CARING FOR THE INFRAORDINARY NEIGHBOURHOOD

PALMERS GREEN

BY JOSEPH SYRETT

Caring for the Infraordinary Neighbourhood | Palmers Green

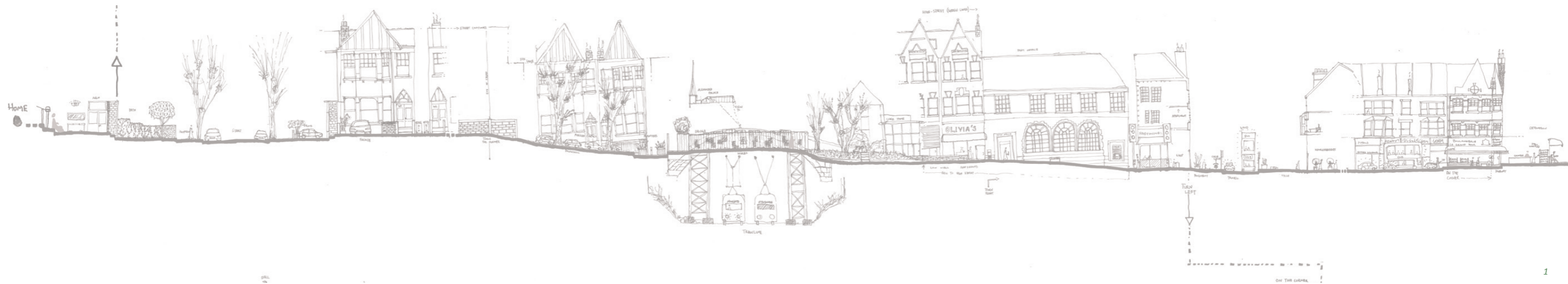Author: Joseph Syrett

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*A special thanks to Andreea and Erik
for all their advice, encouragement and
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INTRODUCTION

The catalyst for setting about a study of my local town centre in Palmers Green was a case of missed opportunity. Palmers Green's most recent development, a set of flats on a key corner of 'Green Lanes' high street, builds onto and above an existing historic pub 'The Fox' and fills an existing car park. Walking past and watching the construction emerge, I could see the missed opportunity that it has subsequently proved to be; the passing over of a real possibility to activate the high street and give something back to the community. A far too common case of a London developer not being held responsible for their potential for positive societal impact.

"Being care-ful means paying radical attention to one-another, recognising kin in a multitude of forms." (AHRA 2023)

Palmers Green, a small suburban town centre in the Borough of Enfield in North London, hosts a variety of cultures and populations that live side by side but with limited social mixing. Bike lanes recently added to the high street and a growing number of 'cosy' cafes, gives the sense of an area sitting on the verge of 'gentrification'. However this has never quite happened. Perhaps something to be celebrated given the negative outcomes of gentrification processes, but also a demonstration of Palmers Green as a faltering neighbourhood; a place that continually settles on temporary fixes, such as shop changes that suit only

"we wish to make an application for the fox to be recognised as an asset of community value... should it ever be threatened, it will be clear that this is both a building and social hub valued in the local area, and that local people might have some kind of option to intervene" (Palmers Green Community, 2023)

select groups, coupled with an absence of communal facilities or activities. The result is a lack of an overarching sense of community - perhaps a natural manifestation of the co-presence of multiple diverse cultures. But does it have to be this way? A more engaged community involved in activities and with access to places or facilities to meet and interact could give the neighbourhood greater inclusivity and vibrancy. An alternative path of designing for the future and not relying on temporary fixes: 'Value what is there → Nurture what is there → Define what is missing' (Fior, 2009).

Infraordinary - "what is worn invisible by daily use and as an opposite to the extraordinary. It is the overall claim that the infraordinary dimension of the city plays a vital role for the social coexistence of and the correlation between its inhabitants." (Nielsen, 2017)
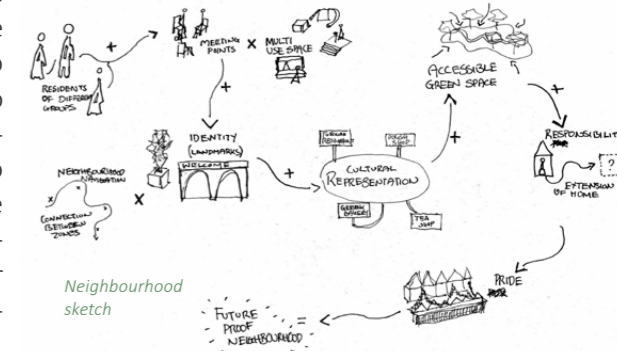
My study will explore the needs of different residents from various cultural groups and how they use this neighbourhood, to see how this community as a whole can grow in strength and realise a future where it feels like home for all residents. This is not about making an extraordinary neighbourhood of large, high-visibility landmark projects, but rather an 'infraordinary' one, centred on everyday life, where all the small, things that you may not notice at first glance are working together to benefit the people that live there.

Palmers Green 'The Triangle' 1965 (Palmers Green Community, 2023)

Focusing upon the infraordinary through mapping, observation and interviews, will reveal the multitude of small key spaces that make up a lived space. These spaces are often lost, swamped by the extraordinary and the 'eye catching'. So what are the small things that are key to the everyday make-up of this neighbourhood? What are the things people do not see? How can we conceptualise the infraordinary in the neighbourhood context? And how can this inform a greater understanding of its successes and failures?

Neighbourhood sketch

My goal is to provide a platform to strengthen Palmers Green as a neighbourhood and in turn enable a participatory framework that can increase place-based community engagement; a future development path that adds to, rather than detracts from, the neighbourhood's civic life. Helping residents see, understand and use their neighbourhood from an alternative perspective through mappings, stories and temporary interventions (follies) across the neighbourhood. Initiating discussions about the potential of spaces, in the hope they can have a lasting and more meaningful impact on the neighbourhood.

'PLACEMAKING VISION'

The 'Enfield draft local plan 2023' sets out goals for the Borough of Enfield and specifically Palmers Green :

"Could encourage greater diversification of uses present along the high street. Where proposals encourage this in a way that will positively contribute to the vitality of the high street they will be encouraged.

Should maintain distinctive shopfronts and open ground floor frontages where alternative uses are introduced to replace retail uses.

Must contribute towards delivery of improvements to the public realm, public facilities and the enhancement of heritage assets and their settings."

"Palmers Green has a vibrant existing shopping centre and it is imperative to preserve its function and success while capitalising on the unique qualities it already offers... the centre should consider diversification and improvements to its offering to build its resilience. This could include creation of new business spaces to support the knowledge and creative industries... good access to public transport (means) the centre can accommodate additional development. (this) must work to support the town centre uses and improve the quality of life of existing residents and workers by contributing to improved facilities and public realm." (Enfield council, 2023)

A map (see below) is all that is provided as a visual representation of these goals.

'Social Streetscapes' sketch produced by Jan Kattein architects depicting a new public square

A highlighted 'Public realm enhancement opportunity' has begun the process of making a new public square along Green Lanes. Designed by Jan Kattein architects, temporary interventions such as markets, play areas and a mural has enabled this road junction to become a pedestrianised part of the high street.

However it is key to note firstly it was put forward by the voluntary 'Palmers Green Action Team' rather than on the council's own initiative. It lies between two cafés that are opposed to public seating being available in the square. It is clearly an issue that there appears to be nowhere to actually sit if you are not using the cafés and reflects a half hearted approach in its implementation.

As Palmers Green's newest public space, I feel it is important to include this to understand where the neighbourhood is at and how well these kind of spaces are functioning.
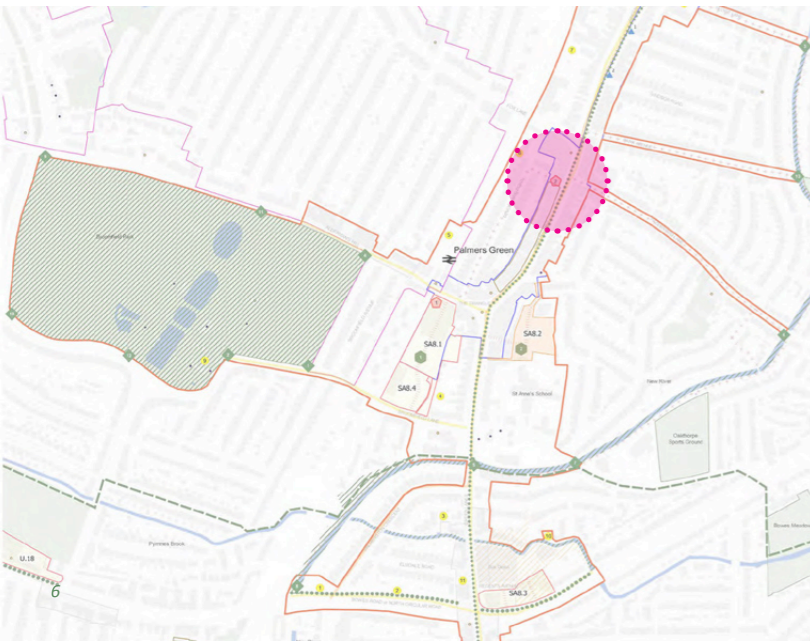
Placemaking Opportunities

☐ Place Making Area Boundary
⬠ Public Realm Enhancement Opportunities
⬡ New Open Space Opportunities
● Infill Opportunities
◆ Enhanced Access to Blue and Green Space
▲ New Rain Gardens Opportunities
— Enfield Green Loop
+++ New Green Links
⁞⁞⁞ New Walking Route
∼ ∼ Enhancements to Existing Walking Routes
═ Streetscape Improvements
⧄ Blue and Green Space Improvements
●● New Green Buffer

Enfield draft local plan December 2023

*'Social Streetscapes' photo by Jan Kattein architects*

METHOD

My aim is to create a platfrom for participatory deisgn that gives residents a new perspective on their neighbourhood and in turn, a new agency within it.

I explore Palmers Green through a series of mappings to help residents understand their neighbourhood from a conventional standpoint. I highlight key points within the neighbourhood based upon these mappings that require observation in order to understand the neighbourhood fully. I undertake observations of key points reflecting upon what is of value, what could be nurtured and what is missing.

Then through conducting interviews and collecting mental maps from residents of the neighbourhood I form a set of data that I can analyse in order to understand where the key spaces in the neighbourhood are in relation to its residents.

A combination of these studies gives me an understanding of the spaces within Palmers Green and the necessary data to place follies around the neighbourhood to host and encourage discussion.

I finally present the data and its possibilities back to the residents in the form of an invitation to the opening of the follies and a map of their locations. This is where participation begins, the follies become a tool to open a dialogue that helps inform a future development and resilience of the neighbourhood.
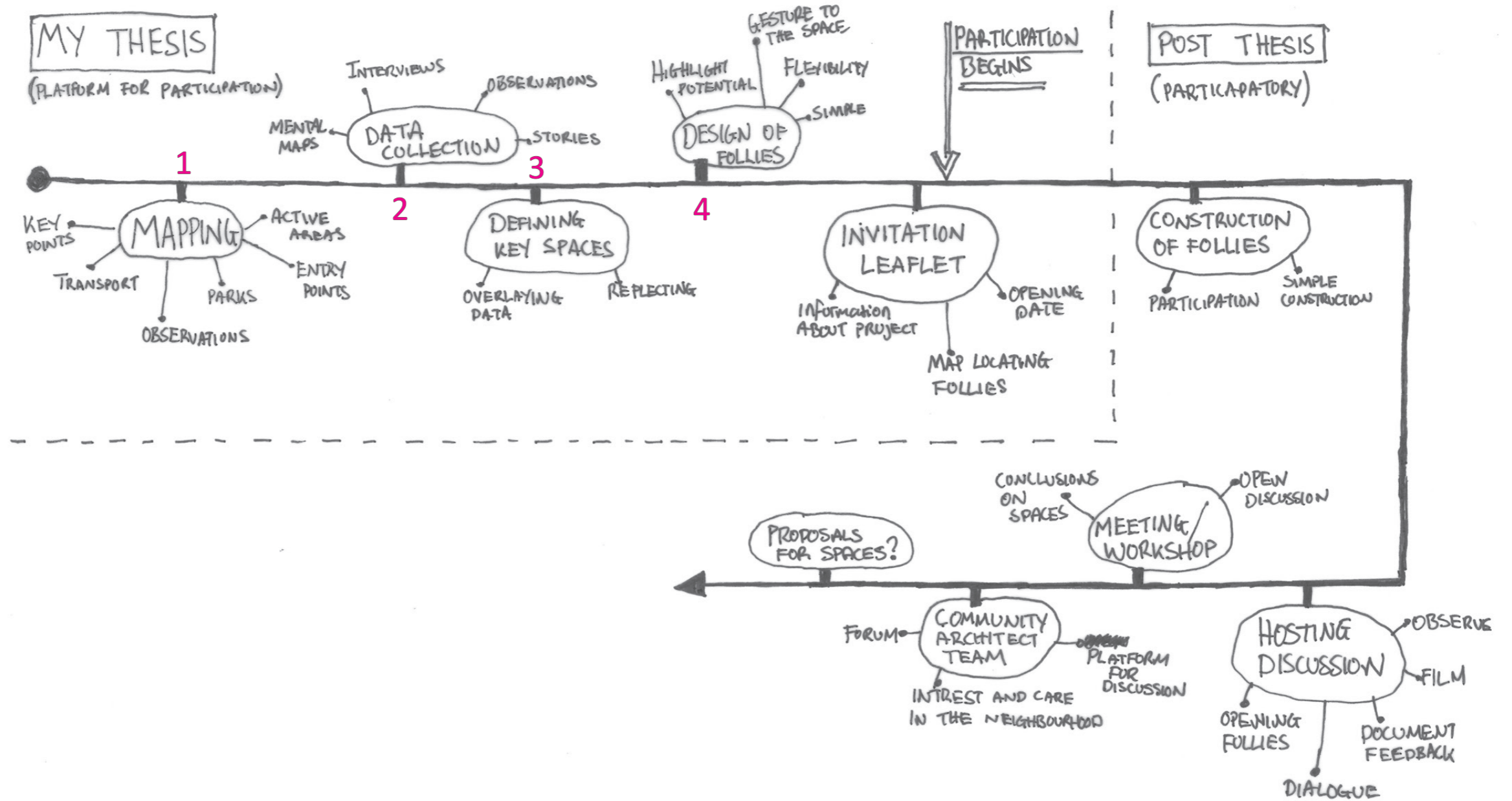
1 | MAPPING

Mapping is essentially an interpretation of or reference to how spaces are produced, closely linked to Lefebvre's theoretical insight "that capitalist space is produced; it is an object, a thing, whilst simultaneously a process... in which social relations, and therefore change, can occur." (Zieleniec, 2007).

In order to understand what makes up different spaces and how "social relations produce particular spaces" (Ackerman et.al, 2016), we need to see "mapping as a process of exploring the diversity of social relations and meanings of a given space". If we are to really represent the social qualities that produce space then our conception of maps needs to be challenged. Perhaps they should not focus on conventional things but rather as Ackerman argues, have the potential to be "playful, low tech, idiosyncratic, artistic" (Ackerman et.al, 2016). Mapping here allows one to tell multiple stories through translating data in an accessible way and map-making becomes a participatory process and communal project.

Accepting the need to challenge conventional mapping raises the important question of what is to be conveyed. What aspects can be highlighted that are often omitted? Mapping is "a practical tool for gaining control over territories"(Ackerman et.al, 2016), so what is seen to be uncontrolled is therefore not mapped.

The process of gathering different perspectives on any given space and observing its use creates a more multi-layered and insightful map, emphasising personal details and interactions and extending well beyond the narrow representation of commercial or advertised functions which predominate on 'Google maps'.

In mapping a town or neighbourhood this process seems essential in order to capture the complex social relations that exist. To achieve the goal of mapping a neighbourhood's 'true identity/ies' "relations between graphic representation and narrative" (Ackerman et.al, 2016) need to come to the fore, in a process not limited to the traditional diagrammatic representation of an urban area but one open to the possibility of multiple senses (sight, sound, smell, taste) and forms of representation including aural recordings, photographs, film, collage etc.

1. BOUNDARIES

- Google maps
- Council
- Overlapping zone

◯ Neighbourhood entry points
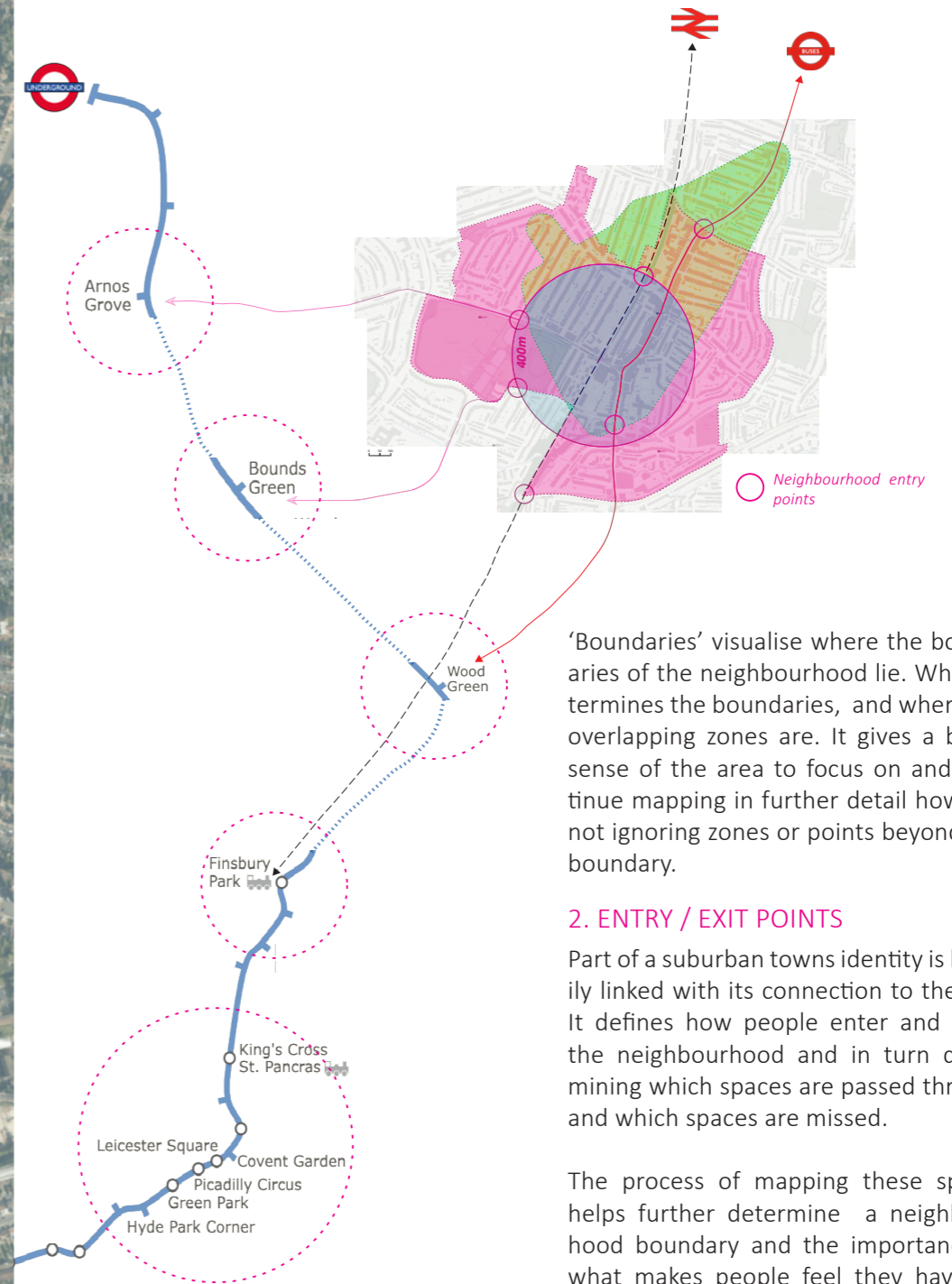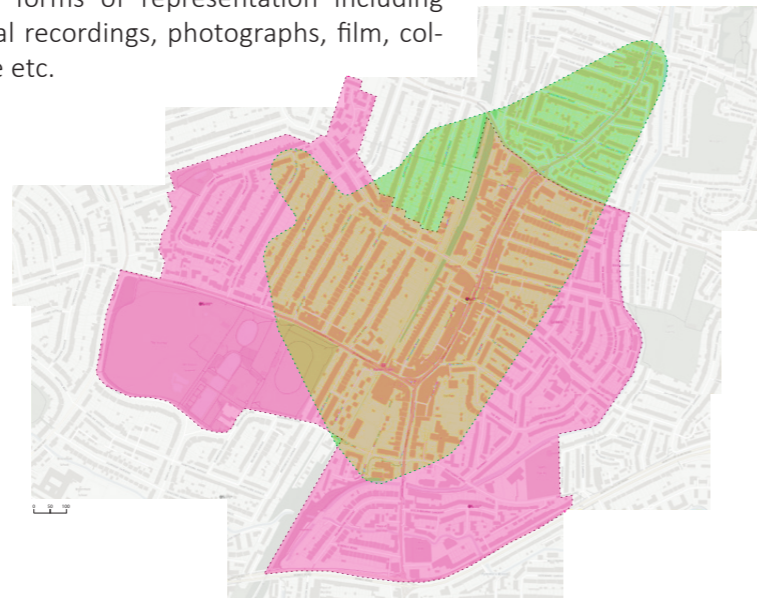
'Boundaries' visualise where the boundaries of the neighbourhood lie. Who determines the boundaries, and where the overlapping zones are. It gives a broad sense of the area to focus on and continue mapping in further detail however not ignoring zones or points beyond this boundary.

2. ENTRY / EXIT POINTS

Part of a suburban towns identity is heavily linked with its connection to the city. It defines how people enter and leave the neighbourhood and in turn determining which spaces are passed through and which spaces are missed.

The process of mapping these spaces helps further determine a neighbourhood boundary and the importance of what makes people feel they have returned home.

3. ACTIVE AREAS

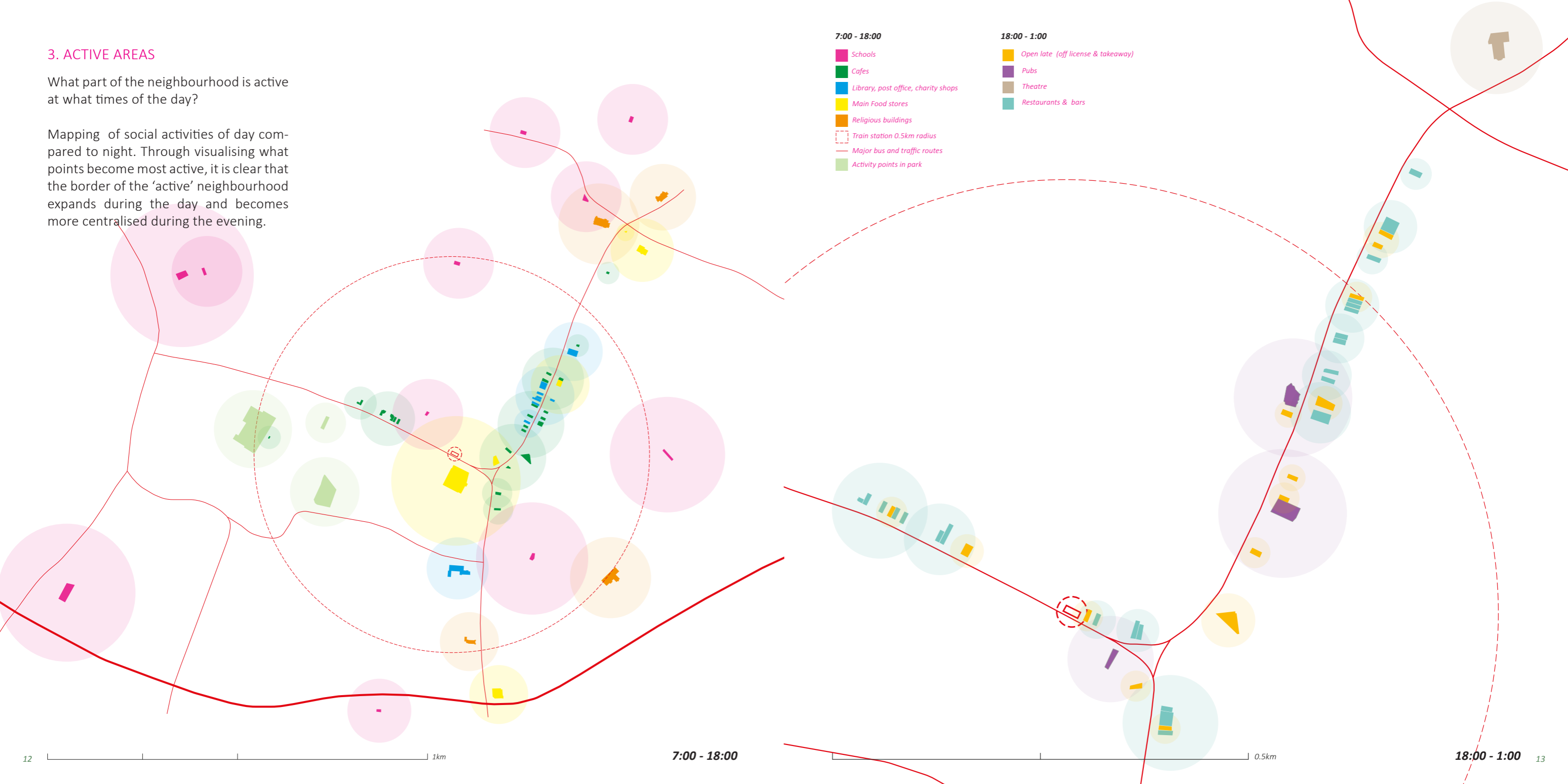What part of the neighbourhood is active at what times of the day?

Mapping of social activities of day compared to night. Through visualising what points become most active, it is clear that the border of the 'active' neighbourhood expands during the day and becomes more centralised during the evening.

1km

7:00 - 18:00

0.5km

18:00 - 1:00

4. PARKS

An opportunity to connect with nature. How might people use the neighbourhood in relation to parks?

This map explores the connections between local parks and where the significant entrances / exits are. We begin to see the relation between the parks as walking, running routes and their accessibility from the town centre. It may be key to consider what is the experience along these routes during observations.

Broomfield Park takes a different role as it has a physical and visual impact from within the neighbourhood, acting as a buffer from busy surrounding roads and the largest public space within the neighbourhood.

● *Park entry points*

GROVELANDS PARK

ARNOS PARK

BROOMFIELD PARK

THE WRECK

neighbourhood

0   0.5   1km
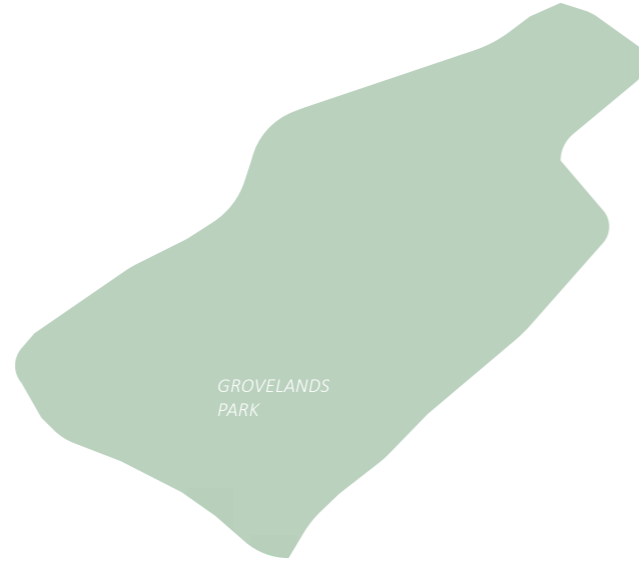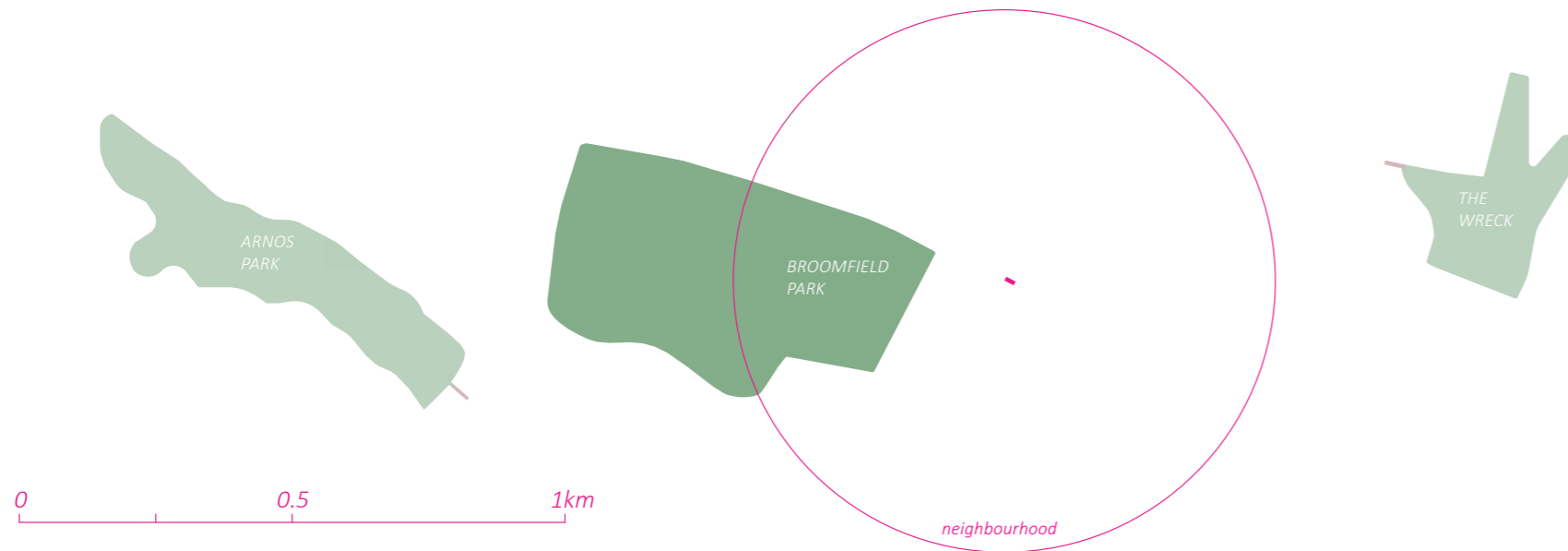
Before combining these maps to define initial 'key points' for observation it is key to note and be aware of the limitations of this type of 'distance mapping' given it is done largely using online resources.

However its intention is to "make things visible" through a process where you "visualise and analyse the links and relationships between different nodes and actors" (Awan et.al. 2011). Simplifying things makes the production of space in a neighbourhood more understandable, and provides a shared knowledge where by it does not exclude through the likes of technical drawings but includes through artistic representation that allow residents to believe change is possible.

To re-imagine our vision of the neighbourhood through mapping recognisable elements, in a more accessible and refined way, helps us to think more deeply about what it is that surrounds us in day to day life. What is it that we consider to be key to our neighbourhood and what should really be included on a 'map' if the neighbourhood is ours not 'theirs'.

This form of conventional mapping can still play a role by informing residents about their neighbourhood, and show that they can become the spatial agents of change and be in control of its future. Mapping in this format provides at the least a basis for this understanding and can give a foundation for to being able to understand the explorations that follow.

The combination of these mappings leads to the defining of five key points in the neighbourhood (see pg.16)

Mapping through online resource:

(+) Connection between zones + accessible green space + proximity to transport / schools + social venues + cultural representation in stores etc + connection to city centre.

(-) Identity- landmarks- clear green walking routes - art or cultural venues - public space - main routes dominated by traffic

= A NEIGHBOURHOOD LACKING IDENTITY

KEY POINTS

The process of combining these maps allows for a visual interpretation of the 'key points' in the neighbourhood.

The criteria of these 'key points': Within 500m of the train station, along key routes between parks, directly connected to bus routes, a high density of social venues, 200m to neighbourhood entry points and inside 'boundary' lines.

This gives an initial basis for observation studies that will greater inform my understanding of the neighbourhood's identity.

It could be argued this drawing is the first step in going beyond the level of research we might typically see before a project is undertaken and marks the completion of the first stage of the method.

The next stage in the following chapter aims to begin to understand our neighbourhoods on a more meaningful, deeper level.

ALONG KEY ROUTES BETWEEN PARKS

DIRECTLY CONNECTED TO BUS ROUTES

INSIDE BOUNDARY LINES

WITHIN 500M OF TRAIN STATION

HIGH DENSITY OF SOCIAL VENUES

NEIGHBOURHOOD ENTRY POINTS CLOSE BY

Key points

2 | DATA COLLECTION

KEY POINT 1 : ALDERMANS HILL / BROOMFIELD PARK ENTRANCE

Feels uncomfortable when lingering, very active with many men chatting outside shops and cafés.

Feels inappropriate to take photographs so took from within the park looking back at the space.

Large amount of traffic along that section due to cars being parked illegally.

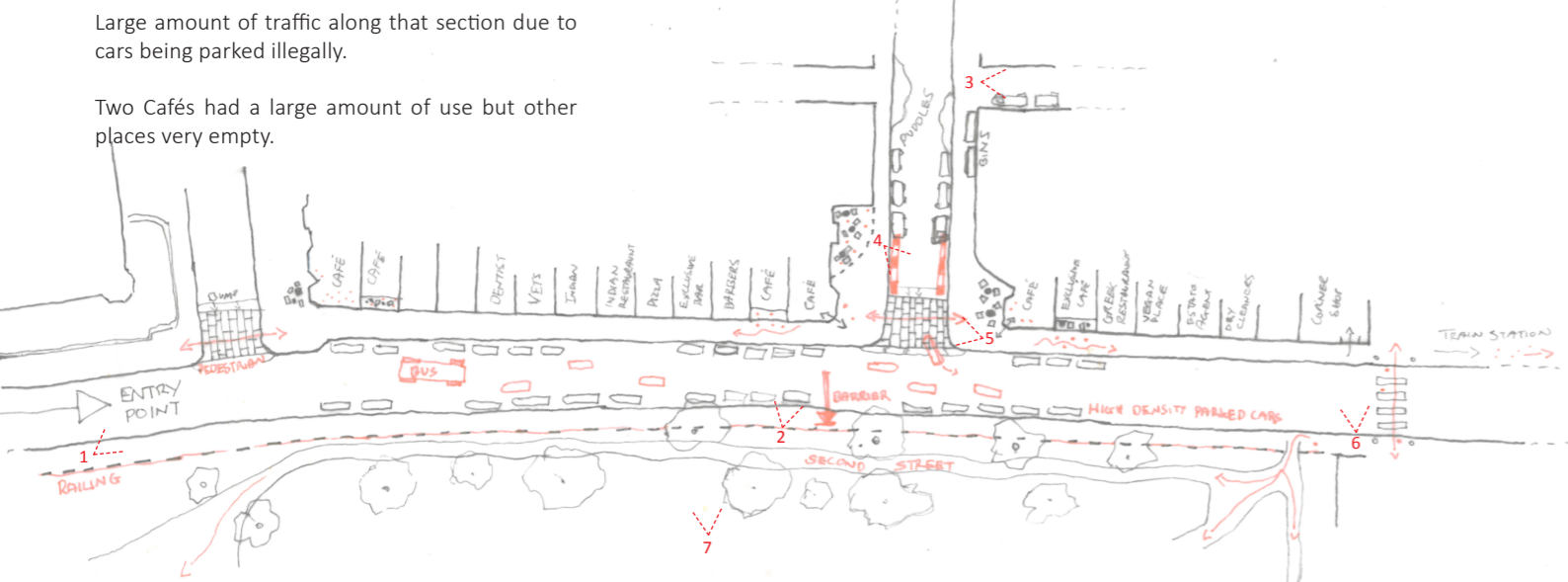Two Cafés had a large amount of use but other places very empty.

Men lingering chatting outside several places.

A clear entry point into the neighbourhood.

Nice connection with park, railings are a barrier.

A 'second' street within the park.

Parking bollards often disregarded.
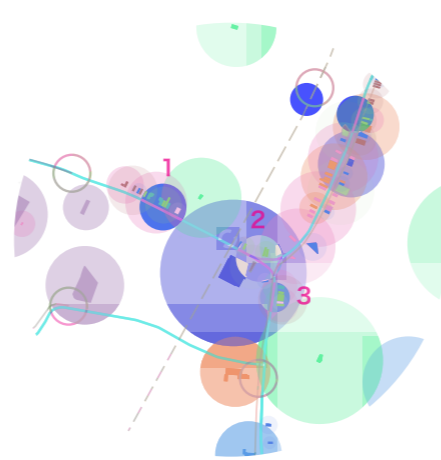
KEY POINT 2 & 3: THE TRIANGLE / END OF HIGH STREET

Small public triangle seating was clearly used.

Cycle lane hardly used but has a big presence through the space.

Not a desirable place to stop and linger.

Busy bus stops - arrival point into Palmers Green.

Disconnected area of high street, not somewhere you wander past.

Felt like a busy junction rather than a centre of a neighbourhood.

Public art installation.

Nice frontage and space in front of bank.

Some restaurants / bars with frosted glass don't feel accessible.

Poor maintenance of existing façades above shop fronts.

Most shops empty not very active usage.

Aksular restaurant was busy.

KEY POINT 4 : THE FOX PUB / DEVONSHIRE SQUARE

Most pedestrianised feelings with coloured crossing and new square, although square was very empty.

Mix of cafés all feeling welcoming and accessible, family-friendly.

Junction out of Hazelwood Lane too narrow for amount of traffic.

Many people stopping to look at pastries in windows.

Sainsbury's supermarket brings a lot of people through the area.

The land mark nature of the Fox Pub and Post Office give it a town centre feel.

The Fox Pub largely empty despite recent redevelopment.

Street towards Hazelwood School brings further traffic through.

Slow moving traffic makes it a quieter area of the high street.
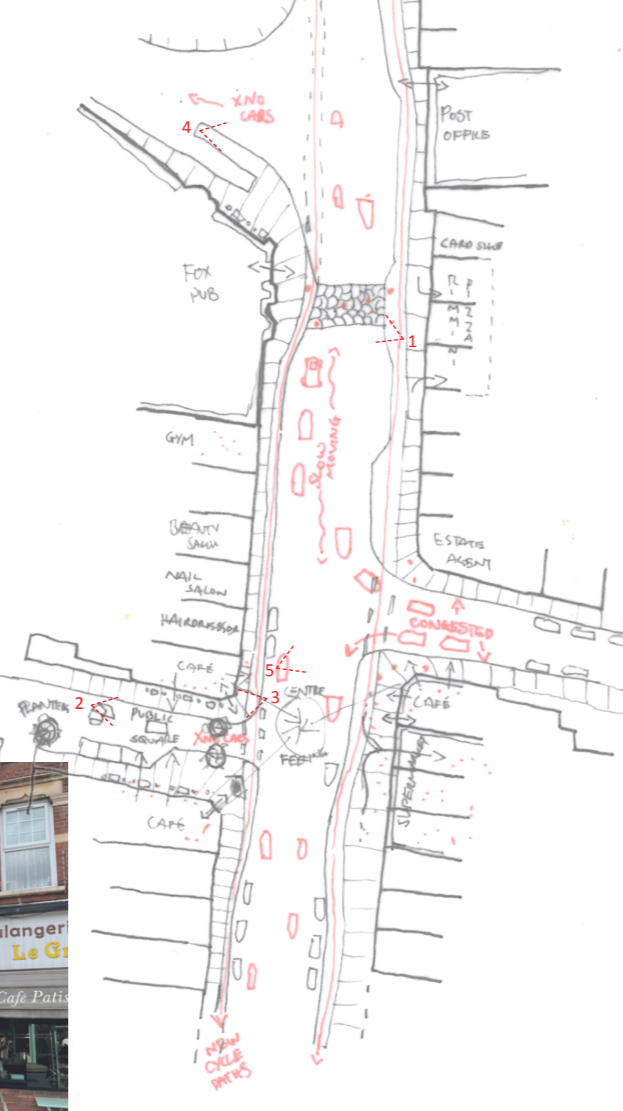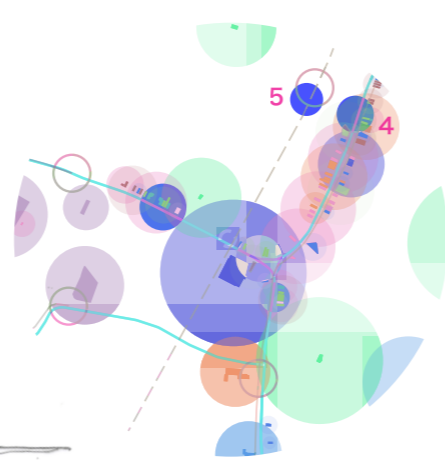
KEY POINT 5 : FOX LANE BRIDGE

Completely pedestrianised because of new emergency access only barrier.

Arrival point onto the high street from residential area looking towards Post Office.

Clear protests over limited access with food waste thrown on footpath and cameras vandalised.

Really quiet considering proximity to high street.

Slither of green space but in no way made usable, definitely just a thoroughfare currently.

Old bridge to the side filled with rubbish and worn down. However some still chose to use this rather than cross the pedestrianised bridge.

New development has no public access along road apart from private parking.

Poor level of construction and detailing.

Easy views into new corner apartments from street- residents made attempts block view.

Holds potential for public space given its pedestrianised, available green space and proximity to high street.
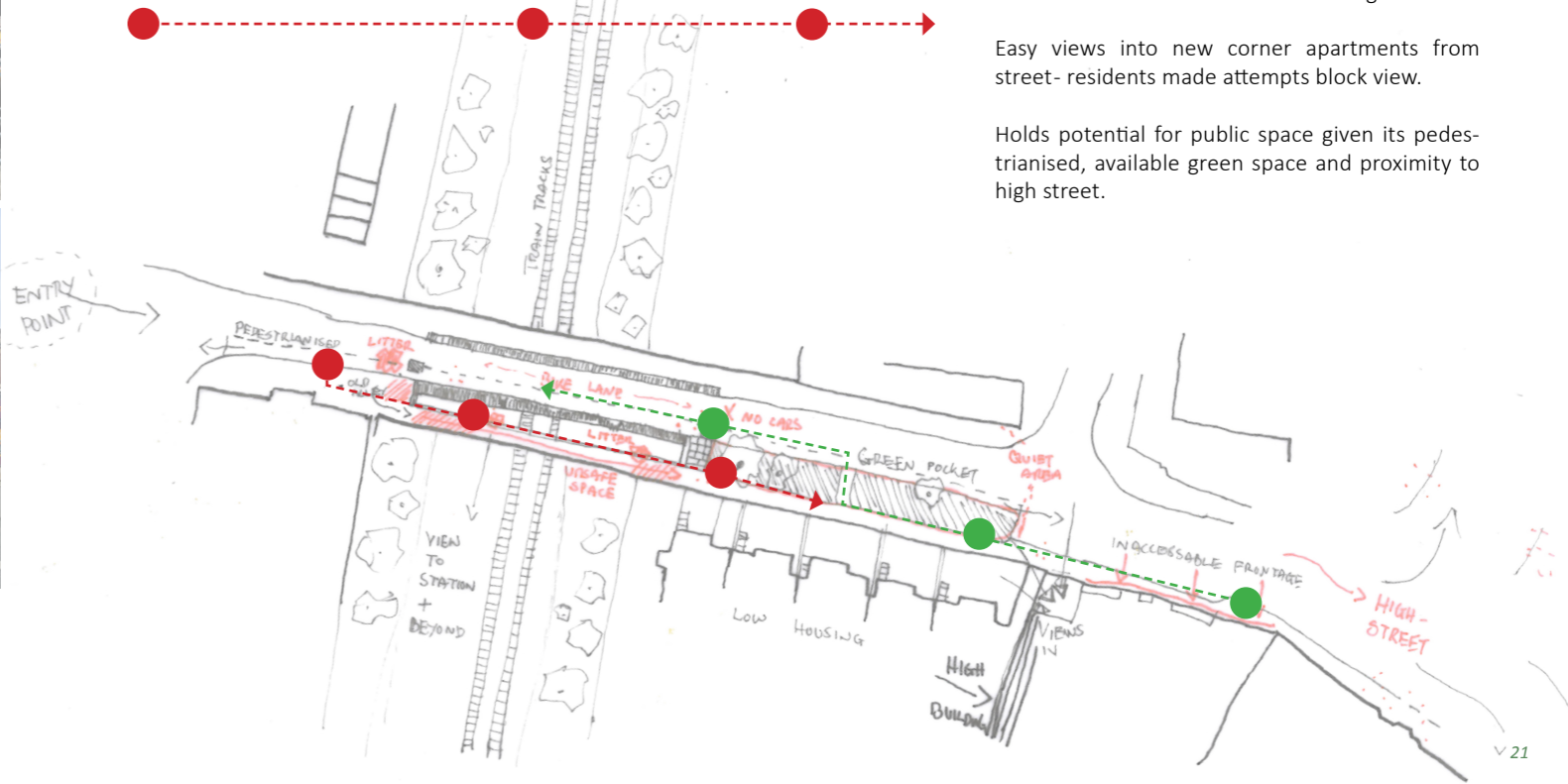
STORIES / MEMORIES

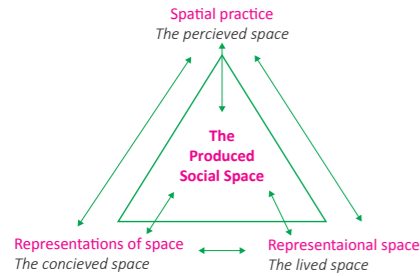Through exploring my own as well as other residents' experiences I will try to build up a form of mapping using layers of memories of this neighbourhood and represent the significance of the infraordinary aspects within that.

Lefebvre states, "Any given space is comprised of an infinite number of social relations… Only by increasing the number of mappings, we can understand more about how a space functions". (Lefebvre, 1974).

Spatial practice
The percieved space

The Produced Social Space

Representations of space
The concieved space

Representaional space
The lived space

Lefebvre's triad is perhaps the simplest way to understand his theory on the production of social space. Here I will use this as a tool to understand how space is produced in a neighbourhood context. I will examine details within each memory / story to help understand; *perceived space* - how we move through space, *lived space* - why we choose to use certain spaces and *conceived space* - the effect of the built environment around us. (Lefebvre, 1974).

Here I start with an autoethnography - my own stories from a whole childhood in Palmers Green.

MANNI
I prepare throw the ball above my head to practise my serve, my coach Manni, a muscular tanned German man, with a seemingly endless amount of energy stops me in my tracks. Corrects my grip on the racket and tells me to try again….

LATE FOR SCHOOL
Another day another commuter train to London. I walk along the train platform recognising the usual 7:36 crew. Everyone in their carefully selected spot with the best chance of getting a seat. We wait, collectively anticipating the train's arrival. 'CANCELLED' murmurs and sighs and in my case panic I'm going to be late for school again.

OKRA & OLIVES
It's Saturday, that means homemade curry for dinner. We are missing one ingredient for our favourite vegetable dish. My mum and I head down to the top end of the high street to buy the okra. Yasar Halim is the only place you can find fresh vegetables like this locally. We enter the Mediterranean market and I'm overwhelmed by the smell of different spices and the site and smell of hundreds of types olives laid out like a pic 'n' mix. Despite not really liking olives I insist we should get some so I can choose. My mother meanwhile fills a small plastic bag with fresh okra and we meet at the counter to pay.

BOULANGERIE
The start of the weekend my dad gives me a £10 note, the order: a croissant for my dad, a pain aux raisin for my mum, two chocolate swirls for my brother and I and two baguettes for lunch. I come to a small corner of the high street and pass what seems like a huge glazed window filled with pastries and cakes. I enter the shop hoping I am greeted by the happier of the two twin brothers that work there.

JUNGLE GARDEN
The excitement of seeing my best friend Rico's house. Every front garden converted to a parking spot but his stands out, filled with tall trees and unusual plants. I duck to get through the front gate and under some hanging branches to reach the front door. I ring the bell which plays a funky tune and wait in anticipation.

GARDEN TRASHING
My brother stands at the far end of the garden tentatively between a 6x6ft plastic goal. Behind him a net torn to shreds through a combination of the local foxes Chewing it and unrelenting use. I stand 10 metres away on what was once grass. I shoot, the ball flies past my brother, through the net and leaves a gaping hole in the fence. My mother hears the noise and repeats a phrase she found herself saying far too often, "stop trashing the garden", despairing that we have "a wonderful park just down the road to kick a football around in." My brother and I head toward the park, deemed safe enough to make it by ourselves on the account of only having to cross a single road that included a 'zebra crossing' (not that we would cross there). We sprint into the park with one destination in Mind, hoping one goal would be free to make claim to for the next few hours. We run around the pond and past the tennis courts, only to see people playing in the 'green cage'. No goal free… we ask the others to join the game with just the offering of a spare football and so we are playing football again, my mother's garden lives to fight another day.

STINKY BINS
I race down the road late for my train to school as usual. It's bin day and the commercial bins at the end of the road are overflowing again, I hold my breath and increase my speed until out of their range.

WONDERGOAL
Friday lunchtime at school means we have just had the best lunch of the week (pizza slice or burgers). There's a rush to get outside for the big football game (year 5 v Year 6). My friend carries a sponge-ball in hand and we set up on opposite ends of the playground approximately 30v30. The playground is filled with obstacles of other groups playing games and chatting. The only way to know your team is through the faces of your friends. The chaos begins, sixty ten year olds charging at the ball. (This continues for the next 30 minutes). The ball falls to me 10 metres out from goal I strike the soggy yellow ball and it crashes against the concrete wall between the jumpers used to mark the goalposts! Pandemonium, the only goal of the game, hero for a lunchtime.

0.5km
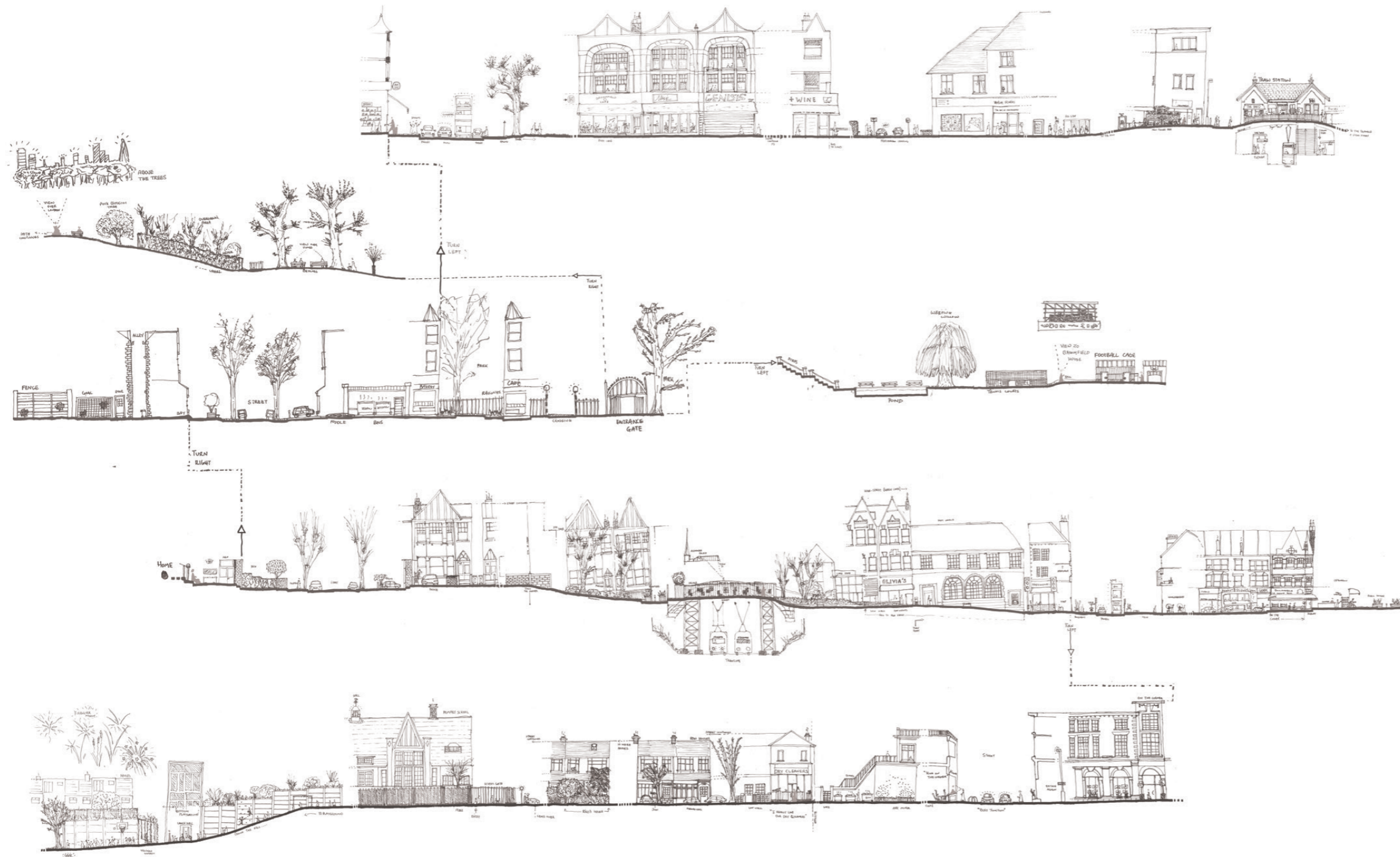
THE TOWN

Here the lived, perceived and conceived spaces begin to express themselves in a way that cannot normally be represented through conventional maps.

As Perec explores in 'Species of Spaces': A town gives us identity as a person, where we were born and grew up. Certain things we think of as childhood relate to the town.

What allows us to navigate a town and what are our most used spaces and landmarks. How do we represent our town from memory. The extensions of our town are based upon where friends live, where memories are attached. We are disconnected from other "foreign towns"(Perec, 1997) (or neighbouring streets in this instance) around us.

We maintain a connection to the 'city' where we work or visit, meaning where transport is located defines largely how we move through a town.

We say we are from London but what defines us? Our town is our interpretation of the City of London and is still relevant and representative. The town belongs to me.

Stories of our neighbourhood are largely made up of infraordinary things and represent what is important to us. Here can be shown why certain places in the town hold a special significance, positive or negative.
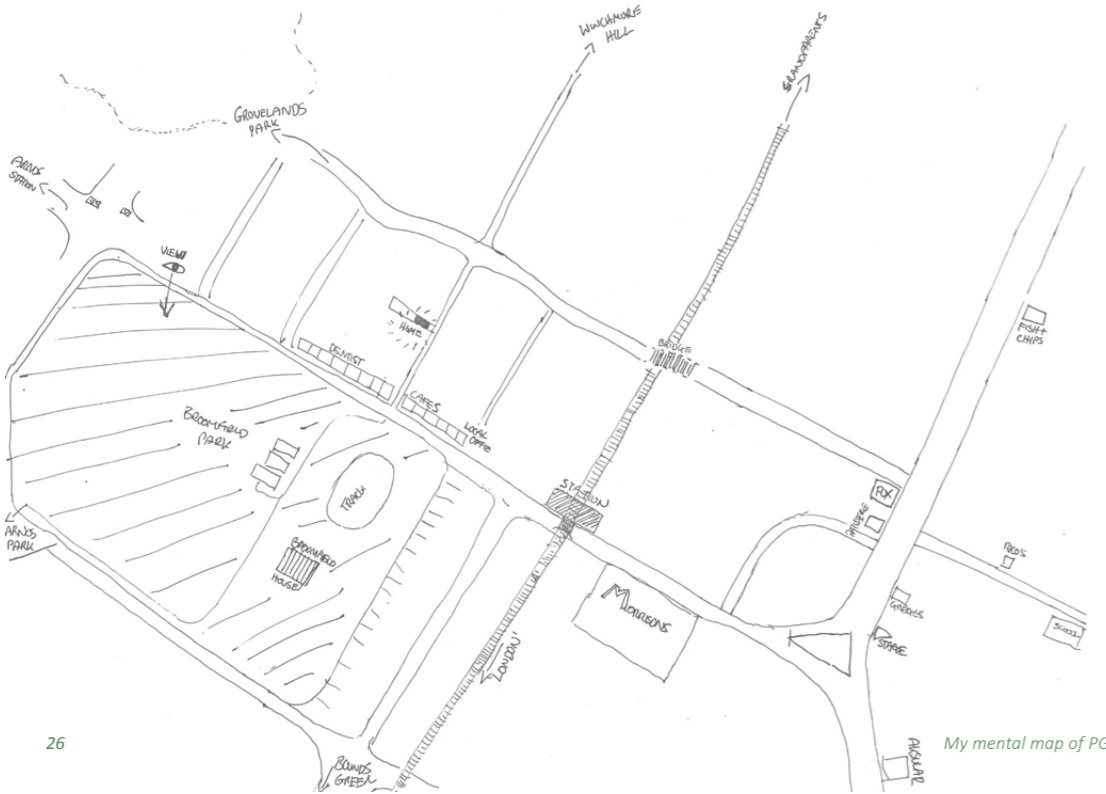
INTERVIEWS

Through the process of conducting interviews and collecting mental mappings I begin a social Cartography. This can be defined as "a method that recognises the two-way relationship of working with communities... the community educates researchers about the realities of their territory" (Ruiz, 2024) this allows for a deeper understanding of the territory.

A series of questions (see right) will help to prompt the subject for the drawing of their neighbourhood mental map. This process aims to produce a series of stories (building on my own), generating a collective perspective and set of data to analyse and draw from.

Interview questions

My mental map of PG

Combined interview mental maps

"A key extension (of maps) is gathering different perspectives on how space is dealt with" (Sulsters, 2005).

A mental map is "an individual's, selective representation of their known world." (Sulsters, 2005). Kevin Lynch, who pioneered the process of mental mapping in 1960 and developed a concept of 'place legibility', "people's ease of understanding the layout of a place". (Sulsters, 2005)

This concept highlights five key aspects: *Paths* (routes through space and circulation), *Edges* (boundaries dividing different within an area), *Nodes* (focal points of activity) and *Landmarks* (points of reference).

Paths however are considered the most important by Lynch because they allows one to understand how we move through and use the city (Lynch, 1960).

These 'paths' and stories or memories associated with them will allow for a mapping that seeks to accurately represent how the neighbourhood is used. Crucially the key points are in relation to the people who use the neighbourhood.

"By detecting similarities and differences within the series of individual mental maps has explicit characteristics with collective meaning can be located. The compilation of these can be seen as 'place identity'." (Sulsters, 2005)

For the interviews I have tried to gather a mixed demographic (in terms of age and background) to represent the area as equally as possible within a relatively small research group.

I conducted 10 'long interviews' and 3 informal 'short interviews'. with ages ranging from 20-86 and a mix of 6 different nationalities. The interviews ran from 45 minutes up to 2 hours, reflecting that some had a lot more to say for the questions than others.

The mental maps were always drawn at the end of the interview and took no longer than 5-10 minutes to complete.

Moved in 1993 - "More than 30 Years in Palmers Green".

Ran a restaurant in Dalston 20 years ago and since has been a local painter / decorator until recently retiring.

Nervous of recording as his accent may be hard to understand and he wasn't sure what I was asking.

On Palmers Green:

Most used venues : Morrisons, Sainsbury's and occasionally Amy's, mostly drinks at the Alfred Herring 2/3 times a week, and has coffee at The Yard almost daily.

One thing he woukd like for the neighbourhood : A wine bar.

Positives : Great transport connections to city often takes trips to musuems and galleries (which are free).

Locality of hospitals, never has to use a car. Sometimes walks 45 minutes all the way to hospital. Explained in depth the many possible routes he can take to the different hospital and was pleased at how easy it is.

Favourite memory of the neighbourhood: Taking a morning walk up to Grovelands Park and sitting there enjoying the sun.
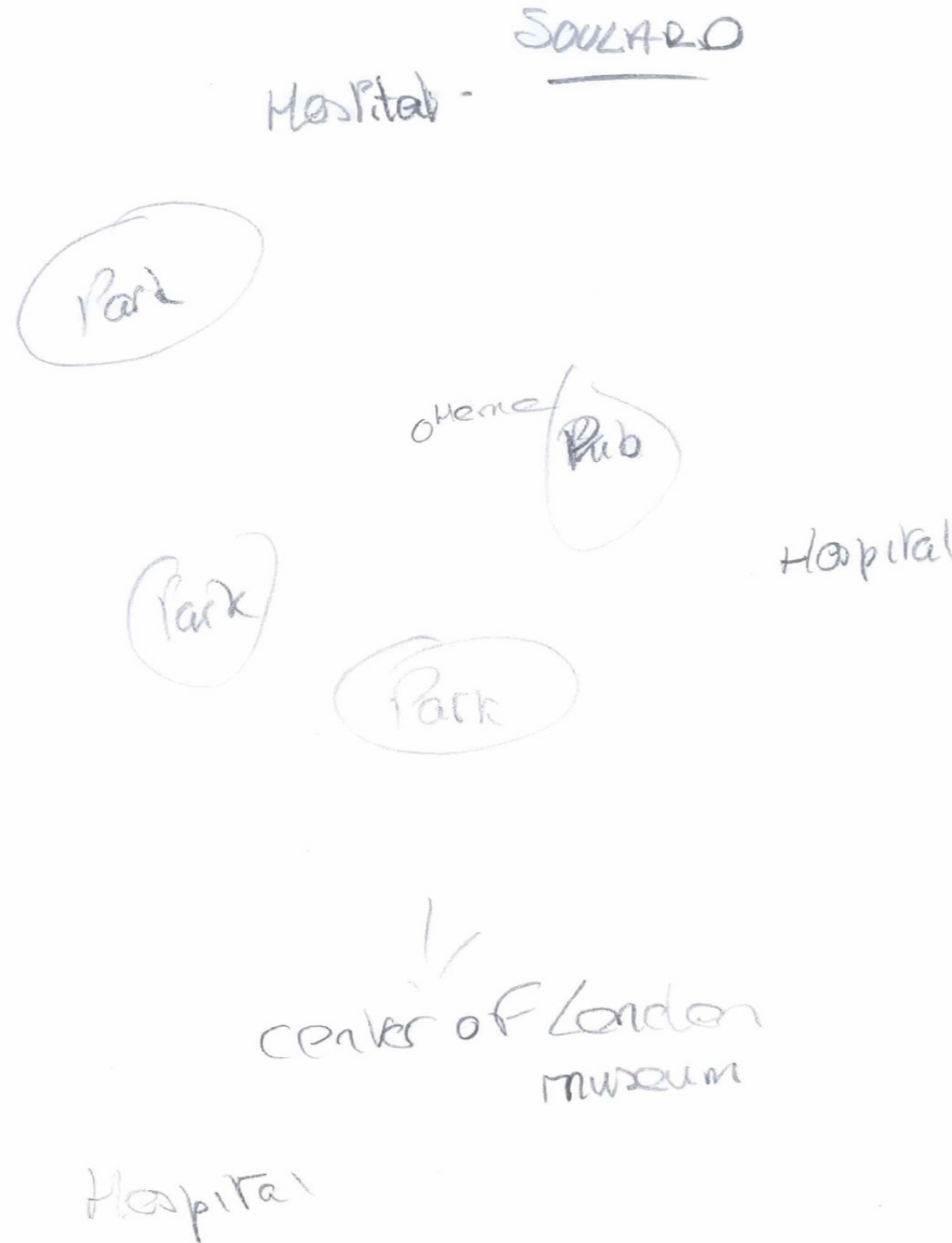
"Every morning I would walk up to Grovelands Park and around then past the Cherry Tree and down to Broomfield Park.

It provides me an escape from the home and somewhere to sit in the sun.

The neighbourhood is 'perfect' in terms of providing all the necessities in walking distance.

It feels like a home because I know so many people and have so many daily interactions. "this morning I spoke to 8 people on my way into London, my brother was telling me this is crazy".

Takes a coffee every morning at The Yard café by the station - enjoys the atmosphere friendly service and reasonable price and meeting a friend there.

Negatives: "It has lost identity, its not the same as it used to be".

There is far less English spoken harder to interact with people on the high street.

Many places feel inaccessible due to being one demographic- for example Albanian Cafés.

Worried the local pub (Alfred Herring) is closing: "It's an important place for many people - do you know how many people go to sit there to have a drink by themselves?"

(He looked at me as if I should know) "It is a lot, and where will they go? It's the only place that is affordable"

"We all want places where we can meet".

When I asked about trying others he said they are too expensive and they don't care for the people that use them, they're just for making money.

On the newly renovated The Fox- "I asked them what are you doing here?"- Feeling it is a wasted chance for a really nice pub.

Confused as to how so many betting shops and inaccessible cafés are allowed to dominate the high street - he remembers it used to be somewhere "you could head to buy things such as clothes and there were many nice shops".

There is concern over cars being stolen from the street and some burglary but says he feels safe in the neighbourhood.

He used to also swim locally but the cost was also too high to keep going regularly.

In general feels restricted on places he can go because of high cost.

Feels the quality of restaurants is not great if you do eat out

"I'm not sure if scary is the word" - in terms of what is happing to the neighbourhood, but feels the culture that was here before has declined its not such a friendly environment.

Moved to Palmers Green in 2001
Why did you move to PG? : Was attracted to the area for its connection to the city, many cultures and what that provided in terms of restaurants and food options, living amongst a mixed demographic and at the time its affordability.

Worked in the city "for many years all I saw of Palmers Green was the train station".

Favourite memory: Grovelands Road Street Party "I remember elderly neighbours putting up bunting, and the street feeling empty as all the cars were gone. Seeing everyone from the street come together was really memorable".

Most used venues : Stage, Kiva, Greens, The Fox, Yasar Halim.

One thing she would like for the neighbourhood : "A Cinema / somewhere I can go with my girlfriends in and evening that isn't to just eat or drink. A safe low-key place that is more central".

Positives : "I always see people I know when I go to the high street, it feels like a small village" there is a feeling of community.

Admires the towns buildings and history and the feeling that is very green because of the surrounding parks.

Favourite place : Broomfield Park- "I like the feeling of it being there (at the end of the road) and the possibility of going". Uses it as an alternative to cut through to get to Arnos Grove tube station and her mother-in-law's house. Also enjoys the many events that take place there across the year.

Why have you stayed in PG? : "The feeling of community, I know the business owners and what cafés I like, also it is a great connection into the city."

"I like that it is a little bit rough around the edges"
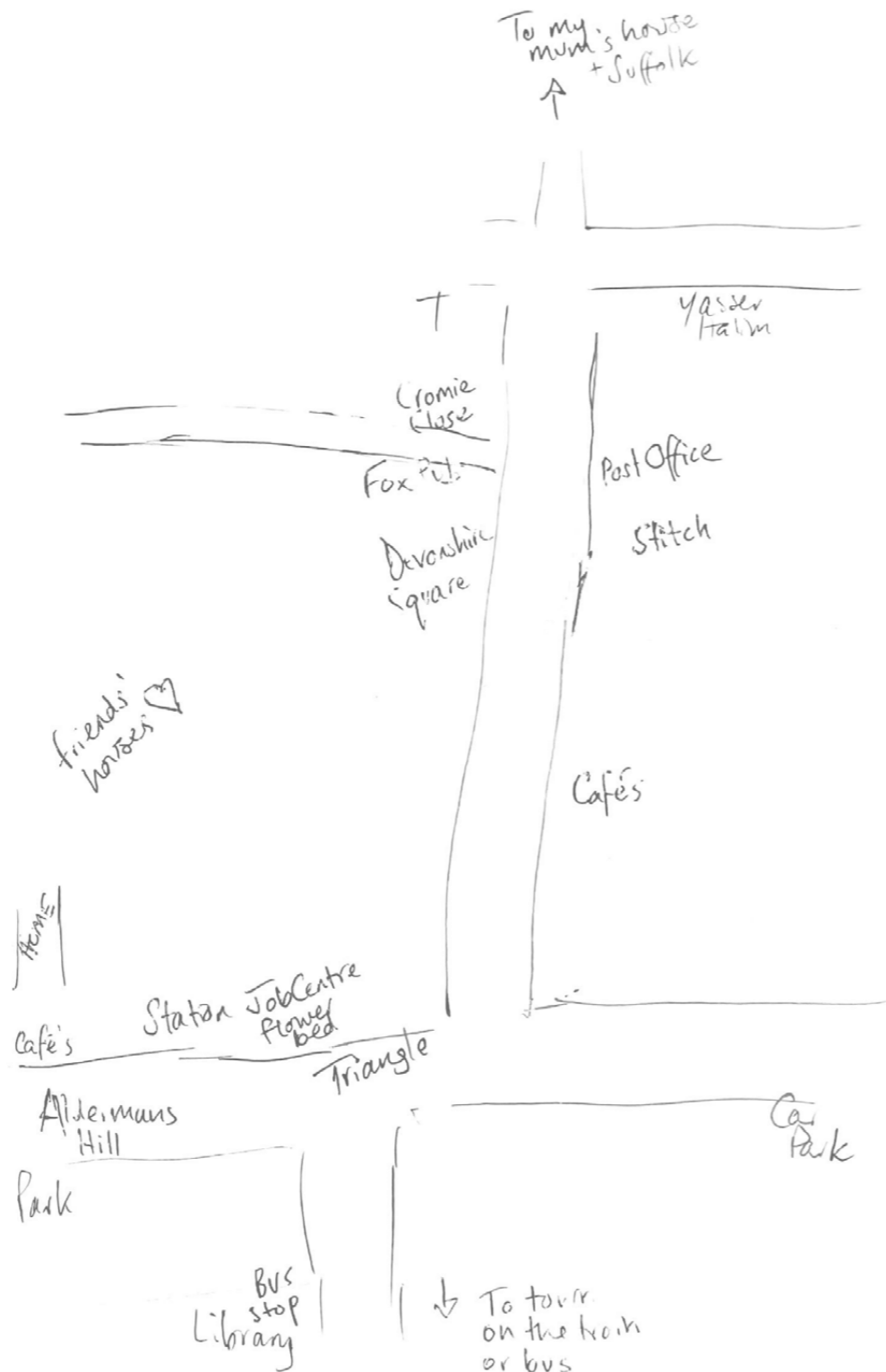
Negatives: Many large units along the high street are closing such as banks.

An increasing number of places opening that are not accessible to everyone, (cafés / bars). Smaller business are outbid on renting available space by 'exclusive cafés'.

Issues of feeling watched passing Albanian café. Told me of business owner who had been collaborating with the community and explained that it's a difference in culture when people first come they don't understand that it's not accepted.

Reflected "you can't control behaviour and the difference in culture".

Worst memory : Demonstrating with others outside unused shop frontages where the Action Team had been working toward getting a local cinema (Arthouse) in place. The Landlord came out and shouted aggressive abuse toward them and said he would refuse to let out the space.

Places you feel insecure?: The bridge across Fox Lane (the narrow part) and crossing through Cromley Close also onto the high-street. Also the high street at night around the piano bar becomes very male dominated.

An underused space in the neighbourhood?: Abandoned 'Eurostars building' (where they had hoped for a new cinema) "the frontage is not looked after and the building is really ugly, you could imagine the difference it would make with something like a cinema there".

About the Palmers Green Action Team?: I am mostly involved with the gardening element such as flower beds near the station and the triangle. But the main aims are, Greening, Cleaning, Street art and Trader target. What is Trader target?: We approach business in other areas that are successful in the community and promote the possibility of coming and having another branch in Palmers Green, For example Holtwhites bakery, Stitch, second hand kids clothing store and almost the Arthouse cinema.

The biggest project was taking initiative on Devonshire Square (a new public square) which we put in motion and the council took over. It hosts regular markets and we hope to get it levelled out with proper trees planted to make it feel more permanent.

Lots of kids use the space but the designed 'street furniture' is a bit award to use.

There is also confusion about seating use in the space - the council provided the chairs and tables for the cafés either side but most people aren't aware that you can use them without being a customer of the cafés.

INTERVIEW 4 : RICO AGE:26

Grew up in PG went to school at Hazelwood for primary school and secondary school in Enfield Town. Living at home commuting into central London daily.

Favourite memory: Playing football in the cage in Broomfield Park, and learning to ride my bike around the pond. Also just going to friends houses around the area.

Most used venues : Sainsbury's local, train station, occasionally The Fox and charity shops.

Favourite place : "The park more from memories of when I was young".

"I could imagine living here, in terms of raising kids, it has a nice residential feel. It's easy and convenient and surrounded with a lot of schools".

"There's been a lot of changes like shops changing but I think it feels like Palmers Green has re branded a bit in a positive way".

Negatives: "Being a regular commuter the train connection is terrible because it's always delayed!".

Too many of the same shops (takeaways, nail shops, barbers).

What's missing?: A cinema, a nicer pub if friends are in the area.

Worst memory : Being attacked on the way home from a night out outside the Alfred Herring.

What do you leave PG for?: I leave for bars/pubs, to see other friends, to be closer to central and for any sports I go to Enfield. I feel like I'm more from Enfield having gone to school there and having most of my friends there.

An underused space in the neighbourhood?: "there's a lot of places I would never use... The Alfred Herring, it's a pub with no appeal to young people so for me thats a waste."

Also the Inn on the Green feels like something nice or creative could be there."

INTERVIEW 5 : ARMONANTIS & MALVINA (ALBANIAN) AGE: 30s

Lived in PG for 2 years and would like to stay in the area. Other family also lives locally. Work as an electrician and beauty therapist and they recently had a baby girl.

Why PG?: Close to family and near to the park. A nice view from the apartment (lots of light). Also close to transport connections.

Favourite memory: Walking in the park and sitting in the highpoint of the park with a view of the London skyline for a picnic.

Most used venues?: A:"Sweet life I use it everyday" M: laughs he is in there a lot! Also the park, Poundland, Olive Cafe, Morrisons.

Worst memory : Fights outside the cafés along Aldermans Hill late at night. And people breaking into Starfish (the Cafe below them) during the night.

Negatives: We have a lot of issues from Starfish being open late, the table in our living room is shaking. The council have come but nothing has changed.
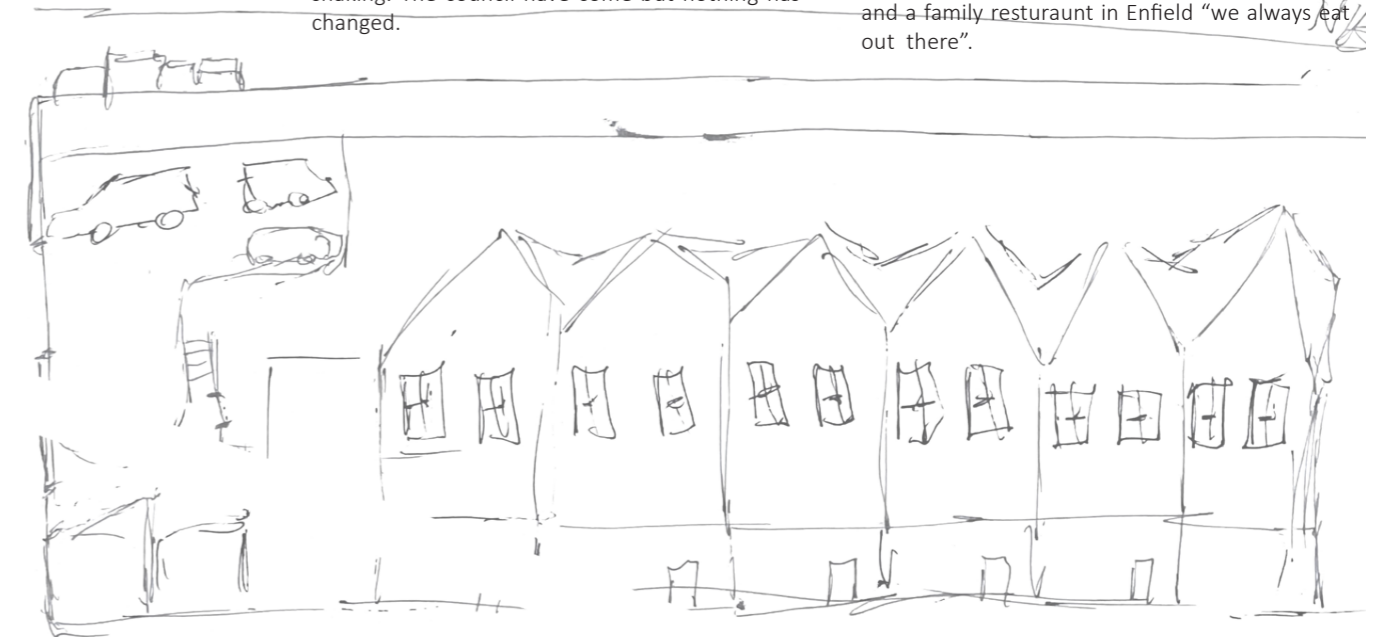
A: Too many coffee shops and too many Albanian men, they are not good for families and women. The cars are also very loud and people coming to the shops park badly blocking me in sometimes.

M: It means for me as a woman I have to choose a different time to go to the cafés when they are less busy.

What is missing?: Somewhere to buy clothes (like Primark) that is affordable.

What do you leave the neighbourhood for ?: A: To use the tube "I walk to Southgate station" also for cinema, meeting friends, bars, driving to work and a family resturaunt in Enfield "we always eat out there".

Moved to Palmers Green in 2004

Why did you move to PG? : Attraction of a big park and openness having lived more centrally. Transport links "it still feels urban enough". Also it's a self sufficient town it has all the essentials.

Favourite memory: Fireworks night in the playground at the school, we had recently moved to the area and it was so nice to see everyone there together.

Most used venues : Stage "it could be somewhere that isn't Palmers Green" 'Kiva on the corner' - "the non-hipster nature of the cafés give possibility to be treated like humans".

Also Rimini, charity shops especially Philanthropy "I like the ethos, it employs adults with learning difficulties.. It has some thought put into it".

Positives : The neighbourhood is always changing but never getting worse.

"I really like the dry cleaners on my road".

Favourite places : Broomfield Park, the higher part of the park where you can see the skyline "the park has a sense of space"- I also like walking around it amongst old trees, birds and wild life, "I normally stop between the lakes".

My garden, the small room I have at the end feels like a sanctuary, just a few trees gives peace. "I feel privileged to have that space"

Why have you stayed in PG? : Having kids it was great, there is Arnos pool locally and Clowntown for kids to play. - "I would only move for something completely different".

What do you leave the neighbourhood for?: For work in Harringey, i take the car or bus straight down Green Lanes, better options for socialising, for a nice pub i go to Winchmore Hill, to use a cinema and see live music.
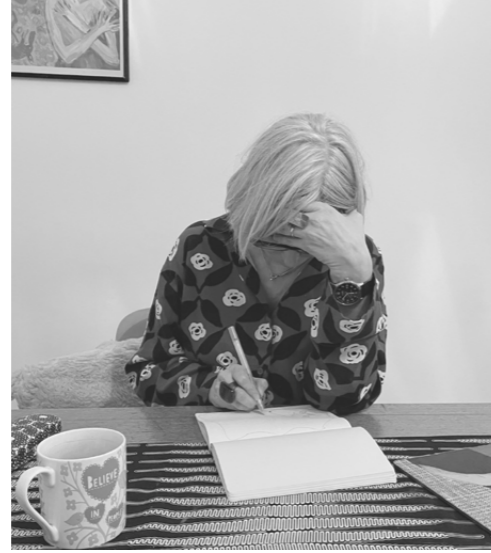
"You don't live in London to stay in a microcosm".

"I often meet friends at Puraam an Indian restaurant on Green Lanes as it acts as a midway point" (between areas).

I feel quite a long way down Green Lanes is an extension of my neighbourhood because I work there and travel above ground rather than on a train or tube.

What is missing from the neighbourhood : "I'd quite like something community minded" A small independent cinema / multipurpose venue , somewhere for meetings and live music.

A smaller venue like a micro brewery similar to 'the Little Green Dragon'- In general something more to draw you to the neighbourhood.

"when we first moved here there used to be something called 'the live rooms' that provided live music for a younger crowd".

An underused space in the neighbourhood?: "Broomfield House!! That's just outrageous" Should make use of what's there not just leave it standing "something you can enter that is a part of the park" - I can imagine it being an outdoor theatre or a sculpture "maintain the history of it without forcing it to be anything".

Worst memory : "Seeing certain people (homeless / drug users) regularly who have fallen through the net, shows the desperation in society and that people are being exploited. I always feel more support is needed for those people".

Negative: "The privatisation of a place like Trent Park lido" (I consider Trent park part of my neighbourhood because it doesn't belong to another area) - it is an extension of my neighbourhood.

Places you feel insecure?:
At my age I don't feel a target - but there is a feeling of a few too many groups sitting around at cafés creating hostility, very male dominated places, the different societal values mean they are quite leery. Adds: "However you live in London for its diversity".

This interview didn't follow the same pattern as others John spoke much more freely from memory and didn't have such straightforward answers.

Moved to Palmers Green in 1995 but lived locally (Cockfosters) for my whole life and family since 1850s. Worked as a graphic designer all over London.

Why did you move to PG? : Came to PG to downsize from a family home in Muswell Hill- "we had a set of requirements that were loosely a library, a bank, a doctors, a level ground floor on the house, a station and food shops all within walking distance .

Favourite memory: (during childhood) "cycling, nearly everybody cycled then. I cycled from Cockfosters to Southgate and then to Broomfield. There was a cycle shop on Hedge Lane 'Camp Cycle Shop' I had my first proper bike made there".

How do you remember PG?: There used to be more attractions in Palmers Green two cinemas, art shops, butchers, green grocers "the kind of thing that's all in the supermarket now and a big store 'Evans & Davies' sold nearly everything, it was a destination".

"its not a target for shopping anymore... There's a diminishing availability of things like buying a light bulb.. You have to go online for everything".

"I'm not sure where I would buy a pair of socks".

"people walking through to schools is the main use of the high street otherwise people wouldn't walk down it".

"There's a hell of a lot of cafés and restaurants in PG so I decided to count them a few years back... There were 52 cafés and restaurants if Hedge Lane is the end of PG - I also counted 29 nail bars / hair dressers / barbers... And a lot of betting shops"- Comment on lack of variation on the high street now.

Most used venues : "I used to use the library extensively but it changed. People used to use it as a place to read their newspapers. Now I use the charity book shop across the road".

"I used to cook a lot for my family but I rather eat out at somewhere like Rimini because I don't want to be on my feet too much".

Favourite places : I like the feeling of a 'cafe society' relax and watch the world go by having a coffee and reading a newspaper".

"Every morning I walk up Fox Lane to where my wife's care home is. I then wander back buy a newspaper and go to Kiva. I sit have a couple of coffees and it gives me a sort of companionship".

"The dual aspect window in Kiva I enjoy its perfect for watching the world go by...I'm quite happy with Palmers Green".

An underused space?: "I often wonder where a railway connects with a bridge who owns those spaces".

What do you leave the neighbourhood for?: I used to leave for work, to play in my Jazz band all across London, to go to galleries and museums, to eat out and do some window shopping. But I stopped going about 3 years ago... I'm less mobile and I stay within the neighbourhood .

"I sometimes drive up to West Lodge Hotel for a coffee and a sandwich as its connected to near where I grew up."
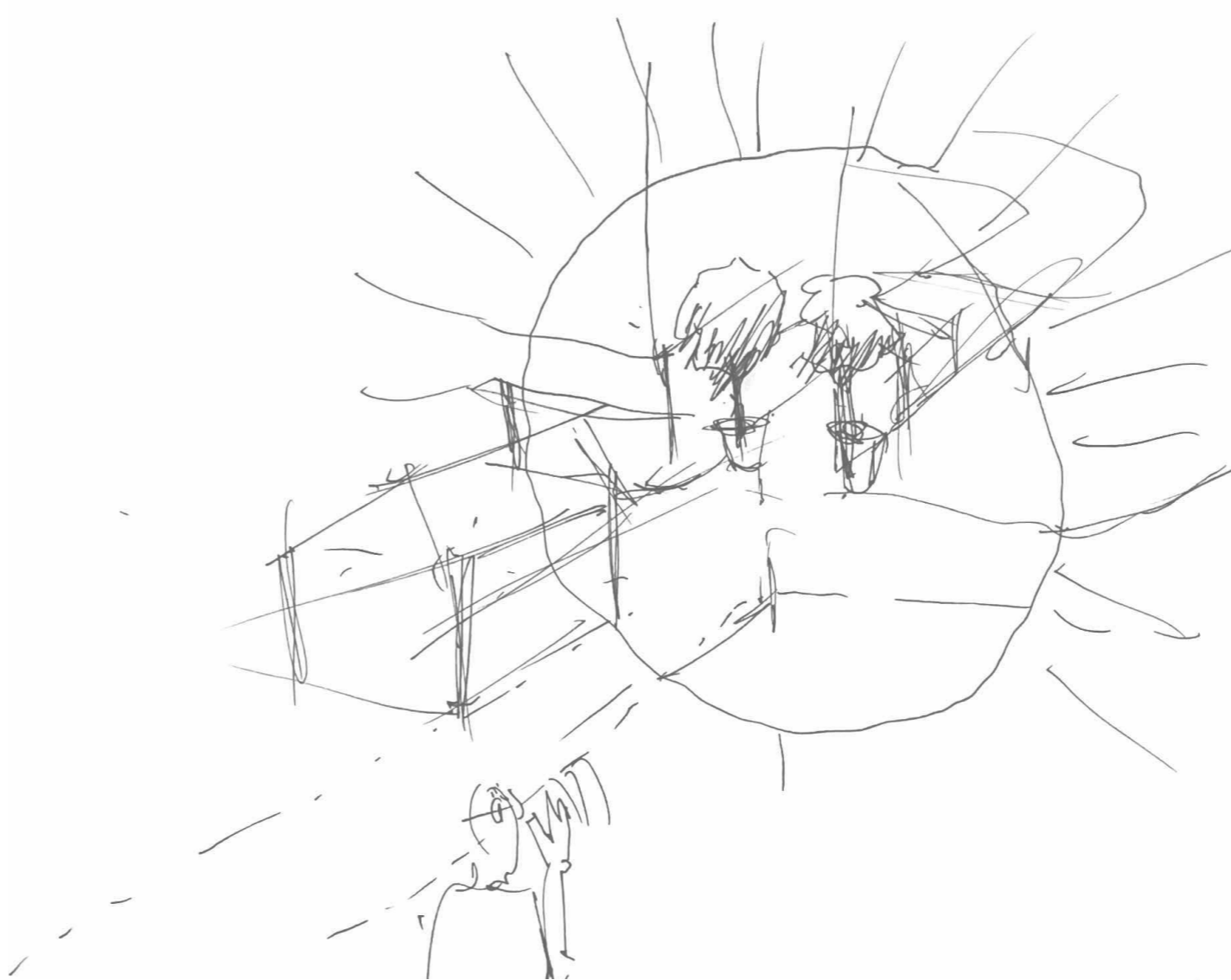
"Development and change is done without debate or an understanding of the neighbourhood".

Negative: Things such as banks closing, when you're old and your not good with computers banks are important for people.

"the way things are designed and managed are bad the new cycle lane and the low traffic neighbourhood ruins the high street pushing all the traffic into one place... It upset the status quo".

"The nature of things being built and changed at different times is that it becomes messy and ugly".

What do you think about the development to The Fox?: "The Fox Pub I don't like it, 52 dwellings places a pressure on PG which it doesn't have the infrastructure for".

What do you think about Broomfield House?: "I gave up on that a long time ago, I used to be on the committee and nothing could happen the council was at fault".

Do you like the idea of having a gallery or something cultural locally?: A gallery wouldn't work by itself I think it would have to be something multi-purpose.

It would be good for some younger people locally I get the feeling some people never go into London and only experience the neighbourhood.

Whilst drawing John remarked that for him the centre of Palmers Green is now around the junction by the fox rather than the triangle, given the new Devonshire Square, the cafés on all the corners and having no access to Fox Lane.

INTERVIEW 8 : GIO (ITALIAN) AGE: 60

Why did you move to PG? : Moved to Palmers Green in 2004 - Drove down Aldermans Hill and noticed the area, the park and the cafés across from it. It had a family feeling, a nice place to raise kids and it was affordable compared to where we were in Manor House.

Favourite memory: It was the first proper snowfall in a long long time. All trains were cancelled and schools were shut. I remember Broomfield Park being filled with parents and kids and it was just a great moment.

Most used venues : Stage, Kiva, , Rimini, Holtwhities, Vadi. "I head out every morning to a cafe just to get out the house now that I'm retired". Use Sainsbury's local daily.

Favourite place : "Broomfield Park, I spend a lot of time there and sometimes use the multigym" don't use so much socially but more as a destination.

I remember when Rico first started at school and getting a home visit from the teacher. The school felt very safe compared to where we were before.

Why does it feel like a neighbourhood? : The links with (my) kids' friends, knowing a lot of people and being so close to a station "it's a big plus".

Positives: "Hedge Lane record shop 'Record Detective Agency' is renowned in London, my friends always want to visit when they come to Palmers Green, people definitely come to the area for that".

I use the charity book shops fairly regularly and the vintage shop occasionally. The Fox is nice to have even though it's quite generic.

Negatives: I think the new square (Devonshire Square) is nice but I really don't see it get used much.
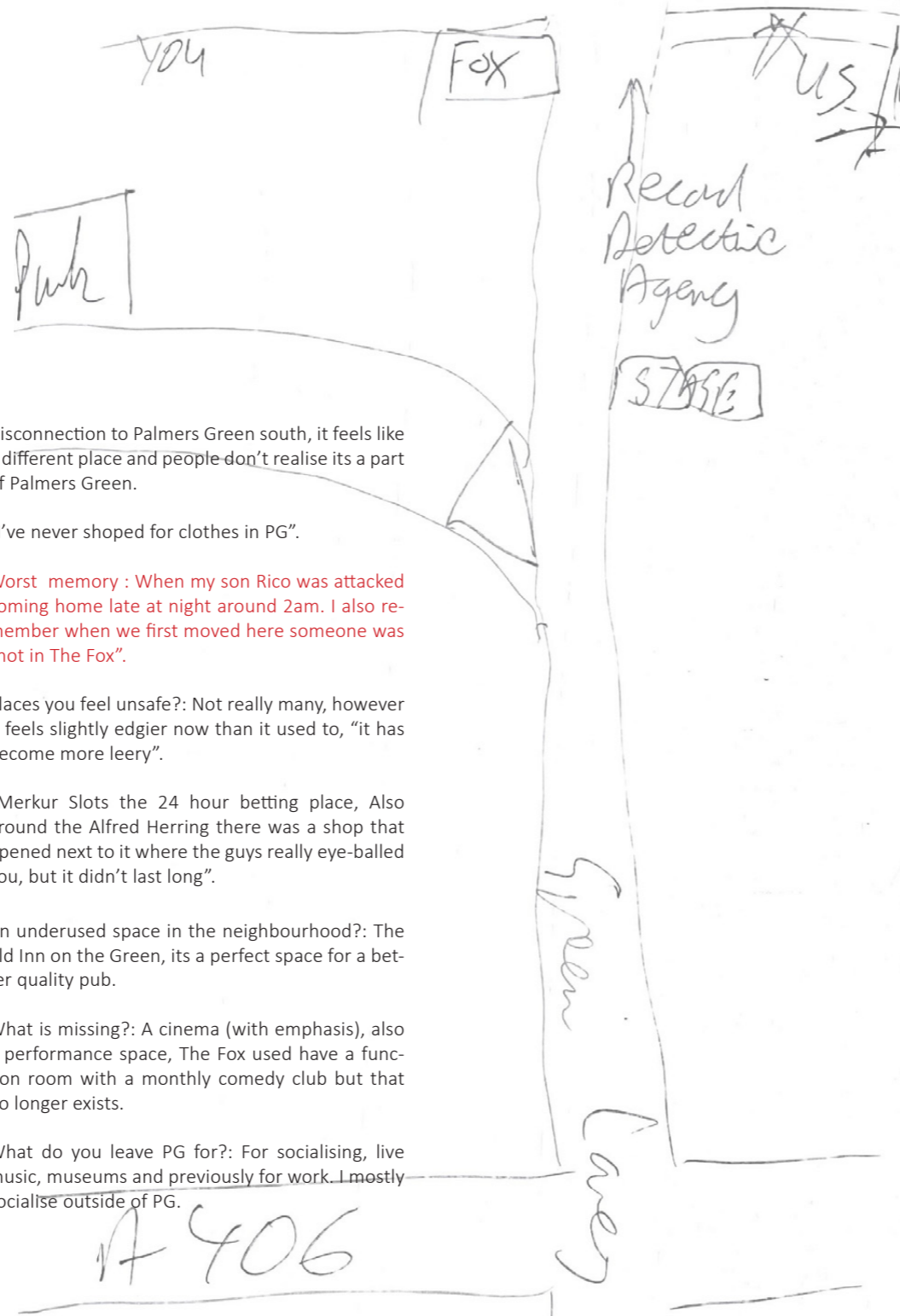
Disconnection to Palmers Green south, it feels like a different place and people don't realise its a part of Palmers Green.

"I've never shoped for clothes in PG".

Worst memory : When my son Rico was attacked coming home late at night around 2am. I also remember when we first moved here someone was shot in The Fox".

Places you feel unsafe?: Not really many, however it feels slightly edgier now than it used to, "it has become more leery".

"Merkur Slots the 24 hour betting place, Also around the Alfred Herring there was a shop that opened next to it where the guys really eye-balled you, but it didn't last long".

An underused space in the neighbourhood?: The old Inn on the Green, its a perfect space for a better quality pub.

What is missing?: A cinema (with emphasis), also a performance space, The Fox used have a function room with a monthly comedy club but that no longer exists.

What do you leave PG for?: For socialising, live music, museums and previously for work. I mostly socialise outside of PG.

We then extended the interview to have a tea at Kiva, (a café) he introduced me to two of the women who worked there (both Turkish and in their 20s) and I was able to conduct short interviews.

The first woman lived in Harlow a 30 min drive away and had little to say as she didn't use the neighbourhood much other than to "park her car in the car park and work in the café".

The second interview was more successful...

SHORT INTERVIEW 1: IRMAK (TURKISH) AGE: 20s

Grew up in PG, I live further along the high street at Hertford Court and my mum works in the café opposite (Olive).

Favourite place: "The gym I use it everyday".

I'm starting uni in September in central London. I will still live at home and commute in on the train.

Do you feel unsafe anywhere ?: No not really I think it's very safe here.

Most used places: Yasar Halim, the bus stop, Murat market and Kiva for work.

She noted when drawing the map, she always notices some bins along the high street and a big £5 sign outside a barbers.

SHORT INTERVIEW 2 : DANIEL (ENGLISH)
AGE: 20s

Lives 10 mins outside of Palmers Green in Oakwood.

Volunteers at Broomfield Park Café as part of recovery.

Mainly uses "kebab spots" on Green Lanes high street and knows "there's a pub there".

Didn't engage much in conversation, map depicts only really knowing the park in relation to Palmers Green. Had the feeling he had no need to go into Palmers Green. A lack of destination.
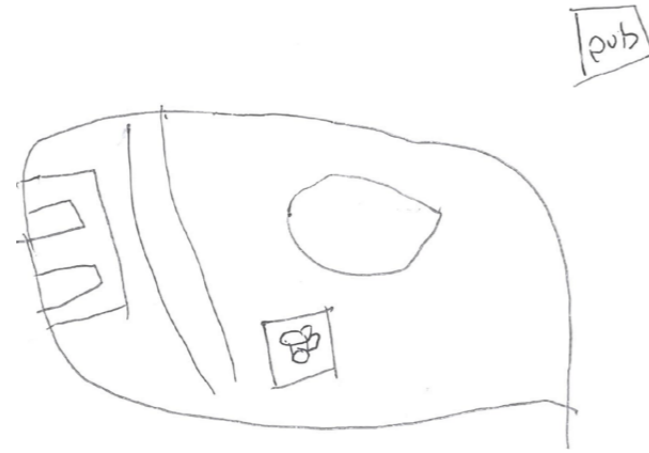
SHORT INTERVIEW 3 : REDA (FRENCH) AGE: 36

Lives on Hazelwood Lane 2 minutes from the bakery/café where he works. (Le Grand Jour) Has lived here for over 10 years.

Favourite place: The parks, the Rec and Broomfield Park, also visits the mosque regularly.

Negatives: "Loss of feeling in the neighbourhood, it used to be a lot better, there was more community before".

"There is always changes in PG it takes time to adjust to always seeing new people".

"All the shops are very similar (referring to male dominated cafés), something is not quite working in Palmers Green, we need something new for the area but the right change"

Mostly uses Morrisons, and Sainsbury's Local.

How does the new square next to your café affect business?: Its very good when the market comes (every 3 months) but it needs to be made flat, have trees like a proper square and needs fixed seating so more people can sit there. Feels it's too temporary.

INTERVIEW DATA
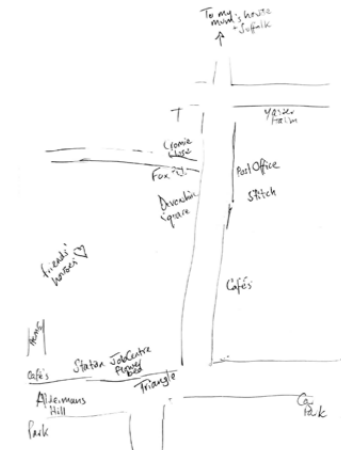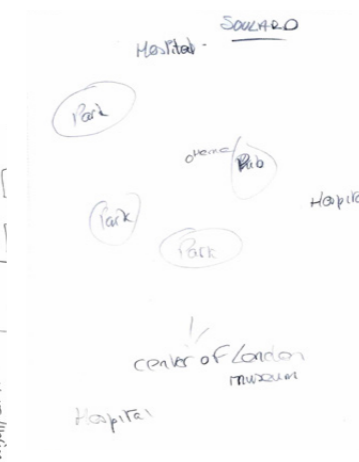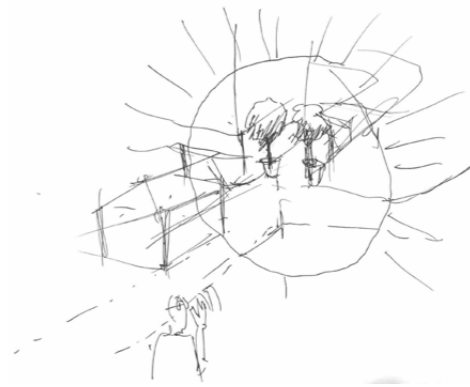
When comparing the set of maps I collected there are some common themes;

The inclusion of Broomfield Park - even if the map is not close in proximity to the park it is still labelled.

Including some or all the high street - The high street is nearly always represented and labelled depending on use

The representation of roads - junctions between roads are clearly used as landmarks in helping people orientate themselves.

The maps in correlation with the interviews clearly show how people link what they use to what they consider 'their neighbourhood' and not much else beyond that.

The amount the neighbourhood is used is quite low with the exception of the park.

COLLECTIVE MAP

Exploring the possibilities of mapping expands the notion of how we can use mapping as a tool. Here I overlay quotes from interviews and the collection of mental maps to give a different perspective on the neighbourhood.

It allows us to start to build up an idea of where certain types of spaces lie, and the intensity of activity around them.

There is also a clear path through the neighbourhood that presents itself (arrow) that indicates what the main movement is through Palmers Green and the spaces you encounter along it.

Leaving spaces ambiguous (positive or negative) creates a desire to understand more. To interpret in your own way and perhaps to explore spaces that you might not normally go.

"A project can hinge upon a chance encounter" (Awan et.al, 2011).

Map quotes:

"the church is always empty"

"I like to take a walk up to the park and sit in the sun"

"My favourite place is the parks like the Rec"

"crossing through Cromie Close"

"Renowned in London my friends always want to visit"

"The table in our livingroom shakes from the noise"

"A nice view from the apartment"

"Concern over cars being stolen"

"The cycle lane is not safe for pedestrians"

"The narrow part of the bridge"

"Its nice to have a local pub"

"I don't like it"

"Too expensive for most people"

"I love George's proper old school chippy"

"I eat at Rimini rather than cook"

"remember elderly neighbours putting up bunting"

"Fights outside the cafes"

"Sweet Life, I use it everyday"

"It needs to be made into a proper square"

"I never see the square being used"

"It provides me with an escpae from home"

"A view over London for a picnic"

"i like the feeling of it being there"

"To many café's that I can't use"

"(the train is always delayed"

"I like the feeling of a cafe society"

"I really like the dry cleaners"

"the park hasa a sense of space"

"Playing football in the cage"

"I use the gym everyday"

"Seeing the same people who have fallen through the net"

"My garden feels like a sanctury"

"Great transport to the city"

"I like walking around amongst old trees, birds and wildlife"

"Learning to ride my bike around the pond"

"Snow day- The park being filled with kids and parents it was a great moment"

"I enjoy the friendly atmosphere"

"I use the charity book shops regularly"

"Kiya on the corner"

"The dual aspect window is perfect forwatching the world go by"

"being attacked outside the Alfred Herring"

"surrounded with schools"

"Broomfield House, I gave up on that a long time ago"

"that's just outrageous"

"Merker slots is just awful 24 hour betting"

"the landlord shouted aggressive abuse"

"a place anyone can sit"

"Stage makes you feel like you're not in Palmers Green"

"the frontage is not looked after"

"PG feels very green because of the surrounding parks"

"The traffic ruins the neighbourhood"

"Philanthrophy has thought put into it"

"too many men - it's not good for families and women"

"Becomes very male dominated"

"It feels like a differnt place its so disconnected"

"I visit the mosque regularly"

"The museums and galleries in London are free for me"

"Walking up to the park and sitting in the sun"

"The street party seeing the street empty of cars"

"The gym, I go there everyday"

"Snow day - everyone kids and parents gathered here"

"It's a place where anybody can sit"

"Swinging on the monkey bars"

"The flower beds I spent a lot of time on by the station"

"Pastries on a Saturday morning"

"Practising running on the grass track"

"It's on the corner so the dual aspect window is great for watching the world go by"

"Having a picnic and a view at the London skyline"

"I love George's proper old school chippy"

"Getting Okra from Yasar Halim with my mum"

"I really like Devonshire Square it just doesn't get used that much"

"Renowned in London and a destination for people coming to Palmers green"

"I have a morning coffee everyday at the yard"

"Riding my bike around the pond"

"A cool business we convinced to open a second store in Palmers Green"

"It's affordable to drink here - where would people go if this wasn't here"

"The cage where we would always play football"

"Holtwhites Bakery does some really great food"

"Broomfield House, that's just outrageous"

The cage has not been well maintained

Protest on the bridge leaving food waste on the footpath

"Inaccessible cafés"

"I never see it get used, there's nowhere to sit"

"I always notice the bins"

"Palmers Green south feels completely disconnected"

"The parking around here is bad sometimes I can't even get my car out"

"There's too many Albanian places along here it's not good for women and families"

"It's a perfect space for a better quality pub"

"I don't like the new development behind The Fox"

"The low traffic neighbourhood pushes all the traffic along the high street"

"This junction is an absolute nightmare"

"Too many Albanian restaurants"

"I always wondered what the spaces by the bridge are used for"

"The bike lane is poorly designed and really dangerous"

"Merkus Slots is just terrible place along the high street"

"The alley by the bridge doesn't always feel safe"

"I got attacked outside the Alfred Herring"

"The church is always empty"

"I always feel a bit nervous going along Cromey Close"

BRING BACK THE TRACK...

A NEW BRIDGE EXPERIENCE...

WELCOME TO BROOMFIELD HOUSE...

VIEW OF SKYLINE ALL YEAR ROUND...

A PUBLIC SQUARE DONE RIGHT...

YOUR LOCAL CINEMA...

DEFINING SPACES

Through this process of mapping, observing, listening and interpreting I hope to have created an altered perspective on Palmers Green, highlighting its values and needs.

A process of overlaying these different forms of data have allowed me to determine specific spaces that relate to each of the stages in the method.

Each defined space was identified by multiple residents in the 'INTERVIEW' stage, for either positive or negative reasons. The spaces sit along the identified key route built up through the overlaying of mental mappings and quotes in the 'COLLECTIVE MAP', and directly connect back to the 'MAPPING' section, located close to identified 'KEY POINTS' in the neighbourhood.

Informed by this methodology, I feel that as an architect, it is important to take a stance on how these spaces could be enhanced and improved for the diverse residents of Palmers Green. How can I help them begin to see the potential around them and engage with a participatory design process?

I will now explore the possibilities of some of these spaces that have value through memory but also are in need for improvement or change.

'SPATIAL AGENCY'

Can a structure (folly) be placed in these spaces to stimulate residents into becoming spatial agents? "For spatial agency to be exercised in its fullest... actions and interventions always take place through negotiation and deliberation and ultimately bring about the empowerment of those involved". (Awan et.al, 2011)

Spatial agents can be defined as "negotiators of existing conditions in order to partially reform them" and can "be effective if one is alert to the constraints and opportunities that the structure presents". (Awan et.al, 2011)

When considering the possibilities of these spaces it is important that architecture becomes a matter of concern rather than a matter of fact. "As matters of concern, they enter into socially embedded networks, in which the consequences of architecture are of much more significance". To achieve a possibility of spatial agency within these spaces it is important to understand some of the key "operations of spatial agency": (Awan et.al, 2011)

'Expanding briefs' - Thinking beyond the boundary of what is considered 'the site'. Is it possible that a resident considers the whole neighbourhood the site?

'Initiating' How to start the project and stimulate interest and widespread participation and provide relevant understandable information.

1 : SKYLINE - (A viewing platform?)

2 : BROOMFIELD HOUSE - (A stage?)

3 : TRACK - (A sports club?)

4 : UNDER THE BRIDGE - (A market?)

'Economy' - Self management, trading within community and negotiating space.

'Critical Awareness' - being aware of freedom and restrictions to avoid applying the same solution to different places.

'Appropriating' - Unsettling status quo and harnessing underused resources questions private/public space, even if something is temporary it can make people aware of its potential in the future.

'Delightful intermediacy' - leave structures to be appropriated over time by residents leaving things unfinished and defending unprogrammed space means for less regulated space : "change the terrain of spatial production".

'Making things visible' - Research, record, visualise and analyse the links and relationships between different nodes and actors", simplify things making change seem possible and understandable.

'Networks' - Crowdsourcing, combined actors together make change, invitation of action through donation/participation.

'Sharing knowledge' collaboration makes architecture more relevant and allows people to feel it is an approachable topic. Sharing of knowledge in an open manner, amateur is equal to expert and not excluding e.g. through technical drawings.

'Subverting and opposing' - "issues such as community consultation have become a tick box exercise rather than an opportunity for the production of a radically different conception of the built environment", we should oppose traditional methods of spatial production.

'Toward other ways of doing architecture' - Who is the built environment for? A dialogue seeking the other. Working 'open source', often voluntarily and non governmental, putting speculative ideas into the next generation.

With these 'operations' in mind what can be done with these identified spaces? From events, structures, benches, flowers, trees, indications of something happening, restoration, public space, cinema, community facilities community facilities, here I aim to begin to unlock the potential of these identified spaces in the neighbourhood and kick start a discussion with the community through the insertion of a structure (folly).

What is imagined for each of these spaces? Can the intention for the space be reflected in the structure that is placed there? Can views be framed highlighting things to consider? How can you create a feeling of what could be?

Considering the spaces as a shared surface that connects the routes as you walk through the neighbourhood. How could it feel when you walk from one to another, making them coherent through materiality, colour and scale? What is the relation between each of them?

Can information about the space be told in an artistic way that provokes thoughts and discussion? How can this be collected and how can residents' responses be shown?

To achieve the goal of making residents into 'spatial agents', I took all these elements into consideration in the design of the follies presented in the next chapter.

5 : INN ON THE GREEN - (Community pub?)

6 : HIGH STREET - (A Cinema?)

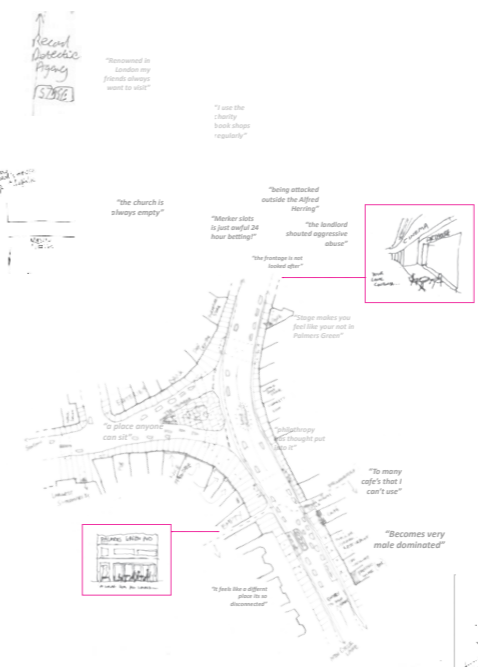

8 : ALLEYWAY - (Artists' space?)

7 : SQUARE - (A green space?)

LATE FOR SCHOOL
Another day another com-
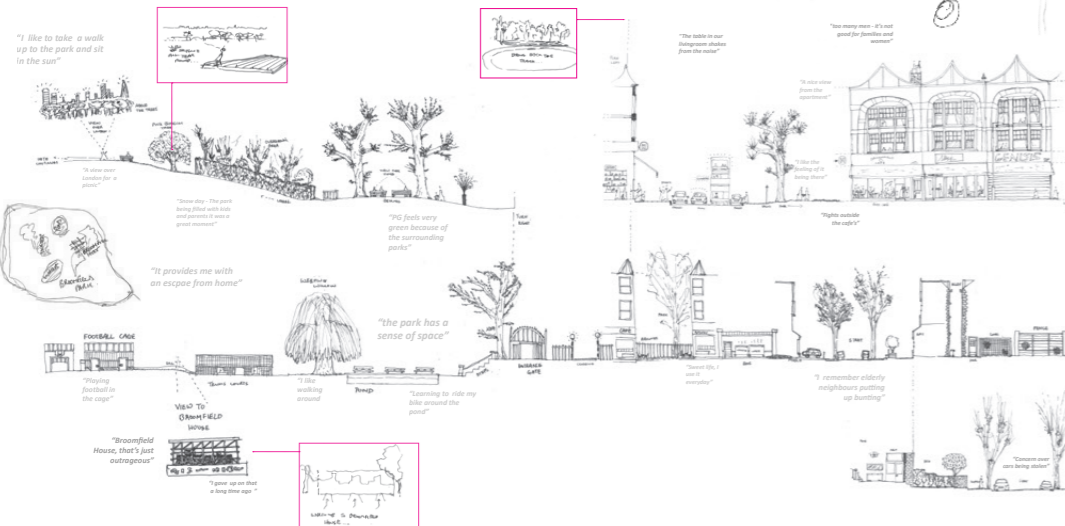muter train to London....

BOULANGERIE
The start of the weekend my Dad gives
me a £10 note, the order: a croissant
for my dad....

JUNGLE GARDEN
The excitement of seeing my best
friend Rico's house....

WONDERGOAL
Friday lunchtime at school means we have
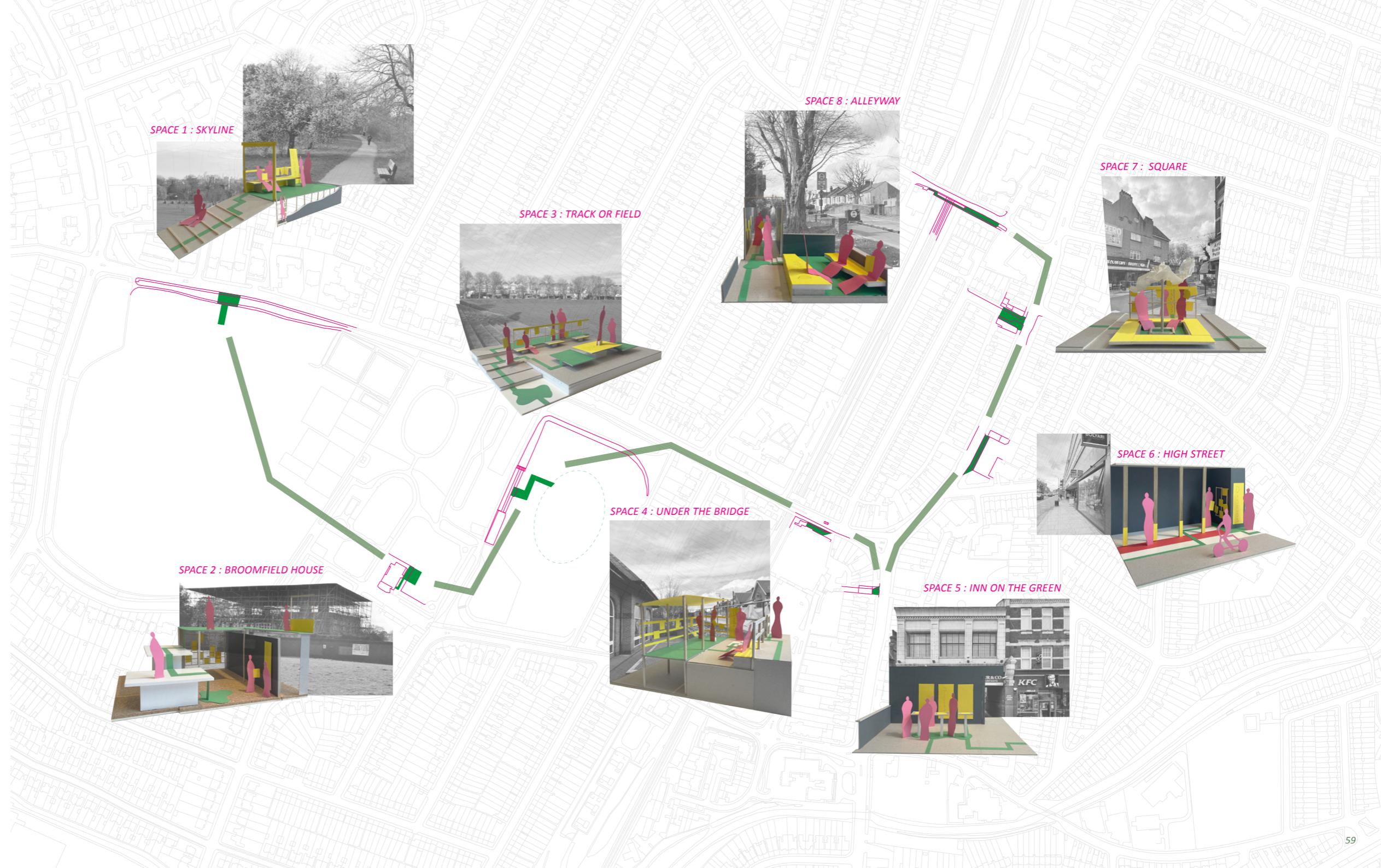just had the best lunch of the week....

4 | FOLLIES

Prompting thought through a series of follies, hosting and engaging residents through a discussion on the potential of different spaces in Palmers Green 'Follies for thought'.

Each folly holds a discussion point that encourages residents to think of the space from a new perspective, giving instruction on how to move through the space and things to consider. This allows for a discussion that is easy to enter into, with clear things to consider and topics in common, naturally starting a dialogue.

The design of the follies picks up on the data collected throughout the process. For example desired features for the space is reflected in the function of the structures to bring the other residents' ideas for the spaces into play.

Experimenting with models allowed me to grasp the spatial quality of each context and begin to understand how residents might interact with the follies. The similarity of scale and their light timber materiality is intended to reflect they are simple to construct and easy to alter. This helps to provide a feeling that the structure is open to the possibility of change and appropriation.

Green paint on the ground guides you through the structures and extends out of the space suggesting there are more spaces to explore.

SPACE 1 : SKYLINE

SPACE 8 : ALLEYWAY

SPACE 7 : SQUARE

SPACE 3 : TRACK OR FIELD

SPACE 6 : HIGH STREET

SPACE 4 : UNDER THE BRIDGE

SPACE 2 : BROOMFIELD HOUSE

SPACE 5 : INN ON THE GREEN

SPACE 1 : SKYLINE

Amongst the trees sits the structure you are now stood upon. Its timber legs sunken into the soggy grass beneath. The structure has drawn you out from the path and your usual routine walk. A steady place to stand, an unobstructed view of the London skyline, a place to rest, climb, lie and relax, to be appropriated. The structure juts out from the trees, exposed to the elements. The timber either warm from the sun or damp from the rain. You are now among the London skyline for any passer by. You now have a space where you view London as a distant landscape rather than an engulfing city. Can this be something more than a summer picnic spot? What can you imagine this space becoming?
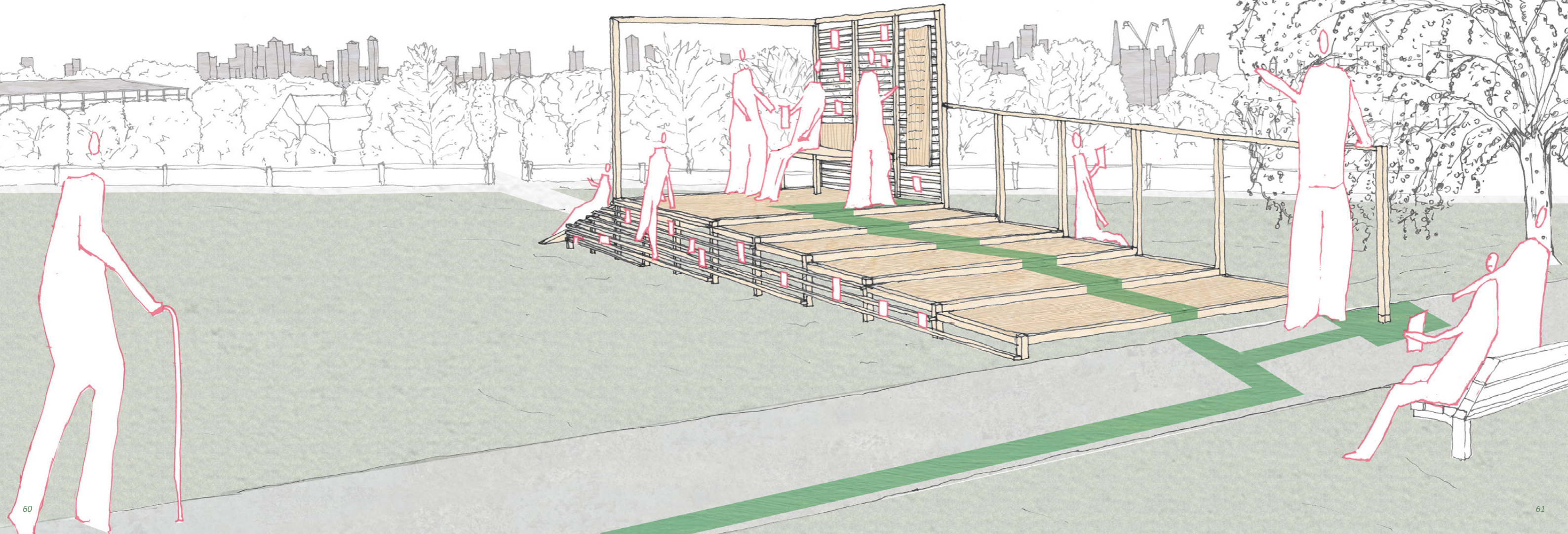
SPACE 2 : BROOMFIELD HOUSE

Years of unresolved debate have led to you standing in front of this tall dark green fencing.

Behind sits an almighty structure covering the remains of a once beautiful house, now only partially visible through a forest of metal scaffold poles. Neither the scale nor the ruggedness befits the peace and serenity of the surrounding park.

*Take a walk up the timber steps that take you up and over the fence for the first time.*

Peer through the frame and into the house and reflect upon its history. What do you imagine the space to be, a backdrop to the park or its centrepiece? Does this new perspective from the other side of the fence change your perception of what it could become?

Take a step back and then out onto the platform, now you have taken the stage...

SPACE 3 : TRACK OR FIELD

Here now you stand on the a huge stone terrace that crowds once filled. If you look out onto the expanse of green space you can still see the faint outline of an athletics track in the grass from what lies beneath. A beautiful parade sits in the backdrop and the sunken grass area lays in wait for the sumer to be in use again. What do you imagine standing behind this railing, racing to glory around the track or something else entirely?
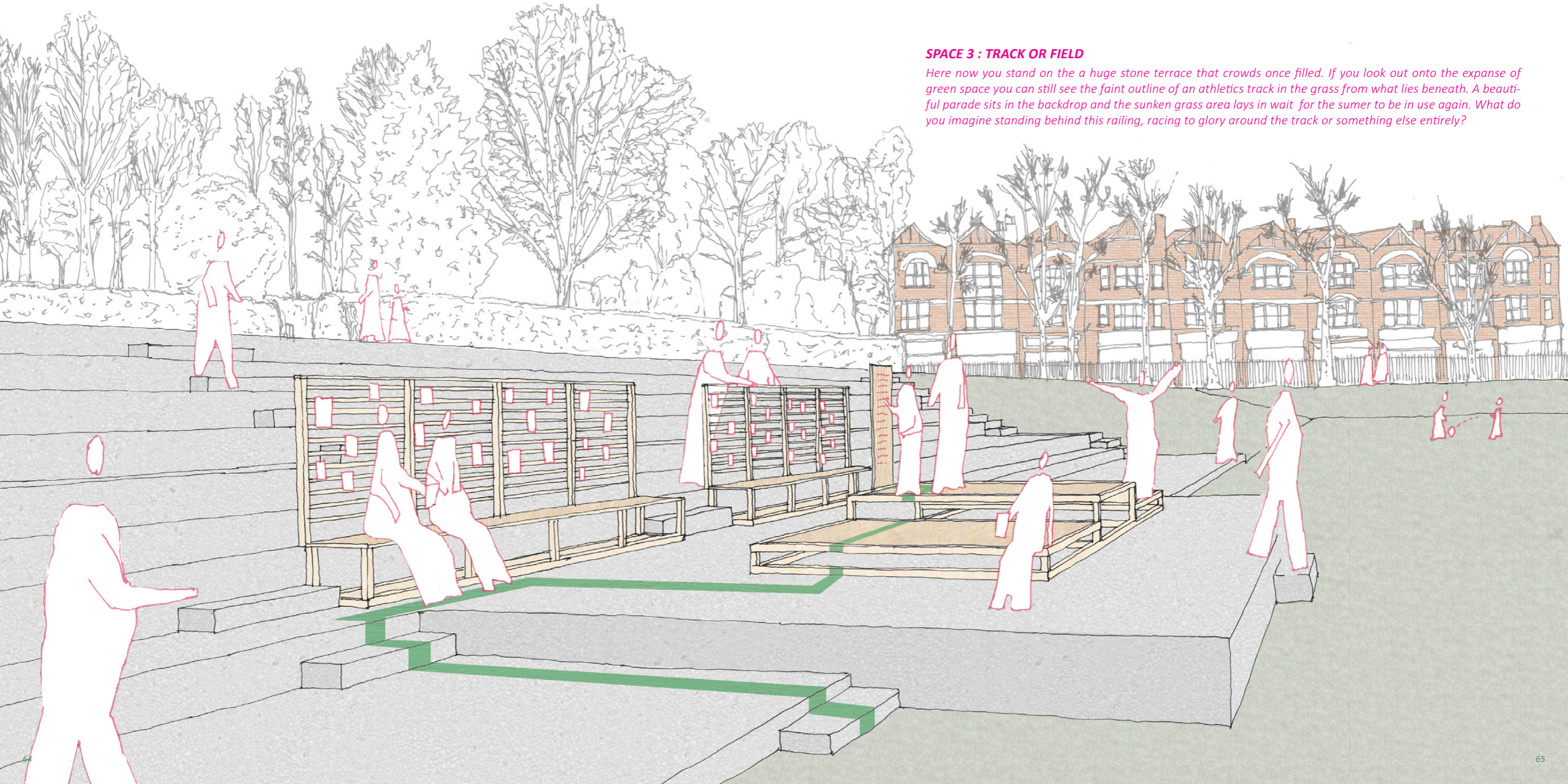
SPACE 4 : UNDER THE BRIDGE

You stand within one of Palmers Green's 'leftover' spaces. No obvious solution for its use given its narrow and inaccessible characteristics. A space you will have passed countless times without much thought on your way to the station or the supermarket.

Walk out upon the structure to your left. Where you stand now lifts you up and out of the space below and gives you a connection onto the street.

SPACE 5 : INN ON THE GREEN

The low wall to your left marks the start of a wider area of pavement. This change in scale reflects that you are now on the high street, a more public surface, and entering the centre of Palmers Green.

The building you face works as an in-between from the houses to the left and the main high street façade to the right. Its façade scattered with delicate details from a pub that once was.

Take a step back and stand at the tables, imagine this a place restored to its former glory. Do you imagine the pub that once was, or something
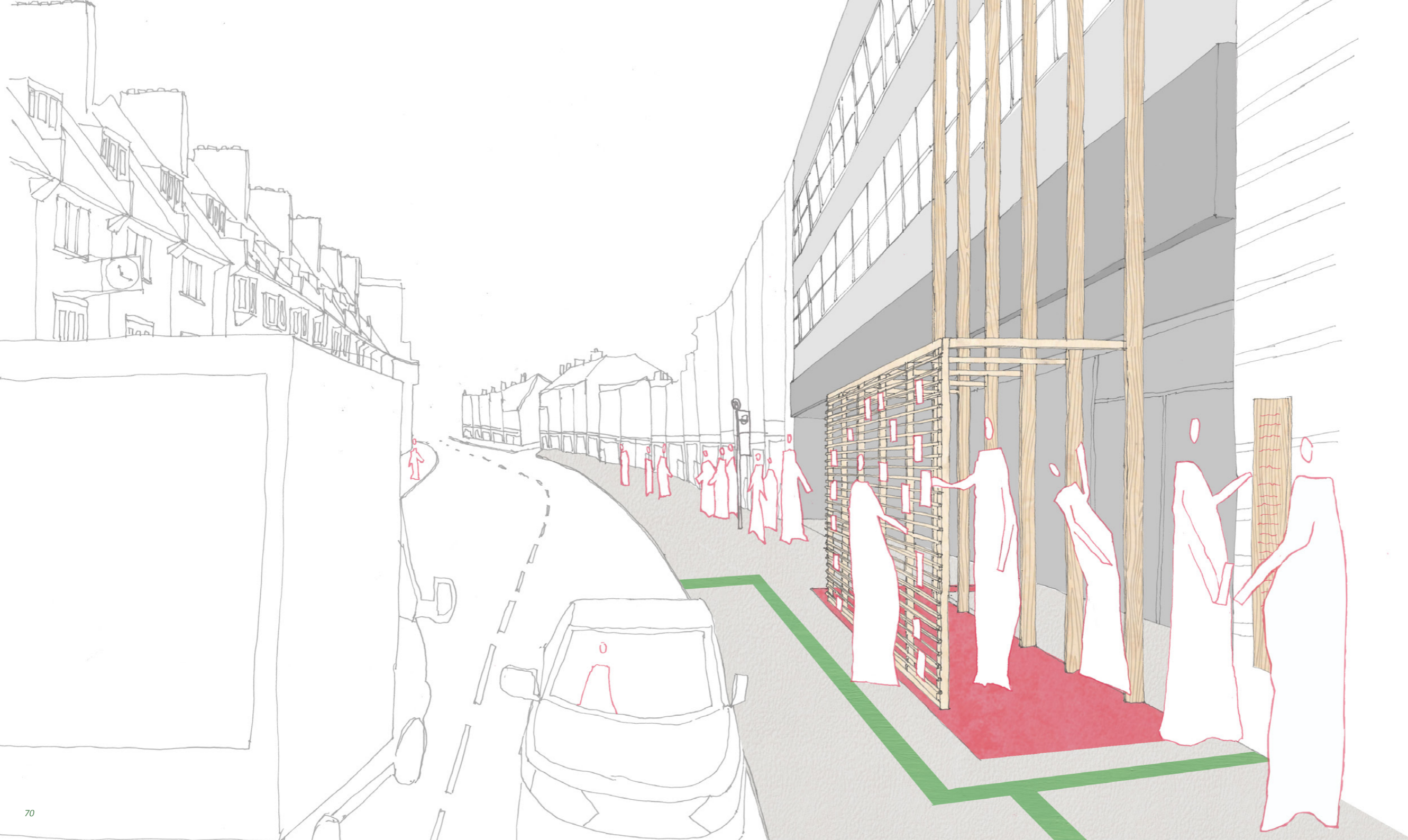
You are at the heart of the hustle and bustle of Green Lanes. Traffic flows continuously behind you, perhaps a bus is pulling in at the stop just ahead.

Set back from the pavement lies a variety of shops with a larger paved area in front, the border between these marked with timber columns. Consider for a moment the empty space that sits above?

Cast your eyes up the columns and imagine what you'd like to sit behind the blank grey façade. Now take a walk along the red carpet, ponder the cinema that nearly found a new home here. Can you imagine a local cinema, or do you picture something else?

SPACE 7 : SQUARE

You are in Palmers Green's brand new public square. On either side a French patisserie and a Greek bakery with seating lining each side of the square giving it an almost Mediterranean feel.

Consider the qualities and distinctiveness of this space compared with the rest of high street. You may observe however that the square lies empty of activity.

There is of course an ever present rumble from the passing traffic in the background but take peace in knowing this space is now free from Cars. Take a seat beneath the tree on the bench and think about the qualities that would make you want to stop and use this space.

SPACE 8 : ALLEYWAY

Here is a space that could be considered a gateway in to the neighbourhood, it is set far enough back to not hear the traffic, but not completely disconnected from the high street. The recently pedestrianised bridge stands to your right leading you down onto Green Lanes. An old pedestrian crossing to the left presents itself in the form of a neglected narrow alley fenced with high metal sheets, a space of insecurity for some.

The surface you stand on now previously acted as a green buffer to the road, but now lies underused holding a potential to become a part of the pedestrianised bridge. Take a step back, sit back on the benches amongst the greenery enjoy a moment of quiet. Imagine what would make you feel comfortable or want to use this space. Is there a potential to make a change to the neglected alleyway?

In this stage of the methodology, (see page 8) residents of the neighbourhood are invited to the follies through the form of a leaflet and given background information on the research that has taken place and where the follies are located.

You have been invited to 'Follies For Thought' coming to Palmers Green in August 2024.

Through a series of mappings, observations and conversations with residents, 8 spaces have been identified within Palmers Green for their potential to change or adapt for the benefit of the neighbourhood.

A structure (folly) for each of these spaces across Palmers Green will be assembled for you to visit, meet and discuss with other residents of Palmers Green.

Here now lies a chance to start a conversation.

1. SKYLINE VIEW   2. BROOMFIELD HOUSE   3. THE TRACK   4. BY THE BRIDGE   5. INN ON THE GREEN   6. HIGH STREET   7. DEVONSHIRE SQUARE   8. THE ALLEY

REFLECTION

A NEIGHBOURHOOD ARCHITECT ?

A gesture, such as a folly, gives an apparatus for appropriation and enables a discussion where meaningful ideas can be harvested. The soft, simple and playful nature of a folly suggests more is to come. However, to place it successfully requires a deeper level of understanding of place.

The neighbourhood is a scale intimate yet public, hard to fully grasp as an outsider lacking years of lived experience. Is there a role for a neighbourhood architect to take care of the smaller details? To understand its inner workings and infraordinary features?

Is there potential for genuine participation from residents if a platform is put in place? One which can involve residents in the process in a playful idiosyncratic way, rather than the continued exclusion typical of traditional approaches.

As discussed in the study 'METHOD', I imagine a potential for its continuation, the 'post-thesis'. Through the research I have conducted there is groundwork in place and an entry point for participation to begin.

Its potential to become a reality hinges on response to the 'invitation leaflet' alongside the ability to mobilise resources to construct the follies.

The stages beyond this hypothesised in the method, will respond flexibly in terms of order and function. However, for the process to continue certain elements need to be addressed including ensuring ongoing community participation and engagement, the support of the council for planning purposes and raising financial support from public, private and community bodies.

Upon reflection, the method I have pursued has taken many twists and turns. My understanding of participation has shifted, recognizing that in this context it needs to extend beyond a small research group to engaging with the complexities of the whole community.

For this to be implemented successfully as a method, I see a crucial role for a 'neighbourhood architect'; someone dedicated to this process and prepared to go beyond the level of engagement characterized by current participatory design approaches.

Investment in this type of human resource would lead to more resilient neighbourhoods that take pride in the infraordinary and actively care for the built environment that surrounds them.
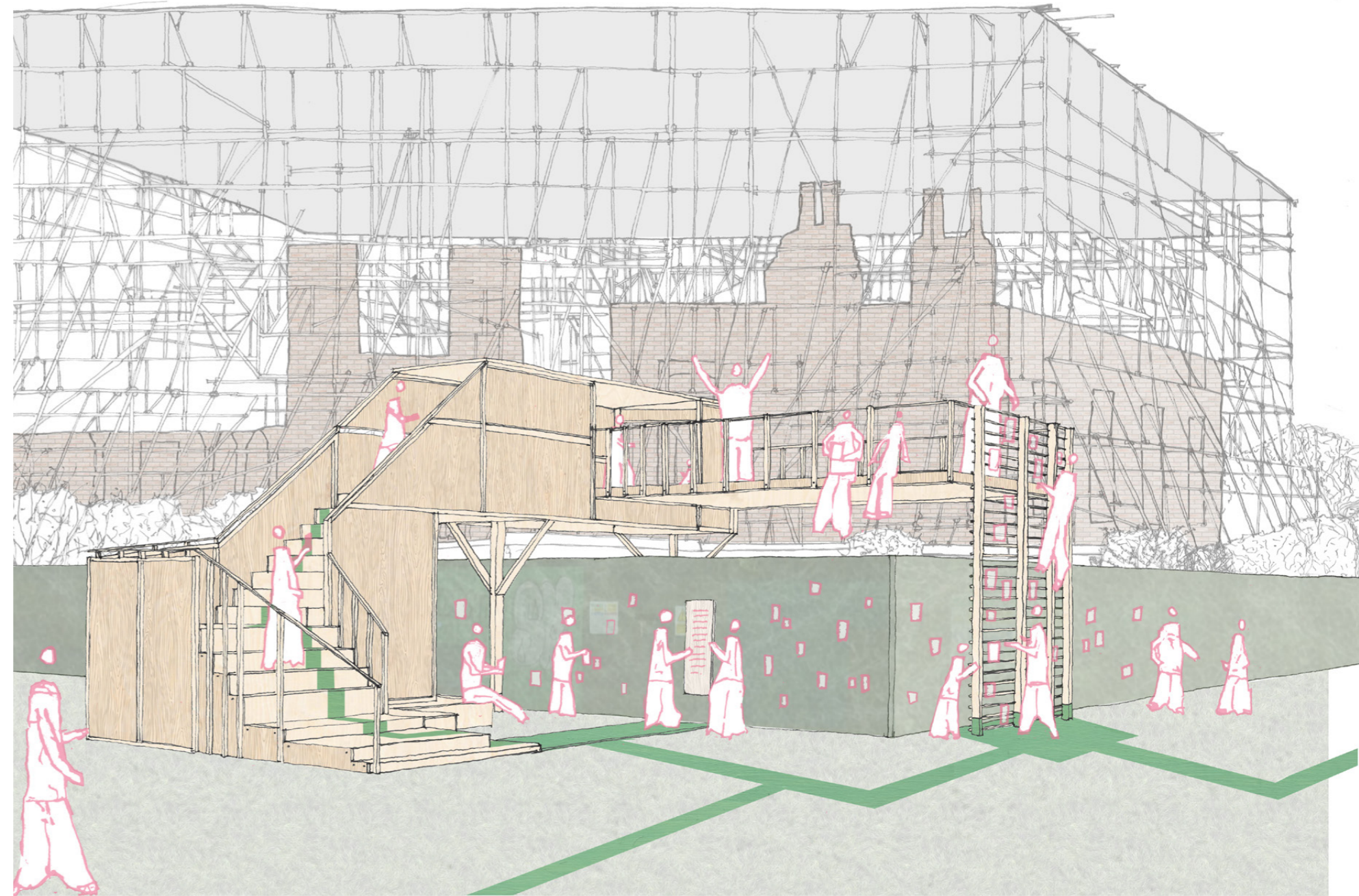
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