



TONIC DESIGN CHARENTE

10th October 2017

Publica

INTRODUCTION

On 10th October 2017, Publica hosted and facilitated a design charette for Tonic to explore refining a set of site and design criteria for the UK's first LGBT+ majority retirement community.

Supported by Publica's Community Interest Company (CIC) since 2015, Tonic is a social enterprise which aims to deliver a national demonstration project that challenges the anonymity often found in older people's housing. Tonic's vision is led by the belief that creativity, innovation, accessibility, affirmation and joy can help to tackle the isolation, fear and discrimination experienced within the LGBT+ community.

The design charette's purpose was to focus debate about project priorities and opportunities in a low-risk, structured environment; intended as a 'dry run' in advance of key decisions that Tonic will make about the development in the near future, including the selection of a suitable site.

We were overwhelmed by the enthusiasm to participate from our invited guests. The group of experts that attended the charette represented a broad cross-section of designers, developers and thinkers, all with extensive knowledge of the culture and constraints within which Tonic's vision will be realised.

The evening was structured around a series of exercises that allowed participants to produce a set of key design considerations for Tonic to use in their search for a suitable site.

This booklet summarises the discussions held in each group, and draws out key design principles for Tonic's future design process.

This document has been produced for internal use only.

AGENDA

SESSION	
1	Arrival and refreshments
2	Welcome and introduction to the charette
3	Exercise 1: Site selection
4	Exercise 2: Developing designs for the new Tonic centre
5	Break and preparation for presentation session
6	Presentations and discussion
7	Wrap-up and thanks

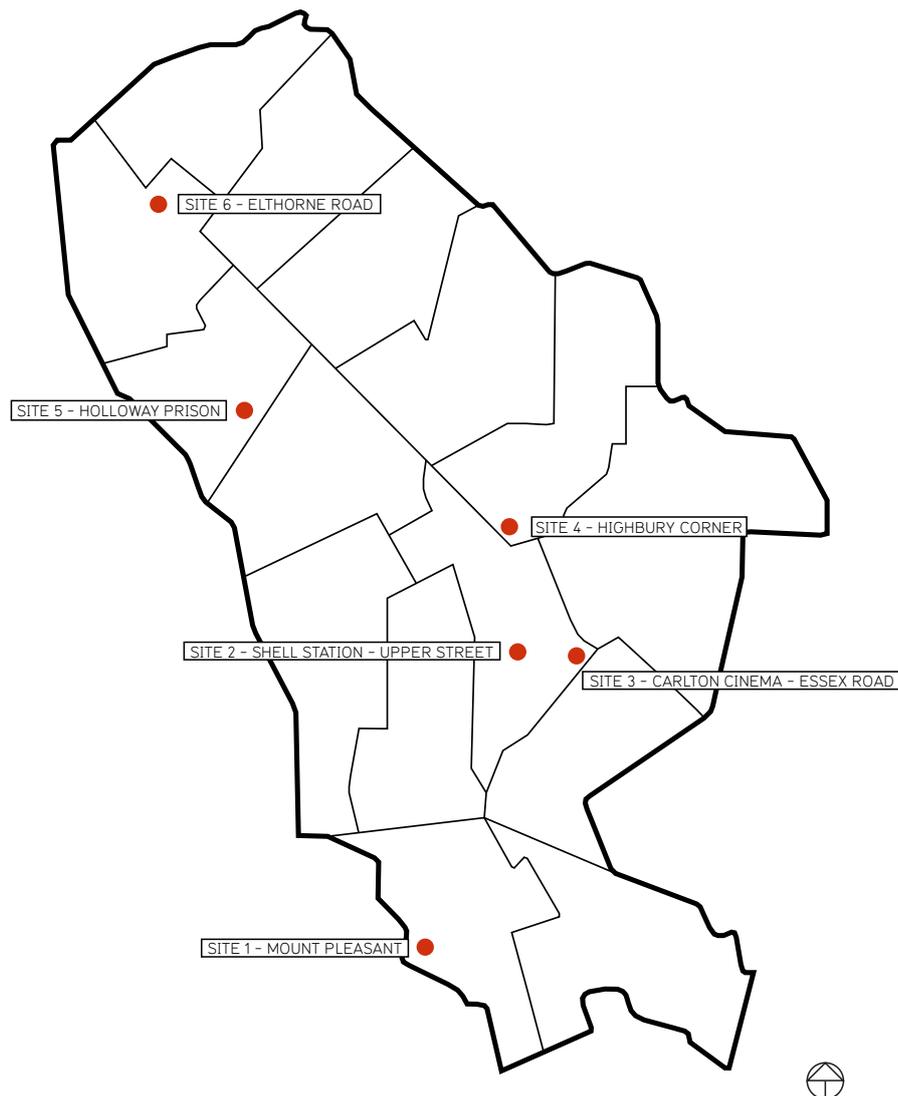
GROUP 1	Chris Brown	<i>Igloo</i>	
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	Patrick Devlin	<i>Pollard Thomas Edwards</i>	
	James Greenshields	<i>Tonic</i>	
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	Jos Boys	<i>Independent scholar and practitioner</i>	
	Gilly Green	<i>Tonic</i>	
	Joanna Karatzas	<i>Níall McLaughlin Architects</i>	
	Kabillan Navaratnarasa	<i>Versiti</i>	
	Kym Shaen-Carter	<i>Igloo</i>	
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GROUP 3	Marie-Claude Gervais	<i>Dubishere/Versiti</i>	
	Jamie Hartzell	<i>Tonic</i>	
	Miranda MacLaren	<i>Duggan Morris Architects</i>	
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		Ketki Mudholkar	<i>Publica</i>
		Lucy Musgrave	<i>Publica/Tonic</i>

SUMMARY OF EXERCISE 1:

Site selection

The design charette asked attendees - divided into three groups - to assess the appropriateness of six hypothetical sites for the Tonic development. The potential sites were selected and introduced by Publica. All of the sites used were located within the London Borough of Islington, with each having a distinctive character and its own strengths and weaknesses. This exercise allowed participants to explore how the Tonic scheme design might emerge in relation to different site conditions and helped to establish a set of criteria for site selection.

LOCATION OF THE SITES WITHIN THE LONDON BOROUGH OF ISLINGTON





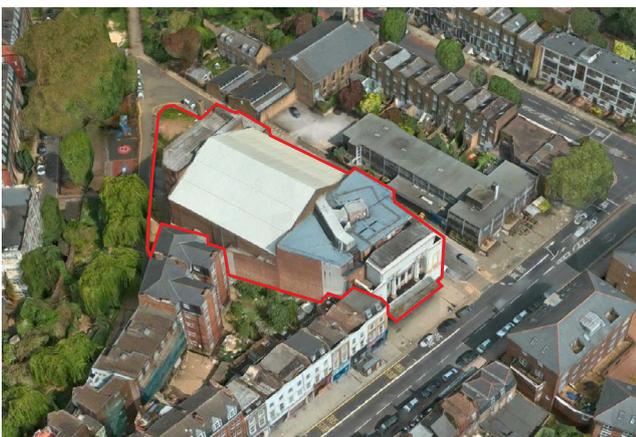
SITE 1: MOUNT PLEASANT

- + Central London site
- + Planning permission granted
- + Access to shared facilities within development
- Relatively small site, 50-60 units
- Limited ability to influence plan
- Relatively limited transport access



SITE 2: SHELL STATION - UPPER STREET

- + Prominent town centre site
- + Good access to local facilities
- + Characterful buildings
- Relatively small site, 50-60 units
- Good but not excellent transport links
- Situated within a conservation area



SITE 3: CARLTON CINEMA - ESSEX ROAD

- + Potential for on-site cultural programme
- + Good access to local facilities
- + Characterful buildings
- Awkward site
- Listed building (Grade II)
- Good but not excellent transport links



SITE 4: Highbury Corner

- + Excellent transport connections
- + Good access to local facilities
- + Good access to local green space

- Very small site, 50 units max.
- Busy road frontage to one aspect



SITE 5: Holloway Prison

- + Large site, 60+ units
- + Opportunity to influence plan
- + Good transport connections

- Local facilities somewhat remote
- Future character of the area uncertain



SITE 6: Elthorne Road

- + Very large site, c. 100 units
- + Good transport connections
- + Local arts and cultural facilities

- Least prominent site
- Least central site

SUMMARY OF GROUP DISCUSSIONS

This section summarises the discussions of the three groups as they selected one project site from the six hypothetical sites presented.

SITE 6: ELTHORNE ROAD

Selected by groups 1 and 3

Groups 1 and 3 selected the Elthorne Road site, in Archway, for the development of the Tonic scheme.

One of the main selection criteria was the size of the site – the largest of those proposed – where an estimated 100 units could be included within the development. Group 1 also emphasised the potential for height on the site.

Both groups noted the possibility of slightly lower land values in relation to the other sites, reducing development costs.

They also highlighted the way in which, by situating the site in a regenerating area, Tonic might be able to influence the development of the wider area, and contribute to a sense of community.

The close proximity of the University of the Arts London building was considered a potential asset by both groups, and group 3 in particular considered ways in which the housing scheme could enable collaborations with the students.

The integration of the site with the city was important to both groups 1 and 3, particularly in regards to establishing a public-facing role for Tonic within the development, as well as providing uses that can be shared with the public.

Group 1 mentioned the importance of the area being ready to use once development is complete, rather than having to wait for the remainder of a wider mixed-use project to be built, which might have been an issue on the Mount Pleasant and Holloway Prison sites.

The ease of access to existing amenity was important for all three groups, and group 3 specifically highlighted the proximity to the Whittington Hospital, as well as the ability to walk up to Highgate and other nearby shopping areas.

Group 2 also emphasised the benefits of proximity to public amenity and services, but they argued that the distance from London's centre and its characteristic of being off a main high street were major issues that would compromise the visibility of the scheme.

SITE 4: Highbury Corner

Selected by group 2

Proximity to the local amenities of Holloway Road was important for group 2, with a location close to a high street being vital in generating a sense of safety and security, while simultaneously embracing city living.

The direct connection to Highbury Fields was also seen by group 2 as an important asset for public life. Highbury Leisure Centre, located to the north of the site, was highlighted as an additional amenity.

A small site was seen as an advantage for group 2, as it could allow for a more compact typology, and the ability to locate in a prominent location.

The central location would enable the project to serve as a flagship project for others to learn from, as well as making sure any retail or hospitality offer is in a location with plenty of footfall.

Groups 1 and 3 did not choose this site because of its small size, with group 3 also noting that the site might have a polluted and noisy environment due to its proximity to both Holloway Road and The Garage music venue.

ALL OTHER SITES

Groups 1 and 3 noted that site 1, Mount Pleasant, and site 5, Holloway Prison, might offer limited scope to determine the surroundings of the site, as both were part of larger masterplans, and might also involve a period of waiting for surrounding areas to be completed, rather than offering the ability to move into an existing community. Group 3 also noted the isolated nature of site 5, and its distance from existing amenities.

Site 2, on Upper Street, was discounted by groups 1 and 3 due to its small size, and by group 2 due to the high land values potentially undermining the project's affordable offer.

Site 3, on Essex Road, was rejected by group 2 on the basis of its listed status providing too much of a challenge, and by groups 1 and 3 as being a potentially very expensive site. However, all groups noted the possibility of collaborating with a cultural institution to rehabilitate the existing theatre at this location.

KEY CONSIDERATIONS

On the basis of the discussions undertaken as part of exercise 1, a number of potential considerations for the selection of a future site emerged.

ENSURING THE VISION IS REALISED

Tonic's vision is to realise a national demonstration project; as such, the project should be both unique and replicable. Cost considerations in selecting an appropriate site, although critical, should be continuously evaluated alongside discussions of whether a particular site will allow the vision to be realised.

THE IMPORTANCE OF THE HIGH STREET OR URBAN CONDITION

In addition to being critical to the residents' ability to access neighbourhood amenities and shops and services, the site's proximity to a high street, within a clear urban setting, is desirable for a number of reasons. This is an important factor in challenging the idea of what it means to grow old, but should be realised without compromising the sense of privacy of residents.

SAFETY AND SENSE OF SECURITY

A key criterion for the selection of the site is the residents' safety and sense of security. This refers to the perceived safety of the area, and preference will likely be given to open and welcoming neighbourhoods.

INTEGRATION OF THE DEVELOPMENT WITHIN ITS CONTEXT

Tonic's vision for the development is for it to become a hub providing retail, businesses and/or services which are relevant to both its residents and the surrounding community. Selection of the site should take into account its 'publicness' and accessibility to the wider community. This is also critical for the development to successfully raise rental income from retail, business or service units.

CONNECTIVITY AND ACCESSIBILITY

Proximity to transport connections and lively neighbourhoods, as well as connections to health amenity or parks and community centres are essential considerations to allow an active life within an urban context.

'READINESS' OF THE CONTEXT

To be a demonstration project, the site needs to be located within an existing context which Tonic is able to influence and contribute to, but which is also able to support the development. In other words, the location of the development should allow Tonic to show leadership and innovation in the neighbourhood, but also provide a supportive environment to build on for the project to rapidly integrate within its surroundings.

ACCESS TO CULTURAL ATTRACTIONS AND COMMUNITY

As part of its integration within its wider neighbourhood, Tonic should select a site that has existing or potential connections to cultural attractions and community groups. In this sense, it would be an advantage for the site to be located in an area with an established open community and cultural institutions, such as theatres, to enable collaborations and further integration of the Tonic community.

DEFINING SPATIAL PRIORITIES

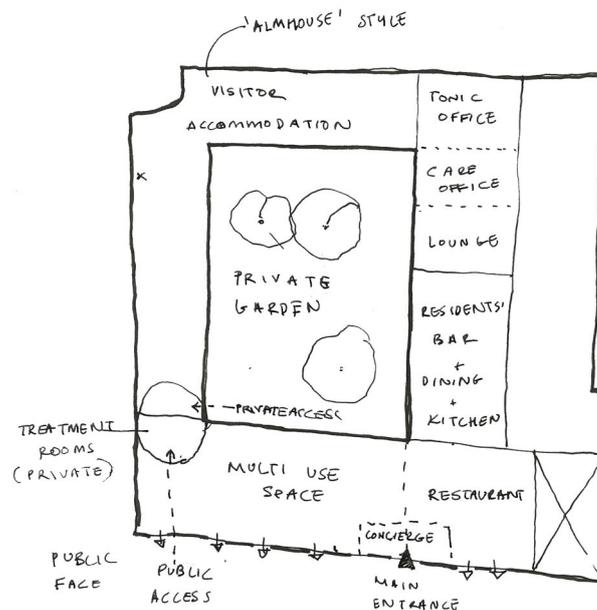
The spatial conditions of sites are as varied as the number of possible sites themselves, and Tonic should consider physical aspects such as size, the possibility of re-using existing buildings, and density when selecting a final site, in relation to its aspirations.

SUMMARY OF EXERCISE 2:

Developing designs for the new Tonic centre

Exercise 2 asked participants to develop design concepts and ideas in relation to the site their group selected. The aim was a principle-led discussion, which might highlight key design considerations, rather than the completion of a final design. The exercise was also useful to establish a set of design principles and to explore how these may be applied to the selected sites.

GROUP 1



DISCUSSIONS

The location of Site 6 (Elthorne Road) on a side street creates opportunities for treating the street as an extension of the development's public space; an important tool for creating an inviting public front.

The intense, urban condition of the site requires the design to create a sense of security without succumbing to an inward-looking or insular development.

The distinction between public and private spaces, as well as the mediation of thresholds between these spaces, requires careful consideration.

The site may accommodate around 76 units within a central building of five storeys and a wing of four storeys.

The residents and the community should assess appropriateness of design elements that encourage interaction with other residents or the public, such as balconies.

There is potential for creating visual connections from the garden to the surrounding area to increase the site permeability and dialogue with its immediate context.

The mews building towards the back could provide opportunity for more ambitious and innovative building typologies.

OPPORTUNITIES

A retail or café unit on the ground floor could take advantage of the site's prominence on the street, providing the development with a means of generating income.

A central courtyard could provide an effective way of incorporating open space within the development, without sacrificing the privacy of the residents.

Different entrances for public and private uses could maintain a sense of sanctuary for living spaces.

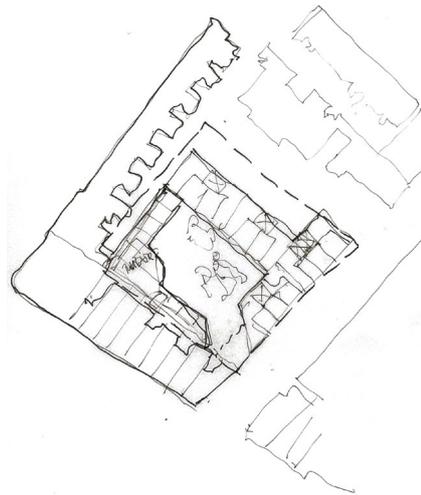
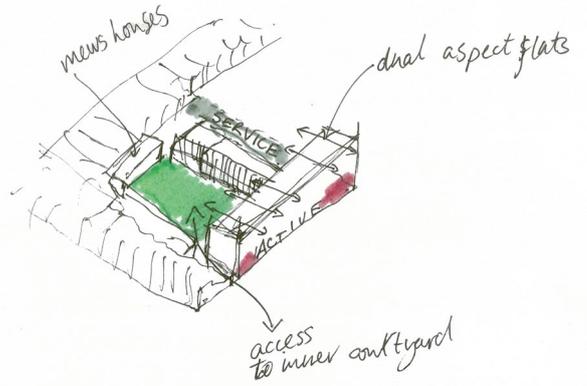
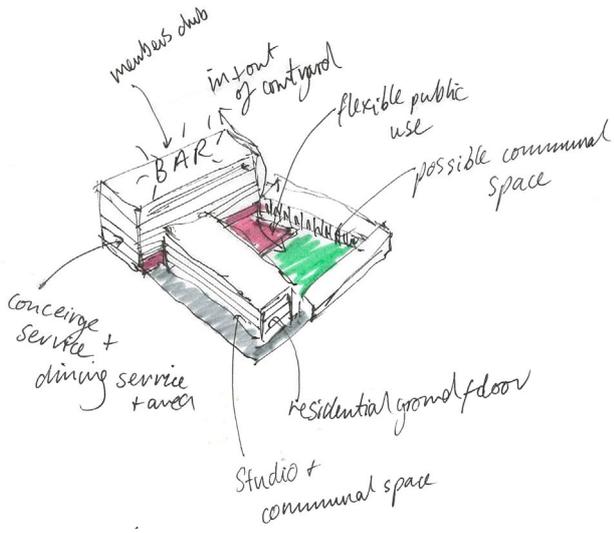
All ground floor uses could have access to the public part of the garden, with an additional threshold for the private garden providing access for the residents only.

The provision of deck access to large, semi-enclosed balconies could encourage appropriation of informal spaces.

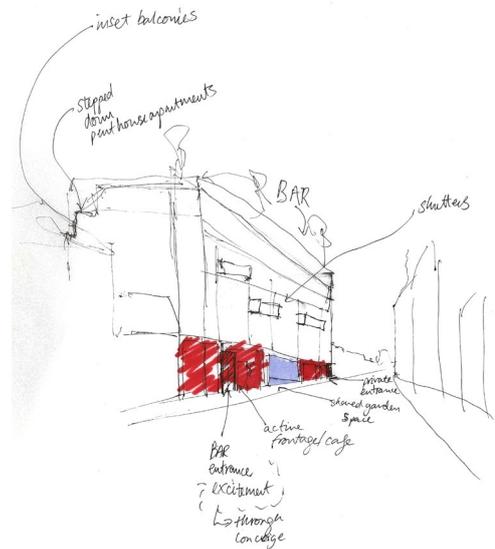
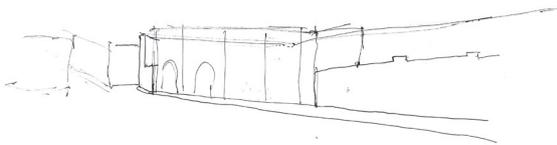
Generous, dual-aspect flats could create light and desirable internal spaces, with views into the shared courtyard, as well as out onto the street.

Flexible, communal spaces could serve multiple functions for the residents and the community; for example the treatment rooms could also accommodate a hair salon.

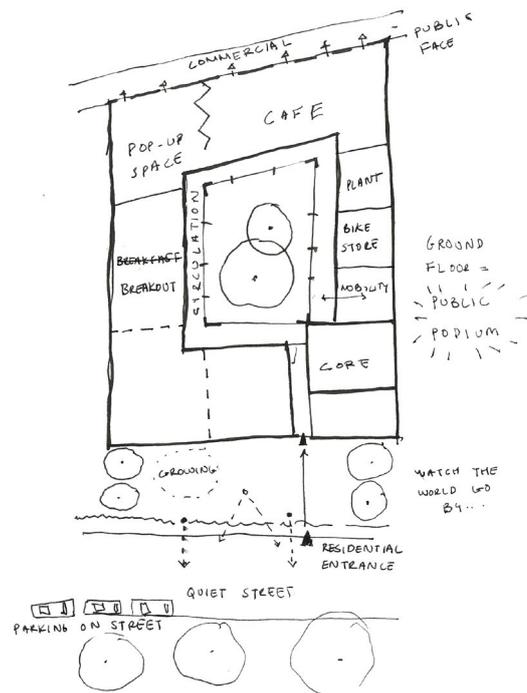
Different types of accommodation to suit different modes of living could be provided within the development.



1700m² communal
1700m² amenity



GROUP 2



DISCUSSIONS

Site 4 (Highbury Corner) provides a small floor area with easy access to a variety of local amenity, with a potential for creating a strong public and street presence for Tonic.

A range of living arrangements catering for residents of different ages and needs should be integral to the development.

The accommodation of amenities should be considered in a temporal, as well as a spatial way.

The balance between the feeling of privacy and isolation needs to be sensitively managed, particularly in response to the small size of the site.

The development should consider having a more private face towards the park and a more active, retail frontage facing the busy street, potentially separated by a courtyard.

The two key frontages would be required to create a series of thresholds, ensuring the privacy of the residents within the development.

A minimum level of intervention for accessibility should be considered, however the requirements for ambulance access or disabled access would be dependent on the degree of care that the residents need.

Storage provision, particularly for mobility scooters and bikes, but also for day-to-day use by the residents should be accessible.

OPPORTUNITIES

A central courtyard/atrium could encourage social interactions while enabling visual connections to the park and allowing natural light into the core of the site.

A variety of communal living areas for socialising could be more beneficial for nurturing a sense of community than creating a cluster of self-sufficient flats.

The communal spaces could accommodate kitchens and other flexible living spaces connecting to more private bedroom units. This model could work at a larger scale across the development or as a smaller version catering to two or three rooms where bathrooms could be shared.

Interventions such as benches along the street front could form buffers between public and private spaces.

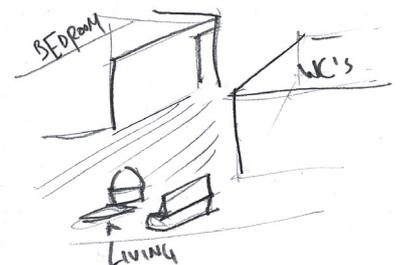
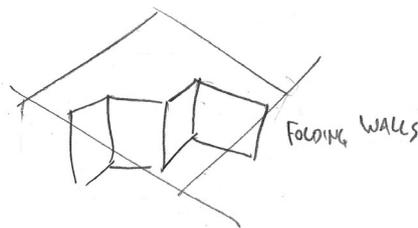
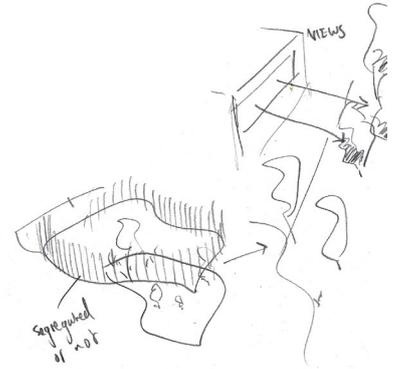
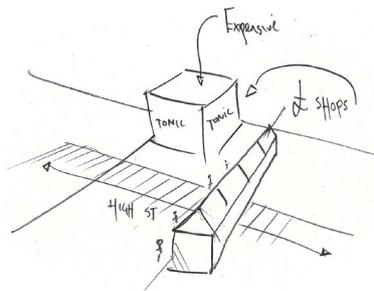
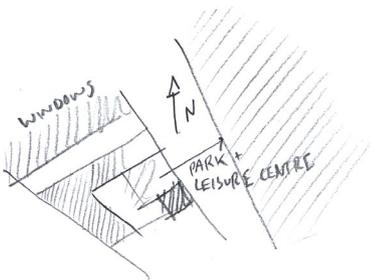
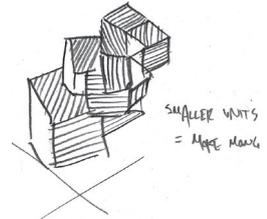
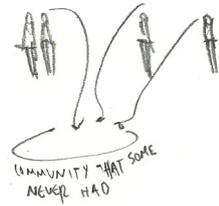
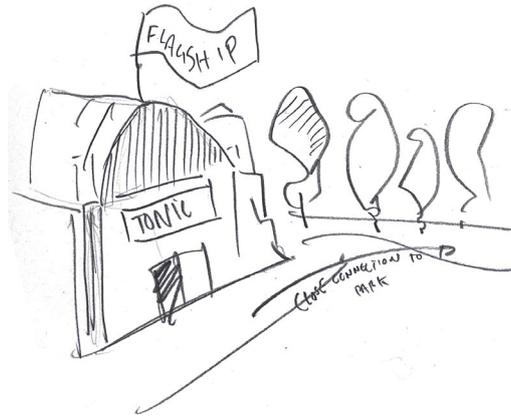
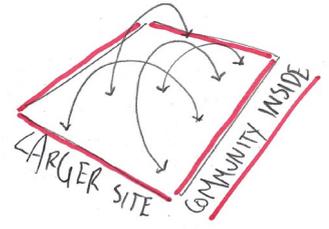
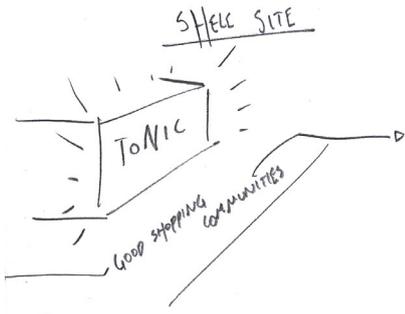
Public-facing, communal activities could be located on the ground floor, providing opportunity for generating an additional income.

Private spaces, such as bedrooms, could be situated on upper floors.

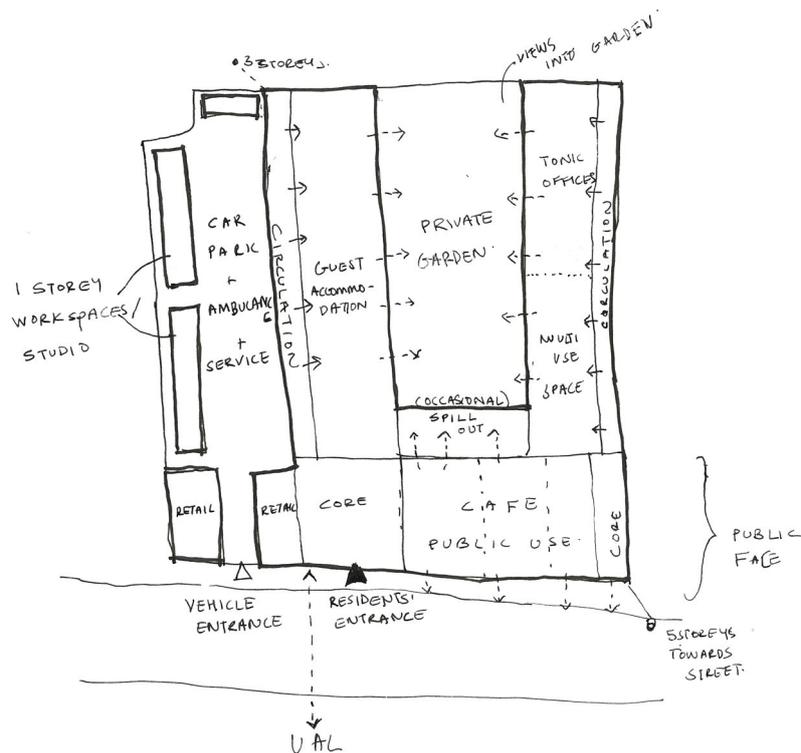
Studio and one-bedroom flats as a typical model would respond to the limited area of the site.

Room pairing could provide greater adaptability, where a door or moveable wall could allow two rooms to become one when required.

Lifetime homes could offer the opportunity for homes to adapt and evolve with their residents.



GROUP 3



DISCUSSIONS

Site 6 (Elthorne Road) provided the opportunity for Tonic to have a strong street presence in an intensely urban context, but also the opportunity to collaborate with existing organisations.

The relationship between public and private space is essential, particularly in establishing the degree to which facilities and living spaces would be shared between residents and with the community.

The 'dignity' of the residents should be considered in a co-housing structure, particularly how carers may be accommodated overnight.

Notions of exchange and porosity with the development's urban context should be explored, however maintaining the safety and privacy of the residents is crucial.

Achieving a sense of custodianship over communal spaces would benefit from community engagement in the design of those spaces.

Careful programming would be required to avoid over-specialised spaces, creating instead flexible, multi-functional spaces which would not be underused.

Further discussions on the more specific requirements of the development from the perspective of the retired LGBT+ community would be required.

OPPORTUNITIES

The changing needs of the residents over time could be accommodated by designing in flexibility, such as rooms that could be adaptable for wheelchair use.

Flexible design could be extended to the programme of the development, allowing residents to move into different types of accommodation on the site over time as their needs change.

A series of thresholds could maintain the privacy of residents' living spaces, such as visitors entering into communal spaces before being able to access private doors.

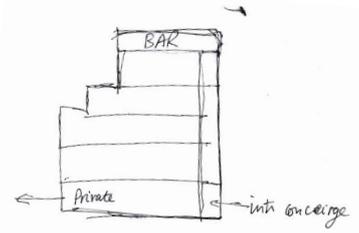
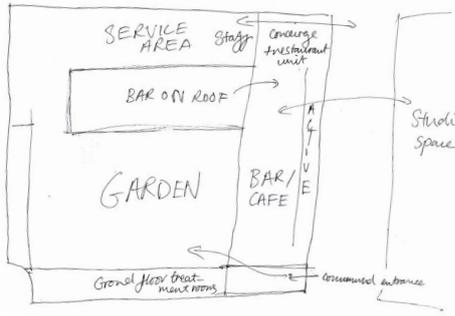
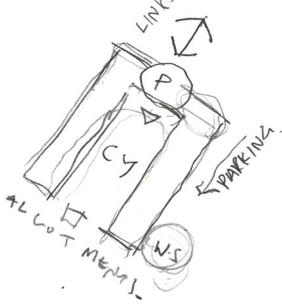
Access for emergency vehicles and some disabled parking should be allowed for within the hard landscape, however the space could also serve alternative and temporary functions.

Residents should be able to customise spaces and exhibit mementos within their private spaces as well as shared spaces and corridors.

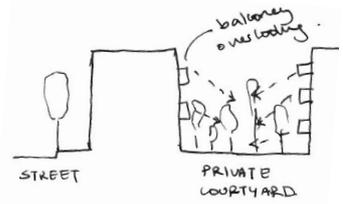
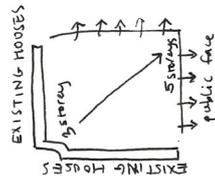
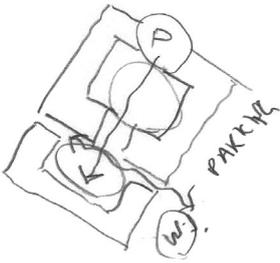
Innovative and creative uses, such as a boutique hotel, would serve the purpose of generating income for the development whilst also catering to the wider community. Guests of the residents could be accommodated in the hotel at discounted prices.

A concierge, or a person greeting the public, could also convey Tonic's approach to this place and wider housing development.

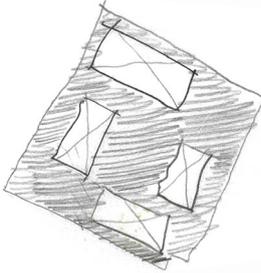
COURTYARD



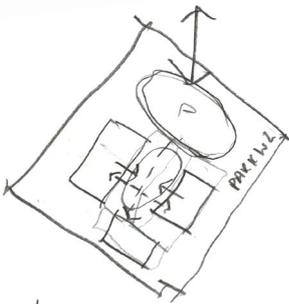
QUAD



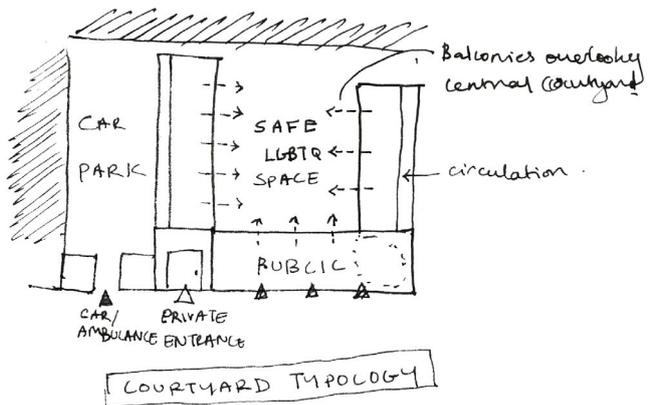
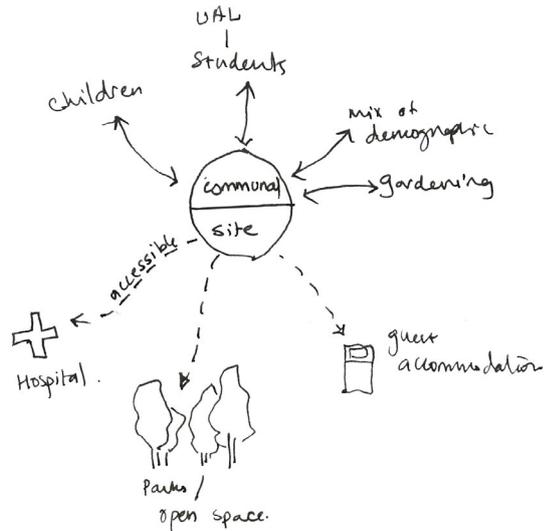
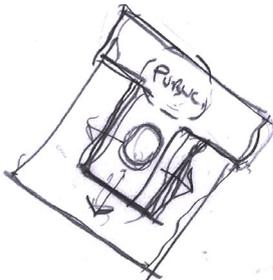
CARVING COURTYARDS



"PAVILIONS IN THE PARK"



"CREATIVE RE-USE"



KEY DESIGN PRINCIPLES

This section suggests key considerations for the design of Tonic's housing, which emerged from the group discussions during exercise 2.

BALANCE THE PUBLIC AND THE PRIVATE

The balance between private and public, and ways of achieving this, was a key theme in the discussions for all groups. Tonic should consider how public and private spaces might interact to enable visibility and porosity without compromising security. Tonic should explore innovative approaches to including the neighbouring community while retaining a sense of privacy for residents.

PROVIDE AN ACTIVE FRONTAGE

The income-generating uses provided by the development should have a street frontage, whether an arts space, café or boutique hotel. These should also provide amenity both to residents and the wider community.

DESIGN FOR FLEXIBILITY

The housing should be able to accommodate the residents' changing needs over time; for example, by responding to the need for wheelchair accessibility or through design elements such as moveable walls. The flexibility of the space should also respond to the diverse preferences of different residents, such as their desire to engage with communal spaces.

ENABLE PERSONALISED SPACES

The residents should be able to contribute to the interior decoration of their accommodation, in order to avoid an institutional look, and to provide a sense of ownership over the space. Tonic might also consider how residents could influence the communal spaces.

DELIVER HARD-WORKING COMMUNAL SPACES

Tonic will need to carefully consider how communal spaces are designed, to ensure that they are flexible and accessible, and appropriate for the needs of the residents, rather than wasteful of space and over-specialised. Careful programming will be part of this, as well as considering how more public groups and events might be able to temporarily use the space.

ENSURE ACCESS TO THE BUILDING

Emergency vehicles will need to be able to access the site, as will visitors. While parking, including disabled parking, is potentially a contentious issue, it is likely that the site will require vehicular access of some kind.

DEFINE DESIGN PRIORITIES

Although the scheme would ideally incorporate every desired design aspect, it would have to respond to the final site's constraints. Tonic should decide and consult with future users in order to establish project priorities; including number and typology of units, types of shared facilities and level of care. Tonic should also consider the possibility of using some external amenities such as leisure centres or parks when there is a limited site area.

DELIVER AN INTEGRATED AND SUSTAINABLE PROJECT

The housing scheme should be carefully integrated within the site and its immediate context, both physically and programmatically, with particular considerations on density, conservation aspects and the nature of the public-facing activities it will provide. Tonic should deliver an exemplary project that is innovative, aspirational and sustainable.

SUMMARY OF DISCUSSION

The charette's exercises demonstrated that innovation is possible on both small and large sites, and on sites with very different constraints.

Group 2, having picked a smaller, more constrained site, were forced to bring in innovative and creative typologies of accommodation, and to focus on the internal arrangements of the development and the possibility of spreading out functions into the wider neighbourhood. The complex character of the very urban site was not regarded as a disadvantage – the group thought it was important that the development was very much 'in the thick of it'.

For Group 1 and 3, the selection of a larger, less constrained site allowed them to develop a range of concepts and strategies for public and private spaces and thresholds within the development, and connections to the wider community. Group 3 also highlighted the potential of building a relationship with the university building opposite the site on Elthorne Road. The site, located in a side street off a local high street, demanded that the development create a distinctive destination in its own right.

The charette aimed to bring together a multitude of ideas from a range of experts to inspire Tonic's vision and to envisage their aspirations. This document compiles some of the key discussions and resulting principles drawn from the holistic and varied discussions that Tonic could use as a starting point for setting a brief for the future development.
