

Placemaking Piccadilly

Exhibition

**28th April 2022
HOME Gallery**

**By Get It Done &
Manchester Central
Foodbank**

Exhibition Guide (Large Print Edition)

www.getitdoneart.com



Placemaking Piccadilly is a community arts campaign led by Get It Done and Manchester Central Foodbank, striving for a new vision for Piccadilly Gardens and Manchester's public spaces;

A vision that meets the needs of its citizens and is inclusive to all, especially to those facing inequalities...

And a vision for a space that actively challenges inequalities and acts as a beacon of participation, rather than consultation.

KEY ASK

We would like to bring citizens of Manchester, community and charity groups, and our major institutions together to **develop a community-led, participatory 'platform' in Piccadilly Gardens...**

With spaces, installations, programmes, and services specifically set aside for, and co-designed with, grassroots organisations, charities, and community groups throughout Manchester...

We would like the council, Piccadilly architects, cultural and educational institutions, and key services to **commit institutional support and capacity for maintenance of the space**, on a long-term basis.

Piccadilly Gardens is the marmite of Manchester. Everybody has an opinion about the space and the planned re-design remains one of the most readily argued topics of debate in the city, especially concerning the grass, the police and the wall. It has a history of anti-social behaviour, but has always been the intersection of people from many different backgrounds, which is part of the site's chaotic charm. The online council consultation in 2021 found that only 13% of people would happily stop in the space as it exists today.

Placemaking Piccadilly grew out of the campaign **Can You Hear Me Now?**, an ongoing collaboration between Manchester Central Foodbank and Get It Done, platforming the experiences of people using foodbanks through creative expression. You can see our archive of testimonies and creative work online here www.getitdoneart.com/cyhmnarchive.

During the creative workshops and discussions part of the Can You Hear Me Now? campaign, people demonstrated a huge interest in improving the accessibility of our local spaces through creativity and conversation. There developed Placemaking Piccadilly; striving towards a radical new vision for our public spaces.

For our community groups and participants, **Placemaking Piccadilly** offers three main objectives:

- 1) To give our participants an opportunity to **engage in rich discussions on services and public spaces**, and have their voices heard by decision-makers.
- 2) To **build links and coalitions with other grassroots organisations** made up of, and supporting, people from diverse backgrounds across the city who likewise have faced barriers to participation in consultations shaping local policy.
- 3) **Create a platform at the centre of the city for those facing inequalities** to communicate directly with other Mancunians; through participatory and creative activities and programmes co-designed with grassroots organisations.

We are very grateful to the hundreds of Mancunians who have participated in the campaign and brought their huge enthusiasm, ideas, experiences, and heart to our community consultation sessions, People's Takeovers and Town Hall sessions. Most importantly, we want to thank our amazing and inspiring team of volunteer Placemakers who have come together to support our events and make this project and today's exhibition what it is.

In April 2020, we started to discuss our local public spaces with people that use Manchester Central Foodbank, beginning to 'Redesign Piccadilly Gardens' in creative activity sessions. Reimagining the Gardens, which introduced policy making in a fun and visual way, was responded to with lots of enthusiasm. Following this, we then opened up this conversation about public spaces (and how we can change them for the better) with other organisations across Manchester.

The sessions began with a drawing activity to reimagine the Gardens, which produced hundreds of original and creative interpretations of the future space that you can see around the exhibition today. We grew this activity into group discussions reflecting on participants' experiences of how inequalities, poverty or low income affect how we were able to use public spaces.

These citizens are '**experts through experience**', each bringing unique insights informed by using the space on a regular basis. Perhaps they are mothers with young children, visually impaired or facing financial difficulties, gathering all these different challenges and stories together helps us to create a space that reflects the needs of all citizens.

Ideas ranged from the serious (community-owned gardens and sheltered spaces) to the silly (water slides and wrestling rings to settle town disputes)!

We worked with a range of diverse groups across the city including: **Manchester Central Foodbank** users, **Invisible (Manchester)'s** guides with experience of homelessness, adult learners at **Back on Track**, a mental health support group at **No.93 Wellbeing Centre** in Harpurhey, **ACORN Housing union**, **University of Manchester Students' Union**, local youth activists at our Changemaker Meet-up event and some members of the **Disabled People's Access Group**.

Tapestry

The responses from these sessions, both visual and spoken, were translated into a series of tapestries by artist and campaign co-producer Freya Bruce. This colourful piece weaves together the voices of Mancunians and expresses the campaign's voices through art.



Participation

“It’s all consultations and then in 2 years time they said well we’ll just have another consultation... and they don’t really listen, they already know what they want to do with this.”

Through participation and co-curation, we can transform Piccadilly into a beacon site that is exciting and innovative for both citizens and community groups. Collective creative action in the square is key to reinvigorating our city’s culture.

When community members participate in creating policies, we create a more ambitious, continually-evolving and collectively-owned vision of our city, in comparison to more formal and dispersed consultations gathering responses from a limited group of people who traditionally have the time, resources and confidence to respond.

How do you reach a wide range of people and engage them meaningfully in shaping policies and actions, especially the people whose voices are least heard, but most need to be?

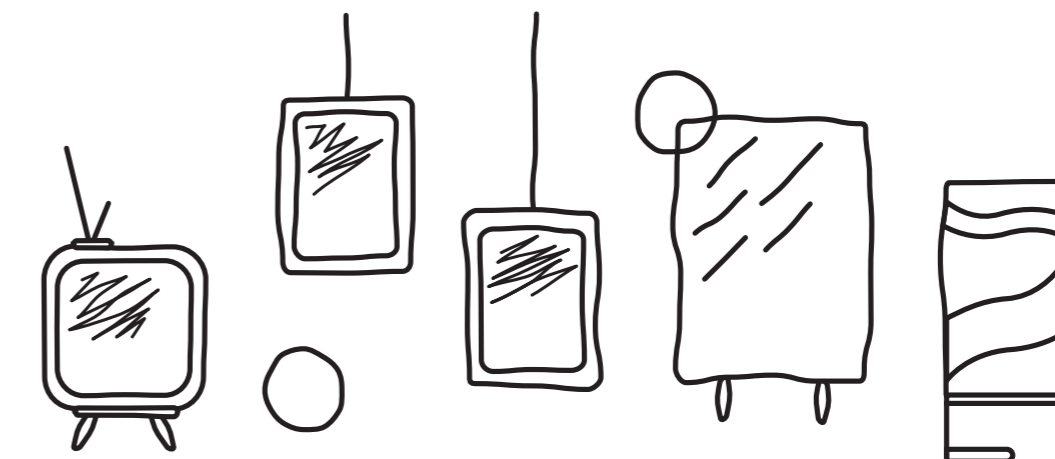
How do we change policy-making from once-a-decade consultation to constant, organic and rich conversation and exchange?

In October, we brought our action to the heart of the square for a 'People's Takeover' of Piccadilly Gardens. Hundreds of local people got involved with our programme of creative activities focused on creating a vision to make Piccadilly Gardens and our city spaces better for everyone.

Sitting on foodbank crates behind the Queen Victoria statue in Piccadilly Gardens, we met with families, friends, and individuals of all ages and took part in fun, creative activities to consider how we, Manchester's citizens, would "Redesign Piccadilly Gardens".

At 11am, we had Richard, Danny and Andy from Invisible (Manchester) give a free **Alternative Walking Tour**, exploring the city through the eyes of those with experiences of homelessness. It was great to join our guide Danny, to hear about his reflections on Piccadilly Gardens and homelessness, his love for poetry, and resilience through difficulties.

At 1pm, Freya led a **Sketch Walk** around the square. The group took time to meditate on the space and the people using it, and to consider "placemaking" in an alternative way. We took rubbings and etchings of surfaces, sketched protestors and people, and traced the skyline. From these drawings we created a collective Sketch Walk map capturing life in the square in 2021, accessible online at www.getitdoneart.com/pp-events.



At 2pm, we gathered in the square for a **Discussion Circle** on how Manchester's public spaces can actively challenge inequalities. Led by Andy from Invisible (Manchester), Dr Morag Rose from the Loiterers Resistance Movement and Matt Stallard from Manchester Central Foodbank, citizens joined in an energetic and spirited discussion about tackling inequalities and moving towards inclusivity for all, followed by a chance for the conversation to grow over hot drinks and snacks in the Northern Quarter.

Our People's Takeover was the action that ignited the campaign going forward. It was great to start new conversations about the deepening inequalities in our city and how public spaces can challenge them in a way that is engaging and accessible for people of many backgrounds. The People's Takeover formed the beginnings of our group of core campaigners, and highlighted the steps we need to take in order to achieve tangible change for the better in our city.

Photography: Ella Wolverson

In December and February, we gathered our core campaigners (including people from our partner organisations, foodbank networks and through previous activities) in a series of creative Town Hall-style sessions.

Using wooden blocks inscribed with keywords, we mapped out our ideas for a new Piccadilly around key themes; including **inclusion and safety, public services, belonging and identity, public services and creativity.**

Together we co-produced a **manifesto**; a focused list of participatory-generated asks, to create a more inclusive and welcoming central space for all Mancunians. Our manifesto reflects thousands of conversations, all in agreement on what we should be prioritising in proposed the redevelopment of Piccadilly. A finalised banner of our manifesto has been produced by Freya Bruce on display here.

The Placemaking Piccadilly Manifesto

1. Budget prioritised for maintenance and care of the space
2. Friendly local Park Custodians to care for the space, ensuring and protecting the safety of all those who visit
3. More covered spaces, accessible for all bodies, for people to sit and be protected from the Mancunian weather
4. To reinstate free and accessible public toilets in the gardens
5. A multipurpose free-to-access community space for social / cultural / community exchange to allow continuous conversation about the future of the city. Having constant activity in the square will make it feel safer (This space could be used for; pop-ups, events, music, arts, education, ideas hub etc.)
6. A variety of green space to enjoy in the square; for example meadow areas, a lawn, trees and courtyards.
7. A 24hr Advice Hub to provide support on issues such as addiction, benefits, homelessness, staffed by approachable 'Community Listeners'. Providing a 'Safe Space' for all times of the day.
8. Digital, interactive Information Boards in multiple languages to provide information about events and services within the square and wider city and host participatory installations around culture, arts, heritage, and community

Inclusion And Safety

‘It isn’t accessible at all at the moment, particularly for people with learning difficulties, people with visual impairments and people with mobility issues as well, it’s extremely hazardous and there are lots of people who won’t go to Piccadilly Gardens because it is so dangerous.’

Throughout our workshops we had many conversations about the role of the police and Environmental Agents within the square. Piccadilly Gardens is known for anti-social behaviour and not a space that many would walk through at night. Through creating a vibrant square, passive observation should decrease crime and create a safe environment. Safety and inclusion should also be considered from an accessibility point of view; taking into consideration the dangers of the trams and trip hazards.

Public Services

‘My main aim would be to get more public conveniences free, not just in the park but throughout the city.’

The number of free public services in the square and throughout the city have greatly diminished over the past decade. Public toilets remain a hugely contentious issue, as does platforming the need for community support through advice centres and charities.

Green Spaces

‘I look back at some photos of the gardens in the 80’s and it was proper nice, trees, flowerbeds and all that.’

The pandemic especially highlighted the importance of access to free and friendly green spaces. For health and wellbeing, these spaces are essential, especially right within the city centre where everyone can enjoy them. There should be accessible greenery for all, and as the primary ‘green space’ in central Manchester it should be maintained and nurtured. It is incredibly important that Piccadilly Gardens becomes a vibrant green haven, with a variety of scales and types of trees, grass and planting to encourage urban biodiversity such as bugs.

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Creativity

‘I will purposefully walk through the middle, just to see what’s going on.’

Using creative techniques and active participation brings the joy, spontaneity, and energy that can be found in collaboration and should be found in decision-making. Moving away from top-down consultation to continuing conversation is essential in the city centre, creating a sense of ownership, pride and maintenance that will create a truly cherished space.

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‘Everybody’s there... It’s not just tourists, it’s not just the middle classes, it’s not just people who’ve fallen on hard times. Everyone just mixes in together because there’s something for everyone.’

To many, Piccadilly can feel like a space that no longer belongs to them, more of a transitory space - a space to rush through, not always a space to enjoy. Manchester is a diverse city with an amazing variety of individuals with different backgrounds and lived experiences. Our manifesto aims for a space that celebrates this diversity, and a space that directly serves the needs and desires of its people.

In the build up to the exhibition, we staged a series of creative interventions in Piccadilly Gardens, continuing our People’s Takeover series.

GREENING THE SQUARE

In March alongside our core campaigners and members of the public, we covered Piccadilly Gardens head-to-toe in chalk flower drawings. We wanted to make a peaceful statement through collective action; demanding a greener, more creative and welcoming central space.

Individuals took to the pavement to decorate it with flowers, messages of hope and, of course, their Instagram handles. It was great to see so many people engaging in such a hands-on and creative activity that provoked conversation on people’s varied experiences of public spaces.

‘I used to actually live in Piccadilly Gardens when I was homeless... I used to live on that bench there. My main aim would be to get more public services, free... not just in the park, throughout the city.’

STREET INTERVIEWS

With the help of Visual Anthropology students from the University of Manchester, we were able to document a snapshot of conversations about Piccadilly Gardens with passers-by. The team stood all day on a busy Saturday, interviewing people on their experiences of the square, questioning things like their sense of ownership over it, their safety moving through it and their enjoyment of it as a communal space.

Watch these short documentary films produced by Julia Brow, Ruby Davies and Danny Gregson, with accompanying portraits by Obat Soepraba.



Public spaces are an essential and often neglected part of our city. They should be spaces for enjoyment and enrichment of individual and public life.

They are the spaces where conversations happen between citizens and where the things we stand for can be seen and heard most clearly.

After over a decade of austerity and cuts to public services, many of the people we have spoken to have been left feeling exasperated and unsure how we can make changes for the better.

The Council and public bodies have a huge desire to find a richer, participatory way of working in these spaces but face barriers to fulfilling their potential for radical change and the improvement of our environment, health, and social cohesion.

BENEFITS

There is both a collective desire to improve the park's quality and accessibility for all and an interest from public bodies. A 2020 Public Health England report on the value of greenspace, especially for those experiencing inequalities, found that, 'for every £1 spent on maintaining parks, there was a benefit of £34 in health costs saved' in Sheffield.

Investing in Piccadilly Gardens as a beacon for community groups and charities to platform and generate engagement and work will create huge economic benefits. We expect investment in our community-focused solutions would:

- Turn an underperforming central space into a diverse and engaging community hub, attracting national interest and richer interactions, attracting visitors, tourists, and customers to the square and city centre.
- Reduce the costs of policing and levels of anti-social behaviour, becoming a vibrant, active, family-friendly, welcoming space, policed by those using it.
- Enhance visibility for charities and community groups, encouraging public and private donations and investment into local support services and networks which will multiply benefits across the city.

- Improve public engagement and ownership of public space, especially of previously-disenfranchised communities across Greater Manchester, reducing costs of consultation and improving efficiency and targeting of services and communications.

- Offering a free cultural hub space for creative activities, especially catered to those on low incomes, would:

- Increase inward arts, heritage, health, environmental, and private funding, which will flow back to host communities of groups and charities across the city.

- Increase engagement with Council-led, public health, environmental, digital inclusion, skills, charitable and other community programmes of advice and support, with improved health, economic, and social outcomes.

- Drive visitor numbers and widen audience engagement with existing cultural institutions at minimal additional costs.

- Allow future generations of Mancunians access to economically and socially valuable creative, media, practical, and community-based skills, and an opportunity to have their ideas, opinions and voices platformed.

Through Placemaking Piccadilly, we aim to create a truly transformatory forum and participatory space. Allowing the voices of those excluded from public discourse, consultation, and cultural life to take a central, guiding role.

We want an innovative and vibrant space that places new and ongoing conversations about the challenges we face as a community at its heart. Enabling conversation between the council, services, citizens and cultural institutions.

We aim to unlock the desire of the Council, services, and institutions for a better space, by investing in the innovative ideas and drive of the grassroots, community, and charity sectors.

We would like to embed our simple, cost effective, participatory approach to the city, allowing people to own and programme our flagship public space; Piccadilly Gardens.



KEY ASK

We would like to bring citizens of Manchester, community and charity groups, and our major institutions together to develop a community-led, participatory 'platform' in Piccadilly Gardens...

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SO, WHAT'S NEXT? Participatory methods mean outreaching to as many individuals within Manchester as possible. This means we need YOU. Everyone is an 'expert through experience' - what is your niche?

Can you pledge time, skills or funding? Whether you are an individual or part of an organisation- leave your email or have a chat with us; help us to create a great square in the future!

