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Exploring Urban Change through Owners' Lived Experiences of Their 'Underutilised' Properties

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**Exploring Urban Change through Owners' Lived Experiences of Their
'Underutilised' Properties.**

Charlene Cross

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of

Sheffield Hallam University

for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

July 2024

Candidate Declaration

I hereby declare that:

1. I have not been enrolled for another award of the University, or other academic or professional organisation, whilst undertaking my research degree.
2. None of the material contained in the thesis has been used in any other submission for an academic award.
3. I am aware of and understand the University's policy on plagiarism and certify that this thesis is my own work. The use of all published or other sources of material consulted have been properly and fully acknowledged.
4. The work undertaken towards the thesis has been conducted in accordance with the SHU Principles of Integrity in Research and the SHU Research Ethics Policy.
5. The word count of the thesis is 77,998.

Name	Charlene Cross
Date	July 2024
Award	PhD
Research Institute	Natural and Built Environment
Director(s) of Studies	Professor William Eadson

Acknowledgements

I have been lucky in having minimal changes to my supervisory team throughout the course of my PhD, and would like to thank my supervisors for their long standing support and guidance. First, I thank my primary supervisor Dr Luke Bennett for designing the original call for my PhD and for introducing me to the fascinating research field that is vacancy studies. Second, I thank Dr Carolyn Gibbeson for remaining my supervisor after moving to another University, providing me with opportunities to share my knowledge of heritage within the new context of undergraduate real estate lectures, and for helping me to break down the multiple steps of thesis-writing. Third, I thank Dr William Eadson for encouraging me to connect with colleagues in the Centre for Regional Economic and Social Research (CRESR) and taking on the responsibilities of Director of Studies from April 2024.

Thanks are due to various people at Sheffield Hallam University, including but not limited to:

- Dr Becky Shaw and Dr Cristina Cerulli for their constructive comments during the RF2 process.
- The Real Estate Team at SHU, including John Grant, Nicola Power, Dr Liming Yao, Louise Kirsten, Tony Cheetham and Helen Reardon for developing my teaching practice at SHU.
- Dr Caron Carter and Gill Adams for hosting weekly online 'write!' sessions.
- Dr Sadie Parr, Professor Ian Cole and Catriona Murray for arranging and hosting writing retreats for doctoral students.
- Dr Yael Arbell for facilitating a mock viva and providing valuable feedback on my thesis.
- Jude Gallucci and Christy Bannister for their administrative support.
- Dr Pete Smith from the libraries team for quickly responding to queries.

Special thanks go to my examiners, Dr Morag Rose and Dr Lindsey McCarthy, and the viva chair, Dr Stephen Green, for making the experience a pleasure.

I am incredibly grateful to Sheffield Hallam University's Graduate Teaching Assistant programme for funding my PhD and Associate fellowship of teaching. Without scholarships such as SHU's GTA bursary many people, including myself, are unable to afford or justify pursuing knowledge through doctoral research. Outside the University, I wish to thank:

- My research participants- without you, there is no data.
- Fairview Homes, Land Hero, Liverpool University Press and Capital&Centric for permission to use images from their websites in this thesis.
- Sheffield City Council for permission to use the maps in this thesis.
- Dr Helen Bailey and Tom Gray for their valuable practical support.
- Dr Marcella Sutcliffe for hosting structured writing retreats.
- My partner Hugh Angseesing for listening to me talk at length about my thesis and facilitating breaks to far away castles and beaches.
- Alison Darby of Sheffield City Archives and Local Studies Library for recommending helpful resources and sharing her family connections to historic Neepsend.

I wish to thank friends and family, who have been a source of support and encouragement. Thanks to my great-aunt Joyce Wardle, Holly Simons, Jos Dent, Jennifer-Anne Scott, Emma-Rose Colk, and Dr Tilda Stickley. I am particularly grateful to Dr Joe Baxter and Holly McCain for regularly cat sitting Beau, Theia, and Europa, allowing me time to get away from work and come back to my thesis refreshed.

Last but not least, I dedicate this thesis to my mum, Lorraine Cross (1964-2019) for setting me on the academic path by teaching me how to read at a young age, and to my nephew, Reo McLachlan-Cross, who came into the world on 10/10/2024, the day of my viva.

Abstract

This thesis advances our knowledge about “set-aside” urban property. Academic literature often interprets these places as derelict, vacant, brownfields, and focuses on cleaning up these problems by changing inactive, “rubbish” properties into active, “durable” spaces (Thompson, 1979). However, property owners’ perspectives have been overlooked. To address this knowledge gap, this study examines owner activities in Neepsend, Sheffield, as part of a broader urban ecosystem that included occupants, planners and developers. Neepsend was selected because it is a “low-intensity” industrial and commercial area north of Sheffield city centre. Neepsend has been considered “underutilised” and ideal for “higher-intensity” uses, such as housing. Combining constructivist grounded theory (Charmaz, 2014) with Lefebvre’s (1974/1991) *Spatial Triad and Rhythmanalysis* (Lefebvre, 1992), primary data was gathered using repeat photography walks and semi-structured interviews. This thesis makes a theoretical contribution to knowledge with the Utility Pyramid. Built upon previous studies, this model identifies five sub-categories of “set-aside” property. The empirical findings revealed that “underutilised” property, rather than “set-aside” property, was a critical area of contestation. Landlords were between occupants of organically developed businesses keen to remain in low-rent properties and maximum utility narratives promoted by government authorities. Regardless of their scale of operation, owners of set-aside properties were wary of being negatively stereotyped. When it comes to resisting or complying with top-down plans, the temporalities of owner decisions were complex. Data analysis suggested that juggling multiple priorities was a simple explanation for setting aside property. When deciding whether to hold, buy, improve, or sell their set-aside properties, events in owners’ personal lives, their management activities at other properties, and the actions of other owners were all contributing factors. An unexpected finding was the emotional labour involved in landholding. Overall, this research demonstrated how visual cues of seeming abandonment, disguise a wide range of offsite owner activities.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

In government policy and academic studies, it is politically, socially, and economically accepted that one should remediate brownfield land and put it to new uses (CPRE, 2014). Brownfield sites are associated with ‘real or perceived contamination problems’ (CABERNET, 2006, 3; Rey, Laprise & Lufkin, 2002, 10). In ‘drosscapes’, Berger (1998) argued that urban areas with large vacancy concentrations are wastelands. These “waste” properties take many forms, including factories (High & Lewis, 2007), hospitals (Avis & Dent, 2004), offices (Muldoon-Smith, 2017) or ambiguous patches of land (Bennett, 2019). The study presented in this thesis seeks to investigate the realities of such sites. In doing so, it brings new understanding to the multi-layered lives of so-called “set-aside” properties, revealing how these spaces are perceived through different spatial lenses, and used in various ways.

From the start, this research encountered difficulty seeking suitable definitions for the focal point of the research because of the broad range of property types that can be “set-aside”. Whatever their form, these properties tend to be depicted as decaying magnets for anti-social behaviour (Andrews, 2020; vom Hofe, Parent & Grabill, 2019; von Schéele, 2016). In seeing “set-aside” property as ‘a bad thing, that something should be done about it, that it constitutes a problem to be solved’ (Thompson, 1979, 50-51), the consequences are that academic interest has focused upon bringing these sites back into active use, rather than wondering if there are beneficial reasons why some sites ‘remain out of use while others are refurbished and reoccupied’ (Guy & Henneberry, 2002, 176).

In addition, much of this research has centred upon the role of top-down actors, such as urban policy makers (Hirokawa & Gonzalez, 2010; CABERNET, 2006) who are expected to manage and remove (O’Callaghan, 2023a) urban vacancy. My literature review established that there is a knowledge gap regarding the actors who directly manage “set-aside” property: their owners. Given the extensive research into “set-aside” property, it is surprising how infrequently landowners are mentioned. Studies of brownfield land (HOMBRE, 2014) rarely consider the owner’s viewpoint or personal circumstances. To understand how set-aside property

owners' priorities interact with wider urban redevelopment agendas, this thesis sets out to address this gap by building new theory from the ground up (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; see Chapter 3).

The **first argument** in this thesis is that owners are overlooked stakeholders who play a crucial part in urban development processes. This thesis aims to address the deficiency in knowledge regarding owners of so-called wasted land (Di Palma, 2021; Berger, 1998) by understanding owners' care practices, time horizons, and attitudes towards their ordinary, visually run-down, seemingly unoccupied buildings. In English law, the legal ownership of "real property" (or "real estate") refers to the asset itself and the rights associated with that asset. These intangible rights outline what owners are and are not legally permitted to do with their property (O'Callaghan, 2023a). Should another party wish to develop the owner's land, the owner has the power to agree or refuse to sell. Therefore, this thesis argues that a deeper understanding of how owners perceive and use their "wasted property" is needed. Looking closer at these lived experiences (Watts, 2014; Maye-Banbury, 2024) could illuminate why and when owners chose not to, or are prevented from, exercising their rights to use their assets.

The **second argument** of this thesis is that the default assumption that set-aside properties result from the 'failure of property owners to maintain their properties' (vom Hofe, et al., 2019, 228) is too simplistic. An overemphasis on the visual condition of set-aside urban property has been used as evidence that the owners must be absent (Petrzelka, Ma & Malin, 2013; CADO, 2019). This thesis argues that this surface-level assumption requires further empirical investigation.

The **third argument** of this thesis is that there is a lack of neutral terminology to describe this phenomenon. There is a knowledge deficit about the relationship between set-aside properties and their owners. Therefore, my first challenge was establishing precise terminology to separate the thematic connotations associated with brownfield land, vacancy, dereliction, and under-utility as they appeared in the literature (see Chapter 2). This was done to distinguish between:

- The ‘real’ (Rey et al. 2022, 10) problems associated with set-aside property that have a physical, material negative consequence;
- The ‘perceived’ (Rey et al. 2022, 10) problems describe people’s expectations of what properties should look like and how they should be managed.

To do this, I draw upon Lefebvre’s *Spatial Triad* (1974/1991) to examine the distinction between the two and how they overlap. This model was introduced in *The Production of Space* (Lefebvre, 1974/1991) and is comprised of three equally important, interlocking dimensions:

- **‘Perceived space’**: concerned with how people use or ‘appropriate’ space (Lefebvre, 1974/1991, 31).
- **‘Conceived space’**: describes the mental abstractions people expect to find in space and place and ‘the “order” which those relations impose’. (Lefebvre, 1974/1991, 33).
- **‘Lived space’**: how people physically experience and move through the world, using their senses, on both a conscious and subconscious level (Lefebvre, 1974/1991. 33).

These three lenses can be used together to interpret, understand, and draw out the common underlying themes in a given space or place and are helpful when processing seemingly conflicting sources of information. Chapter 4 provides a detailed exploration of this theory. The above definitions of *lived*, *conceived*, and *perceived space* are sufficient to explain the research problem.

The **fourth argument** of this thesis is that assuming the worst about owners, rather than directly asking them about their sites, has created a barrier to productive dialogue. This research's original contribution to knowledge is that it addresses something currently unknown: why people leave their property unoccupied in the first place. Having outlined the thesis topic, the remainder of Chapter 1:

- Defines the scope of the study
- Provides an executive summary of the thesis

- Outlines the research aim, objectives and research questions.

1.1 Research Scope: Bad Properties, Bad Owners?

This study aims to challenge the dominant, maximum utility narratives in current literature, media, and urban policies and to dismantle the stereotypes about set-aside properties and their owners. It takes a social constructivist approach (Elder-Vass, 2019) to research design, practice, and data interpretation in order to make ‘sense of (or interpret) the meanings others have about the world’ (Creswell, 2014, 10). My thesis investigates the ‘circumstances’ that render activities that society otherwise considers ‘strange and unreasonable’, such as setting aside urban property, to be a ‘natural and reasonable’ course of action (Becker, 2020, 134-135). In doing this, the thesis consciously attempts to break away from negative assumptions about property owners to facilitate new conversations, which can then lead to new insights and understandings.

One of the data collection methods used was semi-structured interviews. It is essential to have a clear understanding of language in order to interpret what people say (Watts, 2014). Therefore, having clarity around terminology has methodological significance, and terminology will be explored in detail in Chapter 2. As will be explained in Chapter 2, the terms we currently have, and often use interchangeably to describe “set-aside” property are not neutral. To avoid the inbuilt assumptions within vocabulary, I have attempted to step away from these assumptions, and this thesis uses “set-aside” as a broad term that describes the phenomena under investigation. Past and present land use policies appear in Chapter 2 to demonstrate the focus of previous studies, the lack of a common term to define set-aside property, and the connotations and impact of the different language (brownfield, derelict, vacancy) used by different actors when describing “set-aside” sites. Particular policies were encountered or mentioned during empirical research, such as the 2020-2025 tranche of the Brownfield Housing Fund (Prime Minister’s Office, 2020). These findings are reported and documented as part of a more comprehensive data set, but these policies’ background, implementation and wider impact were not investigated or commented on further

in this study. This thesis does not engage in a policy analysis of current or past UK land use or redevelopment policies. This research focuses on the lived experiences and perceptions of property owners. This thesis is not an examination of finance and valuation practices involved in property ownership and development. As I am not from a real estate background, where these topics are raised in the data chapters, they are presented through the lens of participants' perceptions and experiences.

Before directly approaching set-aside property owners, the next section outlines the stereotypes about set-aside land and where these beliefs have come from. We begin with the image in Fig 1.1, which shows a screenshot of a website for the commercial organisation Land Hero. Land Hero is a land intermediary company whose work is commercially motivated. People are willing to purchase and invest in these properties, but the marketing Land Hero uses to identify prospective sites relies on the general public's exasperation with the property's current appearance and the assumption that the owners have failed to clean up their land. Land Hero seeks out 'empty properties and derelict buildings' (Fig. 1.1) to connect prospective owners to potential buyers for a finder's fee.

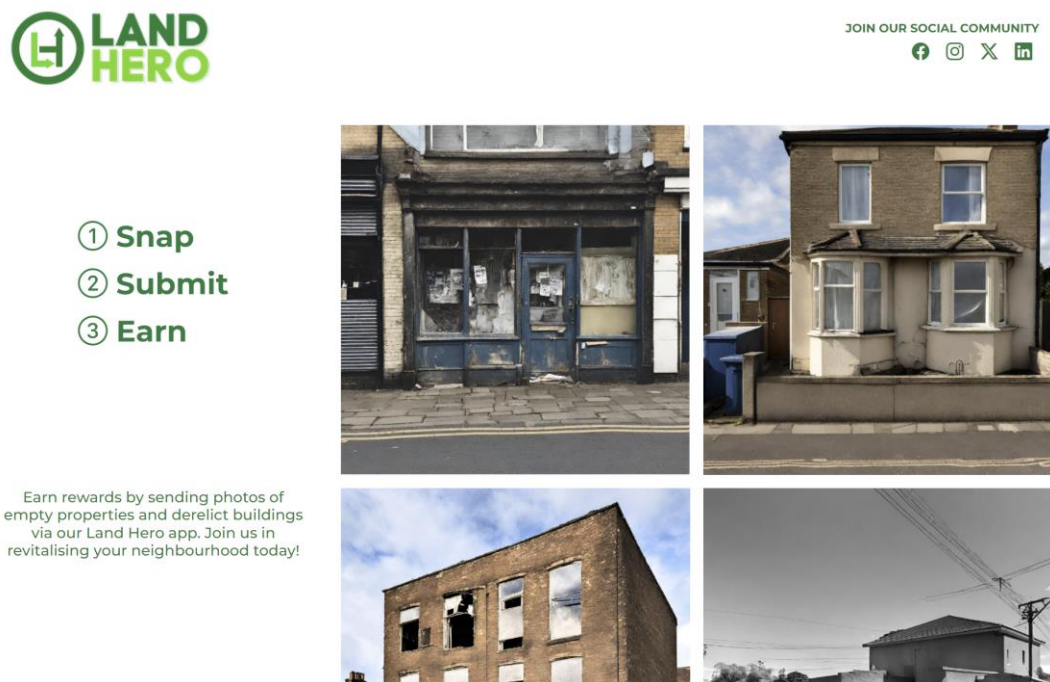


Figure 1.1 Screenshot of the Land Hero website featuring examples of set-aside urban property. www.landhero.org. Accessed June 2024.

Land Hero's advertisements encourage members of the public to submit photographs and information about disused sites by leaning into stereotypical attitudes about "long-forgotten" sites:

'Almost everyone will have noticed an empty house, a closed down pub, a disused factory, a field, or a long-forgotten car park in their village, town, or city, and walked or driven past thinking "SOMEONE should do something about that!" (Land Hero, 2020).

This quote groups together a wide range of property typologies, which will be subject to different property lifecycles (Harris, 1999; Cairns & Jacobs, 2014). In addition, there is speculation that *nobody* is doing *anything* with these 'empty', 'disused', or 'forgotten' (Land Hero, 2020) properties. The linguistic choices reflect cultural expectations that these spaces 'could be used and developed more appropriately for employment, housing or leisure uses' (Land Hero, 2023) and an unverified assumption that sites have been forgotten. This argument was made explicit in the Campaign Against Delinquent Ownership (CADO, 2019), which criticised "absentee landowner[s]". Land Hero's advertisements (Fig 1.1) demonstrate that set-aside properties are seen as a source of frustration in their current condition but that they also symbolise future potential. Following on from this logic that set-aside land is a problem to solve, several studies have focused on better understanding the time frames involved in transforming set-aside properties from derelict and vacant to active and occupied. These studies tend to focus on the property rather than the property owner and are discussed in Chapter 2.

If we turn our focus to the owner, there appears to be an underlying narrative that there are "good" and "bad" ways to manage a set-aside property. Before my PhD, I did an MA in Urban Conservation. This discipline is concerned with looking after heritage buildings. Historic England's website (2018) advises owners of historic set-aside properties that:

'Owners and purchasers of vacant buildings [act] to reduce risks by undertaking an 'active management approach' that can prevent unnecessary damage, dereliction and loss of historic fabric...[to] decommission buildings that are about to be vacated... [and] look after buildings that have already been vacant for some time'. (Historic England, 2018). [Emphasis added].

Because the stereotype of the absentee owner is so pervasive (CADO, 2019), it is easy to assume that buildings such as those in Fig. 1.1 ended up that way due to poor owner behaviour. In the above quote, I underlined actions that emphasise the behaviours and activities one can do to be a *responsible owner*. It logically follows that *bad, irresponsible owners* might:

- encourage risks by undertaking a passive management approach
- encourage unnecessary damage
- not board up vacated buildings
- not look after buildings that have been vacant for some time.

As will be seen in Chapter 2, these inferences form the basis for many critiques of set-aside property and the assumptions that they are held by absentee, negligent owners (Noterman, 2021; Greenberg, Schnider, Lowrie, & Dey, 2008; vom Hofe et al., 2019). The third argument of this thesis is that by directly investigating set-aside properties in their local context and looking at how the presence of these sites impacts multiple stakeholders, we can better understand the role these sites play in urban centres and the rationales behind the thoughts, behaviours, and actions of local actors.

1.2 Research Context

The need for further research into the nuance of property ownership became evident during the literature search. Though there is a significant body of research concerning property *developers* (Brown, 2015; McNamara, 1983; Antwi & Henneberry, 1995; Healey, 1991b; Healey, 1998; Coiacetto, 2001; Guy et al., 2002; Davis, 2009), and several studies that consider the role of property investors in urban development processes (Raco et al., 2019) research into property *owners* of set-aside urban sites remains relatively scarce (Adams et al., 2002; Petrzalka et al., 2013; Lazoroska & Palm, 2019; Ball & Pratt, 1994). This is important because there is a difference between a *property developer* and a *property owner*. For example, I own a property in Sheffield. This house was my home during fieldwork. I moved into my partner's home during my thesis write-up period. The house is currently used as a rental property. As either the occupier or landlord of this house, I could be

described as that property's *owner*, but the term *developer* would not apply to my situation.

The literature review demonstrated several instances where the current landholding phase was being overlooked in favour of discussions about the land's future development potential. This resulted in the terms *developer* and *owner* being used interchangeably. Distinguishing between these actors and these separate phases is essential to this thesis because it focuses on the experience of owning property during a set-aside period. Before empirical data collection, it is not known whether or to what extent these experiences include anticipation of redevelopment.

1.3 Aim, Research Questions and Objectives

To address the absence of the owner's voice in current literature, this thesis proposes studying the relationship between the owner(s), their asset(s) and their locality to advance current conceptualisations of urban redevelopment practices. The focus of this research is as follows:

Aim: To investigate the unseen lives of set-aside or derelict land and property.

Research Questions:

- **RQ1.** What dynamic processes can be found within seemingly set-aside or derelict sites?
- **RQ2.** What are the owner and occupier logics behind low-intensity property use?
- **RQ3.** How can we understand different types of property-owner behaviours?

Objectives:

- **O1:** Through empirical research, identify 'seemingly un-utilised' or 'derelict' properties within a low-intensity area and investigate these properties' 'building life cycles'.
- **O2:** Investigate owner and occupier perceptions of site use through in-depth qualitative interviews.

- **O3:** Produce a multi-faceted understanding of the lives of un/under-utilised spaces and their owners through a synthesis of empirical data and secondary sources.
- **O4:** Through O1, O2 and O3 produce a new conceptual understanding of under-utilised sites.

1.4 Thesis Structure

Chapter 2 provides an overview of the current literature concerning the two components of the research gap: set-aside urban properties and their owners. It should be noted that the structure of this thesis deviates from the standard PhD format. I have deliberately placed the theoretical framework after the methodology. The methodology in Chapter 3 outlines the study's epistemology, ontology and methods and also provides the reader with a detailed 'audit trail' (Thomson, 2014). This audit trail approach documents and justifies the modifications I made to my research practice during the data collection period and analysis processes. This was a necessary response to:

- The changing external circumstances of the COVID-19 pandemic.
- My developing skills as a qualitative researcher.

One outcome of these modifications was that Lefebvre's *Rhythmanalysis* (1992), which is a significant theoretical tool in my research framework, was identified later during an 'iterative' (Clark et al. 2021, 612) data analysis process that synthesised the primary and secondary data with existing literature. Therefore, a structural decision has been made to present the methodology first in Chapter 3 and the conceptual and theoretical framework second in Chapter 4 ahead of the empirical chapters (Chapters 5, 6 and 7).

Chapter 3 introduces the fieldwork site and gives the rationale for its selection. The research design combined semi-structured interviews with walking methods (Perec, 1975/2010, Rose, 2017 & 2021), repeat site visit observations (Crotty, 1998) and repeat photography (Doucet, 2019; Smith, 2007) which were cross-referenced with secondary sources such as Digimap, (EDINA, 2024) archival material, and planning records (Coiacetto, 2001; Adams et al., 2001) to search for

indications of owner-property relationships. The reader is encouraged to adopt a 'curiosity-not-judgement' (Pink & Emery, 2023) approach to set-aside property and their owners. This chapter outlines the research toolkit (Nicolini, 2013) that allowed the researcher to engage with human actors to record stories about different intensities and types of landholding. In addition to interviewing legal owners such as owner-occupiers, this project took an ecosystem approach (Henneberry & Parris, 2013) to understanding the relationships in the fieldwork site. Research participants included occupants of small businesses across the manufacturing, leisure, hospitality or creative sectors, local community groups, planners, architects, and estate agents.

Chapter 4 introduces the theoretical framework. This chapter outlines how the works of Lefebvre (*Spatial Triad*, 1974/1991; Lefebvre, 1992), Thompson (*Rubbish Theory*, 1979), and O'Callaghan (2023a) were combined to build the theoretical framework I used to address the research aim, questions, and objectives. Detailed background information and theoretical diagrams, which will be repeated in the empirical chapters, are set out in this section to demonstrate the research process of using 'theory to think with... data (and use[d] data to think with theory' (Jackson & Mazzei, 2013, 261) by 'plugging one [theoretical] text into another', a process that led to the creation of the Utility Pyramid.

The three empirical chapters each foreground one of the aspects of Lefebvre's *Spatial Triad* (1974/1991). These chapters continue this study's 'iterative' (Clark et al. 2021, 612) approach by revisiting and replicating select quotes and diagrams from the literature review, methodology, and theoretical framework chapters. This allows the reader to see the 'method of comparative analysis' (Glaser & Strauss, 1967,1) that was used to reach the findings by comparing the empirical data with other primary data, secondary data and the literature. Chapter 5 reports the empirical findings of the investigation into set-aside property and engages with the notion of different intensities of land utility. Chapter 5 introduces the reader to the fieldwork location using maps and planning documents. These secondary data sources are abstractions belonging to the *conceived space* domain. As the Chapter develops, the domains of *lived space* and *perceived space* (Lefebvre, 1974/1991) are

reintroduced through primary data generated from semi-structured interviews and researcher-generated photographs. Chapter 5 provides a list of 20 set-aside properties in the fieldwork area which were observed over two years. This data was analysed using the Utility Pyramid, a new model based on the works of Thompson (1979) and O'Callaghan (2023a). This model identifies five different phases of intensity at set-aside property. This nuance demonstrates that the 20 properties identified in Chapter 5 have known owners, and these sites were being managed in different ways on or offsite. The Chapter continues by exploring the building histories of three of the set-aside properties from this list. Again, the constant comparison method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Hallberg, 2006) teases out the interplay between different key themes in the data.

Chapter 6 foregrounds *perceived space* (Lefebvre, 1974/1991) to focus on one of the 20 set-aside properties which has stood empty for 20 years. A range of stakeholders commented on the significance of this currently derelict building in the surrounding area, which, since 2015, has organically developed into a popular area for small businesses. Rather than focusing on the building's past and potential future, Chapter 6 contributes to knowledge by focusing on the so-called dormant period in the property lifecycle (Harris, 1999; Cairns & Jacobs, 2014). This chapter focuses on one site, the Cannon Brewery, over a 20-year window and considers its impact on its local area and the impact of the local area on the Cannon Brewery. This lifecycle approach considers the Cannon Brewery as part of a wider ecosystem (Henneberry & Parris, 2013) in the fieldwork location, Neepsend in Sheffield. The years following the cessation of brewing activity, 2002 to 2022, are focused on revealing the different ways the same owner used and managed this set-aside property both on and offsite. The chapter contains a comparative element (Hallberg, 2006) as it draws on interviews and secondary data to compare how different types of owners manage set-aside properties as part of their wider portfolio. The building was sold in 2022, which allows for comparison between the first and second owners' site management practices. This closer look at the varied types of work set-aside properties may do for their owners challenges the narrative

that these sites have been forgotten about by absent owners (CADO, 2019, Petrzelka et al., 2003).

Chapter 7 focuses on *lived space* (Lefebvre, 1974/1991) and makes a contribution to knowledge by reporting data from owners in their own words. This chapter highlights how owners came to own set-aside property, what purpose these sites serve in their lives, and how they share and interpret local property market information to inform their current attitudes and decisions for their present and future property activities. An embedded oral history approach (Maye-Banbury, 2024) was taken during interviews and data analysis to emphasise the human motivations and life stories that underpin owners' decisions to purchase, sell, or retain their property. Through constant comparison (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) to identify the key concerns expressed by owners of set-aside property, the analysis revealed that those who owned or worked in property pursued a blend of orthodox and heterodox economic strategies for site management (Tinghög, Barrafreem & Västfjäll, 2023). Chapter 8 concludes the thesis by outlining the methodological, conceptual and theoretical contributions to knowledge, the implications of the findings on future research, the limitations of this research, and the recommendations for future empirical studies.

1.5 Conclusion: Summarising the Contribution to Knowledge

Throughout the introduction I have outlined how this thesis contributes to scholarly knowledge. To conclude the chapter I now briefly summarise the overarching contribution to knowledge. This thesis contributes to knowledge by demonstrating how a category of human actors that have received little attention within the wider literature plays a crucial role in shaping wider economic and social activity. Within vacancy studies, the perspectives of site owners and real estate actors have often been excluded from these discussions (Guy et al., 2002). This research presents an interpretation of place dynamics that incorporates a range of stakeholders to examine the interpersonal relationships of owners of set-aside urban properties. This thesis uses a blend of theoretical concepts to analyse the

factors that encourage and impede redevelopment in a way that has not been done before.

The following literature review considers how to define set-aside property and considers how this phenomenon has been described in UK policy and academic literature. As we move through a series of definitions, I encourage the reader to embrace dialectical thinking (Shields, 1999) and ask: What if derelict urban properties are not static? What if they serve a purpose and do some form of work or activity (O'Callaghan, 2023a) for their owners?

Chapter 2: Literature Review

This chapter presents three bodies of literature that explore current understandings and definitions of set-aside urban properties (Sections 2.1-2.2), property owners and developers (Section 2.3), and the wider UK context in which property owners must make their landholding decisions (Sections 2.4-2.6). These themes are addressed in the following order. The first section (Section 2.1) provides an overview of land use studies that have sought to identify, quantify, and remove the phenomenon of set-aside property. This section considers the underlying motivations behind these studies, drawing attention to how vocabulary has changed over time. The second section (Section 2.2) explores the distinct connotations of three recurring terms, “brownfield,” “derelict,” and “vacant”, addressing how these terms have been used in urban policy and academic arguments. This section queries the impact of our lack of positive or neutral terms for describing the phenomenon of set-aside property and how the focus on the visual condition of set-aside urban property has been used to comment upon broader social issues. The third section (Section 2.3) explores the distinction between property developers and property owners. This section considers different scales and types of landholding, which is essential to better understanding the owner’s motivations and attitudes towards set-aside land.

Narratives criticising set-aside urban property often contain negative stereotypes and assumptions about the landowners (von Hofe et al., 2019; CADO, 2019; Noterman, 2015). The fourth section (Section 2.4) considers the relationship between government bodies and private developers to challenge these stereotypes and place them in context by exploring the difference between land use and planning use categories. This section queries why set-aside land is considered positive when described as a ‘development pipeline’ but ‘land banking’ is considered negative and distasteful. Given that setting-aside property is often interpreted as an unorthodox practice, the fifth section (Section 2.5) draws upon literature about heterodox (Mearman, 2012; Almeida & Gustavo de Paula, 2019) decision-making, a term used to describe behaviours that do not align with conventional practices (Becker, 2020). Before drawing the chapter to a conclusion,

the final section (Section 2.6) summarises the latest developments in the field, identifying O’Callaghan’s (2023a) heuristic of vacancy as a critical component to carry forward into Chapter 4’s theoretical framework.

2.1 A History of Land Use

We begin our discussion of language with the first British land-use survey (Stamp, 1937). This section focuses on changes in the wording used to describe the phenomenon of setting aside property and does not comment on or review government policies. Instead, these sources are used to provide insight into the historical uses of key terms and how this may continue to affect our present attitudes and vocabulary. This exploration of language gives context to the empirical land use studies I conducted between 2020 and 2022, which are reported in Chapters 5 and 6.

The first *Land Utilisation Survey of Britain* (Stamp, 1937) was primarily concerned with limiting agriculturally unproductive land. The survey presented six core land use classifications. Stamp (1937, 9) distinguished between ‘Land idle and derelict’ and land that was not fit for agricultural purposes ‘by reason of use’, such as railway sidings. Stamp (1937) further distinguished between “idle” sites with no functional use and those with former or current uses that rendered sites unfit for growing crops. This wording is significant because it shows the idea that land disuse is morally idle and that people’s actions affect land quality. Because Stamp (1937, 8) focused on farming utility, his conceptualisation of “unproductive land” was literal; sites such as ‘buildings, yards, mines, [and] cemeteries’ were identified as non-crop-generating. Demonstrating the complexity of language, though this land was ‘unproductive’ for crops, these sites were not strictly ‘idle’ either. Stamp (1937) reported that these sites provided functional uses for other contexts (burying the dead) and were potentially economically productive in the broader sense (buildings are required for homes and workspaces, extracting coal as a natural resource).

By the 1960s, technological advances had facilitated the construction of modular buildings, and the first national highway was built (Mumford, 2018, 291-2). British ‘boom cities’ (Saumarez Smith, 2019) were experiencing growth and

investment, and this era is often characterised as the golden age of the car and of town planning. Much influential scholarship (Cullen, *The Concise Townscape*, 1961; Jacobs, *Death and Life of Great American Cities*, 1961; Buchanan, *Traffic in Towns*, 1963) in urban studies emerged in this decade. Coleman & Maggs' *Second Land Use Survey of Britain* (1964) also belonged to this era. This study distinguished between derelict urban land and fallow arable spaces but insisted:

*'All efforts should be made to **reduce this category to a minimum**. Areas fallow in August are likely either to have carried a crop such as peas earlier, or to carry one such as kale later.... Fallow in the early spring is a simple matter as generally it signifies a summer crop... Fallow in high summer, however, presents a problem as it may mean that the land is carrying two crops in one year. For example mustard may be sown later in the year after a cereal. The danger here is that an area mapped in June may appear as a great concentration of cereals, while a precisely similar area mapped in November appears largely devoted to green fodder.'* (Coleman & Maggs 1964, 11). [Emphasis added].

Coleman & Maggs's (1964) study showed the benefits of a ground-up approach (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) that built on the lived experience of 'insiders' (Holmes, 2020, 5) for information that may not be visually apparent to visiting "outsiders". In the 1960s, visiting volunteers were tasked with geographically mapping the crops. To accurately do this, they relied upon local knowledge of the properties, which local farmers and workers provided. Coleman & Maggs (1964) shared Stamp's (1937) concerns with ensuring decent quality land for agricultural purposes but appeared more accepting of the increasing presence of urban development. Coleman & Maggs (1964, 14) defined Heathland, Moorland and Rough Land as:

*'unenclosed land which receives little or **no human tending**, and is characterized by semi-natural vegetation kept in an arrested stage of development... Run down pasture **beyond use** for grazing, and urban patches of grass **awaiting the builder** are also coloured yellow.'* [Emphasis added].

The phrases highlighted show how authors use land's relation to human actors and to time when defining their concepts of land-based inertia. Coleman & Maggs (1964, 8) used the term "abandoned" as a synonym for "derelict" in cases where the land appeared to have been "tidied up" by nature. Though some patches

were identified as being ‘beyond use’, Coleman (1964, 8) did not indicate the acceptable time limits for land to be left in this condition. This leaves the reader wondering whether Coleman & Maggs (1964, 14) perceived these ‘run down’ as temporarily or permanently useless.

Coleman & Maggs’s (1964) study draws our attention to the issue of land use zoning. Their descriptions of areas zoned for development were less detailed, which implies that temporary under-utility was viewed as less concerning. At the same time that Coleman & Maggs (1964) were writing, and Fenston and Hyams were leaving functional properties empty in London for profit (Marriott, 1967), industrial decline had begun in other parts of Britain. We will return to Hyams (Marriott, 1967) shortly to discuss the social connotations of vacant property. This is significant because the fieldwork for this thesis (see Chapter 3) takes place in an industrial area in Sheffield, where:

‘The crisis in the steel industry in the late 1970s was sharply felt in the Don Valley, with nearly 20,000 jobs lost between 1978 and 1981 alone. By 1988, British Steel’s local workforce had declined by 80%’. (Mustill, 2021).

Though production stopped and factories closed, the industrial by-products of former uses had been left behind (Centre for Towns, 2019). Though post-industrial properties could theoretically find new uses, some sites were contaminated from former usage. In addition, the experience of deindustrialisation and the locations of the subsequent regeneration efforts were not evenly spread throughout the UK. Because the economic events of the 1980s are within living memory, the legacy of deindustrialisation remains politically, socially and economically relevant (DLUHC, 2022). This has implications for conducting fieldwork in post-industrial British towns and cities (see Chapter 3).

After 1979, during Margaret Thatcher’s premiership (1979-1990), economic policies were implemented to accelerate Britain’s transition from a manufacturing to a service economy. In “left behind” areas (Centre for Towns, 2019; DLUHC, 2022), the presence of set-aside properties, whether residential properties or formerly busy workplaces (Land Hero, 2020; Fig 1.1), has become ‘intuitively associated with areas of poverty and social deprivation in cities’. (Brito-Henriques et al., 2017, no

page). As such, deindustrialisation's economic and political legacy still impacts public perceptions of UK brownfield land. In 1982, the Conservatives introduced the Derelict Land Grant (DLG) to address the economic aftermath of deindustrialisation. This aimed to help City Councils remediate publicly owned brownfield sites. This policy was seen as a sensible way for councils to clean land before selling to private developers, as they could dispose of assets and bring in cash at market value (Nolan, 2015, 301). By the 1990s, quantitative government studies set out to measure and map the phenomenon of brownfield land to obtain a top-down, big-picture view (Greenhalgh & McCafferty, 1996) to assess whether government spending on remediation represented value for money (see Chapter 6).

Greenhalgh & McCafferty (1996, 57) reported that, though the DLG was helpful, a government survey conducted in 1993 concluded that 'the area of derelict land in England between 1988 and 1993 remained relatively static, despite the considerable sums of public money spent on derelict land reclamation'. The notion that investing in places must represent good value for money is an orthodox economic approach (Tinghög et al., 2023) to regeneration that is still present in government spending narratives (see: Brownfield Housing Fund, Chapter 6). Hansard (2001) argues that the cessation of the DLG in 1994 had consequences. As Nolan (2015, 301) explains:

'The way small sites were dealt with historically was via the 'Derelict Land Grant' (DLG). The City Council would remediate sites then sell them on to developers to recoup some of the remediation costs. Since the cancellation of the DLG in the 1990s, the way the Council have dealt with such sites is to sell them at below market value. This means the City Council are not maximising their assets. Should the City remediate the land prior to bringing it to the market they would be able to recoup the cost via the sale of the land and remove the risk for the developer. The Council could further increase the 'value added' by securing outline planning permission. This is not something that the Council currently do.'

Without the DLG money to fund decontamination works, the land was riskier to develop meaning the price had to be low enough to attract prospective buyers. In the case of Liverpool, Nolan (2015) explains that without the DLG to fund remediation, the Council would not have decontaminated the land. Selling land at lower prices accounts for this risk, but it means less income for councils to spend.

Though complex and nuanced, some studies focus on the stories of public land being sold off at low prices into private hands (Christophers, 2018; Shrubsole, 2019) to strengthen the belief that the private and public sector partnerships are corrupt. Rather than developers being seen as parties that can usefully deliver projects, narratives that focus on elites, where ‘owners of the most valuable properties have the most power’ (Zukin, 2010, 144-146), reinforce the stereotype of developers as greedy and over powerful (Stanton, 2017; Mangan, 2020; Busà, 2017), with governments deliberately failing to ‘try and reign in the real estate industry and market norms’ (Zukin, 2010, 144). As will be discussed in Section 2.3, though there are situations where this may occur, focusing only on elite actors overlooks the fact that there are multiple scales and types of landownership, and different types of property developer.

In 2007, the Labour government hoped to encourage the re-occupation of empty units by passing the Rating (Empty Property) Act. The intended outcome was for vacant property owners to develop, re-let, or sell their sites (Goodby & Franks, 2010; Bennett, 2017). Before this legislation, empty commercial properties qualified for tax relief. After the Act was passed, non-domestic properties in the UK became liable to pay business rates, even if the premises were unoccupied (Goodby & Franks, 2010). In practice, this tax on buildings could be interpreted as an attempt to regulate the behaviour of delinquent (Steele, 2022) owners. The timing of this policy caused uproar ‘amongst UK businesses and professional bodies of the property industry’ (Goodby & Franks, 2010, 44) because they were also juggling the financial impact of the 2008 global recession. The 2007 Act attempted to address the problem of habitable-but-empty sites by imposing a tax that was only payable on ‘buildings that are presently capable of gainful occupation’ (Bennett, 2017, 24). Unfortunately, this led to viable buildings being demolished to avoid paying the tax, and vacant buildings were replaced with urban voids. Scholars have argued that the reception of the *Rating Act* (2017) suggests that the legislators did not fully understand the situations of the property owners. These academic studies show how government policies can help or hinder the property market. Policies can backfire (Head & Alford, 2015) and even have ‘the unintended effect of *causing*

ruination' (Bennett, 2017, 24). The following section explores how the terms "brownfield", "vacant", and "derelict" have been defined and used in the literature.

2.2 Terminology: Brownfields, Derelicts, and Vacancy

When I began my PhD, I did not have the clear distinctions between brownfields, vacancy, and dereliction that appear in this chapter. As explained in Chapter 1, a challenge for this research was that several terms have built-in biases. It can be challenging to research this phenomenon because "brownfield", "vacant", and "derelict" are often used interchangeably (Strategic Land Group, 2002; Friere Trigo, 2020). This has caused academic disagreement regarding whether 'vacant' carries the same meaning as 'derelict' (Nolan, 2015; Woodward, 1989; Dixon et al., 2011).

This section explores language's role in communicating one's attitudes, beliefs, and behaviours regarding set-aside urban property. To avoid negative connotations, Chapter 1 introduced set-aside property as the phrase this thesis uses to describe the studied phenomenon. This term comes from agriculture and refers to setting aside a site so it can restore its nutrients and be productive in the future [Appendix A]. I acknowledge that the term "set-aside property" contains some assumptions about the intentions of its owners and is not connotation-free. An important distinction between "brownfield," "vacant," "derelict," and "set-aside" is that the latter *implies positive intent*. This provides a dialectical foil (Shields, 1999) that encourages critical thinking when encountering negative wording.

2.2.1 Brownfield Land

Nolan (2015, 18) asserts that the term 'brownfield land' was first used by Syms (1994, 63) to refer to:

'any areas of land which have previously been the subject of a man-made or non-agricultural use of any type... such as chemical works, heavy engineering, shipbuilding and textile processing... unfit housing clearance sites and docklands... mineral extraction sites and those used for landfill purposes.'

This thesis does not engage with substandard domestic housing, but including domestic buildings in this definition of brownfield adds another layer of

complexity. The inclusion of ‘unfit housing’ (Nolan, 2015, 18) indicates homes can be contaminated, perhaps by dampness and mould, making them unsuitable for human habitation. This suggests that the connotations of brownfield land are rooted in an understanding that brownfields are materially *unsafe*.

Despite these connotations, not all post-industrial land is contaminated. “Brownfield” land is an imprecise term encompassing many property types but treating them as one homogenous group. CABERNET [Concerted Action on Brownfield and Economic Regeneration Network] (2006, 3) defined brownfields as:

‘sites that have been affected by the former uses of the site and surrounding land • are derelict and underused • may have real or perceived contamination problems • are mainly in developed urban areas • and require intervention to bring them back to beneficial use’.

As this quote shows, brownfields are often equated with previously industrial land. When sites are physically tainted, pollutants may be within the soil or building’s fabric and not necessarily visible without professional investigation. On-site pollutants are dangerous industrial byproducts such as chemicals, asbestos, tar, gases, or radioactive waste (Homes England, 2022). Because brownfields pose “real” environmental and public health risks, regulations state that sites cannot be safely used until these risks have been rendered inert (Environmental Protection Act, 1990). Yount (2023) has argued that legislation and debates about what to do with brownfields should focus on these hazardous aspects of brownfield property rather than regulating unappealing ‘eyesores’ (Greenberg et al., 2008; van der Hoorn, 2009).

The industries that produced these contaminating byproducts typically required large areas of land. Before WWII (1939-1945), Britain’s economy placed great importance on industrial production. These economic centres tended to be based in proximity to populated urban areas that provided the workforce. During wartime, these sites of production and trade, such as the Liverpool and London docks, were targeted in air raids to undermine the British economy. After 1945, war damage, a type of land I would categorise as derelict (Stamp, 1937; Coleman & Maggs, 1964), became a tangible feature in the urban landscape. Though in some

contexts, properties war-damaged are retained to serve as a reminder of historically significant events (Van der Hoorn, 2008, 11) in the UK, the logical next step was to clean up the damage, a process that took decades to complete. A thorough discussion of Britain's postwar recovery is beyond the scope of this thesis. The docklands (Healey, 1991a) were a notable subcategory of brownfield land that struggled to recover after WWII. Many were abandoned by the 1980s. Therefore, definitions of brownfield property have a semantic connection with:

- sites of industrial production and employment
- becoming abandoned as too complicated and difficult to clean up
- requiring long-term solutions to remediate

Citing a study 'by Oliver et al. (2005) [that] identifies as many as 19 different definitions and variations for the term brownfield in Europe alone', Rey et al. (2022, 10) reported that there have been multiple attempts to create pre-agreed, distinct criteria (Coffin, 2003; DCLG, 2015) to help define brownfield land. *The Institut d'aménagement et d'urbanisme de la région d'Île-de-France (IAURIF)*, Rey et al. (2022, 10) has defined brownfields by their dimension, type, and activity. IAURIF (Rey et al. 2022, 10) state that brownfield sites should:

- 'be greater than half a hectare'
- have been empty for 'more than one year.'

Adams et al. (2001) focused their study on brownfield land on sites over 2 hectares to define if a research site is in or out of scope. However, Nolan observed (2015, 13) that 'Liverpool still has many derelict sites, the majority of which are smaller than 0.25 hectares'. This suggests that applying strict sizing definitions can overlook vital research into this phenomenon and that categorisation attempts can be too restrictive (Nolan, 2015).

Furthermore, because emptiness and vacancy are associated with economic inactivity, much research attention (Ball & Pratt, 1994; Adams & Hutchinson, 2000; Rosato et al., 2010; Friere Trigo, 2020; Lami, 2020) has been dedicated to seeking solutions that bring sites back into active use, particularly for those 'hardcore sites' (Dixon et al., 2011) that have stood static for decades. After being decommissioned

(Dawney, 2020) some buildings, such as factories, have remained empty to this day (Talling, 2019; High & Lewis, 2017). These sites are often presented in the literature as eyesores (Greenberg et al., 2008; van der Hoorn, 2009) that represent the ‘debris of global capitalism, [and] neoliberalism’ (Martin, 2014, 1037). Such attitudes may be akin to stigma (Pendlebury, Wang & Law, 2017; Gibbeson, 2018) with run-down areas associated with poverty (Greenberg et al., 2008).

In sum, though “brownfield” is a commonly used term, it has associations with a wide range of connotations. “Brownfield land” has strong connections, real or perceived, to deindustrialisation (Andrews, 2020), economic deprivation, and social inequality (Centre for Towns, 2019). Though this makes the phenomenon hard to quantify, this qualitative thesis seeks to understand the perspectives and mindsets of human actors working closely with urban brownfields. As such, “brownfield” frequently occurred during interviews and would be impossible to avoid in discussion. This thesis is less concerned with debating what is or is not brownfield and more interested in how and why others define it. Given the connotations of this term, my analysis avoids using it except in direct reference to the Brownfield Housing Fund (Chapter 6).

2.2.2 Derelict Property

This section defines dereliction in terms of a property's aesthetics. A body of work (High & Lewis, 2007; van der Hoorn, 2009; Apel, 2015; Edensor, 2015; DeSilvey, 2017) has foregrounded sub-optimal use and made the case that economic optimisation is not required for buildings or unprogrammed space (Woodward, 1989) to be useful or interesting. This scholarship has paved the way for my investigation, which examines owner attitudes towards their derelict buildings. The aesthetics of dereliction have been received in two ways. First, some believe dereliction provides artistic inspiration and creative opportunities (Trigg, 2006; Martin, 2014). The work of photographers such as Talling (2019) and Barasch (2019) demonstrates “Ruinophilia/ Ruinophilia”. This term describes the phenomenon of people being fascinated by empty buildings. In *Ruins and Redemption*, Barasch (2019) features beautiful photographs of derelict buildings, many of which are shown before and after regeneration. Talling (2019) also utilised

repeat photography for a different purpose. Talling (2019, no page) explained that the motivation for producing the second edition of *Derelict London* was his emotional reaction to:

'..a historic building being reduced to dust... and seeing its subsequent rebirth as a block of flats raised questions about the future.... This new edition features buildings from the first edition that remain derelict... [and] tells the story of several buildings whose fortunes have been transformed since 2008 [the first edition] (they have all been turned into luxury flats with depressing consistency).'

Though these luxury flats will be occupied, Talling (2009) considers these replacement buildings to be a *distasteful form of land use* (Stamp, 1937; Hardy-Syms, 1937; Coleman & Maggs, 1964). Talling (2019) raises an important issue for future studies: who benefits from urban transformations (see Zukin, 2010; Busà, 2017). Images of dereliction can stir powerful emotions, synonymous with “ruination” and “void spaces” (Hell & Schönle, 2010). However, in recent years, academic interest in highlighting the complex issues underlying this phenomenon has gained momentum.

The NoVOID project, led by Brito-Henriques (2015-2019), argued that ambiguous and undefined property was not the problem; rather, the problem is our mindset about these places. As they explain:

*'Urban planning has followed this hegemonic sensitivity that **demonizes ruins and vacant lands...** [because] the focus has been put in **reversing urban ruins and derelicts**, little attention has been devoted to the analysis and understanding of **the ruination processes...** Inspired by [Ignasi de] Solà-Morales' [(1942-2001)] concept of **terrain vague**, we intend to think of the qualities of the **abandoned and ruined spaces in the city and to discuss positively their value and potentialities.**' (Brito-Henriques, 2015-19, no page). [Emphasis added].*

The NoVOID study goes beyond the surface-level appearance of dereliction and ruins (which I have highlighted in bold) to examine deeply entrenched social, economic, and political matters. The above quote challenges the negative vocabulary often used to describe these places and takes these words as an entry point for questioning the appropriateness of society's normative, anti-ruination motivations. Brito-Henrique's (2015-2019) study echoes my intentions to investigate set-aside property as it is. In keeping with my study's research methods, the

NoVOID (Brito-Henriques, 2015-2019) study cites Solà-Morales, who used photography as a research practice. Solà-Morales proposed another term with implications for investigating set-aside urban property, 'terrain vague' (Brito-Henriques, 2015-2019, no page). This term is defined as:

'a plot of land defined by indeterminacy is the key to understanding of terrain vague, which has both a spatial as well as a social connection – defined by what it is, but that being specifically defined by how the space is used. As de Sola Morales mentions, these become "spaces as internal to the city yet external to its everyday use. In apparently forgotten places, the memory of the past seems to predominate over the present." (110)' (Landscape+Urbanism, 2011- no page).

As Freire Trigo (2020) has noted, the absence of a common reference point makes it difficult to quantify the volume of set-aside property or to conduct chronological research into historical change. The words we use to describe the condition of vacant land have changed over time (DCLG, 2015), and, as seen in the NoVOID quote (Brito-Henriques, 2015-2019) on the previous page, different terms are often used interchangeably. The next section considers the debates around set-aside property that have focused on people's emotional responses to land use and land appearance.

2.2.3 Immoral Vacancy?

Criticisms directed towards vacant property are closely linked to critiques of the people seen to (mis)manage them. As such, vacant land:

- has connotations of mismanaged resources, greed, and wasted opportunities
- provokes moral irritation within onlookers.

Scholarship has noted that 'urban planners...have sought to convert vacant and foreclosed properties from "liabilities" into "assets"' (Noterman, 2021, 43). To unpick the link between vacancy and greed, we must return to the 1960s. Marriott's *The Property Boom* (1967) described the behaviour of property developers who became household names because of their financial success. For example, Harry Hyams (Marriott, 1967) marketed a property on Oxford Street, London:

- For £20,000 rent per year
- The market rate was £12,500-£14,000

- At this time, businesses agreed on a rent level ‘for 25 years’ (Marriott, 1967, 109).

The property developer Hyams (Marriott, 1967) was using this property, and several others, as financial instruments. He deliberately kept this site vacant for three years. Once a tenant agreed to pay an annual rent of £18,500, the negative costs of holding the empty unit were nullified:

‘The capital gain would have far outweighed the loss of interest on borrowed money, which could be offset against tax, and the loss of rent, which is worth less than it appears to a high taxpayer.’ (Marriott, 1967, 109).

The logic of Hyam’s decision was that he could afford to pay the bank’s interest while waiting for this higher price. The property would ultimately generate £462,500 in rental income rather than the typical market rate of £312,500-£350,000 across a 25-year letting.

For Hyams, keeping a vacant building was not a liability; it generated an asset (Noterman, 2021) requiring a waiting period. Marriott (1967, 109) reports that Felix Fenston, another infamous property developer, engaged in this practice and stated, ‘Keeping a building empty is just a question of how much money you’ve got’. We will return to why people might deliberately keep a property vacant and prioritise exchange value over productive occupancy (use value) later in this chapter. For now, we can say that Hyams and Fenston’s attitudes towards vacant property remain strong in public memory and have forged strong associations with greed. In Steele’s (2022, 16) thesis regarding regeneration without gentrification, she described ‘[lands that capitalism was] leaving fallow.’ Steele’s (2022) combination of capitalist motives and agricultural inertia evokes a powerless feeling when faced with the deliberate vacancy described by Marriott (1967).

Kitchin, O’Callaghan, and Gleeson (2014, 1069) have discussed ‘ghost estates’. These abandoned properties enter the built environment but are never completed or used. These never-completed projects occur because property development involves risk. Due to the wider economic climate and the timing of a project, not all projects succeed, and there are multiple reasons why funding may run out (Kitchin et al., 2014). We will return to this phenomenon when discussing

the literature about property development. To continue the discussion about completed properties that are deliberately left vacant by actors like Hyams (Marriot, 1967), a similar term, 'ghost flats'(Neate, 2018), refers to a phenomenon seen in contemporary London. These are completed developments, typically luxury flats built for the super-rich, which are vacant because the owners seldom, or have never, lived in them. These 'ghost flats' are a form of 'super gentrification' (Christophers, 2020; Sklair, 2017) that starkly contrasts with adjacent areas of urban deprivation. When land has been developed and the building is left unused, this provokes ire amongst onlookers who feel they are the 'wrong properties that Londoners don't need' (Neate, 2018, no page) and that the enormous sums of money spent on that ghost development, would have been better utilised for social housing.

The social norms surrounding vacancy are to avoid *disuse* or *incorrect* use (Stamp, 1937; Coleman & Maggs, 1964; Noterman, 2021). My study does not consider the luxury, underused properties in London; however, this phenomenon shows that the key debate was not what the sites looked like, but whether they were perceived as being under-used. This raises the issue of whether owners hold their properties for use value (for its functional utility, e.g. as a home) or exchange value (for its economic value, e.g. as a real estate investment one does not necessarily live in or use). Though owning and not using the property is legal, ghost flats (Neate, 2018) are reported in the media using language that suggests this is considered morally wrong. This moral dimension is applied to the set-aside urban properties this study addresses. They are seen as a problem to be solved for not being used, with the added judgement that they look unattractive and untidy (Greenberg et al., 2008; van der Hoorn, 2009).

The belief that set-aside properties should work harder (Bennett, 2017; Friere Trigo, 2020) remains prevalent in the UK. Following the reduction in economic activity during COVID-19, new policies were announced to help '*empty commercial properties to be quickly repurposed*'. (Prime Minister's Office, 2020, no page). Emptiness and vacancy, as seen with commercial properties like shops and

offices, can be visibly differentiated from post-industrial contaminated brownfields.

We can, therefore, infer the underlying sentiments that:

- vacant property is *ready and waiting* to be reused
- we need to immediately stop something, or someone, from obstructing this reuse

Again, it remains unclear (Coleman & Maggs, 1964) what timescales are acceptable for a site to stay “unused” or “vacant”. Recent studies (Brito-Henriques, 2017) have challenged the appropriateness of this urgent, fast-paced approach (Raco et al., 2018) that treats set-aside buildings as concrete embodiments of social, economic, or political problems. Having outlined how brownfield, derelict and vacant properties have been described in the literature, the next section concludes our overview of terminology by exploring the wording the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG, 2015) use to categorise land.

2.2.4 Contemporary Categories of Land Use

The Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG, 2015, 5) has collected statistics about UK land use changes since 1985. At the time of writing, DCLG¹ defined 28 categories of land use that were ‘aggregated into 13 different groups and split between developed and non-developed land use types’. (DCLG, 2015). According to the DCLG document, land use is broadly split into:

- Previously Developed Land (PDL)
- Non Previously Developed Land (NPDL)

Though the vocabulary used by DCLG indicate that this government department has moved towards more neutral catch-all alternatives, I felt that the term “PDL” was not specific enough to frame my investigation.

¹ NB: By 2024, DCLG had been renamed the ‘Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities’ (DLUHC).

Table 2.1 An extract from DCLG Land Use Change Statistics 2013/15, 'Table 3—New land use classifications and definitions' (June 2015, p. 19).

Land Use Change Classification	Full Land Use Change Classification	Definition
S	Storage and Warehousing	Storage and warehousing buildings
T	Transport	Transport, including rail land and any buildings allocated to transportation purposes
U	Utilities	Utility buildings
V	Vacant Land	Land that is “sealed” off for development – either with development underway, or closed off for future development
W	Water	Bodies of water (lakes, rivers, streams, ponds and tidal water)
X	Undeveloped Land	Grassed areas in urban areas, excluding residential gardens and verges, that are not otherwise classified
Y	Landfill and Waste Disposal	Waste management buildings
~B	Unidentified building	Buildings where no other classification is available
~M	Unidentified general manmade surface (not roadside)	Hard standing usually a car park, paved area, tarmac or other similar construct
~S	Unidentified structure	Manmade structures where no other classification is available
~U	Unknown surface type with no classification	Applied to features where no other classification is available

Table 2.1 provides an extract (DCLG, 2015, 19) from this document demonstrating the range of definitions currently used to describe specific types of land. It is significant that when these 28 categories were last updated in 2013/14, the DCLG (2015, 11-13) removed the terms “brownfield” and “derelict”. In addition, the DCLG’s definition of “vacant” land differs from the usage of “vacancy” in the literature.

DCLG's (2015, 19) notion of vacancy as an active process where land is 'sealed off' for current development processes or future uses (Table 2.1) is similar to the idea of 'urban patches... awaiting the builder' (Coleman & Maggs, 1964, 14). This introduces the idea that change is not immediate and that plans for higher-intensity use rely on the existence of lower-intensity land to instigate this change. In terms of understanding the motivations of set-aside property owners, this also suggests that setting aside property can be a deliberate strategic choice, rather than the story owners have forgotten about their sites. We will return to this idea when discussing the literature around land banking and development pipelines (Chapter 2, section 2.4).

In summary, because "brownfield", "derelict", "vacancy", and "PDL" appear in different contexts, this thesis will continue using "set-aside" as the default term when discussing relevant properties. We will return to the DCLG's (2015, 19) concept of 'vacancy' when discussing land banking and development pipelines. Having outlined the property at the heart of this study, the next section considers two categories of human actors involved in managing set-aside properties: owners and developers.

2.3 Differentiating between Owners and Developers

During the research process, I repeatedly encountered perceptions and beliefs that all property developers behaved like Hyams (Marriott, 1967). This section steps away from these emotionally charged anecdotes about the 'characteristics and behaviour of the typical brownfield landowner, which is mainly drawn from partial evidence or past anecdotes' (Adams et al., 2002, 137-138) and focuses on scholarship regarding modern-day property owner and property developer activities at set-aside property. This section provides an overview of research about these two different categories of stakeholder as these studies have relevance to my research aim, objectives and RQs.

2.3.1 Property Owners

When Moroni, De Franco, & Bellé (2020) researched vacant properties within Italian cities, they argued that the ownership status of a site was crucial

when determining whether an abandoned building was problematic. There are large amounts of vacant publicly owned property in Italy. Because public assets 'belong to everyone', Moroni et al. (2020, 9) suggested that the long-term stasis of public property 'represent[s] a form of wastage'. In contrast, whether a private 'owners use... them, profits from them or not, is publicly irrelevant' (Moroni et al., 2020, 9). This quote is pertinent to my data as the semi-structured interviews were with *private property owners*. Moroni et al.'s (2020, 9) arguments are relevant to this thesis because they challenge the idea that the phenomenon of set-aside property should always be considered wasteful or unsettling (Bennett, 2017).

Moroni et al.'s (2020, 9) arguments that private set-aside property is a non-issue whereas public set-aside property is a problem to solve differs from the argument put forward by Greenberg et al. (2008, 16) that there are 'two types of pariah land uses: locally unwanted land uses (LULUs) and temporarily obsolete abandoned derelict sites (TOADS)'. Greenberg et al (2008, 16) described TOADS as:

'abandoned... non-residential land uses that are no longer productive...if they are neglected, they can become TOADS, marked by illegal dumping, fires and criminal activity. TOADS are eyesores, providing clear signs of neighbourhood decline and decay'.

These conflicting views suggest that there are social issues associated with set-aside property but that interpretations of the phenomenon of set-aside property are highly subjective and context-dependent. Table 2.2 on the following page provides an overview of research that has considered the nuanced role of different types of private landowners:

Table 2.2 Methodologies of Previous Studies concerning potential owners of set-aside land/PDL

Study	Interview Sample Size	Other Methods	Methodology
Lazoroska & Palm (2019)	72	Literature Review	Keyword literature search on planning data
Raco et al. (2019)	Not specified	Secondary accounts and strategy data	Systematic discourse analysis
Raco et al. (2018)	Not specified	Case study	In-depth qualitative research
Dixon et al. (2011)	31 (17 Manchester, 14 Osaka)	10 case studies (5 Manchester, 5 Osaka)	Multi-method approach: data/policy analysis, interviews, illustrative case studies, comparative analysis
Avis & Dent (2004)	3	Secondary census data	Comparative: Heads of large real estate companies.
Jack et al. (2002)	7	Ethnography	Triangulation. Considered rural entrepreneurs in context, not isolation . Gidden's Structuration Theory.
Ball (2002)	34	Survey	Detailed qualitative information about embeddedness and redevelopment
Adams et al. (2001)	120	80 case studies across four cities (20 per city)	Questionnaires to owners . Used planning records to reconstruct site histories. Comparative . Brownfields = over 2 hectares.
Coiacetto (2001)	17	Two case study cities	In-depth qualitative interviews conducted with people who put planning applications in one of two case cities. Comparative .

Though Adams et al. (2001) is a quantitative study, most of the literature in Table 2.2 has adopted a qualitative, comparative methodology. In Table 2.2, I have highlighted these approaches in bold and highlighted the frequent occurrence of semi-structured interviews and cross-referencing with planning records as data-collecting methods. This has implications for my research design, which will be discussed in Chapter 3. The following section comments on the value of taking a similar approach to address the RQs of this thesis.

Petrzelka et al. (2003, 157) argued, 'Despite this growth in absentee owners, we know very little about this group and their... land management behaviour'. Lazoroska & Palm's (2019, 229) study addressed a lack of knowledge about land managers (Kam & Potter, 2021) by investigating the structural barriers and incentives private owners and developers encountered when engaging with local 'municipal actors'. Using a keyword search, they conducted a literature review of 72 dialogues between municipalities and property holders) concerning the issue of sustainable housing. For their purposes, Lazoroska & Palm (2019, 229) used the following definitions:

'Property owners are defined as individual or collective actors with ownership and management rights over property, in the present case, residential buildings. Property developers are defined as the actors who build new or renovate existing housing'. [Emphasis added].

Moroni et al. (2020) suggest that property rights include the right to leave property unused (O'Callaghan, 2023a). Lazoroska & Palm's (2019) study is significant because their participant selection criteria required landowners to engage with the local municipality, and the data set included landowners who did not live in the areas where they owned property. Coiacetto's (2001) study also looked at planning documents to demonstrate how property owners engage with local councils. These two studies draw attention to the fact that engaging in correspondence with local authorities is a form of off-site land management activity. The fact that owners do engage with the authorities challenges the negative stereotype of the absentee landowner (Rose, 2017; CADO, 2019; O'Callaghan, 2023a). The data chapters in this thesis have developed this theme further, which is discussed in Chapters 5 and 6.

Lazoroska & Palm's (2019, 335) study distinguished between different scales of landholders, noting, 'Even relatively "powerful actors" such as property owners and property developers are not homogenous'. Critical differences identified in their dataset include the owner's access to financial resources and varied life experiences (Lazoroska & Palm, 2019). Continuing the theme of scales of ownership, Avis & Dent (2014) and Raco et al. (2018) interviewed large landholding companies. Raco et al.'s (2018) study was conducted through direct interviews with

large corporate landowners in London. Though these studies are informative and challenge stereotypes, Raco et al.'s (2019; 2018) sample sizes are unclear. The fact that larger studies have focused on large development projects or property companies highlights the need for more nuanced studies into smaller-scale private landowners, as being a property owner does not automatically mean the owner is wealthy. The path to property ownership in the UK is often achieved by taking out a loan. This thesis has identified different ownership scales from secondary data and encounters during fieldwork, which are explored further in Chapters 5, 6 and 7.

Property development is a business venture, and McNamara (1983, 92) has suggested that the developers' role is to orchestrate 'development [by] bringing the land rights, about and capital together at a particular place at a particular time'. Coiacetto (2001, 44) noted that 'the local nature of development' is a 'rarely investigated topic of behavioural analysis'. To address this knowledge gap, this thesis approached literature about local 'embeddedness' (Jack & Anderson, 2002, 467) as a means of understanding local property markets (Henneberry & Parris, 2013). Jack & Anderson (2002, 467) have argued that studies of local actors should:

'move away from considering the entrepreneur in isolation and look at the entrepreneurial process... [as] not merely an economic process but [one that] draws from the social context which shapes and forms... outcomes'

Private development companies are not charitable or government bodies and must remain profitable to stay in business (Crosby et al., 2020; Crosby & Henneberry, 2016). Despite 'development' covering a diverse range of activities (Coiacetto, 2001, 44) has argued that the nuances of property development remain poorly understood. Evans (2004, 105) work distinguishes between *owners* and *developers* but acknowledges that they are connected through the property development *process* because:

'the way in which land is owned and occupied will affect the process of development and change- [therefore,] ownership affects development'.

In addition, the intensity of local development pressure can impact how one might describe a property owner (Evans, 2004, 105-9). To support the limited literature on owners, the next section considers how studies of property developers

from organisational behaviour (Neyland, 2008) and behavioural economics might contribute to my study into the motivations of set-aside property owners.

2.3.2 Property Developers

In *Towards a Classification of Land Developers*, McNamara (1983, 87) argued that developers 'are still not well understood, and [that] very little empirical work deals with diversity in the industry'. McNamara (1983, 88) noted that:

*'Many, superficially similar developers act differently when developing land and... many superficially different **types of developer** act similarly.'* [Emphasis added].

To support this claim, McNamara's (1983) study of offices in Edinburgh demonstrated how different groups behaved within the same local market and called for more research into different typologies of developers. McNamara's (1983) study was compatible with a grounded-theory methodology (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) as developers were empirically studied to query whether theoretically similar developers being grouped together would overlook the nuanced differences in their real-world practices. Showing an affinity with McNamara's (1983) typology approach, Kim's (2008) study of local development cultures compared the patterns of development activity in Ho Chi Minh City and local actors' behaviour in the property market. Kim's (2008) methodology focused on how actors behaved in practice and identified four distinct categories of developers operating within one locality. McNamara (1983) and Kim's (2008) studies demonstrate the benefits of research that observes how developers function within a property market, and how this empirical activity can avoid the tendency for these actors to be stereotyped 'based on various assumptions about behaviour'. (Coiacetto, 2001, 45).

Coiacetto (2001, 44) described developers as being motivated by 'the location and timing of development; [and] the geographical extent of their activities'. As seen in the previous discussion about owners in local markets, these three factors may play a significant role in owner decision-making. Local property markets vary and will have different 'ecosystems' (Grabher, 2002, 246; Kofman & Lebas, 2006, 72; Henneberry & Parris, 2013, 232). Unfortunately, not much has

changed since McNamara's (1983) study; as Raco et al. (2019, 1067) observed 'developers are [still] referred to generically, if at all, in policy documents'. When developers across the spectrum are lumped together, the word "developer" becomes a simplistic caricature of a person whose:

'actions are guided relentlessly towards the privatisation of once-public spaces by the capitalist logics of accumulation and profit maximization' (Bennett, 2019, 225).

These simplistic stereotypes and dismissive attitudes towards developers persist in both academic research and popular culture, and can be partially explained by developers and development (Guy & Henneberry, 2002) being closely associated with the wider social structures of neoliberalism and capitalism (Amato, 2021; Christopher, 2018; Martin, 2014). When reviewing three monographs discussing New York of the 1960s, Mennel (2011, 627) observed that narratives portraying Jane Jacobs as a 'plucky housewife' against Robert Moses, a 'power-mad evil genius' aided by 'soulless technocrats' were 'persistent myths' (Mennel, 2011, 629) that contained a grain of truth. Mennel (2011, 629) argued that these 'familiar mothers-against-Moses bed-time stories [were] fighting last century's battles with last century's logic'. Changing our context to twenty-first century Britain, a similar logic is at play in the two examples below that describe local planning meetings. In the first, Stanton recounts:

'At a recent presentation I attended by developers vying for a large contract with a city government, each team had its own "place-making" specialist (always the one male who wasn't wearing a tie)' (Stanton, 2017, 162).

Here, Stanton (2017) has leaned into the tropes that developers are all the same, competitively greedy, and deceptive. In a scene from the BBC documentary *Manctopia* (Mattingly, 2020) a property developer hosts a community consultation meeting. The developers discuss their plans to revive a long-abandoned heritage site. A local woman keen to see this building saved echoes Stanton's (2017, 162) cynicism, and expresses conflicting feelings about the developer's plan. Reluctantly, the woman acknowledges to the camera that saving the heritage asset will come down to 'the dirty word- "money"' (Mattingly, 2020). In this scene, there appeared to be an emotional reasoning at play, and a distrust of development- or perhaps,

the developers intentions- despite the reopening of the heritage asset being of mutual benefit.

As Mennel (2011, 632) argues, '[t]here is simply too much to the phenomenon of urban renewal to be contained in a simplistic narrative'. The narrative arc of *Manctopia* (Mattingly, 2020) is the comparison between the experiences of retired locals who have lived in Manchester all their lives, single parents who are struggling to afford accommodation, and unhoused people experiencing inner city deprivation with the experiences of actors such as developers, pension funds and occupants of premium penthouses who are associated with Manchester's luxury property boom. In contrasting the experiences of wealth and poverty, the documentary invites critique of capitalism and neoliberalism, the contextual systems that contain these stark extremes. In comparing opposites, one is presented with a distorted and extreme vision of reality that, whilst it contains truth, contributes to the prevalence of stereotypes such as the greedy developer, whilst not fully representing the bigger picture. As Mennel (2011, 630) suggests:

'privileging a simple story over the complex ones that generate our perceptions of cities only diminishes our understandings of power and place, much as it only diminishes both Moses and Jacobs to cast them as merely antagonists. Doing so turns complex and thoughtful individuals into useless symbols.'

In another scene in *Manctopia* (Mattingly, 2020), the developers are filmed working inside a derelict mill that is being transformed into flats. As they speak with the tradespeople, they explain to the audience the technical issues involved in renovating, namely that they have exceeded the budget on one of the building materials, but are unwilling to cut costs and use an inferior material. Despite the contrasting nature of the documentary's narrative arc, these scenes added complexity to the story. After *Manctopia* (Mattingly, 2020) aired, by introducing these nuances, a columnist expressed surprise that a property developer had come across as:

'human and humane – a businessman presented with an opportunity to make a lot of something out of a lot of nothing, rather than a diabolical

being wishing to become lord and master of all he lucratively surveys'
(Mangan, 2020).

We will return to Mangan's (2020) description of the developers in this quote in Chapter 7. Here, Mangan (2020) comments on how the 'nothing' of the mills has presented an 'opportunity' to be transformed into homes, a higher-use 'something'. As with the ghost flats of London (Neate, 2018), the wider context of a property seems important (Jack & Anderson, 2002). Though (Moroni et al., 2020, 9) argued that what private owners do with their set-aside property is not necessarily a public matter, campaigns such as Land Hero's (2020, Chapter 1, Fig. 1.1) engage with the emotional logic that leaving land unproductive is somehow morally wrong. However, the lady in Manctopia (Mattingly, 2020) was also wary of allowing the site to be brought back into use.

One of the earliest activities property developers engage in is assembling land. This begins the multi-stage development process that ends with the buildings coming to the market. The marketing particulars produced by real estate companies were helpful data sources when conducting this literature review. Adverts marketed to land owners of set-aside property expressed the desire to purchase unused sites in specific geographic locations (Fairview, 2021; Godwin Group, 2020). One source stated: 'We can't turn a frog into a prince, but... if you have land to sell, we can turn an eyesore into a goldmine' (Fairview, 2021; see image in Chapter 2, Figure 3.2). Similar to the work of Land Hero (2020; 2023) encountered in Chapter 1 (Fig. 1.1), these advertisements indicate that the companies seek set-aside sites to satisfy expansion in *specific* property markets. Though marketing particulars aimed at owners are helpful, they are limited as they do not provide the owner's perspective. To address this gap, Chapter 7 reports this study's research into the various circumstances in which property actors acquire or transmit property to others and how the owner feels about their role in these proceedings.

Aside from acquiring land, another development task is to finance the project. Real estate is a risk-based business, and only some ventures pay off. If something goes wrong and the developer cannot afford to complete the project, this can lead to unfinished 'ghost estates' (Kitchin et al., 2014, 1069). One of the

costs of development is planning fees. When a planning application is rejected, the owner and developer do not have permission to proceed with their planned development. Though planning rejections can be appealed, Evans (2004, 112) reports that since the 1990s, developers have increasingly struggled to win their appeals. Declined planning applications represent a loss of large sums of money. Because developers often work on more than one site, one way of mitigating the loss of money on unsuccessful planning applications is to budget for retaining a significant portion of 'the proceeds [that come out of the completion] of any successful applications to pay the costs of all the unsuccessful ones' (Evans, 2004, 112). Evans (2004) study has significant implications for understanding the costs to owners and developers of putting a set-aside property through the planning process and their desire for more certainty from the planning process. These themes will be discussed further in Chapters 5, 6 and 7.

Though developers can provide funding and expertise to bring set-aside urban property back into use, public mistrust is a potential obstacle to development. This is significant because the public sector in the UK 'currently undertakes relatively little direct development' (Wilkinson & Reed, 2008, 13). Large, contaminated brownfield sites need vast sums of money and coordinated efforts to remediate (Homes England, 2022). Despite the necessity for public-private partnerships (Tallon, 2010) to bring about much-needed development in the UK, this business relationship is sometimes perceived as corruption (Ivey, 2022). This will be addressed in the next section. Having outlined the literature regarding set-aside property and set-aside property owners, the following sections address the wider economic and political context in which landholding decisions are made.

2.4 Land Banking and Development Pipelines

As previously discussed, property ownership refers to physical property and the intangible rights to use that property. Therefore, legal restrictions and permissions may determine what owners may or may not do with their assets. As explored earlier, legislation may try to encourage or restrict certain kinds of landholder activity. Accordingly, the government's decisions can affect the pace of

change in local property markets, impacting change at set-aside properties (Hardy Syms, 1937; Adams & Tiesdell, 2010). The Ratings (Empty Property) Act 2007 was intended to encourage the re-occupation of vacant property but inadvertently caused an increase in void spaces (Bennett, 2017). Chapter 6 engages with one of these government decisions, namely the ‘£400m Brownfield Land Fund’ (Prime Minister’s Office, 2020) announced during COVID-19. If we return to our discussion of terminology, though “brownfield” and “derelict” land are no longer official categories used by the DCLG (2015), the name of this 2020 initiative shows that these words are still used in political discourses and planning agendas. Though this is not a planning study, the legal rights of land holdings are relevant to this thesis, as they form part of the ecosystem in which owners will make their decisions.

As will be discussed in Chapters 4 and 5, the rules and norms of law align with Lefebvre’s (1974/1991) notion of *conceived space*. This is the domain of what people expect and includes both the DCLG’s (2015) *land use categories* and a different set of labels, the *planning use categories* that are covered by the Town and Country Planning (Use Classes) Order 1987 (last updated September 2020). These categories, also known as land zoning, are periodically updated, making it difficult to conduct longitudinal studies tracing land use change over time (Friere Trigo, 2020). Land use zoning and its impact on land use change is a contentious topic in the literature and in popular culture (Mattingly, 2020). Hardy-Syms’ (1937) critique of land zoning regulations demonstrates how the decision-making processes of property owners occur within a wider network:

*‘The best type of **landowner** is frequently not to blame, but the owners of small estates, particularly those near towns, often take the shortsighted attitude and insist on the **town-planning** authority zoning their farm-land for building use. A great deal of unintelligent work has gone on under the guise of planning, but it is **not altogether the fault of ... the local authorities**. The major blame should be laid at the door of **Parliament**... If land is zoned as agricultural, it will be assessed for Estate Duty on agricultural value, but if zoned for building it will be assessed at a higher value on that account’* (Hardy-Syms in Stamp, 1937, 28). [Emphasis added].

Here, echoing a critical realist stance that sees the world as a series of stratified interactions (Næss, 2016, 63) Hardy-Syms (1937) has identified three

concentric circles of decision-making. Parliament has set the rules for what counts as optimum and maximum land utility, and the local authority supports these rules and wants the owners to develop their farmland. Moreover, therefore, the *Homo economicus* (Tinghög et al., 2023) motivations that prioritise highest and best use are contained within the zoning policy. When assessing the decision-making of the landholder, Hardy-Syms (1937) acknowledges that the rules have created this incentive to rezone one's land for building at a higher value. This is significant because when people make decisions, they operate in a wider ecosystem (Henneberry & Parris, 2013). Though a plot of land may look inert, behind the scenes, it may have an owner with a plan, and the current condition of the land may have a future function. The next section examines two phrases that could be used to describe the unseen activities at set-aside property- land banking and development pipelines—to show how the vocabulary used in planning narratives can impact perceptions of set-aside land.

Land is the raw material needed to construct buildings. As such, there are practical reasons why public and private actors seek out a portfolio of unused, under-utilised, and long-term vacant sites. As Wilkinson & Reed (2008, 3) state:

'The term 'property development' evokes many feelings... [it] is a 'process that involves changing or intensifying the use of land to produce buildings for occupation'. It is not the buying and selling of land for a profit; land is only one of the raw materials used.'

Though there are practical reasons why the government would need quick access to land to deliver houses, “land banking” is associated with people sitting on developable land awaiting market uplift (Bennett, 2017, 24). This ‘value-engineering’ (Raco et al., 2018, 1181) activity is often associated with greedy developers keeping land unproductive and waiting for land prices to increase. Wilkinson & Reed (2008, 3) continue to say that development:

'is a high risk activity that often involves large sums of money tied up in the production process... Furthermore, the performance of an economy at national and at local levels both directly influence the process.'

As evidenced by Marriott (1967), there are cases where unused urban property in London, such as offices, was deliberately kept out of use for financial

reasons. Though memorable, Muldoon-Smith (2016, 58) notes that these examples are 'hardly the norm and.. [have] only taken place in the superheated Central London office markets'. Despite this, stereotypes and a mistrust of developers is frequently expressed in popular culture:

*'From It's a Wonderful Life to Beetlejuice, you can be sure that if a fictional character is a property developer, **they are a villain.... whose hobbies include corrupting politicians, [and] destroying cities...** so they can build a soulless new apartment block.'* (Ivey, 2022). [Emphasis added].

Wilkinson & Reed's (2008) comments explain that development is expensive and that much of the money is often tied up in a project. One of these costs is the raw materials (the land) needed to achieve the right project at the right time. Table 2.2 shows that the term 'vacant' land (DCLG, 2015) can describe a 'development pipeline' (Christophers, 2018) of sites set aside for future use. One of the potential sources of this land are the "brownfield" sites that are often seen (Hirokawa & Gonzalez, 2010; CABERNET, 2006) as a resource to address the housing crisis:

'at past elections [promises] to build hundreds of thousands of homes simply aren't meaningful. By contrast, a local plan to build a new generation of council homes in the East Midlands, identifying the brownfield sites and putting a number on delivery within a parliament, would be very meaningful..' (Burnham, 2024).

Once local authorities identify a parcel of land as the correct housing location (Burnham, 2024), this land becomes more valuable. Development projects to clean up contaminated land may depend on government funding, such as the Brownfield Housing Fund. This policy is intended to 'support [the creation of] around 24,000 homes' (Prime Minister's Office, 2020) between 2020 and 2025. Though top-down public actors may identify suitable areas to build new homes (Burnham, 2024), the land they require to achieve this aim may be privately owned. Though the government can provide money to local councils, 'property development is complex, often taking place over a considerable time frame' (Wilkinson & Reed, 2008, 2). As such, it may take more than five years to convince owners of set-aside land to part with it. Dixon et al. (2011, 965) have argued that there is a mismatch between what government brownfield regeneration projects want to accomplish and how they attempt this in practice because government

approaches ‘often fail to take account of the dynamics of market changes.’ Therefore, understanding why owners may not wish to sell is a significant early stage in the development process that warrants closer attention.

One of the purposes of property development is to change land into a higher intensity use (Wilkinson & Reed, 2008). Work concerning destructive capitalism (Bryson, 1997; Busà, 2017) has productively challenged how planners and councils use *the language of underuse to justify use maximisation*. Strasser’s (2021) study of gentrification in Deptford, UK, used visual methods, activism, and community involvement to challenge the language of “under utility” put forward by the local authority to justify why an occupied apartment block had been scheduled for demolition. As Strasser (2021) interviewed residents and took photographs of their well-presented homes, one participant asked, ‘How could this be called a slum?’ This body of work adds another phrase to our vocabulary for discussing set-aside property: the *intensity of use*. If a property is in a desirable location, a property that is not vacant and devoid of people may be subject to market pressures and the belief that the current use should be changed to maximise the land value. This work is relevant to my thesis (Chapter 5, Chapter 6) as it draws attention to the subjectivity of use and disuse and how the label of under-use can be used to downplay and overlook actively occupied property (Strasser, 2021). A shortcoming of these studies is that they can become polemic and overlook the difficult choices the public sector must face when balancing spending priorities.

Perhaps a more productive way to approach set-aside property may be to frame urban development as a ‘wicked problem’:

‘contrary to negative stereotypes, government organizations are good at implementing policies and delivering services that are relatively standardized... But they seem to be less well equipped to respond effectively to nonroutine and nonstandard service challenges... This is especially true of what have been called “wicked problems”—those that are complex, unpredictable, open-ended, or intractable.’ (Head & Alford, 2015, 623).

In the case of set-aside land, the government has set targets for new homes to meet a social need, but the creation of homes cannot be orchestrated by the government alone. There is a practical need to work with actors with specialist skills

and knowledge in the private sector to achieve these targets. My methodology seeks to limit negative stereotyping, not just of set-aside owners, by considering the alternative explanations for set-aside property. This section has demonstrated that external factors and the activities of other actors may influence the decisions set-aside property owners make. The next section considers the financial and non-financial dimensions of holding set-aside property.

2.5 Orthodox and Heterodox Economics

So far, we have established that real property has a use value as a functional building and an exchange value as an investment asset that can be retained or sold. Retaining or selling an asset is complex because owners may prioritise and define these values differently. The phenomenon of set-aside property is often seen as unusual because these sites appear not to be used productively (Becker, 2020). This state of affairs contrasts the classical, orthodox economic perspective, emphasising an asset's financial return as the key motivator for ownership. Evans (2004) argued that demand-oriented perspectives of the property market that focus on the numbers when describing property transactions derive from classical economic scholars such as David Ricardo (1772-1823), which contribute to the stereotype of "*Homo economicus*":

'Homo economicus ["economic man"] is viewed as highly sophisticated when processing information and correctly updates beliefs in the light of new information to make the most accurate decision... is not affected by emotions... relies on analytical thinking and sees the world in numbers... The master rule used to guide decision-making is to choose whatever option maximizes good outcomes, whatever the currency of these good outcomes might be.' (Tinghög et al., 2023, 2).

Evans (2004, 245) argues that real estate scholarship must:

'...detach the theory of the land market from the handicap posed by Ricardian theory.... [because it] has been like a lumpen weight dragged around slowing progress in the field... the assumptions of Ricardian theory induce a mindset, a way of thinking, which is both misleading and wrong.'

Similarly, Wilkinson & Reed (2008) have challenged the *Homo economicus* trope by arguing that profit is not the sole motivator for development and have accounted for nuance amongst different types of owners. They have identified

three main ownership categories: ‘traditional, industrial, and financial’ Wilkinson & Reed (2008, 11). Challenging *Homo economicus* thinking, Wilkinson & Reed (2008, 11) argue that traditional landowners in the UK, such as the Crown Estate, the church, and landed aristocracy, ‘are not entirely motivated by the economic imperative... [because their activities] involve social, political, and ideological constraints’. They proposed that industrial landowners:

‘are both dominated and constrained in their attitude to land by their main reason for existence- their product...and, therefore, will not always be seeking to maximise their return on land...since that would be seen as subservient to their main purpose’. (Wilkinson & Reed, 2008, 11).

The third category, financial landowners are described as:

‘institutions (pension funds and insurance companies who own a significant proportion of land by capital value... [and] major property companies who own substantial portfolios... who may, therefore, act as both landowner and developer’ (Wilkinson & Reed, 2008, 12).

Financial landowners represent one type of ownership associated with having multiple holdings and large amounts of capital. This type of land owner is typically thought of as engaging in profit-driven, *Homo economicus* behaviours. Raco et al. (2018) interviewed financial actors with large-scale holdings operating in London. As previously discussed, stereotypical developer-owners are imagined to have large sums of money, but this type of landholder does not represent *all* landholders. Similarly, London is not representative of all local property markets in the UK (Muldoon-Smith, 2016). Managing the financial aspects of a business will factor into landowners’ decision-making, but their balance sheets do not tell us about the owner or developer’s attitude and motivation (Brown, 2015). A ‘good outcome’ (Tinghög et al., 2023, 2) for an individual may also depend upon qualitative factors, such as reputation and relationship building (Chapters 6 & 7).

In addition to *Homo economicus*, Tinghög et al. (2023, 2) considered two further models of decision-making. The first is *Homo Heuristicus*:

*‘The main characteristic of **Homo Heuristicus** (“heuristic-using man”) is... fast decisions based on intuitions... rather than by deliberately considering all the pros and cons... decisions are **good enough**... [this] can shortly be described as: “If it feels right, it is right”.*

The word “heuristic” in this context is used to describe people’s gut feelings and intuition and how an individual may sense that one option is better or worse than another. While money may be a factor in decision-making, it will not be the only thing an individual considers when making their final choice. The concept of ‘*Homo heuristicus*’ (Tinghög et al, 2023, 2) has relevance for this study when considering why an owner may or may not sell a property. When discussing the government’s powers of compulsory purchase, Rao (2018, 74) argued that owning land gives people access to intangible ‘functions’ that are not directly replaceable through money. Wilkinson & Reed (2008, 12) similarly observe that industrial owners subject to compulsory purchase orders:

‘are compensated for the costs of relocating and the disturbance to their business... [but T]here are intangible losses to commercial businesses that are difficult to value.’

This suggests there are non-financial benefits to landholding. Elaborating on what these intangible functions of landholding are, Rao (2018, 74) identified nine ‘holistic’ areas of land ownership that affect the owner’s well-being about their land and their decision-making processes. These were:

‘(i) Secure means to basic ends; (ii) Self-identity; (iii) Social capital; (iv) Social equity; (v) Political empowerment; (vi) Power to take decisions on land matters; (vii) Family’s wellbeing; (viii) Personal comfort and convenience; and (ix) Psychological wellbeing’ (Rao, 2018, 74).

These interpersonal benefits of landholding are significant to this thesis and will be discussed further in Chapter 7. Chapter 3 will discuss Thompson’s *Rubbish Theory* (1979), a text that forms part of my theoretical framework. Thompson’s work examines the social aspect of value and how this interacts with the financial aspects of value. In his description of early-stage gentrifiers in London, Thompson (1979, 47) gives an example of *Homo heuristicus* behaviours that challenges the *Homo economicus* narrative:

‘[people] tell me that the Knockers-Through did it [renovate what was, at the time, low-financial value Victorian terraced houses] for the money. This is not so: they did it for love... against considerable odds’.

This quote suggests that non-financial reasons were more important to these stakeholders than financial ones. Tinghög et al.'s (2023, 1) second alternative to *homo economicus* is *Homo ignorans*:

*'[Who] avoids, neglects, and distorts information that threatens one's identity. In a normative fairy tale about information processing (s)he is the Ugly in the Good, the Bad, and the Ugly. Ugly because when we **choose to remain ignorant** about facts in order to protect valued beliefs, this is likely to escalate societal problems related to political polarization and provide a hotbed for misinformation, distrust and pseudo-profound bullshit'. [Emphasis added].*

A *Homo ignorans* stance (Tinghög et al., 2023) does not advance our understanding of owners or their relationships with their sites. I encountered studies and newspaper articles (Stanton, 2017; Mangan, 2020) that would fit the definition above because they replicate negative stereotypes about owners and developers despite any evidence that challenges this deeply embedded stereotype. The final section considers a paper (O'Callaghan, 2023a) that forms part of my theoretical framework.

2.6 Investigating Owners of Set-aside Property

The notion that set-aside sites are 'doing work' (O'Callaghan, 2023a, 13) for their owners is a fundamental argument in this thesis. Though his recent paper has used the term "vacancy", like Friere Trigo (2020), O'Callaghan (2023a) has acknowledged that the terminology available to academics to describe this field of study can be unhelpfully unstable. O'Callaghan (2023a, 13) explains that the phenomenon of 'vacancy has been framed [differently] at different moments (e.g., as dereliction, underutilisation, or surplus properties)', demonstrating how language plays a role in people's perceptions of land use. In the previous section, the term "heuristic" was defined as an intuitive way of making decisions based on gut feeling that does not require all the information to make a decision. In this paper, O'Callaghan (2023a, 12) explains there has been much scholarship on urban vacancy over the past 15 years, but that:

'...these insights are spread across diverse research foci and conceptual approaches, and there have been limited interventions that bring them into conversation (e.g. Ferreri & Vasudevan, 2019; O'Callaghan & Di Feliciantonio,

2021)... I propose [a] heuristic for advancing a research agenda that extends these analyses through three lenses producing vacancy, maintaining vacancy, and removing vacancy.'

O'Callaghan's (2023a) use of the term heuristic in this context refers to a non-traditional research approach that purposely brings together, in a holistic fashion, disciplines that might otherwise not come into contact with each other. Rather than focusing on the rules of disciplines, O'Callaghan's (2023a) heuristic places their research questions to the forefront and suggests possible research approaches to investigate different aspects of vacancy to extend this interdisciplinary body of knowledge. In doing so, O'Callaghan (2023a) has highlighted the research gap that my thesis sets out to address. The following section outlines each of these lenses and their implications for their study.

First, O'Callaghan (2023a, 12) suggests scholarship should study the processes that *produce vacancy* by 'look[ing] critically at how specific sites become vacant' and rethinking vacancy as an 'actively produced [process that is] ...doing work for various stakeholders'. Second, O'Callaghan (2023a, 12) defines '*maintaining vacancy* as [a process] operating at the interface of political-economic tensions between use and exchange value'. This lens draws focus to the gap in the literature that my thesis addresses: the middle phase of the property lifecycle (Harris, 1999; Cairns & Jacobs, 2014). O'Callaghan's (2023a, 13) third lens, *removing vacancy*, discusses research into bringing sites back into use.

O'Callaghan's (2023a) work supports and justifies further investigation into 'vacancy' but also perpetuates the continued absence of the owners within the literature. Though O'Callaghan (2023a, 12) suggested studying 'a range of new stakeholders... [to] show how their actions reproduce vacancy over time' to understand specific types of vacancy better, this paper also does not mention the owners. As previously discussed, the NoVOID (Brito-Henriques, 2015-2019) Project has advocated for more academic attention on properties during their dormant, ruined phase. Despite O'Callaghan's (2023a; 2023b) minimal discussion of site owners, the heuristic itself is constructive. It has been combined with Thompson's

(1979) *Rubbish Theory* to create the Utility Pyramid. This is a theoretical model I have built from the literature in conversation with my data. I will introduce this in Chapter 4, and explain how this model assists this thesis as part of the theoretical framework. The next section draws the literature review to a conclusion.

2.7 Conclusion

This chapter has highlighted the lack of neutral terminology for studying set-aside urban property. The terms brownfield land, vacancy, and dereliction have connotations with broader concepts, including land pollution, economic failure, deindustrialisation, the housing crisis, and the sense that parts of the UK have been left behind socially and economically. This chapter considered the relationship between the public sector and private owners. When private owners work to different time horizons from those of the public sector, they may be unwilling to sell their land. This mismatch creates a struggle to access a development pipeline to spend government funding and build houses. Hence, a better understanding of when and why owners of set-aside urban property are willing or unwilling to sell their land and what they use it for warrants further attention. The concept of heterodox economics was introduced to explore the role that uncertainty plays in economic decision-making (Almeida & Gustavo de Paula, 2019) which challenges the dominant notion of property holders as *Homo economicus*. Rao (2018), Thompson (1979), and Wilkinson and Reed (2008) have challenged the notion that owner motivations are solely financial. This body of literature, combined with the work of O’Callaghan (2023a) and Thompson (1979), has implications for the research design and theoretical framework that will be required to address this thesis’ research aim, objectives and research questions. The DCLG (2015) currently refers to “vacant” land as properties set-aside for a future purpose, and O’Callaghan (2023a, 13) has argued that such vacant sites might be ‘doing work’ for their owners. Having reviewed the current state of knowledge, this thesis proposes a research design that approaches the owners directly to establish whether they consider their real estate holdings an asset, liability, or neither. Having advanced my argument that the owners of set-aside urban property are under-noticed and

under-discussed, the next chapter outlines the research design and methodology proposed to address this knowledge gap.

Chapter 3: Methodology

This thesis has taken a qualitative, interpretivist approach (Creswell, 2014). This Chapter provides an audit trail (Thomson, 2014, no page) of the decisions taken and procedures conducted during research design, data collection, and data analysis. The first section addresses the assumptions behind the project as reflected in the researcher's worldview. The second section introduces the theory underpinning the original research approach and data collection. The third section outlines the pilot studies that were conducted during the COVID-19 lockdown and the alternative methods considered as a result of this external circumstance. The fourth section introduces the fieldwork sites, which are Neepsend and Kelham Island in Sheffield. The fifth section outlines the logistical and ethical protocols for the three primary data collection methods: walking, repeat photography, and semi-structured interviews. The sixth section details how data was processed and ethically stored. The seventh section reflects on the ethical issues that emerged during fieldwork and the solutions pursued. The eighth section discusses my experiences of digital and manual coding when processing large volumes of data. The final section reflects on the strengths and weaknesses of the chosen research design. It explains why the combination of constructivist grounded theory (Charmaz, 2014), Lefebvre's *Spatial Triad* (1974/1991) and *Rhythmanalysis* (Lefebvre, 1992) were determined to be the most appropriate theoretical framework for this project.

3.1 Metatheoretical Background

When I began my PhD, I made the academic transition from the Humanities to the Social Sciences. I did not take the '*tabula rasa*' (Chamberlain, 2000, 292; Watts, 2014, 3) approach to grounded theory advocated by Glaser (1992; Glaser & Strauss, 1967), as I engaged with the literature to guide my initial research design. Social Science *was new to me*; therefore, I relied upon the 'Rules and guidelines [needed to] help us learn, practice and perfect' new skills (Tracy, 2010, 838). My research questions contain implicit assumptions about the nature of truth and reality. Namely, it is possible to collect data that contributes to understanding the participants' experiences of a particular phenomenon: urban under-utility.

Determining the best research approach required ‘an ontological interrogation’ (Mills et al., 2006, 2) of the beliefs behind my study.

Danermark et al. (2001, 150) state that ‘[r]esearch is directed by explicit and implicit assumptions of society as a whole’. These assumptions affect how the researcher perceives their research topic, influencing their ‘choice of methodological approach and design’ (Danermark et al., 2001, 150). Creswell (2014, 64-66) suggests qualitative researchers use theory in four main ways:

1. Existing theory provides a ready-made hypothesis to test;
2. Existing theory provides a lens to shape the enquiry;
3. Researchers generate new theories from their data;
4. There is no specific theory.

One’s selection of theory has ontological and epistemological implications for the research design. When I began my PhD in October 2019, I wanted to conduct a phenomenological study that employed grounded theory (option no. 3 in the list above) and was drawn towards literature regarding organisational ethnography (Wenger, 1998; Neyland, 2008). Because I am not from a real estate or business background, I had envisaged interviewing and observing real estate actors to find out how they disposed of surplus property (Avis & Dent, 2004). Before March 2020 I hoped to engage the principles of co-creation of knowledge (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015) and build relationships by conducting multiple interviews with the same participants. I saw myself as an ethnographically naïve (Albera, 1988) ‘outsider’ seeking knowledge from a group of ‘insiders’, (Holmes, 2020, 5) who needed to conduct data collection to reduce this ‘third person’ distance and gain a ‘first-person’ closeness (Watts, 2024, no page).

However, on Friday, 26 March 2020, the Coronavirus Act 2020 became law. The Institute for Government (2022) has collated a timeline of the key events in the UK from the outbreak of COVID-19 to December 2021. This is too large to include in the Appendices, but a link that summarises all the different phases and changes to

the law is provided in this footnote.² For the purposes of this section, the reader needs to know that the rules of social practice regularly changed. Playgrounds were cordoned off, and mundane activities (Binnie et al., 2007), such as handwashing and ‘going shopping’ (as illustrated by Phlegm in Fig 3.1), became a key priority and consumed a larger proportion of people’s day-to-day activities and thoughts.

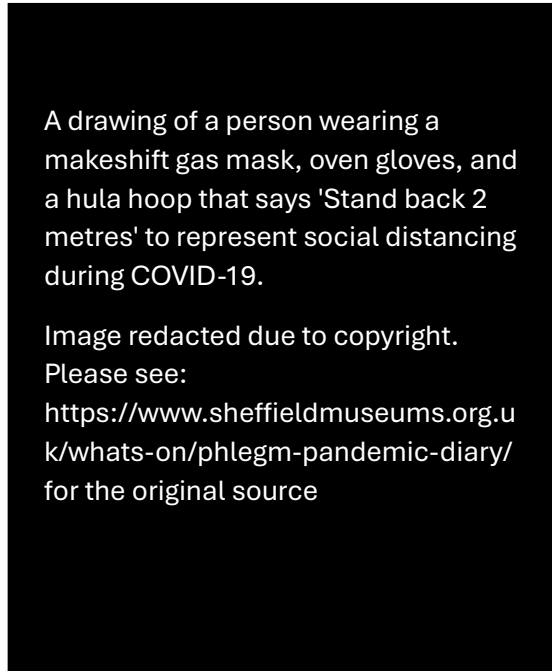


Figure 3.1 Phlegm, 'I'm Going Shopping' (Pandemic Diary Series, no. 16), 2020. Copyright the Artist. Taken from the Series: Phlegm: Pandemic Diary, on display at Sheffield Millenium Gallery (Sat 13 January - Sun 7 July 2024)

Between March 2020 and June 2020, at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, I lived alone and was shielding. This meant I could not leave my house and relied exclusively on online research methods. This external challenge (Tracy, 2010) effectively removed the option to conduct participant observations in a natural setting. Before March 2020, it was not commonplace in educational institutions such as universities to experience hybrid (part in-person, part online) working and communication. However, this became part of everyday life for many people after the social changes in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

² Institute for Government (Dec 2022), *Key lockdowns and measure introduced during the COVID-19 pandemic between March 2020 and December 2021*- Large PDF available to download at: <https://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/data-visualisation/timeline-coronavirus-lockdowns>

Though the original methods were no longer viable, my initial literature review helped to shape my research practice. Rather than rejecting my original theory (Creswell, 2014, 64-66), I employed a toolkit approach (Nicolini, 2013, 213) and cycled through various theorists' works before settling upon the combination outlined in Chapter 4 (no. 2 and no. 3 of Creswell's (2014, 64-66) model). As a subjectivist, I believed, and still feel, that 'the world consists of multiple individual realities influenced by context' (Mills et al., 2006, 2). This ontological stance uses an 'interpretivist paradigm' (McEvoy & Richards, 2006, 67) to make sense of multiple viewpoints in the data. Subjectivists believe researchers bring their personal 'values, priorities, positions, and actions' (Charmaz, 2007, 470) into the research scenario. The ontological position of this thesis is that reality cannot be fully known, and researchers can be passive observers. To manage and use the subjectivities we encounter, researchers must instead be reflexive. Tracy (2010, 840) defines reflexivity as:

'Sincerity: The study is characterized by:

- *Self-reflexivity about subjective values, biases, and inclinations of the researcher(s)*
- *Transparency about the methods and challenges'.*

In the context of a global pandemic where people had to remain indoors, I decided that my methods had to change. Therefore, there were better concepts than the application of the 'emic' (insider) and 'etic' (outsider) perspectives (Holmes, 2020, 5) for investigating my phenomenon. I maintained my reflexivity through detailed research journals (Caetano, 2015). This provided an audit trail (Thomson, 2014) of decisions made about the project. Detailed, deep knowledge about my fieldwork location demonstrated how my approach to knowledge, as documented in this chapter, had changed. An essential aspect of my theory of knowledge is that my positionality and that of other people do not remain static. As Holmes (2020, 8) states:

'researchers should engage in reflexivity to develop and embrace their positionality, recognizing that it is not fixed and will necessarily change over time... [researchers] should pay particular attention to their multiple positions as an insider or outsider to the research participants and setting(s)... acknowledging .. [the] implications for the process of data gathering and interpretation.'

The following section outlines my relationship with and application of theoretical rigour.

3.2 Constructivist Grounded Theory

Clark et al. (2021) identified inductive reasoning as a typical feature of qualitative research, as induction is one of several ways an author can construct their academic argument and conclude about the research topic. This describes my research experience, whereby, during inductive research, the 'concepts and the theory are usually developed concurrently' (Maxwell, 2009, 31). As discussed in Chapter 2, the literature review established a knowledge gap about set-aside property owners. As such, I decided to use grounded theory because the emphasis was on discovering theory rather than testing a pre-existing theory. Grounded theory is a well-established qualitative method that has adapted into three broad approaches over time. The original iteration (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) stated that one should conduct research without preconceptions by starting with data and not with literature. It also states that:

'A major strategy that we shall emphasize for furthering the discovery of grounded theory is a general method of comparative analysis.' (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, 1).

When I began the research, though I began with a literature review I had no empirical knowledge of set-aside property owners. I was attracted to the idea of making constant comparisons to understand better different kinds of owners (Hallberg, 2006). My study aligns with the grounded theory version advocated by Charmaz (2014), who outlined nine central tenets of constructivist grounded theory. Given the prevalence of misunderstanding and stereotypes about set-aside sites and their owners, my study required a qualitative, phenomenological investigation where I could:

- immerse myself in data to understand better why set-aside urban property exists within our landscapes
- empirically investigate what work these sites do for their owners and occupiers.

Grounded theory was appropriate for this purpose, because it uses 'inductive theory building based squarely on observation of the data themselves' (Crotty, 1998, 78). Due to the practical constraints of COVID-19, during the early stages of research design, the methodology of this thesis was influenced by Pragmatism, an approach that argues the best methods for research are whatever works to answer the research questions (Crotty, 1998). This means that my thesis does not strictly follow all Charmaz's nine rules and does not uphold 'Methodolatry' (Chamberlain, 2000, 285).

I used the principles of grounded theory to guide the data collection and implement a three-stage coding procedures. After the data was processed, I compared the data to the literature, and allowed the new theory to emerged from this synthesis between literature and data. This is consistent with Clark et al.'s (2021, 612) approach, which defines qualitative research as 'an inductive, constructionist, and interpretivist [research strategy], but qualitative researchers do not always [have to] subscribe to all three of these features'. My approach is similar to other studies that have used grounded theory as a research approach and engaged a theoretical framework from another source for their analysis. For example, Seaman (2008) used activity theory as his dominant methodology, with grounded theory as the research approach. This thesis used grounded theory as the ontological and epistemological foundation for the research procedures (research design, conducting fieldwork, and initial phases of analysis). This facilitated rigour, but to make sense of the subject matter contained within the data, this thesis required other theoretical constructs. I will return to grounded theory later in this chapter when discussing how it was used during data analysis in sections 3.8 and 3.9.

As Chapter 4 will explain, during data analysis and synthesis with the literature, I engaged in constant comparison (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) with the data and the works of Lefebvre (1974/1991; 1992), Thompson (1979), Henneberry & Parris (2013) and O'Callaghan (2023a). Living through COVID-19, new considerations were introduced for researchers communicating with human subjects. The following section outlines my pilot studies during this period of COVID-19.

3.3 Pilot Studies: Discovering the Photo-Walk Methodology

In April 2020, Sheffield Hallam University circulated research ethics advice that ‘our first priority must be to protect our research participants’ (Macaskill, 2020). Before conducting interviews, I used pilot studies to explore potential options for embarking upon fieldwork during this period of external uncertainty. Before COVID-19, I used walking methods to identify derelict buildings in Sheffield for prospective case studies, to delve into their past uses to explain their current condition. Credible qualitative research should build upon existing studies and be willing to re-evaluate previously held beliefs (Thomson, 2020). I took inspiration from previous studies that challenged negative narratives about dereliction by looking at the whole life cycle of buildings (Harris, 1999; Cairns & Jacobs, 2014). One of the sites I identified was the Salvation Army Building in Sheffield City Centre (Fig. 3.2):



Figure 3.2 Two images of the Sheffield Salvation Army Building were taken on 11/12/19 and 19/02/20 to illustrate the repeat photography research method. Charlene Cross.

When I revisited the building two months later, it remained derelict, but the vegetation removal was a subtle sign of owner activity (Fig 3.2; bottom) that suggests the building is maintained occasionally. To make sense of what I found, I turned to the literature. As previously discussed in Chapter 2, Table 2.2, the

methodologies of previous studies used comparison to make connections. Some studies were large-scale and well-resourced (Adams et al., 2001; Dixon et al., 2010). Others presented small sample sizes of interviewees (Jack et al., 2002; Avis & Dent, 2004) alongside other data sources. These studies combined interviews with another form of data, used 'purposive' (Silverman, 2020, 61) sampling, and embraced multiple methods to address their research question. These three aspects were incorporated into my research design.

My pilot studies established that repeat photography was a viable method to make the invisible visible. Repeat visits (Fig 3.2) may reveal mundane signs of owner activity that are usually overlooked, e.g. for sale signs or the presence of scaffolding that, in turn, challenges the assumption that underutilised sites are uncared for by their current owners (Appendix B). Smith (2007, 180) described the method of repeatedly visiting a fieldwork site as a process of 'ground-truthing', a powerful embodied practice whereby 'The act of returning to particular vantage points...becomes a ground to construct knowledge about place, environment and people's relationship with it.' To test the impact of combining visual methods with secondary planning data, I created a graph to show the volume and frequency of planning applications (Coiacetto, 2001; Adams et al., 2001) that the owners of the Citadel building in Fig. 3.2 had submitted over the past 20 years. Alongside site images, I created a poster for the Sheffield Institute for Policy Studies competition (SIPS, 2020). This winning poster [Appendix B] illustrated how the visual condition of this building evoked "abandonment", yet there was owner activity hiding in plain sight that challenged this narrative (Archer et al., 2020). These insights led me towards using walking methods (Littmann, 2020) and repeat photography to immerse myself in a fieldwork site. The following section outlines another research design activity: my digital pilot.

3.3.1 Pilot: Seeking the owner's view

The uncertainty of COVID-19 guided me towards alternative methods. My study of masters-level modules in Qualitative Research allowed me to consider inventive methodologies (Lury & Wakeford, 2012) such as 'Thing ethnography'

(Giaccardi et al., 2016) and learning by doing (Tracy, 2010). As Clark, Foster, Sloan, & Bryman (2021, 425) state, 'Qualitative research aims to generate deep insights ... through a considered engagement with places and social actors...[by] focus[ing] on words, images, and objects.' For my assignment, I produced a digital pilot study by collecting and comparing eight advertisements from one real estate company's webpage. Some images depicted derelict sites, and others were abstract (Figure 4). To do this, I looked to semiotics, an approach concerned with 'the processes of meaning production and how signs are designed to affect actual and prospective consumers of those signs' (Clark et. al, 2021, 614).

Although classic ethnographic *methods* require participant observation over some time, I combined the *goal* of ethnography- observation to understand the culture of a social group (Clark et al., 2021)- with visual *methods* and analysed the advertisements using a semiotic (Chandler, 2017; Jensen, 2015) framework. This activity contributed to my research design because it established that there are site-seeking individuals and organisations (Land Hero, 2020; Godwin Group, 2020; Fairview, 2020) whose job is actively seeking out unused, underutilised, and long-term vacant sites for redevelopment. The framings in these adverts presented the viewer with the idea that 'eyesore' (Fig. 3.3) sites were worth money. The target audience was owners of underutilised land, and these narratives subverted the assumption that neglected sites are wasted land:

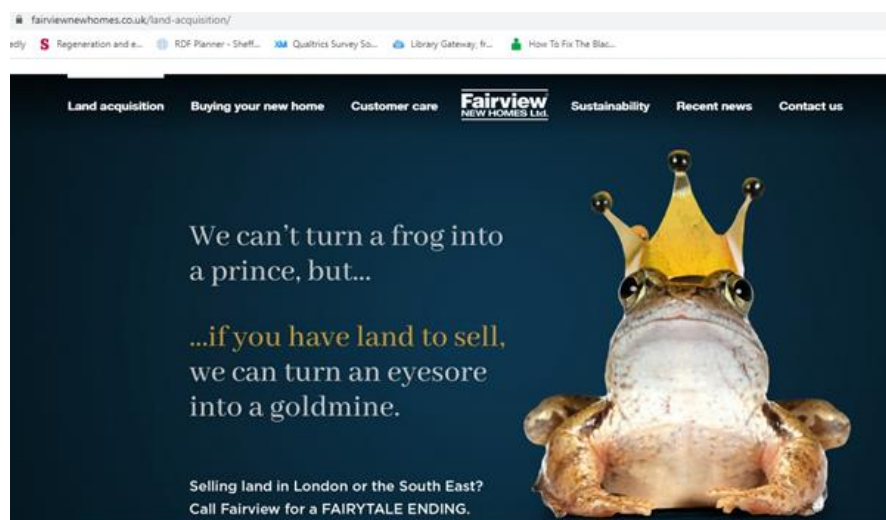


Figure 3.3 Land buying advertisement created by a real estate company. Reproduced with permission from the Main Board Land Director of Fairview New Homes Ltd (granted 07/11/2023).

This activity impacted the design of my semi-structured interview questions because I realised *why* questions were equally important, if not more important, than *how* questions. An essential criticism I had levelled at past studies (Chapters 1 & 2) was that they made assumptions about owner behaviour rather than directly asking owners to explain their perspective. Images like the one in Figure 3.3 allowed me to deduce that there *are* actors who actively seek to obtain and own derelict sites. To speculate about people's positive attitudes towards derelict sites would lack rigour because there would be no data to back the claim. I needed human participants. Having ruled out abductive reasoning, which merely *identified* rather than *explained*, the next phase of my pilot studies compared naturally occurring data (online planning records) and created data (the photographs I took).

3.3.2 Pilot: Repeat Photography

During COVID-19, I watched how mainstream society disseminated, accepted, updated, or challenged government information about vaccines and face masks. This provided a direct parallel for academic research, where:

'some things come to be accepted by the scholarly community as good-enough-to-work -with-until-something-better-comes-along' (Thomson, 2020).

When designing fieldwork during COVID-19, I wrestled with finding an appropriate theoretical framework. Rather than fret about the 'ologies' (Thomson, 2020, no page), I ultimately decided that my initial concern was whether suitable data could be accessed to conduct research remotely. COVID-19 necessitated a pragmatist approach, which Creswell (2014, 10) summarises: 'Instead of focusing on methods, researchers emphasize the research problem and use all approaches available to understand the problem'. The absence of face-to-face contact and the material changes to public space was a strange experience. Still, this hyperfocus on day-to-day lived experiences encouraged reflexivity (Alvesson et al., 2018) and led me towards philosophers and theories of everyday life (Perec, 1975/2010; de Certeau, 1984; Binnie et al., 2007).

When COVID-19 rules changed in June 2020, I no longer had to shield and joined a COVID-19 bubble (Institute for Government, 2022) in Derby. Because my

poster (Appendix B) had won the SIPS (2020) Research Impact Award, I wanted to explore the method of repeat photography further. I began the search for a suitable fieldwork location to design a study that used repeat visits, visual methods, planning applications and remote interviewing. The former Royal Derbyshire Infirmary was a short walk from Derby city centre. I began photographing the progress of this site's redevelopment into a housing complex called the Nightingale Quarter. The former hospital building had stood derelict for just over a decade, but this building was moving forward during a national time of stillness. I started taking 'point-and-click' pictures that were not intended to be shared with a broader audience and investigated the site's planning history. I took photographs of the real estate hoardings and signage to recruit participants if needed. I noticed on a repeat visit that the real estate partner had changed from Ashley Adams to Haart. These mundane details (Binnie et al., 2007) piqued my interest. This pilot of repeat observation struck me as a valuable method for a lone researcher working under COVID-19 conditions. I did not settle on this site for my fieldwork because it was only one development, and the change process was underway. This activity helped me find walking methodologies (Rose, 2017 & 2021) and theories of everyday life (Perec, 1975/2010; de Certeau, 1984; Binnie et al., 2007) as an alternative to organisational ethnography (Wenger, 1998; Neyland, 2008) by trialling place-based observation and interpretation. The next section explores the influence of this body of theoretical and methodological scholarship.

3.3.4 Scholarship: Repeat Observation

In *Attempt at Exhausting a Place in Paris*, Perec (1975/2010) observed how people moved through the same mundane location across three days. On *Day 1, Morning 1*, Perec listed the buses and their direction. He observed frequency patterns, noticing that some routes were more popular than others. The regular interruption of these buses grabbed Perec's attention, moving him from neutral observer to active noticer. (Perec, 1975/2010, 9). On Day 2, Perec (1975/2010, 33-34) was more descriptive of the bus journeys, reflecting his increased familiarity:

'What difference is there between a driver who parks on the first go and another ([bus number] "90") who only manages to do so after several minutes of laborious efforts? This provokes attention, irony, the participation

of an audience: to see not just the rips, but the fabric (but how to see the fabric if it is only the rips that make it visible: no one ever sees buses pass by unless they're waiting for one...)'.

Perec's repeat visits attuned him to *how* things flowed rather than merely documenting *what* flowed. This immersive experience and repeated visits to the same location allowed Perec to query his assumptions. Perec's (1975/2010, 42) final observation occurred on a Sunday:

'Differences stand out: there are fewer buses, there are few or even no trucks or delivery vans... More differences would be due to the rain, which is not necessarily specific to its being Sunday'.

The reduced frequency of weekend bus travel reflected the weekly cycle, or rhythm, of human activity (see Chapter 4). Perec's observations demonstrate the relationship between 'walking thinking and researching' (Rose, 2017 ,61).

Focusing on the mundane and everyday life (Burkitt, 2004; Sandywell, 2004; Binnie et al., 2007; Seigworth & Gardiner, 2004) led me towards *Rhythmanalysis* (Lefebvre, 1992), one of the theories outlined in Chapter 4. Though observational methods are valuable, my digital pilot had established that conducting interviews with the property owners, rather than speculating, would be the most direct path to understanding their plans for their sites.

To summarise this section, my lived experiences during COVID-19 demonstrate that 'a grounded theory has to change when conditions are changing.' (Hallberg, 2016, 144). I believe 'good social sciences make the world more complex, not simpler' (Nicolini, 2013, 215). During the research design and pilot phase, I prioritised the underlying aim of the study. I explored alternative ways to collect relevant data rather than worrying about perfectly replicating particular methods. The following section outlines the research design, selection of the fieldwork location, and the procedures followed for data collection.

3.4 Site Selection Criteria

The literature suggested that I would need to understand the broader context of a local property market, with its variety and intricacies (Ball, 2002; Raco et al., 2019). Before I could observe the roles played by individual sites or actors

within an ecosystem, I needed a suitable fieldwork location that contained a range of underutilised buildings. Due to travel restrictions during COVID-19, my fieldwork site needed to be within walking distance from my home in Sheffield. Despite being badly impacted by deindustrialisation (Jones, 2013), traditional industries such as cutlery-making remain strongly associated with Sheffield's identity. During my fieldwork, I noticed promotional marketing materials by Sheffield City Council that described Sheffield as "a city of makers" with a "maker culture". Sheffield has been a member of the South Yorkshire Mayoral Combined Authority (SYMCA) since 2014, whose 'constituent members are Sheffield, Rotherham, Barnsley and Doncaster councils' (SYMCA, 2024). Sheffield is also one of eleven core cities in the UK, a group 'politically led by the elected leaders and mayors of our eleven cities' (Core Cities, 2024). Sheffield is:

'England's fourth largest city, with a population of over 569,000 and an economy worth over £11.3bn, Sheffield's economy is a driving force for a City Region of over 1.8m people.' (Core Cities, 2024).

In my literature review, I noticed empirical studies had also focused on Core Cities, such as Manchester (Dixon, 2010; Hincks et al., 2017), Newcastle (Healey, 1991a), and Liverpool (Nolan, 2015; Davis, 2022). Regardless of the external constraints of COVID-19, as there are limited studies about Sheffield (Goodby & Franks, 2010), studying the phenomenon of set-aside property in this northern Core City seemed a productive avenue.

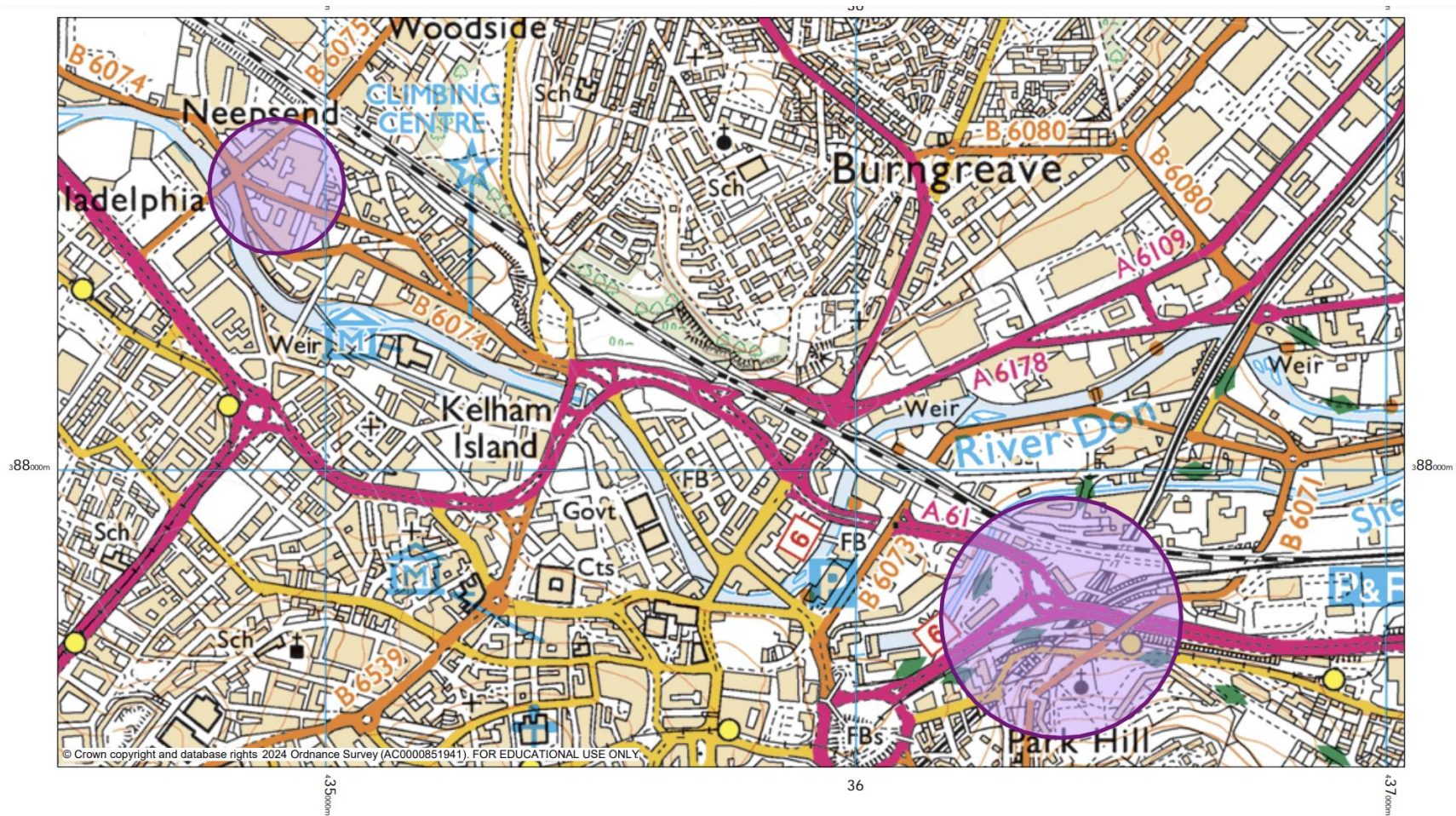
Within Sheffield, I purposively narrowed my fieldwork site options to two areas with suitable, run-down buildings. These were the Castlegate area around Nursery Street, anticipating future top-down development, and Neepsend, which seemed to exhibit a slower pace of change. Neepsend was selected because:

- Though both locations had similar types of buildings, those on Nursery Street were being demolished in anticipation of redevelopment. This would prevent repeat observations of sites in a set-aside condition.
- Sheffield City Council zoning rules and recent planning data suggested that the industrial uses in Neepsend had been protected by rejecting several planning applications for higher-intensity use over the last ten years.

- Neepsend sits adjacent to Kelham Island, which has seen an intensification of residential development over the last 30 years. This juxtaposition of intensity of use in the fieldwork setting was interesting.
- Subtle changes within Sheffield City Council's strategy documents demonstrated this may change. There was increasing tension between preserving Neepsend's industrial areas and incorporating the area into the Sheffield City Centre region by permitting more leisure, retail, and residential uses (see Chapter 5).

Neepsend is geographically located north of Sheffield City Centre (Fig 3.5). Over thirty years, the neighbouring Kelham Island has transformed from a deindustrialised area to a popular residential neighbourhood with independent leisure and commercial uses such as bars, restaurants, and semi-regular food and craft markets. Andy Slater of *Reyt Good Illustration* has produced an illustrated map of independent businesses in Kelham Island and Neepsend, which can be accessed via the footnote.³ Broadly speaking, the area above the River Don (see Fig 3.4) is considered "Neepsend" and that beneath it is "Kelham Island". Despite having different characters, with Neepsend appearing to be an industrial area, the two areas have increasingly been grouped in local policy, e.g. 'Kelham Island and Neepsend has been designated a Neighbourhood forum for 5 years from 28 February 2019' (SCC, 2022, no page). This added a layer of complexity to my investigation in terms of understanding how a local property market changes over time and then placing the activities of property owners within this broader ecosystem. Having introduced the research setting, the section after the map of Neepsend (Fig 3.4) will outline this thesis's primary data collection methods.

³ Andy Slater, Map of Kelham Island <https://www.thisisshffield.com/kelham-island/> [accessed 24/07/24].



Digimap[®]
 Charlene Cross
 Sheffield Hallam
 University

Scale 1:10000
 0 100 200 300 400 500 600 700 800 900 1000 m
 Projection: British National Grid
 15 July 2024 11:42

Ordnance
 Survey
 Licensed Data

Figure 3.4 O/S Map with two purple circles to show the proximity of Neepsend to Sheffield Train Station/City Centre. Digimap 2024.

3.5. Research Design: Data Collection

Chapter 2 reviewed the literature about owners of set-aside property. Studies of the buildings have used site observations and photography to study and document set-aside property (Edensor, 2005; Talling, 2019; Barasch, 2019). The literature in Table 2.2 summarises studies of these human actors. These studies encouraged me to pursue a qualitative methodology by collecting data from semi-structured interviews (Dixon et al, 2011; Coiacetto, 2001) and planning records (Lazaroska et al., 2019; Coiacetto, 2001). During COVID-19, libraries and archives were closed, which meant that online planning records were a valuable source of secondary data that was appropriate for investigating this topic. The studies summarised in Table 2.2 also emphasised there was a precedent for using a comparative methodology (Dixon et al., 2011; Avis & Dent, 2004; Jack et al., 2002; Adams et al., 2001; Coiacetto, 2001). The methods and outcomes of previous studies suggested that this would be a productive avenue to pursue, which encouraged me towards taking a social constructivist, grounded theory approach (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Hallberg, 2006; Elder-Vass, 2019).

This study proposes combining primary and secondary data. The following section explains the three methods that were used for primary data collection. The first section discusses walking methods and repeat photography. These approaches were combined to document and observe property inactivity over two years. The second section outlines the ethical procedures for arranging and conducting the semi-structured interviews.

3.5.1 Walking-Photography Methodologies

After selecting Neepsend as the fieldwork location, the first methods I used to investigate the dynamics of brownfield sites from July 2020 were self-orientation walks and repeat photography. Repeat photography provided a means to embed myself into this location (Montserrat Degen & Rose, 2012) without requiring access to human participants. This was important during this social distancing phase of COVID-19 when, legally and ethically, I could not conduct face-to-face research. This

section uses methodological and theoretical literature to explain how I designed and implemented my repeat photography walks.

As mentioned earlier, Smith (2007, 179) describes repeat photography as ‘as a powerful method to produce knowledge about place’. When I began photographing Neepsend in July 2020, my study hoped to record instances of genuine property stasis. Over the next few years, I anticipated recording negative visual changes, such as vegetation growing out of buildings or anti-social behaviours like fly-tipping. These activities, I assumed, would indicate property abandonment and neglect. I expected positive changes to the area would include signs of repair, renovation, and maintenance, such as scaffolding or skips outside a building, the arrival of new real estate signs suggesting a property had been sold, banners advertising businesses that were ‘coming soon’, or new street art to demonstrate care and pride in the area.

As I conducted walks, I noticed several derelict buildings. I took photos every time I was in Neepsend. To keep track of subtle changes, when I arrived home after a walk, I would write down the course of my journey, noting details and any observations I recalled but had perhaps not photographed. The time stamps on my files served as memory aids that could be cross-referenced with these ‘fieldnotes’ (Silverman, 2020, 376). I would write up the day’s walking route, noting which streets, consciously or subconsciously, had been chosen. Documenting my fieldwork experience whilst I was close to the event was a helpful analytical tool that later permitted an element of distance from the self. When returning to my fieldnotes as an analyst, I could treat my own thoughts as data, noting my subconscious choices and spotting patterns. This also served as a form of ‘coding through memo-writing’ (Silverman, 2020, 124). This distance allowed for reflexivity (Tracy, 2010). Looking back on my actions as a research subject, I could interrogate my decision-making processes and why I moved through Neepsend in specific ways. This reflexivity shaped my future fieldwork by allowing me to identify blind spots and consciously include and record different walking routes on subsequent outings. During data analysis, I produced a photobook that I divided into three sections to reflect my typical walking routes, as I had noticed that I tended to take the following pathways:

- Neepsend Lane from Hillfoot Bridge to Rutland Road
- Rutland Road down Burton Road to Harvest Lane
- Mowbray Street to Harvest Lane and surrounding side streets.⁴

As Rose (2021, 101) observed, 'In the past, we may have taken the need for this immersive experience [walking and conducting fieldwork on site] for granted, but COVID-19 has had a massive impact on where and how we can travel'. Before COVID-19, I had yet to envision walking as a method within itself. Engaging in walking as fieldwork allowed me to see 'the "things between the things", the elements that truly comprise the cultural landscape' (Littmann, 2020, 3). In *Walking in the City*, de Certeau (1984,) used a writing analogy to explain how people make sense of the world. Sometimes, we write our impressions down, but often, we do not. When a person is walking:

'These practitioners make use of spaces that cannot be seen... The[ir] paths.. elude legibility... The networks of these moving, intersecting writings compose a manifold story that has neither author nor spectator, shaped out of fragments of trajectories and alterations of spaces' (de Certeau, 1984, 93).

This analogy views people as pens making a mark on the city's paper. Some of these paths, or marks, will be repeated. Walking methodologies contributed to my discovery of applying a Lefebvrian analysis to my understanding of place. I left deep, dark, repeated lines when I took my three key paths to use de Certeau's words. In other instances, I will have left some light touch and one-off pencil traces.

Without intending to, there were likely spaces in Neepsend where I did not walk at all. De Certeau (1984) argued that the footsteps people create as they walk through an area cannot be easily quantified, but these usage pathways are important. This is methodologically significant for understanding both participant and researcher. Within Neepsend, the different "pens" (or people) making different sets of marks create a composite that can be hard to disentangle. When researchers partake in immersive research, they are focused on their current experiences:

⁴ C Cross, (2022) *Untitled Neepsend Photo Book* <https://www.bonusprint.co.uk/view-online-photo-book?widgetId=2615c211-1d5c-4ab3-b7eb-22d4b5a38a0c>

where they step, what they see, how they feel, and what they notice. The data collection activity must be experienced, not analysed, in situ. The end of this chapter introduces Rhythmanalysis (Lefebvre, 1992) as the theoretical data processing tool I used to interpret this immersive data.

My attitude towards set-aside property changed over the project. At the project's outset, I *embraced and utilised the stereotypical markers* of dereliction as described in Chapter 1 to identify appropriate sites to explore in *detail*. I leaned into the stereotypes to question them. After identifying sites, I could:

- Research them using secondary sources (Digimap (EDINA, 2024), planning records, archives).
- Ask participants about them.

In line with Roses' (2014, 24) assertion that 'images tend to be deployed much more as communicational tools than as representational texts', the photographs contained within this thesis represent a small portion of the visual data set and have been 'deployed' to support and enhance the written argument. A limitation of this data set is that, though my early-stage photographs allowed me to self-orient in the field, I did not know which photographs I would later rely upon as shareable research data. During the write-up, I learned that the earliest photographs were not as clearly framed as I needed them to be for a third party to understand the information I wanted to communicate (Dow, 2017). The following section outlines the semi-structured interview procedures.

3.5.2 Research Design: Ethics

Before conducting interviews, I sought ethical approval from Sheffield Hallam University. Copies of the participant information sheet [Appendix C] and consent form [Appendix D] are provided in the appendices. The participant information form explains the project and is the basis for informed consent when research involves human participants. My research design was reviewed using the Conseris interface by the University ethics board. After obtaining ethical approval, my recruitment protocols were as follows:

'Officially arranging the interviews: This will be done formally using university e-mail. I will send participant information sheets and consent

forms ahead of Zoom interviews. For recruitment via social media... this method will only be used for the initial messaging/ to gauge the interest of the potential participants. The protocols for interview will move to official university e-mail after Twitter/Instagram social media or online forum 'ice-breaking.'

The research ethics outlined by the *Association of Internet Researchers* (n.d) emphasise that researchers must be transparent about one's researcher role in any forum posts, Twitter, or Instagram. Though I could have recruited participants from online forums such as Derelict Places (2024), I decided not to go down this route and did not use any material from online forums.

Due to COVID-19, my interview protocols were designed for Zoom Interviews. The procedures I had ethical approval for were as follows:

'SHU procedures for using Zoom for interviews advise that 'the recording file is saved to the researcher's local PC then treated securely as with any other piece of research data for retention and deletion' (SHU, 2020). For privacy, meeting links are not to be left in shared calendars. Any files containing personal data, such as transcripts, will be securely stored (not on the cloud), have names removed, and be password protected'.

I followed the above instructions and obtained a secure university drive on which I stored my data transcripts. As the interview protocols explain, I deleted the recordings once transcribed.

When designing my interview schedule, I struggled to reconcile the interview styles of social sciences with my former discipline. As a historian by background, I was more inclined to adopt an oral history approach. Oral historians use 'one-to-one interaction[s] for empathy building' (Maye-Banbury, 2024, no page). I brought this method into the interview setting by facilitating a discussion of the participant's life story, thoughts, and feelings before asking specific questions about property in Neepsend. Because property owners are often portrayed as unsympathetic characters, I was receptive to participants' experiences and allowed them to take control of the discussion:

'the specific utility of oral sources for the historian lies not so much in their ability to preserve the past as in the very changes wrought by memory. The changes reveal the narrator's effort to make sense of the past and to give a

form to their lives... in their [participant's] historical context.' (Portelli, 2013, 69).

This interview approach was natural to me and suited my investigation into the perceptions and lived experiences of set-aside property. Applying this approach to every actor allowed me to understand the relationships within the fieldwork setting. This is consistent with the qualitative research approaches to social science advocated by scholars such as Silverman (2020) and Watts (2014).

Before commencing my semi-structured interviews, I pre-designed a list of questions, or interview schedule, that I printed out and used as a memory aid during the interview situation. Embracing a curiosity-not-judgement approach to my participants (Pink & Emery, 2023), I began all interviews with icebreaker questions (tell me about yourself, what brought you to Neepsend). This approach was appropriate for my research because it reduced the tension created by the interviewee-interviewer power dynamic (King & Horrocks, 2010) and allowed the interaction to become a somewhat artificial but still human conversation. I referred to my interview schedule during the interview as a prompt to ensure I covered the main points and returned to it at the end to ensure I had not missed any critical questions. As Watts (2014, 2) has noted, 'Where the reification of method becomes predominant, even the most subtle deviation in procedure must, it seems, be justified by the deployment of a different name'. When trying to label my methods as an early stage researcher, I did worry if I was doing it "right" (Jackson & Mazzei, 2013, 262). Over time I understood my error was not the deviations I made from the plan. The error was expecting that things would go to plan. As the following section outlines in the recording and transcription procedures, one size does not fit all.

3.6 Recording and Transcribing Interview Data

Semi-structured interviews were conducted in three different ways. To avoid repetition, this section discusses the overall data collection and transcribing procedures before looking at specific issues that arose when conducting video, telephone, and in-person interviews. When I designed my fieldwork, I anticipated all

interviews would be conducted over Zoom, a videoconferencing software I was familiar with. When I began the interviews, I re-assessed this assumption. Several participants, such as older participants and manual workers, were unfamiliar with videoconferencing software. Other participants were familiar with video conferencing but were used to using Teams or Google Meet and were unfamiliar with Zoom. I realised that my initial research design had not been inclusive and that I must adapt my approach to suit the participant. I quickly learned to adapt to my participants' preferences. For example, some participants were unable to use Zoom. Most interviews lasted an hour or less, but my conversation with P16 was almost three hours. This participant has retired and wanted to share his story in detail. Given that we were living through a pandemic and P16 owned set-aside properties, I decided to continue the conversation and listen to his story until he had finished telling it.

In total, 23 semi-structured interviews were conducted as one-off interactions with 26 individuals. Except for one in October 2022, these took place between April 2021 and December 2021. A table of my participants which lists them by their the anonymised codes (P1-P23) is included in Appendix E. This table records the date they were interviewed, the mode(s) of the interaction (video, telephone, e-mail, in person), and any deviations from the one-on-one Zoom interview format I originally envisioned. As seen in Appendix E, some participants (P7, P17, P18, P19) also supplied written information in addition to their interviews. Most interviews were conducted on a one-to-one basis. Interview 2 was an exception, as this was a Zoom call with four members of the same organisation. In practice, out of 23 interviews:

- Nine used Zoom*
- two used Teams.
- seven were by telephone*
- one was by e-mail.
- five were in person.
- Interview 2 was conducted with four participants: P2A, P2B, P2C & P2D
- Interview 22 was conducted with two participants: P22 and P21

The numbers above add up to 24, not 23, because one Zoom call (P8) cut out partway through and was conducted as half video call, half telephone call. During the lockdown, I could not access my office at the university. When conducting remote interviews, my resources were of lower quality when working from home.

I often encountered technical difficulties with my internet connection and phone reception. For example, the video streaming during interviews would occasionally break up or freeze, causing a few seconds of the conversation to be lost. When the Zoom video call with P8 cut out, we switched to audio only to finish the interview. When an interview was affected, any technical difficulties were recorded in the body of the transcript. When the audio quality was poor, such as with P9 and P10, I used square brackets and underlining to record my best guess of what had been said. For example:

P10: 'Yeah. [unclear] You know what I mean? [unclear] People say. I've got quite a bit of footprint now, so here... we [unclear] do heavy fabrication for the oil industry, you see... unit [unclear] know, I could have explained all this to you if you'd have been here... we've got like a ten-tonne crane, we've got a four tonne splendid/slender(?) crane... [unclear audio] oil industry, chemical industry...'

Though I had my phone ready as a backup recording device, I had not foreseen Zoom not working and needing to deviate to Teams in my first interview. At this point, Teams was a platform I had never used before. P1 offered to host a Teams meeting, record it, and send it to me. In this real-life scenario, I went with the flow and agreed. As this was my first interview, and the recording file was not under my control, I took detailed running notes by hand so that I had a record of the interaction in case of further technical issues. P1 was true to his word and sent me the Teams video link. I let P1 know when I had completed my transcribing so that he could delete it. Though I am confident that the interview's content was harmless, verifying the deletion of that data is not within my control, and P1 may still have the recording. Building trust with willing participants is crucial to the research process, and my fieldwork experiences encouraged me towards taking an oral history approach.

When transcribing, I began each document with a summary of how I felt the interview went and added footnotes to capture my own thoughts about the experience. These are bracketing techniques (Tufford & Newman, 2012); I could write down my feelings about the interview and anything that affected my personal outlook that day (e.g., having an ADHD brain fog day) so that, with hindsight, I could acknowledge my subconscious bias. Bracketing (Tufford & Newman, 2012) allows researchers to acknowledge their feelings to avoid bringing false assumptions into data analysis. One way this occurs is when researchers inaccurately psychologise participants' body language (Watts, 2024). Since I had both running notes and a video interview from interviewing P1, I transcribed both. This activity was a helpful learning exercise, as the content I captured was similar. This was reassuring, as when I interviewed P16, the recording did not work. Pens and paper are the ultimate backup recording devices. This interview was captured using handwritten running notes, which were later transcribed. In my running notes and typed transcript, I took care to take down any quotes he wished to convey verbatim. These research experiences taught me that many things can go wrong and reiterated the human dimension of the research dynamic. The following section outlines my interview and transcribing procedures for the three modes of interview data collection.

3.6.1 Video Interviews

For video call interviews, I sought consent from participants before recording the session. They were reassured that the recording would be deleted after transcribing was complete. Because videoconferencing records people's faces, I felt that keeping recordings was unnecessary and unethical. My approach to this quandary was to type my transcripts as soon as possible after the interaction and then delete the original files. Though online interviewing was used (O'Connor, 2015) before the outbreak of COVID-19, it was not my first choice:

'The face-to-face interview remains a 'gold standard' and both students and more established researchers often seem reluctant to move in to the online world to conduct interviews getting to talk to people and understand their lived experience.' (O'Connor, 2015, 100-101).'

However, during COVID-19, remote methods were the only means of conducting interviews. Despite my misgivings, I found the video interviews more engaging than telephone interviews because I could see the person's face and build rapport. A benefit of video interviews was that I had visual and audio data when transcribing the recordings. I could pause, repeat, and pay attention to body language and facial expressions, things I may have missed when conducting an in-person or telephone interview. Though this made the interview more engaging, Silverman (2020) and Watts (2014) emphasise that researchers should not assume a participant's state of mind from their body language.

Rewatching video interviews was informative because they also captured my body language. I saw how easily an onlooker could misconstrue my actions—bouncing my head from side to side, twiddling my hair, and fidgeting—things some neurodivergent people do subconsciously when they are focused. Being confronted with this and knowing that what could be seen did not match what was going on in my mind reiterated the value of bracketing (Tufford & Newman, 2012). Without hearing it in their own words, we cannot know what others feel or what their body-focused behaviours mean. Given that body language had no bearing on my research topic, I followed Silverman's (2020, 84) understanding that 'qualitative researchers... emphasise the involvement and experiences of their research subjects' and focused my analysis of participants' experiences on their words alone (Watts, 2014).

3.6.2 Telephone Interviews

As a data collection method, telephone interviews are often discussed in the literature when collecting quantitative data (Bickman & Rog, 2009). Drabble et al. (2016, 118) have provided a survey of the 'small but growing body of literature [that] has documented the potential of in-depth telephone interviews as a viable option for qualitative research'. Aside from the logistical benefits such as reduced costs, interviewer safety and access to participants in different locations, Drabble et al. (2016, 118) argue that qualitative telephone interviews are beneficial to participants because they allow for privacy when discussing sensitive topics and give the participant more control over the interview setting:

'[telephone interviews] may be less intrusive and confer greater power and control to interviewees in terms of negotiating interviews to suit their schedules as well as rescheduling, interrupting, or ending the interview.'

This is methodologically significant because the research topic had the potential to touch on commercially sensitive matters. When discussing property, the data I encountered could, in the right hands, translate into potentially commercially valuable data. This was evident when speaking with P16, a businessman still active in Sheffield who was keen to hear updates about my project in exchange for his story. P16 was happy to be identified but did not understand why I had to anonymise other participants I had spoken to. I sought guidance from my supervisory team. This was an explicit reminder that:

- Participants give their time freely, but their participation may not be agenda-free.
- Ethically, perhaps the researcher owes the participants something in exchange for their stories.

My Participant Information Sheet (Appendix C) had foreseen this need to let participants know what was done with their data. It explains that once my PhD was complete, I would circulate a report outlining the key findings.

When conducting telephone interviews, my resources at home were not ideal. During COVID-19, I did not have in-person access to university recording equipment or, more importantly, colleagues to show me how to use it. As a person with ADHD, I struggle with multitasking activities. So that I could ask for consent before recording, I used my mobile phone to make calls and put the call on speakerphone so that I could use the record function on my laptop to capture the audio. Because I have ADHD, switching between a phone call and a recording app was not a viable accessible option for me. In addition, one of my ADHD symptoms is auditory processing disorder. This means I can struggle to identify the words within sounds, even when repeated. The poor audio quality of the telephone interviews was particularly challenging. To compensate, I would write, replay, edit, write, replay, repeat, repeat, repeat, and write. On average, an hour-long phone call would take me 10 hours, if not longer, to write up. Because I transcribed manually, this activity was intense, so I broke it into blocks over a few days.

3.6.3 In-person Interviews

Before October 2021, some participants had offered to participate in a face-to-face interview. I declined their offer in line with COVID-19 health and safety procedures and only conducted online or telephone interviews. After October 2021, national COVID-19 policies and University ethics procedures permitted in-person interviews. I believe in-person interactions are the 'gold standard' (O'Connor, 2015, 100-101) for a reason, and I was keen to collect some data in this way. I followed the University's researcher risk assessment procedures when conducting in-person interviews. These included meeting participants during daytime hours, taking a fully charged mobile phone with a portable charger, travelling with a face mask and hand sanitiser, and informing my supervisors and friends where I was. To capture the interaction, I used the audio recorder on my phone to record the interview. This produced clearer audio than the remote telephone interviews.

The in-person interviews were conducted one-on-one, except for P22, where P21 was present. I began interviewing P21, and P22 arrived later and was comfortable with P21 remaining in the setting. An unexpected 'exiting ethics' (Tracy, 2010, 840) issue arose when P22 spoke about his father (P21's grandfather). As with the video and telephone interviews, I deleted the audio files from the in-person interviews after transcribing. Before deleting the recording, I offered to send it to P21 and P22 as I felt I had captured precious memories. They declined, but this experience made me aware that the data I collected did not belong to me. Similarly, my final interview occurred a year after my original data gathering when P23 offered to share her family history research associated with Neepsend. These instances show how I modified my initial interview procedures from 'Zoom only' to being receptive to using the format participants had in mind to share their stories. Several participants had an accent. I did not try to mimic these speech patterns, as that is not the nature of my study. I transcribed in plain English but would include regional variations, such as 'mam' for 'mum', to keep the participant's words and experiences authentic. To sum up, my approach to transcribing and data analysis of interviews was to use:

'...low-inference descriptors. As Seale [1999, 148] puts it, this involves 'recording observations in terms that are as concrete as possible, including verbatim accounts of what people say, for example, rather than researchers' reconstructions of the general sense of what a person said, which would allow researchers' perspectives to influence the reporting.' (Silverman, 2020, p. 90).

The next section outlines how I collected, stored, and processed the visual data.

3.7 Research Ethics: Acknowledging non-Participants

The previous sections considered the procedural research ethics of recruitment, interviewing human subjects, and exiting the research setting (Tracy, 2010). This section considers the ethical issues in reporting material produced by or describing third parties that did not participate in the study. The terms of my Sheffield Hallam University institutional ethical approval stated:

'Clearly, the sites themselves may be identifiable, and interviewees may be difficult to anonymise, e.g. if they are a site owner. Nonetheless, the presumption should remain, and the application should detail all steps that will be taken to preserve anonymity and confidentiality. If participant is to be identified within research permission will need to be obtained and demonstrated.'

When I selected Neepsend as the fieldwork location, I did not anticipate that the Cannon Brewery building, which is the focus of Chapter 6, would be identified as a potential housing redevelopment. However, this property sold the year after I collected data from my semi-structured interviews. The previous owners of Cannon Brewery declined to participate in the interview, but it was common knowledge who they were. To preserve anonymity whilst distinguishing between different scales of property owner, when mentioned this company have been referred to in this thesis under the pseudonym 'Family Company' (Appendix F). As previously explained, the table in Appendix E lists each participant by an anonymised code (P1-P23) which is how they are referred to in the empirical chapters. Because there were recurring actors mentioned in the data who did not participate, I also produced a list of pseudonyms to aid the reader in following the argument while keeping the stakeholders names private. These codes that refer to non-participants are provided in Appendix F. It is important to acknowledge that my final project was not just about set-aside property owners. The actors in Appendix F, and their

interactions with the interviewees, are significant as they form part of the local ecosystem.

Cannon Brewery was sold in October 2022, and the new owners engaged with local newspapers to promote their acquisition and my fieldwork period overlapped with a commercially sensitive period for this site. I had contacted the new owners for interview, but had not heard back. I contacted the current owners, Capital & Centric, in February 2024. In line with my ethical procedures, they granted me explicit permission to use their website images in this thesis (see Chapter 6) and to name them.

My empirical investigation combined contextual secondary material such as maps and town planning documents with primary data from walking methodologies, repeat photography, and semi-structured interviews. During the thesis write-up, I contacted Sheffield City Council and Fairview Homes and received express, signed permission to use their maps and marketing images. Where express permission was not received to use a significant image, its location is referenced in a footnote. The majority of the images in this thesis were taken by me. The next section outlines my procedures for recording, storing, and analysing the visual data set.

3.8 Coding Different Types of Data

My research philosophy evolved during my PhD. I now see research as an act of doing, more like a process rather than following a procedure. Like Jackson and Mazzei (2013, 261), I felt compelled to ‘use theory to think with... data (and use data to think with theory)’. I will explain how this thesis has taken the approach of ‘plugging one text into another’ (Jackson & Mazzei, 2013, 261) when I describe the theoretical framework in Chapter 4. For now, this section explores how my experiences with coding visual data led me to this realisation. The final photography data set, summarised in Table 3.1, contained 845 research photographs. I took these pictures using my smartphone between June 2020 and July 2022.

Table 3.1 Visual Fieldwork collected between June 2020 and August 2022

Images taken in 2020 (June-Dec)	63
Images taken in 2021 (Full Year)	647
Images taken in 2022 (Jan-Aug)	135
Total Images	845

Between June 2020 and April 2021, after downloading the images to my laptop, I imported them into NVivo, a qualitative research software where I could sort and code them. An extract from my list of nodes and my coding matrix are available for audit purposes in Appendix G. However, my personal experience was that it gamified my research. I used it religiously for a year, but, as a person with ADHD, this added in more steps. This caused confusion in identifying my primary goal, and completing the database game- something impossible to do- became a distraction to doing my PhD. Significantly, Jackson & Mazzei (2013, 262) have recorded a similar experience when working with qualitative data:

*‘Well-trained methodologists are carefully taught to be attentive to their field notes and transcription data... Perhaps we were becoming post-methodologists [because]... This project was borne out of our discussions of the failures of coding... **Neither of us coded anymore, but we could not systematically describe what happened when we “thought with theory”**’.* [Emphasis added].

As such, I will not dwell on the pros and cons of NVivo because I did not find it useful when producing the empirical findings. Although I stopped using the nodes in the NVivo software, I kept the same research protocols and continued to code the data (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) manually. My manual coding approach for interviews focused on ‘meaning condensation, meaning categorization and meaning interpretation’ (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2019, 20). The procedures I used are summarised in Table 3.2. These were not followed in a strict fashion but in a heuristic, iterative way, and these steps were often repeated and re-done in different orders.

Table 3.2 Manual Coding Procedures for Semi-structured interview data

Activity	Purpose
Hard copy highlighting of transcripts. Colour 1 = linguistic uses. Colour 2= descriptive data. Colour 3= conceptual themes.	Open coding (Corbin & Strauss 1990, Given, 2008). Identify three initial types of information to get a sense of the nature of the whole data set.
Copying quotes from transcripts into a Spreadsheet. Thematic coding using post it notes. 'Noting patterns, themes...seeing plausibility...and clustering help the analyst see "what goes with what"' (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2019, 17).	Open coding labels of each transcript included 'problem solving', 'absent owners', etc.
Printing off and cutting quotes into strips. (See image in Appendix H).	Grouping code words into clusters of meaning using 'code memos' (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2019, 7; Gibbs, 2018, 56-57).
Typing up interpretation from manual findings and avenues of investigation. 'Meaning condensation' (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2019, 9) to pull out central themes.	Audit trail (Thomson, 2014).
Manually taping clusters of data together.	Data reduction- key theme identification.
Compare the themes to the literature.	Iterative, inductive analysis (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2019).
Compare new literature to the data.	Interactive analysis.
Return to the transcripts, print fresh copy if needed.	Methodological thoroughness.

Though these steps were helpful when coding written data from interviews, I did not find them useful or practical for processing visual data. Instead of being stored in NVivo, I stored my images in folders grouped by the visit date. Each 'day' folder was stored in one of three folders by 'year' (2020, 2021, 2022). The temporal data associated with each image was deemed necessary. The files were not renamed, which meant they retained their original date and time stamps. To keep track of the content of the images without altering the file names, I produced a descriptive summary of the content and context of each visit using an Excel sheet. This served as another style of field notes, as the spreadsheet descriptions

summarised what each batch of images showed and why they were deemed significant to the research.

In addition to outlining the 'Context and Content' list of my Image Data Folders, I produced a separate 'Building Image Log' tab in the Excel Spreadsheet that identified all derelict buildings I encountered in the study. An extract from this is shown in Appendix I. I picked out all instances where I had photographed a given building and listed the dates of every encounter. This allowed me to locate the files when needed, and to bring up and compare all images of one site captured across the two years of fieldwork. When fieldwork ceased, I identified 22 'seemingly un-utilised' or 'derelict' properties within Neepsend. These twenty properties' histories and 'building life cycles' were investigated over the next two years to identify signs of land-holding activity. The complete list of 22 sites is available in Appendix J. As discussed in Chapter 5 and 6, two of these sites were later removed as they were not set-aside properties, and were initially mislabelled due to being closed during the COVID-19 pandemic.

3.9 Summary of Methodological Strengths and Limitations

In taking an audit-trail approach to this chapter (Thomson, 2014) I have addressed the pros and cons of specific aspects of the research design. This section provides an overview of the limitations and benefits of the research design as a whole, and looks ahead to the theoretical framework in the following chapter. The first limitation was that the data collection occurred during global uncertainty. As Hallberg (2006, 148) explains:

'...researchers are not always consciously aware of how an era is shaping our research practice. This means that ontological and epistemological standpoints, i.e. our assumptions about what reality is and how it can be known, are embedded in the different modes of grounded theory and need our reflected standpoints.'

I selected grounded theory because it emphasises the data and the pursuit of 'a *general method of comparative analysis*.' (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, 1). One of Charmaz's (2014, 15) nine central tenets of grounded theory is that the research should emphasise 'theory construction rather than description or application of

current theories'. Having reviewed the data, I discovered flows of information: rumours, frustrations, competitive behaviour, personal celebrations, and painful memories. There were relatable stories about why a Subject would buy, sell, or retain their property and why they could later change their mind. As Silverman (2020, 87) states:

'Your research strategy must always depend upon what you are trying to find out and the resources you have available to do this; for some kinds of research problems, the very general approach of 'mapping the woods' may be highly appropriate.'

An ecosystem approach (Henneberry & Parris, 2013) that situated the relationship between owners and their set-aside properties within a broader local context was planned from the beginning. This design facilitated an investigation open to non-owners' perspectives, including neighbours, occupants, real estate agents, and policymakers. The range of stakeholders that inform this thesis' data analysis can be seen in Appendices E and F. Though this exploratory approach was appropriate, my presentation of Neepsend is inevitably coloured by my own experiences and perspectives (Dow, 2011,). As Hallberg explains, 'Constructivism assumes that there are multiple social realities simultaneously rather than the one and only "real reality" (Hallberg 2006, 146). The data in my thesis is open to interpretation. My interpretation has focused on understanding the reasoning behind stakeholders' decisions. In the empirical chapters, I have attempted to showcase various stakeholder views using their own words.

Grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) was helpful for research design and collection but needed to be combined with an applied theory for data interpretation (Seaman, 2008). As seen in Table 3.2, where I outlined my interview coding procedures, I searched for a theoretical model within the literature that could work with the multiple perspectives in my data that were, by their nature, highly subjective. The frameworks (Wenger, 1998; Bourdieu, 1980/1990) I encountered before March 2020 did not fit the "flows" I saw in the data set. When reading Lefebvre's (1974/1991; 1992) body of work, I noticed the use of water analogies to demonstrate how various factors, including rhythms- interact:

'Great movements, vast rhythms, immense waves- these all collide and 'interfere' with one another; lesser movements, on the other hand, interpenetrate.' (Lefebvre, *The Production of Space* 1974/1991, 87).

Lefebvre's analogy of flows of water, flows of rhythm, and flows of information meant that Rhythmanalysis presented a compatible analytical framework to trace and understand the 'specific constellations of various shifting rhythms' (Muliček et. al. 2015, 308) that are found within my data. Lefebvre's (1974/1991) water analogies helped me conceptualise and explain the significance of my data. If we consider particular 'moments' as types of water that merge into the overall river of time, some events described in my case study were smaller and more routine; Lefebvre would call these small-scale flows of activity 'interpenetrations'. Other events are more dramatic and might cause a splash; these types of events Lefebvre (1974/1991, 87) termed 'interferences'.

As Gardiner (2004, 247) suggests, Lefebvre's work is compatible with this thesis' research outlook because he is 'about opening ourselves up to multiple possibilities, to embrace a myriad of alternative ways of thinking and living'. Lefebvre suggested that the researcher should absorb fieldwork experience and use the body as a processing tool. I decided that following the flows of a Rhythmanalysis was consistent with Charmaz's (2014) assertion that grounded theory is a journey. Lefebvre (1992) considered Rhythmanalysis to be a process, or a tool, that a researcher experiences as they conduct their investigation:

'Lefebvre perceives rhythm not as the object of study but instead as an analytical tool: rhythm is present in every interaction between place, time and energy invested (Lefebvre et al. 2004: 15) ... in this respect [he] provides a tool for the observation of the unobservable (Lefebvre et al., 1996).' (Muliček et. al. 2015, 307). [Emphasis added].

Although they may not appear to be an obvious combination, I believe constructivist grounded theory (Charmaz, 2014), the *Spatial Triad* (Lefebvre, 1974/1991) and *Rhythmanalysis* (Lefebvre, 1992) are compatible theories for studying the as-yet understudied relationships between owners and their set-aside properties. The next chapter outlines how the works of Lefebvre (1974/1991; 1992), Thompson (1979) and O'Callaghan (2023a) have been combined to produce

the theoretical and conceptual framework that was used to produce the findings reported in the empirical chapters.

Chapter 4: Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

Chapter 4 outlines the theoretical framework for investigating the unseen lives of set-aside or derelict land and property. Placing the theoretical framework at this point in the thesis allows readers to appreciate the complexity and layers involved in stakeholder decision-making before examples of layered behaviour are encountered within the empirical chapters. The structure of Chapter 4 is as follows. First, I outline the theories required for interpreting human behaviour. I begin with an overview of the three lenses of Lefebvre's Spatial Triad (1974/1991). Next, I introduce Rhythmanalysis (Lefebvre, 1992) and explain its function as an analytical tool. Thirdly, I outline the theories required for interpreting the phenomenon of set-aside property. The fourth section reintroduces Rubbish Theory (Thompson, 1979) as a helpful model for understanding how and why people's attitudes to set-aside property change over time. Fifth, I revisit O'Callaghan's (2023a, 1) three-part heuristic of 'producing vacancy', 'maintaining vacancy', and 'removing vacancy'. The final section combines Gibbeson's (2018) adaptation of Rubbish Theory (Thompson, 1979) with O'Callaghan's (2023a) vacancy heuristic to create the Utility Pyramid. This new analytical model contributes to knowledge by helping researchers identify and analyse different intensities of use at set-aside urban properties. The sixth section suggests that Henneberry & Parris' (2013, 232) diagram of property development ecosystems can be used as a visual aid for researchers carrying out a Rhythmanalysis (Lefebvre, 1992). The final section looks ahead to the empirical chapters, which have been structured to begin by foregrounding one element of the Spatial Triad (Lefebvre, 1974/1991) and bringing in the other two domains as the chapters progress.

4.1 The Production of Space

Lefebvre (1901-1991) was a French Marxist scholar who drew inspiration from various research traditions, including linguistics, philosophy, and psychology (Elden, 2004). Though a prolific writer, only parts of his *oeuvre* (body of work) have been translated into English. The following discussion addresses two texts, *The Production of Space* (Lefebvre 1974/1991) and his final book, *Rhythmanalysis: Space, Time and Everyday Life* (1992). The latter text was published posthumously,

and is considered to be the fourth volume of his multi-volume series, the *Critique of Everyday Life* (Kofman & Lebas, 2006, 7). The *Spatial Triad* first appeared in *The Production of Space* (Lefebvre, 1974/1991). In the original French, Lefebvre (1974) used the terms *espace perçu*, *espace vécu*, and *espace conçu*. These terms were translated by Nicholson-Smith (1991) as *spatial practice*, *spaces of representation*, and *representations of space*. These terms have been interpreted differently within scholarship (see Table 4.1) with differing emphases, resulting in slightly different applications. To clarify how I will use these terms, I have highlighted (Table 4.1) the English terms *perceived space*, *conceived space*, and *lived space* (Soja, 1996) and added my summary to clarify what I use each term to refer to.

Table 4.1: Examples of different scholarly definitions of Lefebvre's (1974/1991) *Spatial Triad*.

Source	Definitions used for the three aspects of Lefebvre's <i>Spatial Triad</i>		
Lefebvre in Nicholson-Smith, (1974/1991)	Spatial Practice	Spaces of Representation	Representations of Space
Lefebvre in Soja (1996, 65)	Spatial Practice <i>espace perçu</i>	Spaces of Representation <i>espace vécu</i>	Representations of Space <i>espace conçu</i>
Soja (1996, 74)	'The trialectics of spatiality'		
	Perceived	Lived	Conceived
Watkins (2005, 209)	Spatial Practices (Perceived space)	Spaces of Representation (Lived space)	Representations of Space (Conceived space)
Carp (2008, 130)	Spatial practice (Perceived space) Sensation/ body	Representational space (Lived space) Meaning/ experience	Representations of space (Conceived space) Mental activity/ abstract
Bauer (2018, pp. 209, 213)	The subject; 'sensing being[s that] ...serve as mirrors for each other' (213)	Representational Spaces ' <i>the vécu</i> '/ cultural memory	Representations of Space ' <i>the conçu</i> '- material/ architectural products
Toro & Navarrete-Hernandez (2022, 360, 364)	Spatial Practice Perceived space/ Commodification	Representational Space Lived space/ Expectations	Representation of Space Conceived space/ Codification
Cross, 2024	What people do	What people feel	What people think

As demonstrated in Table 4.1, the *Spatial Triad* (Lefebvre, 1974/1991) has significantly impacted English-speaking urban studies in various contexts. The elements of the *Spatial Triad* (Lefebvre, 1974/1991) should not be thought of in terms of “most important” to “least important”. The purpose of Lefebvre’s (1974/1991) theory was to argue that each domain is equally important and that each element overlaps with the others. To put it visually, Lefebvre’s (1974/1991) understanding of space would be that it is only found at the centre of this Venn diagram (Fig. 4.1):

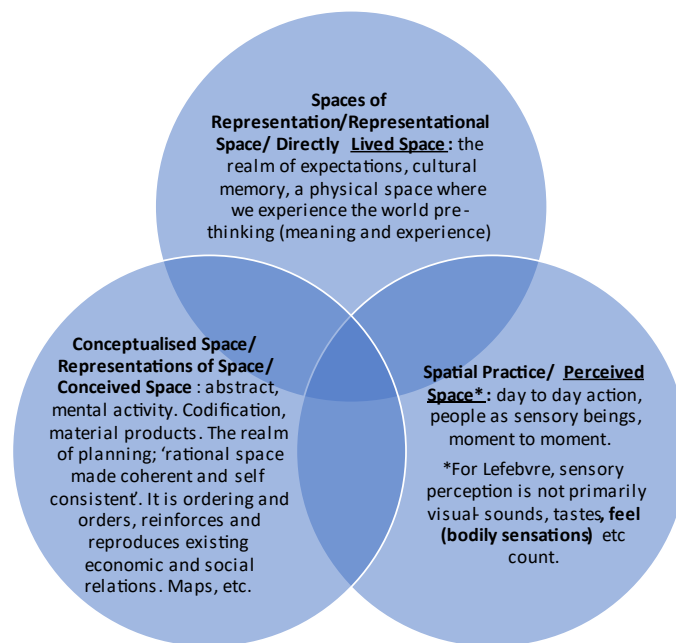


Figure 4.1 Venn diagram to show the working definitions this thesis uses for the three interlocking dimensions of the *Spatial Triad*. It is based on scholarship that appears in Table 4.1. Charlene Cross.

A full understanding of “Space” only exists at the centre of the three circles. If we were to stack the circles in Fig. 4.1 like three coins that are perfectly overlapped, we would find ourselves with the image in Figure 4.2:

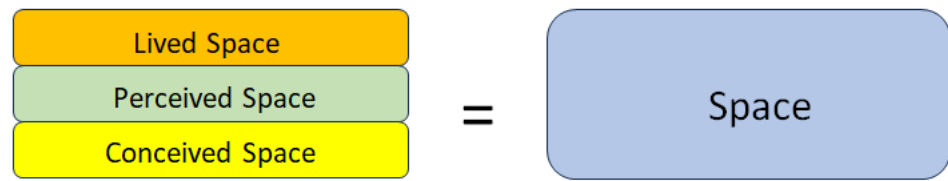


Figure 4.2 Illustration to show how the three aspects of the Spatial Triad perfectly overlap as parts of a whole. Charlene Cross.

Figure 4.2 visually demonstrates how I comprehend the *Spatial Triad* (Lefebvre, 1974/1991). On the left of the diagram are the three types of space. It does not matter what order the circles appear in the stack, like three coins paying for an item. What matters is that all three coins are needed to form the whole. On the right, the sum of these parts adds up to “Space”, composed of the three elements of the *Spatial Triad* (Lefebvre, 1974/1991).

His theories have attracted criticism for being overcomplicated and abstract (Gardiner, 2004), but Lefebvre’s works should be understood as conceptual guidelines. They become less paradoxical and contrary once one inserts concrete questions (RQ1, RQ2, RQ3) into a Lefebvrian framework. Soja (1996) has been credited with popularising Lefebvre’s (1974/1991) work by transforming the original *Spatial Triad* into his theoretical concepts of first space, second space, and third space. In recent years, Toro et. al (2022, 363) used Lefebvre’s *Spatial Triad* (1974/1991) to enrich their understanding of ‘how financial intermediaries conceive of and represent space’. Carp (2008, 129) used the *Spatial Triad* (Lefebvre, 1974/1991) to develop a ‘more comprehensive understanding of planning situations that involves recognizing sociospatial differences and investigating their interrelationship’. These studies demonstrate that Lefebvrian approaches have successfully been implemented to address key issues in urban studies.

Rhythmanalysis (Lefebvre, 1992) is not a theory, rather it is a tool to trace flows of activity that ‘are not separate; rather, they [layers of activities] produce a simultaneous space through dialectical interrelations’ (Pierce & Martin, 2015, 1282). In the empirical chapters, drawing on Lefebvre’s fondness for musical analogies

(rhythm), I have proposed seeing these overlapping layers of data like different components of an orchestra, akin to the diagram in Fig 4.2. The following section discusses Lefebvre's (1974/1991) definitions of each component of the *Spatial Triad* and their relevance to this study.

4.1.1 Perceived Space

The working definition I use in this thesis is that perceived space refers to day-to-day action. People are sensory beings, living from moment to moment. Lefebvre (1992) argued that sensory perception encompasses all five senses: sound, touch, smell, taste, and sight (Carp, 2008,). During interviews, people recalling their lived experiences did recall non-visual responses to Neepsend. For example, P17 spoke about the historic smell of hops at the Cannon Brewery and how the influx of new breweries had brought back childhood memories. P12 and P8 described the day-to-day sounds of metalworking in Neepsend. P13 suggested that empty factories provided pockets of silence for the residents of Kelham Island. Chapter 6 operationalises this sensory aspect of theory (Degen & Rose, 2012) by exploring *perceived space* in the broad sense of what people do:

'1. Spatial Practice, [perceived space] which embraces production and reproduction, and the particular locations and spatial sets characteristic of each social formation. Spatial practice ensures continuity and some degree of cohesion. In terms of social space, and of each member of a given society's relationship to that space, this cohesion implies a guaranteed level.' (Lefebvre, 1974/1991, 33)

As will be seen in Chapter 6, when one business opens and thrives, it encourages more businesses to relocate to the area. This theory asserts that perceived space is a relational activity; what one set of actors do can impact what other actors do. Some of the things people "do" will encourage others to do those activities. This domain covers how people use, or appropriate (Lefebvre, 1974/1991,) and commodify (Toro & Navarrete-Hernandez, 2022) spaces. Because it is a domain of action, I consider this aspect of the *Spatial Triad* to be related to Rhythmanalysis (Lefebvre, 1992). This tool allows an observer to trace how and when people move through a given place. We will discuss this theory shortly, but it is alluded to in the *Spatial Triad*:

'[There is] the need for a study of that space which can apprehend it as such, in its genesis and its form, with its own specific time or times (the rhythm of daily life), and its particular centres and polycentrism.' (Lefebvre, 1974/1991, 31).

The notion of 'polycentrism' is significant to this thesis. The fieldwork collated multiple interpretations of places and events from different people based within one location, which were experienced in different ways, at other times, by other actors.

4.1.2 Conceived space

This thesis' working definition is that *conceived space* reinforces and reproduces existing economic and social relations. It is about what we expect to find. As such, this domain refers to abstract knowledge and mental activity. It is the domain of town planning and abstract space (e.g., place as spatially represented through maps). Returning to Lefebvre (1974/1991) he defined this aspect of the *Spatial Triad* as:

'2. Representations of space, [conceived space] are tied to the relations of production and to the 'order' which those relations impose, and hence to knowledge, to signs, to codes, and to 'frontal' relations.' (Lefebvre, 1974/1991, 33)

People are aware that their behaviours may be received (by other actors in the realm of perceived space) positively or negatively. *Conceived space* is about knowing the meaning of social signs and codes that tell one what to do and when. Lefebvre's (1974/1991, 33) discussion of 'frontal' relations refers to our surface-level interactions. An example relevant to this thesis would be our expectation that properties should be occupied and active. When we encounter a set-aside property, it does not meet our expectations of order. People respond to these visual signs as neglect, which they accept (van der Hoorn, 2009) or reject (Greenberg et al., 2008).

I adopted the *Spatial Triad* (Lefebvre, 1974/1991) because current literature regarding set-aside urban property appears to have been produced in a climate that values *conceived space* but overlooks *lived space* and *perceived space*. As Chapter 5 will demonstrate, this is apparent in the realm of top-down town planning. Masterplans are *abstractions*; they may refer to but are not based on, real-life

experience and divide *future* time (not yet “real”) into manageable, measurable units (number of years) that project an *intended* vision for the *future* of that Space. Masterplans take years to produce and are designed for specific areas with specific resources, with the goal of affecting change and addressing particular problems. Because they seek to change current spatial norms, plans are somewhat *detached* from Place. Because I first oriented myself to the case study by studying historical and current maps, the empirical chapters begin with *conceived space* (Chapter 5). This represents a logical starting point for identifying norms and then incorporating the other aspects of the *Spatial Triad* (Lefebvre, 1974/1991) to challenge the assumptions built into *conceived space*.

4.1.3 Lived Space

As a standalone concept, Lefebvre’s (1974/1991) definition of *lived space* is the most amorphous, as his abstract language is oddly removed from everyday life:

‘3. Representational spaces, [lived space] embodying complex symbolisms, sometimes coded, sometimes not, linked to the clandestine or underground side of social life, as also to art (which may come eventually to be defined less as a code of space than as a code of representational spaces).’ Lefebvre (1974/1991, 33).

To make sense of this vague description, one must insert something tangible into this abstract framework to bring the theory to life. This thesis’s working definition is that *lived space* is the realm of expectations and cultural memory. It is a physical space. Here, we experience the world, have experiences, and consciously and unconsciously make meaning. It is what we do and who we are. Put simply, it is what we think and feel. Having defined each aspect of the *Spatial Triad* (Lefebvre, 1974/1991), I now explain how these elements were separated and reunited using the tool of *Rhythmanalysis* (Lefebvre, 1992).

4.2 Rhythmanalysis as a Research Tool

As explained in Chapter 3, the chosen research design used a data-led approach (Charmaz, 2014) to conduct immersive fieldwork. According to Mills, Bonner & Francis (2006, 2), the relativist ontological position that underpins constructivist grounded theory means that:

'Concepts such as rationality, truth, reality, right, good, or norms must be understood "as relative to a specific conceptual scheme, [or] theoretical framework..." (Bernstein, 1983, p. 8). In other words, the world consists of multiple individual realities influenced by context.'

This quote explains that data must be treated rigorously and systematically to draw credible conclusions. Grounded theory requires a tool to assess the relativist concepts outlined. *Rhythmanalysis* (Lefebvre, 1992) is a tool to process and interpret sensory fieldwork by "reading" a place through the lived experience of one's senses. This style of research method has been employed by studies that use walking methods (Montserrat-Degen & Rose, 2012). To conduct a *Rhythmanalysis* (Lefebvre, 1992), there is no requirement to quantify space, time, or events because the purpose is to observe and become a part of spatial interconnectivity. In '*Elements de rythmanalyse*' (Lefebvre & Reguliér, 1986) and '*Seen through the Window*' (Lefebvre, no date; personal letter reproduced in Kofman & Lebas, 2006, 219-227), Lefebvre called the 'interweaving and structuring of temporalities in everyday life.... the theory of moments' (Kofman & Lebas, 2006, 7).

An earlier iteration of the *Rhythmanalysis* (Lefebvre & Reguliér, 1986; Lefebvre, 1992) concept appeared in *The Right to the City* (Lefebvre, 1967; Kofman & Lebas, 2006, 72). Here, Lefebvre expressed the idea that a place is an ecosystem and the notion that the city is an *oeuvre* (or collection) of activity (Lefebvre, 1967; Kofman & Lebas, 2006). Two critical aspects of any ecosystem are:

- the environment itself
- the organisms that use it.

Lefebvre's (1974/1991) work has influenced human geographers and scholars of the built environment, and the analogy of place as an ecosystem occurs within property development literature. Though they do not directly cite Lefebvre, Henneberry & Parris (2013, 232) proposed a 'project ecologies' model to illustrate the layered relationships underpinning development projects. This model (Fig. 4.3) was designed to 'accommodate the heterogeneity of developers and development'

(Henneberry & Parris, 2013, 227) and will be helpful when discussing owners' decision-making activities in Chapters 5 and 7.

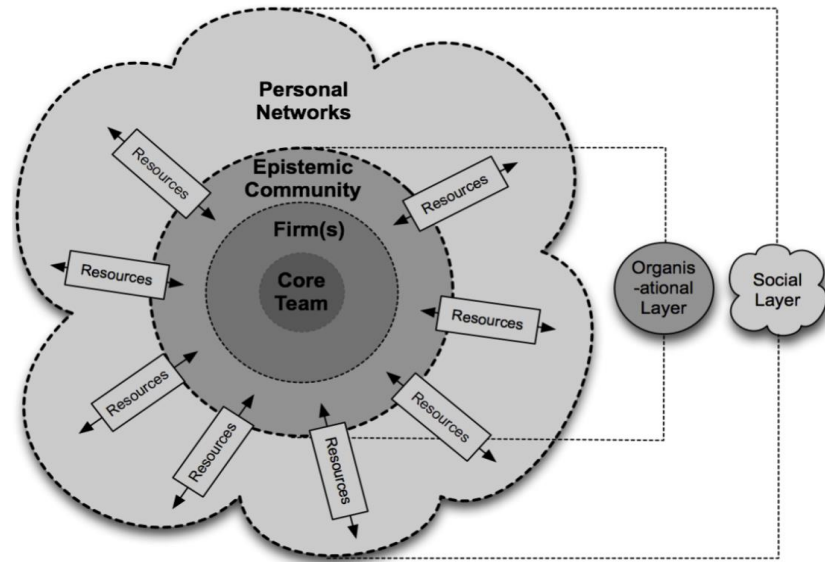


Figure 1 The project ecology
Source: The authors

Figure 4.3 Project Ecologies by Henneberry & Parris (2013, p. 232). Liverpool University Press.

There are two components to this diagram. The central circle component shows a three-tiered 'organisational layer' (Henneberry & Parris, 2013, 232) consisting of a core team, firms, and the local (epistemic) community from which resources can be drawn. This 'organisational layer' (Henneberry & Parris, 2013, 232) is surrounded by a 'social layer', represented by the flower shape in Fig. 4.3. The social layer consists of the wider, looser 'personal networks' of all project participants, whether 'professional or private' (Henneberry & Parris, 2013, 232-233). Consistent with Lefebvre's (1992) notion of *Rhythmanalysis*, the boundary between these two layers is fluid, and in successful development projects, resources (depicted in Fig. 4.3. as rectangles with double arrows) move between them.

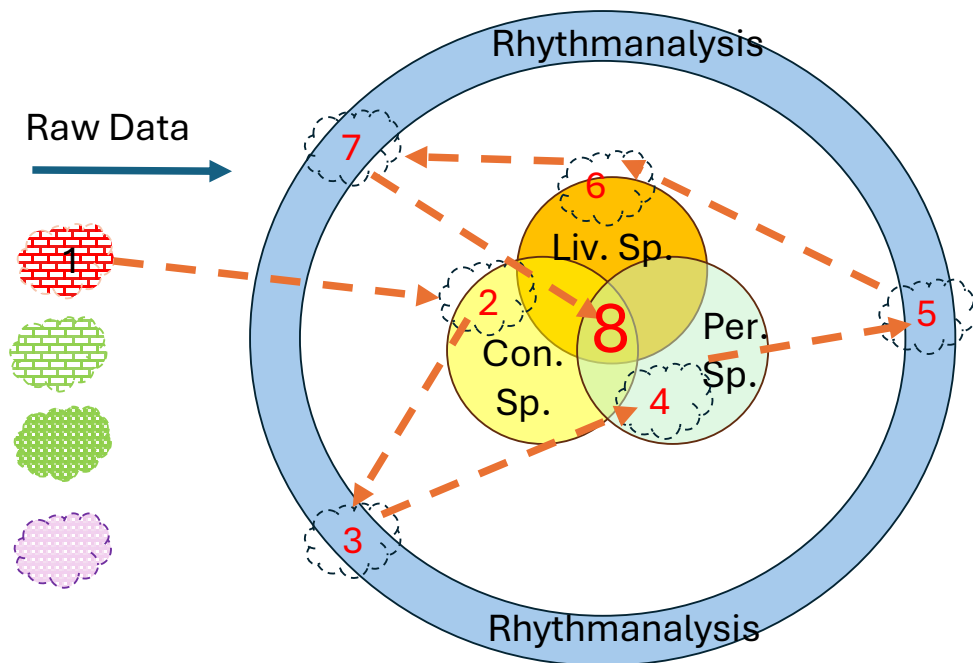


Figure 4.4 A visual representation of how I see Rhythmanalysis as a tool to look at each item of data (Step 1) using all three lenses of the Spatial Triad (Steps 2, 4 and 6) by moving between them (Steps 3, 5 and 7) to build up to a better understanding of Space (Step 8) which is at the centre of the Spatial Triad where all three lenses overlap. Charlene Cross.

In revisiting the literature, I believe Henneberry and Parris' (2013) diagram in Fig 4.3 is a helpful visualisation for operationalising *Rhythmanalysis* (Lefebvre, 1992) to study the situational, contextual inter-relationships between different data set elements. The diagram in Fig 4.4 shows a similar style of diagram that outlines how an item of data can be iteratively reviewed in three different ways to obtain a more holistic understanding of the data that considers all three aspects of the *Spatial Triad* (Lefebvre, 1974/1991). An analysis that considers all three aspects is represented in Fig. 4.4 by the number 8 at the centre of the *Spatial Triad* (Lefebvre, 1974/1991). This approach, where one source is considered from three different angles, is useful when trying to see the world through the eyes of different stakeholders (Watts, 2014). This thesis' empirical chapters will consider various stakeholders' opinions (a list of these participants is provided in Appendix E)—not just the owners- towards 20 set-aside buildings in Neepsend (Appendix J). The next section revisits the works of Thompson (1979) and O'Callaghan (2023a) to explain how these works have informed the design of the Utility Pyramid.

4.3 Rubbish Theory

Thompson (1979) embraced and explained how people’s perspectives and attitudes shape social norms. Therefore, Thompson’s (1979) work has been used in this thesis to understand the subjectivities surrounding interpretations of set-aside buildings. This section explores how Thompson’s (2017, 20) concept of ‘transient’, ‘rubbish’, and ‘durable’ objects can help examine the socially constructed and flexible arena of set-aside property interpretation.

Table 4.2: Table that shows three perceptions of Value; Thompson’s Rubbish Theory (2017, 26).

Durable	Region of fixed assumptions World view determines action. (e.g. Queen Anne Tallboy)
	Region of Flexibility Action determines worldview. (e.g. <i>The Times</i> vases)
Transient	Region of fixed assumptions World view determines action. (e.g. used car)

Thompson (2017, 27) argued that ‘transient’ items, like a used car, are expected to decline in value over time. Though older than a used car, it is commonly accepted that antiques become rarer over time. This means that ‘durable’ (Thompson, 2017, 27) objects, such as a Queen Anne chest of drawers, retain their value over time, and may even increase in value. These two categories of objects have clearly defined parameters that combine financial and social assessments. Yet, there are instances when ‘transient’ objects become ‘durable’. Thompson (2017, 26) suggested that people’s *actions* and *attitudes* towards ‘transient’ and ‘durable’ objects are fixed and defined by their worldviews. These attitudes are reminiscent of how social attitudes are self-reproducing, as defined in Lefebvre’s (1974/1991) concept of *conceived space*. Thompson (2017, 26; Table 4.2) proposed a third category of objects, such as a Times vase, which are harder to categorise and belong to a domain of flexible assumptions.

To cross from ‘transient’ to ‘durable’, Thompson (1979, 27; Fig. 4.5) argued that objects must move through a flexible period of being considered ‘rubbish’:



Figure 4.5 Thompson's Figure 2 of Rubbish Theory (2017, 27).

If we apply Thompson's (2017, 26) theory to set-aside property, an undesirable 'transient' property will move through an active, flexible process where human actors reconsider and reassess their previously held world views. By the end of this flexible process, the set-aside property is re-evaluated. If it is still seen to have no value, it is considered "rubbish". If it is seen to have potential, 'rubbish' sites can be reconsidered as 'durable', desirable place to live (Thompson, 2019, 27). *Rubbish Theory* (Thompson, 1979) provides a framework for understanding the properties discussed in the empirical chapters by illustrating how social processes of acceptance and rejection may occur separately from but related to a physical building. Objects are assigned to a 'region of flexibility' (Thompson, 2017, 27; Fig. 4.5) as they move through the middle stage of the cycle: rubbish.

Gibbeson's (2018, 54) adaptation of *Rubbish Theory* demonstrates how buildings move through Thompson's transient-rubbish-durable cycle (Figure 4.4, previous page). By adding two extra steps to Thompson's original model, Gibbeson's (2018, 54) Five Phase model (Fig. 4.6, below) allows us to trace how fixed, transient Objects move from Phase Two (transient down) to Phase Four (transient rising) by going through the flexible process in Phase Three (rubbish).

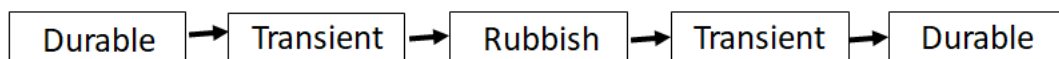


Figure 4.6 'Adaptation of how objects move through value categories over time' Gibbeson, 2015 (Gibbeson 2018, 54).

Gibbeson's (2018) model (Fig. 4.6) shows that the negative labels applied to "rubbish buildings" is a social process that occurs during Phase Three. As Amin and Thrift (2002) and Bishop & Williams (2012) have argued, the city is a complex machine whose material forms are constantly in flux. It follows that buildings do not stay fixed in one state of being. It is helpful to compare Thompson's (1979) model to

the literature on building lifecycles (Harris, 1999; Cairns & Jacobs, 2014). During Phase Three in the cycle, a building will only become 'rubbish' (Thompson, 2017, 26) if it is demolished and 'dies' (Cairns & Jacobs, 2014, no page). If the building is not destroyed, it exits the 'rubbish' (Thompson, 2017, 26) phase of the process and enters Phase Four, 'transient' rising (Fig 4.6; Gibbeson, 2018, 54). This stage represents when a building is reassessed and moves towards being renovated and brought back into active use as a 'durable' (Thompson, 2017, 26) property in Phase 5 (Gibbeson, 2018; Fig 4.6). The following section shows how Thompson's (1979) methodology and research outlook complement my thesis aims. It demonstrates how Thompson (1979) appears to conduct a *Rhythmanalysis* (Lefebvre, 1992) to advance his argument.

4.3.1 Rhythm and Rubbish

Thompson's (1979) methods are evocative of the domain of *perceived space* (Lefebvre, 1974/1991). When Thompson (1979/2017, 49) worked in London 'between 1966 and 1971', he observed the phenomenon that sociologist Ruth Glass (1964) termed "gentrification". In the chapter '*Rat infested Slums or Glorious Heritage?*', Thompson (2017, 49) recalls working as a carpenter during 'the early stages of a process that has since been christened "gentrification"'. His job was to change 'dilapidated early-Victorian artisans cottages into trendy residences for *Observer* journalists' (Thompson, 2017, 49). Thompson's lived experience as the author of the text is combined with participant observation to demonstrate the process of a transient 'slum' becoming a durable 'heritage' Thompson (2017, 49). Thompson's (1979/2017) method of drawing upon his own lived experiences as well as participant observation adopts a writing style that is more 'literary than scientific in intent' (Mills et al., 2006, 7), which is consistent with Charmaz's (2000) notions of constructivist grounded theory.

During the transient-to-durable period, a change in attitude occurs. As seen in the case of Victorian houses in the 1960s, negative attitudes towards the area were retained by the working class 'Ron-and Cliffs' who believed 'buying and doing up a rubbish house... was throwing good money after bad'. (Thompson, 1979, 47). At the

same time, the 'Knockers-Through' (Thompson, 1979, 47) were investing time and effort into them, seeing their value. If we refer back to Fig 4.6, by the end of this cycle, the 'Rat-infested Slum' that belonged to Phase Two (transient down) has become '*Our Glorious Heritage*' (Thompson, 1979, 35) by Phase 5 (durable). Thompson's (1979) focus on human behaviour shows how mental and social processes impact our relationships with material things, such as property. This is compatible with a Lefebvrian outlook.

Though this study does not use, and discourages the use of 'rubbish' as a descriptive label for set-aside urban property, I have incorporated the five stages of *Rubbish Theory* (Thompson, 1979; Gibbeson, 2018) into a model that challenges the mental and social processes that conceptualise set-aside property as rubbish. This theoretical interconnection with Lefebvre's (1974/1991) theory contributes to knowledge. The next section recaps the theoretical value of O'Callaghan's (2023a) heuristic of vacancy before combining O'Callaghan's (2023a) model with *Rubbish Theory* (Thompson, 1979) to produce a new theoretical model, the Utility Pyramid.

4.4 O'Callaghan's Heuristic of Vacancy

As noted in Chapter 2, O'Callaghan's (2023a) study emphasised the legal dimension of policy interventions and 'property rights' in urban processes, but he has not directly identified or addressed the perspective of the property owners and the need for scholarship to understand the reasons why owners might exercise 'the right to leave property unused'. Therefore, a discussion of the owners remains a gap in the literature. Addressing the owner's perspective is one of this thesis' original contributions to knowledge. O'Callaghan's (2023a) call for more vacancy that embraces numerous voices complements my Lefebvrian, multilayered approach. O'Callaghan's (2009) PhD thesis used *The Production of Space* (Lefebvre, 1974/1991) to explore the 'plethora of processes and forces' at play in the docklands regeneration of post-industrial Cork, Ireland. Though his recent paper does not explicitly cite Lefebvre, O'Callaghan (2023a) engages with the Lefebvrian concept of *perceived space* (Lefebvre, 1974/1991) when highlighting how 'the planning

literature... reproduces discourses of blight that cast vacancy as a problem to be solved'. In a recent paper, O'Callaghan (2023a, 1) set out a research agenda that:

'positions vacant land and property- normatively characterized as "surplus", "waste", or "empty" space- as active, lively, and contested within urbanization and urban political processes.'

In line with Lefebvrian thinking, O'Callaghan (2023a,1) notes that the 'dichotomy of "in use"/ "not in use" cannot adequately convey the nuances of urban vacancy. O'Callaghan's (2009) familiarity with Lefebvre's terminology and its usage when discussing the phenomenon of urban vacancy suggests that Lefebvre's concepts are methodologically appropriate for my investigation into ownership and urban vacancy. In addition, O'Callaghan (2023b) has acknowledged the value of using walking tour methods to investigate urban dereliction. The following discussion focuses on O'Callaghan's (2023a) three approaches to vacancy and their significance to this thesis.

4.4.1 Producing Vacancy

O'Callaghan's (2023a) discussion of how urban planning policies have brought about vacancy uses the vocabulary of economic failure or success, terms which are reminiscent of the language of *conceived space* (Lefebvre, 1974/1991). Therefore, O'Callaghan's (2023a) lens of 'producing vacancy' overlaps with Lefebvre's (1974/1991) notion of *conceived space*. As noted in Chapter 2, O'Callaghan (2023a, 13) has suggested exploring how 'vacancy has been framed at different moments (e.g., as dereliction, underutilization, or surplus properties)' by studying 'a range of new stakeholders... [to] show how their actions [*lived space*] reproduce vacancy [*perceived space*] over time' to understand specific types of vacancy better. This description reflects the approach I have adopted in the empirical chapters.

4.4.2 Maintaining Vacancy

O'Callaghan's (2023a, 13) definition of '*maintaining vacancy* as [a process] operating at the interface of political-economic tensions between use and exchange value' has similarities to the transient-rubbish-transient (Gibbeson, 2018) period of *Rubbish Theory* (Thompson, 1979). In referring to the relationship between use

value and exchange value and evaluating space as demonstrating planning successes or development failures, O’Callaghan (2023a) has engaged the Lefebvrian concepts of *conceived space* and *perceived space*. O’Callaghan (2023a, 1) describes ‘maintaining vacancy’ as an active process. As noted in Chapter 2, O’Callaghan (2023a) has not suggested approaching the property owners. In this paper, two minor references to owners reduced them to ‘absent owners’ (O’Callaghan, 2023a, 14) or ‘owners managing security and risk’ (O’Callaghan, 2023a, 13). This absence of owners in an otherwise compelling discussion of vacancy reiterates the need for my research. As a reminder, my research questions are:

- **RQ1.** What dynamic processes can be found within seemingly set-aside or derelict sites?
- **RQ2.** What are the owner and occupier logics behind low-intensity property use?
- **RQ3.** How can we understand different types of property-owner behaviours?

These questions are compatible with O’Callaghan’s (2023a, 14) calls for more research that provides:

‘relational mappings [that] ostensibly provide site histories but are also present-oriented in that they help explain use/development potential and limitations’... ‘combining “deep mapping” with detailed qualitative research on case sites’, [to understand] ‘specific parcels of vacant land and property in terms of both development paths taken and not taken’.

The approach O’Callaghan (2023a) suggests in this quote has similarities to how I approached and mapped Neepsend using multiple qualitative methods. In Chapter 5, I blend a range of secondary data maps with semi-structured interview data (Appendix E), author-generated photography, and detailed case studies of a range of set-aside properties (Appendix J). This detailed approach includes a discussion of planning applications that were rejected, such as the Farfield Inn (Appendix J) or approved but not implemented (O’Callaghan, 2023a), such as the demolition of the Cannon Brewery (Appendix J).

4.4.3 Removing Vacancy

O’Callaghan’s (2023a, 14) final lens, ‘removing vacancy,’ identifies some co-occurring phenomena and narratives associated with set-aside urban property. These include debates about gentrification and urban governance and the diverse ways ‘different stakeholders articulate the “challenge and opportunity” [of vacancy] in fundamentally different, oppositional, ways’ (O’Callaghan, 2023a, 14). O’Callaghan (2023a, 14; 2023b, 4) mentions the ‘meanwhile leases’ as a way that set-aside land and vacant buildings have been reclaimed for temporary activities. There is a body of work that engages with this topic. Typically “meanwhile uses” occur within empty warehouses (Ferreri, 2015; Ferreri & Vasudevan, 2019; Cerema, 2021; Nottingham Post, 2022) or shipping containers; Steelyard Kelham, 2022; Hatch MCR, 2021) are assembled on set-aside land to host cultural events (Hill, Light & Dearden, 2013) or pop-up markets. In the aftermath of the retail crisis (Rudlin, Payne & Montague, 2023), the flexibility offered by meanwhile uses has gained popularity in the last decade. During fieldwork, I encountered and photographed several meanwhile uses in Kelham and Neepsend (Fig. 4.7).



Figure 4.7 Meanwhile Uses: a building composed of shipping containers. Both images were taken on 25 04 2021. Charlene Cross.

The images in Fig. 4.7 shows the Krynkl building on the edge of Kelham Island, which is composed of shipping units. This building is adjacent to a set-aside plot of land. Shipping container units are easier to assemble and disassemble than brick-and-mortar buildings. This means this site can productively occupy land and offer restaurant and workshop spaces as a meanwhile use, before being reclaimed

for higher-intensity use. I encountered another example of shipping container meanwhile uses at the Kelham Steelyard (a food, leisure and retail area on Bardwell Road in Neepsend). During repeat photography visits, I recorded the expansion of this shipping container park. Over time, the site transitioned from a single-storey to a two-storey complex. Despite this expansion, because the buildings are composed of shipping containers, they are temporary. They can be removed relatively quickly if the land is required for future, higher-intensity use. Though my research occurs in a different context from the high street, there have been calls to better understand why owners might leave shops empty rather than permit temporary use (Dobson, 2023). My research into why owners leave property set-aside could have timely implications for projects that seek to understand landlords and owners operating in other contexts.

My thesis shares O’Callaghan’s (2023a, 15) goal of moving ‘questions on vacancy away from the presumption for development’. However, my study does so by asking property owners themselves what they think about their property. Though O’Callaghan (2023a) again mentions the need to consult ‘multiple stakeholders’, the owners- the actors that my thesis argues have a direct impact upon these processes of removing vacancy- were not explicitly considered. The empirical chapters touch on the issue of ‘legal disputes over planning permissions... to analyse power relations... [and] assess what potential futures are ruled in or out for vacant land and property’ (O’Callaghan, 2023a, 15), but from the perspective of understanding why properties, such as the Farfield Inn (Appendix J) discussed in Chapter 5, remain out of use, even if their owner appears to have taken steps to bring it back into active use. The next section combines Gibbeson’s (2018) five-step adaptation of *Rubbish Theory* (Thompson, 1979) with O’Callaghan’s (2023a) three-step heuristic of vacancy to produce a model for investigating and analysing the set-aside sites I encountered during fieldwork (see list in Appendix J).

4.5 The Utility Pyramid

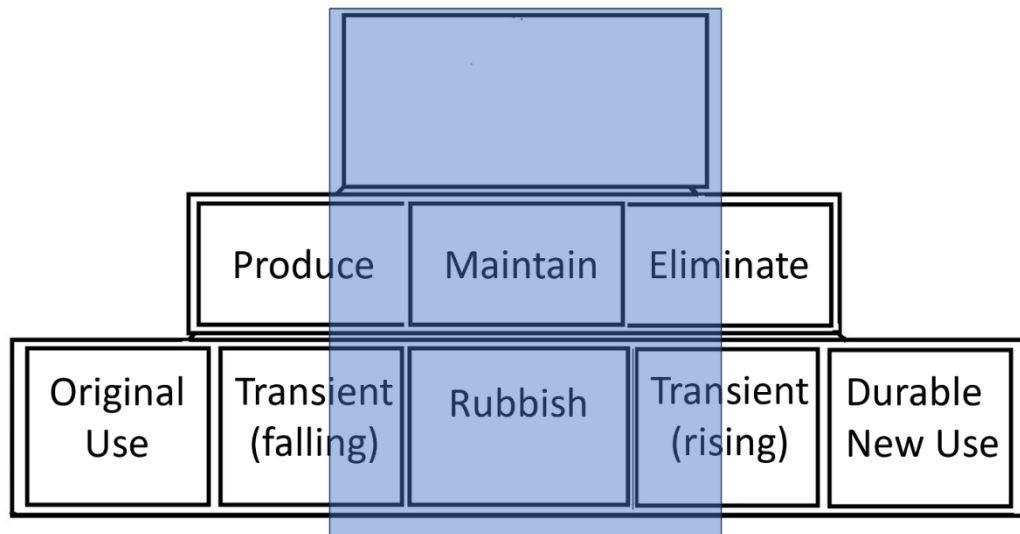


Figure 4.8 Graphic to Show the Utility Pyramid. Gibbeson's (2018) five-phase adaptation of Rubbish Theory (1979) is on the bottom row. O'Callaghan's Three lenses of vacancy are in the middle. The blue-shaded area represents the focal point of this thesis. Charlene Cross.

As seen in Chapter 3, previous studies have synthesised theories not usually found together, such as activity theory and grounded theory (Seaman, 2008) to conduct new research. I created the Utility Pyramid depicted in 4.8 through the iterative process of comparing the data to previous scholarship. The Utility Pyramid (Fig. 4.8) builds upon the work of previous scholars (Thompson, 1979; Gibbeson, 2018; O'Callaghan, 2023a) by overlapping different descriptions of set-aside property at different phases in the property lifecycle (Harris, 1999). The following sections explain what each layer represents, and the benefits of combining these theories.

The layer provided by *Rubbish Theory* (Thompson, 1979) shows human actors' perceptions of properties. At the far end in Phases 1 and 5, the property is seen to be durable and in active use. This thesis is concerned with a better understanding of set-aside properties, typically considered in Phase 3, and labelled as "rubbish". The layer above *Rubbish Theory* (Thompson, 1979) comprises the three phases, 'producing vacancy', 'maintaining vacancy' and 'removing vacancy' from O'Callaghan's (2023a, 1) model. These two layers overlapped on top of the

middle sections, Phases 2, 3 and 4 of *Rubbish Theory* (Thompson, 1979). In combination, these blended phases are now equivalent to:

- Phase 2- transient down (becoming rubbish/ producing vacancy)
- Phase 3- rubbish (maintaining vacancy)
- Phase 4- transient up (leaving rubbish/removing vacancy)

The blank space at the top of the Utility Pyramid and the blue-shaded areas represent the missing data and knowledge gap that this thesis seeks to address. The Utility Pyramid is a model that makes a theoretical and conceptual contribution to knowledge by providing an investigative tool that could be used in other contexts. By aiming to identify properties in Phase 3, I hope to better understand what kinds of activities owners do with these sites during Phase 3. This model is intended to provide a robust checkpoint that can be used to interrogate the sites discovered in the field, such as those in Appendix J. The overlapping aspects in the blue areas indicates that Phase 3 is not static, but an active ongoing process. This means that a set-aside property will move in, move through, and move out of this phase at some point over time, either through demolition and a new use or being kept and refurbished for adaptive reuse (Cairns & Jacobs, 2014). The blue area allows the researcher to ask themselves what they are observing, what phases the site has already experienced, which stages it is in at present, and which stages it has yet to experience. In line with grounded theory, the Utility Pyramid, which was built through interactions with the literature and my data (Creswell, 2014, 64-66) will be now be tested and referred to in Chapter 5.

4.6 Applying Theory in the Empirical Chapters

In summary, this framework has synthesised several existing theories to make a new conceptual contribution to knowledge. This thesis uses the works of Thompson (1979; Gibbeson, 2018) and O'Callaghan (2023) to empirically focus on set-aside properties in Neepsend. The Utility Pyramid model (Fig. 4.7) looks at specific properties is then placed within a wider, area-based Lefebvrian framework that has blended *Rhythmanalysis* (Lefebvre, 1992; Henneberry & Parris, 2013) and the *Spatial Triad* (Lefebvre, 1974/1991) to understand the roles played by set-aside

properties in a wider context of urban change. Having outlined these theories in detail, Table 4.3 summarises where each theory will be addressed in this thesis.

Table 4.3 Overview of theoretical and methodological content of empirical chapters.

Chapter	Lefebvrian Lens	Data Sources	Theoretical Concepts
5: Mapping Neepsend	Conceived space	Planning records, Master Plans, Semi-structured interviews, Area Maps, Photography Walks	<i>Spatial Triad</i> Utility Pyramid Project Ecologies
6: Rhythm of Neepsend	Perceived space	Planning records, Newspaper articles, Master Plans, developer website, Maps, Photography Walks, Social Media, Television broadcasts	<i>Rhythmanalysis</i> , Utility Pyramid, Project Ecologies
7: Lived Experiences of Property Owners	Lived space	Semi-structured interviews Newspaper articles	<i>Rhythmanalysis</i> , Project Ecologies, Oral history

By focusing each chapter around a different element of the *Spatial Triad* (Lefebvre, 1974/1991), the intention is to showcase how using *Rhythmanalysis* (Lefebvre, 1992) as an analytical tool forces researchers to broaden their perspectives and look closely at all three elements. This avoids getting immersed too deeply in one lens at the expense of the others. This is consistent with a Lefebvrian approach. Rather than splitting these rhythms (or data points) up, they all inform each other:

‘when ‘cyclical [time] and the linear can be clearly distinguished, the analysis which has separated them must rejoin them, for they enter into a perpetual interaction and are even relative to each other’ (Lefebvre, 1996, 231 in Gardiner, 2004, 239).

Within each empirical chapter, the other two elements of the *Spatial Triad* (Lefebvre, 1974/1991) will have been brought back into the thematic discussions about mapping place (Chapter 5), the types of work empty properties do for their owners (Chapter 6) and the experience of being a set-aside property owner in Neepsend (Chapter 7). The discussion and conclusion in Chapter 8 allow these separate strands to be reunited once more to answer the three original RQs.

Over the empirical chapters, stories about ownership will emerge from the research, providing new insight into set-aside urban property. This contributes to current debates about urban vacancy by drawing attention to the role of an overlooked and heterogeneous group of actors: the property owner. This thesis explores the relationship between set-aside properties and their landholder in two ways; first, it demonstrates how ownership of a seemingly underutilised site has contributed, is contributing, and will contribute to the landholder achieving their individual life goals during different phases of their life. Second, the relationship with the owner and their actions and inactions over time means that other phases of ownership will influence the property's life cycle.

Chapter 5: Conceived Space: Mapping Neepsend.

5.1 Introduction

Chapter 5 addresses the following research question and objectives:

- **RQ1.** What dynamic processes can be found within seemingly set-aside or derelict sites?
- **O1:** Through empirical research, identify 'seemingly un-utilised' or 'derelict' properties within a low-intensity area and investigate these properties' 'building life cycles'.
- **O3:** Produce a multi-faceted understanding of the lives of un/under-utilised spaces and their owners by synthesising empirical data and secondary sources.

To do this, I begin with Lefebvre's (1974/1991) notion of *conceived space* to discuss how Sheffield City Council (SCC) have used maps to convey their understanding of current and prospective future land use in Neepsend. Second, I satisfy O1 by describing three different intensities of land use in Neepsend and how human occupancy was used to distinguish between properties in or out of scope. As discussed in Chapter 2, aesthetic conditions (i.e. signs of dereliction) are often interpreted as evidence that property has been neglected and forgotten. When exploring land use in an industrial area, I explain how I initially leaned into, but later challenged, these stereotypical assumptions and signifiers of use and disuse. Third, I address O1 and O2 by exploring the stories behind three seemingly underutilised properties and presenting a list demonstrating owner activity and the changed conditions of the properties identified in Appendix J. This data allows me to present two arguments. First, the properties discussed in Section 5.4, such as the Farfield Inn and Mushets sites, have *not* been forgotten. Second, the data analysis revealed that underused property, such as the Jewsons warehouse, rather than the disused properties, presented the critical area of debate within the data set. My fourth move assesses the findings against existing literature. Fifth and finally, this chapter concludes by drawing together the key contributions of this chapter.

5.2 Maps as Conceived Space

In Lefebvre's *Spatial Triad* (1974/1991), 'conceived space' refers to the abstract ways people understand the world. When people imagine a space,

Lefebvre (1974/1991) stated that conceptualising what space looks like reinforces and reproduces the features that people expect to find. This process is evident when we use maps, which provide abstract pictorial representations of space using standard visual cues that identify key features in an area. Lefebvre (1974/1991) argued that maps belong to the domain of *conceived space*. During the shielding period of the COVID-19 lockdown (see Chapter 3), I began navigating Neepsend using Street View on Google Maps. To orient the reader, this first section combines four aerial-view Google Maps of Neepsend (Figs. 5.1, 5.9, 5.10 and 5.11), a series of official maps produced by Sheffield City Council (SCC) between 2008 and 2022 (Figs. 5.5, 5.6, 5.12 and 5.14) and descriptions of my ground-up observations.

When we look at maps (*conceived space*), it is essential to remember that the participants I interviewed are familiar with and use this infrastructure (*perceived space*) as they go about their daily activities (*lived space*). This is important because maps are abstractions of actual, physical places. As Lefebvre (1974/1991) explained, the purpose of the *Spatial Triad* was not to separate *conceived*, *perceived* and *lived space*. Instead, the model allows us to identify aspects of each element to observe how all three domains interact to produce Space. The first map (Fig. 5.1) shows Google Maps' area boundary of Neepsend in red. The wavy red line at the bottom follows the path of the River Don, which has three bridges (annotated on the map as A-C) at Hillfoot (A), Rutland Road (B), and Ball Street (C) within the Neepsend area. The straight red line across the top of Neepsend's boundary follows a railway track, which runs along a bridge above Rutland Road. The A61, or Penistone Road, is shown in yellow. This is a busy thoroughfare and a tram line runs nearby, parallel to this road. The tram travels north towards Hillsborough and south to Sheffield City Centre and beyond. Kelham Island is between the red boundary line along the River Don and the A61, at the bottom, southeastern portion of the map. The bridge at Ball Street (point 'C' on Fig. 5.1) that links Kelham Island and Neepsend has been closed to road traffic since July 2020. There are two other bridges in the area, Hillfoot Bridge (A) and Rutland Road Bridge (B), which can be accessed by car. Rutland Road and Mowbray Street are significant road traffic routes within Neepsend, but they are not prominent in Fig.

5.1. During fieldwork, I used Rutland Road to enter Neepsend. When engaging in walking and photography methods, I would often need to decide if I should turn left onto Hicks Street or right onto Boyland Road. To orient the reader, The roads referred to in this chapter are clearly shown in Fig. 5.2.

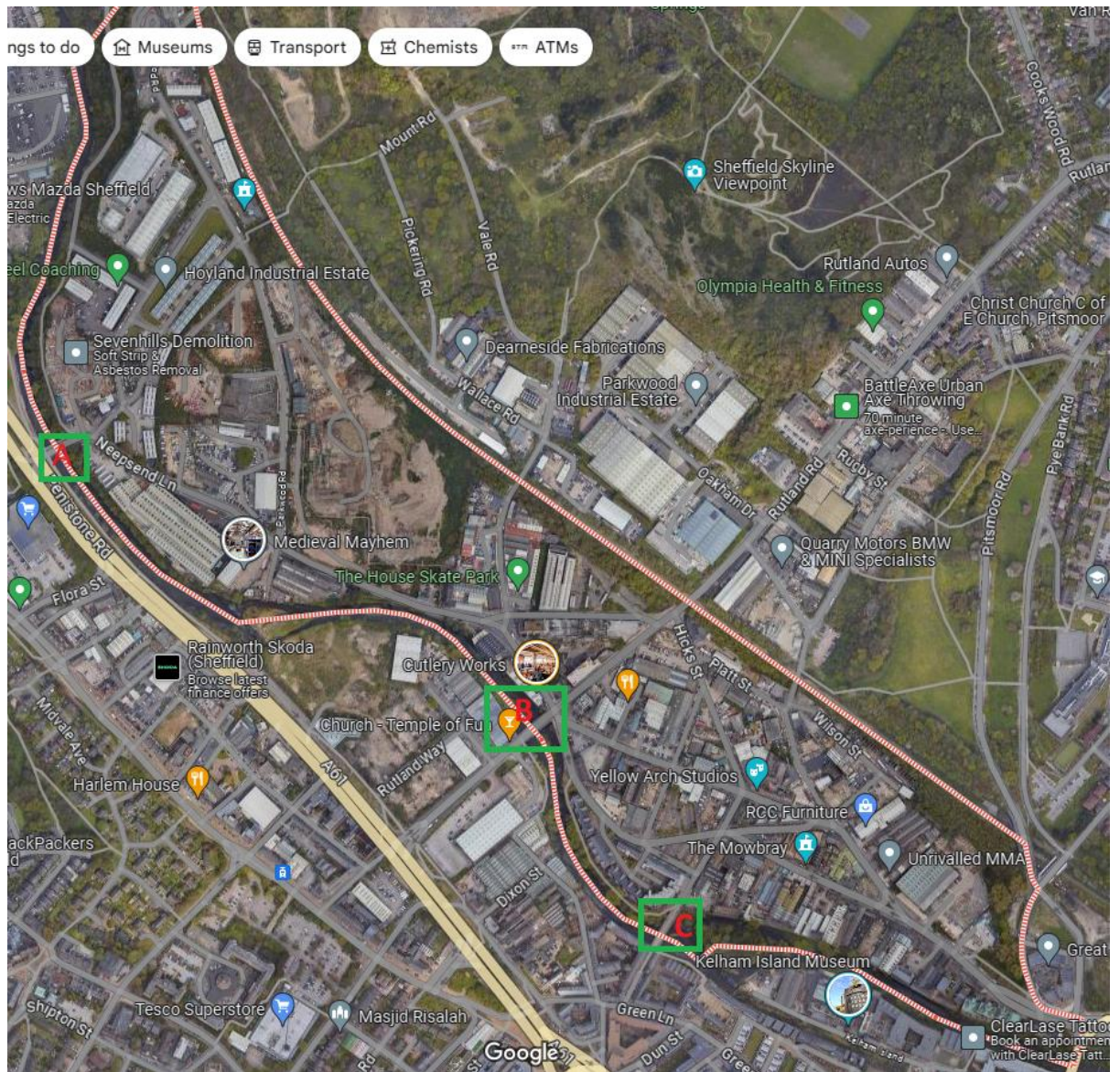


Figure 5.1 The red line denotes the Boundary of Neepsend. points A, B and C show location of bridges. Google Maps, 26 07 2024.

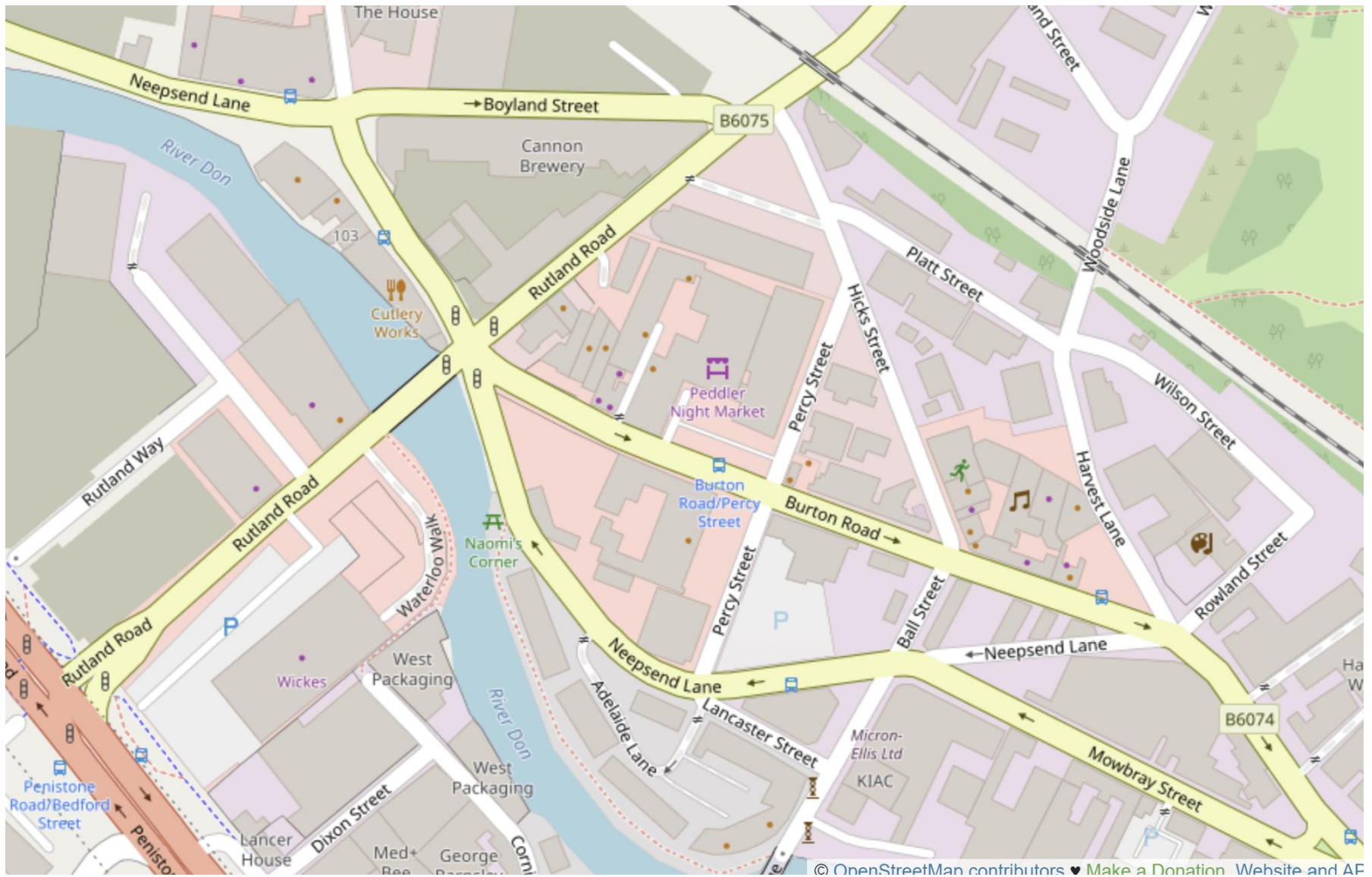


Figure 5.2 OpenStreetMap of Neepsend showing the location of key roads referenced in Chapter 5.

When exploring Neepsend in person, on foot, I noticed that the ‘Welcome to Neepsend’ sign (Fig. 5.3, below) was situated at the intersection of Hicks Street and Platt Street (Fig. 5.2):



Figure 5.3 ‘Welcome to Neepsend’ art installation. Hicks Street facing Platt Street and Blagden’s Motor Engineers (Hicks Street). 20 07 2022. Charlene Cross.

Maps are produced for different purposes. Unlike Google Maps (Fig. 5.1), which aid real-life navigation of a place, the maps produced by SCC set out the local plan for future development. Though the land is contained within the red boundary in Fig. 5.1, the industrial land from Hillfoot Bridge down to where Neepsend Lane meets Rutland Road (Fig. 5.4) does not appear on the maps produced by SCC (2008; 2019; 2022). The absence of this portion of land, which is also known as Neepsend, shows two types of conceived space. There are physical and geographical boundaries, such as the River Don (Fig. 5.4) and abstract, conceptual boundaries (*conceived space*, Lefebvre, 1974/1991) set by human actors to divide space into manageable chunks (SCC, 2013a; SCC, 2013b) and deliver location-based plans over a specified period.



Figure 5.4 OpenStreetMap Section showing the industrial portion of Neepsend <https://www.openstreetmap.org/#map=17/53.39474/-1.48450>

A key finding from my secondary research was that Sheffield City Council's (SCC) definition of the boundary line of Neepsend was flexible and had evolved. The first map of interest comes from the Kelham Neepsend Action Plan (SCC, 2008, p. 7; Fig. 5.5 below). This document conducted an urban analysis of Neepsend-Kelham and divided the space into 'three distinct character areas... labelled as Woodside, Core Neepsend and Kelham Riverside'.

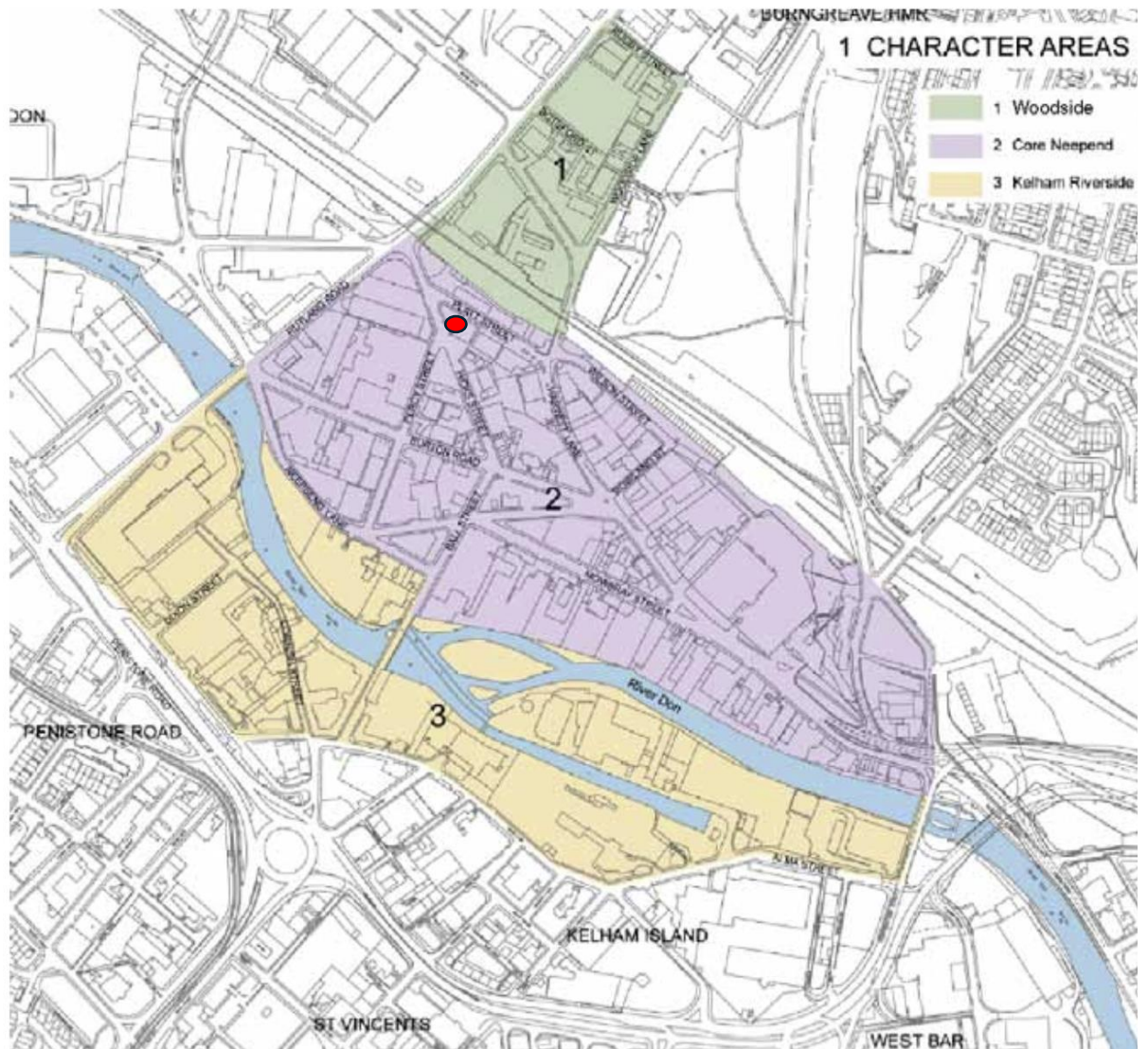


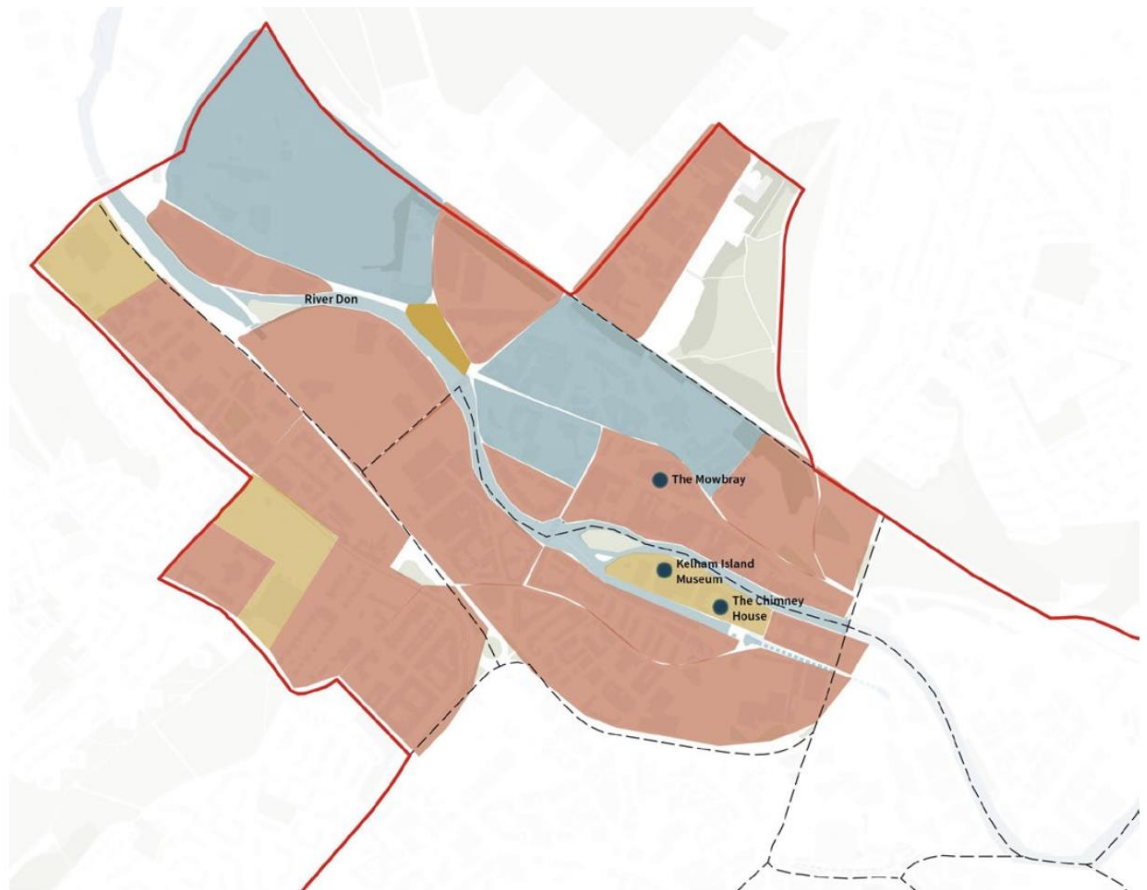
Figure 5.5 Kelham Neepsend Character Map in Sheffield City Council Kelham Neepsend Action Plan 2008-2018, p. 7. A red dot was added to show the position of the 'Welcome to Neepsend' sign.

The Kelham Neepsend character map (Fig. 5.5) is a different shape from Google Map's Neepsend (Fig. 5.1). First, over half of the area in Fig. 5.1 is missing. SCC (2008) conceptualised Rutland Road as the rigid boundary for where 'Core Neepsend' ends, a notion cemented by the 'Welcome' artwork (Fig. 5.3)- the location is shown by the red dot on Fig 5.5. The second difference is that

'Woodside' (SCC, 2008), the area marked in green in Fig. 5.5, has been defined by SCC as being part of Kelham-Neepsend despite not being captured within the red boundary shown in Fig. 5.1. The proposed expansion into 'Woodside' provides a clear visual indicator of the significance of Rutland Road (Fig. 5.2) within local redevelopment schemes. The next map of interest shows the 2019 Kelham and Neepsend Neighbourhood boundary. This map will be discussed shortly because a version I amended to record the land use intensities I observed in Neepsend appears in Fig. 5.8.

As will be seen in Chapter 6, Kelham Island has increased in popularity over the last few decades. Compared with the SSC (2008) map (Fig. 5.5), by 2019, the conceptual boundary of Neepsend had extended beyond Rutland Road. This extension of Neepsend's conceptual boundary to include Bardwell Road, Boyland Street, Neepsend Lane, and land along Penistone Road (see Figs. 5.2 and 5.4) is significant because it brought the derelict Cannon Brewery (Chapter 6) and the land of the former Osborn Mushets factory (Chapter 5, Section 3.1) under the remit of the Kelham Island and Neepsend Neighbour Forum (KINNF). Under the Government's Localism Act in 2019, KINNF was established, and this area was designated as a neighbourhood forum for the next five years. KINNF (2019) use the Neighbourhood map (SSC, 2019, Fig. 5.8) as the basis for proposals put forward to the council regarding the preferences of local people for the future development of this area.

The latest boundary extension occurred in SCC's *Strategic Vision* (March 2022). Fig. 5.6 (next page) shows 'Area One', a new *conceived space* encompassing Kelham Island, Neepsend, Philadelphia, and Woodside. When I encountered this map, I was surprised that the Cannon Brewery and Osborne Mushets sites had been coded as 'predominantly residential with community and amenity uses' (SCC, 2022, 60). During fieldwork, I did not identify these properties as housing. The image in Fig. 5.7 (underneath the map in Fig. 5.6) shows what the Osborne Mushets site looked like when this map was produced:



Key assets

1. The River Don
2. Kelham Island Museum
3. The Mowbray and The Chimney House – historic buildings both repurposed for events space

Existing Land Use

- Predominantly residential with community and amenity uses
- Predominantly commercial with residential
- Predominantly employment / industrial

Figure 5.6 Area One: Kelham Island, Neepsend, Philadelphia, Woodside in Sheffield City Centre Strategic Vision, March 2022, p. 60.



Figure 5.7 The former Mushets Site is pictured from Rutland Road. Parkwood Springs Hills in the distance. 18 05 2021. Charlene Cross.

To make sense of the mismatch between my primary data and the secondary data, I used the official Kelham and Neepsend Neighbour Area Designation Map (SCC, 2019) as a template to present my *lived* and *perceived* spatial assessments of the land uses I observed in Neepsend between July 2020 and March 2022. Reducing my fieldwork into this summary map (Fig. 5.8, next page) allows a reader who has never been to Neepsend to build a mental picture or to “conceive” of the character of this space.

As I developed fieldwork routines and day-to-day practices, which better reflect Lefebvre’s (1974/1991) notion of *perceived space*, I experienced Neepsend not as an abstract concept through maps but as a real place with my senses. The map in Fig. 5.8 presents an abstraction of these experiences and communicates how actors in Neepsend were using these spaces between April 2021- March 2022. The map in Fig. 5.8 (next page):

- added the new boundary line of Area One (SCC, 2022; Fig. 5.6) in blue.
- Emphasises the KINNF boundary (2019) in pink
- colour codes every building based upon the day-to-day, current uses identified through empirical research
- Copies the colour coding of Area One (SCC, 2022) by using red to show actual residential property, blue to show currently active industrial property, and yellow for commercial activity within Neepsend-Kelham
- My map shows housing that currently exists in red (Fig. 5.8), but I recorded fewer instances than those depicted on the map of Area One (SCC, 2022).
- New colours have been added to emphasise activities found in Neepsend that have not been accounted for in previous maps.
- These colours are hot pink for employment use (not food/drink, not industrial use), purple for leisure use (gyms, museums, etc) and solid green for parks.
- I circled notable areas of derelict property and void spaces in green.



Figure 5.8 Researcher produced map coloured in to show observed land use in Neepsend in March 2022. Charlene Cross

If we review the progress of the *Kelham Neepsend Action Plan 2008-2018* (SCC, 2008; Fig. 5.5), Woodside was suggested as an area for housing. However, the land was still being used for industrial purposes in 2022 (Fig. 5.8). Though the plan remains an abstraction in Neepsend, Kelham Island achieved many development goals. Kelham won the Urban Association's award for Best Neighbourhood in 2018, and the industrial conservation area was restored and removed from Historic England's *Heritage at Risk Register* in 2019 (Historic England, 2019). As will be apparent in Chapter 6, the last decade of change in Neepsend is best observed through the Lefebvrian (1974/1991) lenses of *lived space* and *perceived space*. The increasing interest in Neepsend appears to owe something to Kelham Island's regeneration success. Though Neepsend had been envisioned by SCC as a prospective housing area since 2008, there has not yet been a significant scheme along Rutland Road to determine how the market would receive such schemes. From an orthodox economic perspective, whilst land remains available in an established location, it is logical to join that market instead of forging new ones. However, at a certain point, these opportunities dry up:

P5: *'I think Kelham's done. I just think Kelham's... overhyped... I think Neepsend's... a lot more exciting.'*

P1: *'...there's a lot happening in Kelham. It has got expensive... if you were to value a property there on a per foot basis, you know, it's well over £300 per foot now, which is very good.. a lot of landowners... obviously know that... you probably could get better value in Neepsend, but I would say that that's changing quite quickly.'*

During interviews, P5 implied that the flip side of Kelham's success was that it is now a completed project or saturated market, whereas Neepsend was ripe for development. In the domain of conceived space, parts of Neepsend considered out of scope in 2008 were included in the boundary in 2019 and deemed to have potential for housing development by 2022. This demonstrates the fluidity of spatial boundaries and the differing rates of change in Kelham and Neepsend. As discussed in Chapters 6 and 7, several interviewees hoped Neepsend would gain more momentum. The following section compares aerial depictions of land disuse in Neepsend on Google Maps with the conceptual zoning of Area One (SCC, 2022).

This activity provides context for understanding the backdrop against which the owners in Neepsend will make their decisions.

5.2.1 Zones of Differing Land Use Intensity

My research focused on understanding the lived experiences of owners and accessing their points of view when evaluating their sites. The discrepancy between how the land was currently being used (Fig. 5.1, Fig. 5.8) and official maps that represented idealised land use (Fig. 5.5, Fig. 5.6) meant that to identify property disuse in Neepsend, I first had to clarify if and how people were using the land, rather than making assumptions that land was being disused or misused. This section divides the map of Neepsend depicted in Fig. 5.1 into three zones. The boundaries of these three close-up screenshots were determined by arbitrarily dividing Fig. 5.1. into three from top to bottom. As will be explained, these areas, which I have labelled Zone 1 (Fig. 5.9), Zone 2 (Fig. 5.10), and Zone 3 (Fig 5.11) have distinct characteristics. These mini summaries allow readers to understand where and why specific parcels of set-aside land in Neepsend have attracted stakeholder attention. As will become apparent, embedding myself in the fieldwork location allowed me to *know* the places people referred to during interviews (Chapters 6 and 7) and appreciate their words' psychogeographic (Arnold, 2019) context. This provided the foundation for understanding why property is set-aside and the land-holding activities and motivations of 'embedded' owners (Jack & Anderson, 2002, p. 467; Chapter 7). To emphasise Chapter 5's foregrounding of *conceived space*, I begin with the space closest to Sheffield City Centre (Zone 1; Fig. 5.9) and end at Neepsend's periphery (Zone 3; Fig. 5.11).

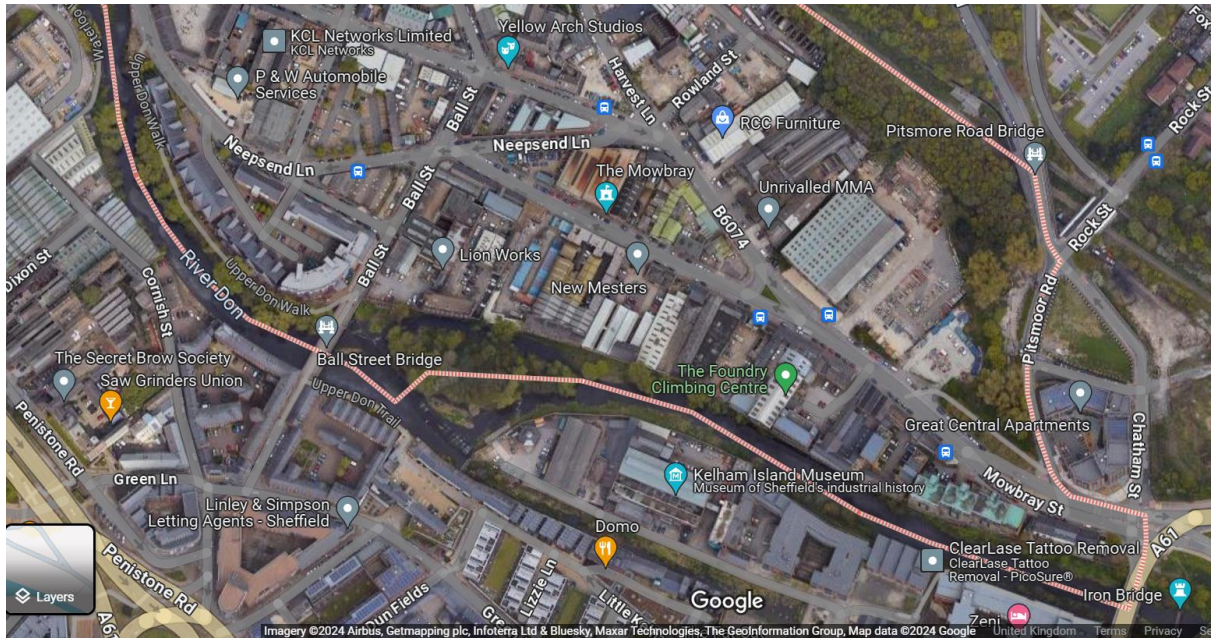


Figure 5.9 Zone 1: Southeast Neepsend. Ball Street Bridge crosses the River to Kelham Island. Google Maps, 04 04 2024.

Fig. 5.9 provides a close-up of Zone 1 of Neepsend. On pre-proposal planning maps, this area is considered as part of Sheffield city centre (SCC, 2013b). This area is joined to Kelham Island by the pedestrianised Ball Street Bridge (point 'C' on Fig. 5.2) and can be accessed on foot or by car via Mowbray Street (bottom right, Fig. 5.9). So far, housing corridors in Neepsend have been restricted to Zone One. These are clustered along the riverside, particularly around Mowbray Street and Neepsend Lane. On the map of Zone 1, outside the red boundary, are derelict land patches identified as set-aside during my fieldwork. One of these has subsequently received permission for housing. Along Mowbray Street, inside the boundary is the area set-aside land discussed in Chapter 5, Section 3.2. The years 2005-2015 were Kelham Island's boom years of change. The Kelham Island and Neepsend Community Association (KINCA, 2022) were formed in 2000. The Kelham Neepsend Action Plan 2008-2018 noted the presence of this small residential community in Kelham and the existence of 'a well-established business community in Neepsend' who had 'concerns over pressures from residential developers and the impact on land values/rents and potential conflict with traditional industry' (SCC, 2008, 4). I will return to the tensions between pre-existing industry and new residential accommodation in Chapter 6, as this was a concern of several

interviewees. For now, it is relevant to know that Kelham has a range of bars and restaurants and an increase in housing. This has led to Kelham being seen as an example of successful urban regeneration.



Figure 5.10 Zone 2: Central Neepsend. Google Maps, 04 04 2024. The Yellow Circle represents the 'Welcome' Sign.

Moving further from Sheffield Centre, Fig. 5.10 shows Zone 2 of Neepsend. On pre-proposal planning maps, this area is considered as part of Sheffield city centre (SCC, 2013b). Inside the boundary, the prominent site on Neepsend Lane and the small site on the corner of Hicks Street and Rutland Road are actively used as waste management facilities. As such, they were not recorded as part of my survey of disused property. In the triangle between Boyland Street, Rutland Road, and the boundary line of the Don is the former Cannon Brewery and a set-aside plot, which was the brewery's loading bay. Outside the red boundary are large set-aside plots along Penistone Road, which was once the Osborne Mushets factory. These sites appear as housing on the Area One (SCC, 2022) map (Fig. 5.6).

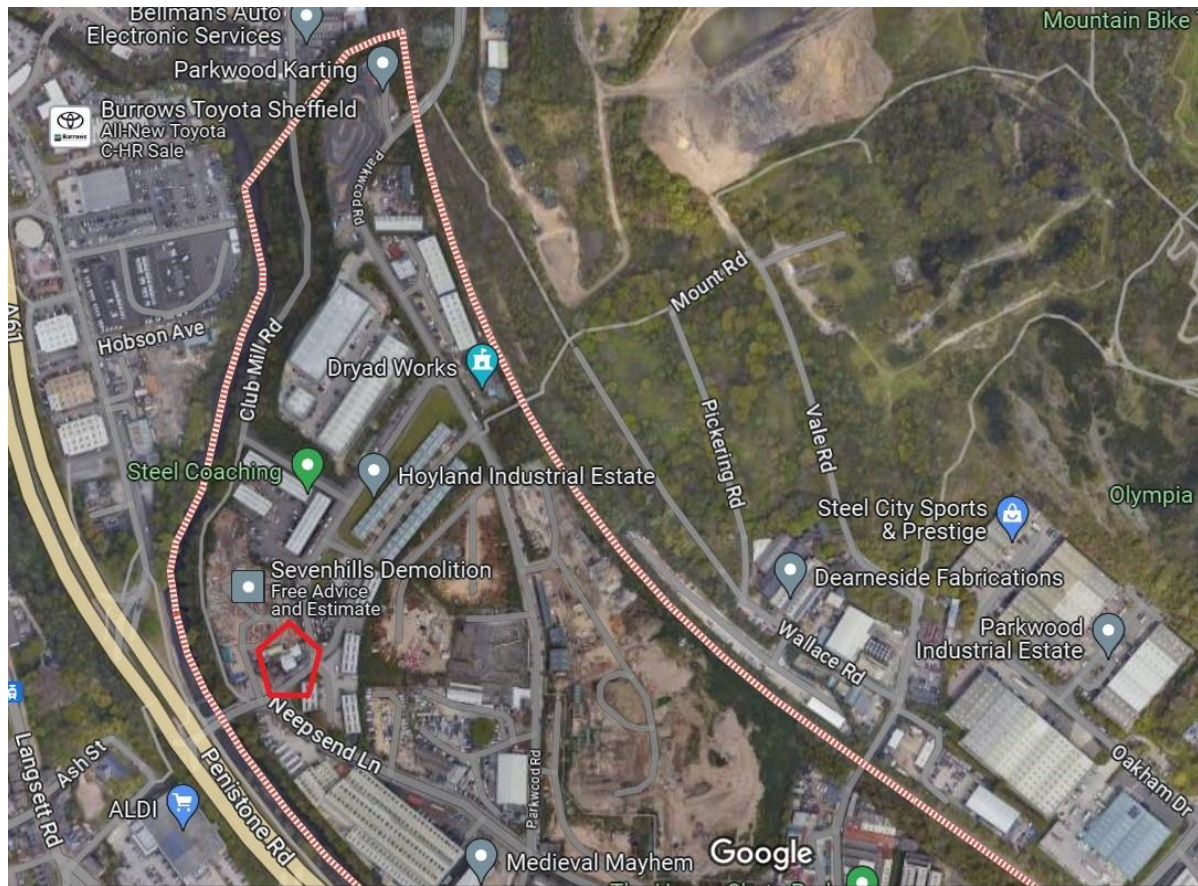


Figure 5.11 Zone 3: Northwest Neepsend. A red pentagram has marked Farfield Inn. Google Maps, 01 04 2024.

Unlike the areas in Zones 1 and 2, on pre-proposal planning maps, this area is not considered part of Sheffield city centre (SCC, 2013b) and is zoned as northwest Sheffield (SCC, 2013a). Zone 3 had significant portions of current and former industrial land. The map in Fig. 5.4 provides a clearer road layout map of this section of Neepsend. When using aerial view in Google Maps, we can see the large footprints in Fig. 5.11 on either side of Parkwood Road (see Fig 5.4), continuing the waste treatment centre built on the former Neepsend Gasworks (Fig 5.10). At the periphery of Neepsend sat the Farfield Inn, marked by a pentagon in Fig. 5.11. The plot directly behind the Farfield Inn was set-aside land but was subsequently occupied by a demolition company. At street level, Zone 3's character was visibly different from Zones 1 and 2:

P3: ‘...it depends which part of Neepsend you’re talking about. Historically, it’s been traditional industrial... [but] a lot of residential development... has taken place along the river. And a lot of the old industrial places have been converted... you’re starting to see that leisure bit creep that side of the [Rutland] road, aren’t you... there’s a couple of bars round there... And then

there's obviously the cleared site fronting Penistone Road where I think they're looking at residential.'

P3 had worked in Yorkshire's commercial property market for 13 years. Their perspective was that the boundary where Zone 2 and 3 meet was becoming increasingly relevant within the local property market:

P3: 'As I was alluding to... my colleague does residential development, and it's probably worth you speaking to him to understand how it [Neepsend] is moving... there's definitely still demand for the industrial accommodation down there. I mean, the demand for industrial is crazy at the minute; it's as high as it ever has been. But I think just naturally that area is becoming more and more established, and it's starting to creep that side of Rutland Road.'

The different characters of Zone 3 demonstrated another layer of *conceived space*, which is considered Neepsend, a workplace. P3 indicated that Neepsend had a substantial market for industrial workspaces. At the same time, a new *conceived space* meant that the area was being 'established' as a commercial zone. Though P3 worked as an industrial property specialist, they suggested I speak with a residential property colleague because there was a 'creeping' market interest in bringing residential usage further into Neepsend. Outside Zone 3's red boundary, at the top of Vale Road, is the set-aside land of the former Ski Village. P4, P5, P12, and P17 mentioned the prospect of the future regeneration of this site and the benefits it would have for Sheffield and Neepsend if this were achieved. However, others (P6, P10, and P14) expressed scepticism that the council would be able to revive the site. The following section summarises my fieldwork findings by establishing the differing land use contexts in Neepsend and the increasing commercial interest in set-aside properties around Rutland Road.

5.3 The Changing Logics of Set-aside Property

At the start of the project, in 2020, I identified all properties in Neepsend that appeared to have been set-aside. The original list had 22 properties, but repeat observations revealed that two were in active use. I had mistaken their visual condition as a sign of disuse. After removing these, the changes I observed by 2023 were analysed using the Utility Pyramid (Fig. 5.19). This model blends Thompson's Rubbish Theory (1979) and O'Callaghan's Heuristic of Vacancy (2023a) and helped

me conceptualise different categories and intensities of set-aside property. Table 5.1 demonstrates that these set-aside sites were not doing 'nothing'. Table 5.1 identifies *six distinct sub-categories* in the data, five of which relate to different intensities of use and disuse. This nuance supports the view that vacancy is 'an active and ongoing process' (O'Callaghan, 2023a, 8).

Table 5.1 Data Analysis Results: Status of 20 Neepsend Sites in August 2022. These sites were previously observed in Appendix J as being derelict or set-aside in 2020. Charlene Cross.

	Property	Location	Use in August 2023	Position on the Utility Pyramid 2023
Type 1: Fully renovated				
1	Derelict plot next to Farfield Inn	Neepsend Lane	Occupied architectural salvage yard	Durable
2	Radiac Works/ MPD Power	Neepsend Lane	Fully renovated and occupied	Durable
3	Small derelict plot	Burton Road	Fully renovated and occupied	Durable
4	Derelict plot	Pitsmoor Road, Chatham Street and Swinton Street	Housing development in progress	Transient Up
Type 2: Currently moving through the planning process				
5	Clarkson Osborn site	Penistone Road	Planning permission in progress	Transient Up
6	144 Neepsend Lane/ Neepsend Tavern	Neepsend Lane	Planning permission in progress	Transient Up
7	Cannon Brewery	Neepsend Lane/ Rutland Road/ Boyland Street	Land assembled. Planning permission in progress.	Transient Up
8	Derelict Brewery Loading Bay			
9	Derelict warehouse			
Type 3: Stranded in Time				
10	Former Farfield Inn	Neepsend Lane	Planning permission sought but denied	Maintain Vacancy
11	Ski Village	Vale Road	Discussed aspiration, no tangible progress	Maintain Vacancy
Type 4: Owned, No Rush				
12	Grade II listed house	Mowbray Street	P11 knows it is owned, owner has no intention to sell.	Maintain Vacancy
13	Former concrete plant	Mowbray Street	No visible change, HEELA states, is in multiple ownership	Rubbish
14	Former Sawmakers Arms	Harvest Lane	For sale since 2020 with a local estate agent. No rush to sell.	Maintain Vacancy
15	Stanley Tools	Rutland Road	HEELA and P16 know it is owned, unaware of current plans.	Transient (part occupied, part empty)
Type 5: On the Market/ Changing Ownership				
16	George Barnsley Factory	Cornish Street	Change in ownership in process/P1, P5, P16 aware it is currently for sale	Maintain Vacancy
17	Rutland House	Penistone Road	Change in ownership in process/local estate agent informed it was for sale.	Transient Up
18	0.05 hectares of land with disused building	Allen Street	For a one-year lease, P5 reports that the owner is seeking an assembly of neighbouring land to sell the plot for development.	Transient Up
Type 6: No Data				
19	Old Post Office	Neepsend Lane/ Rutland Road	Unknown	N/A
20	Former Britannica Inn	Harvest Lane	Unknown	N/A

We will return to this overview of the empirical findings and the implications of the Utility Pyramid in Section 5.4 (Fig. 5.19). First, I will demonstrate the nuances at play by considering the different actors and processes involved at the following sites: Clarkson Osborn (Zone 2, Type 2), the set-aside concrete plant (Zone 2, Type 4) and the Farfield Inn (Zone 3, Type 3).

5.3.1 Clarkson Osborn

Built in 1943, the Osborn Mushet Tools Building was named after Samuel Osborn (1826-1891) and Robert Mushet (1811-1891), the metallurgist who invented tungsten (Mushet's) Steel. As part of Sheffield's Steel industry, different phases of the building's property lifecycle have coincided with national and global economic change. According to Rhodes (2017), the UK was the world's fifth largest steel producer in the 1960s, but this declined to tenth during the 1980s. In 1967, the Iron and Steel Act nationalised the steel industry as the British Steel Corporation (BSC). In 1980, the Conservative government sought to make cuts at BSC, which triggered a fourteen-week national strike of steelworkers. By 1988, the industry was privatised. BSC became British Steel plc (Deans, 2016). As the UK steel industry declined, Mushets merged with similar businesses. Mushet's was renamed Presto Tools in the 1980s, then Hydra-Clarkson Tools (Johnson, 2010: 6). The site ceased production in 2007. The red line on the map in Fig. 12 (below) shows the Kelham Island Industrial Conservation area boundary (SCC, 2010). Outside this line, I have drawn a purple boundary around the Cannon Brewery (top) and the Mushets site (bottom). In 2008, SCC debated extending the boundary of the conservation area to include the Mushets factory because it was an art deco building. This was unsuccessful, and on the morning of 6 June 2010 (YouTube, 2010), the "White Building" was demolished.

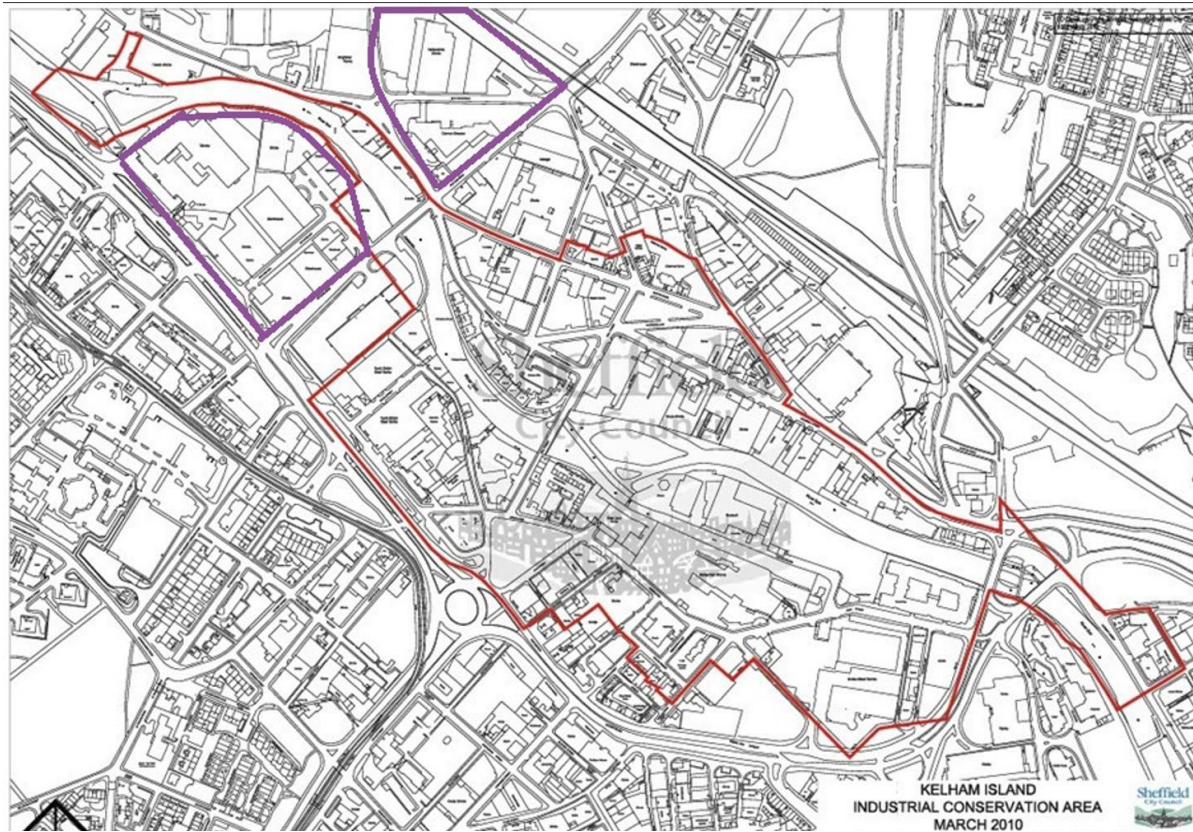


Figure 5.12 The red line shows the Kelham Island Conservation Area boundary (SCC, 2010). The Cannon Brewery and Mushet's sites (outlined in purple) fall outside this boundary.

As shown in Fig. 5.12, the red boundary of the Conservation Area (SCC, 2019) narrows at Rutland Road, deliberately excluding the Cannon Brewery and Mushet's plots (outlined in purple). When I commenced fieldwork, I struggled to establish the subsequent history of the cleared site because it was now a void space; official documents referred to the plot by different variations of its former names. The Cannon Brewery (Nathaniel Litchfield & Partners, 2013) and Mushets sites appear in SCC's Strategic land review (Nathaniel Litchfield & Partners, 2015). Reflecting its complex history of ownership changes, the Mushets site appeared in this document under the name 'Clarkson Osborne site, Penistone Road'. It was described as:

'1.51ha [hectares] of land surrounded by a mixture of B Class uses. All previous industrial buildings on the site have been demolished and the site cleared for redevelopment. As the site is located on the A61, strategic access is very good.'

The most recent source of information about the land came from the Sheffield Housing and Employment Land Availability Assessment (HELAA) maps

(ESRI, 2023). This Geographic Information System (GIS) map communicates key information about land parcels that SCC considers strategically important. Mushets appears on HELAA as 'S03222'; in 2022, S0322 was described as a 3.07-hectare site with the capacity to provide 572 housing units and *0 hectares* of employment use. Yet, as recently as October 2015 (Nathaniel Litchfield & Partners, 2015) this land was considered suitable for future employment use. This shows the flexibility of *conceived space*, as within relatively short time horizons (Raco, 2019), the dominant concepts regarding what to do with this land have changed.



Figure 5.13 The condition of site S03222/ Osborne Mushets on 18 05 2021. This image shows a tall building in the background corner of Penistone Road. Charlene Cross.

At present, the Mushets site is a visually unattractive void space. The ground is covered in rubble and fly-tipping, surrounded by tall metal fences (Fig. 5.13). Regarding activity, there were two visual changes at the site. In 2022, street artists used the hoardings along Penistone Road to create a SpongeBob SquarePants Mural (Street Art Sheffield, 2022). Shortly after, this was removed. Though my photo-walks were instructive in challenging *conceived space*, these visual impressions that conjure up 'dereliction' and the association with neglect (Fig. 5.13) were misleading. In March 2023, partially redacted documents relating to the site were added to the Sheffield Planning Portal. Though these documents only became public after my fieldwork, they had significance for my research questions. The 2019 documents demonstrated that a developer and the Council were undergoing

pre-planning dialogues about a potential 25-storey housing complex on this site, providing evidence that the site was not forgotten and abandoned. This provided evidence that substantial owner activity had occurred off-site during my repeat photography walks, though I could not see any changes (Fig. 5.13).

Though the Council is reviewing the Core Strategy, UDP, and Development Framework to reflect this new direction, the current rules will be followed until the old policy is replaced. This has significance for my fieldwork. The inclusion of the Mushets Site on the most recent Kelham-Neepsend neighbourhood map suggests that top-down planners are keen to encourage this 'creep' (P1, P3, P5) of residential usage further into Neepsend. When I revisited my interview transcripts with this new information, I considered how participants used partial information and personal connections to navigate the rhythms and flows of Neepsend's local property market. As previously noted, the future intended land use is housing, as shown on the Area One (SCC, 2022) map and in the HELAA data. During interviews in 2021, several participants were aware of this change of focus:

P13: 'It used to be the Osborn-Mushet Tool factory... it's a big site there... cleared for many years....one of the issues... if the developer wants really quite a big site for housing development. Then that [property] is one of them... nothing has been brought forward for formal planning permission yet... as far as I know, there is a developer that's got a definite interest and a plan for it. But nothing has been made public.'

Echoing P3's earlier comments, another property professional knew that 'They'll be looking at putting housing on there' (P5), but was reluctant to discuss this commercially sensitive site in more detail. As discussed in Chapter 7 (Section 2), P5's unwillingness to discuss the site is one example of how local actors working on the property valued their reputation. My suspicions that P5 had commercially sensitive knowledge of the scheme were confirmed with the release of the documents. The unavailability of documents before March 2023 highlights a barrier to conducting this type of research.

In summary, this section has demonstrated that a site's visual condition does not tell the whole story. The following section considers an empty plot of land

in Zone 1 that appears on the HELAA map (Fig. 5.14) and its neighbour, which, despite being an occupied and actively used property, also appears on the HELAA map.

5.3.2 Jewsons: Non-use and Under-Use on the HELAA Map

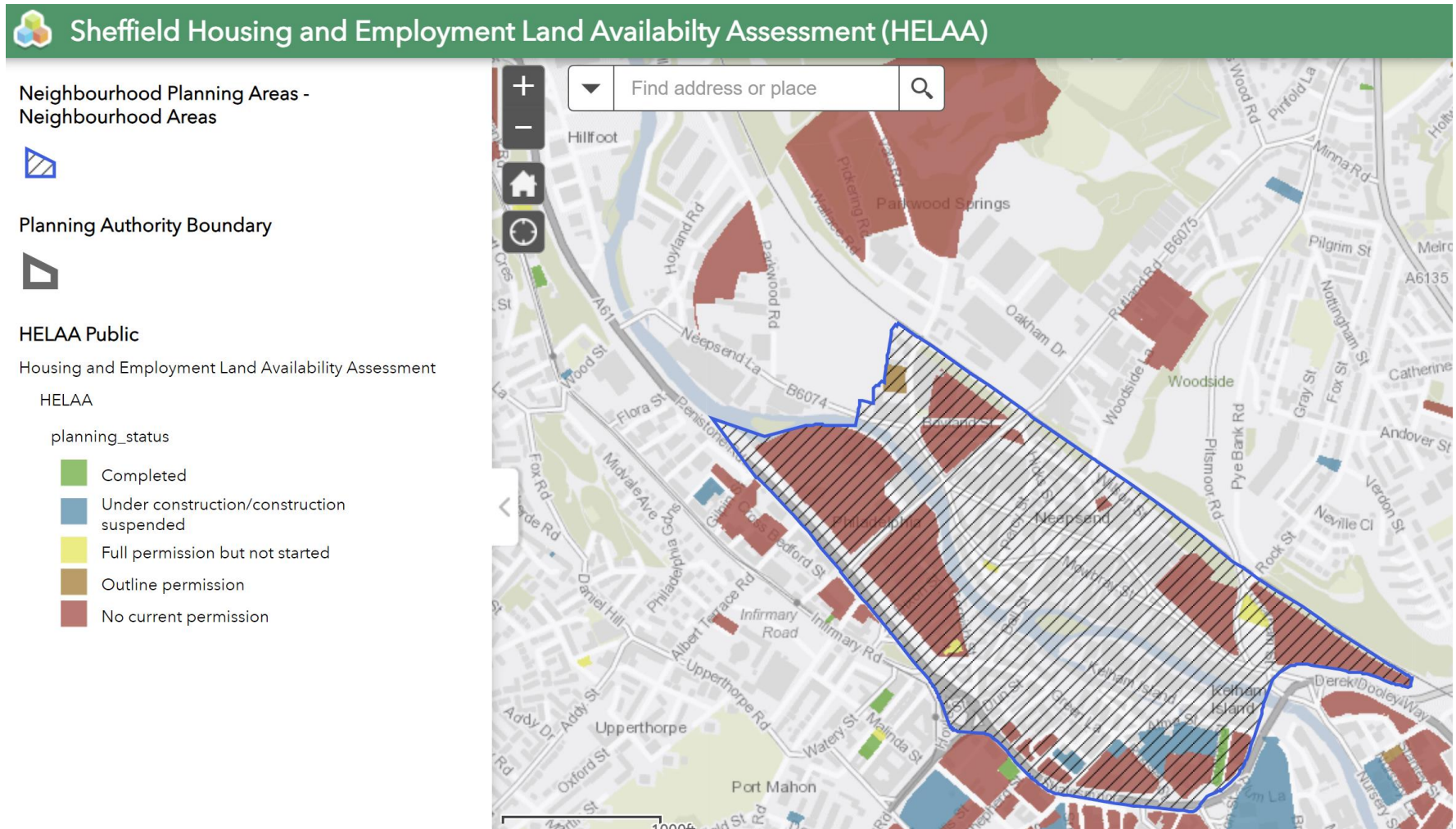


Figure 5.14 Screenshot of HELAA Map showing potential development sites in Neepsend. 06/06/2024.

Fig. 5.14 shows the latest HELAA map (ESRI, 2023) for the Kelham-Neepsend Neighbourhood. The boundary appears in dark blue. The map key shows that areas of land that have not received planning permission appear in red, including the Cannon Brewery and Mushets sites. Though there have been plans to redevelop Mushets since 2019, these are at the pre-planning stage and have yet to be officially submitted or approved. The yellow areas represent sites that have yet to commence development but have permission to proceed. The previous section demonstrated that:

- despite their appearances, set-aside sites have not been forgotten about
- activities to manage or transform them may occur off-site.

This section considers the discrepancy between a site's visual condition and how it is represented in official versions of *conceived space*. This is done by focusing on two neighbouring HELAA parcels (Fig. 5.14) that appear in red. Fig. 5.15 depicts a former concrete plant identified as set-aside during my fieldwork. This appears on HELAA as site S03238 and is estimated to be able to accommodate 45 new dwellings. Fig. 5.16 depicts the neighbouring property. During fieldwork, I did not identify it as set-aside land because it was in active use, but it is identified on the HELAA map as site S03239, capable of holding 60 homes.



Figure 5.15 Vacant land on Mowbray Street that corresponds to HELAA site S03238. 24 03 2021. Charlene Cross.



Figure 5.16 Actively occupied building. Corresponds to HELAA site S03239, Mowbray Street. Trees to the right separate this site from the former concrete works- HELAA site S03238- next door. 25/08/2021. Charlene Cross.

Because of its position leading into Sheffield City Centre, since 2008, Mowbray Street has been a popular location for new apartments. As discussed earlier, housing development has been permitted in Zone 1 of Neepsend for several years, and this has yet to extend into Neepsend Zone 2. The data analysis revealed a tension between the desire to preserve industrial uses in Neepsend and the desire to encourage leisure, retail and residential use. In this chapter, the actors who engage with maps and *conceived space* have tended to be people who work in town planning or the property industry. P15 expressed the town-planning logic behind HELAA:

P15: ‘...you can package land together. Which we’ve done at Attercliffe... [three parties] all owned land, which individually **was pretty rubbish**... one... didn’t have access, but was quite flat and level. One had **sitting tenants but very rundown commercial buildings. So they’re in decline**... one bit has **the dirty bit of the canal** that needs a bridge over it... **they all kind of fit together. Collectively, it’s a massive opportunity.**’ [Emphasis Added].

P16’s use of the words ‘rubbish’ and ‘in decline’ to describe a parcel like Jewsons suggests a town-planning desire to skip over the ‘transient rising’ phase and straight into ‘durable’ (Thompson, 1979). Units like Jewsons were not seen as ‘rubbish’ by their occupants. P20 rents a unit in Zone 2. Following rent increases, P20 explained that his unit was ‘dodgy’ and that one at Hillfoot Industrial Estate (Zone 3) would be a better quality property at the same price. However:

P20: ‘The roof... leaks... it’s very dodgy and cold... not insulated or anything... **[but] now I’ve built this... I’m definitely staying here for at least another two-three years.**’ [Emphasis added].

Though an orthodox economic approach (Tinghög, 2023) would favour a move to the Zone 3 unit, P20 has invested in Zone 2 financially, *socially, and emotionally*. This is in keeping with a *Homo heuristicus* (Tinghög, 2023) approach to making decisions about one's business, where the qualitative benefits of the location, such as the community and previously invested effort as well as capital, are deemed significant enough to take the financial hit of a rent increase for a poorer quality building. Chapter 7 will explore these emotional and social dynamics, also known as 'heterodox' economic behaviours (Mearman, 2012) as they add another layer to our understanding of owners' motivations in a so-called underutilised area like Neepsend. As previously noted in the 2008-2018 *Kelham Neepsend Neighbourhood document* (SCC, 2008), one of the concerns of Kelham-Neepsend's locals was the loss of active premises to property development. This prospect was a key concern of several participants:

P17: '...one of the big problems our business suffers, ... the dirty workshop work, there isn't a lot of actual space available to, to rent, not smaller spaces. You can get big warehouses, but you can't get smaller units.... And this is really vital space for us. Because we can't find it anywhere else. Not with the same sort of interaction that you get with cafes, restaurants, and other businesses. If we wanted a space like this... we'd end up on an industrial estate.'

P14: '... we set up there [in Neepsend] because the rent is cheap... To get a similar price... you're going to have to go out to places like Deepcar, which is miles and miles out of the city centre... there will pressure of course upon workshops because people will be displaced, the landlord will increase rent. It's really an issue... but little will be said, and little will be thought of. And this is going to happen. And this is people's livelihoods.'

Several occupants were worried that more residential use would encourage the owner to evict them and sell their land for residential use. They cited examples where this had occurred in Kelham Island. A key finding was that it was not just void spaces and set-aside properties that stakeholders were concerned about:

P11: '[Neepsend is the] old industrial part of Sheffield, isn't it? It's being developed into a residential area with some modern-type bars and restaurants there. It's still not all there though, is it? Still got some, you know, like the Lion Works, and stuff like that which needs to be developed.... I think when that's all done, it'll look quite nice... where the cement works used to be [S03238, Fig 15], that needs to be developed. And if Jewson's

[S03239, Fig 16] left as well and that got developed, that would be really nice.'

This quote reflects an orthodox economic approach (Tinghög et al., 2023). Echoing P15, the best use of the land would be to combine the two parcels to maximise the footprint for a higher-intensity use. This belief was shared by a local architect (P1) and two developers (P8, P16). P8 commented that his home building company had considered buying the site, but the plots were in split ownership. Evidence suggests the set-aside concrete plot is in an appealing location, but a prospective buyer would want it as part of a larger parcel that includes the active, neighbouring site.

The maps in Fig 5.5 (SCC, 2008) and Fig. 5.6 (SCC, 2022) are council-created abstractions that show a potential reality for Neepsend, and the HELAA map (Fig. 5.14) is a council-managed tool to assist prospective developers. Yet, on the ground, none of the occupants I spoke with wanted to leave Neepsend and move to 'out of town on motorway locations' (P3). This is significant for understanding the positionality of owners of set-aside property in Neepsend. For small businesses to continue, these occupiers need their landlord to decide to keep the rent affordable and keep these spaces "underutilised" and operating as workspaces rather than selling their land for housing.

I have focused on examples from one organisation, SCC, to demonstrate that *conceived space* is not rigid. SCC produced maps representing different conceptual versions of Neepsend between 2008 and the present day. At this point, explaining that other actors bring their versions of *conceived space* to the table in a discussion is pertinent. The city vision proposed in Area One (SCC, 2022; Fig. 5.6) is achievable if owners comply. If owners adhere to a *conceived space* that believes industrial areas near cities *should not* be maximised for housing and choose *not to sell*, SCC will redraw the parameters of their maps to reflect a new vision. Owners' ability to resist top-down spatial visions for their sites demonstrates that *conceived space* alone can only provide a third of the story. The weakness of *conceived space* to explain reality is evident at Woodside (Fig. 5.5), the area of Neepsend where homes have not materialised despite SCC envisioning it as housing since 2008. In

anticipation of Chapter 6, where multiple stakeholders' perspectives will be considered, the following section demonstrates how different versions of *conceived space* have clashed and left one property stranded in time.

5.3.3 The Farfield Inn

The Farfield Inn is situated by Hillfoot Bridge (bridge A in Fig 5.1) at the far end of Zone 3 (Figs. 5.2 & 5.11). Hillfoot Bridge is visible on the HELAA map (Fig. 5.14) and falls outside the blue line on the HELAA map that demarks the Neepsend neighbourhood boundary (ESRI, 2023). As previously discussed, though it is called Neepsend, Zone 3 (SCC, 2013a) is considered outside the boundary of Sheffield City Centre (SCC, 2013b). As this space falls outside of the boundary (Fig. 5.6, Fig. 5.12) Zone 3 is not a current development priority area for SCC. The Farfield Inn is nestled between an architectural salvage yard, a gym, and a garage. P13 recalled the pub being open in the early 1990s, but it was damaged during the 2007 floods (Fig. 5.17) and has remained closed ever since. The following timeline (Fig. 5.17) provides an overview of key moments in the building's lifecycle (Harris, 1999):

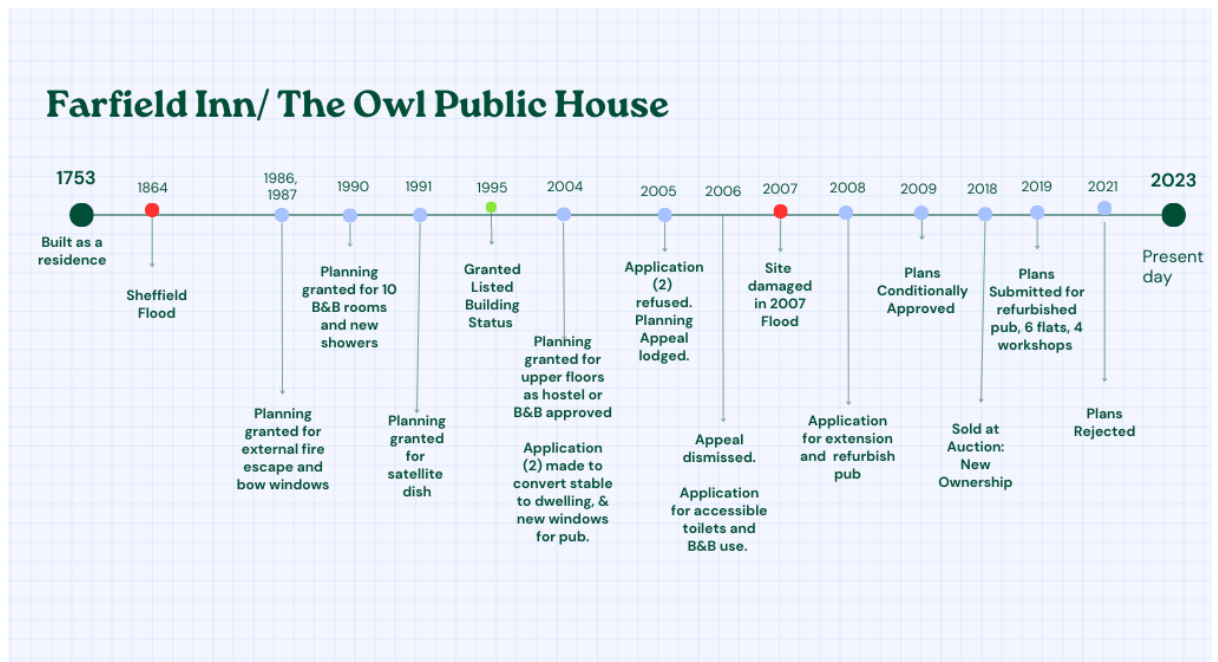


Figure 5.17 Timeline of Farfield Inn. Produced by Charlene Cross using Canva, August 2023.



Figure 5.18 My first photograph of the Farfield Inn. 06/11/2020.. Charlene Cross.

This section considers how three different types of *conceived space* clashed during a recent attempt to revive the building. The three competing perspectives can be summarised as follows:

- Heritage bodies: bring a historic site back to life, ideally as its original use (a pub)
- Local Authority: uphold SCC's planning rules for appropriate development at:
 - Listed buildings
 - Industrial areas
- Owners intention: a mixed-use scheme (pub, workshops, residential).

In 2018, Farfield Inn sold for £250,000 at an auction. The final bid was much higher than anticipated. According to the auctioneer, though the Farfield Inn is geographically at the very periphery of Neepsend, in Zone 3:

"I think there was much interest because there's so much happening in the area, especially with the plans to regenerate the Ski Village site. It may be a while before the buzz around Kelham Island will spread that far, but this is a landmark building with the opportunity for residential upstairs and some sort of commercial use downstairs." (The Star, 2018a).

This quote suggests prospective owners buy set-aside property in anticipation of future development booms. In addition, the auctioneer expressed the development logic: a site like this could accommodate residential and succeed if it embraced mixed-use. However, when the new owner submitted plans to bring

the site back into use as a pub with workshops and flats upstairs, these plans were rejected in 2021.

To understand why the plans were rejected, we need a brief overview of the local policies that govern planning decisions in Sheffield. When planning officials review an application, the highest priority decision-making tool is the *SCC Core Strategy 2009-2026*. This provides a macro view of Sheffield as a whole. The *SCC Unitary Development Plan [UDP]* is the second highest priority decision-making tool. This also provides a macro view and dates from 1998. SCC's website links to the original document but also contains a list of policies that have been superseded and no longer apply. Next, area-based details sit underneath these two policies. The *SCC City Sites Development Framework Maps (2013)* contain a set of 8 maps that show land use zones. These are broadly colour-coded, and where a site sits on these maps (e.g. if a site is situated next to warehouses, it may be likely to get permission for new warehousing only) is used when planners make decisions. Because these sources are pretty dated (SCC, 2013a; SCC, 2013b), one of the critical data points I used to understand the changing pace of *conceived space* in Neepsend was the HELAA map (Fig. 5.14). Though this map is informative in showing the sites SCC deem suitable for redevelopment, HELAA is not used to make planning decisions and, therefore, does not have any effect on official planning outcomes.

When the new owner submitted their plans for the Farfield Inn in 2019, two conservation officers at SCC selected the Farfield Inn as part of their '20 by 2020' campaign (The Star, 2019). When discussing this scheme, a Cabinet member for development at SCC was quoted as stating:

'We don't want to name and shame owners – but we want 2019 to be the year when we ask that they work with us to get these buildings back into use.' (Williams, 2019).

A key finding in my data, as will be reported in Chapter 7, was that participants who worked in development reported that SCC's planning guidelines can be confusing for developers, and that establishing a good working relationship with colleagues in the council was professionally beneficial.

Regarding the workings of SCC, during interviews, several participants remarked that cuts at the Council had had a negative impact on Neepsend and that the hours SCC have allocated for the role of conservation officer- the posts that are most likely to have the professional experience to oversee and implement the '20 by 2020' (P7) scheme- had been reduced by 75%. Though the quote from Williams' article (2019) suggests that SCC were interested in seeing Farfield Inn revived, the article does not give any indication of what format would have been acceptable to bring this site 'back into use'. To answer the question of why some buildings stay vacant whilst others regenerate (Guy & Henneberry, 2002, 176) in the case of the Farfield Inn, this site appears to be stuck because the owner's vision, and the timing of their proposal, did not align with SCC's expectations for this site, at this location, at this point in time.

The proposal for the Farfield Inn that was submitted in 2019 and rejected in 2021 reflected the expectations the auctioneer (The Star, 2018a) had of the site:

'Alterations to and refurbishment of Public House, formation of 6 flats on first and second floor, use of existing outbuilding as a workshop and erection of a two-storey building to form 2 workshops (Use Class B1)' (19/00626/LBC).

The Planning Officers Report, which informs the decision to accept or reject a planning application, listed the proposed design against a series of policies, and evaluated whether each of the three areas of the proposed design (residential, pub, and workshop) satisfied or contravened these policy guidelines. Though heritage bodies often argue in favour of the original use, the Report stated that the Farfield Inn's permission to operate as a pub had expired whilst the building stood dormant:

'The building has been derelict since 2007. The previous use as a Public House has ceased given the significant period of time that has elapsed since its last use. The previous use is considered to have been abandoned in planning terms. Planning permission is therefore required to re-use the building as a Public House and for any other use.' (19/00626/LBC, p. 4).

Though a new owner took over the site in 2018, the use of 'abandoned' to describe the period when the site was unoccupied is reminiscent of narratives that see closed factories as the 'debris of global capitalism, [and] neoliberalism' (Martin,

2014, 1037). Although the heritage bodies appeared satisfied with the proposals (P7), Listed Building Consent was refused for having insufficient information about: 'the level of harm to the heritage asset' (19/00626/LBC). The Officers Report was against residential use at the Farfield Inn because it was too close to active industry, but considered the possibility of allowing this use in the future. Sound mitigation for the adjacent industrial uses was suggested because:

'in recent years, social and business activity has spread from Kelham Island into this part of Neepsend... most notably with the opening of the Cutlery Works. With this has come developer interest for residential accommodation on the former Cannon Brewery site and the large vacant site at the corner of Rutland Road and Penistone Road.' (19/00626/LBC).

These comments indicate a future change in direction, which matches the vision set out by SCC's map of Area One (2022) and will be discussed in Chapter 6. Despite musing on the practicalities and demands of changing the use for housing, the officers report ultimately determined that residential use was not appropriate at this location at this point in time. Because the Farfield Inn is situated near the former Neepsend gasworks, which is now the site of a waste treatment centre, legally the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) must be consulted when new development occurs within a certain radius of this site as part of the planning process. This process brought to light a legal complexity, and showed how the lingering past usage of an adjacent site was having an effect on the Farfield Inn's current and future use. Although the last gasometer was removed five years earlier:

'The gas holder would have received either planning permission or a form of deemed consent at the time of its installation, and that permission/deemed consent remains live unless a revocation order has been granted by the Secretary of State. Whilst the site of the gas holder might now be redundant... the HSE consider there to be sufficient reasons, on safety grounds, to advise against the granting of planning permission in this case. As the permission/deemed consent remains live, the gas holder could be reintroduced at any point until a revocation order has been granted to revoke the consent.' (19/00626/LBC, p. 14).

It appears that the legal rights of an owner without direct association with the Farfield Inn have created an obstacle to restoring this set-aside property. This

extract is informative because it shows that SCC is unwilling to sanction a new development if it infringes upon the property rights of a third party. Even if the legal owner is not using their deemed consent, it is legally valid and must be respected until the owner or a government official revokes it. In summary, several complicated reasons explain why the Farfield Inn was refused planning permission and remains unoccupied today. Having presented three stories behind the dataset in Table 5.1, the following section returns to the literature to discuss the significance of these findings.

5.4 Theoretical Discussion

Despite my endeavours to identify ‘Rubbish’ (Thompson, 1979) property, a key finding was that I did not find “nothingness” in Neepsend. The questions I set out to address (RQ1) and my means of investigation (O1) had subconsciously reflected top-down conceptualisations of land use and utility. Driven by these preconceptions of space, I anticipated that the buildings I encountered would be one of the following categories:

- A. not being used at all
- B. being used correctly, at maximum/optimal utility.
- C. being misused at minimal/suboptimal utility.

During my repeated observations, based on looks alone, only three of the original twenty sites (Type 1, Table 5.1) *appeared* to have changed. Though two sites remained a mystery (sites 19 and 20 in Table 5.1), I found evidence that a derelict appearance concealed a complex story in most cases. During my repeat visits, I realised I had mistaken two Category C sites (buildings 3 and 16, Appendix J) for Category A sites. This happened because I *thought they looked neglected*. As a result, I questioned the narratives that I had previously accepted. The following section focuses on my findings regarding Category A properties. The five types of change I observed at Category A properties in Neepsend, as summarised in Table 5.1, were:

- 1) Full renovation
- 2) Currently moving through the planning process
- 3) Stranded in Time
- 4) Owned, No Rush

5) On the Market/ Changing Ownership

The diagram below (Fig. 5.19) reintroduces the Utility Pyramid (See Chapter 4), which overlaps two pre-existing theories (Thompson, 1979; O’Callaghan, 2023a). This model was used to compile the data in Table 5.1. The blue areas on this diagram relate to periods of the building lifecycle that correspond to the research gap that RQ1 and O1 set out to address.

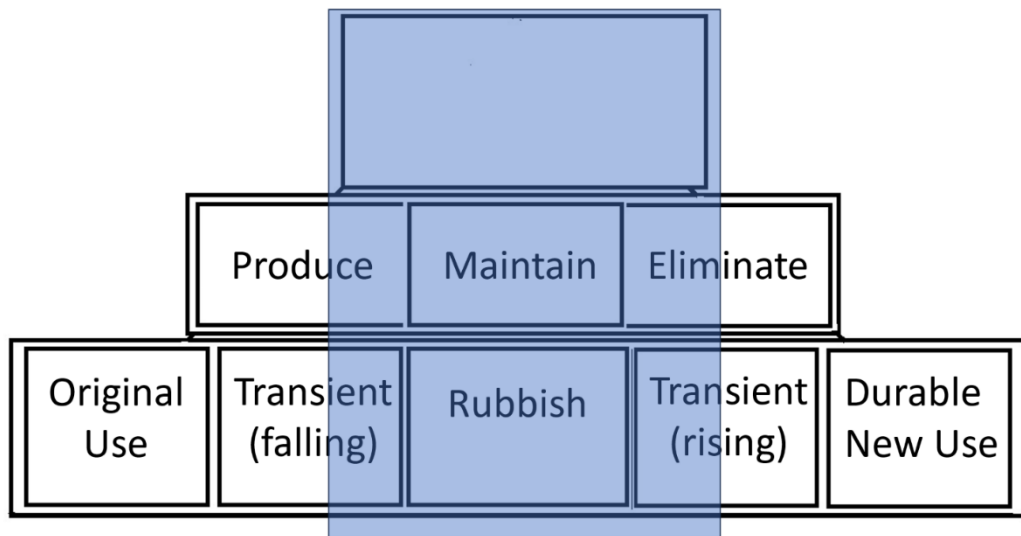


Figure 5.19 The ‘Utility Pyramid’ that combines Gibbeson’s (2018) adaptation of Rubbish Theory (Thompson, 1979) on the bottom row and O’Callaghan’s (2023a) Three lenses of Vacancy (middle). Charlene Cross.

If we return to the data Table 5.1, the right column represents the position of each building on the Utility Pyramid as of August 2023. Type 1 properties have moved away from the blue area, beyond O’Callaghan’s (2023a) heuristic and into Thompson’s (1979) durable category, as the vacancy had *been eliminated*. If we compare the blue area to Table 5.1, the most frequent categories were Thompson’s (2017, 26) concept of ‘transient rising’ and O’Callaghan’s (2023a, 1) concept of ‘maintaining vacancy’. The following discussion uses O’Callaghan’s work to interpret my findings.

O’Callaghan (2023a) states vacancy can be produced, maintained, or eliminated. My map-based approach to Neepsend in Sections 5.2 and 5.3 complements O’Callaghan’s (2023a, 14) call ‘for interrogating vacancy within an

area-based context... [that] layer[s] information about case sites'. When viewed chronologically, the maps produced by SCC tell a story about the pace of change in Neepsend. This is significant because O'Callaghan (2023a, 13) argues that maintaining vacancy is closely linked to 'political-economic tensions between use value and exchange value'. These tensions were evident in the discussion of the Jewson building (Fig. 5.16) appearing on SCC's HELAA map (Fig. 5.14). During interviews, older buildings like Jewsons, whether occupied or not, tended to invite three broad arguments. First, they were no longer fit for purpose and required modernisation (P1; P3; P8; P11; P15; P16). Second, Neepsend's workshops and subdivided units offered cheap rent and a sense of community and were essential spaces (Ball & Pratt, 1994) for small businesses (P4; P6; P7; P12; P14; P18; P19; P20). Third, some respondents fell into both camps. They appreciated Neepsend in its current condition but believed that Sheffield needed to invest and modernise to avoid getting 'left behind' (P10) other cities (P2A, P2B, P2C, P2D, P5; P9; P10; P13; P17; P21; P22).

The data chapters have been structured to reflect the three aspects of Lefebvre's *Spatial Triad* (1974/1991). In using 'conceived space' (Lefebvre, 1974/1991) to provide an overview of Neepsend's built environment, it was evident that the maps produced by SCC did not fully reflect the realities of Neepsend I encountered on foot. Though *conceived space* is the realm of abstract representations, city visions have a material consequence when seeking to bring back set-aside property. This can be beneficial if the vision aligns with the councils' plans, as seen at Mushets, or detrimental, as seen in the case of the Farfield Inn, where multiple versions of *conceived space* clashed and prevented progress. O'Callaghan (2023a, 12-13, italics in original) suggests that 'development failure can pose questions about how urban policy and planning systems *produce conditions for vacancy*, rather than vacancy *indicating their failure*'. This was evident in the rejection of plans at the Farfield Inn. Rather than shedding light on the owner's role, this rejection was more informative about the legal-geographical conflict between 'property rights and vacancy' (O'Callaghan, 2023a, 13). As O'Callaghan (2023a, 13) states 'we can conceive of "vacancy" as the *right to leave property unused*'. This

was apparent when I encountered the protection of owners gas rights at the defunct gasworks. Because the Farfield Inn has stood empty since 2007, I initially considered it to be stuck in a period of *maintaining vacancy*. However, from 2018, when a new owner took control of the building, it could be argued that the circumstances surrounding the Farfield Inn's planning rejection have *produced a new vacancy cycle*.

Given that actively occupied warehouses and workshops appeared on the HELAA map alongside inactive sites, this thesis questioned whether 'vacancy' was the core concern. The study expanded its focus to incorporate this frequently encountered notion of '*under-utility*'. The Utility Pyramid (Fig. 5.19) was a helpful tool to draw attention to the different intensities of use that are covered by the shaded blue area, which helped in the interpretation of this unexpected finding. To understand the significance of under-utility in a place like Neepsend, the set-aside properties identified in Appendix J were reassessed and represented in Table 5.1. An additional column was added to the data presented in Table 5.1, which estimated where on the Utility Pyramid these 20 set-aside properties were in their property lifecycles as of August 2023, compared with where they were in December 2020. The majority of the sites seemed to be in 'maintaining vacancy' (O'Callaghan, 2023a, 1) or 'transient up' (Gibbeson, 2018, 54; see diagram in Chapter 4, Fig 4.6). This is significant because these are both active, dynamic phases, which challenge the stereotype that set-aside properties are static 'rubbish' (Thompson, 2017, 26) that has been left unattended to.

As previously noted, in most cases, the site's appearances were deceptive. Most sites in Appendix K and Table 5.1 *did not look any different* at the start and the end of data collection. This was evident in the visual appearance of the Mushets site (Fig 5.13), the empty plot of the former concrete works on Mowbray Street (Fig. 5.15) and the condition of the Farfield Inn (5.18). The histories of these buildings were investigated by engaging in constant comparison (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Hallberg, 2006) with earlier and later photographs, the content of the semi-structured interviews, SSC's official maps and masterplans, and recent planning records. This revealed that *much activity relating to these sites was occurring off-*

site. Therefore, site use (or disuse) cannot be judged only by what is visible on-site.

My findings were consistent with O’Callaghan’s (2023a, 14) call for:

‘detailed qualitative research on case sites... [to] identify and analyze the strategies market actors use to manage vacant land and property by making it (in)visible at different stages in planning and development temporalities’.

O’Callaghan’s (2023a) notion of temporal (in)visibility as a development strategy was present within Neepsend when redevelopment plans at Mushets were kept secret from the public between 2019 and 2023. Though the project’s commercial sensitivity can explain this, the owner’s need to keep quiet about the proposed change adds weight to the argument that set-aside property is a desirable commodity that may prove ‘profitable’ in a ‘volatile land market’ (Christophers, 2018, 303). Building upon this, Chapter 6 will examine another site, the Cannon Brewery, in greater detail to explore set-aside properties not as signs of inactivity and failure but as sites of invisible or hidden activity.

5.5 Conceiving Space as an Ecosystem

The next chapter seeks to get closer to people’s actions and what *they do* by foregrounding *perceived space*. This aspect of the *Spatial Triad* (Lefebvre, 1974/1991) is closely related to *Rhythmanalysis* (Lefebvre, 1992). As outlined in Chapter 4, this theory is a tool that conceptualises space as a series of flows of information, people, and activities. (Lefebvre, 1967; Kofman & Lebas, 2006, p. 7). In foregrounding *conceived space* (Lefebvre, 1974/1991), Chapter 5 began by mapping Neepsend’s environment before considering how it was used by different actors. This place-person relationship has been theorised as the relationship between ecosystems and organisms. A visualisation is depicted in Henneberry & Parris’ (2013, 232) ‘project ecologies’ model in Fig. 5.20:

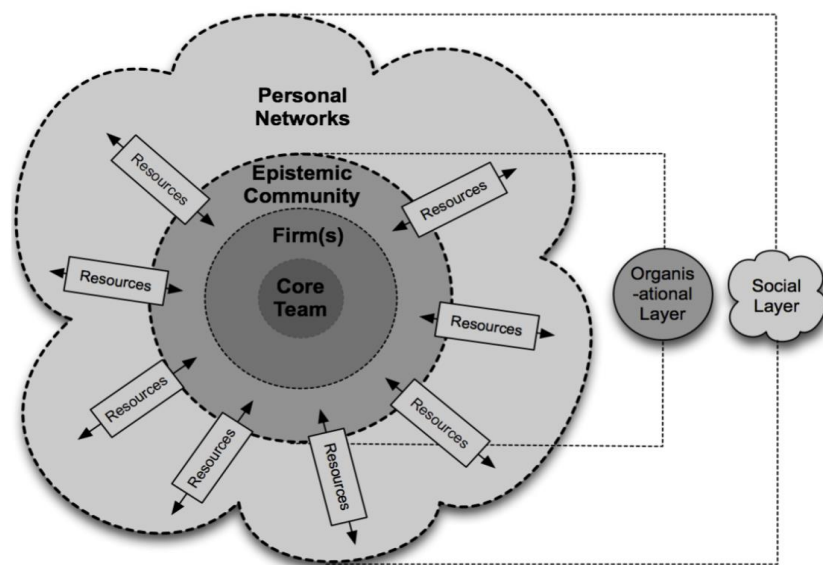


Figure 1 The project ecology
Source: The authors

Figure 5.20 Project Ecologies by Henneberry & Parris (2013, p. 232). Liverpool University Press.

The image in Fig 5.20 was introduced in Chapter 4 as a way of visualising *Rhythmanalysis* (Lefebvre, 1992) as an analytical tool. When taken as a whole, Neepsend can be thought of as one big development project ecology. This interplay of different elements was apparent during my repeat photography walks. After identifying the buildings in Appendix J/Table 5.1, I became aware that the future of these buildings depended on a wider ecosystem. Rather than representing neglect, their current condition was not solely dictated by the owner's plans. This became apparent when consulting secondary sources, such as in the case of the Farfield Inn. Citing Gore & Nicholson (1991), Engwall (2003) and Söderlund (2004), Henneberry & Parris (2013, 231) argued that:

'If projects are 'conceptualised as contextually embedded open systems, open in time as well as space' (Engwall, 2003, 790), then one may understand how a project is structured by its organisational context and how it can shape that context. Projects and project actors are interdependent. Local personal relations and corporate networks underpin them.'

This quote elegantly verbalises why the interplay between people, place, property and time became crucial to my study. Though I struggled to put it into words, I could see these symbiotic "shaping-and-shaped by" relationships in the

data. For Chapter 5, this could be described as seeing how Neepsend (a place) shaped the set-aside properties in Table 5.1 and how these *properties* contributed to the changing character of Neepsend. As Fig. 5.20 (Henneberry & Parris, 2013, 232) and the *Spatial Triad* (Lefebvre, 1974/1991) demonstrate, there are multiple layers of these symbiotic layers. We must avoid thinking of set-aside properties as “lonely project[s]” ... independent of history, contemporary context and [the] future’ (Engwall, 2003, 790).

5.5 Summarising Conceived Space

In summary, my key finding was that there was no “nothingness” in Neepsend. To address O1, Table 5.1 collated 20 set-aside sites and observed them for two years. Though only three sites demonstrated visible change, research established that sites such as the Farfield Inn and the cleared land on Penistone Road, though *seemingly* abandoned, had current owners. In addition, these properties had been subject to offsite, hidden activity. These findings challenge readers to reconsider their first impressions of PDL. To address RQ1 and O2, these buildings were considered in their local context. Using interviews, planning documents and maps, I established that ‘Neepsend’ was a fluid concept with changing boundaries. Neepsend could be spatially divided into three Zones with different intensities of land use. When discussing Neepsend, interviewees tended to focus on Zones 1 and 2, closer to Sheffield City Centre and Kelham Island, and to forget about the more peripheral, industrial Zone 3. One of these Zone 2 properties was the Cannon Brewery. Aside from the addition of graffiti, increasing water damage, and new vegetation growing through the bricks, this property looked similar between 2020 and 2022. The next chapter investigates the ‘unseen’ processes ‘hidden’ when one categories land as ‘set-aside’ or ‘derelict’ (RQ1) by focusing on the set-aside period at the Cannon Brewery.

Chapter 6: The Rhythm of Neepsend: Sounds within Silence

6.1 Introduction

This chapter foregrounds *perceived space*, the domain of Lefebvre's (1974/1991) *Spatial Triad* that concerns day-to-day action and how actors move through space. Chapter 6's longitudinal approach focuses on how one owner used and managed a *seemingly inactive* building over 20 years, before selling it to a developer in 2022. By focusing on *what people do* with set-aside property, I challenge negative narratives of dormancy and neglect by demonstrating that *vacancy can be active* and passive (Christophers, 2018; O'Callaghan, 2023a). Though previous studies have researched the activities that produce or eliminate vacancy (O'Callaghan, 2023a), limited attention (Amato, 2021) has been given to the "silent" period in between. To address this deficit, Chapter 6 addresses the following:

- **RQ1.** What dynamic processes can be found within seemingly set-aside or derelict sites?
- **RQ2.** What are the owner and occupier logics behind low-intensity property use?
- **O1:** Through empirical research, identify 'seemingly un-utilised' or 'derelict' properties within a low-intensity area and investigate these properties' 'building life cycles'.
- **O2:** Investigate owner and occupier perceptions of site use through in-depth qualitative interviews.

The data is presented in three sections. The first focuses on the property management activities of the owners during the twenty-year period when the Cannon Brewery *appeared* dormant. I had hoped to speak directly with the owners, but they did not respond to my requests for an interview. This presents a limitation to the data, as speaking directly with the owners was not possible. Secondary data was available in newspaper interviews and planning documents, but there are limitations to comments attributed to the owners because these have been

reframed through the wording of a third party. In this thesis, the owners have been given the pseudonym 'Family Company' (Appendix F). To compensate for the lack of direct owner commentary, interview data from another participant with experience in managing set-aside factories has been used to illustrate the emotional labour of owning and managing derelict properties. Second-hand accounts of the Family Company's activities as perceived and interpreted by their neighbours have been used to demonstrate that some owner activities are not apparent to onlookers because they occur off site (Chapter 5).

The first section argues that the owners put the Cannon Brewery to different *use intensities* between 2002 and 2022. To address RQ1 and RQ2, I differentiated between these owner activities by adopting the labels of the Utility Pyramid. This theoretical model combines the five phases of Rubbish Theory (Thompson, 1979; Gibbeson, 2018) and O'Callaghan's (2023a) three phases of vacancy. As asserted in Chapter 4, *perceived space* overlaps with Lefebvre's (1992) sister concept, *Rhythmanalysis*. The second section considers the impact of Cannon Brewery's dormancy upon local change and the corresponding impact (Henneberry & Parris, 2013) these local changes have had on the Cannon Brewery site. Between 2002 and 2022, the character of Neepsend changed, and several derelict, formerly industrial buildings close to Cannon Brewery were refurbished and reoccupied. This context avoids the lonely building fallacy (Engwall, 2003) and provides essential context for understanding Cannon Brewery's different phases of "dormancy". The third section addresses O3 by considering the layered reasons why the Cannon Brewery was sold in 2022, having become an attractive prospect for redevelopment at this particular moment in time. Drawing on interviews with a South Yorkshire Mayoral Combined Authority (SYMCA) representative and materials produced by the new owners, Capital & Centric (C&C), this section considers the role of the set-aside *property pipeline* in wider urban processes. The discussion summarises what these different actors *did with set-aside property* and integrates these findings with other dimensions of the *Spatial Triad* (Lefebvre, 1974/1991) and the existing literature. We begin with a brief overview of the Cannon Brewery sites to orient the reader.

6.2 Cannon Brewery

This chapter focuses on the years the Family Company owned the building (2002-2022). Because RQ3 seeks to distinguish between different types of property owners, it is relevant to this analysis that the Family Company operate in several business sectors, including plant hire and property development. This is significant for two reasons. First, the nature of business impacts *how* owners use properties. Second, owners may have multiple holdings. To understand *one set-aside property* from the owner's perspective, we must enter into an analysis with the awareness a plausible reason for development delays or periods of inactivity is that stakeholders are juggling *multiple properties*. The timeline below (Fig 6.1) presents an overview of activities at Cannon Brewery since it closed in 1999.

1999/2000: Stones Brewery Closes production. Sites unoccupied for two/three years.	2002: Family Company Purchase both the Brewery Site (A) and Loading bay (B)	2004: Family Company Purchase Hallam Towers Hotel	2006: Warehouse and yard of Brewery Site B occupied/ rented by a storage and logistics company	2008: Family Company apply to widen Rutland Road access to use Brewery site A to store their LGVs.	
2014: Family Company Sell Hallam Hotel after 10 years ownership	2015: Family Company apply to demolish Brewery (A) Permission granted until 2018. Not actioned.	2015: Commercial/ leisure use increase in Neepsend. Peddler Market opens, Yellow Arch gets venue licence.	2016: Logistics company at Brewery Site B relocate. Site not reoccupied. Declines to current condition	2018: Cutlery Works Opens. 2019: Steel Yard begins, gradually expanding	2020: Covid-19 Brownfield Housing Fund allocated to spend in 5 years. Brewery identified as ideal location.
2021: New Brew opens (Aug)	2021-2023: Family Company redeveloping a site in Peak District	2022: Family Company sell Brewery sites (A & B) to new developer after 20 years ownership (Oct)	2023: New Developers host public meeting in NewBrew to introduce themselves and plans for Brewery sites (May)	2024: Plans for Housing on Brewery Site have been submitted and are under review.	2025: SYMCA need a developer to have started work on Brewery site to qualify for Brownfield Housing Funding.

Figure 6.1 Timeline to show critical events during the 'Vacant' period of Cannon Brewery's Property Lifecycle. Charlene Cross.

Previous studies on property lifecycles (Cairns & Jacobs, 2014; Harris, 2019) have observed that once the original purpose (in our case, the brewery) is obsolete, buildings are demolished or transitioned to new uses. The timeline in Fig. 6.1 shows that the Family Company did consider demolition in 2015. Although permission was granted, the permission elapsed in 2018 and, as of June 2024, the building is still standing. At the point of writing, Cannon Brewery's functional obsolescence (Bryson, 1997) represents a middle stage in its property lifecycle, not the end. This

chapter will use this timeline to talk through key moments in the buildings recent history since the Family Company purchased it in 2002. As Fig. 6.1 demonstrates, the Family Company navigated several issues whilst holding this property:

- Owning multiple sites
- Disposing of sites
- Acquiring new sites
- Using and maintaining multiple sites (as storage, set-aside, or renting)
- Dealing with problems, e.g. trespass and security
- Fluctuations of the property market
- Interactions with non-owners (neighbours, local authorities)

This chapter will discuss the interplay of these activities. Towards the end of Fig 6.1 there are some events that have not happened yet, as they are hoped-for outcomes of other actors who are engaged in work relating to the current and future phases of Cannon Brewery's building life cycle. After the Family Company sold this property, it passed into new ownership. This chapter will discuss how Family Company, and the new owners, Capital & Centric (C&C) have engaged in productive work involving Cannon Brewery, both on and off site. The images in Fig. 6.2 and Fig. 6.3 provide visual representations of the property to familiarise the reader with the case study site.

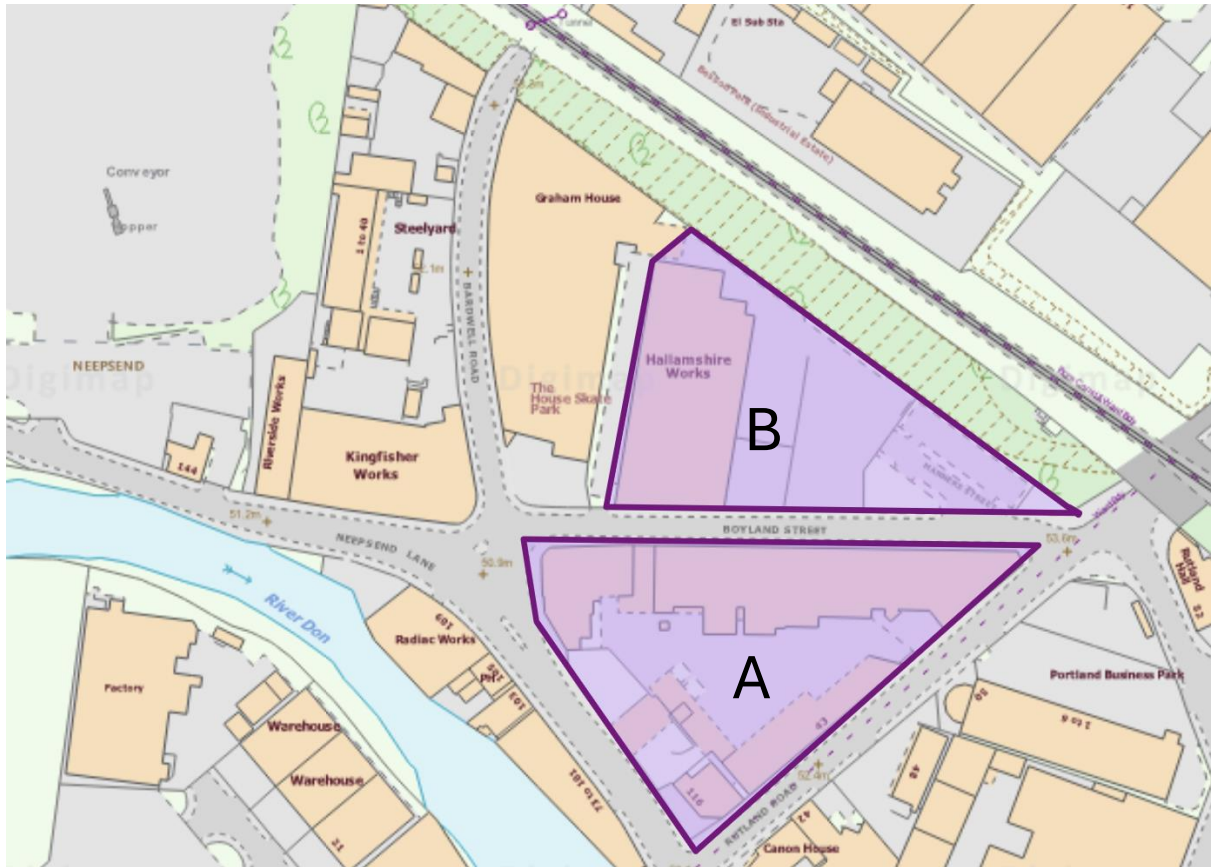


Figure 6.2: Map from Digimap that I have edited to show the footprint of the two Cannon Brewery Sites, Plot A (bottom) and Plot B (top). OS Digimap (EDINA, 2024).

As seen in Chapter 5, maps are helpful communication tools that condense complex places into a series of abstract, representative boxes and lines on a page. Maps follow conventions that serve as an entry point to orient newcomers but cannot reveal the full richness of the places they represent. The Cannon Brewery site (Fig. 6.2) consists of two triangular plots on either side of Boyland Street. In this chapter, these are referred to as Plot A (bottom triangle) and Plot B (top triangle). Plot A is the brewery complex, pictured above in Fig 6.3. It is bounded by Rutland Road, Boyland Street, and Neepsend Lane (bottom triangle, Fig. 6.2). Recent plans (SYMCA, 2021) refer to this portion as Phase 1. Plot B is the former loading bay (top triangle, Fig. 6.2) bounded by a train line to the rear and Boyland Street to the front. The plot contains old lorries and the shell of a warehouse, which is depicted in Fig. 6.4. SYMCA refers to this as Phase 2. The total footprint of both plots is approximately 4 acres (SYMCA, 2021). Neighbouring properties visible on the map include:

- Graham House, a series of occupied workshop units on Bardwell Road that join onto the derelict shell of Cannon Brewery Phase 2.
- 73-101 Neepsend Lane has been the Cutlery Works food hall since November 2018.
- Steelyard on Bardwell Road, a shipping container park with leisure and retail businesses, was established in 2020.
- Radiac Works on Neepsend Lane, which opened as a taproom in August 2021 but was derelict when data collection commenced (see Appendix J).



Figure 6.3: Photograph of Cannon Brewery taken from Neepsend Lane Cutlery Works. Kingfisher Works and Bardwell Road, leading to Kelham SteelYard. 29 08 2020. Charlene Cross.

To bring the images in Fig 6.2 and Fig 6.3 to life, I will now discuss the contents of Fig 6.1 in two thematic clusters. First, I consider the visible activities at Cannon Brewery. Second, I discuss owner activity that occurred off-site, including at other properties owned by the Family Company. As previously discussed, the Family Company did not participate in interviews. However, it cited concerns about trespass in planning documents when seeking to demolish the brewery complex (Fig. 6.1). Because P16 owns large derelict factories in Sheffield and spoke about dealing with trespass, interview data is deployed to understand the experience of holding sites *like* Cannon Brewery from an owner’s perspective.

6.2.1. On-Site Activity

Amongst participants, it was common knowledge that the Family Company owned Cannon Brewery and a wider property portfolio. Though unable to directly

ask what motivated the purchase of the Cannon Brewery in 2002, interview data indicated that it coincided with a low point in the Neepsend property market:

P17: '[at] Ball Street [Bridge], ... the curved Block of flats... sat empty for quite some time... And that just shows you the dynamic down here. As soon as you crossed the River into Kelham Island, it was a little bit different... Kelham Island [had]... established businesses that had survived the decline. Whereas on the Neepsend side... there were only really the Gardener's Rest... Riverside [Pub] appeared around about that time as well, probably 2003. So this side of the river was... very derelict.'

P6: 'Back in 2002, I think? Erm, [Family Company] You know, the plant people, bought the both of them [Cannon Brewery plot A and plot B] for not a lot of money. Pretty much abandoned the actual brewery. That's been virtually derelict and falling down ever since.'

Both P6 and P17 used 'derelict' to describe Neepsend, which suggests the Family Company may have obtained the Cannon Brewery plots at a low price. There is evidence that between 2006 and 2016, plot B was in active use:

P6: '...for about ten years plus, it [plot B] was a company called CE Transport in there. Who were again was using it for storage and logistics. But about five years back [c. 2016] they moved to a better site and then that was it. The scrappers moved in. Tore the place. It's. There's nothing left of it. All the wiring's missing, the pipework. Half the roof's missing now. It's actually a write off. But Family Company aren't really that bothered. They've got more money than anyone needs.'

P6 had experienced break-ins and theft from the direction of the Family Company's derelict property over the years. P6's comment is consistent with narratives that blame owners of set-aside properties for not securing their sites against antisocial behaviour (Greenberg et al., 2008). P6 assumes that because the owners are wealthy and have multiple properties, they were not 'bothered' by the damage done to their site. My interview with P16 suggested this may not be the case. P16 is a chartered surveyor who has bought, owned, and sold multiple 'derelict' properties in Sheffield. As explained in Chapter 3, the transcript style of the interview with P16 is stylistically different from the others, because it consists of running notes. The following extract discusses his experience of trespassers at one of his former factories:

P16: Shortly after buying – couldn't go in tragic thefts. Arsonists, illegal behaviour from urban explorers. [He is] Annoyed with journalists like [P12]

who run stories promoting empty buildings- it does a disservice to the owners of the buildings ... [P16] has had arguments with the police about responsibility for the interior and exterior of the property- [the police's attitudes towards owners are] another disservice'.

As seen in P6's comments, the damage caused by metal theft is not gradual- it can occur very quickly, causing severe damage to a property's fabric. In contrast to blame narratives, P16 was 'bothered' (P6) by these activities. P16 expressed feeling harmed by the actions of arsonists, trespassers, and thieves. Adding insult to injury, P16 believed that the attitudes of journalists and the police do a 'disservice' to set-aside property owners. P16 asserted that news articles about empty sites encouraged further intrusions and explained his experiences with Urban Explorers:

P16: 'Around 2007... Some people had broken into [P16's Factory] [Trespasser A] (Appendix F) called the police to say the building was not secure, so he could get into it. He admitted [doing] it, [Trespasser A] contacted... the press, and complained that [P1's Factory] was open to anybody and that it needed protecting from vandals.... This character knew the law, and what he technically can and can't do- he can't [legally] break in, but if he finds an opening- or his friends happen to have [already] made one- then entering is not illegal. A further affront [to P16] is that when [Trespasser A] died, his urban explorer friends broke in again, and put up a plaque: 'For [Trespasser A] He loved this building'.

P16's accounts demonstrate the range of stakeholders interested in derelict buildings. I empathised with his sadness and anger when listening to P16's account from the owner's perspective. In this case, P16 believed that too much information in the public realm could damage legal owners' rights to privacy and security. Similar to P6, P16 considered himself to have been the victim of crimes such as theft and arson. What was different was that P16 found himself being treated like a perpetrator:

P16 received a police letter and call saying that the building was unsecure and that they [the police] would prosecute the owner. P16 was furious. A neighbour had told him that a break-in was occurring. The police turned up two hours later when the people were gone and then told off the owner. P16 did eventually get an apology.

We will return to P16's ownership experiences when considering Family Company's decision processes when they sought to demolish the brewery complex. Returning our focus to visible activities, P6 provided information that challenged the

notion that Cannon Brewery was derelict since 1999. Nestled amongst the negative stereotyping of wealthy property owners (Marriott, 1967, 1069) was that plot B was actively occupied for ten years, during which it is reasonable to assume the owners received rental income. Once these official occupiers moved on, unofficial parties came onsite and engaged in antisocial behaviours, such as scrap theft and arson (BBC News, 2016).

During my photo walks, the abandoned lorries on plot B and layers of graffiti in the shell of a warehouse seemed to support P6's assessment that the 'absentee owner' (Petrzelka, et al. 2013; CADO, 2019) had left the site to rot:

P6: look at your feet... There are piles of needles in there... we got broken into, erm, three times since that's [the shed on plot B] been derelict. And... the place nearly went up in flames... fortunately... [we] managed to get the fire brigade down... the first building it would have hit would be...[the] specialist...manufacturers of high-end steel... proper military-grade... if it had gone through their wall, it'd have hit a load of oxygen acetylene [a highly flammable gas used in metal working].

Though the issues described by P6 are important, the focus of this chapter is to account for the owner's perspective. On my fieldwork walks, I noted plot B had been subject to fly-tipping in late December 2020. A few weeks later, I first noticed the concrete blocks, or 'jersey barriers' (P6), depicted on the following page in Fig 6.4. The visible presence of these barriers indicates some degree of owner intervention, as these barriers are intended to prevent vehicular trespass and discourage fly-tipping. Adding further complexity, there is evidence that Family Company made functional use of the courtyard on-site. However, this activity was not visible to passers-by as it was "hidden" behind a fence. The current condition of the gate on Rutland Road, where vehicular access on and off the site was situated, is depicted in Fig. 6.6 on the following page.



Figure 6.4 Boyland Road faces Kingfisher Works and Neepsend Lane. 18 05 2021. The Cannon Brewery building is to the left, and the former brewery loading bay is to the right. The long, derelict building and abandoned lorries are in the centre. Charlene Cross.



Figure 6.5 Gate showing vehicular access route in and out of Cannon Brewery's courtyard, Rutland Road. 01 02 2021. Charlene Cross.

Though the gate may have been in better condition in 2008, we can see that it blocks any views of the courtyard, thus “hiding” any active use from passersby. According to the planning application submitted in 2008:

*A large number of the buildings are vacant. However, the **current use of the site is described as a LGV [Large Goods Vehicle] operating centre...** [therefore] Full planning permission is sought for the widening of the existing vehicular access on Rutland Road'. (08/05265/FUL, 2008). [Emphasis added].*

This planning application suggests that plot A of Cannon Brewery, the brewing complex, was actively used by the Family Company during their ownership, albeit at a lower intensity than before. Regarding the planning information and the map in Fig 6.3, plot B was also used for HGVs, but the 2008 application refers to plot A. Given that Family Company's other business activities involve loaning out their plant, at this point, there may have been a pragmatic incentive to store large construction machinery near a redeveloping area such as Kelham Island.

To summarise, this section has demonstrated that Cannon Brewery had periods of active use between 2002 and 2022. Plot B generated rental income for Family Company between 2006 and 2016, and plot A stored their plant between 2002 and 2008, if not longer. In comparing how trespass and vandalism affected a neighbour of a derelict building and an owner of one, I noted how both parties had experienced property damage and frustration caused by the actions of those who committed the crimes. In addition, both accounts believed the blame should rest on the owner, not the criminals, for having a building that encouraged such antisocial behaviour. Following a spate of fly-tipping, I observed the jersey barriers, which indicated Cannon Brewery's owners *had not forgotten* about their property and *were acting to limit further damage*. As previously noted, the Family Company held the two plots at the Cannon Brewery as part of a portfolio. The following section considers how off-site actions paint a picture of the owner's management activities and development intentions towards their set-aside properties.

6.2.1 Off-Site Activity

Shortly after buying Cannon Brewery in 2002, the Family Company purchased a derelict hotel, Hallam Towers, and Thornseat Lodge in 2004. Without directly asking the owners about their strategy, the orthodox economic view assumes that the Family Company were buying cheap and selling high:

P6: '[The Family Company] own a lot of buildings... they, they seem to do that. Just sort of buy stuff on a whim. Sit on it, and let it fall down. Which, must be nice if you can do it.'

At Cannon Brewery, two neighbours had observed unauthorised visitors but had differing attitudes about how effectively Family Company were securing their property:

P6: '...when it first went on the market, erm, and the guys started breaking in and scrapping [plot B] it, I was ringing up their people. And just said 'look, there's someone in there again. You might want to come and secure this.' And they were just, their attitude to it was just like: 'oh well'. And, once you've got a bit of 'oh well', within a few days, they tear through it... couple of years back, I saw a guy on the roof taking panels off it. You know, it's like, he's thirty odd foot up, and he's tearing metal sheets off!'

P4: '...both [plot A and plot B] are managed by the same security company. They come and like, seal the fences and make sure people aren't in the buildings, do regular walk-rounds...I see more around Cannon because Cannon's site tends to be Urban Explorer territory. So yeah, you do see a lot of people in there, a lot of people up the top of it. And it's really (shakes head) not a secure building, at all.'

Both accounts demonstrate the risk of injury or death when people trespass at set-aside sites. P6 reports attempting to communicate directly with the owners' representatives to update them on the problems but feeling dismissed by the owners and powerless as the problem escalated.

Challenging the stereotypical view that set-aside properties have 'owners [who] can't or won't maintain their buildings, and businesses pack up and leave' (Zukin, 2010, 130), participant P4 was not put off renting a property near a derelict site. Furthermore, they signed a lease agreeing to rent a derelict site, and collaborated with the owners to renovate and bring one back into active use. P4 is a relative newcomer who acknowledges that the owners have managed to secure the property but that people still find their way onto the site. Though I could not directly ask the Family Company about their experiences, their interview with *The Star* (Walsh, 2022) about a different site suggested they may have had similar experiences to P16:

*'[Thornseat Lodge] has been **subject to looting** over the last few decades **despite our numerous attempts to protect it**. The lodge is in desperate need of redevelopment to preserve the decaying structure. Our development **plans aimed to preserve** the front façade as much as possible. **Sadly, there is little that remains** internally of any heritage value.'* (Walsh, 2022). [Emphasis added].

There are methodological limitations to using newspaper interviews, as they will have been adjusted by an editor, but in line with a research approach that focuses on the content of what people say (Watts, 2014) the implication of this quote is that owners of set-aside property, like Thornseat Lodge, need to take action 'to protect' (Walsh, 2022) their asset because these properties may be vulnerable to third party damage. We will return to Thornseat Lodge later when discussing the significance of the Family Company's wider portfolio when making decisions about keeping or selling the Cannon Brewery. The next section focuses on the experiences and responses owners of set-aside property have had in regards to third party damage.

In 2015, the Family Company sold Hallam Towers as-is to another developer. This set-aside, vacant, derelict building was in poor condition and popular with urban explorers. The same year, the owners applied for permission to demolish Cannon Brewery. The planning assessment reports the perspective of the owners:

*'The applicants have put forward a justification for the demolition of the site and have cited **three reasons: health and safety, insurance and regeneration....** The applicants state that **the site is difficult to secure... from trespassers** due to its size and the amount of accessible road frontage. As a result of these difficulties, the site has been subject to trespass and graffiti. The site is also stated, by the applicant, as being **dangerous to the public**, and containing large structurally unsound buildings and hidden voids. (15/00107/FUL).'*[Emphasis added].

As previously indicated by the accounts of P4 and P16, securing a property can be difficult in practice despite the effort owners make. Two years after Family Company sold Hallam Towers, the building has still not been redeveloped. It had remained popular with urban explorers, and there was a fatal accident (The Star, 2018b). An owner is legally liable should people, authorised or unauthorised, hurt

themselves when accessing the site. As P16 noted, the police were involved when trespassers came onto his site. Legally, when there are known dangers, the owner has a duty of care and must take precautions and secure the site. When intrusions become too frequent to manage, P16 suggested the next logical step was demolition:

P16: 'With break-ins, urban explorers know the best time for break-ins [are] when the police are busy elsewhere, e.g. when football is playing at home. [I asked how many times he's experienced break ins of buildings] Around 30. It goes with the territory. They get broken into, in some places you're better [off] demolishing them than keeping [them].'

The Family Company expressed similar views when they applied to demolish the Cannon Brewery complex in 2015:

*'The applicants state that the health and safety insurance on the site is very expensive and has extensive exclusions **allowing claims by members of the public, who, even if they are trespassers, can make a health and safety claim.** The owner is therefore concerned that as a result of the **inability to physically secure the site, there is significant threat of a serious injury and/or significant claim** from a trespasser.... in addition... there is a further danger to members of the public using the adjacent footpaths and highways **from building collapse...** the owner of the site is keen to achieve development of the site but that in its current state **it is not effectively marketable. The high abnormal costs of demolition and potential decontamination, particularly from asbestos,** are potentially a deterrent to developers'. (15/00107/FUL). [Emphasis added].*

This extract highlights how owners can view their set-aside properties as liabilities as well as opportunities. Though Family Company hoped to sell the Cannon site to a developer, the potential problems required expensive remediation. When buildings are in advanced states of disrepair, owners have no financial incentive to repair structures that may be torn down. Though permission was granted to demolish the building, the owners did not do so.

After holding the site for 20 years, in October 2022, the Family Company sold Cannon Brewery to C&C, a Manchester-based property development company. That same month, the Family Company family resubmitted a planning application for:

‘Proposed restoration and extension of Thornseat Lodge and ancillary buildings to form holiday accommodation and guest facilities; erection of events venue; alterations to existing access including parking facilities; enhanced site landscaping’ (NP/DDD/1022/1300, 2022)

Thornseat Lodge is located in the Peak District and has stood empty since 1980. It changed hands in 2004 when the council sold it to the Family Company. Unlike at Hallam Towers and Cannon Brewery, where the Family Company were owners who held the set-aside property before selling it to a developer, at Thornseat Lodge, they were both owners and developers of this proposed scheme. Prior to the 2022 application, they submitted one in 2020 for:

‘Restoration and extension of Thornseat Lodge and ancillary buildings to form holiday accommodation and ancillary guest facilities. Restoration of historic stable block to form wedding venue, restoration of existing access and creation of new car park and associated landscaping and management’ (NP/S/0620/0511, 2020)

The local authority, the Peak District National Park (2024), refused this request in 2021. Without straying too far into Thornseat Lodge’s story, as with the Farfield Inn, this presents another example where a local Council’s vision and the owner-developer’s vision for a site have clashed. As established in Chapter 5, what an owner or developer wishes to do with their set-aside property is not their decision alone. Though Thornseat Lodge received planning approval in 2022, there will have been high costs to the owner regarding lost planning fees (P8; see Chapter 7). In 2015, the owners expressed concern that Cannon Brewery was not marketable. To contextualise why Cannon Brewery had become attractive to developers by 2022, the following section considers how the character of Neepsend changed from 2015.

6.3 Area-based Change 2015-2021

When Family Company purchased Cannon Brewery in 2002, Neepsend was an industrial area by day and an isolated place on the city's outskirts by night. When recording their album at Yellow Arch studio, the Arctic Monkeys wrote a song and filmed the music video in Neepsend for ‘When the Sun Goes Down’ (2006). This song described how the character of Neepsend changed after dark, due to

prostitution in Neepsend.⁵ That prostitution was a common occurrence in Neepsend during the early to mid-2000s was echoed in my interview data:

P10: *'...on a Friday 10 years ago down here, you wouldn't see a soul. 'Cuz engineering companies would be shutting at half past four after a 37-hour week. So one o' clock on Friday most engineering companies were shutting, well, they would close early on a Friday. You wouldn't see anybody.'*

P17: *'... 'probably about 2003? That's when [Neepsend was] very empty, very prostitute ridden. You know. Not much to do down here.'*

P21: *'We didn't find any sharps [in 2021], which actually... this area used to be quite notorious for it. We used to find- I say 'we'- dad used to find them. Sort of on his little low wall in the morning when he's come in to work. [But] We've not had it for years.'*

Highlighting a change in the nature of Neepsend, these anecdotes about the area 15 to 20 years ago support the stereotypical arguments about set-aside properties being hubs for antisocial behaviour put forward by Greenberg et al. (2008).

This conflicting information is not necessarily paradoxical. If we return to the timeline in Fig 6.1, the year 2015 saw an increase in commercial activity in Neepsend. The Peddler Warehouse, a weekend market with street food, arts and crafts vendors, a bar, and dancing in the evening, relocated from Sheffield Centre to Burton Road in Neepsend. This business took over the largest unit of 92 Burton Road (Fig 6.6 below). The Peddler Markets ran by the Peddler Warehouse group proved successful, and brought customers into Neepsend for regular events. In line with Lefebvre's (1974/1991) notion that *conceived space* reinforces and reproduces existing economic and social relations, the success of the Peddler Markets encouraged other bars and restaurants to open in Neepsend.

The Peddler Market venue on Burton Road is situated on the opposite side of Rutland Road than the Cannon Brewery. A Sheffield-based property company,

⁵ Official Arctic Monkeys 'When the Sun Goes Down' *YouTube*.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EgkBRVukQmE> accessed 20/07/2024.

anonymised in this thesis as LPC (Appendix F), owns this venue and rents it out to multiple parties. Some of the occupants participated in this study.



Figure 6.6 Facing Burton Road from Rutland Road. 'Frank the Whippet eating Hobnobs' mural by Peter McKee (2016) outside a cocktail bar with a palm tree. Offices and industrial uses are active along Burton Road. 24 03 2021. Charlene Cross.

LPC also hold land on two out of three sides of Cannon Brewery. This section will trace the development of two of their properties on Neepsend Lane: the former Rutland Cutlery Co. site and the former Radiac Works. The Rutland Cutlery Co. Ltd closed in 2009. Within a few years, planning records show the owners intended to convert the site into commercial units (Officer Report, 11/01321/FUL, 2011). The property's shell was remediated and marketed after being vacant for almost a decade (Officer report, 18/01207/FUL, 2018). This attracted the interest of a hospitality business wanting to rent the space. In March 2018, planning permission to become a food hall was granted, and The Cutlery Works food hall opened in November 2018. As their website states:

The site was scouted out as large enough to hold a certain amount of vendors and customers. It also had a pretty amazing history (hence the cool name) and was in an area people could easily get to... Cleaning out the building was the second big undertaking. Removing the debris, cleaning up (and even removing the car!) made the building ready to accommodate some fine cuisine. (Cutlery Works, 'Our Story' 2024).

During interviews, Cutlery Works was considered a local success story that had helped spark interest in the Neepsend property market, though the area still needed 'a little bit more momentum' (P5). Rather than finding the debris off-putting, industrial chic sites are considered cool. The enthusiastic description of

Cutlery Work's (2024) remediation journey had a similar tone to comments made by P21 and P4:

*P4: '...we met up with a ruin bar in Budapest... [we felt] something like that in Sheffield would be cool... for the last three or four years [c. 2017/2018]- Kelham Island and Neepsend's always been the 'up and coming' place in Sheffield. **But it hasn't quite reached the up and coming point yet. So we knew we needed to get in there.** One: because [of] the [business] rates. Two, because **the buildings were quickly being taken-slash-knocked down.**' [Emphasis added].*

Inspired by their travels, both P4 and P21 transformed a derelict site in Neepsend into a hospitality business in 2021. We will discuss P21's experiences of this phenomenon as an owner-occupier in Chapter 7. Following the success of Peddler Market and Cutlery Works, the demand for a rental property in Kelham-Neepsend increased. When all LPC's habitable units were rented out, there was reason to restore the Radiac Works (Fig. 6.7 below).



Figure 6.7 Before Picture: Radiac Works as a derelict shell. 23 07 2020. Charlene Cross.

P4 explained why they agreed to lease this derelict site:

P4: 'We needed to make a quick decision to get in there.... [our site] was derelict for ten years and was pencilled for demolition. That ran out- luckily it wasn't demolished... [the estate agent] said 'we can do the roof for you, we can do the cladding'. We went in and there were trees growing out of the ground. And the roof was caved in. There was birds everywhere, bird poo everywhere, so we walked in and thought 'what the hell are we going to do

with this [Fig. 6.7]?'. But they said, 'we can do this, this, and this' erm, 'at this rate per year'. So we just looked at each other and said 'Yep, we'll take it!'

Planning permission was granted in March 2020. Though COVID-19 slowed the renovations, the business opened to customers in August 2021.



Figure 6.8 After Picture: Radiac Works restored and made habitable (right). The Cannon Brewery (left) is across the road. Neepsend Lane. Charlene Cross. 25 07 2021.

In *Rubbish Theory* (1979, 47), Thompson described how the renovation activities of early adopters (or 'Knockers-Through') in London were not guaranteed to succeed and that the neighbours saw investing in a rundown area as 'throwing good money after bad'. P4's willingness to rent the site depicted in Fig. 6.7 suggests that not only was the proximity to Cannon Brewery not off-putting, but being an earlier adopter of a derelict building can benefit both tenant and owner. Illustrating how local property markets are interdependent ecosystems, LPC's regeneration of rubbish properties into durable assets (Thompson, 1979) has indirectly benefited the Family Company by making the Cannon Brewery more marketable. In contrast to literature which describes set-aside properties and derelict sites like Cannon Brewery as off-putting, the next section will show that there is an active, well established traditional business community in Neepsend and a new generation of small businesses that have been attracted to the area since 2015. The following section considers how those *who do not hold land* in Neepsend have contributed to Cannon Brewery's new marketability.



Figure 6.9 Map showing the roads around the Cannon Brewery (plot A and plot B marked in purple). OpenStreetMap (2024).

6.3.1 Making a Living

As discussed in Chapter 5, Rutland Road (Fig 6.9) has been seen as the boundary of central Neepsend. Until recently, anything beyond this road, including the Cannon Brewery, was considered to fall outside the Kelham Island and Neepsend neighbourhood boundary. As seen in Chapter 5 (Fig 5.5), the maps produced by SCC (2019; SCC; 2022) show that since 2019, there has been an interest in encouraging more home building in Neepsend, particularly around Rutland Road. As outlined earlier in this chapter, in 2015 the Family Company were granted permission to demolish the Cannon Brewery. This permission elapsed in 2018.

In 2015, the Family Company reported that the site was not attractive to developers, yet by 2022, Cannon Brewery was sold to a developer, Capital & Centric. This suggests that circumstances had changed in Neepsend or at Cannon Brewery in order to change perceptions of the site from undevelopable to a viable development prospect. To understand what changed in this window of time, this section focuses on changes in Neepsend since 2015, focusing on business activity (traditional and new) and visual changes (renovated derelict buildings, street art) on Rutland Road, Burton Road, Boyland Street, Bardwell Road and Neepsend Lane, which immediately surround the Cannon Brewery (Fig. 6.9). As seen on Fig 6.9, as of 2024 there are now several bars and restaurants in the immediate vicinity of Cannon Brewery. The next sections will explore the ways occupants have shaped the local area in an ‘organic’ (P1, P5) way over the last ten years, and why these changes have made Cannon Brewery a more desirable real estate prospect.

Table 6.1 shows how long each business owner who participated in the study had been in Neepsend at the point of interview. Each square represents one year between 1994 and 2021:

Table 6.1 Data Analysis: A chart showing when the ten interviewees arrived in Neepsend and how they used the properties they occupied. Charlene Cross.

Property Occupancy and Use in Zone 2 and Zone 3 of Neepsend, December 2021.													
Pre-1994: Owner-occupier P11 [occurs here about renting experiences in 1989]													
1994: Metal Worker, 27 Years, P10													
													1998: Leisure Use, 23 years, P6
													2004: Manufacturing, 17 years, P14
													2012: Manufacturing, 9 years, P18
													2012: Vehicle Repair, 9 years, P17
													2014: Technician, 7 years, P20
													2014: Architect, 7 years, P1
													2016: Food & Drink, 5 years. P9.
													2019: Food & Drink, 2 years, P4.
													2021: Food & Drink, 1 year, P19.
Family owned-land- not a renter/occupier										2021: Food & Drink, 1 year, P21			

P11 and P21 were approached for interview as occupants. During interviews, it was established that P11 owned, and P1's family owned, the premises that their businesses occupied. To distinguish between these participants and the renting participants, the years that P11 and P21's businesses have been active in Neepsend have been highlighted in blue. The participants highlighted in grey in Table 6.1 were renting a former industrial premises. Two of these were freestanding buildings, and the remainder were individual units within larger, subdivided complexes. Except for P1 in Zone 1, all participants worked in Zone 2. When asked about their career paths to date, the participants had come to their current roles through redundancy (P17, P19), weariness with working in call centres (P4), their passion for a niche hobby (P14, P6, P11) and the desire to be self-employed and 'forge my own path'. (P21) During an appointment in Neepsend, I spoke with a nail technician who had begun experimenting during the COVID-19 lockdowns and had retrained and committed to making a career out of her new skills. These warehouse units were perfect for small service industry businesses such as hairdressers, barbers, beauticians and tattooists, as they are close enough to the city centre to attract business and are in close proximity to food and drink for clients on either side of an appointment (Fig 6.9). As P17 explained:

*P17: '...you've got to have that **shared responsibility with these sorts of things to make them successful**. You can't be all insular... at the end of the day, we might all be able to help each other... Businesswise, there's opportunities for everyone. At the moment, I'm looking for a graphic designer... I've asked [a neighbour] and they know somebody... [and] there's other people in here who might know people, who might be able to help me. You know?' [Emphasis added].*

During interviews, the 10 participants who rented in Neepsend (Table 6.1) expressed an emotional connection to Neepsend, and pride in their work. There was a sense from some participants that the influx of newer, hospitality businesses had made units more expensive to rent which had forced out some businesses already [P20]. When I asked what they did in Neepsend, participants expressed enthusiasm for the area, as well as their work:

*P9: 'We're about... **finesse**... how do I explain this... we're constantly trying to **push the boundaries of, erm, the quality of our output**.' [Emphasis added].*

P20: 'The area here was... **creative** spaces for studios... filled with like screen printers, and ceramicists, and all sorts of... like, **arty stuff, which is great!** And since then, they've all had to move out because they can't pay the rent. Because the rent's gone through the roof in the last five years [since 2016]. So basically, **all the creatives have moved, and everywhere is now pubs and... food!** So we've gone from having a nice diverse range to all the same **thing**, which is a bit of a shame'. [Emphasis added].

P1: 'We see it [Neepsend] as being in part of the DNA of the business. **We've got no plans to move anywhere**'. [Emphasis added].

P14: 'I don't think anybody is doing this, but if you... start at [our building] and, work your way down and ask to have a quick look at each of the businesses; **you'd be absolutely amazed at the diversity and number of activities that are happening from top to bottom.** And you could see first-hand what we're talking about'. [Emphasis added].

The pride and fulfilment participants expressed for their ventures, which I have highlighted in bold, is reminiscent of Lefebvre's belief that industry provides people with a creative outlet for their skills:

*'For modern society to **have meaning**, to convey a sense of coherence, it must find some **purpose beyond consumption**. Lefebvre argues that it ought to be the **production of autonomous, thinking, feeling individuals able to experience their own desires and develop their own style**' (Wander, 2002, ix) [Emphasis added].*

The development of their own style was evident in occupants' range of specific skills (P1, P10, P18, P20), and several participants had expanded their hobbies into full-time business (P4, P6, P11, P14, P17, P20). Some occupants catered to 'production' landscapes, whereas others focused on 'consumption' landscapes (Healey, 1991a, 220).

During the fieldwork period 2020-2022, I noticed another way occupants were expressing their style was in repainting the exterior of their traditional businesses. I initially noticed the presence of murals and painted utility boxes in Kelham Island, but in 2021, I noticed this had extended into Neepsend. My repeat photography data identified several traditional businesses that had change their external appearances. Though the activities inside the building remained the same, the business owners had made their premises more visually pleasing. The new

aesthetic of these sites draws attention to their presence and local history. This appeared to be a significant means of defying the threatening stereotype that businesses like these were undermaintained and underutilised.



Figure 6.10 A mural featuring the products and the owner's dog to celebrate 30 years in Neepsend. The building was plain grey on 03 03 2021. Charlene Cross, 13 09 2021.

Rather than being mistaken for an anonymous building, the exterior of the South Yorkshire Ducting Sheffield on Burton Road (SYDS; Fig. 6.10) informs a passer-by *what it does* and *how long it has been there*. The repainting of the local fish and chip shop on Hicks Street (Fig 6.11, next page) was sponsored by the local Kelham Island and Neepsend Community Association (KINCA). KINCA are a 'sister' (P2D) organisation to KINNF. Unlike KINNF, the remit of KINCA is not local area planning. KINCA contribute to the development of the local community by fund raising (pancakes on Ball Street Bridge) and organising events (Pride 2024, litter picking, markets), producing newsletters, and providing funding for neighbourhood improvements such as plant pots and murals. As previously suggested, the Neepsend area has had a reputation as a no-go area in the recent past (P17, P21, Arctic Monkeys, 2016), and these community initiatives make the area more welcoming and attractive for residents and visitors. These changes in the character of Neepsend are significant when considering the impact these changes may have upon the marketability of the Cannon Brewery site. If people want to live in Kelham

and visit Neepsend, this will help create a market for the hoped-for future housing in the area.



Figure 6.11: 'Microchips' mural by Kieran Flynn on Hicks Street Chip Shop. The previous plain red exterior is now striking and bold. Charlene Cross. 12 12 2021.

As shown on the maps in Figs 6.2, 6.4 and 6.9, one of the streets that Cannon Brewery is bounded by is Rutland Road. During fieldwork during 2022, I encountered two artists working on commissioned murals on Rutland Road. One was a utility box on Hicks Street (Fig. 6.12, on following page), which was funded by sponsorship from a local business (one of the participants in Table 6.1) as part of a KINCA-organised art trail. The second artist I encountered on Rutland Road was repainting the Forest Tavern, which is located a little further away from central Neepsend in Woodside (see map in Chapter 5, Fig 5.5).



Figure 6.12 Mural in progress at the corner of Rutland Road and Hicks Street. Painting by Grace Jandrell. 11 05 2021. Charlene Cross.

Concurrent with these community initiatives, SCC announced the Connecting Sheffield: Kelham and Neepsend Traffic infrastructure project (SCC & Counter Context, 2021). According to a local councillor (P13) one of the intentions of these plans was to improve the area for pedestrians moving from Zone 1 (Chapter 5, Fig. 5.9) to Zone 2 (Chapter 5, Fig. 5.10) by introducing a bus gate across Burton Road to prevent road access from Neepsend Lane. As seen in the map in Fig 6.9, the Cannon Brewery stands at this junction. Another interviewee who works for SYMCA (P15) explained that changing the infrastructure is a town-planning strategy used to prime an area for incoming redevelopment:

*P15:[to encourage developers] You **make that land a lot more valuable. So you create value around the land... put in infrastructure... publicly funded... roundabouts, or new roads leading to sites**’.[Emphasis added].*

As seen in Chapter 5, Section 3.2, some versions of *conceived space* can erase others. The map in Fig 6.13 shows an aerial view of the intersection between Burton Road, Rutland Road, and Neepsend Lane. This map corresponds to the junction photographed in Fig. 6.6 and 6.8. I have annotated this map to visually represent different flows of activity through Neepsend:

- In green, I have drawn a box around the Cutlery Works on Neepsend Lane, Depot Bakery and Gaard Café on Burton Road, CrossFit Kelham on Hicks

Street, and Made to Move on Rutland Road. These are modern amenities aimed at the residential population and the type of coffee shop one might take their laptop to and order vegan croissants and lattes.

- In blue, I have drawn an arrow from Neepsend Lane, across Rutland Road, and down Burton Road. This is the direction that workers who drive HGVs and vans will take from Neepsend Zone 3 to pick up their lunch. The cafes they frequent are also in blue; the Crusty Cob on Burton Road, and the Fish and Chip shop (Fig 6.11) or the One Stop Café on Hicks Street.
- In blue, I have drawn a box around several local mechanics whose businesses depend on people's ability to drive in to drop off their cars.
- In red, I have drawn a barrier blocking access to Burton Road. This represents the proposed bus gates that will prevent traffic from entering Neepsend. This will adversely affect anything in blue, but it is unlikely to be detrimental to anything in green.
- In yellow, I have circled the four cafes along Rutland Road.

In the map in Fig. 6.13 (following page) the areas I have drawn in red and blue show conflicting patterns of spatial practice. The proposed plan, shown in red, sought to prevent road traffic, shown in blue, from coming from Zone 3 (Chapter 5, Fig 5.11) into Zone 2 (Chapter 5, Fig. 10). This was not well received by Neepsend's incumbent business community. Traditional businesses that rely on road traffic have also been drawn on Fig 6.13 in blue.

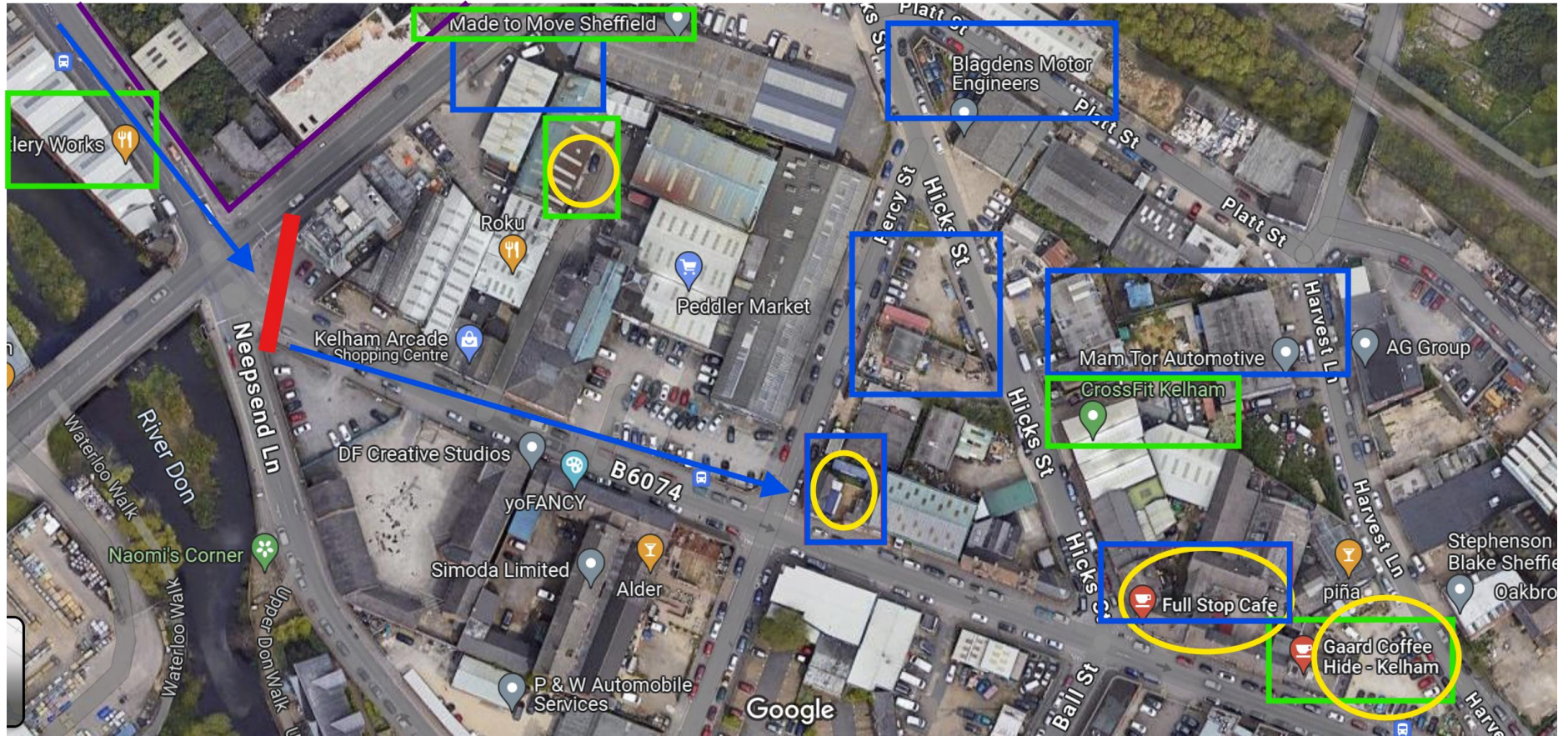


Figure 6.13 Close-up of Burton Road. The red line shows where the proposed bus gate will go, blocking off-road traffic. Yellow denotes cafes on Burton Road. Blue denotes industrial workspaces, social hubs and traffic routes. Green indicates amenities for Kelham (and prospective, future Neepsend) residents. Google Maps, June 2024.

In the following quotes, I have highlighted in bold areas where there is scope for miscommunication because the participants are using language that indicates that they are viewing Neepsend in different ways. I have added in square brackets where we can see the influence of different lenses of the *Spatial Triad* (Lefebvre, 1974/1991):

*P21: There's been a lot of kick-off with local businesses at the minute about the proposed changes to the bus gate. I've been in one of the consultations [conceived space], and the town planners and their sort of stakeholders were saying **that the residents** [lived space A] **were very well for it. None of the businesses** [lived space B] **that I sat with were** [lists six local businesses]... That's a lot of different industries, businesses, and business models. And none of them liked it. Even the bike shed said, 'I don't want a cycle lane'... **It seems that someone's... had a good idea in their office** [conceived space], **not really modelled and seen how Neepsend works and runs** [perceived space]. **And then they've tried to put their square peg into the round hole that is Neepsend, and make it work.** I do think that a lot of the businesses are going to get sort of... muscled further away. Where they've got... lower rent, easier for the wagons and deliveries to come in. [Emphasis added].*

When we compare this quote to the annotated map of the proposed bus gate (Fig. 6.13), and comments of other stakeholders, it became apparent that there were multiple “Neepsends”. The polyvocality (Soja, 1996) that came through during interviews also highlighted how misunderstandings can occur when participants have limited or no knowledge about the other kinds of “Neepsend” than the one(s) they have experienced. During data analysis I noticed that different stakeholders had blind spots when seeking to understand the local area because they came from different ‘lifeworlds’ (Sandywell, 2004, 16). Most occupants I spoke with were aware of KINNF, and several attended meetings, but P18 was not. P2A is a volunteer for KINNF and a town planner by profession. P2A emphasised that KINNF’s ‘mandate’ for action came from the local community, but was aware that the balance of membership may have been weighted more towards the residential concerns in Kelham Island. To address a potential imbalance and be more representative of the local community, P2A and P2B had attempted to disseminate flyers to Neepsend businesses to come along to KINNF meetings, but felt that the businesses were suspicious of their intentions. As a result:

*P2A: on the business side of things, we, **we don't know as much as we would like**. It's one of the harder areas to kind of, break into. (C: mm.) Erm, **because you can't just bump into them in a café or, you know... we don't necessarily need to talk to every owner before we slap a zone over them. By putting a zone over them, that usually forces them to come talk to you if they've got a problem... so that's, that's a reasonable way of doing this.**[Emphasis added].*

A key theme in the data was that stakeholders often act upon partial information within differing 'time horizons' (Raco, 2019, 1180). P2A was keen to know more about the business community of Neepsend, but their efforts had not been as successful as hoped for. The committee members of KINNF had a fixed remit and a fixed period of time within which to make their recommendations. To understand why P2A believed they could not 'just bump into' business owners in a café, we can compare P2A's comments to the yellow circles on the map in Fig 6.13, and an anecdote from a local business stating that they do visit the local café:

*P18: Our neighbours are mechanics, so we take our cars there... that's the best thing about it. If you need something doing, your neighbour can probably do it. So, **we're supporting each other** that way. And we all go to the same cafes in the area. Everyone goes for their breakfast- **there's like two cafés, there's Full Stop and Crusty Cob, and everyone gets their breakfast there.** [Emphasis added].*

Reminiscent of Perce's (1975/2010) observations of daily repeating patterns, the cafes within P18's lifeworld appear to have a *set rhythm*. Confirming P2A's statement and demonstrating the co-existence of two different types of *conceived space*, P18 was aware of two cafes, not four. Despite being on the same street, the four cafes belong to two different worlds, meaning it is plausible that P2A and P18 would miss each other because they are visiting different establishments. If the KINNF members are frequenting the cafes in the residential areas of Kelham Island (or the two on Burton Road marked in green) they will not bump into P18 or the other business workers. These missed opportunities for connection leave top-down actors facing a knowledge gap. KINNF must work with the partial information they have when reporting back to SCC on the changes the community want. Without knowing why it would be a bad idea, it appears 'reasonable' to 'slap a zone' (P2A)

over spaces. As such, the standard procedures of conceived space are implemented by top-down actors, and can overpower pre-existing local approaches to using space (Change.org, 2024; BBC, 2024). The next section considers whether the Brownfield Housing Fund, an external funding opportunity that was announced in 2020, may have contributed to making the Cannon Brewery a more attractive development prospect.

6.4. The Brownfield Housing Fund

This section considers the impact of the Brownfield Housing Fund on the pace of change at Cannon Brewery. In this section, I discuss the sale of Cannon Brewery by the Family Company to a new owner, C&C. During fieldwork in 2021, I was unable to access and interview either of these landholders. However, I did speak with a representative of the South Yorkshire Mayoral Combined Authority (SYMCA) about the potential impact of the Brownfield Housing Fund on the pace of change in Neepsend. In the following discussion, I will first outline the government funding scheme that may have persuaded the Family Company to sell at this point in time. Second, I look at the off-site management of the new owners, Capital & Centric, and demonstrate that ‘very different developer cultures... exist’ (Raco et al., 2018, 1180). Both sections consider the offsite activities involved in ‘unlocking’ (P15) land for development, which is *not one activity* but a multi-step process. The list in Table 6.2 is not extensive but gives examples of “off-site activities” at Cannon Brewery. These are not mutually exclusive, linear stages, and several activities may occur simultaneously.

Table 6.2 Types of owner activity that occur off-site.

Private (hidden)	Public (visible)
Market Research	Planning Applications
Purchasing Land, land assembly	Public outreach
Designing a scheme	Web Presence (Website, Social Media)
Seeking funding	Publicity (marketing, interviews)
Pre-Planning Process (Council)	Sponsorship, Collaborations (branding)
Meetings with stakeholders	
Administrative tasks	

Table 6.2 shows that some offsite activities are publicly available, whereas others are commercially sensitive. To address RQ2 and O3, this section also considers whether participants viewed setting aside property as an active strategy of planning and developing land for future use (development pipeline) or a passive strategy of holding onto land without immediate plans (land banking). O’Callaghan (2023a, 3) has questioned the assumption that urban vacancy is a ‘passive feature of urbanization’. In his notion of removing vacancy, O’Callaghan (2023a, 15-16) has suggested that urban vacancy can be understood as a ‘relational process’, a political process, or a nuanced temporal process. As I do not have an economic or real estate background, I will not engage with property development's technical and financial aspects. However, the financial aspect of unlocking development is an important activity that occurs off-site. The next section focuses on data from an employee of SYMCA. It should be noted that:

- although the regional SYMCA and the local SCC authorities will work together on various projects, they are two separate organisations.
- SCC did not participate in any interviews.
- This study refers to the 2020-2025 tranche of the Brownfield Housing Fund that was announced in June 2020 as part of ‘A New Deal for Britain’ (SYMCA, 2024; Prime Minister’s Office, 2020).

6.4.1 Unlocking Land

In 2020, South Yorkshire was allocated funding to develop ‘3,300 new homes by 2025’ (SYMCA, 2024, 3). During online research, I noticed that regional planning documents on SYMCA’s website were discussing the Brownfield Housing Fund. These documents publicly mentioned that Cannon Brewery fell within Housing Zone North in Sheffield, and that SYMCA intended to seek to spend the Brownfield Housing Fund in this location. This information is in-keeping with map based data discussed in Chapter 5 (see Chapter 5, map in Fig 5.6 showing the inclusion of Cannon Brewery on the Kelham and Neepsend Area Designation Map, SCC, 2019) where the council had begun to express interest in designating more land for housing around Rutland Road in Neepsend (see Chapter 5, map in Fig. 5.4 of Area One, SCC, March 2022).

In 2021, I approached Family Company and C&C as a prospective buyer for an interview but did not receive a response. Given the commercial sensitivity of this property transaction, the silence of both the vendor and the purchasing party is understandable. The sale was not confirmed until 2022, but the money for the scheme was intended to be spent in annual phases. I have highlighted in bold where there appear to be different priorities despite the stakeholders listed seeking to achieve the same goal:

*P15: **The quickest way** to do it was... every combined authority in the country got a proportion... [SYMCA's] allocation was £40 million... **to unlock sites... to unlock the land...** 'can we get a developer to start a build... before March 2025?'. Which is quite generous in government terms... Treasury allocate all money... MHCLG [Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government]... created **the Brownfield Housing Fund. And they got allocated £360 million by the Treasury, to spend in certain increments.....it's a massive risk to our [Housing] programme that MHCLG, who provide the funding, want us to actually spend the money in the financial year... [that's] £16 million by April [2022]. Which just isn't possible... MHCLG are always trying to be as reasonable as possible... saying... we see you're doing a risk based approach, you're doing as best you can'. But that's MHCLG. Treasury might turn around and say... 'Have you spent it? No? Well, we'll have it back then.'** [Emphasis added].*

This quote demonstrates the temporal, political and relational factors (O'Callaghan, 2023a) that will impact Cannon Brewery's redevelopment. As seen in Fig 6.1, SYMCA is operating on a timeline where a developer must break ground before March 2025 because the money is conditional. MHCLG, SYMCA and SCC need homes, and developers need land to build those homes (Christophers, 2018; Evans, 2004; O'Callaghan, 2023a). When discussing set-aside land, P15 indicated it serves an important purpose:

P15: 'There's not that robust pipeline there. Maybe one was, like, ten years ago? They [Treasury] probably could have thrown out that money ten years ago, and there would have been plenty of stuff that was actually ready [and] primed.

Previous studies suggest that 'the earlier in the process of development you control a piece of land, the more you can potentially make from its development' (Jeffreys, 2016, 1, in Raco et al. 2018, 1181). A shortage of suitable land combined

with government pressure to spend the money fast implies the Family Company were in an advantageous position when they sold the Cannon Brewery.

Demonstrating another lifeworld, P15 explained the role of appraisal tools when unlocking brownfield land:

*P15: Have you heard of the Green Book appraisals? That governs a lot of what goes on... Treasury use... they have a **calculation that... standardises everything ... you can look at.[Project A and Project B] and compare... the value for money to the public purse... there's been a massive discrepancy for many years with **the South of England having a much higher value for money assessments. Because...** when you create new housing down south, you create massive land value. If you've got a derelict site, that's underutilised, or a commercial space, and you change it to residential, that residential is **so high value that you've uplifted** the land value by huge amounts... **in the north...we've got... ex-mining, industrial, gas, asbestos, petrol. Dirty land.... [and] in a lot of areas of South Yorkshire, the house [price]s barely scrape £100,000 for a new house. Then the land value is like nothing. And the value for money looks really poor.** [Emphasis added].***

As stated in the introductory chapters, this thesis does not engage in policy analysis or the financial aspect of property development. For the purposes of this study, the Green Book (HM Treasury, 2022) approach can be said to align with *conceived space* (Lefebvre, 1974/1991) and follows an orthodox economic approach. As discussed in Chapter 2, an orthodox economic approach will assume that a scheme should deliver the highest and best value (Tinghög et al., 2023). Though local markets might deliver *use value* through housing units, government metrics measure success through *exchange value*. This standardisation is significant as it provides the macro context for UK development. As P15 observes, standardisation does not account for the micro-level nuanced 'experiences and attitudes' in 'local property markets' (Ball & Pratt, 1994, 158). There is a structural incentive to generate high house prices because this is equated with good use of the taxes from the 'public purse' (P15). Financial incentives such as the Brownfield Housing Fund can help revive contaminated land in northern England. However, there is a top-down expectation that these homes will be premium developments to justify the investment. As P5 argued, developers must *respond* to this market but not create it (Chapter 7). SCC's regeneration team were approached for an interview but did not reply:

*P15: It's not the job of the MCA [to get developers on board], it's the job of the council's regeneration team... [who] know all the landowners... investment strategy. **Who's willing, who's not willing, who might be willing in a couple years' time...** It's all very delicate, commercially sensitive stuff'. [Emphasis added].*

P15's repetition of 'willing' also occurs in the wording of the 2012 amendment to the Town and Country Planning Act 1947 (Raco et al. 2018, 1182; DCLG, 201; paragraph 173). P15's vocabulary and outlook were echoed by P2A, demonstrating that they moved within a similar *Community of Practice* (Wenger, 1998), where the rules of government and town planning shape their view of what good cities look like. The next section focuses on the new owners of Cannon Brewery and their on-site and off-site activities.

6.4.2. New Ownership

Capital & Centric (C&C) are an SME Manchester-based property developer specialising in reviving derelict sites. They appeared on the BBC documentary *Manctopia* (Mattingly, 2020) and described themselves as 'social impact property developers, investors, & operators' (C&C, 2024). Their Crusader Mill development in Manchester was designed for the owner-occupier market and did not allow buy-to-let investors. Before purchasing Cannon Brewery, C&C bought the Eyewitness Works in Sheffield, which caters to the rental market. It featured on an interior design show, *The Big Interior's Battle* (Channel 4, 2023). The prize was a mortgage-free apartment, and C&C's website (2024) suggests, 'Now you can live in one of the contestants' apartments!' This is significant because it shows that the same stakeholder can engage in multiple types of activity.

As O'Callaghan (2023a) has suggested, owners make their sites visible or hidden at different points in the building life cycle. During the 'set-aside' period, C&C also used Eyewitness Works to host an art exhibition, the 'Mausoleum of the Giants... [by] local legend Phlegm'. (C&C, 2024). In Chapter 3, Fig 3.1, I shared one of Phlegm's 'Pandemic Diaries' illustrations. "Phlegm" is the pseudonym of a popular Sheffield-based street artist. During fieldwork, I encountered Phlegm's art in Neepsend at the Skate Park adjacent to Cannon Brewery and in Zone 3 on Club Mill

Road (Appendix K). In section 6.3.1, I noted how over the last few years the increase in street art has contributed to Neepsend's changing character. At their first development in Sheffield, C&C also hired the street artist Phlegm twice (to paint a mural pre and post-development) at Eyewitness Works. These on-site activities during the building's set-aside period helped C&C create affinity with the city of Sheffield.

C&C's second Sheffield development is the Cannon Brewery. When announcing the sale, C&C described the site as being 'abandoned for over 20 years' and capable of 'a few hundred homes... but we're also looking at things like a live music space, workspaces, recording and artists' studios, mini cinema, café bars, a micro-brewery and markets' (C&C, 2023). A key theme in my data that challenges the narratives of under-utility is the notion of fluidity:

- 'Property' can refer to a structure, the land, or both
- Use value and exchange value are distinct but can overlap
- The appropriateness of intensity of use is relative to the user

Before they sold Cannon Brewery, the Family Company *used* the flat land on plot A to store their machinery but *did not* use the structure. C&C want *to use* the property, including existing structures, to create functional buildings. As such, C&C's assessment of the site's utility situation is also valid.

Assuming that the Family Company could field multiple bids during this sale would be fair. When this activity is considered part of a wider whole, the revenue from this sale could have been used to fund other projects, such as their Thornseat Lodge renovations, which were finally approved in December 2023. As P15 explained, the Brownfield Housing Fund favoured investing in deliverable projects. This is significant because bidding on sites is competitive. C&C's website and Instagram pages host a portfolio of developments demonstrating their ability to deliver successfully. After purchasing Cannon Brewery, C&C shared images of the interior (Fig. 6.14). In addition to satisfying public curiosity and being aesthetically appealing to Ruinphiliacs (Trigg, 2006; Martin, 2014; Talling, 2019, Barasch, 2019),

social media allows progress shots to be shared during the set-aside, transient rising period, which builds up commercial interest in the finished product:



Figure 6.14 The interior of Cannon Brewery. Permission from C&C, 2024.

During interviews, I spoke with participants who had been interested in acquiring this site:

*P8: We tried to buy... the Cannon Brewery site.... there would have been bits of that we could have kept and reused... [other bits are] **perfect** to demolish. They're **flat**, and they would have been **great... a really good site** for us.*

*P1: **We looked at the Brewery site...at various schemes on that years ago, for schemes that could be, you know, anywhere from a hundred to three hundred apartments... I think that site's sold now to a developer who will build it out **eventually**. But you know, that **might take some time** because it might be a case of them just **land banking** that, I know, **they've got plenty of other stuff on.****' [Emphasis added].*

P1's comments demonstrate that local property professionals were aware of another developer's off-site, pre-purchase activities. Furthermore, the announcement of Cannon Brewery's intended redevelopment encouraged an

adjacent landholder to rethink their situation. In February 2023, following the October 2022 announcement of plans to redevelop Cannon Brewery, the owner of a set-aside property approached SCC to request that Regulation 19 of the Local Plan *include* their 7.34 hectares of brownfield land in the prospective housing pipeline. Because SCC's redevelopment team did not participate in this study, it is difficult to assess how they would receive this action. Based on P15's comments, it could be assumed that policy actors do wish to extend their development pipeline, and that knowing a specific owner would be willing to be included on HELAA could be helpful (see recommendations in Chapter 8).

Though plot A is currently unsafe for hosting guests, I would argue that C&C's public consultation at the Radiac Works (Fig 6.8), across the road from plot A, constitutes an on-site activity. When discussing their experience with a different developer, P2A explained that:

*P2A: As they were preparing that application, [KINNF] went up to Leeds to meet with them to look at their proposals... we go, 'Well, **the more you accord with our consultation statement, the more support we can give you'**... before developers put applications in, **they do a lot of work preparing them**. So, we try to engage with them at that point because that's when you've got more of a chance to influence them.[Emphasis added].*

To break ground by March 2025, C&C will likely hold a mix of public and private, on-and-off-site meetings with organisations such as KINNF, SCC, SYMCA, Homes England, and many other stakeholders to develop a scheme that will qualify for the Brownfield Housing Fund.

Having reached the end of the timeline outlined in Fig 6.1, this chapter has provided insight into how owners of set-aside property have both managed their asset properties, and taken account of the activities of other actors, including other owners, who have brought about area-based change. The data suggests that owners of set-aside property must consider multi-level temporalities when deciding whether or not to continue with their status quo, or to act and participate in or resist wider change agendas. Chapter 7 will discuss this theme further. Though the categories of on and offsite activities have been a useful structuring device, it is possible that owners may engage in hybrid activities, which are a combination of

both. Since COVID-19, remote meetings have become increasingly common. My semi-structured interviews with owners, which will be detailed in the next chapter, are an example of an offsite activity where owners discuss their set-aside property with a third party. Having established that the Cannon Brewery was not silent for twenty years, the next section suggests how *Rhythmanalysis* (Lefebvre, 1992) can be used as a tool to inform future research into long-term set-aside property.

6.5 Discussion: *Rhythmanalysis*

To understand the owner and occupier logics of low-intensity property use (RQ2) within an area like Neepsend, the data in Chapter 6 has provided evidence that shows:

- A comparison of the land-holding activities of Family Company and C&C, two distinct owners who have held the same site in different ways (RQ3)
- How occupiers of low-intensity property use their sites for a range of purposes (RQ1, RQ2)
- That occupants collaborate with their unit owners (RQ3) for mutual benefit
- Low-intensity property use is not always a bad thing (RQ2)
- Occupants have embraced street art to assert their presence and resist under utility narratives (RQ2)

Chapters 5 and 6 have provided evidence that certain stakeholders, including town planners and property developers, consider Neepsend an area of low-intensity use (RQ3) but that others do not. This section provides a theoretical simplification of *Rhythmanalysis* (Lefebvre, 1992) that can be used as a tool to guide further research into the layers of activity that occur within urban ecosystems. Combining the *Spatial Triad* (Lefebvre, 1974/1991) and *Rhythmanalysis* (Lefebvre, 1992) was essential for conducting this multi-layered research and understanding project ecologies (Lefebvre, 1974/1991; Henneberry & Parris, 2013). Though previous studies have identified *different types of stakeholder*, I felt that using a pre-existing theoretical model would distort a significant theme within my findings: that one stakeholder can ‘wear many hats’ (P2A) and engage in multiple *types of action*. During data analysis, I searched for an academically rigorous framework that would:

- Honour the integrity of the qualitative data
- Identify limitations and gaps in the data set

- Dig deeper into paradoxical findings
- Provide alternative paths to query if gaps and paradoxes were empirically present or if findings were missed through human error.
- Embrace the ‘recalcitrant ordinariness’ of data without forcing it into ‘the canonical terminologies of social theory’ (Sandywell, 2004, 175).

My theoretical framework was introduced in Chapter 4 because the significance of Lefebvre’s (1974/1991; 1992) work became apparent after I had a data set to work with. Consistent with a constructivist grounded theory approach (Charmaz, 2014; Mills et al., 2006,), the theory must support the data. This section demonstrates how my analysis:

- used Lefebvre’s (1974/1991, 87) water metaphor to perceive my data as a series of molecules.
- adopted Lefebvre’s (1992) musical metaphor to *perceive these data molecules as sounds*.

As Gardiner (2004, 247) explains:

*‘critique as Lefebvre understands it is about **opening ourselves up to multiple possibilities**, in order to embrace a myriad of **alternative ways of thinking and living**’ [Emphasis added].*

In his *Spatial Triad*, Lefebvre (1974/1991) uses the word “perceive” to observe the field with all of one’s senses. *Rhythmanalysis* (Lefebvre, 1992) is a method of reading a place by using the body as a sensory data collection tool. Though it has been criticised for being obtuse, once there was data to interpret, this theory came to life. Lefebvre’s (1974/1991, 87) water metaphor demonstrates how various factors, or ‘rhythms’ interact like molecules, rolling across and through each other:

*Great movements, vast rhythms, immense waves- these **all collide and ‘interfere’ with one another; lesser movements**, on the other hand, **interpenetrate.*** (Lefebvre, 1974/1991, 87).

*‘understanding grows out of the **constant and active interaction...which must always be understood as part of a complex, overlapping continuum and not a dichotomy**’ (Gardiner, 2004, 238).[Emphasis added; underlining*

and **bold** phrases correlate with the similarly emphasised words in the paragraph below].

As seen in Section 6.3, activities occur at different scales that produce **different intensities** of impact. The business community has received the traffic plans for Burton Road as an 'immense wave' (Lefebvre, 1974/1991, 87), whereas smaller-scale actions that produce change slowly may go unobserved. In taking an embedded approach and interviewing a range of stakeholders, three examples of the molecules (Lefebvre, 1974/1991,) I observed mixing in the water that is Neepsend's ecosystem were:

- P6 and P16's negative experiences of burglary and trespass
- Family Company's difficulties in planning for Thornseat Lodge
- P2A and P15 seeking to make a positive change under time-pressured conditions

Though a detailed discussion of the orthodox logics of 'bureaucratized and technocratic worlds and discourses' (Sandywell, 2004,174-175) is beyond the scope of this thesis, scholars such as Raco (2018) have called for a slower approach to planning. Such scholarship questions whether the fast paced, 'build, build, build' (Gov.UK, 2020) narrative is the most effective strategy for achieving the right, place-based outcomes at the right time. Though they were doing their best, P2A and P15 had a lot of activities to manage within a tight timeline. The structural problems of the ongoing post-austerity, post-COVID-19 climate have left cities under-resourced (SCC budget cuts were mentioned in Chapter 5, and P2A was an unpaid volunteer). On top of this, my multi-layered data highlighted the 'struggle and contestation' (Sandywell, 2004, 174-175) between macro-economic attitudes and ground-up, local attitudes towards set-aside or under-utilised property and areas of low-intensity use.

If we think of rhythm as sound, the *Spatial Triad* (Lefebvre, 1974/1991) helped me rearrange the themes in my data and repackage them as three concept albums (Chapters 5, 6, and 7). Chapter 6 has challenged the view that Cannon Brewery was abandoned and inactive between 2002 and 2022. Rather than documenting silence and stillness, this chapter has been loud and noisy:

Lefebvre perceives rhythm not as the object of study but instead as an analytical tool: rhythm is present in every interaction between place, time and energy invested (Lefebvre et al. 2004: 15) ... in this respect [he] provides a tool for the observation of the unobservable (Lefebvre et al., 1996).' (Muliček et. al. 2015, 307). [Emphasis added].

My data analysis suggested that stakeholders on the ground were gathering rich information, and processing it quickly to support their multi-layered, time-pressured decision-making processes. To make sense of the different ways stakeholders described the Cannon Brewery and Neepsend in Chapter 6, I used *Rhythmanalysis* (Lefebvre, 1992). The image in Fig 6.15 was previously presented in Chapter 4, Fig 4.4. It shows how *Rhythmanalysis* (Lefebvre, 1992) can be used to look at each item of data using all three aspects of the *Spatial Triad* (Lefebvre, 1974/1991).

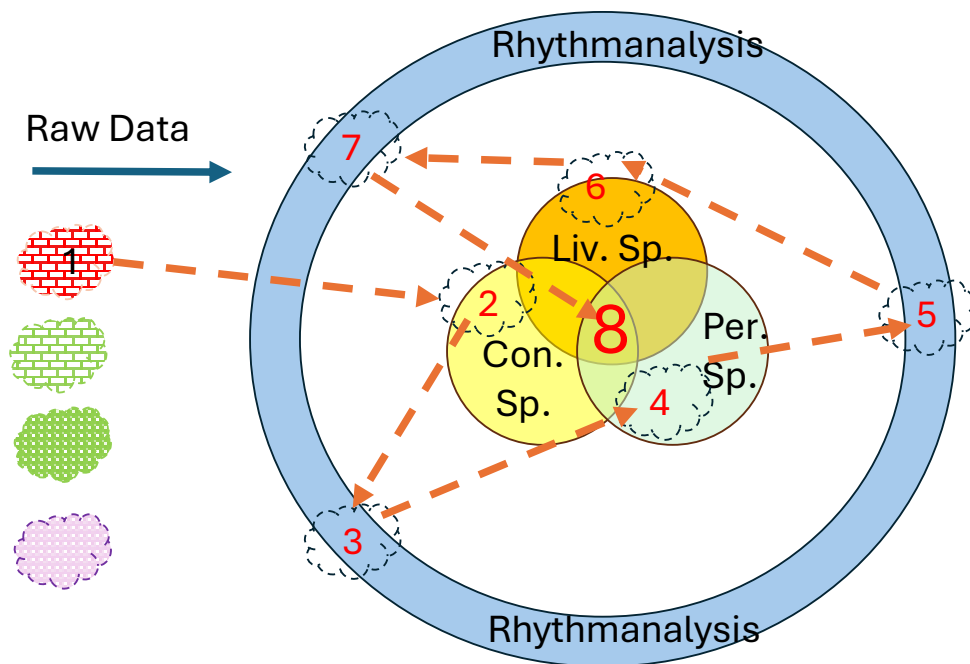


Figure 6.15 Diagram showing the multi-step process of Rhythmanalysis using all three lenses of the Spatial Triad to better understanding a polyvocal (Soja, 1996) space. Charlene Cross.

Though *Rhythmanalysis* (Lefebvre, 1992) is not a quick process (Fig 6.15), the table below suggests a means of simplifying the theory into a flexible data collection tool to observe nuance and spatial interconnectivity:

Table 6.3 Theoretical abstraction of Rhythmanalysis (Lefebvre, 1992) that compared the people, places, and resources in a place-based study to the musicians, venues, and instruments of an orchestra.

Theoretical Abstraction	Real-World Equivalent	Examples from Chapter 6 Findings
Venue	Fieldwork Site	Cannon Brewery
Orchestra- the molecules that bounce off each other	Local Property Market	Neepsend
Conductor- knows the theory, has control, does not play instruments.	Governing Body	SYMCA, SCC, etc.
Musical Instruments- Essential, but they do not play themselves. They need a musician to operate them. A non-musician can play instruments, but it will not end well.	Development Resource	Land, Brownfield Housing Fund
Musicians. <i>People with skills-can play one or more instruments.</i> Property-owning individuals who have differing resources (money, sites) and experiences (years, backgrounds)	Development Partner Investor Land Vendor Owner-Occupiers	C&C; Homes England; Family Company
Audience: Watch and decide if they like the show or not.	Beneficiaries	People of Sheffield

Using Lefebvre’s (1992) music analogy, I have reimagined a fieldwork setting as a concert venue and considered all the layers of activity required to put on a performance. This model is not an ‘elegant solution’ (Beck & Thompson, 2017, 243) that produces a complete and tidy table. As Muliček et al. (2015) explained, Rhythmanalysis (Lefebvre, 1992) is not the outcome; it is part of a process (Fig. 6.15). Table 6.3 is intended to be adaptable, and allow new layers of detail (e.g. ‘set list’ could be ‘phases of development’) to be added. An analysis does not seek to complete Table 6.3; the purpose of the table is to add new instruments into an orchestra, to make sense of the newer, more complex tune. I will carry the theoretical abstractions developed in Fig. 6.15 and Table 6.3 into the next chapter in order to study property-owners’ roles using the analogy of being musicians in an orchestra.

The influence of Lefebvre's *Spatial Triad* (1974/1991) can be seen in O'Callaghan's (2023a, 16) heuristic of vacancy, where his three 'frames [producing, maintaining, removing vacancy]' are intended to be overlapping rather than discrete'. Once all three aspects of the *Spatial Triad* (Lefebvre, 1974/1991) have been discussed, Chapter 7 and Chapter 8 will bring them together (Fig 6.15).

6.6 Summarising Perceived Space

In summary, this chapter has demonstrated that holding set-aside property has benefits and disadvantages. Low-intensity property use can benefit owners and occupiers. Beginning with owners, whilst holding Cannon Brewery, the Family Company productively used plot A as a storage facility and plot B as a rental asset. To address the challenges, the Family Company hired security guards and used jersey barriers to secure their building against unauthorised uses, such as fly-tipping. P16 felt that newspaper stories about set--aside factories infringed upon owners' rights to private property by encouraging trespassing, whereas C&C leaned into this curiosity as a marketing strategy, sharing photographs to build interest in their redevelopments. These differences in owner attitudes and practices also contribute to RQ3 and O4, which are explored further in Chapter 7.

Through qualitative interviews with occupants (RQ2) I established there was an active local business community. Some felt the redevelopment of Neepsend would push them out of the area (P14). In contrast, others believed their landlord would reject developmental pressure (P6). The occupants I interviewed (Table 6.1) reported positive working relationships with the owner of their unit. A recurring theme amongst real estate professionals, owners and occupiers was that Neepsend's development had built a local community that was gradual and organic. Demonstrating the importance of considering set-aside buildings in context (Engwall, 2003), the Cannon Brewery became more marketable when LPC brought an adjacent set-aside property back into active use.

The data analysis revealed that set-aside land plays an important role in urban land processes by providing a development 'pipeline' for local authorities (P15). The data was consistent with Christophers' (2018, 3) assertion that land banking is

actively, consciously, and strategically done. Rather than being purchased and then ignored, there are multiple stages, both on and offsite, that an owner like C&C must go through before breaking ground. As previously discussed (Chapter 5), multiple versions of *conceived space* (Lefebvre, 1974/1991) exist in any given situation. There was a sense that the views of the Kelham residents were drowning out those of the Neepsend business community (P21). In combining *Rhythmanalysis* (Lefebvre, 1992) and the *Spatial Triad* (Lefebvre, 1974/1991) it was evident that there was not one local community, but multiple local communities in Neepsend (Fig. 6.15; Table 6.3). Though KINNF noted that it was sometimes difficult to reach the local business community (P2A), to return to de Certeau's (1984) analogy of the paths people take being like pen marks being made on the page that is the city, I noticed the different ways actors were drawing on the page that is Neepsend. By focusing on day-to-day activity across stakeholders at all levels, I saw how easy it is for well-intentioned actors to not cross paths with others. This may lead to faulty assumptions that are perceived as being out of touch with local wishes, and received as Councils forcing 'square pegs' into 'round holes' (P21). Having observed the Family Company, LPC and C&C from afar in fulfilment of research objective O4, the next chapter presents the lived experiences of owners of set-aside property in their own words.

Chapter 7: The Lived Experiences of Property Owners in Neepsend

7.1 Introduction

So far in the thesis, Chapter 5 has addressed O1 and RQ1 by mapping the changing ways Neepsend's property market has been presented as an abstract 'conceived space' (Lefebvre, 1974/1991) since 2008. Chapter 6 continued this investigation by taking a closer look at perceived space to understand the different logics at and around the Cannon Brewery since the site was incorporated into the Kelham-Neepsend Neighbourhood boundary in 2019. In doing so, Chapter 6 located two different owner's actions before, during and after the brewery complex was identified as a suitable location for SYMCA to spend the Brownfield Housing Fund (RQ1, RQ2). This activity identified the different motivations of two different types of owner when holding, selling, and purchasing set-aside urban property (O3). Chapter 6 also situated Cannon Brewery within a wider, holistic understanding of how Neepsend has changed over the last 10 years, and how these changes contributed to Cannon Brewery being reappraised in 2022 as a desirable location to build homes. The next move in this thesis is for Chapter 7 to deepen understanding of the significance of the owner's interpersonal relationships and how these relationships maintain or create (O'Callaghan, 2023a) a slower, lower intensity approach (Raco, 2019) to site management in Neepsend. To do this, Chapter 7 foregrounds the last aspect of Lefebvre's *Spatial Triad* (1974/1991): that of *lived space*. So far, Lefebvre's *Spatial Triad* (1974/1991) has been used to discuss Neepsend as a place (Chapter 5) and the buildings within that place (Jewsons, Osborne Mushets, and Farfield Inn in Chapter 5, Cannon Brewery in Chapter 6). Though Chapter 7 also answers these concerns (RQ1, RQ2), the chapter places property in the background, instead focusing on the life stories of the people who own them. This addresses the following goals:

- **RQ3.** How can we understand different types of property-owner behaviours?

- **O3:** Produce a multi-faceted understanding of the lives of un/under-utilised spaces and their owners through synthesis of empirical data and secondary sources.
- **O4:** Through O1, O2 and O3 produce a new conceptual understanding of under-utilised sites.

The data in Chapter 7 comes from interviews with the following participants:

Table .7.1 Overview of the backgrounds of participants that legally own property or work very closely with owners.

Participant	Relevant Experiences
P1	Local architect. Based in Neepsend for 7 years. Has designed properties in Neepsend for the last 10 years. Advises clients about realistic planning expectations when designing schemes.
P5	20 years working as a commercial property advisor with occupants and owners.
P8	20 years' experience as a qualified architect. Designed buildings in Neepsend since 2008. Currently runs a Yorkshire-based SME home building company as a land buyer/ developer.
P9	Moved their hospitality business to Neepsend in 2015. Expanded in 2021. Rents both premises, but recently purchased their first commercial property for a future expansion into Sheffield Castlegate (outside Neepsend).
P11	Opened business in Neepsend in 1990. Initially rented, but is now the owner-occupier. Owns multiple properties in Sheffield and the wider UK as a landlord. Has engaged in development in Neepsend as a secondary activity.
P16	Chartered surveyor living abroad. Engaged in redevelopment (brokering deals, buying, owning, selling) in Kelham Island during the 1990s. Owns assets in Sheffield. Maintains an active property network despite not being in the UK.
P21 [son]	Opened a new business in Neepsend on family-owned land in 2021.
P22 [father]	Owner-occupier of industrial premises established in Neepsend during the 1980s and the new family business (see P21). Owns multiple properties in Yorkshire as a landlord. Has engaged in development in Neepsend as a secondary activity.

By highlighting the lived experiences of these seven individuals, my work makes an original contribution that allows for a new appreciation of the significance of owners' circumstances when determining why some properties remain

abandoned. In contrast, others are redeveloped (Guy & Henneberry, 2002). By the end of this chapter, the three empirical chapters will have addressed the thesis' aim: *To investigate the unseen lives of set-aside or derelict land and property.*

7.2 Key Themes in the 'Layered' Data

I took an oral history (Maye-Banbury, 2024) approach during interviews by asking participants about their wider lives and specific properties. When interviewees described their property-based activities, they described both personal and professional factors. Given the lack of research into owners of set-aside property, Chapter 7 will present extracts from these interviews to demonstrate the significance and need for other stakeholders to better understand what I will term 'layered decision making'. To protect the owners' anonymity, Chapter 7 avoids naming specific streets or parcels of land they own when discussing their land-holding activities in Neepsend. Another consideration to bear in mind is that the scale of land-holding portfolios differed among participants. These ranged from owning only one set-aside building (P9) to having holdings grouped close together in Neepsend (P5, P11, P22), or having a portfolio of properties situated around Sheffield (P5, P11, P16), Yorkshire (P8, P16, P22), or in wider UK markets (P11). As indicated by the spread of participants shown in brackets, these categories overlapped. These overlaps complicated my data analysis. Because these participants, as P2A said, these participants wore 'many hats', their explanations for a singular activity, such as a purchase, held multiple meanings.

Previous research into developers has identified a range of complex, nuanced reasons why properties might remain set-aside (Adams, et al, 2001). However, these studies categorise decisions by picking the box that best describes the owner's main motivations. Chapter 7 rejects the urge to produce a typology (McNamara, 1983; Healey, 1991a) of owners. Instead, I have provided a list of recurrent themes (Table 7.2). Rather than pulling apart the themes, *Rhythmanalysis* (Lefebvre, 1992) is a tool that can be used to follow each theme (Fig 7.2) as it interacts with the others, like molecules (Lefebvre, 1974/1991, 87) in water. At first

glance, some themes that may appear unrelated will interact and combine to form the layered decision-making processes applied by owners of set-aside property in Neepsend.

Table 7.2 Key themes that emerged from data reduction via open coding for transcripts P5, P8, P9, P11, P16, P21 & P22.

Achieving Goals	Relationships	Internal drivers
[A] Future career goals, expanding business	[E] Family	[I] Awareness; proactive change
[B] Professional reputation	[F] Friends	[J] Reactive change
[C] Current career, maintaining a business	[G] Professional networking	[K] Intuition and gut feel
[D] Developing a skill set	[H] Local community	[L] Making money

The themes in Table 7.2 emerged from the coding analysis of the transcripts listed in Table 7.1. Though I initially attempted to separate these themes, the contexts in which they appeared were deeply interlinked. Given that the themes in Table 7.2 contain a mixture of social and organisational concerns, the findings were consistent with the notion of *Project Ecologies* (Henneberry & Parris, 2013, 232) depicted in Fig 5.18. The following list uses square brackets to indicate where each theme listed in Table 7.2 [A-L] occurred when specific owner activities were discussed:

- Owners who worked in property development (P5; P8; P16) needed land as the raw material for their business [Table 7.2, Themes A, B, C, G, I, J, K, L]
- Two actors (P11, P22) did not work in property as their main job but had engaged in occasional development and were active landlords [Themes B, C, D, E, F, G, H, I, J, K, L]
- Several owners (P8, P11, P16 and P22) reported multiple landholdings [Themes A, C, E, I, K, L]
- Revenue from property rentals allowed one owner (P11) time and funding to train and compete in sports and to run their own sports facility [Themes B, C, D, H, I, L]
- Property ownership was a means of providing security for their businesses (P9, P11, P21) or families (P22); [Themes A, C, E, F, G, H, I, K, L]

- Cash flow issues caused by COVID-19 prevented one owner (P9) from refurbishing a derelict building purchased with the intention of restoring it [Themes A, C].
- Participants who owned ‘under-utilised’ property in Neepsend were using their sites and did not feel any urgency to part with them, whilst also being aware there may be the potential for future development (P11, P22) [Themes A, I, H, K].

Another significant finding that was hard to code was that the participants in Table 7.1 all came from working-class socioeconomic backgrounds. I deemed this significant for two reasons. First, Lazoroska & Palm (2019) have observed there has been a lack of studies into the nuanced circumstances of different types of owners, and a stereotype lingers that people who own property are wealthy. As the data showed, being a legal owner does not mean one owns the property outright. In addition to the conceptual layering I have been describing, where one has taken on commercial or personal mortgages (P9, P22) until the loan is fully paid, the lender will retain a degree of legal ownership of the site. Second, my positionality as somebody from a working-class background facilitated empathy and understanding (Cialdini et al., 1997; Oceja et al., 2014) when participants spoke about their origins and aspirations. Whether they had worked in property or another industry, six participants had built their businesses over a prolonged period [Themes A, C]. They made personal connections along the way [Themes F, G, H]. This came through in how they valued their reputation [Theme B], and took pride in their accomplishments [Themes B, G, H, L].

The significance of the themes in Table 7.2 became clear after adopting Lefebvre’s (1992) conceptual tool, *Rhythmanalysis*. As discussed in Chapters 4, 5 and 6, Lefebvre (1992) used a sound analogy to describe how people conducting different activities in a space interacted with the activities of others, which produced a series of perceptible “rhythms”. In order to use *Rhythmanalysis* (Lefebvre, 1992) in Neepsend, I needed to distinguish between the different components that would contribute to the rhythm of Neepsend. To do this, I used Lefebvre’s (1992) musical analogy to make a comparison between:

- Neepsend, the people I interviewed, the set-aside property, and the activities relating to these properties,
- The musical activities of an orchestra, the musicians, the instruments, and the playing of these instruments.

This conceptual parallel of Neepsend as an orchestra was introduced at the end of Chapter 6. As I built up my familiarity with the data, I better understood how different parts that might initially seem to be unrelated might interact with each other. To make sense of these disparate parts as part of a whole, I considered them as members of an orchestra, which allowed me to “label” parts of my data and observe if and how they interacted with other “labelled” elements in my data. In doing this, when a new piece of evidence was encountered and analysed (Fig. 7.2) it could be assimilated as part of my wider understanding of Neepsend. This orchestra analogy process is depicted in Fig. 7.1 below:

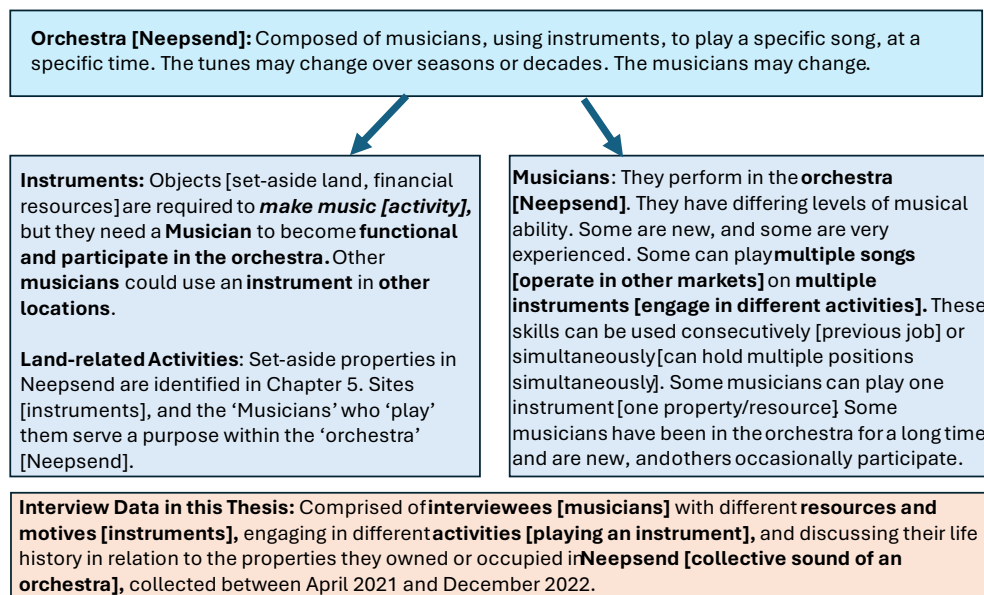


Figure 7.1 Diagram to show how I applied Rhythmanalysis (Lefebvre, 1992) to Neepsend to conduct data analysis.

The image in Fig 7.1 shows how I see the overall data set, and how new items can be placed in to the orchestra as musicians, instruments, etc- and how each new piece of data could subtly, or drastically, change the tune:

‘Great movements, vast rhythms, immense waves- these all collide and ‘interfere’ with one another; lesser movements, on the other hand, interpenetrate.’ (Lefebvre, 1974/1991, 87).

The diagram in Fig. 7.2 below demonstrates how I made the interconnections between the data to obtain the data in the Orchestra analogy that appears in Fig 7.1:

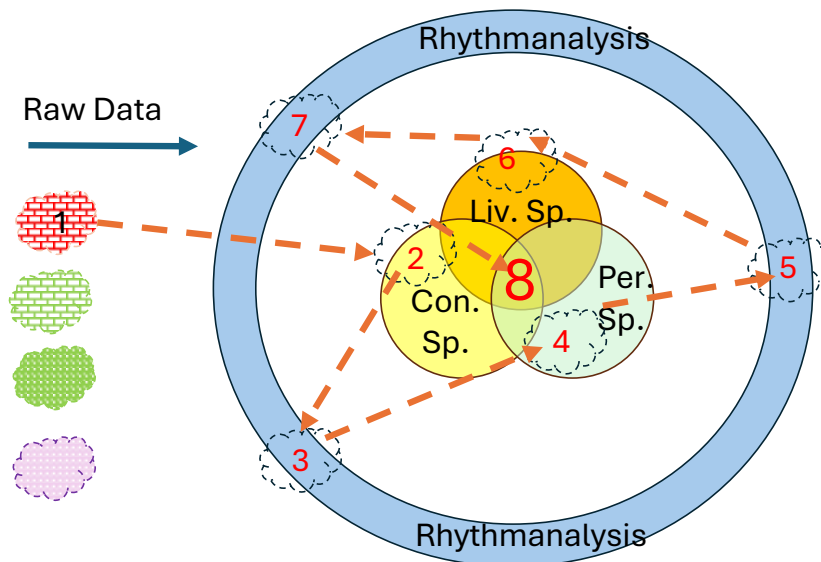


Figure 7.2: Diagram to show how I used Rhythmanalysis (Lefebvre, 1992) to move between different lenses of the Spatial Triad (Lefebvre, 1974/1991) to interpret data. Charlene Cross.

The project ecologies model designed by Henneberry and Parris (2013), which appeared in Chapters 4 and 5, is another visualisation of how one might conceptualise and trace patterns in the data when conducting a *Rhythmanalysis* (Lefebvre, 1992). Having outlined the theoretical model, Chapter 7 turns to *Rhythmanalysis* (Lefebvre, 1992) to examine the stakeholders in Table 7.1 in terms of the following interconnections:

- Person-to Person relationships
- Person-to-place/ Place-to-person relationships
- Person-to-property relationships
- Person to time relationships

My analysis followed the flow of information to identify when, how, and why themes [A-L] interlocked across the data set. Though these themes are significant, it

would be counterproductive to report the findings by untangling them. Rather than treating different interpretations of the world as contradictory, Thompson's *Rubbish Theory* (2017, 149) encouraged the researcher not to be a 'monster excluder' when handling data. Instead:

'a monster conserver should aim to produce models that take account of the contradictions. A step in this direction would be a monster-conserving model of the relationship between world view and action, and rubbish theory helps us to take this step. It serves the double purpose of revealing just how monster-excluding present models are, and of suggesting how one might set about constructing a less repressive version.' (Thompson, 2017, 140).

Hence, this chapter provides data about owners of set-aside properties to explore patterns and 'monsters', either anomalies or paradoxes, in the data. This is an alternative empirical approach to classifying or categorising the owners into neat, orderly types. Instead, this research embraced a clumsy stance:

*'Imposing elegant solutions, where one or two voices drown out the others... [closes off] the totality of the much more constructive outcomes- [a better approach is] called **clumsy solutions** (see Verweij and Thompson, 2011)- that can only emerge when [everybody is heard]'* (Beck & Thompson, 2017, 243). [Emphasis added].

Instead, by working with the seemingly paradoxical nature of the data, the "clumsy solutions" approach advocated in the sections below reveals that the decisions people make regarding their set-aside property are rather sensible when considered as part of their wider life story.

The next sections take a narrative approach and use participants' words to explain how they came to own set-aside property, why they find these sites useful, and how they have held, maintained, and transformed set-aside property in different ways to achieve their personal and professional goals (Portelli, 2013). In doing so, the three labels of the *Spatial Triad* (Lefebvre, 1974/ 1991) were useful for identifying influences and underlying trends within the owner's thought processes. As demonstrated in the diagram below, *perceived space*, *conceived space*, and *lived space* are concepts that emerge when interviewees are asked to describe what they do, how they think, and how they feel about a given matter; questions that

researchers can address by directly asking the owners about their lives (Portelli, 2013; Watts, 2014).

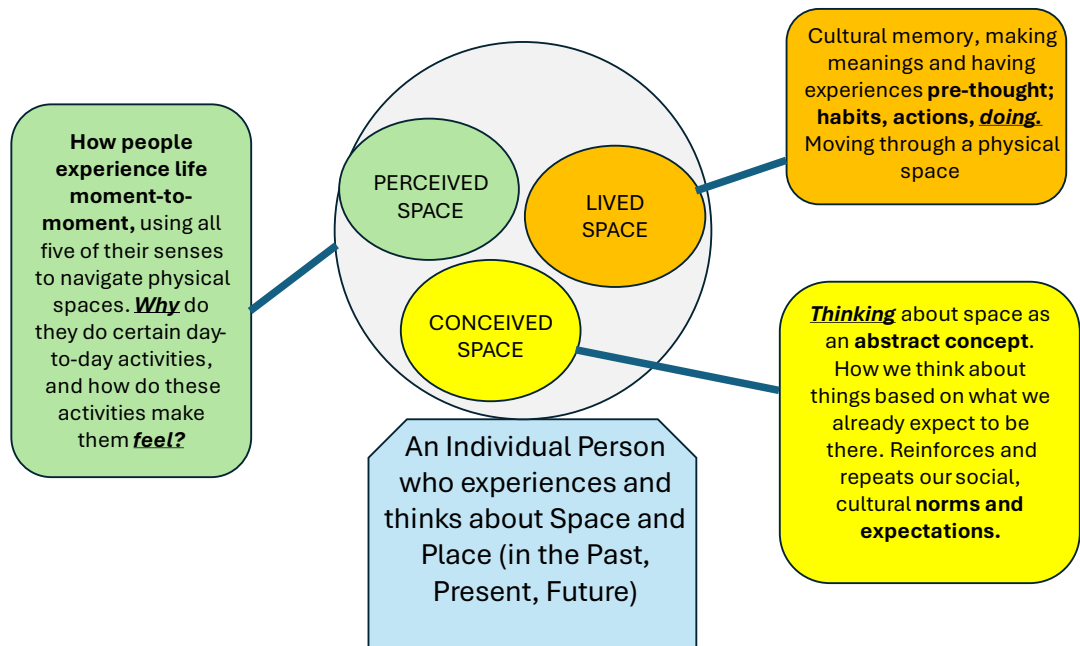


Figure 7.3 Conceptual diagram. The grey circle represents the human mind. The diagram shows how aspects of the *Spatial Triad* can be identified within the accounts given by interview participants. Charlene Cross.

The diagram in Figure 7.3 shows how I approached the content of my transcripts. As discussed in Chapter 4, Lefebvre (1974/1991) did not intend for the three aspects of the *Spatial Triad* to be split out. By foregrounding one element and bringing in the other two, this thesis has demonstrated the value of using each lens as part of a whole. The *Spatial Triad* (Lefebvre, 1974/1991) is interlocking and enmeshed, and to look at one area is to look at all three. This enmeshment came across when speaking with people. Before moving on to discuss the data, I believe it is important to acknowledge that people are capable of holding conflicting beliefs. Rather than compressing the data into one dominant viewpoint per participant, Chapter 7 embraces this complexity and reports what owners of set-aside property did in the past, are doing in the present, and hope to do in the future. I asked how they felt about doing, or planning to do, specific property-related activities at different stages of their life and as their personal circumstances have changed over time.

7.3 Challenging and Internalising Negative Stereotyping

This section seeks to dismantle the stereotypes discussed in Chapters 1 and 2 and to demonstrate that the individuals listed in Table 7.1 are indeed ‘human’ (Mangan, 2020). Of the seven participants in Table 1, working in property was the primary career of P5, P8 and P16. Given the literature would have us believe that all owners are greedy (Busà, 2017, Zukin, 2010), negligent (Greenberg et al., 2008; vom Hofe et al. 2019), and making poor decisions by setting aside their property, it is unsurprising that during interviews, every owner (Table 7.1) made at least one attempt at challenging pervasive negative stereotypes about people who work in the property sector:

P5: ‘a developer will only put a spade in the ground when they can make a profit, there’s nothing wrong with that, that’s the way the world goes round. People and businesses are here to make a profit. Despite what the Daily Mail may say. So I don’t think they sit there through malice or anything particularly negative, it’s just that small sites aren’t particularly economical to build, and that the margins aren’t necessarily there... on small sites, you’re not gonna put up a 20 storey tower, we’re not that sort of city... we’ve got various small sites ... on the market, there are people interested in them... So, yeah. I think it’s just market forces’.

Here P5 implies that newspapers (Ivey, 2022, Mangan, 2020) such as the Daily Mail, perpetuate ‘negative’ stereotypes about developers. In Chapter 2, I discussed the four-part BBC documentary series *Manctopia* (Mattingly, 2020). This programme focused on the contrast between the lack of social housing available to low-income families and unhoused people and the luxury property boom within Manchester’s city centre. *Manctopia* (2020) featured a director of C&C; the same property company that purchased Neepsend’s Cannon Brewery in 2022 (Chapter 6). In a different newspaper, *The Guardian*, the programme was reviewed as follows:

[On Manctopia] ‘ they have found someone who comes across as human and humane- a businessman presented with an opportunity to make a lot of something out of a lot of nothing, rather than a diabolical being wishing to become lord and master of all he lucratively surveys’ (Mangan, The Guardian, 2020).

In the above quote, Mangan (2020) acknowledges that the director was portrayed as personable and reasonable, but their language suggests suspicion that

this humanity is a deceptive mask. Reflecting a '*Homo ignorans*' (Tinghög et al., 2023, 1) mindset, Mangan (2020) struggles to accept that people who are *not* "diabolical" controlling, or greedy may also work in the property sector. This attitude needs to be challenged because:

'when we choose to remain ignorant about facts in order to protect valued beliefs, this is likely to escalate societal problems related to political polarization and provide a hotbed for misinformation, [and] distrust' (Tinghög et al., 2023, 1).

In the previous data extract from P5, without being directly asked about this topic, P5 pragmatically dispelled the notion of developer 'malice' by focusing our conversation on the practical need for developers to stay in business by balancing their outgoing costs against their incoming profit margins.

Challenging the stereotype of maximum utility, which argues that property developers always want to build as tall as possible, P5 spoke about development in terms of what works well and what would not work well in a locality like Sheffield. P5 understood that '20 storey tower[s]' might be wrong for Neepsend's local market. This contrasts with Mangan (2020), who conjures a negative stereotype that *was not present* in the documentary rather than describing the activities shown in Manctopia that allow for the "creation of something out of nothing". Returning to Lefebvre's (1974/1991) notion of *conceived space*, this suggests that the repetition of bad developer tropes in public discourse demonstrates the self-reinforcing process that bad developers are what people will expect to find.

During my interview with P16, he described his appreciation of historic buildings. When describing a property he used to own in Kelham Island, he recalled finding hessian bags full of hip flasks, including 'tiny ones designed for ladies' handbags' and 'big ones with leather casings which were used for the military in the Boer war', in the cellar. P16 was very enthusiastic about finding these items and said that he would be keen to display them when he was back in the UK. Regarding business transactions, P16 explained that he had made money in Kelham Island through brokering deals, though he had 'not got deep pockets', other actors he knew did. When describing a Kelham Island building where he helped broker a deal,

P16 expressed that the new owners had done a bad job of the refurbishment and ‘ripped out the soul’. He lamented that a lot of amazing history in Kelham and Neepsend had been lost. In P16’s own words, when this historic value is ‘lost due to bad developers’, it is ‘a tragedy’ and ‘shameful’. Though P16 favoured changing old buildings into flats, he used the stereotype of a “bad owner” who damages heritage for money as a contrast to his practice. P16 differentiated himself from such owners, stating that just because he is a developer, that does not mean he agrees with demolishing historic properties. P8 echoed this stance:

P8: ‘... there’s that added heritage value. That you’re working with, in something that’s old. You’ve got bigger floor- to-ceilings, you might have weathered materials, you might have period features, like trusses, king posts, queen posts, I dunno. Arched windows. Whatever it might be, old crane systems... but restoration’s difficult to do. It is more expensive, no matter what people think. Refurbishing buildings, it’s harder than new builds. But at the same time, you get premium value for it. So, I would argue that... [what] you’ve got to do is look at it on a case-by-case value. And decide what’s worth keeping. And what’s not.’

P8 provided a list of practical matters that a developer must consider when assessing the viability of a project. Like P5, P8 indicates that ‘what people think’ is that developers only care about making money, though P8 explains refurbishment requires developers to spend money. The stereotype of the developer who prioritises money over heritage was encountered in Chapter 2, where Talling (2019) expressed dismay that ‘historic building[s in London were] being reduced to dust... and ...turned into luxury flats with depressing consistency’. Like P16, P8 appreciated heritage features, acknowledging that investing money into refurbishment, though more ‘difficult’ and ‘expensive’ becomes viable when the development attracts a ‘premium’ price. When describing their first, and so far only, commercial property purchase, P9 explained that the letting agency who marketed the building had anticipated the derelict pub would meet the fate described by Talling (2019):

P9: ‘There’s large companies that own thousands of pubs and just don’t understand the areas that they’re operating in. And then those pubs, shock horror, don’t manage to survive. And... that gives opportunity to large scale property developers who want to demolish it, turn it to flats... so then we walked in with the estate agent, but said ‘we want to turn this into a pub’

and he laughed. He was like, 'you want to turn it into a pub?!' And we were like '...it is a pub.'

C: Mm, it's got the bones! Which estate agents was it?

P9: Er, I'm not here to grass anyone up'.

This exchange demonstrates the different priorities of property owners and property developers. Given that P9 runs a hospitality business, it is logical that he would purchase a pub in order to use it as a pub. P9 describes the estate agent laughing when they realised the site was being purchased for use value rather than exchange value because it is more common that 'large scale property developers' source such sites and apply for a higher-value change of land use to build housing.

Curiously, though P9 expressed the belief that developers will pursue the highest and best value, this attempt at snowball sampling provoked a defensive reaction. To "grass anyone up" is a strong idiom that has connotations of informing on somebody, particularly the police. When interpreted alongside the comments made by our developers (P5, P8, P16) about being misrepresented and Mangan's (2020) salacious description, P9's strong reaction indicates he felt protective towards the agency and that he distrusted the intent behind my question. If we return to Lefebvre's (1974/1991) work, *conceived space* is an abstract force that reinforces and replicates existing beliefs. As such, previous research and newspaper reports that have used negative stereotypes of property developers may have impacted P9's perception of me as a person seeking to write about the actors behind local property development. This glimmer of hostility and concern that my intention was to 'name and shame' (SCC, 2020) an organisation that helped P9 on the journey to expand his business may explain why owners such as the "Family Company" (Chapter 6) were reluctant to participate in the study.

In addition to P9, P11, P21 and P22 (Table 7.1) are also owner-occupiers of local businesses. P11 and P22 have dabbled in small-scale local developments at sites they own, and gain income from their position as landlords. Though property development is not their primary career path, these participants also challenged negative stereotypes. Like P5, P8 and P16, through the act of repeating negative

stereotypes, they adopted *conceived space* (Lefebvre, 1974/1991) as a means of challenging it:

P22: ..we bought that bungalow, and put me in-laws in it. The idea was that when me and my wife decide to downsize, we would move into that bungalow. But, going back to the original question, I've just stumbled across [property deals]. It's not as if, I don't go out, looking for it, it's just-

P21: - No, you're not on property auctions looking, you know, like people will look for cheap houses in cheap areas? No. He's been like, 'the house next door to me mum's has come up', and 'the shop next door to where I work has come up'. It's not, like, headhunting, trying to buy land, like-

P22: -well, I've got mortgages on two of them. But it's just, they're an investment. And it just sat right at the time to think, 'well, we'll do that!'

At face value, my first impression of this story was that P22 sought security for his family. In recounting his activities, P22 echoes P5, P8 and P16's tendency to define themselves by describing what they *are not* doing. P22 and P21 appear to be concerned with my impressions of them. Perhaps pre-empting accusations of land banking, P22 states he does not actively search for sites, perhaps internalising the stereotype that is the behaviour of a "bad" property owner.

Evoking the literature on the moral issues of certain types of property development as seen in Chapter 2 (Steele, 2022; Neate, 2018, Sklair, 2017) though there would be nothing illegal or wrong if they had done so, P21 rejects the *Homo economicus* (Tinghög et al., 2023) approach of actively searching through 'headhunting, trying to buy land'. Instead, P21 emphasises the serendipity and luck element of his father's property acquisitions that is more akin to a *Homo heuristicus* approach to decision making (Tinghög et al., 2023). P21 draws on the stereotype of the slum landlord in making a link between these activities as behaviours undertaken by people looking for 'cheap houses in cheap areas'. This suggests P21 has drawn upon *conceived space* to make a mental association between exploitative, negligent landlords who own swathes of bad-quality housing. Perhaps P21 was worried that my research was probing the existence of the stereotypical bad owner; in case I was looking to 'grass up (P9) bad owners, he may have felt the need to justify P22's actions to prove the family are good people and good owners.

P22 took a more relaxed tone and described the acquisitions as logical; the bungalow has current and future use value as a home for his in-laws now and a prospective home for himself and his wife in the future. P22 subtly indicates he has not bought all his holdings outright, disclosing he has financed at least two of his holdings through mortgages. P22 acknowledges the exchange value of the property and a degree of strategy by describing these properties as investments. The exchange between P21 and P22 is informative because one of the benefits of being a landlord means that P22 has been able to take out a mortgage to own residential property to house and support his extended family. This demonstrates that not all commercial property owners are wealthy people who 'clink champagne glasses as residents are decanted from their homes' (Sinclair, 2019, back cover).

To summarise, this section began by addressing the matter of negative stereotyping. All participants demonstrated an awareness that people working in property are often judged negatively. When participants described potentially frowned upon activities associated with property development, they either:

- offered alternative interpretations of these activities to counter misinformed beliefs of their prospective audience;
- gave examples of stereotypes that they believed existed but did *not* engage in themselves.

This suggests that participants had taken on some degree of social prejudice about property developers; they were seeking to challenge the belief that they are all the same or to offer reasons why their activities were pragmatic and about balancing costs rather than 'diabolical' (Mangan, 2020) schemes. The interviews with P9 and P21 highlighted how these stereotypes go both ways. The cultural expectation that developers are described negatively reinforced the notion that I, as an interviewer, would be looking to report on bad behaviour. Finally, this section made a distinction between developers (P5, P8, P16) and owners (P9, P21, P22). Having set-aside stereotypes, the following section considers the different reasons and means by which the actors in Table 1 came to own property in Neepsend and the purposes for using these properties.

7.4 Becoming an Owner

This section outlines how P9, P11 and P22, who do not work in the property as their main job, came to own property in Neepsend. P9's company moved to Neepsend in 2015. As discussed in Chapter 6, P9's company is well connected within the area and holds the master lease for several units within a multi-unit premises. P9 opened a second location in Neepsend in 2021, during the COVID-19 pandemic. Both are rented from LPF [Local Property Firm]. In 2018, SCC provided funding opportunities for the Sheffield Castlegate Grey to Green (SCC, 2024b) regeneration scheme. This initiative allowed P9's company to afford new premises. They purchased their first commercial property at an 'absolute bargain' (P9) price. Unfortunately:

P9: 'we bought the pub. On a commercial mortgage. Not advised before a pandemic! Makes you panic a lot... [Business 1] was supposed to pay for [Business 2]. It didn't. We had to pay for it ourselves. And then [Business 1 and Business 2] together [which] were supposed to pay for the pub had been closed [due to COVID-19. So, there's been no progress on it at all. Which is frustrating.'

Because hospitality venues were closed and unable to trade during the pandemic (Institute for Government, 2022), P9 could not build the income needed to fund the renovation. Instead, the focus was on the survival of Business 1 and Business 2. As P9 explained:

P9: 'we've done all the costings to every single screw, every single floorboard, we know exactly what it costs, we've got [planning] permission to do it, we just need that money'.

This story reiterates the theme in Chapter 6, which showed how affordable, set-aside commercial properties serve a purpose within the built environment, as they allow stakeholders on lower incomes to access premises and trade (Jacobs, 1961). Though P9 has not been able to refurbish it yet, it intends to bring the site back into active use. The timing of the acquisition took advantage of government funding to asset buyers, and there have been delays due to circumstances beyond the owner's control. After COVID-19, the owner must pay rent on other properties,

manage their businesses, and gradually acquire the funds to execute their redevelopment plans.

Like P9, P11 began his property journey by renting in Neepsend. P11 recalled leaving school with no GCSEs and setting up a leisure business alongside his sports career. After renting for a few years, he purchased his premises and an adjacent building. from the owner. As he recalled:

P11: ‘...one guy owned all of them. The one guy owned a whole lot [of properties]. He lived in Switzerland and he was retiring so he sold them. He was an English bloke with loads of money. He had a load of properties. And he was older, he was like, I dunno, “I’ll sell them”. But in retrospect, obviously [he sold to me] too soon... I got planning on it... I remember, I bought it off him, and he goes “one day you’ll get planning permission on that”, and I had it within a year.’

This quote contains both orthodox and heterodox economic behaviours. P11 suggests that the original owner may have missed an opportunity for profit and that it would have made economic sense if he had waited to sell the land at a higher price, with planning permission. P11 knows that the increase was achieved within only one year. Though the original owner may have been unaware this could be achieved so soon, they willingly shared the knowledge that planning permission would increase the value. As P11 notes, the vendor was already wealthy and planned to move abroad to retire. This suggests that getting the highest land price was less important than a quick disposal. To focus on professionally competing in sports, P11 required a steady income. After P11 got planning permission on the adjacent parcels, he sold the land to a developer. When a friend suggested they share a commercial mortgage, P11 became a landlord.

P22’s father opened a firm in Neepsend in 1982 and retired in 1999. P22 worked at the family business from 1984, which is still active. Over his lifetime, P22 has built up a property portfolio. As previously seen in section 7.3, one of the properties in P22’s portfolio is the bungalow where his in-laws live. Rather than inheriting the family business, P22 purchased it from his father in 1999. On his mother’s side, in another part of Yorkshire, his parents inherited a local shop:

P22: *'Granddad used to have the village shop... Quite a few years ago, my dad was having problems with the tenants. My dad was in his 70s. And I said, 'Look, sell it to me'. I said 'you don't need the hassle. Sell it me'. And that's what he did. And I would sell every other property I own, before I sell that one.*

Charlene: *Yeah. So that one is the sentimental one?*

P22: *Yeah, yeah. That one's sentimental value. That were me granddads. So, I'd never, ever sell that one. (points to P21) He and his brother can sell it! (laughs)*

P21: *I wouldn't sell it!*

Again, P22 purchased this property from his parents, rather than inheriting them. Though he would not willingly part with this property within his lifetime, he acknowledges that it will have exchange value in the future should his sons choose to sell it.

An unexpected theme that emerged from the data was this notion of the emotional labour involved in property ownership. Rao (2018, 74) has argued that there is a relationship between 'land ownership and wellbeing', which I will return to in the discussion. P22 emphasised taking care of one's family. P22 appeared to have developed his attitudes towards property from years of working alongside his father and adopting his parent's attitudes towards money. P22 spoke often of his father, who had passed away a few years earlier:

P22: *My dad always used to say you -never- sell property unless you have to... our first property that me dad bought down here. He said he didn't want to sell it. But... eventually sold it. But even to this day, I wish he never had... I think the biggest regret is selling [our share in another property]. That was solely because, unfortunately [eyes well up, pause] ... God, I'm going... me dad got dementia. And 750 quid a week in a home is a lot of money to find. So that's why we sold... that property.*

In addition to his sadness, P22 expresses several pragmatic points about property ownership. First, property is an asset that can be exchanged for money. Though he feels deep regret about two family assets being sold, P22 explains that he sold his share of a site in Neepsend to afford his father's care home fees. If we change our focus from the building lifecycle towards the human lifecycle, people

will age, get ill, and need money for their retirement and end-of-life care. Second, P22 talks about property in terms of its purpose for the people in his life. His reasons for holding onto sites were part economic and part driven by personal factors:

*P 22: 'What makes me want to buy? Is [P21, son 1] and [son 2]. Because my dad used to say there comes a time in your life when you stop earning money for yourself. You're earning for your kids and your grandkids... Because I haven't done this for myself. It's for them two. [his sons]. So the thing is, for the premises I've got, I will get pre-planning on it... I'm 60 now, and I'm getting more and more fed up of working. And I just think if... we *do* sell it, then I'd rather go it for flats. And I'd want three flats. Plus. Because he can have one (points to P 21), his brother can have one. And we'll have one, and rent 'em out. And then the rest of the money is to play with....'*

In talking about his premises in Neepsend, P22 is thinking about the future. He is aware of the benefits of extending and assembling adjacent holdings around his business so that the footprint of future development can accommodate multiple flats. P22 expressed layers in his decision-making. As P11 did, P22 would use planning to transform the land into higher-value residential. In addition to the development uplift, P22 hoped to own three apartments. Again, this decision was layered. These apartments would provide his relatives with properties to live in, rent out, or sell in an emergency.

To summarise, this section showed that personal circumstances affect why owners obtain and use set-aside properties. In outlining decisions that could be described as being 'good enough... if it feels right, it is right' (Tinghög et al., 2023, 2) the participants in this section appeared more in keeping with a '*Homo heuristicus*' outlook than a '*Homo economicus*' outlook. Though P9 had good intentions, their property remains set-aside because COVID-19 caused a cashflow problem. P9, P11 and P22 gave a combination of orthodox economic and personal reasons for owning property, demonstrating that their motivations were not purely financial. P9, P11 and P22 having mortgages on at least some of their properties, challenges the stereotype that all owners are wealthy. The following section looks at attitudes towards set-aside property as expressed by people who work within the property sector.

7.5 Working in the Property Sector

Previous studies (Ball & Pratt, 1994; Ball, 2002; Evans, 2004) suggest that success in the property sector requires access to funding, good relationships with local authorities (Dabinett & Ramsden, 1999), good relationships with other stakeholders, and access to the raw material: land. These interrelated processes are often conceptualised as a series of stages or phases leading to another. Though abstract flow charts are useful for identifying the components involved in development, in practice, 'property development is not an entirely sequential activity and the stages in the process often overlap or repeat' (Wilkinson & Reed, 2008, 3). The following section focuses on the experiences of land assembly and land management as reported by P1, P5, P8, and P16. Each participant had worked in the property industry for over 20 years in roles such as architect, estate agent, chartered surveyor, company director, and land buyer. Interviewees who worked in property valued their reputation and believed they had the skills to make good development decisions. One of the key criteria SYMCA (2024, p.5) had when allocating the Brownfield Housing Fund was that the project:

'Be deliverable. Applicants [are] to demonstrate they have the plan, capacity and expertise to deliver the proposed scheme on time.'

In the data, the ability to bring sites forward and know when and when not to take risks was a form of tacit knowledge built up over decades of day-to-day experiences. In the following extract I have highlighted in bold the foundational steps when a land buyer is 'trying to buy the land':

*P8: the council's got high design aspirations, quite rightly. The government agenda is to be greener, quite rightly, but that has an **impact on costs**. **People forget about the health and safety impact of development. We want to be safe on site. That has a cost.** And then you've got the decontamination and foundations, **that has a cost**. And then you've got erm, **risk, that has a cost**. You've got finance, **that has a cost**. Then you've got all the planning reports. Archaeology. Contamination. Flood. SuDS (Sustainable drainage reports). Acoustic. Sometimes smells. Sometimes trees. Ecology. **All of these things add layers and layers and layers of cost. Estate agent fees. Legal fees-***
C: Are they quite expensive, all these things?

*P8: Yeah, absolutely... **a planning application can cost a hundred thousand [£100,000]. Easily, without guarantee of getting it.** And then you've got the economic, microeconomic factors. What if the market changes while you're midway through a build? Don't forget a build project takes on average three years from start to finish, and that's **from trying to buy the land to completing your last sale.** So that has an impact on you. **What happens if the market changes or collapses?** Midway through the build. And then you've got all the contractual **risks** with builders, with subcontractors, all that kind of stuff. It's very complicated. Very difficult.' [Emphasis added].*

The extract above demonstrates my assertion that property-based decisions are 'layered'. I have highlighted the crucial, foundational step in development, 'trying to buy the land' (P8), in bold. In the next section, I present a story in which P8 was unable to acquire a site in Neepsend because of the landholding activities of 'Mr X' (Appendix F). Fundamentally, if an owner is unwilling to sell, the development cannot begin.

Assuming a site has been obtained, P8 lists the subsequent costs and risks of developing a site. This shows that development involves spending money and is not just about making money. Echoing P5's assertion that it is economically foolish to 'put a spade in the ground' (P5), knowing that the project would fail, P8 explains that a rejected planning application means a loss of £100,000. If the application succeeds, money can be lost during the building phase. To manage these costs, P8 touches on selling apartments before completion. This is a way to reduce risk and bring in income, and it provides reassurance that actors on the market want to buy the properties at the advertised price. This shows that the phases of development overlap in practice, as the apartments are not sold after completion but during construction.

Evans (2004) has argued that property development has become more expensive because developers expect a certain percentage of their applications to be rejected by councils. To stay in business, developers must raise their costs so that successful projects can cover the financial deficits caused by failed applications. If we compare P8's lived experience, where a single application may cost £100,000, to the literature, Evans, (2004) has suggested that to lose large amounts of money on an application is a regular occurrence faced by property developers. Raco et al.'s

(2019, 1187) study of the 2013 plans to regenerate Centre Point in London notes that proposals were rejected, meaning:

The whole [planning] process took more than three years, during which additional costs were accumulated, that in turn would have to be recouped through higher residential sales’.

My data comes from a different context; Raco et al.’s (2019, 1187) study focused on well-resourced large companies producing luxury apartments ‘with a retail price of £55 million’, whereas P8 is an SME home builder operating in north England. P8’s practical explanations of the ‘Very difficult’ tasks he juggles from start to finish challenge the stereotypes of the greedy developer. Evidence suggests there is a wider systemic issue at play, that affects development costs and has a knock-on effect of inflating house price sales.

In Chapter 6, we saw the viability discussions about the Cannon Brewery. If a set-aside site is to come forward, P8 notes that many reports and investigations need to take place to ensure the site is not contaminated and is safe to live on. P8 and P5 were less concerned with those reports, as they knew to navigate them. The main issues were assembling the land, and receiving planning permission to deliver their ‘vision’ (P5). To reduce uncertainty about whether or not a scheme would be approved, P1, P5, P8 and P16 were in favour of Sheffield developing a clearer masterplan:

*P5: ‘I think what you have to do, from a city’s point of view, is you have to set out a vision... You have to get people to buy into it. Because the council aren’t the solution to all the problems, it’s not their role, [though] a lot of people think that it is. The council should act as facilitators and... er, **leave us to the market. They’re not the market. And they shouldn’t be. It’s public money (shrug) it’s my tax, it’s your tax. They shouldn’t go... (pause) stepping outside their box.** You should let the market dictate it. It’s what happens in bigger, more mature cities. **You look at the London’s, the Birmingham’s, the Manchester’s, the council, well, the public body, set out the vision... they’re there to help facilitate, but they’re not risking their balance sheet. It’s not their job. It’s not necessarily their expertise in a lot of these things’.***

[Emphasis added].

As noted by Wilkinson & Reed (2008), the UK's public sector often relies upon private developers to deliver schemes. If we return to the themes in Table 2 (Section 7.2), those who worked in property emphasised that they were skilled in identifying when was a good time to act and what a realistic scheme looked like [Themes B, C, D, G, I, K, L]. During interviews, comparisons were made between Sheffield's approach to urban design and other cities, particularly Manchester:

P1: *'There's a City Centre Masterplan [in Sheffield], but it's just overarching principles... in contrast to what they do in Manchester... which says **exactly what type of building they want to go where**, how tall it needs to be, what use it wants to be... Whereas Sheffield don't... [Manchester]]takes a lot of the risk out of it for developers... they know that, if I buy that site and can get a building that is 40 storeys tall.. [so when] you buy the site and then the council [will not] come back and say 'oh, you can only do twenty'... [but in] **Sheffield...when a client is buying a site [they ask me] 'oh, what do you think the planners will allow on this?'**... **there's a certain element of risk...** If they buy the site and they pay too much for it, then they can't get the level of development on it that they want... **it puts them in a bit of a sticky position...** [whereas in] Manchester, you can open this document, 'oh that's the site I'm interested in' and 'that's what the council will permit' and it does have a lot more certainty to it... values have risen sharply in Manchester as a result. So it's attracted more investors.'* [Emphasis added].

The principles that guide local development in the UK vary from city to city. When comparing Manchester and Sheffield, like P5, P1 believed that a detailed masterplan which gave developers more certainty was crucial to encouraging investment. Without this degree of certainty, P1, P5, and P8 were aware that the downside of development was that one could end up in a 'sticky situation' (P1). An example of this situation was seen in the case of the Farfield Inn (Chapter 5). The owner took a risk in paying over the expected price for this property auction and spent money on planning fees but has nothing to show for these efforts because they did not get permission to proceed with the development.

Participants were concerned about Sheffield's planning framework. This was because top-down planning frameworks can either align with or oppose, developers' intentions for a site. For example, in the case of Farfield Inn, that property was very risky. This was not helped because there was no certainty about what the council would like that site to become. Because there were different views

about what to do with the property, which ranged from the heritage view, which should be restored as a pub, to the planning-based view that the area was not suitable for use any more, the owner did not attain their plans and which were rejected. This price was possibly paid too high as it went to auction under the impression that this was a desirable property in a good location. Because this plan did not get permission, the Fairfield Inn remains derelict.

P16 echoed P5's sentiment that the council should trust developers more and know when to stay in their 'box' (P5). Overall, P16 felt that:

*'Developers avoid working with the council because they can't be trusted. [It's] Hypocrisy. The council want more income, yet they lack the skill sets. They see developers as con men and distrust them... There are two issues. 1) **planning is slow.** 2) **The Council's Property Services Department moves at a glacial pace.** [Emphasis added].*

This raises two issues. First, the use of 'con men', as seen in the 'I'm not a grass' (P9) interaction in Section 7.3, demonstrates the importance of trust and cordial interpersonal networks within the property industry. P16 spoke to me at length about his skillset in bringing about successful development, but, like P1, P5, and P8, they all communicated, subtly or explicitly, that they had been subject to some degree to negative stereotyping about people in the industry. This sense of mutual distrust was evident when speaking with a regional coordinator:

*P15 : the use of land is, much much much more precious as well to the Council than I, then I ever sort of gave it credit for... Because they only get one chance to do it. So it's taken really really seriously... [if] you get **a major [national] developer...** they're kind of like 'pile them high, sell them cheap'. And they'll often **come into areas that have got very low land values, and they'll basically argue that the site's not viable-** but they'll come and **do us a favour...**you know! We can't possibly make this site viable, the land- the values is- ooh- so low! **We're basically giving them away! We're doing this out of the kindness of our hearts!**' you know? And... **they end up paying very little for the land sometimes. Because the councils want the numbers [of homes], and they want the regenerating effect of housing in a particular area.** [Emphasis added].*

Though P15 is from SYMCA, not SCC, and is speaking about experiences with large national land buyers, and not local SMES like P8, this quote implies some

homebuilders are dishonest in order to get things at a good price. This implication illustrates why P16 was frustrated with SCC for not giving developers positive acknowledgement for their skills, or credit for helping councils meet their housing needs. P16 complained that Sheffield's policies were 'outdated' and the council had 'no vision' (P16). P16 commented that all the council did to bring about Kelham Island's success was '1) [they] sold properties they owned to developers and 2) granted planning consents.' (P16). The reluctance of financial institutions to lend and the requirement that development makes a certain percentage of profit to loan the money also challenge the stereotype that developers are greedy. In reality, they must achieve these externally imposed benchmarks that councils and lending institutions uphold to progress with development.

My interviews took place in 2021 before the draft Sheffield Plan containing the Area One map (SCC, 2022) introduced in Chapter 5 (Section 2, Fig. 4) was made public. Over the last two decades, SCC has produced documents that set out its conceptualisations of what Neepsend should look like, but the official policies that guide planning have been slow to change. This is the second key issue P16 mentioned. P5 and P16 disclosed they were Sheffield Property Association (S-PA) members. The S-PA is a formal network that provides owners and developers, whether businesses or individuals, with an official channel to collectively gather and discuss the city's current priorities. It has local, regional (SYMCA) and national (London) connections. S-PA was established in 2017 and describes itself as 'the collective voice of property in Sheffield' (S-PA, 2024):

Together, we support, celebrate and promote Sheffield. Connecting land-owning and development businesses with stakeholders and partners, we build relationships that strengthen Sheffield's communities... and work collaboratively with stakeholders... including Sheffield City Council, SYMCA and the London Property Alliance (S-PA, 2024).

The S-PA acknowledge that the core planning policies that guide development are currently 'the Sheffield Core Strategy (2009) and "saved" policies from the Sheffield Unitary Development Plan (1998)' (S-PA, March 2023), documents that 'are out of date... [and have] left a policy vacuum' (S-PA, March 2023). In Chapter 5, I discussed the Sheffield Strategy (SCC, 2022) that has set out

the new strategic vision for growth. In their response to this proposed Sheffield Plan, the S-PA (March 2023) note that the finalisation of this new Sheffield Plan is a key priority for the SPA.

In summary, this section has highlighted some of the challenges of working in property. Although the actors in this chapter must be mindful of costs as part of their job, their motivations and rationales were more in line with a '*Homo heuristicus*' perspective than with a '*Homo economicus*' stereotype (Tinghög et al., 2023, 2). As seen above, changes in Neepsend were impacted by wider policy concerns, and a top-down plan for the area can change land values. To keep up to date with these changes, there are official information networks, such as policy networks, and formal networking organisations like S-PA that owners can join to keep informed of the latest news. The next section looks at how information is shared informally and how friendships, rumours, and rivalry impact land-holding activities in Neepsend.

7.5.1 Scales of Ownership

During fieldwork, I identified different scales of property ownership in Neepsend. As discussed in Chapter 6, one Large Property Firm [anonymised as LPF] had significant holdings in the area. LPF's holdings were well-known in the area, including the commercial properties rented by P4, P9, P17 and P20. A key theme that came out of the data was that owners were well-informed about the activities and holdings of other owners:

P22: They [LPF] own the gym, all that, where Yellow Arch is. All that. The new build across the road. They've just bought... at the back of where the Parrot Lounge and everything is, they've just bought all that. And they own where Peddler's is. And if anything comes up for sale...You go around the corner and there's a tyre place and one or two other little units. I know, there's one little bit that they don't own. Because I know who owns it, and they won't sell it to them. But they [LPF] own everything else. Where the skip yard is. And all those units, they bought them about four months ago.⁶

⁶ [I noticed some changes here around then and took photos? And today noticed the Rutland Business Park sign which is new and I could smell fresh paint- the gate was grey and the building has been repainted also.]

This suggests that, during my fieldwork period, LPF strategically assembled larger footprints of land in Neepsend. Compared to my repeat photography, in August 2021, I noticed subtle signs of owner activity along Rutland Road, where refurbishments were taking place. The timing of the changes in this location was consistent with P22's account, which stated that LPF had purchased these sites. The significance of these subtle changes in ownership is, once again, layered. First, LPF's new acquisitions on Rutland Rod are opposite the Cannon Brewery. As P22 remarked:

P22: But!... they don't own the brewery. [Family Company] own that, I think... But they [LPF] own the Heist.

P21 [LPF] do?

P22: Yep. They own the Cutlery Works.

P21: I thought the [leaseholder] owned that?

P22: I think they rent it off them.

P21: It won't be long until Kelham Island's called [LPF] Island (laughs)

LPF own two leisure businesses on Neepsend Lane, and one of the properties they obtained in August 2021 has since become the Made to Move sports therapy centre. As I walked to the interview with P22, 'I noticed the smell of fresh paint when walking past [LPF's] new acquisition, and the [new] signage [for] 'Rutland Business Park' (Transcript 22 Summary, 13/12/2021). This suggests that LPF have upgraded their premises, which could lead to higher rents.

Because LPF has multiple holdings, they have more resources to obtain additional properties, and they can afford to rent to 'risky' (P1) ventures, such as the Cutlery Works, because they have many assets. At the other end of the scale, actors such as P9 own just one commercial property. This has implications for owner activity. P22 reported that LPF attempted (see P8) to purchase an adjacent parcel, but the current owner was unwilling to sell. As discussed in Chapter 6, some landholders rely on their land for their retirement, and the timing of development opportunities may not fit with the timing of their retirement plans (P15). Though P22 and P11 have multiple holdings, they were not operating at the same scale of property ownership as LPF. Landholders with smaller portfolios may wait to see if larger-scale plans, such as the redevelopment of the Ski Village and apartments at Cannon Brewery and Mushets, come to fruition before parting with their land. As

P21 and P22 explained, once an activity has been established as commercially viable, those with smaller holdings are willing to take on risk and seek to replicate that success:

P21 [In] '[20]16? '[20]17? I went interrailing. We ended up in Rotterdam. And then there they have the Fenix Food Factory, it's an old warehouse with lots of little street food units. And I thought Neepsend, slash Kelham, could use that. And I came home and said to Dad, 'look, you're gonna retire soon. Let's get everything sold. And we'll make what I've seen in Rotterdam in your warehouse' and he went 'nah! 'It's not gonna work, you're too ambitious. No.' Less than 12 months later, the Cutlery Works opened.... But what that did was kind of reassure my dad that I -can- have a good idea. And then he said, Well, that's, you know, the whole warehouse. I'm not ready to retire yet. Think a bit smaller. And yeah, maybe we'll see.

Because they were at different stages of life, P22 was more cautious than P21. He had worked hard to build his portfolio and had experience selling property when things went wrong.

P22: We go to Kelham Wine Bar. We go to the Saw Grinders and, there's a lot of nice bars around here. And then Peddler Market opened up- and... they were getting eight thousand people. They were queuing up around the corner!

As the character of Neepsend changed, there was evidence of demand. P22 obtained a neighbouring site and was willing to risk a small portion of his holdings to try a new family venture. Actors who worked in property, such as P1, echoed the idea that cumulative change was in action:

P1: that area, I think that's still... very risky. Because it's on the periphery not only of Kelham, but also of Neepsend... I think Cutlery Works is fantastic. You know, when I first found out that that was going to be put on, I was thinking 'hmm... you know, is that a great location for that?' but it's worked really well. It's popular. So... someone invests, creates a bit of a buzz, and then over time that will attract investment.

P1, P21 and P22's comments demonstrate that the timing of owner activity is sensitive in Neepsend, particularly around the Rutland Road boundary. Though there is an increasing interest in obtaining land in this area, in anticipation of future change, owners with smaller holdings may wait for owners with larger holdings to make their moves and 'risk their balance sheet' (P5). Though the land they hold

may be increasing in value, there is a lot of uncertainty. A ground-up approach to mitigate this uncertainty for smaller scale owners is to wait and see if larger-scale owners' projects are marketable.

7.6 Land Assembly and Flows of Information in Neepsend

Just as the set-aside properties were being used to different degrees of intensity, the property owners demonstrated differing intensity when describing their priorities and motivations. Over their careers, participants had worked closely with planning officers, property-owning clients, family, friends, and SME and national home-building companies. As previously discussed in section 7.3, one of the ways participants described their landholding activities was to compare it with the strategies of other landowners to point out owner activity that they agreed with or knew was taking place but did not engage in themselves. This section focuses on how people who worked in property described how other landholders acquired and managed their land.

Land can move slowly because owners have multiple projects that split their attention. Just as the set-aside properties were being used to different degrees of intensity, the property owners demonstrated differing intensity when describing their priorities and motivations. Some people were juggling multiple holdings and prioritised different sites at different stages:

P5: the delay on that [site] is probably somewhere between my client and [another owner]. I mean, we've always seen that site as being developable, the client's just one of those people that wants to get the most out of it and wants to try and buy the land next door. And it's just taking time. And to be quite frank, I think he's probably not as committed as he should be. He's got plenty of other things that he could be doing at the moment.'

In describing one of his client's sites, P5 acknowledges there is more the owner could be doing, but that his attention could be split. As seen in Chapter 6, the Family Company were working on other development projects during the period they owned Cannon Brewery. This slow pace of activity can be accounted for when we look at P8's long list of priorities one needs to juggle for each project. If we

return to P8, he believed one landholder in Neepsend was holding onto sites and holding up development:

P8: probably the biggest problem in Neepsend is [Mr X, who] has a business model, which... effectively means he goes and buys freeholds... He's waiting for those to expire, or... ask for a change of use. If they want to change from industrial to residential, he wants a payment. To allow that change of use. So it's a fairly... crappy business model, that's quite lucrative. He collects small rents off 'em. So if you, if you've got a long leasehold property... with 200 years on... [with] only be 40 years left. You might be paying £2 a year for the ground rent. But he buys them. For quite considerable sums of money. Knowing that he can frustrate future development. By saying 'well, if you want to build residential here, or office, or leisure, you need to pay me to allow you to change it from the heavy industry that it's currently allowed. It's legal, but it's a very... crap business model in my mind.. [because] no bank will lend you against a leasehold property with only 30-40 years left to go... [and] I've come across it many, many times. Unfortunately, councils sold lots of long leaseholds off in the past. Without realising the impact of what these investors might do with the, with the frustration factor.

As an SME homebuilder, P8 considers Neepsend an ideal location for residential property. He had encountered a landholder, Mr X, and decided it was not worth trying to obtain the sites because of the costs and hassle involved. Though he did not like this type of landholding activity, P8 believed it was a common practice in real estate:

P8: There are lots of companies out there based in London, based around the world that buy long leaseholds because they know that they've got a long term income stream... they get a frustration payment, and a change of use payment, they may expect to keep the leasehold- the freehold still- for the income off the apartments.

P8 described his land-buying activities as follows:

P8: in a national house builder, I'd be classed as a land buyer... I work closely with our stakeholders, and by stakeholders I mean things like people we buy land off. Like [National Home Builder A]. Like us, so I work closely with [NHB-A] when they're looking at new sites. We buy land off them and they bring us connected to their table. Erm, I work closely with [an SME company based in the North], they're a big advocate of ours. They want us to build more houses on their land. I work closely with Homes England, one of our funders, [a] Bank, one of our funders, and a pension fund, one of our funders.

P8 has access to land – a development pipeline-through strong interpersonal business connections with other stakeholders and strong connections to funding bodies. So far, this section has looked at how land is assembled using different logics that favour getting the timing right and taking an orthodox economic approach so that the developments turn a profit. Though these orthodox activities rely on interpersonal relationships, these are not always cordial and can generate competitive behaviours.

Though I have challenged pre-existing stereotypes about property owners being one-dimensional characters, my data does not seek to completely rewrite existing narratives about property. As previously discussed, making a profit is one way in which developers demonstrate their ability to make astute business decisions. When I discussed scales of ownership, I noted that when somebody else does something that works, other people show an interest. Looking back to the early phases of Kelham Island’s redevelopment, P16 noted that other property agents became curious when they were brokering deals in what was a run-down part of Sheffield. As P8 suggested, banks can be reluctant to finance developments if the project is too risky. In P16’s experience, ‘Banks are very negative. Fearful. And that is not how you do regeneration.’ During the early redevelopment of Kelham Island, banks were not convinced the schemes would be viable and would not sell. P16 worked alongside a national home builder [NHB-2] and a local homebuilder [LHB] to fund their vision. They formed a team and successfully applied for grant money from Yorkshire Forward. Though flats in Kelham Island were sold at affordable prices, they have proved popular, and the values have ‘jumped up’ (P16). Though this deal worked out well, on another occasion, the deal turned sour:

*‘[P16 negotiated the 140k purchase of the [Site 1]... [NHB-3] owned [Site 2], his friend had [Site 3], and P16 had [Site 4]. He got his friend to fund the [Site 1] acquisition. The group had an agreement, but... **sheer greed permeates through the industry....**P16, their friend, and [NHB-3] would equally fund the creation of a public square on the garage site [Site 1... [NHB-3] said they would pay for it. [NHB] would fund the land purchase, and then [the others would] chip in. [NHB-3] were **taken at their word** by the other parties. What happened was that [NHB] got planning for [Site 1] and sold the land off for a massive profit. **P16 was livid. [NHB] had conned them and made a lot [of money] out of it...** Now, the land values are so high, you can’t leave it [to*

become a park]. That window [to make one] was when the land values were low.' [Emphasis added].

In this story, P16 uses the negative stereotypes of the greedy property developer to show that, amongst developers, sharing information can generate competitive behaviour. In the next extract, P22 demonstrates the need to keep information to oneself and act fast (see bold):

*P22: 'I just said, 'Oh I haven't seen Old Mrs. So-and-So, and she [the tenant] goes 'Oh no, it's because she's passed away. Her daughter wants to sell the business. So I says, 'are you buying it?' And she said, 'Oh no, we don't want it.' So I said, 'Well, do you mind giving me her number, and er, I'll see what I can do. Because I own next door'. And it's all part of, it ties it into a bigger space... to cut a long story short, within **three weeks of that day. It was mine.***

Charlene: Oh, wow. That was quite a quick sale?

*P22 Oh, yeah, **I didn't want [LPC] to know it was up for sale.** Honestly, I, - I went to see my solicitor friend of mine. I said, 'Look, **I'm buying this property. I want no surveys. No, nothing.**' I just want to take it. I said, 'I'm not bothered if it's falling down'. I bought it outright... that was it. Job done. I don't want any... **messing about- the more of that that happens, the more people get to know it's there.** And then I made her a promise that I won't .. kick them [the tenants] out. Because I know 'em. And er, but we'll see what happens eventually.*

Charlene: What's your favourite thing to get from them?

P22: The favourite to be honest is Thursday is Pie Day.'

The extract above blends orthodox and heterodox behaviours. First, P22 demonstrates a degree of professional rivalry with LPC, and a sense of getting in and buying the land before they know it is available. P22 buys the property in cash, without surveys, because the long-term reason he is obtaining the property is to join onto his existing holdings and the footprint for the hypothetical flats that he will retain for himself and his family as investments.

In the short term, P22 has been a business customer for decades and knows the occupants. Here, we see heterodox behaviours and personal networks come into play. P22 knew the former owner and obtained the daughter's number through

the tenants. Rather than maximising her assets, the daughter did not want to keep the property and sold it. One of the terms of the sale was a *promise* to keep the status quo and allow the tenants to carry on. Unlike the promises made between P16, his friend, and NHB, this one has not been broken. An advantage of P22 owning this property is that another actor, such as LPC, is prevented from owning it and bringing about unwanted change for the tenants or for P22 as a neighbour.

7.7 Discussion

The first finding from this chapter was that the majority of participants owned or managed multiple property holdings. Each owner had at least one low-intensity or set-aside property in their portfolio. They also owned sites operating at higher-intensity uses. Just as Chapter 5 did not find “nothingness” in Neepsend, I realised it would be counterproductive to arrange the participants in Chapter 7 into a “typology” of owners (McNamara, 1983). Only one participant, P9, owned just one set-aside commercial holding. As a local business that has invested in Neepsend since 2015, P9’s story of buying a derelict pub to expand their business challenges the stereotype that ‘property owners’ in gentrifying areas are ‘skimming off’ local profits (Frisch et al., 2019, 14). As P8 and P5 explained, renovating a property is not cheap. Though P9 purchased the pub with full intentions to renovate it, the project has stalled because the owner has prioritised keeping their core business afloat following the financial difficulties that impacted independent businesses that could not trade during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Having established that owners of set-aside property juggled competing personal and professional priorities, I instead focused on the types of activity they engaged in. These included being a commercial or residential landlord, managing a non-real estate business, buying land for a house-building company, preparing plans for redevelopment, and working with other stakeholders. The work participants put into managing their properties challenged the stereotypes about owners of set-aside property being absent and inactive. This contributed more evidence to a previous finding: that set-aside management activities can occur offsite. Though popular culture has stereotyped property owners as exploitative

and untrustworthy, those who engaged in this study allowed themselves to be vulnerable. The purpose of this thesis was to expand current understandings of the relationships between set aside properties and the people who own them. All landholding participants (Table 7.1) were either born in Yorkshire, or had lived there for at least a decade. During qualitative interviews most participants provided rich narrative outlines of their socioeconomic background. As a result, the interview transcripts contain rich thematic data that indicates complex and shifting social class statuses during the lives of the property owning participants.

As alluded to in Chapter Two, negative stereotypes about property owners are often coloured by high profile narratives that have focused upon large scale landholders operating in high intensity property markets (Marriott, 1967). As discussed in the empirical chapters, particularly Section 7.5.1, I did not find these types of interest within my data concerning owners in the Neepsend property market. Rather, my data showed different scales and intensities of ownership. Furthermore, when looking at the comments made by the landowner themselves, their social attitudes were complex. In recounting their successes (P5, P8, P16), there were echoes of the self-made man narratives associated with well-known property moguls like Fenston and Hyams (Marriott, 1967). Yet, their willingness to share when things had not gone well, and discuss the day to day challenges of working in property (P8, P16, P21, P22) challenged the stereotypes of property owners as individuals or corporations that earn money for nothing whilst exploiting the less well off. The findings highlight that attitudes towards property ownership are complex; though properties are an economic asset, *that does not mean the owner will be, or will feel, economically secure*. P22 recalled how his father:

'came from nothing... When we used to go... to see my grandad, we couldn't stay where he lived because it was too rough. So [my dad] didn't give you anything, you had to earn it'.

This attitude to wealth seemed to have a significant impact. Though P22 owned multiple properties and was in the economic position to sell property to fund his father's nursing home fees, coming from a working class background and being

raised to believe that one should never sell property meant that, despite the seriousness of these circumstances, this loss of an economic asset became a 'regret' (P22). Similarly, though his family had resources, his own parenting style echoed his father's, in that P22 would 'help them if they're trying to help themselves. They won't just get it given.'

As explained in Chapter 2, an unwillingness to dismiss stereotypes creates an obstacle to better understanding set-aside properties and their owners. Rather than reinforcing the stereotype of the rich landholder getting richer, the extract above shows how property ownership can expand the socioeconomic opportunities available to participants born into working class backgrounds. Research into the phenomenon of upward mobility suggests there are three factors that impact social mobility. These are: economic success (skills, income, employment quality, human capital), power and autonomy (agency, physical and mental health, a growth mindset), and being valued in the community (social capital, social standing) (Ramakrishnan et al., 2011). Though education is often seen as a means of encouraging upward social mobility, Census 2021 (ONS, 2023) data showed that 8.8 million adults (18.2% of respondents) across England and Wales have no qualifications. This can be a barrier when applying for jobs, with consequences for one's potential earnings. This is significant to my data as both P16 and P11 observed that the property sector values soft skills in employees. P11 came to work in property because it is a sector that did not require formal training. Though P16 had trained as a quantity surveyor, he considered the property sector to be a rare example where one could have a successful career without needing qualifications. As Dunleavy (2003, 119) stated:

'Academics should know better than to use generalizing stereotypes. But in fact when discussing the behaviour of groups of people they often write in a style using the 'archetypal singular'... any statement using an archetypal singular is only true if everyone in that role or with that characteristic behaves in the way cited, a claim that is almost always bound to be wrong and is additionally never provable.'

By speaking about property with property owners who were not born into wealthy backgrounds, the data collected for this thesis has the potential to

contribute to debates around class identity in contemporary society. Two key themes to emerge from the interview data with owners were:

- the impact that their background had made upon their choices to invest in property
- the impact that obtaining and having these economic resources made to their daily life and future prospects.

When I consider the three aspects of social mobility- economic success, power and autonomy, and being valued in the community- (Ramakrishnan et al., 2011) alongside my positionality as a first generation researcher who was born and raised in ‘the most deprived area nationwide in terms of average rank, average score, and local concentration’ (Blackpool Council, 2021, no page) my background allowed me to empathise with these actors.

When I began my PhD I had a mortgage and lived in a single person household. I have exercised my autonomy by making choices to save up for a home before I pursued a Masters and a PhD. These degrees allowed me to access previously unknown communities and careers (Wenger, 1998), but social mobility does not guarantee economic mobility. Though it was not my plan to become a landlord, I did so because, like P22, it did not make sense to me to sell my house when I moved in with my partner. Though Bourdieu’s (1980/1990) concept of the *cleft habitus* presents a fascinating lens when conducting research into the perspectives of individuals whose life experiences that do not neatly fit into socioeconomic categories such as “working class” and “middle class”, engaging in a more in-depth discussion of class and owners’ financial attitudes towards their property holdings did not directly address the research questions, and was therefore beyond the scope of this research. However, these preliminary findings suggest that this theme warrants further empirical study.

The stories in Chapter 7 demonstrate that stakeholders we might be inclined to describe as property maximisers were nuanced individuals, not solely driven by financial gain. They needed to be profitable to deliver successful projects and protect their reputations (P5, P8, P16). An unexpected finding was that owners seemed to have internalised negative stereotypes. Glimmers of worry surfaced at

certain points in the conversation, suggesting concern about being judged harshly. As such, they occasionally felt the need to justify their behaviours and activities. Combined with the difficulty recruiting owners, I wondered if external stereotypes had put people off consenting to the study. The data analysis revealed how complex and nuanced property owners and their lives are. The next section draws this chapter to a close.

7.8 Summarising Lived Space

Chapter 7 analysed the role of stakeholder relationships and perceptions in creating and sustaining slow property or low-intensity approaches to sites within Neepsend. Time played a crucial role in owner decision-making, but orthodox economic reasoning was not always the key factor. One property owner invested in property at low prices when the market timing was favourable but also sold a site when the market timing was unfavourable. Given that money was needed for family healthcare, this was a perfectly logical decision when placed in the context of the human life cycle. Taking an embedded approach (Henneberry & Parris, 2013) and speaking to a broader range of stakeholders meant that some of the owners encountered in this chapter were first approached in their capacity as occupants. These owners demonstrated differing intensities of feeling when describing their priorities and motivations. Some properties held sentimental value. In other cases, being free of a burdensome property or dangerous property (see Chapter 6, P16) may be preferable to waiting for market uplift.

In summary, the themes from Chapter 7 were rooted in owners' desires for security, their relationships with other stakeholders, and how owners accessed, shared, and acted upon information about the local property market through rumour and friendship. Alongside the findings in Chapter 5 and Chapter 6, this thesis has demonstrated that set-aside properties are not necessarily forgotten about. Rather, their owners may be engaged in off-site activity, or their attention may be divided and focused on different development projects or personal matters elsewhere. The next chapter draws this thesis to a conclusion by answering the

three original RQs and summarising the theoretical, methodological and empirical contributions to knowledge.

Chapter 8: Conclusion

This research advanced understanding of urban land use by investigating the perspectives, motivations, and meanings of property owners' activity and "inactivity" in an "under-utilised" area. The literature review established that previous research into set-aside property had not considered how owners see their sites or what owners do to manage set-aside properties. The site chosen for fieldwork was Neepsend, an industrial area north of Sheffield city centre. This area is being re-evaluated as an ideal location for future, higher-intensity, city-centre expansion. Primary data was collected through repeat photography walks and semi-structured interviews with community groups, real estate professionals, area planners, occupants, and owners. The chosen methodology pursued an ecosystem approach (Henneberry & Parris, 2013) to consider how owners were embedded (Ball & Pratt, 1994; Ball, 2002; Jack & Anderson, 2002) in their local property market. In line with my background as a historian, this research blended aspects of the oral history tradition (Portelli, 2013; Maye-Banbury, 2024) with social science research approaches (Watts, 2014) that seek out participants' lived experiences and subjective beliefs. Given 'that research has hardly touched on the complex relationships between developers, industrial property and local economic regeneration' (Ball, 2002, 158) the study was explicitly designed to address this gap by working from the ground up and following where participants led. This research design produced a contextual analysis which has implications for future work seeking to understand the wider phenomenon of set-aside property, or how place-based change both influences and is influenced by the actions of owners.

This chapter concludes the thesis in five steps. First, I reflect on the research questions (RQs) and outline the key findings. Second, I outline the methodological, conceptual, and empirical contributions to knowledge. Third, I outline the wider implications of this research. Fourth, I address the limitations of the study before concluding with recommendations for future research.

8.1 Key Findings

Table 8.1 outlines where, in the thesis, each research question and objective was addressed. This section provides a short recap that answers research questions RQ1, RQ2, and RQ3 before summarising the different contributions to knowledge made by this research.

Table 8.1 Overview of Research Questions and Objectives of this study and where they are discussed in the thesis.

Research Element	Location where addressed
RQ1: What dynamic processes can be found within seemingly set-aside or derelict sites?	Chapter 3: Appendix J Chapter 4: Fig 4.8 – The Utility Pyramid. Chapter 5: Table 5.1; Fig 5.6 Chapter 6: Table 6.1 Chapter 7
RQ2: What are the owner and occupier logics behind low-intensity property use?	Chapter 5 Chapter 6; Table 6.1 Chapter 7: Table 7.2
RQ3: How can we understand different types of property-owner behaviours?	Chapter 2; Chapter 3; Chapter 4. Chapter 6; Fig 6.1; Fig. 6.9; Fig 6.13; Fig 6.14. Chapter 7.
O1: Through empirical research, identify 'seemingly un-utilised' or 'derelict' properties within a low-intensity area and investigate these properties' 'building life cycles'.	Chapter 5: Table 5.1; Fig 5.6; Fig 5.15 Chapter 6: Table 6.1; Fig. 6.1 Chapter 7.
O2: Investigate owner and occupier perceptions of site use through in-depth qualitative interviews	Chapter 3: Appendix E; Appendix F. Chapter 5 Chapter 6: Fig 6.1 Chapter 7: Table 7.1; Table 7.2
O3: Produce a multi-faceted understanding of the lives of un/under-utilised spaces and their owners through synthesis of empirical data and secondary sources.	Chapter 3: Table 3.1; Appendix E; Appendix F. Chapter 4: Table 4.3 Chapter 5: Fig. 5.6 Chapter 6 Chapter 7
O4: Through O1, O2 and O3 produce a new conceptual understanding of under-utilised sites.	Chapter 4: Table 4.3; Fig. 4.1; Fig 4.2; Fig 4.4. Fig 4.8- The Utility Pyramid. Chapter 5 Chapter 6: Fig 6.13. Chapter 7: Fig 7.1; Fig 7.3.

The data analysis revealed much overlap between RQ1 and RQ2. To understand the dynamic processes of the local property market, I first had to establish what “set-aside” or “derelict” property looked like in an “under-used” place like Neepsend. To address RQ1, Chapter 5 provided a list of 20 sites which were observed between 2020-2022. In conducting this empirical activity, it became apparent that the difference between an “under-used” and a “set-aside” site was not always apparent from visual observations alone. To better understand these seemingly set-aside sites, I spoke with a range of stakeholders. This revealed a tension between the intentions behind SCC’s regeneration plans for Neepsend and how stakeholders had received these plans on the ground.

In answer to RQ1, property professionals considered a) set-aside sites and b) occupied but underutilised sites to be prospective opportunities. This finding was consistent with existing sources (Land Hero, 2020). These actors were keen to see a Sheffield masterplan. This would reduce development risk by providing more certainty about the land-use types the Council would approve. When I conducted interviews in 2021, those working in the property industry suggested the adjacent Kelham Island area had reached the end of the regeneration cycle. This shed light on the dynamics of set-aside property and urban regeneration. Rather than advocating for the fast approaches that were seen in policies such as the Brownfield Housing Fund, the developers, with their experience of building, appreciated the slow ‘organic’ (P5) approach to regeneration and anticipated the changes in Neepsend would take another 20 years to complete. This finding was consistent with Ball & Pratt’s (1994) assertion that actors with local experience tend to use this knowledge to aid them in development success and also addressed RQ3 by demonstrating that developers have differing time horizons and are not necessarily seeking a *quick profit*.

To address RQ2, I spoke with occupants and owners, some of whom had been in the area for almost three decades. All occupants who participated in the study reported good working relationships with their landlords. Challenging the notion of highest and best use, occupants explained the benefits of low-intensity properties. These units provided affordable workspaces for local independent

businesses managed by sole traders and small firms. Businesses had chosen Neepsend because the rent was cheap and the business rates were low. Occupants stated that rental prices and property rates in Sheffield's city centre were prohibitively expensive, deterring commercial businesses from setting up closer to the centre. A nuanced finding was that the occupants were not necessarily against Sheffield's redevelopment. P17 spoke of the Ski Village site as land waiting to be brought 'back online', and P22 mused that the proposed changes to pedestrianise the area might harm his traditional manufacturing business, but they could benefit the family's hospitality business. Though his 27-year-old metal working business could be at risk from development pressures, P10 was approaching retirement. P10 felt that Sheffield had to keep up with other cities and move with the times, and expressed concerns about his children's future career and housing opportunities.

Occupant opinions were divided regarding whether it was inevitable that their landlord would 'sell out to gentrification' (P18) or whether their landlord would pursue a heterodox approach. P6 had a gentlemen's agreement with his landlord to have first dibs on purchasing his premise of 23 years should it ever come up for sale. P6 wondered if his retirement-aged landlord might resist development pressure to continue with the status quo because property management was a straightforward way of making a living that had the health benefits of keeping him physically active.

The second aspect of RQ2 was to interview the owners. P16 saw set-aside property as an opportunity but also reported problems when managing set-aside property, such as trespassing and vandalism. When the scale of this problem grew unmanageable, P16 suggested demolition was the next logical step to avoid harm to the public and owners' liability. In terms of land assembly, when recalling his decision-making process when buying a neighbouring property, P22 described his retirement plans, the need to provide for his family, and the land acquisition *as having exchange value in the future*. In the short term, P22 had promised the previous owner and incumbent tenants that he would keep their business as it was for the foreseeable future. Interestingly, this revealed that resisting or giving in to development pressure was not necessarily an either/or decision.

RQ3 looked closer at the combination of orthodox and heterodox motivations behind owner's land holding decisions. The themes I identified in Chapter 7, Table 7.2, included financial and non-financial motivations. The non-financial factors that owners expressed as being important to them included: [B] Professional reputation; [C] Current career, maintaining a business; [D] Developing a skill set; [E] Family, [F] Friends and [H] the Local community. Rao's (2018, 74) nine 'intangible' factors that influence owner decision-making demonstrated substantial overlap with the key themes I identified by analysing the semi-structured interviews with owners and those who work closely with owners:

'(i) Secure means to basic ends; (ii) Self-identity; (iii) Social capital; (iv) Social equity; (v) Political empowerment; (vi) Power to take decisions on land matters; (vii) Family's wellbeing; (viii) Personal comfort and convenience; and (ix) Psychological wellbeing' (Rao, 2018, 74).

This blend of orthodox and heterodox motivations sheds light on why property developers and owners of underutilised or set-aside properties do not see these sites as a problem and may be comfortable with slower timescales for change. I will return to the significance of this finding in the study's implications.

8.2 Contributions to Knowledge

Consistent with constructivist grounded theory (Charmaz, 2007), this thesis advocates for researchers to be willing to bend categories or reject categories to fit the data (McEvoy & Richards, 2006; Nicolini, 2013; Holmes, 2020). This section lists the key contributions of this thesis under three thematic headings.

8.2.1 Methodological Contribution

To answer RQ1, I needed data about what owners were doing behind the scenes. This would help to determine whether they considered the properties to be actively doing *meaningful or valuable* work in their current condition. This was achieved by identifying and documenting the building lifecycles of 20 properties in Neepsend, both on and off-site. I investigated the site's ownership using repeat photography, contemporary planning records, and semi-structured interview questions. Planning records were publicly available in some instances, such as the Farfield Inn and pre-2018 Cannon Brewery planning histories. The plans were not

public in other cases, such as Osborn Mushet's redevelopment scheme. These barriers to access demonstrated that there are layers of “hiddenness” when researchers seek out property data.

Urban scholars, including myself, are confronted with an epistemological challenge: cities are in a perpetual state of flux (Beauregard & Haila, 2000; Amin & Thrift, 2002). During my PhD, my interview and photography data began as fresh accounts of current events. Doucet (2019, 411) argues that ‘photographs are a useful part of [a] critical constructive analysis of the city’ and that rephotographing places can highlight the pace and frequency of subtle and obvious changes. In seeking to tell a story about emptiness in Neepsend, one of the set-aside properties I documented was the derelict Radiac Works. By engaging in repeat photography, as the building changed, so did the narrative about the pace of change in Neepsend. Despite their value, a challenge when managing visual data is that photographs can be informative but potentially misleading when interpreted out of context. To aid interpretation, the images contained in this thesis were accompanied by a date and time stamp and another data source to provide context.

Without investigating the offsite activity, the visual data alone would have recorded change at only 3 of 20 sites, including the Radiac Works. The advantage of comparing the visual data to interview transcripts and secondary materials was that this approach, inspired by Rhythmanalysis (Lefebvre, 1992), revealed layers of information. First, there were owners for every site for which I found data (18 sites out of 20). Second, these 18 owners had not forgotten about their set-aside sites because they had undertaken some form of off-site property management activity. These included marketing the site for sale or engaging with the planning process. Because these activities were “unseen” and “hidden” from passers-by, visual methods alone would not have identified the extent to which people incorrectly assume that these properties have been abandoned or forgotten.

As detailed in Chapter 3, the combination of walking and visual methods allowed me to appreciate the subtleties of site use. This immersive, cumulative method was invaluable for building up rich knowledge of the fieldwork location.

However, when writing up the thesis, I prioritised the research questions and data from the semi-structured interviews. As COVID-19 restrictions eased, I managed to engage in multiple interviews. In using the three lenses of the *Spatial Triad* (Lefebvre, 1974/1991) to maintain balance, the eventual contribution of the visual data to the thesis was less than I initially expected. These images have been useful when illustrating presentations and may serve a future purpose should I undertake longitudinal research into change in Neepsend. This Rhythmanalysis-inspired approach steers the author away from over-focusing on one data source and has wider implications. Using a combination of Rhythmanalysis (Lefebvre, 1992) and the Spatial Triad (1974/1991) aids in articulating and synthesising new connections to help people think differently about land use. To achieve this level of detail, I built upon the conceptual contributions to knowledge that will be discussed in the next section.

8.2.2 Conceptual Contribution

As explained in Chapter 4, this thesis has reworked existing theory to make a new conceptual contribution to knowledge. This synthesis has combined previous work to enhance our understanding of land use and vacancy processes. This represents a change to the state of knowledge that has added something not previously in the literature.

- **This thesis demonstrated that owners ‘manage vacancy’ (O’Callaghan, 2023a) through activities that are not visible to passers-by because they occur offsite.**

This was achieved by taking a novel approach and interviewing various stakeholders alongside ethnographic methods to understand the rhythm of Neepsend and its properties. This embedded ecosystem approach made visible the “hidden” ways that changes made by owners shaped Neepsend and how changes made in Neepsend shaped the owners' activities. This thesis has modelled how future research can replicate this approach by using Lefebvre’s *Spatial Triad* (1974/1991) to aid the researcher in looking at all three dimensions of space to better understand urban land use.

- **When applying the *Spatial Triad* (Lefebvre, 1974/1991), the three theoretical lenses of *perceived space*, *conceived space*, and *lived space* help researchers manage their iterative data analysis processes because, separately and together, each lens allows one to look closer at the data to find connections that may have otherwise been overlooked.**

Awareness of these overlapping spheres allows the researcher to keep questioning, “What else is going on here?” as they contextualise the data, increasing the study's rigour. Building upon this novel approach, this thesis has made a theoretical contribution to knowledge by adapting previous theories into two analytical tools that can be used in future research.

- **The Utility Pyramid (Fig 8.1) provides an original contribution to knowledge by blending Thompson's *Rubbish Theory* (1979), Gibbeson's (2018) adaptation of *Rubbish Theory*, and O'Callaghan's *vacancy heuristic* (2023a).**

This tool contributes to knowledge by allowing researchers to interrogate their first impressions of set-aside property. After collating multiple data points about a site, the Utility Pyramid, repeated below in Fig. 8.1, can distinguish between the different urban processes (O'Callaghan, 2023a) and periods of the property lifecycle (Thompson, 1979) the property is moving through. Though the model could be used as a stand-alone tool, when studying the perspectives of stakeholders, it is helpful to combine it with Lefebvre's (1974/1991) notion of '*conceived space*' to make “visible” the subjectivities and difficulties that occur when labelling a property as “unused” or “underutilised”.

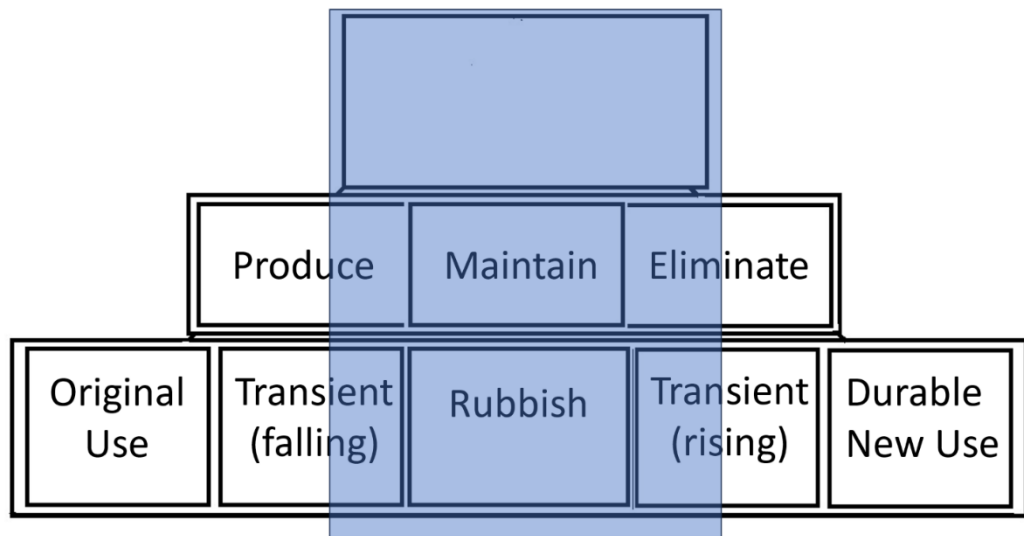


Figure 8.1 The Utility Pyramid.

The Utility Pyramid (Fig 8.1) was instrumental in identifying *five different intensities of use* within the dataset. Thompson’s work (1979) allowed this study to document the “unseen” social processes that drive the Rubbish Cycle. The subtle social processes that change perceptions of property during transient up and transient down phases (Thompson, 1979) guided my focus away from the properties as standalone items (Henneberry & Parris, 2013; Engwall, 2003) and towards the more comprehensive, socially constructed processes through which urban vacancy is created, maintained and removed (O’Callaghan, 2023).

Though this thesis has argued that the intensity and duration of vacancy is significant, and that urban vacancy does not represent a period of inactive nothingness, considerably more work needs to be done to better understand vacancy as an active, not passive, series of processes (O’Callaghan, 2023a). Reflecting on this aspect of my thesis, going forward I believe it would be more accurate to refer to this model as a “utility triangle” rather than a “utility pyramid”. This represents a meaningful correction because the utility triangle provides a new research tool. This model emerged post-fieldwork within this thesis, and was used as a data analysis tool. It is important to amend the name at this stage, as there is

scope for future research to use the model to design and conduct new empirical fieldwork.

- **This thesis has demonstrated how to combine the Spatial Triad (Lefebvre 1974/1991) and Rhythmanalysis (Lefebvre, 1992) to perform data analysis.**

Rhythmanalysis (Lefebvre, 1992) is a tool that describes the interactions of different urban activities as being like music. The theory describes how different sounds interpenetrate and blend. A similar analogy appears in the *Spatial Triad* (Lefebvre, 1974/1991, 87), where interactions are described like water. Activities of different parties can blend and flow in mutual agreement or collide, resulting in waves of confrontation. To operationalise *Rhythmanalysis* (Lefebvre, 1992) as a tool (Chapter 4, Fig. 4.4), it is important to note that these flows (Lefebvre, 1974/1991) can also roll past each other, for example, when information completely bypasses us. When we lack knowledge of another party's experience, we do not know it exists and cannot account for it. This is where plausible but incorrect assumptions and stereotypes creep in, something empirical research should seek to avoid (Dunleavy, 2003). By taking two of Lefebvre's abstract analogies and blending them together, future researchers can identify and label their participants as "molecules" (Lefebvre, 1974/1991, 87) and trace the movements of these "molecules" in the wider "water" that is their fieldwork setting. We can think of our data set as an orchestra to understand how each "molecule" wears 'many hats' (P2A) and takes on a specific role within different interactions. (Chapter 4, Chapter 7).

8.2.3 Empirical Contribution

- ***"Low-intensity" use, not just "disuse," was seen as a phenomenon that needs to be eliminated.***

Chapter 5 revealed that stakeholders at different levels considered the occupied Jewson building "underutilised." This empirical finding meant that my analysis had to evolve to include "underutilised" property owners and "set-aside" property owners. Occupants of similar types of units did not hold this view. Echoing Ball (2002), occupants argued that low-intensity urban properties were becoming an increasingly rare resource for small and medium-sized local firms because they were

being demolished and replaced with higher-utility buildings. The idea that these sites were underutilised seemed to be rooted in orthodox economic assumptions about land use. When walking around Neepsend, I encountered a church, powder-coating workspaces, metalworkers, carpenters, and a butcher⁷, a bakers⁸, and a candlestick makers⁹. As Jacobs argued (1961), there is social value in the slightly shabby, leaky unit that doesn't cost a fortune to rent. Future research could look at cultural economics (Throsby et al., 2021) and contemporary developments, such as those designed by architect Peter Barber (Mark, 2022), which have stitched new development around existing communities.

- **It is more productive to focus on different kinds of owner behaviours and activities than to artificially reduce landholding processes into a typology of owners.**

This thesis challenged stereotypes about owners of set-aside urban property by demonstrating the nuanced activities and different stages involved in managing these properties both on and offsite. Rather than focusing on owners' intentions for *one set-aside property at one moment*, studies need to account for the fact that owners of set-aside properties 'wear many hats' (P2A).

The stereotypes I encountered in the literature can partly be attributed to studies that have focused on the activities of large property actors such as the wealthy 'transnational capitalist class (TCC)' (Sklair, 2017, 3) or property tycoons (Marriott, 1967). When I began the fieldwork, I anticipated producing a typology of owners akin to McNamara's (1983) typology of developers to draw attention to smaller-scale landowners. As the study evolved, I moved away from categories of stakeholders and focused on categories of activity. As such, this study has furthered our understanding of set-aside owners by demonstrating that landholding activity occurs across a diverse spectrum, with owners with different levels of resources (Lazaroska & Palm, 2019) operating at different intensities.

⁷ Waterall Bros Butchers, est. 1964, 2 Percy Street: <https://waterall.co.uk/>

⁸ Depot Bakery, est. 2014, 92 Burton Road <https://thedepotbakery.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/Depot-Kelham-Menu-1023.pdf>

⁹ Tru Pig Vegan Ltd., est. 2016, Albyn Works, Burton Road <https://www.trupigvegan.com/product-page/truffle-pig-candle>

- **Actions do not occur in isolation, and one decision can have repercussions for stakeholders *across time and space*.**

When we consider owners as fully realised human beings with short, medium, and long-term life plans and a real estate portfolio, we can better understand how their priorities are spread across time and space. In some areas of urban studies, there is an assumption that development projects hollow out cities (Sklair, 2017). By taking an embedded approach when speaking with Neepsend owners about their broader lives, this study has drawn attention to the facilitating role smaller-scale landlords play by providing low-intensity units within their local community. The novelty of my empirical approach was that it revealed that these smaller-scale owners do have a significant role in urban development, even though they are often invisible in the literature.

Aside from P9, whose property portfolio consisted of one set-aside property in a low-intensity use area, the other owners I interviewed had multiple properties and were engaged with multiple sites in different UK locations. By focusing on the person, not the property, I followed the data away from the epicentre of Neepsend, Sheffield. This allowed me to interview a participant living abroad in Europe, owner-occupants in Neepsend, and landlords in wider Yorkshire and Milton Keynes. I encountered owners of development projects in Leeds, Stocksbridge, Manchester, and Liverpool. This empirical approach provided evidence that owners' attention was *geographically spread across space* as they juggled multiple activities.

- **All owners in this study had internalised some degree of negative stereotyping.**

To justify their lived experiences, some owners engaged in myth-busting (P5, P8) by explaining the development process. Another strategy was to differentiate themselves and their activities by repeating negative stereotypes about hypothetical (P21) or real-life set-aside property owners (P8), developers (P16), or landlords they encountered during their careers.

- **Emotional labour is involved in managing set-aside property.**

In talking to people about their personal time horizons- their current age, whether they needed to keep that money for elderly relatives or to support children, grandchildren, or themselves and a spouse in retirement- these are things we need as and when they happen. We cannot plan ahead for ill health; it is a situation we must deal with then and there. If that does not align with a high price in the market, it is irrelevant- bills must be paid, and sites must be sold now.

- **Owners can use their property at different intensities across different time scales.**

The literature suggests that owners may hold out for the highest price if set-aside property is scarce. Therefore, it was logical that multiple stakeholders, including private individuals (P11, P22), home builders (P8) and property companies (P5), described the logic of acquiring cheap sites at lower prices and waiting until they needed them rather than being in the situation faced by top-down actors, with short time frames to assemble land quickly, who found themselves hostage to the market price (P15). This has implications for local and regional authorities, who will be keen to spend government funding quickly. The next section turns to these wider implications.

8.3 Limitations

As outlined in Chapter 3, due to the COVID-19 Pandemic, there were legal and practical limitations during the research design and data collection phases of the PhD. Social distancing measures prohibited any in-person data collection activities until October 2021. This placed limitations on my ability to get close to human participants. Most interviews were conducted remotely via video call or telephone. This approach did have benefits, as I could interview participants anywhere in the world. However, this meant that I could not physically visit owners or occupants of set-aside or under-utilised properties. Being removed from the setting may have limited my ability to conduct a fuller multi-sensory Rhythmanalysis (Lefebvre, 1992). This was mitigated by incorporating walking-photography methods. Though not possible during COVID-19, an alternative means of conducting

similar research would be to engage in the co-creation of knowledge (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015), perhaps by conducting ‘ethnographic “walk-along” and photo elicitation interviews’ (Montserrat Degen & Rose, 2012, 3271) with participants within a fieldwork setting.

The second limitation of the study is the absence of key actors whose input may have changed the findings. When I directly approached owners, I found I struggled to recruit participants. Public and private owners were contacted (Lami, 2020), including the Family Company, SCC’s planning and regeneration department, LPC, and C&C, but they did not respond to requests for interviews. Interestingly, my main access route to owners was incidental; I arranged interviews with occupants of Neepsend, who disclosed that they were also property owners. The difficulty of access appears to be reflected in the urban studies literature, which, with few exceptions (Chapter 2, Table 2.2), has predominantly spoken with public sector actors. Despite the small sample size of owners, the qualitative data is nuanced and rich. The key success of this study was that of the 27 participants interviewed, a significant proportion were also *private* landholders or site owners (Chapter 7). A key limitation of research in this field is that it is difficult for researchers to gain access to private, commercial actors. Therefore, the data in Chapter 7, which reports owners' views in their own words, makes a valuable contribution to knowledge.

The third limitation of this study was that the primary data was collected in one specific property market during a two-year window (2020 and 2022) due to the practical timeframes of a PhD. The discussion of Cannon Brewery in Chapter 6 demonstrated the value of conducting longitudinal studies into set-aside properties, which was not possible due to time limitations. The set-aside properties identified in Neepsend were ex-industrial and current industrial property types, including warehouses, factories, and cleared plots. The study did not encounter or discuss other forms of set-aside property in different contexts, such as commercial units on the high street (Rudlin, et al. 2023; Dobson, 2023). When applying this study’s findings to similar contexts, such as northern, post-industrial cities (Healey, 1991a) or out-of-city fringe areas (Ferreri & Vasudevan, 2019), a comparative approach

(Hallberg, 2006) may be helpful, rather than drawing general conclusions based on Neepsend data alone. The opportunities for further research are explored in the next section.

8.4 Recommendations

As stated in Chapter 1, the aim of this thesis was to investigate the unseen lives of set-aside or derelict land and property. In reaching this aim, the data analysis revealed several themes which were out of scope but worthy of further academic research. My first recommendation is for more ground-up, micro-level studies into building trust and developing local relationships during urban place-making processes. One of my sense-making processes during fieldwork and data analysis involved editing and colouring maps to record how I perceived the flow of human activities. In Chapter 6, one of these maps demonstrated how different demographics were using different cafes on Burton Road. This showed that the “local community” in a given place is, in reality, made up of several overlapping “local communities” that use place and space for different purposes.

To give a specific example, a major theme these different communities flagged in the data was about traffic in Neepsend, managing parking, and the pros and cons of reducing cars. Workers who struggled to find parking had petitioned the Council about road access for HGVs and had noticed an increase in the Council’s parking revenue enforcement since the opening of the Cutlery Works in 2018. The forthcoming bus gates discussed in Chapter 6 (Section 3.1, Fig 6.11) were considered out of character and damaging to businesses. Though I spoke with neighbourhood-level and regional-level planners, SCC did not respond to interview requests. P13 and P15 suggested that the preparation of roadworks is standard best practice when areas are transitioning to higher intensity land use, such as more housing. Therefore, this is the approach SCC has taken around Cannon Brewery. This road scheme, discussed in Chapter 6, was criticised by Neepsend businesses for being an abstract idea made up in an office that was akin to placing a square peg in a round hole (P21). This revealed another common stereotype: the out-of-touch

Council making decisions in an office (P6, P19, P14, P17, P18, P21) without consulting local businesses.

In July 2024, the month I submitted my thesis, businesses in Neepsend launched a petition¹⁰ in response to the painting of double yellow lines (Thake, 2024). As a result of these changes, many unit holders cannot find parking for work. Andy Salter, the artist who illustrated the Kelham-Neepsend map referenced in Chapter 3 (see footnote), has decided to leave Neepsend.¹¹ Known for illustrating indie music lyrics, he recently amended his Arctic Monkeys-inspired image of Yellow Arch studios to read, 'It changes when the double yellows go down around here.'¹² As discussed in Chapter 6, these pre-development changes were not wanted by the business community. Demonstrating the different temporalities and layers of *conceived space* at play in Neepsend, though independent businesses have been immediately impacted, with some forced to close, the local council responded:

'I can understand the concern of some businesses surrounding these changes, and we will carry out a review of them in twelve months' time.'

(BBC Radio Sheffield, 2024)

The varying speeds of Neepsend's recent changes and the forthcoming redevelopment of Cannon Brewery present an opportunity for better understanding how there are multiple "Neepsend". When interviewing P2A, P13 and P15 it was apparent that local and regional authorities had good intentions for the futures of Kelham, Neepsend, Sheffield and South Yorkshire. The volunteer-run Neighbourhood Forum in Kelham-Neepsend expressed a desire to better connect with local businesses so that they could better understand and represent their concerns. However, these actors were working to government-imposed, tight deadlines, such as the five-year window of the Brownfield Housing Fund.

¹⁰ Change.org (2024) Petition to eliminate unnecessary double yellow lines in Neepsend, <https://www.change.org/p/eliminate-unnecessary-double-yellow-lines-in-neepsend-sheffield> [accessed 24/07/2024].

¹¹ Andy Slater, Map of Kelham Island <https://www.thisissheffield.com/kelham-island/> [accessed 24/07/24].

¹² Reyt Good Illustration, <https://www.instagram.com/p/C9CnvdPMbxc/?hl=en>

The double yellow lines that were painted on both sides of Burton Road in July 2024 have created difficulties for small business owners who cannot find parking, which may result in an emptier Neepsend. If we return to the orchestra model introduced in Chapters 6 and 7, this new event is another piece of data that could be analysed using the three viewpoints of the *Spatial Triad*. When placed into a wider context, a longitudinal Lefebvrian study could compare ground-up and top-down experiences of this new change to understand if the change is the destructive 'wave' (Lefebvre, 1974/1991, 87) it is feared to be (BBC Radio Sheffield, 2024), or a temporary big ripple. As such, my second recommendation is for more ecosystem-based (Henneberry & Parris, 2013) research that examines the structural issues that lie beneath clashing conceptualisations of space and place to understand if, when, and how local councils, such as SCC, engage with their wider locality on the ground when planning for potentially disruptive area changes like these.

Though this research was explicitly not a policy study, by looking at set-aside property, it became evident that current government funding regimes advocate for maximum utility. P1 and P15 speak about land value uplift (Wyatt, 2018) as though this was the best outcome when spending taxpayer money. Existing research has considered the harm caused to urban centres by land maximisation narratives (Sklair, 2017; Zukin, 2010). When speaking about Kelham Island's transformation, P2A stressed that the changes were not gentrification because the regeneration had taken empty shells and brought them back to life. When interviewing a local journalist (P12), this was evidently not the case, as he had interviewed businesses in Kelham Island that had recently been forced out due to redevelopment. This suggests that the concept of land under utility, rather than land disuse, presents a third avenue for further research. In the vein of Strasser (2021) and Linder (2020), future studies could examine how the notion of underuse is being used and misused when maximum utility is encouraged within urban change dialogues. Accordingly, future studies could focus on gathering and working with spatial data in more quantitative ways.

A fourth productive avenue for future research would be to investigate how to combine the successful elements of the seemingly conflicting top-down and

ground-up approaches to urbanism. Rather than encouraging owners and developers to catch up and meet government agendas by ‘firing out’ (P15) money, perhaps government money could be channelled in a less disruptive, more holistic way. This thesis demonstrated that developers and owners appear to be more comfortable with slow, organic property change than local, national and regional government policy would like. Conversations with P1, P5, and P16 indicated that working towards a 20-year window of cumulative change was a more secure way of doing regeneration, which provided a contrast to P15’s comment that a 5-year funding window was considered a ‘generous’ time frame for a government initiative. Complimentary studies would include Steele (2022), whose thesis proposed investigating ‘alternative[s] to the false choice of gentrification or decline’. Though this thesis did not set out to investigate gentrification, this was a recurrent theme amongst participants.

I interviewed several participants who ran an independent business. Collectively, these operated at different scales, from sole trader to small companies, and they catered to different market segments. In their study of contemporary Manchester, Rose (2017, 195-196) reported that while participants ‘spoke fondly of independent businesses’ they also felt that ‘new “hipster” places were excluding people on [the] grounds of cost and price’. This seemingly paradoxical perspective was also present within my data. Amongst the business owning community, some unit holders expressed the view that having clusters of independent businesses together was mutually beneficial. For example, if customers needed a bike repair, they could spend an hour in a local café. Other unit holders felt that Neepsend was oversaturated with bars and cafes, and challenged this implicit assumption that all visitors have the financial means to be able to move between these businesses. As such, some unit holders were concerned that gentrification would displace them (P14, P17, P18) if value-maximising actors reimagined their units. Though P10 did not use the ‘bohemian style’ (P10) venues himself, he did not consider the changes to be a threat, as it was proving popular with younger generations. Though I have referred to the affection Thompson’s (1979, 47) ‘Knockers-Through’ had for their gentrification projects, it was beyond the scope of this thesis to fully explore the

passions and motivations of small unit holders, or to examine the variety of responses I collected across all stakeholder categories concerning the processes of gentrification in Neepsend. Future research could productively investigate the relationship between contemporary experiences of gentrification and other socioeconomic themes, particularly class and place based identity.

Because this thesis has not directly addressed policy, a fifth avenue for further research would be to investigate the obstacles to spending government-allocated funds before they are returned to the Treasury. The literature review and interviews with planners suggested that the current UK policy regime favours fast-paced approaches when distributing funding for redevelopment. During interviews, several participants noted that council cuts had resulted in fewer human resources, which made top-down changes harder to integrate. Without speaking directly to SCC, I cannot comment on or advise their current approach to set-aside owners and pipeline assembly. Rather than seeing the Council's inability to spend funds on time as a failure, future research could look at the complexity of "wicked problems" (Head & Alford, 2015) and develop realistic policy approaches to finance and support Councils to improve the quality of life for residents.

This study has identified the importance of set-aside land to the local development pipeline. The HELAA map, which shows the set-aside and under-utilised sites the local Council considers strategically significant, was a useful source of secondary data. Within my sample, none of the owners I spoke to held plots that appeared on HELAA. A sixth avenue for further research would be to interview owners whose properties have been identified and promoted on city-level strategic land tools such as HELAA. This research could explore whether these appearances were consensual, any benefits of these tools, and how much faith owners have in major regional development schemes. Conversely, prospective buyers could be asked whether tools like HELAA had influenced their land-buying activity.

This study showed how important nuance is when investigating urban vacancy. The visual data set documented how a wide range of actors used street art to express their identities. Unofficial art was often present in unused, set-aside

spaces such as the interior of Cannon Brewery, the back streets in Zone 3, and the hoardings outside the Mushets site. O’Callaghan (2023a) argued that owners choose when to make their sites visible and invisible during the vacancy process. During the pre-planning period, when the Mushet’s plot was lying low, a third party made that site visible by appropriating the space (Lefebvre 1974/1991) for a colourful mural. This unofficial artwork drew attention to the site, perhaps inviting questions about why that land was empty and what the plans for it might be at a time when the owners may have preferred it to remain anonymous.

In photographing change and what I at the time assumed was stasis, I mistook an active business for an inactive one because of unofficial tagging. The unofficial art contributed to my faulty assumptions. Once I acknowledged this assumption I began to rethink why the official, commissioned murals had begun to appear on traditional businesses such as the local chip shop (Chapter 6, Figures 6.9 and 6.12). Another recommendation is that this holistic, layered approach is transferrable to other areas of urban studies. Though previous studies have considered how street art has been used to express identity, the repainting of traditional businesses, with the 30-year dates of occupancy painted on the exterior, drew attention to the longevity of local businesses at a time when actors in Kelham-Neepsend were sponsoring an art-trail initiative to express their civic pride (KINCA, 2024).¹³ This struck me as a different type of identity statement than has been seen in previous studies. The activities of shop occupants appeared more akin to declaring one’s identity (Rao, 2018) and asserting that *the space was being used* in the face of an incoming maximum-utility threat. My seventh recommendation is that this appears to be a different phenomenon from the acts of reappropriating and making use of seemingly forgotten, unprogrammed spaces (Edensor, 2005) documented in existing studies and is therefore worthy of future empirical investigation.

¹³ <https://www.kinca.org/art-heritage-trail> [accessed 11/07/2024].

8.5 Implications of the Study

This research contributes to knowledge by demonstrating the complex factors influencing how “set-aside” or “under-utilised” landowners decide that now is the time to act. The wider significance of this study is that project outcomes are determined by the interrelations between different actors (Henneberry & Parris, 2013). These actors include financiers, the market, the Council, and the owner's plans for a set-aside property. For urbanists and academics working in property and land use, many factors can contribute to a site staying set-aside for a long period of time, such as being deemed too financially risky or the plan not aligning with the Council's vision. A key theme that has implications for future researchers and policymakers working on land use projects is that different actors were working to different, often clashing, timescales for change (Thake, 2024).

When discussing the regeneration of Kelham Island, which is considered to be a success worth replicating twenty years later, P16 explained that banks did not have the vision to see what Kelham could be and, therefore, considered Kelham *as it was* to be a risky area. This highlighted the difficulty that property holders may face when trying to regenerate property in areas that are socially considered to be “under-utilised”. P16's comment was reminiscent of Thompson's (1979) study of early-stage gentrifiers whose efforts were initially not taken seriously by bank managers, who created a ‘massive economic barricade... to keep the rubbish [properties] out: of the durable category’ (Thompson, 1979, 47).

In present-day Neepsend, owners and developers appeared to be in tune with the organic flow and slower pace of change. However, town planning actors had objectives to meet by March 2025. They were operating in faster time frames and felt pressure to spend or lose the Brownfield Housing Fund (P15). Echoing Raco's (2019) call for slower decision-making processes to ensure better outcomes, participants on the ground were wary of an influx of fast changes and the potential disorienting effect this could have on the local business community (P6, P14, P17, P18, P20, P21). This study showed that visual judgements of property can be misleading. Furthermore, this study challenged the top-down caricature of property

owners as passively skimming profit because the local owners I interviewed were active in the community and wanted to see Sheffield thrive.

In summary, this thesis presented a novel, attentive and layered assessment of set-aside property, the experience of owning set-aside property, and the nuanced and complex situations that surround assembling and holding set-aside land. This study has challenged and dismantled some stereotypes about set-aside property owners by holistically examining how they fit into wider urban networks. This close-up examination of seemingly inactive sites combined with an attentiveness to their owners' actions and motivations revealed a more complex urban ecology than scholarship to date has tended to portray.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Terminology: 'Set-Aside' Property from original PhD Brief, 22 June 2019.

Wastes or in-waiting?: understanding professional cultures of setting-aside urban property

Within the broad interdisciplinary field of urban studies, and in associated policy areas, there has been much celebration in recent years of the rise of 'meanwhile uses' for urban sites (land and/or buildings) as they pass between phases of more conventional, established utilisation. However, despite this, vacant urban sites still exist and little research has been undertaken to understand how site owners and their property advisers perceive the passage of their sites between uses, and in particular why they might still prefer (or at least be comfortable with) a site remaining empty and unused for a period.

The proposed study seeks to address this research deficit by investigating sites that appear to have fallen into disuse, and to understand the stories (and local logics) behind this apparent fate. Through case study-based research using primarily qualitative, interpretative methods (interviews, participant observation, focus groups, archival review) the study will build a rich insight into the way in which professional cultures of setting aside urban land are rationalised and implemented at specific sites.

It is envisaged that there will be a comparative dimension (i.e. looking at case studies from more than one property type) – but within this there is scope for the researcher to focus on types of property that are of particular interest / relevance. For example, the supervisory team have research interest in the life cycles of former mental asylums, abandoned military bunkers and former industrial sites, and the rise and fall of particular types and configurations of office accommodation.

Whilst a background in real estate is not mandatory for this position, the successful applicant will need to be genuinely interested in, and able to build effective research relationships with, site owners, property professionals and their networks, in addition to showing a commitment to interpretative research methodologies.

The project will be supervised by Dr Luke Bennett (Reader in Space, Place & Law), Dr Carolyn Gibbeson (Senior Lecturer, Real Estate) and Dr Barry Haynes (Principal Lecturer, Real Estate).

Potential applicants are encouraged to contact Dr Luke Bennett for further information prior to applying.

Extract from Bennett, L. 'Four Views of Spatial Change and Stasis,'
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Appendix B: Pilot Study Poster: The Secret Life of Empty Buildings: The hidden activity involved in maintaining a site's 'inactivity'

The Secret Life of Empty Buildings: The hidden activity involved in maintaining a site's 'inactivity'

Charlene Cross, Year 1 PhD Researcher



1. Introduction

My research aims to discover a range of perspectives amongst site owners regarding how they perceive and engage with vacancy. By interviewing stakeholders who are close to these sites, I seek to understand the factors that may explain 'why some buildings remain out of use whilst others are refurbished and reoccupied' (Ball, 2002).

I am interested in when and why in the building lifecycle (Cairns and Jacobs; Thompson, 1973) developers or owners purchase vacant sites. By engaging with site owners I seek to narrow a gap in the knowledge by investigating how UK policy, general perceptions, and the practices of developers interact to shape reality.

2. Why is this important?

Urban areas with large concentrations of vacancy are often perceived in negative terms. Within vacancy studies, the perspectives of site owners and real estate actors are often absent. The Sheffield Citadel is an example of a long-term vacant property that appears to be 'doing nothing'. This sentiment was echoed by the Occupy Sheffield Movement, who briefly took over the building in 2012.

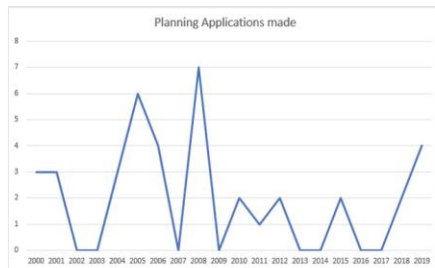
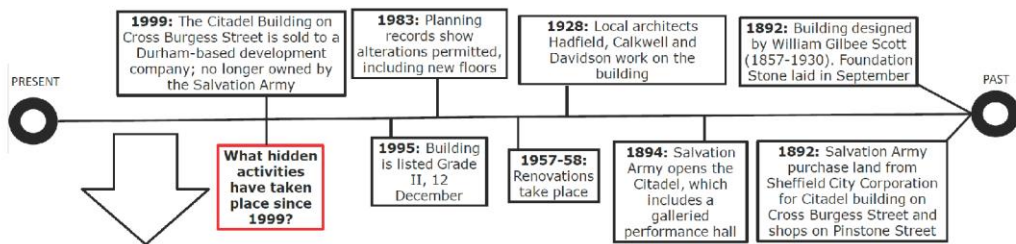
Within contemporary discourse, 'developers' are often described as one monolithic block, and the voices of this stakeholder group are often excluded from conversations about urban spaces; even if they happen to own the building. (Raco, Livingstone & Durrant, 2019).

3. Methodology and Research Impact

Documentary evidence tends to focus on when things happen, rather than on periods of inactivity (see Timeline below). My research focuses on the 'inactive' periods of the building life cycle. My approach considers the hidden activity involved in maintaining inactivity (see graph) and explores the impact of structural issues, such as the Planning System.

Following ethics approval, I seek to combine the data from planning applications with qualitative interviews that capture the lived experiences of the site owner. The research aims to integrate these experiences with an analysis of contemporary urban policy.

Time Line for Citadel Building



4. The Example of the Sheffield Citadel

Since changing hands in 1999, the new owners of the Citadel building have submitted 39 planning applications. Although the building still appears to be unoccupied and derelict (see image, right) the owner is 'doing something' with it.

By examining the planning records I have demonstrated that the static condition of this property is not due to 'abandonment'. There is a difference between utility (the active occupancy of a building) and site activity (the applications that have been submitted over the last 20 years).



For more information, please contact Charlene Cross

April 2020

Appendix C: Blank Participant Information Sheet



PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

1. **Title of Project:** Investigating the land-use activities of businesses in Neepsend, opinions of property owners based in Neepsend, and owners of long-term vacant and under-utilised sites.

2. **Legal basis for research for studies.**

The University undertakes research as part of its function for the community under its legal status. Data protection allows us to use personal data for research with appropriate safeguards in place under the legal basis of public tasks that are in the public interest. A full statement of your rights can be found at <https://www.shu.ac.uk/about-this-website/privacy-policy/privacy-notices/privacy-notice-for-research>. All University research is reviewed to ensure that participants are treated appropriately, and their rights respected. This study was approved by UREC with Converis number ER22016573. Further information is available at: <https://www.shu.ac.uk/research/ethics-integrity-and-practice>

3. **Invitation and purpose of research**

My name is Charlene Cross. I am a PhD student who is researching the opinions and perspectives of the people who own, manage or work with urban properties in Neepsend, Sheffield, that appear to have been derelict or vacant at some point over the last ten years.

There is a lot of research about brownfield property that has been created from the viewpoint of academics and city planners, but not a lot that talks about what the owner, developer or potential future buyers think about these sorts of properties.

My research initially wanted to understand what the reasons were behind why sites stay static, or 'set-aside' for long periods of time, and why other sites that were in a similar condition have 'come back to life'. I would like to understand how owners feel about their asset, and to record the benefits, drawbacks, motivations, perspectives, and experiences of property owners.

After carrying out interviews, Neepsend is a very interesting place with a wide variety of uses. The study is moving towards a survey of all the different activities that go on in Neepsend, and how these contribute to its character and sense of place.

I will be placing this information into a wider context that considers the history of Neepsend, in order to understand how the past and present activities in a given location may affect the shape of its future change and development.

4. **Why have you asked me to take part?**

I am interested in speaking with people who own or manage properties in Neepsend. I am particularly interested in the perspective of site managers, property owners, city planners, real estate professionals, land acquisition and disposal specialists, and property developers.

I am also interested in speaking with local historians, community groups and small to medium sized local businesses about their experiences of operating in Neepsend over time. I would like to interview you because I think you fall into one or more of those categories.

5. Do I have to take part?

It is up to you to decide if you want to take part. A copy of the information provided here is yours to keep, along with the consent form if you do decide to take part. You can still decide to withdraw at any time without giving a reason, or you can decide not to answer a particular question.

6. What will I be required to do?

The interview will take the form of a chat, with me working through a short list of questions of prompts to remind me what I want to explore with you. If there are any aspects you would like to raise or elaborate on that you feel are relevant, please do share these insights with me. **With your permission I would like to record the interview, because this makes it easier for me than trying to write detailed notes as we speak. This will be stored securely and the recording will be deleted once I have typed up the script for my analysis.**

7. Where will this take place?

I will carry out the interview at a time that is convenient to you. I take safety very seriously, and due to current restrictions on face-to-face meetings, the interviews will take place socially distanced. The preference is for online via Zoom video-call, or a telephone at your convenience.

8. How often will I have to take part, and for how long?

There will be no commitment on your part to participating in a follow up interview, but I may ask you at some point in the future if it might be possible for us to have another interview to get your thoughts on any extra points that I have come across in my ongoing research.

9. What are the possible benefits of taking part?

The literature concerning empty property is limited, and little has been written from a real estate perspective. This study seeks to fit the voice of the owner into discussions about the desirability and limitations of large-scale planning policies and urban regeneration. I will send participants a summary of my findings if desired.

10. Are there any possible risks or disadvantages in taking part?

There is potential for sensitive information and emotional topics to be discussed, such as forthcoming business proposals, recounting the stories of past failed projects and difficult financial circumstances. Any such information will be treated as confidential and the presentation of this data in the study will be anonymous. I will be happy to discuss the interview with you after we have carried it out if you have any concerns about it.

11. When will I have the opportunity to discuss my participation?

Until January 2024 I can be contacted by email at [redacted] After this date, you may contact my research supervisor, Dr Luke Bennett, if you have any queries or concerns. Luke's full contact details are at the end of this document. We want you to feel comfortable at all stages, and either of us will happily answer any questions now or at any future time.

12. Will anyone be able to connect me with what is recorded and reported?

Any human participants will be given code-names to maintain confidentiality. However, the study will involve looking at visual materials such as online marketing images, and photographs of buildings and sites that exist in the public domain. If you are providing information about a key building that forms part of the study, it is possible that a reader could deduce who the owner of a particular site is. If you wish to participate but do not wish to be named or otherwise identifiable in any publications, please indicate this by ticking the appropriate box on the Participant Consent

Form. Additionally, if you require me to store your interview transcript on an anonymised basis please indicate this on the Participant Consent Form.

13. Who will be responsible for all of the information when this study is over?

At project close, the relevant data relating to this project will be securely archived and all data will be deleted from the SHU Research Store.

14. Who will have access to it?

Only researchers working on the project (myself and my supervisory team of three academic members of staff) will have access to the data collected.

15. What will happen to the information when this study is over?

All data (raw and analysed) will be deposited in the Sheffield Hallam University Research Data Archive (SHURDA) at the end of the research project. The data will be retained in the archive for a period of 10 years since the last time any third party has requested access to the data. When depositing the data, no further changes to data formatting will be required as all necessary actions will have been conducted as the research progresses.

16. How will you use what you find out?

The information that I gather will be used to write research articles, academic reports, publications, and presentations.

17. How long is the whole study likely to last?

This project is likely to be completed in January 2024.

18. How can I find out about the results of the study?

Please contact Charlene Cross or Dr Luke Bennett if you wish to discuss the study. Details of who to contact if you have any concerns or if adverse effects occur after the study are given below.

Researcher/ Research Team Details:

Charlene Cross
PhD Researcher,
Department of the Natural & Built Environment,
Sheffield Hallam University,

Dr Luke Bennett
Reader in Space, Place & Law,
Department of the Natural & Built Environment,
Sheffield Hallam University,

You should contact the Data Protection Officer if:

- you have a query about how your data is used by the University
- you would like to report a data security breach (e.g. if you think your personal data has been lost or disclosed inappropriately)
- you would like to complain about how the University has used your personal data

You should contact the Head of Research Ethics (Professor Ann Macaskill) if:

- you have concerns with how the research was undertaken or how you were treated

Appendix D: Blank Participant Consent Form



PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

TITLE OF RESEARCH STUDY: Investigating the land-use activities of businesses in Neepsend, opinions of property owners based in Neepsend, and owners of long-term vacant and under-utilised sites.

Please answer the following questions by ticking the response that applies

- | | YES | NO |
|---|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| 1. I have read the Information Sheet for this study and have had details of the study explained to me. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 2. My questions about the study have been answered to my satisfaction and I understand that I may ask further questions at any point. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 3. I understand that I am free to withdraw from the study within the time limits outlined in the Information Sheet, without giving a reason for my withdrawal or to decline to answer any questions in the study without any consequences to my future treatment by the researcher. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 4. I agree to provide information to the researchers under the conditions of confidentiality set out in the Information Sheet. I am happy for the interviewer to record me and understand this will be deleted once the script is typed, and our conversations will be anonymous. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 5. I wish to participate in the study under the conditions set out in the Information Sheet. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 6. I consent to the information collected for the purposes of this research study, once anonymised (so that I cannot be identified), to be used for any other research purposes. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

Participant's Signature: _____

Date: _____

Participant's Name (Printed): _____

Contact details:

Researcher's Name (Printed): Charlene Cross

Researcher's Signature: C.C 12/10/21

Researcher's contact details:

Charlene Cross, Department of the Natural & Built Environment, Sheffield Hallam University,

Appendix E: List of interviews conducted from April 2021 to October 2022.

Interview	No. of participants	Interview Format	Stakeholder Experience Summary	Interview Date	Code in Thesis
1	1	Video	Architect. Projects completed in Neepsend.	30/04/21	P1
2	4	Video	Residents, Community Groups, Town Planner, Heritage Professionals	07/05/21	P2A, P2B, P2C, P2D
3	1	Telephone	Real Estate Agent, specialises in Industrial	07/05/21	P3
4	1	Video	New business in Neepsend (2021), building renovation experience. Rents premises.	10/05/21	P4
5	1	Video	Real Estate Professional (1998-present).	11/05/21	P5
6	1	Video	Established (1990) business in Neepsend. Rents premises.	14/05/21	P6
7	1	E-mail	Local Heritage Body (est. 1970)	19/05/21	P7
8	1	Video/ Telephone	Land buyer, developer, architect, property professional. Multiple projects in Neepsend since 2003.	26/05/21	P8
9	1	Telephone	Established business in Neepsend (c. 2015), new business in Neepsend (2021). Rents two premises. Owns one commercial property in Sheffield.	02/06/21	P9

Interview	No. of participants	Interview Format	Stakeholder Experience Summary	Interview Date	Code in Thesis
10	1	Telephone	Established business in Neepsend (1980s). Rents premises.	30/07/21	P10
11	1	Telephone	Established business in Neepsend (1990). Owner-occupier of business in Neepsend. Multiple property owner. Active in wider UK, Neepsend and Sheffield.	02/08/21	P11
12	1	Telephone	Local journalist since 2010. Connections to landowners in Neepsend.	04/08/21	P12
13	1	Video	Local councillor for City Ward (Kelham and Neepsend)	10/08/21	P13
14	1	Phone	Established business in Neepsend (2004) Rents premises.	17/08/21	P14
15	1	Video	SYMCA Employee. The Brownfield Housing Fund brings land in Neepsend into their jurisdiction	19/08/21	P15
16	1	Video	Property developer (buyer/ owner/ seller) active in Kelham Island/ Sheffield since 1990. Currently active from abroad.	24/08/21	P16
17	1	Instagram, in person	Established business in Neepsend (2000), rents. Lived in Neepsend as a child. Family connections to Neepsend. Former structural	17/09/21	P17

			engineer with planning experience.		
Interview	No. of participants	Interview Format	Stakeholder Experience Summary	Interview Date	Code in Thesis
18	1	E-mail and Video	Established business in Neepsend (2012). Family business. Rents.	18/10/21	P18
19	1	Instagram, in person	New business (2021) in Neepsend. Worked in the area beforehand. Rents.	16/10/21	P19
20	1	Telephone	Established business in Neepsend (2012) Rents.	26/10/21	P20
21	1	In-person	Family Business has been in Neepsend (1980s+). New business (2021) in Neepsend. Son of Participant 22.	13/12/21	P21
22	2	In-person	Family Business, Established business in Neepsend (1980s+) New business (2021) in Neepsend, multiple property owner in Neepsend and Sheffield. Father of Participant 21.	13/12/21	P22
23	1	In-person	Archivist. Family historian: ancestors owned a shop in Neepsend damaged during the Sheffield Floods of 1864 (Odom, 1922).	10/10/22	P23

Appendix F: Pseudonyms used in the empirical chapters to refer to frequently occurring, non-participants.

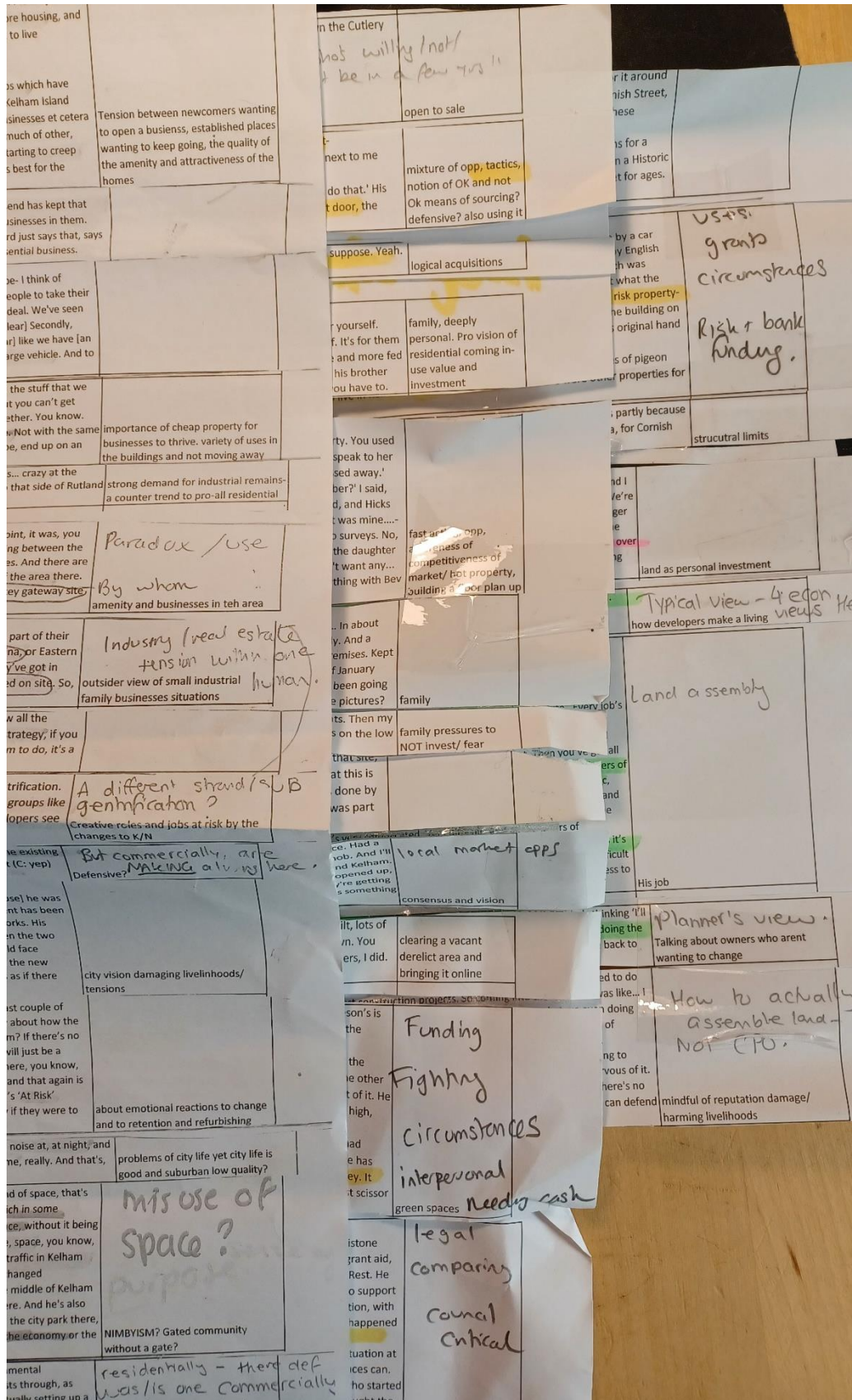
Organisation or Pseudonym	Type of Stakeholder	Connection to Neepsend
Trespasser A	General Public	Urban Explorer
Mr. X	Set-aside property holder	Owns multiple sites here
Sheffield City Council (SCC)	Local authority	Design and uphold local development plans.
Local Property Company (LPC)	Large scale Sheffield based property holder	Owns multiple sites. Is landlord to several interviewees.
Family Company	Set-aside property holder	Owned Cannon Brewery 2002-2022.
Homes England	UK government housing and regeneration agency	Involved with the Brownfield Housing Fund
Capital & Centric (C&C)	SME property company	Purchased Cannon Brewery in 2022.
South Yorkshire Mayoral Combined Authority (SYMCA)	Regional Authority	Investing in the redevelopment of Cannon Brewery.

Appendix G: NVivo Coding- the most common 26 nodes out of 347.

NVIVO HARD COPY BACK UP NODES RECORD 13 APRIL 2021

Name	Files	References	Modified On
2021	171	171	16/03/2021 10:13
February 2021	92	92	11/03/2021 12:40
2020	79	79	18/03/2021 16:02
March 2021	58	58	16/03/2021 10:13
Historic Maps digimaps	32	32	16/03/2021 20:55
Neepsend Lane	26	26	24/03/2021 11:03
Graffiti	26	26	18/03/2021 16:01
January 2021	21	21	11/03/2021 15:30
Cannon Brewery	20	20	24/03/2021 11:05
Boylard Street	20	20	18/03/2021 16:02
December 2020	19	19	08/03/2021 15:19
Fence or barrier	18	18	24/03/2021 10:57
November 2020	17	17	18/03/2021 16:02
Disused building	16	16	18/03/2021 16:02
Contact details	14	14	24/03/2021 10:56
Activity and use	13	13	18/03/2021 16:02
Disrepair	13	13	16/03/2021 10:01
Plants, buddleia or vegetation	12	12	18/03/2021 16:00
Change	11	11	16/03/2021 10:03
Fly Tipping	11	11	11/03/2021 15:33
Boarded Up	10	10	18/03/2021 16:00
Heritage	10	10	16/03/2021 10:20
Housing	9	9	16/03/2021 10:13
Empty lot	9	9	16/03/2021 09:59
To rent or let	9	9	11/03/2021 20:44
Bardwell Road	8	8	17/03/2021 16:22

Appendix H: Example of Manual Coding Practice.



Appendix I: Extract from Visual Data Photo Log Spreadsheet.

	A	B	D	E	F	G	H	I	J
1	Typology	Property description	First Photo						
2	Cleared Site	Former Mushets Factory	18/05/2021						
3	Cleared Site	Land by Farfield Inn- became architectural salvage	06/11/2020	12/02/2021	18/05/2021	08/04/2022			
4	Cleared Site	Land that became Kelham Ridge site	03/08/2021	19/01/2022	01 11 2021	10/06/2022			
5	Cleared Site	Ski Village	07/04/2021						
6	Derelict Building	Cannon/ Old Stones Brewery	04/02/2021	03/03/2021	18/05/2021	28/04/2021	28/05/2021	25/07/2021	16/06/2022
7	Derelict Building	Cannon/ Old Stones Brewery	29/08/2020	06/11/2020	05/01/2021	04/02/2021	01/02/2021	04/02/2021	08/04/2022
8	Derelict Building	Farfield Inn	06/11/2020	12/02/2021	03/03/2021	18/05/2021			
9	Derelict Building	Former Britannica Inn	01/02/2021	25/08/2021					
10	Derelict Building	Former Pub next door to Britannica	01/02/2021	25/08/2021					
11	Derelict Building	George Barnsley and Sons	15/02/2021	03/03/2021	06/11/2021				
12	Derelict Building	Rutland House PacMan building	28/04/2021	06/11/2021					
13	Derelict Building	Radiac Works	29/08/2020	01/12/2020	05/01/2021	03/03/2021	25/07/2021	17/12/2021	
		Warehouse Hallamshire Works							

Appendix J: List of the 22 Seemingly Set-Aside Properties I Identified in Neepsend during 2020.

	Property	Location	Last known use
1	Former Farfield Inn	Neepsend Lane	Pub
2	Derelict plot next to Farfield Inn	Neepsend Lane	Demolished factory
3	Plaster workshop	Neepsend Lane	Occupied. Only appeared disused during COVID-19.
4	Radiac Works/ MPD Power	Neepsend Lane	Heat treatment centre
5	144 Neepsend Lane/ Neepsend Tavern	Neepsend Lane	Massage parlour
6	Old Post Office	Neepsend Lane/ Rutland Road	Sandwich shop
7	Cannon Brewery	Neepsend Lane/ Rutland Road	Occasional HGV usage
8	Derelict Plot	Boyland Street	Loading-bay for brewery
9	Derelict warehouse	Boyland Street	Large vehicle depot
10	Ski Village	Vale Road	Campsite for travelling community
11	Small derelict plot	Burton Road	Dividing wall between two sites
12	FactoryOne	Cornish Street	Leather work and shoemaking
13	Clarkson Osborne site	Penistone Road	Car salesroom
14	Rutland House	Penistone Road	Student accommodation
15	Derelict plot [^]	Pitsmoor Road, Chatham Street and Swinton Street	Offices in 1973, derelict by 1992 [^]
16	Warehouse	Neepsend Lane/ Lancashire Street	Occupied. Only appeared disused during COVID-19.
17	Grade II listed house	Mowbray Street	Storage
18	Former concrete plant	Mowbray Street	Concrete plant
19	Former Sawmakers Arms	Harvest Lane	Furniture shop
20	Former Britannica Inn	Harvest Lane	Office in 1972
21	Stanley Tools	Rutland Road	Zombie-themed paintball experience
22	0.05 hectares of land with disused building	Allen Street	For rent as external storage, building not habitable

Appendix K: Street art in Neepsend, Zone 3 by Phlegm.



Street art on Club Mill Road, along the River Don in Zone 3 of Neepsend, by Phlegm. 06 11 2020. Charlene Cross.