

## Initial summary from Town Anywhere: Manchester

On 3 November 2025, participants from across Manchester and beyond gathered to rehearse the future: to imagine, create and build a future Town called Anywhere.

Anywhere was envisioned as **a place where everyone can live healthy lives, empowered to speak up for how they want to live and the care they want to draw upon and provide.**

On arrival the room was empty with large blackboards erected around the walls, interspersed with stacks of chairs, and piles of small blackboards, chalk and cloths. In the corner was an unusual array of cardboard, string and willow sticks. Music was playing and a ribbon separated people from this space allowing them entry to a small side room where they could get refreshments.

At 10.30, participants were invited to gather as VoiceAbility's Community Development Co-ordinator introduced the day and encouraged people leave their day to day lives behind, to embrace the journey ahead and let their imagination guide them. Facilitators Ruth and Nathalie prepared everyone for a journey to the future – to 2038, and after counting forward the years and cutting the ribbon, we stepped forward into the space.

Initially we found ourselves a home and imagined ourselves in 2038, thinking about what was helping to keep us healthy in this town called Anywhere – **a place where everyone can live healthy lives, empowered to speak up for how they want to live and the care they want to draw upon and provide,** recording our thoughts on individual blackboards. In silence, we walked around the town observing what others had written before we sat with a nearby participant, our “neighbour” and exchanged stories with them. We captured the stories we had heard on our blackboards and then strolled the empty town reading about the stories others had listened to.

Next, we gathered in small groups and together we imagined our neighbourhood in Anywhere, each drawing on blackboards what we saw in that neighbourhood, linking the boards together to create a coherent picture. We visited other neighbourhoods, returning to our own to discuss what we had seen.

After a break we were invited to think about Anywhere as a whole, using 12 aspects that make a town to guide our thoughts about the different things that were present in Anywhere that enabled it to be **a place where everyone can live healthy lives, empowered to speak up for how they want to live and the care they want to draw upon and provide.** We wrote our own ideas on the large blackboards, reading and adding to what others had written.

We were each invited to gravitate toward a theme that resonated with us, and to imagine the role we would have in 2038. After writing these on our blackboards, we wandered and read about the roles others had in the town. Gathering in small groups with similar themes,

we read the requests that people had made about what they wanted Anywhere to have, and discussed our roles. Working together we started to imagine a venture, a place, a structure in Anywhere that would help it be **a place where everyone can live healthy lives, empowered to speak up for how they want to live and the care they want to draw upon and provide.**

After lunch, we brought our ideas to life. Using a supply of simple sustainable resources, we began building our ventures. We named our creations and placed them upon the map. We drew up charters explaining what we were building, who it was for and how it would help Anywhere and its citizens to achieve their vision.

Before long it was time for the official town opening – after a speech from our newly elected mayor we celebrated with confetti and a slice of cake. Then we explored the town, learning about what others had created and why. We captured ways that our venture could work with theirs, exchanges we could make that would enable all the ventures in Anywhere to thrive.

Our time in Anywhere was coming to a close, so we returned to our homes and shared to our neighbours what we had seen and experienced. We wrote a postcard to ourselves back in 2025, telling ourselves what we wanted to remember and to take with us from our visit to Anywhere in 2038.

Then we journeyed back, counting down the years until we arrived in 2025. In small groups we read our postcards to each other, before we all set off home at 4.30pm.

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The following day, the portal to Anywhere in 2038 opened again. Visitors were accompanied by time travel tour guides who took them forward in time. They too were invited to share what was keeping them healthy, and to wander the streets of the town, reading about and visiting the ventures. An archaeological display showed various artefacts that had been left by the previous residents, and participants could read about their hopes for Anywhere, adding their own ideas and thoughts. Participants created additional items that enhanced to or linked the existing ventures before they too returned to 2025.

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Although we are all back in 2025 now, we have seen how many others share our vision for the future. We have experienced what is possible if we work together. We have rehearsed the future we want to live in.

So now it's time to take those ideas, to plant and cultivate them, to take steps together to build and shape the future we imagined.

Manchester Advocacy Alliance is a group of people and organisations who want more people to be able to advocate for themselves, their friends and family, and for their community when it comes to their health and the care they want to draw on and to provide. As a group we want to build on our learnings from the future, and to listen to what people want and to design and build it with each other.

The next pages provide an initial summary of the themes seen at Town Anywhere. We recognise this is only a single interpretation and invite you to share your views too.

# Initial interpretation of themes

## Individual level

At an individual level, we are looking for **connection**, **balance**, and a **nurturing environment**. Health wasn't just a human thing; we wanted to live **sustainably** and ecologically by being **close to nature** - trees, flowers, green spaces, and water. We value being part of **active, supportive, and creative communities**, with family, friends, children, and community groups around them. **Helping others, having fun and purpose**, and maintaining **hope, belief**, and **clarity** were seen as important to many.

Many want a good **work/life balance**, **time and space to retreat and grow**, **routine, activity and exercise** as they all saw these as key to wellbeing. Access to organic food, **holistic mental and physical health support**, **local healthcare**, **green and free public spaces**, good schools, and **creative spaces** are valued. Broader priorities for some people include fair economies, clean energy, peace, safety on public transport, and ensuring everyone's basic needs are met.

People spoke about **acts of kindness from strangers**, moments of **connection that turned into friendship**, and **communities coming together** in times of need. Stories highlighted **celebration, gratitude, and shared experiences**—from birthdays and weddings to cooking meals and stargazing. Many reflected **on personal growth, resilience**, and **resistance**: women overcoming adversity, challenging norms, and standing up to inequality. Themes of **belonging, faith**, and differing perspectives were explored, alongside a deep appreciation for **family, culture**, and **safe, supportive communities**. Adventure, curiosity, and care for the natural world also featured, with stories of travel, environmental stewardship, and purposeful work—like helping during the pandemic.

## Neighbourhood level

At a neighbourhood level, we value **outdoor space** including trees and water. We want **local green energy and transport** and recycling centres. We seek **communal and community spaces** for growing food, eating, living, chatting as well as **clean and safe individual living spaces** – with everyone having their own front door. There is a focus on **multi-use spaces** and **shared resources** including lending library and faith spaces.

Local services were designed such as **activity / sports centres** and **health and wellbeing centres**, including recovery spaces. Some people want to ensure public buildings were accessible, including public toilets in all buildings. Others want both technology-free spaces and for technology to be enabling and used by communities.

## Town level

We came up with more than 250 ideas for the town of Anywhere in 2038. Focussing first on ideas that seem to directly link to the aims of the Manchester Advocacy Alliance, we want:

- **improved knowledge, attitudes and skills of professionals** at both community and individual level – reducing or eliminating prejudice as well as treating people as experts on themselves, giving them time and being transparent about decisions
- a **listening-centred** as well as a **person-centred approach** to health, care and services
- citizens to have **increased influence** over decisions and services
- more **access to advocacy** support
- **improved signposting** - as in more knowledge of what services are available and improved access to those services
- citizens to have **life-long access to resources** which increase our **life skills and knowledge**
- **more varied and accessible communication** and **access to training**
- **greater recognition and encouragement for volunteers**, as well as a **better system for providing voluntary support** to those who want to draw upon it

We identified that for people to live the life they wanted and to live healthily they needed:

- **better and more accessible healthcare services** including prioritising mental and neurodivergent support, and a focus on preventative solutions
- better access to **communal and natural green spaces** and blue spaces (as in water-based spaces)
- **improved access to better food** – both nutritionally and environmentally, including the ability to grow your own, communal and co-operative food systems, and cooking education
- **improved access to clean, safe, pleasant places to live** including removal of economic and discriminatory barriers to living in your own home
- increased **access to creative practices and places**
- more **communal and innovative spaces to share stories** and to learn including more **cross-community celebrations**
- **more inclusive and less restrictive education** topics and practices
- significant **change in economic policy** and approach; a shift away from growth and wealth production, and towards systems based on sharing, gifting, circular economy, or reduction of extreme wealth
- environmentally friendly and sustainable energy and transport infrastructure with a focus on communal or community-based solutions
- increased accessibility to public and communal spaces including access to water and toilets and increasing wheelchair accessibility
- significant **change in power structures and governance** with a drive towards giving citizens more power