Talking Rubbish in Moss Side

Exploring the problem of litter in the streets and alleys of a deprived neighbourhood with a large student population

By Sherilyn MacGregor & Simon Pardoe 2018. Research conducted in 2017 in collaboration with 'Upping It'.
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A stylised map of the study area: 5 streets

It shows the communal nature of the alley space, with the back yards/gardens opening onto it.

The alleys with communal bins have 2 for recycling and 2 for residual waste located at each end.
Houses with individual bins traditionally kept them at the back, and many still do,
but some residents, including most students, keep them in the front yard, facing the street.
Executive Summary

This report presents the findings of a pilot study conducted from May to November 2017 by an academic from the Sustainable Consumption Institute at the University of Manchester and members of an award-winning residents’ community action group called ‘Upping It’. 1

It is a neighbourhood-level study of waste management problems (including littering, fly-tipping, and recycling dysfunction) in Moss Side. The principal aim was to gain insights into how residents view and explain the rubbish problem in the area, and into the potential impacts of the university student population (and the private landlords who house them) on the quality of the local environment.

With funding (£3,500) from the Higher Education Innovation Funding (HEIF), the researchers collected data through doorstep interviews with 55 randomly selected residents, three focussed discussion groups with residents, and field observation. These data were collected in a small geographical study area in Moss Side consisting of five streets with uniform housing type (Edwardian terraced houses with common alleyways).

In addition to collecting the experiences and opinions of local residents, interviews were conducted with 11 key informant professionals from Manchester City Council (MCC), Biffa, Manchester Student Homes (MSH), the University of Manchester and Manchester Metropolitan University.

The context

The research project has been carried out against a backdrop of local and national political attention to the problem of littering and waste management. It is commonly reported in news media that people identify litter as a top environmental concern and that local authorities spend between £800 million and £1 billion annually to clean England’s streets. In April 2017 the Government released its National Litter Strategy for England. In that report, the Government admits the severity of the problem and promotes a variety of measures for redressing it, placing an emphasis on community-based activities and individual behaviour change.

While most stakeholders involved in the issue agree that urgent attention is required, it is clear that a lack of legislation and regulatory frameworks for tackling the complex causes of rubbish poses a significant barrier to the tackling the roots of problem. It is for this reason that the Government has been criticised for placing a greater degree of responsibility on individuals and community groups than it does on profit-making businesses. This report shares a similar critical orientation towards the prevailing policy approach to waste.

Manchester City Council has had over a third (37%) cut from its budget between 2010 and 2016 due to spending decisions taken by central government. These cuts have brought about increasing levels of poverty and homelessness in Manchester, and the pressures on local service delivery are acute.2 In response to budget pressures, the Council has attempted to reduce spending on waste management by reducing residual waste and increasing recycling rates. In 2016, a smaller 140 litre residual waste bin was rolled out to residents in Manchester with the expectation that it would lead to less residual and more recyclable waste thereby saving £2.4million annually. The Council devotes considerable resources to tackling litter and fly-tipping. It also delivers educational and pictorial material to residents to communicate the importance of recycling. These measures have been generally successful, according to Council reports, with rising overall recycling rates. Meanwhile, there has been public criticism of the recent changes to waste services across Greater Manchester, including petitions and demonstrations against the

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1 The content of the report is based on analysis and interpretation by the report authors, in collaboration with members of an activist organisation. It does not represent the views of the Sustainable Consumption Institute or the University of Manchester. The project was scrutinised and obtained approval from the University of Manchester Research Ethics Committee before any research took place. Research participants had the opportunity to review and comment on a confidential draft of the report in November-December 2017.

smaller bins and less frequent collections in some areas (e.g. Rusholme and Old Trafford). According to the Manchester Evening News, Council officials have admitted that fly-tipping has increased in some areas since the introduction of the 140 litre bins.³

This context considered, it should not be controversial to state that issues relating to rubbish, litter and waste in Moss Side (and the city-region as a whole) are controversial.

The contribution
This report aims to contribute, in a constructive way, to the ongoing efforts of stakeholder institutions, such as Manchester City Council, Biffa and the universities, to understand and mitigate socio-environmental problems, specifically in residential areas of South Manchester.

A wide range of measures for managing the impacts of the student population on residential neighbourhoods have been implemented through the Manchester Student Strategy and the Housing and Environment Partnership (HEP) since 2009. These measures are detailed in this report. In spite of the efforts being made, however, the problem of degraded street environments – rubbish in the streets and alleys – remains a significant concern for local residents.

This report is unique because looks at the rubbish problem from a resident perspective (40% of the doorstep interviews were with students). It provides evidence of the impacts that this problem has on residents’ daily life, as well as of the actions they have taken in response. It also considers the extent to which interventions have been effective, whether they have given rise to improved ‘town-gown’ relations, and what more can be done.

Main findings of the research
Rubbish is a serious problem: When asked “what are the three best things about living in this area”, respondents identified the location, the community and access to amenities. When asked for “the three least good things”, environmental quality was the leading issue by far, specifically rubbish/litter and bins, with nearly double the number of mentions of the next most frequently-mentioned issue - security. When asked directly, “do you think there is a problem with rubbish in the area” almost all respondents said “yes”, with the sole exceptions of three students and a teenage boy. Evidently rubbish is seen as the primary problem in the neighbourhood.

The stakeholder professionals reported that Moss Side is slightly ‘off the radar’ in terms of addressing student-created problems, because there are worse areas of Manchester that attract the bulk of attention. In terms of rubbish, several suggested that the problem in Moss Side is no worse than in other areas of Manchester. Therefore the findings have implications for policy within Moss Side and beyond.

Rubbish erodes quality of life: The report contains evidence, including photographs and direct quotes from residents, to support the finding that the rubbish problem causes a serious reduction in quality of life. Respondents described irritation, anger, embarrassment, and a sense of defeat and despair. They also talked about the smell, the unsightly mess, pests (rodents, flies and birds), the constant effort of picking it up, the safety risks for children playing, and the way it drags the area down and potentially encourages crime and anti-social behaviour. There is a sense that feeling angry about rubbish undermines social cohesion in an already transient and deprived area.

The rubbish problem has multiple causes: the street-level research did not find a simple story of individuals deliberately littering, but reveals a more complex, multi-causal problem of waste creation and waste management. In this way it challenges the assumptions of individual misbehaviour that dominate government and Greater Manchester policy approaches, and are evident in the UK Government’s Litter Strategy for England (2017).

When asked the causes of the rubbish, the primary explanation given by residents was the Manchester City Council processes. These include bins not being emptied, overflowing bins, the new 140 litre bins falling over so rubbish blows in the wind, a lack of signs or cameras to deter fly-tipping, and fly-tipping

being cleared but with remnants left on the ground. All of these issues were also observed by the researchers.

The Council’s introduction in 2016 of tall 140 litre waste bins was intended to ‘nudge’ people to recycle more. Yet from the perspective of residents in this area, it appears also to have the opposite effect, of increasing the waste overflow in nearby communal bins, and causing contamination of recycling bins. This was observed, along with their propensity to blow over. Residents also talked at length about the problem of ‘ghost-dumping’.

Several of the stakeholder professionals, on the other hand, do not accept these observations and claim that there are processes in place for addressing all of these concerns, including a robust system for reporting fly-tipping. It was claimed also that the new bins have been a success in increasing the recycling rates in the city.

The other causes of litter most frequently identified by resident participants were people not caring or using bins incorrectly, the students and landlords and the consequent high numbers of people per terraced house, the landlords’ builders leaving their waste for the Council to collect, and fly tipping from people outside the area. An additional observation is of poor people and Roma travellers opening bins to scavenge for food, clothes and anything of value.

Lack of knowledge and/or misinformation about correct waste management practices are undoubtedly contributing factors to the rubbish problem. For example, the researchers heard at least three reports of landlords (who themselves live outside the area) telling their new tenants not to bother about recycling, and in one case to put rubbish in other people’s bins. It was also found that a quarter of long-term residents and the same proportion of students surveyed did not know which bin to use for food waste. Since the numbers of food waste bins put out for weekly collection is well below 75%, there is clearly a knowledge-action gap across the residents.

But Moss Side is a good test for the assumption in the 2017 Litter Strategy that the most effective solution to litter is education. Moss Side is home to a large number of residents with (or in process of obtaining) a university education, at universities that make considerable efforts to promote recycling and environmental sustainability more generally. Yet students who participated in the research seemed disengaged with the waste management system and often revealed ignorance of the system even after living in Manchester for a year or more.

It would appear that the transience of the population may be a better determinant of the problem than lack of education. Length of tenure determines commitment to an area, community networks, collaboration, and whether there is a desire to improve the environment or to simply accept it as it is. The challenge of transience - for residents, landlords, waste contractors, and the Council alike - is that relationships have to be created anew, and information about waste and recycling has to be delivered constantly to new residents.

The sheer volume of waste to be managed in a densely populated residential area is also a significant cause of the problem. Interestingly, however, neither residents nor key stakeholders mentioned unprompted the wider commercial, societal and economic causes of waste such as consumption patterns, excessive packaging, and cheap, non-durable goods.

**There is disagreement over who is responsible and what should be done:** When asked who should remove rubbish in front yards (private spaces) the majority of residents surveyed acknowledged it was their responsibility. For waste in the street, alleyways and public spaces, responsibility was seen to lie primarily with the Council, followed by residents.

The research counters the assumption by local authorities that if there is a problem, people will report it. Whilst nearly half of long-term residents had reported rubbish to the Council, many were put off by the idea that it involved reporting on a neighbour. New residents often either ignored it, or didn’t know how to report it. Others with limited English feared it would be difficult to explain, and didn’t want trouble.

While non-student residents are critical of student behaviour, they agree that students are not solely to blame. There was general agreement that ‘rogue’ private landlords (i.e., those who are not part of the
Manchester Student Homes accreditation scheme) play a key part in causing the problem and that all landlords should be required to provide cleaned bins and practical guidance for new tenants.

Stakeholder professionals working with and in the universities tend to see households of students with the comfort of distance, as young people in need of support to develop adult skills of independent living. Suggestions were made that providing information about (potentially confusing) waste and recycling collection in Manchester and delivering programmes around environmental sustainability were appropriate responses to the rubbish problem.

From a resident perspective, however, if students are ill-equipped to live independently and practice good citizenship, then it is questionable whether so many student houses should be concentrated in already-transient and vulnerable areas like Moss Side. Non-student research participants, who live among students in the terraced streets, express bafflement about why such privileged and highly educated people are unable to read a Council waste collection calendar, or figure out what waste goes in which bin, or remember when to do it. For them, the issue is not about the abstract principle of sustainability, but one of common sense, respect and good neighbourliness.

Significantly for the universities, even when prompted, only one of the 55 respondents knew of any activity by the universities to address the rubbish problem. It could be inferred that this perceived lack of action is a real and potential source of resentment, though in practice negative feelings tend to be more focussed on the actions/inactions of private landlords and the Council. It also suggests that more could be done to foster communication and collaboration between the universities and the communities living with a large student population in South Manchester.

An alley ‘greened’ by residents with support from the ‘Upping It’ team. Upping It have found that for residents, the shared project of renovation, and the resulting quality of the shared environment, encourages people to better manage their waste and recycling, and discourages fly tipping by others.
Recommendations for further discussion, research and action

1. Most participants agreed that an underlying cause of the rubbish problem is a generalised lack of pride in the area due to transience and the stigma attached to a student ‘ghetto’. In response, we recommend that the universities and Manchester Student Homes (MSH) should support local communities by actively counteracting the representation of the residential areas close to the university (such as Moss Side) as ‘student areas’ by landlords, agents and students. This could be done via university messaging to students, community exchange events, and by supporting a crack-down on the student let signs that breach planning law. This recommendation was suggested by participants from the local area as well as from the university.

2. Universities should explain to students living off-campus the impacts of non-participation in correct waste practices on local people, and in doing so frame the issue as one of good citizenship and neighbourliness, not just ‘pro-environmental behaviour’ (recycling). Citizenship and independent living skills could be integrated into the university curriculum to enable and equip students (and therefore the universities themselves) to be good neighbours. This recommendation was suggested by participants from MSH, the universities, and local residents.

3. The universities, in cooperation with Manchester City Council (MCC), should explore the use of a text reminder service for students, which prompts them to put their bins out on the correct days and away as soon as possible after collection. These could include reminders of the penalties that can be incurred for lack of participation. This recommendation has been strongly made by members of Upping It and has been viewed as interesting, or at least something to try, by participants from MCC and the universities.

4. The universities, MSH and MCC should work together to promote and enable the reduction of waste at source. Although the ‘give it don’t bin it’ (British Heart Foundation) campaign is lauded by all concerned, it does very little to address the sheer volume of ‘stuff’ being disposed of by students each year. Other options might be: offer over-summer storage space for returning students; give financial incentives for landlords to provide a greater inventory of durable items in rental housing; penalise landlords for treating furniture and other household items as disposable; promote sharing and repairing by encouraging students to give away or sell their items to other students rather than give to charity; actively promote repair shops as social enterprises. This recommendation was suggested by the report authors and is supported by members of Upping It as well as a participant from MCC.

5. Nearly all participants in this research agreed that private landlords who are not signed up to the MSH scheme are a cause of and therefore a potential solution to the problem of rubbish in Moss Side. However, the limited scope for action due to existing legislation (and lack thereof) was also noted by most. A key question for further research and discussion, therefore, is how to create a means of influencing landlords that are not signed up to the MSH scheme (or that only sign up a few of their properties) to make them more responsible and accountable for their actions and those of their tenants. To what extent is it possible to use the selective licensing system or to impose levies to change landlord behaviour? For example, could MCC create HMO Action Zones to enable greater controls (as mentioned in the Ross/Tribal report that initiated the Manchester Student Strategy in 2010)? Clearly there are wider (local and national) political dimensions to these questions, but this report recommends that the existence of obstacles should be the start rather than the end of the discussion. This recommendation comes from the report authors.

6. While there are fora and channels in place to enable communication between residents, the university and service providers, it would be useful to review the efficacy and the degree to which information is being circulated in areas such as Moss Side. The apparent lack of awareness of university initiatives on the part of participants in this research suggest that more could be done to promote meaningful engagement. Residents have expressed frustration with the universities’ approach to community engagement. Perhaps a collective discussion about how to improve communication and collaboration on problems of common concern could be fostered by this report. This recommendation comes from the report authors.
Mural on the wall of a nearby ‘greened alley’, created by ‘Upping It’ founders Anne Tucker and Graeme Urlwin.
Talking Rubbish in Moss Side
Exploring the Problem of Litter in the Streets and Alleys of a Deprived Neighbourhood with a Large Student Population

1. Introduction

This report presents and interprets the findings of a pilot study conducted from mid-May to end of November 2017. It is a neighbourhood-level study of waste management problems (including litter and fly-tipping, recycling dysfunction) with insights into the impacts of the university student population (and the private landlords who house them off campus) on the quality of the local environment. It drills down into one specific issue - the street environment - in one specific area, and looks primarily at the problems from a non-student resident perspective. In that way, the study contributes to ongoing efforts of stakeholder institutions, such as Manchester City Council and the Universities, to understand and mitigate socio-environmental problems in residential areas of South Manchester.

The bulk of the research presented in this report involved primary data collection through 55 doorstep questionnaire interviews, interviews with 11 key informants, three focus groups and participant and unobtrusive field observation in a small study area (i.e., five terraced streets) in Moss Side.

The project was carried out jointly by a University of Manchester social scientist and members of a third sector organisation, a community group called Upping It. It was funded by an eco-innovation voucher (£3,500 from the Higher Education Innovation Funding, HEIF) which enables academics to develop partnerships and engage in collaborative research projects with external organisations for the benefit of the wider society.

The report identifies a set of common themes and interesting differences of perception/experience across the data. It will be presented for review and discussion by the research participants. After consultation with and feedback from research participants, and some additional targeted data collection, this final report contains recommendations and suggestions for potential next steps.

2. Background

Litter is an issue that regularly tops the list of citizen concerns about urban environmental quality. It is also a perpetual problem for local authorities in the UK, costing them millions to manage and clean up each year. Manchester City Council (MCC) spends up to £7 million per year to clean up litter, including the 30,000 reported incidents of fly-tipping each year. The problem of litter and fly-tipping has reached crisis levels in England, prompting the Government to publish its first ever Litter Strategy for England in April 2017.

There are two major universities, the University of Manchester (UoM) and Manchester Metropolitan University (MMU), which play a significant part in shaping the character of the city. Manchester is home to close to 80,000 university and college students, the largest concentration in the UK and possibly in Western Europe.

The Universities have well-publicised social responsibility and sustainability agendas that are intended to ensure that their institutions, the research they do, and the students they teach make a positive contribution to Manchester and the wider society. They have firm commitments to producing socially responsible graduates and to practising and promoting environmental sustainability. MMU is ranked

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1 Sophie Jamieson, ‘Fly-tipping at ‘crisis levels’ in Britain as councils cut down on bin collections’ The Telegraph 14 February 2017; online: http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2017/02/14/fly-tipping-crisis-levels-britain-councils-cut-bin-collections/

number three in the UK People and Planet League Table 2017 (UoM is 110th),\(^6\) the UoM was awarded Impact Initiative of the Year for its new 10,000 Actions, Ethical Grand Challenges and Sustainability Challenge programmes by the Association of University Directors of Estates (AUDE).\(^7\)

The university-community, or ‘town and gown’, relationship is of significant concern to both parties, with the large student population sitting in the middle. For the most part, the student population contributes great benefits to Manchester, economically and culturally. However, it is well known that there are a number of negative impacts of students living off campus, privately rented accommodation in inner city wards (the traditional suburbs) south of the city centre. Among the types of anti-social behaviour (ASB) that have been identified are noise, public intoxication, and degradation of the ‘street environment’ through littering, fly-tipping, and poor waste and recycling practices in rented accommodation.

Local residents’ groups have been active in pressuring relevant institutions to take more responsibility for addressing these impacts. In response to these pressures, MCC and the Universities have developed a Manchester Student Strategy. In 2009, a report by Patrick Ross of Tribal Group consultants recommended that a more coordinated effort be made to mitigate the negative impacts of student population on residential neighbourhoods close to the Universities.\(^8\) It was well recognized that a degree of tension, and even conflict, exists between the student population and other residents. One reason for this is that much of the student accommodation is concentrated in, or is directly adjacent to, areas of multiple deprivation.

Many of the Ross report’s recommendations have been put into place and are monitored by the Student Strategy Partnership (SSP), which is chaired by MCC. Under the SSP sits the Housing and Environment Partnership (HEP) which deals specifically with social and environmental issues identified in the areas with large student populations, in south Manchester as well as the City Centre. The HEP consists of representatives from the two universities, Students’ Unions, and officers from relevant MCC delivery teams (e.g., compliance, housing enforcement, neighbourhoods). It has implemented a range of measures for better managing the student impact on residential neighbourhoods.

Seven years on, it seems useful to consider – with insights from residents themselves - what impacts such interventions have made, whether they have given rise to improved town-gown relations, and what more (if anything) should and can be done.

Like many areas of Manchester, Moss Side is an area with environmental quality problems. But it also has a high level of community activism to promote greening and regeneration. While it is referred to in the Ross Report (2009) as ‘less desirable and less accessible’ to students than other residential areas, the geographical proximity to the University of Manchester and relative lower rents than in other areas has resulted in a dramatic increase in student rental properties in the past decade. It is one of the ten wards where students make up more than 10% of the population.\(^9\) Moss Side is interesting to study because it is an established yet deprived residential area that lacks the social capital and political influence to be able to adjust to the pressures and negative impacts that have come with recent changes in demographic composition.

According to a 2015 Mosaic Profile, Moss Side is dominated by relatively deprived, transient single people renting low cost accommodation; with the large number of student HMOs, it has the second highest concentration of HMOs in Manchester. Well over half of households contain people ‘whose social circumstances suggest that they may need high or very high levels of support to help them manage their own health and prevent them becoming high users of acute healthcare services in the future’.\(^10\) It has aging population, with a large percentage of the elderly coming from the wave of Afro-Caribbean

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\(^6\) People and Planet League Table 2017. Online https://peopleandplanet.org/university-league PS: MMU was ranked #1 in 2018

\(^7\) See https://www.aude.ac.uk/about-us/awards/awards-2016/


\(^9\) There are 10 wards in the City that have more than 10% student households, with the rest all having below 5%. They are Ardwick, City Centre, Hulme, Withington, Fallowfield, Rusholme, Longsight, Old Moat, Moss Side and Levenshulme. The wards with the highest concentrations of student houses are Ardwick, City Centre and Hulme where the levels exceed 20% (Manchester Student Strategy Report 2009, see n5). At the time of this research, the proportion exceeds 20% within streets in the area of Moss Side under study. NB: the numbers may have changed since 2009 – need to check.

immigrants that came to Manchester in the 1950s. In addition, there are a large number of refugees living in NASS housing and new immigrants from Africa (there is a large Somali population) and the Middle East (e.g., Libyan diaspora). The area is also home to a large number of families in private rental or housing association properties.

Although it is a highly transient area, with a loss of ‘social capital’ in recent years (in other words, a loss of connections within and between communities, and with external change-makers), there is also a strong core of active, long term residents who take part in residents’ associations, faith groups and other community-based organisations. Upping It, the community organisation whose members were involved in the co-production of this research, has been active in the area since 2013.

We observed frequent building work. Extensions on the 3 bedroom houses convert them into 6 bedroom houses for multiple student occupancy (HMOs), apparently sometimes without planning permission. While these houses may be made attractive to student tenants inside, there is sometimes an apparent lack of care for the external appearance.
3. The Research Project

This is a neighbourhood-level case study of waste management problems which intends to yield specific insights into the impacts of the university student population (and the private landlords who house them off campus) on the quality of the local environment. It has been designed and carried out in partnership with a community organisation called ‘Upping It’ that has been working at street level, with student and non-student residents, to ‘up’ recycling rates, reduce fly-tipping through alley greening, and to develop social capital and the conditions needed for sustainable community in Moss Side.

The wider project of collaboration on street environmental issues is not yet complete, so this report is not written entirely in the past tense. There is more work planned and it is hoped that the pilot study will be used to inform the development of a larger, better funded project on the politics of litter in inner-city Manchester.

The aims of the pilot project were twofold:

First, it aimed to collect primary data that enables improved understanding of:

- the reasons for litter in streets and alleyways in Moss Side, and why more waste is not recycled;
- how people living in the local area, and the relevant organisations and professionals who work with/for them, understand the litter problem.

Second, it aimed to establish a knowledge production and exchange partnership between a university researcher and a community organising in Moss Side in order to:

- build on existing local knowledge of ‘what works’ in reducing the litter problem;
- inspire interest/action among sections of the community (including students); and
- promote greater accountability among relevant stakeholders (including MCC, Biffa, the UoM and MMU).

3.1 Collaborative approach

The lead researcher is Dr Sherilyn MacGregor, Reader in Environmental Politics in the Sustainable Consumption Institute. The main researcher from the community group (Upping It) is Dr Simon Pardoe, a trained social scientist working independently in communication and impact, based in Moss Side.

The research was inspired by, and was conducted in collaboration with, members of Upping It. Upping It is a community group that has worked under the umbrella of the Platt-Claremont Residents’ Association since 2013. Between March and August 2017, eight members of the group were involved in framing the project, developing the questions and gathering and interpreting data. The progress of the project was discussed at fortnightly Upping It meetings. Three in depth interviews and one focus group were conducted with Upping It members.

The rationale for this level of collaboration (or ‘co-production’ as it is often called in academic jargon) is to develop and demonstrate a new research relationship with an external organisation that is run by local people whose lives are affected by the University, but who so far do not have established links with it. A key objective is to build on local understanding and to have meaningful impact through local engagement and knowledge co-production and exchange.

The pilot study was intended to be mutually beneficial: to assist the organisation to evaluate their effectiveness and obstacles to success; and to ‘pump prime’ a new university-based research agenda with potential for social and environmental impact.
3.2 Research design

The study area is in the part of Moss Side where Upping It has been working since 2017, but the data from local residents were collected from five terraced streets in a neighbourhood located to the west of Wilmslow Rd. The names of the streets are not given in this report in order to protect anonymity of the participants. The area is typical of ‘the Terrace Square’, an area of dense residential neighbourhoods composed of Edwardian red brick terraced houses (‘two up, two down’ and ‘three up, three down’), most with small gated areas between the pavement and front doors, and all with walled yards off shared alleys in the back (see stylised map, facing p1).

The study area has a mixture of long term owner-occupiers, private and housing association rental properties, and houses of multiple occupancy (HMOs). It has had a significant increase in student-occupied HMOs in the past decade. The streets were selected to include a mixed ‘binrastructure’ (i.e., types of bins provided), including both communal and individual bins for residual waste, recycling and compost. The study area deliberately includes some streets previously engaged by ‘Upping It’ projects and some not.

The research involved mixed method approach to enable data triangulation and a full, rich picture of the situation. It combined asking local residents (including students, long and short term non-student residents) about their experiences, practices, perceptions and concerns as well as having conversations with a small sample of purposively selected professionals. The research questions were informed by interviews with members of Upping It, who also reviewed and provided input into the research design.

The funding was approved in March 2017. An application for ethical approval was submitted at the end of March 2017. The full project was reviewed and obtained ethical approval from the University of Manchester’s Research Ethics Committee (UREC) in mid-May 2017.

The objective was to collect data from a roughly equal number of student and non-student residents of the study area. Although funding was secured in early April, it took over 6 weeks to obtain ethical approval from UREC. Data collection started later than planned and coincided with university exam period and the end of the academic year when students are preparing to move out. As a consequence, there were too few students prepared to be available for focus group meetings.

3.3 Data collection and analysis

Doorstep interviews with questionnaire

In the third week of May, working in teams of two, researchers went door-to-door in the five study streets and invited residents to take part in a questionnaire-guided interview. They knocked on every door in turn, one interviewer on each side of the street. Houses were visited mornings, afternoons and evenings, to catch a range of people. Streets and individual doors were visited up to 3 times to build the total number of interviewees to 50. (The questionnaire can be viewed at www.uppingit.org.uk/rubbish-research.)

This approach initially produced an under-representation of students, so in the final days, student households were prioritised and researchers made additional evening visits.

A total of 55 interviews were conducted. A demographic breakdown of the sample is included in section 4.2. Only adult residents with a sufficient level of spoken English were asked to complete the interview.

In-depth interviews with Upping It members

Extended interviews with three members of the Upping It Steering Group enabled us to write a short history of the organisation (not included in this report at Upping It’s request). An abbreviated version of this story was deemed useful for including on the Upping It website, newly re-created as part of this project, so that other groups can learn from their experiences.

11 The Housing Act 2004 defines a HMO as an entire house, flat or converted building which is let to three or more tenants who form two or more households, who share facilities such as a kitchen, bathroom or toilet.
12 UREC Ref: 2017-1966-2924
Observation and photographs
From mid-June to mid-July researchers made regular observations of the streets and alleys in the study area. This research method was used to gather first hand evidence of the problem (as distinct from evidence reported by research participants). A field journal was kept, which documents the types of rubbish and litter found in public areas and in front gardens. A folder of digital photographs was compiled, which provides visual evidence of the condition of alleys and the areas surrounding communal bins. A small number of photographs of private houses and front gardens we taken by permission of occupants. A selection of indicative photographs is included throughout this report in order to let the evidence speak for itself. Two research participants sent photographs with comments by email for the researchers to use as part of the study.

Focused discussions
After completing a doorstep interview, participants were invited to consider taking part in a focus group to explore further the themes covered in the questionnaire. These residents were contacted two weeks later with an invitation to attend one of several possible focus group dates (day and evening options included). Although all students who indicated initial willingness on the doorstep were contacted, an insufficient number were available to make a viable focus group.

From the sample of non-student residents who had indicated willingness, 15 agreed to attend a focus group. One focus group took place in the morning and two groups took place in the evening. Although five to six people were confirmed in person on the doorstep, and again by text, to attend each group, several did not turn up at the appointed time.

A total of nine local residents participated in the focussed group discussions. The discussions were facilitated by either Sherilyn MacGregor or Simon Pardoe, with support and observation provided by Upping It members Ulka Gaitonde and Jay Din.

A further focus group discussion with community activists from Upping It was conducted at the end of the data collection period. The purpose was to discuss the main initial findings from the research as well as to reflect collectively on the content of the Litter Strategy for England.

Key informant interviews
The purpose of the key informant interviews was to collect information from a range of senior professionals or managers who have first-hand knowledge about the litter problem as well as responsibility for existing systems for managing waste and the interventions in place for mitigating the impacts on the local community. Although they all consented to speak on the record, it has been decided not to use their names in the final report.

Interviews were conducted with 11 key informant professionals, as follows:

- four employed by Biffa (the waste management company contracted by Manchester City Council)\textsuperscript{13}
- two employed by Manchester City Council
- two employed by the University of Manchester
- one employed by Manchester Metropolitan University
- two employed by Manchester Student Homes (a landlord and property accreditation scheme which is owned, managed and funded by the two universities).

Attempts were made to interview one of the local councillors for the Moss Side ward, without success.

Interviews and focus groups were partially transcribed and a grounded theory approach was taken to identify patterns and common themes in the data. This is a well-established method of qualitative data analysis.

\textsuperscript{13} Two of the Biffa employees were bin men working in the study area. They were randomly approached on the street and they took time to speak to us during a tea break; we did not take their names. Because they spoke ‘off-the-record’ we have not quoted them in this report. Their first-hand experience and reflections on the causes of the rubbish problem have been invaluable to the analysis.
The doorstep interview data were analysed using a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods.

Participant review of the draft report

In September 2017, as part of ethical research practice, a draft of the report was made available to the residents who took part in the focus groups, as well as to members of Upping It. Several face-to-face conversations took place with these participants in order to collect feedback and suggestions for improvement.

In October 2017 the draft report was sent to nine of the 11 the stakeholder professionals who were interviewed as part of the research. The email text is as follows:

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Dear X,
Thank you again for your time and input into the research project ‘Talking Rubbish in Moss Side: Exploring the Problem of Litter in the Streets and Alleys of a Deprived Neighbourhood with a Large Student Population’.

We have now produced a full report on the research. It will remain a draft report until all those who provided input via interviews have had a chance to review and comment. Please do not share or circulate it until we send you the final report after this time.

I am attaching the draft report and would like to invite you to send any comments you may have to me by email by 20 November. You will see that we have not used your names in the report. If you are happy for your comments to be attributed to you by name, please let me know, otherwise quotes will remain unattributed (although we have specified the stakeholder institution of the participants and it will be difficult to prevent readers from guessing who I spoke to).

I hope you will find the report interesting and look forward to receiving your thoughts, suggestions and criticisms at your earliest convenience.
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Feedback was received, either by email or phone, from six out of nine professional participants; three did not reply to repeated emails. The report was shown (without permission) to three professionals (in Biffa and MCC) who did not take part in the research but who nevertheless contacted the researchers to express views about the report.

The report was amended to incorporate, as far as possible, feedback and additional input provided by all reviewers. Based on responses received, some issues have been clarified by changing text or inserting footnotes with additional information. Some materials were omitted for the sake of confidentiality and/or to reduce potential misunderstanding. The final report also contains greater information on the wider context (national policy/legislation and local budget cuts) than the draft.

This review step in the process has underscored the finding that there are significant differences in perception between residents and professionals. These differences are discussed in the report. It is not the purpose of this report to solve these differences, but merely to report that they exist.

It is important to acknowledge that the rubbish problem is controversial and there are understandable sensitivities, frustrations, and anger on all sides. Professionals and service providers genuinely believe they are doing all that they can within the bounds of existing legislation and available (finite, insufficient) resources, whilst residents (some of whom are activists working for material and political improvements) believe that more can and should be done to improve the quality of service provision, communication and, ultimately, the quality of their everyday environments.

It is also worth reiterating that the research project was designed to maximise resident input and to gather resident experiences and perceptions of the problem of rubbish on the ground. Approximately 65 residents (55 of whom randomly selected) provided comments against 11 professionals who were invited via a snowball (purposive) method of participant selection. The details of the research design and methodology are provided in the report. Readers are invited to consider these details as a central feature of the report and to make their own evaluation of the validity of the findings accordingly.

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14 We did not send the report to the two Biffa bin men we informally interviewed.
Some residents, including many students, leave the bins at the front of the house for ease of use. This was criticised by many interviewees who don’t want the front of their houses surrounded by bins.

Individual and communal waste bins and recycling bins were regularly observed to be overflowing, often preventing the correct use of the bins, and enabling exposed rubbish to blow in the wind.
4. Research Findings

4.1 Themes from field observation

Most common items of litter

*Observation*  plastic bottles, takeaway boxes, plastic bags, paper leaflets, sweet/snack wrappers

*Comments:* The list of litter complied through field observation is entirely consistent with existing research on litter in the UK which has been conducted by Keep Britain Tidy among others.15

It was noted by several research participants that the proximity of the study area to the Curry Mile and the student lifestyle/diet could explain the large amount of litter from take-aways. It is also highly likely, and was observed by one resident interviewee, that light items of recycling such as plastic bottles and paper blow out of recycling bins as opposed to being intentionally dropped by individuals. The fact that the study streets are also very close to the Manchester Academy School could also account for the large number of sweet and snack (e.g., crisp) papers on the ground. A few research participants suggested in focus group discussions that school-aged children drop litter on their walk home from school.

It is interesting to note that two focus group discussions identified spent nitrous oxide (laughing gas) canisters as a particularly notable and common type of litter. FG1 included an interesting discussion of ‘questionable litter’, by which was meant condom packages and gas canisters, being observed in the study area. One father of young children said:

> Seeing things like condom packages on the street: How do I explain it to my kids? Also those cylinders the young people use for getting high, thrown on the street all over. My kids want to know what they are. I said they are halogen light bulbs for cars but they didn’t believe me, they found out from their friends. So for me it is an ethical issue when you see this questionable rubbish and have to decide what to say to curious children. (STR FG1)

> The students are just interested in partying; like with those little silver bullet things – the gas canisters – I see loads of them all over. I’ve seen people dumping them from their cars as well. They’re all over the streets and alleys. I hear they call it ‘hippy crack’. (LTR FG2)

The recreational use of nitrous oxide has been discussed in the media as a public health problem, but rarely have the ecological impacts of the canisters been identified as a matter for review.

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15 See for example: Keep Britain Tidy (2013) Litter – making a real difference: how can we make the country cleaner? Online: [http://www.keepbritaintidy.org/litter-making-a-real-difference/2261/2/1/476](http://www.keepbritaintidy.org/litter-making-a-real-difference/2261/2/1/476)
Overfull bins

*Observation*  communal bins regularly overfull so that nothing else can be added; individual bins overfilled such that lids don’t close

*Comment:* this observation was matched by reports by research participants in the doorstep questionnaire and focus groups. It plays into a public perception that the reduction in volume of the grey wheelie bins in 2016 has been less effective than the Council believes or its data suggest. It was also noted that when bins are overflowing with rubbish, they are likely to fall over or for rubbish to spill and scatter on the ground, contributing to litter.

Another comment made by several participants was that overfull bins are both a cause and effect of ‘ghost-dumping’. This refers so the practice of putting rubbish in someone else’s bin because it is close by, or because yours or the communal bin is full. One participant reported having written to the Council, and having finally given up on recycling because his blue and brown bins are regularly filled with bags of other people’s rubbish. When a bin is ‘contaminated’ in this way, the Biffa team do not empty it, so the householder is left with that bin full of other people’s rubbish to sort out, with no collection for another fortnight. They then have no option but to use the communal bins in a nearby street.

These individual bins have been assembled by residents ready for collection.
The new ‘slim’ grey bins for residual waste are intended to ‘nudge’ people to recycle more in the other bins. Yet they easily blow over, and fall over, so it is questionable whether they achieve that increase in recycling. The reduction in bin capacity can evidently also cause contaminated recycling, degrade the local environment and defeat attempts to maintain the area.
Individual bins have to be put at the end of the street for collection, so the houses at the end bear the brunt of overflowing bins and side waste. People described the weekly ritual as lasting most of the week as people arrive home in the dark or late and forget to take their bins back. Then people bring their waste to the bin, rather than taking it home. If the bin men refuse to collect the bags of ‘side waste’, it is the houses at the end of the street that suffer most.
These bins have been emptied, but spilled refuse remains on the ground to blow away as ‘litter’.

Communal bins frequently overflow, in this case with visible meat and other food waste. It is directly next to a kitchen window. Like many communal bins, it takes waste from adjacent streets which have the individual bins. Households at the end of streets reported smell and rodents.
Overflowing recycling bins demonstrate residents’ willingness to recycle. But with fortnightly collection, they are often left overflowing for a week or more, thus preventing recycling.

The bin above appears to be ‘contaminated’ by a yogurt pot that is marked as recyclable, but is not accepted for recycling in Manchester.

Alley drains were observed as being blocked, including beside the communal bins, thus preventing any possibility to clean the bins or wash away residual food waste on the ground.
There is often a mix of builders’ waste and household waste beside communal bins. In combination they are maximally difficult to clear and clean, and often impossible for residents themselves. With one initial fly tip, the location right beside someone’s house can take on the appearance of a dump site.

Fly-tipping and side waste

Observation  

**large items and bags of rubbish regularly left on the ground next to communal bins in alleyways**

Repeat observations were made of bags left on the ground next to bins that have been opened to reveal their contents. Most bags contained recyclable items such as paper, clothing and food. Several observations were made of ‘builders’ rubble’ in alleys as well as books, hand-outs, lecture notes and university correspondence (with names and addresses). Researchers also noted many large items: mattresses, appliances, furniture. It was observed that while most large items are collected within a few days, the rubble was never collected during observation period.

Comment: Here again, the observations were supported by reports, not only by resident participants but also by key informants from Biffa and MCC. Several said that the majority of fly-tipping is done by people coming from out of the area. The feeling is that people assume that since the area is messy it is acceptable to dump there. Many felt that contractors/builders leave their construction waste behind to avoid paying fees. Others suggested that people in the area can’t afford to pay the fee MCC charges for collection.

It’s well documented that people who don’t live in the area come into the area to fly-tip because they know that every Monday, Wednesday and Friday we [Biffa] come and collect it. People have reported seeing vans come in from outside, dump, and move on. But this happens in Rusholme, Longsight and Cheetham Hill too. (Biffa Manager)

We have people driving up from outside the area, dumping stuff, furniture, toilets, bin bags full of food. (LTR)

The Council think they are providing a good service, but a lot of people can’t afford to pay to have large items collected, and so they dump it and then the area just attracts more. People think it’s a mess anyway and that everyone else does it, why shouldn’t they? (LTR)
This alley end has easy car access, so receives bulky items and bags of waste regularly. Even when cleared by Biffa, there is enough residual mess left on the ground to invite further dumping and fly tipping. Hence many residents argue for the need for CCTV or for gates to ensure that only residents and bin men have access.

This is the same alley end on another day. A rear garden and home are on the other side of this wall.
Fly tipping increases at the end of the academic year, when students leave and landlords remove appliances, furniture and mattresses, and builders carry out renovations.

The waste below appeared to come from students, with notes and files alongside a waste paper basket, bowls, a cheap vacuum cleaner, toiletries and clothes among the ‘moving out’ waste.
Contaminated recycling bins

Observation  most blue and brown bins contained non-recyclable items

Comment: the fact that, on each occasion of the walk-round, recycling bins were found to be contaminated by non-recyclable waste suggests that the recycling system is not working as it should. A significant number of participants suggested that contamination has become normalized and that it regularly results in lack of collection. When recycling bins go uncollected for long periods of time, there is increased likelihood for the materials to be scattered in alleys and streets, which may explain the high volume of paper and plastic observed in the alleys where there are communal recycling receptacles.

This brown communal recycling bin is ‘contaminated’ with plastic bags and cardboard. The recycling collection team will not collect it or sort it. It then remains until the bin is overflowing and reported as needing collection by the general waste collection team.

This individual blue bin is ‘contaminated’ with glass and plastic bags, so it will not be emptied by the recycling collection team. The student occupants of the house complained during interview that this bin had not been emptied, and then claimed no knowledge that glass doesn’t go in blue bins after 10 months of living there.
Juxtaposition of well-tended and rubbish-strewn front gardens

Observation   the majority of front gardens have no plants; many are unkempt with weeds and litter

Also observed was that anywhere from three to seven large wheelie bins are kept in the walled/gated curtilage between pavement and front door on those streets that have individual bin collection. A minority of front gardens are well maintained with plants and decoration; these often have netting to prevent litter being blown in from the adjacent yard. There are many ‘for rent – student accommodation’ signs on houses.

Comment: in doorstep interviews, many long term residents reported feeling upset by the unsightly state of neighbouring front gardens. Many are older people for whom front gardens are meant to be a source of pride and for whom maintaining gardens is a great effort. Several reported being embarrassed by the sight of their neighbouring gardens to the point of clearing them of litter and weeds in order to save face when people come to visit. There was an extended discussion in FG2 of the embarrassment caused by messy front gardens.

A common concern expressed by longer-term residents is the fact that some houses keep their bins in their front garden rather than in the backyards. Explanations include the fact that some houses don’t have backyards with access to the alleys if they have been renovated to add additional bedrooms and that some people avoid using their back alley out of fear for personal safety (discussion of groups of young men and drug dealers).
Lack of use of green food waste caddies

Observation  less than one quarter of houses put green food waste caddies out on collection day

Comment: although Upping It members have observed an increase in food waste recycling as a result of the alley greening initiative, observational evidence suggests that the take up of this scheme is very low in the area. It was suggested in one interview that there may be a chicken and egg situation at play, where if few or no households on the street regularly put their green bins out, then the collectors may decide to skip the street, which then means people assume there is no reliable collection and give up. On the other hand, participants also commented that the small size of the bin and fortnightly collection makes the system inappropriate for families who do a lot of cooking with fresh ingredients, which is likely the case in a highly multi-cultural neighbourhood. One FG participant said

*The green bins are too small; I have to empty my kitchen caddy three times a day, with kids and all. It may be big enough for a single person but not for a family who cooks with lots of fresh ingredients. And a house of six students with one green bin must have major issues with their food waste.* (STR, FG1)

The doorstep questionnaire results indicate that about 30% of respondents do not know that food waste should go in green compost caddies. And yet there are many comments about the impacts of food being put in grey/black bins, vermin and stench in particular.

FG2 had a lengthy discussion of food waste conflict in shared houses, caused by both the bin not being large enough but also due to lack of collective participation and the responsibility always falling onto one or two people.

*In shared accommodation, the food recycling is a major problem. I’m the one who always ends up cleaning out rotting, slimy bins that the others in my house have just left. It has become so bad that I have decided to move out and live alone. I can understand why most people give up and can’t be bothered to do it. It’s a big ask on top of all the other recycling.* (STR, FG2)
A photograph taken on the green and blue bin collection day. The lack of small green bins in the street indicates the poor level of recycling of food waste. Manchester City Council estimates that across the City, food waste makes up approximately 30% of the waste in the residual (grey) bins.¹⁶

The green bin in the foreground has been decorated by an Upping It member, to give it a house number and encourage new residents to use it.

¹⁶ Manchester City Council Report to Neighbourhoods and Environment Scrutiny Committee, 11th October 2017. Available online.
4.2 Results of the doorstep questionnaire interviews

Participants

A total of 55 people from different households were interviewed, guided by a questionnaire (Appendix B). Participants were divided into three categories:

✍ Students (Stu): Students are registered full-time university students. They were mostly studying at The University of Manchester (UoM): 16; with the others studying at Manchester Metropolitan University (MMU): 1; Royal Northern College of Music (RNCM): 1; The University of Salford (UoS): 1; and the Manchester Art College: 1.

Short-term residents (STR): for the purposes of the research, the distinction between short-term and long-term residents was based on future intention to stay as well as history in the area. STRs have lived in the area for fewer than three years and/or plan to leave in the coming year.

✍ Long-term residents (LTR): Long-term residents are those who intend to live in the area for life or the long-term. Many have lived here for up to 45 years, as both homeowners and social tenants; others are newcomers but committed to living here, as new homeowners / tenants.

The composition of the survey participants is as shown below. The figures show the actual numbers, and the percentage of the total, for each category.
Participant characteristics

Participants were not asked their age, but the interviewer assessed whether they were 'under 18', 'under 25', 'under 35', 'under 45', 'under 75', 'over 75'.

The estimated age breakdown is as follows, arranged by age within each category.

The gender balance was determined by who answered the door. The evening visits that were intended to increase the numbers of students also increased the numbers of men.

As the diagram shows, LTRs include more women than men, while STRs and Students included more men than women. This may influence some of the differences in responses between LTRs and Students.
### What are the 3 best things about living in this area?

The best things about living in this area were classified into six categories, with the number of mentions as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>LTR</th>
<th>STR</th>
<th>Students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Location</strong> (e.g. close to centre, university, work, shops, curry mile, I don’t drive.)</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Access to amenities</strong> (e.g. Whitworth Park, Platt Fields, open spaces, mosque, sports.)</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Housing</strong> (e.g. availability, affordability, maintenance, quality of their home.)</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Community</strong> (e.g. trustworthy neighbours, family links, challenges shared.)</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Environmental quality</strong> (e.g. air, space, cleanliness, quiet, tranquillity)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Security</strong> (e.g. feeling of safety.)</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Question 1 asked: “What are the three best things about living in this area?”*
Participants were then asked the opposite open question: “What are the three least good things about living in this area?”. The unprompted responses were classified in the same six categories:
Environmental quality as an issue

As shown by the chart above, these unprompted opening responses identified “Environmental quality” as by far the most important aspect undermining the quality of life in the area. It is useful, therefore, to look at what aspects of environmental quality were identified.

When environmental quality was identified as one of the best things about living in the area, it was almost entirely about the quiet: mentioned by 10 people, including 9 LTRs and STRs, and 1 student.

In addition, a further 15 participants identified parks as one of the best things (classified under Access to Amenities). Seven of those participants were students.

When environmental quality was identified as one of the least good things about living in the area, the unprompted comments were overwhelmingly about rubbish, litter and bins. See the chart below.

Evidence of a problem with rubbish

Having asked the two open questions above, all respondents were then asked specifically: *Do you think there is a problem with rubbish in this area?* The responses were:

Yes: 51 participants (93%)

No: 4 participants (7%)

The chart below shows the breakdown of these responses between long and short term residents, and students.
All three types of residents said “yes” there was a problem. The “no” responses were confined to three students and one short-term resident.

All participants were asked to explain their response. All four who reported there was no problem, nevertheless referred to a problem in their explanatory comment:

- I've learned to ignore it. Stu
- It's no worse here than other areas. Stu
- It’s hidden in the alley, so you don't see it. Stu
- You can clean it up if it’s on your doorstep. STR
- We can put waste out and it is collected. You have to put rubbish aside to work. It’s smelly. Stu

The 51/55 participants who said there was a rubbish problem, were asked “What is the effect on you and your household?”. The most common effects identified were as follows:
If yes: What is the effect on you and your household?

- Irritation with neighbours or others / unfairness / anti-social: LTRs 10, STRs 3, Students 5
- Irritation with MCC or BIFA: LTRs 8, STRs 3, Students 4
- Aesthetic / not nice to see / drags area down: LTRs 5, STRs 4, Students 6
- Encourages pests / rodents / mice / cockroaches / flies: LTRs 6, STRs 3, Students 7
- Dirty / Health & safety / broken glass: LTRs 7, STRs 2, Students 2
- Bad smell: LTRs 5, STRs 1, Students 2
- Embarrassment of living by it / visitors / people think its mine: LTRs 8, STRs 1, Students 2
- Effort of picking it up / takes time / when friends/family visit: LTRs 4, STRs 2, Students 2
- Feeling defeated / unable to do anything about it: LTRs 11, STRs 0, Students 0
- Other: LTRs 7, STRs 0, Students 1
The effect of rubbish on you and your household

The following selected quotes from the doorstep surveys illustrate the effects of the rubbish on residents, and the comments underlying each category.

Irritation with neighbours or others

- The mess blows from next door, and I end up clearing it up. LTR
- Neighbours’ overflowing smelly bins, and poor recycling leads to rubbish building up. LTR
- There are student black bags in their front yard. I have to tell them next door to move it. LTR
- It makes me furious, angry, because of the smell and lack of cleanliness, and the fear of pests coming in. LTR

Irritation with MCC or BIFA and the waste system

- MCC should be more involved, because we are paying Council taxes. Why are they continuously just clearing fly-tipping? MCC should put up signs “you will be prosecuted”. LTR
- I was very committed to recycling. Now I don’t bother. When I put recycling bins out, people add the wrong waste to them, so they are not collected. I emailed and rang the MCC and Councillors, who told me to put out the bins just before they are collected! The Council needs a system. STR
- We’re at uni 9-5. We put out the bin at 7am. When we get back, there’s more rubbish in it. Stu
- Other people put rubbish in our bins if we leave them at the end of the road for the day. Now we have 2 black bins. Stu
- My mother came to stay, and put our rubbish out by the other rubbish bags because all the bins were full. We got a letter from MCC. We had to reply, to defend ourselves. We said it was not right to fine us only. We had to pay £50 fine. LTR
- My son puts the bins at the end [of the street], but I can’t bring it back. I’m too old. LTR
- MCC doesn’t care about lower class people. Other areas are kept clean. LTR

Aesthetic / not nice to see / drags area down

- It drags the area down. LTR
- The rubbish is all over the place. It blows in the wind. It’s not nice to see. It’s bad for the health, and smells. LTR
- I see rubbish everywhere and don’t like it when I come to my house. STR
- I feel sad for the area, because they are nice houses, but there’s dirty stuff in the street. STR
- I feel sad for neighbours who have to clean it up. Stu

Embarrassment of living surrounded by it

- If visitors come, it’s embarrassing. So I clean and wash the front. LTR
- It’s dumped by my back gate, so it looks like it’s mine. So a resident complained to me! LTR
- When my family come, I don’t want them to see this shit hole. LTR
- I don’t want rubbish, and questionable ‘adult’ rubbish, in the street in front of my small daughter. LTR

Effort of constantly picking it up

- [The effect is] Me taking time to remove rubbish by others. LTR

Dirty / Health & safety / broken glass

- It’s dirty. It’s frustrating. I’ve seen rats. It’s distressing for my elderly dad. LTR
- Going out to the communal bins, treading on glass. It’s unsafe for children [to play in the alley] because of glass. LTR
Encourages pests / rodents / mice / cockroaches / flies

The mice in the kitchen are attracted by the waste. Otherwise no effect. Stu
I had to get a cat to keep the mice out of the house. I don’t even like cats. LTR
I feel down about it. This area is infested with mice and cockroaches. The problem has always been here. We just can’t get rid of it. LTR
The communal bin system is causing vermin infestation and discourages individual household responsibility. LTR

Bad smell

I can’t open the window because of the smell. The bins are open and smelling. It’s bad for the health. STR
There’s a bad smell in the rooms at the back of the house. It’s no good for health and safety. We don’t open the back windows. We’re paying so much in Council tax and rent, and not happy.
What would I most like? A lorry coming to wash out bins in the summer, when they stink. LTR

Feeling defeated / unable to do anything about it

It makes me want to move out. I’m so fed up with it. We tried to tackle it with a clean up, but it just comes back. LTR
The problem is I’m too old to do anything about it. Rubbish blows into the yard. LTR
It needs cleaning. I can’t do it. Nobody does it. LTR
There are too many issues! I have to drag bins through the house on collection day because I don’t feel comfortable [safe] about using the back alley. Stu

Other

If you have a dirty street, it attracts people, youths – they think they can do what they want, like drug dealing, because they think nobody cares.

Dog poo in the alley. There’s a dog owner at the top of the road. LTR

It is worth noting that, in debriefing sessions, the interviewers described their own feeling of sadness and frustration as they met elderly people who had lived in the area from a time when it was populated by families and neighbours they knew. Now, beside their own neat gardens full of plants, there are bare front yards with bins and rubbish in the student houses on either side. Every time they clear the litter from the gardens, it just blows back in from next door. Some residents have installed fine mesh along their railings in order to stop neighbours’ rubbish blowing into their front yards. Many said they clean the next door yards in addition to their own, but several others admitted to having reached a point where they can’t cope with it any longer.

Resident participants reported that there is palpable anger that so much money is being made from buying up family houses and renting them out as student HMOs, yet the landlords apparently have to do nothing in return. They argued that the City Council effectively provides the service to the landlords of removing the rubbish, but nobody clears the yards.

Observational data collected as part of this research suggest that the situation is no better in the alleys and at the street-ends than in individual front yards. Even after the waste teams have gone, enough litter is left on the ground to show fly-tippers that this is the place to dump the next lot of rubbish.

Research participants expressed feeling that the Council provides the landlords a service, not the local people who pay the Council tax. They also feel that the university and council managers need to see the reality of what landlords and their (largely student) tenants are doing to their streets and community.
Explaining the cause of the rubbish

Doorstep survey participants were asked “What do you think causes the rubbish we see in the streets and alleys?” Again most responses to this question were unprompted, but whenever possible, the interviewers pointed to visible rubbish available in view of the doorstep. Their answers can be categorised as in the chart below. By far the most frequently mentioned cause was the processes of Manchester City Council.

Processes of MCC

The responses suggest that Council processes are seen as being the chief cause of the problem by a long distance (chart overleaf). Examples of comments are listed below, grouped by theme.

i) Collection system

I’m looking at 12 bins now, outside here [end of street, all week]. There’s rubbish on the ground. ... Great Western St. put their bins here. The [waste collection] lorry leaves all the bins here by the house, for the whole street. People bring their rubbish here, instead of taking the bins back. STR

[The cause is the] lack of investment by the council. I see street cleaners in Piccadilly, but I don’t see them around here. Stu

You can’t put your bin out the night before because other people put their stuff in. LTR

The [communal] bins are always full. They don’t open enough to put a bag in. LTR

The [grey communal] bin is full. It is always full. So there is waste is on the ground, and some bags are open. LTR

We need more public bins in the roads to be able to discard of rubbish properly. Stu

Bins are not collected and it spreads. Bins not put out on time. The wind knocks them over – you see them lying on their sides. Stu

Bins blowing over and lying on their sides was witnessed during the study. The new bins are tall and slim, with a narrow base. The lightest is the bin for paper and card, which easily blows over, so the lid opens, and the rubbish blows down the streets. From the researchers’ perspective, it would appear to be a significant design problem.

Sometimes the bins are just not emptied. Stu

This comment about occasional non-collection was made frequently. It was borne out by the waste lorries missing a whole side of a street, with MCC then offering additional bags individually to those who phoned.

ii) Grey bins recently reduced in size

In 2016, Manchester City Council replaced the individual bins by smaller bins. The idea nationwide is that by having a smaller rubbish bin, people are “nudged” to recycle more. However, in these terraced houses, the residents reported a different reality, which helps to explain the rubbish and overflowing communal bins in nearby streets. It suggests that instead of increasing recycling, it may be causing an increase in the contamination of recycling bins.

MCC took the old bins away, and the new ones are too small. We’re [a family of] seven, so they are too small. We use the communal bins [over the road] because ours are too small. LTR

We need a bigger grey bin. Two week collection is not enough. LTR

There are lots of people living in the same house, and one bin is not enough. When there’s not enough space, everyone puts it on the ground. STR

We need more bins. There are not enough. There are bags everywhere, all over the ground, because of a lack of capacity. Stu

The bins are too small, so they overflow. LTR

Small bins are a waste of time. Stu
What do you think causes the rubbish we see in the streets and alleys?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cause</th>
<th>LTR</th>
<th>ShTR</th>
<th>Stu</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Processes of MCC: collection system / grey bins reduced in size /</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>17</td>
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<tr>
<td>communal bins overflow / no signs or prosecution</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>People don’t care / people not using bins correctly</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>9</td>
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<tr>
<td>Students / landlords / too many in a house</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Commercial non-residents: builders / local businesses /</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
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<td>supermarkets / packaging / take-aways</td>
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<td>Wind / just blows in</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Passers by / people outside area including from cars</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kids throwing litter / no bins in the street</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>It's not a clean environment to respect</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It was already here when we moved in</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Lack of education</td>
<td>1</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
iii) No signs or prosecution

_Lack of enforcement: people should be fined for littering. I see no evidence of enforcement. LTR_

_We need more involvement from MCC. They don’t like action on people. We need signs on walls saying fines, to deter. LTR_

_We need enforcement, to check bins and fine. We have enough information. LTR_

People don’t care / people not using bins correctly

Apart from identifying Council processes as the main causes of the rubbish problem, there were explanations that the rubbish was caused by people, often unknown, who dump rubbish and/or do not use bins correctly.

_Could be anyone. They are too lazy to put it in the bins. Too lazy to phone the Council for large objects. LTR_

_I’ve seen neighbours clean their cars, and throw rubbish from them onto the pavement. LTR_

_People are not recycling, and just put it anywhere. Putting it on the floor is the worst. LTR_

[as above]People bring their rubbish here, instead of taking bins back. STR_

[It is also because of] local residents’ perceptions that it is not their responsibility to help keep the streets clean. Apathy. Stu_

Students, landlords and multiple occupancy

At the other end of the spectrum, only one participant (a student) cited the popular policy explanation for rubbish and litter, as being due to a “probably a lack of education re school children”.

Given that this is a neighbourhood where the most educated residents are also the most transient, it would seem reasonable to infer that education does not necessarily correlate with care for the environment. A more extensive study might therefore challenge the pervasive policy assumption about education leading to ‘behaviour change’, and might possibly indicate that transiency / longevity and pride of place are the better causal explanations, both here and in wealthier neighbourhoods.¹

During the study, the interviewers repeatedly observed university notes in split bags on the ground, mixed with food, cans, and other waste, beside communal waste bins and recycling bins that were not full. They also witnessed a high level of litter in the student yards (reported in Effects, above). Local residents reported (in the surveys and focus group discussions) seeing this level of litter all the time. So for them, there is little local evidence to support the policy claim that education increases either recycling or care for the local environment.

The cause cited most frequently by all non-student residents was the students, plus their landlords, and the problem of too many people living in small terraced houses.

Upping It has recently shifted its focus to the apparent links between ‘over-population’ in the area and social and environmental problems such as litter. The density issue is worth explaining: three-bedroom houses let to students usually have the living room as a fourth bedroom. This additional bedroom makes student letting profitable, along with the knowledge that student tenants will leave after a year or two. Some of the houses have been converted into six bedrooms, with lowered ceilings, a converted loft and a rear extension. The researchers heard from long term residents that some of these three-up-three down terraced houses have even been converted into three flats. Interestingly, because many of these conversions were done without planning permission, 13 are now subject to enforcement orders requiring the removal of the extensions and their return to single homes.

Household waste is clearly determined by the number of inhabitants. But in addition, students usually cater independently, often eat pre-prepared food and take-aways, and each have their own set of

¹ There is empirical evidence that supports the argument that structural factors, such as transiency, deprivation and physical infrastructure, are more significant causes of poor environmental quality in urban areas than individual factors such as lack of knowledge. See Hastings et al 2009; Bailey et al 2013.
consumer goods, which may be temporary, cheap and disposable. As a result, student houses can produce far more waste per person than non-student households; a multiple occupancy student house can produce levels of waste many times that of a typical local family.

During the study, the interviewers witnessed furniture and white goods being dumped in the alleys at the time when the students leave, said to be by landlords. While the role of landlords may lessen the blame on individual tenants, it is important to recognise that there remains evidently an issue of student responsibility. The student, quoted above, who described the effects of rubbish as “The mice in the kitchen are attracted by the waste. Otherwise no effect” had a front yard full of rubbish. When asked the cause of this rubbish, his response was:

This rubbish in the yard was here when we moved in. Stu

Yet that participant also indicated that he had lived in that house for 10 months.

The following quotes illustrate the finding that the majority of survey participants identify the combination of students, landlords and housing density as causes of the rubbish:

9 out of 10 times it’s coming from student houses. You see the academic notes in the rubbish. LTR

There are too many in a house, so the bins overflow, so you get their rubbish on the ground.
Students put bins out, but don’t bring them back, so they get filled by others. Then when they bring them back there’s no room, so they put it on the ground. LTR

People walking home late at night chuck rubbish into our gardens, mostly students. STR

Students are not thoughtful on the environment. LTR

Students clean nothing. People buy houses, rent them out, and students clean nothing. LTR

Students don’t care. The Landlord is responsible. LTR

Fridges, mattresses, tables, chairs, can only come from rental properties. LTR.

When students are moving out, landlords don’t take responsibility. Landlords are dumping DIY stuff, e.g. kitchen units, baths, in between student tenancies. LTR

There’s a flat above the Barber shop / café on Great Western St. putting their bins on this side, not in their own yards. LTR

Commercial non-residents: builders, local businesses, supermarkets, take-aways

Definitely house builders leaving rubble and concrete in the alleyways. LTR

The bins and smelling rubbish at the entrance to the alley are from the shops on Great Western St. LTR

Bins and smelling rubbish from shops on Great Western St. LTR

Piles of rubbish at the end of street; pizza boxes. Stu

One student made the counter argument:

I could blame takeaways etc. But it’s the customers’ fault at the end of the day, if they decide to discard rubbish. Stu

The wind

So much rubbish blowing in the wind. You clean up and it comes again. Stu

Our neighbours leave rubbish in their garden, and it blows into ours. STR

School children throwing litter / no bins in the street

A recurring theme was the observation that there are no public bins in the street, even though school kids buy things in the shops after school, and walk down the streets with the wrappers. The cause was:

There are no public litter bins in the street. Kids throw litter. LTR
The kids don’t have values now. They throw wrappers away [in the street]. I get drink bottles left on my window sills. LTR
School children eating crisps/snacks. Lack of litter bins. LTR

Passers-by / people outside area including from cars
Last week a car threw his take away out of the window. A neighbour told him to put it in the bin. He did! LTR
Fly tipping is mostly from outside of the area. LTR

Action and responsibility
Who should remove it?
Participants were asked “Who should remove this rubbish we see here now?”. They were asked this question twice, firstly for the street and alleys (public space) and then for their own front yards (private space). To illustrate the question, the interviewers pointed to examples of rubbish while asking, both in the street and in the respondent’s or a neighbour’s front yard.

Many people made a clear distinction between the two spaces:
I clean my bit. We pay rates for MCC to clean the streets. LTR
Alley waste – it’s for the Council to do. I clear house yards, and both sides too. LTR
The person living close to it. If it’s on the road, then the people in charge [i.e. MCC]. Stu

One student made a similar clear public/private distinction, but his claim to clear up the waste in the yard prompted the interview to make a note of the incongruity:
Public – not sure. Private – we tend to pick it up. Stu
Interviewer note: He stands in a communal hall full of junk mail and litter on the floor. There is rubbish all over the ground outside in the front yard.

Responsibility for private spaces
The chart below shows the participants’ views regarding where responsibility for removing rubbish in the front yards should lie:

Who should remove the rubbish we can see now in the front yards?

- MCC / BIFFA / waste collectors
- Residents individually who dropped it
- Residents individually living closest to it
- Residents together
- Landlords if their tenants dropped it

The results show a common agreement that waste inside the front yards is the responsibility of “residents individually living closest to it”.
However this most popular response to the question conceals very different ways of expressing that responsibility, ranging from:

‘us of course, I do it’

said by many long-term residents, to the memorably different response from some students:

‘us, I suppose, but it was here when we came.’

The difference between these two comments appears to be in the extent to which the personal responsibility had been actively recognised prior to the conversation, or was prompted by the question. Even those standing in a yard full of litter, could perhaps appreciate that there was no other justifiable response to the question of responsibility for waste in their own front yard.

The quotes below illustrate the range of responses about responsibility for clearing up in the private space:

The mess blows from next door, and I end up clearing it up. LTR
Householders, but I can’t do it [any more] LTR
We do clear the front. We pressure washed it too. Stu

The comments included criticisms of students and landlords for not clearing the front yards:

Landlords don’t live here, and don’t care. They’re not going to do it. LTR
Landlords should weed the front yards LTR
Need to find out who is doing it LTR
Landlords are never here, so students should clean up their mess. LTR

Responsibility for public spaces

When waste was in the public spaces, in the streets and alleys, it was seen by most respondents as the responsibility of the Council and its waste collectors.

Council needs to do something to solve the problem. We pay council tax. LTR
We need cleaners and street wardens, paid by MCC. LTR
The lorry should clean around the bins. Sometimes a man does so before the bins are emptied. STR

But the suggested Council action was not always just direct cleaning, it was also by helping or enabling local people to sort it out.

MCC needs to create a system that is convenient. The local community needs to act. But students are not here long. LTR
MCC should monitor and support residents to improve their waste management, and undertake occasional clean ups. STR

The chart below shows the different kinds of response.
Who should remove the rubbish we can see now in the street / alley?

The other responses are interesting. The 13 who said the “Residents individually who dropped it” should remove it, appear to be expressing the anger and frustration that *people shouldn’t drop or dump rubbish*. It was not said in the belief that the culprits would actually clear it up. Arguably, it is therefore a response that potentially all respondents could have said; those who didn’t, were just being realistic.

Some were saying it in the sense of needing enforcement.

By contrast, the 13 respondents who said “Residents individually living closest to it” included those who were resigned to picking up other people’s litter in the street. Some described picking up from the street and alley in front of their house. Others described picking up along one side or one end of the street.

*If it’s in front of the door, then we clear it up LTR*

*We pick it up LTR*

Two non-UK students identified the residents in principle as being responsible for the street:

*We’re the ones living here. Council just comes once a week. Indian Stu*

*It’s our duty, the people in the street. We’ve got a bin bag and do it several times. Do your duty: take care of where you live. The council won’t do it. Eastern European Stu*

A Middle Eastern resident perceived the lack of collective action as being a local anomaly, and the reason other areas are cleaner:

*RS[Who should clear it up?] If not the dropper, then residents together. We assume that’s why other streets are cleaner. STR*

By contrast, another student saw it as “sad” that local people felt they had to pick it up.

*Neighbours pick it up, but it’s not their responsibility. I pity them. It’s sad. E.Asian Stu*

There were familiar criticisms of students too, especially from those who pick up litter:

*My neighbour and I often litter pick. If everyone did this it would be lovely around here. But no-one else does it. Students don’t care because they don’t live here all the time. LTR*

*People who rent don’t care about the place. LTR*

Faced with being asked about responsibility, some students acknowledged their own lack of care:

*[In the street and alley] to expect people to do more is unrealistic.*

*[In our front yard] we haven’t bothered to clean up. UK Stu*

*It depends how much you care. UK Stu*
Students often made abstract observations of the challenge or of their own inaction, or articulated policy goals, in contrast to the more hands on approach of the long-term residents.

_We live in western society, which is essentially very selfish. It would be nice if we adopted a collective approach and tackled problems like this with a group mentality._ UK Stu

_Council should [take responsibility]. Residents have responsibility too, however it’s getting there [that is the challenge]. It blows from next door._ UK Stu

_Residents need to be made to feel responsible to keep the area tidy._ UK Stu

**Have you ever reported rubbish?**

Participants were asked “Have you ever reported fly-tipping / rubbish / bins not emptied?” Despite nearly all respondents identifying a problem with rubbish, and despite making the case very strongly, the number actually reporting the waste problem is low.

![Image](image.png)

The result is potentially significant because it counters the common assumption by Local Authorities that if there is a waste problem, people will report it. It is worth questioning, however, whether non-reporting can be taken as evidence that there is no problem.

This pilot study would appear to refute this assumption, and particularly for transient residents. While the long-term residents were almost evenly split, there is a marked absence of reporting of rubbish problems from short-term residents and students.

There is no significant correlation between English language confidence and reporting, partly because most of the students are UK native English speakers, yet say they do not report rubbish problems. Hence
the main predictor of reporting rubbish appears to be the length of residency and intended residency. It appears that those with a higher level of commitment to the area are more inclined to take action.

The reasons for not reporting rubbish are interesting and are grouped into the themes below.

The following are all UK native speakers of English, or confident non-native speakers, who nevertheless do not report. All but one are students:

- Not bothered. Stu
  I don’t think about it. I’m surrounded by people who don’t care, so I don’t either. Standards slip. Stu
  I’ve never had an occasion to report. I’m too busy. Stu
  Never became such a problem for action. Stu
  I’ve got used to it. Stu
  Too laid back LTR

The following cited not knowing how to:

- Not sure. Haven’t thought it would help. Don’t know how. Stu
- Lack of knowledge of how to report. Stu
- Cos I’m just here for a year. Don’t know how. Stu
- I haven’t seen it bad enough to complain, but I do know the procedures STR
- Been busy STR
- Too busy working; can’t report at work. LTR
- I don’t know how to. LTR

The following are the students who thought the waste was not a problem:

- Dunno really. Wouldn’t know how to. Never seen things in a state to report. Stu
  I don’t think it’s a big problem. And to be honest, I wouldn’t know how to report it. Stu

The question prompted some to review why not, and articulate a sense of not being the person to report:

- I don’t feel responsible. I feel other people will do it. Stu
- Not my job. I manage my own waste. The situation in this neighbourhood is too overwhelming. Stu

A finding that may have potential significance for MCC is that many respondents assumed that to report waste involves reporting a person for dumping it, rather than reporting something needed to be cleared. For them, the reasons for not reporting were either that they hadn’t seen who did it, or that it was un-neighbourly to report:

- Never seen it happen. Blows in the wind. No dumping seen. Stu
  I’ve not seen who’s doing it LTR
  We like to keep it cool and clean. We don’t report each other STR

It appeared that even those who felt exasperated by the rubbish, feared reporting it. This seemed more likely from those who felt less secure about being part of the community:

- We try to stay out of sight and out of trouble as foreigners. STR
- Because difficult to explain and understand in English. STR
- Difficult to explain in English. I don’t want trouble. LTR

But that feeling was not limited to newcomers or those lacking native English. The following explanations were given by UK/Irish native speakers of English:

- I mind my own business. Threatening – best not to say. Safer not to intervene LTR
I just clear what I can myself. LTR

Perhaps the most cultural perspective came from a student from the Far East, who explained:

Because maybe it’s normal here. I don’t know if we should report it. Stu

Explanations from long-term residents included criticism of MCC:

Who to? MCC only come at election time. LTR

Who do I report it to? MCC is not clearing the drains, so what’s the point of reporting to them? LTR

Doesn’t make a difference. LTR

Who did you report rubbish to?

One of the claims made in the Upping It focus group discussion was that part of the difficulty in community engagement is the unwillingness of local people to complain to neighbours or to address problems even when they reach a conflict point. This experience seemed to be borne out in the data.

Of those who had reported rubbish, none had reported to the Residents’ Association, none to the shops or local businesses who were believed to have dumped rubbish and only two reported confronting the individuals who were seen dumping. However 21 participants said they have reported to MCC and Councillors. [Note, however that the word ‘reported’ in the question may have influenced this result, so would be better replaced by ‘complained’ in a future study.]

![Diagram of reporting methods](image)

Knowledge of attempts to solve the rubbish problem

Participants were asked “Do you know about any attempts in this area to solve the rubbish problem?”, and asked about the successes and shortcomings of these attempts.

In doing so, all participants were specifically asked whether they knew of:

- any community litter picking
- any projects delivered by the universities (e.g. student volunteering)

The results are shown below. The figures for “yes” and “no” refer to the number of respondents. The figures for the actions refer to the number of times they were cited.

The overwhelming answer is “no”: 35 of 55 respondents had not heard of any attempts in this area to solve the rubbish problem. Few had heard of any community litter picking, though to the two listed should be added the Mosque action, which was one or more community litter picks, and the communal
alley cleaning, both listed separately in the chart. Two mentioned Malaysian students organising periodic litter picks via FaceBook. Nine mentioned the Upping It actions and student welcome pack.

Attempts by the universities

The findings are particularly interesting for the universities, who claim to be actively working to address the negative impacts of their students on the street environment in residential areas with large student population. Even when asked specifically, none of the respondents, including none of the students, knew of any activity by the universities to solve the rubbish problem in the area.

The closest to identifying a university input was two students referring to input in a previous year:

*MMU gave us information in the 1st year as part of our induction, and that was handy. Stu*

*Nothing this year. But when I was in halls of residence last year, we were all given a couple of recycling bags. That made us more aware. Stu*

One long-term resident nevertheless gave the universities the benefit of the doubt, suggesting:

*I’m sure the University would do something, because they are into recycling, but I don’t know what they do. LTR*

The long-term residents’ responses to this question are significant. They have lived in the area for many years and are both the most concerned about the rubbish problem and the most alert to interventions made to redress it. Yet none had ever heard of activity by the universities to help to solve the rubbish problem.

It may be inferred that this perceived lack of action is a real and potential source of resentment. As the responses show (and the focus group data supports), local people witness the rubbish overflowing from student bins, see student bins lying uncollected in the street, and see rubbish blowing from student yards into their own, yet they personally have not witnessed action from the universities. This perceived inaction by the universities about a serious daily nuisance may contribute to bad ‘town-gown’ relations and therefore might be a potential focus for further action by universities.

One resident expressed her/his frustration directly:

*The University has powers to compel students to clear their waste: they must support active residents. LTR*
In terms of the impact of students, and the preparation of students to live in local residential areas by the universities, a respondent who is also an employee of the University of Manchester suggested:

*At university in the 2nd year, the students have to learn all about sustainability and recycling. Problem is, I don’t think they put it into practice when they get home. LTR*

**Practical knowledge of recycling**

Alongside questions about the problem, effects, responsibility and solutions, the survey included two practical questions to find out what participants actually know about waste and recycling collection and the correct use of their bins.

One question was simply *“What day of the week is our rubbish collected?”* Nearly all people knew the day. Those who didn’t were houses with communal bins, where they don’t have to put the bins out the night before. So the insight from this question is not particularly interesting.

Another question was *“Do you have separate bins inside the house/garden for recycling?”* This was asked because we suspected that sorting indoors is a key element in enabling recycling in the correct bins outdoors. Yet alongside the clear and believable explanations of what many people did, and the evident lack of any system by some others, there were many responses where the answer seemed an idealised rather than credible response. The question suffers from having an obvious ‘right answer’.

However, one question achieved the goal of indicating practical knowledge. Respondents were asked *“In which bin does food waste go?”* This question assessed basic knowledge of the recycling system, because if a person does not know it goes in the green bin they can’t make it up. It is also highly pertinent because it is food waste in the communal residual (black or grey) waste bins and on the ground next to them that causes the smell and the rodents. Moreover, while the huge communal bins cannot be cleaned, the small green bins are easily cleaned.

The results are shown below. Over a quarter of students (6/22), and a quarter of long-term residents (6/24), did not know which bin to use for food waste. While the numbers are too small to be significant, the students were slightly better informed than other short-term residents, suggesting the university input that some mentioned may have had some effect.

However, judging by the observed number of green bins that were put out for collection via the observational research, the rate of use in reality appears to be significantly lower than 75%. So there may be both a lack of knowledge, as well as a knowledge-action gap, at play here. This therefore seems a potentially useful focus for action and awareness-raising by local groups and the Council, especially in the summer months when the problems of smell and flies reduce the quality of life for so many residents.
4.3 Themes from focused discussions with residents

The themes raised in the focussed group discussions are by-and-large the same as those found in the doorstep questionnaire results. The fact that the themes are consistent across the two data sets allows for a level of certainty in the findings.

This section presents three additional common themes that were raised and discussed at length in discussions with local residents.

Rubbish reduces quality of life

It is difficult to overstate the intensity with which the problem of litter is felt by local residents in the study. Among the reasons why the rubbish problem matters to them, participants in interviews and in both focus groups discussed these common concerns:

- children can’t play safely outdoors
- unable to open windows due to stench and flies
- rat and mice infestations
- unable to hang washing out due to [pigeons and gulls] attracted by food [put on nearby grass]
- fear of crime
- embarrassment at the mess [especially when family/friends visit].

The following quotes help to illustrate these feelings:

the alleys are so full of rubbish, it’s unbelievable; it’s not safe for our kids. We’re worried about the mice droppings. We can’t sleep at night because we can hear the mice. In summer we can’t open the windows for fresh air because of the flies, moths, smell. We try to keep our house nice and clean but this is such a problem for us. (LTR, FG1)

our neighbour has an eyesore next to them; they come out of their house and see rubbish piled up in the next garden, with a terrible smell and maggots coming out of the bins. It’s an environmental problem. You can’t have that on your doorstep, and yet it happens every single week. (LTR, FG3)

Erosion of community cohesion

The tendency of local residents not to report or complain about the rubbish they see in the streets and alleyways around them is reported and discussed in the findings of the doorstep questionnaire. In the interviews and focus groups, this point was expanded to become one not just about lack of reporting but the erosion of social capital (sustained through bonds between neighbours) in the area. Community cohesion and the willingness of residents to discuss - much less work together to solve - issues of common concern are undermined by the negative feelings of frustration and defeat that people feel after years of living with a recurring problem.

Among the reasons for the perceived erosion of community cohesion are:

- people afraid to tell neighbours what to do
- experience of students slamming door in my face when I have gone to speak to them about their bins
- students avoid speaking to their non-student neighbours because they assume they ‘hate’ them
- elderly people have tried for a long time with neighbours but have just given up
- new immigrants might not be confident in English and want to ‘keep their heads down’
- fear of retaliation if complaints are reported to MCC
- feeling angry that other people ghost-dump in my bins
- wanting CCTV to catch people in the act of ghost-dumping
- caused by people who haven’t been brought up here and so don’t have any pride
One long term resident told the story of confronting someone in the act of fly-tipping and being met with a frightening level of hostility:

The response I got was really hostile, violent even. Afterwards I thought I should have kept quiet, but then again I just thought “how dare you come and dump your rubbish on my street?”. But once people are spoken to like that for making a legitimate complaint, they’ll never do it again. I can understand why an older person wouldn’t want to get involved. I think a lot of the elderly people are quite frightened, scared and fed up – they’re defeated. They’re relying on the Council or the younger people my age to tackle [the rubbish problem]. I certainly don’t expect them to approach anyone who’s fly-tipping, certainly not with the kind of treatment and intimidation they’d be sure to get. (LTR)

Co-founder of Upping It, Jay Din, has an insightful comment on this theme, which draws on many years of working in the Moss Side area:

... in our neighbourhood, due to structural problems, we lack stability. We have people who are fully occupied 100% either in education or employment or they’re transient. This undermines our area of, depletes it of, social capital. In a more balanced community, you have a mix of people with different skills, talents and spare time to devote to addressing problems, and this can be of tangible benefit to the Local Authority. We lack this mix but there is plenty of it in some other neighbourhoods that are less transient, more stable: Whalley Range, for example, Didsbury, Chorlton and so on. Our neighbourhoods are undermined because we’ve lost that social capital.

This comment is interesting and these findings are worth further investigation and analysis in light of the heavy burden of responsibility for solving the litter problem that HM Government’s Litter Strategy for England places on local community groups. If community cohesion is being eroded by the persistence of poor environmental quality and a perceived inability to do anything to change it, then it is unlikely this approach has merit.

Stigmatisation of Moss Side and its residents

There is fairly common feeling amongst the local residents that a factor contributing to the rubbish problem is the stigmatization of Moss Side. It is impossible to assess the veracity of this claim with the data collected for this piece of research, but it seems important to flag it up as part of what makes local people angry about rubbish. It is also important to note that other researchers have found causal relationships between high levels of transience, deprivation and oversees immigrants (all of which exist in Moss Side) and high levels of rubbish in UK neighbourhoods.17

Upping It member Rosy Wilding believes that students behave in Moss Side in ways they probably would not do in more affluent areas such as Chester or Chorlton. She says that they tend to ‘look down on the area because it is a mess, more messy than their posher places of origin’. She goes on to say:

It is feeling rather than something with a lot of evidence behind it, but it seems that certain behaviours are down to a lack of respect for the people and the area. Even though a few years ago it would have been understandable to think it was normal to see rubbish everywhere, now – with all the flowers and alley greening – if they do leave rubbish around – it’s just out of contempt.

Similar kinds of comments were made in other interviews and in focus group discussions:

They have stereotyped our street and think we don’t sort our bins. (LTR, FG2)

This wouldn’t be happening in Didsbury; you go to areas like that and drive down the street and see it’s all kept really nice. (LTR, FG1)

It’s lack of respect for our area, stigma – definitely. (LTR, FG1)

What’s acceptable in Moss Side wouldn’t be acceptable in Chorlton or Didsbury Village. Perhaps these disparities are down to class factors: people with particular lifestyles and incomes have a different tolerance levels for what is acceptable. (Jay Din)

Anne Tucker explained that Moss Side has ‘an enforced chip on its shoulder, due to bad press from earlier times when it was known as Gunchester’. A similar account was given by a Biffa manager who has lived in Moss Side for 40 years; it has a reputation for being messy and rough, but he stressed that the current reality no longer lives up to that reputation. Nevertheless, at some level this (real or perceived) stigma, along with anecdotal comparisons with other parts of the city, played a notable part in conversations with a number of research participants. It therefore might be something further research could explore.

Above: a newly cleaned alley, with pot plants and flowers planted by some of the residents. Below: a mature cleaned and greened ally in a nearby street. Both assisted by Upping It.
4.4 Themes from interviews with key informant professionals

Moss Side is not unique

All interviews with key informants sought to find out whether or not the rubbish problem in Moss Side is worse than in other areas of Manchester. A common theme in their responses is that it is not worse than other areas with a large student and/or transient population of renters. Furthermore, it was suggested by most key informants that the problem in Moss Side is potentially less severe than it is in other areas. Several interviewees indicated that they hear less about Moss Side than areas such as Fallowfield (home to ‘the top 12 streets’ for priority attention), which are the most problematic ‘student areas’. It was suggested that most of the resources are targeted at the worst areas so perhaps less is known about the situation in Moss Side.

A Biffa manager reported that the study area is perhaps more messy due to physical design, i.e., terraced streets with hidden alleyways. The alleys with communal bins are popular fly-tipping places; the alleys are difficult to keep clean because there are large bins obstructing the cleansing vehicles, and the on-street parking means the street cleansing operations are regularly obstructed. But these problems exist in all areas of similar design. Existing academic research includes physical environment as a key cause of high rates of street rubbish in British cities, with the finding that terraced housing is particularly difficult to keep clean. 18

A considerable amount of effort goes into addressing the problem

It was mentioned by several key informants that until recently the Universities did not do very much to mitigate the impacts of students on local communities. Among these, most attributed the more recent attention to these impacts to the establishment of the Manchester Student Strategy and pressure from local community groups.

The interviews provided important insights into the significant level of resources that are being directed towards mitigating the negative impacts of students on residential areas. It was acknowledged that problems of ‘street environment’ and non-participation in responsible household waste and recycling practices are not seen as being as serious as other problems such as personal safety, noise/parties and criminal activities (e.g., drugs).

The group with a remit to consider waste issues is the Housing and Environment Partnership (HEP). All key informants were aware of the work being done by the HEP; indeed several are members. The HEP operates according to a comprehensive Action Plan covering the whole academic year, with specific actions timed for peak problem periods (such as welcome week and moving out weekend at the end of June each year).

The key informants we interviewed provided a wealth of information and concrete examples of interventions being undertaken to address waste and recycling-related problems. These include:

- dedicated off-campus affairs manager with MSH (interviewed for this project)
- MSH landlord code of standards that include several guidelines around waste and recycling
- induction and ‘outduction’ programmes for university students living in and leaving Halls of Residence (called ‘Halls to Homes’)
- The ‘Give it Don’t Bin it’ campaign that collects unwanted items for the British Heart Foundation
- additional Biffa collections during peak times (esp. move out period at the end of June)
- door-knocking to tell students how to recycle (this is apparently done by MCC, MSH and the universities)

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• volunteering schemes: students volunteering as a way to improve through education and awareness raising

• student codes of conduct (i.e., students cannot bring the university into disrepute)

Even though there is a significant amount being done, and even with reduced local authority budgets and within the existing limits of central government legislation, all interviews acknowledge that there is evidence of a street environment problem in so-called ‘student areas’ (even though most didn’t feel Moss Side was particularly bad). Several thought (the Biffa and MCC officers in particular) that universities could be doing more to get the right messages across to students so they are more inclined to establish and maintain correct waste and recycling habits.

_It’s about the universities sending strong messages to their students at the beginning of the year about what is and isn’t acceptable – changing the perceptions of the students. The more messages the better, throughout their degrees. They need to know what it means to live in a residential neighbourhood. And we need to know whether those messages are getting through. (MCC officer)_

There were three common themes raised by the key informants in response to questions about causes of and explanations for the problem.

Transience

There was a common theme in the interviews with officers working on the front lines in local neighbourhoods that a main cause of the rubbish problem is the fact that the community has a high level of transience. Whether or not this perception has an evidential base, or whether or not this area of Manchester is more transient than other areas, it was given by many participants in the study as an explanation for both the problem and for the barriers to solving it. A transient population needs a higher level of information provision than a more established one, short-term renters have less time to establish waste and recycling routines, and these temporary residents tend to lack a sense of belonging or pride in the area that would prompt them to take care of their waste.

• _The challenge for waste management is that people in the area keep coming in and out, very high turnover – means that you have to constantly be giving out information._(Biffa officer)

• _The main problem is the transience. How you avoid that I couldn’t begin to say because that is the very nature of student accommodation. It is what it is._(MCC officer)

• _I’d say a lot is down to transience – if they arrive to an area that is already a mess, then they think it’s normal. They don’t stay long enough to gain a sense of belonging, to be integrated into the community and wanting to take care of the area._(MMU officer)

• _Moss Side and Rusholme have a transient population anyway, regardless of presence of students. Transience could play into the problem; people not having a sense of ownership of the area and/or not knowing the waste system or schedule._(MSH officer)

It was surmised that people will tend to treat an area in a manner consistent with their expectations and assumptions, so if they arrive to a messy area then they might be less inclined to take care of their waste than if they arrive to a very clean and well-kept area. The problem in Moss Side is that it is very difficult to keep it clean for a long enough period of time to break the cycle.

These comments, viewed against existing academic research that identities transience as a key cause of low environmental quality in residential areas,19 raise the serious question for the universities and Manchester City Council about why it has been viewed as acceptable for this huge transient student population, and the buy-to-let industry boosted by it, to be imposed on the communities who are least able to absorb it (due to relative deprivation and lack of social capital).

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19 See footnote 16 and 17
Student responsibility for waste/recycling

Discussions of student behaviour in off-campus accommodation yielded some common themes among the key informants. Most accepted that students do play a large part in causing the rubbish problem in areas where they live, but were also very quick to point out that it would be unfair and inaccurate to put the full blame on students. Students, many argue, are often the keenest recyclers and feel upset by the messy street environments too. These claims were also made by members of Upping It and in interviews/focus groups with local residents.

Those working directly with students in their professional roles (i.e., as environmental manager, engagement and volunteering manager, and off-campus affairs manager) had the most first-hand experience on which to base some explanations of student behaviour. There is a shared sense that:

- **students tend to get confused by the Manchester recycling system.** They may move here from another area with different coloured bins and different rules about what can/can’t be recycled, so they may do things that are incorrect out of habit, thereby inadvertently contributing to the rubbish problem on their street.

  - We’re asking students to change behaviour that has been engrained in them since year dot. Contamination is understandable in some ways. And Manchester keeps changing the recycling system. So I think some of it is genuinely down to confusion. (UoM officer)

- **most students are not very interested in recycling.** They are at university to study and have a good time. They may simply not be engaged with it or have not adopted values that would lead to ‘good and responsible’ waste and recycling behaviour. This is not dissimilar to other segments of the general population.

  - Students need to play their part like everyone else, but for them recycling is not a priority. We can give them lots of information and encouragement but it’s like doing the dishes, no one really enjoys doing it... the big question is how we get anyone to want to do their bit (MMU officer)

  - The biggest issue is that students living in private halls are simply not interested in recycling...this is potentially 18,000 people in the city, so it’s an awful lot of non-recycling going on across Manchester by a bunch of people who have apparently no interest in recycling whatsoever (MSH officer)

- **students tend to lack independent living skills.** They are young and probably living away from home for the first time in their lives.

  - Having to manage your own waste and recycling is part of being an adult, like managing your budget. We want to skill up our students so they go into independent living with knowledge behind them about how to manage a property, how to behave in a community what standard of behaviour is expected and so on. (MSH officer)

- **there is a perception that ‘anything goes’ in the student village.** Students have preconceived ideas about what is acceptable behaviour that is not counteracted or corrected in everyday life - in fact it may even be confirmed in local media and popular discourse.

  - It may be partly a lack of respect... This is really key to the rubbish issue. A lot of them don’t make the link that they are moving into a residential neighbourhood that’s mixed; they think they are moving into a student area and have been led to believe that... we’ve all been guilty of referring to it as the student village, the Manchester Evening News and even the Council calls it that; so students move into the area and it takes them a long time to realise it’s not. (UoM officer)

Landlord responsibility for waste and student behaviour

Finally, as found in the data collected from local residents, there is a shared perception on the part of stakeholder professionals that private landlords do not shoulder enough responsibility for the rubbish problem in Moss Side and that – ideally - more ought to be done to control their impacts.

There is general agreement that the landlord accreditation scheme delivered by Manchester Student Homes works well. It is of mutual benefit to student tenants and to the landlords whose properties they
rent. According to the MSH officers interviewed, the Code of Standards already contains clear guidelines on waste and recycling and is in the process of being revised to contain even more ‘green’ content.

A common concern for the interviewees is that the landlords who choose not to participate in the MSH scheme are difficult to reach and tend not to engage voluntarily in measures aimed to deliver a decent standard of housing or to mitigate effects of their businesses on local amenity.

*MSH are pretty key to our work and the scheme works really well ...but you’ve got a lot of rogue landlords who are not affiliated with MSH.* (MCC officer)

*MSH is a voluntary and self-selecting accreditation scheme, so generally only the good landlords come forward to work with us and the rogue landlords stay away because they don’t want to do what we ask of them in the code of standards; and the fact that we have recourse if they don’t follow it. We have no control over the rest of them who can do whatever they want; so landlords are definitely part of the problem and part of the solution.* (MSH officer)

...*more work needs to be done with landlords. If indit particularly difficult to connect with them. We have tried in the past to engage with them, to have meetings where all interested parties are invited to talk about the problem, but the landlords never show up. It’s difficult to get landlords to do anything.* (Biffa of fær)

The key informants who work with students feel that students should not be blamed when many problems with waste and recycling are caused by the practices of landlords.

*Based on a survey from few years ago, we think that very often students move into houses where the bins are in a terrible state, contaminated by the last group of tenants and not cleared up by the landlord, so they are screwed from the start.* (UoM officer)

Then again, it was also suggested by both University of Manchester officers that landlords should be made more responsible for the behaviour of their students that way they might be more pro-active in preventing problems:

*Landlords need to do more to put pressure on students because after all, that’s who is making money out of the students and they have the power to do something - they own the house. There is a lack of accountability on the part of landlords... but why not make it part of the tenancy agreement that tenants need to keep the house neat and tidy?* (UoM officer)

While most key informants feel that landlords should be doing more to manage the impacts of students and the high turnover of tenants, they also acknowledge that there is very little that can be done without a change in legislation. According to MCC officers, landlords are currently not legally responsible for waste issues in their properties. In addition, they wanted to stress that enforcement procedures are very costly and the Council budget has been ‘cut to the bone’ in recent years.

Given that the Local Authority is picking up the cost of clearing up rubble that is illegally dumped by landlords’ contractors and the unwanted items of former tenants after they move out (this point was made emphatically and repeatedly by the two Biffa bin-men interviewed), it seems rational to impose financial carrots or sticks on landlords to reduce this burden. Many suggested that more should be done to control and discipline landlords who deliberately pollute and/or use the Council as a ‘delux clean up service’ funded by council tax payers. It must be remembered that student tenants are exempted from paying council tax and so do not contribute to the cost of managing their waste.

It should also be noted that the 2009 Ross report that contributed to the Manchester Student Strategy contains recommendations for imposing greater controls on HMOs through licensing. It presents as best practice the use by Nottingham City Council of ‘HMO Action Zones’ which enable the local authority to work more proactively to tackle poor housing standards and environmental issues in areas with a large student population.
Education is evidently not always a route to better recycling or waste management. Students who live in terraced houses have usually lived in halls of residence first, so if ‘information’ and ‘education’ are the route to ‘behaviour change’, as UK and Greater Manchester policy documents claim, then students should be model recyclers. The observations and interviews indicated that at present, many are not.

The revenue from letting a living room as a 4th bedroom has made it profitable to change 3-bed family homes into houses of multiple occupancy (HMOs): in this case for 7 people even without conversion. With each room partly independent, this multiplies the consumer goods and the rubbish in a street.
5. Discussion

From the full set of data collected, a number of observations stand out as interesting in themselves and would be potential topics of additional collective discussion (within the community and between community members and other stakeholders) and further research. Recommendations for continued attention and action are set out in Section 6.

There is a common perception that transience is a major cause of the problem

The overwhelming majority of participants in the study explained the rubbish problem as being in large part a result of the transient nature of the population in Moss Side. Transience means information about waste and recycling routines has to be delivered constantly to new tenants by MCC, Biffa, MSH, the universities, landlords and community members. Tenants may not stay long enough in the area to learn the correct practices or to develop a sense that it is important to manage waste responsibly. The high rate of turnover in rental accommodation also contributes to volumes of waste, with regular refurbishment of properties and replacement of furniture by landlords and the steady stream of personal belongings by students (who have few storage options) being bought, discarded and replaced each year. As several participants remarked, the problem is cyclical, seasonal and unrelenting.

Transience also contributes to a loss of community and erosion of the social capital needed to respond effectively to local problems such as fly-tipping and litter. While Upping It has been making a difference for almost five years, their members are over-extended and express concern that so much needs to be done by ‘a tiny minority of committed activists’. This finding resonates with the 2009 Ross report, which states that, ‘The transient nature of students can engender a lack of community integration and cohesion and less commitment to maintain the quality of the local environment. The subsequent transient nature of the overall area can develop a gradually self-reinforcing unpopularity of the area for families.’

There is general agreement that greater landlord responsibility is needed

Almost all research participants believe that ‘rouge landlords’ play a significant role in causing social and environmental problems in Moss Side. While those that are signed up to the voluntary scheme delivered by Manchester Student Homes are regarded positively, for the most part, it is acknowledged that many others who do not participate are to blame for either direct dumping or indirectly influencing tenant behaviour around waste and recycling. There is general agreement that more should be done to ensure responsible landlord behaviour. Local residents want the Council to do more around enforcement and licensing, whereas MCC officers and other key informant professionals are quick to point out that not much can be done, either due to legal constraints or lack of local authority resources.

There is a difference in perception/awareness of the severity of the problem

It is perhaps understandable that residents are more acutely aware of the problem than professionals whose job it is to manage and mitigate but at the same time may not live in the area. It is also understandable that when asked as part of a research project, residents may feel strongly about getting their views heard while professionals are keen to defend their corners, protect their brands, and promote an official line.

It seems important not to overplay nor underplay the severity of the problem. For this reason, the need for evidence of a problem is clear, and this is what the research has attempted to do through triangulating the data and including direct observation.

People working for the universities and MCC are clear that the problems are largely seasonal (beginning and end of term) and a great deal of effort and expense is being devoted to mitigation. While residents concur that the rubbish problem is worst at these times, they also make it abundantly clear that the problem exists on a daily basis. From the perspective of people living next to student houses, the poor quality of the street environment in Moss Side is unbearable. Words like ‘squalor’ and ‘Dickensian’ and comparisons with ‘third world countries’ were used repeatedly in interviews and focus groups.

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20 Patrick Ross, Manchester Student Strategy: Final Report 2009. Tribal Consultants for Manchester City Council; p.48
Several key informants admitted to not knowing much about the situation in Moss Side, suggesting that it was slightly ‘off the radar’ because there are worse areas of Manchester, Fallowfield for example, that attract the bulk of attention.

It seems important to note that just because there are worse areas should not mean that the problems being experienced by residents of Moss Side are less significant. Instead, it should intensify interest in looking across Manchester and trying to understand the specificity of the problem and responses to the problem in each type of neighbourhood. The Universities may be in a good position to learn more about the communities in which their students live.

It may be worth doing comparative research between Manchester’s studenttivities and those in similar university-cities in the UK and perhaps other countries. Is there a culture of messiness or perhaps of working class scepticism of environmentalism) leading to non-participation in recycling and other ‘green’ practices in Manchester? How can the apparent tolerance for mess and ‘squalor’ be explained?

There is difference in perceptions and expectations of student behaviour
It is understandable that University officers and community residents should have different perceptions and expectations of student behaviour. The former tend to see them as young and in need of support to develop adult skills of independent living, and therefore see the delivery of a range of programmes and messages around environmental sustainability and good citizenship as key responses to the rubbish problem. Non-student resident who live among students in the terraced streets of Moss Side - almost to a person - express bafflement about why such privileged and highly educated people are unable to read a Council waste collection calendar, figure out what waste goes in which bin, and remember when to do it.

It is difficult to accept the ‘information deficit’ line as a reasonable explanation for the lack of responsible waste management among many – not all – students. Considering other reasons, including students’ assumptions or prejudices about the area, could enable the universities to develop other kinds of messages to encourage students to adopt more respectful attitudes to their neighbours.

The Upping It team were highly critical of the relevance of volunteering as a way to help students engage with local communities. They suggested that when student volunteers are sent into an area they do not know to work with residents they don’t know, their actions can easily do harm as well as good. They rarely have time to get to know the residents and may only be there for a one-off visit. Residents see them for a short time and see very little lasting benefit from the work. Apart from being ineffective in generating long term change, this approach misses the real priority that students need to learn to be good citizens where they live – socially and environmentally. Otherwise their sheer number, and their transiency, makes it an overwhelming task for longer term residents to engage a neighbourhood sufficiently to improve or sustain environmental quality. It is interesting to note that the officer interviewed from MMU shared this critical perspective on student volunteering, while the officers from UoM did not.

It is evident that better communication and collaboration are needed
The fact that the local residents we spoke with do not feel listened to, and are generally unaware of the efforts being made by the universities and MSH, is an important finding of this research. The interventions being delivered by the HEP under the Student Strategy, and that were recommended by the 2009 Ross report, are primarily geared to improving relations between student residents and local residents, through volunteering and other means of engagement. From data collected in this research, there does not appear to be much being done to facilitate communication between the Universities and residents’ groups in Moss Side. Members of Upping It had never heard of the Housing and Environment Partnership.

Communication between residents and MCC around waste and recycling issues appears far from dialogical – it consists of the Council ‘informing’ residents (via leaflets) or residents making complaints (via phone calls and an online reporting site). There is a lack of evidence to suggest that constructive two-way communication and listening occurs. Residents claim to want more dialogue but report receiving only unhelpful responses, responses that take a very long time to come, or silence on the part of the Council.

Perhaps better representation of local residents in addressing town-gown relations in general, and street-level environmental issues in particular, would be a positive first step towards improved communication.
There is a lack of critical focus on the need for waste reduction.

A final observation from the researchers is that there was an almost unanimous failure on the part of the participants to reflect, unprompted, on the sheer volume of waste that must be managed in a dense urban community. It is telling that the focus of the research - the problem of rubbish on the streets - seemed to lead people to think about the (bad) behaviour of individuals and the need for more Council resources to clean up after them. Criticism of the wider economic system that produces the waste to be removed or recycled did not form even a small part of the discussions. This finding can be explained by looking at the dominant discourse of behaviour change and environmentalism that permeates many policy areas in this country. It is largely cast as the responsibility of individuals to do their bit and change their ways. But this finding does not mean that, when prompted, the participants in this study did not agree that more should be done to tackle waste at its source: the unnecessary packaging, cheap goods, and in-built obsolescence, that central government neglects to control though regulation. In discussions Upping It members agreed that these were important issues to confront, but as founder Anne Tucker says ‘we’re nowhere near there…, meaning the priority is addressing the mess under their feet in the immediate term.

Perhaps what is needed is greater attention to the politics of waste and opportunities for citizens to question and debate the role of voluntary measures for managing its effects – whether they are awareness campaigns for students, codes of standard for landlords, or local communities mobilizing to clean and green their alleyways. The new Litter Strategy for England, published in April 2017, includes nothing of the sort: there is no mention of the need to question and challenge the status quo. It is hoped that insights from this project will provide arguments and inspiration for politicizing the root causes of the rubbish problem that is severely reducing the quality of life for residents of Moss Side and many other communities in this country.

Even old recycling bins can be reused.
Recommendations for further discussion, research and action

1. Most participants agreed that an underlying cause of the rubbish problem is a generalised lack of pride in the area due to transience and the stigma attached to a student ‘ghetto’. In response, we recommend that the universities and Manchester Student Homes (MSH) should support local communities by actively countering the representation of the residential areas close to the university (such as Moss Side) as ‘student areas’ by landlords, agents and students. This could be done via university messaging to students, community exchange events, and by supporting a crackdown on the student let signs that breach planning law. This recommendation was suggested by participants from the local area as well as from the university.

2. Universities should explain to students living off-campus the impacts of non-participation in correct waste practices on local people, and in doing so frame the issue as one of good local citizenship and neighbourliness, not just generic ‘pro-environmental behaviour’ (recycling). Citizenship and independent living skills could be integrated into the university curriculum to enable and equip students (and therefore the universities) to be good neighbours. This recommendation was suggested by participants from MSH, the universities, and local residents.

3. The universities, in cooperation with Manchester City Council (MCC), should explore the use of a text reminder service for students, which prompts them to put their bins out on the correct days and away as soon as possible after collection. These could include reminders of the penalties that can be incurred for lack of participation. This recommendation has been strongly made by members of Upping It and has been viewed as interesting, or at least something to try, by participants from MCC and the universities.

4. The universities, MSH and MCC should work together to promote and enable the reduction of waste at source. Although the ‘give it don’t bin it’ (British Heart Foundation) campaign is lauded by all concerned, it does very little to address the sheer volume of ‘stuff’ being disposed of by students each year. Other options might be: offer over-summer storage space for returning students; give financial incentives for landlords to provide a greater inventory of durable items in rental housing; penalise landlords for treating furniture and other household items as disposable; promote sharing and repairing by encouraging students to give away or sell their items to other students rather than give to charity; actively promote repair shops as social enterprises. This recommendation was suggested by the report authors and is supported by members of Upping It as well as a participant from MCC.

5. Nearly all participants in this research agreed that private landlords who are not signed up to the MSH scheme are a cause of and therefore a potential solution to the problem of rubbish in Moss Side. However, the limited scope for action due to existing legislation (and lack thereof) was also noted by most. A key question for further research and discussion, therefore, is how to create a means of influencing landlords that are not signed up to the MSH scheme (or that only sign up a few of their properties) to make them more responsible and accountable for their actions and those of their tenants. To what extent is it possible to use the selective licensing system or to impose levies to change landlord behaviour? For example, could MCC create HMO Action Zones to enable greater controls (as mentioned in the Ross/Tribal report that initiated the Manchester Student Strategy in 2010)? Clearly there are wider (local and national) political dimensions to these questions, but this report recommends that the existence of obstacles should be the start rather than the end of the discussion. This recommendation comes from the report authors.

6. While there are fora and channels in place to enable communication between residents, the university and service providers, it would be useful to review the efficacy and the degree to which information is being circulated in areas such as Moss Side. The apparent lack of awareness of university initiatives on the part of participants in this research suggest that more could be done to promote meaningful engagement. Residents have expressed frustration with the universities’ approach to community engagement. Perhaps a collective discussion about how to improve communication and collaboration on problems of common concern could be fostered by this report. This recommendation comes from the report authors.
Residents reported landlord/tenant mattresses regularly being dumped with a new tenancy.

House renovations are a major source of fly tipping. Residents reported that even when it is clear where the waste came from, the Council is unable or unwilling to take action. It raises the question of whether responsibility lies with the evident owner of waste, or solely with the contractor who fly tipped it.
Talking Rubbish in Moss Side:
Exploring the problem of litter in the streets and alleys of a deprived neighbourhood with a large student population

Sherilyn MacGregor, Simon Pardoe and the Upping It team. April 2018
Talking Rubbish in Moss Side:
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