



THIS WAS TOMORROW

*IS THIS THE
FUTURE WE WERE
DREAMING OF?*

A PROJECT BY
ENRICO POLICARDO



Supported using public funding by
**ARTS COUNCIL
ENGLAND**

THIS WAS TOMORROW

ABOUT THE PROJECT

This Was Tomorrow: Is This the Future We Were Dreaming Of? is a long-term audio-visual investigation by artist and photographer Enrico Policardo into community-led housing across the UK - cohousing, Community Land Trusts, cooperative living, retrofit and repair.

It looks at places that are functioning in the present, without framing them as models or solutions. The question throughout is not "does this work?" but something closer to: what futures are still imaginable from where we are now?

The work began in 2022, with the fundamental input of Judith Martin, architectural historian and conservationist, documenting endangered council estates in London and the utopian ideals embedded in their material form. A residency at ESAD IDEA in Porto, made possible by the work of David Marques (Devity Studio), shifted the focus - from documenting the past to watching the present, and to how places actually function across different models of collective ownership, adaptation, repair, resilience and grassroots ingenuity.

The phase you are experiencing today reaches across England - from London and the south coast to Cornwall, and up into the North and West - with visits made during 2026, from March to July.

This work has been made possible by Arts Council England through the Developing Your Creative Practice (DYCP) scheme, and supported by Simon Vickery (Open House Festival Programme Manager), writer and photographer Thaddeus Zupancic (London Estates: Modernist Council Housing 1946-1981), and architectural historian Judith Martin, co-author of the original This Was Tomorrow publication.

IS THIS THE FUTURE WE WERE DREAMING OF ?

Home-making

Home isn't only the physical roof and dwelling - it includes community, living well, and a vision of the future that isn't what I've come to define as the marry-mortgage-die structure. That isn't a criticism but an acknowledgement of what capitalism has done in nuclearising the family, creating false myths of independence, whether financial or of resources, all in favour of a system that is not built around the real needs, the needs of human beings, but around the needs of capital: the dehumanising idea of wealth that has been brought onto the main stage by centuries of elites pushing their own idea of what constitutes a good life. A life of belonging, and of having to defend it from hypothetical enemies.

The history of humanity - not the one written down in books, that one is the history of power, not the history of The People - says the opposite. People have always come together when facing practical challenges, hardships and obstacles, but also to celebrate, to procreate, and to feel a sense of belonging. That's what people have always done - not those surrounded by moats and crocodiles and the suffocating fear of losing their possessions.

It's just a field

Someone who put me in touch with one of the communities I visited told me "It's just a field, there's nothing to see". There was everything to see: an open ground where people could still decide what happens next. What a privilege to witness that. How many of you have been able to do so? To be somewhere where the soil is so rich that just by walking on it you feel nourished, enriched, more resilient than when you first arrived?

Care

Care and intelligence, choices made for the common good - not because I hold some high morality, but because the common good is the only thing that gives back without your having to ask whether it does. Made with the future in mind. Not for the now, but to keep future freedoms open rather than extracted.

This project, above all, is a reminder, mostly to myself. That we can. We're echo-systems: we rely and thrive on each other, on the reverberations we all generate, and we suffer from it too. Dreaming better futures isn't an idle process, an elitist indulgence in speculative horizons. Dreaming is the action that makes futures happen - or rather, that unlocks them.

The work goes outside, where everyone already is, and it's allowed to fade, wear

out, decompose, be forgotten. A vibrant orange turning into a pale yellow. Watching something fade is in itself an act of care, an acceptance of passing time. Things perish, and it's fine. We celebrate and embalm youth and feel bad when anything ages, dents or dims. In this fear there's the quintessence of the era we are living: the fear of losing, of missing out, of being replaced by someone or something faster, more efficient, more attractive, more hungry, more desperate.

Subtraction

I take the faces out of the recordings. I take the frame, the glass, the mount off the print and glue it to the wall.

Subtraction from the false perfection of a file - clean, inhuman, frictionless - and back toward the imperfection of the real world, which might be the only perfection there is. Bitmapping does this by misbehaving: the computer introduces its own noise and error, and never the same way twice, or so I like to believe.

I don't save the result. Every time I need a print I run the reduction again, and every run comes out differently, so no two prints have ever been the same and none can be repeated. It's the opposite of an edition: not one image copied many times, but one source that reinvents itself on every pass.

I like what the error finds: the grain, the wear, the things that don't resolve cleanly. When the result is partly out of my hands, it

takes away the burden of deciding everything. I don't much trust the idea that we author our own outcomes anyway.

People are not absent from this work - they're everywhere in it, digging the soil, foraging, planning, going to protests, dreaming.

They're just not inside the frame: they are around it.

This project is about imagination - about fuelling it - and imagination needs a gap to work in. Like reading: the words on the page are only a tool, and you supply the colours, the faces, the smells.

Enrico Policardo
Winchester, August 2026

IMAGES



ROPERS WALK



SBY WALK

EDWARD HILLAMBY
1867-1976
Landscape Architect
Architect, Designer
Crestedhill, Cheshire
England





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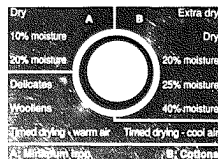
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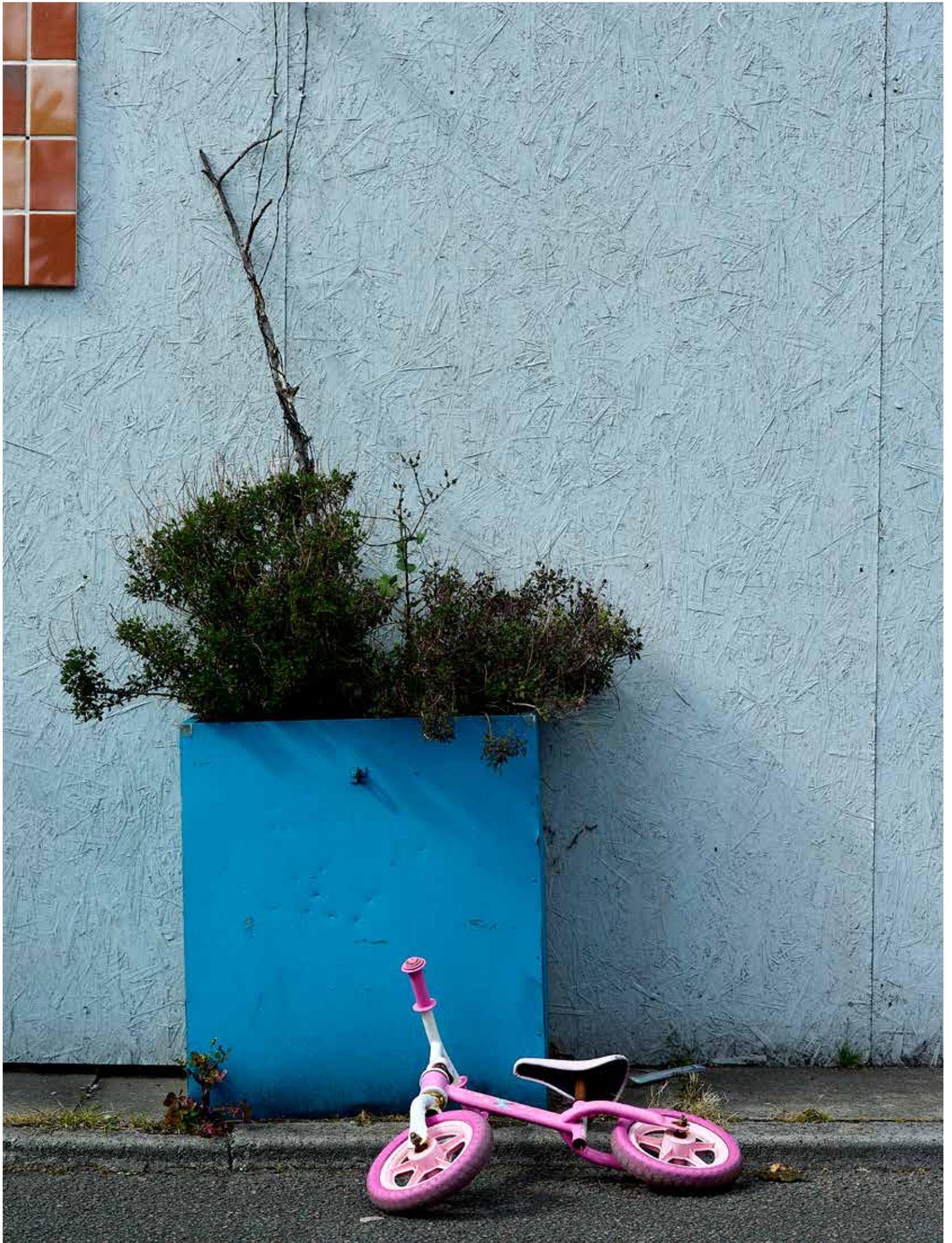


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PAGE 1

CRESSINGHAM GARDENS, LAMBETH // MARCH 2026

Part of the estate already sold off to private developers.

PAGE 2

CRESSINGHAM GARDENS, LAMBETH // MARCH 2026

The irony of the Hollamby plaque beside boarded-up houses. After a decade's campaigning, Lambeth's plan to take Cressingham off the demolition list goes to Council Cabinet on 21 October 2026.

PAGE 3

OWCH / NEW GROUND, HIGH BARNET // APRIL 2026

Photographing buildings, I've realised birds are almost always the secret Where's Wally of the situation - quiet guardians of our cities, getting on with it rent-free. It often makes me think it's how we should live. Learn from the birds; the flying is incidental, I'm happy to walk.

PAGE 4

HASTINGS COMMONS // APRIL 2026

The Observer Building, and the gull that flew into the frame by accident.

PAGE 5

TINKER'S BUBBLE, SOMERSET // APRIL 2026

The water system, and the name of the place - 'bubble' is the travellers' word for a spring. The whole idea of Tinker's is here: low-tech, functioning, functional ingenuity in total harmony with what surrounds it. I never wanted to idealise it. The residents are the first to say it is hard to live there, but hard in ways they can cope with and respect. Life is only the version of pain we can withstand, no more, no less. Tinker's is not a model everyone should follow; it is a beacon for those who put

the planet first and treat humans as just another of its critters. I can't fault that view. My words, not theirs.

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TINKER'S BUBBLE, SOMERSET // APRIL 2026

The kitchen, which I stripped of every possible colour to get to its basic function - the hub of the community and the motor of everyone in it. Almost all the food is grown on site. I had the pleasure of making handmade pasta for everyone: cavatelli, the lazy pasta.

PAGE 8-9

LILAC, LEEDS // MAY 2026

The Utopia sign that presides over the garden at the centre of the community. With Paul Chatterton I had the pleasure of talking about utopia itself - not a far-off place to reach for, but a driving principle in the present. LILAC is doing exactly that, efficiently and intelligently: another reading of what bottom-up sovereignty can look like.

PAGE 10-11

CALDER VALLEY CLT, HEBDEN BRIDGE & TODMORDEN // MAY 2026

Just outside one of the flats we visited - about to be refurbished and retrofitted by Calder Valley CLT - the word COOP is still painted on the wall, a trace of the valley's heritage. Calder carries that principle on: quietly, diligently providing for the community, retrofitting, and now building passive houses from scratch in Todmorden. It is no coincidence the first place we visited bore that writing - it is the very energy the place runs on. Thanks Paul Brannigan. Hebden is a special place.

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TWO UP TWO DOWN, ANFIELD // MAY 2026

I visited during an important transition for this CLT: after my visit they changed their name and widened their

scope. The energy in Anfield is strange and rather unique - the stadium dominates everything, in a tense rhythm of before and after the 60,000-person football tsunami that arrives at regular intervals. The place reflects that tide: the shops, the houses, the services. Two Up Two Down is a safe anchor the community can rely on before and after each wave.

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TWO UP TWO DOWN, ANFIELD // MAY 2026

A detail of the sold-off property next to the bakery - the houses the council handed to a private developer.

PAGE 14-15

KITTY'S LAUNDERETTE, LIVERPOOL // MAY 2026

The immediate neighbourhood, also in Anfield, revolving proudly around the launderette - a reclaiming of what a launderette meant back in the day. I didn't know the story of Kitty Wilkinson, the Liverpool woman who opened her kitchen and yard as a public washhouse during the 1830s cholera years - and once you do, the whole thing makes sense. Free laundry gives back dignity, a degree of humanity to people living rough. They run activities, intentional and not, and the vibe is one I could easily become dependent on. People in Liverpool do chat you up, but in here you feel welcome, not judged - and I like the smell of the place. That is what a third place should look like.

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KITTY'S LAUNDERETTE, LIVERPOOL // MAY 2026

A close-up of the washing machine - the pulsating, or rather spinning, heart of the launderette. One carries a small plaque: 'In memory of June Birch.'

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GRANBY FOUR STREETS, LIVERPOOL // MAY 2026

A child's bike left against the wall - small proof of life returning to streets that were once marked for demolition.

PAGE 18-19

GRANBY FOUR STREETS, LIVERPOOL // MAY 2026

Granby is one of those places that, once visited, stays with you forever. I've overused the word, but beacon is the only one that fits what their actions have meant for communities around the country. In Jess Steele's words, they made the shift from always being on the defensive to being propositional - virtually untouchable by the council and its disjointed plans over the years. Assemble winning the 2015 Turner Prize for the work here was the definitive seal: proof that communities can organise over years, hold an idea, and carry it from imagination into reality. Plenty of buildings still came down, and people are clear-eyed about it - this was never about preserving the walls, but the memory of the place and the community around them. Home is not only the physical place; it is the sum of many things that, left unprotected, produce detached, incomplete people.

PAGE 20-21

TREVONE QUARRY, PENRYN // JUNE 2026

Trevone is another place few know about - a former granite quarry, now home to a fluid community of artists, students and activists who want to be on the land. Listen to the interviews on the site for the background; it is one of those places words can't really hold, it needs visiting. This picture is deliberately cryptic: I couldn't isolate a single image to convey the place, so I worked by subtraction and layering, like the photo itself. A sum of materials and ages - Roman, Norman, Saxon, or the other way round - a post-modern take on what happens to human settlements, a visible process of living happening in real time, declared and announced. Lisa and Dave made soil for their organic vegetable garden where before there was bare granite. Life can happen anywhere if we let it. Trevone is about witnessing what time can do to a place, and to humans, if we let it - with, of course, a lot of work.

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TRENEERE ESTATE, PENZANCE // JUNE 2026

Home-made St George's crosses, cut from sheets and hung across a Treneere terrace. On an estate the outside tends

to write off, these are the markers of belonging a place makes for itself. Estates are complex systems, and I treat them with a mix of respect and some fear. Before starting this project I was in Margate, visiting a friend and, of course, taking pictures of the local attraction - which in my case is not Dreamland but the block next door, Arlington House. I was taking this picture exactly as a mother with a child approached, angrily shouting "What are you doing? That's someone's house."

I am still not sure what she was referring to - the



Arlington House - Margate, 2024

caravan, the flats? It doesn't matter. It stayed with me: someone lives there, what am I doing?

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TRENEERE ESTATE, PENZANCE // JUNE 2026

A van on the estate offering "tarot with a touch of the paranormal." The kind of small, surreal, self-made

enterprise no regeneration plan could ever invent.

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KESOBERI COMMUNITY FARM, NEWLYN // JUNE 2026

When I was initially reaching out to people and communities and making my way through the list of place I was going to visit, Kesoeri came out of nowhere a bit like a meteor. The person who I reached out to first asked me how I managed to find them on the internet as they basically didn't formally exist. I said, I suppose I am good at the internet. And I am good at gut feelings. "I'm not travelling half the country to Cornwall to look at a field - there's nothing to see." - this person said. Obviously that became instantly the number 1 on my visit list. In fact I'd say I have built the whole project hinging around Kesoero. The place that is NOT YET. That was exactly why I went, and there was everything to see.

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KESOBERI COMMUNITY FARM, NEWLYN // JUNE 2026

A wood going in, staked row by row. The future here is literal - planted and left to grow - the truest thing I could photograph at Kesoeri.

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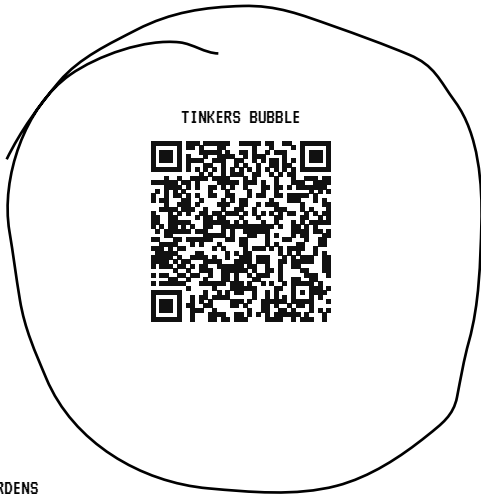
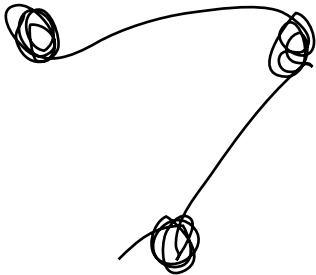
GWAVAS ESTATE, NEWLYN // JUNE 2026

Gwavas, above Newlyn harbour - plain council cottages, a Cornish palm, a bird on the chimney pot. I came only for context, no interview, just to look: ordinary housing doing its quiet work by the sea.

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GWAVAS ESTATE, NEWLYN // JUNE 2026

The Cornish flag flying over a "For Sale" sign. In Cornwall the question of who gets to stay is never far from the surface - local identity and the market pulling against each other.



LND



A note

Making a project about future-thinking and housing while living, myself, inside that same question, is the demonstration that this is not speculatively, but concretely urgent not only for myself and my family but for many people out there.

My hope is that you walk away from here not with faith, and not with some Pandorian hope, but with the awareness that a different future is not only possible but it has already been made.

My deepest thanks go to all those who have supported me throughout these years and beyond, and who have made possible not only this work but my entire roaming existence. Above all, to my partner Rosamond, for the unceasing support she gives me on a daily basis.

Enrico Policardo, August 2026

