THIS WAS
TOMORROW

ANNE

Resident at New Ground

In conversation with Enrico Policardo
OWCH New Ground, High Barnet, London
24/04/2026

Edited from the recorded conversation.

01 You're a resident here. How would you describe this place?

ANNE: New Ground is a vibrant community, especially on a sunny day.

VIVIAN: My name is Vivian, I live at New Ground on the ground floor. It's a community, as you know, of older women, and it's been built so we can have our own spaces but also community spaces, so we can be with other people and have our own space when we want it. It's all built around the garden, so you can talk to people if you're doing some gardening. Sorry, I'm rambling.

02 How did you end up here? Where were you before?

ANNE: I was one of the last people to arrive at New Ground. I'd been living abroad, and couch surfing. And my daughter said to me, you can't be a hobo forever, Mum - better start thinking about the future. So I looked online and up it popped, and I went along to a meeting. I wasn't certain whether it was for me. I met people, I had a buddy - two different buddies, actually, one really encouraging and the other not so. That's okay. So I had mixed feelings. Then I was interviewed, went to several meetings, and one morning I got a call offering me a place. It wasn't part of my long-term planning, but I'm glad it happened. That was ten years ago.

VIVIAN: I used to live in a three-bedroom terrace house, and when all my sons moved out I was rattling around a bit. When I became ill I thought it was about time to move to a community. I looked at various options and came across this one. I went along to a meeting, found the women really supportive and encouraging, and thought: yes, I'll join them.

03 How would you describe it to someone who has no idea what we're talking about?

ANNE: It's difficult, isn't it? I always think we're an intentional community.

04 What is an intentional community?

JUDE: It's a community where a group of people got together and decided how they wanted to live, and they created a social community before they created a building. When we started, co-housing wasn't known in this country - it was known in Scandinavia and the States, but not here. So we were pioneers. We created our own intentional community through social interaction, and then we came here. For me, it's a place where I belong, and a place I've chosen to have ownership of.

05 And your own description, Anne?

ANNE: I'd say it's a great place to live. You feel safe. You're in charge of your life. And you get to choose who you share your space with - I think that's really important. It's got a beautiful garden. There's a social life if you want it, and if you don't, you're not judged. I've made some really good friends here. I've got a lovely neighbour who looks out for me, and I look out for her.

The good thing about living here is I've learned a lot about other people, and about myself as a human. I thought I was very sociable - actually, I'm not so. And you learn tolerance. You have to be tolerant with people. Some people say it's like being married to 25 other women, so you can imagine it's not always easy. But I think we really do work together.

06 What's a normal day like for you?

ANNE: There is no normal day. I manage a charity and I travel quite a lot - sometimes I'm not here for weeks. But a normal day: I get up, do some yoga, meditate, remember to look at my diary and see what I'm meant to be doing. I'm not one of those people who plans the night before and gets their clothes out. Then I work, usually from home. If I go out into the garden on a sunny day and chat to people, that's a rarity. People do come and wave through the window - would you like a coffee? - maybe a couple of times a month. I do a lot of work on Zoom. I used to have to put a sticker on the door saying I'm on Zoom.

07 Do you have a daily routine with people here - checking in on someone?

ANNE: I'm close friends with Jude - we check in pretty much every day or every other day. […] We wave at each other. I'm on the management committee, and on Wednesday we all went for a meal because it was our last meeting of the term, which was nice. Sometimes people invite me for dinner and I invite them, but it's not a regular thing in my week. I have a life outside here as well - my family live quite close. When I first moved in, friends complained: you've given us up for these women.

When we first moved in there was a real pressure to invite people for dinner and everything, and I didn't fit with that. I tried it for a while, but I don't enjoy cooking for lots of people. I'm much more one-on-one, or four maximum. So the communal meals aren't really for me. I feel like I'm at confession! Anyway, it's a really positive place to live, and I do love it. But I'm not friends with everyone. I don't think you can be. In any community there's this expectation that you'll all love each other, and you just can't.

08 Who set that expectation?

ANNE: In the beginning we all used to hug each other whenever we met. Then Covid came and you looked back and thought, that was mad, really. It was about learning what was right for each of us. It took a while, but it works. You have to manage it - that balance between communal and private that Vivian was talking about.

09 Is there anything that's hard about living here?

ANNE: It has added to my life. But I'm quite private, and when visitors come, people want to know who's in your flat with you. Everybody needs to know. That's one of the things I find a bit tricky. […]

10 Do you think there's a social expectation that the standard is to live alone, and if you don't, something's off with you?

ANNE: I do know what you mean. If you look back through our ten years, people have tried very hard to put us in a box - that we're living in a care home, or we're a witches' coven, or we're anti-men. But I think that happens with every way of living. People have a judgment about it.

I think living in community is a good thing and there should be more of it. And I don't think it's only about us being women over 50. Loads of young people would really benefit from this way of living - people who want to own a property but can't get on the ladder, or who just like living with other people, some shared time but also privacy. I think it's a good model.

11 What would you tell someone who wants to do what you've done?

ANNE: Don't be too rigid in your expectations. Go and visit and see how it goes. Jude knows more about the process of what it took to get here than I do. But that applies to life for me anyway - don't be too rigid, just go with it.

12 What makes you really happy in life?

ANNE: Sunshine, my family, creativity, and travel. I like being in a new place, meeting new people. I have a list, but I'm not going to share everything.

13 Is this the future you were dreaming of?

ANNE: Nearly. Pretty much. I don't think there's anything missing. You don't really think about it, do you - but now you've asked, no. If I popped my clogs tomorrow, I don't think I'd be missing anything. You can always have a list of things to do.

JUDE: Bucket lists can become like a stone round your neck, because you think you've got to do it all.

14 Could this happen more widely, and what would it need?

ANNE: It needs a drive from government to recognise that it's a really good way of living, and it needs funding - grants from government. There's a UK co-housing website and a network of these places, but it needs a real push. I'm not sure who would do that push - maybe the people on the ground. It probably needs some really good stories of how good it is.

JUDE: We were very fortunate. We were forward-funded for this, and it hasn't happened since. We wouldn't have been able to do it without forward funding.

This Was Tomorrow – Is This the Future We Were Dreaming Of?
A long-term audio-visual investigation by Enrico Policardo.
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