THIS WAS
TOMORROW

# HAZEL TILLEY

*Founder member, Granby Four Streets CLT*

In conversation with Enrico Policardo
Granby Four Streets, Toxteth, Liverpool
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*Edited from the recorded conversation.*

What it is, it's about starting. People have big ideas, but they don't have a starting point. You start with what you can do. What's achievable. And when you've achieved that, you move on to the next thing that's achievable - and each thing you didn't think you could achieve until you'd done the bit before. That gives you the impetus to think, maybe I can do this.

And we've never worked on our own. Somebody comes up with an idea and it takes off. Somebody else comes up with an idea that isn't great, but someone knows how to refine it, or someone's already done it somewhere else and brings that skill to us. So you end up not doing anything alone. But it started with somebody cleaning the streets - getting a brush out, and planting in one of the front gardens. That went on to other people doing it, and getting a small grant.

Just start, but start at the bit you can do. If that's knocking on doors and saying, I've had an idea, what do you think? - that's a starting point. If the street's dirty, the starting point is cleaning it. Our main goal was to stop demolition. It wasn't to become landlords or build a winter garden. It was to stop demolition and make this a nice street to live in. It was getting empty, it was getting grim, it was getting ignored, it was getting littered. So it was a response to what was happening, but in an achievable way. And it was about owning where you live, because nobody else wanted it. This area hasn't been invested in for years. The council will say, we spent this many millions on that area - but not in the area, not with the people of the area, not with our consent. Mostly it was consultancy. And the way big organisations do consultancy is not about consulting, it's about leading you. This is what we're going to build - what colour would you like the tiles? It ticks a box.

If it's done small, you're in control and you take ownership of what you do. Small is beautiful, because it's an achievable starting point. Then people across the road wanted to do a table sale. And out of that we have a market with 90 stalls, because other people took it on and built on it, and it's just

local. When we had six stalls people said, that's a great market, can we put up a stall? Then you charge a little bit, because it goes into the coffers and buys more plants or a folding table. I used to go round with a little tin: if you've made enough money, can you put some in? Because then we'll buy a gazebo. And before you know it, we had 90 gazebos.

## 01 Who are you, and where are we?

Oh, of course - we always have to start with that. My name is Hazel Tilley. We're recording in my house on Cairns Street, a few doors from the Granby Four Streets Winter Garden. I'm a founder member of the Granby Residents Association, which started 34, 35 years ago. That ended and we formed a CLT, and I was a founder member of that. I've held various positions, all voluntary, and now I'm an ordinary volunteer.

## 02 Have you seen things changing?

The changes have been remarkable. It was busy when I first moved here. We had shops in the streets, a density of housing there no longer is. We had huge amounts of racism, and negativity towards the area, again because of racism. I think Liverpool has been and continues to be a racist city, but it's institutional. I don't think there's been a lot of individual racism. People are far more tolerant than the institutions would have them believe.

And the word we use is not tolerant - we're welcoming. Who wants to be tolerated? When they say England is a tolerant society, you think, who wants to be tolerated? It means I'll just about put up with you, because we're civilised. When Gandhi was asked what he thought of British civilisation, he said, I think it would be a good idea. You judge a society by how it treats its poor, its vulnerable, its children. And capitalism doesn't work for the poor, the vulnerable and the children, and it doesn't value those who do.

As a residents' association we had very little power, because we had very little money. We formed the Community Land Trust, and a social investor who'd seen what we were doing lent us half a million pounds. Suddenly we had power. We didn't before. We weren't worth taking notice of. The council paid lip service to working with the community. But once we could buy houses...

But we'd never have got there if we hadn't started sweeping the streets. If Eleanor hadn't brought out a brush and shovel, and then moved on to painting up empty houses, and other people wanted to join. There's a desire to be useful. Even if you think what you're doing is totally altruistic, behind it there's a desire for approval and to be a little bit useful.

This started because, right at the back of it, there was a threat of demolition and losing our homes. So there was already a collective reason to work together, because together we're more powerful than alone. That's why people form communities, trade unions, organisations. Football wouldn't be what it is if only one person turned up to watch. Fans have power when they recognise they can do something collectively.

### 03 Is it in the DNA of the city, this collectivism?

You'd have to go back to the creation of Liverpool, and the fact that it's a port. That's incredibly important to me. I think that's why Liverpool voted to stay in the European Union.

### 04 Is this the future you were dreaming of?

I never dreamt of a future, because I don't think I'm like that. I have dreams, and big ambitions for all sorts of things. But what we wanted was quite simple. We didn't want to move from our homes, and we didn't want to see a multiracial place that is welcoming, that is accepting, that can absorb,

destroyed. That's it. And we didn't want to be ignored, neglected and not invested in. There was a recognition that if we didn't do something, we'd had it. Nobody else was going to.

And Eleanor is entirely different from me. We've worked side by side and we understand each other. She does loads of things much better than me - much more diplomatically. She thinks differently, and I learn from her all the time.

One of my dreams was to have the back alley turned into reed beds. I did all this research on reed beds and water purification, reed beds in stacks. The house at that end of the street would be the start, and by the time it got to the bottom, in my head, there were leaping salmon and kingfishers. A unique solution to the water problem - all absolutely wonderful things. Just not practical or doable. But from that came: what can we do with our back alleys? They'd become a repository for rubbish. We'd gardened out the front and it worked, and Hazel's got this vision of greenness - so start doing the back. That wasn't my dream, but it's a bloody great one that's materialised.

The Winter Garden came from early plans with Assemble, looking at renovations where you'd take the front of the houses up - glass-roofed, joined on, so you get a glass-covered common space - and build at the back so you keep the same space. Fabulous. Eleanor and I wanted to live there immediately. We priced it up: you can't do it for the budget you've got. Shelved it. Then we went to look at two houses we were supposed to be bringing back to residential, opened the door, and the architect fell through the floor into the cellar. It was covered in pigeon muck, there was a tree growing up the middle, and there were no floors. We were totally despondent. And then somewhere in the recesses of someone's mind, when they had another look on a sunny day, there was a glass roof - because we'd already been there and tried it.

So no idea is bad. It just might not be the right idea, in the right way, at that time. But it's transferable - and look what we've got. Nobody dreamt of a winter garden. Nobody dreamt of a green back alley.

### 05 Do you have a utility equivalent of the Winter Garden, with washing machines?

It's about what a communal space is, what a community hub is. Institutions and developers build what they think is a community hub. A community hub is a good corner shop. It's your bus stop, your street. It's where young people choose to meet. Your community will naturally move towards what it wants.

We had those two buildings, and there was a lot of thought and discussion before we got to the Winter Garden. We called it the Winter Garden because we didn't know what else to call it, and it stuck. People think of winter gardens in Brighton, these huge pavilions - which is exactly what we haven't got. But common consensus says it's the Winter Garden. That's some form of democracy.

### 06 Could you knock through the middle house in a row and share it - a Winter Garden, or something like Kitty's Launderette?

Kitty's is amazing. We had launderettes, we had bath houses. We've moved to more and more possessions on an individual basis, when we used to have collectivism. I didn't have a washing machine until I moved into this house, because I went to the local laundress. Now there isn't one. It was women who needed to earn a little bit extra money: they'd go round and pick up people's laundry, take it to the laundress, dry it, bag it back up and take it back, for the cost of the laundry plus a shilling, or whatever the currency was. When we were looking at the history of the people who'd lived here, we had 90-odd shops on Granby Street, plus the first Tesco in Liverpool. And one woman, grown up with kids of her own, said her favourite memory was her mum

going round with them in the pram, and the pram getting fuller and fuller with pillowcases of washing, and the kids sitting on top. At the laundry she'd sit them on the dryers, because they were warm, and go and get them chips. You'd think, my God, those kids were dragged round the laundry and given chips for tea. They looked forward to laundry night. They were warm, they were fed, they were with their mother, and there were little jobs to do. She remembers the smell, the chips, fighting with her brother on top of the machine, pairing socks, the warmth.

We lost the launderette, and we lost that. Because surely she wasn't the only one to experience the warmth, the smell and the bag of chips - the chippy was about three doors up. We haven't got that now. We don't have a launderette. We don't have a record shop.

## 07 Will people one day feel nostalgic about the McDonald's drive-through?

Films have a huge influence on us. And I don't think there's a present without a past. But your past isn't for ruminating on. It's for recognising what can be learned, and that some things were traumatic. I don't know anybody who reaches 70 without trauma. That's what life gives you. And the poorer you are, the more traumatic it is, and the more continual.

This is why homes are important. If you've got somewhere to live, and you feel secure and safe, and you can afford to live there, then a lot of issues disappear straight away. It takes time, though. And then you sell off your council houses, you give away what belonged to the country anyway, and you wonder why there's no infrastructure that actually works.

Architecture is the poetry of space. That's the Winter Garden. It's not what's on the outside, because on the outside it looks like the rest of the houses. When you go in, it becomes a magical space. The back alley is a piece of

architecture: when you look at what you can do with that enclosure, it becomes poetry. A green space. That's the stuff dreams are made of.

### 08 Is there one thing you haven't said that you want to say to the people of the world?

Work with each other. Work collectively. Collective working can start with you and one other person, because that's two people, and that person knows someone else. Networking isn't a big thing business people do. It's what we do every day. Know that you have skills, even when you don't think they're skills - you think it's just everyday life. You already know how to budget; you do it daily. Recognise yourself, and claim the bit of space around you. Take responsibility, work with others, and know that your way is not necessarily the right way. It's just one way.

There are many trains, many tracks, many stations and many journeys. Sometimes we keep getting on the same train, on the same track, to the same destination, and the same results will always be there - and that can be comfortable. I'm quite happy in the rut I'm in, because it's the rut I know. But I'm also aware there are other things going on, and coming out of your comfortable rut isn't a terrible thing, and it doesn't have to be that uncomfortable if you're open to it. Open, as opposed to suggestible. Listening, and recognising your part in it. Don't be passive. Not being passive doesn't mean being aggressive. It means do something. It's not a new phrase. The journey of a thousand miles starts with a single step. My destination is always the stars, and I'm only on top of the stepladder, and that's not terrible, because at least I got there.

Everyone can take a step towards what they want, and collectively dreams unfold. They come true, and they're a collective dream, not a personal one. What I wanted didn't happen. Something else happened, because it was done collectively. So, over and over again: work with others. And don't be all the

things that I am. You do need to be stubborn, but not all the time. You do need to be dogged, but not all the time. And it's really about breaking things down into bits you can do.

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