THIS WAS
TOMORROW

TOM MURPHY

Coordinator and Director, Two Up Two Down

In conversation with Enrico Policardo
Two Up Two Down, Anfield, Liverpool
2026

Edited from the recorded conversation.

01 Who are you, and what do you do?

Hello. My name is Tom Murphy. I'm the coordinator and director at Two Up Two Down, and I'm also a lifelong resident of Anfield. I got involved around six years ago when I joined the board, and a couple of years after that there was a paid opportunity to be recruited as coordinator. My role is quite varied, but it's essentially keeping all the cogs turning in the right direction, and being the link between the board and the team - making sure everyone knows which direction we're heading in and has the tools and resources to get there.

02 What would you tell someone who doesn't know what Two Up Two Down is about?

Two Up Two Down was born as a protest against the way our neighbourhood was being regenerated, when many local people were displaced and felt disconnected from what was happening. It started as a Liverpool Biennial arts commission, built around one question: what would regeneration look like if local people weren't just involved, but were at the helm of it, and owned their local assets? That's where the community land trust model was first explored, and then adopted as the local vehicle for residents to own, shape and steward their own assets in perpetuity.

03 What's your working background?

Again, quite varied. I've worked for over fifteen years in the local voluntary and social enterprise sector - in health and social care, in education, and in all sorts of community settings: business development, volunteer management, engagement. All of that has been really useful for this central role. And being from the area, I bring a lot of local knowledge and lots of personal and professional connections, which we draw on to make sure Two Up Two Down stays the community-led movement it was meant to be.

04 What's it like living in Anfield all week, not just on match day?

Anfield is a special place for me. It's where I grew up and where I've decided to bring up my own family. So many of my friends and family are from here. Anfield gets a lot of bad press - statistically it always features high on deprivation. What I always say is: come to the place, and see an area with so many assets.

But it's dominated and shaped by sharing our home with a multi-billion-pound football club, which has its benefits and its downsides. As a Liverpool supporter, it's nice to have your club on the doorstep. But a 61,000-capacity stadium brings logistical challenges, and social ones too. The area is now seen very much as a tourist destination, which means homes are bought up for short-term lets, and that puts extra strain on residents, because it creates a sense of transience. If people come to enjoy themselves at the game, as they should, renting an Airbnb in a residential street isn't always a good idea.

It shapes the high street too. A lot of the local shops that served local needs have been bought up and rented out with match days in mind, so you've got lots of pubs, betting shops and takeaways in place of local amenities. On a match day there's lots of energy, a real buzz, and that changes on other days. We still get a lot of tourism through the week - people visiting the stadium for tours, the museum, the shop. It's a shame we haven't got the variety on our high street that would attract visitors all week, not just on home games.

05 Is that something you take on at Two Up Two Down, beyond housing?

Our primary focus is warm and affordable homes, but community ownership extends to other assets too. Our first project was a prominent neighbourhood bakery that was facing closure. We took on the building - there's a commercial space downstairs and a shared home upstairs. Being able to own,

shape and control property locally is really important, because in the same way we can offer affordable residential rent, we can offer affordable commercial rent - unlike a lot of the private rented property on the high street, which affects the quality of what's on offer.

Two Up Two Down was always about imagining alternative futures. That's taken shape as a bakery, and also as a community launderette, which we were integral in supporting to settle and get established on the high street, even though we don't own the building. Those businesses show how things can work on our high street: meeting local needs, but also benefiting from our unique position in a neighbourhood with a football club.

06 With a magic wand, what would you bring to Anfield tomorrow?

As a community-led, member-led organisation, our strategy is shaped by our members and local people. From the very beginning, people's priority has been warm and affordable homes, so that's where most of our energy goes. But second to that is creating spaces and places for local enterprise to thrive. It's difficult to say exactly what a high street looks like today - high streets have changed a lot, with online competition and the way people shop. But what I'm confident saying is that it's the diversity of the offer that's needed: a mix of shops and businesses, retail, leisure, and how that connects to the homes around it.

07 Are there places in Anfield where people can just go and be?

There are limited spaces locally where people can gather and hang out without the expectation that they need to buy anything. We're lucky to have some community organisations with buildings, but how people access them

depends on their circumstances, and on whether they feel those spaces are for them. A long-term ambition for Two Up Two Down is to create more of those spaces, open to everyone rather than to a specific support group.

08 How can a space like that be sustained?

We'd designed how such a space could work on our high street: a commercial venture that generates the revenue to cross-finance a space where people can come and be, without any expectation of spending money. Our challenge was that the project didn't progress as we'd planned and invested in. So those plans and hopes and dreams are still there. We're just looking for another way to make them real.

09 What happened with the Oakfield Terrace bid, and what's the plan now?

After we finished the shared home in the bakery building in 2017, our attention turned to the nine empty properties next door, owned by Liverpool City Council. We had a track record of delivering alternative spaces locally, and of showing there's still value in the buildings we have - we don't have to knock down and build new to meet local needs. We went through a participatory design process for that scheme, which captured a lot of local people's hopes and dreams for the area.

Because of various challenges, the council withdrew its commitment to transfer the row to the community land trust, and instead added it to a list of 52 other properties it owned across the city, to sell on the open market. So we regrouped, secured investment, and submitted a bid to buy. In January we were told our bid was unsuccessful, which was a disappointing blow. But it was a chance for us to regroup as a membership, refocus on our priorities and reflect on the lessons.

What we learned is that our vision is much bigger than one row of properties. From the very beginning it's been a neighbourhood-wide ambition, and Oakfield Terrace had somewhat limited that. So it's been quite re-energising since January. We've been more opportunistic and entrepreneurial in how we pursue opportunities. We've set up a partnership with a local housing association, and we're in the process of buying empty residential properties from them, bringing them back to a really good standard with high energy efficiency, and renting them at an affordable rent. They'll also be affordable to live in, because they'll be less vulnerable to the energy market. So we have an emerging pipeline of homes, and alongside that - limited by the capacity of the team - we're pursuing other property and development opportunities locally.

10 What's hard about the work, for you and for the organisation?

For me personally, it's connected to being from this place and working in it. It's very, very close to home. So when things don't pan out the way you hoped, it takes a toll, emotionally and personally. But it's also a privilege to have so much opportunity to shape the place I live in and love, and where I'm bringing up my family. A double-edged sword, I suppose.

For us as an organisation - and a lot of other community-led organisations - sometimes we're seen as almost unprofessional. That's usually down to a lack of understanding of how organisations like ours are set up and run. We've got a really qualified board who bring a wealth of expertise, and a strong membership, mostly people who live and work locally, so we have a real vested interest in our success. And in regeneration there are local complexities: we've had over three decades of top-down regeneration attempts, which have left many people here with grief, resentment, anger - really powerful emotions. So when we engage with our neighbours we have

to do it really sensitively. Regeneration should be handled with care, and it often isn't. And we're a small but mighty team, so there are limits to what we can deliver until we reach the scale we need.

11 Does it take someone from outside to bring the energy, with local people then carrying it forward?

I'd agree up to a point. But what I'd disagree with is that somebody needs to bring the energy. One of the things I always say is that everything we need is already here. It just needs better organising. A socially engaged artist can act as an agitator and organiser, because we collectively hold an amazing imagination. The challenge is that a lot of people already have a hell of a lot on their plate - they're dealing with lots of different things, so they may feel less able, or less connected to shaping their neighbourhood. So the role is almost to disrupt that belief - that we have to accept the status quo - and then to act as a support and framework for the community to organise itself, and build the right structures to meet local needs in a different way.

The strapline of Two Up Two Down is: brick by brick, pound by pound, we build ourselves. "We build ourselves" isn't just about building housing. It's about building ourselves - education, learning, agency, developing and holding expertise locally. That's as important as delivering the housing. Because if the community has the agency and expertise to do things for itself, it's perpetual. It keeps going. It isn't a one-off.

12 What makes you happy in life?

Being useful, in whatever shape or form that takes - a useful husband, a useful dad, useful at work or to my neighbourhood. When I feel useful, I feel happy.

13 Is this the future you were dreaming of?

I'd say we're on our way, but we still have a long, long way to go. At Two Up Two Down, we know what we want and what we need as local people, and we have a plan to get there. So it's a case of what we've always done: stay steadfast, stay together, keep developing that hope and delivering the mission. Having a warm and affordable home is a human right, and we're determined to get there locally.

14 What would you tell someone who wants to do what Two Up Two Down has done?

Be prepared for a long slog. But be motivated by the fact that it is possible. You've just got to keep going. Unfortunately, that's the way it is.

15 What are the most likely setbacks?

The things outside your control. You can't control how other organisations and individuals will behave and respond. That's why it's really important to get, as quickly as you can, to a position where you're least dependent on outside influences and agencies - where you can do it yourselves.

16 Have you reached that independence yet?

In spirit, ambition and vision, we're there, as we always have been. But we're still operating within the mechanics and inequitable systems of the status quo. We've still got a lot to demonstrate and prove about alternative ways of delivering housing. So it's an ongoing journey to get to a financial point where we can operate better within those systems - and to build the case for community-led housing being seen as a mainstream way of delivering homes.

17 Does politics come first, or community?

People, always. Organised people and groups can then shape and influence policy. And policies often have to play catch-up with where society already is. So, definitely people.

18 Anything else you'd like to say?

As we prepare for our next phase of development, we're looking for co-owners and co-investors. So if people have some spare cash and want to be part of our journey and support it, drop us a line.

> If you'd like to support the work of Two Up Two Down and help them secure more homes and local buildings in community ownership, visit www.twouptwodown.org.uk/buy-back-anfield

This Was Tomorrow – Is This the Future We Were Dreaming Of?
A long-term audio-visual investigation by Enrico Policardo.
Listen: thiswastomorrow.co.uk/sites/two-up-two-down/

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