

Free Social Foundations

Manchester Area Map version 1.0, May 2008

A map showing the locations of the Free Social Foundations project spaces in Manchester.

Despite the spread of the internet and 'social network' technologies, physical spaces still provide the main foundations upon which social activity takes place and develops. Indeed, it appears as though the pressures and demands upon physical space are increasing rather than decreasing as the creation and exploitation of social activity becomes an ever more important part of the contemporary economy.

The Free Social Foundations project explores the current condition of spaces of free and open assembly in our cities, relating those spaces created by the public themselves to those created for public use. This edition of the Manchester Area Map is a preliminary study based on material gathered over a four day period in Manchester. Such a study inevitably only scratches the surface of the more complex issues and histories related to these spaces. It nevertheless reveals much of the tensions, conflicts and positive possibilities that are present in those spaces that provide the foundations for the social in the Manchester area today.

The study focused on three key historical 'strata' that characterise the development of the Manchester area: the industrial city and workers movement of the 19th and early 20th Centuries, the DIY culture of the 1980s and 90s, and the current 'neo-liberal' city of regeneration projects and mass consumerism. Material was gathered, as much as possible, from those directly involved in the spaces examined. This was obtained through interviews and conversations with those currently or previously living in the areas, including community activists engaged in their development, and some related published sources. For older spaces, material was drawn from the first-hand accounts of working class histories such as those gathered by Eddie and Ruth Frow and collated in the Working Class Movement Library in Salford.

This printed edition of the map provides a snapshot of observations that emerged from the initial research. It accompanies an online map that will continue to expand with more examples as the project continues. The online map is also available for those who wish to add their own material to the project:

http://www.freesocialfoundations.org

A map showing the locations of the Free Social Foundations project spaces in Manchester.

This versions of the Manchester Area Map was produced for the Futuresonic Arts Festival, 2008, http://www.futuresonic.com, and the Free Social Foundations project has been a Futuresonic commissioned work.

Free Social Foundations project was initiated and developed by Simon Yuill. The team for the Manchester Area Map were: Aaron McCloskey, Georgie Sullivan, and Simon Yuill. Special thanks to: Jonathan Akinson, everyone at the Zion Centre in Hulme, the Futuresonic team, the Working Class Movement Library in Salford, Damien Mahoney, Adele, Jai Redman, Mick Fuzz, Pete Abel, Leoni, Matt, Adam and Joe in the Redbricks, and the punks in Cider Park.

Extracts from Interviews

A map showing the locations of the Free Social Foundations project spaces in Manchester.

As the map shows, public spaces can often be sites of conflict when different groups attempt to determine what forms of social action are acceptable or not within them. Social spaces, however, can also be extremely productive. This is particularly so when these are self-created or governed directly by the people who use them. These kind of self-created spaces have been a strong characteristic of the Manchester area. The following extracts are from interviews with people involved in such spaces and reflect each of the three historical strata looked at in the study: the allotment which has its origins in the Industrial era, the famous Hulme Crescents of the 1980s and 90s, and current projects such as Equinox which combine aspects of both.

A map showing the locations of the Free Social Foundations project spaces in Manchester.

Parrs Wood Allotments

A map showing the locations of the Free Social Foundations project spaces in Manchester.

Parrs Wood Allotments

A map showing the locations of the Free Social Foundations project spaces in Manchester.

Just over 20 years ago they offered us some land which was part of the playing fields of the Parrs Wood School. Because the playing fields were so big, they weren't in use. We had a look at this land and it was the finest land you could get. It was right by the river, really good land. We said right, we like the sound of that, we'll move. But then, again I don't know whether this is correct, but I think that PFI (Public Finance Initiative) intervened. Somebody offered them a lot of money and they give them the land for probably 40 years to build them a new school which they required. So they got the land that we should have had. Then they said "that's alright, we've got some land just across the river, there's a rugby field there, it's only required for two matches a year. It's nothing so you can have that land there." Ideal land so ok, we had no objection. But then because over the river is Stockport, Stockport wouldn't allow a change of use.

A map showing the locations of the Free Social Foundations project spaces in Manchester.

First of all there was one section of the playing fields and then they decided on another section after some months. Then they decided on the rugby field. Time was going on. Each time we were working on 12 months notice to quit. The 36 allotments went down and down until there were only three of us left. That was until a couple of years ago. I don't know how ... we told them, they knew about this land. It was in the year 2000 that they asked the three of us to go.

A map showing the locations of the Free Social Foundations project spaces in Manchester.

There's a sign up - I think it might have been pulled down now - that the land is for sale. There was great demand for it then. One of our members was on the site and they saw a surveyor and asking and he said "oh, I'm surveying this land on behalf of Marks & Spencers". I think it was then that they felt there was some money to be made so they would sell it. I think the last report I saw said that they were hoping to get 5 million for Parrs Wood when they sell it off. They'll probably get 7 million for it now. It only cost them £4,000 to build the site down there. Originally I don't think that the intention was to make money. I think the intention was to use the land which they had available that wasn't being used, good agricultural land, and sell it. But they make money.

A map showing the locations of the Free Social Foundations project spaces in Manchester.

There's a waiting list of thirty. They only gave us enough land for fifteen allotments and those are only half the size of what was at Parrs Wood so it's roughly seven and a half compared with the thirty six original plots. We've had no end of battle with them and I've been attending the AMAS (Association of Manchester Allotment Societies) meetings, the correspondence with Manchester

City Council goes on and on but I don't want to start about that ... You've got to just try and enjoy it.

The people who got on the new allotment are very mixed. One lady is a nurse in Manchester children's hospital. Others are retired. One man likes it as a hobby. There's another man who's also a nurse...there are two plot holders at the end of the street but I don't know where they work. There are more women now and they can bring their children down at weekends. They're supervised and it's something that the children can do rather than play in the street. More women are getting involved now. I think it's roughly on that site half and half women and men. The children seem to enjoy it, it's something new. They can run about. As I say, not like running about in the street. I think this is why parents with young families encourage them, and maybe this is the main reason for going to an allotment, to provide some open space for the children.

Parrs Wood allotment holder

A map showing the locations of the Free Social Foundations project spaces in Manchester.

Hulme

A map showing the locations of the Free Social Foundations project spaces in Manchester.

There were lots of flats that were empty so people could have one flat for living in and one flat for doing other stuff in. Some walls were taken down. Me and my friends did it with one flat. We set up a bar and a DJ booth. There was a club like that called The Kitchen in the crescents. There was a club called the PSV where Factory Records had their first gigs. If you came out of that there was a flat called The Happening. They used to show old movies and have acoustic music. On the fifth floor of that there was The Kitchen. Someone had jack-hammered the wall down between two flats so you could get more people in there. That was the late 80s.

A map showing the locations of the Free Social Foundations project spaces in Manchester.

I moved out of the Crescents. When they knocked them down it was pretty bonkers. We got together and formed Homes for Change. The people who did Homes for Change were some of the political people that the Council really hated. They were the Council's worst nightmare because they were always causing trouble protesting etc. we got funding for Homes for Change. But they said we had to work in partnership with a recognised housing association. We went to Guinness Trust but they were pretty useless, there were lots of delays and mistakes. I ended up moving into one of the flats nearby instead for a couple of years. October 1996 I moved into Homes for Change. That's been open for over ten years now. It's got roof gardens and stuff like that. It's a co-operative, its run by its members. Since then it's changed a great deal. People have moved on, others have moved in. It's better in some ways. You get people walking around Hulme now who wouldn't have lasted 5 minutes in the Crescents. It's safer than it was. I'm older than I was but I don't think it's as exciting as it used to be. Everything's spoken for now, there are no empty flats or anything.

Herman

A map showing the locations of the Free Social Foundations project spaces in Manchester.

My big involvement was that I set up a performance company with some other people from Hulme called Dogs of Heaven. Dogs of Heaven came about in 1989. In 1990, I'd been into performance and I'd come back from doing a course in performance. I'd been working with a company called Welfare State International down in Barrow who did large outdoor performance events. When I got to Hulme there were other people who

were interested in that kind of thing. This was around the same time as the squat party scene was growing up but we were all into performance and theatre.

A map showing the locations of the Free Social Foundations project spaces in Manchester.

We started off doing bonfires on bonfire night in Hulme. On the first one we built a Margaret Thatcher head out of bamboo and withies onto a caravan, and her hair out of palettes. The whole performances ended on a high point with wheeling this Thatcher head into the palettes of hair and setting her on fire. I think about a week later she was voted out of government so we were like "yeah, it worked!" That was the beginning of Dogs of Heaven.

Dogs of Heaven just grew and grew and grew. We had an open door policy so anyone who wanted to get involved could get involved with the company. By the time last show Safe of Houses was in 1993, there were about 150 people involved in putting that performance on. In the last Dogs of Heaven theatre show we pushed a car off the roof of, I'm trying to think, I think it was William Kent crescent. There's no way in a million years that if you were a bona fide theatre company who had to have health and safety regulations and all of that, I don't know what would happen. You'd probably lose your funding. But because we weren't a funded company and we were all just doing this shit because we loved it, then we could get away with that and there was no one to answer to.

Sara, interviewed by Mick Fuzz, http://dodgytv.blip.tv/file/768807/

Sara, interviewed by Mick Fuzz, http://dodgytv.blip.tv/file/768807/

Sara, interviewed by Mick Fuzz, http://dodgytv.blip.tv/file/768807/

A friend of mine had a place where people would just go there. It was like a jungle, it'd have plants and trees in there. They were planted. The ceiling was taken out and a tree was put in. The artwork people used to have on the walls, there was a lot of very arty people in there, they were good at what they did but they couldn't get a chance. They were able to put on exhibitions. They were welcomed. You could walk along and people's doors would be open. I had people walk into my flat, my door was always open. If they did I'd say come in, sit down and have a smoke and a chill.

A map showing the locations of the Free Social Foundations project spaces in Manchester.

The main thing I remember it for is how communal it was. There were loads of blues parties. You never had to pay. There were regular faces but new people all the time. When I hear people talk about the 60s I realise this was my time. I loved it. My flat got taken off me in the end. That was near the end when the council was boarding everything up. I think they'd decided by then that it was going to go. At the same time there were lots of hard drugs around and I didn't want to go there so much any more. I don't think the council cared about the drugs.

A map showing the locations of the Free Social Foundations project spaces in Manchester.

I worked at The Nia Centre doing the same job I do here at The Zion Centre. When it was first opened the residents started to complain. It's a bingo hall now. On the original plans we could see that the Council was going to build houses right next to it, we could see even then it would cause trouble. We had big concerts on, Nina Simone, Burning Spear, Third World. Residents kept saying it was too noisy. The Ritz and The Green Room are having problems because of the new flats that have been built there now. Those places have been there for years, people should know that so why are they complaining? If you come here have a look around the area and check it out first. I don't understand the complaints.

A map showing the locations of the Free Social Foundations project spaces in Manchester.

I live in Hulme now, very nearby to The Zion Centre. I was in Whalley Range before which isn't far away but I was always round here anyway. I always felt that Whalley Range, Hulme and Moss side, was all Moss Side. I can't see where the borders are. To me this is all Moss Side. I think a lot of people back in the day thought that too, I

still do. I knew people were talking about Hulme, we used to go to The Hacienda and people all wanted to come down here after the night. This was people not from the area. It was nice seeing The Hacienda crew down there. They made it bigger. It was a great way to live. I think I've gained a lot from it in the way I look at the world. It's nice living here again. I'm proud to live and work here.

Steve Bryon

Steve Bryon, interviewed by Mick Fuzz, http://dodgytv.blip.tv/file/768807/

Equinox Housing Co-operative

A map showing the locations of the Free Social Foundations project spaces in Manchester.

A map showing the locations of the Free Social Foundations project spaces in Manchester.

Equinox is an interesting one because it's a private space, more than a public space. However it has ups and downs of being used as a public space. It's my home but it gets used as a doss house and a hostel for meetings and actions and things. I suppose a lot of people come round and are interested in what we're doing and how we can work and live in a more autonomous way. A lot of people come and, because it's my home, I sometimes forget what it does and how amazing it is that I live in a place where I set my own rent. We've paid off the mortgage so we can use the money to do whatever we want. It can be maintenance for the house or it can be to create publicity for something, instead of money going into someone else's pockets.

A map showing the locations of the Free Social Foundations project spaces in Manchester.

I think it's nice that it's kept small and with a committed group of people. It's not like you're opening it up completely. I suppose because it's a private space and you're sharing facilities and social space with each other it has to work on that level as well as a business level. I think in the past maybe people have felt that it brings in aspects of exclusivity. There have been people who have wanted more involvement and haven't been able to have it. But that often comes down to relationships and your needs and values. Within the house we're quite a diverse group but we have to be able to function together. I think most people have felt very included and welcome. We've got an office space in the cellar which is a community space which people can come and use and we have friends over.

The Heap

A map showing the locations of the Free Social Foundations project spaces in Manchester.

The Heap is part of a pre-existing allotment that we've built into a community garden. The allotments have been there for about 50-60 years. They've been through a lot of disrepair. Food growing generally has had quite an upsurge in interest recently. There is a waiting list now for these allotments. I think in other areas allotments need to be protected from being taken over.

A map showing the locations of the Free Social Foundations project spaces in Manchester.

It's a really big allotment so I feel it's a really important one. We're responsible for The Heap within the allotment. The allotment site is probably still organised under traditional lines. People are looking to expand the roles and make more decisions collectively. I think the fact that we're a mini collective means it's very important in making people discuss things more and share ideas. We're challenging that with some of what we want to do on the site. We don't just want to grow vegetables. We want to do educational stuff there and work with young people. We'll be doing harvesting and wildlife things. They're not radical ideas but it's good to have things for people. We want to run a kitchen there where people can sit and talk and socialise.

A map showing the locations of the Free Social Foundations project spaces in Manchester.

We want it to be a social space. I'm interested in creating spaces that aren't alcohol based and are outdoors. We aim for The Heap to be an outdoor living room and an outdoor classroom, where

anybody can come. We've only just got the site in a fit state for anyone to come down. There was broken glass, asbestos, it wasn't in a fit state. It's not been used for years. We can now say to a mother and child, come down, because it's safer. It's a place where different people from different backgrounds can come together and grow and share skills. I've lived in the area and worked here for a long time and I know people from different backgrounds, ethnicities, ages. Most people only have a tiny back yard so I say to them, come down and we can do it together.

The Forest Garden at Birchfields Park

A map showing the locations of the Free Social Foundations project spaces in Manchester.

Birchfields Park had been given to the public at the end of the 18th Century. It was saved from becoming a car park during the Commonwealth Games. I think there was a lot of public outcry about the idea of turning the park into a car park, that's why it was stopped. I can't believe how anyone would think about doing that. A lot of people in Rusholme and Longsight don't have cars and it's quite a long way to get out of the city from there.

A map showing the locations of the Free Social Foundations project spaces in Manchester.

Parks are generally seen as leisure space, places for walking the dog but we are introducing the idea of food growing in public space there. We're creating a model for urban sustainable food production based around the idea of the forest garden. The forest garden is one of the ultimate models for how to grow, how to have productive spaces. It works particularly well in small spaces because it mimics nature to make use of all the spaces instead of having a mono-crop like a row of just carrots. You'll have things growing on different levels: trees, fruit bushes, herbs, roots and things that climb.

A map showing the locations of the Free Social Foundations project spaces in Manchester.

We've been running courses and events to share permaculture ideas with people. This is what you can do together, in your park, in your back garden. It's a very interactive educational space that we're developing. We're looking at wild food foraging and nature identification, trees, introduction to permaculture. I'm looking at people, plants and culture at the moment which is trying to get people thinking about well...if you come from a different country can you grow that here? If not can you adapt your recipe to something that grows here? Can you share recipe that with other people? Can you grow it here in the park or in your back garden? Are there any herbal medicines you know of? Can you teach people about them? I love that.

A map showing the locations of the Free Social Foundations project spaces in Manchester.

When I walk around, even on my street I even appreciate whoever thought to plant trees there 70 years ago. They weren't doing it for themselves. They weren't going to see them mature. They were thinking about the future.

Kirsty Heron

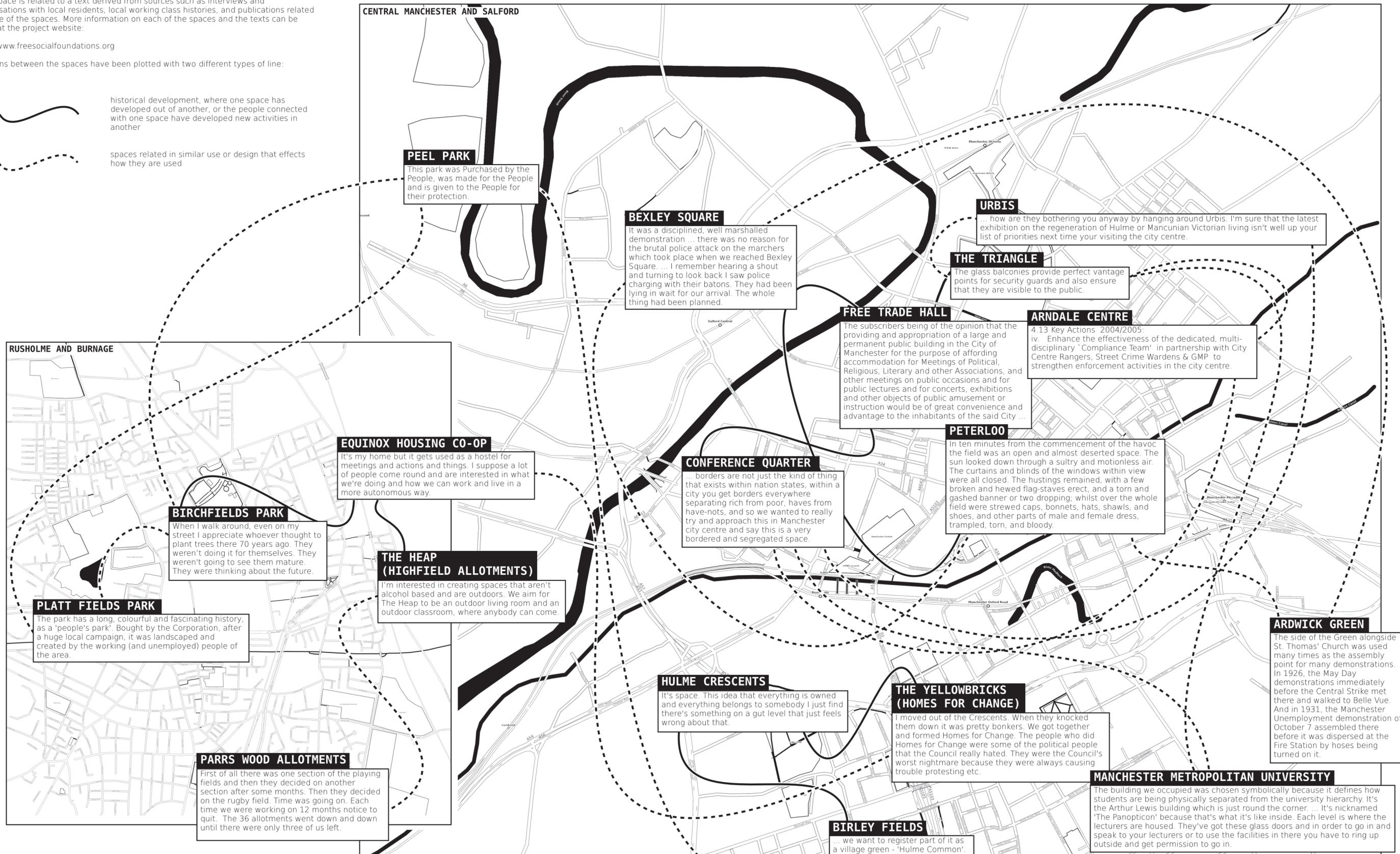
FREE SOCIAL FOUNDATIONS: MANCHESTER AREA, MAY 2008

This map relates a number of spaces selected from those looked at in the research study. Each space is related to a text derived from sources such as interviews and conversations with local residents, local working class histories, and publications related to some of the spaces. More information on each of the spaces and the texts can be found at the project website:

<http://www.freesocialfoundations.org>

Relations between the spaces have been plotted with two different types of line:

-  historical development, where one space has developed out of another, or the people connected with one space have developed new activities in another
-  spaces related in similar use or design that effects how they are used



FREE SOCIAL FOUNDATIONS: MANCHESTER AREA, MAY 2008