

**Security and everyday life in  
Macclesfield**

*Changing faces of  
safety and (dis)order in  
the 21<sup>st</sup> century*

***Project Report***

**Ben Bradford (University College London)**

**Evi Girling (Keele University)**

**Ian Loader (Oxford University)**

**Richard Sparks (University of Edinburgh)**

# Place, Crime and Insecurity in Everyday Life

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## The project and research team

Between November 2019 and the summer of 2023, a research group from Keele University, and the Universities of Oxford, Edinburgh and University College London, studied how people feel about living in Macclesfield today; what makes them feel safe or unsafe living in the town, and what they think should be done to improve public safety locally. The project is called *Place, Crime and Insecurity in Everyday Life: A Contemporary Study of an English Town*. We sometimes use the shorter form *Security in Place*, also the name of our website: <https://securityinplace.org/>

The project was funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) (award number ES/S010734/1). The support of the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) is gratefully acknowledged. An earlier study of the town - 'The Symbolic Construction of Crime in Middle England' – was conducted by three members of the present team under the ESRC's 'Crime and Social Order' Programme (L210252032) from 1994-96.

The current research team and the authors of this report are Dr. Evi Girling (Keele, Principal Investigator), Professor Ben Bradford (University College London), Professor Ian Loader (Oxford) and Professor Richard Sparks (Edinburgh). You can read more about each of us here: <https://securityinplace.org/research-team/> Dr. Gosia Polanska, Dr. Ryan Casey and Dr. Sergen Bahceci were involved at different stages of the project as Researchers. The current team extends our thanks for their valuable contribution along the project's journey.

We would like to express our gratitude and thanks to all those – residents and members of local statutory and voluntary sectors, and faith groups – who gave up their time to assist the project, extend hospitality in difficult times and talk to us – sometimes at great length - about the town in which they live and/or work. The project could not have been completed without that support and we are very grateful.

May 2024

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## Executive Summary

In this report, we offer an account of the main findings of a study we conducted of everyday security concerns in Macclesfield. Between November 2019 and July 2023, we used a range of methods to investigate the experience and perceptions of safety and security among differently-situated people living and working in the town today. We interviewed people individually and in small groups, conducted two community surveys, spoke with the local authorities, police and other security providers, analysed local social media, observed public spaces, and spent time with a wide range of local groups.

Back in the mid-1990s, three members of the present research team conducted a similar study of ‘crime-talk’ in the town. In the 1990s, people in Macclesfield expressed a wide range of concerns, some of which reflected problems that were high on the public agenda nationally at that time. These included worries about burglary, car theft, and drugs and anti-social behaviour, especially around licensed premises and about groups of young people in public spaces. They also worried about the absence of visible policing in the town.

Our new study shows that those worries have not gone away. But they are today less prominent in what people tell us about what it is like to live in and feel safe in this town. For most of our participants, crime was not at the forefront of their accounts of concerns about the town and their ability to imagine a secure future there. **Local place-talk in the 2020s is not first and foremost talk about crime** – a striking change from what we found in the 1990s. The main findings of the present study are as follows:

- **Drugs and drug-related disorders remain a major concern.** But residents typically associate it with concerns about exploitation and vulnerability, and with its impact on the quality of their environment.
- People notice and often spoke to us about various forms of – sometimes hidden – **social suffering in the town**, and much of the work of local agencies, including the police, is today focused on these problems, domestic abuse and vulnerability related risks being prominent along them. This is also reflected in the work of the vibrant voluntary sector in the town.
- People’s attention nowadays seems more focused on a **range of harms that we might broadly term ‘environmental’**. Acts of care and repair of the physical and natural environment are a prominent feature of civic and everyday life in the town.
- There is a **high level of concern about cars and traffic** (including with speeding, poor parking, and driver behaviour near school gates).

- People spoke to us extensively about littering, graffiti, potholes and the future of the town centre that raise **concerns about a deteriorating built and social environment**.
- Residents seem less focused on – and for the most part less angry about – the service they receive from the police, and more **concerned with what they see as the inability of local government to care for the infrastructure of the place in which they live**.

In voicing such concerns, people also raise questions about who is or should be responsible for acting to solve or improve these problems, and sometimes about what actions they can take, individually and collectively, to express care for their locality and its future.

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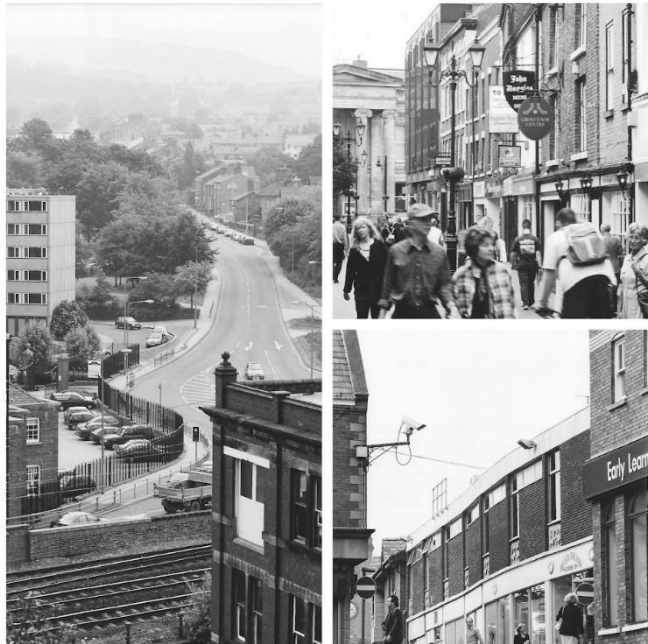
## Why Macclesfield, why now?

We are interested in people's experiences of safety and unsafety in everyday settings and places, rather than in sites of exceptional danger or conflict. How do various forms of risk and danger, or feelings of uncertainty, impinge upon people where they live and work in contemporary Britain? Where do people look for help or protection? Do people's concerns affect how they feel about their locality, and about the future for themselves and their families and communities, or for the wider world?

We chose to study these questions in one town so that we could better locate them in terms of the history, setting, places and people that they involve. Macclesfield - a town of about 53,000 residents in north-west England, about 20 miles south of the nearest large urban centre, Manchester – seemed an ideal setting.

Three members of the present team (Evi Girling, Ian Loader and Richard Sparks) undertook a similar project in Macclesfield between 1994 and 1996. That study focused on crime-talk in the town, and its relationship to people's sense of place.

We chose Macclesfield at that time because it was not a big city (where most research on crime takes place). It was a relatively safe place – though not one without its concerns and problems. The research resulted in a book-length account of how worries about crime featured in local social relations in the mid-1990s called [\*Crime and Social Change in Middle England\*](#) (Routledge, 2000).



Returning 25 years later offered us the opportunity to find out and reflect on what has changed (and what hasn't) between then and now. Have the important upheavals of the last quarter century (the internet and social media, the financial crisis of 2008 and the subsequent period of 'austerity', Brexit, greater climate consciousness and, more recently, the Covid-19 pandemic and the cost of living crisis – to name only some of the more obvious ones) had a bearing on people's experiences of security or insecurity, anxiety or confidence?

We returned with a view to exploring what it means for residents of a contemporary British town to be and feel secure, or to experience challenges to one's sense of security. We were interested in finding out what troubles afflict the daily lives of differently situated people across the town and what actions they took, or demand from responsible authorities, to deal with the things that threaten them.

### **How have we done this?**

To address these questions, we deployed a range of methods that provided exposure to different aspects of local people's experiences of, and demands for, security and the practices of security governance of various state and civil society actors. Our methods included the following:

**Survey research.** We conducted two community surveys in the town. Both surveys used face-to-face interviews conducted by a social research company. The first survey (n = 416) was conducted between May and August 2021; the second (n = 502) took place in September and October 2022. This was not a panel survey; different respondents were interviewed for each wave. Many questions were common across both surveys though new questions were added in the second wave in response to the themes emerging from the interview and observational research. Given Macclesfield's population of about 53,000 residents, about two per cent of the town's population took part in the survey.

**Qualitative interviews with residents.** We also conducted individual or focus group interviews with Macclesfield residents where we were able to explore issues in more depth. We talked to nearly 120 residents in interviews and discussion groups ranging from 45 minutes to two and half hours. Participants were recruited by a combination of responses to a leaflet delivered to every residential address in the town and snowballing from contacts made during our access negotiations and observational work. The aim was to speak to people from across as many socio-economic groups and residents of different areas of the town as was feasible.

**Research with local agencies.** We conducted interviews, informal discussions, and observations with actors from local government, security providers and the town's voluntary sector. We interviewed 25 formal and informal security providers including elected officials, key actors in the local voluntary sector, town centre security managers, and police. The latter included interviews with local Police Officers, Police Community Support officers, Police area managers and leaders in Cheshire Police and the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner. We spent over 300 hours following officers and PCSOs in their everyday work around the town (on day, night and weekend shifts) as well

as observing civil enforcement officers and finding out about the work of the local Street Angels.

We attended meetings of the Town Centre Recovery Group and other related working groups of Macclesfield Town Council, Hope in North East Cheshire and Prayer Breakfasts on the work of the voluntary sector, various neighbourhood partnership meetings, and meetings of the Macclesfield Cultural Forum. We took part in and/or observed various



green initiative projects around the town and participated in two Eco-summits organised by the Town Council and Macctastic. We attended a range of public events in the town including Christmas events, Chinese New Year events, Barnaby festival related events as well as many of the Town's monthly Treacle Markets. We also engaged in formal and informal observation of public spaces, local organizations and security providers. Members of the research team engaged with the work of various local groups – from youth groups, foodbanks, litter-

picking and community gardening. We also visited local activity groups, knitting groups, church social groups, women's organisations, food pantries and initiatives providing 'warm spaces' and social spaces around the town.

**Social media research.** We conducted analysis of how the relation between everyday security and place is articulated, debated and visually represented on social media. On Twitter (now X), we collected and analysed police tweets from 13 Macclesfield-relevant police accounts (n=1389) dating from April 2018 to July 2021. We also analysed tweets about Macclesfield and its places (n= 7660) from November 2019 to April 2022. On Facebook, public town/neighbourhood related pages were monitored throughout the period of the research, with more intensive analysis in Spring 2020, Spring 2022 and early July 2022 until the end of January 2023.

**Documentary analysis.** We closely analysed official documents pertaining to everyday security - local authority consultations and strategy/policy documents and proclamations of the police and elected Police and Crime Commissioner, for example – as well as tracking local planning applications and the objections they prompted.



**Audio/visual testimony.** We elicited a small number of text/audio/photographic diaries from residents – largely in response to our inability to conduct face-to-face fieldwork during the pandemic – and have taken hundreds of photographs to aid our understanding of the relation of everyday security to people’s sense of place.

**Deliberative workshop and local engagement.** At the conclusion of the research in July 2023, we held an all-day deliberative event in St Michael’s Church which was attended by around 60 residents together with local councillors and representatives from Cheshire Police and the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner.



We have also presented and discussed our findings at community events (for example, the 2022 Eco-summit, local WI forums, Civic Society events) and with local voluntary groups (Hope in North East Cheshire and statutory agencies). Learning from these events has been incorporated into this Report.

## What have we learned, then and now?

When we talked to people in Macclesfield in the 1990s, they expressed a wide range of concerns, some of which reflected problems that were high on



the public agenda nationally at that time. These included worries about burglary, car theft, drugs and anti-social behaviour,



especially around licensed premises and about groups of young people in public spaces. Residents were also reflected on the implications of the arrival of public space CCTV. Macclesfield residents expressed concern about a perceived decline in visible police guardianship and voiced concerns about police priorities.

The police have sat in their panda cars and divorced themselves from this type of problem. I don't think the police look at it as serious, it must be a minimal crime to them, it must be nothing at all. But it really is worrying...

Really, they want a policeman on the beat, don't they.

*(Macclesfield resident, 1996)*

Those worries have not gone away, but they are today less prominent in what people tell us about what it is like to live in and feel safe in this town. For most of our participants, crime was not at the forefront of their accounts of concerns about the town and their ability to imagine a secure future there. Local place-talk in the 2020s is not first and foremost talk about crime – a striking change from what we found in the 1990s.

Drugs and drug-related disorders remain a major concern, for example. But residents typically associate it with concerns about exploitation and vulnerability, and with its impact on the quality of their environment. People notice and often spoke to us about forms of – sometimes hidden – suffering in the town, and much of the work of local agencies, including the police, is today focused on these problems. Residents seem less focused on – and for the most part less angry about – the service they receive from the police, and more concerned with what they see as the inability of local government to care for the infrastructure of the place in which they live.

In this respect, we found that people's attention nowadays seems more focused on a range of questions that we might broadly term 'environmental':

- There is a high level of concern about cars and traffic, for example (including with speeding, poor parking, and driver behaviour near school gates).
- People spoke to us extensively about littering, graffiti, potholes and the future of the town centre that raise concerns about a deteriorating built and social environment.
- They also raised a range of concerns around taking care of the natural environment and wider planetary concerns such as global warming, flood-risk, biodiversity, and plastic and air pollution.

In voicing such concerns, people also raised questions about who is or should be responsible for acting to solve or improve these problems, and sometimes about what actions they can take, individually and collectively, to express care for their locality and its future.

## A place that people value

The types of places people live, and how they experience them, can be central to shaping their views on crime and safety and the demands they make of security providers. So, an important part of our task was to understand residents' sense of place.

Macclesfield is a place whose residents mainly feel positive about it. Many are attracted to the town, and/or actively choose to stay and make their lives there, by its various attributes. These are commonly described by residents as a 'good social mix', 'friendliness', a 'strong sense of community', and good schools, as well as the relative absence of the social problems and everyday annoyances of life that go with living in large cities.<sup>1</sup> Evidence of many residents' strong feelings of attachment to place was found in our surveys, as shown in Table 1.

**Table 1: Sense of place in Macclesfield**

*Percentage agreeing with each statement.*

	2021	2022
<b>I feel happiest when I am here</b>	76	67
<b>This is my favourite place to be</b>	54	55
<b>My roots are here</b>	56	62
<b>This place and its surroundings are good just the way there are</b>	68	58
<b>There aren't any features of this place that annoy me</b>	56	39
<b>I feel as if I'm able to move freely in this place</b>	90	85

These findings also echoed in how residents talked about what they valued about living in this place.

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<sup>1</sup> It is worth noting here that Macclesfield is not very ethnically diverse. According to the 2021 census, 94.1% of the town are white, 2.4% Asian, 0.6% black, and 1.8% are mixed or from other ethnic groups. It may be that for some people in the town this homogeneity contributes to their sense of comfort with the place. But some of our respondents also coded lack of diversity as a sign of Macclesfield's 'boringness', as if it has fallen out of step with progress in the wider world.

Prominent among the town's felt benefits are its transport links, to Manchester (and its airport), London and everywhere else. These links have enabled Macclesfield to attract and retain the pharmaceutical industry that helped this former 'silk town' to avoid the worst ravages of decline that afflicted other Northern towns in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century. They allowed it to modernize, restructure, survive and modestly prosper.

The friendliness, the people. It's small enough that people know each other. They know me, they know my children, so I always feel that they are quite safe because, it's walking distance so I can let them go out now they're teenagers. They can go about town, and I let them walk home and things because it is mostly walking distance. I commute into [...] work so that's a good link, I like that. And the hills, nice, next to nature. It's nice you can get out and feel you're in the countryside very quickly. So yes, all of those things

*(Female resident, Tytherington)*

We decided to stay here, and in answer to your question, how would you describe Macclesfield, I would say, perfectly located geographically, and in terms of facilities. It's a friendly, and in my experience, a safe place to live, and the clincher, I think, is that there isn't a school in this town that I wouldn't have sent my children to.

*(Male resident, Broken Cross and Upton)*

[T]he geographical aspect of it, you're right on the edge of the Peak District. You are on the main London line, you're on the Manchester line, it's a great commuter access point.

*(Female resident, Macclesfield Central)*

At the same time, many of those drawn to move stay or return here strongly desired the town to retain aspects of its Northern-ness, its industrial and craft heritage, its homeliness, and its embeddedness in the attractive surrounding countryside.

*Macclesfield felt like a real place, and it felt multi-layered. Sitting on the edge of the most beautiful countryside and rolling hills*

*(Female resident, Macclesfield South, long term resident)*

*Macclesfield's a beautiful town, it really is. It's situated in such a beautiful area [...] we're right on the edge of the peak district, we have all these beautiful hills and it's very lush in the town with all the trees and the grass, the parks we've got. We've got two beautiful big parks, we've got some little ones on the side as well, equally as lush equally as well maintained and looked after. Okay the roads sometimes are a little bit left for a desire, could do with a little bit of a thing, as are the footpaths. But we can't have everything.*

*(Female resident, Macclesfield South, born in Macclesfield)*

*It's very close to the hills, which is really lovely and picturesque. And it's got some rough bits, but it's a really nice place to live, I think. I'm used to living in slightly bigger cities, so sometimes miss some of the amenities. But equally, you don't get to live so close to the*

*Peak District National Park*

*(Male resident. Hurdsfield. recently arrived)*

Residents often spoke of seeking and finding a lifestyle ‘close to nature’ in a place ‘*where very suddenly, you’re in this really nice kind of wilderness*’ (male resident, West and Ivy). For many, the town is perceived and enjoyed as a place where ‘nature’ doesn’t simply exist ‘out there’ but is experienced ‘in here’ as an integral feature of the built landscape. As one female participant in a town centre focus group remarked: ‘*that’s one of the things I like about Macclesfield, that it feels like you’re sitting in hills*’.

This is clearly part of what animates the various forms of environmental activism one encounters in the town. It may also serve as a pointer to how the (local) environment, and its troubles, are more generally perceived and acted upon.

### **Crime is still a worry, but it has become episodic**

How does worry about crime and disorder fit into this sense of place? People living in Macclesfield tend to think of it as a relatively safe place. Yet, there were significant pockets of concern, and some indications of a growing sense of uncertainty and unease over the two waves of our survey. In 2021, 53% thought Macclesfield was safer than elsewhere in the UK, while in 2022 39% thought it about the same. In 2022, 30% thought it safer than elsewhere in the UK, with 50% thinking it about average. Levels of victimisation reported in the survey were correspondingly low, 4% ‘since the pandemic began’ in 2021, 7% ‘in the last year’ in 2022. In the earlier year 29% said they would feel ‘fairly’ or ‘very unsafe’ walking in their area after dark; this grew to 42% in 2022. Similarly, while in 2021 80% felt their life ‘these days’ was very or fairly secure, only 56% said the same in 2022 (and the proportion responding ‘it’s difficult to say’ grew from 5% to 31% over the same period).

The crime issues that most concerned residents in 2022 were burglary (32% fairly or very worried, compared with 28% in 2021) and online fraud (also 32% in 2022; but 44% in 2021). Some 21% were worried about being a victim of violent crime in 2022 (12% in 2021), while 20% were worried about being mugged (12%).

However, the overall sense of these findings, and the way in which worries about crime feature in local social media (Facebook and X (formerly Twitter)) and our interviews and discussions, is that crime has become an *episodic* feature of people’s sense of place – a relatively rare occurrence that may happen *here* because it sometimes happens *everywhere*. This compares strikingly with our earlier study in the mid-1990s, when worries about crime – especially burglary and car crime – were more pervasive, and central to people’s sense of Macclesfield as a place that was targeted by ‘travelling criminals’ and in need of protection from outside incursion. Furthermore, some offences that people do report being worried about (e.g., online fraud) do not feature

prominently in people's sense of place – they are '*non-discursive crimes*', difficult to frame or discuss as a public issue and seemingly disconnected from place.

### **There is (often hidden) social suffering in the town**

We found a range of widely articulated concerns about what we term 'veiled suffering' – forms of exploitation, victimisation or vulnerability that exist largely out of sight of most of the town's residents.<sup>2</sup> There are several dimensions to this overall finding. First, our surveys showed that a minority of residents in the town take regular precautions against crime – suggesting that for this group crime *does* impact significantly on their sense and enjoyment of place. 9% of the survey sample report that they 'often' or 'always' engage in *all* of the following behaviours: 'avoid using public transport', 'avoid streets/areas during the day', 'avoid streets/areas during the night' and 'avoid carrying cash'. Our analysis of this group suggests that older, economically precarious women are most likely to take these routine precautions against crime.

A second finding involves accounts and observations of various forms of vulnerability and social suffering in the town. These include assorted private harms (domestic abuse, isolation, scamming, drug addiction and exploitation) and vulnerability in public spaces (homelessness, drug use/dealing, neglected and vulnerable youth). Our research shows that these problems have – in sharp contrast with the mid-1990s – become preoccupying concerns of the local police and other local statutory and voluntary agencies. They signal a distinctly different set of calls upon police time and resources and, arguably, a new – less publicly visible - idea of the police's role. This was acknowledged by some among our respondents:

It's like, in architecture, they are paid to understand what's going on in the bits of the building that are unseen. Perhaps the most important part of their job. I think it's the same with the police. A lot of their most important work, the general public aren't to know, and they shouldn't know. That's policing.

*(Male resident, West and Ivy)*

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<sup>2</sup> We owe this term to the work of French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu. In *The Weight of the World* (Polity, 1999), Bourdieu and colleagues explore a wide range of sources of 'ordinary suffering' in contemporary society. Part of the reason for the persistence of many forms of suffering, Bourdieu argues, is that they are 'masked', and the project of studying them therefore involves 'making generally known the social origin, collectively hidden, of unhappiness in all its forms' (1999: 629).

Similarly, police officers across all ranks and roles described to us what they perceive as their invisible work, such as to responding to domestic abuse, and managing risks to vulnerable young people in respect of sexual exploitation and ‘county-lines’ drugs distribution.

Nobody knows about that. Those don’t manifest themselves in the letters that come in about parking obstructions. So, people’s own issues in their own minds are what they perceive to be the most important.

*(Police officer)*

Now, it might not be coming in as a demand to us from the public, but we have to recognise that that’s a threat to vulnerable children and prioritise the resources to that even though no one’s banging on our door telling us about it.

*(Police officer)*

Many of our relatively more economically and socially secure resident participants are aware that they only glimpse the effects of such problems on the lives of those that they chiefly afflict. This is why we have characterised these problems as ‘veiled’ suffering. They are, as such, met with a range of responses ranging from care, concern, attention, discomfort, and denial – these problems really shouldn’t be happening in a place like Macclesfield. It is nonetheless striking how the local meanings of certain problems have changed since our study in the 1990s. Groups of young people ‘hanging around’ is a much less pervasive public concern that it was in the 1990s, as we shall see below. But though people do not notice youth ‘disorder’ as much, they tend to register it as more serious when they do. It no longer seems to signal ‘kids being kids’ but is instead read as a surface indicator of neglect and vulnerability that calls for intervention and support, as well as police attention.

Sometimes I feel scared for them, I’m not scared myself. I’m scared for them because I feel like a lot of youth nowadays are quite vulnerable and sometimes, I’m like, I’m quite worried about you. Sometimes they’ll just be sat on the grass bank outside and I’m like, okay, you’re having fun but it’s very late. Why are you still outside?

*(Female resident, Tytherington)*

The same is to some extent true of people’s worries about drugs. These problems today are coded by people both as crime (drug dealers threatening the town from the outside), and as a harm to the local environment (drug detritus littering streets and parks). But our respondents also commonly spoke about drugs – and worried about its impact – in terms of the vulnerability and exploitation of local young people and other vulnerable groups.

There would be people going in and out of the house all the time.... So, it would be extremely obvious that he would have young lads coming to the house, coming to where they lived, going to the park, you know, and then coming back. And that was quite frequent for a time and then the park is obviously somewhere that they used to do drug deals. And I just felt it was sad rather than dangerous, I think. You know, the people that they were dealing looked sad and the boys involved, it's horrible.

*(Female resident, Hurdsfield)*

This respondent summed up these inchoate worries about social suffering in the town as follows:

I feel it's quite a safe environment, but there's this sort of worry about what's happening at the corners and the edges in terms of drugs and whatever.

*(Female resident, Macclesfield Central)*

### **People talk and worry most about harms to their environment**

Our findings suggest that harms to the local environment (whether criminalized or not) loom large in public concerns about the town. If feelings of security mean being able to inhabit an environment in which one's life projects can go on with some degree of certainty and predictability, people are likely to be more sensitive to objects, people and problems that threaten the continuity of that environment than they are to more serious events that happen episodically within it. From the perspective of everyday security, people may be particularly attuned to troubles that impinge upon a place in persistent and incremental ways. We term troubles of this kind *chronic harm*.

It is important to note that **women's safety in public space** was one issue that cut across the distinction between episodic crimes, veiled suffering and chronic harm. In our discussions, some women spoke about risks to their safety as episodic: they exist in Macclesfield because they occur everywhere. Others spoke of these risks as an aspect of lived experience and potential suffering that did not apply to - and was at best partially glimpsed by - men, including their fathers, partners and siblings. For others, risk in public space was a form of chronic harm, a feature of the environment that required routine attention and negotiation, such as deciding when and where it was safe to run. As one female resident of the town centre recalled:



I think it's like, stay away from certain areas, or roads. I suppose there's been times when I'm just walking about and somebody looked like they're on drugs, or maybe alcohol, so they'll just say things to you to get you to interact and you feel a bit on edge, and you avoid those places now more. *(Female Resident, Macclesfield Central)*

In our 2022 survey, 49% of women reported feeling 'a bit' or 'very unsafe' walking alone in their local area after dark; the corresponding figure for men was 28%.

Table 2 shows the results from two waves of a community survey asking whether a range of issues are considered by people to be problems in *their* neighbourhood. Here, in 2022 fully 50% felt drug dealing was a problem in their area, with 43% saying the same about badly parked cars and speeding cars, and over 20% indicating rubbish and litter and homeless people living on the streets. Concern about these harms seems to have risen between 2021 and 2022 across almost all the measures with data for both years.

**Table 2: How much of a problem in your area is ..?**

Percentage seeing a 'fairly' or 'very' big problem.

	2021	2022
<b>Drug dealing*</b>	.	50
<b>Badly parked cars</b>	32	43
<b>Speeding cars*</b>	.	43
<b>Rubbish or litter lying around</b>	20	25
<b>Homeless people living on the streets</b>	13	23
<b>People being drunk or rowdy in public places</b>	15	16
<b>Teenagers hanging around on the streets</b>	13	16
<b>Vandalism, graffiti and other deliberate damage to property</b>	11	12
<b>Noisy neighbours or loud parties</b>	8	8

\* Question not asked in 2021 (added in 2022 in response to themes emerging from qualitative fieldwork)

Table 3 shows results relating to feelings of (un)safety. We asked, 'When you are using public spaces in Macclesfield, do any of the following things ever make you feel unsafe?' Concern grew over the two waves of across almost all the items shown, with signs of drug use, speeding cars, and the way people drive or park their cars eliciting the greatest sense of danger.

**Table 3: Do any of the following things ever make you feel unsafe?**

*Percentage responding 'quite' or 'very often'.*

	2021	2022
<b>Drug users/visible signs of drug use</b>	17	31
<b>Speeding cars*</b>	-	28
<b>The way some people drive or park their cars</b>	20	28
<b>The risk of being infected with Covid-19</b>	23	20
<b>People drinking alcohol in the streets</b>	8	20
<b>Young people hanging around</b>	8	18
<b>A lack of police presence</b>	9	17

\* Question not asked in 2021 (added in 2022 in response to themes emerging from qualitative fieldwork)

Several things stand out about this cluster of harms. The first is that not everyone 'sees' disorder to the same degree, or even at all. Analysis of survey respondents living in the same small areas (meaning they are exposed to very similar environmental conditions) shows that people are more likely to perceive the issues listed above as disorder if they experience economic precarity and political disillusionment. They are also – perhaps surprisingly – more likely to perceive these issues as disorder if they report feeling politically efficacious. This may indicate that those people who care about and are active in the civic life of the town, are more attuned to 'disorder' in their local environment.

Second, some important shifts have taken place in public concerns about disorder since our study in the 1990s. As mentioned, young people 'hanging around' in public places was a prominent (adult) anxiety in the town in the 1990s. So too was alcohol-related disorder in public space. These appear to rank much lower among the things that trouble people in the town today. In the mid-1990s, cars featured in our study in two respects: people worried about their cars being damaged or stolen and complained often viscerally about the police targeting motorists rather than catching 'real' criminals. One striking finding of our research today is that - 25 years on - concern about cars features prominently on the list of public concerns: problems associated with car-dominance appear now to have a consequential impact on the felt safety and liveability of the town. The one recurring finding surrounds worries about drugs and the signs of visible drug use, though as noted above, the meanings attached to this problem have changed over time in key respects.

Let us consider aspects of these chronic harms in more detail.

### **1. *Dwelling in, and getting around, town: Everyday car troubles***

Concerns about the presence of cars and their overall effect on the social ecology of the town have emerged as a central – and unexpected – finding of our research. Our research

was completed *before* questions of urban transport became a national ‘culture war’ issue and in a place where little serious or sustained action is being taken by local authorities to restrict car use or expand public transport and facilitate active travel. These are important background factors to keep in mind.



The impact of cars on people’s sense of the town as a safe and livable place has several dimensions that arose in our discussions and observations. The first is *congestion*: the sheer difficulty of moving around (by car, as well as by other means) created by the volume of road traffic. ‘It’s a town which is not built for the motor car’, one resident reflected, ‘but there are far too many cars’.<sup>3</sup>

The second *is* the *speed* of traffic in residential areas. Councillors reported to us that this problem featured prominently in their inboxes; it is also routinely prominent among issues reported to the police in Macclesfield via their *Residents’ Voice* platform.



One mother encapsulated the way in which this has, for her, become a public safety issue:

Well, car safety’s my biggest one. I mean, I don’t think I worry about . . . in terms of them [my daughters] going out on their own, I’m not somebody who thinks about them being abducted by strangers. It’s crossing roads. Because I think that’s their actual biggest risk. So I think again, there’s lots of places, there’s a lot of traffic and lots of cars and I worry about that for their safety. I think that’s it really.  
(Female resident, Hurdsfield)

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<sup>3</sup> 45% of adult Macclesfield residents have access one car/van; 27% can access two or more cars/vans; 8% have access to three or more cars/vans; 21% have no access to a car/van. The equivalent figures for England & Wales are 45% one car/van, 33% two cars/vans, and 22% no car/van. (All figures from 2021 UK Census). No local figures are available on the changing number of cars in the town. But the national trends are striking. In 1965, there were 7.7 million registered cars in the UK. In 1995 (the period of fieldwork for our original study), there were 21.4 million. In September 2023, that number of registered cars in the UK had reached 33.6 million. Save for the building of the Silk Road in the early 1990s, Macclesfield’s road infrastructure has remained largely unchanged.

A third set of concerns surrounded parking – sometimes bad or illegal parking, but as often environmental problems and conflicts created by legal parking in streets designed before the advent of mass motoring. There were also concerns about the impact of the space given to car parks on the liveability and safety of the town centre:

So, the area that I would walk through in the day is the road past [...] And then I cut across the church, and the car park, and then the back streets. And at night, particularly if Tesco is closed, that doesn't feel so safe, and people hang around there. It's probably fine, but it's just a perception. And the car parks between that and Christ Church are just these big expanses of nothingness.

*(Female resident, Macclesfield Central)*

The other thing I noticed is that there's so much parking. I've become very alert to it because I think it's problematic. I think it's really problematic because there's a lot of things that disrupt the flow of a person visiting the town or walking around. For somewhere that's this small it's very, very car heavy. [...] a whole lot [of car parks], and it's visually unappealing, but I would say unnecessary to have so much emphasis on parking in a place that could be much nicer.

*(Female resident, Macclesfield Central)*

A final issue relates to the road safety risks created by *parents driving their children to school*, as well as attendant disputes between parents, and parents and residents. This appears to be a significant and recurrent issue at several schools (there are no [School Streets](#) in operation in Macclesfield), to the extent that school gates are routinely patrolled by police and/or civil enforcement officers during school drop-off and pick up.<sup>4</sup> As one police officer put it: *'it's chaos when I'm not here'*.

There is an important infrastructural context to these car-related forms of chronic harm. One element of that context concerns cuts to public transport in the town which have made the local bus service at best patchy and on Sundays and in the evening close to non-existent. The second is the limited scope of dedicated cycle infrastructure (in terms of safe cycling routes and cycle storage) making the town – as one resident put it - *'the most unfriendly place to cycle I've ever cycled in.'* Having observed these features of the town, we asked people in our second survey how they get around – see table 4.

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<sup>4</sup> One percent of children in Macclesfield cycle to and from school; 34 per cent are driven - <https://www.pct.bike/m/?r=cheshire> (Calculations taken from the 2011 UK census. No more recent figures are available).

**Table 4: Travelling in Macclesfield**

**How often do you use the following forms of transport to get around Macclesfield?**

	<b>Car</b>	<b>Walking</b>	<b>Bicycle</b>	<b>Bus</b>
<b>Daily</b>	50%	51%	4%	2%
<b>At least once a week</b>	30%	29%	9%	12%
<b>At least one a month</b>	4%	6%	6%	11%
<b>Seldom or never</b>	15%	14%	81%	75%

The findings demonstrate that the car dominates how people travel within Macclesfield – something we have found to impact detrimentally on people’s sense of the town as a safe and liveable place.

## **2. A littered landscape: Other forms of environmental harm**

Road traffic, however, is not the only form of chronic harm disclosed by our research. In our surveys and interviews, and on social media, residents report, worry about and discuss inhabiting an environment that is today in various ways becoming frayed, degraded and spoiled. Taken one by one the problems here appear small, even trivial – potholes, neglected buildings, litter, graffiti etc. But they are not. Their cumulative and pervasive effects on the felt safety and quality of the lived environment are significant and laced with meaning.

The signs of drug-dealing feature prominently among these harms to the environment. These materials were not only seen as littering the local neighbourhoods. They were also an uneasy reminder of hidden harm in Macclesfield’s ostensibly safe environment. In our discussions and on social media (particularly Facebook), residents referred to seeing – or in some cases picking-up – what they took to be ‘evidence of drug stuff’: ‘needles’, ‘little foil wraps’, ‘little pill bags’, ‘poppers’, ‘syringes behind the pavilion’, ‘empty gas canisters’:

A couple of residents involved in some of the many local litter-picking groups observed:

We just did a litter pick at the weekend. So much evidence of drug stuff, little foil wraps and things which must be drugs. There's a big problem there.

*(Female resident, Tytherington)*

And we probably collectively know where every drug den in Macclesfield is. Because quite a lot of drug users crawl into a bit of thick vegetation.

*(Male resident, Macclesfield Central)*

Table 5 on neighbourhood problems from our survey also indicates concerns about other kinds of 'rubbish and litter' in local neighbourhoods. This too was a feature of our discussions, and a staple on social media. Our respondents routinely described the town as 'scruffy', 'a dirty town', where one sees 'lots of rubbish in the street'. People spoke in this regard of a landscape full of 'loads of rubbish', 'neglected buildings' and 'weeds everywhere'; one spoke of 'constantly seeing blocked gullies'. 'We do have a hideous litter problem', one resident observed.

**Table 5: How much of a problem in your area is ..?**

Percentage seeing a 'fairly' or 'very' big problem; biggest problem in red.

	<b>Drug dealing</b>	<b>Badly parked cars</b>	<b>Speeding cars</b>	<b>Rubbish and litter</b>	<b>Homeless people</b>
<b>Broken Cross and Upton</b>	<b>47</b>	39	30	13	24
<b>Macclesfield Central</b>	<b>63</b>	54	47	26	40
<b>Macclesfield East</b>	<b>66</b>	51	41	12	39
<b>Macclesfield Hurdsfield</b>	<b>63</b>	51	50	21	30
<b>Macclesfield South</b>	45	44	<b>47</b>	40	13
<b>Macclesfield Tytherington</b>	<b>34</b>	31	<b>34</b>	20	12
<b>Macclesfield West and Ivy</b>	47	39	<b>55</b>	34	9

Potholes – and the generally frayed condition of the road infrastructure – are also treated as features of this ‘littered’ landscape. The presence and scale and potholes were a common reference point in our conversations about the state of the town. The worry that ‘no town I’ve come across has got potholes as bad as us’, as one west Macclesfield resident put it, is not simply an aesthetic concern. People are anxious about the damage potholed roads cause to vehicles and the real danger they pose to the safety of cyclists. But potholes also send troubling signals about the condition and future of the town. People arguably worry that if the local state cannot maintain the roads, how can they be expected to address more serious problems or deliver on any more ambitious projects:

We’re slowly falling apart at the seams. You look at the state of the roads, they’re disintegrating, certainly from what I’ve heard about what’s going on in Cheshire East. We have a massive shortfall on just repairing roads. And I think that is the most obvious manifestation of what’s going on. The libraries have been run down. We’re just not looking after this country. (Male resident, Macclesfield East)

Given this, exasperation about the road infrastructure often spills over into the concerns people express about what one might call the detritus of development. New housing development is a contested issue in the town – most obviously in respect of the proposed development on Dane Moss peatland,<sup>5</sup> but also more generally. What we observed in the stated objections is not a blanket refusal to accommodate new housing (our survey in fact shows support for more affordable housing), but, rather, a lack of trust in the willingness or capacity of authorities to make proper infrastructural provision for the town’s growth. There also exists deeply-felt concern about the impact of new development on the local environment and planetary climate futures. (Campaigns against housing developments at Danes Moss and similar sites refer to them as ‘Our Amazon Forest’.) This is echoed on local social media where people commonly register worries about housing developments that go ahead without attention being paid to the condition of the roads, traffic congestion, the provision of additional schools or adequate health care, or the impact on wildlife and the physical landscape. In the absence of such provision, development gets coded as



<sup>5</sup> <https://savedanesmoss.com/>

another form of environmental harm. As one resident put it: ‘We need to breathe in this town’.

### **3. *The fate and future of the town centre***

These concerns about the local environment – and what its state of disrepair might indicate about Macclesfield’s prospects – are often crystallised in discussions about the condition and future of the town centre. The town centre has been a topic of local concern and debate for some considerable time as well as being subject to various plans for regeneration. It not surprisingly featured prominently in our research. Much of the attendant concern focused on what was variously described as the ‘run down’, ‘quiet’, ‘empty’, ‘dreary’ and ‘declining’ state of the town centre, and the sense of abandonment that is currently felt to pervade it. The following observation captures well this ambivalent feeling towards the current state of the town.

It’s a town of two halves really. On the surface it can look quite nice. It’s hilly. It’s surrounded by beautiful countryside, the cobbled streets, quite a few old buildings there. But if you scrape beath the surface, you see there’s an awful lot of decline. I think it just looks really sad. It looks really sad having lots of empty shops. It creates a sense of dereliction. So that’s the prevailing atmosphere.  
*(Male resident, East Macclesfield)*

The sense of a littered landscape is part of these troubled observations about the present condition of the town centre. But harms of ‘litter’ here also encompass empty shop fronts, disused premises, and neglected buildings (some of which now offer informal shelter to those without stable accommodation). During our research, these worries were brought to a head for many residents by the closure (and partial relocation to an out-of-town shopping development) of Marks & Spencer – one of the last major retail outlets in the centre of Macclesfield. One local professional reflected on this:

Marks & Spencer is shut now, and it just looks really rubbish. I don’t know if people can make things happen, but going up Mill Lane and walking up towards the town hall is getting more and more depressing and amore empty. And why would you go there if there’s that sense that this is all getting a bit fractured socially. So, that’s what I’m really, really worried about. *(Female resident Macclesfield central)*



The question of what has happened to Macclesfield town centre – and what to do about it – is clearly a local instance of a national story (though people would often remark that other towns in the region appeared to be faring better). Town centres across England are facing considerable challenges is the face of prolonged austerity and changing patterns of consumption and leisure. There is ongoing (local) debate about what might be done to spark regeneration: changes to planning laws, or reducing business rates, or the cost of parking. In the face of this challenge – how to regenerate and sustain the town centre in ways that cater to the aspirations, needs and budgets of all (rather than some) age and socio-economic groups in Macclesfield – we asked respondents for their own fears and hopes in this regard. Here is a small sample of what they said:



I think that litter, along with some of the shops closing, gives people the idea that this is going to fall into one of these ghost towns that's just going to be full of drug addicts and charity shops. *(Female resident, Macclesfield central)*

It really does need planners with imagination. Particularly as town centres right across the land are going through this critical moment, where big chain stores are moving out because of online demand. It gives opportunity, possibly. *(Male resident, Hurdsfield)*

And, yes, we've had a lot of chain stores close recently, but we've also got a lot of independents that continue to thrive and to carry on popping up. And I think there's quite a strong ethos with a lot of Macclesfield residents to support the local independents. I think that's really quite important to a lot of us. *(Female resident, Macclesfield Central)*

From my own perspective, it's really about a town which is easy to travel around on foot, or by bicycle. And where nobody's frightened of using our streets, and a town where streets are caring communities, rather than rat runs with speeding traffic. *(Male resident, Macclesfield West and Ivy)*

## People take an active part in the care and repair of the environment

One key finding of our research is that people do not merely respond to worries about crime, or forms of social suffering, or harms in and to their environment, by demanding action from relevant authorities – though they do make such demands, as we shall see. People’s investment in place also gives rise to various practices of active care and repair among residents, which we have observed, and whose value (and limits) it is important to understand.



One local professional described Macclesfield as a town of ‘doers and volunteers’ and summed up the picture in the town as follows:

There is quite a thriving third sector base in Macclesfield, there’s lots of organisations who work together. There’s a Macclesfield food partnership that’s been set up, they offer different types of food provision, but they all work together so they don’t duplicate, and they help each other out. The churches are very heavily involved in community work in Macclesfield, more so I would say than in any other area. *(Third sector professional)*

One sign of the changing landscape of concern and sentiment in the town concerns the fate of one such form of active citizenship: neighbourhood watch. In the mid-1990s when property crime was historically high and a key local concern, Neighbourhood Watch was active in the town – we spoke to several neighbourhood watch groups and coordinators in our first study. We encountered very little evidence that Neighbourhood Watch is a form of active citizenship in town today – though some of the work it performed no doubt now takes place on local WhatsApp or Nextdoor groups. Other groups concerned with safety do exist in the town today. Street Angels is one example, though their purpose lies more in caring for the vulnerable in public space than controlling disorderly people. Age Concern is another, though their work in preventing various forms of internet crime (bank fraud, romance-scaming etc.) is indicative of the ways the crime threat has changed in the last quarter of a century.

But these groups form part of what we found to be a rich network of groups and volunteers in local civil society concerned broadly with the everyday security of people and environments – if we re-think security as being intimately to do with the care and

repair of infrastructure and of valued things. We might broadly categorise these active components of local civil society along the following lines:

### ***Care for the vulnerable***

Residents were aware of, and valued, local groups/organisations that provide services for vulnerable groups (for example, Food Pantries and Foodbanks, Cheshire Streetwise, Cre8 Youth and Community Programme, Just Drop In, Space4Autism, Cheshire East Hospice, Disability Information Bureau, Reach Out and Recover, Cheshire without Abuse, Pearls of Cheshire, as well as Street Angels and the work of Hope in North East Cheshire). Grow Macclesfield uses the community allotment and other initiatives at different locations around the town to provide an educational and social space for a number of vulnerable communities. We also came across agile responses to new vulnerabilities such as Warm Space initiatives during the cost-of-living crisis in winter 2023 and new groups/provision emerging, such as the Weston Community Hub.

### ***Care for the environment***

Many residents were aware of or participated in activities by local groups campaigning or acting on a range of environmental and sustainability issues, groups acting locally but with a planetary sensibility. These included some Macclesfield specific groups such as Macctastic, Save Dane Moss, Grow Macclesfield, One Project (recycling and community gardening), numerous formal and informal litter-picks, re-wilding projects, zero-waste co-operatives, as well as active local membership of related national organisations.

### ***Urban care interventions***

Individuals and community groups are active in various ways in the repair and enhancement of the town's fabric, submitting Fix-my-street reports, participating in urban gardening projects, litter-picking, and keeping a watchful eye on the changing fabric of the built environment. There have been a small number of funded public realm projects (e.g., Castle Street development, Sparrow Park regeneration project) and permanent public art projects with many contributions from local artists (murals in the Exchange Street car park, Mill Street, in and around the railway station, and along Sunderland Street, for example).

Ways of re-imagining and using the town centre can also be thought of as urban care interventions. Since 2010 the monthly Treacle Market and the Barnaby Festival – the town's (mostly biennial) Art Festival – has transformed the atmosphere of public spaces and invited different uses of, and forms of consumption in, the town centre. Both these

events were created and driven mainly by residents rather than local government. As one local resident put it:

I think in the last decade, the only significant things that have happened in terms of the town's regeneration, sense of identity, have been the creation of Barnaby Festival and the creation of the Treacle Market, which was a direct outcome of Barnaby. And the only things that worked are the things that people just got on with.

### ***Responsible consumption initiatives***

These include 'buy local' campaigns, the promotion of small independent shops/businesses, zero waste initiatives and co-operatives, sustainable local delivery, and repair and re-use initiatives.

Some of this civic activity – what is sometimes called 'DIY urbanism' - involves making good on the absence or failure of local state provision under conditions of ambient austerity. But it is reductive to interpret it simply in these terms. Our research suggests the need to re-think the relation of everyday security to practices of care for people and place: these groups hint at a conception of local security focused around looking after the environment one inhabits, rather than simply protecting it from external threat. They also suggest the need to think afresh about the connection between the care of physical and social infrastructure engaged in by civil society and the work of statutory agencies tasked with providing an infrastructure of care.

### **People worry about fraying infrastructures and the absence of basic governance**

The forms of everyday harm documented in the study prompt concern in part because they signal an absence of effective or responsive governance in the town. The police remain important to people's sense of secure belonging; indeed, analysis of our first survey found a strong positive association between trust in police fairness and people's attachment to place. However, the visceral concern about the absence of visible police authority found in our study in the mid-1990s is not so apparent today. Instead, much of the concern about the felt neglect of place is directed at local government, which is commonly perceived to be absent, or failing in its core tasks.

Asked in our survey how often they ‘saw a police officer of PCSO on foot in your local area’, 39% reported ‘at least once a month’ in 2021, a figure that fell to 26% in 2022. Yet though the issue of police visibility came up from time to time in our interviews and discussions, as well as on local social media, it attracted nothing like the levels of anger and disappointed exasperation that we encountered in the town during the mid-1990s.



When asked to rate the performance of the local police, 36% said they were doing a ‘good or excellent job’, only 11% believed them to be doing a ‘poor or very poor’ job (the rest gave a rating of ‘fair’). When asked to identify the three things they wanted the local police to prioritize, ‘drugs and drug-related crime’ ranked highest (34% of first choices), followed by ‘anti-social behaviour’ (18%) and ‘traffic/road-related issues’ (14%). Tackling domestic abuse was fifth (6% of first choices). When participants in our interviews and focus groups referred to concerns about visibility and accessibility of the police the discussion were often underpinned with statements that such problems were problems everywhere.

I’ve dealt with some of the PCSOs. I found them really helpful and polite and supportive. From my experience, when we did have something taken, there's some... I can't remember the number, it wasn't 999, it was a different one to report it, it did take forever to get through. I just think they're under-resourced, one person at a desk. So, it's not a Macclesfield problem. Again, it's not a Macclesfield issue, we're just part of a bigger issue of police resourcing.

*(Male resident, Macclesfield East)*

I have seen the police at the station when they have certain [football] matches on, they are at the station. You do get a bit of a visible presence, when there's events, to deter crime, I suppose. It's just staffing and resourcing, isn't it?

*(Female resident, Broken Cross and Upton)*

None of this is to say, however, that we never encountered respondents making a case for greater visible policing. The following is a case in point:

I'm not advocating to have a police officer on every corner, but I do think the police fulfil a vital function. I think there is a lot of crime, and I think if the police were more visible it would create more a sense of environment. As I say, as a male, it's easier for me to feel safer, but if you're an ethnic minority, if you're a woman or if you're a younger woman, you aren't going to feel that same sense of safety. And that's where I think visible policing is so important in a general sense, but also creating the sense that there are police going around, so I shouldn't park here, or I shouldn't shout racist abuse at somebody.

*(Male resident, Macclesfield East)*

With respect to local government, we found confusion about who has relevant responsibilities and budgets (Macclesfield Town Council or Cheshire East Council) for services in the town, and widespread disquiet about Cheshire East Council especially. In our second survey, 23% of respondents thought Macclesfield Council was doing a 'good or excellent job'; the figure for Cheshire East was 22%. But 34% thought Cheshire East was doing a 'poor or very poor' job, compared to 25% for the Town Council.

In our interviews, Cheshire East Council was described by residents as 'remote', 'not caring', 'dishonest/corrupt', and 'not responding to people's priorities'. Common sources of concern were recent planning decisions, poor maintenance of road surfaces, the lack of public transport, and failure to maintain key physical and social infrastructure within the town (e.g., community centres, places/activities for young or older people, library futures, an adequate response to the climate crisis). When asked to prioritize the things the Council should be doing 'in your area', the top ranked items were 'regenerating the town centre' (32% of first choices), 'improving the roads' (22%) and 'tackling anti-social behaviour' (16%). 'Making homes available to people who need them' was fourth (12%).

The concern – and sometimes anger – was often directed at specific local authorities and their failure to exercise a duty of care towards place. People were angry about local authorities that has been starved of resources and often appear remote and disconnected. Yet, in our interviews, residents positively referred to some Macclesfield Town Council initiatives and collaborations with the local third sector particularly around greening and improving the 'soft environment' of the town (for example, through the introduction of Town Rangers).

But there is also something more fundamental at play here. What people are noticing in their everyday lives, and bemoaning in conversations with us, is the absence of local governance as a structuring feature of social life. It is the absence of an entity that is concerned with, and able to care for, the basic infrastructure of place that underpins not only the safety but more widely the quality of neighbourhood life. It is the absence of attention towards what the political theorist [Bonnie Honig](#) calls 'public things' – neighbourhoods, a town centre, parks, play-spaces, roads, libraries etc. – things that

‘we’ share and steward (and contest) in common as concerned inhabitants of a place, and as democratic citizens. As one of our participants put it:

Well, I'm coming at it from a different perspective, in that, as I say, I don't feel unsafe in Macclesfield. And I don't know, therefore seeing police on the beat wouldn't make that much difference to me personally. I think if I was making decisions on how to spend public money, I'd put money into preventative services or public services or something like that. Street cleaning, urban space stuff, but really, I think, a lot of the problems in society in local communities, come from a lack of investment in public services. Or cuts in public services year after year. *(Male resident, Macclesfield East)*



## Conclusions and recommendations

Several important themes have emerged from this study of security and everyday life in Macclesfield, especially with respect to the concerns people express about the value, condition, and future of their (local) environment. The following features of people's concerns about, and responses to, what we have called chronic harms can be noted:

First, **they span the criminal/non-criminal divide**. Some of these environmental harms are criminal offences notably in respect of drugs, the effects of which on people's lives and neighbourhoods emerged as a prominent concern in the town. But several of the things that trouble local people, and damage their neighbourhoods, are not criminal offences. Parking problems and potholes are cases in point. They may not be criminal offences; but they significantly impact upon the quality of people's everyday life.

Second, these harms are not simply viewed through a binary lens that sees 'us', or 'our' neighbourhood, or 'the town', as being threatened by 'outsiders'. This kind of framing was more prevalent in the 1990s than it is today. In our research, we found that people also acknowledge a range of everyday security concerns (e.g., litter, decline of the town centre, car-related disorders) of which 'we' are co-authors. People are often, as it were, **agents of their own peril**.

Perhaps the best example of environmental problems of this kind concerned people's worries about the impact of cars on the life of the town. Our research suggests that relevant agencies (the police and local authorities) need to **take seriously the car's impact on the quality of neighbourhood life** and treat car-related disorder as a public safety problem. These concerns suggest the need to experiment with ways to promote less car-dependant mobility – a future which seems both desirable and feasible in a small town such as Macclesfield.



Third, rather than being interpreted as harbingers of serious crime (as suggested by, for example, by the influential ‘broken windows’ theory of the 1980s), these environmental harms are typically read as signs of a lack of care and concern for the town among relevant authorities. In this respect, our research suggests that people often do not make a sharp distinction (as is common in much public policy on tackling anti-social behaviour) between **making their neighbourhoods safer and making them better**.

Finally, the concern that people express, and active care so many people take, over the town and its spaces has been a recurring theme of our study – evident in the time so many people have taken time to engage in discussions with us, and the seriousness in which they participate in deliberation about the condition and future of the town. This suggests a need - and demand - for local agencies to create and sustain forms of **active and inclusive dialogue with and between local people** about how in the future the town can flourish.

## Further reading and information

Anyone interested in reading more about our work can do so by consulting the following papers:

Bradford, B., E. Girling, I. Loader and R. Sparks (2023) 'Policing and Sense of Place: 'Shallow' and 'Deep' Security in an English Town', *British Journal of Criminology*; <https://academic.oup.com/bjc/advance-article/doi/10.1093/bjc/azad062/7408038>

Bahceci, S., B. Bradford, E. Girling, I. Loader and R. Sparks (2023) 'Unsettled Crossings: Underpass Journeys in an English town', *Criminological Encounters*, 6/1: 81-94; <https://www.criminologicalencounters.org/index.php/crimenc/article/view/145>

Loader, I., R. Sparks, B. Bradford, R. Casey, E. Girling and G. Polanka (2023) 'Security and Everyday Life in Uncertain Times', in A. Liebling, S. Maruna and L. McAra (eds.) [The Oxford Handbook of Criminology \(7<sup>th</sup> edn\)](#). Oxford University Press.

Further papers are currently in preparation. When they are published, they will be available on the project website: <https://securityinplace.org/>. We are also in the early stages of writing a book based on the project with the working title 'Ecologies of Security'.

We remain willing to provide further information about our study and available to give talks to local residents and voluntary groups and statutory agencies.

If you are interested in finding out more, please contact Ian Loader – [ian.loader@crim.ox.ac.uk](mailto:ian.loader@crim.ox.ac.uk)