ProxyAddress: using location data to reconnect those facing homelessness with support services

In the past nine years, housing benefit has not risen in line with increasing private rents and has now been frozen at 2016 levels until 2020, no matter the increase in local market rates. As such, the leading cause of the UK’s growing rate of homelessness is the end of an assured shorthold tenancy. When a family, a couple, or an individual lose their home as a result, not only do they lose their shelter but also their permanent address: a piece of information originally intended to organise the built environment but now used as a de facto means of identification. This immediately cuts off access to key services and support that might otherwise provide recovery and prevent a downward spiral into entrenchment and the development of issues relating to mental health or substance abuse that can follow. With a shortage of public-sector housing, funding, and resources, the architectural profession stands uniquely placed to use its understanding of the built environment to help ensure those who live in it are not excluded by it. The ProxyAddress project aims to intervene in this situation by connecting together existing data and systems, providing the information needed to access key services following the loss of a permanent address.

Context

The leading cause of the UK’s growing homelessness problem is the loss of an assured shorthold tenancy, with annual occurrences having quadrupled since 2010. All too often, this milestone represents a watershed moment, introducing additional and unnecessary obstacles that prevent early intervention and can trigger a downward spiral into entrenchment and, with it, the development of serious issues relating to mental health or substance abuse.

The ultimate goal of any intervention into homelessness is to help an individual make the journey back to health, independence, and mainstream society. This requires access to support services, the avoidance of stigma, and the opportunity for recovery — in each case, a challenge best faced early.

Returning a homeless individual to housing is the ideal solution, but the current crisis of both public housing provision and private housing affordability ensures that any construction-based solution will take some time to arrive. In the meantime, thousands of people are becoming homeless and entering the path
to entrenchment. An interim solution is needed: an approach for tomorrow which can make use of existing infrastructure to bring about immediate change and help those in need before their needs escalate.

The ProxyAddress project aims to provide this early intervention by tackling a pivotal issue for those facing homelessness: the severance from key services following the loss of a permanent address. Through direct dialogue with those affected — and analysis of the current postal, financial, and public sector systems — the project sought to question the nature of the addressing lens through which we organise the built environment and identify opportunities to mitigate the negative impact felt by those who are currently marginalised by it (Figs 1–4).

The project began with the support of the Design Museum, London, through its Designer in Residence programme and funding from Arts Council England. Initial research was undertaken with an extensive period of consultation, consisting of interviews with a wide array of people within the community, including those experiencing homelessness, front line workers, policy makers,
academics, credit reference agencies, banking regulators, mapping companies, national charities, local authorities, and the Royal Mail.

Also key to the research was a desire to identify methods by which the architectural profession might use its knowledge of the built environment — and experience in making coordinated interventions within it — to better serve those who occupy it. In recent years, the profession has suffered from a reduction of agency as the increasingly complex technical and regulatory demands of construction give rise to specialist roles and a narrowing of the architect’s remit.
What results is the contemporary condition whereby, despite the pleas of the architectural profession for the urgent creation of social housing, its limited influence dictates that the decision to act remains in the hands of others. A question therefore emerged: if the role of the architect is found to be marginalised in the process of shaping the built environment, can the readily available skill-base of the profession find alternative outputs and opportunities for influence in areas where construction itself struggles to effect immediate change?

**Initial findings**

Following an initial phase of interviews with a total of 124 participants, three main aspects of impact resulting from a lack of permanent address were identified: postal services, public services, and financial services.

**Postal services**

Public sector services that include confidential information still rely on physical post rather than digital email. However, in being forced to move from place to place at short notice, the most vulnerable in society struggle to engage
with this process. This means that keeping appointments or receiving vital paperwork becomes incredibly difficult.

The impact of this is felt by a growing number of people. Since 2010, the number of people sleeping rough in England has risen by 169%.\(^2\) In the same period, a 97% reduction\(^3\) in social rent homes built by government means that those who can be housed tend to be so in temporary accommodation.

There are over 70,000 households, including 120,000 children, now living under constant risk of being moved on with little warning — an increase of 60% since 2011.\(^4\) There are also those whose numbers can’t be counted: the so-called ‘hidden homeless’. These are people who move from sofa to sofa, floor to floor, in order to avoid sleeping rough.

The complexity of maintaining correct address information through such instability leads to the breakdown of communication channels and lost avenues of support. This can be a tipping point. Should an individual miss a single benefits appointment, they will be given a ‘sanction’ — the removal of all benefits for a period from one month to three years. As noted in a 2016 House of Commons Briefing Paper: ‘At present, rough sleepers in most parts of the country are prevented from claiming Universal Credit.’\(^5\)
Such sanctions commonly force a reliance on food banks and can trigger wider health issues. The impact of this is clear: the current life expectancy of a rough sleeper in England is now just 47 — over 30 years lower than the UK average and 3 years lower than the world’s lowest national life expectancy in Sierra Leone. In 2013, the Red Cross launched its first national food aid programme in the UK since the Second World War. This is an issue that has been highlighted several times by multiple government departments and investigations, yet a solution is still not forthcoming. The 2014 Oakley report into Jobseeker’s Allowance sanctions, for instance, found during interviews with those affected that the issue was not only one of service-user problems: ‘Six months ago I moved house. My work program has my new address, along with the job centre, but they sent the letter to my old address. I found this out when I got a letter from DWP saying I was sanctioned.’

This underlying issue can be seen raised again in a subsequent House of Commons Committee Report: ‘In areas of high transience, with significant vulnerable populations, reliance upon written communication is problematic given that postal addresses often become rapidly out-of-date’ [...] A lot of them though, more of them, were wrong addresses … the biggest issue was about information flows not being correct.’

At present, the best option for those who find themselves homeless is an ad-hoc system of disparate efforts to provide ‘care of’ addresses. These are often found in homeless shelters or at Job Centre Plus locations. However, this arrangement is unsustainable for multiple reasons.

First, the Department for Work and Pensions has already undertaken a significant reduction in the national presence of Job Centres, having reduced their estate by 17% since 2010 — and is aiming to reduce by a further 20% by 2020. The impact of this on those who rely on a Job Centre for collection of mail is that the frequent — often long — journeys into city centre areas where such locations are typically found are made even longer and exclude those who are already struggling to make such a trip, either financially or physically. Any resulting drop in attendance and collection of mail introduces the risk that important letters will be missed, again leading to further sanctions (Figs 5–8).

Similarly, for those who rely on the care-of address at a homeless shelter, significant obstacles are found in the sheer amount of resource required to manage post for both present and legacy clients. In one interview with Glass Door — a day shelter based in Chelsea, London — they were found to be receiving thousands of pieces of mail each month for individuals who had since moved on. In one case, a client’s mail was received without collection for over seven years. He was ultimately declared legally deceased before later returning to the shelter unaware of his status.

Another enduring problem with using care-of addresses is the impact of stigma. For those applying for employment through a shelter’s care-of address, the label of homelessness is a major barrier to consideration. Several shelters interviewed had attempted to aid the situation by asking service users to omit the shelter name from the address; however this raised its own difficulties. The Passage, London’s largest voluntary sector resource for homeless and vulnerable
people, met with this very issue. Having removed the address from its users’ job applications, a large number of responses were sent to the adjacent building whose owners soon threatened legal action unless they reinstated it. As such, the clients at The Passage are no longer able to apply for the majority of employment opportunities with any expectation of a reply.

Public sector services
Services and support issued by central and local government are key to inclusion, yet the lack of an address sees these largely placed out of reach. Even such fundamental provisions as a library card or driving licence are no longer available: ‘The DVLA cannot change an address to “no fixed abode.” To proceed with an application you will either need to provide a permanent residential address or alternatively a postal address where you can be contacted.’

When added up, the removal of such services constitutes an impossible obstacle to the already-challenging task of recovery. New legislation has been introduced to tackle the rising issue of homelessness. The Homelessness Reduction Act received Royal Assent in April 2017 and came into force in April 2018. This legislation imposes additional duties on local authorities to
actively take steps to prevent households at risk of homelessness from tipping into crisis. However, since 2010, councils have also faced central government funding cuts of 38% on average.\textsuperscript{14} By 2020, this ‘revenue support grant’ is set to be phased out altogether\textsuperscript{15} and business rates revenue is also set to be kept locally by councils rather than being redistributed according to need. This will mean disproportionally large revenue losses for the poorest areas.\textsuperscript{16} Ultimately, councils are being asked to do more with less, raising the question of how these duties can be met with limited resources.

In recognition of this dilemma, in 2017 the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) announced £20 million of funding for a Trailblazer programme intended to identify and develop innovative approaches to preventing and relieving homelessness.

Should such approaches be found, the effect for local authorities could be significant. It is estimated that each case of homelessness costs between £24−30,000 per person up to an estimated combined total of £1 billion annually.\textsuperscript{17} Interventions that help prevent entrenchment before it occurs would not only help local authorities financially, but also allow for more focused efforts on existing cases.
Financial sector services

Financial exclusion can have a crippling effect on those facing poverty and displacement. It often incurs significant financial costs, for example, in the case of those without bank accounts often having to pay around 10% more in fees when cashing a cheque. The inability to engage financially while in a position of vulnerability not only increases the likelihood of an individual struggling to recover but, for those who do, the lack of information during an itinerant period means that there is significant delay before many basic financial services can be attained. Eligibility is dependent on accurate records of both the present and the recent past.

Through the Financial Conduct Authority (FCA), the UK Government has a policy goal to eradicate — as far as possible — financial exclusion in all forms. This issue mainly affects poorer sections of society who do not have access to things like bank accounts, loans, or overdrafts, damaging the individual’s ability to grow financially and develop independence.

This conflict between policing of new accounts and encouragement of more accounts through various methods, including for example, government paying many social benefits through a bank, is at the core of the difficulties being
experienced. Key areas of guidance exist on this matter, with one such example being the Joint Money Laundering Steering Group guidance:

Where an applicant produces non-standard documentation, staff should be discouraged from citing the [Money Laundering] Regulations as an excuse for not opening an account without giving proper consideration to the evidence available, referring up the line for advice as necessary. It may be that at the conclusion of that process a considered judgement may properly be made that the evidence available does not provide a sufficient level of confidence that the applicant is who he claims to be, in which event a decision not to open the account would be fully justified. Firms should bear in mind that the ML Regulations are not explicit as to what is and is not acceptable evidence of identity.18

This ambiguity is the source of much difficulty in the financial sector. While the FCA strongly encourages banking institutions to actively seek to provide banking services to those unable to meet typical regulatory checks, it is the banks themselves that are liable for ensuring no fraud regulations are broken.

Given that the target demographic does not provide a particularly profitable source of custom, the risk — though low — remains too high to be of interest to many institutions. Through extensive interviews with banks and regulators, it was concluded that what is needed is an intermediary source of data to
provide enough background to meet Anti Money Laundering (AML), Know Your Customer (KYC), and Countering Terrorist Financing (CTF) regulations without imparting undue risk onto those providing the financial services.

Case studies

'Simon', 31, Manchester
Simon became homeless following the loss of his job. Without the income to pay his rent, he was evicted. As a result of falling into arrears, he was deemed ‘intentionally homeless’ by his local authority and therefore not eligible for any housing support. Using paid night shelters, he found it difficult to maintain a routine. One day he was 8 minutes late for a Job Centre interview, causing him to be sanctioned for a month. Without income, he was forced into using food banks and sleeping rough.

That first time I tried to speak to someone and I couldn’t give them an address it felt like a light had been turned off; like nobody could see me anymore. When I had my flat it was tough but at least I was a person. Since I got kicked out, it’s like nobody wants to know. I can’t even get ID. I feel like a ghost.

'Oscar', 41, London
Oscar entered homelessness following the breakdown of his marriage. Based in London, he stayed in a friend’s spare room for several weeks before being kicked out.

I get my post here [a day centre] most of the time. They’re good here, they keep it all for me. But it’s not great for getting a job. You should try applying somewhere with ‘Homeless Shelter’ in your address. They judge you before they even know you. Don’t give you a chance.

'Mike', 28, Devon
Mike fell into homelessness following the death of both of his parents. Without widespread homeless services in Devon, he moved to London to seek support. Though his father was from London, Mike was not considered to have a ‘local connection’ or to be of ‘priority need’ and so was not entitled to housing. He has slept rough or sofa-surfed for the last 9 years.

I move around too much. You’ve got to tell loads of people if you want to keep on top of it. I just can’t, it’s too much. I’m beyond it now. Can’t see a way out. Maybe if I’d had an address: a friend’s place or something then I could’ve kept at it, appealed the decisions. But it’s hard to trust people so I just went out on my own.

'Teresa', 34, Newcastle
Teresa was evicted from her privately-rented flat while pregnant and caring for her 3-year old daughter. Due to her circumstances, she was deemed to be in priority need and given temporary accommodation while her housing application was considered. Due to demand, they spent more than the legal limit of six weeks in a bed & breakfast, sharing a bathroom with other guests. She found she was moved with very little notice, each time disrupting her attempts to get back on her feet.
Every time, we just had to up sticks and go. It felt like we shouldn’t complain — we had a roof. But every time meant more work, more disruption, more missed letters, more trouble with sanctions and appeals. It’s like when you’re a kid and you dig holes on the beach. You keep digging, working away, and the tide still comes and fills it up. There’s always more to do. The deeper you go, the more it fills.

Addressing: the problem

Having established the difficulties facing those using and providing services so reliant on the need for an address, an underlying issue was identified: that the address system in the UK, which was introduced in the late eighteenth century to help organise the built environment, has more recently been appropriated to become a de facto means of identification. And, though this conflation of location and identify has brought with it some efficiencies, by extending location data beyond its intended use it was found to be giving rise to significant issues for those on its margins.

Proposing to replace this system with an alternative one was deemed unsatisfactory during the course of the research. Such a change would require significant operational changes across a broad array of stakeholders and incur such costs as to face resistance from the outset. What is needed instead is a light-touch intervention. A question was therefore asked: is there anything within the nature of the addressing system which might hold the potential to remove this marginalisation?

The first step to answering this question was a historical study into the formation of the addressing system in the United Kingdom. Interviews were undertaken with an international cohort of experts sharing an interest in historical and contemporary methods of addressing, including the Royal Mail, Ordnance Survey, and GeoPlace from the UK.

Despite some occurrences of addressing being recorded in European cities as early as the fifteenth century, the first report of street numbering appearing in the UK occurred in the 1708 New View of London, with Edward Hatton noting: ‘at Prescott Street, Goodman’s Fields, instead of signs, the houses are distinguished by numbers’.

Since that time, street addresses have now become so ubiquitous as to escape significant questioning. However, much of our understanding and expectations of how addresses operate can be said to be based on assumptions resulting from the conditioning effects of exposure to local systems. In fact, the very notion of naming streets is absent in several countries, with the spaces between the streets — the blocks themselves — being numbered instead. This figure-ground inversion is more common in countries using logographic scripts such as Japan, but it is also present in cities such as Mannheim, Germany.

In Austria, the organisation of the built environment’s space was, for a period, mixed with that of its time: when a new house was built in a village, it was assigned the number that follows that of the most recently completed house — no matter if the two were physically near to one another. If two houses were merged, one number was made to disappear. The system of
orientation became a temporal record; a chronology of architecture without concern for spatial order. This system persists in some smaller villages today.

In a similar case, the Czech Republic finds itself with dual numbering system — where each property has a red ‘conscription’ number indicating its historical order and a blue ‘orientation’ number indicating its numerical position along the street. Should a building in this sequence be demolished, all buildings numerically downstream of it subsequently find their orientation number updated. One week you can live at number 5, the next number 3.

In Genoa, a system of dual addressing separates residential and business properties, creating an overlay of two cities dovetailed together; In rural Australia, a distance-based numbering system defined by the number of metres from a particular landmark is used.

The UK itself was found to have had anomalous moments of addressing, one famous example being a London police station located at 20½ Camberwell Church Street (Figs 9–12).

The purpose of finding such conceptual alternatives was to explore alternative methods for how an addressing system can help to order, categorise, and help orientate within, the built environment.
Indeed, the Postal Services Commission (the non-ministerial department charged with overseeing the postal service in the UK, now merged into Ofcom) itself provides an opportunity to reassess the conflation of address, location, and identity: ‘A postcode is a routing instruction, allowing a postal operator to sort and deliver mail accurately and efficiently. It is not necessarily a geographically accurate description of where a property is located.’

It was with this in mind that the ProxyAddress proposal was created. The system provides a way to allocate those faced with homelessness with a consistent address by using a resource already available to local authorities: unused addresses. There are approximately 30 million addresses currently within the UK, over 95% of which are residential. Over 500,000 of these are empty in England alone. Of these, over 200,000 have been empty for
more than six months, while over 11,000 have been empty for more than a decade.\textsuperscript{23}

Of those that are not residential, industry, office, and retail spaces feature a large number of empty properties. For the purposes of ProxyAddress, however, only retail premises were used due to the high turn-over of occupancy found in office and industrial locations. Nevertheless, with one in ten retail premises in the UK lying empty, a further 30,000 addresses are available for use. Furthermore, it is not only empty properties that can be used as a resource for address data. Through original statistical analysis of the Royal Mail’s Postcode Address File, it was found that, of every street in the UK with a number 14, 34% of these do not have a number 13.\textsuperscript{24} In cities such as Birmingham, the rate rises to 74%.\textsuperscript{25}

Though this behaviour finds its origins in superstition, there are also consequential logistical reasons. Houses located at number 13 sell, on average for £3,924 less than neighbouring properties according to an analysis of sale prices by property website Zoopla.\textsuperscript{26} The consequence of this is that buyers frequently purchase such a property then submit a request to the council to renumber the property to, for example, 11a. This added bureaucracy has led to councils including Herefordshire County Council and Lewes District
Council banning the use of number 13 in all new housing developments. In total, there are 160,000 ‘missing’ number 13 addresses across the UK. Combining these pools of unused addresses creates an opportunity to distribute this data to those otherwise unable to access it. But some key questions remain present.

First, can you use the address of a property owned by another without consent? It was confirmed that the address — with its street name and number created by the local authority and the postcode created by the Royal Mail — does not constitute part of the ownership of a property; when you purchase a house, you do not purchase the address. Furthermore, as described in sections 64 and 65 of the Towns Improvement Clauses Act (1847), it is a legal requirement to have your street number prominently displayed and visible from the public highway. In essence, once separated from personal identification, an address itself is the most public information in the built environment.

A second question that arose is how to collate these addresses to prepare them for use? Fortunately, all empty businesses and residential properties are currently tracked by local authorities as part of their duty to assess billing liability for business rates and council tax purposes. The information already exists in databases around the country. Additionally, Section 85 of the Local Government...
Act, 2003 allows a billing authority to use information it has obtained in the course of carrying out its council tax functions for the purpose of identifying vacant dwellings or taking steps to bring vacant dwellings back into use.27 Though they might lie empty, these properties do not need to remain unused.

The final key question asked was: can you use an address without intending to use its location? The separation of address from location is key to the ProxyAddress proposal. With those facing homelessness marginalised as a result of losing their claim to identity simply because they lose a fixed residence, the extraction of fixed location data for the purposes of pairing it with individuals allows this conflation to operate for those facing increasingly itinerant situations. Through interviews and historical research, key precedents emerged to suggest that separation of location and address is not only possible, but eminently powerful.

While most postcodes do apply to a geographic area, there are some used for routing only and cannot be used for navigation or location.28 Several postcode districts are set aside solely for non-geographic use, including EC50, BS98, BTS8, BX1-BX9, IM99 etc. Furthermore, the Royal Mail’s Address Management Unit sometimes assigns semi-mnemonic postcodes to high-profile organisations or causes, such as DE99 3GG for Egg Banking, BX4 7SB for TSB Bank, and XM4 5HQ for letters to Father Christmas. Every year, 80,000 children in the UK post a letter to Santa Clause using the address: Santa’s Grotto, Reindeerland XM4 5HQ,29 and these letters are all delivered with a minimal failure rate. However, the ultimate destination is a sorting office in Belfast. But — and this is the salient point — it could be anywhere. All that is required to redirect the letters is an additional line in a Royal Mail database using their existing redirection protocols.

In fact, this approach has been used for social benefit previously. Following the recent tragedy at Grenfell Tower, the Royal Mail recognised the importance of retaining access to correspondence during periods of instability. It provided free redirection services to those affected for a full year to ensure that they were not faced with unnecessary difficulties when attempting to rebuild their lives.30

Furthermore, a similar system has been used by the military for similar reasons. In the late 1990’s, existing military postal units were transitioned to the British Forces Post Office (BFPO) — a service which reacted to the fact that those serving in the armed forces were penalised as a result of not having a UK address during their periods of deployment. Recognising that this impacted on service members’ ability to apply for financial services, the BFPO enables address data to join seamlessly and provide consistency for those who might otherwise find it difficult to access key services. As the Royal Mail describes:

More than 100,000 British service personnel and their families are stationed overseas at any one time. It is very difficult for these people to order goods and access services without a UK address. BFPO Postcode Data enables you to reach all of them and overcome many of the challenges faced by British service personnel and their families when buying online or applying for financial services.31
Output: the ProxyAddress system

Overview
ProxyAddress works with councils to harness existing information and put it to use for those most in need. It isolates a property’s address data — rendering its actual location of little relevance — and uses this information to create a proxy address, giving the outward appearance of consistency, access to an identity, and providing postal redirection throughout the duration of their period of instability.

Once addresses can be understood as the enframing system with which those who occupy the built environment modulate their understanding of it, and the fact that this system is merely the creation of codified signs related to given locations, it can be understood that the constraints acting upon the address system itself are not the same as those acting upon the physical provision of property.

No interaction with the actual property behind the ProxyAddress need occur: all post is redirected within the Royal Mail sorting process before delivery and, as of the 2006 amendments to the Consumer Credit Act 1974, credit ratings are not determined by address unless individuals are financially linked; the use of the address for identity purposes has no effect on property owners or property values.

Process
As a result of the Homelessness Reduction Act, anybody threatened with homelessness is entitled to a 56-day period of prevention and help from their local authority, regardless of priority need. As part of this assessment process, individuals are given a personal housing plan (PHP). It is during this initial meeting that a user would be given their ProxyAddress.

During this initial meeting, local authorities are also obliged to confirm a user’s eligibility (i.e. their citizenship or their right to reside within the country). In difficult cases, this can often involve discussions between multiple government departments but, importantly, it is a legal requirement upon the local authority and is carried out without exception. Therefore, this stage of the process provides the minimum identity requirements needed to mitigate risk against KYC, AML, and CTF regulations without introducing any additional workload.

From this point onwards, a user will have a consistent address that now serves as an intermediary between themselves and external parties. Post sent to the user’s name at their ProxyAddress is redirected by Royal Mail to their actual, current location. Service providers sending this correspondence no longer need to update contact databases. No matter how often the user moves, the ProxyAddress remains the same. Therefore, third parties such as the Department for Work and Pensions or credit reference agencies no longer need to maintain a live contact database, offering significant savings of resource.

Each time a user moves location, they simply update their destination address within the ProxyAddress database. Owing to variations of access to technology and computer literacy, this can be done via the website, email, text, over the
phone, or in person. Any change need only be updated this one time and in one place, helping simplify the process and avoid communication breakdown. The accumulating of address history is kept securely and privately within the database should the user require it, for example, to help secure access to financial services.

Services requiring an address for identification purposes are able to use the ProxyAddress as the differentiator between separate users. Should these services require confirmation of a user’s actual location, this information can be requested via the ProxyAddress database and access granted (or denied) by the user themselves. The individual remains the controller of their information.

The database
The database is an SSL-secured collation of each assigned ProxyAddress, the name of each associated user, their designated current location, and the accumulated address history for each account. Secure ring-fencing of the information is key to ensuring the privacy, security, and functionality of ProxyAddress. Each local authority is only able to view information for users within its own care and edit only the assigned ProxyAddress. Each user can view all the information relating to themselves. They can edit their current location via the website, email, or text. They cannot view the information of other users.

Third parties, such as the Royal Mail, credit reference agencies, Department for Work and Pensions etc, must request access to view information directly from the user. Following a notification the user can grant permission to view on a case-by-case basis. This permission can be removed at any time. Third party access does not allow editing of information.

This connected information not only allows access to services, consistency of correspondence, the avoidance of stigma, and the potential for financial inclusion — having an address against your name also provides a small sense of belonging and ownership at a time when these things matter most.

Through collaboration with other homeless charities, multiple additional benefits have also been identified. One such benefit comes from the charity Missing People, an organisation offering the chance for individuals who have run away to get back in touch with their families without revealing their location. Through the integration of the ProxyAddress system, the organisation can focus instead on the difficult re-introduction process and share the ProxyAddress with the family to provide uninterrupted communication channels to be opened while retaining the privacy that is so vital to their clients.

Research dissemination
ProxyAddress was primarily conceived to create a functioning real-world intervention, however another crucial element to the proposal is that it should help broaden the discussion of the scale and acuteness of the homelessness situation across the country. For this, the project itself was intended to create debate and conversation around its purpose.

A variety of outputs was achieved. First, a four-month exhibition in the Design Museum was held between December 2017 and April 2018, welcoming an
estimated 250,000 visitors. Over this period, over 50,000 ProxyAddresses were
dispensed to visitors using data sourced from a Freedom of Information Request
made to the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea. The exhibition was
accompanied by the circulation of ten thousand catalogues, featuring an inter-
view with Asif Khan in which the wider relevance of the project on the architec-
tural profession was discussed.

In parallel with the exhibition, the project prompted a wide conversation on
the relationship between housing, homelessness, empty properties, and the
nature of addressing, including international coverage in The New York
Times, WIRED magazine, The Times, Business Insider Italy, GQ Magazine
Spain, and live interviews on BBC radio, LBC radio, and Russia Today’s main
televised news bulletin. Further coverage within the design and architecture
press included articles in ICON, Blueprint, and a talk about the project held as
part of London Design Week 2017.

As a result of this mainstream and industry media coverage, I was also an
invited to speak about the ProxyAddress project at the All Parliamentary
Design and Innovation Group’s Design and the Future of Housing Policy panel
discussion at the Houses of Parliament. I was later an invited speaker at the
UniverCities Conference promoting urban innovation and entrepreneurship
(held jointly by University College London, King’s College London, and the
London School of Economics), and asked to present the work to the Greater
London Authority.

Other events were also organised to complement the core project proposal,
including organising and chairing a public, ticketed panel discussion featuring
national homelessness charities, held in the Design Museum to discuss the role of
architecture and design on the wellbeing of those experiencing homelessness.
Additionally, a collaboration was formed with Streetwise Opera — an award-
winning national charity that uses music to help people with experience of
homelessness to make positive change in their lives. Here, an operatic
performance was organised in the main atrium of the Design Museum, sung
entirely by those with homelessness experience, in what was a first for the
Museum and a catalyst for the public to question their perceptions of homelessness.

ProxyAddress is also reaching internationally with conversations about
possible trials being set up with the public-sector as far away as Texas, USA.

Finally, live trials with Lewisham Council are due to commence in the second
quarter of 2019. Upon completion of the live trial, the long-term ambition is to
roll out the service nationally.

Notes and references

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statistics England, autumn 2017, Table 1.
3. Social rent houses built down from 37,321 in 2010/11 to 1,102 in 2016/17. DCLG, Table 1012, 2018.
6. R. Loopstra et al., The Impact of Benefit Sanctioning on Food Insecurity: A Dynamic Cross-Area Study of Food Bank Usage in the UK (Oxford University, 2016).
15. Ibid., p. 3.
19. Names of interviewees have been changed to respect their privacy.
25. Ibid.
27. Local Government Act 2003, Explanatory Notes, Commentary on Sections, Part 6, Section 86, p. 204.
31. Royal Mail BFPO Postcode Data Factsheet.