

Positive change to Business and Culture

User-centred design underpins transformation of age-friendly borough.

In 2018, Cheshire West and Chester joined the World Health Organisation's (WHO) Global Network of Age-friendly Cities and Communities (GNAFCC), and the UK Network for Age-friendly Communities — initiatives that aim to promote diversity, inclusion, and cohesion, as well as enable people to stay active, remain connected, and contribute to the economic, social, and cultural prosperity of their neighbourhoods.

**The
Engine
Room.**



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The Challenge

Commissioned by Cheshire West and Chester Council, as well as the University of Chester, The Engine Room was sought to facilitate a series of workshops as part of this partnership. Involving key local stakeholders and a number of elderly representatives, this programme set out to continually improve the lives of those living in the borough.

With a user-centred ideas approach renewing a sense of enthusiasm and focus throughout the steering group, The Engine Room was proud to play a key role in shaping the subsequent strategy of both the Council and University. This has not only been key for driving change externally, but also for enhancing internal processes and behaviours for years to come.

Population ageing and urbanisation are major transformers of our society today. And while age brings with it a whole host of opportunities and benefits, it certainly doesn't come without its challenges. With a baseline report of Cheshire West and Chester's age-friendliness identifying eight key areas in need of improvement — including housing, transport, and inclusion, to name a few — representatives from the Council, University, and local community were tasked with transforming the borough.

But the two-year hiatus of the partnership — forced by the onset of the pandemic — meant that pacey innovation was even more critical, to place the mission back on its firm footing. And, while the organisations involved knew they wanted to invite Age Ambassadors to help drive progress, tighter structure was required across the board, to form the bedrock of the partnership and instruct action.



Cheshire West
and Chester

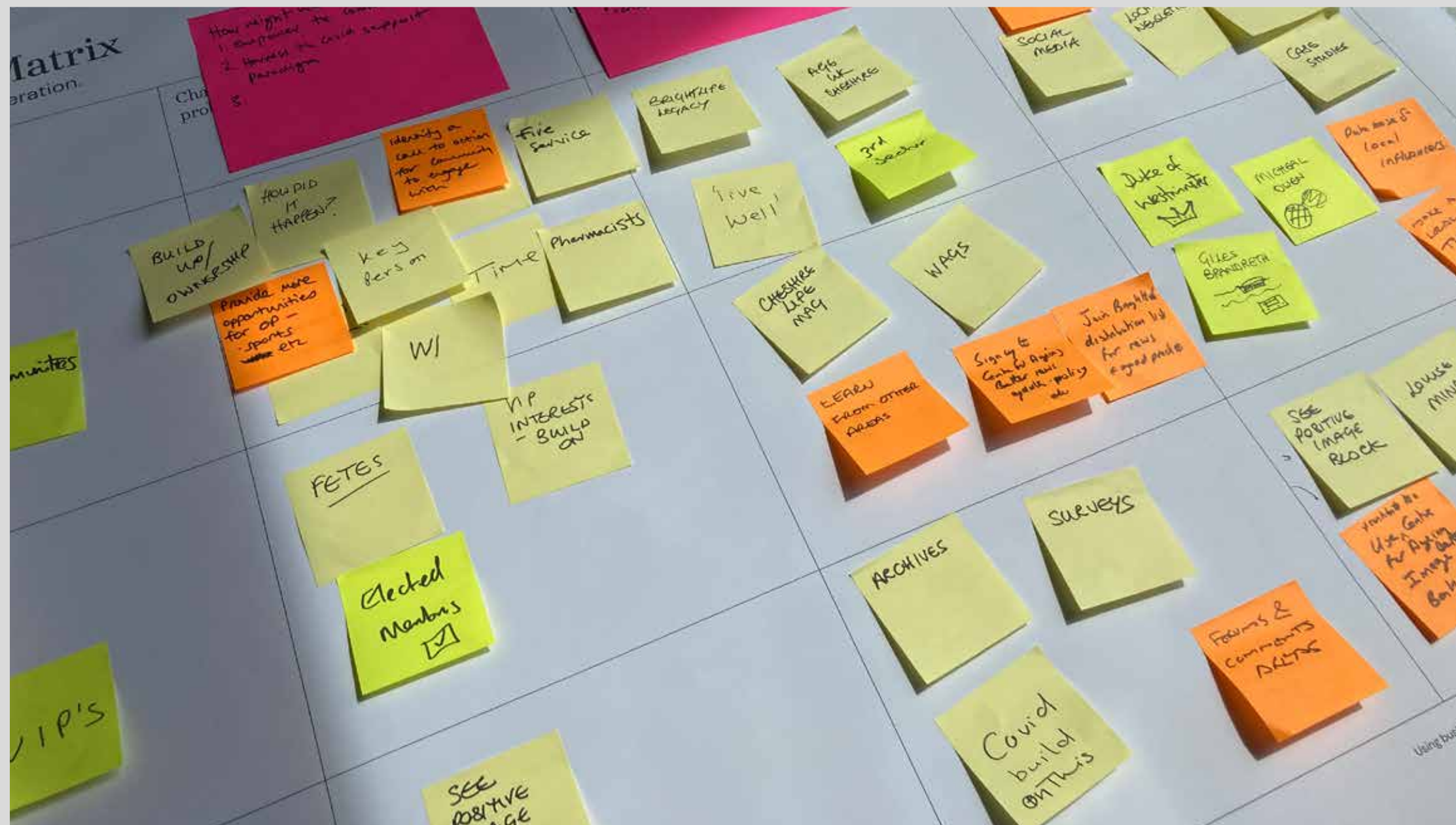
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DESIGN THINKING
collective creativity



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The Difference



Tapping into crucial design thinking methodologies, The Engine Room delved deeper into the primary challenges hindering progress, reviewed key opportunities for change, developed and prioritised a series of ideas, and subsequently created visual action plans to feed into wider community strategies.

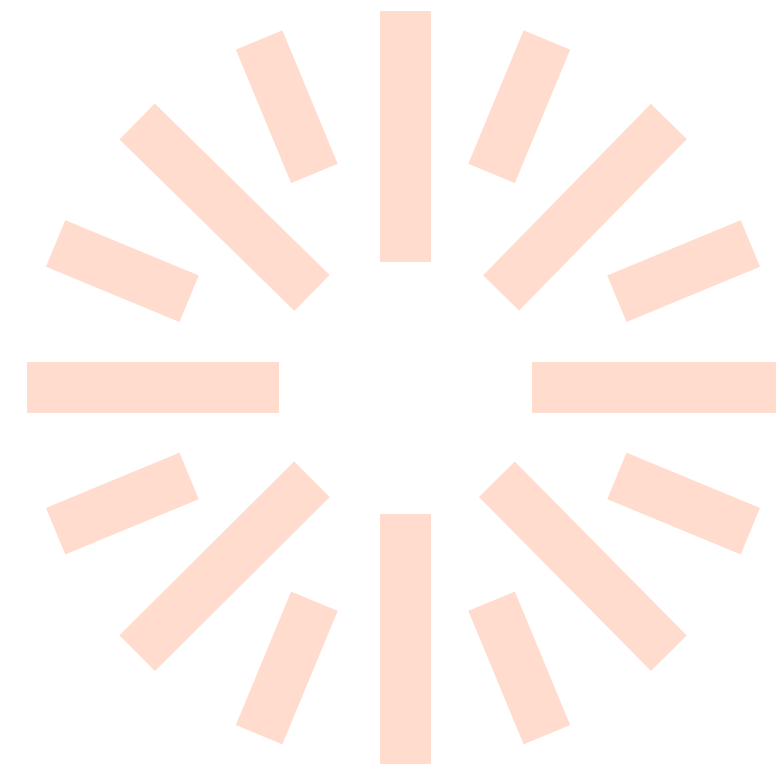
Mirroring the same sentiment of synergy that formed the core of The Engine Room's workshops, Secretary of Cheshire West and Chester's Older People's Network, Margaret Yorke, added: "I think it's marvellous that elderly residents are included, to make decisions about the borough. And I feel privileged to be in and amongst this group of very professional people."

The Engine Room's managing director, Lesley Gulliver, elaborated on the methodologies explored throughout the project, commenting: "We took a very design-led approach, which focused on collaboration and involving people at all levels – encouraging workshop participants to think quickly and 'on their feet', and look at really smart ways to prioritise ideas in a process that everybody can get on board with."

"It's only when you age yourself that you know what it's like, so it's good that they're asking our opinions as well."

Margaret Yorke, Secretary of Cheshire West and Chester's Older People's Network

The Results



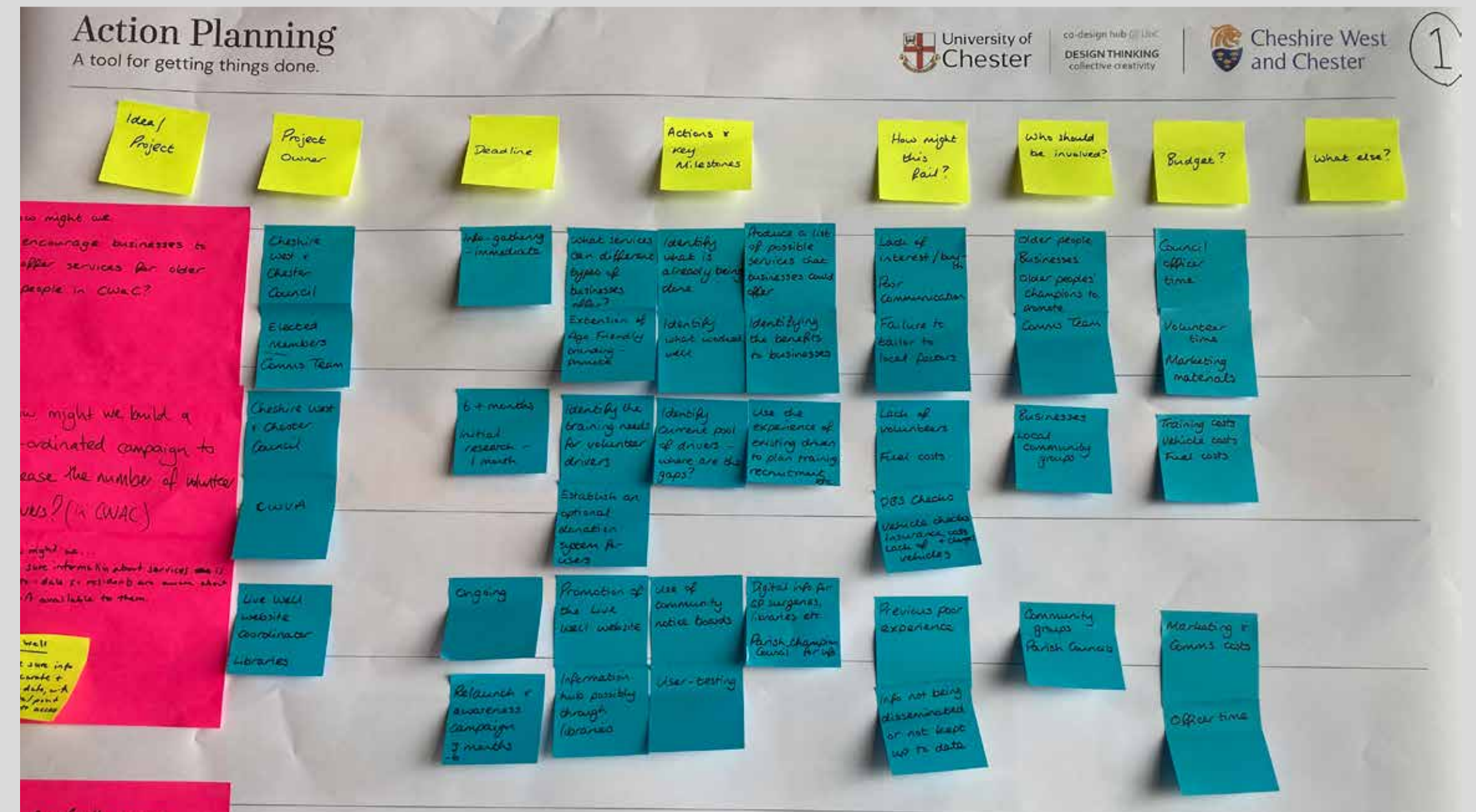
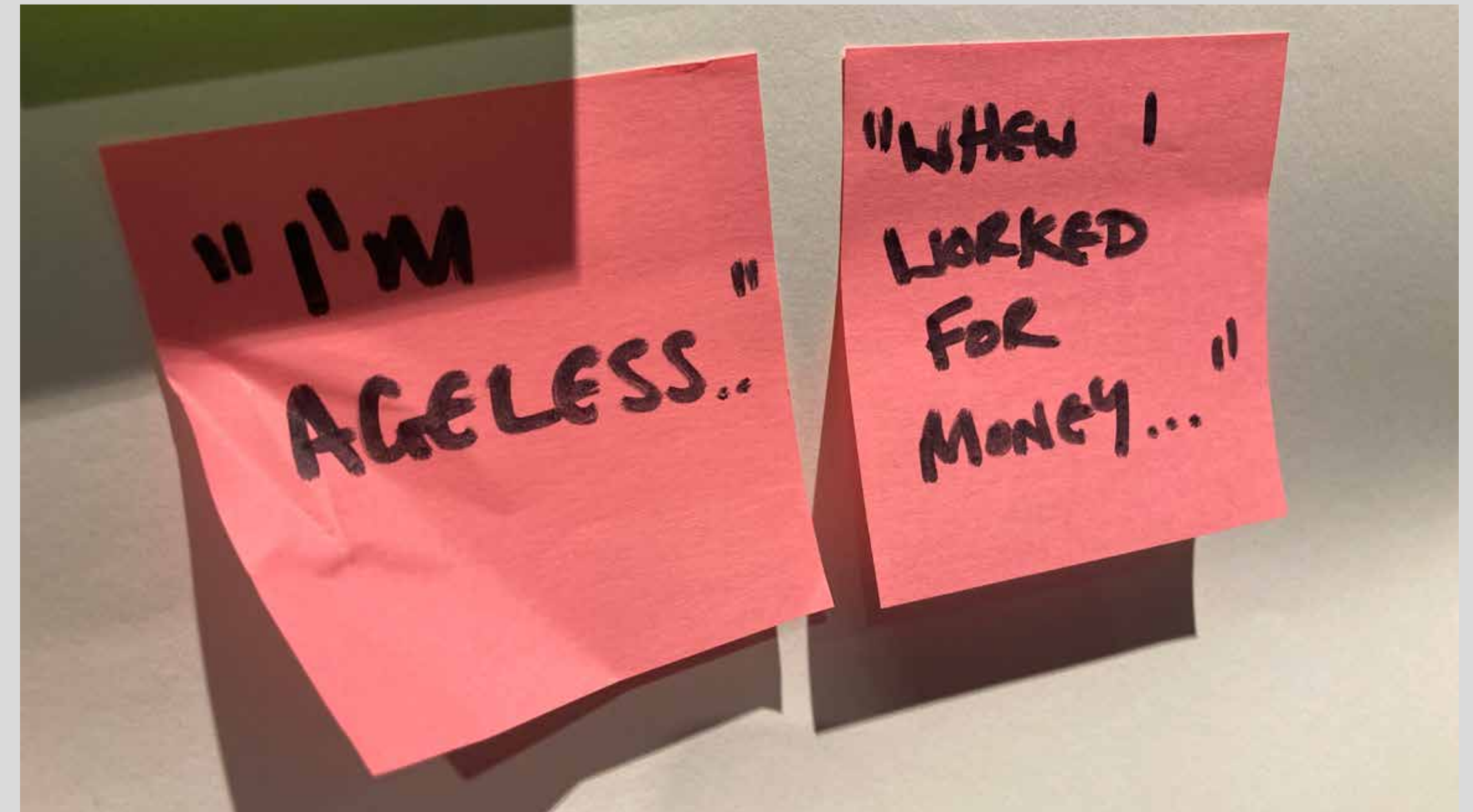
An action-packed three-day workshop brought that much-needed vibrancy to the forefront of the agenda — refocusing the steering group, reinvigorating the teams, and inspiring energy and enthusiasm across all stakeholders.

Since the workshops, both the Council and the University have gone on to adopt the design thinking tools and methodologies that they were exposed to during the workshops. They are now using them internally to address other challenges faced by their organisations, and enhance the borough as a whole.

With an action plan in place to lay the foundations of innovation to come, the borough was empowered with a tried-and-trusted approach to instigating change. This would not only act as a catalyst for current inspiration, but help maintain momentum and structure as the project developed. Importantly, the Age Ambassadors expressed feelings of clarity and empowerment — now tasked with a job to do on behalf of their communities.

“I think the commitment we’ve seen so far has been absolutely fantastic. The attitude, ideas, and energy have been really tangible in the room, and it makes a difference.”

Darren Evans, Design Director, The Engine Room





“The three days were absolutely fantastic. People have been able to think freely and creatively. It’s something that has re-instilled a real sense of direction, and everybody is really excited about moving forward.”

Dr Louise Taylor, Associate Professor, Professional Education and Research Ethics Centre for Ageing and Mental Health at The University of Chester

