

Manchester United stars Neville and Giggs tell hotel squatters: stay for winter

Diane Taylor, *The Guardian*. October 8, 2015

Manchester stock exchange building being renovated by Gary Neville and Ryan Giggs as a boutique hotel has been occupied by homeless activists.

When Manchester United footballers Gary Neville and Ryan Giggs got planning permission to turn a historic Manchester building into a luxury, **boutique hotel**, they **envisaged**¹ opening it up to an exclusive and wealthy clientele. Instead, a group of homeless people have moved in – with Neville’s **blessing**². (1)

The hotel, which will include a gym, spa and rooftop private members’ terrace, has been occupied by a group of **squatters**³ and housing activists called the Manchester Angels. But, instead of rushing to court to obtain an order to get the uninvited new **incumbents**⁴ evicted, the famous ex-footballers who own the building have told them they can stay. And not just for a few days, but throughout the coldest months of the winter. (2)



Giggs and Neville have embarked on a number of joint ventures together since they became teammates at Manchester United. Photograph: McPix Ltd/Rex

Wesley Hall, 33, a housing and human rights activist who is leading the protest, said that he broke down in tears following a phone conversation with Neville. Neville said he had always supported homeless people and had no problem with the activists using the hotel to house people during the cold winter months. (3)

“From my point of view, I’m quite relaxed about this,” said Neville. He added that for the past 10 years he has offered support to homeless people he has seen on the streets while walking through Manchester. “Thank you so much – you don’t understand what you have done for us,” Hall said in **gratitude**⁵ to Neville. (4)

Hall and his fellow activists say they can now provide support for the homeless people using the building. They are going to provide shelter, hot food, health check-

ups, signposting to other services and help with securing permanent accommodation. They are calling the **initiative**⁶ Operation Safe Winter and have renamed the stock exchange building the “Sock Exchange”, as they will be distributing clothing to the new occupants. (5)

“We are going to do everything properly,” said Hall. “We have already **drawn up**⁷ **rotas** for cooking, cleaning and staffing the gate. Everyone will be able to have their own room and each person will be able to lock their bedroom door. We were expecting that as soon as Ryan Giggs and Gary Neville found out that we had occupied the building, they would try to get us **evicted**⁸ and that we would have to look for another building. Having a few months during the winter to work with homeless people without the threat of eviction hanging over our heads is brilliant.” (6)

He said Neville’s only **stipulation**⁹ was that surveyors and other work people would be able to gain access to the building as and when they need to, which was readily agreed to by Hall. “We undertake not to cause any damage to anything and to leave the building in as good if not a better state than we found it in. I have ordered smoke alarms to keep the building safe. I even suggested to Gary that he might be interested in employing some of the homeless people who are living here as labourers to help with the redevelopment work on the hotel,” he said. (7)

The activists say that homelessness in Manchester has risen by 150% in recent years and that the local council has penalised rough sleepers who have **pitched**¹⁰ tents in the city centre. According to the latest statistics published by Crisis, 280,000 people in England approached councils last year seeking assistance, while 7,581 slept rough on the streets of London, a 16% increase on the previous year. The latest figures released by the Empty Homes Agency says that there are currently 610,000 empty homes across the country. (9)

Glossary:

- **Boutique Hotel:** **Boutique Hotel** is a small hotel with between 10-100 rooms with stylish decor that usually has a particular design theme.
- **a rota (n.):** a schedule showing what tasks people should do.

Exercise 1: Match the words in the left column to their correct definition in the column on the right.

Read through the text and look at how the words highlighted in bold are used in context to work out their meaning.

1. envisage (v)		<i>people who break into a property and live there for free without permission</i>	A
2. blessing (n)		<i>the state of being thankful and having appreciation for kindness you have received</i>	B
3. squatters (n)		<i>prepare a plan or agreement</i>	C
4. incumbent (n)		<i>to have a person or persons removed from a property, typically with legal authorisation</i>	D
5. gratitude (n)		<i>to imagine a how something will be in the future</i>	E
6. initiative (n)		<i>a condition or requirement that is specified or demanded as part of an agreement.</i>	F
7. draw up (pv.)		<i>well-meaning authorisation or a sincere gesture of support that is given in good will</i>	G
8. evict (v)		<i>set up and secure in position</i>	H
9. stipulation (n)		<i>someone who is currently in a position (usually within a job or organisation) from which they can be removed in the future</i>	I
10. pitch (v)		<i>an action, scheme or strategy intended to resolve a problem or improve a situation.</i>	J

Exercise 2: Skim through the text and answer the following questions.

Read through the text quickly and find the answers to the questions below. The answers are in chronological order.

1. What features will the new hotel have?
2. What type of clientele is the hotel aimed at, budget customers, all customers or customers with plenty of money?
3. What is the name of the activist group that occupied the hotel?
4. In your own words, say what Gary Neville's attitude toward the homeless always been according to the text?
5. What did he say about the squatters occupying his property during the winter? (Reported speech)
6. What did Wesley Hall and his fellow activists say they would offer the people who were moving into the building?
7. What name have the homeless group given the building?
8. Why did they choose this name?
9. What did the activist leader expect to happen when Ryan Giggs and Gary Neville found out they had occupied the building?
10. What did Wesley Hall say that Gary Neville had insisted on? (Reported speech)

Exercise 3. Read each of the statements and decide which are true and which are false.

1. *Gary Neville and Ryan Giggs are converting an old building into and high quality hotel.*

TRUE / FALSE

2. *Gary Neville was going to get solicitors to evict the homeless people, but he changed his mind because it was winter.*

TRUE / FALSE

3. *Wesley Hall is going to open a drug exchange for addicts in the building.*

TRUE / FALSE

4. *The organisers are going to raise money by selling socks to the occupants.*

TRUE / FALSE

5. *The council in Manchester has punished homeless people for camping on the streets of the city.*

TRUE / FALSE

Exercise 4. Select one of the statements from A-D that most accurately matches the meaning of the line taken from the text.

1. ...the uninvited new incumbents...

- A. *The squatters.*
- B. *The new owners.*
- C. *The workmen.*
- D. *The birds.*

2. ...he broke down in tears...

- A. *He cried because his car broke down.*
- B. *He was so poor that he cried.*
- C. *He couldn't stop himself from crying.*
- D. *He couldn't make himself cry.*

3. ...signposting to other services...

- A. *Signposts with the names of services painted on them.*
- B. *Signposts to the toilets in other parts of the building.*
- C. *Signs that other people are going to provide services.*
- D. *Guidance about how to find helpful services.*

4. We have already drawn up rotas...

- A. *We have all drawn pictures to put on the walls.*
- B. *We have a rota of painters to help paint the walls.*
- C. *We have put together a system for when people work.*
- D. *We have rotated all of the work between people.*

5. ...the threat of eviction hanging over our heads...

- A. *the fear of intimidation stopping us.*
- B. *the fear of being forced to leave on our minds.*
- C. *the threat of being arrested by the police worrying us.*
- D. *the threat of harassment making us scared.*