

**Defra NE0109: Social Research Evidence Review to Inform Natural  
Environment Policy**

**The Big Society Concept in a Natural Environment Setting**

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**Policy Studies Institute**



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Policy Studies Institute

## **The Big Society Concept in a Natural Environment Setting**

**Final report to the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs.**

This review is one of three reviews undertaken as part of the Defra project 'Social Research Evidence Review to inform Natural Environment Policy' (NE0109). The wider project sought to draw together relevant social research findings from a broad and diverse evidence base for Defra's Environment and Rural Group. The full project findings are provided in an accompanying Final Project Report, a Summary Report, and the two other in-depth Review Reports.

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## Contents

|  |    |
|--|----|
| Contents .....   | 2  |
| Summary .....  | 3  |
| 1. Introduction to the review.....   | 6  |
| 2. Methodology.....  | 7  |
| 3. The Big Society Vision and the Natural Environment.....   | 9  |
| 4. Why is local community action beneficial for the natural environment?.....  | 12 |
| 5. How might citizens engage in environmental action? .....  | 13 |
| 6. So, what are the typical characteristics of citizens that adopt these different roles, and who is already engaged in the UK?..... | 20 |
| 7. What are the different motivations for engagement?.....   | 24 |
| 8. What are the barriers to engagement?.....   | 32 |
| 9. What are the opportunities for policy in overcoming these barriers to enhance community engagement?.....                          | 37 |
| 10. Future Research Needs .....  | 46 |
| 11. References.....  | 47 |
| APPENDIX: Case Study Summary Information .....   | 55 |

## Figures

|   |    |
|---|----|
| Figure 1. A schematic ‘wedge’ depicting an idealised process of increasing community engagement .           | 16 |
| Figure 2. Motivations for and benefits of engaging in collective community action for the environment ..... | 30 |
| Figure 3. UK volunteering patterns .....  | 32 |
| Figure 4. Variations in environmental perspectives/concerns amongst different community groups ..           | 36 |

## Tables

|   |    |
|---|----|
| Table 1. Database Search Terms .....                                | 7  |
| Table 2. Modes of cooperative civic action at the local level ..... | 14 |

## Boxes

|                                |    |
|--------------------------------|----|
| Box 1. The Organic Niche ..... | 18 |
|--------------------------------|----|

## Summary

This rapid research and evidence review has been undertaken as part of the project, *Defra Social Research Evidence Review to inform Natural Environment Policy (NE0109)*. There is increasing recognition within both policy and academic communities that many natural environment-related policy issues cannot be framed, explored and addressed through evidence from any single perspective, but require more interdisciplinary research that embraces both social and natural science (amongst other disciplines). As highlighted by the reviews undertaken for this project, social science has a key role to play, not only in finding appropriate solutions to existing policy challenges (to which it is already contributing), but also in helping to frame policy challenges in alternative ways that may enable the implementation of different and potentially more effective policy responses to these challenges.

Unlike the other two reviews carried out within this project, this does not seek to provide an in-depth review of a focused body of literature but rather is a rapid review intended to contribute to the Big Society-related evidence needs set out in Defra's discussion document '*An invitation to shape the Nature of England*'.

Through a rapid review of both academic and grey literature, this review seeks to explore how the Big Society concept could be implemented in the context of the natural environment. In particular, it draws on a range of case studies to examine the potential for collective community action for the protection, restoration and management of local natural environments, and considers how such action may be facilitated by a range of actors, including businesses, existing civil society organisations, and local and central government.

The following questions are explored within the review and are presented in summary here.

- (1) ***Are visions and ideas emerging in the literature about how the Big Society concept relates in practice to the protection of the natural environment?*** Despite a significant amount of emerging grey literature on the Big Society, relatively little directly considers the Big Society in the context of the natural environment. The exception is the Rural Economy and Land Use Programme, which published a formal response to Defra's discussion document, emphasising the importance of: supporting and mobilising volunteers; establishing new types of formal community groups; and developing awareness-raising campaigns to promote environmental messages. In addition to this, a number of organisations have highlighted Big Society-related approaches and mechanisms which could be transferable to the natural environment context. Together these sources present a vision of empowered communities within a Big Society which are well-placed to lead localised policy-making and action, but all emphasise their need for focused help and support to do so.
- (2) ***Why is community-led action believed to be beneficial for the natural environment?*** There is increasing awareness amongst research, practitioner and policy communities that many of today's intractable political challenges cannot be solved by the state and market alone. Where social and environmental solutions rely on changes in the lifestyles of communities and individuals, it is increasingly apparent that the best people to design, organise and catalyse this may often be the communities themselves; not only are they more likely to recognise local needs and local pools of

social capital, but they also bring a knowledge of how existing spaces and relationships work, enabling them to identify and implement more appropriate, socially acceptable and cooperative solutions. Understanding how best to combine such local knowledge with ecological expertise may be central to achieving the nationwide resilient ecological network called for by Professor Sir John Lawton in 'Making Space for Nature'.

- (3) **What types of environmental action could communities engage in?** The review identified multiple spheres of cooperative civic action for the environment, broadly classified as: community-led campaigns, activism or advocacy; collective action linked to sustainable lifestyles (including community recycling, transport, energy, or food growing initiatives); and collective action linked to the protection, maintenance, monitoring and/or restoration of community green spaces and other local natural environments. Within these spheres of action, it was possible to identify a range of roles which citizens may adopt. It is clear that different people are likely to prefer different roles and different levels of engagement; some may catalyse the initial diffusion of a new community initiative, others may prefer just to feed into decision-making panels when invited, and others may wish simply to volunteer time and labour to facilitate its practical implementation. This array of roles and spheres of activity provides a multitude of different engagement opportunities, catering for the needs, skills, interests and capacities of diverse community members.
- (4) **Who already acts at the community level to protect the natural environment?** Whilst significant understanding has developed in recent years about the typical profiles of people adopting *personal* pro-environmental behaviour change, far less is known about those engaged in community *collective* action for the environment. For a long time, the environment movement was seen as a white, able-bodied, middle-class, preservationist movement, holding little salience for many minority groups, such as Black Asian Minority Ethnic and Refugee (BAMER) groups, older adults, the disabled or the very young. However, a gradual change has been observed in the last 20 years or so, largely through the emergence of the environmental justice movement. Consequently a much more diverse picture of engagement is increasingly apparent, though overall levels of collective engagement across the population (or interest in being engaged) remain relatively low. However, the focus of most existing survey information is on *personal behaviours* and individual values rather than specific *community-based* environmental actions and the shared values that may underpin those. This complicates efforts to gain a clear picture of the diversity of collective engagement at present.
- (5) **What or who motivates this action?** When considering motivations for volunteering or engaging in community action at the community level, it is important to distinguish between motivations for *initial* engagement, and motivations for *lasting* commitment; motivations often change over time and this has important implications for ensuring the sustainability of community initiatives. Initial motivations may include: environmental or pro-social values; place attachment; the desire for personal development; social contact and networks; personal health and wellbeing benefits; and a small number of external triggers. The benefits gained from such experiences often serve to reinforce initial motivations ensuring longer-lasting commitment. Three factors, in particular, are thought to influence engagement longevity; (1) the satisfaction of seeing tangible environmental and social community outcomes; (2) forming strong social ties and relationships; and (3) ensuring engagement experiences match prior expectations, needs, abilities and interests.

- (6) ***What are the barriers that prevent community engagement?*** Whilst there are clearly many factors encouraging involvement, levels of engagement in natural environment volunteering or community groups remain relatively low in the UK. Commonly cited barriers to participation include: a lack of knowledge or awareness of opportunities; lack of confidence; practical constraints such as transport availability or health concerns; lack of time and busy lives; existing regulations; challenges in partnership working; short-term funding streams; and a lack of opportunities of interest.
- (7) ***What are the policy opportunities for working with different actors to overcome such barriers and encourage wider community engagement in natural environment protection?*** It is not the intention of this review to highlight 'best practice' initiatives to be rolled out in every community; this would risk undermining the core argument behind the value of local solutions tailored to local issues. Rather this review explores how government might work with multiple actors to help create the conditions in which community initiatives and enthusiasm can flourish.

Key findings here include: (1) engagement is likely to be more widespread in initiatives that address both environmental and social needs; (2) certain civic actions may act as 'entry points' to engagement in others; (3) existing national surveys could be adapted to gain a better understanding of who is currently engaging in collective civic actions for the environment; (4) the need to highlight clear and consistent goals for communities to work towards without prescribing the process; (5) make it fun; (6) celebrate achievements; (7) understand the motivations, needs, expectations and interests of those involved from the outset; (8) ensure appropriate outreach; (9) use social network mapping to understand and engage the community, and identify their valued spaces; (10) reframe local spaces as community assets; (11) the potential to use art to encourage community ownership of a local natural environment or green space; (12) provide appropriate funding opportunities; (13) the potential to complement mainstream grant funding with challenge-based funds in order to catalyse grassroots innovation in particular areas; (14) the need to create more opportunities for civic engagement; (15) consider new incentives for civic engagement; (16) support the use of Web 2.0 tools to enable communities to co-ordinate their activities, share ideas and experiences, and form valuable partnerships that will enable them to achieve desired social and environmental goals; (17) develop low-cost approaches for evaluating community-led initiatives in order to monitor environmental and social outcomes and facilitate shared learning; (18) address regulatory barriers to innovation; and (19) work with agents of social change to enable wider engagement.

Overall, this review has highlighted that communities often have the appetite to engage, but they need support, information, advice, resources and time to do so.

## 1. Introduction

This is the third review undertaken as part of the project, *Defra Social Research Evidence Review to inform Natural Environment Policy (NE0109)*. Unlike the other two reviews carried out within the project, this does not seek to provide an in-depth review of a focused body of literature but rather is a rapid review intended to contribute to some of the evidence needs for the Natural Environment White Paper.

A diverse range of questions were set out in a discussion document launched in July 2010 by Defra Secretary of State, Caroline Spelman, *'An invitation to shape the Nature of England'* (Defra, 2010a). This review seeks to contribute to the Big Society-related questions by identifying empirical examples in both the academic and grey literature of how the Big Society concept is already being implemented in the context of the natural<sup>1</sup> environment. It aims to explore the potential for collective community action for the protection, restoration and management of local natural environments and to consider how such action may be facilitated by a range of actors, including businesses, existing civil society organisations, and local and central government.

The key questions of interest for the review include:

- (1) Are visions and ideas emerging in the literature about how the Big Society concept relates in practice to the protection of the natural environment?
- (2) Why is community-led action believed to be beneficial for the natural environment?
- (3) What types of environmental action could communities engage in?
- (4) Who already acts at the community level to protect the natural environment?
- (5) What or who motivates this action?
- (6) What are the barriers that prevent community engagement?
- (7) What are the policy opportunities for working with different actors to overcome such barriers and encourage wider community engagement in natural environment protection?

This review explores emerging visions and ideas about the Big Society in a natural environment setting, sets out the rationale behind the drive for community-led action for the natural environment, and then proceeds to address the remaining questions about what forms such action could take, who is already engaged, their motivations, barriers to engagement, and policy opportunities for facilitating wider engagement. A brief description of the methodology adopted in the review is provided below.

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<sup>1</sup> A broad interpretation of 'natural environment' is adopted in this review since different individuals and communities may have different interpretations of what constitutes 'natural' – in this review it is any community green space, growing space, or area in which nature-based activities may be carried out.

## 2. Methodology

This review was carried out in Autumn 2010. A three-stage search approach was adopted in order to explore the review questions. Firstly, a **web-based search** of key research, policy, and think tank organisations<sup>2</sup> was undertaken to identify emerging publications on the Big Society and earlier publications where appropriate. The resulting titles and summaries were filtered for potential relevance, focusing only on those articles which made direct reference to the environment or nature, or to Big Society mechanisms that could be transferable to a natural environment context. A call for information was also placed in the fortnightly mailing of the Sustainable Development Research Network to identify any emerging but unpublished work of relevance.

Secondly, a series of **database searches** were undertaken in order to identify both academic and grey literature from a diverse evidence base, including a focus on the Big Society but also on earlier concepts of potential relevance to the 'Big Society', as highlighted in Table 1 below. Since this review intends to stimulate ideas about the different forms that the Big Society could take in a natural environment context, it was important to adopt such a broad focus in order to identify a diverse range of case studies and ideas.

Three principle categories of search terms were used, including: (1) 'Population' terms to identify actors likely to play a significant role in community-based initiatives; (2) 'Natural environment' terms; and (3) 'Big Society' relevant concepts. The search terms utilised are outlined in Table 1 (all were truncated as appropriate in different databases).

**Table 1. Database Search Terms**

| 1. Population terms            | 2. Natural environment terms  | 3. Big Society-relevant concepts |
|--------------------------------|-------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| Citizens                       | Natural environment           | Big Society                      |
| Communities                    | Nature                        | Grassroots innovation            |
| Volunteers                     | Green spaces (or greenspaces) | Community innovation             |
| Voluntary groups               | Parks                         | Localism                         |
| Charities                      | Community gardens             | Bottom-up development            |
| Non-governmental organisations | Nature reserves               | Ecological citizenship           |
| Social enterprises             | Conservation areas            | Eco-teams                        |
| Civil society                  | Allotments                    | Eco-preneurs                     |
|                                | Rural areas                   | Eco-innovation                   |
|                                | Woodland                      | Environmentalism                 |
|                                | Countryside                   | Environmental citizenship        |
|                                | Landscape                     | Environmental stewardship        |
|                                | Hedgerows                     | Environmental activism           |
|                                | Rivers                        | Environmental entrepreneur       |
|                                | Farms                         | Environmental innovation         |
|                                |                               | Environmental champions          |
|                                |                               | Community innovation             |
|                                |                               | Social innovation                |
|                                |                               | Social economy                   |
|                                |                               | Sociotechnical innovation        |
|                                |                               | Green niche                      |
|                                |                               | Green entrepreneur               |

<sup>2</sup> Including: The Young Foundation, NESTA, new economics foundation, Community Development Foundation, Demos, Green Alliance, Institute for Public Policy Research, BTCV, Capacity Global, Institute for Volunteering Research, Natural England, Forestry Commission, Joseph Rowntree Foundation.



The combined Population-Natural Environment-Big Society terms were searched in seven indexing and bibliographic databases, including: ASSIA, Environmental Sciences and Pollution Management, Greenfile, Web of Science, Science Direct, Sociological Abstracts and Planex. Planex was particularly useful in identifying grey literature with case studies of community action, many of which were then followed up through searching appropriate websites. The searches were limited to the last 20 years of publication, since many of these concepts have arisen since the 1990s, but reference lists were also used to identify earlier references where appropriate. Efforts were primarily focused on identifying UK-based case studies unless relevant examples or key lessons emerged from the US, Europe or Australia.

The hits recorded from the searches were filtered following a three-stage process. Firstly, irrelevant hits were disregarded on the basis of titles, secondly on the basis of abstracts, and finally after reading the full articles.

Finally, **key survey reports** were examined to explore patterns of volunteering and engagement in the UK and Europe. Whilst six surveys were examined (Defra's 'Public attitudes and behaviours towards the environment tracker' surveys, the UK Citizenship survey, Monitor of engagement with the natural environment, a recent Big Society Ipsos MORI poll, Eurobarometer surveys, and the Scottish 'Environmental attitudes and behaviours' survey), only three provided relevant information specifically on engagement in *collective* rather than personal environmental actions.

Through these three search approaches, a range of empirical examples and theoretical concepts were identified of relevance to this review, which have been synthesised and summarised in this report. ***It should be noted that many of the case studies identified have not been subject to rigorous evaluation, which limits the reliability of the conclusions that can be drawn. However, they do highlight the diversity of initiatives and partnerships underway, and the potential to build on these in the future.***

### 3. The Big Society Vision and the Natural Environment

David Cameron has described proposals for the Big Society as “the biggest, most dramatic redistribution of power” from government to citizens<sup>3</sup>. Plans include new powers and opportunities for community groups to get involved in running local services. Within the Big Society concept, people play a more active part in their community whilst the state rethinks its role within this. The pre-existing trend for localism therefore pushes power outwards away from the centre towards communities, localities, families and individuals; whereas within the vision of a bigger society, these local groups pull power towards themselves and only involve government if necessary. There are three pillars which the Big Society is intended to be built upon:

1. Decentralisation:
  - Shift power away from the State
  - Shift responsibility for delivery from public sector to individuals, communities, voluntary groups, social enterprises
  - Devolve to LAs (e.g. greater financial autonomy).
2. Transparency:
  - Make information more transparent so the public has the necessary information to challenge government and the status quo
  - Actively help people share and use information
  - A new ‘right to data’.
3. Building Capacity:
  - Government has a role in building the capacity of individuals, communities and organisations to play a full part in this new agenda
  - For example, through providing funding to train a new generation of community organisers.

The web-based search for this review, carried out in November 2010, found only one reference to the Big Society targeted at *natural* environment protection; published by the Rural Economy and Land Use Programme in response to Defra’s discussion document. In their briefing paper, Relu (2010) included a section on ‘How the ‘Big Society’ can play a greater role?’ This proposes a number of actions that local communities need from different levels of government to move towards the vision of a Big Society, which are summarised below. In addition to this Relu paper, several sources provide ideas on how the Big Society concept might be put into practice to manage local environments and services such as parks, as well as how such a society might act to protect the environment more generally.

The Relu briefing paper argues for the need to rethink entrenched practices and approaches to land use, environmental assets and who should be involved in decision-making. In the paper, Relu (2010) proposes that the UK Government could promote a “Big Society” approach to enhancing our natural value by:

1. Supporting and mobilising volunteers;

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<sup>3</sup> Reported on the Young Foundation website - <http://www.youngfoundation.org/communities-big-society-shaping-managing-running-services> , 28 November 2010.

2. Establishing new types of formal groups (community action groups, trusts and cooperatives);
3. Developing awareness-raising campaigns to promote environmental messages.

The paper sets out a vision of empowered communities within a Big Society which are well-placed to lead localised policy-making and action to protect the natural environment, but emphasises their need for focused help and support to do so. The governmental actions which the paper recommends include:

- ‘National and local government should recognise and adopt community-led planning as ‘best practice’.
- The Government needs to build local capacity for delivery - for example through support for local enablers and activists, advice and training and modest funding opportunities.
- ‘Parish and Town Councils should become the ‘guardian’ of the community-led plan, monitoring progress and regularly refreshing the priorities in the light of changing circumstances’
- ‘Local Authorities should recognise that there will often be a very strong case for individual communities obtaining visible benefits, community facilities and community-led services from accepting more development in their area.’

The wider literature on the Big Society makes references to a number of concepts and ideas from across a range of policy areas which may be useful and transferable within a natural environment setting.

*The Young Foundation* (2010a) highlights:

- The Social Entrepreneur in Residence (SEiR) scheme – a person recruited locally who would scout for potential entrepreneurs and new ideas for services in health and social care.
- Maidenhead’s proposal to involve residents in participatory budgeting for spending on parks. The caretaker team has transformed the area; cleaning rivers, tidying up un-adopted roads, clearing rubbish and reopening alleyways.
- The concept of ‘top-up services’ may involve a neighbourhood council taking over the management of a public park from a local authority and could entail the establishment of a partnership between a community-based environmental charity and a social enterprise or local business, letting a contract, agreeing service standards with residents, and monitoring performance.

*Natural England’s* consideration of how to manage the National Nature Reserve estate provides an example of how a national environmental body is responding to the challenge of working within a Big Society setting. Natural England’s National Nature Reserve estate became part of a wider conversation within Defra as they began to examine their public estate in the context of the new political commitment to localism and Big Society (see Natural England, 2010). The most extensive option under consideration was to divest Natural England’s entire National Nature Reserve estate to another management body – either an existing or a specially created one. This is based on the idea that such a move could increase voluntary sector participation, maintain series coherence, and potentially deliver savings through the new body accessing Environmental Stewardship payments.

*Nesta's Big Green Challenge* demonstrates how 'mass localism' provides a new model to promote local action to protect the environment which is very much in line with Big Society thinking (Bunt and Harris, 2010). The report draws upon practical lessons from the Big Green Challenge and the experiences of the local groups. It offers a set of principles for how government can stimulate and support local responses to big problems, at manageable cost to the public purse. Mass localism depends on a different kind of support from government and a different approach to scale. Instead of assuming that the best solutions need to be determined, prescribed, driven or 'authorised' from the centre, it argues that policy-makers should create more opportunities for communities to develop and deliver their own solutions and to learn from each other. It is not enough to assume that scaling back government bureaucracy and control will allow local innovation to flourish. Key lessons from the Big Green Challenge will be discussed later in the review.

*The Green Alliance* report on civil society action on climate change (Scott, 2010) explores a strain of environmentalism which, rather than being campaign based, is founded on collective social action coupled with individual responsibility. It encompasses everything from local charities delivering street by street energy efficiency advice, communities making green lifestyle changes and many conservation volunteers managing our wild spaces. Scott (2010) also reports on a distributed form of environmental action working alongside this strain of environmentalism. Such action is not 'environmentalism' per se, as it is so firmly wedded to the core missions of an increasing array of civil society organisations. Its development is bringing together a diverse set of organisations with sustainability embedded in their work, and a sector that is future-proofing its social responsibility. The report compares this with the objective to create a green(er) Britain and concludes that the ambitions should strongly reinforce each other. It finds that it's not possible to crack climate change without reinvigorating civic responsibility, and argues that encouraging the wider adoption of sustainable lifestyles will require increased social cohesion, with people benefiting from the knowledge that their efforts are part of something bigger.

## 4. Why is local community action beneficial for the natural environment?

There is increasing awareness amongst research, practitioner and policy communities that many of today's intractable political challenges cannot be solved by the state and market alone (Dobson, 2010) but will also require significant civil society engagement, both in policy formulation and its implementation at the local level. Moreover, Bunt and Harris (2010) emphasise that where social and environmental solutions rely on changes in the lifestyles of communities<sup>4</sup> and individuals, the best people to design, organise and catalyse this may often be the communities themselves; local society groups are more likely to recognise and understand 'the needs, motivations and values of people within their community, to access local pools of social capital, distribute responsibilities appropriately and align the right incentives to get people involved' (Dobson, 2010: 55). Penker (2009) highlights the value of local knowledge and capabilities and the ability of locally-led initiatives to identify socially acceptable, cooperative solutions. CABE (2009: 3) reiterates that 'local people bring a knowledge of how existing spaces work and what the needs of the community are', suggesting this is more likely to lead to sustainable places.

Interestingly, there is mixed evidence concerning the willingness and perceived capacity amongst communities themselves to deliver such solutions. In a MORI-poll undertaken in September 2010, for example, only 3% respondents explicitly said that local people know what's best for their area or community (Ipsos MORI, 2010). In contrast, initiatives such as NESTA's Big Green Challenge, Transition Towns and Doorstep Greens (see Case Studies 1 to 3) suggest that when actually tasked with generating community solutions to a specified environmental issue, significant appetite does exist amongst community members to rise to the challenge, and many do so with significant success. What is clear from the evidence to-date is that communities cannot address these challenges alone; their engagement and enthusiasm has to be met, encouraged and supported in multiple ways by government (both local and central), NGOs and other civil society organisations with community and/or environmental expertise, and businesses (as discussed in Section 9).

The rest of this review draws on existing literature<sup>5</sup> and experience in this area to explore who typically engages in community action for the environment, common motivations for engagement and barriers faced, and possible approaches for overcoming such barriers through partnership and support from multiple actors. These ideas will be illustrated with a range of case studies (appended to the review), focusing primarily on community initiatives for the protection or improvement of local natural environment areas. In this way, the review seeks to contribute to wider efforts to understand how the concept of the 'Big Society' can be put into practice in the spheres of natural environment and sustainable development policy.

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<sup>4</sup> In this review, 'community' is interpreted as geographical communities, rather than geographically-dispersed communities comprising individuals with shared interests or characteristics. Throughout the review, however, it is important to remember that the sharing of a common neighbourhood space by diverse groups does not inevitably lead to a sense of community (Manzo and Perkins, 2006) and that a 'geographically-defined community comprises a diverse range of ties and interests that vary in strength and that are sometimes in tension' (Rowson *et al.*, 2010: 1).

<sup>5</sup> Including both academic and grey literature, drawing on multiple fields including volunteering, grassroots innovation, environmental activism, regeneration, planning, community development, social innovation. A full description of the methods used will be included in the Review Annex.

## 5. How might citizens engage in environmental action?

Wakefield *et al.*, (2006: 40) defines 'environmental action' as '*behaviour intentionally undertaken to benefit the environment*', and presents a typology of active responses to environmental concern which is useful for situating the questions in this review:

- i. **Reactionary lifestyle change** may be triggered in situations in which environmental conditions have a direct impact on residents – such as the intrusion of pollution into daily lives – and is typified by behavioural modifications that may mitigate individual exposure to the intrusion, yet do nothing to tackle the cause of the pollution itself.
- ii. **Personal change** includes activities undertaken by individuals in an attempt to personally improve environmental quality, which may have direct environmental benefits but do little to develop community capital. Such actions may include, for example, maintaining a personal commitment not to litter, or closing farm gates when walking in the countryside, or farmers changing their practices to minimise pollution of nearby water bodies. Most of Defra's 12 headline behaviour goals would fall in this category, for example personal recycling behaviour, purchasing decisions, installing insulation products, and reducing non-essential flying.
- iii. **Individual civic action** may include any individual activities that attempt to change societal processes, such as complaining to government or industry, or donating to an environmental group. Whilst this may promote individual empowerment, it is less effective in creating new linkages or social capital within a community of *place*, though it may have the benefit of nurturing communities of *interest*.
- iv. **Cooperative civic action** is focused on increasing the decision-making power and collective action of local community organisations to bring about environmental or wider improvements, promoting individual empowerment but also facilitating community empowerment by creating and nurturing links between community members. This category of actions forms the focus of this review and the remainder of this section will break down this category further.

Much of the cooperative civic action underway at the community level is currently being led or carried out by community-based organisations, NGOs and other voluntary sector groups. Some are working independently and others in cooperation with larger organisations and/or local authorities or business. The size of such groups varies from a few neighbours working together in their spare time to large organisations, charities and social enterprises with both employees and volunteer workers (Church, 2002).

There are multiple spheres in which citizens might engage in cooperative civic action for the environment, as illustrated in Table 2 below, and many will engage in more than one sphere, with varying levels of commitment.

**Table 2. Modes of cooperative civic action at the local level**

(N.B. Links to many of the examples mentioned in the table are available in the References Section or in the full case study summaries, appended to this review)

| Mode   | Description   | Examples  |
|--|---|---|
| Community-led campaigns, activism or advocacy.   | Campaigning against a proposed development that threatens local natural areas of importance, against levels of local air pollution, or perhaps in an effort to change mainstream practices with particularly adverse environmental impacts. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. The Women’s Environment Network has been particularly active in coordinating community campaigns against air pollution.</li> <li>b. ‘Surfers Against Sewage’ was established in Cornwall in response to concerns about polluted bathing waters.</li> <li>c. The environmental justice movement has involved much campaigning and advocacy work in an effort to enhance the environmental conditions in many of the most deprived areas of the UK.</li> <li>d. RSPB’s ‘letter to the future’ was signed by more than 300,000 people.</li> <li>e. The Marine Bill campaign (run by the Wildlife Trusts, WWF, RSPB, Marine Conservation Society and others) attracted over 200,000 petition signatures.</li> </ul> |
| Collective action linked to sustainable lifestyles; collective efforts to change community behaviour are becoming increasingly apparent, particularly around community food growing and community renewables. There are many examples of this type of action, and numerous key organisations are involved in its facilitation. | Community recycling schemes e.g. community recycling enterprises, furniture recycling, community composting, charity shops;   | FreeCycle, Community Composting Network, Community Recycling Network, GreenWorks, London Community Resource Network.  |
|  | Collective transport schemes e.g. walking buses, car clubs, car-free days;  | Pedal Power Recycling, Carplus, Living Streets, the Cyclists Touring Club, National Liftshare Day   |
|  | Community energy initiatives e.g. community-owned renewables, and the notion of ‘energy citizenship’ <sup>67</sup> .  | Global Action Plan’s Eco-Teams, British Gas ‘Green Streets’, Energy4All, H <sub>2</sub> ope Water Power Enterprises, NESTA’s Big Green Challenge (see Case Study 1), the Transition Town Movement (see Case Study 2), Bollington Carbon Revolution, Decc’s Low Carbon Communities, and the new RCUK Energy and Communities Programme.   |
|  | Local food growing initiatives e.g. community gardens, allotments, school gardens, farmers  | See Case Studies 4-10 (BTCV, Incredible Edible Todmorden, Growing Schools, Fairwater Community Garden, Eastside Roots, Global Generation, Eostre Organics)  |

<sup>6</sup> Devine-Wright (2006) describes an alternative view of public engagement with energy issues which he defines ‘energy citizenship’: rather than framing individuals simply as consumers of centrally-produced energy, this alternative view suggests individuals are willing to adopt active rather than passive roles in more localised energy systems. In these localised contexts, energy demand reduction can be maximised through community level interaction and local, community-owned and managed systems of energy production. Such decentralised energy systems enable households and communities to move beyond simple engagement with instantaneous energy consumption towards a more significant engagement with the electricity system as a whole.

<sup>7</sup> Bergman *et al.* (2010) provide a recent discussion of the potential for low carbon, bottom-up social innovation and discuss empirical work undertaken in this area.

|  |  |   |
|--|--|---|
|  | markets, community vegetable box schemes, community supported agriculture schemes (see Case Study 11).   |   |
| Collective action linked to the protection, maintenance, monitoring, restoration and / or other enhancement of community green spaces and other local natural environments e.g. the work of the London Wildlife Trust (Case Study 23). | Ecological <i>restoration</i> of open spaces or water bodies, such as stream clean-ups, restoration of derelict land.  | The Railway Land Nature Reserve (Case Study 12)<br>The Sheffield Botanical Garden (Case Study 13)<br>Britain in Bloom (Case Study 14)<br>The Guerrilla Gardeners movement <sup>8</sup>    |
|  | Contribution to the <i>maintenance</i> and <i>management</i> of green spaces and water bodies e.g. stream water quality monitoring, invasive species control, trail maintenance, contributing to the ongoing stewardship of agricultural land. | Pocket Parks (Case Study 15)<br>Doorstep Greens (Case Study 3)<br>Community Forests (Case Study 16)<br>Soil Association Land Trusts (Case Study 17)                                       |
|  | Conservation activities on sites with some form of protected area status   | Volunteering on National Trust (61,000 volunteers), Woodland Trust (36,000 volunteers), RSPB sites (16,000 volunteers)  |
|  | Species monitoring and amateur naturalists   | OPAL (Case study 18),<br>Bird Watch<br>RSPB Breeding Bird surveyors (2,500 volunteers)<br>Bat Conservation Trust<br>National Federation of Badger Groups<br>Amphibian and reptile groups. |

The majority of case studies highlighted in this review focus on the last category – collective action linked to the protection, maintenance and / or restoration of community green spaces and ‘natural’ areas – since this is most closely aligned with the area of interest to Defra’s Environment and Rural Group. However, the review also draws upon examples from the other categories where these appear to be effective ‘entry points’ for particular underrepresented groups in local community action for the environment. A number of community groups applying to NESTA’s Big Green Challenge, for example, did not previously have an environmental focus, but were inspired by the opportunities presented by the Challenge. Furthermore, many of the communities adopted a broad range of initiatives, not all of which were directly related to energy production and use (see Case Study 1). Many communities engaged in the Transition Towns Initiative (Case Study 2) adopt initiatives across a spectrum of environmental areas, including the development of Community Supported Agriculture (see Case Study 11) and the creation of community orchards. The Incredible Edible Todmorden Case Study (5) highlights the value of food-based projects for engaging a wide range of people, arguing that ‘there is

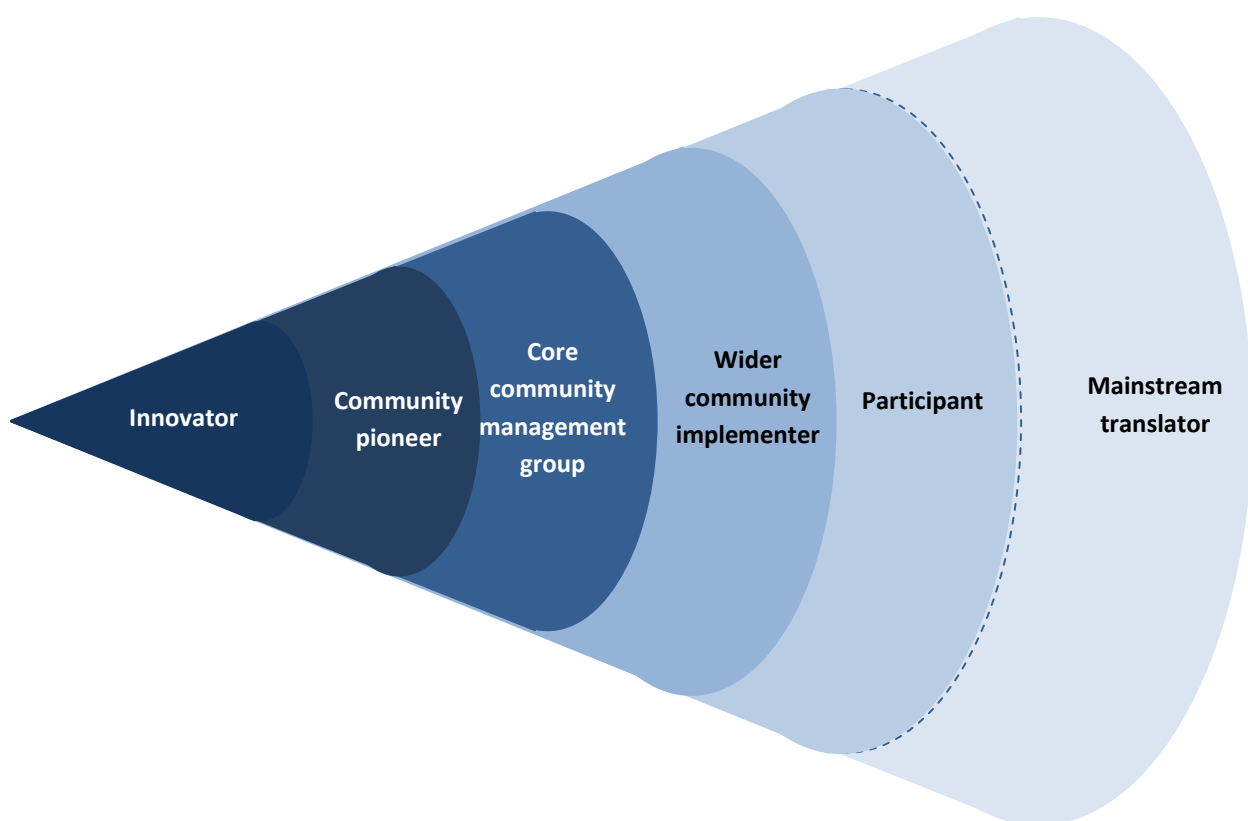
<sup>8</sup> A movement of people adopting land that has been abandoned or neglected by its legal owner to grow plants and create community gardens (a useful summary of the history of the movement is provided here: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/scotland/8548005.stm>).



something in most humans that appears to respond to growing' (Kidd, 2009). Meaningful engagement in such food-related projects may ultimately inspire the adoption of wider pro-environmental behaviours (both personal and collective), as suggested by Global Generation's work with young people and local businesses in Kings Cross (see Case Study 9).

Within these different spheres of environmental action, there are various roles which citizens may adopt, which are illustrated in Figure 1. This is a highly simplified model of a process of community innovation developed on the basis of the stages apparent in many of the case studies in this review. It does not reflect the actual complexities of the process of community innovation and engagement but rather is intended as a means for thinking about the roles and characteristics of the different types of people involved in the process of developing, implementing and sustaining community initiatives.

**Figure 1. A schematic 'wedge' depicting an idealised process of increasing community mobilisation and engagement**



At one end of the 'wedge' are the innovators; those who recognise a local environmental issue and identify novel ideas for tackling this issue. These need not be ideas that have never been used before, but will be new to the community in question. These innovators may be from the communities themselves, thereby representing a form of 'grassroots innovation'. Or they may work in existing third sector organisations, a local authority or even someone in central government looking to pilot a new idea.

These innovators will seek to mobilise and engage others in the community – 'community pioneers' - to further develop the idea into a tenable solution. Collectively they will try to 'sell' the idea to the

wider community, to make strategic partnerships with, for example, businesses or other third sector organisations that could provide valuable skills or advice, and to seek start-up funding. At this stage they will aim to encourage wider community involvement in designing an implementation plan, perhaps through some form of 'citizens panel' (a consultation approach often adopted by local government-led initiatives) or through more informal community meetings, such as community 'coffee mornings' (an approach more commonly adopted by initiatives led by the community or third sector organisations). This may be followed by a celebratory launch event, to mark the beginning of the implementation stage and raise its profile in the community, and then a series of community activity days in which the plan is put into practice.

In time, as tangible outcomes become more apparent, other community members may be keen to engage; perhaps assisting with hands-on activities (for example, in manual activities associated with park restoration processes) or perhaps through more people-oriented outreach activities, community education, events organisation, fundraising etc. Some of these later participants may be keen to shape how the initiative develops, whilst others may prefer just to assist in its practical implementation.

It is clear that different people are likely to prefer different types and levels of engagement in the process; some may catalyse its initial diffusion, seeking to mobilise the wider community, others may prefer just to feed into decision-making panels when invited, others may wish simply to volunteer time and labour to facilitate its practical implementation. This array of roles provides a multitude of different opportunities, catering for the needs, skills, interests and capacities of many different community members.

Many community initiatives are established purely with the aim of meeting community environmental and / or social needs that the mainstream consumption and production systems fail to address; the social economy at the community level often 'provides more flexible, localised services in situations where the market cannot' (Seyfang and Smith, 2007: 591). In other cases, however, such initiatives may be more 'visionary', with the community offering a 'strategic niche' in which alternative ideas and new practices may be tested and developed without being exposed to the full range of selection pressures that favour the mainstream regime (Smith, 2007).

The challenge then is to how to translate successful niche ideas into the mainstream, where practices are often said to be 'path-dependent' and 'locked in' to particular trajectories, largely as a result of: (a) existing cognitive frameworks, routines, resources, capabilities, knowledge and expectations; (b) the way specific social and technical practices are embedded within wider, facilitating infrastructures, which subsequently restrict opportunities for alternatives; (c) the economies of scale enjoyed by incumbent practices; (d) the co-evolution of institutions with existing practices, reinforced by government policies and market rules; and (e) existing market and social norms influencing perceptions of what is satisfactory (Seyfang and Smith, 2007). Often it is only when tensions appear in the mainstream that alternative niche practices – or elements of such practices – may effectively break this path dependency.

A clear example of this process of translation to the mainstream from a strategic niche is provided by the rise in organic food production and consumption, as discussed in Box 1 below.

### Box 1. The Organic Niche

Organic food production differs significantly from mainstream food production practices. Avoiding the use of artificial chemical fertilisers and pesticides, and rearing animals in more natural conditions without regular use of drugs, antibiotics or wormers, organic methods seek to be 'more in harmony with the environment and local ecosystems' (Seyfang, 2006). Today, the most commonly cited reasons for choosing organic food are food safety, the environment, animal welfare and taste.

Three phases can be identified in the development of the organic niche in the UK. Organic food emerged in the 1920s amongst a small group of landowners, farmers, scientists and nutritionists in response to agricultural modernisation. This group condemned the artificial inputs in modern agriculture for their detrimental impacts on the soil and to human health. A key organisation advocating this belief was the Soil Association. The early years (1946-70) were spent trying to make the case for organic food, central to which was the Soil Association's experimental farm which sought to demonstrate the nutritional superiority of organic food. However, since the holistic approach advocated by organic producers were so out of synch with the trends in modern agriculture – frequently dismissed as 'muck and magic' - the Association struggled to secure funding and the farm was forced to close.

It was only in the 1960s when concerns were emerging about the effects of synthetic chemicals on health and environment that perceptions of the organic movement started to change. Taking advantage of these emerging tensions in the mainstream, key figures from the organics movement adopted a strategic reorientation for the organic niche, placing greater emphasis on the moral arguments than the nutritional superiority of organic food.

By 1980 there were around 100 organic farmers in Britain who had gradually managed to overcome a series of challenges in turning organic principles into livelihoods, involving testing and developing efficient and effective production techniques, devising organic standards of assurance, identifying markets for their produce, developing regional producer cooperatives, and making a political case for support. A number of membership groups were created, including the establishment of the Elm Farm Research Centre in 1980 which aimed to develop the organic knowledge base through applied research and dissemination. Producer groups were established, such as the Organic Growers Association, British Organic Farmers, and the Soil Association's Producer Services group, which provided technical services for organic farmers.

As these pioneering producers demonstrated the practical viability of organic food, and more cracks appeared in the mainstream with the emergence of issues such as genetically modified foods, farm biodiversity and food miles, the organic movement attracted greater consumer and political interest. Agricultural colleges began offering organic farming courses and government began research into organic farming.

During the 1990s, policy assistance to organic farmers was introduced and supermarkets began to demand organic produce. However, in this process, the organic niche began to fragment. Only certain elements of the niche were incrementally adopted by the mainstream. As consumer demand increased and premiums of 20-200% were being paid for organic produce, the number of organic farmers increased, such that supermarkets could be more discerning over what they bought. They

made demands in terms of the types, appearance, size, packaging, and regularity of delivery from their organic suppliers. They refused to accept irregularities in size and availability, such that many deliveries were rejected, leading to significant waste and loss of income, and the crowding out of smaller growers who produced a variety of crops on their mixed farms. Since supermarkets needed a large critical mass of supplies on a year-round basis, by 1997, overseas imports accounted for 80% of the organic market. Large farming businesses branched into organics, and international food processors developed organic lines and bought up organic farms, all of which was beginning to undermine the original organic ethos of supplying fresh, wholesome food, and doing so through decentralised distribution networks linked closely to local mixed farming systems.

As this continued, some organic producers voiced concerns, with many feeling that organic mainstreaming was leading to a loss of the original vision. Interest was revived in direct, community-based organic food initiatives, such as box schemes and farmers markets, with the aim of bringing the niche back to its founding ideals (such as Eostre Organics and East Anglia Food Links – see Case Study 10). In this way, the organic niche has fragmented and a renewed niche is once again emerging at the margins of the mainstream.

The experience of the organic niche highlights the opportunities presented by tensions in the mainstream for niche activities to be more widely adopted, but also reiterates the challenges in bringing about radical innovation in the mainstream. Instead, the organic niche served as a source for piecemeal appropriation by the mainstream, ultimately undermining the central ethos of the niche, and leading instead to a revival of the original organics movement at the margins. However, it should also be noted that the box schemes and farmers markets in the new niche are likely benefitting from the enhanced profile of organics in the mainstream, such that the niche is not in direct competition with the mainstream.

*Adapted from: Seyfang (2006a); Smith (2006); Smith (2007)*

## 6. So, what are the typical characteristics of citizens that adopt these different roles, and who is already engaged in the UK?

Whilst significant understanding has developed in recent years about the typical profiles of people adopting *personal* pro-environmental behaviour change, far less is known about those engaged in community *collective* action for the environment.

For a long time the environment movement was seen as a white, able-bodied, middle-class, preservationist movement, holding little salience for more minority groups, such as Black Asian Minority Ethnic and Refugee (BAMER) groups, older adults, the disabled or the very young (Adebowale and Church, 2009). However, a gradual change has been observed in the last 20 years or so, largely through the emergence of the environmental justice movement seeking to address the disproportionate exposure of minority groups to environmental risk and hazards (Taylor, 1993). A key turning point was a conference organised in 1988, by Friends of the Earth, on 'Ethnic minorities and the environment', a key outcome of which was the decision to set up the Black Environment Network (BEN), a network of people and organisations working on ethnic participation in the environment. Subsequently, in 1990, the Community Development Foundation ran an event entitled 'Down to Earth – environmental action and sustainable development in a multi-cultural society', which highlighted the need for the environment movement to pay more attention to the notions of fairness and justice if excluded groups are to be involved. Rather than the previous 'preservationist' approach, the focus expanded to tackling local issues that were often more salient for minority groups, such as damage to local resources, poor urban environmental infrastructures, the lack of green spaces, and the siting of polluting industries in poorer neighbourhoods. It was therefore becoming increasingly apparent that a 'key to successful engagement must be understanding those with whom we wish to engage' (Adebowale and Church, 2009: 7).

Over the last 22 years, a number of organisations have arisen to do just that, including the Black Environment Network<sup>9</sup>, Capacity Global<sup>10</sup>, the Sensory Trust<sup>11</sup>, Mosaic Partnerships<sup>12</sup>, and SHEBEEN<sup>13</sup> (a local black environment network in Sheffield). Furthermore, significant progress has been made in enabling BAMER groups to engage in the work of other more 'mainstream' environmental organisations such as BTCV, Groundwork, Women's Environment Network, the Eden Project, the London Wildlife Trust, and others locally and nationally. The Federation of City Farms and Community Gardens<sup>14</sup> has developed extensive experience of working alongside minority ethnic communities on local food and green space; BTCV set up its 'Environments for All' programme which engaged minority groups in its work through tackling pertinent social as well as environmental issues (see Case Study 4); and the Green Alliance set up the 'Greener Wiser Task Force'<sup>15</sup> of ten older people, working with Age

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<sup>9</sup> <http://www.ben-network.org.uk/>

<sup>10</sup> <http://www.capacity.org.uk/>

<sup>11</sup> <http://www.sensorytrust.org.uk/>

<sup>12</sup> <http://www.mosaicnationalparks.org/>

<sup>13</sup> <http://s207555923.websitehome.co.uk/1.html>

<sup>14</sup> <http://farmgarden.org.uk/>

<sup>15</sup> [http://www.green-alliance.org.uk/uploadedFiles/Publications/reports/Greener%20and%20Wiser%20final\(1\).pdf](http://www.green-alliance.org.uk/uploadedFiles/Publications/reports/Greener%20and%20Wiser%20final(1).pdf)

Concern and Natural England to develop a positive manifesto on the role of older people in environmental change (Adebowale and Church, 2009).

***So, what is the picture of engagement today? What are the typical characteristics and demographics of the 'engaged'?***

Though surveys such as the Citizenship Survey, Defra's 'Public attitudes and behaviours towards the Environment' surveys, and the most recent, 'Monitor of Engagement with the Natural Environment' (MENE) survey do include modules on volunteering and willingness to participate in community groups, it is difficult to gain a comprehensive picture of the types of people participating in the different spheres of engagement highlighted in Table 2 above, or those adopting the different roles identified in Figure 1.

The UK Citizenship Survey 2009-2010 (CLG, 2010) highlights that 10% of respondents had, in the last year, participated in civic activism, either in direct decision-making about local services or in the actual provision of these services. 34% reported engaging in some form of civic participation, such as contacting a local councillor, attending a public meeting or signing a petition at least once in the past year, though this figure is lower than in previous years (a drop of approximately 4%). 18% actively engaged in consultation about local services or issues through activities such as attending a consultation group or completing a questionnaire about these services at least once in the past year. 40% of adults volunteered formally (and 54% informally) at least once in the 12 months prior to the survey, and 25% reported volunteering formally (and 29% informally) at least once a month. Again the figures for monthly volunteering are 3-4% lower than in previous years. There was some variation in volunteering by age; those over 75 years old were less likely to participate in formal or informal volunteering than any other age group. Interestingly, people from ethnic minorities were more likely than White people to feel they could influence decisions affecting their local area (45% compared with 36%). It is important to note that all of these findings relate to *general* volunteering and decision-making rather than specifically to environmental engagement.

In the Defra 'Public Attitudes... 2009' Survey just 6% respondents reported actively volunteering with a conservation group or other group helping the environment. 3% respondents had tried volunteering but given up, 8% were contemplating it, 40% had never thought about it and 40% rejected the idea. These figures seem relatively low, particularly since 95% of respondents felt that having green space nearby is important to them (Defra, 2009).

The Defra 'Public Attitudes... 2010' Survey asked about attitudes to taking part in a community group that encourages people to be more environmentally friendly. On average, 11% are already participating in such groups, with the highest rates observed amongst those aged 45+ and between 25 and 34. The least engaged were those aged 16-24, with only 5% already participating and just 8% thinking about it. This aligns with previous research suggesting that certain life stages are often linked to greater levels of community participation, including middle age and retirement (Hill, 2006). Interestingly, the socio-economic groups most likely to participate were C1, B, C2 and E (12%, 11%, 10% and 10% respectively) with the lowest levels apparent in groups A and D (at 9%). Group A was, however, the most likely to be thinking about it (14%), usually citing a busy life as the main barrier not to have joined a community group yet. This suggests that creating time for engagement might be the most effective means for enhancing participation amongst higher socio-economic groups. Worryingly

for the Big Society vision, 66% of all respondents indicated that they are not currently involved in a community group that encourages the community to be more environmentally-friendly, nor do they want to do it or they haven't heard of it or thought about doing it. Though, on a more positive note, only 4% of those already involved would think about giving it up (Defra, 2010).

The MENE 2010 survey highlights that just 6% respondents enjoyed doing unpaid voluntary work out of doors. Those aged 65 years or over were least likely to make changes in their lifestyle to protect the environment, either through lack of willingness or perceived capacity. Those aged 45 years or less were most open to changing their lifestyles, but appeared to be looking for advice about what to do, suggesting an awareness-raising opportunity amongst these age groups. BME individuals reported the highest intentions to protect the environment (29%), whilst the white group indicated the highest rates of already doing a lot (28%). Understanding the barriers to putting these intentions into action could therefore potentially enhance participation of BME individuals. A considerable gap appears to exist between, on the one hand, the majority of the population (80%) who expressed concern for the natural environment and those planning to make changes in their lifestyle to protect the environment (18%) and, on the other, those who consider (26%) that their current lifestyle is in keeping with protecting the natural environment and would find it difficult to do more (Natural England, 2010). Those who visit the outdoors frequently are more likely to have concerns for the natural environment and to participate in activities to protect it, suggesting that use of the natural environment could be a potential driver for engaging in its protection.

A literature review identified in the grey literature by Hill (2006), exploring patterns of volunteering amongst older groups, highlights that women are more likely to be involved in *formal* volunteering but than men are usually more active in *informal* volunteering. Older adults with an Asian background were less likely than those with a white or black background to volunteer, findings that are mirrored in the 'Helping Out' survey undertaken by the Institute for Volunteering Research (Low *et al.*, 2007). Furthermore, Asian and black people are three times more likely than white people to volunteer in a role connected to their religion, suggesting a useful opportunity for working with faith-based groups to enhance engagement of these groups. Interestingly, *informal* volunteering was particularly common amongst many minority groups, particularly African-American and Hispanic populations, but those involved often did not regard this activity as 'volunteering', which is important to bear in mind when designing national surveys seeking to understand volunteering patterns amongst different groups.

Whilst barriers to engagement will be explored in more detail in Section 8, Hill (2006) suggests various cultural factors that may influence the extent of volunteering amongst different groups. There may be language problems, fears of racism or ageism, or perhaps caste or gender issues in certain communities. The 'Volunteering for All?' research programme (IVR, 2004) identified limited volunteering by 'at risk'<sup>16</sup> groups in the conservation field (who instead tend to volunteer in religious organisations, in overseas aid and disaster relief, or in health and disability-related organisations - particularly those living with illness or disability themselves). It has also been argued that lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) volunteers may be more likely to be involved with organisations

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<sup>16</sup> Defined by the study as: 'Individuals at particular risk of social exclusion (comprising black and minority ethnic groups, those with no qualifications and those who have a disability or long-term illness)' (Low *et al.*, 2007: 21).

championing LGBT issues as they value the safety from discrimination offered by such organisations (Grealy, 2005).

Whilst these surveys provide an indication of the number and demographics of people who are volunteering or contributing time to community environmental initiatives, they do not offer any information specifically about the numbers and characteristics of those that are particularly influential in *catalysing* and initiating community action, which is of particular interest when thinking about how best to engage wider communities in realising the Big Society vision in the context of natural environment protection.

A useful study for understanding the typical attributes or characteristics of the latter category was undertaken by Fell *et al.*, (2009) for Defra. They explored the role of influential individuals in the diffusion of environmental behaviours through social networks, treating the environmental behaviours as 'social innovations' since they comprise 'new things to do' for the majority of the population (2009: 13). They suggest that certain individuals – 'catalytic individuals' – will, in certain social contexts, play a particularly important role in the process of diffusion of an innovation through a social network. This may be through acting as a trusted source of information and advice, by 'setting the tone' of their social circles, or by establishing an innovation as socially acceptable through their own attitudes and behaviour. The literature suggests that their influence is likely to be most salient amongst homophilic individuals; that is with people 'like them'. These catalytic individuals were found to occur in all walks of life, with no particular social, economic or geographical characteristics. They are often gregarious, sociable, opinionated and positive, and their influence seems largely to derive from their internal consistency; they tend to say what they mean, mean what they say, and do what they say. The one characteristic that they were all found to have in common was an overwhelming commitment to altruism. Such individuals are common across many of the case studies, particularly in establishing Incredible Edible Todmorden, the Railway Land Trust, Sheffield Botanical Gardens and the Yarde Orchard social enterprise (see Case Studies 5, 12, 13, 19).

Beveridge and Guy (2005) explore the characteristics of eco- and social entrepreneurs, and draw a general distinction between opportunistic innovators primarily driven by financial gain and more ethical or visionary innovators driven by altruistic or green intentions. These ethical or visionary eco-preneurs are of most interest in this review, since they are motivated either by the desire to meet some form of unmet community need, or by an ideological commitment to bring about wider change in the mainstream (Seyfang and Smith, 2007). Such individuals cannot be characterised by a particular set of attributes *per se*, but rather by their ability to create persuasive story lines that 'sell' their innovation to the community, to mobilise other actors to further develop and promote it, and renegotiate existing community relationships to enable its successful implementation. More visionary eco-preneurs will also grasp opportunities to exploit tensions arising in the mainstream, in order to break the path dependency of existing systems and enable wider diffusion of the grassroots innovation.



## 7. What are the different motivations for engagement?

The previous section touched on the different motivations for engaging in collective civic action for the environment, such as enjoying spending time in the natural environment, or as a result of personal altruistic value systems. This section will explore people's motivations further, seeking to highlight which motivations are particularly strong for certain groups. It is important to distinguish between motivations for *initial* engagement, and motivations for *lasting* commitment; motivations often change over time and this has important implications for ensuring the sustainability of community initiatives.

### 7.1 Motivations for initial engagement

**1. Values.** The key motivation for many is an awareness of the need for environmental protection, an appreciation of nature and the desire to take meaningful action that enables them to express deeply-held pro-environmental values (O'Brien *et al.*, 2008; Ryan *et al.*, 2001; Gatersleben *et al.*, 2008). In the Defra 'Public Attitudes...2010' survey, 17% of those involved in a community-based group linked to the environment indicated joining because it fits with their values and 25% joined to help the environment (Defra, 2010). The thriving Incredible Edible Todmorden initiative (Case Study 5) started because a particularly motivated community member was concerned for the state of the environment that her future grandchild was to be borne into, which illustrates the power of environmental values and concern for catalysing community action.

Linked to this, Ojala (2007) highlights volunteering as a means of pro-active coping by a group of young Swedish people with concerns about environmental problems. Participants in this study saw volunteering as a way to confront feelings of helplessness in relation to environmental issues and to alleviate guilt and perceptions of not doing enough. Similarly, Measham and Barnett (2008) describe a variation on a general ethic of care for the environment; the desire to expunge a sense of guilt and wanting to do something to compensate for irresponsible behaviours in other environmental spheres.

Interestingly, emerging research suggests that personal values need not be specifically *environmental* to encourage community engagement in environmental action. Dobson (2010) highlights the existence of 'environmental citizens' whose pro-environmental behaviour is 'driven by a belief in the fairness of distribution of environmental goods, in participation, and in the co-creation of sustainability policy'. That is, the key value that motivates their engagement is *justice* between humans, rather than concern for the environment for its own sake, or even for what it may provide for us (Dobson, 2010: 12).

Similarly, pro-environmental collective action may arise from community initiatives that do not originally set out with an environmental focus, but are driven by pro-social values and/or the desire to

bring wider social and environmental benefits to communities<sup>17</sup>. This was the case for a large number of the groups applying to NESTA's Big Green Challenge (Bunt and Harris, 2010) (see Case Study 1).

The importance of this wider altruistic value set is something to bear in mind when thinking about how to work with catalytic individuals to encourage wider community engagement in natural environment related civic actions; as highlighted by Fell *et al.*, (2009), these individuals are universally motivated by altruism and the desire to help other people rather than a commitment to the environment per se. Whilst several of the individuals interviewed by Fell *et al.* had already adopted a number of pro-environmental behaviours and were in some way promoting them to others, they were more likely to do so when they could see how such behaviours would benefit the people around them, for example through improved health or cost-savings.

A survey undertaken by the Federation of Small Businesses in 2007 (Connell, 2007) highlighted a range of values-based motivations driving the engagement of small business in community-based initiatives. Of 1,700 member responses, 85% cited personal views and beliefs as their motivation for undertaking environmental activities, and nearly half of all respondents cited 'putting something back' or altruism as their key motivation. 61% respondents worked with local schools and projects and sponsored local organisations, and 19% actively encouraged their employees to undertake work with local charities. The nature of community involvement goes beyond donations and ad hoc voluntary work to also include the use of their business expertise free of charge to support local charities and not-for-profit organisations in their area.

As illustrated in Case Study 9, the pro-bono advice provided by Herbert Smith LLP to Global Generation significantly assisted their efforts to work with young people in designing and implementing biodiverse green roof schemes in Kings Cross London. Similarly, the technical advice provided by landscape firm, J & L Gibbons, was central to the success of the Edward Square project in Islington (see Case Study 20), and the funding and hands-on practical contributions provided to Groundwork by United Utilities as part of the United Futures partnership significantly assisted community efforts to restore the ancient woodlands, Elnup Woods, following a long period of neglect and decline (see Case Study 21).

**2. Place attachment.** For many, an attachment to a particular local environment and the desire to enhance or maintain its quality is a strong motivator for engagement (Measham and Barnett, 2008). Much research has suggested that those possessing a strong emotional attachment to their local area are much more likely to contribute their time to enhance its environmental quality. This emotional attachment is often termed '*place attachment*' and is defined by Manzo and Perkins (2006: 337) as 'an affective bond between people and places. It includes different actors, social relationships, and places of varying scale'. Manzo and Perkins (2006) find that place attachments and sense of community have a significant influence on neighbourhood revitalisation efforts; in areas where neighbours are anonymous or do not stay long enough to develop any emotional connection to the place, they tend not to be sufficiently committed to contribute to collective efforts to improve the neighbourhood. Also highlighted as important is '*place identity*'; that is, 'those dimensions of the self that develop in

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<sup>17</sup> These may relate to the idea of 'shared values'; as highlighted by Fish *et al.*, (2011: 1186), 'shared values demonstrate that human wellbeing and quality of life is a function of satisfying individual 'wants' but also the fulfilment of a variety of social, health-related and cultural collective needs'.

relation to the physical environment by means of a pattern of beliefs, preferences, feelings, values and goals. It is a dynamic phenomenon that grows and transforms through lived experience' (Manzo and Perkins, 2006: 337).

Ryan (2005) explores the key drivers behind the development of place attachments and the factors that affect the emotional bonds between people and urban natural areas. The study involved a survey of 328 park users in Michigan, including 18 park staff, 60 volunteers, 115 neighbours, 74 visitors and 61 members of a non-profit arboretum organisation. Attachment to urban parks and natural areas was identified as a complex construct affected by the physical characteristics of the landscape itself, the experiences that people have within these natural areas, and their knowledge of natural areas in general. Whilst regular recreational users of the park and neighbours with a view of the park held a *place-specific* attachment to the park, those with a high degree of natural area knowledge and volunteers harboured a more *conceptual* attachment (i.e. an attachment to a *type* of landscape and ecosystem rather than to a *particular* place). Neighbours and recreational users were especially tied to the particular park, were unwilling to go elsewhere in spite of potentially negative changes, and were more likely to campaign against such changes. In contrast, volunteers were much more likely to seek out a similar place in the face of negative changes; their expression of loss concerned the degradation of the park ecosystems as a result of the negative change rather than the personal loss of access to the park.

These findings largely confirmed those of an earlier study, in which Ryan *et al.*, (2001) explored the motivations of 148 volunteers in the 'Adopt-a-Stream'<sup>18</sup> programme of a watershed council and two other ecological terrestrial ecosystem restoration programmes. Again it was found that volunteer activities were most important in developing an attachment to natural areas in general rather than to their specific volunteer site, and in fact a number of volunteers were also creating 'backyard wildlife habitats' in their own gardens and reported helping to 'protect native landscapes wherever they may occur' (Ryan *et al.*, 2001: 641). However, in contrast to Ryan's later study discussed above, volunteers in this study were initially more likely to take action to protest against negative changes to their natural areas rather than to look for an alternative natural area to recreate or visit, particularly the longer-term volunteers who have spent many years nurturing and restoring their volunteer sites and therefore have more at stake if the site was lost. Also identified in this study was that volunteers with greater social reasons for volunteering were much more likely to show attachment to the volunteer site.

People's attachments to place are often intertwined with their sense of community. At the core of a sense of community lies emotional attachments to people within that community, developed through feelings of mutual trust, social connections, shared concerns and experiences, and community values. Both bonds between people and to the place can motivate community members to participate in neighbourhood improvement efforts (2006: 339), and observing the tangible outcomes of such efforts can further enhance these bonds (as illustrated by those involved in the Britain in Bloom campaign – see Case Study 14).

Disruptions to place and people's emotional connections to that place can serve to mobilise community action to protect the site, as illustrated in Case Studies 12, 13, and 20 - the Railway Land

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<sup>18</sup> In which volunteers monitor stream quality and map local riparian ecosystems.

Project, Sheffield Botanical Gardens and Edward Square). The NIMBY response, for example, is often denoted as an inflexible closed-minded response to change, when in reality disrupted emotional connections to place often lie at the heart of such campaigns (Devine-Wright, 2003).

**3. Personal development.** For many, engaging in such initiatives offers opportunities for learning, be it learning about new flora, fauna or environmental issues, understanding the interactions between the environment and society, or learning new skills and gaining practical experience. Many of the case studies in this review (such as BTCV, Campaign for School Gardening, Fairwater Community Garden, and Hill Holt Woodland – Case Studies 4, 6, 7, 16) illustrate the way in which such learning and experience enhances personal self-esteem and sense of agency (Bruyere and Rappe, 2007; Measham and Barnett, 2008). In the Defra ‘Public Attitudes...2010’ survey, 8% of those involved in an environmental community-based group indicated joining to learn a new skill set and 4% suggested it provides opportunities for their career, particularly within the 35-44 age group and the socio-economic group C2 (Defra, 2010).

Koss *et al.*, (2010) highlight the valuable role of citizen science programmes in providing a cost-effective way of increasing environmental monitoring capacity in communities through forming partnerships between scientific organisations, NGOs and public volunteers. Using a case study of Sea Search volunteers involved in the monitoring of Marine National Parks and Marine Sanctuaries in Victoria, Australia, the study demonstrates the ability of such programmes to enhance community scientific literacy and awareness, whilst also empowering communities to participate in the preservation of their local environment and create a sense of environmental stewardship. Rossi-Snook *et al.*, (2010) report similar benefits amongst Delaware residents engaged in an oyster gardening programme intended to restore their local estuaries after decades of development and damaging nutrient input from within the surrounding watershed.

Many younger people, students or unemployment individuals contribute their time to community or volunteering initiatives in order to gain experience and demonstrable skills to strengthen their CV and enter employment (Van Viannen *et al.*, 2008). The Millennium Volunteers Certificate provided to youths aged 16-25 upon completing 200 hours of voluntary service within one year, for example, was a particular incentive for those taking part, though it was felt there was a lack of awareness amongst prospective employers of what the Millennium Volunteers scheme entailed (IVR, 2002). Case studies 13 and 22 (Sheffield Botanical Garden and Portland Community Watershed Management Scheme) illustrate the potential for students and graduates to bring significant expertise to community projects and suggest value in nurturing links between communities and nearby universities where possible.

Skills development is also a key benefit of initiatives designed to engage young offenders with nature. Carter (2007) discusses ‘Offenders and Nature’ schemes in which risk-assessed offenders (defined as anybody serving a sentence in custody or in the community) work as volunteers on nature conservation and woodland sites. Whilst many such schemes have not been formally evaluated, they often report a calming and focusing effect in participants, together with significant skills development and reduced likelihood of reoffending. Roe (2006) presents case studies, such as the Venture Trust<sup>19</sup> in Scotland, in which nature-based programmes have successfully rehabilitated youth offenders,

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<sup>19</sup> <http://www.venturetrust.org.uk/>

enhancing their self esteem through capacity building, skills development and team working in the natural environment. Similarly, the London Wildlife Trust's (Case Study 23) 'Earn Your Travel Back' and 'Wild About Bushcraft' projects use experiences in the natural environment to reduce antisocial behaviour and participation in crime amongst young people.

**4. Social contact and networks.** For many, an important driver for engaging in community initiatives on a voluntary basis was the desire to meet new people with similar interests and forge new links with the community (Morris and Urry, 2006; O'Brien *et al.*, 2008). In the Defra 'Public Attitudes... 2010' survey, 18% of those involved in a community-based group linked to the environment indicated joining because it is a good way to meet new friends, particularly for those under 34 and over 65 years old (Defra, 2010).

The social benefits are particularly pertinent for older volunteers, many of whom begin to participate after retirement or following the death of a spouse or partner (Hill, 2006). Granville (2000) highlights the particular importance placed by older people on engaging in inter-generational projects, in part resulting from a passionate commitment to younger people but also to keep in touch with the activities of mainstream society. The participants in Granville's study voiced concerns that spending all their time with their peers would 'lead to narrow, inward looking perspectives and being left behind as other generations advanced' (Granville, 2000: 11). These participants were not trying to act as younger people, but rather wanted to share their experiences, be involved in change and keep in touch. Case study 6, the Royal Horticultural Society's Campaign for Growing Schools, highlights the mutual benefits of such schemes, with older people enjoying the interaction with the school children, and the school garden benefitting from their gardening expertise and enthusiasm (Passy *et al.*, 2010).

Engagement in community initiatives can also provide valuable opportunities to bridge cultural and social divides (Sites *et al.*, 2007), bringing together community members from different cultures to work towards a shared goal, and share different knowledge, perspectives and skills. Dean and Bush (2007) highlight how developing these new social ties can help to challenge existing 'stereotypes'. BTCV highlight the value in identifying 'simple, archetypal experiences' that are enjoyable, purposeful and productive and bring people of all cultures together – such as outdoor play for children, growing and harvesting food, creating and looking after gardens and green space (Church, 2007: 9). Similarly, Kingsley *et al.*, (2009: 209) highlight the value of community gardening for creating 'opportunities for culturally diverse groups and people of different ages to come together and develop a sense of community and belonging'. These types of activities allow informal intercultural learning, and serve to break down barriers through providing opportunities for practical hands-on activity and learning by doing.

**5. Personal health and wellbeing.** Also particularly true for older adults is the desire to engage in such initiatives to provide structure and purpose to their lives after retirement, to remain physically active, and to enable them to continue participating in meaningful activities that contribute to society. In the Defra 'Public Attitudes... 2010' survey, 21% of respondents involved in an environmental community-based group indicated joining because it makes them feel like they are contributing to society, 8% suggested it enables them to fill time (particularly within the age groups 16-24, 35-44 and 65+), and 30% joined because it is enjoyable (Defra, 2010).

The feeling of making a valued and respected contribution is a key element of mental wellbeing, enhancing feelings of self-esteem and self-worth (Granville, 2000; Hill, 2006). Furthermore, just the time spent outdoors in the natural environment provides a space for relaxation, restoration and pleasure (Berto, 2007). Older participants in a study by Milligan *et al.*, (2004) described urban landscapes as 'depressing' or 'threatening at times' and therefore greatly appreciated the opportunity to 'step out' and enjoy the peace and tranquillity of nature, and the colours, smells, flowers and bird song of their gardens and allotments.

Townsend (2006) reports on a series of projects undertaken by the NiCHE (Nature, Community, Health and Environment) research group at Deakin University, Australia. These projects illustrate that participation in a group involved in voluntary conservation activities exposes people to the restorative mental wellbeing benefits of the natural environment, the social wellbeing benefits of meeting other people, and to opportunities to make a contribution that is socially valued. The older participants in particular commented on their sense of achievement, pride and ownership of the work they had undertaken. These findings are mirrored in Quayle's study (2007) into the value of community farms and gardens, in which many participants discussed their happiness and sense of achievement from observing the tangible improvements in their communities resulting from their work.

Such health and wellbeing benefits are not restricted to older adults. The BTCV Green Gym and London Wildlife Trust (Case Studies 4 and 23) illustrate the benefits of conservation activities for all sectors of the population: the chance for physical activity; to grow their own food, learn new recipes and develop healthier eating habits; to meet other people; to get out in the fresh air; and to make a socially valued contribution (BTCV, 2008a,c). Similarly, community gardening is often viewed as a productive and interesting form of exercise rather than activity for the sake of exercising itself (Quayle, 2007). Participants learn new skills and knowledge, and gain affordable access to healthy, nutritious food (Levett-Therivel, 2007).

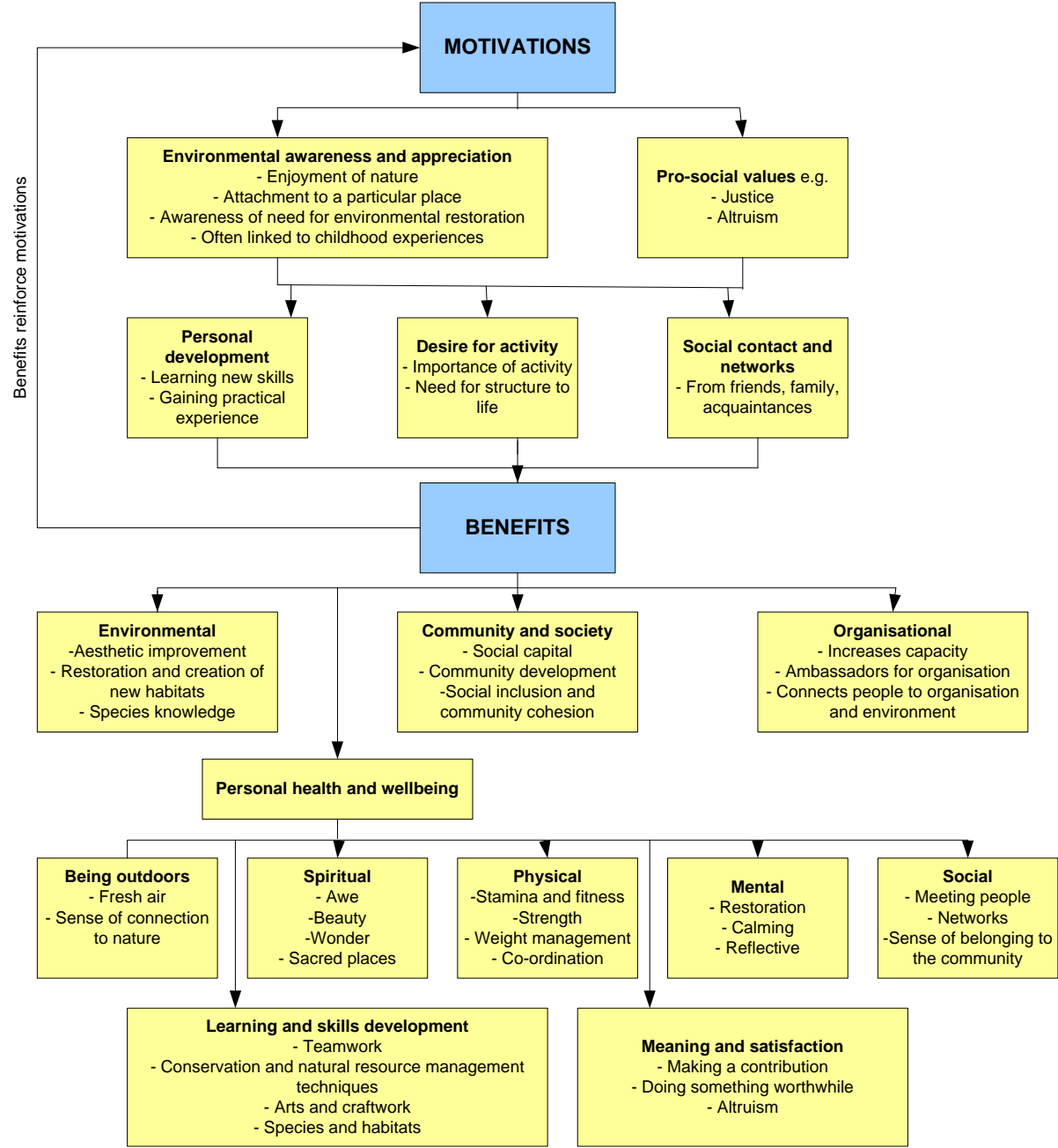
BTCV's Environment for All programme highlights that minority groups, particularly those living in disadvantaged areas, are often more motivated to engage in community-based initiatives that tackle both *social* and environmental needs, including health, social exclusion, life-long learning and skills for employment (see Case Study 4). Similarly, an analysis of a series of focus groups with members of disadvantaged groups in four UK sites, carried out by Burningham and Thrush (2001) indicated that the environmental concerns of these groups primarily concerned the impact of local environmental issues on health and wellbeing.

**6. External triggers.** For many, the decision to engage is triggered by external factors, rather than internal tendencies. People may be encouraged along by an existing volunteer, such as a friend or family member who needs extra support (Van Viannen *et al.*, 2008). Alternatively, as highlighted above, a new social or environmental change to a valued area may trigger community action to resist the change, or for others, action may be catalysed by increasing frustration with the mainstream systems of provision, either for failing to meet community needs or as a result of perceived flaws in their functioning. NESTA's Big Green Challenge initiative and the Royal Horticultural Society's Britain in Bloom and Growing Schools campaigns illustrate how newly available grants may also catalyse action (see Case Studies 1, 6 and 14).

In each of these cases, it is likely that the external trigger merely serves to translate existing intentions into action, which is important to bear in mind when considering how best to encourage wider community engagement.

Figure 2 illustrates the different motivations discussed in this section and highlights that experiencing the benefits of engaging in such initiatives often serves to reinforce motivations and enhance the likelihood of staying on in the longer term.

**Figure 2. Motivations for and benefits of engaging in collective community action for the environment**



*Modified from O'Brien et al., (2008): p8.*

## 7.2 Motivations for continued engagement

As highlighted in Figure 2, experiencing the benefits of engagement is likely to increase commitment to continued engagement. The literature suggests that three factors, in particular, influence engagement longevity. These include:

- **The satisfaction of seeing tangible environmental and social community benefits;** Ryan *et al.*, (2001) argue that people may experience greater rewards from engaging in activities that directly result in more immediate, visible improvements to the environment, such as restoring a local park, than in engaging in activities that seek to address more overwhelming environmental issues, such as air quality or global warming, which do not provide such tangible outcomes, feedback or reassurance of the value of their personal contributions.
- **Social ties;** as people form stronger social ties and relationships with others, they are less likely to break their commitment, such that a core group of repeat volunteers often forms. Also relevant here is Ryan *et al.*,’s (2001) finding that volunteers with greater social reasons for volunteering were more likely to show attachment to the volunteer site, suggesting the social aspects of volunteering may play an important role in developing an attachment to their volunteer site and thereby in nurturing more lasting voluntary commitments.
- **The extent to which experiences of being involved in the initiative match prior expectations, needs and aspirations;** volunteers need to be able to engage in a way that best uses their knowledge and skills and matches their interests and expectations, rather than being used purely as ‘cheap labour’. Not all volunteers will wish to be engaged in decision-making processes but should be given the opportunity to do so if they wish. A mismatch in volunteer expectations and experiences is often cited as a key barrier to volunteering amongst retired citizens. They may be stereotyped and given tasks considered ‘appropriate’ for their age, such that that their actual abilities are significantly underestimated and overlooked. Taking steps to fully understand volunteer needs and aspirations at the outset, and remaining flexible throughout, will help to ensure they are given an appropriate role (as discussed in Section 9). Furthermore, it is important that efforts are made to demonstrably value volunteer input and to ensure they are not stretched beyond their resources i.e. not risking symptoms of volunteer burnout, emotional exhaustion or lack of reciprocity. Ryan *et al.*, (2001) highlight the importance of effective and efficient project organisation for ensuring volunteer commitment; not only do volunteers need to know clearly what is expected of them, but they also need to feel that their time is not being wasted as a result of inefficient organisational procedures and processes.

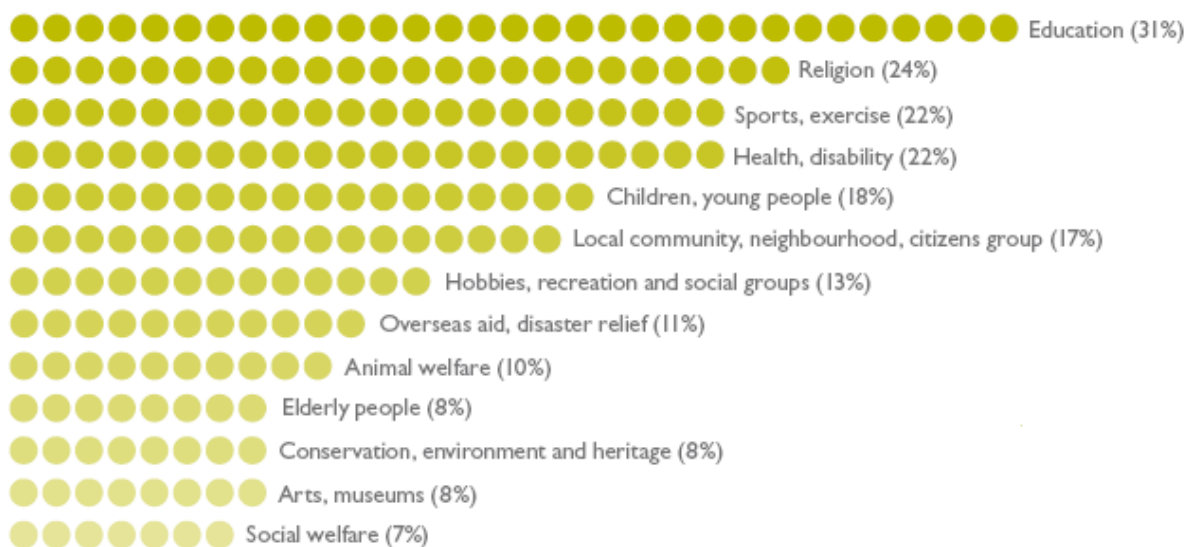


## 8. What are the barriers to engagement?

Whilst there are clearly many factors encouraging involvement, Section 6 shows that levels of engagement in natural environment volunteering or community groups remain relatively low in the UK, particularly in comparison to other types of volunteering (as illustrated in Figure 3 below).

Figure 3. UK volunteering patterns

### Types of activity volunteers were most likely to participate in (2007)



Source: Cabinet Office (2010): p21

This section therefore looks at the key barriers to engagement, before the final section considers how these barriers may be overcome.

**1. Lack of information.** A commonly cited barrier to engagement is a lack of knowledge or awareness of opportunities (O'Brien *et al.*, 2008) or of information about how to get involved; much of this information is available but dispersed and difficult to locate. For example, in a recent survey by CABE (2009) of community representatives trying to improve their local public spaces, almost 40% of respondents did not know where to find resources or guidance. In the Defra 'Public Attitudes... 2010' survey, the third most commonly cited barrier to engaging in a community group was not knowing how to go about it or not knowing what is available in their local area (Defra, 2010).

Hill (2006) discusses the outcomes of the Black and Minority Ethnic Twinning Initiative, highlighting that a key barrier to BME engagement was the lack of appropriate outreach work undertaken by mainstream organisations to BME groups, and the need to offer them more challenging and interesting work. In particular, language barriers were raised as problematic. When trying to engage BME elders from certain communities in London, for example, it was found that 49% of Bangladeshi men aged 50-74 could not speak English, nor could 45% of men of the same age from the Pakistani community. For women in these communities the proportion able to speak English was lower still, at just 10-15%.

**2. Lack of confidence.** Many citizens lack the confidence to engage in such initiatives, fearing prejudice (IVR, 2004; Low *et al.*, 2007) or that they lack the relevant skills or knowledge to make a valuable contribution, and often doubting their capacity to learn new skills (O'Brien *et al.*, 2008; Hill, 2006).

Safety concerns were raised as a barrier by many when asked about volunteering in natural environments, particularly amongst female respondents. The Hill Holt Wood Case study (16) , for example, highlighted that lived in and worked in woodland often attracts people to the site who may be otherwise concerned about accessing woodlands alone, such as women (O'Brien, 2004). In some cases, such concerns arise from a lack of experience of woodlands and natural environments; childhood experience of natural environments has been identified a key predictor of how comfortable people feel and how often they are likely to visit such environments alone as adults (Bell *et al.*, 2003; Ward Thompson *et al.*, 2007). In other cases, safety concerns may result from actual risk. For example, O'Brien (2005) explored the patterns of use of the Peabody Hill Wood in the inner London Borough of Lambeth. A community woodland clearance day was organised in an effort to encourage greater local engagement in the woodland, but limited attendance was attributed to negative attitudes towards the wood, with many concerned about personal safety and anti-social behaviour, and a general feeling that the whole area was somewhat neglected and unappealing.

**3. Practical constraints.** For some, there are quite simple practical constraints to volunteering, such as the need for childcare (Kingsley *et al.*, 2009) or not owning a car and lack of public transport to the site of engagement (or the cost of public transport). This is often particularly problematic in rural areas (Hill, 2006). Some organisations, such as BTCV, provide a minibus service or organise a shared car system (O'Brien *et al.*, 2008), which may help in engaging lower income groups. For others, the practical constraints are more serious. Research in Canada, for example, demonstrates a drop in volunteering rates after 75 years, largely as a result of health and mobility issues (Hill, 2006). This may relate to personal health conditions or to the need to care for a spouse or close relative (Milligan *et al.*, 2004).

**4. Lack of time and busy lives.** The overriding barrier to engagement highlighted in the Defra 'Public Attitudes... 2010' survey was a lack of time to commit to regular community activities, with 32% respondents indicating that life is too busy to give a regular commitment to a community group, and a further 3% saying they have no time (Defra, 2010). This is perhaps not surprising since people are working increasingly longer working weeks; the new economics foundation highlights that, since 1981, two-adult households have added six hours – nearly a whole working day – to their combined weekly workload (nef, 2010). In the survey undertaken by the Federation of Small Businesses (Connell, 2007), a lack of time was also highlighted by 32% respondents as the key factor limiting the degree to which small businesses could engage with community initiatives.

**5. Existing regulations.** Given time limitations are frequently cited as the key barrier to engagement, we would perhaps expect significantly greater engagement from those who are unemployed or retired. Yet the statistics suggest otherwise. In the Defra 'Public Attitudes...2010' survey, working status did not appear to influence participation in community groups with an environmental focus, with 11% of both working and non-working respondents indicating current involvement in a community group, and only an extra 1% of unemployed people thinking about it (Defra, 2010). Time

was highlighted by unemployed respondents as the biggest barrier to engagement, closely followed by a lack of interest.

The limited participation of unemployed individuals is perhaps less surprising when we look at the current regulations and legislation imposed on these groups. The unemployed, for example, find themselves pressurised by current 'welfare to work' policy to enter the formal employment market at the expense of voluntary work. Furthermore, those receiving incapacity benefits may find their payments cut because voluntary work in whatever shape or form would be perceived as an ability to work. Finally, incentives used to attract participants to voluntary work (for example, recycled computers awarded to Time Bank participants for earning a certain number of credits) are interpreted by the Department of Work and Pensions as earned income (Seyfang, 2006b).

At an organisational level, many organisations prevent the participation of retired citizens over a certain age through imposing upper age limits on volunteers (Hill, 2006), despite the widespread acknowledgement in the research community that chronological age is a poor proxy for the diversity of later years (Smeaton and Vegeris, 2009). Midwinter (1991) found that 20% of organisations were guilty of age discrimination, either through the imposition of a retirement age or in limiting the tasks offered to older volunteers. Such limits may be imposed as a result of the cost of trying to insure volunteers involved in more hands-on practical activities (Hill, 2006).

The Guerrilla Gardening movement and a large number of the case studies highlighted in this review (Doorstep Greens, BTCV, Incredible Edible Todmorden, Railway Land Nature Reserve, Britain in Bloom, Pocket Parks, Yarde Orchard and Café, Edward Square – Case Studies 3, 4, 5, 12, 14, 15, 19, 20) demonstrate the willingness and desire of community members to take over unused public spaces for community benefit. However, as legislation currently stands, the work of such groups could easily be undermined since they have no legal ownership of this land. In the Doorstep Greens initiative (Case Study 3), a legal framework was implemented to protect each community's right to continue using its Doorstep Green for a minimum of 25 years, ensuring that once a creation grant was issued to a community group, it was secure. Though this will be discussed in more detail in Section 9, the potential value of asset sharing and transfer schemes is also particularly pertinent here.

**6. Challenges in partnership working.** There is increasing interest amongst community groups in becoming actively involved in restoring or maintaining neighbourhood spaces but in many cases this is coupled with frustration in trying to work effectively with local authorities (CABE, 2009), largely as a result of their size, structures and working practices. One community respondent felt inhibited by the lack of coordination between authority departments, such that they have to deal with each one separately. Another felt that local authorities have well-developed project teams for working with large infrastructural projects but lack the capacity or flexibility to work with small or medium sized community initiatives. Heavy burdens of paperwork and reporting requirements risk prematurely stifling such small-scale initiatives before they've had a chance to develop. Many community representations also felt that local authority officers failed to appreciate the importance of local public spaces to community members, and argued that they lacked the 'softer' skills necessary to work effectively with community groups. In the restoration of the Sheffield Botanical Garden (Case Study 13), liaison between the Friends of the Botanical Gardens Sheffield, the Sheffield Botanical Gardens

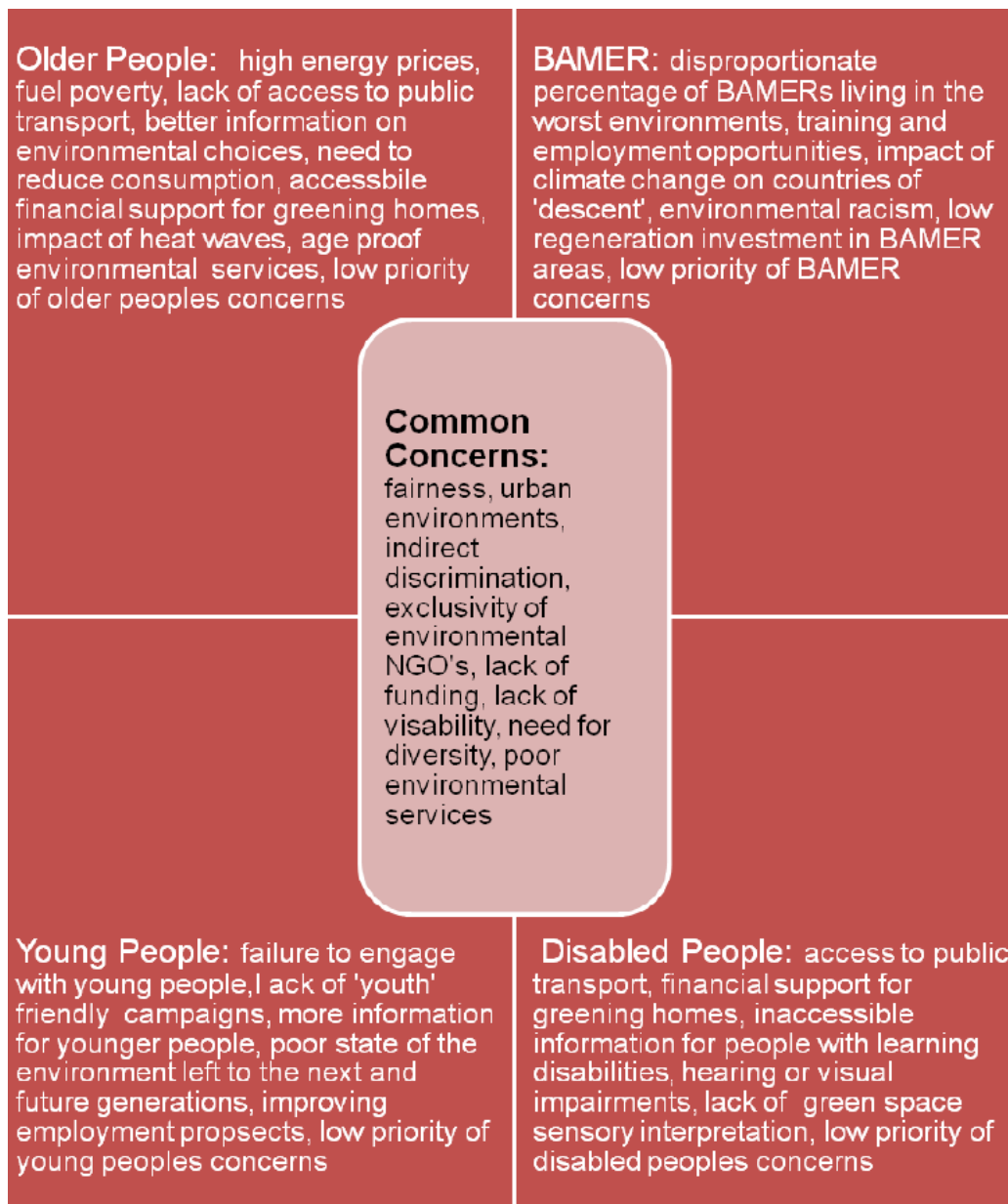
Trust, the Council and the University of Sheffield was described as a 'bureaucratic nightmare' (McEwan, 2008).

**7. Short-term funding streams.** A recurring barrier apparent in the case studies presented throughout this review concerns the constraints imposed on community initiatives by short-term funding streams, the failure of funders to appreciate the time taken in establishing successful community initiatives and the need for long-serving staff and volunteers with in-depth knowledge of the local area and its challenges. For example, the evaluation of the Urban Britain in Bloom initiative (Warburton, 2002), highlighted the challenges of initiating and successfully establishing an inclusive community scheme within just three years, and the highly successful Incredible Edible Todmorden initiative allowed for a minimum of five years for its initiation and successful community implementation (see Case Study 5). Some community groups have overcome these funding constraints through establishing themselves as social enterprises, but this does not guarantee revenue sustainability, and many social enterprises run into trouble soon after the initial grant funding has run out (Amin *et al.*, 1999), which will be discussed further in Section 9.

**8. Lack of opportunities of interest.** Many community-focused initiatives fail to understand or address the diverse needs and interests of community members, particularly those led by external individuals or organisations. Amin *et al.*, (1999) highlight that many local regeneration projects are initiated by external 'professional social entrepreneurs who bring with them what amounts to an ideology of community empowerment which they then set about enacting with local people' (1999: 2041). Whilst well-meaning, many of these efforts fail to understand the interests of more marginalised community members and thereby often accentuate existing forms of social exclusion through inadvertently promoting the interests of some sections of the local community over others. The lack of trust resulting from this renders subsequent engagement of these groups even less likely at later stages in the regeneration process. Community alienation may also arise where consultation efforts are tokenistic and community concerns are not visibly addressed in the regeneration process (Eden, 1996). This highlights the importance of working with NGOs, charities and groups which understand existing community dynamics and who are recognised as part of the community.

Adebowale and Church (2009) highlight the importance of understanding the needs and interests of the different groups within the community and ensuring any community initiative is grounded in this understanding, which is reflected in the success of the types of approaches adopted by BTCV and the London Wildlife Trust (Case Studies 4 and 23). This is likely to require a departure from more traditional methods of community participation, such as formal hearings, citizens panels or comment periods, which rarely engage more marginalised or minority groups (Shandas and Messer, 2008). Adebowale and Church developed Figure 4 below, highlighting the different and shared concerns raised by older people, BAMER groups, young people and the disabled. This presents a broad overview of concerns, but it is also essential to recognise the significant diversity that exists within each of these groups.

**Figure 4. Variations in environmental perspectives and concerns amongst different community groups**



Source: Adebowale and Church (2009): p8.

## 9. What are the opportunities for policy in overcoming these barriers to enhance community engagement?

Based on the literature and case studies identified in this review, this section presents a range of policy opportunities for encouraging and supporting communities to engage in collective civic action for the environment. It is not the intention of this review to highlight 'best practice' initiatives to be rolled out in every community; this would risk undermining the core argument behind the value of local solutions tailored to local issues. Rather it intends to highlight how government can work with multiple actors to help create the conditions in which community initiatives can flourish.

**1. Engagement is likely to be more widespread in initiatives that address both environmental and social needs.** Many of the case studies in this review highlight the benefits in broadening the remit of environmental initiatives to tackle wider social issues, such as the provision of skills for employment, health concerns, empowerment and social exclusion issues (as illustrated by BTCV, Fairwater Community Garden, Global Generation, Hill Holt Woodland – Case Studies 4, 7, 9 and 16). Such efforts may also enhance participation of community members who may not possess strong environmental values but who are strongly driven by values of altruism and justice. Fell *et al.*, (2009) highlight such altruistic values as a core characteristic of community catalysts; a group that emerge as central to the initiation of many of the case studies highlighted in this review (particularly Incredible Edible Todmorden, the Railway Land Trust, Sheffield Botanical Gardens and the Yarde Orchard and Café – Case Studies 5, 12, 13, 19).

**2. Certain civic activities may act as 'entry points' to engagement in others.** There is some evidence to suggest that engagement in one sphere of activity may inspire further engagement in others. The work by BTCV highlights that people of all cultures may be willing to engage in 'archetypal experiences such as outdoor play for children, growing and harvesting food, creating and looking after gardens and greenspace' (Church, 2007: 9). Case study 9 highlights how participation in local food growing and green roof activities can encourage wider adoption of sustainable behaviours such as recycling and walking to work.

It will be interesting to observe the knock-on effects within the communities involved in Decc's Low Carbon Communities initiative and in the RCUK Energy and Communities programmes; whether engagement in community-level sustainable energy production and consumption initiatives catalyses further engagement in, for example, the protection of local green spaces.

**3. Understanding who is currently engaging in collective civic actions for the environment and how.** Whilst Defra's 'Public Attitudes...' survey asks about a range of *personal* pro-environmental attitudes and behaviours, and does ask about involvement in a community group that encourages the community to be more environmentally-friendly, it does not differentiate between different spheres of civic environmental engagement or the different roles played. It is therefore difficult to identify whether someone engaged in a community food growing project or a community renewables initiatives is more likely to also engage in collective ecological restoration or maintenance efforts, nor does it explore whether the barriers to involvement in these different types of activity vary. Gaining this information could help to inform the potential application of point 2 above.

**4. Highlighting clear and consistent goals.** NESTA's Big Green Challenge highlighted the importance of presenting communities with a small set of realistic, clear and consistent desired outcomes, which should be closely aligned with priorities across national and local government. Communities should be given the time and space to consider how best to achieve those outcomes within their local context, without being forced to implement pre-defined, 'codified' solutions designed elsewhere (Bunt and Harris, 2010).

**5. Making it fun.** A key message highlighted by many of the case studies is that communities are more likely to engage when the experience is fun and linked to activities that they enjoy. For example, local food growing efforts may be coupled with cookery sessions and community food fairs; park restoration efforts could be combined with Easter egg hunts or nature days; planning or design sessions during early stages of the initiative could take the form of coffee mornings. Savage *et al.*, (2009) highlight the 'Good Gym' initiative<sup>20</sup>, which matches runners up to isolated older people who they can visit en route for a cup of tea and a chat, thereby combining engagement with their hobby.

**6. Celebrating achievements.** A key benefit of many community-based environmental projects are the tangible outcomes that result from community efforts, be it a thriving green space or the presence of new flowers and vegetable gardens in previously unused or neglected land. Making additional efforts to recognise and celebrate achievements at key points in the implementation of a community initiative is essential for maintaining motivation and for rewarding the time and effort contributed. This may be through presenting awards or certificates (such as BTCV's Green Heroes Award scheme<sup>21</sup> or the Chiltern's AONB Awards<sup>22</sup>), writing progress reports in local news media, or through organising celebratory community fetes. The Edward Square Case Study (20) highlights such events as a chance to keep people informed and gain feedback from the wider community. In this case, a raffle was also organised in which people needed to register their names and addresses, which facilitated future engagement with new community members in the project (Hare and Nielsen, 2003).

**7. Understanding the motivations, needs, expectations and interests of those involved from the outset.** A mismatch in volunteer expectations and experiences is often cited as a key barrier to long-term engagement. People may be left feeling their actual abilities are significantly underestimated or overlooked by the organisers, or alternatively, that they are being stretched beyond their resources, leading to symptoms of burnout and emotional exhaustion. Whilst some prefer to contribute to decision-making, others may be there to learn the basics or simply to contribute time to its implementation. Taking steps to fully understand individual needs, capabilities and aspirations at the outset, and remaining flexible throughout, will help to avoid the occurrence of such mismatches and thereby increase the likelihood of longer term engagement. Linked to this is the importance of offering a diversity of meaningful engagement opportunities and levels of responsibility and commitment that will suit a wide range of personal circumstances, interests and abilities.

Whilst some community members may not feel able to contribute *time*, they may wish to donate *funds* to support local initiatives. The Community Foundation Network has recently launched an online

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<sup>20</sup> <http://www.thegoodgym.org/about/>

<sup>21</sup> <http://www2.btcv.org.uk/display/greenheroes2010>

<sup>22</sup> [http://www.chilternsaonb.org/caring/chilterns\\_awards.html](http://www.chilternsaonb.org/caring/chilterns_awards.html)

searchable donation tool, 'Local Giving'<sup>23</sup>, which seeks to enable philanthropic giving to small local charities and community groups in the UK. As this site develops, it could provide a valuable tool for linking small-scale funds to local community groups.

**8. Ensuring appropriate outreach.** Linked to the previous point is the need to adopt tailored, effective and appropriate outreach activities, be it through local campaigning, awareness-raising events, demonstration initiatives (such as the initial community garden established by Mary Clear in her own garden during the early phases of Incredible Edible Todmorden – Case Study 5), placing articles in local media or distributing leaflets. Hill (2006) emphasises the importance of ensuring such outreach initiatives are inclusive and reflect the diversity of cultures and languages within the community. Once an initiative is more established, there may be value in using role models or real life stories to provide a more powerful argument to different groups for participating, highlighting opportunities and benefits of engagement that are likely to appeal to their different needs and interests. An interesting approach to outreach has been adopted in two projects by the London Wildlife Trust (Case Study 23): the Cockney Sparrow Project which aims to engage estate residents and tenants in creating wildlife-friendly 'natural estates' in London; and the Earn Your Travel Back project, which gives young Londoners who have had their Oyster card confiscated the chance to earn them back through volunteering with the London Wildlife Trust or BTCV.

**9. Using social network mapping to understand and engage the community.** The RSA's Connected Communities programme (Rowson *et al.*, 2010) presents a useful tool for identifying and mapping the diversity of communities - social network mapping - which could constitute a key step in understanding how best to engage community members. Furthermore, engaging communities in this mapping process may serve to increase the strength of connections in local communities and thereby build social capital in the community. Dobson (2010) highlights the existence of a stronger sense of common purpose amongst community members where levels of social capital are high. Social network mapping will help to identify:

- *Bonding social capital*: horizontal relationships and trust within the community, such as those between friends and neighbours, and social ties between people from different background (community cohesion).
- *Bridging social capital*: vertical relationships such as those between service providers and users (co-production) and participation in voluntary, civic and political activity.
- *Agents of change*: these may be the 'catalytic individuals' or 'social entrepreneurs' within the community with visions for change and / or the skills to mobilise and coordinate wider community activity (much like the idea of the 'Social Entrepreneur in Residence' suggested by the Young Foundation<sup>24</sup>). Alternatively, they may be agents of social change, such as schools which could encourage community engagement through the use of school gardens, or GPs who could refer patients to Green Gym type programmes (see Case Study 4).
- *Isolated individuals*: some individuals may be identified with very few social ties. Following the mapping process, efforts may be taken to access these individuals via the limited connections they do have or perhaps through local befriending schemes.

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<sup>23</sup> <http://localgiving.com/aboutus>

<sup>24</sup> <http://www.youngfoundation.org/our-work/ventures-and-investment/health-launchpad/seir/social-entrepreneur-residence-seir>



- *Tensions and community conflicts*: understanding where these lie is the first stage in preventing escalation.

These mapping activities could be combined with efforts to identify the places and characteristics that are important to particular individuals or groups within the community (Ryan, 2005), which may help in identifying neighbourhood spaces that are most likely to motivate community members ‘to act collectively to preserve, protect, or improve their community and participate in local planning processes’ (Manzo and Perkins, 2006).

**10. Reframing local spaces as community assets.** In some cases innovative approaches are needed to help communities realise the potential value of their local spaces, particularly where these have fallen into a state of decline or neglect. Ling *et al.*, (2009) highlight the potential for using visioning exercises during initial community planning workshops to imagine how such spaces could be revived. Similarly, the new ‘Dream Streets’ campaign discussed in the Incredible Edible Todmorden case study (5) highlights the use of ‘Landscape Design Software – Visualise 2D’ to transform a picture of an existing place into how it might look after an ‘incredible edible makeover’, helping to motivate and mobilise further ideas and community action.

In areas that are currently in good condition but at risk of decline due to poor maintenance, efforts to raise awareness of its value may best be achieved through encouraging greater community use of the area. This may involve using the space as a setting for community events or exhibitions, or simply through organising activity days in the area. Biggs *et al.*, (2010) highlighted a significant increase in community interest in the management of local freshwater ecosystems once they had personally experienced those environments and became aware of their value. This lends support to BTCV’s approach of organising volunteer ‘taster’ days. Their ‘Tasty’ project engaged over 3000 young people in 850 volunteering taster events over a 12-month period (BTCV, 2008b), 94% of whom were new to volunteering. Most activities took place outside and involved, for example, litter clearance, tree planting, dry stone walling, hedge-laying etc, and others occurred inside in offices, schools or environment centres. 65% of participants described the experience as ‘excellent’ and a further 65% said they would like to participate again. 91% had learned something they didn’t know or couldn’t do before.

**11. Using art to encourage community ownership of a local natural environment or green space.** Curtis (2009) highlights the potential for art to enhance community connectedness to the environment. A number of the case studies in this review demonstrate the value of combining art with the natural environment to inspire community action and enhance a sense of community ownership. In the creation of Edward Square, for example, (Case Study 20), local school children’s drawings of plants were collated by a local artist and transformed into panels on the entrance gates to square. Similarly, the Fairwater Community Garden (Case Study 7) had developed close links with Fairwater Pottery, which teaches students with learning needs how to work with clay. Their pottery has contributed a ‘Flight Path’ leading to the garden depicting images and words about flying insects, mosaic benches, a floor mosaic, hand-made pots, ceramic apples and screen-printed signs that convey information about insects and the environment. The Wildlife Trusts also use draw on arts-based approaches in a number of their engagement activities, including for example the Itchen Navigation

Arts Project<sup>25</sup> in Hampshire. This is using sculpture, dance, music, textiles, photographs, sound and video to attract a wider audience to get involved in the Itchen Navigation Heritage Trail project.

**12. Providing appropriate funding opportunities.** A common issue faced by many community groups is the challenge of accessing and securing longer-term funding. Many schemes currently provide only initial grants for implementation (as highlighted by the Pocket Parks initiative - Case Study 15), which are often linked to infeasible implementation time frames (such as Urban Britain in Bloom grants) (Warburton, 2002) or constraining bureaucratic requirements which stifle the evolution of potentially successful grassroots innovation efforts at an early stage (Seyfang and Smith, 2007).

Murray (2009) and Osborne (2005) highlight the concept of lending circles and the potential to adopt the Grameen principle in community funding schemes, in which small grants and loans are advanced to community groups along with expert advice and support, to facilitate proposal development, with subsequent funds provided on the basis of performance. This is similar to the approach adopted by the Doorstep Greens initiative which, whilst enabling successful design and implementation of the community greens, did not resolve issues of how to secure maintenance funding once the creation grants had been spent. Two suggestions for addressing this included: (a) the establishment of a Greenspace Stewardship Scheme akin to the existing Environmental Stewardship scheme but for community green spaces; and (b) the use of Management Endowment Funds, working on the premise of a capital fund which can attract high interest, which may be siphoned off to fund green space maintenance without losing the initial capital investment (Somerset, 2006).

Some community initiatives are able to secure greater revenue stability through adopting a social enterprise model, such as the Green Valley Big Green Challenge Finalist (Case Study 1), Hill Holt Woodland (Case study 16), and the Yarde Orchard and Café (Case Study 19). Amin *et al.*, (1999) suggest the stability of social enterprises could be assisted through the development of new social finance institutions, similar to the Triodos Bank<sup>26</sup> which is committed to financing socially useful and ethical activities, including organic food and farming businesses, pioneering renewable energy enterprises, recycling companies and nature conservation projects. Also highlighted by Stoddart (2009) and Seyfang (2006a) is the need to reconsider public procurement practices in order to give social enterprises and cooperatives priority consideration as suppliers to public institutions. The viability of local cooperative food suppliers, such as Eostre Organics (Case Study 10), for example, would be significantly enhanced if the policy infrastructure around public procurement did not inhibit their capacity to access public sector catering markets through schools and hospitals.

**13. Challenge-based funds for catalysing grassroots innovation.** Both NESTA's Big Green Challenge and the Britain in Bloom Campaign (see Case Studies 1 and 14) present examples of challenge-based funds, which could constitute a useful supplement to existing funding approaches for those seeking to catalyse community innovation in particular areas. In these models, clear outcomes and criteria for success were articulated at the outset and barriers to entry were kept very low to encourage proposals from any type of non-profit community group, whether formally constituted or not (Bunt and Harris, 2010). In NESTA's Big Green Challenge, a staged application process was instigated, providing initial expert advisory support and capacity building to aid the development of ideas, and

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<sup>25</sup> <http://www.hwt.org.uk/pages/itchen-navigation-2-arts-project-687.html>

<sup>26</sup> <http://www.triodos.co.uk/en/about-triodos/>

rewarding well-thought through proposals with incremental funding for further development (Bunt and Harris, 2010). Brook Lyndhurst's evaluation of the BGC highlights that, whilst providing small grants and advice to pilot the delivery of innovative ideas is a useful model for selecting organisations with the most potential, the stress, time and resource burdens on those taking part need to be kept in proportion to the risk that they will secure no further funding. They also emphasise that such prize-models are not a substitute for grant funding; none of the finalists would have achieved what they did without additional financial resources or in-kind support (Brook Lyndhurst, 2010).

**14. Creating opportunities for civic engagement.** As discussed in Section 8, time constraints often present the most significant barrier to engaging in collective civic environmental actions, highlighting the need to provide better support for those who would like to volunteer but currently lack the freedom to do so. This may include: encouraging employers to commit to implementing a shorter working week; improving access to affordable childcare services; encouraging employers to allocate time or other career benefits for employees to engage in community-based initiatives; and organising corporate volunteering days to promote team building (Dobson, 2010). GreenSpace (2010) suggests an initial incentive for businesses engagement could involve the use of some form of tax break linked to the achievement of specific targets such as the provision of a certain number of hours of pro-bono advice or staff time to community initiatives. Case study 9 highlights mutual benefits arising from the engagement of Wolff Olins' staff in Global Generation's biodiverse green roof initiative.

Pilotlight<sup>27</sup> is an interesting organisation, which matches and manages teams of senior business people to local charities and social enterprises that are highly experienced in tackling social disadvantage but who do not have, and could not afford to buy, the time and skills to develop their own organisational infrastructure. The business teams volunteer their time (just three hours a month) to coach the charities through the process of planning for growth, development and sustainability, thereby enabling them to work more effectively with the disadvantaged groups they seek to help. Similar models could be replicated, matching volunteer business groups or ecological experts to community initiatives and social enterprises with an environmental focus.

**15. Considering new incentives for civic engagement.** A range of interesting incentives – such as new community currency schemes - have been highlighted within the social innovation literature to reward and thereby encourage civic engagement. Savage *et al.*, (2009) highlight the 'Justaddspice'<sup>28</sup> scheme; a credit system which rewards time donated to community work with trips, events and leisure activities. This scheme has demonstrated both environmental and social benefits in South Wales, with significant aesthetic improvements as well as reduced anti-social behaviour in the area<sup>29</sup>. Seyfang and Smith (2007) discuss the NU Spaarpas green loyalty card which was piloted in the Netherlands, rewarding recycled household waste or local, organic or fair-trade purchases with points that could be redeemed for public transport tickets or discounted green services. This is similar to the concept of Time Banks, which offer a framework for giving and receiving services in exchange for time credits. Each person's time is equally valued and one hour is equivalent to one time credit, regardless of the service provided. This represents a powerful means for utilising previously untapped resources and skills, valuing the work and time of people that often find themselves marginalised from the

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<sup>27</sup> <http://www.pilotlight.org.uk/index.php>

<sup>28</sup> <http://www.justaddspice.org/>

<sup>29</sup> Reported in this publication by the Welsh Assembly Government:  
<http://www.justaddspice.org/docs/Timebanking%20SS.pdf>

conventional economy (Seyfang, 2006b). Linked to this are Local Exchange Trading Systems (LETS), a virtual currency to enable members to exchange goods and services using local credits rather than cash (Seyfang, 2006c). Members of a LETS scheme list their needs and offers in a local directory, such that people can contact each other and arrange their trades, recording credits and debits with the system accountant.

**16. Supporting the use of Web 2.0 tools to enable communities to contribute, collaborate and share ideas and experiences.** The rapid increase in the availability and diversity of Web 2.0 tools provides a valuable opportunity for encouraging greater community connection. Lovelewisham.org<sup>30</sup>, for example, was established to enable Lewisham residents to report graffiti and fly tipping for quick removal and has led to an 8% decrease in graffiti and a 30% drop in graffiti-related complaints (Savage *et al.*, 2009). Similarly, the leaderlistens.com blog in Barnet provides real-time information about local events and offers opportunities for the community to comment (Savage *et al.*, 2009). Such tools may also be used to share learning and experiences between different communities and local councils working on similar issues, such as Islington's Wildlife Blog<sup>31</sup>.

The Low Carbon Communities Network has recently launched the UK Climate and Community Action map<sup>32</sup>, an online interactive resource that is mapping any community initiative that seeks to tackle climate change, to which anyone can upload their project details. This could be more widely publicised and further developed to enable sharing of experiences between different community groups working to tackle local environmental and social concerns.

Web 2.0 tools may also provide a valuable means for coordinating nationwide events, such as the annual Big Lunch day<sup>33</sup> organised by the Eden Project, or for linking up community-level activities to achieve a shared nationwide goal. The Lawton Review (Lawton, 2010), for example, calls for increased connectivity of England's ecological network, including 'large-scale habitat restoration and recreation underpinned by the re-establishment of ecological processes and ecosystem services for the benefits of both people and wildlife'. Through interactive online tools, local level restoration / protection efforts may be mapped and data captured to monitor progress towards a more connected national ecological network. These maps could be combined with an online 'collaborate' tool enabling community groups and land owners to identify local assets as required, such as Local Record Centres and environmental consultancies for ecological expertise, established civil society organisations for community engagement and fundraising expertise, or perhaps local businesses for management advice. Such tools could be piloted using the London Wildlife Trust's 'Garden for a Living London'<sup>34</sup> initiative (see Case Study 23).

**17. Develop low-cost approaches for evaluating community-led initiatives to facilitate shared learning for future initiatives.** There were no publicly available evaluations of many of the case studies of smaller-scale community initiatives included in this review, and indeed many of these initiatives are struggling to find sufficient resources just to remain viable, let alone to undertake such

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<sup>30</sup> <http://v1.lovelewisham.org/public/upload.aspx>

<sup>31</sup> <http://islingtonblogs.typepad.com/blog/>

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<http://www.communitymaps.org.uk/version3/includes/MiniSite.php?minisitename=UK%20Climate%20and%20Community%20Action%20Map>

<sup>33</sup> <http://www.thebiglunch.com/>

<sup>34</sup> <http://www.wildlondon.org.uk/Campaigns/GardenforaLivingLondon/tabid/162/Default.aspx>

evaluations. Any evaluation would need to combine qualitative and quantitative methods, in order to capture both the wider social benefits of such initiatives (including community cohesion, social capital, crime rates, wellbeing) as well as the more quantifiable environmental indicators of success, concerning for example carbon emissions, biodiversity levels, pollution levels and so forth. Bearing this in mind, support could usefully be provided to these community groups by government, either in creating a basic low-cost evaluation process that may be voluntarily employed by organisations to facilitate future learning (perhaps drawing on the Social Return on Investment<sup>35</sup> methods adopted by BTCV), or in linking such organisations up to businesses or academics who may be able to provide pro-bono evaluation assistance and environmental monitoring expertise.

**18. Addressing regulatory barriers to innovation.** Both national and local government need to consider how existing regulation may be hindering the engagement of certain community members or in certain areas. For example, calls have been made to ensure benefit allowances are not compromised by engaging in community initiatives (Seyfang, 2006b) and for changes to existing planning regulations to enable community groups to work on unused or derelict land secure in the knowledge that their efforts will not be undermined by subsequent development. The case studies in this review depict enthusiastic communities keen to enhance their local environments in this way.

This energy could be tapped in various ways, including: (1) the approach adopted by the Doorstep Greens initiative in which a legal framework was developed to protect each community's right to continue using the Doorstep Green for a minimum of 25 years; (2) a use-it-or-lose-it asset sharing scheme, giving voluntary and community groups the right to use unused spaces such as playing fields, community centres, or growing spaces (Savage *et al.*, 2009); (3) asset transfer schemes, such as the Community Land Trust model, in which local communities are given collective ownership over areas in which they have invested significant time or money, such that the appreciation of the property value returns in part to those communities (Young Foundation, 2010b); and (4) efforts to encourage all public bodies (schools, hospitals, local councils etc) and social landlords<sup>36</sup> to allocate space for community growing, be it for food, flowers, or general amenity green space (as suggested by the Incredible Edible Todmorden Case Study, 5). For example, the Campaign for Greener Health Care aims to plant one tree per NHS employee – over a million trees – on NHS land over the next five years<sup>37</sup>, an initiative which could usefully engage local communities in planting days.

**19. Working with agents of social change.** As highlighted by Dobson (2010), the Government has a unique influence over agents of social change such as the education, health and criminal justice systems. In schools, the citizenship agenda could be extended to consider the value and application of *environmental* citizenship, school gardening schemes could be developed in collaboration with the wider community (Passy *et al.*, 2010), and a greater focus could be placed on outdoor education in order to enhance environmental literacy and foster a sense of environmental stewardship from a

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<sup>35</sup> <http://www.thesroinetwork.org/>

<sup>36</sup> The Neighbourhood Greens initiative was established by the Peabody Trust and Notting Hill Housing Group in 2003 with the aim of highlighting the importance of open space for residents of social housing and working with social landlords to raise the quality of their design, management and safe use. More information is available here: <http://www.neighbourhoodsgreen.org.uk/upload/documents/webpage/ANaturalEstate%20021006.pdf>

<sup>37</sup> <http://greenerhealthcare.org/news/2011/01/new-tree-sponsorship-scheme-launched>

young age<sup>38</sup>. At the university level, students could be encouraged to apply their skills in a local environmental project in return for a set number of course credits; this may be particularly appropriate within courses such as ecology, environmental sciences, horticulture or landscape design where students could provide valuable ecological expertise to enhance the environmental benefits of community efforts. A similar approach was adopted with Sheffield University's landscape department in the restoration of the Sheffield Botanical Gardens (Case Study 13) and in Portland's Community Watershed Programme (Case Study 22).

Efforts could also be made to engage local GPs, retirement villages and hospitals in schemes such as the Green Gym and Walking for Health. 'Healthy Lives Healthy People' sets out plans for a £135million Lottery investment in a Mass Participation and Community Sport Legacy Programme together with a volunteer-led walks programme (HM Government, 2010). Evidence increasingly points to the existence of synergistic benefits when carrying out physical exercise in a natural environment setting (Pretty *et al.*, 2003; 2005ab; 2007); there may be mutually beneficial opportunities in linking these walks and physical activities with natural environment conservation or restoration initiatives.

Finally, efforts could be made to explore the potential to expand Offender and Nature schemes. As discussed in Section 7, such schemes may have mutual benefits, with offenders gaining experience of team work, new skills development and a sense of achievement through enabling tangible aesthetic improvements to the community and locally valued green spaces.

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<sup>38</sup> A useful initial list of references about the value of outdoor education is available here: [http://www.growingschools.org.uk/support/makingthecase\\_researchpapers.aspx](http://www.growingschools.org.uk/support/makingthecase_researchpapers.aspx)

## 10. Future Research Needs

This rapid review involved an initial exploration of literature of relevance to the 'Big Society' in the context of the natural environment. Based on the evidence reviewed<sup>39</sup>, possible ideas for future research include:

- Exploring in more depth the existence of potential 'entry points' to collective environmental action for different groups. For example, does interest and engagement in a community food growing project inspire engagement in civic action in other environmental spheres or the adoption of different roles (for example, is a volunteer in an established project likely to go on to catalyse a new project?). Valuable settings in which such ideas could be explored and tested include: Decc's Low Carbon Communities, NESTA's Big Green Challenge communities, the communities involved in the RCUK Energy and Communities programme, Transition Towns, or the Big Society Vanguard communities.
- Primary qualitative research could be undertaken with relevant organisations in the field - such as BTCV, Global Generation, Global Action Plan, the Soil Association, the Royal Horticultural Society - to understand in more depth the challenges they face in engaging and retaining particular groups, and to identify approaches that have been particularly successful in attracting typically under-represented groups. This could be followed by collaborative 'sandpit' events, including both small and large scale community groups and environmental organisations, to generate new ideas and approaches.
- Exploring opportunities for engaging those without strong altruistic or environmental values. This could examine the potential for working with, for example, sports or arts groups to reach more environmentally-disengaged individuals.
- Action research to pilot and evaluate some of the suggestions in this review, for example to explore the feasibility of a Greenspace Stewardship Scheme, or the transferability of the concept of the Social Entrepreneur in Residence from the health to the environment field.
- Collaborative research with existing community groups, NGOs and academic organisations to explore, develop and pilot feasible light-touch evaluation approaches measuring both qualitative and quantitative social and ecological indicators.
- A review of existing Community Land Trust models (in the UK and internationally) to identify particularly successful models for shifting the ownership of both public and private land to communities for the purpose of environmental enhancement or restoration.
- A better understanding is needed of how to reconcile *scientific* views concerning appropriate management strategies for natural environments of high ecological quality and *community* ambitions for the protection, management or restoration of locally valued spaces. In the long term it is important that ecosystems are enhanced not damaged through well-meaning but inappropriate community actions, but this must be done in a way that does not undermine the enthusiasm of community groups for action nor their knowledge of their local area.

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<sup>39</sup> Which included both high quality peer reviewed sources but also non-peer reviewed, in some cases lower quality, grey literature.



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## Weblinks for examples highlighted in Table 2

1. Women's Environmental Network: <http://www.wen.org.uk/your-wen/>
2. Surfers against Sewage: <http://www.sas.org.uk/>
3. Environmental Justice Foundation: <http://www.ejfoundation.org/>
4. FreeCycle: <http://www.uk.freecycle.org/>
5. Community Composting Network: <http://www.communitycompost.org/>
6. Community Recycling Network: <http://www.crn.org.uk/>
7. Green Works: <http://www.green-works.co.uk/>
8. London Community Resource Network: <http://www.lcrn.org.uk/about>
9. Pedal Power: <http://www.cardiffpedalpower.org/default.htm>
10. CarPlus: <http://www.carplus.org.uk/>
11. Living Streets: <http://www.livingstreets.org.uk/>
12. Cycling Touring Club: <http://www.ctc.org.uk/>
13. Eco-Teams: <http://ecoteams.org.uk/>
14. Green Streets: <http://www.britishgas.co.uk/energy-efficiency/products/energy-innovation/green-streets.html>
15. Energy 4 All: [http://www.energy4all.co.uk/energy\\_aboutus.asp](http://www.energy4all.co.uk/energy_aboutus.asp)
16. H<sub>2</sub>ope Water Power Enterprises: <http://www.h2ope.org.uk/content/view/19/29/>
17. Bollington Carbon Revolution: <http://www.bollingtoncarbonrevolution.co.uk/about/index.html>
18. Low Carbon Communities:  
[http://www.decc.gov.uk/en/content/cms/what\\_we\\_do/consumers/lc\\_communities/lc\\_communities.aspx](http://www.decc.gov.uk/en/content/cms/what_we_do/consumers/lc_communities/lc_communities.aspx)
19. RCUK Energy and Communities Programme: <http://www.rcukenergy.org.uk/news/68-using-communities-to-find-the-answer-to-energy-demand-problems.html>
20. National Trust: <http://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/main/w-trust/w-volunteering.htm>
21. Woodland Trust: <http://www.woodlandtrust.org.uk/en/about-us/people-partners/volunteers/Pages/helpers.aspx>
22. RSPB: <http://www.rspb.org.uk/volunteering/>
23. Bird Watch: <http://www.rspb.org.uk/birdwatch/>
24. Bat Conservation Trust: <http://www.bats.org.uk/pages/nbmp.html>
25. National Federation of Badger Groups:  
<http://www.badgertrust.org.uk/content/home.asp>
26. <http://www.badgertrust.org.uk/content/home.asp>
27. Amphibian and Reptiles Groups UK:  
[http://www.arguk.org/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=1&Itemid=3](http://www.arguk.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=1&Itemid=3)

## APPENDIX: Case Study Summary Information

The case studies mentioned in the review are discussed in more detail here, and presented in the order in which they are first mentioned within the review. Where formal evaluations have been undertaken of the initiatives, efforts have been made to draw out key lessons of interest to this review, but few evaluations of this kind appear to have been undertaken.

### CASE STUDY 1. NESTA Big Green Challenge (BGC)

**LOCATION:** Multiple projects across the UK

**AIM:** The Big Green Challenge, launched in October 2007, was NESTA's £1 million challenge prize designed to achieve measurable carbon reduction through community-led innovation.

**BACKGROUND:** The project explored the degree to which an outcome-based prize – rewarding results not process – could stimulate community innovation whilst encouraging the drive and focus required in order to achieve measurable change. The challenge was open to all, including both formal and informal not-for-profit organisations and groups. From 355 initial applicants, 100 were supported by the Big Green Challenge team and partners to develop their ideas into detailed plans. Ten communities were chosen to put their ideas into practice within one year and, finally, three winners and one runner up were awarded a share of the £1 million prize fund. The five criteria used to identify the winners included: carbon dioxide reduction; innovation; long-term impact; potential for growth, replication and transferability; and community engagement.

**ACTIVITIES:** Analysis of the 355 applications revealed nine proposal 'types', distinguished on the basis of how they intended to tackle climate change issues: low carbon zones, low carbon local projects, low carbon youth schemes, low carbon public buildings, low carbon enterprises, low carbon services, low carbon connections, low carbon inventions (i.e. products rather than projects), and low carbon originals (proposals that do not fall into the other categories).

Across the BGC communities, a range of notable innovations were identified, including novel ways of delivering home energy checks; innovative use of behaviour change tools (such as pledges); new measures to influence energy behaviour (e.g. voluntary consumption limits); new legal, financial and governance structures to support community ownership of renewable energy. Particularly interesting models in the context of this review were those that recycled profits from community-owned energy supplies to support further low carbon/sustainable living activities within the community. The Green Valleys winner in the Brecon Beacons, for example, registered as a community interest company and developed a series of community-owned micro-hydro power schemes. The revenue from these will be reinvested in community-based carbon reduction projects such as electric bike sharing, community woodlands to provide managed wood fuel, and the protection of local peat landscapes as carbon sinks. The Isle of Eigg winner is creating a green island, with the aim of halving their carbon emissions through generating renewable electricity, installing insulation and solar panels, producing local food and developing low carbon community transport schemes.

**LESSONS:** According to the evaluation of the project undertaken by Brook Lyndhurst (2010), a number of important lessons have emerged:

- Performance (outcome)-based funding offers potential to mobilise community resources to achieve specific goals and to accelerate change.



- The specific design features of a prize model – the way in which funding and performance criteria are set up - significantly influences the effectiveness of community innovations. More than one outcome measure is most effective, and the desired outcomes must remain clear and consistent throughout the process.
- Enhanced credibility was secured through being part of the Big Green Challenge, which facilitated Finalists in attracting partners and leveraging funding.
- Providing small grants and advice to pilot the delivery of innovative ideas is a useful model for selecting organisations with the most potential, but the stress, time and resource burdens on those taking part need to be kept in proportion to the risk that they will secure no further funding.
- The prize is not a substitute for grant funding; none of the finalists would have achieved what they did without additional financial resources or in-kind support.
- Communities are often able to identify and develop opportunities that private business or the public sector could or would not be able to take advantage of, largely through mobilising social capital, and creating a sense of community ownership, collective endeavour and responsibility that external agents often cannot achieve.
- Leadership by catalytic and entrepreneurial individuals was strongly evident in BGC finalists – generally with a clear vision and purpose, subject knowledge, strength of character to push things through, resilience charisma and connections with their target communities. Mechanisms need to be developed that identify and create space and support for catalytic individuals/groups to initiate and develop community-owned initiatives.
- An important finding was that most of the productive partner relationships emerged organically or were serendipitous, usually arising through word-of-mouth, personal contacts, or the project team/leader researching and securing what they needed. This raises questions about how best to go about identifying and nurturing the crucial nodes in networks. Similarly, the most effective means by which community involvement was encouraged were word of mouth and personal networks, rather than formal or direct marketing.
- Lack of capacity or finance were the key constraints faced by Finalists in trying to deliver, and all were dependent on grants to a fairly high degree and most will continue to be for the next 2-3 years. Barriers caused by public sector funding rules need to be reviewed, grant procedures simplified and greater effort given to exploring how private markets and household capital could support the development of community assets, and reduce the heavy administrative burdens associated with the projects.
- BGC finalists are currently struggling to respond to the level of interest generated by the BGC and would benefit from mechanisms to support the diffusion of ideas and practices, both financially and logistically.
- Communities need help in accessing mainstream energy programmes and forming productive relationships with local authorities and energy companies; for example, none of the groups were engaged in helping local authorities to deliver area-based carbon reduction commitments.

**SOURCES:**

<http://www.nesta.org.uk/library/documents/mapping-the-BGC-summary.pdf>

<http://www.nesta.org.uk/library/documents/BGC-Evaluation-Exec-Summary-FINAL.pdf>

[http://www.nesta.org.uk/areas\\_of\\_work/public\\_services\\_lab/environment/big\\_green\\_challenge/asse](http://www.nesta.org.uk/areas_of_work/public_services_lab/environment/big_green_challenge/asse)

[ts/features/mass\\_localism](http://www.thegreenvalleys.org/ts/features/mass_localism)

<http://www.thegreenvalleys.org/>

<http://www.nesta.org.uk/library/documents/BGC-finalists-booklet.pdf>

### **CASE STUDY 2. Transition Towns**

**LOCATION:** Part of a global initiative, a 'transition initiative' could be a town, village, university and so forth.

**AIM:** To inspire community-led responses to the pressures of climate change, fossil fuel depletion, and increasingly, economic contraction.

**BACKGROUND:** The concept of transition was introduced by permaculture designer, Rob Hopkins, in Kinsale, Ireland. With his students, he was exploring holistic creative adaptations in the areas of energy production, health, education, economy and agriculture as a pathway to a sustainable future, which inspired two of his students to develop the Transition Towns concept. The idea was presented to Kinsale Town Council, who decided to adopt a Transition plan in a new initiative for energy independence. The idea was subsequently adapted and adopted in Hopkins' hometown of Totnes, and quickly spread. By February 2009, 134 communities around the world had been officially designated as 'Transition Towns' (Scott-Cato and Hillier, 2010).

#### **ACTIVITIES:**

Initially, a small motivated community group starts a programme of community awareness-raising, linking to existing community groups and reaching out to others, to highlight the rationale for adopting the transition approach and suggesting potential creative community activities to include.

As the group expands, it may self-organise into themed action teams, such as food, transport, energy, housing, education, textiles. These teams will develop, implement and refine different ideas in the community, such as community supported agriculture, car clubs, local currencies, urban orchards, community re-skilling workshops etc.

Once such activities are well-established, a community may embark on the Energy Descent Action Plan (EDAP); a community-designed 15-20 year plan outlining a range of projects in the different areas, with the ultimate aim of bringing the community to a sufficiently resilient and low carbon dioxide emitting state. Few initiatives have yet reached this stage.

The final stage will be the implementation of the EDAP, learning from and sharing lessons from successes and failures with other Transition Initiatives. In June 2010, only Transition Totnes had reached this stage.

#### **SOURCES:**

<http://www.transitionnetwork.org/support/what-transition-initiative>

Scott-Cato, M. and Hillier, J. (2010) 'How could we study climate-related social innovation? Applying Deleuzian philosophy to Transition Towns' *Environmental Politics* 19(6): 867-887.

### **CASE STUDY 3. Doorstep Greens**

**LOCATION:** UK-wide

**AIM:** Recognising an ongoing decline of many public open spaces, the Doorstep Greens initiative aimed to draw on the lessons learned in previous community-led regeneration schemes to offer 200 communities in England the opportunity to create a new green space, giving particular priority to disadvantaged communities, both urban and rural.

**BACKGROUND INFO:** Following on from the success of the Pocket Park initiative (see Case Study 15), and also from a subsequent scheme – the Millennium Greens fund – the Doorstep Greens initiative was launched by the Countryside Agency in April 2001, providing grants of between £10,000 to £150,000 to local communities to help them create and manage their own special local open space. Approximately £13 million was provided by the Big Lottery Fund as part of their ‘Green Spaces and Sustainable Communities’ programme and a further £15million donated from other funders.

Key characteristics of the scheme included: (1) local ownership and sustainability, with the community taking a leading role in the green’s planning, design, creation and long-term care; (2) project preparation plans – first stage grants of up to £3500 were offered initially to help communities compile a proper proposal, including extensive local consultation to ensure projects were viable and supported by the local community; (3) creation grants of up to £150,000 were then offered to those whose Project Preparation Plans were accepted; (4) priority was given to applications from disadvantaged communities through regional targeting plans and using local knowledge from the Countryside Agency’s regional teams; (5) not only was whole-community involvement encouraged but also wider collaboration with related organisations such as housing associations, Groundwork Trusts, youth workers, the police, local schools, BTCV and wildlife trusts. A Doorstep Green grants panel consisting of ten environmental professionals was convened to decide whether projects would receive creation grants, based on their Project Preparation Plans. Key assessment criteria included: cost of the project, evidence of strong community support, the existence of a sufficiently strong team to take the project forward.

**ACTIVITIES:**

Significant support was provided to community groups by 25 Countryside Agency staff, organised in regional teams, guiding and advising communities through each stage of the process. Quarterly newsletters and specialist online information were provided and regional workshops organised to bring together different groups to learn from each other and share ideas.

Creation grants were usually offered up to a maximum of 70% of the total project cost, requiring the community to fund the remaining 30% through fundraising, other grants, or gifts in-kind, in order to encourage community ownership. Examples of community efforts to raise the match funding include asking residents to ‘buy a square’, holding monthly breakfasts, organising fundraising events such as a local Ladies night!

Each Doorstep Green project was defined by its own unique characteristics: size, location, site layout, existing trees, shrubs or buildings, and the design of the Green was usually driven by the social mix of the community. An elderly community, for example, may prioritise all-weather footpaths and quiet places to sit, whilst families may prefer children’s play spaces (though play equipment could not be included in the grant, instead encouraging ‘features’ made from natural materials suitable for climbing on or hiding in etc).

In order to minimise the risk of youth vandalism, youth workers and community artists were employed

in helping local teenagers define what they wanted from the green and actively engaged in creating the green, such that many of these areas have experienced few problems with vandalism or anti-social behaviour.

From the outset, a legal framework protected each community's right to continue using the Doorstep Green for a minimum of 25 years, but groups who lacked the necessary skills or confidence needed to sustain their project could appoint the local authority to act on their behalf.

As a result of the scheme, 340ha of land have been renovated or reclaimed by the scheme as a whole, and 56ha of former waste tip, industrial or derelict land have been reclaimed. High levels of community spirit, pride and interaction have been observed in these areas, with whole-community involvement embedded in the foundations of each project. In many cases, reduced instances of social problems have been noted, including reduced crime and drug use.

**LESSONS:** Whilst committed local groups, often motivated by one community champion, have proven a powerful force for change during the creation of their community green, a key fear highlighted in an evaluation of the Doorstep Greens initiative is their long term sustainability, particularly due to the lack of funding available for maintenance. Some groups designed their green with minimal maintenance in mind but for others, especially those with frequently changing or predominantly elderly populations, maintenance is a significant concern.

Suggested approaches for addressing this have included: (a) the establishment of a Greenspace Stewardship Scheme akin to the existing Environmental Stewardship scheme but for community green spaces; and (b) the use of Management Endowment Funds, working on the premise of a capital fund which can attract high interest and the interest used to fund green space maintenance.

**SOURCES:**

[http://www.naturalengland.org.uk/Images/Opening%20Green%20Doors\\_tcm6-9082.pdf](http://www.naturalengland.org.uk/Images/Opening%20Green%20Doors_tcm6-9082.pdf)

Johnstone, P. (2006) 'Community-managed countryside' *Green Places* 22: 34-37.

Worsley, K. (2006) 'Did they do well?' *Green Places* 27: 22-24.

**CASE STUDY 4. BTCV**

**LOCATION:** Initially established in the UK, now international with projects across Europe and in Africa.

**AIM:** BTCV's vision is that of 'a better environment where people are valued, included and involved'. BTCV seeks to respond to local need by finding local solutions for local environmental concerns. BTCV's core values include: the contribution of people taking direct action to improve their environment; social justice providing inclusiveness, accessibility and choice; solutions that provide for a sustainable future; everyone having the opportunity to fulfil their potential; ready access to green space; and a safe healthy working environment.

**BACKGROUND:** BTCV was established in 1959 as a volunteering organisation providing the bridge between global environmental ideals and local realities. Their work is based on the recognition that for many people, environmental awareness starts at home as local environmental quality has the biggest impact on their quality of life and experience of nature.

Their work has developed and evolved since its establishment. Though it started out with a focus on engaging people in conservation activities, in the 1990s it became increasingly community focused and

began to adopt a greater advocacy role, speaking on behalf of its volunteer constituency to influence government policies. The period from 2000 – 2004 was closely aligned to the growing environmental justice movement as BTCV developed its 'Environments for All' programme to effectively reach out to more disadvantaged and marginalised communities with programmes that focused on both environmental and social needs. At the same time, the Green Gym programme began, enabling thousands of people to enhance their physical health and mental wellbeing through the activities undertaken with BTCV. From 2004 to 2008, the 'Spring into Action' campaign attracted widespread media and political support, and the Green Heroes Award showcased and celebrated the achievements of volunteers. More recently, through BTCV's social enterprise arm, a vast number of young and / or unemployed people have also benefited from new skills development, with many going on to find long term employment as a result.

**ACTIVITIES:** The approach adopted by BTCV does not focus purely on environmental outcomes, but instead recognises that engaging a wider diversity of the population will rely on addressing a combination of environmental and social concerns in their programmes. Their key strategic goals include:

1. *A better environment:* including biodiversity conservation and improved local environments and natural landscapes, as well as tackling climate change through conserving carbon sinks, protecting natural flood buffers such as wetlands, and encouraging local food production;
2. *Environmentally active citizens:* engaging the diversity of society, making opportunities attractive to volunteers, tackling issues of environmental justice and using physical spaces to involve a broad spectrum of people, identifying issues of common concern that bring together people from diverse backgrounds, circumstances and cultures with a shared goal (such as food growing and children's play). The success of such approaches is apparent in the profile of BTCV's volunteers, with one in ten from BME groups (well above the national average), 8.7% with a disability and a third under the age of 25.
3. *Improved health and wellbeing:* including the creation of a 'natural health service' through the development and maintenance of good quality green spaces offering appealing opportunities for physical exercise and mental relaxation; the creation of the 'Green Gym' as an alternative to the traditional gym to enable people of all ages and abilities to get fit, de-stress and meet new people; and the creation of local food growing schemes and related cookery events to encourage healthier eating amongst participants. BTCV's Annual Review 2009/2010 highlights that if 24% of the UK adult population took part in a Green Gym session once a week the NHS could save over £2 billion a year in treating heart disease, stroke and diabetes.
4. *Employment and skills for the future:* offering practical learning and skills outside of the classroom, particularly for young people excluded from school and young offenders as a route back into society; supporting people through accredited schemes and structured learning plans; providing short courses and informal learning, with a particular focus on leadership skills; supporting people through employment training and local labour market skills and into work. BTCV's Annual Review 2009/2010 highlights BTCV's role in helping almost 20,000 people into jobs the previous year, despite the recession.

Collectively, the changes brought about by BTCV and the communities they work with have had vast social impact; Social Return on Investment calculations highlight that £1 invested with BTCV can generate a social return of over £4. Greenspaces, community gardens and the wildlife they attract have notably assisted in enhancing a sense of place and improving the quality of life for people living nearby. Less visible are the significant wellbeing benefits experienced by environmental volunteers, as

highlighted in the 2008 evaluation of the Green Gym programme by Oxford Brookes University.

Engaging in BTCV volunteering also appears to catalyse pro-environmental behaviours in other areas; seven out of ten volunteers increased the amount of waste they recycled and gave advice to others about being environmentally friendly as a result of volunteering with BTCV.

**SOURCES:**

<http://www2.btcv.org.uk/stratplan.pdf>

<http://www2.btcv.org.uk/display/evaluatingefa>

<http://www2.btcv.org.uk/display/changedplaces>

<http://www2.btcv.org.uk/display/changedplaces>

<http://www2.btcv.org.uk/blaenaugwent.pdf>

[http://www2.btcv.org.uk/BTCV\\_Annual\\_Review\\_2010.pdf](http://www2.btcv.org.uk/BTCV_Annual_Review_2010.pdf)

[http://www2.btcv.org.uk/gg\\_evaluation\\_0308.pdf](http://www2.btcv.org.uk/gg_evaluation_0308.pdf)

**CASE STUDY 5. Incredible Edible Todmorden**

**LOCATION:** Todmorden, Pennines (but also more recently replicated elsewhere)

**AIM:** Incredible Edible Todmorden (IET) is a network of volunteers, businesses and gardeners, which campaigns for and grows real food. The overall aim of the initiative is to promote ideas for a more sustainable economy and a lifestyle that can survive whatever the future might hold. More specific objectives include: to create opportunities for community food growing by finding land, using buildings, micro-finance etc; to invest in training in land skills and local ways of buying and distributing food; to remove obstacles to local action such as legal boundaries, soil testing and covering public liability; to enable active engagement of people around a sense of place and belonging, working towards shared objective understanding and salience for everyone; to accept that there is not a single solution but rather a 'jigsaw of parts'; and to ensure rewards for labour, including the creation of jobs and the harvesting of produce.

**BACKGROUND:** IET was launched by two ladies in Todmorden – Pam Warhurst and Mary Clear - in March 2008 following growing concern about the environment into which Mary's new grandchild was being borne. They decided to focus on gardens as they felt there is something in humans that responds to growing, and gave themselves five years to get a community garden up and running. Pam was the owner of the local cafe, chaired regeneration company Pennine Prospects and sat on the boards of the West Yorkshire Tourism Partnership and Natural England. Formerly chair of Calderdale NHS Trust, leader of Calderdale Council and deputy chair of the Countryside Agency, in 2005 she received a CBE for services to the environment. Pam adopted the 'thinking' role for the project, whilst Mary focused on inspiring the community with the idea of growing their own vegetables.

Mary completely demolished her front garden and focused on planting a 'garden without walls'. Since food is traditionally grown in the back garden and flowers in the front, she made a hole in the wall to her back garden allowing people to step in and help themselves. The aim was to develop a propaganda garden, exemplifying to other community members what they can do. Over time, the

community began to visit the garden, harvest its produce and increasingly they picked up the idea and ran with it in other spaces in the community.

**ACTIVITIES:**

Residents can grow food in grow bags, rear worms in wormeries, make compost, get involved in a community garden, attend free cookery courses, or offer gardening expertise. Volunteers have been planting herb gardens, vegetables, fruit bushes and trees around the town, asking businesses and public bodies for permission to use their land or working with them on food production projects. The railway station, fire station, and social landlord Pennine Housing 2000 are involved. Pennine Housing offers free seeds and advice for tenants and a local old people's home has had an Incredible Edible exterior make-over with help from Community Payback. All schools have planted a 'growing boat' garden, and a lottery bid has been submitted for funds to create a full-scale fish farm at Tod High School. Two orchards were created and there are plans to run grafting courses in conjunction with local experts so that the skills and developed and spread locally.

Calderdale Council have adopted policies borough-wide to remove obstacles stopping the use of community or disused land for growing, and to offer guidance to groups and public bodies about how it can be achieved. IET have set up a simple legal framework with the council to transfer council land to IET for growing, with forms of licences for orchards, planters and growing plots. They are also putting together a land bank of local land.

There are also plans to set up an IET kitchen, with help sought for fitting appliances, electrics etc. Other skills sought include carpentry to produce building planters for vegetable growing around town, film making skills to record IET activities, and further management skills.

The group is collecting memories and knowledge for a history project and recipes for a local food cookbook.

Working with 'Landscape Design Software – Visualise 2D', IET has launched a 'Dream Streets' project. The software can be used to transform a picture of an existing place into how it might look after an incredible edible makeover, helping to motivate and mobilise further ideas and action.

A campaign, 'Every Egg Matters' was launched in February 2009 to make the town self-sufficient in eggs by 2018. The launch event included free pancakes, egg painting and feathery hen hard hats. An online resources page provides advice and guidance for those looking to get involved.

In July 2010, IET hosted an ideas-generating event, attracting planners, architects, quantity surveyors, writers, developers, and public and private sector representatives from across the UK to brainstorm IET's contribution to making Todmorden a really vibrant 21<sup>st</sup> Century market town. The outcome of the event was a decision to embark on an asset transfer initiative, transferring the market hall to a Todmorden Enterprise.

Not only is IET thriving but other communities are also seeking to replicate their success, with a range of Incredible Edibles emerging in Huddersfield, Doncaster North, Macclesfield, Rossendale, and Wakefield.

**LESSONS:** Although the initiative does not appear to have been formally evaluated, it provides an inspiring example of how catalytic community individuals and a range of fun growing activities, related campaigns and valuable local partnerships can stimulate a thriving community working towards a

shared goal of sustainability.

**SOURCES:**

<http://www.incredible-edible-todmorden.co.uk/>

Kidd, MC. (2009) 'Vegetable Empire', *Environmental Health News* 24: 9.

**CASE STUDY 6. The Campaign for School Gardening**

**LOCATION:** UK-wide

**AIM:** The Campaign for School Gardening was initiated by the Royal Horticultural Society, with the aim of raising the profile of gardens as a natural, sustainable resource that has the capacity to offer curricular, social and emotional benefits to pupils.

The specific objectives are four-fold: (1) to encourage all schools to get growing and to acknowledge the right of every child to get involved in gardening; (2) to demonstrate the value of gardening in enriching the curriculum, teaching life skills and contributing to children's mental and physical health; (3) to convince everyone involved with education in schools of the value of gardening in developing active citizens and carers for the environment; and (4) to show how gardening can contribute to a sustainable environment.

**BACKGROUND:** Launched by the Royal Horticultural Society in 2007, by April 2010 over 11,500 primary schools were registered in the campaign. The campaign is supported by Waitrose (the headline sponsor), Dorset Cereals, Marshalls plc, and Manchester Airport. The campaign involves advice and information provision on school gardens together with continuing professional development for teachers. Registered schools receive benefits and rewards when they have achieved each of the five levels on a benchmarking scheme, and receive free seeds for their gardens.

**ACTIVITIES:**

Activities include: gardening clubs, engaging grandparents of school children to provide gardening expertise and advice, organising parents and carers to undertake specific tasks such as digging, tree planting or weeding small and delicate plants.

Many schools embedded the garden within the school development plan, gave staff garden-related tasks, employed teaching and support staff who prioritised outdoor learning, provided staff with non-contact time to be allocated to planning gardening activities and developing gardening expertise. Examples of ways in which the gardens were used for learning included: a 'Darwin thinking walk', pupil-devised experiments, the construction of bug houses, measuring plant growth, and using the garden for mathematical thinking and numeracy projects. One school created a sensory garden specifically intended to facilitate learning engagement amongst children with special needs.

Several activities aimed to engage the wider community e.g. Big Dig days, Dads and Lads groups, participating in church harvest festivals, and donating produce to local pensioners during the summer holidays in return for pensioner expertise in a knitting and sewing club the following autumn.

Celebrating achievements through, for example, articles in the school newsletter, student-led presentations in school assemblies, entering produce at flower shows. One school kept chickens to produce eggs to make cakes to sell in the Town Square, which was combined with a school numeracy



project.

**LESSONS:** A recent evaluation of the campaign by the National Foundation for Education Research (NFER) highlights that school gardens can provide a means, not only for achieving learning outcomes for pupils, but also for wider outcomes around both the Every Child Matters agenda and community cohesion. Schools had used the gardens to promote the development of active citizens as well as independent learners and had observed changes in the children and in attitudes to the school within the local community. In particular, the evaluation highlighted the value in using school gardens to:

- Enhance relationships, both internal and external to the school, through inter-cohort gardening clubs, activities that foster team work, and curriculum activities that involve the wider community, with the sense of working towards a common goal;
- Bring learning alive for students, thereby improving their scientific knowledge and understanding;
- Raise awareness of sustainability issues relating to food miles, seasonality of food production, and food waste. The use of bins to produce garden compost from school food waste, for example, has given students an opportunity to understand how recycling works in practice;
- Increase student confidence, resilience and self esteem; and enhance their development of physical skills and fine motor skills;
- Develop a sense of responsibility and foster a practical understanding of active citizenship;
- Promote a positive attitude to healthy food choices and create a willingness to try new vegetables grown themselves;
- Enhance positive behaviour and emotional wellbeing, with the garden creating a calm environment and offering a sense of purpose to many;

Success factors included: the active support of the headteacher, a key member of staff driving the work in the garden, ensuring a manageable work load, giving the garden a high profile within the school.

Funding and the time and effort involved in managing the school garden sites remained the key threats to the sustainability of the gardens. Schools are trying to develop innovative ways around this, such as collecting supermarket vouchers for tools and seeds, using 'Freecycle' to source specific items, approaching potentially useful organisations to provide advice and expertise (e.g. one school asked 'London Better Together' for practical help).

**SOURCES:**

[http://apps.rhs.org.uk/schoolgardening/uploads/documents/Impact\\_of\\_school\\_gardening\\_on\\_learning\\_821.pdf](http://apps.rhs.org.uk/schoolgardening/uploads/documents/Impact_of_school_gardening_on_learning_821.pdf)

<http://apps.rhs.org.uk/schoolgardening/default.aspx>

**CASE STUDY 7. Fairwater Community Garden**

**LOCATION:** Fairwater, near Cardiff

**AIM:** Broadly, the project aims to provide the opportunity for people, horticulture and the arts to work together for the benefit of the whole community.

Specific objectives of the project include: (1) To encourage plants, vegetables, wildlife and the arts to

cohabit within a sustainable environment; (2) to encourage people's appreciation, understanding and enjoyment of the natural environment through education, outreach activities and practical involvement; (3) to train students with learning needs in horticulture and related skills; (4) to create an environment that encourages wildlife into an urban area and to promote the ecological importance of the area; (5) to provide fairness and equity of opportunity and to ensure that all members of the community are equally valued; (6) that the project be used, and thereby valued, by the local community.

**BACKGROUND INFO:** The garden runs along the length of Sbectrwm Community Enterprise Centre and was established on the site of an old school playground, which became derelict when the school relocated in 1985. In June 1995, volunteers from the local community decided to transform the overgrown site into a community garden which would be accessible to everyone. It is now a project in which local residents, people with learning difficulties, children and other community members can be equally involved. It is managed following organic principles and seeks to promote sound environmental practices, providing opportunities for all to be involved in the day-to-day running of a community garden and to learn about amenity horticulture.

**ACTIVITIES:**

The garden is used to produce seasonal fruit, herbs and vegetables, as well as plants to promote biodiversity. In particular, the garden seeks to attract the community through illustrating its value in arts and crafts. It therefore hosts a range of environmental arts features and events - such as living willow sculptures, tree dressing days - and horticultural workshops, and events such as making bird houses and beneficial insect habitats. The garden is used to produce the materials for these events, such as using plants to produce natural dyes, willow trees used in making wigwams, tree decorations etc. A cutting garden is used to produce plants and flowers for arrangement. Strong links have been established with Fairwater Pottery, and their pottery has contributed a 'Flight Path' leading to the garden depicting images and words about flying insects, mosaic benches, a floor mosaic, hand made pots, ceramic apples and screen printed signs that convey information about insects and the environment.

Students attend the garden for one or two days per week for a period of two or three years, and an individual training plan is developed for each student, particularly focusing on horticultural skills. Accreditation is offered from the NPTC awarding body in the NPTC City and Guilds Skills for Working Life at Entry Levels 2 and 3.

**LESSONS:** Whilst no formal evaluation was apparent, this case study highlights the value of using the arts to bring together and attract diverse community members in local sustainability initiatives.

**SOURCES:**

<http://www.vision-twentyone.com/var/documents/project-fairwatercommunitygarden.pdf>

<http://www.vision-twentyone.com/fairwater-community-garden>

Wright, J. (2000) 'Going for Growth' *Volunteering* 57: 8-9.

**CASE STUDY 8. Eastside Roots**

**LOCATION:** Bristol

**AIM:** To create a forum for the sharing of skills and knowledge, for education, resource hire, as a plant and seed shop, as a demonstration of urban organic and permaculture food production, and a space for holding events and celebrations.

**BACKGROUND INFO:** Eastside Roots is a not-for-profit worker's cooperative which evolved out of the Bristol Permaculture Group and guided by the community.

**ACTIVITIES:** Eastside Roots is creating a community gardening hub for Easton and the wider Bristol community by renovating derelict land next to Stapleton Road train station and transforming it into a safe, social, positive, thriving green space and community resource. It runs a series of training courses, ranging from free one-hour workshops to 8-week accredited courses e.g. organic horticultural courses, introduction to permaculture, forest garden weekends, free skill swaps, and off-site training. Though currently less well established than Fairwater Community Garden, Eastside Roots also demonstrates how the combination of art, music and vegetables can be used to educate and inspire community engagement.

**SOURCES:**

Take Action (2009) *Ecologist* 39(6): 43

<http://www.eastsideroots.org.uk/index.html>

**CASE STUDY 9. Global Generation 'Living Buildings – Local Links'**

**LOCATION:** King's Cross, London.

**AIM:** To inspire and enable young people to generate environmental and social changes in their communities.

**BACKGROUND:** Global Generation is a charity that seeks to support young people to generate social and environmental change, with a particular focus on young people as social innovators. Four interlinked project strands form part of an overall delivery model: living food (young people learning to grow herbs and vegetables in unused urban spaces, cook healthy food and compost waste); living buildings (young people working with environmental specialists to install green features such as green roofs and water conservation systems in local business and community buildings); the Generator (a leadership training programme to empower young people with the skills and confidence to take on mentoring, communication and hospitality roles); and, Pertwood Campsite (residential trips to Pertwood Organic Farm in Wiltshire where youths can benefit from healthy food, energising walks and practical work).

**ACTIVITIES:**

Through this initiative, young people are given the skills and opportunities to develop food growing spaces, biodiverse green roofs and plant-filtered grey water systems on office rooftops, school grounds and development sites around Kings Cross. Prior to starting work on these spaces, volunteers spend time at the Pertwood Organic Farm to learn about themselves, others and the environment through team working and environmental activities. They then use these skills to create the range of green living spaces in London.

A particularly innovative aspect of this project is the development of the portable skip-garden allotment sites, which were created with the intention of being able to move them around as new

spaces became available during the Kings Cross station re-development process. The skips were created and are tended to by local young people, including their own compost production. Advice and training is provided by Global Generation, financial assistance is provided by local businesses, and produce is bought by local restaurants.

Also developed was a courtyard allotment and biodiverse living roof for Medway court Housing Estate and the same for Camden Council, and a rooftop allotment for Wolff Olins, which was installed through a workshop process with ten local people and ten Wolff Olins' staff.

The initiative has benefited from valuable partnerships in the Kings Cross area, with partners including Kings Cross Central, Guardian News and Media, The Big Lottery, Camden Council, and Herbert Smith LLP (who have provided pro-bono legal advice to Global Generation on various green roof projects, including on their own office premises).

**LESSONS:** The initiative illustrates the value of food-related, skills-based approaches in successfully nurturing a new generation of skilled, energised and inspired young people in the area, as well as greater appreciation of the potential of community spaces, with residents becoming increasingly protective of their environment. Participants are also showing signs of adopting wider pro-environmental behaviours as a result of their engagement to-date, suggesting food-related projects could be a useful 'entry' point for adopting other pro-environmental behaviours: Wolff Olins has reported decreased use of office energy, water and paper since being engaged in the project; and the Skip Gardens have generated individual and collective interest in sustainable lifestyles through practical actions such as composting, recycling, walking to work, and thinking about where food and energy comes from.

**SOURCES:**

<http://www.globalgeneration.org.uk/about-us>

<http://www.capitalgrowth.org/opengardens/>

<http://www.nesta.org.uk/library/documents/BGC-finalists-booklet.pdf>

**CASE STUDY 10. Eostre Organics**

**LOCATION:** East Anglia

**AIM:** To build a fair, ecological and cooperative food system, providing a source of sustainable livelihoods and business viability for small local organic producers in response to a decline in rural farm employment and competition from international markets.

The specific objectives are: (1) to supply consumers of all incomes high quality seasonal produce; (2) to encourage cooperative working among its members and between the coop and consumers; (3) transparency about food supply chains; (4) to source all produce from UK and European regions from socially responsible producers and co-ops promoting direct local marketing, and from fair-trade producers outside of Europe; (5) to favour local seasonal produce and supplement (not replace) with imports; to minimise packaging, waste and food transport; (6) to offer educational farm visits to raise awareness of the environmental and social aspects of local organic production (Seyfang, 2006).

**BACKGROUND INFO:** Eostre Organics was borne out of a Norfolk-based NGO called 'Farmer's Link' which was inspired by the Rio Earth Summit in 1992 to improve the sustainability of farming in

developed countries and make solidarity links between UK farmers. In 1997, they established East Anglia Food Link (EAFL) to promote conversion to organic production in the region, building direct links between farmers and consumers to create more sustainable food supply chains and benefit local economies and communities. Eostre was established in 2003 with a Defra Rural Enterprise Scheme grant, supplying organic produce from local farmers, but having scope to meet year round product demand by sourcing seasonal organic produce from organic cooperatives in Europe.

The structure of the Eostre Organics is very different to mainstream markets; it is based on fair trade, cooperative principles and inspiring loyalty among customers with shared principles. The average farm size of Eostre members is 117.3ha, with many much smaller than this, which poses problems for farmers seeking to enter local markets as stability of supply cannot be assured. Collective organisation through Eostre enables members to achieve the scale required to penetrate these markets, for example at market stalls or through box schemes. Some progress has been made in supplying to local public sector organisations, such as schools and hospitals, but this is hindered by the policy infrastructure around public procurement.

**ACTIVITIES:**

Eostre Organics adopts an educative, outreach role to inform and motivate consumers, through farm visits, newsletters etc. Misleading price signals in the mainstream market (as a result of externalised social and environmental costs and benefits, and perverse subsidies) render Eostre's products more expensive such that they rely on informed consumers to choose their produce over cheaper mainstream alternatives.

A challenge emerged early on in Eostre's development in deciding whether to stay local or stay organic in terms of the range of products supplied by Eostre; whilst some customers expressed a preference for less imported produce, the value of importing from organic, socially responsible producers in Europe lies in being able to guarantee a wide range of produce all year round, thereby meeting the demands of local markets for produce that may be out of season in the UK.

By 2006, Eostre was supplying to 13 box schemes, 15 market stalls, nine cafes, pubs or restaurants, and 12 shops. Progress has also been made in supplying public sector catering, through local schools, hospitals and prisons, but a key lesson to emerge from their experience is the need to review public sector procurement approaches if such local food networks are to be able to successfully penetrate these markets.

**SOURCES:**

Seyfang, G. (2006) 'Ecological citizenship and sustainable consumption: Examining local organic food networks' *Journal of Rural Studies* 22: 383-395

**CASE STUDY 11. Community Supported Agriculture**

**LOCATION:** Nationwide

**AIM:** To encourage ecologically sound, socially responsible agricultural systems, providing mutual benefits between growers and communities and reconnecting people to the land where their food is grown.

**BACKGROUND:** In Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) schemes, a community makes a financial

pledge to support a local farm. By making a financial commitment to a CSA scheme, people become 'members', paying for a season up-front through weekly, monthly or annual payments. In return they receive a share of the farm's produce. The concept developed in the 1960s in Germany, Switzerland and Japan in response to concerns about the industrialisation of post-war agriculture, helping to develop a secure market for local producers and reconnecting people to where their food comes from.

In the UK, the Soil Association helps new CSAs to become established and supports the development of a CSA network, through providing information, guidelines and case studies; regional officers to provide group-specific advice and support; assisting interested groups in finding land or farmers/growers to work with; establishing 'buddying' links with other initiatives; and running training and networking CSA events.

#### **ACTIVITIES:**

Examples of initiatives that have come out of the CSA initiative include:

- Receiving a weekly box of vegetables through the year;
- Volunteering on the farm and learning new organic skills;
- Help with running an organic farm and supporting a farm shop;
- Sponsoring an apple tree and harvesting its fruit;
- Renting a plot of farmland and having vegetables grown on your behalf;
- Buying shares in a cow and receiving interest in cheese;
- Rent-a-vine from one of Britain's few vineyards;
- A bond or share scheme where members and supporters of a CSA venture can invest money through the purchase of bonds or shares.

The benefits to local communities of engaging in a CSA scheme include: receiving fresh food from a known sources; reducing 'food miles' and packaging; ensuring ecologically sensitive farming and improved animal welfare; an enhanced local economy with higher employment, more local processing, local consumption and a recirculation of money through 'local spend'; social learning around varieties of food, its production methods and costs; having an influence over the local landscape and encouraging more sustainable farming.

Benefits to farmers include: a more secure income enabling improved business planning and time to concentrate on farming; a higher and fairer return for products by selling direct to the public; increased involvement in the local community and the opportunity to respond directly to consumers' needs; receiving help with labour and planning future initiatives.

#### **SOURCES:**

<http://www.soilassociation.org/Whatwedo/Communitysupportedagriculture/tabid/266/Default.aspx>

#### **CASE STUDY 12. Railway Land Nature Reserve**

**LOCATION:** Near Lewes, East Sussex

**AIM:** The key aims of the Railway Land Nature Reserve are to: encourage learning and knowledge building about ecological restoration and biodiversity conservation; to conserve the biodiversity and highly valued nature within the site; to facilitate community participation in the process; to generate

public interest in the beauty, history and character of Lewes and its surrounding area; and to create local and international connections.

**BACKGROUND INFO:** This 25ha nature reserve consists of a diverse mix of habitats and historic uses, including former railway sidings, wet grazing meadows, old woodland, the remains of a 19<sup>th</sup> century garden, ponds, ditches, old hedgerows, and a newer reed bed, such that biodiversity levels are high and new species continue to be discovered. In 1987 this land had fallen into neglect and was threatened when British Rail proposed to sell the land for use as an urban car park. However, through campaigning, community mobilisation and awareness-raising led by local champions, Dr. John Parry and Peter Linklater (the chairman of the local Friends of Lewes group), the developments were halted and in 1988 the Railway Land Wildlife Trust was formed. Specially commissioned botanical and entomological surveys and the discovery of a wetland fly previously unknown to Britain confirmed the significant ecological value of the site, and led to its designation as a Local Nature Reserve in 1995.

The site is primarily owned by Lewes District Council, but is managed by a group of volunteers including the Lewes Railway Land Wildlife Trust and two rangers provided by the District Council. Since 1996, the site has also had a junior management board consisting of young people aged 9-15. In 2004, Lewes District Council and the Railway Land Wildlife Trust entered into a Memorandum of Understanding, in order to provide stability and a sense of ownership, trust and purpose between both parties which has led them to launch the Railway Land Project and the Linklater Pavilion appeal. Founder sponsors include the Mettyear Charitable Trust and Viridor Credits.

**ACTIVITIES:** A range of conservation, training and education-based activities are carried out at the site, including:

- Site surveying and species monitoring, lead by entomologist Peter Hodge. He has recorded over 1300 insect species, over 100 of which are listed as nationally scarce, rare, vulnerable or endangered.
- The Railway Land bird-watching group meets every fortnight, recording birds on the reserve, and has seen over 70 species.
- The youth management board has raised funds for two key site developments. The first is a wildlife garden, sown with meadow grasses and flowers on waste ground near the entrance to the reserve. The second is the restoration of an old pond, which is now fringed with robin and purple loose-strife, providing nesting sites for ducks and supporting populations of frogs, grass snakes and dragon flies.
- Students from Sussex and Oxford universities, as well as local schools and colleges, have visited the site, and primary school classes studied the new reed bed, with pupil-designed experiments on how reeds function, and games to show how summer migrant reed and sedge warblers reach the reed-bed all the way from Africa.
- Social inclusion is central to the work of the Trust, and Dr. John Parry organised a five-year programme of conservation work on the reserve with a group of adults with learning difficulties as part of an EC Interreg funded project, with links to a similar group in France.
- The project also has connections to a school in Madagascar and they plan to partner centres in Brazil's Pantanal, in Africa and in Bangladesh.
- The all-weather paths around the reserve enable easier access for older or disabled people.
- The opening of a 'Heart of Reeds' land sculpture in 2005, intended to represent the project's

connections to art and science.

- Most recently, a new centre for the study of Biodiversity and Environmental Change is planned – the Linklater Pavilion Centre. This low carbon building will be dedicated to the efforts of Peter Linklater in saving the site in 1987, aiming to provide: a local archive of transition and change that builds on the work of the last 20 years, an innovative centre of environmental education for all generations, and a practical base for adults with learning disabilities working alongside schools.

**SOURCES:**

Sheath, E. (ed) (2010) 'Success Story in Sussex' *Green Places* 65: 32-35.

<http://www.railwaylandproject.org/index>

**CASE STUDY 13. Sheffield Botanical Gardens**

**LOCATION:** Sheffield

**AIM:** To restore the gardens to their previous ecological condition, and to continue to provide free access, develop and promote the role of the Gardens as a 'flagship' of horticultural excellence and education at local, regional and national levels.

**BACKGROUND INFO:** Sheffield Botanical Garden (SBG) is a 7.5ha early Victorian garden owned by Sheffield Town Trust and managed by the Sheffield City Council. It is the only UK Botanical Garden to have undertaken a complete restoration to original design intention (first created in the late 19<sup>th</sup> Century). Following the announcement by the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) of its Urban Parks Programme in January 1996, councillor and president Arrol Winning and former gardens curator Don Williams formed the 'Friends of the Botanical Gardens Sheffield' group with the aim of getting the community more involved in its restoration and upkeep. The friends group set up the Sheffield Botanical Gardens Trust (SBGT) as a tax-efficient registered charity in 1996, and submitted an initial bid to the HLF for a restoration programme. The Trust is manned on a voluntary basis and includes an accountant, solicitor, a professor and master cutler. The gardens were awarded a grant of £5.06 million, which was matched by £1.22 million raised locally and £0.41million of work in kind.

The restoration work was achieved through a partnership between the Friends group, the Trust and the Council – the city oversaw the work, handled the contracts, the legal side and the budget, whilst the Friends/Trust raised the match funding, and focused on publicity and planting. Volunteers were also responsible for much of the physical work of preparing the soil, a hard clay, prior to planting. The main funders are the Heritage Lottery Fund, Garfield Weston Foundation, Wolfson Foundation, and Landfill Communities Fund. The project manager is the Scott Wilson Group, and the landscaper is Brambledown.

**ACTIVITIES:**

Volunteers managed to persuade more than 50 companies, societies and trusts to each donate over £1000, which was assisted by the GiftAid reclaimable as a result of being a registered charity. Covenanted subscriptions raised a further £100,000, which included donations left in the fountain, pavilion and pond. Other fundraising ideas included: sponsoring panes of glass in the pavilion and roses in the rose garden, plant and craft sales, tours, lectures and work in kind.

A key challenge has been the liaison between FOBS, the trust, the council, the University of Sheffield



and the garden staff, described as a 'bureaucratic nightmare' with each having to communicate properly and regularly.

Between 20 and 30 volunteers continue to help maintain the gardens each week, augmenting a regular staff of 6. The number of skilled volunteers is enhanced by students from Sheffield University's landscape department.

An apprenticeship programme runs in the garden, replicating training that was in place until the 1970s before it fell into decline during the 1980s economic downturn. Education is a key thread running through the garden's history since its very beginning in 1833. Current plans include an 'evolutionary garden'.

In order to enhance its financial viability, a cafe and shop were prioritised in the restoration schedule to generate a revenue stream. In addition, art exhibitions, music and theatre productions are held in the gardens in the summer, which bring people in that may not otherwise know of or use the area.

**SOURCES:**

McEwan, G. (2008) 'Communal task of restoration', *Horticulture Week* 28/08/2008: p18-19.

<http://www.sbg.org.uk/index.asp>

**CASE STUDY 14. Britain in Bloom Campaign (and Urban Britain in Bloom)**

**LOCATION:** Multiple locations across the UK

**AIM:** The aim of this campaign is to enable and inspire communities to create lasting improvements to the local environment for the benefit of those that live, work and visit, for today and in the future. The campaign focuses on four core pillars: horticultural enthusiasm, environmental friendliness, sustainable development, and community involvement.

**BACKGROUND:** The campaign was established and is coordinated by the Royal Horticultural Society (RHS). It is one of the largest horticultural campaigns in Europe, involving over one thousand communities across the UK each year.

**ACTIVITIES:**

The RHS provides interested community 'action groups' with a starter pack outlining how the campaign works and providing details of useful contacts for advice and guidance and key information about how to get started. It provides useful tips on composting, water-wise gardening, conservation care and organic gardening etc.

Action groups will produce an 'action plan' to outline possible local projects, thinking about the benefits these will bring for the community and environment and how they will be maintained in the longer term.

Most communities then begin by organising a series of events, projects and activities to inspire, engage and mobilise other local residents, the Local Authority, local businesses, community groups and volunteers in the campaign e.g. group litter picks, bulb planting days, projects with local schools. Local competitions may be used to encourage local participation e.g. best front garden, best shop frontage etc. They may also place media in local papers, put up posters in local shops, let people 'adopt a spot' in the community etc. Guidance for how to involve the media is included in the starter

pack.

A range of activities are initiated by the community groups, including for example: imaginative seasonal and permanent planting of flowers, shrubs and trees, appropriate landscaping or conservation projects, recycling and cleanliness initiatives to reduce litter, graffiti and vandalism etc.

The group develops a fundraising plan, considering how to raise money for the projects e.g. through local events or sponsorship from local businesses etc. Potentially useful funding websites, sources, and guidance for funding applications, are set out in the starter pack.

Once established, community groups can enter into the regional or national 'In Bloom' campaign in the appropriate category which is based on Electoral Roll. The region/nation 'In Bloom' judging typically takes place in June/July, with winners announced in August/September.

Each year, the region/nation is able to nominate successful entries to represent them in the Britain In Bloom UK Finals, alongside other UK communities, with judging in August and winners announced at an awards ceremony in September.

Selected UK Finalist entries that have consistently achieved a Gold Award are given the title of Reference Town, and are invited by the Britain in Bloom (BiB) judges to compete in this special category of the UK Finals.

Each year, two entries from Britain in Bloom UK Finals are invited by the judging panel to represent the UK in Entente Florale, the European horticultural campaign, alongside communities from 11 other countries.

Following the success of this campaign, ENCAMS (previously the Tidy Britain Campaign) developed a similar campaign – Urban Britain in Bloom (UBiB) – with funding from the Community Fund for three years. This sought to engage low income inner city community groups and the 50+ age group (right across the social and ethnic spectrum) in a similar process, providing easy-to-access small grants, advice and multi-lingual guidance information to encourage these groups to progress from initial small-scale planting schemes to wider environmental improvement activities. The hope was that some of these may then go on to enter main BiB campaign process (and four of the groups did become national finalists in the BiB programme in 2001).

Both campaigns have resulted in a number of benefits for participating communities, including:

- Brighter, cleaner and greener local areas. Small-scale immediate visual improvements are well-understood, appreciated and relatively easy to achieve, even in the most disadvantaged neighbourhoods.
- Increased community pride and sense of community (in an evaluation of the UBiB campaign, 93% participants agreed the grant had created pride in the local area, 98% agreed it had created enthusiasm within group members and 92% agreed it had created enthusiasm and / or interest from people outside the group, 85% said it had prompted future work to improve the area, and 52% participants agreed that the grant had encouraged wider community involvement).
- A boost to many local economies through increased tourism
- Regeneration of run-down, neglected or disadvantaged areas
- Initially there was a concern that some smaller neighbourhood groups that could not engage

the whole community were being excluded from the campaign – a particular problem in inner city areas (hence the birth of the Urban Britain in Bloom campaign), but the creation later of the 'It's Your Neighbourhood' groups meant that these groups could be more easily included.

**LESSONS:** Whilst no formal evaluation information appears to be available about the main BiB programme, an evaluation of the Urban Britain in Bloom campaign highlighted considerable difficulties for participating communities to sustain the progress made once the funding ran out, suggesting the need for more appropriate funding streams or assistance in developing initiatives that will provide more sustainable revenues. Also highlighted was the need for an infrastructure of management and for support as well as small grants to both engage and sustain the participation of disadvantaged groups. This needs to be provided over a long time period (> 3 years) since it takes time for information to reach many grassroots communities, to set up this type of scheme and for the impacts of the scheme to be realised.

**SOURCES:**

<http://www.letsogardening.co.uk/Downloads/BinBStarterPack.pdf>

[http://www.sharedpractice.org.uk/Downloads/Urban\\_Britain\\_Bloom\\_Evaluation.pdf](http://www.sharedpractice.org.uk/Downloads/Urban_Britain_Bloom_Evaluation.pdf)

**CASE STUDY 15. Pocket Parks**

**LOCATION:** Northamptonshire

**AIM:** Pocket Parks are open areas of land owned and managed by local people, providing free, open access for all at all times. The overall Pocket Park vision is to develop easy access to the countryside, bringing the countryside to the people and providing opportunities for enjoyment and engagement. The parks serve multiple purposes including: (1) contributing to the protection and conservation of Northamptonshire's landscape, heritage and wildlife; (2) giving local people the opportunity to enhance the place in which they live or work; (3) assisting in the regeneration of areas as well as helping to maintain existing features.

**BACKGROUND:** The 'Pocket Parks' initiative was launched in 1984 by Northamptonshire County Council, with support from the Countryside Commission, in order to encourage and support communities in acquiring and managing their own green spaces. There are now over 80 pocket parks in the region, varying in size from 0.04ha to 35ha.

Initially the Countryside Commission funded a three-year experimental post of Pocket Parks Advisory Officer to run the scheme, and provided 25% of approved capital costs for each Pocket Park. The initiative was community-led and, by 1990, 18 Pocket Parks existed, at which point the scheme was expanded to include urban areas and a permanent post of Pocket Parks Officer was created to manage and further develop the scheme.

A number of key partnerships were developed during the early stages of the project, including with: all of Northamptonshire's District and Borough Councils, the Countryside Agency (formerly the Countryside Commission), Action for Communities in Rural England (ACRE), The Wildlife Trust and the British Trust for Conservation Volunteers.

**ACTIVITIES:**

Parks are only set up where sought out by communities. In each case, the creation of a community

management group ensures that the local community is fully involved with all aspects of the Pocket Park establishment. The management group is needed in order to: ensure continuity of knowledge and experience; make decisions that will affect the Pocket Park; apply for grant aid; encourage new people to stand for office; and, spread the workload.

The Council Pocket Parks officer provides support and advice at all stages, from inception to ongoing maintenance. The development of partnership working by the local authorities and the implementation of service level agreements with various organisations also provide ongoing assistance and support.

When communities express the desire to set up a Pocket Park, finding a suitable site and being able to demonstrate a dedicated team of volunteers are key considerations. Parks can be established of any size and in various locations e.g. the park established in the grounds of Kettering General Hospital with a butterfly garden circular fitness trail, composting area and sensory beds; regenerating a former stone pit and landfill site in Raunds (rubbish dumping ceased in the 1980s but uneven levels had prevented building on the site); and restoration of a former brick yard in Silverstone.

All proposals for a park are discussed with key local people and with any groups or organisations that may be able to assist the formation of the Pocket Park, and then with the wider community in a public meeting.

The Wildlife Trust undertakes a wildlife survey at each new Pocket Park which is used to write an appropriate management plan for the site, ensuring each park has a sound ecological base to build on.

Proposed new Pocket Parks may apply for a start-up grant of up to £5000 from Northamptonshire County Council, but each community must also provide 25% of the overall cost in setting up the park. Once established, no further council funding is available, but ongoing advisory support is provided by the Pocket Parks Officer. Alternative funding may be sought from private businesses sponsorship or national lottery funding etc.

The success of the Pocket Parks scheme has led to two later schemes; the Millennium Greens and Doorstep Greens initiatives (see Case Study 3). The scheme demonstrates a range of cultural, environmental and social benefits:

- Culturally, they: reinforce a positive link between local authorities and communities; provide venues for heritage and cultural activities; are cultural assets and a lasting legacy to future generations.
- Environmentally, they: ensure sustainable and economic management of green space; raise environmental awareness and the promotion of biodiversity through education and practical conservation projects; contribute to the maintenance of existing facilities and acquisition of new ones; and, promote green tourism and the local economy.
- Socially, they: provide free public access to community green space; allow local people to make decisions on things affecting their environment and community; help make safer and more sociable communities through greater contact and interaction; improve the health, fitness and psychological wellbeing of people; equip people with the skills and self-confidence to tackle new challenges; offer children a safe place to play and learn; and, assist with the regeneration of run-down areas.

**LESSONS:** Whilst no formal evaluation was apparent, the Northamptonshire County Council suggest

the Pocket Parks scheme is easily replicable, environmentally sound, good economic value, and community focused.

**SOURCES:**

<http://www.pocketparks.com/>

[http://www.naturalengland.org.uk/Images/Opening%20Green%20Doors\\_tcm6-9082.pdf](http://www.naturalengland.org.uk/Images/Opening%20Green%20Doors_tcm6-9082.pdf)

**CASE STUDY 16. Hill Holt Wood Social Enterprise and Community Woodland (HHW)**

**LOCATION:** 14ha deciduous woodland situated on the Lincolnshire and Nottinghamshire border.

**AIM:** To manage a community woodland, be self-sustainable and flexible, and encourage and enable community involvement. More specifically, the project aims to run and operate a self-sustaining woodland social enterprise using traditional crafts incorporating modern techniques that benefit and are beneficial to the environment.

**BACKGROUND:** The owners of HHW, Nigel and Karen Lowthrop, bought the woodland in 1995. The previous owner of the site was a timber company who had extracted the best timber from the site and not replanted, hence the site was not seen as a desirable purchase. Since purchasing and successfully applying for planning permission to move into the wood, the Lowthrops have developed a social enterprise that currently employs 14 people including the owners themselves.

**ACTIVITIES:**

Local community members were encouraged to participate in the project from the outset via a range of outreach activities, including writing articles and providing information in local parish newsletters, inviting people to visit and use the site, knocking on people's doors to generate interest, and forming a committee composed of the woodland owners and community members. Such activities helped to overcome initial community scepticism of the project.

In 2002 it was established as a not-for-profit community-controlled membership organisation, with a primary aim of providing vocational training for young people on various government schemes, such as Solutions 4 and Entry to Employment, within a restorative woodland environment.

The Lincoln Co-op provided funding to pay for a consultant to identify the most appropriate structure for HHW as a not-for-profit organisation. Twelve community members currently sit on the Board of HHW, which meets quarterly, and seven of these also sit on the Executive, which meets every month. The Director takes any ideas and decisions to the Executive for discussion in order to gain clearance before proceeding.

As work and training developed, straw bale offices were constructed on site using the skills of staff and young people involved in the vocational training schemes. Ponds have been created and footpaths, a green wood-working area, charcoal manufacture, signage, a car park, workshops, canteen and earth composting toilets. Most recently they have opened an IT centre, and an office for the Duke of Edinburgh's Award Scheme.

A variety of groups are attracted to the site, including family groups, retired people, women, and this is alongside the young people often from the more deprived estates of Lincoln and further afield who come to be trained. The presence of people living in the woodland helps to ensure visitors feel secure,

and provides people with an opportunity to ask questions and learn about the work being undertaken.

HHW through its staff and facilities can provide vocational training in a number of areas as well as assistance with basic skills such as numeracy, literacy and IT skills, and are experienced in training youths from mixed backgrounds, including those with a history of substance abuse and criminal activity as well as emotional and behavioural difficulties. Vocational training opportunities include: conservation, horticulture, permaculture, blacksmith, woodwork, green woodworking, construction, animal care, woodland skills, bush craft, vehicle and machinery maintenance, countryside management, landscaping, forestry, and arts and crafts. There is a broad focus on enabling and encouraging these young people to not only learn new skills but ultimately to go on to lead useful and hopefully productive lives.

HHW also provides mentoring to the young people once they have left the scheme and moved on, and is pro-active in working with parents and carers. As well as training, the young people are able to plant their own tree at the site and even if the present owners leave, these young people can always come back as it's a community woodland.

HHW has achieved Investors in People status, which was seen as a good way of motivating staff and adding status to the project. Future plans include the building of five easy and cheap to construct social houses that would be offered for rent to staff, with part of that rent going into a trust fund that the employee would receive if they leave the job or would be part of their pension if they stay (in an effort to retain staff and provide incentives for them to stay).

Other plans include: replicating the project but focusing on vocational training for young people using a farm as a base, with negotiations well underway with a farmer in Yorkshire and Leeds LEA; providing land to be purchased and used as an eco—burial park which would be open to the public and represent a celebration of life; possibilities of working with the probation service, providing vocational training for offenders; and, opportunities for providing woodland manufacturing to local companies and increase retail opportunities through the sale of furniture, other wood products and organic produce.

The project has delivered a number of social, environmental and economic benefits, as highlighted in the table below.

| Social benefits  | Environmental benefits  | Economic benefits  |
|--|---|--|
| Social capital (see page 9) – this has been generated between HHW and people in the surrounding communities, as well as the young trainees.  | Conservation management of HHW.   | Jobs - with fourteen employees HHW is a significant business in a rural county.                                  |
| Possibilities for reducing anti-social behaviour and crime as the young trainees (often from difficult backgrounds) take pride in what they do and gain vocational skills that can help them to find jobs.   | Conservation management of other woodlands through contracts with other organisations e.g. Forestry Commission. | HHW is a social enterprise that is self-sustaining by generating a diverse range of income.                      |
| Reducing safety worries for those who may be concerned about visiting woodlands alone – because people live on the site.   | Raising awareness about the environment.  | Human capital – through the education and training provided.   |
| Social inclusion is relevant in that the mix of those who use the site are from a range of backgrounds and include the young excluded trainees often from disadvantaged urban areas and the local people in the surrounding rural villages who visit the site. | Opportunities for increasing biodiversity through activities such as coppicing.                                 | Investors in People status – motivating and encouraging staff development.                                       |
| Health and well-being – for members of the surrounding communities and the young people who visit and train on site.   | Raising awareness of recycling issues.  | Contributing to the knowledge driven economy through the provision of training.                                  |
| Community involvement through the HHW Board and Executive and for those who become members of HHW Ltd or Friends of HHW.   | Reducing invasive species.  | Infrastructure including buildings and workshops providing possible opportunities for further income generation. |

Source: O'Brien, L. (2004) p5

**LESSONS:** This case study provides a useful illustration of how addressing *social* and environmental issues can encourage wider community engagement, and also highlights how a community-based initiative can become more financially sustainable in the longer-term, rather than relying purely on grant funding. Income for HHW is primarily generated by the training contracts held with statutory agencies. The HHW business plan states clearly that grant funding is only sought for the acquisition of capital projects or items as a base to generate further income. Since 1996, only about 10% of its income has been received from grants.

**SOURCES:**

O'Brien, L. (2004) *Hill Holt Wood Social Enterprise and Community Woodland*. Forest Research.

[online]. Available at:

[http://www.forestry.gov.uk/pdf/eliv\\_hhw\\_report.pdf/\\$FILE/eliv\\_hhw\\_report.pdf](http://www.forestry.gov.uk/pdf/eliv_hhw_report.pdf/$FILE/eliv_hhw_report.pdf) [Accessed 14th November 2010].

**CASE STUDY 17: The Land Trust**

**LOCATION:** Nationwide

**AIM:** This initiative has two key aims: to protect the countryside by acquiring and managing farmland

sustainably, and to connect the public with the stewardship of the land.

**BACKGROUND:** The Land Trust initiative was established in March 2008 by the Soil Association in response to the increasing decline in soil quality and loss of family farms as a result of development and the intensification of agriculture. Farmers and landowners can choose to dedicate their land (be it a farm, woodland, wildflower meadow or orchard) to a land trust after retirement or in their will, which will then be held and looked after by the scheme. Organic and sustainable farming practice will ensure strong stewardship of the land, with the scheme providing opportunities for new farmers, growers and communities to work on the land. The scheme also works with existing farmers to develop more sustainable practices, and promotes public access to these farms in ways that work for farmers and growers, in order to connect people with the land and to inspire and educate them about food, farming and the countryside. Through developing an innovative range of land tenure models, training programmes and shared capital opportunities, the scheme works flexibly to respond to the individual needs of farms and farmers.

**ACTIVITIES:** Case study farms highlight a range of activities underway as part of the scheme. For example, Summerhill Farm in Devon is a small mixed organic farm, developed as a result of a share farming agreement between Ben and Alice Moseley and the Land Trust. They have worked to create a range of enterprises that interlink to form a whole-farm system. They maintain a patchwork of meadows, hedges, arable fields, woods and orchards, and maintain a herd of red ruby Devon Cattle, black Welsh mountain sheep, Christmas geese, hens producing award winning eggs, all of which contribute to the farm enterprises. Oats are grown to provide feed for the animals and straw is used for winter bedding. Engaging people in the landscape is central to their work, including the establishment of a public farm trail, providing training opportunities, and raising community awareness of sustainable food and farming.

**SOURCES:**

Curtis, R. (2010) 'Farming with nature' *Green Places* 62: 24-25.

<http://www.soilassociation.org/Whatwedo/LandTrust/tabid/264/Default.aspx>

**CASE STUDY 18. Open Air Laboratories (OPAL)**

**LOCATION:** Nationwide

**AIM:** Specific objectives include: (1) encouraging people to spend time outside to enhance their awareness of the open spaces and conservation sites around them and become more knowledgeable about the contribution individuals can make to protect them; (2) offering new approaches to learning in which people are active participants with the knowledge and confidence to debate environmental issues; (3) increase active membership of amateur natural history societies, many drawn from under-represented sections of society; (4) to ensure everybody has the skills to participate in projects to monitor the state of the natural environment and its biodiversity, including the most disadvantaged communities in particularly environmentally deprived spaces; and (5) to build stronger partnerships between the community, voluntary and statutory sectors. The whole OPAL portfolio aims to engage with over 500,000 people to encourage a greater sense of ownership of their local environment.

**BACKGROUND:** The Open Air Laboratories (OPAL) network was established in 2007 with a grant of £11.75 million from the Big Lottery Fund Changing Spaces Programme, with the aim of creating and



inspiring a new generation of nature-lovers by enabling people to explore, study and protect their local environment. OPAL is delivered through a national network of universities, one in each region of England, together with the Natural History Museum, the Met Office, Field Studies Council, National Biodiversity Network (involving NERC-CEH), Royal Parks and the Open University. The project is led by Imperial College London. The Environment Agency and Defra are associate partners. OPAL is currently funded by the Big Lottery Fund and accredited by the Living with Environmental Change Programme, but it is not clear what will happen at the end of the funded period in 2012.

**ACTIVITIES:** OPAL is developing a wide range of local and national programmes to encourage people from all backgrounds to get back in touch with nature, and to generate valuable scientific data concerning the state of the UK environment. By bringing scientists, amateur-experts, local interest groups and the public closer together, the aim is to form lasting relationships and collaboratively explore environmental issues of local and global relevance. Environmental activities are organised that are open to everyone, including activity days, pond-dipping, mini-beast hunting, photography exhibitions, nature identification courses, nature walks, food forays, mapping local environments and how they have changed over time, and distribution of environmental monitoring kits enabling public involvement in national surveys on soil, air, biodiversity, water and climate.

**SOURCES:**

<http://www.opalexplornature.org/>

**CASE STUDY 19. Yarde Orchard and Café**

**LOCATION:** Devon, South West England

**AIM:** To develop a sustainable community enterprise, providing local employment and restoring the disused orchard to enhance the quality of the local environment.

**BACKGROUND INFO:** In 2001, David Job, a part-time teacher, discovered a derelict site near a footpath and cycle route – the Tarka Trail – near to his home. The site contained a disused orchard and a wooden building previously used to house chickens, and was close to a group of 17 fairly isolated houses in a predominantly agricultural area. The area had been suffering from high levels of unemployment as a result of a decline in small-scale agriculture and the loss of many local service industries. Many of the locals were therefore commuting to nearby towns, often for low-paid work.

**ACTIVITIES:** David bought the disused orchard site and set up a co-operative with a small group of friends. By 2004, with the assistance of local volunteers and some grant funding (including a small grant from the Department for Transport's Cycling Projects Fund), a café was opened, which is now visited by up to 200 people per day, usually those along the Tarka Cycle Trail. The emphasis is on serving locally produced, seasonal food as well as fair trade produce. Later, a licensed bar was established, and a Bunkhouse and camping site developed to supplement the revenues from the café. Various events are also organised to supplement the revenue from the cafe and bunkhouse, including local wine tasting.

**SOURCES:**

<http://www.yarde-orchard.co.uk/>

Osborne, O. (2005) 'Social and community enterprise: A European Perspective' [online]. Available at:

## **CASE STUDY 20. Edward Square**

### **LOCATION: Islington, London**

**AIM:** To protect and restore the site of a former Victorian town square, using the arts to encouraging community engagement and ownership.

**BACKGROUND:** Edward Square was developed by local residents on the 0.5ha site of a former Victoria town square when threatened by a nearby development. The community group, members of the Friends of Edward Square (FREDS) and the London Borough of Islington approached a local landscape architect firm, J & L Gibbons, to help them develop a design for the space, which was to form the basis of the funding bid. FREDS added planning help from a local barrister and specialist help from the Open Spaces Society to their own professional skills as part of the voluntary support.

### **ACTIVITIES:**

The first task was to engage the wider local community in the process. The surrounding community has a large surrounding population of young and elderly people and, whilst it was relatively easy to engage the elderly people, the young people proved more of a challenge. A Schools Education Liaison Officer post was created to take the project into local schools and weave elements of the project into their curriculum. School projects were also created that involved the students in recording the site and designing new elements. Also involved was a film director who made a film in support of the initial funding bid for the project, in which a local girl was filmed interviewing children in the park, in a youth club, and at a 'Planning for Real' session. Community leaders of local ethnic groups were approached on a one-to-one basis and particular efforts were made to gain direct contact with underrepresented groups, especially women.

A community steering group was convened to enable dialogue between the design team and the wider community throughout the design and implementation process, and a series of parties and events were held at the site at key stages of development engaging more community members, keeping people informed about the progress of the project and providing further opportunities for wider community feedback. To encourage those attending these events to register their names and addresses for further contact, a raffle was held, with prizes donated by local businesses.

Poet Laureate, Andrew Motion, also accepted an invitation from Gibbons to be involved. He worked with local children and based on his experiences wrote a poem which was subsequently translated into lettering of varying sizes and projected on a concrete wall on the site by artist Gary Breeze.

There were several other instances of art being integrated into the project. For example, school children's drawings of plants were collated by artist Kate Blee and transformed into panels on the entrance gates, using colours connected to spring and summer. Encouraging 'Art in the Park' led to many to refer to it as a 'cultural' park.

The renovated garden was completed in 2000 and remains popular and well-used, with the council and FREDS working together to ensure its maintenance, and it remains relatively free of graffiti, vandalism or litter. However, the challenges in securing appropriate management and maintenance does remain a key concern for Gibbons, particularly as local authorities have no statutory obligation to

maintain landscape in their care.

**SOURCES:**

[http://www.sl.life.ku.dk/upload/report\\_no14.pdf](http://www.sl.life.ku.dk/upload/report_no14.pdf)

<http://www.cabe.org.uk/files/helping-community-groups-to-improve-public-spaces.pdf>

**CASE STUDY 21. United Futures**

**LOCATION:** North-west England.

**AIM:** To improve areas of neglected public space and help to make neighbourhoods cleaner, greener and more confident.

**BACKGROUND:** United Futures is the name of a partnership combining Groundwork's regeneration, design and community liaison expertise with United Utilities' funding, local presence and commitment to making a positive difference. United Utilities pledged over £1million to support Groundwork projects over a seven-year period (2003 – 2010), which has been used to address issues of shared concern such as land restoration, water demand management and environmental support for small businesses. United Futures often funds new projects in areas which are being disrupted by United Utilities infrastructure development work.

**ACTIVITIES:**

Funding from United Utilities is used to assist Groundwork either in resurrecting local projects that lay dormant due to lack of cash or in facilitating the development of new community schemes. United Utilities employees also offer voluntary time to the programme, with staff helping out with 'hands on' tasks such as community-driven clean up days or planting activities.

The value of the partnership is exemplified by the assistance provided by United Utilities in bolstering Groundwork's work in the restoration of an area of degraded but locally-valued woodland near Wigan. This woodland had been designated an ancient woodland and site of biological importance under local authority law but was suffering from severe underinvestment and decline. To save the site, Groundwork purchased the woodland from British Coal in 1989 for £1, creating the area's first ever community woodland. Volunteers rather than professional contractors were used to resurrect the site, drawn from local communities and schools, a highly proactive 'Friends of Elnup Woods' group and members of United Utilities workforce. More than 20 action days were held under Groundwork's supervision, guiding and facilitating the repair of pathways and bridges, cutting back overgrown vegetation, removing debris from streams, shoring up banks and installing new interpretation boards. Other funding partners have noted the success of work to-date and became keen to get involved, including the Forestry Commission and local Primary Care Trust. Those involved have learned a range of practical skills, from woodland management to hydrology, and a real affinity with the woodland amongst community members is apparent.

**SOURCES:** <http://www.groundwork.org.uk/what-we-do/major-initiatives/united-futures.aspx>

Campbell, G. (2009) *Transforming neglected spaces*, Green Places 58: 37-39.

**CASE STUDY 22. Portland Community Watershed Stewardship Programme (CWSP)**

**LOCATION:** Portland, USA

**AIM:** To engage citizens in a citywide campaign to protect watersheds from the impacts of urban development.

**BACKGROUND INFO:** During the late 1980s and early 1990s, Portland residents expressed strong distrust of government, with numerous newspapers reporting mismanagement of urban waterways, and citizens contesting public agencies' scientific studies and opposing agency solutions to urban water problems. Consequently, Portland sought to complement top-down regulatory approaches with more locally relevant, community-based programmes to manage urban water resources, explicitly with the aim of achieving win-win outcomes. In 1994, Portland's Bureau of Environmental Services (BES) convened citizen focus groups to identify community needs and potential strategies for designing the community-led watershed restoration programme, which became CWSP. The university was engaged to improve BES' community outreach efforts and several representatives from the local watershed councils also took part.

**ACTIVITIES:**

The interests and concerns of the CWSP's main participants led to a focus on: (1) stewardship grants soliciting proposals for watershed restoration from citizen groups; (2) a BES/university partnership enabling graduate students specialising in environmental planning to take paid internships in which they provide organisational and technical assistance to community groups interested in implementing their own watershed education of water quality improvement projects; and (3) a system for watershed and programme evaluation.

Projects by community groups included education and monitoring efforts, building eco-roofs and storm water features, and restoring streambanks. Each successful proposal was awarded up to \$5,000 to spend on materials and project coordination. Over time, the diversity of proposals broadened.

The university partnership was mutually beneficial in delivering these projects; communities benefit from university expertise whilst the university benefits by engaging the local community and providing students with a service-learning opportunity. Students develop project management skills and identify future employment opportunities while providing service to BES and the community.

Over 130 community projects had been established by 2008, sponsored by neighbourhood schools, civic organisations, churches and neighbourhood groups. As a result, ecology in the region has significantly improved. In the programme's 12 years of existence (up to 2008), over 23,000 volunteers had contributed nearly 150,000 hours to plant 76,000 native plants and restore 1.9million square feet of upland/riparian areas in watersheds throughout the city. Over that time, the city made over 100 small grants totalling \$436,000 that generated matching contributions of nearly \$2million.

**SOURCES:** Shandas, V. and Messer, WB. (2008) 'Fostering green communities through civic engagement' *Journal of American Planning Association* 74(4): 408-418.

**CASE STUDY 23. London Wildlife Trust (LWT)**

**LOCATION:** London, UK

**AIMS:** To campaign to protect London's wildlife and natural spaces; to engage, inspire and enable Londoners to learn about and enhance their local environment; to manage wildlife with local partners

to high standards; and to raise public awareness and influence policy-makers so that wise decisions are made concerning London's wildlife and natural spaces and people's access to it.

**BACKGROUND INFO:** The LWT is one of 47 Wildlife Trusts which form the Royal Society of Wildlife Trusts, a nationwide network of local nature conservation charities. LWT is dedicated solely to protecting London's wildlife and wild spaces, working in partnership with a wide range of partners including: Greenspace Information for Greater London (GiGL), London Biodiversity Partnership, BBC Breathing Places, the London Environmental Educational Forum, schools and businesses across Greater London.

**ACTIVITIES:** Key campaigns run by the LWT include:

- **Garden for a Living London:** This campaign is calling on city gardeners to adopt at least one of seven pledges to transform London's three million gardens into a network of mini nature reserves, designed to make gardens more wildlife and climate friendly. The seven pledges include: plant drought resistant plants; plant a mixed hedgerow; plant a broad leaved tree; make a pond; use mulch; add a green roof to your shed; or wild up your decking.
- **Living Landscapes:** this campaign calls for a landscape-scale approach to wildlife protection and enjoyment, which allows wildlife enough room to manoeuvre in the face of climate change. It calls for both national and local leadership in linking up and restoring natural spaces, which must be grounded in a sound understanding of local social and economic needs and partnerships between community groups, businesses, land managers and local authorities.
- **Save Our Seas:** The Wildlife Trusts played a key role in campaigning for the Marine Bill, demanding the creation of 'Highly Protected Marine Reserves', where all fishing and other damaging activities are prohibited.

Key wildlife protection and habitat restoration activities include:

- LWT has 57 nature reserves across Greater London, which their conservation teams and volunteers protect and manage for wildlife and for people.
- **The 2012 Olympics:** LWT is transforming a stretch of East London land that runs alongside the Olympic site – the Greenway – into an area for wildlife, walkers, and cyclists. Sitting on the Greenway is the 'View Tube', a centre made from green shipping containers which runs science, geography, history and citizenship lessons for primary and secondary school students. The Greenway has attracted many corporate volunteers, including from Defra, the Government Olympic Executive and Barclays.
- **The Cockney Sparrow Project:** building on the idea of 'natural estates' and working with the Peabody Trust, this project aims to connect estate residents and tenants with the bird and wildlife both on their doorstep and further afield in London. Activities include: ID 'crash courses' and on-estate birding; planting hedgerow species such as hawthorn and blackthorn to create ideal bird habitats; planting grasses and flowers to attract aphids, caterpillars and weevils for nestlings to feed on; community workshops to make nest and roosting boxes for a range of species; visits to wildlife reserves and green spaces in London; and training to record

birds and wildlife on estates.

- **Earn Your Travel Back:** working with BTCV and 'V', this scheme gives young Londoners who have lost their right to free travel the chance to earn their Oyster cards back by volunteering in tasks that help protect and improve the capital's green spaces. The scheme was launched in August 2009 and, by September 2010, over 1000 young people had successfully earned their travel back.
- **Wild About Bushcraft:** This project, based at the East Reservoir Community Garden in Hackney, focuses on providing young people at risk of being involved in crime with opportunities to learn new outdoor skills and connect with urban wildernesses. Through coordinated sessions, local young people are able to gain the confidence, knowledge and skills to help improve the Garden, thereby getting them off the streets and into a space where they are less likely to commit crime. They are taught bushcraft skills, including safe fire lighting for cooking and safe knife use for activities like wood carving.
- **The Budding Together Project:** running at Camley Street Natural Park since 2006, this project provides a chance for people experiencing mental health problems to come together in a supportive atmosphere, in a naturally therapeutic environment, to learn practical conservation skills, meet new people, help the local environment and thereby enhance their self esteem and mental wellbeing. Participants learn about the local wildlife, engage in hands-on tasks such as making habitat boxes for birds, bats and insects, and go for regular walks in Hampstead.
- **The Life Cycle Garden Project:** a show-garden highlighting the ecological value and creative potential of small urban green spaces.
- **The Viva Veolia Youth Ranger Project:** this initiative is funded by The Veolia Environmental Trust (VET) through the Landfill Communities Fund, and provides young people with the chance to gain new practical skills such as practical and horticultural conservation, recycling, forest schools, young ranger schemes, clean-up river days, plus networking and social skills.
- **The Walthamstow Reservoirs Project:** LWT has been working with local communities to transform the Walthamstow Reservoirs into a new nature reserve, which is under protection as both an SSSI and RAMSAR site.
- **Species-specific projects:** a number of projects are underway to protect and raise awareness of particular species of importance, such as the water vole and stag beetle projects.
- **The Crane Valley Project:** this project was established to restore habitats and improve accessibility along the River Crane – one of the most natural rivers in London. Whilst some stretches were already well cared for by local communities, others were strewn with rubbish, marred by graffiti and generally unwelcoming. The project gained initial funding from the Heritage Lottery Fund to plan a strategy for enhancing the quality of the greenspaces bordering the river and improving the links between them, and hopes to raise funds to enable a three-year programme of conservation and community activity concentrating on target areas along the river.

The LWT also has a trading arm, 'London Conservation Services, which carries out nature reserve

management, access works, and habitat survey and monitoring services.

**SOURCES:**

The London Wildlife Trust website: <http://www.wildlondon.org.uk/>

LWT (2005) *London's Life-Force: How to bring natural values to Community Strategies* [online].

Available at:

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