



# UNIVERSITY OF LINCOLN

## EVALUATION OF GREEN SYNERGY COMMUNITY GARDEN PROJECTS 2012 - 2013

**Dr Jennifer Jackson**  
**Research Fellow**  
**Lincoln Business School**  
**College of Social Science**  
**University of Lincoln**

## **Overview and Acknowledgments**

In October 2012 the researcher was awarded funding by the College Fund within the College of Social Science to undertake research into the developing community organisation Green Synergy that was setting up community garden initiatives within the Abbey Ward of Lincoln. The research undertaken over the spring and summer of 2013 is analysed within this report.

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### **Contact Details:**

Dr Jennifer Jackson  
Research Fellow  
Lincoln Business School  
College of Social Science  
University of Lincoln  
Brayford Wharf East  
Lincoln  
LN5 7AT

01522 835598  
jjackson@lincoln.ac.uk

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## **ABBREVIATIONS**

CEO	–	Chief Executive Officer
DWP	–	Department of Work and Pensions
HMRC	–	HM Revenue and Customs
LSOA	–	Lower Super Output Areas
NEET	–	16-18 year olds Not in Education, Employment or Training
ONS	–	Office of National Statistics
TAG	–	Tower Action Group

# 1. Green Synergy

## 1.1 Overview

Green Synergy is leading Community Garden initiatives within the relatively deprived Abbey Ward of Lincoln (levels of disadvantage higher than city, regional and national averages) based upon initial Community First funding for the scoping and subsequent development and delivery of projects. Green Synergy was initiated as a community group in April 2012 and registered as a charitable company in July 2013 limited by guarantee. Green Synergy's (2013:p5) mission and vision is to *'create inspiring and therapeutic environments (encompassing plants and/ or animals) in which people can socialise, learn and thrive'* with a vision of a *'thriving and healthy city with an enhanced quality of life supported and enabled by networks of community gardens, farms and related environmental initiatives developed both for and within the community'*.

The objectives of Green Synergy are to develop capacity and individual skills socially and economically within more disadvantage communities, encompassing sustainable development and the preservation and protection of the environment. Green Synergy seeks at a further level to contribute to the prevention of social exclusion, the promotion of good health, the understanding of horticulture and conservation issues and to provide or assist facilities for social welfare, leisure and recreation. As a collaborative and community based organisation Green Synergy has at its centre the 'growing' of the capacity of Abbey Ward's diverse communities through building up new networks and partnerships, the sharing and learning of skills and supporting of new community spaces being created by its residents as well as the encouragement of healthier lifestyles

Within its organisational set-up as a community venture and now a charity the management and day-to-day organisation of Green Synergy depends on its CEO whose post is funded through various funding streams. There is a Board of Trustees who oversee the CEO with three main officers of Chair, Treasurer and Secretary, with the organisation dependent on the support of volunteers to undertake the projects. Green Synergy's initial funding was derived from Abbey Ward's Community First funding for feasibility studies of community growing sessions in the ward. Since April 2013 more substantial funding for the delivery of supported gardening sessions at Cannon Street/Stamp End, Shuttleworth House and the Developmentplus garden of £22,292 was obtained from the People's health Trust. A further £9,640 was obtained for the development of a community garden on the Tower Estate from Cory Environmental Trust. It is these projects that were the subject of the research, although a further £12,750 has been secured from the NHS/Lincoln County Council for the development of the Lincoln Growing Groups Forum and 4 community growing groups across Lincoln.

The onus of the Community Garden projects since its inception has been that of consulting with the community as to what they most want from the projects and how/where they should be developed for maximum benefit in the area. Underpinning Green Synergy in set-up and development has been a process of consultation with representatives and residents of the Abbey Ward community, with the initial feasibility study, for example, using a variety of participatory research methods that included focus groups, semi-structured interviews, questionnaires and pilot activities, such as making grass heads with a kids club on the Tower Estate (Whiting 2012). The research has concentrated on two main projects of Green Synergy the Stamp End Community Growing Project and the Tower Community Garden.

## **1.2 Stamp End Community Growing Project**

The projects funded by the People's Health Trust from April 2013 to October 2014 in the area around Cannon Street, Stamp End and Shuttleworth House provides the opportunity for residents in the area to engage in 3 regular and different gardening sessions per week. On Mondays a ladies only group takes part in afternoon indoor gardening projects at the Developmentplus premises, together with some work in raised beds and the Developmentplus garden. This is complemented by an open gardening group on Wednesday afternoons, which men can also attend and also takes place in Developmentplus premises. On Fridays alternate gardening sessions in the morning and afternoon have taken place around Cannon Street, Stamp End and Shuttleworth House. The open gardening sessions on Cannon Street have developed what were bare communal walking spaces between the flats to incorporate beds of flowers for the summer and more recently the planting of bulbs for spring. In Shuttleworth House gardening events have taken place for residents in the foyer of the building with them encouraged to do some planting in containers and pots that they can take to their flats. Around Stamp End near the River Witham grassed areas by the banks of the river have also been dug and planted. This was complemented by community events, such as in the Croft Community centre where a Spring Fun day and hanging basket workshops have been held.

## **1.3 Tower Community Garden**

The funding from Cory Environmental Trust enabled in consultation with the Tower Action Group the establishment of a small communal garden on the Tower Estate in the summer of 2013 for local residents, of what had been an unused piece of land by the side of some houses. Whilst Groundwork Lincolnshire undertook the landscaping of the site, the Tower Action Group supported particularly by young people from the estate helped with the start of the garden. In addition, events, such as hanging basket workshops, have been held outside in the Roman Pavement and activities for children to engage them in gardening and growing.

## **2. Abbey Ward - Profile**

### **2.1 Overview**

Abbey Ward is the second most populous ward in Lincoln with 11,426 residents (ONS 2012) on the east of the city. Its high population reflects its proximity to the city and its industrial heritage when workers were housed near to factories situated by the Witham. In recent years with the establishment of the University of Lincoln and over 9,000 migrant workers settling in Lincoln from 2002 to 2012, the composition of the population in Abbey Ward has reflected these changes.

Abbey Ward has one of the highest proportions of residents in their 20s of 28% (ONS 2012). Abbey Ward also has the largest number of black and ethnic minority groups in the city of 20.8% (ONS 2012). Together with Park Ward it is where most migrant workers settled with a total of 1,325 migrant workers coming to Abbey Ward between 2007 and 2012 (DWP 2013). Consequently a number of languages are spoken within the ward in relation to its cultural diversity that includes Polish, Lithuanian, Latvian and Afghan residents. English is not the main language for 1,464 residents (ONS 2012) in Abbey Ward, approximately 10% of the population, with 345 who cannot speak English well and 56 who cannot speak English (ONS 2012).

The statistics of Abbey Ward in relation to indices such as employment, child poverty and crime indicate the nature of some of the social issues of the area. Abbey ward has the highest Unemployment Claim Rate in the city of 8.9% (DWP 2013 Jobseeker Allowance Claimants Statistics), which compares with the East Midlands of 3.8% and 3.9% nationally. In terms of NEETs (those not in education, employment or training) 9.3% of 16-18 year olds in Abbey Ward were found to be NEETs, compared to a county average of 3.4% (City of Lincoln Council 2012d). Child poverty data for Abbey Ward shows that 26.8% (HMRC 2010 Child Poverty) of children are living in poverty. With fuel an increasing issue Abbey Ward also has the highest number of households estimated to be in fuel poverty of 24.7% (LRO cited in City of Lincoln Council 2013a). In assessing the overall level of deprivation the Indices of Multiple Deprivation includes one area of Abbey Ward LSOA 26 (situated around Waterside North, Stamp End and Spa Road and from Thomas Street to Eastbourne Street) as within 5% of the most deprived Lower Super Output Areas (Community First 2013, City of Lincoln Council 2013b).

In relation to health inequalities Abbey Ward includes areas that are within the most deprived for health deprivation. Life expectancy being 10.6 years lower for men and 5.8 years lower from women in the most deprived areas compared to the least deprived areas of Lincoln (Lincoln Health Profile 2013). Mental health needs are equally represented in the data for mental and behavioural disorders claimants, with Abbey ward recording the highest number of claimants within the city in 2012 (ONS DWP Benefits).

Although the general overall trend within Lincoln is the reduction of crime, the crime rates within Abbey Ward remain relatively high and consistent from June 2012 to June 2013 (UKCrimeStats). Anti-social behaviour accounts for a large percentage of recorded crimes followed by 'other crimes' (drugs, public disorder and weapons, criminal damage and arson, theft (shoplifting and other) vehicle crime, burglary, violent crime and robbery. A survey undertaken in 2010 by the Neighbourhood Team and completed by 388 Abbey Ward residents identified community safety as one of their main priorities with 25% of respondents

considering that the following were ‘serious problems’ in relation to anti-social behaviour and other recorded crimes:

- Vandalism and graffiti
- Drug dealing and use
- People being drunk or rowdy in public places
- Car crime
- Teenagers hanging round on the streets
- Parents not taking responsibility for their children’s behaviour

Source: City of Lincoln Council (2012a)

A further survey undertaken by Community First in March 2013 and completed by 209 respondents found that 34% of respondents were concerned that the area was ‘getting much or slightly worse’ ‘mainly due to the levels of crime/anti-social behaviour and the cleanliness of the environment’. Of 20 priorities ranked by respondents reducing crime and anti-social behaviour was ranked highest at 51.2%, followed by such issues as reducing litter and graffiti 43% (ranked 3), improving sense of community 32.5% (ranked 6), creating more opportunities to meet others in the neighbourhood 20% (ranked 10) and having more say in decisions affecting their area 17% (ranked 11).

## **2.2 Community**

As in the case of most wards Abbey Ward has distinctly different areas geographically and in relation to housing and infrastructure that provides the background to links and boundaries both within the areas and Abbey Ward itself. The Monks Road area with mostly terraced housing either owner occupied or rented running parallel to it, is divided by the busy arterial road that runs through it, with a mixture of small shops and significant educational, social and medical providers such as Lincoln College, the walk in health centre and the Nomad Trust’s Homeless Shelter. Situated nearer to the River Witham Stamp End has a range of mainly 20<sup>th</sup> century apartment blocks, including small blocks of flats and courtyards around Cannon Street and Shuttleworth House a 17-storey block of flats, one of Lincoln’s few high-rise buildings. Situated to the end of Monks Road is the 1940s Tower Estate built by the Council in the 1940s, with the Allenby Industrial estate on the other side of the road. Although the ward extends beyond this for the purposes of the research this was where the research was focussed and in particular, as will be explored, the areas around Cannon Street, Shuttleworth House and the Tower Estate.

Much work has been done in the Abbey Ward in relation to community development and cohesion by agencies such as Developmentplus whose offices are based in Croft Street and Lincoln City’s Abbey Neighbourhood Office based in Belmont Street. A recent report by the Community Cohesion Strategy (2013:p7) nevertheless reflected that responses to a Community Cohesion Survey ‘*showed Abbey neighbourhood scored relatively poor in regard to respondents feelings of belonging to their neighbourhood. Although other neighbourhoods scored poor for some questions, only Abbey scored consistently poor across all community cohesion questions*’.

In relation to concerns about community issues, isolation and the perceived decline of areas various community and resident groups have been formed. The Tower Estate Action Group, which has an office and premises in Roman Pavement provided by Lincoln City Council was



largely initiated by concerns of residents that the Tower Estate had become ‘forgotten’, as expressed by the Chairman in 2011 when taking over the new premises; *‘I took this on because of my love for the estate. Ten years ago, it was a lovely place to live and now it has been run-down and forgotten. People on here have never had anything really, it has always been called the ‘forgotten’ estate. I am hoping that, as we work to make things better, people will start feeling proud to live her and we can bring back some of the community spirit that people living here used to have’* (thisislincolnshire 2011).

Similarly within Shuttleworth House in response to concerns about issues surrounding the tower block and a report/investigation by the Aegis Communities (2011) following a stabbing on New Years Eve 2010, the Shuttleworth House Residents Group was formed. The Shuttleworth House Action Plan of 2012 particularly identified *‘... social interaction between residents is minimal due to the fabric structure of the building, which encourages isolation’*. A *‘large percentage of residents’* were also considered to be *‘vulnerable’*, *‘socially isolated’* with *‘multiple difficulties’* *‘making it extremely difficult to develop a proper functioning ‘community’* (Aegis Communities 2011:p14). Shuttleworth House also has a diverse population with 28% of its residents of Afghan-Kurd ethnicity and 7% from Eastern Europe (Aegis Communities 2011). The report further highlighted the ‘negative’ media about the building and residents concerns about the decoration of the building and need for repairs detailed in photographs. Since the report a number of initiatives have resulted with the residents group assuring an early £275,000 refurbishment of the building including external re-decoration.

However the area does possess many advantages including a major green area/park of the city in the Aboretum, as well as the River Witham to the southern boundary of the ward. Indeed, a concern of the Monks Road Neighbourhood Initiative is to avoid *‘talking down’* what is *‘a pleasant part of the city’* particularly with, for example, such recent initiatives as the £3 million heritage lottery grant that *‘transformed’* the Aboretum and the development of Lincoln College, which has included an £8 million sports centre. Equally a sense of place and history exists around Monks Road, such as old photographs collated by the history group in the area and publications such as that undertaken by the Survey of Lincoln (Walker 2006). This identity is reflected in the area’s *‘long history of community involvement’* (Community First 2013) as represented in the fifteen years history of the Monks Road Neighbourhood Initiative, the recently formed Tower Action Group and the equally pro-active Shuttleworth House Residents Group.

### **3. Literature Background**

#### **3.1 Overview**

Understanding the value and impact of community gardens largely originates from studies on the effect of the ‘therapeutic landscape’, as proposed by Gesler (1992,1993). This therapeutic influence was found, for example, in the earlier work of Ulrich (1984) who related the beneficial effects that having a view from a hospital window had on the recuperation of patients. Sempik (2008) similarly explores in historical records how farms and market gardens in Victorian times were used in settings, such as asylums, to ‘*contribute to the mental health of the inmates by affording subjects of interest to many of them*’ (Tuke, 1882, pp 383-384 cited in Sempik (2008:p3).

Sempik’s work on social and therapeutic horticulture (STH – term used by the charity Thrive) particularly emphasises that such approaches are not ‘*passive appreciations or reflections on the natural landscape*’ but rather based on physical interaction and an ‘*activity based paradigm*’ within horticulture and gardening, that requires the participation of the individual if not directly related to production. The benefits of social and therapeutic horticulture has been extensively researched (ie Sempik and Aldridge 2005, Sempik 2008, Aldridge and Sempik 2002), resulting in a model of the processes, outcomes and benefits identified through the research on STH based on man’s ‘innate attraction to nature’ termed ‘biophilia’.

The study of Quayle (2007) into the ‘*true value*’ of community farms and gardens used a variety of quantitative and qualitative research methods to understand the holistic value of 22 community farm and garden projects based in the North East. Building on the work of Aldridge and Sempik (2002) within Quayle’s (2007) study a number of themes and benefits emerged in relation to social interactions and inclusion, healthy eating and exercise, natural therapy, skill development, training and education, environmental awareness and economic effect. The main benefits to be derived from existing research are therefore summarised in the following section.

#### **3.2 Physical and Mental Health and Well-being**

The physical effect of gardening/horticultural projects in providing naturalistic and enjoyable alternative forms of exercise that is also ‘productive’ (Quayle 2007) is well researched. The value of ‘green’ exercise and ‘ecotherapy’ has particularly been explored in the work of Mind (2007) who argue in their report that ‘*green exercise has particular benefits for people experiencing mental distress. It directly benefits mental health (lowering stress and boosting self-esteem), improves physical health (lowering blood pressure and helping to tackle obesity), provides a source of meaning and purpose, helps to develop skills and form social connections*’ (2007:p28). The benefits considered particularly important in the ‘*contact with green space*’ are that it ‘*provides a restorative environment for people to relax, unwind and recharge their batteries*’ (Mind 2007:p5). Sempik (2008:p19) similarly found that the notion of being ‘outside’ and in the ‘fresh air’ had further connotations in terms of well-being in which ‘*the natural environment is not simply a pleasant backdrop to these activities, it is the essential framework for them*’. This is considered to be related to Kaplan and Kaplan’s Attention Restorative Theory (1989 see Sempik 2008) that the restorative aspects of such environments and activity allows the participant to concentrate attention easily on a specific task, combined with a ‘*sense of escape*’ (Quayle 2007) and ‘*connectedness*’ (Sempik 2008) with the activity’s natural surroundings. ‘Nurturing’ watching plants grow and the associated

colours/textures are all factors considered central to connecting the individual to gardening projects providing a sense of tranquillity, peace and spirituality (Sempik 2008, Quayle 2007).

### **3.3 Social Interaction, Inclusion, Community Cohesion**

Community gardening as the name suggests has been found in prior research to provide opportunities for developing networks, connections and socialising within communities. Quayle's study (2007:p11), for example, relates that '*the social element of community farm and garden projects was frequently reported throughout the research*', with 'friendships and support' an integral part of the experience. This was considered to both help get people involved in initial participation and to continue to take part as a motive with the opportunity of a 'wide range of team activities' to be involved in (Sempik et al 2002, Quayle 2007).

From the perspective of individual well-being the connection with others reducing social isolation has of itself a value in issues such as depression (Mind 2007, Sempik 2008). At a further level the evidence from the 22 projects in Quayle's study (2007:p11) '*suggested that for vulnerable groups attending the project represented their main point of social contact and provided an important source of contact*'. The 'open door policy' of most projects ensuring that 'people of all ages and walks of life' could get involved and be given support if required. The projects were therefore found to 'provide community spaces' and 'promote integration' including, for example, allowing young people to be involved who did not necessarily want to be 'hanging out on the streets'. The finding of common interests across gender, age and ethnicity was equally a benefit of the projects, building on Richards (2005) consideration that for older adults gardening provided an opportunity to share advice and information. The success of community gardening projects in engaging what are considered 'hard to reach groups' is attributed by Quayle (2007) to the characteristics of the projects that include '*the hands-on activities that take place and visual indicators of achievement: for example, plants growing*'.

### **3.4 Environment and Skills Development**

The creation of gardens and community spaces in often previously underused or derelict sites has been seen as an obvious positive in increasing the attractiveness of an area, pride in the locality and biodiversity. Of the projects researched by Quayle (2007), for example, ten out of the 22 community growing projects were placed on derelict or neglected sites. Moreover, many of the community projects 'provided valuable green space' in urban spaces where local residents either did not have a garden or 'amenity grassland' was either 'sparse' or not really amenable to access (Quayle 2007).

The multi-skills developed in community garden projects have been found to be considerable and 'stepping stones to employment' in their provision of '*valuable volunteer and training opportunities both formally and informally*' (Quayle 2007:p59). Indeed skill sharing from the noted sharing of knowledge of gardening techniques and cultivation, including food production to skills learnt in organising and developing community projects/events are all seen as integral to the ethos and values of community gardens and farms. The 'open door policy' of most projects further provides an opportunity for people of all abilities and ages.

### **3.5 Holistic Approach – Research Gap**

In considering the literature and the benefits derived from community gardens and farms what is most self-evident is that the themes that arise are inter-related. Indeed Quayle (2007:p79) argues that *‘the biggest benefit of all could be the connection between the themes, which allow so many benefits to be delivered by one project. The friendship, social support and information sharing appear to be just as important as relaxing surroundings in establishing a therapeutic environment. The overlap between environmental and health themes demonstrates how key the natural environment is to our wellbeing’*. That despite the considerable research that already exists there is still a ‘scarcity of research’ on the *‘holistic value of community gardens to individual mental and physical well-being and the social, economic and environmental benefits to the community* (Quayle 2007:p2).

An additional gap in previous research is that it has centred on community gardens and city farms that are mostly already established, rather than analysing the operational process of setting up community growing projects and engaging the ‘community’ to be involved. Research has also concentrated on more large-scale projects and those with more rigid parameters/‘rules’ of operation particularly in the case of STH projects which Sempik (2008) seeks to distinguish from community gardening as part of ‘a different paradigm’ in its provision, for example, of a more rigid attendance that participants (termed ‘clients’) are expected to commit to. The smaller scale projects that Green Synergy presently represents and its diverse events and means of participation therefore opened up the ability to research what Quayle (2007:p2) describes as the *‘relationship between cohesion and different outdoor spaces’*. Indeed that there was the opportunity to review at the micro level the many different levels of interaction/benefits within the community projects of Green Synergy and the spaces/environments that were created both inside and outside in Abbey Ward’s inner city setting. Hence the following research questions were determined for the boundaries of the research within Green Synergy.

#### **Research Questions**

- What is the effect of participation/outcomes of community ‘growing’ projects at the individual/community level:
  - Volunteering and community capacity
  - Health – physical and mental/therapeutic effects – health inequality impact
  - Environmental and socioeconomic effects – at community/individual level
- How are projects sustained and how can they be developed? What are the boundaries of a project in terms of impact?
- What is the impetus within communities to be brought together? What factors influence continued community growing projects and ‘healthier’ communities and what impedes them? What works? What are the barriers? Does it reach ‘hard to reach groups’ – do they want to be reached?
- What is ‘best practice’ in developing projects?
- What ‘knowledge’ can be transferred to other projects/policy decisions?

### **3.6 Research Methods and Focus**

The focus of the research was on involving Green Synergy and community members within Lincoln’s Abbey Ward as co-researchers in a co-operative action research process. It is a view of research and knowledge that is co-created, in which exploring research and the paradigms

that underpin are not confined to the researcher, but integral to a continuing debate. It is consequently research not 'on' people but 'with' people, given that research, is not just the preserve of the professional researcher, but should involve communities in researching what they value and want to know more about. In this respect, the CEO of Green Synergy was integral to the research process and guiding what it was that the organisation wanted to particularly know for future direction.

The intention of the research was that it would be as naturalistic as possible, a concern particularly expressed by Green Synergy's CEO at the start of the project was that they did not want it to be too formal and cause concern amongst those taking part. Whilst participants therefore were introduced to the researchers and made aware of the intentions of the research there were many sessions where the researchers attended just to observe gardening sessions and have informal discussions with those attending. This had inter-connected advantages for the research, projects and the participants in that there was a familiarity and context to the more formal interviewing process, where relationships were established and knowledge gained of the applicability of questions through observation of the projects. As a member commented at the end of the fieldwork the researchers essentially became 'part of the picture' *...the best social science research is where people don't even realise that there's any research going on and I think ... (the researchers) have achieved that really well. You integrate and everyone of course, comes forward to you and you're part of the picture.*

Interviews with participants of the project were undertaken around regular gardening sessions held at Developmentplus, Shuttleworth House, or Cannon Street together with events taking place as a hanging basket workshop at Tower Estate. Group interviews/discussions with resident organisations connected to the project, such as the Tower Action Group and Shuttleworth House Residents Group also were conducted including attending meetings. Whilst there were common questions for each participant and group the emphasis was on gathering viewpoints and experiences from the perspective of the user, which opened up further research conversations and directions. Interview discussions were also undertaken with council and community organisations involved in the Abbey Ward area that included a community development worker, a representative of public health related to community gardens in Lincolnshire County Council and a Neighbourhood Manager of Abbey Ward. A workshop was held in July at Croft Street Community Centre to bring together participants to discuss in group sessions their perceptions and experiences of Green Synergy in terms of what it had provided both at an individual and community level, where they envisaged the project developing in the future and their role in it.

All interviews and the workshop discussion were recorded and transcribed verbatim resulting in a large amount of rich qualitative data. This was then reduced to 60 pages (approximately 30,000 words) of more central text relevant to the research, which allowed for the analysis and cross-referencing of emerging themes. Given that the research process had involved considerable time spent in observation and engaging with the groups, this provided invaluable context to the interview data. The researcher, for example, in taking part in a hanging basket workshop on the Tower Estate observed a lot of interaction between residents and the project, such as people stopping to talk whilst passing the hanging basket stalls, or going by in cars that could not be captured by the data alone. This is consequently reflected on as much as the data in the following sections of the report.

## 4 Emerging Themes and Voice of the Participants

### Introduction

Given that the emphasis of the research has been on participatory methods and gaining the views of participants as central to the research process the analysing and reporting of themes seeks to reflect on the rich qualitative data that emerged from the project. The following sections therefore present the data into themes, whilst giving precedence to the 'voice' of participants, reflecting their views on the project as comprehensively as possible and their consideration of the role of community gardens, expanding rather than reducing the research conversations. Observations of events and garden sessions will also be reflected on where appropriate to add to the context of the research themes and findings.

### 4.1 Reasons For Involvement/Participation

The themes that arose in the motivation and reasons for getting involved in the various projects not unexpectedly were connected to the benefits that participants derived from involvement and opened up an understanding of the inter-relationship between the various rationale and effects that are engendered. The main reasons for initial engagement included social networks and isolation, community issues and improvement, environmental concerns, interests in gardening and horticulture. In many cases these reasons are inter-connected as described by the following participant:

*Well, I live just across the road ... and I don't go anywhere; I don't go out to do anything except my shopping and that, and I just need to get away. So they came and asked me about it and I'm interested in gardening, interested in the community and I thought, 'Well, if it's to help other people and we can do something for them, even the way I am, I've got arthritis very badly ... and I thought it would give me a couple of hours out of the house ... and just give something back to the community.'*

As with Quayle's study (2007) 'word of mouth' within the 'open door policy' of Green Synergy's projects is one of the main routes for participants becoming involved, as related in the above quote. Participants recalling how friends or neighbours had eased the first step into the projects:

*I think it was ... who was on about it and she said well come along. You like gardening, come along. And it got me into it.*

*... said how about coming over on a Monday afternoon?' So I said, 'Yeah, I'll come.'*

*It's just by word of mouth really, just going round talking to people ... it's just taken off from there. ...*

*Started coming on the Monday and then (they) asked me about the Wednesday and then you asked me to do the Friday and that was it.*

Indeed 'word of mouth' was seen as a positive way of getting others involved as discussed at the workshop through events within the community:

*Well, we meet at so-and-so every Monday or whatever. Why don't you come along?' ...that's how you get them talking, get them to join in, have a chat, cup of tea or coffee and a few biscuits have a project like this today...*

Others had seen posters about the project or seen the gardening activities in progress and/or had conversations with the project leader of Green Synergy that encouraged them to attend for other inter-related reasons:

*Well, because I live in a first floor flat, I've got no room for a garden ... so I thought, well I'll get involved in outside projects, saw something (poster) on Developmentplus next door about six months ago, I went in and that's how I got involved...*

*I saw (Project Leader) on Cannon Street, when she was going around, trying, like, to get people interested and I said, 'Yeah, definitely.' Gives me something to do and I've got a balcony at home and, like, I get really good sun on my balcony so I might as well make the most of it.*

For others the reason was a more specific health reason related to physical and mental health:

*...I'm poorly, that's why (Project Leader) got me involved, 'cause it gives me something to do and stuff, 'cause otherwise I don't get out much 'cause I have a carer, so if (carer's) not at home I have to sit at home all day and get depressed ... But I can do the gardening with my illness and my illness doesn't affect me or anything. So it's brilliant ...*

*... I thought it would get me out of the flat and because I have mental health problems and depression, and what have you. Rather than sitting down and getting more isolated, doing something, planting it's just nice to sit down on my balcony and see something actually go from a little plant and say, 'Oh that's nice...'*

Equally, participants had become involved in the project for concerns about the environment and wanting to take part in improving the community together with an interest in gardening and horticulture:

*I got involved because I think we don't pay much attention to the environment, the green stuff, because if you think about it, you watch the science programmes, we need it. Without it we're all dead. It's beautiful, it serves a purpose, it looks good and it smells lovely. We spend too much attention knocking up buildings and not enough attention looking after green stuff, as I call it. So I think if I can be a part of helping re-establish the green stuff ...*

*It's the only thing what I ever did when I was at school, what I were any good at, gardening, horticulture, it's the only thing I ever came top in. My Dad was the head gardener at ... before he died, yeah. So I take a pride in gardening and all that. So that's why I join these on a Friday to help the community. It's good.*

For one participant their rationale for starting to come to Green Synergy was particularly that they had become 'incensed' by the lack of care in their area towards such issues as litter and neglect in appearance:

*Rather than 'I come here because it provides me with something to do for two hours.' That's a good enough reason, but ... it's much broader than that ...cause if somebody said, 'Come*

*along, we'll go to Green Synergy for two hours,' I'd say, 'Oh no, I'm too busy today.' ... I've got enough work to do.' ... And then I got incensed.*

## **4.2 Effects of Participation – Emerging Themes**

Given the multiplicity of reasons for being involved in Green Synergy projects at various levels the continuation of participants in the projects and the benefits derived are equally complex in their inter-action. The qualitative data that has emerged can be broadly divided as with the studies of Quayle (2007), Sempik et al (2003) and Hine, Peacock and Petty (2007), as described in Section 3, into the following main areas of:

- Effects on social processes, inclusion and interaction
- Mental and physical health
- Skills development and confidence
- Environmental awareness and improvement
- Community capacity.

The findings derived from the data are further divided firstly into those effects that are found at an individual and community level across the projects, together with a more in-depth analysis of the results of participation for the different areas and main projects within Abbey Ward of Stamp End and the Croft Street/Cannon Street/Shuttleworth House area and the Tower Estate. This reflects that whilst many of the themes were universal, the study of Green Synergy within Abbey Ward has highlighted differing concerns within the areas and the varying stages of project development in relation to, for example, existing or developing community groups, all of which has an impact on Green Synergy's work and outcomes.

### **4.2.1 Social Processes, Interaction and Inclusion 'Togetherness' – Creating a Gardening 'Youth Club'**

For many of the participants the regular afternoon sessions at Developmentplus in Croft Street and/or open gardening sessions around Cannon Street and Shuttleworth House particularly provided an important means of reducing social isolation, something to break up the day or week and get them out from their homes to have contact with meeting new people. As represented in the following responses:

*...as I say, I don't do anything, I don't go out at night ...I'm on me own and me family's too busy too ... They've got things to do; ...so I've just got myself to put up with and meeting other people and that sort of thing, it gives me something to look forward to...I just didn't want to get old and retire and do nothing; I wasn't going to do that.*

*Put some other things on the backburner to do this - Rather than being sat in my flat, it's like, yeah, something to do. Like, it's – I don't know, it gets you outside as well rather than being stuck inside and it, like, I don't know, it gets you more involved with the community...It breaks up the monotony of the day, so to speak. You're not staring at the same four walls.*

*And I think a lot of people look forward to like an afternoon out, even if they only come, you know, to talk a little bit and share a coffee and -*

***It can't hurt when people meet up together, can it?***

*Well I think - people, you know, come out and they look forwards and, oh at least on Monday, you know, I'll be meeting people. (Discussion between two participants)*



That it provided both opportunities for fun and friendship:

*How many of us knew each other here when we first came? We didn't, did we? ...*

***You find new friends and have a laugh don't you ...*** (Discussion between two participants)

Indeed during the workshop discussions the consensus was that being part of Green Synergy was predominantly a 'social thing' in which as represented in the following dialogue amongst women who meet on a Monday afternoon, there was what they described as a sense of 'togetherness' a 'youth club of sorts' based on gardening:

*I started coming on Monday. We aren't Alan Titchmarshes are we, if you know what I mean?*

***It's like a youth club of sorts by another name isn't it?***

*Yeah, instead of being individual people we're now beginning to get used to us as a group.*

***When I first came, it seemed as though everybody was - well there was two and twos wasn't there, you know? More individuals, but now it seems to be getting together and not so much I'm with her and she's with me, you know, that sort of thing. We seem to be able to get together more now ... togetherness and interacting.***

*We're not a social club, but more a social group with a strong emphasis on gardening.*

(Workshop discussion)

#### **4.2.2 Support and Skills development**

The opportunity provided by the gardening sessions was considered to be not just about making new friends, but working in a team with 'like minded' people on different projects and helping each other to learn new skills irrespective of differences in age and ability:

*I just like meeting people and learning something new ... And if you want any help with anything that's going on, somebody'll always give you it. Whether you're old or young, or whatever, they all help you. I didn't know how to do the grass heads, but thanks to ... (participants) I got going with it. Quite enjoyed that. Yeah ... we're nice and friendly.*

*You're doing different things each week and last week we was out in the garden ... ..and all them was taking all the ivy down and it looked quite nice. This week, as we said, it's tomatoes.*

*I've met loads of people since I've been doing this. Like, all the ladies that have been here today, they're all lovely, do you know what I mean? They all want the area to look nicer, like we do, and like, it's just nice to be able to go to a group and everyone be there for the same reason. You know what I mean?*

*You're doing different things, meeting people round your neighbourhood that you didn't know were about, like-minded people, getting your hand dirty with the soil and stuff.*

Within the project there was also considered to be an emphasis on people being able to 'go at their own pace', hence for those with issues, such as mental health they could be supported to take part at various levels, as well as the physical and practical abilities/constraints of learning about gardening:

*Because I mean there's always the pricking out and the potting on isn't there for people who can't do gardening. I mean I do a lot of that and I enjoy it. So I mean there's that element of it isn't there?*

*There's also a number of residents with mental health issues that come along to ... and it's nice to see them coming, and ... (Green Synergy project leader) gives them a little bit of one-to-one attention with a view that, you know, at some point that needs to step back a little bit and they have to integrate a little bit more. But ... (Green Synergy project leader) is very good at catering for individual's needs, setting out little mini action plans for them and saying right well I can give you my undivided attention but only for perhaps an hour of the two to three hour sessions because then I have to work with the rest of the group. But it's great to see that the people that we wouldn't normally be able to interact with are coming along to that.*

#### **4.2.3 Volunteering – ‘Putting something back’**

For many of the participants in the groups the opportunity to volunteer within Green Synergy and ‘contribute’ to the community and help others was important, in that it encompassed more than individual benefits:

*...I know quite a bit about gardening and everything ‘cause I had an allotment before I was taken so bad and I just love what they’re doing. I just love helping people; giving and helping the community. It’s my way of helping the community although I’m disabled, I can give something back that way instead of sit at home and watch telly.*

*Cause we’ve not only just been doing it for ourselves, like, I’ve been going and helping (Green Synergy Project Leader) and, like, helping the other people that come to the groups. I’m not necessarily doing it to get stuff for myself. Do you know what I mean? ... So a lot of the times I walk away with nothing and I’ve done loads of work because ... I’ve helped them and then, like, they’ve taken it home for them to do. But it’s nice, it’s nice to just get out and help people.*

*Being a volunteer what I have found incredibly valuable for me is a willingness to share experiences - I mean even if it's sharing the negatives and the positives, there is a place for that isn't there?*

*So rather than be classed as a scrounger, as certain elements in, shall we say, central London like to think of us, rather than sitting around doing sweet A, B, C. Well, I can turn around and say, ‘Well, I’m not sat on me jacksie all day doing sweet A, B, C, I’m doing gardening and putting something back into our local community.’*

This aspect of volunteering and a sense of ‘community spirit’ is particularly captured in some respondent’s observations of outdoor gardening sessions both within the Developmentplus garden and at Cannon Street:

*They were all here and it wasn’t as warm as it was today, but they were willing to take on the activity and I think it’s also the fact that it’s something for them to do, it’s a community spirited thing, so they’re getting to know everybody in the community, getting to know friends and colleagues and it’s someone to talk to. So in a sense it’s rather than talk to a brick wall you’ve got someone that you can have a conversation with and basically build up a community spirit ... They were very content ... and everybody was so pleasant. So it wasn’t as if we’ve turned up and we’ve gone, ‘Oh, do I have to do this?’ It was more, ‘I don’t mind doing this, I’m a volunteer... It brought out a sense of well-being for that lot of people.*

*Look at them (planting summer flowers), they're loving it look. There's no pressure to do it, it's self-driven, it's self-motivated. They just want to do it; they just want to be part of it. It restores a bit of faith in humanity really [laughs], rather than getting tied up with finances and politics and that sort of thing. Look, they're doing something... Next summer this place is going to look amazing.*

For some of the volunteers this included considering formalising the value of volunteering through such schemes as the Volunteer Card and accreditation of learning through associated courses that would also enhance employability, as much as helping others:

*... (Green Synergy's project leader) wants us to do this volunteer card and we'll get a card then so that we can go round to, like, elderly people's places and that and help them with their gardens. It's really cool; there's a couple of courses that ... (project leader) told me about that we want to do ...*

*... the opportunity for them (participants) to actually accredit some of the skills with some sort of qualification or certification, is fantastic because that shows that we're following it up and we're actually trying to turn something which might be an interest or something that they're enthusiastic about, into something that they might be able to do in the future.*

#### **4.2.4 Confidence**

For many of the participants the skills that were being developed were not just related to gardening but how personal abilities, such as self confidence and communication skills within daily life were affected including the reduction of 'shyness' and feelings that they could achieve tasks:

*I hadn't got the confidence to come to somewhere like this and start doing it again because I had all my self-confidence and that knocked out of me at one time. And coming to a group like this has got my confidence back. And now I enjoy gardening - I've done my own garden at home, which I wouldn't have bothered with. I'd have just put grass and that was it.*

Participants also considered that following participation in Green Synergy that they were now more likely to take part in other projects and be more 'proactive in the community' as involvement within the projects had provided them with the confidence and interest to find out about other initiatives.

#### **4.2.5 Environment – 'Caring for the Community'**

One of the most important effects of the projects considered by participants was the transformation of previously neglected areas within Abbey Ward even if small scale to make the community more aware of its potential, making it more attractive and seeking to reduce issues such as litter on the streets. As found in Qualyle's (2007) study given that a number of the participants were in flats or did not have access to a garden, it was also about providing alternative forms of green spaces and ways to still be connected to nature and plants.

*I want to see so much green. We haven't got enough. You just look round Lincoln and Lincoln as cities go, is a beautiful one. But all we're seeing is more concrete and less and less nature and it has a psychological effect on people. If they look out the window and all they see is a concrete mass it's going to bring them down ... but if you've got trees and trees invite birds*

*and birds invite song and music and stuff like that and you listen to the birds [laughs]. You open the window in the morning and if you hear nothing other than traffic sounds it's awful. But if you hear the song of birds and trees ...you don't want to be stuck with a bland concrete jungle. So I think what ... (Green Synergy) is doing is very, very useful. If anything it just increases morale.*

*I'm a bit wussy, because when I see the first growth in spring, oh, usually late January or early February, I actually have a weep. You know, through joy to see that first growth suddenly just appear.*

*I'm unfortunately in a block of flats, and we don't have proper gardens as such except for a bit of lawn, it's just nice to see ... Don't get me wrong; green is nice to see – rather than brick red, but just, you just fancy a bit of something else apart from green and brick red.*

*No, it's just that I've been around here nine years and I don't know anybody. I don't know any of the neighbours; I see them, I say hello to them but I don't know their names or anything. So you want to know your neighbours and working together to make the neighbourhood nice, so hopefully next time somebody's walking down the street they won't bung the beer can in the bush. They'll put it in the bin.*

*You know ... just supposing, it wasn't just about gardening, because perhaps most people can be taught gardening, but it's caring for the community, let's not have cans growing out of bushes and let's not have – 'oh well, I didn't want that chip paper so it can disappear there', and if everybody thought like that, walk a few steps further where there's a bin. It's a combination, isn't it, of things?*

For those participants without access to a garden they were particularly learning more about what they could do to grow plants in windowsills and balconies, without the need for a garden. The indoor sessions held regularly in the premises of Developmentplus or in the entrance of Shuttleworth House further demonstrates that 'gardening' does not have to be an outdoor activity based in a garden environment:

*There's a lot of people out there that like plants, but haven't got a garden. I didn't realise you could grow them in plant pots.*

*... not everybody lives in house with a garden, do they? They've either a kitchen window sill or just a little space outside the back door or a balcony – there's something nice about living things, isn't there? ... You don't have to have a garden.*

In particular that from growing a few plants in pots 'colour' could be added to people's lives:

*'Cause they could all learn from this bit and go home and do it themselves, even if it's only half a dozen plant pots ... you get a pleasure out of watching something you've done yourself. If you nurture it and care for it it'll come on, won't it?*

*You can look and say, 'Oh, I didn't know you could do that.' Even just to grow a little bit of your own vegetables to save your pocket at the supermarkets and things like that. It's fine when you eat it ... You start with salad things, a few flowers to cheer your life up a bit and a bit of colour.*

There was also the consideration that much of the plants could be bought relatively cheaply from retailers, such as Poundland, so that those on a limited budget were not precluded from buying seeds:

*I've gone and bought a pack of veg (seeds) and I've got over 1,000 different seeds from Poundland for a pound. I got cucumber, cress, lettuce.*

***Oh yeah, half a dozen pots and you could treat yourself to some salad for at least six weeks of the summer season, couldn't you?*** (Discussion between two participants)

Together with the regular weekly gardening sessions, open day events or specific events, such as making grass heads with children on the Tower Estate, were equally considered important in educating about the environment, nutrition and the concept of the growing cycle:

*I think in getting people engaged in growing things and growing their own food and things like that it's a really important to make sure that everybody knows where their food comes from and those sort of things ... I think people are very disconnected from what they eat nowadays so it's great that they can grow things and see how things works so yeah I think it's really important ... Everything's packaged and I think it's really good to see where things comes from and nutrition is so important to our health.*

*It's getting people and especially children to appreciate the environment and because they don't do gardening at schools any more. It's very rare they do proper gardening. ... It's getting them (children) to realise where food comes from. It's not only for gardening, it's teaching them nourishment and how to eat properly and what goes with what ... It's to help them understand where the food comes from, it just doesn't come out of a freezer.*

#### **4.2.6 Health and Well Being**

The positive effects of physical activity on health are well evidenced and contained in government guidance, such as the Choosing Health (DoH 2004) and 'Change4life' programmes. Green Synergy's physical tasks, such as digging up turf strips or neglected strips of land was seen to provide rewarding 'green' forms of exercise which accords with Quayle's (2007:p27) finding that community gardening offers 'exercise opportunities that are associated with activities that are considered to be enjoyable rather than for the sake of exercising'. As found in the study of Lincolnshire's community physical activity programmes (Jackson 2011), such as Community Health Walks, it is the 'social element' of Green Synergy and its connection to the natural environment that can engage participants to do more physical activity, rather than, more inhibiting and individual forms of exercise in a gym environment. As a participant related on how digging up turf strips by the River Witham and Shuttleworth House improved fitness; *'I'd rather just come and do stuff like this ... we get a better workout than we can do at the gym.'*

Equally for those who had health conditions that makes exercise or gardening difficult, such as arthritis, the use of raised beds in Developmentplus or activities that could be done on tables/benches indoors meant that they could still take part, including for those who could no longer manage allotments, or their gardens.

*Well, I'm poorly and I don't really get out much and it's one thing I can do without me illness affecting me and everything. It's brilliant, you spend time with people and socialise as well as doing something positive.*

*I had an allotment, but it was down Sincil Bank so I had to give that up because I couldn't get down there. But I do miss it and I had one bit of garden but now I've had to cut it down to size ... I'm going to either gravel it or something, put pots and everything, so at least I can be able to do something [laughter]. I couldn't sit and do nothing, no... I just didn't want to get old and retire and do nothing; I wasn't going to do that.*

### **The Human Soul, the Human Spirit the Human Mind**

In terms of mental health issues such as depression, the social element of the projects and the 'nurturing' aspect of growing plants was seen to have an important effect on general well-being, in its 'peaceful' effects and in relation to what was described as its holistic effect on the 'human soul, the human spirit, the human mind'. As a respondent related, *I used to get depressed really easy ... 'cause I sat home all the time and I've been so much better since I've been coming here'*.

Participants equally emphasised such factors as having their hands in the soil or watching plants grow as demonstrated in the following discussion of the therapeutic effect of watching plants grow between two participants:

*...it's peaceful (growing seeds)*

***So it's a sort of therapy in effect really?***

*Well I think it's stuff for everybody.*

***Yeah, yeah, even having like, your hands in soil***

*Growing a bit of greenery, if you look after it and give it a bit of water ... Bit of TLC .... comes to fruition, doesn't it?*

***Sort of seeing something literally grow...***

*Yeah, before your eyes ... Even mustard and cress on your kitchen window sill.*

(Discussion between two participants)

Green Synergy was seen to particularly provide an 'equal' and 'non-discriminatory' activity that facilitated confidence in those more vulnerable with skills to take part, together with stepping stones to further access for help and participation:

*I think it's a really positive project. The onus of government policy is on well-being and public health and it's about prevention rather than intervention and things such as art therapy, music therapy, horticultural therapy; all of these soft therapies whereby people can take part – actually it's almost like a self therapy, isn't it, through doing? ... But this is a neutral sort of therapy... it's a very equal sort of environment and activity ... I think it enables people to participate in something that rewards them and gives them something back ... I think it's a fantastic project and the fact that some of the ... (people) that I've know for some years who have struggled, as we do, with our own personal issues, this has become a really positive outlet for them.*

*Horticulture therapy is definitely something that I've always subscribed to anyway and it's non-discriminatory, and that's the great thing about plants. They love whoever – similar to animals – as long as you show them a bit of love and tender love and care, they'll reward you back by flourishing. And it's a metaphor for life really, isn't it? And that's how I see it.*

*When somebody who might not be in the best place, takes steps up to their own plate by participating in something like this, which isn't often easy for them to do... They may have a*

*lack of confidence, they're a bit shy, they haven't learnt for a long time, they have preconceptions of what it might be, what it might not be ... For them to break through their own initial barriers, which is what everybody has to do in the first place, and come and participate on something which means they'll be able to access far more services, let's say, and because they've made the primary step in meeting their own expectations themselves and doing something about their situation it's self-empowerment. That tiny grain of confidence that they've gleaned from just participating is enough to sustain them for the next several steps that are going to be slightly more challenging than the initial step which was challenging for them ... It can only be a good thing because it's about the human soul, the human spirit, the human mind and if we try and help people to reconcile the differences between their own perceptions of themselves and their own ideas of the world and how it perceives them you're going to aid people generally getting better, I think.*

*...We'll have a far healthier society in mind, body and soul, simply through doing simple activities that sing to the soul ... Things like music, literature, art, plants, nature – all of these things; it's not rocket science, is it? ... And it astonishes me how the professional bodies have taken so long to catch on to things that actually cost you nothing, that actually enrich the soul like no amount of counselling for 12 months.*

## 5. Community

The detailing of the social fabric of Abbey Ward in Section 2 in relation to issues, such as crime, unemployment, health inequality, diverse populations and sense of belonging has outlined the background against which the projects of Green Synergy operate. The research therefore explored with stakeholders and participants their views on Abbey Ward together with examining what the differing projects meant for the specific areas in which they lived and the impact/engagement with Green Synergy.

### 5.1 Stamp End Community Growing Project

#### 5.1.1 Fear/reality of crime

In the area around Stamp End up towards Croft Street and Monks Road a number of participants were concerned about safety and fear of crime, particularly more older adults. This was expressed both in terms of what they could do both personally and in relation to their homes and in some cases also their gardens. As a participant related:

*... I know it is going downhill because it was such a lovely area to be in, but now, when it gets dark and everything, we don't go out. We just stay put; we lock the doors for an instance, which is a silly thing, when the leaves were coming down I get most of the leaves because ... all them blow round that corner and I get 'em all. I was clearing them up, they was all wet and soggy and I was sweeping them up and because the broom was wet I didn't take it in straight away, let it dry off a bit before I took it indoors and I forgot to take it in. The next day it had gone. Somebody had been [laughs] and took it and it's so silly that they'd just take a brush, you know what I mean? That's the sort of thing that's going on round here. You just can't put anything in the garden that's really nice because it will go. I got a free gift the other day, I got some plants, and I got six solar lights to put in the garden. I can't put them out because the next day they would be gone, so I'm going to give them to me son, 'cause he's just moved so I can give them to him. 'Cause he's going to a nice area. So I'll give them to him, ... I had nice little statues with baskets that you fill with flowers; I can't put them out because they'll disappear.*

This perception of crime is considered to be often reinforced in Abbey Ward by what is described as a matching of 'fear and reality':

*But I do think in Abbey the fear and reality match up because it's the area that's got the highest crime in the county, so it's quite normal to see crime activity down there, or signs – whether that be broken bottles in the street or a car with a broken window, you do quite often, I can't say it's on a daily basis, but on a regular basis you see it, signs of criminal activity.*

Others however considered that the area had many positive aspects including being a friendly area as related by the following participant:

*It could do with a few improvements but it's better than it was ... You get some people that do turn their nose up at you, but the majority of people are alright. You can say anything you like, they say, 'Come in,' you get talking and that's it.*



## 5.1.2 Taming the Place

All participants in the area reported that Green Synergy's initiatives in the area would have a long-term impact on the neighbourhood in making it safer, more attractive and bringing people together with a renewed sense of pride:

*It is important (Green Synergy projects) ... we know this area's not too good, and we're hoping that it's going to tame the place, if you like, to put it that way, and make them see that they can get on with other people and that things can be done and they can get more out of life than just sitting at home and looking after the children.*

*I'm hoping that something like this and people get to know each other and find that they can get together and that they can get on with each other.*

*...it's very good for the area really, if we can get everybody involved it's making it cleaner and tidier and safer area, isn't it? And that's the main thing; that's what we're looking for...Once you see that it's clean, tidy and everything like that, and all these plans, people take pride in the place hopefully.*

*Brighten the community up, yeah, especially when spring finally arrives and the flowers start coming out.*

One of the main distinctions of Green Synergy's projects was seen to be that because of direct resident involvement and participation in the gardening projects there was 'ownership' of the projects, such as the flowerbeds created around Cannon Street and the strips by the River Witham and Stamp End. As in Quayle's study (2007) this was considered to have important consequences for reducing negativity, potential vandalism and protection of the area by local participants and residents:

*... the flower beds that we did, well I wasn't here, a couple of weeks ago, but they're still there, they've not been wrecked. 'Cause I thought, 'Oh, it's a waste of time, they'll not last five minutes, then they'll be wrecked*

*...Yeah, it's like, people have said to me, 'there's no point – people will just rip it all up again,' and it's like, well, at the end of the day, I don't care. I'm still going to keep putting stuff there and eventually they might get the hint that it's just going to be there ... if you keep on with something and keep doing it, eventually people, like, they'll get the hint that, no matter what you do, things are going to get replaced. Whereas if it was the council doing it, it wouldn't get replaced. They'd think, 'Oh, we've tried it once, that's it.'*

## 5.2 Shuttleworth House

### 5.2.1 'Calming the Community'

Shuttleworth House the 17-storey block of flats situated in Stamp End has, as described in Section 2, its own specific concerns relative to its position within Abbey Ward. In particular, that although it houses a large number of residents equivalent to a street the potential for interaction is limited by the absence of 'shared spaces' and residents feeling stigmatised by the prior reputation of some aspects of the building. Within Shuttleworth House the pro-active residents group has acted to highlight issues surrounding the building and helped to bring

forward initiatives, such as the recent redecorating and refurbishment of the block by Lincoln City Council, to improve the environment in which they live and the reputation of the flats. Green Synergy's projects are consequently supported by the residents group to further improve the physical aspects of the building and both internal and external perceptions of living there. The following represents some of the comments made by residents as to how they felt about the redecoration combined with Green Synergy's projects of providing opportunities for residents to learn about growing plants and putting them around their balconies:

*I think it's calming the community down, because when that block wasn't decorated, I think a lot of peoples' enthusiasm for the area wasn't brilliant. Now that the block has been decorated, a lot more people have taken a bit more care and interest in that, because if you look at the building, people are actually using their balconies more often. You can see clothes hanging on them. When the block wasn't decorated, nobody would really use their balconies. You could see broken windows ... You could see the degradation that was holding the building together. Since it's been decorated now people will use their balconies in the summer. With Green Synergy (they're) saying, 'We'd like everyone to have green on their balconies.*

*... it just shows that a lot of tenants in the building do want to have a nice environment to live in; we don't want to be tainted by somebody who has been put in the block, has run through the block and just upset everybody by making too much noise, litter and so on. As a collective all tenants, I think, feel that they want the building to look nice, be presentable because I said ... 'I'm ashamed to invite my parents to the block'.*

***Because it was really tatty wasn't it?***

*Yeah, it was really, really tatty and even when people walked round the block you'd hear comments like, 'Ugh, I wouldn't live here!' How would you feel if that was your experience? (Discussion between two residents)*

*It (Shuttleworth House) needs initiatives like Green Synergy to get people involved 'cause Shuttleworth House has had a reputation over the years, and it's trying to bring it out of that reputation because I don't believe all tower blocks are bad and there are good examples of nice tower blocks in this country. So why can't we? I think we're slowly turning Shuttleworth House's reputation around by standing there and saying, 'No, no, enough. Why should be put up with it? We live here, we want to feel safe, secure.*

The project's ability to provide opportunities to make the flats more attractive and enhance living is most vividly captured in the following participant's description of plans for transforming their balcony:

*The block of flats that I live in has got a really bad reputation and people, as soon as you say you live there, people straight away cast an opinion of you, just 'cause you live there. But at the end of the day, you make your flat what you want your flat to be. When I get in my flat I forget that I'm in the block. Do you know what I mean? So it's my own space and that's why I've started doing this, 'cause in the summer my balcony's going to look amazing! ... I'm going to get loads of window boxes along the front of it. I've bought a raspberry bush for my balcony to put by the side of it... And the panels that they've just put (on the balconies) have all got holes on and on Friday I got some sweet peas that are already about that tall and I'm going to train them to grow through all them panels on the balcony. It will look really nice.*

## 5.2.2 Creating Shared Spaces

One of the main benefits of Green Synergy's activities in undertaking, for example, pot planting or hanging basket sessions in the entrance of Shuttleworth House was seen to be its creation of 'shared spaces', with people encouraged on entering the building to take part in the planting, or engage in some conversation with fellow residents congregating around the activity. As a participant reflected:

*There isn't any shared space within Shuttleworth House so you go in there, you go in the lift, go to your flat and that's it. So ... (Green Synergy's) work is invaluable and it is trying to create those spaces where people can come together. 'Cause there aren't any – apart from passing on the stairwells– there aren't those opportunities. So yeah, like I say, it will be interesting to see – it's the first step, bringing people together, if those relationships continue and carry on, evolve into other projects that would be a great success.*

One resident equally described that participating in the project was helping to alleviate a sense of 'isolation' which they felt living in the flats:

*Well, as I said, if you're in a block of flats and if you do have problems, whatever they may be, if you're not careful, I've found you can become very isolated. And so personally, I've found doing something like this and getting out I've met some other people from around the area as well as who live in the block and get talking. So I've made some more new friends, as it were...*

The activities around Green Synergy are also providing connections with residents as a source of conversation where previously it would have been difficult to initiate dialogue and friendships:

*... A few weeks ago I got talking to somebody (neighbour) about roses ... we was having a right natter for about 20 minutes about roses and gardening and that sort of thing ... But without Green Synergy I wouldn't have had that conversation with that person; I wouldn't have known that person had an interest in gardening as well ... Otherwise you're not going to suddenly turn round and say, 'Oh, I'll go and talk to that person about roses,' you know, if I was to do that to somebody in the street I'd soon get told to sling me hook, to put it politely.*

Others equally considered that the project was already breaking down some barriers between residents and providing a means of 'interaction' particularly between different ethnic backgrounds:

*Well I've noticed we've had more of the migrant families ... coming down, talking to us and just have more interaction between ... because of the hanging baskets ... As well I've had quite a few of them saying morning to me when I've used the lift, and normally they haven't spoken before, you know.*

### 5.3 Tower Estate

Green Synergy was in the process of setting up projects on the Tower Estate at the time of the fieldwork and in particular the establishment of a small communal garden at the side of some houses, together with some events, such as a hanging basket day outside the Tower Action Groups (TAG) offices on Roman Pavement. TAG was the nucleus on the estate for supporting the projects and their enthusiasm and actions together with residents' participation underpins the impact of Green Synergy's initiatives in the short and long-term. The views of TAG on Green Synergy's role on the estate was therefore sought within the context of their own work within the Tower Estate and the issues that they considered pertinent to both their and Green Synergy's actions.

#### 5.3.1 'Pulling teeth' – Slow Effect

Central to any community work on the estate was the perception that the Tower Estate has been a 'forgotten' estate and that its position at the end of Abbey Ward meant that it had been often overlooked, in contrast with the more central area along Monks Road and around Croft Street. Equally it could be a 'closed' estate in which ideas and change could take some time, that the community required convincing and time to take part and that as with other communities a lot of connections had been lost as part of modern living, as represented in the following dialogue amongst respondents.

*I do believe in what ... (Green Synergy's) doing, but I think it's going to be slow. I think 'cause people have no reason to be involved with each other any more, and nobody's got a clue of what a person's doing two or three doors away; you only know what you're doing so I think its going to be slow. But I believe in what (Green Synergy's) doing – and I can understand where ...(they're) coming from.*

*... But once it gets hold I think it will be fantastic. It took a while for it to get going at Shuttleworth and wherever else (Green Synergy's) been, it's been a little while, but you'll find one thing with this estate is, it's a very closed estate and, as I say, they're not very trusting. So it's got to be shown to be working..*

*I mean, the three years – we've (TAG) been here since 2009 and it's like pulling teeth. It is literally like pulling teeth to get them to join in ... It was about 2007 when we all started getting together to sort the estate out and we've had this (TAG) since 2009. Tower Estate didn't exist on the map within the Abbey Ward thing if you like ... so we brought it to people's attention – irrespective of everybody we brought it forward. Things have been tried for people that never worked. So you've got the apathy of the people saying it doesn't work and all that ... so we're winning, but slowly and everything we do forward we go several steps back.*

#### 5.3.2 Young People and Preconceptions

Given that the housing on the Tower Estate is composed of mostly family homes with a high proportion of young families and teenagers compared to other areas in Abbey Ward one of the main issues for TAG has been the provision of activities for younger people to reduce boredom and levels of anti-social behaviour on the estate. One of the positive aspects of Green Synergy's work in setting up the new communal garden was therefore seen as involving young people through TAG in helping with the new garden. This was particularly considered valuable in reducing potential vandalism of the garden by ensuring that they were

part of its creation as represented in the following dialogue between participants about involving younger residents in this and other activities, such as clearing paths of snow and litter picking:

*Yeah there's nothing up here – there's nothing up here for the teenagers or anything like that, but the lads got involved yesterday (digging the community garden)...it's something they've done, you know, and it's not going to be destroyed is it? ...*

***You know, the lads at least they can turn round and say we've done that, respect it. We've helped.***

*We did ask them and they did come (to the garden)... They said they'd be here, you know, at certain times and they were, they came.*

***...if we don't involve them it it's not going to work but we've got the young ones on our side now because when we first started this we were called grassers and everything you know, but now they're beginning to know what we're doing.***

*So you know it's, it is working slowly. You've just got to catch the boys at the right time. But they do help. You know, it's like one year there was me and ... was going round clearing the snow off on the paths, the old people's paths, and we've got some of the young ones involved in that.*

***We've had them litter picking. And they enjoyed it!***

*It is just trying to find things. Well things like the garden I think the project will be a good thing to get them on board. Get them from damaging things and that type of thing, yeah.*

***You know, we're trying to learn them to respect things.***

One of the values of the project and participation within it was consequently considered to be its inclusion of young people, including those who had been 'in trouble' with the police and were 'known' both to professionals and those on the estate. Moreover, Green Synergy had no preconceptions about people and was therefore giving everyone a 'chance', as respondents described:

*Yeah he's (one of the young participants) settling down, isn't he? You know, and we thought oh you know bad egg but we like to give them the chance. Cos you've got to give them the chance.*

*...When she (Green Synergy Project Leader) started working up there she was getting a whole host of residents come along that she had never met before but which, if you were to talk to other agencies would say, Ooh you've got those ones there have you? They're the troublemakers ... But that just goes to show that if you go in with no preconceptions and they know that you've got no preconceptions then they're fine, they're absolutely fine ... and I think because there was no preconceptions, they went in. I think she said they helped do all the digging over of the land up there as well and that's great ... and I think that's just the beauty of Green Synergy's project, it's just nice and simple, she knows no one, - other than the relationships she's obviously built up over the last year but resident-wise she knows no one.*

Involving young people in communal projects, particularly those who have been sometimes part of anti-social behaviour has been seen as a positive in other gardening projects, as Quayle (2007) found it is about making areas a 'nicer place for everyone to live' and finding a role for all parts of the community.

*Prior to the start of this project (gardening) these young people had been perceived as a problem and as participating in anti-social behaviour. The research demonstrates the value of community projects targeting these groups and providing facilities that promote a sense of ownership ...*

*Reducing levels of antisocial behaviour can make areas a nicer place for everyone to live. Individuals perceived as the cause of antisocial behaviour do not necessarily enjoy hanging out on the streets. They feel as if they have nowhere else to go and may have trouble at home. They too enjoy reductions in antisocial behaviour' (Quayle 2007:p22-23).*

Those young people who had taken part in the digging of the new garden reflected that it had provided enjoyment, alleviated the boredom of having nothing to do because of unemployment and that it would make the estate more attractive:

*Enjoyed it yeah if there was more stuff going on (like gardening) because there's nothing going on really, is there? We've got a few bits and bobs going on but they need more than this. ...it will help ... A lot because then they'll (other young people) be off the streets, won't they?*

*Well they say go to college and after college you'll get work. You've got no chance. I went to college for two years to do painting and decorating and then I went on after, did a job, got laid off ... did a few other things.*

Moreover they wanted more opportunities for volunteering and involvement on the estate through the Tower Action Group and Green Synergy as it built up confidence that they could do more and increased involvement:

*...if they get more on I'll help them out. That's what they need; if they need help in doing that but they just need to prove to us that they can actually get stuff through them to do for people to actually volunteer in, because there isn't that much to volunteer in, is there?*

*... This Tower Action Group, I didn't think it was good at first but now they're actually trying to help and get kids, the younger kids, on stuff like trips and that*

*Yeah it was quite fun better than what we've been doing round the estate, which is nothing ... it would be better if they had stuff like this happening all around the estate but this is like the first time it's happened so there isn't many people doing it ...*

### **5.3.2 Identity**

Overall from older and younger participants the view was that such projects meant that the Tower Estate was 'no longer forgotten' and that Green Synergy was building on the identity that the Tower Action Group had worked to encapsulate, as a respondent related '*they've (Tower Estate) got an identity now, they are strong in their identity and they know it's working and they're ready to take the step out and do that be proud of their area; they're no longer forgotten about.* Certainly observation by the researcher indicated how strong the links between the community are, young people were encouraged, for example, to participate in the hanging basket event by TAG members and residents going to bring them. Moreover as cars and pedestrians passed the stalls placed outside the TAG office on the Roman Bank most would stop to have a conversation about the project.

## 5.4 Reversal of Broken Window Effect?

One of the most important aspects of Green Synergy within Abbey Ward was therefore seen to be its ability to slowly help reversing what was seen as the 'broken window' effect, where the community's perception of place and that of those from outside of the area becomes one that is much more 'positive':

*Hopefully it'll be the reverse of broken window effect, where people see positive things happening and then just slowly but surely start to join in. Again, I think we've already seen evidence that, as I say, from a small base it's growing and growing.*

The work of Green Synergy was equally seen as providing a different emphasis to funding and projects within the area in its 'simplicity' of bringing different sections of the community together without concentrating necessarily on emphasising 'deprivation' or particular groups of the population. That even where particular groups meet, such as the women's group on a Monday, that also transfers to other groups, with a number of the women participants also taking part in the Wednesday open group at Developmentplus and the gardening sessions at Cannon Street and Shuttleworth House, so that the momentum built up in separate groups also transfers and supports interaction:

*... with the Green Synergy Project and growing your own vegetables and your own plants, that actually hits home to everybody whether you're a migrant family or whether you're a British family and (Green Synergy) has managed to interact quite nicely with some of the ethnic groups, which is great but I think that actually is the simplest and the only way you need to have to do something like that, just the interaction with people with a common interest and bringing people together.*

*.... A lot of the funding within Abbey ward is all about bringing the unemployment figures up and all that kind of thing, so this project again crosses that but also includes working families, retired women and that kind of thing. And then on the Wednesday afternoon group we have an open group which is getting bigger and bigger, which is fab and we have a lot of the regular ladies from the Monday group come along to that as well and we have a lot of the chaps come along, and again there's a complete diverse mix of people there too ...And again I think it is literally down to the gardening project, as in it's a personal enjoyment thing that, you know, they're not being made to come to just tick boxes, it's just something that interests them, they can take it away, they can take their produce home with them and continue with that.*

Need within the Green Synergy projects therefore translates as a much wider concept and more inclusive than a more narrow definition of 'deprivation'. Community cohesion and inclusiveness within the project uncovers issues, such as loneliness and daily life stresses that are beyond just economic indicators and statistics that define areas and the benefits of working across all parts of the population:

*Need could just be loneliness at home, you know it's perhaps the mobility problems, it doesn't necessarily mean that, you know, that they've got no money or anything like that and ... I think you need to cover the whole ward and bring people together that way.*

*We think it's about deprivation and stuff, and I think it actually masks, you know, a fact that it's not about that necessarily. It's about other sort of stresses and tensions or aspects of life.*

*...When you're bidding for funding – you have to talk about the deficits and the things that aren't there or the things that people think are disadvantages. And it just feels like you're digging a bigger hole all the time. And you know people there who are hard working, they think about other people, you know, all those qualities that you'd like to have in the people around you. And yet you're sort of talking them down all the time.*

The central vision of Green Synergy's role within community cohesion was therefore using gardening as a mechanism to bring the community more together by not placing 'labels' around groups that could possibly stigmatise or create artificial divisions:

*I think this is a fantastic way of bridging gaps, bringing people together, and overall wellbeing for the community ... I am fascinated in how to build up community cohesion and how that really can be a building block to creating community spirit and really I think I can't think of anything more amazing than using gardening as Lincolnshire is predominantly arable farming land.*



## 6. Organisational Challenges and Learning

As stated in Section 3.5 one of the issues that is less reflected on within the literature and remains a research gap is the organisational learning and challenges that surround the setting up of community garden projects. The review of Green Synergy in its inception and development of projects within Abbey Ward has consequently encompassed continually analysing the organisational pathways, with the research process both engaging the project leader in ongoing dialogue and more formal discussions within interviews and the workshop of both stakeholders and participants.

### 6.1 Small Steps

As a small charitable organisation with only one paid member of staff the main emphasis of the projects have been on small steps and slowly building up capacity both for the organisation and within Abbey Ward, which was seen as a particularly valuable approach in building up confidence both within the community and organisational partners. Hence larger scale objectives, such as setting up a city farm, are dependent on a more realistic appraisal of what both the organisation and community can support. Funding bids are equally based upon the building of funding pyramids where from smaller, but no less valuable funding pots, such as Community First, the organisation can offer increased expertise, networks and capacity.

*One of the things that I really like about (Green Synergy's) approach is that (they) do a few small things really, really well. So they don't try to grow too quickly which I've seen a lot happen within a lot of community and charitable organisations.*

*It is all part of building a track record for Green Synergy. We need to have built a track record for that (City farm) and that, I think, is where these community growing projects are helping to do that on their path and also building up local knowledge and networks and support and experience.*

### 6.2 Changing Phases

There was a consideration that as with most projects there are several phases that an organisation, or programme goes through within their developments that were termed 'forming, storming and norming.... When you first start and everyone's just coming together it's a new, exciting thing and then you go on a bit further and it's starting to find its feet and peoples' personalities are coming through and there's some conflict or confrontations ...

As an intervention based on community participation and consensus the main objective was to find a middle-way between providing a lead and gradually devolving ownership to the participants and ensuring that there was a space for all to contribute; *I am very aware of my role and responsibilities and how to, without being hands-on or top-down, but helping the group to retain that safe, nice feeling that everyone is welcome and that it doesn't become cliquy or that stronger personalities push more quieter personalities out.* It was therefore about establishing group values and recognising that as with 'any small business, you end up wearing all the hats to start with'.

Where strong community organisations already exist, as in the case of the Tower Action Group, there was already a basis on which the responsibility for projects could be devolved. In contrast newer groups related at the workshop that they needed time, support, gardening

knowledge and leadership to establish the projects and that whilst they were willing to support the projects at an operational level, they required directional input in the early stages of the project if it was to develop:

*I like it as it is. I like somebody in charge. So you know where you are instead of being confused about who's going to do what. I think most people like somebody in charge they need a guiding hand.*

*... yeah, a guiding hand, direction from somebody who knows more about it than any of us. You've got to have somebody in charge, haven't you, to know where you're going and what ... otherwise we fail. We need a direction.*

***We need somebody with a knowledge of gardening to be a leader. It's no good – because we've only just started ...***

*It's no good putting us in charge, but if you had somebody with a knowledge of gardening that would give the time.*

However, within these boundaries of having someone visibly taking a lead in the projects there was still fluidity and individual decision making with regard to what people did within the sessions and participants could take responsibility for different functions and tasks within the group if they wanted:

*Everybody's allowed to go at their own pace, aren't they? There's no taskmaster, as such ... You have to keep us in order, but you're not there saying you will do it. Even to the point if it's only making tea for everyone, or washing the cups at the end.*

### **6.3 Increasing Participation**

One of the main considerations for developing the projects was how to increase participation. Participants at the workshop considered that what had been most effective was events, such as the open gardening around Cannon Street and the turf strips by Shuttleworth House and the River Witham where the activities were clearly visible to other residents:

*I think you've got to make yourself visible. Certainly a couple of times coming back from town, I've actually bumped into somebody who's seen us when we were doing the grass strips, you know... just talking for 15 minutes about what we were doing ... I think it's not so much the massive projects as the small projects, one there, one there, you know, over here and somebody starts to see who Green Synergy is.*

Other participants considered that the perception of gardening may contrarily place barriers for some from attending, that they might consider it was too physical, rather than it could incorporate many different aspects, such as an emphasis on its 'softer' therapeutic qualities:

*People automatically think it's physical. And where I'm coming from, and maybe why more people aren't coming to the group, is because they think they've got to be really, really physical. Because as soon as you say gardening, they say oh, can't be bothered. I can't be bothered.*

*...we're all alright. We're all standing and we all know how to use a shovel and you know how to use a trowel and whatever, but you try and get somebody new from outside, they think it's gardening and that strikes the fear of god into them of gardening, because it's physical.*

It was therefore seen as essential that Green Synergy was marketed for its social activity and holistic values, as one respondent related, *'because green synergy can mean a lot of things. It just doesn't mean the garden, does it?'*

As most activities take place during weekdays there was also the consideration that those who are employed find it difficult to take part and that with only one paid employee it could only be extended if projects were more devolved. Moreover, that the indoor and outdoor gardening sessions, such as those at Developmentplus are dependent upon when premises are open during the week and the need to have someone responsible for the sessions for practical issues, such as insurance, in some cases reduces the ability to take part in 'community' gardening.

*I've been but I have to go when I'm not at work. It always seems to be the time when I'm going out to work so when I've been on holiday I've been down ... it's difficult for those who want to get involved but who can't because of work, isn't it? Although ... (project leader's) busy. I said possibly put somebody else in charge on those days like ... or something like that.*

## **7. Conclusions and Overview**

### **7.1 Holistic Benefits**

As Quayle (2007) found in her study it is difficult to disentangle the separate themes that arise when reviewing the ‘benefits’ derived from the provision and participation in community gardens. Indeed that it is the holistic nature of the projects that is so beneficial *‘perhaps the biggest benefit of all could be the connection between the themes, which allows so many benefits to be delivered by one project. The friendship, social support and information sharing appear to be just as important as relaxing surroundings in establishing a therapeutic environment. The overlap between environmental and health themes demonstrates how key the natural environment is to our wellbeing’* (Quayle 2007:p81). Certainly the themes of why people engage in community garden projects and then continue to be involved indicates that there is not usually one single reason but an inter-play in motivation and outcomes. This was particularly notable when listening to participants in interviews and then seeking to isolate the themes in analysing the rich interview data. Overall the following inter-related themes and benefits from the project were identified:

- Social Interaction and Inclusion – ‘Togetherness’
- Support and Skills Development – Increased Confidence
- Volunteering - the concept of ‘putting something back’ in the community
- Environmental Effects – ‘Caring for the Community’
- Health and Well Being – therapeutic effect
- Community Capacity – Reversal of Broken Window Effect

The main cohesion of the projects was often the social element of the projects, where the weekly group meeting provided an opportunity to interact and ‘give back’, as much as concerns about improving the environment, or an interest in gardening. The shared cups of tea/coffee and conversation surrounding most activities being instrumental to participation, so that individual benefits underpinned wider impact for the community and area, in a pyramid effect.

### **7.2 Community**

Compared to other research the projects undertaken in Abbey Ward were more small scale, such as flowerbeds or strips by housing and contained alternative venues, such as gardening groups that met and worked inside, which provided another dimension to the concept of community gardening. Most of the gardening also took place in a very urban context, where even the provision of flowerbeds or gardens did not breakdown the general environmental background in which they operated. The projects however proved that providing different events and ways to participate could be as beneficial in their therapeutic and social effects, that transforming some flats or considering how to garden on a balcony or window-sill was no less important, both for the individual and the overall effects on raising pride and positive attitudes/perceptions of an area.

The research of the different areas of Abbey Ward also indicated that there is much diversity within communities that goes beyond labels, such as ‘deprivation’. Indeed, that labels often obscure rather than help define how communities operate, or can be brought together. What was evident within Abbey Ward is the very different layers of community issues and how they impact and can be approached by residents, issues such as loneliness or incapacity, for example, exist across communities and are not defined only by socio-economic data.

One of the most beneficial aspects of Green Synergy’s projects was its building on community groups and capacity that already existed, such as the Tower Action Group, or Shuttleworth House’s Residents Group, therefore initiatives developed from the centre of the community, rather than being imposed. The role of the volunteer as in other community projects is central in building up projects, at the core of each project within Abbey Ward are residents who help drive them forward. Within the Tower Estate, for example, there was evidence of strong community interaction and existing networks that helped to access and engage younger people into the gardening projects. Equally within the groups who meet at Developmentplus is a core of participants who attend the various groups and support other projects, including Shuttleworth House and Cannon Street. Targeting specific groups, such as those just for women balanced by open groups equally allowed participants to take part according to initial perceptions of what they were most comfortable with to be extended with gained confidence to participation in other groups.

However, as with other community projects building up momentum and schemes take time, with ‘small steps’ and can as residents have attested be like ‘pulling teeth’ in establishing networks and connections and engaging residents in projects. There was nevertheless a consensus that in setting up projects there is a need for central direction, expertise and leadership, to give time for projects to develop, hence the blend of professionalism provided by the funding together with community enthusiasm and support. It is also dependent on the existence or delineating of shared community spaces, such as the setting up a garden in an unused space on the Tower Estate, or the use of indoor facilities, such as rooms at Developmentplus, the latter of which either require funding, or provision at no cost to the groups using them.

The example of Green Synergy and similar projects suggests that in the provision of community projects there are core features that need to be taken into account:

- Communities are diverse and projects need to be directed at the local level in accordance with the capacity, involvement and interest of local groups.
- A variety of projects in different settings enables inclusion and participation, such as indoor sessions and the use of raised beds for those with mobility problems. Indoor sessions also extend when groups can meet and are not dependent on the weather, or the more traditional spring and summer growing seasons, so that the momentum of groups is sustained, without the need for stopping.
- Funding provides the ability to set up projects in providing direction and expertise, paying for materials, the use of halls, initial landscaping and marketing of projects, but long term the capacity of groups to take ownership and the intrinsic role of the volunteer can make projects sustainable. The role

of the volunteer and the expertise they develop can be extended to other groups setting up.

- On-going publicising of projects remains central to engage further participants, with 'word of mouth' and 'visible' advertising of the projects through open events and residents seeing gardening events in their area being the most effective strategy. This is most likely to breakdown barriers and preconceptions of what involvement in a community gardening project entails.

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