

# Shoots and leaves: exploring the impacts and fragile sustainability of sustainable place-making projects working with marginalised people

Sam Ramsden, [sam.ramsden@hull.ac.uk](mailto:sam.ramsden@hull.ac.uk)  
University of Hull

This article contributes to emerging research on sustainable place-making, but makes an important contribution through a strong focus on outcomes for marginalised people and the need for long-term sustainability. Sustainable place-making combines ‘place-making’ and ‘sustainable development’ to describe locally focused action working towards social, economic and environmental goals (Franklin and Marsden, 2015). The article explores an externally funded charity-led project working in a deprived area of the UK, implementing urban agriculture, community gardening and household energy activities. The project successfully engaged marginalised people, who strongly voiced outcomes including reduced isolation, improved mental health and increased resilience and self-reliance. Support from staff, volunteering in a team, enjoying gardening, accessing nature and financial savings provided a platform for impacts. Environmental outcomes were less tangible but included improvements to the local environment and reduced energy usage. However, after the funding finished, marginalised participants were vulnerable to outcomes not being sustained in the long term.

**Key words** sustainable place-making • long-term sustainability • marginalised people • community gardening

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## Introduction

Hull is a city in the north of England that has high levels of deprivation (ONS, 2015; Porter et al, 2015). This article explores the case study of an externally funded charity-led project that supported marginalised people in Hull to engage in urban agriculture (UA) and community gardening, volunteering, and household energy-efficiency activities, with broad aims to increase sustainable living, reduce poverty and improve the environment. The outcomes of the project are explored through the framework of sustainable place-making, which brings together ‘place-making’ and ‘sustainable development’ to analyse community-level sustainability-focused activities working towards social, economic and environmental goals (Franklin and

1 [Marsden, 2015](#)). Sustainable place-making includes UA, community gardening and  
 2 community-level energy activities, which are increasing in the UK and globally  
 3 ([Holland, 2004](#); [Crane et al, 2013](#); [Franklin and Marsden, 2015](#)). The article aims  
 4 to strengthen emerging research on sustainable place-making by focusing on the  
 5 long-term sustainability outcomes for marginalised people, which are sometimes  
 6 overlooked in existing research. The article first explores the concept of ‘sustainable  
 7 place-making’ before then presenting the research, including a description of the case  
 8 study context and the research methods used. The article then explores outcomes  
 9 for marginalised people in the case study through the stories of five participants and  
 10 by tracking what happened to the activities after the project ended. The article then  
 11 makes recommendations for policy and practice. Critically exploring the outcomes  
 12 and challenges of sustainable place-making projects in a deprived area can provide  
 13 important lessons for the growing number of other similar projects.

## 14 Exploring sustainable place-making

17 There is a need to develop healthy and sustainable cities to tackle the growing pressures  
 18 from increasing urbanisation and the impacts of climate change ([van den Bosch and  
 19 Sang, 2017](#)). Cities are places of inequality and marginalisation ([Milbourne, 2012](#)) and  
 20 [Heynen et al \(2006: 2\)](#) describe how ‘the city is the place where socio-environmental  
 21 problems are experienced most acutely’. [Horlings \(2015: 258\)](#) argues that healthy and  
 22 sustainable cities can be created through the development of ‘place-based approaches’.  
 23 Place-making is an active process, described by [Pierce et al \(2011: 54\)](#) as the ‘set of  
 24 social, political and material processes by which people iteratively create and recreate  
 25 the experienced geographies in which they live ... Place-making is an inherently  
 26 networked process, constituted by the socio-spatial relationships that link individuals  
 27 together through a common place-frame’. There is a strong connection between  
 28 place-making and improving access to green and natural spaces ([Dale et al, 2008](#)).  
 29 For example, improving local parks, tree planting and UA activities are increasingly  
 30 important place-making activities ([Holland, 2004](#); [Franklin and Marsden, 2015](#);  
 31 [Mathers et al, 2017](#)) and are especially important in cities, which can suffer from a  
 32 lack of access to nature and greenspaces ([Milbourne, 2012](#)). For example, [Certomà and  
 33 Tornaghi \(2015: 1123\)](#) comment on how increasing UA and community gardening  
 34 support place-making in cities:

36 [I]n the last decade, a large variety of grassroots actors – urban harvesters,  
 37 guerrilla gardeners, community growers and landsharers – have been  
 38 promoting a diversified set of projects that, while interstitial and very often  
 39 considered ‘residual’ are nonetheless significantly challenging the place-  
 40 making of cities in the Global North, and sometimes changing the face of  
 41 neighbourhoods where they are located.

43 [Beilin and Hunter \(2011: 523\)](#) develop the important link between place-making and  
 44 sustainability and argue that ‘community garden activities are frequently described as  
 45 contributing positively to the development of socially and environmentally sustainable  
 46 local communities’. UA and community gardening can help create healthy, socially and  
 47 environmentally sustainable communities through improving health and wellbeing,  
 48 developing skills and confidence, and reducing isolation ([Ferris et al, 2001](#); [Holland,](#)

AQ1

1 2004; Miller, 2015). Pitt (2014) describes the therapeutic benefits of gardening for  
2 older people and people with mental health problems, including through enjoying  
3 the different tasks of gardening and reducing isolation. Baker (2004) and Jean (2015)  
4 research place-making by refugees and newly arrived immigrants involved in UA  
5 activities, many of whom are escaping conflict and trying to adapt to a new country.  
6 Jean (2015: 56) argues that 'a sense of place comes from having the ability to participate  
7 in place-making activities that develop a connection to landscape, soil, and the physical  
8 environment'. Enjoyment of gardening, access to nature and working with others  
9 encourage participation in the growing number of activities (Bhatti et al, 2009; Pitt,  
10 2014; Jean, 2015).

11 Community-level energy projects can also be considered as sustainable place-making  
12 activities (Franklin and Marsden, 2015; Parkhill et al, 2015) and the numbers of  
13 projects are also increasing (Seyfang et al, 2013). Community-level energy projects can  
14 involve both technologically focused projects such as generating renewable electricity  
15 through installing solar panels, and also approaches to increase energy literacy, reduce  
16 energy consumption and reduce energy costs (Stephenson et al, 2010; Seyfang et al,  
17 2013; Parkhill et al, 2015). However, there is less in-depth research into the impacts of  
18 energy projects on marginalised people compared with UA and community gardening,  
19 potentially because many community-level energy projects work at a household level  
20 rather than in a public space and can have limited ongoing contact with participants  
21 (Hargreaves et al, 2010). A range of research suggests that there are possibilities for  
22 community-level energy projects to reduce vulnerability to fuel poverty (Seyfang et al,  
23 2013; Parkhill et al, 2015) and Lorenc et al (2013) describe a charity-led project  
24 that helped vulnerable people to reduce their energy bills through advice on tariffs.  
25 Reducing energy costs for people vulnerable to fuel poverty in deprived areas is also  
26 argued to increase community resilience (Parkhill et al, 2015). Resilience is a broad  
27 and contested term, but can be described as households or communities being able  
28 to overcome shocks or ongoing serious challenges, or even improve their situation  
29 (Parkhill et al, 2015; Dagdeviren et al, 2016).

30 The literature describes many health and social benefits of sustainable place-  
31 making activities, including reduced isolation, improved mental health and reduced  
32 vulnerability to poverty. However, there is criticism of exaggerating the benefits of  
33 sustainable place-making activities without critically analysing negative impacts and  
34 challenges (Ferris et al, 2001; Tornaghi, 2014; Miller, 2015). Long-term sustainability  
35 is often fragile as many projects are led by charities that rely on external funding,  
36 and obtaining external funding is increasingly challenging (Seyfang et al, 2013;  
37 White and Stirling, 2013; IVAR, 2016). Seghezze (2009) describes the importance  
38 of 'permanence' in sustainable development but how this is often neglected in  
39 planning. Planning for sustainability is not possible for many projects operating on  
40 three-year funding cycles and in an insecure funding environment (IVAR, 2016).  
41 Without charity-led interventions, activities can be dominated by more middle-  
42 class participants and develop in more affluent communities (Chatterton and  
43 Cutler, 2008; Aiken, 2012; Franklin and Marsden, 2015), reducing participation by  
44 marginalised people. A further criticism is that external support for community-level  
45 projects enables the further rollback of the state, particularly in the UK, which has  
46 seen public spending cuts through the government's austerity agenda. For example,  
47 Tornaghi (2014: 3) identifies that UA can help justify the 'privatisation of the urban  
48 realm and disinvestments in disadvantaged areas' such as through cuts to health and

1 wellbeing services, and public space management. For instance, community gardens  
2 are criticised for substituting professional care for community care for people with  
3 mental health issues (Ferris et al, 2001; Tornaghi, 2014). In addition, Mathers et al  
4 (2017) suggest that many community-level activities, such as supporting local libraries AQ2  
5 to save them from closure, or maintaining public parks, should be considered 'place-  
6 keeping' rather than place-making. In addition, there is an increasing focus on the  
7 potential of community-level sustainability-focused activities to help tackle climate  
8 change (Holland, 2004; Pearsall et al, 2012); however, Chatterton and Cutler (2008)  
9 question the scale of environmental impacts from community-level initiatives and  
10 whether they can make a difference. While it is argued that there are impacts from  
11 energy activities, UA activities and improved green spaces, in reducing global levels  
12 of carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>), there is very little quantitative evidence (Hargreaves et al,  
13 2010; Mason and Montalto, 2015).

14 Despite the criticisms and challenges, it is argued that sustainable place-making  
15 activities are happening on the ground and research can help support projects (Holland,  
16 2004; Franklin and Marsden, 2015). In addition, there is a need to hear the voices of  
17 marginalised groups describe their own experiences, and this is particularly important  
18 in exploring whether projects can help strengthen community resilience in the face  
19 of serious challenges and shocks such as poverty, austerity and the impacts from the  
20 rollback of the state.

## 22 **Research context and methods**

### 23 *Research context: Hull and the case study project*

24  
25  
26 This article focuses on the case study of a Big Lottery Fund (BLF) project in Hull  
27 in northern England. The Big Lottery Fund was established by the National Lottery  
28 Act in 2006 and is 'responsible for distributing 40% of all funds raised for good  
29 causes by the National Lottery' (Big Lottery Fund, 2018). The Green Prosperity (GP)  
30 project was a £1 million project running from 2013 to 2015, led by a local charity  
31 and supported by two other local organisations. The BLF funded the GP project as  
32 part of the Communities Living Sustainably (CLS) funding stream, which supported  
33 12 projects in deprived areas across the country to explore connections between  
34 climate change, sustainable living and poverty reduction and to achieve outcomes for  
35 vulnerable people (St Clair et al, 2017; Big Lottery Fund, 2018). CLS projects were  
36 established as 'test and learn' projects to explore what worked at a community level  
37 and to provide flexibility for projects. Funding of up to £1 million was provided  
38 for individual CLS projects over a period of three to five years, from 2014 to 2018  
39 inclusive.

40 The GP project worked with communities in east Hull, a disadvantaged area in one  
41 of the most deprived cities in the UK. Hull has a population of approximately 260,000  
42 and has experienced post-industrial decline, with high levels of unemployment  
43 after the reduction in North Sea fishing and dock labour (Atkinson, 2008; Jonas  
44 et al, 2016). At the time of the research in 2015, Hull was identified as the third  
45 most disadvantaged local authority area in the UK (ONS, 2015). It was estimated  
46 that 13% of Hull's residents lived in fuel poverty (Porter et al, 2015), and there was  
47 increasing evidence of food poverty (FareShare, 2015). Platt (2011) says that in Hull  
48 'the worst poverty isn't found in the historic city centre, but on the estates on the

1 outskirts' and areas of east Hull are considered as some of the most deprived parts of  
2 Hull. However, the story of decline and deprivation masks the resilience and positive  
3 agency in Hull. Hull has a strong sense of community and residents of Hull have  
4 demonstrated their resilience, overcoming severe bombing during World War Two  
5 and widespread flooding in 2007 (Starkey et al, 2017). Hull is an important historical  
6 city, a city of poetry, a city of sport and a city of culture (Starkey et al, 2017). Hull  
7 is also becoming a centre of the renewable energy industry through the Green Port  
8 Development. The council also has a history of being proactive in anti-poverty and  
9 food security projects, such as through the pioneering 'Eat Well Do Well' initiative  
10 in 2004 to improve nutrition in schools (Colquhoun et al, 2008). Hull also has a  
11 wide range of grassroots community gardening and food growing projects, and at  
12 the time of the research, it was actively working towards becoming a member of the  
13 'Sustainable Food Cities' network (Sustainable Food Cities, 2017).

14 The local organisations that developed the GP project felt that the aims of the  
15 CLS funding stream were relevant to the local community and successfully obtained  
16 funding. The project plan included a number of sustainable place-making activities:  
17 UA, volunteering outreach, community energy, eco-enterprises and a 'green care'  
18 activity to support local carers. The UA activity became a strong focus and the project  
19 employed three members of staff with strong skills and experience and who were  
20 well connected to the wider food growing network in Hull. The main focus of the  
21 UA activities was to establishing a community garden at the East Hull Community  
22 Farm (EHCF), which allocated land to the project. The volunteer outreach activity  
23 also became embedded in the UA activities. Volunteers met weekly at the community  
24 garden and then provided support to additional activities including supporting local  
25 families to grow their own food (the family growing project) and other more ad-hoc  
26 activities including supporting a city-wide cooking event (the Feastival), tree planting  
27 in local schools and building bat and bird boxes. The UA activity also provided training  
28 courses for the wider community, including specific sessions aimed at fathers and  
29 children, and refugee families. The energy activity was developed separately from the  
30 UA and volunteering activities and was led by one member of staff. It focused on work  
31 at a household level and engaged residents through installing a free energy monitor  
32 and then used this visit to provide advice on identifying better tariffs, switching from  
33 pre-payment meters, which incur higher charges than payment by monthly direct  
34 debit, and the Warm Home Discount (WHD) – a government-supported grant to  
35 reduce costs for vulnerable people. However, the eco-enterprise and green-care  
36 activities did not begin work at a community level due to a range of governance issues.

### 38 *How the research was conducted*

39  
40 The research contributed to monitoring and evaluation for the GP project and the  
41 main focus of the research was exploring outcomes for participants. However, the  
42 research did not include any financial or cost-benefit analysis. Measuring environmental  
43 impacts was also beyond the scope of the research. The research started in February  
44 2014, approximately one year after the GP project began, and continued until one  
45 year after completion. The research focused on the UA, volunteering and community  
46 energy activities due to their engagement with participants. There was a focus on  
47 qualitative research and semi-structured interviews, with a flexible approach to explore  
48 themes from the stories and perspectives of participants and staff. This approach is

**Table 1: Interviews with participants and staff conducted, by activity**

	Interviews	Participants
Operational staff (UA, volunteering and energy activities)	9	6
UA – volunteers	50	31
UA – participants	19	11
Energy – participants	40	40

in line with [Creamer's \(2015: 987\)](#) approach to understanding local interpretations of sustainability and community by allowing 'themes to emerge unrestricted by preconceptions, frameworks and theories'. The length of the research was critical in developing trust and rapport with staff and participants. Continuing research for one year after project completion also enabled me to investigate project outcomes for marginalised people and governance issues and track long-term sustainability.

The embedded research role provided continuous access to participants during project activities, although I had more access to the UA participants than the household energy participants. I regularly attended the Wednesday sessions at the community garden, and the family growing project sessions, and built up relationships with the volunteers and families involved. In contrast, it was more difficult to build up relationships with people who only participated in the energy activities where the interaction between residents and the project was through a household visit, and there was minimal ongoing contact. Conducting follow-up interviews to identify outcomes was extremely difficult due to people changing contact information, particularly mobile phone numbers, and people not wanting to give up time to answer questions due to other priorities such as providing care or working.

[Table 1](#) identifies the number of interviews conducted during this research. Some UA participants and volunteers were interviewed more than once to follow up themes or outcomes. In addition, there was some overlap, with eight UA participants also having energy monitors.

Due to the need for continuous feedback of findings to the project, interview recordings were transcribed on a continuous basis. Transcriptions and field notes were then coded and analysed to identify themes, which were continuously revised. For instance, as the research progressed and more trust and rapport was developed, some UA and community gardening participants were very open in describing how the project helped them address health and wellbeing issues or challenges obtaining state benefits, and I followed up on these themes in more detail through further interviews.

There were challenges and ethical dilemmas in the field especially in trying to be constructive and avoid emotional attachment, while providing support ([Tornaghi and Van Dyck, 2015](#)). For instance, there were tensions towards the end of the funding period when staff and participants were concerned about what would happen to them and the project activities without access to further funding. Many volunteers expressed how they did not feel able to continue their activities without staff support. For instance, one regular volunteer commented: "I think it's a shame, it's really sad. I know they've said this is the best year for volunteers and people getting involved and to cut it off at such an important stage, I think it's a shame, a lot of people are going to lose out."

Concerns about the future of the project affected my research in that I felt under pressure to produce research findings relatively quickly for the project to use as

1 evidence of its impacts. This was particularly relevant for the energy project where  
2 I had less ongoing contact with participants. But this period also showed the reality  
3 of working with a charity-led project that was about to have its funding stopped.  
4

## 5 **Research findings: examining whether sustainable place-making** 6 **activities can lead to social, economic and environmental outcomes** 7 **for marginalised people** 8

9 This section explores the outcomes of the different activities for marginalised people,  
10 focusing on the UA and community gardening, volunteering and community energy  
11 activities as the main activities that were implemented. The section also tracks the  
12 long-term sustainability of the project activities and how this affected the project  
13 participants. As the research progressed, volunteers and participants were often very  
14 open about the challenges they faced and how involvement in the project was helping  
15 them. However, participants also illustrated how these benefits were fragile by the  
16 end of the project in the face of continuous uncertainty. Stories from five participants  
17 have been selected as examples, with pseudonyms used. All five were participants of  
18 the UA activities and two also engaged in the energy activities.  
19

### 20 *Exploring the benefits of being involved in the GP project* 21

22 The UA strand developed a wide range of activities to engage marginalised people,  
23 including establishing a community garden, and a strong team of local volunteers  
24 who wanted to give back to their community (Milligan and Fyfe, 2005; Franklin and  
25 Marsden, 2015). Two members of staff managed the community garden and volunteer  
26 outreach activities, approximately 120 volunteers committed nearly 5,000 hours across  
27 the different activities, and there were approximately 50 regular volunteers (although  
28 some left during the project). A large number of other participants became involved  
29 in the UA activities, which supported people to grow their own food, including  
30 10 local families through the family growing project. Volunteers and participants  
31 strongly voiced how they enjoyed the range of activities and gardening in a supportive  
32 environment, with many volunteers also describing how the project brought back  
33 happy memories of gardening as children (Bhatti et al, 2009): “Yes, the only time I  
34 ever did this was when I was a child and we had gardening tasks to do as children so  
35 we could earn pocket money. Mum and Dad’s garden was always full of gooseberries,  
36 raspberries, you name it they would grow it.”

37 Volunteers and participants described a wide range of beneficial outcomes, including  
38 improved mental health, reduced isolation, the building of friendships, increased  
39 skills and confidence, and improved self-reliance. These benefits resonate with a  
40 wide range of research into UA and community gardening activities (Milbourne,  
41 2012; Crane et al, 2013; Miller, 2015). Arthur and Tony were long-term volunteers  
42 and their stories illustrate some of these benefits. By the end of the project, Arthur  
43 had input nearly 400 volunteer hours for the project, working at the community  
44 garden, and supporting other UA activities including the family growing project and  
45 a ‘Feastival’. Tony dedicated more than 150 hours to the same activities, except he was  
46 not able to attend the community garden. Both Tony and Arthur were unemployed  
47 and were frustrated at being stuck in their homes with nothing to do and with few  
48

1 volunteering opportunities before the GP project and both had enjoyed gardening  
2 before the project but had not done any gardening for a long time.

3 As a reward for their volunteering input, the GP project facilitated both volunteers  
4 to attend horticulture courses at the Hull College horticulture site, which was located  
5 in east Hull. It took a lot of hard work and dedication for them to progress through  
6 the course. Both started the course at an entry level due to their low levels of literacy.  
7 Tony had severe dyslexia but was very committed to improving his reading and  
8 writing. In the following quote, Tony identified how he would need to improve his  
9 reading to move to more advanced levels, but which he then succeeded in doing:

10  
11 Interviewer: 'Would you like to move to the next level?'

12 Tony: 'I am going to try, but I can't read you see, so it will be a bit harder'.  
13

14 Both Arthur and Tony said that staff at the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP)  
15 were supportive of their studying and volunteering, except ~~when they had to rearrange~~  
16 ~~attendance at college when needing to sign on at the DWP benefits office.~~ Arthur said AQ3  
17 that volunteering and studying had helped his relationship with the DWP benefits staff.  
18 Before becoming involved with the GP project, he had received a benefit sanction,  
19 which resulted in him going to a foodbank, despite being 63 years old. Describing  
20 his first use of a food bank in 2014, he said: "I said to be myself I would never go to  
21 a food bank, but when I got sanctioned a couple of years ago, I got no grub in ...  
22 because they stop your money straightaway." However, since being involved in the  
23 project, Arthur stated: "I do this and I volunteer, and it keeps them off my back – they  
24 know I'm not sat at home – they know I'm doing summat, they don't hassle me."  
25 Both Arthur and Tony really enjoyed the other volunteering activities, working as  
26 part of a team and giving back to their local community.  
27

28 'I like doing all the gardening ... I enjoyed the eco-garden, planting trees  
29 at the school'. (Tony)

30 'I love helping people me, ... this lady's got a garden, the council nag her,  
31 to get it done, sent her a letter saying if she don't get it done ... she gets  
32 a lot of volunteers like us, spend a day on the garden, cleared it, dug it, it's  
33 beautiful.' (Arthur)  
34

35 Arthur also used his gardening experience and learning to give advice, illustrating an  
36 increase in skills and confidence:  
37

38 'Yes, yes, the old lady, she put some stuff in the garden and it dies, she uses  
39 the same part of the garden every year, and I said: "What causes that is that  
40 your soil is contaminated, the best thing you can do is put things in the back  
41 of the garden, put 'tatoes in, they clear that sort of thing up ... it's bacteria  
42 in the soil.'" (Arthur)  
43

44 In the account above, both Arthur and Tony described a wide range of benefits in line  
45 with sustainable place-making, including increasing skills and confidence, giving back  
46 to their local community and reducing the impacts of poverty. They also described  
47 how they felt isolated before the project, with isolation recognised as a mental health  
48 issue. The project also helped volunteers with more severe mental health issues. For



1 example, another long-term volunteer, Paul, was discharged from community mental  
2 health care and used the volunteering at the farm as part of a regular weekly routine  
3 to help him with everyday life. He was referred to the project by the local NHS  
4 mental health team.

5  
6 Interviewer: 'Does coming to the farm help you?'

7 Paul: 'Oh definitely, definitely, I've got somewhere to go, I can see people,  
8 ... before I had the farm, I had no one, I didn't see my family, I didn't have  
9 friends ... I was very lonely. But now I've got somewhere to go, even if it's  
10 only once a week, yes, I can look forward to it. So I think it's really helped, yes.'

11  
12 Paul described how he would not have anywhere to go on a Wednesday if it wasn't  
13 for the community garden, helping him establish a routine. Paul also valued the  
14 therapeutic benefits of being outside in a nice environment and working at the  
15 community garden at the farm. The individual and community mental health benefits  
16 of access to nature described by Paul support the research by [Ferris et al \(2001\)](#) and  
17 [Pitt \(2014\)](#) and also link into the importance of access to green spaces and nature  
18 in reducing poverty for vulnerable people ([Milbourne, 2012](#)). "When you're here,  
19 you're almost in the countryside, and the countryside is very therapeutic, it's very  
20 serene, it calms you down, so it's very useful to get out into the community" (Paul).

21 The energy activities also helped a number of people although the outcomes were  
22 not as transformative or clearly described by participants. The project focused on helping  
23 residents save money through reducing energy usage and providing information on  
24 tariffs, pre-payment meters and the Warm Home Discount. By the end of the project,  
25 450 energy monitors had been distributed and 72 households identified that they had  
26 saved approximately £200 per year on average. In addition to work with individual  
27 households, the project also worked with a sheltered housing provider to support its  
28 residents, many of whom were over 70 and lived in energy-inefficient housing. There  
29 were also some attempts to work with UA participants although this was not a systematic  
30 approach, only eight UA volunteers became involved and these did not include some  
31 of the more vulnerable volunteers such as Arthur, Tony and Paul.

32 However, the following two examples illustrate the potential benefits of being  
33 involved in both UA and energy activities. Barbara was a disabled grandmother and  
34 the project supported her to grow her own food and provided her with an energy  
35 monitor. Barbara had learnt about the project through her daughter who had attended  
36 some early UA training sessions. Support for growing her own food was really  
37 important to Barbara and the project helped her with advice, seeds, compost and  
38 raised beds: "Been really good, really good, because obviously with them putting my  
39 beds in, with my health issues, I could still do my veg. So all that side was absolutely  
40 fabulous" (Barbara).

41 Barbara grew a wide range of fruit and vegetables for enjoyment, health benefits and  
42 also providing good nutritious food for her and her grandchildren, involving her  
43 grandchildren in activities.

44  
45 'My salad leaves, my tomatoes, and beans, loads of different types of beans  
46 and my grandchildren absolutely love beans ... and when you're actually  
47 planting up the kids love it ... they like to help to put it out, and they know  
48 that you don't just buy a packet – that's where it grows, so they enjoy it.'

1 In terms of community energy, Barbara was already in receipt of the Warm Home  
 2 Discount and had negotiated good tariff rates with her energy supplier before  
 3 becoming involved with the project. However, Barbara estimated that using the energy  
 4 monitor helped her save approximately £180 per year, mainly through reducing usage  
 5 of an inefficient electric fire: “[I use the energy monitor] all the time, yes, because it  
 6 surprises you, how much things cost ... we use to use an electric fire all the time, but  
 7 when you look at how much it costs.” Saving money proved essential. Barbara was  
 8 worried about a state benefits reassessment by the DWP to move from the Disability  
 9 Living Allowance (DLA) to the Personal Independence Payment (PIP). Even though  
 10 Barbara was told she would qualify, she was also told there could be a four- to eight-  
 11 week payment gap between her DLA support finishing and PIP starting, which could  
 12 cause her significant financial difficulties.

13 Sarah was also involved in the family growing project and energy project. Sarah  
 14 lived locally with her family, including her autistic son. She joined the family growing  
 15 project so that she and her children could enjoy growing food, eat the fresh produce  
 16 grown and also try to save some money: “I’ve always wanted to grow my own fruit  
 17 and veg, but I kill things really quick! ... so I thought if I’ve got someone to help  
 18 to help me and show me where I’m going wrong, and it’s worked! I’ve had loads”  
 19 (Sarah). Sarah also joined the energy activity and identified she saved around £100  
 20 per year through using the energy monitor to reduce the use of inefficient appliances  
 21 such as the tumble dryer. She also received advice on tariffs and planned to switch  
 22 from a pre-payment meter to direct debit, although at the time of research she could  
 23 not afford the £150 payment needed to switch. Sarah felt that the project helped  
 24 to reduce her vulnerability to poverty through providing an opportunity to reduce  
 25 household costs. She described how she experienced fuel poverty in the past, but  
 26 that she would not let that happen again.

27  
 28 ‘I used to live in a very, very, cold, draughty house, freezing cold house, it was  
 29 a big house ... since I moved out I’ve never had a cold house because ... I  
 30 won’t let my kids, I’ll go without to make sure the gas is paid – when you’ve  
 31 been there, you’ve been in that poverty, you think I’ll never do that again.’  
 32

### 33 *Considering long-term sustainability*

34  
 35 At the end of the project funding, the organisations continued to support some  
 36 activities from their reserves, mainly by continuing to pay existing staff salaries.  
 37 However, some key staff left and others became focused on new activities where  
 38 funding could be obtained. For example, the lead charity focused on providing food  
 39 parcels to vulnerable people, developing community allotments and working in schools  
 40 in different areas across Hull. However, ongoing funding support was at a lower level  
 41 than the BLF CLS funding, there was a time lag between the GP project finishing  
 42 and receiving new funding and some of these activities were not in the GP project  
 43 target area of east Hull and did not continue to work with the project participants.  
 44 This meant that staff support for the community garden activities was scaled down  
 45 and the project was unable to continue community outreach activities such as the  
 46 family growing project. There was also no funding to continue the household energy  
 47 project, which had tried to expand to work with registered social landlords in east  
 48 Hull and residents in other areas. This affected the participants in different ways. The

1 project had no ongoing connection to Barbara and Sarah who had been engaged in  
2 the family growing project and the energy project, and so it was not possible to track  
3 whether they had managed to sustain growing their own food or if Sarah managed to  
4 switch from a pre-payment meter to direct debit. The volunteers at the community  
5 garden did not feel able to continue on their own without staff support, for a range  
6 of reasons, including feeling fragile as a newly developed group, feeling they had  
7 limited capacity to manage activities and wanting a safe and secure environment for  
8 their activities. The limited staff support at the community garden meant that many  
9 volunteers reduced their attendance: for example, Arthur's attendance became more  
10 occasional and Paul stopped attending.

11 It was important for Arthur, Tony and Paul to maintain some connection to the  
12 staff and charities involved, as they really enjoyed being involved in activities and  
13 were worried about returning to feelings of isolation. In addition, both Arthur  
14 and Paul were worried about continuous uncertainty of state benefits and facing  
15 these challenges alone, and they were affected by the closure of the Hull College  
16 horticulture site, which became a Green Port Development training facility. Arthur  
17 also described how he used food from the different projects to improve his nutrition  
18 as he had recently developed diabetes. After the end of the project, both Tony and  
19 Arthur still volunteered in projects operated by the lead charity, including tree planting  
20 in schools and developing community allotments. A staff member identified how he  
21 said to Arthur he was sorry he could not start paying him for his work, but Arthur  
22 replied it was fine as he had never had the chance to be involved in such a positive  
23 project before. Paul became involved in a new community garden project operated  
24 by a small local charity, developed by former GP staff, and became responsible for  
25 being in charge of the site when senior officers were not there. He completed health  
26 and safety training, and was planning to take mental health-focused health and safety  
27 training, which was a major step forward for Paul who had previously stated he was  
28 not able to take training and qualifications due to a poor memory.

## 30 Discussion: exploring outcomes and project sustainability

32 The personal stories demonstrate that the project created social, health and economic  
33 benefits at both individual and community levels (Holland, 2004; Franklin and Marsden,  
34 2015). The UA activity helped participants develop their skills and confidence and  
35 improve their health and wellbeing. Health and wellbeing impacts included a strong  
36 focus on improving mental health and helping to reduce isolation, and there was  
37 also evidence of adding fresh fruit and vegetables to some participants' diets. The UA  
38 activities also helped some participants to reduce their vulnerability to food poverty  
39 through reducing their vulnerability to benefit sanctions, as demonstrated by Arthur  
40 (Perry et al, 2014). Although there were less clear social, health and wellbeing outcomes  
41 compared with the UA activities, the energy activities enabled some households to  
42 reduce vulnerability to fuel poverty through reducing energy usage and enabling  
43 participants to negotiate better tariffs or switch from pre-payment meters (Lorenc  
44 et al, 2013; Parkhill et al, 2015). Participants described how reducing costs helped  
45 them to improve their self-reliance, although the other impacts also contributed. As  
46 well as helping individuals and families, these outcomes can also be argued to have  
47 a community benefit. For instance, the UA activities enabled volunteers to help  
48 the wider community by developing the community garden and by broadening

1 engagement to local families (Miller, 2015; Milligan and Fyfe, 2005). In addition,  
 2 Parkhill et al (2015) describe reducing vulnerability to fuel poverty as increasing  
 3 local community resilience.

4 There is a strong link from the UA activities to the concept of place-making,  
 5 supporting arguments by Beilin and Hunter (2011) and Certomà and Tornaghi (2015).  
 6 The UA activities were strongly based around the community garden, which provided  
 7 a space for volunteers and participants to come together, enjoy gardening and access  
 8 nature in a regular activity (Bhatti et al, 2009; Milbourne, 2012; Tornaghi, 2014). For  
 9 many participants, memories of enjoying gardening as children (Bhatti et al, 2009),  
 10 or the opportunity to involve their own children or grandchildren in new gardening  
 11 activities, provided a platform for engagement. The volunteers also worked hard to  
 12 improve the community garden, which they saw as improving the local community  
 13 through providing a social space for volunteering, an attractive space for the local  
 14 community to visit and a garden for growing produce for community activities such  
 15 as the Festival. Volunteers also described how they would help each other with their  
 16 own private gardens or household tasks. There was less clear evidence of place-making  
 17 from the energy activities, which had a household rather than a community focus  
 18 and there was no opportunity to give back to the local community.

19 In terms of addressing criticisms of charity-led projects supporting the austerity  
 20 measures and rollback of the state, the stories of Arthur, Tony and Paul in particular  
 21 show that the project provided a unique opportunity to become involved in an  
 22 innovative, proactive and positive project targeted at marginalised people and  
 23 there were no alternatives in east Hull that suited their needs. The project was also  
 24 improving the local area and therefore should be considered place-making rather  
 25 than place-keeping (Certomà and Tornaghi, 2015; Mathers et al, 2017). However, staff AQ4  
 26 felt additional pressures from supporting volunteers with more serious mental health  
 27 problems, ~~with no additional funding supporting people with mental health challenges~~ AQ5  
 28 ~~become involved in the project.~~ A further criticism of sustainable place-making  
 29 activities is their limited contribution to reducing global CO<sub>2</sub> emissions (Chatterton  
 30 and Cutler, 2008). The household energy activities did lead to a reduction in energy  
 31 usage for some participants through using an energy monitor, which could reduce  
 32 fossil-fuel emissions. However, overall levels of participation and reductions were very  
 33 small and the project did not measure impacts on environmental CO<sub>2</sub>, in line with  
 34 many other community-level projects with limited time and resources (Hargreaves  
 35 et al, 2010; Mason and Montalto, 2015). The UA and volunteering activities could  
 36 have also benefited the environment through gardening, supporting a local food  
 37 network and other smaller activities such as tree planting and building bat and bird  
 38 boxes. While staff and participants viewed any environmental contribution as very  
 39 small in scale, they strongly voiced the importance of these actions in contributing  
 40 in some way to global-level environmental concerns and as a strong tool to engage  
 41 people in future environmental actions.

42 Sustainable place-making also needs to consider ‘sustainability’ in terms of the  
 43 sustainability of outcomes (Seghezzeo, 2009). For example, long-term sustainability  
 44 is essential to provide security for improvements to marginalised people’s lives, as  
 45 they are most at risk of negative changes such as increasing isolation, punitive state  
 46 benefit policies and financial insecurity. Long-term sustainability is also essential to  
 47 embed environmental improvements. However, in this case study the GP project went  
 48 from £1 million funding over three years to no funding at the beginning of 2016,

1 which critically affected long-term sustainability (IVAR, 2016). The project staff felt  
2 unable to plan for long-term sustainability within the three-year project timeframe.  
3 The community garden and volunteer team did not become established until year  
4 two and the family growing project started in year three. It was also difficult to know  
5 in advance if these activities would be successful and worth supporting in the long  
6 term. Despite the challenges, the strong commitment from the organisations, staff and  
7 volunteers to continue the community gardening and volunteering activities where  
8 possible, and also innovate new activities, provided a platform for some continuation  
9 (Purcell and Tyman, 2015; van der Jagt et al, 2017), albeit at a smaller scale. In addition,  
10 land was available for these activities including continued access to the community  
11 garden (Purcell and Tyman, 2015; St Clair et al, 2017). However, despite the best  
12 efforts of the organisations, staff and volunteers, the lack of long-term sustainability  
13 meant that the outcomes were fragile.

### 14 15 **Nurturing shoots: overall conclusions** 16

17 Sustainable place-making emerges as a strong framework for critically analysing  
18 the GP project as the project worked towards environmental, social and economic  
19 improvements in the local community. In addition, the research demonstrates that  
20 sustainable place-making can have clear health, social and economic outcomes for  
21 marginalised people in deprived communities. The project helped people to access  
22 nature, improve their health and wellbeing, reduce isolation, improve their skills  
23 and confidence, work with others with enjoyment and give back to their local  
24 communities. The project also helped reduce vulnerability to fuel poverty and food  
25 poverty including through reducing vulnerability to benefit sanctions. Although  
26 outcomes were more transformative for UA activities than for the energy activities, and  
27 very few participants engaged in both, there were some benefits of developing more  
28 than one sustainable place-making activity. In terms of environmental outcomes, the  
29 project did not demonstrate any reductions in CO<sub>2</sub> emissions; however, the project  
30 showed how involvement in local environmental activities, including both gardening  
31 and biodiversity, could help benefit and also engage residents.

32 However, the charities leading the project were not able to ensure long-term  
33 sustainability within the three-year project timeframe (IVAR, 2016). This meant that  
34 outcomes for marginalised people were fragile and, relating this conclusion back to  
35 the title of the article, the project had developed 'shoots' in terms of improvements  
36 to vulnerable people's lives and environmental benefits, but it was also important that  
37 participants were not left unsupported at this early stage. There was a need for continued  
38 financial support to help plan and work towards long-term sustainability. To achieve  
39 this, a key recommendation, grounded in the reality of the GP project and aimed  
40 at project funders and project managers, is for reflexive funding to enable effective  
41 activities to be continued after initial funding periods finish. This recommendation  
42 is problematic as what is considered successful and who decides will be contested.  
43 However, in this case study, it is argued that there should have been immediate further  
44 funding to support the community garden and the volunteer team at existing staffing  
45 levels, and this could then be used as a basis for continued community outreach.  
46 There could have also been limited funding for a targeted approach to enable the  
47 UA participants to receive the household energy support, and this would have also  
48 provided time to explore social, economic and environmental impacts further and

1 consider new energy projects. An open and transparent conversation would also  
 2 allow discussion of where additional support could be required, such as supporting  
 3 participants with severe mental health challenges. In contrast, other unsuccessful  
 4 activities would not be continued. Any further funding should also focus on building  
 5 skills and access to wider support networks (Franklin et al, 2011), with an aim to reduce  
 6 dependency on funding in the long term. This long-term approach would require  
 7 effective joint working between charities, communities, funding organisations and  
 8 local authorities (Franklin and Marsden, 2015; van der Jagt et al, 2017). This could be  
 9 possible in Hull due to its active sustainable place-making efforts particularly around  
 10 UA and community gardening.

### 11 **Conflict of interest**

12 The author declares that there is no conflict of interest.

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AQ7

# AUTHOR QUERIES

## Author Please Answer all Queries

AQ1—not in the references – please supply – or did you mean to cite 2015, which is in the References?

AQ2—not in the references – please supply – or did you mean to cite 2015, which is in the References?

AQ3—It is unclear as to why DWP staff would be less supportive when it is the college that was affected by their needing to sign on – is the wording correct?

AQ4—Mathers et al isn't in the references – please supply – or did you mean to cite 2015, which is in the References?

AQ5—The rest of the sentence is a little unclear – please check the wording and amend as necessary.

AQ6—Not cited. Is it ok to delete the reference? If not, please indicate where it should be cited.

AQ7—The link doesn't work. Is it possible to find another one?