Abstract

The yields of the garden: an ethnography of community gardening, growing, and green social prescribing in the North of England. Laura McGuire

This thesis explores community gardening and growing practices in a region of the North of England, with a particular focus on their potential to support wellbeing. The study draws on fourteen months of ethnographic research at growing sessions facilitated by small Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) organisations, some of which aimed specifically to support members experiencing mental ill health. The project investigates the experiences of members, practitioners, and organisations; the nature of gardening and growing locally; and the place of health and wellbeing in these sessions, amid the recent national and regional expansion of green social prescribing practices. This interdisciplinary exploration is informed by the literatures growing around concepts of affect and place, rhythm and social practice, therapeutic landscapes, and medicalisation.

The gardening spaces are conceptualised as assemblages, constituted of people, plants, horticultural materials, creatures, food and drink, and environmental and meteorological elements, brought together in complexes or clusters of practices. Building upon understandings of therapeutic landscape experiences as contingent and varied, I illustrate a range of different kinds (and outcomes) of garden encounters, as connections made with and through people and place. While attentive to nonhuman agencies, I emphasise the work and care required to create and maintain these places and communities. This research draws upon literatures exploring the choreographing and engineering of atmospheres and assemblages, which I advance with insights into these practical, emotional, and attuned labours in community gardening settings: the corralling of elements, a balancing of atmospheric qualities, and the tinkering and negotiation of rhythms multiple. These regular meetings of people in place became part of members' routines. Many members established rhythms of weekly participation, offering motion, anticipation, company, and purposeful movement, that were conducive to feelings of wellbeing. Several of the gardening and growing projects were distinctively enabling, developing particular therapeutic affordances as communities and places grew through them. I apply and expand the concept of therapeutic third places to articulate this distinctive constitution and orientation, with a particular emphasis on flexibility and purposeful activity in the projects.

Acknowledging the therapeutic and more-than-therapeutic potential of community gardening and growing spaces, this thesis explores the role that these sessions might play in health ecologies. These sessions can be highly valuable, particularly for people experiencing 'low level' mental ill health.

However, their ability to provide appropriate support is related to the wellbeing of the whole health and healthcare ecology within which they are networked, and the resourcing that is available to facilitating organisations. In recognising this interdependence, I affirm the place relationality of therapeutic landscape experiences, and advocate for broad, networked, ecological approaches to relationality within the therapeutic landscapes literature.

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Statement of Copyright

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1. Introduction

To garden, in the most familiar sense, is to cultivate plants in certain kinds of spaces. Uses of 'gardening', however, are not always quite so rooted in soil and seed. In *Flight Ways* (2014), Thom van Dooren describes practices of care that aim to nourish and sustain species and spaces amid difficult conditions as "gardening in the ruins" (p116), with influence from Anna Tsing (2014). These more metaphorical readings of 'gardening' are not always so far from horticultural gardening practices. In the pilot project (McGuire, 2019; McGuire et al., 2022) preceding this research, community gardening participants recognised gardening as a caring practice that yielded more than flowers and edible produce. Gardening, for some, entailed both the practice of growing plants (and the accompanying practical tasks of maintaining a garden), and the sensibilities, relationships, and meanings cultivated alongside. The contexts of Tsing and van Dooren's writings find continuity and relevance in earthy, horticultural gardening worlds too: gardening projects are often, although not always, concerned with caretaking in the context of climate crisis and environmental degradation. Gardens and green spaces have long been used as spaces for human care and respite. Green social prescribing represents a contemporary effort to promote engagement with green space for wellbeing, with bridges built between these spaces and healthcare services. I mention these orientations and meanings, the metaphorical, manifest, and in-between, to recognise the richness and diversity in gardening practices. This acknowledgement beckons questions of what it means to garden in specific times and places. Community gardening and growing practices in the North of England are the focus of this project. I build an understanding of the places these practices hold in the lives of participants, with a particular focus on the therapeutic potential of these practices. Amid ongoing efforts to promote engagement with community gardening for health and wellbeing, I investigate processes of bridge-building into growing spaces, and how these processes are experienced by people and organisations. The long-term, ethnographic approach taken is apt for the exploration of process, aided by anthropological literatures exploring medicalisation, and lay understandings and enactments of wellbeing. Concepts of therapeutic landscape experience, assemblage, atmosphere, and rhythm (from human geography, and the broader social sciences) enrich this analysis, allowing consideration of the spatial, temporal, material, and affective dimensions of experiences in growing spaces. I take from both critical medical anthropology and human geography an extroverted conception of place (Massey, 1994), understanding that experiences in one location are shaped by those at other places and scales.

Community gardens are promising spaces, as social isolation and mental ill health endure as prominent problems within the UK, and the climate crisis intensifies locally and globally. Yet, questions of how best to promote sustainable, inclusive, and beneficial engagement (for people, plants, and environments) with these growing spaces remain. Green social prescribing creates new pathways to engagement, but there has been limited ethnographic research investigating the experiences of organisations and individuals as these pathways expand. Through green social prescribing, VCS organisations and healthcare services interact, potentially shaping membership bases, organisational and evaluative practices, and the orientations of growing sessions. This project represents one of the first pieces of ethnographic research into green social prescribing, investigating these processes. I explore the scope of a number of horticultural projects (including those which do and do not directly aim to support individuals experiencing mental ill health), and the care and work entailed in therapeutic experiences.

In **Chapter One**, I turn to existing literatures on gardening, plant cultivation, and human-plant relationships, and wellbeing. This chapter explores the roles gardens and growing spaces can play as sites of cultural expression and reproduction, and of resistance and resilience. In the latter half, I consider the role these spaces may play in fostering health and wellbeing, considering multiple aspects and perspectives. The chapter concludes with a discussion of green social prescribing, framing and contextualising the research questions.

Chapter Two introduces this ethnographic project, detailing its research questions and methodology before explaining the research context. I describe the research setting ('Hazelford'), the organisations facilitating gardening sessions, and their 'members' and 'practitioners'.

Chapters 3-5 centre the experiences of participants in the gardens and growing spaces, aiming to capture in depth and detail what these sessions entailed and brought about. The experiences of those coming along to gardens as 'members', rather than as staff, are most focal here. **Chapter Three** captures the type and character of connections made by participants – to one another, to the broader projects and collectivities made, to spaces and 'nature', and *through* spaces and 'nature'. **Chapter Four** considers the processes through which spaces and experiences were constructed, as a collective achievement involving people, organisations, places, plants, and more. I consider aspects of the sessions tending to be particularly conducive to therapeutic experience, while cautious not to imply a universally and homogenously therapeutic character. In **Chapter Five**, the role of busyness, activeness, and movement within sessions is explored.

Chapter Six more directly investigates and place of health and wellbeing in the gardens, and the scope of sessions as therapeutic activities. Efforts to bridge-build into these settings, and their implications for the expansion of green social prescribing, are kept focal. I consolidate earlier findings, and look at how health figures in the organisation and operation of sessions, concluding that several of the projects constituted a kind of therapeutic third place. The 'pathways' taken by members, organisations, and spaces over the duration of the research project are detailed, providing insight into the kinds of preparation and resourcing that may be required in social prescribing systems and networks. Pathways taken by organisations are elucidative of the different aims of community gardens, their potentials and tensions, and the contexts they operate within.

Community gardening is defined here as collective horticulture, arboriculture, and accompanying activities associated with involvement in these spaces that welcome both plants and people. Teig et al. (2009) cite the American Community Garden Association's (ACGA) definition: "a community garden as any piece of land gardened by a group of people in urban, suburban or rural settings" (p1116), while Doyle (2022) acknowledges more specific classifications. Drake (2014) finds three categories of management and organisation in community gardening: grassroots, externally organised, and active nonprofit management. Others make classifications according to how communally managed (Stocker and Barnett, 1998) or publicly accessible (Göttl and Penker, 2020) community gardens are, or by their focus and location. Ferris et al. (2001) subdivide community gardens into those for leisure, therapy, demonstration, commercial activity, the promotion of biodiversity, or their location within schools or neighbourhoods. Like the ACGA, I give most focus to (community) garden*ing*, rather than on the specificities of land features. Privileging verb over noun accommodates the diverse, opportunistic, and sometimes-diffuse nature of community gardening, its processual nature (when does a space become a garden?), the different affinities among garden-goers for the term 'gardener' (Cox, forthcoming), and their differing envisionings of cultivated spaces. As the UK-operating Social Farms & Gardens charity sometimes practices, the spaces in which people engage in community gardening are hereafter frequently referred to as 'growing spaces'. I am interested in people growing together, and in the 'gardens' and other spaces that might emerge in so doing.

In the UK context, 'gardening' conjures specific practices, aesthetics, and materialities. Taylor (2016) describes the emerging of divergent gardening aesthetics at different social, cultural, and economic intersections. Gardening aesthetics and practices are reflected and reproduced in varied ways: she documents, for example, how regulatory handbooks and the gaze of peers shaped the front gardens

of social housing tenants in early twentieth century England (trimmed grass, clipped hedges). Occupational patterns, too, shape gardening. A shift away from biological materialities and towards hard surfaces and low-maintenance planting in 1990s home gardens has been attributed to a rise in dual-income households (Williams, 1995, Mintel, 1997, in Bhatti and Church, 2000). Taylor (2016) highlights some of the factors shaping garden practices and aesthetics, including those which marginalise certain gardening cultures: "facets of the media, funding bodies, local councils and historic houses and gardens tend to prescribe cultural messages about the 'right' garden aesthetics, about 'great' gardens and gardeners and such messages tend to marginalise the ordinary and the working-class" (p31).

Gardening cultures and styles have emerged through allotmenteering traditions, wartime gardening campaigns, and postwar horticultural techniques. Post-World War II, allotmenteering itself came to appear anachronistic (Acton, 2011), although with renewed interest in the 1970s owing partially to both economic crisis and gardening-related media. Nettle (2014) describes the spread of the community gardening movement in the 1970s, influencing gardening practices in North America, before spreading to Europe and Australia. Concurrently, of course, other plant cultivation systems persisted. The 'Three Sisters' intercropping method, for example, is rooted in Indigenous agricultural practices long preceding these kinds of horticulture, and continues to be practiced by Indigenous peoples in North America (alongside horticulturalists adopting such techniques for their sustainability and synergy). Gardening practices are continually inherited, adopted, and innovated.

While research on community gardening is clustered within North America, Europe, and Australia (Milbourne, 2012; Guitart et al., 2021), these practices are increasingly documented in other regions. These activities sometimes draw influence from practices and traditions outside of these more represented areas. There has been limited anthropological engagement with community gardening in England. In the following literature review, I provide context around the emergence of community growing practices, while illustrating how gardens can be rich and interesting scenes of (multispecies) social life. Community gardening has frequently been envisioned as part of 'solutions' to varied problems; I discuss in turn the framing of these practices as potentially significant in facilitating health and wellbeing, in fostering more sustainable ways of living, and as emerging in times of crisis and change. Conversations relating to the contingencies and limits of community gardening, in achieving these broad and complex aims, have been influential. The therapeutic landscapes literature makes a significant contribution in nuancing ideas that the 'green' is always or uniformly good, as do productive and ongoing dialogues around the power of community gardening as a vehicle for social and political action (or, as a potentially *de*politicising or responsibilising practice).

1.1 Gardens as rich social spaces

Documenting the growing, purchasing, consuming, and exchanging of food is part of the endeavour of analysing different lifeways. As such, the anthropological literature is replete with ethnographic examples of plant cultivation in locally specific practices (Veteto and Skarbø, 2009), reflecting cultural and ecological diversity, while being influenced by global 'flows' (Pink, 2012). Here, I briefly overview how gardens and growing spaces have been investigated as domains of social life, and for the insight growing practices contribute to theorisations of kinship and identity (Strathern, 1992), place and practice (Pink, 2012), and multispecies socialities. Myers (2019), for example, defines gardens broadly as "sites where people stage their relationships with plants" (p116), while quoting Conan (1999) to acknowledge *local* and lived definitions of gardens as "contingent on the economy, environment, and culture of any group of gardeners" (p183).

1.1.1 Gardens and gardening as sites of cultural expression, enactment, and resistance

Gardens, Mitchell and Bolton (2021) argue, are telling of the social lives of those who inhabit and (co-)create them, alongside plants and other beings. Gardens do not simply display or represent certain meanings, they assert (adopting what can be called a non-representational approach). They look at gardens through the lens of art, aesthetic, and 'proper form'. The latter captures how gardens may materialise communities' ideas and judgements of how things should be: gardens, and the relations that they 'make visible'. While much research focuses on the enactive, performative, and non-representational role of gardening, sociological and anthropological research has also converged in investigating the more symbolic aspects of gardening. Engagement with specific garden practices and discourses may symbolise inclusion within certain social positions. Conan (1999) describes gardening as "a system of expression" (p196) and social distinction, while Taylor (2016), utilises and critiques Bourdieu's (1984) work on taste and distinction. Maurer (2020) documents how eco-conscious gardening generates forms of (middle-)class distinction in the USA. To the extent that engagement with, or display of, these practices or materialities contributes to the reproduction the social locations from which they emerge, the performative and symbolic can be viewed as overlapping rather than in dichotomy. Maurer (2020) footnotes similarly, viewing class as rooted in material inequality, but "expressed through symbolic and embodied forms" (p737), drawing on Bourdieu (1984). She documents how participants were concerned with sustainability, yet, classed and raced differences in resources and environmental security meant that gardens were shaped by different priorities.

Gardens and growing spaces have been documented as sites of social and cultural reproduction. However, many food growing projects (with varying degrees of explicitness) are oriented around social *change*, resistance, or the continuation of nondominant or threatened practices. Many community gardens are ungirded by values and aspirations to 'garden across difference' (repairing social frictions and promoting cohesion), to facilitate civic participation and collective agency, or to resist dominant practices deemed oppressive or unsustainable. Community gardening has been considered a social movement and form of activism, driven by broader critiques of lifeways and economic structures. Community gardens may constitute nodes within global social movements; Pink (2012) describes the fit of an Aylsham community gardening within the *Cittaslow* movement. Baudry and Eudes (2016) capture the community gardening movement in New York, in the 1970s, and the role of critique of capitalism and industrialism in its development. Some gardening organisers in the pilot research project (McGuire et al., 2022) considered their work to be akin to activism, with one describing his community garden as a "forum for having [political] discussions. The kind of space where conversations can be open and candid, and based around… kindness" (p5).

Community growing spaces can be sites where threatened and marginalised practices be preserved or continued. Ford and Ellis (2013) described the *Känan K'aax* model forest garden, a project aiming to reproduce traditional farming and conservation knowledge, while aligning with the Belize school curriculum. Indigenous knowledges increasingly inform emerging sustainable horticultural practices, with some arguing for greater recognition of this continuity (Spangler et al., 2021), and others raising questions of how non-Indigenous gardeners can and should relate to Indigenous thinking and practices (Walton, 2021; Chollett, 2014). *Moveable Gardens* (2021) collects essays on food gardening practices made precarious through geographical and cultural displacement of people and plants. The editors describe varied cultivation practices as "[performing] memory against cultural amnesia" (Nazarea and Gagnon, 2021: p4), and authors explore: "the ways in which seeds serve as portable altars of identity and place for local and Indigenous peoples, traditional farmers and "old timey" gardeners, immigrants, and refugees alike." (p7).

Significantly, community gardening and growing initiatives are not always successful (or desiring) in promoting nondominant or counterhegemonic practices, or creating more equitable and sustainable modes of food production and consumption. Day (2022) agrees that gardens have politics, yet warns against tendencies to assume that they are always in the service of equity: "garden politics are not always progressive politics. Twenty-first-century pundits and activists who do realize the political nature of gardening often fall into the trap of assuming that food production always functions to further causes of anticapitalism, environmentalism, justice, equality, and peace" (p264). It is

important, therefore, to be attentive to how growing might resist or reproduce social differentiation and hierarchy.

1.1.2 Multispecies co-habitation and sociality in the community garden

Community gardening practices bring people into relations with one another, and with the nonhuman inhabitants, structures, and features of garden environments. Attention to these partners in practice provides a fuller picture of experiences and outcomes of community gardening. Plants and horticultural artefacts shape agency and affect in growing spaces, while the staging of human-plant relations in these spaces has implications for the wellbeing of both. Gagnon (2021) argues that plants grown and consumed extend and blur human capacities, through sustaining more-than-human collective memories. "Memory is in essence tied to emotions and the body" (p23), she tells us, and thus the capacity for plants to affect and intermingle with emotions and bodies ascribes them an active role in human memory and identity. Her participants gardened at sometimes significant costs, seeking to elicit feelings and practices of home- and self-making that specific herbs and vegetables were uniquely able to recall. In taking seriously the sensory and material aspects of plants, and considering the human-plant co-creation of memory and identity, she employs the language of related bodies of literature concerned with multispecies interrelating. A 'turn' within and outside of anthropology goes beyond the human, to be 'posthuman' or 'more-than-human' in analysis. In such scholarship, the nonhuman – plants, animals, fungi, and the non-living things that furnish lives – are not (only) understood as vital to understanding the world and its inhabitants, but as co-constitutive of one another. They are understood relationally. Gardening ethnographies might more appropriately, then, be considered multispecies ethnographies, rather than studies primarily of people, and of people acting unidirectionally *on* plants. While all garden ethnographies are, descriptively, multispecies ethnographies, their fit within such literatures sits upon the maintaining of attention to nonhuman agencies and capacities to affect: a way of seeing I have tentatively been open to being affected by. These ways of seeing are not only fruitful for understanding diverse sites of multispecies interaction; the mounting consequences of humans' harmful relationships with other Earth dwellers impel a search for deeper understandings of multispecies interdependence. Ginn (2014) describes a "pressing need to re-constitute the ways we live with non-humans", in light of "anthropogenic, geological-scale shifts and mass extinction" (p532). Theorising and acknowledging our interrelation with other species opens questions of our responsibilities to them. Puig de la Bellacasa (2017) argues that "naturalcultural interdependency" is not only fact or principle, but is a "matter of care" (p146-147). In this context, gardens have been suggested to be promising locations

in which relationships, feelings, and practices of reciprocity and obligation towards the nonhuman world may be cultivated (Walton, 2021).

The sometimes-lingering, sometimes-explicit sense in Anthropocene critiques that humans are homogenously and necessarily deleterious to environments and their non-human (co-)inhabitants has been critiqued (Malm and Hornborg, 2014, in Todd, 2015; Turner, 2023; Kimmerer, 2013). With diverse lifeways come more and less harmonious ways of living alongside; the concentration of harmful practices amongst certain groups has been highlighted, as have positive contributions towards biodiversity made by particular ways of living in biocultural landscapes (Veteto and Lockyer, 2008; Balée, 1994; Daly, 2021). Myers (2019) suggests that, while gardens have been interwoven with violence – botanical gardens, for example, have both normalised and obfuscated relations of extraction and exploitation – gardens can also be sites where we might "subvert and redefine what counts as "proper" relations among plants and people" (p126).

Multispecies ethnographers and relationality theorists often take from actor-network theory the consideration of both human and nonhuman 'actants' in similar terms: as entities interacting in a network. Entities are constituted through their interactions, rather than possessing some 'essence' that precedes their interaction. This a priori ontological 'flattening' is adapted by Haraway (2016) in her use of the word "critters", which can "promiscuously" refer to "microbes, plants, animals, humans and nonhumans, and sometimes even to machines" (p169). Meaning and matter mingle within these networks or assemblages; an entity is their momentary concentration within relationships. These ideas are in some ways a reaction to postmodernism, in which social theory became preoccupied with an anthropocentric focus on texts and their meanings (Hitchings, 2003; Ogden et al., 2013). Haraway captures this relational, always-situated, and fluid ontological perspective in the terms 'rendering capable' and 'becoming-with'. It is a step away from 'hard' social constructionism (Kopnina, 2017), towards a more material semiotic constructionism, or a critical or anti-essentialist neorealism (Ogden et al., 2013). Attention is drawn to how other actants can evade our impositions, and to how much of life cannot be explained solely through intentions and interpretations of human actors (Smart, 2014; Ingold, 2011).

Lainé and Morand (2020) highlight that biodiversity is both central to the cosmologies of many Indigenous peoples, and interlinked with cultures and identities. Anthropologists have long documented Indigenous cosmologies in which there is continuity and relationship between humans and the "rest of the natural and social world" (Scheper-Hughes and Locke, 1987: p22). Degnen (2009) argues that such ways of thinking are also present in the 'Western' world, though overshadowed often by mechanistic models of Western societies. In her ethnographic work in

English gardens, she documents how gardeners spoke of plants as having likes, dislikes, and personalities. Like humans, they could eat, sneak, and bleed. Of course, the 'personification' of plants and animals is not novel – it is a common device of literature, and in evolutionary theory (Drogosz, 2011). Multispecies ethnographies often differ in exploring how personification can be nonmetaphorical (Willerslev, 2007; Degnen, 2009; Archambault, 2016). Archambault (2016) considers human-plant relations to be "ontological relations in their own right" (p265-266). She primarily conceptualises human-plant relations through the lens of affect. Turner (2023) captures the affective relations into which gardeners are drawn. In a community garden in Canberra Australia, she witnessed the tenacious productivity of Jerusalem artichokes. One gardener yielded to their stubbornness, eventually choosing to water and care for them, appreciating their wind-breaking qualities, and finding people who might appreciate their tubers.

Significantly, writing which emphasises relationality and entanglement has been critiqued for the assumption that proximity necessarily generates or equates to care and ethical relation (Giraud, 2021; Lulka, 2012, in Pitt, 2013). The sentimental language (Brown and Nading, 2019) of entanglement and relationship can sometimes seem to justify interspecies violence, and mask interspecies power inequalities. Both Turner (2023) and Giraud (2019) cite Ginn's (2014) influential account of home gardeners' practices are informed by an ethic of detachment, as they try to *un*stick themselves and garden slugs. Gardeners worked to rid their plants of these unwelcome inhabitants, and tried methods of severing their relation while limiting harm to these creatures. In the context of preserving endangered species and their life (or 'flight') ways, van Dooren (2016) asserts the appropriateness of cultivating distance from "some creatures" in "some places" (p43) as an ethico-political matter. These authors argue that proximity is not synonymous with ethical relation, nor detachment with the unethical, and suggest that relations may come at the expense of others. In gardens, some species are welcomed as others are excluded: an afternoon spent tending saplings might follow a morning eradicating species considered weeds and pests, gently or otherwise. We might be conscious, then, to the factors producing harmonious interspecies garden relations, and to exclusions and detachments. Turner (2023) suggests that a multispecies justice approach might be more widely embedded into gardening. Such an approach maintains a relational ontology, while recognising humans' often outsized capacities to enact, shape, and adjudicate just relations. This resonates with Gillespie's (2019) call for politicized multispecies ethnography, with "attention to differences of embodiment, power relations between and among species, and questions of positionality" (p17). Turner (2023) suggests that multispecies justice might be intentionally designed into garden structures and resources. Multispecies ethnographies, and multispecies justice approaches, are fertile soil for nuancing understandings of what community gardens can do for

humans and nonhumans. These approaches encourage attentiveness to more-than-human communities: to how nonhumans shape community gardening experiences, and how they are in turn are affected. I join these authors in filling a literature gap, of research which practices this attentiveness *and* recognises unevenness within in multispecies communities, in capacities to act.

Turner draws upon Duff's (2012) enabling places concept (and the related therapeutic landscapes literature), in describing how aspects of gardens might come together to enable practices therapeutic for gardeners, and caregiving for garden plants, creatures, and soils. Ideas of enablement serve well as a transition towards looking more specifically at community gardening, and the varied ways in which it has been framed, promoted, and practiced. A substantial literature documents and advocates for the promise of community gardening for improving health and wellbeing. In the following section, I explore literatures which consider relationships between community gardening, health, and wellbeing. This exploration helps contextualise efforts to promote gardening for health, while highlighting the need for consideration of the role and scope potentially therapeutic community gardening sessions.

1.2 Being well in and through the garden

'Health' is a plural and polysemic term (Levin and Browner, 2005), lived and applied diversely even within traditional spaces of healthcare. Research focusing on lay understandings of health and wellbeing largely captures those of non-experts: "lay people have their own valid interpretation of what being healthy means…These beliefs are not just diluted versions of medical knowledge, but rather are rooted in social and historical contexts" (O'Sullivan and Stakelum, 2004: p27). A large body of research (Popay et al., 2003) has considered lay understandings as conducive or inhibitive to health from a public health perspective (Davison et al., 1991), as potentially (positively or negatively) impacted by public health messaging (Smith and Anderson, 2018), and as telling of broader cultural values and norms (Izquierdo, 2005). In this project, I maintain a plural approach to health and wellbeing, open to the diverse ways in which gardening may (or may not) be felt to contribute to wellbeing.

For some, health plurality is largely a matter of different perspectives: they may describe 'lay perspectives' and 'health beliefs'. Others instead take a material semiotic approach (Yates-Doerr, 2020), arguing that health and wellbeing are constituted through practices that are at once physical, situated, and meaningful. Mol (2002) takes disease (specifically, atherosclerosis) to be her object, but the same might be said for wellbeing, too: "objects come into being – and disappear – with the

practices in which they are manipulated. And since the object of manipulation tends to differ from one practice to another, reality multiples" (p5). Yates-Doerr and Carney (2016) argue against "biomedicine's grip" on health, instead advocating for the maintaining of its "material semiotic indeterminacy" (p316). Mindful of this multiplicity, I cast a wide net in exploring research of community gardening and wellbeing, potentially referring to individuals or collectives, 'negative' and 'positive' feelings, a variety of 'objective' measures, and the pursuit of diverse goals. The pilot research (McGuire et al., 2020; 2022) supports such an approach; across even a small number of growing spaces, diverse and multifaceted understandings of health and its relationship to gardening were identified. I have sought to consider how participants' potentially varied conceptions of health and wellbeing do or do not inform their engagement with community gardening. Doing so allows for a fuller appreciation of the range of process and potential outcomes of interaction with and in gardens. Further, Atkinson and Joyce (2011) argue that, particularly in the health sector, holding a broad and even ill-defined definition of wellbeing is beneficial. It may allow for the formation of intersectoral partnerships (in a research context, this might be reframed as interdisciplinary thinking) and addressing of a wide range of health and wellbeing experiences.

I first discuss how community gardens have been promoted as healthful or therapeutic, and how the COVID-19 pandemic has brought renewed attention to the role of green spaces in health and wellbeing. In 1.2.2, I consider the processes through which community gardening has been thought to improve wellbeing, reviewing research within both biomedical and more social and relational paradigms. While not dismissive of the former, social and relational approaches can provide needed nuance, depth, and context to the study of therapeutic experiences in gardens and green space. I conclude with an exploration of the green social prescribing literature.

1.2.1 Recognitions and promotions of gardening as healthful or therapeutic

Associations of gardens and the outdoors with health and wellbeing are historied, re-emerging over time. Walton (2021) describes expressions of accepted wisdoms in pre-modernity, of relations between nature and wellbeing: from the incorporation of gardens into eighteenth century European hospitals, to the Chinese gardens captured in Shi Chong's poetry, which resonate with 'wellbeing' as eudaimonia, relaxation, sociality, and creativity. She describes the waning of these wisdoms through the twentieth century, and their reemergence in more recent decades. This is one to-and-fro amongst other turns towards and away from therapeutic nature. The "long, transcultural idea of nature as a trope of virtue, restoration and escape" (Fowler, 2021: p59) reemerged in the form of

engagements with pastoral landscapes, and the eighteenth-century Romantic poetry and literature this inspired. The Industrial Revolution catalysed this idealisation of the rural.

Contemporary reengagements with ideas of gardens and green spaces as potentially therapeutic are occurring both inside and outside of conventional healthcare spaces and discourses. The value and healthfulness of time spent outdoors and with nature seems to be increasingly widely expressed in popular wisdoms. A number of the forefront (UK) horticultural organisations have delivered and framed at least a share of their work around health and wellbeing. The Royal Horticultural Society (RHS) began constructing the Bridgewater Therapeutic Garden in the late 2010s, in consultation with health and social care professionals, and people with experience of mental and physical ill health. Its piloted incorporation with NHS green social prescribing has been evaluated by Howarth et al. (2020), finding many participants to have experienced improvements in confidence, mental wellbeing, and loneliness. In 2019, the RHS employed its first therapeutic gardener, Ozichi Brewster, and it continues to fund research by its 'wellbeing fellow' Dr Lauriane Chalmin-Pui. Less horticulturally hands-on, Kew Gardens' 2023 schedule of activities included varied wellbeing sessions: 'community wellbeing walks', tai chi, intuitive dance, and sound and forest bathing sessions. Such activities draw upon the relaxing, meditative, and multisensory aspects of the gardens. On the website of Social Farms and Gardens, one of the UK charities tied most closely to community gardening, one can find a host of resources for community gardeners (and practitioners) who might wish to support gardening for wellbeing. Their 2014 Growing Well project collects case studies of therapeutic horticulture projects (supported by the organisation), provided as a resource for community gardeners to draw upon in promoting and obtaining funding for projects. The organisation themselves attracted funding and support to deliver a 2019-2022 care farming project ('Growing Care Farming') alongside the therapeutic horticulture organisation Thrive. Bragg (2022) documents the source of this funding as the Department for Education (with support from the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and Natural England), part of a broader allocation for the Children and Nature programme, a progression from the government's 25-year environment policy paper *A Green Future: Our 25 Year Plan to Improve the Environment* (HM Government 2018). The plan dedicates a chapter to the aim of promoting connection with the environment for the purposes of improving health and wellbeing. Wood et al. (2022) highlight other avenues of direct and indirect political interest in community gardening, including the first loneliness strategy (HM Government 2018), and publications and initiatives relating to green social prescribing.

Worthy of mention, to return to the VCS, is Sustain and Garden Organic's (2016) *A Growing Health Tool Kit*, providing guidance for 'community food growers' to support gardening for health, and to

obtain support themselves to deliver this kind of work. This resource dedicates space, specifically, to the commissioning of food growing activities by Clinical Commissioning Groups (CCGs) and local authority public health commissioners. Sempik et al. (2004) describe the growing involvement of health and social services in starting community gardening projects, in the decades prior. The implications of the more recent changes to the healthcare system (specifically, the shift from CCGs to integrated care) for community gardening are unfolding. Together, these initiatives and resources suggest a substantial and contemporary interest in what together has been called green care – an umbrella term the Growing Care project has helped develop an accreditation for (Bragg, 2022).

1.2.1.1 Gardening and COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic carves a specific enclave, with renewed attention to green space and wellbeing one among many of the transformations of this time period. Growing interest in gardening through the pandemic has been documented quantitatively, in several countries (Lin et al., 2021; Hennessy, 2020; Corley et al., 2021), while qualitative research has captured the emotional salience of gardens in this time (Kingsley et al., 2023). Although prohibited for at least some of the pandemic, community gardening fell under different countries' definitions of allowable voluntary and essential services (Joshi and Wende, 2022). In an altered form (with virus transmission mitigations), gardens were a valuable resource for some (Schoen et al., 2021). There is a long precedence for turning to gardening in times of crisis, including economic downturn (Murtagh, 2010; Reynolds, 2015; Premat, 2009), austerity, natural disaster (Kato et al., 2014), displacement, and war. With respect to food growing specifically, the pandemic triggered an acute awareness of food system fragility, and a reinvigorated interest in local food systems (Jones et al., 2022). The relationship between the outdoors and wellbeing was a recurring theme in the media, capturing the hope gardening offered, while having, Perks et al. (2022) argue, the rhetorical effect of overemphasising individual agency in fostering health and food security. Doughty et al. (2023), drawing on the work of Oikkonen (2017), Berlant (2008), and Miller (1994), describe a renewing of practices and understandings of nature as healing as a themed response to the pandemic (an affective concentration, Oikkonen, 2017); a genre of social action and cultural expression. Disruptions to usual routines, restrictions on movement and leisure, screen-use related fatigue, and declining mental health were among the factors that encouraged people to engage more often with nature. New outdoor mobilities emerged, Doughty et al. (2023) argue, and encounters with nature gained sensory and emotional intensity.

Community gardening sits at the intersection of several of the issues brought into sharp relief through the pandemic: the relationship between green space and wellbeing, inequality in access to

green space, food system insecurity, and community resilience, amongst others. While many availed the benefits of gardens and green space during the pandemic, asymmetries in access became seemingly more consequential, and more widely recognised. The health-supporting potential of gardens and green space was reinforced both in its presence and absence, such that funding for urban green space has been considered an investment in public health (Geary et al., 2021; Earle, 2011).

1.2.2 Processes of cultivating health and wellbeing through community gardening

Having established the recent and renewed traction of understandings of gardening as healthful, I now review research exploring the relationship between gardening, health, and wellbeing. I begin by considering aspects of health dominant within a more biomedical research paradigm: physical activity, fruit and vegetable consumption, and healthful prosocial behaviours (often described as 'health behaviours'). I next look more broadly, exploring the role of pleasure, community, and enjoyment in community gardening experiences. Throughout, I draw on more social and relational approaches to wellbeing as useful for understanding the contingent, diverse, and situated nature of cultivating wellbeing through the garden. Concluding 1.2.2, the therapeutic landscapes literature is more directly reviewed.

1.2.1.1 A movement practice: community gardening and physical activity

> "we have to turn the soil over every [year], in the fall and usually in the spring. And rake and dig holes and all that is quite a bit of exercise, physical exercise" (Hale et al., 2011: p1860)

The mosaic of practices required to maintain a productive community garden involve movements large and small, slow and fast. The exertion required can fluctuate throughout the year, and with the tasks gardeners adopt. Several of Hale et al.'s participants enjoyed the activeness of community gardening, which the authors described as a pleasurable, productive, and integrated form of physical activity. Community gardening has been attractive to healthcare practitioners, commissioners, and researchers, for its potential to facilitate physical activity. Veen and Doughty (2023) found that several research participants wished their community garden site had *more* opportunities for movement; the small space lacked the size and features associated with more strenuous work. The accelerometers worn by their participants did not indicate moderate physical activity, however, other researchers have found garden access to be associated with increased moderate and

moderate-to-vigorous physical activity (Wells et al., 2014). While physical activity often emerges as a valued element of community gardening for participants in qualitative research, there is little and low-quality research at present (Hume et al., 2022) evidencing quantitatively that community gardening increases physical activity levels. A recent systematic review (Kunpeuk et al., 2020) found six papers measuring physical activity; all used self-report questionnaires, and only two reported a significant improvement in physical activity. Heise et al. (2017), however, note that even low-to-moderate levels of physical activity can positively impact on other health outcomes, including quality of life. A number of British Medical Journal (BMJ) articles and letters (O'Brien, 2022; Greenhalgh, 1996; Kmietowicz, 2022) recognise or promote gardening (amongst other daily practices) as physical activity, seemingly in response to persistent widespread low physical activity levels, and feelings that conventional forms of exercise have been unattainable or unattractive for many. A number of studies suggest that outdoor activities may help meet a need for forms of activity outside of places and activities closely associated with exercise and fitness. Walking group participants have expressed aversions to gym environments (Copelton, 2010; Pollard et al., 2020), and lack of identification with a "gym person" (Morris et al., 2019: p3) identity. Aversions to such environments can also emerge from felt stigma, a dislike of competitiveness (Copelton, 2010; Hazan, 1986, in Katz, 2000), or a lack of interest: "it's more interesting than going to the gym and walking up and down on a treadmill" stated one community gardener (Kingsley et al., 2009: p213).

A BMJ 'practice pointer' suggests that healthcare practitioners, to help patients meet physical activity (UK public health) guidelines, communicate that daily tasks like housework and gardening contribute (Salman et al., 2021). Such recommendations are often aligned with contemporary public health priorities and paradigms, and desires to reduce public spending. Increasingly, it seems, the role of enjoyment in achieving consistent physical activity is acknowledged in healthcare and health research, as are the broader aspects of people's lives which may make intentional exercise more challenging. Yet, such recognitions often appear alongside exhortations to personal responsibility. "Pleasure pursuits" like gardening are recognised for the role they may play in fostering enjoyable physical activity, but are also drawn into discourses of individual responsibility to engage in (a perhaps increasingly diversely conceived of) range of health behaviours: "everyone has a responsibility for their own health. Those who are able should attempt to engage in regular exercise…recreational activities such as gardening…will confer substantial benefit to personal health. If enough people engage in these pleasure pursuits, they will impact positively on the escalating exchequer spend on healthcare" (O'Brien, 2022: n.p.).

Almost all of the commissioned gardening case studies in the aforementioned A Growing Health Tool Kit (Sustain and Garden Organic, 2016) mention physical activity as an objective or benefit of activities, alongside other aims. Other case studies are cross-referenced, providing examples of gardening projects commissioned for their alignment with public health objectives. A Bradford-based project (Bradford Community Environment Project, commissioned by local authority Public Health with NHS/Public Health Trust funding), for example, lists as its objectives: "To encourage local residents to grow their own food which increases physical activity, improves mental wellbeing and promotes a healthier diet which contributes to improved health outcomes" (Sustain and Garden Organic, 2015: p3). These objectives are tied explicitly to an aim to reduce health inequalities, a priority in the area; the document compares the stark differences in life expectancies in inner city Bradford, with the nearby and more affluent Ilkley.

Physical activity is an inevitable aspect of community gardening work, and a point of shared interest amongst stakeholders participating in, organising, and funding community gardening projects (albeit, with potentially different understandings and prioritising of activity in the garden). Frequently, gardeners express enjoyment in relation to the movement, activity, or exercise (variously conceived) their gardening entails. Conveyed by one community gardener: "it helps you keep yourself loose, moving…That's exercise right there itself." (Poulsen et al., 2014: p74). Activity within gardens can provide feelings of meaning, purpose, and pleasure, which some may struggle to access in environments more intentionally structured around exercise. The design of gardens can influence how intense gardening activities are, and individuals may differ by what level of activity represents an achievable, desirable, and meaningful change in their weekly activity levels through gardening. Further research is required to ascertain more conclusively the potential for community gardening to increase physical activity. Existing research, however, has questioned the promotion and orienting of community gardening predominantly in terms of physical activity (McGuire et al., 2022), or the frequently allied public health goal of weight management (Watson and Moore, 2011). Veen and Doughty (2023) describe two perspectives on health, through which community gardening has been understood: a 'holistic' perspective, and a more risk-focused approach, in which gardening is valued as a means of encouraging individuals to engage in certain health behaviours. The authors are informed by a social practice theory, more concordant with the former perspective, considering how community gardening is a multifaceted practice embedded in broader routines. As O'Brien's (2022) letter suggests, these approaches are sometimes syncretised. For example, pleasure in active gardening is valued insofar as it is utilised towards the end of individual, 'responsible' health improvement (and reduced use of public healthcare). There are multiple ways, then, of understanding the place of physical activity and movement in community gardening. The question of

which understandings have resonance for particular gardeners, is explored in this research, with possible implications for how 'gardening for health' might be well utilised in public health and healthcare.

1.2.2 Small-scale food growing, dietary change, and food security

As with physical activity, food consumption has been considered both a health behaviour and a situated social practice. Community gardens have been thought promising, for the role they might play in promoting fruit and vegetable consumption, and food security more broadly. This is a pressing concern: while cross-sectional and cohort research (Zhang and Zhang, 2018; Angelino et al., 2019) finds robust associations between fruit and vegetable consumption and incidence of a range of diseases and conditions, consumption guidelines are not widely met. Health survey data (NHS Digital, 2019) suggest that only 28% of adults in England meet the recommended five portions of fruit and vegetables per day, with average intake lower for research participants of a lower socioeconomic position (Maguire and Monsivais, 2015). Controlling for sociodemographic variables, Litt et al. (2011) found that Coloradan community gardeners were more likely than both home gardeners and nongardeners to meet national guidelines for fruit and vegetable consumption. A recent systematic review (Hume et al., 2022) found similarly, although contrary studies have been published (Tharrey et al., 2020).

Beyond simply making available fruits and vegetables, community gardening may encourage their consumption through creating meaningful ways of relating with plants, and with people via plants. Community gardening structures opportunities for the exchange and consumption of food, seeds, and plants (Gerodetti and Foster, 2023; Williams, 2023), both through creating social and material structures (including expectations) for reciprocity, and horticultural cycles of seasonal surplus. These opportunities support the extra-nutritional benefits of food, commensality, and exchange, too. In community gardens, breaks are often structured around tea, coffee, and biscuits, facilitating rest and interaction. Gardeners might also share food produced from garden yields: gifts of chutneys and baked goods can be tools of welcoming and relationship-making. Growing one's own vegetables can produce feelings of trust in one's food and its safety, that may relieve gustatory anxiety (Biglin, 2020) and encourage consumption. Gardeners may place extra value on vegetables grown locally, and on plants one has developed a connection to; van Holstein (2017) found, at the three community gardens visited, garden produce was deemed "fresher, cleaner and thus healthier" (p1165). More than just a rational attribution of value, involvement in the production of vegetables can make them viscerally *feel* of greater quality and taste. Martin et al. (2017) draw on Fischler's (2001)

incorporation principle, in describing how the labour and care of cultivation are incorporated within the vegetable. The gardener incorporates this meaningful object through consumption (and arguably, through harvest); the community gardeners in their study expressed the feelings of pride and worth that accompanied these acts of transferring and reinforcing value: “when you pick it, you're proud! When you see that you had a little sprout…little by little it grew…and that you're the one who brought it to the table” (Martin et al., 2017: p594). That *she* was the one who brought the sprout to the table suggests, too, the opportunities for others to affirm this value (of gardener and produce) through commensality. As gardeners often share produce and food, these value-laden acts may have a relational, contagious quality.

In Martin et al.’s study, however, the quantities of fruit and vegetable produced were modest: only 53g per household per day, for the study period. They monitored household purchased food supplies too, finding gardeners to buy greater quantities of fruit and vegetables. This could reflect the reinforcing of familiarity with, taste for, and valuing of fruit and vegetables through gardening. However, while the garden and non-gardener participants were similar in their ‘financial situation’, the gardeners had fewer children (and thus, mostly likely, experienced diminished demand on their food budgets). This finding hints towards the manifold factors that might influence both participation in community gardening, and its contribution towards changing dietary patterns. Notable amongst these are economic factors; growing food can be costly: “you can buy tomatoes for three dollars a kilo in summer…I couldn’t grow them for three dollars a kilo. But for me it’s not about saving money, it’s about the quality of the produce and also the leisure” (van Holstein, 2017: p1166). The quoted gardener deems the cost of cultivating to be worthwhile; others may have competing demands on their resources, which make such judgements unfeasible.

The role community gardens might play in promoting food security is debated, and variable between projects. Amid recent disruption to food systems, locally produced food is especially attractive. However, it can be challenging to produce substantial quantities of food, and to do so in an economically viable way. The costs associated with community gardening can serve as a barrier to supporting food access. Whilst access to community gardens is often free (although some charge membership or subplot rental fees), some community gardens exhibit informal socioeconomic exclusivity (Blokland, 2008). Small scale food farming can sometimes operate at cost, and subsidies (at present) can favour larger growing operations (Todd and Whitt, 2020, in Koempel, 2023). Small-scale growers may struggle to find consumers able to pay sustainable prices, or find that selling interferes with local norms of neighbourly sharing, as suggested by food grower, Colleen: “I can't charge the appropriate price because I feel guilty, because the family always taught us to share it.”

(Koempel, 2023: p16). Colleen's words highlight both the informal exchange networks that gardening can support, while drawing attention to the difficulties of developing local food economies. Donald (2008) discusses the implementation of growing projects for the most marginalised, acknowledging both their attractiveness (in potentially cultivating care, community, and environmentally-sound food provision), and the issues of meeting marginalisation with expectations of self-sufficiency. She suggests that community gardens should constitute only one in an array of interventions to address food insecurity.

Community gardening can encompass a range of different activities and sites: from the informal cultivation of small residential interstices, to medium-scale, multi-garden, staff-coordinated operations. Factors like plot size, labour availability, food distribution networks (charitable, reciprocal, and marketised), participant expertise, local ecology, and land tenure all impact the ability of sites to produce regular and sizeable quantities of produce. Williams' (2023) autoethnography recounts her experience in a productive community growing organisation, which distributed produce to food banks, social enterprises, community fridges, and sponsor restaurants and events. The organisation supported approximately twelve growing sites, and received donations of supplies from sponsors. Labour was supplied largely by volunteers, alongside some paid workers. Williams describes how her participation increased her family's vegetable consumption: "there is no question that doing this…improved my family's intake of vegetables…in frittatas, omelettes, pastas, stews, and soups" (p43).

Williams' autoethnography captures a successful, productive community gardening project, both in terms of increasing her own vegetable intake, and in supplying local organisations with produce. It perhaps also serves as a vignette indicating some of the factors conducive to such successes, including the aforementioned site characteristics, as well as those of herself and her family. She describes the volunteering experience as an enjoyable one, recalling fond memories of childhood gardening: "it allowed me to connect with my past in real and memorable ways" (p47). Produce arrived in a home kitchen with cooking facilities and condiments, with people with the familiarity and skills needed for these culinary transformations. The converging supportive factors she outlines provide some suggestions as to what may be absent, where community gardening has not been found to increase fruit and vegetable consumption (Litt et al., 2023). Williams (2023), recalling Donald (2008), suggests that the growing organisation made a "small dent in better managing food insecurity" (p47).

1.2.3 Cultivating mental wellbeing

Community gardening has oftentimes been framed specifically as a practice promoting mental wellbeing. Relaxation, meaning making, and feelings of connection and belonging are just some such potential benefits encompassed under this umbrella. They appear in the case studies and resources so far mentioned, as well as in a range of more specific research outputs and reports commissioned by both nature- and mental health-oriented organisations, such as the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (Bird, 2007; Bradley, 2023), Natural England (Seers et al., 2022), Mind (Bragg et al., 2013), and the Mental Health Foundation (2021). Spending time in gardens, and in 'green' and 'natural' spaces, have been incorporated into both specific 'eco-therapies', and less targeted efforts to support gardening for mental wellbeing. Sempik (2020) makes a distinction between 'horticultural therapy', a specialised occupational therapy, and 'therapeutic horticulture', describing more generalised activities. Community gardening projects differ in how much they incorporate psychotherapeutic language and techniques, and by whether they employ facilitators with training and qualifications in therapeutic intervention. Processes of entry can include referrals from healthcare professionals, self-referrals, or self-guided participation conceived in less medicalised terms. Activities may be targeted towards those with a specific learning disability or mental health condition (Sempik et al., 2014), although community gardens frequently do not require participants to have a specific diagnosis, or any diagnosis at all. Seifert (2014) describes most of the (thirteen) Northern Irish community gardens she identified as providing eco-therapy to be open and non-diagnostic in approach. They often aimed to provide support for people experiencing mental ill health and related issues (including unemployment and isolation), groups tended to be mixed, and support multidirectional.

Here, I explore some of the ways in which community gardening may contribute towards fleeting and enduring feelings of mental wellbeing: an aim of several of the community gardening sessions included within this project. Contact with plants, wildlife, and changing weather (glossed as 'nature') is a basis and medium for some of the therapeutic outcomes of community gardening. However, therapeutic outcomes go beyond those emerging from nature contact, which itself is not always straightforwardly linked to mental wellbeing. The success of conventional therapies is linked strongly to the strength of the therapeutic alliance (Flückiger et al., 2018; Baier et al., 2020); relatedly, what might loosely be called 'the social' figures large in community gardening projects' therapeutic potential. I briefly review some of these 'outcomes', and consider *how* community gardening might come to improve mental wellbeing. I begin by outlining some of the ways in which community gardening can feel good, through sensory pleasures and absences, and senses of cognitive-affective escapism, belonging, and purpose. Combining the semantic and emotive, I explore how people

derive meaning from community gardening, and how this may positively shape narratives of the self, community, and world.

1.2.3.1 Pleasure, relaxation, enjoyment

Feelings of pleasure, relaxation, and 'flow' are (often) afforded in the community garden. These are, partially or largely, sensory pleasures. In the garden, modes of engaging with 'natural' materials are encouraged in ways out of place elsewhere. Community gardening has been described as "dirt therapy" (Koempel, 2023: p17). Soil, twigs, and leaves become tactile materials with which to cultivate, create, and play (Sonti and Svendsen, 2018). Others (Cutts et al., 2017) have reflected on the place of soil in the garden; it is perhaps because earth is elsewhere dirt (to also invoke Douglas 1966) that qualities of freedom and fun are lent to its sanctioned handling in gardens. While, when asked directly, gardeners most frequently remark on the visual aspects of gardening (Tilley, 2006), gardening is a richly multisensorial experience. Tilley noted the contrast between the (visual) senses that English and Swedish gardeners indicated as important on a research form, and the more multisensory engagements evident as he observed and spoke with them. He is one of several authors to describe gardening experiences as 'synaesthetic', stimulating multiple senses in pleasurable and layered ways: "wafting fragrances of basil and mint and tomato plants mix and your body submits to the sensations of bending and stooping with the sun on your neck, feeling the brush of leaves and the hum of insects" (Gagnon, 2021: p39).

Gardening experiences can be stimulating without overwhelm, and pleasantly immersive. Gorman (2017) links engagement with the novel scents of the care farm as helping create feelings of immersion and flow (Pitt, 2014), for some. The scents and sights of the garden are a source of pleasure and respite, described by gardeners as an oasis (Passidomo, 2016; Slabinski, 2012) and break: "[gardening] makes a wonderful break from life…you can go lose yourself in nature and are able to stop worrying about things" (Sonti and Svendsen, 2018: p1195). Gorman (2017) suggests too that the absence of certain scents may account for some of the therapeutic effect of care farming. Being *away* from certain places, sensations, and accompanying thoughts can be conducive to therapeutic experience. Such suggestions are consonant with one of the most cited theories for how 'nature' can be therapeutic: Kaplan's (1995) Attention Restoration Theory. It posits that natural spaces often comprise of 'soft fascinations', effortlessly drawing our 'involuntary attention' and creating feelings of restoration and relaxation that last beyond the encounter. In such environments, one can 'be away' from usual places and concerns, in an environment with 'extent'. Extent refers to the richness of the environment, sufficiently stimulating as to occupying one's mind.

The importance of the multisensorial richness of garden spaces is evidenced in its felt absence. The sensorial thinness of (some) 'sensory gardens', designed for those with sight impairment, is described by a research participant in Bell (2019: p314): "most sight impaired people are completely bored by the sensory garden…isn't particularly sensorially rich." While these gardens are made with aspirations to provide accessible and stimulating spaces, designers may underestimate the breadth of multisensoriality in therapeutic experience in green space. Haptic and olfactory stimulation was insufficient alone in making the sensory garden an enduringly therapeutic space; the participant instead preferred a park, for how it allowed safe movement between areas, stimulating the kinaesthetic sense (and an accompanying and more abstract sense of novelty). Sensory pleasure and immersive respite are thus important aspects of therapeutic garden experiences, and elements that may be more and less present (designed for or otherwise) in specific gardens and green spaces.

At once abstract and grounded, senses of accomplishment, purpose, and belonging engendered through community gardening have been considered important to therapeutic garden experiences. Gardens have been described as 'quasi-natural' spaces (Bhatti et al., 2009); a product of human and non-human cooperation, whose caring-for can be mutually constructive. Tilley (2006) characterises gardening as "cultivating the soul through cultivating the earth" (p313). Visibly transforming garden spaces in ways deemed positive and meaningful can serve as a palpable source of esteem. In one community garden, a volunteer linked "physical result" with "a sense of accomplishment" (Pitt, 2014: p88), while Dunkley (2009) describes practical outdoor activities as allowing participants to find "evidence of their ability to do good…in the landscape" (p94). This understanding links tactile, purposeful activity with understandings of what is good, and with constructions of oneself, the community, and environment. Psychiatrist and psychotherapist Sue Stuart-Smith (2020) suggests that some of the joy of gardening is attributable to the pleasure of being the cause (Groos, 1901). She goes so far as to call the gardener as operating under an illusion of control, while also characterising gardening as involving collaboration, cooperation, and negotiation. Nature, she argues, fails to fully cooperate, and gardening entails a series of small and manageable 'humblings' that may build feelings of resilience, sustaining us through the sensorial *displeasures* of the garden. Human and non-human agencies combine to influence processes in the community garden (Black, 2020), potentially extending each, while creating feelings and experiences of connectedness. Feelings of connectedness may become woven into more enduring narratives and histories of self and place. Participants in gardening projects at the RHS Bridgewater, for example, came to feel part of the site's history, and part of "something larger" (Howarth et al., 2021: p6).

1.2.3.2 Company and community

It is in opportunities for connectedness that community gardens are somewhat distinguished from other green spaces, and for which their potential to improve wellbeing is often recognised. Loneliness and isolation are associated with poorer health and wellbeing (Luo et al., 2012; Wang et al., 2023). The declining presence of cohering organisations within contemporary industrialised societies has been documented (Putnam, 2000); in this context, community gardens are especially attractive. Doyle (2022) identifies a desire to socialise as a primary motive to participate in community gardens, in Dublin. Many community gardens are self-consciously oriented around principles of inclusivity and bridge-building. They structure opportunities to socialise, and offer common interest points and shared activities. Several authors (Dolley, 2020; Matsuno, 2012; Marsh et al., 2017) have considered how they act as third places (Oldenberg and Brissett, 1982; Oldenberg, 1989) – public or semi-public spaces, separate to work and the home, where people may comfortably and accessibly relax, socialise, and play. The building of community has been linked to wellbeing not only via companionship and company, but through social capital. The role of bridging social capital is perhaps especially significant; some research finds community gardens functioning to connect structurally disempowered people with local decision-makers (Hite et al., 2017). In this way, community gardening may be materially linked to wellbeing, networking individuals within channels of resources. There is substantial debate around whether community gardens may function to increase collective *agency*, creating communities which can mobilise resources, participate politically, influence their wider environments, and make "collective claims" (Nettle, 2014: p44). Hence, the role of these communities in shaping wellbeing and lifeways may go beyond companionship and belonging.

Community gardens may bring together people of different backgrounds. Contact theory (Allport, 1954; Hewstone, 2009, in Aptekar, 2015) has been used to explain the tolerance-building role of public spaces which facilitate frequent contact between heterogeneous groups. Relations may be intergenerational, or bridging between socioeconomic position, ethnicity, or gender. Some gardens aim to promote the meeting of diverse people. For example, intercultural gardens (*interkulturelle gärten*) are the most common form of community garden in Germany (Follman and Viehoff, 2015). Participation in horticultural activities may have a somewhat levelling effect, described by one allotment-keeper: "when you're up here in your wellies full of muck it doesn't matter who you are." (Kettle, 2014: p50). Notably, Kettle also describes the different styles of allotment-keeping and their socioeconomic and demographic correlates. The newer gardening practices, associated with women, younger people, and with (as perceived by some) frivolous spending, were sometimes met with disapproval by longer-standing gardens, suggesting the presence of dividing tendencies as well as those which cohere.

Premat (2009) found that Cuban food growers came to feel like members of a more diffuse "growing community of urban farmers" (p46), while being relatively insulated from proximate communities. Massey (1994) advocates for an 'extroverted' sense of place, which resonates with the way in which gardeners may identify with diffuse communities through their activities. The white, middle-class skewing in community gardening participation found by Blokland (2008), however, alerts to the exclusion that may be enacted through the selective community-building which may occur through these activities. The aforementioned authors describe instances of community gardens as both facilitating *and* impeding connection across difference; of reproducing and resisting social hierarchies. Aptekar (2015) notes that contact can also precede conflict and the reinforcing of prejudices, while Skrunk and Richardson (2019) find that enduring 'bridging' connections between gardeners were rare. The sanctioning of culturally patterned gardening practices and aesthetics may act as an indirect way in which certain groups experience discrimination and marginalisation. The ways of cultivating of dominant groups may be enshrined in local regulations, and divergent practices and aesthetics poorly tolerated. Skrunk and Richardson found that local authorities received complaints about the appearance of refugees' gardens, and about the apparent disruptiveness of a harvest celebration at an 'International Garden'. The local authority proceeded to ban 'non-gardening' activities at the site, a form of policing that some participants deemed to be influenced by residents' discomfort towards the provision of resources for refugees. Poe et al. (2014) describe how differences between people may be emphasised through their distinct ways of relating to nature and place. They document the suspicion of foragers in Seattle, towards the practices of foragers of certain ethnic groups, and of recent immigrants. Both Aptekar (2015) and Skrunk and Richardson (2019) describe community gardens as *potentially* inclusive and bridge-building. The latter argue that minoritised community gardeners do connect with others through gardening and sharing produce, and that their gardening constitutes an embodiment of their right to the city. This can be furthered, they argue, by the positive recognition of non-normative gardening practices, rather than an emphasis on assimilation.

The role of community gardens as sites for practicing and reproducing marginalised cultural practices has been considered one of the ways in which they may improve wellbeing, theorised as cultural wellbeing (Gerodetti and Foster, 2023). While all horticultural practices are sites of cultural expression, reproduction, and transformation to some extent, community gardens may be especially valuable to this end for practices threatened through marginalisation or migration. On a micro level, people may feel they are enacting familial traditions and idiosyncrasies (Martin et al., 2017), or fostering biographical continuity (Li et al., 2010). Gardening can act both as a physical presence, enacting a right to the city, and a space in which tangible connections to one's cultural identity, past,

and former homes are felt. Biglin (2020) describes the sensory nostalgia felt by refugee urban allotmenteers with agrarian backgrounds. The material, emplaced nature of gardening is thus an important element for gardeners experiencing physical and cultural displacement. Practices which re-make and evoke home can be an ambivalent experience, too, not straightforwardly therapeutic: Biglin notes that feelings of homesickness can also be evoked, while Gerodetti and Foster (2023) capture feelings of frustration that may occur as one struggles to grow culturally important produce.

1.2.3.3 Therapeutic landscapes experiences; relational understandings of wellbeing in place

That therapeutic experiences may inconsistently emerge in certain places is a central observation of much of the therapeutic landscapes literature. This body of work is useful in building a more nuanced, relational, and contextual understanding of green space encounters. The therapeutic landscapes concept was conceived to describe extraordinary places with "an enduring reputation for achieving physical, mental, and spiritual healing" (Gesler, 1993: p171; 1992). It has increasingly been used to describe ordinary spaces, and wellbeing enhancement rather than healing (Williams, 1998). To capture the contingent, emergent nature of therapeutic effect, the concept has been extended, with authors writing of *potentially* therapeutic landscapes, therapeutic landscape *experiences* (Conradson, 2005), and *contested* therapeutic landscapes (Curtis et al., 2007). More recent innovations on the concept include Gatrell's (2013) work on therapeutic mobilities, exploring how the relationship between movement and wellbeing is shaped by activity, connection, and context. A therapeutic landscapes lens is useful for acknowledging the range of experiences people may have in community gardens, and for encouraging attentiveness to how, when, and for whom gardens may be therapeutic.

'Green' environments are not unproblematically attractive, salutogenic spaces, possessing an inherent biophilic (Wilson, 1984) attraction. Increasingly acknowledged, these spaces can be scary (Milligan and Bingley, 2007), uncomfortable, dirty, and disgusting (Bixler and Floyd, 1997). The practices which embed us in the outdoors can have unpleasant components: tasks may be frustratingly difficult and physically uncomfortable (Edwards, 2022). In community gardens specifically, vandalism, poor weather, and interpersonal conflict may hamper therapeutic outcomes, while interest in community gardening can vary with age and prior experience, amongst other factors. Gardeners frequently describe their affinity for growing as beginning in childhood, while community gardening practitioners often observe a dip in interest in teenage years (McGuire et al., 2022; Richardson et al., 2019). A simplistic, valorising view of green and natural spaces can mask variation in use of, and benefit from, green spaces, which can differ with socioeconomic position,

biography, gender, and ethnicity, and landscape features, amongst other factors (Ward Thompson et al., 2010). Such a view homogenises both people and green spaces. In one study (Jones et al., 2009), those living in deprived areas were less likely to use green spaces, despite (in this sample) being in closer proximity to them. The authors attribute this to perceptions of the safety and accessibility of such spaces. Lachowycz and Jones (2013) call for more attention to the mediators and mechanisms in these relationships.

Grinde and Patil (2009) and Hitchings (2013), drawing on the language of genetic expression, talk about the 'penetrance' of green space benefits. That is, they agree that there are potential benefits to be had through interacting with green space, but that a variety of social, cultural, and individual factors can prevent their manifestation. To this I would add historic and environmental factors, and specify that such factors are at work not only in the absence of these benefits, but in their presence too. Additionally, Hitchings argues that there is a good evidential basis for the restorative effects of time in green space, but that these effects are often underappreciated. Thus, it might be more appropriate to try and gain a greater understanding of why people do and do not use such spaces, and how best to "tempt them there" (p98). Ideas of penetrance have focused my attention on *how* people come to enjoy community gardens. In the remainder of this section, I build a nuanced, relational understanding of green experiences, accounting for diversity in penetrance, and moderation of greenspace-health relationships.

Community gardens can be understood as complex, socioecological spaces, inscribed physically and symbolically with diverse meanings, by and for diverse people. Dinnie et al. (2013), in line with situated and relational perspectives, describe wellbeing as "inescapably mediated by social relations (and associated networks, meanings, and practices)", and green space benefits as "contingent upon the experience as it unfolds" (p2). Wellbeing is a result of complex, embodied, and interpreted person-landscape interactions, situated within a broader web of socionatural relations. Thomas (2015), drawing on the therapeutic landscapes literature, explores the role of natural environments in 'everyday health and wellbeing', for women in Copenhagen. Her participants describe using green spaces for exercising, socialising, and relaxing; green spaces were places where they "undertook physical activity and sought restorative wellbeing" (p190). The therapeutic green space experiences of her participants were produced through the interaction of person, place, and wider context. She elaborates on how different participants chose different green spaces, for the qualities they afforded – younger participants frequented a centrally-located garden, considered a fashionable place to socialise and drink. These same qualities made the space unattractive to some of the older participants, in particular. The type of socialising sought was dependent, in part, on participants'

living arrangements. Conradson (2005) arrives at a similar finding, in his work with individuals visiting a nature-based residential respite centre: “the sociality they appreciated…was in some way indexed to their everyday ecology of place. Each appeared to appreciate an element…that was not strongly or consistently present in their home environs” (p344).

People living with others often sought passive socialising, perhaps sitting alone in a park while watching others go by. This may be respite, not only from a busy environment, but from the roles and demands it requires. The opposite was true of many living alone. Conradson describes the ‘relational shift’ that occurs as people transcend different contexts. Thomas (2015) contextualises participants’ use of green space within a metropolitan context in which green spaces are valued and supported through policy, with recent initiatives to provide new green spaces, and support access to them through bicycle-friendly city planning. In Copenhagan, Petersen (2013) writes of the cultural value of ‘hygge’, and describes how parks are designed with features to promote this atmosphere of cosiness. Bushes, trees, hills, and banks had been constructed - spaces in which to relax and socialise, that were comfortable, sheltered, and a pleasant balance of public and private. The public element of green space emerged as an implicitly important element of green space experiences, which were, in part, productive performances. In sight of green space ‘audiences’ the young women constructed and affirmed their identities, while Thomas (2015) also describes how, for one park-goer, enacting grief was validating and therapeutic. While many of these benefits and elements of their green space experiences might be broadly called ‘social’ or ‘restorative’, there is diversity and depth within these categories. People play roles as audiences, friends, drinking partners and exercise buddies; banks and bushes afford spaces in which to socialise; living situations and broader cultural values of hygge, fitness, and fashion act as imperatives to go to green spaces. Conradson (2005) takes influence from the language of actor-network theory to describe such interactions, writing of assemblages of human and non-human actants (Callon, 1986; Law, 1992).

As both Conradson and Thomas (2015) suggest, green space experiences are intricately linked to spaces beyond them. Conradson draws on the work of Massey (1994; 1995), in understanding places (and place experiences) as the outcome of socioeconomic processes at various scales, proximate and distal. As Dinnie et al. (2013) write: “greenspaces are not bounded, internally coherent entities separate from their surroundings, but are produced and reproducing in relation to their proximity or connectivity to other places, and the activities they open up or close down” (p5). In these papers, individuals’ home environments recur as places relationally shaping experiences in particular landscapes; other locations (and their influence on one another) are less frequently detailed. Conradson (2005), for example, does acknowledge that a particular respite service sat within a

"wider network of care and welfare provision" (p341), but focuses predominantly on the relationship between home life and experiences in the care centre. He provides some indications as to the roles of other places, in how the personalised, non-hierarchal care given to residents purposefully contrasted with forms thought to characterise other care settings. Care settings are linked through healthcare systems, patient and practitioner movements, and sites at which decisions are made about their relative resourcing. The therapeutic landscapes literature would benefit from further consideration of the multiple locations shaping therapeutic landscape experiences, and their relationships to one another.

From a relational perspective, both people and place are constituted, in part, through their interactions. Acting on the earth may foster changes in relational self-conception (Jax et al., 2018), and perceptions of one's abilities (Conradson, 2005); I am attentive to how community gardening might harness this dialectic relationship. The green space users and managers of Dinnie et al.'s (2013) ethnographic study derived much of their enjoyment and satisfaction from actively trying to shape both green space, and the green space experiences of potential users. In creating a picnic area, they transformed the physical space and the activities it facilitated, with a concomitant shift in associations and meanings it held for local residents. This accompanied a shift in their own subjectivity: they became caring, active citizens with informal authority over their locality, and a moral authority over those deemed to be misusing the space. 'Shaping' efforts are important, and go beyond the kinds of creative additions Dinnie et al. capture. Research within the therapeutic landscapes literature does not always linger on the work and action required to bring and hold together therapeutic assemblages. Duff (2016; 2012) gives great insight into the role of place in recovery from ill health, while calling for more attention to the work involved in creating and maintaining enabling places and atmospheres. I agree with this call, and argue that there is space for more extensive recognitions of administrative, communicative, practical, creative, and emotional labours; without which, his suggestion that mental health services might broker access to enabling ordinary places may be difficult to beneficially enact. This thesis looks at the nature and extent of the work entailed within maintaining, and facilitating access to, enabling places; this work is perhaps underexplored, in Duff's (2012) proposal of a consumer-focused, peer-led approach to enabling place access.

The therapeutic potential of community gardening, and its enduring (or fleeting) quality, may depend on the activities they accommodate; the resources available for their maintenance; and the manifold factors shaping the biographies and broader lives of participants. Gardens and green spaces do not exist in a vacuum, unconnected to their wider context. There has been growing

concern around the issue of environmental or green gentrification, in which the provision of green space can displace vulnerable communities – both businesses and residences (Checker, 2011; Anguelovski et al., 2018). While some argue that gentrification can bring social mobility, Cole et al (2019) found that, in gentrifying neighbourhoods, only the more privileged appeared to benefit from green space provision. Similarly, improving the quality of green space does not necessarily improve health equity, as an event relating to London's Royal Parks demonstrates. Outsourced park workers, almost all of whom were non-white, entered a legal case against The Royal Parks charity, in relation to alleged indirect racial discrimination; their pay and benefits were significantly less than the in-house, predominantly white staff (Southworth, 2020). When green spaces become places of (insecure) work, as well as places of stigma and exclusion, the relationship between their use and wellbeing may be diminished or reversed. Similar issues occur in contexts beyond the UK (Duncan and Duncan, 2003). Such experiences may engender feelings of alienation in relation to green spaces, changing their affective and therapeutic potential. Some have written about how, for example, particular working cultures can impede green space use. Amongst city professionals, proximate green spaces may go unused within the working week, as their use is seen to interfere with the embodied professionalism such individuals aim to cultivate (Hitchings, 2013). The provision of green spaces, thus, does not necessarily lead to their use. Additionally, fleeting therapeutic experiences in gardens may not amount to enduring and equitable improvements to health and wellbeing on the level of the individual, community, or population.

The therapeutic landscapes literature enriches understandings of experiences in (potentially) therapeutic places, capturing their complexity, diversity, and contingency. Place is conceived of as having social, symbolic, and physical dimensions, and as being an 'outcome' of processes nearby and distant. This study contributes to this literature, addressing some of its gaps: I describe therapeutic assemblages and emergent atmospheres, *and* illustrate some of the processes, labour, and care required to craft and sustain them. I think, not only about particular therapeutic landscapes, home environments, and their relationship, but of the multiple sites pertinent for 'green' therapeutic experiences: varied places members attend through their weeks, the different growing spaces managed by garden practitioners, and the locations and organisations linked through healthcare systems and social prescribing services. I engage with concepts of medicalisation, and lay enactments of health and wellbeing, more closely rooted in medical anthropology than human geography. Most writing within the therapeutic landscapes literature originates in the latter, at present; I aim to combine and build upon insights from both areas of research.

1.2.3.4 Cultivating wellbeing sustainably and equitably

The broader context of people's lives shapes their health and wellbeing, including 'non-medical' factors (or 'determinants'). The determinants of good health are distributed unequally, across socioeconomic groups (Graham, 2004). Some of the difficulties faced by certain groups in availing of the benefits of therapeutic landscapes fall under this broad umbrella. These inequalities in living conditions lead to preventable health inequalities; health and wellbeing are thus matters of politics and social justice (Virchow, 1948; Marmot, 2010). While there is abundant documentation of therapeutic experiences in community gardens, there is debate around the role these spaces may play in contributing to health and wellbeing in equitable and enduring ways. Related to discussions of collective agency, some have considered how community gardens may sensitise people to social and political inequities (Barron, 2017), and provide a forum for communities to organise around issues which shape the conditions in which they live (whether conceived through the lens of health and wellbeing, social justice, or otherwise). Community gardens can themselves be considered a wellbeing resource, to be included in broader conversations about the distribution and structural support for resources. Understandings of community gardening and food growing as a political or justice-seeking activity have been documented among many gardeners and growers. Reynolds (2015) quotes one such city farmer, from New York: "[urban agriculture] can empower people to have political power, and economic power. And that is part of the mission of [our farm]. That's part of what we do" (p255).

A wider group of authors question how, counterintuitively, the promotion of community gardening could function to exacerbate health and social inequalities. The previously cited BMJ letter (O'Brien, 2022), encouraging engagement with recreational activities as a way of "taking responsibility for [one's] own health" (n.p.), hints towards some such possibilities. The notion of health as primarily a matter of individual responsibility and lifestyle change has been widely critiqued for discounting the wider determinants of health (Williams and Fullagar, 2019). Health interventions premised on this notion, typically targeting 'health behaviours', can be potentially stigmatising (Täuber et al., 2018; Trainer et al., 2021), limited in effectiveness (Brewis and Wutich, 2019), and can widen inequalities (Goldberg, 2012; Baum and Fisher, 2014). Discourses of individual responsibility have been prevalent, and influential on political action, as the UK has shifted towards neoliberalism, from social democracy. The 1980s saw Margaret Thatcher's oft-quoted criticism of the notion of society (Thatcher, 1987), and health interventions and policies around the millennium tended to target the individual (Ulijaszek and McLennan, 2016). The 2010s delivered a political program of austerity, accompanied by exhortations to personal responsibility from multiple health secretaries (Hunt,

2015) - given by Matt Hancock during (Hancock, 2018) and prior to (Campbell, 2018) a speech about social prescribing. David Cameron's adoption of the concept of 'Big Society' supplemented individual responsibility with community responsibility, advocating for "individual citizen-volunteers doing good in their community, organising themselves and taking responsibility for sorting out their locality's need" (Szreter and Ishkanian, 2012: p10). This approach drew scepticism, conceived by some as potentially masking and justifying reductions in public spending (Ransome, 2011; Baggott and Jones, 2014). Austerity governance has been critiqued for entailing cuts to healthcare services, and for its impact on living conditions (Cummins, 2018) - the 'causes of causes' of ill health and health inequality. During fieldwork (2021-2022), a new period of threat to public spending began, risking a post-pandemic "return to austerity" (Hiam and Dorling, 2022: n.p.). In this wider context, a degree of caution regarding the implementation of social prescribing may be warranted. Researchers and VCS employees have worried that its implementation may represent a new iteration of under-resourced transfer of responsibility for health, onto individuals and local civic organisations (Dayson, 2017; Pot, 2024). Rosol (2012) suggests that certain promotions of community gardening may with fit within a broader neoliberal ethos of self-responsibilisation, in which individuals and communities are encharged with maintaining and improving their health and wellbeing. The large range of supraindividual factors shaping wellbeing, and the unequal distribution of health-promoting resources, explain some of the paradoxical impacts of promoting therapeutic community gardening within a neoliberal context.

1.2.3 Green social prescribing

Optimistic claims about the health-promoting potential of green spaces meet strongly stated ambitions to improve health and health inequality, in green social prescribing. The growing therapeutic landscapes literature, acknowledging the possibilities, contingencies, and limits of therapeutic landscape experiences, is a useful lens for exploring their union in this loose association of interventions.

Social prescribing is premised partially upon a recognition of the social determinants of health. It titles a framework of "linking patients in primary care with sources of support within the community to help improve their health and well-being" (Bickerdike et al., 2017: p1). Social prescribing has a number of synonyms, models, and antecedents, existing in various forms across a number of countries. The same is true of 'green' social prescribing, in which people with an identified need are referred to, and supported in, participating in 'green space' activities. These prescriptions may also

involve a 'blue' element (Britton et al., 2020), that is, people are referred to activities in outdoor water-based environments. A key catalyst in the story of social prescribing is the *NHS Long Term Plan* (NHS, 2019); in which plans to recruit over one thousand 'link workers' across England are outlined. Link workers are a type of social connector or care navigator (Tierney et al., 2020); primary care practitioners refer patients to link workers, who use their skills and resources (non-exhaustively: motivational interviewing, and knowledge of local resources and community groups) to support people in attending or using a range of non-medical activities or services. This might involve walking, art therapy, nature-based activities, legal advice, or support with debt, housing or employment (Moffat et al., 2017; Pescheny et al., 2018). Attendance might be encouraged by helping service users use public transport, or accompanying them to activities (Foster et al., 2020). They work with service users to identify their needs, interests, and wishes, informed by a social, person-centred model of healthcare, aspiring to focus on what matters *to* individuals, rather than what is the matter *with* them (Howarth and Lister, 2019). Concurrent with a growing understanding of the social patterning of wellbeing at a population level has been an expansion of more 'holistic' conceptions of wellbeing, held by individuals and promoted by organisations.

In social prescribing research, wellbeing-related positive outcomes reported include increases to self-esteem, confidence, and feelings of control and empowerment; improvements in mental wellbeing and mood; improvements in physical health and lifestyle; increased sociability; reduced isolation (Moffatt et al., 2017); improved 'day-to-day' functioning (Pescheny et al., 2019); acquisition of new skills, and improved feelings of confidence and self-worth (Liebmann et al., 2022). Green social prescribing specifically has been suggested as having the added co-benefit (Robinson and Breed, 2019; Thompson et al., 2023) of improving human-nature relationships, and protecting ecosystems. Garside et al. (2023) note, however, that green social prescribing could exploit nature, should it not be implemented in ways that contribute to nature recovery. Social prescribing is often embedded within a person-centred, asset-based philosophy (Howarth and Lister, 2019). Link workers consider patients' different needs and desires, and work with their and their communities' assets. Hence, the wide range of potential outcomes. Social prescribing could, in theory, hold potential to improve the wellbeing of those involved in healthcare and service provision, through lightening their workload, and providing appropriate tools for helping patients with complex or so-far unmet needs. Social prescribing attracts interest as a solution to the 'heart sink' felt by some healthcare practitioners, evoked in part by the mismatch between their patients' needs, and their (in)ability to meet them (Brandling and House, 2009; White and Salamon, 2010).

However, social prescribing evaluations can be hard to compare, due to differences in the operationalisation of outcomes of interest, and the length of follow-up periods, as well as the

differences across interventions as already mentioned. Many studies lack control groups, making the attribution of improved wellbeing to social prescribing rather than outside factors, a condition's natural history, or regression to the mean, difficult. As a relatively applied area of research, many reviews rely in part upon grey literature. Such literature suffers its lack of peer review, though it may avoid some of the publication biases associated with academic journal publishing.

Movement towards broader understandings of health and wellbeing is an important step towards improving wellbeing and alleviating health inequalities. It widens the scope of exploration when trying to understand complex health issues, and offers new solutions – for prevention and treatment – where other, more reductionist approaches are limited or harmful. Yet, a number of limitations to socially prescribing as currently practiced have been identified: insufficiently resourcing prescribed-to organisations, complex caseloads and high staff turnover (Wildman et al., 2019; Briscoe, 2022), and mismatch between the scope of the intervention and the needs of patients. Mackenzie et al. (2020) argue that it is fundamentally flawed in its capacity to reduce health inequalities, if it is not implemented alongside wide-reaching structural action on the social and wider determinants of health (see Scott-Samuel and Smith, 2015). The social determinants of health, in practice, can be misunderstood or reinterpreted in a number of ways. Firstly, there is a tendency for interventions which target social determinants to drift towards individualistic, lifestyle-based approaches to health (Williams and Fullagar, 2019; Powell et al., 2017; Popay et al., 2010). The social determinants of health are commonly reframed as individual exposure to risk factors, and as personal troubles (Mills, 1959, in Mead et al., 2020). Those experiencing challenging living situations are exhorted to make healthful choices, without full interrogation of the conditions that make such choices difficult or impossible. Gibson et al. (2022; 2021) describe how the classed (dis)possession of capital shapes capacities to engage with social prescribing, with moralising consequences for those felt to be 'choosing' not to engage. Additionally, social prescribing systems rely heavily on the VCS, within which many or most of the activities prescribed-to sit; the strength and resourcing of the sector is unequal across the UK (Clifford, 2021; 2012). It is important not to equate interventions that address some of 'the social' aspects of an individual's life, and those that alter the broader conditions shaping the health of collectives (see Moscrop, 2023).

The development of pathways to community gardens via healthcare routes can seem a natural progression from the recognition of gardens' therapeutic potential. However, these routes may bring about changes which impact the experience of gardening, and the viability of the organisations who facilitate these activities. The expanding purview of medicine (albeit, a potentially changed medicine) into more areas of life warrants attention. Whilst a focus on the social determinants of

health, through the implementation of social prescribing or otherwise, may constitute an expansion beyond (bio)medicalised healthcare, this may also entail a relative medicalisation on non-traditionally 'medical' realms (Brown et al., 2019). The medicalisation literature argues that conventional healthcare can carry a range of specific meanings, allocations of authority, and organisational structures. Community gardening organisations have their own organisational features, processes, values, and allocations of authority. The wholesale compatibility of these meanings and features with those of community gardening organisations cannot be assumed. Through social prescribing, different kinds of organisations meet, which may or may not entail processes of medicalisation. Rose (2007) suggests that medicalisation cannot, a priori, be deemed a positive or negative process (or as a singular 'process' at all). To distinguish between welcome and inappropriate forms, Kaczmarek (2018) uses the term 'over-medicalisation', while Broom and Woodward (1996) argue that medicalisation can be helpful and unhelpful. The extent to which green social prescribing medicalises community garden spaces, the specific manifestation this takes locally, and whether this shapes experiences positively or negatively, is one of the avenues of exploration guiding this research.

The therapeutic landscapes literature highlights that green space experiences are not homogenous; different encounters may have differing valences, which may change with person, place, and over time. Healthcare referral pathways may constitute one of the shifting elements which shape garden experiences, to be more (or less) therapeutic. Marsh's (2020) work suggests that there may be processes of mutual influence between community gardening and public health, rather than a one-way reorienting of gardens. However, some of the medicalisation literature describes instances in which medicalisation has shifted practices in less beneficial directions. Baxter and Fancourt (2020) find that a subsection of research participants working in the VCS worried that social prescribing might "take all the joy out of" VCS activities; that "People don't go and do these things usually to cure their mental health" (p6). While many people who participate in VCS activities are driven by desires for enjoyment and (broadly defined) wellbeing (Yamashita et al., 2019; Halpenny and Caissie, 2003), it is perhaps also true that it is a smaller number that view their participation through the lens of 'treatment' or 'cure'. Writing of the VCS context, Turk et al. (2022) document some resistance to the prescribing of non-medical activities. One participant worried that social prescribing to museums may discourage volunteering, should it acquire the stigma that can be directed towards ill health. This is a reminder that social prescribing may have to involve and occur alongside broader efforts to improve health (here, de-stigmatisation).

In other contexts, there have been instances in which the building of links with healthcare has been found to be disruptive. One walking group, documented by Copelton (2010), rejected the introduction of pedometers, for the competitiveness they were felt to introduce conflicted with the practice norms of sociability and camaraderie. The practice was not uninformed by notions of health and wellbeing, however, the participants' understandings did not converge with those centring measurement, fitness, and the setting of specific targets. Carter et al. (2018) speak of the *bio*medicalisation of everyday practices (at the expense of other health practices and related identities), through the incorporation of wearable technologies. Additionally, the social aspects of the group became more central for the participants, over time. The technology failed to be 'domesticated' into the practice. For these walkers, pedometers symbolised and promoted a 'version' of health disharmonious with their own. It is fitting to think not (only) of how the 'medical' might impinge on the 'non-medical', but of how different understandings and practices of wellbeing may interact with one another. Fullagar and O'Brien (2014) capture how, for women with depression, biomedical and 'psy-discourses' of recovery can feel a poor fit. Often, women are subject to demands to responsibly take care of both the self and others; in this context, the aforementioned discourses can be received as creating another 'task' one must do as a 'responsible' subject. Everyday leisure practices in which these women could find enjoyment became especially meaningful, as sites to manage complex emotions, and experience less demanding enactments of self. Moralisation ('healthism', Crawford, 1980) can accompany dominant medical discourses, which may introduce unwelcome forms of outwards and inwards judgement into medicalised practices. Medicalisation can be depoliticising (Zola, 1972), which is perhaps especially a concern where interventions are claimed to reduce health inequalities.

Social prescribing narratives – of holistic health, people-centred care, community empowerment, and of social capital and cohesion – are compelling, and well-liked by many patients, general practitioners (Smith and Skirvington et al., 2016), and policymakers. The role of 'link worker' is attractive, as a descriptively community-oriented and caring job, appealing to those with experience in both the public and third sectors. Although the evidence base is nascent and of mixed quality, there is reason to believe that, in some circumstances, social prescribing may be utilised to improve the wellbeing of certain people. It is an unresolved question as to how 'medicalised' the system should be, how activities should be evaluated, which activities should be on offer, and how schemes should be resourced and received. Qualitative enquiry can provide some direction here. Debate continues around the appropriate framing of the scope of social prescribing, with its role in systematically addressing health inequalities (and the social determinants of health) increasingly questioned.

1.3 Conclusion

This chapter has provided insight into scholarship exploring gardening, food growing, health, and wellbeing, and the social and political contexts in which community gardening and green social prescribing have been practiced and promoted. I have reviewed literature embedded within academic disciplines across the social and health sciences, and within biomedical and social and relational paradigms. The chapter began by characterising gardens and growing spaces as anthropologically interesting locations. I drew upon research which illustrates how gardens can be sites of social interaction, and of cultural enactment, reproduction, and resistance. Cited works have shown that gardening practices are influenced by broader social, economic, and political events and flows, and have emerged and reemerged at times of disjuncture and crisis. Next, I explored the interdisciplinary turn advocating for non-anthropocentric ways of conceiving of the world. This section considered approaches for understanding community gardens to be *multispecies* communities, and contextualised this research in unfolding debates around ethics and care in more-than-human communities.

The latter half of the chapter has focused on the relationship between health, wellbeing, community gardening, and outdoors activities more broadly. I have discussed research investigating whether gardening may promote specific health behaviours, and that which conceptualises community gardening as a social practice(s), influencing wellbeing in a more holistic and relational manner. Recalling earlier discussion, some of this work views the social and cultural dimensions of community gardening as potentially engendering wellbeing. Attention has been given, in particular, to the therapeutic landscapes literature; in the forthcoming chapters, I contribute to this literature, addressing gaps regarding the work and care involved in holding together therapeutic assemblages, and regarding the multiple external sites which shape relational therapeutic landscape experiences. This review acknowledges historical associations of the outdoors with wellbeing, and the more recent tendency to frame gardening (in addition to other tasks of leisure and maintenance) as healthful, embodied by green social prescribing. Drawing upon critical medical anthropology and public health research, I have highlighted parallel debates regarding community gardening and green social prescribing, which ask whether they can promote health *equality*, and tackle the wider determinants of health. This chapter acknowledges multiple academic and lay approaches to, and understandings of, heath, and reviews research characterising gardens as rich and meaningful spaces. In so doing, it provides context and justification for this exploration of the interaction between healthcare services and local community gardening settings.

2. Researching community gardening and growing in the North of England

2.1 Orienting the project

An appreciation of the diversity, in kind and nature, of human-plant relations cultivated in gardens and growing spaces, undergirds this research. This appreciation grew initially during the preceding master's research project (the 'pilot project'), in which I interviewed community gardening practitioners in the North of England (McGuire et al., 2022; McGuire, 2019). Growing plants, and garden-dwelling and -building, can take the form of any of a range of practices. Gardeners may grow for subsistence, for leisure, or for dietary supplement and novelty. Garden-goers might not grow at all, attracted instead to the social or sensory affordances of community gardens. Horticulturists work together for companionship, access to space, or to build community around particular goals or values. Gardens can be sites of production and consumption, of inclusion and exclusion, and of cultural reproduction, innovation, and resistance. Multiple also are the claims made of garden projects, particularly with regards to the role they may play in promoting health and wellbeing. As explored, a dialogue continues around community gardens' capacity to promote sustainable multispecies wellbeing, and to contribute to human wellbeing in a socially just manner. Cognizance of the variety in growing and garden-making practices, in all of their local particularity, and recognition of recent efforts to bridge-build into gardens, inform the study's research questions:

- How do participants experience community gardening?
    - What discourses, practices, and understandings are fostered in community gardening projects?
- How does community gardening affect health and wellbeing?
- How does the implementation of social prescribing within the NHS intersect with community gardening projects?
    - How do people interact with community gardening when it is socially prescribed?
    - What is the wider impact of social prescribing on community gardening projects?

Heeding insight from the therapeutic landscapes literature, of the contingency and variability of therapeutic experiences in green space, I explore experiences of community gardening, maintaining an openness their potentially varied and changing valences. Relatedly, I look to how this participation shapes wellbeing, with a particular focus on mental wellbeing (broadly defined). This thick exploration into the place of community gardening in people's lives aims to elucidate what may

be happening when people do and do not avail of these opportunities. Harrod et al. (2023) note the need for in-person methods, for understanding how beneficial green space experiences are maintained or constrained, particularly those supported by interpersonal relationships. Emmerson (2019) recommends an openness to the more-than-therapeutic. I adopt Emmerson's attunement to happenings not strictly oriented towards health improvement - to "what-else happens" (p595) - to furnish a fuller understanding of the feel and functions of gardens, and experiences therapeutic and otherwise. Looking for the understandings and discourses embedded in garden practices is especially important, as bridge-building into community gardening expands through green social prescribing. Turk et al. (2022) similarly recognise the need to research "whether socially prescribing activities risks medicalisation" (p6); doing so requires an understanding of the discourses, moralities, and structures which interact through this system. Others, also, ask how experiences of outdoor activities might be supported, or changed, through social prescribing (Grant and Pollard, 2023).

The choice of research area (Hazelford) is significant, for the exploration of community gardening and growing amid the expansion of green social prescribing. While the region is home to a range of assets - passionate VCS organisations, parks and nature reserves, business parks, and higher education institutions – it is also has areas of high economic deprivation and poor health outcomes. Social prescribing has been characterised as able to reduce health inequalities (National Academy for Social Prescribing, 2023; Office for Health Improvement and Disparities, 2022), and interventions often incorporate this objective (Gibson et al., 2021). Through ethnographic research, I provide insight into practices of green social prescribing and therapeutic horticulture in areas experiencing these challenges. Further, Pink (2012) notes the underrepresentation of town-based growing projects in research literatures, to which this study responds.

2.2 An ethnographic exploration of community gardening and growing in Hazelford

2.2.1 Introducing ethnographic research

Captured by Howard Becker, Richard E Park (in McKinney, 1966) exhorted students to get "their hands dirty in real research" (p71). In researching community gardens ethnographically, I have heeded his encouragement to *in situ* research, immersing myself in garden spaces, with the literal soil-marked hands of a regular gardener. Ethnographic research is described by Ortner (2006) as follows: "Minimally…[ethnography] has always meant the attempt to understand another life world using the self—as much of it as possible—as the instrument of knowing" (p42-43). While most often this entails participant observation or fieldwork, it may include other methods, similarly practiced

with “a commitment to what Geertz has called ‘‘thickness,’’ to producing understanding through richness, texture, and detail” (p43). In this research, I have carried out both participant observation and interviews, aspiring to this kind of understanding of gardening practices, and the place they hold in the lives of participants in the North of England. I have explored the potentially many roles these practices may have, the biographical contexts leading people to gardens, and the broader sociocultural and political context in which garden practices become possible and appealing, and receive (or not) support of varying kinds. This latter aim takes influence from a critical medical anthropology perspective; Singer et al. (1992) advocate for a recognition that: "the micro-level is embedded in the macro-level, while the macro-level is the embodiment of the micro-level" (p81). While I predominantly focus on up-close garden practices and the interpersonal (and inter-species) relations within, I recognise that actions and relations at other places and scales (Singer, 2004) play a role in configuring practices at the local level.

In ethnographic work, researchers participate in and observe (listen, feel, and hear) experience, and reflect. Good (1994) characterises the anthropologist’s role as participant and critic; I take the role of ‘critic’ in its reflective, interpretive, and querying spirit, rather than in one which seeks necessarily to be *critical*. While not wishing to conflate ethnography and participant observation (see Hockey and Forsey, 2012), Shah’s (2017) four aspects of participant observation describe well the approach taken. Gardening sessions were attended for a *long duration*, fourteen months beginning in July of 2021. While concerned with gardening and wellbeing, these themes were explored with an aspiration to *holism*. Attending the gardens was recognised as being only part of lives extending beyond the garden, and of longer biographies. My aim to understand more about gardening practices, green social prescribing, and their manifestation in a particular locale approximates Shah’s principle: *the revealing of social relations*. Finally, I sought this understanding by learning from and through people with these experiences: relations were made (*intimacy*) with people with knowledge routed in experiences divergent from my own, who were previously unknown (*estrangement*, or initial ‘unfamiliarity’).

As mentioned, semi-structured interviews also took place (see Appendix B for the interview schedules). Thirty people were interviewed, mostly individually, with four participants interviewed in pairs. Interviews took place in the growing spaces, cafes, and via Zoom or telephone, depending on the preference of the participant. Hockey and Forsey (2012) describe interviews as “as a moment of engagement, a site of participation in the life of the person we meet and talk with” (p75). It is with this view that I conducted interviews, seeing them as engagements that provided insight into community gardening experiences. In interviews, one can ‘intercept’ interiority (Hockey and Forsey,

2012), engaging with the more internal aspects of experience as verbalised. They can reproduce dynamics similar to those occurring outside of the interview. Interviews can be sites of reflection, of memory reconstruction, and processing. They are not unique, as *ex situ* sites of consolidation: practitioners described having meetings outside of sessions, and members mentioned sharing their experiences with family members. "*We call it the gardening club, in our house*", one member (Kim) told me: she would show her husband what she had grown or made, and he would encourage her to go each week, constructing the sessions as a valued activity for her.

The combining of interviews and participant observation was not done with a view to triangulate data, to arrive at 'the reality' of the gardens or the 'history' (Randall and Phoenix, 2009) of participants' experiences. Instead, these methods were utilised for their differing affordances in suggesting what participating in gardening does for participants, and the place it holds in their lives. Differences between interview and participant observation data are viewed, not as problems, but as potentially informative. Bell (2019), Hockey and Forsey (2012), and Giddens (1990) acknowledge that research participants often have a great deal of insight into uncertainties in, and conflicts between, their actions and words. Interviews (and situated informal conversations) allow for participants to share (and perhaps generate or elaborate on) these insights. The pairing of interviews with participation observation helps elicit the hard-to-articulate and otherwise unarticulated. While distance between words and actions can indicate gaps in self-insight, distance was also analysed for what else it might suggest. Plans that materialised differently than articulated, for example, provided insight into the shifting and flexible working landscape of practitioners.

I concluded fieldwork early in autumn of 2022, to begin the more intensive phase of writing and analysis. Through 2023 and 2024, I was able to visit some of the organisations again, to see practitioners and members, and to share updates. Over these two years, I made approximately seven visits, the final few allowing me to communicate my findings. I produced a short booklet summarising the thesis, worded and designed for attractiveness and accessibility, to be distributed to members and practitioners during these trips. I aim to share additional, more detailed research outputs with the Community Interest Company (CIC) practitioners in the first half of 2025.

2.2.1.1 Research 'at home'

Notably, in relation to estrangement (Shah, 2017) in ethnography, the distance from my home to the research sites was narrower than is often the case in anthropological research. Ethnography within one's resident country (or smaller boundary) can sometimes draw question, as going against once-

normative standards in the discipline (Clifford, 1983). Passaro (1998), researching in her home city, relays an academic's "half-joking" comment to her: "you can't take the subway to the field!" (p151). Researching in and around towns, my journeys to and from the field were usually via several buses. The academic's words encapsulate some of the concerns around relatively proximate fieldsites: might one be unable to see the field as observer or critic? Distance is often felt to accompany an 'outsider' perspective that can foster an analytical perspective, and ward against ignorance to the locally taken-for-granted. Like Passaro, I do not equate distance with 'Otherness'. She describes messy, overlapping social ontologies, in which people are not sorted into neat groups with mutually exclusive insider and outsider statuses. Instead, I recognise the informative *experiential* differences between myself and the participants, while acknowledging our commonalities. Participants brought with them diverse knowledges and life experiences, and held constellations of varyingly fluid identities, differing (to a greater or lesser extent) from one another and from myself. As in other ethnographic research, a literature-mediated comparison with sites and situations elsewhere has been an analytical asset, not as a way to acquire an 'objective' outsider perspective (as critiqued within feminist anthropology, Mahmud, 2021), but as a resource for productive defamiliarisation. On the one hand, ethnographic research has an inevitable auto-biographical (Coffey, 1999) and co-experiential quality: we learn through experiencing and sensing alongside participants, and thus similarities can be a virtue. Difference is only one source of insight. On the other, divergence can be informative: between the research participants and the researcher, or other garden-goers at elsewhere sites, documented in publications.

2.2.2 Reflexivity and positionality

While some of the assumptions underlying the subway comment are now less commonly held, these words nonetheless provide an opportunity to address questions of reflexivity and positionality: how might my own presence, knowledge, and action have shaped the ethnographic process, and the resultant findings? 'Positionality' captures how our social positions, roles, and embodiment shape our knowledge and interactions. Reflexivity, among other things, asks us to be cognizant of this: reflective on our positionality, and responsive to this in how we negotiate the field. Naples (2003) describes insiderness and outsiderness as fluid: they are not "fixed or static positions", nor are ethnographers ever wholly "inside or outside of the "community"" (p49). She encourages an attentiveness to processes through which insiderness is made. While acknowledging less mutable aspects of one's position and identity, I agree with Reyes (2020) that there is a relational and

situational character to insiderness. I thus have reflected not only on my positionality, but on how it shifted with time and across contexts.

In 2020, I emailed an organisation with a social prescribing service, and was put into contact with practitioners from Let'sGrow and Pots-and-Plates. In conversation and by email, we discussed my hopes and plans for research, and whether they might fit with the organisations' activities. I was able meet members in spring of 2021. I completed the two CICs' volunteer agreement forms, as had group members. I was both researcher and volunteer or member. The roles we take as anthropologists are hybrid (Bell, 2018); a combined term like friendly researcher, or researching volunteer might better characterise my own. Arriving at a research site via gatekeepers (here, practitioners) can potentially influence data collection. Non-gatekeeper participants may be reluctant to disclose less positive experiences to a researcher perceived to be in close relation with gatekeepers. This was averted, to some degree, by communicating to members that they would be anonymised in research outputs. Additionally, the sessions tended to have a non-hierarchical and open dynamic. It seemed that members often felt able to be communicate their (positive or negative) thoughts with practitioners, rather than holding many negative thoughts, uncommunicated to practitioners (or me). I tried to be attentive to the full range of experiences members may have, cautious not to risk omissions myself, as I carried out fieldwork.

All sessions were usually attended by 1-4 staff members, and individuals I group as 'members', but whose reasons for attending varied. At Pots-and-Plates, some had used the term volunteer to describe themselves. People joining had relatively diverse backgrounds; my presence as a researcher was perhaps part of the welcome diversity in experiences of the group. At sessions for those experiencing ill health, members sometimes asked whether newcomers were coming "*to do something*" (i.e. they were present in a work capacity), or whether they had likely arrived via health-related pathways. At such sessions, I was possibly in a more unfamiliar role in some ways, not staff nor member joining under health-related circumstances. All sites occasionally received visitors, from news organisations, the council, VCS organisations, and from a local university. At Celandine Community Garden, members tended to be resident locally, with regular attenders often volunteering for a charity (The Kitchen Table) which facilitated non-gardening activities too. My insiderness and outsiderness was relative to each site, to particular times, and to individual participants. The CICs functioned with values of kindness and inclusivity; I was made to feel welcome, and both practitioners and members were generous in supporting my participation. While insiderness is often portrayed as increasing in a linear fashion over the course of an ethnography, this was not always the case. Outsiderness could reemerge as group compositions changed, or as

groups strengthened around forms of peer support I was less able and experienced in. At Celandine Community Garden, I was less capable in negotiating the uncertain role I held, not resident, volunteer, or staff; this was perhaps evident in the low response to invitations to participate. I responded by reducing the frequency of my planned visits to the space, conscious my presence may have been felt to be an intrusion. At sites in which my role seemed to fit more easily, I was conscious too that more private spaces within the microgeographies of the gardens could emerge. It was sometimes appropriate, I felt, to not always seek to be 'inside' of more private moments between participants, particularly at health-oriented sessions. Discussions with me about the health-related aspects of community gardening came more freely in interviews, for a number of the participants: the interview space seemed to cultivate the sort of private spaces I had not always done in the gardens.

I have addressed the role I held relative to pre-existing roles, and how this may have been understood and experienced by participants. Other researcher characteristics can be significant, too. Opportunities for commensality emerged often, making conspicuous that I am vegan. This was accommodated very kindly and frequently by practitioners and members, who often supplied plant-based milks, and informed me which foods I could consume. Some others present also followed vegan or vegetarian diets. Aware that vegans can be found to be a moralising presence (Brookes and Małgorzata Chałupnik, 2023; Kurz et al., 2020), and of the contentiousness of veganism within food cultivation communities and discourses (Weis and Ellis, 2020), I mostly refrained from initiating conversations about veganism. I was participant-led, attentive to these conversations where they arose, cautious not to provoke feelings of judgement regarding consumption facilitated by the organisations or by individuals.

It is worthy of note, too, that I am monolingual. The majority of participants within the growing projects were anglophone. However, at a park-based session I began attending halfway through the fieldwork period, some of those using the 'non-gardening' sections of the space (particularly the cooking workshops and the community supermarket) spoke little English. These individuals were unfortunately not recruited as research participants, despite the value of insight into their experiences, and attraction to the non-gardening practices within the space. I was unable to hire a translator, due to resource and time constraints. Future research might incorporate from the outset resourcing for a translator, or a multilingual researcher or research assistant. For a similar reason, I did not attend gardening sessions ran by a local charity supporting people seeking asylum.

2.2.3 Doing, writing, and thinking: the process of describing and analysing

Capturing and reflecting upon participant observation took the conventional form of fieldnote writing: descriptive and analytical notetaking and memo-making. In the findings section, fieldnotes are accompanied by the month and year of the happenings detailed. Multiple approaches to taking fieldnotes have been described, some self-consciously partial, and others more comprehensive (for example, Emerson's, 1995, and Wolfinger's, 2002, discussions of a 'salience hierarchy' approach, and a 'comprehensive' one); I combined aspects of both. I practiced a comprehensiveness in notetaking, aware that what I might later consider salient may not be apparent in the moment. Spradley (1980) provides a list of concerns to guide writing, that describes some of the aspects I was attentive to: space, actor, activity, object, act, event, time, goal, and feeling. While primarily concerned with the experiences of participants, some more reflective notes were made about my own thoughts and feelings, contributing towards a more reflexive analysis (and acknowledging the intersubjective nature of participant observation). Conscious of the tendency during fieldwork to privilege one sense over others, sights as well as sounds were described - tastes, haptic phenomena, and the multisensory and elusive 'feel' of sessions. Tilley (2006) argues that the multisensory aspects of gardening can be both profound, yet are often unarticulated: I was cautious not to reproduce this myself. There is an inherent partiality, however, to all fieldnotes. Some of this partiality came from my locatedness within specific areas of the growing spaces. As I later elaborate, the growing spaces were textured microgeographies, and immersion in one of their emergent zones meant absence from another. One practitioner described this partiality as part of his own experience of the sites: "*I find I don't have an overview of the whole session*", he told me, before describing the more involved contact he would have with two or three people, in a particular area of the growing space. Emerson (1983) recommends being attentive to the rhythms of research participants, in ethnographic fieldnotes, while Becker (1998) recommends paying attention to what participant do (without excluding aspects of sessions they do not give attention). My movement around, and insight into, the spaces was thus guided largely by the structure of sessions, and by participants' taking up of certain spaces and practices within. This in itself was guided by the direction of practitioners, of regular members, and by the movement and growth of plants and materials, to which we would respond. Fieldnotes were usually written chronologically, which aided in describing the flow and rhythm of sessions.

I wrote fieldnotes after sessions, usually on the same day. More analytical memo-writing occurred throughout fieldwork, and while typing the audio-recorded interviews into transcripts. Okely (2002) describes the iterative nature of writing and analysis, description, and interpretation: "Interpretation

move from evidence to ideas and theory, then back again" (p32). The process of analysis intensified as interviewing and participant observation drew to a close. Transcripts and fieldnotes were uploaded into NVivo 12, to be coded.

2.2.3.1 Data analysis

The transcripts and fieldnotes were subject to thematic analysis, in which I iteratively derived and grouped codes and themes. Braun and Clarke (2006) provide a simple definition: "Thematic analysis is a method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data. It minimally organizes and describes your data set in (rich) detail" (p79). They note that it often goes beyond this; researchers often look for both manifest and latent meanings, theorising about the ideas and assumptions underlying data, and the circumstances of their production. As is typical for this analysis method, this process began with more descriptive and 'broad brush' coding, and moved towards more analytical coding, and to grouping codes. Codes were searched for themes, and themes reviewed. The deriving and refining of themes continued into the thesis writing process; writing is a kind of thinking (Menary, 2007). This process was primarily inductive, centring the research sites and the ethnographic data in generating themes and codes. However, as in most anthropological research (de Sardan, 2015), an uneven mix induction and deduction were combined in the project: in the loose influence from literature and theory on the research questions, and the analysis process. At the gardens, I witnessed and participated in varied gardening experiences, as different people, plants, tools, and weathers assembled at different sites and times. The discovering and acknowledging of the contingency of 'green' therapeutic experience gelled well with the continually revisited literatures articulating relational ontologies. Candea (2010) and Puig de la Bellacasa (2017) cite Latour (2005) and Mol (1999) in describing a 'real constructivism', (*sans* 'social') constructivism, and an ontological constructivism. These ideas resonate with how I depict participants' experiences as emerging from (or constructed through) the coming-together of diverse constituents of growing sessions: human and nonhuman, material and immaterial. The research findings are thus framed by a constructivism with (to adapt Holstein and Gubrium's, 2008, phrasing) new materialist or posthumanist impulses. Social practice theories, positing the dependence of practices on meanings, materials, and competencies (Shove et al., 2012), and their structured and structuring nature (Bourdieu, 1977; Giddens, 1984; Ortner, 2006), have been influential also.

2.2.3.2 Research epistemology

I do not represent the arriving at codes and themes as their emerging from the data or fieldsites; Braun and Clarke (2006) critique this notion, that codes pre-exist in our data (and world) for us to excavate. Instead, I adopt an epistemological position that has been analogised to that of a traveller rather than miner (Kvale, 2007), approaching data and the following findings as co-constructed through the situated interactions between me, researcher participants, and the research sites. The description and interpretation of these events through the production and analysis of fieldnotes (and writing of the thesis), are further sites of knowledge construction: an author-driven construction and interpretation. Hence, the importance of being explicit about how the findings came to be produced: through iterative interpretation, interaction, with reflexivity, and in dialogue with academic literatures. Notably, it is impossible to capture all of the potential influences on one's interpretations, and to have total self-insight when practicing reflexivity. Conversations are not taken as exact descriptions of growing sessions, but as moments in which knowledge about gardens and gardeners is co-constructed, through latent, manifest, and performative aspects of communication.

The result is co-constructed, contingent knowledge about community gardening in a region in the North of England. While not generalisable in the statistical-probabilistic sense, it provides insight into community gardening and growing for health and otherwise, that may have a generalisability more appropriate to qualitative research (Smith, 2018). Smith argues that readers of qualitative research, particularly that which is built upon thick and rich descriptions, may (where appropriate) generalise concepts or aspects of findings to other settings. Important compositional and contextual features might thus be noted, such as the size and age (small, and relatively young) of the VCS organisations and projects, the mental health-oriented focus of the sessions linked to social prescribing pathways, the UK healthcare context (publicly funded, and facing issues around resourcing and access), the pandemic or post-pandemic environment, and the research location (a nonmetropolitan region in northern England).

2.2.4 Ethics

This project received ethical approval from the Durham University Department of Anthropology Ethics Committee, in June of 2021.

I introduced myself to the majority of people I met as a researcher, and was sometimes described as such by staff members. Prior to beginning research, I volunteered semi-regularly at some of the

sessions for approximately four months; during this period, I said that I had plans to do research soon. These introductions constituted part of the informed consent process. At two gardening sessions, I explained the research project simultaneously to the participations, around a table and campfire area. At sessions without these collective moments, and for participants arriving later into fieldwork, explanations were given individually. Other aspects of obtaining informed consent included the creation of accessible research forms (a consent form, privacy notice, an abridged privacy notice, and information sheet; see Appendix A) to be given to each (potential) participant. Wording, fonts, images, and colour were chosen with the aim of producing unintimidating, clear forms. Following feedback from a participant, an additional privacy notice form was adapted from the 'generic' one, in this more welcoming format. Participants were told that their names, and place names, would be replaced with pseudonyms. All of the participants signed a consent form, including sections indicating that consent was optional, and that they may withdraw their continued participation at any time. Verbal consent was obtained from people met infrequently, whose experiences are included minimally. I recognise consent to be a process, and tried to be attentive to indications that my presence might have been less welcome. During fieldwork, I reaffirmed with practitioners that they were happy with my continuing presence, until the planned end of regular fieldwork. My presence as researcher was reinforced as I invited people to participate in interviews, and as I (re-)introduced myself when new members arrived.

Several of the community growing sessions aimed to support individuals experiencing ill health (primarily, mental health ill health); carrying out research with vulnerable participants necessitates specific ethical considerations. For the assurance of the organisations, I had a Disclosure and Barring Service check, prior to recruiting garden members as participants. To develop my skills in recognising signs of mental ill health, and in providing appropriate support, I completed a Mental Health First Aider course. This two-day (online) course was delivered Mental Health First Aid England CIC, and aims to develop abilities in identifying mental ill health, engaging in supportive conversations, and encouraging support-seeking. My role here entailed providing a non-judgemental and listening ear, and occasionally encouraging support-seeking. Participants were informed that confidentiality may be breached, if risk of harm or danger was disclosed. I was careful not to represent myself to be a practicing or training healthcare professional, reaffirming this when needed.

My permission to come to the sessions was granted by the practitioners, with whom I consulted repeatedly prior to inviting people to participate in the research. As others have in similar contexts (Black, 2020), I sought the practitioners' guidance. At most of the growing spaces, they did not advise against approaching certain individuals to participate. At one of the green social prescribing

projects ('Taking Notice'), I was advised against asking most of the participants, who were often very new to the project. The earliness with which I gave invitations was something I was cautious of. First sessions could be anxiety-provoking for members, and invitations to participate may have contributed to feelings of overwhelm. Pitt (2013) describes how she waited to build rapport before interviewing gardeners, which could mean missing opportunities to interview those who left. I waited both for rapport, and for participants to develop more comfort in the space. This meant acquiring less insight from those who attended the sites only briefly, although hopefully with the benefit of not impinging on first sessions, and initiating interviews on a more familiar basis. Esmene et al. (2020) note how some walking group members appreciated moments alone; the researcher honoured this. I tried to be similarly attentive: permission to attend (by practitioners) or participate in research (from individuals) was not taken to grant access to all spaces and moments.

Interviews are potentially transformative events (Randall and Phoenix, 2009), capable of influencing participants' understanding of their own lives in positive or negative ways. Interviews should not render participants vulnerable to harm (Sinding and Aronson, 2003). In general, and especially during interviews, I was acutely aware that some of the topics broached could be considered sensitive. Health and wellbeing are often emotive topics, moralised (Crawford, 1980), and private, to some degree. Members referred via health-related pathways were likely to presently be experiencing ill health, or stressors broadly defined. I conducted interviews in ways which sought to minimise the possibility of members feeling pressured to discuss matters that might provoke upset, unwelcome reflection, or disclosures more personal than they would wish. Participants were beforehand informed in interview invitations that they may be asked about health and wellbeing, and that interviews (and individual questions) were optional. This was raised again, at the beginning of interviews. I aimed to phrase questions such that participants did not feel pressured to answer in a certain way, and tried to be attentive to nonverbal signs of participants' comfort (phrasing was especially important in telephone interviews). Sinding and Aronson (2003) include these steps as part of ongoing process consenting (see Munhall, 1989). The participants, organisations, and places have been assigned pseudonyms to protect their anonymity. Details have sometimes been replaced with more vague descriptions, and some quotations and fieldnote excerpts have not been attributed to individual participants, to this end.

2.2.5 Research and the COVID-19 pandemic

As I began planning the project in 2019, the COVID-19 pandemic began. From the outset, adapting to the pandemic was necessary. During fieldwork, I undertook regular lateral flow tests, and received

the available vaccines. On bus rides to sessions, I wore a mask, and opened windows to ensure airflow. In the study's ethics application, I sought permission to carry out remote and in-person research, so that I may switch to the former should it be necessary for the safety of participants and myself. I kept an active awareness of COVID-19 infection rates, and adhered to government and university guidelines around social contact. I suspended my attendance at the projects, in January of 2022, owing to climbing infection rates. I used this time to remotely interview a small number of participants. The pilot research project, taking place in 2020, used entirely remote methods (phone and video interviews).

The COVID-19 pandemic was part of the context of members' participation, and the practitioners' and organisations' work. While sessions were mostly outdoors, and thus restrictions around social contact were less acutely felt than in indoor settings, the pandemic nonetheless shaped the project. Compounding ill health, due to the pandemic, influenced project membership bases. Some members were especially driven to seek out community gardening, owing to isolation. It is likely, also, that worsening health prevented certain individuals from attending community gardens. Demands on social prescribing services locally seem to limit the number of link worker figures with which I spoke. My carefulness in pursuing wellbeing-related questions was especially important, amid the stresses of the pandemic. As discussed, the relationships between the outdoors and wellbeing were increasingly recognised through 2020-2022, which may have impacted the funding landscape for 'green' VCS organisations. Egerer et al. (2022) argue for the continued fostering of the benefits of gardening, beyond times of crisis.

2.3 Community gardening and growing in Hazelford: the gardens, the people, and the organisations

Beginning in July of 2021, I attended 3-6 growing sessions per week. These sessions were located in a region of the North of England which I call Hazelford, around a cluster of towns. Like many places in the UK, areas of high and low affluence were in close proximity. The local authority areas in which these towns sit had high levels of income deprivation, and deprivation gaps (ONS, 2021). In 2021, the largest town, Partford, had a Health Index ranking within the bottom ten percent of local authority areas; the second largest, Dawsby, ranked within the bottom thirty percent (ONS, 2023). Hazelford is post-industrial; waves of deindustrialisation brought the difficulties associated with losing secure (if challenging) employment, for individuals and communities. During fieldwork, there were moments of remembering and rediscovering the region's historic landscapes and achievements, from its

allotments to its industrial exports. Parts of these towns have been included in academic and popular media discussions of 'left behind' places. This concept or imaginary has been used - especially as inequalities have grown following the 2008 financial crisis (MacKinnon et al., 2022) - to describe towns and rural places with relatively weak economic and social infrastructure, and high deprivation. However, it has been critiqued as oversimplifying and divisive (Boswell et al., 2020; Pike et al., 2024). While in the region, I heard conversations about poor employment opportunities, and negative perceptions of aspects of life in its towns, in particular. However, I also encountered efforts to build upon and celebrate the area's strengths - particularly its industrial heritage, diversity, green and blue spaces, and educational and cultural resources.

I established contact with two small (<5 employees) CICs: *Let'sGrow*, based primarily in the towns Dawsby and Birchden, and *Pots-and-Plates*, with most of their growing sessions hosted in and around Partford. Each facilitated a range of growing sessions, across different kinds of spaces: schools, churches, community centre gardens, an orchard, street planters, and more conventional community gardens, to name a few. The diversity of these spaces, of activities within them, and of participants' understandings of their activities, leads me to tend towards using the term 'growing spaces', more often than 'gardens'. Some of the sessions specifically aimed to support those experiencing mental ill health, and others were open to a broader range of members. Self-referral, and self-guided arrival (in less medicalised terms), also occurred. These two CICs, both with a focus on community growing, are the predominant ones followed during the course of the project. Each had a focus on growing projects, wellbeing, community work, and food, varyingly manifested, and changing over the course of fieldwork. A small number of charities were involved regularly at some of the research sites, with varied focuses on food, cooking, community, and youth work: a practitioner from one, The Kitchen Table, became a longer-term research participant, and two people from other organisations were interviewees. Finally, partway through fieldwork, a larger health charity (*The Sage Project*) began a green social prescribing project (*Taking Notice*) involving Pots-and-Plates as a delivery partner; I semi-frequently attended some of the project's gardening-oriented prescribed activities, in addition to attending a number of the project meetings. Both CICs were young. In addition to receiving short-term funding grants, working across a number of locations, the changing affordances of growing spaces, and having connections with diverse institutions, some of the activities facilitated lasted only a short time. Consequently, I also attended a number of less regular activities: gardening in street planters and cultural institution gardens, celebration events, presentations at a local university, and educational evening sessions.

Amit (2000) calls the fieldsite constructed, not pre-existing, and describes the process of construction as being shaped by "the conceptual, professional, financial, and relational opportunities and resources accessible to the ethnographer" (p6). My own construction process was thus shaped by relationships established with the CIC practitioners (and their own resources, capital, and negotiations used in gaining access to spaces), by public transport routes, and by a guiding interest in gardening, growing, and intersecting practices. Buses and walks from bus stops were sites of reflection and contemplation, and car rides, cafes, a pub, and a participant's house sites for conversation. Concerned with the place of gardening in people's broader lives, these additional spaces provided some contextualisation, although insight also came through conversations about biographies and weekly routines outside the gardens. Fieldwork inevitably involves both presences and absences (Amit, 2000); in my prior discussions of ethical considerations, I suggested some of the absences of the research project. It is noteworthy, too, that each CIC facilitated activities I did not attend, including those aimed exclusively at children. This research is not a thorough account of the CICs, but an exploration of community growing by adults in Hazelford. Given in Table 1 are the sessions I went to repeatedly; in a usual week, three or four sessions were attended. Detailed below are the most frequently visited sessions and their locations, and descriptions of the two main CICs. Appendix C provides tables concisely describing the organisations, sessions, and research sites.

	Monday	**Tuesday**	**Wednesday**	**Thursday**	**Friday**
AM	*Taking Notice* at Clover Farm Garden (The Sage Project)		*Volunteer Wednesdays* at The Apple Grove (Pots-and-Plates)	*Wenlock Welcome* at Wenlock Park (Let'sGrow, The Kitchen Table and other local VCS organisations)	*Head Outdoors* at Wenlock Park
PM	*Celandine Garden Club* at Celandine Community Garden (Let'sGrow, The Kitchen Table)		*Taking Notice* at Orchid Park Allotment (Pots-and-Plates, The Sage Project)		

Table 1: A timetable of regular growing sessions

2.3.1 The research sites and sessions

Wenlock Park

Approximately a fifteen-minute walk from the centre of Dawsby, sat Wenlock Park (Figure 1). Access to the gated park was managed by a number of VCS organisations working locally, including Let'sGrow, with another organisation serving as the main tenant. Greeting you initially when walking through the gates was a portable-cabin style building, joined later in the fieldwork by an area with benches, and a storage facility for food. Walking fifty or so metres past another small building, a games area, and a long strip of seasonally variable vegetation, you would arrive at the allotment area. It housed a polytunnel, growing beds, a chicken enclosure, a shed, and a (gradually less, with work) bramble-filled concrete alley running alongside. At *Wenlock Welcome* sessions, tables were arranged not far in front of the gates, around which a community supermarket was ran by one of the VCS organisations. Inside the cabin building were kitchen facilities, couches, and tables surrounded by small plastic chairs. The Kitchen Table facilitated cooking activities at these *Welcome* sessions. These were busy, with cooking, shopping, and gardening co-occurring, and without restrictions on attendance. *Head Outdoors* sessions, contrastingly, tended to be quieter. They too took place at Wenlock Park, and were attended by those arriving through health-related pathways (including self-referral, and social prescribing and referral from health services and organisations). Member support needs were shaped by varied health conditions relating to mood, anxiety, pain, trauma, neurological conditions, and caring responsibilities. Initially, the sessions were linked with The Sage Project, who had supported varied iterations of similar projects locally for some years. They withdrew relatively early in the fieldwork period, and the sessions continued to accept referrals from health pathways (including The Sage Project, varied points in the healthcare system, and local authority care services) for the duration of fieldwork. Head Outdoors sessions began in the cabin, with coffees and teas, and a group "*check-in*", followed by gentle instruction, leading into varied horticultural activities. Sessions concluded with a commensal moment – often a soup cooked inside, or over a wood-fired stove outside – as people ate together, and filtered homewards. Regular participants to *Head Outdoors* included Alistair, Sarah, Denise, Loraine, Gerard, Lisa, Robert, and Beth. Some of these members also attended Wenlock Welcome, in addition to Cynthia and Marion – the latter eventually began to provide help in a voluntary capacity at Head Outdoors. Let'sGrow practitioners participating in the research included Thomas, Phillip, Jane, and Jack.

Figure 1: Scenes from Wenlock Park

The Apple Grove

The Apple Grove (Figure 2) was situated more peripherally to Hazelford's urban centres, located on the large grounds of a medium-sized charity with whom Pots-and-Plates had a relationship. *Volunteer Wednesdays* at The Apple Grove primarily involved two adjacent areas: a dense heritage orchard, and a small clearing with a campfire area, shed, and chairs. It was described by some as having a "*wild*" feel, cushioned and sheltered by expansive areas of plants and trees, and with few built features. The area was fond to many locally, previously open to the public, but now used primarily by VCS organisations to facilitate activities for specific groups. *Volunteer Wednesdays* were bookended with refreshments (teas and coffees to begin, and a warm meal to conclude, usually). Activities filling the two or three hours in between could vary, including seed-sowing, pruning, cooking, craft, and more. Prior to fieldwork, Pots-and-Plates had run a weekly group at the site, for people experiencing mental ill health or risk of suicide. The group became the base of Pots-and-Plates' volunteering program, no longer specifically aimed at those experiencing mental ill health. Some members continued on from the prior group, and one participant arrived through a social prescribing pathway during fieldwork. Pots-and-Plates began a small-scale agricultural project during the fieldwork period, and some of the recruited members thus began to utilise more of the site, for food growing. Although not all present at the conclusion of fieldwork, members at Volunteer Wednesdays participating in the research included Gillian, George, Shaun, Milly, and Alistair, and practitioners included Samantha, Natasha, and Heather.

Figure 2: A view of The Apple Grove

Celandine Community Garden

Celandine Community Garden (Figure 3) was created in Birchden around the time I began volunteering with Let'sGrow, on a piece of land within a terraced residential area. The removal of a disused building years previously had created an area of green space – an opportunity utilised by Let'sGrow and The Kitchen Table, who repurposed it as a gardening space with local residents. Most weeks of the year, a small group would meet in the space, creating and using growing beds, a pergola, and seating area. Some space was left uncultivated, for wildlife. Members met once a week, during a two-hour *Garden Club* (to borrow Kim's descriptor) slot. Usership fluctuated, but included a core group who participated in The Kitchen Table's activities in other sites. In the school holiday periods, children would often come along, with other organisations and individuals invited to help with craft or decorating activities. In winter, it was adorned with Christmas decorations; in summer, wildflowers bloomed next to rows of potato, beetroot, and broad bean plants. New facilities were gradually added to the space, with connections to toilet and cooking facilities coming after I had stopped attending regularly. The members Kim, Luke, and Martha participated in the research, in addition the practitioners Thomas (Let'sGrow) and Angela (The Kitchen Table).

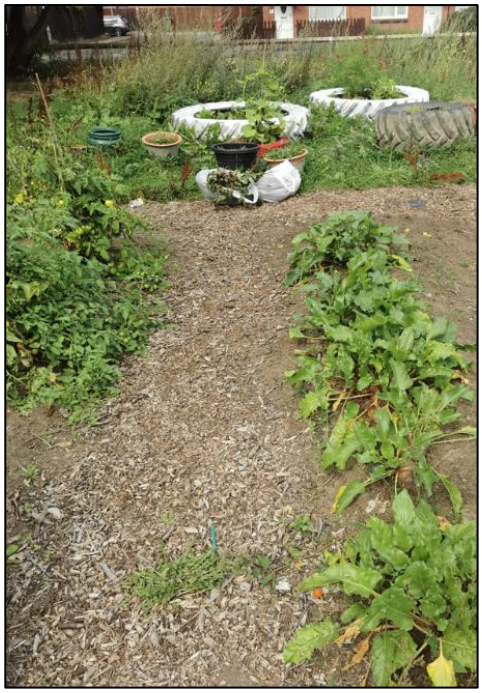


Figure 3: Growing beds and a space for wildflowers at Celandine Community Garden

Clover Farm Garden and Orchid Park Allotment

Having been introduced to The Sage Project's *Taking Notice* green social prescribing project, of which *Pots-and-Plates* were a part, one of the employees shared with me a timetable of weekly activities. The timetable commenced from Spring of 2022; I attended the farm and allotment activities semi-regularly, from May until August. Clover Farm sat on the outskirts of Partford, approximately a twenty-minute drive away. Separate to the larger farm was a small, gravelled area with raised beds (Figure 4), that Taking Notice had been given permission to use. Sessions were usually spent doing one or two gardening tasks, with sporadic breaks where individuals had refreshments, peeked at cats or sheep nearby, or sat in chairs for respite from the sweltering sun of the 2022 heatwave. Present at this site usually were a small number (1-4) of referred members, and James, the engagement practitioner at Taking Notice (joined occasionally by link workers).

Within the centre of Partford's Orchid Park was a second site utilised by *Taking Notice*. This allotment had a polytunnel, composting facility, a storage building, and benches (Figure 5). Usually used by people associated with a local charity, an afternoon was carved out for gardening and crafting activities, for individuals with social prescriptions. At the sessions I attended, there were two or fewer of these individuals; the reasons for which are explored in 6.2.3. The small available areas at both of these sites meant that staff had to be resourceful in devising activities there. Three practitioners involved in Taking Notice were recruited as research participants: Natasha (Pots-and-

Plates), James, and Jennifer. Additionally, two external practitioners, encountered incidentally through visiting Orchid Park Allotment, participated as interviewees: Connie and Haabeel. Both were involved in organisations supporting people seeking refuge. One Taking Notice member was recruited as a participant, named Farhad.

Figure 4: Clover Farm Garden

Figure 5: Orchard Park Allotment seating area

2.3.2 Practitioners and members: introducing the research participants

Having described the key research sites and gardening projects, I now introduce the research participants (n= 32). Three participants were only interviewees, and two were included only via fieldnotes; the remainder were participants in both components of the research. I begin first with those holding paid roles at the organisations, grouping people working at the CICs and charities as 'practitioners'. The breadth of their roles has made finding a suitable name for them challenging. One programme, supported by Social Farms & Gardens, has used the portmanteau 'gardeniser', combining 'garden' and 'organiser' to cover such roles. The programme (Gardeniser, n.d.) describes a gardeniser as part technician, landscape designer, expert, facilitator, trainer, counsellor, and friend, giving insight into the skills often required of those working in community growing projects.

The practitioners at the CICs brought with them varied expertise, accumulated through years working within the private or third sectors, and through the pursuit of personal interests. They drew upon other experiences and qualifications in their work: in teaching, horticulture, community engagement and youth work, and cookery. Several described lifelong passions for food or horticulture, beginning in childhood. Other interests and experiences unevenly informed different practitioners' work: in permaculture and agroecology, environmental activism, and nature-based crafts. Some of the practitioners worked full-time for the organisations, while others were employed part-time, or hourly, for certain sessions. In terms of health-related training, none of the full-time staff held healthcare-related graduate qualifications. One of the Let'sGrow practitioners (Jane) hired to attend Head Outdoors sessions was qualified in mental health social work, and a part-time and short-term practitioner (Heather) at Pots-and-Plates had some training and experience in working with people with mental health conditions.

The other group of participants with paid roles were those employed within social prescribing pathways. All were linked to The Sage Project, including a senior staff member (Phillipa), a link worker (Matthew), a Taking Notice project manager (Jennifer), and somebody in a hybrid 'engagement' practitioner role (James), akin to both a link worker and session delivery practitioner. The practitioners were aged mostly in their thirties and forties, and there was an approximately equal share of male and female practitioners. In total, there were fourteen research participants with paid roles, spread across VCS organisations.

The eighteen research participants present in a voluntary capacity are grouped as 'members'. Reasons for joining the growing projects were diverse. 'Members' thus includes both those joining through health pathways (elsewhere called patients, service users, or clients), and other pathways (perhaps most often called volunteers). One emic term did not dominate at the sites; some tended to use 'volunteer', and at others, a collective term was rarely used. The infrequency of use of a collective term seemed to reflect desires to create non-hierarchy and communality (furthered also, for example, by end-of-session meals being shared by members and practitioners) between those arriving via all pathways, and between staff and members. Members ranged in age from early twenties to seventy, with the majority being in their forties or fifties. Excluding non-research participants, approximately two thirds of members were female, and one third male. They spanned a wide range of education and occupational backgrounds; during fieldwork, the majority were not in employment, most often for reasons relating to health. Most were associated primarily with one of the CICs, with some crossover.

2.4 Conclusion

This chapter has outlined the aims and questions guiding this study, the research and analysis methods used, and the research sites, participants, and facilitating organisations. The chapter began by framing this ethnographic project. I have described a motivating interest in diversity in community gardening practices, and in experiences of community gardening in Hazelford, as gardens build bridges with social prescribing services. I next discussed the interview and participant observation methods employed, and included reflections on my epistemological position, and on reflexivity and positionality in the field. I have detailed the ethical considerations entailed within this project, including those which relate to researching during the COVID-19 pandemic. Finally, I introduced Hazelford, the VCS organisations (Pots-and-Plates, Let'sGrow, The Kitchen Table, and The Sage Project), the key gardening and growing spaces (Wenlock Park, The Apple Grove, Celandine Community Garden, Clover Farm Garden, and Orchid Park Allotment), and the practitioners and members who became research participants.

The findings chapters follow these introductions, the first of which focuses on connection-making in the gardens and growing spaces. I now move on to illustrate how the gardens were spaces of encounter, with interactions occuring within broader garden assemblages. I explore a variety of connections and affiliations found and made, involving people, plants, landscapes, and collective projects. The section provides insight into different kinds of connection, and how they might emerge and cascade into others.

3. Connecting to people and plants, connecting through people and plants

A welcome response to forms of isolation that accompanied life transitions, relocations, unwellness, and living through a pandemic, the growing spaces provided opportunities for connection. Experiences of isolation were common to participants, who found benefit in the connections they built with those who they found to be like-minded and like-situated. Some participants described socialising infrequently outside of the sessions, while for others, relations outside the growing spaces were complemented by those inside them.

In section 3.1, I explore senses of connection that were rooted in recognising sameness in others, from the more surface-level sharing of gardening-related interests, to deeper feelings of shared values and substance, to the experiential empathy wrought through similar experiences of mental ill health and familial care. Loosely similar interests – the environment, outdoors, or wildlife – were often part of people's attraction to the sessions, be they a strong motivator, or a factor that nudged them in the direction of one prescribed activity over another. In these spaces were chances to share and expand such interests with other people, with whom participants perceived themselves as sharing enthusiasms, and to some extent, qualities. Head Outdoors participants felt they were in the "*same boat*" with regards to mental health, facilitating comfort and peer-support in sessions. In 3.2, I consider the ways in which connections were made through sharing space and working together; sources of commonality were not only formed prior to engagement, but through shared experiences in these assemblages. Working together on tasks facilitated both more fleeting and enduring socialities, alongside feelings of belonging to the communities of these spaces. In 3.3, I turn to the ways in which participants formed bonds of different kinds with 'nature'. For members, community gardening involved forming connections of varied kinds and strengths with and through place, people, and nature.

This exploration of diverse connections builds upon Duff's (2010; 2011; 2012) work on enabling places and resources, understanding place experience largely through the practices and interactions afforded. Duff uses this concept in his relational accounts of how places support recovery, through facilitating the utilisation of material, social, and affective resources. I highlight how features of these sociomaterially constituted places were engaged or availed of, both in the more directed work of recovery, *and* in broader efforts to enjoy, maintain, and caretake place and community. This latter point reflects my concern with the context of community gardening (by those who do and do not describe themselves as in recovery), and agreement with Emmerson (2019), who states that the therapeutic and more-than-therapeutic are relational. I view place-based connections or encounters

as enabling resources, with material, social, and affective aspects and benefits. The framing of connection and encounter permits the exploration of experiences varied in valence and kind, while preserving the embedded multidimensionality of experiences in garden assemblages. This framing allows me to build upon literature exploring the specifics of encounters in green spaces, and their relationship to different outcomes of garden interactions (Pitt, 2018; Bell, Leyshon, and Phoenix, 2019). I provide insight into interpersonal variation in the kinds of affective pull these spaces have for participants, and practitioners' ambitions to foster more specific kinds of connection.

3.1 Similar interests, values, and experiences

An interest in things 'outdoorsy' was common to most participants, with different intensities and flavours. An affinity for the outdoors was sometimes accompanied by knowledge or curiosity about specific domains: nature and conservation, allotment-keeping, hydroponics, and permaculture were interests of different members, acquired during or prior to joining the sessions. With more niche interests, usually one or two people could be found with whom to share information and passions. Others were open to learn, and might hear more in-depth conversations as they worked.

An "*outdoor person*", and one "*worried about the planet*", the sessions appealed to Sarah's desire to be outside, and concerns about the environment. Sarah was in her fifties; while not working now, she had formerly been active in her work. Health problems had made rigorous and "*coordination*"-requiring activities challenging. Gardening, she told me, satisfied her need to be outdoors, without leading to overexertion. Initially less familiar with *this* outdoor activity, she had attended a beginners' gardening course facilitated by Natasha prior to attending Head Outdoors. A foundation point that left her with curiosity, she went on to develop her knowledge further inside and outside of the sessions. She had become somebody that others turned to for guidance at sessions; she credited her knowledge to the practitioners, alongside books and videos from the worlds of organic gardening and permaculture. In Wenlock Park, she found others sharing similar passions; this commonality an enabling resource, facilitating learning and excitement. In a Head Outdoors session, a practitioner (Jack) showed Sarah his recent purchase of an unusual variety of seeds, as people pottered around the polytunnel:

> *"It's great being able to talk to people that are as excited about this as I am",* Sarah said (April 2022)

Four or so Head Outdoors participants took a more active interest in the permaculture-inspired gardening that linked Jack and Sarah. The projects could be an "*outlet*" (George) for nature-based

passions not always shared with friends or family, in a setting in which they gained additional interest and relevance. As Milly told me, of The Apple Grove session:

> "*Everyone has like, this common interest of like nature…it's just nice…I do actually talk about nature quite a lot with them. But then you just don't find yourself talking about that with people in your everyday life. So it's quite nice to have that with people there*." (Milly, member, Pots-and-Plates)

She was one of the younger members, who found connection through this shared interest. While some participants – particularly practitioners – were more frequently turned to for information, each member brought with them their own interests and knowledge, be it a fact about wildlife, or a knack for whittling:

> Almost everyone spent most of the session around the campfire, getting on with different jobs. Milly sat and repaired the bug hotel that Heather had made… At one point, Milly pointed out a huge woodlouse that had already moved in to the house. "*They're crustaceans, you know"* said Shaun. "*really*?!"…"*Yeah, you get land crustaceans too"*. While people got on with their activities, the conversations drifted between nature-related things, non-nature related things, and quietness. (April 2022)

> Gillian showed us how to use the shaving horse [a wooden structure, combining both a place to sit while whittling wood, and a steadying vice], going first to make a label; Shaun split pieces of wood while we did this. I ended up sitting and chatting with two members for 10 minutes, and then the three of us went over. It turned out that Gillian had built the shaving horse…Another member and I watched as she pulled the blade towards herself, shaving down the piece of wood – she offered us it to feel, telling us how lovely the smooth surface was to touch. She had a little crowd, watching and listening – it was easy and calming to watch. (May 2022)

At different points, members experienced the pleasures of giving and receiving knowledge, sure somebody would be there to listen to, verify, or build on what they knew. Gillian described how she enjoyed seeing others use the shaving horse, while Beth valued the opportunity to show others how to cook:

> "*I just enjoy it because we, we're trying to pass on our skills to other people*" (Beth, member, Let'sGrow)

Gillian was a keen learner, often learning new skills in craft and cultivation online, through previous volunteering, books, or from her adult children.

When asked what she thought was important about sessions, Marion, like many others, spoke of practical, social, and emplaced learning:

> "*Learning…knowledge that you didn't have before, about plants, or leaves, or things you can eat"* (Marion, member, Let'sGrow)

She would sometimes tell her grandchild what she had learned – another instance of intergenerational connection through nature and horticulture. Knowledge was sometimes co-produced as participants collaborated on tasks, checking in with one another for discernments or reassurance. An initial desire to be outdoors, for George, grew into a familiarity with scything, pruning, and apple-pressing. The practitioners were skilled and well-connected, and occasionally invited people with certain specialist knowledges along. A session on hedgelaying delivered by a visiting CIC practitioner was a particular favourite. Fellow participants allowed for the practice and recognition of interests and identities. They could be an interactive audience with which to reinforce somewhat relational identities; the status of good cook reaffirmed as participants enjoyed meals, or as charitable community member, evident as participants watched their vegetables be taken home by others.

While passions for permaculture, or openness to nature-based activities, could be activity-oriented shared interests, the commonalities among participants could be taken to run deeper. A sense of being in the company of others with certain values or dispositions was felt by some: interest in the outdoors, the environment, or community-based projects was believed to be indicative of, and attractive to, certain sorts of people. Introspection, care, empathy, non-judgment, curiosity, and ambitiousness were qualities participants recognised and valued in others at the garden, who had been described variously as "*life's givers*", as "[*having] an ambition*", and as thinking about "*their place in the world*". Maurer (2020) finds, in some community gardens, perceptions of a relationship between cultivating gardens, and cultivating certain kinds of person.

While there was likely to have been a selection effect shaping the values and interests of those in the growing spaces, it occurred alongside a more active cultivation of the values and qualities in and of the social space. As projects mostly initiated to support people experiencing mental ill health, and the communal enjoyment of green space, the spaces were actively and intentionally made to be safe ones. This was communicated early in members' participation, with both Pots-and-Plates and Let'sGrow asking that participants commit to being kind, considerate, respectful, and positive in participant agreement forms:

> You agree to…Proudly represent Pots-and-Plates and treat all people with kindness and respect.

(Pots-and-Plates "Volunteer Agreement" form)

Cultivating inclusive values and mindsets seemed to be achieved much of time, with most participants communicating to me how they valued the non-judgemental, welcoming character of the sessions. This was expressed variously: in members telling me how they enjoyed how they were not made to feel negatively about their circumstances or level of involvement, in recognising inclusiveness as organisational values, and in describing diversity within sessions positively:

> "*it's relaxed. There's no judgement or anything. Right. Whatever, regardless of why you're there, or what, you know…everybody is friendly*." (Beth, member, Let'sGrow)

> "*there's a very sort of, an effective mix of individuals that, that partakes... with all different experiences, life experiences…what is really nice as well, is you can do as little or as much as you choose to do. Without any judgement*." (George, member, Pots-and-Plates)

The degree to which these qualities could be attributed to the places or those in them was undecided. In a moment of thankfulness for Head Outdoors and the second "*family*" that had developed there, Sarah said there was "*something about*" Wenlock Park, to which Robert responded: "*it's not about the place, it's about the people*".

Alongside the aforementioned dispositions that were felt to be shared by some participants, at Head Outdoors, there was another significant source of commonality: that most of those in attendance were experiencing some kind of mental health "*issue*" or "*problem*". Beginning shortly after I started fieldwork, and over several months, a familial, therapeutic community developed at the Head Outdoors sessions. Grounded in a sense of shared experiences, and norms of inclusion, mutual support, and non-judgement, a core group of approximately 10-15 individuals met every Friday morning at Wenlock Park. Unlike other Let'sGrow sessions, Head Outdoors members first participated as a result of worsening mental health, following self-referral or referral via different health-related pathways. No specific diagnoses were a prerequisite of attending; participants shared less and more vague conceptions of being "*in the same boat*" (Gerard) – as having experienced some form of mental ill health. These health problems were a source of isolation, rooted partially in stigma and judgements participants had experienced in the social spaces through which they had moved. Stigma, privacy, and initial uncertainty around the 'sameness' of members meant that the lack of pressure (see 4.2) to directly confront these problems was appreciated; they could be backgrounded:

> "*if you don't want to talk about yourself – which loads of people don't – you can just talk about the gardening*." (Loraine, member, Let'sGrow)

The expressed feelings of 'sameness' with others in the growing spaces eased relationship building, laughter, and "*camaraderie"*:

> "*when you realise that you're all in the same boat…there's always somebody there to talk to, and you do get to grips with...thinking ah, they're not right, and then you go up and ask them: 'how are you feeling today?' 'cause, see, I've come here some…times, and I've just had to sit...and you can just sit and have a chat to them. And obviously, when you're chatting to them, they come up with their side as well, and then, so, you end up having a chat with them about that. Yeah, the friendship, camaraderie*" (Gerard, member, Let'sGrow)

> "*Let'sGrow, it's like a really all-round thing, I think. It satisfies the community side, that like, it's like everybody's got something in their life, some sort of, disability or mental health problem, that, it's almost understood, between us all. Because, virtually everybody there, it's an invisible problem*." (Sarah, member, Let'sGrow)

A source of isolation and interpersonal suffering (Kleinman et al., 1997), for some, came from experiences of caring for their parents. Most members were in their fifties, and several were or had previously cared for parents with neurodegenerative disorders. The difficulties associated with this caring role often came up during Head Outdoors sessions; participants offered empathy, listening, practical advice, and recognition of the difficulties, compromises, and work that it entailed. Caring for somebody with dementia could not be fully understood, I was told, by those who had not experienced it. Mental ill health and the negotiation of caring responsibilities, alongside usual relationship strains and frictions, meant that interactions throughout the week were sometimes a source of stress for which members sought support. Fellow participants became privy to, but separate from, these strains, and were thus a good source of support and understanding. Experiential empathy was an enabling resource, allowing peer support and destigmatisation:

> "*But, you just realise that…they've got issues like you've got issues*."
>
> "*they're more interested in hearing about you. Not because they want to know what problems there are, but they want to know…how they could help*" (Robert, member, Let'sGrow)

Peer support involved providing listening, recognition, and practical advice. Of this multidirectional, somewhat generalised peer support, Loraine told me:

“if you're having a wobbly day, you've got the support. If somebody else is having a wobbly day, you don't mind supporting them. You don't have to explain your mental health to anybody, but also on a sort of subliminal level, they all know that you've got a mental health problem.” (Loraine, member, Let’sGrow)

Participants were receptive to signs that others were having a difficult week, and often knew how to respond in appropriate ways, without the misunderstanding, overreacting, or coddling they had experienced elsewhere:

“*none of [the other participants] are making a drama out of it, which is what happens in the, outside world”* (Loraine).

Responses to a moment of heightened anxiety might involve the initiation of a thoughtfully distracting conversation, or being offered a quiet moment away from the larger group. Sarah recounted to me such a moment, in which her upset was noticed, and the difficulties of her care role were recognised. She was supported by somebody who understood her experience intimately:

“*I got really upset because me mam and dad were bad. And I'd got chewed. And Loraine walked me off, round the corner, and said come on…she knew exactly where I was. And, you know, she just went come on you! You don't need, put that spade down, you're coming with me. And we went for a little walk…at that moment, it was needed. But then it's like, well actually, somebody else cares. And you can't bottle that, unfortunately”* (Sarah, member, Let’sGrow)

While no longer with this specific aim, The Apple Grove session had formerly been targeted towards supporting those experiencing mental ill health. Knowledge of the group’s origin seemed to contribute towards a shared understanding that the group should be a safe and calming space:

“*[The Apple Grove is] a really safe environment for people to go and just, relax, and enjoy nature together…Which is really important*” (Milly, member, Pots-and-Plates)

In finding a space in which there was room for both vulnerability and light-heartedness, Shaun found that he gained perspective on his outside concerns:

“*[The Apple Grove] is kind of one of them places where you have to like, laugh at yourself, in a way. And it's good, because, it's one of them things where - I might be stressing about something…and we'll just laugh about it, you know, and it's like, and then you realise, like*

actually…it is a bit stupid. I am worried about nothing. It helps you like, kind of, ease, or like, you know, it takes the pressure out sometimes." (Shaun, member, Pots-and-Plates)

While at Head Outdoors, some experienced a shift in their perspective on their place relative to others, too:

"*I've thought people might treat me different, but they don't, do they? They treat me as, the same*" (Denise, member, Let'sGrow).

The Head Outdoors 'check-ins' were utilised to give indications of worries and struggles, in which people, in turn, gave their name, and an indication of how they were. Rather than primarily measuring progress over time, the check-in was used by some as a tool to express the intricacies of their experience, and to communicate their needs for that particular session. Practitioners usually suggested the format of check-ins – one week, a participant might give a 'thumbs up' or 'down', and a short description of how they were, and how their week had been. 'Spoons' (an importation of Miserandino's, 2003, terminology, by whom I was unsure) and numbers were used other weeks. At times, this seemed to be beneficial in itself, as members found space to articulate their worries, and gained language and perspectives with which to talk and think about them. When talking about how they were, people sometimes expressed a felt dualism between how they were 'inside' and 'outside'. They might give two numbers; there was a dissonance between how people had been presenting themselves to others through the week, and how they felt within themselves. In sessions, people could express their inner sense of wellness or unwellness, and perhaps experienced reduced strain associated with trying to perform happiness. Although sometimes difficult, members expressed feeling more able to be openly upset in Head Outdoors sessions, than elsewhere (in other 'publics'):

"*But this is what this place is for. If you want to sit on your own and maybe have a little cry, then it's up to you. Isn't it. It's here. You can feel like you can do it in front of people. It's different when you go out them gates*" (Denise, member, Let'sGrow)

"*I think I'd far rather be dealing with it in front of people here, than people elsewhere…I'm not wondering about what people think about the way I'm feeling. Erm, whereas I do, I would, out in public. I know it's public but, it, do you understand what I mean? It's a different sort of public*." (Robert, member, Let'sGrow)

These worries were sometimes revisited in the small groups that formed across the allotment throughout the session, allowing for more intimate and involved conversations. These were

preferable to the check-ins, for some. For those who found less benefit in sharing the details of their concerns with other members, staff members were listening ears. Jane was available each Friday for more private and in-depth conversations, her expertise in health and social care a resource drawn upon and put in practice. She was perceptive to signs that members might need to talk, sometimes approaching people to check whether they may like to speak. At a Wenlock Welcome session in June, Denise's masked upset was noticed:

> She told me that she'd said she was fine, but Jane had noticed she seemed down: "*they know*" (June 2022)

These signs might be overt or discrete – some found check-ins difficult, and would speak briefly. Others appreciated this more therapy-adjacent opportunity for disclosure, emotivity, and support-giving and -seeking. On occasion, members seemed to hang back at the portacabin, when others walked down to the allotment area. This seemed to be a more subtle sign they might like Jane to stay back too.

The practitioners had cultivated an embeddedness in the group, and were considered part of this therapeutic community. Efforts were made to reduce hierarchy and difference in areas where this was appropriate: Head Outdoors practitioners joined in with the commensality that closed sessions, and the check-ins that began them. Practitioners did not wear clothing that marked them as staff, and gave instructions in the tenor of a suggestion, with care not to appear overly authoritative. Most were local to the region, and all were empathic, listening, and "*easy-going*". While certain members more frequently adopted a support-giving role, there was a generalised culture of support-giving, and feelings of belonging to a group. The therapeutic community at Head Outdoors was produced through the generalised support and companionship of a relatively consistent group of individuals with similar experiences of mental ill health, their collective engagements with the growing spaces, and the support of practitioners. They underwent concurrent and communal efforts to feel well through doing, being, and socialising together. While practitioners and co-members were described as friendly and supportive at Celandine Community Garden, senses of similarity and shared experienced seemed to be rooted more in local co-residence, and volunteering with The Kitchen Table. Regarding Taking Notice sessions, one member – keen to develop friendships – mentioned finding socialising with practitioners easier than with co-members.

The cohering of people with background commonalities – in combination with the efforts of practitioners (and members) to create a safe space – were enabling resources, contributing towards the development of an ethos of inclusivity and generous communication. Of one of the practitioners, it was said "*he seems to see when you're not right, and gives you a lot of leeway*" (Gerard). The

materiality of the space also fostered inclusivity: that people could move between activities of differing difficulty and privacy seemed to alleviate some of the worries that could prevent people entering other spaces (see 4.5.3). Additionally, members could practice negotiating the tricker side of relationships: managing frustrations and avoiding conflicts. A joke might be taken as a little too abrasive, or conversation might be unwelcome in a particular moment. Jane described the ability to handle feelings of agitation and irritation arising in the company of others as a "*skill*" that participants were developing, and as an aspect of the family-like dynamic of Head Outdoors. Relationship building is rarely wholly frictionless, and conflict management is an integral part of community building. Lawson et al. (2014) found similarly in art-based support group, where participants expressed that their understanding and acceptance of others improved. Inevitably, similarities in one area can butt up against dissimilarities in others.

3.2 Connecting through doing, and light sociality

Alongside connections formed through common interests, values, and experiences of mental ill health, connection was fostered too through doing – a closeness through *sharing* experiences in the garden. Here, I explore the socialities emerging through working on the same tasks as others, and through sharing in the broader projects and spaces.

3.2.1 Cultivating community

Eizenberg (2011) and Pitt (2013) emphasise the role of gardening together in building community; I suggest that doing is important both for building and unearthing similarities. Many of the tasks in the garden favoured teamwork, facilitating feelings of collective achievement and bonding-through-doing. Group activities could be the setting in which individual participants deepened their connection with specific others. By the summer of 2022, just over one year into fieldwork, the Head Outdoors group had grown. Approximately fifteen people came each week, in addition to less frequent attenders, and new people and health and social care workers who may or may not come back again. It could be several weeks before two particular members became more familiar with one another, affirmed by Gerard, as he told me about his more recently developing friendship with another member:

> "*We're actually quite the same. And I've never really talk, talked to her until about, yeah, three weeks ago. And, we sit down now and have a good laugh together*" (Gerard, member, Let'sGrow)

Skilled in fixing and making, he had connected earlier with those he had worked with on more practical activities:

> "*the chicken coop, I quite liked that, working with [member]. Er, that's how I sort of got to know [member]…And I started on the polytunnel with Phillip, when it was first going up*"

The share of time spent discussing personal worries and struggles, and in light-hearted banter or task-related talk, varied. Some sought more support early in their time at Head Outdoors. For others, it could take longer to feel comfort speaking more personally. For those who disliked speaking about wellbeing and worries during check-ins, talking while gardening was perhaps favoured for being less intense, structured, or public.

In addition to the connections that formed between individuals, the sessions allowed for more diffuse feelings of belonging to a greater whole. Robert described community garden as a "*team effort*", and frequently joined in with practical activities at Wenlock Park. Such tasks often satisfied his desire to be physically active and mentally engaged, and he said that working with others meant that they could be more efficient, and he more motivated. In our interview, it became clearer how Robert's feelings of belonging to an inclusive, synergistic community had developed through his engagement with the various micro-projects at Wenlock Park:

> "*community gardening is involving like a…team effort. And sort of like [feels] like a family…you develop trust…I don't feel that I'm alone…it doesn't matter how big the task it is, it can be done. Because if you can't do something, someone else will be able to…together, we seem to achieve more. Because erm, we each recognise each other's strengths*." (Robert, member, Let'sGrow)

That community gardening could usually accommodate everybody in one activity or another was highlighted by participants, for whom this was consonant with values of inclusivity.

The nature of the communities that were built and fostered through community gardening differed between gardens and localities. Of all the growing spaces, it was at Celandine Community Garden that the 'community' was most closely linked to locale and residence. Martha spoke of the "*friendships that had formed, and bonds*", as an important aspect of the garden. Celandine Community Garden sat at the corner of a large park, surrounded by onlooking terraced houses. Its

location, low fences, and predominantly closely residing members contributed to this local embeddedness. This seemed to foster connection, and at times, disconnection. New visitors were often invited by friends or neighbours, and some of the nearby houses contributed to the activities loosely: they might occasionally donate a plant, or building materials. However, attendance was sometimes vulnerable to neighbourhood frictions, with some participants coming and going seemingly following disagreements. When asked about the challenges of coming to sessions, Martha told me about tensions that could sometimes arise:

> "*I've had a few run ins with a few people there. Obviously, because it's open to anyone. Not everyone gets on…And you always have issues with a group dynamic, especially when a group is forming, and people don't know their roles*." (Martha, member, Celandine Community Garden)

Along with residing nearby, involvement with the co-facilitating charity The Kitchen Table most clearly seemed to link most members with one another, and with the garden. Many of the small group of regular attenders both volunteered with and utilised the charity, helping with the weekly community supermarket and cooking events at a nearby community centre:

> "*[the regular member group] all know each other really well, because they're working in the [community centre], other days of the week…I feel sometimes that I'm the only other [person]. But…I've felt included. They've been friendly*" (Marion, member, Let'sGrow)

Unlike Head Outdoors, where a distinct therapeutic community developed through the sessions, the Celandine Community Garden group overlapped with external social circles: of volunteers, and neighbours. The garden's links to the charity and community hub allowed for a wider range of services and activities to be accessed, which were spoken highly of by members. However, it perhaps made it harder to retain some of the members who did not engage in these additional opportunities to build familiarity and community. Additionally, at the time of fieldwork, the garden lacked some of the physical and social structures that help consolidate gardening groups. Sessions did not usually begin with the communal coffee that initiated other growing sessions, and the site did not have a space around which to cook and eat. Thomas spoke of future plans to create an indoor space with kitchen facilities there:

> *"It [would feel like] a bit more of [a] homely space…I think having somewhere where there's toilets, and seating, and somewhere to sit down and be comfortable is actually a really important part of these sites, and that, I don't think Celandine Community Garden has that at this point" (Thomas, practitioner, Let'sGrow)*

At a session in April, Thomas suggested the possibility of making a more visible perimeter fence and entrance to the garden, to which others seemed enthusiastic. There was a need to constitute the garden more visibly and distinctively as a place, through such materially mediated placemaking techniques.

Perhaps partially a legacy of its former disuse, community gardening at Wenlock Park was initially somewhat disembedded from its locale. Participants frequently described not having known about the space prior to joining Head Outdoors, which was relatively hidden from street view, with a high fence. Head Outdoors members travelled approximately 1-4 miles to the space, making this therapeutic community distinctly separate to participants' communities of co-residence. This community cohered around similarities in experiences and needs; it was a new social sphere, with distance from the everyday. Angela suggested that, for those in recovery from certain mental health or substance use problems, new connections can sometimes provide distance from old ones:

> *"Lots of people, I think, with mental health issues, or people on like, recovery pathways…they need to get away from their existing friendship group, or family group…volunteering kind of like, creates this atmosphere where you're in a different environment, you're meeting new people*" (Angela, practitioner, The Kitchen Table)

Siefert (2014), in her study of eco-therapy and alcohol misuse, agrees that community gardens may work as "preventatives", getting people "out of situations" (p7).

With the creation of the Wenlock Welcome session, the member base grew. During these sessions, the space was used by three VCS organisations, a subsection of Head Outdoors members, and users of the community shop and their families, augmenting the community. Participants were connected to a wider community through simultaneous use of the space, through cooking and eating, and through growing produce for the shop. Some of these connections were more interactive, and others constituted lighter forms of sociality.

In building chicken coops, picnic benches, and raised beds at Wenlock Park, participants were in the company of others engaged in tasks, as well as the imagined wider community of users of the space throughout the week, who they might not see or encounter directly. A sense of indirect and delayed benefit was seen more acutely at The Apple Grove, which had only a small number of other visible regular users. The orchard community included its nonhuman occupants – the robins, pheasants (Figure 6), and moorhens that animated the space - as well as the uncertain others who might benefit from the preserving of rare, local apple varieties, and the unique woodland space. Skrunk and Richardson (2019) highlight how giving away produce can extend garden communities beyond

their physical boundaries, while noting they often exclude nonhumans deemed as pests. Labelling apple trees, and updating notes on their taste, variety, and use, might be seen as both a useful resource-making task for the sessions, but also, as a form of document keeping for future users of the space (perhaps especially as the group's future use of space was not guaranteed). Members continued the partially-preserved projects of former enjoyers, who had shaped the space and preserved fruit varieties. Apples were sold at local low waste shops, or given freely to community groups. Members who harvested the apples initially did not see those to whom these apples went; they were a broader, invisible community connected through harvesting and eating. As time went on, the practitioners encouraged contact between these producers and consumers, organising stalls at local farmer's markets. For the Pots-and-Plates practitioners, food was something that *should* connect people, through carrying with it the story of its production – its socioecological *terroir*.

To the extent that broadly 'environmentalist' ideas informed the sessions, perceptions of belonging (and obligation) to a wider and more abstract earthly, more-than-human community were occasionally suggested (see 6.4.3).

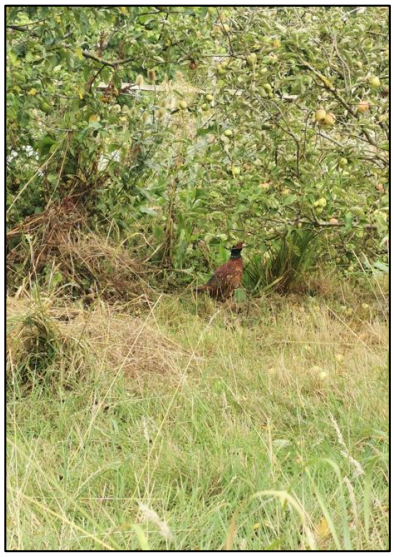


Figure 6: A resident pheasant at The Apple Grove

3.2.2 Light sociality, loose connections

Both looser and tighter connections were fostered in the gardens. As in the fleeting and light sociability of walking groups (Doughty, 2013; Pollard et al., 2020), members could easily associate and disassociate (see 4.5.3). Varied areas and activities served as an enabling resource, accommodating different styles and intensities of socialising.

> "*it's a friendly - usually - calm space to come, and either speak to people, if you want to, or do something by yourself, if you, if you want to do that. I think it gives you the space to do that. There's no, you're not forced into working beside somebody. Because I think, sometimes, we all need that, those days as well, where, you can just go off and weed a bit yourself, if that's what you want to do. Or plant some seeds. So I think it, it's kind of the best of both worlds, really*." (Marion, member, Let'sGrow)

Akin to parallel play (Parten, 1932), some forms of activity could be done separately-but-together, alongside but without an expectation of continual conversation. Others encouraged collaboration, allowing more in-depth conversations if desired, with task-related talk a reliable fallback.

Activities like pruning and harvesting supported the formation of associations of smaller groups of participants in these 'low-key' (Walton, 2021) socialities, in, for example, navigating a space together while making collective discernments on what to was too young to pick or too thick to snip:

> I sat at the table with them for a little while, as we drank our coffees. It was a beautiful day of around 23 degrees; a dry heat, and bright, blue sky. We chatted for a little while, then began with gardening activities: firstly, harvesting what was left of the green beans. Sarah said that she was to spend time supporting a newer person today, but he didn't arrive for another ten or so minutes. Sarah, Marion, and a member asked each other questions, and answered them collectively and through deliberation: what size beans to pick, how long the plants would have left, and what might be planted afterwards. Marion suggested, to me, that leeks and squash would be planted; this reminded me that winter was indeed coming, despite not yet being halfway through summer. We moved between the planting rows, and then on to the bed by the polytunnel. Sarah advised that we pick lettuce, but snap off the top third of each stick/plant: it had bolted, and thus these leaves would be bitter. As the harvestable produce was picked, I switched to weeding some of the thistles and dandelions that had become visible now the leafy plumage was removed. (Wenlock Park, July 2022)

> Soon after arriving, Milly and Gillian went to prune some of the nearby apple trees. I went to join them, overcautiously picking at branches. They had spent most of last week's session doing this, and were adept, talking me through the process. ~*"you're trying to make them a goblet shape….cut them beneath the node, so that they can regrow"*, they kindly instructed me. They were quick and collaborative, talking together to discuss what could, and what could not, go. "*If it were George and I, we'd have all that off*"~, said Gillian, grinning as she gestured to a particularly weight-bearing branch. Still indecisive in my pruning, Milly suggested that I "*process*" the cut branches instead, telling me that she'd

> done this the week prior. This involved chopping pieces into 30cm lengths, to be bundled and used or sold as firewood at a later date. (The Apple Grove, February 2022)

These ephemeral working groups might cohere for ten minutes, or upwards of sixty. The activities were usually guided with contributions from all in the group, as they developed together a style of executing the task: gentle leaf collecting, or slightly overzealous pruning. Periods of quietly pruning or picking were punctuated by these moments of coming together for quick chat, or to seek an opinion on a fruit's ripeness:

> "*You've all gone quiet*", laughed Samantha. "*We tend to be quite quiet, when we're cracking on*", said Shaun. (April 2022)

While the busyness of Thursday's Wenlock Welcome session could be a source of stress for some, others valued the diversity of people they would see, whether or not they were spoken to or worked alongside:

> "*it's lovely to see other people that I haven't seen as well, where they'll dip in and out, you know. Sometimes you'll see somebody, and then you won't see them for a month, and then, they, you know…I'm not very good at remembering names, though, so that's a bit of a drawback for me. But I, I remember faces*" (Cynthia, member, Let'sGrow)

As someone for whom charitableness was central to their participation, seeing others using the space she had gardened and tidied was a source of joy: an indirect appreciation of her efforts perhaps more evocative of a belonging to a wider and more abstract community. Additionally, having once spent much of her time around children, in her pre-retirement childminding days, the gardening sessions allowed her to again enjoy intergenerational connections. In observing moments of connection, there is a temptation to look primarily for verbal communication. Yet, in the garden, companionship was also found in being and doing in the same space of others: a quieter enjoyment.

Working away from others could signal a desire to be alone in that moment, or (and) suggest that somebody might benefit from being gently checked upon. Biglin (2020), too, found that her participants, allotment gardeners, communicated (perhaps with varying levels of intentionality) their state of mind with movement. Loraine recounted to me her efforts to include a fellow member who was often quiet:

> *"I said, do you want to help me with the fire? He said no I think I'll just sit here. I said oh, okay, knock yourself out. But eventually, just because I was still there, he ended up helping*

me with the fire…because it, sometimes it's just time, isn't it? Well, I know it is with me."
(Loraine, member, Let'sGrow)

Sensitive to the possibility of exclusion, she enabled him to be included in ways he may have felt more comfortable. In our interview, she acknowledged that it could take time for people to become relaxed, and relaxed enough to talk. The acceptability of being less talkative or gregarious was an aspect of the non-judgemental, low-pressure atmosphere and ethos of the group. The opportunities for looser and closer connections were accommodative of fluctuating moods, differing levels of comfort in interaction, and perhaps also of the specific sorts of isolation people faced. The pandemic, ill health, care responsibilities, and retirement had isolated people from a variety of relationships, and their roles within them. The light socialities in the gardens – passing conversations, the sharing of space, and the bustle of people – share a certain amount of similarity with those that characterise some workspaces. The majority of members were not in paid employment; in conjunction with the pandemic, this perhaps created a desire for these looser and lost ways of relating for some of the participants. Cynthia cherished the opportunity to be around children again: "*it's lovely to see children as well…we've been children people all of our lives",* she told me. While often reluctant to be taken as authoritative, Sarah was skilled in guiding activities and supporting fellow members (utilising skills honed through her prior occupation, and a gardening course). She often joked while giving guidance:

"*I think that's my [community worker] side coming out!*" (August 2021)

The sessions seemed to allow for the continuity of certain roles and their constituting relationships: an activity leader, or – as for Beth, who had previously worked in hospitality – a food provider. Continuities with former ways of relating and interacting seemed to be experienced positively by some. However, others sought to counter their isolation through community gardening for its *distinctness* from their experiences of former workplaces: in its minimal hierarchy, outdoor setting, the likeableness of one's company, and the electiveness of participation.

3.3 Connecting with nature and the outdoors

In the growing spaces, participants engaged with nature in more and less structured and serendipitous ways, from seed-sowing activities to the shared appreciation of a wandering robin. The aforementioned associations suggest some of the ways in which people connected with one another through nature-based activities. Here, I explore the connections people made with nature

through people and place, as connections made in communal growing spaces. Members experienced therapeutic sensory shifts and reorienting, perspective-giving encounters with nature. Other users of the space shared and shaped these experiences, yet practitioners and co-members were only some among the relationships made and enacted in the garden. In these spaces were caring, animate, and reciprocal more-than-human relationships, alongside human relationships of memory and nostalgia, mediated via flora and fauna. Connecting with nature allowed for relationships to be sustained, in some cases, between present and past selves, fostering biographical continuity. However, with proximity to nature came more ambivalent feelings for some, as nature's changing patterns evoked 'eco'-anxieties.

The centrality of nature in participants' experiences varied**.** For those who spent much of the sessions cooking indoors, plants from the growing areas occasionally entered as ingredients, and the outdoor spaces were often where food was eaten, temperature-permitting. For those who tended to spend the sessions with screwdrivers and wooden planks, plants and animals were a background presence, providing purpose. Peas required structures up which to grow, and chickens needed fenced space in which to forage. Horticultural work was, by nature, hybrid. Other participants spent each week engaging with plants in a hands-on manner, uprooting weeds and sowing seeds**.** While many of the constituents of these places – grass, weeds, frogs, and flowers – might in isolation be considered to be natural, there seemed to be an unevenness in whether participants viewed the spaces and activities as being 'to do with' nature. With these nuances in mind, I ambivalently go on to use the word 'nature' to refer to flora, funga, fauna, and landscapes elements sometimes described as such.

3.3.1 Perspective and life lessons

In addition to the perspective-giving potential of revisiting outside worries in a new setting, to fall on new ears, the natural elements of the space engendered (transitory or transformative) moments of reframing too. Going outdoors could entail a sensory shift, disrupting the feelings that can grow in spaces of isolation:

> "*a lot of people are isolated in their homes, or they live on their own…and being outside in the sunshine, being outside and getting soaking wet, being outside and being freezing, you're feeling something else. It's something else other than that crippling depression, that crippling anxiety. That crippling isolation that you've got. It gives you a different kind of, of feeling…it doesn't even have to, you don't even have to have a mental health problem, or a physical*

health problem, to benefit from, from being outside. A walk, just takes you away. It just changes your perspective" (Heather, practitioner, Pots-and-Plates)

Her description of isolation resonated with some of the members' accounts of their daily lives prior to (or outside of) the sessions, and their appreciations of the growing spaces. In the growing spaces, nature could be a source of teaching; a repository of metaphor and ontological insight. In nature, some participants found meaningful patterns and stories, in and through which they learned to see their own lives differently:

"*when you're gardening, you're tending for other parts of life. So you're realising that, you're realising the cycle that these things go through. And that in order for the plant to grow and flourish, it has to die first, and become a seed, before it can come into its new life. And then that can help you to reflect on, when you feel like you're going through a death, or separation from somebody, or a difficult time in your life, you can realise that actually, it could be the start of something, a new part of life*." (Phillip, practitioner, Let'sGrow)

The association of 'nature' and 'life' seemed to give the former authority in teaching lessons about the latter. Seeing oneself as intertwined with, or part of, nature seemed to constitute part of the benefit of engaging with nature; its valence carried over into participants' own lives, and fit into optimistic stories of renewal, interdependence, and growth. Through the interweaving of her agency in planting with the beauty of plants, Denise found reason to feel good:

"*When I'm having a bad day, I just sit and look at my plants and think they're nice, because I did that*." (Denise, member, Let'sGrow)

For Alistair, nature was both something to love, and a fundamental part of who we are:

"*it's important, to me, it's important to have contact with nature. Because, you know, I, I just, I do really love nature, and I think that we are nature…I say I am nature and nature is me*." (Alistair, member, Pots-and-Plates)

Risking overinterpretation, a member's recounting of the emergence of blossoms at one of the garden sites seemed to express a degree of acceptance or comfort with ephemerality and cyclicity:

"[the blossoms] were out a couple of weeks ago – they were beautiful! But were gone on Monday. I suppose that's how these things are" (April 2022)

At a Taking Notice session, Natasha had brught four plums for us to eat, from The Apple Grove. They were perfectly soft and sweet – the sort usually only available at certain times of year, through

friends, neighbours, and local gardens. As we ate, she told us about the different varieties of fruit; in this positive appraisal of diversity, Farhad found meaning he extended to people:

> Before telling us how to weave, Natasha pulled out four plums from her bag: one for each of us. They were from The Apple Grove, and were ripe: she talked a little about how the drier weather could make fruit fall prematurely, an early autumn. She said too how delicious the plums were, comparing them to the much less tasty "*Victoria*" plums sold in supermarkets....Natasha talked about all the different varieties at The Apple Grove, lamenting that most supermarkets only carried around four. Farhad made a connection between diversity of food being positive, and diversity of people. (August 2022)

Her words serve also as a reminder that interacting with nature could be ambivalent: the early crop of plums a reminder of the changing climate (see 3.3.4), and their diversity an ideal against which to critique mainstream food production. Metacognition and overt reflection on this taking of meaning from nature seemed more common amongst practitioners, who perhaps spent more time reflecting on the *how* of being well in nature, and for whom nature was more central to their daily lives and self-concepts. Such ways of thinking are seemingly not uncommon amongst those who regularly interact with 'natural' materials. In a seed, a London seed saver (Dow, 2022) found lessons that, under the right conditions, growth (of a more literal and metaphorical, plant or human nature) was possible.

3.3.2 Awe, enchantment, and delight in nature

Feelings of intrigue, curiosity and awe were evoked in interaction with nature. While undoubtedly these feelings occurred quietly, in private moments not shared with the group or me, they were also emergent out of communal interactions with the plants and creatures of the spaces. Rarely was a frog spotted without the beckoning of someone else to co-observe, and photos might be taken to show others. Farhad, who was living alone, told me that he found extra benefit in nature when alongside others with which to share the experience:

> "*when I watch with someone else, we share our feelings, and it gets very good, very useful for mental health…And when we are in community, in nature, we get extra good feeling, extra positive feeling from friendly, friendly environment. Friendly situation…people are community kind of creatures, creatures I think*." (Farhad, member, Taking Notice)

People were often united by loosely related outdoorsy interests, and they brought with them different knowledges, perceptions, and attunements. At The Apple Grove, Alistair called over Milly and me, and drew our attention to the lichen – (the 'moss' I had overlooked) coating the apple tree branches. He first showed us a close-up photo he took on his phone, revealing in high definition its grooves. We then hunted for more of this composite organism, "a case of seeing something everywhere, after noticing it", I wrote afterwards. At another orchard session, George called us over to where he had been scything. He had been doing so sparingly, for the "*creatures*". This mindful style of cutting walkways left room for uncultivated plants and insects – one of which he showed us. Amidst the long grass, carpeting The Apple Grove, was a rogue, vibrant orchid (Figure 7). We delighted, collectively, in its vibrancy and unexpectedness. "*this is what it's all about, isn't it?*", he said. The joyful spontaneity of nature was contagious. Through leaving areas of grass uncut, for wildflowers, room was made for the pleasant and unpredictable agencies of plants and creatures; for this, participants were rewarded.

Figure 7: The Apple Grove orchid

Fellow participants offered different ways of perceiving the environment, and were good partners with which to ponder it. They suggested new ways to see, touch, and even taste the environment. Jack (practitioner) picked the leaf of an unassuming green plant in the polytunnel, offering it to us to try:

> I stood up, and Jack came around, handing Sarah, another member, and me stevia leaves. It was super-sweet, which Sarah commented on, and had an interesting aftertaste...I went to the polytunnel with him to look at the stevia plants, that he'd grown from seed – three unassuming little plants, that could apparently grow quite large. Jack handed us another two leaves to try – although laughed and added that I didn't have to eat them. One was a sweet, basil-like leaf, and the other, he told me, would make your tongue tingle after

> chewing it for a while. I tried both, with the tingling sensation setting in after maybe 30 seconds or so. (June 2022)

The practitioners knew the value of these moments of unexpectedness, novelty, and intrigue, and sought to grow interesting varieties of plants. In interviews, people described with excitement their olfactory and gustatory encounters with plants with surprising flavours and unusual colours. Practitioners – and at points, members - thought not only about how plants might taste or grow well in certain conditions, but about how they may pique interest and fascination. At Wenlock Park, pumpkins were grown in a long strip, with the hope that children could carve them for Halloween.

In addition to facilitating the sharing and structuring of sensitisations and attunements, the sessions provided a social context for prolonged and novel engagements with nature. Milly, Samantha, and I, following a morning of slowly collecting leaves to use as environmentally friendly packaging, laughed in recognition of the pleasantly unusual outdoor tasks that the sessions made doable and thinkable. In each other's company, time could be spent interacting with and enjoying nature in atypical ways. Recounting to me his first session, George described the pleasure of working with apple trees, low to the ground and embedded within The Apple Grove, touching it with palms and knees. In this group activity, he found a new way to engage with nature; a vantage point "*amongst*" plants and insects:

> "*we were just on our hands and knees, clearing around the base of the [trees]…we were sat in this lovely, lovely area, amongst the greenery, amongst the grass and the insects, and the - the blossoms weren't out, but there [were leaves] on the trees...it just felt really good, you know?*" (George, member, Pots-and-Plates)

He described haptic engagement with earthly materials, and encounters with the fire - sensory pleasures enabled by the sociomaterial environment of The Apple Grove, yet out of place elsewhere:

> Laura: "…*what draws you to outdoor activities?"*
>
> George: "…*getting dirty - although I don't like coming back on a Wednesday stinking of fire smoke…it's nice while you're there, but then when you get back, and you're like…Haha, my clothes stink*."

Conversely, at the neighbourhood embedded Celandine Community Garden, my muddied trousers were more conspicuous. As a space within in a residential area, with high visibility to resident non-gardeners, mud could more easily become dirt.

3.3.3 Horticultural rhythms, seasonality, and cyclicity

I now focus on seasonality, allowing for further reflection on novelty, and nature's motion and cyclicity. As mentioned, novelty was a source of pleasure and continued intrigue, present in seasonal changes, and harnessed by participants wishing to capture and keep the attention of members. Even the short six days between sessions brought visible and evocative changes, of excitement, surprise, and reflectiveness. Transitions from season-to-season could be dramatic, as could the week-to-week plant growth, under hypertrophying summer sun. Such changes scarcely went unremarked upon. Fieldnotes from The Apple Grove collect moments of noticing and sharing these changes:

> since the last session, spring had sprung, and several people seemed to comment on this. The apple trees had started to form buds and blossoms (April 2022)

> Heather: "*wow, it looks so different. It feels so bare! Like everyone can see in*!" Since the last time, all of the trees had shed their leaves, leaving a blanket of yellow foliage…The leaves were a beautiful yellow hue, but the spidery branches that they'd left behind affected the sheltered, remote feeling that the small pocket around the fire usually had (November 2021)

With seasonality came shifts in the activities and work required to maintain the growing spaces, and occupy members:

> "*as the seasons are changing, we're changing what we're doing, when we're doing it, that's what [the] project is. It's not just a few weeks and it's done. It's going to be a constant...different events and things…because obviously, you can plant things at different times, and harvest things at different times, and [build] structures*." (Martha, member, Celandine Community Garden)

Developing familiarity with the patterned novelty of seasonal change within the growing spaces contributed to place-knowing and place-belonging**.** Knowing and remembering what could be done at different times of year was an intimate dimension of knowing place. Transformations could be anticipated, and memories within the spaces elicited and reinforced. Seasonality sometimes evoked past memories of the growing spaces; the coming winter evoking the prior. Past, season-permitting activities were sometimes referenced in ways that suggested their place in nascent group identities and feelings of connection. Talk of upcoming Christmas celebrations at The Apple Grove beget collective reminiscing of the previous winter's activities. A wreath making session was a particular favourite, recalled from two years previously by Shaun in our interview. Whether seasonal memories

and their future iterations would go on to become the foundations of enduring group- and place-based identities is an open question, as the groups were relatively young, and subject to other forces impacting their composition and longevity.

Persevering through some of the more sensorially taxing times of year was valued by some, giving the seasonal pleasures the quality of something invested in and deserved. Some seemed to see the cooler months as a somewhat unpleasant endurance, while others valued them as part of a greater annual whole. These appreciations were most clearly present in participants who articulated an interest in nature. Shaun conveyed the reward of persisting through the colder months, and the cumulative and emergent benefit of experiencing all seasons. His words suggest, not (just) an appreciation of seasonality, but of the seasonality of *The Apple Grove*, and how it deepened his enjoyment and knowledge of this space:

> *"it would be nice to have glorious sunshine all the time, yes, but at the same time, that then takes, takes away from it, I think…it's good to sort of see that cycle. Particularly in The Apple Grove, of what goes on throughout the year…Like now, it's all just bare trees and twigs. And then in the spring, we're going to have all the flowers, and then we're going to start seeing all the, you know, all the buds. And then we start seeing the flowers, and then we've got all the, all the fruits, and the harvests. And then different trees come at different like, times, in terms of what needs to be picked and stuff. And then it's all storing it away, and then winding down, you know. So I wouldn't change it at all…I think to fully appreciate The Apple Grove…you need to go there for a full year…you need to see it in all seasons...when you go there, because each one has its own, sort of, beauty, and its own good and bad bits*" (Shaun, member, Pots-and-Plates)

Being able to see through and follow along with horticultural rhythms in their fullness was considered to be an important part of the therapeutic benefit of sessions, evident in Alistair's belief in the importance of seeing a plant through from seed to harvest, which he relayed to a staff member from The Sage Project:

> "*it's about being outside*", he said. He also said that the sessions – six to eight weeks, weren't long enough. "*you need to be able to plant something and see it grow, and harvest it. You can't rush it*" (September 2021)

Importantly, he reiterated to her how valuable it was for the Head Outdoors sessions to have changed from 6–8-week courses (after which a member was expected to move on), to an ongoing, rolling format, in which members felt no pressure to leave. There was benefit in the convergence of

temporalities: of horticultural temporalities, intervention temporalities, and also, in the sometimes-slow process of regaining trust and confidence during periods of mental ill health. Both practitioners and members spoke of this; Natasha, in a discussion of green social prescribing:

> "*not everyone does their mental health journey after two years*" (April 2022)

Building on prior seasons' work, and planning for future changes, was perhaps a way of temporally entrenching oneself in a growing space. Planting a seed in the present can be an act of linking oneself to its product in the future. The past, present, and future were joined in participants' actions and orchard produce:

> Gillian suggested that they go and look at how the fruit trees were coming on. "*the pruning felt quite brutal, but it looks as though it'll pay dividends",* George said (May 2022)

The pilot project found (McGuire et al., 2019) that there is therapeutic valuable in what may be a method of orienting oneself towards the future, with one participant suggesting that waiting with a growing seed provided something to "*hold on to*" (p31). Another described horticulture as "*future-oriented*" (unpublished data), as found by other researchers (Capek, 2001; in Schwartz, 2019). In Denise's awareness of floral cyclicity were traces of forward-looking optimism:

> "*I hate it when flowers die. But then I know they'll be back again next year…double the size*" (Denise, member, Let'sGrow)

In fieldnotes, I captured moments of awareness of the seasons ahead. They were prompted through horticultural and solstitial happenings, and brought into relief through a reminder of other orientations to seasonal temporalities (here, the pacing of the academic year):

> Marion suggested, to me, that leeks and squash would be planted; this reminded me that autumn was indeed coming, despite not yet being halfway through summer (July 2022)

> It was the busiest I'd seen Clover Farm. This reminder that, for schoolchildren at least, summer had just begun, was welcome; the summer solstice was only days ago, and chat in the other gardens was increasingly orienting towards the planting of autumn and winter crops. (July 2022)

These horticultural and arboricultural projects' rhythms were not just those of plant and animal chronobiology. They were not wholly synonymous with seasonality, which was to be worked with, mitigated against, and adapted to. Rhythms were not experienced only passively or automatically, as a series of bloomings and wiltings, of changing colours and temperatures. Scaffolding and facilitating

activities allowed for more active, tangible engagements with seasonality. Both meteorological changes, and the facilitated group activity of wreath-making with orchard materials, contributed to the feel and pleasures of winter. To an extent, seasonality in the growing spaces was a more-than-human collaboration, made and made-positive by humans and nonhumans together. Natasha, while speaking of how some crops would go unharvested at a local growing space, described how one had to learn which times of year were harvesting times, for different plant species:

> She pondered that the reasons that people don't take food home seem to be related to "*harvesting*" and "*mindset*"...She talked about the "*practicalities of harvesting*", the "*skills and knowledge*" it took, the knowing "*when*" to harvest (April 2022)

For May to be identified as a pea-picking month depended upon the time pea seeds were sown, on the ontogeny of the plants, and on knowledgeable and attuned harvesters. The Pots-and-Plates practitioners tried to emphasise and enculture seasonal transitions, highlighting the solstices, and planning to wassail around the traditional winter period. Locality mattered for season-making and season-knowing too: Jack told us how seed packet planting instructions are not always tailored to the north of the country, while George described learning about the specific growing conditions of his personal allotment from other allotment-holders. In describing to me the plant varieties at Wenlock Park, Jack demonstrated the confluence of seasonal and practical influences on local horticultural patterns:

> "*there are some seasonal limitations. So we've got a big long row of broad beans at the moment, they're one of the first things you can get in in the year…climate [and] weather wise…there's seasonal concerns like that. But a lot of it is improvised. A lot of the time, we have people looking for jobs, and there've been times when I've just given people jobs so that they have something to do*" (Jack, practitioner, Let'sGrow)

Concerns with optimal times for planting combined with his need to engage participants (alongside factors like seed expiration, and member preferences) in shaping what and when things were planted. Some of the rhythms intersecting with the work of these small organisations worked against the horticultural. Bureaucratic rhythms of permission- and infrastructure-providing organisations sometimes misaligned or diverged with the work of the CICs (see El Ouardi and Montambeault, 2023). The slowness with which funding was granted for a fence at another, new local gardening space meant that a growing season was missed. At another growing space, the delay with which the land-owning organisation acted in installing a water source and maintaining the site meant that members' work was made redundant. Weeds grew over once-excavated walkways, and

tomato plants withered away. As on farms (Whitehouse, 2017), season-making is a matter of collective human and nonhuman doings, with 'bureaucratic plans' exerting influence on agricultural (and horticultural) rhythms. Let'sGrow's relationship with a donating organisation meant that some plants were received and planted shortly *after* what would be prime: unsold plants were received by the CIC, and were mostly revived following a watering. Here, an opportunity was found in the changing of shop stock to more seasonally appropriate wares, one that Thomas described as aligning with the CIC's aim to reduce waste.

Seasonality shaped the horticultural rhythms of community gardening; rhythms through which seasons were known and experienced. Certain times of year afforded differently enjoyed activities and experiences. Practitioners engaged in work to soften the difficulties associated with seasonality. Thomas described poor weather as impacting greatly upon some members:

> "*when it's pouring down…that has a big impact on people, doesn't it…like, a really cloudy day… it's thinking, what can we do better in the winter, on those cloudy days, to make people feel happier within themselves*." (Thomas, practitioner, Let'sGrow)

While tolerance or appreciation of these vicissitudes could be built, practitioners expressed that this was better begun in the warmer months. At a meeting for the green social prescribing project, practitioners and staff discussed summer recruitment to the projects, as a possible temporal strategy for building resilience through the winter:

> They all talked together about it being good to recruit during summer – I got the sense they felt that routines could be established in summer…that might then encourage people to come through winter. (July 2022)

There were limits to the agency of practitioners in recuperating harsh seasonality: in the record-breaking, potentially dangerous heats of the summer of 2022, several sessions had to be cancelled. Other coinciding rhythms in the lives of participants had a greater effect in the shaping the experiencing of certain months and transitions. Summer overlapped with the school holidays; the busyness associated with a greater presence of children at Wenlock Park reduced one participant's relaxed enjoyment of the space. She told me that she might consider regularly attending the Wenlock Welcome session in September, when the community allotment became a cooler and calmer place. While recognising the difficulty some people found in the summer-autumn transition, Natasha noted the (less mitigable) coinciding of this period with the significant impact of wider sociopolitical events on the lives of participants:

> Natasha told me how this was a difficult time of year for people, attributing some of this to the seasonal transition, of a refresh.
>
> She spoke about how September seemed to be a difficult time for people, worsened by the fact that people were being re-evaluated for their benefits. Currently, universal income is being cut, furlough stopped...There is a general sense of worry and uncertainty more widely – food and fuel prices are rising, shops are running out of certain products, and services are being disrupted due to staffing issues related to Brexit. (October 2021)

While the festive winter period was one of decorating and celebrating at the growing spaces, it was also a challenging time for several members. Christmas can be an ambivalent time, highlighting unwelcome changes, in relationships and the life course (Kuper, 2001). Their attendance despite these difficulties attests to the value they had for these members.

Seasonality textured the experience of community gardening, and shaped the horticultural rhythms of garden work. It was a source of patterned novelty. Through community gardening, participants were afforded intimate engagement with the seasons, and new ways of knowing them. Experiencing the growing spaces in their seasonal wholeness seemed to bring feelings of resilience and achieved and acquired appreciation, and deeper connection to the spaces and nature. Horticultural patterns inherently required planning for the future; the work of today anticipated the changing temperatures and textures of the upcoming weeks. Correspondingly, past efforts and events were materialised in the present, in harvests and bloomings. This combination of reward and future-thinking represents one of the therapeutic aspects of engaging with nature. For some participants, however, seasonal extremes seemed to remain negative, as something to endure. Additionally, horticultural seasonality was only one among many other rhythms and patterns shaping how months, seasons, and their transitions were felt. These rhythms may compound, contradict, or outweigh one another.

3.3.4 Eco-anxiety and changing affective qualities

The affective experience of interacting with nature occasionally bore a more dissonant quality. As Natasha indicated, while bringing plums for members to enjoy, this enjoyment was out of place. In the tastiness of plums, the hues of leaves, and the eruption of snowdrops – quintessential, pleasurable experiences of British seasonality – was a slight souring, palpable to the practitioners in particular. Several had worked and leisured outdoors for much of their lives, and were closely attuned to when these pleasures were usually afforded. Autumnal browns and yellows now sat

against August blues and greens, as orchard leaves fell to the floor prematurely. Close, regular engagement with nature made the climate crisis tangible, visible, thermoceptive, and even gustatory.

These physical reminders of a changing climate could create fleeting senses of futility, with regards to the work they were doing. This was felt in relation to individual tasks – Samantha questioned whether her attempts to not disturb tulips were worthwhile:

> *"I don't want to chuck compost on those tulips. Although, they'll be killed off by the snow*". Unseasonably (or perhaps soon, seasonally, according to our shifting baselines), snow was forecast in the next few days – a jolt that might terminate the freshly-sprung bulbs. On several occasions, Samantha had…a palpable ambivalent mournfulness or cynicism when seeing what had become symbols of a changing climate. It was perhaps the third of four years in which spring weather was worryingly atypical. Climate change as felt. (March 2022)

Their beauty was not only untimely, but likely to be quashed in the coming weeks due to unpredictable weather patterns. In these bulbaceous plants, surrounded by unseasonal snow, was evidence and symbol of a changing climate. Climate anxiety can be provoked both by unseasonal presences, as well as the absences described poignantly by Whitehouse (2015) and Carson (1962). Misplaced presences were just as discomforting. In addition, on more challenging days, feelings of futility might be felt more broadly about the work of the organisations. This was a rut that could occasionally be fell in to, provoked once by media coverage of private jet rides to the G7 summit, in July of 2022. These feelings were not constant, and existed amongst feelings of creating positive change, that came from engaging with nature:

> "[*the sessions are] very fulfilling…The things that are annoying you about the world, you're actually being proactive in…being part of the solution*" (Gillian, member, Pots-and-Plates)

Gillian was passionate about the environment, and interested in activities and actions which might help combat climate change. The simultaneous evocation of joy, awe, anxiety, and fear in response to nature's beauty and precarity is increasingly a feature of nature media and representation. While discussing nature television programs, two participants noted that once "*safe*" nature programs now routinely featured "*negative bits*" – reminders of the uncertain futures of the creatures, plants, and landscapes they deliver to us. Since the millennium, British wildlife documentaries have increasingly featured discussion of the threats of anthropogenic climate change (Richards, 2013). Novel vocabularies (of a more and less medicalised nature) are emerging in academic and popular

literature to describe the psychological weight of rapid, manmade environmental destruction and change: solastalgia (Albrecht, 2005), meteoranxiety (Albrecht, 2016), ecoanxiety (Leff, 1990), tierratrauma (Albrecht, 2012), environmental melancholia (Lertzman, 2015), alongside others. Ford and Noorgard (2019) adapt the Arabic *ghurba* to describe the loss of a sense of home due to anthropogenic environmental change, while acknowledging that such feelings are not novel, particularly amongst colonised people. Medicalised terminology or understandings of these neologisms have been critiqued for being individualising and depoliticising (Barnwell et al., 2020; Walton, 2021). These terms are best used to recognise a wide range of legitimate affective responses to anthropogenic environmental change, *and* their causes in external processes with historic roots. *Unambivalent* joy in response to daffodils in February could be indicative of shifting baselines, and a cause of concern. The climate crisis threatens both the presence of vulnerable species and places, and the positive experiential and affective qualities of perceiving and interacting with them.

3.3.5 Creating, maintaining, and evoking relationships with and through nature

Collectively and individually, participants interacted with nature, shaping and being affected by it. The connections formed through these interactions could extend, not only to those physically present, but to those materially and temporally distant from the site of interaction. Nostalgia or evocation characterise these connections in some instances: when walking through The Apple Grove, looking at its fruits, a member described feelings reminiscent of her grandparent's garden. Edwards (2022) argues that those who find benefit in nature are most often those who are oriented towards to such a possibility; experiences with nature early in life are likely a part of orienting processes. These experiences may be diverse: Sarah located the root of her love of trees in books she had read in childhood. Past encounters, alongside the fostering of present comfort in such spaces, can make the outdoors especially evocative – albeit for better or worse, depending on the character of prior experiences. Through repeat engagements, natural features can become especially differentiated and meaningful.

In the presence and movement of plants and animals, participants sometimes found the continuation of human relationships. In these connections, members found overlaid or collaborative agencies. In plants and animals, reassuring presences were felt. Visiting robins were said, by one practitioner, to be somebody lost, returning. For Denise, the agencies of plants were augmented in her own garden, in which she had created an area in memory of her late sister:

> "*And I've got like, [my sister's] plant, that's growing on marvellous. I'm sure she's looking down on it, making it grow more. But it's mainly flowers…the roses, they turned out stunning this year. I don't know, I think it's our [sister]. She's there, watching over. 'Cause they have, I can't believe it, how, they've doubled…Literally doubled in size. From when I got them*" (Denise, member, Let'sGrow)

Alongside moments of continuation of human relationships through plant agencies, relationships with plants were developed as legitimate ontological relationships themselves. Archambault (2016) argues that, for gardeners in Inhambane, their proclamation that plants were lovers was true in both a metaphorical and ontological sense: metaphorical, for how the gardeners compared their love for plants against intimate human relationships. Ontological, in the sense that they elicited wonder and seduced, and responded to the forms of care and affection they were given, in a different but legitimate form of reciprocal relationship. Rather than lovers, the plants of the growing spaces appeared variously as children, of a more ontological or metaphorical kind (see Dow, 2022). Familial language was used to talk about plants: small plants were described as "*babies*", and descendent plants as originating from the same (gendered) "*mum*" plant. Yet, some participants understood themselves as something akin to a parent to the plants that they nurtured into good health, productivity, and "*bloom*". *"Nurturing*", for Cynthia, captured something of the experience of both raising children and nourishing plants, combining simile and description:

> "*it's like children. You nurture them, don't you, you nurture your garden over the year...and, you know, you look after your garden, you look after your children, and hopefully, they'll bloom*" (Cynthia, member, Let'sGrow)

The nurturing of individual plants, and the cumulative caring for the growing spaces, rewarded and recognised the care and work participants enacted over their months and years of engagement. This relational investment in plants could make moments in which they did not thrive saddening. Denise found the death of annual plants dispiriting (see 3.3.2), opting instead to grow perennials at home, which could receive and evidence care each year. In the harvesting of plants at Wenlock Park was a source of upset and ambivalence. People who came to use the community shop near the entrance to space were invited to take home some of the produce. Gradually, through spring and summer, more shop users would walk down to the allotment area, picking vegetables and legumes from the growing beds. Whilst participants voiced appreciation at a wider and more diverse usership of the space, and at produce being taken, methods of harvesting could engender unease:

> '[Sarah:] *last week*' "*they were picking full plants*" '*that could have kept going for week*s'. Marion was next to us, at the potting table. "*it's like your babies*" Sarah said, "*they aren't ours by half", "but they feel like it",* replied Marion. Sarah said to Thomas that we need to grow more things…Sarah, I think, suggested that people be given bags, so that they could fill one each – a natural limit on how much would be taken.
>
> Jane had joined midway through chatting, and said "*we maybe should've told them*". Sarah seemed to express that she was holding back a concern for the plants – that it was difficult to see them being uprooted. (June 2022)

The initial invitations to harvest were relatively unguided, with shop users left to decide how they might take produce. Taking whole lettuces was perhaps more intuitive for those introduced to the space as a community shop, and as a shop user, rather than as a grower in ongoing relations with the plants of the allotment. The members' concerns for this limiting of the crop productivity were interwoven with an emotive, visceral response to the premature uprooting of the plants, that they had care for over the prior weeks and months. These two groups of garden-goers had distinct relationships to these plants; two of a diversity of possible human-plant connections.

3.4 Discussion

The community growing sessions were cohering contexts, purposes, and projects that facilitated the association of actors into generative, and sometimes health-promoting, relationships. Working on tasks, as part of these collective projects, supported the development of kinds of relationship, opportunity, feeling, and proximity. These resources were availed towards recovery (Duff, 2010; 2011; 2012), and engaged in encounters otherwise valuable, enjoyable, or meaningful. Repeated association created and reinforced broader and deeper connections, as commonalities were made through growing, weeding, eating, drinking, cooking, and navigating space together. Here, I conceptualise the growing sessions as the forming of assemblages, enabling particular encounters and connections, with implications for participants and the spaces alike. I first consider social connections, before going on to explore connections made with plants, creatures, and 'natural' and horticultural features. I refrain from strictly categorising resources as material, social, or affective, cautious not to deconstruct garden assemblages in understanding members' experiences. The feeling of belonging, for example, that might emerge from building a chicken pen, is at once originated in the material engagement wood, screws, and nails; in the commitment to the sociomaterial project of the garden, and to the feeling-part of the community created through

multitude such acts by a group of people. With this in mind, I outline some of the connections made during community gardening, acknowledging the interrelation of the social, semantic, affective, and material dimensions of encounters.

3.4.1 Social connections

Participants were brought together into relationships with varied dynamics: of homophily, complementary role taking, participatory activity and performance, dyadic and generalised peer support, of companionship, and as co-navigators of activities and space. These were relationships of recognition, exchange, and collaboration. I begin with the connections made through early identifications members made with one another (although reinforced by acts of support-giving and -receiving), before considering connections made through doing.

3.4.1.1 Connecting through similarity and shared understanding

While dissimilar in some ways, commonalities were found between participants that had implications for the experiences of the group, therapeutic and otherwise. These were cognitive identifications, that were reinforced in moments of support-giving and -receiving. For Head Outdoors participants, opportunities to garden alongside others also experiencing ill health were enabling resources, reducing perceived stigma, and sensitising members and practitioners to the additional support and accommodation others need. This reassuring commonality supported further acts of connection and engagement. Rebeiro (2001), drawing on Goffman (1963), posits a mechanism for the therapeutic benefit of being alongside those with shared, (sometimes-)stigmatised identities. Being with 'one's own' may lessen the need to expend energy and attention on stigma management, fostering relaxation, enjoyment, and occupational participation in enabling environments. Veen and Doughty (2023) found that people in a gardening project for those going through cancer treatment appreciated feeling understood, and that they did not have to "explain or defend" (p94) themselves when tired or in pain. A reduction in the felt need to stigma manage was indicated by members' accounts of alleviated internal-external dissonance during sessions. Participants disclosed feelings of pressure to conceal or mask distress, discomfort, and anxiety in other social contexts, to avoid stigma, for how it may go unrecognised and unappreciated, and potentially as a type of protective isolation. The two-part format of some check-ins, with two numbers or two thumb-gestures, suggested that the exposing of usually 'internal' feelings, and the communication of experience of dissonance, was valuable. Ilic et al. (2011) find that being with

others with mental illness, alongside being open about one's experiences (through humour and positive ingroup stereotyping), is associated with better self-esteem. Concealing or overcompensating for stigmatised identities was found to be detrimental. They identify these as identity management strategies; enabling environments, perhaps, foster prosocial and therapeutic forms of managing, enacting, and relating to one's health-related identities. Dissonance appeared to be alleviated through mood improvements during sessions, levelling oneself with an outwardly calm exterior. At other times, alleviation seemed come through a reduced need to mask, camouflage, or perform aspects of oneself or one's mood. Masking is a term used in some autistic communities; Miller et al. (2021) note distinctive aspects of masking for autistic people, but also speak of nonautistic masking (perhaps more appropriately, identity or stigma management). Masking can feel both socially necessary and distressing; hence, being able to 'unmask' (Price, 2022) is valuable (Miller et al., 2021; Bradley et al., 2021). There seemed to be some relief in how dissonance was, if not alleviated, shared and recognised.

Moments of peer support could further increase identification between participants, and lay down the trust, reciprocity, and mutual understanding that facilitated future supportive exchange. Connection beget connection, as mutual understanding and identification were deepened and evidenced in acts of disclosure, of support giving and receipt. Wood et al. (2022) find that the shared experience of mental ill health (also in a community garden setting) produced "a sense of belonging and a positive non-judgemental space for recovery" (p6). This similarly suggests the cognitive-affective resource of this connection, productive of positive affect, and enabling further connection-making action. Moments of identification might lead to supportive exchanges, or feelings of enablement to engage further in the activities of the growing spaces.

3.4.1.2 Complementary role-taking, social recognition

The growing spaces and materials afforded opportunities to enact and sustain identities and subjectivities, relating to nature, teaching, and caregiving. Fellow members and practitioners provided support and company in these enactments, and acted as participating audiences and partners. Identities are socially bestowed, sustained, and transformed (Berger, 1963); participants are not only recognisers of identity, but co-participants in its performance. The growing spaces provided a social and material context to enact such identities. The re-assuming of past, relational roles during sessions contributed to forms of biographical repair or continuity (Sanderson, 2011), following the disruptions of changing health and withdrawal from work. Small exchanges of information about collective tasks allowed for both the expansion and recognition of identities as

people who enjoy, know, and interact with nature. Such exchanges might entail remarking upon a passing bird, or the concurrent learning and teaching occurring while one is shown how to prune. Recognition and witness were actively articulated in Head Outdoors check-ins, in how Pots-and-Plates practitioners thanked volunteers through Christmas gifts, and in the nomination of volunteers at Celandine Community Garden for local awards.

3.4.1.3 Connecting through doing

Bonding through doing was a form of connection finding and making at all of the projects. The idea of community as rooted in copresence has been critiqued (Massey, 1994), and attention brought to the role of active and collective engagement with place in community-making. Engagement in activities brought participants into association around the tools and earthy materials of the growing spaces, in task-oriented socialities of shared purpose and experience. While participation in tasks could support person-to-person connection making, with occupied hands and averted gazes easing conversation, tasks could also facilitate the emergence of certain *ways* of socialising and associating: task- and place-related socialities and collectivities.

Others have theorised the experience of collective and interrelated tasks which connect people with larger projects and socio-occupational collectivities. Smith (2021) asserts that craftwork and taskwork have collectivity and co-operation intrinsic to them, citing Amin and Roberts (2008) in detailing how aspects of taskwork - community-specific language, stories, reciprocity, and varied forms of contact - cohere and connect. He extends materiality and motion into conceptions of belonging to something "productive, caring, and larger than the individual" (Smith, 2021: p159), describing how the scents, feels, and rhythms of therapeutic woodworking came to reinforce feelings of belonging, as did the routine taking-up of the sociomaterially-afforded roles of the workshop. In a different context, Salisbury (2012) suggests that the textures, sounds, and smells around people working can shape feelings of community and identity. Most of the growing sessions, similarly, offered cohering tasks, roles, and accompanying sensory qualities, that created connection between participants and the spaces and projects. The growing sessions afforded communal modes of navigating space. As groups navigated The Apple Grove together, tasting their way around trees, they would consult one another to compare the tastes of different apples, or a plum's firmness, ergo ripeness for picking. Harvesting seemed to be particularly well suited to group work, as participants shared knowledge and opinions about flavours and readiness. Task-related talk might drift to and from humour, or into matters more personal or serious. Morris et al. (2019) similarity find that outdoor mobilities can facilitate socialisation, as people collectively manoeuvre through spaces,

'discovering' and sharing knowledge on their surroundings. At The Apple Grove, I also observed more stationary (and sometimes unspeaking) campfire socialities.

Socialities emerging through doing have been identified in outdoors spaces and 'men's sheds': undemanding (Bierski, 2016), fleeting (Doughty, 2013), or shoulder-to-shoulder (Ireland et al., 2019; Lefkowich and Richardson, 2018) socialities and forms of support. These concepts are not identical, but describe varied ways in which socialising and support-exchange can be made easier by mediating activities (and the focus and guidance they provide), and through the validation of looser forms of interaction that might otherwise be experienced as awkward or uncomfortable. Articulated by a community gardener in Dolley's (2020) study: "it's always awkward meeting new people, but at least here there's something to do…you're not just standing around...here, you've…something to do and then you end up talking anyway" (p114).

Lefkowich and Richardson (2018) highlight the role of spatiality in affecting social dynamics, in their conceptualisation of shoulder-to-shoulder and sideways support, while Ireland et al.'s (2019) approach considers mobility too. In the mobile-social arrangements (Lormier, 2016) of people navigating outdoor landscapes they describe, both health and nature entered and exited conversation, the latter carrying a sense of peace and perspective. At the growing spaces, periods of more intense mobility beckoned periods of rest, these bench and fireside moments creating space for conversation. Bierski (2016) describes more distant forms of socialising; his participants countered isolation through visiting parks, where "interaction is possible but not required" (p142). This type of less demanding connection was accommodated in most of the growing spaces; large enough for participants to be diffuse, while working on tasks within the broader projects of spaces. Participants were afforded relative privacy, while linked to others visually and in purpose. Mobility between different areas, and the tasks and socialities they afforded, was a mechanism for accommodating, regulating, and seeking varied affective states (see 4.5.3). Notably, however, the ease of socialising could be compromised at certain times and for certain people. Providing help and guidance, and managing competing demands (whether as a practitioner or member), could be straining. Changes to the number or familiarity of people present could be a source of overwhelm and discomfort, as experienced at times during Wenlock Welcome sessions, and at occasional 'one off' events and celebrations facilitated with the CICs.

The social connections made, in these mobile-social arrangements, did not always amount to dyadic relationship building, but instead, to emergent collectivities. Friendship between participants did not fully characterise or explain the nature of social connection in the growing spaces. Certainly, people were friendly with one another most of the time. I wish here to draw attention to the largely

welcoming and friendly atmospheres of the growing spaces, and the social collectivities created in and through these atmospheres. As mentioned, in the therapeutic community of Head Outdoors, peer support was somewhat generalised. While some members provided support more than others, few had not ever provided either practical, horticultural, or emotional support. Conversations were often had in groups, whose constitutions would vary within and between sessions. People bonded largely through doing, and adopted socialities oriented around and influenced by the outdoor spaces. As such, the material components of spaces, and the activities and affects they afforded, can be considered elements in the emergence of these collectivities. Following Head Outdoors check-ins, the formation of small groups seemed to be guided largely by the activities people chose to do, rather than clique-like groups reforming each week. I characterise Head Outdoors as a therapeutic community, for the nearness and farness of members' experiences mental (ill)health within sessions, the prevalence of peer and practitioner support, and for the therapeutic aspects of horticultural work, which structured tasks and interactions. Friendly collectivities emerged at the other sessions, too, taking on more neighbourly or familial feelings, with the specificities of the spaces and sessions. Both Head Outdoors and The Apple Grove had been described as developing a family-like feel by multiple participants, further suggesting the emergent, collective production of the "*sense*" of the sessions.

Samantha's comments following a session at The Apple Grove affirm the role of the social and material together, while highlighting that therapeutic atmospheres and collectivities are both an achievement, and tentative (Smith, 2021). Samantha described the session as "*flat*"; she had been unable to prepare food for it as she usually would have, and felt that this affected the session's feel and dynamic. Commensality was a routine part of the sessions; members and practitioners would sit around the campfire, eating and conversing. The absence of food, it seemed, affected how other elements in the usual assemblage connected and interacted. Of the session, I had noted that she was the only practitioner attending that day. I wondered whether the absence of the usual inter-practitioner rapport, that could act as a tone-setting base and springboard for wider interactions, had been impactful. Coinciding, too, were the shortening autumnal days - all potential candidates in upsetting the atmospheric balance of the assemblage.

The more collective and emergent elements of these social connections are evidenced, too, in the largely place- and session-bound nature of relations in the sessions. As mentioned, few participants socialised outside of the gardening sessions, as observed by Pitt (2013) in community gardens in Wales. Members who did largely did so at other places and events organised by the VCS organisations. Kingsley and Townsend (2006) have found that relationships made in community gardens do not necessarily extend beyond the time-spaces of these activities; one participant

expressed that they had not experienced a "social spin off effect" (p535), and suggested this was due to the garden's infancy. In workplace settings, 'extra-organizational socialising' is associated with moving from acquaintance to friend, to close friend (Sias and Cahill, 1998). Practitioners themselves were pleased to see signs that people had offered one another help independently of them, be it a shared car ride to sessions, or the teaching of a task. However, a body of sociological and psychological literature suggests the value of a range of looser relations: weak (Granovetter, 1973; Putnam 2000), peripheral, or nonintimate ties, one's 'active network' (Dunbar, 2014, in Cacioppo et al., 2015), and consequential strangers (Fingerman, 2004), in addition to the previously discussed 'fleeting' and 'light' socialities. Weak ties can foster access to information, opportunity, novelty, and resources (Fingerman, 2009). While relations in the growing spaces do not neatly match categories of nonintimate or intimate - members often had more intimate conversations with people they would not see again until the next session – this work has some applicability. The groups seemed to help counter feelings somewhere in between what Cacioppo et al. (2015) call relational and collective loneliness; the former referring to lack of closer, more intimate relationships from which one derives more intense support, and the latter referring to looser relations rooted in a shared identity. Edwards (n.d.) finds, too, that some participants value the distinctness of their relationships inside and outside of nature-based activities. I argue that the place-specificity of these valuable associations and collectivities is an argument for the protection of such spaces, rather than an indictment of the value of community gardening projects for not always fostering dyadic social connection.

While not wishing to overlook the value of friendships that develop and extend beyond community gardening projects, I highlight that other (often collective) relations are valuable, and that some of the beneficial and therapeutic aspects of relations in the garden are emergent in and across sessions. Inevitably, then, arise questions of sustaining spaces in which such potentially beneficial and therapeutic socialities emerge (see 6.4.2), rather than focusing wholly on developing abstracted 'capacities' in individuals. Friendliness, warmth, and welcome were properties and values of the groups, requiring some active maintenance, rather than (only) characteristics of dyadic relationships, or of individuals. Beth's praise, that "*everyone is friendly*", can be considered not (primarily or only) the result of friendly individuals cohering, but the communal production of friendliness in a particular sociomaterial setting. The generalised, networked nature of relations and relational attributes (friendliness, warmth, support) itself contributed to the therapeutic resource of sessions. Feelings of alienation, loneliness, and exclusion can occur within groups (Stuart et al., 2022). Additionally, Stuart et al. suggest that, for some people on social prescribing pathways, the belief that friend-making was the purpose of joining groups could be inhibitive, particularly for those who

felt they were poor at making friends. As such, receiving warmth from most participants, and being able to participate without pressure to develop deep dyadic bonds, is likely to have been beneficial.

The Apple Grove session became more akin to a friendship group over time, with closer relationships, and (social media-mediated) contact outside of sessions. However, this accompanied a shift in the session, productive of a different purpose and set of qualities. This, partly, was an intentional movement, as the CIC transitioned towards a more horticultural (and commercial) orientation. The members took on greater responsibility, eventually able to come to The Apple Grove without practitioners. However, this represented a movement away from the mental health focus it had once had. Towards the latter half of fieldwork, I had not encountered new members joining (see 6.2.1). In later visits, conversation could be more familiar, at times. The ability to talk more directly can involve a trade-off, between the benefits and risks of people finding out their similarities and dissimilarities in political orientations or perspectives. I do not wish to privilege one way of associating and relating over another – friendship over a generalised friendliness, relative independence over dependence. Instead, I highlight that different assemblages of people, place, and activity have different qualities, which may be differentially beneficial or therapeutic depending on an individuals' needs and interests.

3.4.2 'Nature' encounters

Thus far, I have focused on human sociability, mediated by the plants, creatures, and horticultural materials of these assemblages. Socially situated and navigated, encounters with nature were given shape and meaning through being done collectively, and as part of collective projects. As illustrated, navigating the growing spaces together produced particular types of sociality, enabling connections to be made between participants, and with the spaces and gardening projects. Bell, Leyshon, Foley, and Kearns (2019) suggest that diverse engagements with nature can be "interdependent, coproduced through a form of shared sociality" (p9). While the horticultural settings and tasks influenced social dynamics, social dynamics and practices shaped how nature was known and interacted with. I now focus on connections made with 'nature' or 'natural' features, considering the ways in which plants and participants affected one another, with influence from posthumanist literatures. I summarise how the specific plants and features attended to were guided in part by other participants. I discuss how the social context of activities – the harvesting apples *for* others, for example – could add to their meaning. Pitt (2018) cautions against assuming the homogeneity of environment features and their impacts upon humans, and calls for specificity around the term nature 'connection'. I conclude this discussion by providing such delineation, in the relation to types

of connections made in the growing spaces. Such connections could be sensory, cognitive, affective, and culturally inflected. The relations made with the varied constituents of the growing spaces were shaped by member and practitioner understandings of the orientations of sessions, and could change over time. Notably, a small number of participants seemed less affected by plants, and affiliated more consciously and intimately with other participants, with other features of the spaces, or with the broader projects. The limits of social context in rendering nature meaningful and valued for individuals are discussed.

3.4.2.1 Co-navigating the outdoors

Nature encounters occur throughout the life course, and participants brought with them different knowledges and attractions to the varied aspects of the growing spaces. Gardening, volunteering, nature documentaries, and YouTube permaculturists were sources of learning. Practitioners had broad and eclectic knowledges, originating in their own experiences and qualifications, and building on their social embeddedness in local networks of environmentally minded people. Participants sensitised one another to elements of the growing spaces, drawing prior learnings and experiences. Co-members and practitioners shaped one another's encounters in the gardens, through social learning or socially enhanced interaction. Sharing and scaffolding moments of being affected by nature could invite discussion of one's related thoughts and feelings, akin to how rural group walkers would share "nuggets of specialist knowledge" about their environments, which "animated deepened interest" (Grant and Pollard, 2022: p90). These were generative, cognitive-affective moments, in which positive affect was produced, recognised, and solidified ("*this is what it's all about, isn't it*?"). The growing sessions provided the space and social context for tactile, novel engagements with nature. At The Apple Grove, the unusualness and meditative quality of the task of slowly gathering leaves were remarked on and laughed about. Several members described how they enjoyed the feel of mixing with garden materialities, becoming muddy and smoky. Bell et al. (2014) note that social and cultural norms govern behaviour in green spaces. Participants invited others to experience and perceive garden beings and environments in different ways. Invitations to taste or touch garden plants offered ways of accessibly and collectively producing knowledge on the growing spaces, accommodative of those arriving with less specialist knowledge of nature and horticulture. Some members availed of opportunities to learn more structured horticultural skills. For those with interest, inclination, and ability, the growing spaces could provide the setting and social approval for otherwise less conventional, multisensory encounters with nature. The sessions offered not just accommodative norms, but activities, spaces, and company in these encounters.

Participants, thus, enriched one another's garden encounters, through providing information and focusing attention, and inviting, teaching, and structuring particular ways of interacting with plants. In this context, it becomes difficult to think of static plant affordances, or immutable agencies. Even when considering plants to be potentially highly agentic, Pitt (2015) and Turner (2023) describe roles that people may play, in attuning attention towards these agencies. Pitt (drawing on Ingold, 2011) explores plant agency with aid from experienced gardeners, who helped her learn *from* plants by attuning her perception to them. Turner, concerned with nonhuman agencies and multispecies justice, suggests that an attentiveness to nonhuman agency and needs can be cultivated through education, support, and design, at community gardens. In the context of Hazelford community gardens, I wish to highlight (and perhaps celebrate) joint human-nonhuman agencies, viewing co-members as fundamentally shaping composite experiences of interacting with plants, creatures, and environments. An understanding of plant agencies and affordances as joint and augmentable is applicable to many of the situations in which these agencies are encountered: situations in which we might care for plants and ourselves. Both Pitt and Turner provide helpful correctives to accounts which underappreciate nonhuman agencies. However, I find value in thinking, not only in terms of attunement and attentiveness *to* plant agencies and affordances, but about how their affective power can be *extended* (or attenuated) and elaborated upon through specific sociomaterial encounters. Such a lens recognises the relationality and multiplicity of plant agency, while potentially encouraging attention to the joint agencies which might support human and nonhuman flourishing.

Nature is often written about with an assumption of biophilic, automatic enjoyability. Without disregarding instances of more passively, individually, and readily experienced therapeutic encounter, it is worthwhile to consider the social context of therapeutic green experiences, their emergence, and augmentation. Discussing the pleasures of eating, Mol (2010) explores how food can taste better in more pleasant surroundings. She describes how, in a care home dining context, talking about the food created ambiance, and had a performative aspect, improving its taste. She revisits food and taste in *Eating in Theory* (2021), using it to think with more broadly: "Perceiving is not the natural effect of the encounter between an eating subject and a food object, but a possible event occurring as a part of a complex socio-material practice" (p58).

Mol's insights have resonance in the context of encounters with nature, and the sociomaterial practice of community gardening and growing. Ambivalent reactions to snow-covered plants further demonstrate the relational quality to perceiving and sensing nature. This example poses a reminder that experiences of nature are part of a range of generative sociomaterial encounters. Cumulative encounters with nature through life, alongside, presumably, encounters with nature via climate

crisis-oriented media, impacted the affective quality of viewing blossoming plants. Outside and prior encounters can enhance the therapeutic qualities of community gardening for an individual, as when certain natural features evoke nostalgia (Whitehouse, 2017), or connections with family (Black, 2020). This might not be the case for those with negative experiences in nature, or with few. Such participants are underrepresented in the gardens, and in this research. I concur with authors (see Ingold, 2000; Macnaghten and Urry, 1998) arguing that it is through engaged interactions that nature is known, made, and perceived. I provide an account which demonstrates how particular encounters with nature are shaped by present sociomaterial conditions, and by prior encounters of oneself and co-present others, with natures varied and mediated.

For a share of participants, the altruistic element of sessions motivated and shaped participation. Participants were not just harvesting apples or beautifying gardens, but were harvesting and beautifying for others to eat and enjoy. These appreciators might be physically present, or held in one's mind: the unknown local shoppers or community centre members receiving apples through sales or donations, or the schoolchildren using the park at other times during the week. While this sometimes sat in tension with ideas of contributing to harvests or spaces, it was nonetheless an aspect of the sessions that contributed to motivation and enjoyment in activities. That the activities helped produce food and beautify and caretake green spaces helped construct the activities more broadly as *good*. A member, Alistair, described participating and aiding others in tasks, as "*beneficial to society*". His comment has slight resonance with discourses of responsible citizenship, although such themes did not seem dominant during sessions. Some appreciated being in the company *of others* who valued altruism, as expressed through their participation.

The social contexts of the sessions, however, were not deterministic, universally able to encourage engagement with place and practices. Some practices were found too hard or unappealing, while the materiality of spaces and bodies could make certain activities difficult for some: physically challenging, or prompting worry about the visibility of bodies. The semi-public, mixed-gender, and somewhat scripted nature of the sessions, for example, could sometimes limit willingness to participate in activities practiced or suggested (including yoga and dancing). Enrolment in the different practices facilitated within the sites could be uneven. While this raises the question of what might be done to extend participation, it also represents an advocation for multi-practice, multi-area spaces. For, factors influencing enrolment were shaped by experiences and rhythms inside, outside, and prior to engaging in these spaces.

3.4.2.2 Illuminating 'connections'

The gardens enabled affective encounters with nature, people, and built elements. Here, I discuss the grounding of encounters in particular understandings of nature, and how they cascade (or may not) into other kinds of connection. I explore the extent to which garden connections entailed recognition of nonhuman agency and interdependence. These reflections contribute to conversations of whether community gardening necessarily engenders interspecies wellbeing, and those which nuance understandings of the relationship between recognising nonhuman agency and interdependency, and ethical, pro-environmental behaviour (Giraud, 2019; Pitt, 2018; van Dooren, 2014). I highlight the diversity both of the 'nature' that is 'connected' with, and of the character and impacts of these connections.

As described in 3.3.3, encounters in the growing spaces were affecting, producing feelings of awe, enchantment, and delight, amongst other ways of being affected. Feelings of surprise and familiarity in response to expressions of seasonality demonstrate an extension of the affective resource of nature, through repeated encounter. The spontaneous behaviour of wildlife was an affecting force too, largely pleasant, although sometimes less so for 'pest' creatures. Hitchings (2006) captures gardeners' experiencing of wonderment in response to the unpredictability of garden plants; their growth could never be anticipated exactly, implicating vitality, magic, and agency. Others have documented the joy found in the spontaneities of gardening (Müüripeal et al., 2023; Tilley, 2006). Members and practitioners augmented the agencies of plants and animals, known not just for how they looked, sounded, or tasted, but for how they moved, worked, and afforded certain activities. An apple tree might be reckoned more passively for the visual beauty of its blossoms, while applewood might be appreciated for its role as the substrate in whittling; for its smooth inner wood and suitability for use as a plant label, when carved into shape.

Encounters with nature could prompt cascading connections with a broader, benevolent 'nature', sometimes taken to offer insight into life. Phillip's description of a seed's renewal, its eruption after a plant's death, had a metaphorical resonance, and provided ontological teachings. Plant cyclicity mirrored cycles within human lives and relationships, and demonstrated renewal as a possibility. Veen and Doughty (2023) and Hale et al. (2011) capture similar processes, the latter arguing that community gardeners' reflections on the reciprocity in caring for plants may have implicit metaphorical resonance for caring for oneself or the environment. They, too, found that teachings of cyclicity had a wider applicability: "[gardening]…reminds you of the cyclical nature of things" (p8), said one participant. Grant and Pollard (2022) found that walking through nature – the combination of sensations, appreciations, and reflections this entailed – made some group walkers think about things larger. Applying Heidegger's (1927/1962) *Dasein* concept, Duedahl et al. (2022) describe some of their national park-visiting participants as feeling a sense of becoming-with these spaces. This

mutual, interwoven becoming developed understandings of ontological co-existence with nature, providing perspective-giving moments of belonging to something greater. Like the garden members, visitors found new ways to engage with nature, and see themselves. Invoking scale, nature could provide perspective. The practitioner, Heather, implicated the sensory shift of leaving home for the gardens in perspective-giving. Williams and Harvey (2001), citing Gallagher (1993), describe a therapeutic diminutive effect, rooted in feelings of fascination, insignificance, and humility. Metaphorical resonances and ontological teachings in green spaces can produce positive feelings of belonging, and understandings of processes of growth and change. Masterson et al. (2020), using a realist framework, describe such metaphors as mechanism resources that individuals (in some circumstances) apply to their own lives, creating desires to change in the context of mental ill health. Drawing on Duff's (2010) terminology, the ontological and metaphorical resonances found in the community gardens can be considered a kind of meaningful affective resource, availed by some.

The nonhuman components of the gardens had influence, agency, or impact in the sociomaterial assemblages of which they were apart. Their affordances were vital in the creation of certain activities, socialities, and collectivities. Some (see Degnen, 2009) bracket questions of agency, while still addressing human-nonhuman relationships and intentionality. I use the term agency in a relatively inclusive manner, recognising diversity in the ways in which agencies are expressed, understood, recognised, and augmented. A number of participants spoke of feeling powerfully affected by different natural features: mountainous terrain, moon phases, and coastal landscapes. Participants entered into reciprocal relationships with plants, which sometimes had the character and affective qualities of human-like relationships. This was occasionally acknowledged and reflected upon. Caring relations allowed for the practice of the aforementioned, valued relational roles. The fruition of cared-for plants could promote feelings of pride and esteem; this joining of agencies perhaps also alleviating forms of stress associated with perceptions of individual control or responsibility. Garden encounters, for some, entailed the aforementioned ontological and metaphorical connection-making: plant agencies were *recognised* as teachers, and interdependences and continuities between humans and nonhumans were found. From an analytic perspective, recognising the agency or affective capacities of plants, creatures, and earthy materialities does not mean that participants thought similarly. This was seemingly true for some, and less so for others.

Several participants self-consciously promoted more relational understandings of plants and other environmental features, evident in Alistair's reminders: "*I say this to people, I say we are nature".* Jack encouraged members to taste plants typically considered weeds, or to eat usually discarded parts of plants, a becoming-food (Nyman, 2019) that invited a more positive and engaged

appreciation of garden plants and their potential roles in the garden socio-ecologies. Both were keenly interested in nature, and deeply concerned about the climate crisis. Some of the participants' recognitions of agency could be described as spiritual or metaphysical. In home gardening, Denise recognised a combined, augmented, or proxy agency, describing how her late sibling would look over her plants, helping them grow. Being landed on by a butterfly was described with significance, "*it gives you luck*".

There can be some therapeutic benefit in certain instances where participants hold more relational views of plants and the environment. Suggestions that caring for plants might beneficially release oxytocin (Stuart-Smith, 2020) may depend upon gardening being recognised *as* care for another, rather than through the lens of work or chore. Additionally, some of the meaningful metaphorical resonances and ontological lessons found and felt in the growing spaces built upon feelings of kinship, consubstantiality, or common origin with nonhumans. As mentioned, Hitchings (2006) finds the recognition and acceptance of not having total control over gardens, as joint human-nonhuman projects, to be part of the pleasure of gardening. Varied recognitions of the affective power of nature seemed to form part of the wellbeing strategies of some members. However, they do not underlie all positively affecting experiences of nature and gardens.

There were not only one or two ways of understanding and connecting with nature at the root of all therapeutic, caring, or engaging encounters. One participant self-consciously acknowledged her ambivalence in according intention, significance, or relational obligation, stating that ivy should be thanked when cut, before calling this "*superstition*". Some connected more to the idea of ecosystems, over nonhuman beings. At one growing space, and with wavering ambivalence, slugs were given to the chickens, a contribution to "*the circle of life*" that would ultimately create more produce. At another, a visitor killed spiders, before being gently discouraged from doing so by a practitioner. My intention is not to value one of these acts over another, but to demonstrate the diversity of connections and obligations in the growing spaces. Hazelford gardeners formed varied attachments. For those familiar with weeding, weeds could be appreciated as a familiar presence providing an ever-available task. They could be an ambivalent presence, with enjoyment, satisfaction, fatigue, and frustration found in cutting down and piling up unruly blackberry bushes. Some saw these plants as untidy, and others enjoyed learning from Jack, a practitioner who often shared interesting facts and unusual uses of 'weeds' with the groups at Wenlock Park. One or two participants wished to strim or use weedkiller, and others sought to use methods – while similarly eradicative of weeds and overlong grass – that were felt to be kinder to nonhuman species and communities. The 'natural' elements' affective agency could be limited, by individuals' other interests or needs: Beth spent most sessions in the portacabin, cooking, while many who attended

Wenlock Welcome days rarely ventured to the allotment area (instead using the supermarket, or looking after children).

The shape of relationships with 'natural' features in the garden were influenced by member understandings of what the sessions were for, what they hoped to get out of them, and seemingly, too, by participants' pre-existing schema. The growing spaces were not simply 'natural' ecologies, but socio-ecologies assembled in part with multiple, important instrumental focuses: to improve members' mental wellbeing, to caretake spaces, facilitate community interaction, and produce food that could be donated or sold locally. Illustrative of the varied ways of connecting with nature in the gardens were Gillian and Natasha's relations to wandering animals. Both seemed to welcome robins, but differed in their feelings towards rabbits. As a practitioner motivated by a farm-to-fork philosophy, Natasha was concerned with making the site more productive (of food). Gillian's participation, as a member, was guided more by leisure. Resultingly, lettuce-nibbling rabbits were much more of a problem, or enemy (Pitt, 2018), for Natasha. Wandering cats might be viewed as annoying interlopers, toileting and digging in edible plant beds, or cheeky co-habitants, adding texture and surprise to the growing spaces. The co-presence of such varied understandings of nonhumans resonates with Heydari's (2020) critique of Hitchings, which serves as a reminder that the agencies of 'natural' actors differ in kind and welcome.

Affinities for plants were not always or only the result of growing affections for an abstract 'nature'. They emerged out of sociomaterial encounters with plants, creatures, and environments, which may or may not be recognised as 'nature'. Marion valued opportunities to learn:

> "*about plants, or leaves, or things you can eat. Different ways of doing things*." (Marion, member, Let'sGrow)

She was taught specific ways of relating (eating, harvesting, growing) with specific plants. Connection here can be more specifically described as learning and eating: a tomato or edible leaf more salient than 'nature'. Thus, affinities and caring relations might be incubated through a variety of practices. For Marion, the plants, creatures, and landscapes that I describe in imperfect shorthand as nature are known as particular species allowing novel ways of "*doing things*". Phillip recognised that particular practices and conversations may need to be facilitated, to foster some of the kinds of nature connection he hoped to:

> "*we don't really get involved at the moment with the wild side of nature. Which I, I feel is even more powerful in the allowing of people to reconnect both with the…healing properties of the earth…[and] the environments that you're in*" (Phillip, practitioner, Let'sGrow)

Some individuals seemed to feel more connection or affinity with the projects and collectivities, than with the plants and creatures themselves. One member, who had chosen the sessions out of a range of other prescribed activities for how they fit within his schedule, was drawn closer to practical building tasks than those involving tactile engagement with plants. He was less compelled into the sort of relations with plants that Phillip described, and took some convincing to recycle plastic rather than disposing of it in the fire burner. Not using petrol-powered tools, too, seemed like an inefficient choice. While not unaffected by plants - he enjoyed harvesting tomatoes when they were plentiful, and his practical work was often guided by their needs - he seemed to develop ongoing relations with members, practitioners, and the broader project, more than with its plants and creatures. For Cynthia, her affiliation with the broader project of the garden, and those who used it, seemed most salient. While convinced that it was good to leave areas for bees, she preferred tidied, neat gardens, with designated areas for wildlife. Producing food and a beautiful, tidy space to be enjoyed by others were more familiar ways of relating. Cynthia was happy to learn new ways of thinking about and relating to plants, but did not adopt them in her garden, which she kept "*weed free*":

> "*the people are trying to encourage us to do different things, which is really interesting*."
>
> "*I'm not a wild gardener*" (Cynthia, member, Let'sGrow)

As in Pitt's (2018) research, the encounters in these gardens defy a homogenous view of nature connections, and their outcomes. In community gardens, she argues, interspecies relations can vary in character – from friend, to stranger, to enemy. These relations are shaped by the instrumental purposes of gardening sessions, with implications for how humans behave. Further to this, I highlight that *therapeutic* garden encounters were not always predicated on acknowledgements of nonhuman agencies and interdependencies on the friendlier end of the spectrum Pitt provides. Environmental 'co-benefits' of therapeutic gardening projects cannot be assumed.

Green social prescribing introduces a particular instrumental purpose to community gardening projects, inviting members with attachments to nonhuman creatures potentially diverse in character and strength. This welcomes inquiry into how (and whether) therapeutic gardening practices might be made to have co-benefits. Pitt suggests that deliberate conversations are required, for garden encounters to foster ethical connection. I agree that intentional actions are likely to be needed: even where agency and interdependence, of a kind, is recognised, different relations can follow. However, I argue that therapeutic gardening sessions are not always be amenable to such conversations. I have shown how this was recognised by practitioners, who, nonetheless, found different ways to promote ethical relations through their work. Explored further in the following chapter, the flexible

orientation of sessions (with a gentle offering of opportunities to develop such connections) was a virtue in this regard, as was the implicit embedding of ethical commitments within ways of doing and learning (see 4.1.1.1). Phillip's comments show that he was eager to facilitate such connections, and thinking through the ways, times, and places that Let'sGrow might augment these opportunities. The variation in people's understandings of – and attachments to – plants, creatures, and landscapes, raises questions: how large an ontological shift can be cultivated through community gardening, and how might such shifts be elaborated in locally and personally meaningful ways? This research indicates that efforts to cultivate certain kinds of connection may need to build upon or align with existing affinities for garden places and beings. One member might respond to the language of task-embedded learning about horticultural processes, and another to more animated languages. Some might more easily relate to ideas of interwoven ecosystems, or collective projects, or personally knowable creatures. Others, yet, will be less open to such efforts and conversations, while still finding valued connections in the projects. Enhancing the ability for community gardening to promote nature connection (as environmental stewardship, Pitt, 2016) may require specific conversations and actions, tailored to existing attachments, and occasionally subordinated within specific sessions and contexts, where promoting human wellbeing is paramount.

Garden encounters entail a range of potential opportunities for connection-making. Without nuance, the term 'nature connection' can flatten different ways of relating, and assume beforehand what constitutes nature in these relationships. Ruiz-Ballesteros and Cáceres-Feria (2016) argue that there are many ways in which people may understand and substantiate nature, and situate themselves relative to it, through different horticultural practices. This chapter finds similarly, while showing that 'nature' was not a dominant framing for all community garden members. Looking to the specifics of garden encounters might foster conversations about conditions which support particular health or environmental outcomes. The specificities of interspecies connections matter for what is made, achieved, or maintained through them (van Dooren, 2014). Additionally, a nuanced understanding of garden connections can furnish an appreciation of the different discourses and practices through which plants, creatures, and environments come to matter to individuals. Connections with nature can be affective-cognitive, sensory and perceptive, and reflective, and entail a whole range of ways of relating: of caring, killing, ignoring, and more. A tactile encounter with nature may or may not cascade into other ways of connecting and relating. I have taken influence from Bell, Leyshon, and Phoenix (2019), who tend towards using the phrase 'nature encounters', with the effect of distinguishing nature contact from more specific and potentially meaningful 'connections'. I have spoken about both nature and garden encounters, making a similar distinction, inclusive of the breadth of attachments made in the community gardening context. Both

'nature' and 'connection' are sufficiently multiple, that the character of garden encounters matter, for elucidating their potential impacts (for health, sustainability, or otherwise), and their transferability.

3.5 Conclusion

This chapter has explored the concept of connection as it relates to members' experiences, and relationships between individuals, collectives, places, and plants. I have explained varied kinds of encounter and connection, some begetting others: identification through shared experience or interests, supportive peer and member-organiser relations, interactions with plants and horticultural materials through tasks, task-mediated group socialities, feelings of connectedness to people physically present and absent, affiliations with the project and group, intrigue and interest around horticultural knowledges, affinity with 'nature' and specific natures, occasional fractious encounters, and meaning-laden teachings wrought through interaction with plants and environments. In doing so, I have nuanced ideas of social and nature connection. I have demonstrated how connections were not simply bidirectional, but occurring and shaped by wider heterogenous garden assemblages. Experiences in gardens are influenced by the elements they cohere, alongside members' lives outside of and prior to participation. Some among the connections made were therapeutic. Experiences characterised by eco-anxieties and social frictions are more ambiguous; the former mixed positive and negative feelings, while the latter were sometimes recuperated as part of therapeutic progress.

While 'nature' and 'social' connections are commonly proposed as 'benefits' of community gardening, this chapter advocates for attention to the kinds of relations made in community gardens, both to capture gardening in its experiential richness and variability, and to aid understanding of why, when, and how specific benefits emerge. I argue for looking with specificity to the particular types of connection that might be meaningful for individuals, and to whether and which encounters might cascade into other forms of connection and affiliation, including continued engagement. Describing places as facilitating connection, or affording enabling resources (Duff 2012), ought to be a way into exploring *which* kinds of connections are made, and *how* resources are availed of.

Attention has been drawn to the impact of nonhuman agencies on participants, and the different ways in which nonhuman agencies were felt, conceptualised, and recognised. I have highlighted the varying purchase different articulations of these agencies have for therapeutic experiences in green

space, and for generating feelings of obligation towards plants, creatures, and environments. I raised questions around how to ensure encounters with nonhumans are mutually beneficial, and have proposed that there are different culturally and personally appropriate pathways there.

This chapter has touched upon some of the work underlying the making and cascading of connections, including the negotiating of different temporalities, and the structuring of opportunities to receive support. In the next chapter, I delve more deeply into the processes through which the gardening and growing spaces became safe and enabling.

4. Creating safe and enabling community gardens and growing spaces

> "While a 'safe place' implies a reasonable degree of 'technical safety', it may, as importantly, embrace social, psychological, and emotional safety, corresponding to the relational, social and symbolic dimensions of therapeutic landscapes." (Curtis et al., 2013: p209)

For most of those who returned to sessions, the growing spaces became safe and enabling places. Expectations and reassurances developed in members, that they may attend each week to a space supportive of therapeutic experiences and accommodative of their needs, in which conflicts would be minimised and managed. The desire to create such spaces was a guiding principle for the practitioners and their organisations, adopted and supported as members reproduced values of inclusivity and nonjudgement in their interactions. The orientations and efforts of practitioners and members are the focus of 4.1. In the following sections, I describe the enabling social and physical structures of the growing spaces, and how they emerged. 4.2 shows how members experienced the growing sessions as largely low-pressure environments, through norms of non-judgment, and the collective nature of the gardening work. In 4.3, I more directly explain the role of practitioners in supporting therapeutic landscapes experiences. 4.4 argues that flexibility and structure are important aspects of these experiences. The ways in which these socioecological spaces supported different members, needs, and emotions is considered to be enabling type of flexibility, tempered and balanced with structuring elements. This chapter draws on concepts of atmosphere and of assemblage, and the emotional geographies literature, to describe the emergence of generative cognitive-affective moments and states. As outlined in the prior chapter, participants did not simply make dyadic connections, but had situated, multidimensional encounters with garden assemblages. I advance these literatures by providing an understanding of community gardening landscapes and their atmospheres as materially, socially, and semantically textured landscapes: productive not of *an* atmosphere of safety, but of multiple atmospheres and practices, with synergetic affordances. The work of creating and holding together these assemblages, and of balancing different aims and atmospheres, is made evident. This idea, of balancing, employs and extends ideas of choreographing or engineering atmospheres (Adey, 2008; Duff, 2016), and invokes Mol's (2010) work on tinkering. I explore the establishment and negotiation of rhythm as an aspect of the work of assembly.

4.1 Safety and enablement as values, goals, and orientations

The aspirations and efforts of practitioners, in particular, were significant for the shared achievement of safety and enablement in the growing spaces. Amidst broader and varyingly articulated goals and wishes for the spaces, their construction as safe spaces – at least for the duration of the sessions – was paramount. Two of the regularly attended sessions were initially tailored towards those experiencing mental ill health. While this created more specific imperatives around monitoring and managing feelings of safety (including safeguarding plans, and the attunement of practitioners to members' needs throughout sessions), the desire to create a safe space was not coterminous with the need to respond to experiences of poor mental health, narrowly defined. The understanding that everyone 'has' mental health, and that people experiencing emotional distress of varying sources and conceptualisations can benefit from being in these sorts of spaces, informed these desires. Some of the Let'sGrow practitioners talked about how the Head Outdoors sessions had become a favourite and appreciated part of their own weeks. As "*social purpose*" (Natasha) CICs, concerned with doing things differently and informed by permaculture ethics ('earth care, people care, fair share'), concerns for feelings of safety and supportiveness informed much of their work. The practitioners (and members, to an extent) had a structuring and guiding role within the groups; here, I discuss some of the ways in which they supported feelings of safety and enablement, while acknowledging that other actors inside and outside of the spaces influenced this shared achievement.

4.1.1 Managing conflict, friction, and competing goods

While the growing spaces were described by participants as calm, relaxing, and enjoyable, like in any social space, conflict and friction remained a possibility (or probability, according to Jacob and Rocha 2021). Learning to negotiate and tolerate social frictions, it seemed, was a skill honed through participating, and was considered by some members and practitioners to be a sign of progress. Conflict was managed through practitioners' and members' efforts, and the spatial affordances of the sites.

Potentially divisive or sensitive topics – be they relating to the political intersections of community gardening, or to current affairs – were generally not introduced as topics for deep discussion or debate by practitioners. Related topics that might in other contexts lead to disagreement and opinionated conversation - like sustainable living, veganism, climate change, and healthcare access - did sometimes more overtly arise, amid political events (include COVID-19 transmission-reducing measures, the conflict in Ukraine, and Cabinet resignations). However, when such topics arose, practitioners would generally not expand upon them at length. Mentions might be brief, such as

Phillip's (practitioner) subtle suggestion for people to "*keep to other-than-human in our minds*", amid Extinction Rebellion's mass direct action, or light-hearted, as when a group of members joked about politicians' resignations. There was a small amount of variation in how much such topics were avoided, and how much members adopted this approach too. When asked about some of the themes of conversations at sessions, Shaun told me:

> "*we do talk about politics sometimes, but generally, I think, for the most, it's not one that comes up too much*" (Shaun, member, Pots-and-Plates)

The avoidance of divisive topics seemed to partially be a strategy to minimise conflict and create an environment conducive to therapeutic experiences. In addition, some of the practitioners expressed that their politics and ethics were embedded in what they did, shaping and orienting practices:

> Natasha: "*So, I think, we're not very explicit in the way that we talk about environmentalism, but actually it's always there"*
>
> Samantha: "*it's like, the being outside thing, because it's fundamentally part of our psyche, it's just the way we live, isn't it…and it's the way we work, so that just spills over into the way we work"*

A number of practitioners and members sometimes characterised the relationship between these activities and environmental and social change as being 'ripple-like'; a quiet modelling of ways to grow, cook, and socialise that might spread from person to person (discussed further in 6.4.3), rather than the outcome of debate or directed conversation. For many, doing good for the community, the environment, and wildlife was an important part of their experiences, however, this was not necessarily framed through a more 'activistic' or divisive understanding of community gardening.

Inevitably, friction, conflict, and misunderstanding can arise as relationships and social groups develop. The growing spaces supported diverse groups of people with sometimes differing needs or dispositions, which were occasionally misaligned. Managing competing needs was part of the work of practitioners, who tried to ensure that members could have compatible therapeutic experiences. Careful negotiations were made, balancing different member support needs, and the emotional and horticultural support-providing aspects of their roles.

At Head Outdoors, the openness with which some difficulties were mentioned occasionally became challenging. In addition to the garden's unfamiliar placing, not quite a space of the everyday or a healthcare space, there were times it seemed to be unclear to participants when and where they

could (or should) talk about certain issues. These disclosures could be "*distressing*" and "*triggering*" (Jane) for other members. The practitioners responded to this distress with efforts to make expectations and norms relating to how people discuss upsetting events and concerns clearer:

> "*we try and manage that by saying…we want you to be able to talk to people, but come and talk to one of the staff*" (Thomas, practitioner, Let'sGrow)

The groups were relatively young; it could take time to establish norms. A balance was negotiated, between maintaining a safe space in which people could predictably return without fear of encountering challenging topics, while allowing people room to share their experiences and receive support. Initially, this took the form of asking the group not to talk about "*sensitive*" issues collectively. Such wording was possibly an attempt to not curtail supportive and intimate discussion too greatly; however, for a period, members were unclear what was meant. Some voiced that they were unsure what constituted sensitive issues, while others continued to make these personal disclosures in group settings. Responsive to this uncertainty, check-ins were guided more carefully: members were reminded that the practitioners were available if anyone would like to speak privately throughout the session, and reassurances that people need not share a great deal were sometimes given. Members were told that they could "*pass*" their turn if they would like, and shorter-form check-ins were sometimes suggested if a member seemed to be having a difficult time, as determined from pre-check-in conversations over coffees. The practitioners had quiet and considered conversations with some of those for whom disclosures could be potentially beneficial, and sometimes unintentional. One participant told me how she had "*a couple of tickings off*", and how a practitioner had told her "*I'm not going to chuck you out. You're alright, ha*". This was added in a relatively light-hearted manner, conveying the sensitive and warm way in which practitioners often spoke to members. She was "*learning*", she told me, and keen to not upset others.

The polytunnel, portacabin, and outdoor benches became spaces for more intimate conversations with practitioners. Providing members with space to voice their worries made way for sometimes in-depth conversations, requiring the directed time and attention of practitioners. However, as testament to the trusting and affable relations the practitioners made with members, some found themselves caught between different support needs. One practitioner spoke of struggling with the tension between providing attentive in-depth support to a member, while other members might need guidance. Some members felt anxiety in response to uncertainty around how to navigate the space, and engage in horticultural tasks:

> *"a couple of people who like to have very sort of, quite clear guidelines about what they're doing…I try and keep a bit of an eye on, in a sense that, you know, if they look like they're getting stressed…obviously if someone's really opening up about something, then you can't kind of go hold that thought…I'm going to go off…you need to gauge it. But sometimes, it's difficult to know…how best to, to sort of manage the competing demands*." (Jack, practitioner, Let'sGrow)

While some more intentionally sought specific practitioners for these conversations, sometimes, these moments would arise organically, as members and practitioners worked alongside one another. Often, Jack would survey the site, contemplating the needs of its plants, while maintaining a caring watchfulness for those who seemed to be feeling uncertain. Usually, four practitioners attended Head Outdoors sessions, creating capacity to respond to the differing support needs of members, and to manage the cultivation of plants. There were some efforts to support navigation through the space and activities through the creation of a blackboard (Figure 8) with weekly tasks listed. This served as the beginnings of an attempt to reduce anxieties by materially outsourcing the structuring of activities; a tinkering which made the plans and knowledge of practitioners more visible. It dovetailed with desires to create a more carefully planned and productive space, and provide an interactive opportunity for members to contribute towards the shaping of the space.

Figure 8: The activities blackboard

Members did not necessarily follow a linear therapeutic pathway from 'supported' to 'supporter' (see 6.2). However, with time and familiarity, several members were able to share with practitioners some of the labour and care of providing support. This was helped by skills acquired prior: Sarah had taken a gardening course, and was one of several who had worked in the care and community

sectors before retiring. By having only a small number of new members on any given week, and through changing the structure of Head Outdoors to allow members to stay for the foreseeable future, a productive dynamic emerged. Some support needs (such as in navigating activities, or receiving emotional support in relation to distress or care responsibilities) – were able to be met by fellow members, increasing the capacity of practitioners:

> "*we've found with this way of doing it is, we have a core group that come most weeks. They know their jobs, they know their roles. Some people are taking a bit of ownership and leadership with things….there's like, introductory work that we need to do with people as well…there's still work around talking to people - so there's some people that come that obviously are struggling quite a lot with their mental health, and each week need some kind of support from some of the staff…on an ongoing basis. But we're, we don't have suddenly six to eight people where we're finding out who they are, where they're from…what they're trying to deal with…Gerard can take somebody under their wing…Loraine can go off to the alleyway, and take people along there*" (Thomas, practitioner, Let'sGrow).

Through adopting this 'rolling' model, establishing clearer communication norms, and finding ways to increase their capacity, practitioners were more able to fulfil the different therapeutic and horticultural demands of their role, and balance the varied needs within the growing space. However, as in Mol's (2010) account of care, efforts to reconcile different goods and different needs - to tinker - did not always have "happy endings" (p230). On some occasions, member needs could not be met, nor reconciled with those of others. This sometimes led to the departure of members; here, I recount two such instances.

In both cases, the distress caused to fellow members was central in the decision of practitioners. I was told of how a member had reached a heightened state of anger and upset, prior to my first session at The Apple Grove. Natasha and Samantha recounted to me how the member had shouted around another, distressing members and practitioners. The expansive wooded area provided spatial insulation for some; more proximate members were affected greatly by this event. It had represented a nadir of the individual's gradually declining wellbeing, noticed at other sessions. The practitioners had persevered until this point, but reattendance became unfeasible. They had been caught between two obligations: to provide an enabling space for the member, and to ensure that The Apple Grove was a safe space for all. Compassion was shown by practitioners and members following the departure: Natasha emailed them for some time, while others asked her how they were. However, there was a recognition that the individual's needs were beyond the scope of the

sessions, and were currently irreconcilable with those of the other users of the space. In Chapter Six, I revisit the question of the scope and limitations of the sessions.

Similarly, James shared with me an instance in which the Clover Farm Garden (Taking Notice) session had been unable to harmoniously accommodate multiple members. He told me how a newly referred individual had upset others. This individual spoke repetitively throughout the session, repeating phrases and discussing topics in a manner which caused high levels of distress amongst the other members:

> James sensitively described how the [individual's] behaviour had upset the other members, with them walking away one-by-one. (July 2022)

James had to sensitively tell them that he "*didn't think the session was for [them]".* A combination of two factors, it seemed, foreclosed possibilities for the individual to return. Spatially, the garden was limited in its capacity to accommodate people with differing tolerances for distressing noise and speech. Its small size (approximately 40m^2) meant that members were usually close by, and activities were limited and practitioner led. Unlike other sites, which allowed for diffuse pockets of activity, this garden had only a small number of raised beds. Participants were able to walk away, but this method of emotional regulation could only be temporary: the spaces into which they moved were not places they could settle and garden. Whilst link workers were sometimes present, often James was the only person in a practitioner role, unable to lead different activities around the site. Alongside the physical limitations of the space were issues relating to the relationship between a referring organisation, and the referred-to activity. In this instance, the individual was referred to the session without James' prior knowledge. The lack of contact from the referring organisation meant that James was unable to make a judgement about the session's suitability for the individual, or prepare to accommodate their needs. This instance highlights the importance of communication, and the sometimes-irreconcilable nature of (potential) referred members' needs within sessions and groups. This was due, in part, to scope and limitations in the capacities of the spaces and the organisations, alongside factors external to the session (including the actions of referring organisations, and the myriad factors impacting member needs and wellbeing).

4.2 A low-pressure environment

Being able to engage without pressure or prescriptiveness was mentioned by most as a valued aspect of the sessions, and seemed to allay anxieties around participating in the sessions. Not *having* to come along, nor do particular tasks or talk about certain topics, made it easier for people *to* come

along. Occasionally, the freedoms within growing spaces were contrasted with places and publics without. Of their experience in the growing spaces, participants described an absence of certain kinds of pressure, alongside some of the positive feelings and experiences that could thrive in their place. Here, I explore these felt freedoms, and consider how they were brought about, and why they might have been welcome.

4.2.1 The foregrounding and backgrounding of health in conversation and practices

Despite an awareness, at some of the sessions, that fellow members had experienced mental ill health, there was little expectation that these issues be discussed. Participants had a large degree of control over whether to discuss – to foreground – their health concerns or other worries. Contrasting the fluidity of the gardening sessions with the imagined rigidity of other therapeutic spaces, members described to me how they would not like to attend a table-bound session, in which conversations and movements were inflexible and dictated. They were averse to the idea of being "*[sat] round a table*", encouraged to speak about health, hearing and being heard by all others present:

> "*I thought [Head Outdoors] was something like…you sit round a table…and you have maybe a plant pot, and some seeds, and they'll say 'alright, my name's so-and-so so-and-so' blah blah…and then they go to the next person. But it ain't, it's nothing like that. There's no pressure of them to make you talk, you can just wander off and do your own thing*." (Denise, member, Let'sGrow)

Emslie et al. (2007) similarly find a desire for action-oriented groups, amongst those experiencing ill health; their participants (women attending an exercise group for those with experience of breast cancer) were also averse to ideas of "sitting round a table talking" (p832) about their health and illness. Wood et al. (2022) heard related thoughts from link workers and therapeutic gardening staff, who felt that people (men, in particular) appreciated the activity-forward nature of their project, and how it allowed them to 'open up' at their own pace, and in their own way.

While gardening or outdoor activities were familiar to most, therapeutic community gardening was not; popular images of support groups were perhaps a repertoire from which people drew their expectations of sessions, initially. One member told me how she had wanted to avoid the "*one room*" activities her social prescriber had suggested. Members could decide for themselves when (and if) they felt that they would like to speak about themselves and their worries or conditions:

"you can make your own, I don't know…there's a soft word for that, I didn't want to say barriers, but erm, if you don't want to talk about it, that's fine" (Robert, member, Let'sGrow)

The lack of expectation to speak about health-related concerns allowed for people to first develop trust and familiarity in the space and in the members and practitioners, and communicated that this was a space in which agency was granted. Gardening served as a safe talking point upon which to draw, and a common orienting purpose of the sessions. It seemed to be a conversational anchor for those who voiced tendencies to talk more than they would like when anxious or uncertain. The only occasion at which discussion of wellbeing was prompted was the check-in at Head Outdoors; as mentioned, practitioners responded to some discomfort around this activity by reminding participants that they may 'pass' their turn. Sensitive to this discomfort, one member suggested to another that she may bypass it altogether by going straight to the growing area on arrival – a suggestion that was acted upon soon after. Many of the gardening projects seemed to constitute a kind of therapeutic third place (see 6.1.1), with characteristics distinguishing them from both ordinary spaces (the routine presence of those with experiential empathy, and individuals able to give support), and more conventional spaces of health and wellbeing (both in the nature of activities, and the flexibility and autonomy in activity and conversation).

4.2.2 Volition in the garden

Counterintuitively, the lack of pressure to attend each week, or participate in particular activities, seemed to enable people to regularly attend, and adopt particular roles:

"*it is so relaxed, that you don't feel under pressure to actually do anything. If you're having a bad day, or whatever, and you just feel like you just want to sit down, have a cuppa, maybe just talk to somebody, and, and that's what's good about it…I think…'cause it's so relaxed, that there's no pressure…that makes it a lot easier for me to actually attend*" (Beth, member, Let'sGrow)

Welcome at most sessions was generally not conditional on any level of attendance, nor participation in certain activities: sessions could be missed, or spent sitting, chatting, or gardening. Practitioners were eager for members to not feel pressured into productiveness, and - aside from the occasional joke - regular members were not expectant of one another:

> "*what is really nice as well, is you can do as little or as much as you choose to do. Without any judgement…It's just, just nice, and free, and easy, and, at your own speed, at your own pace, whatever you want to do*." (George, member, Pots-and-Plates)

Members could adapt their participation to fluctuations in their mood and health, supporting continued attendance through dips in wellbeing, and frictions during sessions:

> "*as healthy as you feel, you can almost do what you feel on the day. So you can judge your body as to how you're going to be able to do stuff…I don't think there's many projects like that*" (Sarah, member, Let'sGrow)

Some members described how they experienced fluctuating (by hour, or week) levels of pain and fatigue, that prevented participating in more vigorous activities, or coming along at all. Additionally, the anticipation that members *could* respond to such fluctuations readily and without judgment was a comfort. Low pressure was both a therapeutic aspect of their experience of these environments, and, for some, a personal condition of their initial participation. Several spoke about how, in their first few sessions, the knowledge that they could leave without consequence was a reassurance. It could take time before dips in the wellbeing of members and those that they cared for prompted attendance, rather than discouraged it. The first sessions a member came to could range from pleasant, to ambivalent, to highly anxiety-promoting:

> "*the biggest challenge to begin with is them coming back to the second session…'cause sometimes it's the first time that they've come out, whether they've had a mental health crisis beforehand it's the first time that they're coming out after that, or, whether they've been locked up 'cause of COVID. And, a lot of people are very very anxious the first time that they come*" (Jane, practitioner, Let'sGrow)

It was important that members felt that inconsistent attendance and varied engagement early-on was acceptable, to allow for anxieties to reduce, for the spaces to become experienced as safe, and for therapeutic accretion (Foley, 2017).

Features of the garden socio-ecologies contributed towards the felt absence of pressure, and the affective encounters this enabled. Unlike more structured or mobile activities, in which departing at midway points would be challenging, the growing spaces could be left at any point. In joining the groups, members were not committing themselves to finishing a 'course' of sessions, completing a circuit, or even staying until its approximate finish time. Participants frequently left at different times for various appointments and commitments, and leaving prematurely could be done discretely.

Most of the sessions had separate areas or zones of activity (see 4.4), allowing for movement between activities to avoid certain pressures and emotions. Beginning most sessions with a collective conversation with members, practitioners usually gave a range of varied activities from which they could choose. Almost invariably, this included both vigorous and relaxed activities, alongside an assertion that people could stay (around the campfire, or in the portacabin), chatting and drinking tea and coffee. These instructions were delivered in a light-hearted manner, minimising feelings of authority under the practitioners:

> [Thomas] went through the jobs: there were benches to be built, which would be led by a member, and painting the trailer, to be led by Phillip. In this garden and in others, while lots of planning and effort went into making things flow and function, there was often a light-hearted and inclusive attitude of 'we make things up as we go along', or we 'wing it'. As he listed through what there was to do, he paused and said, '*it's all gone a bit serious*!' (May 2022)

4.2.3 Sharing pressures and responsibilities in collective projects

In 3.2.1, I briefly discuss how the communal nature of the gardening projects, as a "*team effort*", allowed for the distributing of the difficulties of tasks, while creating feelings of group belonging. The communal orientation of the sessions served to create a low-pressure environment for members. A section of fieldnotes shows how a task – the labelling of apple trees – was spread amongst members, alongside Natasha's gentle recruiting of a newer member to this activity:

> Conscious that a member didn't have a task, I think, Natasha went to her car to grab some paint pens, to decorate the apple tree signs that George had previously cut up, and Shaun had painted. Natasha said to her "*how artistic - are you feeling artistic today?*" (April 2022)

Amongst members, responsibility for shaping and maintaining the space was diffuse: it was a collective effort, shared amongst members, practitioners, and plant agencies. Whilst certain tasks were taken up with volition by individuals, few tasks were done entirely alone, and all contributed towards the collective production and maintenance of the growing spaces. This ongoing group endeavour contributed towards feelings of belonging to and benefiting greater wholes, while also being accommodative of the aforementioned fluctuations in attendance and engagement of individuals. That sessions and the spaces would keep on ticking was a reassurance; contrastingly, Robert described his experience of ceasing gym-based exercise. This *individual*-oriented project, he expressed, was halted by a small number of non-attendances:

> "*well if I stop going [to the gym] for one week, I think ah, it's alright, I can get back the week after. And after two weeks is gone, you think ah, w- I'll give it the week after. And a third week, well what's the point of going back?*" (Robert, member, Let'sGrow)

He later described to me how it had taken a little while for him to enjoy the community gardening sessions; sporadic attendance progressed to weekly participation. The communality of the project of community gardening can, in some circumstances, be inconducive to the sorts of pressures that can characterise individual-oriented projects. Whilst mistakes could happen, and tasks might be slow to complete, this was rarely interpreted as an individual failure or shortcoming. Heather reflected on how the way that she thought about The Apple Grove sessions differed from how she evaluated herself when working alone:

> "*I never look at it as like, how much work we've done...if I'm on my own I do... But, when it's, when we're with other people, I think oh they've done this, and they've had a conversation, and we've chatted*" (Heather, practitioner, Pots-and-Plates)

She did not measure the session's success by individual productivity, but instead by people's engaging and participating in the group. Discussions of personal benefit came alongside a concern for the enjoyment and wellbeing of others. Asked about the appeals of the sessions, Cynthia told me: "*But the main thing is, we're helping others*", alongside mention of fresh air and company.

The agencies and responsibilities involved in shaping the spaces were not only shared amongst the human users of the spaces, but with the plants and other agents within them. For some members, plants had a 'say' in the matter of how things went. Discussed in the prior chapter, this joining and conceding of agencies can bring pleasure (Hitchings, 2006), and perhaps reduce pressure. While Gillian showed me around her growing plot at The Apple Grove, I asked which of the things she was growing would be taken to an upcoming market:

> She was growing many of her plants in perlite; I asked why, and she told me that you could use many different mediums, and that it helped retained water…I got the sense she was experimenting in the garden, and asked what she'd be taking to the market: whatever was ready, she replied.
>
> She showed [plants] which had grown, and which had not, describing how this would guide her growing next year
> (June 2022)

In her gardening, she did not seem to worry about being unable to tightly control when her crops would fruit. Instead, she was happy to be led by their emergence on their own time, and by the forgiving cyclicity of the seasons that would let her try again the following year.

4.3 The work of practitioners

Creating safe, functioning, and enjoyable garden spaces was an effort shared between members, nonhuman beings, and practitioners. I turn, now, to consider some of the roles played by the latter; practitioners helped "[set] the tone of territories" (Thibaud, 2016: p44, in Duff, 2016), and gently guided the sessions with a caring attention to the needs of the groups and spaces. They carried out practical tasks of facilitation, inside and outside of sessions, and brought with them particular skillsets.

4.3.1 Shaping social dynamics, setting the tone

Practitioners helped shape the feel and social dynamics of the sessions. Many members voiced their appreciation for the practitioners' warmth, friendliness, and welcome:

> "*the main thing is [the practitioners] are just so friendly. You instantly just get on with them"* (Milly, member, Pots-and-Plates)

> "[*the practitioners] are helpful, they're listen to you*" (Kim, member, Celandine Community Garden)

Thomas felt similarly, telling me how key practitioners were to the feel and function of sessions:

> "*the people that you have working for an organisation is a massive part of how people feel when they come to a session…so, if you've got people that are a bit more empathetic, and are willing to listen, and have an understanding of what other people are going through, I think people feel safer, and er, are more willing to come along*." (Thomas, practitioner, Let'sGrow)

James identified the importance of interpersonal skills and adaptiveness, for his work:

> "*I'm a people person, and I try and help people the best I can. If I can't, then I think outside the box, and we try and adjust it, and think about other ways we can…help people."* (James, practitioner, Taking Notice)

In discussing social prescribing pathways, he noted the importance of the relationships he established with (potential) members:

> "*if they can't relate to you, and they feel like they don't want to open up, or speak to you, I think that's a hurdle, that's a barrier straight away. I always think that, you've got to be warm, and you've got to have the right personality to be in this line of work*." (James)

These small organisations were friendly ones. The friendliness, warmth, and banter between practitioners (and members) perhaps helped model ways of interacting. Sometimes, it seemed, the inter-practitioner rapport served as a good springboard and mood-setter for conversation more broadly. Bonds with practitioners were some of the first relationships many people made; an initial friendly face and trusted person that could support further relationship-building. Practitioners might field the occasional joke, a light emotional labour (Hochschild, 1983) producing feelings of familiarity. Practitioners modelled and managed social dynamics. A member, Alistair, described how his discomfort around large numbers of people was assuaged by Pots-and-Plates' typically smaller group sizes. This was a byproduct of Pots-and-Plates practitioners' capacity, and desires to develop members' skills:

> "*what can be challenging is you suddenly come to a session, and there's new people there. When you don't know them…that can be quite overwhelming…If there's like, one new person, it's sort of okay…I know with Pots-and-Plates…they only want the sessions small*" (Alistair, member, Pots-and-Plates, Let'sGrow)

> "*the smaller amount [of members] we work with, the better it is for us as a business, 'cause we get more out of them. They stay with us longer, so they're trained up and more skills, and therefore that benefits them in all aspects of their lives as well*" (Samantha, practitioner, Pots-and-Plates)

Having not always lived in the area, Alistair was glad for the opportunity to meet people in a calm and interesting setting. At several of the projects, practitioners could decide who could come to certain sessions. At sessions with capacity, practitioners were inclusive. As stated, exclusions were considered when participants recurrently distressed others, and when their needs exceeded the capacities of the sessions. Safeguarding concerns were taken into account; Thomas told me of such an occasion where they were able to direct somebody to a more appropriate organisation. In Chapter Six, I further consider the sorts of referral pathways such people may follow. Exclusions could also apply to non-members. Pots-and-Plates reflected on the disruption caused by visitors from a charity, and they resultingly changed their method of accommodating visitors. Going forward,

the CIC decided that, should external visitors wish to come and film, they would designate a separate area for this to happen, careful not to disrupt the atmosphere of the area with unfamiliar visitors who might have a more partial understanding of the feel and function of the space. These sorts of projects frequently receive requests for visits, with calls and messages coming from local authorities, potential volunteers, health and social services practitioners (including link workers), businesses, and more. The disruptiveness or welcome of such visits depended on the session, the character of the visit, and the number of visitors.

Practitioners were inclusive and friendly, and keen to minimise their authority. I wondered whether their presence did slightly formalise the space, establishing it as one separate to the everyday, in which certain ways of interacting were expected. This, perhaps, was another way in which conflicts were avoided and managed, and feelings of safety fostered. After telling me that she would move away from conflict should it occur, Marion added that:

> "*I think there's always people around to…pick up on that, if things did happen*" (Marion, member, Let'sGrow)

4.3.2 Attunement and attuning

The practitioners were attuned to the wellbeing of the members and growing spaces. Expressions of care, and acts of adaption to differing needs and abilities of members, were common. At a Head Outdoors session, Thomas and Phillip noticed the upset of two members; mindful of how challenging it can be to speak when emotive, they adapted thusly:

> "*Shall we have a non-verbal check-in*?" suggested Phillip, to which they agreed. (October 2021)

In fieldnotes, I captured other small attunements and accommodations occurring through the sessions: the offering of thinner gardening gloves to members who might struggle with the feel of thicker ones, and the suggestion of a hands-on activity for someone seemingly feeling uncomfortable:

> Heather said to a member: "*shall we go and thin some apples? I can tell you're fidgeting/wanting something to do"*. (July 2021)

Efforts were made to nurture interests and preferences, too. Mine were no exception – Milly captured how the Pots-and-Plates practitioners were hugely forthcoming and inclusive in providing

opportunities to us. Milly was looking for employment and experience in the broad area within which the CIC were involved, while I tried to gain a broader understanding of the work they did:

> "*when I was like in between jobs as well, they were just like really getting me involved in projects and things, and, stuff I was interested in, they'd be like, oh yeah, come along to this like, or listen in on this meeting, stuff like that. I think I've heard like, Natasha say that to you. Like, oh, like listen in on this meeting, and stuff like that...they're just good at getting you involved with things that you might be interested in as well? Whilst also just like being very relaxed in it all as well?*" (Milly, member, Pots-and-Plates)

At one of the Wenlock Welcome sessions, Angela noticed that a small group of women had begun to play volleyball. She balanced a keenness to support them with not wanting to overwhelm this budding activity, deciding to watch for the next couple of weeks before offering further help:

> "*I'll just see if they do it again next week. And then we can introduce them to [a local sports charity], and say like, is there anything you'd want to set up?*" (Angela, practitioner, The Kitchen Table)

Peppered throughout the fieldnotes were examples of practitioners carrying out the work of facilitating community gardening sessions with care, mindful of how activities would or could make members feel. The guarantee of a warm meal was attraction of the sessions, for some members. Samantha's choice in the food she would bring to The Apple Grove sessions was shaped by (alongside practical factors, and understandings of good food) her memorising of participants' favourite meals and dietary preferences:

> Samantha had been warming up a new kettle, and had set out several cups for us. The shakshuka she'd been making was nearing completion. She cracked eggs and crumbled feta into the large dish, and set aside a separate portion for Alistair and me (both vegan). (February 2022)

Angela's work, too, was concerned with the affective aspects of receiving food. Her charity helped facilitate the community supermarket at Wenlock Welcome sessions. She also facilitated events in the park adjacent to Celandine Community Garden, often with a food-and-activity focus, which was welcome during school holidays. I had heard that local VCS organisations worked together to deliver and fill "*gaps*" missed by the Holiday Activities and Food (HAF) programme: a Department for Education-funded initiative, aiming to provide food and activities during the school holidays, for children eligible for free school meals.

Evident in her care and work, it seemed, were efforts to minimise negative feelings that have been documented when people are perceived to be in the receipt of charitable food (Storey and Chamberlin, 2001; Garthwaite, 2016). She tinkered, considering how best to efficiently allocate food, while creating a comfortable and welcoming atmosphere:

> [Angela] had always been reluctant to use a number system [at the community supermarket], "*I thought it was a little...*", she paused, trying to find the words. It's not very nice, she said, "*you know, here's your number, go and wait*". "*But I was wrong*" – she told me how the number system eased the pressure of people's worry about keeping their place in line, and it allowed them to wander off – I had noticed more of the community shop users coming down to the allotment, and using the benches too. (June 2022)

Crucially, she maintained an ongoing responsiveness to people's experiences. She reluctantly initiated a numbering system, to counter busyness and palpable fears around losing one's place in the queue, while remaining attentive to how people responded. In practice, this allowed those who came primarily to use the shop to use and enjoy the space more freely, which practitioners were pleased to see.

4.3.3 The practical labour of caring facilitation

Reluctant to view atmospheric emergence as a wholly passive process, I wish here to consider more directly the practical labour involved in facilitating sessions; in the bringing together of elements. Intentionality is a driver in the coming-together of therapeutic assemblages (Foley, 2023). This labour included the bringing of equipment to and from sites, managing members, securing access to sites, applying for funding, facilitating activities, and the managing of myriad communications and negotiations with other organisations that is entailed within running a small organisation.

With both CICs working across numerous sites (with variable storage facilities), a not-unsubstantial part of practitioners' weeks were spent carrying horticultural or refreshment equipment (see Figure 9) between locations: a care and labour facilitating rest and activity.

> James had set up a table with refreshments at the front, and reminded us all to utilise them. He'd brought squash and nice biscuits, and a flask of coffee – another of the thoughtful efforts of practitioners to make sure that hot beverages were available. He said that he'd like to get a shed build, to save him carrying equipment from his car each week, but wanted to speak to the others with plots around the garden to get their permission/thoughts first. (May 2022)

Figure 9: Refreshment stations across sessions

At Celandine Community Garden, without any storage, Thomas often brought a trailer of tools. At the wider The Apple Grove site, storage was increased as practitioners worked to secure the delivery of a lockable container. The delivery of a greenhouse, broadening the material and occupational affordances of the space through the creation of a new microclime, was secured by the CIC too. The acquisition of the funding required for such resources was itself a form of labour; an ongoing, never-finished labour, as is often the case with VCS work. Many of the sorts of funding streams drawn upon were relatively short-lasting, and infrequently covered 'core' organisational costs, including the labour to secure such funding in the first instance. Securing the funding for proposals, and delivering upon them, sometimes required making difficult negotiations with other organisations. As discussed in 3.3.2, such partners worked according to their own organisational and bureaucratic rhythms and pressures, which did not always align with the horticultural and organisational ones of the CICs. The decision to build the greenhouse at The Apple Grove site resulted from a protracted series of interactions with another organisation, who owned a plot of land upon which they had initially planned to house the structure. Members worked at the site several times, but these sessions ceased:

> "*maintain[ing] the land…hasn't happened. Presumably because they're under pressure as well, and also, we really need to get water in on that site as well, and we haven't been able to get a price from them to…put water in, let alone anything else in terms of permission…We can't work safely down there, and we certainly can't expect volunteers to work in the conditions, which are you know, kind of five-, six-foot high grass, very very high pollen levels this time of year*" (Natasha, practitioner, Pots-and-Plates)

Establishing whether potential partners shared the values of the organisation was identified as another aspect of collaboration. Despite a fluid landscape, with regards to access to space, the practitioners managed to ensure this resource could be utilised.

Collaborations with other organisations could be both a key strength of the work of the organisations, and a source of frustration and arrhythmia (Blue, 2017; Lefebvre, 1992/2004). The management of *potential* partners and members, too, was another form of labour. These VCS organisations received many requests for voluntary work placements, and meetings in which to discuss collaborations or request the knowledge. Correspondences were sometimes from organisations with core funding (covering staffing costs), an asymmetry that perhaps made meetings a more casual and compensated arrangement for those organisations.

> "*I sent 3 emails out last week to people saying, thanks for getting in touch, but at the moment…we have no capacity for any more volunteers*" (Samantha, practitioner, Pots-and-Plates)

> "*you get pulled into meetings, and things like that. I have to be a bit strict and go…I can't'"* (Angela, practitioner, The Kitchen Table)

Sometimes, organisations would request meetings or contributions towards projects without compensation.

Members or volunteers were a fundamental part of most of the sessions. Their presence and work was recognised and highly appreciated by practitioners:

> "*it's a very reciprocal relationship*" (Natasha, practitioner, Pots-and-Plates)

> "*our volunteers, you know, really really help us, they kind of like, come up with their own stuff that they want to do. And what they're passionate about, and it totally feeds in to what we do"* (Angela, practitioner, The Kitchen Table)

However, despite their well-appreciated provision of horticultural labour (in addition to the sociality, good humour, and fun members helped create), managing and supporting members required work. The contributions members made towards sessions were not always equivalent in kind to this work:

> "*the more volunteers you have, the more organisation's needed, the more paperwork is needed…and then you have to start looking at your insurances and that type of thing*." (Samantha, practitioner, Pots-and-Plates)

Grant funding could be precarious. An exciting opporunity that would have allowed one of the CIC's to hire a second full-time staff member was unrealised, withdrawn following funding reallocations. In a conversation about their plans, Natasha told me that the types of activities for which funding was available changed over time. This attests to the value of flexibility and skill of practitioners, to

adapt to funders while keeping to their goals and values, and the needs of local people and spaces. *Funder* flexibility was valuable, also; the flexibility of funders during the pandemic allowed Pots-and-Plates to deliver adapted projects amid uncertainty and change. Working in the small VCS context thus entailed wrangling with a dynamic resourcing landscape, requiring practitioners to utilise existing resources and connections well, and seek emerging opporunties.

4.3.3.1 Knowledge and skills

Attuning and adapting, modelling and managing social dynamics, materially resourcing sessions, and facilitating specific activities were all undergirded by the knowledge, skills, and care of practitioners. While knowledge was shared and made as groups negotiated tasks together, sometimes, the initiation and guidance of tasks required that somebody have a deeper knowledge that preceded the bounds of the sessions. Often, the practitioners were these catalysts, and were recognised as such:

> "*she's a brilliant teacher. And she's taught me so much. And it's kind of like, you can go back and ask questions*" (Heather, practitioner, Pots-and-Plates)

> "*He's just like, a guiding light…he's a wealth of knowledge*" (Sarah, member, Let'sGrow)

Combining both abstract and experiential, cumulative knowledge, practitioners guided discrete tasks. They were available throughout sessions for more piecemeal guidance. A fieldnote extract captures Natasha leading a weaving activity, at Taking Notice. While harvesting occurred at other sites at this time of year, this allotment had limited space for the members to grow produce. Countering this lull, she adapted, and prepared the required resources earlier in the day:

> Natasha showed us how to weave, and passed around the DIY weaving looms. She'd made them this morning, I think, from pruned branches of The Apple Grove apple trees…Each of us began weaving, with a choice of yarn, twine, and a paper-y material. (August 2022)

In offering me a task to do, Jack demonstrated the mental record he kept: on what could soon be grown, what tasks might be done today in preparation, what had not grown last year and its implications for the current one, and his reaching out within his network for further expertise and opinion:

> [Jack] asks if I'd like a task...He tells me that I could weed two of the growing rows – pointing them out. He says that soon, garlic could be grown in them. Last year, he recounted, little had grown in them as there had been issues with the soil. It could've been, he said, that the compost had not finished the composting process…or it had been

> contaminated. Natasha had had a look, he said, making him believe that the problem was the former. (March 2022)

He was frequently drawn upon for opinions and information; learning was mentioned by many of the members as something they valued greatly about the sessions. It perhaps supported their engagement in the sessions over time, stimulating continued interest and intrigue, and contributing towards members' own knowledge and perceptions of themselves as knowledgeable about things horticultural and crafty.

While practitioners frequently shared knowledge with members, the mental mapping, planning, and coordinating of activities was predominantly done by practitioners for most of the fieldwork period. Practitioners recounted to me their experience with permaculture courses, working in commercial growing, autodidactic learnings in ethnobotany, and years spent managing kitchen gardens and cooking with local produce. Knowledge and experience gleaned over years could not be imparted or reproduced in weeks or months, and thus practitioners were indispensable for the management of sites in certain ways. They too sometimes invited others within their social networks – built up over years of working within related fields in the local area – to lead activities. Notably, at the sessions oriented most towards calm and therapeutic experience, a focus on transferring of most of the skills required to manage these spaces would likely compromise their therapeutic qualities, for some. As discussed, the lack of pressure to come each week, or engage in certain activities, was cited by several as key to their enjoyment of the spaces. This tension was one that some of the practitioners had to negotiate, and could mean that they carried out some of the tasks required in the planning and upkeeping of sites, or that the therapeutic yield was prioritised over permacultural or horticultural yields. On one 'Wenlock Welcome' session, Phillip told me that he and Jack had taken time to make plans for the space, while worrying that this took away from their ability to structure the session for members:

> I asked what he'd been doing, and he said that he and Jack had been planning. He said that he felt today's session was a little bit disorganised, and he worried that he didn't have things for people to do. (March 2022)

In his interview, he conveyed the tension between creating spaces of refuge and relaxation, and ones in which "*key jobs*" towards making high yielding green spaces were routinely practiced:

> "*sessions that we do don't necessarily get the key jobs done that need to be done. Because they also have another role to play, which is to give people who are coming to the site space*

for themselves to be able to get away from the, the, normal day-to-day." (Phillip, practitioner, Let'sGrow)

There was a desire for members to be able to take "*ownership*" and potentially increase their responsibility and knowledge for the sites and practices, and a number of members did so. Significantly, however, this tended to happen gradually, and a share of members continued to benefit from not feeling such pressures. These tensions, and their potential implications, are explored further in Chapter Six.

Touched upon in several sections, while peer support was a feature of most of the sessions, the practitioners at Head Outdoors played some distinct roles in the provision of support. Members varied in their willingness to speak with others about personal worries and concerns, reserving these conversations for dyadic, private encounters with practitioners. These encounters might be member initiated – "*I'll talk to you later*", or practitioner initiated, should they notice signs somebody may appreciate a quiet word. Providing support could sometimes be emotionally heavy (see 6.3), but was, to some degree, part of the practitioners' roles. Most of the practitioners' experiences of providing support in a professional context were in varied forms of community, youth, or support work. Jane held qualifications in social work, and had experience volunteering at a mental health charity; in check-ins, it was often Jane to whom people were directed first:

> [during Head Outdoors check-in] Thomas also introduced the staff, and me, and indicated the Jane would be a good person to talk to, if people had any issues or fancied a chat. (November 2021)

These backgrounds, paired with the qualities of empathy and understanding earlier described by Thomas, informed the attunements and evaluations practitioners made.

> "*You might find that [a member is] having a bad day, and, they've got something on their mind, and they're not really focused, and they're a bit…you can always see that. I don't know whether, because I've been in this field of work for so many years, you just see it…if I see that in one of my sessions, then I kind of have a chat to the person, and say 'is everything okay? Do you want to talk about anything?' I sit them down, maybe make them a cup of tea*" (James, practitioner, Taking Notice)

> "*I think from working in the community sector for a couple of decades, there's not much that you can't deal with…there's enough of us there with a good enough understanding to be able to support people on a, a basic level"* (Thomas, practitioner, Let'sGrow)

Jane similarly affirmed that support within Head Outdoors sessions entailed providing a listening ear, and gentle and practical advice:

> "*Sometimes people just want to talk and need someone to listen. Sometimes they want some advice on certain things, like practical stuff…services that they can reach out to, or problem solving, and things like that…I think most people know that I've got like, a social work background as well…so they sometimes ask me social work-y type questions as well*" (Jane, mental health social worker, Let'sGrow)

She might ask lightly probing questions, asking or suggesting with someone might feel a certain way. In her interview, Jane apologised for not providing "*in depth*" answers. I interpreted her hestiation in articulating the ways in which she supported members, in addition to James' assertion that "*you just see"* when members require support, as attesting to the experientially and cumulatively honed, responsive nature of their care. In Chapter Six, I revist the scope of support available for members experiencing mental ill health at the sessions.

4.4. Flexibility and structure

Featured in most of the growing spaces were smaller zones or regions or activity: microgeographies within, with differing material and affective affordances. Complementing these textured landscapes were practitioner reminders that members could move through the spaces as desired, and the willingness of members, most often, to welcome others to join their activities. Having a selection of spaces and activities to engage with created latitude for members to make of the sessions what would be appealing and beneficial to them. It facilitated choice, although a choice that was guided by prior skills, knowledge, mood, and physical ability. The freedom and flexibility to move between activities, and to do so without pressure or judgement, accommodated and generated certain affective states. However, the sometimes busy and differentiated growing spaces required for flexibility to be balanced with structuring elements, for these landscapes to become navigable. Here, I discuss the affordances of these zones, and the structure and flexibility that supported their use.

4.4.1 Flexibility

Valuing the flexibility within sessions was a sentiment shared by most members; sessions usually allowed for movement between activities, and practitioners were receptive to ways in which the

spaces could be changed to better fit the needs and interests of members. At both Wenlock Park and The Apple Grove were regularly two, three, or four zones of activity, depending on the week. A typical Head Outdoors session at the allotment might have four people cutting brambles in the alley, three sitting in the polytunnel, two building a table, all whilst others cooked and weeded. There was no hierarchy amongst activities, allowing participants to gravitate towards certain areas and activities depending on their mood, extroversion, energy, confidence, or curiosity:

> *"the way that [Wenlock Park is] designed, we have quite a lot of sort of quite separate spaces, so if someone wants to come down, but they don't want to be sort of centrally involved in things, and they need to just go off to the side for a little bit, then there's that option*." (Jack, practitioner, Let'sGrow)

Many members routinely chose similar activities each week. More strenuous activities were a favourite of some; becoming physically tired was a reason to come, and the sign of a successful day. Beth's chosen role seemed to be shaped by her competencies and values: she took the lead with cooking each week, devising tasty meals of varied ingredients with the confidence and familiarity of a skilled cook. She described cooking there as "*giving back to the community*", an important aspect of the sessions for her, manifest as the food she prepared, and transfer of her skills while doing so. From the array of activities available, participants created their own routine and structure, perhaps creating a sense of identity, purpose, and predictability within the sessions.

Prior to attending, members held different assumptions and expectations about the sessions and their rigidity. A gardening session oriented around health, some feared, might involve the social and emotional intensity associated with group therapy, or certain spiritual dimensions imagined to be present in spaces oriented around wellness and the environment. As mentioned, Head Outdoors member Denise had arrived with both preconceptions; the former was only fleetingly confirmed in the beginning ten minutes of her first session, in the group check-in. Denise voiced her appreciation that most of the sessions were spent outdoors, with choice around where to be and whether to talk:

> "*I thought it was going to be one of those sessions where you sit round a campfire and go kum-ba-yah, and all that kind of thing…But it's totally different*." (Denise, member, Let'sGrow)

The more-than-therapeutic figured greater in sessions than Denise has expected, and there was flexibility in when and how health and wellbeing might be approached more directly. While community gardening might be new to a participant, they would often find familiarity in one element or another. Gerard, for example, who described the sessions as "*new*" to him, would often

pick tomatoes or engage in construction tasks, building on prior experiences and knowledge. This may explain some of the small variations in how different participants described the space and sessions, as 'gardening', 'volunteering', or "growing food", in an 'allotment' or 'garden'.

4.4.2 Affective microgeographies

The flexibility within sessions allowed participants to engage with the activities that affirmed the elements of the sessions that they found relevant, beneficial, and meaningful. It seemed to soothe over some of the more negative experiences of particular zones and practices-within-practices: conflicts could be "*walk[ed] away from*", and busyness avoided. There were spaces in which certain emotions could be sought, sat with, and escaped, and support to move between them. The affective resource of these zones, and the movements and interactions they afforded, were not static; they were relational, and sometimes shifting. The seasons, and seasonal cyclicity of gardening, shaped the opportunities within the spaces, and their affective qualities. Whilst certain areas could more reliably bring comfort, privacy, or relaxation, some were more ephemeral. With the changing tasks of the horticultural calendar came more short-lived pockets of activity. Arranged by practitioners, participants were sometimes greeted by large tarpaulin bags of compost, woodchips, or manure to shovel. Such strenuous tasks were often attractive to those who wanted to keep active, looking for opportunities to become tired and a little short-winded. The changing of environments (with seasonality, and participant activities) was itself an affective resource, producing feelings of achievement, endurance, alongside the ontological and perspectival reflections discussed in 3.3.1. Here, I explore some of the affective encounters within zones of the growing spaces.

4.3.2.1 The campfire area, and "*campfire effect*"

On arriving at The Apple Grove each week, one was usually greeted by Samantha stoking a circle of bricks with pieces of applewood and reclaimed planks. The campfire would burn from the beginning until close of sessions, and served as a focal point amid coffees and commensality. Wooden log seats sat in a disjointed circle around the firepit, with wooden chairs brought out of a shed to accommodate extra members. In summer, a blanket of deciduous branches encased the campfire area, their leaves cushioning and separating the space (Figure 10). The autumn falling of these leaves was dramatic, exposing the campfire area, and visually connecting it with orchard area. As a safety precaution, somebody had always to keep close to the fire, creating a natural zoning of The Apple Grove sessions as others headed off into the grove of fruit trees. Movement between these zones

was governed by seasonal shifts in the activities The Apple Grove afforded, the structuring of work and rest, alongside member activity preferences.

Figure 10: The Apple Grove across the seasons

Often, Samantha would guard the fire whilst reheating a vegetable soup, or browning sausages in cast iron pan. The majority of members would spend most of the session amidst the trees, collecting around the fire together with a hot beverage to begin sessions, and with soup or a sandwich nearer their end. Remaining around the campfire allowed for conversations from the morning to continue, and provided the practitioners with a moment of respite during their otherwise busy weeks. The session, it seemed, was a restorative highlight in the weeks of practitioners and members alike. Oftentimes, staying around the campfire allowed me to speak at greater length with practitioners about their work, in ethnographic interviews hopefully not too disruptive of their respite. We would sometimes be joined by members pottering around, allowing for insightful moments of more explicit reflection on the sessions, as in our conversations about taking produce home. During periods of heavy pruning or harvesting, fireside breaks would often be governed around eating, drinking, and the opening and closing of sessions. In the interstitial times, in which the trees bore no more fruit, or their buds discouraged pruning, more time would be spent fireside. Activities like wood whittling, weaving, and seed sowing provided useful occupations, and were one of the ways in which practitioners worked to counter boredom amid the quieter parts of seasonal cycles.

Soft fascinations abound at the campfire. Gazes settled on its flames, and the patterns that the smoke would make through the wood. For a portion of the year, robins joined us at the campsite, watched and welcomed with mealworms. Around the fire, people sometimes engaged in gentle activities that drew the eye of others. Movements were slow: people sat, cooked, or crafted, and occasionally shifted to avoid the smoke in a slow choreography with the fire. The practitioners theorised a "*campfire effect*": moments of intersubjective calm and quiet that occurred as people sat together, looking into a fire. These fascinations, it seemed, drew the *effortless attention* of Kaplan's theorising (1995), while relaxing interactional pressures.

> Natasha likened looking at a beehive to people looking around a campfire, and described moments where everyone would be looking, peacefully, and calmly. Other Pots-and-Plates practitioners had said similar things; this 'moment' seemed to be part of what they thought was effective/important/therapeutic about The Apple Grove session, and nature contact more generally (October 2021)

In 3.2.2, Loraine describes a similar effect, in a moment of light and unspeaking fireside sociality. The practitioners utilised this effect through scheduling meetings at the site, where possible, with food and a fire. Feeding and warming those attending meetings was believed to be more productive, and was consistent with their embedded ethics around care and food.

The slowness of the campfire contrasted with the movement of the orchard area. Only a short few steps away from the campfire area, perhaps ten or fifteen metres, were rough concentric circles of fruit trees. Members reached, sawed, bent, and pottered around these circles. Some participants found more comfort in movement, and sought opportunities to be active. While Gillian valued the perspective-giving, often light-hearted conversations that occurred while working in orchard area, she did not like to spend too long chatting around the fire - keen to keep on the move:

> She talked about how she doesn't tend to sit around the campfire and chat, though, like many do, she observes non-judgementally. "*I like to keep active"*~, she tells me, and I ask why it is that she prefers to stay up. She tells me that she likes to be doing things, and feels a bit uneasy sitting still for too long. (July 2022)

As members' confidence with, and knowledge of, the site grew, they were more able to move freely around The Apple Grove. George and Gillian were often keen to return to the trees and the activity therein. For these members, the 'campfire effects' were most appreciated in small amounts. Varied affections for sitting around the campfire demonstrate the relationality of therapeutic experiences in the growing spaces, and show the value in their heterogenous physical and affective texture.

4.3.2.2 The allotment and portacabin at Wenlock Park

Whilst the structure of Head Outdoors sessions evolved, most participants had come to expect sessions to begin with the check-in. This was usually in the portacabin, of which they had exclusive use. After check-ins, most members would walk down a grassy corridor of around forty metres, to arrive at the medium-sized 'allotment' growing space approximately 30 metres on its longest side. Accustomed to the calm and diffuse atmosphere of Head Outdoors sessions at Wenlock Park, Robert's first sessions at the 'Wenlock Welcome' sessions were an unwelcome change of pace. The

entrance of the space became populated with the practitioners, users, and equipment of a community supermarket, and the portacabin transformed from a place of respite, to a bustling communal cooking classroom. Adapting to this changing socio-ecology, he gravitated towards the allotment area:

> "*That's one thing I didn't like about [Wenlock Welcome] initially, because it was very busy, and erm, until I learned that if you go up the other end…where the chicken run is, and where the community…allotment [is]. Now, I found like, going up there, it was quieter. And therefore, I was able to cope more…they've got the quiet space now, where you can, sit underneath the, what do you call that…under the willows*" (Robert, member, Let'sGrow)

At the allotment, people were more diffuse, and there were quieter areas that could be retreated to. The practitioners were receptive to ways in which the affective affordances of the spaces might be harnessed and enhanced. Following a session in which anxieties were especially heightened, dispenser thermoses were moved to picnic benches further down the space – a tinkering aiming to accommodate different user groups. This calmer drinks station was eventually relocated to a shed in the allotment area, in which gardening participants could share drinks and snacks (Figure 11), beginning their session:

> As I walked to go inside the portacabin, Thomas was walking out – dispenser thermos in hand. He said that we'd be having coffees down at the bottom today; I wondered whether this was a way to create a less 'frantic' feeling session, as several participants seemed to be a little perturbed – in Sarah's words – by the Thursday commotion. (June 2022)

Thomas had mused upon how more relaxing and "*magical*" spaces might be created; he described plans to surround the den Robert mentioned (Figure 12) with aromatic herbs. The gardens were places incomplete, with room for adaption.

Figure 11: A refreshment station at Wenlock Welcome

Figure 12: The willow den

2.3.2.3 Supportive and private spaces

Opportunities to receive support and be listened to, in smaller and larger groups, were created during the sessions. The check-in at Head Outdoors served as a routine opportunity in which members could be open and expressive with their emotions, although answering turns with light-heartedness and brevity was acceptable. More private affective zones emerged, too. On a quiet day, the portacabin could provide a suitable avenue for intimate or emotive conversations. At other times, one of the benches peppered around Wenlock Park would seat a practitioner and participant, in supportive steps-aside from communal activity. At a team meeting (for Taking Notice), James shared that that "*good conversations*" happened in his car, as he took some members to and from the sessions.

Entering into, or creating, these supportive zones could involve a range of movements and pauses. As when people lingered in the portacabin following check-ins, this could mean staying in certain spots, rather than following the flow of people to a growing space. Alternatively, members might move away from centres of activity and sociality to a quiet space, or to nowhere in particular – the supportive space found in the movement together and away. These conversations were initiated by members for themselves, or by intuitive co-members and practitioners. In 3.1, I share an instance of Loraine's receptiveness to Sarah's upset, and their ensuing walk together. In Gerard's interview, he relayed the practitioners' efforts to check-in with members, sensitive to their needs (and perhaps also to inhibitions around initiating chats):

> "*there's a couple of times he's come up sort of 'how are you doing, do you want a chat?' oh yeah, yeah. And he comes and sees us, a bit later on.*" (Gerard, member, Let'sGrow)

Having space to move away from others could be an important resource for managing conflict and friction. Farhad recounted to me a time during which he had accidentally upset a fellow member, after tapping his shoulder affectionately with a little too much force. His apology was not initially accepted; he walked to a fence slightly out the way for a break, upset by this encounter:

> "*[the member] still was angry because the pain was I think was a lot…I give up to apologise, and erm, [I] went to [the] fence, fence around our garden, and erm, was, start to smoking [a] cigarette. Suddenly, James came to me, what happened Farhad? Are you sad, are you worried?* (Farhad, member, Taking Notice)

While the two members had a momentary break, in separate areas, James was able to speak with both in these two areas, soothing over the miscommunication.

4.4.3 Structure

While the capacity to move around a differentiated space was beneficial, complete freedom and flexibility could *contribute* towards anxiety, and was thus balanced with structuring elements. At most Let'sGrow sessions, after check-ins, Thomas and Phillip would suggest multiple activities that could be done:

> Thomas said what tasks there were to do today: planting seeds, harvesting, and looking after the chickens. He looked to [a newer member] who looked unsure, and he said ~"*or you can just have a wander and get used to the site*" (September 2021)

Members and I would remind one-another of available tasks, during sessions. Practitioners and regular members would often guide others – more or less informally – in particular activities. Others felt less confident taking leading roles. As mentioned, while differing activities allowed choice, differing knowledge and confidence meant that not all felt equally 'do-able' to each member.

> "*some days, I don't really know what I want to do. Erm, sometimes I feel like there's not, there's not enough of a, a structure or direction for me, and I'm kind of like, well, I don't know what to do. Or I don't want to do anything, ha*." (Lisa, member, Let'sGrow)

Both Lisa and I reassured a member that we were grateful for her direction; she would often lead work in the alley alongside the allotment, but worried about being viewed "*bossy*".

The fluctuating needs and protracted rhythms of the growing spaces meant that there could be seasonal and sporadic lulls in activity. Without seeds to sow, compost to shovel, or vegetables to harvest, there was a risk of heightening anxieties for those who benefitted from higher levels of structure. Others might become bored, or lament being unable to engage in the blood-pumping labour they valued. Thomas described having reached this dreaded "*point*" before, and how he worked to avoid it:

> "I *think that's part of the challenge is…my thinking is, like, this afternoon, we're over at Birchden, is there enough stuff for people to do while they're there? Because if there isn't, and there's nothing to do, it's a bit of a dull experience for them. So, you don't, as a starting point, you don't want to hit that point, ha*." (Thomas, practitioner, Let'sGrow)

Here, the perceptiveness and work of the practitioners, and sometimes members, became even more apparent. They would keep a gentle eye on members throughout, looking for members who looked a little lost, offering a quick chat and the suggestion of an activity. Sometimes, during times where a lull might occur, practitioners would plan craft or construction activities. Other rhythms could mean there were more people to cater to; two members planned art activities for the schoolchildren that would come to Wenlock Park in numbers, during the summer holidays. The materiality of some growing spaces could complement or hinder this work: at Wenlock Park, children sometimes eschewed planned activities, instead finding brambles to forage and entertain themselves with. At growing spaces with fewer or less varied pockets of activity, like Clover Farm Garden, more work was sometimes required of practitioners: "*you've got to keep adapting, and making it fun*" (James).

Structure in the form of regular, scheduled sessions played multiple important roles for participants. With the exception of Celandine Community Garden, all of the other research sites were only accessible during two- or three-hour slots, at the same time each week. Significantly, although Celandine Community Garden was ungated, it seemed to be mostly attended by participants during the weekly slot during which facilitators were present, save for some watering of plants in warmer months (and occasional visits by young local residents). When arriving on an afternoon, there were only people associated with the gardening sessions present. When passing by on a bank holiday, when practitioners were not working, I saw that members were absent also. This perhaps attests to the value of the structure both practitioners and delimited sessions provided.

Having caring responsibilities was both a reason to come to the gardening spaces (Head Outdoors in particular), and something which had to be balanced against coming. If not caring for an elderly parent, other relational responsibilities shaped the weeks of many participants. Their wellbeing was bound up in the wellbeing of others, which depended in part on their own labour, as well as on the quality of health and social care services locally. Having a regular, time-limited session allowed participants to schedule commitments around this time, often marked out as 'my time'. For some, these could be some of the only hours in which they could put themselves, their needs, and their interests first. These limited hours could be used to negotiate and justify having a time each week in which they were not available for other tasks or responsibilities. Of course, it was not always possible for a desire to attend to win out over other responsibilities, or inflexible healthcare or appointments.

Having a predictable and enjoyable activity became something to look forward to for those with caring responsibilities, breaking weeks into more manageable chunks. Lives outside of sessions increased the value of structure within them; causal employment, retirement, and the COVID-19 pandemic could remove contour from participants' weeks. When working irregular hours, sessions were a "*goal*" for Shaun, punctuating his weeks:

> "*my job was casual, so it was as and when they needed me...so it wasn't even that I had regular hours. So knowing that I had at least something, once a week, was good. It was like, it was a very, it was a structure, even though it was a loose one…it was good for my mental health…it got me out the flat. You know, to be doing something. Especially in lockdown, where we were all kind of like, stuck inside, gave me that sort of breather*." (Shaun, member, Pots-and-Plates)

He greatly missed being able to attend regularly, when he began working full-time.

4.5 Discussion

In this chapter, I have described the feelings of safety that emerged in the space created through the minimising of varied threats: of conflict, judgment, pressure, and stigma. In the absence or reduction of pressures, many participants felt able to engage with sessions in ways they found possible, meaningful, and beneficial. A lack of judgement and pressures, combined with the availability of support, meant that many participants felt that their concerns, worries, and mental health struggles could be accommodated (see Robinson and Breed, 2019; Ramsden, 2021). It was important that

participants felt, should difficulties emerge (be they from another participant, or feelings emerging within oneself), they would not draw judgement, and could be managed. A range of emotions and anxieties were felt, sought, expressed, and avoided in these semi-public spaces, without precluding future participation.

Here, I collect my reflections on the centrality of safety and enablement, considering their nature, creation, and limits in the sessions and spaces. I synthesise and expand upon writing about emotional geographies, microgeographies and microspaces, therapeutic mobilities, and affective atmospheres. I define safety as a sort of cognitive-affective atmosphere, a "tone of feeling like a haze" (Böhme, 1993: p114) or "social and performative hue" (Duff, 2016: p65) emerging as human and nonhuman bodies and entities interact. As described by Curtis et al. (2013), safety can have social, psychological, emotional, and technical (physical) aspects, encompassing feelings of being able to do and be without likelihood of various kinds of perceived threat or harm. In the gardens, often, safety was known and felt: an enabling comfort. As others do, I view atmospheres as giving shape to feeling, and influencing capacities to act (Anderson, 2009; Bissell, 2010). Enablement is related to safety; I use this word to describe how particular doings and feelings were made more possible for participants, largely although not exclusively through atmospheres of safety. Following Bissell, I understand affective atmospheres to constitute a "pull or a charge that might emerge in a particular space which might (or might not) generate particular events and actions, feelings and emotions" (p273). His definition usefully explores affect without staying in its realm, and aligns with my understanding of how garden atmospheres generated or enabled particular feelings and encounters: feelings of safety, enabling valuable encounters, sometimes cascading into sustained engagement, for example.

Reluctant to equate atmosphere with entirety of a session or growing space, I use ideas of microgeographies and emotional geographies to explore the affective and spatial differentiation of sessions, and explore how this texturing of space was greater than the sum of its parts. I highlight the sociomaterial aspects of the emergence of atmospheres, and occasionally prefix *cognitive*-affective atmospheres to capture purposive and reflexive aspects of experiencing and engineering (Duff, 2016) atmospheres of safety and enablement. I advance conversations regarding the active production of fluid atmospheres with novel findings regarding the balancing and negotiating of atmospheres of differing affordances, as participants tried to engender beneficial or therapeutic experiences in community gardening groups. In particular, the balancing of structure with flexibility is shown to be an important characteristic in many of the gardens, which I conceptualise as therapeutic third places. In these garden assemblages, atmospheres were nested, multiple, and occasionally jostling.

Importantly, I note that bodies are not affected identically when moving through and contributing towards the creation of affective atmospheres; Bissel (2010) attributes this to their differential imbrication in to "other relations of practice and performance" (p278). I concur with Bissel, acknowledging how atmospheres penetrate and affect differently, owing to experiences outside and prior. Both external, biographic, and cumulative experiences seem to impact how people are affected in growing spaces, including what is found to be threatening and comforting. Additionally, the capacity to be affected by such atmospheres had a temporal dimension. Those with low thresholds for feelings of unsafety may require cumulative 'proof' of the safety of sessions, while familiarity and trust in people, places, practices, and roles could take time to develop or accrete. This finding further develops a non-essentialist understanding of the enabling resources (Duff, 2012; 2016) of particular places as non-static and relational, not wholly belonging to place or person. Pink, et al. (2015) and Edensor and Sumartojo (2015) eschew the word 'affective', to emphasise the role of social and cultural contexts, as well as materialities, emotions, sensations, and meanings, in the production and experience of atmospheres. I endorse these multidimensional and contextualised approaches to atmospheres, attentive to affect while not losing sight of the fuller range of processes shaping experience in place.

In Chapter Three, I described some of the types and impacts of the relationships made in the growing spaces. Chapter Four more deeply considers *how* the sessions acted as cohering contexts and purposes, fostering generative associations. I focus on how safety and enablement were engendered collectively, and through cultivating flexibility and structure. This discussion reflects on the establishment of atmospheres as a collective achievement: of human intentionality, nonhuman agencies, and the guidance and coordination of both. Inclusivity, safety, and kindness were established as qualities in these microcultures of interaction, written into participation agreements, modelled in exchanges, and expressed in acts of support, guidance, and friendly socialising. Safety and enablement were not only an achievement of certain qualities or microcultures of social interaction. Features of the sessions and spaces, in their pacing, materiality, and affordances were contributory too, both less and more intentionally engineered by practitioners. Smith (2021) describes how an "interpersonal atmosphere conducive to recovery and care" (p7, a "comfort blanket" in the words of a participant) was created in a therapeutic woodworking workshop, as its founder tried to "shape experiences and moods…organizing objects, bodies and spaces" (Bille et al., 2015: p33, in Smith, 2021). I wish to highlight both this staging of interactions, objects, and bodies, whilst also considering the less intentionally staged aspects in these affective atmospheres. For example, the 'campfire effect' captures both how qualities of calm and friendly communication, alongside commensality, the warmth and soft fascination of the fire, and cocooning summer foliage

of the trees, created a calm and safe affective atmosphere. The projects were naturalcultural (Haraway 2003) collaborations, in which plants participated in the production of affect.

4.5.1 Collective projects

The creation and maintenance of the spaces was a collective project. This seemed to guard against worries about irregular participation, fluctuating capacities, or overly individualised responsibility. Collaboration with other people seemed to produce feelings of belonging and of being-supported, while collaborations with plants and forgiving horticultural cyclicities assuaged pressures around controlling and getting right the shaping of space. Unlike Robert's experience with the gym, occasional non-attendance was not felt to derail the collective project, while the disappointment of Gillian's wilted plants was lessened with the knowledge she could try again next time around. As discussed, authors (Sander-Regier, 2009; Hitchings, 2006) have speculated that this sharing of responsibility with plants, and ceding of control to them, can be part of the joy of horticulture. Similarly, Stuart-Smith (2020) hints towards the pleasure of vegetal collaborations: "I see gardening as a reiteration: I do a bit then nature does her bit, then I respond to that, and so it goes, not unlike a conversation" (p9). In the community gardens, control was ceded to both the group and the plants, which I view here not primarily through the lens of joy, but of therapeutic enablement. The work of cultivating understanding of the gardening projects as shared was set in motion by volunteer agreements, nonjudgemental attitudes, and participation with few formal conditions. Appreciations for nature's role in shaping space were evident, albeit with some agencies more welcome than others. Such appreciations were nudged along by acceptance of 'wild' gardening, focuses on pleasure over productivity, and experiences of horticultural cyclicity. Hitchings (2006) argues, with parallels here, that this position towards plants can take time and expertise to develop. Brice (2014), citing Latour (2004), describes the effort, learning, and attuning required to appreciate plant agencies: "learning to be affected" (p46).

4.5.2 Reflections on flexibility and structure

Interacting bodies, objects, plants, and spaces produced affective atmospheres, shaping feelings, moods, and capacities to act. Each week, for each person, and in different encounters in the spaces, these elements reassembled. Affects were emergent, and thus somewhat precarious and varied. The textured differentiation of spaces provided a twofold flexibility: it enabled participants to seek tasks and zones (and accompanying affective states) that were appealing and meaningful, and respond to

shifting affective atmospheres. As described, certain feelings could be sought, accommodated, or avoided, through movements, breaking away from and entering microentanglements across the growing spaces. This differentiation was more than the sum of its parts. The knowledge that one would not be held in place was a comfort and reliever of pressure, whether participants routinely adopted varied roles and positions in the spaces or not. Movement could also be used as a communicative tool (unintentionally or otherwise), signalling a need for space or support. The routine movement from one space to another formed part of the structure of certain sessions; zones had a multiplicative or synergistic compatibility. Here, I discuss the benefits of flexibility and spatial differentiation within sessions, exploring the character, production, benefits, and navigation of what I have called affective microgeographies.

4.5.3.1 Elaborating 'affective microgeographies'

The concept of affective microgeographies draws upon aforementioned ideas of affective atmospheres, while taking influence from writing about microgeographies, microspaces, taskscapes, and emotional and affective geographies. Broad and descriptive, 'microgeographies' appears across varied geographical literature. It has been used to describe place-making and place differentiation on a small scale. Matthews et al. (1998) use this word in one of the earlier, widely cited pieces utilising this idea. They describe how teenagers develop individual and collective microgeographies, imbuing places in their neighbourhoods with meaning through action and in microcultures (Wulff, 1995, in Matthews et al., 1998). As with the gardening participants, emotions guided movement and place-making. The teenagers sought places where they felt safe and could socialise, and avoided those associated with fear, hassle, violence, and authority. The stability in the sorts of places sought suggests the role of material affordances, while the use of graffiti suggests the recursive relationship between place- and group-making. Bergeron et al. (2014) use go-along interviews to produce a map of the affective and semantic differentiation of a city, noting clusters of positive, negative, neutral, and mixed associations around different places. Positive clusters formed around the village, where people met and talked around scenic walking trails. The park, a place of calm and sociability, was largely viewed positively, although some saw it more negatively, considering it too busy and built. These authors describe microgeographies of meanings, and talk of emotion and feelings, rather than using the term affect. Their work seemingly captures the linking of what can be done with what is felt, in certain places; clustering may suggest shared and potentially intersubjective feelings and meanings. MacLeod (2002) emphasises the role of institutions in creating microgeographies, serving as a useful reminder to not focus on small-scale interactions to the neglect of other place-making

forces. Thwaites et al. (2022) offer the related term “microenvironments”, as “dynamic interactions of social, spatial and material dimensions of small-scale human-environment relationships” (p272). Their paper provides examples similar in scale to the growing space microgeographies: they provide photographs of a playhouse, of small front gardens, and the ‘fleeting microenvironment’ appearing as al fresco restaurant diners chat with passersby.

More posthumanist in orientation, Barua et al.’s (2021) concept ‘microspaces of wellbeing’ describes processes of ‘niching’, where humans and nonhumans become entangled in place. They capture how humans, provisioned macaques, and even celestial bodies become enmeshed in material and affective exchanges at a Hanuman temple. While acknowledging how wider political economies generate distress, they argue that these emplaced exchanges: “have the potential to alter the everyday, be it in the lightest of ways, and foster practices of endurance, sometimes barely perceptible” (p2). Such microspaces were viewed as the product of these affective entanglements, made through humans feeding the macaques, the macaques learning to congregate and develop food-soliciting behaviours, and through macaque-mediated connections to celestial bodies and the deity Hanuman (and the social relations that they were felt to influence, according to certain astrological beliefs). Their paper usefully highlights that nonhumans can participate in the generation of microspaces of wellbeing, bringing them into discussions of the emplaced and interactive production of affect.

While these papers use these terms in non-identical ways, with some differences in theoretical orientations, they together make useful and complementary contributions, which I build upon. They capture how places can be made, inhabited, and differentiated through everyday interactions with material and social dimensions. Some of these papers suggest the role of affect in producing place, and shaping movement to and from microgeographies, microenvironments, or microspaces. The emotional geographies literature further develops the emotional and affective aspects of place making and negotiation.

Crewe et al. (2013) discuss the “distinctive kind of emotional geography” in prisons: “with zones in which certain kinds of feelings and emotional displays are more or less possible to experience and exhibit” (p57). They use the term ‘emotion zones’, influential in my understanding of spatial and affective zoning, in showing how certain emotions and their expressions were associated with different spaces: the gym, schoolroom, visiting rooms, and so on. Expressions of upset were collectively suppressed in the more public spaces, for their contagiousness; tenderness could be show openly in the visiting room, while certain forms of sublimated warmth found acceptable expression in ‘spotting’ one another in the gym, or through making cups of tea. Interestingly, Stuart-

Smith (2020) documents the contrasting emotive experiences of incarcerated people in a prison and its garden, as described by one of the people with whom she spoke: “inside, it’s all negativity, commotion, and violence. Out here you can find yourself again” (p56). Crewe et al. (2013) illustrate the social and material factors shaping emotional geographies: in the more playful and less ‘prison-like’ spaces, classroom staff brought biscuits to share, and allowed people to call them by their first names. ‘Emotion zones’ is adopted from Crawley (2004) and Hearn (1993), which the former defines as how “places and settings…are socially constructed for particular forms of emotional display” (p420). In my usage of ideas of zoning, I am conscious of the *sociomaterial* construction of affect, emotion, and its display. Or perhaps just ‘construction’, to capture processes of producing affect, involving varied co-constructing forces.

This zoning and texturing had multiple sources: Wenlock Park, in its largeness, accommodated the making of many zones, and private ones too – audibly distant from others, and physically peripheral. The Apple Grove’s typically two-area zoning was the product of (non-exhaustively) fire safety rules, the constructing of a campfire seating circle (featuring tree stump-seats, decor, a shed, sink, and woodstore), the weather, previous dwellers’ building of a heritage orchard, practitioner-led activities, and the gathering of people in activity and sociability (following seasonal and mealtime patterns). This space could, ephemerally, subdivide further, with participants sometimes moving seats to form a peripheral outer layer around the campfire circle, to craft, cook, or sow. A similar division occurred at Head Outdoors. Some participants began the sessions by routinely gathering around a large table in the portacabin, while others sat upon the sofas lining the outer edges of the room, and others still in the kitchen space, making and giving beverages. These affective zones might endure for a session, a couple of weeks, a season, or longer. The zone forming around delivered tonne-bags of compost lasted for as long as they took to be shovelled elsewhere; they served as earthy hourglasses for the socialities and (intense) physicalities forming around them. The affective atmosphere of the Wenlock Park portacabin was relatively similar across Head Outdoors sessions, but different across the other recurring weekly sessions there. The mood and feel of these microgeographies took shape with the lighting of fire, commensal moments, with certain activities, and the constitution of the group present that day. The polytunnel, portacabin, willow den, picnic benches, and growing beds all became affective hubs of activity at different times. The refreshment shed, too, its creation in response to a disruption to the usually safe and predictable affective atmosphere of the space demonstrates the precarity and emergent achievement of atmospheres. Zones became animated and attractive as plants required harvesting or weeding, with participants contagiously gravitating towards them. People who came for months often took up familiar roles, and might have been more comfortable heading towards an area with or without others, in the

comfort that they would know what to do there. Smith's (2021) description resonates, of the "dynamic social rhythm" that formed at a woodworking workshop taskscape, as "volunteers take up familiar roles, day after day…developing familiarity and resultant comfort" (p159).

4.5.3.2 Navigating microgeographies

The navigation of microgeographies is part of their generation, through movements between areas and within practices. It warrants more specific attention, however, as a potentially (although not universally) enabling feature of the sessions. Navigation of the spaces could sometimes be considered as one of the therapeutic communal mobilities (Pollard et al., 2020) within sessions, entailing the socialities and collectives discussed previously. Being able to move between different areas or zones functioned as a form of conflict management, and emotional signalling and regulation. It may also have provided participants with feelings of control and autonomy over what they did.

Stuart et al. (2022) usefully highlight that even (or perhaps especially, for some) when people are isolated and lonely, they may be highly averse to aspects of being in a group, even prohibitively so. Fear of conflict and dominant personalities, alongside numerous other social, psychological, and physical barriers accumulating throughout the life course, dissuaded some of their participants from seeking socially prescribed groups, while others sought specific *types* of groups. One of their participants favoured a nature reserve, for how it allowed her to 'escape', and not spend too long in conversation. Relatedly, there were times throughout fieldwork when microgeography navigation allowed participants to avoid conflict. Farhad's misunderstanding with another participant was managed, and conflict assuaged, through the use of space at Clover Farm Garden. The fence area, to which Farhad went, became an ephemeral zone, in which conflict and emotion could be managed through distance, having a cigarette, and through supportive private conversation with James. Movement had a buffering and recuperating function where atmospheres tipped from safety towards anxiety, worry, or discomfort. Such tipping moments, or atmospheric disruptions, were document by Smith (2021); a participant left the room, distressed after visitors had entered the wood workshop. Of atmospheres, he states: "As a performative achievement, atmospheres can be robust or ephemeral, secure or shifting" (p160). Similar disruptions occurred at the gardens, sometimes: the unanticipated presence of workpeople or other visitors, an unusually busy session, or the occasion where a participant became angry with others around them.

The navigation of green space as a method of emotional regulation, and perhaps expression, is documented by Bierski (2016) in his exploration of the favourite places of people experiencing mental ill health. With influence taken from Ingold's (2011) dwelling perspective, he employs the notion of "tuning", in which people: "becoming aligned with the environment through intentional and, eventually, skilled movement." (Bierski, 2016: p139). In tuning, he proposes, action, ideas, emotions, and the environment intertwine co-constitutively. The experience of his participant, Q, is most relevant and illustrative. Bierski describes how Q, when feeling low, would go to Richmond Park in his home city, London. Q guided Bierski through the routine movement he would take: a peaceful sit on a log that would begin and end his trip, and a fast walk around the park, purposefully via a leafy tunnel that he found energising. These periods of slowness and speed demonstrate affective tuning to the park's textured microgeography, the synergy of different zones, and how the routinised movement between zones constituted a wellbeing strategy. Adevi and Lieberg (2012), from interviews with caregivers in a rehabilitation garden, advocate for the importance of what they call "self-chosen places…that "receive" their current mood" (p55). They draw on Tuan's (1977) fields of care concept, describing the impact of repeated contact with the microenvironments of the garden of garden-goers. People would find places "based on [their] current mood/needs", and a sense of unity was reported to be felt between self and place. This might be a chair under a tree, or a patch of grass, where one could weed or stroke a passing cat.

Both authors capture how participants are affected by areas, and how movement to and around green microgeographies can be used to influence one's emotions. My account similarly captures a matching and manipulating of affect and emotion through place and movement, which I articulate in the language of zones, microgeographies, texture, and atmospheres. I emphasise, to a greater extend, the plasticity of place, and the role of people in creating and characterising zones. I note, also, the signalling role of the inhabitation of zones. Biglin (2020) found allotment gardeners to "use their body to communicate their current state of mind" (p4); she too saw this ability to move as providing a sense of agency and control. I concur with Biglin, acknowledging the communicative aspects of movements around growing spaces. Additionally, I recognise the affective pull and push of zones (themselves shaped through such movements), and how these movements played other roles in managing and responding to *changing* emotions.

Others have considered the synergistic qualities of different practices, discussions relevant when approaching microgeographies as involving action and movement, not only the physicality of place. Ireland et al. (2019) capture the benefit of periods of mobility and stillness in walking groups, with parallels in the community gardening projects' structured opportunities for more and less active and social activities. For their participants, transitioning from mobility to stillness, and from outdoors to

indoors, facilitated the development of social connections that might not occur otherwise. The bracketing of The Apple Grove and Head Outdoors sessions with coffee, tea, and commensality seemed to encourage feelings of group belonging, in addition to the rest and relaxation it allowed for. Doyle (2022) notes how, for community gardeners in Dublin, tea breaks served to structure social interaction: "the most important piece of equipment is the kettle" (p25), remarked one participant. The importance of such amenities, identified in Doyle's research, is reinforced through their absence at Celandine Community Garden. As fieldwork ended, wheels were in motion to acquire this for the garden, so that it might become more "*homely*". The value coffee breaks have has been captured in the context of workplace settings; importantly, not just as a discrete activity, but as a practice embedded alongside others within the workday, with impacts upon them. Stroebaek (2013) describes participation in coffee breaks as part of entering workplace communities of practice (albeit, sometimes challenging for newcomers to enter), while Wegener et al. (2015) view the coffee break as a social boundary zone. Mintz (1986) famously captured relationship between the stimulating properties of sugar, coffee, and tea – commonly consumed in breaks – and industrial work. Ireland et al. (2019) call the *combination* of place, walk, and talk a therapeutic assemblage, which made support possible; the makeup of many of the garden sessions' textured microgeographies can be conceived of similarly. For their participants, the "undulation of aesthetic and affective qualities" (p43) was shaped by the pattern of walking together (in small, ephemeral groups) followed by going to a café. In the community gardens, these qualities changed with the numerous factors contributing towards affective atmospheres, and the participants' movement across these affective microgeographies. I consider affective atmospheres to be nested and multiple, and the therapeutic assemblage to constitute their totality. This is owing to the synergistic value of the textured microgeographies, with different zones affecting, pushing, and pulling members at different times. At length, I have considered the role of affective microgeographies in avoiding, accommodating, and seeking certain emotions. It is notable, too, that factors like weather, appetite, shelter, familiarity, warmth, the presence of animals, the interests, skills, health, and abilities of members, and the growth of plants (beckoning weeding, harvesting, and so on), all influenced participants' movement through the spaces, shaping the push and pull of zones.

4.5.3 Variation, and the limits of accommodation and enablement

Like Rose et al. (2010), I argue that affective atmospheres are not immutable or uniform. Some practices, they state, can "enfeeble" a place's "affective materiality" (p344), suggesting that interacting humans and nonhumans can shift the affective atmosphere of the buildings they discuss.

The project's findings support feminist theorisations of variability in the penetration of affect: "The way we feel depends on what Ahmed calls "our angle of arrival" or the affective relations and histories we bring into or generate within spaces (Ahmed, 2010: 41)…we don't [all] feel the atmosphere evenly." (Leff, 2021: p3). Such writers highlight the role of histories and biographies, the materiality of bodies, and of power, for affective experience. Stewart (2012) coins 'atmospheric attunements'; a developed (and thus differently held between people) familiarity or openness to the possibilities of atmospheres in place. Atmospheres can wax and wane (Edenson and Sumartojo 2015), and be experienced differently depending on cultural values, prior experience, and personal background.

To a degree, temporary disruptions to the affective and occupational therapeutic resource of the sessions were part and parcel of projects, perhaps true of running *any* gardening project. As discussed, horticultural and season rhythmicity could lead to lulls in which activities were fewer, and thus boredom could creep in. Fluctuations in the constitution of the groups could be impactful, too. Fewer practitioners could mean there were fewer affective zones through which to move, in the absence of people confident to lead activities. This could be more impactful when a large share of the group were newer members. Gardens without a storage area relied upon people to bring tools, for particular activities to go ahead. I have demonstrated (see 3.4.1.4) the tone-setting role of inter-practitioner rapport, and thus the potential impact of their presences and absences. In the context of heritage conservation volunteering, Power and Smyth (2016) document the frustrations arising out of having to work collaboratively: the differing of opinions, and culture and personality clashes. In walking groups, sociality is an asset *and* a source of distraction and frustration, Grant and Pollard (2022) find. Similarly, I have documented social frictions in the growing spaces. The inevitable fluctuation of affect suggests the importance of factors like subjectivity, group- and place-attachment and belonging, and the active taking of interest in the 'stuff' of the sessions, for the persevering through affective disequilibrium.

There are reasons why people may be less affected by an atmosphere. Angles of arrival (Ahmed, 2010) to the sessions were impacted a number of factors: upsetting (or pleasant) experiences earlier in the day or week, green biographies, the wellbeing of friends and relatives, perceptions of similarity to those within the group, and experiences traversing therapeutic and harmful landscapes outside of the sessions. Natasha recognised that she saw only a "*snapshot*" of members' lives during sessions, that might not be reflective of their "*daily lives*" otherwise. Some participants highlighted how past experiences made them more sensitive to conflict, or take longer to feel confident around others. Illness can disallow participation in the potentially enabling practices that objects afford; van Hout et al. (2015) describe how becoming ill can "disable the function of the scripted object"

(p1212). Skill and familiarity with certain activities, too, can shape their affective capacities. For Edwards' (n.d.) participants (people involved in meditation practices or outdoor activities) "'therapeutic' outcomes were inseparable from an individual's history…from existing interests and previous experiences" (p3). In other work, Edwards (2020) draws on Ahmed (2006), in exploring how embodied histories shape the experience of landscapes. The texturing of the growing spaces, fortunately, insulated against some of the variation in the skills, interests, and comforts of participants. Importantly, however, sites and sessions differed in this accommodativeness: practitioner or member absences, and the physical characteristics of sites, could reduce the number of emergent activity-areas. These shifting and relational aspects of experience in place and with 'nature' are affirmed within much of the therapeutic landscapes literature (Edwards, 2020; Bell et al., 2018; Conradson, 2005).

Significantly, the first few sessions could be highly anxiety-provoking for some participants: initial group meetings have been called a hurdle elsewhere (Hanson et al., 2016). The anticipation of an atmosphere can precede participation in it, as articulated by Büscher and Urry (2009): "Much movement involves experiencing or anticipating in one's imagination the 'atmosphere' of place" (p106). Pink's (2012) phenomenological construction of gardens, as places, as intensities of 'flows', is useful for understanding differences in people's ability to avail therapeutic experience. Gardens exist as part of individuals' routes, extending into towns and homes, "by means of its affective and material dimensions as well as in the imagination" (p97). She discusses how the home and self can stretch to the garden. Equally, however, I found that negative imaginations or constructions of the garden could extend homewards, while difficult routes could add to the challenge of participating. Denise and Loraine had somewhat negative expectations of the sessions pre-arrival, some of which were fortunately not realised. In a social prescribing project meeting, James described how four of the people with whom he had met were "*keen*" to attend:

> but had "*chaotic*" lives, with ill health and mobility issues that could get in the way, he added, with empathy. (July 2022)

These individuals were unable to make their first sessions owing to ill health. Others have described social prescribing amid similar challenges (Haywood et al., 2022). Thus, when considering affective atmospheres, it is important to consider who is excluded from exposure to them, or from becoming increasingly porous to them, that can occur beyond their initial sessions.

The penetration and shape of an affective atmosphere can change for participants over time, as Foley (2017) captures in the concept of 'therapeutic accretion'. This deepening benefit through engagement is evident in the gradual development of the family-like therapeutic and friendly

communities that developed at Head Outdoors and The Apple Grove. However, this accretion was not guaranteed, owing to precarities inside and outside of the projects. In the context of walking groups, Hynds and Allibone (2009, in Pollard et al., 2020) capture how landscapes could become boring without variety in route, suggesting that the affective potential of landscapes can change for better or worse, with influence from how they are interacted with. Their research connects with these findings: atmospheres can be unstable, and repeat encounters do not always lead to sustained therapeutic accretion. In circumstances in which relatively long-attending members had to be asked to (temporarily, or for the foreseeable future) cease attending, the ways in which they recurrently spoke or interacted with other members seemed to challenge the achievement of a therapeutic atmosphere. The participant who repeatedly raised "*triggering*" life experiences at Head Outdoors, I found in a later visit, had to be asked to leave the sessions. They were unable to limit discussion of such issues to the more private, dyadic interactions with practitioners when asked to on several occasions. Wood et al. (2022) describe an instance where a community garden member, arriving through green social prescribing, limited their own participation through worries they had upset other members. As mentioned, a member had to be asked to leave after a "*third strike*", upsetting others by shouting at them loudly. Both participants had needs that were beyond the scope of the organisations to address. Broader contexts (including mental health service access, and stressors outside of gardens) play a role in shaping the overall wellbeing of participants in small scale projects. These departures also provide insight into the potential scope and limits of such projects in improving health and wellbeing, and indicate areas where additional support may be targeted. There was a strong desire to help all those who came to sessions. However, when competing needs could not be reconciled, and atmospheres were disrupted to the detriment of other members, participation seemed to no longer be possible for certain members.

4.5.3.1 Revisiting the practitioner role(s)

Here, I reflect further on the roles (predominantly) of practitioners, in holding together assemblages and managing atmospheres. Nonhuman agencies vitally contributed towards affective atmospheres – from the vacillating weather, to the awe-inspiring or recalcitrant growth of different plants. Human actions (as well as social dynamics), intentionally or otherwise, could shape atmospheres to be less or more therapeutic. Especially because of the emergent and multifarious nature of affective atmospheres, practitioners were important. Practitioners played a role in engineering atmospheres (Duff, 2016): choreographing (Adey, 2008) elements, responding to atmospheric shifts, and tweaking and tinkering. The affective potential of certain plants and features guided the practitioners' work,

evident, for example, in Thomas' plans to harness the magical, calming smell of herbs for members, by planting them around a willow shelter. Additionally, as practical projects requiring specialist knowledge, expertise, and material resources, practitioners were indispensable to the function and feel of the spaces.

The achievement of functional, enabling spaces, with safe and low-pressure atmospheres, depended upon the work of practitioners, sometimes backgrounded and outside of sessions. This work was not completely exclusive to practitioners – some members would plan and lead activities, or bring in equipment, and most would provide (peer) support to other participants sometimes or often. They would often participate in gestures of care: from remembering whether someone took dairy milk or oat in tea, to bringing in a game or product for another. However, I argue that in these settings, the presence of paid, distinct practitioner figures was valuable, shaping the enabling capacity of sessions in particular ways. Others have suggested similarly: in the context of a school-based art intervention, Atkinson and Robson (2012) argue that the presence and authority of practitioners prevented disorder, and distinguished the intervention time-space from the everyday. Duff (2016) suggests that mental health services might help promote the "therapeutic yield" of places, although this could equally be said of practitioners too, by "engineering atmospheres of recovery" (p16), contributing to their upkeep, brokering access, and helping in setting their tone.

In Chapter Four, I have detailed how practitioners shaped the social dynamics of sessions, modelling and springboarding interactions. They had some say in gatekeeping access to the sessions – a tool utilised sometimes in their care for social dynamics and affective atmospheres. Their presence facilitated distinct support providing opportunities, and helped prevent and manage conflict. I have captured some of the ways in which practitioners were attuned to the moods, needs, and interests of members, and carried out their work with care. Vital to all this work was the practitioners' practical labour: in transporting materials, securing access to sites, establishing connections with other organisations both similar and divergent in size and purpose, devising activities, in managing volunteer labour, and securing funding for labour and materials. Informing this care for place and people was a range of skills and knowledges, interpersonal and horticultural, sometimes enlisted from social networks built over time. Here, I summarise organising roles, and relate these roles to literature exploring the engineering (Duff, 2016), staging (Bille et al., 2015), assembling, configuring (Kuijper et al., 2020), and tinkering (Mol, 2008; 2010) of and with atmospheres, experiences, and care. Practitioners do much of the work of bringing together (and, sometimes, excluding) the elements that constitute place and produce atmospheres. They carry out much of the practical structuring and scaffolding work required for sessions to run, and they navigate through emerging tensions.

Duff (2016) and Smith (2021) have suggested how people organise objects, bodies, and spaces so as to orchestrate or encourage affects, emotions, and practices. The findings of this chapter extend this research, illustrating the depth of the work of coordinating assemblages. I have expounded upon the preparatory efforts of practitioners, and both their cumulative and responsive learnings and adaptions. Further, I have shown how practitioners do not simply design for safety, but cultivate a flexibility within sessions, allowing members to shape the affective relations into which they enter. Notions of engineering atmospheres are familiar to those who design spaces. Martin et al. (2019) capture how architects designing supportive drop-in centres for those with cancer ('Maggie's centres') encourage architectural affects: "Architectural affects are generated through a *layering* of multiple objects, practices and interactions." (Böhme, 2013, in Martin et al., 2019: p2). The architects carefully considered the type, form, and quality of building materials, and the building layouts, to evoke certain feelings (buoyancy, optimism, surprise), and stage certain interactions and care practices. Room colours were varied, a thematic zoning drawn on by one of the psychologists there, to synergistically encourage people they led around the space to take different perspectives on their lives outside the centre. While highlighting the planned nature of this design – which followed a loose architectural brief, relatively sedimented in the built materials of the space - they also describe how the daily social actions of participants contributed towards the creation of atmospheres. While not without relevance, notions of creativity and responsiveness are more fitting than of design, in community gardens; the 'designers' are embedded in dynamic everyday flows, and working with lively beings whose spontaneous agency could be a virtue. Edensor and Sumartojo (2015) describe "vernacular creativities" (p279), citing Pink et al's (2015) capturing of the improvisational, mundane, and ongoing work of assembling domestic spaces and their feel. Together with these pieces, I find that designed (planned, purchased, built) materiality, situated and ongoing coordination of elements, and the emergent and somewhat unpredictable interaction of these elements (including the human and nonhuman users of these spaces) are generative of the experience, feel, and atmosphere of places.

There are resonances, here, with work informed by care ethics, and (related) conceptions of care circulating in Science and Technology Studies (STS). Bødker et al.'s (2019) description of an STS perspective on care accords with the work of facilitating safe and enabling growing sessions and spaces: "In this perspective, care is seen as a continuous process of connecting sociomaterial entities to form 'enabling arrangements'" (p1360). Drawing on Mol et al. (2010), they argue for looking at "what specific elements – human as well as non-human – need to be enrolled, negotiated and tinkered with to form part of caring *arrangements*" (Bødker et al., 2019: p1360). This definition of care is in harmony with how practitioners (and members adopting practitioner-like roles) managed

social dynamics, and recruited plants, animals, and horticultural, culinary, and crafty materials (non-human elements). That members also provided care, and that plants and spaces frequently reciprocated care, evidences claims that care can be multidirectional, multi-actor, and co-produced (Tronto, 1993; Milligan and Wiles, 2010). While not a perfect match for definitions of care oriented around maintaining and repairing worlds (Fisher and Tronto, 1990), practitioners (and members) certainly engaged in activity guided by identified sub-elements of care: recognising and responding to need, with skill, and with responsiveness to itself. As Williams (2023) found of community gardens in Toronto, practitioners made subtle judgements of how to instruct gently: "being sure not to dictate to or boss us in any way…[providing] the right amount of direction without being overbearing" (p44). Relevant, too, are conceptualisations of care as attunement and attuning to need, which explore the negotiation of different values or understandings of good care. Mol's (2008; 2010) work on tinkering is most relevant, when exploring how organising, engineering, and assembling work involved negotiations between caring for the needs of different individuals, for the atmospheric balance of the group, and for the growing spaces and food exchange networks within which they sat.

Described previously, many factors impacted upon the penetrance of affective atmospheres for members. In light of members' differing needs, interests, and fluctuating wellbeing, practitioners were attuned to signs participants might need more support or accommodation. Throughout, I have described instances of practitioner attentiveness to member needs, and willingness to adapt: the suggestion of having a "*non-verbal*" check-in to prevent upset, or of apple-picking, to redirect nervous energy. They would try to notice whether somebody was quieter or louder than usual, or look for other breaks in patterns of behaviour (notably, something more noticeable with time and relationship-building). Interests, tastes, and passions were remembered and incorporated, from favourite meals, to invitations to activities of interest. Angela's tentative creation of the supermarket numbering system (and welcome surprise at its unexpected effects) demonstrated an ongoing awareness to the results of care, that Tronto (1993) calls 'responsiveness'. When speaking with practitioners about the CICs' sessions, details could shift over time, as they adapted assemblages to changing contexts. Locations, for example, changed, in response to delayed cooperation of partners, ungranted permissions, and the responses of residents local to planned activities. Managing to redirect activity and funding while staying within the remit of funders drew on the skills and connections of practitioners.

Significantly, and in agreement with Mol (2010), attunements were not infinitely implementable. Members' wellbeing was shaped by factors beyond the influence of sessions, and practitioners' capacities had limits. Additionally, their work sometimes had to serve one 'good' or target of care

over another: caring for growing spaces (so that they may be productive and available for future enjoyment) could sometimes divert attention from facilitating activities, or aiding members navigating the space. At other times, "*key jobs*" in caretaking for the growing spaces might be suspended, in the prioritisation of creating a therapeutic and low-pressure space for members. As Mol notes, sometimes goods coincide, as in the mutual nurturing of members and plants that constituted much of the activity within the growing spaces. Sometimes, however, they do not. For Mol, operating with a logic of care involves confronting or persevering through these tricky negotiations, and anticipating and adapting to them. I noticed such an approach when speaking with Natasha, in a conversation in which I expressed sympathy for some of the difficulties in initiating Taking Notice:

> I said "*I'm sorry that this happened"*…She paused, thoughtfully, and said "*I'm not, we've identified a problem*", and she said that she'd be feeding it back. (April 2022)

She had recounted how a member, arriving through social prescribing, had become very distressed in a session, with signs suggesting that they were experiencing potentially more complex and severe issues than had been apparent previously. Given that health and safeguarding issues can be co-morbid, re-emerging, or not immediately knowable, practitioner attentiveness and adaptiveness is important in identifying such issues, as are systems that can integrate such feedback. I do not wish to valorise (or dichotomise) experiential learning at the expense of planning – especially as some practitioners identified that foreplanning (around referral pathways) should be integrated in social prescribing services. Instead, I aim to highlight this disposition in practitioners, and co-contribute their navigations as "stories" that might inform "public coordination" (Mol, 2010: p89) around similar situations and tensions.

In addition to this attuned care, I have detailed the practical labour of facilitating activities and groups. Carrying out these tasks in ways that accorded with the values and goals of the individuals and organisations could add another dimension to this work. While atmospheres are emergent, the assembly of many of their productive elements required active, time-consuming work. Elements were not only assembled, but reassembled and reassembled again. As mentioned, in assembling elements and collaborating with partners, practitioners worked with different temporalities and rhythms: horticultural rhythms, bureaucratic rhythms, and the others within which elements and partners were entrained. Phoenix and Bell (2019) develop Crang's (2001) concept of polyrhythmic ensembles in elucidating the patterned comings-together involved in physical activity. They describe how activities (golfing, indoor bowls, and swimming) depended upon the rhythms of cohering people, the replacement and rearrangement of equipment, the taking of medications, ordering of

sheds, and reshuffling of other activities. In their research, this concept represented physical, bio-social, and environmental rhythmicities, "which in turn, interacted with those of other material and non-material affordances and temporalities of place." (Phoenix and Bell, 2019: p52). The authors view repetition within sessions as a source of structure, suggesting that the ensuing familiarity and predictability is part of the pleasure of movement. Becoming aware of, and entrained within, these patterns is likely an aspect of therapeutic accretion (Foley, 2017), and a reason why anxieties common in early gardening sessions became generally less so in later ones. Polyrhythmia is an aspect of the texturing of microgeographies, too.

Others have explored the role of rhythms in sustaining practices; Blue (2019; 2017) adapts Lefebvre's (1992) concept of rhythms in their account of engagement in physical activity as a matter of synchronising practices and their rhythmicities. Regular participation in martial arts, for example, depends upon the fitting together of patterns of eating, training, and working into a regularly reproducible combination, or 'eurhythmia'. Other practices do not fit with such an ensemble; Blue (2017) notes, auto-ethnographically, how he disengaged from drinking alcohol and socialising outside of the gym while he trained. This resonates with my earlier accounts of practitioners suggesting that the growing sessions usefully displace certain habits and relationships. Eurhythmia, or polyrhythmic ensembles, are vulnerable to disruption, with changes to one rhythm or practice potentially destabilising whole practice complexes. Practitioner roles, I argue, entailed a making and maintaining polyrhythms; a coordinating of elements with certain (and sometimes differing) regularities. Throughout, I am attentive to when polyrhythms converge or diverge, complement or sit less easily together.

Practitioners played a role in first establishing rhythms: I have described how the creation of regular sessions helped some of the members justify to others carving out this time for themselves, and created a form of structure for those whose lives had gained more fluidity through the COVID-19 pandemic, retirement, relocation, or other life events. Gerard described how he became less vulnerable to low mood impacting his ability to come, as the Friday sessions became a regular and anticipated part of his week. At some sessions, practitioners had more latitude to help members establish regular participation as part of their weekly rhythms. Natasha, speaking of her knowledge of earlier iterations of Head Outdoors, told me how:

> "some people need to be met at their house, and for you to walk through the door with them, and to take them in the car" (July 2022)

Prior to the establishment of rhythms of attendance, more support was needed by some. Attendance might then become more entrenched: expected by members' friends or family, and

combined with other practices. Denise described how she established a weekly pattern of borrowing a parent's car prior to each session for transportation, combining this trip out with her and her partner's weekly food shop.

Discussed in 3.3.2, seasonal and horticultural rhythms were worked alongside, compensated for, adapted to, and sometimes altered and expanded. Practitioners helped attune participants to the seasonal affordances and horticultural tasks possible at different times of year, and devised other tasks to engage members in the lulls between periods of harvesting, weeding, or sowing. James described to me the work of anticipating these lulls:

> "*you've got to put that effort in. If you don't, it becomes very erm, boring…You go home on an evening, you do your homework, you find what's, what's good and what's bad, and you kind of like assess what you can do, and what can't you do…You've got to engage, and keep the activities lively, and entertaining*." (James, engagement practitioner, Taking Notice)

Horticultural rhythms, social dynamics, and therapeutic temporalities were negotiated in transitioning Head Outdoors sessions to an ongoing (rather than 6-8-week) format. In facilitating different activities, practitioners contributed to the texturing of rhythms and paces across these microgeographies.

Bureaucratic and institutional rhythms of both the CICs and partner organisations had to be negotiated, too. When asking about historic provision of gardening projects in the area, a practitioner from The Sage Project told me of the relatively short-term nature of these projects:

> "*We've got bits of different bits of funding over the last ten years or so to run similar sorts of projects. Erm, but without, without a great deal of sustainability to some of those things…it's, you know, hard after a certain amount of funding to keep going, to find different funding and so on and to try to keep reinventing things*" (Phillipa, practitioner, The Sage Project)

VCS funding cycles seemed to sometimes conflict with the sustainability of projects; practitioners had to weave together funding streams to compensate for the potential impacts of such institutional rhythms. Arrhythmia, or divergent rhythms, are not always manageable, as with the conflict between the organisational rhythms of Pots-and-Plates, the organisation responsible for maintaining an area of land, and the horticultural rhythms of the tomatoes and weeds, respectively withering and flourishing without timely care. Collaborating with numerous partners could mean that practitioners had to accommodate a range of different patterns of activity:

> "*it's very responsive the work…you can plan ahead for stuff, like, be proactive, that's fine.*

> *But, like, the other day, when somebody said "oh I've got, we've got all this [donated goods]". and you're like, yeah, we'll come and get it*" (Angela, practitioner, The Kitchen Table).

Amid arrhythmia, aspects of the practitioners' work were akin to wrangling. Liyanagunawardena (2023) proposes this innovation upon Mol's (2010) tinkering; wrangling for health, they argue, characterises much of the practice of health-seeking in the resource-poor, postcolonial context of their research setting. Without minimising the differences in these two settings, I argue that the work of these practitioners – running small organisations, in a precarious VCS context - can too go beyond the "minor adjustments and calibrations" (Liyanagunawardena, 2023: p2) of tinkering. Without official ownership of growing spaces, nor long-term resourcing arrangements, they wrangle for continuity, making the most of opportunities as they arise.

4.6 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have illustrated the role of atmospheres of safety within community gardening sessions, and their contribution to enablement: of particular feelings, reflections, interactions, and capacities to act. Affective atmospheres have been understood to emerge from assemblages of different garden elements, whose interactions are governed by both human and nonhuman agencies. The social, material, and affective are engaged in atmospheric emergence, and in ensuing generative acts. I have demonstrated how these dynamic atmospheres can be nested and multiple, concentrated across different zones in the gardens. A number of characteristics of these garden assemblages have been highlighted as playing important roles in therapeutic and otherwise valuable experiences in the community gardening spaces. The gardening sessions had a certain flexibility: offering different activities and modes of socialising, accommodating different patterns of engagement, and allowing the therapeutic *or* more-than-therapeutic to be foregrounded in particular moments. Gardens were unfinished spaces, with room for adaption. They were differentiated microgeographies, creating a texturing of atmospheres which contributed further to flexibility within sessions. This texturing had buffering effects, enabling continued participation despite differences in members' interests, skills, and needs, and through fluctuations in feeling and mood. While much work within the therapeutic mobilities literature focuses on a specific mode of travel (walking, most often), I instead capture the therapeutic potential of a mosaic of types and paces of movement, and transitions between them. Significantly, however, structure was also cultivated within sessions, because it prevented flexibility from drifting into uncertainty. These

regular sessions also added a structuring rhythm into members' weeks, valued in particular for those with irregular or no employment, or facing enduring challenges outside of the gardens. Finally, the collective nature of the projects (albeit, with greater and more concentrated responsibility sitting with practitioners) assuaged some of the anxieties around participating, while shaping the affordances and affective power of the horticultural tasks.

Evident through this chapter is the work and care entailed in creating and holding together garden assemblages: the corralling of elements, attunement and responsiveness to the needs of people and place, and the negotiating of horticultural, seasonal, and bureaucratic rhythms. This work was carried out by both members and practitioners, with the latter occupying some distinct roles, and adding a reassuring, mildly formalising presence to gardens. Participants engaged in a choreographing of atmospheres, working with and against nonhuman agencies and rhythms over which they lacked complete control. Shaping atmospheres, and configuring and orientating assemblages, required forms of balancing: atmospheres of safety and structure with those of freedom and flexibility, and of varied aims. An ongoing attunement to members' needs and interests, alongside more stable goals (relating to productive and ethical cultivation, cooking and consuming with care, or the caretaking of place), served as 'north stars' in this work. The work of balancing atmospheric qualities, and different aims and orientations of the sessions, has parallels with Mol's (2010) work in care homes. Her writing explores the practical tinkering entailed within good care: a constrained, attentive, adaptive effort to work towards goods or values, which can have some degree of mutual exclusivity in particular situations. My focus on this kind of work enriches the literature around affective atmospheres, through highlighting the compromises, tensions, care, and attunement entailed in their engineering. Meanwhile, this exploration of community garden atmospheres, assemblages, and rhythms illustrates a version of tinkering with multiple tinkerers, cultivating and caring for place and for one another. The recognition of exogenous institutional rhythms and practices offers further insight into some of the conditions and constraints under which care (including both tinkering and wrangling) may be enacted. In some settings, choreographing atmospheres is the work of designers, with a rigidness to the affects and behaviours they aim to engender (Adey, 2008). In green care settings, I have shown how there can be therapeutic benefit in choreographing with a degree of flexibility, collectivity, and acceptance of nonhuman agencies.

5. Keeping busy and active

To regularly participate in community gardening was to incorporate a newfound source of busyness, activity, and movement into one's weekly routines. Although punctuated by moments of relative still, each session afforded and demanded varied movements, as part of tasks that busied minds, too. Gross and fine motor skills were engaged as members shovelled compost, scythed grass, painted apple tree signs, and whittled wood. Preparatory activities and movements were supportive of these sessions. For members, mental and physical preparations might take the form of buying and cooking food to share, walking to the bus stop, or 'psyching' oneself up to get in the car and drive to a garden. In addition to travelling to gardens and participating in activities, regularly attending sessions brought a sense of more metaphorical activity and motion for some, for whom it constituted an effort to "*see a way forward*" and gain freedom.

Desires to be busy, and appreciation for the 'active' element of sessions, took various forms. Some articulated a commitment to exercising for health improvement, or that they valued how the sessions fit within broader active dispositions, inhabiting their weeks with movement and occupation. For such participants, more rigorous activities were often gravitated towards, and breaks were taken with brevity and encouragement from others. While not particularly driven to high exertion, others enjoyed how the sessions represented a relative increase of mobility, purpose, and novelty in their lives. Having full or fuller schedules, weekly focal points, or something to look forward to beneficially structured members' weeks, and formed part of their understandings of what wellbeing is. Broadly speaking, movement was understood in relation to activity, having a full schedule, being occupied and engaged, and keeping active. Participants' impulsions to move existed variously as preceding and emergent motivations, as well as ones that existed in minor, subtle, and complementary forms. While many of the participants expressed a desire to be active and move, its place within other appreciations was such that it is sometimes difficult to separate or privilege it as a motivator or driver of participation.

The stimulus for the writing of this chapter was a curiosity for the place of movement in community garden experiences. I intend for 'movement' to encompass the respectively more fitness-oriented (Caspersen et al., 1985) and fitness-associated terms of exercise and physical activity, while not being limited to them. This, of course, includes many or most 'doings'. It is precisely because 'movement' is so ingrained in action more broadly, that it is important to consider its less intentional and fitness-oriented forms: such movements may comprise a larger share of some people's weekly activity. While more interested in nature than physical activity, one participant rode his bicycle

(weather- and health-permitting) up to ten miles each way to attend sessions, for example. A broad understanding of movement is in keeping with the inductive nature of the study, while allowing for the role of 'physical activity' to be examined in a nature-based research setting in which it was not the sole orientation of sessions.

In this chapter, I explore the movements that supported and comprised the sessions, and how these activities fit within participants' understandings of activeness and wellbeing. Section 5.1 focuses primarily on how desires for motion and activity were given shape by experiences outside of, and prior to, participation, and how these desires were met by the mobilities and rhythms offered in gardens. I employ the anthropological concept of lay understandings of wellbeing, and geographical insights into place relationality. 5.2 more directly considers the pertinence of physical activity and exercise to participants, and in gardens, adopting a holistic, pluralistic approach to physical activity. Its variable place is considered as part of more overarching, sociomaterial constructions of movement - embedded within engaging community gardening practices - as enjoyable, agreeable, and accessible.

5.1 Being busy, active, and well

5.1.1 Getting out of the house, getting fresh air, and having something to look forward to

Many of the participants recounted to me how a sense of having fewer places to go, and fewer things to do, had become entrenched in prior months or years. Due to mental and physical ill health, changing relationships, awaiting asylum, the COVID-19 pandemic, and other life events, lives could quieten, and homes could feel enclosing. Several participants described having, during periods of worsened mental ill health, struggled to find the reasons or capacity to leave the house more than two or three times a week. While home could provide distance from some challenging experiences, it too could come to feel discomforting through association with (and seeming evocation of) such periods of isolation. Being unwell or unhappy was closely linked, for some, with being "*trapped*" in the house. Similarly to retirees attending 'men's sheds', the sessions were valued as an alternative to being "*stuck at home*" (Kelly et al., 2019: p1152). Following encouragement from her mental health team to "*get involved back in the community*", Denise felt she had benefitted from the opportunity to leave the house and socialise:

> "*[Head Outdoors] helps me. And it's fresh air, and it's, it's not sitting in the same four walls… Because I was just staying in the bedroom, and wanted to be left alone. And I was in darkness*" (Denise, member, Let'sGrow)

To speak of the value of "*getting out of the house*", out of "*four walls*", and to get "*fresh air*" was common. "*Fresh air*" was a widely used expression; it can have more symbolic (Sachs, 2019) aspects, evoking efforts to refresh oneself through breaking patterns of stillness and making connections with and in the outdoors. This is true of other expressions too; '*the house'* and '*the outdoors'* can take on deeper meanings and associations following periods of isolation, that extend the commonplace notion of the goodness of getting out in fresh air. Milly appreciated the fresh air of The Apple Grove, not only for its sensory qualities, but for how it was a place away from other spaces and concerns:

> "*especially when like, work is a bit much…it's nice to just like, get there and just have a like, nice fresh air for a couple of hours*" (Milly, member, Pots-and-Plates)

Fresh air was appreciated both for what it was, and was not. 'The outdoors' was a particularly salient category for participants, sometimes moreso than 'nature'. Getting out and getting fresh air had become salient framings of their participation, while resonating with wider cultural expressions.

While not always speaking in terms of mental health, others talked about the challenge of being home during the COVID-19 lockdowns – a challenge perhaps reevoked by spending too long at home 'post'-pandemic. The outdoors had been a lifeline for Marion during the pandemic, which, in conjunction with having relocated to a gardenless flat, had reinforced her aversion to spending too long indoors. She had taken long walks frequently during the lockdowns, and wished that she had found the gardening sessions before the lockdowns ended. While Marion counted craft and other volunteering opportunities amongst the things she did to keep well, she was especially grateful how community gardening allowed her to be outdoors:

> "*I think for me, it was just about, it was about being outside. And, and, doing physical activity. Because, as I say, I'm in the flat, and not got a garden. It was about the physical stuff, and being, volunteering, but outside. I think that's, because I think through COVID I felt really sort of trapped, trapped in. You know, without, not having the outside space*." (Marion, member, Let'sGrow)

With the expanse of time that could accompany certain life transitions and health fluctuations, routines could fall by the wayside, as formerly structuring practices were disengaged with. Some seemed to feel as though being busy *was* being well or more well, and to be home most of the time

was to be unhappy or unwell. When asked about wellbeing, some participants seemed to associate it closely with maintaining a routine. Recounting a time before standing for too long brought fatigue, Denise described how she had lost the practice of regular, 'non-basic', nutritious, tasty cooking, that she and her partner had previously enjoyed:

> *"we need to get back into that routine of getting the slow cooker out 'cause - what, we, sometimes I used to use it two or three times a week didn't I?...when I started getting like this, my energy goes…and I don't feel like - I want to cook, but I haven't got the energy to stand there and cook. It has to be basic cooking now, doesn't it? Something out of the freezer"*
>
> (Denise, member, Let'sGrow; speaking to me and her partner, who sat nearby during her interview)

The emerging possibility of, and need for, opportunities to participate in accessible, engaging activities in time-spaces of biographical disruption is consistent with findings from walking groups and 'occupations' more broadly (Morris et al., 2019; Hart, 2022). Availing of these opportunities can require additional support. Difficulties with low mood that were described and alluded to perhaps attest to the need for interventions that can occupy such time-spaces early in their emergence. For some participants, the gardening sessions were one among many in the patchwork of activities (including sport groups, walks, personal allotment visits, and housework) they had built following such disruptions. Cynthia worked to ensure she had a full schedule each week; this was a vital component of her wellbeing strategies, in retirement and in bereavement of her partner:

> "*I have something every day…Monday to Friday, I have something every day now. And like I say, I even play bowls, we play tennis…If I'm not busy, I'm not happy*" (Cynthia, member, Let'sGrow)

Coming to the growing spaces, alongside other weekly activities, provided both the immediate occupation and pleasures of participating, while also infusing time spent at home with an occupying sense of anticipation:

> "*I have literally something going on every day, which is again, good for mental health...to see somebody in the diary*" (Cynthia)

For Cynthia, keeping busy was a wellbeing strategy, contrasted with stillness and low mood. Utilising busyness as a strategy to stay well emerged from the biographical disruption of bereavement.

Anticipation was significant too, to those for whom community gardening was their "*main*" activity, or their primary respite and "*[my] time*", during most weeks. Having something to "*look forward to*" seemed to be a resource upon which to draw. As discussed in 3.3.2, the future orientation of horticultural work could be therapeutic. The structured, weekly scheduling of sessions served a similar function. Shaun described how the orchard sessions, in addition to being a resource for relaxation and enjoyment, served to provide purpose during a period of worsened mental health:

> "*at the time, I was living on my own…and sometimes, they would be the only people I would see all week. So it was good, to keep some sanity…it was that sort of, it was that like goal, that target…it gave me a sense of purpose, a sense of commitment, erm, gave me an outlet*" (Shaun, member, Pots-and-Plates)

Having a predictable, calming social activity at which he would be expected and welcomed provided a focus during difficult days, particularly during the pandemic. The value of these sessions was made especially apparent when a change in employment meant that his attendance was disrupted:

> *"I didn't realise how big a part, and how sort of meaningful it had become…to my life, and to my routine, and to my mental health, and my actual wellbeing, until…I couldn't go there"*

Schoneboom et al. (2023) explore the role of temporality amongst community gardening volunteers out of employment, describing the pleasant dwelling of volunteers within botanical and task-oriented temporalities. Being in the garden engendered feelings of an "elongated present" (p171), linking the volunteers with materially indexed memories of former experiences in the garden, and ongoing cycles of plant renewal.

For Robert, rather than filling otherwise quiet expanses in his week, the sessions broke down his schedule – otherwise full with caring and informal work responsibilities – into more manageable sections:

> *"I always look forward to Thursday and Friday mornings, coming here….for two, two mornings a week, it like, it stops [the challenges of his other commitments] being continuous. It like, it gives it a break, so I'm dealing with smaller chunks. I have like, three days to deal with things, and then erm, I've got a time here, to do like, some physical things, and to like, problem solving things. Then, I've got a relaxing break of a weekend. And then back two or three days of whatever, I've got to handle"* (Robert, member, Let'sGrow)

For those like Robert, the sessions were a much-appreciated break that, whilst unable to lessen the challenges outside of them, could provide the comforting reassurance of routine respite. Thomas

described having heard another participant call the sessions "*the oasis in [my] week*", before asserting what a positive move it was for participants to be allowed to come along on an ongoing basis, rather than for a limited eight-week course as had happened previously. This changed model allowed for participating to become part of people's routines. As discussed, early sessions could be emotionally ambivalent or actively challenging; Gerard described how gaining a familiarity with sessions, alongside a weekly pattern of attending, helped for dips in mood (that might have previously foreclosed participation) to be weathered:

> "*this morning, [my mood] was a two [out of ten]…if it wasn't for the fact that I've been coming here regular, I'd put it this way...I wouldn't have come this morning*." (Gerard, member, Let'sGrow)

Several participants spoke about trying to ensure appointments and commitments were arranged to fall outside of sessions; they had become a priority. The stability of weekly sessions, alongside the changes that came with growing plants, changing seasons, and incremental progress with garden tasks, helped the sessions to be established as regular and anticipated rhythms for members. As discussed, having two or three hourly slots at the same time each week could help participants negotiate other commitments and relational demands, and justify coming along.

As for the impact of seasons, plants, and tasks, horticultural and task-specific temporalities and rhythms served as threads between sessions, creating investment in the next. In sowing seeds, participants initiated botanical sequences to which they would respond, returning each week to repot, water, and, with luck, harvest. To reach harvest was to work with and against less desirable agencies, combating the weeds and insects that would arrive without welcome, and grow on more condensed timelines. The demands which plants and their competitors would make upon participants might be considered as a type of environmental 'press' (Kielhofner, 1995) that encouraged routine participation, albeit one that required an initial investment in, and attunement to, the growing spaces. In the context of occupational therapy, Kielhofner argues that environments not only afford certain behaviours, but press upon people to engage in them. Multiple participants asserted the value of seeing things grow, from start to finish:

> "*you need to be able to plant something and see it grow, and harvest it. You can't rush it*" (Alistair, member, Pots-and-Plates, Let'sGrow)

Alistair had previously participated in varied nature-based volunteering projects (some of which were no longer running), and had been attending the CIC's projects for two years. These overlapping beginnings and endings formed tapestries of horticultural activity that constituted and responded to

seasonal change. Sowing and harvesting anticipated the nearby future, whilst working with products of the recent past. Pruning led to harvesting led to pruning, with stacking, burning, and whittling wood peppered around and between. The micro-projects of building a chicken run, or seeing a vegetable through to harvest, all cumulatively contributed to the ongoing project of continually shaping the growing spaces. Some of the less animate tasks of the garden (such as building and crafting) also beckoned engagement. Completing these tasks could span over several sessions. Gerard described how the joint task of building a chicken coop extension, and awaiting the tomato harvest, favoured ongoing engagement:

> *"it took me and [a member] a good few weeks to make the chicken- the extension on the chicken run. That was very good, [I looked] forward to that. I look forward now to coming back for the…seeing the tomatoes and yeah, and just er, being a part, with everybody, and joining in." (Gerard, member, Let'sGrow)*

While a plant's growth or a seed's germination could not be hastened, horticultural rhythms – as a product of both other-than-human *and* human activity - could be slightly tinkered with, attuned to group needs: by starting more or fewer tasks, or planting more or less labour-intensive plants. Lower priority tasks might be drawn upon when members were without occupation. Group sizes and capabilities (alongside other factors) shaped the horticultural capacities of spaces. For this reason, Phillip looked forward to the opportunity (post-fieldwork) to pair with a local college for how it may increase the productivity of the space.

The routines and rhythms of participants, of garden horticulture, and of the CICs, were not always eurhythmic. As discussed, practitioners worked to counter botanical lulls with craft, perhaps in recognition of the place of busyness and activity for sessions and members. A once-regular Pots-and-Plates gardening session was temporarily stopped; the site was modest in size, and the practitioners did not want people to be "*sat around*", unoccupied. Additionally, several participants wished for community gardening to take a greater place within their weekly patterns of activity; speaking with both members and practitioners revealed a desire amongst some members for sessions to run on more days of the week. During shorter school holidays, Let'sGrow would usually run additional events in the local area; some members would attend most of these events. Such desires represented tensions between local need and the capacities of organisations (see Chapter Six), and raises questions about how 'open' garden sites should be. As mentioned, Celandine Community Garden was the only site that was ungated, and technically accessible through the day and night. Yet, it was infrequently used outside of sessions. The members with which I spoke told me that they rarely used the space outside of sessions. Admittedly, many hours of the week were outside of the

observation of members and me. Occasionally small traces of other users of the space were left: a broken section of pergola, or a small potted plant left under it as a donation, alongside evidence of plant and animal activity. Where members did visit outside of scheduled hours, it was usually in response to the call of dehydrating plants in the warmer months – a quick watering was warranted. This speaks to the social dimension of valued community gardening sessions, and asks: what might increased access to the sorts of beneficial experiences detailed here entail?

5.1.2 Displacing negative practices, thoughts, and feelings through engagement

As found while considering the salience of expressions such as "*it's fresh air, and…not sitting in the same four walls."* (Denise), the sessions' value came partially from what they could replace or displace. The interrelated practices, thoughts, and feelings that emerged in the growing spaces were sought to take place of those that might thrive in their absence. Participating in sessions could be viewed as an action to place such things in relationships of mutual exclusivity with the activities of the growing spaces. Displacements might last for the duration of sessions and perhaps extend beyond them, or be situated (and possibly limited) to moments of feeling engaged within specific activities. Natasha suggested that outdoor spaces were sought for these reasons:

> "*There are reasons why people come to places like [The Apple Grove]. Often they're doing this so they don't do something else*" (August 2021)

Practitioners Haabeel and Angela both spoke of how some of the members – in particular, those who were seeking, or had recently sought, asylum - found that being alone and without places to go could negatively impact their mental health. Of one such member, Angela told me:

> "*he just has to fill his time…if he's on his own he really really struggles. So it's better for him to be, working, or helping people...probably, if we were out there five days a week, he would be with us five days a week"* (Angela, practitioner, The Kitchen Table)

Haabeel helped manage a local community allotment. He conveyed the damaging impact of the long periods (sometimes of several years) during which people waited for their asylum claims to be processed, and in which they were disallowed from finding paid work. In these long periods of uncertainty and inactivity, volunteering with the CICs could be an ameliorative form of occupation. As for Cynthia, a participant of Hart's (2018) research with refugees in the North of England believed that "*keeping busy is keeping well*" (p262); purposeful activity was an important way to try and keep certain thoughts and activities at bay for many in this research. When asked about wellbeing and

community gardening, Haabeel told me how he tried to keep people "*busy and active*" to reduce the depression and anger that could burgeon indoors and in isolation, filling unallocated time:

> "*when you feel that erm, loneliness, it hits you so hard. You know. And you become depressed, you get angry with people, y- angry at yourself, as well. So we need to get people out*" (Haabeel, practitioner, local VCS organisation)

> *"if they stay in the house, if they watch TV, eat food, put on more weight, there is nothing they can do. So, it's the only way for you to get them out, we try to get them out and do just gentle exercise."*

Here, activities sometimes called health-impacting 'behaviours' are placed within the situations in which they emerged as fulfilling a function, and within the larger sociopolitical context of their origin.

While being in the growing spaces may have been sufficient for abating undesired patterns of thinking and feeling for some members, this was not always the case. As discussed, it could take time for people to feel at ease in the gardens, and their comfort and needs fluctuated. Described in 3.2, movement and activity could decrease the intensity and anxieties of socialising. It was in moments of engagement in tasks, and their associated movements (large or small), that more stubborn ways of thinking seemed to become displaced:

> "*Sometimes just working alongside somebody just, either makes you relaxed enough to talk, or just relaxed enough for the bloody head to be turned down a bit*" (Loraine, member, Let'sGrow)

Feelings of uneasiness or discomfort could reappear, for some, if sedentary for too long (see 4.3.2.1). Whilst others have theorised the relieving capacities of time in green space, there is often a focus on passivity or gentle activity in such research, as in Kaplan's (1995) Attention Restoration Theory writings (Pitt, 2014). Undoubtedly, this theory has relevance for some members' experiences some of the time. However, especially in the context of experiences with mental ill health, more active and mobile engagement are sometimes required for people to experience relief from unwelcome thoughts or feelings.

Engagement, by name or description, recurred in many of the practitioners' descriptions of the ways in which they evaluated sessions. They would keep a caring eye on members, ensuring they were happily undertaking tasks, or were okay with not doing so. 'Engaged' members might have laughed

with others around a campfire, or become absorbed within cooking or seed sowing. I asked practitioners what signs of a good session they looked for:

> "*…if [members] come and they've, they've really enjoyed themselves, and, you know, they've had fun and they've had a conversation, and their mind's been taken off some- away from something that's happening to them at home or, you know, they're having a rough time and they've come to a session, that's progression and progress*"
>
> (Heather, practitioner, Pots-and-Plates)

> *"I think, are people, are people engaged in something?...and if they're not, are the okay not being engaged in something?*"
>
> (Thomas, practitioner, Let'sGrow)

Engagement can be thought of as a type of immersion, which Phoenix and Orr (2014) argue is a form of pleasure that can entail a beneficial detachment from everyday concerns and relationships. Ideas of detachment and displacement also resonate with Bell et al.'s (2023) review of (nature-based) therapeutic landscape research, in which they cite studies suggesting that movement can facilitate ruminative disruption through repetitive movement (Pitt, 2014) and demands upon focus (Milligan et al., 2021). Writing about community gardening (while suggesting possible generalisability, to other locations), Pitt (2014) argues that 'emplaced flow' is central to the relief that engagement with these spaces may provide. She draws on Csikszentmihalyi's (2002) influential idea of flow, adding the important qualifier 'emplaced' to capture how the potential of these flow experiences to improve wellbeing in an enduring and substantial manner depends upon (micro- and macro-level) social, spatial, and temporal factors. Kielhofner (1995)'s discussion of environmental press has convergences with the idea of 'flow' too; he argues that therapeutic 'occupational performance' is well achieved when people are met with environments exerting an appropriate 'press' upon them. By this, he refers to a 'just right' challenge-without-overwhelm, a matching of personal potentials with appropriately demanding environmental presses. Relatedly, Turk et al. (2022) use the idea of 'stretch' to capture how volunteers value experiences which allow them to draw on existing skills, while providing the opportunity for novelty and learning.

For one member, with little experience of weeding and a preference for physical exertion, weeding was a poor match. For others, weeding was a reliable task to return to most weeks: almost always required, needing little equipment or direction, and considered relatively easy. Lisa had gardened

sporadically through her life, and furthered her comfort with plants through prior nature-based volunteering.

> "*I seem to end up doing a lot of weeding. So, I find that quite an easy thing to do*" (Lisa, member, Let'sGrow)

> "*I have a bit of an issue…deciding which is a weed, and which is a plant*." (Robert, member, Let'sGrow)

Instead, Robert sought tasks he found to be very mentally and physically engaging:

> "*the activities that I like the most, are the ones that are very physically engaging, that leads to....my heart pumping more [and] the ones involved with like, er, mental strategi-, organise strategies for doing things, or planning things*" (Robert)

Their experiences indicate that activities can be differentially engaging for different people (who, additionally, may have varied preferences for activity intensities), and attests to the value of materially, occupationally, and socially textured community gardens.

5.2 Enjoyable, embedded movement and physical activity

Having explored desires for motion and busyness, their emergence, and their role within wellbeing strategies, I now look more specifically at the variable place of physical activity and exercise in participants' understandings of movement.

5.2.1 Physical activity, exercise, and being active

Some members expressed the value of being physically active, in their interviews. These members saw community gardening as involving exercise, or as an enactment of their active disposition. For the latter, community gardening fit within broader patchworks of activity during the week, and they described themselves as busy people:

> "*I like to remain physically fit. Erm, I always think that's very important, and, at the core of most things Again, this comes back to working down the allotment, so it's all digging, it's being on my feet. I have a garden in the house, so I'm out there a lot. Er, I run, I do the*

parkrun, now and then…you know…I'm always out and about, doing something" (George, member, Pots-and-Plates)

"*I actually get my physical exercise [at The Apple Grove] as well*." (Gillian, member, Pots-and-Plates)

For a number of participants, indoor forms of physical activity (such as swimming or going to the gym) had become unappealing or worrisome as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Community gardening thus served as a way to be active that carried a reduced chance of infection (of oneself and one's family), and associated anxieties.

"*I was a member of the gym, and I was going swimming, but then I cancelled that. Because I kept getting COVID, ha. Or I just kept…I just felt as though, that, on the two occasions…I felt as though I was catching things from there.*" (Gillian, member, Pots-and-Plates)

"*even though erm, [COVID-19-related] health risks have become less, erm, because I've allowed [the] obstacles to last for so long in my mind, it's become bigger*." (Robert, member, Let'sGrow)

When considered in conjunction with aversions to the lockdown-evoking experience of being indoors for too long, it is an open question as to how long such effects may endure. While the impact of the deprivation of social contact and touch ('touch hunger') has been researched and discussed (Burleson et al., 2022; von Mohr et al., 2021; Golaya, 2021; Durkin et al., 2021), there is less insight into the potentially lasting pandemic-related forms of *aversion* to certain sorts of social proximity.

Few verbally elaborated upon *why* they considered physical activity to be important; they might suggest that they identified as 'active', or imply that being active is good, enjoyable, or required to some degree. Only one member explicitly mentioned his wish to exercise as a means of reducing his risk of future illness; this was influenced by his own medical history. Alongside socialising and experiencing respite, Robert was keen to use the sessions to exercise, and sought more vigorous activities. He, and some others, would try to become fatigued and slightly breathless:

> I, on the way back up, asked Robert how he was doing: he was on the side of the pathway to the allotment, gathering clumps of dried grass into the lawnmower's grass basket. He said he was well, "*I'm out of breath, which is good*" (June 2022)

Physical activity and exercise were mentioned more peripherally by others, who might add it to longer lists of things they enjoyed about the gardening sessions. For no member was exercise or

physical activity the sole reason for participation; even those especially motivated to exercise described appreciating the, for example, social and charitable aspects of participation. Desires to move more were bound up with activity-related objectives and measures of progress; while some actively aimed to raise their heartbeat and become tired, they were simultaneously trying to deplete compost heaps, or mow areas of grass. A section of fieldnotes provides insight into the collective, purposeful task of manually cutting down bramble branches: the joint work of participants (and me), flexibility with which activities could be chosen, the being drawn back to prior week's activities, practitioner guidance, and visible, satisfying signs of progress:

> I decided, today, to join those working in the alley. I had not done this yet, and it had been a project of several weeks. Working in there was Lisa, Loraine and another member. I went to look for secateurs in the polytunnel, in which Sarah, Jack, and a member were. While walking around, Jack caught me and asked if I was okay. He kindly kept an eye on everyone, making sure that they were occupied. I went and asked Lisa if there was a spare pair, and she said yes. A member and I cut large brambles down, and Lisa (soon joined by Thomas) chopped them into smaller bits and placed them in a dumpy bag. Loraine stood further back, shovelling mud into the bag. She'd done this most weeks, and seemed to be keen to see the job through. At multiple points, people described the satisfaction of cutting back the brambles, and seeing the progress that was made: the cleared brambles, and piled cut pieces of branch. (March 2022).

Branches were put into large and (increasingly) heavy bags, and dragged twenty or so metres to eventually be composted. Over several weeks, members worked to clear an alley running alongside Wenlock Park, so that it could become a space in which to garden and sit. Joining in with more physically intensive activities was largely member-led; there did not seem to be a pressure from practitioners for members to move more at the sessions. The focus of cultivating produce, and maintaining an inclusive, low-pressure environment, perhaps prevented individual aspirations for increased physical activity from characterising or dominating the atmosphere of sessions. Additionally, the usefulness of both less and more vigorous and mobile tasks possibly countered tendencies for the hierarchising of tasks in accordance with intensities of movement. When speaking with practitioners, it was recognised that some people appreciated opportunities for more vigorous activities. They believed that the active element of sessions was likely to account for some of the mental health benefits that members reported:

> *"I think that there's a big thing linked with positive mental health and the physical like, activity side of things. And just being outside as well, erm, sort of, releases endorphins*" (Jane, practitioner, Let'sGrow)

> "*the nice thing about working outdoors is there's always something – some people respond really well to really physical activity. So, literally, shovelling…moving stuff from one place to another, carrying heavy loads*" (Natasha, practitioner, Pots-and-Plates)

In spring, The Kitchen Table organised for a short dance activity to begin sessions at Celandine Community Garden. Sometimes, most of the members joined in, and at other times only one or two did. One member told me that she would take part were it indoors, perhaps self-conscious to be dancing in view of the onlooking houses. Another cited the uneven ground as a reason she did not join in, and her weight. The body, and (actual or potential) social audience of an activity, emerge here as important factors shaping member ideas of which forms of movement feel comfortable, appealing, and appropriate in the garden setting. Of not participating in the dancing, Kim told me:

> "*I do feel a bit guilty…[so] instead of sitting here, I'll go and do a bit of gardening, which I'm here for*." (Kim, member, Celandine Community Garden)

While keen to support physical activity, a practitioner at The Kitchen Table was very open to the members influencing the provision of activities going forwards, encouraging a member with experience of tai chi to teach it during a session; it was well-received, I was told. The organisation had success in supporting people to engage with enjoyed forms of physical activity as part of their broader work. Garden members were not necessarily averse to more overt forms of physical activity. However, some members preferred to find other avenues for its practice. Jane described having considered arranging for yoga to happen at Wenlock Park, which was greeted with laughter by a member. Yet, some members also voiced an interest in attending activity or exercise classes activities elsewhere.

For a portion of members, physical activity or movement were little mentioned outside of the conceptualisation of 'getting fresh air' or 'getting out the house' detailed above:

> *"it's made me more, a bit mobile, I suppose… because I'm getting out the house"* (Denise, member, Let'sGrow)

For such members, the potential benefits associated with the movements of travelling to and participating in gardening sessions can be considered a form of 'health by stealth'. This was more common amongst those for whom the sessions were one of few activities they reported doing each week. It was for this reason amongst others that Matthew, a link worker with a background in fitness, valued green social prescribing:

> "*[green social prescribing can] get them more active without them thinking that like 'oh I'm gonna go do like an hour's worth of exercise there', the walking around like the riverside or Ivesdown Woods or Clover Farm Garden…They're active, but they're like, they're more distracted by how great the place is*." (Matthew, link worker, The Sage Project)

> "*you're active, but you're not, you're not like, exercise active? … It's just like, really relaxing and enjoyable to be in…You know, you're not there to be, like, running up hills or anything like that and, you know…even if you want to go potter around the garden for a little bit, have a sit down. Just have a cuppa and a chat*."

Attending gardening sessions can represent valuable movement (Humphreys et al., 2014) from inactivity to a degree of activity, amongst those for whom more direct appeals to become more active feel unattractive or inaccessible. This raises the somewhat counterintuitive question of how directly or overtly activities can be associated with health before becoming less accessible or attractive, and thus less able to promote health, to certain groups. Morris (2017) argues that spaces that enable "self-directed, 'accidental' physical activity and active playful practices" (p273) can be valuable; the gardens were one such space.

5.2.2 Enjoyable and social movement: "*you need the social to do the rest*"

The combination of purposeful and meaningful activity, pleasant environments, and welcoming members and practitioners intersected with member interests and skills, so that community gardening was appreciated for how it facilitated *enjoyable* movement. Some described struggling to engage with physical activity in contexts and activities that they enjoyed less: such activities felt less motivating and supported, or constituted too great a demand on one's energy at the expense of more valued forms of leisure. Whether actively seeking enjoyable movement, or moving as part of the enjoyed composite experience of community gardening, pleasure played an important role in sustaining member participation. Pleasure is frequently neglected in physical activity research (Phoenix and Orr, 2014; 2015; Coveney and Bunton, 2003), and in constructions of health (Yates-Doerr et al., 2016). Varied elements contributed to the experience of movement as enjoyable, with differing applicability to different members. A mixture of what are sometimes called intrinsic and extrinsic motivators, as well as more and less immediate, embodied, delayed, and cognised aspects of experience, were at work.

Revisiting Sarah's experience is illuminative. In 3.1, I discussed how community gardening enabled her to engage with the outdoors, reaffirm her 'outdoorsy' identity, and act upon her concern for the

environment, following health problems (and her resulting withdrawal from paid employment) that made prior forms of outdoor activity challenging. As mentioned, rigorous and coordination-intensive activities had become more difficult. Sarah told me that she had stopped attending a gym, that she had attending as part of a mental health-oriented scheme; she recounted to me feeling worried about being unable to follow along with the movements of the fitness classes, during which she found herself "*hiding at the back*". In addition to her difficulty with following along with classes, and the pre-emptive stress surrounding her ability, the classes were fatiguing. Fatigue worsened her health issues, and she described having to be careful to avoid overexertion. Attending the fitness sessions left her without energy to engage with activities that she "re*ally enjoyed*", while community gardening combined both her desire to be active with her passions for plants and helping others. In community gardening, her valuable energy was well allocated, attributable both to its flexible and inclusive structure, and its capacity to meet her need for movement and meaning. Enjoyment came in part from the pleasures – sensuous pleasures (Phoenix and Orr, 2014) - of tactile engagement with the materials of the garden:

> "*I love mud and soil. So, I can't stand digging with my hands gloved…I like to feel the mud...I like that feeling and the texture, and I find it really relaxing*." (Sarah, member, Let'sGrow)

Yet, it was not only the immediate and sensory qualities of movement that contributed to her enjoyment, but rather, the place this movement had within the broader project of the community gardens. It resonated with her love for nature, her valuing of inclusivity, and the benefits of both providing and receiving support. These were values honed and practiced in her former employment; she was well-suited to the practitioner-like role she took during many sessions. In her own words:

> "*I'm no good at sports. Because of my body, and the way that it works...Or not good enough to be, to feel confident enough to be able to do it, let's say that. Erm, so I think gardening sort of satisfies the outdoor nature side of things, but equally…at Let'sGrow, it's like a really all-round thing, I think*." (Sarah)

With a particular emphasis on the communal elements of activity in the gardens, Robert described how the social nature of the sessions made it easier for him to routinely engage in physical activity, too. In supportive company, garden work became enjoyable at best, and tolerable at worst:

> "*[in earlier life] I wasn't too motivated to do any like, gardening, and pulling weeds out. I just think of it as a chore…But strangely enough, like, when we come here, like, I can't…wait to get into it. And I don't know, it's because maybe the people around here, the atmosphere*" (Robert, member, Let'sGrow)

As proposed in 4.5.2, the communal nature of activities perhaps had a tempering effect against forms of pressure more common when working individually. More difficult or physically intensive elements could be distributed between people, on whom the responsibility and potential stress of doing things quickly or in the right way did not fall individually. In response to a fellow member becoming stressed or overexerted, groups could set a slower pace of work, and initiate breaks in which to sit or drink coffee:

> Robert worked particularly hard, and look a little uncomfortable…Thomas joked that *"if you collapse, you're not allowed back*". Lisa got him their water bottle, and Loraine offered him her cushion to sit on. He said that he struggled to not push himself too far. (May 2022)

While mindful that going to the gym might offer more health-promoting physical activity, Robert felt unable to go at this moment in time. Community gardening at Wenlock Park, he found, provided the company, environment, support, and purpose that made regular physical activity feel achievable:

> He then went on to talk about how gardening covered multiple things that are good for brain health: he talked about "*getting out of breath 'the social' "having a chat*"", "*and it's also about motivation*", he said, telling me that it was good to "*feel like you've achieved something*"…He said "*you need the social to do the rest*". At the compost heap, he elaborated on the gardening, and wellbeing. "*It's easier when you find it fun"* he said, and talked about finding going to the gym difficult. By "*it*", he meant working on some of the factors important for looking after one's brain health…"*why wouldn't you want to try and prevent dementia and poor mental health*?" He drew particular attention to physical activity (through talking about getting out of breath, and tired, and socialising... He said "*it's better to do it as a community"*. (June 2022)

The processes at work in rendering physical activity attractive, enjoyable, and accessible are multiple, and can coalescence differently for different individuals. Finding pleasure in activity may relate partially to pleasure's *social* construction. Emotions have been theorised to be somewhat socially co-created and interpreted, as intersubjective and shared (Denzin, 1984; Tammien and Bennett, 2017; Phoenix and Orr, 2014). In addition to shaping how others used the space and interacted with nature, co-members shaped the experiencing of these spaces as positive. Robert's *communication* to me of the value of breathlessness might be considered an example of the performative and enactive aspects of emotion and the interpretation of physiological responses. Phoenix and Orr cite Sarbin (2001), who explores the role of connecting to particular narratives, in feeling emotion. The experience of emotion can relate to its cultural scripting, suggesting the importance of both early life and collective experiences with nature for future positive nature-based

encounters. Robert's positive experience of breathlessness is informed by his prior exposure to risk- and lifestyle-based understandings of health, and experiences with ill health that have given them salience. Its emergence is closely linked, too, with the supportive social environment, which supported his engagement with such activities, and assuaged anxieties that might otherwise exist in the place of feelings of achievement, breathlessness, and purposefulness. In other scenarios, potentially negative emotions and sensations were averted through shared experience and interaction. At The Apple Grove, for example, nascent feelings of disgust in relation to rotting windfall apples, or discomfort in response to cold rain, were little dwelled upon. Milly recounts how enjoyment was found in the collective experience of taking shelter from the rain:

> "*obviously it rains quite a lot - but you know, like, even being outside, you just kind of like, have a laugh when it's raining*. *You know when we were like, under the tarp? And it was kind of like…raining - even that is like, nice, in a weird way*." (Milly, member, Pots-and-Plates)

Importantly, the mere presence of those with whom to move and do is not sufficient for movement to become pleasurable. Group sociability and friendliness, and instructor personality and approach, have been found to be significant in influencing adherence to group exercise (Killingback et al., 2017; Morrison et al., 2023). Physical activity in group settings has the potential to foster feelings of competitiveness and social comparison, alongside other unpleasant or friction-causing social dynamics. The experiencing of movement as pleasurable, or as a part of the broader, enjoyable community gardening experience, is inseparable from the socio-ecologies of the growing spaces: the low-pressure environment, therapeutic and inclusive gardening communities, skilled practitioners (and members), and opportunities for activities that are engaging and meaningful for the members.

The enjoyment of specifically horticultural movement owes something to cultural inheritance, too. Walton (2021) suggests the influence of the Georgic ideal: an understanding of horticultural work as pleasurable, rewarding, and socially useful, with origin in the writing of Virgil. She traces this ideal through to 20th Century farming holidays and 'WWOOFing' (work homestays facilitated by the World Wide Opportunities on Organic Farms network), to contemporary books, television, and migration from cities to the rural. In conversations at The Apple Grove, we sometimes spoke about aspirations for countryside living and homesteading. In community gardening, a number of participants found accessible and manageable encounters with these kinds of labour. In speaking about nature and wellbeing with me, Alistair conveyed his understanding of land-based work as being beneficial, desirable, and timely:

"*it's important to have contact with nature…. I think that's what's needed more now, more people working on the land*." (Alistair, member, Pots-and-Plates)

5.2.3 "*it's like a really all-round thing"*: multiple and interconnected reasons for participating

Moving to and within the growing spaces contributed to some members' senses of metaphorical forwards motion within their lives. Movement created feelings of busyness and activity, and responded to desires for physical activity. To risk upholding an overly capacious definition of movement, it was an aspect of all activities within the growing spaces, and shaped imagery and understandings of what it means to be well or more well. Most participants had a desire, of one kind or another, to engage in movement. For some, going from the house into the outdoors and 'fresh air' was of particular significance. Those with a self-consciously 'active' disposition often sought vigorous activities. Whatever the shape and priority physical activity held for individual members, their movement in the garden was tied up with a range of appreciations, actions, and objectives. When speaking with me about community gardening, 'being active' often sat amongst longer lists of reasons to participate. Sometimes, it appeared to be central and significant. Other times, members mentioned activeness after exhausting lists of other things they enjoyed about participating: "*I* suppose *it's made me a bit more mobile*" (Denise). The desire for movement or physical activity is not exclusively a motivating factor preceding participation. It could emerge from participation, and be secondary to other objectives: to cut grass, socialise, to harvest food for the community shop, and to become engaged in 'displacing' activity. When members were less driven by the desire for movement, other aspects of gardening helped maintain their participation in sessions: routine, interest in gardening, or a wish to help others. As discussed, seeking movement could be dependent upon its enjoyability, and supported by its purposefulness. Marion, who framed her participation in terms of physical activity, being outdoors, and helping others, told me: "I *wouldn't do it if I didn't like it*".

Sometimes, the benefits of movement seemed to be drawn upon post hoc, to try and account for the enjoyable experience of community gardening. Counterintuitively, when asked about the relationship between community gardening and wellbeing, some of the participants' responses implied that their positive relationship was both obvious *and* elusive, evading articulation. In interviews, discussion of physical activity was perhaps sometimes used to attempt to account for some of the elusive positive feelings that emerged in the growing spaces, alongside mention of interaction, endorphins, and nature. In the widespread knowledge that physical activity is associated with wellbeing, it was sometimes posited as a reason why being at the gardens was so enjoyable. For

a pilot study participant, exercise was one of the few aspects of his pleasurable nature-based experiences that could be accounted for with reasonable certainty:

> "*I often wonder why we got so much pleasure of out something that gave us very sore feet, and aching muscles. Apart from the fact it was very good exercise…And it may be even to do with colours, colours in the countryside are somewhat different from in the middle of a city*" (Martin, practitioner, pilot research project)

He later speculated whether the serendipity of nature might be responsible, too. Whilst certain of the potential benefits of community gardening, Jane, a valued part of the Let'sGrow team who was often approached for one-to-one support, apologised for not giving "*in depth*" answers. To verbally break apart the multifaceted experience of community gardening could be challenging. While at other points articulating varied benefits of community gardening, Jane and Sarah conveyed this sense of elusive, cumulative benefit:

> "*I just think that there's something in it*." (Jane, practitioner, Let'sGrow)

> "There's "*something about*" the park, [Sarah] said, describing how coming here felt: in not these words exactly, she seemed to talk about a kind of effect of being at the park, a calm and friendly atmosphere/mood. (July 2022)

Undoubtedly, movement was one among the many benefits of community gardening, and existed as a motivator to varying degrees for different members. However, 'physical activity' also emerged as a way to try and explicate the experience of community garden, in the interactive context of the interview (and perhaps in other interactive sites of co-construction, in which participants may have found themselves explaining and accounting for their participation). Such interactive meaning-making, while occurring outside of the 'moment' of community gardening, is nonetheless a site of constructing and interpreting how one understands their experience.

5.3 Discussion

Movement was both an inevitable part of participating in the gardening activities, and something sought and augmented to various degrees and for different reasons. Here, I begin by discussing two orientations towards movement and physical activity in the garden: one in which exposure to 'fresh air', and 'getting out the house' were more central; and the second, in which 'activeness' was a disposition and value. These are loose categorisations, with overlap and internal diversity.

Literatures exploring lay understandings and dominant discourses of health and wellbeing are resonant. I consider the relation of these orientations to the gardens and movement with lives outside the growing spaces, before then contextualising movement within the growing spaces. Authors taking a holistic and plural approach to movement and physical activity are drawn upon. I next discuss how active orientations did not dominate or characterise the growing sessions, and did not always exist straightforwardly as 'motivators' or 'benefits'. I reflect upon the implications of this discussion for efforts to increase physical activity via gardening projects. Community gardens can afford valued opportunities for engaging and fulfilling physical exertion (and other senses of motion and movement); those creating or supporting growing spaces might beneficially consider how to further foster these opportunities. I argue, however, that some caution is prudent, in promoting or orienting community gardening primarily through the lens of exercise or physical activity. As discussed, low pressure and flexibility were important in supporting therapeutic experiences in the community gardens: they were accommodative rather than prescriptive, about what people did, and how. Centring certain ways or intensities of movement may have a disruptive effect, in some established growing spaces or groups. Varied intensities of movement were engendered as part of the complex of practices (Maller, 2018) of community gardening, dependent on a wide range of objects of engrossment and notions of collectivity.

5.3.1 Getting outdoors

Fullagar (2019) states that physical activity "is created via multiple logics or meanings – some of which intersect with ideas of health and wellbeing, while others do not" (p70). I similarly view the movements of community gardening as emerging from specific contexts, and intersecting with varied understandings of wellbeing. 'Lay' understandings of wellbeing often include some element of physical activity, exercise, or movement, sometimes adapting or reappropriating academic or medical vocabularies (Katz, 2000). The first orientation to movement I observed entailed desires to get 'fresh air', to move 'outdoors', and to 'get out of the house'. Movement manifests here as the route out of the house (recalling Pink's, 2012, understanding of place), travelling to sessions, and the sense of motion and anticipation throughout the week. Relatedly, Scott-Arthur et al. (2021) found that, for older adults in their research, routinely 'doing rounds' - leaving the house, visiting nearby amenities, helping neighbours, and socialising (through more and less conventionally 'healthy' means) along the way – was part of participants' practices of wellbeing. Doing rounds became an important symbol and enactment of wellbeing, in a context where many friends' and neighbours' declining wellbeing meant few trips outdoors. It involved a routined kind of movement, that could

include socialising and errand running. The authors relate this to participants' habitus, and state that more 'conventional' understandings of health did not have purchase for their participants, of a particular socioeconomic position and life stage. Others have explored the role of habitus in shaping understandings of wellbeing, and the attractiveness of specific active practices (Hanson et al., 2016). Both doing rounds and getting outside and out the house describe lay conceptions of a wellbeing practice, in which people fulfil a felt need to venture outside, aided and structured by having purposeful and accessible activities and destinations nearby. Community gardening facilitated this wellbeing practice, involving mobility, but rooted also in being outdoors, being somewhere different, and in senses of anticipation for the sessions. The sessions were valuable for meeting members' feelings of stillness with contouring, routine-giving motion and rhythm. Gatrell (2013) has theorised the role of bodily rhythms, such as metronomic walking motions (Middleton, 2009), in therapeutic mobilities. I contribute to such considerations of rhythm and its roles, having explored the importance of regularity in facilitated therapeutic mobilities, and understandings of wellbeing. The discussion of seasonal and horticultural rhythms further develops the link between bodily motion and rhythms in one's environment, for wellbeing. While Gatrell considers rhythm under the heading of 'activity', I have demonstrated its relevance to another of the components of therapeutic mobility he posits: context.

5.3.2 An active orientation

The second orientation to movement in the community gardens was one of purposeful 'activeness'. Some saw themselves as busy and active people, or were keen to cultivate activeness within their lives. There are traces of Katz's (2000) ideas of 'busy bodies' in several of the participants' active dispositions: their desires for busy weeks, gravitation towards more physically demanding activities, and the brevity of their breaks taken during sessions. While I have emphasised the therapeutic utility of the slower horticultural rhythms of the growing spaces, sessions routinely seemed to create a valued sense of busyness and faster motion, too. Katz describes a cultural, ethical imperative and disciplinary discourse to age well through active living. He contextualises this within a neoliberal political context, in which the 'problem' of dependency is to be resolved through managing the self through participation in 'activities'. Katz adds that people's own narratives of ageing well might incorporate a busy ideal, although also may resist, transform, or exceed it: he notes how his participants: "demonstrated a keen theoretical understanding of activity as a plural term riven with contradictory meanings" (p144). One of Katz's participants, Agnes, felt occasional guilt if she was not busy, yet also recognised the pressure to participate in activities as an external pressure, that she

could reject. Gillian, in telling me about her usual week, recognised and minimised some of the stigma associated with being out of work, asserting that she kept busy, but did so for enjoyment and leisure:

> "*on an average week, well, I don't, (air quotation gesture) 'work', I'm very busy, but I don't work…I just come down [to The Apple Grove] when I want to really. Or, like, in hot weather you know that the greenhouse and the plants need watering, so, you just try and gauge it, and check other people haven't been down…then, I just come down, well, I enjoy it…It's a bit [of] leisure time*" (Gillian, member, Pots-and-Plates)

This second orientation seemed to incorporate widespread ideas of fitness, physical activity, and exertion as healthful and good, while also stressing enjoyment, purpose, and the 'fit' of activities with one's routines and passions. More biomedical understandings of movement-as-physical activity did circulate: in Robert's desire to engage in more physically intensive activities for disease prevention, and in a latent molecular imagination (Landecker, 2011) that emerged when people were called on to account for their positive experiences, when participants might talk of serotonin or endorphins released when outdoors. Knowing that scientific research exists around a relationship between being outdoors and good health seemed to act more as a background validation of the benefits of the sessions, for some:

> "*physical exercise, that's one of the things they say around mental health is don't stay inside, and, be captive. Get out and move…it releases endorphins that you need to release, that kind of fight off all the things that are helping you feel, bad*." (Thomas, practitioner, Let'sGrow)

Such research seemed to indirectly infuse and circulate in different forms in wider public knowledges. Physical activity or exercise thus figured greater in some understandings of horticultural movements than others, while seemingly being called on to help explain, understand, and perhaps justify participation in community gardening to an extent.

To conclude, members' orientations to movement had some origin in lives outside the garden, in prior ill health events, active biographies, pandemic isolation, and experiences of asylum and bereavement. Along similar lines, Morris et al. (2019) argue that the benefit participants found in walking groups related to their life circumstances, past and present. The relation of the appeal of 'green' projects to lives external to them extends Conradson's (2005) contention that places elsewhere matter for therapeutic landscape experiences, bringing multiple places and times into sight. The partially exogenous variation in orientations, in addition to members' holistic enjoyment of movement, suggests the benefit in sessions themselves not being oriented towards one

understanding of movement. In this finding, again, is the counterintuitive relationship between the therapeutic and more-than-; it seems that the therapeutic potential of sessions is not a function of how much they are overtly oriented towards health and wellbeing. This resonates with Kingsley et al.'s (2009) finding, that health-promoting movement can happen in (and in transit to) community gardens, without members necessarily viewing activities as "health promotion in physical activity terms" (p216). Watson and Moore (2011), too, express a wariness around promoting community gardening in such terms, deepening the case for flexibly oriented gardening projects. They acknowledge how health discourses can engender stigma, and question whether concerns for health are key to engagement with community gardening. It is to the more holistic enjoyment of movement that I now turn.

5.3.3 Embedded and purposeful movement

Movement was an *aspect* of a range of other activities, enjoyed or appreciated as part of them, for a range of reasons. It was, if not quite incidental to the garden doings, varied in how much it was thought about intentionally and separately to them. The demands of the growing spaces, and the purposes of sessions, guided how, where, and why people moved. Movement could be a product of other objectives, that might be appreciated in the moment, or in retrospect. Discussing walking practices, Gatrell (2013) questions whether one can disentangle the setting of a practice from the practice itself, in terms of their health and wellbeing benefits. Others, drawing on his 'therapeutic mobilities' concept, suggest indivisibility; Grant and Pollard (2022) describe the experiences of group walkers in nature as a "kind of indivisible gestalt" (p95), combining appreciations for scenery, movement, wildlife fresh air, and seasonality. Similarly, Smith et al. (2017) use a recipe analogy to capture such indivisibility. In alignment with these holistic approaches, I characterise participants' movement as embedded in purposeful tasks, and the sociomaterial context of the growing spaces. I highlight some of the ways in which this embedding was key to the continued enactment and enjoyment of movement for individuals adopting either of the aforementioned orientations towards movement. I draw on Gatrell's (2013) therapeutic mobilities concept, and Piggin's (2019) holistic definition of physical activity. These understandings of movement usefully recognise the vital roles of context, interests, and relationships for engendering wellbeing (Gatrell), and configuring rich movement practices (Piggin). I take forward these recognitions, while characterising community gardening, not as a singular therapeutic mobility, but as a complex of practices enabling a mosaic of modes of movement (alongside more figurative senses of motion).

The stimulation of the senses and the mind through horticultural tasks was an important element of activity. In community gardening, movement meshed with pleasure, purpose, enjoyment, and sociality, and for this it was appreciated. Pleasures could be immediate, sensory, and emotional: the enjoyment of the texture of manoeuvred garden materials, or the allaying of uneasiness found through movement and immersion. Minds were engaged through interesting tasks, through learning new ways to *do*, and through witnessing and causing physical changes in the gardens, unfolding over weeks and months. It is challenging, therefore, to attempt to tease apart the pleasure of moving from its context, purpose, and material indexes. Others have theorised how, in green mobilities, emplaced flow (Pitt, 2014) and immersion (Phoenix and Orr, 2014) create relaxation, pleasure, or therapeutic benefit, resonating with the importance of active engagement with engrossing, tactile tasks. Relatedly, Marks (2021) describes 'Zen-like' states in which repair workshop participants become in absorbed in the complex-but-manageable tasks of working with materials, increasing their comfortability in the world while offering an analogous sense of capability with complexities beyond the tasks at hand. Engrossment or engagement with physical garden tasks larger and smaller similarly seemed to account for some of the therapeutic experiences of participants. The discussion of how environmental press or stretch (in which places offer sufficiently stimulating and challenging activities) enables engagement bridges considerations of therapeutic landscapes and mobilities, and contributes some explanation around interpersonal variability in therapeutic outcomes in like environments. Prior sections have indicated the importance of activities of mixed physical intensity; here, the role of mentally and sensorially stimulating experiences, for engendering movement enjoyable or therapeutic, is made apparent.

Finding enjoyment, meaning, and value in the larger collective projects of the gardens, if not in the immediate qualities of movement, gained importance when individual tasks became uncomfortable or straining. The sociomaterial context of the gardens helped render movement valuable and achievable. In Robert's words, "*you need the social to do the rest*". Co-members added, not only sociability and support in the garden tasks ('connection', in Gatrell's terms), but constituted a participatory audience with which to construct benefit from them. In both 4.5.2 and 5.2.2, the value of co-members for enhancing the pleasure of activities, while reducing their pressures, is detailed. In a similar vein, others have explored how caring movement communities may insulate against some of the *negative* potential impacts of physical activity and surrounding discourses, including the effects of responsibilising and disciplinary approaches (Wiltshire et al., 2018; Tupper et al., 2020). Notably, however, Tupper et al. (2020) argue (in the context of movement volunteering) that interaction alone does not render communal movement beneficial. As with their participants, whose activities were "[infused] with good-will, humour and general 'bonhomie'" (p9), supportiveness,

inclusivity, and kindness framed and facilitated participants' movements through the growing spaces. Relatedly, Pitt (2014) emphasises the importance of belonging, for "someone is unlikely to linger long enough to flow somewhere they feel unwelcome" (p88).

As discussed in the previous chapter, the gardens were generally low-pressure and inclusive sociomaterial environments, offering multiple activities between which members could choose. It was perhaps due to wishes for a low-pressure atmosphere, guided by members and the horticultural tasks and rhythms, that participation in more physically demanding activities remained largely member-led. Additionally, practitioners did not report pressures from funders to evaluate sessions according to physical activity related metrics. They seemed to be motivated to support members to participate and engage in sessions, whatever level of movement they sought. Atmospherics, thus, can play a role in configuring therapeutic mobilities, not wholly belonging to any one of the three dimensions (activity, connection, context) that Gatrell (2013) posits.

I have shown how movement was enacted and enjoyed, not only due to desires for activeness or busyness, but as part of engaging, meaningful, and social experiences. The enablement of movement (albeit, of varied intensities and kinds) through gardening does not necessarily depend on – or benefit from - the foregrounding of physical activity in these practices, I argue. Desires for activeness were one among many attachments to gardening practices and places, rather than existing as a prime 'motivator'. Pollard et al. (2020) complicate the notion of motivators, describing how group walkers' attachment to walking transformed through their continued engagement. Initial concerns for health and fitness morphed into more expansive appreciations for the sociality, peaceful respite, and growing feelings of confidence entailed in what became a communal therapeutic mobility. These findings resonate with how 'physical activity' was sometimes mentioned as a way to *account* for the pleasure of community gardening, and how it sometimes was mentioned as a benefit only after longer lists of other aspects of the practice(s). The mobile element of gardening appeared to add value to gardening, increasing its positive valance while not straightforwardly being the purpose, motivator, or primary benefit of people's activities. Continued engagement with community garden mobility practices, it seems, sits on the forming of attachments to the collective projects of the gardens, and their constitutive tasks, purposes, and relations.

There can be great value in spaces in which the enjoyable, engaging, and social aspects of movement are focal. The foregrounding of pleasure and purpose can represent an ethical and sustainable approach to movement and wellbeing (Ladwig et al., 2017), while incorporating purposes beyond the physical-instrumental may decrease attrition and widen therapeutic benefit. For those who have to carefully ration their energy, leisure, and time dedicated to self-care - including although not

limited to those with disabilities (Miserandino, 2003; 2017) and caring responsibilities – opportunities for such enjoyable, meaningful movement can be welcome. In contrast to the elusive, delayed, and somewhat probabilistic relationship between physical activity and health outcomes, a focus on engagement and feeling good in movement may add this to relationship tangibility and an experiential sense of plausibility for individuals. Company in gardening, and its embedding within meaningful collective projects, went some way in rendering garden mobilities enjoyable. The sessions were not oriented around physical activity or exercise, nor one understanding of movement. Occasions for more intense activity were valued; smaller growing spaces, and those without people able to guide and coordinate varied activities, are likely to be at a disadvantage in attracting and keeping members. Opportunities for movement were successfully augmented through the provision of mixed intensity activities embedded within horticultural tasks, like the shovelling and pruning frequent in the larger sites, and through caring attunement to activities aligned with the interests of members (notable in Angela's attention to interests in volleyball and tai chi). However, reorienting sessions around physical activity may shift garden assemblages, potentially disrupting the therapeutic affordances availed of by those whose attachments to community gardening exceed such a framing.

If community gardening is to be considered a form of physical activity, I advocate for a holistic definition, moving beyond unidimensional, energy expenditure-oriented understandings that may: "omit all else that can result from, be produced by, or created through physical activity" (Piggin, 2019: p3). Community gardens produce a range of "yields" (McGuire et al., 2022: p5).

5.4 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have shown how movement-in-place (Kearns and Milligan, 2020), and movements from home to garden, contributed to valued feelings of activeness and busyness. These mobilities facilitated flow, immersion, tactile nature encounters, therapeutic displacements, and tangible, physical place-making. Community gardening was not necessarily *a* therapeutic mobility, but afforded a variety of mobilities, incorporated into members' routines and providing senses of wellbeing. I have covered two of the main ways in which movement was manifested in members' understandings and experiences. For a number of members, opportunities to be out of breath, tired, and "*physical*" were an important part of what the growing spaces offered. Equally, for some, it was the movement *to* sessions that seemed most significant. These members sometimes, within sessions, preferred to engage with the slower and gentler activities available. Together, these findings have been shown to further support the idea that a polyrhythmic texturing of garden

spaces, activities, and paces can be beneficial, widening their attractiveness and inclusiveness. Additionally, having *regular* sessions can provide appreciated senses of motion and busyness.

This chapter has raised and addressed questions regarding the role community gardening can play in increasing physical activity levels. Opportunities for more intense physical activity might be beneficially augmented within gardens, and movement (rendered enjoyable or agreeable in gardening together) did constitute part of their benefit. However, I have recommended caution in structuring, promoting, or evaluating community gardening primarily as a form of physical activity or exercise. The growing spaces seemed to attract and engage through accommodating different orientations to movement, which were originated in part in members' biographies and lives outside the gardens. Members valued being able to adapt their activities to how they felt on a given day. Additionally, movement was embedded within tasks with other foci. These findings indicate that there is benefit in fit minimising pressures – from practitioners, funders, organisations, and perhaps social prescribers too – to engage in high-intensity activity. One of the values of these spaces was in how movement was not distinct from other aspects of participating, nor was participation evaluated according to such terms. Engaging diverse groups of people in ongoing and therapeutic relationships with growing spaces might not neatly fit with conventional physical activity intervention logics. While many of the members entered gardens through health pathways (including social prescribing), it was important – at least, for these research participants – to have latitude to explore and develop varied attachments to the growing spaces, groups, and activities. In the following chapter, I investigate the place of health more broadly in the gardens.

6. Pathways to the garden: considering the place of health and wellbeing in community gardening and growing

In chapters 3-5, I have illustrated different dimensions of experiences in the growing spaces, and shown how the spaces were made therapeutic and otherwise. In Chapter Six, I more directly address how health and wellbeing figure in these assemblages, detailing how processes and pathways of integration with health and social services can be impactful (and potentially medicalising) forces within them. The place of health in these sessions, and the pathways taken through sessions, are explored for their implications in relation to the expansion of green social prescribing. I recapitulate and develop the idea of community gardens as therapeutic third places, and demonstrate how garden assemblages and their affordances may shift over time.

6.1 The place of health in growing spaces

Guiding this research, and informed by a broad and pluralistic approach to health and wellbeing, have been questions of the place of health in community growing projects. I have illustrated the ways in which participants experienced pleasure and purpose in the growing spaces. Their experiences of connection-making, of creating and enjoying safe and enabling spaces, and of being carried with new rhythms and routines, are detailed. Woven through are the contingencies upon which therapeutic experiences sit, nuances to the idea of connection, and indications of the scope of gardening sessions. When participating in these sessions, I was attentive to whether and when they were found to be enjoyable, therapeutic, nourishing, engaging, and otherwise, and when the feelings of participants were expressed in more and less conventionally health-related terms. Here, I focus more closely on how and when health- and healthcare-related meanings and structures interacted with those of the gardening projects. Held in mind are the literatures outlined in Chapter One, exploring the potential of community gardening and green social prescribing for improving health and alleviating health inequalities. I begin by synthesising prior themes into the idea of therapeutic third places, capturing the role(s) they played in members' lives. Next, I consider the place of health from a perspective oriented towards these small VCS gardening and growing organisations, reflecting on the extent to which aspects of operation (including referrals, staffing, and funding) were shaped by a focus on health and wellbeing. Including, although exceeding, health benefits, I explore the successes of sessions (from practitioner and member perspectives), and how they were evaluated. Finally, and in acknowledgement of the broad range of potential achievements of growing sessions, I ask whether there may at times be mutual exclusivity in the potentials of

community gardening. Both the benefits and scope of these activities are addressed, particularly in relation to the needs they are well-situated to address, and the resources they require to do so.

6.1.1 The roles of community gardening for members: therapeutic third places

In earlier chapters, the ways in which participants found sessions to be enjoyable, distracting, and engaging have been captured. The sessions contributed, often, to feelings of wellbeing, fleeting or enduring. Some participants viewed the sessions as part of their wider efforts to recover or 'get better'. Others valued the company, leisure, purpose, and structure they provided, while drawing on less health-oriented framings. Foregrounded frequently, within sessions, were the practices of maintaining and enjoying a growing space and community. These practices were guided by the needs of the space, and the interests and needs of members. Together with practitioner- and organisation-oriented perspectives, the growing spaces appear as a kind of therapeutic third place. These places were not necessarily replacing or opposed to biomedical or conventional healthcare. But rather, they were local and distinctive sites in which participants enacted wellbeing, with varying and relatively backgrounded influence from more conventional health discourses. I conceptualise most of the growing sessions (particularly Head Outdoors) as a specific kind of enabling, non-(bio)medical space. This is not to say that more conventional framings of health did not have purchase for participants, perhaps especially when moving in the biomedical assemblages through which some had sought treatments, concurrently or previous to community gardening. Rather, the growing spaces fostered practice-oriented routines that promoted a sense of wellbeing, while backgrounding more overt and prescriptive approaches to wellbeing. Assumptions about good ways to eat, grow, move, and socialise were sometimes implicit within practices. I propose three features of therapeutic third places, before arguing that there is value in these kinds of in-between spaces. I explicate this concept with reference to the related literature on enabling places and third places; both explore enriching experiences in non-medical environments, with the former so-far tied more closely to health and recovery. In particular, I build on Glover and Parry's (2009) exploration of 'Gilda's Clubs' (home-like places, a VCS resource for those affected by cancer) as a third place, further elaborating upon the 'third places' concept in therapeutic settings, and Duff's (2010; 2011; 2012) work on enabling places.

Firstly, the therapeutic community gardens were social, activity-rich places. This feature describes the foregrounded more-than-therapeutic: the activities of sessions, not primarily concerned with the health of the individual. Here, these were horticultural and culinary activities, and the knowledges

and orientations undergirding them: horticultural and permacultural knowledges, the supporting and enjoying of wildlife, and beautifying and cultivating of space for the use of others. Opportunities to routinely participate in these activities were beneficial for engendering moments of enjoyment, camaraderie, growth, meaning, and purpose, consonant with broad notions of wellbeing. Such moments are valuable in relation both to recoveries in which symptoms alleviate, and those where some difficulties or challenges will persist. Understandings of recovery can be clinical and cure-oriented, or focused on finding fulfilment and meaning with or without the resolving of symptoms, (Doroud et al., 2015). Both may resonate for an individual (Fullagar and O'Brien, 2014). Like Fullagar and O'Brien, I have found non-illness related 'doings and beings' to be part of recovery, or the enactment of wellbeing; therapeutic third places cluster and support opportunities for these enactments. As in Duff's (2010; 2011; 2012) enabling places, the therapeutic and wider benefits of being in these places were originated, in part, in the practices they entailed, and the interactions afforded. Further, Chapter 5 illustrates the benefits of embedded, meaningful, and purposeful movement for sustaining participation in projects. In other therapeutic third places, the activities available may differ. This study demonstrates the value of possibilities for tactile engagements, learning, commensality, and for caring for the self and others. As explored below, I have argued that a varied mosaic of *multiple* activities has particular therapeutic affordances. The distinctive appeal of community gardening practice complexes specifically, to an individual, will vary with their curiosities, skills, and needs, and the extent to which a particular project may meet (and even 'stretch', Turk et al., 2022) them.

Second amongst these features is the flexibility (see 4.4) which characterised assemblages and the approaches of practitioners. This theme captures the way in which sessions were accommodative of multiple orientations to health, wellbeing, and the projects themselves. These projects allowed latitude in how central health and wellbeing were made in members' experiences. This flexibility allowed members to broach topics on their own terms, and contributed to the escape- and perspective-giving qualities of participation. Flexibility in what one did during sessions, and in how activities were evaluated, allowed people to adapt their participation to their needs, interests, and capacities, and contributed to the low-pressure atmosphere which members enjoyed. Additionally, this feature contributed to diversity in sessions, providing the buffering role described in 4.6. This characteristic was achieved, largely, through the multidimensional texturing of these microgeographies (see 4.5.2), the largely non-judgmental approach taken by participants, and the attuned tinkering of practitioners. Similarly, Glover and Parry (2009) found that participants appreciated both spatial and activity-related "free reign [sic]", and conversational freedom ("if you

want to talk about an illness, that's fine, but if you don't want to, then it's okay", p100), at Gilda's Clubs.

The therapeutic scaffolding within sessions serves as the final characteristic of therapeutic third places which I detail. Despite flexibility within sessions, health had a firmer place in several of the projects, with implications for their affordances. Some among these projects were exclusively attended by those experiencing ill health, and had staff members with experience in providing support in relation to these needs. The gardening projects were linked, to varying extents, with health and social care services. These ways in which health was embedded in projects shaped their ability to inculcate feelings of belonging, reduce feelings of stigma, and provide opportunities for peer- and practitioner-support. I have demonstrated the value of experiential empathy between those of like experience (akin to Glover and Parry's 'standpoint understandability'), *and* the presence of tone-setting, structure-providing staff members. As with the therapeutic gardening projects, Gilda's Club participants entered into highly valued but place-bound relations, affording kinds of support, understanding, and exchange not found in relations outwith. As I elaborate upon in 6.2, the networking of therapeutic garden projects with health and wellbeing services and resources can help organisations meet the needs of members.

Together, these characteristics illustrate how several of the projects were configured, as to be conducive to particular enactments of wellbeing and recovery by those experiencing mental ill health (and, in some cases, co-occurring health concerns). I have shown how the more and less health-related dimensions of projects were in a distinctive and flexible relationship, differentiating them from both 'ordinary' and more (bio)medicalised spaces. For garden members with experience of mental ill health, or with caring responsibilities, there was benefit in both the nearness and farness of 'health' in sessions, and in the relative autonomy they had in making of the sessions what they wanted and needed. In sharing a joke about experiences with counselling, or recommending a support service to another, the nearness of health was a benefit. Earlier in a member's participation, before familiar and trusting relationships were developed, or amid moments of worry in which a source of distraction was welcome, the backgrounding of health and diagnoses was a comfort. These three characteristics may be beneficially incorporated within other to-be therapeutic third places, particularly those which are to receive referrals via social prescribing.

There is much in the nourishing potential of these projects that aligns with characterisations of third places, as relatively accessible places to participate in an amiable place-based group: not home, nor work (nor, mainstream healthcare setting, either). In *The Great Good Place,* Oldenburg (1999) describes the benefits and features of third places: perspective-giving, emplaced conversations, novelty, and diversity (in people, activities, and settings). Third space regulars "set the tone of

conviviality", and help avoid atmospheres "of lethargy" (p34), Oldenburg states, capturing dynamics similar to those set in motion by garden staff and longer-term members. In 3.4.1.3, I have described the benefits of the non-dyadic connections made in growing spaces, recalling Oldenburg's positive appraisal of 'friends by the set'. Glover and Parry's (2009) application of the concept corresponds more closely with my characterisation of the gardens as third places; I have detailed some among these strong parallels. However, I contend that experiences in several of the community gardening projects were sufficiently different from traditional conceptions of third places as to benefit from more specific classification. It has not been uncommon for authors to employ this concept, while describing places where multiple of the originally proposed benefits and characteristics of third places are absent, or are manifest differently (see Biglin, 2021). The term *therapeutic* third places, I propose, invites appreciation of these differences and unique affordances, by those who might build or evaluate such settings. Publications in architecture and spatial planning (Fonteles Castro Pinto, 2024; Janicki et al., 2021; Fairbrother, 2020) have used this phrase descriptively or briefly; I advocate for its usefulness as a concept. Fairbrother designed a hypothetical 'therapeutic third place', modelled to be in the interstices of an outdoor mall. They contextualise their work within Māori understandings of wellbeing, the therapeutic landscapes literature, and the need for acceptable community-based therapeutic architectures (acknowledging colonial histories of institutionalised mental healthcare, and inadequate and scarce community-based alternatives). We converge in recommending a diversity of areas inside such places, and appreciating the benefit of "formal oversight" (p146) within them. I have substantiated (empirically) and developed (theoretically) this concept and its characteristics, applying it to more contained places, with a specific set of sociomaterial therapeutic scaffolds.

Additionally, this concept builds upon Duff's (2010) 'enabling places'. Duff coins this term to describe ordinary settings which facilitate access to resources, put towards the work of recovery. Like Duff, I have explored the value of non-medical settings in promoting wellbeing, envisioning place as assemblage, and upholding a distributed notion of the capacities associated with wellbeing and recovery. The therapeutic third places concept, I argue, identifies somewhat generalisable characteristics of places configured to support wellbeing. I have suggested that expanding the role of non-medical places in cultivating wellbeing entails, not only brokering access, but creating space-times with the aforementioned characteristics.

I have refrained from considering accessibility as a separate characteristic, instead acknowledging it to be a prerequisite of therapeutic experience, which crosscuts and exceeds these characteristics. Members and organisers reflected both on ways in which the projects met their health needs, and how they might be better adapted as to accommodate a wider range of disabilities and needs. Sarah

spoke with me about the importance of accessible equipment, and how it may widen the reach of the projects:

> "things like, you know, raised boxes at certain heights so that some people have got the ability to, to do stuff sat down." (Sarah, member, Let'sGrow)

> "you can get certain tools that make things easier for people with disabilities…there's a different way to hold [tools], that are more ergonomic…currently, all spades go straight up"

At Pots-and-Plates, practitioners had been exploring options for people to virtually explore sites before attending, to improve their accessibility:

> Natasha: "*so people can actually…online, go and explore a site, so they know when they come in - 'cause the things that challenge people are*"
>
> Samantha: "*toilets"*
>
> Charlotte: "*who's going to be there, what if I need the toilet…you know, where is that? What does that look like? What's the process for doing that? How am I going to get there and back?...I think we could go a long way this using…technology to actually make those spaces more accessible*."

Improving a therapeutic third place's accessibility is, thus, both a matter of making modifications to place, and of information provision (prompting Janicki et al., 2021, to develop a mapping tool, to aid those with chronic illness in assessing a place's relative accessibility). Accommodative features, adaptive equipment, and communicative tools are some of the ways in which community gardens can be made therapeutic third places for a wider range of individuals. This research has shown that flexibility and therapeutic scaffolding of community gardens can expand accessibility, while also indicating other dimensions along which accessibility might be improved in community gardens.

Having taken space to consolidate and delineate the concept of therapeutic third places, I next provide illustrative detail regarding the place of health in the configuring of sessions.

6.1.2 The structure and operation of organisations and sessions

Here, I explore the structure and operation of organisations and sessions, acknowledging that garden assemblages can be constituted, oriented, and connected in different ways. I build on the idea that (most) of the community gardening projects embodied a distinctive orientation to

wellbeing. Most sessions received members via health-related pathways, and some practitioners acknowledged that – working in their sector and geographical area – it was common for members to be experiencing some kind of ill health, or challenge to wellbeing. Yet, the organisations were not diagnosis-focused, welcoming those who wanted to make changes or enjoy the spaces, however articulated. Gardening practitioners suggested that sessions could be very helpful for those experiencing low-level mental ill health. Health-related pathways into sessions influenced their structure, staffing, and operation. As Taking Notice grew, additional sessions had to be created for referred individuals: pre-existing sessions were not referral ready. To some practitioners, these shifts constituted a mission drift, or a tension with some of their other organisational aspirations. To others, they were considered less so. The expansion and adaption of health-related referral routes offers insight into the potential scope of community gardening sessions, the resourcing that may be required for similar organisations to bridge-build with healthcare services, and the importance of the broader health and healthcare ecology.

6.1.2.1 Referral, entry, and the contexts of participation

The CICs had links with several health-related organisations - in addition to other VCS organisations, and local authorities - through which members came. Some routes were described as social prescribing, while others fit broader definitions of the term. Varying between sessions, practitioners somewhat expected – or actively aimed – for sessions to support members with some kind of wellbeing support need. Organisations did not require for people to have specific diagnoses to participate (nor any diagnosis at all), with Taking Notice shifting towards a less medicalised approach to referral over time.

Despite the number of gardens attended being relatively few, entry pathways were several. Incidental, in some cases: one person's participation began following an inquiry about a piece of equipment, and another had crossed paths with a practitioner while walking through their neighbourhood. On a walk together in a park, two participants had encountered a local authority stall, promoting one of the CICs. Head Outdoors accepted self-referrals, which one person pursued after having read about it online. Kim's curiosity was piqued as she regularly walked past Celandine Community Garden, and she eventually became involved through asking one of the members – a family friend – for more information. One longer-term member had participated in an earlier iteration of Head Outdoors with her partner, on the recommendation of his tertiary healthcare provider. Sometimes, shorter-term participation was facilitated via other organisations: as with one refugee-oriented charity, and an organisation working with young apprentices, who lent their skills

for short construction projects. It was sometimes unclear (to me, and occasionally to practitioners) which organisation a person had arrived via, particularly with individuals who did not return after a first or second session. If non-returners require further support or follow up, it is important that referring organisations provide this, and do not hold ungrounded expectations that referred-to organisations can. Approximately two thirds of the research participants had become involved through health-related pathways. This included primary and secondary care, and health charities. Some did not disclose pursuing biomedical or psychotherapeutic treatment for their health conditions, while others described engaging with healthcare services alongside gardening.

Natasha acknowledged that the broader work of the organisation, while not always specifically drawing members from health-related pathways, often accommodated those experiencing varied challenges. In the organisation's operating location, much of their work, she told me:

> could be thought of as a form of social prescribing, due to the things that they're tackling. [In the area] many people experienced "*situational mental health problems*", with unemployment higher, financial problems, and general "*greater need*" (March 2022)

Her words, from one of our conversations at The Apple Grove, are informative. They point towards the broad skillsets held by practitioners facilitating horticulture, especially in areas of high economic deprivation, while highlighting the interwovenness of wellbeing and wider health determinants. Her phrasing, alongside that of Thomas, is perhaps also informative about the place of health in the projects. As I asked Thomas about referral pathways, he replied: "*I suppose [the Celandine Community Garden session] could be called self-referral*". In these situations, "*social prescribing*" and "*self-referral*" appear as introduced terminology, by more recent developments in referrals, and by my own verbiage in prior questions. While both practitioners had pre-existing familiarity with these more health-oriented terms, their application to the garden sites seemed to be more recent, and context-dependent.

At growing sessions catered mainly or exclusively to those experiencing mental health issues, participation was on the basis of feeling one might benefit, rather than having a specific diagnosis. "*If you think you'd benefit, then you can come*", Natasha told me of The Apple Grove session, and Phillipa said similarly, of the social prescribing service commissioned to the organisation of which she was a part:

> "*for all of our social prescribing, it's not about having any particular diagnosis of either a physical or mental health difficulty... So it's more about identifying that people are motivated and want to make something different in their life. And then we can help them to work out*

what…might be better for them or what they can do to help to change things" (Phillipa, practitioner, The Sage Project)

Taking Notice diversified their referral routes, following low uptake (particularly amongst their target groups: people experiencing mental ill health, including children and young people, their families, and people who did not usually engage with nature). They, over time, began accepting self-referrals, and ran engagement events at schools. Housing associations and local charities were approached, although adult social services were not, due to capacity concerns. A number of factors contributed towards this shift away from entry pathways oriented exclusively around primary care. These pathways were considered to sometimes create barriers to access, both because of the limited provision of General Practice (GP) appointments locally, and in the difficulties of arranging and attending treatment for those experiencing challenges. It was expressed that, by the time that people attended a GP appointment, their conditions or challenges would have worsened. Wood et al. (2022) find similarly amongst social prescribing link workers and garden staff, who felt that some members only sought therapeutic gardening when reaching a particularly "*low point*" (p8). Some participants recognised the limits of biomedical or psy-science interventions in treating certain conditions or challenges (while acknowledging their strengths for others). Phillipa addresses several of these factors, while also questioning whether VCS organisations should strictly centre diagnoses:

"*I suppose there's something kind of fundamental about being a voluntary organization that's not about a medical diagnosis of a particular condition, and people not having to, not having to have that…someone might be struggling with their mental health, if we said that they needed to have a diagnosis, they'd have to go to their GP first or to secondary mental health services and get a diagnosis before they could come to us, which is just an unnecessary barrier really for people. And particularly for people who might have other things going on in their lives, you know, it's just creating difficulties in terms of people getting help as quickly as possible*" (Phillipa)

Diagnoses can sometimes be stigmatising, she told me, and both the organisations and those who came to them seemed to find a broader and less (bio)medicalised understanding of 'mental health' as fitting with their activities:

"*people have all sorts of experiences of their mental health, and if someone feels like talking about it or getting involved in one of our projects will help them to feel well and to understand how they're feeling and to be able to function in their lives more effectively then, you know, that's the most important thing as opposed to what label we might put*

on…sometimes [diagnosis] is really helpful. Sometimes it's helpful for the person because it can help them to understand their experiences and feel less like it's just them. And sometimes it can help for people to access the right source of help, care, and support, but that's not the sort of, I suppose, the sorts of services that we provide...it's just, I guess, focusing on what's actually relevant to, to the way that we work with people and not placing emphasis on things that aren't" (Phillipa)

This diversification suggests that therapeutic community gardening sessions, while well able to facilitate therapeutic experiences, have limits in the kinds and degrees of ill health they are well-suited to support; supported, also, in participants' comments:

"*we're not there to be counsellors, qualified counsellors…but, I do feel like the benefit that it brings people is quite impactful, considering it's just a session that we run, that's around gardening…from what people have said, it has a massive impact on their mental health*" (Thomas, practitioner, Let'sGrow)

The sessions' distinctness may be a virtue for those who do not require conventional therapeutic treatments, or to whom they may not be acceptable. For those requiring of those therapies, green social prescribing is a supplemental (rather than substitutive) wellbeing practice.

6.1.2.2 Peopling and resourcing sessions

At most of the sessions, practitioners described feeling well placed to support members experiencing low-level mental ill health. The benefit of Jane's presence, at Head Outdoors, with her occupational and educational background, was articulated by some. In addition, the other practitioners' knowledge of the local health and social care landscape was important, when onwards connection-making was required.

Particularly keen to support those who do not often engage with nature, and have "*health and other challenges in their lives*", the Taking Notice project employed a small number of people to hold roles with elements of engagement, delivery, and link working. Their roles (less typical of social prescribing services more widely) seemed to recognise the extra work required to support this specific group, and to coordinate with VCS project delivery partners. James described his hybrid engagement practitioner role to me, in which he would accompany social prescribers, learn from (potential) members what they might enjoy or need, and begin to develop relationships:

> "*when I go to meet the participant with the social prescriber…I tend to give them the timetable, for them to keep. So they can digest the situation, and whether they feel it's right for them...I'd ask them where they see themselves, and what kind of activity, they, [what] their interests are, and hobbies…I kind of go with what they want, really…'cause it's person-centred*" (James, engagement practitioner, Taking Notice)

While the project initially began with the intention to feed into existing projects, many of the timetabled activities were led by James. In an early pre-project meeting, there was more support for the former:

> Those present seemed supportive of the fact that the money wasn't to fund new projects – that they wouldn't be "*re-inventing the wheel"* but instead *"bringing wheels together*", said a representative from one of the partner charities. (October 2021)

James' activities were some of the more popular ones offered, attributable largely to the relationships he developed with members. This transition towards the creation of new activities is significant. The keenness of the VCS partners to *not* begin new sessions as part of the project suggests limits to their capacity. The creation of new, prescribing-specific sessions and activities by James (and Pots-and-Plates) indicates a dearth of nature-based activities catered to this specific member group. Additionally, the relative popularity of his sessions both attests to the importance of the practitioner-member relationship, while raising questions about how sustainability may be fostered. A learning outcome from the Taking Notice pilot was found, Phillipa said, in reflections relating to the multifacetedness and volume of work required in the creating these pathways. She suggested that, in the future, some of these skills might be delegated to a broader project team. Maintaining strong practitioner-member relationships, while having a sufficiently skilled and peopled project team, may be a tension negotiated by organisations involved in green social prescribing pathways.

Health interventions or systems which expand referral into community gardening organisations must consider both the resourcing required for sessions to run, and any additional resourcing required as a result of the expansion of such interventions. Additional sessions may have to be facilitated, and staff with more specific skillsets hired or resourced. Community garden projects are frequently grant funded, with grants awarded by a range of organisations. Such grants may or may not cover 'core' organisation costs, like salaries, or preparation time. Funding must be sought to cover staffing costs, materials, petrol, evaluation, and rent and utility bills. Practitioners spend time outside of sessions planning and documenting sessions, completing administrative tasks, attending training and outreach, delivering materials, and communicating with the many organisations they are networked

with. Most received a plethora of messages requesting information and advice, and some communicated with members outside of sessions too. Acquiring funding for all of these kinds of labour involved in VCS work could be challenging, with core costs especially hard to obtain; some of this work was uncompensated at times:

> "*I probably get paid two thirds of what I actually work…and probably the same for everybody*" (Angela, practitioner, The Kitchen Table)

Some costs were partially mitigated through the utilisation of practitioners' social capital, contributions from members, and use of accumulated and reclaimed materials. In one case, for example, a composting instructor forewent payment, instead asking that some of his fee be put towards a group lunch. Taking Notice made some money available to delivery partners: a recognition of some of the labour involved, that is not universal in social prescribing projects. It is widely documented in the literature that acquiring sustainable, longer-term support is a difficulty common to many community gardening organisations and projects (Jacob and Rocha, 2021; Drake and Lawson, 2014). Evaluations (Grantham and Whaley, 2023; Haywood et al., 2023) specifically addressing green social prescribing have similarly raised concerns relating to activity and provider sustainability. A participant in Grantham and Whaley's (2023) research describes how, for sociodemographic groups usually less represented in nature-based activities, short-term funding is unapt: "Providers are always saying that they have to be like chasing, you know, one-year funding pots and it's taking so much time and you can't do things like link with hard-to-reach communities if you only have a year. They need to have time to build trust" (n.p.).

While the gardening practitioners did manage to achieve some project continuity by seeking overlapping funds with broadly similar objectives, most grants were short-term (1-3 years), and required additional work. During the pandemic, it was felt that funding opportunities were relatively abundant, particularly in relation to work addressing food provision, green space access, gardening, and mental health. Thomas described finding funders whose goals aligned with the organisation's:

> "*There's a mental health crisis that's going on, and gardening and growing is a very well-recognised kind of way of combatting that…that's all reflected in…funding opportunities. Saying all that about…about six months ago, it was looking quite tight for us an organisation. And then we got a couple of very good grants…that kind of secured our core for three years, which is a game changer…but in three years' time, or now, two and a half years' time, erm, who knows what the world - and that's a world of working for a charity, or a Community Interest Company. There's always that struggle that's going on…I feel like you've got to [be]*

> *conscious that you don't…we could go out and get salaries for three or four people full time, for example. But then, in three years' time, we then need to find three or four salaries for those people again, and if you can't…you'd have to let those people go*." (Thomas, practitioner, Let'sGrow)

> *"our week should be reflective of whatever we're working towards, from a funder. Not that we try and be dictated by what, by a funder. But, we apply for funding based on what we want to do*" (Thomas)

While Natasha felt that Pots-and-Plates had been well placed to facilitate activities for those experiencing mental ill health, both Natasha and Samantha felt that the pandemic was a period in which they moved away from some of their main organisational objectives, relating to food security, local food consumption, and sustainable food livelihoods. In one meeting with a local charity, she introduced the organisation as such:

> Natasha introduced Pots-and-Plates as being a "*social enterprise*" that focused on "*plot to plate projects*" (October 2021)

6.1.3 What is a successful community gardening project?

Evaluation of community gardening projects may be formal or informal, quantitative or qualitative, and shaped by factors internal and external to small organisations. Evaluations can be subtle and ongoing, or more discrete. In addition to the more formal and discrete forms, I have throughout considered the embedded, phenomenological 'evaluations' – most often unarticulated – that guide practitioners' and members' action in the moment, and from week-to-week*: is this session going well? Am I enjoying this activity? Am I getting better at it? Does _____ need my support? What should I do next? Are we making progress?* Here, I focus more on the formal and informal evaluations engaged in by practitioners, and consider how their understandings of success accord with the aims and objectives of social prescribing.

6.1.3.1 Informal and ongoing attunements

In the previous chapter, I outlined how practitioners look for signs that participants were "*engaged*", or "*if they're not, are the okay not being engaged in something?*" (Thomas) as an indication of a successful session, and of progress. Drawing on concepts of tinkering and adaptive care, I have

described their ongoing attunement to participant wellbeing and group dynamics in sessions – an ongoing, immanent, and action-oriented evaluation. Jack together describes both the identification of a member's need, and his ability to respond to it:

> Laura: "…w*hen you come to these sessions, how do you evaluate sort of whether they've gone well? What sort of things do you look at or for?"*
>
> Jack: "*sometimes, I find I don't have an overview of the whole session, but…quite often, I end up in the polytunnel doing stuff with maybe just two or three people. So, I kind of judge the success of that on how, how that's gone for them. Quite often, if they've needed extra support, or if people've sort of wanted to talk about things, if they've had the opportunity to do that, and we've been able to do that for them, I think that's quite, quite a good thing, so I'd count that as a success*." (Jack, practitioner, Let'sGrow)

Phillip expressed a similar position with regards to evaluation – one focused on action:

> "*it's hard to judge, but a lot of it is on anecdotal stuff, and feedback that we get. And we chat and see how people are at the end, or during. And then we feed back to each other, those people who are, Thomas, and myself, and Jane. Just to share the good and the bad so that we can integrate that into whatever comes next*" (Phillip, practitioner, Let'sGrow)

As James and Natasha make clear, it can take time to develop this attunement, and to learn signs that individuals require support. These signs can be easily readable, or more subtle:

> "*we see significant improvements in people… sometimes it's almost kind of intangible, sometimes it's really obvious, like a conversation happening in a Whatsapp group. Sometimes it's just because somebody's started saying things that are funny, rather than seeing them as a personal issue. I don't know, it's, it is really intangible, sometimes, and difficult to put your finger on*." (Natasha, practitioner, Pots-and-Plates)

Several practitioners spoke about the preventative role of their activities; Natasha in particular noted how this could be hard to capture, as a counterfactual decline in health is invisible.

In terms of evaluation against certain values and goals, practitioners were keen to see signs that members were offering one another support. This is reflective, partially, of VCS funding patterns, and the hope that outcomes would last beyond a given funding cycle. Signs of independence from the *practitioners* were valued, but signs of mutual and generalised interdependence between members were praised: practitioners hoped for communities to build and grow:

> "*our job is done when people have a network of support that exists, without us being there…so that can be two people making arrangement[s] to meet up outside the session. Or it might be somebody loaning somebody something else, you know actually, 'oh I need a pair of shears' 'I've got a pair of shears you can have, I'll bring them next week'…it might be something really small like that*" (Natasha)

There was some indeterminacy and responsiveness to their evaluations: their guidance by asset- and person-centredness meant that signs that participants were pursing interests (variable between people, and variably aligned with their own goals and values) were valued and supported. An excerpt from Natasha's interview demonstrates this subtle supporting and attunement to progress, guided by members:

> "*[if] somebody says do you know what, I'm really interested in this. We might kind of, nudge them towards finding out a little bit more about that. And then we would use that as a way of indicating that they're kind of moving on a little bit*" (Natasha)

A non-universalising ethics of care, recurring within permaculture discourses (Leahy, 2021), was likely influential too; permaculture influenced several of the practitioners' beliefs and practices, while not always made explicit.

Signs that the sessions were contributing towards the broader and more foregrounded goals of the projects or organisations were noticed too. In particular, the successful growing and distributing of food, cohering of community, the participation in more environmentally conscious practices (and discussions), or the completing of planned jobs. Often, these were the forwarded topics of conversation, and orientations of action. Phillip added, after describing the check-in and ongoing, process-oriented evaluations, that he looked too for signs that compassion for human and nonhuman life was being fostered:

> "*the way in which the site's developing, and people, yeah, I guess how people are treating the rest of life here. And success, I guess, to me looks like, it's the slow realisation that we're in it with the plants, and it's kind of a reciprocal thing. They're giving us oxygen, we're giving them food and they're giving us food*" (Phillip, practitioner, Let'sGrow)

To his account of attuned-to signs, Jack added:

> "*it's very nice to see - especially like, early on in the season when we haven't got a lot in the beds - it's nice to see progress being made with that, or when you know that some of the jobs*

that have been kind of weighing on your mind a little bit have actually been ticked off." (Jack, practitioner, Let'sGrow)

Jack had created a permaculture-influenced plan for the Wenlock Park allotment with Sarah; while it was approached flexibly, he was pleased to see its implementation. At Pots-and-Plates, participation in a local market – both through selling produce, and socialising with others with shared interests in cultivation – was taken as a sign of success of the organisation, and of the members. As previously discussed, the growing spaces contained material signs of achievement and progress, registered with pride and esteem by both practitioners and members:

> I said hello to everyone, and asked James how he'd been. He took out his phone, and showed me two large piles of carrots and parsnips, recounting how proud the members had been who'd pulled them out of the ground. (July 2022)

Situated feelings of progress and success were expressed by members, through these physical signs (and the physiological too, as in the importance of becoming "*out of breath*" described previously):

> We continued to rake and clean for quite a while – a practitioner came over to tell us that the soup was ready, but we continued for maybe another ten minutes. People seemed absorbed in the task – enjoying their productivity - and keen to keep going. As we eventually cleared our tools away, Loraine said that we'd managed to clear 2.5 bags of things…I asked whether it was a record: "*no, but it's the most we've done for a while*". (March 2022)

Some members described feeling that they were making broader, cumulative progress with their mental health:

> *"it's done me good being here. I feel better, but not physical better. Mentally, getting better*". (Denise, member)

Apt for the diffuse and multifocal nature of many of the sessions, and for the need of practitioners to carefully allocate their limited time and attention, practitioners adopted multiple mediums for capturing success. Photographs and videos were an important way of documenting and archiving activities, and were often posted to social media for archiving and communication.

> *"the pictures and the videos like, we're very big on social media, so we can always refer everybody back and say oh look, this is what we did here, on this day…And I think that's speaks thousands of words"* (Angela, practitioner, The Kitchen Table)

Photographs were a useful and timesaving way to document activity, and to inform interested others about the organisations' work. The member, Robert, agreed that the feel and benefit of the sessions was hard to pin down and communicate: "*I couldn't tell someone totally about it - they'd have to see it*." Pots-and-Plates utilised hashtags on their photo-accompanied Facebook posts:

> "*every post should be hashtagged…So say for example we want to look back over everything that's happened with [our volunteer project] we can put in our page [our volunteer project] from that, we've got a really good, usually graphic account of how things have gone on. And the type of tasks that people have engaged with, and little comments or things that have been the topic of discussion at the time.*" (Natasha, practitioner, Pots-and-Plates)

Despite working for different organisations, the paths of many of the practitioners crossed at times, and photographs and text messages were a good way to show each other progress with the sessions and sites:

> [James, Natasha, and I] then talked about the Wednesday afternoon session. Everyone seemed to have enjoyed it greatly [Farhad messaged her] things like [how] he was grateful for the sessions, and thanked her for teaching him skills…James showed a photo of him, and two other members, stood proudly in front of the polytunnel they'd built on Monday. (July 2022)

While text messages were useful channels of communication and documentation, practitioners had to make decisions about when to share their phone numbers. Both text messages and social media interactions – while helpful and timesaving in some ways - extended the work of organising beyond the physical and temporal boundaries of the sessions. Whatsapp groups similarly required caution, despite their usefulness; I was aware of only one of the sessions developing a Whatsapp group, and it did so years into the project, rather than months.

6.1.3.2 More formal evaluations

In addition to informal and action-oriented attunements and judgements, more formal and prescribed funder- and partner-driven evaluations were also carried out. Funding and evaluation are interwoven to an extent. With funding often being short-term, this meant evaluation practices changed over the duration of fieldwork. Although, some of the gardening activities were supported by a patchwork of grants, and were thus not dominated by one imposed evaluation framework. When Head Outdoors was linked with The Sage Project, the practitioners were required to write

notes following each session. I asked Jane, who took these notes, to describe broadly what they contained:

> "*Just how [members have] been at the sessions, like, what kind of a mood that they were in, you know, positive or feeling negative. Anything, any sort of risk issues that might have come up, I'll include that, and just an overview of what activities they've done in the sessions as well. Just so that The Sage Project can monitor, kind of, that people are engaging and getting the outcomes that they want*." (Jane, practitioner, Let'sGrow)

It was unclear why the (partial) funding from The Sage Project for the sessions was not renewed. Although, the continuation of referrals from the organisation suggests that this was not related to displeasure with outcomes. With this non-renewal, Thomas thought that they may transition to more session- and group-oriented internal notetaking:

> "*if there's anything that comes up as a concern, we'll record it on there [the CIC's session record], just like we would with any of our sessions and then obviously, if we need to call anyone like the crisis team or anybody else, who would need to know about anything that comes up or that somebody said…that would, that would come under our kind of generic safeguarding*" (Thomas, practitioner, Let'sGrow)

Other evaluations occurring as a requirement of funders, or in preparation to acquire funding, were relatively short ones. A number of these evaluations occurred through Pots-and-Plates and Let'sGrow during fieldwork, where members were asked (to write, in some cases, or to have a short conversation) to communicate their experiences of the sessions. Pots-and-Plates wrote this into their funding bids, and hired an external professional to carry out the more circumscribed evaluations:

> "*for the more technical evaluation stuff - particularly for funders, where we've got a very specific set of objectives to reach, and [with our volunteer project] which started as project to support, intensively support, volunteers, we couldn't do the jobs that we were doing if we were also trying to evaluate it at the same time, properly*." (Natasha, practitioner, Let'sGrow)

Some of the funders required organisations to meet certain targets: numbers of garden sessions, garden parties held, or planters built.

Some funding sources required onerous evaluation processes, that practitioners may not have the time (or funding) to complete. Qualitative evaluations, exploring session benefits and members' hopes or motivations, were the most visible of more formal evaluations during fieldwork. As for

quantitative evaluation, two practitioners mentioned their usage of the Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-being Scale (WEMWBS). In a cooking-based project, part of The Kitchen Table's broader work, Angela felt that the scale was a poor fit for the participant group:

> "*We've used previously like you know like the Warwick-Edinburgh scale, things like that, just to see how people are. That's a bit intense, I think, for us...[a] funder once wanted us to use that scale, and again the wording didn't seem to fit what people thought they were coming for. They thought 'oh I'm just coming for a cooking session', you know*" (Angela, practitioner, The Kitchen Table)

She told me the sorts of things that she did look for, in these sessions, and the duration over which change became noticeable:

> *"six sessions wasn't enough. You know, you're just starting to get to know people, and you couldn't really show them everything…So we did ten. So that was a really good way of evaluating it, because after ten sessions, you can have quite an impact on somebody. Either with their skills, knowledge, nutritional knowledge, but also, addressing like, their anxiety levels."* (Angela)

In content, the WEMWBS scale was a better fit with the Head Outdoors group at which it was used when members joined the sessions. There was a plan for it to be used as members left, too, although the patterns of joining, staying, and leaving the group did not seem to align with the implementation of an exit questionnaire. Longer-term participants did not have these final sessions, and it was not always clear when a person's last session might be, for those who did suspend or end their participation. In these cases, the referral services would be better placed to carry out questionnaires, should they still be in contact with individuals.

Practitioners were appreciative when funders understood that their capacity to complete detailed evaluations was limited (without additional funding or personnel). Two suggested that smaller grants sometimes required disproportionately time-consuming evaluations. It was felt, as others have identified (Haywood et al., 2023; Grantham and Whaley, 2023; Jacob and Rocha, 2021; Drake and Lawson 2014), that funders sometimes had a novelty bias, preferring or mandating new projects:

> *"that's the problem with funding…it's very…'you've done that one, that's great, but you can't apply again'. Even though everyone really loved it. I mean, that's not stopping us like, doing that again, and applying again somewhere else, for different funding. But you'd think, that's*

where like, the likes of Anshores Housing Association are different. They see what you do, and say right this is great, carry on doing that." (Angela)

For Taking Notice, James was required to capture progress through a software program, used by the link workers also, in which he could write about the sessions, and record attendance and responses to his messages:

"*I'm just writing a statement of how the gardening session, or the walk and talk group session went…and how the participant was feeling on the day, if they were happy enough…That's, that's how we note it, and it's like having…case notes…And then there's a risk assessment attached to the [software]*" (James, engagement practitioner, Taking Notice)

Initially, he had also gone through support plan forms, each month, with participants. They adapted these plans, owing to their capacity:

"*we're only doing the case studies. We're not doing the support plans, because it was just too much. But I did do them originally…But it's time consuming, it's a lot to do. As well as your other time, other paperwork, and other activities*." (James)

Matthew also described writing notes after working with people socially prescribed into activities, and occasionally checked in with individuals at sessions. Both James and Matthew spoke of taking a "*person-centred*" approach, with definitions of success guided by the terms of the service user. When asked to elaborate on his understanding of person-centredness, Matthew mentioned both the extended duration he could work with individuals, and having space to work through a range of interrelated concerns:

"*So it could be someone comes with us and like 'oh and you know, I wanna lose weight. But, I don't, I'm too anxious to get out the house'. You know, 'I'm, I'm not doing my food shopping. you know, my house is a tip. I can't invite people around'. And so we'll like, we'll say, what's your biggest priority? Right. It's: you want to get your house in order? Once your house is in order, your anxiety is going to go down. Once your anxiety is down, you'll feel more, you know, approachable to do things like this. And we'll just work through them.*" (Matthew, link worker, The Sage Project)

Continuing with the example of weight management (albeit something he usually referred into walking groups for), he told me would usually evaluate as follows:

> "*during the session, I'll, we'll ask how, the way it's going, if you've noticed much weight loss? Is there anything else you need support with? And we just gauge from there. And then normally people say like, a lot of people don't weigh themselves. But like 'oh well, I know that my coat's fitting a lot because it used to be really tight, and now it's baggy.' And yeah, and just evaluate from there...it's mostly just interacting with who's attending and just checking up with them*." (Matthew)

Garden practitioners were engaged in immanent, action-oriented judgments, in addition to the documentation (often photo- and text-based) taken for their own purposes, to document progress or concerns, to share with funders, and to communicate with others. Within sessions, they became alert to signs people may require support or guidance, while making positive evaluations in line with their goals to foster community, food growing, site development, and member-led (or person-centred) progress. Noted also by Hitchings (2013), some describing feeling that the health and wellbeing benefits of spending time gardening in general were already well documented. More uncertain were ways to help certain groups engage with nature, to "tempt them there" (p98), to repeat Hitching's words. In the case of Taking Notice, engaging young people, and people with complex health needs, was most challenging. In the growing spaces, practitioners were attuned to the wellbeing of both individuals, the garden communities, and the development of the spaces and the collective outcomes of sessions; to multiple units of concern or attention (Yates-Doerr and Carney, 2016). Progress was evaluated by multiple values and (usually informal) measures. Often, they looked for members' active engagement with activities, and with other people. Signs of success at sessions could include the completion of horticultural or culinary tasks, sharing car rides to sessions, a light-hearted message, or the taking of produce by garden visitors. The social prescribing practitioners (James and Matthew) seemed also to adopt an inclusive, interactive, and member-guided approach to their evaluation practices.

Owing to time constraints upon practitioners, the multifocal nature of community gardening sessions, and the multiple objects or units of evaluation (the wellbeing and development of spaces, communities, and members), standardised quantitative evaluation measures had little presence at the growing spaces. Practitioners found ways to capture successes demonstrated at the sessions, for use in promoting their projects, communicating with funders, and adapting their own work. Having now discussed the place of health in the projects, their structure, and the ways in which they were evaluated, I now explore pathways to gardens, and pathways taken by gardens, individuals, and organisations.

6.2 Pathways to and through community gardens and growing spaces

Numerous pathways into the growing spaces were taken, facilitated through varied organisational, physical, and social structures. Once connected with community gardens, different patterns and durations of engagement were adopted by members. Many community gardens operate with a core group of regularly attending volunteers or staff, alongside more peripheral and infrequently present members. Some gardening organisations provide short courses, oriented towards skill-development or therapeutic outcomes, and may also have longer-term volunteering programmes. Fees may be required, throughout or after a period of time. Participating may require signing up as a volunteer, informally or with the formalised organisational body of a garden, should it have one. Organisations and growing spaces themselves carve pathways, co-evolving alongside the humans and nonhumans who inhabit them, and adapting to contexts and pressures beyond their boundaries. Garden assemblages, their elements and affordances, are not static. Green social prescribing represents a set of related pathways into green spaces, usually from healthcare services, and often via link worker figures. Models of social prescribing represent abstracted journeys that members, clients, or patients might take 'through' social prescribing systems. In this section, I explore the changing experiences of members and organisations, considering the implications of their pathways for models of green social prescribing.

Calderón-Larrañaga et al. (2022) identify, in academic and grey literature, three main discourses through which social prescribing is represented. One of these three discourses encapsulates a common model of engagement with social prescribing, whereby individuals move from "dependence to independence" (Dayson et al., 2013: p21). Social prescribing is presented as a service promoting inner changes within individuals, which gradually lead to a reduced reliance on health and social services. In these models, the reducing use of services is of primary focus, with less attention to how continued engagement with prescribed-to organisations and places may be resourced. Sun et al. (2023) describe pathways observed in an English green social prescribing project: "This case clearly demonstrates the pathway and possibility for people in need to go through GSP moving from 'patient' to volunteer, which changes the ledger from user to at least supporter—in some cases, even to provider" (p12). Signs of the development of members' skills are often welcome for those working in the VCS (Baxter and Fancourt, 2020). However, linear models and realisations of social prescribing have been critiqued, as embodying a neoliberal rationality in which individuals ostensibly learn how to self-manage their health through lifestyle changes, reducing healthcare service use in the process (Calderón-Larrañaga et al., 2022; Mackenzie et al., 2020; Fleming, 2023).

Different types of social prescribing exist, and understandings of even the same service can vary between link workers; Calderón-Larrañaga et al. (2022) and Griffith et al. (2023) identify multiple logics, understandings, and practices. Some publications acknowledge that continued engagement with prescribed activities is likely to require resources, as in Thomson et al. (2015)'s identified social prescribing pathway endpoint: "Reassessment is fed back to GP, patient is signposted to similar activities (often incurring cost)" (p31). Similarly, Briscoe's (2022) report on a river-based socially prescribed activity includes the following step within her process flow chart: "at the end of the prescription the volunteer coordinator will assess whether person referred would like to transition to 'regular' volunteering" (p16).

While some models end before considering what happens after an individual arrives at a prescribed activity, recognitions of the issue of (un)sustainability of VCS activities (Aughterson et al., 2020) warrant attention to extended pathways, beyond initial prescriptions. One of four simplified social prescribing models described by Husk et al. (2020) reflects non-linear movement from an 'activity' back to the 'link worker' or 'hub', while Garside et al. (2020) include consideration of support and activity provision at 'completion' within their logic model of nature based social prescribing. Here, I explore some of the pathways taken by individuals, groups, and the facilitating organisations. Amid the dominance of linear visions of social prescribing, I argue for increased recognition of (and support for) multiple pathways into, through, and between social prescribing services and delivery partners. I reflect, also, on what the evolving nature of groups meant for their affordances over time.

6.2.1 Pathways through The Apple Grove: the dynamic nature of spaces and communities

Over the course of 2022, members developed a growing familiarity and fondness with The Apple Grove space. Their knowledge of orchard care deepened, and they became more self- and orchard-guided in their activities. Pots-and-Plates had managed to acquire a storage container and greenhouse for the site, and enrolled some of the members in a training project that expanded their cultivation of the site. While the group narrowed in size, bonds became stronger, and grounded in friendship. Mentioned previously, conversations seemed to occasionally touch on more sensitive topics. The pathways taken by several of the members can be considered as highly successful, in terms of an individual-oriented sustainability: positive outcomes were achieved for individuals, requiring eventually little input from practitioners. Milly stopped attending regularly, having found employment in a degree-related sector, and described drawing on her volunteering in the application process. Gillian saw her referral as a small but powerful step, addressing isolation

through the opportunities it afforded for laugher, and nature-based, sociable activity: "*It just absolutely fits with me and my love for nature*". She evaluated social prescribing positively:

> Samantha said that when people are at the GP, often their problems are too great/advanced; Gillian replied that small things are powerful, and essentially that it needn't be the only thing [someone uses in treatment]. (November 2023)

She had previously engaged in environmental volunteering, which perhaps eased the pathway to these activities. George, another regularly attending member, described the fulfilment and enjoyment he found in coming to The Apple Grove:

> "*it's really nice, little centred community we have there as well. We all get on well…I have a sense of achievement. I feel a sense of reward. I, I look forward to going down there…and when I come back I have a smile on my face, because it's been such a good day*." (George, member, Pots-and-Plates)

Their ongoing engagement with the site, and growing arboricultural expertise, meant that the orchard continued to be cared for: trees pruned and harvested, and apple varieties (their names, tastes, and qualities) documented. The project was, therefore, successful too in developing sustainable environmental caretaking.

Mid-summer, Samantha described the developing skills of "*core*" members, and how most were able to attend without requiring the presence of practitioners:

> "*they are at a level now, where…we can go do you know what, we're going to be running late, we've got a meeting...So it's, it's relieving us of [work] as well. And it's also giving them the skills to do it. So, it's beneficial both ways*" (Samantha, practitioner, Pots-and-Plates)

When first arriving at The Apple Grove sessions in the summer of 2021, I was greeted by two men, Natasha, and Samantha, and by a group of nine at my second session. The group had begun as a men's mental health-oriented group; some of those who participated (sometimes sporadically) had continued on from this prior iteration, and others joined after its changing focus. During fieldwork, the session transitioned to become one of Pots-and-Plates' main volunteering sessions. The space retained a loose orientation as one for respite, enjoyment, and unwinding, while accepting volunteers from non-health pathways for a period of time.

Owing to a number of factors, the group remained relatively small, and eventually was closed to new members. Practitioners were concerned with investing in volunteers' skillsets, and limited in the number of volunteers they could support. The space was a restorative one for practitioners too, a

respite from the busier and more taxing projects. While Pots-and-Plates were linked to Taking Notice, they decided against including The Apple Grove session within this social prescribing pathway (after a short period of its inclusion). The site was large, with some potentially risky and varied terrain. Additionally, it was relatively isolated, a few miles from the nearest town centre, and with indirect public transport links. I had wondered, also, whether the practitioners had worried about upsetting the balance of sessions with additional members, as the group became smaller and more familiar.

> Natasha looked around at The Apple Grove, and said that the session was ill-equipped for people facing these difficult issues...The [Taking Notice] social prescribing session [there] would no longer happen, or at least not soon, she said. It would, at most, be a possible "*progression*"… she described how people might feel "*trapped*" at the isolated location. (April 2022)

The pathways taken by some of The Apple Grove members can be considered sustainable, for how members were able to attend and cultivate with gradually withdrawing support from Pots-and-Plates and social prescribers. The reasons for the withdrawal of other volunteers were not always clear to me, although the person who left following declining mental health is counted amongst these departures. His situation reaffirmed the need for referral options *from* these projects as well as to them.

In other regards, however, the session and entailed pathways were less sustainable. The space and group co-evolved through engagement, more able to foster certain therapeutic outcomes, while losing the ability to support others. Namely, the incorporation of new volunteers, from health- or other pathways. Its affordances were shifting. The stepping back of practitioners from the site was linked both to the growing independence and interdependence of members, alongside other contributing factors. Included amongst these were the risk of the sale of the site by its local authority owners, inconsistent access to toilet facilities, and the changing organisational focus as the pandemic receded. The practitioners' work, aiming to significantly contribute to the growth, consumption, and sustainable commercial or semi-commercial production of local food, did not allow for the specific kinds of volunteering and prescribing opportunities and pathways observed during fieldwork. While Samantha had purchased produce from some of the members, growing on a small scale, her contracted catering work was unsuited to volunteers:

> "*it is backbreaking work. And it can be very overwhelming…it's very difficult, you need a trained person in there*" (Samantha, practitioner, Pots-and-Plates)

She recounted to me one case, in which she had brought along a volunteer with experience in catering. However, especially in private work, time pressures and customer requirements meant that a broader range of volunteers were unable to accompany her. With this change might come other avenues for supporting local food livelihoods. Member groups, and their relationships with growing spaces, evolve and change over time; for some members, therapeutic relationships to people and place deepen. Members who had been part of the group took one of several pathways forwards: continued and less supported engagement with the site, or discontinued participation (relating to occupational commitments, ill health, and routes I had not observed). Organisations too are non-static, adapting and responding in relation to changing circumstances, funding opportunities, and the needs and aims of the organisations and their practitioners. The arrangements accommodative of referrals can shift over time, generative of certain kinds of therapeutic or otherwise valued experience, while foreclosing possibilities for others.

6.2.2 Pathways through Head Outdoors: supporting enduring connections to people and place

A pathway akin to a more linear social prescribing model had initially guided the Head Outdoors sessions. Previously touched upon, the sessions had initially run as 6-8-week sessions, with new individuals enrolling and departing with each course. The Head Outdoors session was described by Thomas as highly rewarding, attributed partially to their diverging from this model. While several members no longer engaged with social prescribers, their participation in Let'sGrow-led sessions was of a relatively long duration. Here, I illustrate the value found in this longer-term engagement with specific places and situated communities, and argue that the months post-referral are deserving of attention and resource.

In chapters 3-5, I outline some of therapeutic group dynamics that were able to emerge through this transition to an ongoing, rolling model. Thomas elaborated upon the contrasting group dynamics: with a shorter course, groups had to be regularly built anew. Early sessions can be challenging for members, and the inconsistent early attendance in an already small (6-8 people) group added another element of difficulty:

> "*the full new cohort would come in, the people who've left were really upset that they had to leave, and it was almost like we were letting them down. And then some new people…come in, but they might come in and there might be a couple of them…so then they're starting…it doesn't feel like a, a big session*" (Thomas, practitioner, Let'sGrow)

Members shared with Thomas the difficulties of short-term support within healthcare services, solidifying his decision to try to not replicate these issues within the sessions:

> *"I realised that we need to not, not kick people out for 6-8 weeks…there was a lot of panic… [members] were saying…you get your six weeks counselling…You'll get that through the NHS…you do that for six weeks and then you just start delving into some of the issues that you're facing, dig it all up, and then your six weeks is over, and you're left…trying to deal with the turmoil that's all been dug up again…so there was that, that was something that was recognised that - it's not just counselling, it's other services like that…that people feel like they might be about to get some support, and the rug's kind of pulled from underneath them…that was the deciding factor for us to say no…we're going to just carry this on"*
> (Thomas)

Through the NHS, individuals in England can access pharmacological and psychotherapeutic mental health treatment without charge. Counselling and psychological therapies, for those who may have depression or anxiety, are available through NHS Talking Therapies (formerly Improving Access to Psychological Therapies, or IAPT). However, provision can fall short of National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence guidelines (Scott, 2018; Binnie, 2015). In IAPT services, receiving a course of only six cognitive behavioural therapy sessions was "not uncommon" (p81); Binnie suggests that was linked to the competitive tendering system that services were subject to. A survey (We Need to Talk, 2013) of individuals with mental health conditions, who had sought psychological therapies through the NHS, found that half felt they were not offered enough sessions. Echoing Thomas' comments, treatment durations (and modalities) have been critiqued for raising, without sufficiently addressing, individuals' difficulties (Omylinska-Thurston et al., 2019). The changed format of Head Outdoors sessions responded to some of the weaknesses in this wider context of support provision, as reflected in the experiences of members.

I have described the group that developed over months as a therapeutic and family-like community: the pathways of individuals were interwoven, producing therapeutic effects greater than the sum of individual pathways, benefits, or capacities developed. Thomas reflected on the feel of the sessions, developing over time within the group:

> "*there's something that's incredibly valuable about that kind of supportive family feel, that's developed there with everybody…that's to everybody's credit, everyone who comes down there. The staff, yourself, but just as much like, the service users, because they've got to buy*

into it, and they, they support each other, and encourage each other, and look out for each other, give each other lifts and stuff…it has a massive impact" (Thomas)

Community gardening groups and spaces change, in their character and therapeutic affordances, over time. The appreciated shift towards rolling sessions evidences a longer temporal horizon for some of the benefits of attending these kinds of groups. This changing format represented a eurhythmic convergence in therapeutic temporalities and rhythms of individuals, groups, and sessions. Bell, Leyshon, Foley, and Kearns (2019) view encounters with nature as relational and emergent; the changing format Head Outdoors adapted to the emerging benefits experienced by the group, rather than imposing a dose-like model of provision, as critiqued by these authors.

The facilitation of Head Outdoors sessions, and the realisation of their therapeutic potential, was collective, with members and practitioners providing practical and emotional support to one another. In February, I noted Sarah's contribution to the tasks of the day. She had brought seeds, and offered the surplus (and the calm, indoor activity of labelling them) to others:

> Thomas then talked us through the tasks for the week: four tonnes of compost were to be delivered and spread, the chickens needed cleaning and feeding, and there was some weeding to be done too. Phillip would be building some beds…Sarah then began speaking, lifting up a box of seeds that she'd bought. "*if anyone fancies doing something inside, I've bought lots of organic seeds, but there's too many for me here. I've got some seed envelopes; you could put half in there, and label them to plant here"*. (February 2022)

She had, elsewhere, voiced the value of varied activity types at sessions. On another occasion, I noticed her stay back with a member, offering listening and advice:

> [I] took a seat at the table in the portacabin. The room was full, and several people around table said a warm and kind hello…Sarah chatted with a member…and they stayed in the cabin after most had left. I went to make a cup of coffee for myself, and some of the others who trickled in. While I made drinks, I heard Sarah providing him with a number of some sort of care service, after having provided him with advice, and a listening ear. (July 2022)

The regular, longer-term participation of members contributed towards the sustainability of garden sessions. With regards to the group dynamics that could support or hinder participation, Thomas elaborated on the need to establish a core group of committed volunteers:

> We spoke about [Let'sGrow's] current projects…I asked how these projects had started, and he talked about them now having a few "*successful gardens*" going, and about things like this needing to reach a "*critical mass*". (June 2022)

Others have documented the importance of developing this core group, for continuity, leadership, and modelling within gardens (Doyle, 2022).

While the voluntary work and care given by members was greatly appreciated, an essential component of the sessions, there can be a degree of asymmetry in work of practitioners and volunteers. The former had responsibility for distinct administrative, practical, and evaluative tasks required to support members, and new referrals. For The Apple Grove, the development of a more tightly knit community accompanied changes that made the sessions less able to accept new volunteers, perhaps especially from health pathways. Head Outdoors retained this ability to a greater extent: relationships remained more generalised, and there were more practitioners (and, over time, experienced members) present to support members. The group was larger, too, likely less sensitive to fluctuations in member presences. Member-oriented sessions remained more central to Let'sGrow's activities, while Pots-and-Plates' orientation towards local food production and consumption was less conducive to this particular purpose.

In the summer of 2021, the practitioners discussed setting up a session on a different day at Wenlock Park, that could act as a "*spillover*" session for people to progress on to from Head Outdoors. This became the Wenlock Welcome session, during which the space was used simultaneously by two other VCS organisations, for group cooking sessions and to host a low-cost community supermarket. This was a busier space than Head Outdoors, making available new services and activities to a wider group of members, while temporarily losing some of the qualities emerging at Head Outdoors. Described in 4.3.2.2, I outlined the creation of a calmer, quieter refreshment space away from bustle, at these sessions; some of the members began to regularly attend and enjoy Wenlock Welcome days too. However, they did not transition from one session to the other. They continued to attend Head Outdoors, which seemed to retain a distinctive and appreciated therapeutic quality. Social and horticultural skills and confidences developed were somewhat tied to place, and relational; the conceptualisation described by Calderón-Larrañaga et al. (2022), of socially prescribed activities as (primarily) developing individually inhering capacities, is an incomplete picture. Head Outdoors became a space and community in which to enact recovery, to experience health and care concerns differently, or to gain space from them. Through his understanding of assemblages of health, Duff (2016) captures this distributed sense of recovery, a "becoming-well" reliant on "on a heterogeneous cast of human and nonhuman objects, bodies and forces, rather than the perseverance of individual bodies" (p64).

As noted in 4.1.1.2, none of the Head Outdoors participants followed a linear pathway, transitioning completely from 'supported' to 'supporter'. Support was multidirectional, and often reciprocal

across sessions. I have described how this created capacity for practitioners to assist newer members, and contributed towards feelings of competence and confidence. Members did contribute to the work of running sessions: one practitioner joined Let'sGrow as a volunteer, initially enquiring in search of opportunities to practice permaculture in a community-based setting. Another member, participating through a non-healthcare pathway, was employed for a few hours of regular site maintenance work. As with Pots-and-Plates, there were occasions where members required support greater or different in kind from that which the organisation could provide, further reaffirming the need for strong and multidirectional pathways between services. The value found in the situated, mutually supportive community developing through Head Outdoors highlights the importance of facilitating and resourcing longer-term engagements with gardening spaces.

6.2.3 Pathways untrodden

Evident in the adaption of referral pathways in Taking Notice, coming to gardening sessions was too challenging for some of those at the beginning of healthcare pathways. Here, I acknowledge those who were not able to come to sessions, or continue beyond initial visits, and discuss what this suggests regarding the scope of community gardening projects.

6.2.3.1 First and second steps

There were several people whom I did not see again, following first or second visits. While community gardens can be sites of exchange and connection across difference (Williams, 2023), Sun et al. (2023) note that community-based activities can inherit wider patterns of social exclusion (Meenar and Hoover, 2012), which can make certain demographics feel less (or more) welcome at specific gardens. For health-related pathways, as touched upon, both health problems and broader life circumstances could preclude prolonged engagement with gardening and green social prescribing. In a meeting, James described the difficulty felt by some in attending:

> He talked about how many weren't ready to leave the house: one person that did come to a session he ran (1:1) with them had told him how they had been in and out of the door and car, trying to decide whether or not to come. He said it was about taking "*baby steps*" with people, who were "*jittery*" and "*not ready to step outdoors*". (April 2022)

The prescribing organisation had anticipated this difficulty, to some degree, with one employee emphasising that they hoped to promote "*quality*" engagement with green space, rather than assuming a high "*quantity*" of referrals. In the first months of the project, several sessions had two

or fewer participants. Natasha reflected upon the work that was needed to help support "*transitions*" out of the house:

> "if *we could get people to get that transition between the front door and the community allotment, that would probably be more manageable…we kind of maybe need to do a little bit of work around those transitions…it's difficult because, so one of the issues we've had with that project is because people can't get out the front door, but there's nobody to actually go to the front door and take them somewhere…and sometimes that's really needed. It's hugely labour intensive*" (Natasha, practitioner, Pots-and-Plates)

James managed to adapt to some of this need, visiting people prior to their first session, and offering one-to-one sessions. He drove some of the participants to sessions, reflecting also the dispersed nature of community gardening sites in the region. Transport was identified by several practitioners as a factor inhibiting participation. While James' role was appreciated, and others described similar roles as working well in prior projects, participation in the projects remained too challenging for some. Connie told me how some of the refuge-seeking people with whom she worked were not ready to engage in volunteering:

> "*you'll meet people at different parts of their journey, when they're ready to do different things*" (Connie, practitioner, VCS organisation)

In 6.2, I include fieldnotes describing how ill health and mobility issues precluded participation. These obstacles have been captured elsewhere; Gibson et al. (2021) detail how multiple and overlapping setbacks (and low social support) prevented one green social prescribing participant from engaging: attending a gardening group became "too difficult to go back" (p6). Gibson et al. and Pollard et al. (2023) highlight the role of class and other inequalities in these exclusions. Experiencing multiple challenges or health concerns did not prevent participation in all cases, but could make beginning or continuing participation vulnerable.

6.2.3.1 The scope of organisations

The ability for community gardens to function as part of systems of care, receiving appropriate referrals for which they can provide support, depends upon the quality and resources of these broader systems. As expressed by practitioners, trouble in accessing GP appointments could lead to potential members' needs exceeding the capacities of these organisations. Problems could worsen as to be beyond the scope of these organisations to alleviate, resulting in inappropriate referrals, or

an inability to join care pathways. Reflecting on how the success of social prescribing relates to the health of this broader care ecology, Samantha told me:

> *"I honestly genuinely think if the mental health provision in this country was working, for whatever level mental health it is, whether you're hospitalised, alcoholism, addiction, or low level, wherever - I think if all that was working, then social prescribing would work. But there's far too much to be dealing with at the minute*" (Samantha, practitioner, Pots-and-Plates)

Samantha's comments can be contextualised within wider challenges in the UK. By June 2022, there were approximately 1.2 million people in England on the waiting list for community-based NHS mental health services (National Audit Office, 2023), with those experiencing more severe mental illness likely to encounter longer waits for treatment (Rethink Mental Health, 2018). A recent British Medical Association (2024) report described England's mental healthcare system as "broken" (p2), citing (amongst other factors) insufficient funding, staffing, and preventive action around the wider determinants of health. In Britain, there has been growing dissatisfaction with access to health and social care, particularly with regards to access to primary care (Jefferies et al., 2024). Poor access to healthcare services may provoke doubt in the expansion of social prescribing, due to its reliance on primary care pathways, and its non-substitutability with some other services.

At a meeting, James provided insight into the capacities and scope of Taking Notice, describing how some people could not come to sessions:

> James began to talk about his experience, and mentioned the "*complex*" problems that the six participants faced. One person referred to him wasn't interested in any of the activities, which he reassured was "*fine*". He talked about the range of issues people experienced: dementia, mobility issues, etc…James assured that as long as he helps even one or two people, he'd feel that he was doing what he was supposed to. (April 2022)

His words evoke the wide range of factors shaping the lives and health of those referred into this social prescribing service. While participating in Taking Notice had been transformative for some, the inability of others to participate draws attention to the 'health' of other parts of the healthcare ecology, and the contexts in which people live. Arguably, those experiencing complex, overlaid issues might be kept in touch with a link worker, who may be able to link individuals to one or more appropriate services, presuming their capacity. While an individual may benefit from having access to multiple forms of support, such a situation represents an individual-level approach to health, casting health as a matter of patchworked service utilisation. Others have described social

prescribing as an individual-level intervention, and link workers and VCS practitioners as limited in their capacity to target health determinants in a systematic and comprehensive way (Turk et al., 2022; Sun et al., 2023; MacKenzie et al., 2020; South et al., 2008). Additionally (and with reference to green social prescribing specifically), Sun et al. (2023) find that, when diverse issues like housing, poverty, and nature access are addressed together through social prescribing, the latter falls lower in priority lists of link workers. While advocating for more joined-up and resourced arrangements, where social prescribing is practiced, I argue also for recognising where it has limits in health promotion and inequality alleviation.

6.3 The wellbeing of practitioners

Evident throughout, although addressed most directly in 4.3, is the importance of the practitioners in cohering and caring for the assemblages constituting the growing spaces. I have described their practical, emotional, and administrative labours, their knowledge, skills, and social capital, wrangling, and attuned tinkering with atmosphere and assemblages. Harrod et al. (2023) also emphasise significant role played by practitioners in nature-based interventions, while the paramount importance of the therapeutic alliance in therapies more broadly has been recognised (Flückiger et al., 2018; Baier et al., 2020). Others affirm the pivotal role played by practitioners and leadership in community gardening, in, for example, managing relationships with local authorities (Fox-Kämper et al., 2018; Doyle, 2022). These roles were in many ways fulfilling, with practitioners varyingly describing their gratitude: to work on their passions and with the community, to see people benefit from sessions, and to be relatively autonomous in their work:

> "*it's been so nice to watch [Wenlock Park and Head Outdoors] develop into what it is…our staff team say we feel lucky to be able to go and do that as a job…if you want to work in the community sector like we do…and to be involved in a project that does actually make a difference for people*" (Thomas, practitioner, Let'sGrow)

> "*I'm really proud of the garden…I'm so glad we did that…[it was] very much user-led…What we've produced there, and how it's had an impact on the community, I'm really proud of that*" (Angela, practitioner, The Kitchen Table)

However, these could be taxing roles, particularly in their projects that were highly member- and health-focused. There were worries relating to the practical and operational aspects of the organisations, to funding acquisition, and to interorganisational collaboration, to achieve similar

goals amid sometimes-differing organisation rhythms and priorities. As touched upon, funding could often be project-based, with time spent outside of sessions sometimes unfunded. This issue emerged as Natasha and I spoke about activity timetables:

> "*Even a three-hour session is more like five, six hours. Today, I'm at the office at 8:30am, washing cups, and there is work afterwards too*" (April 2022)

Community-based work can be as much an emotional labour (Hochschild, 1983) as a practical one; Angela told me both how she absorbed people's worries ("*it's really hard, because you absorb a lot of stuff*"), and how this became more manageable as other services reopened following the pandemic lockdowns:

> "*So, it's better now that baselines services are open, and we can refer people to them*" (Angela, practitioner, The Kitchen Table)

'Sleepless nights' were spoken of more than once, in relation to funding cycles, and the scope of the support needs of people who came to sessions. The Taking Notice project aimed to support people who do not usually engage with nature, and who may be experiencing multiple mental and physical health challenges, or other difficulties. The gardening projects operated in underserved areas, with relatively high levels of ill health and economic deprivation. Natasha recounted to me how a recent craft session, with a project member, had provoked worry:

> Arriving 90 minutes into the sessions, Natasha initially thought that [the member] wouldn't come. This was well handled, though, with the craft instructor responsively giving them the demonstration piece to continue to work on, so that they weren't left behind. (April 2022)

During the session, the individual became deeply, visibly upset:

> Natasha described how she went over, then tactfully distracted the room with a "*daft story*" while the individual calmed themself down. They managed to, luckily, and could continue on…This incident awoke Natasha, she told me, to…the complex lives people who may be referred into sessions could be leading.

While the practitioners had managed to respond well to the situation, it had caused concern in Natasha. Reinforced, in this incident, was the need for a preparedness for members' wellbeing needs to increase or change – sometimes acutely – beyond their first few encounters with VCS organisations. Socially prescribed activities can be tailored towards different kinds of health needs, with such preparedness potentially less or more necessary depending on their focus and location. Concerns about this preparedness, and the potential for similar situations to emerge, were a source

of worry, and mental and emotional labour, for some. Baxter and Fancourt (2022) find similar struggles amongst VCS practitioners working with people with mental ill health, who expressed feelings of being overwhelmed. Jacob and Rocha (2021) describe community gardening practitioners, committed to the purposes of their work, but frequently experiencing tiredness, working in settings with low staffing and funding. While practitioners were in no doubt about the potential benefits of gardening sessions, the scope for impact in certain situations was sometimes limited, which could be upsetting. Street gardening activities, for example, could happen in residential environments more challenging to transform and maintain.

Practitioners worked amid a number of broader stressors: the COVID-19 pandemic, rising costs of living, and the palpable emotional impact of the war in Ukraine, beginning in February of 2022. Beginning the same year, and further registering wider difficulties in living and working conditions, was a series of industrial action across a range of sectors. These broader events impressed upon members and practitioners, as events impactful, and with a disruptive and intensifying effect upon services. When considering the sustainability of pathways to community gardens (and green social prescribing), attention must be given to the occupations which facilitate them, and how manageable, sustainable, and well-supported they are.

6.4 Discussion

In 6.1, I have consolidated prior findings into the idea of therapeutic third places, considering how discourses, practices, and understandings of wellbeing figure in these spaces. As bridge-building into community gardens and growing spaces expands, I have reflected on their distinctive appeal. 6.2 explores the routes taken over time by members, organisations, and community gardening and growing groups, from health-related origins and otherwise. Member pathways were varied, multidirectional, and (sometimes) protracted. This chapter provides insight into the scope and specificity of community gardening as a potentially therapeutic practice, particularly when sessions or services provide support in relation to mental ill health (alongside, sometimes, co-occurring difficulties). Here, I elaborate these implications, considering them alongside the broader bodies of research into therapeutic horticulture and green social prescribing. I begin by outlining how members may take pathways across, between, and back towards different nodes in social prescribing services (and the networks of VCS organisations with which they are connected). Acknowledging both the potentials and limits to the scope of individual community gardening projects, I argue for these pathways to be thoroughly explored and resourced, in social prescribing

services. In 6.4.2, I consider 'sustainability' in relation to therapeutic gardening sessions, highlighting the mutual support that happens within them. Finally, 6.4.3 looks to issues of tensions and trade-offs within sessions, recalling the manifold potentials of community gardening sessions discussed in the opening chapter.

6.4.1 Creating and resourcing pathways to and through community growing spaces

Following observation and interviews with healthcare workers, Pinder et al. (2005) conclude that integrated care pathways (a kind of care plan or map) can exclude the networks of support which enable care, and "omit the plasticity of patients' personal circumstances and lived experience" (p775). Their observations have relevance for models of green social prescribing and therapeutic horticulture, in the recognition of the networking of care, and of how path-users' circumstances can defy simple path-making and -taking. I have documented a number of different pathways taken by members to and through the garden spaces, beginning variously with primary, secondary, and tertiary care services, self-referral and independent inquiry, and the accompanying of friends or family. Most of the research participants came to sessions for at least several months, the therapeutic qualities of place changing and accreting as they became more familiar with the garden spaces and communities, which themselves changed with prolonged engagement.

Protracted and situated pathways may foster certain therapeutic experiences. Feelings of belonging and ownership, for example, are cultivated over time and through practice (Pitt, 2013), and can have limited place transferability. In 3.3.2, I capture participants' reflections upon the pleasures of witnessing horticultural cycles, witnessing seasons change, and seeds, become saplings, become fruiting plants. Parallel and supportive of these pathways, for some participants, was the utilisation of healthcare services. For another set of participants, less represented in this research as participants, their pathways extended from gardens to other services. Participation at gardens was suspended, in some cases temporarily, and in other cases more permanently. On one occasion, somebody was directed instead to counselling services. In another, a practitioner contemplated where she might best redirect a member; another small VCS service came to mind, although she worried that they may also be underequipped for these specific support needs. Brief encounters with those trialling sessions suggest a number of other pathways, leading to the revisiting of referral services, onwards referrals to more appropriate destinations, or, possibly, no longer seeking support.

While pathways from primary care, to link workers, to garden organisations were taken, they were only some among a number of other pathways. With the expansion of social prescribing, some of the practitioners anticipated that their linkage to other services needed to be reinforced. Some felt they had knowledge of other services, relating this to their occupational backgrounds. Members should instead be viewed as entering a network of services, whose links must be strengthened through social prescribing, should member support needs necessitate non-linear movement between services. The likelihood of requiring movement between services is linked with the kind and number of support needs someone enters social prescribing services with, and the scope of the 'green' delivery organisation. Individuals with more singular and consistent (or alleviating) health needs, matched to the capacities of delivery organisations, may often follow more linear paths. Gibson et al. (2021) share client Eddie's experiences, whose concurrent poverty, type two diabetes, insecure living, and mental ill health shaped his non-linear path through social prescribing. Clients experiencing fewer challenges (and with more supportive relations) seemed to take more linear paths. The preparation, link-building, and resourcing required to support those with more complex needs is important, as social prescribing is sometimes promoted as suited to such needs. The establishing of interorganisational relationships is necessary, valuable, and potentially challenging, involving negotiating and wrangling with different rhythms, funding regimes, values, priorities, and organisational cultures. While a linear pathway may be taken in some cases, preparedness for other pathways acknowledges the realities of fluctuating wellbeing and support needs. The comfort and assuredness of practitioners in facilitating sessions, and providing 'low level' mental health support, related to their confidence in the existence of these linkages. Network- and path-mapping activities may be of benefit for those implementing social prescribing and therapeutic horticulture services. Influenced by the routes of members, Figure 13 represents the multiple pathways that might be considered in path-mapping.

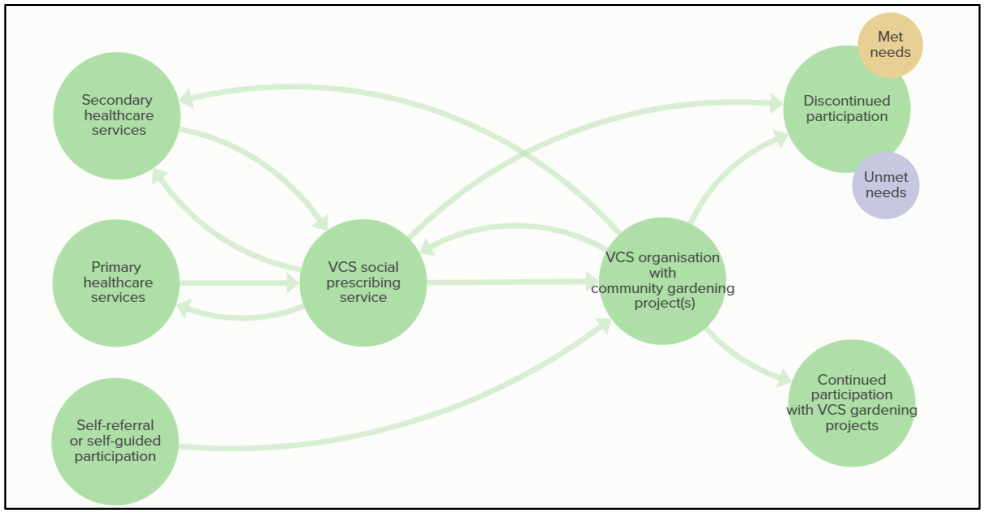


Figure 13: A diagram of pathways through healthcare ecologies

In such exercises, the possibility of health and wellbeing needs may remaining, increasing, or changing in nature should be accounted for. While many participants did view themselves as 'getting better', and adopted more support-providing positions, support needs sometimes remained, or were created with changing life circumstances. Wood et al. (2022) found similarly: "it was still difficult for some members to attend regularly or take part in all the activities. Staff and members described how declines in mental health, changes to medication or failure to take medication could cause members to disengage" (p8). In these cases, these staff allowed for garden participants to return when ready, rather than being discharged.

The need for the fortification of networked links with other services provides some insight into the scope of these organisations, in improving wellbeing. The positive experiences of participants attest to the sessions' strengths. The need for services for those with mild and moderate depression, or who might be more reluctant to approaching conventional healthcare services, has been noted by Baxter and Fancourt (2022), and by practitioners:

> "*It makes such a huge difference because, I've worked with a lot of men who've been very resistant to therapy. That hasn't worked for them, they do not want to talk about what's going on. You know, they don't want to take medication because of the stigma that's associated with it. So this is another way of like, nature - we'll call it nature therapy - is another way of people accessing help and support*" (Heather, practitioner, Pots-and-Plates)

Yet, there were bounds to the role they could play in fostering health and wellbeing. People struggling to begin pathways to gardens, or who needed support elsewhere, faced a number of challenges. Some experienced "*complex*" living circumstances, and health needs including physical illness, substance use issues, and neurodegenerative disease. Natasha described "*situational*" mental health problems, unemployment, and financial needs as prevalent locally, while Phillipa acknowledged that help may be needed before somebody was ready to engage with green social prescribing. When considering whether implementing green social prescribing or therapeutic horticulture can improve health and wellbeing in a locality, the capacities and nature of the whole health and healthcare ecology is relevant. As argued, in relation to the impact that GP-mediated pathways (particularly amid poor appointment availability) were felt to have on upon referrals, the success and capacity of the gardening sessions depended in part on other services. The availability and connectedness of a range of other services can support more appropriate referral practices throughout. Some health and support needs were beyond the capacities of these small VCS organisations to address. Griffith et al. (2023) have captured how social prescribers (and the services to which they can refer) can be bounded in their ability to meet the needs of services users, which

can be rooted in larger scale patterns of inequality and low resource: “there were limited opportunities for link workers to adapt the role to navigate the impact of austerity, high levels of local deprivation and dwindling third sector capacity” (p290). Reflecting on the experiences of Eddie (aforementioned) and other clients, Gibson et al. (2021) note that some of the challenges faced by people referred into social prescribing systems are beyond the capacities of the system, to address in a systemic and significant manner.

A reinforced networking with other (well-resourced) support-providing organisations (in the public and third sectors) is likely to accommodate a wider range of referred individuals, and provide organisations with more support and reassurance. However, the framing of social prescribing primarily as a means of reducing public spending risks overlooking the resourcing required throughout care ecologies, for prescribed gardening sessions and other referred-to activities to function well. While social prescribing sometimes contextualises health issues (Calderón-Larrañaga et al., 2022), Griffith et al. (2023) find that social prescribing can function as a neoliberal disciplining strategy, working towards the production of self-managing individuals who gradually require less support and resource. Griffith et al. and others suggest it has the potential to “obscure the need for wider investment” (p293) in healthcare and social determinants of health (see Dayson, 2017). These conversations usually take the health and wellbeing of people to be their focus, although parallel arguments have been made in relation to the potential for community gardens to contribute to towards the wellbeing of the nonhuman components of environments and ecologies. Such dialogues present gardens as pieces in a larger puzzle, valuable although not sufficient to create thriving ecologies and multispecies wellbeing. Recognising how urban agriculture can be interwoven with processes of neoliberalism, McClintock (2014) argues that it should be “simply one of many means to an end...towards a unified vision of food justice, and of just sustainability” (p166). “Keeping a garden will not, in itself, stop climate change”, says Walton (2021), “But that doesn’t mean that the kind of work that goes into tending a garden isn’t part of a bigger story of rebuilding the relations necessary to guide us out of this crisis” (p122). Some authors highlight how broader factors, including supportive political landscapes, contribute to the success of community gardens (Doyle, 2022; Jacob and Rocha, 2021; Skrunk and Richardson, 2019), while others describe the scale and diversity actions required to meet broad objectives like health equity, sustainable production, and biodiversity preservation (Koempel, 2023; Reynolds, 2015). Community gardening activities, socially prescribed or otherwise, are a node in broader wellbeing ecologies.

6.4.2 The sustainability of projects, organisations, and therapeutic outcomes

While usages of the term 'sustainability' vary, they are linked through their orientation towards the future, and towards preservation. In the contexts of green social prescribing and therapeutic horticulture, the longevity of projects, organisations, and therapeutic outcomes are important dimensions of sustainability. Social prescribing is often described as potentially cost saving; as such, there have been several explorations of its financial sustainability, with mixed results as to whether services "pay for themselves" (Maughan et al., 2016: p120; Wildman and Wildman, 2023) through reducing healthcare costs. The operational sustainability of social prescribing sits on the ability of referred-to VCS services to continue to run, which is often dependent on grant funding. As mentioned, models of social prescribing can be vague with regards to what comes after the prescription, and how therapeutic outcomes might be sustained. Some suggest that independent engagement with similar activities follows a period of prescribed activity.

Independence was counted among the objectives practitioners aspired to, in evaluating sessions. However, this typically entailed some independence from their own input as practitioners; interdependence between members was valued in this community-minded context. Many members occupied a dual position, both giving and receiving support, at different times, of varied kinds. The sessions were collective achievements. These projects developed and maintained places and (largely) situated communities; envisioning their benefit as the inculcation of certain context-independent qualities and relationships, within and between individuals, is an incomplete fit with the experiences of participants. Duff (2016) similarly suggests that qualities – in the given case, sociability, are "not entirely innate". "I feel Robert relax" (p68), he observers of a research participant, who became visibility more relaxed and outgoing as he walked into a familiar café. Duff calls sociability an 'affective capacity', enabled through the participant's practiced familiarity with the space, the comfort afforded by its furniture and gameboards, and the conviviality of fellow café-goers and staff. To an extent, the sociability, confidence, and connection to nature of the community gardening participants can be regarded similarly. Participants came to specific sessions for how they enabled them to be affected by, and affect, others. Qualities were somewhat relational and situated. The emergent enabling qualities of the growing spaces encouraged continued participation with them, rather than a progression onwards to other activities (or even, in some cases, to using the growing spaces outside of planned sessions).

Additionally, VCS organisations help maintain green spaces as well as projects. The sustainability of therapeutic *outcomes* is interwoven with the sustained management and access to green spaces, both of intervention spaces, and spaces to which people may and may not progress. Places and

communities are the interwoven 'units of concern' (Yates-Doerr and Carney, 2016) of wellbeing in therapeutic community gardening, not only individual members. For green spaces to work well as part of progression routes, place maintenance extends beyond physical, practical upkeep, towards the cultivation of a range sociomaterial constituents, affording feelings of safety and enablement. Efforts made by two members to garden outside of the sessions were seemingly stymied by the poor quality of local allotments, which were described by another participant as quite "*divided*". One member regularly attended his allotment, but continued to come to The Apple Grove for the more unique experiences, affects, and company afforded. Managing green spaces requires resource, often from the public and third sectors; (potential) cost-savings made to healthcare spending must not overlook the other forms of resourcing required for green social prescribing to function, and for opportunities for therapeutic encounters with nature (and communities) to endure. This is particularly important, as social prescribing may increase the demands placed upon VCS organisations. Others (Polley et al., 2020) have documented the dependence of social prescribing on the capacity of the VCS locally. Regional inequalities in VCS service provision can limit the equity-creating potential of this system.

Outside of the granting of access to the sites and tools, a number of members required little support from the practitioners, particularly those arriving through non-health pathways. As mentioned, The Apple Grove group became relatively self-sustaining, eventually requiring no practitioners to be present, although dependent upon a larger charity allowing them access to the area. Some of the participants arriving through health pathways did not meet with link workers for long periods, after joining the projects. In these ways, the projects had degrees of 'sustainability', defined as relatively self-supported participation. However, some sessions and participants continued to require higher levels of support through the fieldwork period. In these cases, practitioners and co-members provided a valuable resource, whose need for continued resourcing may only unfairly be deemed a sign of non-success. Angela described how, for some VCS sessions, a narrowly defined 'sustainability' is hard to achieve through the actions of the organisation alone, particularly when working in areas of deprivation:

> "*[those sessions are] never going to be sustainable. The sustainability for me, is the fact that we're helping people. And hopefully, either, stopping them having to use services. Or certainly reducing the level of service they need from statutory services or the NHS. You know, like, if we can address somebody's mental health, and help them, without them having to go through counselling, then I feel that's a sustainable model.*" (Angela, practitioner, The Kitchen Table)

Detailed throughout, facilitating sessions and maintaining spaces can involve substantial work and care. Glover et al. (2005) acknowledge these investments made, citing Stebbins (2000) in stating that leaders within these spaces found this work to be a form of 'agreeable obligation'. The tasks of facilitation felt to be agreeable, doable, and conducive to therapeutic experience varied between participants.

For the projects and pathways requiring longer-term resourcing, organisations must seek funding. While demands upon healthcare and social prescribing services may in some cases diminish through the uptake of VCS-mediated activity, there may be a related risk of the transfer of support service provision to a shorter-term and more precarious funding structure. While VCS activities are often delivered as short-term projects, they should be considered valuable services, resources, or community assets, requiring of enduring funding arrangements. Kaley et al. (2019) distinguish between ameliorative and transformative therapeutic 'journeys', arguing that the latter occurs when benefits extend beyond sessions, affecting participants' lives outside. In the former, therapeutic experience sits within feelings of more temporary relief or sanctuary found through continued engagement with therapeutic spaces, experienced as relatively boundaried from the otherwise everyday. At the growing spaces, both kinds of therapeutic journeys were taken. The continuing availability of specific places, and their relatively place-situated affordances, was valued.

6.4.3 Tensions and trade-offs

The opening literature review briefly tours the diverse potential benefits of community gardens: the roles they may play in influencing diets, bringing together diverse people, encouraging environmental caretaking, and facilitating movement, are some among these opportunities. Growing spaces have been found to be sites for the enacting of cultural wellbeing, for maintaining relationships with the human and nonhuman world, and for the anchoring of civic engagement. The therapeutic landscape experiences literature, in particular, holds space for these potentials, while acknowledging their contingency, nonuniversality, and the possibility for more ambivalent and negative landscape encounters. Whilst recognising and appreciating the multifacetedness of community garden experiences, there can be, in certain moments and places, trade-offs and tensions between their manifold potentials. In a New York community garden, Aptekar (2015) documents the diverse visions of the gardens held by different participants, and the processes and forces which threaten some while entrenching others. A slight mutual exclusivity, in potential orientations of sessions, was apparent at the growing spaces. Organisations themselves take

particular pathways, shaped by the interests, passions, and needs of their staff and members, as well as the constraints they operate under.

Community gardening, while potentially promoting more circumscribed 'health behaviours', has been utilised to support wellbeing, more broadly defined and focused. A debate continues to unfold (Rosol 2012), as to whether community growing initiatives can significantly and systemically promote food security and sovereignty (Koempel, 2023), tackle health inequalities (Miller, 2019), promote social justice (McClintock, 2014), and promote the wellbeing of environments and more-than-human communities (Pitt, 2018). At the growing spaces, the need to create inclusive and therapeutic environments conflicted, at times, with more direct aspirations to inculcate certain objectives, and ways of thinking and doing. A conscious and conspicuous orientation to what might be considered more outwardly 'political' objectives can be dissonant with certain members' understandings of growing spaces, or may surface issues around which conflicts may emerge. While some see community gardening and urban agriculture as overtly or quietly political, to others such an orientation can be a deterrent (Baudry and Eudes, 2016; Green, 1979). Certomà and Martellozzo (2019) describe many urban agriculture initiatives as having an "apolitical and post-political character" (p67; see also El Ouradi and Montambeault, 2023), and Leahy (2021) has characterised strands of the permaculture movement in similar terms. Affirming observations elsewhere (Nettle, 2014; Nazarea and Gagnon, 2021), desires to create more radical social and environmental change were somewhat embedded in the garden practices, having a character of what others have called quiet[ism] (Nonini, 2013), ordinary environmentalism (Milbourne, 2012), and everyday resistance (Scott, 1989, in Baudry and Eudes, 2016:). Campbell and Cornish (2021) caution against the privileging of more overtly and loudly oppositional practices, and recommend an inclusive consideration of the transformative potential of activist practices 'aslant' of power. Both Pink (2012) and D'Anieri (2023) acknowledge how growers operate in messy contexts, the latter using Tsing's (2015) concept of pericapitalism to show how growers' practices are neither wholly resistant nor compliant with the broader set of socioeconomic forces they operate alongside. The embedding of ideals within action may reduce conflict and widen appeal, and constitute prefigurative (Sandilands and Gersdorf, 2023) practices consonant with the practical orientation common in some activist and VCS settings (Nonini, 2013). However, others have noted the necessity of more explicitly addressing particular values and ideals, for their enduring cultivation. Pitt (2018), Myers (2017), and Ruiz-Ballesteros and Cáceres-Feria (2016) highlight how plant-human relations can be 'staged' in more and less caring ways; gardeners can both harm and nourish. Community gardens vary significantly in their (positive or negative) environmental impacts (Guitart et al., 2012; Hawes et al., 2023). Citing Murdoch (2006), Pitt (2013) acknowledges that the cultivation of ethical human-plant relationships

in the garden may require intentionality: “community gardeners might require some deliberate consideration of the nature of their gatherings with nonhumans if they are to have an ethical dividend” (p53) I agree, while acknowledging that this is not always appropriate or possible in therapeutic gardening sessions. Turner (2023) acknowledges that the capacity for practicing care for nonhumans is unequally distributed; this is manifest, I suggest, in moments and contexts where human wellbeing may be prioritised. I have shown that practitioners work through these tensions, through embedded ethics, behind-the-scenes work, and an openness to opportunities where they can further foster an ethic of care for nonhumans. Additionally, the pathway of The Apple Grove shows that the amenability of groups to such conversations may change as the purpose, age, and composition of the group changes.

Relatedly, Reynolds (2015) argues that urban agriculture practices must have some explicit focus on nurturing social justice, to maximise their capacity to create social change. While some participants pursued opportunities for learning and practicing in line with such broader aspirations (particularly in relation to permaculture), the need to create therapeutic spaces can sometimes be in tension with the more overt and systematic cultivation of social change in sessions. Additionally, cultivating a productive garden (and aiding others in developing and practicing the skills entailed) places demands on time and resources.

In a conversation with Phillip, he acknowledged some of the prioritisations and tensions faced by organisations. Enthusiastic about creating new ways of growing and sharing food, he described the relationship between trying to meet more immediate needs (including food insecurity and mental ill health), and creating new cultivation paradigms:

> “*creating an organisation and doing something which feeds people needs to happen very quickly, because people really need it now. But a change in paradigm…where you suddenly change all of your ways of doing things and living, takes a long long time. And so there's this tension between wanting to change the world, but knowing it takes a little while to do that*” (Phillip, practitioner, Let’sGrow)

Phillip was, and had been, involved in several organisations and movements which aimed to promote more harmonious ways of living with and as part of the natural world. Enactments of the tensions between objectives were visible in the pathways taken by both CICs. I have described how The Apple Grove group’s more familiar and direct discussions, and more arboriculturally productive work, accompanied a decreasing of group size, and a changing in its focus. Concurrently, Pots-and-Plates’ practitioner-driven activities became increasingly catering-driven, more extensively

facilitating the consumption of local food, while curtailing the volunteering offering. Sun et al. (2023) note that VCS organisations have their own 'central missions', which may or may not align well with providing extensive mental health provision. At Let'sGrow, an opportunity for Head Outdoors participants to gain a horticultural qualification arose, beginning as my regular fieldwork drew to a close. Revisiting the site in April of 2023, Thomas told me how the course became focal, and referrals less so:

> I asked Thomas how Head Outdoors was going; he reaffirmed that it [was not linked] with The Sage Project anymore…They were focusing on the course there, for now. I asked if they still took referrals, he said a few from [a 'bridge building' local authority service for people with disabilities]. They weren't actively recruiting people for it, and had lots more weekly sessions on now (April 2023)

Small VCS organisations offer many virtues, in working with local communities. They can be highly knowledgeable of local contexts, and may have established relationships with residents and other organisations. Their policies can be especially place-tailored, and their communication responsive and unbureaucratic. However, the pathways taken by these organisations and projects indicate that there can be some constraints to realising the broad range of possibilities attributed to community gardening. Single sessions and projects tended to privilege certain objectives, while others were backgrounded. Reducing these tensions within organisations may be, in part, a case of resourcing small organisations so as to increase their offerings and capacities. They may not be able to be met within single projects. Thomas describes how Let'sGrow facilitated a growing number of weekly sessions, several of which had slightly different focuses, and locations. After regular fieldwork, their offering seemed to expand – perhaps partially relating to the receding pandemic, and the longer duration the organisation had been operating for. The impact on social dynamics and garden experiences of multiple groups using the same space might usefully be explored in future research. Some of the objectives which small VCS organisations may aspire to, or be recruited towards, require actions and investments at sites and scales beyond the garden.

6.5 Conclusion

Building on a conceptualisation of community gardens as assemblages of varied elements, orientations, and affordances, this chapter has examined the place of health and wellbeing in these gardening projects. I have proposed that, in several of the projects, the gardens were therapeutic third places. Cultivating wellbeing and contentedness amongst members was one among several

project aims, pursued alongside and through horticultural practices and embedded socialities. Sessions embodied a flexibility and non-prescriptiveness with regards to the tasks and aims pursued, while offering practitioner- and peer-support, care, and understanding, grounded in implicit and explicit recognitions of experiences of ill health. The chapter has built on those prior, adopting a broad and relational understanding of the therapeutic. The elements (and their relations) configuring gardening spaces can shift and change over time. Included within these changes are therapeutic accretions, and the emergence of place-embedded therapeutic communities, indicating, I have argued, that longer-term relations with growing spaces ought to be anticipated and supported. Change, too, can occur as elements are introduced or reoriented. Health pathway referrals into community gardening spaces can constitute a potentially medicalising change, introducing particular support needs, staffing requirements, evaluation methods, project aims, and connections with places elsewhere. Some gardens may be able to accommodate and resource such shifts, adjusted alongside their other aims, while others may drift towards other arrangements and objectives as time progresses.

The notion of pathways has been used to examine how garden project assemblages evolve, and to consider how members go to and through community gardening spaces (with a particular focus on individuals arriving through health-related channels). The experiences of members demonstrate multiple potential routes to gardens, patterns of engagement, and journeys onwards. Linear models of social prescribing, I have shown, represent only one route an individual may take. Planning for a multiplicity of pathways, in green social prescribing services, is realistic; individuals may have needs beyond the scope of referred-to organisations to address alone, and needs can grow, change, or lessen over time. The mapping of paths is likely to aid in the meeting of wellbeing needs, while also providing practitioners at referred-to organisations reassurance. For such maps to be followed, other healthcare or nonmedical services (where appropriate) must exist, and have capacity. Thus, I propose an understanding of therapeutic community gardening projects as nodes in broader health and wellbeing ecologies, whose success depends in part on other nodes in the network. Pathways untrodden, due to complex living situations and health concerns, suggest the expansiveness of wellbeing ecologies.

7. Conclusion

The impetus for this interdisciplinary project was twofold. Firstly, I sought to develop an ethnographic understanding of gardening and growing practices in a region of the North of England, with a particular focus on how they may contribute to wellbeing. Recognising the different orientations of such practices (in the interview-based pilot project and wider literatures), and their resonance with a range of challenges pressing on human and nonhuman communities, I set out to explore community gardening and growing in Hazelford. Gardening and growing sessions were attended regularly, with an aim to learn what they might bring about, how they were understood, and how they may reproduce, transform, or resist wider discourses (particularly around health and wellbeing). Understandings of members' experiences, and of gardening projects, were developed in conversation with geographical literatures positing therapeutic landscape experiences. Secondly, this study responds to the recently expanding efforts to promote engagement with gardens and outdoors spaces via healthcare pathways. I have researched green social prescribing into VCS-led projects. Taking influence from anthropological literatures describing medicalisation processes, I investigated the ways in which bridge-building with healthcare services might (mutually or otherwise) influence the organisations and projects within these pathways and networks. With prominent and recent recognition of gardening as potentially health-promoting, questions of who it may 'work' for, and how, have become especially salient; questions that have guided this research. My illustration of the relational processes by which gardens improve wellbeing provides insight into their scope and specificity. I conclude this ethnographic exploration with key reflections on cultivating wellbeing in Hazelford community growing spaces, the theoretical contributions entailed, and their implications for public health.

7.1 Key themes and reflections, and their implications

7.1.1 Rhythms, temporalities, and affective microgeographies

Rhythm, pace, and temporality recur as themes throughout the thesis. Becoming familiar with the rhythms of a situated group can contribute to feelings of belonging, and comfort in traversing differentiated spaces. Dominant amongst them were horticultural, seasonal rhythms: a more-than-human seasonality (Whitehouse, 2017) comprised of changes in weather and foliage, but also, in the activities coordinated around these changes. These changes had mnemonic, evocative qualities,

recalling the previous year's activities. Knowing a place in all-seasons, through experience, is a particularly intimate attachment. In these changes were novelty and familiarity, flexibility and structure. The rhythms and pace of organisations were not pre-determined, but shifting, evident in changing affordances of different Wenlock Park sessions. Garden groups tend to develop their own patterns and paces, finding ways of working together that become familiar (Edensor, 2010; in Pitt, 2013). Where this does not happen, 'communities' may not develop. The routined motion of attending weekly sessions constituted an entrenching rhythm in the lives of participants. It provided beneficial feelings of motion and anticipation, and interacted with other rhythms. In some cases, routine attendance broke down periods of dealing with difficulties faced through the week into shorter, more manageable sections. In others, regular gardening helped sustain 'busy' life tempos amongst other activities. Garden microgeographies were rhythmically textured, often, with inclusive opportunities to seek slowness or motion. Rhythms themselves can be considered an aspect of wellbeing, converging with lay understandings of health and wellbeing relating to routine, activity, and getting outside.

There are three informative subthemes, under which to discuss rhythm. The first is that of *converging* rhythms and temporalities, relevant as an aspect of therapeutic experience. The temporalities and rhythms of sessions and activities shaped their affordances. In 3.3.2, I described the forward-looking character of gardening, and the ways in which gardeners can become beneficially bound up in horticultural timescales and cycles. Another significant convergence is present in the time taken for anxieties to assuage and for communities to develop, and in the adapted provision of Head Outdoors sessions. Additionally, some members were experiencing health or caregiving-related challenges, requiring support over a longer duration. Many of the therapeutic 'outcomes' of community gardening had particular rhythms and temporalities, to which some of the garden sessions matched or adapted. Therapeutically converging rhythms have been explored as 'eurhythmia' (Blue, 2017), particularly in relation to the enduring 'entraining' of individuals within practices.

The notion of *diverging* rhythms provides insight into the work of facilitating sessions; I have described several, negotiated by organisers to maintain groups and spaces. Blue, drawing on Lefebvre (1992/2004), speaks of 'arrhythmia' in social practices. These small VCS organisations were embedded in networks of other organisations, who granted access to sites, funded projects, or referred members. This networking could be a virtue, but also entailed efforts to work amid differing rhythms. Horticultural and bureaucratic rhythms could tend towards divergence, while differing organisational paces also had to be managed. Funding arrangements could contribute towards a divergence from temporalities favourable to specific projects, potentially changing their affordances.

In harmony with these findings, Kotsila et al. (2020) describe the "long-term care, patience, flexibility and time" (p9) needed to maintain valued community gardens, and identify clashing temporalities as a threat to them.

The establishment of *polyrhythmic* microgeographies was an asset within sessions, an aspect of their flexibility. Participants vary in their needs, interests, and moods, and affinities and needs inevitably fluctuate. The polyrhythmic texturing of spaces, achieved through space and activity, was accommodative against variations and fluctuations, to a degree. Sequential polyrhythmia helped constitute groups, bringing people together in routined moments of movement and collection (often 'break, activity, commensality').

These reflections on rhythm offer two primary implications. As others have argued, participating in (and facilitating) practices can involve a eurhythmic aligning of rhythms and temporalities. Therapeutic gardening, perhaps especially for chronic and mental health conditions, can favour longer temporalities of engagement. Garden communities can take time to develop, and horticultural happenings often unfold on the scale of months or years. The benefit found in the convergence of Head Outdoors sessions with these longer therapeutic temporalities indicates that short 'course' or 'dose' models of green social prescribing may be limited in their outcomes (see Bell et al., 2019). The second implication relates to the constitution and facilitation of therapeutic community gardening sessions. The beneficial experiences enabled by these (poly)rhythmically and physically differentiated spaces provide support for the cultivation and augmentation of these features, in projects aiming to foster wellbeing through green space. Practitioners and members aid in the creation and navigation of these microgeographies.

7.1.2 Choreographing atmospheres, maintaining assemblages

Responding to calls within human geography and the wider social sciences for greater attention to the engineering of affective atmospheres and enabling places (Duff, 2016; Lin, 2015), this thesis illustrates with detail some of the work and care underlying therapeutic landscape experiences. Detailed throughout are the practical, emotional, caring, and administrative labours involved in facilitating community gardening sessions at the small VCS organisation level. Descriptions of the maintaining of polyrhythms within sessions, and the negotiating of diverging rhythms, add detail and colour to understandings of such labours, and surrounding conditions and constraints. Synthesising anthropological work on tinkering (Mol, 2010) with concepts of atmospheres and assemblage, I have captured the types of atmospheric balancing entailed within creating supportive spaces, contributing

an understanding of atmospheres as nested, textured, and multiple. Of particular focus has been the cultivation of both safety and structure *and* flexibility and freedom. Notable, too, are the negotiated tensions between different potential orientations and objectives of sessions. Practitioners emerge as skilled figures, whose attuned care, social capital, and accumulated knowledges are vital to the function and feel of therapeutic community gardening sessions. I have shown how they tinker and wrangle, finding Liyanagunawardena's (2023) concept to have some applicability in the small VCS organisation context. Alongside practitioners, I have highlighted how regular garden members contributed much to the feel and functions of sessions: providing support, guidance, and company, and texturing space through mood, activity, and movement. The value of practitioners and regular members in configuring and holding together these assemblages has practical implications, providing further support for the resourcing of staff roles, and longer-term member engagements with therapeutic community gardening spaces.

7.1.3 Health ecologies, therapeutic third places, and reflections on medicalisation

For most of the fieldwork period, The Apple Grove and Head Outdoors sessions constituted therapeutic third places. The experiences of members at these sessions resonate with existing literature on third places and enabling places, however, the Head Outdoors sessions in particular have warranted further reflections. The distinctively safe and enabling character of these sessions related to their construction as a specific kind of enabling place. Head Outdoors members described how the underlying, "*subliminal*" recognition that co-members were experiencing similar issues supported feelings of comfort and camaraderie, and the providing of generalised support. The prior orientation of The Apple Grove (alongside its construction as a safe and special place) had similar effects, although shifting over time towards different affordances. Yet, important also for therapeutic experience was the backgrounding of health and wellbeing, for much of the time during sessions. I have argued that enacting wellbeing and recovery can be supported through access to these kinds of therapeutic third places; flexible spaces which have a certain distance from conventional healthcare discourses and practices. Throughout, I have illustrated the wider orientations, meanings, and roles of these community gardening practices. The concept of therapeutic third places represents an advocation for nonbiomedicalised spaces, with a particular relationality between the therapeutic and more-than-therapeutic. Brought together, in this framing, are anthropological understandings of medicalisation, geographical concepts of the therapeutic, and the third place theorising of writers within the broader social sciences.

Turk et al. (2022) notice the potential for social prescribing schemes to create hierarchies of volunteers (owing to stigma), and argue for the incorporation of socially prescribed members within larger volunteer groups. However, at Head Outdoors, members seemed to appreciate a space oriented towards supporting those experiencing mental ill health. Seemingly, there was not a hierarchy of members within the organisations, owing to the norms of inclusion and non-judgement fostered in the organisations along these lines. Pots-and-Plates felt that creating additional sessions for green social prescribing was necessary: pre-existing sessions did not have the capacity or accommodations required to support the needs of all members who might arrive via these pathways. Recruiting small VCS organisations within social prescribing can create particular resourcing needs, which can include the support needed to run additional sessions, or employ staff with health-related qualifications and occupational experiences. Specific resourcing needs may vary depending on the nature of referrals: organisations generally felt well placed to support those with 'low level' mental health needs. Where members had multiple or higher support needs, the need for VCS organisations to be networked within functioning healthcare ecologies sometimes became apparent.

Green social prescribing had some influence over the structure and function of these organisations. The organisations did view supporting wellbeing as part of their missions, and could accommodate some members arriving via health pathways. Organisations sought funding that allowed them to support wellbeing in their own distinctive ways, alongside their other aims. As health-related resourcing arrangements ended, sessions seemed to move along different pathways, as groups evolved, and other organisational aims were foregrounded. Both of the participating CICs were relatively young, negotiating different aims and funding sources, and adapting to pandemic and (arguably) post-pandemic landscapes. If incorporating community gardening sessions within healthcare pathways, it is important that organisations are appreciated (and valued, Polley et al. 2020) for their distinctive offerings, aims, and scope. Using community gardening groups for more specific, medicalised therapeutic aims may require additional resourcing, and may sometimes be inappropriate. The evolution of gardening groups seemed to push back against overmedicalisation. The decision to transition Taking Notice away from conventional (primary care) social prescribing routes suggests that less biomedicalised understandings of wellbeing often underly engagement with community gardens. Additionally, poor general practice provision locally was felt to increase the risk of inappropriate referrals.

Notably, organisations were concerned with the development of communities and places, as well as the wellbeing of members. Pots-and-Plates and Let'sGrow practitioners were passionate, also, about the generation and reproduction of *practices*, keen to sustain local food growing and cooking to

different extents. This represents a divergence from the usual unit of concern in healthcare systems and discourses: the individual patient-body (Yates-Doerr and Carney, 2016). I have described how wellbeing in Head Outdoors related to the situated family-like *group*, constituted of a number of different roles - with some variation in the people who occupied them week-to-week. This group, like the others, was largely tied to place. The places and communities created through community gardening were a kind of alternate every day, incorporated into routines while also offering escape and difference (Jensen and Sørensen, 2020). Together, these findings demonstrate that therapeutic outcomes are bound up in the sustainability of specific sessions, growing spaces, and communities. Networks, places, relational skills, and relationships can be considered important therapeutic outcomes, alongside any more individually inhering skills or confidences developed.

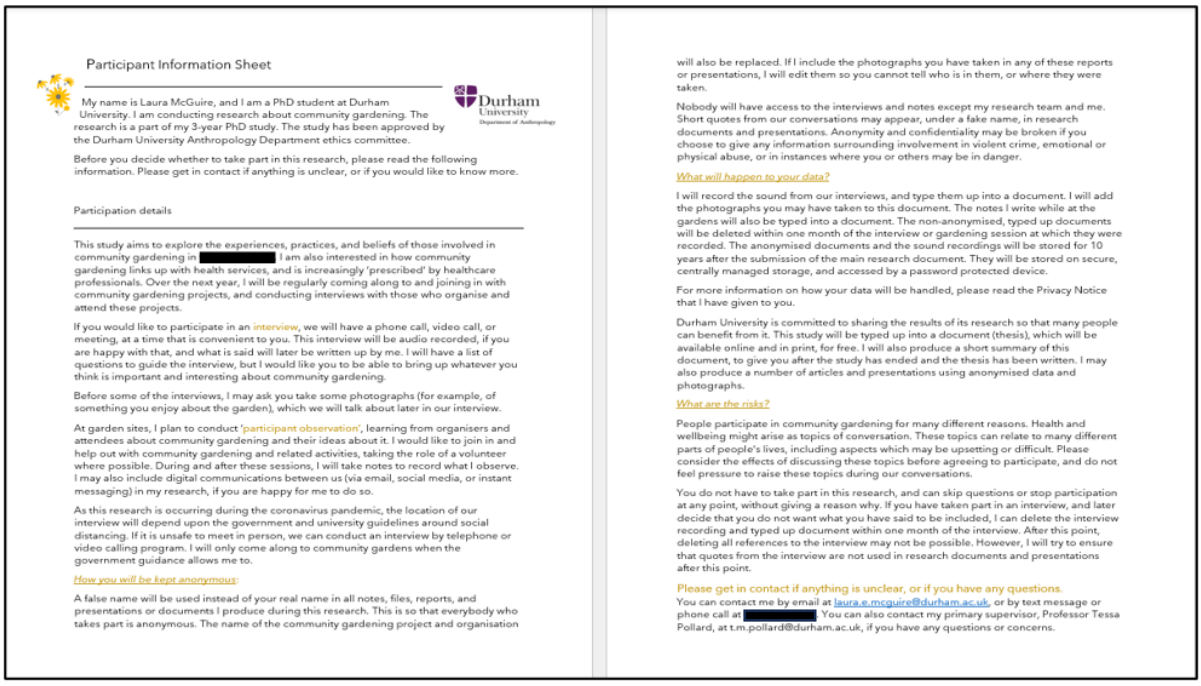
7.2 Concluding comments

In this study, gardens and growing spaces are presented as horticultural assemblages, materially and affectively textured, and shifting. These assemblages are constituted by plants, landscape features, communities of garden-goers, by interrelated practices, and the patterns and rhythms of movement they afford. While *assembly* is not fully reliant on human intentionality, I have elucidated some of the labour, care, and resourcing it sits upon. This research sits alongside work which explores garden connections critically (Pitt, 2018), and considers the constitution, creation, and outcomes of therapeutic assemblages and atmospheres (Duff, 2011; 2012; Smith, 2021), and the attuned and constrained caring work involved in their maintenance (Mol, 2010). Links have been drawn with writing which analyses the role of rhythm(s) in social practice (Blue, 2017; Phoenix and Bell, 2019), and considers third places with a particular focus on wellbeing (Glover and Parry, 2009). The project builds upon critiques of medicalisation, and illustrations of non-biomedicalised spaces of care and health (Yates-Doerr and Carney, 2016) within medical anthropology. An interdisciplinary, ethnographic approach has permitted the exposition of a multifaceted, relational, and place-aware account of how community gardens are made and experienced, and how processes of medicalisation and demedicalisation may unfold in garden spaces. The influence of several areas of scholarship is evident in the proposed conceptualisation of therapeutic third places. To geographical concepts of therapeutic landscapes and assemblages, affective atmospheres, and emotional geographies, I contribute an articulation of affective microgeographies and their enabling texturing. As an early ethnographic study of green social prescribing, the project adds to the growing body of work which critically analyses social prescribing. The notion of community gardens as interdependent nodes within a broader health ecology offers insight into the scope and

contingencies of green social prescribing in supporting wellbeing. The implications of this project have wider relevance within critical public health research, and to organisations and individuals delivering or providing access to community gardening activities.

Appendix A: Research forms

i) Information sheet provided to organisers



Participant Information Sheet

My name is Laura McGuire, and I am a PhD student at Durham University. I am conducting research about community gardening. The research is a part of my 3-year PhD study. The study has been approved by the Durham University Anthropology Department ethics committee.

Before you decide whether to take part in this research, please read the following information. Please get in contact if anything is unclear, or if you would like to know more.

Participation details

This study aims to explore the experiences, practices, and beliefs of those involved in community gardening in [redacted]. I am also interested in how community gardening links up with health services, and is increasingly 'prescribed' by healthcare professionals. Over the next year, I will be regularly coming along to and joining in with community gardening projects, and conducting interviews with those who organise and attend these projects.

If you would like to participate in an interview, we will have a phone call, video call, or meeting, at a time that is convenient to you. This interview will be audio recorded, if you are happy with that, and what is said will later be written up by me. I will have a list of questions to guide the interview, but I would like you to be able to bring up whatever you think is important and interesting about community gardening.

Before some of the interviews, I may ask you take some photographs (for example, of something you enjoy about the garden), which we will talk about later in our interview.

At garden sites, I plan to conduct 'participant observation', learning from organisers and attendees about community gardening and their ideas about it. I would like to join in and help out with community gardening and related activities, taking the role of a volunteer where possible. During and after these sessions, I will take notes to record what I observe. I may also include digital communications between us (via email, social media, or instant messaging) in my research, if you are happy for me to do so.

As this research is occurring during the coronavirus pandemic, the location of our interview will depend upon the government and university guidelines around social distancing. If it is unsafe to meet in person, we can conduct an interview by telephone or video calling program. I will only come along to community gardens when the government guidance allows me to.

How you will be kept anonymous:

A false name will be used instead of your real name in all notes, files, reports, and presentations or documents I produce during this research. This is so that everybody who takes part is anonymous. The name of the community gardening project and organisation will also be replaced. If I include the photographs you have taken in any of these reports or presentations, I will edit them so you cannot tell who is in them, or where they were taken.

Nobody will have access to the interviews and notes except my research team and me. Short quotes from our conversations may appear, under a fake name, in research documents and presentations. Anonymity and confidentiality may be broken if you choose to give any information surrounding involvement in violent crime, emotional or physical abuse, or in instances where you or others may be in danger.

What will happen to your data?

I will record the sound from our interviews, and type them up into a document. I will add the photographs you may have taken to this document. The notes I write while at the gardens will also be typed into a document. The non-anonymised, typed up documents will be deleted within one month of the interview or gardening session at which they were recorded. The anonymised documents and the sound recordings will be stored for 10 years after the submission of the main research document. They will be stored on secure, centrally managed storage, and accessed by a password protected device.

For more information on how your data will be handled, please read the Privacy Notice that I have given to you.

Durham University is committed to sharing the results of its research so that many people can benefit from it. This study will be typed up into a document (thesis), which will be available online and in print, for free. I will also produce a short summary of this document, to give you after the study has ended and the thesis has been written. I may also produce a number of articles and presentations using anonymised data and photographs.

What are the risks?

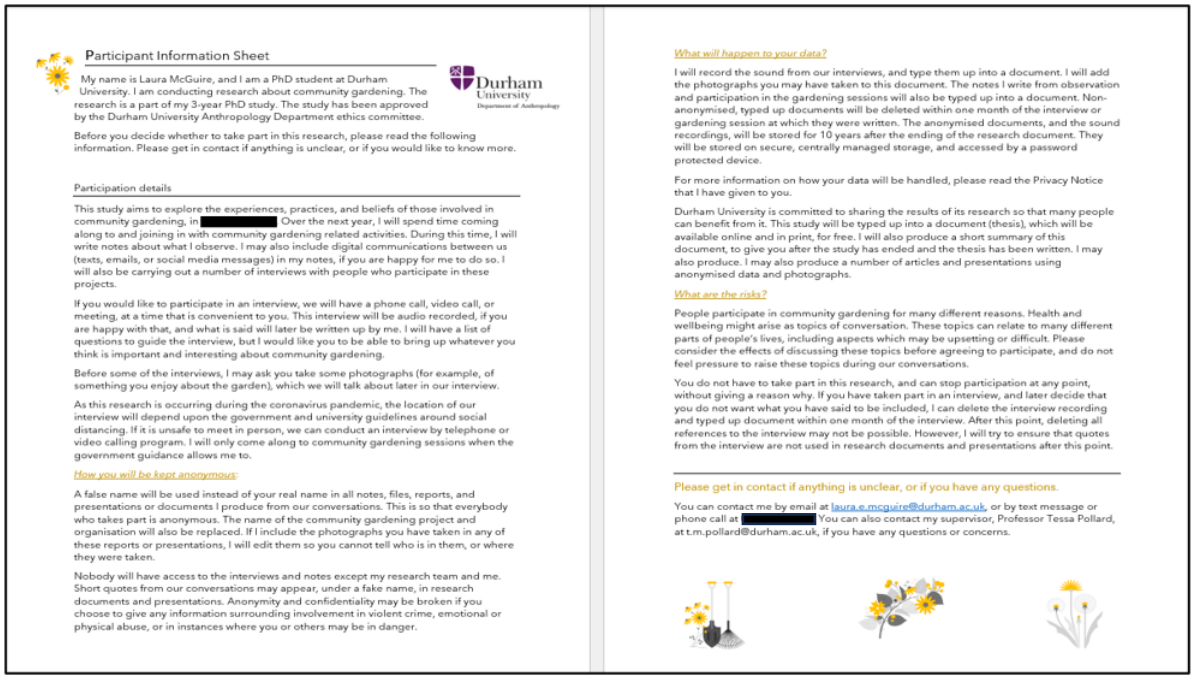
People participate in community gardening for many different reasons. Health and wellbeing might arise as topics of conversation. These topics can relate to many different parts of people's lives, including aspects which may be upsetting or difficult. Please consider the effects of discussing these topics before agreeing to participate, and do not feel pressure to raise these topics during our conversations.

You do not have to take part in this research, and can skip questions or stop participation at any point, without giving a reason why. If you have taken part in an interview, and later decide that you do not want what you have said to be included, I can delete the interview recording and typed up document within one month of the interview. After this point, deleting all references to the interview may not be possible. However, I will try to ensure that quotes from the interview are not used in research documents and presentations after this point.

Please get in contact if anything is unclear, or if you have any questions.

You can contact me by email at laura.e.mcguire@durham.ac.uk, or by text message or phone call at [redacted]. You can also contact my primary supervisor, Professor Tessa Pollard, at t.m.pollard@durham.ac.uk, if you have any questions or concerns.

ii) Information sheet provided to members



Participant Information Sheet

My name is Laura McGuire, and I am a PhD student at Durham University. I am conducting research about community gardening. The research is a part of my 3-year PhD study. The study has been approved by the Durham University Anthropology Department ethics committee.

Before you decide whether to take part in this research, please read the following information. Please get in contact if anything is unclear, or if you would like to know more.

Participation details

This study aims to explore the experiences, practices, and beliefs of those involved in community gardening, in [redacted]. Over the next year, I will spend time coming along to and joining in with community gardening related activities. During this time, I will write notes about what I observe. I may also include digital communications between us (texts, emails, or social media messages) in my notes, if you are happy for me to do so. I will also be carrying out a number of interviews with people who participate in these projects.

If you would like to participate in an interview, we will have a phone call, video call, or meeting, at a time that is convenient to you. This interview will be audio recorded, if you are happy with that, and what is said will later be written up by me. I will have a list of questions to guide the interview, but I would like you to be able to bring up whatever you think is important and interesting about community gardening.

Before some of the interviews, I may ask you take some photographs (for example, of something you enjoy about the garden), which we will talk about later in our interview.

As this research is occurring during the coronavirus pandemic, the location of our interview will depend upon the government and university guidelines around social distancing. If it is unsafe to meet in person, we can conduct an interview by telephone or video calling program. I will only come along to community gardening sessions when the government guidance allows me to.

How you will be kept anonymous:

A false name will be used instead of your real name in all notes, files, reports, and presentations or documents I produce from our conversations. This is so that everybody who takes part is anonymous. The name of the community gardening project and organisation will also be replaced. If I include the photographs you have taken in any of these reports or presentations, I will edit them so you cannot tell who is in them, or where they were taken.

Nobody will have access to the interviews and notes except my research team and me. Short quotes from our conversations may appear, under a fake name, in research documents and presentations. Anonymity and confidentiality may be broken if you choose to give any information surrounding involvement in violent crime, emotional or physical abuse, or in instances where you or others may be in danger.

What will happen to your data?

I will record the sound from our interviews, and type them up into a document. I will add the photographs you may have taken to this document. The notes I write from observation and participation in the gardening sessions will also be typed up into a document. Non-anonymised, typed up documents will be deleted within one month of the interview or gardening session at which they were written. The anonymised documents, and the sound recordings, will be stored for 10 years after the ending of the research document. They will be stored on secure, centrally managed storage, and accessed by a password protected device.

For more information on how your data will be handled, please read the Privacy Notice that I have given to you.

Durham University is committed to sharing the results of its research so that many people can benefit from it. This study will be typed up into a document (thesis), which will be available online and in print, for free. I will also produce a short summary of this document, to give you after the study has ended and the thesis has been written. I may also produce. I may also produce a number of articles and presentations using anonymised data and photographs.

What are the risks?

People participate in community gardening for many different reasons. Health and wellbeing might arise as topics of conversation. These topics can relate to many different parts of people's lives, including aspects which may be upsetting or difficult. Please consider the effects of discussing these topics before agreeing to participate, and do not feel pressure to raise these topics during our conversations.

You do not have to take part in this research, and can stop participation at any point, without giving a reason why. If you have taken part in an interview, and later decide that you do not want what you have said to be included, I can delete the interview recording and typed up document within one month of the interview. After this point, deleting all references to the interview may not be possible. However, I will try to ensure that quotes from the interview are not used in research documents and presentations after this point.

Please get in contact if anything is unclear, or if you have any questions.

You can contact me by email at laura.e.mcguire@durham.ac.uk, or by text message or phone call at [redacted]. You can also contact my supervisor, Professor Tessa Pollard, at t.m.pollard@durham.ac.uk, if you have any questions or concerns.

iii) Abridged privacy notice

The Privacy Notice

Durham University has a responsibility under data protection legislation to provide individuals with information about how we process their personal data. As part of this, it is important that I tell you why I am collecting your data, how it will be used, and who it will be shared with. This is a short summary, and a more detailed version of this privacy notice is attached.

What data is going to be collected?

The data that will be collected includes notes taken during and after community gardening sessions, audio recordings of interviews, typed-up interviews, digital communications with me (texts, instant messages, and emails) and any photographs that you wish to share with me. I may also ask your name, contact details, and information on employment, residence, and views on community gardening, wellbeing, and social prescribing. Data is being collected as part of a PhD research project.

How is the data stored?

All personal data will be held securely, and shared only with the research team (which includes me and my four supervisors). I will anonymise the data – giving participants and places fake names. Short quotes from interviews and conversations may be used in the final document that I produce during my PhD, or in articles or presentations that I produce.

Non-anonymised data will be destroyed within one month of its collection, while I anonymise it. Anonymised data, email addresses, and audio files will be stored for 10 years, in case the university needs to see that my work is accurate. Consent forms will be destroyed within 6 months of handing in the final research document, once I have given participants feedback on the study. If you have any questions about data storage and management, you can contact me, my supervisors, or Durham University's data protection officer (university.secretary@durham.ac.uk).

If you decide that you no longer want to be a part of this research, please let me, my supervisors, or one of the community gardening organisers know. Non-anonymised data can be deleted within one month of its collection.

If you have any questions about data management or storage, you can contact me (laura.e.mcguire@durham.ac.uk, [redacted] my supervisors (t.m.pollard@durham.ac.uk), or Durham University's Data Protection Office (university/secretary@durham.ac.uk).

iv) Consent form (interviews)

Consent form - interview

Durham University
Department of Anthropology

	Please tick or initial each box
I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet dated [../ /] and the privacy notice for the project.	
I have had enough time to consider the information and ask any questions I might have, and I am satisfied with the answers I have been given.	
I understand who will have access to personal data provided, how the data will be stored, and what will happen to the data at the end of the project.	
I agree to take part in the project.	
I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving a reason.	
I agree to interviews being audio-recorded and later written-up in full for analysis. Quotations from these interviews may be used in the published research. I do not agree to my real name being used in research outputs.	
I understand that my data will be anonymous. This anonymity is with the exception of involvement in violent crime, emotional/physical abuse or similar situations where I or others are deemed to be in danger.	
I consent to the use of my photos for this project and any publications (such as reports, articles). No photos containing clearly identifiable people will be used in any publications.	
I consent to data being used in the researcher's PhD project, lasting from approximately May 2021 to January 2023.	

Please circle yes or no, indicating whether you would be interested in receiving a summary report of the findings of the research: yes / no

Please get in contact if anything is unclear, or if you have any questions.

You can contact me by email at laura.e.mcguire@durham.ac.uk, or by text message or phone call at [redacted]. You can also contact my supervisor, Professor Tessa Pollard, at t.m.pollard@durham.ac.uk, if you have any questions or concerns.

v) Consent form (interviews and participant observation)

Consent form – interview and participant observation

Durham University
Department of Anthropology

I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet dated [../ /] and the privacy notice for the study.	
I have had enough time to consider the information and ask any questions I might have, and I am satisfied with the answers I have been given.	
I understand who will have access to personal data provided, how the data will be stored, and what will happen to the data at the end of the project.	
I agree to take part in the project.	
I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving a reason.	
I agree to interviews being audio-recorded and later written-up in full for analysis. Quotations from these interviews may be used in the published research. I do not agree to my real name being used in research outputs.	
I agree that digital communications (such as emails, text messages, or instant messages) between myself and the researcher, exchanged after the return of this consent form, may be typed up and included in this research.	
I understand that my data will be anonymous. This anonymity is with the exception of involvement in violent crime, emotional/physical abuse or similar situations where I or others are deemed to be in danger.	
I consent to the use of my photos for this project and any publications (such as reports, articles). No photos containing clearly identifiable people will be used in any publications.	
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Please circle yes or no, indicating whether you would be interested in receiving a summary report of the findings of the research: yes / no

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You can contact me by email at laura.e.mcguire@durham.ac.uk, or by text message or phone call at [redacted]. You can also contact my supervisor, Professor Tessa Pollard, at t.m.pollard@durham.ac.uk, if you have any questions or concerns.

Appendix B: Interview schedules

i) Generic interview schedule: members

Interview schedule

Thank you for making the time to speak with me, I really appreciate it

In this interview, I hope to learn about a little bit more about you, your experiences with nature-based activities, your beliefs and ideas about them. As part of PhD research into community gardening, health, and wellbeing. Are you happy with me recording the conversation, so that I can type it up later?

Please feel free to bring up anything that you feel is relevant or that you would like me to know – tangents are more than welcome. As mentioned in the consent form, **you can stop or pause the interview at any time, without needing to give a reason why. You can also skip questions if you would like**. Do you feel that you understood everything in the consent form, information sheet, and privacy notice? Are you **happy with everything in the consent form**? Any Qs about the research

Right, are you happy to begin? **Start recording**

- Talk me through some of the sessions you've been involved with?
  - Do you have to travel far to get here?
  - How local are you to the activities? Are you from the area? Did you know it well?
- Have you been involved in similar (nature-based activities) things before?
  - How did you come to enjoy and be knowledgeable about nature-based activities?
- What activities do you like doing most at the [community garden]
- How would you describe the CIC, and the activities that you go to?
- When you first started coming, what did you hope to get out of coming?
  - What do you get out of coming to the [community garden] now?
  - What interests you about the activities?
- What sorts of things do you do, or try to do, to stay well, or look after your wellbeing?
- Do you see a relationship between nature-based activities and wellbeing?
- Is there anything that you don't like about coming to [community garden], or find challenging?
  - What things get in the way of coming?
- Do you think coming to the group influences the rest of your week? / Has your week or routine changed since coming to the garden?
  - Do you see people from the group, outside of the garden?
  - Do you do gardening at home?
  - Have any of the cooking practices influenced your cooking at home?
  - Have the sessions changed your routines?
- How did you come to be involved in the sessions?
  - Name of org
  - Name of staff member/link worker
  - Do they check in on you?
  - Do you remember the first session?
- Cooking is a big part of some sessions: how would you define healthy eating?
- Have you met many people through coming to the sessions?
  - Did you know the area well before coming?
  - Do you have much contact with participants outside of sessions?
- What do you think is important about sessions/CIC?
- Do you have any favourite sessions?
- In the pilot research, these themes came out: activism, community building, environmentalism, religion – would you agree with any of these things? Do they ring true to you?

Closing points

- Ask demographic information
- How far do you have to travel to get to the site?
- Are there any questions that you would like to ask, or concluding remarks you wish to add?

ii) Generic interview schedule: practitioners

Interview schedule – for organisers

- Thank you for making the time to participate in an interview
- I hope to learn about:
  - Your experience of, and thoughts about, the activities that you've been involved with while working at [CIC]
  - About you, and your thoughts, opinions, what you think is important or valuable about nature-based activity/community gardening and wellbeing
- Of course, you can **stop or pause** the interview at any time, and **skip** questions, if you would like to
- Do you have any **questions** about the consent forms, etc?

Questions

- Please could you give me a bit of an overview of the activities/sessions that [CIC] runs, that you're involved in?
  - How have they changed since you started?
  - Is the work you do now different to what you envisioned when you set up [CIC]?
- How did you go about setting up [CIC]?
- How are most of the activities funded?
- How would you describe:
  - CIC + their broader activities?
  - Specific sessions?
- How did you become interested in, and knowledgeable about, nature-based activities/community gardening?
- In which ways to people come to know about the activities?
- What sorts of local needs do these activities respond to?
- What contact do you have with participants outside of the sessions?
- Could you tell me about what it is like working in partnership with other organisations?
- What do you think is important about the activities the group does are important?
- What are you trying to encourage or change through these activities?
- How do you evaluate whether a session has gone well? What sorts of things do you look for?
- Where would you like to see [CIC] in 5 years?
- What are some of the challenges associated with organising and running these activities? And meeting these needs?
- What are some of the biggest barriers to participation in nature-based activity/community gardening?
- How do you envisage the social change that you create, or the goals you work towards, being realised on a wider scale?
- Do you see a relationship between community gardening and wellbeing?
- How has the coronavirus pandemic impacted the group? How has the group responded?
- How do you feel about the idea of social prescribing, of people being referred to the group, by those working in healthcare services?
  - Have you had any experience with this happening?
  - If yes, how has this impacted the community gardening activities?
  - Did you hear from the link worker from last year again?
  - Do you have any contact with GPs, or other healthcare services? Which services is mostly contact from?
- How would you define health and wellbeing?
- What are the differences between different sites and sessions?
- In the pilot research, these themes came out: activism, community building, environmentalism, religion – would you agree with any of these things? Do they ring true to you?

Appendix C: Additional site, organisation, and participant information

i) The community gardening and growing sessions descriptions

Community gardening sessions	Description
Head Outdoors	A weekly therapeutic community gardening session at Wenlock Park, in Dawsby. The session was facilitated by Let'sGrow. Members arrived via health-oriented pathways, including referrals from VCS organisations, and self-referral.
Wenlock Welcome	A weekly gardening and cooking session at Wenlock Park, in Dawsby. The session was facilitated by Let'sGrow, The Kitchen Table, and other local VCS organisations. A community shop, offering free and low-cost food, operated at Wenlock Park as part of this more informal session. Cooking sessions were also facilitated, during these sessions. Members arrived via numerous pathways, with some initially having attended Head Outdoors.
Celandine Garden Club	A weekly community gardening session at Celandine Community Garden, in a residential area of Birchden. The session was facilitated by Let'sGrow and The Kitchen Table. Members arrived via numerous pathways.
Volunteer Wednesdays	A weekly orchard-based session, in an area on the outskirts of Partford. The session was facilitated by Pots-and-Plates. Members arrived via health-oriented and non-health-oriented pathways.
Taking Notice	A two-year nature-based social prescribing project, facilitated by mental health charity The Sage Project (alongside several VCS deliver partners, including Pots-and-Plates). The projected aimed to promote access to nature amongst young people and people who do not usually spend time in nature, who are experiencing mental ill health. Members arrived via numerous pathways, including through primary healthcare. I attended two of their sessions repeatedly: one at Clover Farm Garden, in an area of outside of Partford, and Orchid Park Allotment, in the centre of Partford.

ii) The VCS organisation descriptions

Organisation	Description
Pots-and-Plates	A small CIC, operating predominantly around Partford. The CIC carried out a range of projects, supporting varied themes: sustainable and local food production and consumption, cooking, sustainable livelihoods, community engagement, and wellbeing.
Let'sGrow	A small CIC, operating predominantly around Dawsby and Birchden. The CIC carried out a range of projects, supporting varied themes: sustainable food cultivation, youth and community engagement, wellbeing, and food security.

The Kitchen Table	A small charity, operating predominantly around Dawsby and Birchden. The charity aims to promote health and wellbeing, using food and cooking as a way to engage communities.
The Sage Project	A medium-sized charity, operating in multiple areas of Hazelford. The charity provides mental health support, and runs a social prescribing service.

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