

## Research Paper

# Places of urban disorder? Exposing the hidden nature and values of an English private urban allotment landscape



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## ABSTRACT

Increasing urbanisation is placing significant development pressure upon our urban spaces and green infrastructure. Allotments have strong cultural roots in the urban domain with emerging evidence of multiple health and quality of life benefits associated with their existence, use and management. However, they represent a remnant landscape; out of order and unproductive according to conventional economic and market assessments of urban land use. Consequently, allotments represent highly contested spaces; as opportunity spaces for re-development to meet housing demands or as growing spaces for escape and socialisation. This paper employs a phenomenological approach to explore the values and perceptions of plottolders, residents, planning managers and allotment bodies relating to one privately owned allotment site in Dudley, West Midlands, UK. Our focus on private allotments fills an important research (lack of information on ownership and spatial extent) and policy (treated differently to public allotments as open space in planning policy) gap. Semi-structured interviews reveal that the allotment site is valued by plottolders and nearby residents on a wide range of ecosystem services and community benefits with only minor concerns evident about modern allotment infrastructure and bonfires. This positive picture reflected strong local governance and community relationships. However, there was a misunderstanding among residents that this private allotment had the same level of protection as a municipal site. It is recommended that planning policy treats both municipal and private sites equally and that more research is conducted on the ownership, distribution and governance of private allotment sites given their importance in urban planning and placemaking.

## 1. Introduction

There are now estimated to be some three million allotments across Europe which collectively constitute a valued social and environmental resource (Van den Berg, Van Winsum-Westra, de Vries, & Van Dillen, 2010). Allotments are defined “as a parcel of land being allotted to someone for their own use” (Bell, 2016:1). Allotments form part of the wider global urban agriculture movement as citizens take advantage of the multiple benefits generated by growing their own food (Bendt, Barthel, & Colding, 2013; Gorgolewski, Komisar, & Nasr, 2011; Hardman & Larkham, 2014; Jerme & Wakefield, 2013). Allotments differ from other forms of urban agriculture due to their bespoke legislation and the formality and structure in the way they involve people (Bell, 2016). Allotment sites set aside individual plots, whereas new forms of urban agriculture, such as ‘community gardens’ favour more collective aspects of cultivation (Adams, Scott, & Hardman, 2014;

Beitin, 2011; Bell, 2016; Firth, Maye, & Pearson, 2011; Holland, 2004; Glover, 2004).

Originally allotments in the UK were introduced to relieve rural poverty during the 18th century and were then adapted for leisure purposes in the densely populated towns and cities where green space was at a premium (Acton, 2011; Barclay, 2012; Cooper, 2011; Crouch and Ward, 1997). Across the rest of Europe as a whole, varied manifestations of allotments arose as a response to similar drivers from the 19th century to post Second World War (Keshvarz & Bell, 2016; Bell et al., 2016).

Allotment sites have a number of complex environmental, social, cultural and economic linkages and benefits across the participants, communities and environment in which they are located (Acton, 2011; Crouch & Wiltshire, 2012; Irvine et al., 1999; Preston & Wilson, 2014). These include increased sense of community, place identity, health, quality of life and local food production (e.g. Acton, 2011;

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Hardman & Larkham, 2014; Kingsley, Townsend, & Henderson-Wilson, 2009; Kingsley & Townsend, 2006; Lohrberg, Lička, Scazzosi, & Timpe, 2016; Quale, 2009; Tornaghi, 2014; Turner, Henryks, & Pearson, 2011; Viljoen & Bohn, 2014).

Allotments can challenge and confirm existing gender and power relations (Longhurst, 2006). Allotments historically convey masculine space which still dominates growing narratives. However, women are increasingly challenging masculine approaches to gardening and enhancing their cultural identities (Metcalf, Minnear, Kleinert, & Tedder, 2012). In the USA research suggests that allotments can also become exclusionary spaces; whilst allotments can offer sites of meaning for deprived communities, these spaces can also become aligned with neoliberal gentrifying processes that seek to exclude poorer residents from urban redevelopment areas (Moore, Church, & Gabb, 2014).

Whilst allotments are popular today, the nature and identities of those linkages have changed markedly over time reflecting fluctuations in supply and demand of allotments. In today's pressurised urban realm they constitute vulnerable and spatially distinctive resources; under threat due to the pace and scale of urbanisation (Barthel & Isendahl, 2013; Elmqvist et al., 2013). This is evident globally, driven by rising urban land values and planning policies that favour urban densification to prevent sprawl and by differential attitudes of policy makers to the protection and value of allotment spaces (Acton, 2011; Bakker, Dubbeling, Gündel, Sabel-Koshella, & van de Zeeuw, 2000; Drilling et al., 2016; Eisenberg, Tappert, Thomas, & Zilans, 2016; Jenks, Burton, & Williams, 1996; Leendertz, 2013; Spiklová and Vágner, 2016).

At a UK level, The Guardian (2009) reported that the total number of allotments had declined steadily since the end of World War Two as they became less popular, from 1.4 million in the late 1940s to around 500,000 in the late 1970s, and with 200,000 plots sold off by local councils unable to find takers for them during the 1980s and 1990s.

In response the National Society of Allotment and Leisure Gardens (Moran, 1990), as well as the Federation of City Farms and Community Gardens are trying to reverse and revive the fortunes of urban agriculture in the UK including with a growing number of private community-managed allotments. The National Trust launched a scheme in 2009<sup>1</sup> which has now created over 1200 new growing plots for allotments and community gardens within a range of rural or urban communities throughout England, Wales and Northern Ireland, registered through a landshare.

However, whilst there is dedicated legislation for municipally owned allotment sites, private sites remain somewhat "hidden" with a conspicuous lack of information and data on their nature, ownership, extent, quality and spatial distribution (Leendertz, 2013). This raises important questions as to how they are treated in planning procedures, their vulnerability to conversion (as opposed to municipal sites) if owners wish to take advantage of rapidly increasing land values (Spiklová & Vágner, 2016).

Within the English planning system, protection for private sites sits within more general policies for open space. For instance, Birmingham City Council's (2016) approved local plan provides a useful comparison within its statutory development plan policy TP9 which covers both open space protection (within which private allotments fall) and allotments. This illuminates how issues of viability and provision of land as surplus need for development may override general protection. However, the dedicated allotment policy has stronger requirements, processes and protections relating to demand considerations as expressed through waiting lists.

#### Policy TP9 Allotments

*Provision of allotments should relate directly to demand in the area. Where there is a shortage of provision then consideration will be given to*

*using other surplus open space land for allotments. Allotment land will only be released for development where it can be shown that the site is not required to satisfy the demand for allotments.*

#### Policy TP9 (Open Space)

*Planning permission will not normally be granted for development on open space except where:*

- *It can be shown by an up to date assessment of need that the open space is surplus taking account of a minimum standard of 2 ha per 1000 population and the accessibility and quality criteria listed below.*
- *The lost site will be replaced by a similar piece of open space, at least as accessible and of similar quality and size.*
- *"Where an area of open space is underused, as it has inherent problems such as poor site surveillance, physical quality or layout, which cannot be realistically dealt with, then in this case proposals that would result in the loss of a small part of a larger area of open space will be considered if compensation measures would result in significant improvements to the quality and recreational value of the remaining area." (Birmingham City Council, 2017: TP9: 80)*

This paper addresses what we believe to be a major research deficit on private allotments within a phenomenological case study exploration of one private urban allotment site in Coseley, West Midlands. We argue that small scale qualitative studies have value in exposing new research agendas that can be upscaled subsequently given its position at the fringe of current urban agriculture and allotment research (Schoneboom & May, 2013). We use the work of Qvistrom (2007) on landscapes out of order to characterise both municipal and private allotment spaces which, in an increasingly technocratic urban landscape where the fetish for order subjugates and reduces nature and landscape to neat Euclidian constructs, located and mapped in two dimensional space, and consequently zoned according to land values and most profitable uses, is somewhat anachronistic. Investigation of differing perspectives from allotment users, nearby residents and planning managers through detailed semi-structured interviews enabled the values, meanings, perceptions, aspirations and interrelationships between the governance, management and vulnerabilities in this private allotment space to be explored and compared with its municipal counterpart as to their contribution of the kind of urban spaces we wish to create.

Specifically the paper will, using English policy and practice framing:

- 1) Locate the private allotment within the wider discourse of spatial planning and nature using notions of order/disorder in urban spaces.
- 2) Investigate the relationships between a private allotment site and its users, and residents
- 3) Investigate the wider governance of private allotment sites through interviews with planning managers and the National Allotment Society
- 4) Assess the extent to which private allotment sites differ in status from their municipal counterparts

## 2. Spatial planning, order and disorder in the urban realm

The character and distinctiveness of any particular landscape have their own meaning(s) to the viewer/user, which generates contestation about the kind of place that is valued and desired (Adams et al., 2014; Meinig, 1979; Scott, Carter, Brown, & White, 2009).

*"Landscapes do not have edges, they are seamless webs which extend out in all directions, constrained only by the conceptual horizons of people for whom spaces mean something" (Darvill, 1998: 16).*

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/features/allotments-and-growing-spaces> (Accessed 12th June 2017).

Qvistrom (2007) focuses attention on how built environment professionals view and shape their worlds through technocratic “lenses” championing order and regulation, seeking to neatly classify and divide objects, communities. Hinchliffe (1999) exposes the dualism between the desired rational order of the city as opposed to the inherent disorder of nature and wilderness. Thus nature becomes antithetical to urban ideals of civility and culture (Whatmore & Thorne, 1998; Anderson, 2000).

Allotments encapsulate this ambiguity both spatially and existentially, resulting from their varied urban manifestations and their transcendence of conventional rules (Crouch & Wiltshire, 2012; Costa, Fox-Kämper, Good, & Sentić, 2016). According to Certoma and Notteboom (2017) urban gardening practices reflect more informal modes of planning but are supported by a transactive governmentality which shapes and transforms both public and private urban space. Qvistrom (2007) terms this a “landscape out of order”, reflecting a wider body of work that critically examines the way space is ordered and managed. This builds on ideas of Leffevre (1991) with his predilection towards functional and technical ordering of space, ignoring particular sights, sounds or smells that might be considered as out of place when conceived of within a “rational”, Cartesian perspective (see also Hubbard, 2011; Merriman, 2005; Porteous, 1985; Porteous & Mastin, 1985). Furthermore, Olwig (2003) views the plan or map as an instrument through which places become reduced to spatial abstractions, introducing a particular expert-led understanding of how areas should be viewed, interpreted and planned (see also Swords and Jeffries, 2015). Hence many contemporary spatial planning tools, underpinned by established rationalities such as zoning regulations, use class orders and environmental classifications rely largely on notions of order and control at the expense of more diverse types of interactions that can occur between people, place, flora and fauna in productive urban ecosystems (Prager et al., 2012; NEA, 2011; UKNEAFO, 2014). This give rise to calls for more holistic approaches and assessments that integrate landscape, biodiversity and urban development (e.g. Cutaiia, 2016)

Contemporary spatial planning approaches are justified by the regulatory environment within which planning systems operate to safeguard wider societal interests. However, Edensor (2005) argues that the relationship between culture and nature is much more complex with nature having the capacity to deliver greater goods and services than more preconceived notions of managed order (Scott et al., 2014). Consequently, Hinchliffe and Whatmore (2006) argue for more fluid and relational interpretations of human interaction within different forms of biodiversity as essential components of liveability and sustainability.

Allotments, and their associated infrastructure can be located within this narrative of urban landscape disorder through their “violent individualism” (Acton, 2011; Costa et al., 2016; Crouch & Ward, 1997). Although allotments have particular meaning and function to their users, others may view them as a cumulative jumble of individual sheds creating an anachronistic landscape (Crouch & Wiltshire, 2012; Steward, 2012). Thus the seeds of urban conflict are sown, dependent on context and socio-political factors (Guliani, 2015).

### 2.1. Urban development and allotment vulnerability

The UK, like many other countries globally, is experiencing a major housing crisis, with increased demand driven by both population increase and lack of building in previous decades (Lyons, 2015; Sayce, Walford, & Garside, 2012). However, this current wave of urbanisation is nothing new; our contemporary urban realm reflects a legacy of successive waves of urban expansion (Scott et al., 2013). Increasing concern for the protection of the countryside has led to the development of SMART growth models favouring urban densification (Daniels, 2001; Jepson & Edwards, 2010; Jenks et al., 1996), with resultant loss of urban green space and its attendant ecosystem services (Arnett,

2013; Barthel et al., 2010; Dempsey, Brown, & Bramley, 2012; Rudlin & Falk, 2009; Stephan, Carl, & Johan, 2010; Soini, Vaarala, & Pouta, 2012; Tratalos, Fuller, Warren, Davies, & Gaston, 2007).

Initially, allotment sites were often situated on green space at the edges of towns and cities. However, as the urban fringe has expanded and towns and cities have grown, allotments have become engulfed and, are now found scattered throughout the urban realm as remnant landscapes (Scott et al., 2013; Speak, Mizgajski, & Borysiak, 2015; Way, 2008). The resulting scale and location of these allotment sites within cities as brownfield sites have made them attractive to develop for both residential and commercial reasons (Drilling et al., 2016; Sayce et al., 2012; Van den Berg et al., 2010; Way, 2008).

Spiklová and Vágner (2016) explore the pressures facing allotment sites across Europe, where policies on their protection vary. They highlight the loss of allotment sites in Prague (Czech Republic) as a result of competing pressures between urban planning and public and private interests, whereas in Basel, Switzerland, there is policy contradiction with allotment sites being sold for development despite recognition of the wider social and ecological benefits they provide.

Under current English law if no legal agreement is in place for a set period of use, plot holders have no legal rights to prevent the land owner serving a 12 month notice to evict the tenants (Chamberlain, 2013; Leendertz, 2013). The case of Queen Roads allotments Leicester in 2001 shows how, with declining interest of a majority of shareholders, 45 plots were lost to housing development with planners citing a lack of any waiting list as support for consent. In cases like this there was little incentive for the management committee to raise awareness of vacant plots, or to encourage new users to fill spaces given the profits they could make as part owners (Queens Road Allotments, 2016). Eisenberg et al. (2016: 99) argue that the “*absorption of allotment gardens by the real estate market*” raises important questions of environmental and social justice within the entrepreneurial city as residents are increasingly displaced in favour of gentrification or urban renaissance.

Such examples have generated a wave of voluntary campaign groups rallying against allotment loss and raising public awareness of allotment attrition and vulnerability. For example, McVeigh (2015) noted for the period 2007–2014 that 194 of 198 applications for allotment closure were granted by the Secretary of State. The Greater London Assembly (GLA) review of allotments in London in 2006 found a net loss of 4.2% (statutory allotments) and 6.9% (private allotments). The Campaign for the Protection of Rural England report(s) on Allotments and community gardens in Greater London (CPRE, 2015), echoed concerns about the scale of loss, but also highlighted the proliferation of smaller (private) community gardens which were seen to be changing the face of allotment gardening across London. Indeed, this can be seen as part of a wider movement by UK cities to encourage and support cross-integration and planning for co-benefits of health, biodiversity and urban food production as part of a new “urban foodscape” (Morgan, 2014; Port & Moos, 2014; Viljoen & Bohn, 2014). For example, Brighton & Hove are using supplementary planning guidelines which now are formalised within the local plan to incorporate food into the planning system and encourage more food growing spaces in the city (Brighton & Hove City Council, 2016). Councils have also produced non-statutory Allotments Strategies highlighting initiatives that can be provided as an incentive for people to take on plots. This includes arranging for overgrown plots to be cleared and prepared ready for new holders to take over (Rabbitts, 2013). Localism also provides new opportunity space within emerging neighbourhood plans where new planning powers provide communities with a means to protect existing allotments and identify new plots (HM Government, 2011).

Arguably this discourse reflects a modal shift in the way urban residents are constructing and reinterpreting over the time the character and meaning of urban garden, allotment and community (Kurtz, 2001: 668). Nevertheless, at the heart of the tension between allotments and possible alternate uses is how land is valued and priced through



- This site falls within the borough of Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council, however, the site is not operated or owned by the local authority and is private in nature.
- The site is owned by the Coseley Allotments and Smallholders Cooperative Society Limited which is split into 348 shares.
- Shareholders of the site receive a small dividend each year which is donated to charity
- The site is operated by a committee elected at the sites AGM.
- The Coseley Allotment sites total of 67 half and full plots with housing surrounding the north, east and southern boundaries with woodland to west.
- The housing styles vary between traditional Victorian style terraced housing to modern detached in fill developments.

Fig. 1. The Coseley Allotment in perspective.  
Source: authors.

economic models (HM Treasury, 2013). Traditional neoclassical economic theory views allotments as inefficient use of urban space (Nathan & Overman, 2011) as this informal use doesn't sustain the high land values and rents thus creating market pressures for more profitable uses of the land (Adams et al., 2014). Yet it is increasingly valued as a social and environmental resource with significant ecosystem service benefits (Speak et al., 2015; Lohrberg et al., 2016).

## 2.2. Exposing the multiple benefits of allotments in the urban realm

Urban agriculture, in general, and allotments, in particular, necessitate a re-interpretation of post-productivism in urban space given its consumptive and productive credentials (Lin, Philpott, & Jha, 2015; La Rosa, Barbarossa, Privitera, & Martinico, 2014; Slee, 2005) resulting in the potential generation of multiple ecosystem service and societal benefits beyond food growing *per se*. These include biodiversity, climate change mitigation, urban waste minimization, physical exercise, mental well-being, diet improvements and increased social contact (Angotti, 2015; Badami & Ramankutty, 2015; Gorgolewski et al., 2011; Perez-Vazquez, Anderson, Wiltshire, & Fraser, 2006; Reynolds, 2009; Speak et al., 2015; Van den Berg et al., 2010; Wood et al., 2016). For example, Manchester launched its urban food strategy in 2007, after an informal partnership had been forged between the City Council and the National Health Service (NHS). Likewise, Bristol set up a formal Food Policy Council in 2011, coincidentally the year the UK's Sustainable Food Cities Network was also launched which includes Brighton, Sandwell, Sheffield, Plymouth and London; areas which have designed distinctive urban food policies in recent years (Morgan, 2014).

However, research on the benefits for users of urban agriculture landscapes are largely anecdotal with a lack of empirical evidence

hindering its wider legitimisation and mainstreaming beyond relatively small scale studies (Van den Berg et al., 2010) Notwithstanding this a growing international research literature is becoming apparent; Quale (2009) provides a useful regional study in Northern England across 22 sites; Speak et al. (2015) provide a useful comparative assessment of ecosystem benefits between UK and Poland; Wood et al. (2016) provide a useful example showing how allotment gardening can play a key role in promoting mental well-being and its potential use as a preventative health measure whilst Perez-Vazquez et al. (2006) demonstrate the importance of non-market benefits of allotments using contingent valuation methods.

Neighbouring residents also value the green open spaces, 'rural' views and cultural heritage (La Rosa et al., 2014) from the urban allotment. For example, views of green space at work places have been shown to promote employee well-being (Gilchrist et al., 2015; Dempsey et al., 2012). There is also emerging evidence of the value(s) of managed open space in the urban environment in terms of the community, health and environmental benefits as spaces for people to engage and relax with nature (Bragg & Atkins, 2016; Martin & Marsden, 1999; Moseley, Marzano, Chetcuti, & Watts, 2013; Peschardt & Stigsdotter, 2013; Van den Berg et al., 2010). Furthermore, due to the increase in urban density and high property prices, people are less likely to be able to afford a home with a garden or private outside space; hence allotments are now being seen as a viable alternative for leisure and access to open green space (Van den Berg et al., 2010; Hough, 2004).

Allotments are not just growing spaces for vegetables and biodiversity sites; they provide an important component of place-identity: ".....they herald the creation of new multifunctional landscapes combining utility, meaning and beauty with local distinctiveness" (Way, 2008:39). These cultural ecosystem services build a strong sense of place for

beneficiaries with memories and oral histories being passed down between generations. They also serve significant social functions as both formal and informal community meeting spaces (Bendt et al., 2013; Barbosa et al., 2007). Economic aspects of allotments are also evident through the informal value of exchanges and transactions of produce, along with the positive impact on property values for houses overlooking aesthetically pleasing green space (Guitart et al., 2012; La Rosa et al., 2014; NEA, 2011; Speak et al., 2015).

Cumulatively these multiple benefits challenge the established stereotype as allotments being simply the preserve of retired men (Way, 2008). In places they are extremely popular commanding long waiting times as the provision of municipal sites and plots has been in marked decline, although this varies across the country (Acton, 2015; Chamberlain, 2013; Martin & Marsden, 1999; Reynolds, 2014), as well as more regionally and locally. A survey by the National Allotments Society of 323 English councils showed 78,827 people were on waiting lists as opposed to 12,950 in 1996 (Campbell & Campbell, 2013).

This section has exposed the multiple benefits municipal allotment spaces provide. We argue that the benefits are likely to be the same for private allotments. However, there are no national, regional or local databases on the extent, spatial distribution and demand for private allotment sites, nor documentary evidence of their underlying governance and land ownership models, nor any academic research, which cumulatively raises questions over their value and long-term future. Consequently, this research provides an initial exploration to understand how private sites operate and are valued and whether their different governance arrangements result in specific challenges and experiences from those faced by municipal allotments.

### 3. Methodology

Positioned within a phenomenological research epistemology, this small scale qualitative research elicits the values, meanings and experiences of users, residents and planning managers in relation to one private allotment landscape. The Coseley Allotments site, Clifton Street, Coseley in the West Midlands UK (Fig. 1) was selected as a detailed case study predicated upon researcher insider perspective within the council allowing access to information and gatekeepers, set within the limitations of a pilot research project. The Coseley site is long established, with the allotment site celebrating its 100th anniversary in 2016. Established in 1916 the site is owned by 348 shareholder members of the Coseley Small Holders Cooperative Society Limited, an Industrial and Provident Society. The site has 67 half and full plots surrounded by housing on three sides (Clifton Street, Rock Road and Turls Hill Road

(Fig. 1)). Currently the site has no plot vacancies and has a waiting list of three. In 2011, the borough of Dudley had 624 people on council waiting lists for allotment sites (Campbell & Campbell 2011). Dudley Council own a total of 38 allotments sites at various locations within the borough of which 32 sites are managed by allotment associations and 2 which are managed by the Council and four currently redundant (Dudley Metropolitan Council, 2017).

#### 3.1. Data collection

The data was secured from semi-structured, face to face interviews with residents (n = 10) and ploholders (n = 12). Each interview was between 1 and 1.5 hours long and was recorded and transcribed verbatim. Additional interviews were held with the local authority planning department during and after the research together with an interview with the National Allotment Society (Fig. 2).

Residents of all 52 surrounding properties on three roads (Turls Hill Road, Clifton Road and Rock Road) which overlooked the site were invited to participate in interviews (see Fig. 1). Letters were hand delivered along with the project brief and details of when the researcher would be available to conduct interviews. An interview guide (Box 1) with specific prompts helped shape the discussions.

Ploholder interviews were secured after an initial meeting with the chair of the Coseley allotment committee permitting researcher access to the allotment site and enabling a project poster to be displayed on the site notice board requesting volunteers for interviews. Again, an interview prompt guide was produced. (Box 2).

Face to face interviews were undertaken with the local authority planning department and a representative of National Allotments Society, with the results from the ploholders and residents' interviews used to gain additional insight looking towards the future of private allotment sites more generally.

#### 3.2. Data analysis

All case study data collected was analysed and subject to content analysis using NVivo software to identify key themes and trends. The key themes collected from each data set were then triangulated to identify the main converging themes for discussion.

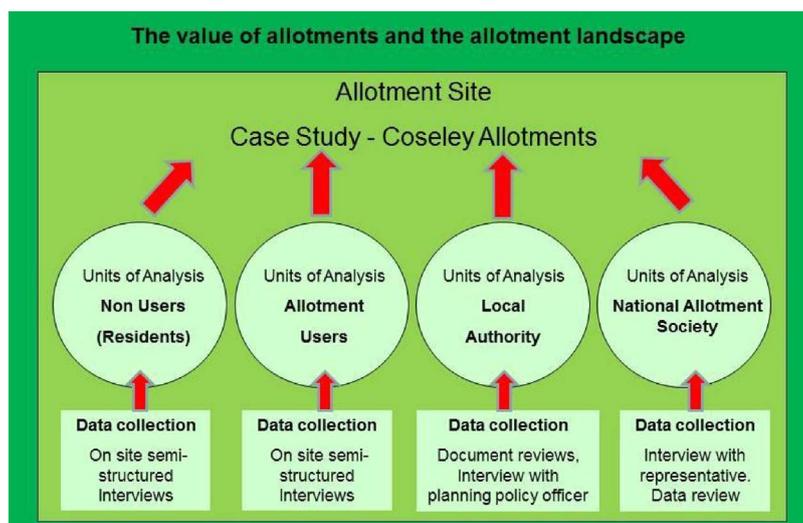


Fig. 2. Data collection methods.

**Box 1**

## Interview Prompt list: Residents

- Any interests in the allotment site (plotholder or shareholder) past, present or future
- Attitudes to the allotment site: visual; noise; smell
- Benefits/problems to you of living next to an allotment site
- Informal or formal complaints made
- Interactions with the allotment site, management committee or plotholders (direct/indirect)
- Changes to the allotment in any form.
- Impact on your own behaviours regarding food
- Scenario: proposed housing development. Loss of allotment and impact
- Any other developments supported?
- Future development and management of the allotment.

**4. Results****4.1. The residents' allotment experience**

The allotment site has been an established feature of the Coseley landscape for 100 years. The residents' interviews focused on both positive and negative experiences of living next to a private allotment site. These are examined below but it is important to appreciate at the outset that the nine residents viewed the allotment as a positive amenity space, which outweighed any negative experiences for all but one of the residents.

**4.1.1. Benefits of living next to the allotment**

Each resident identified multiple benefits from living adjacent to the allotment landscape. The most common response was the importance of the open, uninterrupted views over the green space, mentioned by eight residents; a lack of being overlooked (6 residents), quietness (4 residents) and relaxation (4 residents). Resident 3, for example, referred to the "allotment as a peaceful scene". The value attached to the site highlighted its importance as spaces for relaxation and contemplation; "When you've had a hard day at work you can go out with a cup of tea, sit down and forget the world and relax". She also highlighted the enjoyment gained from watching people and activity in the allotment landscape and its role in helping overcome her perceived isolation; "living alone, I see people pottering around and I don't feel quite as alone, people are always in your view". Resident 7 echoed the significance of watching; "I also find it relaxing watching people pottering around" whilst Resident 4 noted a seasonal and temporal dynamic to the watching process; "I like the fact you can see the seasons changing with the physical appearance of the site changing, it's like a life clock". Residents also recognised some economic benefits such as the increased property values with the view over the site being a positive selling feature for their properties.

The social and community aspects of the allotment were also valued with multiple interactions between residents and plotholders. For

example two of the residents interviewed commented that plotholders had shared produce with them. Resident 2 confirms the importance of local place associated with the harvest from the allotment; "There is something really powerful in being able to get freshly grown products from the ground with the plotholders. That makes this place so special".

Consequently, all but one of the interviewed residents would recommend living next to the allotment with eight of the interviewed residents not wanting to see the allotment site used for any other purpose. The remaining two of the interviewed residents on Rock Road argued for a small section of the site to be used to address the narrow nature of the street or include a parking area for residents.

**4.1.2. Disbenefits of living next to an allotment**

The site's visual appearance attracted most negative comment with nine of the interviewed residents expressing some disquiet. The main source of contention for residents was the detrimental visual impact of large scale nets and polytunnels used to protect crops from pests. Furthermore, the cumulative impact with other allotment infrastructure such as sheds, unused equipment and waste combined to produce a messy and unsightly landscape at times (Fig. 3).

As Resident 3 lamented; "Some plots have gone barmy with green netting". Resident 1 noted that this reflected a recent change to the allotment landscape; "Generally the allotments are well looked after; (but) in the last couple of years there has been a significant increase in the number of unsightly polytunnels". Resident 4 highlighted the variability of the management inputs and tidiness by different plotholders affecting the allotment landscape; "(they) have different standards of care in terms of shed and plot conditions". Indeed, this was evidenced by our own visits to the site which revealed some evidence of overgrown plots and selective rubbish dumping (Fig. 3). However, the majority of plots were seen to be well maintained.

The other principal negative feature for two of the interviewed residents was the bonfires (Fig. 4). Resident 10 was clear that such activities constituted a serious public nuisance; (the) "lighting of fires is our

**Box 2**

## Interview prompts for plotholders

- Socio economic profile of the plotholder
- Details of the lot site and extent and duration
- Experience in urban agriculture/allotments
- Place of residence and distance to site (time taken to get there)
- Attitudes to your plot and its management: visual; productive; tidiness;
- Attitudes to the allotment site as a whole
- Changes over time
- Governance of the site and role of the management committee.
- Scenario: Housing development: reaction
- Alternative developments
- Future plans



Fig. 3. Unsightly allotment paraphernalia.  
Source: authors



biggest bug bare, people always light them and leave them and it is always at the plots closest to the houses. The smell of smoke then comes through the house or makes the washing smell.”

Rock Road residents living in the only properties to directly front onto the allotment site (Fig. 1), had specific concerns over the narrowness of the access road exacerbated by the 1.8 m high palisade fence adjacent to the road. This boundary caused concern for residents as weeds could grow through the fence and cause damage to cars (Fig. 5). Resident 2 commented; “Parking is an issue on this street, or lack of it; we think the fence looks terrible and has loads of weeds and bushes growing through it. This scratches our car and our neighbours”.

Two of the residents identified site noise and disturbance as affecting their quality of life but this was framed around the access issue for cars getting on to the site due to the opening and closing of the metal gates. Previously, the gates on Turls Hill Road used to cause traffic issues for residents with driveways and the road being blocked as plotholders opened the gates to gain access to the site. As a result of residents’ concerns the gates were repositioned further back allowing cars to wait off road whilst the entrance gates are opened. Whilst this addressed the issue of waiting cars on Turls Hill Road it has increased overall noise and disturbance for 2 neighbouring residents.

#### 4.1.3. Planning application scenario

The planning application scenario presented to interviewees involved a hypothetical housing scheme which would result in the redevelopment of the site and loss of the allotment space. This produced both highly negative and emotional responses from all residents who objected strongly to any application for development on the site. Resident 7’s objection was typical, citing a sense of loss of openness and semi-rural amenity; “...loss of view to the rear is a concern; I personally enjoy the open aspect to the site and its semi-rural appearance”. Resident 2 highlighted the value the site had as a proxy for a countryside location in an urban setting; “... it’s very peaceful and as close to being in the countryside without actually driving out into the countryside”. A further dimension of landscape importance is revealed through a respondent’s “memoryscapes” as Resident 6 reflected on the importance of the cultural dimension of landscape value; “I remember when I was a kid the gate and fence wasn’t there, you could walk through the site, it was like you were walking in the countryside” (Resident 6).

The planning scenario also revealed a significant misunderstanding of the status and vulnerability of this private site within policy and planning. Half (5) of the interviewed residents wrongly believed that the site could not be built on due to the legal protection of allotment



Fig. 4. Smoke on the Coseley site.  
Source: authors

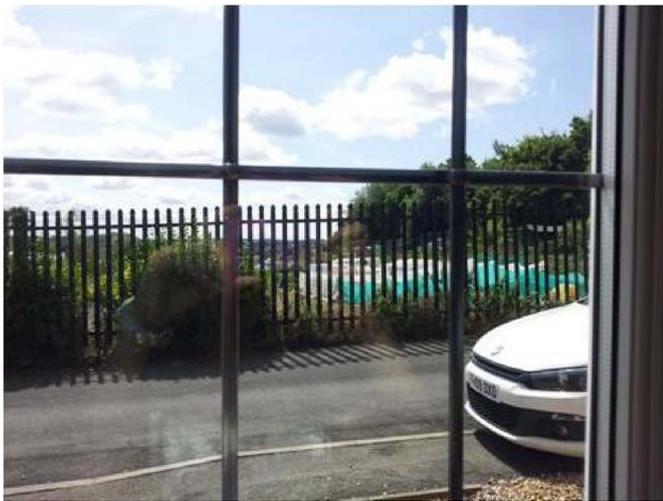


Fig. 5. View from a Rock Road property over the allotment site.  
Source: authors

sites. Comments included Resident 5; “*We didn’t think you can build on an allotment site anyway?*”; Resident 10; “*Aren’t allotments protected by law? Or some type of legislation to stop this happening?*” Resident 2 commented; “*As far as I know allotments are protected, we feel pretty safe that this type of thing wouldn’t happen here*”. Interestingly, Resident 7 made reference to the fact she held one of the shares owning the site with the recognition that if sold, it could result in a substantial financial gain. However, her sense of history and shared experience was seen as more important than any personal financial gain; “*I currently get a dividend of 50p each year which goes to charity, even with that, I wouldn’t want the site lost, with my dad I have a lot of history with the site and I have been in this house all my life*”. Seemingly, the strong cultural and family ties, developed over time, and sense of place, combined to outweigh considerations of financial benefit.

#### 4.2. The plotholder allotment experience

In recent years there has been a revival in allotment gardening meaning many sites no longer struggle to find members. The Coseley site is no exception with Plotholder 2 remembering when they took on their plot only 5 years ago there were 5 plots available for rent; now it is full. Furthermore, the plotholder remembered through visiting his father on the site that 20 years ago only 12 plots were used. This also reveals the allotment as part of the continuation of important and valued family traditions.

Plotholders travelled to the site from varying distances, ranging from an average of two miles to five miles at the furthest point. This reflects the increasing demand and pressures on municipal allotment sites, requiring people to search further afield for a plot. Multiple motivations were involved in taking on an allotment plot amongst those 12 interviewed. The dominant responses revealed the importance of the allotment as a hobby (7 responses), an exercise space, (7 responses) and a healthy and cost effective food production space (For example the growth of organic foods and knowing what has gone into the food was mentioned by plotholder 9 as a key catalyst; “*We like to buy organic food but it’s really expensive so growing our own is a great way to cut these costs, with harvesting your food comes a big sense of achievement. It’s been well worth it*”) (6 responses). Socialising, fresh air, enjoyment, organic food, relaxation and a lack of a garden at home, all attracted at least one response. The age and gender profiles were also interesting, challenging the ‘old man’ stereotype with a profile ranging from 35 to 75 with 3 women plotholders interviewed.

Allotments do not just provide spaces for people to grow food. Plotholder 11 alludes to the importance of the allotment as an

“occupational community” based around cultivation and vegetable production (Newby, 1979) with spaces for socialization. For example, the Sunday afternoon wine club (Fig. 6), where plotholders met for a chat over a glass of wine, reinforced the importance of social bonds that are created and reaffirmed. Indeed, Plotholder 10 felt the allotment site offers more of a community atmosphere than the area where he lives because “*everybody on the site talks to each other and knows each other’s names*”.

Plotholders viewed their own allotment landscape in predominantly positive terms (Fig. 7). Here the functional productive aspects were most evident but the aesthetic qualities were also appreciated. The perception of the site as a ‘green lung’ captures the allotments’ importance as a core component of green infrastructure in the urban realm with consequential health benefits. However, two plotholders did recognise the varying level of individual plotholder management effort identifying a problem of untidy and overgrown plots.

Plotholder 1 highlighted the more positive aspects of the design and management practice when compared with nearby municipal sites set within their strong local governance mechanisms; “*When compared to other sites ours is well presented, only a few plots are overgrown and we don’t have massive amounts of sheds. You have to get permission for a shed or greenhouse and its location from the committee before it is erected*”. There was also recognition of the positive way the site committee organised voluntary workdays to manage the site, including work cutting back hedges, removing dumped materials from vacant plots and general clearance.

Whilst the plotholders acknowledged the negative visual impact of protection nets, Plotholder 3 revealed their functional importance for pest control; “*The trouble is it’s needed to stop pigeons and butterflies that can decimate what we are growing. Badgers are bad here as well as you have to cage in sweetcorn to stop them taking that. It’s frustrating when you put effort in just to lose what you have grown. I agree though, looking around at this level, they do look unsightly*”. Plotholder 1 was also sensitive to the disturbance factor of bonfires mentioning some of the rules that were in place to limit the impact; “*It’s in the site rules that we don’t allow fires on windy days, you can’t burn material brought off site and we also discourage fires on plots next to houses*”. Furthermore, the committee has also erected a notice on the display board of the relevant smoke nuisance legislation.

##### 4.2.1. Planning scenario

The plotholders responded to the proposed scenario of housing development in a similar vein to the residents. They stated an overwhelmingly negative and emotional response. Words such as “anger”,



Fig. 6. Socialising on the allotment, Sunday wine club.  
Source: authors

“worry”, “deflated” and “devastated ‘conveyed a strong sense of loss and resentment. Plotholder 8 lamented the loss of continuity of a way of life; ‘lots of people would not be able to maintain their hobby/lifestyle which has been the case for 100 years at Coseley’. Plotholder 11 described the allotment as ‘a valuable community asset’ and expressed the sense of shock he would feel if somebody wanted to build over it. Plotholder 1 highlighted the importance of the social and cultural value of allotments as performing a vital community role; ‘It’s not just the fact I would lose my plot, it’s the people, friends and atmosphere, I don’t think that could be replaced elsewhere. Plus the only other plot in the area has a large waiting list’.

An interesting tension was apparent in discussing the planning scenario as the allotment site looked to celebrate its 100th anniversary in 2016. At the AGM held in April 2015 the allotment committee asked its members for ideas how to mark this occasion. An idea for an allotment open day was proposed. However, the committee expressed reservations due to concerns that the increased publicity and exposure might ironically make the site vulnerable, enabling shareholders to become aware of the size and potential value of their asset; in effect a potential victim of its own success. This resulted in a much lower key activity and celebration with limited press exposure. This illuminates

the vulnerability plottolders felt themselves over their own private allotment and the need to dilute the community asset value; keeping a ‘low profile’ to avoid future loss. It is important to acknowledge that plottolders are not necessarily owners (shareholders) although one of our residents was.

#### 4.3. Interviews with The National Allotment Society and Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council Planning Authority

The interview with a spokesperson from the National Allotment Society (NAS) confirmed our hypothesis that there is insufficient protection for private allotments sites. The principal concern was that private “allotments are being subsumed into open space policies” rather than being given their own bespoke protection. Furthermore, there was concern over whether planners and councillors recognised the multiple values and benefits arising from private allotments when considering planning applications for development particularly in brownfield sites. The current housing crisis, concomitant with the push for new houses, was a source of concern for the society with economic benefits seen as outweighing any community and environmental benefits which in themselves were rarely made explicit. As such the allotments provide



Fig. 7. Plottolder key word cloud descriptions of the site.

important functional green spaces which once lost cannot be replaced: “there needs to be more appreciation of the genius loci of the allotment and if you move it, it’s gone”. They cautioned against the current government policy of urban densification; filling towns and cities in, with potential building on allotment sites which was not regarded as a sustainable answer. There was also concern at the lack of awareness of their nature, extent and ownership thus keeping these private resources hidden from public view and accountability. Significantly, no database is kept by the NAS on such sites.

At the time of research, Dudley MBC did not have an adopted Local Plan in place, working instead to the Unitary Development Plan (2005). Within the new Borough Development Strategy (BDS), Policy S34 on Allotments outlines the status of protections for municipal allotment sites (DMBC, 2016).

*The redevelopment of allotment sites for other uses will not be allowed if a substantial part of the site is in use; or there is proven demand for allotments in the area.*

*Redevelopment of an allotment site will only be allowed if alternative allotment provision of the same or better quality and quantity is provided in the locality before the use of the existing allotment ceases.*

*Planning permission will not be granted simply because an allotment site has been allowed to fall out of use and become derelict. Proposals for the provision of new allotment sites will be permitted provided that they:-*

- are accessible by a variety of transport means, including walking and cycling as well as adequate parking
- do not result in the loss of, or harm to a high quality nature conservation site
- do not harm the visual amenity, landscape setting and appearance of the area
- do not detrimentally harm the amenity of adjacent residents and/or highway safety
- safeguard and enhance any biodiversity features where possible to help support wildlife.

*On all allotment sites, the Council will encourage sustainable methods of power, the storage and re-use of water and on-site composting where appropriate do not result in the loss of an area of importance and value for informal or formal recreation*

In addition, allotments feature within Policy S2 highlighting the need for planning for a healthy borough, including supporting healthy choices and active lifestyles. This includes a focus on accessibility and protection of green spaces, including ‘creation and protection of allotments’ and ‘promoting greater access to healthy food’. This was incorporated into a previous supplementary planning document “Planning for Health” (2013) which cemented the authority’s opinion concerning the value of allotments of increasing access to fresh food through the retention and provision of allotments. Other policies within the BDS, including S19 on the Green Network, and S29 Public Open Space can also be seen to have relevance to allotments.

The interview with a senior planning policy officer revealed that Dudley are placing increased importance on allotments as part of promoting healthy lifestyles, highlighting that demand on the borough for allotments has increased.

The new BDS Allotments policy S34 states that redevelopment of an existing site will only be allowed if the alternative provision is of the same or better quality. Importantly, it also makes reference to permission not being granted because a site has been allowed to fall out of use. This policy, however, only has relevance to municipal sites due to owners of private site being able to close the allotments without requiring permission. Crucially, a private site like Coseley would fall under the open space provision of the local development plan and core strategy. This policy is far less clear in its protection of allotments and according to the planner would seemingly enable some housing development if green infrastructure was in place as part of any

masterplan. Anecdotally, one green space officer commented that private allotments are “completely separate” from the council “as they are privately owned”, although acknowledging that they do pass people who are interested in growing to these sites.

Policy S29 – Public Open Space (DMBC, 2016)

*Development proposals which impact on areas of Public Open Space (POS) will be assessed against the criteria which inform on the value of such areas as set out in Core Strategy Policy ENV6 (Open Space, Sport and Recreation), and also the criteria set out in the NPPF at paragraph 74 (or superseding policy). These provisions will also apply to assessing proposed or existing, unlawful encroachments into areas of POS as a result of the extension of the site curtilage, including the extension of private garden land.*

*Developers will be encouraged to seek opportunities to use open space as a dual function, offering a reduction in flood risk (through flood water and surface water storage) and improvements in amenity.*

*Dudley Council will seek to identify areas of tranquillity and protect the value of such areas to the local community as publically accessible areas which are undisturbed by significant noise and light pollution.*

A further interview in 2016 with a planning officer on the vulnerability of private allotments exposed a clear perception that they faced increased risks when considering the demand for densification in existing urban cores and their uncertain future and looser policy environment.

*“... private sites, the only thing really that is preventing them from being developed is local planning policy, obviously we don’t look to designate allotment sites for housing, or anything; we don’t highlight and put neon lights and say ‘lets develop here’, but in a speculative bid, it would come down to the full assessment in an application process, and that is very much geared around what people want to do with it. The other argument, if people come forward with arguments of them being underused and people want to put alternative uses that are community related, I would imagine there would be some strong argument to lose them, not necessarily for a commercial development, but for another community use, for example, there would be an argument”*

There was a clear feeling that such sites really needed but that the local authority were limited in the protections they could use. “...some more national level protection, I think allotment sites are always going to be vulnerable, because you have always got the only things standing in the way of development is local policy and that is not enough to protect them in the long term I don’t think”.

The interviews, however, confirmed that no allotment sites in Dudley – either statutory or private – have been allocated for housing in the proposed plan at the present time as sufficient housing land had been allocated to satisfy demand during the plan period. In addition, the National Allotment Society data confirms between 2007 and 2015, Dudley MBC has not applied to dispose of any of its statutory allotment sites. However, in contrast, Birmingham currently faces a 60,000 housing shortfall with a requirement under the Localism Act 2011 duty to cooperate for all local authorities to try and accommodate this unmet need. Thus prime urban sites like Coseley may come under greater scrutiny.

## 5. Discussions and conclusions

### 5.1. Municipal and private allotments: an urban landscape out of order

This research is positioned at the interface between traditional neoclassical economic theory and urban agriculture. The former views allotments (municipal and private) within the urban realm as an inefficient use of space given the increased need for more housing and commercial development in urban brownfield sites (Nathan & Overman, 2011). Whilst the latter reflects a resurgent urban

agriculture movement which champions new partnerships and planning policies for food production in urban areas (Bell, 2016; Morgan, 2014). The resulting discourse raises fundamental questions about the kind of urban landscape(s) we need and are actually planning for (Scott et al., 2009).

Are these remnant allotment landscapes then out of order? Speak et al. (2015) and Drilling et al. (2016) both highlight the multiple ecosystem services and multiple environmental, social and economic benefits provided by allotments. Here both a localist and communitarian perspective is apparent with associated mechanisms of self-governance and community social interactions. This generates a strong sense of place-based identity engendered through this shared sense of history and “occupational community” (Newby, 1979) where participants have a real stake in the outcome and are free to express themselves as identified by McMorran, Scott, & Price (2014) in their work on crofting and community land ownership in Scotland.

Furthermore, in our Coseley private allotment case study we have captured positive resident and plotholder perspectives reflecting a valued landscape and seemingly effective governance. Effective local governance of the site is a key factor in being a good neighbour to residents and in preventing site disorder, nuisance and vandalism. The Coseley site committee is seen as proactive in addressing concerns brought forward by neighbours and employs its own simple rules in order to keep a well-managed site without preventing plotholders from expressing themselves. This is seen as an advantage for the allotment site drawing less attention from outside. In addition, overgrown plots covered in dumped rubbish are much harder to let than clear, well managed ones, which attract plotholders (Acton, 2015).

However, protecting an allotment for its own sake is not an appropriate response in today's pressurized urban landscape and it is here that transparent ecosystem service assessments and trade-offs of different options may help inform decisions as to the best land use option (Cutaia, 2016; Scott et al., 2014; Speak et al., 2015) although such transparency is not always welcome (Förster et al., 2015). Undoubtedly, this will challenge traditional neoclassical economic models that have failed to capture and account properly for environmental and social benefits. Furthermore, whilst we have recorded a decline in allotments for individual plots we have observed a counter shift towards more community food growing which reflects a growing trend in urban agriculture evolution in urban areas globally (Kurtz, 2001).

### 5.2. The fallacy of protection in private allotments

One year's notice from a landowner (s) can lead to a loss of a private allotment in a UK context. The Coseley site has greater protection than some private sites as the ownership is split into 347 shares, spreading the risk of loss as opposed to a site owned by a single private landowner. However, in theory, it would only take one person to investigate the land value and offer to purchase shares for the site to be at risk. This might be a particularly persuasive argument in deprived areas like Dudley with an ageing population suffering under austerity with concerns about future social care and pensions. Indeed, Resident 7 recognized the financial gain that could be made by selling her shares but was held back because of the strong cultural ties and association with the allotment landscape. Others shareholders may have other priorities which makes the site potentially vulnerable. This was borne out by the planner interview(s) which confirmed their view that Coseley was vulnerable partly due to location, unmet housing need in the Birmingham region and its brownfield status.

There is a significant misconception towards protections for private allotments where half of the interviewed residents and several interviewed plotholders wrongly believed that the private site was bestowed with the same level of protection as municipally owned allotments. Indeed, the discussion about limiting publicity in recognition of the site's centenary reflects a tension between exposing this site to wider public gaze and the realization of the potential development value of

the site. This exposes the hidden nature of the private allotment phenomena with a lack of knowledge of their vulnerability, geographic location, spatial extent, ownership and overall suitability/capability for future development. However, as indicated, in the literature review there is a growth of more community based allotments through the voluntary groups such as the National Trust.<sup>2</sup>

Crucially for this research there is no map or inventory of private allotment sites in the West Midlands, or nationally with only limited ad-hoc global research studies (e.g. Spiklová & Vágner, 2016; Kingsley et al., 2009). This suggests an important research priority into the extent, nature and spatiality of private allotment sites especially as there are long council waiting lists in areas where private allotments exist (600+ in Dudley at the time of writing).

The views of the planners and National Allotment Society suggest that there is emerging support for national legislation to protect both private and municipal allotments equally as a uniform land use category and to ensure that the multiple benefits they deliver are accounted for in decision making with any disbenefits minimised through effective governance. This synchronization of policy responses to private and municipal allotments has global application and relevance. We argue that there is a case for all allotments to be merged under one planning policy rather than the current duality with dedicated allotment policies for municipal sites and open space policies for private sites. Such a policy development can be seen in conjunction with increased support for urban agriculture and the recognition of its contribution to the wider green infrastructure network of a city which, in itself, is poorly protected under planning policy (Mell, 2014).

The hypothetical redevelopment scenario of the allotment site revealed strong support for the protection of the allotment space from both plotholders and residents. The multiple dimensions of this emotional attachment to the site reveals a powerful cultural asset which can command significant local opposition going beyond a simple NIMBY ethic (e.g. Addley, 2015). This becomes significant as land values are increasing, and with the Coseley site being large in nature, the prospect of the multiple owners wishing to cash in on the land becomes a real possibility. Indeed DCLG (2015) land value estimates for policy appraisal for Dudley reveal that 1 ha of land post permission is worth £1.3 million. Thus across the 347 shareholders there is potentially a very valuable resource if planning permission could be secured. The government's desire for more housing, translated into national planning policy guidance, represents a major concern for the National Allotment Society with the society questioning why private allotments cannot be embedded and safeguarded in development proposals in the same way public allotments are rather than replaced with cheaper open space proposals.

### 5.3. The private allotment: spaces of socialisation and community cohesion?

The benefits from allotments were not just confined to users. Those residents living nearby valued the health, social and community bonds that are engendered (Moseley et al., 2013). Equally an important “watching” element was exposed where the functional and dynamic landscape provided interest and security to residents. Here our results accord with Camps-Calvet et al. (2016) with the allotment viewed as landscapes of socialization as much as for gardening. But despite these wider benefits, private sites such as Coseley are still forced to rely on much weaker open space policies where contested issues of “need”, not value, become central considerations. Furthermore, alternative open space in a proposed development can replace the space lost from a private allotment in a way that is not allowed under allotment policy.

Much has been written about the social landscape of the allotment as a benefit in terms of a meeting place for communities of all cultures

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/features/allotments-and-growing-spaces> (Accessed 12th June 2017).

(e.g. Barbosa et al., 2007; Van den Berg et al., 2010). Our results support this with strong social bonds in evidence between the plottolders. Indeed, plottolders feared the loss of irreplaceable friendships made on the site should the allotment be developed. The residents also have important connections with the site through the visual, social and trading interactions and the important passive act of watching allotment activity from a distance as a viewer. Thus the amenity view over the allotments with its openness and semi-rural nature is arguably just as important for residents in terms of its benefits as the physical use of the site for its users. These results support Swanwick (2009) who introduced the idea that the multifunctional aspects of landscape and not just its visual appearance should be taken into consideration in decision making (see also Tress et al., 2005; Scott et al., 2009).

Therefore our findings directly challenge one dimensional neo-classical ideas of land value in a city environment that much planning practice is based upon in favour of more neoliberal and anthropogenic approaches that take account of the multiple environmental and social benefits from allotments (Adams et al., 2014; Breuste & Artmann, 2015; Reynolds, 2009; Rudlin & Falk, 2009; Van den Berg et al., 2010). It is here that capturing the multiple ecosystem services and user/resident satisfaction as integral environmental and cultural assets that add value to traditional neoclassical economic assessments (Barthel et al., 2010; Speak et al., 2015). This may help a wider appreciation of the hidden value of the allotment resources in urban areas globally challenging the neoclassical economic models that label them as out of order and ripe for more development (NEA, 2011; Qvistrom, 2007).

Applying this thinking to other countries will require more effective and collaborative governance models for effective protection and enhancement of allotment ecosystem services (Nikolaïdou et al., 2016; Prager, Reed, & Scott, 2012). This is also dependent on urban agriculture practices being seen increasingly as ordinary urban practice (Cockrall-King, 2012; Miazzo & Minkja, 2013; Nasr et al., 2014), with potential health risks found not large enough to outweigh the benefits (Leake et al., 2009).

#### 5.4. Conclusion

The private allotment landscape is a highly valued yet hidden landscape within the urban realm both to users and nearby residents. Their status in the English planning system is currently unclear whilst set within broader open spaces policies in statutory development plans. Moreover, there is a general misconception among residents and plottolders that private sites have the same level of protection as municipally owned sites. Yet they form part of the wider green infrastructure network of urban areas; however there is little, if any, knowledge of the extent, spatiality and condition of private allotments sites. This information deficit needs to be addressed urgently in further research.

Undoubtedly, Coseley is a valued landscape in terms of its aesthetics and as a functional space with its own community providing an open space of socialization and relaxation. Nevertheless, the Coseley allotment site is 'out of order' with the surrounding urban fabric (Qvistrom, 2007) and at face value would not win any prizes for aesthetics in the traditional sense. However, in this research we have established that these sites are valued by users, residents and planners through the cumulative multiple benefits they generate and it perhaps through a new form of transactive governmentality that their future resilience might lie (Certoma & Notteboom, 2015).

Whilst this research paper only focuses on one qualitative case study, further research should be undertaken on the nature, role, extent and impact of private allotments and their relationships within the wider communities and places within which they are located together with the ecosystem service benefits they bestow. Given the current direction of policy towards densification, the vulnerability of such sites is of concern given the fundamental research and policy gap we have unearthed (pun intended), raising important implications for the future role of these privately owned spaces as an integral part of the urban

green infrastructure network.

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