Connecting People and Place: Sense of Place and Local Action

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# Table of Contents

List of Figures ........................................................................................................ 4  
List of Tables ........................................................................................................... 4  
List of Abbreviations ............................................................................................... 5  
Acknowledgements .................................................................................................. 6  
Foreword to thesis. ..................................................................................................... 7  
Abstract ................................................................................................................. 9  
Introduction ............................................................................................................. 11  
  Structure of the thesis ............................................................................................ 23  
Literature Review: Connecting people and place .................................................... 24  
  Sense of Place ......................................................................................................... 25  
  Sustainability and Planning ................................................................................... 51  
  Participation and Citizenship ................................................................................. 73  
  Systems and Social Learning ................................................................................. 85  
Summary .................................................................................................................. 94  
Methods: An action-orientated approach ............................................................... 96  
  Aims and research questions ................................................................................... 98  
  Philosophical framework ...................................................................................... 103  
  Methodological approach ..................................................................................... 105  
Data Analysis: People in ordinary places ............................................................. 153  
  Uncovering Sense of Place ................................................................................... 156  
  Visioning for a place ........................................................................................... 180  
  Making Changes in a Place .................................................................................. 210  
Discussion: Social learning in practice ................................................................. 227  
  Reflections on the research .................................................................................. 270  
Conclusion and Recommendations ...................................................................... 275  
  Contribution to knowledge ................................................................................... 282  
  Limitations of the current study and recommendations for further research ...... 285  
  Recommendations for practice ............................................................................ 287  
References ............................................................................................................... 291  
Appendix ................................................................................................................. 305
List of Figures

Figure 1  Key areas for literature review in understanding sense of place ........................................26
Figure 2  Location of study area – Bolton, NW England ..................................................................100
Figure 3  Conceptual Framework of methodology ........................................................................106
Figure 4  Kolb’s Learning Cycle ....................................................................................................110
Figure 5  Location of study area – Bolton in relation to the UK and NW ........................................116
Figure 6  Map showing the Borough of Bolton, highlighting wards in East Bolton .......................120
Figure 7  Aerial view over East Bolton ..........................................................................................121
Figure 8  Front cover of postcard used as part of a survey in East Bolton ......................................123
Figure 9  Back view of postcard from survey carried out in East Bolton .........................................124
Figure 10  Keto toolkit - used in visioning exercises .......................................................................133
Figure 11  Keto kit layout showing workspace ‘felt’, branches, leaves and icons .............................135
Figure 12  RoundView graphic demonstrating a systems view of the earth .....................................139
Figure 13  Urban Care and Neighbourhood (UCAN) Centre, Tonge Moor Rd ..............................165
Figure 14  Green space in Breightmet off Milnthorpe Rd, close to Bury Rd ....................................175
Figure 15  Crompton Way (A58) the road that divides Breightmet from Tonge ..............................176
Figure 16  Tonge Moor Rd at the lower end nearest that town centre ............................................178
Figure 17  Section of felt from the visioning exercise using Keto ...................................................182
Figure 18  The number of ideas generated by participants in Breightmet and Tonge ......................183
Figure 19  Seven Acres Local Nature Reserve ..............................................................................186
Figure 20  The number of ideas generated at the scale of the borough of Bolton ............................189
Figure 21  Section of ‘felt’ populated with ideas from Keto toolkit ................................................193
Figure 22  Rich picture illustrating research findings .....................................................................249

List of Tables

Table 1  Timeline of practical phases of research. ...........................................................................122
Table 2  Interview questions posed in initial, pre-intervention workshops .....................................127
Table 3  Post-intervention interview questions ...............................................................................129
Table 4  Outline of activities from first workshop that took place May 2010 ....................................130
Table 5  Outline of Workshop 2, July 2010 ....................................................................................136
Table 6  Outline of third and final workshop, May 2011 .................................................................141
Table 7  Insert pasted into front inner leaf of A5 booklet to form a ‘solicited diary’ .........................143
Table 8  Research questions and data sources derived from mixed methods design .....................148
Table 9  Number of participants involved in the study .....................................................................153
Table 10  Pen Portraits of the participants (not real names) ............................................................161

List of Reflective Boxes

Box 1  Personal reflection on the underlying philosophical framework ........................................104
Box 2  Personal reflection on prior experiences of participatory processes ...................................145
### List of Abbreviations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AR</td>
<td>Action Research</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AHRC</td>
<td>Arts and Humanities Research Council</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CBD</td>
<td>Convention on Biological Diversity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DCLG</td>
<td>Department for Communities and Local Government</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DEFRA</td>
<td>Department for Environment Food and Rural Affairs</td>
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<tr>
<td>EIA</td>
<td>Environmental Impact Assessment</td>
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<tr>
<td>EU</td>
<td>European Union</td>
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<td>FCCC</td>
<td>Framework Convention on Climate Change</td>
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<td>IALE</td>
<td>International Association of Landscape Ecology</td>
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<tr>
<td>GT</td>
<td>Grounded Theory</td>
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<tr>
<td>LA</td>
<td>Local Authority</td>
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<td>LA21</td>
<td>Local Agenda 21</td>
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<tr>
<td>LOCAW</td>
<td>Low Carbon at Work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NIMBY</td>
<td>Not in my back yard</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ODPM</td>
<td>Office of the Deputy Prime Minister</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NRM</td>
<td>Natural Resource Management</td>
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<tr>
<td>PLA</td>
<td>Participatory Learning and Action</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PPGIS</td>
<td>Public Participation Geographic Information Systems</td>
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<tr>
<td>PRA</td>
<td>Participatory Rural Appraisal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SES</td>
<td>Social-Ecological Systems</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SL</td>
<td>Social Learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TL</td>
<td>Transformational Learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNCED</td>
<td>United Nations Committee on Environment and Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UK</td>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
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<tr>
<td>WWF</td>
<td>Worldwide Fund for Nature</td>
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A special landscape juxtaposed with an ordinary streetscape (Broadbent, 2014)
Foreword to thesis.

My first degree was in the biological sciences (Ecology) and this was followed by postgraduate study both in the UK and abroad in Environmental Monitoring and Environmental Management, respectively, which extended my knowledge and interest into broader contexts of practice and policy. My professional life took me into the utility industries, where I experienced the ‘messy’ situations of the real world. Here my assumptions and expectations were challenged, as I was faced with the complexity of attempting to bring about positive outcomes from an environmental perspective while encountering the sometimes conflicting and harsh realities of the newly privatised utilities. Cost cutting and efficiencies were the order of the day, as these entities sought to maximise shareholder benefits by liquidating assets, while at the same time jettisoning responsibilities for stewardship of previously public lands and assets. From my perspective, it seemed that simplistic solutions were pursued for short-term results, with the problems being left for others to deal with.

In my personal life, I developed a passion for conservation of biodiversity, alongside a realisation that conservation was not solely the responsibility of governments and agencies, rather wider issues of lifestyle impacted on whether species and habitats would survive and thrive in the future. This led to embarking on a PhD process: to understand more about how people interact with landscapes (and each other) and what this might mean for conservation. My initial thoughts on what the research might cover was to look at the conservation of biodiversity in a particular location, but this quickly progressed to broadening my scope to encompass a wider perspective of ‘place’, inspired by Adams (2003) in his book ‘Future Nature’

“We have to confirm and establish cultural links between people and nature, which means taking people seriously in the places where they live and work and go to school, enabling them to engage with “nature” even in its most restricted and plainest forms, particularly in cities.” (Adams, 2003 pg173)

The focus of nature conservation in Britain has largely been on special sites designated as nature reserves, but that strategy only values small ‘islands’ of biodiversity and cannot hope to retain the ecological diversity and the vital processes that a broader biodiversity in the landscape provides. Of course, nature has its own intrinsic value, aside from the value that humans put onto it.

This follows a shift in much thinking around conservation, which suggests that we must consider the wider environment as a whole, rather than concentrating on nature reserves as being the key to species’ survival. My thinking coincided with an experience I had when walking to school with my young son. We noticed a particular tree that we walked past every day with a yellow cross sprayed on the trunk. The tree looked healthy, so this sign of its impending removal shocked us. I made enquiries to the local authority, who informed me that the tree was a ‘Manchester Poplar’ (a type of Black Poplar which had been planted throughout south Lancashire because of its ability to withstand air pollution) and that a fungal disease was killing them, so removal was a public safety necessity. The trees were genetically identical, being clones, and therefore whole swathes of these trees were vulnerable to infection by the pathogen. The change to the local landscape was quite dramatic, in the parks particularly, where hundreds were felled.
Following this, I became hyperaware of the treescape. I found out as much as I could about the issue and attended a conference held at Delamere Forest on the fate of the Black Poplar, and took steps (in a very limited way) to replant a more genetically diverse stock of black poplar in my locality. I was made aware that this tree is no longer favoured in urban areas because poplars tend to produce fluffy white seeds that are deemed a nuisance by local authorities, as residents complain about the ‘mess’ created by the tree. This struck me as an example of people not tolerating nature, but rather seeing it as problematic.

All of this got me thinking about sense of place and how I had taken for granted the feelings that having those trees in my locality gave me. I began to wonder whether change was key to altering one’s sense of place. Is it a latent entity in all of us? Can it be made more salient to people? If so, how might this happen (without resorting to destroying valued assets such as trees)? What might be the consequences of making people more aware of their sense of place? And what might the implications be for biodiversity conservation and planning for a more sustainable future in general?

Around the same time as this was happening, in my job as a part-time lecturer, I became involved in the doctoral research at The University of Manchester of Joanne Tippett, who was later to become my PhD supervisor. Joanne was testing a toolkit that she had developed with residents and agency representatives in North Manchester. My initial intention was to sit and observe the process and use it as a case study in participation in my teaching. The nature of action research demands involvement rather than detachment, so I took part in the research project over a period of months, and found it to be a profoundly engaging experience.

As I had been considering doing a PhD myself, in 2006 I registered to undertake some research into sense of place and conservation. It was hoped that my research might have implications for practice, whether that be formally in the land use planning system, or more informally through community action. It is hoped that the thesis addresses some of these issues.

Most of this thesis is written in the standard third person passive tense, however, from time to time there will be sections written in the first person. I feel it is important to express my thoughts in this way and to acknowledge my feelings and motivations at various points. These sections will appear in boxes, to show them as vignettes of my thought processes, and to give the reader a more personal view of my PhD journey.
Abstract

The relevance of places to people has been questioned in recent times, as the world has become increasingly globalised and people more mobile. The aim of this research was to explore the relationship between sense of place and people’s behaviour in ‘ordinary’, everyday places that people inhabit. This contrasts with much prior research, which has focused on ‘special’ places, such as national parks and impressive landscapes in order to investigate the components of sense of place. Most people do not live in such places, but inhabit ordinary places in (sub) urban contexts. The research questions were: How does sense of place manifest in an ordinary, everyday landscape? In what ways can social learning impact upon the dynamics of sense of place? Can a more salient sense of place affect people’s attitudes towards and behaviour within their local area? Using an action research approach, pre- and post-interviews and three workshops to create a sustainable future vision at a neighbourhood level of scale, and the town as a whole, were held with fourteen residents of East Bolton, in the North West of England. The activities were designed to facilitate interaction between the participants, so that meanings attributed to places could be shared and discussed. This approach allowed participants to see familiar places in new ways and to share perspectives with others.

The key themes that emerged from this research were: the importance of childhood places; the impact of mobility – both physical and social mobility; the interdependence of places at various scales; and also feelings of self-efficacy and people’s ability to influence their surroundings. A key finding was that sense of place can be made more salient for people in ‘ordinary’ landscapes, particularly if people are given direct experience of their places and opportunities to share and reflect on their perceptions relating to place. Social learning, however, takes time and requires resources to create opportunities to influence the salience of sense of place.

The findings point to the value of promoting social learning through engagement activities. Planners, regeneration project officers and citizen groups could utilise sense of place as an organising principle to explore place meanings and as a catalyst for stimulating
local action. An unexpected finding was that participants found it more difficult to discuss sense of place at the neighbourhood level of scale than the town level of scale, partly owing to their differing conception of boundaries and lack of awareness of the neighbourhood beyond the home. This has implications for implementing the localism agenda, suggesting that local action and visioning needs to be situated within activities nested at a range of scales in order to be most effective. The drive towards localism may lead to more self-organising and activism emerging from outside of the formal planning system and becoming a force for collective place shaping. Thus, the benefits of developing a more salient sense of place may also have impacts in less formal ways, such as greater interest and involvement in neighbourhood affairs and increased capacity-building, from which community action could potentially emerge.
Introduction

In an increasingly globalised world, the importance (and relevance) of local places to people has already been questioned (Massey, 1991; Harvey, 1996). In the richer nations, increased mobility and opportunity to travel has had an effect upon places both physically and socially and it could be said that most places have been impacted by globalisation to some degree. So whether one is in the privileged position of being able to exercise choice in deciding where to live, or it is the case that economic and environmental forces have served to push people to live in certain locations, places do exert influence on people in many ways (and vice versa). In the context of resource depletion and biodiversity loss, to name but two of the pressing problems facing humanity, the future sustainability of human settlements and how places are designed and utilised are issues that require addressing.

Hamdi (2010) has worked all over the world, examining how people make cities work and can make them work well, even where there is poverty and overcrowding. He believes that people living in cities have the innovation and know-how to improve their local places and that planners and designers would benefit from tapping into this wisdom when looking to improve living conditions. He states that:

‘The intelligence of place, I continue to maintain, is in the streets of places everywhere, not in the planning offices of bureaucracy.’ (Hamdi, 2010 pg18). The question is how to tap into this intelligence of place, so that better planning results.

It may have been the case in the past that people were ‘born and bred’ in a particular locality, often remaining there until death, but increasingly people are presented with many options to travel and to relocate as a result of the opportunities created through globalisation (Taylor, 2005). Definitions of globalisation often include reference to ‘hyper-mobility’ which involves the metaphorical shrinking of the globe as telecommunications and technology facilitates communication allows people to interact on a greater scale than has ever been possible before. What does globalisation mean for places in the 21st century? Are they less valued or more valued, now that people are in a better position to draw comparisons between different places?
Biodiversity, that is the variability of species and habitats on the planet, is spatially located and faces threats from myriad causes: urban expansion, fragmentation of habitats into less viable and poorly functioning fractions, the impact of pollution and exploitation by humans generally. Despite efforts in recent decades to slow down these trends, the onslaught continues. Climate change is another emerging threat to the viability of life as species may be unable to adapt at a fast enough pace (Secretariat of the Convention for Biodiversity, 2010).

So places are where both the human and other than human co-exist and where all life is enacted. The fate of places affects them all, therefore examining what places mean to the most dominant of all the species, *Homo sapiens*, may have useful repercussions for the long-term fate of biodiversity (of which humans are an integral part). This brings us onto the notion of a ‘sense of place’. It will be discussed in detail in the literature review, but it is fair to say that sense of place is a concept that has been discussed by a range of disciplines for several decades and, although there has been a plethora of research seeking to define it its nature remains elusive (Patterson and Williams, 2005; Altman and Low, 1992). The relevance of sense of place in relation to how people function in their localities and how much agency they possess has implications for the planning process and ultimately, whether valued assets such as biodiversity are to be conserved.

In contrast to much of the research on place which has tended to focus on special places such as National Parks (Gifford, 1998), this study examines sense of place in an ordinary landscape. Understanding the factors that bond people to such places is seen as important in many fields of endeavour such as land use planning and natural resource management. The elusive sense of place is something which has been of interest not just to academics and those working in the areas just mentioned, but also by government (at all levels). Their interest has been not only in terms of ensuring the well-being of citizens, but also for market advantage in an increasingly competitive global marketplace.
The overall aim of this research is to explore the relationship between sense of place and social learning with regards to perceptions and behaviour in an ordinary landscape. The implications of a more salient sense of place in terms of practice are then discussed.

This research outlines the potential of the concept of sense of place as an organising principle, within which people could find common ground in order to develop their neighbourhoods, towns and regions along more sustainable lines (Cameron et al., 2004). Specifically, it focuses on how individuals in a locality that could be deemed ordinary and everyday perceive the places that are significant to them. This is done in order to uncover something of what a sense of place might mean to those inhabiting such localities as opposed to ‘special’ or ‘iconic’ places, where much previous place research has already focused. This work also examines the dynamics of place perceptions when people come together to discuss their neighbourhood and the wider settlement area that they share. The implications for planning practice and place shaping in general are discussed in the light of the findings of this research.

This research does not reify the local and acknowledges the interconnectedness of global processes in people’s everyday lives – from the fuels that drive and sustain homes, businesses, transport and agricultural systems, to the effects of climate change that are the result of historic as well as current human endeavour. Despite decades since place first began to be researched and the many theories that have attempted to explain the nature of sense of place, it is still the case that this evolving phenomenon has much to reveal, particularly in modern society when technological change is occurring so rapidly (De Miglio and Williams, 2008).

One of the objectives is to examine whether people’s perceptions and feelings about the places in which they find themselves living influence self-efficacy, positive behaviour and the likelihood of activism within said places. The research acknowledges the so-called ‘democratic deficit’ where traditional forms of involvement in politics and community life in general are seen to be declining (Putnam, 1995). Involvement in democratic processes and increased participation in local
decision-making mechanisms have been described as countervailing forces against globalising tendencies which move decision-making into non-democratic realms such as corporations and other non-governmental bodies i.e. those who are less publicly accountable for their actions (The Power Commission, 2006).

The research has three main strands to it. The first strand examines sense of place as a concept in an everyday landscape, from the neighbourhood through to the national scale, providing insights into the ways in which people use and value places, both current and past, at various stages in their lives. By focusing on the large town of Bolton in the north west of England at the neighbourhood scale and also looking at the larger scales of the region and beyond, the dynamics of sense of place can be explored. The links between the self and place are also part and parcel of the research, as psychological studies of places have identified that they can play a significant role in forming and maintaining identities.

The second strand of the research explores the role of social learning and how it might impact upon sense of place. This aspect is tackled by means of the researcher carrying out an intervention with a group of people so that feelings, associations and meanings around places can be aired and shared. There have been calls for the past few decades to increase opportunities for people to get involved in activities such as planning. The ‘participative turn’ has received criticism on a number of fronts, for example Rydin and Pennington (2010) and Flyvbjerg (1998), which will be detailed in the literature review, but in general, the idea that involving a greater number of participants and garnering a wider range of perspectives still holds sway in many circles and indeed is enshrined in laws and conventions, for example, the Aarhus Convention (UNECE, 1998). The research however does not focus in depth on the relative merits of participative techniques, but uses a small range of such methods in order to elicit responses and reactions to various elements of place. This strand of the research, in effect, shifts the emphasis of the study from the individual to the collective.
The third and final strand examines the implications of making ordinary and everyday places more salient to people. Manzo and Perkins (2006) speculate as to whether it is possible to have a collective sense of place. This research speculates on whether increasing people’s understanding and appreciation of places manifests in both subtle and more overt ways, whether that be in changes in perceptions or in practical behavioural change. It acknowledges that activism can take many forms, and these are discussed in subsequent chapters. The possible consequences and ramifications of increasing place awareness are considered in the light of current planning practices and also in the light of recent UK coalition government pronouncements on the ‘big society’ and ‘localism’. These related concepts have been promoted by the UK government as a societal response to the economic problems facing the state and seen as a way to respond to funding cuts and the contraction of public services. The possibilities of non-governmental and informal groups to self-organise around place-shaping are considered in this research and although it takes place in a particular location, the findings could potentially be transferable to other localities.

The approach taken in this research could be broadly described as human ecology, as it is an interdisciplinary exercise which aims to study the relationships between humans and the environments they live in, i.e. social-ecological systems (SES) (Berkes and Folke, 1998). It is broad in scope and as such encompasses diverse research fields such as those found in the natural sciences and the humanities. Bringing these traditions together may seem problematic to those used to working firmly within disciplinary boundaries. However, appreciation of the concepts and methods adopted by researchers in diverse realms of academia can give rise to new perspectives (for example, emergent properties of systems) and new ways of studying phenomena (Berkes and Folke, 1998; Musacchio et al., 2005). This research looks at sense of place from the perspective of human ecology, and brings together the biophysical and the social in order to develop insights into the phenomena of sense of place.
A preoccupation in recent decades has been that of sustainability. This is very much a contested concept, but at its core, it is concerned with living within the limits of one planet, the inequalities experienced currently amongst the human population, the effects of humans on other species and also the future survival of all inhabitants of the planet. Humans require resources derived from the environment, sometimes termed ‘critical natural capital’ (Ekins, Folke and De Groot 2003), so the ways in which people choose to live, and the ways in which human settlements are designed and exploited, have a great impact on the natural world (Carley and Christie, 2000; Chiesura and De Groot, 2003). People living in the more materially developed parts of the world may not directly experience environmental degradation as acutely as those in less developed countries although many places are dealing with the legacy of past industry which has despoiled many towns and cities. Rapid development not only has a physical effect on the landscape but also affects the feelings of those who interact with it. Ryan (2005) highlights a gap in research examining this relationship:

‘The effects of these changes on people and on their attachment to natural areas have gone relatively unstudied’ (Ryan, 2005 pg4)

Another facet of researching sense of place surrounds the extent to which people are conscious of the depth of their thoughts and feelings about everyday places. It has been suggested that generally people are not thinking about how they feel about their local place on a regular basis and that it can take some sort of disrupting event to make sense of place more salient to people. Manzo (2003) states:

‘we need to learn more about how experiences beyond disruption or disaster can precipitate increased awareness of our surroundings.’ (Manzo, 2003 pg53).

This doctoral research examines the relationship between salience of sense of place and how the dynamic of salience may be altered.
Commodities such as fuel and foodstuffs are globally traded, which allows richer nations to draw them in from afar, so rather than seeing the extraction of those natural resources on their doorstep, the environmental and social problems associated with this globalised trade can remain hidden from those enjoying the benefits. That is not to say however, that people are ignorant of environmental problems, but that they may perceive them as external to their own concerns and as something that they are powerless to have any impact upon. This leads to questions around self-efficacy and whether people can take action to improve their local environment and by extension, add to efforts to limit negative impacts of humankind on the planet as a whole.

This research draws upon work carried out in a number of different academic disciplines. One of these is Landscape Ecology and in an editorial in a journal of the same name, Palang, Mander and Naveh (2000) criticised the field as being too narrow and largely ignoring important elements of the interdisciplinary field stating:

‘when the importance of the role of humans, their behaviour, wants and aspirations and their cultural impacts on landscapes is appreciated much more than ever, many landscape ecologists shy away from ‘holism’, and regard it mistakenly only as a ‘soft’ philosophical, ideological or even mystical term for which there is no room in the world of such a respectable ‘hard’ science as landscape ecology’.

(Palang et al., 2000 pg2).

They call for ‘interdisciplinary synergism’ amid biophysical and social science disciplines. In turn, this would facilitate a science that is transdisciplinary and orientated towards problem solving. It would also allow ‘new insights gained from systems thinking and acting’ (Palang et al., 2000 pg3).
One of those authors, Naveh (2007) takes this idea forward more forcefully by drawing on the work by Laszlo (2001) on ‘Macroshift’\(^1\). Naveh believes the role of landscape scientists has changed and that they should no longer ‘follow the well-paved road of prevailing conventional and chiefly outdated mechanistic and positivistic scientific paradigms’ (Naveh, 2007 pg1438). Rather, he calls for a much broader ‘integrative’ approach whereby disciplinary boundaries are blurred and where people work co-actively together to shape future pathways of development. Interestingly, he does not just restrict his purview to the geophysical and ecological aspects of landscape (which is what landscape ecologists traditionally concern themselves with), but he includes the people actually ‘using, perceiving and shaping’ the landscapes they inhabit. This therefore brings in a much wider remit than most previous landscape ecological studies and this will be examined in further detail in the thesis.

Both these editorials from the traditionally scientific discipline of landscape ecology signal a distinct shift in approach and they also provide some justification for this research, as they call for ‘transdisciplinarity’. This term is distinguished from the more commonly used term ‘interdisciplinarity’ as the latter refers to working between disciplines, while transdisciplinarity suggests working across and even beyond disciplines. What this means, is for disciplines to work closer together and to be more open to systems thinking approaches. Naveh (2007) makes specific suggestions as to how the International Association for Landscape Ecology (IALE) congresses could be run differently so that more in-depth discussion is facilitated, but he also suggests that including a broader range of participants in landscape related endeavours will bring benefits, as it would bring more options to the debate than a more narrower constituency would. This doctoral research will make a contribution to working in the way that these landscape ecologists have called for.

\(^1\) Macroshift refers to the changes taking place at the planetary scale that human societies need to be preparing for and the ways in which these challenges are addressed (Laszlo, 2001).
To provide a wider context for this study, it is useful to examine the phenomena of sustainable development and globalisation. These two concepts are interlinked in many respects and influence the key ideas in this thesis. Firstly, sustainable development is an idea that emerged in the 1980s as a reaction to the exploitative nature of humanity during a time of increased consciousness of the global nature of many of the emerging problems, such as climate change and other forms of air pollution. These issues do not respect borders, so concerns about how these ‘commons’, i.e. shared resources that are not privately owned, could be protected were now being discussed globally. The term globalisation refers to a number of interrelated phenomena that include greater connectivity and speed of communications which have given rise to the increased interdependence of economies and societies. Habermas (2006) defines globalisation as ‘cumulative processes of worldwide expansion’ (Habermas, 2006 pg175) that involve trade, financial markets, migration of labour, media, and environmental problems, amongst others. Sustainability and globalisation could be seen as two sides of the same coin, with places being where globalising forces are made manifest.

Many initiatives emerged from an international event The Earth Summit in Rio in 1992, which was attended by world leaders. One of these was ‘Agenda 21’ – an agenda for the 21st century. From this, ‘Local Agenda 21’ (LA21) came into being, with the express aim of stimulating action at the local level of scale, the collective results of which could have a demonstrable effect upon communities and ultimately the health of the planet and its life support systems. The strap line ‘think global, act local’ was widely quoted and snappily communicated that small actions could build into something significant. Interestingly, the process of gathering people together to define and shape the local plan was deemed as important as the product (i.e. a document outlining a local action plan).
The stimulus for communities to come together to self-organise around the issues of local concern, was seen as a highly positive outcome of the LA21 initiative. The success of the initiative is difficult to evaluate as inevitably countries and communities differed in their interpretation of it. In the UK, there was an initial flurry of activity as local authorities sought to put their action plans together, resourcing staff to co-ordinate the local response. However once the documents were produced, few authorities maintained similar levels of support, meaning that the implementation was largely limited (Mittler, 2001).

In this interconnected world, lifestyle decisions taken in the UK, a small nation with a now low natural resource base (such as fuel sources, agricultural land availability), have far reaching effects. Looking to the future, people will need to be increasingly mindful of the impact of their actions, from everyday considerations such as how they travel and the food they consume, through to the fate of their waste. Modern western lifestyles rely heavily on imports, which may not be as readily obtainable in the future if fuel prices continue to rise and the pressure on natural systems continues. The UK currently has a chronic shortage of housing, so demand for land for building is high and urban expansion has impacts on agriculture, biodiversity, and water resources. Land-use planning and decisions about which resources need protecting and which are plentiful enough for exploitation are often heavily contested. Such complex issues do not lend themselves to easy solutions, as they involve interactions between human and natural systems, many of which are politically sensitive. This research will examine interactions between participants who will work on a sustainable vision involving social learning techniques and a focus on place.

It has been suggested that people are much less connected to their places than they once were (Gustafson, 2009). The study area in this research, the North West of England, was one of the first areas in the UK to industrialise in the mid 1800s. People moved away from an agrarian way of living to a more urbanised lifestyle. Commodities that may once have been sourced locally (for example, food, textiles, and building materials) are drawn from a globalised marketplace. These factors have served to
remove people from as much direct contact with the natural world as they might otherwise have had and as technology becomes more of a dominant force in peoples’ lives, are they less likely to engage with or care about the real, as opposed to the virtual? The media have bemoaned the fact that children, certainly in the UK, have been given much less freedom to explore the natural world than their parents and ancestors did. This ‘extinction of experience’ has real consequences for the support for conservation efforts, and calls have been made to ensure that urban areas in particular provide spaces where nature can be seen and accessed by the populace (Pyle, 2003; Miller, 2006). Adams (2003) believes that unless there is much more of a ‘cultural concern’ for nature, the objectives of conservation have a poor chance of making a difference. How this cultural concern might be fostered is of interest in this doctoral research.

Bannerjee (2012) points out that there has been something of a radical shift in the way that conservation discourses conceptualise nature in recent years. This shift now positions place-based attachments as being an important consideration in conservation practice whereas in the past, nature was seen as more of a separate entity and human perceptions of it were of minimal concern. This may be partly owing to the declines witnessed in once common species and a growing realisation that lifestyle issues impact on nature in many profound ways.
Ryan (2005), in his study on attachment and the effects of environmental experience in urban natural areas in Michigan (USA) identified gaps in knowledge which this study goes some way towards addressing. One of the gaps he identified was whether attachment had an effect on stewardship of areas. He postulated that a greater understanding of how attachment is manifested could have real implications for the management of natural areas in urban settings. Interestingly, another focus of his study was the difference in place attachment between the general public and those who had expertise in natural history – what he termed the ‘conceptual attachment’ (i.e. of people who liked nature in general and would seek it out) compared to the ‘place-specific’ attachment of residents and other users of urban natural areas. Both of these issues will be addressed in this study. The nature of sense of place in ordinary landscapes and the implications of this, in terms of whether perceptions relate to levels of, or likelihood of, activism (be that overt or more subtle ways of demonstrating care and concern for place).

Salience is the extent to which place impinges on consciousness. This is an aspect of interest to this research. To what extent do people interact with places? Is that interaction reflected upon and communicated with others? Answers to these questions serve to indicate the salience of place to individuals and groups.

This research is not looking to measure levels of local activism but rather to explore the range of actions that might be construed as activism. Questioning people about their motivations, opportunities and barriers for being involved in their networks lends insights into the forms of activism that are being enacted. This will be discussed further in the literature review as it pertains to self-efficacy, social capital, citizenship and local pro-activity at both individual and collective levels.
Structure of the thesis

The overall of this thesis is: to explore the relationship between sense of place and social learning with regards to perceptions and behaviour in an ordinary landscape and to discuss the implications of a more salient sense of place on practice.

This leads to the following three research questions, will are explored in more detail in the methodology.

1. How does sense of place manifest in an ordinary, everyday landscape?
2. In what ways can social learning impact upon the dynamics of sense of place?
3. Can a more salient sense of place affect peoples’ attitudes towards and behaviour within their local area?

The next chapter outlines the main literatures that inform the areas of interest in this research. This is followed by details of the methods adopted in this research in order to address its aims and objectives. A case study chapter, detailing the characteristics of the study area is presented, along with details of a pilot study that was carried out in order to find out more about the nature of the place and also to help inform the interview questions. A data analysis chapter goes through the various outputs and themes that emerged from the research process. These themes are then evaluated in the discussion chapter, and conclusions and recommendations are drawn and presented in the final chapter.
Literature Review: Connecting people and place

This literature review chapter covers four broad areas and encompasses literature from a range of disciplines. These are:

- sense of place
- sustainability and planning
- citizenship and participation
- systems and social learning

The first part of the chapter examines what is currently known about the phenomena of ‘sense of place’, drawing largely upon the field of environmental psychology but also psychological theories in general. Looking at a spatial element also draws in disciplines which are concerned with what happens in places, therefore perspectives on the concept of sense of place from geography, sociology, human ecology and natural resource management are also explored.

The second section of this literature review looks at the interlinked areas of sustainability and planning. Sustainability is a contested concept and this has real implications for action, particularly in the highly political field of land use planning. Some would argue that land use planning is one of the major arenas whereby sustainable development could take place. The third section follows on from sustainability and planning, and examines citizenship and participation. The manner by which people interact with planning is increasingly through participative means, and involvement in planning thus inherently encompasses consideration of the nature of citizenship.

The final section of the chapter explores theories around learning, particularly as they pertain to participation and action. The theories come from psychology and education, and also draw upon systems theories by bringing attention to the contexts in which learning takes place. This section also highlights studies which have
attempted to bring together some of the issues mentioned earlier in the chapter, for example, around sustainability and natural resource planning.

This chapter as a whole highlights gaps in knowledge around these four broad areas and sets the context for the study.

**Sense of place**

This research examines the relevance of Sense of Place in a globalised world, under conditions of increased mobility and the reduced incidence of people spending their lives within a restricted geographical area. People’s relationship to place is worthy of study, given that globalisation has perhaps influenced the nature of that relationship to varying degrees. Gustafson (2001b) discusses mobility in terms of ‘roots’ and ‘routes’, arguing that attachment to particular places may even be reinforced by mobility, but also that further research is needed to explore how the roles that places play in people’s lives are affected by increased mobility. Even if people remain physically rooted to their place of birth, many have certainly had their horizons widened in recent decades, whether that is due to travel for work or leisure purposes or perhaps through access to visual media, such as television or the internet. The latter might be seen as vicarious experiences of imagined places, but they will influence the way that people perceive places that they have experienced directly, and perhaps change their perspective somewhat. One of the aims of this research is to examine the nature of the relationship between people and place.

This review organises the varied literature on sense of place, primarily by means of providing an overview of the myriad definitions associated with this body of knowledge. There is an outline of some of the historical development of theory in this broad area, and the review aims to give an overview of the current state of the field, given the varied range of disciplines that have paid attention to the concept. Attention is also paid to the methodological considerations that research in this area has been concerned with, coming as it does from a wide range of disparate disciplines. There is also an examination of the way that sense of place literature treats the bio-physical,
psychological, social and political elements that appear to make up the topic area as a whole. The division of the literature into these categories is somewhat arbitrary and artificial but discussing the elements in this way highlights trends in the literature and the ongoing debate about the relative significance of the elements, as well as the weight given to them by those who are working in different disciplines but looking at essentially the same phenomenon. The concluding paragraph brings the elements together again to reflect on the ‘sense of place’ literature in relation to the proposed research.

The following diagram illustrates the literatures that were consulted in order to construct this review.

![Diagram](image)

Figure 1 Key areas for literature review in understanding sense of place
The concept of sense of place is also widely used in policy circles and has been mentioned in several governmental documents, particularly in the field of regeneration and planning. The phrase has also been widely adopted in the fields of tourism and marketing whose publications seek to present certain forms or versions of sense of place in order to attract more visitors or inward investment. Whether those conceptions of place formulated as part of place branding have a basis in reality for the people living and working in those places could be questioned, but they certainly aim to give a positive impression to their readers.

Reputations created about places because of incidents reported in the press (for example, sites where disasters have occurred or significant events happened, possibly in the distant past) also serve to fix certain impressions of places in the minds of others. These events can be persistent in shaping perceptions and difficult to erase once created. For example, a locality may have gained a bad reputation because of perceptions about the socio-economic status of the residents, which may be more related to prejudices than a basis in reality and therefore unwarranted. This demonstrates that perceptions of places can be every bit as influential as their actual characteristics. How these perceptions are formed and communicated by people is of interest to this research, as well as their consequences.

The purpose of looking at this particular body of literature comes from a desire to learn about how people feel about their local, everyday landscape and how that influences their thoughts and perhaps their behaviour as actors within that landscape. Do feelings about a place really have much impact on how people operate within it, or is place merely functioning as a backdrop to other activities, with minimal influence on people’s thoughts and actions? What is the role of the physical places themselves in terms of how they affect people? Are some places more affective than others i.e., do they influence feelings of attachment more than other landscape types?
Despite globalising forces that serve to make the world seem a smaller place and allow us to be connected in an instant to most corners of the globe through technological advances, Kemmis (1990) states that:

‘No real culture - whether we speak of food or of politics or of anything else - can exist in abstraction from place. Yet that abstraction is one of the hallmarks of our time.’ (Kemmis, 1990 pg7).

The extent to which place has become an abstraction, even places where we spend most of our time enacting our daily lives, is worthy of study.

Ryan (2005) asks a similar question in his research on nature spaces occurring in urban areas. He wonders whether certain types of habitat are more likely to engender feelings of attachment. There has been a great deal of research on landscape preferences, usually in terms of their visual qualities and aesthetics, but work on the meanings of such place preferences are less easy to find. Kaltenborn and Bjerke (2002) carried out a study in Norway examining landscape categories that were more likely to engender place attachment and stated that wild lands and farm environments were the types of landscape most favoured. However, this was undertaken in the World Heritage Site of Roros, perhaps an atypical landscape not commonly found. In contrast, this doctoral research takes place in an ordinary suburban landscape, so it will be interesting to see what types of places participants seem to value in this context.

It is important to ponder on the nature and dynamics of the concept of sense of place because there has been much written about it by both academics and practitioners working in a wide range of fields, each potentially having differing conceptions of the term. There is a need for closer investigation in order to unpick the concept and to tease out the nuances imposed by different disciplines tackling this issue. Therefore, it may be a useful exercise to break down the terms in the first instance. For example, ‘sense’ refers to perception, whether that is visual, tactile, or aural. It could also refer to something less tangible like ‘feelings towards’. This part of the term has the possibility of much interpretation by individuals as it is being processed in an
embodied fashion, and this may indicate a high likelihood of wide variation in construal. This boils down to ontological questions of the nature of reality and the degree to which it is knowable, as filtered through our perceptions. Herein could lie most of the arguments around definitions. That is, the extent authors to which believe that the world is knowable and the extent that is constructed by individuals, through the medium of the senses and prior experiences.

‘Place’ is easier to define perhaps when thinking of particular locations or localities, but could also refer to places in a more general way, for example, urban, sub-urban, or rural. Traditionally, geographers dealt with places as being bounded entities that could be used as units of study. Relph et al. (2001) describe place as a ‘foundational concept’ in geography. They trace how place in geography was first really examined in a phenomenological way in the 1970s, whereby the importance of meanings began to be studied. Tuan (1974), for example, was very influential in bringing academic attention to places. He defined place as ‘space with meaning’.

Since the 1970s, place has been reinterpreted by geographers in a number of ways. Some have argued how some places become devoid of character and indistinguishable from similar settings no matter where in the world you are (places like airports, for example, and shopping malls) and as such could be described as ‘placeless’ or even ‘non-places’ (Relph, 1976). Places could also be imagined or abstract rather than actual places, perhaps conjured up in art and literature. In more recent times, virtual reality has come to prominence, largely through computer gaming where whole worlds can be created such as SimCity or Second Life. How these virtual spaces impact on actual places and identities of people is not the focus of this research but it is of interest, given their now widespread nature, particularly amongst young people (Turner and Turner, 2006).

Some academics see place as having clear boundaries, whether that be at the scale of a room or of a region, while others contest the very idea of places having clear cut, accepted boundaries, preferring to see places as intersections where various physical,
social and cultural processes are enacted, and therefore ‘relational’, (for example Massey, 1993, 1994; Latour, 1987). Others, who acknowledge the bounded nature of places, accept that they are movable and ever changing entities which are contested and constantly remade (Creswell, 2004; May, 1996). Place can simply refer to a location but it can be described as being a ‘repository of meaning’ (Hay, 1998), while others refer to ‘dwelling’ (Norberg-Schulz, 2000).

Attempting to find an adequate definition of ‘sense of place’ from the literature is a difficult task, given that the discipline areas that contribute to this body of literature are so numerous. The diversity of such disciplines has meant that there are various definitions and alternative terms associated with the notion of ‘sense of place’, such as Topophilia, Place Attachment, Genius Loci, Biophilia, Place Dependence, Dwelling, Rootedness, Place identity and Belonging. These terms will now be examined in further detail.

- **Topophilia** was coined by the geographer Yi-Fu Tuan to denote a strong sense of place or identity amongst certain peoples (Tuan, 1974). He, along with Relph (1976) talk about ‘insidedness’ and ‘outsidedness’, to illustrate the kind of belonging that people may feel. These relate to the depth of knowledge and experience of places that people have and connote understanding and appreciation of the character of place.

- **Place attachment** (Altman and Low, 1992) is a commonly used concept in place research although mainly coming from psychology, its use has spread to other disciplines to operationalise a significant aspect of sense of place.

- **Genius Loci** is a term that has currency in architecture and it has its roots in phenomenological studies. Is has been translated as the spirit of place and in many mythologies was personified as an actual spirit that protected places (Norberg-Schulz, 2000). Jiven and Larkham (2003) believe that the concept has much to offer urban designers as they consider the character of places.

- **Biophilia** was a term coined by the biologist E.O. Wilson to describe the propensity of humans to love living systems (Wilson, 1986). He notes that people seek out places which are attractive and are drawn to particular places.
because of the features of the natural world that are found there. In particular, he commented that people express preferences for green spaces and water bodies. This has implications for sense of place when considering natural areas in urban environments.

- **Place dependence** (Williams et al., 1992) is a term that has been used mainly in sociology and studies of natural resources. It largely covers aspects of place that people require - whether for survival or for recreation. However, this term is somewhat ambiguous in that some define dependence as being things people need while others use it more generally to include things that are desired but not necessarily needed. The ambiguity will be explored in more detail further on in this review.

- **Dwelling** is a term used in phenomenological studies and emphasises the importance of home places where people spend a great deal of their time and to which they show a high degree of attachment (Cuba and Hummon, 1993; Ingold, 2000).

- **Rootedness** is a metaphor used by Chawla (1992) and comes from botany to denote the fact that plants are anchored into the ground by means of roots. In terms of people and place it suggests a degree of permanence, although that rootedness may be shallow or deep.

- **Place identity** is a subset of a much larger body of work in psychology which examines the key concept of 'identity' i.e. the factors that determine who one is, or who one perceives themselves to be (Proshansky et al., 1983). It is a complex construct, as it encompasses both internal and external factors. Place has not been considered to a great extent in psychology in the past, although there has been a burgeoning of academic interest in recent years.

- **Belonging** is a notion that is frequently used in sociological studies as well as social psychology. It can be applied to a range of scales and has been used in studies of nationalism. Anderson (1991) coined the term ‘*imagined communities*’ to represent the abstract feelings that people have for fellow citizens of their nation but whom they have not and probably will not ever meet (Anderson, 1991). This term appears to have strong links with the social,
yet it is also spatial. Yuval-Davis (2006) points out that it is a dynamic concept in that people can belong somewhere in a number of ways. She also points out that it can be something that is only articulated (sometimes even politicised) if feelings of belonging are under threat in some way.

Looking at the historical development of place research, early studies tended to be phenomenological in nature (Relph, 1976; Tuan, 1974 and 1977). This means that the subjective qualities of place were the focus, particularly how they impacted upon an individuals’ sense of place (Hay, 1998). Some tendency towards humanism was reversed in the 1950s when the trend turned to more positivist approaches. It should be pointed out that Proshansky et al. (1983) took issue with those studying place attachments in the early days. The phenomenological approach, which geographers such as Tuan and Relph were using, was seen as having many shortcomings by the psychologists who were advocating established social psychological methods such as structured questionnaires and attitudinal scales, which are largely quantitative.

Recently, however, there has been renewed interest in the more holistic, phenomenological studies although post-positivist ontologies still permeate the field (Altman and Low, 1992). Environmental psychology, in particular, makes extensive use of quantitative techniques to explain phenomena, but there are increasing moves towards methodological pluralism and use of interpretive approaches. For example, the LOCAW project (Low Carbon at Work), looking at workplace behaviour towards low carbon adoption strategies, has used life histories, back casting and focus groups as data gathering methods, and analysed the material using approaches such as content analysis and grounded theory (Uzzell et al., 2002).

Altman and Low (1992) outline a general trend or trajectory that tends to occur in the social sciences when a topic becomes of interest to the research community. That trajectory is identified as having three phases. The first phase is to tackle a phenomenon as if there is consensus about the idea or the meaning of it. A second phase questions this supposed consensus so that sub-types are identified and
described in a much more rigorous fashion. The third phase is characterised by the development of theoretical positions and by problems being operationalised. At the time of publishing their work in 1992, it was thought that the study of ‘place attachment’ was moving into the second phase of generating precise definitions. It is questionable whether this broad field of study has reached this third stage in its evolution and other authors have commented on this process and whether it is ever likely to occur in the way Altman and Low envisaged (Patterson and Williams, 2005; Trentelman, 2009).

Stedman (2002) takes issue with the field and asserts that much place research is methodologically weak and recommends that note be taken of the contribution that social psychological approaches could make, such approaches being testable and robust. Hidalgo and Hernandez (2001) too bemoan the lack of theoretical coherence in the field, suggesting that many more empirical studies are needed to aid its development. The debate, seen here in the environmental psychology community somewhat mirrors that between those working in the natural and social sciences, as regards methodological approaches. Psychology as a discipline has tended to be more quantitatively inclined; building its findings upon quasi-scientific approaches such as analyses based upon surveys. Interpretive approaches are also used but to a much lesser extent although this may be changing, as qualitative methods appear to be gaining more currency as evidenced by the increasing number of papers published that demonstrate greater methodological plurality.

The three stage sequence of a maturing discipline has been referred to in numerous papers since Altman and Low’s book was published in 1992. Most notably, Patterson and Williams (2005) argue that the quest for a clearly defined and accepted third phase may be illusory, if it is a single research tradition that is being aimed for. They contend that place research is more properly a ‘domain of research informed by many disciplinary research traditions’ (Patterson and Williams, 2005 pg361). Their paper maps out the influence that the epistemological foundations of the different traditions looking at the concept of place have on the resultant paradigms and research
traditions. They look, in particular, at studies on place carried out in psychology and sociology. They also respond to critiques of place research that have made much of the perceived lack of theoretical coherence (Hidalgo and Hernandez, 2001; Stedman, 2002), as being somewhat overstated. They believe that conceptual clarity comes from an understanding of the history of those research traditions and analysis of points of convergence and divergence. This call for pluralism and acknowledgement of different approaches liberates the field from the self-imposed pressure to fit into conventional disciplinary constraints and frees it to be more open to alternative approaches. Devine-Wright agrees that the search for a monolithic framework to tie all the disparate parts of place research together may not be desirable (much less achievable), but he does caution against fragmentation and factionalism, which can result from positions becoming entrenched, calling for novel conceptual frameworks to take the field forward (Devine-Wright, 2010).

Ryan (2005) concluded from his research that place attachment was a ‘complex construct’ which is influenced by the physical characteristics of the place itself, the type and intensity of people’s experience with a place, and their knowledge about nature in general. The interest in sense of place for so many disciplines, and the associated proliferation of definitions and approaches, mirrors some of the wider debates which have been played out in the natural and social sciences over the past half century or so. Debates about the nature of reality, and how best to reveal the mechanisms and impulses that shape human relationships towards the landscapes that they inhabit, are on-going. For example, there have been calls for greater interdisciplinarity and cross-pollination between psychology and community planning (Laborde et al., 2012).

In terms of boundaries, Jorgensen and Stedman (2011) point out that more often than not it is researchers that define the boundaries that are to be looked at when designing their research. These are usually established administrative boundaries rather than the ones that are meaningful to people. They advocate that participants should be allowed to define the size and location of areas of interest, as this will yield
very different results than the researcher defined boundaries. This aspect has parallels with work done by Beebeejaun (2006) which highlighted the ways in which assumptions are made by well meaning planners who define community along their own lines, which may be very different than the definitions members of the community might offer. Researchers, planners and people working for agencies may well be missing out on key information because they fail to ask those being studied what their perspective is. There are obvious links to notions of power here, which need to be taken into account when working with groups of people.

Three of the key concepts that are perceived to constitute sense of place (at least partially) and which have been studied widely in the field of environmental psychology are that of ‘place attachment’, ‘place identity’ and ‘place dependence’. While these can be considered to be separate phenomena, many would argue that they are overlapping concepts to a degree. Other concepts of note relate to ‘belonging’; this is more to be found in the sociology literature, while the concept of ‘genius loci’ is more often used architecture and urban design. These will be examined in further detail to tease out the commonalities and differences.
Place attachment

Altman and Low (1992) define place as ‘space that has been given meaning through personal, group, or cultural processes’ (Altman and Low, 1992 pg5), indicating that it is not just the physical characteristics that are important. Their book, entitled ‘Place Attachment’ provides a broad overview of the field in the mid 1990s, encompassing chapters concerned with place at a range of scales, different stages in the life-course, from the perspective of various agents. The authors define the main characteristics of place attachment as being:

- Emotion / feelings being central (also described as ‘affect’ in psychology terminology)
- Cognition (thought / knowledge / belief)
- Practice (action / behaviour) - sometimes called ‘conative’ aspects in psychology
- Action (individuals through to groups)
- Social relations (co-operative, conflictual, connectedness, cohesion, in-group and out-group, social capital)
- Temporal aspects (longevity, memory, nostalgia, acceptance of change, future trajectories)

(Altman and Low, 1992)

These components of place attachment do not stand alone when exploring phenomena, but will generally co-occur, overlap and interact to produce that ‘genius loci’ which is always personal to a degree, but which may be at least partially shared by others (Jorgensen and Stedman, 2011). Most modern interpretations of place ensure that both the physical and social aspects are acknowledged, rather than ignoring one of them, although researchers frequently emphasise one aspect over another.
Place attachment has been studied extensively in psychology, particularly in terms of child development and the formation of the parent / child bond, as well as informing the study of relationships between people and all sorts of phenomena whether that be the wider family, social groups, pets, and most frequently, that of places (Hidalgo and Hernandez, 2001; Jorgensen and Stedman, 2006; Lewicka, 2005). Morgan (2010) focussed on how place attachment develops by drawing on human attachment theory. By studying childhood experiences of place he was able to construct a development model to account for place attachment in adulthood. If childhood experiences of places were positive, those young people went on to develop an internal model that worked from the unconscious mind that served to promote place attachment in adulthood.

Altman and Low’s (1992) edited volume ‘Place Attachment’ is one of the most quoted books in the sense of place literature. The contributing authors come from various disciplines such as architecture, sociology, family studies, psychology, marketing, and urban planning; bringing diverse perspectives to bear on the topic of ‘place attachment’. This book itself, owes much to earlier authors such as Tuan (1977), also Proshansky et al. (1983), to name but a few, who brought ‘place’ to prominence as an area of academic interest.

Attachment can manifest in different ways and is therefore unlikely to be a singular phenomenon. Ryan (2005) demonstrated this by examining the phenomenon of place attachment from the perspective of users of natural areas in Michigan. He compared those who chose to spend time in these sites, to enjoy the space or to look after it as volunteers, as well as staff charged with its protection and those just passing through the space. Differences were found between the groups, and the term ‘conceptual attachment’ used to describe the kind of attachment demonstrated by those who some expertise in natural history, as distinct from the kind of attachment felt by local users who did not have the same level of knowledge. This kind of attachment of ordinary local users described as ‘place-specific attachment’. Another useful construct to come from Ryan’s study was the notion of ‘substitutability’. This illustrates how those with a conceptual attachment will seek out similar places if the site they are
attached to is unavailable. Therefore, the loss of a particular place may not be felt as profoundly to those with a conceptual attachment compared to that of people with place-specific attachment, who would not view the place as necessarily substitutable. The study also demonstrated that at least two distinct forms of attachment were evident and sheds light on the motivations and actions of people when valued places are lost or threatened. This notion of substitutability may necessitate people having the time and access to transportation to be able to travel further afield to find alternative places that meets their needs. This notion has parallels with the concept of place dependence, which will be discussed in more detail further in this chapter.

Hummon (1992) developed a typology of attachment of communities to places which included everyday rootedness and ideological rootedness, alienation, relativity and placelessness. The two types of rootedness characterise attachment while the latter ‘sentiments’ demonstrate different modes of non-attachment (Lewicka, 2011). The positive modes of attachment differ in their degree of salience, as the everyday rootedness tended to be more of a taken for granted attitude while the ideological rootedness demonstrated a more conscious consideration of place and its characteristics.

Turning to the situation in special areas, Brown and Raymond (2007) took landscape values as the variable(s) of interest and how these operated to influence place attachment. Their method of gathering data was a large scale survey of residents and visitors to the Otway National Park area in the state of Victoria, Australia. This encompassed a range of tasks, one of which was to provide respondents with stickers to affix to a map of the region, which related to areas they felt were special for biodiversity, landscape/aesthetic value, economic importance, and recreation. They also had to identify six particularly special parts and to write down why they found those places special. In addition, they could use stickers to identify areas that should not be developed and those places where development for housing or tourism would be appropriate.
The results indicated that the most important aspects relating to attachment to special places were mainly associated with spiritual and wilderness values. Other important values that were felt to contribute to the attachment people had to this special place were therapeutic, aesthetic, recreational and economic. This study reveals that there are many different values associated with place attachment in special places. These, however, are not likely to necessarily be applicable to less special places that do not possess awe inspiring scenery and opportunities for recreation in the same way. However, the methods used in this study could be replicated in an ordinary landscape. A criticism of this method however, is that people will only have a partial experience of this large area of landscape, so responses may be skewed in favour of particular parts that are more readily accessible. The issue of partial knowledge of a place is potentially problematic but it is realistic.

Kaltenborn and Bjerke (2002) see place attachment as a social construction, that is formed through personal experiences, but which is constituted by a whole range of meanings that are rooted in the physical. Their study in Norway illustrated how people tended to categorise landscapes on a pleasant / unpleasant spectrum. Wild lands were at the positive end of the spectrum through to the farmed environment, then cultural landscapes, and finally modern agricultural landscapes coming at the unpleasant end of the spectrum (in that particular study location).

Place attachment has been linked to self-reported pro-environmental behaviours (Scannell and Gifford, 2010; Vaske and Kobrin, 2001). For example, youth involved in natural resource projects in their locality, and who were more emotionally attached to the place, expressed more behaviours which could be classed as pro-environmental than the less attached individuals (Vaske and Kobrin, 2001). So, as places engender feelings of belonging, there may be benefits emerging as a result of this relationship. More studies are required more studies to see if this phenomenon is widespread.
Places are not fixed entities, however, and are constantly subject to change. That change may be slow or it may be rapid, but Burley (2007) believes that, as places change, our attachment to those places also changes. The relationship is very much dynamic and constantly being re-made. While this fluidity makes attachment difficult to study, it underlies the malleability of the concept, and as such, the possibility that place attachment can be altered to engender place protective attitudes and behaviours, although how this might be effected, is not clear. Place attachment is clearly an important aspect of sense of place and it has a key role in any definition, but is it enough on its own? The next part of this review of the sense of place literature examines other key aspects, namely place identity and place dependence. These overlap with place attachment somewhat but form distinct research strands in their own right.
Place identity

Pretty, Chipuer and Bramston (2003) define place identity simply as a “self-definition attitude towards a place” (Pretty et al, 2003 pg274) and as such it is subject to the worldviews and life experiences that the individual has accrued. This aspect of place research is again mostly psychological in origin although it has permeated other disciplines with an interest in place. Proshansky et al (1983) highlighted how place was almost completely disregarded in human psychological development. They felt that the physical setting was a very important aspect of the development of self-identity and bemoaned the fact that “rarely has the impact of neighbourhood deterioration, geographical mobility, and technological reconstruction of the landscape been evaluated in terms of their impact on self-identity” (Proshansky et al, 1983 pg59). This situation was echoed by others who believed that it was a flaw in the study of psychology to ignore the fundamental importance of the natural environment, and places in particular, in the development of the psyche (Roszak, 1995). This could be seen as really going back to first principles and recognising that the primary attachment as humans is not to mothers (the usual focus of conventional psychology) but to the natural environment which all living things are subject to for fundamental needs such as food and shelter.

With the emergence of environmental psychology as an important sub-discipline in recent years, the omission of place is beginning to be acknowledged and studies are now appearing in this research field (Bonnes and Secchiaroli, 1995). Landscape ecologists, Hunziker et al (2007), argue that place identity is a more useful concept to work with than sense of place, particularly given the vagueness of the latter term. They believe that place identity is more specific as an analytical tool for exploring the relationships between humans and places. That the term has currency in the field of psychology is another reason for its use over that of sense of place, they note that this risks alienating those working in other disciplines that prefer the breadth and accommodation that the term sense of place provides.
Devine-Wright (2012) reviews the concepts of place identity and attachment and concludes that there has been a definite lack of cross-disciplinary dialogue on these. He also points out that the impact of level of scale on the concepts has not been adequately researched. This doctoral research aims to address both of these aspects as it considers place from a variety of perspectives and addresses scale issues also. Devine-Wright also states that: ‘the connection (and sometimes confusion) between place attachment and place identity illustrates the strong ties between identity and emotion’ (Devine-Wright, 2012 pg269) as both these concepts impact upon motivation and whether people are likely to take action, in a place protective manner. His research has examined the reaction of communities to changes brought about by novel sources of energy generation in their localities, such as wind and tidal power, which can potentially alter the visual aspects of the local environment.

Although she did not specifically use the terms, sense of place and place identity, Bragg (1996) conducted a study that aimed to provide participants with an ‘expanded self-concept’ using a participative process called the ‘Council of All-Beings’ (Macy et al., 1988), which could be said to be allied to identity studies, in order to influence people’s perceptions towards their environment. This was done by conducting experiential workshops that had a strong ecological orientation, as participants were given the role of an element of the natural world such as a plant or an animal, and they had to think and talk from the perspective of that species. The study looked at how participants’ thoughts and feelings were modified as a result of participation. It was found that the changes were not long lasting, which suggests that alone, these experiences are not sufficient, particularly if they are a ‘one-off’ experience (Bragg, 1996). More recent studies conducted by English Nature (2002) and WWF (2009) builds on Bragg’s work, taking forward the idea of connection with the natural world. Although these studies were conducted with small groups, they indicate some interesting findings in terms of people’s engagement with the natural world and the wellbeing benefits that greater contact with natural places engenders.
Place dependence

Place dependence could be a characteristic of people who feel trapped by place and who have few options to move elsewhere, whether that was through economic constraints or lack of ambition. However, the definition taken by most researchers in the field highlight the facilities that a place offers, for example, recreationists needing water bodies to sail upon or hills to climb. These conceptions of the term could be said to be very similar, with the difference lying mainly in the availability of choice and opportunity – one group seeking out the resources it wants while another group needs particular characteristics from a place – the difference being degree of choice. Maybe a more appropriate term for the phenomenon of wanting to take advantage of the positives that places afford may be ‘place contingency’ or ‘place attraction’. This doctoral research will probe this aspect with participants.

A number of studies have examined this facet of the sense of place construct and have deemed that it shows a more instrumental understanding of place, as it is built around what people need and require from their locale. It can be said to be characterised by low levels of attachment (Halfpenny, 2010; Jorgensen and Stedman, 2001; Vaske and Kobrin, 2001; Pretty et al., 2003). A similar distinction was drawn from a sociological study looking at residents in a town in rural Cumbria (UK), contrasting those who had chosen to live there either through work or to be close to the recreational facilities of the English Lake District, as compared to those who were ‘born and bred’ in the town. The researcher described the groups as ‘citizens’ and ‘denizens’, respectively (Szersynski, 2006). The perceptions of the place were quite different depending on whether people viewed the town’s facilities as positive or negative. Citizens tended to be better off and have more choices available to them, in contrast to the denizens who were more likely to be characterised as ‘stuck’ in a place with few prospects for changing that situation.
In the case of Szersynski’s work, it could be said that both denizen and citizen are manifesting place dependence, but that they diverge according to whether the dependence relates to a desire or a need. So the incoming workers to the nuclear industry and those retiring to enjoy the benefits of the nearby national park, have exercised choice for which they have the freedom to do so, while many ‘denizens’, who were born in the geographically peripheral area of the West Cumbrian Coast, may not feel that they have any other option but to stay there. Notions of denizen and citizen map onto Hummon’s typology mentioned earlier, particularly his descriptions of everyday and ideological rootedness (Hummon, 1992). Experience of other places also plays a part in this study. The incomers have generally been more mobile and as a result, have experienced other places and having done so, made a conscious choice to locate to West Cumbria. The locals may not have had the same opportunities to experience life elsewhere and make comparisons.

Place dependence, too, might suggest a lack of choice over where people find themselves located. People may feel that they have to stay in a particular location because of work, family ties, lack of opportunity elsewhere, or lack of agency on their part to seek out other places (Lewicka, 2005). Another potentially negative aspect of having a strong sense of place is whether that feeling may lead to a kind of insularity. Green and White (2007) looked at young people and examined their attachment to the local area in three different parts of England. By using a combination of mental maps and interviews, they looked at whether the young people were inward or outwards looking in terms of looking for employment. There was a suggestion that strong place attachment could be a barrier to getting work, as many young people had very narrow horizons and were happy to stay within the confines of the familiar and safe. Some of the young people in the study, however, who were more willing to consider travelling further afield for work, equated ‘getting out’ as ‘getting on’ (Putnam, 1995). This has links with notions of self-efficacy. Part of this doctoral research will explore what sense of place means in terms of whether it makes a difference to people’s feelings of self-efficacy.
The relationship of place dependence with attachment has been described as inversely proportional, with high dependence and low attachment (and vice versa). It is questionable however, whether this is actually the case. As the previous paragraph illustrates, it depends on whether the factors depended on are a need or a desire. Where they are desires, the possibilities for strong attachment are high, and therefore a more appropriate term which distinguishes this is needed.

Stedman (2002) prefers to use a sense of place construct that is made up of cognitive, affective and conative dimensions. He provides an account of his interpretation of the term, going some way to addressing charges of lack of rigour around the term itself. He describes sense of place as being a ‘multidimensional construct’ that is made up of the following three facets:

- Beliefs about the relationship between self and place (cognitive)
- Feelings towards the place, (affective) and
- Behavioural exclusivity of the place in relation to alternatives (conative)

Stedman (2002)

These aspects, he believes, are more useful than the narrower definitions encompassed by the place attachment, place identity and place dependence constructs. He believes that they have greater explanatory power than the others but some would argue that the general vagueness of the concept of sense of place and the varying ways it has been interpreted by people weaken its use.

Kyle et al (2013) sought to bring some theoretical clarity to the notion of sense of place by stating that the three elements described by Stedman (i.e. cognitive, affective and conative) do not occur simultaneously but that the cognitive dimension precedes the other two dimensions. Their approach is from the positivist tradition and parallels are drawn with other studies that align with theirs. Identity is seen as being the driver behind feelings and behaviours that are manifested. The authors take issue with more phenomenological approaches because they claim that they cannot add to theory, but only suggest possible associations at most.
**Belonging**

The term ‘belonging’ also has a body of knowledge behind it and has been used in sociology and political ecology, often in relation to ideas around ‘in-groups’ and ‘out-groups’. These refer to the degree to which people feel part of groups and are included or excluded from groups in society. It also forms debates around nationalism and is particularly pertinent when looking at migration and acceptance of new people into communities (Yuval-Davis, 2006). This concept has a developed flip side in the study of ‘placelessness’ (Relph, 1976; Relph et al., 2001) whereby people find it ever harder to form bonds to places because they have become homogeneous.

Henri Lefebvre’s theory regarding what he terms ‘the social production of space’ (Lefebvre, 1991) provides some clarity to the ways that space is utilised by people. He focuses on a triad of what he terms ‘moments’. These are:

- spatial practice or **perceived** space,

- representations of space or **conceived** space, and

- representational space or **lived** space

Lefebvre’s ideas have been exemplified by Carp in her 2008 study of planners, where she demonstrated that those three moments were illustrated in the following ways:

- Perceived space - planners being physically present in spaces (embodiment is a key element of this - abstract practices such as looking at maps and reports about an area are insufficient)

- Conceived space - people being involved in the creative processes around places

- Lived space - having awareness of what and whose subjectivities matter in planning processes  

  (Carp, 2008).
Carp (2008) recommends that the planning profession consciously enact these moments in order to make planning more responsive to people and places.

The findings of all these studies are of interest to this doctoral research as they shed some light on the reciprocal nature of people and their physical surroundings, and also the cognitive processing of impressions and feelings. These aspects will be explored further in this research in terms of the methodologies used to elicit responses about places.

Many studies looking at sense of place, particularly place attachment, testify to the fact that longevity in place is a significant factor in feeling that one belongs to a place. The reasons for this may be a phase of gaining familiarity with one’s surrounding. There is also the social aspect in terms of newcomers needing time to feel that they ‘fit in’ with those already established there. Indeed, some of the negative connotations surrounding sense of place touch on whether people feel included or excluded from places. It may take time for newcomers to settle and to feel that they have a stake in a place. Beebeejaun (2006), looking at attempts to include different ethnic groups in planning processes, highlights the problems of representation and also of identifying particular groups as ‘other’. This has also been discussed by Sandercock (1998) who looked at ways of living with diversity and difference as a positive way forward for planning. She also firmly places the socio-cultural at the centre of planning rather than the more material considerations of traditional planning. Some of these aspects will be discussed in further detail later in this literature review in the sections concerned with planning and participation.

Cross (2001) states that ‘sense of place’ has become a buzzword partly from being, by its very nature, multidisciplinary and as such has taken on the ‘baggage’ of different traditions and theories. Some claim that social science disciplines have generally avoided dealing with ‘place’, believing the field to have too many epistemological problems associated with it, and turning instead to more quantifiable areas of research (Agnew, 1992; Hayden, 1997; Buttimer and Seamon, 1980; Seamon, 2002; Stefanovic, 1998).
According to Rogan et al. (2005) sense of place is an “overarching concept articulating the relationship between people and place” (Rogan et al., 2005 pg147). It provides a valuable framework with which to explore the relationship between the biophysical environment and the well-being of its inhabitants (Eyles and Williams, 2008). This broad conception of sense of place which encompasses notions of attachment and identity is the one which will be adopted throughout this study. Indeed, Brown and Raymond (2007) point out that ‘place attachment’ is to environmental psychologists, what ‘sense of place’ is to geographers. Actually, sense of place is used by many authors other than geographers, although place attachment and identity are perhaps more restricted in their use by academics who are not psychologists.

Having given an overview of research around sense of place, its relevance to this study needs to be articulated. Humans have undoubtedly had a profound effect upon their surroundings. This is particularly true of the UK, which was at the heart of the industrial revolution, and which made extensive use of its own natural resources as well as drawing in resources from its former empire. The ways in which settlements have been designed (i.e. whether it is easy to walk and cycle to places or whether motorized traffic dominates) has been identified as a key factor in their sustainability. As such, landscape planning could be seen as an endeavour that has a great deal of influence upon the sustainability (or otherwise) of places as they grow or perhaps decline.

Many places have developed in an unplanned way, meaning that people have to live with the consequences of past decisions that were made about settlements and use of the landscape. For example, there are many examples of towns emerging from single industries like coal mining or textiles, which are now left with the legacy of a despoiled landscape and have struggled to adapt to changes in the economy. Despite these physical degradations of places as a result of industry, people living there can have deep connections to their local places that outsiders may find hard to understand.
Good planning can help to make those places more pleasantly liveable as a consequence of restoration activity. In the North West of England, the former mining stronghold of the Wigan area has largely receded as a centre for mining, but its landscape is increasingly being recognised for its nature conservation value. This has taken place in only a couple of decades since the industry affected the physical fabric of most parts of the town in negative ways. Research has shown that proximity to natural settings such as green spaces, even if it is just a view from a hospital window or a patch of vegetation on a housing estate, can have positive effects on people, whether that be in terms of enhanced recovery rates from illness (Kaplan et al, 1998) or getting on better with their neighbours (Sullivan and Kuo, 1996). The restorative nature of places could be a factor in building sense of place.

Ryan’s (2005) study on place attachment in relation to people’s behaviour towards urban natural areas highlighted the need for greater understanding of how the physical attributes of places influence people’s attachment to places. He stated that such research was vital to inform the work of planners and others making management decisions about natural resources such as nature reserves. He particularly flagged up the necessity of more research on urban natural spaces, as the majority of such research had been on special places and landscapes. The focus of this thesis addresses this gap as it examines place attachment in an ordinary, quotidian context. The results of this research will contribute to the endeavours of those working in the field of planning and natural resource management, as well as citizens.

Manzo (2003) is interested in “the nature and nuances of people’s emotional relationships to place” (Manzo, 2003, pg47). She discusses sense of place, and also attachment to place and identity and finds that some dimensions have been overlooked in the body of place research. One such omission is the political element, particularly in environmental psychology.
Manzo and Perkins (2006) believe it to be a problem that the larger socio-political context is lacking when looking at how people feel about places. The phenomenon of place relationships and how these work to promote or inhibit people to become active shapers of their lives is something that this piece of research will address, taking account of the wider political context.

Brandenburg and Carroll (1995) explain that the values and wisdom that people share with their primary social group can be altered by one’s personal experience of their places. However, individuals may be reluctant to share their feelings of emotional ties to a place within traditional public involvement frameworks. Exposure of these conflicting values suggests the importance of using methodologies and public involvement programmes conducive to expression of the creation of place. This research will investigate this phenomenon.

Scannell and Gifford (2013) have suggested that the development of feelings of ‘connectedness to place’ could be a vital factor when looking at people’s attitudes towards climate change and the likelihood of behaviour change. This is because they believe place protective intentions may be engendered if people regard their places as being potentially at risk. It has been shown in studies that people who felt greater attachment to their locality were more opposed to plans for a new motorway (Nordenstam, 1994).

Although authors such as Brown et al (2003) have stated that place attachment is an ‘underutilised tool for neighbourhood revitalization’ (Brown et al, 2003, pg259), others may contend that it does not automatically follow that people would feel inclined to protect their local places. Understanding more about this phenomenon would be useful for planners, those working in regeneration and community development workers.
Sustainability and Planning

Issues around the long term sustainability of the environment are well documented (Miller and Spoolman, 2008; UNEP, 2012). One of the ways in which society can address some of these issues is through the formal land-use planning system. This is because the activities that take place on land have a huge impact on the wider environment. For example, granting permission for a polluting activity or extraction of resources has direct consequences not only for the immediate environment where the activity is taking place, but also a ripple effect occurs affecting adjacent environments and possibly much further afield.

This section of the literature review will examine the notions of Planning and also Sustainability. The two concepts are closely linked in that the former is deemed to be one of the key ways of moving towards the latter. Definitions will be provided first of all, and then the two aspects will be discussed in relation to this research. There are many parallels between the concepts, particularly in terms of how they are enacted. For example, they both involve bureaucratic systems to a lesser or greater degree and they both rely on mediating between governments and the citizenry. They are subject to a variety of policy initiatives from the local through to the international, and take place in highly contested arenas. This literature review will set the scene for the research and provide a context for exploring the role of sense of place and local action.

Planning, specifically land-use planning is a formal system for making decisions about where and how land can be utilised. It is a vital aspect of government because it plays a crucial role in enabling (or some might argue – stifling) economic growth. As such, it is highly political, as the rules and regulations that accompany planning systems aim to balance competing demands on land so that the economy functions whilst protecting valued assets in the long term.
Most countries have provision for some sort of planning system, although these can vary considerably in their spheres of activity. In the UK, planning could be seen as the nationalisation of property rights, which contrasts with many other countries where the individual has more power over developing their land. This is a consequence of the United Kingdom having been the first to industrialise and having to deal with concentrations of population and the associated issues that come with many people living in overcrowded and insanitary conditions.

Healey (1997) defines planning as ‘managing our co-existence in shared space’. Cullingworth and Nadin (1997) describe it as attempting to reconcile conflicting views of how land should be used. These definitions demonstrate that planning is relational and that some form of negotiation is required in order to bring about changes to the way land is used. This serves to protect valued assets but also to enable economic activity to flourish. Power is a key factor also. Planning arose in the context of empiricism and a mechanistic view of how the world works. Further, it has exercised a massive influence upon the way in which societies have attempted to impose order on development activities. There are numerous definitions of planning, many of which were concerned with the activities that take place in relation to towns, cities and urban areas in general, as opposed to the rural. In the United Kingdom, planning is often termed ‘town planning’ and this is largely because its remit has been mainly urban, with the concerns of countryside and less populous areas being under the remit of different agencies and government departments such as agriculture and environment (Taylor, 1998). Healey (1997) defines planning as ‘managing our co-existence in shared space” (Healey, 1997 pg3).

Sandercock (1998) sets about challenging the dominant attributes of planning that have held sway for several decades now, namely, rationality, notions of objectivity, and what she terms ‘state-directed futures’ (Sandercock, 1998 pg30). Instead, she proposes that planning must now embrace notions of social justice, community, citizenship and an expanded awareness of the multiple publics that are out there.
The term ‘sustainable development’, at one time hardly in the lexicon, is now widespread but highly contested in its meaning. Derived from natural resource management alluding to safe levels of resource extraction, it refers to an entity being able to continue on indefinitely into the future. It is now applied to larger levels of scale than just an area of forested land or a fishery; it encompasses whole ecosystems, indeed, the planet as a whole. The most common definition cited for sustainable development is that provided by Gro Harlem Brundtland as part of the World Commission on Environment and Development report ‘Our Common Future’ in 1987 defines sustainable development as:

‘development which meets the needs of current generations without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs’

(Brundtland, 1987 pg43)

The report that contained the definition was influential in stimulating international action to address concerns such as biodiversity loss and climate change, as evidenced through the hosting of the Rio Earth Summit in 1992 which was attended by world leaders. Many initiatives resulted from the summit such as the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development (1992), and also the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), and the Framework Convention on Climate Change (FCCC). In addition, many countries signed up for ‘Agenda 21’ which was a groundbreaking initiative to involve citizens at the grassroots level to ‘think local, act global’. This translated, through ‘Local Agenda 21’, into many, many activities taking place at the local level to engage citizens to set their own local priorities which (if acted upon), cumulatively, would improve the sustainability of the planet in addition to ameliorating the local situation. Interestingly, the process of people coming together to discuss and formulate a local level plan was deemed as important as the product of the process, which was a document detailing local priorities and actions.

As such, it could be said that the LA21 process was an example of public participation on a large scale and it certainly mobilised a great number of citizens around the world to get involved in formulating a local plan (Selman, 2000; Sancassiani, 2005). However, the LA21 process itself appears to have been
characterised, in the UK at least, as an initial flurry of activity which has waned over time. The reasons for this point to diminishing support from local authorities themselves in response to lack of funding once the LA21 documents were produced, as well as the process not having statutory force behind it. That is not to say that the process did not engender positive outcomes, but that the overall impact of it was patchy (Mittler, 2001).

Having established that land-use planning has a great impact upon the way that places develop and ultimately their sustainability, it is necessary to examine the ways in which decisions are made that shape development of land and how we utilise the physical resources in an area. Practice differs around the world in terms of how planning is enacted, with the relationship between the influence of the state (whether at the national, regional or local level) and the extent of the rights of individuals to determine how to develop their land being key factors. In the United Kingdom, local government undertakes much of the day to day oversight of the planning process but central government retains extensive powers to intervene and override decisions made at the local level. Land-use planning systems tend to be bureaucratic and rely on complex systems built up over time. It seems also to be in constant flux as successive governments are keen to steer development in certain directions, as befits their ideology and electoral strategies (i.e. being seen to be serving their supporters, like New Labour wishing to relocate parts of the BBC to the regions; promotion of the Northern Way, for example).

The planning system has been subject to many changes over the past decade or so, and the signs are that this trend will continue. The current United Kingdom coalition government has recently published its National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) for England (Department for Communities and Local Government, 2012). Underlying these changes are differing ideologies on development and its link to economic growth, but more importantly, recognition that globalisation puts pressures on land use that local government and communities have limited powers to resist (Swyngedouw, 2005).
In addition to the arena of land use planning, as overseen by elected officials and professional planners, a significant part of the literature on place and its governance comes from the field of natural resource management (NRM). This includes studies examining the experience of recreational users like sports enthusiasts or tourists, or perhaps those living and working in places where extractive industries are important parts of the economy like logging, mining, and agriculture - activities that make direct use of the natural environment to meet the needs of humans. It also includes the management of biodiversity, which has gained increasing prominence in policy circles as well as the public imagination. Since the Earth Summits which started in 1992, international bodies such as the United Nations have sought to gather and share global data on the state of the environment. However, like many so called ‘wicked’ problems which are multi-scalar and therefore complex, effective action at the international through to local levels has been patchy, as people struggle to see connections between factors such as energy consumption and consumerism with biodiversity loss. As a report by the United Nations Environment Programme (dubbed the ‘Stern for Nature’ report) stated:

‘We can no longer see the continued loss of and changes to biodiversity as an issue separate from the core concerns of society: to tackle poverty, to improve the health, prosperity and security of our populations, and to deal with climate change.’

(Secretariat of the Convention for Biodiversity, 2010 pg13)

As well as the input from politicians in these areas, such arenas are also governed by government institutions such as the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs in the UK (Defra) and also quangos such as the Environment Agency. Such organisations are heavily reliant on technocratic expertise from scientists employed directly by them and also by academics and researchers working on a consultancy basis to inform policy and practice. Increasingly, expertise is sought from commercial bodies as part of public sector cuts and the loss of institutions that would formerly have provided such functions.
The use of scientific expertise in policy-making has attracted research effort in terms of how such actors operate and frame issues, and particularly how they consult and utilise lay knowledge from users and those affected by decisions they might be involved in. There are some parallels between these arenas (town planning and resource management) which have tended to be treated separately in the UK, namely between the urban and the rural. It has to be said, however, that nowadays it is far more common to find cross-cutting and inter-departmental working taking place in order to arrive at more rounded solutions to issues both types of landscape face. This is largely as a result of recognition that activities in each domain are not isolated spatially and that issues in one area can often cause effects in another.

Recent examples of this would be debates around appropriate flood defences and decisions about land use in the uplands and ways to manage the ways that rivers behave. These issues are also linked to larger scale issues around climate change and the increased likelihood of catastrophic flooding. Therefore, actors in the planning sphere and those involved in Natural Resource Management are in a position to shape places and to interface with people and places in a variety of ways. This review, as well as the research, will discuss the role that sense of place has, or could have, in decision making and policy arenas, as well as citizen activism.

The interest from researchers in planning and natural resource management on places, and perceptions around places, has come about largely because of conflict that is evident from those with different views on how places should be used and the contested nature of some of these activities (Ryan, 2005). The views of farmers or loggers may well differ from second home owners or birdwatchers. Even in a mainly urban context natural resource dilemmas still occur, for example, how green spaces should be managed. For instance, there is a perceived problem with off road motorcycles damaging parks and nature reserves and threatening other users by their speed. On the other hand, there is also a perception that the needs of young people should be accommodated in the environment also, therefore allowing some places where off road vehicles are welcome, is seen as a necessity.
Such conflicts are inherent in the work of planners and those charged with managing natural resources. But what of the role of those living, working and seeking recreation in these places? To what extent are they able to shape their places?

This research is concerned with looking at local action in relation to people’s relationship with the local landscape, but it necessarily needs to be put into a wider context. Therefore, land-use planning and local decision making are important aspects of this. It is vital to appreciate the role of different actors and to get a sense of the influence they exert on the local landscape. The local context is, in turn, influenced by machinations at a larger scale, whether that is at the regional tier of government, national or supranational. The past two decades or so have seen a shift in governance (Rhodes, 1997) and the landscape of governance may well be very different to the mode that existed in the earlier decades of the last century.

The extent to which it has changed is still very much a matter of debate. An appreciation of the way decisions are made and the interactions between different parties is vital to this research. The governance of ‘place’ via the land use planning system and the ways in which people articulate their views on development trajectories is of particular relevance to this doctoral study. The next section examines governance issues. This is to provide a context for the present situation and lays some foundations for this research project.

Land-use planning is a formalised system of rules and regulations that have been built up over time to shape and control development. A variety of planning traditions have developed across the globe, reflecting the history and values of those places. For example, the United States of America (USA) has a quite different planning regime than that in the UK. This is mainly a function of size and definition of the relationship between citizens and the state. Freedom to develop one’s land is enshrined in the American constitution meaning that historically, settlers in the USA have had more or less free rein to make decisions about their land as long as it was
not in breach of any laws. However, the UK is much smaller in size and has had serious nuisance issues in urban areas, so that the right to develop one’s land-holding has largely been subject to approval from the community by reference to planning policies and regulations (Cullingworth and Nadin, 1997). These are partly derived from legislation but others are negotiated at the local level and administered by the planning profession, with politicians having the ability to decide on the outcomes in a formalised public forum.

Increasingly, the planning systems in Europe have been subject to changes coming about via European Union (EU) directives and regulations, to harmonise practice in certain fields, the environment being a key aspect of these. Those wishing to develop must seek approval from the wider community and this is enacted via the land use planning system, which has provision both for strategic planning and also control of development. Therefore, governance of this bureaucratic system is a fundamental aspect of planning.

The term ‘governance’ is frequently used interchangeably with the word ‘government’ which is separate and distinct. Governance is regularly enacted by governments, as one of its central concerns is with administration and the taking of decisions, but it is not exclusively the realm of government. Governance is covered in this literature review linked to land use and sustainability. The way the landscape is managed, the institutions that oversee the process, as well as how the population in general interact with landscape resources, are key factors in shaping future trajectories of development. Perceptions and actions will determine (largely) whether the resulting development is more or less sustainable. Therefore, consideration of the interactions of people and those who govern them is of interest in this research.
Governance systems are focused upon the ways in which societies operate. As this section will outline, a distinguishing characteristic of governance in the United Kingdom in recent times is that it is less the sphere of government than it once was, now encompassing other actors and institutions. These institutions, organisations and groupings of citizens are being invited to participate in activities which were once the preserve of government.

A number of authors (Rhodes, 1997; Healey, 1997; Vigar et al., 2000) trace the historic changes in both government and governance in the UK during the last century. They highlight the gradual transition from what Rhodes terms a unitary state (described as the Westminster model) to one of a ‘differentiated polity’. This is characterised by a ‘hollowing out’ of the State whereby a strong executive has become segmented, leading to a situation where bargaining games occur within and between networks. Blowers (2003) believes that this left a void, which has been filled by various actors, jostling to influence and shape public policy. This doctoral research is focused on citizens and how sense of place may or may not be a motivating factor in people’s involvement in place-making and policy.

The work of Rhodes and Marsh (1992) on policy networks shows a typology which forms something of a continuum along a scale. They stress the importance of these policy networks as a mechanism of governance. The networks may limit participation in the policy making process, define the role of actors, decide what will be included / excluded from the agenda, to privilege certain interests, and to shape the behaviour of the actors who are included. Local governance is characterised by vertical linkages to central government and horizontal links to various public sector organisations. So the policy landscape is neither straightforward nor transparent, which has implications for the ability of the public to make sense of it and to influence it.
The sociological debate surrounding the interplay between ‘structure’ – meaning class, religion, social norms and ‘agency’ – meaning the ability and freedom of individuals to make choices, enters into the question of governance and involvement in planning processes. The structure-agency dualism has been challenged by academics such as Giddens (1990), whose ‘Structuration theory’ questions the separation of the two aspects, believing them to be mutually reinforcing entities (actions are constrained or enabled by structures, while structures are [re]produced by the action). Structures have arguably become, if not more fluid, certainly more fragmented in the past couple of decades. Class divisions are less of an overt political issue than they once were (or perhaps people are less inclined to define themselves along class lines), social norms are constantly being redefined, meaning that there are fewer certainties on which people can base their actions.

Peters and Pierre (2000) observe that the role of elected officials is less significant than it was in the past and see more of a need for political entrepreneurship. They do concede, however, that accountability is an unresolved issue in new forms of governance such as that seen in ‘New Public Management’ (NPM), which is typified by the move towards reforming the public sector to act more like the private sector in the drive for efficiency and cost savings. The change in the landscape of governance has led to what some have termed the ‘democratic deficit’ (The Power Commission, 2006) whereby power has shifted away from elected officials and moved more towards unelected and unaccountable organisations, often at the supranational level. What this means for the citizenry, is that they have even less influence on shaping their towns and cities. Apathy is one of the results of this situation as fewer people exercise their vote, believing that it is not an effective means of representing their views. To compensate for this, there have been moves towards more devolution and increased opportunities for people to influence what goes on in their locality through ideas promoted by recent UK governments such as ‘localism’ and concepts such as the ‘big society’, which relate to greater local powers and increased civic involvement, respectively.
Carley and Christie (2000) identified ‘command and control’ bureaucracies as being unable to effectively tackle complex environmental issues and suggested that a rethink of governance was called for. The idea of ‘action networks’ as an effective means of taking on the challenge of sustainable development was put forward as a possible route. They note, however, that those with power will work hard to maintain the status quo and would have little motivation to enable ‘process issues’ such as those seen in more collaborative modes of governance. This may have changed since the financial crisis, however, as the State withdraws from areas where they have traditionally had responsibility. How exactly the gap left can be filled is an issue that society faces. The UK Government hopes that the third sector and individuals will be able to do their bit to fill the gaps in their local areas. This doctoral research will comment on this issue in the light of the study in the discussion chapter.

In the UK, local government has been subject to a modernisation agenda which promotes speed, efficiency and a closer relationship with business interests, although ‘Stakeholderism’ and consumer choice is more evident (Peters and Pierre, 2000). Carley and Christie (2000) pay close attention to the relationship between the individual and the State but emphasise the changing nature of that relationship, exploring the characteristics of ‘action networks’, which they believe are the way forward if society is to move in the direction of sustainable development. Action networks are typified by their non-hierarchical nature, commitment to local action, and active participation whereby discussion and debate lead to collective self-development, management and teamwork. The role of the State is still seen as being crucial despite the plea for devolution. Its role as mediator and a coercive power when necessary is highlighted. The nature of the relationship between the State and how local places are governed is undoubtedly a complex one. The contraction of the State does not mean withdrawal, and may indeed require stronger government to ensure that safeguards are put in place. Communication with citizens may need to become more sophisticated, with effective channels open to facilitate interaction between councillors, local authority officers and the public.
It is interesting to note that the literature on policy and governance talks of sweeping changes and multiple influences, yet there is also much written about the resilience of established norms in institutions, which shows that there is great inertia in these systems. So although reform strategies are many, there is still undoubtedly a strong element of ‘path dependency’ whereby a limited range of policy choice is available for administrative reformers as existing systems and practises shape new initiatives. This is understandable, particularly when new situations arise, because the repertoire available to people in terms of how to react to circumstances may well be limited. Local government may need to become more open-minded to alternative approaches by citizens in order to capture innovation embedded in the communities they serve (Parker and Parker, 2007).

It is vital to scrutinise the relationship between central and local government, and any tiers that lie between and around these major entities. Globalisation may suggest that solutions to issues of environmental degradation are global ones but many see action at the local level of scale as being vitally important. Carley and Christie (2000) emphasise that all global problems have local implications; therefore the scope for local action needs to be addressed. Problems and opportunities at the local, (bio)regional, and international scale are part of what could be seen as a ‘nested hierarchy’, which needs to be tackled at all levels simultaneously. A problem with this could be lack of integration between policies enacted at different scales which contradict, and therefore undermine effective action. This research discusses the implications for increased salience of place at a range of scales, given the inter-relatedness of local actions to the bigger picture of global concerns.

Despite the move towards more inclusionary modes of governance, the issue of power is a crucial one. Are these changing modalities of governance a challenge to established power holders or do they merely give the impression that power is being distributed more equitably? Ambiguity in the idea of ‘empowerment’ is noted by Coaffee and Healey (2003), as the reality could mean the offloading of tasks that the state has traditionally done, using the rhetoric of the stronger citizen.
In a case study in Newcastle, Coaffee (2004) identified mixed messages embodied in various regeneration initiatives carried out at different scales as both central government and the local authority attempted to engage the citizenry. Trust (or more commonly, lack of trust) emerged as a key issue in that situation. This finding has been identified as a key issue in other studies of the effectiveness of public participation (Swearingen-White, 2001) along with civic capacity and previous history of dealings with agencies or administrations.

A complex picture emerges from this section of the literature. Governance needs to be seen as a system which is constantly and rapidly changing in the direction of further complexity. This mirrors other trends in society whereby fragmentation is a defining feature. Governance as conceptualised in the past (post-World War Two) has changed beyond recognition although some, still cling to the certainties afforded by that model. This research will discuss how an appreciation of sense of place fits with current governance modes and how that might change in future, given government rhetoric on localism, neighbourhood involvement in planning and the ‘big society’.

Healey characterises governance as being constituted by the following elements:

- rules of behaviour
- collective affairs
- taking many forms
- power relations
- role of government
- complex interactions
- history and culture

Healey (1997)
This list demonstrates the numerous factors that influence planning and that fact that the way that the public get involved is just a part of the process and not privileged over the others. It is, however, a key part of governance, and one which Healey believes needs to be optimised.

This overview of governance and how it pertains to planning needs to now focus more precisely on some of the more theoretical and procedural aspects of planning. The reasons for this are twofold: firstly to outline the emergence of the so-called ‘communicative turn’ in planning, and secondly to state how it relates to this research.

Throgmorton (1996) rejected what he saw as the ‘extreme rationality’ that seemed to negate the importance of politics in planning. He focussed on the role that ‘storytelling’ plays, in the dialogue between planners, developers and the wider community. At the time of the controversy over the proposals (the extensive case study the book relates to plans to construct a nuclear power station in Chicago), the fields of development and planning could be described as following a ‘modernist’ agenda whereby faith in planning, as almost a scientific endeavour, relying on the knowledge of experts.

Throgmorton could see that there was a ‘decisive turn’ away from this approach towards ‘a form of planning for which we do not yet have a name’ (Throgmorton, 1996 pg243), but which now could be described as communicative or deliberative planning. He went on to state that both planners and citizens need to be open to persuasion if the moral ambiguities inherent in planning are to be dealt with.
Throgmorton fleshes out what should happen in planning situations (in what he names forums), namely:

1. Conversation to be conducted in ordinary English
2. Advance distribution of written plans and analysis
3. Oral presentations of those plans and analysis to the public and to be questioned on them
4. Written responses to those questions and alternative interpretations listened to (Throgmorton, 1996)

These guidelines for deliberation are mindful of some of the shortcomings of planning processes, largely owing to issues of power and influence.

The ‘communicative turn’ came about partly as a reaction against modernist modes of planning that dominate practice the world over. Matthews (2013) states:

"The key issue debated in the literature on communicative planning is whether a public sphere can be created that allows the Lifeworld to sufficiently flourish to produce a discourse to counter power/ knowledge"

(Matthews, 2013 pg143).

Throgmorton (1996) examined the case of the energy provider, Commonwealth Edison, that had plans in the 1980s in Chicago to construct a nuclear power station. These plans were not welcomed by all and the company found itself in the position of having to deal with conflict over the proposals. For him, it illustrated how the nature of planning had changed so that developers (and also the planning professions) could not retreat to their lofty positions and expect the populace to accept all their proposals as they had in the past. Examining the planners’ role, Throgmorton suggested that they should be concerned with writing ‘future-oriented texts’ with which to persuade people of their vision, but also that they need to be ‘open to transformation through honest engagement with contending stories’ (Throgmorton, 1996 pg255).
Forester (1999) states that the role of the planner is fundamentally communicative and that they should promote the interests of less powerful groups as a counterbalance to the influence that more powerful actors and interests have. Yet planners are often in a weak position when they do not have access to sufficient resources themselves to make their proposals into a reality. Cook and Swyngedouw (2012) point out that in a capitalist context, the role of planners can often be reduced to functionaries who oversee the implementation of regulations rather than proactive agents ensuring that a wide constituency of people are well served by the system. Having a good measure of autonomy and scope to consult widely is a luxury that many planners do not enjoy in the current economic climate. It is also personally demanding to deal with the public, particularly as planning has tended to become more and more adversarial. Clifford (2012) goes as far as to say that lack of resources mean that planners are only able to do the minimum required, which is not conducive to providing opportunities to engage deeply with interested and affected parties. Mittler (2001 pg56) states that Planners may prefer to be ‘on top’ rather than ‘on tap’. This indicates that the role of technical expert tends to be preferable to that of community service provider.

Taylor (1998) identifies the role of the planner as being to communicate and negotiate. However, he feels that the focus has been most definitely on communication rather than negotiation as a consequence of wider debates in society around the increasing need for the democratisation of planning. This may be a result of the emergence of new social movements in the 1960s and 1970s which highlighted the rights of particular social groups who were routinely disadvantaged by mainstream politics for example, women’s, civil, and minority rights. This, along with calls for more participatory modes of engagement with citizens, led to planning theorists such as Healey, to describe what would become known as the ‘communicative turn’. They drew on the work of Jurgen Habermas’s (1984) theory of communicative action, which emphasised the interpersonal modes of communication that must be in place before action can take place. Habermas identified four preconditions necessary to communication, namely:
All four must be in place as a precondition of ‘real democracy’. Flyvbjerg (2001) however, takes issue with Habermas owing to the lack of consideration of power relations. He states that power is a factor that cannot be ignored and must be addressed. Much has happened in the planning sphere since the limited degree of public involvement was highlighted by Arnstein and others in the late 1960s onwards. Arnstein’s (1969) ladder concept depicts increasing levels of citizen involvement, starting from a very low base whereby people are completely passive. Moving up the rungs of the ladder, the role of the citizen becomes more pro-active and powerful. There is a reversal of the power of institutions also as one moves up the ladder, with bodies having to devolve some of their powers to citizens. The highest rung shows citizens as agenda setting and taking control.

The modernist agenda of earlier decades in planning had come under criticism for being too paternalistic and not being open to question by wider society, sometimes leading to civil unrest and social upheaval (Forester, 1989; Taylor, 1998). In the UK, the Conservative governments of 1979 - 1997 were solidly pro-development and drove through policies aimed at regeneration of problem areas and their associated communities, although tempered somewhat by the necessity to take account of European Union (EU) directives. There was limited interaction with affected communities in terms of their inclusion in decision-making. When they were succeeded by the ‘New Labour’ government (1997 – 2010) the emphasis had changed somewhat, but had a new flavour (Imrie and Raco, 2003).
Lupton (2003) writes that government attempts to engage local people in decision making tend to ‘embody the culture of local authorities’ with professionals ‘unsure how to value local knowledge and scared of conflict’ (Lupton, 2003, pg127). So unless people quickly learn to operate within the culture of officialdom, chances are that they will not be able to participate effectively.

This adoption of the administrative culture, even when achieved, can backfire on participants as their capacity, having been built up, can be dismissed as ‘the usual suspects’, serving to further alienate and exclude. There has been much written about unrepresented groups and how some groups in society are particularly ‘hard to reach’, and so efforts to get more representative groups of people participating is certainly an uphill struggle and one that planners and others involved in community development find challenging (Beebeejaun, 2006; Sandercock, 2000).

Flyvbjerg (2001) discusses the Aristotelian concept of ‘phronesis’, which relates to value-rationality (as opposed to instrumental-rationality) when discussing Aristotle’s ideas about kinds of knowledge. He points out that phronesis i.e. practical wisdom, was regarded more highly than its sister notions of ‘techne’ and ‘episteme’, which could be thought of as characterising the foundations of the natural sciences rather than the study of the social. Flyvbjerg argues convincingly that the methods informing the natural and social sciences thus far have been too focussed on instrumental rationality and that the study of social phenomena requires the application of more context dependent approaches. On the subject of communicative planning, he critiques the work of Habermas in terms of it being utopian, more particularly, because it is predicated upon communication between actors as being somewhat ideal. For Flyvbjerg, the issue of power relations is missing and this is something that is vital when examining planning processes.
Healey (1997) examined the ways in which the environmental movement over the past few decades had impacted upon the planning system. She asks whether planning systems have become too established in their practices to incorporate new ideas readily and whether they sometimes form their own barriers to greater progress. Undoubtedly, planning practice could be susceptible to getting stuck in certain routines over time but it has also adapted to external pressures imposed on it in the past, so change is possible.

The planning profession has undoubtedly taken on board ideas around communicative planning, although the extent to which it has manifested in practice has been questioned (Baker et al., 2010, 2011; Beebeejaun, 2006; Clifford, 2012). Owens (2000) took issue with the way the planning system deals with participation, pointing out that there was a deficit model at work suggesting that people just needed to be educated about planning in order to get better outcomes. She argues instead for participation to be more central to planning, so that genuine engagement can take place. She does not let citizens off the hook, however and comments that the people are more capable as consumers but ‘alienated as citizens’ (Owens, 2000 pg1146). This perceived lack of interest and capacity in citizens has also been mentioned by Rydin and Pennington (2010) who provide a forceful critique of calls for widespread participatory planning initiatives. They question whether the public have much of a hunger for involvement in planning, citing the prevalence of low levels of involvement, NIMBYism (Not in my back yard), and also free riding, as evidence.

There appears to be a great deal of idealism surrounding the notion of communicative planning, but equally, some cynicism about whether it is practically feasible, or indeed desirable. It would seem that there has been lots of academic debate around the idea but whether the caveats around power and capacity of people and institutions have been taken sufficiently into consideration by participants (whether planners or citizens) is still a matter of debate. This research partially addresses some of these issues through the lens of sense of place.
The view of government in the role of natural provider of services and as a force for protecting the environment once may have held some truth, but powerful globalising forces make this scenario less likely. Privatisation of public services and all that that entails has reduced the ability of local authorities to exert control over the local environment in ways which they once did. The move towards localism may be an attempt to limit the control of external forces but the tide of globalisation may prove too powerful to contain. The challenges of governance in an increasingly globalised context have profound implications for the manner in which communities manage their collective affairs. Discussion, debate, co-production of knowledge, sharing visions, and making alliances may need to feature more prominently and effectively if the move towards a sustainable future is to be realised.

Huxley (2000) disputes whether communicative planning is even possible, given the strong power relations that exist. The state is the driving force behind planning; therefore the chances of achieving real change through communicative means are pitted against the monolith of the economy which is imbued with vast power. She believes that the thrust of communicative planning focuses too much on the competence of actors and that proponents do not take sufficient account of the power of the wider context in which planning operates, as well as the motivations and capabilities of planners. While it is wise not to underestimate the power of the state and the economic context that planning operates under, the potential for greater accountability of planning decisions in the light of the wider scrutiny that communicative methods engender, is certainly a possibility worth exploring.

The sustainable development agenda and how that has impacted upon governance is of interest to this doctoral study because it has risen in prominence over the last few decades in response to pressing environmental issues. The Rio Earth Summit (UNCED, 1992) saw the launch of Agenda 21 which has been influential at the local level with Local Agenda 21 (LA21).
Governance issues are central to LA21 and a call for greater involvement of stakeholders in this process has led some to phrase it as ‘soft governance’ (Evans et al., 2006). This means being inclusive, participatory and democratic. Citizen participation and engagement are key characteristics of the so-called soft governance agenda which are clearly enshrined in the Aalborg Charter (European Union, 1994).

Evans and Theobald (2001) surveyed Local Authorities (LAs) in Europe to assess the extent to which they had managed to move towards modes of governance which were more inclusive. Evans et al (2006) looked at this issue in more depth and found that local authorities needed to be given the institutional capacity to deal with the longer term issues that sustainability demands. The study involved 40 local authorities throughout Europe and found that those authorities that demonstrated successes in policies relating to sustainable development were characterised by higher levels of civic engagement and greater knowledge of the issues around sustainability amongst the populace. Taking inspiration from Chapter 28 of the Rio Declaration, and the part on ‘good governance’ in particular, they argue that progress in enacting sustainable development requires local government to harness the energy and innovation of its citizens. In order to do this, governance arrangements that facilitate the increased involvement of citizens in local democratic processes are vital, particularly when some of the choices will be difficult. This research will explore how the concept of sense of place may have a role to play in promoting citizenship.

Recent United Kingdom governments, both New Labour and the Conservative / Liberal Democrat coalition, have drawn upon communitarian ideas to build policy around civic engagement and to address perceived tensions between different social groups, around race and poverty, for example. A recent Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) initiative entitled, Connected Communities (Painter et al., 2012; Durose et al., 2012), has examined the ideas around the ‘big society’ and localism. These studies have pointed out the less than clear cut ways in which these
ideas have been presented and the implications of these policies. Durose et al (2012) analyse the notion of the big society and foresee the danger of government offloading responsibilities onto groups that are unable to meet them, concluding that it may well be ideologically driven. The implications of the current state of the land use planning system in the UK and how that relates to place will be further elaborated in the upcoming section of the literature review looking at the role of citizens and the ways in which they are able to influence decisions that affect them.
Participation and citizenship

The previous section examined some of the theoretical aspects of how societies have organised themselves to mediate development and how that is formally enacted via the land-use planning system. It touched on ways that governments and institutions have evolved to deal with changes in society resulting from increased urbanisation, population growth and consumerism. It also examined the role of the planner as a key actor in these spheres and outlined how that role has changed as planning has evolved over time. The role of the citizen will now be examined, particularly as regards action outside of formal settings like planning. This is in the context of the social and environmental changes that has led many citizens to question the authority of leaders and experts, and to seek alternatives to once-accepted orthodoxies.

This section of the review looks at two related phenomena – participation and citizenship. They will initially be dealt with separately and then the links between them (in relation to this research) will be made more explicit. The structure of the two parts will follow a similar pattern in that clarification as to the meanings of the two concepts will be addressed, followed by some contextual information as to how they manifest themselves and an in-depth analysis of why, who is involved, and how they are enacted in the real world.
Participation

The word ‘participation’ invokes some sort of involvement in a process, maybe involving others and most often with a purpose. It has been something of a buzzword in the realm of politics, certainly since the 1960s, and particularly in relation to planning. This is largely thanks to the work of Sherry Arnstein (1969) who used the metaphor of a ‘ladder’ of participation is still very influential today, despite many critiques of its appropriateness (Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, 2006). These critiques look at the hierarchical nature of a ladder and question the goal of citizen control as that which ought to be aspired to. The frequency with which Arnstein’s ladder of participation is cited illustrates the impact of the idea and how embedded it has become in popular consciousness.

Participation, as both a policy goal and an academic study, largely stems from the field of International Development. However, notions from those origins hold true for more developed societies in that there is a recognition that local knowledge needs to be tapped into in some way if appropriate decisions are to be made. This is in part owing to society questioning the omniscience of science and the recognition that the views of ‘experts’ are partial and incomplete (Funtowicz and Ravetz, 1993). The views of those normally excluded from decision making processes may complement those of ‘experts’ so that a better outcome is achieved.

A study by the Power Commission (2006) examined the reasons for disengagement with the political system as evidenced by much reduced voter turnout and diminished involvement in political parties and revealed that the main reason could be found in the changes to citizens themselves. They explain this transformation in terms of a “great shift in social and economic relations since 1945” (Power Commission, 2006 pg99). Since the period of the Second World War, agriculture and industry have declined, leading to what could be described as ‘post-industrial’ societies which are characterised by shifts in the class system (an expanded middle class and shrinking working class), increased education, affluence and mobility, and a
move away from deference towards leaders and greater individualism. Taken
together, these factors help to explain why citizens are less trusting of governments
and of politicians in particular.

Participation in social relations can be viewed in different ways; it could be formal
participation such as voting, being an active member of a political party or other
institution that takes an active part in civil society. Examples would be membership
of well-established bodies that have some standing and respect such as the
Women’s Institute or the National Trust. However, participation is not limited to
formal or traditionally organised forms. It can be involvement in social movements,
perhaps ones that are organised via the internet and social media. For example,
online campaigns such as those organised by groups like ‘Avaaz’ and ‘38degrees’
which operate to mobilise support for online petitions on global issues such as
modern slavery, and issues of national concern such as protecting the National
Health Service (NHS) in the UK from privatisation, respectively.

Pain and Kindon (2007) emphasise the importance of place when discussing
participation, as it is an inherently spatial endeavour, "participation, space, and
place are mutually constitutive" (Pain and Kindon, 2007 pg2808). In order to bring
place more fully into participation, it is recognised that there needs to be a new set
of skills and competencies developed by those who would seek to use them. The
main characteristics of Participatory Learning and Action (PLA), as described by
Chambers (1997) in ‘Whose Reality Counts?, include a number of what he terms
‘shifts and reversals’. For example, he identifies moving from a closed to a more
open process, from measuring to comparing, from the verbal to the visual. He
implies that the usual process can be turned on its head and that there is a real shift
in power as the communities taking part are given the space and scope to put their
ideas and views across in a way which traditional methods of engagement are
unable to allow. The role of the facilitator is given prime consideration as their
behaviour and attitudes are deemed to be very influential in getting communities to
participate effectively and to take ownership of the outcomes that they generate.
Participatory Learning and Action (PLA) differs from traditional approaches to data gathering in a number of ways. Chambers (1997) describes traditional methods to be characterised by the dominance of outsiders who set the agenda, appropriate information and then remove it for analysis. Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) by contrast, encourages those taking part to take the lead, determine the agenda and analyse the information that they generate, with the support of a facilitator who is self-reflective about his/her behaviour and attitudes within the process. PRA is seen as fitting a cybernetic model rather than a linear one, a feature identified by Chambers as being parallel to changes occurring in fields such as quantum mechanics and complexity theory, perhaps indicating a paradigm shift as different ways of seeing the world are explored.

Despite participation and the processes and tools developed for its furtherance being seen as a means of delivering empowerment and better planning outcomes, there have been a number of dissenting voices that highlight shortcomings of the approach. Much research focus has been on the methods of participatory methods, particularly in the field of international development but they are not without their critics. Indeed, some would say that the approach has almost become ubiquitous (Cooke and Kothari, 2001). The discourse of participation and its associated methods has been under scrutiny as practitioners and academics have identified a number of shortcomings. Proponents have warned against bad practice when using the methodologies, such as inappropriate behaviour of facilitators who run the risk of dominating, rushing the process and raising unrealistic expectations. They exhort facilitators to practice self-reflective criticism of their role as a guard against such pitfalls, and emphasise reflexivity and the use of techniques such as triangulation and contrastive inference, which involves having more than one set of competing ideas and looking for evidence of each before making a judgement about the best interpretation (Thomas et al, 1998). So while criticism of such participatory methods is widespread, there have been calls to reconsider the contribution that they can make by situating them theoretically as a form of ‘critical modernism’ and in more practical terms to ally them to the notion of ‘citizenship’ (Hickey and Mohan, 2003).
Other criticisms of the participatory approach relate to the definition of ‘community’ and whether assumptions are made about the cohesiveness (or otherwise) of groups by researchers. Are existing inequalities perpetuated by the process, whether unwittingly or by design (Beebeejaun, 2006)? How are all voices heard, and not just those of the strongest (Laws et al., 2003)? Power relations is an area in which proponents of participatory approaches need to address closely, otherwise there is a risk that the perceived benefits of the approach i.e. empowerment of disadvantaged groups, could be subverted and existing inequalities reinforced. But as Thomas et al (1998) point out overcoming power relations is beyond the scope of a technique. Those utilising participatory methods are required to be mindful of the dynamics of power taking place in the chosen setting. Such awareness can help to militate against this but ethical judgements need to be made by facilitators regarding the goals behind the process and whether the outcomes will be used in a way that warrants the time and effort expended by those participating.

Chambers (1997), an early advocate of participatory approaches, particularly in the context of international development, responds to some of the criticisms outlined above and demonstrates the many pitfalls and misuses of the methods in guidance for facilitators, emphasising the critical role played by facilitators and organisations using such methods. Ericson (2006) also acknowledges the benefits of participatory processes but questions whether they are always suitable for the conservation programmes, in terms of how the local knowledge is utilised.

Participatory approaches appear to have a lot to offer the researcher and potentially a lot to offer communities. If the criticisms are taken on board and explicitly addressed then there is much to recommend the approach for use in research. Issues such as rigour, accountability, validity and an awareness of quality control need to be tackled if the work is to gain wide acceptance. These issues can appear daunting, but that is not a reason for dismissing participatory approaches as the benefits could potentially be considerable.
The participatory approaches described thus far, have largely been applied to the field of international development, but their use has been significant in the fields of planning and community development in more economically developed countries. In the UK, initiatives such as ‘Planning for Real’ are well established. Such methods allow participants to visualise future developments by means of 3D models and other visual tools. Tools such as these will be discussed in more detail in the Methods chapter of this thesis.

More recently in land-use planning, Rydin and Pennington (2010) have questioned the need for greater public participation. They cite lack of interest from the public and dominance of the processes by those who have an agenda, meaning that the majority are not properly represented in these fora. There are undoubted costs involved with participatory processes, both in terms of time, money and the personal costs of involvement for all concerned (Clifford, 2012).

The English planning system, while distinct from that in the US and the planning systems in mainland Europe, has undoubtedly been influenced by them in many ways. An example of this, and one which is particularly pertinent to this research, is the impact of Sherry Arnstein’s ‘Ladder of Participation’ which was published over 40 years ago (Arnstein, 1969). Whilst the ladder and the ideas behind it have been thoroughly critiqued over the years, the idea still retains some power and is cited often (Collins and Ison, 2006; Baker et al., 2010; Burns et al., 1994). Why has Arnstein’s (1969) image of the ‘ladder of participation’ retained such influence despite the passage of more than 40 years since its publication? A simple answer may be that the imagery is striking, and possibly also because it captured the spirit of the times, when many were questioning the legitimacy of governmental initiatives and wanting a role in shaping places.
Burns et al. (1994) point out that the ‘rungs’ of the ladder should be spaced unequally as some of the lower stages are more easily attainable than the higher levels. They also believe that there should be a greater number of rungs, to indicate more of the complexity in moving towards citizen empowerment. Collins and Ison (2006) suggest stepping off the ladder completely, arguing that the metaphor is flawed in many ways. Coming from a systems perspective, they point out that Arnstein’s ladder takes for granted that there is a hierarchy (when one may not exist), has a simplistic view of the roles of both citizens and the authorities (do citizens always want power?), and also that it assumes that the process is linear, when in fact most systems behave in a non-linear fashion and feedback loops exist. Their alternative is social learning, which they define: “is about learning about the nature of the issue itself and how it might be progressed” (Collins and Ison, 2006 pg2). So, for these authors, the key is in ‘framing’ the issue to be deliberated. This allows for new perspectives to come in, whereas many participatory processes have fixed assumptions which can hinder the search for solutions. The concept of Social Learning will be discussed in more detail later in this review.

Participation can take many forms, and this is an aspect that Arnstein’s ladder does indeed highlight. It illuminated the minimal ways in which many authorities dealt with the public, in that most interaction with the public was minimal. The public were generally seen as passive recipients of information from authorities, with little opportunity for genuine dialogue. But seen in the context of the 1960s and 1970s, the mere act of giving information out could be seen as radical, given that decisions before then were largely made without any thought of public consultation. The provision of information is now enshrined in laws, thanks to international initiatives such as the Aarhus Convention and various EU directives.
Citizenship

This word has connotations related to belonging to a nation but that meaning has been broadened, particularly in the UK and increasingly elsewhere, to encompass the rights and responsibilities that people have as citizens. Narrowly it might refer to individuals and communities, but even that is being broadened to include non-humans and the planet (Keen et al., 2005).

Social Capital

The notion of social capital is one that has caught the imagination of policy makers and academics alike in recent times. Putnam’s (1993) influential book, ‘Bowling Alone’ discusses the concept and highlights two major typologies of social capital – bonding and bridging. Bonding social capital is exemplified as being bonds such as family and those who share things in common for example, religion or social class. Bridging social capital is where links are made with those who are different and who are not usually thought to interact through the usual channels of family and religion, for example. It has been a kind of Holy Grail for policy makers, at both national and local level, particularly under that last New Labour government, to aim to increase levels of bridging social capital.

Holman and Rydin (2012) outline two other forms of social capital, namely ‘linking capital’ and ‘bracing capital’. The former refers to the links that people have with more powerful groups, while the latter encompasses both bridging and bonding capitals focussing on the networks that exist between them. They also point out that social capital has a ‘dark side’ in that groups can become too inward looking and exclude others. Ironically, while policy makers have aimed to increase social capital, the result can be that “areas with stronger levels of social capital are better able to resist and sometimes deflect unwanted land uses” (Holman and Rydin, 2012 pg13). The relationship of social capital to sense of place will be discussed in this thesis.
Technological advances in social media have allowed a larger range of people to become connected, often over great distances and via shared interests, what Wenger (2000) would term, ‘communities of practice’, as opposed to traditional communities of place (Muro and Jeffery, 2008). It could be argued that technology has facilitated and greatly expanded opportunities for people to interact with decision makers via specialised platforms such as Public Participation Geographic Information Systems (PPGIS) for planning (for example, Kingston et al 2000). Virtual forms of engagement are set to become more significant as the technology becomes cheaper and more widespread.

Owens (2000) points out that many participatory processes have at their heart a ‘deficit model’. This means that there is an underlying assumption that people lack understanding and therefore require measures to address this deficit. Instead of this perspective, she suggests that a more ‘civic’ model is required, that relies on deliberation. People face constraints when considering participating in planning fora or other forms of participatory processes designed to change behaviour. Deliberation should not be seen to be a panacea to cure all ills. According to Owens (2000), deliberation may point the way forward but should not be expected to guarantee that issues will be fixed as a result. This is important because it demonstrates that participatory processes need to be designed to allow participants to frame issues as well as comment on them. Without this freedom to set the agenda, there will be limits imposed on the extent to which the issues can be examined.

Another interesting contribution that Owens makes to the debate about social capital and the nature of citizenship is the observation that we are living in a time when "so many people have become practised as consumers but alienated as citizens" (Owens, 2000 pg1146), indicating that our dominant cultural influences, in Britain in particular, mean that people are more individualised and less used to behaving in citizen-like manner. She concludes that promotion of citizenship may help to get people more involved deliberative fora but it may well be an uphill struggle as the overarching cultural influences may militate against involvement.
Power and empowerment

It is useful to examine the notion of power and also a related term, empowerment. Both of these concepts require some attention as they lie at the heart of most research into participation and citizenship (and also that of governance). The word ‘empowerment’ has become part of mainstream discourse. So much so that it has led some to say that “its meaning has become devalued; it can mean whatever the user wants it to mean” (Townsend et al., 1999 pg2).

Oakley (2001) identifies various forms of empowerment, such as:

- Participation
- Democratisation
- Capacity building
- Economic improvement
- Individual (Oakley, 2001)

There is a strong communitarian ideal to notions of participation in that those involved will be ‘empowered’ to be more active in their communities. Another reason for the promotion of participation, particularly in planning, is that those affected by proposals will feel a sense of ownership and the process will therefore stand a much greater chance of success. This is of particular interest in planning circles given the often adversarial nature of planning. The English government, under New Labour, sought to promote participation but there was also a paradox apparent. Alongside the discourse of stakeholder engagement and partnership working, there was a parallel and contradictory discourse in its adoption of managerialist practises that values speed, efficiency and value for money, which does not sit well with the requirements of deliberative methods and the capacity building that needs to operate alongside. Local planning authorities are penalised for taking too long to deal with applications and to formulate plans, so even with willingness on the part of planners to engage meaningfully with stakeholders, the pressure to conform to the managerialist agenda is very strong (Skelcher et al.,
The current Conservative/Liberal Democrat coalition government, although having different ideological origins, have come forward with their own brand of participatory politics in the form of localism and notions around the so-called ‘big society’ which they have attempted to incorporate into the English planning system.

How these contradictory forces of efficiency alongside involvement play out in practice will vary depending on the context but there is acknowledgement that traditional methods of consultation are still prevalent as familiar ways of working, with more innovative and engaging practice much less common (Baker et al., 2010). Diamond (2001) states that despite rhetoric of inclusion in the New Labour administration, it frequently operated on terms already defined by others and set outside of the community. Thus, bottom-up approaches have tended to be tightly controlled from the centre. Whether this will change under the Localism agenda of the new coalition government in the United Kingdom, in the form of the Localism Act (2011), remains to be seen. While it is still early days for the legislation, critics point out that in England power remains firmly with central government and that more meaningful devolution as seen in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland is needed.

The most obvious forms of social action are organising and taking part in community events, protesting, lobbying decision-makers, mobilising the community, and applying for funding to make changes or to enhance services. Martin (2007) characterises activism as ‘action that goes beyond conventional politics, typically being more energetic, passionate, innovative, and committed’ (Martin, 2007 pg19). Rootes (2008) commented on the role of local activism, particularly how local environmental campaigns have been well established as the site of resistance, noting that these seemed to heighten people’s sense of place. He points out that local campaigns have been the ‘most persistent and ubiquitous form of environmental contention’ (Rootes, 2008 pg2) while conceding that many environmental organisations were elite from the outset, for example, Greenpeace, working at a larger scale than the local.
Definitions of the word ‘activist’ emphasise the strong nature of the action taken by the person or the strength of the beliefs of the person taking action. However, Jupp’s interpretation, particularly focussing on gendered expression of activism, is more subtle. In her work with communities in Stoke on Trent, she identified a number of actions that could be interpreted as constituting powerful forms of activism, albeit in subtle ways that those supporting communities may not fully appreciate. Examples of these were sociability, acting collectively and other more embodied every day practises (Jupp, 2007). These are partly derived from work by Gibson-Graham (2003) who have defended place-based activism from critics who see it as merely ‘accomodationist and divisive’ (Jupp, 2012). Both they and others, for example Martin (2007) see this transformative form of activism as being more relational, and that it demonstrates capacity over time that can develop in the local sphere, that may lead to more overt and visible forms of activism reported on in the literature.

Participation in planning is embedded in government policies, largely thanks to initiatives that have taken place in recent years at the supra-national level such as the European Union as well as the influence of theories, particularly around planning. The current Conservative and Liberal Democrat Coalition government could be said to be slightly less enthusiastic about promoting participatory methods than their predecessors, but the principle appears to have become embedded in discourse. How far this has translated into the everyday practises of government, and planning in particular, remains to be seen. The role that sense of place plays or could play is the subject of this research.
Systems and Social Learning

This section of the literature review examines some of the issues that have been touched on in the previous sections of this review from more of an ontological and epistemological perspective. It also outlines some of the approaches informing this research, namely, systemic thinking and social learning. It also explores the thinking that underlies these approaches. Before providing definitions, an overview will be given of systems and systemic thinking as an understanding of these concepts could be said to be pre-requisites to social learning.

Systems

Meadows (2009) defines a system as an ‘interconnected set of elements that is coherently organised in a way that achieves something’ (Meadows, 2009 pg 11). Systems are made up of three things, these being:

- elements,
- interconnections, and
- purpose/function.  

(Meadows, 2009)

Systems display integrity and wholeness, but can be highly complex and therefore difficult for human brains to fully comprehend. Much Western philosophy, certainly since the time of Descartes, has followed a path of dualism and separation, where previously the division between mind and body, humans and nature, were not evident. This line of thinking has led to the dominance of reductionist ideas, whereby phenomena are examined by means of their constituent parts. While this has led to breakthroughs in knowledge and the discovery of many phenomena, reductionism and positivist approaches have their limitations (Funtowicz and Ravetz, 1993; Roszak, 1995; Sale, 2000).
Recognition that the whole is more than the sum of its parts has led to the
burgeoning of alternative ontologies that view the world differently. These more
holistic ontologies see the world as being more or less unknowable and that the
study of the emergent properties of systems can be a useful scale of inquiry.

Many of the ideas around systems that are prevalent now, can trace their origins to
General Systems Theory (GST) which was developed in the 1930s by Ludwig von
Bertalanffy (Mingers, 2000). GST found resonance in a number of disciplines such as
biology and economics, and systems approaches began to emerge in other areas
which took more of an interdisciplinary approach such as cybernetics and systems
analysis – in both the sciences and the social sciences (Midgley, 2003).

As interest in global environmental issues gained prominence from the 1960s
onwards, the limitations of post-positivist approaches began to be noted. Work by
Funtowicz and Ravetz (1993) on ‘post-normal science’ highlighted the shortcomings
of those approaches when looking at large scale complex problems like ozone
depletion and climate change. They posited that issues where both the decision
stakes and the uncertainties in the system were high, this formed the realm of post-
normal science (where those factors were low, applied science could deal with the
issues reasonably well). Ability to control the variables is key to understanding this,
but when looking at human societies and large scale environmental problems,
control of variables is impossible. The suggested approach to dealing with a high
degree of uncertainty was to enter into dialogue with affected parties and share
what was known, so that possible solutions could be negotiated. Researching
places, particularly sustainable places, could be considered an area of research that
would come under the umbrella of post-normal science, given that issues are
complex and messy.

There has been a burgeoning of the application of systems thinking to real world
problems in recent years, whether that is working in organisations (Checkland, 1999)
or landscape ecology (Palang et al., 2000). The impact of systems thinking has also
had significant impacts in education, with the development of ideas on single, double and triple loop learning (Keen et al., 2005) which developed in parallel with ideas that emerged from psychology (Maiteny, 2000; Maiteny and Ison, 2000).

Flood (2010) draws an important distinction between ‘systems thinking’ (assumptions of knowledge as objective) and ‘systemic thinking’ (which makes an assumption that knowledge is subjective), which is that the former is ontological while the latter is epistemological. Both systems and systemic thinking has impacted on the way that land-use planners and resource managers have started to work with stakeholders, with the development of deliberative methods and approaches to fulfilling their duties. Many of these ideas and techniques emerged from the field of international development, which were outlined earlier in this literature review.

From this holistic, non-reductionist perspective, social learning and adaptive learning perspectives have emerged. Building on Habermas’s theory of communicative action (Habermas, 1984), social learning involves a process whereby those affected and those with responsibility for managing come together to collectively learn from each other and share their perspectives. The act of creating dialogue and discussing the issues, should give rise to a shared understanding and potentially, solutions to those issues that are more acceptable than those that would have been otherwise arrived at (Ison et al., 2007).

Another model of systemic thinking comes from recent work by Snowden and the Cynefin model (Snowden, 2002). Cynefin is a Welsh word that is not easily translated into English but which has similarities to the word ‘habitat’. The model seeks to shed light on the nature of knowledge. Snowden sees knowledge not only as a thing, but also as ‘flow’, building on work by Polanyi (1969) who talked about tacit knowledge and how that lead to explicit knowledge. Snowden characterises his Cynefin model on different domains where knowledge can reside, in growing levels of predictability and disorder.
Thus,

\[
\text{simple} \rightarrow \text{complicated} \rightarrow \text{complex} \rightarrow \text{chaotic}
\]

(Snowden, 2002)

How people deal with these domains will be different as the visibility of cause and effect become much more obscure and reliance on past experiences becomes less useful as one moves towards more uncertain states. Most knowledge that people possess is tacitly held. How that knowledge can be made explicit, particularly as regards places and how people feel about places, is of interest to this research.

The study of Social-Ecological Systems (SES) has emerged in the past couple of decades largely through the work of Hollings and Gunderson (2002) and their concept of ‘panarchy’ which encompasses the study of coupled human – environment systems. It is also concerned with notions of resilience and adaptive cycles. Currently, the social and ecological spheres have tended to be studied separately, but those working on SES aim to re-align these fields by bringing them together through transdisciplinary studies (see Burns and Weaver, 2008). This is no easy task given different academic traditions and practises. However, it is seen as crucial that these systems are treated as integrated entities in the hope that they can generate new insights and ways of tackling wicked problems faced by society and impacting on both natural and social systems. Transdisciplinarity requires acknowledgement of the complexity of relationships between humans and nature and appreciation of the inadequacy of much disciplinary approaches to address issues facing the planet. It also requires the exchange of knowledge, not just between academics, but with a wider constituency of people so that different ways of knowing can be shared and solutions can be co-created through dialogue and participation (Lawrence and Depres, 2004).

There have been many calls for the problems facing humanity and the planet at large to be approached differently from the usual ways, in the belief that current thought patterns and ways of behaving have contributed to the current ecological
and societal crises. Transdisciplinarity is thought to be one of the ways in which humans could search for innovative solutions as a result of the insights gained from this approach (Du Plessis, 2008). Attempts to understand the world better is a first step towards conceptualising issues and framing problems. Theories about how we learn provide insight into the approaches that may aid humanity in its search for ways to transition to a more sustainable and just world.

The disciplines of psychology and education have been the principal protagonists in conducting research on learning but in recent years, other disciplines have made contributions to the theories. A key perspective, as mentioned previously in this section, has been that of systems and systemic thinking. With its emphasis on the holistic, it has helped to shift the focus of attention away from the individual somewhat by expanding the sphere of learning to include the situations where learning takes place, accounting for wider cultural influences. Merrifield (2001) identifies another subset of these and names it ‘citizenship learning’, acknowledging the accumulated tradition of studies on learning that have allowed it to be characterised.

Bandura’s social learning theory, which has been very influential since it first came into being in the 1970s, gave importance to the notion that people often learned by observation of others and modelling that behaviour themselves. Bandura cautions, however, that this kind of learning does not necessarily translate into behaviour change. His influence has further been felt in the field of social learning with the notion of ‘self-efficacy’ which is the belief that one is capable of effecting change in one’s life. Those who hold beliefs in their ability to achieve certain tasks are more likely to do so that someone who does not hold that conviction. There are various aspects to self-efficacy, such as motivation, observation of others achieving, being persuaded to try, and also response to moods and emotional states that can either help or hinder the process (Bandura, 1997). These aspects pertain to the individual but also the individual in a context, which is where the social comes in. When
looking at the application of social learning to participatory processes, self-efficacy has a bearing on the outcomes. However, Pahl-Wostl (2006) deems Bandura’s work to be too narrow to encompass all that social learning is.

Bateson (1972) was highly influential in developing ideas around systems in his work on Cybernetics. He pointed out that learning can be helpfully conceptualised by concentrating on what exactly is being learnt and he identified three orders of learning which are:

- First order - routine learning, where the context is a given
- Second order - comparison of approaches, which suggests an understanding the context of first order learning
- Third order – this constitutes a further step outwards, in that the context of second order learning is considered.

(Collins and Ison, 2006).

An influential conceptualisation of learning was developed by Argyris (1999) which maps onto Bateson’s three orders of learning somewhat. Argyris termed these single, double and triple loop learning. Single loop learning is the simplest and refers to acting and noticing the consequences. Second loop learning involves an awareness of ‘governing assumptions’ around the single loop learning. Third loop learning necessitates taking account of the values that underpin the previous two states (Keen et al., 2005). This concept of multiple loops of learning has widespread currency, particularly when looking at organisational learning and has been used by others researching the way that adults learn (Open University, 1999; Checkland, 1999). It underpins the concept of social learning, which will be discussed further in this review.

It is important to note at this point the important work done in psychology by Ajzen and Fishbein (2005) whose research revealed that, contrary to expectations, people’s behaviour was often not consistent with stated beliefs. Many studies have
demonstrated this phenomenon, for example, recycling behaviour whereby people claim to recycle much more than they actually do. The implications of their research are far reaching when looking at ways in which behaviour might be altered in order for social benefits to be gained. Raising awareness of issues through educational or advertising may not necessarily result in desired behaviour change. The factors that affect behaviour are multi-faceted but include social norms, intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, and self-identity, to name a few. This research will comment on how the focus on sense of place may impact on perceptions, feelings and actions around local, ordinary places. The role of learning is important in this study so the next few paragraphs centre upon further learning theories that may be useful.

Transformational Learning (TL), an idea developed by Mezirow (1995) is related to social learning (SL) but is more focussed on the individual, although it could occur collectively according to Dirkx et al (2006). Mezirow’s (1995) theory posits that transformational learning most often than not occurs because of what he terms a ‘disorienting dilemma’ in the life of someone. That could be some sort of crisis in one’s life or caused by moving from one phase to another, working then retirement, for example. The frames of reference that once sufficed may now no longer be appropriate. This has been mentioned in the sense of place literature as several authors have mentioned that fact that changes or threats to places have resulted in a number of outcomes, whether that be an enhanced sense of place or increased sensitivity to place, through to more tangible outcomes such as place-protective behaviours (Scannell and Gifford, 2013; Devine-Wright, 2009).

O’Sullivan (2003) explores more deeply as to what takes place when TL occurs:

‘Transformative learning involves experiencing a deep, structural shift in the basic premises of thought, feelings, and actions. It is a shift of consciousness that dramatically and irreversibly alters our way of being in the world’

(O’Sullivan, 2003 pp327).
Mezirow believes that critical reflection, dialogue and action are necessary if TL is to take place. These could be described as cognitive, convictional and behavioural aspects, respectively. Other authors have taken a slightly contrary view in that they downplay Mezirow’s more rational stance and emphasise the importance of emotion and intuition in TL (Dirkx et al., 2006).

Collins and Ison (2006) point out that social learning can possess a number of meanings depending on which particular theoretical traditions is used and how that its definition is interpreted. They conceptualise social learning as being made up of some of following elements:

- the convergence of goals
- a process of co-creation
- change of behaviours and actions

So a willingness to have one’s views challenged and potentially altered in the spirit of achieving overall goals that will benefit all the parties, is part and parcel of the first element listed. Co-creation relates to the participants working together to generate knowledge in order to arrive at potential solutions for concerted action. Any resulting change in behaviours could be seen as an emergent property of the process. Note that the authors do not stipulate that all the elements are needed – the achievement of just one of them could indicate that social learning has taken place.

According to Ackoff (1974), who coined the term ‘messes’ to describe problems that interact with other problems, they result in such complex interrelationships that even getting a handle on the nature of the problems can be tricky, much less solving or untangling them. Some researchers believe that social learning may be a way forward in dealing with messes. Social Learning, as defined by Keen et al (2005) see it as comprising five braided strands (the braiding denotes the interrelationships and overlaps). These strands are reflection, a systems orientation, integration, negotiation and participation. The desired outcomes from social learning include:
Relational changes (forming relationships and building trust)

- Cognitive changes (learning new things), and

- Transformational changes (changing one’s views in the light of the experience)

(Muro and Jeffery, 2008)

Reflexivity is a key feature of social learning processes. This could be described as an iterative process that occurs when people reflect on their learning, which then leads to new learning (Keen et al., 2005). There is currently much debate about social learning, mainly around the process and outcomes, and whether those engaged in social learning activities understand whether they are achieving their aims. Muro and Jeffrey (2008) state that outcomes are not always as positive as some of the research would have us believe, and cite instances where processes have led to conflict and lack of trust between actors. Recent research has sought to disentangle some of the underlying assumptions in social learning processes in the field of natural resource management (Rodela, 2011; Rodela et al., 2012; Blackmore, 2007). Different epistemological areas have brought slightly differing perspectives to bear on the analysis of social learning.

Collins and Ison (2006), devised the Social learning for Integrated Management (SLIM) process which addressed issues around water catchments, believing that a social learning process can run alongside traditional policy making processes. However, the traditional process assumes a fixed form of knowledge is applied to a problem whereas the knowing emerges from the process of constructing the issue in social learning, so it is quite different. The two courses of action can be complementary but awareness is needed of the differences in the approaches and also what the implications for practice might be. Interestingly, given the critique of Arnstein’s ladder by the authors for being too focussed on power relations, ensuring that both processes are valued equally and the social learning processes are not undertaken tokenistically, could be a challenge.
An essential part of the social learning process is for those involved to become what Schön (1983) termed ‘reflective practitioners’. This is necessary for both practical and also ethical reasons: practical because it allows for thoughtful sense-making to occur regarding what has occurred, and ethical because consideration of the assumptions that people bring to processes and the ever present danger of power being wielded to the detriment of others, for example. Being reflective allows one to achieve double and triple loop learning, as it takes learners outside of the immediate situation and provides some context on which to arrive at new learning. Thus social learning is linked to the need to practice reflexivity outlined above in the sections on participation and power.

**Summary**

The literature areas covered in this review have involved research from a wide range of discipline areas that have an important role in setting out the context for this study. Sense of place is perhaps the broadest of the four areas, as it is an umbrella term for many disciplines and covers a broad spectrum of meanings, that each has built-in assumptions about the nature of reality. Notions of belonging and identity are complex constructs and, as has been demonstrated in this review, dynamic also. The ways in which we see ourselves and our surroundings, and how we relate to the physical, social, spiritual and historical dimensions, vary over time and can be negative as well as positive.

The concept of sense of place was discussed with a number of participants residing in the study area prior to and after a series of interventions, which facilitated deliberation about the locality and the wider environment. Following the intervention, the effects of involvement in the process were examined in order to comment on what the impact of the intervention was on those who took part.
Following analysis of the social learning intervention and its impacts on sense of place, the potential implications of this research for citizens, agencies and local authority staff, such as planners and regeneration workers, is discussed. In the context of the current economic climate, government policies are promoting development as a stimulus for the economy, whilst entreating citizens to become members of the ‘big society’. The interplay of these two dynamics may well result in citizenry that is inclined to hinder development in valued landscapes, rather than the intended outcome of people promoting development and even taking on roles that previously local government would have carried out (Holman and Rydin, 2012).

The next chapter outlines the conceptual framework, methodological approach to the research and the underlying philosophy that has informed it.
Methods: An action-orientated approach

Introduction

The ways in which sense of place manifests in ordinary, everyday places (in contrast to the more widely studied field of special landscapes in place research) is of research interest because such places represent those where greater numbers of people live, particularly in the context of the UK. The pursuit of sustainability depends largely on the way that people use their local places and their perceptions of their place in the world.

Structure of the chapter

This chapter outlines the practical aspects of the research and the underlying philosophy informing them. The aims and research questions are presented, along with a discussion of the underlying ontology and epistemology. The methodological aspects that were considered for the research are listed, together with a treatment of the pros and cons of each. Once the rationale for the choice of methods is made, details of how they were enacted are explained. The way in which the data yielded by the various methodological processes was used and analysed in this research is discussed. This then leads onto the description of the data. Commentary on what the analysis reveals will be covered in the subsequent chapters.

The previous chapter provided the context for this research, outlining the debates within different disciplines around the conceptualisation of the term sense of place. It also considered the notion of sustainability as largely enacted through the lens of place, exploring the way in which land-use (and people) is governed both in the past and now in a globalised world. At the sharp end of land-use planning is the planner, so the role of this key player in relation to the citizenry was explored, particularly in the light of the neo-liberalising agendas that governments have followed in recent decades.
The extent to which communicative planning theory has impacted on the planning profession was also discussed in the literature review. All the previous considerations lead to a key part of this research, which explores questions about it and ways in which the cognitive, emotional and behavioural aspects of learning may be conceptualised when learning occurs in concert with others. These considerations help to inform the discussion about how much the state gets involved in place-shaping and to what extent citizens can and should be involved in this process.

This research will elicit some of these dimensions and consider them in the light of the research aim. The conceptual framework (see figure 2) identifies the context for the study and demonstrates the stages that the research aims to focus on. It has been developed from the key areas of the literature surveyed in this chapter, and framed the research process.
Aims and research questions

The overall aim of this research is to explore the relationship between sense of place, social learning and peoples’ perceptions and behaviour in an ordinary landscape. The underlying reason for this exploration was to better understand what the implications of a more salient sense of place might be in such a setting and to explore what that might mean for planning and place shaping.

This overall aim led to three research questions being developed:

1. How does sense of place manifest in an ordinary, everyday landscape?
2. In what ways can social learning impact upon the dynamics of sense of place?
3. Can a more salient sense of place affect people’s attitudes towards and behaviour within their local area?

These three questions address identified gaps in the literature that the subsequent research with a group of residents living in an unspectacular everyday location will help to address. The research is largely qualitative in nature and is situated within a systems perspective, which views social and environmental problems as being characterised by complexity, connectedness, multiple perspectives, uncertainty and (often) conflict (Maiteny and Ison, 2000; Mingers, 2000; Ison, 2007). This is in contrast to the dominant perspective in Western societies which has tended towards dualism (i.e. seeing binaries such as separation between humans and nature, mind and body). This way of seeing the world can lead to viewing processes in a linear manner.

The problem is that it does not acknowledge, nor take account of, the nature of systems which are non-linear and subject to feedback loops and therefore more open to uncertainty than a more mechanistic perspective allows (Meadows, 2009).
The nature of systems has been outlined in the literature review of this thesis but it is worth mentioning here the particular value of studying social-ecological systems (SES). The study of SES differs significantly from efforts to study ecological systems without the human dimension. According to Du Plessis (2008), understanding what differentiates the role of humans from other species is key to conceptualising SES. She believes that the social aspect of SES refers to the symbolic construction of meaning and as such, there is a need to find ways of developing indicators and assessing changes in the noosphere\(^2\). This is in contrast to approaches that have traditionally dominated SES studies, which have tended to be quantitative ways of measuring changes in the biosphere.

This research takes place within the context of what could be described as an ordinary landscape in the North West of England (see Figure 2). A range of geographical scales are included in the study but the predominant levels are that of the neighbourhood and the borough as a whole. The regional, national and global perspectives are touched on also. The research is situated within a systems perspective and an action learning approach is taken, involving local residents in exploring their sense of place in some depth.

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\(^2\) The noosphere, as defined by the Oxford English Dictionary refers to “a stage of evolutionary development dominated by consciousness, the mind, and interpersonal relationships” OXFORD ENGLISH DICTIONARY 2014. Oxford English Dictionary.
Objectives of research

By the end of the research process, a better understanding of the concept of sense of place will be gained, particularly in the context of unremarkable landscapes that many living in the UK experience. Exploring how ordinary places impact on sense of place and identifying key factors may be important in helping to design ways in which citizens might be engaged in place shaping and place protective behaviours. Some commentators have remarked that ordinary places may be less important to people than they once were, as a result of globalisation (Giddens, 1990). Others, however, assert that place, local places in particular, are valued more than ever because of the anchoring that place provides (Gieryn, 2000). Williams (2002) argues that social meanings and identities that people possess have been somewhat ‘uprooted’ as a result of globalisation but that this has not eroded the importance of place so much as underlined its increased contestation.
Turning to the more practical aspects of the research, it will test whether an intervention to make sense of place more salient achieves that end. This is exploring a phenomenon that has been reported by a number of authors who believe that people’s sense of place tends to be tacit and more likely to manifest in the face of some sort of disturbance or change (Brown and Perkins, 1992). Increasing salience of a sense of place by means of social learning opportunities rather than relying on place disruptive situations for example new energy developments such as wind farms (Devine-Wright, 2009) or boundary changes and forced relocation as a result of war (Lewicka, 2008) to stimulate place awareness may be more desirable. An outcome of this part of the research is to speculate on how social learning situations might be developed in order to facilitate the increased salience of sense of place, if indeed, it proves useful.

An additional outcome is to evaluate whether or not a more salient sense of place influences people’s attitudes and behaviour towards places. The implications for planning practice and the consideration of what a process to enhance sense of place may mean for grassroots organising and citizenship, are also a key part of this research. In summary, the overall research aim, three principal research questions and associated objectives are as follows:

To explore the relationship between sense of place and social learning with regards to perceptions and behaviour in an ordinary landscape. The implications of a more salient sense of place in terms of practice are then discussed.

*Research Question 1:*
How does sense of place manifest in an ordinary, everyday landscape?

**Objectives:**

- To gain a better understanding of the concept of sense of place.
- To explore how ordinary, as opposed to ‘special’, places impact on sense of place and what those factors are.
- To ascertain whether ordinary places matter to people in a globalising world.
Research Question 2:
In what ways can social learning impact upon the dynamics of sense of place?

Objectives:

- To test whether an intervention, in the form of exercises designed to help participants develop and explore a collective sense of place, makes their sense of place more salient.
- To examine what elements of the social learning intervention aided in making sense of place more salient.
- To discuss how social learning situations might be developed in order to facilitate the increased salience of sense of place.

Research Question 3:
Can a more salient sense of place affect people’s attitudes towards, and behaviour within, their local area?

Objectives:

- To evaluate whether or not a more salient sense of place influences people’s attitudes and behaviour towards ordinary places.
- To discuss the implications of a more salient sense of place in relation to planning practice.
- To consider what a process to enhance the salience of sense of place may mean for grassroots organising and citizenship.
Philosophical framework

The ontology adopted in this research is constructivist realist and this gives rise to an epistemology which both accepts the existence of a physical reality whilst recognizing that humans exist in a realm that is socially constructed to a significant degree. The literature informing this research has come from a wide variety of disciplines (for example, planning, psychology, natural resource management studies, ecology, and sociology) which span both natural and social sciences (see figure 1 in chapter 2); however this work is rooted in the social sciences. It is also reflexive in the sense that participants are engaged in ‘a collaborative process of social transformation’ in which they learn from and change the way they engage in, that process of transformation (Kemmis and McTaggart, 2000).

Blaikie (2007) identified four modes of inference: deductive, inductive, retroductive and abductive. Of these, this research could be described as falling into the mode of abductive reasoning as it involves observing, describing, interpreting and also explaining phenomena framed by a new context (Danermark et al., 2002). Lincoln and Guba (1985) caution that when researchers are carrying out work, say in an action research context, they need to be aware of how ‘trustworthy’ their work is, if it is to be deemed valid. They name the attributes of credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability as building towards that trustworthiness. Aspects such as having prolonged and persistent engagement with participants is vital if they are to be given the time and space to explore the issues at hand (Stringer, 2007). This research has the advantage of taking place over an extended time period in order to facilitate this very thing. In addition, a key factor in this research is to examine the social learning process. This also necessitates time for relationships to form, which may well be a pre-requisite if social learning is to occur.
Box 1: Personal reflections of the underlying philosophical framework

Having come from a largely positivist academic tradition in my previous studies in the natural sciences, it came as something as a shock to be asked what my thoughts on the nature of reality were when I started the PhD. In the natural sciences, traditionally the world is characterised as being tangible and knowable, and the task of the scientist it to try and unlock its secrets. This assumption is taken for granted and I have to say that I had worked in this way in the past, not really spending much time pondering my underlying ontology. Early on in this research I had to confront these issues and try and make sense of the range of alternative ontologies. As I did start to think about it, I realised that I had in fact been asking myself these questions but outside of the academic terminology. Ecology is a study of relationships between species and their environments and its influence on politics and social movements meant that it was taken further as an idea than its natural history roots. Many outside of the science of ecology took a more holistic perspective about the connections between species (including humans) and the environment. As my interest in ecology was broader than the somewhat narrow confines of the biological discipline, some of the ideas inspired by ecology in the wider world were already familiar to me. In particular, holistic thinking as opposed to reductionist thinking was appealing to me as it signalled a different way of seeing the world.

Ecologists are well aware, particularly those studying animals, that different species will have different ways of perceiving the world, largely based on their biological characteristics. For example, bees seeing certain wavelengths of light that humans cannot detect, snakes perceiving their world via their tongues much more than their eyes, or earthworms sensing vibrations in the earth. These examples demonstrate the striking differences in perception between different animal species. When we look at human perceptions, there are a whole host of factors, other than our anatomy and physiology, that influence the way we process the stimuli around us. We may describe these other factors such as family circumstances, the culture one is immersed in, the education experienced, as being instrumental in shaping our unique view of the world i.e. our worldview, which can have a profound effect on the way humans think, feel and behave.

Abrams’ (1998) anthropological book entitled, ‘The Spell of the Sensuous’ in particular, had exposed me to the work of phenomenologists. Abrams’ had studied different cultures and the way their languages were intimately linked with the landscapes they were familiar with and their conceptions of space and time. Having had my worldview challenged, prepared me in some small way for this research, although my academic journey into different disciplines proved to be quite a test for me intellectually.

There have been dualistic debates between natural and social scientists, with polarised views as to the degree to which reality is knowable and how much of what we perceive is filtered through the physical limitations of our senses. Much of the debate has been redundant in that ‘straw men’ have been set up on both sides (Jones, 2002), although Burningham and Cooper (1999) point out that most work done from a social constructionist perspective is not as extreme as some commentators would make out. Constructivist realism aims to takes a more measured position in its acceptance of the likely validity of both perspectives to a certain degree. Social construction, therefore, underpins much of the interpretive elements of this research design, relying as it does on reported meanings gleaned from participants about their perceptions of their familiar places. The natural scientist in me, however, wishes to ensure that the physical nature of places is not overlooked but that it is included in discussions about places and how people feel about them.
Methodological approach

The overarching methodological approach in this research is that of the case study. Other methods were utilised in order to provide a range of activities within which participants could explore and share their perceptions about places. Yin (2003) identifies the case study as being ideal for exploring ‘how’ or ‘why’ questions. The case study has been subject to criticism as a valid method in social inquiry in some quarters. However, Flyvbjerg (2006) provides a robust defence of the value of the case study - both as a method of inquiry but also as an important tool for learning in researchers, as “concrete, context-dependent experience is central ......in developing the skills needed to do good research” (Flyvbjerg, 2006 pg224).

When designing a case-study based research project, a decision had to be made whether to observe multiple cases or just a single case. The advantage of looking at more than one case would be to provide a contrast, but the investment of time to familiarise oneself with more than one locality and to carry out the number of interviews and workshops needed would have been prohibitive in terms of the researcher’s capacity. There is also an inevitable trade-off between breadth and depth. Instead, the aim was to provide a rich experience to the participants, where some depth could be attained in terms of the relationships between the researcher and participants and also between the participants themselves. With this in mind, it was decided to carry out a single, ‘embedded’ case study in the one location. It is embedded in that different units of analysis are incorporated into it. These will be outlined further in this chapter.
The case study was centred in the borough of Bolton, situated in the North West of England, UK. This chapter gives details of the mixed methods that were employed in order to elicit the narratives of participants in the research and to generate other forms of data deemed useful in this study.

**Figure 3** Conceptual framework of methodology.
The sources of evidence used in this study are interview transcripts, direct observations, and also physical artefacts generated through the process. According to Yin (2003) there are strengths and weaknesses associated with all these sources of evidence. For interviews, the benefits are the rich insightful comments gleaned from direct interaction with participants who share their thoughts and feelings about the case study location and how they operate within it. They can, however, be problematic in terms of the potential for bias. That bias could occur in a number of ways, one of which is that questions posed may lead to confirmation of the interviewer’s prejudices or opinions.

There can also be operational issues with this technique in terms of how the questions are constructed and how they are perceived and interpreted by the interviewees. There is also the ever present problem of interviewees wishing to please the interviewer by giving the answers that they think are wanted. It can also be a time consuming method of deriving data depending on where they take place as well as the time involved in transcribing interview material. All in all, the costs of this method can be considerable in time as well as monetary respects. Steps can be taken to lessen the impact of the problems, through good design of the interview situation, although they cannot be totally eliminated. In this research, two sets of interviews were conducted: at the beginning and after a series of workshops. The technique of interviewing is a widespread and well-accepted method of gathering data before and after an intervention; in this case a number of participative workshops.

Making direct observations help to ground the research in the context of the events (in the case of this research, a series of workshops). However, the nature of the workshops mean that the activities carried out, and the artificial nature of the grouping of people being brought together, leads to a somewhat unique and unusual situation being created. People may conduct themselves differently based upon the cues picked up from the setting and the other participants. In this respect, the research situation may give rise to behaviour that is atypical and therefore the impressions given to the
observer could be quite different as a result, particularly as the participants are well aware that the proceedings of the workshop are forming part of a research process. There are parallels with the issue already described above with respect to interviews, in that the participants may behave in a way they perceive to be consistent with what the researcher is looking for. The atmosphere in the workshops will aim to be relaxed so that the participants do not feel awkward or exposed. As trust builds between the researcher and other participants, these fears should lessen. Sensitivity towards the dynamics of the group during workshops, and action taken by the facilitator (author) to modify proceedings if necessary to make the situation more conducive to group working, are required.

Physical artefacts also play a role in this research. They take the form of outputs from a visioning exercise, mental map construction and the interpretation of old maps of the area. In addition, the participants are to be asked to complete solicited diaries in order to reflect upon the workshops and any other matters they feel are pertinent to the research. All these artefacts are potentially very useful for gaining insight into the interests and priorities identified by participants. Drawbacks include selectivity and availability (Yin, 2003). Selectivity can include where the range of artefacts generated may not yield the range of insights hoped for. Availability refers to the potential that artefacts are actually obtainable. The researcher may not be able to secure access to the artefacts, which will lessen the data available for analysis. The case study approach facilitates triangulation of mixed methods within its framework. This research looks at evidence from the range of sources gathered using different methods and then examines the data for similarities and differences in findings.

Reason (2003) defines action research (AR) as “orientation to inquiry rather than a methodology” (Reason 2003 pg106) because of its normative characteristics. Reason and Bradbury (2001) go on to state that AR’s function is to “produce practical knowledge that is useful to people in the everyday conduct of their lives” (Reason and
Bradbury, 2001 pg2), but also that it has a wider purpose in society in that it aims to improve the wellbeing of people and the planet. This view is echoed somewhat by Greenwood and Levin (1998):

“Action Research aims to include the ability of the involved community or organisation members to control their own destinies more effectively and to keep improving their capacity to do so” (Greenwood and Levin, 1998 pg5).

They conceptualise action research as involving a group of people, whether that be a residential community or those working together in an organisational setting, having the capacity to exercise more effective control over their own destinies (Greenwood and Levin, 1998). As such, it is clearly normative in that it purports to give those participants the tools to continue working in this way. This doctoral research falls into the category of AR as it has adopted a broadly normative approach; that being the increased engagement of people in shaping local places.

The purpose of this research is to work with a group of participants to give an account of ‘sense of place’ and to explore how this might be made more explicit through workshops designed to raise consciousness about place. This is considered to be Action Research (AR) and is associated with ‘social transformation’ and highlights shared ownership of research projects (Reason, 1994). It is hoped that the participants will feel that they have gained something positive out of their involvement. Criticisms levelled at this kind of methodology have shown that the role of the researcher is open to abuse as it can take the form of a dominant voice, potentially suppressing the voices of others (Cooke and Kothari, 2001). The role and conduct of researcher, being explicit about actions and motivations throughout, and being reflective, is a key consideration.
Action research tends to have a normative orientation as it aims to improve practice in some form or other. AR also tends to be cyclical (or more precisely, spiralic) in that those involved engage in learning cycles. There have been various iterations of the nature of learning cycles but at their simplest, they involve moving through the following stages identified by Kolb (1984):

![Kolb's Learning Cycle](Kolb, 1984)

**Figure 4** Kolb’s Learning Cycle (Kolb, 1984)

Kolb’s ‘experiential learning theory’ examines learning from a psychological perspective, with focus being on the individual, whereas the learning described by Argyris and Schön (1996) is broader in its conception and could be said to be more embedded in people’s environment. They also focus more emphatically on action being a key part of learning and note that values play an important role (Rossing, 1988). This research draws on these works in so far as the design of the workshops will take account of these theories of learning, and facilitate single and double loop learning.
Chalmers and Colvin (2005) used action research in a project with the UK Environment Agency looking at environmental inequalities and felt that the approach had much to offer policy makers. Other researchers such as Ison and Watson (2007) and Blackmore et al (2007), highlight the benefits of taking a social learning approach to devising solutions to ‘wicked’ problems that society faces, which involve collaboration between policy makers, scientists and stakeholders.

Gustavsen (2003) attempts to draw together the similarities between different forms of action research that have been described over the past few decades by looking at points of convergence rather than points of difference. He believes that there is a need to ‘reawaken’ the notion of social movements, as they are forces that have already taken on board many tenets of AR, and therefore have the potential to bring together what he terms ‘islands of change’ into a more unified effort, which could bring about societal change on a broader scale. Examples cited where AR has had an ongoing impact include the women’s movement, groups campaigning for social change in the areas of building democracy, fair trade and environmental justice. The aims of this research may not go that far, but it is hoped that perspectives will be shifted and assumptions examined somewhat through a focus on place. Part of the research is exploring the nature of sense of place in a particular setting (ordinary, everyday landscape) so in order to do that, it would be necessary to spent time with people to elicit their thoughts and perceptions. Ways of obtaining such information often involve questionnaires or interviews. As this research was looking to build relationships between people in the locality, and to delve deeper into motivations and actions, it was clear that the engagement with any participants would be over an extended period of time.
Participatory techniques and social learning

As introduced in the literature review, Chambers (1997) talks about participatory techniques facilitating ‘shifts and reversals’ as the communities taking part are given the space and scope to put their ideas and views across in a way which traditional methods of engagement are unable to allow. There are different rationales for the use of participative techniques. In the case of this research, the rationale is somewhat instrumental, as the goal is to generate data from participants to help address research questions. The aim, however, of making recommendations from this research for practice would be more ideological / normative (Leeuwis, 2000), in terms of the belief that people have a right to participate in shaping their places (Ding, 2005). The role of the facilitator is given prime consideration as their behaviour and attitudes are deemed to be very influential in getting communities to participate effectively and to take ownership of the outcomes that they generate.

Social learning is conceptualised by Wenger (2000) as being made up of personal experience and social competence. This approach contrasts with some of the previously mentioned approaches to social learning (see chapter 2), which tend to emphasise the individual cognitive aspects of the term, whereas Wenger places emphasis on the social. He coined the term ‘communities of practice’ to describe groups of people who come together to work on issues of relevance to that group. His concept has been influential in the work of organisations and professionals seeking to improve on their practice, by means of techniques such as ‘action learning sets’. Such groups of people working in an organisational setting often self-organise, but it is more usual to have someone steering the process and attending to issues around maintaining the momentum of groups and facilitating the smooth-running of meetings.

He also identifies three modes of belonging, one or more of which could be adopted by those participating. They are engagement (choosing to be part of a group), imagination (having the ability to take on board views of others) and alignment (one’s identity and
how one chooses to ally to a viewpoint or to oppose it). These factors are closely linked to personality, with some people being more inclined towards involvement in social learning activities than others. These ‘modes of belonging’ are somewhat incorporated into the design of the social learning workshops that take place as part of this doctoral research.

Rodela et al (2012) in their meta-analysis of several studies in the field of natural resource management claiming to utilise social learning methods, tease out four main approaches, namely positivist, interpretive, critical and post-normal. These vary in their conceptions of the world and the nature of knowledge. There are also important differences in the nature of the evidence gathered and the role of the researchers in the social learning process. The approach this research will take could be described as ‘critical’ in Rodela et al’s typology, in that its basic goal is transformation which provides input for empowering processes. The approach also recognises that knowledge is power and that the main mode of inquiry is reflective.

The researcher’s role is that of both learning agent and participant, rather than being an impartial observer in the process. This research takes an interdisciplinary approach as a range of aspects pertinent to places will be discussed during the interviews and participatory workshops. Although, in this case, the process is mainly for the purpose of doctoral study, the audience for this kind of process ultimately would be the peer community of the participants, practitioners and society at large.
Stages in the research process

The main stages in the research methodology that was employed are as follows:

1. Undertake a search of the relevant literature

2. Identify case study area

3. Conduct practical elements of the study.
   The key components of this aspect were:
   - Postcard questionnaire survey
   - Pre-workshop interviews
   - A series of three workshops (the intervention), incorporating visioning and other activities designed to facilitate social learning and reflection.
   - Post-intervention interviews
   - Solicited diaries

4. Analyse data generated from interviews, workshops, and diaries.

5. Make recommendations in the light of the findings

These steps (with the exception of the literature search which has already been described in chapter 2 and is also the subject of a personal reflections box) will be described in more detail, along with a rationale for choosing particular methods rather than others.
Choosing case study area

The location of the case study also was a key consideration that required a great deal of thought and a number of potential case study areas were considered. The researcher attempted to locate places where there were proposed or existing plans to work with communities in a participatory way. However, the issue with choosing a place where there were already plans to make changes to the locality, and where public engagement was to happen, was deemed risky for a number of reasons. One reason was the lack of control over the process if working with an agency already involved in delivering the process. The focus may have not fitted with the proposed methods and the overall aims of the consultation process by the other parties. Another issue was around the possibility of plans changing once the process was underway, which could then sabotage the research. This was a particular concern given the part-time nature of the research.

The researcher spoke to local authority officers and regeneration agency staff at three locations in the region – in Darwen, Bury, and Bolton (the researcher has greatest local knowledge of the latter), with a view to carrying out the research in one of those locations. All of these areas met the criterion for being ‘ordinary’ landscapes and were not too distant from the researcher’s home location (a pragmatic choice given domestic commitments and frequency of visits required to conduct the research). The areas had evidence of having some sort of an industrial past (old mill buildings, rows of terraced streets) with a mixture of different housing types and other uses operating such as retail, leisure and light industry. Considerable time was spent exploring the options for community building hire, the potential for recruiting participants, and possible support from community groups and agencies working in the areas, in order to decide which would be the most feasible. It was ultimately deemed appropriate to set up a case study which was under the control of the researcher in Bolton as opposed to one relying on regeneration agency and local authority staff as gatekeepers. The location of Bolton can be seen in Figure 5.
According to the Natural Area Profiles compiled by Natural England in the 1990s, Bolton is identified as being within the ‘Urban Mersey Basin’ natural area. The boundaries of these natural area profiles are based upon ‘the distribution of wildlife and natural features, and on the land use pattern and human history of each area’ (Langslow, 1997 pg2). Viewed from a natural area perspective, the wildscape is characterised by urban commons, managed greenspaces and former industrial sites. Historically, Bolton grew from a small village into the large town it is today because of its textile industry. Originally a cottage industry, making textiles from wool and fustian, later as the technology for weaving and spinning improved and the British Empire expanded, into cotton. The climate is suited to textiles because of its damp nature and the availability of reliable fast flowing streams to power the early mill complexes. The expansion was huge and drew a large population looking for work in the mills (Farrer and Brownbill, 1911).
Bolton also had a thriving engineering industry. However, the cotton industry went into decline in the 20th century, so that the industry is almost non-existent in Bolton. Old housing stock, a legacy of pollution and empty industrial buildings are a feature of Bolton today. However, other industries have moved in and because of its proximity to Manchester; its suburbs and rural fringe are an attractive prospect for commuters.

The researcher had concerns about choosing to work in an area that she was already somewhat familiar, but there were also concerns about lack of knowledge of the other areas considered. As the nature of the research would involve in-depth discussions about the locality and its position in relation to the wider landscape, some local knowledge would also be advantageous. Going to a place somewhat ‘cold’ can perhaps offer a fresh take, less encumbered with expectations, but by the same token, could miss out on the richness of those places because of unfamiliarity. It was decided to work in the more familiar area of Bolton as an understanding, not only of the landscape and its landmarks, but also of its political context and the general characteristics of the borough as a whole, was thought to provide valuable insights which would be useful when discussing places with the participants. There was also the possibility of a greater rapport with the participants if one could relate to the things they were reporting about local places (Hockey, 1993).

The researcher was also aware, however, of the fact that personal perceptions would also be partial and that efforts would have to be made not to privilege these over the perceptions of the participants. To overcome this, careful reflection on the process and attempts at identification of where personal blindspots might occur was undertaken and will be addressed further in the thesis when the research process and its limitations are discussed. An appreciation of how those views might have undue influence on the process, whilst also acknowledging the power and privilege that steering and controlling the process conferred on the researcher is necessary in this type of research.
It was a challenge to provide an incentive for people to take part in the research as the rewards for them were intangible. Time was spent in the case study area and the researcher spoke to agencies working in these areas to gain insight into the area’s general characteristics. For example, the environmental charity Groundwork and the government backed family support network Surestart, as they had a presence in these areas. Finally, East Bolton was chosen: the wards of Breightmet and Tonge, in particular (see Figure 6). Other levels of scale i.e. the borough of Bolton, the North West region, and the country as a whole were also incorporated into the design of the research so that place perceptions could be considered at a range of scales.

**Recruitment of participants**

The participants for the interviews and workshops were drawn from the study area. The postcard survey covered a wider geographical area of East Bolton, which encompassed the wards such of Breightmet, Tonge with Haulgh, Harwood, Bradshaw, and Darcy Lever. For the interviews and workshops, the participants were drawn from the adjacent wards of Breightmet and Tonge (see Figure 6). The plan was to recruit around 16 participants in order to give a good coverage of viewpoints and reasonable number of people to ensure that the workshops still functioned if some of the interviewees dropped out of the process. It was acknowledged that not all participants would be able to commit to the whole process, so initially recruiting more than what was needed meant that there was sufficient remaining to make the project worthwhile. In terms of sampling participants, the aim was to recruit a range of age groups, a fairly even gender balance amongst the local residents, some of whom would be long-term residents, while others would have a shorter residence in the area.

Other than the research project, there was not a pre-existing purpose for people to come together for neither this process nor the promise of concrete action on the ground as a result of participation. As such, there was little in the
way of an incentive for people to get involved in the research project. It was necessary to take care to emphasise the lack of any commitment to enact the vision that respondents would be working on, so that participants would not have false hopes. A ‘snowballing’ technique, whereby the pool of participants grows from a small number to a greater number as the initial participants are recruited and they proceed to go and find other people to invite along, was utilised. This technique of participant recruitment allows for a range of participants to get involved, bringing in different perspectives and experiences as well as drawing people in from networks that the researcher would not have access to (Stringer, 2007). The researcher visited various settings in the study areas such as local libraries and community centres in order to recruit participants. People were told a little about the research and asked if they wished to participate. A small number of people agreed, so interviews were arranged with them. Some interviews took place in the homes of participants, while others were done in a room at the community centre or at the interviewees’ place of work. On concluding an interview, people were asked if they could ask other local residents that they knew whether they would be interested in being involved. This resulted in more participants coming forward.

It was important to bring in a varied group of individuals so that the conceptions of sense of place revealed during the process would provide an array of perspectives. The research did not have aspirations to represent all sections of society but aimed to avoid the group being made up of very similar types of people, for example, all of the same gender, age or socio-economic group. While this research does not make claims towards generalisability, it could be said to demonstrate transferability in so far as the outcomes may be applicable to other contexts (Lincoln and Guba, 1985).
The Borough of Bolton, highlighting neighbourhoods in East Bolton. (The relative location of Bolton to the Greater Manchester conurbation is shown in the left hand corner of the image).

The neighbourhood scale of the study area can be seen in Figure 6 and Figure 7. These illustrate the relative proximity to the centre of the town and also the peri-urban fringe. These wards demonstrate what could be deemed to be an ordinary landscape. There is a mixture of built up areas and green spaces, with mixed tenure of housing ranging from Victorian terraces, through to more modern housing design, including social housing, of which there are some large estates. In terms of the green spaces, the study area is scored with watercourses in valleys and elevated areas. The urban matrix is shot through with green spaces, even in what might look to be a densely populated area. Breightmet and Tonge with Haulgh, contain some of the most deprived areas in the town, according to the Index of Multiple Deprivation for 2007 (DCLG, 2008) but there are also more affluent parts of these boroughs, particularly moving towards the urban fringes.
The researcher, being a part-time PhD student, conducted the practical elements of the research over an extended period of time (see Table 1). This had benefits in terms of having a longer period of time available to work with the participants than would have been the case if studying full time. There was time for relationships to form and to immerse oneself in the locality so as to get to know it better. The negatives of having a longer timescale are losing participants as their lives take them in different directions. Long timescales are also risky from the policy perspective. Changes in government mean changes in policy that may impact upon the research, particularly if it is taken in completely different directions. In this case, the financial crisis and change from New Labour government to the Conservative and Liberal Democrat coalition ensured that the political and social landscape was subject to wide ranging changes. Table 1) illustrates the timeline of the practical phases of the research. Further particulars of the elements listed in the table will be outlined in greater detail in this chapter.
Table 1  Timeline of practical phases of research

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**Postcard questionnaire survey**

A preliminary study was carried out before the main elements were undertaken in the form of a postcard-based survey. This was designed and carried out in order to elicit information on ‘place’ from a large number of people, with a view to informing the research questions and to get a feel for the place and the issues that were salient for people. For example, were people’s concerns primarily social or physical? This has been a central concern of place research, with various disciplines speculating as to whether one aspect has pre-eminence over another (Trentelman, 2009). The front cover displayed images of the area of East Bolton, showing some of the main roads so that respondents could hopefully recognise their locality within the images. Details of the research and also contact information were provided Figure 8.

The initial phase involving the postcard survey deliberately had wider geographical coverage than the next stages, so that there was a greater pool of participants. It covered the whole of East Bolton, rather than the subset, which was used in the main part of the research. This allowed for a greater number of potential respondents. As explored in more detail in the following paragraphs, the postcards were taken to various community groups such as tenants and residents associations, sports clubs in the area and also sent to local schools. The postcard contained a few, short questions which asked basic
demographic information and was designed to elicit immediate impressions of the area. The responses to the postcards partially informed the next stages of the research process, namely the questions posed in interviews and the content on the workshops, to some degree. The wider literature also informed the content of interview questions, for example, drawing on the work of Gustafson (2001a; 2009) who used in-depth interviews in his research to reveal place meanings.

Figure 8 Front cover of postcard used as part of an initial survey in East Bolton

The back of the postcard contained the survey information (Figure 9). The postcard posed few questions, so as to aid rapid completion. Limited demographic data was sought, relating to age group, gender, and length of residence classes. There was space for three quick impressions regarding thoughts about their locality.
The postcard also contains two attitude scale questions relating to positive and negative feelings about the area. It was hoped these few questions would give valuable insights into the most salient aspects of places to people. The researcher was particularly interested to ascertain whether physical or social aspects were most common within the responses.

The postcards were distributed in a number of ways. The researcher visited public buildings such as libraries and community centres in East Bolton, along Tenants and Residents association meetings, where people were asked to complete the surveys. Batches of postcards were also posted off to all the primary schools in the area and some secondary schools also. The packs sent to primary schools were addressed to the Year 6 teachers (as they were the eldest age group in the school cohort). The secondary school packs were addressed to the head teachers. All packs posted out included a pre-paid envelope, addressed envelope in which to return the postcards, thus ensuring that no cost would be incurred by respondents.
In terms of analysis of the postcard data, some quantitative summary was to be conducted but generally, an insight into the broad concerns that people report about places to help inform the next stages of the research were the main aim rather than drawing conclusions about East Bolton solely based on this data.

Participants were interviewed before and after three intervention workshops in order to gain insights into their perspectives on place. This was also addressed by means of providing participants with a diary in which to record their thoughts during the process. Analysis of the workshop outputs and the interview transcripts was undertaken with a view to looking for changes in perspectives, and the trigger points for these, during the process the participants have been taken through.

**Interviews**

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with participants before and after an intervention (in the form of a series of workshops – see workshop outlines further in this chapter). The interviews were designed to elicit from the participants what they thought and felt about their local area. The workshops were designed to bring ‘sense of place’ to the forefront of participants’ minds as a shared vision for the local area was constructed.

Some elements of grounded theory (Strauss and Glaser, 1967) were utilised, mainly within the data analysis phase. However, theoretical sampling, whereby the researcher continues to collect data until there are no more new themes emerging, was not utilised as the format of the data collection, i.e. pre- and post-intervention interviews with workshops in between, did not lend itself to this kind of process. Themes were not decided *a priori*, but emerged from the data gathered, which took the form of interview transcripts,
information from the visioning exercises which utilised the Ketso\(^3\) toolkit (Tippett \textit{et al.}, 2007) in the form of ‘leaves’ which were used to gather details of existing assets in the area, along with details of what they wished the vision to consist of. Data was also gathered from solicited diaries which were given to participants in the first workshop and discussed with them in the follow-up interview (Meth, 2003).

The interview questions were partly informed by the postcard survey data but also inspired by other studies in the literature. For example, Trudgill (2001), Milton (2002) and Lewicka (2005) pose questions in their respective studies that identify interesting aspects that they feel studies in sense of place should examine (see Table 2). The format of the interview involved a semi-structured interviewing technique. The questions were designed to elicit thoughts, feelings, and perceptions of the local landscape in order to account for the range of elements that ‘sense of place’ covers, i.e. physical, social and abstract meanings. Interviews took place in a variety of locations. Some were in the participants own home at a time arranged with them, while others took place in a community centre or their place of work. Interviewees were asked to sign a consent form, to give permission for their responses to be used as part of the study. The interviews were recorded using a digital voice recorder so that the researcher did not have to attempt to write too much during the interview, thus leaving more opportunity to listen and to probe further when the need arose. These recordings were transcribed onto a word-processing package using the line number facility to allow navigation through the text.

\(^3\)\texttt{www.ketso.com} Developed by Tippett \textit{et al.} (2007) for use as a tool in participatory workshops. Ketso is an African word, from the language used in Lesotho, which means ‘action’. Kits comprise background ‘felts’ that have branches and leaves affixed using Velcro. The kit is highly visual and can be manipulated and customised by participants as they see fit.
Table 2 Interview questions posed in initial, pre-intervention workshops.

1. **Interviewees background information:** Name and gender/age/employment status/size of household
   - How long they have lived in current place?
   - Thinking about this area that you live, tell me how you feel about it?
   - What’s do you like about where you live?
   - What do you dislike about where you live?
   - What are the things about the place that you really value /value the most?
   - What would you change if you could?
   - If the place was threatened in some way, how would you feel about it? e.g. removing landmarks.
   - How would they feel if they had to move away? (Trudgill, 2001; Milton, 2002)
   - If you have lived here more than 5 years, how have your feelings changed about the place?
   - And why have your feelings changed? What triggered these changes?

2. **Extent of mobility:**
   - Tell me about other places you have lived? (if any)
   - Have you travelled? (Where and for how long?)
   - Thoughts about those places e.g. what was special about the places.

3. **Place(s) where they grew up** (explores identity).
   (If same place as current, ask about how the place has changed, how feel about it, has how you feel about it changed over time?)
   - Where and how long lived there? What was it like?
   - What really stands out in your memory of those places / what was special?
   - What’s did they like about where they lived?
   - Where family comes from? Knowledge of family history. (Lewicka, 2005)
   - If you have lived in lots of places – does somewhere stand out?

4. **How do you feel about the fact that you have moved a lot?**
   - What did they dislike about where they lived?
   - What does that place mean to them now?

5. **Questions about behaviour in places** – thoughts, feelings, involvement in places and in communities
   - Thinking about the local area again, where do you spend time?
   - What sort of things do you do there? (how do you use the local environment?)
   - Are you active in your community e.g. members of any groups? If so, in what ways?
   - Tell me whether you feel able to have an influence and to make it a better place to live?
   - What barriers are there to being active in your community?
   - Do you know people who are actively making it a better place to live? What are they doing?

6. **Is there somewhere else locally you would consider moving to?**
   - What has that place got that you wish to be part of?
   - Is there somewhere else further away you would consider moving to?
   - What has that place got that you wish to be part of?

7. **Scale – how do you feel about your community, town, region, nation.**
   - Do you feel attached to your town? Why?
   - Do you feel attached to Lancashire or the North West? Why?
   - Do you feel attached to your country? Why?

8. **Is there a place that you feel particularly attached to? Why?**

9. **Have you ever been involved in community visioning exercises? What kind, extent of involvement?**

10. **Would you be interested in being involved in a series of visioning exercises as part of this research?**

11. **When would be a good time for you to get involved if we start workshops (daytime / evening)**

   Do you know anyone else in the area I could interview – both people who are active and who are not but may be interested in being involved?
After the three workshops had taken place (see further details in this chapter), a post-intervention round of interviews took place. Details of the follow-up questions are set out in Table 3. The main purpose of these post-intervention interviews was to provide a comparison to the views expressed in the initial interviews about their sense of place and to probe into the process that the participants engaged in during the workshops. Insights from the first interviews also informed some of the questions in the follow-up interviews.

The mobility questions, in particular, were informed by the initial analysis. In order to address the research questions, and in keeping with the tenets of action research, insights into the reflections on the activities and thoughts generated from involvement were sought from the interviewees. Some questions were related to their thoughts on the vision on which they worked as part of the workshop, and their thoughts on activism, particularly as regards planning and place-making. Again, these interviews were transcribed and analysed. This will be discussed further in this chapter.
### Table 3 Post-intervention interview questions

**Aim:** to reflect on the workshops and the ideas generated from the workshops, and also to go through solicited diaries with interviewees,

**Sense of place**
- What does the phrase ‘sense of place’ mean to you?
- Would you say that it is something that you are aware of?
- Do you think people are generally aware of or have a sense of place?
- How would you describe the place to someone visiting from elsewhere?
- When do you think about the place you live? (what kind of things make you stop and think?)

**Taking part in the workshops**
- Have your feelings changed about the area you live? If so, what triggered these changes?
- What do you remember about the workshops?
- What did you think of the exercises using the Ketso?
- What did you think of the exercises using the maps?
- What did you think about the observation exercises?
- Did you learn anything from the other people there? (what and when?)
- Did anything surprise you?
- Thinking about what other people said about the area, do you now have a different feeling towards the place? (i.e. did other people’s views influence you in any way)
- Looking at the list of things people brought up during the workshop, in particular the assets, did any of the items that others put down surprise you?
- Would you say that people generally agreed about what they thought was important about the area or was there a lot of variation in the kind of things people came up with?

**Feelings about other places.**
- Do you consciously compare the area you live with other places?
- If I asked you to compare this area with say living in an area which was more urban, what would you say? If I asked you to compare this area with say living in an area which was more rural, what would you say?

**Identity and sense of belonging**
- Do you think this area is a good place to grow up? (probe deeper with ‘why?’)
- Where would be the ideal place to grow up / or be elderly?
- Would you feel the same way about this place if you did not have any family or friends nearby?

**Mobility**
- How do you normally travel around? Foot, bike, car?
- What things to you tend to notice when you are travelling?
- What do you think of the ‘bits in between’ e.g. when travelling from here into town?
- Is it a good thing that people are more mobile nowadays? E.g. travel and work opportunities
- Are there any negative aspects with this mobility?
- Has the fact that you have travelled and seen other places affected how you see your locality?

**Questions about behaviour in places**
- Has anything changed for you since you got involved in this project (in terms of how you use the local area)?
- Do you plan to stay in the area for the foreseeable future?
- Are you involved in any community activity at the moment? (Who with, doing what?)

**Sense of place and the planning / regeneration processes**
- Do you think that focussing on people’s perception of places, particularly what they value, could be used in planning processes? In what ways? If not, why not?
- Communities face lots of challenges. How could people be more enabled to take part in decision.
- To what extent should decision making be done by councillors and developers, and to what extent should local people be involved? How could people be persuaded to get involved?
- Do you think any of the exercises that you took part in would be useful to planners when making decisions about an area?
- Would you like to have more say in what happens in your area?
- Do you think that it is important to have a ‘sense of place’? Why (not)?
Workshops

Three workshops were organised and carried out. These were designed to provide a space for participants to focus their interest on their surroundings, to share thoughts and feelings about the place, and to create a future vision which prioritises and preserves the existing assets that are most valued. Detailed information on the activities involved in the workshops is included in Table 4 below, and also Tables 5 and 6.

Table 4 Outline of activities from first workshop that took place May 2010

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Activity / Exercise</th>
<th>Mins</th>
<th>Brief Description of Activities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6.00</td>
<td>Food and drink</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>Informal interaction, settling into the space.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.15</td>
<td>Introduction to workshops</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>Overview of research + housekeeping stuff, area of interest, ethics, ground rules, show various images of the area and on powerpoint presentation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.30</td>
<td>First exercise</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Using the crayons, you have five minutes to do a rough sketch of the area. Share with your neighbour and describe what you have</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.40</td>
<td>Second exercise</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Give three brown leaves and ask them to write on each one, something they like about Bolton. Collect the leaves, and have</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.50</td>
<td>Comfort break</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Set up three felts with EASEL format: (one Bolton scale, others East Bolton)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.55</td>
<td>Ketso exercise – green leaves – New ideas</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Introduce the Ketso (by placing the brown leaves on the Bolton scale) and get people thinking about what a future East Bolton would look like</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.05</td>
<td>Review other table</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Rotate tables and get people to use icons for the interesting ones. Use comments cards for questions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.40</td>
<td>Tea break</td>
<td>10</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.50</td>
<td>Introduce brown leaves – problems and – assets</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>What is good about the area, what do you value?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.10</td>
<td>Grey leaves – problems and – assets</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Give one grey leaf per person, but also green leaves to add a solution to that</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.20</td>
<td>Discussion</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Have discussion about what they think about what has come out of the exercises so far. Which ones could be applied to Bolton (larger scale)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.30</td>
<td>Wrap-up and next session info</td>
<td></td>
<td>Give out solicited journals and give instructions on how to complete – emphasise that they are for recording thoughts that occurred during and between sessions</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 4 illustrates the introduction to visioning, showing the Ketso toolkit that was used to gather data and encourage participation. An overview of the workshop and research as a whole was given at the outset. Attention needs to be paid to the comfort and wellbeing of participants, so opportunities to have a walk round and access to food and drink was an important part of the process. Not attending to such issues can make the situation stressful for participants, so creating a pleasant space for working and interacting was important. The venue chosen for the workshops was a community building near the centre of the study area on Bury Rd (A58). There were car parking facilities and outdoor space at the back of the building that was adjacent to a well-known green space called Seven Acres Country Park.

One of the first workshop activities involved participants drawing mental maps of the area (individually, then sharing) with another participant. This got people thinking about the physical layout of their neighbourhood and to identify how much of the areas were familiar to them. As a group, the initial focus on the physical elements that people drew later turned to the social as participants discussed their relationships and networks in the area. Space for place meanings was also made available through facilitation of the process. Participants were then introduced to the visioning activity.
Visioning

The workshops involved working on a sustainable vision at the neighbourhood scale and also at the scale of the borough of Bolton and its hinterland. The visioning spanned all three workshops, using the Ketso toolkit which is designed to elicit information from participants in a creative and simple way. Another established community planning tool that could perhaps have been used is ‘Planning for Real’ (2014). It was established in the late 1970s and remains a popular and useful method of harnessing the wishes of communities. Much of the activity centres around people putting together a 3D model, focussing on the unpleasant parts initially. Once constructed, this is circulated amongst the wider community and comment invited. People are given lots of control of the process with professional involvement being relegated to that of a service role only (providing support only when asked for). People take account of timescales by a process of prioritising what is needed in the short, medium and long term. An important element of the process is identifying the capabilities of the community and where gaps appear, thinking about who might be able to help deliver the plans. Throughout the process, care is taken to use non-technical language and to be inclusive (Gibson, 1991).

Planning for Real has similarities with Ketso, in that it is highly visual and interactive. It also allows people to give their views, stimulates debate and deliberation. It was deemed to be inappropriate for this research, however, as it is focussed on the built environment. The visioning in this research needed to be open to be more encompassing than a focus on the physical may allow. Use of ketso was a pragmatic choice given the skill set of the researcher and availability of the toolkit, and achieving social learning outcomes is not dependent on using any particular toolkit, whether that be ketso, planning for real or any other set of tools available. A key consideration is finding an appropriate means to engage participants and to enable stories to be shared. The visioning using ketso forms only a part of a suite of activities in the workshops, which also include creating mental maps, observing the local landscape, examining old maps to discuss changes in the landscape and habitation patterns, etc.
The Ketso toolkit consists of a large workspace ‘felt’ that fits on a table, along with a themed centrepiece that affixes to the felt by means of Velcro

![Ketso toolkit](image)

**Figure 10** Ketso toolkit - used in visioning exercises (Ketso, 2012)

Participants can write upon various colour-coded ‘branches’ and ‘leaves’. There are many advantages to using such a tool for gathering data, such as:

- lots of space for ideas
- everyone contributes (people are given several leaves on which to write)
- anonymity can be maintained around the comments as the tool does not require people to claim ownership of their suggestions and comments
- The colour-coded leaves encourage positive comments as well as ‘parking’ negative comments so that the process is not immediately stymied.⁴

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⁴ Many community participation situations often get stuck from the outset with problems being articulated and these issues dominating the process. The Ketso toolkit encourages a starting point of looking at positive aspects, with its growth metaphor – of starting with the soil, what we like and existing assets (brown leaves), then growing new ideas in the soil (green leaves). The Ketso toolkit contains grey ‘leaves’ which are purposely designed for use for negative issues to be expressed. These can then be placed on the felt and the process allowed to move on, thereby acknowledging the negative element but not being railroaded by it. That is not to say that negative aspects are ignored, just that they are managed so that there is space for positive points to be made also. Later on in the process, participants can discuss potential solutions for these and examine the root causes for these problems.
Ketso is marketed as ‘a workshop in a bag’ as it contains all the materials needed to carry out a community consultation process with a group of people. The kit contains large cloth ‘felts’, coloured and laminated ‘branches’ and ‘leaves’, as well as water-based pens, comment cards and icons. The design incorporates ideas inspired by mind-mapping (Buzan, 2003) and also De Boon’s ‘Six Thinking Hats’ (De Bono, 1999), so the materials are colourful and versatile, to allow participants to utilise them creatively.

The kit can be used in a number of ways, depending on what the desired outcome of the participatory process is. Sometimes, the main themes can be decided a priori whereby the branches are labelled up before the start of a workshop, or they can be left blank so that participants can decide what the main themes emerge as people start to add leaves into the process (see Figure 11). The colour coded ‘leaves’ are placed on a ‘felt’ which has branches, denoting various themes (or left blank for determination later on in the process).

Participants discuss the meaning of the information on the leaves that they have generated and decide collectively where they should be placed. This aspect of Ketso is very important as it allows people to interpret the comments as a group. They can deliberate as to the meaning and then decide, again collectively, where it should be placed on the felt. In some cases, the comment made on a leaf could potentially be put in more than one location on the felt, so the negotiation process can be more in-depth as the meanings are deliberated. This aspect of using Ketso relates strongly to ideas in the social learning literature, as participants are learning together as they focus on ideas generated as individuals but interpreted collectively.
Another important part of the Ketso design relates to the relative anonymity of the ideas put forward. Participants are given a pile of leaves and they work alone to make some comments upon them. They then share the leaves and place them on the felt, building them into a shared picture, where the individual ideas become part of the larger whole, and cannot be traced back to the individuals. The importance of this lies in the fact that people do not have to ‘own’ their ideas but can just offer them as part of other ideas put forward. It is possible to strengthen this anonymity by mixing ideas up, or asking people to leave some ideas on the table unread, for another group to read out. Ketso has been demonstrated to include the voices of the less dominant in discussion, important when working with groups where there are inequalities such as gender that could prevent oppressed groups having their voices heard (Tippett, 2004).

The process went through various stages of discussion and iteration. There were two ‘felts’ being worked on – one at the neighbourhood level of Breightmet and Tonge, and one looking at the larger scale, that of the town of Bolton. These were developed over several workshops, so the ideas were built upon and considered on more than one occasion.
The second workshop took place approximately two months after the initial one. This workshop also revisited the Ketso felt workspaces so that participants could reflect on them and have the opportunity to make additions or amendments. Much of this session however, involved other activities that built on people’s knowledge of the area and enabled discussion about changes to the landscape over time and also thinking about future directions for change (see Table 5).

**Table 5** Outline of Workshop 2, July 2010

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Activity / Exercise</th>
<th>Mins</th>
<th>Brief Description of Activities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6.00</td>
<td>Food and drink</td>
<td>15</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.15</td>
<td>Introduction to workshops Have felts out complete with legends</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>Re-cap what we did at the last session and what the workshops are for. Welcome new people. Any Questions? Any thoughts after the last session. Opportunity to add additional leaves.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.30</td>
<td>First exercise - two tables Imagining the area in the past</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>One table to draw the area – what was it like 100 years ago / other table – what was it like 1,000 years ago? Does not need to be accurate – just impressions. What did it look and smell like?, what did people do?, where did they go?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.45</td>
<td>Swap tables</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>Look at each groups maps and talk about them</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.00</td>
<td>Presentation</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>History of the area – reading at the landscape. Snapshot from 1742 – map and field names.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.10</td>
<td>Looking at old maps in turn</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>Find clues about how people met their needs from the landscape – travel, food, activities, recreation. 1850, 1894, 1925 Think about the future of the area and how the landscape plays a part.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.25</td>
<td>Tea break</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Informal interaction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.35</td>
<td>RoundView</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Dr Jo Tippet take group through the RoundView exercise</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.55</td>
<td>Look at Ketso</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>Each group look at a branch and think about how sustainable the goal is in light of the exercise. Use red warning triangles to highlight potentially problem areas. Re-define them using yellow leaves for</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.10</td>
<td></td>
<td>15</td>
<td>Discuss as a group how some of these issues might be made more sustainable in the longer term. What alternatives are there</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.25</td>
<td>Wrap-up and next session info</td>
<td></td>
<td>Agree a date to meet up again next time.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The workshops were run with the aim of fostering social learning about the varied experiences of living within the study area. The workshops took participants through a series of processes which encouraged interaction with each other, and provided a platform for people to explore their area at a range of scales. Activities were used to focus participants on viewing their locality with a particular lens of ecological literacy while also giving people tools to engage, discuss and formulate a vision with ‘place’ at the heart of it. These were used to aid the process of bringing sense of place to the forefront of discussions / activities. Examples include constructing mental maps, looking at historic maps of the area, and using the RoundView process (Tippett et al., 2009) to stimulate discussion.

Initially, the participants were divided into two groups, with one group being tasked to draw the area, how they imagined it to be 100 years ago. The other group had a similar task to complete but they had to think about the area 1,000 years ago. Although some knowledge of the history of the area would have helped, the activity necessitated thought and discussion about the landscape and what was new and more modern. Thinking about signs of past industry, the development of infrastructure, settlement patterns and natural features, all played a part in this activity. Deliberation and interaction while constructing these mental maps is deemed to be a useful means by which groups can share their mental models with others (Cornell et al. 2013; Green and White, 2007). As such, they were felt to be an important aspect of the workshop.

Another mapping activity, involving historic maps of the area, was deemed to be a useful resource for working with groups, as people interpret them together pointing out landmarks and making sense of where things are. Changes to the landscape are also highlighted by this, which can be a powerful way of facilitating reflection on the nature of the changes that have taken place, requiring imagination to conceive of what things may have been like in times past. Maps from more than 200 years ago are rare, so asking participants to imagine times from further back in time can be quite a mental challenge and require participants to think about what natural landscapes would be like without
the pervasive influence of humans. The shape of the landscape and the presence of natural features such as hills, valleys, watercourses, vegetation, animals, are brought to mind. Parallels may be drawn with natural areas in the region that people are familiar with. This may be more difficult if the site is highly urban and participants have not been exposed to other landscapes.

In addition to these mapping exercises, participants were asked to consider a systems framework of sustainability and how their area might be moved in a more sustainable direction using RoundView\textsuperscript{5}. The Roundview toolkit was inspired by ‘The Natural Step’\textsuperscript{6}, a schemata devised by Karl Henrik Robert as a means of communicating knowledge about earth system science with a view to framing the conditions which facilitate or hinder long term sustainability of ecological systems while acknowledging the importance of human agency.

\textsuperscript{5} www.roundview.org
\textsuperscript{6} www.thenaturalstep.org/en
Tippett (2013) devised RoundView as a hands-on tool, with stimulating graphics that allows people to explore sustainability in a positive and motivating manner (Tippett, 2013). RoundView has been trialled with many groups including a supermarket chain, Tesco, to teach its staff (from senior managers to checkout staff) about sustainability (Tippett et al., 2009). Dr Tippett came along to the second workshop and delivered a short session using the RoundView toolkit with participants.

The puzzle-like kit was distributed to the two groups, leaving them to explore and examine the pieces. The group activity involved them putting the pieces together, having deliberated the best way to do this. Then, the implications revealed by the toolkit were discussed with the whole group. After the RoundView exercise, the participants revisited the visions on the Ketso workspaces and discussed amendments they might wish to make in the light of the insights gained from the RoundView exercise.
about how the earth functions in terms of the cycles and flows of resources and energy. Grounding a vision in a sustainability framework helps to avoid unrealistic and damaging aspects being included in the vision as participants encompass notions of sustainability.

The *third and final workshop* took place a few months later than the second one (see Table 6). Participants were settled into the space with sharing food and then a reminder of what had been done previously in workshops. The iterative process of working on the Ketso workspaces were again revisited, but a major theme of this workshop was on place feelings and meanings. It was planned to leave the community building and walk around the locality, to really engage the senses of the place, as if visiting for the first time. An elderly member of the group did not feel able to walk very far so we just explored the spaces immediately around the community building. Although this was more restrictive, the building is on a main arterial road with long vistas up and down it and behind the building is a large green space with a former mill reservoir (lodge) behind it, so there was a mix of built and semi-natural stimuli in the vicinity. Discussion of these impressions took place on returning to the building and any amendments to the Ketso workspaces, were made.
Table 6 Outline of third and final workshop - May 2011

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Activity / Exercise</th>
<th>Mins</th>
<th>Details of activities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6.30</td>
<td>Food and drink</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>Sign in, name badges, choose re-interview slot</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.45</td>
<td>Introduction to workshops</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Re-cap the stuff we did at the last session and what the workshops are for. Imagine that the info would be passed to council and be implemented (rather than a theoretical exercise)! Any Questions? Any thoughts after the last session. Display old maps and make spreadsheet available.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Have felts out complete with legends (ensure dots on original leaves)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.50</td>
<td>First exercise - using local felt</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Give and collect green leaves (put them on the back of a planner felt)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>new ideas since we last met</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.55</td>
<td>Using local felt</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Taking the green leaves from the back of planner felt – add new ones to the felt - looking where things are repeated. Using comments cards and icons (to show where changes have occurred and to highlight important aspects.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>what’s changed since we last met?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.05</td>
<td>Walk (or look out of window if weather bad)</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>First five minutes quiet and making sure senses are engaged. Imagine it is the first time in the area. What are people noticing?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.25</td>
<td>Best and worst things seen</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Brown and grey leaves – one each. Added to the felts.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.30</td>
<td>New ideas</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Focussing on the grey leaves, use two green leaves each to come up with solutions to tackle those problems on felt.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.40</td>
<td>Break</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Informal interaction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.45</td>
<td>Bolton-wide felt</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>Brown leaves (5+5), Green leaves (5+5), then Grey leaves (5+5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.15</td>
<td>Icons (!) - Green leaves</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Individually, people decide where to put an icon about what they regard to be their most important issue. When all icons down, then as a group, using 3-5 tick icons, decide what are the most important issues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.25</td>
<td>Wrap-up and plenary</td>
<td></td>
<td>Summarise what has been done in terms of creating a community vision. Remind about diaries and ensure interview slots made available.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Participants were interviewed both before and after the workshops using a semi-structured interviewing technique. The questions were designed to elicit thoughts, feelings, and perceptions of the local landscape in order to account for the range of elements that ‘sense of place’ covers, i.e. physical, social and abstract meanings. Interviews were transcribed and analysed using a grounded theory approach to gain insights into the phenomena. Key themes were identified and discussed.

**Solicited diaries**

Participants were also encouraged to reflect on the process by means of a solicited diary. The purpose of this was to help track key points where new perspectives were gained and to give a space for participants to express opinions about the process, consider their thoughts and feelings away from the group and having had time to digest and reflect upon the process (Meth, 2003). In the first workshop session, A5 booklets were distributed to participants along with an explanation of their purpose. An insert was stuck on the front inner leaf, repeating the information given verbally in the sessions (see Table 7). It was made clear that these would form part of the analysis and that the contents would be discussed in the final interview.
Table 7  Insert pasted into front inner leaf of A5 booklet to form a ‘solicited diary’ distributed to research participants.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Guidelines for diary completion</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Thank you for agreeing to keep a diary about the workshops. If you have any questions about your diary, contact Ann.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Please try to fill in the diary after each workshop. Look back and think about the workshop exercises, and also of moments where you became aware of the place you live, in either a positive or a negative way. This may have arisen through comments said to you, something you hear or see.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In completing your diary, please try to include the following:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• did you learn anything new at the workshop?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• what did you do?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• how did it make you feel?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• did anything make you change your views on the local area?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If there are any other thoughts or experiences that you would like to write about related to the local area, please add these.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Please do not worry about grammar, spelling or handwriting.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You and your diary entries will remain anonymous.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Participants were reminded about the diaries in subsequent workshop sessions. The researcher asked participants to go through the contents of the diary with her at the end of the follow-up interviews. The contents of the diaries was used as data to supplement interview data, and analysed in the same way.
Research conducted by Rogan et al (2005) found that environmental changes emerged as a salient influence on the way participants structured their relationship with their surroundings. With this in mind, it could have been productive to target a study area where changes are imminent, whether that be redevelopment, regeneration, or perhaps threats posed by more widespread phenomena like climate change (increased risk of flooding, for example). However, it proved difficult to identify an area where there were particular changes planned. Given the size of the study area chosen, it was deemed likely that some changes would happen throughout the course of the research period, and that it would therefore not be necessary to target an area where profound change was certain.

Another criterion for the proposed case study area was that it should be deemed to be an ‘ordinary’, as opposed to special, landscape. Indeed, the landscape could even be deemed ‘degraded’. The reason for choosing such a location is to bring about more balance into the discussion, as many studies in the ‘place’ literature have concentrated on special landscapes. It could be argued that it is easier to feel a connection to places which have appealing and exceptional aesthetics.
Box 2 Personal Reflections on earlier experiences of participatory processes

As mentioned in the foreword to this thesis, the author had been involved as a participant in a research project conducted by Dr Joanne Tippett in Manchester whereby a new participatory protocol was being developed (Tippett, 2005a). The toolkit was called DesignWays and had the purpose of providing a hands-on and highly visual means by which participants can come together and discuss what would make a sustainable vision for their locality. The DesignWays toolkit included many parts to it and in the years since that research was carried out, some of those parts have been further developed into stand-alone elements. Two of those elements were used as part of this research: ‘Ketso’ and ‘RoundView’. The former is an interactive set up that allows people to work together to contribute their ideas and share understanding of a specific phenomenon, while the latter is an engaging way of learning about the interconnectedness of human and natural systems.

Through the participatory research project in North Manchester in 2003, I had been exposed to a powerful process involving an extended series of workshops working through different aspects of the DesignWays process, the aim of which was to test it as a tool for promoting ecological literacy and design, with various stakeholders (Tippett et al., 2007). Its focus was how the aims of the Water Framework Directive might be promoted and furthered at different levels of scale.

I was part of a group in that research that comprised people working in an environmental endeavour with communities such as staff from agencies, charities such as Red Rose Forest, and local authority staff. I also attended some of the sessions aimed at community members, so could observe the differences between how the participatory process worked between these different groups and observe the dynamics between facilitator and participants in different settings. Although I was familiar with the idea of action research, it was my first experience of taking part in such a process and appreciating the ways in which it seemed to differ from participatory processes in other locations.

One of the main differences I observed was in respect of the time element. I had previously attended consultation exercises and events that were very short and little in the way of two-way communication, whereas the DesignWays process required an extended period of engagement to enable participants to develop with the process and to begin to think about their locality in different ways, but crucially, had time to share that understanding with others. I undertook an Open College NVQ qualification in using DesignWays as part of my involvement in the research process, so by the end of the couple of years or so that I was involved in it, I had really come to appreciate how potentially transformative it could be. To summarise the outcome of that
research project, although there had been no prospect of the community generated design being implemented at the time of the research, at the end of it, a newly formed offshoot of the Forestry Commission called Newlands, decided to fund and implement the local design generated for the area known as Moston Vale. Their decision was based on having a well thought out design, based on community need that had buy-in, as a result of the level of engagement (Tippett, 2005b).

My growing interest in sense of place, as outlined in the foreword, was influenced by my participation in the DesignWays process. That process had a number of stages, some of which required specially designed tools for participants to work on and manipulate. Although the entire suite of DesignWays tools are not readily available to use as a complete entity, some of those individual elements that made up the toolkit have since been developed as standalone tools that can be used for a number of different purposes. Two of those tools: Ketso and RoundView, were utilised in this research and are outlined in this chapter. As a result of my participation in the DesignWays process, I was given the opportunity to work towards a Level 3 Open College qualification in facilitation using DesignWays, which I achieved. I have since used Ketso in participative processes with groups as varied as the Chartered Institute of Water and Environmental Management, Bolton Council’s Food Growing Advisory Group, Transition Town groups, as well as forward planning with colleagues to redesign courses and sessions to explore options for embedding sustainability across the university as a whole. Thus, familiarity and expertise at facilitating processes with the toolkit, along with an appreciation of its applicability, has been gained over a few years.

My previous higher education experiences had been largely in the natural sciences, but my most recent post-graduate study had been in the field of education (PGCE in post-16 education). As such, the epistemologies that I had been exposed to had given rise to predominantly quantitative approaches to answering questions. Through the PGCE and then the involvement in DesignWays, I came to appreciate the different ways of seeing the world and the range of qualitative methods that this view can give rise to. As I began to read the literature, particularly that in environmental psychology, I did not feel that assessing people’s feelings and perceptions via quantitative methods were appropriate or particularly informative. Sense of place, as mentioned in the previous chapter, has been a focus of interest in various disciplines, so it was very useful for me to see how different academic traditions have sought to address its complexities.
Ethical Issues

Working with participants can throw up many potential ethical issues (Reason, 2003). The well-being of participants is important and so processes need to be designed to ensure the comfort of those taking part. The researcher needs to think about what participants are to be asked to do and whether it may cause harm or distress to them. Measures need to be put in place to be flexible if participants highlight any problems. Demands on people’s time and resources also need to be considered. Participants were advised as to the commitment they were being asked to make in terms of participation, but the researcher was mindful of not demanding too much from them in terms of time, as there was no promise of tangible outcomes for them other than the hope that they would find the experience interesting and enjoyable.

The external demands of participatory processes can serve to put pressure on both facilitators and participants alike. Mendis-Millard and Reed (2007) discuss this issue in their paper as they had to change their plans in order to ‘honour’ the participants. Failure to do this can result in alienation and bad feeling. The way that this can be dealt with is to be upfront and honest with participants about the scope of the process, so as not to give unrealistic expectations. It became necessary for them to adapt their methods and, while their changes had been risky from an academic point of view, it was deemed necessary from a community perspective as there was a need for meaningful outcomes for the participants (Mendis-Millard and Reed, 2007). Their research could be termed ‘emancipatory’, while this research project is more ‘exploratory’ in nature.
Anonymity

Participants were asked for their permission to use their interview transcripts as part of the research (see appendix for consent form). The identities of participants were kept on a spreadsheet that contained their telephone numbers, actual name, age and name assigned for the purposes of this research. This file was password encrypted and not kept in paper format, only electronic. While the research being conducted was not particularly contentious and not part of a formal planning process, it was always the intention that names of participants in the research process would be reported using pseudonyms rather than real names, as such a protocol is the norm in this kind of research. Table 8 indicates how the data sources inform the research questions.

Table 8  Research questions and data sources derived from mixed methods design

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Questions</th>
<th>Sources of Data</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Postcard survey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How does sense of place manifest in an ordinary, everyday landscape?</td>
<td>Pre-intervention interviews</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Visioning Exercise outputs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Discussion in workshops</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Observation of group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Solicited diaries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Post-intervention interviews</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In what ways can social learning impact upon the dynamics of sense of place?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Can a more salient sense of place affect people’s attitudes towards and behaviour within their local area?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Analysis

Triangulation of data derived from these various methods was employed to help build the case study and aid in potentially corroborating phenomena. Triangulation can be said to have occurred when the same events have been supported by more than one source of evidence (Yin, 2003). The postcard data analysis involved a measure of quantitative assessment but also categorising of themes, to ensure that the subsequent interviews would incorporate appropriate questions. Some numerical analysis of the data from the Ketso leaves was conducted and this is presented as graphs in the next chapter. The purpose of this was to identify the nature of the assets highlighted by participants and to quantify the new ideas generated by the visioning process. These numerical aspects give a different lens to query the data, supporting and supplementing the qualitative analyses.

This research, being largely qualitative and exploratory in nature, required a mode of analysis that would give the opportunity for new and surprising insights to be generated. Therefore, it was deemed sensible to utilise an approach inspired by grounded theory (Strauss and Glaser, 1967). Urquhart and Fernandez (2006) caution that researchers need to be aware of the distinction between grounded theory (GT) as a method and as a theory. GT aims to generate theory that is ‘grounded’ in the data collected. Theory is derived from data acquired from fieldwork. A large range of data can be used, whether that is interview transcripts, or more unusual forms of data such as outputs from Ketso workspaces. As for the analysis of case studies, Yin (2003) identifies the following strategies for analysis:

- relying on theoretical propositions;
- thinking about rival explanations; and
- Developing a case description.
These stages are congruent with grounded theory, apart from the first point which may suggest that existing theory guides analysis, while a GT analysis would look to build its own theory from the data, and only then comment on how it compares to existing theories.

GT is useful for the kind of inquiry that this research aims for as it is often used to investigate how individual interact with phenomena, and is suited to examining processes. In terms of sampling, GT recommends that sampling continue until no new insights or categories emerge. In the case of this research, the design of the research, and the time constraints on the researcher, did not lend itself to sampling in this way. The research process was bounded by time and somewhat restricted to gaps in the researchers work schedule. However, the coding process aimed to follow the sequence shown below that is used in GT:

**Open Coding** —> **Selective Coding** —> **Theoretical Coding**

- Identify categories and domains
- Clustering around categories
- Done at a certain level of abstraction

(Urquhart and Fernandez, 2006)

This way of analysing the data connects categories and allows space for novel and unexpected aspects to emerge. This fits in with the systemic ethos of this research, as emergent properties are not always predictable and the unexpected can occur. The theory emerging from this process is often reported as a narrative. Comparison with the literature is a vital element of grounded theory, although there is a greater emphasis on engaging and comparing with the literature later in the process than research projects would normally do so. The reason for this is to avoid being too influenced by orthodoxies. However, in practice, this is difficult to achieve as all researchers approach investigations with some pre-conceptions and familiarity with theory.
An orientation to open-mindedness is what is aimed for. This is termed ‘delayed scrutiny’ and is meant to avoid the imposition of ideas too early in the process. Guba and Lincoln (1989) state that the following aspects are important when conducting qualitative research:

- credibility,
- dependability,
- transferability and
- confirmability

These are in contrast to the more positivist strictures of validity, generalisability and objectivity, which may well be inappropriate for some forms of qualitative research, and certainly for the research conducted in this study.
Conclusion

This chapter has outlined the philosophical orientation of the research and provided details of the study area selection, recruitment of participants and delivery of the practical parts of the research. A rationale for choice of location, participants and data collection methods was given. The research took place in an ordinary, everyday landscape and over a period of four years, as the research was undertaken on a part-time basis. The next chapter describes the themes that emerged from the various data sources in relation to sense of place in an ordinary landscape. It also focuses on the social learning activities participants were engaged in.
Data Analysis: people in ordinary places

Introduction to chapter

An aim of this research was to explore sense of place in an ordinary, everyday landscape. In order to address the research questions, data was gathered from a number of sources (see Table 2) and involved varying numbers of people. An initial postcard survey was done, covering the area of East Bolton. Then a much smaller group of participants resident in two wards in East Bolton, Breightmet and Tonge, were recruited to take part in interviews and workshops initiated and facilitated by the researcher. The participants were drawn initially from groups active in the area, for example tenants and residents associations and fitness classes. Using the snowball technique of participant recruitment, further potential participants were then suggested by interviewees, who were then contacted by the researcher and invited to be interviewed themselves. This section examines the themes emerging from the analysis of the data.

Table 9 - Number of participants involved in the study

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Postcard survey</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre-workshop interviews</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Workshop 1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Workshop 2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Workshop 3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post-workshop interviews</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Completed Solicited diaries</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Structure of the chapter

The chapter firstly outlines the findings from the short pilot survey of people living in East Bolton (postcard survey). This aimed to give a snapshot of responses from which the subsequent interview questions could be developed. This is followed by detailed presentation of the data derived from the interviews and participatory workshops. Pen portraits of those who participated are presented to familiarise the reader with the nature of the cohort. The outputs from the visioning exercise are highlighted and then the main themes to emerge from the study are presented. These themes are largely derived from textual analysis of the interview data, but also supported by other data sources such as solicited diaries. These themes are grouped under three major headings, which map onto the research questions. They are as follows:

- Uncovering sense of place
- Visioning for a place
- Making changes in a place.

These headings allow the research objectives to be examined in terms of a number of sub-themes that emerged. It was difficult to decide which research question some of the themes fitted into, as there is inevitably overlap between the categories, given such a complex construct that is place. Where there is overlap with another theme, it is highlighted. In terms of the data that has informed the research questions, the ‘uncovering sense of place’ theme mainly draws upon the initial interviews, but also contains some data from the follow-up interviews that took place after three workshops. This was to reveal peoples thoughts and feelings about places at a range of scales – mainly the neighbourhood (East Bolton) and the wider town scale (Bolton metropolitan borough), but also it encompassed regional and national identity. The analysis for the ‘visioning for a place’ section employed the outputs and observations from the workshops and also interview material to emphasise relevant points relating to how people envisioned the future of places.
The subsequent section, entitled ‘making changes in an area’, drew upon the transcript data from the post-intervention interviews, supported by material from the solicited diaries. This aspect examines the evidence for how people operate within their locality and their capacity for self-efficacy in having influence over decision making and place-shaping.
Uncovering Sense of Place

Postcard survey

The main purpose served by the postcard survey was to give an indication of the type of issues that people first think about when asked about their locality. One of the exploratory elements of this research was to identify whether physical or social aspects were most important. The number and type of responses to the open part of the questionnaire demonstrated that people more often mentioned physical aspects of places compared to the social but not overwhelmingly so. Social, and to a lesser extent, psychological aspects were mentioned frequently.

Of all the respondents (n=182) to the ‘first impressions of place’ postcard survey, 90% were in the 10-11 age group. This was because a large proportion of the postcards were sent to the final year at primary school (year 6) for their perceptions of the place they lived. The dominance of this age group amongst the respondents tended to skew the findings somewhat, although illuminating as regards the concerns of pre-teenaged children.

In terms of gender, there were slightly more female respondents (53%) than male (47%) but only by a small margin. In terms of how long respondents had lived in the area, 47% had lived in the area for more than ten years, with 32% reporting having been there for between six to ten years, leaving 22% being relative newcomers. However it must be borne in mind that the majority of respondents were Year 6 primary school children, so many of those would not yet have reached the ten years point, but may have lived in the area all their lives (and not yet been old enough to reach the ‘more than 10 years’ category).
The population surveyed was very much skewed towards the younger end of the age spectrum, with the next largest grouping being from the older, retired end of the age range. This was owing to the nature of the settings where postcards were left. Community groups and tenants and residents associations tended to be frequented by older people. The school children were a somewhat captive audience as the decision to participate was largely determined by the teachers. The age group largely unrepresented were in the twenty to fifty year old category.

A slightly higher proportion of the responses related to the physical environment of their neighbourhood, with social aspects being mentioned to a lesser extent. Many statements were factual, with respondents mentioning actual places in their locality, sometimes specifically and at other times, generically e.g. ‘parks’ or ‘Leverhulme Park’. A great number of the responses expressed values and impressions of places such as ‘trampy’ and ‘friendly’. Responses relating to people’s psychological impressions of their neighbourhoods included mention of emotions such as ‘happy’, ‘safe’, and ‘fun’.

In terms of positive and negative impressions of places, there were far more positive comments than negative ones, with many respondents mentioning both positive and negative impressions of their places. Individuals expressing incongruent views of place illustrate the complexity of the construct. There were also a smaller number of responses where it could not be ascertained whether the respondent had positive or negative attitudes towards the locality, being mainly statement of facts regarding features that had made an impression such as schools, parks, and shops.

The statement ‘I feel proud of my local area’ elicited a mainly positive response (just under 60%). Only a few people chose the ‘disagree’ or ‘strongly disagree’ options (about 8%), with the remainder unsure about their feelings. Many of them sat on the fence and chose the ‘unsure’ category. This demonstrates that people can feel ambivalence towards places, with liking and disliking aspects at the same time. This illustrates the multifaceted nature of place perceptions.
As for the statement, ‘I would feel sad if I had to leave the area’, it elicited a more emphatically positive response from people, compared with the previous statement, as over two thirds stated they would indeed feel sad if they had to leave the area. There were much fewer in the ‘unsure’ category, and less than a sixth in the categories stating that they disagreed with the statement.

The question about feeling ‘pride’ is one that requires a judgement to be made. The study area is perceived to have some negative qualities within the town as a whole. The ambivalence expressed may be a reflection of not only personal perceptions but having taken on board ideas about how desirable a place is more generally. Pride is quite a complex concept to describe as it encompasses a whole range of ideas and feelings, which can be more or less abstract and certainly carrying emotional baggage related to their own identity.

The main themes that emerge from the postcard survey are the ambivalence that is expressed when people list a mixture of likes and dislikes about the locality. The young people commented on recreational spaces largely, but an unexpected finding was that many mentioned being fearful of slightly older children. This was surprising, given that they themselves will join the category of teenager very soon. Overall, the responses erred on the positive side much more than the negative in the attachment questions. The postcard survey helped in the formation of questions to pose to participants who, it was hoped, would get involved in other aspects of the research process i.e. the interviews, workshops and the solicited diaries.
Interviews, Workshops and Solicited Diaries

Firstly, semi-structured interviews were undertaken to explore sense of place in terms of the aspects raised and discussed by the interviewees. At the end of the interview, participants were invited to take part in further elements of the research process. Some declined at this stage, while a number agreed to continue; some of whom attended all of the subsequent sessions. The issue of participation (and non-participation) will be addressed in the Discussion chapter.

Another stage of data collection took the form of a series of three workshops. A number of activities took place in these two hour long sessions in a community building, which were designed to offer opportunities for social learning to take place. Also, the spacing out of the workshop sessions over a number of months facilitated interaction between participants and reflection on the activities over an extended period of time. The kinds of activities that took place were observation exercises, using historic maps, drawing mental maps, using the Ketso toolkit to record local assets and to display ideas for a future vision of the area, and participation in the ‘RoundView’ process looking at sustainability, were all carried out within the workshops. It should also be noted that plenty of opportunities were made for informal discussion and interaction during the refreshment breaks. It was aimed to create a relaxed and convivial atmosphere conducive to mutual learning.

To supplement the data gathered in the workshops (which were observations and data captured on ‘leaves’ from the Ketso felts), participants were provided with a small book (solicited diary) in which they were invited to record their reflections between workshops. When the series of workshops ended, participants were interviewed again in order to capture their thoughts and feelings about the social learning process, and to reflect on how their ideas might have altered for having taken part. The researcher discussed the contents of the solicited diaries with the participants at the end of the interviews.
The numbers of participants involved are shown in Table 2. From a starting number of fourteen interviewees, the level of participation fell somewhat throughout the research period, although some participants did manage to attend the full suite of activities. Sadly, one of the participants (Brian) who had attended all the workshops passed away before the post-workshop interviews were conducted. Pen portraits of the participants are provided overleaf.
Table 10 Pen Portraits of the participants (not real names)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rosie</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>An undergraduate student. Born and brought up in the study area but currently living in Blackpool, where she studies. She had not gone to university straight from college but worked and spent a few months training as a snowboard instructor abroad. She travelled back to Bolton from time to time during the course of her studies and stayed with her parents.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brenda</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>Born and brought up in Wigan but settled in Bolton with her husband. She then went on to have two daughters and now has grandchildren. She has lived in Bolton for over thirty years although now a widow.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caroline</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>Originally from the town of Todmorden on the Lancashire / Yorkshire border. She lived in a number of places in the North of England before settling in Bolton with her husband and children. She too was recruited from the yoga class and is retired from work. She lives in Breightmet with her husband.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phillip</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>Born in Tonge Moor, he has always lived in Bolton and lives with his wife on the periphery of the case study area. He worked for many years as a youth worker and has a particular interest in local sport. He has children and grandchildren, some of whom live abroad.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shelley</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>Born in Breightmet, has lived within a mile of her childhood home all her life. She was recruited by the researcher when hiring the venue for the workshops, as that is her place of work. She travels abroad every year on holiday and also within the country. She lives with her husband.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lydia</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>Originally from a village on the periphery of Bolton but moved to the study area on getting married, as her husband is from Breightmet. She has lived in Bolton all her life, other than a few years living in South Wales when she was a student, a few years ago. She works full-time and commutes by bus to the other side of the borough.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brian</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>Brian was born and brought up in the western parts of Bolton but has lived in the study area now for most of his adult life. He is retired and a widower, living alone in Breightmet. Sadly, Brian passed away during the research period, but had taken part in all the workshops and made valuable contribution to group activities and discussions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nathan</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>Brought up on the periphery of the study area. He had lived in a northern city as a student and also spent a year living in Canada with his wife. The couple had recently moved to Bolton to settle. He was planning to become a teacher.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Edna</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>Born in the Republic of Ireland and lived there until she was 18. Moved to Bolton to work in the cotton mills and ended up marrying and staying in Bolton, despite having no intention to do so. She is now a widow with great grandchildren and lives in a retirement flat in the study area.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Renee</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>Has lived in several different parts of Bolton over the course of her life but has now lived in Tonge Moor for more than three decades. She is a widow and lives alone.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lena</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>Lived in a number of different areas of Bolton growing up and in young adulthood. She also settled in Tonge Moor after being allocated social housing with her family in the 1970s. She is widowed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mark</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>Grew up in a different part of Bolton from the one he now lives in with his wife and family, which is in Tonge. He works with young people and was recruited to the study by Phillip who knows Mark through their shared interest in local sport.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Debbie</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>Studying to become a youth worker. She has lived on various social housing estates during her childhood, some within the study area, and she now resides in the ward of Tonge.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Irene</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>She had lived all her life in Bolton, with the last four decades in the study area with her husband. She is retired but still helps out at a local school and fostered children in her younger days.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The purpose of these pre-intervention interviews were to ascertain currently held views about the places people lived and places they grew up in, in contrast to other places they may have briefly travelled to, say on holiday. The term ‘sense of place’ was not explicitly used in this initial set of interviews. The reason for this omission was because one of the aims of the research is to reveal the various meanings that people hold about places. As such, forcing participants to provide a definition of the concept at this early stage in the process was avoided. However, the term was explicitly referred to in the post-workshop interviews, as the participants would have been thinking specifically about places over an extended period of time at that stage. As well as probing thoughts and feelings about places, the interviews also explored how people used spaces and identified assets in the locality, important to them.

The first questions were demographic in nature – gender, age, employment status and make up of household. A total of fourteen people, ten female / four male, were interviewed prior to the workshops. The average age of the participants was 53 years old, with the eldest in her 80s and the youngest being 22 years of age. Six of the participants were employed, one was a full-time student, and the remaining seven were retired. Eight of them were married or in a relationship living with someone, while the remaining five were single (some of whom were widowed). Only one participant had children living at home. Eight of them had brought up children that had now left home (some now having grandchildren), while the remaining five participants did not have children at the moment.
Perceptions of place

Although the initial interviews attempted to tease out some of the elements of places that people valued, the participants had not previously been directly asked about their ‘sense of place’, using that phrase. The characteristics of place had been discussed along with their feelings about places they liked and disliked, and the reasoning behind those judgements. So in the follow-up interviews, the specific question was asked: “What does the phrase ‘sense of place’ mean to you?” Themes of belonging and being part of a community were prominent in the definitions that people gave. For example,

“Realising that you do belong somewhere and a place isn’t just what we refer to as a place, there can be more to it; a community behind it. It’s just not what you are looking at, it’s the community round it. The people who live there.” (Lydia)

“It’s where you belong” (Brenda)

“To me it means where you are, where you are living, where you work, to me it is sense of place within. How you fit into society and others. It’s not just one thing, its many things” (Shelley)

“A community. An area that means something.” (Rosie)

All of these definitions seem to allude to belonging and to the social aspects of places i.e. the relationships that exist within them. There is also recognition of the multi-dimensional nature of places. The self, but also its context, are implicit in the quotes. Following on from the notion that peoples’ sense of place is often unarticulated and latent, another question was posed asking whether they are aware of having a sense of place. All four of the remaining participants stated that they felt that they were conscious of their sense of place. Two of the participants felt that increased sense of place comes to you as you age. Getting older for some, meant a slowing down, and becoming more reflective and philosophical:

“I think when you get older you are more aware of your immediate surroundings. When I go into my garden; I love going into the garden and listening to the birds. I sit in the summer house and I think, ‘I just love being here!’” (Brenda)
When asked about other people, however, and whether people are generally aware of or have a sense of place, the responses diverged. Some felt that people did, while others thought it was “almost a luxury” (Shelley) and therefore not as pertinent if you were poor and struggling. Another participant thought that people did have an awareness of places: “I think most people do” (Lydia), going on to say that most people that she is in contact with, certainly do. The other two participants were emphatic in stating that they thought that people did not have a sense of place.

“No I don’t think so. Most people don’t even notice what they’ve got and what’s around them”. (Rosie)

The factors identified by the participants as to whether people had a sense of place seemed related to life stage (with older people having more of a sense of place) whether that was because of having more time, and possibly also a function of how much of a struggle one’s life was, in terms of having time to think about such things and possibly being more focussed on day to day living than being reflective. Therefore, given that the participants felt that they did have a sense of place, could that be attributed, in part, to the process that they had undergone?

Probing into what people felt about East Bolton, the amenities and the people were rated highly and cited as reasons for the positive feelings. For example, Phillip commented:

“I really like living here, the environment, the wildlife, it’s quiet, so it’s a really nice place to live” (Phillip)

It’s good. The area is really pleasant. It’s an area we strove to live in.” (Steve)

“I love it! The people are very friendly. Yes, it’s very nice”. (Edna)

Several respondents qualified their positive comments by mentioning the absence of problems, which may suggest some sensitivity to the areas reputation for anti-social behaviour or the experience of problems in the past. For example:
“It’s alright. It’s nice, it’s quiet. Erm, there’s worse areas. So quite happy. Contented. We don’t get no bother, nothing like that.”

(Shelley)

“I like the people. The majority of people are alright. It’s convenient for the shops, we’ve got the UCAN centre— and it’s good for buses”

(Renee)

![UCAN Centre, Tonge Moor Rd, Bolton.](image)

**Figure 13** UCAN Centre, Tonge Moor Rd, Bolton.

Where negative feelings were expressed, it was usually in relation to how the place had changed over time, but not in the recent past (participants were specifically asked later in the interview about more recent changes, which tended to be positive). A couple of interviewees recalled a time (more than forty years ago) when neighbourliness was more pronounced and residents took pride in their area, the sense of community that it engenders making them feel a sense of belonging.

7 “Urban Care And Neighbourhood (UCAN) centres are a home for local facilities and services which support the delivery of initiatives to tackle crime, promote employment and learning, and help sustain the neighbourhood in that community” (Bolton at Home, 2012). They are operated by Bolton At Home, which is the largest social landlord in Bolton. There are two of these centres in the neighbourhoods being studied (Breightmet and Tonge), while throughout the borough there are six of them.
Several also made comments about their past experiences as children having the freedom to use the landscape more fully than present day children. This particular theme, freedom of children to explore the local landscape, was cited by all the interviewees as being a cherished memory of growing up. The younger participants also mentioned this aspect but the nostalgia was not quite as strong as the older ones. This aspect (memories of childhood places) will be discussed further as it formed a significant element of the interviews.
Restorative places

When asked ‘What do you like about where you live?’ people expressed a strong liking for their homes and gardens, first and foremost. Home represented a safe haven and was cited by many of the interviewees in a highly positive manner:

“The community of it and I obviously love our garden and the space that we’ve got”
(Rosie)

“I love it. I like the fact that it’s in a nice quiet cul-de-sac with people of similar ages. I love the trees in the garden and being able to see the hills, the Pennines.”
(Brenda)

Withdrawal from the hustle and bustle of the wider area is also cited. Several people indicated that the people who lived nearby were an important aspect of liking the area. The feeling that people living alongside can be trusted and called on in times of need, which could be characterised as bonding social capital (Putnam, 1995) as neighbours tend to be in similar socio-economic groupings, although that was not necessarily always the case. The quality of the local environment is also mentioned by many of the interviewees, whether that is in the form of access to nearby green spaces or the convenience of the transport facilities and shops

“I like the space at the back, nice walks and people are friendly”
(Irene)

“Probably the accessibility to green space so close to town is one of the big pluses for me that you can get out and have a walk and that is isn’t all built up and concrete and horrible”
(Lydia)
Roots

People could generally report knowledge of their family history going back two generations with a reasonable level of detail. Overall, most respondents were interested in this aspect although only a couple of the interviewees had actively searched themselves, going back for several generations. If they had not done research, a number of interviewees stated that other relatives were actively researching the family tree and that they took an interest, albeit a passive one. The town’s industrial past appears to have left its mark on people’s lives as a number of interviewees mentioned ancestors leaving rural areas such as Shropshire and Cornwall to come to work in the cotton mills. This question was posed because Lewicka’s (2008) research indicated that knowledge of one’s heritage was a good indicator of attachment.

Mobility

Those who had moved a lot in the surrounding area, were generally positive about the moves as their life stage (marriage, divorce, down-sizing after children left home) had dictated the relocations and were largely accepted. Where the moves had involved living much further away, and particularly for women moving for their partners careers, they found the moves much harder to cope with, as the support networks needed when children were small were limited. Once the families were settled, the interviewees felt much more bonded to the place and had ultimately become part of the community. For example, Lydia worried that she would not ever settle and feel at home in the area:

“I think I’ve settled in. I didn’t think I would settle in at first, when I first moved in. But now I think I have settled in, enjoying getting more involved in community activities down here as well as where I used to live. But I’m feeling happier now with, through that. I think some of it’s because my husband has lived in the area all his life and I felt like an in-comer. And now I’ve got involved in things, and certain people talk to you in the street and do seem to be being accepted in the area.”

(Lydia)
In this group, several of the women had moved from their childhood places because of following a partner’s career. This was less remarked upon by the male participants although one of them did move to an area close to his wife’s family, at her request.

Related to this aspect, was the fact that incomers to new places appeared to be more active in the community than those who had always lived there. Perhaps this reflects a more concerted effort on their part to create bonds that might not necessarily have been there to start with, or to reproduce bonds that had been in place elsewhere.
Disruptions to place

One participant recalled having to be evacuated as a child when their house was damaged owing to mining subsidence, after a huge crater appeared. The family were separated for a time as they had to stay with other relatives. They liked the area but moved shortly after that, to a different part of the town as it was deemed unsafe to return to the original home. It appears that this early disruption to place served to make her more aware of the importance of places, particularly in terms of how she felt. This theme is returned to again in this chapter when talking about how people compare places to the home place, particularly when they move around for travel, study or work purposes.

A way of enquiring about place attachment is to ask how participants would feel if they had to move away. In this study, the responses were generally of the nature that they would be upset by such a prospect. They expressed sadness and regret if they had to move as they feel a strong attachment to the area:

Some expressed this more forcefully than others, perhaps reflecting the level of identification they had with the area. A word frequently used was “gutted”, when faced with this question; another was “devastated”. One participant said that she thought about other places, having moved a number of times already, but did not crave to move away as she would miss the amenities.

The following quotes demonstrate the perceived difficulty in creating bonds to a new place, particularly as regards meeting people. It also suggests that as one ages and mobility becomes restricted, the social relationships change too:

“I’d be devastated! You know people. If you move, you have to start meeting people. When you have got children you meet people through school. It’s harder when you’re older”.

(Irene)

“When you are older, you are in your home more”

(Edna)

“It would have to be somewhere equally as nice or nicer”

(Brian)
The younger participants did not comment on this. Perhaps they have fewer place-based relationships or are more relaxed with the idea of maintaining relationships with people at a distance or via mobile technologies such as phones and Facebook. So it seems that stage in one’s life course may be an important factor in moderating perceptions of place and feelings of belonging.

Some of the participants were actually contemplating a move, with one wishing to enjoy greater amenity with a property rather than leaving the area, and another dreaming of moving far away:

“How would I feel? I would probably just do it actually. It’s been quite a long time since I’ve moved house but between my late 20s and early 40s I have moved several times. People consider it to be very stressful but I lived in several houses in several places so moving wouldn’t be a problem if you can replicate what you’ve got and add to it”

(Phillip)

“I would feel over the moon! <laughs> I don’t mean that because I hate the area. It’s just that if I get the chance I’d like to actually emigrate. There’s nothing really keeping us here. We are free in that sense that we could ‘up-sticks’. We are bound to the house until we pay the mortgage off. But, yeah, I’m not so sort of, you know, if you like, stuck to my house that I think ‘Oh no, I can’t move, I love it, I love it!’ No. I would be off like a shot if I had the money. I would I’m afraid.”

(Shelley)

Overall, despite some expressions of regret, people would be pragmatic about having to deal with a new place to live and said that they would just have to get used to it, and that maybe a move could ultimately turn out to be positive. A number, who had moved around somewhat for work or study, mentioned appreciating the home place more for having experienced other places. Having the contrasting experience gave a different perspective on the familiarity of the home place. This will be addressed further in this chapter.
Childhood places

The thing that really stands out from the responses to the question of what people thought about their childhood places was the feeling of great freedom away from the company of adults when growing up. People had a strong familiarity of and an in-depth knowledge of the people and places in the locality. Adults (not necessarily family members) were often described as being a benign and protective presence rather than a threat. There were many reports of high levels of community spirit and feeling that non-related adults were a protective force looking out for all the children as they explored their local environment. A discourse of ‘stranger danger’ and fear of paedophiles has now permeated our language and adults, particularly men, are often afraid to speak to young people in case their intentions are misinterpreted. This factor may have had important implications for community bonding, if people are regarded with suspicion from the outset. Trust and openness seem to have given way to fear and apprehension.

People also reported using green spaces a great deal and that they had lots of contact with nature through climbing trees, catching frogspawn and newts, collecting eggs, and picking flowers. Spaces to play sports and to wander round with friends were also mentioned. New council estates were mentioned by a couple of participants, and these were on the edges of towns, adjacent to the rural fringes of the town, affording the children freedom and space to play. Brian reminisced about watching the farmer making hay in the field behind his house. People seemed to walk more as families when they were growing up, particularly the older interviewees. There seemed to be more local farms active and people commented on cows being led back to the farms from the fields along what are now major roads. This is a sight that has virtually disappeared from Bolton.

When questioned about whether feelings have changed about the place (if they have lived there more than five years), many mentioned an increase in traffic which has diminished their enjoyment of living in the area somewhat. Others feel that the area
has not changed very much, nor how they use the local spaces and places. Another interviewee mentioned that she recognised that she and her circumstances had changed a lot but that she still felt the same way about the area.

Another female reported feeling unsafe in the area in the past as the crime rate was higher and she was the victim of burglary and anti-social behaviour.

“I would never have walked round the area like ten or fifteen year ago, no way, but I do now, you know what I mean, but I’m confident enough that the bad elements going on have almost gone that I can feel safe walking around, you know in the local community. And plus, I know quite a few people anyway and if you see people and it breaks down them barriers you don’t know and you think God they look dodgy and then you get to know them and you say ‘well actually they’re quite alright’. I’ve seen some changes but all for the good hopefully” (Shelley)

When probed on the aspects of place that are the things that are most valued, access to attractive parts of the area such as parks and green spaces was the factor mentioned most. Other valued aspects were nice neighbours and the presence of a community spirit in the form of knowing neighbours and feeling able to rely on them. These were all mentioned on several occasions:

“I think, in our little bubble here it’s really nice. And I’ve got really nice neighbours on every side”. (Rosie)

“The people. Here at the top end it is a community, we look after each other. When people ask you for help, you just do it without umm-ing and ah-ing” (Lena)

“I enjoy people walking past. You are never alone. There are always people passing who wave or stop to talk when I’m in the garden. Many a time I just stand and watch people. It would kill me to live in a cul-de-sac” (Irene)

“A pleasant landscape and a feeling of social cohesion came out as being the most important factors mentioned by people, particularly in the immediate environs of the home, but also further afield. There has been much debate in the popular media as well as academia about the loss of community and the increasing isolation felt by individuals in localities.
In contrast, the question ‘What do you dislike about where you live?’ elicited fewer responses, as not many things were brought up by the participants. Dislikes were often related to perceived anti-social behaviour such as dropping litter and a general lack of civic pride and civility, particularly demonstrated by young people. Children who play ball games that could potentially damage property were mentioned; as were youths congregating in groups near houses.

“When we first moved in, I just saw it as somewhere to live. We had a bit of trouble at the beginning with burglaries and kids, and that, but as the years have progressed and years have gone on, there’s not been as much crime in the area and I have seen a difference in the, like I say, the crime rate definitely and I feel a bit safer as well, actually walking around than I used to”

(Shelley)

Interestingly, one interviewee mentioned older people who complain about noise when there are parties as being a negative:

“We have some council flats to the rear of us. ..... I’m not talking about young couples; I’m talking about older end couples. They don’t understand when you have parties and they always kick off about it.

(Mark)

This illustrates differences in expectations of neighbourliness between the generations, and also the perceptions of rights and responsibilities of those groups towards making a place function smoothly. The difference between the perceptions of different types of housing was also mentioned by some interviewees. There were both negative and positive comments made about social housing by people. East Bolton has a number of large housing estates which are largely post-war semi-detached properties with fairly large gardens. Three of the participants currently lived on these estates and another two had grown up on the estates. Generally people who had experienced living on council estates had positive views of them but there was recognition that poorer areas tended to experience more problems, and that maintaining the upkeep of areas was a challenge:

“It’s the environment. It used to be beautiful. People wanted to live on this estate. (Now) The gardens are a mess. It should be kept a lot cleaner. It’s the whole look of it.”

(Lena)
The qualities of the council housing estates appears to have changed over the years as the perception of them as desirable places to live seems to have altered. The reasons for the change to a perhaps more negative view could be related to physical deterioration of the fabric of the estates as they have aged or it may be a change in the social mix of people living on them. The participant quoted on the previous page (Lena) commented on how the council had not invested in the infrastructure of estates for some years, so that a downward spiral of neglect could creep in, if not remedied. The quote below illustrates that the social aspects of having lots of other children around was highly positive. This and the subsequent quote, illustrate how increased building around these estates had changed the nature of the environment so that there were fewer open spaces available to those living in these areas, particularly the children:

“I’ve always lived on council estates. I’ve lived in Breightmet, Tonge Moor, then I moved to Halliwell and Great Lever. They’ve all been, like council estates, and I’ve enjoyed it…. When I was younger, obviously I enjoyed it because when I was in Breightmet there were lots of fields and there were lots of friends. Well there were loads of us, loads of kids just living on the street and we always used to go out on our bikes, and stuff like that, on the back field.”

(Debbie)

Figure 14  Green space between houses on Milnthorpe Rd, Breightmet, Bolton. Beyond the houses in the distance is Bury Rd (A58).
“There were 17 football pitches within their grounds [Walmsley’s – local engineering factory in Tonge Moor] where they have built a couple of private housing estates there. There were other bits of open spaces where they have subsequently built on. On Crompton Way, we called it Dobby’s Meadow ‘cos there used to be an embankment there but we’d play there. There were lots of open spaces then. Nobody had a car and people could play in the streets.”

(Phillip)

Figure 15 Crompton Way (A58). This road divides the wards of Breightmet and Tonge and provides a visible boundary that the small river, Bradshaw Brook, which is in a valley behind the houses on the left, historically had done.

The impact of increasing urbanisation on the nature of places is therefore a factor that was commented upon by participants who live in this suburban part of Bolton. So while the availability of certain green spaces was widely remarked upon, people nevertheless mentioned the extent of loss of previously accessible green spaces, and the fact that children were the main losers in terms of their freedom to explore the local environment.
A couple of people mentioned a negative aspect of living in the suburbs in that they had to rely on a car rather than having amenities within walk-able distances. There was also the perception that this would become more of an acute issue as they aged and mobility became more difficult. For example:

“the idea that I’ve got to travel by car most of the time, which will get worse, I suppose, as I get older”  

(Phillip)

Having to rely on the car and the negative impact of the car were both themes that emerged from the interview transcripts. One particular participant talked of the joy of playing in car free streets as a child and the wonderful sense of freedom she enjoyed, but as an adult bemoaned the fact that local children played ballgames in the street, which sometimes hit her car. There is therefore a cognitive mismatch between place as experienced by children and adults, in terms of the impact of the car. The wider social costs of car ownership and the implications for how places function deserves more attention as these could be profound.

Empty properties, attracting the attention of vandals, were also cited as being negative aspects of living in the area, along with lots of traffic for those living near main roads:

“I feel sad when I see empty buildings, like that one on the corner of Bury Rd. That could be made lovely! It’s such a shame to see them going to rack and ruin”  

(Brenda)

“Speeding cars! ‘Cos our road is a road that they cut through to miss out on the traffic lights out on Bury Rd…….and we have kids playing in the street and the cars are speeding at 40/50 miles an hour”  

(Mark)
Figure 16 Tonge Moor Rd, Bolton (top image looking towards town centre and Parish Church. Bottom image shows opposite direction, towards the suburbs of north Bolton).
These aspects highlight how the state of the physical fabric of a place influences peoples’ feelings towards it. They are also not readily controllable by residents, being in the hands of highways engineers or private property owners. The presence of busy roads is something that people largely need to endure as residents but may well benefit from as commuters. Once more, the benefits and negatives of the same phenomena are evident. Pro-development arguments normally highlight the benefits of job creation over and above loss of quality of life, amenity that residents require and social justice concerns.
Visioning for a place

A series of three workshops took place over a period of approximately one year at a community building in East Bolton. While a number of exercises and activities were carried out with the participants, one of the major outputs from the workshops were ideas for the area that people wished to see (visioning), along with details of the assets that people wished to retain because they were highly valued. Many community consultation exercises carried out in efforts to improve areas, sometimes forget to ensure that the positive elements are identified and protected, so they are in danger of being swept away in the change process. This can then exasperate communities who wish to hold onto the positive assets that their community has.

A key aspect that the workshops were designed to encompass was to encourage interaction and discussion amongst those attending. An atmosphere conducive to the sharing of ideas was generated by means of a number of hands-on exercises and space for discussion and reflection on the activities was created. Using such tools as the Ketso participatory toolkit, providing drawing materials to sketch mental maps, the use of the RoundView toolkit to generate discussion about sustainability and resource use, along with perusal of old maps of the area, and observation of the surrounding landscape: all these activities gave space for interaction between workshop attendees.

The focus was on two levels of scale: the local neighbourhood scale, considering the local districts of Breightmet and Tonge, but also the larger settlement of the borough of Bolton. It struck the researcher that participants found it more difficult to discuss the smaller scale of the local districts when working in groups, as they had intimate knowledge of only parts of it, which did not necessarily correspond with others knowledge, even though those areas were in close proximity.

They seemed much more comfortable discussing the wider Bolton as a group as the landmarks and characteristics were more generally understood by all, particularly when considering the town centre. So a shared level of understanding of places was important but
it must be noted that when a participant talked about a part of the neighbourhood that others were not familiar with, the others did take an interest in learning something about that part of the area that had been unfamiliar. On more than one occasion it was remarked that people would make an effort to go to those parts of the town to see for themselves.

**Mapping Exercises**

Two of the three workshops involved mapping exercises. These were done as small group activities (with two groups) and the main purpose of these exercises was to stimulate the imagination and to generate discussion. Inevitably the focus tended to be upon the physical environment given the visual nature of the task. It was interesting to see the level of awareness of the topography of the area and how the resources of the locality were used in the past, for example, using the power of the water from the river, the kind of land use that the area lends itself to and the evidence for historic mining and quarrying.

Data was not specifically gathered from these exercises, as they were part of the process of making place more salient in peoples’ minds and to prompt discussion and reflection on the ways in which residents of the town had made use of its natural resources in the past. It was interesting to hear the discussion that went on in the groups, where they tried to pool their knowledge of the way the landscape would have been used in terms of agriculture, industry – particularly mining and quarrying, the ways in which people could have made a living or survived in the particular landscape of the local area. People recalled place names such as ‘cinder hill’ and ‘toot hill’, and speculated as to their origins and meanings.
Ketso toolkit - results from workshops that used the kit to gather participants’ ideas

Workshop outputs - The Ketso toolkit was introduced in the first workshop and then revisited in the subsequent workshops. This gave participants the chance to revisit ideas and to add new ones as the discussions developed over time. The participants used the Ketso at two levels of scale – the very local scale of the wards of Breightmet (pop. 14,000) and Tonge (pop. 12,500), in east Bolton, but also at the scale of Bolton as a whole, which is a very large town pop 262,800 (Bolton Council, 2007a, 2007b). A section of one of the felt workspaces is shown in Figure 17.

![Felt workspace](image)

**Figure 17** Section of felt from the visioning exercise using Ketso. The branches are themes, with the brown leaves showing ‘existing assets’ and the green leaves showing ‘future possibilities’.

There was some overlap in the issues as certain points made by the participants were identified as being relevant at both the district and town level. For example, the wish for action to be taken to utilise unoccupied buildings, was deemed relevant at both scales of
study. Other commonalities were the high value that people placed on the green spaces available to them. Parks were mentioned by several participants as being highly valued assets. A total of ninety seven leaves were placed on the Ketso felts at the local district scale and fifty five for Bolton-wide scale. The following chart shows a summary of Distribution of types of answers by themes from Ketso Workshop at the district level of scale.

![Number of Ideas by Branch](image)

**Figure 18** The number of ideas generated by participants in the various categories at the neighbourhood scale of the wards of Breightmet and Tonge, Bolton.

The branches of the Ketso were pre-prepared with the themes of: Economy, Activities, Society, Environment (Built), Landscape (the EASEL framework developed in Tippett’s PhD research, (see Tippett et al 2007), with two spare unmarked branches to accommodate extra themes should the group feel that they were needed. In the case of the neighbourhood level of scale, the group identified the need for two extra branches with the theme of Transport and Heritage, respectively. At the Bolton borough-wide level of scale, the group only utilised the pre-determined branch categories as mentioned above, and did not utilise the extra branches.
Economy theme

Of all the themes, this one had the fewest leaves generated by the group. The only asset mentioned was the fact that there are local shops. There were more ‘green’ leaves laid out on this theme, highlighting the things that people wished to see in their vision for the area. These included a wider range and variety of local shops, fewer fast food outlets, the need for more opportunities for volunteering and work experience so that locals have access to places where they learn skills and become more employable. The need for affordable, sustainable energy in the area was also mentioned. There was one ‘yellow’ leaf used on this branch, denoting a ‘goal’ that was deemed important in the economy theme, and that was to have a reduction in working hours. There was quite a bit of discussion around this by the participants, with views expressed around the amount of time that was spent in the workplace and travelling to get there. Some participants felt that they had little time left to do other meaningful things in their lives and in their locality because paid work was so all encompassing.

Activities theme

This theme encompassed the things that happen in an area. The leaves denoting assets were concerned with leisure and recreational activities such as community events, watching wildlife, sports activities like bowling, and the fact that there are numerous cycle paths through the local parks and green spaces. In the future vision aspect, people hoped for more of the assets to be realised in terms of community activity and the space to be made available to groups and organisations to make these happen. They also emphasised the need for activities aimed at children, particularly for them to learn to grow fruit and vegetables, but also for people to learn to ‘make do and mend’ as there was a feeling that much fewer people knew how to sew and repair things, compared to previous generations and that this lack of skills was something to be concerned about.
**Society theme**

In terms of the number of leaves (ideas) produced per branch (theme), the most populous was that of ‘society’ with twenty three leaves. The visioning aspect of this theme included a strong emphasis on education around environmental awareness. This incorporated features like ‘bring back learning to fix things in schools’, ‘recycle clothes and swapping’, ‘teach young children to keep Bolton tidy’ and ‘more freecycle\(^8\) type things’, to name a few. The assets highlighted in the ‘society’ theme took in valued facilities provided by the state such as the health centres and the library, but also the neighbours and people that one meets during activities in the area. Once the green and brown leaves had been done, grey leaves denoting ‘problems and issues’ were used. These highlighted crime, litter and people hanging out on the streets, as being negative aspects. Of the ‘goals’ that the group aspired to under this theme, ‘Develop environmental based economy that rewards sustainable practice and develops community spirit’ was articulated.

**Built Environment theme**

The ‘Built Environment’ theme teased out valuing the closeness of the shops and pleasant surroundings. The visioning part of this theme took in the hope for eco-homes in the future, and for renewable technologies to be used so that the air would be cleaner. There was also a hope for improved housing, and for there to be fewer empty buildings. Another participant picked up on the idea of wishing for less advertisements / billboards along the roadsides, believing that the area had a disproportionate amount of advertising hoardings compared to other areas of the town.

\(^8\) Freecycle and Freingle are web-based groups that aim to prevent items being sent to landfill by means of giving away unwanted items to people who want them.
Landscape theme

The assets revealed under this theme were mainly green spaces, with nearly everyone mentioning Leverhulme Park and Seven Acres Country Park. People valued the wildlife in the area, the pleasant environs and the views across the town and the surrounding hills. The vision for the landscape theme referred to the need for more trees and more green linkways and also that the greenspaces be better managed. An overall goal for this aspect was to have more bees. One of the participants had recently taken up bee keeping and shared his experiences of it with the group, so it was quite topical, particularly as there had been quite a lot in the news about the reduction in bee populations.

Figure 19 Seven Acres Local Nature Reserve, Thicketford Rd entrance. Bradshaw Brook runs behind the trees and is the natural boundary between Breightmet and Tonge.

Heritage theme

The group decided to make this a theme, although only two leaves were generated. The leaves were quite generic and merely highlighted as assets the heritage of the area. In previous activities, participants had discussed the industrial archaeology still visible in the area such as man-made ‘leats’ made for transporting water to and from rivers and mills. People seemed interested in knowing more about the area’s history and development.
Transport theme

For this theme, in terms of ‘what works well’, the only asset mentioned were the cycle paths running through the local green spaces. The group were more forthcoming when it came to ‘future possibilities’ with transport. There was a hope for less dominance of the car and roads, with other leaves expressing the wish for ‘car free estates’ and also ‘lots of cycle and footpaths’. Other leaves had the aspiration that speed bumps would be removed, with the allied suggestion that the pot holes could be filled with the material from the humps. There was a hope for better transport in general, and specifically ‘renewable energy powered transport’ and ‘better public transport in evenings and at weekends’. Some participants were dependent on buses and commented that the service was very good during the day but patchy at other times, making it difficult to plan to do things outside of the immediate area.
Ketso Workshop Results at the level of scale of the Borough of Bolton.

Participants also considered the larger scale of the town of Bolton using one of the felts. This felt generated fifty five leaves in total, so fewer than the ninety seven that the neighbourhood level felt yielded. Working at this scale, however, demonstrated that participants were more able to talk about places that they were all familiar with, particularly as the discussion often mentioned the town centre, which is the place that everyone knew well and used more or less frequently.

Considering the neighbourhood scale where people lived, participants often knew some parts really well while nearby parts of the same district were known very little. The state of the town centre had been a very topical issue in the local press, so this was something the participants had been exposed to and everyone had an opinion about it. To a certain extent, the felt reflected the debate in the press, with many negatives being expressed, although as before, the process teased out the positives and hopes for the future before tackling the issues and problems. The fact that the state of the town centre was so topical meant that the participants were well aware of the issue and had opinions on the reasons for the decline.

The following chart shows the distribution of types of leaves (questions asked) against the themes used to structure the workshop. The same themes, Economics, Activities, Society, Environment (built), and also Landscapes were used to structure the discussion, following the finding by Tippett et al (2007) that using the same simple framework to structure discussion at multiple levels of scale helps participants to synthesise ideas between the levels of scale. This also helps the analyst to see similarities and differences.
Economy theme

This theme reversed the trend seen in all the themes on both felts in terms of the leaves generated, in that far more problems were highlighted than assets and future possibilities. The single asset that came up in the Ketso exercise was ‘charity shops’ which is interesting because the preponderance of charity shops in town centres is often seen as an indicator of poor economic health of the retail sector. Here, however, they were seen as a thriving part of the town centre. Another aspect was highlighted as both a future possibility and a problem – that of empty shops. The negative comments mentioned that there were too many empty shops while a green leaf indicated the hope that good uses would be found for these empty properties. Additional problems mentioned were ‘lack of public funds for what people really need’, the perception of too many fast food outlets, and also the ‘state of the roads’.
Activities theme

In the ‘what works well’ category, the arts and culture were mentioned as people put down the fact that there are lots of clubs and societies in the town that focus on amateur dramatics and the arts in general. They also mentioned lots of events that take place in the town that are valued. The library and museum was also cited as an asset. In terms of the ‘future possibilities’, people felt that having a large community event in the town at least once a month, and generally more community events was something they wished to see. Victoria Square, which is a large pedestrianised space in front of the Town Hall was mentioned as being a focal point for community events and should be used more. One problem was highlighted on the felt for this theme and it concerned the lack of opportunities for young people.

Society theme

The only asset mentioned in this theme was Bolton Wanderers Football Club. An unusual decision perhaps, but people talked about the positive influence the club had on the whole town, mainly in terms of its success reflecting well upon the town and its people. There was a large number of future possibilities cited on this branch and they included: ‘more power to teachers’, ‘fair housing for all’, ‘compulsory community service for the unemployed’, ‘recycling’, ‘more police on the beat’, and also there were two leaves which alluded to the Market Hall in the town centre which had been converted from a space that housed many small independent stalls to a few large chain stores, much to great public opposition. The leaves called for its restoration and reversion to its former state. Again, this had been a very hot topic in the town for a number of years and was still highly controversial.

This theme also had a large number of problems, as highlighted on the grey leaves. The concerns were mainly around cleanliness of the physical environment but other leaves touched on incivility of others in the town. The negative perception of outsiders as Bolton still being industrial and labelled as a ‘mill town’, was commented upon as people did not feel resonated with its current state.
Built Environment theme

Quite a number of assets were highlighted under this theme and they all related to civic buildings and the public realm of Bolton such as the Town Hall, Victoria Square, and the Parish Church. People expressed great pride in these examples of the built environment, although people expressed a negative comment about some of the street furniture. Derelict buildings were also cited as a problem in the town, along with more mention of the state of the Market Hall, as discussed previously.

Landscape theme

The landscape generated few leaves but interestingly, no negatives came up at this scale. The assets were ‘parks’, ‘parks and greenspaces’, and accessible green spaces’. This sub-theme of parks and green spaces was also one of only three where the group as a whole decided that a ‘tick’ denoting an aspect that advanced peoples overall goals and vision for the area should go. Perhaps the emphasis on natural areas could be seen as a counterbalance to the view of Bolton as (post) industrial.

Transport theme

This theme was emergent in the discussion. That is, the group decided that it needed its own branch, suggesting a degree of significance for participants, despite the fact that it only yielded three leaves: two wishing for greener transport and the provision of shuttle buses, while the single negative comment related to the costs of car parking in the town centre and public transport.
Summary of workshop results gathered with Ketso toolkit.

One of the key benefits of using the Ketso toolkit is that the design allows everyone’s voice to be heard because they all contribute ideas into the ‘pot’ by means of the various coloured ‘leaves’. The leaves are completed in stages so that participants focus on particular aspects such as future ideas, existing assets, goals and problems. This partitioning of activity allows consideration to be made of the different aspects systematically, ensuring that negative thoughts do not dominate the process (as is often the case in community consultation processes).

As can be seen from the graphs (see Figure 18 and Figure 20), many ideas were generated from the exercises, which were largely positive. It was clear that people cared deeply about the state of the neighbourhood and also of the town as a whole and of the impression it gave to others. The passion with which people talked about their places could indicate that it had an impact on their identity as residents of Bolton.
The way the Ketso toolkit was utilised was based on the work of Tippett’s (2005a) Designways format, which tailors the workshop process in such a way that it is ‘assets-based’. Many participatory processes tend not to anticipate an inevitable focus on problems that might be prevalent in an area. This can quickly lead to groups feeling demoralised. To facilitate an environment which is conducive to envisioning, it is vital to ensure that the initial focus at least is on the positives an area has to offer. Working in North Manchester, Tippett (2004) demonstrated that community groups from areas perceived to be deprived, have had their negative perceptions challenged by focussing on what works well and the assets that an area has to offer. This has particular impact when they themselves have generated the assets using the toolkit and the number of assets is laid out before them.
So in the context of ninety seven leaves generated on the neighbourhood scale felts (see fig 14), forty one of those were for ‘future possibilities’ which is the creative visioning aspect; twenty six leaves were detailing ‘what works well’ i.e. the assets, while only five problems were identified. That is not to suggest that there are few problems in the study area, but more that the process is concerned with teasing out a vision and a picture of what is valued by the participants, rather than having a negative focus. As such, it can be said to be designed to focus on the assets first and foremost, rather than dwelling on the negative aspects. This is because many community consultation exercises can easily become trapped in a negative mindset, which can limit the range of views expressed.

**Visioning at two different scales**

Interestingly, the Ketso toolkit enabled many ideas to be expressed on the leaves which were largely practical and mostly physical. But as these more or less concrete issues were discussed, as the ideas were laid out on the felts, they often evoked emotional responses as well as political and operational reactions. For example, people became animated when talking about the parks and green areas in the locality. They reminisced about when ‘The Bolton Show’ used to take place on Leverhulme Park, and how they missed having that annual celebration to take part in (it has not run for a few years). People also recounted wildlife sightings in the area, which gave them a great sense of well being knowing that these creatures lived in such close proximity in an urbanised landscape.

‘What do you dislike about where you live?’ elicited fewer responses, as not many things were brought up by the participants. Dislikes were often related to perceived anti-social behaviour such as dropping litter and a general lack of civic pride and civility, particularly demonstrated by young people. Children who play ball games that could potentially damage property were mentioned; as were youths congregating in groups near houses.

The notion of mobility – how and when people move around and between different parts of their locality (and beyond) was of interest in this research. This is because modes of transport can potentially offer very different experiences of places. The participants in the follow-up interviews were asked about their travel modes. Those who owned a car used it
frequently, while those who did not relied on public transport every day to get around. Of those with cars, however, they all stated that they made a point of walking, mainly for health and fitness reasons. None of the interviewees used a bicycle to get around, although one commuted to Manchester regularly by train.

These participants were also asked about things that they tended to notice when travelling around. One participant commented upon noticing the changes in the plants and the trees over the seasons, particularly looking out for birds and trying to identify them when travelling on buses. Another agreed that she notices changes a lot in the local area when travelling around. She describes ‘having feelers out’ when changes occur and will ask people for further information (Brenda).

A question was posed which asked what they noticed when travelling say from home into the town centre: the ‘bits in between’, as it were. One participant mentioned noticing empty buildings in particular when travelling around the town and feeling sad to see nice buildings being neglected.

“Oh, I notice! I notice if things are looking up, or a bit… (wrinkles nose)” (Brenda)

Lydia expresses similar sentiments. She lives on a council estate and mentioned another council estate that she passes on her way to work, comparing it to where she lives and feeling that it is sometimes ‘grotty’, having noticed old furniture left in gardens. She notes that people living there behave in a way that she would not, giving the example of people having barbecues in front gardens when they live on a main road, with all the traffic streaming past. She found that unusual and amusing that people would do that. Another one commented on noticing ‘wildlife and churches’ as she is interested in those things from a visual perspective. Things that she would like to change or would not do herself were also mentioned but just as passing thoughts that would not be given much attention. The example given was judging people negatively for having dirty net curtains up at the windows and thinking:

“She ain’t got no Acdo!” (Shelley)

9 Acdo is a proprietary name for a brand of washing powder.
Rosie works in Manchester and commented on the fact that fellow travellers on public transport rarely interacted with one another, and there was often a lack of civility. She commented on tracking the journey by the landmarks passed while travelling to work. She also felt a measure of embarrassment that she does not know much about the place surrounding her place of work, and that perhaps people should make the effort to find out about it. Given that she did not plan to stay in her current job meant that she had not invested time in getting more familiar with the place.

When asked their views on the increased mobility that people enjoy, compared to the situation in the past, a range of views were expressed. Participants agreed that it was generally a good thing that people are more mobile for example giving increased travel and work opportunities. However, they all mentioned the difference compared to the situation in the past.

“People have to travel more to get a job. But my parents’ generation, you walked to work, it was ten minutes away”. (Brenda)

The situation whereby people lived close by to their place of work seems to be a rarity now, but was certainly the case in Bolton’s industrial past. The availability of local jobs meant that people stayed in the town and had less need to travel.

“You grew up in an area, got married in the area, and brought your children up in the area”. (Lydia)

It has to be said, however, that no one particularly commented on whether the change was positive or negative, so the follow up question probed into whether it was good or bad. Some commented on the environmental impact and how they know people who commute long distances to get into work, therefore they will be damaging the environment with the fuel use and emissions, but on the other hand it opens up the world to people and gives many more opportunities. Another commented upon the impact on community cohesion as family members move away for work opportunities. The effect on the community was that it “gaps and spaces” can occur with the result that the networks are damaged. It was also mentioned that places could be left behind in some instances, if skills were lost; the economic impact on a locality can be quite important.
Participants were then asked about how travel had affected them and their perceptions of their locality. Brenda says:

“I’m always glad to get home. (laughs) It is lovely to go and see. I mean I am very grateful that I have had the opportunity to go and see, but I must admit, I really am pleased to get back.” (Brenda)

Lydia travels a lot with a camera club she is a member of and mentioned other places she had travelled to, for example Newcastle, and how impressed she was by the regeneration of the place compared to the current state of Bolton town centre.

An interesting point was made by Shelley who had compared her experience of Wales, where she felt that the balance between nature and green areas and the small urban settlements compared very favourably against her experience of Bolton, which had only small pockets of nature amongst the mainly urban fabric. She felt that Bolton had been massively overdeveloped in recent years:

“In Bolton it’s very much that you are overwhelmed by so much built environment that you’ve only got little pockets of nature. In Wales, they’ve developed, but not at the expense of nature.” (Shelley)

This participant went on to expand on her perceptions of places:

“Even if I went to live in Wales, that would be better. There is always something better, or you perceive something to be better. And I think, is it the fact that you are perceiving it to be better, or you want it to be better or are you never going to be satisfied with what you’ve got?” (Shelley)

Shelley has previously expressed discontent at living in Bolton and feeling trapped, however, she confesses to feeling homesick when travelling abroad, even though she has negative feelings about home. When she returns from travelling abroad, in particular, she thinks:

“Oh God, I’m back to this dump! ....But it’s MY dump!” (Shelley)

Shelley’s view could be seen to fit in with the category of ‘place relativity’ in Hummon’s typology (1992), as her comments express ambivalence about the place she has lived all her life. Although the opportunity to move elsewhere is a possibility, it is one that has not been acted on.
A number of questions addressed the place(s) where participants grew up in order to explore ideas around identity formation and what part place plays in that. All except three of the interviewees had been born and brought up in Bolton. Of the remainder, two were from the north of England (less than 30 miles away), with the other coming from the Republic of Ireland. These three had all arrived in Bolton in young adulthood, so had spent most of their lives in the town and not in their childhood place. All of the participants had therefore spent at least 20 years in the town, with some having been resident for 60 or more years.

When asked what their place was like where they grew up, this aspect awakened a great deal of enthusiasm from participants. They were happy to talk at length about their memories of their places when growing up. Many people seemed to talk with a tinge of sadness about how they perceived that impressionable time in their lives as having gone, particularly in how those important places had become something different.

Whether that was a perception through the eyes of an older person or whether the places had really changed substantially, is unclear. One person, however (Brenda), felt that the environment she grew up in (not in the study area) was dirty, industrial and unpleasant. That participant spoke negatively of that place as it was when she lived there but, now much older, has affection for the place and professes attachment to that place, despite not liking it. Like Lydia, her feelings could also be said to fit in with ‘place relativity’ in Hummon’s typology. Others mentioned the strong communities they grew up in and how non-related adults played a big part in making children feel safe:

“It was lovely, because everybody knew everybody else. It was safe. You could go and play in the fields and you know, everyone knew you and you couldn’t do anything wrong because somebody would tell your mother.”

(Irene)
Another participant mentioned the abundance of recreational space there was, now much reduced:

“There hasn’t been much thought about kids and their recreation. All those places that kids appropriated for themselves have gone. 17 football pitches and there is only one left now and that is fenced off. Before DDT\textsuperscript{10} everyone used to collect eggs. It was great I loved it...... So there are huge amounts of space still in the late 1950s but over the years those spaces have gone”  (Phillip)

A few people commented on how cars had changed streetscapes by making them dangerous and less suitable for children to play out. Cars illustrate a conundrum of modern life – the freedom of mobility on the one hand but the tyranny of the danger they pose to others and their dominance (and pre-eminence) in the environment.

Delving further into what really stands out in their memory of those places, and about what was special; a number of key areas were exposed. Firstly, lots of green areas and spaces to play in and explore were described in the interviews. Many commented on whether those spaces still existed and whether they had since been developed i.e. built on or used for other purposes:

“What I liked about where we were was our house used to erm back onto the golf course at Breightmet before erm sort of like they developed it, you know before they put the houses on. When I was five years old I used to run out into our back garden, climb out through the hedge and run off onto the golf links. Then the houses came and we couldn’t get access to it and even before they developed the golf links it used to be a quite wooded area, with the river running through Red Bridge where the paper mill and it was very open then, and you could play to your heart’s content.”  (Shelley)

Civic pride and pride in the exterior of the houses and gardens was mentioned by a number of respondents. There seemed to be lots of opportunities for organised recreation via church groups and clubs, as well as many sporting opportunities on offer:

\textsuperscript{10} DDT – Dichlorodiphenyltrichloroethane – a commonly used pesticide up until the 1980s when its use was restricted. Its effects upon birds was highlighted in Rachel Carson’s seminal book, Silent Spring in 1962.
“It was lovely growing up in Deane, everybody knew everybody else. It was safe. You could go and play in the fields and, you know, everybody knew you, so you couldn’t do anything wrong because they would tell your mother. So Deane Church as well – that was our life. Everything was centred around the church and the Brownies, singing, and both mum and dad belonged as well. (Irene)

“Life often seemed to centre round the church through brownies, concerts, dances in the church hall: It was a real community!” (Lena)

“We used to look forward to the ‘whit walks’ and the Rose Queen parades. Kids now don’t know what that is. Also, when we were kids, our neighbours were like our aunties. There was always someone watching you” (Renee)

Streets were safe to play in, whether that was playing football or putting on plays with your friends. This contrasts with more recent reports of childhood where strangers are feared and dominance of the car serves to limit the freedom of children to play and interact in the local streetscape, as well as further afield. The consequences of the curtailment of children’s experience of place on their attitudes and behaviour towards places on reaching adulthood could be profound. Exploring, taking risks, possibly experiencing danger, way finding, are all vital aspects of learning and making sense of the world.

Many people mentioned the more affluent parts of Bolton and its periphery when asked where locally they would like to live, given the choice, while a few mentioned picturesque, semi-rural areas with a nice house and garden as a general aspiration. The fact that the places described were often not specified, suggests an ideal rather than actual place. For example, two of the participants mentioned wanting to live in a place that had a large garden where they could grow food and keep animals, which would indicate a particular lifestyle choice which might be out of reach in reality to most, but an aspiration nevertheless. People mentioned moving to a place with a sunnier climate but liking the landscape and people of Bolton.

When asked if there was somewhere else further away that they would consider moving to, a few specific places were mentioned which were places that people had repeatedly been to for holidays. Rural and coastal destinations seemed popular choices of places aspired to. There was an acknowledgment by some that holiday destinations were a momentary change of scene rather than a serious place to live:
“I’d like to move to Wales. I think I’d like to move anywhere when I’m on holiday though!”

(Debbie)

Participants were asked to reflect on when they actually stop and think about the place they live (at whatever scale). One participant felt that she thought about places when talking to others as she was mentally contrasting perceptions of places mentioned:

“At times, just at work, especially talking to people from other parts of the country who.... I mean I was talking to someone in Bournemouth, and we were saying how nice the weather was and how nice things were with all the green areas. It’s things like that.”

(Lydia)

Another participant felt that she was more aware of her place when she was feeling poor, lacking in options and wanting to move away, particularly if there were problems with neighbours. In this case, a feeling of lack of options and perhaps being trapped was evident. She went on to say that she feels that there are much better places to be than where she lives. Another participant who is now retired, often walked around the area to keep herself fit and had noticed much more about her locality for doing that and was surprised to learn that there were a lot more green spaces in the area than she had thought, and that this was reinforced since coming to the workshops and hearing from others about places they knew about:

“Well, I learned that they know a lot more than I do. And Shelley did. She knew a lot more than I did. We looked at how we would like to see things improved, what we would like to be changed, and how much we appreciated when we sat down and actually thought about where we were and what we’d got, what we appreciated.”

(Brenda)

Being away from the place was when another participant thought about it:

“I definitely think about it when I’m away. It makes you appreciate what we’ve got when you are away.”

(Rosie)

Being presented with a contrast from the norm seems to be a key trigger for thinking about and making judgements about places in relation to other places experienced or highlighted by others in conversation.
Those interviewed were asked how they would describe the place to someone visiting from a different part of the country or from another country. This was posed to explore the nature of the characteristics of the place highlighted by participants. All of them said that they would mention the dramatic landscape surrounding Bolton and the pleasant green spaces first of all. There was a sense that they needed to convince people that Bolton was not like a perceived stereotype of ‘dark, satanic mills’. One participant mentioned the fact that they perceive Bolton people to be very friendly. Indeed, it is part of Bolton Council’s marketing of the town to refer to the friendliness of the populace and they often refer to ‘The Bolton Family’, as a reflection of this perception. This was specifically mentioned by two participants.

An older participant said that she loved the closeness of the countryside with the urban and rural being very close by:

“It’s an industrial area but within 10 minutes you’re out on the moors and in the countryside. My sister-in-law from Devon is amazed how quickly you are in the countryside, when we live so close to Bolton and Manchester”  
(Brenda)

“I would emphasise the nice places like Seven Acres and other areas that have been regenerated and just explain that the rest is what Breightmet is, we have to put up with it. It shows the diversity of the place”  
(Lydia)

This ordinary landscape when presented to others is primarily showcased in terms of its landscape and friendly locals. There was some defensiveness about potential negative perceptions of others, which they felt were often based on ignorance and past reputation rather than the actual qualities of the place currently.

Interviewees were asked to talk about other places that they had lived. This was to ascertain the elements that people chose to focus on as important to them in regard to places they had spent significant parts of their lives. As above, this ability to draw comparisons between the qualities of places is interesting in terms of looking at what makes up a sense of place.
Some of the interviewees had moved a number of times, mainly owing to work or marriage. Often people listed the places without much in the way of nostalgia, unless it was where they grew up. One person disliked some of the places she had lived and was happy to find her place in Bolton after three previous moves. Some mentioned the shortcomings of previous places they had lived and of being happier where they now found themselves.

Many interviewees had moved more than once during their lives. One female who expressed weak attachment to the area, had only moved once from the parental home, to less than a mile away. Many of the females had moved away from their birthplace for the purpose of following their partners’ careers, and not just once. Most mobility was in the local area and followed the gradual upgrading of housing as aging and affluence allowed. Three of the interviewees have lived elsewhere as students and as a result, viewed their hometown with lots of fondness having experienced different places and drawn both negative and positive comparisons between the localities:

“Having worked in the off licence, I was always slightly disappointed by Breightmet until I went to Blackpool. And Breightmet is such a lovely place and there really is a community and people do support each other and are Lytham St Annes and they are all really nice places but the actual place where I live it’s a definite student poor area and not somewhere I would want to stay” (Rosie)

The comparisons she had drawn between the two places had led her to re-evaluate her previous thoughts about where she lived, which had been negative but were now more positive. She’d also spent time living abroad for several months and felt a strong affection for that place owing to the friendships made there and the spectacular landscapes. One male interviewee immigrated to North America to be with his (now) wife for a couple of years but had decided to return to his hometown where they intended to stay, despite having liked the other place very much.

Another of the younger participants described all the places she had moved to within the borough of Bolton. She had always lived on council estates until more recently and had liked living in all those locations. She seemed acutely aware that people viewed council estates in a negative light, but was keen to state that she had a very positive experience of living in a number of them:
“I’ve always lived on council estates. But this is my house. My property. I bought it. So this is the first time that I’ve not lived on a council estate. I’ve lived in Breightmet, Tonge Moor, and then I moved to Halliwell and Great Lever. And council estates have always been alright and I’ve enjoyed it.”

(Debbie)

A participant who had only moved from their childhood home to the marital home, chose her house on the basis that it was very similar to the one she grew up in:

“Erm, I’ve lived in Breightmet, erm, just at the top...... so I’ve only moved probably what a mile at most. And again that was a similar set up, like a semi. A semi-detached. In fact, that was one of the reasons I moved here, hence I bought a house that was a semi.”

(Shelley)

The extent to which people had travelled and experienced other places was probed. The literature suggests that people who have had these opportunities were then in a better position to make comparisons between their familiar places and the newly experienced ones. For instance, Syzerzynski (2006) drew a distinction between ‘denizens’ and ‘citizens’, whereby the latter had the insight afforded by mobility and therefore tended to view places more positively than perhaps the denizens, who may feel quite differently about a place because they have little to compare it to. All of the interviewees had travelled a little, (and some a lot), for holidays. They had all holidayed in more or less exotic places and had been taken aback by the landscapes and cultures experienced. Few, however, expressed a desire to live in those places. There seemed to be recognition that going away on holiday to various places in Britain and abroad was something different and special compared to the rest of their everyday lives:

“I liked Wales. I thought it was very picturesque and nice. But then again it’s a seaside town so I don’t think I’d like to live in a seaside town”.

(Debbie)

A participant who regularly visited a grown up child in their holiday home in the French Pyrenees stated: “Nice for a holiday, but not to live there” (Irene), even though the locals were very welcoming and friendly. She went on to explain that the rurality of the place was nice for a short time but she craved the bustle of a large town very quickly. The wonder of the landscapes certainly made an impression on people, as did the warm climate of typical holiday destinations, which people found to be a nice contrast with the wet climate of Lancashire.
Of those who did wish to move to some of the holiday destinations visited, one in particular was keen to seek out new places that had what she describes as the ‘wow factor’ – magnificent and awe-inspiring landscape and wildlife. Another participant mentioned the cleanliness of other places compared with the litter visible in Bolton. Others who had visited countries which had lots of poverty and then opulence alongside, commented on how this affected them and made them look differently at their home place, and also to appreciate the enhanced levels of development:

“When I went to Bangkok I couldn’t believe the difference between the haves and the have nots. There are shacks by the river and it’s really dirty and the palace is dripping with gold. And you think ‘why is there a divide’?” (Irene)

“I thought Jamaica was like a paradise. My wife’s dad comes from Jamaica and you go to Kingston and it’s like another world. You get the local paper and there’s a shoot out with the police every night and there are four or five people killed every night and the population of Jamaica is about the same as Manchester.” (Phillip 60)

These stark contrasts with everyday familiar places seemed to challenge people to re-assess some taken for granted conditions back home. Hard won rights such as the rule of law and having the welfare state, reminded people how fortunate they were to live in the UK. Participants all commented on the aspects of the places visited that they appreciated, which was mainly the special landscapes and the different climate. Little was said, however, about people, in terms of relationships and interactions with others when on holiday, so the experience seems much more visual and dependent upon the sights and sounds rather than interactions with other people.

The nature of holidays tends to be that they are of short duration, thereby making it difficult to form relationships with locals, but where people had visited the same place on a number of occasions, they expressed more sentiments towards the locals and usually in terms of how they feel partially accepted by them. One participant mentioned stumbling upon a place on Anglesey, where they have since spent many weekends and have got to know the locals. His family would move there if there was work. Family is of the utmost importance to some participants and having family members around them, and one participant in particular mentioned feeling part of something is important. Even holidays were an extension of that, with attempts made to fit in and be accepted by the locals.
When pressed about what people defined as being special about those places, people seemed highly impressed by the landscapes encountered on holidays. There was a definite thrill at seeing spectacular landscapes such as lakes and mountains, but also cultural things such as the Pyramids in Egypt, or exposure to exotic plants and animals. Participants’ lack of attachment to visited places is probably owing to the short duration and lack of association with others who might make it meaningful, which accords with much of the ‘attachment’ literature which states that length of engagement with places is a prerequisite.

During interview, the participants were questioned about what they would change about East Bolton if they could. This question was frequently met by puzzlement and some hesitancy; few of the interviewees had views ready to express on this issue. The fact that participants had to really stop and think about this may suggest that because it is something largely out of their control, that they have not given consideration to this in their thoughts about place. Or it may be that there are lots of changes they may like to see and time was needed to decide which ones to mention.

Of the issues that were mentioned by a couple of participants were the desire to be further away from social housing and the perceived problems associated with it. So perhaps, some self-censorship could be taking place, knowing that their views may not be welcome in some quarters if expressed publicly. This next quote is interesting as it is from someone who grew up on a council estate:

“Well I think certain parts of it are unpleasant. It’s a strange thing. If you were to walk to the newsagent at Breightmet, you cross a line somehow where on one side there is no litter lining the streets. If you pass this line, on the other it’s just strewn. Erm, so there is that, that divide between private residences and the social housing, which is exemplified by the state of the shops in Breightmet where there is a drunk outside who is always begging for money outside the shop.”   (Phillip)
Another person talked about wanting to feel more neighbourly and to have more interaction with neighbours, as currently people keep themselves to themselves and rarely converse. For example:

“If I had a magic wand, I would try and get people talking more, get like it used to be in the old days when they used to have like street parties and people knew each other and I think it’s a bit sad now that in my street like, the next door neighbours don’t really talk to each other they don’t talk to people four or five houses down. Some neighbourhoods maybe do but we don’t. It’s a trust issue, and somehow, if you can break down some of those barriers, feeling more like a community, like a group.” (Shelley)

Personal affluence is often the key factor when looking at relocating from a poorer area to a more salubrious one, which is quite a difficult thing to achieve for most. Talking to neighbours is much less prohibitive but seemingly quite a difficult thing for people to achieve.

Small, local spaces where communities could interact were highlighted as well as spaces where young people could be free to explore and utilise. There was a feeling that activities on offer were regulated and not available to everyone. For example, youths getting into trouble for making use of facilities on their doorstep, which children in the past were not subject to:

“For the like of my lad who is growing up, there isn’t anything. He just gets criticized for everything he does. He goes down on his mountain bike, if he goes fishing on the river he gets moved on as you need a rod licence, so there isn’t much for him.” (Mark)

An older, active member of the community also mentioned the need to have more community activities but she also recognised that having willing people to run these is often in short supply and that when activities are organised, that they are sometimes not well supported by the groups they are aimed at.

“More community things, but its having people to run them…. there could be more things for the community, especially for young people even, although I think half the time, they don’t want to go to things” (Caroline)
Perhaps there is a mismatch between what people perceive is needed and what groups such as youths, actually want. Two of the participants mentioned that they would like people to have more pride in their area like they used to. They mentioned feeling ‘let down’ by the local authority who had not maintained the properties on their estate, as physical deterioration had occurred. It was also mentioned how certain streets could have a very bad reputation and how easy it was for a place to gain that reputation and how difficult it is for an area to shake off that bad name. Examples were given of streets that had notoriety, some of which were bulldozed and re-built with new names, in an effort to change negative perceptions. One participant thought about it for a while and stated:

“I wouldn’t change anything. I really am happy with what we have here. I really do like it!”

(Brenda)

It has been documented that people often have unarticulated feelings about places that may only surface when places face some sort of threat. For example, changes to the landscape like new buildings, or the removal of existing infrastructure, loss of green spaces. The interviewees were asked ‘How would you feel if the place was threatened in some way?’

In general, people were positive about change although most comments were qualified with exceptions of things that they would not accept. People were protective of the parks and green spaces and particularly those living on the edge of the greenbelt were horrified at the thought that it ever might be threatened with destruction and the impact on wildlife.

Many would be accepting of what they deemed to be good development or “a reasonable change”, as opposed to quick fix, poorly designed development. Examples were cited of plans that would be welcomed if it enhanced the area, but often opportunism by developers meant that making quick money was seen as the prime motivator rather than creating a pleasant environment for people to live and work:

“If it infringes on nature and wildlife because that’s a passion of mine, if it’s not deemed like a necessity then it would upset me because there is a lot of like quick fix and make a quick buck kind of developments that are happening at the expense of nature and wildlife, as it were. But no if it’s for the good and it’s managed and if it’s balanced with what’s there already then I think its progress and a good thing. Change can be a good thing.”

(Shelley)
“Well if they do want to change things, everybody’s up in arms, aren’t they? It’s like with the library. When somebody bought it, they were up in arms. Like opposite us, at the school, they were going to put houses on that, which we had no objection to. They wanted to put too many on and have the entrance in a very, very stupid place. It’s not that we didn’t want the houses there, that was fine. We had no objection to that but there was nowhere to park”. (Caroline)

Others felt that if changes in the area did not directly affect them, then they would not care:

“If it didn’t impose on me directly, I don’t think I would be too bothered” (Mark)

“It depends how it would affect me personally. My house is empty during the day so we’re only there at night and at weekends” (Debbie)

So far from being anti-development or NIMBY (Not In My Back Yard), people were reasonable when asked about accepting changes to their area. Some cited positive changes that had happened over the years, such as cleaning up old industrial sites to create community facilities. Perhaps developers would do well to put more effort into speaking to local residents and coming up with designs that are acceptable before submitting plans.
Making Changes in a Place

Reflecting on involvement in visioning workshops
One participant stated that she loved maps and had particularly enjoyed the exercises that involved maps:

“I absolutely love looking at maps and seeing how things were.”

(Brenda)

“...There again, I thought it was an interesting concept because it how many things hadn’t changed, stayed the same”.

(Lydia)

Considering different scales – neighbourhood and borough
The aspects dealt with in this section aimed to highlight whether peoples’ feelings about places varied according to scale. They were asked in the initial interviews about their feelings towards a well known local green space (Seven Acres Country Park), about the town of Bolton, then to the larger region of Lancashire and the North West of England, and finally about their nation (England and the Republic of Ireland in the case of one participant).

All the participants were familiar with the Seven Acres and had used it in the past. Comments were all positive, particularly about the changes that had occurred in the past five years or so (East Bolton had been a regeneration area which had quite a bit of investment in the past decade) which saw the access to the site improved greatly. Many played there as children, and many have taken their own children and grandchildren there.

“It’s improved immensely. You can walk along safely now”

(Irene)

“Erm, Its great, I love it. A little bit of Eden in the middle of squalor. No, I don’t mean squalor, that too harsh a word for it. ... But it’s got everything. It’s got the land, the water feature; it’s got the entertainment, the excitement. I think so anyway. And then obviously like, the different seasons and it’s like a different palette altogether. Like springs palette is nothing like winters palette. You get a new species coming on or a new species dropping in to say ‘hello’ then moving off. It’s a hive of entertainment. Better than telly! Absolutely!”

(Shelley)
“It’s really good; you meet some nice dog walkers. It feels safe down there”  
(Nathan)

“I love it. Definitely. I used to play there as a child - pond dipping. I think it’s a brilliant place.”  
(Rosie)

Almost everyone interviewed knew the place and had positive things to say about it. It is a place that people feel drawn to and seem to value highly. The reasons for these positive comments may be related to the contrast of the semi-natural with the urban fabric of the districts. People visit Seven Acres for recreation reasons mainly and express pride in the place. There has been much research on the restorative benefits of being in natural places, even those that are mixed within an urban matrix.

When asked whether or not they feel attached to Bolton, and why, almost everyone answered positively, with the majority of interviewees stating that they did feel attached to the town. One participant mentioned feeling attached but also ashamed of the state of the town and how it had deteriorated, mentioning empty shops in the town centre.

I always want Bolton to do well as a town, sporting, or anything else. I feel its failing a little bit at the moment, in that the town centre, to me, is a sad looking place. Too many boarded up shops and it doesn’t seem customer friendly..... Every time I get the Bolton News there is always someone complaining about Bolton centre and saying ‘Look at Bury!’ That place seems buzzing.”  
(Brian)

He went on to mention that a decision to allow the Market Hall to be developed into a shopping mall, despite strong opposition (with a petition of 88,000 signatures against the proposal) from local people, had had a detrimental effect on the centre. His loyalty to the local football team was also mentioned as an important factor, as it was for another couple of participants.

Shelley expressed an indifference to the town:

“No. I could up sticks tomorrow, me, given half the chance.... It’s just haven’t got an affinity for it..... I could quite easily pack my bag, shut me door and go”.

Another participant listed the advantages of Bolton, largely in terms of its connectivity but also referring to the population:
Regional Scale

When asked about whether they felt an attachment to Lancashire and the North West of England, most people responded with the affirmative. They felt proud to be from Lancashire, more so than the North West, as a conception of a place. The county of Lancashire has a long history, and although administrative boundary changes took place in the 1970s, with Bolton being located in the then newly created ‘Greater Manchester’ authority, people still retain an allegiance to the old County Palatine of Lancashire (although the administrative area covered by Lancashire County Council does not include Bolton, nor any of the more southerly parts of the old county boundary). The speed at which administrative boundaries and their boundaries change was commented on negatively. It appears that people do not generally approve of such actions, preferring to retain historic (or longer established) boundaries that are familiar to people. One participant forcefully commented on the changes that had occurred in her childhood hometown of Todmorden which has been in both Lancashire and Yorkshire in the past few hundred years. She was definite about which county its borders lay within.

“It’s your identity, it is important. The postcode is Lancashire though because it goes to Oldham, but it’s definitely in Yorkshire!”

(Caroline)

Another participant did not feel particularly attached to the regional scale (she had also expressed little attachment to the town):

“No it’s just a place to me..... To me it’s not conducive to a ‘one world’, erm, set up if you like. To sort of compartmentalise the earth, if you like, into like, zones just seems like well, a bit irrelevant because the earth isn’t compartmentalised into zones. You know? The earth is one round ball and everything belonging on it is on that ball. So, it’s the same kind of feeling for me. Okay, I live in Bolton but what I do in Bolton, I would do exactly the same as I would if I lived in Manchester or the other side of the world. It’s not so much the place but where you are and how you live your life in that place.”

(Shelley)
This suggests that place does not really matter to this participant and that motivations and behaviours are just a product of one’s personality and independent from the landscape they are enacted in. This echoes some of the views expressed earlier when thinking about people’s views about dealing with a house move.

A younger participant expressed positive feelings about the area from her perspective but felt that those from outside held negative views about it, which elicited a defensive response:

“I feel proud to be from the North West but not necessarily attached to it, as a whole. I don’t know, I think we’ve got some iconic...you have got your Peter Kay and that type of thing that everybody knows about and I think people always seem to stereotype the North West as a poor area but I’ve made something of myself and I’m proud of myself”.

(Rosie)

It appears that people feel more of an affinity for the county of Lancashire, and the heritage associated with that, rather than more contemporary conceptions of the region such as Greater Manchester and the North West.

Definitely, definitely it’s Lancashire. Always ‘Bolton, Lancashire’ and not ‘Bolton, Greater Manchester’. But I would certainly always recommend anybody who is not from Bolton or Lancashire or the north west to come and visit and see what we have to offer and that we are not all ‘dark satanic mills’ and that we have our own green spaces.

(Lydia)

Lancashire appears to have a strong place in the nations’ consciousness because of the history of the country, for example, the ‘Wars of the Roses’ and also the birthplace of the industrial revolution. Sports teams were also mentioned a few times:

“Yes, I feel Lancashire pride. The north west is where we spend most of our time that’s the main county we go for, so I feel like I have pocketed myself here. I feel attachment to the team, Bolton.”

(Nathan)
Attachment to the nation

When questioned about people’s attachment to their country, mixed views were expressed by the participants to this question. Most of the participants did feel attached to their country. One was quite clear that she did not, but almost everybody else did. One participant mentioned how he specifically identified as being English:

“Being English means something to me, more so than being British. On forms when they ask about ethnicity, instead of ticking the ‘white British’ box, I always tick ‘Other’ because I’m English. I support England at football and cricket. I’m also a European and a citizen of the world but being English does mean something to me. I also feel very Northern”.  (Phillip)

It is interesting that when asked the question about feeling attached to one’s country, most people just volunteered a short answer, usually ‘yes’, but did not expand on it in the same way that they tended to do about the smaller regional and local scale. One of the reasons for this could be that the nation is more abstract a concept compared to one’s hometown, which is physically experienced every day. One could perhaps say the same of the nation, but as people will only have experienced part of that nation and only met a small fraction of the population; the nation can only ever be an abstraction.

Another theme relates to how people behave in places and which parts they use. This includes thoughts, feelings, and involvement in the affairs of the locality and within the communities. It also explores ways in which people are enabled to make changes to places (or otherwise).

Interviewees were asked to talk about where they spent time, in the local area. This would indicate the amenities that they valued in the locality. Most of the interviewees said that they made use of the local shops, although the quality of these was sometimes questioned (anecdote about shop assistant sneezing on the cheese!). Almost all of the interviewees spoke about using the green spaces, particularly those who had children. These places were highly valued for restorative reasons: getting away from the noise and the built environment and to have some contact with nature. The more elderly respondents seemed
saddened by the fact that they felt they could no longer access these facilities because of reduced mobility and were restricted to using facilities that afforded them a more uniform (and navigable) environment to negotiate. Others made lots of use of the activities going on locally such as art and crafts, and exercise classes.

Younger interviewees used the town centre and other district centres of Bolton as well as their immediate local area, as they sought entertainment in the form of pubs and shops. The local area did not therefore meet their needs. The location of friends also dictated where they spent their time. Another commented on the lack of local shops in the Tonge part of Bolton, particularly the post office, which was closed down. They are forced to travel further afield for their needs now that the bakery, newsagents and chemists have gone, and the doctors surgery has relocated to a larger facility which is further away.

The loss of local facilities such as small independent shops is a factor that has affected many parts of the country, and been well documented in the press. The reasons for this are partly attributed to the growth of supermarket chains, which incorporate many functions that were served by small businesses in the past. For example, a supermarket could provide groceries, fresh produce, household items, clothing, newspapers, and dry cleaning. Having all these facilities under one roof and the provision of free car parking has made the viability of small shops less likely. Bolton has seen an increase in the number of supermarkets in the past couple of decades, both in the town centre and in the district centres such as Breightmet. Many of the smaller premises are now fast food outlets.

A question was posed regarding how active in the community participants were. Were they a member of any group(s), for example? Few interviewees identified themselves as being active in the community, yet when questioned further, many were actually highly active. This perception of non-participation in the affairs of the locality was puzzling as almost all people mentioned groups and activities that would be regarded as being active - guide leader, activities around local churches, doing gardening and repairs for elderly neighbours on a regular basis, attending Area Fora organised by the local authority, for example. A few participants were active in the community via their job (youth worker, administrator in a
community building), or had certainly become more aware of the variety of groups operating in the town. All the participants were able to name community-oriented activity that they did, whether it was formal, such as being a registered Girl Guide leader, or more informal such as helping elderly neighbours with their gardening or doing minor repairs for them.

Two of the participants were highly active locally and had a highly developed civic capacity with involvement on local committees and the tenants and residents association. Interestingly, these interviewees both declined to continue with the research process beyond the initial interview. One stated that she now refused to take part in workshops, stating that she got ‘worked up’ by such events. Only one participant stated that she was not active in any way, but her job was such that it would be classed as community-type work. One participant had been very active in the church as a churchwarden and secretary of the social club allied to the church, but poor health meant that he had to give this up rather than not wanting to do it. Another participant was a long standing volunteer at a school for children with special needs and still helps out when they are short-staffed even though she is beyond retirement age.

Further questioning probed into the various ways that people were active in their community. The forms of community activity ranged from the more formal through established groups and charities, supporting Admiral nurses (fundraising for these), attending the East Bolton neighbourhood network meetings, establishing sports clubs, taking part with photography clubs, representing residents on local committees, helping with a children’s wildlife group and youth clubs, for example. There was also a number of more informal activities that people talked about such as contacting local councillors when planning issues arose on behalf of themselves and neighbours, and also support activities like assisting elderly neighbours when they needed help. Many were connected to various churches and some had important networks based on friends made at the school gate when their children were young, which have persisted into old age, which is particularly important for those who were widowed.
Participants were also asked whether they felt able to have an influence and to make their locality a better place to live. In response, most people said that they felt that they did not have an influence, but when pressed, actually realised that they had made a difference either themselves or by association with others who were active.

The reasons behind people not being active were explored by asking interviewees what the barriers were to being active in the community. One reason cited was not knowing who to contact in the council. Another reason was feeling that it was a waste of time and energy. An interesting point made by a couple of interviewees was that people were afraid of putting their head above the parapet and being judged negatively by other residents for doing so.

“it’s also a lot of responsibility when you are taking on other peoples trouble. And that is what pushes people back from joining in sometimes”. (Rosie)

One respondent cited the council-organised ‘Area forums’ as being a barrier. He explained that these events promised listening and action but the reality was often much different. He gave the example of agendas stating that certain key people would be attending but then they would not turn up and no one else would undertake to deal with issues. He felt that it was a token gesture designed to pacify residents by giving the impression of consultation, rather than an actual commitment to tackle a community’s problems. One participant mentioned that some people were more politically inclined to get involved while others chose to let elected politicians do things on their behalf. One participant stated that people are more insular nowadays and there is less social intercourse between people, for example, being friendly and talking to people on the buses or while walking around the area, and that this had consequences for involvement.

After asking a question regarding general barriers to involvement, they were then asked whether they specifically knew people who were actively doing things to make the area better place to live. Examples of the sort of things being done were requested if people stated that they did know of community activity and involvement by those they knew. Most people, but by no means all, were able to name community activists and had knowledge of local councillors who could act on their behalf.
Some latched onto the idea of people who had taken action in the past and believed that these ‘pioneers’ would be willing to take on future issues. This view that others have the civic capacity to take on the authorities rather than oneself was a view that was expressed on more than one occasion. Perhaps there was a perception that these people had an ability that they themselves lacked, that being self efficacy. Two particularly active interviewees reported feeling unappreciated by the people that they were fighting for facilities on behalf of. They cited changes in society as the main reason for their disillusion, in so far as people expecting things and taking them for granted rather than seeing that people are working and advocating on their behalf. One person mentioned that fact that lots of people give up their time volunteering but she feels that it goes unappreciated by most people.

It is useful to focus some attention upon the four participants that saw through the process fully. These remaining participants were able to report on their views on the research process taken as a whole and so their insights are particularly valuable to this research. The small number is not in any way representative but it does provide some useful perspective on the research process. These four participants – Shelley, Brenda, Rosie and Lydia were interviewed once they had ended in order to explore what they felt about the process and whether their ideas about places had altered having spent time with others discussing and thinking about them. Sadly, Brian who had attended all the workshops, died before the final interview could be conducted after sustaining a fall in his garden.

One of the first questions posed, specifically asked whether their feelings had changed about the area they lived, and if so, what triggered these changes? The reaction to this question was mixed. Shelley stated that her feelings had changed since her involvement in the workshops. She had her eyes opened somewhat and felt that she was now less judgemental of other people than she had been, having gained a wider perspective. Sense of place was more salient for her after seeing from different angles and hearing the views of others. There is always the possibility that she was telling the researcher what she felt was wanted rather than her honest opinion. However, she did seem to have been reflecting deeply on her thoughts and feelings over the course of her involvement in the research.
Lydia felt that her feelings had changed slightly, in that she was more aware of areas in the locality that she had not really used as much as others:

“I realised that there are more green spaces than Seven Acres and I’d only really thought about Seven Acres and never really thought about Leverhulme Park, and realising that there’s other people who have similar ideas about the area” (Lydia)

She felt the need to go and explore the area more fully as a result and intended to do so. Participants were then asked to recall what went on in the workshops. The purpose of this question was to gain insights into the activities that made an impression upon them.

Meeting new people, sharing ideas and finding out that there were lots of commonalities expressed, were the comments from one participant:

“Met a nice bunch of people! We shared ideas about the area and what needed improving” (Lydia)

This was echoed by other participants. One also made the point that she was surprised that themes were repeated even when looking at different scales. Another recalled doing lots of different exercises and how it made her appreciate what the local area has to offer. The conviviality of the workshops was also commented upon:

“How much we appreciated, when we sat down and actually thought about where we were, how much we did appreciate what we’d got, just around us really. And a lot of fun as well!” (Brenda)

This underlines the importance of making participatory processes engaging and enjoyable. People are perhaps more likely to get involved if they see it as a pleasant way to spend time rather than a chore.

When asked what they thought about the exercises using the Ketso toolkit, with the branches and leaves that they could write their ideas on and manipulate, they were positive:

“I thought it was really good, actually because it meant that everybody got a little bit of a say and then we could discuss each part”. (Rosie)
Another was struck by how the ideas started to flow using the leaves on the Ketso, allowing her to get a good overview of peoples’ feelings about issues:

“Once you got the leaves on the branches, you really had more perspective then of how things were in this area”  

(Brenda)

The ease of using the Ketso was also commented upon:

“It made you think! You think about one thing and then sort of, especially bouncing ideas off other people, you think of something, somebody else says something and you generally then you come to another conclusion on something else. It is a really good way idea of making you think on things.”  

(Lydia)

She went on how to say how well the ideas flowed, that it allowed people to bounce ideas off the others and that having that feedback led to different conclusions that she would not have arrived at if she’d done the exercise alone. Another participant liked the visual nature of the Ketso exercises.

The experience of the observation exercise whereby participants ventured out from the community centre and spent time focussing on the sensory aspects of place and then sharing their perceptions, was discussed. Brenda was struck by how attractive the area was when you took the time to look. It reminded her how the local authority had done some wildflower planting in the area on roadside verges and how lots of people had commented on it as being a positive thing that had lifted everybody’s spirits. Lydia commented on the soundscape as well as the visual impact:

“Makes your realise how much you do hear. And you suddenly realise how many plants that are actually there every day that you do not really see”  

(Lydia)

These comments demonstrate that people tend to ‘tune out’ much sensory stimuli in day to day life. This is not surprising given the amount of stimuli that people are potentially exposed to. A key difference with special places perhaps is this orientation to notice things.

In terms of being part of a participatory process looking at place, Brenda felt that everyone knew a lot more about the area than she did, not having been brought up there. Lydia commented:
“I couldn’t actually put my finger on it but at some point someone would say something and it made you think about it in a different way. And it was nice to have such an age range because you had completely different concepts of what was new and people who remember Seven Acres when it was really decrepit and you had the old factories on there” (Lydia)

Being a relative newcomer to the area, she was aware that her knowledge of the place was limited. She stated that it made her curious to learn more about it.

When discussing whether anything about the process surprised them, Brenda commented:

“It was surprising how deeply people thought about it. And that did surprise me” (Brenda)

Rosie was surprised that there was so much commonality between participants:

“Just the fact that given there was such an age range of people there, we did all come up with basically the same things” (Rosie)

Thinking about whether perspectives on living in East Bolton had altered, particularly in light of sharing viewpoints, Rosie commented that it had made her see the place slightly differently. She also made the point that her perceptions on Bolton and Breightmet had already been challenged by living as a student in Blackpool.

Participants did feel that their views were represented in the workshops and that it was nice that there was much agreement. Brenda agreed with the list of assets that were generated by the group, and not particularly surprising, although she said it was good to see them all laid out as there were so many of them. Lydia summed it up as people liking the green spaces and “not liking the tat” – which suggests that the physical state of place was a key factor for her. Shelley commented that it was good to be reminded of the positive parts of the locality as it was so easy to focus on the bad parts. All agreed that the natural and wildlife assets were the most common things to be mentioned by people living in the area. This perhaps signifies the importance of green spaces to people living in urban and sub-urban settings. This, however, could be attributed in some measure to the fact that the view from the windows of the room the workshops took part in, overlooked a large pond and that wildlife was so visible.
The participants were also asked whether anything had changed for them personally as a result of their involvement, in terms of how they used the local area, for example. Brenda disagreed:

“No, because I think I am very aware of my surroundings and I do walk around and I enjoy going round Seven Acres and walking up to Starmount. I suppose I will look at it slightly differently now that I’m more aware of what’s going on.”  (Brenda)

Lydia stated that she is more confident about telling people about the positive parts of the local area, particularly Seven Acres Country Park and dispelling any fears that people may have about the safety of going down the river valley.

Most of the participants expected to remain in the area for the foreseeable future, although Rosie planned to travel before settling down anywhere permanently. Inertia dictates that most people would tend to remain in the same place; not having plans to move away from the area could be seen as tacit agreement that the place is meeting their needs and valued to a certain extent.

In terms of levels of activism, participants were questioned about this aspect. All of the remaining participants were active in some way. Brenda was involved with her church, but was also active with a local ‘Parkinson’ group, supporting the Admiral Nurses. Lydia continued her involvement with the Guides, and would like to help out with another new project that is about to start with young people on Seven Acres but wonders if time will allow, given that she works full time. She also helps out with activities at a local church although she is not an attendee. Through photography, she has been involved in covering religious festivals as part of the Bolton Inter-faith council, which has lead to meeting and working with a range of other communities i.e. Sikhs. Rosie helps out, when she can, with a group doing outdoor activities with young people. This is because her mother is active with the group, so she can get involved easily when time allows. Surprisingly, given her negative comments about the area previously, Shelley reported getting involved with a new group that is made up of representatives of other local groups, with the aim of pooling their collective resources to put on local events. This was a new venture for her and one which she was looking forward to being involved with.
Rosie felt that barriers to being active in the community were largely personal ones:

“I think its personal barriers that people have and perhaps they don’t want to
talk to each other and don’t want to get involved with each another and it’s
also a lot of responsibility when you are taking on other peoples’ trouble. And
that is what pushes people back from joining in sometimes”

(Rosie)

The burdens that it can impose on an individual can be quite heavy. Mark recounted a time
when he tried to make a difference by going to a local ‘Area Forum’ meeting organised by
the council at a time when it has implemented a controversial refuse collection regime. As
someone who happened to work for the council (in a different department from the
environmental services) he was targeted for abuse by others who used him as a scapegoat
for their anger at the changes. He also recounted incidents where he had complained to
the council on an issue which they denied was happening. In that instance, he and a
number of neighbours took direct action to deal with the issue because they did not get any
help or support from the local authority.

The remaining participants were asked to reflect on whether focussing on people’s
perception of places, particularly what they value, could be of worth in planning processes.
The response was positive from all of them.

“Yes, if you actually ask people what they are valuing, hopefully they
won’t get rid of, you know, and try and keep those and get more similar things”.

(Lydia)

Planners could listen to people because they know it better than anyone
in the Town Hall

(Brenda)

Communities already face lots of challenges and people have many constraints on their
time. Speculating on how people could be more enabled to take part in decision making in
their area, Brenda felt that people already have mechanisms to contact decision makers
Area Fora, for example. However, she also commented on the lack of support from people
giving up their time to come along to these workshops as symptomatic of the apathy that
many people feel.
Lydia believes that being more flexible in having meetings would bring more people into planning processes. She suggested that instead of early evening, to consider weekends, and perhaps drop in sessions, so that a wider range of people are able to attend. As someone who works full-time, she finds that meetings are hard to get along to even if interested in taking part.

When asked about responsibilities and the extent to which decision making is dealt with by councillors and developers, and to what extent should local people be involved, there was agreement that those elected to represent people are best placed to effect changes rather than individuals, but that local people should be more involved. Lydia commented that some aspects of planning are not appreciated by the public so they are not always in a good position to make such judgements, regarding costs for example. She feels that consultation should be more widespread and that the results made public and that reasons should be given if peoples’ ideas are not taken on board.

Lydia suggested that consultations could be more innovative and suggested combining with events that have family activities whereby the children are occupied while the parents can get involved. Shelley believes that people could be more interested in getting involved if more of an effort were made to invite them in and to feel that their contribution would be worthwhile.

Brenda thought that the methods used in the study could be used but wondered who would actually carry them out. Lydia liked the Ketso and emphasised how ideas emerged from the exercise:

“the idea of using the leaves and seeing the good and the bad points and it triggered another idea. Seeing that opened your mind up to different concepts” (Brenda)

Rosie also found the Ketso a good tool and felt it would be an easy way of getting more people involved in planning processes. When asked about their feelings of self-efficacy in terms of making changes to the area, Brenda feels that she does have a voice and cited examples where she had contacted the council and councillors with success, in the past.
Lydia highlighted the constraints on people, saying that she would like to be more involved but feels that working and commuting on public transport makes it very difficult to be involved. She would like opportunities to be offered that would fit in with her lifestyle better. Therefore, more flexibility of provision attuned to people’s needs could be considered by those designing participative processes.

“I think so, because if you have a sense of place you actually feel proud of where you live, because it’s not just a house, it’s a community, .....<pause>
...your environment. It’s not the right word, but it’s your environment. Some people never do anything for their community and never venture out other than the local shop, usually in the car.”

(Lydia)

Another participant had a similar outlook regarding personal responsibility and efficacy, wishing that people were more aware and took action. She cited an example of a man from her church who takes a litter picker out with him when he goes out for walks and she would not mind doing the same:

“I wouldn’t mind doing that myself to improve the surroundings and make people more aware of what it’s like living here instead of thinking so someone else will do it; someone else will sort it out”.

(Brenda)

She has had success when informing the council about issues in the local area such as fly tipping and pot holes in the road: “If more people were aware of what’s happening and complained... things would change”. People complained about the potholes nearby and they were then repaired.... “it’s our area and we want it to look as nice as possible” (Brenda)

Rosie did not agree that having a sense of place was particularly important:

“I wouldn’t say important. It’s nice to be proud of somewhere and that its home and your roots and you can go back to it”

(Rosie)
Renee, who lived on a council estate in Tonge, stated that it was the people that had changed over the past few years:

“They have different standards than us. And there used to be a lot of married couples with families but now we seem to get a lot of single parents. When I first moved in here there were four ladies and they nearly fought to sweep the streets! You could eat your dinner off it. They’ve no pride in the estate [now]. One woman said ‘what do you do it [sweeping the street] for?’ and I said ‘Do you want to live on Raikes Lane?’ [local refuse tip]. She said, ‘I suppose not’”. (Renee)

In this case, the change in the social mix of residents appears to have affected the feelings of attachment to the locality, a feeling that a different kind of person than the ones who lived there in previous decades, perhaps reflecting the changes in wider society around family structures. Issues like unemployment and single parent households have had an impact on social housing estates since the number of houses available in the social rented sector has shrunk in recent years, perhaps magnifying perceived problems that may have been more diluted in the past, given more of a mix in the social situation of communities.

**Conclusion**

In this chapter the data drawn from before and after interviews, workshop outputs and solicited diaries were examined in order to explore what sense of place meant to the participants. Analysing data from interviews before and after the social learning interventions, as well as the data generated in the process (for example, on the Ketso felt workspaces and in solicited diaries) and from participants observation during the interventions, allowed for an exploration of how this sense of place was affected by social learning during the visioning process. Thus possible implications for practice could be identified. Various strands of findings were presented and illustrated by data drawn from the participants. These strands are explored in further depth in the following chapter.
Discussion: Social learning in practice

Introduction to the chapter

Understanding more about sense of place and how it can affect peoples’ perceptions and behaviour in places could be useful for those concerned with regeneration and place-shaping, such as planners, policy makers and community organisers. This section of the thesis revisits the research objectives and relates the findings of the research developed in the previous chapter to the wider literature, exploring the implications of the findings. The chapter will also reflect upon the process used to investigate the phenomenon and the methods employed, commenting on how these could be improved in future research.

Structure of the chapter

The chapter is made up of a number of sections dealing with the research objectives, followed by sections examining and reflecting on the research process. The main thrust of the research was looking at the phenomenon of sense of place and how it manifests in an ordinary, everyday landscape, in contrast to special landscapes that have been a principal concern of researchers in the fields of natural resource management and environmental psychology. This is explored in the first section of this chapter. The second section deals with the concept of social learning and the effect it may have on senses of place. The next section considers the implications of a more salient sense of place for local action and involvement in planning processes and activism more generally. The final section then offers a critical analysis of the research process.
Research question 1: How does sense of place manifest in an ordinary, everyday landscape?

Special and ordinary landscapes
Many previous studies into sense of place have focussed on special landscapes such as national parks (Halfpenny, 2010; Cameron et al., 2004; Barkley, 2011; Kaltenborn and Williams, 2002; Meitner, 2004) which have the ability to leave a deep impression because of the high landscape quality as well as opportunities for psychological restoration and well-being (Clay, 2001). However, this research focuses upon the ordinary, everyday and mundane landscape that many people find themselves living and working in.

Gifford (1998) highlighted four ‘dimensions’ that psychologists were interested in, namely: persons, processes, environmental problems, and places. However, he cautioned that the psychological community were wary about some of the methods that were being adopted to study places that were more anthropological than the more commonly used quantitative studies. He observed that places had been downplayed in the past because of the methodological concern about generalising from the particular; the particular being the focus of many studies of place (Gifford, 1998). Such concerns seem to have been largely overcome in recent years with the growth of interdisciplinary work and the forging of alliances across traditionally separate disciplines and the expansion of sub-disciplines such as environmental psychology and human ecology. Greater methodological plurality is now the norm in environmental psychological research and also other discipline areas that were formerly more conservative in their approaches.

Feelings about places are thought to be largely tacit and unarticulated (Turner and Turner, 2006; Jupp, 2007). It is often the case that people only become aware of the importance of place to them when there is a threat posed to valued assets in the landscape, whether it be loss of green space, demolition of old buildings, or the closing down of shops, pubs and churches. It could be said that dislike of change is at the root of the feelings engendered, but there is also evidence from this research that people see places as being part of their identity, and therefore a threat to their local places can impact on feelings about themselves. The research sought to tease out whether taking part in workshops focussing on places and identifying valued elements both on an individual and collective level made sense of place
more salient to participants, without necessarily needing the trigger of a perceived threat to the place.

Stefanovic (1998), coming from a phenomenological standpoint, states that place cannot be reduced to simple reductionist definition. Multiple themes, incorporating physical, social and temporal aspects serve to muddy the waters as they have in many other studies that have attempted to pin down the nature of places. Stefanovic compared an old, established settlement in Croatia to a more modern settlement in Canada, in order to uncover sense of place. In essence, one place was seen as special, as it had a long history and was now a tourist destination, whereas the Canadian suburb was a relatively newly planned and built settlement, and more of an ordinary place (the latter being most similar to the case study area in this research). Her study drew heavily on Heidigger’s notion of ‘dwelling’ as an overarching theme and found that despite obvious differences, both places were similar in a number of respects. She states that sense of place ‘cannot, in principle, be delineated in bounded concepts but only tentatively signified’ (Stefanovic, 1998 pg32) and that part of what makes sense of place is retaining some sense of mystery; that there is more yet to discover.

The meanings for the participants remained largely personal but more importantly perhaps, better able to be articulated and shared than was previously the case, largely by means of facilitating a shared space where social learning could be enacted.

Stefanovic’s (1998) research also highlighted notions of ‘self-enclosure’ and ‘self-sufficiency’, however, these themes did not really emerge in this study, possibly because of the spatial arrangement of the town and the local districts of Tonge and Breightmet which do have identifiable centres, but are part of a larger conurbation with permeable borders to adjoining places. The latter aspects regarding self-enclosure and self-sufficiency may well be a feature of the places studied here, but the different methodological approach taken did not reveal them specifically. Having said that however, there were some perspectives discussed by the participants in this study that echoed points made about the importance of the private sphere of the home – the notion of ‘insideness’. Several of the participants talked about how important the private space of home and garden was to them. The idea of insideness when talking about places where people have deep familiarity and knowledge of the characteristics of place was brought to attention by Relph (1976). The dialectic between feelings of
belonging and feelings of exclusion has been a focus of some place researchers since the publication of Relph’s influential book, as many have found the construct of ‘placelessness’ useful to work with.

From this research, sense of place in an ordinary landscape appears to be made up of a number of elements: namely physical characteristics and the presence of specific people, but also strong emotions such as belonging, feelings of safety and familiarity, length of time spent in a place, and also the ability to make changes and to make some sort of mark on the area. These elements accord with the findings of others such as Jorgensen and Stedman (2006) who categorise the elements as falling within cognitive, affective or conative dimensions. These aspects were reported by almost all of the participants and could be said to be, on the whole, reflected in a positive attitude to their local area. However, for one or two of the participants, sense of place manifested as a negative state. Sense of place can therefore be seen as a multidimensional construct which is also very fluid and subject to frequent revision depending on the context.

Looking at special places, Brown and Raymond (2007) found that what emerged as important themes were ‘aesthetic, recreation, economic, spiritual, and therapeutic values’ (Brown and Raymond, 2007 pg89) in their study of visitors to a national park in Australia. It seems that the visual and instrumental aspects therefore predominate in attachment feelings of those using special landscapes. These values also emerged somewhat from this study in an ordinary landscape (although not so much the spiritual) but the main contrast seems to be the social aspects which contribute to feelings of wellbeing and belonging. These were prominent and reported on by the participants in Bolton. People purposely visit special places for recreation and the restorative qualities offered. They go primed to engage with the places, as they have been highly motivated to go there and ‘consume’ the space. Where people live can be so familiar as to become a backdrop, and so reasons to think about it can diminish over time.
Stage in life course

The analysis pointed to circumstances such as ageing, retirement, unemployment, change in pace of life as providing opportunities for people to stop and think about places. They serve to make people notice places more frequently. It was certainly the case for some of the older participants in the research that retirement and more time spent in the local area, functioned to make them more aware of their surroundings and to bring into focus elements of place that had previously been rendered less visible by the busyness and pace of working life. This echoes work by Gustafson (2001b; 2009) where he outlines his ‘roots and routes’ idea. Although there is a perception that increased mobility is incompatible with sense of place and feelings of attachment, his studies suggest that it is not the case. The participants in this doctoral research had all travelled to a greater or lesser degree and some had lived in other locations, but still demonstrated attachment to place. The issue of mobility will be discussed in further detail in this chapter.

Childhood experiences of place

When the participants in this research were asked in interview about their childhood experience of places, all mentioned the freedom to play outdoors and to wander largely at will; often considerable distances from the home. The freedom to explore and to discover new places as well as getting to know local places very well, were mentioned highly positively. A study by Roe (2006) looking at ways in which children could be involved in landscape planning demonstrated that children valued the following attributes in their local environments: the potential for danger, climbing, small spaces, the potential for observation, areas deemed out of bounds from parents and unmanaged by adults, and lastly, 'untidy' or wild areas. In between or marginal spaces, perceived as exciting or dangerous, were also valued. The study was with children living in a village setting with access to natural areas. In a more urban setting, some of the attributes would have to be provided by built elements in the neighbourhood, which then potentially goes into the realm of anti-social behaviour.
A key factor that emerged from this study links to appropriation of space and the extent to which people feel able to explore and use spaces. Children may have fewer concerns about their right to be in places but adults can be acutely aware of how their presence may be perceived by others and this serves to limit exploration by adults.

The finding in the research that memories of valued places from childhood are important in the making of place bonds corresponds with findings from other research (Halfpenny, 2010; Hay, 1998; Wells and Lekies, 2006). Chawla (2007) analysed interviews from environmentalists and found that such childhood experiences were indeed important in helping appreciation of the natural world and bonds with places. She found that interaction with influential role models was a key finding in her research. This finding was also echoed in this research, with a number of participants mentioning parents and other role models who took them to places to go sledging in winter, to pick blackberries in autumn, or who taught them valued skills like bird identification. These early experiences seemed to be highly formative and to have had lasting effects on their attitudes in later life, with many feeling strongly about green spaces and gathering together for community activities. In formal parks or more commonly, open spaces that were undeveloped and available for exploration with friends, as well as the more prosaic back and front streets adjacent to houses where they played on a regular basis. Some participants talked about being taken on ‘Whit Walks’ which are an almost now defunct tradition of church congregations parading through the streets singing. These were an annual feature of most towns and villages, particularly in the north of England, and were a key part of the year as people recalled the purchasing and wearing of new clothes for the events.
Sensory aspects

The visual nature of places is deemed highly influential in affecting people’s awareness and appreciation of place. In this study, people often noticed differences in their places, for example, the deterioration in empty buildings and the neglect of gardens. Having the time to take in and appreciate places was lacking somewhat for those who worked, particularly for those who commuted by car. Those who owned and used a private car regularly were more physically separated from places, from a sensory perspective, than those who walked or used public transport. Being ensconced in a car limited the sensory stimuli (not only the visual) that they would be subject to if more immersed in places. The disconnection between people and the environment outside of the home, has been commented on by researchers and even termed ‘the extinction of experience’ (Pyle, 2003 pg206), whereby people (and increasingly children in particular) are largely disengaged from their local places. The phenomenon of the so-called ‘battery farm’ child suggests that fear of harm from road traffic and from strangers has served to prevent children from exploring and learning about their local environment as parents restrict them to home based or adult-accompanied activities. The long term implications of this lack of engagement is one that has been commented on by numerous authors (Milton, 2002; Miller, 2006; WWF, 2009) and is of concern to government agencies such as English Nature (2002).

Oreszczyn and Lane (2000) studied the meanings associated with a feature of the British countryside, that of ‘hedgerows’, and found that they were a repository for feelings about places where they occurred and were seen as part of people’s identity. There were many examples of features of places that participants in this research referred to as being highly valued because of the meanings that people ascribed to them. The objects of those meanings may not be obvious to those not sharing them, illustrating the care that needs to be taken in regeneration projects that might unwittingly erase the past while creating something new. Social learning processes can aid the revelation of such valued features and associated meanings through sharing stories and associations.
Turner and Turner (2006) whose research is in the field of virtual environments, talk about place as ‘chiaroscuro’ i.e. the nuances of light, shade and texture which can bring an image to life, and is an intrinsic part of place and how it is interpreted. They believe that there is much variation in place experiences and feelings, so much so that sense of place is a real complicating factor when looking at how to recreate places in the virtual world. Relph (1976) talks about ‘placelessness’ and how that comes about from a ‘superficial and casual involvement’ with a place. However, he is often referring to so called non-places such as shopping malls and hotel rooms, which could be anywhere. The idea of people having such a superficial and casual involvement with a place, thus rendering it less than it might be, is an interesting one as it suggests a lack of chiaroscuro with bland features and little for people to read into other than uniformity.

So, what are the factors that influence whether people wish to be more immersed in their places? Are there ways in which this can be influenced to encourage greater engagement with place? Trope and Liberman (2010) discuss psychological distance and ‘construal-level theory’ which states that the more removed an object is from one’s direct experience, the more abstract that object becomes. This suggests that if people engage with places, they are more likely to pay attention to the phenomena that they are interacting with, as it becomes more tangible for them. This could have important repercussions for sense of place and how alert people are to changes.

This research probed into what made the ordinary and familiar places valuable to the participants. The kinds of responses suggested that natural places were particularly highly valued, even though they were often in an urban context. Natural places which contain vegetation and wetland environments such as rivers and ponds are deemed to be very rich in their sensory aspects (Sullivan and Kuo, 1996; Kuo and Sullivan, 2001; Clay, 2001; Hunziker et al., 2007). Heritage features also seemed to be mentioned with regularity, such as old buildings and remnants of Bolton’s industrial past. Again, these have histories attached to them which give the place a unique identity that appears to hold much meaning for people and are often visually appealing and rich. This research demonstrated that participants’ feelings about places were more easily articulated when talking about the past, particularly where they had grown up.
Mobility

The notion of mobility has several meanings, all of which are pertinent to this research. There is mobility in the sense of physically getting round a place on a daily basis, often facilitated by access to some sort of vehicle, whether that is car, bicycle, bus, or train. The very young and old are often dependent upon others to get around places, particularly when distances are more than a mile or two. The commonly used term ‘walking distance’ is imprecise, and one that someone would have to make a judgement on, depending on their level of fitness and the terrain to be traversed. Two key aspects of mobility emerging from this study will now be discussed.

Physical mobility

This notion of mobility needs qualifying in terms of physical ability to move around and to even walk at all. Some of the more elderly participants described their mobility as increasingly restricted as they aged. The eldest participant could only make it to the local shops once or twice a week as it took her a great deal of effort to do this. Another participant had a car and mentioned that he was less able to access local places that he would once have gone to on foot, so drove to shopping centres where he could park very close to the amenities he needed to visit.

The extent to which people were able to move through their environment and their access to transportation coloured not only perceptions of places but also dictated to a certain degree the scope to contextualise places. This notion of disconnection from the sensory realm of local places (particularly revealed by transportation choices) emerged as a key finding of the research, as it strongly influenced people’s feelings about places. It had great bearing on people’s ability to use and experience places. However, before going further with this idea, certain aspects of mobility need clarifying.

Mobility can also pertain to the ability to cross greater distances and is often reliant on having money to travel. All of the participants in this study could be described as having this kind of mobility (or at least had had it in their younger days) as they had all been on holiday to more
or less exotic places. Nearly all had travelled widely in Britain, most had been to European
destinations, and a significant number had been much further afield. While few of the
participants would be described as affluent, access to cheap foreign travel had definitely had
an impact on their lives. This theme also links to that of comparing and contrasting places
and is related to travel and globalisation.

Another interesting facet to come out of this research is that of mobility being enacted at
vastly different levels of scale. A few participants reported travelling great distances by plane
to places like the Far East, Australia and the Caribbean but not venturing into the local area
very much; with the home being the place most time spent, with few forays out locally. This
may mean that the impact of their travel and the greater contrast with familiar places can
make a deep impression on people but this may reinforce sense of place as people value the
familiar and may not relate to vastly different places very easily, even if they enjoyed the
experience. For example, both Irene and Phillip commented on the shocking contrast
between rich and poor people they encountered on trips to the Far East and Caribbean,
respectively. They mentioned how fortunate they felt to have been born in a part of the
world with good welfare and sanitation.

Social mobility

There is also the meaning of mobility in terms of the social sense, i.e. whether people have
the social and personal capital to mix with different groups of people. This meaning has
implications for employment possibilities and having choices about where to live, socialise
and recreate. With social class being less restrictive than in the past and with wider access to
educational opportunities, aspirations have been expanded, with the consequence that many
children choose to live far from their place of birth and parental base. This has led to the
phenomenon of the nuclear family and the consequent demise of the extended family, where
this has occurred. The implications for this social (and environmental) change are far
reaching.

Some place literature has identified mobility as being antagonistic to place attachment,
mainly because studies that have measured place attachment have found correlations with
length of residence (Cuba and Hummon, 1993; Lewicka, 2010). However, this has been questioned by some researchers who believe that mobility and place attachment are not necessarily mutually exclusive (Gustafson, 2001b, 2009; Green and White, 2007). Indeed, there is evidence from this doctoral research that those who have been the most mobile still ascribe considerable value to home places, and when living or working in other places have made efforts to immerse themselves in these places. So those participants desired to recreate elements of home that they missed, or to seek out places that they could easily attach to because of similarities with their previous home.

This finding concurs with work done by Szerzynski (2006) who differentiated between ‘denizens’ and ‘citizens’ in a Cumbrian community and also those displaying everyday or ideological rootedness in Hummon’s typology (Hummon, 1992). People who had been born and bred there (denizens), tended to display what could be described as place dependence, while the citizens (largely educated incomers) had chosen to locate themselves in the area because of work and also proximity to the Lake District which they utilised for their recreation. It could be said that main difference between the two types was their framing of the place, with one being more extensive (and therefore more amenable to putting in a wider context) than the other, perhaps more insular perspective (Szersynski, 2006).

**Scale**

This research probed into sense of place on a range of scales. The interviews asked about place ranging from the very local neighbourhood scale right through to the national and international scale, but the workshops largely focussed on the neighbourhood scale up to the scale of the borough of Bolton (and a little beyond that). An unexpected finding from running the workshops was that participants found that they could more easily share their thoughts on places at the scale of the town as a whole, rather than the local neighbourhood that they lived in. There seemed to be a greater collective imagination for the places that they all knew, rather than the particular corners of their neighbourhood that the others might not be familiar with, despite the proximity.
This finding was initially a surprise as it was felt that the more local area and smaller scale would be more conducive to being familiar. However, this finding reflects work done by Hidalgo and Hernandez (2001), which examined attachment at a range of spatial scales. They found that people had the weakest attachment to the neighbourhood scale, which was contrary to the assumptions made by many researchers. This phenomenon was, however, also reported by Jorgensen and Stedman (2011) who carried out map-based exercises with participants and asked them to draw the extent of their neighbourhood. There was much variation in people’s conceptualisations of neighbourhood, and the researchers considered that it was this lack of knowledge of boundaries that makes it difficult for people to understand exactly what a neighbourhood is, i.e. it is a unique construct (Jorgensen and Stedman, 2011).

This finding has implications in terms of working with groups of people with a place focus. The boundaries need to be established (or negotiated and agreed upon) so that people can orientate themselves. This process will be easier in a smaller settlement, such as a village with relatively clear boundaries between the built environment and open areas, but much more problematic when working in more populous areas where districts tend to merge into one another, and where obvious visual boundaries are lacking. In the study area, the neighbourhood area was initially felt to be quite obvious because the historic boundaries were rivers, but the rivers are culverted in parts and not highly visible. The rivers have been superseded by roads as being the main visual divider between parts of the town although unofficially so. As a side note, it is interesting that at the larger scale and in terms of identity, people reported being loyal to historic borders. For example, the County Palatine of Lancashire, which has little administrative relevance today, yet people are less accepting of imposed boundaries decided by government agencies. In this study we see that people have assumed district boundaries based on contemporary man-made features such as roads and bridges which do not match with official boundaries shown on maps. This came through in the discussions during the workshops. For example, one participant, Phillip, drew a boundary between the social housing estate and the private housing as this represented a real boundary for him as he compared the way that people live, possibly reflecting social divisions as well as architectural, while ignoring the administrative boundary which placed those streets together in the same neighbourhood.
Studies looking at the difference between those living in special places and visitors, did not find a great deal of difference in terms of attitudes towards place (Kaltenborn and Williams, 2002). A more nuanced view of mobility and how people construct their attachments to places (Gustafson, 2001b, 2009; Taylor, 2005) was also evidenced in this doctoral research, from the way that participants described and compared their feelings towards other places that they have spent time in (for example, regular stays in France and Spain with relatives who have emigrated, in two cases) demonstrating that people can show attachment to places irrespective of length of residence. Again, the mediating factor of social bonds (familial in the case of the participants) was important here in people feeling attachment to places that they had only intermittently visited.

Ryan (2005) looked at special places within an urban context, i.e. sites that were semi-natural and decidedly different from the surrounding urban fabric, in Michigan (USA). Using a photo-questionnaire method he explored place attachment and found a distinction between the attachments felt by local users as compared with those having some sort of expertise in natural history. He called the latter type of attachment ‘conceptual attachment’ (Ryan, 2005). He mentions the idea of ‘substitutability’ - whether people will seek out the similar if the thing they are attached to is unavailable. There was evidence of this in the doctoral research, particularly in the types of places people chose to live. Two of the participants stated that they sought out housing types that were very similar to ones that they had grown up in, while others stated that if they had to leave their current place, they would look to move to somewhere that had the same features and facilities. This could be said to demonstrate ‘place dependence’ as they had particular needs from the neighbourhood that needed to be fulfilled. However, the housing types were not distinctive so could be found in locations other than Bolton. So while ‘substitutability’ was in evidence in this research, the location of those similar type houses were still decided within the place of Bolton so other facets of place held sway.
There have been many attempts to describe the essence of place (and also sense of place), and a feeling by some that it is a necessary exercise in order to move the discipline of place research forward (such as Jorgensen and Stedman, 2001; Hidalgo and Hernandez, 2001). Others, however, wish to encourage the pluralism of approaches that such a concept engenders, given the diverse range of disciplines that contribute to the debate (Patterson and Williams, 2005). Forming a more holistic appreciation of the elusive nature of sense of place, and accepting it as such, may be necessary in order to honour the multiple senses of place that are held by people. Stefanovic speaks of the phenomenological task as being to illuminate “essential moments of taken-for-granted settings which seamlessly interweave to constitute sense of place” (Stefanovic, 1998 pg 33).

Places as dynamic and fluid

The dynamic nature of places is acknowledged by many place researchers. This fluidity was observable in the variation in the language used by participants in this research during interview and the workshop activities. People would express a whole range of emotions about the same neighbourhood (or the town as a whole, or the people in it); expressing likes and dislikes, and oscillating between different viewpoints. Memory was also important when thinking and talking about places, with people reflecting on previous places they had known well. The very act of articulating their thoughts brought up other issues about where they now are in relation to other places so that, as the researcher (and thus instigator of workshops and interviews), it was like witnessing the reassessment of identities.

This finding has some resonance with the notion of ‘intimacy’ described by Raffles (2002), who comments that no matter how far away places may seem from the cosmopolitan, places are still,

“constantly in dialogue with other people and places, constantly confirming and reinventing their own locality in relation to the innumerable elsewheres in which they participate physically, imaginatively, culturally” (Raffles, 2002, pg329).
Like Massey (1991), he invokes the relational aspects of place and the essential fluidity that the making and re-making of connections within and between the physical and social domains. This process never stops and so places cannot be seen as fixed, but made up of myriad constructions which could be seen as an emergent property of an individual’s cognitive and affective experience. And so too, can new constructions emerge from the sharing of these to wider groups.

May (2011) discusses ‘sense of belonging’ from a sociological perspective, which has close parallels with sense of place. Taking a temporal perspective she describes the present as being fluid and dynamic, in contrast with a stable and fixed past. Manzo and Perkins (2006) consider place feelings at a range of scales, from the individual through to community level, in recognition that these will contain much variability. Many psychological approaches to place concentrate on the perspective of the individual, but Manzo and Perkins (2006) caution against restricting the view to this level. Their work overlaps somewhat with that of sociologists, who argue that you cannot divorce the individual from their social and political context.
Summary of research findings for research question 1:

How does sense of place manifest in an ordinary, everyday landscape?

- There are subtle differences between special and ordinary landscapes in terms of people’s construction of sense of place. The social aspects that contribute towards sense of place were more prominent in the ordinary landscape of Bolton than in studies of special landscapes, where the visual tended to dominate. The physical aspects of sense of place were sometimes ignored because of familiarity in ordinary places.

- People noticed more about places when they were in the slower-paced and sedentary life stages such as retirement and unemployment compared to those who had busier lives.

- The sensory aspects of place seemed to be assimilated and filtered out somewhat in the everyday landscape unless they were out of the ordinary and demanded attention.

- Physical and social mobility did have an impact on whether people took notice of their surroundings. In particular, travel by car served to cut people off from their surroundings compared to walking.

- People had difficulty visualising the neighbourhood scale given its unclear boundaries, and worked more effectively in groups at the scale of the town because they could find more points of reference that could be shared. This may be because they have less direct experience of the neighbourhood scale unless it is very close to home.
Research Question 2

In what ways can social learning impact upon the dynamics of sense of place?

This research sought to explore whether social learning is a useful approach to use in order to make sense of place more salient to people. If sense of place is underpinning effective participation processes, understanding whether a sense of place (which is often a tacit phenomenon) can be articulated and made more salient through social learning is of interest when looking at how participation processes could be designed to best effect. Being highly aware of valued places and appreciating why one finds them important can happen to an individual without sharing feelings with others, but research suggests that social learning can be an effective means by which people are exposed to other viewpoints and are therefore more able to reflect on their own (Measham and Baker, 2005; Selman et al., 2010).

Consciousness of sense of place

An aspect of sense of place that is often hard to articulate is the individual’s own consciousness of having a sense of place. All of the participants in the final interview stated that they felt that they had a sense of place, but some of them also stated that they felt that they had it all along (i.e. it had not been developed by the visioning process and interviews). Interestingly, some participants also stated that they did not believe that other people had a sense of place; relating that to others not caring about, nor being interested in, places. The idea of consciousness of having a sense of place remains difficult to pin down although the fact that all those involved in the research claimed to possess a sense of place, suggests the possibility that their consciousness had been raised as a result of participation. Taking part in interviews where their thoughts and feelings about a whole range of places they have encountered, means that some processing of the experiences will have taken place in addition to the exercises carried out in those few hours working with the others.

From the small number of participants who made it all the way through the activities facilitated for this research, it is not really possible to say definitively whether the visioning workshops and opportunity to reflect afforded by the interviews and use of the diary were sufficient to make them conscious of their sense of place. Participants would have been in
possession of a whole range of thoughts about places before the process, having had direct experience of places throughout their lives. However, the possible effectiveness of the workshops at promoting articulation of those thoughts cannot be discounted (Rogan et al., 2005).

The relationship between participants and the forging of new bonds can be an important part of a participatory process i.e. sowing the seeds for continued interaction. In this way, if public participation is used as part of a process under the localism agenda, there are possibilities for on-going debate and deliberation if people decide to take their ideas forward to actually shape their locality in more measurable ways.

As discussed in the literature review, the idea of social learning has gained much currency in recent years but there is confusion over whether it is process or product, and whether it is synonymous with participation (Muro and Jeffery, 2012). Wenger (2000) described ‘modes of belonging’ that could be applied to informal ways of learning such as those that take place in place communities. Keen et al. (2005) outlined various conceptualisations of social learning, particularly focussed on environmental management applications. Their perspective draws on soft systems methodologies and systems thinking. Reed et al (2010) define social learning as:

‘a change in understanding that goes beyond the individual to become situated within wider social units or communities of practice through social interactions between actors within social networks’ (Reed et al, 2010 pg4).

They also state that the term is largely misused as well as being surrounded by confusion. Many researchers, they claim, use old definitions and have not kept pace with advances in the field and significant contributions from psychological and educational perspectives. They particularly take issue with the use of ‘social learning’ as being synonymous with ‘public participation’. They believe that more conceptual clarity is needed if better processes for enabling social learning are to be designed (Reed et al., 2010).

In this research, a series of workshops took place with the aim of providing social learning opportunities to a group of local residents living in Bolton. A number of activities were
designed for three sessions to allow people to form relationships and interact in a convivial setting. The activities ranged from using the Ketso toolkit (Tippett, 2004) to create a sustainable vision for the adjoining neighbourhoods of Breightmet and Tonge in East Bolton, and for Bolton borough and its hinterlands.

People drew their own maps of the area, focusing on important features in the landscape, they also worked in groups, to map what they thought the landscape would have looked like in the past (100 years ago and a 1,000 years ago). Historic maps were also used as a basis for discussion. Sensory observation exercises were carried out in the local area (although not venturing far as some of the participants were elderly), also lots of opportunities for discussion and informal chats in tea breaks to facilitate the build-up of relationships between them. The overall aim, therefore, was to create an opportunity for people to interact and learn from each other, focused on place.

There are many examples in the literature of participatory processes that have focused on places in order to elicit data for feeding into planning and resource management processes. For example, Barkley (2011) carried out a study with stakeholders living and working around the Grand Canyon national park in the USA using a technique that involved photo-elicitation, storytelling and interviews in order to reveal senses of place and stated that:

‘The only way we can come to know and understand our lived experience(s) is through acts of remembering, and we share stories of our lived experience(s) through processes of telling and/or retelling. Further, recollection is not merely reduplicative, but socially influenced’ (Barkley and Kruger, 2013 pg95).

The findings underline the importance of giving voice to people’s meanings so that they can be shared and understood more widely. This doctoral research used slightly different methods but aimed to provide opportunities for residents to articulate their place meanings and to jointly deliberate, so as to create a future vision of the neighbourhood and town as a whole.
Brown and Raymond (2007) used maps to good effect in their Australian study and found that the information generated was useful to natural resource planners and managers. Valued aspects of place can be invisible to those managing the assets so ways in which this could be facilitated is by utilising mapping methods, whether actual maps or virtual maps by means of Public Participation Geographic Information Systems (PPGIS). Brown and Raymond’s study (2007) used maps in order to elicit information from participants.

However, in the case of the research in Bolton, the maps were used in a workshop setting as a focal point for discussion. Many participants in the study commented highly positively on the map-based exercises in the follow-up interviews, with them expressing interest and enjoyment in working with maps. Their highly visual nature makes them suitable as prompts for discussion and interaction, interpreting the symbols collectively. Historic maps, in particular, were used in this study, and they provided an effective medium for reflecting on the nature of changes that had occurred. A caveat to this, however, is that maps are a representation of the territory but not a substitute for experiencing the territory directly. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, the value of direct sensory experience is a key factor in making sense of place more salient.

The use of visioning as a technique to aid to planning, particularly in areas around sustainability, is becoming more widespread, but it is not without its critics. The process of visioning itself could be described as being subject to the same criticisms as those levelled at participatory processes in general, such as power relations and dominance of certain views over others. It has also been suggested that visioning can serve to mask people’s fears about the future, which can be become problematic when trying to plan ways of implementing any vision (Saunders and Jenkins, 2012). Their study was conducted with students and was not rooted in a particular place and was initially quite generic and served to repeat obvious motifs of what a sustainable future might have. However, subsequent ‘re-visioning’ led to more grounded outcomes, which interestingly moved away from pictures (which had been the main way of expressing the initial visions) to the increased use of words to highlight more detail and feelings behind the visions.
The Ketso toolkit developed by (Tippett et al., 2007) utilised in this research, is highly visual (i.e. coloured branches and leaves, with themed clusters formed by participants) and is also text-based in its detail. Part of the process of visioning in this research was deliberation around points that participants added to the branches, so that a shared understanding of the individuals’ ideas could be achieved. Doubts and fears about the fate of the place were sometimes expressed at this stage of the process and participants had the option of adding comments, further questions, and also had the opportunity of using icons (exclamation marks and question marks) to highlight areas in the vision that were tricky. The process of visioning using the physical toolkit thus supported participants in learning from each other and exploring areas of difficulty together, highlighting them visually on the felt workspaces.

Visioning ‘dream’ communities has been used in international development with poor communities to enable participants to take some control over their lives and to literally put them ‘on the map’ as far as the authorities are concerned. Archer et al (2012) examined the role of community architects to provide technical aid to groups of people so that they could plan improvements to their settlements, while retaining valued assets that may not have been visible to the authorities. The process tapped into sense of place and allowed groups to network with others in the city, as the local visions formed part of a citywide process. These actions allowed neighbourhoods to bid for funds, which although limited, when combined with micro-credit, made prioritised actions possible. This demonstrates that such a process can have an impact on future development with real benefits for the participating communities. This doctoral research was an academic exercise, with no promise of implementing the vision created, but it allowed people to think about future possibilities and to identify valued assets that they wished to be retained. Despite not having any guarantees of outcomes in terms of official sanction from local authorities, there is the possibility that more subtle outcomes could have arisen from providing the opportunity for that group of people to form new bonds.

Gustafson (2009) and also (Jones and Evans, 2012) discuss how many regeneration schemes can have a ‘tabula rasa’ approach, which serves to make invisible the valued assets that communities have that are tied in with the history of the place as well as their memories and interactions over time. Jones and Evans (2012) utilised a technique whereby residents walked
round the study area with a researcher recording their thoughts and perceptions as they occurred to them. This allowed the researchers to capture the meanings of valued places so that future plans could at least be informed that the place does have a meaningful history, which those living around the area have articulated. This was carried out by individuals and researchers but there is scope to pool and share various narratives in wider processes.

The importance of asking people about what is important and meaningful in their places as part of regeneration or a development process, to prevent these features being obliterated in the development, is an important consideration in planning processes. The significance of asking participants about what they value in their area and their understandings and stories of their local places was highlighted also in this research. In particular, participants found that it helped to have an opportunity to discuss these stories and to develop their understandings in a group. They were able to bounce ideas off each other and to hear other people’s stories and histories within an area and relate these to their own understandings.

Rich pictures can be used in planning to represent situations and interactions between different systems; be they social or physical. Often made up of simple visual representations, they capture complex relationships and stimulate analysis and discussion of the linkages. They are particularly useful in the early stages of participatory planning processes to help formulate questions but can also be used further on in the process in order to integrate the information gathered (Monk and Howard, 1998). The rich picture below (Fig. 22) illustrates some of the findings of this research whereby the cognitive, emotional (affective) and behavioural (conative) aspects inter-relate to reconfigure sense of place. It also captures important outcomes like the importance of working at multiple levels of scale. While the workshops had an impact at the level of the individual, they also influenced a more collective sense of place, whereby individual senses of place overlapped to a certain extent. The importance of stage in one’s life course is also illustrated in the rich picture, with young and older people tending to notice more about their surroundings than busier mid life stage people being more distracted generally. Sharing of experiences of travel, comparison of impressions and discussing feelings about places, all helped to re-formulate individual senses of place and to create a more shared collective perspective.
Figure 22  Rich picture illustrating the cognitive, affective and conative aspects of sense of place (line drawings Marshall, 2014)
Social learning processes seek to enable worldviews to be articulated, shared and potentially re-examined. The approach adopted in this research could be seen as falling into the category of ‘socio-ecological systems’ or SES, in that the human aspects of place were rooted in the physical and ecological context of the town of Bolton (Berkes and Folke, 1998). There is also acknowledgement of the fact that Bolton (and indeed the NW of England) is heavily dependent upon global resources, i.e. they are nested within larger systems. Moves to broaden understandings around places need to ensure that both expert and lay views and perspectives can be shared and mutually acknowledged (Halliday and Glaser, 2011). This research brought in expertise in terms of the RoundView process in order to ground the vision within the bounds of planetary limits. Planners and others with expertise could be brought in to share their bigger picture perspective in future visioning and social learning exercises aimed at developing a more salient sense of place.

The stage of the visioning workshops when participants were asked to imagine the area in the past brought interesting insights. Participants said that this helped them see their area in a different way, making them think about how the landscape came to be as it was. This exercise thus prompted a different view of the area. This suggests that the act of deepening knowledge about place from either a natural science perspective, as discussed by Ryan (2005) or perhaps a historical one could help to shift people’s perspectives.
This research highlighted that the feelings people express about places and the meanings held are very important factors when participants make judgements about whether they are positively or negatively disposed towards places. These feelings can also be mediated by mood, which can vary a great deal over short periods of time. The internal and external stimuli experienced by people all serve to give rise to emotional states, and that includes place. This has implications for carrying out participatory processes also. Creating spaces that are relaxing, with thought about the well-being of the participants can help towards a productive session. While not always possible, paying attention to their bodily needs in terms of providing warmth, sustenance and sufficient light, helps to ensure that attention is directed towards the task and less on things that are peripheral.

Another important consideration when designing social learning opportunities to engender heightened sense of place is to ensure that there are opportunities for sensory engagement in the places. For example, this doctoral research involved an observation exercise where a walk was planned in the neighbourhood and participants were asked to experience the place in silence for a while, with the opportunity for sharing impressions later on. As one of the participants in this research was not very physically mobile, the walk did not venture very far from the community centre in which the workshops took place, but the exercise was still deemed useful by participants. Perhaps a wider range of observations would have been gained from a more extensive traverse of the area, but there were enough people and sufficient time to fill with the reflections on their feelings. The act of becoming a ‘flaneur’, strolling through places and observing the surroundings, allows participants to take notice of the sights, sounds, smells and textures of a place; to see what catches their attention, what impressions and feelings emerge from being fully present in a place (May, 1996). Tuning people into their local places or reminding them to really notice could be one of the most important aspects of developing place awareness in individuals. Then giving space to share those impressions, makes them all the more powerful because the experience is direct and immediate, hence made concrete rather than abstract (Trope and Liberman, 2010).
Immediate and reflective impressions

Turner and Turner (2006) in their work on creating virtual reality and the ways in which people feel immersed in the places created, found that there was a difference between the focus of participants’ attention depending on whether the reaction was immediate (verbalising impressions of places in real time) or whether reporting of reactions took place after the event. The time delay from assimilation of stimuli and subsequent contextualisation of these stimuli produced more meanings than the first approach, where fewer meanings were expressed. While this doctoral research was conducted in an actual (as opposed to a virtual) place, participants had the opportunity in the workshops and observation exercises to express immediate impressions and feelings, as well as chances to offer considered reflection on their perceptions in interviews and reflective diaries. Offering the opportunity for both immediate and reflective impressions to be shared helped to give a more rounded impression of places than focussing on a single mode may have done.

This finding leads to some interesting observations on attention, focus and awareness of one’s surroundings, and how that might affect the impressions formed about places. Do these aspects work as a trigger for salience? The degree of interaction with place, as well as openness to noticing, certainly emerged as a theme in this research. There was a difference between participants in terms of how much they chose to engage with their neighbourhoods. Some actively sought to use surrounding places while others chose to limit their interaction with a small number of locations and avoided interacting not only with place, but also with others inhabiting those places.

An understanding that our place experiences are mainly embodied suggests that efforts are made when designing participatory processes, that they take account of this by ensuring that experiential aspects are not ignored nor obscured by the cognitive aspects of social learning. Collective and embodied activities were identified by Jupp (2007) as being important steps in aiding the development of new relationships between people, which could be seen as a key outcome of social learning processes.
Who is involved?

In this research, the viewpoints shared were largely from a lay perspective as it was with local residents, but within that group of people, high levels of expertise in certain areas was revealed. This highlights the latent knowledge embedded in communities that can benefit the wider group. For example, one participant was a bee keeper and he shared some of his expertise about landscapes that bees preferred with the group, which stimulated discussion about the way the landscape could be better designed and managed with bees in mind. While not necessarily deemed to be ‘experts’ in the formal sense, people in the group held information about the place that would be difficult for others to access. This tacit knowledge which they have picked up through their everyday embodied practice of either involvement or knowing others who are (so being part of networks) can only be tapped if some thought is given to the design of social learning processes for the information to flow. However mundane it may seem, having regular refreshment breaks can help to stimulate the flow of such information, albeit in an unmanaged and serendipitous way (Hardill and Baines, 2011; Jupp, 2012).

The use of the RoundView exercise (Tippett et al., 2009) within the second workshop was designed to embed sustainability thinking into the process in an interactive and discursive manner so that a shared understanding of basic ecological processes and systems could be gained in a relatively short space of time. This was done so that the vision was grounded and not simply a product of fantasy. Time was then spent on continuing working on the vision, re-evaluating the implications of having a sustainability focus. This reflective and iterative process, with discussion by the participants throughout, as they tried to make sense of and understand the implications of future changes to their neighbourhood, the surrounding landscape and forces operating at even larger scales, such as climate change.
An assets-based approach to planning starts by focussing on what people already have and what is valued and working well in an area. This helps to create a sense of possibility and to foster creative thinking about how best to use existing resources (Kretzmann and McKnight, 1993). When working with communities, often they have particular problems in the locality that are long standing and really cause annoyance to people, for example littering and dog fouling. When trying to create a vision, it is very easy for the process to turn into a critique of what is not currently working which can stymie creative thinking about what people actually want to see. In contrast, an asset-based approaches enables creativity to come to the fore as people discuss different ways of moving towards the place they want (Tippett, 2005b; Briggs, 2004). While the problems obviously need addressing, it is much more productive to focus upon what they wish to see. So rather than saying ‘no litter’, it is more constructive to state that the vision should be of ‘clean streets’ and that refuse bins are provided or that incentives to deal with waste more productively are highlighted.

Focussing on assets can also foster pride in the local area. East Bolton has a somewhat negative image in the rest of the town who characterise it as quite deprived and subject to crime. All the participants were aware of this as they referred to it in interviews, and some were defensive about it. Shelley, in particular, was very negative about the place on occasions but often contradicted negative comments straight after making them. Such ambivalent feelings were expressed frequently, giving further weight to the idea of the fluid nature of place feelings mentioned earlier in this chapter, that can oscillate between the positive and negative.
Summary of research findings for research question 2:

In what ways can social learning impact upon the dynamics of sense of place?

- Consciousness of sense of place can be made more salient to people if time is taken to notice and experience places in a social learning setting.

- It is important to encompass immediate impressions and build-in space for reflection if thoughts are to be contextualised fully.

- Residents are repositories of tacit knowledge, which can be tapped into during the course of participatory processes. Sometimes, outside expertise can be brought in to broaden the issues being considered or allow for different angles to be explored than might not emerge otherwise, but attention needs to be paid to the power dynamics of the group and the way questions are asked, to prevent this from unduly affecting the results.

- Consideration should be given to ensuring inclusiveness and avoiding *a-priori* assumptions about communities and their characteristics, as these can often be misleading and limiting.
Research question 3:

Can a more salient sense of place affect people’s attitudes towards and behaviour within their local area?

In this section, the discussion is based around the implications of making sense of place more salient. Any change in peoples’ perceptions and feelings towards places and concomitant alterations in how people use and behave in places and about places is examined. Some of the desirable outcomes from participatory processes could include less tangible outcomes such as knowledge production, but even less obvious ones that could be termed as personal transformation. Using the local environment to a greater extent, for example, local shops, or green spaces, might be deemed to be an outcome and this was explored in the follow-up interviews with participants, and also through the reflective diaries kept.

Encouragement of others to engage with place and generally having a greater appreciation of the affordances available within it, are some of the more understated aspects of what could be termed ‘conscientisation’ of place. Mohan (1999) points out that most knowledge is ‘non-linguistic, tacit and generated in practice’ (Mohan, 1999 pg12). Jupp’s broad definition of activism as being “everyday collective, embodied practices, which could draw people into new relationships over time” (Jupp, 2007 pg2841), is used to ensure that the more subtle nuances of behavioural and attitudinal change is acknowledged. These draw upon feminist perspectives whereby activism is also seen relationally, in that sociability and trust are recognised as capacities that help build the capacity of others as well as those who are active in this way (Jupp, 2012).

As mentioned in the literature review, there is an assumption that strong sense of place may translate into some form of activism. However, Soini et al. (2012) examined residents living at the rural / urban interface in terms of their sense of place and found that where emotional commitment was evidenced, there was still only a weak link between sense of place and willingness to become involved in community action. Capacity for activism is complex and will be related to many factors that are physical, temporal, social, environmental as well as psychological.
Self-efficacy

In this research, most people said that they felt that they did not feel like they had an influence over events happening in their locality, but when pressed, actually realised that they had made a difference either themselves or by association with others who were active. The reasons for this are not easy to explain as people had clearly seen tangible results from their efforts in the past. The actions may have been unspectacular to witness, for example, contacting a local councillor to discuss plans for house building on a former school site, but had been effective nonetheless once a number of arguments had been presented and passed on to the planning committee. Perhaps people interpreted the question about involvement in the community as being something of a prominent and high profile nature, like being an elected councillor or leader of a group, rather than someone working more in the background at a local church or helping to run a wildlife club for children on a local nature reserve. These examples still count as activism, as they involve those enduring, caring and support functions identified by Jupp (2012) as being vital ‘capacities’ that may lead to change in the longer term.

Willingness to engage has parallels with the notion of social capital, as outlined by Putnam (1995) and also with Bandura’s (1997) work on self-efficacy and also interest in the place and the issues arising i.e. does it relate to them personally or the people they associate with? Scannell and Gifford (2013) took these ideas forward looking at place attachment and how it related to communicating climate change messages. They concluded that locally relevant messages directed at people that demonstrate attachment to place, are more effective in inspiring action than more general messages. Thus, providing information that people can relate to is key to getting a message across and stimulating action. A number of participants in this doctoral research, when asked about how they would feel about changes to their places, commented that they would only react if it impinged on them directly. Others however, had a more extended view of the impact of changes and stated that they would potentially take action for the benefit of the whole community. When it came to actual participation in forms of community organising and action, those that were active did, unsurprisingly, have a strong personal interest in their activities. On reflection, it would have been useful to inquire as to what had prompted their initial involvement in their various activities. In some cases, the reasons were family tradition of involvement, in Girl Guiding or existing associations with church groups.
Lefebvre’s (1991) characterisation of the social production of space as described in practical terms by Carp (2008) in her work on the education of planners has parallels to this doctoral research in terms of how different modes of engagement are required. Working only in the abstract domain (which often happens in formal planning processes) is insufficient to gain a rounded appreciation of space. Drawing on the senses and the lived experience of participants Lefebvre’s ‘representation of space’ and ‘representational space’ (Carp describes these as ‘conceived’ and ‘lived’ space, respectively) could serve to orientate planners more fully towards the needs and aspirations of communities. This doctoral research suggests that using multi-sensory approaches that address multiple intelligences through social learning can indeed provide more raw materials for planners to work with, which may in turn lead to more responsive planning.

An Australian study by Cameron et al (2004) had a strong normative focus and aimed to help build a ‘place responsive society’ facilitated by a variety of professionals such as conservationists, community workers and environmental educators. In this project, place responsiveness is defined as:

“a society whose institutions and customs nurture and support a rich, deep connection with land and place” (Cameron, 2003 pg99).

The project focussed on place because it is a concept around which people can understand and contribute. Multiculturalism is also a big issue in Australia with sensitivities around its history of immigration and the treatment of its indigenous peoples. The study also had a bioregional approach, which focussed on natural boundaries rather than administrative ones. A key feature of this project was its long-term nature. The dialogue and the stories told between participants in the region was seen as crucial for working towards the goal of creating a place responsive society, as it made the symbolic explicit, in ways that traditional engagement methods do not. The deeply participative, long-term dialogue and sharing of experience approach looks to systemic change in actors, while traditional means of engagement such as public meetings and consultation exercises are more focussed on informing or getting feedback quickly so that it can inform prescribed procedures.
Taylor and Littleton (2006) in their work on identity have stated that even biographical accounts provided by research participants are to a large degree both ‘shaped and constrained’ by the meanings which prevail within the larger society, recognising that people are not isolated individuals but are subject to validations in relation to societal norms. Manzo and Perkins (2006) work looks at the dynamics between the individual and wider society - so-called ‘intra-psychic’ phenomena. They assert that the emotional aspect of place is often neglected in participatory processes and in so doing, misses an important aspect that could make community planning more ‘grounded’. This doctoral research probed quite extensively on the emotions tied to places in the before and after interviews but less so in the workshops, perhaps because the workshops themselves usually required the participants to provide the material to be discussed. If the workshops had been of a longer duration and the participants had increased opportunities to form more extensive relationships, emotions may have been a more prominent feature, although emotions were an element amongst other aspects discussed.

The interviews were directed by the researcher who specifically asked about emotions evoked by particular places. However, in the workshops, the direction of the discussion was more directed by the participants, so although emotions were mentioned, they were somewhat subordinated by the pre-occupations of the participants, which tended to be more focussed on the physical attributes of places, certainly within the activities such as the Ketso visioning exercise which looked at the two scales of the neighbourhood and the borough of Bolton as a whole. The discussions over refreshments may have addressed emotional issues around place to a greater extent, given the less formal setting, but the dialogue was not recorded for analysis. With hindsight, more attention to the emotional aspects of place could have been designed into the workshops, given the importance researchers have suggested that this aspect has (Manzo, 2005; Barkley, 2011; Stewart et al., 2013).

Participants in this research who had moved into the area from other parts of Bolton or from further afield, certainly made much more of an effort to interact positively with their local places. This could be in part because they knew fewer people there at the outset, and so having a much reduced social support network forced them to forge new links and relationships. It could be said that the attachments of the newcomers were somewhat
stronger as a result of the time and emotional investment made to feel part of the community. Therefore, being pro-active and consciously using places to meet your needs, was part of the process of developing sense of place for some participants. For those who had always been living in the area, it could be said that they tended to take for granted their places because they did not need to expend much energy in creating social bonds, as they existed as a by-product of their long length of residence there. Those who had moved away to study seemed adept at this.

Albert et al. (2012) identify a number of elements that contribute towards social learning and which could be built-on, beyond the participative process. These include the integration of tacit and formal knowledge, being able to recognise complexity, the bringing forth of different perspectives, outlining potential future pathways of development, thinking through potential futures and evaluating the desirability of these (Albert et al., 2012) From enacting these processes within the workshops, participants also are forming relationships with others that may continue beyond the scope of the process so that potential friendships and alliances may develop.

These less obvious changes could include general efficacy such as feeling more connected to the place and others using it, taking more notice of the surroundings, and the likelihood of further involvement in local affairs. More obvious indications of behaviour and attitudinal change could be taking responsibility for the status of the area in some way by joining a group that cares for aspects of places and the people within them, notifying authorities of problems rather than expecting others to do so, or lobbying local politicians on matters of concern. Higher levels of activism may manifest as involvement in various levels of consultation with institutions, where others set the agenda, through to actually initiating or supporting initiatives that aim to put their own views and energy forward, perhaps with new agenda. This could be linked with issues, place or both (Leino and Laine, 2012; May, 2011; Nash and Lewis, 2006). One of the most striking outcomes reported by a participant in this research was for Shelley to put herself forward for chairing a new group (set up by a local social housing provider) to connect together local community groups in order for them to have joint events in one of the wards included in the study area.
The issue of salience of places is interesting when looking at planning, as it is primarily focussed upon land-use and choices about where development should take place. Some might argue that people are more likely to get involved in planning because of particular ‘issues’ that interest them more than the fact that they inhabit a place. It is actually hard to separate ‘issues’ from ‘places’ when looking at planning as the two concepts overlap somewhat. The salience of issues, in many instances, could be seen to have a complementary focus to that of place salience, with the difference being the former could be aspatial and more far reaching and the latter more parochial. In terms of what this means when looking at public involvement in planning, Marres (2007) states that ‘articulation of the issues’ is what public participation is all about.

Leino and Laine (2012) take this forward in a case study in the Finland. They emphasise the fact that people get involved primarily because they are interested in an issue but that it is institutions that frame issues and it can be difficult for people to influence that. The relationship with institutions was also highlighted by the larger policy contexts which frame options and possibilities at the more local level (see also Huxley, 2000). Gallent and Robinson (2010), looking at the ‘localism’ agenda in England, also identified a disconnection between communities and planning processes. Communities wish to see their input taken on board but this is often not visible or the input is not acted upon. This can be demoralising for participants who have given up their time to get involved in place-shaping and may explain why participatory processes are sometimes not well attended.

The implications of a more salient sense of place can be negative. People may feel hurt by change and perhaps more depressed at their lack of influence, and feel disempowered as the enormity of some of the challenges are revealed. The potential for social support offered by participatory process will not suit everyone and could in fact lead to more alienation. One of the younger participants in this study felt that the responsibility of getting involved in local politics, in particular, was fraught with problems. The worries mainly stemmed from the fact that she felt only a few people really cared and so it was inevitably going to be demoralising to try and convince others about the value of assets that they probably did not value as much as she did.
What people do and how they behave.

The literature review touched on the communicative turn in planning and here the practical implications of this are considered. Local authorities, and other agents, routinely employ participative techniques in order to fulfil legal obligations to inform and involve the public, in planning, for example. Some argue that the institutionalisation of participation has made it into an exploitative endeavour as power relations have become ingrained and whereby people can be manipulated or managed (Cooke and Kothari, 2001; Pain and Kindon, 2007).

Campbell (2012) takes planning researchers to task (also social policy research and academics in general) for overemphasising analysis at the expense of synthesis. Real world problems need solutions and she argues that much academic work tends to look back at what has been done and offers critique (which is important) but does not really help to decide what needs to be done to tackle the normative issues (i.e. what ought to be done) with which planning is concerned, such as deprivation and poor quality environments. This research, carried out in Bolton, is normative in that the vision is consciously situated within a context of a sustainable future. This was facilitated by taking participants through RoundView exercises, which purposefully looked at the earth as an essentially closed system, highlighting the natural cycles of growth and decay that take place, but also the role of humans as significant actors in these cycles. Campbell calls for deliberative spaces to be made available for academics to develop research programmes with those at the sharp end, in order to ensure that the pressing needs of planners and other policy makers are worked through, with a view to providing some ways forward. She also highlights the tendency for pessimism in much social research and argues that it is safer for academics to dismiss endeavours such as those done in the normative orientated communicative and social justice research arenas as naive (Campbell, 2012).

Better knowledge about the linkages between sense of place and community action could be utilised in the planning arena but also it has been identified as being useful in natural resource management, helping with policy development, implementation and acceptability by the public (Jorgensen and Stedman, 2006).
Outside of the planning arena, Oakley discusses the “need to develop a common knowledge space and a common language” (Oakley, 2003 pg93) and suggests that forms by which it could happen could be through the creation of formal ‘observatories’ which could gather diverse forms of evidence and insights from people, whether that be sharing oral histories and personal testimonies through to developing local economic models.

When thinking about who should be involved in planning debates and whether it is practical or desirable, a study by Chipeniuk (1999) highlighted some interesting findings. He asserts that argumentation is an inherent part of planning and that there is a necessity for debate so that assumptions can be challenged. He analysed the process of the Lands for Life project in Ontario and found that the root causes of degradation were not articulated and that those with expertise failed in their duty to elaborate on these. He believes that:

‘Sooner or later planning will have to face up to underlying causes. If it does not, if members of the public continue to lack useful explanations for why the environment is deteriorating, sustainability will be a lost cause’(Chipeniuk, 1999 pg104).

In his study, planners and others with expertise were involved in facilitating participatory processes and could bring in factual information to share with the public involved. He argues that conceptions around environmental degradation are not well understood and that people can bring erroneous information to the table, which needs challenging. This resonates with the current research undertaken in Bolton in so far as the RoundView exercise allowed participants to learn about and discuss the implications of viewing their locality in the framework of a system nested within much larger ones.

This issue of whether expertise is required in a social learning process an important one and it is clear that the purposes of gathering people together in a participatory process needs to be articulated and made clear at the outset. If the group is looking for solutions to a problem, then it is argued that some expertise is needed in order to give participants information and tools from which to search for potential solutions.
However, in the case of this doctoral research, the main aim was to share stories of place and increase awareness of the functions and meanings associated with the landscape at a range of scales, so while expertise was brought in (in terms of going through the RoundView process) it was the shared expertise of the residents – of what it was like for them inhabiting that area - that was largely tapped into and shared. The process initiated in Bolton did not have a particular ‘problem’ to solve, but was focussed on a future that they would like to see, albeit a more sustainable future. This required some knowledge of the interaction of human and natural systems in order to think of features that may go towards a more sustainable locality.

The ‘communicative turn’ in planning has influenced not only that arena but also that of Natural Resource Management. Cheng et al (2003) call for professionals working in that field to pay greater attention to interpretive methods if a wider range of voices is to be heard.

‘As natural resource social scientists proceed, systematic exploration of place-based natural resource decision processes needs to be vigilant and have a strong ethical core, for these are real places, real pieces of land, and real people’s values that are at stake’

(Cheng et al., 2003 pg101)

So what use can a heightened sense of place be in practical terms? Kaltenborn (1998) looked at whether sense of place was a useful construct when considering environmental impact assessment (EIA) which is a statutory requirement when certain major developments are proposed. He concluded that if empirical measurements of the construct could be developed, then sense of place could provide valuable depth to EIA studies, which at the time, did not sufficiently capture the importance and value that place meanings had for people. It may be that heightened sense of place serves to enhance citizenship as it may encourage reflection on the responsibilities that one has as a resident and neighbour in a locality.
The ‘New Labour’ government under Tony Blair brought in policies around devolution which were a response to globalisation, but these initiatives had a mixed reception from the population. There were proposals for increased self-governing of the countries that make up the United Kingdom, but also entities at the regional scale – assemblies and development agencies – that were implemented early on into the administration’s term of office. While Wales and Scotland largely welcomed some of these initiatives and embraced them, the English regions had a less positive take on the idea, with administrative regions being an unpopular tier of government with voters, who saw them as unnecessary and remote. Alongside these, New Labour developed many initiatives, deriving from communitarian ideals, which sought to empower and give voice to communities (Imrie and Raco, 2003; North, 2003).

Cole (2011) talks about the paradox of localist policy that is being promoted by central government i.e. top down, but that there is lack of enthusiasm for it at the local level. This perspective is also supported by Raine and Staite (2012) in their reflections on the Localism Act of 2011. They argue that the legislation actually entrenches centralism as vital prerequisites for more local autonomy are missing from the Act. Taking the regional tier of government in England as an example, the populations within them largely failed to identify with regions and this may have something to do with their somewhat artificial nature, in that they have boundaries that people would not necessarily associate with or feel part of. Some regions, however, fitted onto a long held identity and established name, for example Yorkshire, and there seemed to be more support than the more artificially titled regions. From this doctoral research, a number of people commented on the fact that they did not feel an affinity for the North West region, nor for that matter, Greater Manchester (which was a boundary imposed in the 1970s with local government reform), which included parts of the county palatine of Lancashire and Cheshire. Certainly, the participants in this research much preferred the historic categorisation of Lancashire than that of the North West region. So historic boundaries seem to hold significance for people and can be strongly defended in the face of proposed changes or used in contexts that people do not believe they should.
There has been a focus thus far on formal planning processes utilising the sense of place construct, but there is scope for its use in more informal settings. Groups in civil society could make use of social learning processes to foster an enhanced sense of place. For example, groups such as Transition Towns and Civic Voice, where the sustainability and heritage of local areas, respectively, are their main interest. Local policies and projects around nature conservation such as Local Biodiversity Action Plans could benefit by building more interest in the issues at hand (Shipley and Michela, 2006).

**Social capital and place**

The link between social capital and place has been investigated by the researchers Hanna *et al.* (2009). Social capital seems to rely on the ability to form relationships, so opportunities to do this are necessary. The question is, how can place facilitate or militate against this? Places can provide a milieu for interaction and therefore give scope for the increase in social capital. Some of the participants in this study bemoaned the lack of communal spaces. Fewer local shops (as a result of retail moving to more car friendly locations) mean that there is less opportunity for encounters in the neighbourhood. A concomitant impact is also on those who are disenfranchised from car ownership (particularly the young) is that the people more likely to be encountered are youth, leading to a skewing of the social and generational mix of people seen walking on the streets. This can be seen in the decline of town centres and the proliferation of edge of town leisure and retail facilities (Hanna *et al.*, 2009).

Peel and Bailey (2003) celebrate community activism, which takes many forms and one of the conclusions arrived at after interviewing many activists was that sharing information was important as people often had little idea what was going on in localities. This can also serve to bring in more people and help to towards bridging social capital.

Another finding was that activism sometimes was borne out of social activities, which could be an indication that it is interaction that is a key aspect. This emphasises the importance
of ensuring that information and outcomes are disseminated in some way. This could be via social media as well as more traditional forms of communication.

**Negative aspects of participative processes**

Dealing with conflict and differences in values and expectations is as much an issue with the more participative forms of engagement as the traditional, and these issues must not be underestimated (Cameron *et al.*, 2004). Even when there is not any particular contentious issue at stake in an area, as in this doctoral research, a diversity of opinions is expected even in the seemingly innocuous. The part of the workshops that generated the most heated discussion was the RoundView exercise whereby participants were taken through an exercise where they looked at the earth as a closed system, going through the processes of energy and nutrient cycling and looking at human impacts on the natural world. The debate was generated around the implications and people feeling like they had little power to influence global systems, such as capitalism, and how that impacts on daily lives. Part of the purpose of the workshops was to make people more aware of places and to make connections with each other and to have an awareness of the way their places functioned.

The issue of who is involved in these processes and the opposite of this – who is excluded, is one that must be addressed. Many will not want to take part in such processes, but equally, they might not want the outcomes proposed by certain groups. For example, ‘Transition Town’ groups, which are collections of people who may well take advantage of the localism agenda, may be a minority in an area, but through their desire for a localised economy and more ecologically aware approach to living, could drive agendas forward which the majority of the populace may not welcome.
The contestation of issues, particularly land use, is where the planning system tries to mediate. Creating more vocal and active citizenry could conceivably make the job of planners more difficult (particularly in the short to medium term when the relationship with central government is still prescribed). Outside of the planning arena, a more engaged citizenry could re-invigorate local life by increased involvement in the day to day life of a town or neighbourhood.

Traditional planning formats designed to fulfil requirements for public participation such as public meetings, could put off many people from getting involved, particularly if they require people to speak out loud or to feel exposed, and therefore, vulnerable. Many do not possess sufficient civic capacity or confidence to articulate their feelings in a public domain (Swearingen-White, 2001; Brandenburg and Carroll, 1995). Therefore, alternative ways in which people can give their views and make a contribution to planning processes, will allow a wider cross section of people to potentially have their say. This view is echoed by Brandenburg and Carroll (1995) who gained valuable insights into alternative strategies for managing a local river from a participatory process they ran with rural residents delving into different ways of dealing the drainage issues. They commented that using non-traditional participatory methodologies could reveal the social and cultural nuances that go into making places that are meaningful and important to people (Brandenburg and Carroll, 1995).

It could be argued that planners and other community workers could have an important supporting and facilitation role in communicating the wishes of residents to planning authorities:

"Embedding stakeholder participation in official planning strategies as part of a transdisciplinary effort could lead to a win-win-situation for all people involved. It could help to actively plan landscapes instead of reacting to conflicts that could have been avoided” (Tress and Tress, 2003 pg175)

The purpose for initiating any kind of participatory project needs to be articulated clearly so that all those involved know why they are participating. Some of the negative reports from participatory processes have been because the use to which their efforts have been put is unclear (Fraga, 2006). Also, what happens with any knowledge or views generated?
Summary of research findings for research question 3:

Can a more salient sense of place affect people’s attitudes towards, and behaviour within, their local area?

- Making the tacit knowledge of participants explicit through social learning may be an important pre-requisite for action. The role of emotion and feelings about place is acknowledged as being key to unlocking people’s senses of place.

- Self-efficacy of participants can be increased through a more salient sense of place, whether that is overt activism or the more subtle embodied forms of social support that help build the foundations for social capital.

- A more salient sense of place could be a valuable resource for planners, decision-makers, regeneration professionals, and communities themselves, as they find ways of building sustainable places in challenging times.
Reflections on the research

As demonstrated in the preceding sections, the study successfully addressed the three research questions. However, there are a number of issues relating to the research and possible future research agendas that are worthy of mention.

The first such issue relates to engaging participants to take part in the study. Those enrolled onto this research project were recruited from the local community by a number of means that included: the researcher attending local community facilities such as libraries, tenants and residents group, and sports/recreation venues. A large number of people were asked to get involved in the research, but the majority declined. Consideration of how much time it would take was a key factor in people deciding not to get involved. Possibly fear of the unknown was also a factor. Therefore, the demands on time and the novelty (and possibly anxiety) of the situation make involvement in such research, particularly involving novel participatory processes risky for people in terms of their level of comfort and practical ability to contribute. There was more success in terms of involvement where participants knew someone else who was taking part. Safety in numbers and mutual support may therefore be important when considering recruiting people to such events.

Another issue which was of concern to the researcher was the age profile of participants. There was only one participant who was in his 30s, making this age-bracket the least represented in the research. The most frequent age range was the 60s, perhaps reflecting the newly retired and most energetic sub-section of the elderly end of the spectrum. There were also few participants with young children. Most of the older people had children, and grandchildren, but none of the younger participants had children. Parents of younger children have fewer opportunities to get involved in civic life owing to the demands on their time and energy. Work demands can be particularly heavy for those in the 30s age group.
Accessing such people proved difficult. With hindsight, the researcher could have been more pro-active in ensuring that this age range was included. Approaching local employers would have been one way of recruiting participants. Therefore, the findings of this research need to be tempered by the knowledge that an important demographic is missing. The researcher employed the snowball method of recruiting participants, so perhaps it is not surprising that people asked others who were a similar demographic. Although this research did not set out to be completely representative of society, future research in this area would benefit from ensuring that people mid-stage of their life-course can access and be enabled to take part in participatory opportunities. This issue echoes many planning processes that can miss out on key demographics because of timing issues.

A number of people agreed to be interviewed initially, with a small number declaring that they did not wish to have further involvement in the research. It is useful to reflect on who took part and the reasons why people did not continue their participation. Only two participants stated that they did not wish to take part in the workshops. These women were in their 60s and were highly active in their communities and had been for a number of years. They were well versed in various programmes and initiatives run by the local authority and the ‘council housing’ provider. One of these participants stated that taking part in workshops made her angry. She had many stories of past participation where neither feedback nor results had been communicated back, and more importantly, that there had been little evidence of change. Many researchers have noted the phenomenon of ‘consultation fatigue’ (Thomas et al, 1998).

As part of this research inquired into people’s activism, there is the possibility that the people who were motivated to take part may well demonstrate a kind of bias in that the very act of participation suggests a certain degree of self-efficacy. Some participants were indeed active in various community settings such as church-based groups and the Girl Guides, but almost all of the participants in the initial interviews had not been involved in a research project before, nor had they attended participatory workshops. The self-efficacy of the researcher to ensure greater participation could be called into question.
A more concerted effort to encourage people to continue beyond the initial interview may have yielded a greater number of workshop attendees. Many people had agreed in principle to attend the workshops, but with hindsight, the researcher needed to follow up that initial assent more forcefully. Potential fears could have been allayed and a more personal touch may have prompted a greater commitment to become involved. The fact that people knew that the process was part of an academic exercise and would not result in actual changes on the ground, may have put people off pledging their time.

Acknowledgment that people’s time is precious and that their involvement will count, carries weight when recruiting participants. People are asked for feedback and their opinions in many areas of life now, so people can be put off when the benefits to them are not tangible (Jupp, 2007; Ericson, 2006). The reasons for non-participation are multiple. Swearingen-White (2001) examined the reasons why people did or did not engage with initiatives and identified a number of factors such as civic capacity, trust, interest in the issue, past experience and history of dealing with agencies and institutions, as contributing to the ability and motivation people have to take part in participatory processes (Swearingen-White, 2001)

A related concern in this reflection on the research process is that of whether the sample was already highly connected to place by the fact of their participation. Could it be that those who had little interest in place and were less connected were those who either refused to take part at all, or whether the ones who only took part in the initial stages but then dropped out? It is not possible to definitively answer this, but the researcher feels that the interviews did reveal attachment to place – quite strongly in some cases. The fact that the initial interviews had revealed strong place attachment in some of the interviewees who did not take part in the later stages suggests that other factors were at work preventing participation.
An approach taken by Stewart et al (2013) aims to gather place meanings and values together so that these can be recognised and hence legitimised as well as helping people to share their thoughts on places. They felt it important to deflect the focus from people onto place in the ‘learning circles’ they brought together. This was felt to be highly positive and their method entailed asking people to bring along photographs of places so that these form the basis for description and discussion in the group. The dialogue was recorded and then fed back to the participants by means of a booklet. It was felt that this method was highly effective at bringing out a range of place meanings. The fact that participants decide on which images to bring, gives power to them rather than researchers deciding what is acceptable or otherwise – what they describe as being a ‘stakeholder-stakeholder’ rather than ‘stakeholder – planner’ interaction (Stewart et al., 2013). They recognise a potential danger in the method is that they may create a social norm to be positive about place; however this could be tempered by asking participants to bring a positive and a negative picture from their place.

As well as being many aspects of this research that could have been carried out more effectively, there are also other avenues of research that this one has highlighted. Working on a live project with real outcomes would be of great interest to practitioners in particular. Although this research had the benefit of taking place over a longer period of time than most PhD studies would allow, instituting ongoing social learning processes and observing the outcomes would be interesting and add more depth to the issues raised in this study. Funding would be needed in order to hire community space, so a partnership with an organisation would be needed in order to access such resources.

Inclusion of planners and other people with expertise to work alongside residents in similar social learning processes, would allow all parties to reflect on their roles. This is potentially a risky avenue for research as things could go wrong but as long as the participants were committed to a social learning approach and open to scrutiny (mainly their own of themselves) it could prove to be a fruitful exercise. Similar studies have been undertaken with planners and various stakeholder groups, such as Ison and Watson (2007) but fewer longer term studies have been carried out, particularly with place meanings as a focus.
This research made manifest a number of interesting aspects by taking a ‘sense of place’ orientation. While it revealed many more interesting aspects worthy of investigation, the overall impression is that the sense of place construct is potentially a highly valuable one when looking at building sustainable and resilient communities. The study was very small scale but has the potential to assist planners and citizens to work better together towards shared aspirations.
Conclusion and Recommendations

This study has investigated sense of place in an everyday landscape, exploring how it might differ from studies of the phenomenon in special landscapes, which has been the focus of many previous studies in the psychology and natural resource management literatures. The relationship between sense of place and people’s behaviour within those places, whether it be overt or more subtle in form, is explored in this study. The previous sections have outlined the procedures undertaken to conduct a participatory process that draws upon social learning concepts with residents. This chapter sets out some conclusions and recommendations that can be drawn from the research.

Having sought to gain a greater understanding of what constitutes sense of place in an ordinary, unremarkable setting, an intervention was undertaken with a group of residents of East Bolton. The intervention, which consisted of a series of interactive workshops over a period of just over a year’s duration, was focussed on building a sustainable future vision for the neighbourhoods of Breightmet and Tonge, as well as at the larger scale of the Borough of Bolton as a whole and its hinterlands. This action learning setting enabled participants to learn from, and share ideas with, one another about their places. The purpose of this was to investigate the mechanisms by which sense of place might be made more salient to people and to discuss whether such interventions might influence behaviour and concern for those places. The implications of drawing on action research and social learning in order to make what is often an unarticulated sense of place more salient were also explored.
Within the context of the overall aim of exploring the relationship between sense of place and social learning with regards to perceptions and behaviour in an ordinary landscape (and discussing the implications of a more salient sense of place on place-shaping) this study set out to answer the following research questions:

**Research Question 1:** How does sense of place manifest in an ordinary, everyday landscape?

**Research Question 2:** In what ways can social learning impact upon the dynamics of sense of place?

**Research Question 3:** Can a more salient sense of place affect people’s attitudes towards, and behaviour within, their local area?

The main findings of the study, in respect of each of these three research questions, are outlined below.

**Research Question 1:** How does sense of place manifest in an ordinary, everyday landscape?

This study has shown that the manifestation of sense of place, as observed in an everyday landscape in the UK, differs only subtly from that reported in studies looking at special landscapes. One of the main differences appear to lie in the fact that the social aspects that make up of sense of place appear to be more pronounced in ordinary landscapes than special ones. This may well be because some of the respondents of studies on special places are actually visitors rather than permanently resident. Also, the visual aspects, which predominate in sense of place in special landscapes, are somewhat muted in comparison in the everyday landscape. This may have something to do with familiarity, so that they are prone to become more of a background feature than is the case in more special areas. This could also hold true for other sensory phenomena such as sounds and odours. The meanings associated with visual phenomena in special places can be very strong, compared to those in unremarkable places.
The feelings of familiarity and belonging that particularly come with associations with others in ordinary places, and forged over time, help to strengthen the bonds that people have towards places. These factors help to influence people’s identities in relation to places, but are not fixed.

Engagement with places can vary according to the stage in the life course. Some participants had very strong memories and feelings associated with childhood experiences in places. This phenomenon has been reported in other studies as being formative and having a profound influence on people in adulthood. The older participants in this study felt that ageing also impacted on their place feelings. They tended to be more reflective and also more observant of places as they had to renegotiate their use of places in the light of reduced mobility and other challenges. Therefore, stages in life course are worth further investigation in terms of the ways in which they relate to sense of place.

Another aspect of this research question was to ascertain whether ordinary places still mattered to people in a globalising world. Based on the findings from this small group of participants, the answer is a resounding ‘yes’. People cared deeply about their local places even though those perceptions could be ambivalent about what aspects they liked and disliked. Increased opportunities to travel seemed to facilitate comparison and lead to increased appreciation for local assets. Many of the participants had the option to move elsewhere but chose to remain in a part of the town of Bolton that is not well regarded in the rest of the Borough. Despite the awareness of this perception, people were keen to highlight the positive aspects of living in that area and demonstrated defensiveness about some of the negatives.
Research Question 2:
In what ways can social learning impact upon the dynamics of sense of place?

The study showed that providing social learning opportunities, particularly if such groups are able to maintain participation for extended periods of time, can make place perceptions more salient. Participants in this study reported learning things from others that they did not know about places and they gained a greater appreciation of the assets located in their local area, having been given the chance to take time from usual routines to pause and think about what they valued. One of the more significant findings to emerge from this study was the importance of scale, and how carrying out social learning activities for more than one level of scale can be beneficial in giving participants a greater sense of context for the situation of the neighbourhood or town. Participants found it difficult to appreciate some places at the very local scale because they had limited experience of it, given imprecise boundaries and also lack of physical engagement with much of the local area.

Scaling the level of interest up to the town, particularly the town centre that everyone related to meant that participants could share their insights with the others knowing that people knew exactly where and what they were talking about. This was certainly found to be more the case than when people were talking about specific parts of the local neighbourhood, unless it was a known focal point such as a park or location of shops. A caveat to this, however, is that focussing on the larger scale can mean moving from the concrete to the abstract, with the associated removal of feelings of personal efficacy at that level.

The elements of social learning that aided in making sense of place more salient were the sharing of perceptions and the reflection on those of others as well as one’s own. The exercises that facilitated this were mainly the iteration of an emerging vision using the Ketso kit, as well as the work done using maps (both mental maps as well as real maps of the area in the past). These exercises lent themselves to the examination of different viewpoints, possibly because there was an artefact being used and manipulated by participants with the focus on that, rather than on them as individuals. The observation
exercise was somewhat underdeveloped as a method in this research although reports from interviews indicated that being immersed in places could be an important process, particularly for bringing attention to things normally unnoticed in day to day life in a familiar setting.

Reflecting on the methods used to facilitate social learning, variety in activity as well as the revisiting of previous activities in the light of new insights generated by deliberation and sharing of stories, was deemed important. This allowed framing of issues to be adjusted as people considered alternative viewpoints.
**Research Question 3:**

*Can a more salient sense of place affect people’s attitudes towards, and behaviour within, their local area?*

Whilst, given the relatively small number of participants, this study could not fully confirm that a more salient sense of place affects people’s attitudes and behaviour, it did lend support to claims in the literature that having an attachment to and appreciation of place can make someone disposed to caring for that place because their perceptions had been shifted somewhat by the experience of social learning. It is fair to say that this study has shown that perceptions were shifted to varying degrees so that the salience of sense of place was brought to the forefront of people’s minds. Asserting causal effects of behaviour linked to particular interventions is problematic, although there was evidence that some of the participants in this study had subsequently taken some action (become involved in a community project, for example) that perhaps they would not otherwise have done.

Other findings that emerged from this study were centred around the notion of ‘self-efficacy’ and related to the extent that people felt they could appropriate space and make changes. Where people felt they could appropriate space (more often the home and garden, but sometimes places in the wider environment) they were more willing to make efforts in those places. The difference between how much people had appropriated space as children was remarkable in comparison to where people felt able to go as adults. So while they had a much wider reach in terms of where they travel as adults, that reach was often superficial compared to the depth of engagement they had with places as children.

Another finding to emerge from the study relates to identity formation (in relation to place) and how articulation of place perceptions, mainly through the visioning process, served to reaffirm and remould these. Discussing perceptions of the place that did not accord with their own permitted new ones that were more positive to be brought forward. Being faced with the many assets identified during the visioning process, an increased confidence in
places filtered into the language used, which was more positive. Sharing and articulating these aspects were key to bringing other, more positive, perspectives to the fore.

Taken together, the research questions posed in this research have provided some evidence that scale and consideration of issues at a range of scales is important for helping people to situate themselves in an interconnected world and also to give both a ‘local’ and ‘larger-scale’ frame of reference. The study has gone some way towards enhancing our understanding of sense of place in an ordinary, everyday landscape and given insights into the ways in which social learning opportunities can affect the salience of place perceptions for those involved in such processes. As society faces problems that are global in nature, such as climate change and resource limitations, solutions will be needed at all levels of scale. People’s lifestyles and choices are a part of that, so micro-level, everyday decisions about how to travel, what to eat, what to do about waste, have an impact globally as well as locally. Social norms are very powerful and so debating these in place-focussed settings and sharing perceptions of how places matter, as well as thinking about possible futures for a locality, could contribute towards increased activism and care.

In terms of theory, this study has come from the perspective of systems thinking which seeks to have an appreciation of the interconnectedness of the physical and the social. Sense of place is a messy and complicated construct that encompasses many different facets. Social learning, particularly the multiple loops that are possible when people step back from routine behaviour to consider a wider context for their actions and to reflect on what this means, can potentially be a powerful tool for change. Those changes at the cognitive level may, in turn, effect change at the societal level as well. While this study was too small to demonstrate changes at that level, it has gone some way towards illustrating the possibility of an expanded and more salient sense of place, which could well be a precursor to action. That action may be at the level of providing social support for others, through to more outwardly recognisable forms of activism.
Contribution to knowledge

Theory

A key finding was that sense of place can be made more salient for people in ‘ordinary’ landscapes through social learning processes, particularly if people are given direct experience of their places and opportunities to share and reflect on their perceptions relating to place.

The sense of place construct, seen from a systems thinking perspective, provides insights into the ways in which people perceive themselves as part of larger systems – those of nature and of society. More specifically, issues around levels of scale came out of this study as being important. The finding that people do not tend to identify as well at the neighbourhood level of scale than they do at the borough level implies that working at the local scale needs to be combined with activity and visioning at a larger level of scale in order to be meaningful and effective in terms of making the most of people’s sense of place in planning. It confirms other research that people do not tend to identify as well at the neighbourhood level (Hidalgo and Hernandez, 2001), and is potentially a policy relevant finding of this research. Planning for sustainability needs to be carried out at nested levels of scale, so that the local informs, and is informed by, the landscape level of scale. Working at nested levels of scale may be more effective than working at just the local level of scale (as encouraged by the current shift towards localism) for engaging people in exploring a sense of place and place meanings.
Practice

The contribution to knowledge from a practice point of view relates to the ways in which governance (particularly at the local level) can be better attuned to the citizenry. The Planning profession has been affected negatively by the contraction of the state and its public service role diminished by politicians. If more scope can be given to the advocacy role that planners were trained for, the benefits to places and the wider sustainability agenda would be better served. This may sound idealistic, but on a practical level, there are insights in this research (such as opening up channels of communication between people and local government, thinking about how and when participative events can take place so as to be more inclusive) that are valuable from a practice point of view. Also for non-planners, there are useful pointers in terms of finding out the aspirations and values of groups, in particular through allowing for an exploration of meanings, memory and the affective aspects of sense of place to surface new insights into place, and to help make people’s sense of place more salient (which will in turn potentially lead to a more engaged and active citizenry).

The research design took a deliberate decision to use a number of different participatory techniques in order to tap into different senses and to make the sessions convivial and engaging. Analysis showed that the most valuable aspect the visioning intervention was creating the space to deliberate ideas and share understanding, as this interaction and group reflective process this enabled sense of place to become more salient to participants.

It is the whole participative situation that needs to be looked at, rather than picking individual aspects when designing events. The atmosphere created is an emergent property of many factors, some of which are very basic (such as food or comfort levels). Using hands-on and visual props, such as those provided by Ketso, RoundView and historic maps, shifts the focus away from the individual and allows discussions to be shared and explained amongst groups.
Methodology

From a methodological viewpoint, this research was unusual in design as it spanned several years for the data gathering processes and action intervention (due to the part-time nature of the PhD). This allowed for a much longer timeframe than is often the case in exploring shifts in perception from an action intervention in a single research project. Interviews before and after an intervention are a common methodological design for action research, and one adopted in this project to identify changes in perspective over time. A more unusual aspect of this project was the concurrent analysis of the outcomes developed by participants in the workshop process, and the use of these physical artefacts to encourage reflection and discussion with the research participants.

A range of tools were used to facilitate social learning in the workshops. The strength of the method does not lie in the use of particular tools but in the variety and interest that utilising a range of activities to stimulate storytelling and discussion allowed. Creating a relaxed and informal setting where participants feel comfortable and confident to speak is also not to be underestimated. The activities were designed not to be threatening or difficult to engage with. Participants reported finding the activities fun and interesting. Importantly, designing in space for refreshments and non-structured interaction gave an extra dimension to the social learning opportunity, as well as power to the participants to decide what to do with those time periods between more structured activity.
Limitations of the current study and recommendations for further research

Several limitations to this study do need to be acknowledged. The number of participants that made it through the whole process (from a starting point of fourteen, to the four that remained committed to the end) was small and so the findings need to be treated with a measure of caution. A considerable commitment can often be required in social learning settings as time to form relationships with the other participants can be key to whether trust can be built up and understanding can be generated between people. This is particularly the case if the purpose of the participation is to find solutions to problems facing residents although, in this case, the visioning process was concerned with creating a future vision for the town and the locality. As such, it was somewhat abstract in that the results of the vision itself were not likely to be taken forward in a formal sense (given that it was an academic exercise for the purposes of this research). In and of itself, this is likely to have limited participation as potential participants were aware that the visioning process was unlikely to lead to any actual change on the ground.

Another potential limitation relates to the nature of people who agree to get involved in the research process. It could be the case that the kind of people who actually agree to take the commitment forward, are already quite conscious of their sense of place compared to others who were asked to participate, but declined. Finding out why people chose not to be involved in the first place, and why those who started the process did not continue all the way through, is of interest as the reasons for lack of participation are useful for designing ways to engage more people.

Given the recent legislative changes introduced by the coalition Government in England under the Localism Act 2011, further research might usefully explore the phenomena of sense of place and social learning in the context of an actual neighbourhood plan where there is a commitment to implement the findings. This would ensure that there were more participants involved, given the increased likelihood of outcomes being realised from their involvement.
In this study, the participants knew that it was an academic exercise so recruiting people to give up their time for little tangible results was quite a lot to ask. If people feel that their involvement will be fruitful, there is more chance that they will invest their time in it and give the issues more intense focus, given that it could well have a lasting impact on their neighbourhood.

Another interesting aspect for investigation would be with people who did not continue with the whole of the study, even those who declined in the first place. Finding out why people do not get involved in such initiatives would be illuminating and could help with the design of more inclusive processes. Although barriers to participation were addressed in this research in the initial interviews, further exploration of the phenomenon of non-participation would be useful. This is particularly relevant because there has been criticism that involvement in planning processes in particular have attracted what is termed as ‘the usual suspects’ and that many groups in society are marginalised and excluded. If good planning decisions are to be made and future visions realised, they will be much more inclusive and fit for purpose if a wider range of actors have had an input (Beebeejaun, 2006).

It would be interesting to know whether any lasting bonds were forged between participants as a result of involvement in social learning opportunities, as such an outcome would be strong evidence that social learning has taken place (Reed et al., 2010). There was insufficient time in this research to follow up the participants again to look into this aspect, so it would be very useful to track longer-term effects of participation to see whether their impact was merely short-term, or longer-lasting. Given that social learning theories are rooted in systemic thinking, research on iterative processes needs to follow the learning loops and the later stages of participation.
Recommendations for practice

This section sets out some thoughts, drawn from the research, on how social learning situations might be developed in order to facilitate the increased salience of sense of place amongst local residents and communities. In terms of who might be able to benefit from such findings, planners and other local authority decision-makers may be able to build into their practices a greater appreciation of place meanings and values that people ascribe to assets in their neighbourhood. The constraints that planners work under may mean that opportunities for extended periods of community engagement are uncommon (Hauser et al., 2011; Clifford, 2012). But where they do exist, the benefits for creating neighbourhoods that function better are many. In terms of specific social learning situations that might be developed in order to facilitate the articulation of values that people have in the community about their places, planners could consider the formation of workshops in localities, particularly when updating local plans. This could help ensure that valued assets, which might otherwise be disregarded from a more strategic perspective, are at least identified and put on the radar. Initiating visioning processes would also give planners and decision-makers greater insights into the aspirations of communities and allow them to be more responsive.

On another level, it might be worth exploring how the channels of communication could be developed so that any processes initiated by community groups and others might be made available to local authority officers, with a view to making local views known and therefore helping to make sure that draft strategic plans are informed by community aspirations. This may allow for a more nuanced process of plan formulation and avoid conflicts with residents and communities further down the line. This will not always be straightforward as the lack of resources, and the reduction in planning staff in local authorities as a result of public service cutbacks, militate against such initiatives being instigated.
The current UK coalition government in England (Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland having different administrative arrangements in terms of planning) has an agenda based on Localism and Neighbourhood Plans that aim to increase the say that communities have in shaping their local areas. However, there is an ongoing tension between these initiatives, which purport to increase citizen involvement in the planning system, and potentially competing drives for more development (in order to facilitate economic growth) and speedier decision-making by planning authorities. It is difficult to envisage how these aims are compatible. This research has highlighted some potential areas for good practice in terms of designing opportunities for social learning, particularly aimed towards getting more people to think about the factors that make places special to them, with a focus on the positive and existing assets. This could be of immense value in the local plan-making process, but also in situations where there are proposals for regeneration or major development. It may also be of use for groups not directly connected with planning to invest time and energy articulating their sense of place so that they are better able to contribute ideas to planning processes as and when the opportunities arise. A good example of groups likely to do this are emerging groups such as Transition Towns, which bring people together to find solutions (often with a strong localist orientation) to the global issues that will affect communities such as climate change and the impacts of increasing fuel costs.

Beyond the formal planning system, there are opportunities for creating spaces for social learning around sense of place and sustainability, whether they be in existing groups such as church congregations, schools (as part of citizenship lessons) or youth groups, or even self-organising groups where people come together on issues with a local focus. Stokowski (2002) states that places and sense of place are:

‘always in the process of being created, always provisional and uncertain, and always capable of being discursively manipulated towards desired (individual or collective) ends’.  

(Stokowski, 2002 pg368)
As stated previously, resource limits may prevent planners from instigating and running participatory processes in communities, but they may still be able to learn what is happening in an area and tap into the outcomes of these processes to inform their own efforts. It thus behoves both the local authorities to endeavour to create channels of communication from informal processes into the formal planning process; and for the groups involved in informal planning processes to endeavour to communicate the results of their deliberations and thoughts to the local authority. Such on-going, two-way communication would not only help to better embed place meanings into the planning process, but would also help build a sense of trust over time as people felt that their ideas and efforts in informal processes were appreciated and had value. This in turn could help reduce ‘consultation fatigue’ and make it easier to recruit participants into the planning process when community members’ views are being sought.

Having a focus on sense of place and appreciating the multiple values that people ascribe to places especially if a vision is produced, could help inform planners working with communities to identify what aspects of place are deemed to be of particular value. Thereby, ensuring that these assets are given prominence when advocating on behalf of such communities or developing plans for their neighbourhoods. This research worked with residents, but involving planners and other decision-makers and stakeholders in the social learning process as participants could help break down some of the ‘them and us’ barriers that frequently exist between experts and lay groups.

This is potentially resource-heavy in terms of time. But there would be benefits in the increased understanding of the constraints and limitations that planners are all too aware of, but that civic groups may be less conscious of, and ultimately in terms of better relations between planning authorities and local residents. A caveat to this, however, would be that the process presented in this research aimed to be positive in its vision and focussed on valued assets. With a more contentious planning process, there may be a danger of negativity dominating the discussions, leading to anger and despair at seemingly intractable issues.
In terms of the tools used in this research to facilitate social learning, most of the activities were low cost and easily resourced (maps, flipchart paper and pens for drawing, for example). Proprietary toolkits such as Ketso and Roundview used in the workshops for this research do have a cost implication but there are alternatives which could be utilised instead such as planning for real or photo elicitation. The competence and creativity of facilitators counts for a lot in terms of making workshops engaging and productive. For planning departments and community groups, the greatest cost is going to be staffing time, venue hire and refreshments. The potential benefits to community cohesion and better planning outcomes relative to resources needed to run sense of place workshops could be considerable however.

While space for deliberation must be open to dealing with negative feelings, the aim should therefore be on being creative when looking at solutions, and focussing on the future that people wish to see in their localities, as a guiding principle. Negotiation is a key part of deliberation and thus conflict and disagreement are to be expected and not avoided.

This research has demonstrated that sense of place is a useful construct, despite the myriad meanings and complexity of the concept. The participants in this research confirmed the importance of ordinary places, even in a context of increasing globalisation. Social learning, particularly the articulation of perceptions and feelings about places and the opportunity to reflect and share thoughts through visioning and using maps, served to make sense of place more salient to them in terms of shifting their perceptions. The impact on how people use and behave in places is difficult to demonstrate in a relatively short-term study but the experiences that emerged may sow the seeds for action in the longer term.
References


Broadbent, J (2014) Original pencil drawing of special and ordinary landscape.


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Appendix

PhD Research: Participant Information Sheet

You are being invited to take part in a research study as part of a PhD project. Before you decide it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Please ask if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Take time to decide whether or not you wish to take part. Thank you for reading this.

Who will conduct the research? Ann Kolodziejski, Planning & Landscape, SED, Arthur Lewis Building, University of Manchester, Oxford Rd, Manchester. M13 9PL

Title of the Research Connecting People and Place: Sense of Place and Social Learning.

What is the aim of the research? To investigate people’s perceptions of ordinary, everyday places to gain insights into their values and motivations. It is hoped that the research will help planners in their work with communities.

Why have I been chosen? You have been chosen as you are a resident of East Bolton, which is where the research is to take place. It is hoped that around 20 participants will take part in this project.

What would I be asked to do if I took part? I will be interviewing participants and inviting them to take part in workshops at a later date. The interviews should last approximately an hour. The interviews will be recorded so that the researcher can analyse the interviews.

What happens to the data collected? The recorded interviews will be typed up and analysed by the researcher. It will be seen whether common themes emerge from the interviews which will help to address my research questions.

How is confidentiality maintained? Actual names will not be used in any published work. A code or pseudonym will be used.

What happens if I do not want to take part or if I change my mind? It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part. If you do decide to take part you will be given this information sheet to keep and be asked to sign a consent form. If you decide to take part you are still free to withdraw at any time without giving a reason and without detriment to yourself.

Will I be paid for participating in the research? No.

What is the duration of the research? If you decide to take part fully in this project, it will consist of 2 x 1 hour interviews plus attendance at approximately 3 workshops. The study will take place over the next 12 months.

Where will the research be conducted? The research is taking place in East Bolton. The interviews will take place at a mutually convenient location to be decided between the participant and the researcher.

Will the outcomes of the research be published? The outcomes of this research project will be published in a PhD thesis, which will be housed in the library of the University of Manchester. The findings may be written up as part of a research paper and published in an academic journal.

Criminal Records Check (if applicable) The researcher has enhanced CRB clearance.

Contact for further information Ann Kolodziejski, alk1@bolton.ac.uk Tel: 01204 903149