PRIDE OF PLACE

Land, community and a popular environmentalism

OF

PLACE

By Natan Doron & Ed Wallis

GROUNDWORK
CHANGING PLACES
CHANGING LIVES

rspb
giving
nature
a home

theWI
INSPIRING WOMEN

WOODLAND
TRUST

FABIAN
SOCIETY

ABOUT THE FABIAN SOCIETY

The Fabian Society is Britain's oldest political think tank. Since 1884 the society has played a central role in developing political ideas and public policy on the left. It aims to promote greater equality of power and opportunity; the value of collective public action; a vibrant, tolerant and accountable democracy; citizenship, liberty and human rights; sustainable development; and multilateral international co-operation.

Through a wide range of publications and events the society influences political and public thinking, but also provides a space for broad and open-minded debate, drawing on an unrivalled external network and its own expert research and analysis. Its programme offers a unique breadth, encompassing national conferences and expert seminars; periodicals, books, reports and digital communications; and commissioned and in-house research and comment.

The Society is alone among think tanks in being a democratically-constituted membership organisation, with almost 7,000 members. Over time our membership has included many of the key thinkers on the British left and every Labour prime minister. Today we count over 200 parliamentarians in our number. The voluntary society includes 70 local societies, the Fabian Women's Network and the Young Fabians, which is itself the leading organisation on the left for young people to debate and influence political ideas.

The society was one of the original founders of the Labour party and is constitutionally affiliated to the party. We are however editorially, organisationally and financially independent and work with a wide range of partners from all political persuasions and none.

CONTENTS

About the authors

Natan Doron is the senior researcher at the Fabian Society where he leads the organisation's Environment & Citizenship Programme. He authored the reports *Green Europe: Reconciling the local and the global* and *Here Today: the uncertain future of the Post Office network,* and co-authored *Home Truths: how to change attitudes to housing benefit.* Prior to working at the Fabian Society, Natan worked in the Greenpeace China office in Beijing where he contributed to a number of campaigns including the Road to Copenhagen public engagement programme.

Ed Wallis is the head of editorial at the Fabian Society and editor of *Fabian Review* magazine. He has edited and contributed to numerous Fabian pamphlets, including *Back to Earth: Reconnecting people and politics, Within Reach: The new politics of multiple needs and exclusions* and *The Fairness Instinct: How we can harness public opinion to save the environment.*

Acknowledgements

Summary

Pride of Place investigates how people's sense of identity, shaped by their attachment to their local area, can sit at the heart of a new politics of the environment.

New public attitudes research uncovers that people think of the environment in terms of the place they live and the people they live there with, not carbon emissions and climate change.

Pride of Place calls for a revolution in the culture of environmentalism, which puts a much greater focus on rebuilding democratic capacity rather than focusing on securing legislative change at a national and supranational level. The report identifies four key lessons:

1. Place is people
People do have a strong attachment to the places they live - but it is as much about human relationships as it is about the natural or built environment.

2. Environmentalism starts at home
People need to be able to feel they can effect change in their own backyard before they can change the world.

3. The ecology of the economy
Lack of time erodes people's capabilities; greater transience erodes solidarity. Environmentalism needs to engage more directly with the way in which the economy functions.

4. The chemistry of community
People feel a strong sense of loss, believing that community spirit has declined over time. But one person's community is another person's clique. Addressing this requires a different approach to environmental campaigning and policy-making.

The report makes a series of recommendations that we believe will drive the transition to a more popular environmentalism:

1. Environmental campaigning groups should '**switch' a proportion of the campaigning resources they use for lobbying UK and EU legislators to support community organising** to improve local environments.

2. Local and central government must **reverse the trend towards the increasing privatisation of public space** and use it to create more parks, woodland and other free open spaces.

3. Central government should let go of more funding and allocate it towards **allowing communities greater power to shape their environments** and support community action.

4. Local authorities should use **participatory budgeting** to allow local people to engage directly with the 'tough choices' politicians constantly talk about, giving people a stake in what happens in the place they live.

5. **We propose a new bank holiday** held in the middle of the week to focus national attention on community action. It would provide a focal point for campaigners to highlight local environmental projects on a large scale and generate widespread media attention, as well as an opportunity to reach out beyond the 'usual suspects'.

This work builds on previous studies within the Fabian Society's Environment and Citizenship programme, and is based on a series of in-depth, deliberative focus groups in a range of rural and urban locations. These sought to better understand how people form their attachment to the places and communities they live; and to establish public perception of the potential opportunities for community-focused environmental initiatives, as well as the barriers for personal involvement.

We also commissioned YouGov to conduct a nationally representative opinion poll, the key findings of which are summarised on the following pages.[i]

THE POLLING

Which ONE, if any, of the following would you say was the most important factor in how attached you feel to your local area?

41%
The local environment

natural environment (parks, trees, woodland etc.) or built environment (houses, shops, public buildings such as libraries) that I see in my daily life

41%
The people
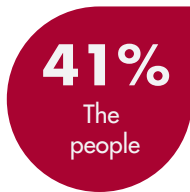
friends, family, neighbours in my local area that I know or that I see in my daily life

Which of the following comes closest to your view...?

53%
It is not enough to make sure you do no harm, everyone has a responsibility to go further and improve the environment around them

33%
People have a responsibility to make sure that they do not damage the environment around them but people shouldn't be expected to improve the environment around them

Thinking about the sense of community spirit in Britain over your lifetime do you think it has...?

68%
Declined

5%
Improved

20%
Stayed the same

Below are a broad range of environmental issues. Which are of most concern to you and your family?

- Anti-social behaviour: **53%**
- Extreme weather: **29%**
- Climate change: **26%**
- Litter: **26%**
- Dog fouling: **26%**
- Wildlife decline: **21%**
- Bad air quality: **14%**
- Noise pollution: **14%**
- The decline of rainforest coverage: **14%**
- Lack of access to green spaces: **9%**
- Lack of access to outdoor facilities: **8%**
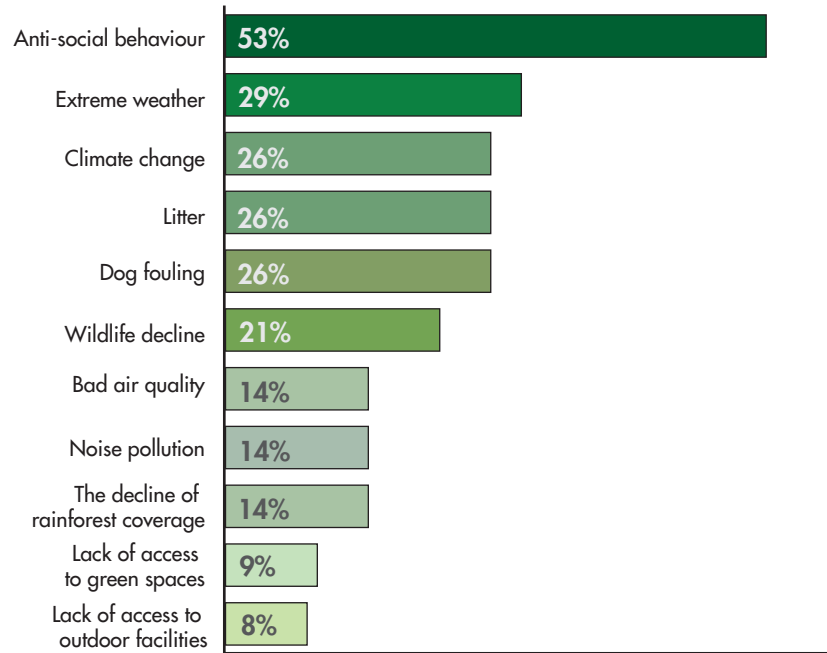
If community spirit in Britain has declined over your lifetime, which would you say are the main reasons?

- People being too busy to get to know neighbours: **54%**
- People commuting and/or working too hard: **46%**
- Immigration changing communities too quickly: **41%**
- People being too scared to let their kids play out: **39%**
- The increase in technology pushing people apart: **36%**
- The decline of places where people can meet: **22%**
- People not staying in the area long enough: **16%**
- Cuts to public services: **9%**

**Do you think community action is a good or bad (or neither)
way to improve the environment in the place where you live?**

71%   18%   3%

**Thinking realistically about your everyday life
and how you like to spend your free time, how likely or unlikely (or neither) are you to be
involved with community action to improve the environment in the place where you live?**

30%   30%   33%
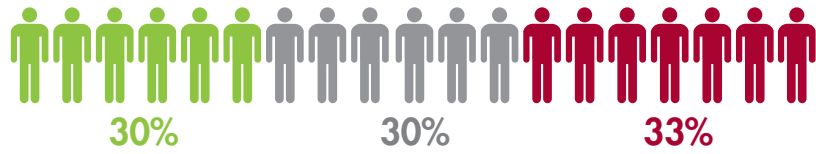
**Please list the most important reasons why you are likely to be involved
in social / community action used to improve the environment in the place where you live:**

I think that if people don't try and
improve their local environment
no one else will so I would see that as
an important reason to get involved — 49%

I like to be involved
in making the environment
in the place where I live better — 47%

I like to be involved in
things that bring the
community closer together — 36%

I would like to have a nice local
environment to improve the place
where I live and raise house prices — 22%

**Please list the most important reasons why you are NOT likely to be involved
in social / community action used to improve the environment in the place where you live:**

I don't have the time — 47%

I pay taxes to have the government
provide a good local environment — 22%

I don't litter or damage my
local environment, why should I
clean up after other people who do? — 22%

The kind of people who get involved
in social/community action are not
people I would want to spend time with — 12%
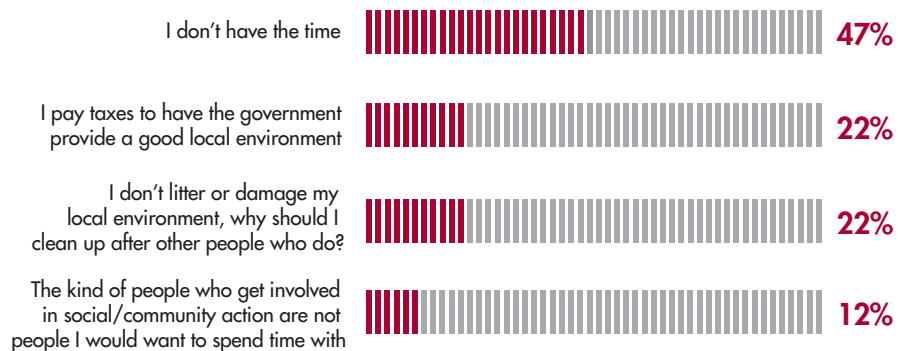
1 INTRODUCTION

The staggering loss of faith in elites that we have witnessed in recent years has shaken the foundations of public life. Following a series of scandals and catastrophes - the abuse of parliamentary expenses, phone hacking, the financial crisis - trust in our major institutions is at an all-time low and our leaders are seen as remote and unrepresentative.

The environmental movement has not sparked national outrage on the same scale but it is perhaps guilty of similar detachment from people's lives. Environmental politics is another one of those things feels like it is being done to us, not with us; that can feel bossy, high-handed and technocratic.

This may explain why the environment has been able to slide so rapidly off the political agenda. In recent years, politicians from all parties have given the clear impression that, while they see environmentalism as 'nice to have' during good times, it now serves as a distraction from the real business of securing the economic recovery. Committed 'greens' may howl betrayal at politicians reneging on pre-recession commitments, but the inconvenient truth is that there has been hardly a whimper of public protest. An approach to environmental campaigning which has focused on elite-level engagement - on the rationalism of climate science and the agency of top-down legislation - has failed to embed the concepts of sustainability and conservation in people's lives and build a broader sense of environmental citizenship.

But people do care about the environment - it's just the popular understanding of it is different to the political one. Indeed, pro-environmental sentiment provided one of the highest profile political news stories of this parliament: the huge public opposition to the coalition's botched attempt to sell-off the nation's forests. As new research in this report shows, people think of the environment in terms of the place they live and the people they live there with, not carbon emissions and climate change. People have a strong sense of local attachment, including a resonant spirit to conserve, which we can rarely muster when thinking about the global. This report argues that it is only by restoring faith in the power of collective action in a specific locality that we can restore the momentum environmental politics needs. The political approach to environmentalism has put the cart before the horse: instead of focusing on the abstract and transnational, we need to build out from people's pride in their sense of place. People need to be able to see the change they wish there to be in the world.

Our research reveals the following four lessons that hold the key to building an environmentalism that is owned by the people rather than imposed on them; a truly popular environmentalism:

1. Place is people: People do have a strong attachment to the places they live - but it is as much about human relationships as it is about the natural or built environment.

2. Environmentalism starts at home: People need to be able to feel they can effect change in their own backyard before they can change the world.

3. The ecology of the economy: Lack of time erodes people's capabilities; greater transience erodes solidarity. Environmentalism needs to engage more directly with the way in which the economy functions.

4. The chemistry of community: People feel a strong sense of loss, believing that community spirit has declined over time. But one person's community is another person's clique: 'little platoons' can feel exclusive without action to encourage wider participation in community life. Addressing this requires a different approach to environmental campaigning and policy-making.

These insights present a serious challenge to environmental campaigners, policymakers, trade unions, businesses and communities. What this report calls for is nothing less than a revolution in the culture of environmentalism, that puts a much greater focus on rebuilding democratic capacity rather than focusing on securing so-called 'policy wins' at a national and supranational level.

Creating a popular environmentalism will also require a different approach to politics. While Conservatives and Liberal Democrats have long been champions of localism, it has tended to be viewed with suspicion in some quarters on the left. This reticence stems from understandable fears of the potentially harmful impact on life chances in the poorest areas without strong oversight from central government through the emergence of so-called 'postcode lotteries'. However, there is now a renewed and growing interest in the concept, in part due to the realisation after 13 years of government of the limitations of what can be achieved from the centre, and in part due to a growing recognition that "real, practical democracy is the only answer to people's massive sense of disempowerment", as Jon Wilson put it in the Fabian pamphlet *Letting Go*.[ii]

Labour's leaders are beginning to embrace the decentralising ethos, with Ed Miliband promising "people-powered public services" and large-scale regional investment.[iii] The party's policy chief Jon Cruddas explains that his policy review "is about giving power to people to give them more control over their lives".[iv] Our work shows the same guiding spirit can inform all parties' approaches to the environment.

In opinion polling conducted by YouGov for this report, a majority agreed that "it is not enough to make sure you do no harm, everyone has a responsibility to go further and improve the environment around them". This was supported by 53 per cent of respondents, compared to 33 per cent who thought "people have a responsibility to make sure that they themselves do not damage the environment around them but beyond that people shouldn't be expected to improve the environment around them."

Two-thirds of people responding to our survey said they would consider being involved with 'community action' to improve the environment in the place they live. But our research highlighted the sense of powerlessness that grips people when thinking about wider global environmental challenges, which makes inertia feel like the only sensible response: what David Runciman calls "the problem of the worthlessness of individual contributions to the actions of large groups".[v] As one participant in our focus group said:

I find the whole thing quite hypocritical really, because it's a personal responsibility, but of course the ultimate responsibility is to governments. You've got the biggest nation on earth which appears not to give two hoots and will continue burning fossil fuels. What we could do in this country would sort of be insignificant. You have China and India with massively expanding economies again doing all the same thing.
[Male, Winchester]

The 'free rider' has always been the environmentalist's nemesis: "The person who, seeing that his individual contribution doesn't make any real difference to a collective endeavour, decides to withhold it and simply surf off the wave created by the other group members".[vi] However, as Runciman explains, this view of individualised rationality is only a relatively recent construct:

> *"Before the 20th century, philosophers who saw human behaviour in self-interested terms did not conclude this at all. Instead, they took it for granted that individuals will have good reason to co-operate in most circumstances, because it is obvious that the benefits of the group for the individual depend on the contribution of the individual to the group."*

We need to rekindle this sense of community and embed the notion of environmental citizenship. Rather than viewing people as greedy, self-interested and isolated, this report highlights the potential warmth of the social. It is in inculcating this shared sense of co-operation that the future of the planet lies. Solidarity means starting small and starting at home; and from that can grow the collective strength to take on the worldwide challenges we all need to face together.

2 THE FOCUS GROUPS

This research set out to investigate how people's sense of identity, shaped by their attachment to a local environment, can sit at the heart of a new politics of the environment. Building on previous studies within the Fabian Society's Environment and Citizenship programme, we undertook a series of in-depth, deliberative focus groups in a range of rural and urban locations to better understand how people form their attachment to the places and communities they live; and to establish public perception of the potential opportunities for community-focused environmental initiatives, as well as the barriers for personal involvement. By engaging people in a conversation, we hoped to gain a deeper understanding than before of people's hopes and fears, how they feel about their local areas, and how to form a more productive partnership with both local and national government in supporting people to care for the environment in the place where they live.

The focus groups were conducted during July and August 2013. Two of the groups took place in cities, Birmingham and London, with participants who defined themselves as living in urban areas. Two groups featured participants who defined themselves as living in rural areas and they took place in Lincoln and Winchester. The London and Winchester groups featured participants from social classifications B and C1. Participants in the Birmingham and Lincoln groups were drawn from social classifications C2 and D.[vii]

The group discussions were split into two sections. The first half of the focus groups asked participants to talk about what place and community meant to them. We were very careful not to mention the environment at all. The second half asked participants to talk about what the environment and the notion of a sustainable community meant to them. Participants were then asked to generate ideas for community action to improve the local environment. In this final task we asked participants to engage with why people would and would not get involved with community action projects.

Place and community: what are they?

Despite obvious variance - as one participant in London put it "we probably all have different ideas of what home is or what place is and what community is" - there was a lot of crossover between responses in the groups. The discussion on place and community focused on a few recurring themes. One theme was about spaces where people meet. The following quote from the London group was fairly typical of views expressed in other groups:

So the question was, what do you think of when you mention the word community and I was going to say I think of communal areas within your area - so places like parks, libraries, schools, high street, sort of places where you just meet up with everyone within your community because it's easy to sit in your

own house but, you know, it's not part of life.
[Male, London]

Community centres. That is what I thought. I thought community is the home, isn't it where you live. It's about where you live and what surrounds it.
[Female, Lincoln]

This notion of public spaces where people meet was used in the Birmingham group as one of the reasons that a participant thought public transport was important.

A community feel. People in your area, if you're going to get a bus you're going to get to know them a bit more better when you're sitting next to them on the bus going into the city centre.
[Male, Birmingham]

In our first group, the notion of being near other people and different people was felt to be an important factor in why people choose to live in cities.

Male 1: I live in Muswell hill. Five minutes away from Crouch End. There is so much to do within those areas but it's nice you don't, you know…There are parks and green areas that you don't feel like you're right in the thick of the city. A different kind of suburban, as it were, so you get the best of both worlds. So you get the ability to walk to any shop or doctors or dentists or whatever you need. But you also get kind of the tranquillity of not being right in the thick of it.

Male 2: For want of a better word - multicultural. We all rub along together rather well I think. And I'm talking about the rich, poor, different sort of foods, different sort of backgrounds, that kind of thing.

Female 1: Maybe that's why people live in the city - they have to be more comfortable with being, rubbing along as you say. If people don't like that, then they can live out in the country away from so many people. But maybe because we do all live in the city, that's what we like.
[London]

Not all discussions of other people in the local area were positive. In Birmingham the downside of being with other people was explored by almost all the participants at some point in their discussion. Quite often the negative comments were about people who were new to the area.

My area, I was born there. I love the people, I love the area. I actually love the place. I'm proud of it, but it's the new stuff that you mentioned, rolling weed and all that rubbish. Things are taken over in a bizarre way. There's new kids, there's gangs … I've got a big family and I didn't realise about this gang stuff, the way this was working until I met one of my family that I hadn't seen for years who works with children who are in trouble. Gang situation to the pressure on some of these young kids to come and do some of these things, and that's the problem, but I love my area and I love the people that come from there. I just don't like the people that come on the area.
[Male, Birmingham]

Another recurring theme in the discussion of place and community was the decline of community spirit.

Community. I think when you say it nowadays you don't really have a community any more. Maybe where I live anyway it's quite, I straight away thought, it doesn't exist as much as I would like it to anymore, if that makes sense in a way.
[Female, Winchester]

A common reason given for the decline in community spirit was people being too busy.

Male: I think it is busy. Everyone is busy - you get up, you go to work and you come back, your doors are locked, that's it. Street parties when I was a kid, there was a lot of street parties. You don't get none of that now, very rarely. That was all part of our community when I was young.

Female: Well, it's like that what they've just said. I know the one side of my neighbours, but the other side I don't and they've lived there some years. But they haven't got time for you. When you're on your own and you're getting older, they don't want to know in case you ask them to do something. That's what it's like today. That's what I think anyway.
[Birmingham]

One participant in Winchester offered a view that there were perhaps cultural reasons for the decline in community spirit.

I was a parish councillor for a number of years and so I have been involved. It's difficult because you know, I'm not choosing to opt out of the local community, but it takes two to tango in some respects. Colton Common used to have a great firework display in the village for various reasons and health and safety. That's now gone. That was a great community event and we still have the village fete as a great community event, but erm, the English aren't quite like the French. You go to France and they have their local carnival or something. There is always something going on and the whole village is there. The English people are perhaps more reserved and it's just perhaps where we are as well. A lot of people working. Long hours during the week and just want to spend the weekends with their family and not do a lot else.
[Male, Winchester]

The final recurring theme in the discussions about place and community was about local cliques. The following exchange from Lincoln was fairly typical.

Female 1: I think sometimes the people who organise things like that in the community are very often the ones who think, I don't want to say they think they are superior, but they feel that they are gaining something by doing it, don't they.

Female 2: Fulfilling a need in themselves.

Female 1: It's making themselves feel better and you don't always want to be surrounded by that sort—I wouldn't go out of my way to become part of it.

Female 2: I wouldn't like it. I wouldn't like to be committed to doing things with a group of people.

Female 1: Who are going to decide what you do and when you are doing it.

Female 2: I really wouldn't like it.
[Lincoln]

A participant in Winchester relayed the story of a group of local people who bought a field to stop it being built on. Though she acknowledged that she thought they did it for the right reasons she felt it was 'elitist'.

Female 1: There was a field in Twyford where people were asked by the parish council if they wanted to buy shares, I'm assuming to save it from ever being developed. I didn't actually agree with that, because I felt that people probably couldn't afford to put £500 and what they were asking the minimum of, I thought that was a little elitist. However, now there is a group of people in the village were in this field and it will never be built on. You are talking about people who can afford to do that.

Female 2: It definitely isn't nowadays. It's not fair and just.

Female 1: They did it for the right reasons. They wanted to save that area. It does become an elitist thing.
[Winchester]

Environmentalism: what is it?

The discussion of what the term local environment meant to people featured a lot of crossover between the different groups. The most common responses to what people thought about when they heard the phrase 'the local environment' covered things like litter, dog fouling and traffic.

Rubbish and dustbin, that sort of stuff, you mean? Pollution's the first thing that I come up with.
[Male, Birmingham]

Similar concerns were often raised when participants were asked what they didn't like about their local area.

What I get annoyed with, I walk my dogs every day and go past the estate park and it's such a mess. The council employ two groundsmen. You have already got something in place. Somebody gets paid to pick that litter up.
[Male, Winchester]

One participant in London linked dropping litter to people visiting as tourists and lacking any consideration about a place they may not see again.

I think it's more difficult in London because a lot of people in your community are strangers and it's not like a small town or village where you get to know more people. So a lot of people come into an area, a lot of people come into Marylebone and they don't live here. They come and go and on the streets even worse. You've got hundred thousand people coming in and they go away and they don't really care what people when they leave. They will dump their rubbish, their cigarettes, they're chewing gum and just go. Because they're not going to see it again. They're going to go home to wherever they live.
[Female, London]

Antisocial behaviour featured in all the focus group discussions. In the Lincoln group antisocial behaviour was often linked to drinking in public.

I was in the park a couple of weeks ago and there was a woman laying on the grass with two small children playing on the swings and things. She was drinking beer. Just drinking it, finishing the tin and leaving it there and then carrying on again. I thought, how irresponsible that is. Not just setting a bad example to her own kids, but just leaving it there in the middle of the park and stumbling off with the kids.
[Female, Lincoln]

Antisocial behaviour was a particular concern in the Birmingham group. In this group a key environmental concern was people not feeling safe. This included answering the door at night. The following exchange was typical.

Moderator: Back to this question of what your hopes are for your local area and the community, what comes to mind?

Male: Safer, you want safer.

Female 1: Safer environment, yes.

Male: That's all you want.

Female 2: Where you can go out of a night instead of in the dark nights draw your curtains and that's you in until the next morning.
[Birmingham]

Local green spaces were also mentioned by some participants.

Moderator: When I say the local environment, does anything come to mind? Any kind of initial thoughts?

Male: Yeah, for me, there is parks around where I live. We are very lucky in North London, I'm surrounded by Hampstead Heath. I mean, they're all lovely sort of huge open spaces. But, we mentioned that Hampstead Heath isn't allowed to be touched… There is a lot of regulations around that … With the amount of green space that is around those areas you feel like you're not totally engulfed by the city. It's a nice kind of mixture.
[London]

Well, there's not enough green for a starter, there's nowhere, of the environment

like for the kids to play, nice environment for the kids to play, nice piece of grass they could play football or anything. It's all took up with buildings and things like that.
[Female, Birmingham]

In the rural group there was more talk of 'habitats' and 'wildlife'. But in all the groups when participants were asked to define what they thought a sustainable community was, it was often a mix of social and environmental concerns that came up. In all the groups the idea of having a nice clean local space was central to this.

Moderator: Just to move on a related thing, different question, what does the idea of a sustainable community mean to anyone? [male participant's name], I'm going to bring you in on this one.

Male 1: To just creating a sense of like energy and sort of helping people out and things that help each other out, different roles that are, I'm sounding very vague here, I'm aware. But sustainable as in continue on and on, it doesn't waste anything.

Female 1: We should be proud of us, shouldn't we, we should want to be able to keep it clean and look after it, but people just haven't got respect for it.

Male 2: A lot of it though is down to the council. On the corner, again, people who've got cats and they let them out and they just go and rip people's bags. I should be able to ask them, "Can you just come over and clear up what your cats made a mess of?" They'll go, "How do you know it's my cat?" "I come and see it is." It's all over. On a Sunday you have some chicken, you wrap it once you've ate it, you collect all the bones up and hide in your bag somewhere, the next morning there's grease all over the front. If people don't police, then what? If everybody just cleaned their bit...
[Birmingham]

We want a proper environment. We don't want to be kicking tins out the way when we go and feed the swans and do nice things with our grandchildren, we don't want it.
[Female, Lincoln]

Some of the discussions did feature more traditional forms of what would be considered environmental concerns. In Winchester for example the idea of self-sufficiency was thought to be important to the idea of sustainability. It was expressed in relation to food and also to energy.

Moderator: What's your idea of a sustainable community?

Male 1: Community that's self sufficient and looks after itself.

Female: I think about growing vegetables and stuff like that when you think about self sufficiency.

Male: Providing your own energy. Build a wall around the outside and get the lorries to go round the outside.
[Winchester]

In half of the focus groups participants didn't mention climate change. This was the case even though they were explicitly asked if they thought there was a link between the local and global environment. There was a sense among some participants that traditional environmentalists were not really concerned with their particular locality but rather with a distant more abstract notion of the environment.

> *Male 1: You say environment, you just think of Greenpeace, wouldn't you, they're like the environment people.*
>
> *Male 2: That is when they go and do things to the ships and stuff.*
> *[Birmingham]*

We asked the focus group participants to talk about who they thought was responsible for maintaining the local environment. The most common response was that there was a shared responsibility, usually between residents and the council. Some participants felt that paying council tax was a reason that individuals did not need to show responsibility for the local environment but this view was usually challenged by other participants.

> *Male: I would say, the council in that sense, because everything else is run off the council as such like, schools and stuff like that. I would expect the environment to be sorted out by that. You pay enough council tax and that towards it.*
>
> *Female 1: I think everyone to act for themselves, to be honest. If everyone made one change it's a start isn't it.*
>
> *Female 2: I agree. I think it's everybody's responsibility, but the council have got an incredible input. They hold the monies. They do take the community tax and so therefore they are going to spend it on the communities, aren't they.*
> *[Winchester]*

One participant in Lincoln felt very strongly that a commitment to doing no harm was enough:

> *I think in terms of the environment and your community I think so long as you are not harming it and so long as you are not causing any problems and you are not making things worse then, that's enough for me.*
> *[Female, Lincoln]*

In the London group one participant felt that it was important to do something at a very local level to improve the environment if only to make a statement.

> *I think you can still make a statement. I think you can, it's hard to affect worldwide change in one project in Crouch End, or whatever. But if you can make a statement, it's the kind of symbolism of it to reduce litter overall or reuse and recycle whatever it is, then it's kind of the message that can have an impact on wider things. I think it's going to be hard to change, global issues just in one area, but it's just about trying to make a statement.*
> *[Male, London]*

Community action: will people do it?

Overwhelmingly people in our focus groups felt that community action to improve the local environment was a good thing. An exchange towards the end of the group in London demonstrated that participants saw the potential for community action to be an activity of choice with wide appeal. One participant reflected that just brainstorming community action in the focus group was itself a positive experience. Another participant agreed and suggested, partly in jest, that it might be compulsory:

Female: Coming here and just sitting together and creating this sort of life force, to me it does seem the way forward perhaps for community. Because too often we go about our daily lives and we don't really get involved. I think it was actually quite exciting just sitting there and brainstorming for this community. I think if I had discussed the sort of thing today I definitely want to get involved. Whereas before I might have been one of those…

Male: I don't know if it's too much to say it should be almost compulsory. Jury service brings together a load of people together from completely random backgrounds or whatever. It could almost be compulsory for a few people from whatever background or whatever. As long as you're all in the same kind of area or borough to meet or chat once a month or something like that. I don't know if you would ever be able to-

Female: I think that might be going too far (laughs).
[London]

The final comments in the groups when participants were asked to summarise what they took from the discussion often featured positive statements about getting more involved in community action. One participant expressed that he had very low expectations for the focus group but found himself enjoying the discussion:

I was thinking "get through my three hours, get my 60 quid, and go home." But actually, I quite enjoyed the discussion and at the start I was sort of saying things like "I'm too young to do this and it's not my sort of thing." I guess the take home thing for me is different. People in a community could easily get together for a common project, which I wouldn't necessarily have thought of. I've tried to fund the project directly linked to my interests or to a science project or something. But this has made me think that you can do a wider project and still enjoy it.
[Male, London]

Similarly in Birmingham a participant highlighted that it was pleasing to find common ground with strangers about the importance of a clean environment.

Yes, I think that it's definitely made me think about, I don't know, it made me wonder whether something like this could actually work when it comes to putting all that on the, the declaration and stuff like that. I think it's good and I think it's good that we've seen people that actually think alike as well, for like keeping the place clean and that.
[Female, Birmingham]

3 KEY LESSONS

1. Place is people

People do have a strong attachment to the places they live – but it is as much about human relationships as it is about the natural or built environment.

The resonance of people's attachment to place has been one of the most crucial insights of recent political debate. Most associated with Blue Labour and Red Tory thinking, and present in the communitarian philosophy behind the 'big society' and 'one nation', it recognises that people's identities are closely, intimately intertwined with the places they live, be that the national and patriotic or the local and specific.

Our focus groups found some evidence to support this, but found that people defined place in a much more 'relational' way than we might have imagined. While people did discuss their local built or natural environment, in particular parks and other free open spaces, in all groups participants were more likely to talk about the people in their local area as being key to their sense of place and community rather than the place itself. Those who lived in rural areas were only marginally more likely to mention natural aspects of their local place, and even then it was in fairly abstract terms. When people think about the place they live, they tend to think about the people they live there with; the community is the environment that surrounds them.

People-centric place manifested itself positively, in taking joy from friends and family, appreciating the vibrancy of social mix:

Male: For me personally, where I went to the primary school in my village, all my friends, obviously lived around that area as well, for me, it was nice, because literally if I walked five minutes down the road one of my mates lives there and another five minutes and another friend, so for me, that's what I like with my area.

Female: It's knowing quite a lot of people, my kids went to the local school and [I'm] still friends with the parents and we all know each other.
[Winchester]

[It's] wonderful because in the 10 minutes that it takes me to walk from home to the Broadway, I have about five conversations. I know the staff. I know the staff at Starbucks, and Marks and Spencer's, Waitrose, the shoe makers and you just get a wonderful sense of belonging. So for me, that's what community is about. Just being accepted, being able to recognise people, people being able to recognise you, and being able to put down roots.
[Female, London]

However, it was also represented negatively, focusing on antisocial behaviour:

Male 1: Antisocial things really. That could be people just driving danger-ously, the fact that cars are making pollution. That's a bad thing. Noise at times - bad dog owners, of which there are a few. Dog mess and the like.

Female: Barking dogs.

Male 1: Yeah. That's right. And it's the owners really, it's always the owners. And sometimes a lot of people means that, proportionately, there will be one or two antisocial individuals who are really quite nasty.
[London]

In our poll, we tested this further and asked which one, if any, of the fol-lowing respondents would say was the most important factor in how attached they feel towards their local area:

• The local environment whether natural (parks, trees, woodland etc) or built (houses, shops, public buildings such as libraries) that I see in my daily life

• The people (eg friends, family, neighbours etc) in my local area that I know or that I see in my daily life

The answer produced a tie: of those who gave an answer, 50 per cent agreed with each statement, showing the resonance of both place and people. What is particularly interesting is the patterns that emerge, painting a picture of the different tribes within communities. 18-24 year olds, those intending to vote Liberal Democrat and people from social classification ABC1 were more likely to give preference to local environmental factors, whereas those over 60, Labour voters and people from social classification C2DE were more likely to prioritise people.

While the globalised economy and digitally networked society has made the world bigger and our lives more mobile, it has not eroded our attach-ment to the specific places we live. In many ways, place may have become more important in providing roots in an insecure world. As Marc Stears, the political theorist and close adviser to Ed Miliband, argues "the fact that we are now less likely than we were to be based always with a single physical environment appears to have enhanced many of our senses of the importance of that environment".[viii] Our findings show that human relationships must be understood as a key part of this environment.

2. Environmentalism starts at home

People need to be able to feel they can effect change in their own backyard before they can change the world.

Since 2010, there has been growing acceptance of a critique of an approach to governing in the UK that has become too bureaucratic, too managerial and too remote. An anti-poverty strategy which relied on state-led income transfers and a public services strategy which relied on centrally-imposed targets risked leaving people feeling "frustrated, powerless and ignored", as previous Fabian Society research discovered.[ix]

Similarly, the environmental movement has often been guilty of being overly distant and technocratic, with campaigning energies mainly focused on international climate negotiations. Ruth Davis of Greenpeace has argued in *Soundings* that conservation of land and nature has been consigned to bureaucratic 'action plans' administered by officials.[x] While there have been huge and significant legislative achievements - most notably the Climate Change Act in 2008 - it has meant environmentalism has for the most part been happening elsewhere.

Our findings bear out this analysis. Climate change was hardly mentioned at all in our groups, even when participants were prompted to think about global environmental issues. And in our poll, over twice as many people regarded antisocial behaviour as their biggest environmental concern than climate change. Wildlife and rainforest decline was even lower:

Below are a broad range of environmental issues. Which TWO or THREE, if any, are of most concern to you and your family? (Please tick up to three.)	
Antisocial behaviour	53
Extreme weather (flooding, storms, heat waves or prolonged snow/icy conditions)	29
Climate change	26
Litter	26
Dog fouling	26
Wildlife decline/extinction of animals	21
Bad air quality (e.g. from fumes caused by traffic or industry)	14
The decline of rainforest coverage	14
Lack of access to green spaces (e.g. areas of natural beauty, rivers, woodland)	9
Lack of access to outdoor facilities (e.g. parks, playgrounds, football pitches)	8
Not applicable, environmental issues are not important to me and my family	3
Something else	3
Don't know	4

The strong showing for 'extreme weather' should be handled with care, given our poll was conducted at a time when large parts of the country were still underwater following the 2014 winter floods. More eye-catching perhaps is the equal number (26 per cent of respondents) concerned by the global concept of climate change with the ultra-local problems of litter and dog

fouling. Again we see a different emphasis from more liberal and more conservative groupings. For example, those intending to vote Lib Dem in 2015 chose climate change as their top answer (48 per cent vs 14 per cent and 16 per cent for litter and dog fouling respectively) and 18-24 year olds display a very similar pattern; UKIP voters and Tories the reverse.

People don't live their lives in abstract terms and as such find emissions targets difficult to care about, and exhortations to make small lifestyle changes difficult to reconcile with the reported scale of the climate threat. And if people feel powerless to prevent damage to their local environment that they see every day, how are they going to feel empowered to tackle complex global challenges? Of course there will always be a crucial place for lobbying legislators to set national and supranational policy frameworks, but this research suggests we need a change of approach to what we see as environmental campaigning and how we go about it. For transformative change, campaigners need to get out of Westminster and Brussels and become more present in the places people live. We discuss what this might look like in the final section of this report.

3. The ecology of the economy

Lack of time erodes capabilities; greater transience erodes communities. Environmentalism needs to engage more directly with the way in which the economy functions.

Ruth Davis has written that: "It is ultimately jobs and incomes that determine our relationship with place and nature. It's the economy, stupid - because the way we organise the economy can act either to strengthen or dissolve communities and traditions, and with them our ability and willingness to invest in the places where we live."

This is a message that leaps out from our work. To rekindle the strong social bonds and enduring community spirit necessary to sustain a popular environmentalism, directly addressing the way the modern economy functions is crucial. Lack of time and increasing transience - as people work longer hours, commute further to work or struggle with ever more unaffordable housing - erodes our capabilities and prevents us putting roots down.

This has not, traditionally, been regarded as within the strict purview of the environmental movement. That needs to change. Environmentalists need to take a much closer interest in the workings and outcomes of the economy, seeing the concept of the green economy through a wider prism than environmental sustainability issues alone. A greater sense of community and a greater ethos of care for the local environment depend in large part in changing the nature of work, focusing on good jobs and work life balance. Creating a productive, localised, high wage economy - so there are enough well-paid jobs to allow people to afford to live in the places they grew up in and put down roots - is central to this.

When we asked people who said they were unlikely to get involved in community action to support the local environment why that was, the main reason (by a large margin) was 'I don't have time' - 47 per cent, over twice as many as those who chose another response. This is the standout figure across all groups, although the professional, Liberal Democrats and the young feel it more.

We also see it as the reason people think community spirit has declined across their lifetimes: 'people being too busy to get to know their neighbours'

(54 per cent) and 'people commuting and/or working too hard so they are never around to get to know each other' (46 per cent). In both rural and urban environments, our focus group participants lamented the lack of time to invest in communities:

Female: I live in a village and we do have a community, I think, but it has changed over the last ten years, I expect. It isn't like it used to be … It has changed because people work a lot more. There is a lot more people who are out to work for longer periods of time it seems.

Male: I think particularly in this area and my experience of Colton Common is its commuter belt. You get a huge number of people that leave the village at somewhere between six and seven in a morning and get back between seven and eight at night. Perhaps they just treat where they live as somewhere to live.

Female: A stopping point.
[Winchester]

Five, six, seven at night, if you are still at the office or something and people don't get time. At the weekend people see their family or do things and it's like six days a week and so they do recycling at home and bits like that, but then it's trying in the real world people haven't got the time to do and do all this and that.
[Male, Lincoln]

People move around a lot, they come and go. If we are in a block of flats, people move in and they move out ... a lot of people in central London are here for a couple of years until they get a job somewhere else … you get to know people, then they go.
[Female, London]

The lack of affordable housing was seen as a particular driver of people moving around and preventing community bonds being built over time:

My kids are grown up and if they wanted to stay in the village and have their own children in the village, it's going to be probably another twenty plus years before they would be able to afford it. They won't be able to afford to buy one of the cheapest houses in the village whereas if they went somewhere else they might if they are lucky get on the ladder.
[Female, Winchester]

The cost of living, time poverty and transience: these are key barriers to a popular environmentalism. The environmental movement must recognise this and be prepared to act accordingly by putting economic issues at the heart of their campaigning.

4. The chemistry of community

People feel a strong sense of loss, believing that community spirit has declined over time. But one person's community is another person's clique: 'little platoons' can feel exclusive without action to encourage wider participation in community life.

There is a clear feeling from our work that people feel the ties that bind people together have been eroded over time and that this is a hindrance to

our ability to take collective action. In our poll we asked:

Thinking about the sense of community spirit in Britain over your lifetime do you think it has…?	
Improved	5
Stayed the same	20
Declined	68
Don't know	6

This is reflected across all age groups and political persuasions, though as you might expect is stronger amongst the over 60s than 18-24 year olds (81 per cent v 52 per cent) and UKIP voters (84 per cent) than Liberal Democrats (57 per cent). There is also a greater sense of loss amongst C2DEs (72 per cent) than ABC1s (66 per cent).

When asked why this might be the case, the answer was clear as highlighted by the previous section: 'people being too busy to get to know their neighbours' and 'people commuting and/or working too hard so they are never around to get to know each other' were the two most popular answers when asked to choose from a list. Third was 'immigration changing communities too quickly'. Immigration was especially high for Conservative and UKIP supporters and C2DEs, and very low for 18-24 year olds. Commuting and working too hard was relatively higher for ABC1s, and being too busy was a particular factor for women - 60 per cent compared to 47 per cent for men.

Interestingly, many of the seven per cent who chose 'something else' volunteered a variation of 'Thatcher's legacy'. Some people have an enduring sense that we are living in the shadow of the shift to market liberalism in the 1980s, the rampant inequality it unleashed and the philosophy that there is 'no such thing as society'.

For people in our groups, feeling part of the community didn't necessarily mean formalised activity or group action, there could be a much softer sense of living together with other people:

I think it's when people are doing shared stuff. If you're just in a house living there, you don't really get a sense of community. If there's like an event on people are out and about, cycling race came past me the other day and people went out and watched them going past and I felt the sort of community spirit. Whereas if everyone is just in their houses they don't really know these things. For me it's like when there are events going on, shared experiences.
[Male, London]

Using the local library or leisure centre, local shops and post offices, joining a football team or visiting a farmers' market were all cited as examples of being involved in the community. Here are a much broader set of concerns that haven't necessarily been seen as 'environmental' per se, but should be. School sports fields sell offs, library closures, the disappearance of pubs and post offices, the homogenisation of our high streets: they all reduce the rich and varied tapestry of civic life and erode communal spaces.

But more formalised community action is difficult, not just for the time shortages discussed above but due to 'other people'. The Lincoln focus group revealed a particular fear of cliques:

Female 3: Would you want to be part of that little cliquey group everybody is talking about? They are in even classrooms, aren't they? Everywhere you go there is that kind of clique. Any pub or club there is always a little group isn't there that and it's in all walks of life.
[Lincoln]

In London, this was described as "snottiness":

I went to one resident meeting and it was so painful I just couldn't go back again because it was people arguing about where they put their bins and putting stickers on people's cars and that. I was 40 years too young for that (laughs) ... The people there were ... a bit kind of snotty and that put me off getting involved.
[Male, London]

The below exchange in response to a question about community land ownership further highlights participants' fears about cliques alongside a deep mistrust of local politicians.

Female 1: I could see there being a clique so to speak and eruptions and I just can't see how it would work or how it could be fair and what happens ten years down the line. Obviously, it would be drawn up legally and that. But I could see there would be major problems. I wouldn't want to be part of it. I wouldn't feel comfortable with it.

Female 2: It would be a selected few wouldn't it in making the decisions. Same as really how things work now.

Female 1: A bit like a parish council.

Female 3: Eventually somebody would have to be in charge and then they would have to elect somebody and then it would be no different from just having a council.
[Lincoln]

And the difficult chemistry of community is as much about street gangs as it is about 'middle class' cliques. Two female participants in Birmingham talked about their appetite for community action being derailed by antisocial behaviour.

In order to get the balance right, a broad set of barriers must be overcome, from ensuring a mix of tenure types in future house building projects to ensuring communities have the infrastructure and public services capacity they need to cope with changes brought by immigration or development. A response from one participant in Winchester highlighted the importance of access to services:

Female: If they wanted to develop the area and create more housing and community members, then they need to adapt the schooling and the other facilities … I'm

still travelling twenty minutes down the road to another school, which, in one way, I don't mind doing it, but I want [my daughter] to grow up with friends in the local area and at the moment she doesn't know anybody, because she's not attending the local school. She's having to attend another school and building friends and social groups everything else in a different area, meaning she's making friendships in a different area, meaning that local community spirit is already gone for her.
[Winchester]

4 BUILDING A POPULAR ENVIRONMENTALISM

It is the tradition of reports such as these to make a series of recommendations that call on people with political power to do things. As we have seen, however, this is not a process that has so far managed to carry people with it: it has led to a decoupling of environmental politics from everyday life. Instead, this report calls for a change of practice 'from below', for a new approach to environmentalism. This section sets out some principles that we believe will drive the transition to a more popular environmentalism.

Organise!

Our research demonstrates that although people believe that 'community spirit' has declined, it exists in latent form and can provide the bedrock for a popular environmentalism. In our poll, we explained the idea of 'social action' or 'community action', where people get together with others to support a community project in the place where they live. When asked if this was 'a good or bad way to improve the environment in the place where you live', 71 per cent said it was good, with only three per cent bad (18 per cent thought it neither good nor bad).

So there is strong support for getting involved in the community in theory. But we asked people to think realistically about their everyday lives to find how likely they were in reality to partake in this kind of community action. As one might expect, we found a much more nuanced picture, though not one without encouragement.

Thinking realistically about your everyday life and how you like to spend your free time, how likely or unlikely are you to be involved with social/ community action to improve the environment in the place where you live?	
Very likely	5
Fairly likely	25
TOTAL LIKELY	**30**
Neither likely nor unlikely	30
Fairly unlikely	21
Very unlikely	12
TOTAL UNLIKELY	**33**
Don't know	6

This 30 per cent of likely involvers tallies with recent work conducted by the Young Foundation on *Growing Community Organising,* which found that "across the four localities this programme operated in, around 30 per cent of people that community organisers engaged with went on to be involved in some form of social action."[xi]

The UK has a long history of community development, where agencies and voluntary groups work closely with communities to help them take action in their local area. There is also currently a great deal of interest in community organising which, according to Citizens UK, is "based on the principal that when people work together they have the power to change their neighbourhoods, cities, and ultimately the country for the better". The idea is to listen to specific local concerns and then uses trained community leaders to co-ordinate action and empower communities.

It would be for environmental groups to define which model best suited their purposes but more and more, this is how environmentalists need to see themselves. When our groups were asked to design a local environmental project, many came up with the idea of a litter pick or an organised street clean. They felt this was the kind of activity they would have the capacity to do and would make a noticeable impact on the quality of their environment, creating the kinds of safe and attractive public spaces necessary to bring people closer together. What these types of activities require though is someone to take the initiative: what one participant called a "passionate co-ordinator".

What is crucial is that campaigns are defined by local communities. For example, when asked to design a local project in our groups, participants in Birmingham focused on a 'clean step' initiative - to make the front of people's houses tidy and presentable. In Lincoln, the idea was to introduce an alcohol free zone in the city centre. What was universal was people's sense that there was no way to make things happen - and in many cases people felt they lacked 'permission'. Giving people the power to act - both in terms of personal agency and securing support from decision-makers - to make the changes they want to see in their local area is what community organising is all about.

BOX 1: ORGANISING FOR A POPULAR ENVIRONMENTALISM: LIVING UNDER ONE SUN

Living Under One Sun (LUOS) was created in 2005 by mothers of many cultures and ages to tell their 'stories' through meet cook and eat sessions in a corner of Tottenham.
Nine years later LUOS is a multi-award winning not-for-profit organisation, actively creating places for communities to meet, access services, share skills and ideas and shape their neighbourhoods.
A recent initiative has seen the organisation bringing an innovative approach to saving money on gas and electricity bills through advice on collective action to reduce energy costs: The Haringey Big Community Switch.

Organisations that recognise the value of building environmentalism 'bottom up' could 'switch' a proportion of the campaigning resources they use for lobbying UK and EU legislators. The money could be diverted to supporting dedicated 'local environment community organisers' across the country. If environmental groups were to devote resources towards

community organising, this might require them to be open to projects that are not traditionally perceived as 'environmental'. For example, Citizens UK have strongly focused on campaigning for the living wage. But as this report has shown, such concerns are increasingly important to forging a popular environmentalism. And there are also opportunities within community organising to listen to concerns and then finding the areas of overlap with environmentalists' organisational goals and values.

For example where a community prioritises a litter pick, it can be linked to the importance of connecting people to the natural environment. Can the group doing the litter pick transition to tree planting in the local area or one day take on community management of woods? Where a community puts forward concerns about the cost of living, can an environmental community organiser develop a collective energy switching scheme and offer advice on demand reduction? The case study in box 1 from the organisation 'Living Under One Sun' demonstrates the capacity for community organising around issues the people in the local area define as salient.

Green space

Reinvigorating community life requires us to make space in people's hectic schedules through economic reform leading to a shortened working week, local jobs and decent wages. But is also needs physical spaces in which people from all walks of life can rub shoulders.

We must cultivate deliberative places that bring people together. Where do people go to experience a sense of community? When participants in our groups talked about their changing communities, they talked about the pubs, the shops and the workplaces they once knew that have now gone. They talked about how Tesco have taken over high streets and forced out local shops. They talked about when their local post office went out of business. Community spirit has been lost because the places where people once met and forged mutual social bonds have, to a large extent, disappeared.

As well as a more responsible, less rampaging capitalism, we therefore need new sites where people can meet and establish trusting relationships with the people they live with - what Marc Stears calls an "everyday democracy … in which we continuously forge new, deep and powerful relationships with whom we live." Parks, woodland and other free open spaces can be those places, the new hubs of civic life. One participant in London spoke about the joy of being out in shared gardens in the summer where "everyone seems quite friendly and chatty and, I wouldn't say that everyone is best friends, but they do let you get on with your business or help you out when you need help". Another referred to "a sort of nodding regard - you're friendly but not over-familiar with your neighbours".

The modern world lacks arenas for this community interaction which are free, democratic and which enhance life. The market is often more than willing to provide these spaces, but while people in our groups appreciated the convenience and functionality that the private sector provided, but they didn't trust it and they felt sad to see it spread into all spheres of life. A stronger environmentalism requires stronger community - and that can be forged in our local green spaces.

Local and central government must therefore reverse the trend towards the increasing privatisation of public space.[xiii] [xiv] This public space should be used to create more parks, woodland and other free open spaces to create the spaces where communities can share experiences and forge bonds.

Put people first

Local government, which bears the greatest responsibility for the care and conservation of local green spaces, has been hit disproportionally hard by the public sector spending cuts implemented by the coalition government since 2010. The Fabian Society's Commission on Future Spending Choices found that English local authorities will lose around 35 per cent of their central government grants between 2010/11 and 2015/16. Poorer areas are more reliant on these grants due to higher needs and less ability to raise funds from council tax. The Commission reported that:

> "So far cuts have had the most impact on planning, housing, cultural services and back-office activities, with authorities minimising cuts to social care and environment services. Many councils now speculate that on present trends by the end of the decade they will only have money to fulfil their statutory social care and refuse collection duties."[xv]

The first consequence of cuts is likely to be an even greater reliance on the private sector to deliver environmental contracts than we are already seeing. However, previous Fabian Society work found that 62 per cent of people were of the view that public services should be provided mainly or only by government. Only a minority supported the view that there should be 'no default' provider of public services. 64 per cent of people agreed that public services should not be run like businesses but rather depend on the values and ethos of the public good.[xvi]

But as the retrenchment of the state continues and goes deeper, that which the council is responsible for becomes vanishingly small. There is a danger we will be left with a rump of 'essential' council services, providing support for the most disadvantaged only, with its hands tied when it comes to broader environmental stewardship. Not only would this threaten the provision of safe democratic spaces, it would continue - perhaps complete - the erosion of the principles of universalism and participation in society which the Fabian report *The Solidarity Society* argued are "so essential to prevent that sense of 'them' and 'us', which makes us so much less willing to contribute to the collective pot."[xvii] It's a vicious circle, where most people get less and less from their council and so are less and less likely to support or participate in its work.

Participatory budgeting could provide a way to ensure our public spaces are conserved in what Patrick Diamond has called "an era of less".[xviii] Participatory budgeting was piloted by the Labour government and was initially seen as a key plank of the coalition government's 'big society' agenda. It allows communities to engage directly with the local authority budgeting process; as the Participatory Budgeting Network puts it, "local people making decisions directly over how local public budgets are spent".

Recent Fabian Society work on political disengagement found strong support for this type of approach: when offered a number of proposals on how to reduce the democratic deficit, a workshop of swing voters and non-voters found "decentralising power and giving communities more say over local decision making" by far the most attractive option. Citizens were keen to see a provision "guaranteeing that a certain percentage of council tax goes towards spending on the local area, and that spending priorities are decided (or at least informed) by local people".[xix]

This is not only a model for austerity - indeed the lack of ownership that people felt over spending decisions when the public coffers were flush with cash may explain the ease with which the narrative has taken hold that the Labour government was profligate with the public finances. But it has particular appeal when there is a limited pot. As Simon Parker, the director of the New Local Government Network, has put it: "We need to engage the public in participatory budgeting exercises that pose three fundamental questions: what are you willing to see go; what are you willing to pay more for; and what are you prepared to do more of for yourselves?"[xx] Participatory budgeting would allow local people to engage directly with the 'tough choices' politicians constantly talk about, giving people a stake in what happens in the place they live. Our groups found that people know you can't always get what you want and accept there will be change and difficult decisions. They just want to feel they are being listened to, that their experiences are valued, their opinions count and have some consequence.

An example of this in practice is in Leith, where Edinburgh council supported a series of '£eith decides' events to allow local people to make decisions on the award of community grants. The aim was to link the community to local democratic processes, as surveys found people felt they had little ability to influence local decision making. Participation overshot expectations and 75 per cent rated the approach as excellent or good.[xxi] In Tower Hamlets, London, residents were presented with a menu of options: 'Reducing Levels of Youth Unemployment', 'Tackling Anti-Social Behaviour', 'Raising GCSE results', 'Improving the Quality of the Public Realm' and 'Improving Cleanliness'.[xxii] At a series of public 'You Decide!' meetings, these services were pitched, deliberated on and budgets allocated accordingly. Residents were also able to adjust the services on offer, with original proposals for a street lighting project reshaped from cleaning and replacing lights to improving lighting underneath bridges. As well as allowing residents to reflect on their own sense of local priorities - recognising people as the experts in their own lives - this type of deliberation has the potential to be positively reinforcing in the same way that participants in our groups were often inspired by the opportunity to come together and deliberate on the matters they cared about.

At present, participatory budgeting has been used to allocate small pots of money but the opportunity here is to apply the approach to larger service budgets, like public health interventions and youth provision, as well as open spaces. We need to focus on asking communities to participate in what is left of the universal service offer, firstly because this is what enhances quality of life for everyone, and secondly because people need to be in the driving seat of their own communities.

Community Day

To raise awareness for our approach, we propose a 'Community Day' public holiday. This would be a symbolic answer to the key conclusion of our research - that people lack the time to invest in the places they live - and would be an opportunity to focus national attention on community action. It would provide a focal point for campaigners to highlight local environmental projects on a large scale and generate widespread media attention, as well as an opportunity to reach out beyond the 'usual suspects'. Community Day should be a new bank holiday, held in the middle of the week, for two reasons: to break up the working week and highlight the work-life balance

issues which prevent communities coming together; and, more prosaically, to discourage people from using it for long-weekend leisure activities.

There is a long-standing argument that Britain lacks public holidays. As previous Fabian research has highlighted, Britain has the second fewest public holidays in Europe and its employees work the longest hours. As the research concluded: "Most working people find it increasingly hard to achieve a satisfactory balance between work and other activities, particularly the enjoyment of quality time with children and the fulfilment of other caring responsibilities. Long hours have reduced the voluntary work done by those in employment."[xxiii]

Community Day would not only highlight the issue, it would give people the opportunity to get to know their neighbours and witness the benefits of community action, helping to embed an ethos that might flourish over time. This would also draw on practice from Norway where the national 'Dugnad' (the Norwegian word for 'voluntary') day is devoted to communities to organise a big tidy up of their local area.

BOX 2: ENABLING LOCAL ACTION IN HALTON

The Halton Community Association was formed in 1978 in response to the decline of the village hall. The hall faced closure but the group managed to keep the facility open. Limited resources and capacity meant that for many years, the hall could not be improved and few facilities were available to residents. However, between 2003 and 2010 the group began to redevelop the site, improving access and renewing heating system.

In 2008 the Association drew up a business plan to drive them forward. Their plans were ambitious and included the development of world class facilities for local young people.

Local residents were very sceptical about the project. They were used to the village the way it was and were resigned to there being nothing to do there. The Association found it difficult to secure help from the city council. However, with the strong support of the parish and county council, plans for a new skate park, games area and playground for the village were submitted to Community Spaces.

The Association found the grant application process difficult and agree that without the support of the county council, Groundwork and their facilitator, their plans may not have proceeded as well as they did. Nevertheless in March 2010 Halton Community Association successfully secured £450,000 Community Spaces funding as a flagship project. The project was successfully completed in July 2011.

Community ownership: a challenge and an opportunity

A big challenge for a popular environmentalism agenda is whether it can be transformed into harder forms of engagement. Can a focus on small local issues lead to action on global warming? Our report argues that building a strong sense of environmental citizenship is a prerequisite of developing the agency to act on national or international issues.

A related challenge is to help people transition from doing the easier things like litter picks into the more complex environmental actions like community energy schemes. There may be a journey of popular environmentalism where local woodland clearing or food growing provides the gateway activity to a

deeper engagement with the local environment, such as community management and ownership.

However, it is important to note that high levels of engagement were met with some resistance in our groups. For example, in our groups we discussed the idea of community land trusts (CLTs). CLTs typically emerge from the gift or grant of land to a community-led body, who develop the land into mutually-owned housing and other often commercial properties. As the Blue Labour thinker Lord Glasman has said, "the area of the trust is not a neutral space but a mutual space. It is neither state nor market, though each plays a role, but is something held in common. In that way community land trusts are an autonomous institution, part of the civic life, with interests and amenable to organisation in pursuit of those interests."[xxiv]

Yet participants in Lincoln had difficulty conceptualising the concept of CLTs and thought the idea was "cultish". There was a particular fear of capture by cliques:

Male: Cliquey group again and they probably won't take on everybody's opinion.

Female 1: I don't like that idea at all. I wouldn't want to be part of it.

Female 2: It would be a selected few wouldn't it in making the decisions. Same as really how things work now.
[Lincoln]

There is great potential for CLTs to address many of the issues raised by this report: low cost housing that allows people to stay in the area for a longer period of time, establishing a more resonant bond of care over the local environment, greater familiarity with neighbours, and a greater stake in the community. A report for Co-operatives UK pointed out the potential for CLTs and other forms of mutual housing and enterprise "to both become a driver for co-operative place making and for setting foundations for investment in the kind of homes and places that many people long for".[xxv] But there may be some way to go until people feel comfortable with that level of engagement. And there is a danger that unless pre-existing power balances are redressed, asset-based approaches will further exclude the excluded, leaving a rump of 'usual suspects' who dominate civic life.

From top-down delivery to enabling local action

This wouldn't be a Fabian report without some consideration of the role of the central state. And indeed, the role of the state does need to change radically in order to enable the type of approach we advocate in this report.

Localism in recent years and in particular under the coalition has largely been about the state retreating. It is an adversarial localism where communities, if they have the capacity, can challenge existing providers and set up their own services. It has been accompanied by massive cut backs to funding of previous programmes that supported local services. What our research calls for is a more co-operative form of localism that sees local public services working in partnership with communities to shape the places in which they live.

To do this effectively central government will have to let go of more funding as well as resist the urge to take a prescriptive view of how change is

achieved, to allow communities greater power to shape their environments. This will also require a rethink of how environmental governance is structured so that communities have the means to participate in the management of their local area.

For example, can central and local government do more to provide support to communities? An example of what is possible can be seen in the work of Groundwork. The account of Brian Jefferson from the Halton Community Association in box 2 demonstrates the difference that having one key point of contact can make to a community project.

BOX 3: POPULAR ENVIRONMENTALISM IN ACTION: PUTTING PEOPLE FIRST IN STOKE

The city of Stoke on Trent is well blessed with semi-natural green space. However, the positive correlations that are usually associated with urban green areas are currently lacking in the city; some of the council's largest green spaces are in close proximity to areas of housing that contain some of the most health-deprived communities in the country. This demonstrates that having the resource is not enough. The barriers which are preventing people from using and benefitting from green assets need tackling.

During 2012, Stoke on Trent city council worked in partnership with the Woodland Trust and the Forestry Commission to plant two new large woodlands in the city as part of the Woodland Trust's Jubilee Woods project. The woodlands were planted on public open space that was not currently well used for recreational activities.

After community consultation on the proposals, two community events were held so that local residents could get involved through planting some of the trees and create part of these new woodlands. Over 300 people attended these events, with many planting trees in memory of loved ones no longer with them. A competition to name each woodland was also run with the winners coming from the local area. In addition, free school educational and tree planting sessions were held with a total of 410 school children attending and learning about woodlands, their history and wildlife.

Opportunities to involve both the health and economic sector in programmes to increase the use of semi-natural green spaces are currently being explored and the lessons learnt from the Jubilee Woods project is a great start from which to build. It is envisaged that through the involvement of local people from the outset, the sites selected will become vibrant and well used green spaces with users benefitting from access to nature and experiencing improved mental and physical health.

Environmentalism everywhere

Environmental action needs to build better connections with all parts of the community, such as local schools, faith groups, trade unions, local women's institute chapters and businesses active in the area. Park friends groups could seek out neighbourhood watch groups to strengthen the links between people that want the place where they live to be safe as well as green. The need to enhance access to quality green spaces such as woodland have a clear link with wider public health concerns. Natural England estimate that the NHS could save £2.1bn if every household in England were provided with good access to quality green space.

Local environmental groups should build links with local schools so that

children build a connection with nature in the place where they live from a young age. The example in box 3 from Stoke is a strong example of how this can be done.

An important part of building a popular environmentalism is to renew the language used by campaigners. In our research people talked about place, community, safety and beauty. Environmentalism needs to be discussed using a vocabulary that is simple and resonant.

The need to build a more popular environmentalism is growing urgent with each passing year. Research by the RSPB has shown that children today have less contact with the natural world than 50 years ago. Work by the Woodland Trust has shown that only 14 per cent of people in England have a wood within 500 meters of home that they are allowed to walk in. At the same time the estimated impact of air pollution in the UK is between £9-19bn. Flooding is costing the country in the region of £2.5bn a year. Energy bills have risen at alarming rates and the public feel that community spirit has declined. These are all issues that demand attention and many of them require solutions which overlap. Through a new culture of environmental campaigning and policymaking they are issues we can together start to address.

5 CONCLUSION

Even when the economy was growing at an unprecedented rate in the middle of the last decade, many were noting the advent of a 'social recession'. As Nick Johnson observed in the Fabian pamphlet *Separate and Unequal:* "More of us live alone, we express greater anxiety about the future and are generally less happy than previous generations."[xxvi]

The overall picture of the current strength of our social solidarity is mixed. The Cabinet Office's most recent assessment of community life found an increase in rates of volunteering in 2012-13 compared with 2010-11, although concluded it was "too early to say whether this represents a sustained reversal of the decline since 2005".[xxvii] Participation in formal politics continues to decline, with 54 per cent of the public telling the Hansard Society Audit of Political Engagement they 'don't have enough time to get involved in politics' and only 41 per cent now saying they would be certain to vote.[xxviii] However, the decline in participation in formal politics does not necessarily mean the collapse in the democratic instinct. As Graeme Cooke has argued, "many forms of political participation - like community organising, online activism and single-issue campaigns - have flourished in recent years." Cooke points out that the street protests, student demonstrations and public sector strikes of the early part of the parliament demonstrate a high degree of popular engagement in the public life of the country.[xxix] While membership of political parties and trade unions has declined, membership numbers for many large charities remain healthy, in particular environmental charities.[xxx]

There is both a challenge and an opportunity for environmentalism here, which this report seeks to highlight. People are undoubtedly pessimistic about the strength of their communities and their potential to turn things around. But they are not without desire. Based on a strong attachment to place, many are ready and willing to commit themselves to improving their local environment if certain barriers are addressed and if someone takes the lead. This needs action from all sides - for central government it requires a much firmer grip being taken to ensure fairer market outcomes and improved quality of life; for local government it means the opening up of the budgeting processes to allow citizens into the decision-making process to shape the places they live; and for campaigners it means becoming much more present in people's everyday lives.

Our sessions tended to end with people talking about positively about the experience of taking part in the focus groups and meeting people from different backgrounds with things in common. They appreciated the opportunity to come together and discuss their hopes and fears for their local areas with other people, and took pleasure and inspiration from what they found they shared. But our communities lack places where people can meet on a regular basis and share their lives with one another. Perhaps by focusing on local shared spaces, environmentalists can help facilitate this democratic conversation.

So despite the widespread assumption that the environment remains off the table as the political conversation moves from recession to recovery, this report reveals a great deal of hope for a new, more resonant environmental politics if we start from where people live. When the financial crisis struck, environmentalism lacked the language to convince people that what was needed was a 'green recovery', that the low-carbon transition was the answer to austerity. The crisis was a missed opportunity for the environmental movement. There now has to be a relentless focus on defining the recovery as a failure unless it can deliver a better standard of living for ordinary people, better access to health and education and equal access to a safe and beautiful environment.

We cannot win this argument without building a popular environmentalism. And this means building relationships at a local level in order to rebuild trust in both politics and the environmental movement. That trust must be rebuilt because so much is at stake. The connection we feel to the places in which we live are determined both by the physical attributes of that place and the people we share that place with. Public health, intergenerational justice, resilience to extreme weather, quality of life and wellbeing, building a sustainable economy: all rely on a popular environmentalism being a political priority. The public needs to believe that environmentalism is a movement of the people, by the people, for the people; the means to a safer and more beautiful place for everyone.

ENDNOTES

i   For full details of the opinion poll, see www.fabians.org.uk/pride-of-place/
ii   Wilson J (2012) *Letting Go: How Labour Can Learn to Stop Worrying and Trust the People*, Fabian Society
iii   http://labourlist.org/2014/02/ed-milibands-hugo-young-lecture-full-text/
iv   http://press.labour.org.uk/post/76437199785/power-and-one-nation-jon-crud das-speech-to-the-nlgn
v   Runciman, D. (2008) 'Why Not Eat an Eclair?' *London Review of Books*, Vol. 30 No. 19, 9 October
vi   Olson, M (1965) *The Logic of Collective Action: Public Goods and the Theory of Groups,* Harvard University Press
vii   BC1 and C2D refer to the National Readership Survey (NRS) social grades and these are taken to equate to middle class and working class respectively. Only around 2% of the UK population identifies as upper class, and this group is not included in the classification scheme. The NRS social grades are a system of demo graphic classification used in the United Kingdom
viii   Stears M (2011) *Everyday Democracy: Taking Centre-Left Politics Beyond State and Market,* IPPR
ix   Doron, N (2012) 'Frustrated, powerless and ignored', Fabian Review online, www.fabians.org.uk/frustrated-powerless-and-ignored/
x   Davis, R (2012) 'A popular environmentalism', *Soundings,* Issue 51, Summer
xi   Hothi, M (2013) *Growing Community Organising*, The Young Foundation
xii   As the Young Foundation's work shows, community organising will not be appropri ate everywhere: in areas that lack civil society institutions and local leaders "it is unlikely that community organising will be sustainable or effective in the long term… In areas where community organising is not viable, other forms of community work may be more appropriate."
xiii   Minton A (2006) 'What kind of world are we building? The privatisation of public space' http://www.annaminton.com/Privatepublicspace.pdf
xiv   Minton, A (2012) We are returning to an undemocratic model of land ownership http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2012/jun/11/public-spaces-undemocratic-land-ownership
xv   The Fabian Commission on Future Spending Choices (2013) *2030 Vision: The Final Report of the Fabian Commission on Future Spending Choices*, Fabian Society
xvi   Doron, N and Harrop, A (2012) *For the Public Good: How people want public services to change,* Fabian Society
xvii   Horton T and Gregory J (2009) *The Solidarity Society: Why We Can Afford to End Poverty, and How to Do it with Public Support,* Fabian Society
xviii   Diamond P (2013) 'An era of less', *Fabian Review,* Volume 125—No. 1
xix   Wallis E and Skrzypek-Claassens A (eds) (2014) *Back to Earth: Reconnecting People and Politics*, Fabian Society
xx   Parker, S (2013) 'How Councils Can Respond to Funding Cuts', *Ethos Journal,*19 December
xxi   http://www.participatorybudgeting.org.uk/case-studies/case-studies/a3eith-decides-edinburgh
xxii   http://www.participatorybudgeting.org.uk/case-studies/case-studies/you-decide-tower-hamlets-london
xxiii   Jacobs, M (2001) 'Give us more bank holidays', *New Statesman,* 5th March, http://www.newstatesman.com/node/139775
xxiv   Conaty P and Large M (eds) (2013) *Commons Sense: Co-operative place making and the capturing of land value for 21st century Garden Cities,* Co-operatives UK
xxv   Ibid.

xxvi   Johnson, N (2010) *Separate and Unequal: How integration can deliver the good society,* Fabian Society

xxxvii Cabinet Office (2013) *Giving of time and money: Findings from the 2012-13 Community Life Survey*

xxviii Hansard Society (2013) *Audit of Political Engagement 10: The 2013 Report*

xxix   Cooke, G (2011) *Still partying like it's 1995: How the Centre-Left can grasp the new sources of political energy in society to transform politics,* IPPR

xxx   National Council for Voluntary Organisations (2011) Participation: Trends, Facts and Figures

PRIDE OF PLACE |

LAND, COMMUNITY AND A POPULAR ENVIRONMENTALISM

By Natan Doron and Ed Wallis

Pride of Place investigates how people's sense of identity, shaped by their attachment to their local area, can sit at the heart of a new politics of the environment.

New public attitudes research uncovers that people think of the environment in terms of the place they live and the people they live there with, not carbon emissions and climate change. The report argues that it is only by restoring faith in the power of collective action in a specific locality that we can restore the momentum environmental politics needs. *Pride of Place* calls for nothing less than a revolution in the culture of environmentalism, which puts a much greater focus on rebuilding democratic capacity rather than focusing on securing legislative change at a national and supranational level.

Despite the widespread assumption that the environment remains off the table as the political conversation moves from recession to recovery, this report reveals a great deal of hope for a new, more resonant environmental politics if we start from where people live.