Whose Right to Urban Nature?

A case study of Old Tidemill Wildlife Garden in Deptford, south-east London.

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Abstract

This exploratory research project explores the production and use, and subsequent closure and eviction of the community-designed and managed Old Tidemill Wildlife Garden in Deptford – a predominantly working-class area in south-east London. This community garden played a key role in the lives of many local residents and its closure and subsequent demolition to make way for a large housing project drew a significant backlash from local residents which included protests, law-suits, and the occupation of the garden itself.

Why this small, half-acre community garden garnered such a notable response is the main focus of and motivation for this research project. Using a combined-methods approach consisting of semi-structured interviews and participant observation, this research investigates what it was about Old Tidemill Wildlife Garden which resulted in this backlash, and why the local council’s decision to close it drew such a militant revolt from local community members.

Combining the empirical results of this research with a deep inquiry into the concepts of space and power within urban theory, this thesis seeks to understand the rights working-class communities have to contribute to the production of public green space, and how such community-led contribution can impact on the space produced, both inside and outside the context of Old Tidemill Wildlife Garden and its former users.

Keywords

Urban nature, urban political ecology, critical urban theory, community activism, public green space, working-class politics.

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Firstly, I would like to thank every person who agreed to participate in this project. The passion and humility of the people of Deptford is truly special, and their commitment to their local community is in my eyes unique within the context of London. For many this was a very emotive, and still a very raw topic to speak about so I am incredibly grateful to all those who agreed to share their views and opinions with me.

I would also like to give a big thank you to Andrew Byerley for agreeing to supervise this project and for providing continual feedback, advise and encouragement throughout.

And finally, a special thank you goes to Nicola Varanese and Sarah Kirkby, whose wonderful hospitality in Deptford allowed this project to happen, as well as offering an immense amount of help through their local knowledge, expertise, and recording equipment kindly lent to me.
This Master’s thesis has been written between April and May 2019, with the fieldwork conducted for this research project undertaken between March and April 2019. All statements relating to the current situation regarding Old Tidemill Wildlife Garden’s impending closure, the occupation of Tidemill Green and lawsuits and as well as social conflict that have arisen from this, along with the social makeup of Deptford in general, are correct at the time of writing to the best of the my (the author’s) knowledge. However, this is a complex and ever-changing situation, and attitudes and opinions on the impact of urban changes shift over time. Therefore the reader is advised to understand such statements, as well as the overall perceived impact of the case study itself, within the context of the time it was written.

It is also necessary to point out that some parts of this thesis have been adapted from my own previous, unpublished coursework, written for courses forming part of the International Master’s Programme in Environmental Social Science at Stockholm University.
Ethics Statement

This research project will be conducted with the full compliance of research ethics norms and accepted procedures, and more specifically the codes and practices commonly adhered to at the Department of Geography at Stockholm University, Sweden. The research will involve human participants in the form of both face-to-face, voice-recorded interviews, as well as conversational in the form of participant observation. As researcher, I take core responsibility to explain, in detail, what my aims, goals and motivations for my research project are, to all of my participants.

Stockholm University does not require its Masters researchers to provide an information or consent form to any of its participants. Therefore I confirm that I will give an open and transparent description of my intentions to all of my participants, with no intention to mislead or misinform in the pursuit of data. For every one of my face-to-face, voice-recorded interviews, I will obtain verbal, recorded consent to use their data. I will also obtain verbal, recorded conformation of their understanding of their right to withdraw their consent at any time between now and the hand in date of May 29th 2019.

As participant observation often requires having informal conversations with groups of people, I hereby confirm that I will always make my own position as a researcher clear whenever I intend to use the data obtained from such conversations.

Due to the delicate nature of the research project, I also confirm that all names used will be pseudonymised, and that this will be made clear to all participants involved. Due to the small size of the community being researched, there will be cases where the data obtained may nonetheless give clear indication of the participant’s probable identity. In such cases, I will make this clear to the participants.
Finally, I hereby confirm that I will ensure the safe protection of all data collected from misplacement or theft. This will include, but not be limited to, ensuring all voice recordings are wiped, without trace, from recording equipment that have been borrowed, as well as the safe encryption of all voice files, interview transcripts and observational field notes on my own hardware.

In summary, I hereby testify that I will adhere to the research ethics standards expected of me by the Department of Geography at Stockholm University for a Masters thesis.
1. Introduction

In contemporary urban policy there is a problem. A problem that is understood, accepted, critiqued and critiqued, but it remains. This problem is systemic of the arrangement of our current world in which we live and operate, in which planners plan, investors fund, architects draw and builders build. This problem is a huge disconnect between people and their lived space.

Very few of us have the opportunity to influence how our lived public urban spaces are shaped. Even those who become architects and planners professionally, or who end up in positions of influence over the decisions which impact the lived spaces of our cities rarely decide on their own lived spaces – more often than not such positions are filled by people with little sense of attachment or emotional investment in the spaces whose futures are being planned. Instead we have come to accept that cities are the way they are, and change because that is simply what is the most economical and least problematic way forward. Yet we cannot deny that cities are after all one of humankind’s greatest achievements; the urban sociologist Robert Park describes them as “man’s most successful attempt to remake the world he lives in more after his heart’s desire” (Park, 1967, p.3, quoted in Harvey, 2008). Yet those who actually live in these cities have little to no influence on the way the look, feel and work. For the most part, we do not design cities, we simply occupy cities and adapt to their changes, unable to influence and shape their spaces.

This dynamic between society and space may not necessarily be a bad thing – after all many of the public spaces we use on a daily basis are more than adequate in fulfilling our needs. In a city like London, the unfortunate rarity of sunny summer days sees the city transformed and in particular its public green spaces being utilised in abundance; indeed the luxury of owning a private garden in London is rapidly declining, particularly in the city’s poorer areas (Smith, 2010). Yet the way we use these spaces, the paths we take through parks and more poignantly the way we interact with this urban nature is largely predetermined. Public green spaces are designed for us, and whilst often they are seen as a refreshing
alternative to the concrete, glass and traffic of a modern megacity, their designs do nonetheless dictate the way we can and do use them.

Yet every now and again green spaces pop up which break this pattern; when forgotten flecks of urban land find themselves appropriated and redesigned by local residents in a way that plays a key role in their livelihoods, empowering people in their experience and interaction with nature within urban environments.

One such space was Old Tidemill Wildlife Garden (hereafter referred to as ‘Old Tidemill’) in Deptford – a poor area of south-east London unfortunately close to one of the financial centres of the modern world, Canary Wharf. This small garden had been taken over by local artists and transformed into an invaluable community asset by the local community, following the closure of the local school which had previously owned the space in 2012 (Douglass, 2017). This small oasis of green offered the predominantly working-class local community space to grow vegetables, space for families to bring children to play and learn with a small pond-based ecosystem and educational materials, a space for local artists to perform, a space for the local community to come together, to bond and, importantly, its tree cover provides a valuable carbon sink to mitigate the severe air pollution caused by local traffic (Bennett, 2018). The key success of this space has been a focus on the future. Parents have helped with the design of this space with their children and future generations in mind. It has therefore deliberately been designed as sustainable from the beginning, rather than the more common instance of a space being adjusted to fit within the modern ‘sustainability’ paradigm. That makes this space for its users rather special.

Yet in March 2019 this community garden was demolished to make way for housing – something which is currently in London both urgently needed and highly profitable. But this hasn’t happened without a backlash from the local community. In fact the conflict that has erupted from this decision to develop this space has gained national attention (e.g., Powell & Carlin, 2018; Childs, 2019). This is where I first heard about this struggle and became aware of the impact Old Tidemill’s closure was having on the local area.

As a former resident of Deptford I had developed a personal interest in the local area, and this provided a key motivation to use this case study to investigate contemporary urban social change and its impact on a socioeconomically marginalised community in London. A key interest here was understanding the agency an urban community (which I perceived to be unusually tight-knit and culture-bound for London) have in how their lived public spaces – particularly green spaces – are produced and managed.
This research project investigates Old Tidemill as a single case study. This allows it to go into great detail investigating both the space itself, including why it was eulogised by local residents to such an extent, and the power relations which have resulted in the closure of Old Tidemill, and the response to this from local people. Entirely qualitatively based, I employ a combination of face-to-face interviews and participant observation to do this. This project is exploratory and sequential, allowing me as the researcher to let the garden’s former users tell me what aspects and topics carry the greatest important to them and to be able to build and react to this information in the field. These topics are then analysed in detail, and combined with a selection of academic literature relevant to them, exploring the relationships between Deptford as a society, and its interactions with power and across space to try to understand what role Old Tidemill can play in contemporary urban theory.

Due to my own personal investment in the local area and its people, I have classified this project as action research, insomuch as it is designed to encourage further academic engagement with Old Tidemill, and I will make it freely available to anyone who wishes to make use of it in the hope that it can encourage greater engagement with the topic. This positionality and its implications for the research itself are explained in greater detail in Chapter 4.
1.1 Background

Since 29th August 2018, a group of activists had been occupying Old Tidemill Wildlife Garden (see Figure 1) in Deptford, south-east London (Worthington, 2018a). Exactly two months after the occupation began, on 29th October 2018, they were evicted by police in a dawn raid described in the media as ‘heavy handed’ (Witton, 2018). This tiny, half-acre community garden, along with the neighbouring Reginald House block of (primarily council) flats was set to be demolished to make way for a new housing development including social housing - something much needed in one of London’s most deprived areas. These campaigners had resorted to extreme action, vowing to chain themselves to the trees should bulldozers come in, following a recent eviction notice served by Lewisham Borough Council (Powell & Carlin, 2018). However in the end they were heavily outnumbered by police and privately hired bailiffs, unable to resist their eviction (Witton, 2018) (see Figure 2).

Fig. 1: Location of the 2,400m² Old Tidemill Wildlife Garden within Deptford, south-east London (source: Citizen Sense, 2018)
This small patch of green, formerly an overgrown, unused space neglected by local authorities, was adopted by the local school in the 1990s and, over the course of a few years, transformed by a combination of teachers, children and parents into a thriving garden (Save Reginald! Save Tidemill!, 2018). 74 trees were planted, a thriving pond-based ecosystem was established, flowerbeds were designed and two small amphitheatres were built for local artists to perform in. When the trees grew, tree houses were built and became part of a larger adventure playground for local children (see Figure 3). Soon enough vegetable patches were established for local residents to use, and the garden quickly became a major centre for community-run local events, from science workshops and family days, to farmers’ markets, food festivals, poetry and storytelling events, and even exhibitions for local artists (Bennett, 2018) (see Figure 4). In 2012 a community-based artists’ initiative under the banner

Fig. 2: Local campaigners are met by a line of police and privately-hired bailiffs during the eviction on 29th October, 2018 (source: Worthington, 2018a)
Assembly SE8 was formed, who took over the everyday management and maintenance of the garden following the closure of Tidemill School, and use of the space as well as engagement with the greater Deptford community increased further, with the space being opened to the public on regular occasions (Assembly SE8, 2018). In particular it was commented on by users how the unusual layout and ‘wildness’ of the garden made children interact with it in a very special way (Douglass, 2017) (see Figures 5 and 6). This small garden had become a vital asset of the community, and an integral part of many residents' everyday lives. This had all been achieved by a local community in one of London's poorest and most neglected areas, through a combination of volunteering and fundraising initiatives, and without any financial help or help in general from the local authority.

**Fig. 3:** Local children using the treehouse and adventure playground built by local community members (source: Hodgkinson, 2015)
**Fig. 4:** A local musician plays to a small crown in one of the two amphitheatres in Old Tidemill Wildlife Garden (source: Douglass, 2017)

**Fig. 5:** Some of the wild and unkept aspects of the wildlife garden (source: Douglass, 2017)
In 2017 that very same local authority announced plans to sell this space, along with the adjacent and now derelict Tidemill School, and a block of primarily council flats, Reginald House, to a private developer, Peabody, to build 208 new homes, including 51 private (likely luxury) properties. On their website Lewisham Borough Council state that the garden was only ever set up as a temporary use for the site and that the site had been earmarked for new homes for more than a decade (Lewisham Council, 2018a).

Local activist and journalist Andy Worthington (2018b) sees this proposal as part of a wider project of ‘social cleansing’ being carried out by Lewisham Borough Council; seeing comparisons in similar, ongoing regeneration schemes tearing apart communities across the borough - in Catford town centre, Milford Towers in Catford and the Achilles Street area in New Cross. These projects are getting the go-ahead under the guise of providing vital social housing at an affordable cost, however this appears to be primarily in line with the so-called 'London Affordable Rent' which is actually 63% higher (equating to around £3,000 extra per year) than the Lewisham average; one of the capital's poorest boroughs (Trust for London, 2018). It is hard to envisage that those affected by the increase would have agreed to this in any form of fair and democratic process, and despite Lewisham Borough Council's seemingly
transparent consultation processes for local residents and businesses for the Achilles Street project (Lewisham Council, 2018b), counter-research carried out by local community group A Better Besson Street (2016) found only two of the 45 affected residents they interviewed had actually been consulted on the redevelopment plans, with the majority of residents having a real culture of mistrust towards local authorities.

In 2017 researchers in nearby Goldsmith's College showed that the large tree canopy in Old Tidemill Wildlife Garden, planted by the community 20 years previously, had significantly mitigated PM$_{2.5}$ levels for the surrounding area, which on nearby Deptford Church Street had been recorded on numerous occasions as exceeding six times the World Health Organisation's guideline of 25µg/m$^3$ for 24-hour daily mean concentration of PM$_{2.5}$ (Citizen Sense, 2017). As a former resident of a second-storey flat overlooking Deptford Church Street, I am personally all too aware of the harmful effects of pollution caused by heavy traffic in the area, and how valuable this ecosystem service is as a result to the local community.

1.2 Rationale

With a growing acceptance of the need for urban areas to adapt and become more sustainable and healthy environments, there is a clear thirst for more green space within cities, and for the protection of current urban nature from redevelopment. What influence local communities – particularly those in poorer areas of our cities – have on the design and purpose of these green spaces provides a key motivation for this work. Deptford’s residents designed this garden entirely to serve their needs, yet it was taken away. Therefore the main rationale for this research is to use this case study as a lens through which to explore the agency of poorer urban communities in the overall shaping of our future cities and their green spaces.
Further to this, the Old Tidemill conflict is current, ongoing and still very relevant to local residents. Therefore this research intends to be activist in nature. I intend this research to be made available to those involved in both sides of this conflict (and similar ones) should it be of any use and should they wish to use it. Taking such an activist stance with this project means that I have had to fully consider all the ethical and methodological implications, and I lay these out in detail in Chapter 4.

1.3 Structure

This thesis structured into seven main chapters. The introduction, which outlined the research project’s rationale, as well as the historical background of Old Tidemill, is presented here. Following this, Chapter 2 comprises of a literature review which investigates the interplay between two key concepts identified as critical to the understanding of this case study; space and power. Chapter 3 adds to this conceptual analysis and builds an overall theoretical framework, introducing critical urban theory and urban political ecology which are used later on as lenses through which to understand this research project’s empirical study. Chapter 4 describes the methodology I adopted, and outlines the ontological and epistemological basis for this research, as well as justifying the research methods used. Chapter 5 presents the results from the empirical study, which are then discussed and analysed in conjuncture with the conceptual and theoretical frameworks introduced previously in Chapter 6. Finally, Chapter 7 concludes the thesis and offers suggestions for future research.
This research project concerns itself with two key aspects of the case study site in relation to its community – its accessibility, and its use. In other words, it is interested in how and when local people were able to use Old Tidemill, and what the significance of this was. Broadly speaking, these two themes can be classified as ‘space’ and ‘power’. In the context of Old Tidemill, the concept of spatiality explores what this garden was and what uses this space offered, what meaning was infused into it by its users, and what this space represented to the local community as a whole. In the same context, ‘power’ explores the struggle of the local community to claim this space and to save it from redevelopment, and more broadly the ability of its users to influence this decision-making process. This literature review initially separates these two topics and delves into the thematic basis for each topic and their relevant academic literature. The interaction between space and power then investigated and, importantly, is later on viewed within the context of London’s current political landscape, which plays a key role in shaping Old Tidemill’s story.

This research is not attempting to see the Old Tidemill case study as a parallel or example of similar struggles in other places as a cross-sectional research design would attempt, but rather accepts its uniqueness within the context of Deptford’s history, culture and people. Indeed the methodology was designed to collect data which emphasises this and are not generalisable (see Chapter 4). Instead, I have attempted to explore the concepts of space and power in relation to this particular case study as an example of how they can manifest themselves in specific conditions. Therefore this literature review will explore these concepts in relation to the overriding themes of community, urbanity and nature as they are most relevant to the case study itself.

Following this investigation, Chapter 3 is used to develop a theoretical framework through which the research topic will be analysed and discussed. This literature review lays the foundations for the overarching theoretical mechanisms introduced in Chapter 3 to frame this empirical study, and realise its significance within the greater picture of urban theory. It is worth noting at this point that my research design was exploratory and sequential in nature.
This means that I went into the fieldwork without this developed theoretical framework. This was done intentionally to allow my participants to steer this research to the topics which were most relevant to them, rather than being guided by myself through preconceived thematical bias (for a thorough discussion of the motives underpinning this, see Chapter 4). Accordingly, this literature review has been developed in retrospect to the field study itself and its choice of topics is influence by the data I collected.

2.1 Space

“Not so many years ago, the word ‘space’ had a strictly geometrical meaning” (Lefebvre, 1991: 1)

One of the fundamental concepts explored in the field of geography is ‘space’. Human geography is concerned with how human beings – and therefore society – interact, shape and understand the space around them. Initially, as the quote from Henri Lefebvre, above, explains, the understanding of space was confined to descriptive and measurable realms. The study of space and therefore more generally the discipline of geography (as it would be described today) was interested in the Cartesian aspects of an area, related to mathematical volume and Euclidian geometry and observations of what was in in that space (Castells, 2000). In the context of a city therefore, describing space would be describing streets, plazas, alleyways and parks – in other words anything with cartographic relevance (Rice, 2015). As the point of describing space in this way was to facilitate societal interaction with their environment, space and society are intrinsically interlinked (Hubbard et al., 2004).
2.1.1 Space and society

As this interaction between society and space started to be realised, the concept of space began to be reconceptualised as more than a simply measurable area or volume, but to include and be shaped by the social aspects which inhabit it (Harvey, 2009). Lefebvre’s (1991) ‘La Production de l’espace’ emphasises this in great detail, pertaining that space is entirely defined by society’s relation to it and hence is not static, but in constant flux, shaped by society’s changes within it. As Castells (2000: 441) puts it, “space is not a reflection of society, it is its expression. In other words, space is not a photocopy of society, it is society”.

This shifts a human being’s relationship with the environment in which they live drastically. No longer are we living our lives within the constraints of our environments, but the environments in which we live are fundamentally defined by the lives we choose to lead. We inject meaning into these environments and they respond by creating the space we define, and the relationship between space and society becomes symbiotic. Space and society (re)produce each other over time; space provides the context in which we can operate and produce society, which in turn provide the context to control and produce space (Foucault, 1991).

2.1.2 The production of space

This symbiotic relationship between society and space ultimately renders a separation between what we define as ‘space’ and what is simply there. As an example, an undiscovered planet in a distant galaxy has yet to have any meaning injected into it as it is yet to be seen, described, or even thought about by society. It exists, yet nobody knows so. Therefore it has zero relationship with humans and is meaningless and irrelevant to society as a whole. If space and society are interlinked in this way, then this planet would struggle to fit the definition of ‘space’ until it has been discovered or ‘produced’ by society.

In a similar vein, a particular space can be reproduced in accordance with human interaction with it. Tiananmen Square in Beijing is (outside of the modern-day Great Chinese Firewall) ubiquitous with peaceful protest and violent military counteraction and largely
defined by them, as era-defining societal events in June 1989 happened in this space, reproducing its meaning and significance to society (Langley, 2009). Furthermore, the societal change that the entire country underwent – retreating to an autocratic and repressive regime which limited the freedoms of its citizens – this change is largely embodied by Tiananmen Square through the historical context in how and by whom this space was contested. This means that this particular space represents a far greater meaning to society in general than merely to those who actively use or have used the square.

2.1.3 The trialectic of space

But the space of Tiananmen Square is not singular, and societal obliviousness of the events of 1989 do not reproduce this space to erase previous meaning infused into it. Lefebvre (1991) saw space itself as exhibiting itself across three separate metaphysical conditions in which it is occupied. He described this trichotomy as the ‘trialectic of space’ (i.e., the triple-dialectic of space).

The first condition in which space can be occupied is ‘espace perçu’ or ‘perceived space’. This is the physical space we perceive around us in our everyday lives. It created the material conditions for our society, as described previously.

The second condition is referred to as ‘espace concu’ or ‘conceived space’. This is the objective space as we describe it, theoretically and objectively. It is resigned to theory and is the space in which architects and planners work in. Its representations often are quite literally blueprints, drawn plans and animations.

The final condition in which space manifests itself is ‘espace vécu’ or ‘lived space’. This space is representational, contracted by individuals and therefore individual to each of us. According to Soja’s (1996) interpretation (what he describes as ‘Thirdspace’), this space can only exist because of the existence of espace perçu and espace concu. It is the space in which we live, in which we actively experience our everyday lives and our social relations. It exists exclusively because of the other two conditions, as every action happens in the gap between spatial practices and representations of space. It therefore exists as a result of our understanding of the other two spatial conditions (Rice, 2015).
Understanding the different forms space can take on a metaphysical level, and how its representation can be shaped in different ways will be central to understanding the conditions in which the Old Tidemill garden itself – a space now relegated to history – exists. This can no longer be *espace vecu* in the form this research project is interested in (as a garden, pre-demolition) and understanding its significance will rely on memory and interpretation.

### 2.1.4 Space and power

That space is produced in these ways (and can be reproduced in accordance with societal change) is fundamental to Lefebvre’s (1991) thesis that the social production of value and meaning ultimately shapes the space around us. As a Marxist theorist, Lefebvre saw this as heavily interlinked with capitalism and therefore the reproduction of society through the reproduction of space is guided by who controls that space (Butler, 2012). If space and society are intrinsically interconnected, influencing each other, then the assertion of control over space equates to the assertion of control over society (Lefebvre, 1991). In other words, space becomes a political tool to be contested and controlled; more poignantly it becomes the arena of power.
2.2 Power

2.2.1 Power and space

If space is the arena of power, then it would be useful to understand exactly what power is. Unfortunately, however, the concept of power is fiendishly difficult to define. As Law (1991: 165) puts it: “power is surely one of the most contentious and slippery concepts in sociology. Used, re-used and endlessly abused”. Therefore, instead of attempting to define power as a concept outright, we shall adopt Westwood’s (2002) conceptualisation that power is fundamentally something which one group of people owns and exerts over another. The ‘owning’ of power is realised through control, which often manifests itself through forceful means (e.g., through weaponry, policing or control of information). In the case of nation-states, power has always been wielded and retained through such means (Chomsky et al., 2002) or, as CGP Grey (2015) puts it, through ‘bigger-army diplomacy’.

Yet power is not just won through intimidation and is often linked, in a Machiavellian sense, to knowledge, through influence and coercion (insomuch as adopted power is maintained through the strategic positioning of knowledge) (Harrison, 2011). This is the idea that the possession of greater knowledge gives a political advantage if exercised correctly, therefore knowledge is power. Whilst this is heavily dependent on what type of knowledge is concerned and, more importantly, what the repercussions of knowing this knowledge might be, this is an interesting thesis regarding space. If space is contingent on the infusion of knowledge through the social sphere, then the concept of knowledge as power dictates that space is a construction (and expression) of power itself.

2.2.2 Power and public space

This concept is why Nancy Chang (2002) interprets the heavy policing of US public spaces in the aftermath of the September 11 terrorist attacks as a fundamental shift in power away from ordinary people and into the hands of the state. By asserting control over public space, one asserts control over the collective knowledge of how this space should be used. Losing control
over vital spaces is only too evident in recent memory, as popular control over the main square in capital cities has led to recent revolutions in Egypt and Ukraine. This also explains the actions of the Chinese army in Tiananmen Square in 1989.

So this is nothing new. Harvey (2006) traces this assertion of power through the medium of public space back to the grand design of Haussmann’s Paris, built between 1853 and 1870. He states: “the new boulevards were construed as public spaces to facilitate the state’s protection of bourgeois private property. They should not be open, therefore, to those who might challenge (or even appear to challenge by virtue of their rags) the bourgeois social order. (ibid.: 20). Not just were the boulevards of Haussmann’s Paris deliberately designed to be obstructive to lower classes, but Harvey (ibid.) asserts that the entire city was designed to emphasise the spectacle. Its grandeur and sheer scale were, indeed, spectacular, and underneath that façade Paris was “spectacular in the most oppressive sense of the word” (Clark, quoted in Harvey, 2006: 23), designed to mask and disguise the fundamentals of class relations through sensual experience and consumerist distraction allowing barely a second to stop and think. We must not forget the context in which this grand plan was drawn up – in the direct aftermath of the Paris Commune in 1848 where, for a brief moment in history, power was held not in the hands of the state, but in the hands of Paris’s people; its community.

2.2.3 Power and community

The notion of what constitutes a community is fluid, dynamic and, as this research project goes on to show, almost impossible to pin down (for a detailed discussion on this, see Chapter 5). However broadly speaking, a sense of community amongst any group of people involves, according to McMillan & Chavis (1986: 9pp), the following four key elements:

- membership
- influence
- integration and fulfilment of needs
- shared emotional connection
All of these elements facilitate an overall sense of belonging that community expresses through the connection of like-minded people. Of particular interest here is the second point – ‘influence’. This is the idea that a sense of community facilitates a bidirectional perception of influence. In one direction this perception comes from an individual member understanding to have some influence over the group as a whole. In the other direction, “cohesiveness is contingent on a group’s ability to influence its members” (ibid.: 11). This means that the sense of power within a community is dichotomous and although it may initially seem contradictory, it is the result of a careful balance. Vital to the longevity of any community is the equal weighting of a strong sense of one’s own influence within that community, and the community’s influence over oneself. Chavis & Wandersman (1990) claim that this balance creates a sense of empowerment which extends outside of the confines of the community and gives it real purpose – the sentiment that collective power is greater than the sum of its parts.

This might explain why there is a tendency to find strong communities in more marginalised neighbourhoods. For example, Corcoran (2002) showed that a variety of marginalised communities across European cities all shared a deep sense of place and belonging, of people and place, which acted as a mechanism to mobilise around the challenges they faced. In other words, the closeness created by community led to empowerment, and more marginalised urban neighbourhoods were together subject to a powerlessness which this addressed.

In this sense community can lead to the empowerment of local residents in direct relation to local place (and therefore in general terms, space) which is likely to occur amongst marginalised groups out of necessity, as the very marginalisation the community is subject to results from a collective sense of powerlessness.

2.2.4 Power and London’s working-class communities

This research project concerns itself with a community in a predominantly working-class neighbourhood in London. Therefore it is worth at this stage delving into the concept of power within this specific context. As Mckenzie (2017: 265) puts it, “class struggle, class politics and class identity is embedded deep within the cultural norms, practices and history of British democracy. Consequently it is difficult if not impossible to prise class inequality in
the UK away from and out of national, local and personal politics”. Working classes have experienced a growing disillusionment with politics in general, emphasised by a drastic decline in electoral participation amongst demographically and socioeconomically marginal groups (i.e., the young, the old, and the working class) (Flinders, 2014). This growing working-class political apathy has been very publicly coupled with the Leave vote in the 2016 European referendum elsewhere in the UK (Mckenzie, 2017), however this is not particularly relevant in London, whose residents voted predominantly remain (BBC, 2016) (with the Borough of Lewisham seeing a 70% Remain vote overall (Lewisham Council, 2016).

Instead, Peter Mair (2013) points us to a far more fundamental failing of democracy itself, which has manifested itself in a different way in London to the rest of the UK. He argues of a dangerous spiral which Western democracies can all too easily fall victim to, where politicians begin to turn their back on the electorate, and in turn the electorate begins to turn its back on politicians. Politics becomes more depoliticised and as the connection between voters and voted diminishes, democracy falls away. Evans & Tilley (2017) argue that this process of depoliticisation threads its way up from the working class, being the backbone of the UK’s major political parties’ voting bases, and that it is the political parties that have abandoned their voters and not the other way around. Whilst in rural northern England, for example, the discourse this detachment has fuelled has largely been expressed through Leave voting, in multicultural London it realised another outlet – local governments.

The Grenfell Fire disaster in 2017 – the UK’s deadliest peacetime fire in more than 100 years (Chakrabortty, 2017) – exposed how poor residents in the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea were completely excluded from virtually all local democratic process by their council (MacLeod, 2018), ultimately costing at least 71 lives (Gentleman, 2017). There have been many reports of a complete break in trust from London’s poorer, working-class communities living in council blocks towards their local governments as a result of this (Omar, 2018). In other words, the democratic empowerment which public representation at a council level should lend to London’s working class has disintegrated, leaving a bitterness that, according to Mair’s (2013) thesis, perpetuates itself both in voters and (local) government itself.
2.2.6 Power and rights

London’s working class are all too aware of their political weakness discussed in the previous section – a trend which critical urban theorists see perpetuated in cities the world over by the workings of capitalism (Mitchell, 2003; Brenner, 2009). The inevitable backlash to political disempowerment is protest and street activism, the rise of which Harvey (2012) argues is a direct result of growing inequality between urban rich and urban poor. As this gap widens or, maybe more significantly, as the middle classes become wealthier thereby leaving the working class behind, the accumulative political voice of the working class is drowned out.

With the wants and desires of poorer communities falling on deaf ears, the rhetoric of their protest has tended to encompass an argument of rights, i.e., a universal moral prefecture about what all of us as human beings should be entitled to. Arguments about what fundamental rights we do and do not have, so-called ‘rights talk’ (Mitchell, 2013), have been dismissed by some as a metanarrative which distracts from the real and actual pursuit of social justice. Tushnet (1984) argues that feeding a hungry man is more pressing than arguing over whether he should have the right to eat. At the core of this argument is his assertion that rights talk will inevitably attract discourse, as rights – even morality – is not universal. This is an argument which goes all the way back to Marx, who famously asserted that rights inevitably conflict and carry ‘ultimate’ weighting in argument on both sides, and therefore “between equal rights, forces decide” (Marx, 1967a: 225). The forces Marx refers to here are power, and therefore for the disempowered to argue with rights talk, they will never win.

Yet as Harvey (2000) notes, Marx is not dismissing the concept of rights and, generally, of universal moral principle, but rather their effectiveness as an organising principle of social struggle. When poor communities cite their rights in argument, it is an argument of morality and injustice, and Rorty (1996) suggests this is better directly attributed to their socioeconomic condition in what he calls “economic injustice” (ibid.: 16). The problem this presents is it does not directly attack the root cause of the argument, which is one of power, not economics. Disempowerment is symptomatic of socioeconomic condition, just as much as being poor may be indicative of general political weakness, and in the case of London where the complete exclusion of working classes from democratic processes has been brought to the surface (MacLeod, 2018), it is hard to argue that this is an economic injustice before a moral one. Council tenants are not excluded from democratic process because of their income, but
because of institutionalised democratic failings which affects the city’s weakest citizens, who also happen to be the working class.

The concept of rights therefore provides a counter to this kind of political side-lining. It is difficult to argue that a person has the right to economic prosperity in a world where we are expected to labour for the majority of our income. But it is hard to argue that a person does not have just as much right as their neighbour to democratic participation regardless of their income. Power may distort the application of rights as Marx testified to, however their application provides a moral baseline to which acts of social struggle can hold misusers of power to. As Mitchell (2003: 27) puts it; “that is precisely what ‘rights’ do: they provide a set of instructions about the use of power. But they do so by becoming institutionalised – that is, by becoming practices backed up by force [as Marx recognised].”

2.3 Reflection on literature and theories discussed

In this chapter, I have attempted to take the reader on a journey through a selection of the vast academic and philosophical literature on two key concepts relevant to my case study; space and power. These concepts and the interpretation of them has underpinned much of Western thought, and played a crucial role in the development of modern political theory and discourse. I have chosen these two key topics, and particularly the interplay between them, as I believe that understanding them is crucial to understanding the empirical data presented in Chapter 5, and the events that have shaped Old Tidemill in general.

However I believe it important to point out that my interpretation of these concepts, particularly in light of the limited space allowed in a Master’s thesis for their discussion, is only one of many different perspectives. Another researcher could see space and power to play very different roles in our cities and therefore construe the meaning of Old Tidemill in a very different way, and they would not be wrong.
My worldviews, and therefore my understanding of urban discourse, are heavily shaped by some of the literature presented in this chapter. Therefore this chapter serves a number of purposes. Its main function, as alluded to in this chapter’s introduction, is to provide a clear conceptual framework through which my findings (Chapter 5) are analysed and discussed in Chapter 6. However it also provides a secondary function in helping the reader to contextualise how this research project’s methodology (Chapter 4) was designed and influenced. This should be combined with the overarching theoretical framework, which provides a more coherent basis for this research, which is presented in the following chapter.
3. Theoretical Framework

In the previous chapter the notions of space and power were introduced and dissected. This provides the overarching conceptual framework through which the case study site, Old Tidemill, will be empirically investigated. Of course any such framework is narrow; tailored to best fit the problem being addressed. The way in which these very basic concepts of space and power were analysed and the literature around it was chosen is dependent on the worldviews and influences of myself – the researcher. This chapter is designed as an interlude to reflect upon this slant, and to articulate this into a coherent theoretical framework.

Understanding one’s own theoretical basis is vitally important in urban studies, as this dictates one’s interactions and interpretations of the city itself, and of the myriad of flows and processes within it. The philosophical perspective (i.e., the ontology and epistemology) one adopts is just as important to articulate, however in the context of this research project it bares most relevance to the methodological consideration, and therefore forms part of the following Methods chapter instead.

This chapter begins by underlining the basic underlying radical perspective on the urban, summarised popularly as ‘critical urban theory’. The following part then brings in the concept of ecology, specifically human-nature interaction, within the urban setting. This is done through the lens of ‘urban political ecology’, which could loosely be describes as a sub-field of (or at least heavily interwoven with) critical urban theory.
3.1 Critical urban theory

The term critical urban theory is often used as shorthand to describe a wave of leftist, radical urban geographers and theorists in the post-1968 period, notably Henri Lefebvre, David Harvey, Edward Soja and Manuel Castells – all of whom feature prominently in the literature review in Chapter 2. What unites these thinkers, according to Brenner (2009: 198), is a continual “critique of ideology (including social-scientific ideologies) and the critique of power, inequality, injustice and exploitation, at once within and among cities”. This is heavily influenced by a variety of post-Enlightenment social philosophy, particularly Hegel, Marxian political economy and Michael Foucault’s interpretation of power and its relation to knowledge (ibid.).

These philosophies underpin much of my own thinking and form a basis for this research generally. A noteworthy element in this thinking is a Marxian critique of political economy which both underlines capitalism’s contradictions as detrimental to urban processes, but also fleshes them out so as to point beyond them, to offer an alternative view on how society as well as society-nature interactions can be organised and designed (Katznelson, 1993). In the context of Old Tidemill, this interpretation allowed the way the garden was used (specifically, how it was free and found itself outside of the fetishised consumer system) and how it was fought for to be viewed as indicative of traditional class struggle, thus presenting a different position on the democratic process within this urban setting. Old Tidemill can be viewed as inherently anti-capitalist in its rejection of control, fetishism and alienation and therefore this framework enables the struggle over it to be viewed as symptomatic of extreme modern urban capitalism itself. This concept is explored in greater detail in the discussion in Chapter 6.
### 3.2 Urban political ecology

Whilst critical urban theory provides the lens through which the economic fabric of Old Tidemill’s urban setting is viewed, a more explicit theory is required to understand the garden as urban nature and more generally urbanity’s relation with the natural world. Urban political ecology is a field which sees the city as a socio-ecological process, and is heavily influenced by critical urban theorists, in particular Henri Lefebvre and his notion of ‘second-nature’. On this concept of second-nature, Lefebvre (1976: 15) suggests:

> “Nature, destroyed as such, has already had to be reconstructed at another level, the level of “second nature” i.e. the town and the urban. The town, anti-nature or non-nature and yet second nature, heralds the future world, the world of the generalised urban. Nature, as the sum of particularities which are external to each other and dispersed in space, dies. It gives way to produced space, to the urban.”

This concept explains Harvey’s (1993: 28) dictum that “there is nothing unnatural about New York City” as the concept of the city – the concept of urban – is a social process and the social is inherently natural, no different to an anthill or beehive. It removes the distinct separation between the social and the natural and asserts that we as humans have not somehow elevated ourselves above our environments, we are part of them and always have been.

This framing of the process of urbanisation has profound implications for how we interpret natural processes and flows within cities. Whilst much of urban political ecology focuses on urban social processes as being inherently natural (something which Swyngedouw (2006) refers to as ‘urban metabolism’), for this case study I am more interested in how social processes lead to the production of urban natures. So-called natural metabolisms (i.e., gravity, photosynthesis, or stomata-based filtration) are not socially produced, but their powers are socially mobilised and, at that, very unevenly in terms of who benefits from this (Heynen et al., 2006). As Swyngedouw & Heynen (2003: 907) suggest; “[i]t is on the terrain of the urban that [the] accelerating metabolic transformation of nature becomes most visible, both in its physical form and its socioecological consequences”.

We therefore must ask what kind of nature we are producing, and most importantly, by whom; for whom. As second-nature takes precedent through the vital urban construction of
housing and infrastructure, ‘natural nature’ becomes an afterthought (Moore, 2017). Yet as urban environmental conditions appear to be significantly worsening on a global scale (Notman, 2017), a growing public concern for the preservation of urban nature and greening of our cities in the name of public health can be seen all over the world (Wolch et al., 2014). When green space in cities becomes contested, some benefit, whilst others do not. When urban nature loses out to housing (as is the case with Old Tidemill) at the expense of environmental benefit, there is a clear mismatch between the potential value of the land in each configuration. Housing attracts instant, indisputable value at the point of sale and, at least in the majority of European cities, the closer this land is to the urban centre, the greater the value which can be extracted. A public park, garden, or other type of urban nature does not.

This mismatch traces back to Marx’s (1967b: 770) assertion that in the face of capitalism’s inherent contradictions, land becomes a form of ‘fictitious capital’ where value is simply created out of thin air. Whilst Harvey (1982) points out that this assertion lacks a full, coherent explanation, it is nonetheless accepted as fundamental to Marxian theory and provides a basis for understanding the rough deal urban nature is subject to in urban development.

Within this context, urban political ecology provides a neat dichotomy that is both biocentric and not at the same time. It sees the processes of urbanisation as being part of the metabolic cycles of nature and sees urban nature as being part of the metabolic cycles of urbanism, both of which are natural within Lefebvre’s premise of second-nature. It is through this lens that I will analyse Old Tidemill as a space of ‘natural nature’ within London’s political economy, and the political economy of the urban in general.
3.3 Summary of theoretical framework

Two theoretical perspectives were introduced in this chapter, and each serves a different analytical purpose going forward. Critical urban theory provides the intellectual backdrop to the project, shaping the motives and interpretations I have used. It provides a coherent way of understanding Old Tidemill’s significance and closure within London’s (as well as the UK’s) political economy.

Urban political ecology offers a well-defined perspective on the case-study’s ecological aspects, particularly the significance of green space and urban nature in general. It also allows processes of urbanisation, including redevelopment and urban change to be viewed as natural processes, insomuch as they are societal and therefore indistinguishable from any other natural process. In the analysis section of this project (Chapter 6), this notion guides the interpretation of much of the rhetoric gleamed from the empirical data and helps build the conclusions drawn in the final chapter.
4. Methodology, approach and research methods

4.1 Introduction

This chapter will lay out the empirical development of this research by presenting the research process in its entirety, with particular focus on the decision-making process undertaken in light of the constraints particular to a Master’s thesis (e.g., financial and temporal restrictions). It will examine, in turn, both the methods and the methodology chosen. A methodology is the “science or study of methods” (Payne & Payne, 2004: 150) and therefore will examine the entire process of selecting the methods I determined to be best suited to answer the initial research question and develop further research questions, including their applicability as well as their limitations.

Methodologically, this research began with the identification of Old Tidemill as a site of potential research, before any key research questions or even clear direction of inquiry was developed. Old Tidemill displayed a mixture of interesting characteristics which made it very attractive to research. Firstly, this site had been developed, designed and built by members of the local community outside the influence of local administration or property developers. It was therefore in a sense ‘organic’, insomuch as it was supposedly free from the politics surrounding gentrification and the land-rent pressures which dictates so much of urban green space development, particularly in London. Secondly, its closure had attracted an emotional – even militant – backlash from the local community. It was therefore obvious that this small green space had, in its short lifetime, become a valuable asset to the local community, as well as that those fighting to save it saw its redevelopment as systemic of wider urban processes which were putting their community under threat. Finally, this was an ongoing and developing conflict. This meant that not just were emotions running particularly high at that time (meaning that the local community wanted to express their opinions and would welcome
any contribution to the ongoing debate), but also that there was a clear sense of urgency to this developing debate.

These factors initially made it clear for me that this particular space and its community would be a worthy topic of study. It also meant that I did not initially decide to research Old Tidemill to answer a particular question – I simply knew that it was a rather unique case of something. I therefore went into the empirical study without a clear preconceived notion of what I wanted to find out. The idea behind the chosen methodological approach was therefore to allow the research to grow around the empirical study, and for research questions to be developed reflexively to the data themselves. The following sections will examine the elements which constituted this overall empirical process.

### 4.2 Development of initial research question

The overall aim of this project initially was to examine why there had been such a pronounced response from members of Deptford’s community to the closure, eviction, and destruction of Old Tidemill Wildlife Garden. What was clear from the literature on Old Tidemill and the battle to save it, was that the garden was perceived as unique in its appearance, its ecology, and its significance to the community as a project and an arena to explore the critical-ecological urban theoretical framework discussed in the previous chapter. However it was also clear that an in-depth field study – constituting a significant amount of time spent with the local community and having conversations on the ground – would give a better picture of why members of the community had gone to extreme lengths to save it from development by holding protests, fighting legal battles and, ultimately, illegally occupying the space for a number of months (Worthington, 2018b).

Therefore, knowing that more specific, in depth research questions would develop further into the project, I entered the field with the following initial question in mind: What made Old Tidemill valued by its community and what has led to the growth of a resistance movement in reaction to its closure? The principal research question allowed the research project to find
out what issues and motives lay at the heart of the community and its members, and were being communicated by them. By spending several weeks in the field, I was able to have open conversations with a wide breadth of actors and let them tell me what issues were important to them, rather than for me to presuppose what this was a case of through my own narrative.

4.3 Reflexivity and the role of the researcher

While the role of the researcher would more commonly be assessed retrospective to the actual field work, this particular research design, as well as my own motivations for choosing this particular research site, dictate a more holistic approach. Payne & Payne (2004: 191) describe reflexivity as; “the practice of researchers being self-aware of their own beliefs, values and attitudes and their personal effects on the setting they have studied”. Once it became apparent that the research subject was a dynamic, ongoing and evolving conflict, it became clear that my presence as a researcher would play a role, in some capacity, within the unfolding situation. Simply by being in the area, having conversations with members of the local community and participating in certain events, I would be in no way removed from my research subject.

My own motivation for choosing the site of study in the first place results from my former participation within the local community and my affinity to the local area. I lived in Deptford from 2015 to 2017, specifically on Deptford Church Street, around 150 yards from Old Tidemill. I therefore developed a lasting relationship with the local area and certain members of the local community. Consequently, I became aware of the conflict because of this connection and the ties, affinities and interest in Deptford I had developed during my time as a resident. My connection to the local people of Deptford also means that I do not have a neutral stance in relation to the conflict itself, which initially appeared problematic for the undertaking of transparent and unbiased scientific inquiry.
It was therefore clear from the outset that I would not be in a position of neutrality (or at least aspired neutrality). Some may argue that a researcher in such a setting would never be able to maintain such impartiality as it is human nature to build bonds and connections with others, and to develop one’s own opinions. However, I chose to go a step further and accept my position of bias as purposeful and deliberate whilst identifying the reflexivity of my role as a researcher within this research project. In summary, I had from the outset felt a connection with the area of study and its people, including their battle to save Old Tidemill.

4.4 Impact and orientation to inquiry

Due to my subjective relationship as a researcher to his field, I have classified this as an instance of action research. Reason & Bradbury (2008: 1) refer to action research not as a methodology per se, but as an “orientation to inquiry that seeks to create participative communities of inquiry in which qualities of engagement, curiosity and question posing are brought to bear on significant practical issues”. Due to my own positionality, as described in the previous section, I was in a position of advantage through my connection with the local area and understanding of local life and community dynamics. This bore fruit in relation to building rapport with local people and arguably enabled me to develop richer data than a researcher with no connection to Deptford would have had.

Whilst not envisioning my involvement as a harbinger of change within the ongoing conflict, I intend to not only make this research available to anyone it may be of use to, but also as a catalyst for further academic engagement with Old Tidemill.
4.5 Epistemology and ontology

Part of understanding one’s own positionality as a researcher is to reflect at one’s own philosophical standing and how that influences how we interpret the world around us. Moon & Blackman (2017) heavily advocate the investigating of philosophical perspectives within interdisciplinary research, and by no means are the first to do so.

For the methodology, one’s ontology is of particular importance. Noonan (2008: 580) points out that ontology “is essentially a form of questioning”. Whether a researcher understands the reality of whatever they are investigating to be real or constructed will heavily influence what questions they ask; thereby also influencing what research methods they select. My motivation for this research was not to investigate the ‘truth’ of the occupation and repossession of Old Tidemill in the way that an investigator would piece together evidence to ascertain the best picture of what events unfurled. Instead I was interested in what caused people to react in the way they did to its closure by developing a deep understanding of how the space was used, who was using it and how it impacted people’s lives. Hence, I was never looking to unearth one single truth, as from my perspective there is no one truth. The ‘truths’ here are constructed through the garden’s former users and their interactions with the space, then preserved through their memories and the emotional responses the closure and destruction of the space has had on those memories. From this perspective, this research takes a clear and stark relativistic ontological stance.

Independent from this research project’s theoretical framework outlined in the previous chapter, or indeed any chosen theoretical framework within which to sit a piece of research, epistemology concerns itself with how knowledge itself is formed (Moon & Blackman, 2017). This knowledge ultimately constitutes the data which are collected, therefore laying out one’s own epistemological basis for the origin of that knowledge plays a decisive role in designing a methodology. The reality that Old Tidemill had been demolished prior to the beginning of my fieldwork meant that upon arrival, the only data I could work with rested in people’s collective memory of the Garden. It is now in the past, therefore its reality is preserved only in texts (including video, photographs as well as written text), as well as people’s imaginations. This automatically rejects a subjectivist epistemology which Moon & Blackman (ibid.: para. 2) describe as “relat[ing] to the idea that reality can be expressed in a range of symbol and
language systems, and is stretched and shaped to fit the purposes of individuals such that people impose meaning on the world and interpret it in a way that makes sense to them”. The texts and memories that contain the data on Old Tidemill that I tried to extract were already second-hand data. They were already interpretations by individuals, infused with their own worldviews, biases and beliefs. Therefore this research adopts a constructionist epistemology which rejects the idea that objective truth lies within these data (ibid.). The knowledge here was constructed through a combination of my participant’s experiences with Old Tidemill, and the meanings they infused into the memories of these experiences.

4.6 Research methods

This research design began with the identification of a case study to research in the form of Old Tidemill. It then sought to understand the significance of this space, therefore a key goal was to develop a case study-based research design that allowed me to do this. Financial and temporal constraints meant that I could allow myself a maximum of four weeks in the United Kingdom. My initial research question was exploratory in nature, with an emphasis on developing interpretive frameworks of my study site in the field, as my knowledge of the case study grew through conversations with different actors and stakeholders. I was at an advantage regarding access to the field, however, through my connections to the local area and to a number of its residents. I therefore designed a framework that was exploratory and sequential, allowing me to build up knowledge of my case study and use this to hone in on research topics and ultimately research questions over the course of the four weeks I spent in the field.

The philosophical perspective I took into the field, as outlined in the previous chapter, favours a phenomenological qualitative approach. Whilst quantitative elements (such as economic indicators for the area, or general attitudes towards social issues surrounding housing, education and ecology) were vital in providing the context within which to place this research, the focus was to develop an understanding of Old Tidemill’s significance to its users and the local community as a whole. Blatter (2008: 68) points out that the case study, as a research strategy, has proven to be the major source of theoretical innovation; “whereas
large-N studies tend to focus on causal research goals, case study research has an affinity toward descriptive goals”. In addition, much of the literature was already portraying Old Tidemill as being different to other green spaces by displaying certain rather ‘unique’ characteristics, further supporting a qualitative case study approach.

4.6.1 Initial research design

To develop a deep understanding of the research subject, quality of conversation was favoured over quantity – fewer in-depth discussions with members of the local community would produce the rich data needed to tackle the research question. Therefore unstructured, face-to-face interviews were initially chosen as a primary research method. This would also be supported by a small number of focus groups to allow participants to speak in a more group environment and allow for a more collaborative and supporting environment, possibly more reflective of everyday social environments experienced in the community. A more unstructured research method can be particularly beneficial, according to Firmin (2004), as an initial research wave in a sequential design. Here, unstructured interviews would allow topics to be introduced by interviewees. The interview phase would then be followed by an analysis phase, where key analytical frameworks and discussion topics would be realised. These could then be used to build a more structured focus group in which these topics would be presented to a larger group of participants. This was structured as an initial two-week phase of interviewing, in which I would employ a snowballing tactic, using a number of local contacts to help set up an initial interview prior to arrival in order to maximise potential interview numbers. This would be followed by around one week spent analysing my data which, due to financial constraints, was to be spent away from London to save accommodation costs. The final week was then reserved for organising a small number of focus groups.

However upon arrival in the field, it became quickly apparent that there were a number of obstacles to this research design. Firstly, despite identifying a clear desire from many local people to share their views on Old Tidemill, whose trees had only been cut down two weeks prior leaving emotions still raw, it proved more difficult than anticipated to organise interviews in a 14-day period. The majority of local people worked full-time or more and had busy lives, so I had to deal with numerous push-backs and cancellations, which greatly
impeded progress at first. It was also becoming clear that organising focus groups would be very challenging, as the likelihood of finding a time that enough participants could work with, as well as the guarantee that good numbers would indeed attend, seemed slim. It was also apparent that my own more informal observations through spending days around the local community, meeting new people and developing a network of contacts who had some connection with Old Tidemill were producing very valuable data that would be naïve to let go to waste. I therefore made the decision to reassess my research design a few days into the project.

4.6.2 Revision of research design

Accepting that focus groups were an unlikely proposition, I removed them as a research method to allow an extra week for interviewing. This gave greater flexibility to participants and indeed around half of the interviews conducted ended up happening in that final week. I also changed my approach to the more informal interactions I was having by actively incorporating participant observation into the research design. The following section addresses this in greater detail, but put simply, this allowed me to retain the sequential quality of the old research design by extracting key topics from field notes taken on the ground and allow for a more structured approach to the face-to-face interviews, whilst simultaneously utilising the time at the start of the project as I waited for interviews to materialise. In this new model, the elements which had made focus groups as a research method attractive initially were incorporated into the new methods. The benefits of group discussion would be retained in participant observation, as many of the conversations I was having involved larger groups where participants were bouncing thoughts and opinions off of one another. The more semi-structured format of focus groups which helped produce more relevant and specific data would now be taken on by the interviews, and the sequential format would be retained in a different form.
4.6.3 Participant observation

According to McKechnie (2008: 599), the purpose of participant observation is “to gain a deep understanding of a particular topic or situation through the meanings ascribed to it by the individuals who live and experience it”. Participant observation generally involves a researcher spending a prolonged period of time in their area of study, engaging in social activities and the like, and has often been favoured by sociologists and behavioural researchers (Bryman, 2012). My research strategy had never intended to be built around an in-depth ethnographic study, as for me the nuances of people’s everyday lives, as well as their behaviours, were not of particular importance in relation to Old Tidemill. Rather, this research method developed out of having rich conversations with members of the community at the beginning, and wanting to make use of the data being produced in these settings, outside of formalised interviews.

I therefore began writing a detailed field diary, in which I recorded observations, logs of informal conversations and interactions with local people, as well as discussions I had with closer acquaintances within the community on a daily basis. The key purpose of these fieldnotes was less to create a formally codable and analysable dataset comparable to interview transcripts, but rather to record the development of my personal understanding of my research subject, as well as to guide the development of relevant research topics to be used in interviews. Bryman (ibid.: 443pp.) describes this particular weighting of informal conversations and observations versus formal interviews as the ‘minimally participating observer’, where the participant observation is meant only to complement interviewing. In this case, all data collected was done in an overt manner, as I made my role as a researcher and the nature of my research clear to every person at the beginning of every interaction.

For the duration of my time in the field, I stayed in accommodation within the Deptford area. Therefore I was able to spend every day within the local community, searching for people with connections to Old Tidemill who were willing to speak to me. This involved spending the majority of my time in a number of key locations that were frequented by former users of the garden: Tidemill Green (the small green patch next to the garden that, at the time, was being occupied by protesters), the local library, the local market, when on, as well as a number of local bars, cafes and restaurants. This also involved a degree of snowballing, as I developed a growing portfolio of locations to visit where informal conversations as well as interviews could be sought mainly through conversations with locals.
4.6.4 Face-to-face interviews and the use of elicitation tools

Following the revision of the research strategies, interviews were planned in a semi-structured format. Design included a set of six ‘key questions’ whose topics were developed by analysing early participant observation fieldnotes (see Appendix I). The interviews did intent to reflect an exploratory element, so therefore many of the unscripted, contextualising sub-questions changed over time. Therefore I deliberately used information from previous interviews and fieldnotes to invoke responses from interviewees deeper into the project. This enabled a small degree of triangulation of certain data gleaned from earlier in the project.

In total, eight different interviews were conducted in a variety of locations chosen by the participants themselves, including homes, cafes, the library, a local business and Tidemill Green. Interviews were recorded using a Tascam voice recorder, and later transcribed by hand. The majority of interviews lasted between 20-35 minutes.

As Old Tidemill had been closed and its trees felled, I was relying on recollection to gather accounts of its use. To aid this, interviews included a number of elicitation devices including map-elicitation and photo-elicitation. Bryman (2012: 455) defines photo-elicitation as a researcher’s use of images as a “springboard for discussion with the producers of the photographs concerning the meaning and significance of the images”. However the term has also frequently been used to describe the use of extant images (i.e., from an external source), with imagery often being used in interviews to invoke an emotional response (see, for example, Wilson & McIntosh, 2010). In this instance, a booklet of printed images was presented to each participant and they were encouraged to look through the images prior to the interview (see Appendix III). The images consisted primarily of events and features in the garden, with one photograph showing the destruction of the garden in early March 2019 (photograph 9; Appendix III). The latter was included in case an interviewee had not seen Old Tidemill since the demolition. Each image was numbered 1-9 and interviewees were advised that they could refer to the images in their answers by mentioning the image number, so this could be recorded and referred back to in the transcript.

Map-elicitation is a relatively new research method that has developed out of qualitative geographical information systems (GIS) studies. Whilst Moore-Cherry et al. (2015) appear to be the first to formally adopt the term ‘map-elicitation’ to refer to the interpretivist and evocative use of GIS and deep mapping in interview-based methods, there are examples of
similar usage of mapping under different guises since the qualitative turn in GIS in the early 1990s (e.g., Pickles, 1995, Cuzzocrea & Mandich, 2015 and Pavlovskaya, 2009). Map-elicitation was employed as a complementary technique in interviews, used to allow participants a spatial reference point to use to help answer questions that contained a spatial element (such as when describing the distance and route to the next nearest alternative to Old Tidemill – a topic which was covered in every interview). Google Earth’s (2019) web app was used here due to its high-quality 3D imagery of the local area. It was presented to interview participants on a touchscreen laptop with a pin placed on Old Tidemill (whose imagery was a few weeks old and still showed the trees and garden prior to demolition in impressive detail), with Windows 10’s inbuilt gamer software used to video capture its use, and the recording was synchronised with the voice recording to enable referral back to the map-elicitation during transcription. Participants were shown how to move around, and its purpose was briefly explained.

Possibly due to the rawness of the majority of interviewees’ recollections of Old Tidemill with events so recently past, in the end both elicitation devices were rarely directly referred to during the recorded interviews. However, both devices were presented and explained in the preamble prior to recording, and during this stage all participants did spend some time studying the photographs and exploring the mapping software. Therefore it is difficult to say that these techniques did not have some degree of success in helping to elicit certain aspects of their responses, however the tools were not used in the way initially intended and interviewees preferred in general to focus on the conversation without any distractions.

### 4.6.5 Analysis overview and development of key research questions

Following the completion of the fieldwork, all interview voice recordings were transcribed by hand, before a two-stage coding process was initiated to analyse the data produced. The first stage involved a careful reread of the transcripts together with the field diary, with the initial research question in mind. Six broad themes were identified in relation to the importance of Old Tidemill, as well as the fight to save it: Community and people; public representation; gentrification and capitalism; nature and ecology; children and education; and perception of
rights. The texts were then colour coded and organised in relation to these themes. This process involved a large degree of triangulation between the datasets. Triangulation refers to the combination of different methods in a multimethod research design to corroborate findings between the different methods used. Bryman (2012: 635) emphasises that “a triangulation exercise may occur as a result of a planned or unplanned strategy”. In this case, the process was introduced following early analyses and reflections on the data gathered. As this research design is exploratory in nature and I was attempting to gauge what kind of conceptual framework my participants were seeing the case of Old Tidemill being part of, it became necessary to employ a corroboratory tool in order to maximise the generalisability of two qualitative methods across the participants I engaged with.

Once this stage was complete, the broadly coded data were analysed and three key research questions were developed based upon the themes identified:

1. **What role can local communities play in the creation of urban green space?**
2. **What right do local communities have to urban nature?**
3. **How does the case of Old Tidemill fit into the wider context of contemporary urban social change?**

These questions were designed to fulfil two clear objectives. Firstly, answering them should be able to capture as much of what the earlier analysis of my datasets had gleaned to be the most important concepts to participants in their interpretation of the overall Old Tidemill case study. Secondly, they should be able to link the case study into the wider analytical framework outlined in Chapters 2 and 3.
4.6.6 Reflections on methods used

As a research strategy, the case study can provide an unparalleled richness of data in a concentrated localised area, and can allow for a variety of qualitative methods to work together. Yin (2009: 96) remarks that “a major strength of case study data collection is the opportunity to use many different sources of evidence”; in this case allowing a balance of formal and informal through participant observation combined with interviewing. Whilst it is impossible to quantify how many interviews or incidences of observation produce a satisfactory understanding of a phenomenon, an exploratory-style research question necessitates a richness of data gathered from a number of different sources. The complementary nature of the two methods chosen for this research project allowed for a good degree of flexibility which opened up a wider range of data than a single-method approach. When individuals were unable or unwilling to partake in interviews, I was still able to gather informal conversational data through the participant observation.

However, just like any urban area, Deptford’s community is complex and multidimensional. Certain residents restrict themselves to certain cliques and social groups, and given the relatively short four-week period I was working with, I was aware that I could in no way find representation from every sub-community in a way that would be truly representative of the area’s population. The snowballing also led to an inevitable degree of confirmation bias, as individuals I spoke to put me in touch with people close to them who were more likely to share their views, particularly in relation to an emotive topic such as Old Tidemill. Whilst my more random strategy of speaking to local residents in the apartment blocks surrounding the site did yield some opposing opinions that differed from the general consensuses I encountered, the majority of my data were gathered through snowballing, and therefore are subject to this critique. Reflexively, I have steered clear of making generalisations based upon corroboratory and confirmatory data within the analysis.
4.7 Ethical considerations

As Stockholm University does not require its Masters researchers to provide an information or consent form to any of its participants, an ethics statement is included (see Ethics Statement, pp. 5) which outlines the steps taken to underline transparency with my research participants during my time in the field. Much of the participant observation involved having informal conversations with groups of people. Whilst I conducted the research overtly and made my intentions as clear as possible, obtaining clear and obvious consent is a common issue encountered with the participant observation method (Bryman, 2012). I therefore conducted a further review of my field notes during the analysis phase in which particular attention was paid to any social scenarios where it wasn’t clear that participants were aware of my role as a researcher, and data were removed accordingly.

Further to this, all names were pseudonymised and clearly identifying data was removed during the write-up phase. One of my participants made it clear that, due to their life being very much in the public eye, they would not insist on anonymity and gave clear consent to be formally included, although their name has nonetheless been removed.

Additionally, steps were taken to ensure the secure and confidential retention of all interview data collected (in this case, each interview was marked A-H, and are referred to throughout the following chapters as Interviewee A etc.). Each interviewee was clearly advised of the purpose of the research and verbal consent was recorded and retained in each incidence. Each interviewee was also given the right to remove their consent at any point and each was given my direct contact details should they wish to do so.
This chapter provides an in-depth elaboration and justification of the overall research design I have chosen to employ. It explained the exploratory sequential research design and a clear explanation for the choice of methods employed. An initial research question was used to explore the field and gain a clear understanding of what issues were important to members of Deptford’s community in relation to Old Tidemill, and these data were then used to develop key research questions later used in the analysis of the overall findings presented in the following chapter. However, this design does carry with it a number of clear limitations which must be discussed, and should be considered by the reader in relation to the findings and discussion of them.

I entered the field with a clear understanding of my own positionality as someone with an affiliation to the local area and to its people. I attempted to remain as reflexive as possible throughout the process, however inevitably my position will have influenced the conversations I had with local residents, as well as which local residents were happy to speak to me. As a young, white, clearly middle-class individual, certain residents will have felt more comfortable in my presence than others. There is therefore an unintentional selectivity in terms of the breadth of responses presented in this research, and many voices will not have been heard as a result.

Observation as a research method also carries with it an inherent limitation in its superficiality. It does not allow the researcher much scope to delve deeper into the thoughts and attitudes of those observed, and the motivations and interests guiding particular views or statements may not be entirely clear (Bryman, 2012). Therefore I remained cautious to not ascribe meaning to accounts or actions I observed, as the motivations behind them are unknown. Whilst the triangulation process does go some way to mitigate this limitation through corroboration of observations, the limited scope of the project (eight interviews and four weeks of observation) denies a comprehensive confirmatory analysis and therefore the reader should be wary of the potential limits to the results I present.

The limited scope of the project also restricts any generalisability that could be attained from my findings. A month’s immersion in an ethnographic project does give a very good overview of what issues are relevant to a community, however it in no way is able to
completely reflect the complexity of said community. As the below results do attest, Deptford’s community is complex and multifaceted with no clear consensus on any given issue. Therefore such a short period in the field cannot hope to gain an overall and reflective picture which does justice to every resident and member of that community.

As snowballing was employed as the principal sampling method, this was subject to compounding confirmation bias. Payne & Payne (2004: 210) describe snowballing as “purposive sampling”, i.e., sampling for the sake of appropriating a purpose, rather than to give a reflective sample through random or quota-based sampling techniques. As I was only looking for respondents who had an affiliation to Old Tidemill, this was deemed the most appropriate strategy. However this technique carves a very specific path through the local community network, as participants’ recommendations for who to next approach will be based upon their own social network, which is subject to their own biases and views. In addition, there were a relatively high number of non-respondents, either because they did not reply to me, or because the did not want to be involved.

This was somewhat mitigated through a second sampling strategy more random in nature, which involved approaching people in the streets surrounding the site, or at a number of cafes, pubs and other institutions I knew to be favoured by Deptford residents. However this approach did exclude a number of demographics entirely, particularly those who do not frequent the institutions I chose, as well as those who do not tend to spend much time out on Deptford’s streets (e.g., the physically and mentally impaired, the elderly and more socially introvert members of society).

Whilst this research is not trying to attain generalisable findings that could provide an ‘overall attitude or opinion’ of Deptford’s community, these limitations should be clearly considered by the reader in the following section. Yet despite the limitations presented here, this research remains nonetheless relevant and these limitations take nothing away from the overall goal of answering the research questions presented. The idiographic approach to case study research allows the researcher to “elucidate the unique features of the case” (ibid.: 69) that are applicable in a specific time and place, not to create a cross-sectional analysis. Despite its limitations, the overall research design presented here is able to achieve this and create substantive findings in the process.
5. Findings

In this chapter I present the findings from this research project. The findings presented have been put together following the coding and analysis of my empirical data which were in their rawest form interview transcripts and observational field diary notes. Not all data is created equal and some inevitably carries greater weight in its relevance to my research questions, therefore the analysis involved a sifting phase, which in qualitative research is inherently and unavoidably subjective. Consequently, it is worth pointing out to the reader that there is a greater reliance on certain interviews, as well as more generally interview data over observational data. Nonetheless I have made best efforts to be as reflexive of my own subjectivity as possible when deciding which data to include and which not to, and I have tried to paint as holistic a picture as possible in light of all potential researcher bias, realised or otherwise.

These findings are presented thematically, roughly following the coding process I adopted prior to analysis. Interviews are referenced with the prefix ‘I’, and ending with the page number of my coded transcript document (e.g., IA:1, IF:17, etc.). Firstly, my overall impressions of the mood of the neighbourhood is presented, following the destruction of Old Tidemill shortly before my arrival in the field. This is included to give the reader an understanding of the context in which I was working. The following parts lead through the themes of community and people; nature and ecology; children and education; public representation; capitalism; and, finally, perception of rights. The concluding section of this chapter provides an overall summary of my findings, before introducing the next chapter where my findings are read through the lens of the conceptual and theoretical frameworks laid out in Chapters 2 and 3.

As the research questions were developed during the analysis phase following the actual fieldwork, they are not addressed in this section and instead form the conceptual basis for the Discussion in Chapter 6.
5.1 Initial impressions: my return to Deptford

“whilst new buildings have gone up and investment has clearly been injected into the area, Deptford feels just as colourful and full of life as when I moved out. It still retains its rugged, rough-around-the-edges appearance shaped by its working-class history, and art still plays a major role in shaping its identity” (FN 22/3/2019)

“The Old Tidemill site has a kind of post-conflict feel to it. The destruction on the other side of the ten-foot fence surrounding the site is obvious, and an army of security guards patrol the perimeter day and night” (FN 22/3/2019)

“A sunny Spring Saturday, and there are people out everywhere in Deptford. Browsing the market, sitting in the concrete square outside the library, hanging out in the churchyard, standing around outside the Albany [community hall]. It seems the entire community insists on being outside, despite there being virtually no space for them to be” (FN 23/3/2019)

The above quotes are taken from my research field diary and are designed to give an idea of my initial impressions upon arrival. Shortly before I arrived, demolition workers had felled the trees and razed Old Tidemill to the ground. The small green outside the perimeter – known by locals as Tidemill Green – had been occupied since the eviction in November 2018 and at the time of writing is still being occupied. A vigil had been set up around the various tents and temporary structures comprising the occupation site, consisting of 74 white wooden crosses – one for each tree which had been felled – along with a large information board showing photographs of Old Tidemill before it was destroyed, as well as a number of large, handmade banners criticising the redevelopment (see Figures 7 & 8). This vigil appeared to be deliberately provocative by equating the destruction of the garden with death, and drew the attention of the passing traffic on Deptford Church Street.
Fig. 7: Photograph of the occupation site on Tidemill Green, taken from outside the Bird’s Nest pub. The site of Old Tidemill can be seen in the background, with only shrubbery remaining. The placard in the middle reads “Tidemill Legal Protest: Lewisham Council spent 1.4 million securing 74 trees the cut them all down!” The placard to the right states “Peabody Pollution Park: Not suitable for children”. (Author’s own photograph, 2019)
Fig. 8: Photograph of the occupation site on Tidemill Green, taken from Deptford Church Street. The site of Old Tidemill can be seen to the left. 74 white crosses have been erected – one for each tree felled. The structures in the background are shelters built by the occupation movement. A security guard can be seen patrolling the Old Tidemill site. The leftmost placard reads “4 years of building site or a community wildlife garden?”. The placard to the right states “Peabody Pollution Park: Not suitable for children”. (Author’s own photograph, 2019)
5.2 Community and Old Tidemill

From my own initial observations over the first few days, it was clear that the battle to save Old Tidemill had played an important role in Deptford’s recent history, and the majority of local people I spoke to were aware of what happened had expressed their distaste for the council’s decision to redevelop the site. As a resident in the area I always felt very proud of Deptford’s tight-knit community, as this was something I didn’t experience anywhere else in London. This sentiment was shared by some my interview participants:

“[…] I think the community around here are very, kind of, strong-willed; a very, very tight community; very, very diverse” (Interview [I]G:20)

“People love Deptford, I don’t think people understand that. Like the people who are in Deptford love it. Them people [who ran Old Tidemill] are part of Deptford, like if you take that away, you’re taking all that away. And they stay throughout all that stuff, and that’s why people love it. And now it’s just going to be shit” (IH: 21)

“I think Deptford’s one of those last bastions [in London]. […] strong community and the working class. Rough around the edges, but people care about each other. And not too much money being injected into the area artificially or whatever” (ID:9)

These opinions indicate that a large part of the area’s identity is its people. Many residents appear to feel like they are part of something more than just an average London neighbourhood, and this was heavily supported by informal conversation during observations. And as the last of the above quotes shows, this identity is linked to the socioeconomic status of the area. This is partly down to a sense of togetherness that arises from having to work together to make ends meet (e.g., traders and businesses working together to maximise chances of profit, as well as community members building ties through networks of social support). Indeed relatively socioeconomically homogenous low-income inner-city areas like Deptford are likely to benefit from stronger communities ties – something which Sullivan et al. (1998) point out is heavily reliant on an abundance of common space. Deptford, partly
down to the market, as well as the observed insistence of local residents to occupy outdoor spaces in large numbers, clearly has this. This might in part explain why there has been such a great level of opposition to the destruction of Old Tidemill as one of these vital common spaces.

“It’s unusual for this not to have died out. But it is really because there isn’t a dividing line between this campaign [to save Old Tidemill] and the community. This is happening in Deptford, to Deptford” (IE:13)

“They don’t give up, do they. Tells you everything you need to know about this place, that does. It’s just so very Deptford” (IF:16)

“I think that Tidemill going – it’s such a strong part of Deptford […] I know how much that park [Old Tidemill] means to people” (IG:20)

A possible reason for the unusually large backlash to the redevelopment is that local residents have interpreted it as a direct attack on the neighbourhood’s strong community. When a neighbourhood’s identity is shaped by its people and their perceived togetherness, removing the ability to be together by taking away one of the few spaces people have left to congregate and realise their togetherness is hard-felt. This is perceived as a direct assault on the structures which hold together the very fabrics of this community.

What became abundantly clear throughout the fieldwork was that ‘community’ is a very fluid term. I found during observations that in general conversation the term’s ambiguity did tend to superpose Ferdinand Tönnies’ traditional Gemeinschaft-Gesellschaft dichotomy. This differentiates between a common way of life that is concentrated on close ties and frequent interactions (more akin to traditional rural, village life), and one that revolves around dispersed ties and infrequent interactions (as is accepted as part of most modern, urban living) (Brent, 2001). From the impressions I was getting, combined with my own recollections from living in the area, relations and ties within Deptford formed across a far more complex network than could be expressed across two distinct categories. Whilst Deptford’s residents certainly perceive there to be a real ‘sense’ of community distinguishable from what is usually experienced in London neighbourhoods, in reality this manifests itself through combinations
of close social circles more *gemeinschaftlich* in their nature, as well as a comparatively large number of loose social ties across the local area in general.

Following the opening up of Old Tidemill in 2012, this concept began to flourish in the Garden as well:

“they got it in 2012 when the school closed. So it was basically in the community... you know the community has had a sense of ownership of that garden ever since” (IE:11)

“it was pretty much about ordinary life and social relation between ourselves, you know? [...] So it was a bit like a community, but in a small sense. It could have opened. Without this pressure from the council, it could have been really public” (IB:5)

As the garden developed around a group of artists who originally took guardianship of it (forming the Assembly SE8 (2018) group), there appeared to be a mix of this sense of community surrounding those involved with it and a sense of creativity. This community, developed around the beginnings of Old Tidemill, were handed a blank canvas on which to develop a wildlife garden however they pleased.

“then we started developing a kind of community based on the garden. And also we became then the custodians of an autonomous space. [...] you know [Lewisham Borough Council had] technically only given meanwhile use of it to the community. But it became an autonomous space, which are not things our society are generally interested it” (IE:11)

The term ‘autonomous space’ was mentioned on other occasions in informal conversations with residents who had been heavily involved with the day-to-day running of Old Tidemill. Clearly the artistic scope allowed by this idea was highly valued. It allowed a closer connection with the nature within the garden, and also seems to have helped community bonds tighten. When a large group of people spends large amounts of time creating, shaping and maintaining a garden on this scale, they will inevitably become closer to one another
along the way. So the term ‘community garden’ has a multitude of meanings – it was a garden made by the community, for the community, and in a sense ‘created’ community in the process.

However not every person I spoke to felt welcome in the community that had evolved around Old Tidemill. One participant, a resident in a block adjacent to the site, expressed a view of feeling unwelcome in the space:

“It was clicky. And myself, I didn't just feel that I could join into that little patch. […] personally, I didn't feel Old Tidemill was a community. It wasn't my community” (IA:2)

I asked if the interviewee felt like Old Tidemill excluded certain members of the community; “yes, I think so. Yes” (IA:2) was the response. This information was gained early on in my fieldwork, so I pressed the issue in conversations in following observations. Generally, this was met with a certain amount of surprise or, at least, a lack of contemplation over the multifacetedness of Deptford’s complex social set-up. Of course not everyone has the same views of a space, or same interpretations of the openness of a group of people or the space they are trying to open up.

It remains difficult to ascertain whether or not this particular viewpoint was influenced by the more militant stance the group adopted as they were protecting the space following the eviction in the past 15 months. As the fight to save Old Tidemill grew, the garden saw an increase in events it was hosting including solidarity gigs to raise awareness, and fundraising events. It is worth mentioning that the vast majority of those I spoke to expressed support for the garden and views such as this were rare. This finding must be critiqued upon reflection though; as my primary sampling method involved snowballing, I was always going to be far more likely to come across those more closely associated with Old Tidemill and the battle to save it. Therefore the generalisability of these findings holds little weight. Nonetheless a noteworthy remark can still be made about this particular interviewee – whether their opinions are comparatively rare or not, this shows that the ‘community’ of Old Tidemill does not reflect the views of every local resident, and the neighbourhood – like any in a fast-changing population like that of London – comprises of many different fragments of many different
communities. As a result, it becomes difficult to say the Old Tidemill community is truly representative of Deptford’s community.

5.3 The construction of urban nature

As mentioned in the introductory chapter, a key argument used by local residents and campaign groups against the redevelopment of the Old Tidemill site is an environmental one. An area renowned for its poor air quality (Citizen Sense, 2017), the mitigating effect that Old Tidemill’s rich tree canopy had on particle levels in the area was no secret:

““It’s […] a complex ecosystem that's taking pollutants out of the air”” (ID:8)

“It was mitigating pollution, which was horrendous on Deptford Church Street” (IE:12)

“They proved it helped all the pollution, didn’t they” (IF:15)

For one participant the decision to remove trees in an already dangerously polluted area was interpreted in an environmental injustice, rooted in the socioeconomic profile of the area:

“[…] like it’s sad that they took it away, but the saddest thing for me is the fresh air thing. And people can fight their corner, I’ve got really upset about the whole fresh air thing because it’s a really heavily polluted area […]. Don’t take away somebody’s fresh air when that space means so much to them, it’s a class war thing unfortunately. I think it’s just a symbol of that people in this area don’t have a voice, because of the income of this area”
Abundance of green spaces is often a good indicator of an area’s wealth, and Deptford’s low socioeconomic status is seen to dictate its inhabitants’ access to urban nature and its positive impact on air quality. The local council felt a greater pressure to build housing than to address air quality issues:

“it became apparent that, although [Lewisham Borough Council] had environmental obligations, they also had what they regarded as housing obligations and they chose housing over the environment” (IE:11).

This perception that the redevelopment value of the little green space in the area outweighs residents’ right to a healthy environment is a recurring topic across my observational data as well. Lewisham Borough Council have emphasised that the redevelopment plans include a large amount of greenery, including open lawns and green roofs (Lewisham Council, 2018a), however this has been met by scepticism surrounding the functionality and intended use of the proposed green space:

“I’m sure their design will be a design of smashing the place, putting obstacles in the middle and unproper for gatherings. So you will have a bench, you can sit three people at the most and you can sit five minutes at the most before your bum starts to ache on a marble cube, as they do” (IB:5)

A key motive behind this dismissive response could be the contrast between the proposed green areas in the new development, and what is being taken away. Old Tidemill was appreciated as far more than the average green space and whilst there are other green spaces around – particularly parks – they are not held in the same high esteem as Old Tidemill was:

“There’s obviously parks nearby, but they’re just normal grassed parks aren’t they. Like Fordham Park and that. [...] it’s still not the same thing, is it” (ID:9)
“[Old Tidemill] was different. It was so kind of wild, and right in the centre of this really, you know, concrete place. It was just such a benefit, such a bonus…” (IC:6)

For some, it was the combination of nature and its sense of community that made it so appreciated:

“Well I think the garden itself was an extraordinary place, as I’ve said, you know, as a social gathering place and as a local green space in somewhere where there isn’t much” (IE:12)

One participant took this a step further, seeing Old Tidemill as a refreshing and unique alternative to the planned urban green spaces which tend to dominate in modern cities:

“It was more like about people and their relation to Earth, to nature, and their right to have this relation and the real feeling that, uhm, we are being, you know… uhm, put in a system where we cannot experience direct relation. The system will always go; ‘okay, this is your place. Okay, don’t pick flowers, have your dog on lead. Look at this bird, isn’t it beautiful. Say yes’” (IB:4)

This encapsulates a feature of Old Tidemill which made it very rare for an urban setting – something which can be interpreted as ‘wildlife’ (insomuch as it is unmanicured). This response directly criticises planned parks and greens for being socially engineered. As this participant puts it; “We do not design a park with the people of the neighbourhood, this is unusual” (IB:5) and it is difficult to find spaces in urban areas which can accommodate this, or even allow for it. As it was community-run, having this decision-making process entirely within the community allowed for a very different approach to urban nature to what is usually found in inner-city areas. This allowed this garden to become something very different, and is interpreted to be heavily linked to its artistic origins:
“A garden where you actually do things directly, by yourself. [...] this new community came in, at the time it was hired by artists which was extraordinary! Maybe people don’t make the step to interact with their environment, because they haven’t got time, because na-na-na, because we are quite told, we shouldn’t, you know. We’ve got a public representative to provide us what we need. We do not design the roundabout, you know, with all the neighbours around. We do not design a park with the people of the neighbourhood, this is unusual” (IB:5)

Other community-run informal public green spaces do exist across London, such as in Haringey (GrowN22, 2019) and Dalston (McSorley, 2019), but they are not common compared with planned public green spaces, such as parks, heaths and commons. Such spaces represent the majority of Londoners’ regular interactions with nature, and Old Tidemill therefore was highly prized by local residents as a refreshing alternative to this, and its history and management had led to it developing a degree of wildness that was “otherworldly” (IE:11), “like a little oasis” (IF: 16) and was compared to planned spaces “not sterile” (ID:8), having “more texture, more imagination” (ibid.).

5.4 A space for children

“What Old Tidemill meant to me? What it was was the children. [...] They used to go into the nature and you used to hear children screech, because they had found something or they were afraid of something, so that was nice. That meant a lot to me, [...] it was an environmental education for the children” (IA:1)

The existing literature on Old Tidemill had often emphasised the value of the garden to children in the local area, as a fun, interactive and educational space in an area of notable child poverty compared with the rest of the country (e.g., Douglass, 2017), and this was a
commonly raised topic by participants. The unplanned development of Old Tidemill discussed in the previous section played a key role in creating this child-friendly space highly valued by local parents:

“Kids can create more imagination [in a space like Old Tidemill]. There would always be people bringing their kids there and it was quite nice to see them in that kind of environment rather than sterile fucking playground equipment in other parks or whatever, you know?” (ID:8)

“This beautifully landscaped garden was like a magic place for children. You know, its concentric circles, you know... It’s clear that some hippy thought went into it. You know, it’s a bit trippy in some ways that garden. It’s like you go in the garden and you get lost, you know. It’s... it’s bigger than it should be. Your sense of perspective and proportion... all the things that kids absolutely love. You give kids a really controlled, linear place and it’s like, they’ll have make-belief games. But if you put them into a space that they can feel it’s outside the norm, then, you know, they just love it.” (IE:11)

Such comments really emphasise the impact wild nature can have on children in an age of internet, video games and other reasons to remain indoors. This is particularly important in high-density urban areas, where interactions with nature are difficult to come by, short-lived and underappreciated. In an area with some of the highest rates of child poverty in England (Worthington, 2018a), parents are often unable to find the time or money to regularly take their children out of London and into the countryside, so having something like this in the local area was viewed as a blessing.

“A lot of parents can’t afford to take their children to different places in the country. There’s got to be something that the children can do!” (IA:1)

“I took [my daughters] there and they... they’re so sad it’s closed they don’t understand they’re too young. But they would learn more in a few hours in there, what with all the flowers and trees, and the pond and that, than they would in school I swear. [...] It was amazing” (IF:16)
The important role environmental education such as this plays in a child’s development has been generating a lot of interest recently (King & Stefanovic, 2012; also see the journal Children, Youth and Environments (2019) for a sense of the subject’s current scope). Old Tidemill’s dense canopy and wild landscape made it an exciting adventure playground for young children, and its vibrant and varying flora meant there were sometimes painful obstacles, barriers and other features, such as ponds, spikey bushes and nettles which helped children to learn about nature by quite simply getting their hands dirty. Kellert (2002) describes such interactions as ‘experimental learning’, stating they are vitally important for a child’s “cognitive development, especially during middle childhood and early adolescence” (ibid.: 122).

“And their parents were there, it’s not as though it was unsafe. It was just kind of none of the usual bullshit that goes along with, fucking, modern world or whatever” (ID:8)

This seemed a particularly emotive topic to a lot of the people – both parents and non-parents – I spoke to in both interviews and observations. Removing a space perceived as one of the most important for children in the area would naturally draw a strong response, and in this instance is compounded by frustration at the high socioeconomic and educational barriers facing children living in the area. This is perceived as impacting future generations.

“It feels everyone associated with Old Tidemill used to go to the school. [names removed] talked about how they helped plant trees as young kids. This garden transcends generations already, and it’s only been properly open since 2012” (FN 27/3/2019)

This field diary extract highlights the multigenerational role Old Tidemill has played for some residents. Originally the garden was the playground of the local school, which moved into Deptford Academy in the Deptford Library building in 2012. Local schoolchildren helped landscape the garden originally, and many of those children then began taking their own children to the community garden in adulthood.
“I can really see its [Old Tidemill’s] importance. I know a lot of the old people that live round here. And the children at the old Tidemill Academy basically helped build it in the 90s” (IG:19)

I believe the importance of this cannot be overstated when seen in the context of London’s demographic profile. In a city dominated by rented housing, people come and go and neighbourhoods are in constant flux. Building any sort of tight-knit community is notoriously difficult, so institutions which manage to cross multiple generations are cherished as they do not occur as regularly as in areas with more stable populations. Old Tidemill being knocked down does not just remove a space with nostalgic value for many local people who have remained in Deptford in adulthood, it also breaks this institution by denying it to future generations.

5.5 A crisis of public representation

“If our elected representatives won’t represent us, where are we at? I mean, they are absolutely failing the people. Because the only people they’re working with have no interest in the genuine affordability of people’s lives” (IE:12)

“It seems that there’s really a gap between the needs of people, the aspirations of people, and what they get from the council. And it seems as though the representatives are completely deaf to what people are saying, what they want” (IB:5)

These comments show quite clearly where much of the frustrations mentioned so far are directed to. They summarise an overall general feeling of mistrust and disappointment in local government which I gauged over the course of four weeks of observations. Naturally those with connections to Old Tidemill will disagree with the council’s decision to have it closed and redeveloped, however over the course of my observations, it was clear that Old Tidemill’s
closure was for many the culmination of growing antagonisms at the actions of local
government over many years. This frustration manifested itself in the unusually large scale of
the protest movement surrounding Old Tidemill’s closure, and was still being expressed very
publicly at the time of writing in the form of anti-council banners and placards (see Figures 7
& 8, above).

These sentiments occupy a number of clear, distinct themes I observed. Perhaps because of
the obvious profitability of a major housing development such as the one planned for the Old
Tidemill site, corruption was suspected by some of my participants:

“This relation that the public representative have with money, finance, is not sound. It cannot be. Money empires made themselves not by being philanthropic. It’s about private interest. You cannot expect from the money empire to do good things, no? And as them representatives are so tightly together, you know. They step out of the council and work for a private developer, and then after that they go back to the council… they cannot serve people, they cannot. No-one can serve two master at the same time” (IB:4)

“It’s not even just because of the fact that they’re doing it [closing Old Tidemill], but the fact that you know there’s corrupt, kind of, processes happening in the background that that made happen. It’s basically the big company paying people in the council or whatever to do whatever they want to do. And it happens everywhere” (ID:9)

“The last figure which just came out last week are that the [housing] sector made £5.8bn in – we’re not allowed to call it profit – in surplus. Where’s that money going? That’s not all going back into housing. It really isn’t [laughs]” (IE:13)

Similar remarks were observed in informal conversations throughout the fieldwork, although
it must also be said that a number of individuals I spoke to did show some sympathy to the
council, citing the central government’s tightening of purse strings forcing their hand to some
degree. The last of the above quotes is particularly enlightening, as it shows how much is
being investigated by a wide variety of actors keen on exposing what is perceived to be
unethical business conducted by the council, against the general consensus of their
constituents. In this instance, the contract Lewisham Borough Council signed with the
developer Peabody has been scrutinised due to Peabody’s questionable role as a social
housing provider. As I was told by a local activist regarding their attempts to raise concerns over Peabody to the council:

“That’s been a very difficult argument because all they ever throw back at us is they’re not for profit. All their profits go back into housing. And it’s like, well it’s not true is it? And the obvious way that it’s not true is the salaries that they pay their senior executives. And more complicated than that, and what really hasn’t been exposed properly, and isn’t properly in the public eye at all, is that they’re getting funding to support the extraordinarily huge amount of work that housing associations are doing – Peabody being one of them – for which these international investors are getting returns. But that doesn’t fit in the traditional shareholding model.” (IE:13)

Not every person involved with Old Tidemill will have delved as deeply into the business of the council’s contracts, agreements and general outsourced politics, however this mistrust does appear to filter down to many residents, and Old Tidemill’s redevelopment has merely reinforced this view. As one resident told me:

“Council should be looking after the people in their constituency, and want them to have the best kind of life and it doesn’t seem that that is the main goal of probably many a council. Which is a shame, because I don’t think on an individual level anybody who works for the council would think that. It just seems to be that fucking way doesn’t it” (IH:22)

That there is so little trust in the elected local government underlines the failings in the democratic process which should be there to act in the interests of the people. Whilst there is no way of knowing whether every person in Deptford, or even whether a majority of local residents, would be opposed to the redevelopment of Old Tidemill, it does have wide-ranging implications for those affected by it and has caused a reaction which has gained a lot of publicity. Yet one participant pointed out that in democratic terms, the council’s mandate faces an issue of legitimacy:
“What they don’t really talk about is how [Labour councillors] achieved [a clean-sweep of all 54 council positions in the most recent local election] with only 20% of the electorate. So, you know, they may have the majority of the people who vote, but the majority who are eligible to vote are not voting for them. Now whichever way you spin that, you should end up with the fact that you’re not engaging your electorate enough for them to really give a damn” (IE:13)

Politically, this is a difficult situation. The council was elected democratically, yet there is a crisis of engagement in local politics – something which is not unique to Lewisham Borough as England in general saw an estimated turnout of only 36% of the electorate in the 2018 local elections (Kuenssberg, 2018). How much this situation influences policymaking is difficult to tell, however it is clear that local government officials do not need to gain the support of a large proportion of their constituency to remain in office. This contradicts the democratic framework which is there to represent local community in decisions which affect them, leading here to confusion and anguish:

“But the council are the community. The council are meant to represent the community so, you know, who owns who? [laughs] You know, why are they doing something against what the community wants, if they’re meant and elected to represent us?” (IC:6)

“So that’s just the council for you […]. [raises voice] They don’t care about the community” (IG:18)

This feeling of disillusionment is nothing new. The council have previously made decisions which faced a large community backlash and as one participant told me; “it’s kind of like what happened with the [Deptford] Anchor. Like they take something away and they solve their problems with it” (IG:20). The Deptford Anchor – a large anchor which sat on a plinth at the end of Deptford High Street as a public monument and symbol to Deptford’s maritime history and people – was a much beloved local landmark. In April 2013 the anchor was removed by the council who claimed its raised plinth was encouraging anti-social behaviour as people often loitered and sat on it, drinking. There was a strong reaction from local residents as its removal was interpreted as a direct attack on the area’s identity, resulting in
protests and petitions which lasted on and off for five years, until the anchor was eventually restored in 2018 (Waywell, 2018). What appears to enrage residents in both decisions – regarding the anchor as well as Old Tidemill – is the failure of the local authority to recognise something which has significant cultural value to the community. The Deptford Anchor, as years of demonstrations and petitions showed, was far more than simply a piece of street art, in the same way that Old Tidemill was far more than simply a small garden.

5.6 Capitalism and the need for housing

A post-it note placed on an effigy in the empty piece of road where the anchor used to sit during these demonstrations read “anchors don’t make people drink on the street – capitalism does” (Waywell, 2018: para. 2). And whilst there are allegations of corruption as touched upon previously, there is also a view that a predominantly working-class area such as Deptford will suffer from political neglect on a national and local level:

“yeah, [Old Tidemill] was a necessity. And it’s really important for [the people of Deptford] because it’s a low-income area, a working-class area, no-one gives a toss, and they don’t want to listen to the people that need this garden. It’s their garden; they probably don’t have gardens themselves. These old people or young children, they have to walk to Blackheath or Greenwich Park, or the park in New Cross” (IG:18)

This feeling of neglect acts as a double-edged sword however, as many recognise that part of what has allowed Deptford to retain its strong identity expressed through the tight community atmosphere we looked at previously is the lack of major development. Many residents will be well aware of the stark identity shifts experienced by so-called ‘up-and-coming’ areas in south London, such as Clapham and neighbouring Peckham, and the gentrification this image shift
has resulted in (Eshun et al., 2013). As one participant, a long-term resident and local worker, told me:

“I think maybe people with lots of money have got to this point where they’ve realised that bad reputation doesn’t mean they can’t make lots of money out of it. And even when [Deptford Station] got redeveloped, like it was quite clear, for years before that, the company doing it were doing it because of this concerted effort — like you could see it in the papers and stuff — to try and create this idea that this area was worth investing in. It’s an up-and-coming area, there’s all this art and stuff. And you know that it was true, but you could see they were artificially trying to create this idea that they get investors in. […] It’s hyper fucking capitalism isn’t it. And that’s what’s doing this shit” (ID:9)

Another participant told me that they saw this process as the main driver behind drastic and seemingly undemocratic decision-making on the part of the council, such as the decision to redevelop Old Tidemill and the neighbouring Reginal House council block:

“I think [the council] have their own narrative [in redeveloping Old Tidemill and building new housing]; which is that they want to bring in people who theoretically have more disposable income, into an area, and are more aspirational. Which is probably insulting to the poorer people who make up the majority of the population of anywhere! But also I think that even their notion of who these people are is more constrained than they think it is. Because the more they market Deptford as a hip place, the more the people who have the power which controls rents and… is raising the prices of things, thereby making sure that even the people who come into the area are going to have less disposable income than they would like them to have” (IE:12)

The council, as well as the Mayor of London’s office, have clearly argued for the need for more housing as the main reason behind the development plans (Lewisham Council, 2018a). Yet this argument, when I brought it up, was usually laughed away, or brushed aside. My observations showed me that generally this was viewed as a proxy for the profitability of major construction projects such as the one planned on the Old Tidemill site. As one participant put it:
“[laughing] You don’t believe that bullshit, do you? [Former prime minister Theresa] May has cut all [local councils’] funding and the only way they can do anything is by selling fancy flats to rich people. […] That’s what’s happening at Tidemill” (IF:17)

This disregard for the housing argument was linked by another participant as systematic of Deptford’s socioeconomic status, particularly compared to the affluent neighbouring areas of Greenwich and Blackheath – both of which have an abundance of open green space including Blackheath’s 211-acre heath which in the past has seen public consultation heavily support its conservation (see, for example, Lewisham Council, 2007). As they put it:

“I think like Greenwich Park is Royal Greenwich and Deptford is a low-income area right next to Greenwich and they had this tiny, tiny, tiny green space, and they’re not even allowed to keep it even if they fight for it. I bet if they got rid of a bit of space on Blackheath they wouldn’t even bother protesting” (IG:19)

5.7 Whose right?

The final topic identified from the data differs from the general theme of this chapter, as it was a topic I explicitly asked my interviewees about, rather than being raised by participants following more general questions about their relationships with Old Tidemill (see Appendix I). At the end of each interview, I asked my participants if they felt like they had a ‘right’ to Old Tidemill or, more generally, to access green spaces like Old Tidemill if they lived in a city. This discussion point was partly motivated by literature on the topic of rights, which is discussed in the final part of Chapter 2.2. It was clear to me that the word ‘right’ is heavily laden and, as discussed in Chapter 2.2, supersedes general notions of power. Therefore it was designed to invoke a reaction based on an emotional sense of justice and moral fairness. For
one participant, the question gave a sense of gut feeling when reflecting on the community’s right to the garden vis-à-vis the council’s claim to the land:

“I think I did feel we had a right to that as a green space. Which the council wrongly wanted to destroy. I do, yeah.” (IE:14)

To another former user, the question of rights was, interestingly, interpreted in a very different way. When asking whether they thought they had a fundamental right to…, I was interrupted with, “to fresh air? Yes. Yes I do” (IG:19). This illustrates the eclecticism of opinion on what Old Tidemill represented to its users, and which particular rights are being restricted through its demolition.

This perception of Old Tidemill representing individuals’ – or, in general, the community’s – right to access certain ecosystem services, was not shared by everyone. The very concept of ‘rights’ failed to speak to one participant:

“I think rights are totally constructed things. Like I have the right to do whatever the fuck I want. You know, if it’s there I’m going to use it and I think people have more right to do things like that, as long as it’s a positive thing. Then companies shouldn’t have to destroy those things that are actually healthy and good for individuals or communities or whatever.” (ID:9)

This shows a very different perception of Old Tidemill generally; this space was a benefit to the community, but not vital to its overall wellbeing. Old Tidemill represented different things to different members of the community, and certain members saw it as more imperative to their everyday lives than others. Indeed the interpretation of what Old Tidemill actually was (or at least should have been) came out with this question:

“I do think the community have a right to this space under the idea of a commons. Like I think people have a right to… to use the space in their surroundings, and the community should own more of the space around them as common ground they can use” (IC:7)
To this participant, Old Tidemill should have been common land and in a general utopian sense, urban communities should have access to more common land. A similar utopian idea was attached to the notion of rights by another participant:

“My kids should have a right to it at least! They don’t though, do they. In a fair world we’d all have the right to greenery and trees and that, but the world isn’t fair is it.” (IF:17)

Yet not every participant felt a sense of right in relation to Old Tidemill. One participant had an entirely different view on the topic, seeing the land’s ownership as the overriding factor:

“Well I don’t think people have a right to the green space because it doesn’t belong to them. If people owned the space well of course they would have the rights. But it doesn’t belong to them, it belongs to the council. So you know, as far as rights, they can ask if they can keep it but if the council say no, we want to build on it, they haven’t got rights, they haven’t got rights” (IA:3)

For this participant, the concept of rights is entirely construed in a legal sense. Without the legal right, all other supposed rights that can be attached to Old Tidemill are irrelevant. Whilst it must be said that this sort of opinion differed quite substantially to the majority of people I interacted with in Deptford, it clearly shows that Deptford has a large and multifaceted community, with a wide breadth of opinions and values. It shows that Old Tidemill meant a lot to a great number of local people, but not every person, and policymaking will always have to attempt to represent a community as a whole, not just the loudest voice. Whether this had any impact on the decision to evict and demolish Old Tidemill is unknown, however it becomes evident from all of these findings that Deptford’s community is indeed vibrant, rich and multi-layered not just in its demographic composition, but also in its many opinions, views and ideals.
This chapter is designed to lay out the results from my field study. With nearly one month’s worth of interview and observational data, the extracts exhibited here have the purpose of giving an overall picture of what was found out. Many of my participants displayed strong and developed opinions about the processes which led to the closure and destruction of Old Tidemill. As my epistemological considerations in the previous chapter have attempted to show, these views have not been presented to show that local residents are somehow ‘right’ and the council were ‘wrong’, but to highlight the fallout that has resulted from the closure of Old Tidemill and explain why there has been such a great backlash from certain members of the local community.

There appears to be an overriding feeling of powerlessness in relation to decisions such as this. Local residents have shown that they were unable to have any influence over the decision-making process, and unable to express why Old Tidemill was so important to them to their public representatives. A key motive for this project was to gain an understanding of what made Old Tidemill so important, and what it was about this small green space that was so valued by local residents. How these findings fit into the overall conceptual and theoretical framework of this research project as laid out in Chapters 2 and 3, and how they develop and tackle the key research questions, is addressed in the following chapter.
Lewisham Borough Council’s decision to redevelop Old Tidemill Wildlife Garden has drawn a strong and emotive response from many of Deptford’s residents. The data I collected show that for a number of community members, this chapter in their history has exposed a mismatch between their understanding of what the general consensus on the garden’s significance to the community is, and what their elected representatives in local government perceive it to be. Many have drawn their own conclusions on what this clash of rationalities says about the viability of a democratically elected council body, concluding that the volume of a predominantly working-class community’s voice in local decision-making practice and general governance appears to be drowned out by an agenda guided by profit. Additionally, their voice helped paint a picture for me of what Old Tidemill was, and what a green space like this was able to offer an urban community that appears to have enriched the lives of a large number of local people.

In Chapter 3, I laid out a theoretical framework which combines traditional critical urban theory with a more modern urban political ecology perspective, allowing urban development and change to be viewed within the context of a politicised economy, as well as allowing urban, natural and urban-natural processes to be viewed as one-and-the-same, entirely interdependent on one another. In this chapter, this framework is applied to the conclusions I have drawn from the results of this research project. To assist with this contextualisation, the conceptual tools of space and power, analysed in detail in Chapter 2, are introduced to these conclusions to gain an understanding of how these notions of space and power manifest themselves within this case study.
This chapter has been split into three main sections, each of which attempts to answer the three key research questions introduced in Chapter 4:

1. **What role can local communities play in the creation of urban green space?**

2. **What right do local communities have to urban nature?**

3. **How does the case of Old Tidemill fit into the wider context of contemporary urban social change?**

The first two of these key research questions explore the notions of space and power respectively. The final research question then attempts to articulate the overall significance of this research project for urban studies in general, paying particular attention to current trends of urban planning and ideas on how our cities should be organised. In doing so, it also draws in comparisons with similar case studies within the contemporary academic literature. A synthesis of these three discussions then is presented in the following and final section; the Discussion.

### 6.1 Old Tidemill, communities and green space

In Chapter 2.1 I introduced Lefebvre’s (1991) ‘trialectic of space’, which I argued plays a key role in interpreting the Old Tidemill space itself. To understand this space, this research project relied on my participants’ memories of both what Old Tidemill was and what it meant to them, as the garden had been demolished upon my arrival in the field. In other words, there was no *espace vecu* (or lived space) any more, and Old Tidemill took on a representational and symbolic meaning to Deptford’s residents and the garden’s former users.
This dynamic is an important consideration when attempting to understand Old Tidemill as a space. Because of the meaning instilled into it through its usage and the general (social and ecosystem) services it provided, the moment that Old Tidemill’s occupation was evicted and the space became inaccessible, it took on a different form altogether. It became an *espace perçu* – a perceived space – as it was physically there, yet unreachable. One could argue that the perceived significance of this space increased upon its closure as the injustice felt by its former patrons regarding the council’s decision was shared, and public support for the campaign to save it grew. It took on a symbolic meaning which superseded its status as a wildlife garden; representing injustice in a stark physical representation through a wall, security presence and the occupation of the neighbouring Tidemill Green. And whilst it may be argued that the anger felt by those opposed to the council’s ultimate decision has led to a temporary, even fleeting increase in the discourse influencing this symbolic meaning, it is nonetheless significant, and will indelibly shadow future uses of the space (the construction site, followed by the housing development) to many of Deptford’s residents.

To the community defined by a mutual interest in Old Tidemill, this is the space that defines their society; as Castells (2000) would put it, Old Tidemill was their expression. Of course other spaces in the local area had an equally important sense of expression over what, in their eyes, makes Deptford *Deptford*, however my results show that there appears to be a relatively broad consensus amongst its former users that Old Tidemill encapsulated to a large degree their sense of place-based local identity.

### 6.1.1 Old Tidemill and the societal construction of green space

What allowed a deep sense of place-based identity to be instilled into Old Tidemill by community members is tied into the creation of this space in a variety of ways. Firstly, this garden was an entirely community-driven project, and was very literally constructed by the people who intended to use it, and not by external stakeholders. In terms of economics, this represented a maximisation of the space’s use value at the expense of the pressures of its
exchange value or land-rent potential (Harvey, 1982). As a participant noted, designing a public urban green space without the involvement or influence of local government or investment-led external stakeholders “is unusual” (IB:5) and changes the dynamic of what can be produced. No longer is the emphasis on creating something to fulfil the needs of what those with power perceive local residents to have, but the local residents now have the power to use their own imagination regarding their understanding of each other’s needs. As Old Tidemill proved, this allowed an entirely different kind of space to be constructed.

As the space in its most recent, pre-demolition configuration was designed largely by a group of local artists who took over the everyday running of it in 2012 (Worthington, 2018a), the focus on its potential was full of imagination. Imagination which my participants claimed added “texture” (ID:8), “vibrant colours and wild nature” (IF:15) and made it a “magic place for children” (IE:11). It was a garden “where you actually do things directly, by yourself” (IB:5) and you would “get lost in [it], it [was] bigger than it should be” (IE:11). It was perceived as outside of the norm and potentially the rarity of something like that in an inner-city neighbourhood enhanced the feeling of how special this place was. More than anything though, this showed how urban nature can be constructed if local people are given the tools and possibilities to do so.

This was a caricature of society’s imagination across space. A half-acre canvass of societal-spatial co-production which was not stencilled by those in power. It was working-class led and grassroots in every sense, itself questioning Foucault’s (1991) assertion that power shapes societal-spatial co-production, at least briefly. In the end however, Foucault may have been right all along, as this co-production did not last and critically one could argue that the struggle, eviction, closure and demolition were all eventually inevitable in light of the potential exchange value of a half-acre of prime inner-city real estate.
6.1.2 An urban political ecology perspective

Much of the positive descriptive rhetoric identified in my data regarding Old Tidemill’s ecological and aesthetic appeal was bucolic. Notions of the space being “like a little oasis” (IF:16) in urban concrete were common – as one participant told me: “you couldn’t tell that you were in a city when you were in there” (IH:22). The sheer size of London’s sprawl limits many of its citizens’ access to nature and my results showed that this dense and vibrant ecosystem was a highly regarded aspect of Old Tidemill to its users.

Old Tidemill’s perceived qualities lay in its wildness; it was unmanicured and gave the illusion of feeling ‘natural’ and unplanned. Yet Matthew Gandy (2006) questions the return of nature in post-industrial areas such as Deptford. He argues that entropic urban spaces that have been reclaimed by nature are becoming ‘green ghettos’, and being surrounded by concrete the species of mammals, plants and insects they attract become trapped, unable to expand and at the mercy of the human life they are surrounded by. Our ecological imaginaries, where urban nature must be a distinct entity and added to an urban area for the health and wellbeing of its citizens is exactly that – imaginary. Instead, Gandy (ibid.: 73) argues, the production of urban space should include a synthesis between nature and culture “in which long-standing ideological antinomies lose their analytical utility and political resonance”.

It feels difficult to criticise members of Deptford’s community for recollecting Old Tidemill with bucolic eyes. However this perspective does shed light on why Old Tidemill’s caused such a strong reaction within the local community, and the progress of urban change in general. Being exposed to this little oasis amongst the throng of concrete showed its users how valuable spaces like Old Tidemill can be to residents. It was a nature that these city-dwellers created to fulfil their needs, and the fact it could be seen as a ‘green ghetto’ emphasises the severe lack of ecology in the surrounding area. As this case study shows, however, urban nature, like all urban planning, is subject to political decisions, and in this case, as one participant put it, the council “chose housing over the environment” (IE:11). And as long as the political ecology at play here conceptualises nature as a luxury, separated from urban society, more Old Tidemills will fall victim to metabolisms with greater economic clout, such as housing and regeneration projects (Heynen et al., 2006).
6.1.3 What role can local communities play in the creation of urban green space?

Following the analysis of the data collected on this research project, it became clear to me that those involved with Old Tidemill had been almost taken aback at the opportunity the community had had in creating this space. The rarity of such a situation has been touched upon throughout this thesis; so has the physical result of this situation in the unique space that was created. In light of this, the following research question became a clear one to investigate:

*What role can local communities play in the creation of urban green space?*

My findings have shown that Deptford’s community is complex, multifaceted and largely united by a collective sense of place and belonging – in other words despite its continual shifting and change (like any area in contemporary London), local people are very proud to live in and be part of Deptford. Whether this means that Deptford residents have a ‘stronger’ sense of community than other areas is not within the scope of this research project, however this bond between people – and people and place – is important to note.

This local community have shown that they can play a major role in shaping urban green space to be something drastically different from what urban planners and architect perceive urban nature to be. One could argue that London’s plethora of parks, commons, heaths and greens are, in comparison to what Old Tidemill was, sterile, aesthetically-driven and, to a degree, unidimensional. Old Tidemill was none of these things because it was designed and run by its users, with the needs of children, families, the poor, local musicians and artists, local businesses, the elderly, disabled and the homeless all in mind. It was designed to attract everyone, not to attract investment.

So the role local communities can play in creating urban green space is by the reckoning of this case study full of potential. Yet, as the following section illustrates, it is a role which is entirely dependent on the power a local community has in shaping their lived environment.
6.2 Old Tidemill, power and rights

In Chapter 2.2 I outlined the interplay between power and space, arguing that space is the arena of power. This argument is based upon Lefebvre’s (1991) assertion that space and society are intertwined, co-producing one another, both guided by the hand of capital. With that in mind, then the assertion of control over space (through the creation of value in land-rent – Marx’s (1967b) ‘fictitious capital’) equates to the assertion of control over society.

When the everyday running, use and upkeep of Old Tidemill fell into the hands of the community in 2012, suddenly residents of a predominantly working-class area found themselves with control over that space, and a rare grip on spatial power outside of the traditional capitalist accumulative system. This gave this community the agency to shape that space to fulfil their needs as they saw fit, and to create a space which could enrich the lives of local people regardless of their socioeconomic status.

Paradoxically, this developed against the backdrop of London’s growing crisis of public representation discussed in Chapters 2.2 and 5.5. So just as the lack of democratic power experienced by London’s working-class communities was being exposed, this space became controlled by local people. All around it, however, Deptford was experiencing a growing pressure from the threat of redevelopment. A key theme identified in my findings was Deptford’s continued battle against redevelopment as “one of [London’s] last bastions [with a] strong community and the working class” (ID:9). The removal of Deptford’s Anchor in April 2013 (Waywell, 2018) seemed to symbolise for many residents this battle to avoid the gentrification seen by similar working-class communities in Hackney, London Fields, Shoreditch, Clapham and neighbouring Peckham, yet with the towers of Canary Wharf looming ominously in the distance, and the springing up of shiny new private developments in Greenwich’s suburbs around the recently closed docklands of Creekside a stone’s throw away (Cardule, 2016), this threat was abundantly clear to see.
6.2.1 Accumulation by dispossession

These changes in the urban fabric and their ability to break up urban communities like that found in Deptford are no doubt fuelled by heavy investment. The global growth in wealth driving such investment, Harvey (2012) argues, has since the 1970s not been met by significant economic growth. Wealth inequality continues to rise around the world (Oxfam, 2017) fuelling this investment in a perpetual cycle – something which Harvey (2000, 2012) terms ‘accumulation by dispossession’, where the centralisation of wealth and power in the hands of a few is driven not by economic growth (which is negligible), but instead by dispossessing poor individuals, communities, neighbourhoods and even countries of their wealth and land. In the case of Old Tidemill, this dispossession was not of a private individual, but of a community, however the driving up of rents that the new housing development taking its place will inevitably contribute to will almost certainly dispossess the poorest of Deptford’s residents in the years to come.

Lewisham Borough Council may argue that the land on which Old Tidemill sat was only in temporary use by the community whilst investment was found, however the council’s inability to provide any basic green space in the local community in that case is noteworthy. As my findings point out, it is no secret to local residents that the small, wealthy neighbouring communities in Blackheath were able to lobby Lewisham Borough Council during public consultations to preserve their vast 211-acre green space from any development (see Lewisham Council, 2007), when Deptford’s residents resorting to protest and occupation did nothing to save their half-acre community garden.

An overriding theme in the analysis of the data collected here concerns local governance. The local residents I spoke to overwhelmingly felt a mismatch between their perception of community consensus (regarding issues such as Old Tidemill), and the decision-making of their elected public representatives. There appeared to be an acceptance of the failings of a democratic system in local people’s capacity to influence political decisions which impacted their lived environment and public space.
This begs the question of whether the council were simply unwilling to listen to residents on this matter, or unable to. If the dispossession of Old Tidemill as viewed as accumulation (through the profits the new development’s investors will eventually reap), then in that respect local governance would be powerless to these processes and unable to stop the greater power of investment and accumulation exerting its control over space (and therefore over society) in this way.

6.2.2 Whose power? Whose right?

The concept of rights is analysed and critiqued in Chapter 2.2, and based upon a variety of Marxist literature I contrasted this ‘moral ideal’ with the reality of power. To quote Mitchell (2003: 27) once more; rights “provide a set of instructions about the use of power”. How these instructive tools were perceived within the context of the struggle to save Old Tidemill formed part of my interview guide (see Appendix I) and was asked of every interviewee, with the results discussed previously in Chapter 5.7.

Interestingly, the perception of individual right in regards to Old Tidemill, as well as urban green space in general, varied to a large degree across my respondents. Some dismissed the concept altogether, others accepted their lack of rights as morally justified, and for a number of respondents their perception of rights in this context ranged from environmental and health-based concerns to access to green space and the prospects of future generations. If rights are indeed a set of instructions on the use of power (in this case by local government), then this shows their vagueness and ambiguity. Many people feel very strongly that individual moral justice should be protected by the concept of rights, but not everyone and those that do feel this cannot agree on which rights are the most important. This lack of clarity seems to undermine the concept itself, unless rights are written into law – such as with internationally recognised human rights laws, which have generally become recognised as a source of political obligation (although even these are subject to fragmentation and dispute (Marti, 2002)).

So perhaps Marx (1967a: 225) was right and “between equal rights, forces decide”. Harvey (2000) noted on Marx’s critique of rights that it was their effectiveness as an organising principle of social struggle which was being questioned, not the concept of rights.
per se. One could argue that this variety of opinions on what rights are perceived by Old Tidemill’s former users undermines its very purpose, and as Marx points to, power wins out before any form of consensus can be realised.

6.2.3 What right do local communities have to urban nature?

The second key research question developed in this research project builds on the rights talk discussed so far in relation to Old Tidemill:

What right do local communities have to urban nature?

While the perception of what rights Deptford’s residents should have regarding Old Tidemill is subject to discourse, the clear reality is that there is little weight in terms of the rights they do have. Certainly in this particular context it is difficult to say that local communities have any right to urban nature, if it is being taken away, although if neighbouring areas such as Greenwich and Blackheath did not have such an abundance of green space, it may very well be a different argument.

What seems to be clear is that the community has come together over this issue and therefore there is a perception of injustice over the council’s move to evict and demolish. By coming together as a community, Deptford’s residents have built a collective power, which has been evident in the occupation of Old Tidemill itself (as well the ongoing occupation of Tidemill Green), and the garnering of support for the cause around the local area. However this power has been trumped by that of the council and despite the fight, the redevelopment looks set to commence.

This story tells us more about the power of local communities in their fight for urban nature. There may be a perceived lack of power through traditional democratic means, yet the attention this battle has drawn, not just locally, but even now in national media (e.g., Childs, 2019) will help empower working-class communities to be heard in their fight for access to
urban nature going forward. This may help policymakers and planners change their conceptualisation of nature itself within cities and begin to see battles like this as evidence of urban socio-environmental interdependence.

### 6.3 Old Tidemill and the wider context of contemporary urban change

A fascinating aspect of the Old Tidemill story is how such a small space has, in a relatively short space of time (from its opening up to the community in 2012, until its closure in 2018), become to many of Deptford’s residents such a significant part of the area’s history and culture. As this thesis has speculated on, perhaps the emotional backlash following its closure has drawn such reflection that would not be there were the garden still open today, yet nonetheless its importance to the people of Deptford (both in what it was and how a community came together to try and save it) should not be understated.

To many in Deptford, the Old Tidemill story encapsulates the community’s struggle against the bourgeoisification of a predominantly working-class London suburb whose people capture its rich cultural identity through the meaning they inject into its lived space. So its localised significance is clear, and how this lived space is shaped by power relations analysed throughout this project. The next step is to ask how this story fits into a wider picture of urban change in general, particularly what Old Tidemill can teach us about the potential and the limitations of our cities and their people. To do this, this project’s final research question is proposed as following:

*How does the case of Old Tidemill fit into the wider context of contemporary urban social change?*
With this question, the potential impact of Old Tidemill on the way we think about urban change is two-fold. Firstly, we need to look at the space itself, and how the community-based design and management altered its use-value from that of a traditionally designed urban green space. Secondly, we also need to look at the eventual closure, eviction and demolition of the garden, and why there was such a hard-fought battle to save it. In doing so, we will take a comparative look into similar studies, and look at the impact that community-based public green space design and community activism have had and potentially can have.

6.3.1 Grassroots urban green space design and activism

There are many aspects of this study that have shown how arguably unique Old Tidemill was within the context of urban green space design. The garden, in its pre-demolition configuration, was radically different from the standard template one would find in a modern urban green space. Its aesthetic wildness and unmanicured landscaping allowed its users a very different interaction with nature to what a park, common, green or heath (which make up the majority of London’s green spaces) can offer. As I have previously concluded, this configuration came about by virtue of the empowerment of local people – indeed those who had the intention of actually using this space – to not just be involved in the design and management of the space, but to have complete control over them without the pressures of the land’s potential exchange value (or indeed that of surround land and housing, when we consider the impact of green spaces and on speculative house prices locally).

Yet whilst there are many aspects of Old Tidemill which make it unique within Deptford’s unique cultural and historical context, it is not the only example of a local urban community gaining such empowerment through a community-run garden. A small number of other community-based garden initiatives have sprung up across the UK’s capital, such as in Haringey (GrowN22, 2019), and possibly London’s most well-known community garden – Dalston Eastern Curve Garden (McSorley, 2019). And as recent work by Cumbers et al. (2018) illustrates, the city of Glasgow has seen a surge in community garden projects, both formal and informal, in response to the steady decline in the maintenance of the city’s public green spaces caused by a severe tightening of public purse strings in one of the UK’s poorest
large cities recent years. In this case, Glasgow City Council’s budget cuts have led to the abandonment of a number of parks and greens, and these derelict green spaces have then been taken over by community-led groups and transformed into community-run gardens. As the authors (ibid.) note, this phenomenon has been most pronounced in the city’s poorest areas, particularly Glasgow’s East End and the northern periphery. As a result, they have been hesitant to celebrate this growing trend as a victory of community empowerment, as it has happened in the backdrop of (and arguably as a result of) public funding cuts, the resulting negligence of public space by the local council and accompanying rise in urban poverty.

However whilst the economic conditions which have allowed such spaces to exist (arguably Lewisham Borough Council’s decision to relinquish responsibility of the Old Tidemill space would not have happened in a more positive national economic climate), the progressive social relations within the community that community gardens enable cannot be ignored. There have been those who have viewed the rising trend of community gardens in places like Berlin and the US as part of a neoliberal agenda, helping to justify central government’s failure to provide adequate funding to local governments for the maintenance of urban green spaces in cities, meaning that communities are in reality being exploited as ‘free labour’ in maintaining these spaces themselves (e.g., Ghose & Pettygrove, 2014 and Rosol, 2012). I believe that the case of Old Tidemill provides a strong counter-argument to this critique through the clear willingness of local people to contribute to the garden, and in particular through the strong backlash, protest movement and even occupation that has resulted from its closure. The findings of this case study have shown that this response was not just down to the decline of general green space access that Old Tidemill’s closure represented, but also because of how proud the community was in the space they had designed, helped maintain and what it could offer local people.

Old Tidemill shone a very different light on the potential for community empowerment through a community garden. It showed the potential for what can be designed when a community is given agency to do so and in doing so, raises questions about how urban green space is traditionally envisaged.
6.3.2 Questions of working-class agency and democracy in local governance

This project has raised a number of questions about the ability of a predominantly working-class urban community to be able to influence the decision-making process which ultimately affects their lived public spaces. There is clearly a feeling amongst many residents in Deptford that their elected representatives have no interest in representing their interests in such matters, and decisions like the redevelopment of the Old Tidemill site are made regardless of their wishes. A feeling that was possibly exacerbated by a feeling of the community’s voice falling on deaf ears, and a generally ineffective communication between local government and the governed.

This appears to reflect a growing trend of working-class communities across London being actively excluded from the democratic process in local government as MacLeod (2018) recently exposed. London is a megacity and one of the financial capitals of the world, and therefore the force of capital in its ability to redraw the city’s demographic layout through processes commonly described as gentrification are undeniably strong. Those at most need of protection from such forces are the city’s most vulnerable, economically deprived working-class communities, and yet they are the ones being excluded from the decision-making which impacts their lives.

This case study has shown that this is no secret, and in fact was the predominant, overriding theme my participants spoke about. This shows that there needs to be a reassessment of the democratic, governmental framework as here in Deptford, a working-class community feels entirely excluded from governance, powerless to have any say on what their community value and prioritise.
6.3.3 How does the case of Old Tidemill fit into the wider context of contemporary urban social change?

Reflecting on the findings of this research project in conjuncture with the unpacking of notions of power and space, the story of Old Tidemill has revealed hard truths about the political disconnect between this urban community and their lived public space. But it has also shown the potential of urban communities to reconnect with (both first- and second-) nature and how even just a half-acre of land in the correct hands can be utilised to serve the needs of a community in an impressive way.

Many have commented on the clear benefits of community cohesion and the ‘urban village’ effect (e.g., Brindley, 2003; Chavis & Wandersman, 1990) and the way Old Tidemill was used and perceived in and by the local community is testament to what close social bonds in an urban area can achieve, particularly how advantageous this can be for marginalised communities. Whilst the Old Tidemill story may indeed be unique within Deptford’s unique history and culture, there is no reason that stories like this cannot be written in other unique urban contexts.
7. Conclusions

This brief concluding chapter will reflect back on the overall research process and take a critical look at what this means for the overall validity of my findings in light of the methodology I adopted. Finally, I will offer suggestions for future research to build on these findings and push the needle for contemporary urban studies both within the context of this case study, and in general.

7.1 Reflections on the research process

Whilst I have already reflected on the overall methodology adopted and the research methods chosen in Chapter 4.6, it is worth reflecting back over the entire research process now that my findings have been presented and discussed. As the methodology was sequential and exploratory in design, a number of themes were identified and analysed, and these topics were often resultingly revisited in observational and interview conversations further on in the research process. Considering the emphasis my overall analysis placed on these identified themes, it comes to mind that a different set of conditions and parameters (i.e., different opening conversations, different settings or even a different researcher) could have led to a very different set of results. Reflexively, I did my utmost to ensure I was not putting words in my participants’ mouths and tried to allow them to tell the story and tell me what they believed to be the important and defining characteristics of Old Tidemill. Yet as I made clear with my ontological considerations in Chapter 4, there is no one truth to this story, and Deptford’s rich mix of people will undoubtably yield a vast array of differing and at times contradictory opinions, not all of which this research project could hope to represent.

The scope of a Master’s thesis limits this as well. Due to my own constraints as a researcher, only a fairly limited time period was spent in the field, and by the time I arrived,
Old Tidemill had already been demolished. As a sequential study, the ability to spend a greater time with the local community, particularly being able to spend time in the garden prior to its closure and demolition, would have allowed me to work with a greater spectrum of research tools.

Nevertheless, I believe that despite such limitations, the findings of this research project are relevant, not just to Deptford and the community that formed around Old Tidemill, but also to urban studies in general, and can act as a springboard for future research to build on.

### 7.2 Suggestions for future research

There are a number of avenues for future research to go down to build on the work undertaken in this research project. In relation to Old Tidemill, the way the local community rallied together following the eviction notice and subsequent demolition is particularly noteworthy. Studying how these community bonds continue to develop, and whether the activist work already undertaken in attempts to halt the redevelopment of the site lead to any consequences for the area’s local governance and representational issues would be of particular interest. This could shed further light on the empowerment of Deptford’s people and whether activism, protest, occupation and resistance in response to these urban changes are able to have any lasting impacts, despite their inability to save Old Tidemill itself from demolition.

A more global avenue for future research would be to place greater academic attention on the potential for small, working-class urban communities to create agency through community-environmental projects like Old Tidemill. I was in the advantageous position as a former resident of Deptford of being able to find out about and experience this case study. However I did note that the academic literature on working-class community-led environmental projects like Old Tidemill often tended to focus on the negative, exploitative aspects of ‘free labour’ and potential underlying neoliberal agenda (e.g., Ghose & Pettygrove, 2014 and Rosol, 2012, amongst others). Future research could build on this work conducting studies which instead focus more on the potential of community gardens and other community-designed public spaces in contrast to the far more prevalent top-down public space design.


9.1 Appendix I: Interview Guide

1. What did Old Tidemill Wildlife Garden mean to you?

2. How regularly did you use this space?
   How did you use it?

3. Would you describe the garden as an ‘asset of community value’?
   Why?

4. Do you think the council were correct in their decision to evict?
   Why? / Why not?

5. Considering how you used this space, what are you going to do now that it’s gone?
   Are there any alternatives?

6. Do you think you had a right to use this particular space?
   More generally, do you feel you have a right to urban nature or green space in cities?
9.2 Appendix II: Interviewee Profiles

It should be noted that the identities of all interviewees have been hidden. This profile guide simply gives an outline based upon answers given to me, and has been carefully designed to give the reader a small insight into the individuals, without any details which may result in identification. The transcript pages are for reference and can be made available from me upon request.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interviewee</th>
<th>Transcript pages</th>
<th>Age &amp; gender</th>
<th>relation to Deptford</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Interviewee A (IA)</td>
<td>1-3</td>
<td>66, female</td>
<td>Local resident of 29 years, retiree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interviewee B (IB)</td>
<td>4-5</td>
<td>40, male</td>
<td>Old Tidemill activist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interviewee C (IC)</td>
<td>6-7</td>
<td>36, female</td>
<td>Local worker, public service</td>
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<tr>
<td>Interviewee D (ID)</td>
<td>8-10</td>
<td>42, male</td>
<td>Local worker, local resident of 15 years</td>
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<tr>
<td>Interviewee E (IE)</td>
<td>11-14</td>
<td>56, male</td>
<td>Local resident of 20 years, Old Tidemill activist</td>
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<tr>
<td>Interviewee F (IF)</td>
<td>15-17</td>
<td>31, male</td>
<td>Local resident entire life, local worker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interviewee G (IG)</td>
<td>18-20</td>
<td>26, female</td>
<td>Local resident entire life, local worker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interviewee H (IH)</td>
<td>21-22</td>
<td>25, female</td>
<td>Local resident of 7 years</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
9.3 Appendix III: Photo-elicitation guide

**Photograph 1:** *Old Tidemill Wildlife Garden, 2016 (source: TimeOut, 2019)*
Photograph 2: *Old Tidemill Wildlife Garden, date unknown (source: Assembly SE8, 2018)*
Photograph 3:  Old Tidemill Wildlife Garden, date unknown (source: Old Tidemill Garden, 2017)
Photograph 4:  Old Tidemill Wildlife Garden, date unknown (source: Douglass, 2017)
Photograph 5: Old Tidemill Wildlife Garden, date unknown (source: Assembly SE8, 2018)
Photograph 6: Old Tidemill Wildlife Garden, date unknown (source: Douglass, 2017)
Photograph 7:  *Old Tidemill Wildlife Garden, date unknown (source: Assembly SE8, 2018)*
Photograph 8: Old Tidemill Wildlife Garden, date unknown (source: Assembly SE8, 2018)
Photograph 9: Old Tidemill’s demolition, March 2019 (source: Worthington, 2019)