

EXPLORING ESSEX PARKS

GENDERING GREEN SPACES
FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

MAY 2025



This report is written by Social Place and Make Space for Girls in collaboration with Chelmsford City Council and Maldon District Council.

It reflects the views of 38 participants, aged 13-14; while these views shed light on some of their perspectives, this demographic is very diverse and has varied perspectives and experiences. Where this report refers to boys and girls, young men and young women, these categories refer to gender identities; we recognise that the concept of gender is not binary nor invariable or biologically determined, but, rather, socially constructed. In addition, while we primarily discuss age and gender throughout the report, we take an intersectional approach to our work acknowledging that other characteristics such as class, belief, race and disability also have an impact on experiences of public space.

Social Place and Make Space for Girls would like to express their thanks to the amazing young people and staff from Boswells School, Chelmer Valley High School and Plume Academy; Chelmsford City Council, Maldon District Council, and the Essex Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner for funding this work; the councillors and officers at Chelmsford City Council and Maldon District Council; Broomfield Village Hall Charity and Broomfield Parish Council; the Essex Police Children and Young Persons Officer; Active Essex; and Be Their Lead for supporting the work.

INTRODUCTION

This report is intended for local authorities, those working in community safety and tackling Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG), planners, park professionals, policy-makers, and people working in the built environment. It aims:

- To provide an evidence base to inform and influence planning, policy, and design for gender inclusive public space – particularly green space; and
- To provide inspiration for professionals trying to envision what “informal play” areas for young people could look like, if we step away from the gendered provisions that we currently have.

By doing this, the report seeks to support people to make decisions about designing green spaces that enable young women and gender-diverse young people to have parks where they feel safe and included.

This report draws together the outcomes of three engagement projects working with a total of 38 year 9 students (the Participants) who identified as girls, young women, trans-men and non-binary in three schools in Chelmsford, Broomfield, and Maldon, Essex during 2024. The value of these projects was acknowledged by the prestigious national Thornton Educational Trust (TET), which recognised the projects as the best youth long term project in 2024.

The projects worked with the Participants over multiple weeks to explore their feelings towards, experiences of and design suggestions for a series of parks in their local areas. While each group focused on similar questions, the parks were deliberately chosen for being representative of different types of parks across Essex: a city centre urban park in Chelmsford; a suburban local green space in Broomfield; and a destination park in Maldon.



Participants with the TET Award awarded to the project

WHAT IS THE BACKGROUND?

For many decades, organisations like Fields in Trust¹ and Sports England² have provided authoritative and practical guidance to local authorities, planners, park professionals, policy-makers and others working in the built environment, to support them to create parks and green spaces that work well for their local communities.

But despite this, research shows that many young people, particularly young women and gender diverse young people, do not feel welcome, comfortable, or safe in their local parks and green spaces. They often feel they do not have a say about or sense of belonging in parks and green spaces which stops them from benefiting from them.

- **A 2022 Girlguiding survey showed that over 80% of girls and young women feel unsafe when they are out alone³;**
- **Work by the YWL in Scotland in 2021 found that only 20% of girls and young women in Glasgow felt very comfortable in the park that they had chosen to use⁴;**
- **A 2018 Stonewall report revealed that more than two in five trans people wholly avoid certain streets due to fear⁵; and**
- **Research by Grosvenor in 2021 indicates that 89% of young adults aged 16-18 have never been consulted about their local areas⁶.**

Parks and green spaces form a key component of the public realm. They provide the opportunity for activity, social connection, interaction with nature, and community cohesion. But many young people do not use parks and green spaces, and research shows that use differs based on gender.

It is generally recognised that boys and young men use facilities in parks and green spaces designated for formal sports (eg. football, rugby and cricket pitches) much more than others (for example, research by Make Space for Girls shows that men and boys make up at least 90% of the teams who access these outdoor facilities for formal sport⁷). The work of the Participants was not focussed on these formal sports facilities.

Rather, the work of the Participants focussed on non-sporting/leisure provision in parks and green spaces (also referred to as informal play areas). Field in Trust 2024 Guidance¹ (and benchmarks) recognise the importance of these informal play areas and refers to these as:



Angel Meadow, Park in Broomfield, Essex

“Facilities specifically designed for informal recreation such as pump tracks, parkour elements, bouldering walls, social areas for teenagers, ball courts, multi-use games area or skateboard areas.”

In practice, informal play areas for teenagers in parks and green spaces normally take the form of skate parks, fenced multi-use games areas (sometimes called MUGAs) and other pitches and BMX or pump tracks. While no one actively sets out to make these spaces unwelcoming, in practice they – like formal sports grounds – are dominated by boys and young men:

For example, research carried out by Julia King and Olivia Theocharides-Feldman of the London School of Economics with Make Space for Girls showed that⁸:

- **63% of young men regularly used parks; compared to only 31% of young women;**
- **50% of young men used fenced football pitches / ball courts regularly; compared to only 6% of young women.**

And, in a recent survey carried out by Make Space for Girls⁹:

- **92% of the teenage users of fenced pitches were boys and young men;**
- **84% of the teenage users of skateparks were boys and young men.**

Teenage girls, young women and gender diverse young people often feel that they do not have a place in parks that they can claim for play, relaxation and social interaction.

This gendered difference matters: it shows that many girls, young women and gender diverse young people are not exercising their right to enjoy the benefits of parks and green spaces; and it matters to local authorities who want to comply with their duties under the Public Sector Equality Duty in the Equality Act 2010.

We need to think differently about what provisions are put in parks and green spaces if we want them to be used by more diverse young people. To think differently, decision makers need practical guidance about more inclusive provisions and to listen to those young people who don't currently feel the park is "for them".

We hope therefore that this report will provide inspiration for what could be included by way of "informal play areas" as an alternative or additional to a MUGA or skatepark; and prove a constructive supplement to existing guidance, to support local authorities to address the current gender imbalance in park provision for teenagers.



Collaging with participants

WHY DO THIS WORK IN THE CONTEXT OF VAWG?

Addressing young women's and gender diverse young people's use of public space is not just a leisure issue. It is an issue of having full and free participation in public life which is heavily linked to women's / gendered safety.

In policy and planning, "women's safety" and "gendered safety" is increasingly seen as a spectrum, from inconvenience to serious harm¹⁰. While safety means different things to different people, it often stems from feeling one's presence is legitimate, valued, and free from domination. This broader understanding recognises that **safety is not just about the absence of violence but about fostering environments where people feel they have the right to exist fully and freely, without fear.** Public spaces that feel safe are those where individuals feel welcomed, respected, secure, and represented. They are places people feel they have a right to occupy without being targeted, or objectified¹¹.

When young women and gender-diverse young people enter public spaces that do not reflect their wants, or their needs—in other words, where there seems to be no place 'for them' and no users 'like them'—it can trigger feelings of fear. It suggests to them that they don't belong, that they do not have a right to occupy public space, and that their sense of security may be at risk. This fear significantly restricts their public lives. As a result of that fear, many avoid certain areas, stay indoors after dark, or rely on friends and family (often men) for security¹².

The development of this feeling of fear is cyclical: a sense of fear in public space limits their ability to move freely and confidently; the subsequent lack of young women and gender diverse young people in public space reinforces the notion that public space 'isn't for them'; this in turn reinforces the feelings of fear.

Addressing young women and gender diverse young people's participation in the public realm is therefore crucial to enabling their sense of safety. And vice versa: addressing their fear is essential for enabling their full participation in the public realm.

WHY HERE? WHY NOW?

Essex in general and Chelmsford and Maldon in particular have already been the focus of a number of important initiatives to tackle violence against women and girls. As part of doing this, key stakeholders have sought to build an understanding of the role that the public realm has in how safe women and girls feel. For example:

- The creation and implementation of the Chelmsford Women's Safety Charter¹³. This is a statement from Chelmsford City Council and its partners that they will not tolerate behaviours that make women feel unsafe in Chelmsford at any time of the day or night. It asks businesses not just to sign up to a set of values, but to be active custodians of a culture where women can feel confident that they will have a 'Capable Guardian' on their side and a safe space if they need it.

"With this Charter, I believe Chelmsford can lead the way in implementing real change, culturally and practically, to make women's experiences positive whether living, working in or visiting our city."
– Karen Whybro: Chelmsford resident, business owner and gender and equality consultant

"The 'Minerva Approach' highlights a wider range of potential drivers of VAWG incidents and fear of VAWG, which, if addressed could also yield public health and social well-being benefits."
– Professor Rowena Hill, Nottingham Trent University

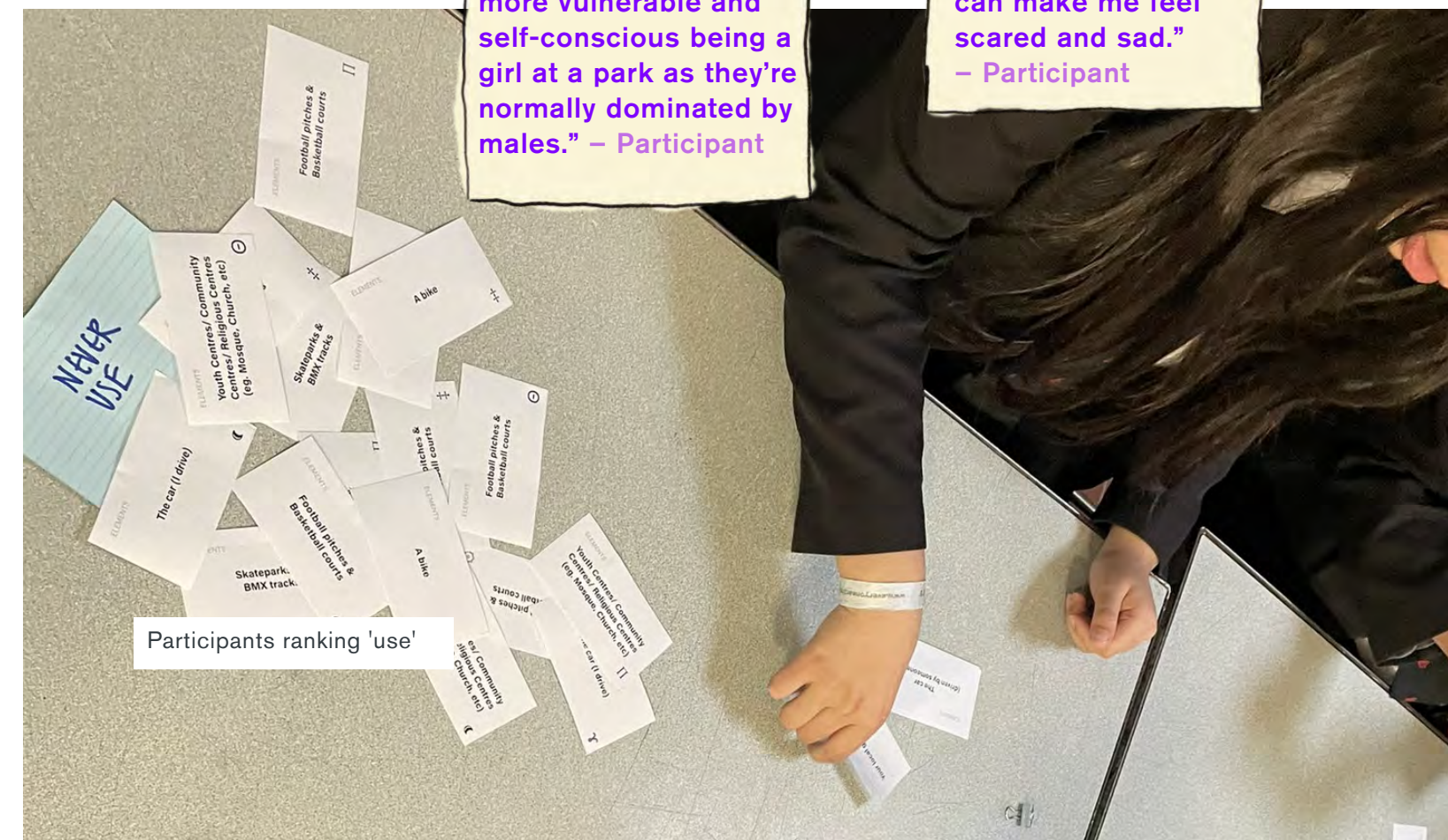
- In Project Minerva¹⁴, a groundbreaking team from Nottingham Trent University, Essex County Council and Essex Fire and Rescue developed a model to identify geographical areas of greater vulnerability through evidence-based statistical mapping, underpinned & evaluated by academia. Once this is done the project will work through Safer Essex to enable evidence-based decision-making to identify and agree 'Minerva Zones' for partnership action so that partners in each Minerva Zone can assess the local issues and engage with 'users' of the space, develop and deliver an action plan.

- The Essex Violence and Vulnerability Unit has continued its regular survey of young people (age 10-25)¹⁵ across Essex to understand their feelings of safety. When asked "where do young people feel the safest?" Parks appeared as the least safe from a variety of options. Young people from Maldon viewed the Prom and skatepark as two of the top "crime hot spots" with the "Bunny Walks" and local parks occupying this position for young people in Chelmsford.
- A key strand of the PFCC for Essex priorities for tackling violence against women and girls is to invest in understanding and delivering evidence-based initiatives that women and girls say will make places be and feel safer for them, including through the Essex Safer Streets Fund.

Our project was part of this investment: through the engagement and reports, we hope that this project will allow stakeholders across Essex to share in the understanding and evidence base produced by 38 young women and gender diverse young people. And as a result, over time, local Essex Parks will be seen as safer more welcoming spaces, and drop down the list of perceived crime hotspots.

"I feel like it feels a lot more vulnerable and self-conscious being a girl at a park as they're normally dominated by males." – Participant

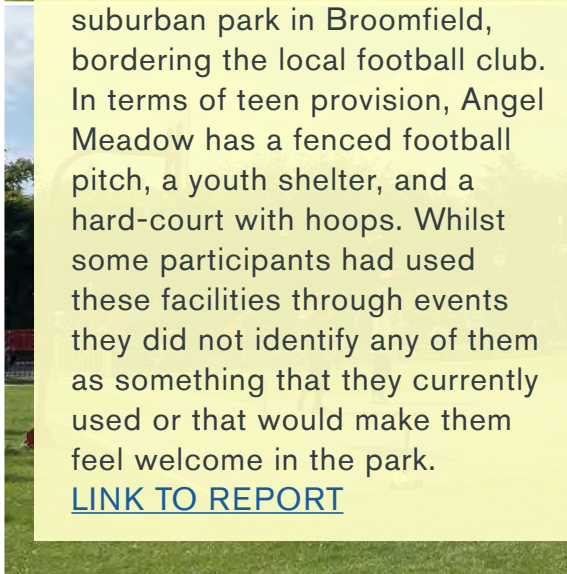
"Gender inequality can make me feel scared and sad."
– Participant



WHAT ARE THE THREE SITES?



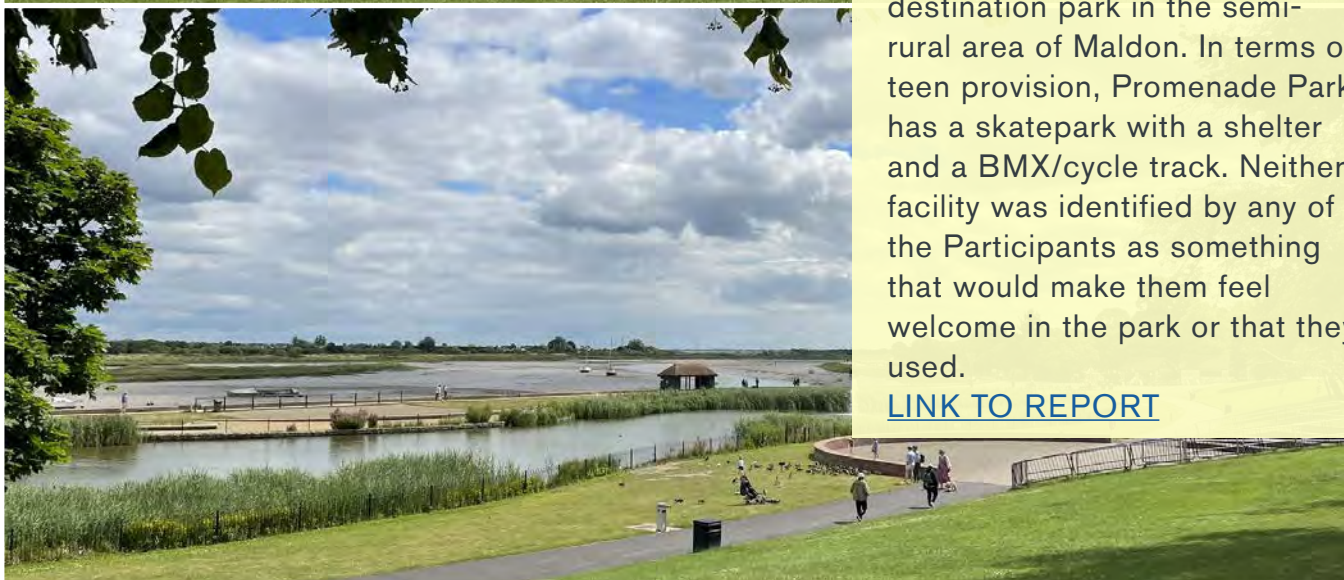
Central Park is a large urban park bordering Chelmsford City Centre. In terms of teen provision, Central Park has a multi-use games area and a skate park with youth shelter. Neither facility was identified by any of the Participants as something that would make them feel welcome in the park. [LINK TO REPORT](#)



Angel Meadow is a small suburban park in Broomfield, bordering the local football club. In terms of teen provision, Angel Meadow has a fenced football pitch, a youth shelter, and a hard-court with hoops. Whilst some participants had used these facilities through events they did not identify any of them as something that they currently used or that would make them feel welcome in the park. [LINK TO REPORT](#)

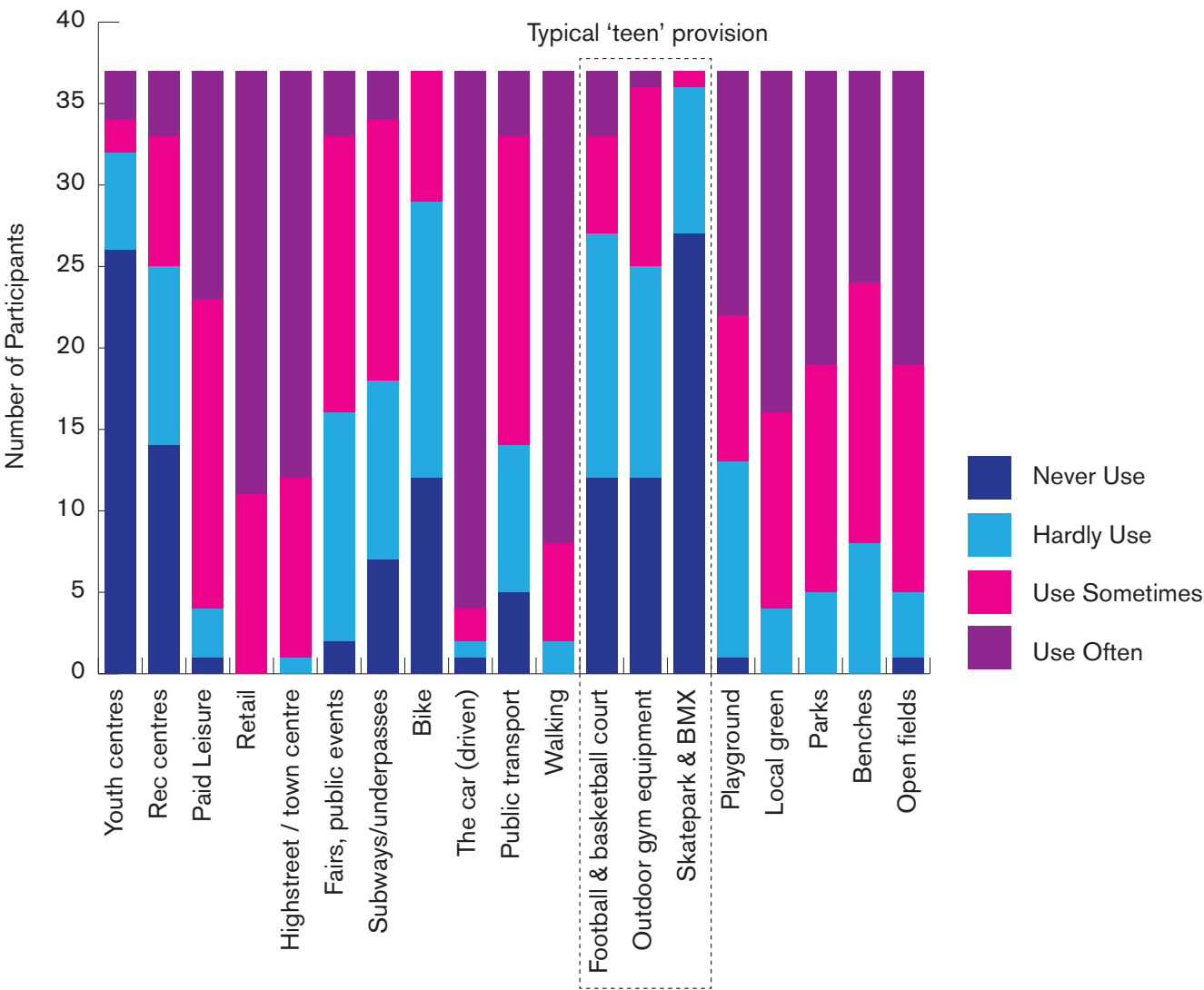


Promenade Park is a large destination park in the semi-rural area of Maldon. In terms of teen provision, Promenade Park has a skatepark with a shelter and a BMX/cycle track. Neither facility was identified by any of the Participants as something that would make them feel welcome in the park or that they used. [LINK TO REPORT](#)



HOW DO THE PARTICIPANTS USE PUBLIC SPACE?

We asked the Participants to evaluate their use of various common park facilities, town and venue centres, sports and play facilities and ways of getting about. The figure below displays their responses. It shows us how the Participants use their local public realm. While there were some minor variations between how the three groups made use of their local public realm, overall the Participants do not regularly use the informal play areas that have been provided in green spaces for users of their age. Instead, they feel more comfortable in retail and paid for leisure spaces, on their highstreets, and would prefer to use the children's playground over the current "informal play areas" (skateparks BMX tracks or MUGAs/hooped courts).



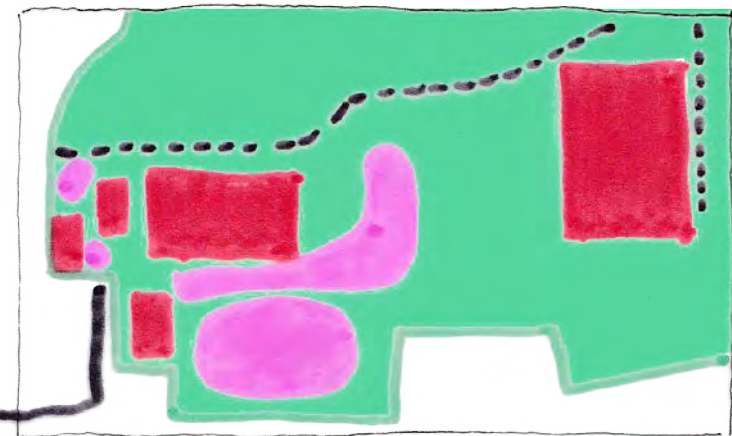
- Most Participants often use their local green spaces and parks.
- Almost all Participants 'never' or 'hardly' use skateparks or BMX tracks, football and basketball courts and outdoor gyms.
- Many Participants instead regularly use children's playgrounds.

HOW DO THE PARTICIPANTS VIEW THEIR LOCAL GREEN SPACE?

As part of the workshops, the Participants were guided by the project team to map their respective local green spaces. The Participants mapped the places they used (pink) and there was a clear mismatch between these spaces and the spaces designed for teenage use (red).



CENTRAL PARK



ANGEL MEADOW



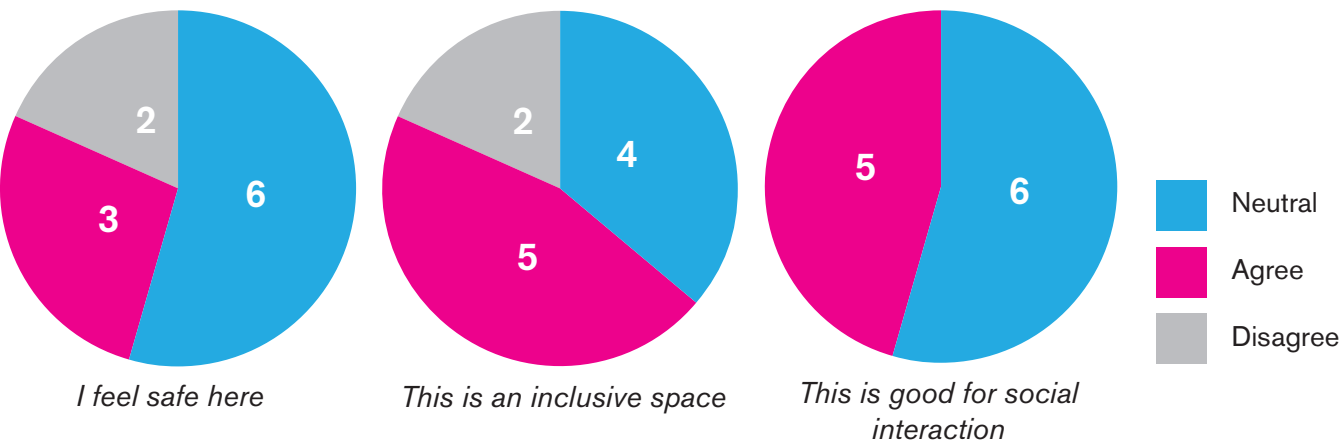
PROMENADE PARK

- Paths
- Roads
- Water
- Places they use
- Teen provision
- Park boundary

WHAT MATTERS TO THE PARTICIPANTS WHEN THINKING ABOUT A GREEN SPACE FOR THEM?

We asked the Participants to identify three attributes through which to evaluate whether a space was a 'good public space' for them. They evaluated their local green spaces through the lenses they had chosen.

For example, in Chelmsford the Participants assessed Central Park in the following ways:



“Put your hand up if in your experience these spaces [MUGAs, skate parks and BMX tracks] are mostly used by boys.” – Facilitator



WHAT DO THE PARTICIPANTS WANT IN THEIR PARK?

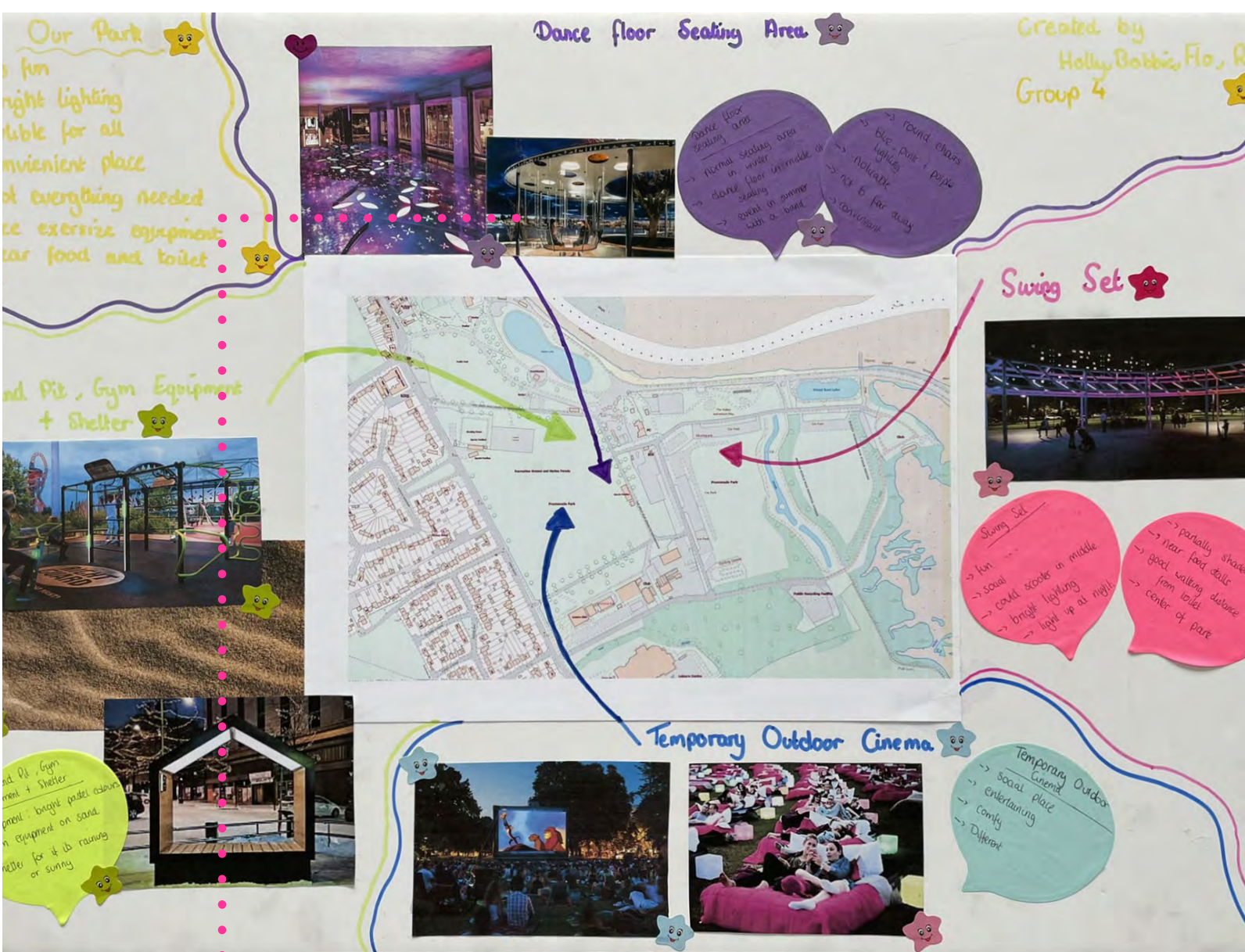
The Participants were tasked with developing a series of design proposals for their local green spaces. Their proposals focused on the idea of “a space for me” and “a space I would use”. To ensure their needs were truly being foregrounded, we discouraged the Participants from focussing on “a space for teenagers” or “an inclusive space for all”. This is because asking about a “teenage space” often results in a focus on skateparks and pitches; and asking about an inclusive space results in a focus on children’s playgrounds and accessibility for those with mobility impairments. The Participants’ design proposals had many similar key themes. These key themes are outlined below.

A hang out place:

Standard teen facilities often focus on specific activities: eg kicking or throwing a ball, skateboarding¹⁶, BMXing. In contrast, the Participants wanted park spaces in which to simply “hang out”. They wanted inclusive, safe and engaging informal teenage play areas where they could socialise and feel a sense of belonging without the need to be engaged in a particular activity. Proposals included:

- Multiple seating and shelter options to limit one group from ‘taking over’.
- Varied seating designs to accommodate chatting (circular or curved for easier conversations) as well as having time alone.
- Thoughtful shelter designs –using natural materials and focussing on comfort– to provide weather protection and a level of privacy; but not so enclosed as to leave users feeling trapped or unsafe.
- Avoiding traditional “teen shelter” designs which were seen as: promoting territorialisation (a single shelter for a single group to use); lacking protection from the weather (too open/insufficient roof); perch like seating, that seemed to discourage sitting; a bland aesthetic that felt as though it invited anti-social behaviour.
- Designing seating and shelters to feel specifically welcoming to teenagers – a place that signals that teenagers are supposed to be there; lively and inviting; visually appealing.
- Located where informal surveillance is effective (closeby to heavy footfall, a highstreet, a children’s playground).

“ [A shelter should be] a space you can escape to if you have an argument with mum.”
– Participant



CASE STUDY Frizon Årstidernas park, Umeå, Sweden (2016)

Frizon (Free zone), made by Tyréns AB in collaboration with artist Kerstin Bergendal, is one of Swedens' first public outdoor environments fully focused on teenage girls' needs to take their places in public areas. Through dialogues between local teenage girls and the Umeå municipality, the resulting design has resulted in a series of light up social swings for multiple groups to use at once and a welcoming place for conversations after dark.
[READ MORE](#)

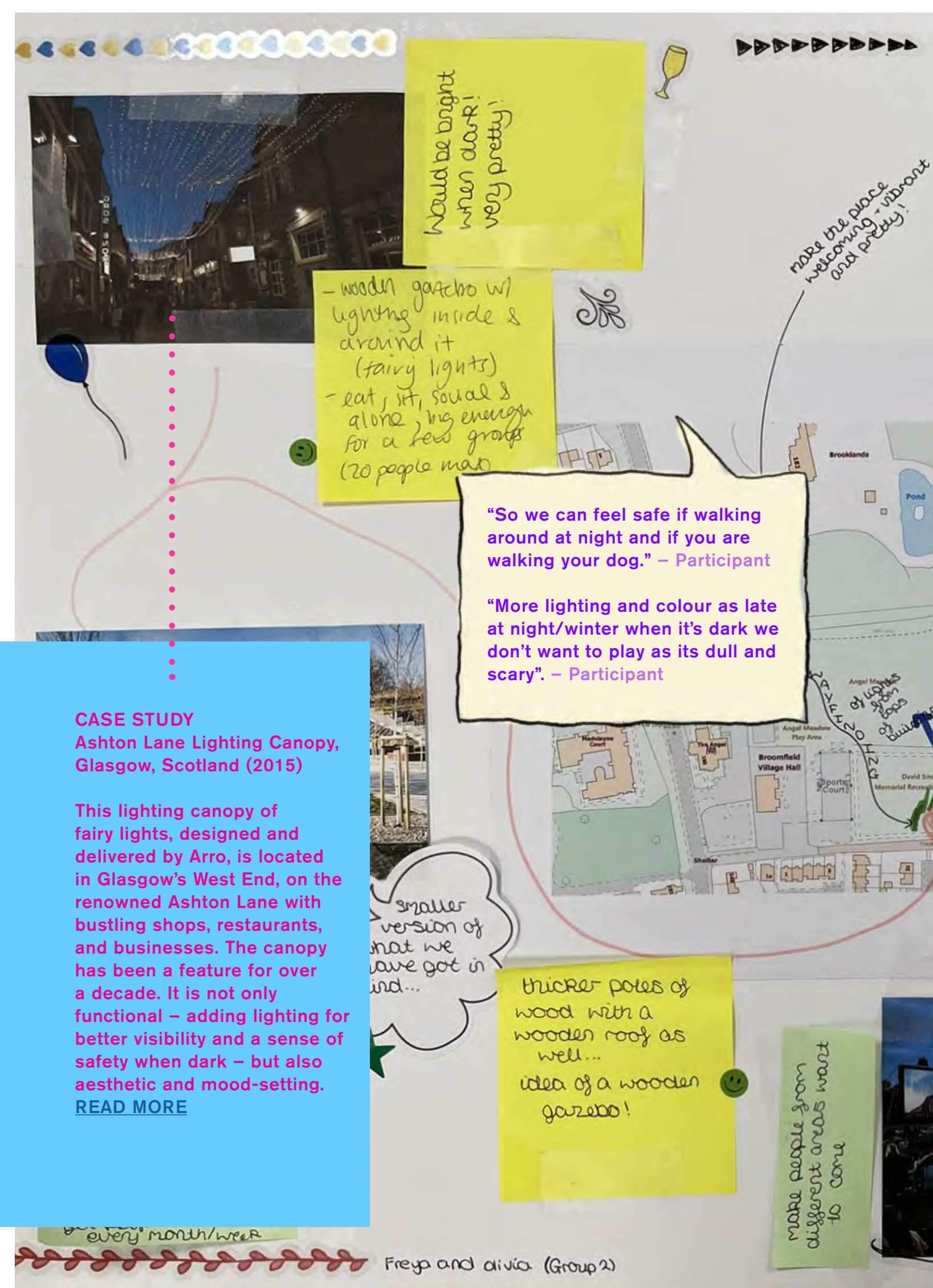


Photograph by Andreas Nilsson

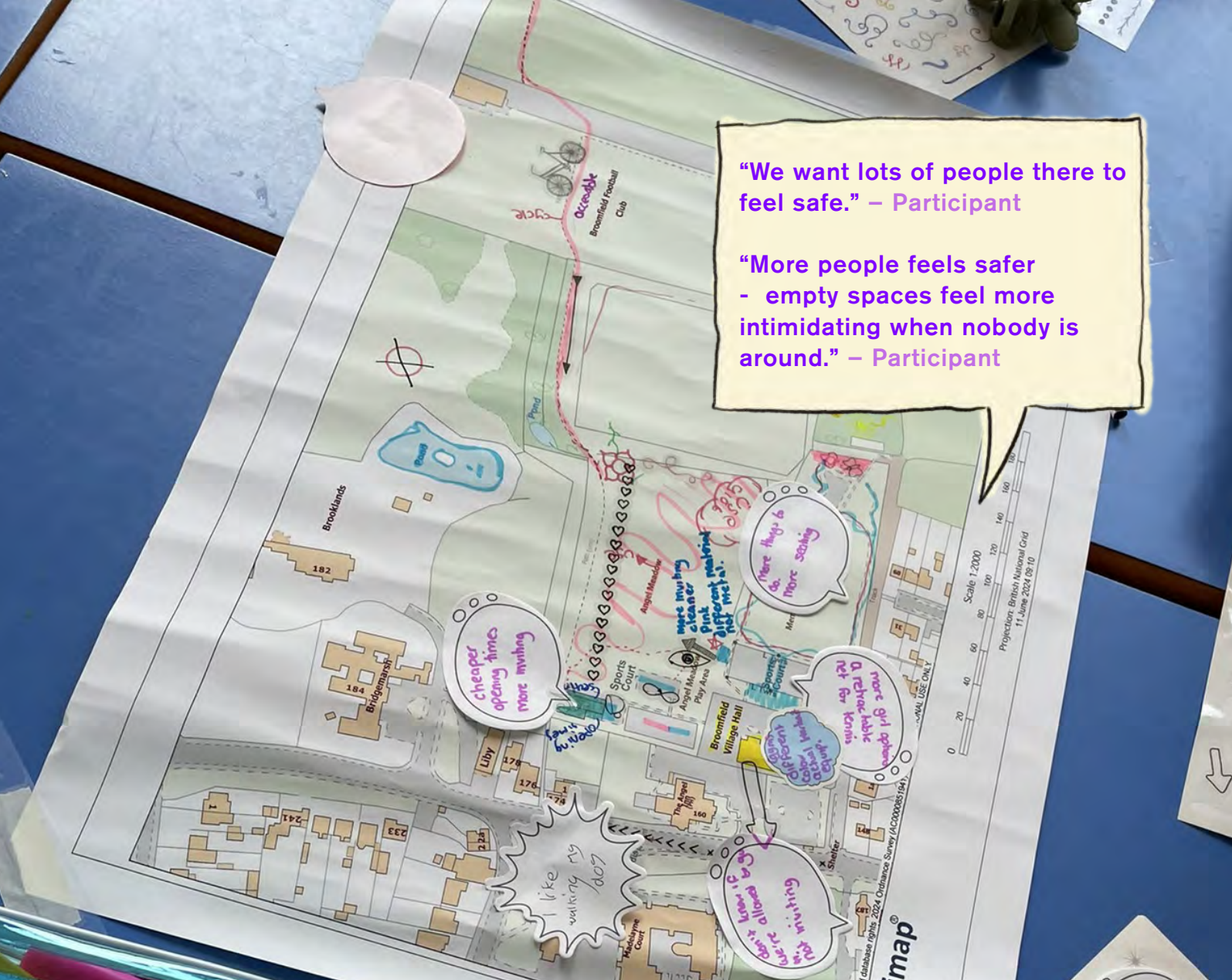
Lighting:

Research has shown the importance of well thought out lighting in making spaces feel more welcoming to women and girls. The Participants, however, did not need to read these studies to identify this issue – from their own experiences, they felt improved lighting would extend their use of the public realm and the value of parks as active travel routes, especially in the winter. They identified a number of ambitions around lighting:

- Extending lighting beyond key pathways and avoiding creating dark spots next to paths (reducing sharp lighting contrasts).
- Considering lighting carefully in areas like underpasses and under bridges.
- Ensuring lighting strategies address safety and creating a welcoming and warm environment.
- Innovating more creative lighting solutions than standard street lighting such as festoon lighting for a cosy vibe; colourful LEDs for playfulness; geometric designs for intrigue.



Arro Lighting and Events



People, Stewardship and Context

The Participants emphasised that a sense of safety in parks was closely tied to the presence of people.

- Participants valued locations that were close to pathways, playgrounds, dog parks and duck feeding, and other amenities because they attracted more people, enjoyed informal surveillance as a result and were more welcoming; informal surveillance allowed the Participants to “see and be seen” without being actively watched or on display.
- Formal trusted oversight and surveillance also made them feel safe in some contexts, for example having staff in the Community Centre in Angel Meadow and an understanding of the scope of the monitored CCTV operating in Chelmsford Town Centre; in contrast unmonitored CCTV cameras did not seem to contribute to a greater sense of security.
- Empty, tucked away or isolated spaces were described as intimidating and certain locations, such as skateparks were associated in the minds of the Participants with “sketchy” behaviour by others.



Photograph by Susannah Walker

CASE STUDY

Superkilen, Copenhagen, Denmark (2012)

Superkilen, a public park located in Copenhagen's Nørrebro district, was designed to foster tolerance and unity between immigrants and locals. It is a popular meeting place for residents and a tourist attraction. The park's name refers to its wedge shape. Superkilen was a collaborative project between the arts group Superflex, Bjarke Ingels Group, and the German landscape architecture firm Topotek1.

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“Although I’m judged in the [children’s] playground I’m not going to get jumped.”
– Participant

“There’s not much to do because it’s all for younger kids” and “boys own the [sporting] space a lot more.” – Participant

Swings & Informal Playspaces (non-sport specific play):

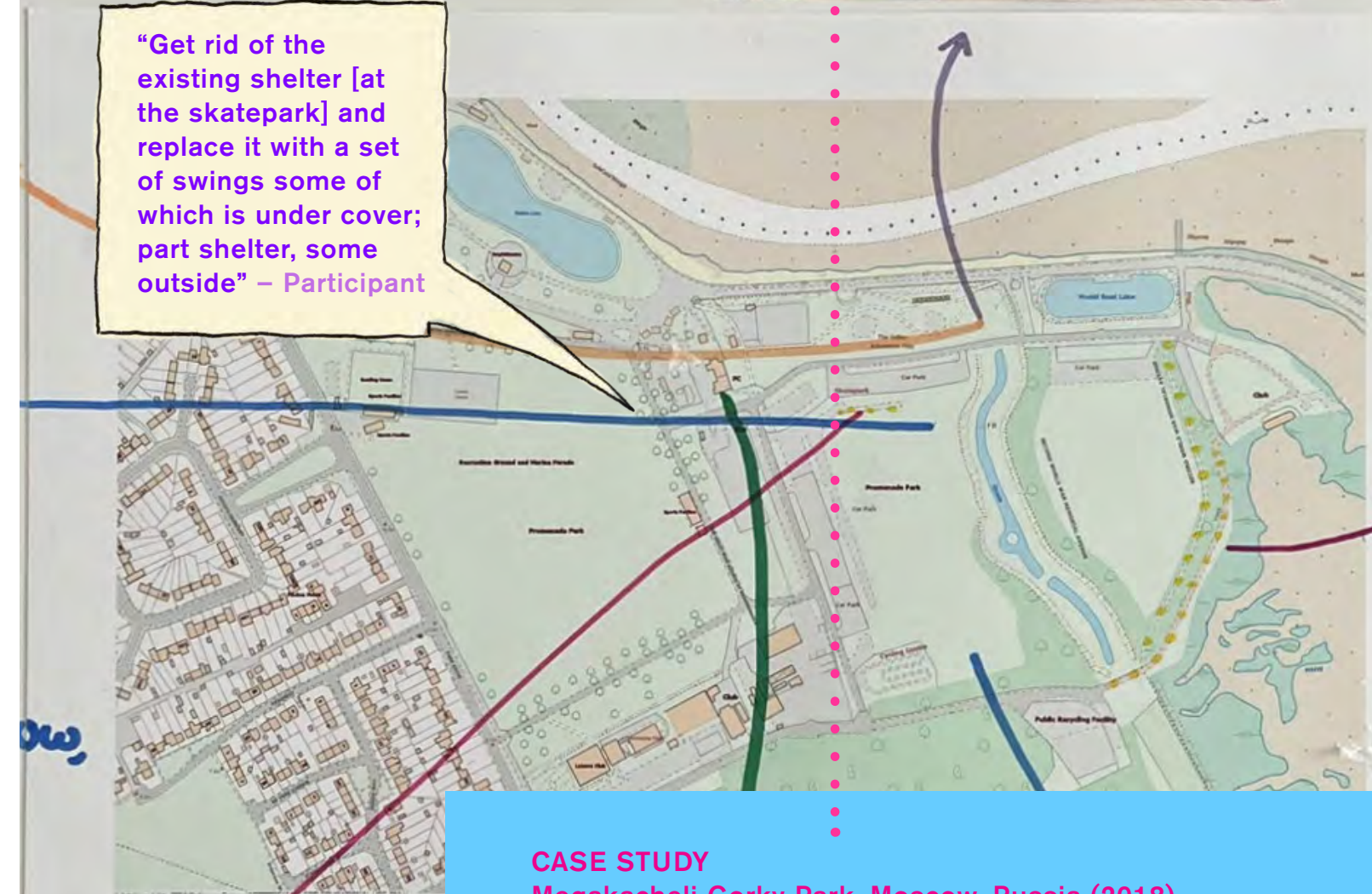
In a study in Yorkshire, and in our own research⁸ young women frequently say they would enjoy swings. Our Participants also expressed a strong desire for swings and play areas designed specifically for their age group. They viewed swings as being able to promote fun, activity, social interaction, and a sense of belonging. In fact, many Participants shared they still enjoyed using the swings in children’s playgrounds but felt awkward, judged or moved along when they did. The Participants proposed:

- **Social swings** arranged in formations that encouraged both play and relaxation. For example swings arranged in a circle or donut shaped swings with colourful lighting to use when dark.
- **Customised large swings** with bright or “funky” colours and signs stipulating a teen age minimum to make them feel more welcoming, intentionally for teens and distinct from those for small children.
- **Swings integrated** into other areas of the park, such as replacing an unloved skatepark shelter, repurposing a hard court with hoops, or hooking them on to a park cafe.
- **Other adventurous play elements** like climbing walls, rope parks, and obstacle courses, offering exciting and engaging activities that are not formal sporting grounds. Overall, their proposals reflected a need for dedicated teenage play spaces.

Have swings round in a circle all facing each other, each swing is a different version and they are all lit up



“Get rid of the existing shelter [at the skatepark] and replace it with a set of swings some of which is under cover; part shelter, some outside” – Participant



Put hanging seats around the skate-park

CASE STUDY

Megakacheli Gorky Park, Moscow, Russia (2018)

Megakacheli or ‘Mega-Swings’ is part of Russia’s largest public open-air playground: Salyut Playground. It was designed by Gorky Park, working with architects AFA and lighting designers Heliocity and built by Garage Museum of Contemporary Art to mark the Park’s 90th anniversary. ‘Mega Swing’ consists of 29 large swings of various types, arranged in an ellipses and lit up with moving colour in the evenings.

[READ MORE](#)

Can freshen up and a regular clean up - who have a free dispenser filled with sanitary products

WHAT ELSE MATTERS?

In many cases the Participants' proposals were about designing in elements and amenities that could reinforce their right to take up space; or the permission to hang out. These varied from amenities which enable young people to access and use public spaces, such as adequate transport networks, toilets, and affordable food; to symbolic gestures, like signs as well as visual cues, like colour and planting, that indicated to them that such spaces are also for them.

Aesthetics: The Participants described how beautifying the green spaces, with an emphasis on colour, greenery (planting, water features), and artistic features (murals, painted pathways), were ways of making those spaces feel more inviting. They highlighted that these were important design elements, not just for aesthetics but also for signaling who a space was intended for, with the group in Maldon suggesting more “girly” colours to make areas feel welcoming to teenage girls.

Signage: Participants described how informative, creative and welcoming signage in their local green spaces could make the park feel more welcoming to them. They wanted signs that helped them navigate the space, find facilities, safety details and emergency contacts and identify exits— particularly in Angel Meadow’s wooded areas. Many participants, particularly in Chelmsford and Broomfield, wanted signage that was more than just functional: creative and optimistic signs, inviting labels for picnic areas, and designating teenage play areas.

Affordable Food: While all three green spaces either have a cafe or food stalls, many Participants stressed the desire for affordable food nearby or in the park. They felt this would make their demographic feel more welcomed and included.

Toilets: Many of the Participants, particularly in Maldon, wanted there to be better public toilets in green spaces, because lack of toilet provision limited how long they could stay out in public space. In order stay longer in the park, they wanted clean and regularly maintained public toilets with free menstruation products and placed in busy areas for safety.



WHAT COULD THIS LOOK LIKE?

To flesh out the designs and interventions, the Participants created a series of collages to propose what a “space for me” might look like. Certain key ideas, elements, and amenities emerged from these. The collage shown here highlights some of the most popular ones. The size of each represents the degree of popularity of the intervention for the Participants.

It is important to remember that every site is different, and will have teenage users with interests and ideas that also differ. These proposals are not intended to be finished designs that can be installed; but inspiration for further discussion and development.



IMPACT

Feedback from the Participants shows they believe they have gained, on a personal level, from their involvement in the project. Giving young people the knowledge and confidence to express their informed assessments of their local parks and how these parks could be made more welcoming enables them to feel more than passive consultees: it gives them the tools to become active agents for change in their local community.

The value of the project, however, has the potential to extend beyond the impact on the individuals who took part. Influencing the design and creation of public space is a long-term undertaking and substantive and sustainable change will take many years. But the work of the Participants is already making an impact: in terms of advocacy, policy change and their everyday experience of local parks.

Advocating for change: The Participants from the two schools in Chelmsford have presented their work to councillors, officers, staff and parents in the Council Chamber, Chelmsford, articulating in an authentic and convincing manner the case for change. A number of the Participants were invited to present their work to over 200 delegates at the “2024 Essex Police: Towards Excellence Conference” and the team hopes that there will be other opportunities for the Participants to share their knowledge with decision makers.

Policy Change: There are many planning documents and policies that could draw on this work to include statements that support the creation of parks and similar spaces that work better for young women and gender diverse young people. For example, park and green space policies, play strategies, active design frameworks, VAWG and other strategies aimed at increasing the safety of women and girls in the public realm, and local and neighbourhood plans. As an initial step, reflecting the work of the Participants, Chelmsford City Council have included the following in their draft local plan:

Extract from [Pre Submission Local Plan Consultation Document March 2025 - Section 9: Making High Quality Places](#)¹⁷

9.1 This Section provides the basis for promotion of Chelmsford as a high-quality place to live, work, visit and study in. 9.2 High quality design is essential to making places more attractive, locally-distinctive, sustainable and safe. Good design can help reduce and mitigate the impacts of climate change, promote healthier lifestyles and create safer and more accessible places for people to live in or use.

9.17 The Council encourages developments to take account of all users, and is committed to enhancing safety for girls and women in new development. Where major development proposals are providing or improving parks and public spaces, regard should be had to design advice and resources provided by Make Space for Girls (www.makespaceforgirls.co.uk)

Experience in local parks: We hope that the work of the Participants and this report will provide planners, park professionals, policy-makers, and people working in the built environment with an evidence base and inspiration for what could be included by way of “informal play areas” for teenagers, as an alternative or additional to a MUGA or skatepark. And it is clear that the seeds of this change have been sown into receptive ground in Chelmsford and Maldon.

For example, the Participants recommended temporary events as part of overcoming the feeling that parks were not “for them” and these have been taken forward in the form of celebration events. The first, in Central Park involved local musicians, live DJ and karaoke, street art and street dance workshops, yoga and arts and crafts, cricket and food trucks. The project also had a small amount of funding to create limited more permanent interventions in the local parks. For example, as a result of the Participant’s work in Chelmsford:

- A new teenage sociable seating/hang out zone has been created in Central Park.
- The underpass leading from city to Central Park has been refurbished, involving bright new designs and (at the Participants’ suggestion) younger children painting some of the stones to reinforce the sense of community ownership.
- Innovative lighting has been commissioned for Central Park.



Painting the underpass pebbles, Central Park

"Skateparks are more than just recreational facilities; they are vibrant hubs for exercise, creativity, and safe socialisation for young people. Let's work together to create spaces where young people can thrive, and everyone can enjoy the benefits of an active lifestyle." – Councillor Richard Siddall, leader of Maldon District Council

As a result of the Participants' work in Maldon:

- The intention is to reflect the Participants' emphasis on the importance of safe, welcoming toilets by installing perimeter CCTV, and creating a wall of public art on the outside of the current toilet block;
- The skatepark refurbishment at Promenade Park will include replacing the current teen shelter with a shelter reflecting the Participants' suggestions. The current teen shelter was properly specified and provided by a high quality play equipment manufacturer, but from the Participants' perspective it was unwelcoming and did not function well as a shelter;
- The design of the skate park refurbishment at Promenade Park includes multiple seating areas, flat smooth concrete and tarmac areas to facilitate roller skating/ blading; sight lines that allow users to see who is on the park and easier more relaxed skating areas, clearly separate from the more advance bowl.

It is incredibly encouraging to see the tender and design process for the skatepark refurbishment in Promenade Park taking into account the perspectives of the Participants. In due course, signage at, publicity for and activation of the new area when it opens will be crucial to making it clear that young women and gender diverse young people, with their roller skates, scooters and other wheels, are welcome in this new skate area and have as much right to use the space as the established skateboarding community.



Social seating included in skate park



Flyer for celebration event

Conversations are ongoing with local decision makers to create something permanent in Angel Meadow, Broomfield, Chelmsford. And the team looks forward to this being the beginning of a more creative approach to teen provision in parks across Chelmsford and Maldon districts.

We have also sought to evaluate the impact this project has had with the participants. At the end of the project, the participants were asked to supply anonymous feedback which showed that:

- 90% felt they had been listened to;
- 87% felt they had more confidence to talk about what spaces felt safe and why;
- 97% felt they had been given an opportunity to explain the changes they would like to see in their local park.



New social seating installed at Central Park, Chelmsford

RECOMMENDATIONS

To design the public realm in a way that enables young women and gender-diverse young people to have spaces where they feel safe, included, and represented, we suggest the following:

1. Question your default approach and be led by the data. When and where money is available, consider the gendered dimensions of any proposals; what is already in the local area (to what extent does the data suggest the current provision is likely to be dominated by boys and young men?), and how this money may contribute to widening the pool of those provided for in public space. More of the same is unlikely to create greater inclusion.

2. Engage meaningfully with young women and gender diverse young people. They are the experts of their own lives and they can easily articulate their unmet wants and needs. Avoid engagement that is tokenistic or poor value for resources. Ensure your engagement prioritises diversity, care, reciprocity, listening and respecting difference. By thoughtfully drawing on local knowledge this will also ensure any resulting recommendations, policies, decisions and designs better reflect community needs and aspirations.

3. Embed learning and – crucially – unlearning into any approach. A lot of behaviours and ideas around complex themes – like safety, mobility, gender and spatial occupation – are normalised from a very young age. To rethink how spaces may work better for young women and gender diverse young people, challenge what you think you know. This will offer ways of exploring the more common place (e.g. benches) and complex (e.g. feelings of safety) and equip your communities and yourself with better tools through which to begin thinking about how things could be better.

4. Take an expansive view of safety, and gender issues. Consider safety not just as the absence of violence but freedom from the fear of violence and use the ideas from this report to support breaking the cycles that feeds this fear. For example, consider how building a large set of swings for teenage girls to enrich their public lives and provide them with play may be one of many safety approaches.

5. Context is critical. The right project in the wrong place will not work. This means considering wider contextual factors that affect communities' use and experience of a place is crucial. For instance, consider front door to destination travel; wider park dynamics and amenities around an informal teenage play area. Understand the amenities that are needed to support young women and gender diverse people's lives in public life, like toilets, lighting, routes through and so on.

6. Small changes matter. Changing the public space experiences for young women and gender diverse young people takes time and will involve big and small changes. No matter the budget, incremental change is still change, and small steps towards creating better places for young women and gender diverse young people count. Whether that is re-designing an informal teenage play area, a lighting scheme for a green space or simply putting in place one well-placed social bench, these steps will contribute to the change that is needed.



The participants presenting at the Council Chamber

CONCLUSION

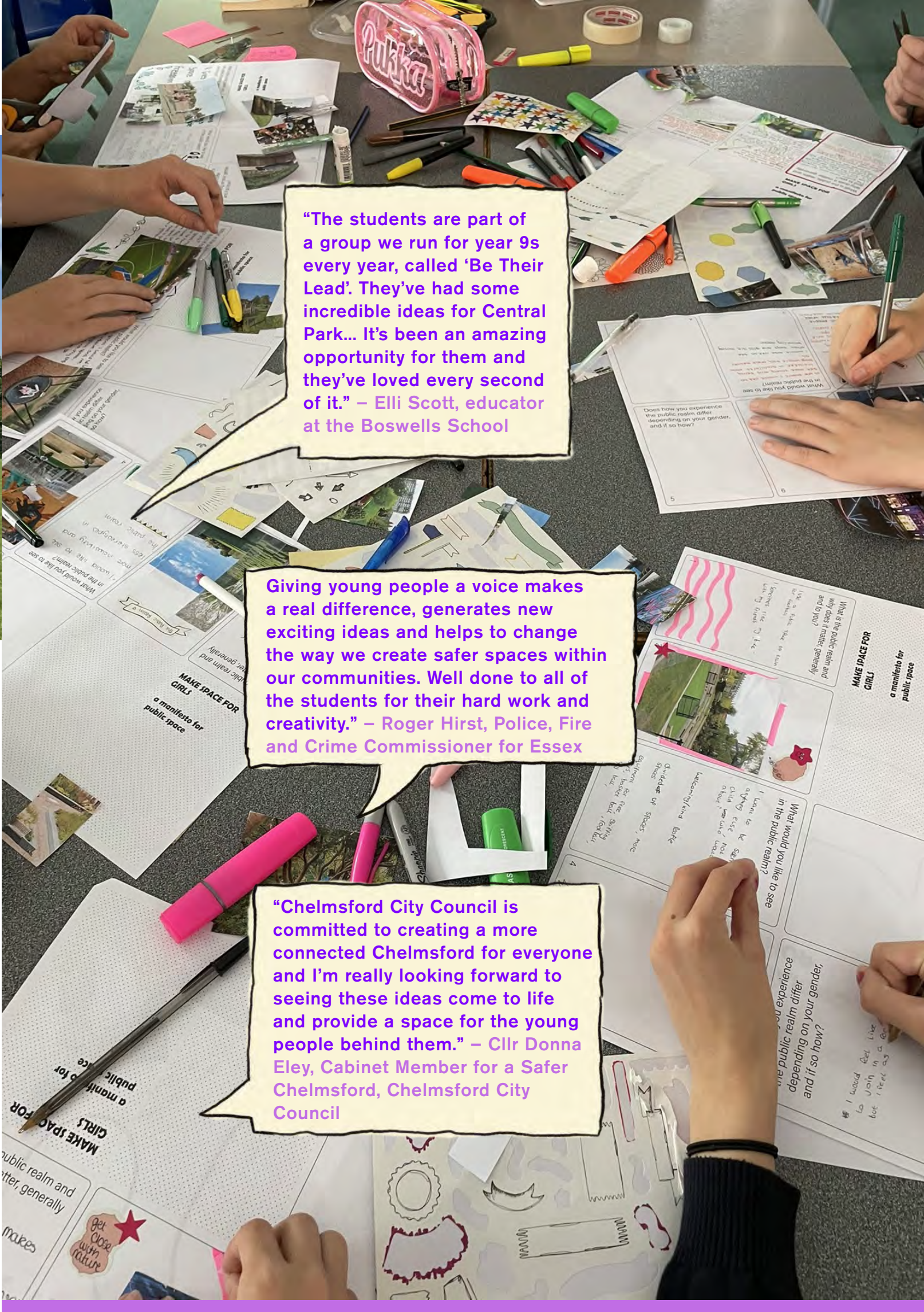


“I do think our ideas will be acted on and our ideas have been left in the hand as of very trustworthy people.”
– Participant

Parks and green spaces have the potential to be wonderful places for young people. They can be spaces where young people learn independence, practice fun for free, socialise, take refuge and make sense of themselves and their place in the world. But there is a clear gap in the current approach to providing for a diverse range of teenagers, particularly of informal play areas in green space. Many young people, particularly young women and gender diverse young people – like our Participants – do not use the informal play areas supposedly designed for them as "teenagers". The thoughtful interventions, crafted by the Participants attempt to counter their current feelings of a lack of belonging, an absence of fun, excitement, relaxation and play, as well as a sense of fear in public space.

This report has sought to address this gap while highlighting the Participants’ proposals. By summarising the concerns and aspirations of young women and gender-diverse young people regarding public spaces, we hope this report is used to spark meaningful change in how green spaces are imagined, planned, and designed—ensuring they feel more welcoming and inclusive for a diversity of teens.

We encourage decision makers to take action head-on by incorporating the recommendations in this report into their processes and involving a diversity of young people into planning and design processes in a meaningful way. Doing so can significantly impact their lives, while creating more thoughtful and inclusive green spaces that benefit a broader and more diverse group of young people and green space users.



“The students are part of a group we run for year 9s every year, called ‘Be Their Lead’. They’ve had some incredible ideas for Central Park... It’s been an amazing opportunity for them and they’ve loved every second of it.” – Elli Scott, educator at the Boswells School

Giving young people a voice makes a real difference, generates new exciting ideas and helps to change the way we create safer spaces within our communities. Well done to all of the students for their hard work and creativity.” – Roger Hirst, Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner for Essex

“Chelmsford City Council is committed to creating a more connected Chelmsford for everyone and I’m really looking forward to seeing these ideas come to life and provide a space for the young people behind them.” – Cllr Donna Eley, Cabinet Member for a Safer Chelmsford, Chelmsford City Council

APPENDIX 1: WORKSHOP STRUCTURE



WORKSHOP 1

An Introduction to public space: what counts as public space why does it matter.

Using collaging and Zines to explore the Participants' initial ideas on the following themes:

- What is the public realm and why does it matter, generally and to you?
- What would you like to see in the public realm?
- Does how you experience the public realm differ depending on your gender?



WORKSHOP 2

Mapping session using large scale map of their area to locate the places that the participants went during leisure time. Sites were chosen for a discussion around safety, inclusion, and social interaction.

A short presentation about what the terms "safety" and "inclusion" might mean.

A "quick fire" session where the participants assessed on a spectrum from : strongly agree to strongly disagree, how well these sites met criterias established by the participants.



WORKSHOP 3

Site visit with local stakeholders. Structured and informal conversations around safety, access, play, opportunities, barriers and a range of site specific highlights.



WORKSHOP 4

Following from the site visit, the Participants were asked to think about how they might want to change things in the park to make it more welcoming to them.

The session was structured around the 3 key themes that had informed the visit to the park and asked the Participants to group their thoughts around 4 questions:

- What is in it?
- How should it make you feel?
- What does it look like? and
- How is it run?



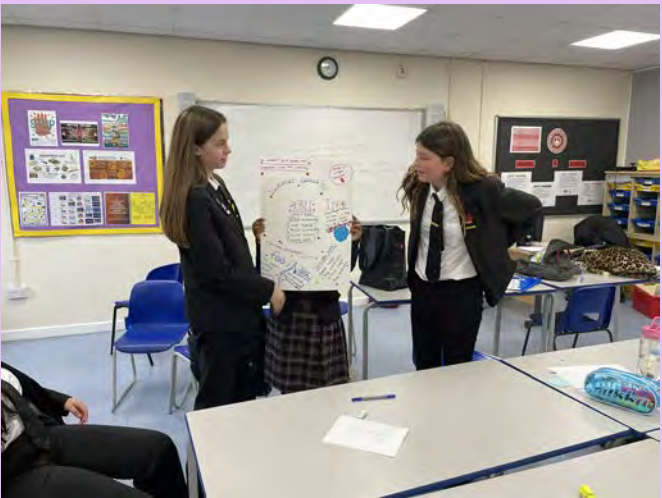


WORKSHOP 5

The Participants were provided with a large bank of images of parks and facilities and objects found in parks and similar public spaces.

The images were grouped into themes (eg sports, food, swings, skateboarding, seating, lighting, toilets, play).

Working in groups the Participants selected up to 5 images that best reflected “a place for them”, and using these images, created a mood board that captured the core proposals for an intervention in their local park.

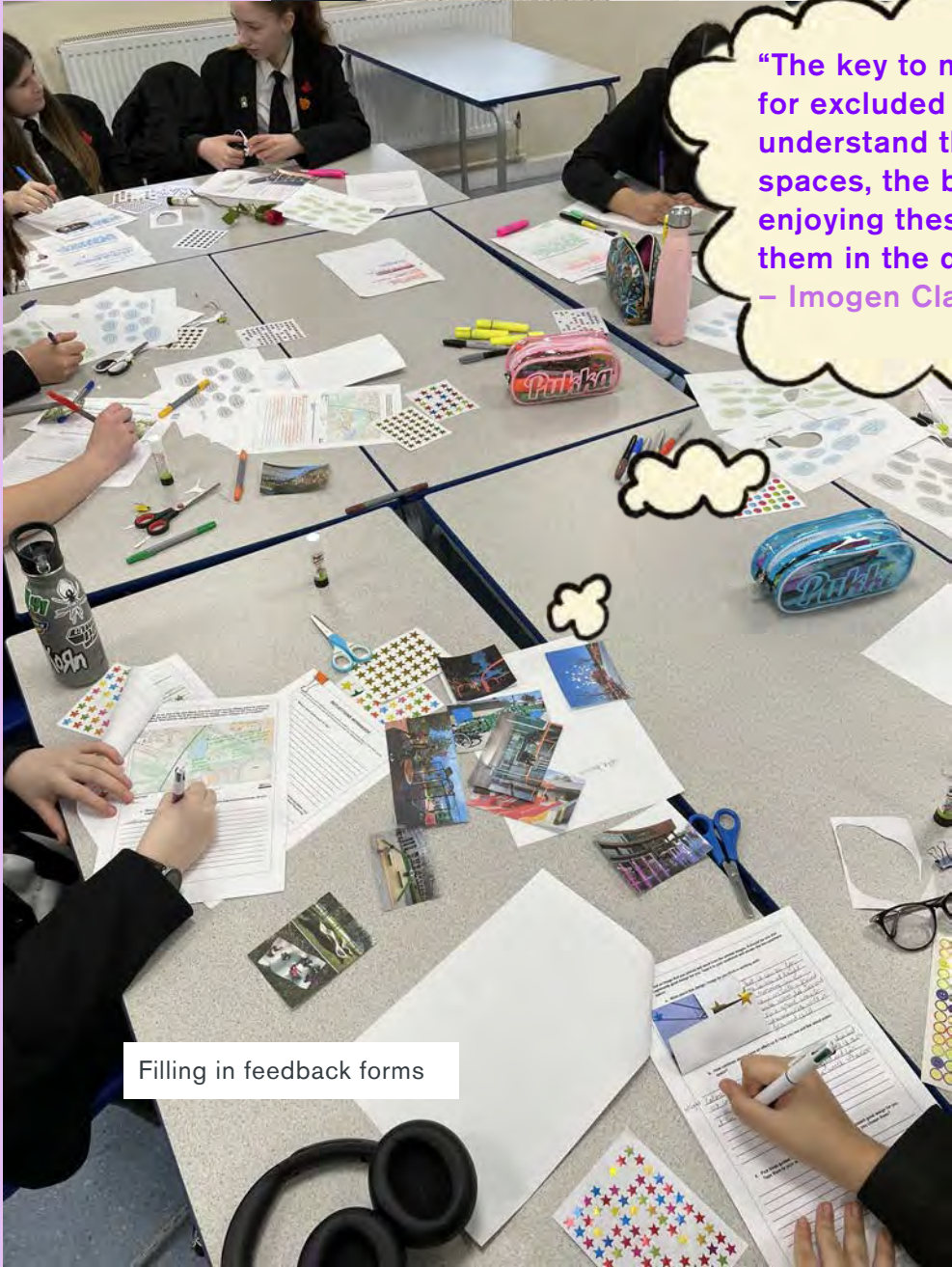
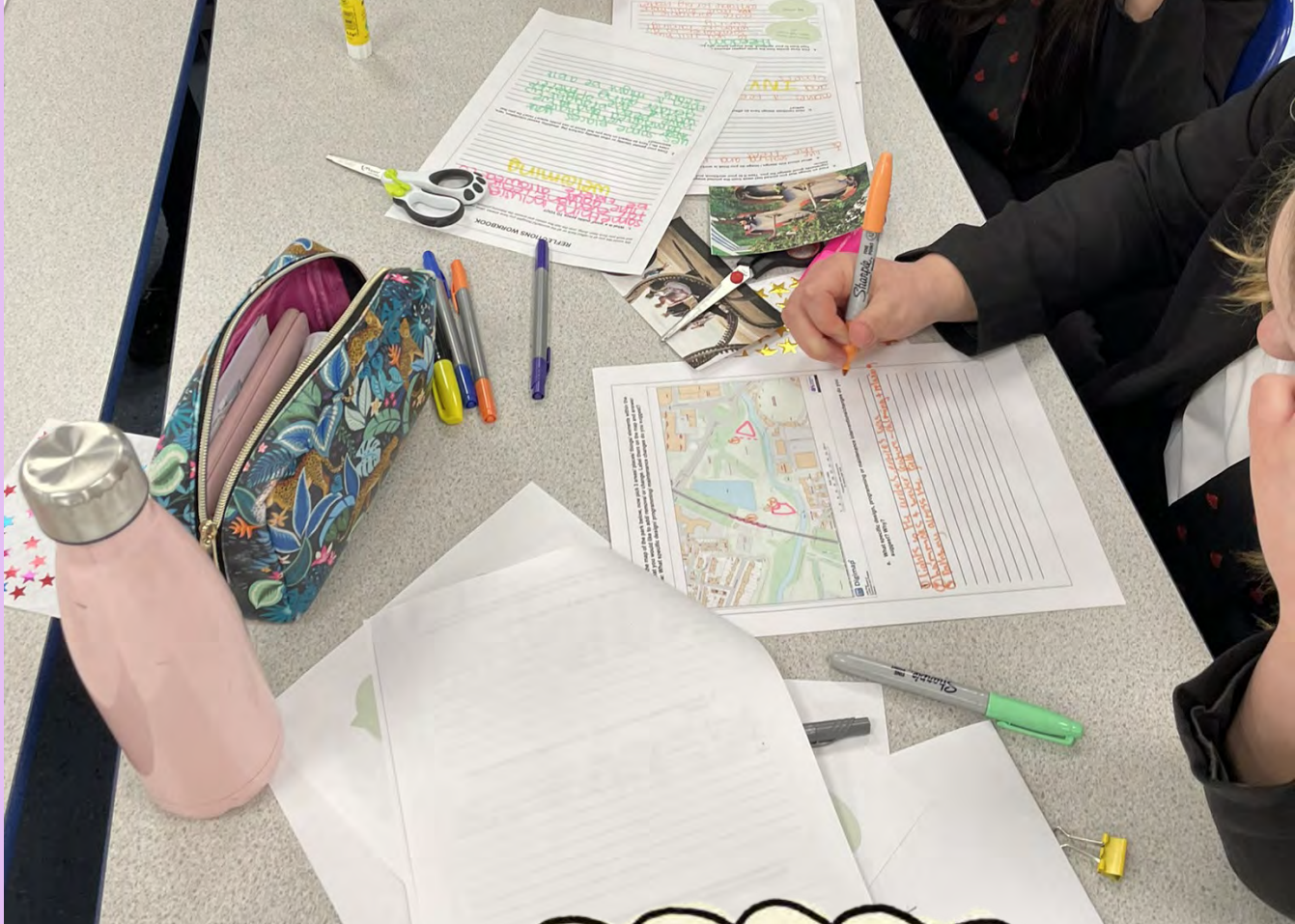


WORKSHOP 6

The Participants reflecting on the previous 5 sessions and addressing the questions:

1. What is a ‘good’ public space to you?
2. Does your gender identity or other identity markers (eg. disability, sexual orientation, race, class etc.) have an impact on how you feel about or use public space? How? Do you feel welcomed?
3. Find an image that you picked last week from the printed images that represents good design for you. Tape it to your workbook and consider: What about this design do you think is working well? How can/does design have an effect on if / how you use and feel about public space?
4. Pick statements that represent good design for you: why have you chosen these?
5. Look at the map of the park below, now pick 3 areas/ places/ things/ elements within the park that you would like to add/ remove/ or change, label and explain
6. Do you think it is important that young people get a voice, or the opportunity to share their thoughts about their local areas and how they could be better? Why or why not?

Working in groups, the Participants designed a poster for an event to be held in their local park to celebrate their work and encourage young women and gender diverse young people to see parks as a “place for them”.



“The key to making spaces work for excluded young people is to understand their take on their local spaces, the barriers they face to enjoying these spaces and involving them in the design process.”
 – Imogen Clark, Make Space for Girls

Filling in feedback forms

GLOSSARY:

TRANSGENDER (TRANS): a person whose gender identity does not align with the sex they were assigned at birth but still follows a gender binary (eg. trans-man: is a person who identifies as a man but was assigned female at birth).

NONBINARY: a person whose gender identity neither aligns with the categories of man or woman.

GENDER IDENTITY: means one's own internal sense of self and gender, whether that is man, woman, neither or both. Gender identity is about self perception rather than what is outwardly visible to others.

GENDER BINARY: the view that gender exists as either male or female – a binary where gender is often seen as biologically determined and synonymous with sex. This contrasts the more inclusive reading of gender, as socially constructed and existing along a spectrum.

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