

BELIEVE IN BASILDON

INSIGHT AND PROPOSALS FROM
GIRLS AND YOUNG WOMEN
ON BASILDON'S PUBLIC REALM

SUMMER 2025



Basildon
Borough Council



**SOCIAL
PLACE**



Participants discussing the opportunities and challenges of Basildon on a large map.

Social Place and Make Space for Girls would like to express their thanks to the amazing young women from Basildon for sharing their experiences, insights and creativity with us; Basildon Council and the Essex Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner for supporting and funding this work; the councillors and officers of Basildon Council and the teams at Bar’N’Bus and the Salvation Army Hall in Basildon for all their support.

This report reflects the views of 11 participants, aged 12 to 14 who identified as young women or girls (the participants). Participation varied across the days with a core group of three who attended all sessions. While these views shed light on 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. We believe the findings in this report build on a body of work which is contributing towards a step change and expansion of what constitutes teenage provision in public space which would improve the offering for not only girls and young women, but a broad, diverse constituency of young people including gender diverse young people.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

“In a post-pandemic world marked by cost inflation, it is essential to facilitate outdoor spaces by activating underutilised public areas and green spaces, such as Gloucester Park. This will support residents' health and well-being while encouraging more active lifestyles.”

“Inclusivity is at the heart of the Masterplan, ensuring spaces are not only safe and accessible but also welcoming and adaptable to a variety of activities. Community engagement, including input from women/girls and young people, will shape the design, ensuring diverse voices are heard.”¹

This work, sponsored by the Community Safety Team at Basildon Council, supports these two ambitions and was undertaken by 11 Basildon young women, aged 12-14. The work was supported by Social Place (research, engagement and design specialists), Make Space for Girls (a national campaigning charity) and Bar’N Bus (an Essex charity, delivering professional, community-based youth work).

The work was delivered through a series of creative workshops in July 2025 and focussed on the participants’ use of outdoor spaces in Basildon, and what can be done to increase the use of these spaces by teenage girls and young women.

This work is needed because research across England shows that standard teen provision in the public realm usually comprises fenced pitches (multi use games areas, or MUGAs), skateparks and BMX tracks. Research also shows that these provisions are dominated by boys and young men: 92% of teen users MUGAs are boys and young men, as are 84% of the users of skateparks. This dominance means that often young women, teenage girls and gender diverse young people struggle to find outdoor space they can use. The work shows that, if Basildon wants to realise these ambitions from the Masterplan it needs to:

- **think beyond MUGAs and skateparks when it comes to teen provision in the public realm and include free to use facilities in Gloucester Park and the Town Centre that are designed to meet the needs and wants of teenage girls, young women and gender diverse young people;**
- **embed design principles in local plans, play and open space strategies etc that recognise the need to tackle the current gender inequality in teen provision;**
- **use the Public Sector Equality Duty to pro-actively reduce disadvantages faced by girls in using outdoor spaces;**
- **support teenage girls, young women and gender diverse young people to become involved in the creation of spaces that are more welcoming for more teenagers.**

By giving a platform to young women, this work shows that inclusive, creative, and community-driven approaches can transform Basildon’s public realm. Making Gloucester Park and the Town Centre feel safe, welcoming, and “for them” will not only benefit teenage girls, young women and gender diverse young people, but support Basildon’s social fabric and sense of community for everyone.

¹ Extract from 2025 draft Basildon’s Town Centre Masterplan

KEY TAKEAWAYS: ACTIVATING UNDER-USED PUBLIC AREAS AND GREEN SPACES:

- **A place for Community:** The participants connected good public realm with strong communities, noting that a good public space is: “A place that helps the community be a community.”
- **A place for them:** The participants were unable to identify any space in the public realm in Basildon designed to include them as young women. They were easily displaced/moved on from spaces by more dominant groups.
- **Provision for informal teen play:** The teen provision in Gloucester Park (a skatepark and MUGA/ basketball court) were not used by the participants; specific activation of those spaces by creating events “for girls” were not viewed as likely to be effective to change the dominance of these spaces by boys and young men.
- **Green spaces:** The green spaces in Gloucester Park brought out the playful/active side of the participants but felt unsafe. The participants recognised that Basildon has lots of green spaces; but there was very little green space that felt usable for them.
- **The Town Centre:** This felt more usable to the participants than Gloucester Park but less playful; the participants felt high levels of judgement/being watched when in the Town Centre. While there are places to sit, linger and relax in the Town Centre (eg around the Mother and Child; the sunken seating in East Square) the participants did not feel they were supposed to use these spaces.

Proposed interventions

- Interventions in Gloucester Park and the Town Centre, **designed with the needs of teenage girls in mind** would help activate these areas for teenage girls and young women.
- The participants proposed sociable sheltered seating, incorporating design elements that signalled clearly “this is a place where teenage girls are supposed to hang out”. For example: circular and curved lay-outs; ability to accommodate multiple groups; variable height; playful access; features to encourage climbing and play; swinging; colour; signage; and lighting. These design features were important to distinguish the space as a teen space as opposed to a general seating area that might be found attractive to other groups such as parents with buggies, younger kids, and older park users.
- Interventions needed to be safely accessible with appropriate levels of informal surveillance/oversight to feel secure without being “on show”.

A. INTRODUCTION

The following, an extract from the draft *Basildon Town Centre Masterplan: Strategic Context and Drivers for Change*, is at the heart of this project:

“In a post-pandemic world marked by cost inflation, it is essential to facilitate outdoor spaces by activating underutilised public areas and green spaces, such as Gloucester Park. This will support residents' health and well-being while encouraging more active lifestyles.”¹

This project focused on the use of outdoor spaces in Basildon, including the Town Centre and Gloucester Park, by teenage girls and young women and asked them what can be done to increase the use of these areas by that demographic.

This report is intended for planners, park professionals, councillors and officers, and those working in community safety in Basildon. It aims to:

- provide an additional evidence base to inform the development of Basildon’s planning policy and practice to facilitate outdoor spaces as referred to in the Masterplan above;
- provide inspiration for those in Basildon tasked with activating underutilised public areas and green spaces, so that teenage girls, young women and gender diverse young people feel more welcome and included.

1. Why focus on teenage girls, young women and gender diverse young people?

“Inclusivity is at the heart of the Masterplan, ensuring spaces are not only safe and accessible but also welcoming and adaptable to a variety of activities. Community engagement, including input from women/girls and young people, will shape the design, ensuring diverse voices are heard. The Town Centre will also address the lack of dedicated play spaces by introducing more child- and family friendly amenities.”²

It is important to explore how teenage girls, young women and gender diverse young people experience the public realm, because research shows that many in this demographic do not feel welcome, comfortable or safe in public space and do not have a say when it comes to changes in their local areas. For example:

- Plan UK’s Report *State of Girls’ Rights in the UK 2024* found that 93% of girls

1 (2025) Draft Basildon Town Centre Masterplan

2 IBID

and young women do not feel completely safe in public spaces.³

- In research into the safety of parks in West Yorkshire by the University of Leeds in 2023, 89% of park professionals thought parks are safe for women and girls, but only 22% of teenage girls felt the same.⁴
- A 2018 Stonewall report revealed that more than two in five trans people wholly avoid certain streets due to fear ⁵; and
- Research by Grosvenor in 2021 indicates that 89% of young adults aged 16-18 have never been consulted about their local areas⁶.

2. Why focus on parks?

Parks form a vital component of public life, providing the opportunity for activity, social connection, interaction with nature, and community cohesion. But many young people do not use parks, and research shows that there is a marked difference based on gender. For example, research carried out by Julia King and Olivia Theocharides-Feldman of the London School of Economics and Make Space for Girls⁷ showed that:

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

Provision for teenagers in parks is usually considered in terms of a relatively small range of facilities: skate parks, fenced multi-use games areas (sometimes called MUGAs or cages) and other pitches and BMX or pump tracks. These provisions are frequently cited as examples of “good” informal play provision for teenagers⁸. Indeed, research across 91 councils by Make Space for Girls⁹ showed that 90% of facilities provided for teenagers in parks were MUGAs, skate parks or BMX tracks.

3 (2024) Plan International, The State of Rights in the UK
4 (2023) Parks for London, How do women and girls perceive safety in parks, and what might make parks feel safer?
5 (2018) Stonewall, LGBT in Britain
6 (2020) Grosvenor, 'I live here too: Why Young People Want a Stake in their neighbourhood'.
7 (2023) LSE and Make Space for Girls, Young Researchers-in-Residence Report
8 (2024) Fields in Trust Standards, 2024: 'Creating great spaces for all.'
9 (2023) Make Space for Girls, Parkwatch

Although these facilities are identified in various public guidance documents as “good teen provision”, this masks the fact that these provisions are not “gender neutral”. In a 2023 survey by Make Space for Girls¹⁰:

- 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.

This data doesn't mean that MUGAs and skateparks are “bad” provisions for the (mostly) male teenagers who use them, these spaces are good. But if a council wishes to activate its parks and green spaces in a way that reduces the gender segregation we see in the current data, it must broaden its provision beyond the traditional skatepark/MUGA/BMX facilities and provide facilities that support more teenage girls, young women and gender diverse young people - and boys who don't use them - to feel that they belong in their local parks and that there is a “place for them”.



MUGA in Gloucester Park, Basildon

10 (2023) Make Space for Girls, Parkwatch

3. Why focus on Town Centres?

Town centres and high streets have the potential to play an important role in the enjoyment by teenage girls, young women and gender diverse young people of the public realm. But the value of these spaces can vary hugely from place to place. In some places their busyness and the diversity of people using these spaces can provide informal surveillance that is important to creating a sense of safety; and shops, cafés and fast food outlets that meet the wants and needs of teenage girls, young women and gender diverse young people can send a signal that the town centre or high-street is a “place for them”.

In other cases, however, town centres and similar spaces can feel unwelcoming. For example, research by Julia King and Olivia Theodorides-Feldman of the London School of Economics in the London borough of Brent showed¹¹ that young people frequently felt that in town centres and on high streets they were being judged for “being in groups”, and were told to ‘move along’ as though they were ‘up to no good’.

Young people may also perceive town centres as hot spots for crime, but again this varies greatly. For example, in Essex, the Violence and Vulnerability Unit (VUU) commissioned an annual listening project¹² to enable young people from across Southend, Essex and Thurrock (SET) to share how safe they feel in their local areas. Young people in Basildon and Colchester identified the town and shopping centres as the highest crime hot spot, whereas young people in Chelmsford and Braintree identified parks as the highest crime hot spot.



11 (2022) LSE Cities, 'Evidencing local girls and young women's experiences of and aspirations for public space in Brent'

12 (2025) Council for Voluntary Youth Services, Listening Project

4. Relevance of park and town centre for Basildon

Gloucester Park is a large, well laid out and attractive park, accessible on foot from Basildon centre and a through route from the town centre to key facilities valued by the participants, like Basildon Sporting Village and Leisure Park. When we went to Gloucester Park, the participants' sense of release was clear- they ran down the hill, out into the park and started to seek out places that could be “for them” with very little prompting and a very evident appetite for play.

"I finally feel free., All of this pressure is off of me
I can look at the sunrise and set, I can finally see
All these beautiful things around me. When I was trapped.
I went to the lake. It held my tears. And calmed me down."
- A participant's poem written during the project

However the work with the participants also showed that for them there were significant barriers to their use of Gloucester Park. The perception by the participants themselves that it was “dodgy”; that there were “creepy” people there, and it wasn’t a place they would go on their own; and a view that their parents would not be comfortable with the participants visiting Gloucester Park without a parent or other adult with them.

In contrast, when we went to the Town Centre, the participants were more cautious and watchful, more conscious of their surroundings, what might be going on and who might be looking at them. In the Town Centre, there was a desire for a place to hang out, to feel comfortable and welcome, but not a desire to play.

One of them summed up how they felt about park vs town centre as follows:

“With friends I use the town centre more because it feels more fun than the green space. But if I am with a group of people I feel more comfortable in the green space.”

The work of the participants showed that among the challenges faced by planners, park professionals, councillors, officers, and those working in community safety in Basildon are:

- **How can Gloucester Park be made a place where it feels “fun” for teenage girls;**
- **How can Gloucester Park be made a place that the parents of teenage girls think is a good place for them to go; and**
- **How can the town centre be made to feel a place that is more comfortable for teenage girls.**

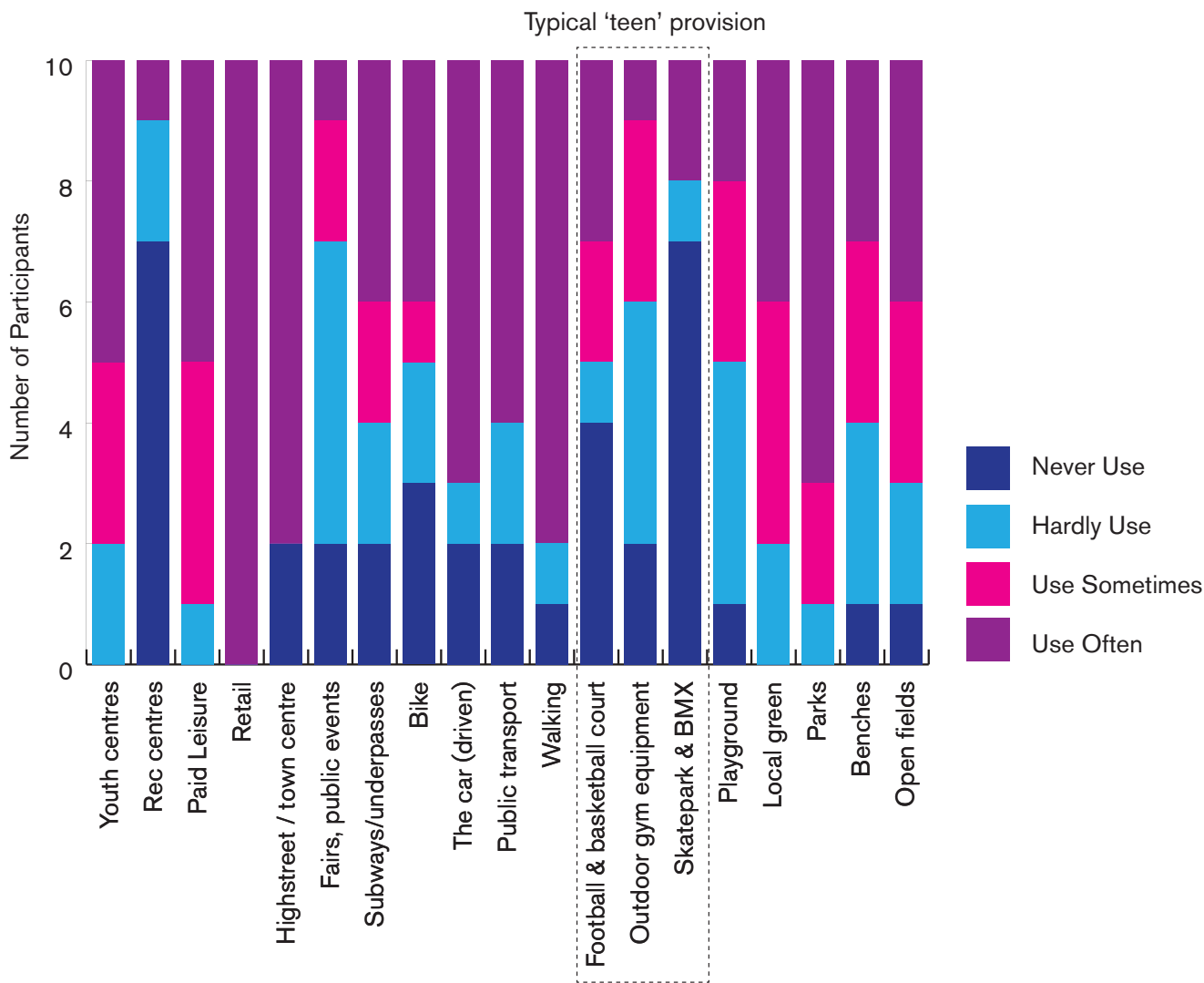
In section D of this report we show the ideas that the participants proposed as part of meeting these challenges, with interventions in East Square, in front of

B. THE WORKSHOPS

The participants took part in 14 hours of workshops, spread over 4 days in July 2025. A detailed summary of the workshops is in Appendix 1.

One of the first exercises was to explore with the participants how they used spaces, facilities and transport in the public realm in Basildon. The results are summarised in the graph below:

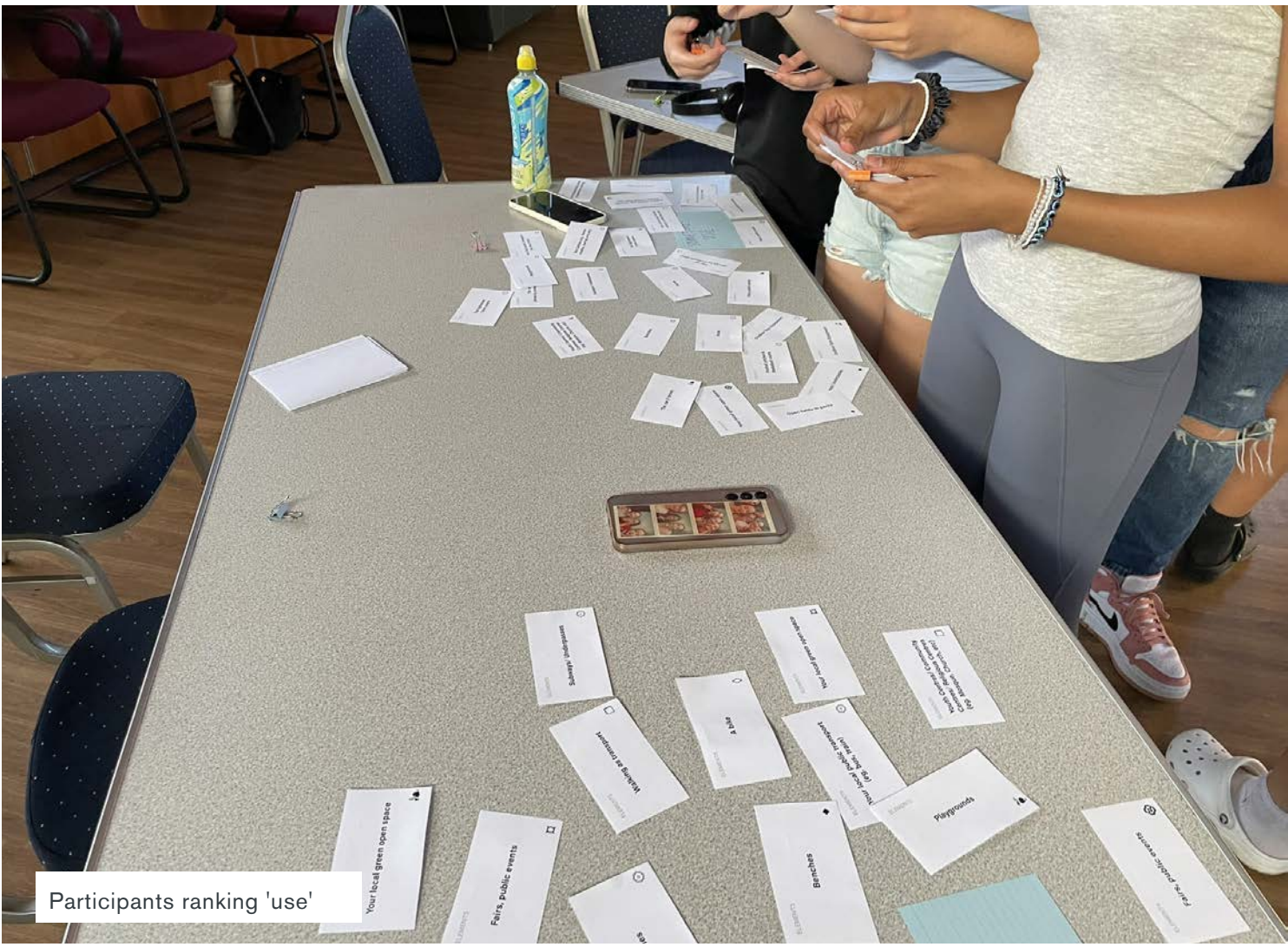
The bar chart below summarises the results of an exercise in which participants were asked how frequently they used different public-realm elements, on a scale from “never” to “often”. It is notable that retail and town centre/high street were used much more heavily than spaces designed to support teenage residents' health and wellbeing (eg MUGA, skatepark).



A word about judgement and comfort

Throughout the workshops, the linked concepts of judgement and feeling comfortable arose as recurring themes impacting how the participants used public space in Basildon. A number of the participants noted the prevalence of judgement of young women and girls in the public realm including based on their appearance, being called "sluts" and "slags" based on their clothing and body shape.

One participant observed that it was unfair that girls with "bigger breast got more slut/slag comments than those with smaller breasts", because, as she continued, "a teenage girl doesn't control how big her breasts are". Another participant explained that she'd "told a teacher about a boy calling her a slag and stuff" and that he pulled on her bag to try to make her fall over on the way home: the teacher had responded "boys will be boys" and didn't do anything - this



C. FEEDBACK ON BASILDON'S GREEN SPACES AND OUTDOOR PUBLIC REALM

left her feeling bad. A third participant said she felt that there is a difference in gender between boys and girls because boys do not get judged in a sexual way in public spaces; and a further gender difference arose in relation to the public realm because girls feel more unsafe than boys.

There was general agreement with these sentiments. But there was also empathy and understanding for their male peers, with a number of the participants noting that boys were also judged when in the public realm but in different ways. One explained that if boys wear track suits and have their hoodies up, people think they are in gangs, and that in a mixed gender group of friends, hanging out together, the boys will be stopped by security guards going into a shopping mall, but the girls will not.

There was also a lot of discussions around feeling comfortable. We would suggest that the concept of comfort is a broad concept that includes feeling safe, but goes beyond this to include feeling at ease and welcome in a place. In considering how the public realm can work better for teenage girls, young women and gender diverse young people, the concepts of comfort and feeling comfortable are, we believe, more helpful than viewing matters through a narrow lens of "safety"- which too often can be interpreted as limited to an absence of physical threat or the fear of physical threat.



Discussion around a large map of Basildon

We used a combination of large-scale mapping of Basildon town centre and Gloucester Park and visiting the areas to explore with the participants their experience of public space in Basildon.



Common themes across Basildon

There were different spaces across Basildon that the participants used and valued, for example some valued Basildon Sports Village, others Leisure and Pipp's Hill. But the participants did not recognise traditional teenage spaces (the MUGA, the skate park) as areas that were intended for their use as teenagers, and generally did not use them. The participants were not aware of any spaces in Basildon that had been designed with their wants and needs as teenage girls in mind.

There were no places in Basildon where the participants said they felt comfortable to just "be", on their own, to get some "space" from the pressures that teenagers experience. The majority only felt comfortable/safe in groups or with older siblings. These views were supported, according to them, by parental attitudes. Some of the participants were allowed to visit the town with groups of friends, but, for others, parental concerns meant they stayed close to home.

Another persistent issue was a lack of maintenance and/or the presence of vandalism in Basildon - especially in parks, where the participants' perception was that swings and zip lines were frequently broken by older teens and "offensive graffiti" was drawn. The participants emphasised the importance to them of being in a place that felt clean and well maintained.

A number felt that water in Basildon (whether in natural features like Basildon Brook or man-made features like the pond around the Mother and Child sculpture) was "brown and unattractive", and that when they went to other places, "there was cleaner water in the environment". There was also a recurrent theme that most places in Basildon suffered from poor lighting, which contributed to feeling unsafe/uncomfortable and further restricted access, especially in the winter months.

GREEN SPACES

Gloucester Park

When we visited Gloucester Park as a large group, with adults present, the participants visibly relaxed and became more playful as we moved from the Town Centre into the green of Gloucester Park. The participants were happy to run across the park, seeking out places that felt “right for them” becoming noisier and more childlike.

But Gloucester Park also presented a paradox: when we discussed Gloucester Park in the focus groups, it was clear that for many the park felt unsafe both to the girls and their parents. A number of participants reported fears of knife crime, drug use, or concerns of other antisocial unsafe behaviour. This sense of unsafety and lack of comfort was a factor in leading to Gloucester Park being inaccessible for many in the group.



The skate park in Gloucester Park

This is clearly a well-used facility.

In line with national usage patterns, when we observed this facility over three¹ short periods of observation during the project, we saw that it was dominated by boys and young men. All three periods were on days with good weather during the school summer holidays. An early evening visit showed use by approx. 12 boys and young men, a mix of skateboards and scooters and one girl on “heelies” being supervised by an adult woman from the bench. A morning visit showed a smaller group of slightly younger boys on scooters. On the third visit, with the participants on a Tuesday afternoon there were approximately 8 boys on scooter and 2 girls - one actively scooting on the site and the other “supervising” from her bike.

The teen shelter was well used by the skate park users and one boy telling us “it’s a good place to leave your bag and stuff.”

Only one of the participants said that she currently went to the skatepark, when part of a mixed gender friendship group.

But none of the other participants used the skatepark or showed an interest in using the skatepark or teen shelter, even when prompted with the idea of girl focused sessions.

¹ Within the funding for this project there was not the capacity to undertake more extensive period of observation/monitoring of the skatepark and MUGA areas; the 3 periods of observation showed a gendered pattern of use in line with nationally observed norms of domination of these spaces by boys and young men. If, however, it is felt that in fact in Basildon there is a more gender balanced use of these facilities we would be happy to be funded to do more extensive observations to test such a hypothesis.

The Basketball Court/MUGA in Gloucester Park

The basketball court at Gloucester Park is a well maintained and attractive facility.

Before we visited this facility, we had explored with the participants their experience of using facilities like this. Of the 10 who were at that session, only 2 had used this type of fenced pitch and their experience had not been easy. One of participants talked about her experience playing on the fenced pitch with her cousin - they had been kicking a ball around and minding their own business when some boys came onto the fenced pitch and told them to “*get off*”. The participants commented that the boys just assumed that they were entitled to do this, and the girls felt they had to go. The participant also observed that on other occasions the boys didn’t explicitly tell them to “*get off*” the fenced pitched, but she and her friend would leave if boys showed up because they felt intimidated. Another participant agreed, saying that she loved sports but it was difficult to get any time when she could be on a ball court.

As with the skate park we conducted 3 short periods of observation. An early evening visit showed a group of about 8 boys and young men enjoying the facility as part of informal play (not part of a formal game of basketball - instead passing and stealing, throwing hoops). A morning visit showed the facility empty. On the third visit, with the participants on a Tuesday afternoon there was one boy who had brought his bike down and was practicing throwing hoops.

Only one of the participants had used the facility in the past. She had come with (older) family members so she could practice basketball - the participant concerned enjoyed and was good at throwing hoops and was of a similar age to the boy who was there at the same time. But she did not feel able to use the facility with the same freedom as her male peer.

We also discussed the etiquette of using this facility, if someone else was using it when you arrived. The participants were clear: if someone else was on the pitch when they arrived, they would expect to have to wait for the incumbent to move on, in their own time. They suggested a bench outside the basketball pitch as somewhere to wait. They had no expectation that it would be appropriate for them to ask the incumbent to “*get off*” or try to intimidate them into leaving. The difference in how they expect to behave and how they themselves had been treated by boys while on a fenced pitch illustrates one reason why teenage girls and young women struggle to find any time when they can be on a ball court.

We discussed ways that this facility could be made more welcoming for teenage girls. For example, adding in seating within the facility (something that has been trialled in some MUGAs). It was felt “*that would just be annoying to the*

people who wanted to play basketball”. We also explored reducing the height of the fences - again it was felt that this would be annoying for the people who played basketball. We also discussed the possibility of girl-only sessions on the MUGA, but it was felt that this would not get much take up.



MUGA, Gloucester Park

Basildon Sports Village

Some of the participants valued Basildon Sports Village for the variety of different sports available. There were some concerns about the costs of some of these and little awareness of “*Everyone Loves a Friday Night*” discounted youth club. Participants commented that Basildon Sporting Village generally felt safe, but for one, “*I want to use the Sports Village but [it is] difficult to get to*” and access through the park was not an attractive option. But its sporting focus made some of the participants feel excluded “*...if you don’t do sports there is nothing there for you.*”

Local Green Spaces

Some participants identified specific small local green/open spaces as ones that they felt very attached to, taking time to explain these spaces, and in the case of the Gore Green space, to show us on the walk round.

“I love this place, my nan lived round here.” [green space between The Gore and Broadmayne]

“Outside my friends house there’s this chess set-- they’re good to sit on, so we hang out there.” [the William Mitchell, Chessmen- Jermayns, Basildon]

“This is where I spent all one summer.”

RETAIL SPACES

"[I] don't hang round the [Mother and Child] statue. Sometimes there is water in the pond, but often it looks dirty. You go other places, and they have clean water in ponds and things, but in Basildon it's not clean. Sometimes when there is water in the pond, people scoop water out and throw it at you."

Town Square

This was seen as a place to pass through, rather than a place to linger. Although on our visit we observed adults sitting near the Mother and Child statue, the participants did not see this area as a place for them to linger:

There were also concerns from the participants about boys on bikes: *"boys ride round the town centre on bikes - they aren't supposed to but they do. And they don't care, you just have to get out of their way."* And *"I literally had to pull my friend's little sister out of the way of a bike cos they would have just knocked her down."*

Pipps Hill

The Pipps Hill retail park was identified by a number of the participants as a place they liked and used. The variety of affordable shops (Lidl) was a positive, but as with Basildon Sports Village there were issues around how to get there. One participant described her route which involved going all the way round Gloucester Park because the direct route, cutting through the park, was not seen as an option.

Eastgate Shopping Centre

The shopping mall was identified as a place to hang out: *"we go there a lot because there is nothing else to do"*. The food court was a place to go and get a drink or something quick to eat - but it wasn't seen as a place a teenage girl could sit and linger.

Towngate/St Martin's Square

One of the participants had strong and positive memories of the theatre, and felt very fond of the space; but this sense of attachment did not extend to her feeling that it was a place she would hang out in. For other participants, Towngate/St Martin's Square was seen as a space where *"boys tend to hang out"* and not a place for them.

East Square

The participants were fairly neutral about this area in its current configuration and were positive to the idea that a space might be created that was *"a place for me"* in the area in front of the hoarding. There were some concerns about how overlooked the area could be (for example from the steps above) and that this could leave young women and girls feeling exposed to unwanted gaze/attention. The participants considered how these concerns might be addressed as part of their design for "Swaying Souls" (see section D). It may also be sensible to consider how the character of the space develops after the opening of the King of Essex Pub (due September 2025).

TRANSPORT

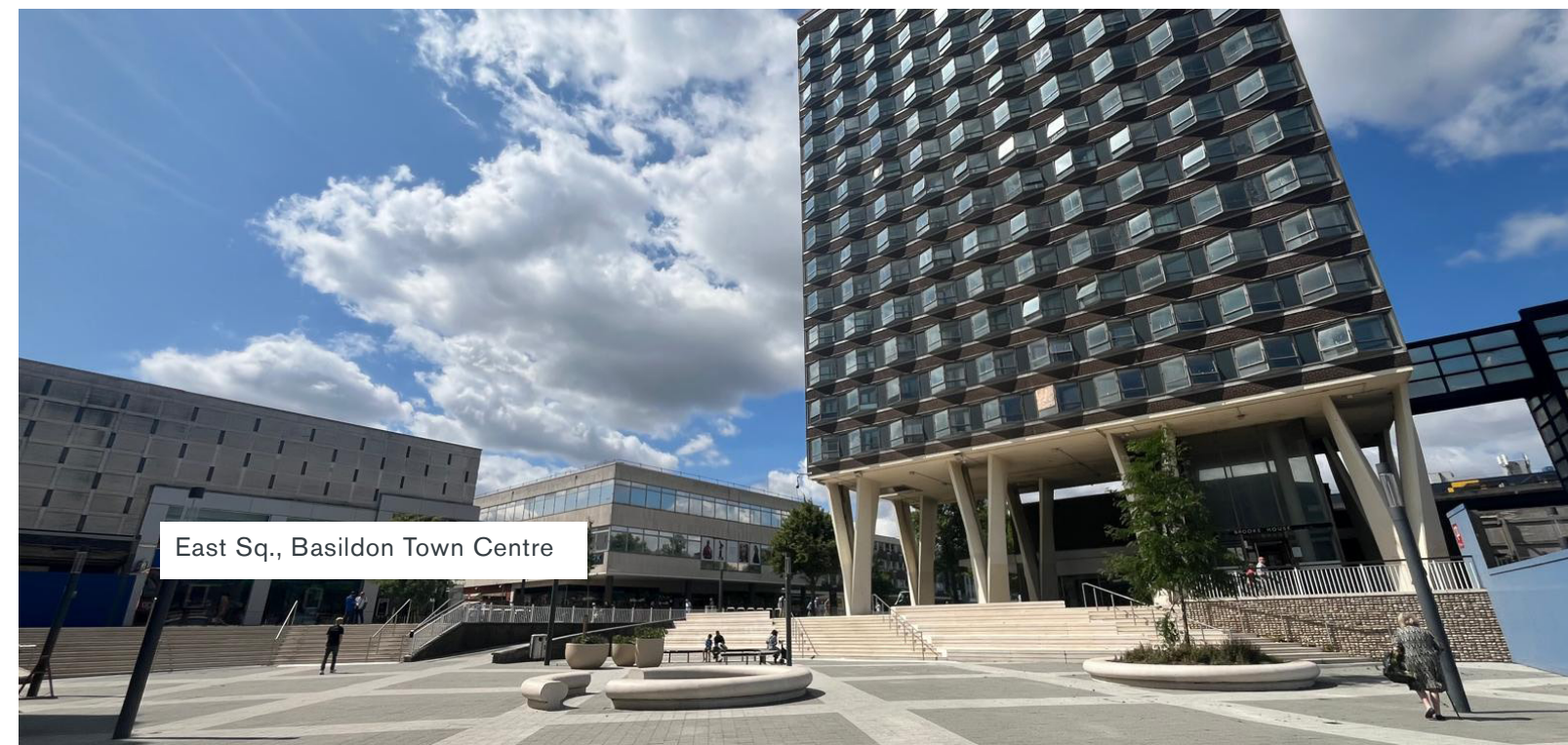
Travel and Underpasses

The train station was generally felt to be safe, with plenty of people (and staff) around. In contrast the Bus Station was a place that a number of the participants avoided, either opting to avoid the bus altogether and walk; or to pick the bus up from other stops. We discussed whether the new Greggs at the bus station made the area feel any safer, but the general sense was that it did not - it was not a place you could go and wait if you were feeling unsafe - you could only go in if you could afford to pay for a drink.

Underpasses were acknowledged to be part of life for pedestrians in Basildon, but a number were felt to have vandalised CCTV (camera lens sprayed over) and to be too poorly lit to be used with comfort. It was frequently mentioned that the underpasses felt less safe than crossing busy roads.



Underpass, Basildon



East Sq., Basildon Town Centre

D. OUTPUTS

WHAT WOULD A PLACE “FOR ME” LOOK LIKE? HOW CAN WE ACTIVATE THE SPACE?

We asked the participants to tell us what a good public space meant for them. Here's some of what they shared:

“Somewhere anyone can go without having to ask. So everyone can feel accepted.”

“It is an area you can go for free and it lets you be sociable. It is somewhere you can meet up with friends.”

“A place that belongs to the community.”

“A place that helps the community be a community.”

We have worked with a number of groups in different areas on similar projects, and it was notable that the theme of public spaces being an integral part of creating, maintaining and belonging in the community came out more strongly with this group than it has with others. It is exciting and encouraging to hear young people linking 'community' and the 'public realm': because to be part of the community within the public realm, teenage girls, young women and gender diverse young people need spaces where they can be present, visible, welcome and respected. They need to have spaces that are “for them”.

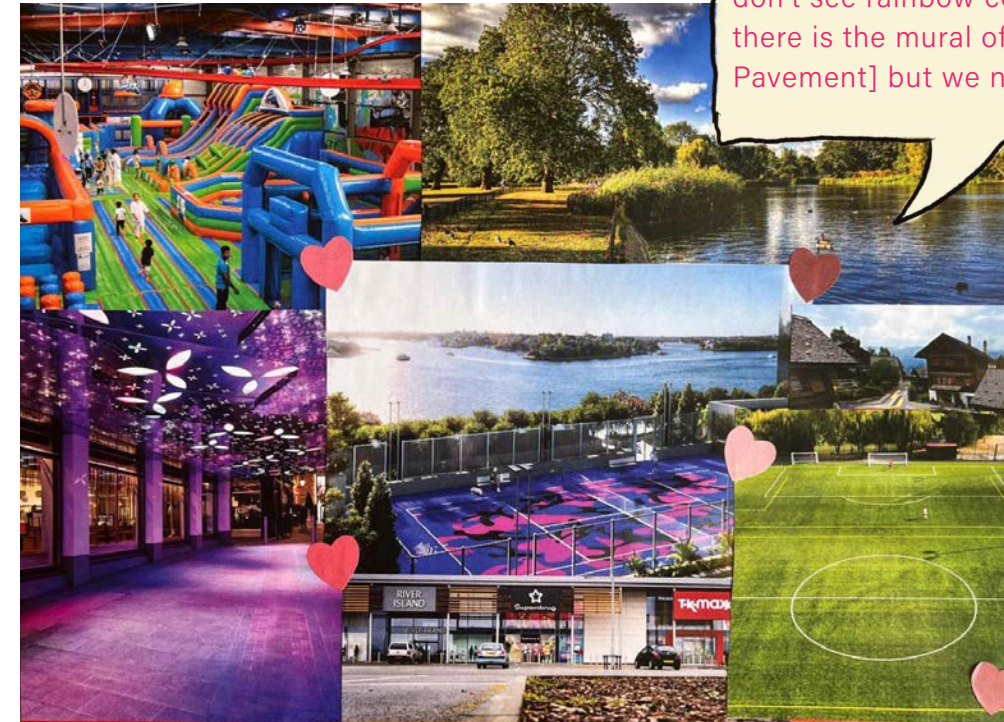
The workshops therefore asked the participants to think about what “a place for me” in the public realm Basildon might look like.

The participants focused first on the principles behind “a place for me” through the creation of collages. Key themes that emerged were:

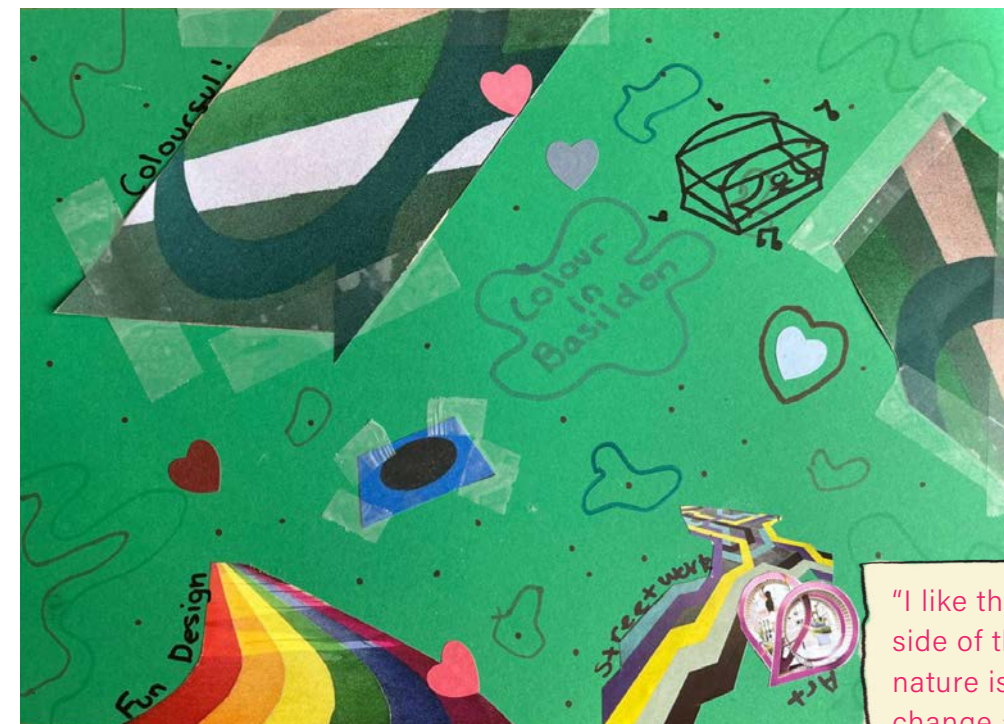


Group work

1. The use of colour as a part of creating “a place for me”



“If I see something with rainbow colours, it stands out to me, it says to me, this is something that I want to investigate. You don't see rainbow colours in Basildon - well there is the mural of the horse” [by Market Pavement] but we need more.”



“I like the rainbow flowers [on the side of the old M&S]. I like that nature is included and the colours change as you go down the row.”

A number of the participants returned to this theme of colour when designing their specific interventions (see the proposals for “Wonderful Water” and “Swaying Souls”, page 30 and 32).

2. The role of green spaces and nature in “a place for me”

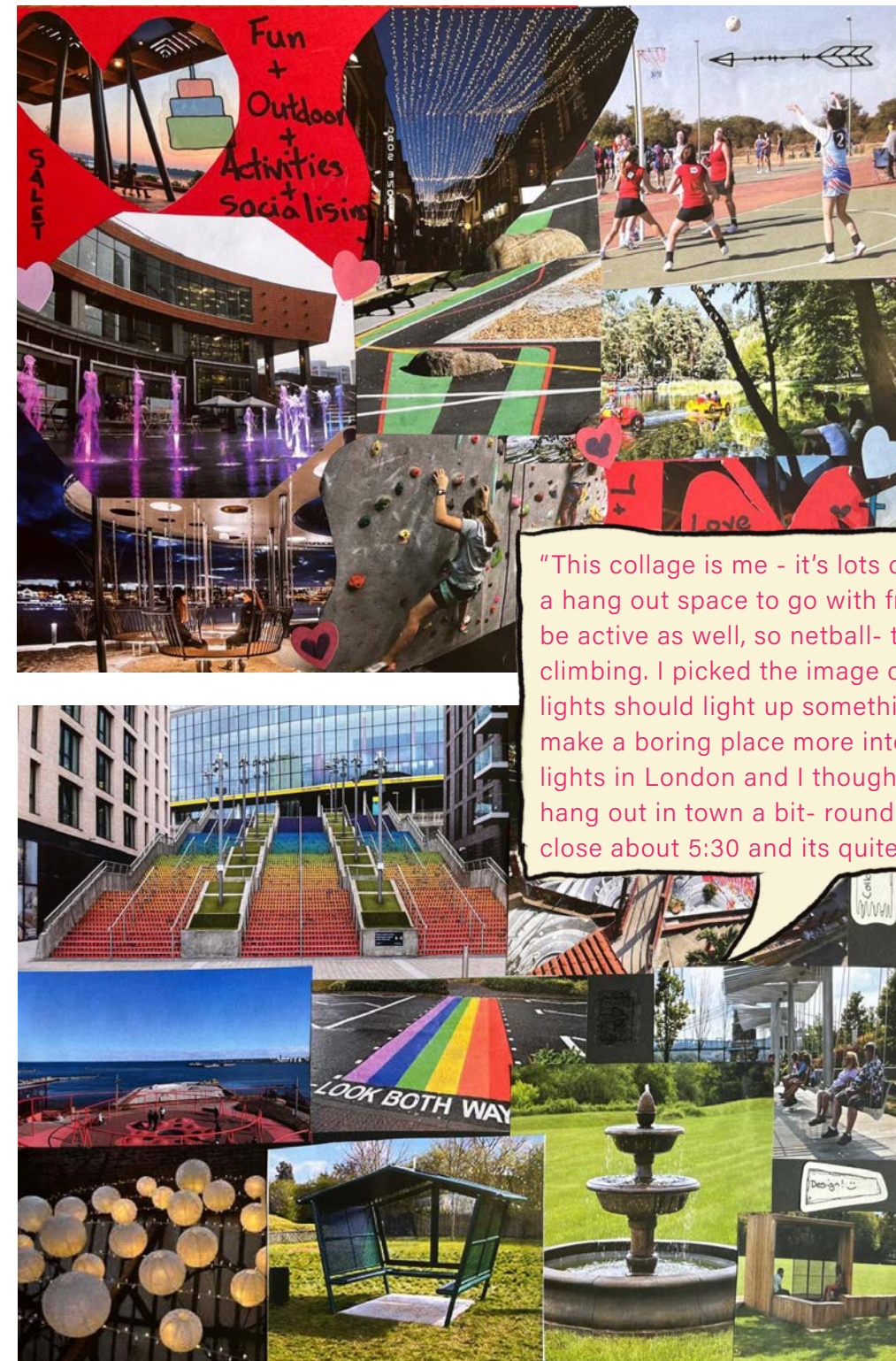
“My happy place is a calm place, where I can do what I like and be me. It has to be green, and not too crowded. And somewhere we’re allowed to go - my friends aren’t allowed to go to town or Gloucester Park - it’s too far - I go to the [small green space] outside my friends house - there are big yellow swings there and me and my friend race to get on them.”



Green space and nature emerged as a recurrent theme when discussing “a place for me”. Greenery, planting was consistently mentioned as a key feature. Despite their being a large park they felt their desires were currently being met.

“Green space should be somewhere you can go and you can do what you want to do. Basildon doesn’t have green space like this. On the map, Basildon has lots of green space, but what it usable for me, feels very small.”

3. The role of variety in “a place for me”



“This collage is me - it’s lots of different things, with a hang out space to go with friends; but I like to be active as well, so netball- that’s at the top; and climbing. I picked the image of string lights because lights should light up something important - they can make a boring place more interesting. I saw these lights in London and I thought they were cool. We do hang out in town a bit- round Eastgate, but the shops close about 5:30 and its quite boring.”

PROPOSALS: "DESIGNING MYSELF INTO BASILDON"

4. The role of lighting in "a place for me"



Lighting was identified as an important aspect in creating a welcoming place. The participants noted that Basildon generally seemed to have poor lighting, with one observing:

"In the winter after school it's pitch black- I have to use my phone to see [my way]" making the important point that in the winter lighting isn't just about being out late at night - it's about getting home from school, taking part in after school activities, and seeing friends and family in the early evening - all of which ought to be accessible to teenage girls.

Lighting was also seen as extending beyond the functional side of illumination, with the participants recognising the role that good lighting "... can make people feel calmer, and cheer them up" and contribute positively to the visual appeal of a place: *"When I go to London and I see neon lights I think that looks interesting and attractive."*

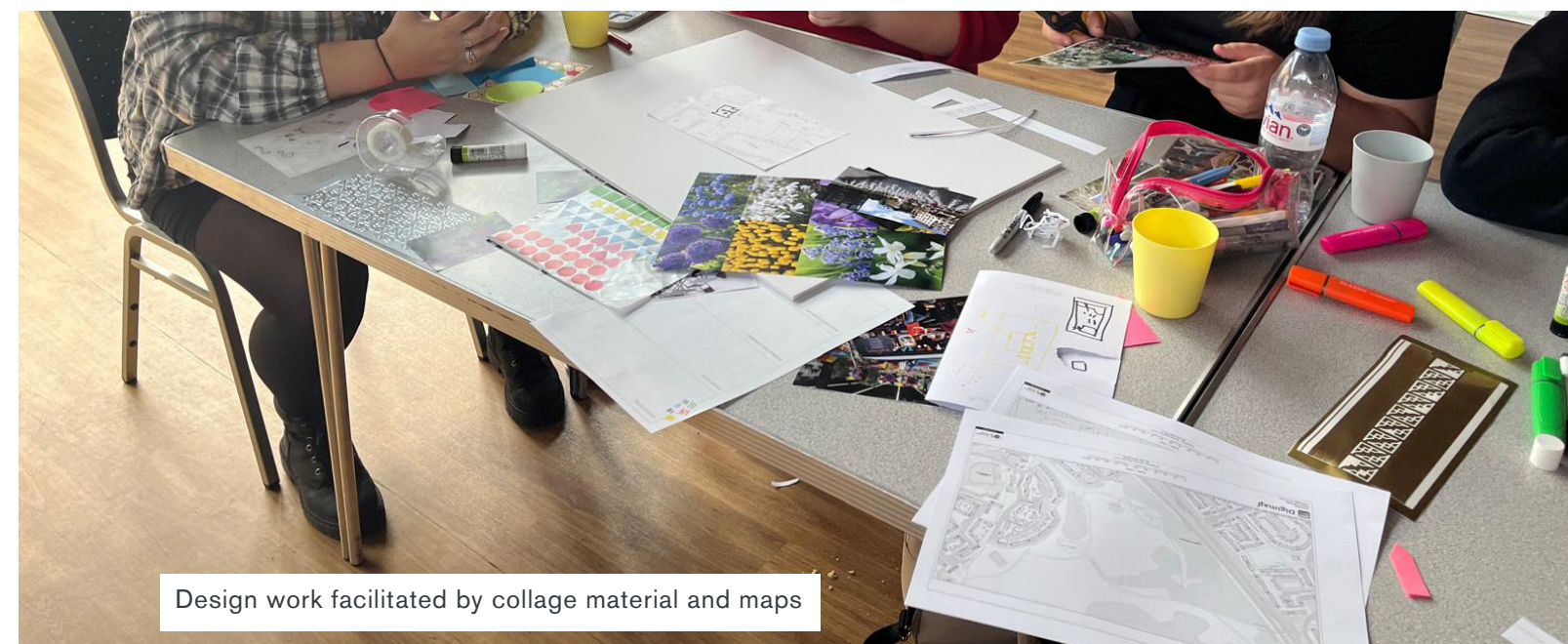
Once the participants had explored the general themes that shaped "a place for me", the participants worked on how they might specifically design themselves into a space in Basildon.

The participants worked in 2 groups:

- In the town centre: both groups worked in East Square in the area in front of the Sorting Office; we asked them to focus on this space because we understand there is scope for a "meanwhile" installation here.
- In Gloucester Park: the groups chose areas that appealed to them: one group chose the grass area in the dip behind the skatepark, to the side of the tree circle planted for the Platinum Jubilee; the other chose the grass area to the side of the basketball court. It is interesting that both groups chose areas close to existing teen provision.

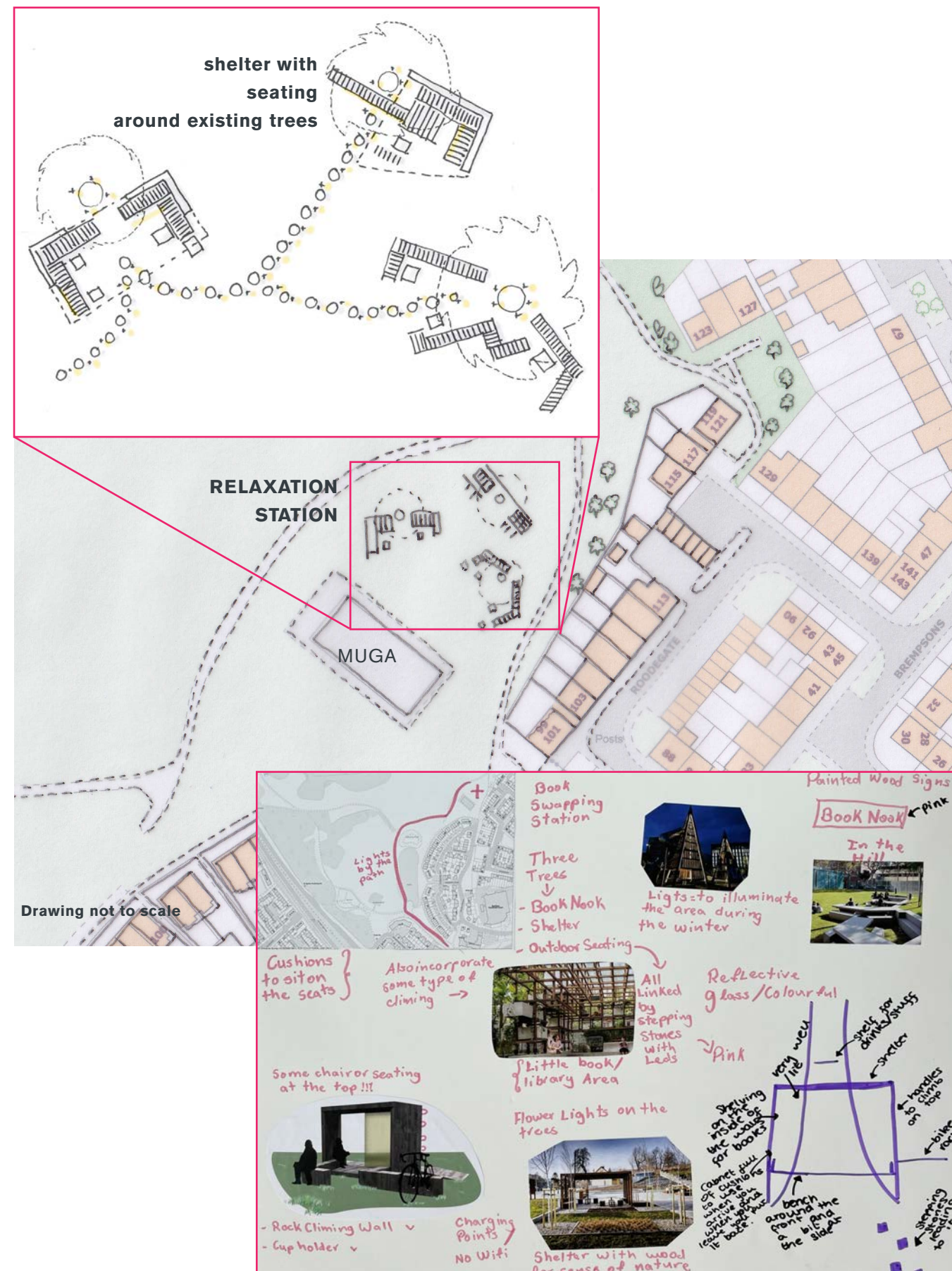
The groups took different approaches to their proposals but they had a common desire for the designs they created:

- **To create a sense of pride in Basildon,**
- **To inspire positive ownership and use of the space; and**
- **To operate to protect the space from vandalism/ littering/ attracting an unintended crowd.**



Design work facilitated by collage material and maps

GLOUCESTER PARK: RELAXATION STATION



Design Inspiration for Relaxation Station

This proposal was based in the green space to the side of basketball court, bounded on two sides by paths, which has three well-spaced trees.

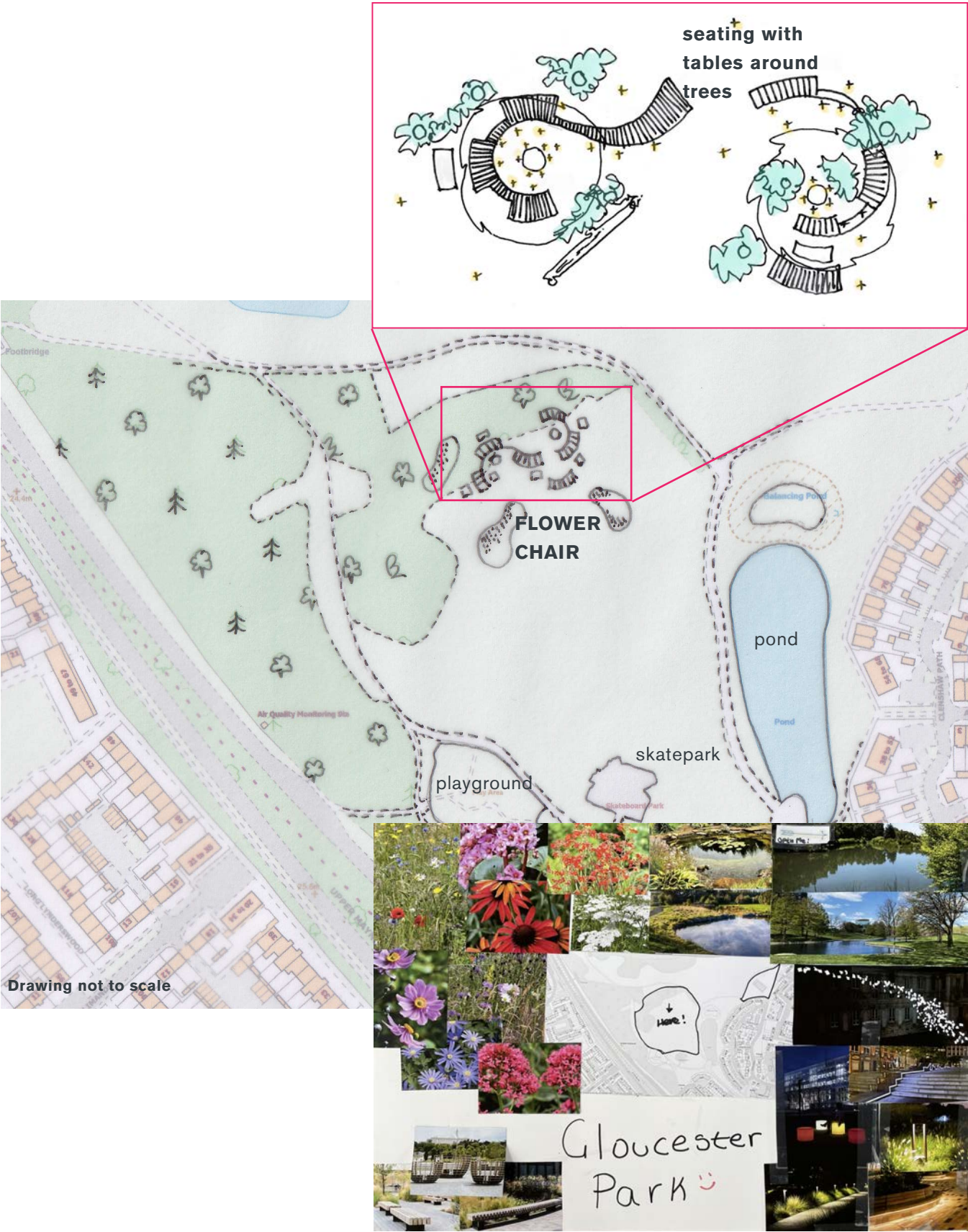
To address the fact that a single space can be dominated by a single group and the need to accommodate variety in a teenage space, the proposal involved 3 distinct but connected social seating zones. The design of the seating elements are intentionally “relaxed” and targeted at teenagers - at low level, a bit “wiggly” to get into, to signal that it isn’t really a place for older adults or mums with toddlers etc. The zones also recognised fun elements like climbing and playing on and around the structures; and practicalities, like a stand to park your bike. The three seating areas are connected to each other and to the paths by stepping stones with purple LED edges to provide light and colour to the place.

The three seating areas comprised:

- **A book nook:** a place to be alone or with just one friend; a covered area to accommodate a book swap facility and relaxed seating to sit and read a book; good lighting would allow teenagers to read and relax in the winter evenings, and a cupboard would store hard wearing cushions that could be taken out to be sat on and put away afterward. There would be a charging point for phones but the group didn’t feel the need for WiFi to be installed. The sides of the book nook would have climbing handles so that the user could climb up and sit on the top of the book nook if they wanted, feeling connected to the tree branches above.
- **Sheltered communal seating:** a place to be sociable with a few different configurations of seating, under cover and with a bike rack to lock a bike to. Again climbing handles so that the shelter can be climbed and swung on as well as sat in.
- **Open communal seating,** sunk into the ground with tables for sitting around and on.

The materials would be natural wood and stone but with sufficient pink (painted wood, signs etc) to give a “girly vibe” and send the signal that girls and mixed gender groups are welcome, and to discourage boys who take the view that “pink is a girls colour so boys don’t want to be there”.

GLOUCESTER PARK:
FLOWER CHAIR



Design Inspiration for Flower Chair

This proposal was based in the green space in the dip behind the skatepark. This group also focused on a social seating idea, with a continuous wooden seat, looping round a tree and then curving out in front to provide a variety of different seating options, with space for several groups and individuals to sit with friends or sit alone. Tables were sited at various points along the curve. Lights were placed under the seats to create soft ambient lighting focused on the seating area. Additional lighting was dotted around the wider area to create a diffuse and dappled effect - to provide general illumination but not creating glare/hard lines between bright light and dark shadow.

The seating was integrated with lots of planting, some in boxes connected or close to the seating, other planting free standing in the ground. Additional support for nature, interest and a sense of calm was provided by small ponds with reeds and planting around them, possibly acting as part of a sustainable draining system to help reduce the risk of the area (which is quite low lying) from getting too muddy in winter.



Experimenting with cardboard to design social seating in the park.

TOWN CENTRE: SWAYING SOULS



Design Inspiration for Swaying Souls

The group that made this proposal also proposed Relaxation Station for Gloucester Park. As with Relaxation Station, “a place for me” in East Square was focused on the idea of a teenage hang out space. But the intention was for a more contained and reflective space. At Relaxation Station, provision was made for climbing and playing over and on the structures and provision for lots of groups to hang out. In contrast, the emphasis in “Swaying Souls” was on a more intimate space. Somewhere you could go on your own or with one or maybe two friends and sit and chat. There was no intention for it to be a space for climbing or more active/boisterous play.

The proposal was for a set of 5 double/2 person tethered swing seats, arranged in a pentagram facing inwards, with a wide canopy offering shelter from the elements. The swing seats provide a gentle rocking, not a “kick the sky” swing experience. The arms of the swing had cup holders so the user could relax with a milkshake, coffee etc.

The swing seats were coloured, one each in green, orange, purple, blue and pink, with matching LED lights under the swings activated by the movement of swinging, to cast a light on the dark, “safety surface” underneath.

A trellis (metal or wood) decorated with natural forms such as flowers and leaves (which could be artificial) curved round half of the structure to provide a level of privacy for the area. The intention of the trellis is to partially shield the area from gaze, when viewed from the steps under Brooke House and from the site of the new King of Essex pub. But it would not be a solid partition - it would allow the users to “see but not be seen”. Lots of small lights (eg shaped like butterflies) could be dotted around the trellis to make it feel more welcoming; the vibe would be one that was intentionally welcoming to women and girls.



PROPOSAL: ACTIVATING THE PARK

This design focused on creating a water based feature in East Square that would provide a place of calm and welcome, encouraging people to stop and linger. The inspiration echoed ideas from the fountain areas in Granary Square, Kings Cross and the Mirror Pool in Bradford. But unlike these areas, the water would be complimented by lots of beautiful flower planting, providing a burst of natural colour in the otherwise very urban space.



Design Inspiration for Wonderful Water

We invited the participants to consider an event to celebrate their work and make a space feel more welcoming. The participants had a choice about whether to locate this event in the Town Centre or Gloucester Park. Both groups chose to put their events Gloucester Park. The two groups produced distinct but complementary proposals.

“Active Sparkles”

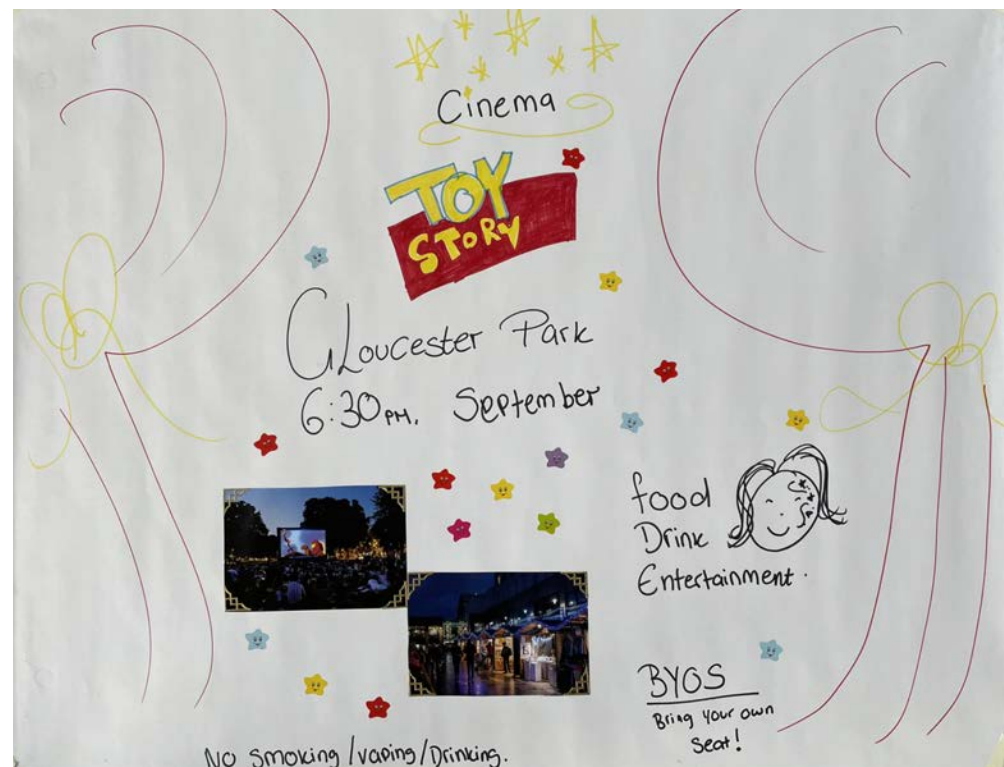


This group proposed a daytime event, near Sport Village, targeting age 12-17 years. The event involved a mix of physically active and sports related activity and craft/fun/feminine focused activity. The physical activity included zorbs and street dancing. The sporting activity was to give girls the chance to take part in football, netball and basketball but in a fun/friendly mixed ability environment with the emphasis on enjoyment (as opposed to competition and winning). Because there would be ball sports, the group reluctantly decided to exclude dogs because of their tendency to run off with balls.

Craft activities included graffiti art, spray painting tote bags, canvass drawing, face painting, glitter tattoos, hair braiding, hair tinsel, and a photo booth to record the fun. Music was part of the event, but as a background sound track rather than as a request for a live band or disco/karaoke.

Chill out zones with bean bags and comfy outdoor seats, with games (giant Jenga, Connect 4 etc.) provided space to relax after all the action and food trucks would provide healthy and more “junky” food options at affordable prices. Initially the group had wanted the event to be for boys and girls. However as they focused on the intention that part of the event was to encourage girls to have fun doing sport, they decided that including boys to take part was likely to undermine this - their concerns were that in playing football and basketball the boys would be too aggressive in their style of play and seek to dominate in a mixed team environment. They therefore changed their minds and opted for a girls only event.

“Cinema under the stars”



This group focused on creating an evening event that would welcome teenagers and parents to enjoy a film in Gloucester Park and show that Gloucester Park has the potential to be a fun, safe, and comfortable place to be. The event would be open to all, but there would be a stipulation of no smoking, vaping or drinking.

There would be a separate dog friendly section for those who wanted to bring a dog and a dog free zone for those who preferred their film without a doggy companion.

The film would be one that was familiar to, and fun for adults and teens. Toy Story was chosen as an example, but the group had many different options. The key however was for an inclusive and fun film (as opposed to, for example, a scary, romance or action film). The audience would be asked to bring their own seating, and food trucks would provide cinema appropriate food.



Participant explains the detail of Swaying Souls

E. CASE STUDIES

PRECEDENTS OF GOOD PUBLIC SPACE



Central Park, Chelmsford, UK (2025)

Chelmsford City Council worked with Make Space for Girls, Social Place and pupils from the Boswells School, Chelmsford to understand what would make Central Park more welcoming to teenage girls and gender diverse young people. This award winning project led to a number of initiatives in and around the park, including improved lighting, refreshed and more welcoming art in an underpass and a new social seating area (photographed above) near the park café.

Image credit: Chelmsford Council



Samovar Space, Wembley, UK (2023)

This space, close to the main stadium at Wembley, was delivered in partnership with and funded by Quintain, the developer behind Wembley Park. The installation, a meanwhile space, was the result of 26 months of collaboration with five local young people aged 16-24. Their intention to create a place for young people to ‘hang out’ and ‘just be’ focused on the themes of: a place to see and be seen; a place to chill out and do nothing; a place to snack and chat. The final designs were developed in collaboration with architects Flanagan Lawrence.

Photograph by Chris Winter



Frizon Årstidernas, 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 place in public areas. Through dialogues between local teenage girls and the Umeå municipality, the design has resulted in a series of illuminated social swings for multiple groups to use at once and a welcoming place for conversations after dark.

Photograph by Andreas Nilsson



Ashton Lane Lighting Canopy, Glasgow, UK (2015)

This canopy of fairy lights, designed and delivered by Arro, is located in Glasgow's West End, on the renowned Ashton Lane with bustling shops, restaurants, and businesses. The canopy has been a feature for over a decade. It is not only functional – adding lighting for better visibility and a sense of safety when dark – but also aesthetic and mood-setting.

Image credit: Arro Lighting and Events

APPENDIX 1: WORKSHOP STRUCTURE



WORKSHOP 1, 2HRS

An introduction to public realm including what counts as public realm and why does it matter.

A quick-fire session to explore what spaces, facilities and modes of transport the participants used in the public realm in Basildon.

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, 4HRS

An introduction to “good design” as it relates to space and how innovation in design can lead to real change.

Using collage to explore initial ideas around “a place for me”.

Mapping session and detailed discussion/ focus group using a large-scale map of Basildon town centre and Gloucester Park to locate the places that the participants went during leisure time, the places they did not use and the places that they would like to use.



WORKSHOP 3, 4HRS

An introduction to different case studies, looking at how other places have innovated to create places that work better for more teenagers.

Exploring the town centre and Gloucester Park to discuss participants' experiences of these places. Beginning with cardboard activities to encourage exploration and help participants imagine how they might design themselves into different areas, then returning to the large-scale map to further consider what a “place for me” could mean in practice.



WORKSHOP 4, 4HRS

Following on from exploring the area, the participants were invited to think about specific “spaces for me”: one in East Square and one in Gloucester Park.

The participants were provided with ideas and support to develop their initial themes and then sat with one of the team (a trained architect) to develop those ideas and sketch out how they might work as architectural plans.

The participants explored what kinds of events could activate a space and signal that it is welcoming for teenage girls and young women. They then developed their ideas and designed a poster to promote the event.

APPENDIX 2: HOW TO EMBED DESIGN FOR BETTER TEENAGE SPACE IN LOCAL PLANS AND POLICY DOCUMENTS

Identify barriers in existing documents

Identify if there are policy, planning or other documents which create barriers to more inclusive parks.

Many play and park strategies perpetuate the idea that the “right” play provision for teenagers comprises skateparks, MUGAs and bike tracks. These reinforce the proposition that spaces which are in practice dominated by some (but by no means all) boys and young men must be protected.

Sports strategies and active environment strategies can create an unintentional barrier to more inclusive spaces. They can create the risk that by attaching “protected status” to spaces that are dominated by boys and young men there is little or no space or money for the needs of teenage girls, young women and gender diverse young people.

Use new policies to support more inclusive spaces

Local Plans, Neighbourhood Plans and supplementary Planning Documents all have the potential to create an environment that encourages developers and communities to think about parks and public spaces more creatively.

A good starting point is ensuring these documents recognise the role that gender plays in how people can access space; and that teen play spaces do not currently serve all genders equally.

For many developers, proposing MUGAs, pitches, skatepark and BMX tracks as part of a planning application is the safe option. There is wide spread acceptance of a

narrative that this is the right provision for teenagers, and that this “ticks the boxes”. Local Plans, Neighbourhood Plans and supplementary Planning Documents should be drafted to challenge and change this narrative

Local Plans, Neighbourhood Plans and supplementary Planning Documents need to be explicit that the council wants a range of outdoor facilities, to meet the needs of all teenagers; recognising that MUGAs and skateparks may form part of a mix of provision for teenagers, but they must not be seen as offering a full/satisfactory solution to the need to include teenagers in the public realm. The documents should highlight the need for social hangout spaces, swings, climbing , adventure and opportunities for informal active play for teenagers.

The precise wording would always need to be tailored to the particular plan or policy but some examples are below.

Newham Local Plan: Regulation 19 submission June 2024 p279

Gender differences in how spaces are used and experienced should be considered. In addition to skate parks, BMX tracks, football pitches and MUGAs the design of spaces should consider incorporating more diverse elements such as those listed below:

Provision of gym bars for hanging on, leaning against, sitting on.
Gym equipment designed to encourage social interaction
Robust hammock swings for older teenagers to meet and spend time with friends.

Dividing up MUGA space so there is not just a pitch but also less prescriptive space, to give more chance for different types of play.
Seating should be designed into the perimeter of the MUGA. Such spaces allow people to choose how to use the space.

Social Seating – allowing people to speak, circular designs achieve this well.
Consider innovative ways to provide shelter from rain and/or heat.
Stages can provide space for performances both formal and informal.
Spaces for older children to hang out.

The following indicators demonstrate a play space has been designed to embrace diversity, equality, and inclusion.

The space should provide freedom to move and allow for a choice of activities. This can include places to retreat to when things are too busy, green spaces and equipment which provides different levels of height and difficulty

The space considers independence and access, with provision of accessible facilities, suitable equipment for children with additional support needs.

Schemes should think about the accessibility of paths and surfaces, seating and tables.

The sensory qualities of play spaces have been considered, for example including: things that spin and you can touch, contrasting light and colour and the use of natural materials in place spaces (e.g. sand, planting, long grasses).

Good play spaces avoid segregating children on the basis of age or ability, and are laid out so that equipment and features can be used by a wide range of children, even allowing different patterns of usage throughout the day or week.

Chelmsford City Council Pre Submission Local Plan Consultation Document Feb 2025

"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)"

Other planning and policy documents can also be important places to include a suitable reference to support gender inclusive teen space:

South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse District Council Design Guide

"Spaces for older children should be designed to appeal to a much wider range of teenagers, of both sexes, and not be easily dominated by one type of user. Elements that could be included in a youth space are wide ranging, such as: swings, hammocks, high bars, outdoor gyms, bouldering structures, more open (less cage like), and divided areas of MUGAs."

TFL's Sustainable Development Framework identifies the importance of a public realm that works for teenage girls to make Vibrant Places

"By gender mainstreaming park design to cater for the needs and safety concerns of teenage girls, trans and non-binary teenagers, equality and health can be much improved. Young people are encouraged to live more active lifestyles and recognise that they all have a right to occupy public space. This in turn will benefit teenagers of all genders."

APPENDIX 3: PRINCIPLES FOR ENGAGEMENT AND CO-DESIGN WITH TEENAGE GIRLS, YOUNG WOMEN AND GENDER DIVERSE YOUNG PEOPLE.

- Make sure there is a clear and common understanding about what the engagement is seeking to achieve. Is the process to collect data, inform a policy, design a space or something else? Explain to the participants at the outset what you are asking them to help with.
- Allow sufficient time and resources to work with a group to get meaningful outputs - how long/how much will depend on what the engagement is to achieve and the complexity of the site. A single workshop may be sufficient if the task is "where should we put the new social seating in our local green space". But if the task is to tackle the question "how can we integrate healthy green spaces that work well for most teenagers in a new housing development?", this requires a series of workshops to unpack and understand the local context and specific needs.
- Seek out teenage girls, young women and gender diverse young people: open calls for consultations/engagements will often miss the young people who feel currently excluded from the public realm because they don't think the public realm and hence the consultation/engagement has any relevance for them; work with schools and community groups that work with teenage girl, young women and gender diverse young people.
- Ensure the team has all the necessary and appropriate administrative arrangements in place, including safeguarding arrangements, DBS checks, risk assessments, consent forms for participation and photography/videos; the right adult to participant ratio etc.
- Be cautious about using online surveys, mapping tools etc.; experience indicates that while teenagers are "digital natives" they don't always respond to online surveys.
- If there is scope to create a new space or facility for teenagers, be clear about what is achievable: is there a specific site? What is the budget? What is the time table? Are there site specific restrictions?
- Recognise the value of the time that the participants are being asked to invest: the community will get a benefit from creating more inclusive parks- but depending on the time scales involved, individual girls and gender diverse young people may not; consider how you may be able to reward workshop participants for their time eg by using vouchers.

APPENDIX 4: SOME OTHER PRACTICAL STEPS FOR COUNCILS WHO WANT TO CREATE BETTER TEENAGE SPACES.

- Ask careful questions: if teenage girls are asked to draw a space “for teenagers” they will often draw a fenced pitch or a skatepark- not because this is what they would use; but because this is what they see every day as being the space that is provided for teenagers. Ask them instead to think about: a space that they would use; a space they would want to go to; “a space for me”.
- Don’t expect girls to be able to simply tell you what would work for them: the chances are they have never seen spaces that has been designed with their needs in mind; they can’t conjure ideas out of thin air; provide lots of precedent images to trigger ideas and listen to their responses to these precedent ideas.
- Explore how they experience parks currently: what stops them using parks and other areas in the public realm currently; what might help change things?
- Make it fun- visit the sites; get creative; use big print maps, collaging and model making as part of imagining what a good public space could be.
- Allow teenage girls, young women and gender diverse young people the opportunity to express their views without boys being present; this doesn’t mean excluding boys from the overall discussion. But it means recognising that the research is clear: the behaviour of (a minority) boys is likely to be a significant barrier to the enjoyment of parks and it can be easier to explore these issues and find solutions when boys aren’t in the room.
- Be clear about what is going to happen next and keep in touch after the workshops, as the space/development progress. A workshop that ends with the adults collecting up lots of bits of paper and then heading for the exits never to be heard of again is demotivating and undermines the credibility of those trying to make change happen.

Spread the word within the council

Lots of councillors and staff members need to be involved in making decisions that will lead to more parks and public spaces being more inclusive to more teenagers and young people. Spread the word internally and make sure people understand what the project is, and as importantly what it is not.

Making spaces for teenage girls, young women and gender diverse young people is not about creating gender segregated spaces; it is not about designing out boys; it is not about reinforcing stereotypes about girls and boys. It is not about getting rid of MUGAs and skateparks. It is about recognizing that currently teen provisions are highly gendered and dominated by (some) boys and young men, with many girls, young women, gender diverse young people and quite a few boys feeling that teen spaces have nothing for them. It is about being led by the data, thinking about teen spaces differently, positively designing in girls, young women and gender diverse young people and being creative in how the public realm can help make young people feel visible, welcome, comfortable and respected.

Ensure you have the 'communications' to explain your project to your external community and stakeholders

In the same way that it is important that people within the council know what the project is and is not about, there must be proper communication and engagement with the local community and other stakeholders to increase the prospect of a positive reception.

Partner with local community groups

Council resources are very limited and working with local groups and the voluntary sector may be key to making a space that is more inclusive. So finding ways to support a local Friends of Group or other community group committed to “making space for girls” can be a really good way to make change happen.

For example:

- Let people know your council’s commitment: if your council is committed to making parks that are more welcoming to teenage girls, young women and gender diverse young people, publicise this to your local community groups and let them know who they can contact if they want more information.
- Being clear up front about limitations: if there are site specific limitations that would stop certain facilities (eg concerns about anti-social behaviour, ecological impacts or planning or other strategy implications) identify these up front.
- Be flexible: if you have a policy document that states that an existing MUGA or pitch must always be replaced by a MUGA or pitch, consider whether that policy is right for that location and that community.
- Access to providers: the first question a group may ask is “how much would a space like this cost”: the council can use its connection with equipment manufacturers to help the group get indicative prices.
- Access to funding: Charities/community groups can often access funds and grants that a local council cannot; providing support to the charity to

help with grant applications can support change. We have come across at least one example where a town council helped a group of interested parents establish a charity to support a playground renovation so that funds could be accessed. Helping the community group to access CIL/section 106 funds can be very effective.

- Supporting local community fundraising: use your Community Newsletters to publicise events; support events in the local parks by helping the group through the “red tape”; use your experience to help them avoid mistakes; support links to local business forums.
- Provide back office support: a community group will be run by volunteers with very few resources. Can you help with back office services like printing, postage, volunteer management?

Engage with teenage girls and gender diverse young people about the public realm

Often consultation about parks takes place with the park users and special interest groups like skateboarders or the groups that are using the MUGAs.

This generally means that the views of teenage girls, young women and gender diverse young people simply don’t get heard and leads to parks and similar parts of the public realm becoming more focused on their current users. As a result they can feel more exclusionary of those who already felt that parks and other parts of the public realm “aren’t for them”.

Engagement with teenage girls and gender diverse young people can help to mitigate

this. Appendix 1 (which describes the workshops in this project) and Appendix 3 (which looks at engagement more generally) provide some suggestions for engagement.

Use the Public Sector Equality Duty to support changing teen provision

The Public Sector Equality Duty under the Equality Act 2010 is a legal obligation that councils must comply with when exercising public functions, whether that is taking decisions, setting policies or providing services.

It applies to all councils from the smallest parish council to a large metropolitan district council. It applies regardless of the source of funding; for example the fact that money for a skate park in a council run park may come from grants and community fundraising does not absolve the council from the need to comply with the PSED.

The PSED protects people by recognising that there are certain personal characteristics which can lead to discrimination or disadvantage within society. These are referred to as the “protected characteristics” and include sex (referring to male/female/man/woman/boy/girl).

Where a council’s current facilities for teenagers (skate parks, fenced pitches, BMX tracks) are dominated by boys and/or there is low participation in the park by teenage girls, girls are disadvantaged.

As a result, the PSED requires councils to consider proactively the need to reduce this disadvantage and encourage greater participation.

The PSED requires this consideration to be done before the relevant decision is taken. It is not a box ticking done after the event.

Review tender processes and challenge suppliers

A common observation from playground equipment providers who want to provide spaces that work better on a gender basis is their perception that tenders can often be quite restrictive.

Suppliers say that they want to create more gender inclusive spaces. But often they are asked to respond to a tender that asks them to provide, for example, a MUGA with full external fencing of a particular height, entrances of a particular type, goal posts and basketball hoops as specified etc. The suppliers argue that the tender process restricts their scope to propose a more inclusive space.

This suggests that councils may want to look at their tender process: consider whether the facilities being sought are likely to benefit more boys than girls and what outcomes the council is seeking in terms of gender equality.

Councils may also want to consider asking suppliers to provide examples of work they have done that are more inclusive.

And it is reasonable for councils to be demanding and ask to look beyond words. It is easy for suppliers to include a standard paragraph along the following lines:

“Our facilities attract users from every demographic: Boys, Girls, Men and Women, fully-able users through to those less able,

including wheel chair users who are often found enjoying the facilities and interacting together in a positive manner.”

But sometime this sort of generalised statement isn’t backed up with concrete data or examples.

Councils are entitled not to simply take statements like this at face value and can ask suppliers to show some data that supports their assertion that they create inclusive spaces. Challenge suppliers to show how they accommodate the needs of teenage girls, young women and gender diverse young people in their work. Ask them how they will show that they have delivered on an inclusive space.

Consider analysing the costs through a gender lens

This is not about making sure that the same amount of money gets spent on boys and girls. It is about adopting a process that can disclose how apparently neutral spending may exacerbate existing inequalities. In the case of parks and similar spaces, it is about identifying how spending on teen provision may fail to address the different needs and priorities of girls and boys.

To take a very simply example: data indicates that 85% of skateboarders are male, 15% female. If a council proposes to spend £300,000 on a skatepark, a reasonable gender sensitive budget assumption would be that £45,000 of this spend would benefit girls and women; and £255,000 would benefit boys and men. The gendered nature of the benefit of the cost becomes clearer in financial terms.

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APPENDIX 2

- 1. [Newham Local Plan: Regulation 19 submission June 2024](#)
- 2. [Chelmsford City Council Pre Submission Local Plan Consultation Document Feb 20253](#)
- 3. [South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse District Council Design Guide:](#)
- 4. [TFL's Sustainable Development Framework identifies the importance of a public realm that works for teenage girls to make](#)

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