



Making Space in Chelmsford and Maldon 2024-2026

A strategic approach to changing minds and changing places.
A practical framework of research, best practice and implementation.
Making more parks more inclusive for more teenagers.

This information is intended to support councils that want to take a strategic approach to making more parks and green spaces more inclusive for more teenagers.

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Why do parks need to change?

The following notes are intended to support councils that want to understand why parks need to change to make them more inclusive for more teenagers

Feeling welcome in parks and green spaces matters

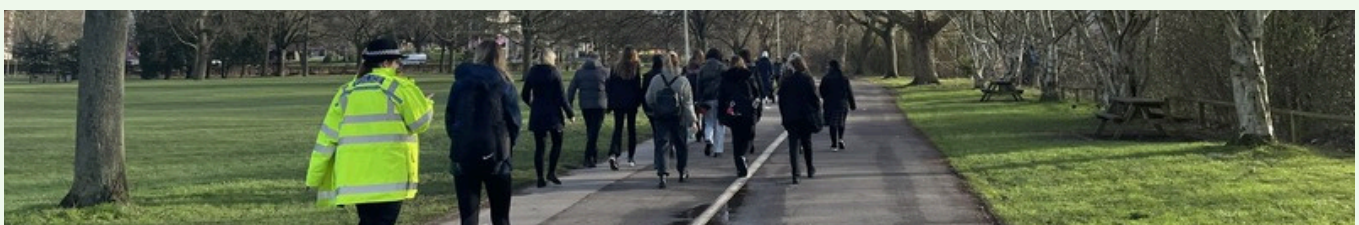
- It matters because being in green space has a **positive impact on adolescent mental health**. Teenagers know this, with **64%** believing that spending time in green space is important for their mental health.
- It matters because parks and green spaces are places where people can be **active without having to pay** fees for gym sessions or organised classes. The NHS recognises that being active matters and that regular **physical activity can make people healthier and happier**.
- It matters because parks and green spaces can be **places where communities come together** in a way that they choose and on their own terms; where different groups meet and recognise that others have a right to occupy shared spaces.
- It matters because children and **young people have a right to play** under the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child **up to the age of 18**. But most of the time, policy makers focus on play for younger children with teenage play ignored or labelled as anti-social behaviour.
- Gender matters in teenage play, as many teenage girls feel unwelcome in parks.
- Urban and suburban parks and green spaces matter a lot. Nearly 83% of England's population lives in urban areas. And cities hold a much larger share of 16–24-year-olds than other areas.

Why focus on the needs of girls

Over the last five years, the charity Make Space for Girls has engaged with more than 500 girls and gender-diverse young people.

- Too often they tell us they don't feel welcome in parks and green spaces.
- Too often spaces for teenagers are dominated by groups of boys.

Girls and gender-diverse young people tell us they feel like they don't belong, or that they're judged for just being there. And there are plenty of boys who don't feel that standard teen provision in parks are for them and would like something different.



Why do parks need to change?



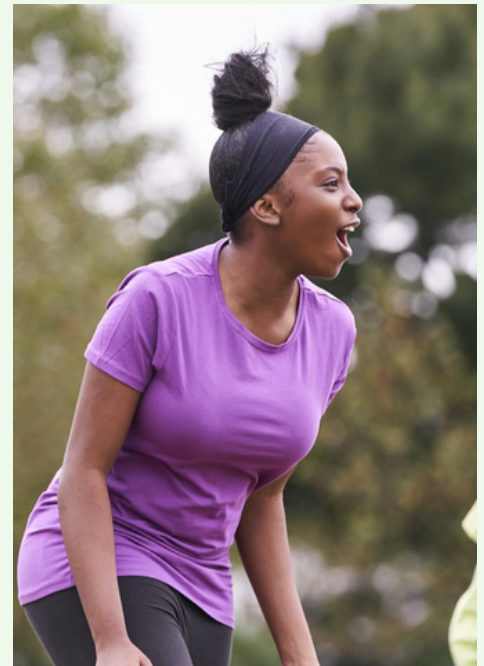
The data back up what girls tell us

- **Only 8%** of teen users of fenced pitches/multi-use games areas in our parks and green spaces are girls.
- **Only 16%** of teen users of skateparks in our parks and green spaces are girls.
- **Only 10%** of the teams who use community pitches in our parks and green spaces are for girls/women.
- **49% of teenage girls** felt unsafe to exercise in their local park compared to 26% of their male peers.
- **Only 22% of teenage girls** in West Yorkshire felt their parks were safe for them, compared to **89% of the park professionals** who looked after those parks.

This data isn't just numbers on a page

It is part of the picture that leaves teenage girls less active and less happy.

- Teenage girls are over **three times more likely** than boys to not feel confident when taking part in physical activity.
- Teenage girls are **16% less likely** to have a positive and meaningful relationship with movement and physical activity than their male peers.
- Teenage girls are **7.9% less likely to average 60+ minutes of being active** a day than their male peers.
- From early adolescence, girls experience a greater risk of low mood and anxiety relative to boys, and from mid-adolescence onwards **girls are twice as likely as boys to report depression**.



We need more parks to be more inclusive for more teenagers.

Feeling welcome in parks and green spaces matters for teenagers. Many teenage girls and gender-diverse young people currently feel unwelcome in parks and green spaces.

If councils can make parks and green spaces more welcoming to teenage girls and gender-diverse young people, they will make parks and green spaces more inclusive for more teenagers, including the boys for whom the current provision doesn't work either.

How can councils make their parks more inclusive for more teenagers?

The following notes set out some principles that a council can adopt to support making more parks more inclusive for more teenagers

More of the same is unlikely to lead to greater inclusion

"If I think about parks, they're either ones that people our age don't want to go to or they are for people much younger than us. I want a park where whatever your age it is suitable for you." [girl, year 9, Essex]

We know resources are scarce: but when resources are available, think about spaces that may work better for teenage girls and gender-diverse young people. Challenging "how it's always been" and "what we have always done" for teen spaces can better equip our communities and our decision makers to think about how parks and green spaces can be made more inclusive for more teenagers. **Don't simply assume that most teenagers want another fenced pitch or skatepark.**



Ask questions

I used to go [to the skatepark] when I was young and my mum would sit on a bench and watch. But I don't go now I am older." [girl Essex, year 9]

90% of council-provided teen spaces in parks and green spaces consist of fenced pitches (multi-use games areas), skateparks and BMX provision. The data shows that these are dominated by boys, with 92% of teen users of fenced pitches and 84% of teen users of skateparks being boys.

As a first step towards parks that are more inclusive for more teenagers, ask questions about the existing outdoor spaces for teenagers. Who is using the fenced pitches and skateparks? Are there outdoor spaces provided for teenage play and socialisation that are neither a skatepark nor a fenced pitch? **Where do you expect to see teenage girls and gender-diverse young people play and socialise in your area?** Are they using the outdoor areas provided for teens?

Engage with teenage girls and gender diverse young people

"Everyone deserves to be heard and listened to. There are many stereotypes of teen girls that loads of people think are true but us teens can show they are false" [girl, year 9, Essex]

Teenage girls and gender-diverse young people are the experts of their own lives and they can easily articulate their unmet wants and needs. **Use long-term and in-depth engagement.**

Using engagement to draw on the local knowledge of teenage girls and gender-diverse young people will often result in decisions and designs that better reflect community needs and aspirations.

How can councils make their parks more inclusive for more teenagers?

Activation is important and this doesn't mean fixing the girls

"The boys own the sporting space a lot more" [girl, year 9, Essex]

Activating spaces so that teenage girls and gender-diverse young people feel welcome is key to helping more parks feel more inclusive for more teenagers. But too often, activation aimed at gender inclusion is equated with running "girls only" sessions at the skatepark or the fenced pitch. Activation needs to go further: it needs to demonstrate that, on a day to day basis, teenage girls and gender-diverse young people are as entitled to use teenage spaces, as their male peers. **The girls don't need to be "fixed"; the spaces need to be fixed.**



Take an expansive view of safety

"How am I to feel safe and sound where I am living if I don't get a say in how/when it changes? [girl, year 9, Essex]

Feeling safe is a subjective experience. Low crime statistics do not automatically translate into a park feeling safe. Safety is not just the absence of violence; it requires not feeling afraid of violence; and it requires a sense of belonging in a place.

Research shows that the presence of groups of boys and men in, and an absence of women and girls from, a park makes it feel unsafe to women and girls. **Encouraging more women and girls into a park will make it feel safer to more women and girls.** This means consciously designing and activating parks in a way that will attract women and girls.

Context is critical

A beautiful teen hang-out space will not work for girls and gender-diverse young people if it is tucked away in a hidden part of the park, away from informal oversight and facilities, or cuts into an area that is already "owned" by other park users (eg dog walkers). It is also important to **consider wider contextual factors that affect communities' use and experience of a park.** For instance, consider how teenagers get to the park, wider park dynamics and amenities around a teenage play area. Understand the amenities that are needed to support teenage girls and gender-diverse people's lives in public, like toilets, lighting, signage and so on.

Small changes count

Changing parks and green spaces so they are more inclusive for more teenagers will take time. It will involve big changes (installing new infrastructure), medium changes (a new approach to activating certain spaces in the park) and small changes (cleaning up the litter and improving the signage). But **whether big or small, incremental change is still change**, and small steps towards creating better spaces for teenage girls and gender-diverse young people are still steps towards making a park more inclusive for more teenagers.

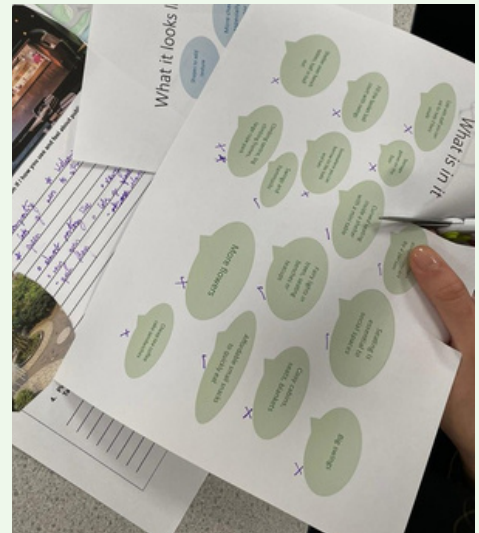
Making Space in Central Park

"I think the best people to ask what teens want is the teens themselves." [girl, year 9, Essex]

The following notes describe a case study in Chelmsford that led to teenage girls and gender-diverse young people changing the minds of local decision makers and changing some of the spaces in their local parks.



Funded by Essex Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner and Active Essex, and led by the Chelmsford City Council's community safety team, a group of students from Boswells School, Chelmsford worked with [Make Space for Girls](#) and [Social Place](#) to explore how Central Park in Chelmsford could become a more inclusive place for more teenagers.



Over a series of six workshops, the group explored the role that public space played in their lives, mapping the local area to understand what different areas felt like: safe; inclusive; and/or a good place for social interaction. The group met with local civic leaders to understand why local policy and politics matter; and with members of the community safety team to understand the role that CCTV played in keeping their city safe. And the group explored how the design of, and activities in Central Park could make the park more inclusive for more teenagers.



The students spent time in Central Park, focussing on entrances, lighting and signposting; active play facilities aimed at teens (the fenced pitch and skatepark); and opportunities for hanging out and socialising, in different seasons, at different times of day.

Although well-made and maintained, the areas in Central Park designed for teens (the skatepark and the fenced pitch) did not appeal to the members of this group. Instead, when looking for a “a space I would use” they identified the need for other spaces for teenagers to socialise, hang out and chill, with seating, swings and hammocks that clearly signalled that they were for teenagers. They talked of ways to be active that weren’t organised sport, the joy of having age-appropriate adventurous play, things to climb on, swing off and jump from.

Making Space in Central Park

"If [they] want to build an area that is safe and inclusive for young people it would be better for them to ask the young people because we may have different opinions from people in the government and council" [girl, year 9, Essex]

Describing a more inclusive park

Key to the success of the case study was to listen to what teenage girls and gender-diverse young people said a good park would feel like for them. Here are some of the things they said:

"A place that lets me know that I'm allowed to be there"

"A place where you feel safe and welcomed, a place of belonging and a place of inclusivity."

"Somewhere where people can interact freely without worrying what other people are going to think."

Is gender relevant to whether a park is inclusive for teenagers?

Some of the students identified as cis young women, some as non-binary and some as trans young men. Bringing their personal experiences to the table, the group discussed whether and how their gender impacted how they felt in public space.

The students had never seen any research about the gendered use of teen facilities in parks. But they knew from their own experience that standard teen provisions in parks (skateparks and fenced pitches/MUGAs) were used a lot more by boys than girls. They knew from their own experience that gender mattered. Here are some of the things that the students said:

"I've experienced worry about going into skateparks that are filled with boys as I'm worried I am going to be made fun of. Gender inequality can make me feel scared and sad."

"To walk past a skate park and see that its filled with men and boys deters and intimidates me from using that space, even though I skate."

"To me, personally as a transgender man, I often feel fearful walking in the streets."

"As a female I feel that heavily male-dominated spaces can be daunting, but they have a right to be there as much as I do."

"As a Muslim woman who wears a headscarf, sometimes I feel uncomfortable like there are people who are judging me."

Workshop Structure

The following notes set out a six-workshop structure that can be adapted by local councils to support teenage girls and gender-diverse young people to articulate their experiences of local parks and green spaces; and to provide meaningful information to a local council that wants to make its parks more inclusive for more teenagers.

"The joyful atmosphere of the sessions created confidence in me to talk freely to everyone"
[feedback from workshop participant]



Workshop 1

Introducing public space: the group explored what counts as public space; who it is designed by; who it is designed for; does it matter for the community, and does it matter to you as a teenager; if someone said "you can never go to the park" would you care and why/why not?

The students also used a large bank of images, words and free text to create mini-magazines with collage and text to explore each student's experience of their local public spaces.

Workshop 2

Using large-scale maps the students analysed different types of public spaces in and around Chelmsford (parks, town centres, nature reserves, leisure centres), assessing them against feelings of safety, inclusion and their potential as a place for social interaction for teenagers.



Workshop 3

The students met with local councillors, Active Essex, police and the local community safety team to understand why local decision making is important to public space. They visited the CCTV control centre to understand the role CCTV played in their local area. They carried out field work in the park to research its strengths and weaknesses in terms of "a space I would use".

"The council in particular made me feel encouraged to give my opinions which made me feel more confident" [feedback from workshop participant]

Workshop Structure

" I feel I understand safe places in Chelmsford more and that I can identify safe spaces and what makes a place safe" [feedback from workshop participant]

Workshop 4

Back in the classroom, the students analysed the park, grouping thoughts around: what's in the park; how should it make you feel; what does it look like; and how is it run. They were asked to think about how they might want things to change in the park to make it more welcoming to them.



Workshop 5

The students moved from analysis of what was already there to become propositional: what needed to change? They selected five images from a large selection, choosing those that best reflected "a place for them" and using these images created boards that captured proposals to create a more inclusive park.

Workshop 6

Recognising the importance of activation in making more parks more inclusive for more teenagers, the group worked in teams to design a poster for an event to be held in Central Park aimed at teenage girls and gender-diverse young people.



Celebration in the park

The ideas from workshop 6 fed into a live event in Central Park, with more than 80 teenage girls and their friends coming together to celebrate their work and the importance of parks that are more inclusive for more teenagers. There were street dancing, yoga and street art workshops; music from a DJ, karaoke and a young, local female artist; fun and games came from Essex Country Cricket. Food and drink and plenty of space to hang out, enjoy the park, knowing that you were definitely supposed to be there and wouldn't be judged.

How did the students' work in Central Park help decision makers?

The following notes share the findings of the teenage girls and gender-diverse young people who took part in this case study

Like any group of any age or gender, the groups' ideas, thoughts and proposals were not homogenous. But some strong common themes emerged, which can support the council to develop parks that are more inclusive for more teenagers. These themes are set out below.

People

The presence of people and particularly women, girls and families in the park made it feel safer. The group valued the use of the park as part of walking and cycle routes. As the group explained: *"More people feels safer" "empty spaces feel more intimidating- nobody around. Dull scary area." "I feel a space is welcoming to me if it feels welcoming to others [eg LGBT] because everyone should have equal rights no matter your beliefs / looks".*

Spaces to socialise

The group proposed a greater variety of places to hang out. Central Park had a limited number of standard park benches but these were not very sociable. The group emphasised the importance for them of seating designed for groups to hang out together and socialise; and how creative, attractive and interesting seating design can signal that this is a place they are supposed to be. As the group explained: *"A social space needs to feel alive (more colourful lighting) and not dull as it gives bad vibes" "Seating is essential to social spaces" "Cosy cabins, seats, blankets to sit on and chill"; "benches in areas people will walk, in easy areas to find".*

Shelter

The group identified the importance of somewhere to shelter- either from a quick rain shower, or for a bit longer on hot sunny days; but none of them valued the typical teen shelter, sold by most play equipment manufacturers, as seen in the Central Park skate park: *"I hate the current shelter and it's the only one." "It's small and awkward".* Instead they wanted areas of shelter that were more welcoming *" half covered, half not, facing the pond" "cover for rain, with open sides when hot, and light under the roof",* with wheelchair access.

Lighting

This was important for the group, especially given Central Park's role as a through route within central Chelmsford. The group explained the need for lighting that spread light well, minimising dark spots and shadows. Proposals included: lighting the trees and surrounding areas (not just the paths); something more interesting than the standard flood-light in the underpass; festoon and fairy lighting linked to seating areas *"more lighting and colour as late at night/winter when it's dark we don't want to play as it's dull and scary".*

How did the students' work in Central Park help decision makers?

Swings

Research consistently shows that swings are very popular with most teenage girls and (perhaps to the surprise of some) with many teenage boys. For example, research done in Yorkshire showed that 75% of girls aged 13-15 said swings for young people their age would make them more active in the park; as did 39% of teen boys. The group had never seen this research: but they were clear they wanted swings. The swings should be clearly identified as for use by teenagers (not for little kids) and could be part of a wider area in the park for teenagers to hang out, without being judged. *"everyone loves swings" "fill the basketball court with swings" "Canopy swings" "Big Swings"*.

Colour

Colour in the design of parks was important, with the group emphasising the value of flowers, greenery and features to make the park feel more alive especially during the winter months: *"more flowers on the outskirts of the main field" "Wild flowers and more flowers"*.

Activity and adventure

Although the fenced pitch and skatepark didn't appeal, the group did focus on being active. They suggested areas that are adventurous, like a climbing wall, or obstacle course. They proposed a *"climbing centre, big climbing frames, large rope park" "Difficult to pin point... but something more exclusive to us [young people]...dangerous for [little] kids"*, with *"Somewhere you can borrow sports equipment and give it back"*

Finding your way

Knowing where things are, like the toilets, café, nearest exits, way to shops etc makes a place feel safer. The group proposed welcoming and creative signage- showing exits to the road, where facilities are (cafes, toilets), and creative signs intentionally designating young people spaces etc. *"naming/labelling areas clearly" "Knowing where you are, better communication, safer" "optimistic signs" "eat and chill out here"*.

Impact of Making Space in Central Park

The following notes explain how the learning from this case study can be used as part of a strategic approach that can change minds about how parks can be made more inclusive for more teenagers.

"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

Changing Minds



The work of the Boswell's students was captured in a report which can be found [here](#). And their work was foundational to the development of a strategic approach to making parks in Chelmsford and Maldon more welcoming to teenage girls and gender-diverse young people.

A strategic approach that has led to changes being made in parks, to holding events to bring more teenage girls and gender-diverse young people into the park, to changes in local policies and plans, and to changes in how people locally think about spaces for teenagers in parks.

Presenting their own ideas

Too often the product of engagement with young people doesn't leave the pages of a report. Chelmsford and Maldon Councils were determined this shouldn't happen. Recognising the value to the council and the young people of presenting their own work, the students explained their findings in the formal council chamber in front of parents, teachers, councillors and council staff. Students used their work to address over 200 delegates at the "2024 Essex Police: Towards Excellence Conference".



Extending to other schools

One of students' ideas was to invite local primary schools to get involved. This happened when a park underpass was refurbished and primary school students took a lead in designing and creating the artwork on the walls. More secondary schools got involved and Chelmsford City Council used its career fair (Skills Fest) to ask over 350 young people to show the council what facilities in parks they felt were most "for them".



This strategic approach at Chelmsford City and Maldon District councils has led to in-depth consultation with 93 teenage girls and gender-diverse young people across Essex. They have analysed 15 different sites and proposed improvements in seven different parks.

Impact of Making Space in Central Park

Changing Minds

Supporting Parish Councils

Many of the local parks and green spaces around Chelmsford and Maldon are run by local parish councils and community trusts. This project has formed the foundation for the work of making more parks more inclusive for more teenagers to be rolled out cost-effectively in these areas.

The link to safer places for all

The strategy focussed on the links between outdoor teen spaces and feeling safe in parks. This approach saw a conference in May 2025 that brought together stakeholders from across Essex working in the field of parks, public realm and Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG), as captured in a report which can be found [here](#).

In September 2025, a national sub-working group of Designing Out Crime Officers (DOCOs) for matters concerning VAWG focussed on this work. And later in the year it was covered in a discussion session of DOCOs from around the Eastern Region.



Innovation in funding

The strategy also saw Chelmsford and Maldon Councils being innovative in their approach to funding, both in terms of seeking funding and in terms of supporting grant makers. For example, in addition to funding from Essex Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner, the council secured funding from the UK Shared Prosperity Fund and allocated funding from the Community Infrastructure Levy to support this strategic approach.

In terms of supporting grant makers, the council shared learning with Active Essex, where the approach fitted within Active Essex "Fit for the Future" strategy, prioritising inclusion, safe and accessible spaces for women and girls. The work also supported Active Essex' Places and Spaces Funding providing resources to encourage community groups to apply for grants to make teenage girls feel more welcome in their green spaces.

Impacting new housing developments

The strategy has extended beyond its original target of making changes to existing parks, to include shaping new green infrastructure, as areas in Chelmsford are considered for new residential development. For example, the team behind East Chelmsford Garden Community, a large scale residential development, are engaging with the work of this strategy as part of their master planning process aiming to make more parks more inclusive for more teenagers from the outset.

Impacting new local plans

The strategy was further embedded through local plans (for example in Chelmsford and Basildon) being drafted to reference the importance of recognising the needs of teenage girls and gender-diverse young people in the design of parks and green spaces, to make more parks more inclusive for more teenagers.

Impact of Making Space in Central Park

The following notes explain how the learning from this case study can be used as part of a strategic approach within a council with simple examples of changes to spaces in parks aimed to make more parks more welcoming to more teenagers.

Changing Places

"This is a fantastic project and the engagement from the young people involved has been inspiring. I hope the students... are proud of their hard work and pleased with how their designs have been brought to life!" Councillor Donna Eley, Cabinet Member for a Safer Chelmsford

At Central Park, Chelmsford, a teen hang-out area with beautiful planting and attractive lighting, tables for chess, and bike racks, all near the community café, show how the ideas of the participants can be turned into reality, improving the park for all its users without the need for budget-busting investment.



Angel Meadow, Chelmsford has seen a local green space brightened up by simple low-cost actions inspired by the girls' work, like decorating the parking bollards, a mural celebrating the nature of the park and replacing the old metal shelter with a welcoming colourful one that teenagers want to use.



Impact of Making Space in Central Park

At Promenade Park, Maldon

Creative seating with sails for cover at the waterside provides an area to hang out with friends.

Young people produced the wall art that brightened up the walls at the toilet block, sending a positive message.



The commissioning of an updated skatepark was already in train when this strategy was being developed. But the skatepark design team were interested in creating a more inclusive skatepark and drew on the work of teenage girls in Maldon to create a design aimed at encouraging more teenage girls to skate in Prom Park. It will be interesting to see whether, in practice, this innovative design leads to more equal use between boys and girls.



Instead of a standard metal teen shelter, a timber, green-roofed shelter was installed, the students challenging what adults saw as a “good design” for teens, proposing a design that supported nature.

And these images are just the story so far. Soon work will start at other sites, all part of the strategic approach that started with the amazing work of the students at Boswells.



“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, The Boswells School

Embedding design for better teenage space in Local Plans and Policies

The following notes are intended to support councils that want to use their local policies and plans to make parks that are more inclusive for more teenagers.

Identify barriers in existing documents

Start with existing policies and planning documents to identify any 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 are a great place to embed principles for parks and green spaces that are more inclusive for more teenagers. But progress doesn't have to wait for the next iteration of the Local Plan. Neighbourhood plans, supplementary planning documents, play and open space strategies, policies and action plans all have the potential to create a policy environment that encourages developers and communities to think about parks and green spaces more inclusively.

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, skateparks, 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”. By drafting plan and policy documents to challenge and change this narrative, councils can prompt developers to think more creatively.

Involve teenage girls and gender-diverse young people in policy/plan consultation processes

There is a democratic deficit when it comes to local planning policy and young people. The usual routes for consultation on local plans and similar policy documents are unlikely to reach young people. The documents are lengthy and hard to navigate. Standard “town hall” and other drop-in events are not on their radar, and if they are, don't seem to be aimed at them. And most young people simply are not aware that a local council would value their input into a local plan. This means finding new ways to engage with young people, via schools, youth groups and a council's wider youth strategy.

Embedding design for better teenage space in Local Plans and Policies

Be explicit

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 more 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 make more parks more inclusive for more teenagers.

Change can come about if these documents highlight the need for social hangout spaces, swings, things to climb on, adventure equipment and other opportunities for informal active play for teenagers.

Be local

Cookie cutter wording, or a “cut-and-paste” from another council’s policies will not capture the needs and ambitions of a local community.

The council’s own planning team, with their local knowledge and experience, building on the engagement they have done with local young people, are best placed to translate these needs and ambitions into plans and policies.

We know it can be daunting to start with a clean sheet of paper - so below are some examples of how different authorities have addressed in their policy documents how to make more parks more inclusive for more teenagers.

The Chelmsford City Council Pre-Submission Local Plan Consultation Document Feb 2025 [Pre Submission Consultation 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)”

tFL’s Sustainable Development Framework: [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.”

Basildon Local Plan Consultation: Reasoned Justification for policy DP1: Design and Place Shaping Principles

9.9 To improve inclusivity across Basildon and address the underrepresentation of teenage girls, young women, and gender-diverse youth in public spaces, the Council commissioned a report from Social Place (a research, engagement, and design specialist), Make Space for Girls (a national campaigning charity), and Bar'N Bus (an Essex-based charity delivering professional, community-based youth work)...This report offers inspiration for activating underutilised areas in Basildon through inclusive, creative, and community-led approaches.

South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse District Council Design Guide: ([Space and layout \(southoxon.gov.uk\)](https://www.southoxon.gov.uk)).

“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.”

Scottish Government: Play Vision and Action Plan 2025-30

6. Develop Guidance for Public Bodies to support access to play by specific groups of children, acknowledging their specific needs and obstacles they face.

6.2 Working with our partners in local government, share effective practice on maintenance and development of free, accessible and inclusive public spaces, including principles for design and maintenance of public spaces to create an environment where girls feel safe and welcome in public play spaces. (by end of 2026)

Scottish Play Sufficiency Guidance

Play opportunities for all children

para 65. Protected characteristics. To support advancing equality and eliminating discrimination, planning authorities are encouraged to carry out their [assessments] taking into account the interests of children of all ages, of different gender, with different abilities and from different social, cultural, racial and religion backgrounds along with other protected characteristics. Understanding the demographic profile of the child population of the area will help inform planning authorities of where there is a need to reach out to and engage with those relevant groups of children to understand any specific needs and identify gaps in provision...

para 72 Some research in UK has highlighted concerns around the restriction placed on girls in play spaces in comparison to boys. [Make Space for Girls^{\[19\]}](#) highlighted how girls can be crowded out of parks and equipment, how their needs are mostly ignored and that parks, play equipment and public spaces for older children and teenagers are often designed for the default male.

"More people feels safer - empty spaces feel more intimidating when nobody is around."

"A place to go no matter what you have or who you are."

"We want lots of people there to feel safe."



lighting



swings

social tables



social seating

sheltered spaces

"More lighting and colour as late at night/winter when it's dark we don't want to play as its dull and scary."



trampoline



climbing wall

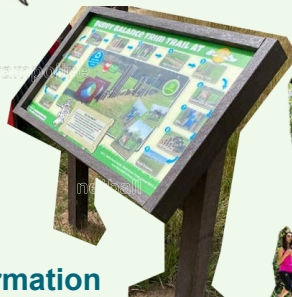


netball



fountains and water

"[A shelter should be] a space you can escape to if you have an argument with mum."



information board



non traditional gym



art and colour

"Knowing where you are, better communication, safer ... optimistic signs [like] eat and chill out here signs."



clean attractive toilets



planting

"Wild flowers and more flowers."



food trucks

"Something nice to look at."

fire pits

out door cinema



Practical Tips to make more parks more inclusive for more teenagers

The following notes are intended to provide some practical tips for councils that want to adopt a strategic approach to making more parks more inclusive for more teenagers.

Spread the word within your council

People across different teams within the council will need to be involved in making decisions that will lead to parks being more welcoming to teenage girls and gender-diverse young people and hence more inclusive for more teenagers. Spread the word internally and make sure people understand what the intention is, and as importantly what it is not.

Adopting a strategic approach to making parks more inclusive for more teenagers, by designing and activating them to be welcoming for teenage girls 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; and it is not about getting rid of MUGAs and skateparks.

It is about recognising that currently teen provisions in parks are, sadly, highly gendered and dominated by (some) boys and young men, with many teenage girls and 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 teenage girls and gender-diverse young people. It is about being creative in how parks and green spaces can help make young people feel visible, welcome, comfortable and respected.

Ensure you have the comms 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 strategy 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.

It is easy for people to misunderstand and think that making parks more inclusive for more teenagers is about pushing out the teenage boys who currently predominate in the skateparks and fenced pitches. It is not: **it is about bringing different groups of teenagers into the park, so that more of them can benefit in the same brilliant way.**

"We were introduced by some partners to the charity Make Space for Girls, and once we saw what they were doing, working with them was a no brainer. With their help, we were able to look at our parks and green spaces through a new lens and see that, like in many places across the country, there was not a lot there for young teenage girls" Public Protection Manager, Chelmsford.

Practical Tips to make more parks more inclusive for more teenagers

Engage with teenage girls and gender diverse young people about parks and green spaces



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

This generally means that the views of teenage girls and gender-diverse young people simply don't get heard and **leads to parks and green spaces 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". Reaching out to teenage girls and gender-diverse young people can help address this feeling that parks and green spaces are not relevant to them.

Review tender processes and challenge suppliers

A common observation from playground equipment providers that want to provide spaces that are more inclusive for more teenagers is that tenders can often be 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. Suppliers argue that **the tender process restricts their scope to propose a more inclusive space**.

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**.



Practical Tips to make more parks more inclusive for more teenagers

Partner with local community groups

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

Each community partnership will be different but **the following ideas can help kick-start** an approach to making more parks more inclusive to more teenagers that is rooted in the community.

- **Let people know your council's commitment:** if your council is committed to making parks that are more welcoming to teenage girls and gender-diverse young people, and as a result more inclusive for more teenagers, tell 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. Participants will appreciate the clarity and it helps avoid disappointment.
- **Be flexible:** for example, if you have a policy document that states eg that an existing MUGA or pitch must always be replaced by a MUGA or pitch, consider whether that policy is right for that particular location and that particular community.
- **Access to providers:** when working with parish councils and community groups the first question they may ask is "how much would a space like this cost?". As a council you can utilise connections with equipment manufacturers to help the group get indicative prices and support them to manage the contracting process.
- **Access to funding:** Charities/community groups can often access funds and grants that a local council cannot; providing support to a community group to help with grant applications can support change. 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?



"I feel heard. It means that my ideas are being considered in the community that I am living in"
[girl, year 9, Essex]

Where we refer to boys and girls, young men and young women, these categories refer to gender identities, not biological sex. We recognise that the concept of gender is not binary nor invariable or biologically determined, but, rather, socially constructed. Our work aims to be inclusive of non-binary and gender-diverse young people. Where we refer to boys and girls, young men and young women, we include cis and trans young people.

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Thank you!



