

Environment, Community Safety and Engagement Scrutiny Commission

Wednesday 15 October 2025

7.00 pm

Ground Floor Meeting Room G02B - 160 Tooley Street, London SE1
2QH

Supplemental Agenda

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Item No.	Title	Page No.
5. Make Space For Girls	Make Space for Girls have provided the enclosed presentation as evidence to support the Play-spaces review. Nadine Peters, Trustee, and Imogen Clark, Associate, will present.	1 - 16
6. London Play	Fiona Sutherland from London Play will attend to provide evidence for the Play-spaces review. A presentation is enclosed.	17 - 30

Contact

Julie Timbrell on 020 7525 0514 or email: julie.timbrell@southwark.gov.uk

Date: 3 November 2025

Make Space for Girls

Evidence for Southwark Environment,
Community Safety and Engagement
Scrutiny Commission on Play Spaces

Nadine Peters, trustee & Imogen Clark, associate
Make Space for Girls
15 October 2025

website: makespaceforgirls.co.uk
Email: makespaceforgirls@gmail.com



Who are we?

- A charity working across the UK to make parks, town centres and similar spaces **more welcoming** to:
 - teenage girls;
 - non-binary young people; and
 - teenage boys for whom current provision doesn't work
- Worked with **over 270** young women and gender diverse young people; hearing **their experience of public space**; building an evidence base; reducing the guesswork



MSFG is about Play!

- Self motivated, self directed, creative, social.
- Many people associate “play” with the under 12s and exclude older children
- Teenagers have a **right to play** under the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child - up to age 18
- What does teenage play look like?
“loitering with others, sizing people up, talking, pushing, shoving and horseplay. Adolescents are always criticised for this kind of loitering, but they can hardly grow up without it”.... Jane Jacobs
- [Older-children-play-too_2024.pdf](#)



Play provision for teens

- When facilities for informal play are built for teenagers they are almost always:
 - Skate park;
 - MUGA or basketball court, or both; or
 - BMX track
- Parkwatch Survey findings: September 2023
92% of MUGA users are boys and young men
84% of skatepark users are boys and young men

Survey of 265 assessments of teen facilities including 117 assessments on 87 different MUGAs and 100 assessments on 81 different skate parks.
- Research in Yorkshire: July 2022: (Make Space for Us)
59% of girls don't feel welcome in parks because the spaces are dominated by boys



Why do parks feel unsafe?

- Research by the University of Leeds: supports the contention that “**not feeling safe**” in the park is a **major barrier** to the use of parks by teenage girls, whilst 89% of park professionals thought parks are safe for women and girls, **only 22% of teenage girls felt the same**.
-
- Research by Yorkshire Sport and Women in Sport, identified **49% of girls aged 13-15 felt unsafe** to exercise in the park compared to **26%** of boys of the same age
- Girls aged 13-15 expressed a ranges of views as: 3 main “camps”

Society

It's men and boys generally - they are a threat wherever you are in the public realm; society needs to change

People

It's the people in the park, often large groups of teenage boys - intimidation and harassment in the park; this needs to change

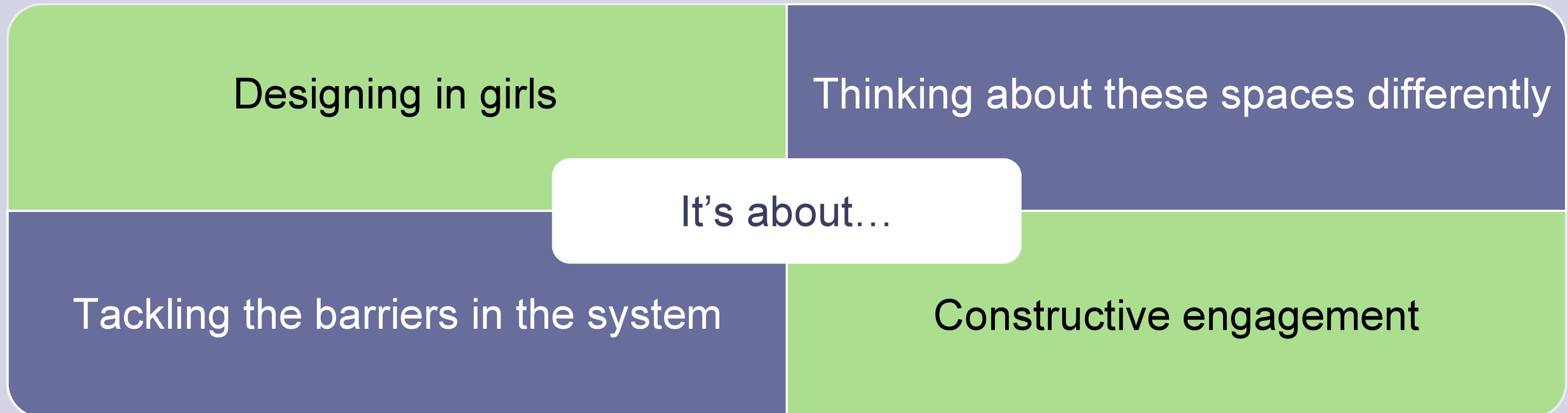
Facilities

There's much that can be done to make parks feel safer, such as more security, lots of exits, visible staffing and policing, better facilities and fostering busyness

What we have now is gender segregation in teenage play provision.

→ We want to change that

- It isn't about painting things pink, creating gender segregation, or designing out boys



Rebalance the gendered use of parks:

- Provide alternatives to MUGAs skateparks and BMX tracks as teenage spaces.
- Create spaces where teenage girls, young women and gender diverse young people feel they have a right to be.

Sociable seating and shelters - spaces for multiple groups; things to climb on

Reading nooks and book exchanges

Swings that are clearly not for “little kids”

Stages for performing on

Places to chill out, decompress, “*a place to go when I have had a row with my mum*”

Malmo, Rosens Rodd Matta

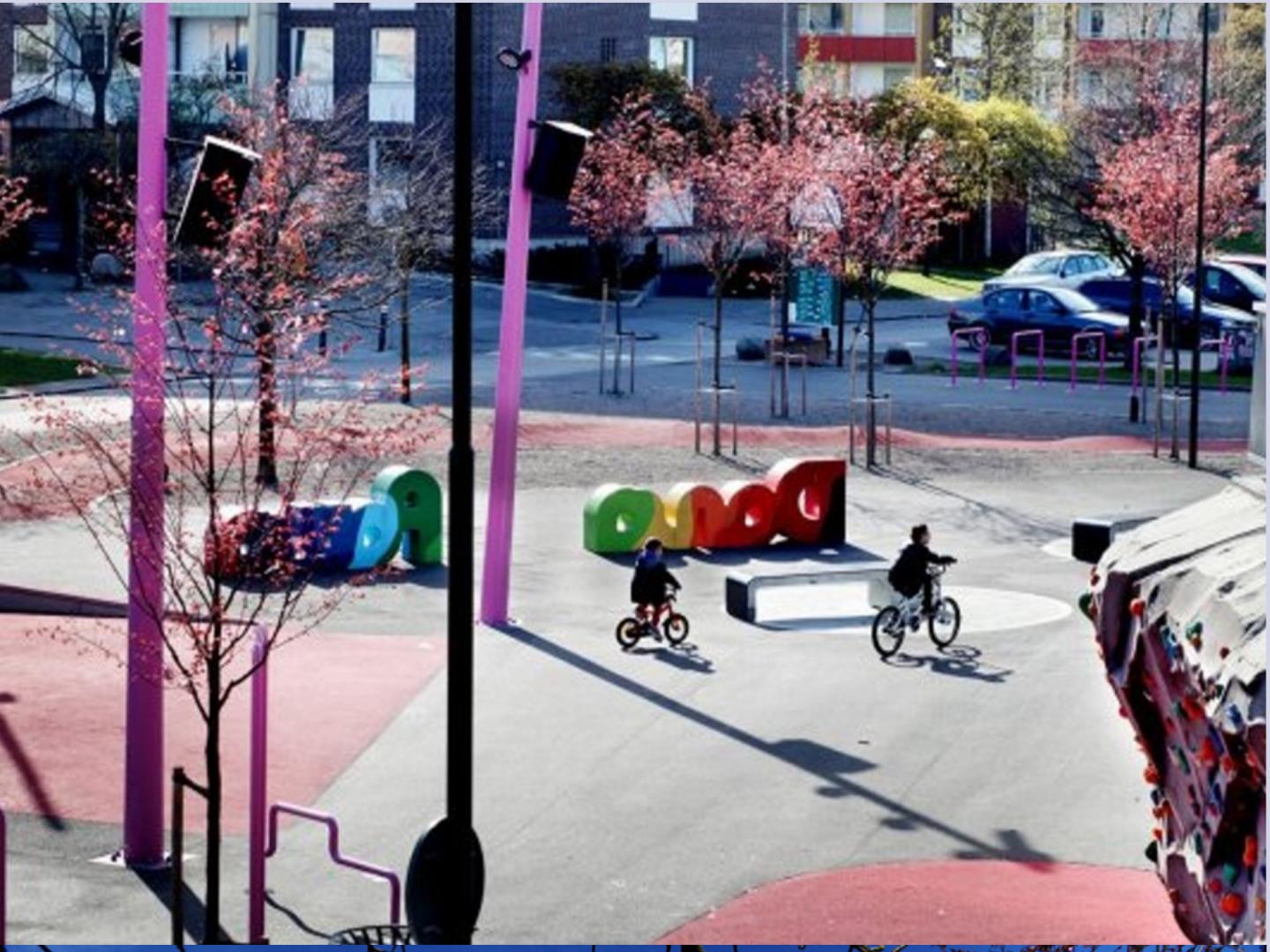
The only park in Europe designed by, with and for girls.

Location: Old car park in disadvantaged suburb.

Design Process: In consultation with a group of girls from the area, aged 16-24.

The result.... was an urban activity park with:

- A climbing wall
- Stage for performances
- A set of bars for climbing and gymnastics
- Series of smaller spaces so that no one group can dominate.



Gaukel Street Parkette

The Deconstructed Heart was designed, in consultation with teen girls, to be a welcoming and playful public space for their specific demographic.

The three sections inside the Heart structure have a semi-private feeling of enclosure but offer enough transparency for a sense of safety.

The curve of the interior space allows for small groups of girls to sit face-to-face inside each segment.

- Space to hang out
- Curved for good sightlines
- Ergonomically designed to fit teenage girls



MSFG work in Chelmsford and Maldon 2024-2025

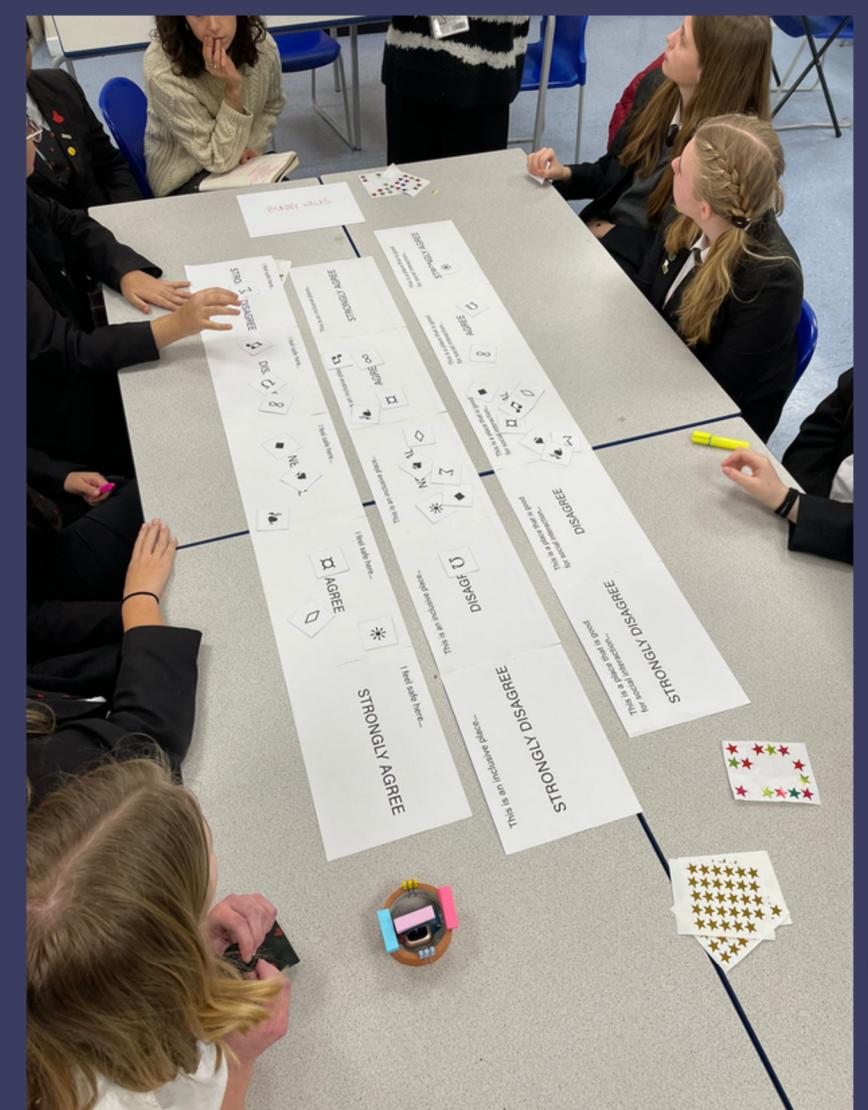
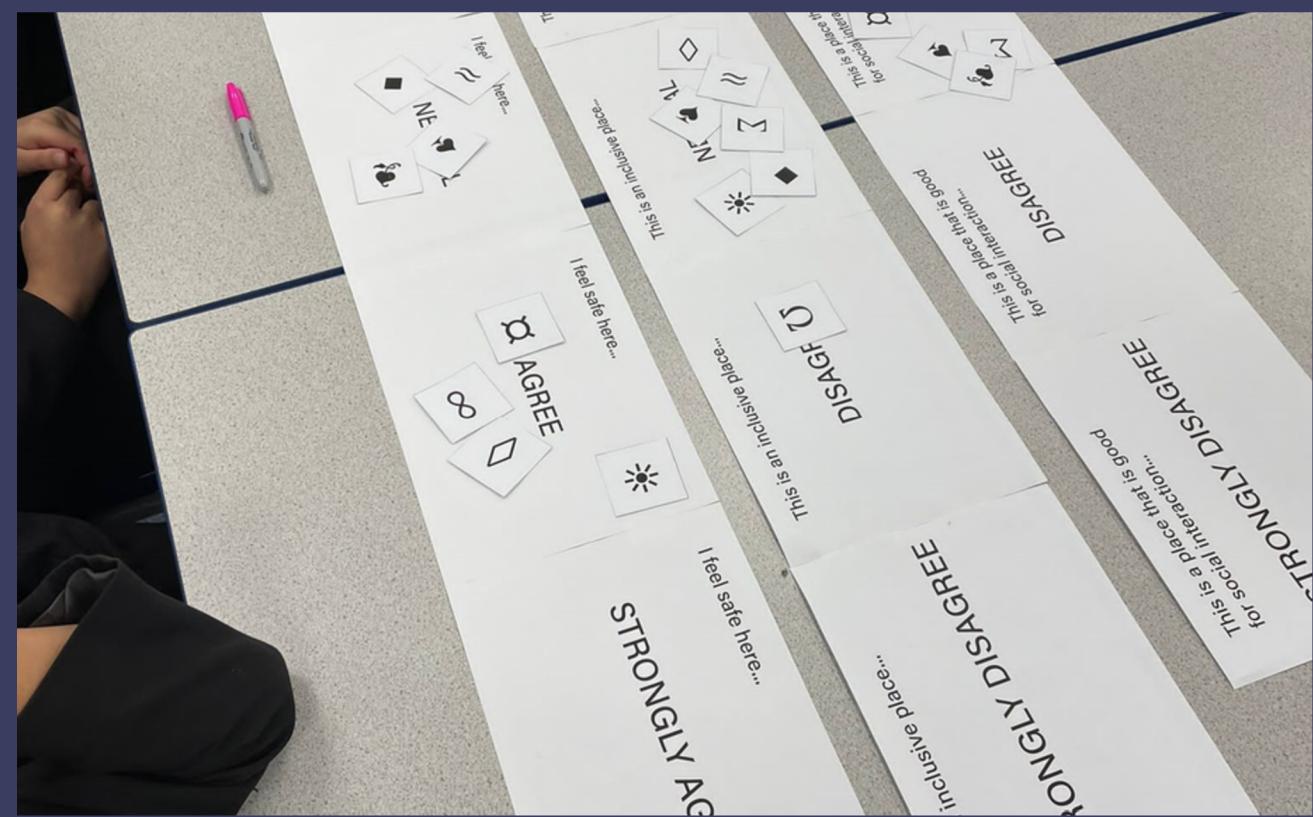
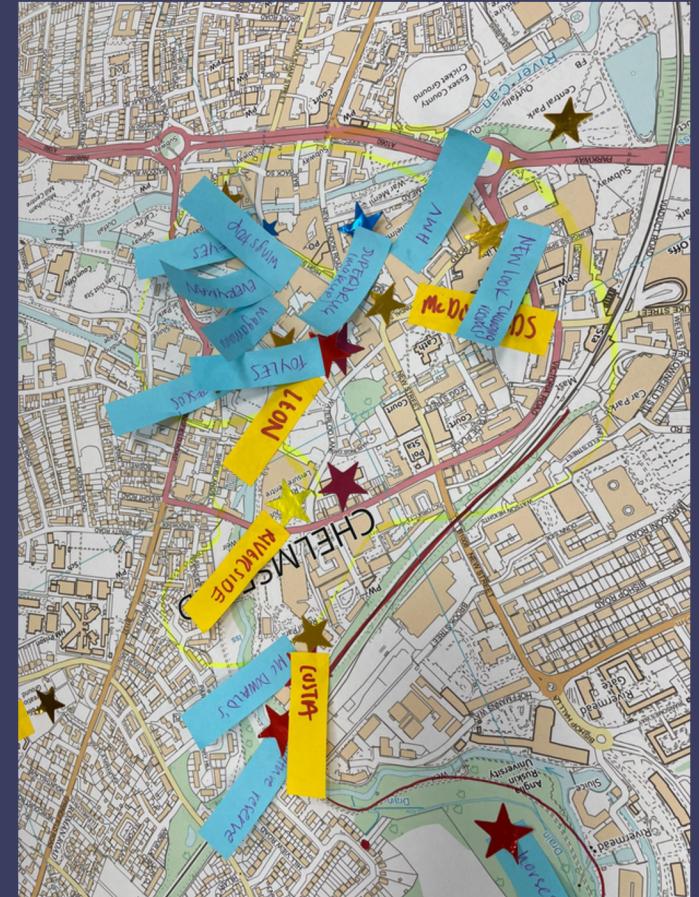
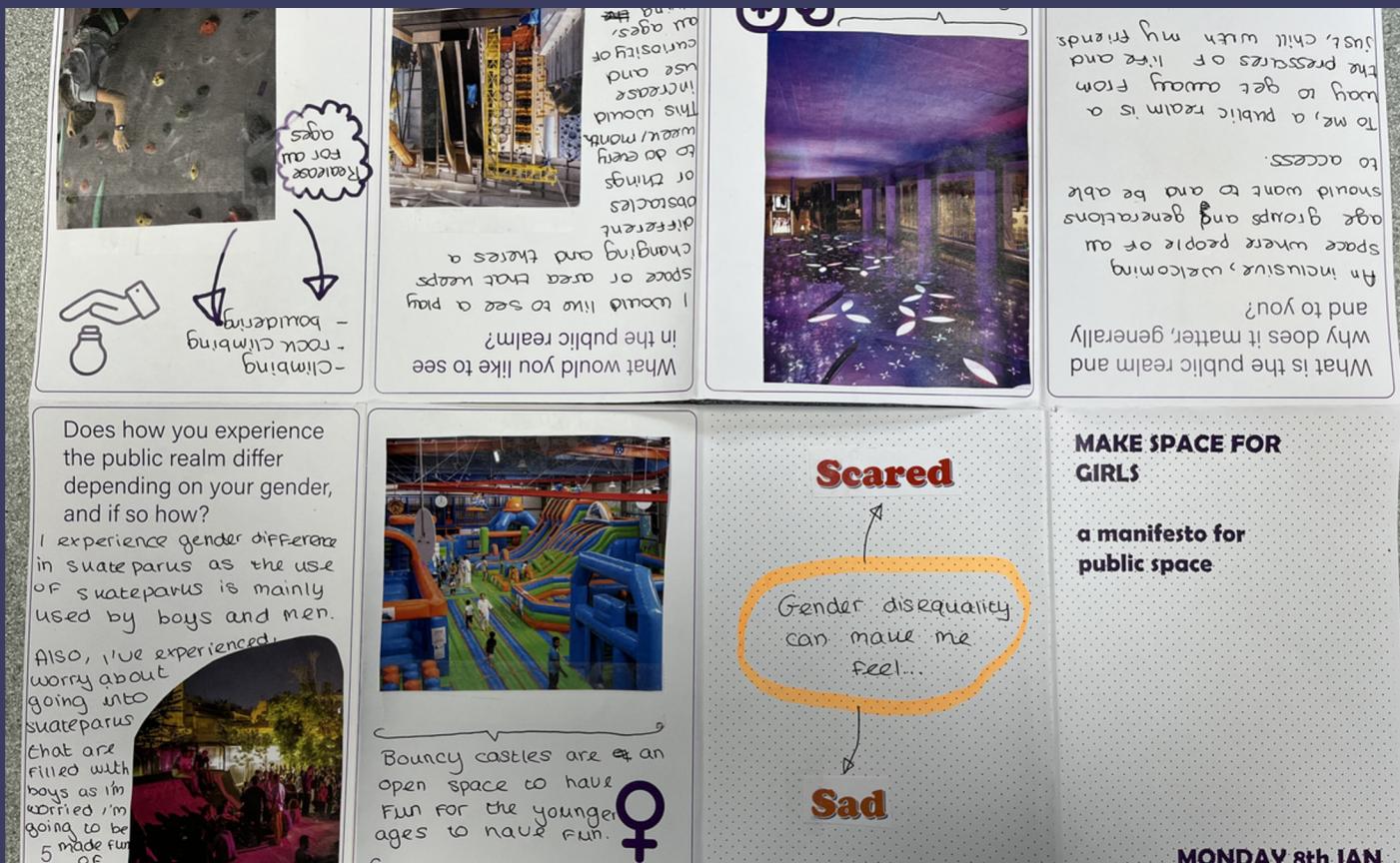
a good local park should be...

*“a place where you feel safe and welcomed, a place of belonging
and a place of inclusivity”*

Workshops 1 &2

The objectives of the project:

- The project involved working with 38, Yr 9 students to empower and explore with young women and gender diverse people (the participants) how they use the public realm and what changes they would propose to make specific local parks more welcoming to them.
- We worked across 3 schools in Chelmsford and Maldon, looking at 3 parks across the area.
- Use those findings to inform and influence local decision-makers practically and strategically, placing the participants' voices at the centre of reporting and presenting their work.



Site Visits

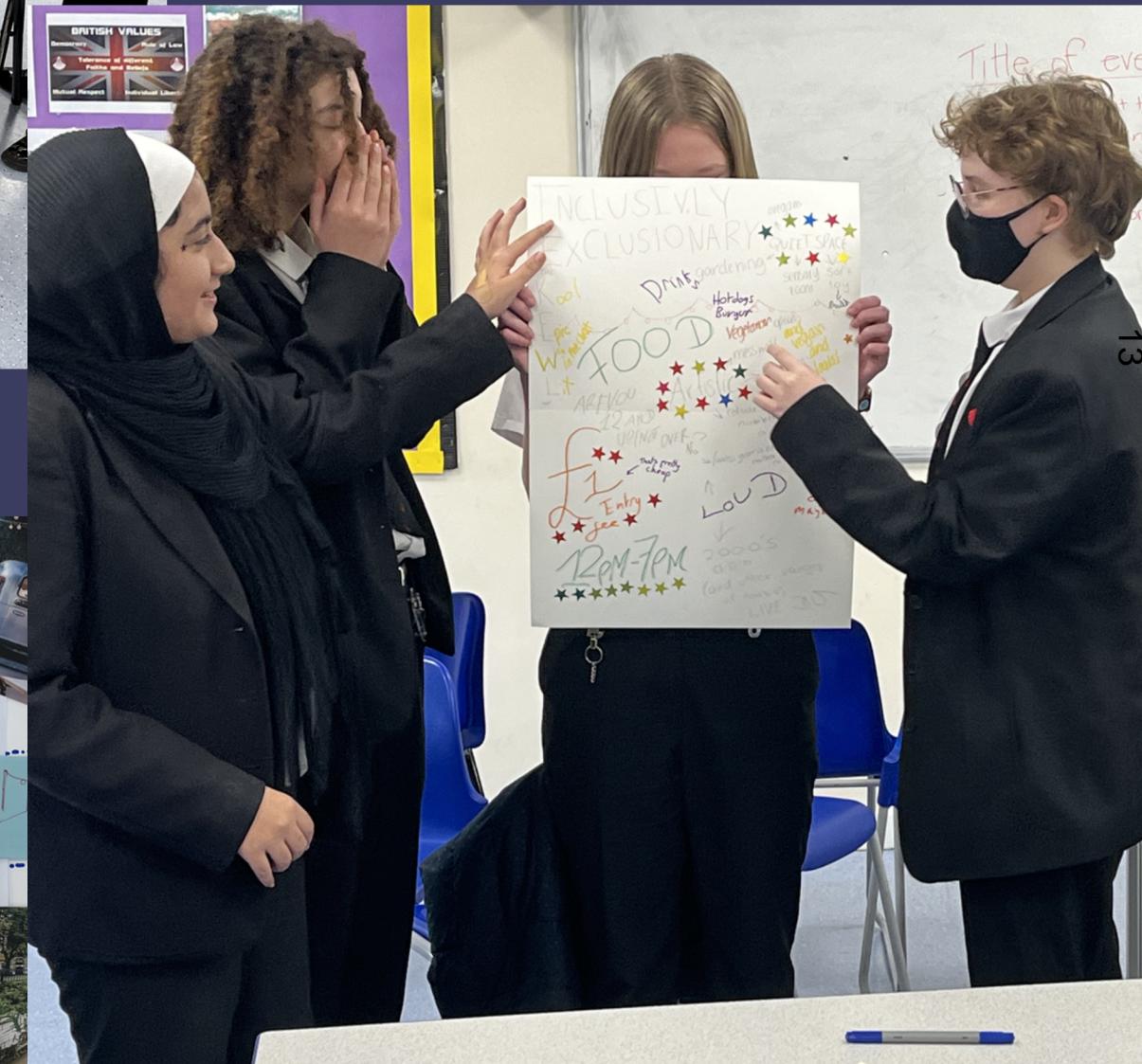
The workshop structure covered:

- 15 workshops over, 7 months (Jan to Jul 2024).
- An introduction to public space; why it matters; how gender influences its use. The participants reflected on this and explored the public spaces they used and why.
- An exploration of mapping and its role in evidencing issues in public space. The participants mapped how they used their local area; each group identified different lenses to analyse their local provision (eg. safety, inclusivity, judgement)



Workshops 4,5 & 6

- A consideration of design's importance to spatial experiences. The participants visited their focus parks.
- Engagement by the participants with local decision makers.
- The participants proposing temporary and permanent park interventions 'for them'.



Winner of Thornton Educational Trust Award 2024

TET run awards annually to recognise excellence in projects working to engage young people with the built environment. TET listed 9 finalists in our category, from much bigger organisations (eg Grimshaws/London School of Architecture/Stanton Williams). This MSFG/SP project won!



“

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

– Participant

”

Route 2: build on the positive ideas teenage girls have

- Use design/colour to signal: “this is a space where teenage girls are supposed to be”
- Lighting - beyond key pathways; general illumination, avoiding sharp glare and shadow; creative, warm; festoon; colourful LED
- Use of public art and pictures (murals, paths, painted bins and benches)
- Signage and way-finding: navigation of a space; information about activities and staffing; more than just functional - creative and optimistic
- Clean toilets with attractive approaches
- Affordable food options



TOWARDS A MORE PLAYFUL, VIBRANT SOUTHWARK

Fiona Sutherland, London Play

fiona.sutherland@londonplay.org.uk

LONDON **PLAY**



London Play

Established 1998, a small charity with a big vision:

“For every child in London to have the space, time and freedom to play outside daily, near to where they live.”



LONDON **PLAY**



How we work

Adventure play: supporting and championing London's staffed adventure playgrounds

Doorstep play: helping residents reclaim streets, estates & public spaces with play

Campaigning: building public support for play, in collaboration with local groups plus leading London-wide campaigns

Advocacy: working with decision makers to influence policy and practice.

LONDON
PLAY



What is play?

“Play encompasses children’s behaviour which is freely chosen, personally directed and intrinsically motivated.

It is performed for no external goal or reward and is a fundamental and integral part of healthy development — not only for individual children but also for the society in which they live.”

SUSAN ISAACS

“It’s what I do when everyone else stops telling me what to do.”

ONE CHILD’S DEFINITION



Why does play matter?

Fundamental to healthy happy childhoods:

- Mental and physical health
- Emotional & social development
- Creativity and social skills
- Communication, cooperation

AND! to thriving, cohesive communities:

- Brings diverse residents together
- Safer, friendlier streets
- More active travel, use of green space
- Free doorstep play is accessible to all

ARTICLE 31 UNCRC: RIGHT TO PLAY

Kids in London need play!

- 1 in 4 children obese, mental health problems rising
- 1 in 4 live in overcrowded homes (~90,000 in temporary accommodation)
- Only one playground per 866 children, streets dominated by cars
- Only 27% play outside regularly; over half don't get enough exercise
- Poorer areas, Black/Brown families, and SEND children have less access to play



LONDON **PLAY**

Why play isn't prioritised

- Right to play not enshrined in English domestic law
- Children can't vote: voices rarely heard
- Play has an 'image problem': seen as frivolous
- Strained public finances: non statutory services at risk





Southwark's play audit: a strong start

- 260+ play areas (60 parks/204 estates)
- 70% no major investment >12 years
- 53% not accessible
- Most in areas of deprivation
- £3m capital programme + Play Working Group established

The policy moment

- Play Commission report
- Planning Bill Amendment – proposed Play Sufficiency Duty
- All Party Parliamentary Group on Play established
- Call for National Play Strategy and funding for play



From audit to action in Southwark

- Audit shows assets and gaps
- Lack information on quality of play, resident views
- National policy window for action
- Borough-wide Play Strategy can coordinate action





Why a strategy matters

- Play beyond playgrounds: parks, streets, estates
- Ensure inclusivity – girls, teens, SEND, temporary housing
- Understand barriers (traffic, fear, maintenance)
- Connect play to council priorities: health, housing, safety, environment, culture
- Measure quality, not just quantity

Listening & co-producing

- Co-production connects everything: inclusivity, barriers, quality
- Engage children, families & residents
- Prioritise excluded voices: girls, teens, SEND, temporary housing
- Combine audit data & lived experience
- Test ideas through pop-ups & pilots

LONDON
PLAY



A Playful Southwark

- Develop a borough-wide Play Strategy
- Recognise play happens everywhere: playgrounds, parks, streets, estates
- Address barriers: safety, access, traffic, perception
- Embed engagement & co-production
- Focus on quality not just quantity
- Sustain coordination - keep the Play Working Group visible and resourced



