

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

Membership

Councillor Esme Hicks (Chair)
Councillor Graham Neale (Vice-Chair)
Councillor Sabina Emmanuel
Councillor Hamish McCallum
Councillor David Parton
Councillor Leo Pollak

Reserves

Councillor Rachel Bentley
Councillor Sunil Chopra
Councillor Esme Dobson
Councillor Youcef Hassaine
Councillor Adam Hood
Councillor Darren Merrill
Councillor Reginald Popoola

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

Members of the committee are summoned to attend this meeting

Althea Loderick

Chief Executive

Date: 7 October 2025



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7.00 pm
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Order of Business

Item No.	Title	Page No.
1.	APOLOGIES	
	To receive any apologies for absence.	
2.	NOTIFICATION OF ANY ITEMS OF BUSINESS WHICH THE CHAIR DEEMS URGENT	
	In special circumstances, an item of business may be added to an agenda within five clear working days of the meeting.	
3.	DISCLOSURE OF INTERESTS AND DISPENSATIONS	
	Members to declare any interests and dispensations in respect of any item of business to be considered at this meeting.	
4.	MINUTES	1 - 8
	The minutes of the meeting held on 16 July 2025 are enclosed; to be agreed as an accurate record.	
5.	MAKE SPACE FOR GIRLS	9 - 27
	Make Space For Girls have provided the enclosed report as evidence to support the Play-spaces review.	
	Nadine Peters, Trustee, and Imogen Clark, Associate, will present.	

Item No.	Title	Page No.
6.	LONDON PLAY	
	Fiona Sutherland from London Play will attend to provide evidence for the Play-spaces review.	
	More information on their work can be found here: https://londonplay.org.uk/	
7.	INTERVIEW: CABINET MEMBER FOR LEISURE, PARKS & YOUNG PEOPLE	
	The commission will interview Cllr Portia Mwangangye, Cabinet Member for Leisure, Parks & Young People, on the following aspects of her portfolio:	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leisure centres - management of the councils' leisure centres, swimming pools and gyms • Sport - management of the council's multi-sport, athletics, football, tennis and cycling facilities; supporting and promoting grassroots sports; and the council's relationship with local sports clubs • Libraries - council's libraries, heritage and archives service • Parks and Play - parks, green spaces, adventure play, playgrounds, including on the council's estates • Biodiversity and trees - tree planting and maintenance; increasing biodiversity and nature • Gardening - community gardening, food-growing and allotments, including on the councils' estates 	
8.	STREETS FOR PEOPLE - ZONING CONSULTATION	
9.	SCRUTINY REVIEW REPORT: EXPLORING THE PHYSICAL AND MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING IMPACTS OF ACTIVE TRAVEL AND ACCESS TO NATURE	28 - 60
	The final report, completed by last year's Environment Scrutiny Commission, is enclosed to note.	
10.	WORK PROGRAMME	61 - 71

EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

The following motion should be moved, seconded and approved if the sub-committee wishes to exclude the press and public to deal with reports revealing exempt information:

“That the public be excluded from the meeting for the following items of business on the grounds that they involve the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in paragraphs 1-7, Access to Information Procedure rules of the Constitution.”



Environment, Community Safety and Engagement Scrutiny Commission

MINUTES of the OPEN section of the Environment, Community Safety and Engagement Scrutiny Commission held on Wednesday 16 July 2025 at 7.00 pm at Ground Floor Meeting Room G02A - 160 Tooley Street, London SE1 2QH

PRESENT: Councillor Esme Hicks (Chair)
Councillor Maggie Browning
Councillor David Parton
Councillor Leo Pollak

OTHER MEMBERS PRESENT: Councillor Stephanie Cryan – Cabinet Member for Equalities, Democracy & Finance

OFFICER SUPPORT: Dominic Cain – Director of Customer & Exchequer
Eugene Nixon – Head of Strategy & Compliance
Ade Aderemi – Head of Customer Services
Toni Ainge – Director of Leisure
Tara Quin – Head of Parks and Natural Environment
Julie Timbrell, Project Manager , scrutiny

1. APOLOGIES

Councillor Leo Pollak gave apologies for lateness.

1. NOTIFICATION OF ANY ITEMS OF BUSINESS WHICH THE CHAIR DEEMS URGENT

There were none.

3. DISCLOSURE OF INTERESTS AND DISPENSATIONS

There were none.

4. CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE PLAN

The Chair welcomed attendees and introduced the purpose of the session: to scrutinise the draft Customer Experience Plan (CEP), which is scheduled to be presented to Cabinet in September 2025.

Attendees:

- Cllr Stephanie Cryan – Cabinet Member for Equalities, Democracy & Finance
- Dominic Cain – Director of Customer & Exchequer
- Eugene Nixon – Head of Strategy & Compliance
- Ade Aderemi – Head of Customer Services

Presentation:

Officers presented the draft CEP, outlining its aims to improve customer service standards across the council. The plan is a public document and sets out clear expectations for staff and services.

Organisational Development is embedding the CEP into every officer's workplan, with director-level leadership to ensure accountability.

Member Questions and Discussion

Communication and Clarity:

Members raised concerns about jargon in the document, such as “customer journey,” and recommended using Plain English.

Members highlighted gaps in communication regarding capital projects (e.g., scaffolding on estates, playground investments) and requested explicit commitments to regular resident updates.

Complaints and Member Enquiries:

Members noted that informational requests are sometimes misclassified as complaints.

Officers confirmed targets exist for reducing complaints and that most departments aim to respond within 8 working days (housing takes longer).

Members asked whether a target could be introduced to reduce the number of complaints escalating to Stage 2.

Digital Strategy and AI:

Officers are exploring the use of AI in repairs but are cautious about implementation. The digital strategy aligns with the CEP and includes

consideration of AI.

Contact Centre Operations:

The contact centre has reduced telephone enquiries from one million to 600,000 through the promotion of e-forms.

Ade Aderemi reported average queue times of 3 minutes, with an automated callback option at 4 minutes.

All calls are answered, and voice recognition is used to streamline processes.

Resident Feedback and Apps:

Members praised the “Fix My Street” app but noted issues when faults occur on private land, where responses are on occasions lacking or dismissive.

Officers acknowledged this feedback and committed to follow up with Environment colleagues.

Cross-Council Consistency and Implementation:

Members raised concerns about inconsistent responses from different teams (e.g., parking services).

Officers emphasised the importance of culture and the “One Council” vision to ensure consistency.

Members welcomed the planned 18-month survey and asked about resource allocation to support it.

Officers confirmed that training, development, and contact management are key components of the CEP’s delivery.

Cleaner Greener Safer Funding:

Members raised issues with communication and updates related to this funding stream.

The Chair summarised the following recommendations for consideration by the Cabinet Member and officers:

RESOLVED

Recommendations to the Cabinet Member and Officers:

- Be explicit in the CEP that this will include capital projects, with particular attention paid to resident communication and progress updates.
- Revisit the categorisation of members' enquiries being assigned as 'complaints'.
- Consider having a target focused on reducing the number of complaints that go to Stage 2 or beyond.
- Resident communication of the plan to be in Plain English and avoid jargon.

5. STREETS FOR PEOPLE - ZONING CONSULTATION

This item was deferred to the next meeting.

6. PLAYGROUNDS

The Chair opened the session by explaining that this item was requested to support the proposed scrutiny review on **Playscapes**, with the scope circulated as part of the work programme.

The Chair welcomed the following officers, who provided a verbal summary of the report circulated in the supplemental agenda:

Attendees:

- Toni Ainge – Director of Leisure
- Tara Quin – Head of Parks and Natural Environment

Presentation:

Officers outlined the strategic background to the playgrounds programme:

- The work is aligned with the **Council Delivery Plan Target #55**, which commits to providing high-quality playgrounds accessible to all children, including those with disabilities.
- Play is additionally recognised in a number of other strategic plans including Streets for People which focuses on small play spaces in localised areas, the Climate Resilience Action plan in relation to creating play spaces for the future taking into account hotter temperatures.
- The programme supports the **Good Start for Life** goal under **Southwark 2030** and is being delivered through a One Council approach, with collaboration across departments including Housing, Parks, Planning, Cleaner Greener Safer, and Health.
- A **Play Working Group** has been convened, meeting quarterly to

coordinate efforts across departments and improve asset management and service delivery.

Audit, Investment, Planning

- A high-level audit was conducted to map playground locations, assess conditions, and clarify management responsibilities. It identified playgrounds in both parks and across the Council's housing estate.
- This informed a more strategic approach to investment and collaboration.
- In October 2024, a further £3 million was allocated for play investment across parks, with details outlined in the report.
- The London Plan advises that each authority has a Play strategy. Southwark does not currently have one, although play will feature in the new Leisure Strategy (2026).

Member Questions and Discussion:

Discussion on specific playgrounds, with reference to upgrades, consultation, funding and delays:

Peckham Rye Adventure Playground:

- Closed due to equipment reaching end-of-life (rotted timber).
- Scheduled for completion in December 2025.
- The original CGS money contributed a small pot between 5-10K , but consultation led to higher expectations with a scheme costing closer to 100k. Officer spoke about master plans that are generated to help secure external funding but there may only be a proportion available at a time and acknowledged that, when a master plan has been developed but is not fully funded, this could be better communicated to residents.
- Officers acknowledged that there is sometimes a long gap between identifying the first small amount of investment, and the scheme being completed, and cited planning challenges, levels of consultation required, and partial funds /

funding constraints as contributing factors.

Mint Street Adventure Playground:

- Reopened in Spring 2024 following investment.
- Reported as a huge success, with high popularity and strong feedback from Youth Services.

Bethwin and Dog Kennel Hill Adventure Playgrounds:

- Managed through partnership arrangements.
- Officers are exploring opportunities for further investment and community involvement with the Trusts that manage the sites.

Alexa Street, South Bermondsey

- Members raised concerns about delays in projects funded through local CIL money, citing examples such as Alexa Street, South Bermondsey, with delays of up to 1600 days.
- Officers clarified that the current paper covers only this year's projects, and longer-term projects are listed in a separate 3-year plan (to follow).

Members requested better communication with residents regarding phased funding and masterplans.

Inclusive and Environmental Play:

- Members advocated for play in the public realm, such as walking on walls and tree climbing.
- Officers confirmed links with the **Streets for People** programme to support this.
- Staffed adventure playgrounds were highlighted as crucial, especially for children with special needs.

Community Involvement and Maintenance:

- Suggestions were made to involve **volunteer labour** and **trusts** in playground development.
- Officers expressed a preference to keep maintenance in-house to ensure safety and standards but acknowledged the role of community groups.

Policy and Strategy:

- A request was made that the council consider the removal/rethinking of “**No Ball Games**” signs in an attempt to allow more young people to play in their local area and participate in physical activity. Leisure Officers agreed to discuss this request with Housing colleagues given that the signs tended to be in Estates. Members suggested signs pointing to places where ball games were welcomed and better suited.
- A **Leisure Strategy** is under development, likely to be completed by **2026/7**, and will aim to incorporate play and integrate findings from the scrutiny review.

Design and Standards:

- Officers confirmed adherence to **national play standards**, with both external audits and internal expectations.
- Design processes vary depending on funding. For large capital projects, the **Policy and Programmes Team** and a **Project Manager** are involved, with consultation and community feedback.
- Projects may involve **Friends of Parks** groups.
- Officers aim to improve inclusivity, particularly for **girls and disabled children**, and are identifying three playgrounds to enhance accessibility, with a long-term goal of improved universal access.

Funding Collaboration:

- Members asked about collaboration with other funding sources, including housing.
- Officers confirmed that conversations are ongoing across teams and committed to officers providing further updates.

The Chair thanked officers and members for their contributions and confirmed that the insights from this session will inform the upcoming **Playscapes Scrutiny Review**.

RESOLVED

A follow up briefing will be requested seeking further clarity on spending and service provision by Housing and Environment to enable comparison.

7. BIODIVERSITY SCRUTINY REVIEW - CABINET RESPONSE

Members commented that it was good to see a thoughtful and detailed response by officers and the cabinet to all 34 recommendations, and that all of the recommendations had been either accepted, or partially accepted.

RESOLVED

A follow up briefing on implementation will be requested in 12 months time.

8. WORK PROGRAMME

The following proposals for additions to the work programme were discussed:

- It was noted that the Thames super sewer, the Thames Tideway Tunnel, is being switched on soon, and this will radically change the water quality. The Thames is one of the largest bodies of water and repository of London wildlife, and so this is a very significant development. There are authorities and community groups such as the Port of London, river related charities, and Marinas that scrutiny could engage with to explore how the expected increases to biodiversity and opportunities to increase the amenity value of the Thames could be maximised.
- There was a proposal to look at what further could be done to reduce light pollution and bring forward a dark sky borough, given the negative impact on wildlife.
- An independent Community Safety Review, alongside other anti-social behaviour concerns, may come to the commission in November, following an item at OSC in October.



Make Space for Girls

Written evidence to the Southwark Environment, Community Safety and Engagement Scrutiny Commission on Play Spaces

October 2025

Introduction

Make Space for Girls is grateful to have the opportunity to present our work and submit written evidence to the Southwark Environment, Community Safety and Engagement Scrutiny Commission on Play Spaces.

Make Space for Girls is a registered charity, that has been campaigning since 2021 to make parks and similar spaces in the public realm work better for teenage girls, young women and gender diverse young people.

A core strategic aim is to promote change in policy and practice. To do this we advocate and campaign for changes in national, local policy and practice, offering evidence-based guidance to inform decision-makers. We highlight the benefits of inclusive parks and public spaces, showing how they improve physical, mental, and societal well-being.

For too long, standard teen provision for play in the public realm has been dominated by boys and young men; for example 90% of council provision for teenagers consists of multiuse games areas (MUGAs) and skateparks; 92% of the teen users of MUGAs are boys and young men; as are 84% of the teen users of skateparks.¹

Given this data, it is clear: change is needed in the provision made for teenage play.

Make Space for Girls is the only charity that focusses specifically on tackling the disadvantage that teenage girls and young women face when it comes to parks and similar spaces.

We don't need to "fix" the girls and make them use the standard teen provision. We need to look afresh at the design of teen provision and, working with teenage girls, young women and gender diverse young people, create new provision that meets their wants and needs.

Sport vs Play.

Sport is excellent for many young people, but not all; and a significant proportion of teenage girls and young women are "turned off" sport as they leave primary school. For example, research by Women in Sport showed that 88% of teenage girls who used consider themselves "sporty" said sport and exercise had changed since primary school.² And it is clear that girls' teams struggle to access public sport spaces, with boys and men's teams comprising 90% of the organised teams who use public pitches.³ The gender imbalance in teenage community sports is outside the scope of this written evidence: suffice to say that reasons and solutions are complex and significant resources will need to be found to change the current gender imbalance in teenage community sport.

¹ [Make Space for Girls Parkwatch report](#)

² [2022-Reframing-Sport-for-Teenage-Girls-Tackling-Teenage-Disengagement.pdf](#)

³ [MSFG Pitch Report](#)

The work of Make Space for Girls is not focused on sport. It is focused on play. Play is often associated in people's minds with younger children, up to the age of 10 or 12. The images used by many play organisations speak to the ideal of happy small children and their carers being accommodated in a stimulating and well cared for outdoor environments.

Very few organisations use images of teenagers at play. But teenagers play. And teenagers have a right to play under article 31 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child - up to age 18⁴.

Teenagers themselves recognise the importance of play, irrespective of whether or not they take part in organised sport. For example, we worked with a young woman in South London who was very sporty, playing American football at a high level, training regularly. But play remained important to her and, reflecting on what was available locally for teen play, she commented:

“My female friends and I constantly struggle to find places where we can relax and have peace... Boys have skateparks – although they are technically open to everyone, they are predominantly used by boys, and when girls use them, they often face unwanted attention [...] When they put in skate parks and fence pitches they think all young adults are the same”

Teenage play is often perceived by older adults as unwanted behaviour. When teenagers use the children's play park as a place to hang out, to sit on the swing and chat to friends, they are often moved on by parents who tell them “*this isn't for you*”. Professionals working in parks and in community safety frequently get complaints of teenagers being loud, hanging about, laughing, being in the wrong place. This is not new: when many of those who make these complaints were, themselves, teenagers town planners and architects were being urged to recognise the need for teenage play in the public realm:

“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, The Death and Life of Great American Cities, 1961.

Sometimes teenage play is equated with anti-social/unwanted behaviour because of a lack of understanding; but often because there is a lack of appropriate spaces for teenagers to play.⁵

There is an urgent need for:

‘spaces that allow young people to develop their own, and contribute to shared culture. The adoption of a nurturing and civil attitude towards them from institutions, the media and public should be an imperative, as is the need to increase participation rates in the design and development of space’

Claire Edwards, Leeds Beckett University: A Critical Discussion of the Provision of Public Space for Young People in the UK.

⁴ [UN Convention on the Rights of the Child](#)

⁵ [Older-children-play-too 2024.pdf](#)

What spaces are provided for teenage play?

The most common play provisions made by councils for teenagers in the UK are:

- Skateparks
- Multi use games areas (MUGAs) or fenced pitches
- BMX/Pump/cycle facilities.

Research by Make Space for Girls in the summer of 2023 showed that 90% of council teen play facilities fell into one of these categories.

The provision of these facilities is often hard-wired into policy documents, for example play strategies, open and green space policies, national guidance.

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

It is important to explore how teenage girls, young women and gender diverse young people experience teen play provision, because research shows that many do not feel welcome, comfortable or safe in public space or that they have a place to play.

For example:

- Plan UK's Report State of Girls' Rights in the UK 2024⁶ found that 93% of girls and young women do not feel completely safe in public spaces.
- 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.⁷
- In research in Yorkshire by Women in Sport, 49% of girls aged 13-15 felt unsafe to exercise in the park compared to 26% of boys of the same age
- The same research showed that 59% of girls don't feel welcome in parks because the spaces are dominated by boys.

Are parks different for teenage boys and girls?

Parks form a vital component of public life, providing the opportunity for activity, social connection, interaction with nature, and community cohesion. Parks have the potential to provide great places for teenage play, without teenagers having to pay. It is important to note that cost can be a major barrier when teen play is offered via "pay to play" facilities, and that "pay to play" facilities can lead to deepening inequalities rooted in economic background.

⁶ [state-of-girls-rights-report.pdf](#)

⁷ [What makes a park feel safe or unsafe - Anna Barker](#)

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 Theodorides-Feldman at the London School of Economics and Make Space for Girls⁸ 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.

As noted above, provision for teenagers in parks is usually considered in terms of a relatively small range of facilities: skateparks, multi-use games areas (MUGAs) and BMX or pump tracks.

These provisions are frequently cited as examples of “good” informal play provision for teenagers⁹. Indeed, research across 91 councils by Make Space for Girls¹⁰ showed that 90% of facilities provided for teenagers in parks were MUGAs, skateparks or BMX tracks.

Although these facilities are identified in various public guidance documents as “good teen provision”, this masks the fact that use of these spaces for teen play is highly gendered.

In a 2023 survey by the charity Make Space for Girls¹¹ :

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

Teenage girls see this gender imbalance in parks and it affects them. They tell us:

“to walk past a skate park and see that it’s filled with men and boys deters and intimates me from using that space, even though I skate.”

“Areas dominated by boys are quite threatening- intimidating, off putting, scary. Limits where girls can relax”

“I feel like it feels a lot more vulnerable and self-conscious being a girl at a park as they’re normally dominated by males.”

“It’s mostly boys that are [in the MUGA]. If you go up, they’ll just start shouting at you, not in a horrible way but it gets irritating”

“Boys own the space a lot more”

This data doesn’t mean that MUGAs and skateparks are “bad” teen play provision- for the (mostly) male teenagers who use them, these spaces provide a good place for teen play. But if councils continue to view the provision of teen play spaces through the limited lens of skateparks and MUGAs, councils will continue to perpetuate the gender imbalance we see in the current data.

⁸ [Young Researchers-in-Residence](#)

⁹ Fields in Trust Standards, 2024: ‘Creating great spaces for all.’

¹⁰ [Parkwatch](#)

¹¹ [Parkwatch](#)

The role of safety in teenage play in parks.

Unlike younger children, teenagers do not want to play under the supervision of known adults. In order to play, teenagers must feel safe in areas designated for teenage play without the presence of a parent or carer. This is another distinguishing feature between sport and play: in teen community sport the presence of known adults (eg coaches, parents) is an integral part of the experience.

Research by the University of Leeds in 2023 supports the contention that “not feeling safe” in the park is a major barrier to the use of parks by teenage girls.¹² One of the most striking findings of this research was that while 89% of park professionals thought their parks were safe for women and girls, only 22% of teenage girls felt the same.

In this research, the team talked 50 girls age 13-18 using a “Q methodology” to understand their views of safety in parks. Interestingly, there was less consensus among teenage girls about what made a park feel safe/unsafe than there was among older women, which highlights the importance of taking a wide ranging and holistic approach to safety in parks for teenage girls rather than looking for single “fixes”.

The researchers found that the teenage girls’ views split into 3 main “camps” as to what made a park feel unsafe:

- Those who took the view that it’s men and boys generally - they are a threat wherever you are in the public realm; society needs to change;
- Those who took the view that it’s the people in the park, often large groups of teenage boys - intimidation and harassment in the park; this needs to change;
- Those who took the view that although parks may feel unsafe, 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.

The girls who fall into the first camp do not believe that any changes to teen play facilities in the park will alter whether they feel safe or not. If their’s was the only view, there might be arguments that spending resources on making teen play facilities more welcoming to teenage girls, young women and gender diverse young people would not be a good use of resources because doing so would not change society.

However the girls who fall into the other two camps show quite clearly that it is worth making changes to teen play provision in the park.

How can we change “the people in the park”?

Girls who fall into the second camp hold the view the cause of them feeling unsafe is

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

Councils who want to tackle the gender imbalance we see in the current teen play must tackle this. This does not mean taking boys and young men out of the park- but it does mean taking

¹² [What makes a park feel safe or unsafe, the views of women, girls and professionals](#)

proactive steps to bring more teenage girls, young women and gender diverse young people into the park.

If councils want to tackle the gender imbalance seen in the current data on teen play provision in parks, they need to:

- *provide something other than skateparks and MUGAs as places for teenage play, designed to be welcoming to teenage girls, young women and gender diverse young people; and*
- *tackle the gender imbalance in the use of skateparks and MUGAs.*

Broadening teen provision beyond the traditional MUGA and skatepark

We believe that this is the route to tackling gender imbalance in teen play in parks which is likely to prove more effective in the shorter term, compared to tackling the gendered use of MUGAs and skateparks.

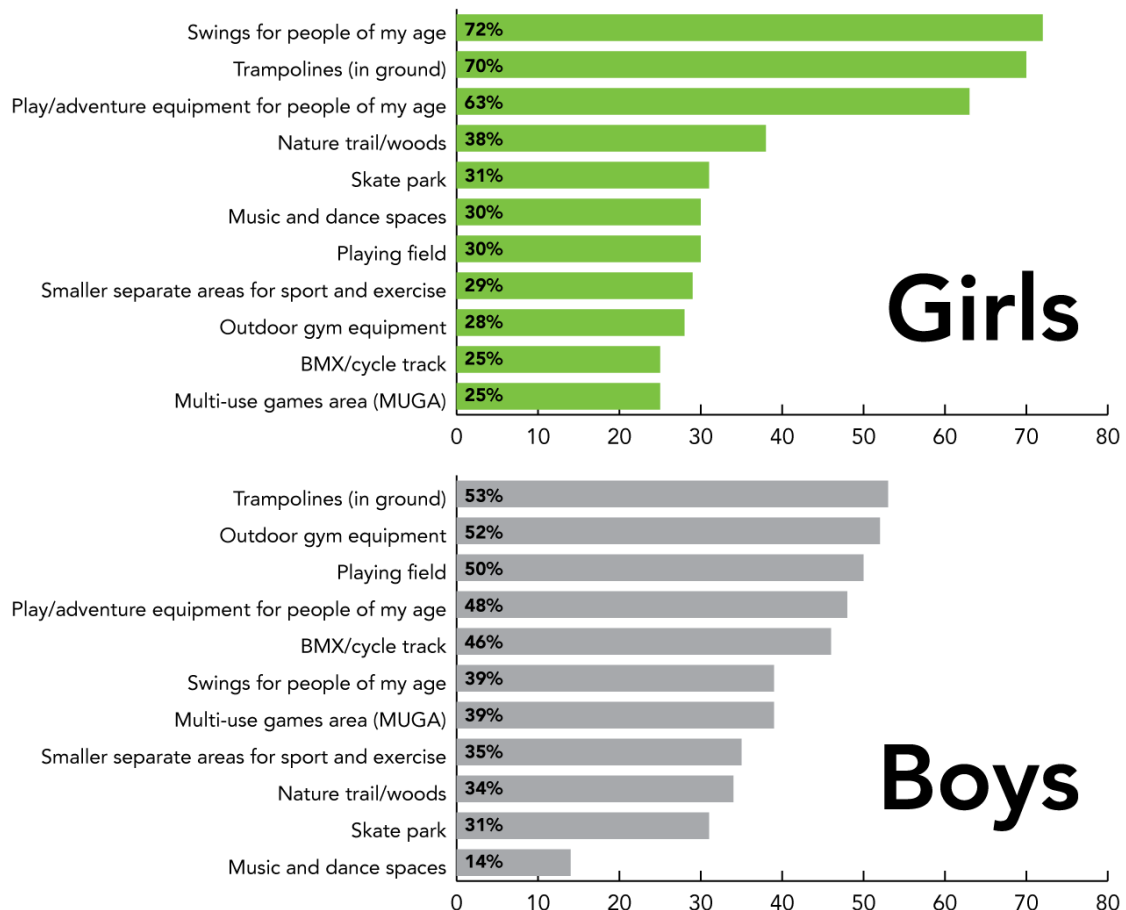
This is because, as discussed below, changing the gendered use of MUGAs is an areas where there has been no investment in UK research; and the UK research into changing the gendered use of skateparks shows the need for design, behavioural and cultural change for boys, girls and those who support them; making these sorts of changes will require long term and resource intensive projects.

In contrast, there is consistent evidence from multiple sources about what teen play provision beyond the MUGA and skatepark would make teenage girls play more in the park.

For example, the graph on the next page shows the responses from nearly 400 girls and boys aged 13- 15 when asked “*what would make you more active in the park*”?¹³

The popularity of “swings for people of my age” (72% of girls said these would make them more active) is something that we see repeatedly when we engage with teenage girls, young women and gender diverse young people. But when this data is presented, audiences are generally more surprised by the answers given by the boys. It is generally assumed that “most boys” like skateparks and MUGAs. This data suggest that this assumption is wrong: a minority of boys said a MUGA or skatepark would make them more active. And for boys, MUGAs and “swings for people my age” scored the same: 39%.

¹³ [Make Space for Us: Yorkshire Sport and Women in Sport](#)



Other facilities that are consistently identified by teenage girls and gender diverse young people when we ask them what would attract them to play in the park include

- Sociable seating and shelters;
- Things to climb on
- Things to swing off
- Reading nooks and book exchanges
- Stages/raised platforms
- Spaces for multiple groups so that no single group can take over the teen play space and dominate

It is also important to design these play facilities so that they clearly signal that a space is a place where teenage girls and gender diverse young people are welcome:

- design that shows a place that teenage girls and gender diverse young people themselves recognise as a place that they are supposed to be; and
- design that shows a place where other adults recognise that teenagers (and not older adults or younger children) are supposed to be.

For example, a well sited area of social seating may be attractive to teenage girls as a hang out place for after school: but it may also be attractive to groups of mums with toddlers and younger children, looking for somewhere to rest and meet with friends. And when it comes to competition for the use of that space, the mums will likely win because of their age, greater social authority and sense of legitimacy in occupying space, when compared to teenage girls.

If the design of and around the seating clearly targets teenage girls, this effect may be countered. Good example of what this design could look like were created in Gaukel Park, Ontario Canada: [Gaukel Street Parkette - Earthscape Play](#) and in Umea, Sweden: [Umeå](#).

Lots of examples of the ideas that teenage girls and gender diverse young people have put forward as “places for them” are in our reports at [Exploring Essex Parks Making Space for Girls](#) and [Chelmsford Central Park](#).

Reduce the gender imbalance that is seen on skateparks and MUGAs

Skateparks

Research by Make Space for Girls in 2023 showed that 84% of the teen users of skateparks were boys and young men.¹⁴ This is consistent with research by Skateboard GB, GB’s national skateboarding body which showed that 85% of skateboarders were male.

Evidence at the elite athlete level would suggest that this gender imbalance is not attributable to innate gender or aged based ability. Team GB skateboarding squad for Paris Olympics in 2024 had 3 members: Sky Brown (born 2008); Lola Tambling (born 2008) and Andy Mac Donald (born 1973).

Professor Carrie Paechter, Nottingham Trent University, undertook detailed research around the barriers and enablers to girls and women skateboarding¹⁵. The following is from a blog that Professor Paechter kindly wrote for Make Space for Girls.

The research found that there were far more things that inhibited young women’s skateboarding than enabled it. Girls said that they didn’t like the fact that the general public often see skateboarding as a form of antisocial behaviour, especially outside skateparks. This general feeling of being disapproved of was exacerbated by harassment, which they felt was directed much more at them than at young men. This included frightening assaults, such as people jumping in front of them, trying to grab their boards or throwing bottles under them in order make them fall. One young woman had been spat at twice in broad daylight.

‘Skateboarding spaces’ take many forms, including: those officially designated for skateboarding and other wheeled sports (outdoor and indoor skateparks and ‘skate-friendly’ public realm); and informally utilised but not necessarily officially permitted spaces, (roads and pathways, public plazas, carparks and temporary ‘DIY skateparks’). Young women often felt uncomfortable in all or most of these. A significant factor was the male dominance of skateboarding space, both in terms of numbers and in relation to the space they took up.

The researchers “mapped” how male and female skaters used the space in skateparks and found that, except in woman-only sessions, girls tend to stick to the edges of the space, often semi-concealed behind ramps or other barriers. Even expert girl skateboarders worried about being ‘in the way’ of others, something not mentioned at all by the boys and men. This meant that the girls tended to use skateparks at less busy times, especially early mornings, cutting sessions short if others arrived.

¹⁴ [Make Space for Girls Parkwatch report](#)

¹⁵ [Making Space for Girl Skateboarders](#),

Young women taking part in the research discussed being undervalued as skaters and their abilities being questioned by male skaters. They felt they had to ‘prove’ themselves as competent skateboarders immediately on arriving in a skateboarding space, and that even expert skaters were seen as being ‘good for a girl’. They also felt constantly watched by male skateboarders, and that, while this could just indicate curiosity, sometimes it had an element of sexual harassment.

The research identified the following changes that might help to address the gender imbalance in skateboarding in parks:

- formally designated skateboarding spaces need to be designed so that there are quiet places for beginners to practice, relatively undisturbed by more expert skateboarders. This would make it easier for young women to get started in the first place, as well as being more welcoming for older, younger, or differently-abled skaters of any gender. Clearly there are many skateparks that have not been designed with this in mind; and in creating new areas it is important to be aware that consultation with existing local skateboarding groups may not lead to the creation of areas for beginners, roller skaters etc because existing skateboarders do not need these areas themselves. Make Space for Girls has worked with skatepark designers to consider these design issues and our work with Wheelscape was featured in [Physical Activity Facilities November/December 2022](#) in PAF Magazine.
- second, local skateboarding organisations and communities should provide more woman and girl sessions in managed skateparks, while remaining clear that these should not be seen as the only safe times that girls can skateboard.
- third, skateboard coaches should be made more aware about girls’ fear of being in the way and what they can do about it when teaching skateboarding. For example, while (for safety reasons) skatepark etiquette tends to emphasise taking turns and letting others go first, skateboarders need also to understand that some users are more assertive than others in claiming their space and time.
- Finally, there need to be wider general culture change in skateboarding. The research suggests that young men generally welcome young women skateboarders – but they need support in understanding how to do that.¹⁶

In short- there is a lot to be done. Some of this work will require resources from councils: capital resources (to build more inclusive skateparks); ongoing resources (to support women and girls sessions and to support more and different skateboard coaching for boys and girls). Some of this work will require changes that are outside the control of any council- for example changes to skateboard culture.

MUGAs

Although the research shows that there is no quick fix to address the gender imbalance in skateboarding in public parks, the good news is that there is a robust evidence base to provide a starting point for action.

The same cannot be said for MUGAs. While MUGAs are probably the most common provision for teenage play made by councils, there is very little research about their use. Apart from Make

¹⁶ [Making Space for Girl Skateboarders](#): Professor Carrie Paechter, Nottingham Trent University. 2022

Space for Girls Parkwatch research¹⁷, the only UK research that we have been able to find into MUGA use is by Luke Billingham: [mugas places of safety places of harm places of potential Billingham 2020](#).

In considering teen play provision, it is important to distinguish the different types of MUGAs. There are those that are locked facilities, only made available to people who book them. These tend to be MUGAs that have sufficiently good surfaces that teams will pay to hire them. We would argue that MUGAs that are only available to prebooked hire should be regarded as part of the sport infrastructure within a borough. They do not form part of the infrastructure for teenage play. In contrast, MUGAs that are open and can be used as and when (ie where there is freedom of access to the space) can properly be regarded as part of the local infrastructure for teenage play.

It is likely that the starting point to addressing the gender imbalance on MUGAs will lie at least in part in recognising that some (but not all) teenage boys feel a sense of legitimacy to occupy a free to access MUGA: whereas very few (if any) teenage girls have this sense of legitimacy.

This would suggest that a necessary condition to more equal use of MUGAs would be to :

“broaden this sense of legitimacy [to occupy a MUGA] to include other users and other activities, whilst also maintaining freedom of access to the space. “ [Billingham 2020]

But we are not aware of any evidence base about how this might be done.

In our workshops, we have talked to teenage girls who are good at the ball skills that MUGAs are designed for- mainly football and basketball. These girls play in teams; they train; they are skilled; but despite having skills and the intention, they do not feel able to compete with the boys for space on the free access MUGAs.

From what we have observed, the internalisation of MUGAs as a “boy space” appears to be very deeply ingrained for many boys, girls and those who supervise them. For example a very confident young woman in Somerset told us

“even if I know some of the boys on the MUGA, it still feels uncomfortable”

A young man in Kent who used his MUGA regularly and had a mixed-gender friendship group observed that he would not invite a female friend to join him on the MUGA because

“you’d end up as that weirdo on tik tok”

A group of teenage girls in Kingston, South London, who were part of their school’s very successful football team were asked why, during break and lunch at their secondary school, only boys used the MUGA in the school yard. Their answer was that if they tried to use the MUGA, the boys would stop it—they would take the ball, kick the ball over the fence, and generally frustrate the girls’ use of the space until the girls backed off.

A group of four teenage girls from Bury, Greater Manchester, told us about going to the MUGA at the back of their school with the express intention of having a kick about. They had a ball, were wearing trainers and joggers. A member of staff saw them and asked if they were going to watch the boys play football. They replied that they were going to play football. They got to the MUGA, where a group of boys were having a kick around and the girls started to work their way into the

¹⁷ [Make Space for Girls Parkwatch report](#)

space, trying to carve out an area they could use. Another member of staff walked past the MUGA and called to the girls to stop messing around and go home- they were distracting the boys. The girls gave up and went home.

A very sporty girl in Essex told us about how she enjoyed having a kickaround with her female cousin on her local MUGA, but if the boys turned up they would tell her to “go away” (using more profane language) and she would.

The view is sometimes expressed to us that the solution must lie in increasing the confidence of individual teenage girls, implying that the gender imbalance in MUGA use is the result of their individual characteristics- namely their lacking confidence; the gender imbalance could be solved if only teenage girls, as individuals, could be equipped to be “more confident”.

We are not aware of any research that supports this view. And our experience has been that many teenage girls, particularly those who are sporty, and want to play football/basketball are confident. The teenage girls from the football team in Kingston were fantastically confident. The young women from Bury were as strong a group as you could hope to meet. The sporty girl from Essex could hold her own in any debate. They did not lack confidence. But they did not feel entitled to occupy a free to access MUGA.

As with skateparks, it seems likely that tackling gender imbalance in the use of MUGAs will involve a combination of design, activation and cultural change. But until there is proper research into this area, councils who are trying to tackle gender imbalance in parks through increasing the use of MUGAs by girls are doing so without an evidence base to support their efforts.

We believe that that it is essential that someone funds and does the research to understand these issues. Lots of organisations are in the business of installing MUGA. It is a valuable and constructive industry. We would suggest that understanding how MUGAs could be made to be more inclusive of teenage girls, young women and gender diverse young people should lead to a better and more valuable MUGA industry. However, like many industries, progress may be best led by client demand. We would therefore urge councils to use their power as commissioners of MUGAs to encourage installers to fund and carry out this research and support progress to more gender inclusive MUGA provision.

Some practical steps for councils to improve teenage play.

Spread the word within the council

Lots of councilors and staff members need to be involved in making decisions that will lead to better and more inclusive play for teenagers. It is therefore key to spread the word internally and make sure people understand what the project is, and as importantly what it is not. Creating teen play spaces more welcoming to 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.

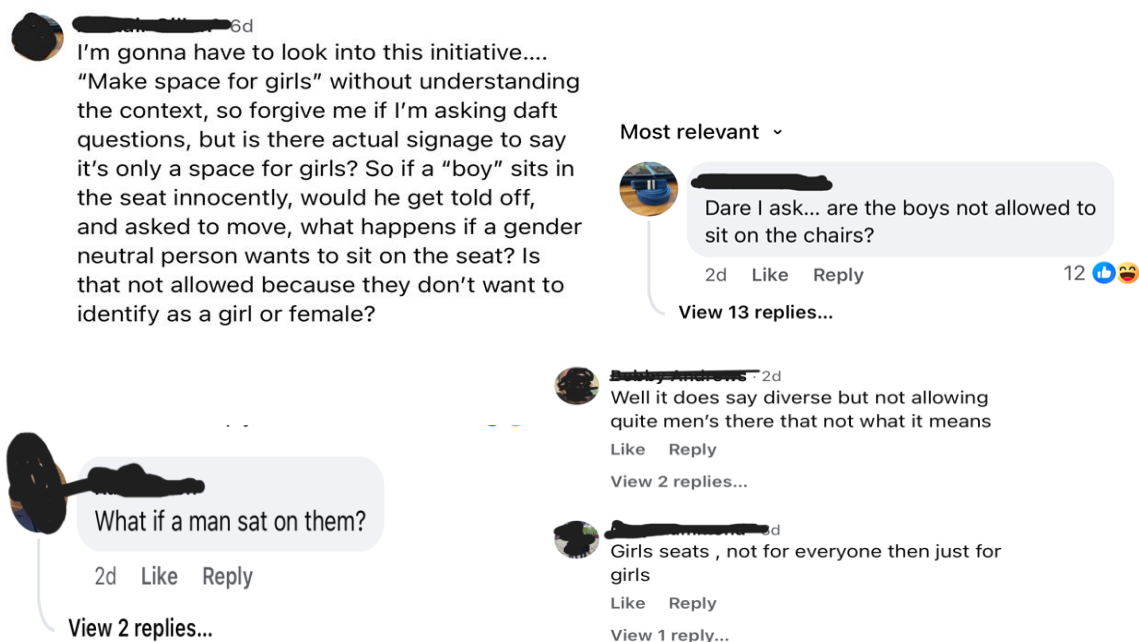
It is about recognising that currently teen play provisions are highly gendered and dominated by (some) boys and young men, with many girls, young women, gender diverse young people and quite a few boys feeling that teen play spaces have nothing for them.

It is about being led by the data, thinking about teen play differently, positively designing in girls, young women and gender diverse young people and being creative in designing teen play spaces.

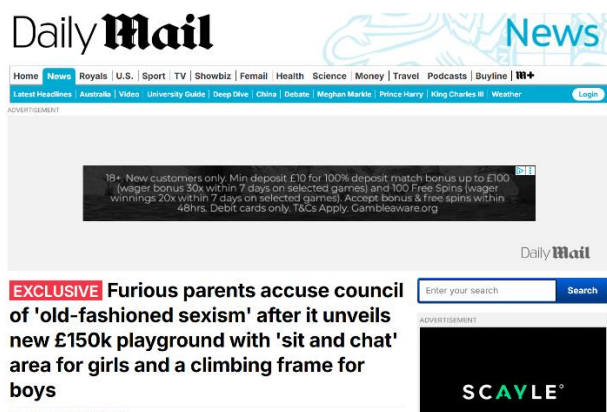
Be prepared to explain to your external community and stakeholders

There must be clear and positive communication and engagement with the local community and other stakeholders.

Announcements about initiative that focus on the wants and needs of teenage girls and young women can get negative (as well as positive) attention on social media. Here are some screen shots of social media response to a girl design led project in a park:



And traditional media can be hostile as well (for clarity, the climbing frame was not “for boys”, but the new play area did include social seating areas as requested by teenage girls).



Partner with local community groups

Council resources are very limited and working with local groups and the voluntary sector may be key to creating more inclusive teen play. So finding ways to support a local Friends of Group or other community group committed to “making space for girls” can be a 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 teen play spaces

Teenagers know their local areas really well. They know what feels safe and what feels unsafe. They are expert in their wants and needs when it comes to teen spaces.

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 teen play spaces because they don't think the space (eg a skatepark) and hence the engagement has any relevance for them. Work with schools and community groups that work with teenage girl, young women and gender diverse young people.

Engagement often gets compressed into a single workshop or open meeting. But in our experience this often doesn't give results that are useful to make change. 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.

There is more information about the approaches we would recommend to engagement in our reports, for example at [Exploring Essex Parks Making Space for Girls](#); and [Co-clienting with Teenage Girls in the Queen Elizabeth](#)

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. It applies regardless of the source of funding; for example the fact that money for a skatepark 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 (skateparks, MUGAs, 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.

There is more information about the Public Sector Equality Duty [here](#)

Review tender processes and challenge suppliers

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

Suppliers say that they want to create more gender inclusive teen play. 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 play 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.”

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 teen space.

The role of policy documents in creating better teen play spaces

Identify barriers in existing documents

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

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 councils, developers and communities to think about teen play spaces more creatively.

A good starting point is ensuring these documents recognise the role that gender plays in the use of standard teen play provision; and that teen play spaces do not currently serve teenagers 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 that this is the “*right provision*” for teen play, 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 a greater number of 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 for teenage play. 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 in the following pages.

Newham Local Plan: Regulation 19 submission June 2024 p279 [local-plan-2024-web-part-1-](#)

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 [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)”

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: ([Space and layout \(southoxon.gov.uk\)](http://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.”

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.”

Exploring the Physical and Mental Health and Wellbeing Impacts of Active Travel and Access to Nature

Scrutiny review report

September 2025

Environment Scrutiny
Commission

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INTRODUCTION

Increasing participation in active travel and improving access nature have been pursued by many councils as key environmental policy areas which, indeed, they are. Generally, the link made to public health has been secondary and largely focused on the irrefutable contribution that both can make to improved air quality, especially in an urban environment.

Nevertheless, the over-arching purpose of this review is to highlight the clear and growing body of evidence that both active travel and improving nature should rightfully be considered as key public health policies, and to explore how access to both can be extended to yield considerable positive impacts on the physical and mental health and wellbeing of all Southwark residents. Equal opportunity of access to active travel and nature must be seen as mainstays of public health policy, ending their compartmentalisation as environmental “nice to haves”.

There is a multitude of evidence from across the globe that physical activity improves health. Strikingly, the evidence is that people living in Blue Zones (regions around the world identified as having exceptionally long-lived populations with a high proportion of centenarians) don’t exercise purposefully, say, by going to the gym. Instead, exercise is built into daily life through walking, gardening and daily chores. For example, a study in the Sardinian Blue Zone found that longer lives were associated with raising farm animals, living on steeper slopes in the mountains and walking longer distances to work. These findings are replicated in other Blue Zones around the world. Whilst it may be challenging to recreate the conditions of the Sardinian Blue Zone here in Southwark, the principles can still inform our approach.

Furthermore, whether walking, cycling, scooting, skating or other, active travel can usually be more easily and universally fitted into a daily routine than a trip to the gym. Just twenty mins a day of active travel can make a significant contribution to supporting improved health outcomes and making it easier for residents to meet the UK Chief Medical Officer’s guidance that all adults should undertake at least 150 minutes of physical activity per week.

Active travel through green space is the most beneficial for health and wellbeing. Routes through parks, woods and open spaces are often safer, with reduced or no vehicle traffic. And the Commission heard evidence that simply being in and around nature is well demonstrated to improve mental health and wellbeing. Active travel can also help to combat social isolation.

The Commission heard that recreational/social journeys can help to lower the bar to participation and can be a more appealing way to begin building active travel into daily routines: a social cycle through green space is often very different from a commute to work through city traffic and different types of infrastructure are often required.

In general, the greatest barrier to active travel is motor traffic, which dominates the public realm reducing the amount of space – especially the amount of safe, clean and pleasant space – available for other activities like walking, wheeling and cycling. Southwark Council's Streets for People strategy addresses this primary issue. Meanwhile, this review seeks to explore some of the others.

During the course of the review the Commission sought to gain an understanding of some of other the barriers to accessing active travel and nature, particularly amongst residents with protected characteristics including ethnicity, sex, age, disability and socio-economic disadvantage, and explore how these barriers may be broken down to achieve equal opportunity of access.

We have set out to identify measures that can be taken by the council and its partners to plot a path towards achieving improved access to active travel and nature as a route to reducing health inequalities. In particular, the Commission wanted to explore how improved access to active travel and nature could help Southwark residents to build activity into their daily lives, thus reducing the incidence of conditions such as obesity, high cholesterol, heart disease, poor mental health and well-being and other conditions that are frequently linked to a sedentary lifestyle.

Key issues

1. **How can uptake of healthy active travel be increased and the obesogenic environment/lifestyle reduced by:** Considering the needs of different demographics and making active travel more appealing and accessible to those experiencing the highest levels of health inequalities, with particular reference to Southwark's Streets for People strategy and the associated walking and cycling plans.
2. **How can exposure to pollution be reduced and access to nature increased by considering the following:** How green infrastructure can be further used to reduce exposure to air pollution and improve the aesthetic value as well as the health impacts of our streets and wider environment for walking, cycling and other healthy activities.
3. **Exploring and improving access to the benefits of community and wildlife gardening as a way of increasing physical and mental activity and wellbeing:** Identifying how time in nature is beneficial and how to widen participation in community gardens, including engagement with food growing, as well as wildlife gardens.

IMPROVING HEALTH OUTCOMES AND ADDRESSING INEQUALITIES

Obesity and inequality in Southwark compared with the national picture

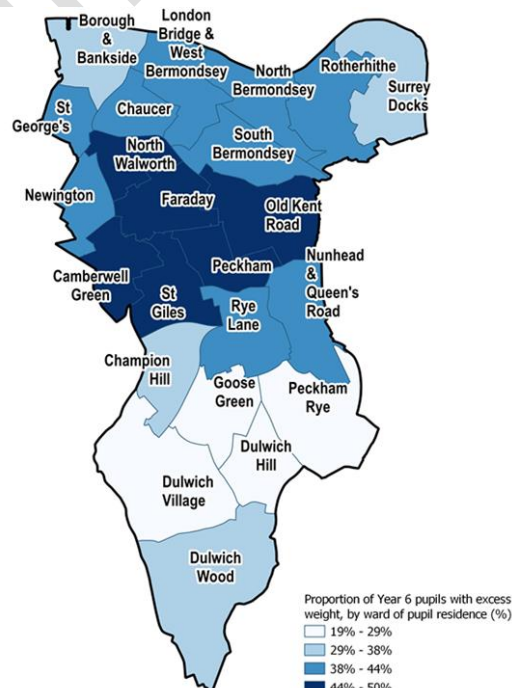
We have an obesity crisis in Southwark, which has a significant impact on our residents' health and wellbeing, our economy and our community as a whole.

The council and Partnership Southwark Integrated Care Board (ICB) strategies are focusing on addressing the 'Vital 5' factors of BMI, smoking, harmful drinking, blood pressure, and mental health and wellbeing. Obesity is one of the five significant risk factors for premature death; high blood pressure (hypertension) is the leading metabolic risk factor globally and is linked to a large portion of global non-communicable disease (NCD) deaths, according to the World Health Organization (WHO). Physical inactivity is the fourth leading risk factor for global mortality accounting for 6% of deaths globally.

Physical activity has significant benefits for both physical and mental health and can help to prevent and manage over 20 chronic conditions and diseases.

We know already from Southwark Council's work in public health that children from a black ethnic background are more likely to be living with obesity than those from a white ethnic background; children from Asian, mixed or other ethnic backgrounds fall in the middle.

In 2022/23, 22% of reception children nationally were classed as having excess weight (overweight or obese). By year 6, this rose to 42%. Children living in the most deprived areas are more likely to be overweight or obese than those living in the least deprived areas. This is starkly illustrated in the map below:



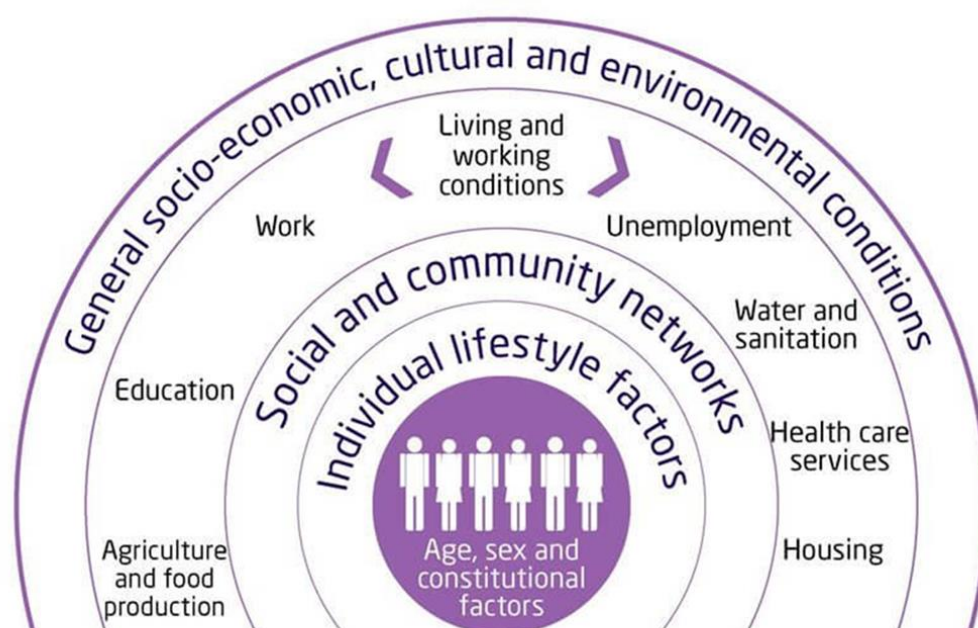
In 2022/23, 56.5% of adults in Southwark were classed as overweight or obese. Excess weight amongst men aged between 45-74 years is the highest of any age group in Southwark. Whilst these statistics place Southwark, on average, slightly below the national average for obesity, they are a cause for concern, especially when considering the health inequalities within the borough.

Southwark Healthy Weight Strategy 2022-2027

Southwark Council is working with partners across the borough's healthy weight network to deliver effective prevention and treatment services that aim to reduce inequalities and improve health.

The Strategy prioritises 5 population groups, identified on the basis of obesity rate inequality:

1. Maternity and early years
2. Children and young people
3. Black, Asian and minority ethnic groups
4. People experiencing food insecurity
5. Men aged 45 years and above



The Strategy applies a whole systems approach to address inequalities and the obesogenic environment.



Whilst references to improved physical activity are included alongside other important elements focusing on medical services and improving diet and nutrition, the Commission felt that there are compelling reasons to place more emphasis on boosting the type of physical activity that can easily be incorporated into existing routines, such as active travel.

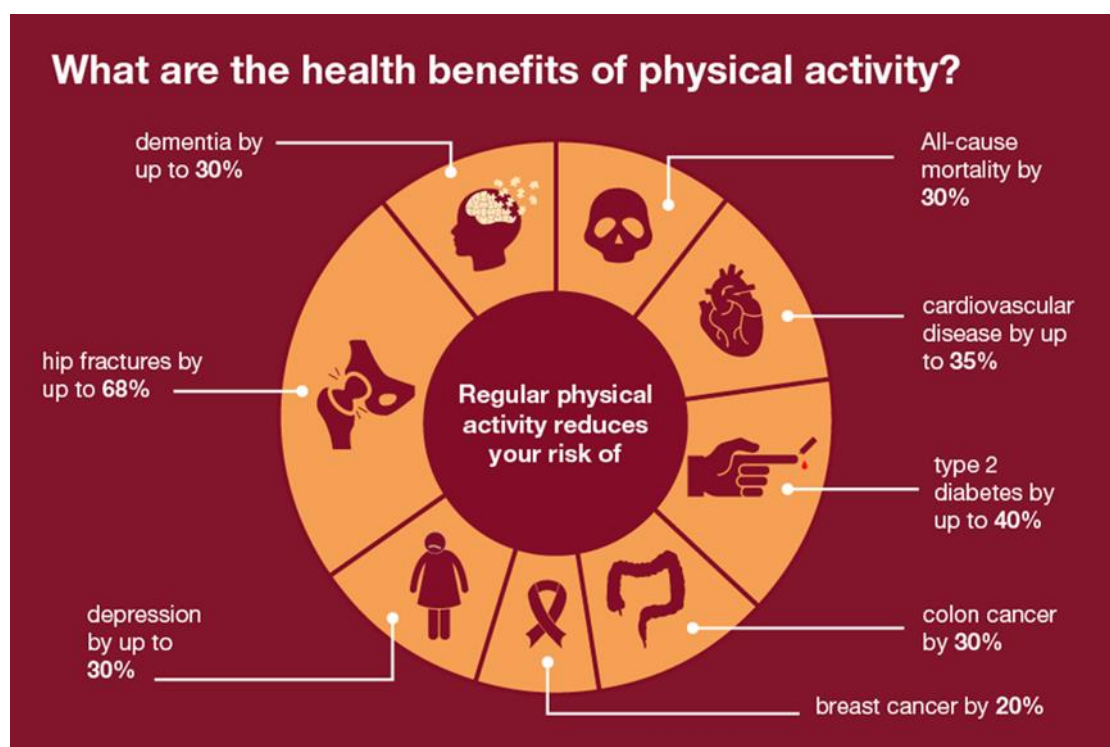
The Director of Public Health acknowledged that there are lots of barriers to participation in physical activity based on gender, class, age, ethnicity etc. and asserted that the approach has been to work with groups over time to find out what they want. In general, however, the evidence presented showed a tendency to focus on organised indoor activities (such as gym sessions).

The Commission felt that more priority should be given to fully embedding active travel and access to nature into the Healthy Weight Strategy as key public health policies. In particular, Southwark's widely acclaimed Streets for People Strategy should be fully exploited in this context.

Around 1 in 3 (34%) of men and 1 in 2 (42%) of women in the UK are not active enough for good health. People not doing any exercise at all are most at risk of poor health outcomes.

People with disabilities or long-term health conditions are particularly disadvantaged as they are typically twice as likely not to be active enough for good health.

Regular physical activity is associated with a reduced risk of a number of medical conditions.



ACTIVE TRAVEL – EVIDENCE

The Commission heard from a number of organisations which aim to promote participation in active travel particularly amongst groups with protected characteristics that are currently less likely to participate.

A key consideration for all groups and demographics was the safety and general appeal of routes for walking, wheeling and cycling. It follows, without doubt, that reducing motor traffic will always be the biggest catalyst for increased participation in active travel. This principle is key to Southwark's Streets for People strategy.

In addition to improving infrastructure, there are many council initiatives within the borough aimed at reducing car dependency and/or boosting participation in active travel:

1. Travel Training Bus

A joint initiative between Southwark Council, TfL, and The Metropolitan Police to give young people and special needs residents guidance and advice on safe independent travel on the bus network.

2. Pedestrian Training

The Active Travel Team offers free pedestrian training and practical road safety to all Southwark schools.

3. Active Travel Maps

An Active Travel Map is produced for and with each Southwark School to encourage more families to walk, cycle and scoot to school and surrounding areas.

4. Southwark Cycle Fest

Community focussed event in Burgess Park supported by partners and funded by Streets for People.

5. Free Cycle Training with JoyRiders (as outlined below).

6. Try Before You Bike

An innovative hire scheme that allows anyone who lives, works or studies in the borough to try out a new or nearly new bike for a monthly fee.

7. Second Hand Bike Markets

8. Bike Marking

9. Fix a Bike

Bike maintenance sessions, provided by Community Cycle Works.

10. BetterPoints

A reward-based app to change behaviour and get residents active.

11. Walking Diary

Children record details of their efforts to walk, scoot or bike to school, capturing obstacles like lack of pedestrian crossings on their route.

12. Parent/Carer Coffee mornings

A collaborative project with the Public Health team for active listening to schools and local community to establish the needs/obstacles of the area.

13. Theatre in Education

An innovative road safety education programme delivered through theatre performance.

14. Children Design a Road Sign to Slow Down Traffic

15. TfL 'Travel for Life'

The borough works with schools to help create a School Travel Plan unique for each school.

The Commission felt that some of these projects could be refreshed and enhanced as public health initiatives.

Black Riders' Association

The Commission heard from Temi Lateef, founder of the Black Riders Association. The initiative – originally “My Choice” – started when Temi decided to cycle to Nigeria, and was aimed at encouraging people to participate in social cycle rides. There was a noticeable absence of black and women cyclists and naming the initiative the Black Riders Association led to much more diversity.

The initial call out generated 800 people signing up for cycle rides integrated with social activities: turning cycling into an activity perceived as being sociable and enjoyable brought in new participants. Over time, the rides expanded beyond borough boundaries to take in parks and canals further afield.

Black Riders Association now works with schools and community organisations including other cycling groups. The Commission heard that fostering belonging amongst communities/participants is key to the success of the organisation. This gave the opportunity for skill sharing and spending time outside, generating a sense that barriers are coming down.

More recently Temi has started working with communities with different languages and developed leaders who would organise fun events and conduct low-key easy engagement to find out what people would like to do. There is a process of developing cycling captains and coaching to build capacity. Temi also highlighted the attraction of taking bikes further afield by train and enjoying a ride in a different location.

Temi highlighted to the Commission that in his community some people continue to see cycling as an activity for children, and that the media promotes car use as an image of success. Due to these pressures, cycling as an adult is often perceived as an indication of financial under-achievement/failure. Temi said that the limited exception to this is wearing Lycra and riding an expensive racing bike, which is associated with professional success, however this type of cycling is not appealing or possible for many people.

Temi concluded that to make cycling more acceptable to a wider demographic, people needed to see themselves represented in images of cyclists, whether for leisure or sport. He also emphasised the importance of linking cycling with professional/financial success and social recognition – for example to careers in sports/ health and fitness etc. as well as business and engineering.

Sustrans

Sustrans gave a whistle stop tour of some of the work it is doing across London and beyond to foster behaviour change, focused on schools, workplaces and community. Sustrans highlighted the following steps to achieve a greater uptake of active travel:

1. Identify which groups aren't walking, wheeling and cycling.
2. Engage with these groups to understand the barriers and motivation for walking, wheeling and cycling.
3. Design interventions that are tailored to their needs.
4. Allow for continuous feedback and programme redesign.
5. Measure impact.
6. Accept that behaviour change takes time and requires ongoing support

The Commission noted that similar advice was given by the Public Health team.

Sustrans gave examples of groups it had targeted on this basis:

- Teen cycling
Barriers: “Its not cool”; low levels of cycle ownership; concerns about safe routes to cycle; lack of secure cycle storage.
- GPs cycling
Barriers: commuting distance; cycling confidence; lack of secure storage; childcare and requirement for multiple stops; being too busy; disability.
- East End Mom cycling
Barriers: Insufficient safe routes; low levels of cycle ownership; lack of secure storage; lack of cycle skills/confidence; cultural norms; requirement for a female led activity.

Two barriers common to all groups were concerns over safe cycle routes and insufficient access to secure cycle storage, once again highlighting that these are major barriers to behaviour change across the board.

JoyRiders

JoyRiders has been commissioned by the council to deliver free cycle training, aiming to widen participation amongst groups least likely to cycle. The sessions have a high take up by demographics least likely to cycle in Southwark: e.g. by people from the more deprived areas of Southwark, by people of colour and by women. Sessions are based in Burgess Park and target families and women with fun social rides. Participants across the Burgess Park projects are most likely to be black, aged 5-12 years or 26-45 and from Walworth or Faraday wards.

Following attendance at women’s sessions with JoyRiders, 26% reported that they had got themselves a bike, 11% reported getting bikes for their children and 43% said that they had started cycling for fun.

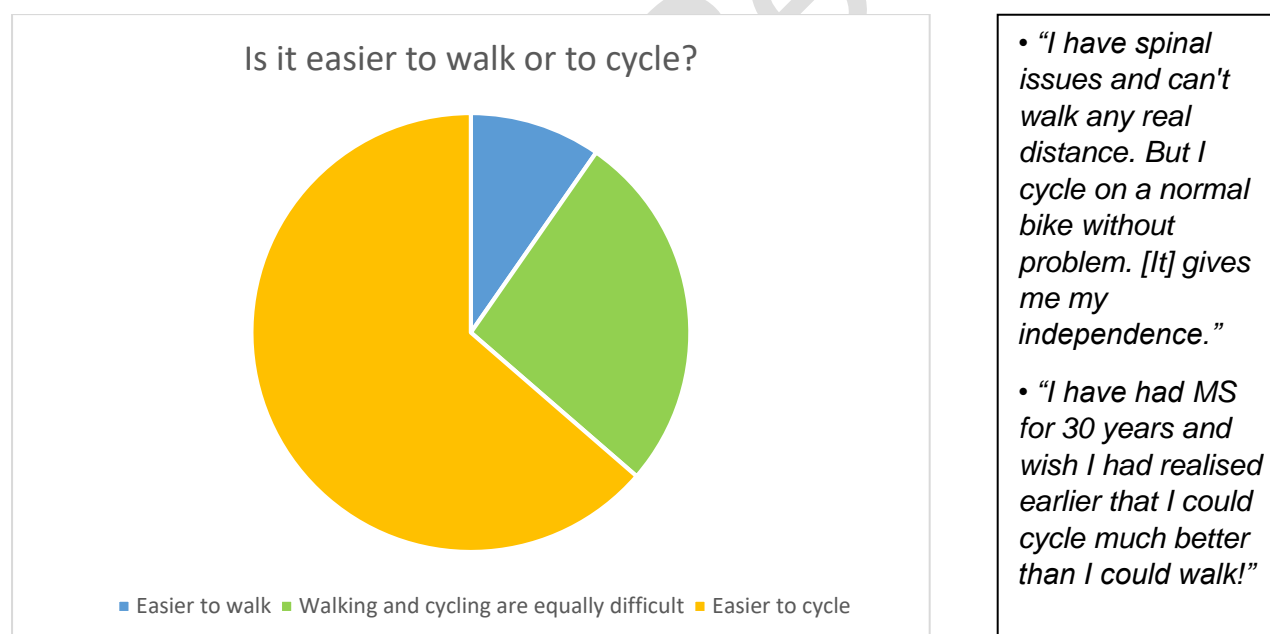
JoyRiders asserted that it can be more fun to cycle outside and there is no need to go on the road: there are opportunities in parks, including social activities, which offer the additional benefits of being in nature and of meeting people.

JoyRiders emphasised that cycling infrastructure must go beyond Cycle superhighways aimed at the very able bodied and must offer opportunities to the less able too. The representatives from JoyRiders advised ongoing design and redesign and greater engagement with different groups to understand how people cycle around an area, in order to adapt and readapt cycling spaces.

Wheels for Wellbeing

Wheels for Wellbeing (WfW) is a disabled people's charity that campaigns for mobility justice, develops policy and training resources, and delivers inclusive cycling sessions for disabled people. The group is based across South London including in Herne Hill Velodrome where it leads rides and has a scheme to hire non-standard/adapted bikes.

The Commission heard that disabled people are far less likely than able bodied people to own a car, have regular access to private motor transport, or be able to drive. According to the Disabled Ramblers, 90% of mobility impaired disabled people don't have a suitable mobility aid to complete a 1km journey. On the other hand, there are numerous options in types of cycles which can cater to different disabilities, meaning that cycling has the potential to offer extended mobility and independence to many disabled people. WfW's 2021 National Survey found that most mobility impaired disabled people find cycling easier than walking. The current definition of what constitutes a "mobility aid" is outmoded and should be extended to include cycles.



WfW's 2021 National Survey also provided information on the barriers to cycling experienced by disabled people:

- Infrastructure (53%)
- Secure parking / storage (35%)
- Cost (33%)
- Unable to hire a suitable cycle (30%)
- Abuse (24%)
- Lack of inclusive cycling opportunities (23%)

Sport England's Active Lives Adult Survey data shows that disabled people are almost twice as likely to be physically inactive as those without a disability, effectively halving the likelihood that disabled people are able to reap the key health benefits of exercise that are more easily available to people without a disability. By enabling a form of physical activity that, for many disabled people, is easier than walking, improving access to cycling, including through the provision of non-standard cycles, could considerably improve the health of disabled people.

Thus, the benefits of making cycling accessible to disabled people are potentially even greater than the benefits to the population as a whole, simply because there are fewer alternative ways for disabled people to access exercise, social contact, mobility, freedom, independence, nature and the outdoors, or to access the significant mental health and well-being benefits thus accrued.

Battery powered cycles/tricycles can improve accessibility for the less mobile – (disabled and older people) and WfW strongly supports the expansion in public e-bikes, although emphasises that better enforcement against inconsiderate parking is important. WfW favours dedicated bays over pavement parking, as clutter makes pavements less accessible for disabled people.

E-bikes and e-scooters for hire

In November 2022 the council approved trialling e-bikes for hire in the borough. Two operators of e-bikes – Lime and Forest (formerly Human Forest) have agreed memorandums of understanding that stipulate conditions, including the locations where vehicles may be deployed. As of the time of discussion, there have been over 12 million trips made on e-bikes in the borough. There are over 300 e-bike parking bays in Southwark.

Southwark Council has been participating in the pan London e-scooter trial managed by Transport for London ("TfL") since May 2021. There are currently 10 participating local authorities, and this trial was extended until May 2026. Since May 2021 there have been over 700,000 trips in the borough.

E – bikes can further open up cycling for disabled people and older people, and there are adapted bikes and hire bikes in use and available. Wheels for Wellbeing supports e-bikes, and urges proportionate action regarding safety concerns around batteries etc. which should not jeopardise the future of this vital form of transport.

E-Conveyances can be a disincentive to pedestrians in parks and there are concerns about the danger of collisions with children. It is possible to limit speed and access in certain areas by geo-fencing.

Lime has teamed up with the London Cycling Campaign and Loud Mobility to launch a new £100,000 'Share the Joy' fund to increase cycling within underrepresented groups and deliver equitable access to its benefits.

There have been efforts made to standardise rules for the use of e-bikes and e-scooters for hire across London, as different boroughs have developed different rules since these conveyances were introduced. Southwark initially favoured a flexible model which simply permitted considerate parking, preferably on the carriageway, whilst some other boroughs opposed carriageway parking. Having adopted the Equal Pavements Pledge, Southwark has been firmly against extending pavement parking as favoured in some other boroughs, as this obstructs pedestrians, especially those in a wheelchair or with other mobility impairment.

There are concerns that the withdrawal of the flexible parking model, which effectively delivers door-to-door travel by permitting the parking of the hired e-conveyance in any safe parking space, may limit up-take by women, especially for late night journeys.

Lime said that park-ability is key to maintaining and increasing uptake. If Southwark opts for mandatory parking in designated bays, there will need to be a mass rollout of bays (reaching a minimum of 25 bays per square kilometre) which may prove prohibitively expensive (the greatest cost being associated with the time and consultation process). An insufficient number of bays will result in any associated noise disruption being focussed in a single location, which could prove unpopular on quieter streets. Data shows that people will not take a bike if they cannot locate one close by.

Lime has offered to assist with the provision of bays using the infrastructure fund for London Boroughs. The proposal is to provide dual parking for regular bicycles and Lime e-bikes. This is subject to ongoing discussion with officers and TFL.

Cycle Parking

The Commission heard evidence from a number of sources that a lack of secure cycle parking, particularly for people living on older estates and for disabled people, is a significant barrier to widening participation in cycling. Sustrans research shows that just 27% of people who live in a flat have access to a secure place to store a bike, compared with 60% of people living in a street property. Accessible storage was even less commonly available: to just 23% of people living in flats vs 58% of people in street properties.

Over 70% of Southwark residents live in flats and, according to 2021 census data. 12% live in overcrowded homes, making them even less likely to have space to store

bikes. Low income households are most likely to live in high density housing and/or overcrowded homes.

According to Sustrans, almost half of people on a low income or not in employment (47%) said they would start cycling or cycle more if they had a place to park their cycle at home which was convenient, secure, safe, and accessible. Sustrans highlighted that cycle storage must be safe and accessible to ensure women and disabled people utilise provision available. Residential cycle parking must be designed to be inclusive of those who need (more expensive) specialised cycles, including e-cycles, hand cycles and recumbent cycles.

There is no council programme aimed at increasing cycle parking provision in older estates managed by housing associations; however, this is a place where provision is particularly inadequate.

The Commission was concerned at the imbalance in parking costs on council estates, where residents can park their cars for free, whilst having to pay for cycle parking. This contradicts the Street for People hierarchy which prioritises active travel over car use or, specifically, aims to “Keep cycle parking cheaper than car parking so that nobody is penalised for making responsible transport decisions”.

Sustrans recommended that local authorities should increase residential cycle parking provision, prioritising flats and areas of deprivation and incentivise housing associations to do the same. Local authorities and housing associations should provide communal cycle parking for flats and in areas of deprivation. Care should be taken to increase awareness of availability of residential cycle parking amongst local communities and tenants’ and residents’ groups.

Streets for nature, greenways and nature corridors

Streets for People has a Streets for Nature theme, which is focused on integrating nature into the streetscape in order to clean our air, increase carbon sequestration and water attenuation and improve biodiversity, making our streets greener and more resilient to extreme weather.

New street trees and green spaces were ranked as the highest priority for highways improvements in the Streets for People public consultation. Highways officers said their priorities are linked to reducing the negative impacts of car use and increasing active travel. Highways land is a finite entity, and competing priorities have to be balanced. Highways currently aims to deliver planting on 10% of space in new schemes.

The Commission is keen to see what more can be done to depave highways land, in order to expand the area given over to planting in planned Streetscape schemes.

The Commission heard that ecology officers advise on planting, design, species selection and maintenance requirements, helping to deliver Streets for People SuDS and street tree planting programmes alongside infrastructure designed to discourage traffic and enable active travel.

There is growing evidence to suggest that physical activity in green spaces is more beneficial than activity in other settings, linked to reduced feelings of tension and stress and increased energy and positivity. The Streets for People walking plan states that the council will: “look for opportunities to extend existing long-distance leisure routes and connect them with our parks and green spaces. We will link them to our town centres and train stations, so they are easy to access”.

The Streets for People cycling plan contains a specific commitment to deliver “separate greenways”: routes for walking and cycling that are completely separate from roads for motor vehicles.

The Commission supports Transport for London’s signposted walking routes encouraging active travel through Southwark’s parks, such as the Green Chain Walk, and London’s newest walking route: the Green Link Walk, running from Epping Forest to Peckham, and would like to see the addition and expansion of such networks.

The Commission’s earlier report on Biodiversity recommended that Southwark develop Nature Corridors. Strategic nature corridors prioritise nature but can be less suited for active travel due to a lack of access/infrastructure (e.g. those in railway sidings and cuttings).

Pedestrian nature corridors combine wildlife routes with active travel routes (e.g. Surrey Canal Walk, Green Dale, Kirkwood Road Nature Garden, Deal Porters Walk, Brenchley Gardens. There are several green corridor projects currently in development/underway, for example: North Bermondsey Wildlife Corridor; North Camberwell Wildlife Corridor; Low Line (an urban regeneration initiative in the north of the borough) and the B-Line national scheme which aims to create a pollinator pathway running through the west of the borough from Elephant Castle through Camberwell and down through Dulwich.

Improving the accessibility of nature sites for active travel and enhancing the biodiversity of these spaces has the potential to deliver significant public health benefits in Southwark. This is especially significant when such initiatives are focussed on areas with a higher proportion of residents experiencing multiple forms

of deprivation, such as those facing both poor health outcomes and limited access to nature.

Mapping by Southwark Nature Action Volunteers shows that areas of social and economic deprivation are also often areas where improved connectivity would deliver greater ecological benefits – e.g. Old Kent Road, Peckham Rye, and Canada Water – and where there are both needs and opportunities associated with restoring missing green links.

Developing a Green Infrastructure Strategy to strategically plan out Ecological Networks was a key recommendation of the Biodiversity Review. Linking Nature Corridors, Greenways and Streets for Nature is vital to improve integration, connectivity and deliver best value.

Green Active Travel – Conclusions

Active Travel represents a huge opportunity to increase physical activity amongst groups that are least active and experience most health inequalities. One of the best ways to do this is to ensure that walking, wheeling and cycling are easy to access, inclusive, attractive and fun. This can best be achieved by linking recreation and travel to greenways, green walks, parks, woods and open spaces. Turning recreational walking, cycling and wheeling into a gateway to a wider enjoyment of and participation in active travel is key.

Recreational journeys in nature may be particularly important for people undertaking manual jobs who could be less inclined to commute by active travel. Here it is useful to acknowledge that physical activity is not the only outcome: there is compelling evidence that time spent in nature will also improve mental health and reduce stress.

Greening the highway was the most popular request in the Streets for People consultation. In addition, making the environment more pleasing for people, plants and carefully placed trees will reduce air pollution and increase biodiversity. Investing in greening our active travel routes will help to maximise the positive impact of walking, wheeling and cycling.

Separate Greenways as connections between parks and green spaces for walking and wheeling will maximise Active Travel opportunities for the most vulnerable road users whilst maximising recreational use.

The Thames and river tributaries offer opportunities to make the most of blue and green space, and opportunities here ought to be explored thoroughly.

Introducing Greenways in areas of highest deprivation should be a key priority, in recognition of the fact that these are places where people are statistically least active, experience most health inequalities and are, therefore, most likely to reap the greatest health benefits of an enhanced natural environment. These are also often where there are missing biodiversity connections.

Ensuring that active travel routes become nature corridors, enhancing local biodiversity by increasing connectivity as far as possible, will maximise the benefits. Thought will need to be given to location, protecting ecology and recognising trade-offs.

There is a need for hard flat surfaces in line with Sustrans' Disabled Citizen Inquiry (solution 8 – Improving off-road routes) but there could be more emphasis on permeable planted space to enhance the experience of all users and reduce flood risk. Increasing secure cycle storage capacity across the borough, as well as awareness of it, is a key pillar in expanding participation in cycling.

PUBLIC HEALTH AND ECONOMIC BENEFITS OF PARKS, WILDLIFE GARDENS AND COMMUNITY GARDENING

Public Health England (2020) asserts that greater access to greenspace is linked with improved physical health, including healthier immune systems, lower risk of chronic disease such as asthma, and better maternal and birth outcomes. It is estimated that £2.1 billion per year could be saved in health costs if everyone in England had good access to greenspace, due to increased opportunities for physical activity in those spaces.

Additional research has drawn a direct correlation between improved ecological quality (i.e. greater biodiversity) of greenspaces and better health outcomes, with worse outcomes in degraded environments (Public Health England, 2020).

Some councils in the United Kingdom have produced compelling research on the value of green space to urban communities. Birmingham City Council concluded that:

- The annual net benefit of the city's parks and greenspaces to society was nearly £600million, which included £192million in health benefits (£4.6billion over 25 years).
- For each £1 invested in parks and greenspaces Birmingham saw returns of £24 to society, and £1.60 directly to the Council through direct parks income such as fees and Council Taxes.
- Physical and mental health benefits are estimated to add more than 3,300 Quality Adjusted Life Years (QALYs) each year (83,000 over 25 years).

- Council-managed woodlands capture more than 350 tonnes of pollutants each year, avoiding approximately 133 hospital admissions, 28 deaths, and adding 489 life years.
- Its parks and greenspaces store more than 573,000 tonnes of carbon, equivalent to 2.1 million tonnes of CO₂ with a value of £221 million.
- Nearly 7,300 Council-managed allotments are estimated to produce 2.9 tonnes of food each year with a value of approximately £4.3 million.

In summary, for every £1 spent on maintaining parks and green spaces, Birmingham saw over all public benefits worth £27. Similar research by Sheffield City Council led to an estimate that for every £1 spent on parks maintenance there was a £34 saving in health costs, with local residents being the primary beneficiaries.

Community Gardening and Inclusivity

Community Gardening can offer significant physical and mental health and wellbeing benefits through gentle physical activity, social interaction and collective creativity. Access to locally grown nutritious food, often combined with participation in its production is a common characteristic of Blue Zones.

The Commission heard from Capital Growth, London's largest food growers' network, established in 2008 with the aim of creating 2,000 growing spaces in London. The network has expanded significantly, reflecting a strong interest in food growing across diverse communities, including amongst people of colour, migrants, and refugee groups.

Access to land remains a challenge across London. Capital Growth conducts annual surveys to better understand the needs and challenges of urban food growing communities, with a focus on diversity and inclusion. Key findings from recent surveys include:

- Only 20% of gardens fully reflect the ethnic diversity of their areas with 36% reflecting the diversity to some extent.
- Paid staff in community gardens are predominantly white, with 70-80% not reflecting the ethnic diversity of the communities they serve.

There is a strong desire to improve diversity and inclusion, with 40% of members identifying it as a challenge and nearly 60% seeking support to become more organized and inclusive. The organization collaborates with local food growing networks and recognizes the need for a people of colour led food growers' network. Resources provided include a Growing Change Toolkit, an anti-racism resource page, and an anti-racism movement building program.

Southwark Council has been commended for its work to expand community gardening. Southwark community gardening coordinators take a resident-led approach with the food growing on estates, which means that community gardens are based in areas with greater socio-economic disadvantage.

From officer observation food growing and community gardening in Southwark are more representative of our borough's diversity than, for example, conservation volunteering. Nevertheless, there remains an under representation of Black and Asian residents.

The Community Gardening Coordinators work with black led groups, homeless groups and neurodiverse communities to increase inclusivity. The Common Place mapping tool and the demand for allotments indicate that access to sufficient land to meet the demand for community gardening remains a challenge in Southwark. The community gardening coordinators advised that, in line with their project ethos, they work with the community to bring forward plots of land that residents have identified, rather than themselves setting out to identify land that could be brought forward, as this would take additional capacity and expertise.

Southwark Sustainable Food Strategy 2023-2026 aims to build on the existing Good To Grow map of food growing spaces, and identify suitable, unused public spaces that could be utilised for food growing, cooking and other food activities.

Earth Tenders CIC – a case study

Earth Tenders is a community garden and hub in Southwark led by two black women. They have transformed the Dulwich vegetable garden into a vibrant space for marginalized groups, especially people of colour.

Their mission is to make green spaces accessible to everyone and address diversity challenges in the environmental horticulture sector. They offer workshops on food growing, cooking, nature walks, crafts, and art to foster community connection and resilience. They prioritize inclusivity and co-creation, gathering feedback to shape their programs.

The space is seeking to look after people who come along and make it a safe and healing place, which is resource intensive. In their first year, they hired seven black facilitators, upskilled 30 volunteers, welcomed over 600 attendees, and redistributed 15 kg of food each month.

Earth Tenders offers support for career development in the horticultural sector and is supporting a Young Fellowship. The group aims to expand and continue advocating for inclusion and equity in community gardening.

London Wildlife Trust: Centre for Wildlife Gardening – case study

The Centre for Wildlife Gardening, based in East Dulwich, is run by the London Wildlife Trust. Various sessions are held with schools, and also with disadvantaged groups. There is a focus on family learning as well as sessions for people with learning disabilities, and older people. The centre works with volunteers, many of whom are older people.

Capacity to deliver sessions for schools currently outweighs demand, as wildlife is not part of the national curriculum. Nevertheless, wildlife gardening can be particularly captivating as people observe nature unfolding. People with autism in particular can benefit.

If nature has not been introduced by parents and grandparents, young people are likely to be less familiar with wildlife. The Centre for Wildlife Gardening focuses on whole family learning and children are often extremely enthusiastic to learn more. This can be infectious for the whole family. The project builds familiarity and appreciation of nature, and encourages good stewardship. For example, the centre teaches the children about the important role of insects.

The London Wildlife Trust runs the London wide “Nature in Mind” project, which works with people on the CAMHS green list whilst they are awaiting further mental health care. There are two age groups (under and over 11). The sessions help young people to develop practical and personal life skills, and to provide a perspective.

Parks, green spaces, wildlife gardens and community gardening: conclusions

The evidence pointed overwhelmingly towards the need for a greater emphasis on inclusion and well-being in nature based activities. As with active travel, maintaining a focus on making these activities enjoyable ways to build relationships and connect with nature is seen to boost participation. This takes time and energy which must be accounted for and valued.

As with active travel, the multiple benefits go well beyond the health impacts of increased physical activity to encompass better mental health and well-being.

Links to learning and career development are also important.

Black African and Caribbean residents are most underrepresented, but well served in our borough by organisations such as Earth Tenders.

Neurodiverse people and those experiencing poor mental health may particularly benefit from time in nature.

Resources or links with outside organisations are required to bring forward more land for community gardening

Investment in green spaces is proven to pay high dividends through enhanced public health and economic wellbeing.

THAMES WATER AND NETWORK MANAGEMENT

The Commission felt that some focus on network management fitted well with the theme of this review, as decades of under-investment by privatised utility companies has ultimately led to catastrophic neglect of their networks. This has, in turn had a deleterious effect on the public realm and road network, which is increasingly frequently disrupted by emergency works, impacting the way we are able to travel around our borough.

Councillors frequently receive complaints about poor reinstatement following road works by utility companies, in particular Thames Water, and the sheer number of these interventions means that it is almost impossible for each one to be inspected upon completion. Accordingly, poorly executed reinstatement is not always reported immediately, and remedial works are frequently delayed.

This problem is becoming still more challenging as we invest in improvements to the public realm, including through delivery of our Streets for People strategy. There are a growing number of instances where high quality paving materials have to be dug up to access poorly maintained utility infrastructure and, rather than preserving the original surface materials, they are removed and discarded. Reinstatement following excavation all too frequently leaves an ugly tarmac scar. Members of the Commission wondered about the possibility of purchasing excess paving materials in order to be able to deliver faster reinstatement following excavation. However, it was noted that additional costs would be incurred for spares and storage space.

The Commission heard from Thames Water and Network Management colleagues, who contended that it is often difficult to re-use the same surface materials once they have been dug up due to the way that they are originally bonded into place. Whilst they said that contractors are instructed to re-use paving materials in reinstatement where possible, often this is not feasible. Furthermore, often the surface materials used are not widely available in the UK, meaning that the lead time for replacement can be considerable. For example, materials such as York stone and Chinese

granite can take up to 48 months to procure. Nevertheless, there is a legal statutory duty to reinstate within 6 months.

The Traffic Manager spoke about the context, and noted that this is a nationwide issue currently being examined by the Transport Select Committee, which has issued a Call for Evidence on managing the impact of street works.

ACTIVE TRAVEL AND NATURE REPORT

RECOMMENDATIONS

Green Active Travel

Recommendation 1

A working group is recommended to bring together Highways, Public Health, Parks, Ecology and Planning officers to deliver a strand of Streets for Nature that includes a more prominent focus on integrating the wider health benefits of active travel and access to nature into the Council's public health function. This ought to include a particular focus on the health benefits of increasing Greenways for people and nature and the link with Nature Corridors, as well as enhancing the Streets for Nature theme. This is in recognition of the wide-ranging health benefits of physical exercise in nature. As part of this:

- i. Landscape Architects /public realm designers and ecology officers should be empowered to take a more proactive role in delivering the Streets for Nature strand of the Streets for People Strategy to ensure maximum incorporation of nature for health.
- ii. Streets for Nature and the provision of more Greenways requires oversight beyond the Highways division if it is to be optimised. Creating separate Greenways and enhancing Streets for Nature needs to be recognised as a distinct discipline within highways engineering if it is to achieve its potential to bring the benefits of nature to people and enhance biodiversity connectivity. Ecology officers and Landscape Architects / Public realm designers should be fully empowered to provide specialised input to maximise greenery, help select the right species palette, enhance connectivity and oversee the installation of SuDS.
- iii. Ecology officers, Public Health and Planning should also be empowered to provide specialised input to help determine routes for Greenways, including along our rivers, to ensure that the Streets for Nature theme is integrated with the emerging Nature Corridors, Ecological Network and Green Infrastructure strategy. This will help to deliver nature enhanced Active Travel and recreation opportunities to the most disadvantaged communities.

Inclusive Active Travel

These interventions are aimed at increasing active travel by cohorts with protected characteristics who are typically less likely to take exercise and/or more likely to experience most health inequalities (e.g. disabled people, people of colour, women, people experiencing socio- economic deprivation, older people)

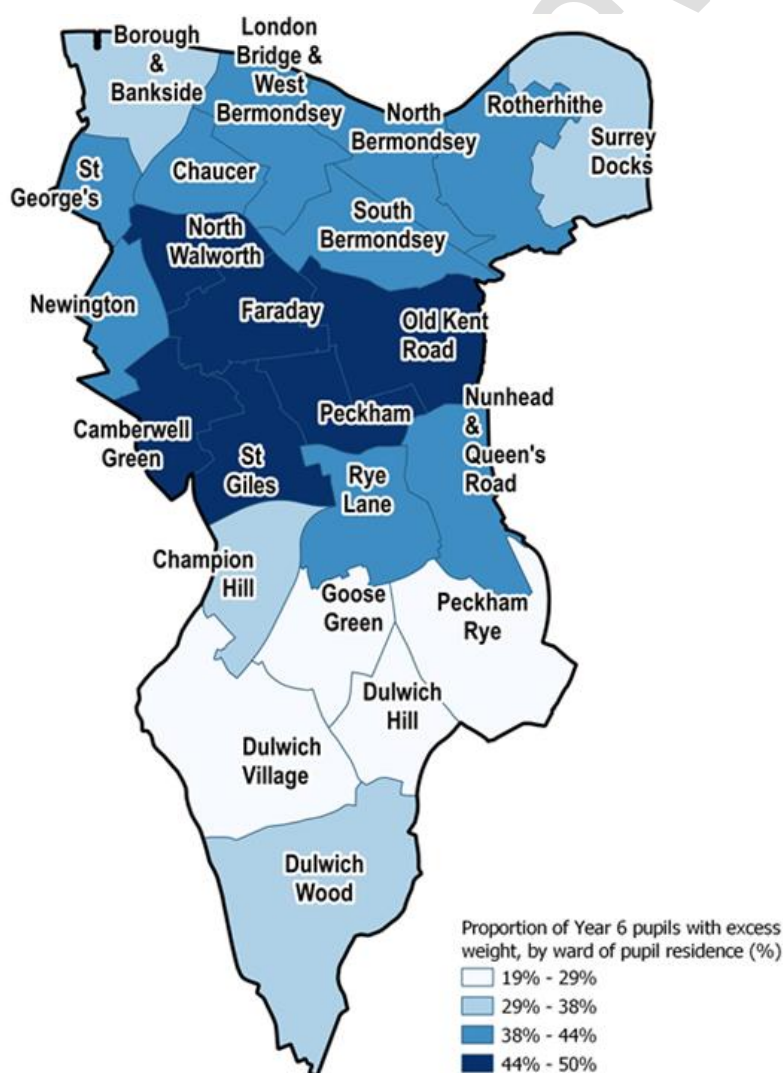
Recommendation 2

Amplify and build the capacity of local community and voluntary groups working to make active travel more inclusive in Southwark:

- i. Continue to invest in and explore further ways of building relationships and unlocking funding for local groups who are already working with disadvantaged cohorts in Southwark to improve access to active travel: (e.g. Wheels for Well-being, Joy Riders). This should include exploring/promoting possible funding opportunities through social prescribing.
- ii. Identify other local groups that are delivering or could deliver similar benefits in order to further expand access to active travel and nature for these cohorts

Recommendation 3

Given the mapping of health inequalities across the borough, higher priority should be given to facilitating access to active travel and nature in areas of higher deprivation:



Recommendation 4

Conduct research by working closely with and listening to groups experiencing the most health inequalities to better understand the practical and cultural barriers to increasing active travel and recreational time in nature, in order to remove this over time. Sustrans could be a good partner in this task.

Sustrans told the commission that their approach it to:

- i. Identify which groups aren't walking, wheeling and cycling
- ii. Engage these group to understand their barriers and motivation to walking, wheeling and cycling
- iii. Design interventions that are tailored to their needs
- iv. Allow for continuous feedback and programme redesign
- v. Measure impact
- vi. Accept that behaviour change takes time and requires ongoing support

Recommendation 5

Consider designing and expanding bespoke activities/events/walks aimed at particular groups in tandem with addressing structural disadvantages such as a lack of cycle parking, inaccessible infrastructure for cycling, wheeling and walking, and transforming wider social and cultural attitudes to support active travel.

Pay specific attention to:

- i. People who are not active at all
- ii. People with health conditions often associated with inactivity such as obesity, hypertension, diabetes and poor mental health
- iii. People in multiple and/or low paid jobs (including cleaning/ caring construction and service industries)

Recommendation 6

Ensure that walking, wheeling and cycling infrastructure is fully accessible through a process of engagement and codesign. In particular, the cycle network must not only be for the very able bodied, so not just Cycle superhighways. Infrastructure must also include separate Greenways, wider connectivity to the train network and other open spaces and be suitable for a range of mobilities. Ensure that routes are designed for recreation, as well as getting from A to B, and include circular routes. Undertake a process of ongoing redesign with more engagement with different groups to adapt and readapt, to understand how people walk, wheel and cycle around an area.

Recommendation 7

Increase availability of cycle training for children and adults, especially promoting these amongst cohorts we know are less likely to try cycling. Whilst working through schools is useful, engagement and training must be aimed at families too.

Recommendation 8

Explore ways to link active travel and working in nature to social recognition, career pathways, professional success and financial prosperity in all cohorts with a protected characteristic – paying particular attention to ethnic minorities and disabled people.

- i. For example, demonstrate a link between active travel and enjoying nature and study and careers in sports science, physiotherapy, coaching, ecology, horticulture, arboriculture and management of green spaces, raising the status of these pursuits and widening participation.
- ii. Proactively seek cycling ambassadors with influence in diverse communities.

Recommendation 9

Explore grant funding to lower the cost to disabled people of owning an adapted/accessible cycle and ensure that the Try Before You Bike scheme includes accessible bikes.

Recommendation 10

Join with Wheels for Wellbeing to lobby the government to a) have bikes recognised as mobility aids and, b) recognise the importance of e-assisted bikes for disabled people and ensure proportionate actions regarding battery safety

Improving cycle storage

Recommendation 11

Target cycle storage and hangers where they are most needed by:

- i. Providing funding to increase secure cycle storage capacity, especially focussing on areas around homes without private storage space – e.g. flats on older estates and HMOs.
- ii. Work with residents and tenants' organisations to actively build demand.
- iii. Where possible work proactively with housing associations and private landlords to encourage delivery of sufficient cycle storage for tenants and residents. This is particularly necessary on some older estates where there is currently almost no provision.

Recommendation 12

Storage should be made available for non-standard bikes such as cargo bikes, larger accessible cycles and child carriers.

Recommendation 13

Roll out residents' parking permits on estates on the same basis as on-street parking. Parking revenue can be used in part to significantly subsidise the fees charged to users of secure cycle storage space.

Recommendation 14

Ensure that cycle storage facilities are located in areas which are well lit and overlooked so users feel safe when securing their bikes.

E bikes and scooters

Recommendation 15

Work with e-conveyance providers to improve parking by:

- i. Accelerating rollout of dedicated bays for e-bikes and e-scooters on carriageways across the borough. Funding ought to be provided by conveyance operators to deliver this.
- ii. Work with operators to ensure that e-conveyances are parked either in dedicated bays or in regular parking spaces on the carriageway after use. Where possible, pavement parking of e-conveyances should be discouraged and eliminated over time. This will rely on operators maximising enforcement against poor parking to ensure that users are aware of obligations to park conveyances considerately in accordance with the Council's commitment to Transport for All's Equal Pavements Pledge.

Recommendation 16

Work with providers to explore options for less able riders, e.g. e-trikes.

Recommendation 17

Reduce maximum speeds of e-conveyances through geo-fencing at locations where riders share space with pedestrians, e.g. in parks.

Recommendation 18

Explore partnerships with operators to improve access amongst lower income groups who are less likely to cycle.

Wildlife Gardens and Community Gardening

Community gardens (wildlife, horticultural, community)

Recommendation 19

Whilst acknowledging existing work in this area, ensure greater emphasis on inclusion and well-being in nature-based activities. Specific provision should be made to fund projects enabling resident participation in nature based fun, arts, craft and health pursuits, as well as encouraging use of produce to promote healthy eating and developing healthy cooking skills for children and families.

There is particular value in investing time and resources in community building to sustain social relationships, especially in marginalised communities.

Recommendation 20

Whilst acknowledging existing work in this area, focus on ensuring that people from marginalised communities have access to community gardens, particularly Black African and Caribbean residents who are most underrepresented.

Recommendation 21

The education service should actively promote the Centre for Wildlife Gardening's offer to local schools to maximise take-up and work with the Centre to further explore ways to incorporate gardening including food growing into school life across the borough.

Recommendation 22

Commission a mental health programme that links children and young people to nature in recognition of its therapeutic benefits, particularly for people with autism (see 'Nature in Mind', a collaboration between the London Wildlife Trust and East London NHS Foundation Trust).

Recommendation 23

Expand the community gardening team to help build capacity across the borough in recognition of the significant health, environmental and social value and demonstrable multiplier effect of investment in this activity. Develop schemes through TRAs, parks and other volunteer groups.

Parks and Green Space

Recommendation 24

Recognise and publicise the significant public health benefits of green space and, accordingly, the value of investing in green space, both with regard to existing spaces and also through ensuring adequate provision in new development.

Recommendation 25

Ensure that new green space is proactively designed with input from ecology officers and landscape designers to maximise public health and biodiversity value.

Recommendation 26

Include community food growing within non-mandatory planning advice i.e. proactively explore with planning applicants the possibility of integrating community food growing spaces and edible landscapes in developments involving communal spaces within flats, student halls of residence and public spaces. Examples may include community orchards and gardens.

Recommendation 27

Identify other potential spaces that could be used for community gardening, including for allotments and orchards. Ensure there is a dedicated and adequate resource to bring forward land (cf. Southwark Sustainable Food Strategy 2023-2026 aim re Good to Grow map). This ought to be complementary to the role of community gardening co-ordinators, whose focus is on working with residents on land they have identified.

Recommendation 28

Take steps to publicise, mitigate and reduce the harms of pet insecticide treatments. This includes public education on the damage caused by contaminated dogs entering water courses and contaminated dog and cat fur being discarded where it can be picked up by birds during nesting.

Highways Reinstatement

Recommendation 29

Design public space to maximise safety, durability, permeability, aesthetics, and wherever possible, ease of disassembly and re-use. Where possible, consideration should be given to suitable "soft" setting and permeability, for example using sand-based settings for paving units, with suitable underlay materials and subsurface preparation, in place of rigid and impermeable surfaces, which require breaking to be removed.

Recommendation 30

Southwark Highways should continue to ensure that the materials it uses in public realm improvements are of a high quality, safety, durability and aesthetic value.

Recommendation 31

Utilities companies must be made aware that the council is increasingly moving away from the use of tarmac in enhanced public spaces delivered under its Streets for People strategy. As such, employees and contractors engaged in excavation of the highway and other public space must be made fully aware of the need to ensure prompt and like for like reinstatement.

Recommendations 32

Where the surfaces excavated are not of tarmac, employees and contractors must be mindful of the need, wherever possible, to preserve and reuse excavated surface materials during reinstatement.

Recommendations 33

Where surface materials displaced during excavation cannot be reused during reinstatement, utilities companies shall be obliged purchase like materials to ensure full reinstatement within due time (6 months).

Recommendations 34

Highways should consider limiting the palette of surface paving materials deployed in the public realm and explore the possibility of retaining small stocks of these materials to ensure availability of supply to utilities companies where required following excavation. This would be conditional on utilities companies covering the storage and financing costs. (These could be less onerous than the costs of shipping in new materials combined with the costs of fines levied in respect of delayed reinstatement and, as such, fulfilment of this recommendation may be contingent on an agreement with utilities companies on this basis.)

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Environment Scrutiny Commission members 2024/25:

Elected members

Councillor Margy Newens (Chair)

Councillor Graham Neale (Vice Chair)

Councillor Reggie Popoola

Councillor Bethan Roberts

Councillor Sabina Emmanuel

Councillor Leo Pollak

Councillor Hamish McCallum

Co-optees

Anna Colligan

Simon Saville

Officer

Julie Timbrell, scrutiny Project Manager

Evidence received – Partners

Diana Wallace, Community Learning and Engagement Officer , London Wildlife Trust

Jane Lilley, the acting Head of Learning and Engagement, London Wildlife Trust

Jack McKenna, Senior Public Affairs Manager UK and Ireland, Lime

Temi Lateef, My Choice/ Black Riders Association

Isabelle Clement, Director of Wheels for Wellbeing

Mariam Draaijer, Chief Executive , JoyRiders

Scott Weddell, General Manager, JoyRiders

Alison Litherland, Head of Team, Behaviour Change at Sustrans

Racheal Dring, Capital Growth and Sustain

Idman Abdurahaman, Co-Director, Earth Tenders CIC

James Abbott, Local Engagement Manager, Public Affairs, Thames Water

Steve Dennard, Regional Streetworks Manager, Thames Water

Claire Alleguen, Community Partnerships Specialist, TfL,

Evidence received – Members and Officers

Councillor James McAsh, Cabinet Member for Clean Air, Streets & Waste

Councillor Portia Mwangangye, Cabinet Member for Leisure, Parks & Young People

Sangeeta Leahy, Director of Public Health

Abi Oguntokun, Director of Landlord Services (acting)

Gillian Boundy, Senior Public Health Programme Manager – Place and Health Improvement

Tim Long, Team Leader Transport Policy

Hedley Mellor, Transport Policy Officer

Ruth Arnott, Community Gardening Coordinator

Liam Nash, Ecology Officer

Holly Weber, Ecology Officer

Tom Robison, Programme and Policy Manager – Highways

Ian Law, Traffic Manager, Network Management

Paul Lowbridge, Roads and Street Works Manager

Matt Club, Director of Environment

Item No. 10	Classification: Open	Date: 15 October 2025	Meeting Name: Environment, Community Safety and Engagement Scrutiny Commission
Report title:		Cover report for the Environment, Community Safety and Engagement Scrutiny Commission Work Programme 2025-26	
Ward(s) or groups affected:		N/a	
From:		Project Manager, scrutiny.	

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. That the Environment, Community Safety and Engagement Scrutiny Commission note the work programme attached as the Work Programme, plus appendix.
2. That the Environment, Community Safety and Engagement Scrutiny Commission consider the addition of new items or allocation of previously identified items to specific meeting dates of the commission.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

3. The general terms of reference of the scrutiny commissions are set out in the council's constitution (overview and scrutiny procedure rules - paragraph 5). The constitution states that:

Within their terms of reference, all scrutiny committees/commissions will:

- a) review and scrutinise decisions made or actions taken in connection with the discharge of any of the council's functions
- b) review and scrutinise the decisions made by and performance of the cabinet and council officers both in relation to individual decisions and over time in areas covered by its terms of reference
- c) review and scrutinise the performance of the council in relation to its policy objectives, performance targets and/or particular service areas
- d) question members of the cabinet and officers about their decisions and performance, whether generally in comparison with service plans and targets over a period of time, or in relation to particular decisions, initiatives or projects and about their views on issues and proposals affecting the area

- e) assist council assembly and the cabinet in the development of its budget and policy framework by in-depth analysis of policy issues
 - f) make reports and recommendations to the cabinet and or council assembly arising from the outcome of the scrutiny process
 - g) consider any matter affecting the area or its inhabitants
 - h) liaise with other external organisations operating in the area, whether national, regional or local, to ensure that the interests of local people are enhanced by collaborative working
 - i) review and scrutinise the performance of other public bodies in the area and invite reports from them by requesting them to address the scrutiny committee and local people about their activities and performance
 - j) conduct research and consultation on the analysis of policy issues and possible options
 - k) question and gather evidence from any other person (with their consent)
 - l) consider and implement mechanisms to encourage and enhance community participation in the scrutiny process and in the development of policy options
 - m) conclude inquiries promptly and normally within six months
4. The work programme document lists those items that have been or are to be considered in line with the commission's terms of reference.

KEY ISSUES FOR CONSIDERATION

- 5. Set out in the Work Programme and review scope appendixes are the issues and reviews the Environment, Community Safety and Engagement Scrutiny Commission is due to consider in 2025-26.
- 6. The work programme is a standing item on the Environment, Community Safety and Engagement Scrutiny Commission agenda and enables the commission to consider, monitor and plan issues for consideration at each meeting.

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

Background Papers	Held At	Contact
Environment, Community Safety and Engagement Scrutiny Commission agenda and minutes	Southwark Council Website	Julie Timbrell Project Manager
Link: https://moderngov.southwark.gov.uk/ieListMeetings.aspx?Committeeld=518		

APPENDICES

No.	Title
	Work Programme 2025-26 Appendix A Playspaces

AUDIT TRAIL

Lead Officer	Everton Roberts, Head of Scrutiny		
Report Author	Julie Timbrell, Project Manager, Scrutiny.		
Version	Final		
Dated	15 October 2025		
Key Decision?	No		
CONSULTATION WITH OTHER OFFICERS / DIRECTORATES / CABINET MEMBER			
Officer Title		Comments Sought	Comments Included
Director of Law and Governance		No	No
Strategic Director of Finance and Governance		No	No
Cabinet Member		No	No
Date final report sent to Scrutiny Team			15 October 2025

Environment, Community Safety and Engagement Scrutiny Commission

Emerging Workplan 2025 /26

Reviews

- Review: Playspaces **Appendix A**

Topics

- Customer Experience Plan pre scrutiny

Items

Streets for People – zoning consultation

Fly-tipping officer report to coincide with interview with Deputy Cabinet Member for Cleaner Southwark

Recycling rates and Food recycling – update on pilot , implementation and lessons learnt (link to Deputy Cabinet member/ Cabinet member interview)

Climate Emergency strategy and action plan update (March)

Community Safety Independent review – tbc as may go to OSC

Standing item – cabinet member interviews, Borough Commander, (tbc):

- Cabinet Member for Leisure, Parks and Young People
- Cabinet Member for Clean Air, Streets and Waste
- Cabinet Member for Community Safety and Neighbourhoods (linked to the Community Safety Independent review – tbc as may go to OSC)
- Cabinet Member for Climate Emergency, Jobs and Business (tbc)
- Cabinet Member for Equalities, Democracy and Finance
- Cabinet Member for Council Homes
- Cabinet Member for New Homes & Sustainable Development
- Deputy Cabinet Member for Cleaner Southwark (with a focus on fly-tying tbc may attend with Cabinet member, tbc)
- Deputy Cabinet Member for Neighbourhoods
- Deputy Cabinet Member for Landlord Service

- [Borough Commander \(fire\)](#) (tbc may go to OSC)
- Borough Commander (policing) (tbc may be OSC)

Proposals for scrutiny (to be considered)

- CCTV (link in with Community Safety independent review) – tbc may go to OSC
- Phone snatching (link in with Community Safety independent review) – tbc may go to OSC
- [Policing oversight board](#)

Recommendations from previous administrative year 2024/25:

- Energy review update – briefing paper to update on progress
- Flooding and resilience
- Green Finance update – briefing paper to review from cabinet member and officers
- The Thames and opportunities to increase biodiversity and recreation along the foreshore

Environment, Community Safety and Engagement Scrutiny Commission		
Meeting	Date	Items
1	Wednesday 16 July	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Customer Experience Plan pre scrutiny • Streets for People – zoning consultation • Playspaces – officer paper • Biodiversity review – cabinet response (to note) • Workplan
2	Wed 15 October	<p>Play Spaces review evidence</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make Space for Girls • London Play <p>Cabinet Member for Leisure, Parks and Young People</p> <p>Streets for People – zoning consultation</p>
3	Wed 26 November	<p>Community Safety Review</p> <p>Community Safety topics: Phone-snatching, CCTV</p> <p>Playspace Review: Designing Out Crime and reducing anti-social behaviour</p>

		<p>Interview with the Police Borough Commander</p> <p>Playspace review: update on Open Space Needs Assessment and a wider briefing on how regeneration schemes support provision and upgrades of playgrounds (tbc)</p> <p>Playspace review: briefing on spending and service provision by Housing and Environment to enable comparison (to note)</p>
4	Tue 3 February	<p>Cabinet Member for Clean Air, Streets and Waste (plus Deputy Cabinet member for a Cleaner Borough welcome to attend too)</p> <p>Recycling and food recycling</p> <p>Fly-tipping</p> <p>Police Oversight Board</p> <p>Playspace headline report</p>
5	Thu 12 March	<p>Climate Emergency strategy and action plan update</p> <p>Playspace final report</p>

Scrutiny Review Scoping Proposal Form

Procedure:

1. The proposer must complete Part 1. Parts 2 and 3 will be developed by the Scrutiny Team working with the proposer and other Scrutiny members – any information which can be added now will help in taking the Review forwards. Forms should be emailed to ScrutinyTeam2@southwark.gov.uk or relevant Scrutiny officer
2. The *blue, italicised text* is for guidance only and can be deleted
3. The CfGS's [Running Effective Reviews – a Practice Guide](#) provides further useful advice

Part 1 (to be completed by proposer of Scrutiny Review)	
Title of Review	Play space – ensuring Southwark has sufficient good quality and accessible play spaces for all children and young people.
Reason for Review	<p>Play spaces offer numerous benefits for children's development, including physical, cognitive, social, and emotional growth. They provide a safe and stimulating environment for children to learn, explore, and engage with their world.</p> <p>The impact of the Covid lockdowns brought into sharp relief the importance of good quality outside play space for children and young people, both during the pandemic and in recovery.</p> <p>Investment in good quality outside play space is impactful in terms of Public Health, education and community safety, and return on investment.</p>
Rationale, Importance and Relevance	<p>The review is seeking to address:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> I. Variable quality – in terms of design, accessibility, age of equipment and maintenance (including variability across playgrounds in parks and on housing estates) II. Inclusive design, particularly for: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Girls (from early years to secondary-school age) - Disabled children and young people III. The adequacy of associated facilities, including for the adults who may be looking after the child (e.g. toilets, drinking water) IV. The link between play space provision and community safety, specifically the role designing out crime plays, if any, in design and maintenance of play and open space provision.

	In addition, the review will examine the impact of Regeneration schemes and relevant policy, including planning, to ensure these are fit for purpose and promote development and maintenance of good quality play spaces.
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Part 2 (to be completed by the Scrutiny team in consultation with the Chair of the Committee and relevant officers)	
Internal stakeholders and partners	<p><u>Councillor Portia Mwangangye</u> <u>Cabinet Member for Leisure, Parks & Young People</u></p> <p><u>Councillor Natasha Ennin</u> <u>Cabinet Member for Community Safety</u></p> <p>Chief Officer (Strategic Director): Aled Richards Strategic Director Environment, Sustainability & Leisure Director: Toni Ainge, Director of Leisure Head of Service: Tara Quinn, Head of Parks and Natural Environment</p>

Part 3 (to be completed by the Scrutiny team in consultation with the Chair of the Committee and relevant officers)	
Context	<p>The review is a both Service and Issue-led.</p> <p>The review will draw upon recent Play Space audit.</p> <p>There is an Open Space Needs Assessment in progress (tbc) that the review can influence</p>
Aims and Objectives	<p>The aim is to improve the quality of play spaces and ensure adequate provision.</p> <p>Make recommendations to improve the outcome and delivery of play spaces to ensure:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Good quality • Accessibility (for girls and disabled children in particular) • Provision is supported and enhanced through regeneration • Associated facilities are factored into delivery (e.g. toilets, drinking water) • Adequate geographical provision • Safety

<p>Scoping lines and Key Questions</p>	<p>Key Questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ What is Southwark's play provision like for girls in the borough? ▪ How is sex taken into account when designing park improvements and associated facilities (e.g. toilets, drinking water)? What data is used to inform this? ▪ How is provision for disabled children considered? ▪ How is inclusive play/open space taken into account in the planning process when working with developers on play provision and phasing of works? ▪ What are the incidences of crime/ASB in our play spaces (on estates and off estates)? How are these monitored and managed? ▪ How are we designing out crime in our play spaces? <p>Out of scope:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Public toilet provision in parks and the borough more generally
<p>Approach used to gain evidence of and insight into the issue</p>	<p>Task & Finish</p> <p>The review will be completed over the course of the administrative year 2025/26</p> <p>The review will consider evidence from:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leisure and play officers • Relevant Lead Cabinet Members • Make Space for Girls: https://www.makespaceforgirls.co.uk/ • London Play https://londonplay.org.uk/ • Play England https://www.playengland.org.uk/
<p>Logistics</p>	
<p>Outputs and Deliverables</p>	<p>Report by end of the administrative year: Spring 2026</p>
<p>Next steps</p>	

Environment, Community Safety and Engagement Scrutiny Commission

MUNICIPAL YEAR 2025-26

AGENDA DISTRIBUTION LIST (OPEN)

NOTE: Original held by Scrutiny Team; all amendments/queries to Julie Timbrell Tel: 020 7525 0514

Name	No of copies	Name	No of copies
		Julie Timbrell, Scrutiny Team SPARES	10
		External	
Electronic Copy Members <u>Councillors:</u> Councillor Esme Hicks (Chair) Councillor Graham Neale (Vice-Chair) Councillor Sabina Emmanuel Councillor David Parton Councillor Leo Pollak Councillor Hamish McCallum <u>Coopted members:</u> TBC Reserves Members Councillor Reggie Popoola Councillor Darren Merrill Councillor Youcef Hassaine Councillor Esme Dobson Councillor Sunil Chopra Councillor Rachel Bentley Councillor Adam Hood		Total: 10 Dated: May 2025	