

SAFER PARKS

Improving access for
women and girls



FOREWORD



Our towns and cities have been designed primarily by men, and as a result, they work less well for women. Parks are no exception.

We know that women don't feel as safe as men in all public spaces. This affects their ability to move around freely, reduces opportunities for work and leisure and denies them the huge physical and mental health benefits that parks can bring.

This guidance shows how we can make changes to park design and management to help women and girls feel safer and more welcome in these spaces, at all times of day and throughout the year.

The foundation of the guidance is research that I'm proud to have funded in 2022, conducted by the University of Leeds, which explored women and girls' perceptions of what makes a park feel safe or unsafe. It showed that while they have a variety of different viewpoints, informed by their different experiences and identities, there were many areas of agreement.

It is the voices of those women and girls that are heard throughout this document.

I was moved by reading their words. They told us how their lives were impacted on a daily basis by misogyny and harassment. The girls in particular were wonderfully individual and brutally honest, challenging us to 'change society' as well as reworking parks. This determined spirit gives me hope that a new generation of female decision makers is emerging, to bring a more gender-balanced workforce to our design professions and shape our towns and cities for the better.

Until then, as we strive for a more just society, let us begin to change our parks to offer women and girls equality and safety in public space. The rewards will be amazing.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Tracy Brabin".

Tracy Brabin
Mayor of West Yorkshire

This document has been prepared by Keep Britain Tidy, Make Space for Girls, the University of Leeds and West Yorkshire Combined Authority.

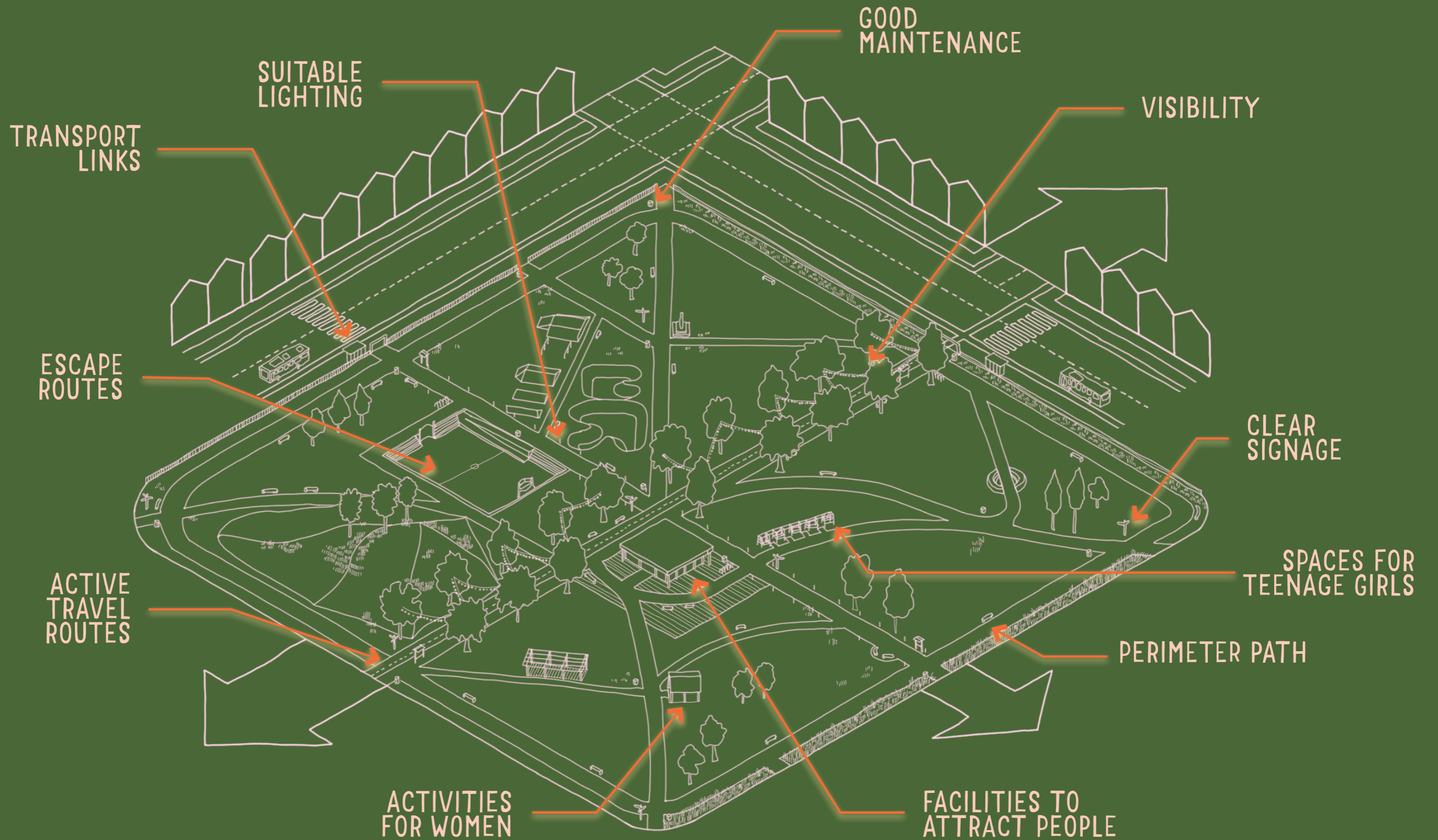
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INTRODUCTION



Parks are essential for all of us. Across the UK, an estimated 27,000 parks and green spaces¹ provide somewhere to be active, play, socialise and relax. Their importance for health and wellbeing is widely documented, but the benefits are not so easily available for women. The impact begins at a young age: there is a drop off rate in girls' use of parks in adolescence, when they begin to feel that parks are not for them.² Whilst parks appear to be 'open to all', there is still a long way to go until they are experienced as safe and welcoming places by women and girls.

Designing safer parks is important for everyone, but the perspectives and lived experiences of women and girls require specific consideration. Sexual harassment in public space is a routine part of daily life, which affects 71% of women in the UK, rising to 86% of 18-24-year-olds.³ Girls encounter unwanted sexual behaviours in public from a young age, with 77% first experiencing these before their mid-teens.⁴ Over 50% of girls and young women don't feel safe outside alone.⁵ In addition, other aspects of women and girls' identities, such as ethnicity, disability, age, gender identity and sexual orientation, increase the harassment they face.

Concern about safety is perhaps the biggest single barrier to women and girls' enjoyment of parks and green spaces. In Britain, women are three times more likely than men to feel unsafe in a park during the day, and parks feel less safe than public transport, residential areas and high streets.⁶ This is worse after dark, when as many as four out of five women in Britain say that they would feel unsafe walking alone in a park, compared to two out of five men.⁷ Safety is a relative and multi-faceted

concept, broader than crime or the risk of victimisation. Indeed, some of the acts of sexual harassment and misogyny which women and girls endure on a regular basis are not categorised as crimes, but still have an impact on how safe they feel. Moreover, safety spans a broad spectrum of experiences, including feeling uncomfortable, unwelcome, or judged.

All these factors mean that women and girls are less likely to use parks than men and boys, a situation which has a significant impact on their lives. But how can decision-makers act to change this?

This question is what the guidance addresses. It is based on research by the University of Leeds in 2022⁸ (henceforth called 'the West Yorkshire research'), along with a survey of other research and good practice. From this, a set of design and management principles for both existing parks and new developments has been developed.

It is primarily aimed at parks managers, landscape architects and other public realm design professionals across the UK, but is also relevant for local and national politicians, developers, council officers and community groups. Although some of the principles could be applied to other public spaces, this guidance focuses on parks, helping stakeholders understand gender-sensitive principles of safety and implement changes at varying scales and budgets.

The principles cover ten core areas under three themes.

Eyes on the Park reflects that the presence of others makes women and girls feel safer.

Awareness addresses design issues that can help women and girls feel more secure.

Inclusion considers the importance of bringing a diverse cross-section of women and girls into our parks and designing spaces with their input.

The guidance addresses the full range of safety provision, advocating for design that not only addresses practical issues such as sightlines and escape but also subtler themes including belonging and familiarity – creating parks which welcome women and girls and ensuring that changes do not result in a bland, sterile or overly-defensive environment. Parks should be beautiful, nature-rich spaces, where improved feelings of safety lead to a positive self-fulfilling cycle of greater use and thus more reassurance.

In addition, the guidance presents ten inspirational case studies of good practice and innovation from Britain and abroad which demonstrate how the principles can be applied. In a sector with reduced resources and thus little evaluation of the impact of different interventions, these practical examples illustrate how women and girls' safety and inclusion in parks can and should be improved.

The document forms supplementary guidance to the Green Flag Award

scheme, which sets the benchmark standard for management of parks and green spaces across the UK and around the world. It also supports Natural England's new Green Infrastructure Framework, the Equality Act 2010 and the Public Sector Equality Duty. On an international level, it will help UK parks achieve the UN's Sustainable Development Goals, in its target to provide universal access to safe, inclusive and accessible, green and public spaces.

The research shows the importance of the design, management and maintenance of parks for the safety of women and girls, but it also shines a light on broader societal issues such as misogyny, harassment and violence against women and girls, illustrating a need for more fundamental change.

Each sector must work towards contributing the difference they can make, now and in the future. While societal change is essential and necessary, we can also make a difference to the lives of women and girls in the way our parks are planned, designed, managed and maintained. We must all play our part.

1. House of Commons Communities and Local Government Select Committee, 2017.
2. There is currently little gender-disaggregated data for the UK, but work elsewhere demonstrates that this is the case in many other places, as summarised by Make Space for Girls, 2023.
3. All-Party Parliamentary Group on United Nations Women, 2021.
4. Crimestoppers, 2023.
5. GirlGuiding, 2022.
6. Office for National Statistics, 2021.
7. Office for National Statistics, 2021.
8. Barker et al., 2022.

PRINCIPLES



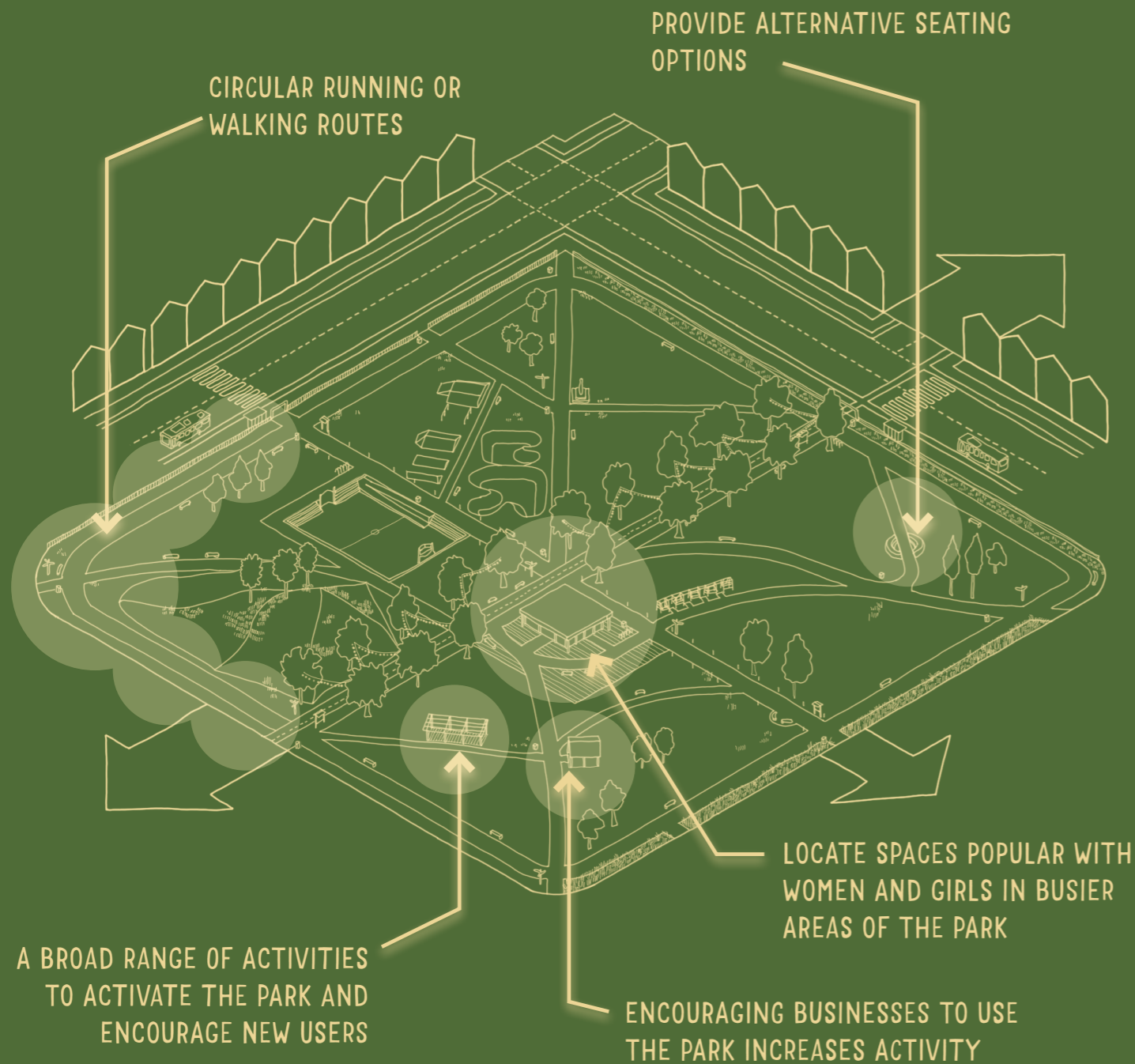
- EYES ON THE PARK
 - Busyness and Activation
 - Staffing and Authority Figures
- AWARENESS
 - Visibility and Openness
 - Escape
 - Lighting
 - Wayfinding and Layout
- INCLUSION
 - Belonging and Familiarity
 - Image
 - Access and Location
 - Co-production and Engagement

EYES ON THE PARK

The phrase 'eyes on the street' was coined by the writer and urbanist Jane Jacobs in the 1960s to describe how safety in city streets is fostered by constant mixed activity and 'natural proprietors' watching over an area. The concept is no less relevant to parks today and the West Yorkshire research shows it is key to women and girls' feelings of safety and enjoyment.

- Busyness and Activation
- Staffing and Authority Figures

BUSYNESS AND ACTIVATION



The presence of other people makes parks feel safer. This was something which came through very strongly in the West Yorkshire research. Women and girls felt particularly safe in the presence of other women and girls but would schedule their visits for times of peak general usage because a diverse range of other users also contributes to a park feeling comfortable and secure.

“
In the bigger parks... definitely you feel much more comfortable being around those facilities because there is people there and there is stuff going on and there is a sense of it being official... And it attracts people throughout the day.
 ”

Women and girls are reassured by seeing others like them, and this makes them feel that a park is safer, although teenage girls also feel safer in the presence of other women. Research elsewhere shows that the presence of middle aged or elderly people also benefits the overall sense of safety in a public place.

However not all users make a park feel safer. Women and girls reported that the presence of lone men or large groups of men or boys makes them uneasy.

Busyness

Design and management techniques can be used to create busier and more active parks which feel safer for women and girls.

Facilities

Facilities are an important factor

in bringing users to a park, and the provision of additional amenities which attract a broad demographic will make a park feel safer.

Good practice includes:

- Those facilities popular with women and girls, such as cafes, outdoor gyms or social seating, should be situated in areas of relatively high footfall.
- Ensure these have good sight lines to and from other well-used spaces like play areas.
- Circular running or walking tracks have been shown to attract more women to the park.
- Encourage businesses such as food trucks, exercise classes, personal trainers and childcare providers to use the park.
- Ensure facilities are open at regular times, which helps women know when the park will be well-used.
- Publicise these times to allow women to plan their visits for when they know others will be present.

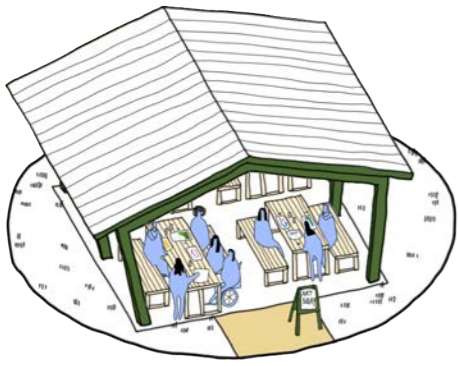
Some facilities which are predominantly used by men and boys such as pitches, skate parks and BMX tracks, may not feel safe or welcoming to women and girls due to the potential for harassment and they may be reluctant even to walk past them.

To enhance safety:

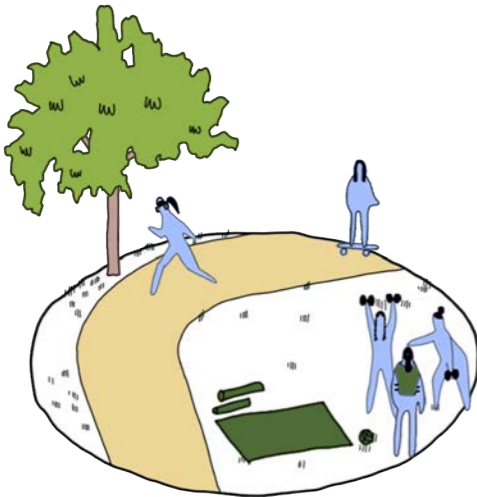
- Ensure that alternative routes are available so that women and girls can choose not to pass these facilities.
- When designing new spaces, consider that grouping facilities of this kind together may create an area in which women and girls feel unsafe.

Seating

The conventional layout of benches directly alongside paths is useful for



Classes in the park can include a wide range of activities, not just exercise.



Encouraging regular business users, such as personal trainers, can make the space feel safer.



Promoting active travel increases overall use of the park.

older and disabled people who need regular rest points but can result in women and girls feeling exposed to comment when they are sitting on them. Providing other seating options in different locations can offer an alternative. Teenage girls particularly like facing each other when they are sitting.

Active travel

Encouraging active travel such as walking, wheeling and cycling will make the park busier and so has the potential to make a space feel safer. Integrating routes through the park into the active travel network can facilitate this. Similarly, pedestrian usage should be encouraged by ensuring paths follow the most convenient routes across the park and also connect with the wider transport network beyond.

Activation

Activation can play an important role in making a park feel more secure for women and girls. These can be events specifically designed to attract more women and girls into the park, but more general activations can also improve safety by bringing in a broader demographic of users and increasing the number of people using the park.

“ I think having other women and girls there, especially ones that are on their own, it makes you feel a lot better. ”

Activities for women

Because women and girls feel safer in the presence of others like them, activities specifically aimed at women

and girls have the potential to create a positive feedback loop of safety.

To make these successful:

- Activities should be located in a space which is easy to find and safe to access.
- Ensure they are accessible for the widest range of women and girls possible, taking into account age, disability, ethnic background and religion and those with caring responsibilities.
- Events aimed at groups who do not usually use the space should be located near the perimeter where possible as this feels safer.
- Activities with a facilitator are more likely to attract those who don't currently use the park.
- Publicise the programme beyond the park and its existing users.
- Collaborate with local groups in both creating and publicising events.
- Schedule events so that they extend the times and days in which women feel able to use the park.
- Don't just think about activation for women in terms of sport and exercise. A broader range of provision, such as book groups, social events and creative classes will attract a wider demographic.
- Consider the use of other budgets, e.g. health, safety, arts or environment, to fund these activities.

“ I will walk the dog while parkrun's going on because... there's an organised thing going on, there's lots of volunteers around, there's lots of people I could ask for help if I needed. ”

General activation

Other activations aimed at a general audience bring more people to the park. This increased busyness makes women feel safer.

As well as attracting more users, these events bring in a regular group of staff or volunteers (see Staffing and Authority Figures principle). To ensure these activities make a positive contribution to park safety:

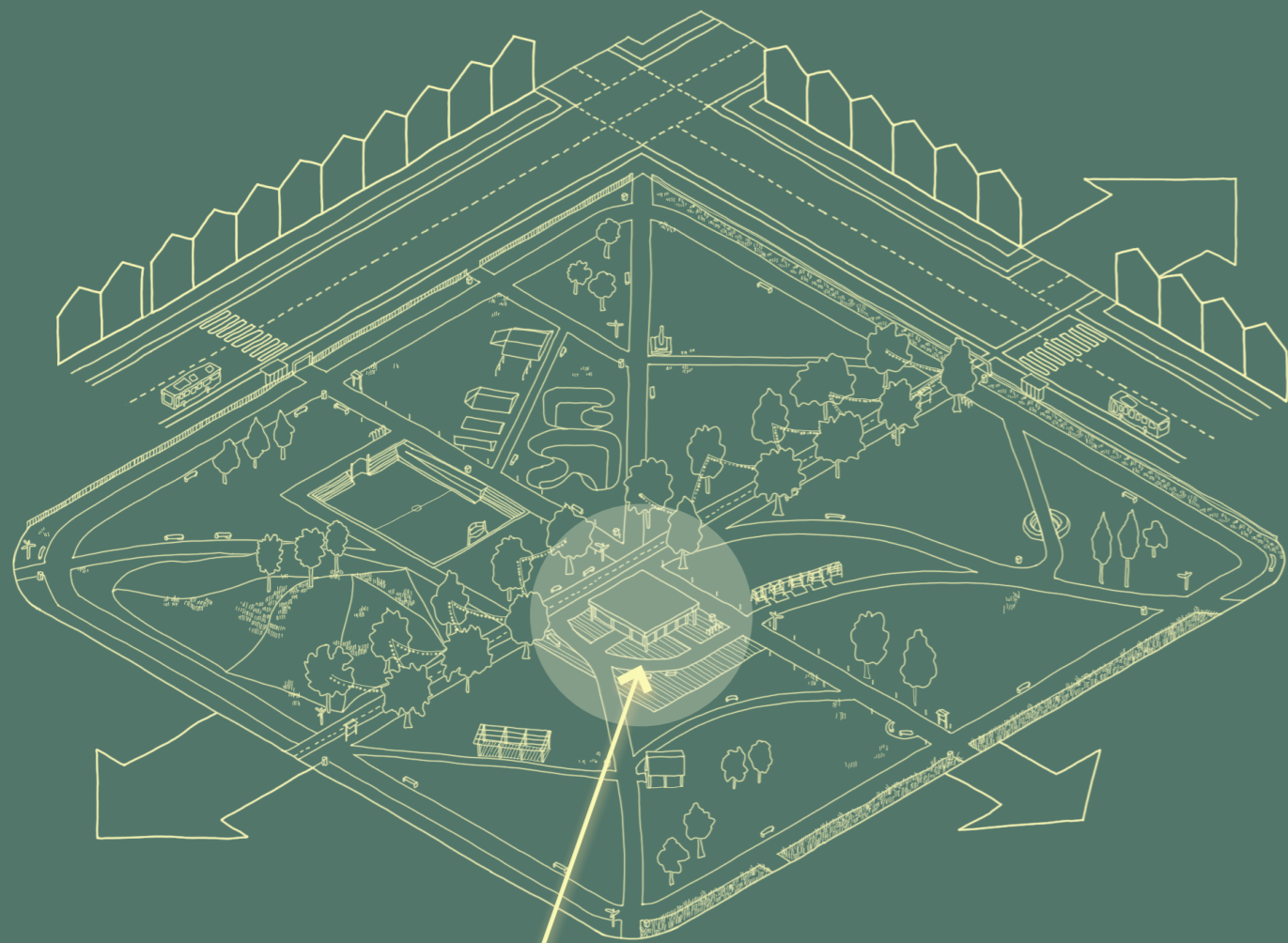
- Open up the park to a wide range of activities and events, particularly those which attract women and families such as fetes and play sessions.
- Where possible, situate these close to entrances or main paths so they feel accessible to those who are not regular visitors to the park.
- Encourage staff and volunteers at these events to see themselves as a positive safety presence.
- Give all staff and organisers a central contact number to report incidents.
- Work with schools and nurseries to incorporate the park into their curriculum or routine.

Be aware that events and activities such as organised football matches or skate jams which bring large groups of men and boys into the park may make the space feel less safe for women and girls.

Quick Wins

- Involving local groups in using the park for activities is a low-cost strategy that could generate income.
- Encouraging businesses to use the park can make it busier.
- Ensure a variety of routes exist permitting women and girls to avoid specific facilities.

STAFFING AND AUTHORITY FIGURES



ARRANGE WORKING PATTERNS TO
MAXIMISE STAFF PRESENCE

Parks staff and other official presences such as the police are important in creating a safe space. However, there are differences between how women and girls perceive authority figures in the park. In the West Yorkshire research, women generally approved of the presence of park staff, police and other security staff and said it made them feel safer. Not all the teenage girls agreed. For them, female park staff and officers were preferable.

Management

Staffing is obviously costly, but there are several measures which ensure that staff make the maximum contribution to their parks feeling safe for women.

- Arrange working patterns so that people are present in the park for as much of the day as possible.
- Prioritise providing a visible presence during times, such as winter afternoons, when women feel less safe.
- Rostering should ensure that a female member of staff is present in the park as often as possible.
- Women preferred staff with recognisable uniforms or ID.
- Recruitment should aim for a good gender balance in park staff.
- Parks staff and those working in other facilities should receive active bystander training to help them challenge inappropriate or threatening behaviour.
- Agree a specific protocol in risk assessments and event plans for safety incidents.
- Encourage staff to make themselves available to the public and say hello.
- Encourage staff to engage with women and girls to ensure they know how to report issues or concerns.

“ Maybe if there was someone in the park that you could go to... A woman police officer, or a woman that works around the park. So if they see anything going on, they could prevent it from happening. ”

- All staff, including contractors and volunteers, should be involved in park safety planning.
- Facilities and other places to get help should be clearly signposted.
- Times when the park is staffed should be publicised.

Technological eyes

In the West Yorkshire research, women and girls felt that help points and CCTV would make parks feel safer, although the presence of people was always preferred to cameras.

The London Borough of Greenwich have introduced a Public Safety Protocol for their parks, which details the actions which staff should take for a range of safety issues from drug detritus to sexual assault. This aims to ensure that the incident receives a full response in the immediate and longer term, and that the community is reassured.

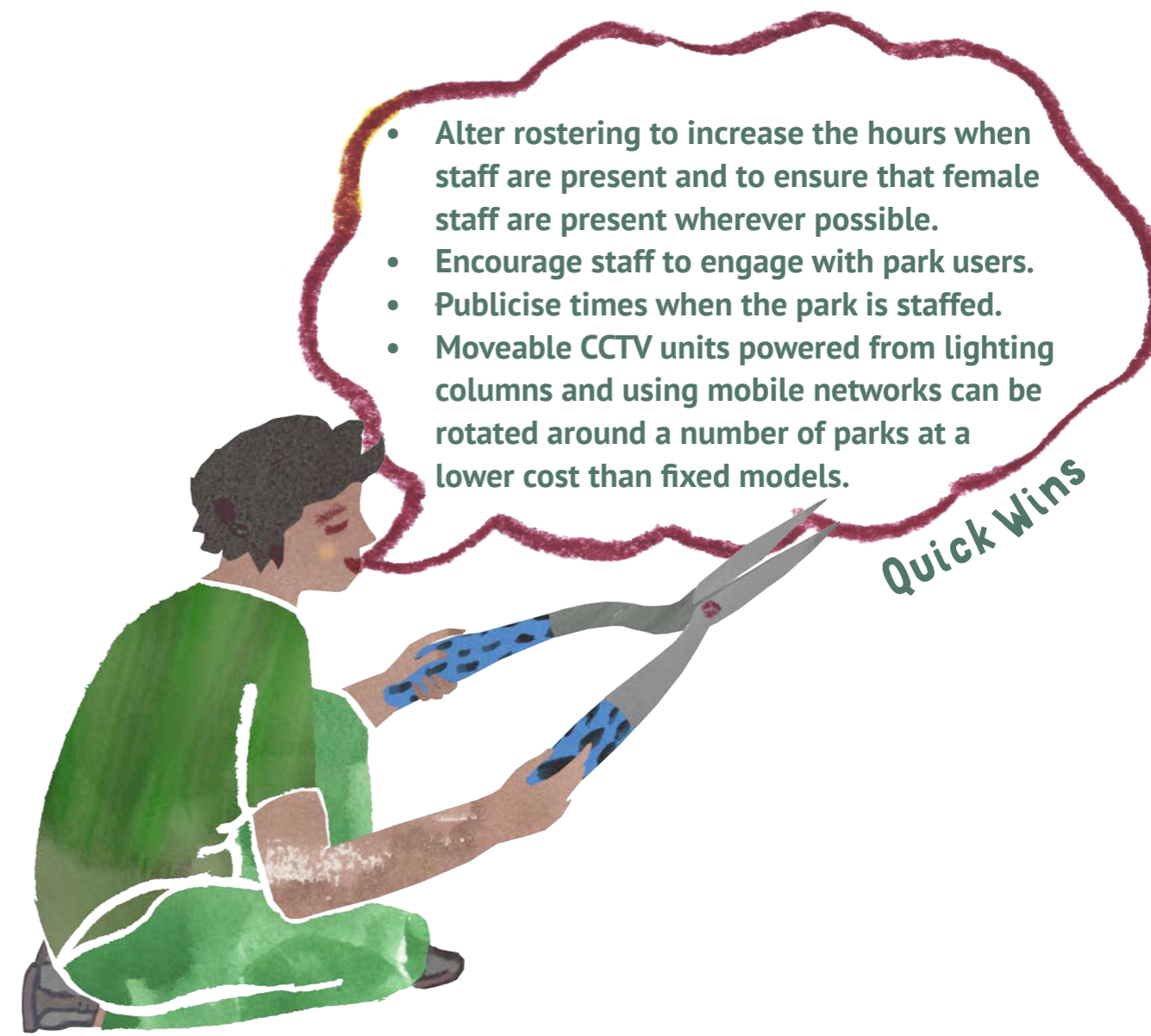


The visibility of staff around the park makes women and girls aware that help is available

Other research on CCTV has found it reduces crime but some work suggests that it can make women perceive a space as risky or dangerous. It also does not necessarily prevent the kinds of lower-level harassment which can deter women from using a park. In areas of potential property crime such as cycle and car parking, however, it is generally seen as worthwhile.

Help points are a relatively recent innovation and as yet there is no evidence about their effectiveness. However, they may be useful in areas where phone signal or Wi-Fi is limited, or if someone's phone has been lost or stolen.

“
Somebody needs to be actively watching that CCTV and able to act to be able to do that and let's be fair, it doesn't happen.
 ”



- Alter rostering to increase the hours when staff are present and to ensure that female staff are present wherever possible.
- Encourage staff to engage with park users.
- Publicise times when the park is staffed.
- Moveable CCTV units powered from lighting columns and using mobile networks can be rotated around a number of parks at a lower cost than fixed models.

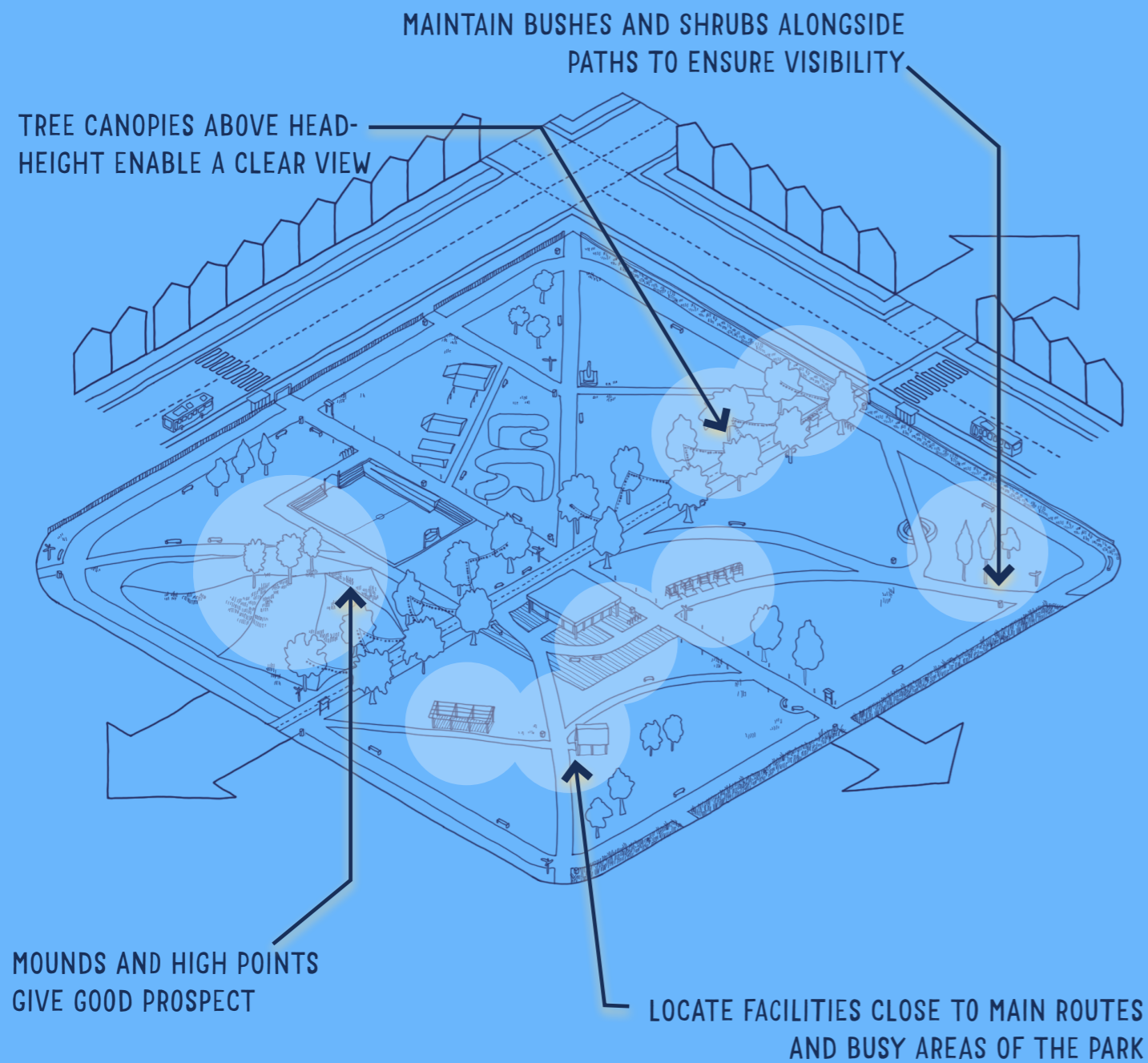
Quick Wins

AWARENESS

The West Yorkshire research found that, when in a public place, women and girls are constantly scanning their surroundings for potential threats. The design of parks can make them feel safer by enhancing their ability to see and be seen, helping them to navigate their surroundings easily, and by reducing their fear of being trapped.

- Visibility and Openness
- Escape
- Lighting
- Wayfinding and Layout

VISIBILITY AND OPENNESS



Visibility and openness – the ability to see around for a good distance and be seen by others – are crucial for a park to feel safe and were seen as positives in the West Yorkshire research. Women and girls disliked both areas which were hidden from view and those with thick vegetation, particularly where it obscured key lines of sight.

Wider research supports this need for openness and shows that it comes from four interlinked motivations:

- **Prospect** – the need to see ahead and behind in order to anticipate what or who might be coming.
- **Natural surveillance** – being seen by other people is also a very important factor in feeling safe.
- **Refuge** – the ability to identify a safe space to go to should a problem arise (see also the Escape principle).
- **Concealment** – an open space provides nowhere to hide for a potential attacker.

“ So parks with thick vegetation, hedges, trees, no I don’t feel safer... [the council] have thinned things quite a lot so there is more visibility and that feels really good. ”

Vegetation

The simplest way to increase visibility is management of the surrounding vegetation alongside the main paths and active travel routes in a park, and in core areas.

- Shrubs and bushes should be kept low alongside paths.
- Where possible tree canopies in

these areas should be raised to above head height.

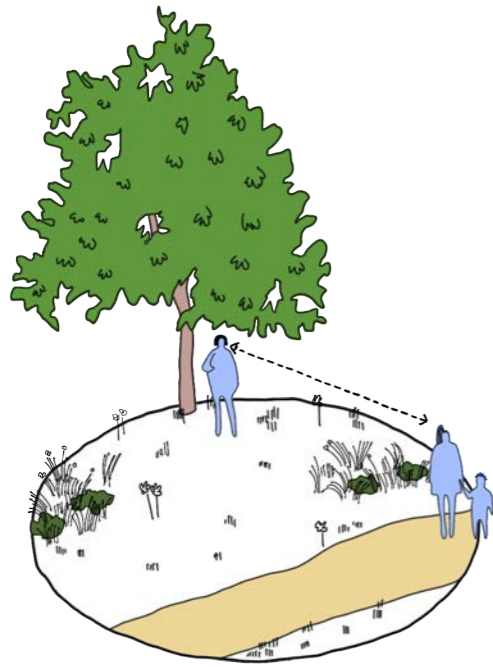
“ Every park has beautiful [greenery], one has trees, one has bushes... But if this is too big it does not make me feel safe because the person can hide inside and then can push me into the bushes and, for example, rape me. ”

These considerations are particularly important at entrances, corners and intersections. However every location is different, and the required heights will depend on the specifics of the natural surveillance in that space.

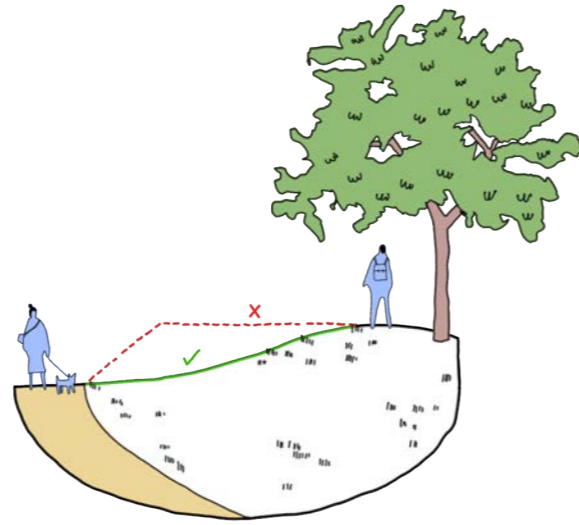
Regular maintenance to control height and spread is essential, and also improves the feeling of a space being looked after and therefore being safer. This is of particular importance not just along paths but also by routes which are used after dark, around seating, in core areas of the park and hot spots for crime or anti-social behaviour.

Where areas are being managed for either nature or safety, communicating the reasons for this can help users understand the requirement to accommodate competing needs within the park.

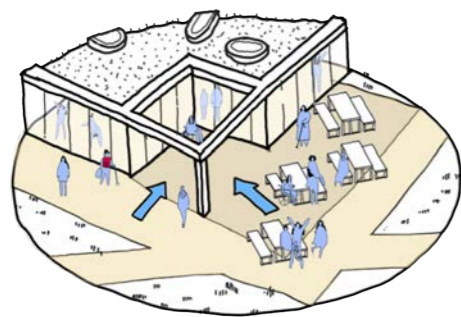
“ As nice as trees are, I’d rather be in areas where it’s quite open and you can see around you. ”



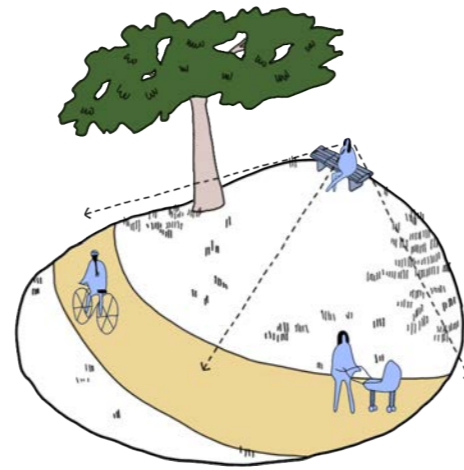
Raising the height of tree canopies and planting low bushes by paths improves visibility.



Hills and mounds with an S-shaped profile creates better visibility.



Facilities should be placed and designed to maximise natural surveillance.



Building in hills or other high places can give good prospect around.

Visibility also needs to be considered in any new planting schemes.

- Plant medium to large trees back from main paths and on the periphery of core areas.
- Species which are clear stem, multi-stem or fastigate (where the branches cluster upwards) are preferable in these spaces.

- Plan the spacing between new plantings carefully and anticipate their mature height and width.

The balance between openness and a rich natural environment also needs to be considered (see Wayfinding and Layout principle). A stripped back area of only grass with utilitarian furniture can feel unwelcoming and dull and so discourage use.

Facilities

The design and location of key park buildings, such as cafes, toilets and changing rooms also needs to be considered in terms of openness, visibility and natural surveillance. Their approaches and entrances need to be orientated so that they have good sightlines to and from a wide area around and, where appropriate, it should be easy for passers-by to see inside.

Sports facilities and those for teenagers also need to be designed to maximise prospect and natural surveillance. They should be sited close to busy sections of the park with the approach to their entrances open and visible from a wide area, and there should be no hidden sections which cannot be seen from outside. This is particularly important for teenage facilities; so pitches or multi use games areas (MUGAs) should not be surrounded by trees or other vegetation, and skateparks with a deep bowl should be avoided.

Where new facilities of any kind are being provided, they should be sited near main routes and other well-used sections of the park.

Prospect can also be used positively in the design of play facilities for teenage girls – for example high climbing frames and platforms can provide areas for socialising which feel safer.

Landscaping

In more extensive redesign work, other means of designing in visibility and openness can also be used.

- Including open or exposed spots throughout the park.
- Build mounds or other high places which give good prospect.
- Using an S-shaped profile for mounds and hills feels friendlier for users beneath.
- Wider paths increase openness and can also be multi-use – e.g. for cycling and even roller-skating, thereby also increasing natural surveillance.
- Avoid sharp corners on paths which frustrate visibility.

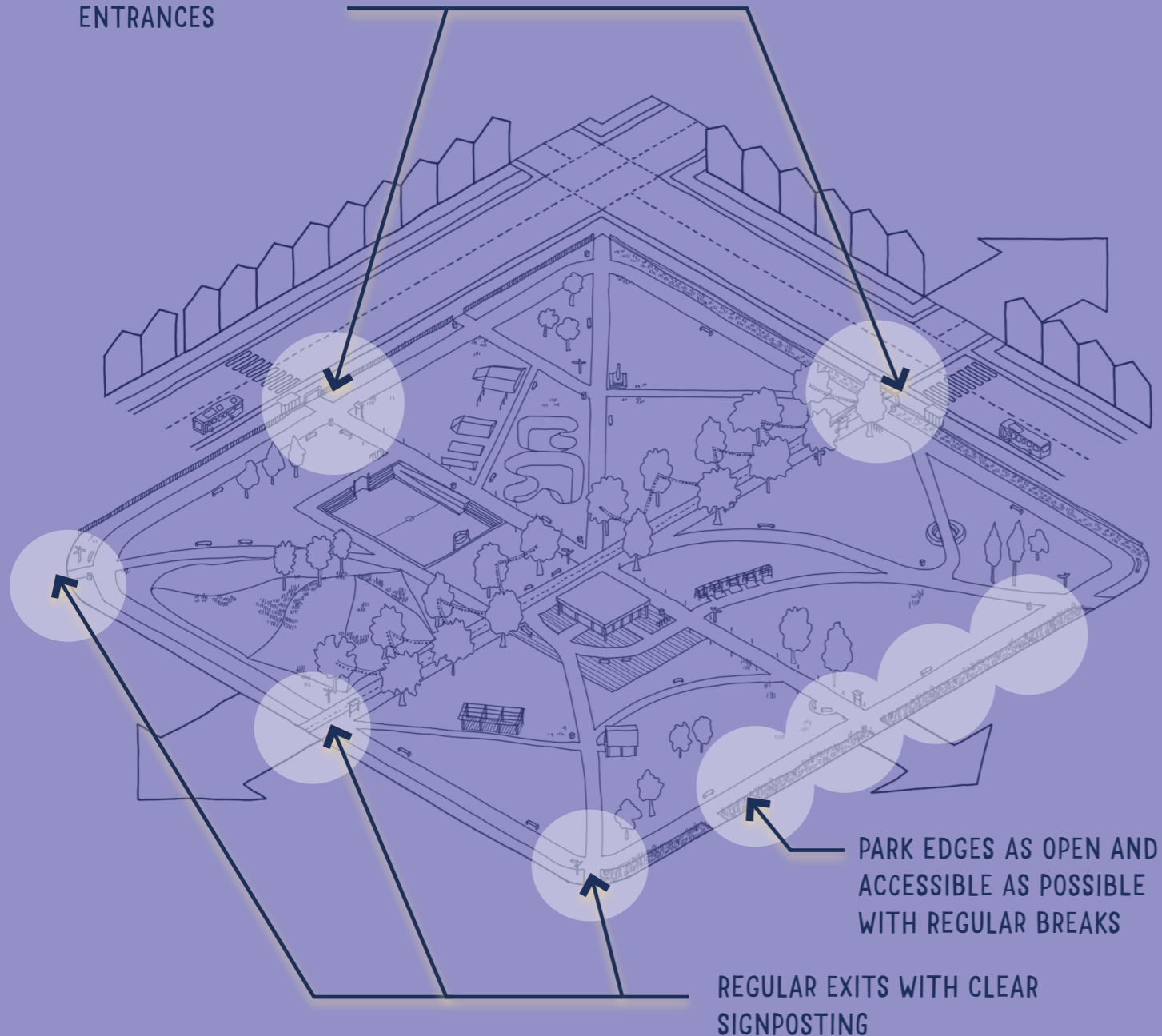
Quick Wins

- **Keep vegetation maintained along paths and in core areas.**
- **Regular maintenance of tree canopies.**



ESCAPE

WIDE AND CLEARLY VISIBLE PARK ENTRANCES



PARK EDGES AS OPEN AND ACCESSIBLE AS POSSIBLE WITH REGULAR BREAKS

REGULAR EXITS WITH CLEAR SIGNPOSTING

How easy would it be to escape from a potentially threatening situation? This is something that women and girls routinely evaluate in deciding whether a park feels safe. High fencing, hedges, locked gates and enclosed areas all make escape difficult.

“ I think if there was fences everywhere and it was hard to get out... that wouldn't make me feel safe. ”

In the West Yorkshire research, both women and girls felt that fences or walls round the edge of a park made them feel less safe by limiting both escape and visibility. Teenage girls also specifically highlighted feeling safer at the edge of the park and their dislike of enclosed facilities where they might feel trapped.

Perimeters and entrances

The perimeter of a park space is particularly crucial for safety. Ideally the edges of the park should be as open and accessible as possible. Entrances need to be wide and visible from an extensive area around. They should also be clearly

indicated by both their design and signage within the park.

The design of heritage parks can sometimes be a problem in terms of both perimeters and entrances. They often have dense vegetation around their edges in addition to walls or railings, and the potential for change may be limited by conservation areas or the listing of specific features. Where possible, increasing the number of exits and clearly signposting existing ones can help with this.

“ ...to make it feel safer [you would need]... exits just like everywhere so like you can easily get out. ”

Paths

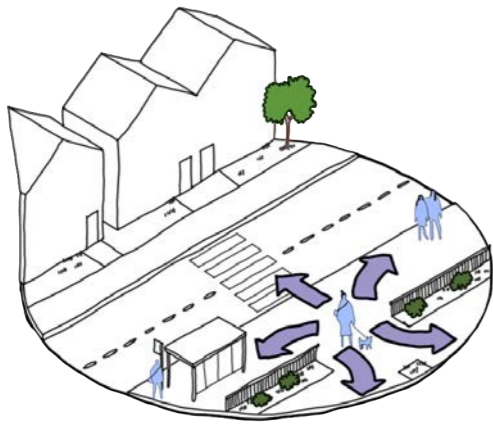
Escape is also important for the design of pathways, which need clearly visible exits along their length and should never culminate in a dead end.

Particular care should be taken to provide identifiable escape routes where a path either runs alongside a hedge or

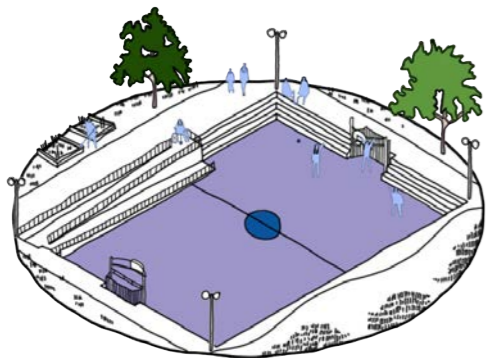


Image credit: LDA Design

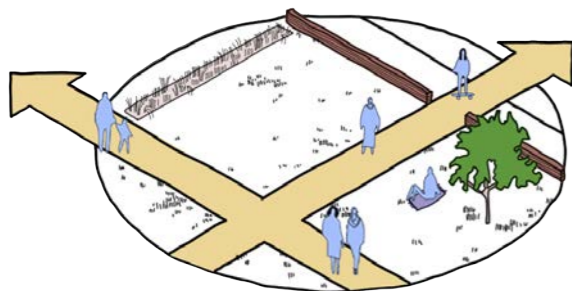
Burgess Park in South London redesigned its exits so that they were clearly signposted and visible, but also wider, allowing potential users to see a good distance into the park before they enter.



The entrances to a park should be wide and clearly visible.



Fenced areas feel very unsafe to teenage girls so other design approaches are more inclusive.



A choice of routes and exits improves the feeling of safety.

wall on one side, or where it is very long – as may be the case with some active travel routes such as greenways.

Facilities

Escape is also an important consideration for facility design. Girls did not like being inside areas which were enclosed by fences, hedges or trees, nor places with only one or two small entrances.

For example, the typical MUGA design, with a high fence and entrances which are narrow and sometimes chicaned was highlighted as not feeling safe, particularly because these areas tend to be dominated by teenage boys.

“ I don't really like that one [a MUGA] because there's only... one entrance to get out... you'd feel trapped. ”

Where possible, at least one wall of a MUGA should be low and multiple, wide exits provided. An example of this kind of redesign can be found in the Vienna case study.

Similar consideration needs to be given to the design of any other fenced facility, for example tennis courts or skate parks, and any facilities specifically aimed at women or girls should be unfenced wherever possible.

Park layout

Rather than using fencing to delineate different areas within the park, consider alternatives such as changes in level, colour, planting or differences in surface treatment. Low walls can also be used as informal seating, making an area more welcoming.

- Adding gaps in fences can open up enclosed areas.
- Removing at least one wall from a MUGA can make it feel less dangerous.
- Where a facility has multiple gates, keep them all unlocked.
- Where entrances have double gates, keep both open if possible.

Quick Wins



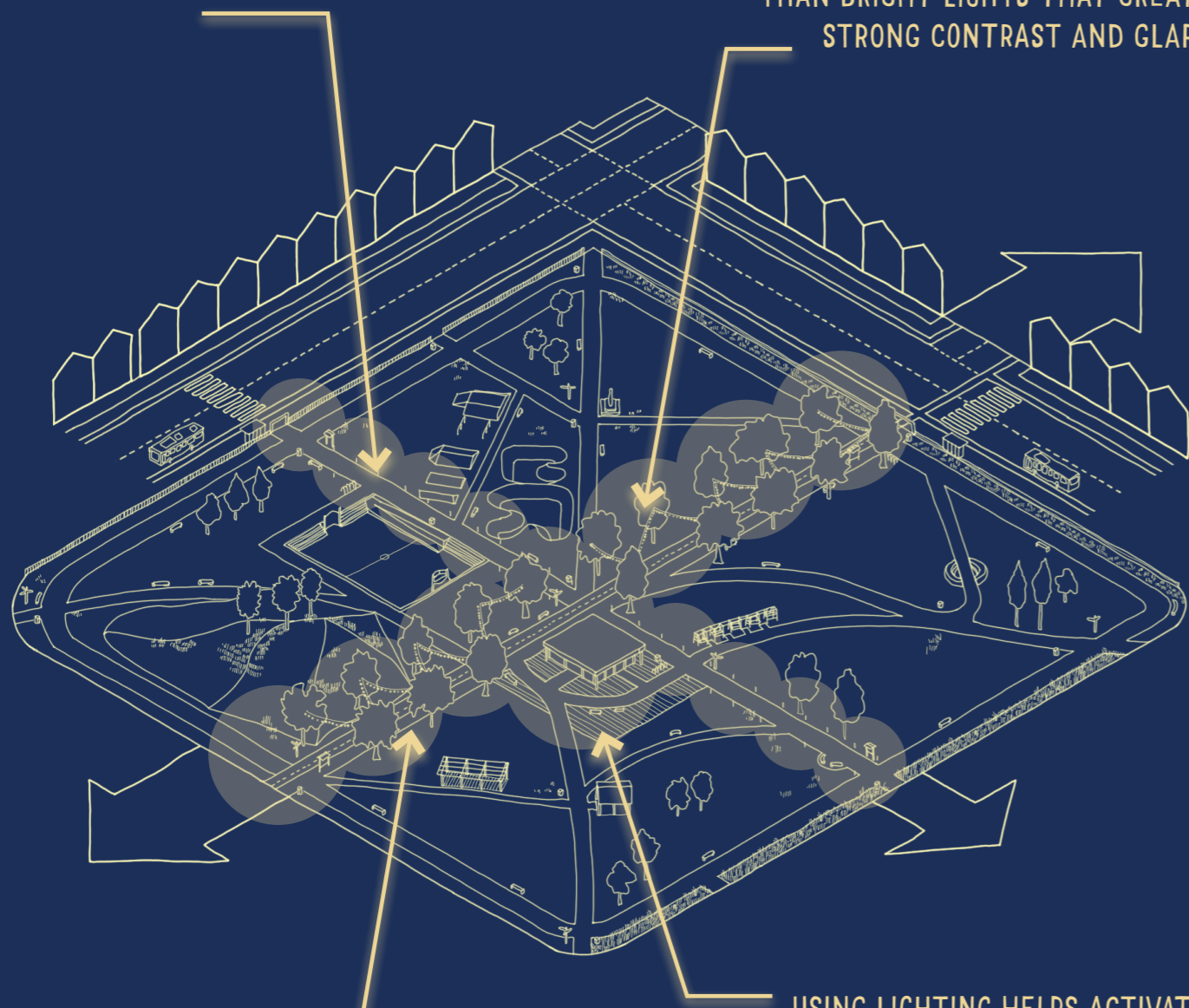
Image credit: Matt Roebuck

This MUGA in Copenhagen takes a more radical approach, prioritising sociability and inclusiveness over containing the ball. It has also been designed as a storm water holding facility during heavy rain.

LIGHTING

HUMAN-SCALED LIGHTING
RATHER THAN FLOODLIGHTS

LOW AND EVEN LIGHT CAN BE SAFER
THAN BRIGHT LIGHTS THAT CREATE
STRONG CONTRAST AND GLARE



LIGHTING SHOULD ENABLE GOOD
COLOUR RENDERING

USING LIGHTING HELPS ACTIVATE
KEY ROUTES AND SPACES

Night time is a safety problem. While 16% of women in Britain felt very or fairly unsafe walking on their own in the park in the daytime according to Office for National Statistics surveys, that rose to 82% after dark. In the UK, women and girls' use of parks can be limited during the early mornings and dark afternoons of winter, as well as at night.

After dark, parks do not feel good for women and girls. There are fewer other people around, and it's not possible to see them as easily. It may also attract different users and uses to a park. Lighting can help address all of these. As a result, it is not surprising that it was one of the interventions which some women felt strongly would improve park safety.

“
Light automatically makes it feel safer because you can see what's going on around you and you can pre-prepare for things.
”

Principles of Lighting

Lighting for safety in parks is a complex subject and one for which there isn't yet enough detailed research or examples of good practice.

But what is clear is that the obvious answer – just make it brighter – isn't necessarily the right one. The tone and placement of lighting also affects how safe women feel, and intense lighting on one particular area – for example a pitch – can actually make the surrounding areas seem darker and so less safe. Lighting design should consider layering, location and distribution to reduce these pools of darkness and enhance women and girls' ability to see their surroundings.

General points to consider include:

- Brighter does not mean safer.
- Colour and tone are important for safety.
- Atmosphere and ambience can make the space feel more welcoming.
- People feel safer when they can perceive actual colours, so good colour rendering is preferable to



Image credit: City of Bradford Metropolitan District Council

When City Park in Bradford underwent regeneration in 2011, the lighting was designed to be both practical and a positive attraction for visitors. In particular a laser light installation at the Mirror Pool made it a destination at night as well as during the day.



Well-designed lighting helps to activate key routes and spaces in a park

- yellow sodium lights.
- Lighting should allow park users to see the faces of those approaching.
- Strong contrast between light and dark can be disorientating and make the darker areas feel less safe.
- Bright lights can also cause glare, which has the same disorientating effect.
- As a result, consistent but lower-level lighting may feel safer.
- Multiple, layered light sources can be a good way of achieving this.
- Vertical lighting (e.g. on tree trunks or walls) can increase the perception of safety.
- Reflective and brighter surfaces can also help provide greater evenness in light levels.
- Think about lighting at the right level for a person – street lights may work for cars, but lower and less pooled may be better for pedestrians who can find downward lighting threatening.

Further considerations

The provision of lighting also needs to be considered in terms of the other principles.

It should be seen as not just a practical measure but also as an activation, something which can attract more users to the park. To do this it needs to be attractive and appealing as well as technically correct, and focused on points of interest as well as main routes.

The right kind of lighting, in warm colours and using more small lights can also help make a space feel more homely and therefore help with a sense of belonging (see the Southwark case study).

It also interacts with many of the other principles:

- People need to be able to see a clear route forward.
- Lighting should indicate the most important routes through the park.
- Exits should be well lit and easy to identify.
- It should highlight landmarks and maps to make wayfinding easier.
- Cycle parking and similar infrastructure needs to be well lit and visible.
- Because of the fear of concealed attackers, consider vertical and low-level lighting which illuminates nearby bushes as well as the path itself.
- Maintenance is important.
- Reporting faulty lights should be easy and clear.
- Installing lighting which is easy to access lessens the risk of neglect.

Most importantly of all, engagement and co-design are essential for creating the right lighting which meets the needs of a particular space and community.

However, it should also be remembered that lighting on its own may not be enough to encourage women and girls to use the park after dark, and it may need to be combined with additional night-time interventions such as increased staffing and activations. Also be aware that lighting some areas may cause out of hours use which can cause nuisance and may deter women from visiting the park.

In addition, installing lighting in a park can be expensive and many factors including a park's location and footfall will need to feed into decisions about whether to provide it.



Image credit: Greenspace Scotland

Greenspace Scotland and Glasgow City Council's #lighttheway project has been running community safety workshops in three parks in the city. These involved a group of local stakeholders walking around the park at night together with professionals in order to assess problems and suggest short and long-term actions to improve the space at night.

Lighting and nature

Lighting is also a requirement which has to be balanced against not just its installation, running costs and carbon impact but also its effects on nature and wildlife.

- Consider the location. Illumination in an already built-up area is less detrimental.
- Use light only where it is needed. Point illumination towards the ground (there is no reason to point it to the sky where it will affect wildlife), and limit the area of lit ground to what is required for safety.
- Use light only when it is strictly needed. Do not illuminate areas at times of low demand. Smart control systems and LEDs give flexibility, as they can be easily turned on and off or dimmed when light is not needed.

- Use light of the right colour temperature. Blue light is bad for animals' circadian rhythms, but many new LED installations use bulbs that are rich in blue wavelengths. Aim for a colour temperature with more orange-red tones.
- In areas where lighting is not possible or suitable, reflective surfaces and posts or bollards can be helpful.

Because lighting is a complex area with specific requirements and a range of factors influencing how it is designed and implemented, it is important that lighting projects are evaluated by experts in lighting and ecology. Any large scheme should be part of a wider night-time strategy for the park, and suitably-qualified designers engaged.

Quick Wins

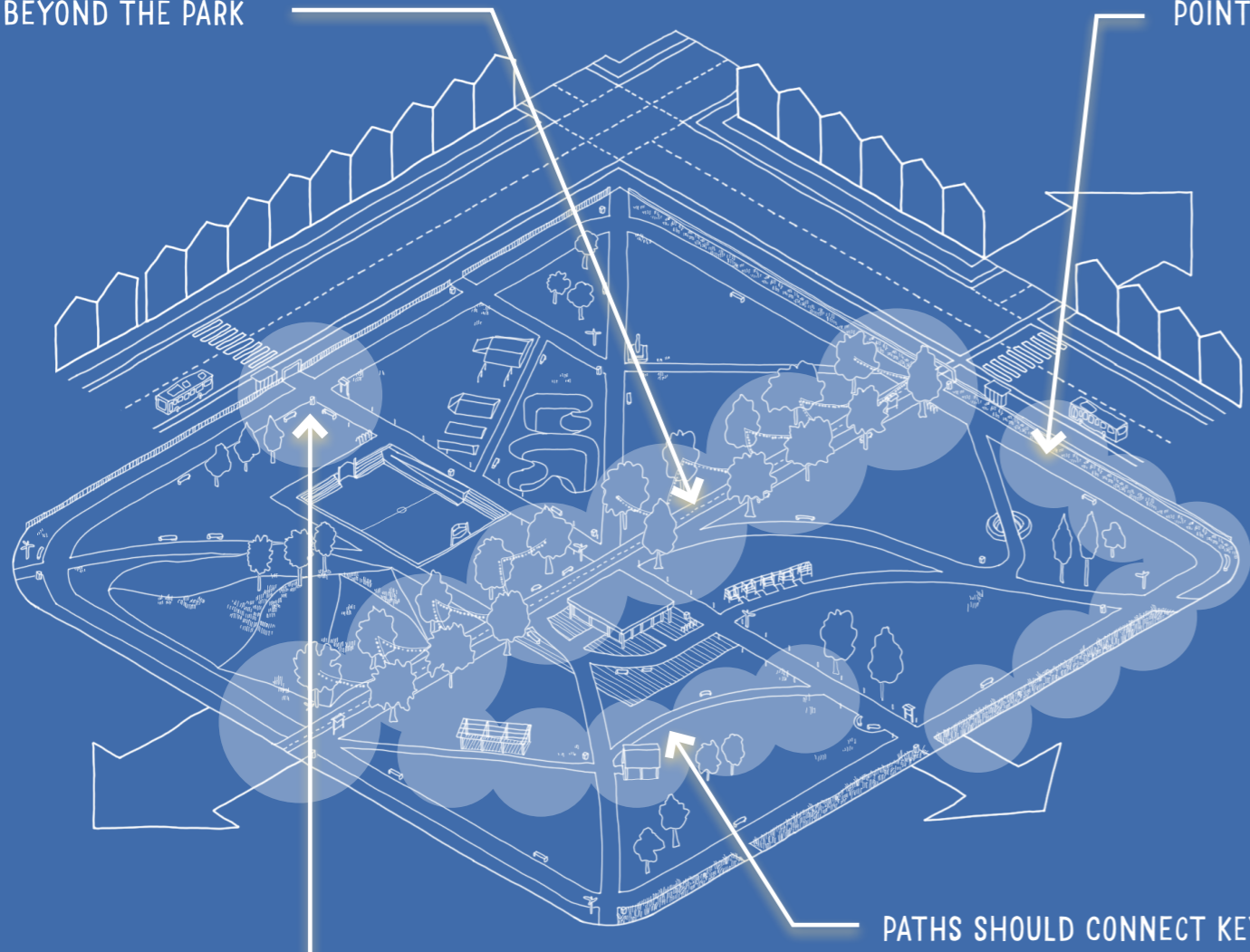
- Where routes such as Public Rights of Way or parts of the National Cycle Network run through the park, funding for lighting may be available.
- Make sure existing lighting is well maintained and clear of vegetation.
- Signpost which routes and areas of the park are well lit.



WAYFINDING AND LAYOUT

A CLEAR HIERARCHY OF PATHS WHICH CONNECT WITH ROUTES BEYOND THE PARK

CIRCULAR PATH AROUND THE PERIMETER WITH REGULAR EXIT POINTS



CLEAR SIGNAGE WITH DIRECTIONS TO KEY DESTINATIONS

PATHS SHOULD CONNECT KEY FACILITIES WITH EACH DESTINATION VISIBLE FROM THE LAST

In the West Yorkshire research, women felt strongly that parks need to be designed with women and girls' safety in mind. Research and good practice elsewhere suggest a range of ways in which design can make parks safer, through changes to paths, wayfinding and overall layout.

Paths

It has been demonstrated by research that a circular path around the perimeter of a park which forms a legible walking and running route will attract women and girls. It also means that women are more likely to be active in the space.

In addition:

- The overall path network should be easy to understand and navigate.
- Paths should lead from one well-used area to another, with each 'destination' being visible from the last.
- Their layout should incorporate preferred routes across the park.
- They should feel open, with hedges and shrubs well away from their borders and good visibility into any adjoining spaces.
- Each path should have multiple entrances and exits and no dead ends.
- There should be a clear hierarchy of paths, with the most important ones connecting with walking routes and other travel options outside the park.
- They should offer choices – for example between a main path and a less used, more secluded route.

Wayfinding

Women feel safer when they know where they are and how to get to their destination, so clear signage and information is also important. This should:

- Indicate the main routes.
- Give a sense of distance and walking time to key destinations.
- Show which paths are lit at night.
- Indicate where there are choices about routes, e.g. where one is lit and another not.
- Include a map of the park at entrances, key path intersections and information boards, incorporating a clear 'You are here' label.

Signage should also be checked regularly to make sure it is still correct, legible (not covered in dirt or hidden by foliage) and pointing the right way.

Apps which indicate safer or busier routes can also help with wayfinding, although this method should not be used exclusively as it may not be accessible for everyone. Physical park leaflets incorporating a map that people can carry with them are still very popular.

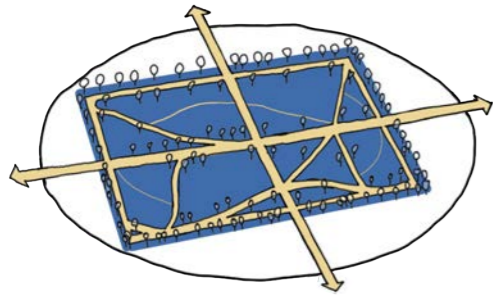
Layout

One design intervention which is important in making parks feel more accessible for both women and girls is to break large or defined spaces down into several smaller areas. This can be applied to open areas of the park, to provision for teenagers and to individual facilities.

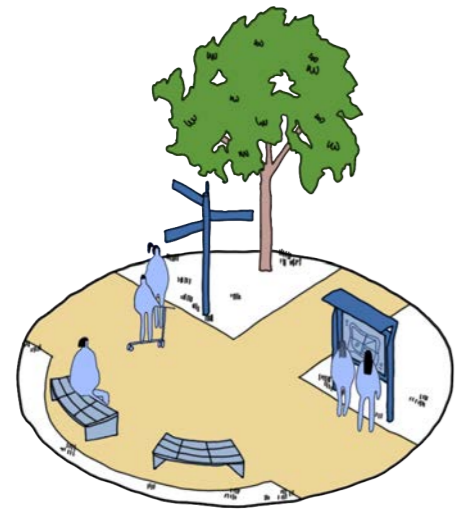
“
...if a girl goes there,
like a group of girls, they
[boys]’ll just kick you out.
”

Large spaces

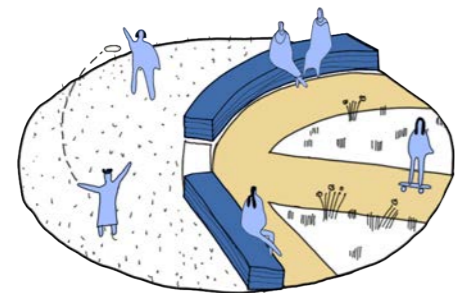
Dividing large spaces into smaller areas has two advantages for women and girls. Firstly, by creating a range of different places and opportunities in the park it



There should be a clear hierarchy of paths, and the main ones should connect with routes outside the park.



Clear signage should include distance and walking times to key destinations.



Providing a range of spaces which can accommodate more than one group improves safety and inclusion.

permits a wider range of activities and a broad spread of users which improves safety. Secondly, it prevents the single space being dominated by one group of users to the exclusion of others. This may occur, for example, where a large area of grass is used for informal kickabouts and other users find it difficult to access or even cross.

Changes of level, flooring treatment or colour can be sufficient to create different, smaller areas, while low walls also provide seating. Even simpler solutions include mowing spaces into big areas of grass, with the unmown strips working as dividers.

Multiple spaces for teenagers

Providing more than one facility or area for teenagers is particularly important in allowing girls to access the park.

Quite often a park just has one piece of teenage provision, e.g. a MUGA or shelter which means it can be taken over by a single group. This is most often boys, who may also territorialise the facility and exclude others. As a result girls will tend to avoid these spaces because of the risk of harassment and threats, but have no alternative place to go within the park.

It is therefore better to provide several distinct areas for teenagers, including provision which appeals to girls such as seating, play equipment, swings and other facilities. This will allow a range of different groups to share the space simultaneously and so make the park feel safer and more welcoming for girls.

Facility design

The concept of providing multiple areas can also be applied to an individual facility. Dividing up the space within MUGAs, skate parks or wheeled sports

areas permits different uses and abilities to share the space simultaneously while also lessening the risk of territorialisation. There are examples of this in the Vienna and Swedish skateboarding case studies.

Variety and nature

Designing in a range of different features and experiences is also important. Variety in the form, colour and texture of landscape elements contributes to an interesting environment which attracts a higher intensity of users and encourages them to return.

It is also worth noting that in surveys and research women and girls find the presence of nature in a space more of an attraction than men do. However, this is not what many parks provide. Smaller suburban parks in particular can often be 'green deserts' of mown grass, pitches and courts with few other features.

The Project for Public Spaces in America have proposed the Rule of Ten. This says that for a place to be attractive enough for people to return, it needs ten different, overlapping attractions. These can be as simple as a circle of boulders to sit on and as complex as a museum, but can also include seating, places to eat, a range of opportunities for play, quiet spaces, sensory gardens and shelter.

- Mow sub-spaces into grass so that different groups can use it at the same time.
- Clean existing signs and check they are correct.
- Display a map of the park at entrances and central points.
- Add walking times to signage.
- Engage with your local Sustrans or Active Travel officer.

Quick Wins



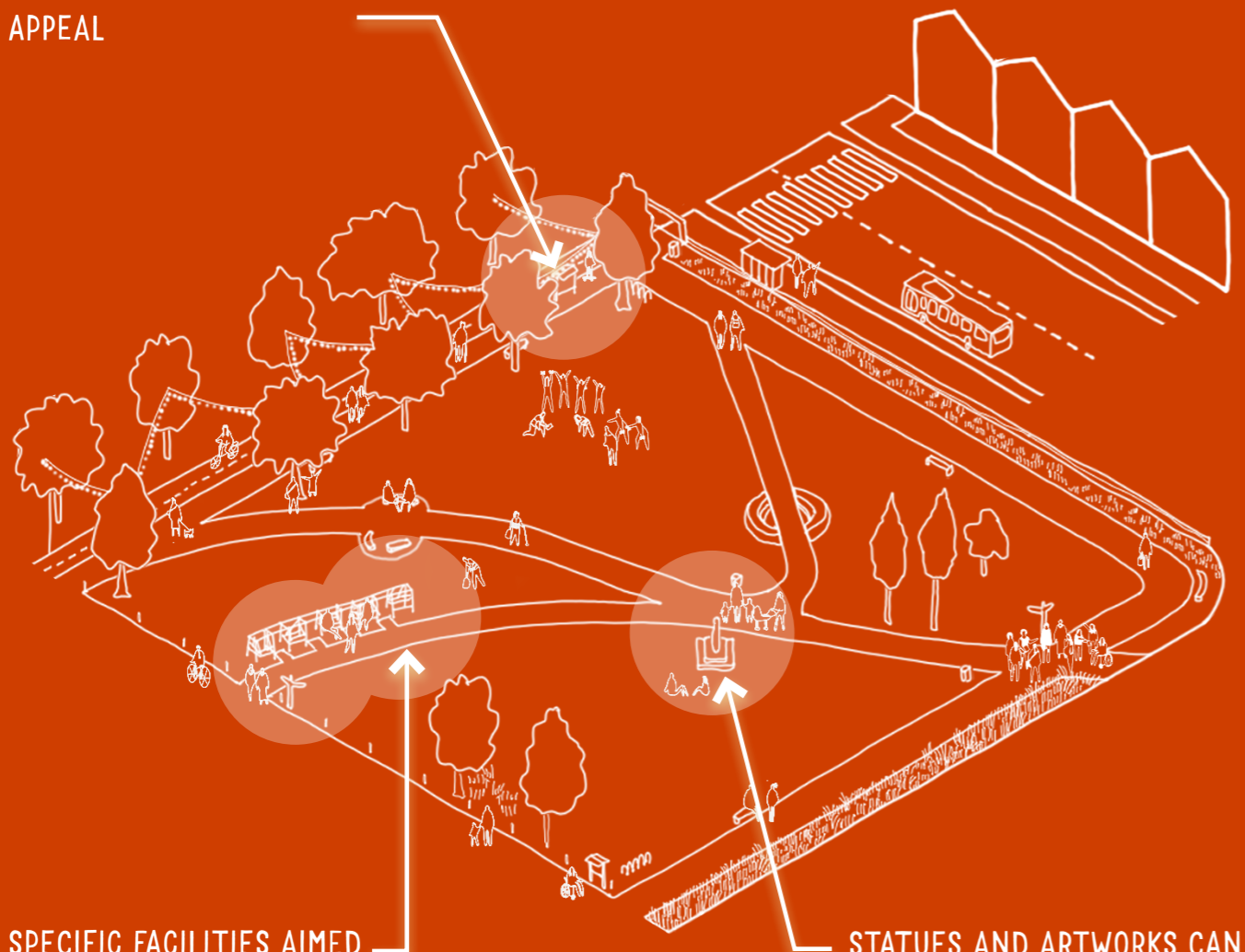
INCLUSION

Everyone should feel safe and welcome in parks. Research demonstrates that women and girls have a distinct and different understanding and experience of safety to men and boys. It also shows that additional barriers exist for those who have other protected characteristics. Improving access, familiarity and engagement can help everyone to feel more at ease and confident in their local park.

- Belonging and Familiarity
- Image
- Access and Location
- Co-production and Engagement

BELONGING AND FAMILIARITY

NAMING OF FACILITIES TO SIGNAL MULTIPLE USES BROADENS THEIR APPEAL



SPECIFIC FACILITIES AIMED AT WOMEN AND GIRLS SIGNAL THAT THEY ARE WELCOME

STATUES AND ARTWORKS CAN INDICATE BELONGING

Both belonging and familiarity are important for a park to feel safe for women and girls. A sense of belonging means that they feel welcome in the space, while prior experience of a park enables them to evaluate the risks.

Belonging

In the West Yorkshire research women and girls said that seeing other people like them using the park was key to creating a sense of belonging.

“ I just feel that if there is somebody that looks like you and you just automatically feel that you are not on your own for some reason. ”

Belonging is not just a question of gender: other characteristics such as age, ethnicity, religion, disability and sexual orientation all affect whether women and girls feel included in parks. They also impact directly on safety; for example those from ethnic minorities and disabled women regularly report higher levels of harassment and greater levels of fear.

“ A lot of times your religion or what you are wearing [points at headscarf] that makes me feel vulnerable. It makes people think they can do something. ”

These factors also influence what facilities and activations would encourage women and girls to use the park and feel that they belong.

Sometimes this is obvious, as with the need for wheelchair-accessible play equipment or regularly spaced benches to allow older people to rest, but others can be less obvious. For example, observant Muslims can find the presence of dogs in a park off-putting and will travel some distance to access spaces where this is not a problem. Equally, some ethnic groups may want to use parks as venues for large gatherings of friends and families with food and seating and facility design can encourage this.

Park design and management needs to consider these intersectional identities in every part of their work so that all women and girls feel that they are safe and belong in the park.

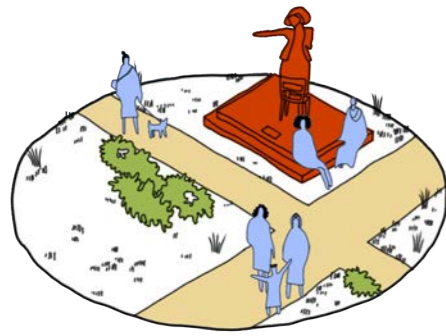
Indicating inclusion

For some groups of women and girls from minoritised communities who don't currently feel that the space is designed with them in mind, parks may need to provide visible indications that they are welcome. This can be done through facilities, communications or design.

Exactly what these measures might be will vary from place to place, which is why co-production is important. This not only ensures that the right facilities are provided, but the act of being consulted can itself create an increased sense of ownership and belonging (see Co-Production and Engagement principle).

Engagement with teenage girls suggests that specific facilities can act as a sign that they are welcome in the park. These include:

- Age-appropriate swings.
- Social seating.
- Hammocks.
- Fitness equipment arranged in groups to allow for socialising.

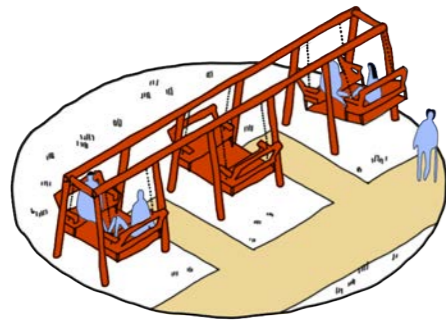


Representation and naming can help women feel that they belong in the park.

- Trampolines.
- Age-appropriate opportunities for play other than sport.

The naming of facilities can be important in indicating who is included. For example, a building called a Cricket Pavilion may not feel relevant to many women and girls, but renaming it an Activity Hub or similar makes it open to a wider range of uses.

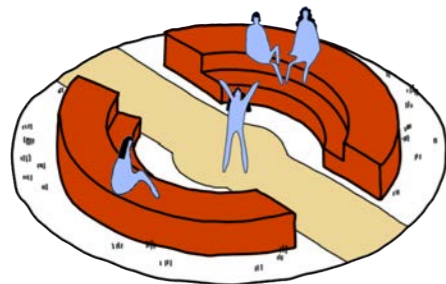
Good quality public toilets are also important. They not only help women and girls remain in the space for longer but also act as a signal that they are welcome in the park.



Facilities aimed at women and teenage girls increase the sense of belonging.

“ How do we bring back public toilets?... you know, that’s probably quite an important feature really in a park... I have been with an older woman who just had to squat down and have a wee... she had to do it. And it just felt like there should have been somewhere that she could have gone to use the toilet rather than that. ”

Locating toilets as part of a café or other building can make people feel safer in comparison to a stand-alone facility. Individual toilets can also make people feel safer rather than having to enter a larger toilet block. This is not only important for older women but also teenage girls and those accompanying young children.



A stage area can be a community asset as well as appealing to teenage girls.

Other facilities may unintentionally signal to women and girls that they are not welcome. Areas of recreational



Image credit: János Korom Dr., Wikimedia Commons

This stage was built in a square in Vienna after engagement with teenage girls. Importantly, it has also been labelled as ‘The Girls’ Stage’ to ensure that the girls feel they have permission to use it.

space given over to facilities which are predominantly used by men and boys, such as pitches, MUGAS, skate parks or BMX tracks can feel ‘coded male’, to the point where women and girls may choose to avoid them. For teenage girls in particular, the presence of these features can result in them being less active in a space.

Familiarity

In the West Yorkshire research, familiarity was generally referred to in terms of a park which the women and girls knew and which they visited with their family and friends.

“ I tend to stick to parks I am familiar with...it’s familiar surroundings so you know... where the not safe places are... familiarity is good for me. ”

A number of reasons can lie behind this preference. It may be because they have already experienced the space and believe it not to be dangerous, or they may know who does or does not go

there, or because they understand the layout and so where the safe spaces, escape routes and visibility can be found.

The most obvious way of increasing familiarity is through activation, by bringing women and girls who are not currently users of the space into the park for events or volunteering and so making the space known.

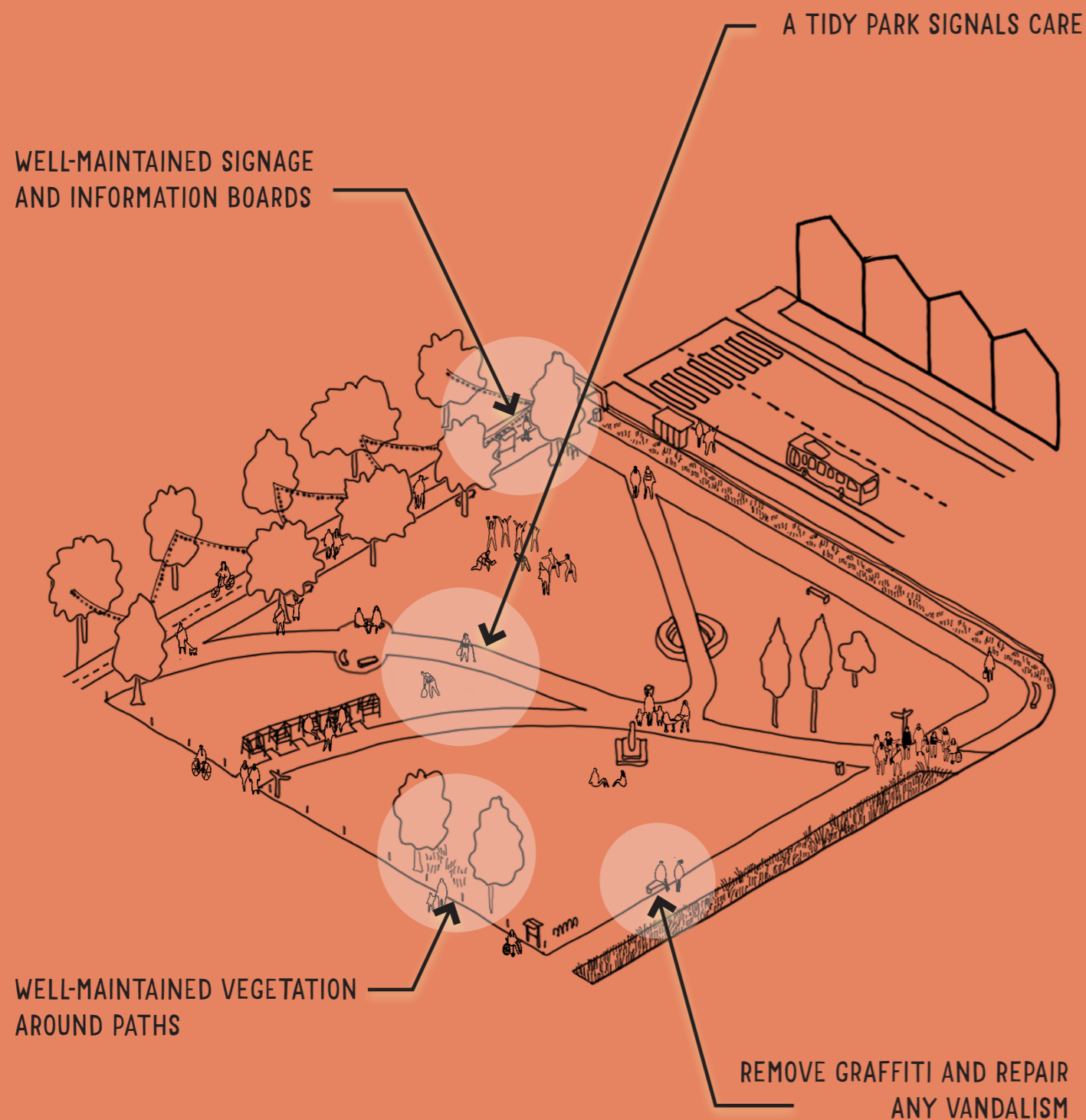
Familiarity and design

Design cannot make a park instantly known but it is possible to design a space so that it feels familiar more quickly. Repetition of design elements – for example seating, signage or even planting schemes – along the main axes of a park can help make the space more comprehensible and so more familiar even on a first visit.

- Labelling facilities to indicate that girls and women are welcome can help with belonging.
- Encourage schools, community groups and others to use the park as a resource, thereby making it more familiar.

Quick Wins

IMAGE



WELL-MAINTAINED SIGNAGE AND INFORMATION BOARDS

A TIDY PARK SIGNALS CARE

WELL-MAINTAINED VEGETATION AROUND PATHS

REMOVE GRAFFITI AND REPAIR ANY VANDALISM

The image and reputation of a park has a big influence on how safe it feels to potential users.

“ I had to change cutting through the park to go and get my son, to going the long way round because I had heard about that assault. Which was fear and it was quite scary and then you don’t want to put yourself in them positions. ”

Improving public perceptions of a particular park can be hard work and takes time but there are four main ways in which this can be done:

- Tackling litter and anti-social behaviour.
- Maintenance.
- Management.
- Communications.

Litter

Both the West Yorkshire and other research are clear that litter and disorder make a park feel less safe.

“ I think the needles speak for themselves obviously, you know they could be drug users there... people using drugs can be intimidating. So if I saw all that it would, it would just be off-putting. ”

This is both because it suggests the presence of undesirable users (for example with drug paraphernalia or beer bottles) but also because it indicates

a general lack of care. Either way, the correlation is clear: a well-tended park feels safer for women and girls.

Maintenance

At a wider level, maintenance beyond just the removal of litter contributes to this sense of order, and so prompt identification, removal and repair of damage and misuse is essential. It is particularly important that safety provisions are sustained beyond their initial installation. For example:

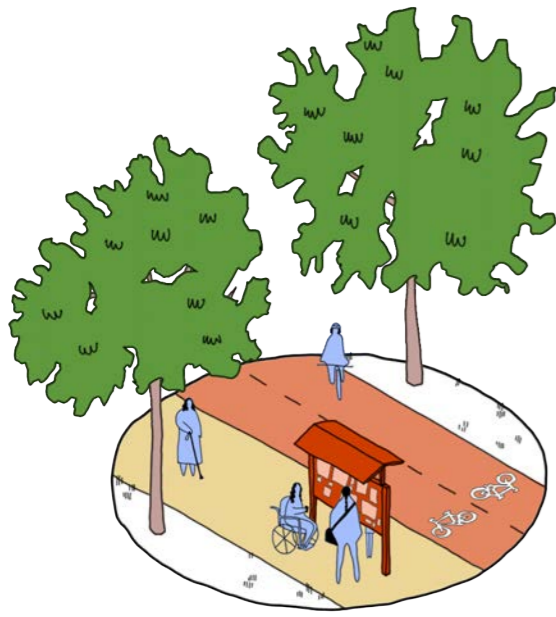
- Vegetation around paths should be regularly maintained.
- All lighting, cameras and help points should be checked regularly to ensure they are operational.
- Signs need to be cleaned and checked for accuracy.
- Graffiti must be removed promptly and vandalism dealt with.
- Check that key sightlines are not blocked by new installations or tree growth.

“ If it’s a scruffy park with rubbish and needles and graffiti, you know that it’s neglected and it just doesn’t feel as nice an environment just to, you don’t want to spend your time in there do you. ”

There is also an emerging digital aspect to maintenance – checking that the park and its facilities are accurately mapped on Google and that the information is correct both there and on local websites.

Management

Management is also a crucial factor in a park’s image for women and girls.



Good communication about park events and facilities is important for safety.



Removing litter and other signs of disorder makes the park feel safer for women and girls.

- Ensure that all park committees and decision-making bodies have a good gender balance.
- Invite local women's and girls' groups onto management and stakeholder groups.
- Incorporate safety considerations into all existing management practice – e.g. as part of rostering decisions or in user surveys.
- Consider administrative barriers which prevent use by women and girls. How easy is it for groups to get permission to use the park? Do booking systems result in men's teams reserving pitches at favourable times?
- Examine wider council policies to ensure that safety and equality are embedded into the planning and decision-making framework.

There are also direct management steps that can be taken to create safer spaces, such as the use of Public Space Protection Orders in parks. These make

predefined activities within a specific public space prosecutable and are already being used by some councils to address harassment and catcalling.

Communications

Communications are an important component of safety, whether this is in publicising events in the park to non-users, highlighting new facilities or generating positive reporting of the space.

In late 2022, Glasgow Council unanimously voted in favour of 'feminist urbanism' – putting the needs of women at the heart of all planning decisions in the city. Safer green and public spaces, along with consultation with a wide range of women and girls are seen as key to making this happen.

It is important that images show women and girls using the park alongside other groups and avoid obvious stereotypes and sexism, but the underlying message of the picture should also be considered – for example avoiding scenes which show only boys being active.

When there is an incident in a park, communications should address this to offer reassurance and reduce the potential that women avoid the park in future.

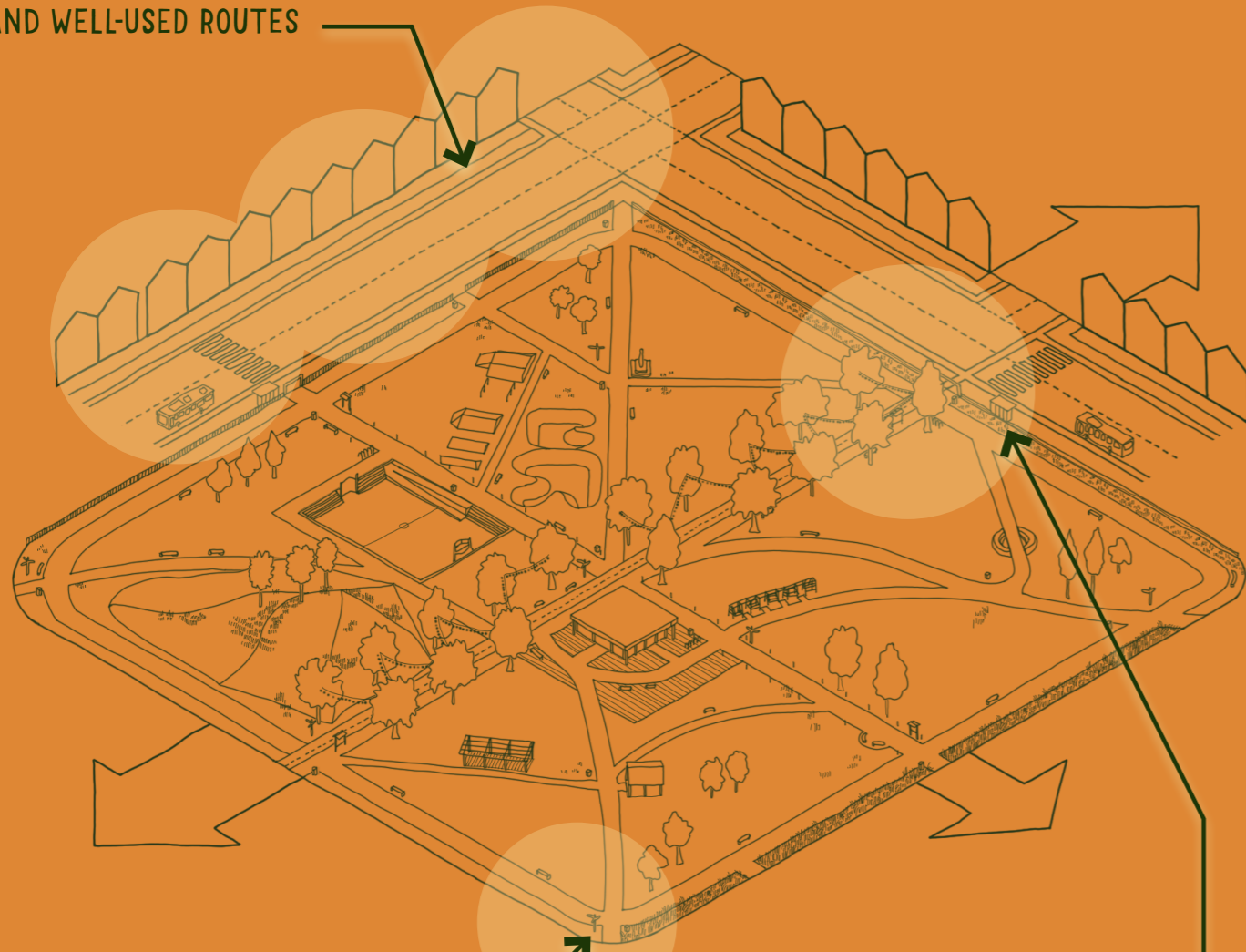
Quick Wins

- **Ensure every local park has its own web page with details of facilities, accessibility, public transport etc.**
- **Review all communications to ensure they are inclusive.**



ACCESS AND LOCATION

ACCESS SHOULD BE VIA SAFE AND WELL-USED ROUTES



SIGNPOST NEARBY PLACES AS 'SAFE ZONES'

PRIORITISE ENTRANCES CLOSE TO PUBLIC TRANSPORT CONNECTIONS

A safe park on its own is not enough. For women and girls to use the park, they must also be able to access it safely, which means that the surrounding area and routes in should not feel dangerous or uncomfortable.

An obvious example is if the main entrance to the park requires most visitors to use a subway under a busy road, or where a park entrance is accessed by a back lane. But other factors, such as the reputation of the surrounding area, entrances with poor visibility or an approach which runs past industrial buildings and so lacks good natural surveillance, may all play a part in how safe access feels for women and girls.

Safe access will present more of a challenge in some parks than in others. Councils may find it more cost-effective and efficient to concentrate their initial efforts on parks in their area which

do not have access limitations, in particular where these already have a range of facilities and are busy and well-used.

“**‘The state of it. You’d have a swing set without the swings. They would have been taken away having been vandalised. We’d spend most money on transport to get to another park that was better maintained.’**”

Transport

Transport access to the park can be improved by enhancing entrances which are closest to public transport routes and stops and providing cycle paths and storage, as well as car parking where appropriate.

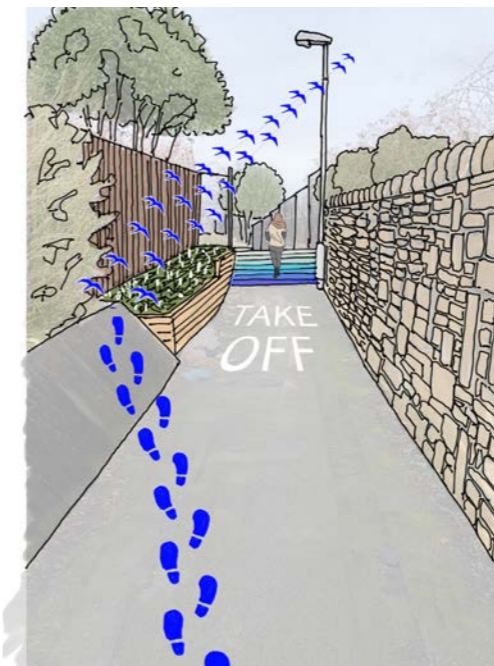


Image credit: Street Space

In Bradford, a project called Safer Snickets run by Street Space has been working with teenage girls to make key pedestrian links through narrow side alleyways feel safer. Ideas include colour, no litter and added playful elements.



A prominent main entrance, near to public transport and with clear signposting to nearby destinations will make the park feel more accessible

Research also shows that organised transport to specific activities in the park can attract women and girls who do not otherwise use the park.

Planning

Where new parks are being created as part of a masterplan or development, the principle of safe access should be designed in from the start, for example by making sure that all major routes in are safe, above ground and via main roads and that entrances are not only clearly visible but also face areas with positive and active frontages to ensure good natural surveillance.

Other considerations include:

- A readily available Wi-Fi and phone signal is important, as calling parents, friends or partners is an significant factor in a sense of safety.
- Signpost to nearby places around parks which can be 'safe zones', for example libraries, shops, schools. This is especially important for more rural areas with fewer facilities and less footfall.

Quick Wins

- Signposts to nearby safe zones.
- Opening up vegetation around entrances.



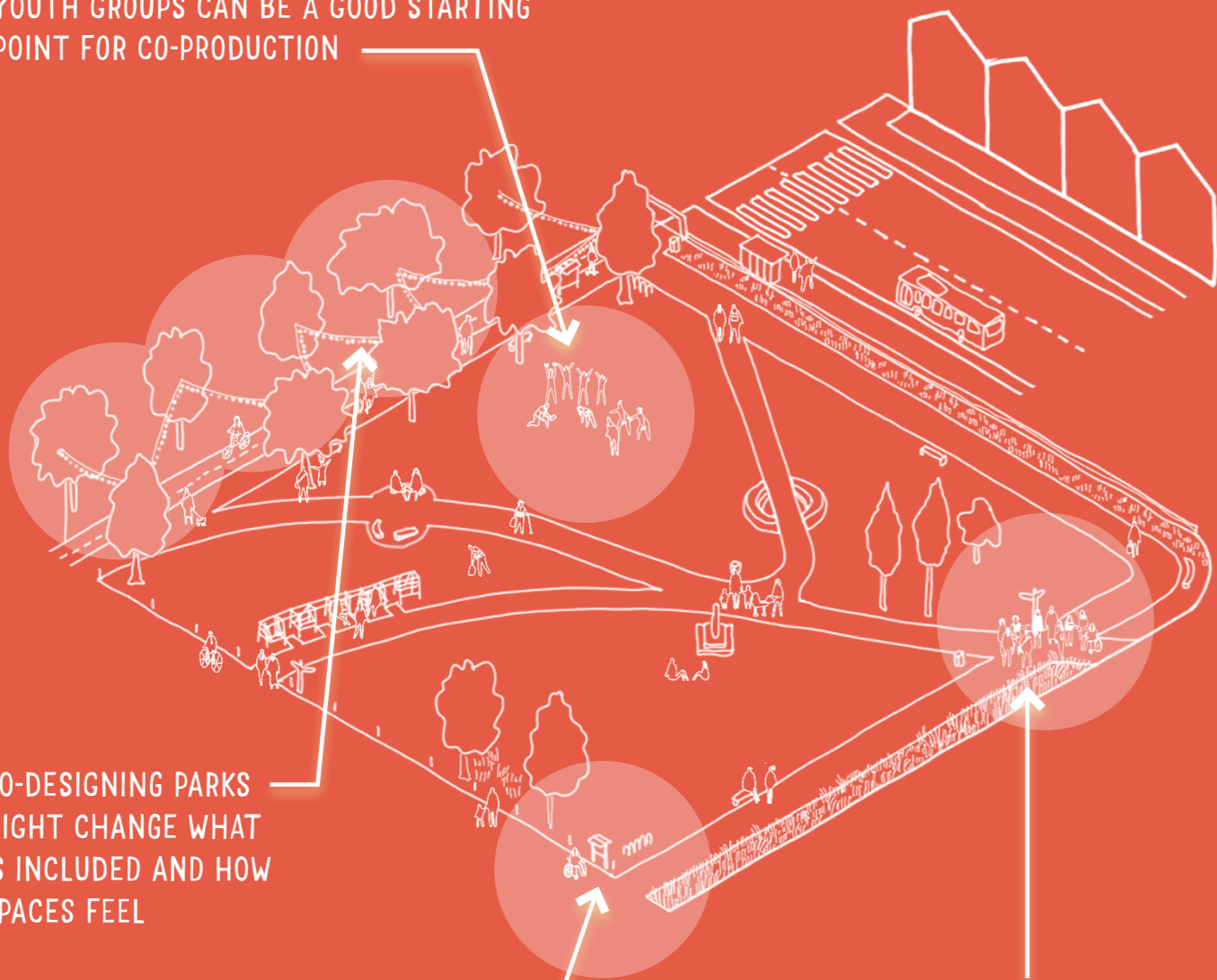
CO-PRODUCTION AND ENGAGEMENT

ENGAGEMENT WITH EXISTING WOMEN'S AND YOUTH GROUPS CAN BE A GOOD STARTING POINT FOR CO-PRODUCTION

CO-DESIGNING PARKS MIGHT CHANGE WHAT IS INCLUDED AND HOW SPACES FEEL

ENGAGEMENT MUST BE INTERSECTIONAL AND INVOLVE EXISTING AND POTENTIAL PARK USERS

SAFETY WALKS HELP TO ARTICULATE PERCEPTIONS OF SAFETY IN THE PARK



Guidance can only ever be general, and it is important to ensure that the specific barriers and issues which women and girls face in any particular park are addressed. Therefore it is essential that engagement with all women and girls is a core part of both improvement and ongoing maintenance.

“
If they were designed with women you would see lighting better, I think you would see signs, you would see more patrolling. Yes I think that's important.
 ”

Co-production and Engagement

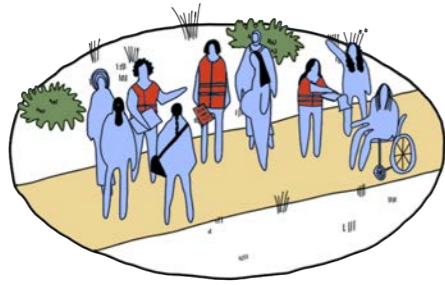
Co-production, where women and girls are involved at every stage of the design process with regular feedback, is the ideal but this is not feasible in every situation. However, the levels of engagement should be as meaningful and close to co-design as possible because the sense of ownership and belonging which this creates in itself has the potential to make the park feel more familiar and therefore safer for women and girls.

To ensure that engagement is as effective and wide-ranging as possible:

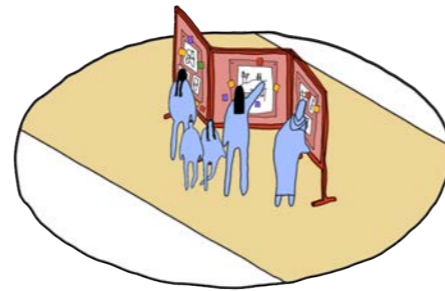
- Dialogue with women and girls should happen at the start of any design process so that their specific needs are understood and addressed fully and they have input into masterplanning as well as detail.
- Women and girls should be involved in determining the scope of the engagement.
- Ensure that intersectionality is fully considered (see below).

- Don't just engage with women who are already using the park, it's also important to reach those who don't currently use it, with a particular focus on minoritised groups and teenage girls.
- Online surveys can be helpful in creating safety maps of particular areas, but teenage girls are reluctant to use them, so they should be supplemented with other methods.
- For at least part of the process, create a space where women and girls can speak without boys and men being present. This will allow a more open discussion of the barriers to women and girls using the park, including the presence or behaviour of some men or boys.
- Be clear about what is possible in any co-production exercise. Are you looking at a specific site or area of the park? Is there a limited budget?
- Ensure that the process and next steps are clear – taking part without a sense that change will result can be very demotivating.
- Ensure that women and girls are fully involved in ongoing management as well as development.

“
I don't think parks are designed especially with girls in mind. You know all the equipment that is put into parks it tends to be stuff that boy's do. And I have daughters and they just don't a say in have any of that public leisure equipment, it is always boys...
 ”



Safety walks can provide valuable information about issues in a particular park.



Co-production is an essential part of creating parks which work for women and girls.

Not all engagement work has to be centred around specific improvement projects. In Sweden, 'safety walks' have been developed in which council staff and police officers tour an area with women and girls to pinpoint areas of specific concern and discuss solutions. This approach has been formalised into a national strategy.

It's also important to recognise that not everyone is going to be happy with everything – an intervention may make some women feel safer or more welcome in the park but not work for others.

Intersectionality

As has already been discussed in the Belonging principle, women and girls do not form a homogenous group with similar needs. Other protected characteristics such as age, ethnicity, religion, disability, gender identity and sexual orientation all affect how they use the park and the barriers they face.

Under the Equality Act, councils and park providers have a responsibility to consider that people with certain protected characteristics are not disadvantaged when decisions are made. Therefore the needs of disadvantaged groups such as women, ethnic minorities or religious groups should take precedence over those who are not

protected under the Act, such as dog walkers or footballers.

For this reason, it is crucial to ensure that any engagement work reaches all groups of the local population in order that every social and cultural barrier for women in the park is addressed. This requires involving a wider range of people than just the Friends group and existing users, such as youth groups, community leaders, faith leaders and others, but it also means making sure that the engagement takes place at a time and in a place which is easily accessible to that particular group. For example, the timings should consider factors such as care-giving responsibilities as well as disabled access, while Muslim women may prefer all-female opportunities for input.

In Glasgow, Wise Women are running tours of safety hot spots to explain the issues that women face to decision makers, city planners, support workers and residents. The tours include a discussion session to encourage participants to find solutions.

Engagement of this kind may also take some effort. Where a group feels that parks are 'not for them', it may require repeated attempts to persuade them that their opinion has value.

All major design and management decisions should be subject to an Equality Impact Assessment at the start of the project, to ensure that all major design and management decisions consider the impact on protected groups and identify areas where discrimination may be occurring.

Quick Wins

- Simply observing how the park is used can be very informative and work as a basis for future engagement.
- Engagement with existing women's and youth groups is a low-cost way of reaching women and girls who might not currently use the park.
- Safety walks are a proven method of consultation and do not require vast resources.



HOW TO IMPLEMENT THIS GUIDANCE

This guidance contains a range of practical measures which everyone involved in parks can use to make these spaces safer for women and girls.

Below, we suggest how a range of groups, using this guidance as a starting point, can embed women and girls' safety into management, practice and policy.

Park Managers

- Review all park sites in conjunction with the local policing team and where appropriate with other bodies such as Friends' groups.
- Engage with women and girls specifically on safety, ensuring that those who do not currently use the parks are included.
- Share the results and this guidance with elected members and senior officers.
- Incorporate the guidance and the results of engagement into the management plan for the site and review regularly.
- Ensure all parks staff are aware of the guidance and the results of engagement and discuss actions they can take.
- Work towards a more diverse, gender-balanced workforce.
- Develop a specific protocol for dealing with incidents and safety concerns.
- Embed the safety of women and girls into all relevant training, policies and procedures.
- Collect baseline sex-disaggregated data on park and facility usage.

- Use data to evaluate the effect of interventions on the safety of women and girls.

Councillors and Council Staff

- Ensure that this guidance is shared across all relevant departments.
- Encourage cross-departmental working on women and girls' safety.
- Discuss approaches to safety, design and management with relevant groups including park users and Friends' groups, local women and girls' groups and representatives of other local communities.
- Review all relevant policies to ensure that women and girls' safety is written in wherever possible and that gender inequalities are not accidentally perpetuated.
- Conduct full Equalities Impact Assessments at the start of all relevant projects, and ensure safety is included as a metric.
- Create campaigns to encourage people to report safety concerns, maintenance issues and crime in parks.
- Develop a specific policy on the safety of women and girls.

Design Professionals and Developers

- Foreground the safety of women and girls at the start of every design project.
- Advocate for the inclusion of safety with other stakeholders such as clients, community groups and consultants.
- Conduct site visits to existing parks to

- evaluate how design can contribute to improved safety for women and girls, as well as their comfort, convenience and fun.
- Integrate the recommendations of this guidance into any new park designs.
- Undertake co-production with women and girls as part of the design process wherever possible and appropriate.

Community and Volunteer Groups

- Engage with women and girls to identify potential improvements.
- Meet with park managers and local councillors to discuss findings from engagement.
- Consider this guidance when running future events and activities.
- Ensure women and girls' safety is a regular agenda item at meetings.
- Identify funding that community and Friends' groups can access, that is not available to councils.
- Gather sex-disaggregated data on who is using the park and its facilities.
- Network with existing local women and girls' groups.

Planning Staff

- Ensure that the safety of women and girls is considered in all planning guidance.
- Review existing planning guidance to ensure that it does not perpetuate poor practice for example, specifying only those teenage facilities which are mostly used by boys.
- Include safety and gender equity in all relevant policy documents, including green space, play and sports policies.

Police and Designing Out Crime Officers

- When conducting reviews of park sites, engage with park managers and other bodies where appropriate.
- All staff training to include reference

to this guidance.

- Discuss approaches to safety and design with relevant local community groups.
- Develop campaigns with partners to encourage people to report safety concerns, anti-social behaviour and crime in parks.
- Use the data collected to inform neighbourhood policing and partnership working with councils.
- Review existing guidance to ensure that it does not perpetuate poor practice.
- Ensure that the safety of women and girls is a specific recommendation in any future documentation and specifications.
- Consider the gendered experience of safety when implementing crime prevention and security measures.
- Consider the principles in this guidance in implementing crime prevention and security measures, with particular reference to the needs for variety, facilities and belonging.
- Supplement Environmental Visual Audits with safety walks with women and girls.

Charities, Advisory Bodies and Other Stakeholders

- Promote this guidance throughout relevant networks.
- Commission research and the testing of specific interventions.
- Ensure the safety of women and girls is foregrounded in all relevant policy and guidance.
- Make funding available for supporting interventions in areas of greatest need.
- Collaborate with councils on projects that focus on improving the safety of women and girls.
- Review existing guidance to ensure that it includes safety and does not perpetuate poor practice.

CASE STUDIES

- Vienna : Gender Mainstreaming in Parks
- Umeå : Inclusive City for Women and Girls
- Her Barking : Low Cost Interventions for Change
- Wakefield : Bringing Women into the Park
- Southwark : Lighting for the Community
- Toronto : Women Managing the Park
- Bradford : Active Spaces for Teenage Girls
- York : Community Engagement
- London: Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park - Information for Safety
- Sweden : Inclusive Skateparks



VIENNA: GENDER MAINSTREAMING IN PARKS



Hammocks and platforms were early interventions to get the girls to linger
Credit: Zdenka Lammelova

Gender mainstreaming – the idea that the differing needs of women and girls should be considered in every decision around planning and design – began in Vienna in the 1990s, and the design of parks and public spaces was a crucial and early part of the work.

An early project was Einsiedler Park, a large square in an ethnically mixed neighbourhood of the city. It contained two MUGAs and a playground for younger children, along with several areas of grass and mature trees.

An analysis was done of the way that the space was used by both boys and girls.

Observations showed that girls passed through the park every day on their way to and from school, but never stopped or lingered. When researchers spoke to the girls, they said that there was nothing in the space for them, but also described how they were excluded from using facilities, particularly the MUGAs, because the boys would often not let them join in their games.

The first intervention aimed to get the girls to linger in the park for just a few minutes, a strategy that the planners described as ‘quick attraction’. They put hammocks and platforms near the path to give the girls a reason to stay. This



Dividing the MUGA into two spaces allowed for more diverse uses
Credit: Bethany Francis

began to work, and girls used them. Safety was also a consideration, with the designers adding wider paths which ran round the entire perimeter, and better lighting.

Next, the MUGA was altered so that it could not be dominated by the boys and the girls felt that it was a safe space to enter. The entrances were widened, and a new one put in so that the girls did not feel trapped. A structure was also built which provided an opportunity for play as well as dividing the MUGA into two spaces – only one of which was painted with pitch markings. On the other, the young people could decide how it would be used.

Observations also showed that some girls from ethnic minority backgrounds were expected to care for younger siblings, and often brought them to the park. Seats and benches were installed

by the infants’ playground so they could sit and chat with their friends while keeping an eye on their siblings.

Vienna produced gender mainstreaming guidance which covered every aspect of planning and design for the city. Their general guidelines for how parks and play spaces could be made to work better for girls and young women include:

- Visible footpaths with clear routes.
- Good lighting.
- Spaces divided into smaller sub-zones.
- Wide entrances and exits.
- Areas for rest and lingering or loitering.
- Shelter.
- Games such as netball, volleyball, and badminton.
- More swings and equipment for climbing and balancing.
- Good quality toilets.

UMEÅ: INCLUSIVE CITY FOR WOMEN AND GIRLS



The Frizon seating was co-designed with teenage girls
Credit: Umea Kommun

Umeå in northern Sweden began focussing on gender equality in 1978 and it is now at the heart of all municipal policy. This in turn has resulted in a considerable focus on safety and inclusivity across the city.

One intervention was Frizon (“Freezone”) in Årstidernas Park. The council had identified that teenage girls were not involved in discussions about public space while at the same time they felt less safe than young men in these places. The aim of the project at the outset was to design something which would allow girls to feel welcome and safe and so able to participate in public space.

A group of teenage girls worked with landscape architects and an artist to create a feature which they could use. The aim was for it to have excellent visibility and lighting, and to be situated near well-used paths. Being close to a public toilet was also a consideration.

The result was a structure based on a roundabout, with coloured roof lights and swinging seats, ergonomically designed to suit teenage girls. It also hosts WiFi and speakers to play music; however the intention was not for it to be exclusively for girls but that it should be open for everyone.



A central underpass was widened and made lighter for safety
Credit: Fredrik Larsson



Signage can underscore the need for inclusion
Credit: Fredrik Larsson

Observations show that the project was very successful, attracting a wide range of people but mainly being populated by teenage girls – not only in the daytime but during the evening as well.

Another project focused on a very different barrier to greenspace usage – the booking of football pitches. Men’s teams often have more resources and deeper reserves and so are able to block-book the best slots months ahead, leaving women’s teams to play at less popular times. This in turn limits the number of women who take part and

the success of their teams because they cannot get as many hours of practice. The city changed the system at one of the main facilities to provide more equal access.

Elsewhere in Umeå, a narrow and dark underpass was also redesigned from the perspective of safety for women and girls, becoming broader and lighter, with rounded corners to the entrance to make it easier to see who is coming. A third entrance was also added to give an alternative means of escape. Panels on the walls of the tunnel celebrate the works of local author Sarah Lidman.

The city has also used representation elsewhere with the same intention. Outside the old town hall in the main city square, a statue of a metallic red puma called Listen is intended to represent and be a response to the #metoo movement. Signs in the city have also been employed to draw attention to the need for equality and to enhance women’s sense of belonging in public spaces.

Umeå municipality also runs bus tours, called the Gendered Landscape, designed to raise awareness of the gendered power structures which mean that men and women experience the city in different ways. When the tour passes parks, feelings about security and public spaces are highlighted. The tour isn’t just aimed at showing off the progress that the city has made, but also drawing attention to areas where more work is needed.

Quick wins

- **Changing pitch booking policies to make them more inclusive.**

HER BARKING: LOW COST INTERVENTIONS FOR CHANGE



Temporary interventions on Abbey Green
Credit: Street Space

Her Barking was an experimental programme of co-production in the outer London borough, designed to test out whether low-cost interventions could make spaces feel safer for women. It was led by the social enterprise Street Space.

Initial research showed that 51% of residents in the borough didn't feel safe after dark, compared with a national average of 21%, and the majority of these were women, older people and those with disabilities.

“
There's rubbish everywhere, so it feels threatening.
”

The first stage was to identify spaces in the town centre which felt particularly unsafe, and the project identified three key places: Barking Station; a central park, Abbey Green and St Awdry's Walk, an alleyway running alongside the railway.

Local women were supported by Street Space to create temporary interventions inspired by the provocation, 'If you were holding your best mate's birthday party in this space, what would you do with £50 and the local shops?'. From this came temporary schemes including festoon lighting, planters, balloons and spray-painted decorations on paths. In St Awdry's Walk, this led to 60% of users feeling safer and feedback which included 'It feels more friendly and less



The artwork in St Awdry's Walk contains solar lighting
Credit: Julia Forsman, Street Space

alarming' and 'I've seen it – its great! I had a detour to check it out!'

National Lottery funding then enabled the scheme to be scaled up, and Street Space collaborated with artist Hanna Benihoud and the community to create a solar-powered light up canopy for St Awdry's Walk which featured geometric shapes and crowdsourced messages.

A programme of experiments outside Barking Station was then funded by the London Borough of Barking and Dagenham in 2021. This was again a collaborative design project with residents and community organisations, and resulted in the installation of seating, planters, locally designed artwork and a programme of local performances. It was also backed up by monitoring, which revealed that the number of people who felt safe outside the station increased by almost 30% and many more people said that they would be happy to meet a friend outside the station.

The project faced particular issues which are not necessarily the case in

parks, such as complexities of land ownership and authorities not wanting to take responsibility for these kinds of marginal spaces. However, a number of the findings from Her Barking are very relevant:

- Huge value in the interventions being designed and implemented by local people.
- Good to start small and see what works before scaling up.
- This 'practicing in public' can also be a way of winning local support.
- Funding needs to be made available to community and catalyst organisations who are willing to take on the work.
- Whatever is installed needs to be maintained quickly and efficiently or can lead to a worsening state of neglect.

Quick wins

- **A temporary low-budget installation can kick-start the process of change.**

WAKEFIELD: BRINGING WOMEN INTO THE PARK



Facilitated events can help parks feel more familiar
Credit: Sport England

In Wakefield, the West Yorkshire Mayor used money from the Safer Streets Fund to support EMPOWER, a programme of activities for women in parks with the specific goal of making women and girls feel more confident and safer in the city as well as improving their mental and physical health.

The programme needed to take place in a short time frame. To facilitate this, it was delivered by two local CICs, Bring Me to Life and Evergreen Active CIC, both led by women and who were already providing fitness and mental

“ **This is a wonderful opportunity to meet new people in a safe environment and improve wellbeing at the same time. Am so pleased I joined - Thank you.** ”

health opportunities for women in the local area.

The EMPOWER events ran across five different parks in the city and were designed to reach the broadest range of women and girls possible. Many were walking events, aimed at simply getting women and girls into the park. These ranged from buggy walks for mothers and other carers, TikTok Treks after school for teenage girls and Menopause Mayhem for older women, as well as mindfulness walks and open groups.

In addition, the project provided a range of more active classes, including Boxercise, Running for Beginners and outdoor yoga in the parks.

The sessions ran over eight weeks, with events scheduled throughout the day, including a number of classes scheduled for early evening, enabling them to reach working women but also helping to extend the hours in which the parks were being used. Over 830 women participated, and the feedback was overwhelmingly positive.

Women valued the opportunity to be active, but also to do this as part of a supportive group, which was both confidence-building and ensured that personal safety wasn't a barrier to participation.

Crucially, the project succeeded in its goal of making Wakefield's parks feel safer and more accessible to women. 87% of participants said that taking part had encouraged them to access green and open spaces more confidently than before. And there will have been

“ **This walk is amazing and it encourages ladies to meet in a safe environment.** ”

additional benefits too, because it is likely that the presence of groups of women in the park would also make non-participants feel safer in the space.

Quick wins

- **Working with existing local groups made it easy to deliver the classes and to recruit from a wide demographic.**
- **Budgets from health, safety and sport funding can be used to create activations in parks.**

SOUTHWARK: LIGHTING FOR THE COMMUNITY

A number of high-profile incidents had focused attention on security in the Brandon Estate in Southwark. As part of a review of safety on the estate, the lighting was upgraded across the estate to LEDs, but while these improved overall light levels, they also increased glare and contrast and the light spilled into residents' homes. The floodlighting also caused areas of high brightness next to much darker spaces and the contrast did not support feelings of safety and security.

Light Follows Behaviour worked with Configuring Light to trial a different approach to lighting in the area, using the idea that safety was based on the quality of the space and the feel of the lighting as well as practical and regulatory concerns.

The premise of the project was to introduce a temporary and very different lighting installation to encourage both residents and council members to reconsider their ideas of appropriate lighting on housing estates. An aspect of this was also to refocus the debate away from safety and security and concentrate on positive community aspirations for the site instead.

For this reason, consultation with local residents was undertaken before any design work began. They believed that the estate's reputation was undeserved and felt safe in almost every area during



Bath Passage before lighting
Credit: Light Follows Behaviour & Configuring Light



Bath Passage with temporary lighting installation
Credit: Light Follows Behaviour & Configuring Light



Residents in Bath Passage
Credit: Light Follows Behaviour & Configuring Light

the day. Only some, specific spaces were perceived as unsafe at night, and this was often the result of inadequate lines of sight rather than issues with the lighting. Residents thought that the LED lighting was reassuring but did not fit with how they saw the estate, and wanted to enhance the sociability they felt already existed.

The site chosen for the trial was Bath Passage and Grimsall Square which formed a natural entrance to the estate and a potential gathering space, but was currently a quiet area which residents would avoid at night, taking longer alternative routes. The temporary installation consisted of festoon lights strung between the mature trees on the square. The design came from functional considerations – reducing glare and increasing the uniformity of the lighting and the colour rendering – while also aiming to bring character, a sense of place and joy to the space.

Light levels were reduced by over 50%, and colour rendering significantly improved as did the light spill through windows. Most importantly, residents noted feeling safer walking through the space after dark as a result of the changes.

The new lighting was immediately welcomed by the residents. They not only felt safer using the space at night, but also began to think of the space as a potential venue for community events which could be improved with new planting and seating.

Although only intended as a temporary installation to serve as a research tool, the overwhelmingly positive response led to residents convincing the local authority to make it a permanent feature. The total cost, including the additional budget to make it permanent was £10,000.

TORONTO: WOMEN MANAGING THE PARK

The Thorncliffe Park neighbourhood of Toronto is a densely populated area to the northwest of the city with 30,000 residents living in high rise flats. Many of the residents are recent immigrants and there was only one small park locally – R.V. Burgess Park, which suffered from neglect and a high crime rate, while the community centre was closed.

A group of women who lived locally got together to see what they could do, eventually becoming the Thorncliffe Park Women's Committee. They visited other local parks to see what activations and engagement worked, and then began to organise a range of activities.

Early events included litter picking and guided walks in the area. With additional funding from charities, they then built a children's garden and organised women's fitness and sewing classes in the community centre, as well as holding arts events in the park for families and children.

The focus on children was in part for the benefit of women – as primary caregivers, they couldn't come to the park if there was nothing for the children to do. But the committee also realised that many of these women were also running micro-businesses from home. This led to the idea of the bazaar. Every Friday night R.V. Burgess Park now hosts a pop-up market, where local women set up stalls for their businesses



Photos top down:
Community tandoor oven in the park
Credit: Guntar Kravis, Metcalf Foundation

The community café employs local women
Credit: Guntar Kravis, Metcalf Foundation

and sell to the local community, but it's also an event with music, food and a place for residents to meet and relax.

Getting approval for this was difficult – the city wasn't used to this kind of activity in its parks and the committee wanted to ensure that local women weren't priced out of the space and that they remained in control of the event.

After several months of deadlock,



R V Burgess Park has become a valued local space
Credit: Guntar Kravis, Metcalf Foundation

Toronto City Council workers went on strike and the Thorncliffe Park Women's Community saw their chance, running nine Friday night bazaars. The first had five vendors, but by the end of the project they had become a regular success attracting people from the whole area. The committee had proved that it could organise the kind of event that their neighbourhood needed, selling locally made products, food made by the local community and the kinds of fruit and vegetables that the diverse population of the area wanted to cook with.

The bazaar became an incubator for micro-entrepreneurship, with many vendors turning their small-scale productions into proper businesses, often with the help of the committee, getting work experience and improving their English in the process. And the emphasis on food was brought into the

park structure too, with funding being given in 2011 for the installation of a permanent tandoor oven.

The committee has also created a strong community of women, who together have used the bazaar and the park as a catalyst for more events, including English lessons, free bike clinics and a permanent low-priced cafe and catering business.

The project is now supported by a range of charitable grants, has won awards and the women's committee now mentors other park groups.

What started as a park improvement project has gone on to have a much wider impact in the whole community – giving women work experience and even careers, creating a more cohesive neighbourhood and strengthening its economic resilience.

BRADFORD: ACTIVE SPACES FOR TEENAGE GIRLS

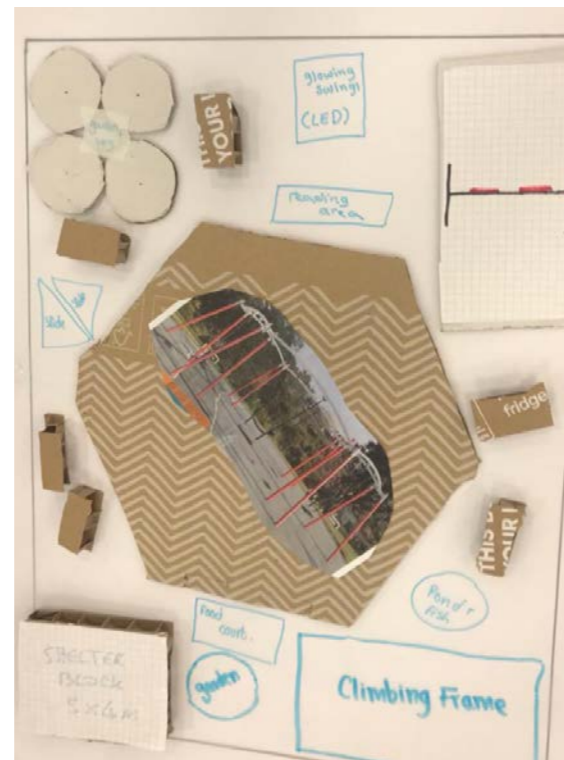
In Bradford, the Join Us Move Play programme (JU:MP) has worked on making parks more attractive to teenage girls.

The JU:MP programme is a project designed to increase physical activity in children aged 5-14 in Bradford, using a whole systems approach - a dynamic way of working which brings people together to understand a challenge. Increasing the use of parks through both improved facilities and activations has been a key element in the work. Among the green spaces identified by communities as needing investment, two have involved a particular focus on meeting the needs of teenage girls through a co-design approach. Girls aged 11+ who live near these spaces have taken part in a series of design workshops, developed and delivered by JU:MP and Make Space for Girls.

In Fagley, in the north-east of the city, an initial workshop was held with 13 girls to explore their experiences of parks. A number of themes emerged, including concerns about anti-social behaviour (especially fire-setting, quad bikes and public urination by boys/young men), being “judged” by others while in public space, and equipment not being suitable for their use.

After this initial workshop, a small local green space owned by the housing association Incommunities was

identified as one in which an investment could be made. Building on the initial workshop, a second group of girls, most of whom lived very locally to that park, worked with JU:MP and Make Space for Girls to explore the type of provision that would make them more likely to use this particular space. Using facilitated discussions about their experiences of parks, mapping and collaging techniques, they created a set of “mood boards” and experimental layouts, which were then shared with Bradford Metropolitan District Council’s landscape design team.



Model produced as part of engagement work
Credit: JU:MP and Make Space for Girls



Final design for the park
Credit: JU:MP

Developing the ideas from the mood boards, the landscape designer produced three different designs for the space. At a further design workshop, these were presented to the girls who gave feedback so that he could finalise the design. Care was taken to manage the power dynamic between the ‘expert’ landscape designer, David Bennison, and the participants.

Not everything that the girls wanted could be provided because of budgetary constraints and concerns about anti-social behaviour. Care was taken to communicate the reasons for these decisions to the group very clearly, so that they understood why these were not included and did not feel that their input had been sidelined.

From this workshop, a final design was produced which included different areas

of seating and some informal playable spaces, as well as wildflower planting and fruit trees. This is now being specified by the council and will be installed in summer 2023, for a budget of £45,000.

The JU:MP programme is funded by Sport England as part of its Local Development Partnerships and is being delivered and evaluated through the Born in Bradford project in partnership with the University of Bradford. Bradford Metropolitan District Council are delivering landscape design projects to support JU:MP.

YORK: COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT



Activations include a regular group for older girls
Credit: Friends of Rowntree Park

Rowntree Park, on the south side of the City of York, is a large traditional park laid out in 1921. It has a cafe and formal gardens, as well as wooded areas, ponds, tennis courts and some open spaces. In addition, it has some more modern facilities including a basketball court, table tennis, a skate park and, unusually, an amphitheatre.

The Friends of Rowntree Park is a very active group. It has become a charity, raising money from grants, donations and membership, which it uses for both

looking after the park and initiating new activities.

Over the last couple of years, the Friends group has specifically considered how the park can be made more welcoming to teenage girls, and with a limited budget.

The first step was engagement with the girls themselves. In-person and online surveys showed that the park already had a number of features which appealed to them, including the diversity

of nature and wildlife, the open spaces with paths which were flat enough for rollerblading and cycling, and the circular benches for chatting to friends.

Another interesting finding was that the park felt welcoming in part because it was a community venue – other events like Tai Chi, forest school, pilates, yoga and dance classes made it feel safer, because of the range of ages and different people using it.

However, what didn't appeal to the girls were the traditional teen facilities – the skate park and basketball court – because there were too many boys in an enclosed space. Only 20% of the girls ever used them. They also found using the swings and play equipment uncomfortable because these were in the fenced off area for younger children, and so girls didn't feel welcome there, even though they liked the swings.

As well as wanting swings of their own, girls also suggested female-led sports and activities, more social seating and being more involved in the management of the park.

As a first stage, the Friends group secured funding from the LNER community fund to run Wild Ones, a forest school group for older girls set up with the aim of making them feel that they belonged in the park. As well as bushcraft and campfire cooking, the group features a lot of hammock time – another feature that is often requested by girls.

Further research was done with boys as well as girls, which revealed that

**WE WANT TO SIT
ON SWINGS BUT
FEEL BAD WHEN
SMALL KIDS
WANT THEM.**

Quotes from engagement were used to highlight the issues

Credit: Friends of Rowntree Park

only 26% of those surveyed used the skatepark while 75% of both boys and girls wanted to see swings, so the next stage is to secure funding for a set of swings outside the fenced play area. Rowntree Park's experience demonstrates that engagement doesn't have to be expensive and can itself help girls to feel that they belong in the park, even before any of the recommendations are implemented.

It's also a reminder that a good park with a rich range of features is already attractive to teenage girls, and it may not be that difficult to get them to feel that they belong in the park.

LONDON: QUEEN ELIZABETH OLYMPIC PARK - INFORMATION FOR SAFETY



The south of the park is well lit at night
Credit: LLDC

In September 2021, London Legacy Development Corporation (LLDC) launched a project to engage with women and girls about Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park and the surrounding area. This was aimed at understanding what makes women and girls feel safe or unsafe and identifying what interventions could be made to improve this.

Inconsistency of lighting was seen as the most important factor influencing safety. 65% of respondents reported poor lighting as a reason why they felt unsafe

“
The lighting is very patchy and lots of places for people to hide along. I've seen many groups of men hanging out in the shadows along this route. I now don't use this route to go home once it's dark.
”

at night; 80% felt that more lighting would help them to feel safer.

The park is designed as two distinct character areas. The southern part is a destination which has consistent coverage of light with some variations in colour and configuration of lighting features. Respondents generally felt it was safe.

The north of the park primarily provides a varied and ecologically rich landscape with the River Lea at its centre. To protect nocturnal wildlife certain areas - generally those which are inaccessible or associated with the waterways - are kept as 'dark corridors' at night. The wider area also contains similar biodiversity-sensitive environments managed by other stakeholders, such as the Lee Navigation managed by the Canal and River Trust. Where dark corridors needed to be maintained, alternative approaches

have been taken, in particular signposting people to other, lit routes. One example of this was the towpath along the Lee Navigation. Some respondents reported that the low light level did not feel safe, and this was exacerbated by brightly lit underpasses under some of the roads. The high contrast made the darker pathway feel more insecure.

In this case, the LLDC chose to provide clear information to users about the availability of alternative, better-lit routes for pedestrians and cyclists. This was done through signage suggesting that people 'Follow Lit Routes'. The language used made no reference to safety, to avoid creating unease.

Elsewhere in the park, signs have also been installed to explain why some areas are deliberately kept dark for the benefit of wildlife.



'Follow lit paths' sign at park entrance
Credit: Marina Milosev

DID YOU KNOW?

The lighting in the north Park is deliberately low to support biodiversity and wildlife habitats. The Park is home to six species of bat.

For more information visit the Biodiversity pages at QueenElizabethOlympicPark.co.uk



Signs placed in the north part of the park
Credit: LLDC

SWEDEN: INCLUSIVE SKATEPARKS

The design of specific park facilities is important in making women and girls feel safer and more welcome in parks, and skate parks are a good example of this. Their design and location can often deter girls and women from using them and has the potential to create male-dominated spaces which make a park feel unwelcoming or threatening. In addition, by creating arenas in which large groups of teenage boys gather, they can in themselves deter girls from using the park.

In Sweden the architectural practice White Arkitekter collaborated with the Swedish Skateboarding Federation to see what a more inclusive skate park might look like.

The first stage was focus groups of 'non normative skaters', which included girls and non-binary and transgender skaters, to find out what the problems were and what the solutions might be.

These reported that the space was dominated by boys, which could feel threatening and exclusionary, and that because most parks were designed as one big bowl, they found it difficult to participate, in particular because there were no areas for beginners. The parks were also often positioned in out of the way areas with little change to pedestrian traffic, which increased their feelings of being unsafe.

Their recommendations included the

following:

- Creating several different zones within the skate park for varying skating styles and abilities.
- Separate spaces for practice to reduce the sense of being watched.
- Shading the edge of the skating area into the park so it is not perceived as an arena.
- Locating the facility close to public transport and in a busy area.
- Areas which are designed for beginners.
- The presence of official people for a sense of security.
- More colourful and inspirational design rather than the stereotypical concrete.
- The inclusion of greenery and a variety of materials.
- Lighting which feels cosy rather than floodlighting.
- Good maintenance.

Make Space for Girls worked with the skate park manufacturer Wheelscape to turn the more detailed recommendations from the report into a design. This also included other features to make the facility more inclusive for a wider group:

- Spaces for other wheeled sports, e.g. scooters.
- Flat areas for roller skating.
- Other facilities like slides and swings so that the area is used by a wider group.
- Café and sensory garden.
- Good sightlines across the park.



Two views of the inclusive design produced by Wheelscape
Credit: Wheelscape

- A path running through the edge of the space so that there are eyes on the skatepark.
- Ranges of formal and informal seating.

Clearly this is an aspirational image, but Wheelscape are already including some of the principles into their designs for smaller wheeled sports parks as well.

However, it also needs to be remembered that skate parks are expensive facilities which only cater for a small proportion of the population (under 8%) which is 85% male. So provision of a skate park should only be considered as part of a much wider range of facilities for young people in a park, and care has to be taken that it does not affect women and girls' sense of safety.

MEASURING SUCCESS

Improving parks is just the first step. It's really important that managers and other stakeholders measure the impact of the changes they make against baseline data. This makes it possible to evaluate what works well and to share this knowledge.

A number of key indicators can be useful in measuring the success of the implementation of this guidance:

- Are women and girls reporting fewer barriers to using parks?
- Are they reporting that they feel safer?
- How has their usage of parks changed? For example, are they visiting parks more frequently or staying longer? Or visiting at different times, such as evenings?
- Are there more women and girls using parks?

Both qualitative and quantitative methods can be used to measure the impact of any changes or improvements that have been introduced, whether these are physical interventions, alterations to management practices or the introduction of new or expanded programmes of activity.

Potential methods and tools

Surveys and feedback

Visitor surveys can help with understanding the needs and views of park users. Historic visitor surveys may provide baseline data about levels of use, frequency and time of use, dwell time, satisfaction ratings and any potential barriers. Re-analysing these

using respondents' characteristics may provide valuable sex-disaggregated baseline data. Surveys may already include questions about personal safety; if not, this may be identified through open comments. Sample questions about personal safety can be taken from the Office of National Statistics (ONS) Opinions and Lifestyle Survey and incorporated into new visitor surveys, which allows comparison with national statistics.

Repeating visitor surveys at regular intervals, typically every 3-5 years, can demonstrate changes over time. There needs to be consistency in the survey questions and the sampling methodology to ensure robustness of data. If the responses are to be analysed by sex and age, the sample size should be sufficient to allow this.

Surveys can be delivered face-to-face in the park or through online surveys promoted in the park (through noticeboards or QR codes at the new facility). Teenage girls are often reluctant to use online surveys, so other methods are preferable where they are the main focus of the research.

Social media can also provide an effective and low-cost way to gain qualitative feedback about improvements that have been delivered. Opportunities can be promoted in the park, or at the new facility, and participants asked to submit images or qualitative comments and marking posts with an appropriate hashtag (#makespaceforgirls #saferparks etc).



Both Make Space for Girls and the Green Flag Award have Resources sections on their websites with links to a wide range of additional information on data, engagement and methodology.

However, while useful for gauging sentiment, this will not get the views of non-users of the park.

Where new facilities or measures have been introduced to attract more women and girls, targeted surveys can be used to understand responses to the changes. Qualitative approaches such as interviewing women and girls and bringing groups of people together for discussion / focus groups, allow for more detailed conversations. This can provide much richer data and insight and also highlight further areas for improvement. A complementary approach would be using Safety Walks (see Co-Production and Engagement principle) both before and after interventions in order to review their impact.

However, it is important to remember that the goal should always be meaningful engagement with women and girls from the very start of any project, and the ideal is co-production, where they are involved throughout the design process with regular feedback.

Data

Recording the level and pattern of usage of parks and green spaces by women and girls can be achieved using two methods. Firstly, through visitor observation, recording the broad demographics of who is using a space and their behaviour over a series of sample periods (usually spread across different times and during weekdays and weekends) and then collating and analysing the resulting data. Observation studies carried out before and after interventions can provide good evidence about changes to patterns of use and the types of users (although seasonal factors can affect the results).

While police statistics can be used as an indicator, there are significant issues associated with reporting certain crime types such as sexual assault, and other issues related to the logging of crimes and the location accuracy. In addition, these statistics do not capture acts of sexual harassment and misogyny that women and girls endure on a regular basis and which can deter them from using a park.

For these reasons, it is important to encourage women and girls to report safety concerns through other means, and to analyse data collected. For example, StreetSafe is a national tool for people to identify specific public spaces where they feel uncomfortable and why. These data can then inform neighbourhood policing and partnership working.

It should also be noted that if interventions result in women feeling more comfortable and welcome in a park, this may result in a higher rate of reported crime, due to their feeling more confident to report it, and also simply because there are more people in the park.

Process evaluation

Process evaluation looks at how policies, procedures and working practice have changed to deliver improvement.

Public authorities should also consider the need for data in complying with their obligations under the Public Sector Equality Duty (Equality Act 2010). The courts have looked at this and confirmed that if decision-makers don't have the information to understand the impact of their decisions on potentially disadvantaged groups then they may have a duty to acquire it.

Reviews of park management plans and wider green space and play policies will show whether safety is being incorporated into parks at this level.

Green Flag Award feedback

The use of this document as supplementary guidance to Raising the Standard - The Green Flag Award guidance manual and subsequent analysis of judges' feedback - can in future provide a sense of how parks are incorporating the safety of women and girls into their design, maintenance and management.

Quick wins

- **Analyse historic survey data and start planning for future data collection specifically based on sex and gender.**
- **Manual visitor counting should record sex and include approximate periods of the day.**
- **Measure women and girls' attendance at park events and activities and generate a baseline. Then aim to increase attendance by women and girls in future.**
- **Incorporate ONS Opinions and Lifestyle Survey questions on perceptions of safety into your visitor surveys and compare your responses to the national average.**
- **Employ observational techniques on different types of facilities at different times of day.**
- **Continue to monitor and measure – interventions may take some time to have an effect.**

RESEARCH SUMMARY

The principles outlined in this guidance have been developed primarily from the research conducted by the University of Leeds, which was funded by the Mayor of West Yorkshire as part of its award from the Home Office Safer Streets Fund Round Three to support women and girls' safety in West Yorkshire parks.

Methodology

Using an approach called Q methodology, the study conducted in-depth one-to-one interviews with 67 women and focus groups with 50 teenage girls from across West Yorkshire. Participants were between the ages of 13 to 84 years, and were from diverse ethnic groups. Some 18% of women and 8% of girls identified as Asian, 6% of women and 16% of girls as Black, 5% of women and 4% of girls identified as from multiple ethnic groups and 6% of women (0% of girls) as from 'other ethnic group'. Additionally, 31% of women and 14% of girls identified as having a disability. Three girls identified as non-binary. The participants were asked to order 49 statements relating to their feelings of safety in parks on a grid, from 'most like' to 'most unlike' their views. Afterwards, women and girls discussed the reasons for their views and reflected on ways to make parks feel safer and more welcoming. In addition, 27 professionals from different sectors in local government and police were asked to order the statements, to provide a comparison. Whilst women and girls were invited to reflect on their own individual experiences, professionals were asked to think about women and

girls as a general, and therefore much broader, category. Statements phrased using 'I' in the women and girls' set were replaced with 'women and girls' in the professionals' set.

A further research activity was conducted with teenage girls in order to understand what facilities might make parks more appealing for them. Images of standard and gender-sensitive (i.e., designed with or for girls) play spaces were circulated, with girls given the opportunity to say what they liked and disliked about them.

Findings

Overall, there were some differences between professionals' views and those of women and girls, notably in the perception of how safe parks are perceived to be. 89% of professionals thought parks in their area of West Yorkshire are safe for women and girls, but this compares with only 37% of women and 22% of girls. Nearly all women and girls felt unsafe in parks alone after dark, and approximately 1 in 5 felt unsafe in parks alone during the daytime. Beyond these differences, there were common areas of agreement as to what factors make parks feel safe or unsafe.

The research resulted in two reports. In the first we identify clusters of women, girls, and professionals who ordered the set of 49 statements in statistically similar ways, and who share a viewpoint on safety in parks. The viewpoints also reveal wider insights into how participants see the problem of women

Having lighting in parks would make them feel safer for me to use after dark.

Parks would feel safer if there were more park staff present, for example gardeners and maintenance staff.

Signs of disorder make me feel unsafe in parks, for example rubbish, needles and graffiti.

I feel less safe when the park is busy with people.

I feel safer using parks if I can see other park users of similar identity to me.

I would feel safer using parks as part of organised group activities, for example sports, exercise, social activities, or volunteering.

I feel safer in parks that I am familiar with.

As long as women and girls take personal safety measures in parks, they can be safe.

I feel safer nearer the middle compared to the edge of parks.

I feel safer in areas of parks where I can see a good distance around me.

Example statements used in the study

and girls' safety in public spaces more generally. As these diverse viewpoints illustrate, women and girls do not form a homogenous group and our research highlights some different preferences for interventions or priorities for action, particularly among teenage girls. In the second we identify what teenage girls 'like' and 'dislike' about a range of park facilities and play spaces, with a focus on feelings of safety and belonging. The key findings of the research form the basis for the principles outlined in this guidance, and the quotes included throughout come from the women and girls who participated.

However, not all the findings from the research can be translated into guidance for park managers. As a consequence of wider misogyny in society, women and girls felt strongly that the risk of danger and violence was not something which could be designed out of parks, and nor was it women's responsibility to solve through the use of safety apps, or by limiting their activities. Women and girls' felt strongly that societal and male behavioural change is necessary.

The following section sets out the West Yorkshire research findings that are relevant to each principle.

Safer Parks Reports

Barker, A. Holmes, G. Alam, R. Cape-Davenhill, L. Osei-Appiah, S. and Warrington Brown, S. 2022. What Makes a Park Feel Safe or Unsafe? The views of women, girls and professionals in West Yorkshire. University of Leeds, Leeds. <https://doi.org/10.48785/100/108>

Barker, A. Holmes, G. Cape-Davenhill, L. and Warrington Brown, S. 2022. What do teenage girls like and dislike about park play spaces and multi-use games areas? University of Leeds, Leeds. <https://doi.org/10.48785/100/122>

Both are available at: <http://futureofparks.leeds.ac.uk/safer-parks/>

Eyes on the Park

Busyness and Activation

“**Well obviously the more people that are there the more safer it is. As a woman, it's when you're actually on your own, isolated, that I'd feel more unsafe.**”

One of the strongest areas of consensus in the research was that well-used parks feel safer for women because

of increased passive surveillance and the possibility of getting help. They would often choose to visit when they knew the park would be busier. In addition, women and some girls felt that the presence of other women in the park was particularly reassuring and created positive feedback loops by encouraging other women to use the park. This was also the case when women saw park users of a similar identity to them within a diverse set of users.

However, not everyone makes the park feel safer. For some women and girls, the presence of drinkers and drug users were an issue, while lone men or groups of men and boys could also make a space feel less safe, although this was lessened when a park was busy with other groups of users.

Teenage girls most diverged in their views on the presence of other teenagers. While some girls perceived such groups, particularly boys, as threatening and linked to experiences of harassment, others perceived them as more benign or variable, perhaps because of their similar identity as teenagers or because their fears linked to older men.

Women felt that busyness, including the presence of other women, could be encouraged through more facilities, amenities and activities, and a wider variety of uses. Organised events in the park were helpful for safety and also allowed women to extend their use of parks, including in quieter or secluded areas and after dark.

Staffing and Authority Figures

“**He [a groundsman] was just busy doing his thing and it was just a really quick interaction and off he went, but it would make me feel safe to run around the park again...**”

The presence of park staff and other official groups such as the police, as well as more informal activity such as people working in cafes or volunteers are also important in creating a sense of safety. Women generally reported that they felt safer when staff and authority figures were present, and reassurance was also gained from friendly interactions with park staff. Being 'noticed' by park staff meant that 'you don't feel invisible' and are on their 'radar', imparting a feeling of safety.

Women advocated for staff to be present throughout the day, and particularly during late afternoons and early evenings in the winter when the park is dark. Some teenage girls had previous negative experiences with authority figures in parks, and some expressed a preference for female staff and officers, who they felt would take harassment more seriously.

Many women and girls also felt that technological eyes such as CCTV would make them feel safer, but there was ambivalence around this point, and the presence of other people, staff or authority figures was always seen as preferable if there was a choice. Teenage girls agreed that help points in the park would improve safety.

Awareness

Visibility and Openness

“**I need to have an open view because I like to know who is behind me, I like to scan and see who is going to be approaching me.**”

Being able to see and be seen came across as an important feature of a safe park in the research. Women disliked thick vegetation that blocked sight lines and secluded areas that are hidden from view. Many women also thought that maximising visibility across the park and providing plenty of exits were important too.

The park landscape and vegetation were seen as simultaneously important to wellbeing, and potentially intimidating to women.

“**I mean it's lovely to go and see all the flowers and the bushes and everything and the wildlife running around but it still does make you feel quite concerned for your safety... I think the hedgerows and things like that could be a little bit more well maintained so they are not as intimidating.**”

Escape

“
Like a bush I could probably throw myself through it if worst came to the worst but a wall, it's like blocking off your exits, your escape routes.”

The ability to escape easily from a threatening situation is important to women and girls in deciding whether a park feels safe or not. Girls and women agreed that fences or walls around the edge of a park made them feel less safe because they restricted both escape and visibility.

Teenage girls also felt safer at the perimeter of the park, as a space where it would be easier to escape from a threatening situation. Additionally, they noted their dislike of enclosed park areas or play spaces, such as fenced courts or MUGAs, where they could be 'trapped'.

Lighting

“
If there was plenty of good lighting, I would love to use my park... But, it makes me feel unsafe because some of the pathways don't have any lighting.”

That parks feel unsafe after dark was a strong area of agreement between most women and all girls, but there was a range of opinions around whether lighting alone was enough to make

them feel safe. Some felt that other factors such as vegetation density and park usage would need to be considered along with lighting for parks to feel safe at night; whilst others felt that they would never feel safe in a park after dark given the threat of violent and predatory men, regardless of lighting or other interventions.

Wayfinding and Layout

“
I tend to stick to the same ones [parks] that I know just because I'm familiar with ways to get out if I needed to quickly, and things like that... lots of entrances and exits, if you can see them and they're clear then it just makes it a little bit more, you feel a bit more at ease.”

Wayfinding and clear signposting emerged as important for safety. Women and girls felt safer in familiar parks, in part because they knew the park layout, direction of paths, where exits are and places to hide or seek help. Aspects of park layout, such as having lots of exits, was particularly important for some women and girls.

Girls also expressed a preference for mixed-use design and play spaces with different areas for diverse activities, which could reduce the likelihood of male domination of space.

Inclusion

Belonging and Familiarity

“
I feel safer in parks that I am familiar with... I know where the exit routes are, I know the routes, I know where the clear areas are, café, shop. Parks that I am unfamiliar with I am less likely to go on my own or feel safer.”

For some women and girls, familiarity was an important part of what made a park feel safe and welcoming. This could be manifested in a number of different ways, but most often meant a park which they knew and which they visited regularly. Familiarity reduces unpredictability producing a feeling of comfort and ease.

Women and girls also explained that particular facilities, or the lack of them, could produce feelings of exclusion and a sense of unsafety, rather than belonging, and these experiences also intertwined with aspects of their identity. For example, teenage girls perceived certain play spaces or seating arrangements as exclusionary by age and/or gender, as being either aimed at boys (such as MUGAs) or younger children/adult women. On the other hand, some women noted a lack of public toilet facilities could exclude older women or those with physical disabilities from using the park.

Activities were seen as something which did not just make the park busier, and so safer, but also increase their sense

of belonging in a space. Women and girls also expressed a desire for a wider choice of organised activities beyond exercise classes to include a broader demographic of women.

Moreover, some women and girls felt they were at greater risk of prejudice, harassment, and violence in parks according to interlocking power structures of gender, age, ethnicity, religion, disability and sexuality, thereby curtailing their sense of belonging. In this respect, an important indicator of belonging was the presence of other people with a similar identity.

Image

“
I feel like when you like just hear about like stories about like women getting abused or something in parks, it kind of makes you more wary to go in them.”

Women and girls raised several aspects relating to the image of parks. The poor reputation of a park could make it feel unsafe, particularly in relation to incidents of violence against women and girls, with knowledge of previous assaults resulting in women and girls' reluctance to use specific parks. Equally a park which was known to be safe would be actively chosen.

In addition, some women and girls specifically singled out the presence of physical disorder and signs of anti-social behaviour - rubbish, needles, graffiti and vandalised equipment - as making the park feel less safe and welcoming. On

the other hand, signs of order such as tidy grass were less important as an indicator for safety.

Access and Location

“**It’s very closed off, there’s no houses near it [the park]; it’s kind of at the bottom of a hill, so you can’t really see in very well; there’s trees all round it... you can’t see it unless you’re actually in there.**”

Some girls identified parks in more isolated spaces, without housing or shops surrounding them, as feeling less safe than parks that receive good levels of natural surveillance from streets or overlooked by housing.

Women and girls’ perception of park safety may also be influenced by their perception of an area more generally. For example if an area is perceived to be unsafe, such as being seen a ‘hotspot’ for anti-social behaviour, then parks within this area may also feel unsafe.

“**I run through Holbeck three times a week. So, it’s one of the hotspot parks and I’ve lived on Holbeck more 17 years and it’s rife for people doing drugs and drinks on there. It doesn’t really matter what you do to Holbeck Moor it will never change.**”

Co-Production and Engagement

“**I think a lot of our councillors are older men... And all of the parks management team... are middle-aged and men... I think they would find it really difficult to see it from this point of view, so I think the hardest part of redesigning a park will be getting the hearts and minds changed, to understand that this is even needed.’ (Design professional)**”

“**... what it is about being LGBTQ or what is it about being of a certain ethnicity or from a certain religion that makes you feel unsafe. I feel like that’s a conversation that we need to have on a larger scale.**”

Professionals commented on the gender imbalance of councillors and parks staff and felt there was a lack of specificity around women and girls’ safety, rather general safety. Women also felt that if they had greater involvement in the design and management of parks, safety would be improved. Furthermore, as highlighted above, intersectionality was also a key concern in the research, with

women and girls from minoritised groups facing specific forms of exclusion or barriers to feeling safe in parks. Their experiences underscore the importance of co-design processes which engage with women and girls of all different ages, identities and backgrounds.

9. Q methodology combines quantitative and qualitative techniques to study subjectivity, such as people’s views, perceptions or beliefs. Its purpose is to identify the range of shared viewpoints that exist on a topic, revealing areas of consensus and divergence across these views.

10. To develop a comprehensive set of statements for this study, we collated a wide range of 230 sources on women and girls’ safety in parks and public spaces from academic research, civil society organisations, women’s campaigns, governmental and parliamentary sources, existing guidance, online sources, safety apps and market research and consultancies.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Alongside the West Yorkshire study, the guidance has been informed by the findings of wider academic research, public safety and gender-inclusive design guidance and information provided by a range of experts.

The most important and relevant of these resources and research papers are listed in the bibliography below.

Resources

A wide range of guidance, toolkits and other advice exists on subjects covered in this guidance, e.g. on lighting, path design or engagement. Listed below are resources which focus specifically on safety or designing for women and girls.

Active Design - creating active environments through planning and design, Sport England, 2023.

Better Design for Parks, Make Space for Girls, 2021.

Cities Alive: Rethinking the Shades of Night, Arup, 2015.

Cities Alive: Designing Cities that work for Women, Arup, 2022.

Creating Safe and Inclusive Public Spaces for Women, Women's Health East, Melbourne, 2021.

Creating Safer Spaces, Marshalls in collaboration with Landscape Institute, 2022.

Dealing With Crime and Disorder in Urban Parks, Center for Problem-Oriented Policing, U.S. Department of Justice, 2009.

Design for Play: A guide to creating successful play spaces, Play England, 2008.

Fair Shared Green and Recreational Spaces - Guidelines for Gender-Responsive and Inclusive Design, Tbilisi Municipality, Tbilisi, 2021.

Field Guide to Life in Urban Plazas, SWA Group, New York, 2019.

Gender Issue Guide: Urban Planning and Design, UN Habitat, Nairobi, 2012.

Gender Equality and Plan Making - The Gender Mainstreaming Toolkit, Royal Town Planning Institute, London, 2003.

Gender Equality Monitoring Report, City of Vienna, Vienna, 2013.

Gender Mainstreaming in Urban Planning and Development, City of Vienna, Vienna, 2013.

Girls Make the City, Zijkant and Wetopia, Brussels, 2023.

Green Infrastructure Planning & Design Guide, Natural England, 2023.

Handbook for Gender-Inclusive Urban Planning and Design, World Bank, Washington DC, 2020.

HER City: A guide for cities to sustainable and inclusive urban planning and design together with girls, UN Habitat, Nairobi, 2021.

How to Design a Fair Shared City, WPS Prague, Prague, 2016.

Inclusion by Design - Equality, Diversity and the Built Environment, CABE, 2008.

Interventions to reduce violence against women and girls (VAWG) in public spaces, College of Policing, 2022.

Lighting the way for women and girls: a new narrative for lighting design in cities, Arup and Monash University, 2018.

Make Space for Us, Women in Sport and Yorkshire Sport, 2022.

Parks & Green Spaces Resources Hub, Green Flag Award.

Professional Practice: Universal Design: Parks and Plazas, American Society of Landscape Architects, Washington DC, 2022.

Public Sector Equality Duty: Q&A for Councils, Make Space for Girls, 2022.

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Safety in Public Space: Women, Girls and Gender Diverse People, Mayor of London, London 2022.

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Urban Girls Handbook, Global Utmaning, Stockholm, 2019.

What to Do About Women's Safety in Parks, Women's Design Service in partnership with Anne Thorne Architects, 2007.

Women Friendly Urban Planning: A Toolkit from Cities of the Global South, Cities Alliance, Brussels, 2022.

Women's Safety Audits: What works and Where? UN Habitat, Nairobi, 2008.

Research

Listed below are some of the papers we have found most useful in producing the guidance. Research into safety has particularly focused on three areas: vegetation, the presence of other park users and the effects of crime prevention strategies. In almost all these cases, the results support existing guidance and good practice. Some specific insights have been included in the guidance. For example work in America has shown that the inclusion of a circular walking and running path attracts women users to a park, and that they are more active when in the park.

One of the issues we did encounter is that a considerable proportion of the work done to date does not provide sex-disaggregated data. This is important as, where captured, it shows that the experiences of men and women are markedly different. As a result we have predominantly referred to research that

either concentrated on women and girls or provided sex-disaggregated data. Finally, the research available is international in scope and much of it considers parts of the world where parks, the social position of women and the climate are very different to the UK. We have again concentrated on research where there is a clear practical application of the findings to the situation in the UK.

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A note about terminology.

In this document we have followed government guidance on how to refer to ethnicity and sexual orientation. However, these terms are not perfect and may not fully encompass how all park users see themselves or wish to be represented.

Throughout the document we also refer to women and girls, in part because sex is a protected characteristic under the Equality Act and Public Sector Equality Duty. However, we recognise that other marginalised genders are affected by these issues and believe that this guidance will result in them feeling safer in parks.

Furthermore, it is a recognised principle of inclusive design that changes almost always end up benefitting a wider group than simply the one they were aimed at. So creating parks which are safer for women and girls will almost certainly also provide spaces which work better for other groups who are disadvantaged by age, disability, sexual orientation, ethnicity or religion.