



Where Are The Teenage Girls?

**A guide to creating
parks that work for
teenage girls**

**Practical advice and real examples
for anyone shaping public space**

Overview

Parks play an important role in everyday life for people of all ages. A wide body of research shows that access to good quality green space supports physical health, mental wellbeing, social connection and a sense of belonging. For teenagers in particular, parks can act as an important 'third place' beyond home and school. They offer somewhere to gather with friends, to move, to rest, to talk, to be seen and to feel part of a wider community without the pressure of spending money. When parks feel welcoming, they provide freedom, independence and opportunities for informal social life that are vital during adolescence.

However, while parks are public spaces open to everyone, they are not experienced equally. As girls move into their teenage years, their use of parks declines compared to boys. This is not because they lose interest in being outdoors as research and lived experience consistently show that teenage girls do want to spend time in parks. The issue is that many do not experience parks as spaces designed with them in mind.

Park layouts, sightlines and levels of natural surveillance affect how safe and comfortable spaces feel. The types of facilities and equipment provided send strong signals about who a space is for. Just as importantly, social dynamics and unspoken norms shape who feels able to be present, to stay and to belong. Together, these factors can make parks feel unwelcoming, or even exclusionary, for teenage girls. This guide is about helping to address that imbalance.

Focusing on teenage girls is not about creating parks, or spaces in parks, only for them. It is about recognising that their experiences reveal where public space is falling short. Teenage girls' needs, experiences and voices are rarely centred in decisions about parks and public space. When parks work better for teenage girls, they tend to work better for many others too - especially those who value social, flexible and welcoming spaces.



About this guide

This is a practical guide to creating parks that are more welcoming and inclusive for teenage girls. It's for anyone involved in the planning, design, management or funding of parks and public space, including local authorities, landscape architects, urban designers, developers, park managers, councillors and community organisations.

Creating more inclusive parks requires a cross-department approach. Responsibility often sits across areas such as parks and green space, planning, transport and active travel, public health, community development and housing. Collaboration across these areas is essential to create spaces that feel safe, welcoming and relevant to teenage girls.

The term 'parks' is used broadly. It can include small play areas, pocket parks, recreation grounds, neighbourhood parks and larger open green spaces. While these places vary in size and setting, many of the factors shaping teenage girls' experiences are consistent across them.

You do not need specialist knowledge of gender or youth engagement to use this guide. Some may already recognise that teenage girls are underrepresented in their parks, whereas others may be unsure whether this is an issue locally. This guide supports different starting points- whether you are reviewing an existing space, planning improvements or designing something new.

Rather than offering a single model or checklist, this guide encourages reflection, listening and practical adaptation. It is designed to help shift perspective, question assumptions and embed inclusive thinking into everyday decision making.

What this guide covers

This guide brings together evidence, lived experience and practical learning to help you:

Understand the issue

An overview of why girls' park use often declines during teenage years, and how design, management and social norms influence who feels welcome.

Apply inclusive thinking in practice

Practical principles that can be embedded in park planning, design, programming, maintenance and investment decisions, at different scales and budgets.

Learn from real examples

Case studies and projects that demonstrate what can happen when teenage girls are meaningfully involved in shaping public space.

A note on inclusion

This guide focuses on teenage girls while recognising that gender is not binary. Women, girls and gender-diverse people often experience similar barriers in public space, particularly in relation to safety, visibility and belonging. Trans and gender non-conforming people frequently experience heightened exclusion in public environments.

Gender also intersects with race, disability, class, sexuality and age. Experiences of public space are shaped by these overlapping identities. Inclusive planning should therefore be grounded in partnership, ongoing dialogue and a willingness to learn from lived experience.

Objectives of this guide

This guide aims to:

- Build understanding of the barriers teenage girls face when using parks, including physical design, management, safety, social norms and power dynamics.
- Centre girls' voices and lived experience throughout the planning, design, delivery and management of parks and public spaces, rather than treating engagement as a one-off exercise.
- Provide practical ideas to help assess existing parks, identify gaps, and design, implement and evaluate changes that support more inclusive use.
- Support collaboration between decision-makers, practitioners, community organisations and teenage girls, recognising that lasting change requires shared ownership and cross-sector working.
- Share learning from practice, including case studies, examples and approaches that show what has worked, what has been learned and how ideas can be adapted in different contexts.

The guide will later be accompanied by a toolkit of resources that can support creating parks that also work for teenage girls.



A pragmatic starting point

Teenage girls' use of parks is known to decline nationally as they enter their early teens. However, this guide does not assume that every place starts from the same position. Your starting point might be evidence you already have, a concern raised by young people, a funding opportunity, or simply a sense that something is not quite working.

In some contexts, the first step may be to understand whether this issue exists locally at all. In others, it may be appropriate to proceed on the assumption that teenage girls are underrepresented and focus immediately on defining a vision for change. Both approaches are valid. What matters is being explicit about where you are starting from and why.

Some organisations will begin with research and awareness building, using evidence to make the case internally or with partners. Others may already have a budget or mandate to deliver change and need practical guidance on how to proceed. This guide is designed to support all of these entry points.

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01

Why focus on teenage girls and parks?

Across the UK, teenage girls use parks less than boys. As girls move into adolescence, many gradually stop spending time in parks, even when those spaces are close to home and freely accessible. This pattern appears consistently in national research, local observation and community engagement.

This decline is not about a lack of interest in being outdoors. The issue is that many parks are not designed or managed in ways that support how teenage girls want or need to use them. Many girls do not see parks as spaces for them.

A public health dimension

National data shows that teenage girls are less likely than boys to meet recommended daily physical activity guidelines. Activity levels drop sharply for girls during adolescence (Sport England's 'Active Lives' surveys), and only around one in five girls aged 13 to 15 meet recommended daily activity levels (NHS Digital data). At the same time, teenage girls are more than twice as likely as boys to experience probable mental health disorders such as anxiety and depression (NHS Digital data).

Access to green space supports both physical and mental health. If parks do not feel welcoming or usable, teenage girls lose access to one of the few free resources that could support their wellbeing. This is not only a recreation issue, it is a public health issue.

Unequal patterns of provision and use

Research by Make Space for Girls in the 'Parkwatch' report (2023) highlighted that teenage facilities in parks often consist of Multi Use Games Areas (MUGAs), skateparks and bike tracks. Observational data showed that 92% of users of fenced pitches were boys and young men, and 84% of skatepark users were male. In summary, around 90% of users of the spaces seen as 'teenage facilities' in parks were male.

Research by the University of Leeds (2022) found that multi-use games areas and similar sports facilities are overwhelmingly used by boys, with between 80-90% of users being male. The study highlighted that teenage girls are significantly less likely to use these spaces, particularly when they are already occupied. Fenced and competitive environments were seen as unwelcoming, with many girls reporting discomfort in highly visible, central areas dominated by loud, group-based activity.

Overall, the research reinforces the idea that the design and social dynamics of these spaces can unintentionally exclude teenage girls, limiting their participation in public park environments.

Facilities themselves are not inherently gendered but patterns of use are. Social dominance, fencing, layout, visibility and competitive formats influence who feels comfortable using a space.

This is not an argument against sports provision, it is a recognition that when teenage provision is primarily competitive and centrally positioned it may unintentionally exclude some groups. Barriers to use should be addressed and those who want to use these spaces supported to do so, but it should not be assumed that this provision meets the needs of the majority of teenagers.



Inclusive provision is often about asking what else is needed alongside existing facilities and how current spaces could be adapted to feel more welcoming.

While some councils collect observational data, there is no consistent national dataset measuring teenage park use by gender. Where detailed observation has taken place, significant imbalance is frequently revealed.



Safety and feeling welcome

Safety is not only about crime statistics. It includes lighting, sightlines, maintenance, visibility, access to toilets, who else is present and whether a space feels exposed or judged. Women in Sport & the Yorkshire Sport Foundations 'Make Space for Us' report (2022) found that 59% of girls felt unwelcome in parks because spaces were dominated by boys, and 68% felt there was nothing for them to do. In addition, 49% of girls aged 13 to 15 felt unsafe exercising in their local park, compared to 26% of boys.

Research carried out by the Safer Parks Consortium in West Yorkshire (2023) revealed a striking perception gap - 89% of park professionals believed parks were safe for women and girls, yet only 22% of teenage girls agreed.

Broader social research reinforces this. Plan UK's State of Girls' Rights report 2022 found that 93% of girls and young women do not feel completely safe in public spaces. These wider dynamics shape how parks are experienced.



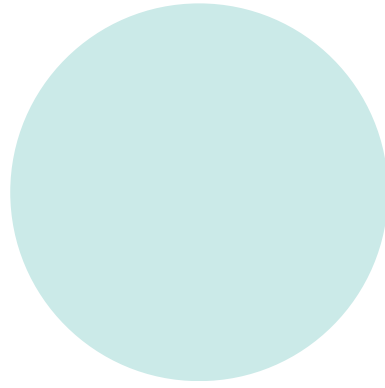
Sport is not the same as play

When councils invest in teenage provision it is most commonly sports and skills focused. Multi Use Games Areas (MUGAs), skateparks, basketball courts, bike pump tracks and pitches can work well for some young people. However they do not meet the needs of all teenagers, particularly those who want to be active without competition, performance or feeling watched.

Most park play equipment is designed for younger children. As children move into adolescence, opportunities for informal, unstructured play reduce sharply. Yet under Article 31 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, young people have the right to rest, leisure and play up to the age of 18.

Teenage play often involves gathering with friends, sitting, swinging, climbing, talking and testing independence. It is a time for exploring identity, taking small risks, solving problems and building confidence away from adults. It can be loud, social and highly visible. Without spaces designed with teenagers in mind, these behaviours are often misinterpreted as anti-social, rather than recognised as an essential part of healthy development

Parks are one of the few remaining free third spaces beyond home and school where teenagers can spend time independently. As more leisure activity shifts towards 'pay to play' models, access increasingly depends on income. If parks do not provide legitimate and welcoming spaces for teenagers to gather, move and spend time, inequalities deepen.



An equality consideration

Under the Public Sector Equality Duty in the Equality Act 2010, public bodies must consider how their decisions affect people with protected characteristics, including sex. If teenage girls are not using parks in equal numbers, this is not simply a matter of personal preference. It raises questions about indirect barriers and equality of opportunity.

Inequality can also be embedded in policy. Local plans and green space standards often prioritise pitch provision and formal sports infrastructure. Research consistently shows unequal patterns of pitch use by gender. If planning frameworks prioritise competitive sport without equal consideration of informal, social and flexible space, they may unintentionally reinforce disparities.

Addressing these imbalances is not about blame, it is about good practice. By actively considering who uses parks, who does not and why, councils and organisations can advance equality in a practical and measurable way.

Focusing on teenage girls is not about creating parks only for them. It is about recognising that their needs and experiences are often overlooked. Teenage girls offer a powerful lens through which to understand inclusion, belonging and fairness in public space. When parks work better for them, they tend to work better for many others too.

Deciding whether a project is needed

Before committing to a new project or intervention, it is important to understand whether there is an issue in your park or parks, and what form that issue takes.

Start with simple observation and reflection. Who is using the space? Who is not? Is there a visible gender imbalance in how teenagers use the park? Are certain areas dominated by one group? Are older girls present, or do they tend to pass through rather than stay?

If an imbalance is identified, the next step is to understand why. This should involve teenage girls and young people directly, including those who are not currently using the space. Reaching those who have stopped coming can be just as important as speaking to those who are already present.

Alongside engagement, it can be useful to review the park's layout, facilities and management. Consider visibility and sightlines, entrances and exits, seating, toilets, lighting, routes through the space and the type of equipment provided. Guidance such as 'Safer Parks: Improving Access for Women and Girls' offers a helpful framework for this kind of review.

If further work is needed, a simple scoping phase can clarify what form that work should take. A scoping plan does not need to be complex, but it should set out:

- What information is needed and whether new data or insight is required
- How girls and young people will be involved from the outset

- The scale of ambition, available budget and likely timescales
- Roles and responsibilities across organisations and teams

For some councils or developers, this thinking will sit at the start of a capital project. For others, evidence gathering may come first and help build the case for funding once the need is clearly defined. Projects do not need to begin with a fully formed solution. In many cases, data and engagement shape both the direction of the work and the level of investment required.

It is important not to import solutions from elsewhere without understanding local context. What works well in one park may not translate directly to another. Local patterns of use, social dynamics and geography all influence what is appropriate.

Change does not need to happen all at once. Small adjustments to seating, layout, programming or maintenance can begin to shift how a space feels. Engagement can be ongoing rather than one-off, with learning built in as changes are introduced.

Once changes are implemented, review their impact. Are more teenage girls using the space? Are they staying longer? Do they report feeling more comfortable? Treat this work as an evolving process rather than a single project with a fixed end point.

Working across departments

Projects that address teenage girls' experiences of parks often cut across multiple agendas including public realm, public health, youth services, community safety and equality. Involving relevant departments and partners from the start can help one project meet several objectives and avoid duplication of effort.

Establishing a small project working group early on can support this. One of the most important roles within this group is that of community engagement, particularly during scoping and visioning. Using expertise here helps ensure that engagement is meaningful rather than extractive, and that the project narrative is shaped with, not just about, the community.

Visioning and co design

Defining a shared vision and clear goals is a critical early step. This should be developed in collaboration with girls and young women themselves, using co design approaches that value lived experience alongside professional expertise.

Co design is not simply consultation. It uses creative and participatory methods to share knowledge and influence within the planning process. Girls and young women should not just be asked to react to finished proposals, but be involved in shaping ideas from the outset.

Taking time at this stage to align the project team, partners and the wider community helps to build trust, set realistic expectations and create a strong foundation for what follows. It can also reduce resistance later by ensuring that the purpose and direction of the project are clearly understood.

Being able to communicate clearly why teenage girls are a focus is essential. You need to tell the story, share the data and views of local girls and be clear that this work is not about creating separate spaces, but about designing parks that work better for more people. Building community understanding early on increases the likelihood of long term support and success.



02

Foundations: understanding the context

Once you have decided to explore this issue further, the next step is to build a clearer understanding of how your park is currently experienced.

Before deciding what to change, it is important to understand how the park is used in practice, who uses it and who does not. Many decisions about parks are shaped by assumptions, anecdotal feedback or long standing patterns of provision. This section encourages a more deliberate and evidence informed starting point.

Understanding the context does not require large scale or expensive research. The aim is to establish a baseline that identifies barriers, challenges assumptions and guides proportionate action. In some cases, light touch evidence will be sufficient to move forward. In others, deeper insight may be needed before design or investment decisions are made.

Evidence & Data

Relevant information may include:

- Observational insight into how different areas of a park are used at different times of day, by whom and for what activities

- Perceptions of safety and comfort, which often differ from recorded incidents or crime data
- Local knowledge from youth workers, community organisations and those who regularly work with young people

Collecting or reviewing this information helps move the conversation from “we think this is a problem” to “this is how the park is experienced in practice”, creating a clearer basis for action.

What this might include in practice

Depending on your context, capacity and resources, this could involve:

- Simple age and gender counts of who is using the park at different times and on different days (existing park tools such as SOPARC could be used and/or adapted)
 - Short surveys, conversations or focus groups with teenage girls about how they use the park and how it feels
 - Perception mapping, where girls identify areas they feel comfortable, uncomfortable, safe or unsafe
 - Interviews or discussions with youth groups, schools, youth workers or local service providers who understand young people’s everyday experiences

This information does not need to be perfect or exhaustive. The goal is to gather sufficient insight to inform decisions, highlight gaps and ensure that teenage girls’ experiences are visible within the planning process.

03

Inclusive engagement: co-designing with teenage girls

Creating parks that work for teenage girls requires designing *with* them, not *for* them. Engagement is not an optional extra or a one-off consultation, but a core part of understanding how parks are experienced and how they could work better.

Teenage girls are experts in their own lives. Their everyday experiences of parks, including what feels welcoming, uncomfortable, boring or unsafe, often differ significantly from adult assumptions. Co-design recognises this expertise and seeks to share power in the planning and decision-making process. Inclusive engagement should be:

- Ongoing rather than one-off
- Proportionate to the scale of the project
- Accessible, creative and respectful of girls' time

Designed to reach girls who are less visible or less confident, not only those who are already engaged.

Not every project will use the same methods. The aim is to choose approaches that fit the context, resources and timescales, while ensuring that girls' voices genuinely influence outcomes.

Approaches to co-design and engagement

There are many ways to involve teenage girls meaningfully. The following approaches are commonly effective and can be used alone or in combination.

Youth advisory groups

Small groups of teenage girls can provide ongoing input throughout a project, from early scoping and visioning through to design decisions and evaluation. Advisory groups work best when they include girls of different ages, backgrounds and abilities, and when their role and influence are clearly explained from the outset. Continuity helps build trust and confidence over time.

Participatory workshops

Workshops can help girls share experiences, ideas and aspirations in ways that feel collaborative rather than formal. Activities might explore how parks are currently used, where girls feel comfortable or uncomfortable, and what would make a space more welcoming.

Creative and visual methods often work better than written consultation alone. Drawing, mapping, photography, zine making, storytelling or model building can make it easier for girls to express ideas and reflect on their experiences.

Online surveys and digital engagement

Online surveys can help reach a wider group of girls, including those who may not attend in-person sessions. Surveys can be distributed through councils, Friends of Parks groups, youth organisations, schools or local networks. They can provide useful quantitative insight alongside more in-depth engagement.

Digital engagement can also allow anonymous participation, which may encourage more honest responses, particularly around safety and confidence. While surveys should not replace co-design, they can help identify patterns, test ideas and strengthen the evidence base for change.

Pop-up and in-park engagement

Some girls are unlikely to attend workshops or meetings. Bringing engagement into parks and public spaces, at times when girls already use them, can help reach a wider range of voices. Informal conversations, interactive activities or temporary installations can make participation feel easier and more natural. Even simple sticker charts and visuals on equipment they'd like in their parks make for simple activities and a starting point for a discussion.

Young researchers & peer led enquiry

Training teenage girls as young researchers can deepen engagement and shift who holds knowledge. Girls can learn simple research methods such as mapping, observation and documenting how spaces are used. Rather than only responding to adult-led questions, they generate their own evidence about how parks function and how they feel in different areas. This positions girls as knowledge producers and ensures lived experience directly informs design decisions.

Working with schools and community partners

Partnering with schools, youth organisations and community groups can help reach girls who are less visible, including those who may face additional barriers to participation. Trusted intermediaries can support engagement that feels safe, inclusive and culturally appropriate.

A note on safeguarding, trust and expectations

Engagement with teenage girls should always be carried out with appropriate safeguarding, consent and support in place. It is also important to be honest about what influence girls' will have, what is within scope, and what may not be possible. Trust is built when participation leads to visible change, feedback, or clear explanations of decisions.



This guide outlines why co-design matters and highlights approaches that have been shown to work well in practice. Real examples of engagement can be found within the case studies, with additional examples referred to in the appendix.

Alongside this guide, a set of simple activity outlines, example templates, prompts and resources are being developed to support implementation. These materials are designed to be adaptable and can be tailored to suit your local context.

Inclusive engagement: co-designing with teenage girls

Case study: Rowntree Park

Location

Rowntree Park, York, North Yorkshire.

Project Focus

Increasing teenage girls' use of public park space and creating a welcoming park. Focus evolved and widened through engagement.

Approach

Ongoing engagement, co-creation, practical delivery and programming.

Background

The Make Space York project started in late 2021 in conjunction with the Friends of Rowntree Park. It was in response to local observations and national research showing that teenage girls use parks significantly less than boys.

Rowntree Park, a large park 15 minutes from the centre of York, provided an opportunity to explore how older girls experienced public space and whether changes could make it feel more welcoming.

Rather than starting with predetermined solutions, the project began by listening and evolved from there. Engagement has intentionally prioritised girls who were not already frequent park users, to understand barriers as well as preferences.

Engagement Approach

Engagement has been iterative and multi-layered, recognising that no single method reaches all girls. Since 2021, engagement has included:

- Online surveys with teenagers across the city
- Focus groups with teenage girls
- Workshops exploring park use, safety and belonging
- In-park drop-in sessions
- Informal conversations during events
- Co-design activities focused on layout and equipment choices
- Partnership work with schools and youth settings
- Photo and video projects to share views
- Zine and Manifesto making
- Art projects displayed in the park to share views and get more views.
- Exhibition and workshops to raise awareness.

Engagement has led to change with including a co designed area in the park with equipment girls asked for and helped fund raise for, plus a programme of events and activities again shaped by girls.



Case study: Central Park

Location:

Central Park, Chelmsford, Essex.

Project focus:

Co-designing park space with teenage girls and gender-diverse young people to improve inclusivity, safety and social use.

Approach:

Multi-session workshops, youth co-design with community partners, implementation of student-informed interventions.

Background

Chelmsford City Council, in partnership with Make Space for Girls and Social Place, undertook a programme of engagement in Central Park to explore how the space could be more welcoming to teenage girls, young women and gender-diverse young people.

This was part of a broader commitment to community safety and inclusive green space design, funded through the Essex Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner's safer streets initiative.

The project recognised that traditional park provisions, such as multi-use games areas, skate parks and tennis court, tend to be used disproportionately by boys and young men, leading many girls and gender-diverse young people to feel that public spaces were not "for them".



Engagement Approach

Engagement with young people was structured, sustained and centred on lived experience. Activities included:

- Partnership workshops: Over six sessions in spring 2024, a group of 12-14 young people aged 13-14 from The Boswells School explored how they experience Central Park and what changes would make it feel like "a place I would use".
- Spatial assessment: Participants worked together to develop criteria around safety, inclusivity and sociability and applied these to assess areas of the park.
- Co-design of ideas: Based on their assessments, the young people developed design concepts that focused on social interaction, colour, lighting and comfort rather than competitive sport.
- Presentation to decision makers: The students presented their ideas directly to Chelmsford City Council officers and councillors in the Council Chamber, reinforcing youth voice in planning decisions.

The engagement has led to some physical changes in the park.



Photographs Chelmsford City Council

Case study: Drummond Road Recreation Ground

Location:

Drummond Road Recreation Ground, Manningham, Bradford, West Yorkshire.

Project focus:

Co-design and co-production of a neighbourhood play space with local children and teenage girls, with a particular focus on South Asian and Muslim girls, to create a more inclusive, socially usable park environment.

Approach:

A place-based, community-led co-production model delivered through the JU:MP (Join Us: Move Play) programme.

This combined:

- whole-systems partnership working (public health, local authority, research, community organisations)
- culturally competent, trust-led engagement
- a shift from consultation to shared decision-making with teenage girls

Background

The JU:MP programme, led by Active Bradford and hosted by Born in Bradford, is a Sport England-funded initiative focused on increasing physical activity and reducing inequalities.

Research from Born in Bradford shows that teenage girls, particularly from South Asian backgrounds, are significantly less likely to be physically active or use parks. In some groups, participation levels are extremely low.

This reflects wider structural barriers, including:

- gendered use of public space
- cultural and social norms
- safety and visibility concerns
- lack of representation in design processes

JU:MP recognised that improving access is not just about providing facilities, but about creating spaces that are socially, culturally and physically welcoming, and shaped by those who are currently excluded.

Engagement Approach:

Engagement (2022-23) was embedded as part of a long-term, community-led process, with a focus on teenage girls from South Asian and ethnically diverse communities.

Key elements included:

- working through trusted settings such as schools, mosques, madrassahs and community organisations
- building relationships over time rather than one-off consultation
- using accessible, informal communication methods (including WhatsApp)
- creating culturally appropriate, safe spaces for girls to participate



Photograph Bradford Council Parks Team and JU:MP

Inclusive engagement: co-designing with teenage girls

Case study: Drummond Road Recreation Ground - continued

Engagement Approach continued:

Girls were not treated as consultees, but as co-designers and decision-makers.

They worked alongside engagement leads, researchers and designers to influence:

- layout and spatial design
- equipment and activity types
- safety, visibility and positioning
- social and gathering spaces
- overall look, feel and identity of the space

This resulted in a shift away from a traditional, sport-focused design towards a space that supports social use, flexibility and inclusivity.

Key Learning from Engagement:

- Inclusion requires intentional focus
- Spaces described as “for everyone” often exclude girls unless their needs are explicitly considered
- Co-production leads to better outcomes
- Involving girls in decision-making results in spaces that are more relevant, used and valued
- Cultural competency is essential
- Understanding cultural and social context shapes whether girls feel able to participate at all
- Trusted relationships are critical
- Working through community partners and building trust over time enables meaningful engagement
- Engagement is not a one-off activity
- Ongoing involvement builds confidence, ownership and long-term impact
- Systems working enables change
- Alignment between public health, local authority, research and community organisations strengthens delivery and influence



Photograph Bradford Council Parks Team and JU:MP

Outcomes and Impact:

- Increased use of the space by teenage girls, families and community groups
- Greater sense of ownership, confidence and belonging among participants
- Progression of some girls into wider community roles and opportunities
- Influence on local authority practice, design approaches and strategic thinking



Photograph Bradford Council Parks Team and JU:MP
With thanks to Sonia Fayyaz for sharing this case study.

Inclusive engagement: co-designing with teenage girls

Case study: Waterden Green

Location:

Waterden Green, Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park, Stratford, London.

Project focus:

Co-designing a public space for teenage girls and young people as part of wider park and neighbourhood development.

Approach:

Youth co-clienting with teenage girls and young women integrated into early project briefing, design and procurement stages.

Background

Despite Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park's extensive facilities and green space, the London Legacy Development Corporation (LLDC) recognised a gap in provision for teenagers, especially girls aged 12-18, who often feel public spaces are not welcoming or relevant to them. Working with partners including Elevate Youth Voice and Make Space for Girls, LLDC sought to prioritise young people's perspectives in shaping the park's next phase of development. This initiative aligns with LLDC's broader commitment to gender-inclusive public spaces under its Women and Girls Safety Charter.

Engagement Approach

The Waterden Green project used a co-clienting model where teenage girls and young women were invited to work alongside LLDC as full partners in developing the project's design brief.

Key elements of the engagement included:

- Forming a co-client team of young women from Elevate Youth Voice, representing diverse local voices and experiences
- Collaborative workshops and briefing sessions with LLDC officers and design advocates to define priorities
- Co-creation of design principles focusing on safety, inclusivity, adaptability and comfort
- Participation in design team procurement, ensuring the selected architects and consultants aligned with the values and needs identified by young people
- Broader engagement with girls aged 12–16 through workshops with local schools and community groups to expand the evidence base and refine ideas

This approach positioned young people as active shapers of the project's direction and criteria. Designs are being developed into detailed plans with a multidisciplinary team.



04

Design principles for more inclusive parks

The principles below are drawn from engagement with teenage girls across projects in the UK and internationally, alongside wider research and practitioner learning. They reflect recurring themes and shared priorities rather than a fixed checklist or universal solution. Teenage girls are not a single group, and there is no one size fits all approach to park design. Local context, culture, climate and community all matter. These principles are best used as prompts to inform local conversations and co-creation with girls, rather than as off-the-shelf design answers.

a. Safety and comfort

Across many engagement activities, feelings of safety and comfort consistently shape whether girls choose to spend time in parks.

This often includes:

- Good quality lighting that feels warm and ambient. Poor or overly harsh lighting can make spaces feel more exposed rather than safer.
- Clear sightlines that reduce hidden or secluded corners.
- Paths that are clear, easy to navigate and feel welcoming at different times of day, including evenings.

Perceived safety is as influential as recorded safety. Design decisions that communicate care, visibility and welcome can significantly influence how a space is experienced.

b. A range of activity options

Teenage girls consistently express a desire for choice and flexibility rather than single-purpose spaces. While some enjoy competitive sport, many want spaces that support social connection, creativity, rest and informal movement in parks.

Commonly requested elements include flexible, non-competitive spaces for hanging out and spending time with friends. This may include seating areas, swings and equipment that allows informal activity such as climbing structures, bars to hang from or platforms to sit on and climb.

Also the following get mentioned in some engagement: shelters and also natural features (planting and materials for equipment). Providing a spectrum of options allows girls to move between different moods, energy levels and social situations during a single visit.

More detail on what girls want is in a later section of this guide.

c. Facilities and infrastructure

Practical infrastructure strongly influences whether girls feel able to stay in a space for any length of time. Engagement repeatedly highlights the importance of:

- Toilets and changing facilities that feel safe, clean and thoughtfully designed.
- Access to power, such as charging points, recognising that phones support safety, navigation and social connection.
- Comfortable seating and shade that accommodates different bodies, preferences and weather conditions.

These features signal that girls are expected users of the space, not an afterthought.

d. Wayfinding and information

Clear, welcoming information helps parks feel more accessible and easier to navigate, particularly for girls who may already feel uncertain about using public space.

Helpful approaches include:

- Signage that is accessible, inclusive and youth-friendly in tone and design.
- Maps that clearly show different zones, routes and facilities within the park.

Good wayfinding supports confidence, exploration and longer stays.



e. Maintenance and upkeep

Maintenance consistently emerges as a critical factor in how safe and welcoming parks feel. Well cared for spaces are more likely to be perceived as safe and valued.

This includes:

- Regular maintenance of vegetation to avoid overgrown or hidden areas.
- Clear and accessible pathways.
- Clean and usable toilets.
- Visible systems for reporting issues and confidence that concerns will be addressed.

Ongoing care is not separate from design. It is a core part of how inclusion is experienced day to day.

f. Positioning and spatial relationships

The positioning of seating and equipment can significantly affect how comfortable a space feels.

Benches placed directly on busy paths can leave girls feeling exposed, while seating set too far away may feel isolated. Equipment that is slightly set back can create a sense of having their own space, while still allowing visibility of others for reassurance.

Girls' often describe wanting to feel connected but not watched. Layouts that balance visibility with autonomy help achieve this. Spreading features across a park, rather than clustering them tightly together, can reduce dominance by a single group and create space for a wider range of users.

Small adjustments in positioning can make a significant difference to how welcoming a park feels.



Case Study Safer Parks- Improving Access for Women and Girls (2023)

The Safer Parks guidance developed by The Safer Parks Consortium is to support local authorities, designers and park managers to better understand the barriers women and girls face in parks and embed gender informed thinking into planning, design and management decisions.

Core Themes

The guidance emphasises that improving access is not simply about lighting or CCTV. It highlights a wider set of design and management principles, including:

- Visibility and sightlines - avoiding hidden corners, improving natural surveillance and ensuring routes feel open and connected
- Layout and connectivity - designing clear, intuitive paths and avoiding isolated dead ends
- Maintenance and care - recognising that well maintained spaces increase confidence and sense of safety
- Facilities and amenities - including toilets, seating and gathering spaces that support longer stays
- Activation and programming - encouraging positive use through events, activities and visible presence
- Inclusive consultation - engaging directly with women and girls to understand lived experience

The guidance reinforces that how a park feels matters as much as what it contains.

The Safer Parks Consortium is a partnership led by researchers from the University of Leeds-Dr. Anna Barker and Professor George Holmes- aimed at improving safety for women and girls in urban green spaces. Collaborating with organisations like Keep Britain Tidy, Make Space for Girls, and West Yorkshire Police, they provide evidence-based guidance to urban planners and local authorities.

Designing more inclusive parks

What teenagers say they want?

There is a growing body of evidence about the types of provision that would encourage teenagers to use parks more. Importantly, research that includes both girls and boys challenges the common assumption that sports based facilities are the primary or preferred form of teenage provision.

In research by Women in Sport for the Yorkshire Sport Foundation (2022) involving nearly 400 young people aged 13 to 15: 72% of girls said that “swings for people my age” would make them more active in the park. This finding is repeated consistently in engagement with teenage girls, young women and gender diverse young people.

The same dataset also challenges common assumptions about boys. A minority of boys said that a Multi Use Games Area or skatepark would make them more active. For boys, MUGAs and “swings for people my age” scored equally at 39%.

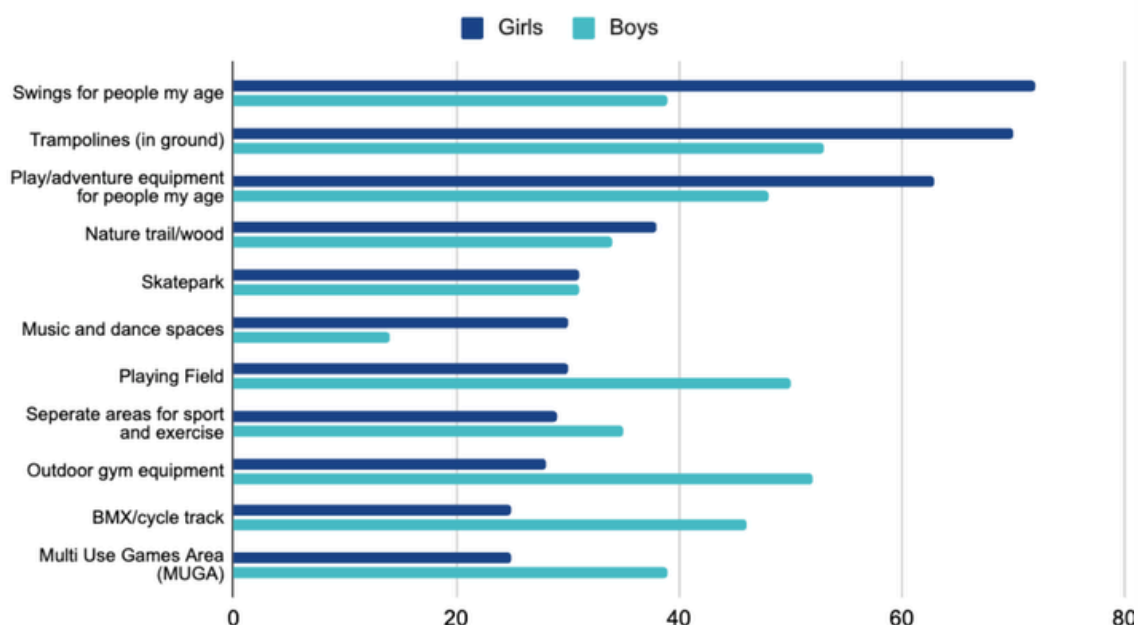
This suggests that assumptions about teenage provision may be overly narrow. While sports related facilities are valued by some young people, they do not represent the majority preference.

In this particular study, teenage girls identified the following as attractive forms of provision:

- Sociable seating and shelters
- Things to climb on
- Things to swing from
- Reading nooks or book exchanges
- Small stages or raised platforms

These preferences point towards social, flexible and playful infrastructure. They also demonstrate that more varied provision benefits a wider range of teenagers, not only girls.

Make Space for Us (2022) - What do girls want?



Designing more inclusive parks

What do teenage girls want?

Across engagement sessions in the UK clear patterns are emerging about what teenage girls value with regard to equipment and features in park spaces. They are design responses to how girls describe wanting to use space.

Social Seating -spaces to gather

Teenage girls repeatedly prioritise places to sit together, arranged to support conversation and connection. Varied seating options matter, as does placement, for example not directly on paths and not hidden away. Social seating supports belonging and signals that staying is welcome.

Communal swings and hammocks

Basket swings, multi-user swings and hammocks allow girls to sit together rather than take turns, move while talking and use equipment without competition. These features are active without being performance-based and support shared use.

Non-competitive climbing and height

Girls often ask for climbing, but in flexible and informal ways. Freestyle stacks, logs and parkour-style elements allow creative movement without rules or pressure. The chance to sit up high is particularly valued, offering perspective and a sense of comfort.

Balance and Movement -moving while chatting

Low bars, balance beams and stepping elements allow movement alongside conversation. The focus is playful and social rather than structured sport. These features support physical confidence without creating territorial spaces.

Natural materials and soft landscape

Natural elements such as logs, wildflowers and timber structures create warmth and comfort. Girls often describe wanting spaces that feel calmer and less dominated by hard surfaces. Soft landscaping can define areas without creating isolation.

Colour and creativity

However in some contrast to the point above, in some areas girls ask for colour in park spaces, including art work. Some suggest the need for contrasting spaces in larger parks depending on your mood.

Zoning - distinct yet connected spaces

Zoning means arranging a park to support different types of activity without conflict. Thoughtful placement reduces competition with dominant uses while maintaining visibility. Well-designed zoning increases comfort, choice and confidence to enter a space.

Recognising diversity and context

Teenage girls are not a homogenous group, and their priorities vary depending on what is already available locally and what they feel is missing. In some areas girls have asked for stages or platformed seating for performance and visibility, while in others this has not been a priority. The same goes for the use of colour through materials and art for spaces.

Alongside equipment, wider design elements are consistently highlighted, including good lighting, clear sight lines, parks that feel active but not overwhelming, and spaces that are well maintained. Context matters, and engagement should respond to local needs rather than assume a single solution.

Case study: Brickfields Park

Location

Brickfields Park, Bath, Somerset.

Project led by

Your Park Bristol & Bath in partnership with Bath & North East Somerset Council, working with local schools and guide groups. The initial engagement was facilitated by Make Space for Girls.

Funding

£75,000 through Community Infrastructure Levy and local contributions

Opened

March 2025

The project

Through the Your Park Bristol & Bath programme, partners worked with local schools, including Hayesfield Girls' School and the Mixed Sixth Form, as well as local Guide groups to create a space that felt welcoming and usable for older girls.



Photographs: Your Park Bristol & Bath

The improvements include

- A five-way swing designed for shared use
- Accessible entrance gateways
- Tree trunk social seating and climbing areas
- A bespoke figure-of-eight bench encouraging face-to-face interaction
- Somersault bars
- Reduced hedgerow heights to improve sightlines and safety

The scheme combines movement, social seating and improved visibility. It supports both activity and gathering, while also addressing how the space feels through improved access and sightlines.



Case study: Rowntree Park

Location

Rowntree Park, York, North Yorkshire.

Project led by

Make Space York and the Friends of Rowntree Park.

Funding

Patchwork grant funding including local ward funding, The Sweaty Betty Foundation and the Whitwam Family Charitable Foundation (£15,000 initial phase). Second phase funding secured from Tesco Community Grants, Asda Community Grants, TRU Community Fund and The Movement, Activity and Sports Fund - David Skaith, Mayor of York and North Yorkshire and York and North Yorkshire Combined Authority (£24,000 - second phase). Total- £39,000 in grants.

Opened

May 2024, with further equipment added in June 2026.

The project

Ongoing engagement with teenage girls has taken place since 2021. The park has playgrounds for smaller children, a skate park and basketball court. Many girls stated they didn't use these spaces or feel welcome therefore the new space was designed to support gathering, low-pressure activity and shared use rather than competitive sport.



The improvements include

The first phase of improvements (2024):

- A shared basket swing
- Lounging and climbing log stack
- Picnic table and log stump seating arranged for social interaction
- A wildflower patch to soften and define the space

The second phase (2026):

- Freestyle climbing stacks
- Bars for hanging and movement
- Hammocks designed for relaxation and shared use
- Collective art work

Signage explains why the space was created and highlights the involvement of teenage girls in shaping it. The area remains open to all, but visitors are invited to be considerate of its purpose and to help ensure it remains welcoming for those it was designed to include.



Photographs by Bec Hudson Smith for Make Space York

Case study: Central Park

Location

Central Park, Chelmsford, Essex.

Project led by

Chelmsford City Council in partnership with local schools with Make Space for Girls and Social Place.

Funding

Supported through the Essex Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner Safer Streets funding. Detailed budget figures for the design and delivery are not publicly available.

Opened

'Our Place' social area opened May 2025.

The project

Aimed to explore how Central Park could better meet the needs of teenage girls and gender-diverse young people. Through a structured programme of workshops with students from The Boswells School, young people assessed the park, identified barriers to use and developed ideas for change.

The improvements include

The resulting intervention, known as Our Place, includes:

- A dedicated social seating area designed for gathering
- Seating arranged to support face-to-face interaction
- Planting to create comfort and soft enclosure
- Improved lighting to enhance safety and visibility
- A location near active routes and the café to ensure natural surveillance

The design prioritises connection to surrounding activity while still providing a distinct and recognisable place for teenagers to spend time.



Photographs supplied by Chelmsford City Council



Case study: Frederick Adventure Playground

Location

Frederick's Playground and surrounding park space, London Borough of Southwark.

Project led by

Root and Erect Landscape Architects in partnership with Southwark Council.

Funding

Detailed budget figures for the design and delivery of Frederick's Park are not publicly available.

Completed

2024

The project

Frederick's park space was redesigned to create a more inclusive environment that better supports a range of ages and activities. Root and Erect worked with the local authority to rethink how the space functioned, focusing on layout as much as equipment.

Rather than concentrating activity in a single dominant zone, the redesign introduced a more layered and varied arrangement of spaces, helping different groups use the park simultaneously without conflict. The architects were aware from research that zoning works well for teenage girls amongst others, as it allows multiple groups to occupy areas simultaneously whilst providing multiple routes in, out and around the play space.

Design

The scheme illustrates zoning in practice through:

- Clear but permeable spatial divisions
- Varied seating and gathering areas positioned alongside, but not within, active zones
- Natural play and landscape features integrated into circulation routes
- Planting used to define areas without creating hidden or unsafe corners
- Activity spaces that are visible and connected rather than isolated

Different types of use are supported within the same park footprint.

Zoning in this project means arranging the park so that:

- Dominant activities do not overwhelm smaller groups
- Social and informal spaces are protected from competitive zones
- Movement through the park feels intuitive and safe
- Users can choose the level of activity they want to engage in

For teenage girls, zoning can reduce territorial pressure and increase confidence to enter and remain in a space. It creates options without isolation.



Photographs: Rachel Ferriman - Root and Erect



05

Programming and activation

Physical design and improved equipment are important, but they are not always enough on their own. Where older girls have already reduced their use of parks, upgrading facilities may not immediately bring them back. Confidence and belonging take time to build.

Thoughtful programming can help reintroduce girls to spaces and support independent use. A park with a visible and varied programme of activity often feels more welcoming and safer. The presence of events, facilitators and a mix of users signals that the space is valued and actively used.

General community programming may not address the specific barriers teenage girls face. Activities designed with older girls in mind can make a significant difference, particularly in the early stages of change.

Examples include:

- Youth-led events such as music, art or performance
- Outdoor workshops including sport, creative arts or nature-based activities
- Photography, creative writing or film sessions
- Seasonal festivals or themed events

In some places, councils may have teams responsible for community events or youth engagement who can support this work. Where this capacity does not exist, partnerships can be equally effective. Friends of Parks groups, youth organisations, community groups, sports clubs and local creatives may be well placed to deliver or co-deliver activities.

Pilot projects can often be supported through small grants or community funding. Short-term or seasonal activity can test approaches, build confidence and generate evidence before longer-term commitments are made.

Targeted programming helps girls build confidence using equipment, explore different areas of the park and develop a sense of ownership. It can also help prevent the gradual drop-off in park use during early adolescence. When girls see activities designed with them in mind, and experience the park as somewhere they are expected and welcomed, they are more likely to continue using it as they grow older.

Over time, programming should support informal use rather than replace it. The aim is not constant activity, but to create conditions where girls feel confident coming on their own terms.

Programming and design work best together. Design creates opportunity. Activation builds familiarity and belonging. The case study that follows demonstrate how programming can act as a catalyst for longer-term change.



Programming and activation

Case study: Make Space York

Location

Rowntree Park, York, with expansion to other York parks.

Project led by

Make Space York in partnership with Friends of Rowntree Park and local facilitators.

Launched

Festival of Free events - June 2023

Funding

Initially volunteer-led with minimal costs covered by Friends of Rowntree Park. Now supported through grants and sponsorship.

The project

Engagement in Rowntree Park consistently showed that teenage girls wanted more events and activities aimed specifically at them. While physical design changes were important, girls also wanted visible reasons to come into the park and feel that it was a space for them.

In response, a pilot programme of free events was launched in June 2023. Initially spread across a month, the programme had no dedicated funding beyond basic printing costs. All facilitators volunteered their time and skills. The aim was simple: create opportunities for girls to try new things, meet people and feel empowered in public space.

Since 2023, the Festival of free events has run annually over two weekends each June. Each year around 300 girls from across the city participate. The initiative went on to win the first Green Flag Award for 'Best Initiative to Increase Park Use by Women and Girls' in 2023.



Programming

A wide range of activities in parks, such as:

- Sports and exercise sessions
- Arts and crafts
- Performing arts
- Photography and film
- Music and writing
- Nature-based sessions
- Social awareness and discussion spaces

The term “festival” is used loosely. The aim is to remain community-focused, with a mix of scheduled activities, drop-in stalls and informal hang-out spaces rather than a large-scale commercial event. Feedback highlights increased confidence, resilience and belonging.



Case study: Make Space York continued

Ongoing Engagement: Events and activities throughout the year

While the Make Space Festival plays an important role in raising awareness and bringing people together, the Make Space York project is rooted in ongoing, year-round engagement with teenage girls.

This work combines creative workshops, nature-based activities and campaigning to:

- build relationships and trust
- reach a wider range of girls
- gather lived experience and insight
- create visible outputs that influence change

Rather than one-off consultation, this approach creates a continuous conversation, where girls can share their experiences in ways that feel natural, social and creative.

For all these activities to run, funding has to be found and that search continues each year.

Wild Ones : Nature hang out for teenage girls

In 2022, Wild Ones - a nature group for older girls started in Rowntree Park. This is an evening group that meets once a week in the woodland area, a nature youth group for girls aged 10-16. Places are grant funded to reduce barriers to participation.

The group meet for a block of sessions, giving them the opportunity to get to know one another and direct the programme of activities based on their interests. Run by Forest School practitioners, sessions include a range of nature crafts, campfire cooking, foraging, wood work skills and lots of hanging in hammocks! The focus is on creating a connection with nature, the park and each other and know they belong.



Creative engagement in practice

In 2025 a public exhibition was held in York city centre on the need to create welcoming parks for teenage girls. Highlighting issues, the project in York and examples of good practice from elsewhere.

Some other examples of workshops running through the year included:

Seen and Heard: Photography and voice

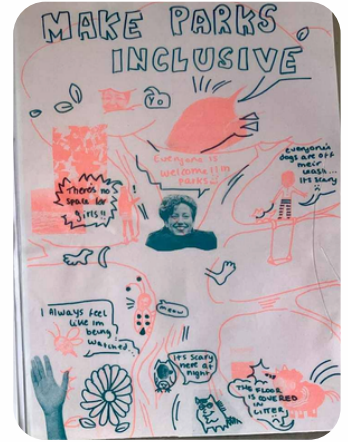
A photography workshop with a local photographer combined creative practice with discussion. This led to:

- Pairing portraits with girls' own words about their experiences. This created a powerful platform for girls to express themselves directly, in their own voices.
- Images celebrating teenage girls at play to highlight the idea that girls do want to be in parks having fun.



Programming and activation

Case study: Make Space York

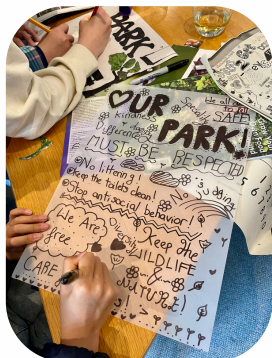


Chains: A collective artwork

The piece explored two ideas:

- chains as a symbol of being held back or excluded from public space
- paper chains as something joyful and celebratory

By linking self portraits together, participants both raised awareness of barriers girls face with regard to parks and celebrated collective voice and visibility that comes from joining together.



Nature-Based Workshops

Seasonal, nature-based activities also play an important role in engagement.

For example, winter wreath-making workshops using foraged materials from the park provide:

- a relaxed, social environment
- opportunities to build connection with nature
- space for informal conversation

These sessions often attract girls who may not engage with more formal consultation approaches.

Throughout 2026, a continued programme of creative workshops is taking place across multiple parks in York.

These focus on themes of:

- safety
- identity
- belonging
- confidence in public space

Activities will include:

- collaborative mural creation
- creative workshops and drop-in sessions
- ongoing opportunities for girls to share their experiences

By working across different locations, the project is building a broader picture of how parks are experienced across the city, helping to inform future design, investment and policy.

Zines and Print

A zine and risograph printing workshop invited girls to explore themes of safety, identity and belonging. These were turned into printed materials and displayed within the exhibition, offering another creative and accessible way to share insight.

06

Assessment & evaluation tools

Creating more welcoming parks for teenage girls is rarely a single-step process. Changes are often introduced gradually, and each stage offers an opportunity to learn. Evaluation does not need to be complex. The aim is to understand whether changes are making a difference and to use that learning to shape what happens next. Establishing a simple baseline before changes are made and reviewing progress afterwards, helps track impact and strengthen the case for continued investment. The following are just some examples of assessment and evaluation ideas.

a. Park safety

A structured checklist can help assess whether a park feels safe, comfortable and well cared for.

This might include reviewing:

- Lighting quality
- Sightlines and visibility
- Entrances and routes
- Seating quantity and condition
- Toilets and general cleanliness

Using the same checklist before and after changes makes improvements clearer and supports consistent decision making. This is best done with a group of teenage girls/young women.

b. Perception surveys

Perception matters. A park can be technically safe but still feel uncomfortable to use.

Short surveys, repeated over time, can track changes in:

- Feelings of safety and comfort
- Frequency of park use
- Length of time spent in the park
- Where girls choose to spend time within the park
- What helps or prevents them from returning

Surveys can be delivered online or through schools, youth organisations, community networks or in-park engagement.

c. Usage monitoring

Simple monitoring can help you understand whether patterns of use are shifting.

This might include:

- Counts of park users at different times and on different days
- Observations of who uses which areas, and how
- Seasonal comparisons to avoid drawing conclusions from one-off weather or event effects
- Notes on whether girls are passing through, staying, or gathering in groups

Light-touch observation is often enough. The goal is to spot trends, not to capture everything.

d. Youth feedback loops

Ongoing feedback channels help ensure changes continue to reflect girls' real experiences.

This might include:

- Follow-up sessions with advisory groups
- Regular check-ins with schools or youth partners
- Anonymous feedback options via QR codes or online forms
- Periodic “walk and talk” site visits with girls to review how spaces are working

Maintaining feedback loops signals that girls' input is valued beyond a single consultation, and helps identify issues early so they can be addressed.



Using evaluation to guide next steps

Treat evaluation as part of an ongoing cycle:

Baseline → Make a change → Review impact → Adjust → Plan the next stage

Small changes can produce valuable learning. Tracking what happens after each intervention helps avoid assumptions, ensures resources are used well and strengthens the long-term impact of the work.



07

Policy and Planning Integration

Creating parks that work for teenage girls requires more than good design intentions. It depends on gender and youth considerations being embedded within the policies, plans and everyday decisions that shape public space over time.

This means moving beyond one off consultation and ensuring inclusion is reflected consistently across planning, budgeting, procurement and community engagement. In many councils, responsibility for parks, planning, public realm, public health and youth services sits across different departments. If these teams do not already work closely together, cross departmental coordination may be needed to develop coherent strategies for active recreation and inclusive public space. Without this, well intentioned improvements can remain isolated rather than systemic.

a. Park master plans

Master plans should explicitly recognise teenage girls and young women as a key user group, rather than grouping them within broad categories such as “youth” or “families”.

This can include:

- Using evidence from local engagement to inform zoning, movement routes, lighting strategies and activity provision
- Recognising that activity includes socialising, informal gathering and teenage play, not just sport and skills based activities.
- Treating meeting and hanging out as legitimate park functions

- Building flexibility into plans so parks can evolve as needs and patterns of use change

Embedding these considerations at master plan stage avoids retrofitting inclusion later.

b. Planning policy and new development

Inclusive provision should be considered not only in existing parks but also in new developments.

Community Infrastructure Levy and Section 106 agreements are key mechanisms through which infrastructure for new housing and regeneration is funded. While Community Infrastructure Levy supports wider infrastructure needs, Section 106 agreements address the direct impacts of a development and often include contributions for sport, leisure and recreation.

If these mechanisms prioritise traditional pitch provision or standardised teenage facilities without considering patterns of gendered use, they may reinforce inequalities. Planning policies, green space standards and supplementary guidance should therefore recognise the need for inclusive informal space, social space and non competitive activity alongside formal sport.

Embedding expectations for inclusive teenage provision at policy level avoids retrofitting inclusion later.

c. Budgeting and maintenance

Inclusion must also be reflected in how resources are allocated.

This includes:

- Funding not only capital build but long term maintenance, lighting upkeep, cleaning and repair
- Budgeting for engagement and co creation as core project costs rather than optional extras
- Resourcing small scale improvements identified through engagement, such as seating, improved sightlines or planting
- Planning for ongoing monitoring rather than assuming decisions are final at handover

Funding should be approached holistically. Contributions may come not only from parks budgets but also from public health, community safety, youth services, regeneration or climate programmes. Aligning objectives across departments can unlock shared investment.

Partnerships with community organisations may also unlock additional grant funding for capital improvements or programming.

d. Design briefs and procurement

Inclusion should be clearly articulated within design briefs and tender documents.

Procurement processes can:

- Require consultants to demonstrate experience of youth engagement
- Value qualitative insight and lived experience alongside technical expertise
- Assess how inclusion has influenced spatial layout and overall design, not only equipment choice

Making these expectations explicit shifts inclusion from aspiration to requirement.

Community engagement policy

Teenage girls are often underrepresented in formal consultation processes. Engagement policies should recognise them as a distinct group whose participation may require tailored approaches.

Effective practice includes:

- Supporting creative, informal and peer led engagement methods
- Avoiding reliance solely on public meetings or written consultations
- Building long term relationships with schools, youth organisations and community groups
- Providing clear feedback to participants about how their input influenced decisions

Sustained engagement builds trust and improves future participation.

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- Providing clear feedback to participants about how their input influenced decisions

Sustained engagement builds trust and improves future participation.

f. Partnership, activation and shared delivery

Park budgets are frequently under pressure, yet community organisations often hold strong local relationships and specialist expertise. Policy frameworks should support partnership working that adds value while maintaining clear responsibility for safety, accessibility and long term stewardship.

This can include:

- Working with community groups and charities to support engagement with teenage girls
- Collaborating with sports clubs, creative groups and wellbeing providers to deliver inclusive programming
- Supporting joint funding approaches where community organisations can access grants beyond local authority budgets

Partnership working is most effective when it is embedded early in planning processes, based on clear roles and expectations, supported by straightforward systems for permissions and communication, and recognised in policy as a legitimate part of park development and activation.

Embedding these approaches within policy helps ensure that improvements are sustainable, equitable and aligned with the priorities identified through local engagement.



08

Conclusion

Creating parks that work for teenage girls is not about a single intervention or a finished design. It is an ongoing process of listening, testing, learning and adapting.

This guide is intended as a starting point. It brings together current research, practitioner insight and lived experience to support more inclusive decision making. It does not offer fixed solutions and it is not static. As new evidence emerges and as more projects are implemented, the learning will continue to evolve.

The work requires commitment. It requires councils, designers, planners and community organisations to question assumptions, examine patterns of use and be willing to adjust long established approaches. It also requires trust in young people's insight and recognition of their right to belong in public space.

Future iterations will include practical engagement resources, evaluation tools and examples of good practice shared by councils, developers and community organisations. Contributions and reflections from those applying this work in different contexts are welcome.

The aim is to build a growing body of knowledge that supports parks where teenage girls feel visible, valued and welcome. When parks work for teenage girls, they tend to work better for many others too, strengthening inclusion, health and social connection across communities.



The following section includes references and links to further reading to support deeper exploration and local adaptation.

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10

About This Guide

This guide was put together by Abigail Gaines of Make Space York, a grassroots project working with teenage girls to create more welcoming, inclusive parks. Alongside leading Make Space York, and manages the Friends of Rowntree Park, supporting community-led approaches to parks and green spaces.

An Evolving Resource

This guide is intended to be a living, evolving document. As more work takes place and new ideas, research and examples emerge, it will continue to grow and develop. If you have insights, case studies or approaches you would like to share, please get in touch.

Contact

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