



Make Space for Girls/  
Hackney Council/ Clapton  
Girls Academy  
Millfield Park Yr 8,9 and  
10 Engagement Day  
21st June 2022

Charity number: 1193772



## Context

Many parks and similar public spaces do not cater for the play needs young people over 12. Where provision is made for teenagers, it usually comprises skateparks, multi-use games areas (MUGAs)/pitches; and BMX/pump tracks, provision which tends to be dominated by boys and young men.

Make Space for Girls is a charity that has been set up to work for parks and similar spaces to be more welcoming to teenage girls. This is an issue of equality and rights, but is also important because of the positive impacts that such spaces can have on their physical and mental health. Understanding the impact of decisions relating to parks and similar spaces on women and girls is also a key part of discharging a local authority's duties under the Public Sector Equality Duty under section 149 Equality Act 2010. Make Space for Girls believes that teenage girls are the experts on what makes space more welcoming to them and that the current inequality in use of park space can only be addressed by engaging with teenage girls. However this is not entirely straightforward. A

key contributor to the difficulties faced in creating park spaces that work for teenage girls is the fact that teenage girls are not currently going to parks, which means the usual forms of park consultation such as user surveys do not reach them.

To address this Make Space for Girls seeks to engage with schools and other organisations in order to hear the voices of teenage girls and work with them to express what they would like to find in parks and other public spaces. Over the past three years, parks, planning and consultation officers in Hackney have been working with children and teenagers from across the borough to shape parks, play areas and sports places that are more inclusive for all ages and genders. Hence we were very pleased to work with Hackney Council and Clapton Girls Academy to set up this full day workshop. To hear how girls in Hackney feel about parks, to learn more about the work that Hackney has been doing, and compare this local insight with what we have been hearing in other parts of the country.

## Aims of the Workshop

**Make Space for Girls:** an understanding of what would make parks more welcoming to teenage girls who live in Hackney via (1) the workshops and (2) via the survey produced during the workshops.

**Hackney Council:** As above, to inform our on-going conversations with children and young people about parks in Hackney, but also site specific feedback about Millsfield Park.

**CGA:** to contribute to students' community coursework and portfolios related to engagement with the local community.



*“We were so lucky with the weather!”*



## Executive Summary

### What the participants like about parks

- wide open spaces, big trees, shade, larger playground equipment suitable for older kids (like those big round swings).
- A place to come and picnic with family.
- The nature areas, brought back memories of walking through the wildflower meadow in Victoria Park.
- Place in the park where they can be on their own but feel safe.

### What the participants don't like about parks

- That it doesn't feel safe; they recalled seeing crime and aggressive police tactics in some parks.
- Boring benches.
- Boring areas with no facilities or equipment. Bare, remote areas that feel less used and unsafe.

### What the participants said about the day:

*“Life is short so go to the park and enjoy!”*

*“Cllr Woodley, Imogen and Caroline were very receptive and responsive to our ideas.”*

*“An interesting, fun experience that gave us insight into the creative process of [the architects'] day to day work.”*

### The participants' ideas for making parks better

- More security including lights, cameras, staff.
- More facilities e.g. bike racks, large lidded bins (helps prevent fox rummage messes!), drinking fountain.
- Renew all signage! All faded and dull. Orchard sign needs replacing/renewing. Also the main entrance notice board could do with a map of facilities etc.
- Separating the cycles from pedestrians; you can't just wander on the paths, you have to watch out for the bikes.
- Put signs up in the orchard to tell people what the trees are, when the fruit is ripe and what to look for to know it's good to eat.
- Swings - big swings
- Stuff to climb on.
- Places to sit to be sociable; like picnic tables but may be bigger.
- Bigger versions of the kids play areas: trampolines, big swings (proper adult size, so all bums can fit); the roundabout in the kids area was a great place to sit and chat;
- Tree houses.
- Emergency contact points, especially in the bits of parks that are more remote

*“Versatile and creative. [The architects'] practical creativity helped us to see what our ideas could become.”*

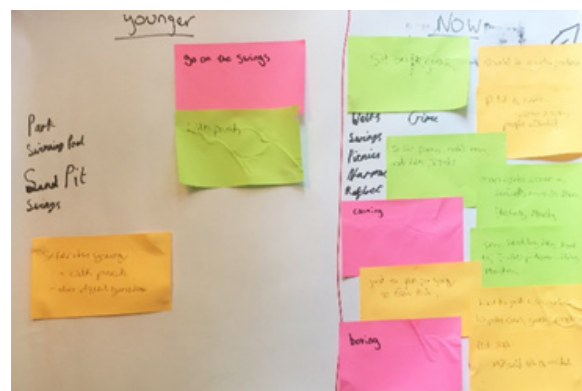
## Report on the Workshop

The workshop outline is in appendix 1.

There were 9 participants in total: 5 year 10; and 4 from Year 8 and 9. The groups separated naturally into the Year 10 and Year 8/9 and worked in these groups throughout the day.

### Session 1: How do parks make you feel?

When asked about their memories of parks when younger, there were strong themes of visiting with family, with memories of playgrounds, swings and slides being fun, hide and seek, learning to skateboard; although one participant recalled more negatively *“facilities were often out of order or broken”*.



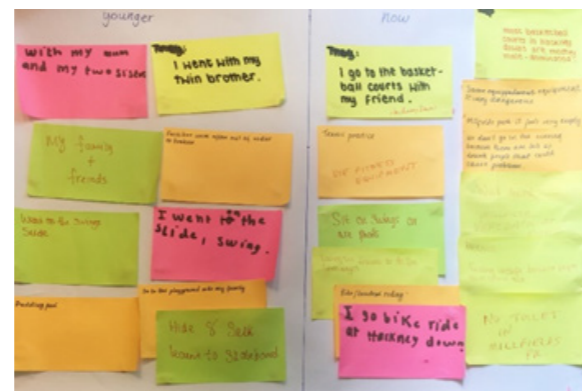
In response to how they saw parks now, there was positive feedback about using parks as active spaces (bike riding, basketball, use of fitness equipment to do fun challenges) and Hackney Downs was cited as an active place. One participant noted however that most basketball courts in Hackney Downs are mostly male dominated.



But parks were also seen as more relaxed social space (*“sit on swings on are phones”, “sit on the grass”* and *“calming”*).

In contrast to their memories from when younger, the young women now had a greater range of negative impressions of park space. In the year 8 & 9 group there was a more generalised sense of lack of safety *“because people will come and talk”* and *“lots of drunk people that could cause problems”*.

In the year 10 group the young women specifically called out *“a lot of crime”* with women and members of the LGBTQ community seen as at higher risk. The year 10 group also commented on having seen examples of police taking a heavy handed approach towards young people, especially young people of colour. The year 10 group also viewed the park as less safe now than when they were younger, partly because parents made it feel safer and also because it was a *“different generation”*.



### Session 2: Walking and Mapping

The Group took the above route round the park:

#### 1 Entrance from Millfield Road/Chatsworth Road junction.

The young women appreciated the idea of the Notice Board at the entrance, and the bus info was appreciated: but ideas to improved included: condition generally; add a map to show where things were. Why put up the Byelaws? The print is too small- old fashioned language; it doesn't help you know what you can do or not. Other signage (eg about dogs) was hidden and/or too small to be effective.

The entrance felt ok overall (contrast the entrance by the Lee); the trees felt spaced out enough not create dark spaces, and bird boxes were suggested for the trees.

#### 2 Wide path and standard benches

The overall impression was that the benches were ok but not that inviting. Benches got a mixed reception: some liked them; some comments that it was better to face people when you want to talk to them, so the benches didn't work for that.

The wide path was good but there were some concerns about the lack of separation between walkers and cyclists: the girls commented that you had to be very aware of what is going on around you to not get bumped into by bikes.

#### 3 Open grass to the children's playground

The girls were very positive about the open green space between 2 and 3. Comments about its peacefulness- can sit under trees and relax; picnicking with family also came up- lots of space for large family groups to sit together. They liked the picnic tables in the open areas by the children's playground. These were clean when we visited but girls said they are often dirty and strewn with rubbish and worse. On the less positive, the young women commented re. too many dogs. Some of the participants very annoyed about fact that dogs can go everywhere and come and bother you, eat your food etc. Really very little enthusiasm for dogs across the two groups.

The children's playground was viewed with enthusiasm by all the participants. They were very keen on the idea of (bigger) trampolines and a basket swing for teens. The roundabout was quickly

## Report on the Workshop (Continued)

occupied and used as a social seating area, with comments that a bigger version of this for teens would be great. The dried out pots were "disgusting".

There was an interesting conversation about whether the play areas was an area they were allowed to use or not. There was no age limit on the gate but the general view was that they would not go in if little kids were there but would use the back area (with the roundabout) if no-one there.

Also comments that if this was an area where older children were welcome bike racks would be good.

### 4 Path

The young women generally liked this path area, and the mix of cut and uncut grass to the left. One of the young women with a visual impairment commented that it would be good to have a separate running track which was just for running- otherwise you're having to watch out for little kids, scooters etc which makes it difficult.

Opinion divided over whether it was more welcoming to have long grass under trees or short grass; the slightly more popular view was that cut grass was better because fewer bugs (general dislike of bugs). Discussion of trees led to a discussion about tree houses and from there to the idea of having a place where teens could hang out.

### 5 Picnic table under tree

Not popular - the branches were too low; a bug trap and annoying.

### 7 & 8 Community Orchard and Path by Lee

The young women liked this area but wanted to know more about the orchard:

why weren't there signs to say what the trees were, what fruit they had, when the fruit would be ready to eat, whether anyone was free to eat them etc. We walked through the orchard to the area where new willows and wild flowers have been planted. This area was well liked, with one participant commenting that it reminded her of walking through the wild flower meadow that had been planted in Victoria Park when she was younger. The participants liked the idea of a painted mural on the far wall.

One participant commented that this area would be a really good area to come and relax and just be on your own, but worried that it was a bit isolated for this.

Would prefer if area had lights. The bare scrubland area between power plant and riverside path could do with picnic tables to make it appealing to families and teens. Also bins. Presently it feels underused if not abandoned!

### 9 Entrance by the Lee

This entrance got universally negative comments: scary and creepy; you can't see where the path is going; there is no signage; it feels very dark and enclosed. Unlike entrance 1, the wall of trees created darkness and shadow. The river side path and access felt lonely and unsafe. The participant were uncomfortable with the idea of the boat residents living more or less in the park.

This led to a discussion about the need for some sort of emergency contact point: somewhere where you could go if you were scared.

This in turn led to a discussion of whether having wi-fi in the park would make you feel safer because you could be connected (there was no overall conclusion).

### 11 Grass areas

We had lunch here and did the exercise from session 3 outside.

### 13 Basket Ball court

We used this area as a case study to think about facilities and activities in parks. There was some discussion about using it as a skating space and putting in some ramps. But we also discussed other uses of the space. After the enthusiasm for the children's play area, the consensus of the group was that it would be great to use this area to create a hangout place with swings (adult size), sociable seating: as one participant put it: a playground but made bigger for us. Swings had been mentioned on and off as we had walked round the park, but it was here that the girls spoke most strongly about making these usable by all older girls and young women with all body types and catering for disabilities.

The girls were also very keen to throw some hoops once they saw some young men arrive with a ball; but they were very reluctant to approach the group and only did so once the full group including the adults (14 in total) approached the area.

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### Session 3: Remove/Avoid/Good & Dreams

The brief the participants were given was as follows:

#### How could we make Millfields Park an ideal space for you and your friends?

Remove – this shouldn't be happening but does;  
Avoid – not wanted in the park;  
Good – what works well;  
Dream – what would make things even better.

They used post its on a large page divided into these quadrants to collect these ideas.

The Remove/Avoid quadrants identified: litter dog mess and plants that need a lot of care (because they would die if not looked after). In addition the risk of bikes being stolen (lack of places to secure bikes when relaxing in the park) and cyclists and pedestrians on the same path were seen as problems.

The Good quadrant identified the Community Orchard and Trees more generally.

But the quadrant that drew the most engagement from the participants was the Dream quadrant: (see photograph overleaf)

In the Dream quadrant, we have grouped the girls' thoughts by reference to core themes: sociable spaces; active spaces, nature, activation (events) and infrastructure, but there are ideas that cross between them (eg swings, big climbing frames and zipwires are active and sociable).

We would suggest that key takeaways from this session are:

- The girls' ideas about what would make their park better are much more varied and creative than the standard trio of teenage provision (skate park; MUGA; BMX/pump track); skatepark was mentioned only twice and MUGA/pitch did not feature.

- The girls wanted both active and sociable spaces: this would suggest that if girls are less active in parks than their male equivalent it is not because they don't want to.

- Nature featured strongly; and more frequently than Activation/events.

- The comments re infrastructure are perhaps predictable in referencing lighting, toilets and café/shop, but the fact that the girls felt strongly enough about these "boring" things to identify them in the Dream quadrant is striking.

# DREAMS

## SOCIABLE

Rain Selter  
Barbese are  
Camping with Barbese are

Treasure  
Fire all  
Sitting are  
wing  
dream house  
YELOK Echats

Dog free zone

Swings & hammacs  
tire swing  
I found about  
Big swings

My big climbing frame

Rides YES

Zip line  
Adventure park

Trees zip line  
TOWER

## ACTIVE

Sport creating with football nets

Skate park

Go 7-9g

Lido

A Track  
bike are

Swing set

Pool

A separate path for those people that need

## NATURE

Re wilding

Nature are Pond

butterfly house

gardening

C More information about fruit trees

Farm

## ACTIVATION

Family movie - free movie

What kind of...  
...  
...  
...  
...

## INFRASTRUCTURE

Lighting

Water towers

Shop - no year

bright light

AToilet

Ice cream shops

8 More bike racks

street lamps

bikes

A Cafe

## Report on the Workshop (Continued)

### Session 4: Survey making session

The participants were asked to think about questions that they would ask if they wanted to find out what their classmates thought about parks and what would make parks more welcoming to them. They were briefed to consider different models of question: statements with an agree/disagree option; multiple choice; list selection; open/closed questions; leading/open questions.

After 15 minutes working in groups the participants identified a list of 10 potential questions which are listed in appendix 2.

The Year 10 group intend to work with their teachers to refine these into a survey to be circulated to classes in Year 8, 9 and 10.



### Session 5: Model making with design professionals

After a fairly intense day, this session was designed to be creative and a bit more relaxing. The groups were given model making materials and a number of cards showing examples of exciting spaces in parks (both real and imagined). Based on all that they had thought about and learned from the day, and guided by two young architects, the participants made models of what they might like to find in a perfect park.

The participants were really engaged in this process and their approach was summarised brilliantly by one of the young architects:

*“I loved working with them and seeing how engaged they were in what they were doing and seeing all their amazing ideas - they thought about the park so spatially and really communicated their ideas so well!”*



## Conclusions

Overall the participants showed a brilliant level of engagement in talking about parks and what would make them better. They had loads of ideas, many of which were intensely practical as well as creative and showed great consideration of other park users as well as themselves. If anyone had any doubts that young people are interested in the design of the public realm, we hope the results of this workshop will help to dispel those doubts.

One point that struck the MSFG representative was how tuned in the Year 10s were to the risks associated with crime and the level of distrust of the police. We have engaged with other groups of similar aged girls in cities and town settings and have not come across this level of awareness of these issues in other locations. Similarly the Year 8 and 9 participants were focused on the risk of crime (especially bikes being stolen) in a way we have not seen expressed in quite such definitive terms in other places. In terms of specifics:

- The sharing of paths by all users was raised as a concern on a number of occasions both by participants who had visual impairments and by those who did not. And as part of the "Dream" quadrant in session 3, "a separate path for these pedestrians" was identified. The participants were clearly not "anti-bike" however, citing the need for bike racks and greater security if they brought a bike to the park and identifying a "bike area" in the Dreams quadrant. It may be worth considering the impact of this sharing on certain sections of the community.
- The dominance of basketball courts on Hackney Downs by men and boys was identified and it may be worth considering whether there should be any monitoring to find out whether these spaces are indeed dominated by men and boys and if so what can be done to provide better access to women and girls.

- For Hackney Council to get greater insight into whether part of the basketball area should be repurposed and if so for what purpose, further engagement is needed, since we got relatively little in terms of feedback on this specific proposal. The use of some visuals to show what a skating area or other alternative might look like would likely prompt a more informative discussion.

- For parks officers to use this insight, alongside other surveys and sessions they have been running with children and young people, as a baseline to inform future improvements of parks and green spaces to make them more inclusive of all genders.

### With thanks to:

We would like to thank everyone who supported us in this workshop, including Cllr Caroline Woodley, Emma Winch from Hackney Council, the amazing staff team at Clapton Girls Academy, Aaran Sian and Margeaux Adams for their fantastic support in the Architect Park Design Workshop, and of course the brilliant young women from Clapton Girls Academy.





## Appendix 1: Workshop Outline

Times	Content	Location
9.30am - 10am	Welcomes, warm up, and briefing	In school
10.00am - 10.30am	<b>Walk to park</b> <b>Meet Cllr Caroline Woodley</b> (cabinet lead for parks, green spaces and leisure)	Millfields Park
10.45am - 11.30am	<b>Walkabout and Mapping</b> using walking map and cameras	Millfields Park
11.30am - 45noon	<b>Basketball courts</b>	Millfield Park Basketball Court
11.45am - 12noon	<b>Remove/Avoid/Good &amp; Dreams</b>	Millfields Park
12noon - 1pm 12.30-1pm	<b>Lunch in Park</b> <b>Walk back to school</b>	
1pm - 1.45pm	<b>Survey making session</b>	In school
2pm - 2.45pm	<b>Architect park design workshop</b>	In school

## Appendix 2 :Potential Survey Questions identified as part of Session 4

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A question to set the scene about frequency of park usage: eg a 4 option question: do you use the park: every day; twice a week; once a week; once a month; less than once a month.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A question about times you use the park: use a selection of time slots.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A question to test how safe respondent feel in the park eg do you feel unsafe or uncomfortable in the park: never, sometimes; often; all the time.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A question seeking views about how staff could make the park feel safer eg how would you feel about the presence of security guards in the park?</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A question about whether you would like to use the park as a place to study.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A question asking the respondent to identify their favourite thing in the park.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A question asking the respondent so say what they would like to improve in the park.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A multiple choice question about what would could be included in a teen hang out area: eg swing; trampoline; seating areas; shade/shelter; etc.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A question seeking the respondents views on how they would rate/prioritise changes the infrastructure in the park: free wifi; cafes; toilets; bins; water fountains etc.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A question to collect the age and gender of the respondent.</li> </ul>

