

This is for the Majority

Gender inclusive design – creating a welcoming, inclusive and restorative borough

May 2024



Contents

1. This is for the Majority	3	5. Themes and recommendations	31
1.1 About this report	4	5.1 Welcoming Borough	34
1.2 Executive Summary	6	5.1.1 Women are not scared of the dark	34
1.3 A vision for greater inclusivity in LBTH	8	5.1.2 Constant, low level threat	39
1.4 Context: Places shape people and people shape places	9	5.1.3 Lighting	42
1.5 Background: This is our city. These are our streets.	10	5.1.4 Design and maintenance	44
1.6 We are the majority: Understanding Intersectionality.	12	5.1.5 Infrastructure	47
1.7 Scope: Acting and doing is shaping and making	13	5.1.6 Busy Roads	50
2. Policy Review	15	5.1.7 Wayfinding and signage	53
3. Methodology	21	5.2 Inclusive Borough	55
4. Vision	29	5.2.1 Valuing the local: strengthening community	55
		5.2.2 High Streets and shopping areas	60
		5.2.3 Communicating a sense of place	63
		5.2.4 Acting and doing is shaping and making	64
		5.2.5 Industry Diversity Is Vital	66
		5.2.6 Co-designing with communities	68
		5.3 Restorative Places	70
		5.3.1 Green spaces are social spaces	70
		5.3.2 Levelling up parks	71
		5.3.3 Benches are not the problem	76
		5.3.4 Plants and flowers, trees and green streets: Bio Diversity is restorative.	82
		5.3.5 Play parks are also social spaces	86
		5.3.6 The green grid	89
		5.3.7 Walking is a social space	92
		5.3.8 Active travel- walking, running, cycling and exercise after dark	94
		6. Summary of key recommendations	97

1. This is for the Majority

1.1 About this report

Gender inclusive design is an approach to development that learns from the experiences of women and girls in order to build inclusive, healthy, child friendly, climate resilient places that are socially and economically prosperous.

This report has been prepared to inform planning policy in London Borough of Tower Hamlets. It is an evidence base for the new Local Plan and has been through public consultation under regulation 18 (December 2023) and regulation 19 (June 2024). The findings of this research have been aggregated throughout the new Local Plan draft with input into each policy and this document will be circulated across the council and further afield, in order to encourage shared approaches and collaborative strategies that embed equity in the built environment.

When this research process began in December 2022, the London Legacy Development Corporation (LLDC), the Greater London Authority (GLA), The World Health Organisation (WHO) and the World Bank had published documents focusing on

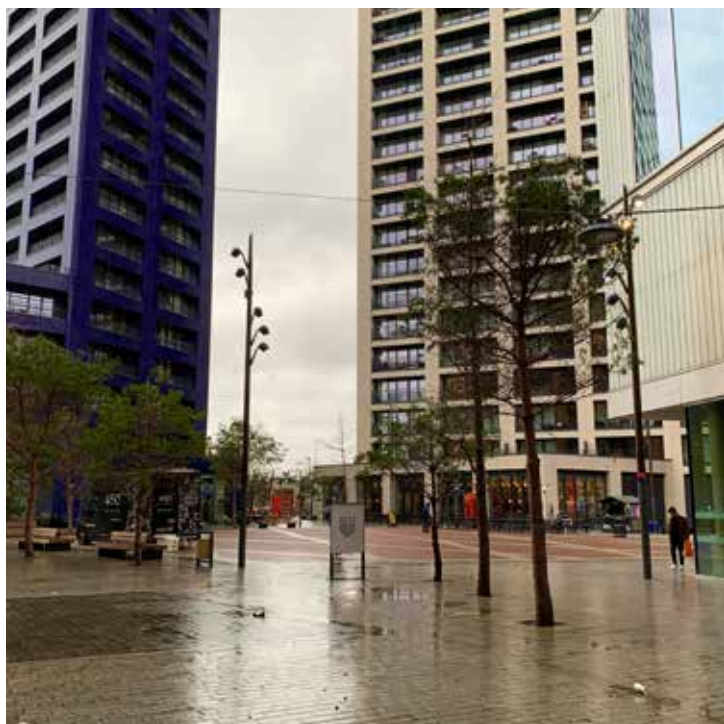
women's safety and street safety. Make Space for Girls and LSE Cities have also made significant headway, changing the conversation around gendered provision for teenagers in parks and public space. This network of research and broader discourse around women's safety, is formative and has been used as a reference tool (see the policy review in section 02).

Being part of this broader conversation created an opportunity for the scope of this evidence base and design guidance to respond in a more holistic way to the experiences of women and girls in London Borough of Tower Hamlets.

While this document sits within the Local Plan evidence base at Tower Hamlets, it is also part of an unfolding conversation which is becoming more nuanced as thinking about gender inclusion in the built environment evolves. The ambition of this guidance goes further than addressing the limiting belief that design is a defensive strategy to protect women from violent men and presents an expanded vision that considers the built environment as a language that can be an agent for change and inclusivity.

Our work in Tower Hamlets has prioritised listening to and learning with women and girls at the outset and this document grows out of an iterative engagement programme that has been shaped, at each stage, by an ongoing process of learning and reflecting. It was important that this document put lived experience at the centre of the evidence base and that recommendations are drawn out of a consensus rather than fall back on assumptions or led by perceptions.

This report is written at the mid-point of an inclusive research project working, to date, with over 450 women, girls, and non-binary people from across the borough. The title of the report – This Is For The Majority – is reflective of the fact that the recommendations that are made will have a positive impact on all residents, because designing with the needs of women and girls in mind, will





lead to improved public realm for the majority of people who live and work here. Furthermore, designing with women and girls in mind aligns with biodiversity net gain objectives, planning for climate mitigation, healthy, child friendly places, vibrant local neighbourhoods and brings social and economic prosperity to a place.

Adopting an inclusive design framework will support and enable a cultural shift not simply to 'level up' women's experience but to create an entirely new, shared context which is empowering and enabling for women and girls and offers broader benefits to the wider community. The report maps the scope of findings that have emerged through engagement, a 'vision' for greater inclusivity, a set of themes and a series of recommendations to ensure greater balance and representation in the planning and design of the borough. The report provides insights into the evidence base, so that the source of recommendations can clearly be traced through to the original research.

The second phase of this document will be published later in 2024 and will outline a framework for gender inclusive design. It will be a 'how to' guide that enables place shapers to apply gender inclusive approaches as a design tool.

Whilst this document is written to inform design and planning it is envisaged as useful tool for teams working with violence against women & girls team (VAWG), youth service, community safety provision and strategic planning for public health, high streets, parks and green spaces, leisure and planning for new developments.

1.2 Executive Summary

A legacy

Cities, towns, and public spaces are an ongoing human project to co-create, make, and re-make spaces that both speak of who we want to be 'now,' and how we wish to be seen by future generations. Historically this has been led by able bodied, white men. This statement does not undermine or judge their contribution; it is merely a statement of fact that provides insight into the shape of built world we have inherited.

A city out of step

Living in cities, towns and public spaces means navigating this inherited patchwork of histories structures, systems and institutions that had limiting views of women and girls, disability and neurodiversity, race and ethnicity and sexual and gender identity. This has shaped spaces that favour and celebrate the lives of men. From street names and public sculptures through to a skyline of blocks and towers that replicate male power, to a transport system designed for a smooth daily commute 'into' town. We live amongst and navigate a built environment that is out of step with a contemporary culture that explicitly values plurality, inclusivity, and diversity.

"In general, cities work better for heterosexual, able-bodied, cisgender men than they do for women, girls, sexual and gender minorities, and people with disabilities. Key aspects of the built urban environment – related to access, mobility, safety and freedom from violence, health and hygiene, climate resilience, and security of tenure – create disproportionate burdens for women, girls, and sexual and gender minorities of all ages and abilities, thus exacerbating and reinforcing existing gender inequities"

World Bank, Handbook for Gender-Inclusive Planning & Design, 2020

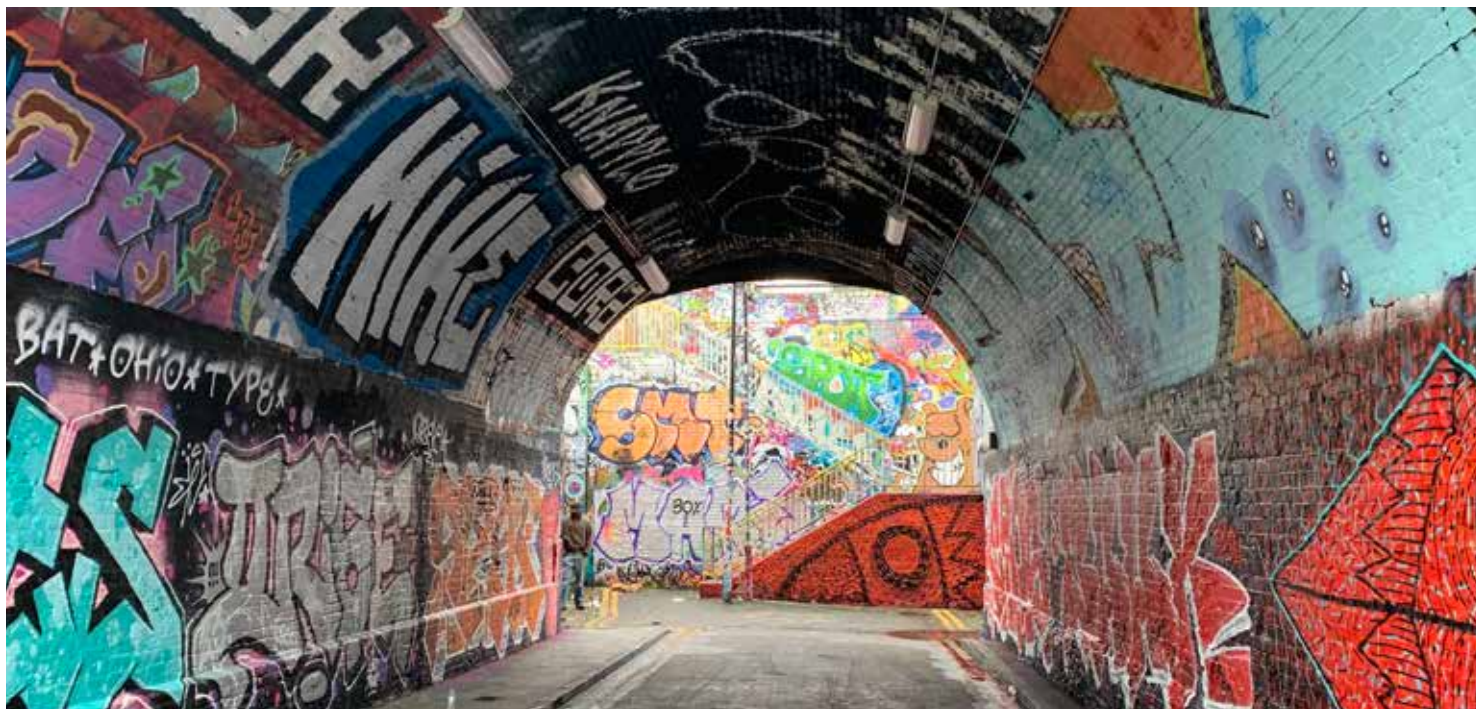
What needs to change?

To bring ourselves more in step with contemporary culture the question we must ask is; what needs to change, from the fine detail to the big picture, to make spaces that work for everyone? Central to making space work for everyone is making spaces feel welcoming and therefore safe.

Our work in Tower Hamlets makes it clear that it is important to change the narrative and language around street safety. Statistics show men and teenage boys are also at risk from random violence, but that women, girls and non-binary people carry a greater daily burden of dealing with sexism and misogyny on the street and that acceptance of this lower-level behaviour, leads to broader acceptance of crimes such as domestic abuse, rape, and murder.

The link here is male violence – whether that is targeted at women or other men. So, making spaces safe also means asking: how can male violence be challenged, and men helped to manage and change their behaviour?

Clearly this question is complex and there are many reasons, from broader cultural and historic acceptance of male violence to upbringing, poverty, lack of deterrent and poor education. In the context of this report, it is a question of how the 'language' of the city supports and communicates shared value through design, the ways that inequality is replicated through the built environment and the practical considerations that make places feel more welcoming to women and girls.



Welcoming places feel safe

Participants in our research told us that they felt welcome in places where there was a range of activity happening and where they could see other people; women, families, people from several generations and cultural backgrounds. That designing 'welcoming' places both encouraged diverse users to spend time there and discouraged anti-social behaviour. This creates a positive feedback loop.

Focusing only on safety further perpetuates limiting views of the experience of women and girls and this creates a contradiction. Safety is important, but in the context of design, perpetuating the narrative that women and girls are potential victims and limiting discussions about gender inclusivity to safety, is missing an opportunity to think about the big picture changes that can happen when places are designed by and for everyone. One of the ways urban design can support a culture change is to shift narratives by designing with the needs of women and girls in mind.

We talked to some 450 people about the design of streets and public spaces and some of the many topics that were discussed included provision in parks, biodiversity, climate mitigation, opportunities for children to play, the harms caused by high levels of pollution and the fact that they would like greater opportunity to socialise in parks and outdoor spaces, as well as talking about safer parks and streets.

It's nuanced: thinking about approaches

When women and girls change their behaviour, it has an impact on the social and economic prosperity of a place. Therefore, proactively designing welcoming spaces that encourage women and girls to feel welcome, is also proactively designing regenerative spaces that benefit the whole community.

Design by and for women and girls is important because it can help us create a new vision for our built environment which is more in line with the big picture changes we need to make to support Biodiversity Net gain and climate sensitive planning. When these elements align places feel welcoming and this in turn has social and economic benefits for an area.

Recommendations at the close of this report consider on street interventions, changes to the way inclusive approaches are implemented and big picture thinking about the language of the built environment.

The breadth of responses and more nuanced comments from women and girls about safety should not be overlooked and one truth which flows through this report is that all women, girls, and gender diverse people, feel or perceive safety or public space differently. However, 96% of survey respondents agreed that a holistic culture shift is necessary in order to challenge violence against women and girls.

Design of the built environment can contribute to this culture shift by ensuring that the 'language' of the city speaks of equality.

Gender mainstreaming

One of the ways to make places for people is to ensure greater representation in planning, policy, and design teams by adopting gender mainstreaming with a focus on intersectionality.

Gender mainstreaming at policy level, through design guidance, can help to shift the culture of a place, with the aspiration being to create something new that is of benefit to all people of all backgrounds and genders.

Gender mainstreaming is a tool that can be used to identify gaps in policy where the experience of women and girls is absent. The aim of gender mainstreaming is to achieve equality.

In 1998, the Council of Europe defined gender mainstreaming as:

“The (re)organisation, improvement, development and evaluation of policy processes, so that a gender equality perspective is incorporated in all policies at all levels and at all stages, by the actors normally involved in policymaking.” (Council of Europe)

In this policy document, gender mainstreaming relates to planning, policy, urban design and architecture and the built environment.

1.3 A vision for greater inclusivity in LBTH

Welcoming borough:
Empowering and educating.



Inclusive borough:
Enabling individuals and
strengthening community.



Restorative borough:
Prioritising health and
ecology



1.4 Context: Places shape people and people shape places

Architecture makes our culture legible. It communicates the aspirations and values of the dominant culture (i.e. those with capital). Planning shapes this language, providing the grammar and structure by holding space for conversation, collaboration and indeed the robust push and pull between the will of the market and the needs of the community.

Cities play a vital role in production, consumption and reproduction of gendered norms and biases and are themselves shaped by gender embodiment and the experiences of its inhabitants. These biases are communicated through design, materials, and spatial planning all of which are historically shaped by and for priorities determined by men. This limits opportunities for layering or multiplicity, for places to be more than one thing- something women who are caring for children often experience as a failing and a comment on the value of mothering.

Gender and feminist studies show that women and men experience the built environment differently, and insufficient attention to women's needs within planning processes reproduces gender inequality.

A key tool for communicating inclusive and egalitarian public spaces is through good design. Design not only shapes spaces it communicates a level of care and makes a visual statement to the people who use those spaces that those with governance are considering their needs.

The design and nature of that intervention is iterative, relational, formative and communicates a kind of politics. Whether people know it, or not, they are constantly reading and internalising design- or entropy, as a reflection on them and their sense of self in that place.



In short, the built environment communicates not just 'where' we are but also 'who' we are. It frames the personal and inter-personal relationships we have in those spaces; memories, stories, and aspirations. Children growing up are shaped by the built world and its generosity towards them. External architectural environments are internalised and shape both memory and identity.

Our relationship with place is therefore porous – places shape people, just as people shape places.

The question that gender inclusive design asks, and which this report will ultimately make recommendations on, is what needs to change, from the fine detail to the big picture, to make Tower Hamlets work for the majority?

1.5 Background: This is our city. These are our streets.

This report was initially envisaged as a 'Women's Safety' Project. It was set up in the light of the tragic murders of Sarah Everard, Bibaa Henry, Nicole Smallman, Sabina Nessa and many others whose stories may not have received national coverage. Horrific acts of misogyny, which shone a light on the precarity women face within a legal and judicial system that empowers men to act against women.

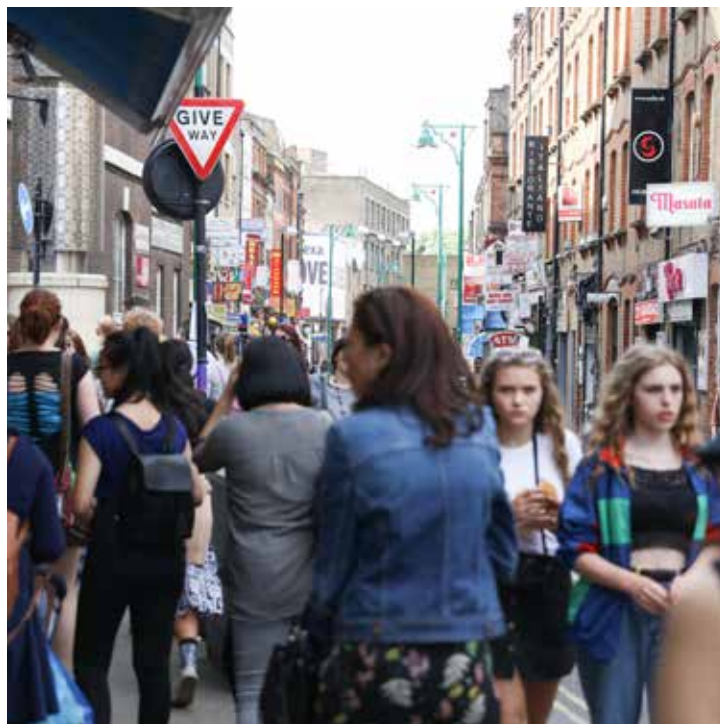
Male violence and fear of male violence is a facet of gendered experience must be countered through whole system thinking, starting with adequate police and judicial processes that promise justice to women through the prosecution of offenders, and by sending the clear message that violence, sexual violence and abuse of women and girls is unacceptable and punishable by law.

The report carefully weighs the accounts of women who report feeling unsafe or indeed being assaulted, the poverty of justice for women and under reporting, against the problem of over-sensationalising levels of fear and indeed danger. Some elements of the city are dangerous; however, this must be balanced against the alternative dangerous path of turning women into 'victims' and therefore perpetuating rhetoric around victim blaming, control of women through fear, being an equally problematic path to travel.

Women and girls are more likely to suffer violence or death through contact with family, partners, and ex partners, than they do from random attacks on the street by a stranger.

ONS data the year ending March 2021 shows that of 177 women who were victims of homicide across the UK, 95 percent of perpetrators were known to the victim. According to the Femicide Census, a woman is killed every three days in the UK and research has shown that incidents of violence towards women have increased in recent years.

This includes a 13 percent increase in the number of women who are sexually assaulted from the year ending September 2021. A recent report found that the leading cause of femicide is intimate partner



and ex- partner violence, followed by son-mother domestic violence and then killings that were sexually motivated.

Sexual offences recorded by the police were at the highest level recorded within a 12-month period (194,683 offences) in the year ending March 2022, a 32% increase from the same period in 2021. (During the Covid 19 pandemic) Of all sexual offences recorded by the police in the year ending March 2022, 36% (70,330) were rape offences. This was a 26% increase from 55,678 in the year ending March 2021. Other sexual offences increased by 35% to 124,353 compared with 92,212 the previous year.

(Office for National Statistics 2023)

These figures are high and contrasted by extremely low rates of prosecution and conviction.

However, for the purposes of this report about the design of streets and public space, it is important to bear in mind the statistic that 5% of these crimes are committed by a stranger on the street.

Violence against women and girls in the UK is a national outrage and this document will not minimise this fact, however it is a misconception that the greatest threat to women and girls is from a stranger on a dark secluded street.

Our engagement has shown that we must consider safety from the fine detail to the big picture considering on street interventions to create a welcoming and inclusive public realm whilst at the same time understanding that the design, material and spatial planning of cities is gendered, legible and indeed this power in-balance is internalised by both women and men. This is echoed by respondents to our survey who state that community, a diversity of people on the streets, and seeing other women created welcoming places and that when women and girls feel welcome, they also feel safe. For these reasons, the emphasis of this report has shifted from focusing on a defensive night-time strategy, to looking more broadly at how to strengthen community and design welcoming places so women and girls can confidently use their streets and reclaim that space, while feeling safe to do so.

The evidence gathered during our engagement shows that women feel relatively safe most of the time but that they feel less safe at night. 'Feeling safe' is personal and everyone will experience and perceive safety differently. Intervention in the built environment such as better lighting, greater passive surveillance, active frontages, better visibility, focus on entrance and exists, can make places feel safer and these recommendations will be aggregated through the Local Plan.

The majority of participants told us that they are not in the main navigating the city in a heightened state of fear but that they are burdened by exposure to elements that will be read as low-level threat; graffiti, trash, poor maintenance, drug dealing and taking, cat calling, ASB and concerns about low level crime. Most of the time this burden is carried with a level of vigilance. However, this raises to threat when experienced in combination. Women did not talk about living in fear, instead many women spoke in resigned terms about carrying this additional responsibility of staying safe as a burden. That navigating threat is part of city life.

Women have described how they create routes that navigate around places where groups of men congregate and cat call, hot spots for drug dealing or

where they have previously experienced threat. They also navigate around streets that feel unsafe due to limited sight lines, escape routes or poor lighting and that this 'way' of getting around is precautionary. They spoke of situations and moments when they became more stressed, for example pausing to find keys and unlock their front door especially if that was poorly lit or lacked passive surveillance. Many of these situations can be countered through design and solutions are suggested in the recommendations listed later in this evidence base.

The issue of taking up space runs like a golden thread throughout the research and it is extremely complex both because of the contemporary culture in which young men are growing up, because of the effects of fifteen years of austerity impacting youth services and provision, because of the density of population in Tower Hamlets, and issues of overcrowding, which sees cultures, families and inter-personal conflict heightened because space operates at a premium.

Young men are, themselves, living in fear as they are aware of knife and gang crime and stabbings, meaning a certain amount of bravado is partly a survival strategy for them.

This report is written with empathy towards young men and the complex issues they face. However, the scope of this work is to make space for women, girls and gender diversity and part of that must be to articulate the impact that groups of young men have. This imbalance (inequality) impacts how women use space and the confidence they have about navigating the borough by day and by night.

The negative impact of this is much wider because when women and girls avoid somewhere it quickly becomes a no-go area. For example, when a small park becomes unwelcoming or attracts ASB, women stop taking their children there to play, the elderly do not go there, and the park gets a reputation as a problem area. When women and girls stop using an area it goes into decline. Therefore, proactively designing welcoming spaces that encourage women and girls to go there and feel safe doing so, is also proactively designing regenerative spaces that benefit the whole community.

This document will look at the role design can play in creating more welcoming places to make a more balanced city.

1.6 We are the majority: Understanding Intersectionality.

“In general, cities work better for heterosexual, able-bodied, cisgender men than they do for women, girls, sexual and gender minorities, and people with disabilities. Key aspects of the built urban environment – related to access, mobility, safety and freedom from violence, health and hygiene, climate resilience, and security of tenure – create disproportionate burdens for women, girls, and sexual and gender minorities of all ages and abilities, thus exacerbating and reinforcing existing gender inequities.”

World Bank, Handbook for Gender-Inclusive Planning & Design, 2020

Gender inclusive design is about making places better for the majority. Modelling the experience of women, and girls, and gender diversity makes places better for all inhabitants.

Whilst it is well established that historically, architects and planners have built cities that serve the needs of men, we cannot assume that the ‘men’ for whom the city is built, represent 50% of the population.

There are many other factors beyond gender that make the city tricky to negotiate or which communicate one’s ‘otherness’ to the norm, making it hard to fit in by setting individuals aside because they ‘can’t,’ ‘won’t’ or ‘don’t’ conform. Physical disabilities can make it harder to get around, neurodiversity can make certain spaces feel overwhelming or simply being older or indeed very young, means moving more slowly or differently which can make it harder to negotiate the city.

These are all issues that affect women or can be modelled through the experience of women and girls.

Whilst at first glance gender inclusive design targets the missing 50%. In fact, gender inclusive design also considers differences which can be articulated or modelled through a ‘gendered’ experience and will, in fact, enable many others to participate.

A gender lens can provide, insights into being ‘other’ in the city, because at different times in her life a women will be ‘other’, whether that is other as a sexualised body, other as a mothering or pregnant body, other as a menopausal body or an elderly body or other as a transgender body or other as racialised body or an intersection of these considerations.

Intersectional experiences will mean many women face compounding forms of discrimination. All forms of inequality are mutually reinforcing. Women on low-income, with a disability; single parents, women dealing with racism, trans and homophobia; any women who face multiple challenges have greater struggles and it is often the case that disadvantage is magnetic. Being a single parent, on a low income with an abusive ex-partner; facing racism; dealing with mobility issues may also affect a woman’s mental health, make work challenging, and in turn impact her children if she has them.

Women of colour, may, for example, face greater challenges when reporting to the police and, during a listening workshop at Account 3 in Tower Hamlets, a woman shared her story of an assault and described her hesitancy to report to the police. The decision to pick up the phone and call the police to report a crime is complex for all women. For women of colour there might be additional concerns around trust, around putting themselves in potentially harmful situations and the tacit understanding that they are going to have to interact with systemic racism and misogyny in the police force, even if individual officers are sympathetic or helpful. Women at the ‘Account 3’ listening exercise explained that it is complex for women of colour to report, as she may have already been harmed or let down by the system.

However, whilst this statement is true for the Women at Account 3 it may not be true for all and, of course this is a blanket term again that negates the complexities of class, cultural identities, histories, and heritage.

So this evidence must acknowledge and hold on to our differences. There is a complex ebb and flow



to negotiate and throughout this report the word 'WOMEN' will at once refer to a generalised concept of women but it will also indicate the complexity of that term as it refers to intersectional experience of both gender and sexual identity, race, culture, disability, age, neurodiversity, and lived experience.

WOMEN must navigate a built environment that is spatially and architecturally coded to favour a male experience and they must also navigate the social systems designed to create order in those places, systems also designed for and made by men.

Consider gender inclusive design is to be a model that shapes the borough through the experience of women, girls, and gender diversity, to create a more equal and equitable experience for all people. It is then possible to see that this is a strategy that rebalances streets and public spaces to benefit the majority and seeks to empower women and girls by making space for them. This shift is about changing the conversation and creating better, safer feeling, public realm that everyone can enjoy by improving wellbeing, supporting inclusive community, and driving an agenda of social prosperity.

1.7 Scope: Acting and doing is shaping and making

Conversations about safety and feeling safe are extremely complex and whilst the media sensationalises 'random' assault and plays down partner abuse, the majority of violence against women and girls is unreported and threat on the street is more likely to be experienced through continuous exposure to low-level interactions—commenting, cat-calling, threatening behaviour which continues to exert male dominance and lead to broader cultural acceptance of crimes against women and girls. These are behaviours that urban design can do little to change and as Leslie Kern has often been quoted saying “No amount of Street lighting will abolish the patriarchy” (Feminist City, 2020).

It is therefore important to change the narrative and language around street safety. The fact is whilst the media focuses on women and safety, creating an impression that it is dangerous for women to go out at night, statistics show men and teenage boys face the same risks of random violence. The key defining a link here is men. Whether it is men being violent

to women or men being violent to other men the problem, or question is:

Why are men violent? And how can men be helped to manage their behaviour?

Clearly this question is complex and there are many reasons, from broader cultural and historic acceptance of male violence to upbringing, poverty, and education, however it is time to shift the narrative away from 'Women's Safety' and toward the problem of male violence and abuse of power. This is fundamental and connects all abuse from workplace harassment and bullying, domestic or partner abuse to knife and street crime.

With this in mind, this document takes a much broader scope focusing on the development of 'gender inclusive design' to rebalance inherent inequalities that exist in the built environment and therefore be part of a culture change that empowers women and girls by changing the shape of the built environment. It is felt that whilst much research has focused on identifying specific design interventions that mitigate 'feeling' unsafe at night-time, such as better lighting and street design, limiting the research to a night-time 'defensive' strategy, ignores the opportunity to tackle more inherent and systemic inequalities. **That, instead of focusing on 'designing out' threat, we can instead prioritise 'designing in' what women and girls want and need.**

Allowing women 'in' to the design of the city will develop of more complex and nuanced places which can be socially and economically prosperous, child friendly, healthy, climate resilient and rich in biodiversity and gender inclusive design provides development with a framework or an approach to build more successful and inclusive places.

This approach will be controversial because what women describe as welcoming, challenges 'Secure By Design' and the over- provision of 'pitch' space allotted in parks across the UK. Recommendations made later in this report will seek to rebalance this unequal approach.

Jane Jacobs famously describes the 'sidewalk' as a dance of people moving through their day and the fact that this movement playing out on the street

makes the city, is the city. She is famously quoted from *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (1961) "Think of the city, what comes to mind? The streets." She then goes on to state: "Cities have the capability of providing something for everybody, only because and only when they are created by everybody."

Streets and public places are where everybody can take up space. Where all people are entitled to be. To sit on a bench in the sunshine, walk the canal and take in the scene, window shop, go for a run, take your child to the park, walk home after seeing friends, after school or work.

Public space is where there is interplay. In an age of division and polarity, the streets are where we meet. Where we see each other.

This notion of sharing or co-designing space is current. Simply by using the street, by going to the park, or sitting on a street bench, we are participating in the making and re-making of place. Acting and doing is making and shaping.

How we interact with the streets is, in and of itself, an act of faith in the other humans around us. One principle of gender inclusive design must therefore be to consider how we are included and how we take part in space.

Parks and green spaces have been a key discussion and focal point of all workshops. A theme repeated over and over by women is that groups of teenage boys or young men in smaller parks feel threatening and make parks feel unsafe, particularly if they are taking or dealing drugs. Women and girls then avoid these places meaning the user group is un-balanced, in turn parks get a reputation for being unsafe.

This is an example of how acting and doing is also shaping and making place. It is also a good example of an opportunity where design can help with behaviour change by considering the physical interventions that can be made in a place to encourage a broad range of users.

2. Policy Review

This section of the report sets out the existing policy context regarding gender inclusive design. It includes a review of the policy directly relevant to Tower Hamlets, including national and London policies; policies and evidence from other London boroughs and British local authorities; and international exemplars.

The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) 2023 sets out the objectives and structure of the planning system in England. While the NPPF does not explicitly address gender inclusive design, it does include several references to the need to design for safe and inclusive spaces, including in Chapter 2, where the social objective of sustainable design includes fostering well-designed, beautiful and safe spaces, with accessible services and open spaces that reflect current and future needs and support communities' health, social and cultural well-being.

Chapter 8 provides more detail on planning for healthy and safe communities. It expects planning policies to aim to achieve healthy, inclusive and safe places which:

- a. Promote social interaction, including opportunities for meetings between people who might not otherwise come into contact with each other – for example through mixed-use developments, strong neighbourhood centres, street layouts that allow for easy pedestrian and cycle connections within and between neighbourhoods, and active street frontages;
- b. are safe and accessible, so that crime and disorder, and the fear of crime, do not undermine the quality of life or community cohesion – for example through the use of attractive, well-designed, clear and legible pedestrian and cycle routes, and high quality public space, which encourage the active and continual use of public areas; and
- c. enable and support healthy lifestyles, especially where this would address identified local health and well-being needs – for example through the provision of safe and accessible green infrastructure, sports facilities, local shops, access to healthier food, allotments and layouts that encourage walking and cycling.



Chapter 8 also expects planning policies to:

- a. plan positively for the provision and use of shared spaces, community facilities (such as local shops, meeting places, sports venues, open space, cultural buildings, public houses and places of worship) and other local services to enhance the sustainability of communities and residential environments;
- b. take into account and support the delivery of local strategies to improve health, social and cultural well-being for all sections of the community;
- c. guard against the unnecessary loss of valued facilities and services, particularly where this would reduce the community's ability to meet its day-to-day needs;
- d. ensure that established shops, facilities and services are able to develop and modernise, and are retained for the benefit of the community; and
- e. ensure an integrated approach to considering the location of housing, economic uses and community facilities and services.

Chapter 12 also includes a requirement that planning policies ensure that developments create places that are safe, inclusive and accessible and which promote health and well-being, with a high standard of amenity for existing and future users; where crime and disorder, and the fear of crime, do not undermine the quality of life or community cohesion and resilience.

The London Plan provides strategic planning policies at a regional level, and includes more detailed development management policies. The London Plan forms part of the development plan for Tower Hamlets and is a material consideration in determining planning applications.

London Plan policy D5 supports inclusive design. It expects boroughs, in preparing their development plans, to support the creation of inclusive neighbourhoods by embedding inclusive design, and collaborating with local communities in the development of planning policies that affect them. Policy D5 also expects development proposals to achieve the highest standards of accessible and inclusive design by:

1. being designed taking into account London's diverse population
2. providing high quality people focused spaces that are designed to facilitate social interaction and inclusion
3. being convenient and welcoming with no disabling barriers, providing independent access without undue effort, separation or special treatment
4. being able to be entered, used and exited safely, easily and with dignity for all
5. being designed to incorporate safe and dignified emergency evacuation for all building users.

London Plan policy S6 expects large-scale developments that are open to the public, and large areas of public realm, to provide and secure the future management of:

1. free publicly-accessible toilets suitable for a range of users, including disabled people, families with young children and people of all gender identities; and
2. free 'Changing Places' toilets designed in accordance with the guidance in British Standard BS8300-2:2018.

These should be available during opening hours, or 24 hours a day where accessed from areas of public realm.

London Plan Policy GG1 sets out the principles of building strong and inclusive communities. It requires those involved in planning and development to:

- A. encourage early and inclusive engagement with stakeholders, including local communities, in the development of proposals, policies and area-based strategies
- B. seek to ensure changes to the physical environment to achieve an overall positive contribution to London
- C. provide access to good quality community spaces, services, amenities and infrastructure that accommodate, encourage and strengthen communities, increasing active participation and social integration, and addressing social isolation
- D. Seek to ensure that London continues to generate a wide range of economic and other opportunities, and that everyone is able to benefit from these to ensure that London is a fairer, more inclusive and more equal city
- E. ensure that streets and public spaces are consistently planned for people to move around and spend time in comfort and safety, creating places where everyone is welcome, which foster a sense of belonging, which encourage community buy-in, and where communities can develop and thrive
- F. promote the crucial role town centres have in the social, civic, cultural and economic lives of Londoners, and plan for places that provide important opportunities for building relationships during the daytime, evening and night time



- G. ensure that new buildings and the spaces they create are designed to reinforce or enhance the identity, legibility, permeability, and inclusivity of neighbourhoods, and are resilient and adaptable to changing community requirements
- H. support and promote the creation of a London where all Londoners, including children and young people, older people, disabled people, and people with young children, as well as people with other protected characteristics, can move around with ease and enjoy the opportunities the city provides, creating a welcoming environment that everyone can use confidently, independently, and with choice and dignity, avoiding separation or segregation
- I. support and promote the creation of an inclusive London where all Londoners, regardless of their age, disability, gender, gender identity, marital status, religion, race, sexual orientation, social class, or whether they are pregnant or have children, can share in its prosperity, culture and community, minimising the barriers, challenged and inequalities they face.

London Plan policy D8 provides details regarding the design of public realm. It includes an expectation that development plans should ensure the public realm is well-designed, safe, accessible, inclusive, attractive, well-connected, related to the local and historic context, and easy to understand, service and maintain. Landscape treatment should be of good quality, fit-for-purpose, durable and sustainable. Lighting, including for advertisements, should be carefully considered and well-designed in order to minimise intrusive lighting infrastructure and reduce light pollution.

As part of the establishment of the Mayor's Design Advocates programme, the GLA published a guidance document on safety in public spaces for women and girls. It provides a framework for the consideration of gender issues as part of the assessment of the design of a project. It encourages stakeholders to consider the following questions:

- Is project leadership addressing exclusion?
- Is the project team gender informed and diverse?
- Is the project budget appropriate?
- Are you practicing inclusive engagement?
- Is your data collection process adopting inclusivity principles?



- Are you adopting genuine co-design with women, girls and gender diverse people?
- Are your design features gender-informed?
- Are you considering diversity and inclusion issues beyond the site boundary?
- Are appropriate policies and strategies in place to support women's safety in the longer term?
- Is there an agreed approach to continuing community programming in the space?
- Directing pedestrians to particular, well-lit routes at night;
- Improving the visibility of bridges, providing different route options, and introducing human-scale lighting;
- Specific interventions on isolated routes, particularly the Greenway, to make them more welcoming;
- Longer-term planning for safe routes;
- Develop a site wide strategy for biodiversity that takes into account the need to address dark areas.

The London Legacy Development Corporation (LLDC) was established to deliver large scale redevelopment in and around the Olympic Park in East London. The LLDC acts as the local planning authority for an area that includes parts of four London boroughs including Tower Hamlets. In May 2022, the LLDC commissioned a study that looked at how public realm interventions could enhance safety and feelings of safety for women and girls. The study recommended a number of actions, including:

The LLDC study was based on extensive engagement with women, girls and gender diverse people in the LLDC area and more widely. It will inform the management of the Olympic Park and public realm interventions, and can serve as evidence for policies within the boroughs that will take over planning powers from the LLDC in 2024.

In 2018, the City of London Corporation commissioned a lighting strategy to inform the design of street and other lighting, as well as planning policies and other local authority policies. It includes a number of recommendations, including avoiding overly bright lighting that creates areas of high contrast, using integrated lighting to illuminate changes of level, and prioritising lighting for pedestrians and cyclists. It also recommends that planning policies require a detailed lighting strategy to be provided for planning applications at the pre-application stage.

UN Habitat is an agency of the United Nations that focuses on policies and research in the built environment field. In 2012 UN Habitat published a guidance document to support gender issues in urban planning and design. Its focus is on gender mainstreaming in decision-making around urban issues. It encourages stakeholders to undergo training and workshops on gender-sensitive urban planning, gender-based violence and gendered dimensions in access to housing and other essential infrastructure and services. This guidance document is focused on the process of decision-making and does not recommend any specific design interventions or planning policies.

As part of the planning of a major urban extension in the 1990s and 2000s, the city government of Vienna developed a process for gender mainstreaming in the planning process. The process was led by the city's women's office, and initially only female architects were invited to submit proposals. The development was focused on how women were using the city, including prioritising shorter journeys and the pedestrian experience between public transport and the front door. The principles of this initial development were then incorporated into a more comprehensive plan for the city, with gender-mainstreaming incorporated into public realm and new development design in existing parts of the city

3. Methodology

Co-designing research with Women and Girls in Tower Hamlets: Or how to do justice to the multiplicity of voices and experiences in the borough, and how to respond to them.

This evidence base has gathered a unique set of insights about gendered use and perceptions of public space. The report uses what we have learned from our listening exercise to formulate recommendations about how to better include women and girls in streets and public spaces. The research will be impactful both in terms of recognising specific local issues and helping to mainstream gender in future planning decisions .

For this evidence base to be of value it is imperative that it is co-designed by women and girls that live in the borough. The voices of residents have been key to shaping the conceptual scope of this document. Their experiences have been drawn together to find points of consensus from which to design principles and shape project themes and recommendations.

To date the research has comprised of:

- 40 street Interviews with Women and Girls across the borough
- 81 attendees at the LBTH Women's Network consultation
- 102 women, girls and non binary people attending digital walks with the community safety team.
- 60 women attending a women's safety event at Account 3
- 60 participants at the listening workshop, Queen Mary University
- 100 people from diverse backgrounds completing an online survey.

In total the research, so far, draws on direct input from 440 women, girls and non-binary people from diverse racial and cultural backgrounds.

Phase two of the project will test specific ideas through micro- projects and design workshops. A 'How To' guide will be produced with a focus on implementation and delivery.

The evidence base for this report has focused on gathering data in Tower Hamlets. The approach to research is generative and starts from a point of wishing to learn from participants, as opposed to testing and re-testing a specific question. This approach is situated in a field of analysis called Grounded Theory, a methodology for conducting qualitative research that creates theory- or in this case design recommendations, projects, and plans, through the generative process of gathering data, reflection, testing, re-gathering. Projects emerge from the synthesizing of analysis to conceptual theory, design themes, principles, and project outcomes.

This approach to creating design principles is grounded in design thinking, an approach to problem solving founded through the cognitive, strategic, and practical approaches to problem-solving used in the practice of design. This follows a similar route of gathering, testing, ideating, re-testing and to find answers that are human centred.

The engagement process started from a position of 'not knowing', setting out to ask questions, gather insights and learn from the shared, collective and intersectional experiences of women and girls in Tower Hamlets.

Outline of the design process

1. Making a broad range of street recordings.
2. Reflection and synthesis- looking for repeated themes, shared experience, and points of consensus.
3. Testing initial themes with women at the Tower Hamlets Women's Network (80 attendees) and in person event at the Brady Arts Centre where attendees were invited to listen to themes and respond.
4. Learning from this session to write an online survey for Let's Talk.
5. Womens safety walks, collaboration with the Community Safety Team
6. Listening exercise at Account 3, an organisation working with women and girls from diverse communities in Bethnal Green.
7. Synthesising results to create themes/ principles and design projects.
8. Producing an interim report.
9. To follow- final version of interim report
10. Engagement and testing phase.
11. Final report.
12. 'How to ' guide to delivery and implementation.



Audio street recordings

In January 2023 recorded 40 street interviews with women across Tower Hamlets. Key recording spots were Spitalfields Market, Regent Canal and Victoria Park, Poplar High Street, Limehouse Basin, behind Mulberry Place, Fish Island, Whitechapel High Street and Commercial Road, Toynbee Hall Gardens, Brick Lane area, Bangla Town and Globe Town.

Street recordings are a way to quickly map out the key themes and understand a range of perspectives. They enable the interviewer to engage directly with people on the street. This approach cuts out lengthy recruitment process, saves inconveniencing people and enables the interviewer to ensure a broad social/ cultural/ generational mix of interviewee.

The audio recordings are a practice of deep listening. It uses a universal starting question, in this case 'How do you feel about the streets and public spaces in Tower Hamlets' and then leaves spaces for the participant to direct the response and the rest of the interview. The interviewer will then converse freely from within the context set by the interviewee, responding to points made by the participant, for example, "Can you tell me more about that park? Can you tell me more about your walk home from the tube at night?"



This practice of deep listening establishes a 'fair exchange' with participant by ensuring they feel deeply heard, acknowledged and assured that their voice will make a valuable contribution to effecting positive change. The interviews lasted between 10 minutes and 35 minutes.

The audio interviews are edited to short clips in which the participant makes a specific point. Over the course of editing all of the interviews in this manner the researcher is able to build points of consensus and find common threads and themes.

The limitations of this approach are that I am an English speaking, middle aged, white woman and therefore embody institutional inequality, to an extent. I was only prepared to conduct interviews in places where I was visible on the street and felt safe. Whilst I was able to engage with women living across the borough, a number of women did not want to speak because they felt their English was poor.

Audio Interviews can be heard [here](#)

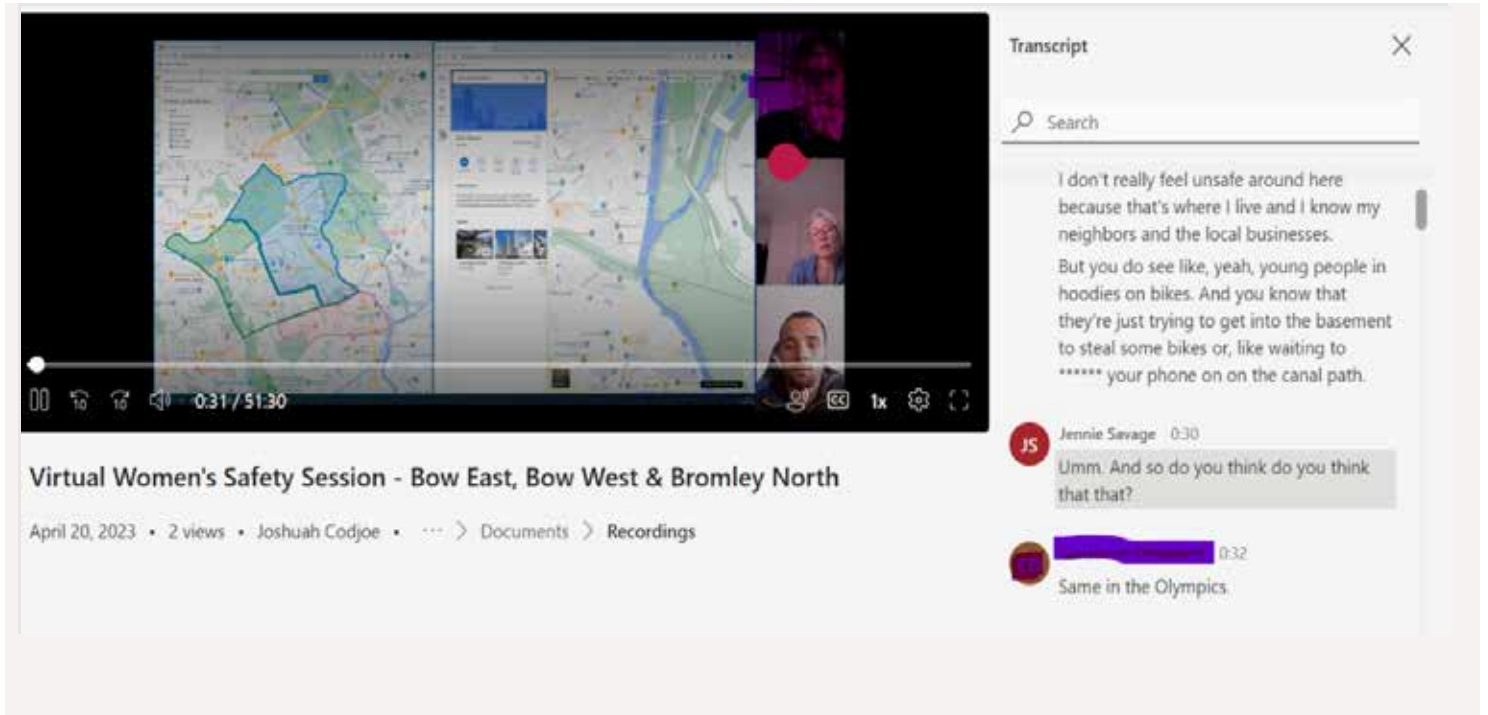
Consultation & Engagement, Women's Network event

The event was at the Brady Arts Centre, organised by the Tower Hamlets Women's Network and bought together, primarily women, and some male colleagues from across the council.

The event was set up to test emerging initial themes.

Worksheets, based on the initial scoping work and audio interviews asked participants to comment and expand on the themes. Participants worked in groups to complete the worksheets. After an introduction to the project and an outline of key themes, participants broke into groups and were asked to discuss, share ideas and experiences. At the end of the session the groups fed back thoughts to the room and there was a general discussion.

80 attendees.



'Women's Safety Walks', A collaboration between the Community Safety Team & Plan Making Team

The 'Women's Safety Walks' are an innovative collaboration between the Community Safety Team and the Plan Making Team.

The sessions were held online and participants could join anonymously if they wished.

Google Street View was used to talk about the places where participants live, regular walks and the local area.

During these sessions people talked about preferred routes and explained what they were attracted to. They also identified hot spots and tricky areas, explaining why they chose to avoid these places.

The purpose of these sessions was to create a safe space for women to talk to the Community Safety Team and report their concerns. The Community Safety Team were then able to action any issues in a swift and timely manner and participants were able to see the issues they had raised taken seriously.

The digital walks provided the Plan Making Team with a new data set, focusing solely on women's experience. The meetings revealed both 'threat' typologies – the kinds of places that feel unsafe and the strategies that women adopt to mitigate feeling unsafe.

There were 24 sessions which were advertised extensively by the community safety team with a special event run for NHS staff working at the Royal London and an event run with ELOP and LGTB+ charity working in the borough.

102 participants



Account 3 meeting

Account 3 was established in 1991 in Bethnal Green, an area of East London which is home to socially and economically excluded minority groups from across the globe. Account 3's overall driver is gender equality and economic independence for women with reference to women facing multiple disadvantages.

The community Safety Team/Plan making team worked with women at Account 3 to represent the experiences of women from culturally diverse backgrounds, through an in-person listening event. The aim of this session was to connect to any women who had been unable to join the digital walks and was important as we were able to hear intersectional experiences of women from the borough.

51 attendees

Let's talk: Online Survey

The 'Let's Talk' platform was used to share a survey which has 103 responses from a broad demographic across the borough.

The survey consolidated learning from all the previous engagement activity and created a feedback loop to test emerging themes and principles.

102 surveys completed

Summary of Research

A variety of approaches were adopted to listen to the experiences of women and girls from, a range of ages, educational, social, and cultural backgrounds. Varying the research tools provided insight into the lived experience, aspirations and challenges of women and girls living in Tower Hamlets. The engagement was designed with specific barriers that women might face in mind – for example, time limitations in the evening, the need for flexible engagement, inclusive space to speak about gender specific issues etc.

Approaches to gathering research were generative. Each stage provided an opportunity to stop, reflect, draw together, and understand what had been learned, what further questions needed to be asked, what theories needed to be tested and necessary next steps.

The research process was open to anyone who identified as a woman. Broadly speaking the research has achieved a strong and representative cultural and class mix. Interaction with the gender and sexual identities have been led by ELOP a LGBTQIA+ group who collaborated with LBTH.



This is for the Majority

Gender inclusive design – creating a safe, inclusive and restorative borough

4. Vision

A Vision for Gender Inclusive Design in London Borough of Tower Hamlets

**Welcoming borough:
Empowering and educating.**



**Inclusive borough: Enabling
individuals and strengthening
community.**



**Restorative borough:
Prioritising health and ecology**



5. Themes and recommendations

Design Themes



1. Welcoming Borough

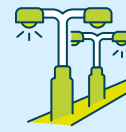
5.1.1
Women are not
scared of the dark
34



5.1.2
Constant, low
level threat
39



5.1.3
Lighting
43



5.1.4
Design and
maintenance
44



5.1.5
Infrastructure
47



5.1.6
Busy Roads
50



5.1.7
Wayfinding and
signage
53



2. Inclusive Borough

5.2.1
Valuing the local:
strengthening
community
55



5.2.2
High Streets and
shopping areas
60



5.2.3
Communicating a
sense of place
63



5.2.4
Acting and doing
is shaping and
making
64



5.2.5
Industry Diversity
Is Vital
66



5.2.6
Co-designing with
communities
68



3. Restorative Places



5.3.1
Green spaces are
social spaces
70



5.3.2
Levelling up parks
71



5.3.3
Benches are not
the problem
76



5.3.4
Plants and
flowers, trees and
green streets:
Bio Diversity is
restorative.
82



5.3.5
Play parks are also
social space
86



5.3.6
The green grid
89



5.3.7
Walking is a social
space
92



5.3.8
Active travel-
walking, running,
cycling and
exercise after dark
94





5.1 Welcoming Borough



5.1.1 Women are not scared of the dark

“ With the news stories recently, going for a run at night. It gets so dark in winter the idea of exercising outside is not available. I'm lucky to be able to cycle to work at 2 in the afternoon. If I had to get work early in winter, when it's still dark, No I couldn't do it. If I had to cycle home late I couldn't do that. It's not about whether I am wearing enough reflective clothing, it is about how unsafe the streets can be. I am lucky that I am married I am not often walking about late at night on my own in London. I feel safest late at night on the tube, that is one of the ways to feel safe because there are people around.

[Audio transcript](#)

“ On Canning Town High Street there have been children who have been attacked and killed. That is gang and school violence. It is very sad and I feel awful for them, but that doesn't make me feel unsafe, because I am not part of it. But things like Sarah Everard do make me think twice, because it was so random.

[Audio transcript](#)

These quotes are taken from the audio street interviews, where women and girls were stopped on the street and asked to describe how they felt when out and about, using streets and public spaces in Tower Hamlets. Discussions about safety were frequent but depended on context, for example when women with children talked about safety it was with regard to busy roads, fears about exposure to pollution and the stress they felt when walking children to school along busy streets. These conversations and others like them reflected the complexity of talking about safety and the fact that one person's safe street- which is busy and well- lit, is another's stressful after school, winter commute.

One interviewee described her time as a student in Leeds and how she would frequently walk home at night alone or walk through parks after dark. She reflected that this was 'risky behaviour' and that she would not do this now, in London. This was an interesting conversation, as Leeds is also a big city, however the woman seemed to reflect on her past self with judgement, as though she had been naive and stupid to take such risks, and that she was 'lucky', nothing had happened.

These quotes raise several questions about how perceptions of safety are transmitted locally, how our behaviour is affected by context and the fact that time and time again the focus is on the behaviour of women and their responsibility to stay safe. Clearly between leaving Leeds and moving to London, this young woman adopted the view that she is responsible for keeping herself safe- which given our culture and the current context is sensible, but that she must also take responsibility for the unpredictable behaviour of the 'unknown other'. Again, a reality for most women.

During the digital walks participants told us that they feel least safe outside their building. Arriving home, getting keys out, entering their building was the place where women felt exposed because it was the threshold between leaving the outdoors and arriving home. Several women talked about getting to know shops and restaurants locally as this assured them that they could get help. (Digital walks)

During the audio recording a number of women talked about exercising at night and wishing to have the agency to go for a run after work, but feeling this was risky after dark.

There is a difference between feeling safe and being safe. It has been established in previous chapters that statistically crimes and violence against women, girls and gender diverse people are most often perpetrated by people known to them with 5% of serious crime being perpetrated by strangers (ONS 2022) and the majority of crime being committed by partners, ex partners or family members.

However women, girls, and gender diverse people are constantly negotiating the world under the scrutiny and power of the male gaze. This means that women, girls, and gender diverse people are aware of male power and in turn the potential threat of unpredictable behaviour. Living with threat is oppressive and women and girls carry a greater daily burden of dealing with sexism and misogyny on the street. An acceptance of this 'low level' threat leads to broader acceptance within our culture of crimes such as domestic abuse, rape and murder.

Looking at the statistics may provide comfort however knowing the statistics provides little reassurance when walking home in the dark and having a stranger walk closely behind or passing a group of men that stare and make comments.

These are the contradictions women, girls and gender diverse people must negotiate. Design cannot mitigate the actions of a man with malicious intent. It can make day-to-day life easier and help a place feel safer through the design of welcoming streets and public spaces.

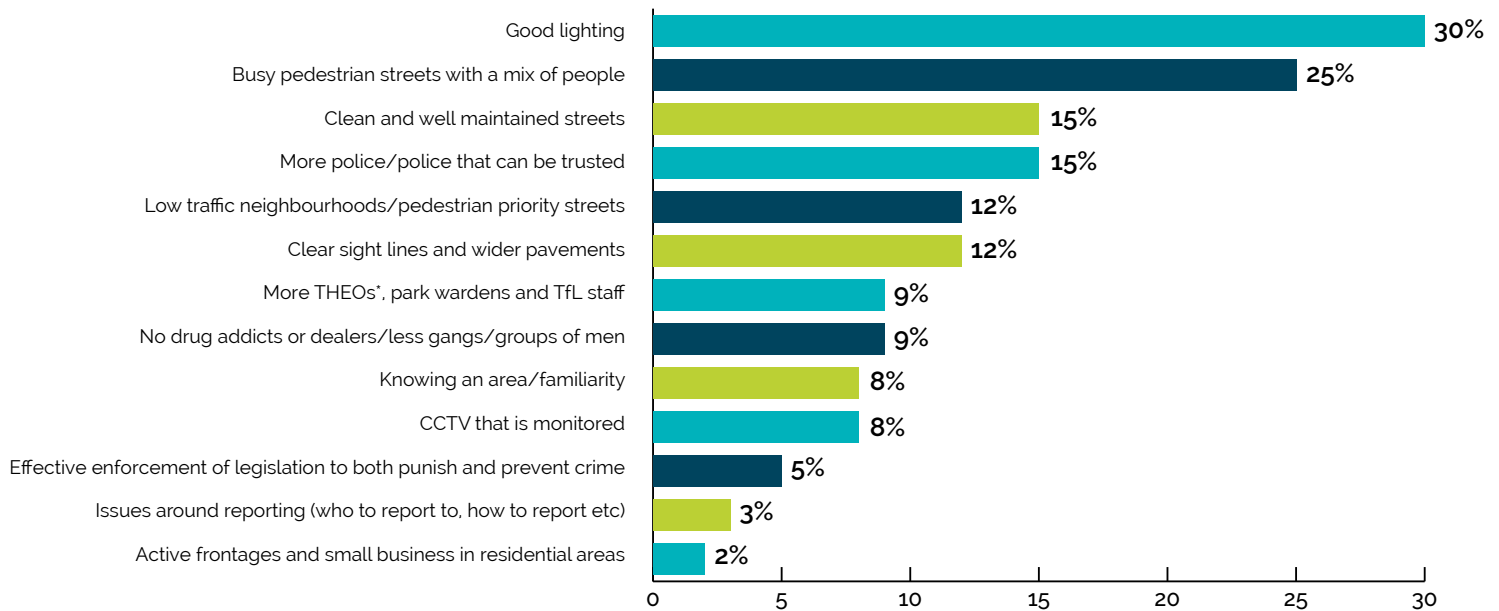
The 'let's talk' survey asked women 'Do you mind walking in Tower Hamlets after Dark?' Responses to this question were varied. They included comments about car drivers behaving more dangerously at night, through to respondents disclosing that they had been assaulted, but still liked to walk at night.

Figure 1: Do you mind walking in Tower Hamlets after dark?



Of the above 10% Disclosed assault/ harassment as part of their answer.

Figure 2: What strengthens feelings of safety for you?



• Tower Hamlets Enforcement Officer

Summary

Public space is contradictory. Women, girls, and gender diverse people are navigating streets, public spaces and transport systems whilst being in a woman's body which means living with the abject, additional demands of biology (periods, pregnancy, breastfeeding, menopause) and/or at the same time potentially avoiding unwanted attention and the gaze of others, being aware of how to position that body in space to avoid attention or confrontation, being cat called (objectified), or simply not wanting to travel, with a pushchair, in a lift that somebody else has used as a toilet.

There is a world weariness when women talk about safety.

The women that have participated in the research for this report say they feel both safe and unsafe in Tower Hamlets. They are not, in the main, living in fear. They are carrying the burden of living in a system that is not designed by or for them, having been bought up in a culture that anticipates male violence and perpetuates the idea that we should fear the 'faceless stranger' hiding in the dark.

Women and girls manage the potential of threat at a subconscious level, knowing that should something 'happen' they are unlikely to be supported by the police and should not expect justice.

What emerged most clearly from this research is that serious assault, sexual assault, stalking and homicide should not be grouped under the same banner as cat calling, staring, and other anti-social behaviour that is maddening and diminishes women. That the former must be effectively tackled by police and judicial systems that take assault of women seriously. And understanding that by accepting this low-level misogyny to persist unchecked, we are enabling a culture that is permissive of worse crimes.

The latter, day-to-day casual misogyny that women encounter through contact with strangers on the street, can and must, be tackled by instigating a culture change and it is here that design can play a role in supporting change.

One of the questions the survey asked is whether a respondent felt that 'victim blaming' played a role in their decision to take a specific route. It was interesting to note that younger respondents stated that fear of victim blaming did shape their response to walking in the city, whereas women over 35 were generally perplexed, some even outraged, by the suggestion.

This could be read in a number of ways, and it perhaps reflects the more general 'shaming' of young women and therefore broader 'controls' placed on their behaviour. These responses highlight fundamental and systemic sexism and broader controls subconsciously or otherwise, imposed on the behaviour of younger women to mitigate the behaviour of men. It underlines the importance of changing cultures around male behaviour. (Let's Talk Survey)

It may also be useful to raise a question about the language that is being used around projects like this one. Where there is a focus on 'women's safety,' words like 'fear' and 'protection' and 'victim' are being used frequently. It is important to evaluate this language and question whether even framing this work in this way is perpetuating a control of women. This language is neither empowering nor does it hold men to account. These are catch-all terms that address domestic abuse, workplace harassment and street violence and all the other myriad ways that men abuse their power or indeed manage their feelings of powerlessness, because it is of course moments when they lose control, don't get what they want or can't understand their feelings, that men turn to violent, abusive and controlling behaviours. It may be better to consider 'the problem of men's violence' or the 'difficulty men have managing their feelings'.

Recommendations

1. Consider the language that LBTH uses to talk about women's safety. Create a borough wide policy to shift language and terms towards moderating the behaviour of men.



2. Use the term 'welcoming' instead of safety. We will create welcoming public spaces rather than 'safer' public space.



3. Co-create signage for parks and public spaces to indicate acceptable shared behaviour.



4. Raise the profile of women in LBTH by naming new streets, buildings and public spaces after women that have shaped the area.



5. Commission new public artworks by women.



6. Design is a language, from the fine detail to the big picture. LBTH should consider design that empowers women, girls, and gender diversity.

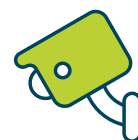


7. Focus on educating people and asking the question, why are men violent?





5.1.2 Constant, low level threat



The greatest impact on women's feeling of safety is managing constant low-level threat and maintaining awareness as they navigate the city. This is true both at night and by day.

Women reported that the things that make them feel unsafe are encountering drug dealing and drug taking, high levels of homelessness and drunken behaviour, groups of young men gathering on pavements, staring, commenting and crimes such as phone theft, ASB including people smoking cannabis, taking nitrous oxide, and street drinking.

These interactions do not pose a direct threat, however they are unwanted and navigating around this activity feels uncomfortable and threatening. It makes an area seem unsafe.

Women are not scared of the dark. In fact they are not, in the main, scared. They are burdened. There is a difference.

Walking down a dark street, late at night, alone, with a suspicion that somebody might be following you, is terrifying. (Digital walks)

This is not an everyday reality for most women and the majority of men do not pose a direct threat.

Women manage low level threat and fear by drawing on their network for support. They text a friend to say they are home, they walk and talk on the phone, and choose routes that are well known and punctuated by community- for example, knowing the security guard in the local shop, passing a friend's house or staffed tube station. Consciously or unconsciously clocking points of potential contact. (Digital walks)

Women also walk at night for pleasure. There is a freedom to navigating the city by night and walking quiet streets. It is important to acknowledge and give voice to the women who actively enjoy a stroll after dark, choose to walk home after a night shift or enjoy a walk back from the pub. These women are not stupid. They are not taking risks. They are simply walking in the city at night. (Let's talk survey and Street Recordings)

However many women talked about the level of burden they carry whilst dealing with the behaviour of men. (Digital walks)

This could be the equivalent of an almost full jug of water below a dripping tap. That the greater reality is managing risk and carrying the awareness of that risk. It is the constancy of encounter with drug dealers, with litter, with graffiti, nitrous oxide canisters, of walking around groups of men drinking on the street, or inconsiderate groups of men dominating the parks, staring, commenting, of feeling lost but not wanting to look at a phone in case it gets snatched, of wondering why the light outside your house has been out for five years, of stopping people tailgating you into your block or dealing class A drugs in the alleyway behind your place of work or stepping over the homeless person blocking the way into your child's nursery or walking your 12 year old daughter to school because there is a weird man that hangs around outside and the police won't move him on. (collated from digital walks, audio recordings, 1:1 interview John Fortune & public meetings at account 3)

Managing this constant interaction with a 'man's world' weigh far more heavily on women and girls and it is the combination of all of these things contribute to a generalised feeling of stress, which is replaced by fear in moments when any one of these generalised threats becomes specific or amplified.

Women are not scared of the dark they are stressed and fed up. They just want to be able to go for a walk without some man commenting on what they are doing, or making some helpful suggestion or other about how she could do it better. These intrusions are maddening and although they do not pose a threat, they reiterate the fact that men believe they have the right to pass judgement and comment. That they believe in their own power.

The majority of participants have stated clearly that seeing other women and girls and experiencing a sense of community strengthens feelings of safety. Witnessing people being friendly to each other on the streets is a key indicator of safety. When women are unfamiliar with a place, they will conduct a dynamic risk assessment looking at whether the area is maintained, seeing whether people are friendly to each other, seeing how green a street is, is there litter? Who is around and where the exits are.

Crucially from a design perspective key themes that have emerged around the design of streets. These responses predominantly show that good street design cultivates feelings of safety and that a welcoming 'community' feel is achieved by a combination of - low traffic, busy pedestrian streets with a diversity of people, inter- generational mix, street activity, pedestrian priority streets with low or no car use, streets that are green with street trees and planting, streets that are clean, well maintained; are the places that feel most safe.

Participants in the digital walks agreed that diversity of people on the streets, busy streets, wide pavements, street trees and well-maintained streets, parks and public spaces, made places feel welcoming and pleasant. They also talked about the value of devolving some power and focusing hyper local governance around parks and green spaces, that a local group were able to manage and make some decisions there was less ASB, higher levels of community participation and strengthening of social infrastructure. That enabling greater local ownership was of benefit to local communities, making places feel better.

This notion of local ownership was discussed both in relation to places, parks, gardens, areas along the canal, but also in relation to events; street closures for parties and festivals, party in park, carnivals and performance of theatre, dance, art or music. That enabling people to put on local events and be the creators of culture strengthened community, was empowering and by giving ownership, cut down levels of fear.

Summary

Women and girls have reported that they are navigating constant low-level threat and evaluating risk. It is sensible for anyone in a busy city to be aware and street smart, however women experience this low-level threat as stress and burden and they remain vigilant.

A focus on strengthening community and inclusion through design of welcoming streets, parks, and public spaces, enabling community, keeping streets well maintained and nurturing green networks, carving out low traffic areas, will build feelings of safety.

Streets and public spaces that have a combination of these elements feel welcoming and pleasant. Places where people feel a sense of ownership, where they can influence hyper local decision making, put plans into action, act within a community have strengthened sense of place and feel more welcoming and pleasant.

This is enabling and it also means that people who choose to can get involved in projects in their area this could be around (for example) gardening, the arts, activities for children, young people, health and wildlife promotion and conservation.

Recommendations

- A combination of design interventions make an area feel pleasant and welcoming. These include widening pavements, planting street trees and plants, maintenance, wayfinding, benches, and bins. Ensuring there is passive surveillance via street level activity such as cafes and shops with active frontages and street engagement.
- Avoid streets that feel closed, with poor visibility, narrow pavements, shuttered windows, 'backs' of property facing onto a street or alleyway.
- Encourage hyper local governance of parks and gardens, encourage community involvement and participation and include budgeting for gardeners and wardens for three years after a schemes completion.
- Facilitate events and enable community activity through arts, culture and events.
- Enable public participation in the organisation of their local area by providing guidance on local governance, for example how to close a road for a street party or organise a party on bank holiday.
- Give 'in kind' support to activity by making shared resources accessible.
- Support applications by community groups for funding by offering support in kind.
- Also see recommendations on co-design.



5.1.3 Lighting

“ The experience of other people makes me wary and think that could happen to me. If it has happened once, it could happen again. It could easily be me. I think it is down these little alleys there is no one around a lot of the time. I mean you can run, but if there is no one around to help... And maybe more lighting and police presence. It's a funny area around here. There is a lot of big buildings and big business, but there are a lot of junkies... and that makes you feel unsafe, they ask you for money. That adds to the unsafeness. You don't want to get your purse out and it be a trap. But also, its because you don't want to be approached in the first place.

Audio Transcript

“ I live in Old Street, when I am walking home it is really dark around there. I think it is important the streets are well lit.

Audio Transcript

“ I think about lighting, although you don't want everything to be hideously lit up, that is the alternative. Iron gardens where I work, is not well lit and there is a high hedge and you have to walk past it. Actually, it is a really high hedge, when you walk past you think anyone could be hiding behind there. I don't think I have changed in my view, thirty years ago I felt the same, you always have to be careful, you need to be aware, you always need to feel cautious.

Audio Transcript



30% of people that responded to the survey stated that good lighting makes places feel safe after dark. In the street interviews there were many references to lighting and the importance of improved lighting was stated as an important issue.

Later in the survey respondents were asked to weigh the value of lighting against the importance of dark skies to human sleep patterns and biodiversity.

The responses to this question showed lighting as a more complex issue with answers ranging from the suggestion that Londoners wear sleep masks, through to considering areas and situations where different approaches could be taken to lighting. These included consideration of the types of lighting through to locations where it would be good to have bright light or to keep lighting to a low level and indeed the times lights might switch off.

The question of walking through parks and along the canal or exercising after dark was addressed throughout all the engagement events. Again, this was something that divided people. Some women advocated for the closure of parks and canals after dark, saying that this was safest option, whilst others

felt their freedom was being limited by not being able to run in the park at night. Lighting was seen as key to making this possible. Many people talked about the need to illuminate cycle lanes or cycle pathways after dark whilst others felt lighting should be approached from the perspective of biodiversity and night skies.

Lighting was also discussed during the digital walks and workshop at Account 3. People told us that arriving home can be the most stressful part of a journey because it was a moment to stop and pause, perhaps search for keys in a bag in a spot that may be poorly lit. The transition from the public space of the street to a private residence being a moment of potential exposure. Women of the digital walks talked about being tailgated into their block. Women stated that good lighting and visibility at the entrance of blocks would make arriving home less stressful.

Summary

Lighting is the go-to solution to women's safety. However, under closer scrutiny it becomes a much more complex issue. This complexity is acknowledged by respondents to the Let's Talk Survey and on the digital walks.

Guidance on lighting should be considered in relation to specific development schemes and domestic contexts, for example how to illuminate entrances and exits to homes, how to light areas around bins and cycle stores and ensure that any temporary routes around developments feel safe.

Further consideration should then be given to streets and public spaces, parks, and walkways. With specific focus on safety around the entrance/exit to buildings and ensuring good visibility around doorways, whilst also maintaining privacy- a healthy contradiction!

Recommendations

- Commission a lighting design code. This should consider lighting as a design element, the ways that lighting can shape and enhance areas after dark, create social spaces and discourage anti-social behaviour.
- As part of this design code LBTH should conduct a survey of current lighting provision, identify gaps and areas for improvement.
- Implement these findings and ensure any new development adheres to lighting strategy.
- Ensure that entrances into apartment blocks are well lit, they feel safe to enter and exit. Also consider rear entrances, entrances and exits into parking areas and around new development.
- Ensure good visibility and passive surveillance common areas and around entrances and exits to buildings.
- The decision to light or lock parks should be made on a case by case basis considering the specifics of that park.
- Clear post occupancy guidance on maintenance of grounds and in particular lighting.



5.1.4 Design and maintenance



At the Women's Network event, participants told us that looked after places feel safer. The following comments were noted by women who explained that seeing heavily littered areas, unemptied bins, graffiti meant they would feel uneasy and be on their guard in that place.

Whereas well looked after green spaces and maintained areas with working streetlights and a pleasant atmosphere all add up to an area feeling safe.

In turn, busy places with a good intergenerational mix are described as 'safe'.

Therefore, ensuring a place is clean and well maintained will encourage users, which will encourage more users and in turn deter littering and ASB. This is generative and self-perpetuating.

At the Women's Network event participants stated:

“ I live in a nice part of LBTH in a private society who have their own cleaner. But when I go out, I do see a lot of litter. I don't know if that is because of the council or because of the people. I saw somebody dropping litter today, but I didn't feel comfortable to say anything. Cleaner streets make you feel safer.

Audio Transcript

“ Not a single lift on the DLR is clean, so even though I have an ACL injury and I'm advised to take the elevator, I prefer taking the stairs because I feel better (complains about smell of urine in lift). I am wondering how women with children, pregnant women, or the elderly would be experiencing this. I don't think this area is good for elderly people as there is so much walking to do and too many stair climbing. My society is really nice but it is a difficult to navigate. The elderly or the disabled experience would not be great.

Audio Transcript

Looked after environments encourage feelings of safety.

Small green areas/ gardens and looked after green areas feel safer.

Routes and social spaces need to be clean.

Looked after environments encourage feelings of safety.

Spaces that are maintained and monitored feel safe

Freedom to use alley ways that are free from litter, graffiti and well lit.

Looked after environments encourage feeling safe, rather than run-down areas – might attract people you feel less safe around.

These comments from the Women's Network event are strongly echoed in the Let's talk survey.

A key learning that emerged from the networking event was that women experience Tower Hamlets

in a non-linear way. That is, as they walk from, say home to work, they are having to navigate not only a physical geography but also a patchwork of extremes as they pass through dilapidated high street areas, new developments that are 'looked after' but feel empty and isolated, pass by areas that feel unsafe or where they feel they 'shouldn't' be.

There were many comments made about the lack of joined up experience over any one journey. And that this disparity made the extremes of poverty and wealth even more stark. Comments suggested that a greater coherence and harmony between places would integrate the transition between, for example, a new development and a local high street. Addressing these issues would be sense making for the communities who live there and level out the visible and sometimes stark polarities.

A number of women joined the digital walks calls and raised a different kind of issue about care and cared for places. These people were living in new developments, places, which to the outsider look cared for. However, they described the ways in which lack of community and a sense of emptiness contributed to a sense of isolation. Some of the issues raised were about the lack of inhabited flats due to properties bought for investment or as Airbnb, which contributed to a feeling of transience. However the knock-on effect of this is that ground floor shops, cafés and restaurants, active frontages, have closed down as there is not enough general footfall to keep businesses open.

Women on the calls reported that their area had become a target for low level crime and that they were aware of being 'tailgated' into the building, of buggies and bikes being stolen and feeling unsafe walking around the development with ASB such as street drinking and cat calling, adding to a feeling of threat.


It is therefore important to acknowledge that 'care' and 'cared for' spaces are crucially about signs of human intervention.

The 'dodgy' high street, that feels rough and run down feels excluding with a sense of dilapidation adding to low level threat, and equally the over-designed, over-coiffured space feels exclusive and excluding. That this is also read as threat.

Both places make women feel out of place and ill at ease.

Both accentuate polarities in wealth and advantage, and this adds to a general feeling of imbalance and mistrust of the other.

Levelling up the experience of public space and creating a more even flow across the borough would add to the creation of more coherent places and accentuate feeling of community and feelings of safety. This would include levelling up areas that are currently under resourced, creating greater porosity across and through new developments and utilising ground floor spaces for community infrastructure, for example childcare, gyms, community spaces, youth groups etc. (comments from women's networking event)

 **It is important to protect local independent retail shops and community services such as laundrettes, corner shops and food shops in residential streets. Seeing a shop light and a known storekeeper definitely puts me at ease. A trades people in workshops makes walking around my neighbourhood pleasant and safe. The council can do more to make sure rent increases do not displace them.**

Let's Talk Survey

Summary

Well maintained areas signal that there are people around who are responsible and who care. Well maintained places evidence human infrastructures of care and therefore care over other people. They are a sign of respect.

When applied to streets and walkways women are reading levels of care and maintenance and weighing them against the care that others will show them.

Deprived, uncared for streets feel hostile as do uninhabited, isolated new developments both extremes feel unsafe because they are empty of people.

Seeing other people, a good intergenerational mix from a diversity of cultural backgrounds, makes a place feel safe.

Levelling up areas that are deprived and integrating developments that feel hostile will create a more coherent experience and help to make streets feel safer.

Participants on the digital walks, the audio recordings and Let's Talk survey, noted that green streets with street trees and diversity of planting contributed to a greater feeling of care and made streets feel safer.

Recommendations

- Connected walking routes ensure an 'even' experience between areas. Avoid creating situations where new developments sit in stark contrast to high streets. Prioritise flow and create shared community infrastructures to avoid polarity.
- Use CIL and Section 106 funding to develop whole community infrastructure.
- Ensure new developments are porous and connect to existing streets and pathways.
- Avoid dead ends, narrow walkways and ensure good visibility/ entrances and exits.
- Use wide pavements to avoid close encounter and enable safe passage for buggies and wheelchairs.
- Encourage community usage to encourage footfall and ensure a diversity of people on the streets.
- Ensure new developments become communities by privileging the development of housing for owner occupiers, rather than remaining empty, used for Airbnb or as investment property. This can be enforced through leasehold agreements and legislating higher council tax rates for unused or second property.



5.1.5 Infrastructure

“ I'm a Gynaecologist and I specialise in issues of incontinence, especially with older women and in fact it affects women at all ages. I know for older generations it's a real issue and it does effect where they go and what they do. Access to good clean toilet facilities is important for everyone but they are especially important for women.

Audio Transcript

“ I like a water- front, a park, the canal, a café, a terrace, a museum, a park is nice, somewhere I can access for free, a bench, I like to sit by a tree and having access to nature. I burn easily, I like shade and trees. There is something comforting about it. I like being able to have access to nature, it is calming. There are those parks that have trees around the outside then nothing in the middle. That just seems weird and the grass goes yellow. There is a big open space and no shade.

Audio Transcript

“ You see a lot of people gathered here in the summer. It's really chilled, everyone has their lunch on the grass. There is plenty of benches and seating for people to sit down together and there is a little grass space for people to sit on, when there is hardly any grass space around here. There are so many food and drink places around here to get their lunch and everyone sits here to have their lunch. It's a relaxed atmosphere. You do start to recognise people. There is a community here and there are sunflowers in the summer.

You don't feel threatened here, because you can see everything that is happening.

Audio Transcript



Gender inclusive design embeds the experience of women and girls from the fine detail to the big picture. Consider the precarity of carrying a heavy pushchair up several flights of stairs- with a child strapped in and possibly a young sibling messing around, many mothers will have experience of a situation like this. It is stressful, difficult, dangerous and a constant reminder that she is navigating a place that does not value the important role of parenting children.


Ensuring walkways are open and that parks have public toilets or that pavements are accessible with a pushchair, that the pavement is not being blocked by bins, cracked or uneven slabs, simply make life easier not just for parents with small children but also to wheelchair users and those with mobility issues.

This section will focus on specific design interventions that will make it easier to get around the borough:

Facilities

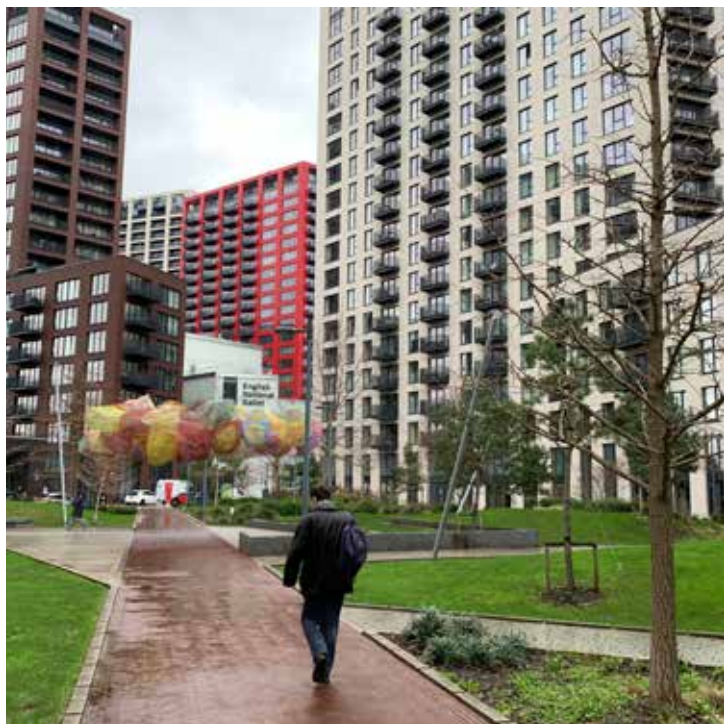
- Clean, well maintained public toilets with baby changing.
- Enough women's toilets to avoid excessive queues.
- Enough public toilets discourage misuse of the street/ lifts etc.
- Modern, self-cleaning toilets with floor to ceiling cubicles that open outwards (rather than entering a toilet block with cubical inside) This is also better and safer for gender diverse people.
- Communal bins for litter that are regularly emptied.
- Timely removal of household and business waste.
- Bins and bike stores in apartment blocks that consider safe access and safe passage- i.e. easy and safe for residents to access whilst avoiding blocking sight lines and through routes.
- Picnic tables, parklets and social benches that are appropriately located and placed to create social spaces.
- Benches and social seating.
- Ensure that during construction phase, building sites consider any diversion and/ or temporary pathways / covered walkways/ hoardings etc through the lens of gender and safer feeling spaces.
- Wide pavements create space, easy passing and avoid confrontation.
- Wide pavements are safer and easier for walking with children.
- Keep public amenities such as lifts and walkways clean and free from urine and litter.
- Ensure alternative routes to avoid stairs exist and are well signposted.

Notes from Women's Network Event

 I love walking around here, it is very green which is much better as it is less polluted (she is walking with a small baby) we have an older four-year-old as well, so when you have the playground and the canals it's great, we love living in London because of the green space. We live in Peckham and we walk from Shoreditch down through Limehouse and across the river. There could be more facilities along the canals, cafés and coffee shops, public toilets and drinking fountains. I'm just thinking I have to change and feed the baby and I don't know where to do that. I also haven't walked down the canal at night and I think as a woman I probably wouldn't feel that safe.

Further design interventions that will improve people's experience of the borough include levelling up between areas to create an even flow through the borough so that new development does not sit in stark contrast to under-resourced communities and ensuring active frontages on high streets are welcoming and inclusive.

Design plays a key role here in shaping the 'feel' of a place- for example metal shutters on high streets make a street feel closed off and unwelcoming, whereas well-lit streets with attractive window displays and restored frontages are visually interesting, invite window shopping and browsing.



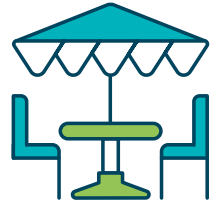
Summary

Consideration of design details is important because it makes getting around easier. It also sends a clear message to women and girls, people with mobility issues, that they are included. Research shows that women measure and read a place by assessing the social interaction that is happening around them. Paying attention to details such as litter and graffiti, checking to see an area is well maintained and understanding the kind of area they are in by measuring design detail, plants and planting the kind of street furniture and noise levels from roads. The right combination of these elements creates a calm and convivial space where women and girls can feel comfortable.

Lighting is a further design intervention – see sub-theme 02.

Recommendations

- Connect walking routes and ensure an 'even' experience between areas. Avoid creating situations where new developments sit in stark contrast to high streets with poor public realm. Prioritise flow and porosity.
- Ensure streets have good visibility and entrance/ exit routes.
- Wide pavements make it easier to walk with children and have better access for wheelchair users. Wide pavements also make it easier to avoid unwanted encounters/ make eye contact.
- Lighting doorways and areas outside property make arrival and departure feel safer.
- Active frontages with ground floor activity should face onto the street and consider natural surveillance.
- Active frontages should be open and avoid metal shutters or window coverings that block passive surveillance.
- Support independent business and workshops through managing rent and rates.
- Ensure streets that connect to parks are well lit, well maintained and have good way finding.
- Provision for public toilets across the borough is poor. Greater access to sanitation is important. However consideration must be given to the design and placement of blocks.
- CCTV cameras should be clear and visible in places, where women feel vulnerable.



5.1.6 Busy Roads

“ Recently I have noticed that the businesses down by the canal are doing really well. Because they are away from traffic there is a sense of a place that is completely free, where you don't need to worry about where your child is running and there is a playground area there, so it is multi use. You don't have to constantly check where your child is and think about the road. It is this multi-use space which is really important.

Audio Transcript

“ The routes that we walk to school. They are not safe. Sometimes we just don't walk that way because it is too stressful. Car free zones change the way the streets are used. It means there is more room for parklets and places to spend time. Speeding cars and traffic pollution is a constant worry and a more specific, real worry that we can observe and measure.

“ Audio Transcript

I think what they have done in Old Bethnal Green Road is really pleasing, it is now is really lovely. I think if you can walk along a quieter road with less or no traffic, I would walk further. It would be great to have connected, linked routes to walk, off roads.

Audio Transcript



“ Cycle lanes that are separate from the roads, you see families out on the roads. Over lock down there were loads of families out on their bikes, because it was safer.

Audio Transcript

Cars Create Unsafe streets

“ The routes that we walk to school. They are not safe. Sometimes we just don't walk that way because it is too stressful. Car free zones change the way the streets are used. It means there is more room for parklets and places to spend time. Speeding cars and traffic pollution is a constant worry and a more specific worry that we can observe and measure.

Audio Transcript

Participants throughout the research have stated emphatically that busy roads are part of the low-level threat that adds to the burden women are managing daily. The strain this puts on women is exponential if they are walking with small children or babies, firstly because they worry about the very real risks posed to their child by pollution and secondly because they are always managing the child and focusing on keeping them safe. This makes day to day journeys like the school run difficult and stressful for parents and can, in turn lead to increased car use and congestion.

A broader observation of this research is that the perception of an area is read through a combination of elements and that women are constantly 'reading'

the signs of a place to check in with themselves about safety and their perceptions of the area. The reading of this complexity is highly nuanced and informs not only feelings of safety but also how to behave in certain contexts and situations, how to fit in, be invisible or stand out.

Busy roads are a key element of this combination and the 'busy ness' of a road contributes to a sense of overwhelm where children and belongings must be highly monitored and watched. There were high levels of support for Low Traffic Neighbourhoods in the Let's Talk survey and majority of respondents talked about the value of quiet roads and walking streets.

Question	Answers
<p>Could you tell us about any places in Tower Hamlets that have a positive impact on your well being:</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All the LTN's, especially Old Bethnal Green Road. • Columbia Road and Wapping • Parks and canal Tow Paths. I like Low Traffic Schemes which humanise spaces and challenge our in- built deference to cars • Local high streets and markets • Answers talking about car free routes or car free places are typical
<p>What is it about that street or journey that works for you?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Car free, wide pavements, benches and flowers • Lots of people around, clean, quiet • Its quiet, no cars zooming by, my child can walk or scoot by herself (4) without me constantly shouting at her to watch out • Large pavements, cycle lane, pocket park, chairs for sitting, fewer cars and large vehicles • Green space with less pollution • I walk here to avoid noise and pollution. I like the trees • Fewer vehicles and lots of people/ pedestrians and people out on bikes, they are pleasant places to spend time with clean air • I try to minimise my babies exposure to pollution so I always choose small roads and back streets • Green. Full of trees. Green. No cars. Quiet • Quiet healthy parks with clean air • I avoid busy roads on my bike. There are less problems from car drivers towards women.

The surveys predominantly feature reference to car free streets and clean air, especially with children and babies because when walking with children, women prioritise the needs of their child with health risks from busy roads at the fore front of their minds. When talking about busy roads, women speak about cars and pollution as a threat to their health and safety.

Women in the Let's talk survey and the audio recordings also report that men in cars behave badly towards women, calling out of windows as they drive past, littering and throwing rubbish out of moving cars or parking up on the side of the road and throwing litter on the street. (digital walks)

Summary

This section acknowledges that participants on both the audio walks, the digital walks and in the survey emphatically stated that busy roads are perceived as a threat, particularly by women walking with children and babies.

This report has been commissioned to look at women's safety. It must therefore be acknowledged that women and girls report that busy roads and high levels of pollution make them feel unsafe and contribute to a general feeling of threat.

When roads become too busy, they create a tipping point where more people drive, because they don't want to walk on a busy road. This is especially true of women with children who must manage the stress of the school run, for example, the worry of busy roads and the ease of jumping in the car.

Recommendations

- School streets and flexible road closures around school pick up and drop off.
- Ensure routes into and out of parks are low traffic and accessible.
- Connected, well-lit walking and cycling routes away from busy roads encourage active travel and reduce car use.
- Wide pavements and street trees create a buffer to busy roads and improve pedestrian experience.
- Develop inclusive active travel strategies that tip the balance away from heavy car use.
- See also green grid.



5.1.7 Wayfinding and signage

“ I live near the East India DLR I don't think it seems very nice. There is a lot of construction happening. If the roads are well lit and cleaner then maybe it is better. Also maybe signs and better signage because it is a confusing area. I did hear some phone snatching stories so I would want to avoid taking out my phone.

Audio Transcript

“ If there were more marked spots along the canal, more seats, more spaces to meet that would be great. So better wayfinding and meeting spots. It would be amazing to connect the whole greenways of London. Maybe we need an app that does that, so you could walk the whole city without going on roads.

Audio Transcript



Women on the digital walks described how they make 'their' place by connecting joined up routes and curating their 'version' of the city. Most participants described way finding by day via green ways, quiet roads, across parks and through gardens, even if that made their journey longer. Navigating the borough in this way is about making or co-creating their city, finding pleasurable moments in the day, and adding enjoyment to day-to-day life, finding joy in the city. On the digital walks women showed us a regular journey. In the majority of cases they told us how they navigated to work (for example) by linking quiet roads and parks so as to avoid traffic and connect to nature.

By night they would use different routes taking busier, more populated streets, past shops, along high streets and past transport hubs. Participants told us they would take routes via a parade of shops or well-lit and busy areas. That they would walk with an awareness of where to find help, and where they were in relation to safer areas. This knowledge helped them feel safer.

Participants told us they would often speak on their phone or use their phone to feel connected to others whilst walking, but that now, due to high incidents of phone theft, they felt cautious to use the phone in this way. They also told us they no longer feel comfortable using the phone to navigate in case it was snatched.

This approach to mapping and navigating the city is shaped by an awareness of risk and to an extent this is sensible. We know cities can be unpredictable simply due to the high density of people. All users must make choices about what feels right to them. However participants on the digital walks also told us they shaped their city with joyful moments and interactions, seeking out routes where they can connect to community, fresh air, green space and bio diversity by day. This is an important distinction to make as it is evidence of how participants shape the city by walking and the fact that they do this pragmatically prioritising, for example green space for relaxation or pleasure or lighting for a sense of safety.

During the event at Account 3 and the Women's Network event there was discussion about signs and signage in parks. Many participants felt that clear guidelines about acceptable behaviour in parks would discourage some men from hassling, propositioning or cat calling women. Stating it is a criminal offence to do these things may be enough of a deterrent and educate offenders. Workshop participants felt that establishing clear 'rules' would help everyone to know what behaviour was acceptable and it would strengthen women by showing them they were supported and giving them clear messaging to point to in the event of a problem.

Finally the Metropolitan Police joined a number of the digital walks. During these calls they suggested places could be better or more clearly named so any victim of crime on the canal or in the park could easily state their location in the event of an incident.

Summary

Women navigate the city differently by day and by night. By day looking for 'restorative' spaces and enjoyment, connection to nature or social spaces. By night prioritising well-lit routes, busier areas and tracking community or help points.

Way finding and route shaping could reflect these impulses and respond with a focus on night routes that take in shops and busy areas that are well lit.

Simple signage about acceptable behaviour in public spaces would strengthen women and show them they are supported, whilst educating and discouraging offenders.

Consider suggestion by London Met to name places in parks and canals clearly, to locate victims of crime.

Recommendations

- Co-design signage for parks and public spaces to indicate shared behaviour. Signage could also give guidance to dog owners. Women have talked about fear of dogs and dogs around children.
- Create a way finding safety 'kit' that combines monitored CCTV units with way finding signage and intercom linked directly to THEOs/ police.
- Develop night-time super highways, well-lit walking routes with plenty of passive surveillance and a variety of evening activity. GLA good growth promotes night markets and diversifying the nighttime economy. Later opening shops and café's to provide passive surveillance and increase footfall.
- Name unnamed places (areas within parks or along canals) so victims of crime can easily provide a location.
- Also see section on the green grid, relating to restorative spaces and day-time navigation.



5.2 Inclusive Borough

5.2.1 Valuing the local: strengthening community



The Tower Hamlets, Let's Talk survey asked women and girls to talk about whether knowing people locally and recognising people on the street, helped them feel safe. 68% of respondents felt that living in an area where they recognised people, helped them to feel safer. This question was expanded in the digital walks where participants stated that even a connection as tenuous as recognising the security guard in the local supermarket was enough to make a journey feel safer.

"Even Sainsbury being open, you are popping into your local shops and cafes locally and you say hello to people, because you see them all the time. It is things like that that foster community, so if someone comes in who is not quite acting right people will spot it and do something about it."

However when talking about 'feeling' safe respondents clearly stated that knowing people locally and feeling connected, even in a tenuous way, to their local area strengthened feelings of belonging. They also stated that seeing other people be friendly toward each other made an

area feel safer and that seeing diversity of age and background on the street, made an area feel more welcoming.

The local, walkable neighbourhood is a planning concept that favours locality over travel and it gained popularity over lockdown when people started to see the value of the local and being able to access what they need within a short walk or cycle of their home.

In LBTH the notion of the hyper local neighbourhood perhaps echoes the network of high streets, parks, leisure facilities, medical centres, schools and colleges and housing, ensuring people can access to shops, culture, leisure and services is within a short journey is important. However a key concern about adopting a hyper local city model in Tower Hamlets would be that it would create greater polarity, with less well-off neighbourhoods, high streets and parks, feeling increasingly siloed and well-off, new developments becoming more segregated. The idea of the hyper local neighbourhood should therefore be seen as a chance to level up and even out areas, to reduce disparity. A further issue with this model in

LBTH is that many people travel much further on a day-to-day basis and their network of home/ work/ socialise/ school / shops is across a far wider area.

Maximising 'the local' is important for many reasons however in the context of this report it boosts the sense of a vibrant locality, forges greater local networks and brings people into conversation.

Residents create their own hyper local neighbourhoods, simply by living in urban contexts. These networks are shaped by the local shop, gym, access healthcare, friendships and for children- trips to school, nursery or childminder, visits to friends' houses to play, local activities such as sports, culture and religious clubs and groups.

It is important to caveat the next few paragraphs because the report does not seek to assume that women should or will adopt a 'caring' role, either for children or relatives, it also does not seek to perpetuate these assumptions or create guidelines that are rigid or restrictive.

But, there are currently 74,700 children under 18 in Tower Hamlets and somebody is looking after them.

The informal networks that are established around caring for children is an example of where acting and doing are not, at the moment, shaping and making. These informal networks evolve and change quickly at different stages of a child's life, and are established by parents to look after, provide fun activities, do the best for their children by providing education, friendship and opportunities to socialise and learn about the world.

This is another example of how the lives of women has failed to impact the built environment and failed to be an agent that shapes the world through the experience of women.

Parents looking after children must adapt and shape their behaviour to fit into cities that do not acknowledge the impact of spending a year at home with a baby, balancing work and home life and the considerable burden of managing the behaviour of an unpredictable being, in a city that has been shaped and designed by men, for men.

The model of the hyper local neighbourhood, when seen through the lens of gender, does begin to answer this question and give the informal networks of care, visibility. Indeed Vienna and Barcelona,



both cities where gender mainstreaming has had extremely positive impacts for all, both use the fifteen minute neighbourhood to model gender inclusion.

For many, a nearby parade of shops or high street will be at the centre of their neighbourhood, it will be the place to stop by for provisions on the way home from the school drop off, get a pint of milk or to meet at a café or attend a market, go to the library or run an errand. For those without children the local high street is a place to shop locally, to access local services and facilities, take part in local cultural activity. It is the limit of activity on a Sunday morning after a night out and the place where you might say 'hi' to someone you have passed on the street several times.

Enhancing these local hubs and ensuring they are well connected to, health, leisure, and social activity makes for a walkable neighbourhoods in which people feel connected to each other. Connected these walkable routes to the green grid in turn opens up the possibility of a walkable borough to residents.

Women who have participated in this research have stated that building in this connectivity improves peoples quality of life.

The Tower Hamlets Women's network made the following suggestions:

Building resilient, friendly communities:

- More local facilities on high streets (day care/ gyms/ shops/ youth clubs/ after school clubs)
- More fully accessible spaces.
- A design code that is inclusive would include car free streets, courtyards, walkable routes, well lit, social. Car free/ car sharing streets (eg Lambeth's Van Gough walk) Seating, planters, basketball hoops.
- Invest in infrastructure that can build better communities.
- More female business owners
- Male dominated business, for example around the markets and high street traders. Be active including/ recognising women
- Co-ordinate services so there is a joined up approach to community building which can be accessed on the high street.
- Community hubs and spaces for non- religious women.
- Build trust in the police
- Partnership working with the local community to build flexible public space, this could mean more events and community focused activity.
- Retrofit inclusion in private developments and 'Take back' private spaces and privatised feeling, public realm.
- Financially inclusive spaces, public spaces accessible to all.
- Sense of community, changing people's mindsets – feeling safe

Communicating Our Place:

- Public art that connects to local history and character and celebrates the lives of women.
- Public campaign to promote better behaviour and instruct on better behaviour.
- Embrace the history of the area (and tell those stories)
- Acknowledge intersectionality through place names, public sculpture, and public realm.

Sense making and story building through public art can be a way for people to build a shared understanding and appreciation of where they live. Shared stories from the past connect people to place and to each other. Uncovering the lives of women and those of diverse communities can be a way to re-make places through identification with past and aspiration for the future – what are the future stories we can tell through public interventions?

The Fifteen-minute neighbourhood offers a toolkit for community development and community building shaped by local activity. It encourages lower car use and encourages people to shop locally and enjoy local goods and services. Maximising the local, ensuring that there is a diversity of amenities accessible, and that local high streets and shops become centres of the community will build local resilience, help areas to feel safer, enable people a greater sense of empowerment to get involved with the local areas and care and pride in the local.

Summary

The hyper local neighbourhood is a model that focuses on maximising quality amenities that can be accessed. This can be amplified by diversifying nighttime offer on high streets to include more after school and holiday activities for young people and children, and by diversifying the evening economy to ensure a greater mix of business are open later into the night.

This sense of the local can be further amplified by enabling and supporting events and activities to flourish, supporting community leaders to produce street festivals, carnivals and other cultural activity to the streets and parks. The key being to support groups to develop ideas about how to take to the streets.

Enhancing a sense of the local, ensuring that high streets offer a range of services and enabling people to take the lead on events, will, in time build a greater sense of community. This will make areas feel welcoming and pleasant.



Recommendations

More local facilities on high streets (day care/ gyms/ shops/youth clubs/after school clubs)



More fully accessible spaces



A design code that is inclusive would include car free streets, court yards walkable routes, well lit, social. Car free/ car sharing streets (eg Lambeth's Van Gough walk) Seating, planters, basketball hoop +cars.

Invest in infrastructure that can build better communities



More female business owners



Co-ordinate services so there is a joined up approach to community building which can be accessed on the high street



Community hubs and spaces for non-religious women



Partnership working with the local community to build flexible public space, this could mean more events and community focused activity



Retrofit inclusion and 'Take back' private spaces and privatised feeling, public realm



Financially inclusive spaces, public spaces accessible to all



Sense of community, changing people's mindsets – feeling safe





5.2.2 High Streets and shopping areas

High Streets are typically the centre of hyper local neighbourhoods in London, and LBTH is no different. Whitechapel High Street and market, Limehouse High Street or the small parade of shops off Bethnal Green Road, wherever there is a combination of amenities - a corner shop, a hairdressers, cards and gift store and a takeaway, there is a community of people for whom those businesses become central to day-to-day life, particularly for women, the elderly and teenage girls or for those who now work from home either part or full time.

This section will use gender as a model to explore the 'new local' and potential growth of high streets as community centres and to model regeneration post-pandemic.

High Streets are important as they express something of the culture of an area- both positive and more challenging. The focus on lifting high streets and framing positive aspects of the area will also frame people's perception of where they live and in turn who they are- their place in the world. Most crucially high streets are community centres, places where we can all take up space and where everyone can meet.

This is important because this is democratic space.

For many women the local runs between the park, the school run, friends and relatives, the local shop, work and other caring responsibilities; the hyper local will frame their lives. These spaces are populated with social networks. Networks take work, and women work hard to maintain networks of care because they are also linked to being able to work and socialise. Informal networks that involve sleepovers and playdates for dependent children enable women's economic and social activity as well as providing a sounding board to off load on the often-circular activity of childcare. This nurturing of relationships is invisible, it is multilayered and based in fragile inter-personal relationships that are formative to the smooth running of many families and many types of family. It is about maintaining friendships between children and their parents

because those relationships mean that a child is taken to 'Guides' or picked up from an after-school club, enabling a parent to leave work on time. These communities of care are not exclusive to women with children, for example LGBTQ+ communities that form around sexual and gender identity can also be considered communities of care which are place shaping- think of the Gay district in Manchester or Manhattan as place shaping.

These fragile, tenuous and ever-changing arrangements may seem a world away from town planning, but they are not. Or at least they shouldn't be. Because even though it is rarely explicitly stated these rhythms of caring and of providing care are central to the lives of many women for some or part of their lives. Not all women will have children, but those who do will inevitably become involved in such arrangements and the voices and needs of women who care for children are largely absent from planning policy and indeed silenced as conversations about 'mothering' become obscured. However, the role of this report is to talk about women's experience and articulate the views of the 450 women that have participated in the research. It can also be confidently stated that these assertions are cross cultural and expressed variously through the lives of women from diverse cultural backgrounds in the borough; women carry the mental load of managing and maintaining these hyper local relationships.

How can acknowledging these intangible relationships shape the high street?

High streets are central to the local and they are places where multi-faceted lives cross over. They serve the needs of the surrounding community and are central to the expression of that community. They are places to gather and meet, places where inter-cultural and inter-generational activity can build social networks and strengthen a sense of community- even if the extent of participating is simply to show up and be present on the street.

Design recommendations can be applied to support and strengthen community and articulate how these intangible networks can be made formal by making space for them.

The high street as a flexible space where a regular market or stalls bring an injection of variety, an opportunity to collect and gather or run into a friend or acquaintance. Equally it might be the place where a local club puts on a dance event or piece of street theatre, where a group of artists organise an event in a meanwhile space, or an annual carnival is prepared. Flexibility can be designed in by making space for events, activity and meeting.

Shops and businesses reflect this sense of locality. Independent businesses can respond to local need. These could include after school clubs or soft play or indeed flexible spaces that could be hired by groups. They could be places to access services such as healthcare, advice and support and they could be home to hyper local leisure services. Diversifying the high street would place a gym or childcare next to a corner store, the takeaway and the florist but it could also mean the health and leisure services could respond to local demand and be co-designed with residents.

Businesses that celebrate the uniqueness of the area can convey a sense of character and community. Flexibility around opening hours and licensing can ensure that high streets remain active through the evening- thus creating more active frontages and the appearance of safety. Night markets and nighttime activity can also create safer way-finding on dark evenings and provide a sense of 'event'.

Physical design interventions are also important, well-lit high streets can feel safe, but lighting that is playful, creates a festival atmosphere or provides variety and character and will create a different kind of night-time environment.

Ensuring high streets have wide pavements, uniform frontages and signage (but with the opportunity for character and difference) Avoiding metal shutters and grills in favour of well-lit window displays will all make the nighttime feel safer and bring social and economic prosperity to an area.

'Experience' is also taking up space on many high streets with underutilised shops becoming eventful spaces, hosting pop up activity or hosting businesses that are experiential and provide activity that engages people, where people can learn something new or take part in something. This in turn will enliven and enrich a place. Giving permission to meanwhile use is a good way for people to test creative business ideas and bring something new to a hyper local community whilst also responding to local knowledge and cultures. (cultures in the plural referring to interest and specialism as well and background and identity).

Some of the ways the council can support this is by saying yes and supporting ideas. Becoming an organisation that supports local people and guiding them through the myriad of red tape involved in organising a festival or carnival or setting up a project in a meanwhile space, in order to support and enable activity.

These are all ways to enhance local character, celebrate local heritage and make an area feel unique. They are also ways that the informal networks women and girls form, can co-create space and ensure visibility.



Summary

Celebrating the status of high streets, no matter how small, as centres of community, can be a way to articulate and make space for the invisible network's women build, networks that are most tangible around care. They can be flexible spaces of encounter, (Carnival/ dance/ music) hold a regular market or events. They can diversify to include activities as well and shopping and they can celebrate local history and the culture of the area.

The council needs to get good at saying yes! And supporting hyper local activity by providing space through meanwhile use, supporting those who 'do' by providing a guide through red tape, and making it known that the council will enable local activity.

Recommendations

- Markets should be designed with women in mind and prioritise visibility, variety and a range of stalls.
- Diversify high street use with a varied offer and opening hours: a gym, childcare and clothes shop may sit next to each other and support each other.
- Prioritise community activity and become and council that says, YES! How can we help!
- Design interventions such as lighting, opening up shop fronts and picture windows to create a pleasant and welcoming night-time.
- Licensing can play a role in varying the nighttime economy.
- Flexible adaptable architectures support events.



5.2.3 Communicating a sense of place

Intergenerational and intercultural spaces can further strengthen a sense of community. Local history and culture build shared values and opportunity for dialogue. Where parks, high streets and public spaces provide opportunity for the community to take up space, understanding place, history and locality can build understanding, support culture change, empower and shift perspectives. Appreciation of or participation in the natural environment can connect communities through shared activity.

Public art that connects to local history and character and celebrates the lives of women. (this doesn't mean statues of women it means art by women that reflect on women's experience)

Contemporary art can communicate shared values and a sense of place



Architecture and development co-designed to build new spaces that relate to history and heritage



Embrace the history of the area (and tell those stories)



Acknowledge intersectionality through place names, public sculpture, and public realm



Participate in local activity to actively co-design space and implement real small scale/big impact change





5.2.4 Acting and doing is shaping and making

Many of the women interviewed as part of this research have talked about their role as a mother and the specific experience of becoming a mother and being a parent to children or a child under five. It is of course acknowledged that many fathers actively parent and take care of their children, but it is equally fair and true to say that on any given weekday the majority of people at the park looking after children are women. This statement does not diminish what all parents do or the role they play or seek to push women into the silo of carer. But it does invite a speculative conversation about how 'mothering' children could and should be a model to reframe public space, particularly play parks.

However in researching this document it has been hard to find design guidance on the specific situation of being a mother and the ways in which this relationship with a child or children, totally re-frames a woman's relationship to their body, how women perceive or map the city both in terms of shifting focus towards the local, new communities and social dynamics, and most crucially a complete re-framing of how mothers use space and their local area, when caring for children. Emphasis perhaps shifting drastically from a daily commute to accessing nearby healthcare and socialising for small babies at, for example, children's centres or playgroups.

When recording street interviews and talking to mothers with children under five it is striking that the act of parenting creates new communities and informal infrastructures that are place shaping and community building. They are place shaping in the sense that being visible on the street, walking with children, children playing in parks animate the city in a 'friendly' and safe feeling way. That mothers with children make parks feel safe, but they also show us a diversity of use and as an onlooker, we might, for a moment, see the local park from a new perspective and be reminded that play is an important and creative way to take up space. It adds a layer of richness and complexity to the city.

Equally 'seeing' this kind of diverse and intergenerational use connects people, it leads strangers to chat on a bench, and creates inter-generational connection and a feeling of safety; one student in her early twenties reporting that seeing



women and children in the park help her to feel safer.

The 'optics' of seeing women and children out in the park, is the first way that 'mothering' shapes places, adding a visual reminder that there are different ways of occupying and taking up space and helping others to feel safe.

However, being a mother in Tower Hamlets is also about the social connection's people create around caring for children, and parks are the key 'stage' on which these connections play out. One interviewee with two small children described how she and her friend were always looking for parks and outdoor spaces to meet up, away from busy roads, so she would be able to let her children play and keep an eye on them, whilst meeting and talking to a friend. Other women talked about how she would go to the park and look for people to chat to if she was feeling lonely.

The role that these short term and long-term connections play in raising children cannot be underestimated. Most new mothers will struggle at some point with isolation, a child that won't stop crying, a difficult partner or simply the shift towards a relentless pattern of laborious work.

Parks and playgrounds are often places that hold women and frame these relationships, provide a sense of community and a moment away from occupying a child in a small flat.

They are also places of warmth and community. Places to laugh, to make long term friendships and to talk; even on the bleakest winter days you will find groups of women huddled under the trees in Victoria Park whilst their kids run around and play outdoors.

Finally, they are well used. With women taking their child to the park several times a week if not every day. A visit to the park often being part of a routine built around the child eating and napping.

The effects on health have been noted by women as key to supporting their mental health and with child experts stating the value of open space and being outdoors for children.

It is therefore astounding that the timeless act of raising children, the communities women build around their families and maintain as their children get older and start school, have made very little impact on the built environment with most parks not even providing the basic essentials such as a public toilet. Whilst other parks offer the most rudimentary and basic amenities. A barren patch of grass, a set of swings contained in a metal cage, a graffitied slide. These parks perpetuate inequality not only in terms of offer but also long-term impact on educational attainment.

What would play parks and public spaces look like if they were shaped around these informal communities? What basic amenities would be present? And how would parks and public spaces be different if they considered the needs of women, children and teenage girls?

Recommendations

- Maximise the space for users by developing a 'kit' of parts that can be scaled up and down depending on location. This kit should include:
 - i) Wayfinding.
 - ii) Place names and Place identity.
 - iii) Play-on-the way interventions for small children
 - iv) Parklets- social benches with planting
 - v) Small areas with interventions for older children and teenagers located near to a kiosk or youth hub. This could be playful features such as three-person swing or low level but challenging climbing areas.
 - vi) Meet up spots with benches.
 - vii) Regular public toilets.
 - viii) Kiosks providing refreshment and natural surveillance 'help' spots/visibility.
 - ix) Water tap to fill up bottles.
 - x) 'Hubs' for education and community use.
 - xi) Sensitive lighting.
- Park wardens and THEOs help places feel safer as do other 'officials', someone running a café or hub, gardeners, someone managing play hubs, youth workers walking around chatting to teens. These people are not police but they make women and girls feel safer and that there is 'help' on hand.
- Green spaces are community centres. Design interventions that encourage community include places to sit and meet, good views, wild flowers and landscaping, spaces to exercise, activities for teenagers and play facilities for smaller children.



5.2.5 Industry Diversity Is Vital

Diversity within the built environment industry, particularly planning, engineering and architecture is vital if gender inclusive design is to become mainstream. Opening these potential industries to girls and gender diversity must start in school through primary and secondary education enabling pupils to understand the breadth and potential of working in design, planning and engineering industries.

In higher education a decolonised and indeed de-gendered curriculum will open out individual research projects beyond the traditional male dominated cannon. This will help female students to find a voice and articulate a broader scope of experience. (Teaching through traditional routes replicates existing power structures, hence the drive to decolonise curricula post BLM) this is important because success for women at architecture school can mean successfully reproducing work that replicates traditional power dynamics etc.

Research shows that women and minority ethnic groups are underrepresented in the field of architecture. According to the Architects Registration Board, 80% of architects classed their ethnicity as 'white'; with minority ethnic groups representing the remaining 20%.

Additionally, as of 2020, only 29% of registered architects are women. (Architects Registration Board, Architects Journal, 2020)

Architects play a crucial role in creating a built environment that is safe, sustainable and where everyone in society can live well, and it makes sense that a profession that designs in the interests of a diverse society should be drawn from and representative of that society.

Promoting an inclusive community

Buildings are the products of people's creativity, and if architecture and urban design is going to represent the diversity of our cities effectively, the creators must be representative.

A diverse design industry can help to build an environment that reproduces our diverse world. Through collaboration and sharing ideas.

The contribution of Architecture and development to communities can be inadequate when they fail to include a variety of ideas and perspectives. Without diverse ideas behind the construction of buildings, the industry is operating in a restricted bubble and failing to fulfil its true potential. They will reproduce gendered norms and fail to express the lived experience of women and girls.

Diversity can result in greater success for the industry

There is substantial research showing that more diverse teams are more successful. Working with individuals who offer diverse ways of thinking and whose cultural backgrounds and experiences differ encourages us to indulge in a wider spectrum of possible approaches to challenges and tasks. This, in turn, results in a more effective and prosperous industry

(The Architects Registration Board 2017)

To create a borough that is more inclusive there needs to be greater inclusion in the architecture, urban design, planning and built environment industry at large. This could be actioned by ensuring that contractors have a balanced and diverse workforce and that they are supporting and investing in women, gender diversity and women of colour.

Recommendations

- Use women architects and designers and ensure teams are diverse. When assessing suppliers ensure workplace diversity is a consideration.
- Consider who is planning/ who is designing/ who is building.
- Are developers women and are women represented on their teams at decision making level?
- Write into policy that teams will be scrutinised for diversity stating that LBTH understands the pressing need for inclusion and diversity within architecture and the construction industry and the value of employing diverse teams because of the broader range of ideas that can lead to inclusive design in all projects.
- Set inclusion targets and implement a detailed equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) action plan.
- Commit to improving workplace culture to support diversity and inclusion.
- More broadly look to create internship and work experience opportunities for school age girls in LBTH encouraging cultural and ethnic diversity and inclusion of all socio-economic groups.
- Connect to youth groups and youth provision in the council and establish collaborative youth projects that aim to encourage girls in design.
- Look to also embed opportunities through schools.
- Ensure routes into architecture, planning and design are clear by presenting at career open days in schools, colleges and universities in the borough.
- Ensure that taught programmes encourage women designers to succeed on their own terms.





5.2.6 Co-designing with communities

It is crucial that the voices of women and girls are heard and not assumed. It is vital that women and girls are engaged prior to design stage and they are able to shape, improve and input changes and that the lives of women shape and change cities.

Listening to a diversity of voices will lead to innovative, inclusive places that reflect our diverse world and meet the needs of a broader range of people.

Co-designing project briefs, ensuring women and girls are consulted on plans and inviting creative input into design processes are all ways to ensure the LBTH better reflects the diversity of people that live here.

Prior to consulting with or engaging residents the below considerations have been set out as a flexible framework for engagement:

Barriers to engagement for women and girls

- Development projects that are paying consultants and profit-led must pay participants for their time and local knowledge.
- Covering the cost of childcare and travel in the case of face-to-face participation.
- Time and timing of events - ensure a range of times are offered to ensure diversity of participation.
- Mental load - just too busy and day too fragmented. In this case consider running engagement sessions at the school after drop off/ pick up, join existing groups or networks such as the library service.
- Value and feeling valued – If women have joined sessions previously and been talked over/ disregarded they won't return. Ensure meetings are chaired and all voices valued and heard. Better still frame sessions to prioritise listening.

- Not wanting to speak in public- Lack of confidence will often mean women stay silent. Ensure sessions offer break out groups and 1:1 options so all voices can be heard and valued.
- Ensure ground rules are set before meeting starts.
- Work with expert facilitators, skilled at creating spaces that are enabling.

Summary

Make space to hear the voices of women and girls and ensure participation.

Engagement must be done at scale and in response to the project, who is paying/ what for etc.

Private developers should pay people for their time and local knowledge and people must be valued accordingly. In this instance the council or a third party practice should manage engagement and provide independent brief based on this work.

Engagement with women and girls is vital to shape places that are balanced and equitable. Women face many barriers to participation and any work that is done must acknowledge time and financial pressures, responsibility, and mental load. It is therefore important to plan engagement by first considering how to make it as easy as possible for people to join in.

Consider WHO leads engagement. Who is appropriate? For example, it is better to draw down funds from a developer and commission an engagement programme via the council, the results of which get fed back to the developer in order to ensure oversight and good practice.

Co-design is not the same as coms & marketing. Allocate budgets to pay a skilled co-design practitioner.

Recommendations

- Engage women and girls in design process prior to design phase.
- Create opportunities to hear about their experiences and how they use a place or area.
- Synthesis learning to write design brief.
- Create feedback loops to test ideas and check in.
- Design engagement strategies with barriers to participation in mind.
- Engagement is a creative, design process. Whoever is engaging should collaborate with design teams.
- Pay or compensate participants.





5.3 Restorative Places

5.3.1 Green spaces are social spaces



Access to green space is a priority to the women and girls that participated in the research. This is true for women from a range of cultural backgrounds and generations.

This research shows that parks and gardens are vital and a valuable piece of community infrastructure, indeed the 'Let's Talk' survey of women and girls showed that 89% of respondents considered parks and green spaces to be social spaces.

Giving parks and green spaces status as social infrastructure enables greater consideration of how these spaces are designed, managed, and accessed by the public and re-focuses the priorities about how these spaces are organised and managed.

What women and girls feel about the value of parks, gardens and outdoor spaces must be taken seriously because women and girls view parks as centres and hubs of social activity impacting on all aspects of individual health and wellbeing, the health, wellbeing and development of children and young people and the health of the community itself.

Parks and gardens in the borough are valuable community assets. Consideration of gender in relation to the boroughs green spaces and climate

resilience could be seen as twin imperatives that work in harmony to both manage and mitigate the effects of the climate emergency and provide restorative space for all.

It must, therefore, be a priority to maximise all green space in the borough and to transform any under used or paved area into a green space that can also support community. This will strengthen community, the wellbeing of women and girls, build climate resilience and capacity for BNG.

This chapter will share what women have said about the value of parks and green spaces and outline some of the issues which could be designed out by adopting an inclusive approach to the borough's green spaces.

The developing themes and ideas will make recommendations about how to deliver better green space for women and girls, create capacity for BNG and climate resilience. It will improve living standards for those living in overcrowded accommodation, improve the quality of life of children growing up in the borough and create intercultural, intergenerational meeting spaces, that strengthening a sense of community.



5.3.2 Levelling up parks

“ I live in Mile End Park just down the bottom end. The streetlights stop before my house. I don't like walking at night because of safety. I run around Victoria Park and the canal. I do it for my mental health to go outside and be around nature. I like the access to green space and nature. I don't know how to improve it and make it more woman friendly. I guess if there was more lighting it would attract more people. But I feel that if it was busier, I would feel safer. When you are in a busier environment, I feel like if something happened, there would be someone to help you.

Audio Transcription

Tower Hamlets has some fantastic parks that are loved and celebrated by the community. However, provision of and within parks is patchy and tends to reflect the areas general level of prosperity. In many places there is a clear indexical link between the quality of outdoor green spaces and the prosperity of the surrounding area. This is compounding inequality with those on lower incomes, living in overcrowded accommodation also being deprived through poor quality outdoor space, play equipment and opportunity to socialise outdoors. Improving local outdoor space, especially in low-income areas will have an impact and improve lives.

Actively 'levelling up' parks and outdoor provision is important as all people living in the borough should be able to access high quality, diverse, green areas with a range of planting and trees, good seating, and quality play areas. This is vital for women and children living in overcrowded flats where easy access to green outdoor space provides places for children to run around and make noise, for women and girls to meet, to walk and exercise.

“ I take my son to the park. His behaviour is better afterwards. This makes life easier for me.

Let's talk

This finding is in line with the Mayor of London's vision to ensure that every household should be within 400 meters of green space.

Account 3's is a charity in Bethnal Green that supports women from socially and economically excluded minority groups from across the globe. Account 3 and Tower Hamlets organised a listening exercise to hear from local women about their experience of parks and public space.

“ We need to do something about our parks. It is the only outdoor space where we can take our children, but we don't feel we can go there, because there are always boys there smoking cannabis. Parks are a big problem.”

“Yes, there needs to be police or wardens patrolling the parks, to help them feel safer.”

“Teenagers or, usually men, smoking weed, it makes the area feel unsafe and I don't want my kids breathing that, they already know what weed smells like, they know what it is because they see people smoking.”




A lot of general conversation about how teenage boys dominate parks. At least 5 women and a chorus of agreement about how groups of young men feel threatening, stop the parks being accessible to all and make the area feel unsafe. In general, there was an acknowledgement that this didn't pose a threat but that it contributed to generalised sense of uncertainty, another factor to map when thinking about going out. Many women talked racial motivations for assault or attack.

There needs to be clear signs telling people what they can/ can't do in the park.

However the conversation evolved to adopt a more nuanced view. Women in the room acknowledged that they had teenage sons and that boys hanging around in parks was a sign of more complex issues about masculinity and practical issues about space and youth provision. Women talked about lack of youth provision, the importance of male role models for young men, and that they needed to be provided with interesting, alternative things to do.

The group discussed the value of providing better, intergenerational design, so that young men still had a place to meet, but that they didn't dominate parks or take over.


Women talked about the problem of overcrowding and that when there is not enough space indoors, young men hang about in parks. They said young people often have complex or difficult family lives, that they don't want to be at home, the fact that there is not enough good provision for teens after school and not enough good outdoor spaces that are inclusive of everyone.

 **If we can deal with the problems caused by teenage boys (and young men) women will feel safer."**

"Young people face all kinds of problems, when we see them on the street it looks bad, but they also need their own spaces and to be listened to."

"It's not just teenage boys though. Teenage girls need somewhere to go as well."

We talked about increasing youth provision, positive role models for boys and better intergenerational spaces which are inclusive of all people and don't polarise but instead build community and connections. Parks and gardens where everyone can take part.

 **I live near Weavers fields. It is a beautiful place and I love it there, but I was assaulted by a man in front of my children. He pushed me over. It made me feel scared but it also scared my children. We don't go to Weavers fields so much now. I have to make myself go."**

This led to a conversation about dogs and dogs in parks. One woman stated it was known that Asian people didn't like dogs and that some women present had experienced people using dogs to scare or threaten them. Many women present nodded in agreement and shared their experiences of dogs in parks.

The women's networking event saw similar reactions and participants shared ideas about how to improve parks in the borough.

These comments focus on strengthening local community to make parks feel inclusive.

- Playgrounds for parents. We spend a lot of time in parks too!
- Community fun days and local events to encourage community.
- Include activities in parks for teen girls and young adults. Ways to play and participate – PLAY for all.
- Organised activity in parks to feel safer eg outdoor gym classes/ women only sports activity
- Family night-time events
- More planned local sessions and activities in parks.
- Dedicated sessions for vulnerable people and carers.
- Dedicated spaces for young people in particular girls, women, and children.

- Opportunity to populate green spaces through volunteer schemes that keep places busy through activities such as gardening (could this include organising clubs and events – Js)
- Women's community safety walking groups
- Why are parks only centred on small children and teenagers – no space for childless adults to use – how do we make women feel safe in parks if they're not by the play area?
- Parks in the borough very well-used though, and lots of people in the borough have no alternative outdoor space, so do use them. Park design to consider all ages and promoted as community meeting spaces.
- Over 50% of our play equipment is inclusive, play should include older kids too.
- Outdoor gyms – less used by women because there's no funding for organised classes to use them.

This is not without friction and the number one barrier for women in LBTH is groups of young men colonising and taking up space, making spaces feel unwelcome and dominating green spaces. Over dominance of young men in parks, smoking drugs or dealing drugs, taking nitrous oxide, has been named as the number one block to women of all ages accessing smaller parks. Young men are allowed to meet and gather in parks and that is what parks are for. It is only a problem or 'anti-social' when it stops others using that space.

Levelling up parks by investing in planting, play equipment, landscape design and furniture will increase busy-ness and natural surveillance, it will stop the dominance of one group and it will level up access to high quality outdoor space and challenge inequality.

Drug dealing and drug use and associated activity in parks was cited throughout all of the engagement activity as a number one barrier for women park users.



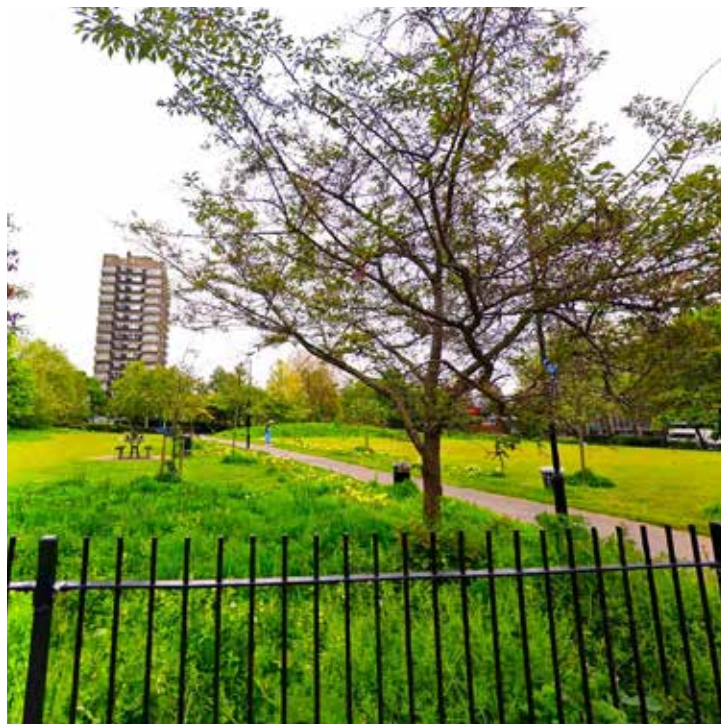
The digital walks participants noted that hyper local governance of parks leads to greater feelings of safety and inclusion. Rectory Road park, has a 'friends' group. This local governance builds community, cuts down ASB, gives people an opportunity to get outdoors, make friends with each other, have a say in how the park is run and what happens there. Evidence from the digital walks shows that parks with local governance have less ASB and suffer less from over dominance of one group.

Summary

Parks and green spaces in Tower Hamlets are vital pieces of the boroughs social infrastructure and participants have identified parks and green spaces as key to physical, emotional and psychological wellbeing providing access to the outdoors and to the myriad benefits that being part of a natural ecology affords. On a practical level they are vital spaces for the many people who do not have gardens offering the opportunity to step away from busy roads and get fresh air.

This research has identified inherent inequalities in provision, meaning that some parks are impoverished and feel intimidating, whilst others are populated with diverse planting and great play areas. This inequality will impact women and children the most. Opportunities to play and access not only decent play equipment but also diverse and interesting ecology; the sounds of water, the shadows cast by trees, and the chance to run and make a noise are important for the development of young children.

They are also important for the mental health and wellbeing of women and girls. Levelling up parks, green places and play areas will ensure that all areas of the borough have access to high-quality, well-designed parks and foster inter-generational and intercultural activity with access to complex ecologies. This will benefit women and girls by creating restorative spaces that support health and wellbeing, improve the lives of children and build in climate resilience.



Recommendations

- Recognise parks as community infrastructure in the local plan.
- Design at scale and level -up park facilities:

Pocket parks and community gardens

- Remove metal barriers and gates, open up spaces for hyper-local community use. Include benches, planting, trees- to provide shade in hot summer, picnic tables.
- Connect small parks to green grid. These pocket parks and gardens could be co-designed with residents, who could be encouraged to take hyper local governance, setting up resident's 'Friends' group.
- A games/ toys hub that can be accessed by residents, ping pong or swing ball, roller skates, other games. The hub can be opened up at certain times for people to use.
- Parks as community centers : Organised activity throughout the day, under 5's play and gardening, exercise for the elderly, urban garden apprenticeships.

Medium size green space

- Benches, planting and public areas to sit in the evening. Picnic tables and play area. Public toilets, café or kiosk (provide surveillance and increase feeling of safety)/ hub space- a local venue that could be used to organise events and activities, hold a birthday party, a weekend workshop, a place for people to meet and do exercise (e.g running club or use outdoor gym), regular youth club or youth drop-in space.
- Connect to green grid.
- Co- design/ friends groups create social architecture and shared ownership.

Large park

- These large open spaces are really valued by residents and people love to be able to walk in the park. People have told us how much they value being able to connect to nature, access green and blue ecologies and get a sense of space and distance.
- There is a perception by women that vast areas of open green space exclude women. Many women associate large areas of grass with team sports such as rugby and football. Even though many girls participate in team sport it must be acknowledged that reserving vast areas of grass is perceived by many women as space 'exclusive' to men and boys. It is also known that such large areas of cut 'pitch' grass do not meet criteria for BNG. Areas of grass could be divided to ensure there is still capacity for field sports whilst also building in greater capacity for BNG and more diverse uses such as forest schools, wild areas, areas for games. These bigger parks are also key event spaces with the capacity to bring people together and create festivals and parties that are positive for the community.



5.3.3 Benches are not the problem

Seating is integral, and it has to have more shade. As the climate is heating and we are seeing more extreme weather. In parks I use I try to find a place in the shade where I can sit, and people find somewhere where they can observe their children, and also have a nice time. Multi-generational space is also important so it works for the young child but also needs to cater for the growing child and also adults can engage with their child, but maybe can also be used for exercise, a space for the elderly and for local people to meet. I think it is about scale and location.

Audio Transcript

Officers from the Metropolitan Police who joined the digital walks, were able to share their views on public space and how to mitigate the impact of groups of young men, suggesting that the removal of benches and placement of benches were a key factor in designing out crime.

Advocating that street furniture be removed is however problematic because the availability of benches has been mentioned across all the research. Make Space For Girls found that park benches were the only resources that teenage girls saw as available to them to use.

On the digital walks and during the interviews benches were mentioned and described by participants as the safest feeling place to sit. Sitting on a bench is comfortable, it enables frequent breaks for the elderly or less mobile, it's a place to stop for a snack with children, a place to eat lunch, a place to watch the world go by, meet friends or encounter and chat to a stranger.

This was highlighted by one of the participants in the digital walks who talked at length about how the placement of benches were key to her own feeling of safety both in terms of walking past groups of young men and where she felt most comfortable sitting.



“...you know, I don't want to necessarily draw attention to myself when I'm sitting down reading a book. I just kind of want a nice view, a quiet spot away from people like, you know, ropemakers field, for example. You know, having rather than have the benches that are right on the main pathway and everybody's way, you're going to be spotted by everybody. Like it's a runway. But if you have benches that kind of face the river or the canals and, you know, just a quieter outlook, you're facing away from people.”

Figure 3: Do you feel comfortable sitting alone in the park?

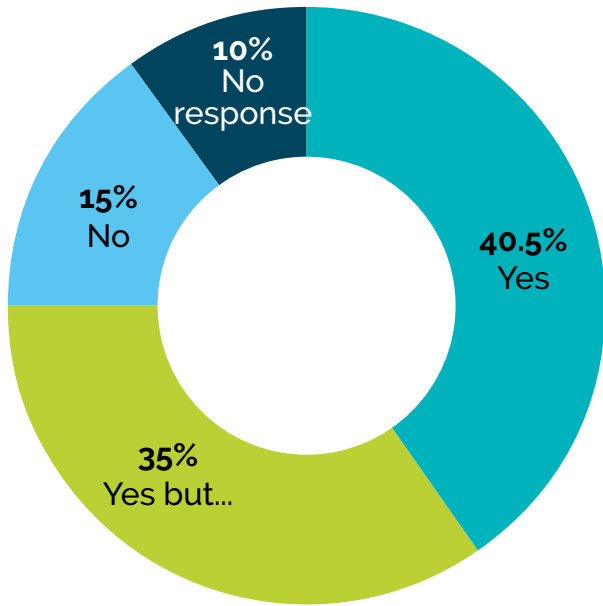


Figure 4: When alone where do you sit?

	When alone	With friends
On a bench	66	42
Under a tree	21	25
On grass to side	20	21
Grass in the middle	38	31
Somewhere secluded	12	13
In or next to play area		18

The question, do you sit alone in the park 40.5% responded with a clear yes. 35% said yes but caveated answer e.g, in daytime, depends on park, sometimes men harass me, I wouldn't sunbathe because men stare, usually not always, fear of dogs.

The data regarding where women sit is more nuanced. The first clear take away is that there is a really strong preference for benches. Women who have mobility issues, young children, those who don't want to sit on the ground, put bench at the top of their priority. Women want benches!

But there is also something more interesting around choices that are made when someone is alone- for example they will feel safer sitting on a bench. The same person meeting a friend would choose to sit in a secluded spot. Similarly women with children are more likely to sit in the play park or the middle of the grass, than at the edge, presumably so children can run freely, whereas those with babies who are breast feeding need a bench.

Teenage girls are all but excluded from public space, designed out of the city. They have told a study by Make Space For Girls and LSE that for them a specific park bench might be the only place they can take up space or have a sense of place in the city.

These findings contradict the reflex of Secure By Design to reduce benches and seating in order to limit opportunity for groups gathering and ASB.

The question is not should there be benches, but how to design benches and seating that foster community, allow for conversation or reflection, and cut down ASB. The psychology of benches is a fascinating area of growing research and recent projects, such as LDA's social seating on the Strand and Vestre's regeneration project in Brixton show how well thought through seating that considers placement and relationship can enhance an area.



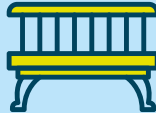
Question, Let's Talk: What would improve your local park or green space?

(listed in order of frequency mentioned)

1. Public toilets



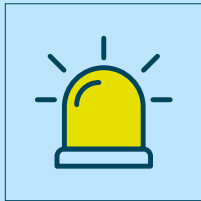
2. Benches



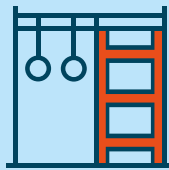
3. Rangers or wardens



4. Law enforcement to stop dealers and gangs



5. Play equipment for kids



6. Bins and less litter



7. More trees



8. More bio diversity of plants and planting to encourage pollinators and look good



9. Picnic tables



10. Water fountains



11. Less dog poo



One solution to consider is putting more (not less) benches and seating in parks, increasing park infrastructure so that a group of youths gathering around a bench is just one group of users framed in the context of another group of people gardening, some children playing, a running group meeting up. So rather than one group of young men dominating the park, they are a part of a much bigger picture. When this is the case they will manage their behaviour accordingly. This is where design and in particular co-design with residents, can play a role in designing out crime and ASB. Moving the focus away from visibility and towards directing activity will design -in women who have also told us they want to see more landscaping, more plants and flowers and a greater sense of multi layered activity.

The approach here moves away from vast swathes of green space that afford the opportunity to spot a figure on the horizon, and, move towards designing multi-layered spaces with a range of activity and multiple viewpoints. This is a fundamental conceptual shift as well because it suggests that we think about parks differently. Rather than focusing on the preservation of vast areas of open grassland, designers can think about increasing biodiversity, planting more complex ecology and designing in activity and sociability.


Crucially by putting more social infrastructure in parks and creating opportunities for older teenagers to play, the focus moves away from the singular gang and towards a multiplicity of activity, of which the group of boys are one part. It shifts the framing by encouraging ownership of the space.

The issue of taking up space runs like a golden thread throughout the research and it is extremely complex both because of the contemporary culture in which young men are growing up, because of the effects of fifteen years of austerity impacting youth services and provision, because of the density of population in Tower Hamlets, and issues of overcrowding, which sees cultures, families and inter-personal conflict heightened because space operates at a premium.


Young men are, themselves, living in fear as they are aware of knife and gang crime and stabbings, meaning a certain amount of bravado is partly a survival strategy for them.

This report is written with empathy towards young men and the complex issues they face. However, the scope of this work is to make space for women and girls and part of that has to be to articulate the impact that gangs of young men have on women and girls, their use of space and the confidence they have about navigating the borough by day and by night. It is also to note that for every group of young men on the street there are far more teenage boys at home, not fitting into this picture and also perhaps feeling alienated.

To advocate for women and girls it must be clearly acknowledged and stated that, whatever the root cause, women and girls are changing behaviour as they move through the borough, avoiding making eye contact, interacting with or being challenged by groups of young men. It prevents many women from using smaller parks and gardens and forces them to make choices about how they walk down high streets, use pavements and sit in or take up space in parks.

 **What works well with this particular square is it's not too big. Where this is just the right size you do start to recognise other people who use it. It's a little secluded area, a little oasis! It's nice in the summer. Everyone has their bit of grass. We like to get out for lunch, we like the benches and palm trees, we like the plants, there are load of lovely plants and flowers here. The park is small enough to feel safe.**

Audio Transcript

 **I like a water- front, a park, the canal, a café, a terrace, a museum, a park is nice, somewhere I can access for free, a bench, I like to sit by a tree and having access to nature.**

Audio Transcript

“ Most of our public space would need a more multigenerational focus, with space for resting and sitting, for talking and multigenerational use, maybe play areas but also space for older people.

[Audio Transcript](#)

“ I imagine women would like more space like the Barbican, where it is nice bricks outside. It's a space that feels like you are still in a building, like you are protected. Maybe a space with a heightened level of protection. So even it was something like those built-up bricks, with plants and flowers. Somewhere for conversation.

[Audio Transcript](#)

Summary

Benches and seating are important because they provide places to rest in hot weather, somewhere to have a rest for the elderly or people walking with young children, outdoor space to sit and chat. Benches are important for teenage girls because there is so little else on offer to them, they use benches to socialise outdoors.

The police are wary of benches and seating as they know that benches become sites of ASB, somewhere groups and gangs congregate, drink after work or regular spots to deal drugs.

This research finds that benches are important for women and girls and that benches per se are not the issue. That design can play a role in locating benches appropriately and that the design of benches can support sociability and regenerate an area.


Designing infrastructure into parks will create a greater diversity of use and activity. This will encourage multiplicity of use by all generations and ensure spaces are not dominated by one group.

Recommendations


- Co-design parks with residents.
- Co-design and make improvements to parks and green spaces with residents. Find out what people would like to use the park for and work together to implement changes.
- Shift emphasis away from large open areas of green towards more landscaped planting, complex ecology and zoned areas that facilitate activity and community.
- Consider placement and design of benches.
- Ensure Parks have visible entrances and exits, walking loops and tracks to walk with a dog or a friend or alone. To be able to run, roller skate or dog walk.
- New infrastructure could facilitate local events, sporting activity. A small stage for low-key local gigs, a volleyball net or bouldering wall. Through to park run and larger scale weekend events.
- Gardening clubs and user groups give people ownership and increase passive surveillance.
- Move drug dealing and drug taking out of parks by increasing THEO'S (Tower Hamlets enforcement officers) park wardens and policing in parks.

5.3.4 Plants and flowers, trees and green streets: Bio Diversity is restorative.

Plants and Flowers make you feel better.

 I like nice things to look at. I'm a sucker for a view, a water feature or something nice to look at like a statue or some art, a nice water feature wouldn't go a miss. We want more green too, more plants and flowers, more bio-diversity, more plants the better- it makes you feel better seeing plants and flowers.

A Great place for lunch.

 What works well with this particular square is it's not too big. Where this is just the right size. You do start to recognise other people who use it. It's a little secluded area, a little oasis! It's nice in the summer. Everyone has their bit of grass. We like to get out for lunch, we like the benches and palm trees, we like the plants, there are load of lovely plants and flowers here. The park is small enough to feel safe.

Tree lined streets, gardens with flowers, complex planting, green buildings, trees in parks that provide shade on a hot day or shelter in the rain, throughout the research there are multiple references to greening the city. Seeing street trees makes a street feel safer and engenders a sense of community.

Participants in all aspects of the research talked about the value of complex urban ecology, the benefits to mental and physical health, to children and young people and a sense of safety.

Large open areas of green space are important, however many participants felt they were underutilised and could be of greater benefit with more diverse planting and landscaping. Many women felt that large open green space was not for them. They would not feel comfortable sitting in the middle of a large open space, it was associated with sports and the open-ness left them open to ambush.

Over a quarter of survey respondents stated that they visited the park for access to nature. Plants and flower are frequently stated as adding value to a place in the street interviews, whilst the Tower Hamlets networking event advocated for "Opportunity to populate green spaces through volunteer schemes that keep places busy through activities such as gardening".

The benefits of being able to walk amongst trees and meadow planting is well documented as restorative, however creating opportunities to get involved in gardening has the added benefit of social and physical activity, with associated known health benefits, whilst other people choose to grow food and use produce to feed families or source hard to find ingredients.

Many respondents talked about wanting to 'connect to nature' in the park and talked about listening to birds singing, the smell of flowers as sensual connections to a more complex world.

These conversations point to a deeper cultural shift towards living as part of ecologies, rather than being separate to 'nature'. It is important to pay attention to this cultural shift as we move towards actively living with the effects of the climate emergency. The voices of the women and girls included in this research are calling for a climate resilient city in which ecology is threaded through daily life, rather than constrained and organised into parks.

There is no reason why cities cannot be home to greater biodiversity. Car use is diminishing and much of the industry of our time is desk based and small scale. Actively embracing BNG directives and consciously investing in the local ecology to enable the growth of a green city will cool in the summer, suck up rain in the winter and most interestingly of all create space to grow an entirely new, previously unimagined city that is verdant and rich.

Imagining a place like this is perhaps a glimpse into a possible future that could be inclusive, green- a better way for people to live. Is this what a gender inclusive city looks like? Could it give rise to entirely new industries? New growth economies?

"My walking is about my mental health. Yes it's about fitness, but for me is about my mental health. I have teenagers at home, and getting out for a walk, even if it is to go around the block for ten minutes, it is just lovely to get out. To get out and do a longer walk, half an hour, an hour. I think it proximity to green space, walking along the river, being close to the water, the ponds and the canals it's just lovely."

94% of survey responders go to the park and use the park. A key take away from the research however is that in the survey responses, digital walks and workshops women and girls described access to green spaces as an antidote to living with the constant low level threats they are managing on street level.

That is not to say parks are without threat. All following discussion of parks is a discussion about day- time use, however the language used by women and girls in the research changed when talking about parks and canals. There is a clear consensus that parks and green space make Tower Hamlets a great place to live and respondents were proud of the canal networks and the lifestyle this walkable network affords.

A place to relax, access peace and calm, to go for a walk, to access 'nature', fresh air, and sunshine. A place to go with children, do sport, socialise, and picnic. With health and mental health listed as a top benefit.

When asked in the survey to speak about a place in Tower Hamlets that felt good, the majority of women listed green spaces, parks and public gardens. These were places respondent actively chose to spend time. They were described as places that provide respite. One woman who completed the survey frequently talked about her loneliness and that she would sit in the park on a bench at lunchtime to connect with others and see people.

Why do you go to park?

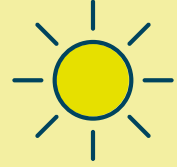
Walk/dog walk



Relax/quiet/peace/calm



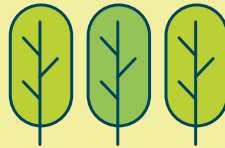
Fresh air/sun



Kids to play park/
family time



Green space and trees
access nature



Short cut or active travel



Healthy/good for
mental health



Beauty/scenery



Sport/exercise



Socialise/café/picnic



How does access to green space improve the quality of your life? (in order of frequency)

- Mental health and well being
- Happier
- Calmer
- Fitter
- Connection to green space
- Better air quality
- Respite from high density
- Space and time out
- Essential/ tranquil
- Improves the mood of children
- Better quality of life
- Necessary because of density and crowding
- Place to decompress
- Peace
- Positivity/meditate

Summary

Cultivating complex ecologies and supporting BNG harmonises with the needs of a climate resilient city. It also supports human health and wellbeing by creating restorative places.

Recommendations

- Transform underutilised green space to serve as community gardens for flats and apartments and provide shared outdoor social space. Good design of these spaces will maximise green space and create opportunities for all local people to gain the use of garden outdoor space. Restorative spaces can diminish ASB, improve mental health and create opportunities to socialise and for play.
- Smaller gardens can connect to the green grid.
- Making specific decisions about parks and walkways on a case-by-case basis. The Let's Talk survey a number of women advocated for parks to be locked at night and canals to be shut at a certain times. Whilst other people talked about better lighting in parks so they can be walked at night. In each instance the respondent will be holding a specific context in mind. It is appropriate to lock some parks at night and close some pathways. Whilst other routes can be kept open and used. These decisions can and should be made in consultation with local people.



5.3.5 Play parks are also social spaces

The National Study of Playgrounds found that over half of park users are over thirteen years old.

“Despite Perceptions that playgrounds are just for children, they are a public resource for all, however they are typically not designed to support teens, adults or seniors to be more active and foster social connection. Adults and seniors are more attracted to picnic table, beams, and boulders, all places where they can perch and have clear lines of sight to children playing. Teens were found most on swings and in spaces where they could connect with friends.

The National Study of Playgrounds (US)

“Most parks have more facilities for dog waste than for teenage girls.”

Make Space for Girls have published their ParkWatch report. The report looked at who was using the facilities aimed at teenagers in parks. The results are shocking, but not surprising:

Overall 88% of users of these facilities were boys



On Multi Use Games Areas (MUGAs), the most popular facility, 92% of users were boys



On skate parks and BMX tracks, 84% of users were boys



MUGAs, BMX tracks and skate parks make up 90% of facilities that the local councils surveyed in the report fund and 90% of their users are boys.

That means that these councils are in effect spending just 10% of the money they spend on park facilities on girls. We know from our research that teenage girls don't feel parks are spaces for them – and this report shows why. But we also know that if we listen to teenage girls and design parks with them in mind then we can change this and make parks a welcoming space for everyone

Teenage girls are largely excluded and excluding themselves from parks and green spaces because they don't feel safe, included, or welcome. The design of MUGA's does not serve them, and teen girls perceive MUGAS as spaces for boys and considered risky because they often have only one entrance/ exit.

The charity 'Make Space for Girls' was set up to advocate for facilities and space in parks for teenage girls, a group that are excluded from planning, design and provision of outdoor space. Their research underlines the concern that teenage girls disappear from public space around the age of 13 because provision for teens is limited to skate parks and MUGA'S. Through their research however they have discovered that, in fact, MUGA's and Skate parks only serve a minority of teenage boys and that actively designing the needs of teenage girls into parks, accommodates the needs of other, less sporty young people who do not play football or skateboard. The findings from their research inform and shape the recommendations for parks and green spaces. (MSFG)

They key findings from Make Space for Girls:

- Girls use parks less than boys
- Girls face many barriers to using the parks as a space to be active.
- These barriers come from: a lack of understanding of the needs of teenage girls in park design; and the way society treats teenage girls if they do go to the park.
- These barriers stifle the girls' opportunities to enjoy the amazing public resources that our parks ought to be
- These barriers limit the rights of teenage girls to enjoy the many health and wellbeing benefits of being outside.



Provision of high-quality play areas for younger children has been established by writers such as Tim Gill in the book 'Urban Playground', through the work of the Bernard Van Leer Foundation and the urban designer, Jan Gehl.

Gender Inclusive Design goes beyond limiting perceptions of women as people who must be taken care of and protected. Instead, inclusive design actively asserts the rights of women and girls to be included in the design of public spaces.

Parks are a key amenity where women are under considered.

Levelling –up parks must be a priority for the borough because the current provision is perpetuating inequality between children and young people. This will affect health, mental health, development and educational attainment. However, levelling up parks must also incorporate the needs of women in any improvements and should consider seating, lighting, increased bio diversity and planting, areas to sit where small children can play nearby, social infrastructures such as park wardens and gardeners, good visibility, wayfinding, interesting planting and trees, wild areas, 'beauty' or attractive areas, clean, tidy and well maintained with clear entrances and exits. However one of the key findings is that parks that are co-designed, co-delivered and have hyper local governance are also welcoming to all.

Recommendations

- Involve teenage girls in shaping parks
- Consult and co-create with local teenage girls to design and develop inclusive, active parks that meet girls' needs, and those of the wider community
- Create varied, exciting and innovative spaces so teenage girls can get active
- Facilitate organised opportunities and community events for girls to enjoy physical activity with others.
- Reframe perceptions of parks as active spaces for everyone, with local campaigns and messaging.
- A good variety of benches and parklets create options for seating. Situating benches away from the path means groups of men are less intimidating to walk past.
- Benches and picnic tables with good visibility, a public toilet and sanitation facilities, bike locks and equipment they can play on with their kids.
- Roving youth teams in parks to engage young people in activities.
- Outdoor gyms could be extended to include women and girls. Equipment arranged socially and not weighted for adult men; to include space for an exercise class to meet outdoors or become a temporary dance floor or stage.





5.3.6 The green grid

On the Digital Walks many women told us 'how' they navigate the city, describing the ways that they curate regular journeys, defining 'their city' by walking. 76% of respondents to the 'Let's Talk' survey stated they actively choose green walking routes to improve their day to day life and avoid busy roads and high levels of pollution.

This is interesting because by and large the routes women described taking by day create a city that is green, pleasant and traffic free. This shows how women modify the city to create an experience of place that fits their aspiration of it.

One woman described taking her route to work, using a longer route that took her across Weavers Fields, down quieter roads, where people had 'taken care of their front gardens' out across Cambridge Heath Road and through the network of alley ways and parks until she reached her place of work. (Digital Walks)

This use of the city and the way it is framed by walking demonstrates the value that residents place on quiet streets, interesting high streets, green routes, parks and gardens. That actively joining up these routes adds genuine richness and value to their day to day lives and quite simply creates a sense of happiness, belonging and ownership and wellbeing.

Furthermore the same women described how they would navigate home after dark, connecting busier, well-lit routes to find their way home via transport hubs and well-lit roads, the shops, to get something for dinner, or socialise or pick up children from childcare.

This 'way' of navigating the city was common and many participants talked about positively mapping routes that gave them pleasure, that were joyful to walk and improved their day.

This is important to acknowledge because this study is about gender inclusive design, responding to what women have told us they like or enjoy, this sense of the 'green grid' as a source of joy, wellbeing and way to connect to friends is present throughout the research. It is therefore a point to listen to.



One of the key themes that connected their walks was quiet streets, green, well looked after streets and access to complex ecologies, parks and gardens. Respondents also told us how these routes were key for exercise and also socialising and that they also bring a huge amount of pride to Tower Hamlets and joy at living there.

The Green Grid concept describes an endeavour to create a grid of connected walking routes across the borough to enable residents to walk safely, create corridors for biodiversity net gain and a joined-up experience of the borough that enables residents to map the area on foot in pleasant, peaceful and safe footpaths. We should perceive this green grid as a social space as much as a green space, the green context in and of itself supporting new relational forms that are both urban and not urban.

This research shows that in fact residents co-create the green grid on a daily basis, choosing routes that enable them to connect to both blue and green ecology and that they do this consciously, acknowledging its value to wellbeing and mental health.

This is another example of how acting and doing are also ways of shaping and making the city, and that paying attention to how women have reported they 'create' their city, by walking, can give us key insights into how to make small adjustments to create maximum benefit to residents' health and well being in the borough. Paying attention to what women and girls have reported both about how they walk in the city and the value and sense of wellbeing that brings to their day to day lives, provides clear direction - a principle, that re-focuses on valuing the experience of walking in Victoria Park or along the canal can provide maximum return in terms of improving wellbeing.

“ Victoria Park is just phenomenal. There are so many little pockets like iron gardens or Meath gardens, Im still surprised. We are so spoilt in Tower Hamlets. I have done the capital ring route.

Connect green routes across London.

“ If there were more marked spots along the canal, more seats, more spaces to meet that would be great. So better wayfinding and meeting spots. It would be amazing to connect the whole greenways of London. Maybe we need an app that does that, so you could walk the whole city without going on roads.

Linked Walking Routes

“ I think what they have done in Old Bethnal Green Road is really pleasing, It is now is really lovely. I think if you can walk along a quieter road with less or no traffic, I would walk further. It would be great to have connected, linked routes to walk, off roads.

When you go for a walk do you actively choose 'green' or off - road walking routes? If so, can you tell us why and explain how those routes benefit you?

- Yes 76%
- No 13%

Overwhelmingly people stated they took green routes to avoid traffic, exposure to pollution, exposing children and babies to pollution, clean air, noise and stressful traffic and the stress of walking on busy roads with small children and babies.

People also commented the canals were friendlier and people smile at one another, the canals make Tower Hamlets feel like a village in the city, it is better for mental health, gives respite from the city and that people wanted to connect to nature by walking next to water, trees.

The complaints focused on aggressive cyclists and feeling unsafe around bikes, having disabilities which mean the uneven surface is tricky and preferring busy roads because of better visibility. Two people also stated they like to look at architecture and walk on streets to see more city scape.

Summary:

The Green Grid is already a popular and well used part of the borough comprising of a network of pathways along the canals and through parks, gardens and quiet tree lined roads. Participants in this research spoke of their pride in this area describing the lifestyle it affords as beneficial to health, wellbeing, community and sociability in the borough. They also talked about how they created their version of the borough by mapping pleasant routes by day and 'safer' routes after dark. The primary positives people stated for using the green grid was to be close to nature, to breath clean air, to escape the noise and pollution of busy roads and to be able to walk safely and easily with children, without fear of traffic.

Participants also talked about the value of the green grid as a place to exercise, again, avoiding pollution, noise and traffic on busy roads.

Recommendations

Maximise all green space in the borough for biodiversity NetGain and to support social infrastructure by developing or creating parks and gardens.



Connect parks and gardens across the borough with a network of greenways and walking routes.



Ensure this network of green routes can support social infrastructure by including meet up hubs, café stops, play areas for children, play on the way and interventions to encourage 'play' for older children and teenagers.



Work with local land owners to connect the green grid, this could include institutions such as Queen Mary University London, who would like to be part of the scheme.



Give the Green Grid a name, visual identity, maps, and wayfinding that tell people they are on the green grid and how to navigate Tower Hamlets via its current greenways.



The green grid is a source of local pride.



Connect to education and school projects.



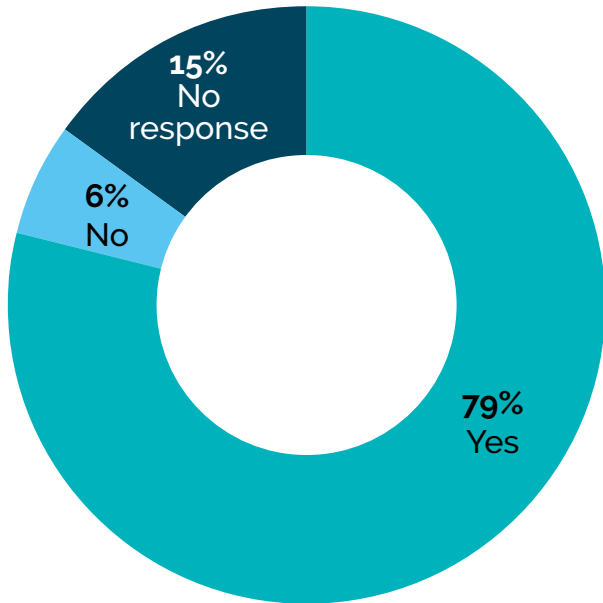
Wayfinding to connect to identity or the borough, tell our stories and narrate local history, ecology etc.





5.3.7 Walking is a social space

Figure 5: Do you consider parks and canals to be social spaces?



Caveated 1 responses stated: Parks are social spaces, canals not so much.

- They are social spaces, but drug dealing makes them feel unsafe
- Social spaces for others, not me.
- Dangerous at night.
- Cyclists too fast.

The aspirations for a joined up green grid across Tower Hamlets are echoed by survey responses in which 76% of respondents stated they actively choose to walk on green routes, away from traffic and roads, if they could.

Overwhelmingly people stated they took green routes to avoid traffic, noise, exposure to pollution, and exposing children and babies to pollution.

People also stated it was extremely stressful to walk along busy roads with small children and babies and that they actively choose green routes because of benefits to health and wellbeing.

The Green Grid is a tried and tested positive asset in Tower Hamlets. Women and girls have told us about the value this brings to their day to day life in the borough, the impact walking in green space has on their mental health and sense of wellbeing, their capacity to care for their children. They have talked about canals and green spaces as social spaces, with % of people stating they view green spaces as social spaces. It is free to meet a friend and walk along the canal or in the park and provides meeting places for all, regardless of impact. Women have reported that the green grid is where they exercise and that it is a place to run, cycle and walk away from busy roads. Finally, they have talked about the green grid as a good place to walk with babies and children because it is a way to avoid stressful walks down busy roads and limit exposure to air pollution.

More Facilities on the Canal

I love walking around here, it is very green which is much better as it is less polluted (she is walking with a small baby) we have an older four-year-old as well, so when you have the playground and the canals it's great, we love living in London because of the green space. We live in Peckham, and we walk from Shoreditch down through Limehouse and across the river. There could be more facilities along the canals, cafés and coffee shops, public toilets and drinking fountains. I'm just thinking I have to change and feed the baby and I don't know where to do that. I also haven't walked down the canal at night, and I think as a woman I probably wouldn't feel that safe.

Audio Transcript

Summary

Women and girls have reported that the parks and canals in LBTH are social spaces, and that walking is a social activity that gives them a sense of community, freedom and enjoyment. Participants in this research have said they value the lifestyle this network of parks affords, and they name it as one of the best aspects of living in the borough.

Recommendations

- Maximise the current green grid and parks.
- Expand the green grid and extend connecting routes to other parks and greenways.
- This can be used to improve failing areas by adding the grid effect- footfall.
- This can enable improvements to parks and gardens that need it and extend the scope of the grid.

5.3.8 Active travel- walking, running, cycling and exercise after dark



Shared spaces can feel cramped.

“ There are not enough cycle routes around here. The cycle routes are also used by walkers and runners and it can feel quite cramped at times. I think there needs to be some dedicated routes for cyclists.

Audio Transcript

The Green Grid presents a complex set of questions that are not easily solved to satisfy all people. There are many issues here which are at once interconnected and at the same time each complex and in need of in-depth attention. People on foot value the canals and parks as a social space, a place to meet, walk with children and meet friends or exercise, they see it as a leisure space, or a walking space to connect areas whilst avoiding roads. Those who travel by bike see it as a way to navigate the borough without travelling on busy roads.

This report focuses on representing the experience of women and girls. The overwhelming response regarding cycling and cycle routes is that male cyclists feel dangerous and aggressive. This annoys pedestrians, makes walking with children on shared cycle paths tricky and puts off many women who want to cycle or want to cycle with kids.

The conflict here is that the current network of canals and pathways feel cramped. As places for active travel they enable people to get around on foot or by bike quickly, but as spaces for leisure they can feel less relaxing.

In turn there is an issue of lighting. If this network are to be focal active travel routes they would then need adequate lighting to ensure safe passage after dark (particularly given the proximity to the canal!) however this network are also preserved for biodiversity netgain, and there is conflict here around lighting.

- Participants talked about wanting to be able to exercise outdoors and run all year round.
- They wanted to be able to walk all year round after dark on the canal.
- They wanted to be able to cycle.
- They wanted to be able to cycle but felt they couldn't because of the 'alpha male' attitude of many cyclists stopped them.
- They wanted to be able to cycle their children to school but felt other cyclists created an aggressive attitude.
- They wanted to be able to cycle on roads but felt cycle provision was inadequate or male dominated.
- They wanted to be able to walk along the canal without intrusion from bikes.
- They felt that sharing pedestrian and cycle routes caused conflict.
- They felt that shared pedestrian and cycle routes made walking tricky with children.
- The green grid supports bio diversity which needs darkness at night.
- Women wished for the canals to be locked at night and alternative busy routes to be better lit.
- Women wished for the canals to be lit at night and usable.

At the moment this very fine network of routes is being asked to be all things to all people. Cyclists become frustrated by pedestrians and vice versa and this conflict is counterproductive, especially when one of the greatest values is peace, tranquillity and mental health and wellbeing.

Summary

There is a need for active travel and exercise after dark to be a readily available option for women. Cycling superhighways are male dominated and women have reported that they feel aggressive. Whereas running after dark feels unsafe and stressful to many women. Women don't want to run along well lit busy roads that are highly polluted, nor can they run at night in parks alone.

Some women want more lighting and to make parks safe, whilst others talked about options like running groups and specific groups or activity that make parks feel safe. Others talked about appropriating spaces such as Canary Wharf or Westfield for night time running and leisure.

There was however clear conflict between the runners who wanted to run and not be 'lumped together' with cyclists or the cyclists who wanted well lit highways to be more accessible to them.

By day women felt that cycling had become very aggressive and dominated by men.

The development of active travel in Tower Hamlets could be seen in line with the green grid. However, there is a lot of conflict between daytime and nighttime and whether shared highways work.

Recommendations

- Further study is needed to look at how to solve the complex problem and lay the foundations for a really efficient set of cycle routes- transport, set against the need for restorative spaces, places for women to walk, socialise, walk with children, without being in conflict with bikes.
- Clarification around types of active travel and whether people are running, cycling and walking for leisure or for transport. Separating out leisure walking, running and cycling from active travel could be a way to re-prioritise the green grid.
- The Green Grid would be an area for leisurely travel which would focus on enjoyment of the space and a focus on prioritising the experience of other users. Cyclists could therefore use these routes, but on the understanding it is for slow travel, cycling with kids, social walking and running. A leisure space. Where speed does not have right of way and consideration of other users is a priority. This network would be unlit at night to prioritise Bio diversity and nature.
- For those wishing to actively travel for transport and/ or after dark an alternative active travel network would prioritise commuters and provide a safe busy route for cyclists after dark. This network could connect to the after dark walking super highways in order to populate busy, well lit routes and create safer feeling areas after dark.
- Considering this as a leisure space then in turn creates the option to weave in amenities.



6. Summary of key recommendations

Gender inclusive design is a highly consultative and responsive approach to design that factors in the need for streets, parks and public spaces to perform multiple roles. Gender inclusive places are hard working. They can simultaneously be somewhere to play, somewhere to socialise, somewhere to relax, a pleasant way to travel, somewhere to feel safe, somewhere to sit with nature.

Gender inclusive spaces are layered and multi-use. They are created collaboratively with input from all users especially women, girls and gender diverse people.

Gender inclusivity should be seen as a design tool and an approach to urban design. The second half of this document (to be published later in 2024) will look at how to deliver and implement for gender inclusivity.

The following recommendations summarise recommendations and are organised under the headings 'Empowering and educating' which look at how design interventions can make getting around easier and reinforce positive cultures.

Inclusive, enabling and strengthening community considers the social infrastructures that are needed to create better places.

Recommendations under the heading 'restorative borough', look at changes that can support health and wellbeing and offset the burden and stress women and girls (and most people) experience in the borough.

Recommendations
1. Welcoming Borough- Empowering and educating
Development
Design of public realm should include a combination of the following elements: wide pavements, street trees and plants, wayfinding, benches, good lighting and street seating, playable elements where appropriate to create more welcoming places. Ongoing programs of work should be planned to ensure places are kept clean and well maintained.
Eyes on the street- opportunities for passive surveillance via street level windows, active frontages that have a range of uses (shops and cafes, community resources such as childcare, gyms etc), avoid creating alleyways and concealed exits or routes with limited escape options.
Ensure that entrances into apartment blocks are designed with clear sight lines and good visibility and that rear entrances and exits, routes to bins, cycle stores and car parking areas are well lit.
Lighting is place shaping and should be considered a design element. Lighting can shape and enhance areas after dark, create social spaces and discourage anti-social behaviour.
Conduct a survey of current lighting provision, identify gaps and areas for improvement. Commission an SPD for lighting that considers how good lighting can enhance places and make them feel more welcoming. It is important to explore flexible solutions for example temporal interventions such as changing the brightness of lighting at certain times of the evening considering impact on wildlife and human sleep patterns.
Design of parks and public spaces should focus on welcoming people by encouraging a range of activity, different environments to sit in, variety of seating and activity. Teenagers like to and should be encouraged to play. Simple interventions like swings from trees can connect young people to nature and create social spaces.
Ensure good visibility and passive surveillance in common areas and around entrances and exits to new development creating an 'even' experience between areas. Avoid making situations where new developments sit in stark contrast to high street or existing estates.
Prioritise flow across an area and build shared community infrastructures.

Recommendations
Design clear post occupancy guidance on maintenance and in particular lighting so that tenants know how/ who to report and resolve maintenance issues.
Use CIL and Section 106 funding to develop whole community infrastructure. Ensure gender equality by co-designing with residents and speaking to women and girls. Residents can benefit from new development through improvement to existing facilities for example levelling up parks and play areas.
CCTV cameras should be clear and visible in places, where women feel vulnerable. (Front and back door to block/ car parks)
Safer streets mean less traffic. Safe routes to schools, local parks, high streets and leisure facilities should design out the threat posed by busy roads and pollution making it easier for parents to walk with children.
Culture shift
Use the term 'welcoming' instead of safety. If we will create welcoming public spaces. The word 'safe' is misleading because design cannot guarantee safety.
Consider the language that LBTH uses to talk about women's safety and be aware of how that perpetuates sexism and victimisation of women and girls. Focus on asking the question, why are men violent?
Co-create signage and messaging for parks and public spaces to indicate and build positive shared behaviour.
Raise the profile of women in LBTH by naming new streets, buildings and public spaces after women who have shaped the borough.
Commission new public artworks from and by women.
Design is a language, from the fine detail to the big picture. Imagine a future city shaped by inclusive design- feminist architecture?
Improved facilities
Provision for public toilets across the borough is very poor. Greater access to sanitation is important particularly in parks and green spaces. However, consideration must be given to the design and placement of new toilet blocks and avoid creating new 'unsafe' places.
Blocks should be self-contained cubicles with floor to ceiling doors that open outwards. Placement should consider passive, but not direct, surveillance; near café or shops (e.g. slightly set back from a high street), in a busy car park or set off to the side of a public square.
Toilets should be free.
There should be 'women's' toilets and mixed gender toilets, with baby change facilities in the mixed cubicle and men's toilets with a ratio 2:3:1. Consideration should be given to where queues would form and whether that would be a mixed queue or separate gender queue. If a queue is mixed it should form in a visible area (not behind the block or out of sight)
Blocks should have an auto cleaning function that is activated after 15 minutes or after use.
Clear wayfinding and route maps for navigation through parks and green spaces is important. Wayfinding should also be legible at night and guide people towards nearest 'peopled' place- offering, for example daytime and nighttime routes. (This should link to green grid strategy)

Recommendations
<p>Benches are important and make places more inclusive for women and girls. This is a conflict with advice from the police, however research into the psychology of seating shows that when design and placement of benches is considered improved seating 'people's' places and creates a more diverse user group. The recommendation here is to increase benches, social spaces and seating outdoors in order to develop more diverse user groups.</p>
2. Inclusive Borough- Enabling individuals and strengthening community
<p>The development or regeneration of any new park or public space should consider and implement community infrastructure from the outset. This could include employing wardens, gardeners, youth workers, setting up social groups to programme or manage the space and creating community gardens and food growing areas. This should connect to cross cutting themes such as health determinants or social prescribing.</p>
<p>Design alone cannot make a place feel safe, passive surveillance and activity make a place feel welcoming. Awareness of authority figures (This could be a café owner, gardening team, youth worker or park wardens) can provide light touch reassurance.</p>
<p>Facilitate and enable community activity through arts, culture and events.</p>
<p>Help people and communities to set up an event or street party with minimal red tape by making council systems clear and easy with short turn around.</p>
<p>Council to provide 'in kind' support to activity by making shared resources and expertise accessible.</p>
Change starts with us
<p>Within the council there is extensive local place knowledge, a broad range of expertise and deep connections with the local community.</p>
<p>LBTH should establish a pool of employees to consult on new development proposals and share their professional and local knowledge with DM teams.</p>
<p>They could advise on the detail of proposed development and the broader local context including potential impact/ improvements to local community.</p>
<p>Stop letting flats and apartments stand empty. Discourage the purchase of investment property or Air B&B through Leasehold agreements, by increasing rates and council tax for second homes.</p>
<p>Support independent and diverse business- offer a variety of units and manage rents and business rates to create more unique and independent places with variable opening hours.</p>
<p>Encourage school streets, low traffic neighbourhoods and flexible road closures around school pick up and drop off so that it feels safer to choose active travel.</p>
<p>Co-design signage for parks and public spaces to indicate shared behaviour and build shared mutually respectful culture.</p>
<p>Co-design and make improvements to parks and green spaces with residents and work together to implement changes.</p>

Recommendations
<p>Engage women and girls in design process prior to design phase. Create opportunities to hear about their experiences and write design brief together. Create feedback loops to test ideas and check in.</p> <p>Design engagement strategies with barriers to participation in mind. Pay people for their time or offer a fair exchange.</p> <p>Co-designers should be independent.</p>
<p>Public space should be flexible.</p> <p>Activate local parks at varying times of the day; activities for pre-school children in the morning, after school activity for older children, youths and teens early evening, apprenticeships in urban gardening, and initiatives linked to the circular economy, community gardening groups or activity via social prescribers, meet ups for the elderly.</p> <p>Consult on a park-by-park basis and add infrastructure and a program as needed.</p>
<p>Embrace the history of the area and tell its stories through murals and public art. Build shared culture across the borough by developing history and art trails. Ensure that these illuminate the lives of women.</p>
<p>Encourage hyper local governance of parks and an open dialogue with residents. This could include working with existing stakeholders and community groups to extend their activity outdoors in summer months or linking to initiatives such as social prescribers, food banks or London wide charities such as 'National Park City'.</p> <p>Focus policing and wardens to tackle drug dealing, drug taking and associated activity in public spaces.</p>
Inclusive practice
<p>Employ women architects and designers and ensure teams are diverse. When assessing suppliers ensure workplace diversity is a consideration.</p>
<p>Consider who is planning/ who is designing/ who is building. Are developers women and are women represented on their teams at decision making level?</p>
<p>Set inclusion targets and implement a detailed equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) action plan.</p>
<p>Include a policy at corporate equality level, that teams will be scrutinised for diversity stating that LBTH understands the pressing need for inclusion and diversity within architecture and the construction industry and the value of employing diverse teams because of the broader range of ideas that can lead to inclusive design in all projects.</p>
<p>Support equity, diversity and inclusion in the workplace.</p> <p>LBTH can build equity into teams by setting up peer mentoring for new colleagues and help build confidence to, for example, speak up in meetings, navigate stressful encounters and learn from more established colleagues.</p>
<p>Create internship and work experience opportunities for school age girls in LBTH encouraging all women, women from diverse backgrounds and socio-economic groups.</p>

Recommendations
Connect to schools, youth groups and youth provision in the council and establish collaborative youth projects that encourage girls into careers in design and the built environment.
3. Restorative Borough- Prioritising health and ecology.
Level up parks and green spaces. Current provision replicates inequality across the borough. This impacts women, girls, school age and preschool children and perpetuates socio-economic deprivation.
Level up access to play grounds, play equipment and increase the variety of trees and plants, materials, surfaces, levels in parks and play areas to encourage curious inventive and risky play.
Women socialise at the play-park too. Create places to meet, interesting, flexible spaces that women can enjoy in all weathers whilst looking after children. Consider making some covered seating, places to chat with good visibility over playground, things that adults and kids can play on together.
Shift emphasis away from large open areas of ground towards more landscaped planting, complex ecology and zoned areas that facilitate a variety of activity and community interaction including non gendered sports such as handball and volley ball, rollerskating, swings and risky play, rounders and international sports.
Many women feel that football pitches and large areas of grass are excluding and not for them.
Wide pavements and street trees create a buffer to busy roads and improve pedestrian experience.
Consider placement and design of benches. Provide a good variety of benches, parklets and options for seating.
Situating benches away from the path means groups of men are less intimidating to walk past. Boys and young men are entitled to meet in parks but large groups can feel intimidating. Situating some benches away from the path would give teenagers space to socialise.
Ensure Parks have visible entrances and exits, walking loops and tracks to walk with a friend, to run, roller skate or dog walk etc.
Transform underutilised green space to serve as community gardens for flats and apartments.
Good design of these spaces will maximise green space (creating opportunities for BNG) and provide residents with access to the outdoors and therefore space to socialise, play, chat etc.
Outdoor spaces can be restorative, improve mental health, build community connection and has been shown to reduce ASB.
Smaller gardens can connect to the green grid and walking routes.
Consult and co-create with local teenage girls to design and develop inclusive, active outdoor spaces that meet girls' needs, and those of the wider community. Create varied, exciting and innovative spaces to support girls to get active.

Recommendations

Outdoor gyms could include women and girls. Equipment arranged socially and not weighted for adult men; to include space for an exercise class to meet outdoors or become a temporary dance floor or stage.

Developing the concept of the green grid

Give the Green Grid a name, visual identity, maps, and wayfinding that tell people they are on the green grid and how to navigate Tower Hamlets via its current greenways. Use this identity to build pride in the borough and celebrate its unique green assets, history and culture.

Encourage new development and current land owners to connect to the green grid.

Whilst land is at a premium in LBTH the experience of green space can be extended by connecting parks and gardens via walking routes and avoiding busy roads.

Ensure this network of green routes can support social infrastructure by including meet up hubs, café stops, play areas for children, play on the way and interventions to encourage 'play' for older children and teenagers.

