



# Teenagers and Public Space Research: Final Report

2023

**A Project for Sustrans, led by Dr Jenny Wood and Dr Jamie Hamilton, A Place in Childhood (APiC)**

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Jenny is a highly-respected research and participation specialist, who has spent over 10 years working with and for children and young people. Her core professional interest is understanding social systems and human-environment interactions, towards identifying socially-just policy interventions to complex problems. She is a leading expert in children's human rights and the built environment with a strong track record in the field of homelessness and assisting people experiencing severe and multiple disadvantage. Prior to APiC, Jenny conducted a PhD which highlighted the spatial implications of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. She is author of many academic papers and reports, including the first overarching review of the child-friendliness of town planning systems across the UK.

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## Executive Summary

This report details the process and outcomes of a Participatory Action Research Project in three Scottish communities, to explore teenager's needs from public space. The three places are:

- North Edinburgh;
- Huntly (Aberdeenshire); and
- The Denny and Bonnybridge area (Falkirk).

They each cover differing urban/rural categories and geographies, with all linked to a Sustrans Places for Everyone project. At all stages of the work, outcomes have fed both this research and the respective plans for delivery of infrastructure and placemaking interventions on-the-ground.

In each case study, APiC worked with groups of teenagers to create experiential maps that show experiences and priorities from their perspective. This forms the bedrock of insights in this report, and was followed up by a Local Strategy Workshop to facilitate dialogue between young people and local stakeholders on their priorities, ideas, and work already ongoing/in development. For context-specific reasons detailed in this report, a slightly different approach needed to be taken in North Edinburgh. In total, 146 young people between the ages of 12 and 18 took part, alongside adult stakeholders from local and national public bodies, charities, and community groups.

The work culminated in a National Workshop where stakeholders across all case studies were invited to look at the bigger picture of teenagers and public space across Scotland. This report therefore includes both place-specific insights and priorities, and recommendations for Sustrans to bring into their work across the country. The most significant problem participants would like to see tackled is anti-social behaviour, yet the solutions lie beyond the typical surveillance and control measures often suggested. Creating more places to go and things to do for teenagers is fundamental, with many interested, motivated, and able to play an active part in their planning and design.

From the findings of this work, APiC proposes the following recommendations for Sustrans:

1. Prioritise all measures that lead to improved community safety, especially recognising the positive impact this can have for girls.
2. Prioritise all actions that reduce anti-social behaviour, recognising:
  - that effective design necessarily integrates both infrastructural and community-based interventions; and
  - related strategies are best co-developed with young people who regularly experience, and best understand the root causes.
3. Build the meaningful engagement of young people into Places for Everyone Programmes from RIBA Stage 0 (Strategic Definition) and establish a plan of engagement for the entire project at the start.
4. Work on the principles of 'trustful dialogue' and transparency when engaging with young people.
5. Acknowledge and work with the fact some communities will require more work to

establish trust and meaningful engagement with young people.

Bringing young people and adult stakeholders into a trustful dialogue has proven an important and successful part of this project. However, this needs to stretch beyond one-off conversations and into genuine commitment to shared agendas and collaborative change. The ways in which Sustrans's infrastructural improvements in communities can support these aims are manifold, yet they will always work best if other partners outwith the built environment sectors can be engaged as well. The findings from this research provide fruitful ground to begin these actions as part of Sustrans' work to improve walking, wheeling and cycling opportunities for everyone. They also have further application to any and all place-based interventions that seek to improve the experiences in teenagers in and beyond Scotland.





# Chapter 1



# Introduction

Teenagers are an often-overlooked stakeholder in the design of public space and infrastructure in our towns, cities, and countryside. While teenagers may often be considered a ‘nuisance’ by other users of public space, research and consultations in communities continually point to a lack of things for people in this age group to do. Moreover, while teenagers may often be major culprits of anti-social behaviour, many young people when asked will note that the behaviour of them and their peers is often misinterpreted by adults and younger children. Indeed, they often point out that they are the group most affected by anti-social behaviour from their peers and from adults (Wood & Hamilton, 2022).

This project, conducted by A Place in Childhood (APiC), on behalf of Sustrans, seeks to understand what teenagers need from public space, and how they may most effectively be catered for and involved in placemaking projects. A range of literature exists on these needs, yet there is wide acknowledgement that gaps remain in several areas, and there is not yet enough strategic direction to guide Sustrans’ particular needs in Places for Everyone schemes. We know that public space is crucial for teenagers. It is the “key site in [teenagers] everyday lives. This is where they meet up, where they socialise and where they foster a sense of collective and individual identity” (Bourke, 2020). Indeed, the “adolescent years mark an important staging post in the evolution of a sense of community connection and civic identity” (Gill, 2019).

In commissioning this work, Sustrans wanted to know how to better respond to the needs of teenagers in public space, and how to consult and navigate the potential conflict between the needs of teenagers and other members of local communities. Tackling this (mis)perception through Sustrans’ infrastructure and behaviour change approaches will yield benefits for every scheme and increase understanding of teenagers’ needs from public space more widely. This will enable Sustrans to truly design places “for everyone”.

We already know some of the specific needs of teenagers, such as shelter from the weather; gathering spaces where they will not bother or be bothered by others; physical activity opportunities; access to food; places to study; and places to be creative. Yet, significant questions remain which require further investigation to effectively inform Sustrans’ programmes. These are:

1. What are the needs of teenagers within specific communities in Scotland, and how might Sustrans infrastructure and placemaking activities best serve these?
2. What difference are there in terms of need between teenagers of differing UK protected characteristics? Specifically, Sustrans would like to understand age and gender differences.
3. What are the most appropriate methods of engagement with teenagers on infrastructure and placemaking projects?
4. How can practitioners mediate and balance potential conflicts within a community between the needs of teenagers and other groups?

## The Project

This research project has investigated the issues by conducting a literature review and Participatory Action Research in three different places across Scotland, covering differing urban/rural categories and geographies. In all cases, a Sustrans Places for Everyone project was in place in each of these areas and in differing stages of development. These correspond with the Royal Institute of British Architecture's (RIBA) Plan of Work stages. Engagement work with young people and local stakeholders has thus had the dual purpose of contributing to this research and to the design and implementation work in each place. The three case studies are:

- Huntly (Aberdeenshire), relating to the Room to Thrive project led by Huntly and District Development Trust. This project was in Stage 3 (Developed Design) in the RIBA process.
- The Denny and Bonnybridge area (Falkirk), relating to the Denny to Falkirk Union Canal connection project, led by Falkirk Council. This project was in Stage 1 (Preparation & Brief) of the RIBA process.
- North Edinburgh, relating to the North Edinburgh Active Travel (NEAT) Connections Project led by The City of Edinburgh Council. This was in Stage 2 (Concept Design) in the RIBA process).

This report begins in chapter 2 with an exploration of the research questions, through a literature review on the existing evidence on teenagers and public space and how to engage young people. In chapter 3, we then turn towards the methodology for conducting the case study research. Following this, chapters 4-6 each present a case study. The report then draws together the overall findings from across Scotland in chapter 7. We end by drawing conclusions and recommendations for Sustrans's future work in chapter 8, to ensure better inclusion of teenagers in decisions and outcomes around public space going forward. While these have been put together with Sustrans in mind, they also have broader applicability to other placemaking, infrastructure, and community building projects with and for teenagers.





# Chapter 2



# Teenagers and Public Space - Policy and Evidence Review

In the UK age is a protected characteristic under the Equality Act 2010, which means that public authorities should endeavour to improve understanding between differing equalities groups and strive for progress in facilitating differing needs. With this, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, and sexual orientation must also be taken into consideration. These characteristics can all apply to teenagers, on top of the age protection. However, understanding and willingness to cater for these differences remains lacking in the built environment (Wood et al. 2019). Supplementary to this, Article 15 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) (UN 1989) states that children (anyone up to the age of 18) have a right to gather in public space, providing that no laws are broken. Meanwhile, Article 12 gives them the right to participate in all matters that affect them, and Article 31 outlines a right to play, rest, leisure, and access cultural life. Public space is critical for enacting these rights, and both the Planning (Scotland) Act 2019 and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (Scotland) Bill are enshrining new obligations on public authorities to ensure children and young people's needs and rights are incorporated into future decisions.

Poor perceptions of teenagers are often reinforced by national planning and maintenance policies, as well as social norms that increasingly see young people spending much of their leisure time indoors (Wood et al. 2019). However, we also know that teenagers are routinely excluded from public space for matters that do not constitute a real threat to others (Horschelmann and van Blerk 2012), and many teenagers cite the actions of their peers as a reason they do not venture outdoors themselves (Wood and Hamilton 2022). The 2016 Scottish Health study shows that around one quarter of children aged 5 to 15 do not meet physical activity guidelines over an average week. This is shown in Figure 1. Moreover, the proportion not meeting these standards increases with age (Scottish Government 2017). Ensuring a built environment that encourages outdoor physical activity by teenagers is therefore an important policy imperative (James et al. 2018).

## The proportion of children meeting the physical activity guidelines declined with age

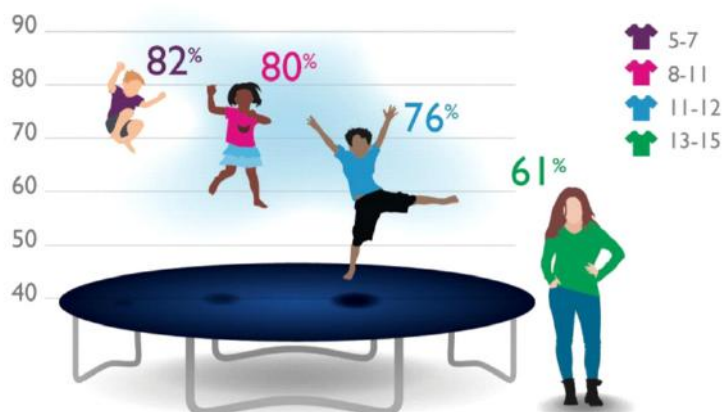


Figure 1 Proportion of children meeting the physical activity guidelines. (Diagram Source: Transport Scotland 2020, p.40)

## Teenhood and Public Space

Rural environments are often pictured as the idyll for raising children, playing off the romantic ideas of innocence and the countryside (Holloway and Valentine 2000, Jones and Barker 2000, Jones 2002). Though there may be a greater range of outdoor activities that some appreciate in rural environments (Wood and Hamilton 2022), there are also often other restrictions, such as poor public transport and limited leisure options that studies show do not always provide young people with the opportunities their urban counterparts can enjoy (Jones and Barker 2000, Matthews et al. 2000, Nordström 2010, Davey and Lundy 2011). Meanwhile, cities are often pictured as dangerous or ‘corrupting’, and where children need increasing protection (Gill 2008). The limited personal mobility this affords has a range of potentially negative effects on both children and adults, such as increasing mental and physical health problems (Jackson et al. 2008, Steiner 2009, Strife and Downey 2009), and adult intolerance of children playing in public space (Percy-Smith, 2010; Dickerson, 2013). This indicates that prevailing norms and ideas of the ideal childhood could be denying children’s place in the urban and denying them opportunities in the rural.

To this end Hörschelmann and Van Blerk, (2012) put forward a compelling argument to evidence that cities are more than just context for young people’s lives. Cities shape them and provide structure to the culture and meaning of growing up in the contemporary world. However, ‘out of placeness’ has been coined to describe how young people are seen in cities (Sibley 1995, Connolly and Ennew 1996, Hörschelmann and Van Blerk 2012). Unaccompanied young people in the urban landscape are often viewed as disruptive and can become targets of adult intervention such as surveillance and police ‘stop and search’ initiatives (Travlou 2003). This can be further exacerbated by socioeconomic differences with young people living in deprived and affluent areas of cities having differing environmental experiences, and encountering differing public perception of their potential threat (Valentine and McKendrick 1998, Castonguay and Jutras 2009).

Some of the most widely recognised and acknowledged land uses for children and young people are schools, playgrounds, and parks. Yet, many young people prefer space to hang around, socialise and participate in activities of their own choice rather than those prescribed by adults (Derr et al. 2013, Cele and van der Burgt 2015). A problematic conflation of children and young people’s needs as being the same across all ages can lead both to areas of conflict where all are designated the same space for their leisure (Wood 2016), and a feeling from adults that young people should not be hanging around but engaged in something ‘more productive’.

Evidence consistently points to teenagers having distinct needs from public space that are unique to this age group, alongside many that are common with other groups. For adolescents, opportunities to socialise with peers, and the informal social support this brings, is particularly important for wellbeing (McGrath et al. 2009, Smith et al. 2015), with young people more likely to be lonely than older age groups (Coughlan 2018). <sup>1</sup> However, in the UK teenagers are often marginalised, stereotyped, and seen as a nuisance. They are routinely excluded from public spaces either due to lack of suitable facilities, inability to pay for facilities that are provided, or for low tolerance of their presence from adults (Day & Wagner, 2010; Derr, 2015; NACTO, 2020). Such isolation from the rest of society can lead to increased teen alienation, dysfunction, and antagonism (Derr, 2015).

*1 - Wording from Children’s 20-minute neighbourhoods (Coles and Musgrove, 2023).*

Unfortunately, the needs of teenagers are routinely misunderstood and this accords with a broader lack of understanding of adolescence as a developmental stage in humans. Piaget's (1952) widely regarded theory of developmental stages in children shows that adolescence (broadly age 12-18) is a time where abstract thought capacity improves, and young people are therefore more tuned to academic ideas and theory than younger children. However, at the same time recent international research from the OECD (2021) shows that there is a consistent reduction in social and emotional skills between the ages of 10 and 15. This likely accords with a mixture of developmental changes and school environment, where conformity and grade attainment is increasingly emphasised. However, older children/adolescents still need play opportunities, just often with more adventure and risk than younger children. They are experiencing brain changes that incentivise greater socialisation and a need to experience and navigate uncertainty. Being 'part of a crowd' can therefore be important and so gathering spaces should be created with teenagers in mind. These need to be flexible and give young people some control over how the space is organised. There also needs to be space with more familiarity and security to recuperate away after spending time exploring and 'performing' identities in large groups (Barclay 2019).

Regardless of causation, research on developmental stages and social and emotional skills accord with culturally accepted observations of teenagers as often struggling more with emotional regulation than adults; more attuned to and concerned by the opinions of others; and struggling with the dual pressures of what is required for successful adulthood and their own developing self-image. Indeed, puberty leads to physical and hormonal changes that can lead young people to feel out of step with their own bodies, and increasingly focused on social and sexual concerns that do not tend to worry younger children (Travlou 2003). Wood and Hamilton (2022) note the impacts of self-image and social norms in their recent systems-map of the factors that influence young people's motivation and confidence to active travel in Scottish Communities, especially for girls. This mix of changes explains why teenagers can find it difficult to meet adult standards and norms in public space and may have little interest in doing so.

Pushing boundaries and self-discovery are age-old pursuits of young people. In many ways, it therefore appears the problem of teenagers and public space is one of socially constructed norms of acceptability that lead to intolerance of the teenage demeanour and actions. Providing for teenagers is thus as much about challenging ideas of what is deemed acceptable to do in public space as it is ensuring there is appropriate provision. Research shows that, contrary to common perception, teenagers generally want to be integrated into public spaces and want to see public spaces designed for everyone (Bourke, 2014). Spaces that work for all are important in encouraging intergenerational interaction – which has itself been in decline in the UK. This can benefit both young people and older adults, through enhancing community cohesion, understanding, and social opportunities.

## What do we already know about the needs of teenagers?

An increasing number of studies in the last decade look at the specific needs of teenagers. A pivotal systematic review by Hecke et al. (2018) looked at open space characteristics and their influence on use and physical activity by adolescents. Through extensive evaluation of 31 articles, they note a range of features of public space that attract and detract teenagers. A key finding is that teenagers like diverse facilities for all age groups, so that they can benefit from intergenerational interactions. They also like to alternate between different activities, and so range of provision is important. For instance, playgrounds are often deemed by teenagers as for younger age groups, though their presence in public space can also be welcome for some



in terms of using equipment such as swings if there are not youth-specific options. They can also feel safer in the presence of younger children than their own or older peers. **Adventurous play facilities such as giant slides, swings, climbing equipment and flying foxes may in fact attract teenagers specifically.** They are also especially important for teenagers taking their young siblings out to play, which is common in many families.

Sport and recreational facilities are also positive characteristics for public space visitation. These may include **basketball courts, football pitches, public indoor swimming pools, bike tracks, BMX jumps, paths and trails, and treehouses.** Amenities such as **toilets, drinking fountains, benches, comfortable seating with heaters, sheds, shelters, tables, affordable food options and BBQ facilities** are positive features for attracting teenage use for long periods. Additionally, **chalkboards, performing arts stages and sculpture gardens were found to be positive features in spaces such as parks. Boundary markers, such as fences can be useful for ad hoc games and providing privacy and protection from others.** However, needing additional equipment such as supplying your own rackets for badminton or tennis can be off-putting for some. Natural features, beauty and less constrained outdoor spaces are also highly regarded by teenagers, especially when they provide adventurous opportunities including water features, trails, and varied terrain. Meanwhile, both public transport links and good quality active travel infrastructure that connects young people to motivating destinations is very encouraging for visitation. Conversely, high levels of motor traffic are off-putting and limit the movements of young people. This is something strongly confirmed by Wood and Hamilton's (2022) research in four Scottish communities.

In terms of local amenities, there are a range that attract young people which are confirmed both by Van Hecke et al.'s (2018) systematic review and Wood and Hamilton's (2022) Scottish research. For instance:

- Sufficient light is important, though many adolescents (especially girls) avoid public space after dark regardless of lighting.
- Flags, symbols and statues, and other cultural features can increase a sense of connection to a place and therefore willingness to use it.
- Park comfort is positively associated with number of adolescents in the space in some cases, but it can depend on who those people are. Meanwhile, isolated, and secluded areas feel unsafe, and teenagers can fear assault.
- Good maintenance and modern equipment increase a sense of welcome. Rubbish, unsolicited graffiti, dirt, dog fouling, illegal dumping, broken glass, lack of smooth and well-kept surfaces, evidence of drug use, vandalism and bad smells are all negatives and enhance fear of using public space.
- Safe road crossings are vital.

Beyond general amenities, there are some additional features that may put young people off using a space, such as unleashed dogs, and some limited evidence that safety-related features such as police substations, park wardens, lighting and emergency phones may detract teenage visitors (Loukaitou-Sideris and Sideris 2010). Indeed, rules and restrictions such as the presence of 'no ball game' signs deter young people, and teenagers generally do not want to be excessively surveilled but appreciate non-intrusive natural surveillance such as others being not too far away if they need assistance (Coles and Musgrove 2023, Wood and Hamilton 2022). Areas where we lack evidence of impact include the size of public open space, the number of features present, safety-related characteristics and maintenance-related features. Future research should focus on public open space other than parks, playgrounds and squares within the neighbourhood, and more research outside the US and in different types of areas should be conducted (Van Hecke et al. 2018).

Tim Gill (2021; 162) provides a simple Tool that gives a checklist of features for teen-friendly parks. He notes the following features to be included, based on the work designing for teenagers in Boulder, Colorado as part of the long-term 'Growing up Boulder' initiative. These features are; **wi-fi; movie nights; food trucks and cafes; interactive lighting and art; play spaces for both children and adults; study space; trees, flowers, and nature; music events; lighting and safety features; and water features.** Barclay (2019) also highlights the specific needs of older children to play and the huge value in places where children of different ages can learn to play together. Additionally, some children who have been deprived of play may need play types often considered for younger children into later ages than is often recognised.

In addition, Wood & Hamilton's (2022) recent work for Sustrans investigating the barriers and enablers of active travel for young Scots surfaced factors that are of relevance to encouraging teenagers to use public space across urban, rural, and most and least deprived areas. **The relevant cultural factors are:**

- Tackling antisocial behaviour in communities in terms of both the behaviours of other young people and adults. This is especially true in urban areas but can still be significant in rural locations. This can be extended to finding ways to increase the respect given by adults to young people when they are in public space.
- Tackling traffic and poor driver behaviour that limits the confidence of young people to walk and cycle.
- Improving the availability of skills and knowledge about active travel amongst young people, so that they are confident and able to get out and about by themselves.

#### **Core Infrastructure needs include:**

- Ensuring routes connect areas that are motivating and accessible for young people to visit.
- Improving and increasing lighting of urban areas and key locations for meeting and hanging out everywhere. This is vital for young people to feel safe, have opportunities in the winter and after school, and to allow parents/carers to feel more confident with their child/ren being outdoors.
- Safe road crossing points that align with the places young people need and want to go and that do not involve unnecessary detours or barriers.
- Improving the maintenance of areas such as parks, pavements, and roads. These should be free of hazards and signs of lack of care, including fixing potholes.
- Building/improving cycle paths that are safe, and with a strong preference for explicit separation from traffic.
- Encouraging access to bikes and bike hire schemes, including ensuring they are genuinely accessible to young people for their everyday journeys, and making them affordable to young people and families on low incomes.
- Ensuring routes are well and appropriately signposted so that young people can navigate effectively, and parents/carers feel confident that their child/ren will not get lost.
- Improving internet and mobile phone coverage so that young people can consistently connect with one another and their parents/carers, as well as access maps and location information.

Motivating and accessible destinations was a core theme of the systems-diagram produced as part of Wood and Hamilton's (2022) research and this element can be seen in Figure 2 below. Urban areas have more motivating destinations, but greater barriers posed by anti-

social behaviour and traffic; rural areas have fewer motivating destinations, but greater access to leisure routes. There are poorer opportunities for cycling and considerably more dangerous traffic and other infrastructure barriers in areas considered to have lower socioeconomic status. However, all areas would benefit from improved infrastructure. The full systems-diagram can be viewed here.

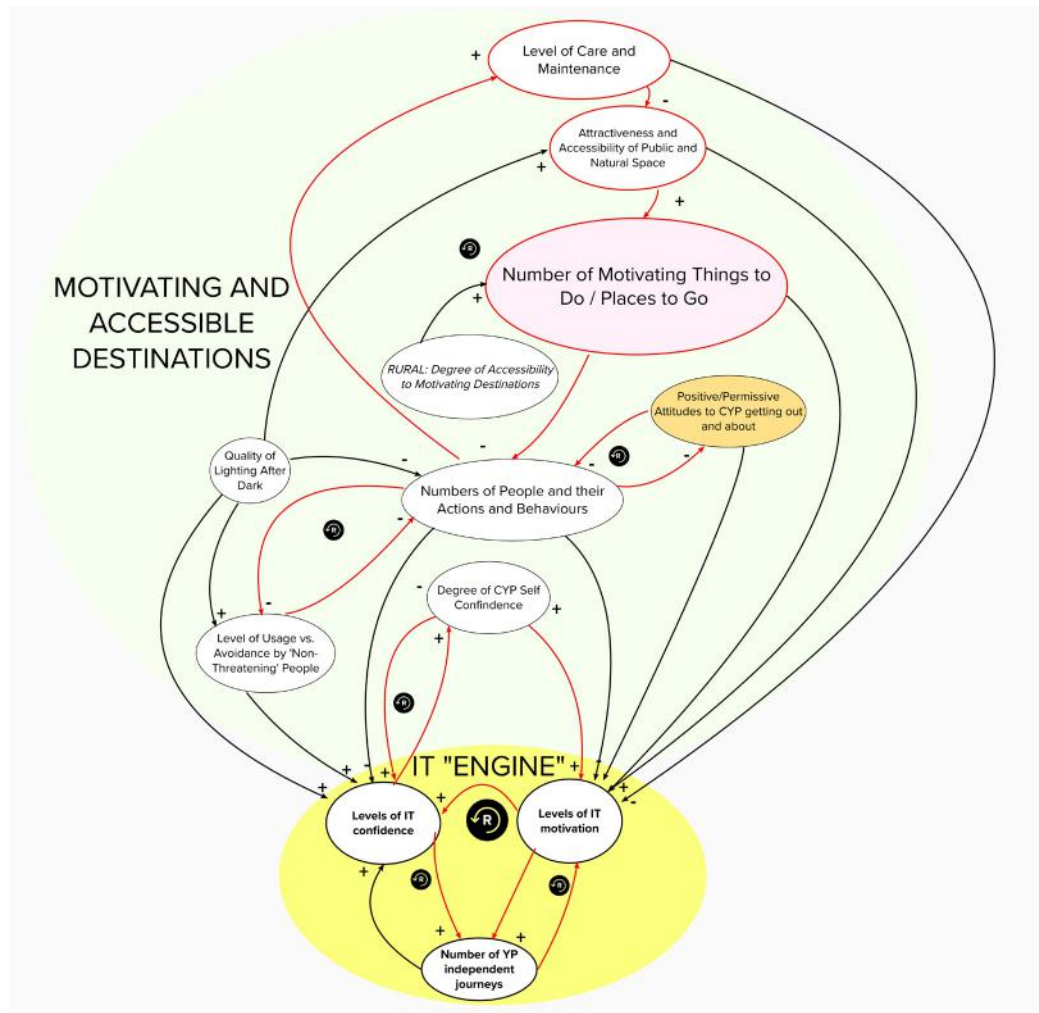


Figure 2 A sub-section of the 'Closed Loop Diagram' by Wood and Hamilton (2022), showing 'Motivating and Accessible Destinations' and how this links to the 'Independent Travel Engine'. Arrows with a + at their head indicate a positive impact, while a - indicates a negative. Rs with arrows around them indicate a reinforcing cycle.

Emerging research supports the increasing need for public space to be integrated with technological infrastructure to support the way that the current generation of teenagers navigate social relationships. Menezes et al (2019) note that cyberspace is increasingly the area where young people have most freedom, and they tend to be hyper-connected with significantly less defined boundaries between the virtual and physical space of socialising than previous generations. Use of social media is common, but girls are thought to use it in a more intensive way and be more likely to experience detrimental impacts on their self-esteem.

As explored by Wood and Hamilton (2022), the internet is both an important feature for encouraging young people to venture outside, and detrimental to it. Without an adequate 'pull factor' of motivating destinations and ability to access them safely and enjoyably, then the opportunities presented by the internet and other digital technologies will be more enticing.



However, intensive usage may contribute to a sense of fear and alienation from the outdoors environment, including an increase in teens feeling self-conscious about their appearance. While previous generations may have hung around outside because there was nothing else to do, the internet now provides an alternative distraction – one which often grants young people more freedom to explore away from public gaze than their local environment. This may be exacerbated by lack of financial resource to engage in other leisure activities such as visiting cafes or going to the cinema. Interestingly, Barclay (2019; 4) notes ‘the same children who may be perceived as a threat when hanging out on residential streets can be seen as vulnerable to the risks presented by the internet’.

## Differences amongst Teenagers

Protected characteristics legislation found in The Equalities Act can all be held by young people. Gender plays a critical role; adolescent girls’ needs are less represented in design and planning, and research from Sweden suggest they tend to feel more than ten times more insecure in public places than adolescent boys (Akerman et al. 2017). In addition, characteristics such as ethnicity, religion, belief, disability, class, or sexuality means the culture of childhood is complex and contextual. For example, Horschelmann and van Blerk (2012) note that young gay men and lesbians do not have the same opportunity to access networks and spaces to develop their identities, with school and home often representing a ‘normative’ space for heterosexual youth. With respect to ethnicity, they also note the structural discrimination and segregation that young people belonging to an ethnic minority face, drawing attention to higher instances of poverty and social exclusion. In Wood and Hamilton’s (2022) research for Sustrans, racism arose as an issue in one urban area that prevented young people from seeking to spend time in local public space:

*“So, like a group of teenagers were in the park. I think they were drunk or something. And they actually fired a firework near me, like they meant to do it on me. It was really scary. I had my little sister with me too,” Girl, 14-16 years old.*

The needs of children and young people who are disabled – an estimated 7% of all in the UK (Blackburn et al. 2010) – are also neglected in research and break down into multiple subgroups with diverse physical, sensory, cognitive and communication impairments and mental health issues. Each subgroup has its own set of barriers to inclusion and participation (Law and Dunn 1994, Franklin and Sloper 2009), and environmental challenges (Horton 2017). Features of the environment trivial to most passers-by can constitute fundamental hinderances for these young people, such as availability of transport and equipment (e.g., wheelchairs); facilities (e.g. toilets and seating); and material obstacles, barriers, and hazards (e.g. steps, kerbs, steep gradients, narrow pathways, uneven surfaces, and inconsiderately designed access points and infrastructure) (Horton 2017). The Scottish Government’s guidance on support for disabled children and young people states, “the physical environment can make a lot of demands on (them), and good design principles need to recognise this” (2018, p32). Adaptation of places may be essential to enable children and young people with disabilities to have full participation in activities (Doctoroff, 2001). Nevertheless, reviews in Scotland (Stalker and Moscardini 2012) and Wales (Bevan Foundation 2011) have reported that, despite wide-ranging policy and legislative support, young people with disabilities still face significant difficulties accessing the mainstream social, recreational, and youth-centred opportunities necessary for becoming independent and reducing isolation.

A core difficulty in assessing age as a protected characteristic also lies in the fact that needs are not static within the full age range of those that constitute teenagers. 13- and 14-years olds are likely to have fewer ‘licenses to roam’ in their neighbourhoods unaccompanied, and more likely to be subject to curfews or specific rules about locations by parents/carers. Meanwhile, older teenagers may effectively be living the lives of adults and have jobs and

other responsibilities. Wood and Hamilton (2022) found that independence was lower for 11–13-year-olds than 14–16-year-olds in Scotland, and parents/carers were more focused on having specific and often indoor venues for their younger teens to attend. Meanwhile, some Young Consultants on the project noted that as they get older, they feel more wary of using certain spaces, due to increasing fear of judgement:

*“Obviously, when I get older, I’m allowed to go farther...but I also feel every time I get older, I feel less confident to go outside because like some people are mean and they can judge you by how you look or something, you know what I mean?”  
Girl, 11-13 years old.*

This chimes with Kraftl’s (2008, p. 11) observation that ‘it is the treatment of and attitudes towards young people...which matters, fundamentally, to their self-esteem’.

## Gender

There have long been struggles to resource and locate the specific needs and preferences of teenagers in public space, be they boys or girls. While sport pitches have often been available in parks, and shopping centres/malls have provided semi-public space for many teenagers, little attention has been given to providing specifically for their needs. However, much of the debate in the 90s and 2000s was around the need for and location of skateparks in the UK. This was accompanied with worry from some that it would lead to severely increased levels of anti-social behaviour by teens (Horschelmann and van Blerk 2012, Bishop and Corkery 2017). What was generally not considered was the extent to which the installation of a skatepark would meet the needs of all teenagers, and especially teenage girls. Meanwhile, much observational data shows that sports pitches and skateparks are predominantly used by boys, with girls more likely to be gathering at the edges, if at all (Bornat 2016).

The needs of girls have risen up the agenda in recent years, with research increasingly highlighting a need to investigate the problem of exclusion from public space further (Akerman et al. 2017, Van Hecke et al. 2018). The campaign group Make Space for Girls formed in the UK in 2019 for this specific purpose and highlight that very little public money or attention is given to how their needs may differ from those of boys, and the heightened safety concerns that girls often experience. Such debates have been thrown more into the public eye since 2021 after the murder of Sarah Everard and Sabina Nessa in London. For instance, such debate is now leading The Olympic Legacy Committee to consult specifically on the needs of girls and women in Queen Elizabeth Park, and for The City of Edinburgh Council to investigate the safety of women and girls across the city.

Make Space for Girls highlight features girls tend to favour in public space include swings, performance space, benches and high-quality care and maintenance. They also highlight several case studies, such as a public square in Malmo, Sweden where a space was designed in a neighbourhood with girls in mind. Here, they worked with local girls and the design eventually put forward included multiple, rotating benches where the surface could also be rotated so that recent rain would not get in the way of hanging out; a dynamic informal performance space and areas to watch; a climbing wall; and Bluetooth speakers that could be used to play communal music up until 10pm. Fundamentally, including girls means asking their views and taking them seriously. While boys should also be asked about their needs from public space, they rarely experience the same barriers and are less likely to feel excluded from their local public spaces (Make Space for Girls 2021). Wood and Hamilton’s (2022) work in Scotland confirmed that there are greater barriers to independent active travel for girls. Key factors include experiences of judgement over appearance, sexism, racism, and a feeling that there is not adequate space to hang out away from people engaging in anti-social behaviour. Activities such as cycling are also often not considered cool for girls, and they are less likely to

engage in it if dedicated infrastructure is not there. Further investigation of the needs of girls in Scottish communities is therefore timely and could lead to significantly more inclusive spaces.

## Engaging Teenagers in Placemaking

With a wide range of research that focuses on and describes the strong relationship young people develop with their local environment, it is imperative young people are party to the decisions around space and place that are so prominent in their lives. Young people's participation can also act as a catalyst for engaging adults more constructively in the decision-making process (Francis and Lorenzo 2002). By bringing the young person's view to the foreground, decision-makers become more aware of the world around them, and how it affects different types of people (Hart 1992). Indeed, effective dialogue between children and young people and adults can benefit intergenerational relationships (Steele 2005, Mannion 2007, Thomas 2007, Hugh Matthews et al. n.d.). These bring benefits in both the present and future. However, bringing young people meaningfully into placemaking means engaging them, to the extent possible, on their terms rather than seeking to include them in a process that suits adults (Iveson 2006).

Matthews, (2003) draws from an English study to set out three main barriers to young people's full involvement in regeneration:

1. The nature of the schemes means organisers often have little intention of focusing resources on young people's participation;
2. The attitudes of adults mean they are most likely to favour young people that will engage on their terms; yet
3. The characteristics of young people means they may be unable or unwilling to become involved in these ways.

These perpetuate a cycle of not including young people in the process, and not seeking solutions to the problem. To clarify how young people could participate in decision-making from a rights-based perspective, Hart (1992) and Shier (2001) introduce particularly influential models of participation. Hart's ladder of participation (1992) (Figure 3) includes rungs that address not only the quality of young people's involvement, but also the extent of adult direction in their activities. The ladder shows that even when adults have good intentions to involve children and young people in processes, they may:

- manipulate their voices for their own gain;
- use a project with children and young people to decorate their approach, by adding it to a list of things they have done, without substantiating what they have contributed; or
- make only tokenistic attempts to respond to children and young people's views.

Within the higher levels of the ladder, two rungs denote a limited approach to their real participation. In the lower rungs of 'assigned but informed', the participants are given a strict remit of what they can be involved in, but they are informed of the reasoning why, and do have some genuine level of influence in what they are participating in. In the higher rung of 'consulted but informed', the participants are asked for their views and ideas on pre-determined topics. For instance, this could be a planner asking young people about their local area in a structured way to focus on issues, and the young people would have a fair chance to contribute their opinions on these topics. However, they would not be able to change the topic of the session if they felt another issue was more relevant to them.



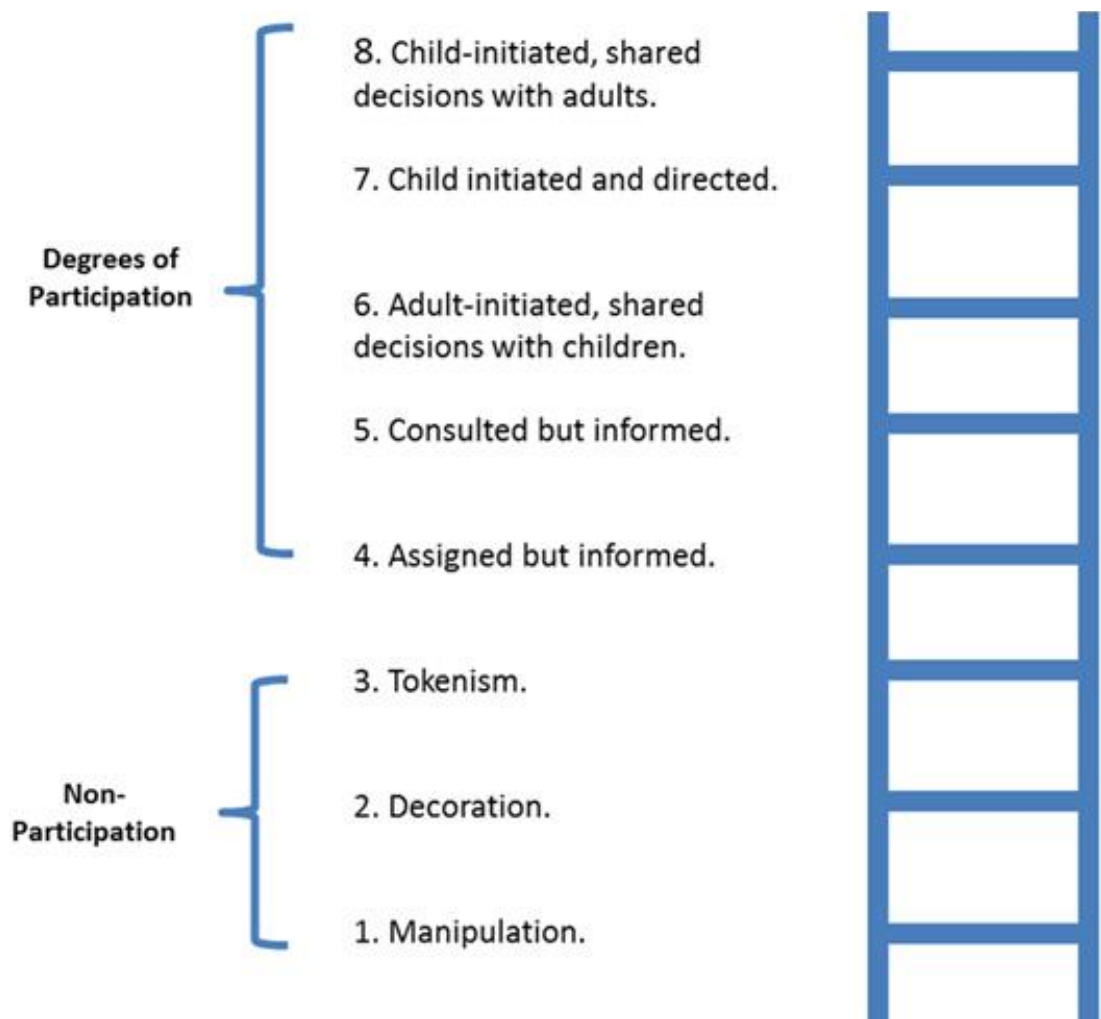


Figure 3 Hart's ladder of participation (1992) (redrawn from original)

The higher rungs of the ladder correlate with a partnership approach, where the young participants have a greater chance of making their own, or shared decisions, with support from adults. Hart is careful to note that a higher rung on the ladder does not necessarily mean better participation, but that different levels are appropriate in different contexts. In particular, he notes the highest rung is likely only achievable with older age groups, and literature suggests this is still a rare occurrence (Frank 2006). Meanwhile, rung seven is most likely to occur in an adventure-play setting, rather than in formal decision-making processes. Whilst this is one weakness of the ladder, its ability to recognise the varied ways young people can participate has been instrumental in establishing young people's meaningful involvement in a variety of projects. Especially important is its ability to draw attention to what is not genuine participation, for young people are often aware of when they are being manipulated, or their participation is tokenistic (Skelton 2007, Kränzl-Nagl and Zartler 2010, Percy-Smith and Thomas 2010, Mannion 2012). Indeed, participation exercises can be commissioned on the promise of change but may lose funding or political will. In many ways, poor participatory projects can be more damaging than not seeking children's participation at all, as it may lead to misunderstanding, distrust, and disillusionment (Hart 1992, 1997, Shier 2001, Lewars 2010, Khan et al. 2019).

Despite its influence, Hart's (1992) ladder shows 'what is done, rather than how it could be done' (Le Borgne 2014, p. 26) and tends to focus on individual projects rather than a process of long-term, ongoing commitment and dialogue. To address this, Shier (2001) proposes

another influential model. His 'pathways to participation' originate from work to involve children as consultants in play and leisure activities. The model similarly uses a graduated process of participation over five levels:

1. Children are listened to;
2. Children are supported in expressing their views;
3. Children's views are taken into account;
4. Children are involved in decision-making processes;
5. Children share power and responsibility for decision-making. (Shier 2001).

Shier identifies three stages of commitment at each level: openings, opportunities, and obligations (Figure 4) These levels of commitment identify when an organisation or individual is willing to allow young people to participate in the process. Opening occurs when a worker makes a personal commitment or statement of intent to work with young people, creating a potential for participation, even if no opportunity currently exists. However, when there are the resources and skills available, an opportunity opens. An obligation is established when an agreement exists between organisations and staff to enable a certain level of participation by young people, and this becomes embedded in the policy and practice of an organisation.

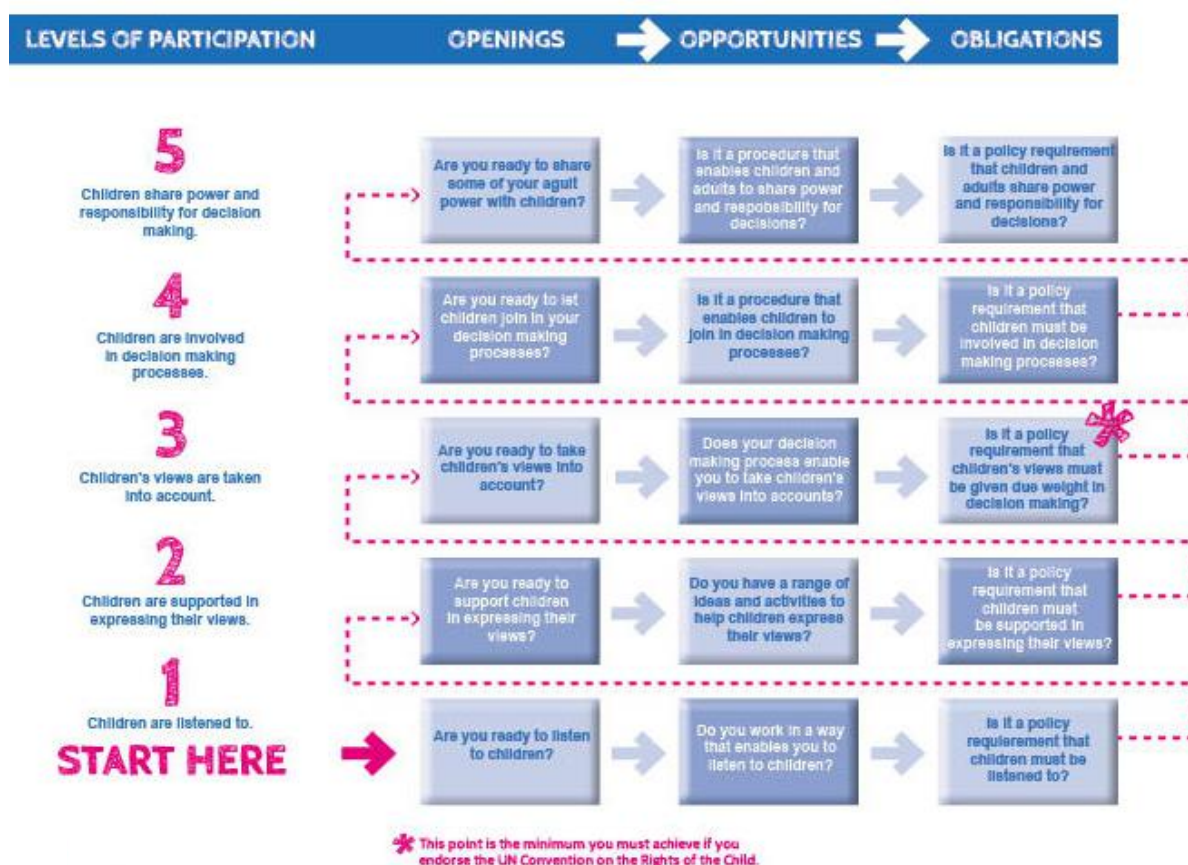


Figure 4 Shier's (2001; p.111) Pathways to Participation. Redrawn from original by APIC.

Shier argues that to ensure young people are supported in expressing their views (level two), adults working with them must attempt to overcome the barriers that prevent their views from being expressed. He notes 'there is no point in enabling children and young people to express their views if they are not going to be taken into account' (Shier 2001). Level three then ensures decision makers take children and young people's views into account, and only

here does the process begin meeting the UNCRC. At level four, children and young people are involved in decision-making processes, which indicate a move from a consultative to an instrumental role. This corresponds to Hart’s (1992) level five, as both authors consider consultation a legitimate form of participation, with the position of children and young people either strengthened or supported. However, children and young people at this level do not have any decision-making power of their own. Finally, in contrast to Hart’s (1992) ladder, Shier’s (2001) model has children and young people making decisions independently of adults in its top rung.

In addition, the Children and Young People Commissioner for Scotland’s (Children and Young People’s Commissioner Scotland 2013) seven golden rules of participation, **formulated with** children and young people offer a strong foundation for their meaningful involvement. These, shown in Figure 5, emphasise the core principles of children’s human rights, particularly rule seven ‘keeping in touch’. It is often overlooked that children and young people want to know the outcomes of their participation for it to be meaningful.



Figure 5 The Children and Young People’s Commissioner Scotland Seven Golden Rules. Diagram redrawn from original by APiC.

## Methods for Engaging Young People in Placemaking

Urban designers Lynch and Banerjee set about in the 1970s to develop methods planners could use to gather children’s views (Lynch and Banerjee 1977). In the ‘Growing up in Cities’ project, they used observation, interviewing, drawing, mapping, and photography with children across varying contexts. This pioneering project was revived by Chawla (2002) and similar methods were once again used to gather views from children about their urban environments. Derr and Tarantini (2016) still advocate for these methods today. Reflecting on their influential ‘Growing Up Boulder’ project in Colorado, USA, they credit the ‘Growing Up in Cities’ project as a key inspiration for many of their media-based methods. Specifically, they argue such methods “actively engage participants, promote dialogue necessary to understand children’s

desires, and help us to ‘transform unequal power relations inherent to public processes’ (Derr and Tarantini 2016, pp. 1536–7). One of the most popular methods to come from this body of work, ‘cognitive mapping’, asks children and young people to draw a route from memory that they know well. This method generates perception-based maps that give detail of what is and is not important to them, and what they do and not notice.

There has been a particular focus in Scandinavia on developing innovative, practical child-centred methods for planning. For example, in Sweden, the geographer Cele (2006) utilised exploratory methods to unearth several ways to help children communicate their place preferences in her thesis. These included walking interviews, drawing routes to school, and focus groups, which with the right resources can communicate several elements of children’s experiences that are otherwise difficult to access. More recently, in Denmark, Winge and Lamm (2019) sought to involve 10–14-year-old children in process of co-design of public spaces in a deprived neighbourhood of Copenhagen. They achieved this through three main activities: mapping their understandings of the area, coming up with idea for possible future changes and creating physical prototypes, which were then placed in-situ in the place they were redesigning.

In Newcastle upon Tyne, Strachan (2017) details several participatory methods developed with university students as part of the ‘Youth Engagement Service (YES) Planning’ toolkit. These methods, tested and refined after working with several local schools include cognitive mapping, picture cards and diamond ranking (where participants categorise ideas and statements based on importance or relevance). Meanwhile, methods developed in London by ZCD Architects (2020), and partners involve bringing young people onto a design team as paid consultants, and their ‘Youth, Opportunity, Power’ toolkit for engaging in participatory design with teenagers. This sets out several methods, including site visits, mapping and model making, that converge with conceptual and political methods to bring about clear design strategies and outputs.

Wood (2016) also reported on methods used successfully with young people by two anonymised Scottish planning authorities. These included a ‘Young Person’s Conference’ which included the use of:

- An innovative video written and performed by local young people;
- ‘Big Brother Chair’ style video box for recording individual responses to place-based questions; and
- ‘Who wants to be a Millionaire?’ style voting on key issues.

Another engaged with nearly all secondary schools in their local areas across two stages of their local development plan. Methods of participation included:

- Creating visions for their local area in 2035;
- Discussing and determining where a city centre boundary should go;
- Mapping places that are ‘dead’ and places that are ‘alive’; and
- Mapping areas they felt safe and unsafe, and at different times of day.

The above methods and frameworks highlight both what is backed by evidence as successful and useful, and what is achievable in practical terms, with limited resources and time.

Horelli’s (1997) framework for action research with young people provides a useful methodological frame to structure methods with young people most appropriately in a planning-context. This approach is used by APiC throughout our work, and was employed in project fieldwork:



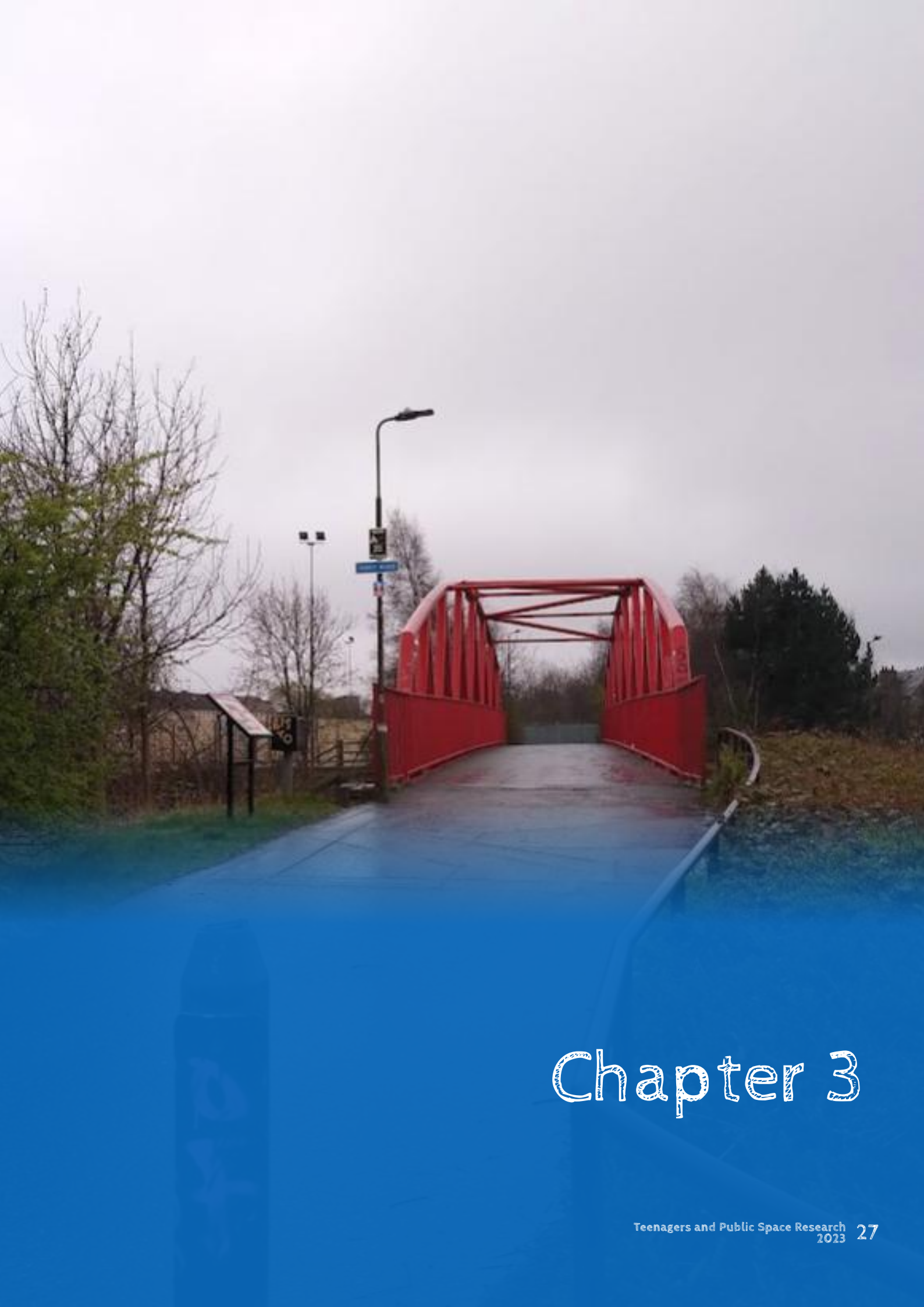
1. Diagnostic methods to 'evaluate personal, environmental, and situational variables' (p.110)
  - This could include youth-led walks, cognitive mapping, or SWOT analysis of the participants' local area.
2. Expressive methods to liberate participants from the constraints of their experiences with traditional designs and encourage them to express themselves in new ways.
  - This could include art/drama, creative writing, or craft/design.
3. Situational methods which structure learning in a way that makes it easier to understand and apply new ideas.
  - This could include working through scenarios, role play, or visits to the local area.
4. Conceptual methods which help re-organise abstract thinking.
  - This includes literature and policy reviewing, and in-depth discussion of themes and priorities with young people.
5. Organisational methods 'which support the realisation of the results of the project' (p.112)
  - This can include experiential mapping, and design of meaningful workshops with clear purpose.
6. Political methods, which establish how the research findings will gain visibility and contribute to political will.
  - This includes bringing stakeholders into workshops with young people; facilitating intergenerational dialogue; and devising principles of engagement and action at both the local and national level. It may also involve advocacy activities after the outputs are finalised.
7. These categories serve as a valuable basis for bringing young people into any place-based project and provide a framework through which to advise on best practice regarding methods for effective participation.

## Conclusion

Teenagers needs for public space reflect both many of the same needs as the rest of the community, and some specific needs that are frequently overlooked. They are also likely to be considered culprits of anti-social behaviour by others, including by other young people. We know what some of these needs are in terms of creating welcoming and adaptable spaces, where young people can feel some sense of ownership. Features that enable this include good quality active and public transport access; varied facilities for sport and recreation; natural areas; and places to gather. Features that are likely to disable this aspiration include heavy surveillance, limited use of the space by others, isolation from other uses, and poor signposting and lighting. Meanwhile, we know that extra attention needs to be paid to the needs of girls, disabled young people, and young people with other protected characteristics under The Equality Act. A core next step is therefore to listen meaningfully to the needs of different young people in different communities and assess what their needs are with regard specific communities in Scotland.

While it is clearly true from the literature review that a bespoke approach is required to design teenagers into public space, it may be that the biggest barrier to true inclusion is the attitudes of adults towards adolescents and a misunderstanding of this developmental phase and how it manifests in teenagers' use of space. This is not to deny that anti-social behaviour can at times be attributed to teenagers, for testing of boundaries, underage drinking, and more limited awareness of impact on others are common amongst this age group. Yet, the isolation and disenfranchisement many young people feel can also explain why some

engage in activities that are anti-social. To solve this problem, we need ways to engage meaningfully within and across generations and reach compromises and understandings that do not privilege one group's needs over another's. These considerations formed the methods employed in APiC's fieldwork on this project which are explained in chapter 3. They also provide context to the case study chapters that follow.



# Chapter 3

# Methodology and Methods

In early 2022, A Place in Childhood (APiC) began working with teenagers across three case studies in Scotland:

1. Huntly (and surrounding villages such as Insch)
2. Denny (and Dunipace, Banknock, and Bonnybridge); and
3. North Edinburgh, focusing on Pilton and Muirhouse.

The locations were picked to cover different types of areas in terms of urban and rural, and different sizes. The aim was to understand teenagers' needs from public space in the towns, cities, and villages they live and go to school in, using a Participatory Action Research Methodology. This is an approach whereby participants take an active role determining the direction of the research and outcomes, and what needs to happen beyond the research timeline. It was informed by the framework set out in the literature review, alongside APiC's experiences working with young people across the country. In this case the key participants were teenagers living in the three communities, though wider stakeholders were also involved in the initial setup and final two stages of the project. In total, 145 young people and 35 adult stakeholders were involved at some point in the work. A further 16 young people were engaged in a related follow-up project in North Edinburgh.

## Stage 1: Baseline Engagement to Create Experiential Maps

APiC initially worked with 20-30 local young people, between the ages of 13 and 18 in each place. Engagement took place through sessions held face-to-face at The Gordons School, Denny High School, and Pilton Youth and Children's Project (PYCP). In each case, young people spoke to APiC about their area firstly in gender and age-based subgroups and then designed a local walk and led APiC facilitators on the journey. From this, APiC drafted experiential maps of what the teenagers had spoken about and checked in and discussed this further with participating young people in a facilitated discussion that included all genders. APiC formulated additional exercises in each situation, based on the key ideas and priorities emerging for each group. In Huntly, for example, this meant a discussion on how change could happen and what would get in the way. In Denny, this meant specifically discussing interventions to address anti-social behaviour.

One session with teenagers aged 17 from the Huntly area was also held, online due to adverse weather in January 2022 leading to the cancellation of a planned face to face workshop. In North Edinburgh, APiC also spoke online with a family of three young people online aged 13 to 16 and of mixed gender. This was facilitated due to their existing connection with another APiC project. A 17-year-old from North Edinburgh was also interviewed over the phone, after having initially shown interest through a survey distributed amongst pupils at Craigroyston High.

The aim of these initial engagements was to establish what is important/good about the area, what's missing/could be better, and what actions would lead to these changes to create a better environment for teenagers. Table 1 below shows a breakdown of the different groups involved in this first baseline round of engagement from January – June 2022.



Table 1 Young People Engaged in Each Case Study Area

North Edinburgh	Denny	Huntly
<p>25 young people aged 11-16 were engaged face to face in both an open group session and a girls group session at PYCP.</p> <p>A family of 3 young people aged 13-16 were engaged online.</p> <p>A 17-year-old was interviewed over the phone about the area.</p>	<p>30 young people aged 13-18 were engaged face to face across two school-based sessions. On day one, APiC worked with boys and girls in S3 (first separately and then together), and on day two we worked with boys and girls in S5 and S6 (first separately and then together).</p>	<p>20 young people aged 13 and 14 were engaged face to face at The Gordon's School. Boys and girls were initially engaged separately and the brought together for the afternoon.</p> <p>2 17-year-olds were engaged through an online workshop around their local place, and reviewed materials and ideas produced by the younger age group to establish level of consensus.</p>

## Stage 2: Online Local Strategy Workshops

Following stage 1 sessions, APiC pulled together the experiential maps and priorities for action from the young people and convened an online Local Strategy Workshop for teenagers from Denny High and The Gordons School, inviting a selection of the interested teenagers (8-9 Young Consultants from each) and local community stakeholders and Sustrans Scotland staff. What followed was a lively discussion between young people and adults, reflecting on the findings of the research so far and determining a local strategy for addressing the needs of local teenagers and addressing anti-social behaviour in the community. This was then collated into a Local Action Report for Denny and Huntly, which was shared with and refined by participants before being finalised.

Preceding these workshops, all young people were sent initial maps and other outputs for checking, and these were then sent onto the adult stakeholders to review before the workshop. The workshop began with young people and adults forming into two separate breakout groups, with differing tasks to complete over the course of 30 minutes. These were all laid out on a collaborative online Whiteboard, hosted by Mural. Young people were asked to add anything missed or misunderstood from previous outputs, and to then discuss what the absolutely core priorities for change were from their perspective. Meanwhile, adults were asked to reflect on the teenagers' findings, and discuss what is already happening and could happen to make some of these changes happen. Following this first task and feedback from each group to the other, the entire group was split into three breakout groups with a mixture of young people and adults. The task in these groups was to discuss how they could work together to better achieve the needs of young people, and how anti-social behaviour could be tackled.

A different approach had to be taken in North Edinburgh, as young people from PYCP were hesitant to take part in the Local Strategy Workshop. In the absence of a shared discussion, it was determined to firstly engage a range of adult stakeholders on the work so far and gauge their interest and willingness to hear further from local young people. The agreed next step was then to approach Craigroyston High School with the possibility of a face-to-face session between young people and local stakeholders. Initial discussions with the school surfaced that this may be possible, but firstly it would be advantageous to work with pupils in S5 across the Summer Term to gather their thoughts on the local area through PSE classes. APiC therefore engaged a further 65 15- and 16-year-olds through a quick-fire process to determine what

was good and could be better about their place. This broadened both the geographic area we discussed and added room to establish a greater level of context and consensus on what could be better in the area. APiC then created additional maps to show the views of S5 pupils and draw them together with the priorities identified by other local teenagers.

While the largest number of teenagers were involved in these initial engagements in North Edinburgh (around 100), we were not able to convene a Local Strategy Workshop in the same format as the other case studies. Instead, and in partnership with the City of Edinburgh Council and Craigroyston High School, APiC worked further work with local young people on codesigning new spaces on the street outside their school. This work added significant depth to the overall findings, and an opportunity for meaningful collaboration that had not originally been foreseen.

### Stage 3: Online National Workshop

A National Strategy Workshop was convened online 1st November 2022 for all interested parties from each location to come together and consider overall needs, priorities and principles for teenagers and public space across Scotland. National Stakeholders such as Transport Scotland and heads of Sustrans' Places for Everyone team were also invited.

The workshop was held online, via Zoom, with 20 people involved in total. This included 9 young people between the ages of 13 and 18, and 11 Local and National Stakeholders. The evening began with young people and adults splitting into separate breakout groups with an APiC facilitator in each. In the young people's group, introductions were made between those from Denny and Huntly, and the difficulties around sourcing young people from North Edinburgh were explained. Participants then explored the priorities from each of their places and settled on some common themes and principles arising from each of their areas.

In the adult stakeholder group, the project was introduced in an overall sense to those national stakeholders who had not taken part in earlier stages. A discussion was then had about people's reactions to the findings so far, and the challenges they raise for their practice. The workshop then progressed with a sharing of the findings from each breakout group and settling on the two main themes the young people would like to discuss with adult stakeholders in more detail. Taking preferences into account, two breakout groups were then formed with a mixture of young people and adults to unpick the principles and route map for tackling these issues in an overall sense in Scotland.

### Conclusion

APiC led a Participatory Action Research project across three Scottish case studies, which aimed to take on both best practice in young people's engagement and adapt to local context. A three-stage consensus-building approach was taken, starting with baselining in each community through youth-focused experiential mapping, followed by online discussions between young people and local adult stakeholders on the findings. The final stage was to bring together as many stakeholders as possible into a collaborative online workshop that looked at national issues and solutions around teenagers and public space. For contextual reasons, a different approach was necessary in North Edinburgh, which brought challenges to the project, but ended in significant further insights and opportunity.

The following four chapters detail the findings from each case study, and then from the national workshop. They begin with the map/s created in the initial engagements and then go onto the core findings of the workshops. These are presented from the perspective of participants, using the collective voice to show the consensual decision-making process used to develop insights.



# Chapter 4







# Teenagers and Public Space in Huntly

## Stage 1: Experiential Maps and Priorities for Action

Below are two experiential maps and set of priorities from young people in Huntly. We worked firstly with S2 and S3 pupils in school-based sessions, and here they also told us about what challenges they could foresee to change and how these might be overcome. We followed this with an online workshop with two 17-year-old participants at the same school. For this latter session, we were also able to bring in the views of the older young people on the priorities determined by their younger peers, to begin building further understanding and consensus on ways forward.

### The Views and Experiences of Local 13- and 14-Year Olds

#### Key

-  What's Important
-  Places we avoid or find dangerous
-  What's Good
-  What Could be Better
-  What's Missing

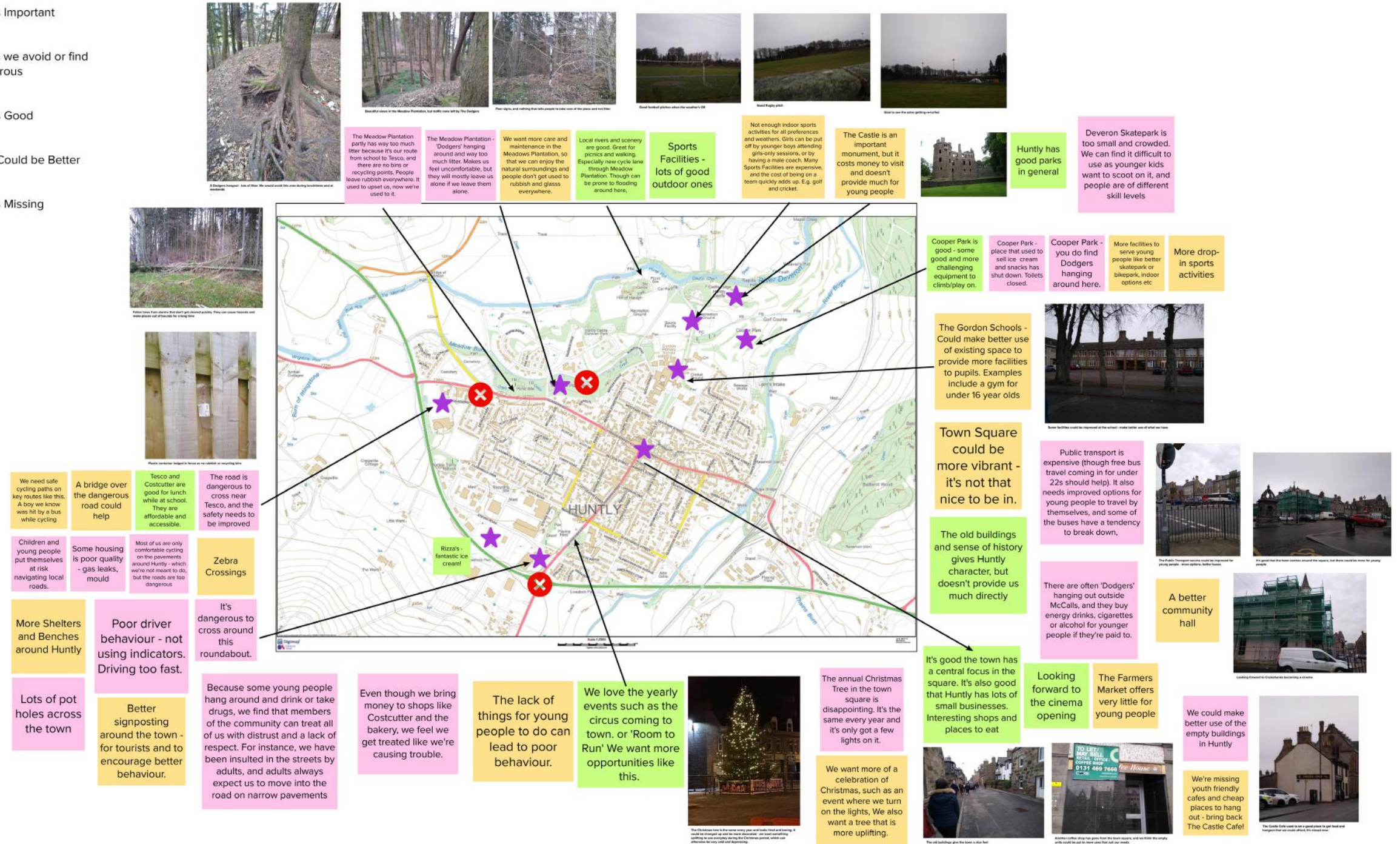


Figure 6 An Experiential Map for 13- and 14-year-olds in Huntly. The base map contains public sector information licensed under the Open Government Licence v3.0



## Our Priorities for Action

(Also agreed as priorities by 17-year-olds)

- 1. Action on Litter:** There is way too much, and it's been so bad for so long that we're just used to it, and no one tries to change it. We especially need: bins and recycling points between Tesco and The Gordon Schools; to clean up The Meadow Plantation and Huntly in general; high quality signs that encourage people to take care of the town.
- 2. More Community Events and Celebrations:** including a better Christmas Tree that changes each year and has more decoration. We want to feel uplifted by it, not depressed. Older teens agree but note that there used to be a ceremony to turn on the lights where the citizen of the year would press the button, but this and other events haven't happened recently due to the COVID-19 pandemic. They add that a funfair would be good.
- 3. Affordable Places to Eat and Hangout:** some favour fast food outlets (mostly boys), others for locally run options (mostly girls). Older teens note that if there was to be a chain, it shouldn't be in the centre of town, but on the A96 near Tesco or Asda.
- 4. More Indoor Sports and Activities** - arcade, youth cafe, bike park, skate park climbing wall, bowling, slides in the swimming pool to make it more fun etc. Older teens note that this will encourage young people to stay in Huntly, rather than going to Inverurie.
- 5. A Better Sports Offer for Girls:** Female coaches for girls' sports, and no boys being allowed to join girls' teams.
- 6. Genuinely Affordable Places to Hangout:** Not many options young people can afford, especially young people more likely to be/become Dodgers (young people who commit local anti-social behaviour).
- 7. Action on Dodgers:** They make us feel uncomfortable, and other people treat us badly because they think we're Dodgers. It's too easy to get drugs in Huntly. Older teens note that poor treatment by others is less a problem as they get older, and they mostly don't experience it now. However, COVID-19 has increased animosity towards teenagers, who are seen to be spreading the virus. They add that there used to be more support help drug dealers and takers to take a different path, but now more seems to be done to defend their behaviour than solve the issue.
- 8. More for P4-S3 Ages to Do:** There's stuff for older and for younger children, but not the in between ages. Young people get used to having nothing for them, and more likely to become Dodgers. We also find that other age groups take over stuff that we want to use.
- 9. Better Public Transport:** more options, more affordable, higher-quality buses that don't break down all the time.
- 10. Make Better Use of the School Buildings;** we don't always need new stuff, but better use of space. A gym for under 16s is one idea. There's a lot of unused space.
- 11. Action on Dangerous Driving and Unsafe Roads:** better signs; crossings at key places such as a Zebra crossing near Tesco; wider pavements; cycle paths that take us to useful places, so we don't need to use the pavement; encouraging drivers to use their indicators. Older teens note a one-way system might help.
- 12. Action of the Attitudes of Older people Towards Young People:** Older young people can treat us badly, but so do many adults. The girls have experienced more direct confrontation in the community, where older people question our right to be in public space (when we're not causing any trouble) and have questioned our intelligence. We also feel judged and treated like we're untrustworthy in shops, even though we're spending our money there.

13. **More Trails for Walking, Running and Cycling:** we like the ones that already exist, but we get bored of using the same ones all the time.
14. **Improve Parental Attitudes:** We notice that some parents of younger children are rude to us when we're using space that their children are also using. We also think that some parents don't care what their children get up to or keep their children indoors all day because they're scared of older children and Dodgers.

#### What Might Get in the Way of Change?

1. Money to make changes - people don't trust young people, so don't want to fund their activities.
2. New activities and facilities might not make enough money and will then shut down.
3. Support from other young people - if other young people don't care then any effort, we put in will be wasted. Lack of motivation.
4. Support from adults - they don't care because it doesn't affect them.
5. Support from Aberdeenshire Council - linked to the above, and no one usually listens to our views in the community. They might also deny there is a problem, so that they don't have to do anything to help.
6. Everyone being used to the litter and nothing to do.
7. Education about litter and the environment isn't relevant to local context - learning about turtles far away, rather than local pollution and how it affects our community.
8. Younger generations assume adults will lead; adults think young people should sort out the issues. So, nothing happens.
9. Drugs too easily available in Huntly, as well as energy drinks and alcohol for under 18s.

#### How do we overcome these barriers?

1. Get bins and recycling points put in - educate young people better about what goes in which bin and why.
2. Engage the whole community in a litter pick - especially school, where each year could be responsible for litter picking at different times.
3. Eye-catching, high-quality signposts about the impact of littering and poor driving
4. Get children and young people involved in designing a youth cafe.
5. Start with small changes like drop-in sports activities and events to get more children and young people motivated to go outside.
6. Look for Inspiration - Alford has a great bike park, for example.
7. Use empty buildings - create a multi-floor entertainment space in the town square.
8. Employ female coaches in sports facilities.
9. Contact businesses who might be able to setup affordable places to eat and drink in Huntly - could be chains like McDonalds or Taco Bell (preference of some boys), or local options with more healthy alternatives.
10. Raise money in the community through events to keep youth facilities running.
11. Remind shops to always check for ID.
12. Focus on removing drug dealers from our community.
13. Find out what motivates Dodgers to change their behaviour - we need to prevent their



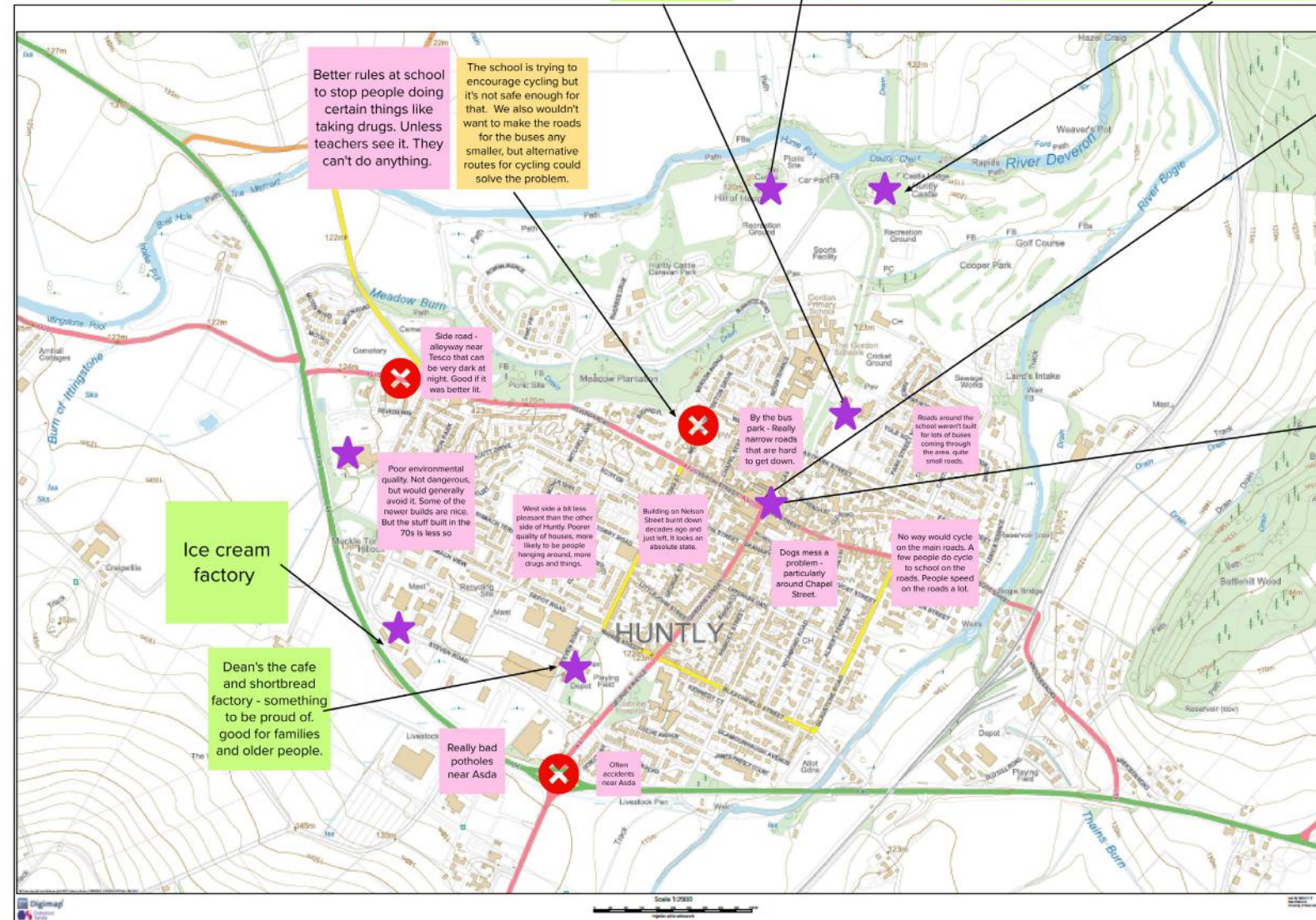
behaviour by understanding it starts early and helping them with more good quality activities. We think P4-P7 is the key age group:

*'You have nothing to do, so by S1 you are going to get influenced to do things like cause trouble and be a Junkie. If more things to do when P4-7, then less likely to be influenced in young secondary school' S2/3 Group*

Key

-  What's Important
-  Places we avoid or find dangerous
-  What's Good
-  What Could be Better
-  What's Missing

- No places to do sports outside schools except for cricket hall and golf club- Stewarts hall used to be available, but now tht's a vaccination centre so not available
- Everything's really sports based and we need other stuff for teens. Social things. Too much focus on sports
- Gym membership fee is expensive - £26 per month. It doesn't have many machines in it, especially when compared to cities. It's beyond the limit of what young people can afford. Even lowering it to £20 would help.
- Swimming pool and gym faciility
- The Ski Centre is a unique activity, and also affordable
- Good sports clubs like rugby
- Really nice surrounding hills and 2 rivers
- Huntly Castle Hotel cycling trail. Nice during Lockdown. Cycle down the Port Soy Road. Great views. Good in warmer weather. Don't like going out on bike when lots of people there.
- Huntly gets repititive - many young people leave. Young people used to stay more in Huntly.



- Mostly people are friendly., and people know one another so more of a community feel.
- Not a very diverse place, so there can be racism. Racial slurs get thrown around too easily.
- Some teenagers get into drugs due to nothing to do. A lot go down the wrong path from a really early age. Issues not identified early on
- People ignore the problem of teenagers taking the wrong path. We need action on the drugs issue. Word goes round that people do it at lunch at school etc. It doesn't feel like disputes really bother with it.
- Nothing to do - just see teens roaming around.
- Most people just stay home during winter, and occasionally go to Aberdeen

- Huntly Hotel used to run clubs like karate, but now it's been sold and left there it looks a bit abandoned and a safety hazard in the middle of the town.
- Public transport quite reasonable - available most of the time
- Times for public transport aren't always that handy
- About an hour away from nearest city and no dual carriage way.
- Huntly a centre for learning to drive. Lots of instructors. Handy for young people.
- Small businesses - beauty and hair, bakeries, book shop, takeaways, Farmers Market etc. Don't need to leave Huntly to get main things and nice not to have lots of chains.
- A lot of the square has been abandoned.
- Used to be more in Huntly - banks, cinemas, and other entertainment
- Only cash machines at Asda and Tesco in Post Office before 5pm. Really appreciated post office one in town centre, others on edge of town.
- Progressively getting worse - need at least one bank as you can only do so much online. Have to go to Inverurie or Elgin to open an account etc.
- People speak a lot about what's going to happen in the square, but not a lot happens.
- Nice old buildings like The Simpson building at the school, castle, and catholic church. Lovely old architecture and history around that gives us pride in the place.
- Cruikshanks - been told going to be a cinema and stalls etc but not really been updated on it.
- slightly odd array of businesses setting up - likely better for older folk. Don't attract teens.
- A lot of businesses have disappeared because of Asda and Tesco
- Cafes not doing so well. One bakery. The bank cafe closed, the castle cafe closed, the castle hotel also closed. Huntly Hotel has gone
- Charity shops and takeaways do well

Figure 7 An Experiential Map of the views of 17-year-olds in Huntly. The base map contains public sector information licensed under the Open Government Licence v3.0



## Our Priorities for Action

- 1. Making a Social Space for Youth** – a youth café would be great. As seniors we get a common room at school but no place to casually meet up indoors outwith school. There are plenty of empty buildings for that in the square. Many people go to pub type places in Inverurie because there isn't enough here. We have limited (and often poorly advertised) activities like dance (only highland dance and ballet available), boxing, and Karate. We also want clubs where you can learn a new hobby like drama and theatre. We don't want to go back to school at the weekend for these.
- 2. Projects to Encourage Walking** – we especially think a walking group for young people would be good, as many are interested but lack confidence. Young people will be more motivated by a group led by someone experienced.
- 3. More Opportunities to Learn New Skills** – the Barista skills course at school is excellent, and we'd love more opportunities like that to set us up for the future.
- 4. Monthly Events** – we don't have many for young people. There's the Huntly Hairst for older people, and it'd be nice to bring young people together for more celebrations. Generally, our age group can split up into smaller groups, and we'd love to have opportunities where everyone joins together and gets involved in something.
- 5. Promoting Local History** – teach more young people about Huntly's past in a way that really brings it to life. There used to be some of this at the heritage centre and library. We don't get taught much local history at school, beyond P5 doing a tour guide event in period costumes. This could include fundraising events, and could link with something theatrical in the castle, for instance. There are grants around for this kind of thing because we've seen it in Inverurie.
- 6. Improving the Parks** – for example, there used to be more casual activities like mini golf. This might encourage more people into golf itself.
- 7. Bring Back Banks and Places for Financial Advice** – it's important for teens to get used to managing their finances and have people to talk to about it.
- 8. Improve School Facilities Before Buying New Things** – money is spent on things that make no difference to us, like the gazebo. Young people aren't asked about these decisions, we're just told things are going to happen. We'd prefer the school to be done up, but we're told there isn't money for maintenance. For instance, the toilets are old. We'd rather money was spent on improvements before we buy new things we don't need.
- 9. More Modern Facilities in the Town Centre** – If Huntly had something new and more modern, people might be attracted to it. Maybe a building that's been refurbished to have a more modern look inside. Seeing the mix of new and old might get more people interested in local history.
- 10. Getting Young People Involved with the Public Library** – More needed to encourage young people to read or get involved. The community book shop could collaborate.

## Stage 2: Huntly Local Strategy Workshop: Core Findings

Below are the core findings of the Local Strategy Workshop run between local young people and adult stakeholders.

Highest Priorities for Improving the Teenage Experience of Huntly

Discussion amongst the young people surfaced four key categories of improvements that would make the biggest difference to local teenagers:

1. Social spaces:
  - There needs to be a lot more things to do for older children and young people that aren't just playgrounds (where play equipment is inappropriate to us).
  - There needs to be social areas such as a youth café, and affordable places to eat and hangout. This includes things that can help calm people's behaviour and reduce anti-social activities.
  - There could also be something that might be a social/safe/study space with technology for children and young people to use outwith school.
  - There used to be a youth club at the Linden centre, pre-lockdown, which could also be brought back, and theatre and local library clubs could be set up.
2. Addressing litter – there needs to be more effort put in and encouragement take care of the environment.
3. Engaging with the history and culture of the town – there is a need to make history interesting and engage more people with it. Huntly doesn't feel all that appealing and looks quite sad now.
4. Ensuring there are adequate services – it should never be difficult for a community to access a bank and financial advice.

### Thinking about how Huntly could be the best possible version of itself for teenagers

Young people determined that the following changes were likely the easiest to achieve:

- Support for anxious and non-sporty people to meet others - people really want to get out and meet others but need some support. It shouldn't all just be about sports, which not everyone wants to do. Local teenagers don't want to just sit at home behind screens all the time.
- Affordable activities for all young people – there need to be affordable activities for girls, especially. But in general, if activities aren't affordable, people won't engage. Then they lose all motivations to engage in further activities. We need to find constructive ways for anti-social/ drug using young people to express frustrations. An idea surfacing on reflection from a Young Consultant was the possibility for a place to go to do arty things, and a graffiti wall to help young people get creative and let off steam.
- Areas for older young people - don't want to share all the same spaces as children. We make the children feel inferior, anyway. It's beneficial for everyone to have different places for different age groups. For instance, a skate park or bike park that is more adventurous.
- More adventurous activities in general – Adventure Aberdeen is a good example of what it could be like.
- More biking things - fix and learn how to fix. There is the bike shack in the industrial estate at the moment. It's good but it's quite hidden and quite small.
- Reducing litter
- Improvements to school - quality of PE equipment for example.
- Some play options are too dangerous for the kids - need to have clearly designated



things. For instance, the diamond at Cooper Park where lots of injuries happen. Children play a Super Man game that involves spinning and causes most broken bones. This doesn't set a good example to younger kids.

- o Support local businesses - such as the honesty bakehouse as they are forced to close if they don't find a new place to rent out as they have basically been kicked out their current building. We like them, and they sell out of their baked goods quickly, so clearly others do too.

Young people also determined that, even if it's difficult to achieve, the following should also be addressed as matters of priority:

- Tackling the drug issues in Huntly - Drugs, cigarettes and alcohol are far too easy for young people to access (Shops should be encouraged to check for ID more often).
- Keeping things in good condition – there have been so many storms and fallen trees and we really need ongoing maintenance and for damage to be fixed. We also need to try to find a way to preserve some of the things we know might get damaged during storms.
- Not a lot of new things in Huntly - Things need updated to create safer and better places in general.
- Having a social space/study space for youths.
- Creating a Sport's Centre.
- Attractions for all sorts of people – there is way less to do than other places. We also need to reduce the impact of some activities on older people and other members of the community.

Following discussion between young people and adult stakeholders, it was clear that both groups appreciate the lack of funding available to make change happen. However, all were committed to greater partnership working to make the system work better using the resources already available, and better strategising on how to tap into additional resource that might become available (such as through applying for grant funding). It was also noted that the young people's priority around a skate park may be a long-term ambition, but that there was significant knowledge and learning from creating skate parks in other local communities to look at taking this forward.

## How do we work together to achieve improvements?

Young people talked about how they want there to be more meetings between adults and teenagers so that they can:

1. speak to changemakers directly about their concerns and ideas;
2. learn about what's possible and how change happens; and
3. be part of both shorter- and longer-term processes as equal partners.

One Young Consultant pointed out that if you keep giving people the same standard things, then you will keep getting the same standard responses. It shuts down creative thinking and pride in the community when you feel uninspired and restricted.

The most ideal place for this to happen would be at The Gordon Schools, where stakeholders can be invited to meetings with young people in school time, where young people set the agenda, and young people have the chance to participate more on their own terms. Outwith school, young people are often busy and tired, but that doesn't mean they don't want to be included.

An example would be to have Friday meetings where young people can go along (not like a lunch or a break). They could speak with both teachers and other members of the community directly and engage in two-way dialogue where realistic plans for change and improvement can be determined.

Everyone agreed that face-to-face interaction is preferable, and young people also noted that they would like the opportunity to develop the skills to facilitate their own groups and take more responsibility for actions as they get more experienced and used to taking part in community action. These are also vital skills to learn for future employment, and they want to be clued in on how the systems through which change happen work. They can then also support peers to do the same. Adults in the group noted the benefits this would bring the wider community as young people take ownership of community assets and are treated as equals.

Starting these activities at the earliest stages of secondary school means there is also the opportunity to find out directly from the 'dodgers' what they want and need. It can also help prevent some of their troubling behaviours and create support opportunities if they are struggling with drugs or alcohol. Instead of discussing what they might need, we need to speak to them directly and understand their experiences. Young people and adults also discussed how the space of discussion needs to be inclusive to young people of a range of backgrounds and experiences and could link with Community Learning and Development (CLD) and their existing youth platform.

Stakeholders to involve in dialogue should include the Towns Team and Huntly Learning Community Partnership. There is also a pivotal role to be played by Huntly and District Development Trust, and Deveron Projects can further support with space, events, and furthering opportunities for local young people. Police Scotland officers could also come to The Gordon Schools to discuss the issues local young people experience and consider how they can better support young people's needs and concerns.

Following a greater appreciation and understanding of what young people want, questionnaires could be used within school to measure interest in different proposed activities and when would be a good time and venue to hold them. Community developments and conversations could also be communicated via the local paper – The Huntly Express. After we really truly understand what young people need, we can have a further conversation about the support that adults need to put in place to keep the momentum and will going across partners.

## Huntly Route map for Youth Inclusion and Tackling Anti-Social Behaviour

1. Establish a regular space and time within The Gordon Schools (suggestion of Friday afternoons) for community participation. This can link with the Learning for Sustainability and Skills 4.0 agenda, and local stakeholders can be invited to speak directly with local young people and workshop and organise further ideas.
2. Connect the young people, through the school sessions, to speak directly with the Huntly and District Development Trust, The Towns Team, and the Huntly Learning Partnership:
  - An invitation can be sent out by The Gordon Schools to invite them to a session designed and convened by the young people as part of this project, to springboard

the start of an honest and equal dialogue.

- The immediate conversation is about how and what change can happen in Huntly with and for them. It's important to consider what is realistic, and what can happen in the shorter and longer term.
- Once there is a clear set of asks and priorities that are agreed and actions between young people at the local changemakers, they can engage in shared lobbying to Aberdeenshire Council for free spaces for young people to start enacting the activities and improvements they wish to see.
- Ideas and opportunities can be shared through The Gordon Schools via The Huntly Express and questionnaires. Over time, more and more young people can be involved directly.

**3.** Develop capacities amongst local young people to facilitate activities, groups, and feel confident engaging in broader community activities.

The starting point for this could be a set of workshops with interested teenagers that cover:

- core facilitation techniques
- understanding and reflecting upon how change happens
- supporting themselves and one another in the challenges of making change happen.



# Chapter 5



# Teenagers and Public Space in the Denny Area

Below is an experiential map and set of priorities from young people living in the Denny area. We worked firstly with S3 pupils and then with S5/6 pupils in school-based sessions. The four walks we conducted are shown on the map, with much crossover in what we were told. The priorities for action were begun by S3 in the first session, and then built upon by their older peers in the second, to begin building consensus.

## Stage 1: Experiential Map and Priorities for Action

### A Combined Map of Everyone's Views

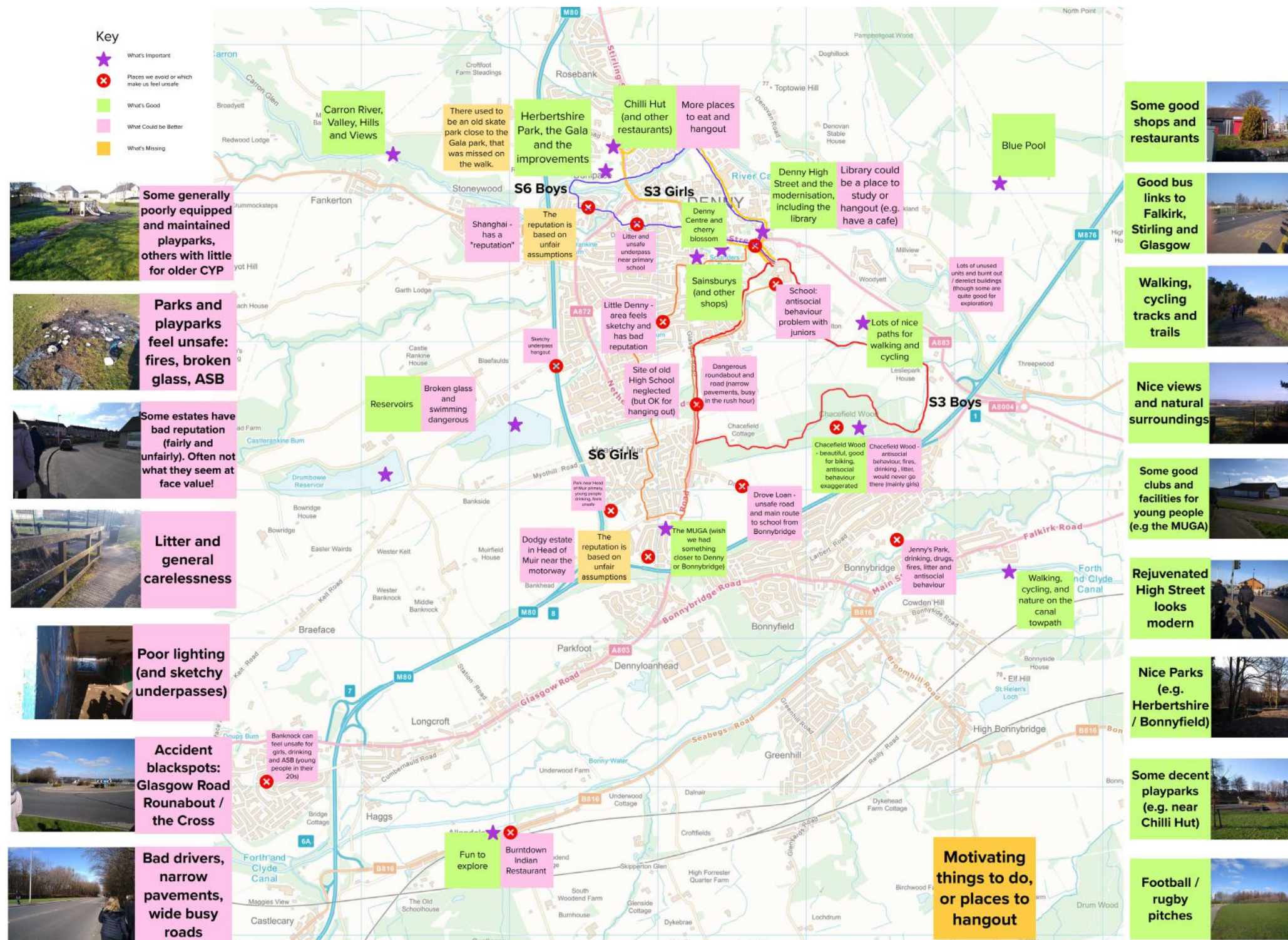


Figure 8 An Experiential Map of the views of Teenagers from across the Denny area. The base map contains public sector information licensed under the Open Government Licence v3.0



## Our Priorities for Action

- **Dealing with antisocial behaviour (ASB) in our communities and public spaces:** disrespect; intimidation; littering; vandalism; fights; vaping, drinking, drug-taking, and fires; one bad experience can really change perception of the area and motivation to go out.
- **Making our outdoor spaces, parks, woods, and estates safer (particularly for young women):** our outdoor places do not feel safe due to ASB (mainly high schoolers who want to hang out and party with friends but have nowhere to go and are not old enough to drink at home or in pubs). This is mainly in groups of juniors who keep themselves to themselves, although Banknock involves groups in their 20s.
- **Acknowledging that the pressures and perceptions of ASB are worse for girls than boys:** Boys acknowledge there are some dodgy groups and activities, but the situation and some places are not as bad as it is perceived or rumoured to be (e.g., Chacefield woods). Some areas both unfairly (and fairly) judged – Little Shanghai, Little Denny or Banknock. For girls safety is a big concern and problem for them. They don't feel they can travel except in groups and avoid places with a 'reputation' or call a parent when a situation seems dodgy. The impact of this limits their access to the outdoors, friends, and other facilities, which over lockdown meant the loss of friendships, and some friends beginning to hang out with the wrong crowd and their personalities changing.
- **Things to do for young people with friends which are cool, meaningful, purposeful, a good use of time (e.g., learning a new skill) and provide models of respectful behaviour:** there is quite a lot for young people to do in the area, but often the motivation to organise and participate can be a problem, both for us and the adults that organise them. While there are some clubs which run in the community where we feel adults are totally committed, there are others where we feel those who run them's hearts aren't in it. Some clubs are only attended because they look good on our CVs, or can seem aimless and difficult to maintain interest in. We need more support to get youth-led clubs and activities up and running which meet the criteria described, and incentivisation, training and support for adults to help us do it. Some of the ideas we had included a martial arts academy, a youth cafe, a pet therapy service in school, or a 70s cafe with a vinyl record store for hanging out. All these need to be easily accessible to young people across the Denny High catchment, where travel and active travel between the communities can take time.
- **Less schoolwork** so we've more time and energy to contribute to and focus on other extracurricular activities. The levels of homework are increasing and the lengths of breaks decreasing so we're often exhausted in what little off time we have.
- **Dealing with carelessness and apathy:** A range of things such as littering, selling vapes, not showing up to clubs, parents/teachers not challenging poor behaviour, can at times make it feel like some young people and adults have given up caring. There is a danger that it becomes a culture of 'not caring' and this becomes "amusing". This is not easy to address but some ideas included more meaningful activities; taking greater care of our places (see below); and not expecting young people just to 'show up' to clubs, but encouraging them to come. It would also help to assist young people to understand the "if you don't use (a service), you lose it" rule (e.g., trampolining or the athletics club).
- **Improve unpleasant and dangerous roads and active travel routes.** A lot of us walk to school (from Bonnybridge) and the routes are not enjoyable. None would cycle them, although some roads (e.g., Glasgow Road) are very wide and might allow for safe lanes. The pavements are narrow, so in some places the hedges force one person into the road if two are walking together, and there is one new and very dangerous roundabout - an accident waiting to happen. We are forced to use the main roads as these are the only routes between the communities, but they are also arteries for commuters and haulage,

often driving dangerously. Other accident black spots include The Cross (no one understands it), Drove Loan (narrow, speeding drivers), Broad Street and Stirling Street.

- **Affordable indoor places where friends can eat out and hangout.** As teenagers, fast food outlets, cafes and shops offer us a way of hanging out indoors with friends. Some of our favourite things about the area fall into this category, and we'd like more, particularly facilities more tailored to our age group, where we don't feel we're being judged, and which feels "ours". It was this need which underlies our ideas for a youth cafe.
- **Better equipped play and sports facilities for younger children** (some are very poorly equipped), and more for our age group (swings), and addressing ASB which often means playparks are hijacked and 'no go areas' in the evenings. Particularly annoying are young people who throw the swings over the top of the frame, so they're impossible to use. There is also a lot of rubbish, broken glass, and overgrown grass, which makes them hazardous and feel neglected. The MUGA in Head of Muir is great but isn't easily accessible from Denny or Bonnybridge. An under 16s gym or swimming pool would be a big improvement.
- **Take better care of our place: less littering and derelict / burnt out units.** There are lots of empty units and burnt-out buildings, as well as poorly maintained green areas with not enough bins or signs. The result is a place which looks uncared for, which means young people are more likely to leave litter, vandalise and graffiti, and it becomes a vicious cycle. The regeneration of Denny High Street 10 years ago really made a difference to the way we feel about the place, because it looked modern and stylish.

## Stage 2: Denny High Local Strategy Workshop: Core Findings

Below are the core findings of the Local Strategy workshop held online between young people and local adult stakeholders.

### Highest Priorities for Improving the Teenage Experience of the Denny High catchment area

Discussion amongst young people surfaced four key categories of improvements that would make the biggest difference to local teenagers:

#### 1. Fixing Issues of Anti-social Behaviour:

- Addressing patterns in behaviour that affect other people – clearer rules, bigger consequences for breaches. They felt there is too much disrespect between age groups just now.
- Trialling activities and approaches with younger age groups (S1/2), to see what will work best for them to help improve behaviour. This is better than throwing lots of money at one big thing that we don't know is going to work.

#### 2. Social spaces:

- There need to be affordable indoor places where young people can hang out. For instance, a youth café.
- There need to be spaces to hangout outwith Denny town centre.

- Additional parks and places 'with a sense of presence' so that anti-social behaviour is less concentrated, and there are more alternative spaces for young people to hang out in where they can avoid it:

*'more like indoor spaces for when it gets to winter, and the daylight hours are shorter... And we just thought it was important to make sure that areas are well-lit that and they've got like a good sense of like presence, like other people around and it isn't just like, a random park in the middle of nowhere where it feels really unsafe to*

*just be around. Because that's when things are the most dangerous'. Young Consultant, Male, S6*  
*'if I was to just go out tonight, I feel like the plenty of places would already be kind of filled up before you would get there with people you potentially want to avoid.' Young Consultant, female, S6*

3. **Addressing litter:** – there needs to be more effort put in to clean up, and encouragement to take care of the environment. This is both for the safety of both people and animals, and because it increases general pride in the place we live and the motivation to improve it and keep it clean and tidy.
4. **Walking and Cycling:**
  - There needs to be safe cycling lanes on busy roads.
  - Young people, especially girls, need safer walking routes to avoid 'unsavoury characters' and worry less when out and about.

### Thinking about how the Denny High catchment area could be the best possible version of itself for teenagers...

Young people determined that the following changes were likely the **easiest to achieve**:

- **Clearing up litter and making underpasses feel safer.**
- **Affordable activities for all young people** – there need to be multiple affordable places for young people to hangout e.g., parks and halls for them. More activities and areas mean fewer that are taken over by dodgy people. Creating motivating activities/ addressing motivation problems for young people – to divert young people from causing anti-social behaviour.
- **Determining appropriate levels of school homework** – some young people felt there was too much homework, which means they don't get enough time to switch off from school and engage in activities they enjoy. Others feel that homework is useful for building commitment and character, diverting young people from anti-social behaviour.

Young people also determined that, even if it's difficult to achieve, the following should also be addressed as matters of priority:

- **Increasing the number and quality of streetlights in some areas** – to enhance feelings of safety in more parks and areas after dark, especially to give girls more confidence.
- **Improving travel routes** – enhancing ease of use and safety, to encourage more active travel, particularly those routes that connect the different communities in the area, and which otherwise require us to use busy and dangerous roads.
- **Strategic actions to address anti-social behaviour** – through establishing and enforcing clear social rules, and providing opportunities to experience models of appropriate respectful behaviour (e.g., schoolhouses or clubs). There also needs to be action on drinking and drug-taking in public areas.



- **Increasing the number of hangout spaces outwith Denny town centre**
- **More study spaces for teenagers open outwith school hours, to promote positive academic productivity.**

## Principles for working together to achieve improvements.

Following discussion between young people and adult stakeholders, it was clear that both groups appreciate the lack of funding available to make change happen. However, all were committed to greater partnership working to make the system work better using the resources already available.

Young Consultants talked about how they want there to be more meetings between adults and teenagers so that they can:

- a. speak to changemakers directly about their concerns and ideas;
- b. learn about what's possible and how change happens; and
- c. be part of both shorter and longer-term processes as equal partners.

Young Consultants discussed how school provides an ideal, and appropriately focused, environment for gathering their views on the matters that affect them. Working effectively to find a balance between the resource available to engage young people from Falkirk Council, and young people's ability to engage was a shared priority within one group. Other groups came up with slightly differing initial reflections, but through sharing ideas it emerged that a process such as the following may be a useful model. This would work using the mechanisms already in place at Denny High, and may provide a future model for stakeholders to engage constructively with other schools as well:

### **1. Establishing a “working group” of young people and adult stakeholders, and a relationship of trust, as a basis for effective dialogue.**

Good quality engagement starts with a small group where stakeholders and young people can get to know each other face-to-face as equal partners in discussions. At this stage, the focus is on gathering qualitative information, and keeping options open.

For example, adult stakeholders talked about a toolkit for design and infrastructure towards making places safer. This could be shared and discussed with young people towards establishing the interventions most appropriate and needed for specific local places. The needs of girls and young women should be a particular focus:

*'the stuff like climate change, black lives matter, that kind of thing - making sure that adults take teenagers seriously. You know, there's a lot of people that think we're joking or we're being silly talking about climate change and we're just young. But I think teenagers can have a big difference you just need to take on board the stuff we say' Young Consultant, female, S6.*

**2. Implementing ways which enable the young people to consult their peers more broadly on ideas and agreements which emerge.**

Young people were clear that the voices of a few should not dictate what happens for everyone. School pupils in the Pupil Voice group could set up a communication structure which enables opportunities or ideas emerging from discussions with adult stakeholders to be open to contributions from the broader school via forms, surveys, or other consultation methods. This broader conversation can be used to identify key priorities and areas of strong consensus:

*'A more general gauge of what is good about our community? What can be improved? How do we feel about it?' Young Consultant, Male, S6*

*'we can use things like computing classes or can put like a big survey out to see people who are currently in the school their thoughts on it, and what they want to do and get a sort of immediate response on that. And the best ways to do that would be like a Microsoft form or a Google form' Young Consultant, Male, S6*

**3. Maintaining an ongoing dialogue for consultation and feedback.**

For example, so data collected through surveys or via other methods can be shared within the working group for discussion and decisions made on next steps. This group can act as an ongoing body, like an in-school youth parliament, who are the first port of call for adult stakeholders on young people's views. As part of an ongoing dialogue, regular meetings might be scheduled for updates and further two-way exchange of developments and ideas:

*'If you're not constantly involved, or constantly aware of the updates, you're not 100% certain on what's happening. And that makes you feel like you don't have a say in what you're doing.' Young Consultant, male, S6*

*'we need to be trying to deter people from vandalising stuff by involving them more in the planning and upkeep of the places to encourages them to abuse them less. It will also like make them want to keep them nice and also be building skills for later in life.' Young Consultant, male, S6*

*'being aware of these channels that, you know, have credible links, is super useful for us to engage with, because, you know, when we're doing community engagement and outreach to understand public opinion, often through our sort of normal means of community engagement, we'll contact as many people as we can, but it is often adults and older people. So, knowing about these links through the schools and having connections means that we can use these resources to engage better, and you know, create these forms that are accessible, and easy to use.' Adult Stakeholder*

*'qualitative research, like starting with that facilitates a better working relationship so we get more benefit in the long run. So, starting with that, and then maybe doing quantitative after getting the relationship and then doing the rest of the research' Adult Stakeholder*

**4. Allowing for engagement opportunities to take place outwith school too.** While young people felt that school was a good environment for most engagement, they could also see the limitations. For instance:

*'Doing it inside school hours may cause it to link back to school more that it may be necessary. Doing it outwith school hours may allow for less bias responses'. Anonymous Comment on the Mural board.*

Therefore, there should also be opportunities for further involvement in strategic and community-based matters for young people. Zoom calls, such as in the Local Strategy

Workshop, may allow for a fuller explanation of answers, different groups to be engaged at once, and lends a level of anonymity and comfort that some young people feel enables them to say more of what they wish to say to adults.

Adults felt they could support teenagers in their ideas for high-quality engagement, as well as in the ideas tabled for improving the community. Falkirk Council noted that resourcing challenges make it difficult to engage with young people at the level they'd like to sometimes, but that the model proposed could work both meaningfully and efficiently. The key to this was agreed to be making the effort to establish a personal relationship of trust upfront, as well as a commitment to enabling and sustaining the dialogue on both sides. Adult stakeholders noted that the difference between adults and teenagers is not that big, and there is no reason that everyone can't come to the table as equal partners. From the school side, it was agreed that all teachers and staff can be involved in this process so that there is a clear understanding across the school to the concerns and ideas for young people and wider community. This will help ensure a 'one team' approach.

## A Route-map for Youth Inclusion and Tackling Anti-Social Behaviour in the Denny High Catchment Area

Drawing on the discussion, a successful route map for working together and tackling anti-social behaviour would be:

- 1. Establish a regular space and time within Denny High School for community participation.** This can link with the Learning for Sustainability and Skills 4.0 agenda, and local stakeholders can be invited to speak directly with local young people and workshop and organise further ideas. Pupils already have forums and mechanisms that might support this, and The Pupil Voice group will look at sending round a survey to gather consensus around the ideas in this project, as a first step.
- 2. Connect the young people, through the school sessions, to speak directly with stakeholders from Falkirk Council and Sustrans about their ideas and the survey results.** This can feed their infrastructure project connecting the canal to Denny High. At the same time, it can act as a starting point for the model for future engagement. Stakeholders in other council departments such as Community Learning and Development, and Parks and Greenspace might usefully be invited to join the conversation, given relevance to the young people's ideas. There may be other community groups that could also join the forum, and it would be good to start understanding further where links can be made. Principles of this discussion are:
  - Open, honest, and equal dialogue
  - Keeping young people informed and up to date on changes, and why certain decisions have needed to be made, or why ideas discussed cannot be actioned.
  - Focusing on establishing strong relationships for dialogue on future opportunities.
  - Youth-led engagement with the wider student body, based around understanding shared concerns, ideas, and paths forward.
- 3. Work together on the issues and ideas brought to the table, with initial focus on:**
  - Creating and advertising motivating clubs that young people want to get them off the streets. Proactively encourage them to keep showing up if commitment lapses, appreciate their involvement, and actively involve them in planning and designing activities. These clubs need to be affordable and easily accessible, or those

excluded may gravitate to antisocial behaviour due to lack of alternatives.

- Further establish opportunities for more parks and youth hangout spots, such as creating a youth café. It could also mean casual, affordable, café's that don't begrudge young people hanging out there. Involve young people in all stages of any designs and management approaches, so that they feel ownership and don't abuse the facilities. This can also help build skills for later life as well as providing a positive model of respectful behaviour by and for young people.
- Look at ways to introduce 'a greater sense of community presence' in public spaces. Lighting is important, as well as establishing 'lines of sight' from residents, and other methods for making people feel observed (without it feeling threatening). This could include introducing approaches where 'a responsible adult' is available. This might be like a youth worker, or a park warden scheme. Some also suggested CCTV may be useful in certain problem areas to deter poor behaviour.
- Give special attention in all discussions to the increased safety fears of girls and women, factoring in and prioritising measures that will increase general community safety. It was acknowledged that these fears are legitimate and that there should be a collective sense of 'community' responsibility about, and commitment to, addressing them.





# Chapter 6



# Teenagers and Public Space in North Edinburgh

## Stage 1: Experiential Maps and Priorities for Action

Below is an experiential map that draws together the views from young people after our initial engagements in the area. It also shows the overall priorities for action they felt were important. I

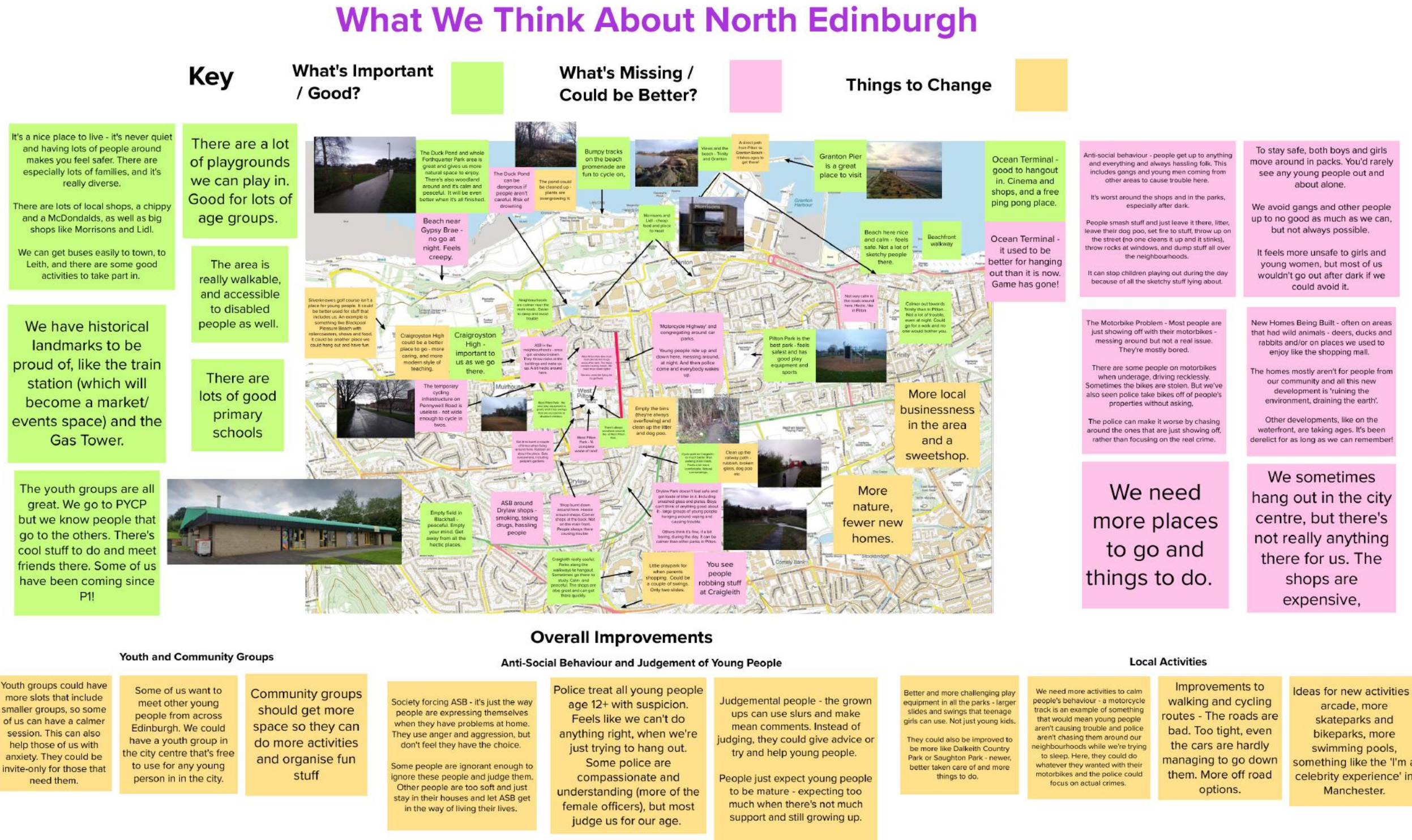


Figure 9 An Experiential Map of the views of teenagers attending PYCP, a local 17-year-old, and a local family. The base map contains public sector information licensed under the Open Government Licence v3.0



## Stage 2: Local Strategy Workshop (Adult Stakeholders Only)

Initial maps from the work were sent to local adult stakeholders, with 5 attending this session, representing Sustrans and the City of Edinburgh Council. Everyone expressed a will and interest in speaking to local young people and recognised that there are often difficulties in accessing this age group in a meaningful way in North Edinburgh. Given the amount going on around the Edinburgh waterfront development, old rail station plans, improved access to the beach opportunities, new housing, improvements to Pennywell and surrounding roads, and 20-minute neighbourhood work, now is a very good time. There are also opportunities to help them understand the roles they could play in later life in the community and in terms of career options.

It was also acknowledged that, given the findings, a multi-agency approach was required that could work across housing, planning, community development, youth work and policing. Stakeholders noted that some of this is in place, but more needs to be done. Fundamentally, a cohesive community takes time, and the amount of new housing in the area is always going to lead to difficulties in integrating the old with the new. They could understand why it feels to many young people like much of the community has been permanently under construction for all that they can remember.

Stakeholders were keen to discuss the issues around anti-social behaviour, which also arises as a key theme from engagement with adults. It is vital to recognise that most young people are not causing issue in the community and are as much (or more) affected by it as older people. They noted the role that community policing can play in this, provided they are careful and perceived as a helpful force and not targeting young people. A plan was made to engage with Craigmoynton High School to deepen understanding of young people's insights.

Following this, further engagement was undertaken with S5 pupils across the school in June 2022. Figure 10 overleaf therefore shows a combined map of all findings from all groups, followed by overarching priorities for action we gleaned from all workshops held.



# What We Think About North Edinburgh

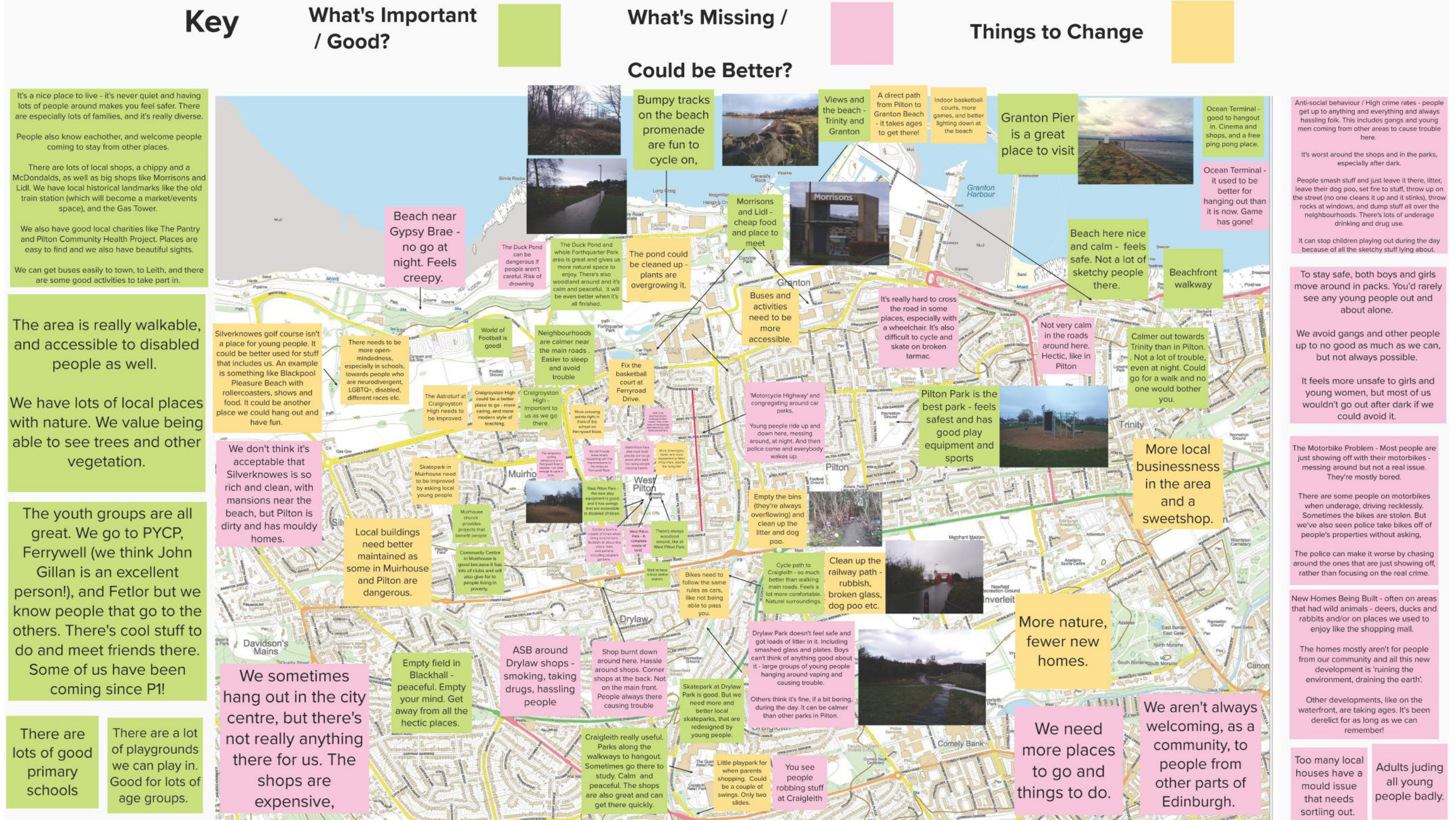


Figure 10 An Experiential Map of the views of teenagers across North Edinburgh. The base map contains public sector information licensed under the Open Government Licence v3.0



## Our Priorities for Action

### Improving our Environment

- To improve our ability to get around, we need:
  - more safe crossing points.
  - more smooth pavements.
  - more ramps for people with pushchairs and wheelchairs.
  - to stop cars parking on the curb, meaning people in wheelchairs can't get passed!
  - stop bins ending up on paths and roads when they're not meant to be there.
  
- We need to sort out the litter problem - trash is everywhere including in the grass and on the roads. The environment looks really depressing. We could:
  - work as a community to litter pick;
  - schools could give people a better education on protecting the environment and how; and
  - the council could give us more bins and better places to store them.
  
- We need to increase the amount and take better care of all the natural places around us.
  
- We need improvements to walking and cycling routes - The roads are bad. Too tight, and even the cars are hardly managing to go down them. We need more off-road options.

### Effective Action on Anti-Social Behaviour and Judgement of Young People

- Judgemental adults - they can use slurs and make mean comments. Instead of judging, they could give advice or try and help young people.
  
- People just expect young people to be mature - expecting too much when there's not much support and we're still growing up.
  
- Police treat all young people age 12+ with suspicion. It feels like we can't do anything right, when we're just trying to hang out. Some police are compassionate and understanding (more of the female officers), but most judge us for our age.
  
- We want a safer community with less drug taking, anti-social behaviour, and more parks and trees around and about. This should include better lighting in all the parks. Some people are ignorant enough to ignore these people and judge them. Other people are too soft and just stay in their houses and let anti-social behaviour get in the way of living their lives.
  
- For many, anti-social behaviour is just the way people are expressing themselves when they have problems at home. They use anger and aggression, but don't feel they have the choice. We need effective action to help local people with the issues they have.
  
- Local rehab centres are needed, and more support to help young people that take drugs to get clean. Pharmacies could help more in the wider community.

## Local Activities

- We need better local shops, especially around the school, that have stuff young people want. For example, Tesco is the shop that has the best meal deal, and we'd like a Subway, Starbucks and bubble tea place.
- We need more close by areas to hangout and things to do with friends, that are safe and affordable. Not just sports! These could include:
  - More and safer parks.
  - An arcade.
  - A bike park.
  - redesigning the Skatepark and adding in more stuff, involving young people in the process!
  - a local cinema.
  - a swimming pool we can use any time (not just during school sessions).
  - restaurants like Subway and KFC.
  - Good quality indoor and outdoor basketball courts.
  - a local music scene, including venues and opportunities to learn instruments or start bands. These would be for both young people and adults.
  - More and/or better equipped local gyms that young people can afford and are allowed to use.
- Better and more challenging play equipment in all the parks - larger slides and swings that teenage girls can use. We enjoy using swings, but don't want to take them away from younger children (and be judged as anti-social!). Our parks could also be improved to be more like Dalkeith Country Park or Saughton Park - newer, better taken care of and more things to do.
- We think there is potential for exciting activities that bring people to our area, like the I'm a celebrity experience in Manchester, or Blackpool Pleasure Beach.
- Linked with reducing ASB, we need more activities specifically to calm people's behaviour - a motorcycle track is an example of something that would mean young people aren't causing trouble and police aren't chasing them around our neighbourhoods while we're trying to sleep. Here, they could do whatever they wanted with their motorbikes and the police could focus on actual crimes.

## Youth and Community Groups

- Some of us want to meet other young people from across Edinburgh. We could have a youth group in the city centre that's free to use for any young person in the city.
- Youth groups could have more slots that include smaller groups, so some of us can have a calmer session. This can also help those of us with anxiety. They could be invite-only for those that need them.
- Schools could also take us to local youth groups to get to know what they do, and who works there. That way, we wouldn't be worried about going there for the first time. We

could do this instead of days where we just watch a video.

- Community groups should get more space so they can do more activities and organise fun stuff. People who have just moved into the area need communities to help them make new friends.

## Project Addendum: Co-design on Pennywell Road - January 2023

It was not possible to arrange the idealised Local Strategy Workshop, but a golden opportunity arose in January 2023 to build meaningfully upon this work.

The City of Edinburgh Council commissioned and worked in partnership with APiC to engage local teenagers on a co-design project. This centred two sections of Pennywell Road immediately outside the school and related directly to the wider place-making elements of the NEAT Connection project funded by Sustrans Scotland. There follows a brief overview of relevant outcomes, and further details of the outcomes and methodology is provided in [Appendix 1](#).

### The Process

The co-design process took place over the course of 2½ days, including 3 Phases comprised of 6 sessions across two community venues outwith the school premises. Participants were 16 young people aged 13-14 years (S2 and S3), with an equal split of boys and girls. In Phase 1, the girls and boys separately visited the site and discussed their own important design themes uninfluenced by the other, before coming together to share and agree priorities. The separate sessions began with a review of the outcomes of the previous North Edinburgh engagement, to provide a summary of what their peers had already agreed was good or could be improved about the local area. Participants were given the freedom to object or add their own ideas, and use this information to the extent it was helpful in thinking through designs.

Following the site visits and discussions, the group agreed that they would like to think of their designs as being about creating a new community park. The following priority design themes emerged:

- **Safety.** The girls expressed their dismay at their lack of feeling safe in the area. They said they rarely go out in groups, let alone on their own, and especially not in the dark. If they do go out in groups, they go to a different area of the city where they feel safer. When thinking about things that make them feel safe, they noted that these are places populated by the 'right people', especially families, and with good lighting. Therefore, a well-lit place suitable for families was a measure of success for a new park.
- **Looks nice, well maintained, and cared for,** and makes us feel good about our place. This includes introducing more nature and enhancing what is already there.
- **Shelter and seating,** as this would guarantee use by pupils during lunch and breaks. Currently, they have nowhere to sit other than a small playground, and shelter under shop overhangs or return to school when it rains.
- **Measures to reduce littering and vandalism.** There was initially a general despondency amongst many participants that improvements were pointless because vandalism was inevitable. This would immediately ruin something good, and the result would be to make people feel worse about the place they live. Some felt efforts to curb vandalism (e.g. signs) could make it even more likely that it would take place, in that it

would act as a challenge or an invitation to disobey.

- Nevertheless, discussion did lead to a range of interventions which would be needed or that could be done to tackle the problem: public or close circuit surveillance, peer pressure, education, and specific features such as more bins. The young people articulated antisocial behaviour as a systemic issue, and one referred to the aim being to 'reverse the chain reaction', with a particular focus on nipping the first abuse in the bud; collective responsibility for this; and the need for effective community policing and clear consequences.
- **Play equipment for older age groups.** Particular emphasis was placed on swings ('big' or 'basket'), but a good seesaw and flying fox were also mentioned.
- **Better and cheaper food options,** such as a bubble tea shop, fast food outlets or a nice café (such as at Saughton Park in Gorgie).
- **Safer Cycling Options,** such as a bike park, although many participants suggested they do not own their own bikes, so bike hire might be helpful.
- **Basketball court.**

These themes gave rise to 3 key questions which the young people felt it important to hold in mind throughout the subsequent co-design process:

- **Who maintains** the area to ensure it looks nice?
- **Who polices** the area to ensure it isn't vandalised?
- **How do we provide for everyone?**

In relation to these questions, the young people identified the need for a community champion, to coordinate community involvement in the new project, promoting inclusion, while all the time advocating for important local needs to ensure they were not downplayed.

Phase 2 involved a design jam where four teams formulated and constructed their ideas, using a range of materials. Each focused on a different aspect of the design: physical art and design, architecture and design concepts (using Minecraft), landscape architecture, and strategies for encouraging general use. Following this, each team was asked to reflect upon the strengths and weaknesses of their designs with regard to 5 key planning criteria set by the City of Edinburgh Council, which would determine the likelihood of related planning consents.

Finally, in Phase 3, participants worked together to integrate the outputs of the co-design jam into a final proposal. They did this in three teams, two taking responsibility for designs of the two focus areas, and the third worked on a joined-up strategy for mitigating site vandalism, littering and antisocial behaviour. Two stakeholders representing AECOM project partners responsible for the broader concept were present and seemed open to the idea of involving young people and the community collaboratively in realisation of the design. They acknowledged the potential of this to promote a sense of community ownership, which could mitigate antisocial behaviour and ensure the project meets its expressed objectives.



## Overview of the Final Proposal

The co-design focused on two sections of Pennywell Road, with the first a narrow strip located immediately in front of the school. While the space limited design options, the proposal entailed a natural space, seating, with an indoor shelter as its main feature (see [Appendix 1](#)). This would provide a peaceful study space for pupils during the day, and a base for community support groups in the evening. It was envisaged community members might take some responsibility for the guardianship and maintenance of both sections, promoting community cohesion and a shared sense of ownership.

The second section entailed a much larger site outside a local shopping area, slightly further up the road. This provided the focus for the co-design ideas for the new park, which is shown in Figure 11 overleaf. Participants named this “The Forth Bridge Community Park”, on the basis that an identity with shared meaning for their community might engender collective ownership and care for the space, which in turn, might help mitigate antisocial behaviour. It features three ‘themed’ garden zones, which emphasise their top priority for ‘enhancing nature’ and integrate this into design features. These include seating, shelter, play (for all ages and abilities) and features for harvesting rainwater and reducing flooding and maintenance costs. Good lighting was considered important for safety and natural surveillance, but choices are intended to contribute to the attractive, low-maintenance design.

A first underlying principle for the park was that it would be a safe space for girls. This, in turn, determined the second principle of family-friendliness, as it emerged that a space much-frequented by the “right type of adults” and young children, was important for how safe girls felt there, and to levels of antisocial behaviour. A third, was that it would be a nice place to sit, relax, enjoy and socialise, as they were unanimous that the local area lacked any of these. The fourth and final principle was collaboration with the community around design and implementation, to ensure it incorporated core unmet needs; promoted inclusivity and cohesion; and through all this, mitigate dynamics associated with antisocial behaviour.

## An integrated strategy to address antisocial behaviour, combining physical and social design

The way the young people talked about the relationships between antisocial issues, interventions and key questions arising during the co-design process, are represented in the causal loop diagram in Figure 12. In a Causal Loop Diagram, common themes are expressed as variables, presented in ovals on the diagram, and then linked by arrows which represent hypothetical relationships between them. Connecting arrows marked with a plus sign indicate a positive relation, while arrows with a minus sign indicate an opposing relation. Reinforcing loops are marked by Rs with a looping arrow surrounding them. Reinforcing loops are where a change, positive or negative, in one variable in that chain propagates through the loop to cause the same change in that variable. When the change is positive, the loop is called a ‘Virtuous Cycle’ and when it is negative, a ‘Vicious Cycle’.



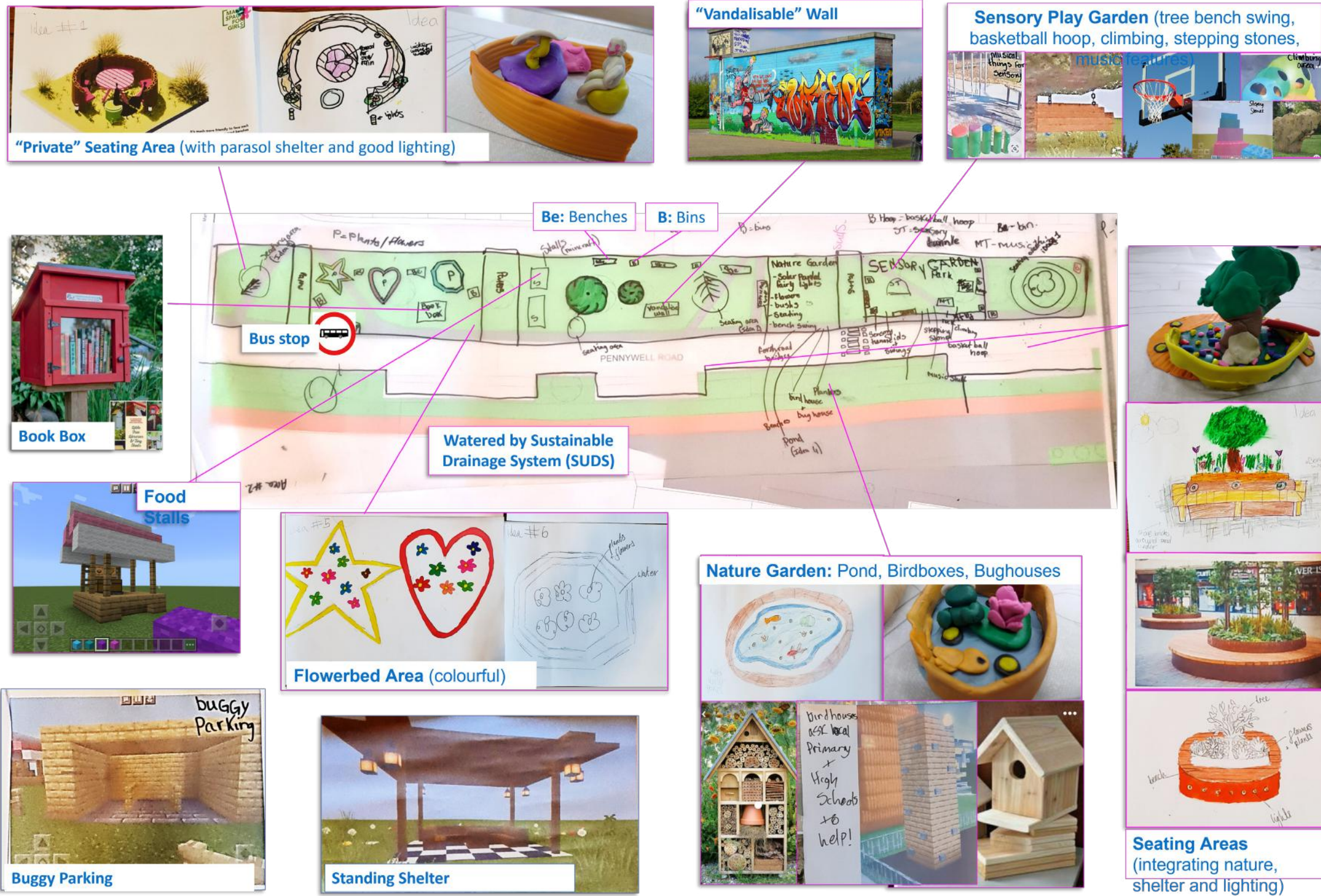


Figure 11 Participant's final design for Site 2 - Forth Bridge Community Park



This diagram is included to show how integral related considerations were to all physical design aspects of the final proposal. Indeed, the young people's final proposal should be seen as a holistic physical manifestation of a 'best effort' strategy to address antisocial behaviour, by those who experience it every day and have sophisticated understanding of, and empathy for, its root causes. One participant clearly articulated that he saw young people's antisocial behaviour and apathy as a vicious circle, where the more evidence that people don't care about place, the less people care ("if no one else cares, why should I?"). The way to reverse this is by demonstrating care of place, where nipping the first abuses in the bud is key.

With respect to the co-design of public spaces with and for teenagers, these findings bring three critical additional insights:

1. The process must involve participants who experience, and ideally perpetrate, antisocial behaviour on a regular basis. It is non-trivial that in other recent APiC engagements, these findings have helped other young people less aware of the root causes and solutions to think about better improvements in their local area. The young people from North Edinburgh were skilled at placing the causes of anti-social behaviour within their systemic context, and articulating what would need to happen to bring about change.
2. The holistic context and strategy underpinning any proposals must be understood and considered in subsequent design decisions. For instance, the proposal should not be divided up into discrete ideas to cherry-pick in accordance with concept designs, expert preferences or cost. Rather, it must be treated as an integrated concept where features are interrelated and act in concert to reduce antisocial behaviour through physical design. In the above proposal, features include a graffiti wall which invites a positive outlet for vandalism, fun bins which encourage and reward their use, CCTV, vandal-proof features, good lighting, as well as all those intended to make the place popular with "the right kind of adults".
3. The importance of collaboration with young people and the community around implementation, as well as design. The participants' strategy is both a proposal for physical change and a longitudinal exercise towards cultivating community care, engagement and ownership. A park which feels meaningful to the whole community would lead to it being popular and valued, and social forces would act to regulate antisocial behaviour. They saw local participation in the creation, maintenance and upkeep of the park as essential to this, where the involvement of local schoolchildren and eco-groups emerged as a particularly strong idea. Shared ownership also underpinned other measures they proposed such as community policing, neighbourhood watch from nearby homes, and community service around park maintenance and upkeep for anyone charged with abuses.

## Final reflections

Firstly, while some students had an active interest in urban design and planning, others had no experience before participating and therefore required more support to fully engage. We therefore needed to bring the whole group on a shared journey to understand how change could happen, and endeavoured to listen, and demonstrate an unswerving commitment and service to youth-leadership and co-design throughout the project. Ultimately, 75% of those who began the project remained until the end, and every one of them made a material contribution to the final proposal.

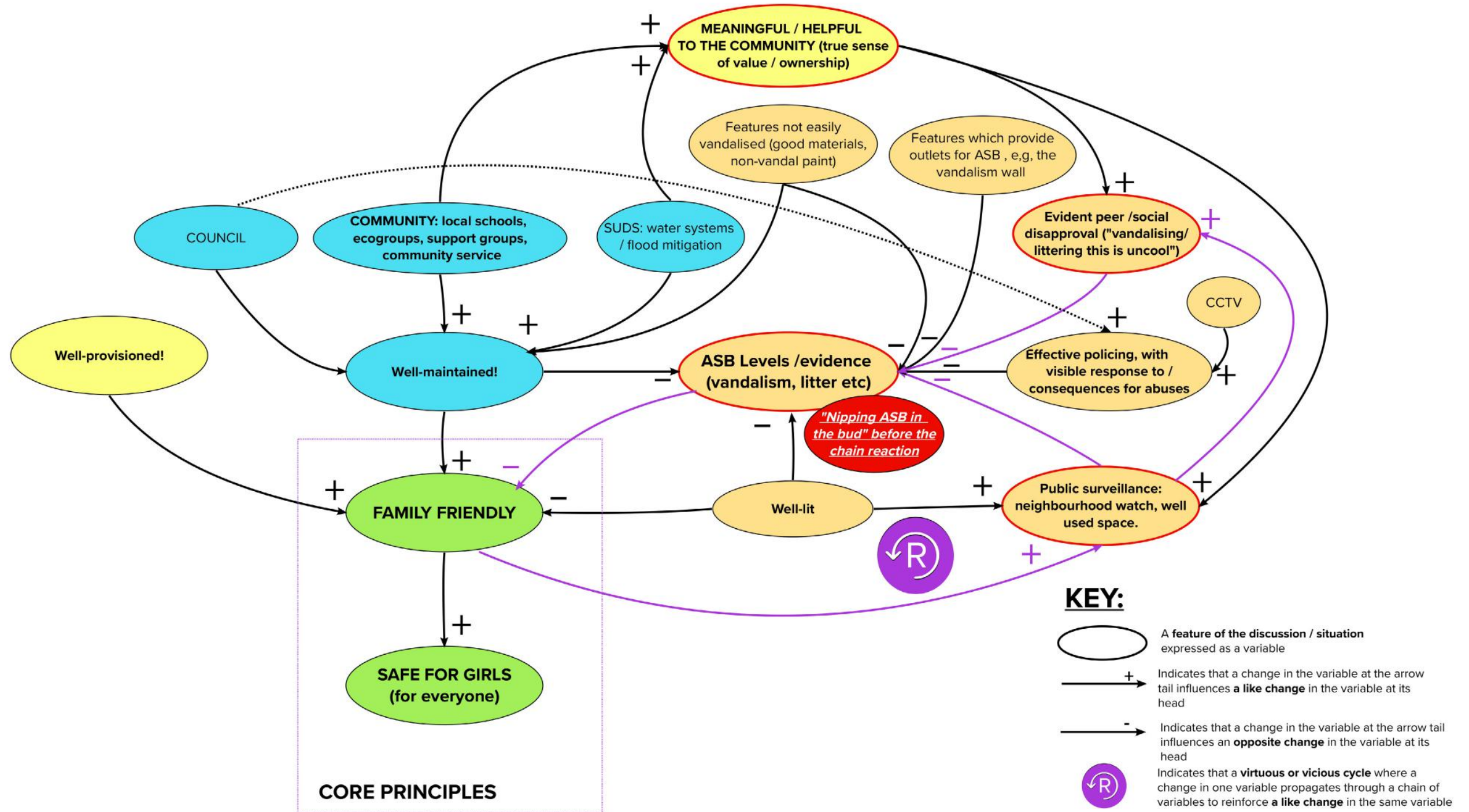


Figure 12 A Causal Loop Diagram representing participant's insights on how anti-social behaviour may be tackled through their Co-designed proposal.



At a final session at the school to review and sign-off the final proposal, participants expressed their interest in participating in implementation and in related plans to improve neighbouring West Pilton Park. When asked to provide private anonymous feedback on what was good or what could be improved about the process, their responses revealed a level of personal engagement and interest which had rarely been expressed explicitly. The common themes were as follows:

**What was good:**

- Opportunity to express themselves creatively;
- Freedom to think through their ideas without pressure, and to take breaks when needed;
- Getting to think about big ideas, and ways to improve their community for both themselves and others;
- Working together as a team; and
- Having choice about how to participate.

**Improvements:**

- Getting to visit other local places to increase their knowledge and inspiration for the design process;
- Having more time on the project to think through ideas (which can be tiring), where provision by facilitators of drinks and snacks might assist with energy levels;
- Not having to travel as far to participate in the workshops, especially during very cold weather; and
- Facilitators finding more ways and opportunities to help some participants express views without fear of judgment or dismissal by peers.

These provide evidence for the benefits of a slower, trust-building approach to working with young people and reflecting on improvements with and for them. A commitment to trustful dialogue requires adult professionals to persist in finding ways to connect with young people and prove what is possible. At times, success may not be immediately evident, and continuing the trust will depend on future follow-ups and commitment to implementation of carefully constructed proposals.



# Chapter 7

# Teenagers and Public Space Across Scotland

## A Model of Anti-social Behaviour in the Community

To assist in the strategy devised in the Local Strategy Workshops, and drawing from everything young people told us across the process, we created a Causal Loop Diagram that explores the factors that increase and decrease anti-social behaviour amongst young people in communities. This can be viewed overleaf in Figure 13.





We presented a draft of this in the Denny Local Strategy Workshop, and finalised it from further conversations with young people and stakeholders to add variables related to the perceived safety of public spaces. This adds context to the principles and route maps presented above, enabling to us see how these fit into the 'whole'. It sits alongside the place-specific Causal Loop Diagram presented in chapter 6 for North Edinburgh, which can be viewed as manifesting and articulating remedies more concretely in the physical and social design of a solution.

An important and unusual characteristic of this Causal Loop Diagram is that it is entirely composed of interconnecting Reinforcing Loops. This has three theoretical implications of considerable significance:

1. Any change of any variable in the system sufficient to turn a Vicious Cycle into a Virtuous Cycle, will have a reinforcing beneficial influence on the whole system related to antisocial behaviour.
2. Without effective intervention, Vicious Cycles will continue to get worse, propagating negative effects through the system.
3. That the COVID-19 pandemic served to reinforce dynamics related to teenage antisocial behaviour through its invisible influence on related variables (green-dotted arrows). Evidence suggests these effects continue to perpetuate these via the Vicious Cycles



**KEY:**

-  A feature of the discussion / situation expressed as a variable
-  Indicates that a change in the variable at the arrow tail influences a **like change** in the variable at its head
-  Indicates that a change in the variable at the arrow tail influences an **opposite change** in the variable at its head
-  Indicates that a **virtuous or vicious cycle** where a change in one variable propagates through a chain of variables to reinforce a **like change** in the same variable

# Model of Influences on Anti-Social Behaviour in the Community

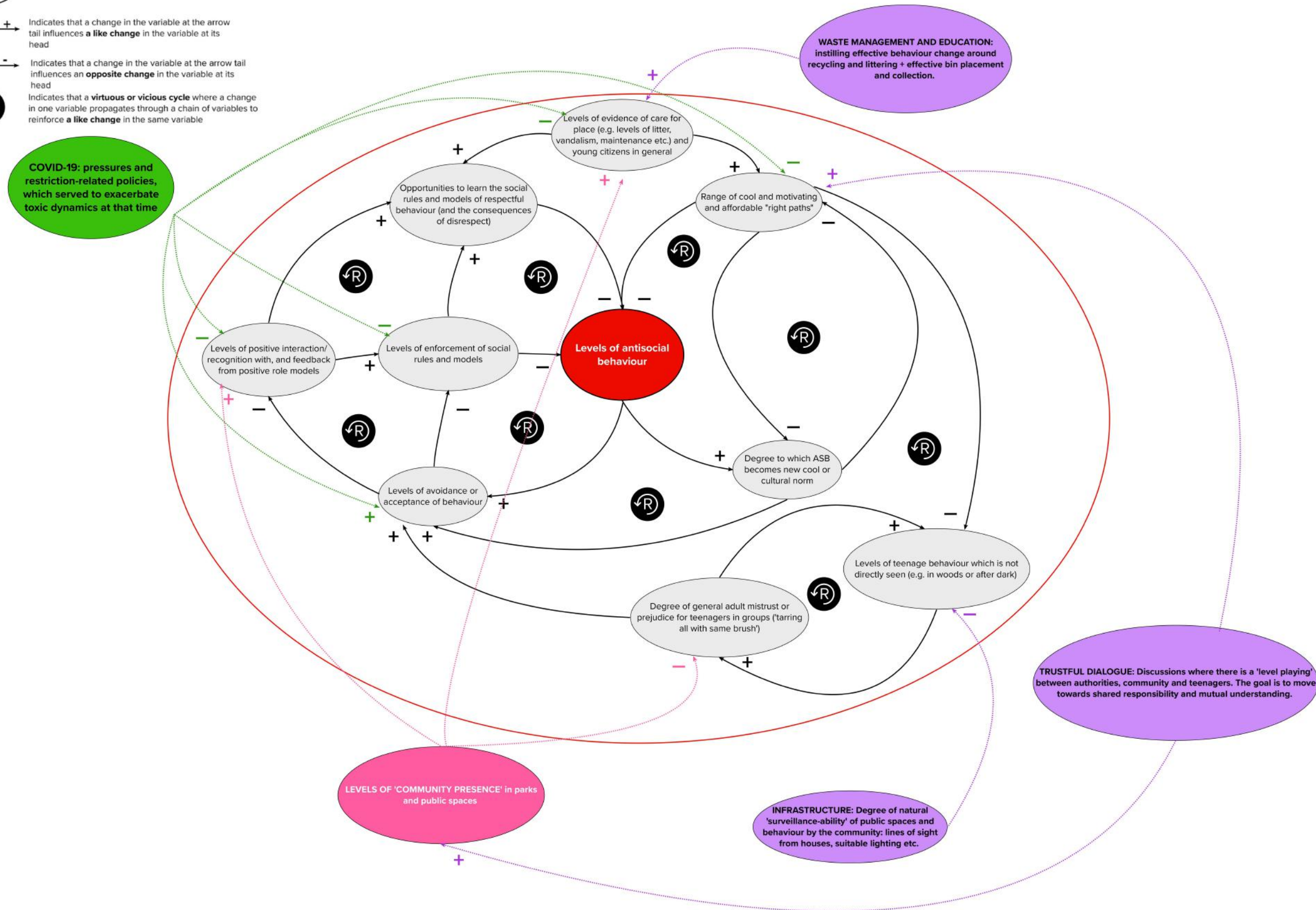


Figure 13 A Causal Loop Diagram showing model of Anti-social Behaviour in the Community



To add further detail to the Causal Loop Diagram above, find below further explanation of some key intervention points that emerged in discussion, and which could be addressed most strategically by adult stakeholders and local young people:

**COVID-19: pressures and restriction-related policies:** During the COVID-19 pandemic, policies necessarily limited numbers of young people able to use certain areas at certain times. This resulted in a long break in traditional opportunities to gather socially and build a shared culture. Participants in Denny told us that this meant a reduction in positive interaction between older and younger teenagers, and non-family adults and young people. The consequent lack of guidance and experiences of social rules and appropriate behaviour, combined with the impact of pandemic isolation, seriously exacerbated tendencies towards antisocial cultural behaviour. Moreover, the often disturbing character of this behaviour, on top of other pressures and stresses, meant that many adults and older teenagers were avoiding the issue, rather than addressing it. As such, social feedback which ordinarily would have served to balance these vicious cycles, was instead allowing them to accelerate, where the worse it got, the less the motivation to intervene became.

The resonance of these findings across the case studies, and other APiC projects at that time, suggested this was a national and not a local trend. The school was fully aware of these dynamics and committed to leading on interventions to combat them, including a return of larger assemblies and shared breaks. While empathy and compassion are required for the changes and ways the young cohort have been impacted by the pandemic (extending also to older age groups), there was also a fear from older young people that their younger peers needed to learn the social rules and become more respectful fast. This would decrease their current anti-social behaviour and provide more future opportunities to get on 'the right path'.

The COVID-19 pandemic has further impacted the number and types of extra-curricular opportunities and social engagements for young people, with knock-on consequences for having motivating reasons to be engaged in purposeful activity (something which reduces anti-social behaviour).

**LEVELS OF 'COMMUNITY PRESENCE' in parks and public spaces:** Young people from all case studies pointed out that they feel safer in public spaces where there is a level of 'community presence'. This is a feeling that users of a public space are being watched out for, in a supportive, way. This is important for all, but even more so for girls who are less likely to feel safe when out and about. Indeed, it became an essential consideration in the North Edinburgh Co-design project of a new public park. It means that people being anti-social will be called out for it by an appropriate authority (such as a park warden or youth worker, or by police if a genuine crime is taking place), or a friendly Neighbourhood Watch style system deters anti-social behaviour. It means places aren't deserted and people know where they could go to for support:

*'A point which I found interesting was creating spaces for young people where there's almost a responsible adult present. And so no anti-social behaviour can take place, and they feel safe.'* Adult Stakeholder, Denny Local Strategy Workshop

However, measures that target young people unfairly or make them feel unduly observed will be counterproductive, such as wide-spread CCTV or heavy police patrols. This is likely to lead to fewer young people simply hanging out, as they fear being 'tarred with the same brush' as those who are behaving anti-socially:

*'not like policing them, but just monitoring - like letting them be, but just like, kind of keeping an eye on them just to make sure everything's going fine.'* Young Consultant, Denny

**INFRASTRUCTURE:** This variable refers to the design of infrastructure, which can either ‘design out’ teenagers and other users by being inappropriately placed and feeling unsafe, or invite them in by being in the right locations, abiding by the principles of ‘community presence’, and being appropriately lit. This can include walking and cycling paths that connect the places that are motivating for people to go and provide natural surveillance by being overlooked by homes. It also includes equipment or street furniture in appropriate places, that would encourage positive interactions and deter genuine anti-social behaviour, such as shown in the North Edinburgh codesign project outcomes.

**TRUSTFUL DIALOGUE:** This is where authorities, adult community members, and teenagers can come together as equal partners on a ‘level playing field’. This starts with high quality engagement at school and may expand beyond this with further opportunities for young people to be engaged across a project (and across their lifetime in the community). In this dialogue, adults need to be ready to accept that teenagers are not so different from adults, and everyone can learn about each other’s needs, perceptions, and challenges, towards building shared responsibility and mutual understanding around the use of public space and developing ‘motivating right paths’ for teenagers.

**WASTE MANAGEMENT AND EDUCATION:** instilling effective behaviour change around recycling and littering and effective bin placement and collection. This theme emerged from a young person in our North Edinburgh case study. However, it gives voice to the concerns raised by young people across the project. This factor notes that waste management is often impeded by structural factors around literal number of bins, their placement, and how often they are emptied. At the same time, there is a behaviour change element whereby young people and wider communities do not always understand what can and cannot be recycled and where, why they should do so, and what the impact of littering is on other people and the environment. In the North Edinburgh case study, this means that bins overflow with materials that could be recycled and cause greater harm to the community and the environment. Addressing all these issues in combination can help combat the anti-social behaviour of littering.

**OTHER VARIABLES.** Each variable within a Reinforcing Loop might also potentially provide the basis for direct interventions. For example, “levels of enforcement of social rules and models” or “opportunities to learn the social rules and models of respectful behaviour” might lead to discussion about what other ways or opportunities, new or from experience, might be employed to turn these from a negative to a positive influence.

## The National Strategy Workshop

Below we lay out the key findings agreed by participants – both young people and adults – as ways forward for improving the teenage experience of public spaces across Scotland.

### Common Themes and Priorities for Improving the Teenage Experience in Scotland, as agreed by young people from Huntly and Denny

#### Culture Change

- Addressing antisocial behaviour by and towards young people (littering, drug, and alcohol abuse, threatening behaviour) by reflecting on opportunities represented by the dynamics in the anti-social behaviour system diagram created as part of the project (Figure 13).

- Care and pride for place and better maintenance.
- Better role models and more meaningful exemplars of 'what's cool'.
- Safety and respect towards everyone - too many people are shown disrespect. All sorts of people get targeted with poor behaviour - it might be gender, neurodivergence, race, or other differences.

## Provision

- Accessibility and affordability for all.
- Having choice of places or greenspaces to go as a young person (because the only ones we have are 'occupied' or 'boring').
- Have a range of options beyond just sport (e.g., music, creative arts, common interest groups), and to learn real life skills.
- Indoor places just for our age group to hangout (e.g., teenage cafe).
- More and better shops and places to eat.
- More naturally rich places to enjoy, walk and cycle.

## Infrastructure

- Actions to make places feel safer ,especially lighting.
- Better and safer transport and active travel opportunities, especially buses.
- New facilities and better maintenance of the ones we have e.g., skate parks

## Decision-making skills for us

- Ability to facilitate conversations and planning around complex issues.
- Enabling and supporting us to take forward and manage our own clubs and projects ourselves.

## Meaningful participation in decision-making for our community

- Meaningful conversations with the people who can make change happen, and who will genuinely listen to our ideas. Schools were identified as a great place to start.

## Common Barriers to Overcome for Improving the Teenage Experience in Scotland, as agreed by Local and National Adult Stakeholders...

- 1. The Narrow Remit and Long Timeframes of Many Projects.** For instance, Sustrans's Places for Everyone funding is focuses on active travel and, while some elements of placemaking can be included in designs, priorities around indoor space and facilities are outwith their scope. Infrastructure also takes years to develop:

*"At a very broad level on a project-by-project basis, I guess anything that is infrastructure and active travel based will be of interest to those projects.... [we need] also to be managing expectations because obviously, infrastructure improvements take a long time, particularly on these big projects." National Adult Stakeholder*



- 2. Short-term Project Funding.** For instance, on this project APiC was funded only to facilitate conversations and not to facilitate ongoing development of outcomes. A local arts organisation in Huntly also discussed a Climate Action Project that has now come to an end, and young people will need to take forward their hopes for an ongoing youth club without direct support:

*“They’ve become like an autonomous group, they’ve gone to Inverurie, which is a town down the road, to take part in the climate festival there where they presented their manifesto. So, they’re having a lot of support from around the place, but I think it’s, it’s been quite tricky to like, keep up their confidence levels. And to really, like truly make them believe that even though they’re 14, they still can run this thing and still can have a voice and they don’t need us adults to support them in the way that we’ve done for the past six months. Hopefully they continue to meet but obviously it’s entirely up to them.” Local Adult Stakeholder*

- 3. The Skills, Knowledge, and Confidence of Young People.** Young people don’t have access to the networks and understanding of how the system works that adult professionals do. While there may be funding and support options out there, they need someone ‘in the know’ to facilitate that link initially. Organising around community-based passions is also often not seen as ‘cool’ in teenage peer groups, and it takes a lot of effort to get a group off the ground:

*“I’ve spoken over the last 12 months to various people at the school to say that one of the things that we would like to do, and our premises is just inside the school grounds, so we could do it at lunchtime or anytime during the day, is to meet with young people with a view to help finding out what they would like; who they think can help them take it forward; and working to support them to take the next steps so that they have the ownership of it with support behind them.” Local Adult Stakeholder*

*“My concern around everything like this is that young people have their expectations raised. And if the proper support isn’t there to enable them to take things forward, then their expectations are once again dashed. And, for one, I get really fed up with seeing that with young people being invited to comment with them having wonderful ideas, and with it being a struggle to work out how to take them forward, and who’s going to support them? And where? Who’s going to instigate the support? ... they don’t know what’s out there for them to tap into. So, anything that any of us can do to help them drive things forward, can only be beneficial, but we have to do it. We can’t just keep asking young people for views and doing nothing...” Local Adult Stakeholder*

- 4. Space for Young People to Meet and Organise their Own Activities.** Schools have been identified as the ideal places, but they often don’t have the facilities or ability to provide suitable space outwith school hours. Local community space where young people can gather free of charge could solve this problem. Where space and time can be found in school, then this is the ideal solution:

*“S1s, S2s and S3s are not working towards National Qualifications, they’re not doing the ‘two-term-dash’. So, they have got the opportunity for us to suspend timetable. When we did A Place in Childhood, that was a classic example. You know, we moved things around and the young people got granted time to do different things in different spaces. And it was fantastic. It was an absolute buzz, and I’ve got a fantastic pupil council built on the back of that so it can be done. It’s more challenging for young people engaging in National Qualifications. But that said, depending on the age, depending on the timetable, a lot of them do have study periods. So, there are options and possibilities to do that.” Local Adult Stakeholder*

- 5. Lack of Follow-Through and Whole-Project Thinking from Professionals.** Engaging young people meaningfully needs to start with trustful dialogue: honesty, transparency, and commitment to outcomes from the start. Where realistic conversations take place and young people are truly listened to and involved in local change, relationships are built, nurtured and young people are motivated to remain active citizens. When nothing happens, or views are ignored, resentment and disengagement builds:

*“My sense - not necessarily for the 13- and 14-year-olds today because they’re not the 13- and 14-year-olds of three or four years ago - but they were fed up with being asked what they wanted. And that was it. It was a tick box exercise to fill a line in a strategy which says we have consulted widely with the community. So, we do have to start putting our money, metaphorically speaking, where our mouth is.” Local Adult Stakeholder*

After comparing outcomes from the young person’s and adult stakeholder discussions, it was agreed that the most important issues participants would like to resolve were increasing and improving things for young people to do in their local areas and tackling Anti-social behaviour in communities. APiC then created two breakout groups in which to discuss solutions to these problems in more detail. Below are summaries of the principles or approaches agreed by the end of the workshop.

## Principles and a Route Map to Improving Things to Do for Young People in Scotland’s Communities

- 1. Be Strategic** – Assess systematically what there is and what there isn’t for young people to do in an area.
- 2. Engage Young People Most Interested in Change First, and Focus on Points of Agreement** - start where there are young people that have ideas about things they want to do in their community, and connect them in trustful and focused dialogue with the stakeholders that could make a change:

*“I don’t think it would be a lot of people. But I think that there are quite a few people in the community that would quite like to see a change in where they live and stuff. And I think that obviously, those people will have different interests. And I think it will be good to try and find out like a general area of interest that people all like and base some future decisions off of that.... for example, in my class, I’ve heard a lot of*

*people complaining about like the lack of things there are to do. And a bunch of those complaints I’ve heard are kind of targeted to how in our school, we have like a climbing club and a climbing wall. And a lot of people say that it’s well, it was boring... there’s a bunch of other extracurricular clubs that people have taken interest in. But due to the way that our school does things, they have clubs that are set for S1-3. But S4-6 sometimes don’t have much... So, one of my classes like wanted to do rugby, but it was S1-3. And it didn’t make them very happy.” Young Consultant.*

*“The thing that keeps coming back to me is that we need to learn to actively listen, first of all, and to start being much clearer and more concise with our communication as we move forward.” Local Adult Stakeholder*

*“We need to think more carefully about how we shift power to the young people; you know, the engagement is an absolutely essential first step, but what, what are we giving with that engagement? Where’s the action, who has remit to then take things forward? Or where are we giving them the reins? Where are we giving the resource to take those decisions? ... are we passing on a budget with this engagement activity, so they can identify what are the priorities? ... Maybe highlight what’s realistic... I think we can provide that clarity, but we also have to provide the means to pass or think about how to pass that power across. And the budgets where appropriate, and the support to actually make it happen.” National Adult Stakeholder*

- 3. Make the Effort To Empathise with Young People.** There is a need to think about things from young people’s perspective as a starting point for trustful and meaningful dialogue:

*“I think it would be great if the adults could be able to understand the teenagers’ minds more. Because a lot of people think differently... like if I am playing an online game, which I do quite often ... like games where it’s like live and with other people at the exact same time. And then if your parents asks you to pause it, you physically cannot pause it! Because it’s online! If you pause it, you will die and you will lose.” Young Consultant*

- 4. Understand that Young People Want to Feel a Sense of Purpose.** Many clubs and opportunities fizzle out, or young people lose interest because they lose motivation to succeed in developing a skill or feeling an impact. Having this as a core principle in finding opportunities for young people could be really advantageous:

*"A lot of the clubs that we at least had in Denny - they weren't like connected to a wider picture... I don't know how to put it, but like quantifiable success. Like with debating club we went to like competitions, and stuff like that. Whereas other clubs don't have like some sort of outreach, to like the community or impact... it's hard for people to stay motivated and keep going, if that makes sense. Like you need some sort of goal to achieve." Young Consultant*

*"I'm pretty sure that a lot of schools and like Aberdeenshire and stuff when if you do a club, they don't really help you to get to continue what you want to do. So, like if you did a massive football thing, it's kind of difficult to find ways to, like continue that arm. So, it's not like you can just like call whoever you want and say you want to do something. It's like you need to try and find ways online or follow other courses. So, like as soon as you leave the school where all the clubs are, they don't offer support to help you follow things in the club." Young Consultant*

- 5. Facilitate Young People's Access.** Young people either need to rely on active and public transport to get to places, or to rely on others for private transport. This can be especially limiting for young people in rural areas to find opportunities they want to engage in. If these issues can be overcome through funding minibuses, lift shares, or improving access via improved services and infrastructure then more young people can access opportunities to keep them occupied:

*"So even if I wanted to join a club, I'd have to find other ways to like, go up, get to and from school and time on those days, and because I that's not really easy, because the person that works, someone that lives at my house and works, and that drives, like finishes work relatively late, after school time, so it doesn't really work." Young Consultant*

*"When we were setting up the club, we're really lucky in that we receive funding. So, we were able to pay for transport for young people to come along to the club. And then, the project sort of finished with a big Ceilidh where we were raising funds, essentially, in order to keep paying for this transport that one of the group in particular uses to get there." Local Adult Stakeholder*

- 6. Involve Young People at The Strategic Level.** Giving young people positions of power, or truly delegating power to them can ensure that strategic decisions are truly made with their views and ideas in mind:

*"We also have a young person on our board as well as a school representative, but also just as a young voice which is really, really useful." Local Adult Stakeholder*

- 7. Bring Back Opportunities Lost During the Pandemic.** The pandemic has led to huge societal shifts, and young people have lost out on opportunities. Many of these haven't returned or are slow to return. The resulting lack of things to do is increasing anti-social behaviour and lowering wellbeing:

*"For a few years before COVID, I volunteered at a local youth club and so did [name of other young person] for a while as well. But I did that for a number of years, but then COVID obviously happened, and then you can't really do things like that anymore. And then if it opened up again, then it's not gotten much publicity or like I've not heard of it opening at all." Young Consultant*



- 8. Advertise Opportunities for Young People in a Youth-Friendly Format.** Young people felt that there were several ways this could be done that are more effective than the ad hoc way they are advertised now. They noted that school-based Microsoft Teams channels and morning announcements in schools are ideal ways to spread the word around opportunities. Town squares are also underutilised for this purpose. In terms of non-school channels of communication, young people felt there was a need for a channel that was exclusive to young people and well moderated. Discord, or a Discord-like application, could be the ideal format if it's accessible to all young people (some felt Discord to be too associated with gaming):

*"It feels like there's a lack of awareness for other things that are outside of school. And like community-based groups, like how youth clubs and stuff aren't getting as much publicity as other things." Young Consultant*

*"Discord is cool, as like you can make entire servers with like, loads and loads of people on which is just like great. I think Discord would be good. Because it's like, you can do whatever you want with it. It's like it's just a chat service. It's good for streaming voice channels too... It's pretty easy to work with." Young Consultant*

## Principles and a Route Map to Tackling Anti-Social Behaviour in Scotland's Communities...

- 1. Focus on Improving the Number and Quality of Things for Young People to Do.** The principles and route map above are also an important part of tackling anti-social behaviour, much of which is caused by boredom and disaffection.

*"They're just like, following older people because it could be like boredom. Or it could be like, they're in a very low and dark place. It can be for many reasons, but I think the most common reason is probably boredom because there's not really much to do to be honest." Young Consultant*

- 2. Encourage Good Community Role Models to Spread Messages of Respect.** Participants felt that more role models from all walks of life would help set people who are struggling down a more positive path:

*"I think, sadly, to a certain extent, it can be a cultural thing in our community. I think what we need to try and do is make sure every opportunity we have for positive role models, to make sure people are seen for contributing for who they are. That's really important. And we've got a lot of positive role models at the school. But I think there is a culture about law breaking and all that." Local Adult Stakeholder*

*"The community generally as a whole still has older values and old-fashioned values, around men around women, around the language that's used to describe people. And it's not always very helpful at all. And I think there's a lot of education needs to be done. But as I say, positive role models, people seen to be doing things people seen to be taking the lead in the community who are female, would be a positive thing for me." Local Adult Stakeholder*

*"There also needs to be very evident positive male role models, who demonstrate very clearly the right way to treat and behave towards a member of the other sex or somebody who identifies as a different gender. I don't think that the emphasis has to be on the female at all times. And that's what seems to be coming through the media and everything is that it's the women who dress badly, not just because they want to dress in a certain way to please themselves, but they're asking for trouble to happen to them. Nobody says that about a man. ... We must have role models from both male female and from other gender identifications as well, all working together to get the same message across. And that message should quite simply be that everybody deserves to be treated with the same level of respect as anybody else." Local Adult Stakeholder*

- 3. Consistently Enforce Rules and Laws Around Respectful Behaviour.** This was a key finding from all levels and types of anti-social behaviour discussed, and in all settings. This includes at school, in the home, and in the community. Participants felt that everyone's getting lazy about antisocial behaviour, and with every slip the problem deteriorates. This can only improve if we raise our standard again around what is and isn't acceptable:

*"It's laws as well that are being broken. And if the policing, not necessarily by the police force, or the monitoring of the laws and actions taken, when laws or rules are broken doesn't happen, then you add a new invite and potential for the antisocial behaviour to worsen in nature or increase in volume, because there are no consequences." Local Adult Stakeholder*

*"I'm not saying like, all people break the law. I'm just saying some people will break the law because they think it's cool. And they think there'll be idols and things." Young Consultant*

*"I think I would politely also say that a lot more parents need to do a lot more parenting, in terms of reinforcing and expectations of what good societal norms are, and what good values are." Local Adult Stakeholder*

- 4. Focus on Infrastructural Improvements that Enable Greater Feelings of Safety and Engender Respect for the Environment and Other People.** Poor quality environments, lack of care and maintenance in public space, litter, graffiti, vandalism and poor or no lighting were all discussed as contributing to anti-social behaviour. Women and girls highlighted that lighting is a key issue for ensuring they can feel safe in public space. The less you respect the environment, the less you respect other people, and the less you feel cared about. Make Space for Girls was highlighted as a useful campaign with ideas of how to improve public spaces for greater equality:

*"I think in Huntly we definitely need to fix and address the waste and rubbish. Because there I think, as the years have gone on, it's just continuously got worse and it's just I think that it's no longer just a nice place to live anymore because of how much rubbish there is." Young Consultant*

*"I think definitely we have to take into account lights that are in the streets. Because I myself do not like going out by myself at night because there's not that much light in order to see where you're going or to see other people or to see cars so it's dangerous in a way even though the cars have headlights. You might not see them from far away if you're like short sighted or something." Young Consultant*

APiC's further work in North Edinburgh further suggests that family-friendliness and space populated by 'the right kind of adults' may also be a key factor in these respects

- 5. Recognise the Impacts of the Pandemic and Increasing Financial Insecurity.** Anti-social behaviour is increasing due to these broader societal factors, and it increases the vulnerability of people to these actions as well:

*"People taking advantage of the vulnerable, whether that's young people to young people, young people, to older people, older people to young people, the sort of darker types of antisocial behaviour that may not be driven by boredom but could also be driven by social circumstances and finance." Local Adult Stakeholder*

- 6. Recognise that Anti-Social Behaviour also Happens Online.** Online bullying is a serious issue for young people, and the effects spill out into offline spaces as well. What's happening out of site is just as important to pay attention to, even if it's harder to do so:

*"I think there's a lot of online bullying me myself being a person that actually experienced online bullying before and cyber bullying and things. I think that's a big thing as well. I don't think it's as big as it was, like a few years ago, but it's definitely still a thing." Young Consultant*

- 7. Educate Young People About the Consequences of their Behaviour.** Habits such as vaping and heavy drinking have long term effects that young people often don't consider because they're too focused on the moment and feeling 'cool'. Parents, public figures, teachers, and senior students can take a greater responsibility for pointing out how young people, their families, friends, and communities are impacted by this behaviour in the long term:

*"I know quite a few people that have went to the shops, and they've bought like alcohol, energy drinks and vapes because vapes are now coming into trend, and they're becoming a lot more popular. So, a lot younger people are gonna go to the shop and buy a vape... I've seen a lot of videos on social media about people having vapes at the moment." Young Consultant*





# Chapter 8



# Discussion and Conclusion

This research has explored teenager's needs from public space in three differing Scottish communities, as well as reflections on how Scotland could become more friendly to teenagers. The findings from the National Workshop indicate that the most significant problem that teenagers would like to see tackled to improve their access to and safety within public space is anti-social behaviour. Their other key priority relates closely to this, with a will for there to be more things for young people to do in their communities. The two route maps in chapter 7 provide detailed insights as to how to take these needs forward in every community. While public space is an important element of these changes, it is also clear that indoor spaces and organised activities also need to improve for young people.

Bringing young people and adult stakeholders into a trustful dialogue has proven an important and successful part of this project. However, it is also clear that this needs to stretch beyond one-off conversations and into genuine commitment to shared agendas and collaborative change. This should be built into schemes and programmes from the start, with clearly defined end goals to work back from. The teenagers who have been involved in this work want to make an active contribution to their communities, and they know what they want this change to be. Yet, they will need the support of adults in their schools, local authorities, and community sectors to be able to take these ideas forward in a sustainable and sustained manner. A clear additional finding has thus been that many young people are looking for purposeful and meaningful activities to be a part of, and to learn the skills that enable them to make the changes they would like to see.

The ways in which Sustrans's infrastructural improvements in communities can support these aims are manifold, yet they will always work best if other partners outwith the built environment sectors can be engaged as well. In Huntly, stakeholders from Community Learning and Development were involved in this research, and they have proved an invaluable resource in connecting the dots between stakeholders that have an interest in supporting young people. There was a very palpable sense of community commitment to make things better for young people in Huntly, which was not nearly as strong in the other two places studied.

In terms of physical infrastructure, the findings of the research suggest the following priorities for Sustrans:

- 1. Prioritise all measures that lead to improved community safety, especially recognising the positive impact this can have for girls** and other communities who feel particularly unsafe in public space. This includes:
  - street lighting;
  - public space that is designed around the concept of natural surveillance, and for use by all sectors of the community, especially those that lend a sense of family-friendliness;
  - creating choice of parks, or at least spaces within parks that offer some safe separation for young people to visit so that the presence of one group/s does not perturb others from leaving home; and
  - ensuring there are high quality paths and segregated cycle lanes to help young people travel between the places they wish to go.

**2. Prioritise all infrastructural and community-based actions that reduce anti-social behaviour.** The Causal Loop diagrams in chapter 6 and 7 provide a useful exploration of the intervention points for this, and how particular features may lead to a vicious or virtuous cycle, and how some actions reinforce others. A key intervention here for Sustrans is to work on the number of meaningful and purposeful places young people have to go and ensuring high quality and safe routes to them. Another is involving schools and communities in co-design to promote a sense of shared ownership of the space, including most importantly, young people who regularly experience or perpetrate antisocial behaviour as these can best inform related strategies. Key elements requested are:

- Swings that are big enough for teenagers to use, and where there is a sense they are invited to do so;
- Youth cafes, where affordable food, drink and activities are available to a range of young people;
- Places for physical activity, including swimming pools and gyms available to the under 16 age group;
- Affordable indoor and outdoor activities for young people, that they can reasonably get to in the evenings. Especially important in these is that there is a sense of meaning and purpose in them, and they are encouraged to take part consistently;
- Places where activity that may otherwise be considered anti-social can take place away from other people likely to be affected by it. For instance, motorbike tracks or graffiti walls. Young people often talked about activities that ‘calm people’s behaviour’ or help them ‘let off steam’; and
- Features, naming or activities (e.g. shared responsibility for care and maintenance) which promote a sense of shared community identity and ownership.

**3. Build the meaningful engagement of young people into Places for Everyone Programmes from RIBA Stage 0 and establish a plan of engagement for the entire project at the start.** Meaningful engagement requires sustained commitment from the parties that can make a difference, and the ongoing building of trust and partnership. Schools provide the ideal environment in which to begin dialogues with young people, and it makes sense to begin with those who have a genuine interest in improving their communities before opening it out to a wider group to agree on more specific actions.

Wherever there are opportunities for fruitful codesign with teenagers around their area, this is likely to improve outcomes for all. It is also important to think about the legacy of the process and outcomes, so that there are plans in place to support young people and spaces they have created after any interventions funded by the project need to come to an end. This may be established by supporting young people to be able to run their own groups or handing support over to another body that remains on the ground.

**4. Work on the principles of trustful dialogue and transparency when engaging with young people.** Create environments where young people can help work on the ground rules of engagement with adult stakeholders, and where honesty and transparency are maintained. Young people can work with the constraints under which authorities and third sector organisations need to operate and are keen to come up with realistic solutions, if



they have all the information required to get there.

Young people will benefit from joining broader community conversations, but they should always be supported to do so. As a general principle, any environment in which the young people are invited to contribute should be one that is most comfortable for them, and not one where the environment has been made to best accommodate any adults in the room. Ground rules that set a level playing field are important, such as everyone being asked to use language that is as accessible as possible, and people of any generation being invited to ask others to define their terms if they are unfamiliar with the language or concept.

This project has shown that communication is a vital element of constructive and trustful dialogue. Young people need to be kept informed of what is going on and why. Opportunities also need to be communicated via routes they can and will genuinely engage with. Adults need to recognise that teenagers may need prompting and encouragement to continue participating, to help remind them of the value of their input and gain confidence in working in new ways.

- 5. Acknowledge and work with the fact some communities will require more work to establish trust and meaningful engagement with young people.** This should be factored into engagement plans at the start, so that time and resource can be used most effectively. It should also never become a reason to not engage with young people.

The North Edinburgh case study shows that reaching a deeper level of engagement requires continual reflective practice. It is vital that communities which may be facing more significant pressures than others do not become further disillusioned by organisations giving up on engaging them or imposing change without their consent.

The co-design project APiC helped facilitate in North Edinburgh, and the participant feedback provides some positive indications of deeper-dive youth-led approaches which can help to build engagement and trust around co-designing genuinely effective solutions. However, it is critically important to recognise that these outcomes are fragile and contingent on institutional commitment to their meaning, and an ongoing dialogue around their implementation. If the promise and trust built in the process are not suitably respected, there is a great risk that levels of disengagement and apathy increase following the engagement.

In conclusion, there is significant work required to bring the needs of teenagers' more directly into how we plan public space in our towns, cities, and countryside. A review of the evidence shows that for generations young people have complained that there is not enough for them to do, while communities as a whole have complained about the anti-social behaviour of some young people. There is continued misunderstanding of the developmental phase of teenhood and its implications on how young people act. However, there is increasing interest in improving things for younger and future generations, and a will from many professionals to find solutions. There is growing evidence reviewed in this report, and new evidence presented here on the specific needs within Scotland. A new and specific focus on the needs of girls is also now emerging, for which this project makes a significant contribution.

be enacted with them. The principles laid out for solving these problems by our young people, and the adult stakeholders who worked with them, provide fruitful ground to begin these actions as part of Sustrans' work to improve walking, wheeling and cycling opportunities for everyone.

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