

# Greenspace & Us

A community insights project to understand barriers and enablers around access to greenspace for teenage girls in East Oxford

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# Foreword

Natural England commission a range of reports from external contractors to provide evidence and advice to assist us in delivering our duties. The views in this report are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent those of Natural England.

This report was commissioned by Natural England to build knowledge and understanding through participatory approaches to inform future initiatives and improve equitable access to greenspace and recreation opportunities for girls and young women. Oxfordshire County Council was commissioned by Natural England to understand the barriers and enablers, through participatory and creative approaches, to influencing recreation and access to greenspace for young women in East Oxford. This final report presents the outcomes and evaluation of the project and uses it to answer the key insights research questions and provide recommendations for future delivery to better support equity of access to greenspace and contribute to understanding of ways in which best to engage with young people in matters relating to the built and green environment.

# Executive summary

Access to greenspace and connection with nature are key determinants of physical and mental wellbeing. Yet some groups face significant barriers to access, many of which are poorly understood. Nature connection and time spent in greenspace both drop significantly in early adolescence. Teenage girls are less physically active than their male counterparts and are at particularly high risk of poor mental wellbeing. Greenspace & Us is a community insights partnership project that used participatory and creative approaches to understand the barriers and enablers influencing access to greenspace for young women in East Oxford. Key insights questions that the project sought to understand were:

- How do young women currently use greenspace and to what extent does this meet their needs?
- Which barriers and enablers influence young women's access to, engagement and connection with greenspace and nature?

Learnings of the current use of and general attitudes towards greenspace include:

- Young people are unlikely to choose to spend time in greenspaces
- Young people infrequently visit more natural greenspaces
- Young women characterise greenspace as social, rather than active environments
- A disconnect between the theoretical mental wellbeing benefits of greenspace and young women's lived experience
- Young people understand the importance of protecting greenspaces
- The project identified large disparities in the distribution of space and provision of equipment and facilities in local parks and other greenspaces to meet different needs – resulting in 'male dominated' spaces where young women and girls feel unwelcome and sometimes unsafe.

Young women put significant energy into developing the Greenspace & Us Manifesto, which clearly outlines the changes they see necessary to improve their access to greenspace. Manifesto statements included the desire to have opportunities to learn about greenspace and nature; to have access to necessary infrastructure to meet basic needs (including clean toilets, natural features, shelter and appropriate seating); and for young people to be consulted on local greenspace developments. Reflecting on the need to support young women to take their daily routine outside, participants also developed a prototype table and shelter combination as an example of the type of park furniture that would allow them to socialise and study in greenspaces. This is currently being professionally designed and built, with a view to the final piece being installed in the East Oxford recreation ground that was the subject of the 'greenspace walkabout'.

In addition to the Greenspace & Us Manifesto, key principles and recommendations are drawn from analysis of identified behavioural factors, and are designed to improve young women's capability, opportunity and motivation to engage with local greenspaces. Whilst some issues have relatively 'easy fixes', others are more complex, requiring focused

attention and partnership working between a wide range of stakeholders. Thus, recommendations are not aimed at any one organisation or sector alone but highlight general approaches necessary to address this important determinant of health and wellbeing.

Key principles in improving access to greenspace for young women:

- Prioritise equity in decision-making
- Ensure meaningful co-production
- Take safety concerns seriously
- Make nature normal
- Recognise the right to play
- Deliver connected greenspaces

Recommendations:

1. Integrate greenspace access into routines of young people and young women specifically, e.g., take youthwork, school, creative activities, or sports outside.
2. Promote opportunities for young women to discuss their relationship with greenspace, to develop and amplify their own narratives around what it means to connect with nature, and to build a sense of ownership over local greenspace.
3. Ensure adequate funding for free/low-cost women's only activities in greenspace – both sporting and social.
4. Work with young women's groups to co-design areas and sports facilities in local greenspaces specifically to meet their needs – considering the potential for women only spaces where possible.
5. Ensure adequate access to information that allows young people to find out about their local greenspaces and related social opportunities. E.g., through school, youth work, web resources, maps or welcoming/ engaging signage.
6. Carefully consider the inclusion of greenspaces when planning affordable public transport or active travel networks and ensure that these are linked to key places of interest for young people.
7. Prioritise the development of greenspaces that are close to secondary schools or other places of significant interest to young women.
8. Take advantage of interest in spending time in outdoor spaces in urban centres by creating opportunities for young people to engage with natural features whilst meeting other social needs outdoors.
9. Explore the root causes of anti-social behaviour in specific greenspaces, seeking the opinion of young women to identify hotspots and potential solutions.
10. Invest in the maintenance of existing greenspaces to ensure that basic needs are met (clean toilets, water, seating, and shelter as a minimum) and to reduce opportunities for anti-social behaviour.
11. Ensure that greenspaces, particularly those in residential areas and close to secondary schools, provide age-appropriate equipment and offer opportunities for adventurous and nature-based play for older children and teenagers.
12. Offer safe, quiet spaces for girls to spend time together, participate in social and creative activities, and enjoy the natural environment. Areas should include facilities that support the specific social needs of young women and be separated from other areas but maintain visibility and perception of safety.
13. Actively welcome young people into natural spaces by providing adequate information, signage, and age-appropriate activities.

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# Introduction

Access, engagement and connection with nature are important determinants of physical and mental wellbeing, yet some groups face significant barriers in accessing green and natural spaces (Public Health England, 2020). According to Natural England's People and Nature Survey, nature connection drops off dramatically between the ages of 9 and 15 and does not recover to the levels observed in childhood (Richardson, 2019). Furthermore, Sport England's Active Lives survey identified a decline in physical activity among teenagers which is most striking amongst girls and young women, many of whom never regain a healthy level of physical activity (World Health Organisation, 2022). Both these effects particularly impact girls from more deprived backgrounds, who have lower access to high quality greenspace and face numerous other barriers to engaging and connecting with nature, many of which are poorly understood.

A recent Mental Health and Wellbeing Needs Assessment for Oxfordshire highlighted a steep decline in self-reported wellbeing among young people aged 13-16, with teenage girls particularly at risk of common mental disorders, such as depression and anxiety (Arbuthnott, 2021). Although disengagement with wider enablers of wellbeing is thought to be central to this trend, local insights into why this is the case are lacking.

As part of the drive to build a greener and fairer county, Oxfordshire County Council's Fair Deal Alliance has included 'improving access to greenspace and nature', 'prioritising the health and wellbeing of residents', and 'tackling inequalities in Oxfordshire' among nine key priorities. A consultation carried out in Autumn 2021 found that the ability to spend time in greenspace had become a priority for young people during lockdown and they were concerned about the threat of new housing developments on access to greenspace, and felt they had few places they could go to socialise.

The Greenspace & Us project is a community insights partnership project, funded by Natural England, which aimed to build knowledge and understanding to inform future initiatives to improve equitable access to greenspace for girls and young women.

Key insights questions that the project sought to understand were:

- 1) How do young women currently use greenspace and to what extent does this meet their needs?
- 2) Which barriers and enablers influence young women's access to, engagement and connection with greenspace and nature?

The project additionally aimed to contribute to understanding of ways in which best to engage with young people in matters relating to the built and green environment. Methods were designed to be participatory, creative and empowering – in order to ensure that any new knowledge was shared equitably with participants, and to build sustainable relationships with young people and community-based organisations representing them.

This report primarily addresses findings relating to our key insights questions. A separate evaluation report summarises learning from the process of engagement.

## Project development

### Methods

The Greenspace & Us Project methods were developed by a working group, made up of representatives from Oxfordshire County Council, the University of Oxford, the Name It Project (Oxford Youth Enterprise) and Fig.studio, and overseen by colleagues from a DEFRA steering group. The East Oxford area was chosen as a geographical context because it contains four of the ten most deprived wards in Oxfordshire, which are also identified as having sub-standard provision of publicly accessible greenspace (Fields in Trust, 2022). We did not aim to critically assess specific sites in East Oxford – rather, we sought to develop a general understanding of the issues.

Methods consisted of:

- A survey of young people ages 11-16
- Participatory workshops
- Creative outputs

### Survey of young people

Questions were adapted from Natural England's People and Nature Survey for Children, in order to quantify use of and access to greenspace for both boys and girls. The survey was delivered through Oxfordshire County Council's consultation platform at an East Oxford secondary school in February 2022. The school has a catchment area that includes several local areas of deprivation. Students in one form group for years 7-11 (ages 11-16) were invited to participate within school hours. Full survey questions are available in Appendix 1.

### Participatory workshops

Twenty young women aged 10-16 were recruited by Oxford Youth Enterprise, via various youth organisations operating in the area, to participate in six three-hour workshops delivered in February and March 2022. The lower age cut-off was agreed due to significant interest from 10-year-old girls already engaged with youth work, who we did not wish to exclude.

All workshops were facilitated by six female working group members (from the Public Health Team, Name It Youth Project and RESOLVE Collective), based on an early planning decision to maintain a female-only space and safe environment for open discussion. Workshop content and specific questions were informed by survey data,

existing models of best practice in engaging young people in matters relating to their built and green environment (Make Space for Girls, 2022; Youth Scotland, 2022; Voice Opportunity Power, 2022), youth worker and creative expertise, and insights from the COM-B model of behaviour change (Michie, Atkins & West, 2014). The COM-B model posits that for any behaviour to be enacted, people must have the capability (physical e.g. skill, strength, stamina; psychological e.g. knowledge, cognition, interpersonal skill, self-regulation) ability), and opportunity (physical e.g. triggers/ prompts, space/ time, location/ services; social e.g. peer pressure, social norms, culture, credible models) to do so, and they must have motivation (reflective e.g. plans, intentions, beliefs, identity; automatic e.g. emotions, desires, impulses, habits) to partake of that behaviour relative to other behaviours (Michie, Atkins, West, 2014). As well as informing data collection methods, this framework is used to summarise findings in a structured way.

Content of the workshop programme was adapted on a weekly basis, informed by ongoing feedback from participants ('Check-In' and 'Check-Out' sessions) and weekly facilitator debrief sessions. Except for a local greenspace walkabout, all workshops were based at an East Oxford community garden. See Appendix 2 for the workshop programme overview.

Data collection methods included flip chart notes/presentations, annotated maps, annotated photos (photovoice), audio clips, and group 'scrolls' (discussion notes and thoughts) (Figure1). The 'Tree of Change' involved identifying barriers and enablers to greenspace access, noting these on coloured leaves, and using group consensus to decide which were changeable and add them to the tree accordingly. This was used to encourage young women to start a conversation about what they considered 'reasonable asks' of those who make decisions about their environment.



**Figure 1: Examples of data collection methods including annotated maps, group 'scrolls' and photovoice. © Greenspace & Us 2023**

## Creative outputs

At the beginning of the project, RESOLVE Collective introduced the idea of using a 'creative output' to express ideas in a way that best represented the group. Participants were supported to design a written Manifesto as a public declaration of their views and intentions, and to explore ideas further in a piece of physical artwork. As an interdisciplinary design collective, RESOLVE did not set any specific parameters on the format of this piece, however the group expressed significant enthusiasm from the start to build a physical structure.

Although the creative outputs were discussed at regular intervals, work towards developing these mainly took place in workshops 5 & 6. This was completed as a group, using consensus and voting, where necessary, to make joint decisions. Following completion of the workshops, a Celebration Day was held in May 2022. This was an opportunity for young women to celebrate their participation and present their ideas to family, friends, and local greenspace stakeholders.

## Ethics

Project development and methodology was assessed and approved against Natural England's internal ethics review checklist.

Participants completing the online survey did so via Oxfordshire County Council's consultation platform (Oxfordshire County Council, 2022), which adheres to standard data protection principles including UK GDPR. This platform is regularly used to engage with young people, who do not need to register or disclose any personal data to participate in surveys.

All workshop participants and their parents/guardians were provided with a participant information sheet (Appendix 3) clearly outlining background and aims of the project, activities they would be contributing to, and any identified risks associated with participation. Once they were happy with this information, all workshop participants, and a parent/guardian of those aged under 16 years, signed an informed consent and assent form (Appendix 4).

Participation was voluntary and all participants were free to withdraw from the project at any time without needing to provide reason or justification. All participants were offered expenses/reimbursement for their time.

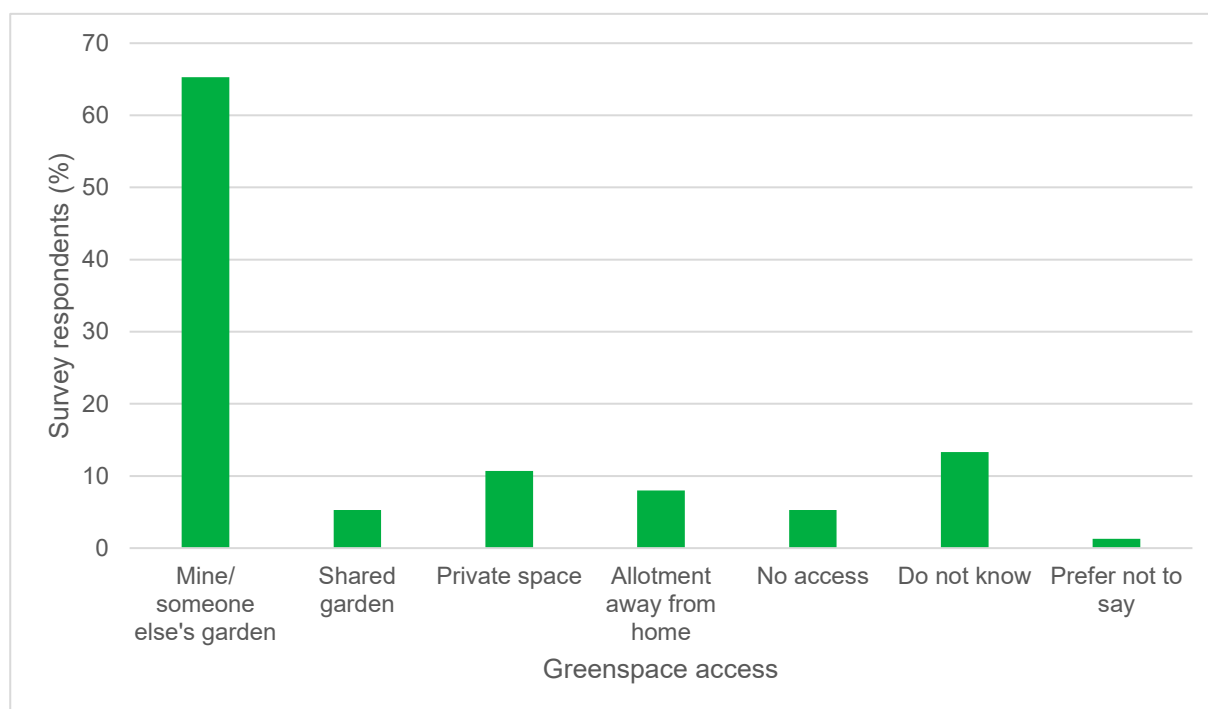
Data collected as part of the project is held in strict accordance with UK GDPR regulations and Oxfordshire County Council data processing policy. Quotes included in this report are all anonymised and any use of photos is with written consent of participants.



## Respondent and participant characteristics

75 young people responded to the survey, including 37 female, 35 male and 2 respondents who identified as non-binary or gender fluid. The median age was 12. Nearly two-thirds (58%) identified as having a White ethnic background, 15% Asian/British Asian, 14% Black/Black British, 3% Chinese, 4% mixed/from multiple ethnic backgrounds, and 6% 'other'. Ten respondents (13%) reported having a disability/mental illness that affected their life a little, and four (5%) respondents reported having a disability/mental illness that affected their life a lot. Of 53 respondents who shared resident postcode data, the vast majority (50) were from OX4 (East Oxford).

When asked about access to a private/shared outdoor space, most reported having their own garden (65%), with a small proportion (5%) reporting no access at all. Nearly a quarter of respondents (24%) reported access to shared spaces which included a shared garden (5%), private space (11%) or allotment away from the home (8%). 13.3% did not know and 1.3% preferred not to say. (Figure 2).



**Figure 2: Survey respondents' access to a garden, allotment, or private outdoor space (n= 75)**

Of the 20 young women who participated in workshops, roughly two-thirds were already engaged with the Name It Youth Project and everyone in the group knew at least one other person at the start of the project. The majority (16/20) of the group lived in the OX4 area, with 3 living in neighbouring OX3 and one participant (who has a strong relationship with East Oxford) living just outside of the city in OX13.

Workshop participants ranged from age 10 to 16, with a median age of 12 years. While multiple ethnic backgrounds were represented, around one-third of the group chose 'Asian

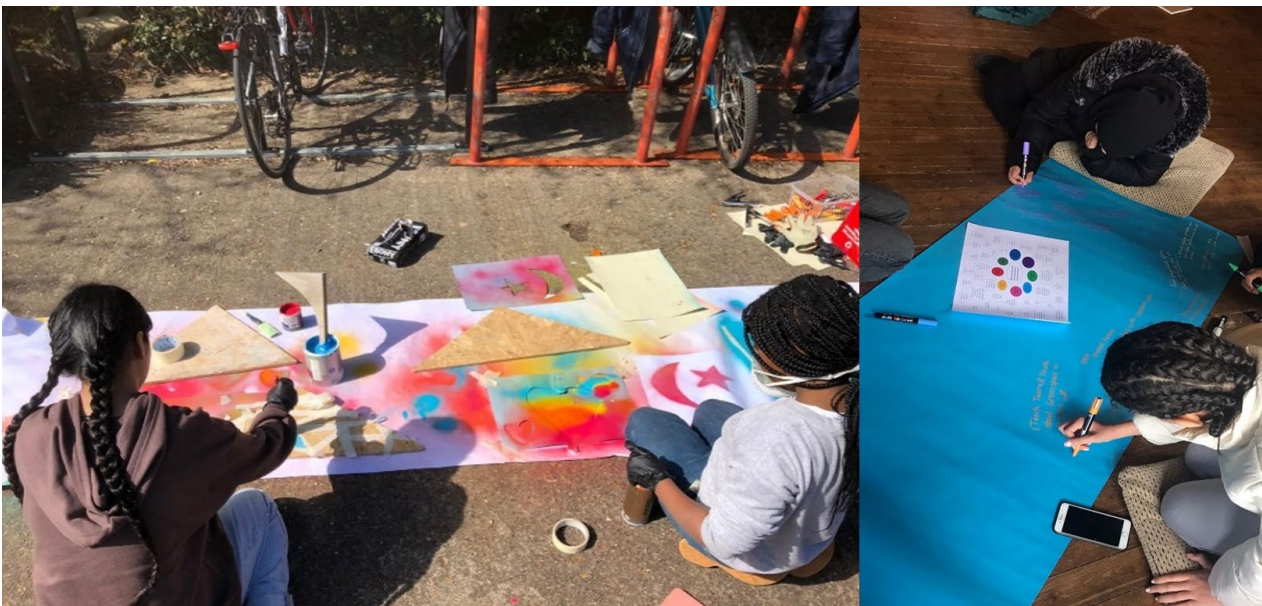
or Asian British (Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi or any other Asian background)' as the option that best represented them. No participants reported having a physical or mental health condition that reduced their ability to carry out day-to-day activities.

## Findings

Findings presented here combine learning from both the survey and workshops. We start by introducing the group Manifesto and artwork, as primary project outputs that present participants' thoughts and feelings in a way of their choosing. We then explore some of the wider data in more detail, using the COM-B model as a framework to understand young women's access to greenspace.

### Manifesto and accompanying artwork

Workshop participants worked closely with artistic partners RESOLVE Collective to bring together their ideas and requests of decision makers in a 'Greenspace & Us Manifesto' and accompanying inclusive park furniture design.



**Figure 3: Girls designing the manifesto and park furniture. © Greenspace & Us 2023**

Content and design elements of the Manifesto were developed as a group (Figure 3), then combined into a final document by a local artist (Figure 4). Based on frequent discussions around basic needs such as seating and shelter, participants worked with RESOLVE Collective to design a table and shelter combination, an example of more inclusive greenspace furniture. Prototype elements of this were developed and built by the young women themselves and designs were professionally developed by RESOLVE Collective with ongoing input from participants. The final product was built by a local carpenter and installed in an East Oxford park, accompanied by information boards about the project and unveiled at a ribbon cutting event (Figure 5). The circular table design has 3 curved

benches, with wheelchair access at the open segments. The height of the table allows for a wheelchair user to be able to use sufficiently.

As part of the creative workshops, participants also discussed and voted on a 'strategy' to present the Manifesto and initial design ideas to stakeholders of their choosing at a project 'Celebration Day'. Invitees included friends and family, County and City Councillors, other members of the Public Health Team and the City Greenspace Development Team.



# GREENSPACE & US

## Teach us!

We want:

### TO LEARN ABOUT GREENSPACES

Many of us did not know what green spaces were. We should be taught about what they are, where they are & why they are important.

### TO BE TAUGHT ABOUT NATURE

We want to know more about nature at school. We think this should be included in the school curriculum and we should be given the option to attend Forest School.

## Make us feel comfortable!

We want:

### TO STAY LONGER IN GREENSPACES

We really enjoy spending time in green spaces and want to stay longer in them. Provide us with regularly maintained, clean toilet facilities that we can use throughout the day.

### TO HAVE CLEANER GREENSPACES

Green spaces are for everyone to use. Please keep them clean, tidy & well maintained with lots of bins for people to clean up after themselves.

## Green spaces can improve!

We want:

### MORE NATURAL FEATURES

We love green spaces that have more natural elements like flowers, water, trees to climb and nature reserves.

### MORE SHELTERS AND BENCHES

We want to be able to relax and socialise with family and friends, regardless of the weather.

### TO FEEL SAFE IN GREENSPACES

Add more security cameras & lighting along pathways so we can feel safe both during the day & night.

### BETTER SIGNAGE IN GREENSPACES

We want to know about all the different routes and areas within green spaces and make them fully accessible. Improve and add more signage so we can enjoy it all!

## Include us!

We want:

### TO BE INCLUDED IN THE DECISION MAKING FOR PLAY SPACES

Play equipment is either too young or doesn't exist for older kids. We want to have a say about what play areas for young people look like so that we can play too.

### TO USE GREENSPACE FREELY

Sports and other outdoor activities take up a lot of space and don't allow us to use the green space as freely as we'd like. Separate these spaces so that we can all use the green space for an even bigger variety of activities and nobody gets pushed out!

### MORE ACCESS TO SPORTS AND OUTDOOR ACTIVITIES FOR GIRLS

Girls want to be active too but there aren't many teams to join. Put more money into sports and outdoor activities such as football and basketball for girls so we can keep fit & healthy in green spaces too.

## Make space for older kids!

We want:

### SPACES FOR OLDER KIDS

Like young children and sports teams, older kids need their own spaces to relax, socialise and just be themselves.



## Our Pledge

We pledge to take care of green spaces ~~~~~ We pledge to tell you our ideas when you ask

# MANIFESTO

Figure 4: The Green space & Us manifesto. © Green space & Us 2023





Shelter prototype by children



Table prototype by children



Colour scheme

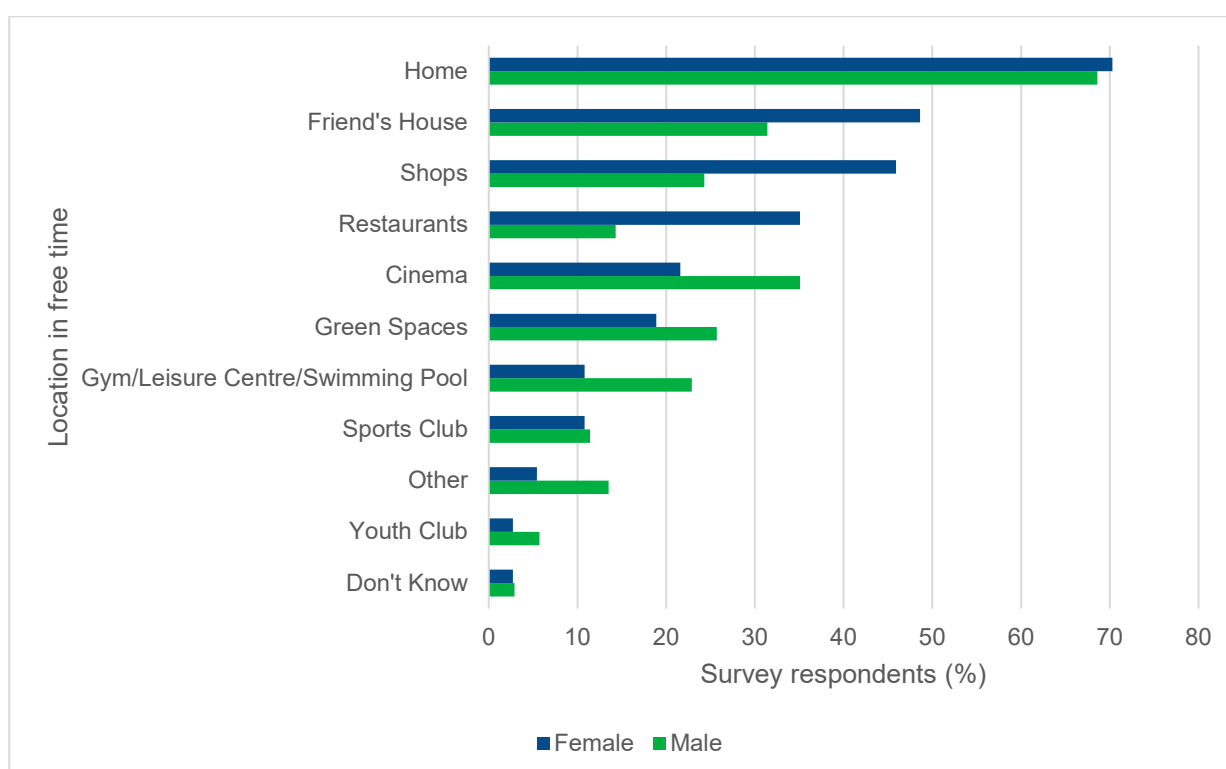
**Figure 5: Professional workup of table and shelter designed by RESOLVE Collective in collaboration with participants for prototype. Final structure built by Toffee Hammer Carpentry and painted using designs and motifs from and by the young women. Final structure photographed by Reuben Worlledge. © Greenspace & Us 2023 and Reuben Worlledge.**

## Current use and general attitudes of greenspace

Discussions around current use of and general attitudes to greenspace are summarised in the following five themes:

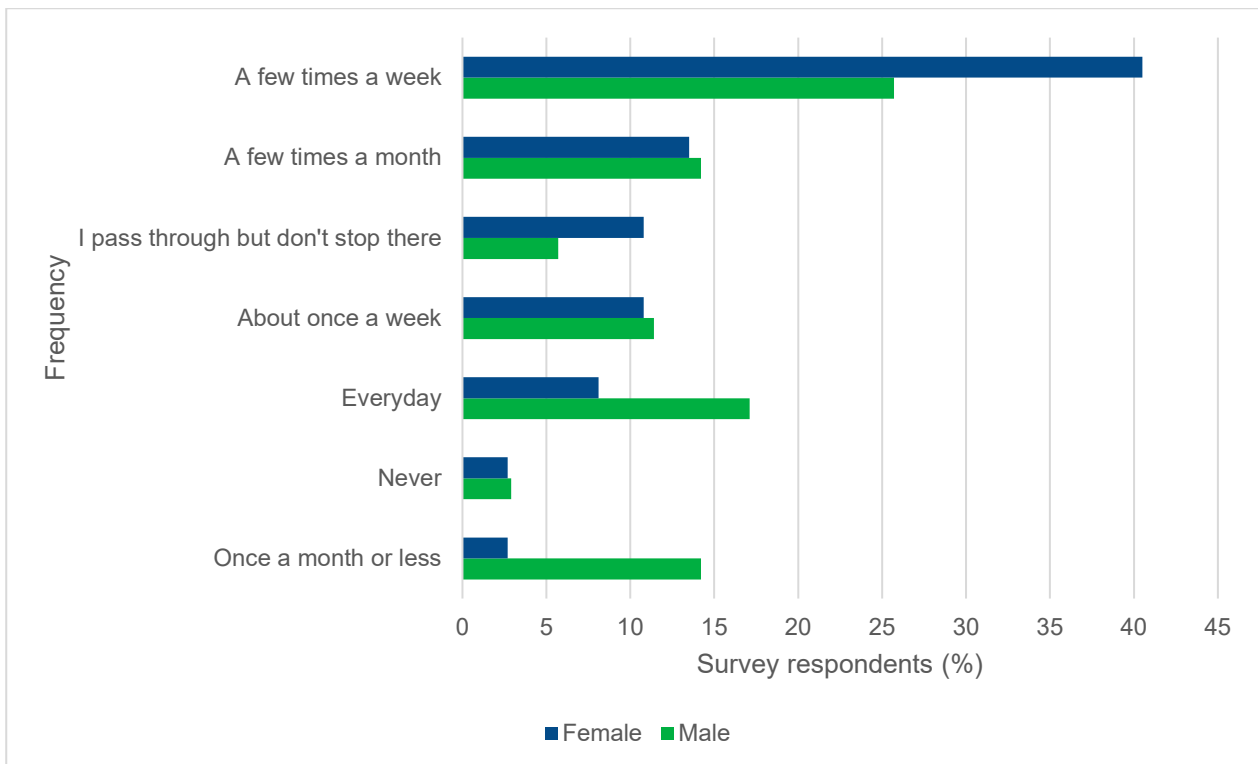
### Theme 1: Young people are unlikely to choose to spend time in greenspaces

Survey results suggest that around only 1 in 4 boys and 1 in 5 girls choose to visit greenspaces in their spare time – in preference for home (69% girls, 70% boys), a friend's house (49% girls, 31% boys), shops (46% girls, 24% boys), cinema (22% girls, 35% boys), or restaurants (32% girls, 14% boys) (Figure 6).



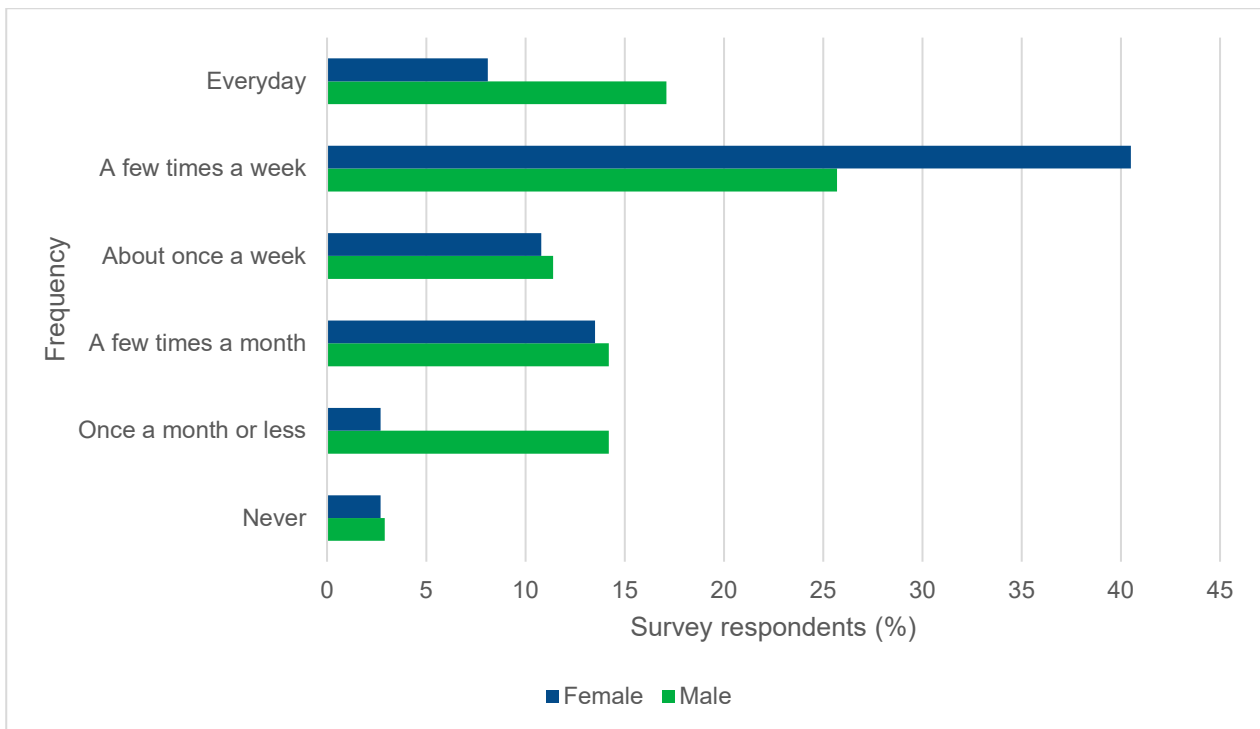
**Figure 6: Responses from survey question 'Where do you like to go in your spare time?'**

Although only a minority of young people reported visiting a greenspace every day, this proportion was higher among boys (8% girls, 17% boys), with girls more likely to report 'a few times a week' (41% girls, 26% boys). However, more boys than girls (17% boys and 5% girls) also responded to that they visit greenspace 'never' (14% boys, 3% girls) or 'once a month or less' (3% boys, 3% girls). Additionally, nearly double the number of girls (11%) compared to boys (6%) 'pass through but don't stop' in greenspace (Figure 7). There were similar frequencies between boys and girls who visited a greenspace 'about once a week' (11%) and 'never' (3%).



**Figure 7: Responses from survey question ‘How often do you spend time in public greenspaces in or around Oxford?’**

More girls than boys reported passing through a greenspace a few times a week (41% girls, 26% boys), but were less likely to pass through a greenspace everyday (8% girls, 17% boys) (Figure 8). Again, boys were more likely to report passing through a greenspace to get somewhere once a month or less (14% boys, 3% girls). There were similar frequencies between boys and girls who passed through a greenspace ‘never’ (3%), ‘a few times a month (14%), and ‘about once a week (11%).



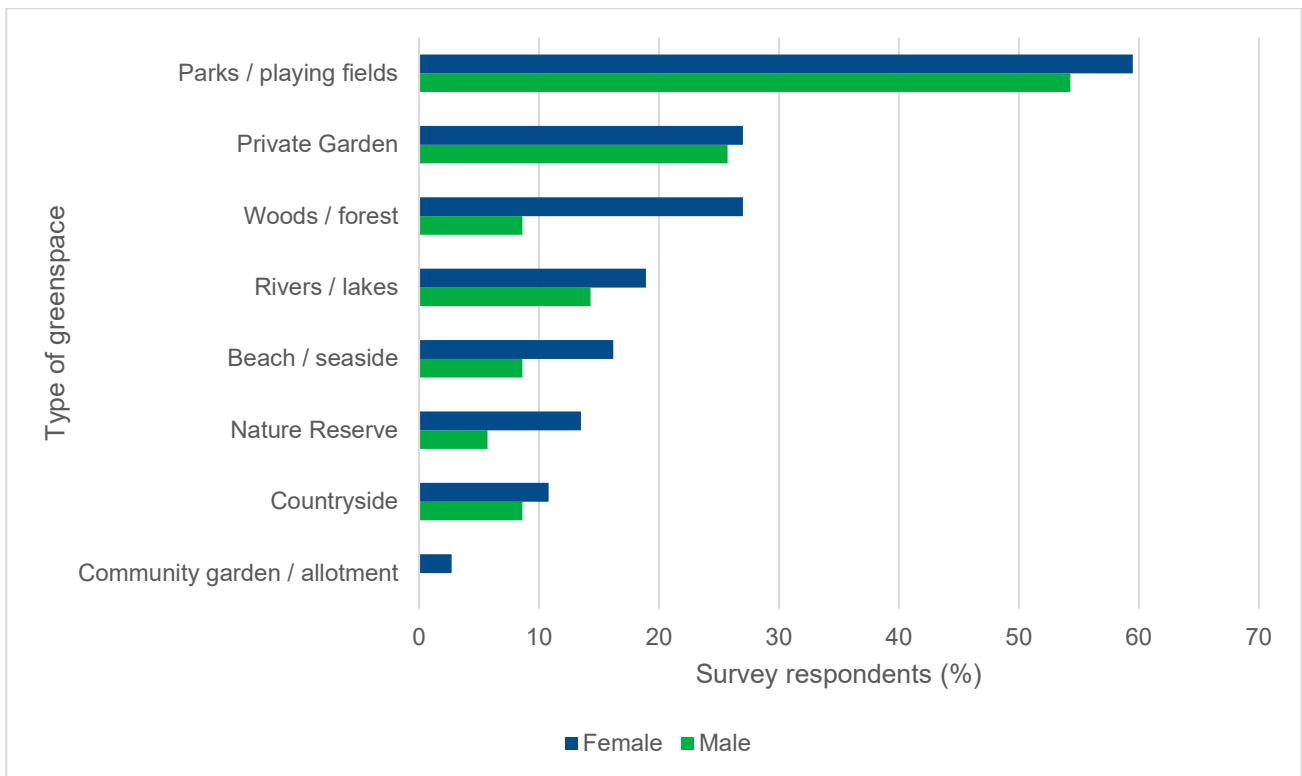
**Figure 8: Responses from survey question ‘How often do you pass through a local greenspace on your way to get somewhere else?’**

## Theme 2: Young people frequently visit more natural greenspaces

At the start of the workshops many young women were not familiar with the term ‘greenspace’. We spent a significant amount of time developing a broad group understanding of the types of environments that ‘greenspace’ could encompass. The group articulated a wide variety of natural settings (e.g., forests/woods, nature reserves, fields/farmland, gardens, lakes/rivers/sea, hills, and plains, etc.) and features (trees, plants, flowers, insects, animals, wildlife, fresh air, green light, etc.).

However, when it comes to their daily lived experience, it seems the picture is much more limited. When completing a local greenspace mapping exercise, participants identified on average two greenspaces that they visited regularly – usually parks or recreation grounds close to home or school. Nature reserves or woodland (of which there are many in the area) were infrequently recognised as places you could visit.

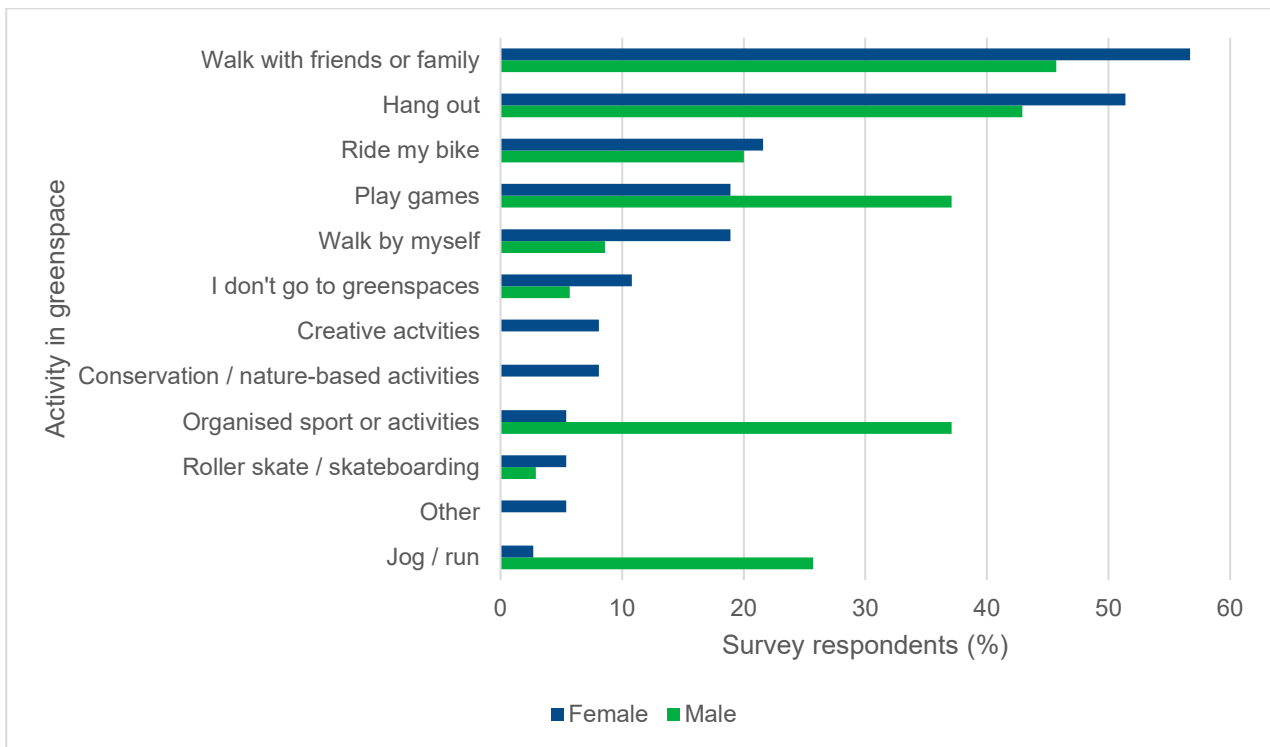
Similarly, survey results suggest that parks and playing fields are by far the most common type of greenspace for both girls and boys to spend time in (reported by 60% girls and 54% boys) – compared to private gardens (26% girls, 26% boys), woods/forest (27% girls and 9% boys), rivers/lakes (19% girls and 14% boys), nature reserves (14% girls and 6% boys), beach/ seaside (16% girls, 9% boys), countryside (11% girls, 9% boys) and community garden/ allotment (3% girls, 0% boys). Interestingly, girls were more likely than boys to report regularly spending time in all these types of greenspaces, despite being less likely to say that they ‘like to go to’ greenspace in their spare time (Figure 9).



**Figure 9: Responses from survey question ‘What kind of greenspaces do you regularly spend time in?’**

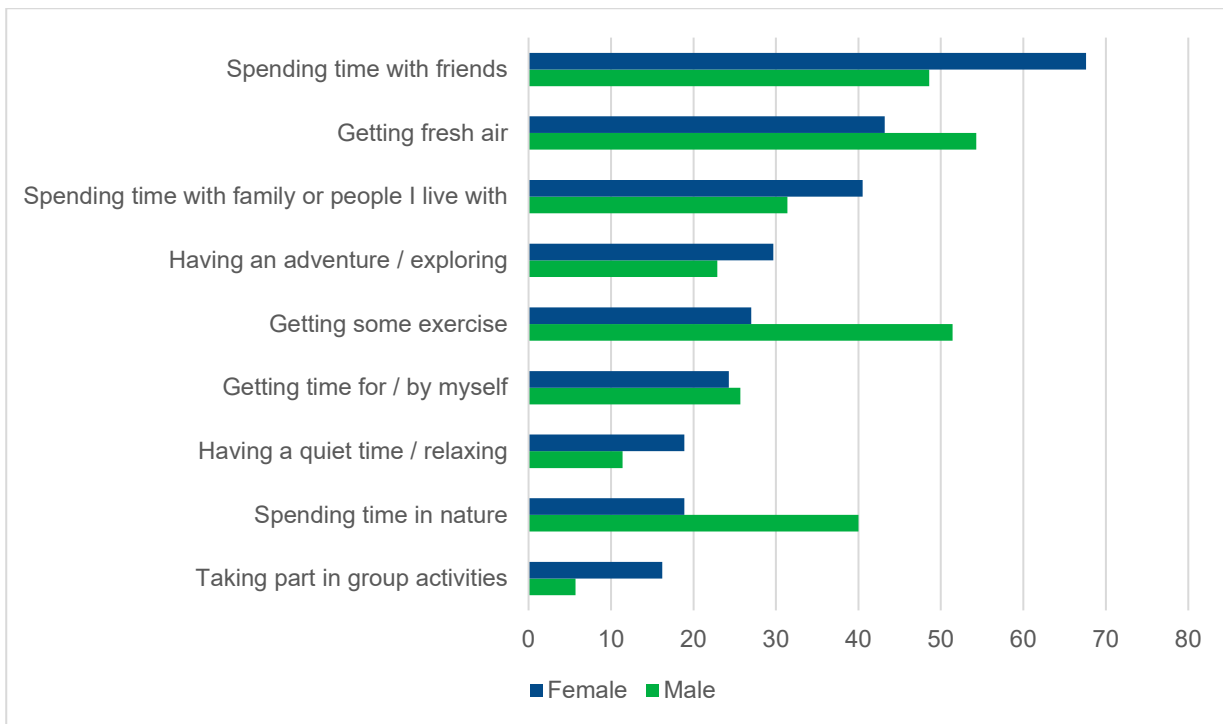
### **Theme 3: Young women characterise greenspaces as social, rather than active, environments**

According to survey responses, the most common greenspace activity for both girls and boys is ‘going for a walk with friends and family’ (57% girls and 46% of boys) followed by ‘hanging out’ (51% girls and 43% boys). However, girls are much less likely to identify greenspaces as active environments in which to play games (19% girls, 47% boys) take part in organised sports/activities (5% girls, 37% boys) or go jogging/running (3% girls, 36% boys) (Figure 10).



**Figure 10: Responses from survey question ‘Which of the following do you do regularly when you go to greenspaces?’**

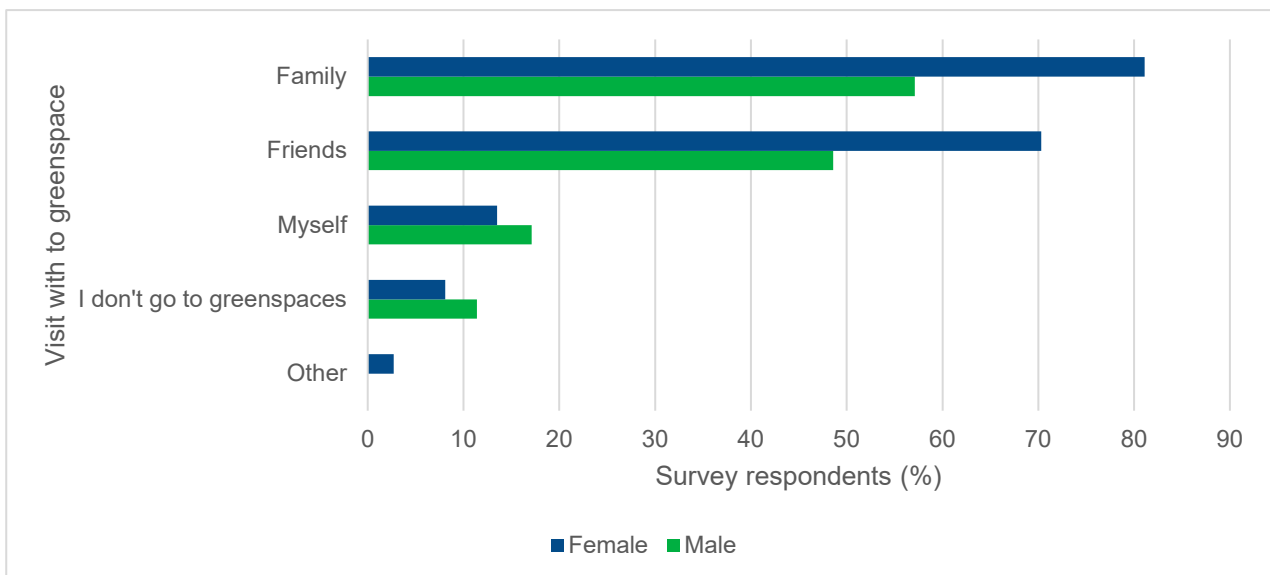
Similarly, when asked what they like most about spending time outside, girls were most likely to choose ‘spending time with friends’ (68% girls, 49% boys), and less likely than boys to choose ‘getting some exercise’ (27% girls, 51% boys). Additionally, girls were less likely to report getting fresh air (43% girls, 54% boys) or spending time in nature (19% girls, 40% boys) (Figure 11).



**Figure 11: Responses from survey question ‘What do you like most about spending time outside?’**

A large majority of girls reported that visits to greenspaces are usually with family (81% girls, 51% boys) or friends (70% girls, 49% boys) (Figure 12).

These findings were also reflected in workshop discussions, where greenspaces were primarily characterised as quiet places to feel calm, relaxed and to ‘hang out’ with friends.



**Figure 12: Responses from survey question ‘When you go to greenspaces, who do you usually go with?’**



## **Theme 4: A disconnect between the theoretical benefits of greenspace and young women's lived experience**

In initial discussions, young women articulated a wide range of 'good stuff' about local greenspaces – including the availability of free/low-cost activities, equipment and facilities, a relaxing and beautiful environment, and a range of features that supported nature and wildlife.

Thinking about who and what greenspace is for, participants clearly articulated ideas about the importance of equality of access and experience:

“Greenspace is for everyone”

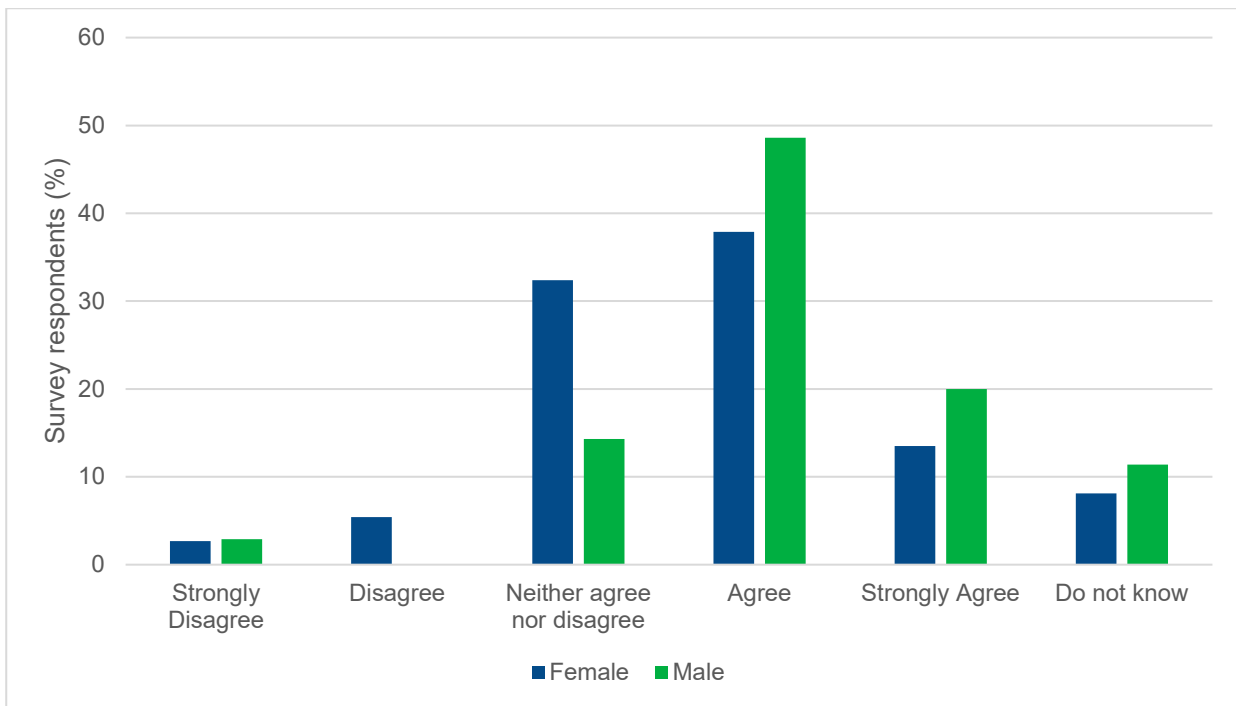
However, despite these positive ideals it was evident that their lived experience was much more varied. In addition to the 'good stuff', 'bad stuff' or negative features of local greenspace were associated with feelings ranging from disinterest (e.g. “there's nothing for us to do there”) to distaste (e.g. “you'll get all muddy and wet”) to feeling uncomfortable/unsafe (e.g. “I'm scared to be alone in greenspace”). We also noted frequent use of the word 'should' in conversations about what greenspace is for:

“[Greenspace is...] a place/park where you should feel comfortable in nature”

“[Greenspace is...] a space where you should be yourself and do something that makes you feel relaxed, calm and free”

In contrast to the cited positive mental effects of greenspace, only half of female survey respondents agreed/strongly agreed that being in nature/greenspace makes them very happy, compared to 71% of boys, and were much more likely to be ambivalent on this matter (Figure 13).





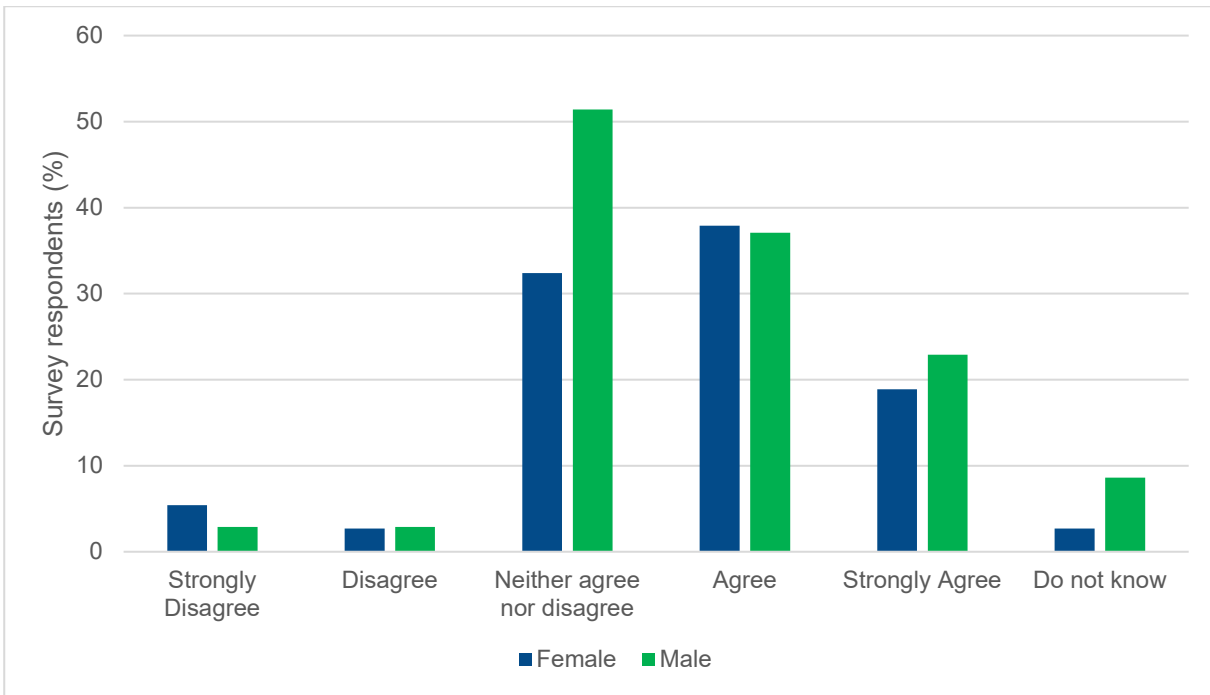
**Figure 13: Responses from survey question ‘Being in nature/ greenspace makes me very happy’**

Whilst positive and negative features or attributes may be experienced at the same time, these discussions allude to a disconnect between the theoretical benefits of greenspace and the reality that some young women experience. Notably, workshop facilitators found that it took some time for young women to start talking more about the negative features of greenspace, or to transition from talking about ‘typical’ greenspace activities such as ‘going for a stroll’ or ‘hiking’, to less defined activities such as ‘hanging out’ and ‘doing girly things’. We therefore suspected that young women were initially more comfortable amplifying dominant narratives about what you should do in greenspace, and the benefits that this offers, which in reality are not always accessible or even desirable to them.

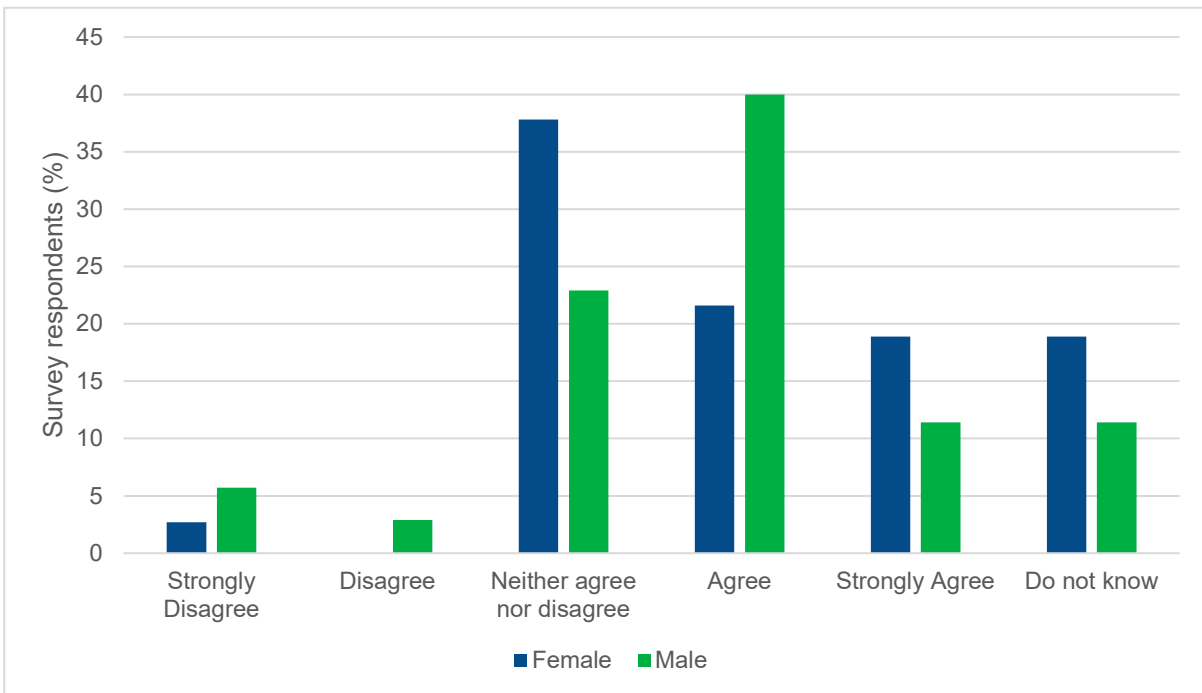
### **Theme 5: Young people understand the importance of protecting greenspaces**

From early workshop discussions, young women articulated ideas connecting greenspace with environmental protection, which in some ways stood separately from issues around access. The importance of spaces ‘for’ wildlife and nature was recognised, in addition to wider issues around the use of fossil fuels, plastic and other types of pollution.

Survey responses suggest no major differences between boys and girls in the value that they place on protecting nature/greenspace. Just under two-thirds of each group agreed/strongly agreed that this is very important to them (Figure 14) and just under half agreed/strongly agreed that they would like to do more to protect greenspace/nature (Figure 15).

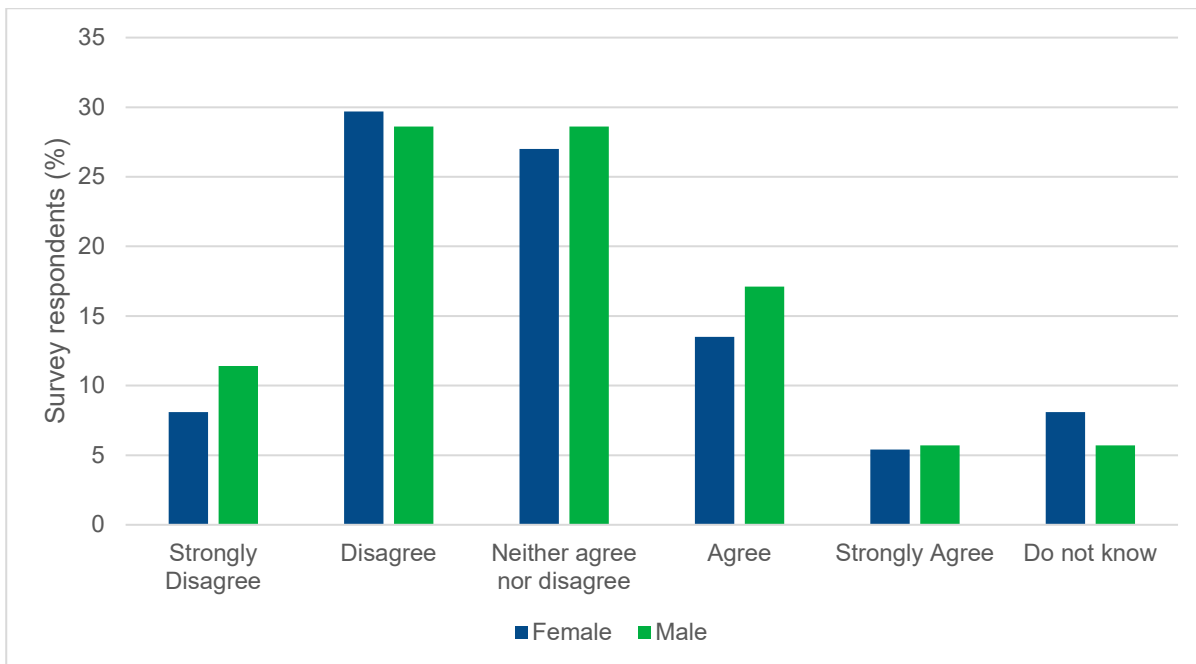


**Figure 14: Responses from survey question ‘Protecting nature/ greenspace is very important to me’**



**Figure 15: Responses from survey question ‘I would like to do more to protect nature/ greenspace’**

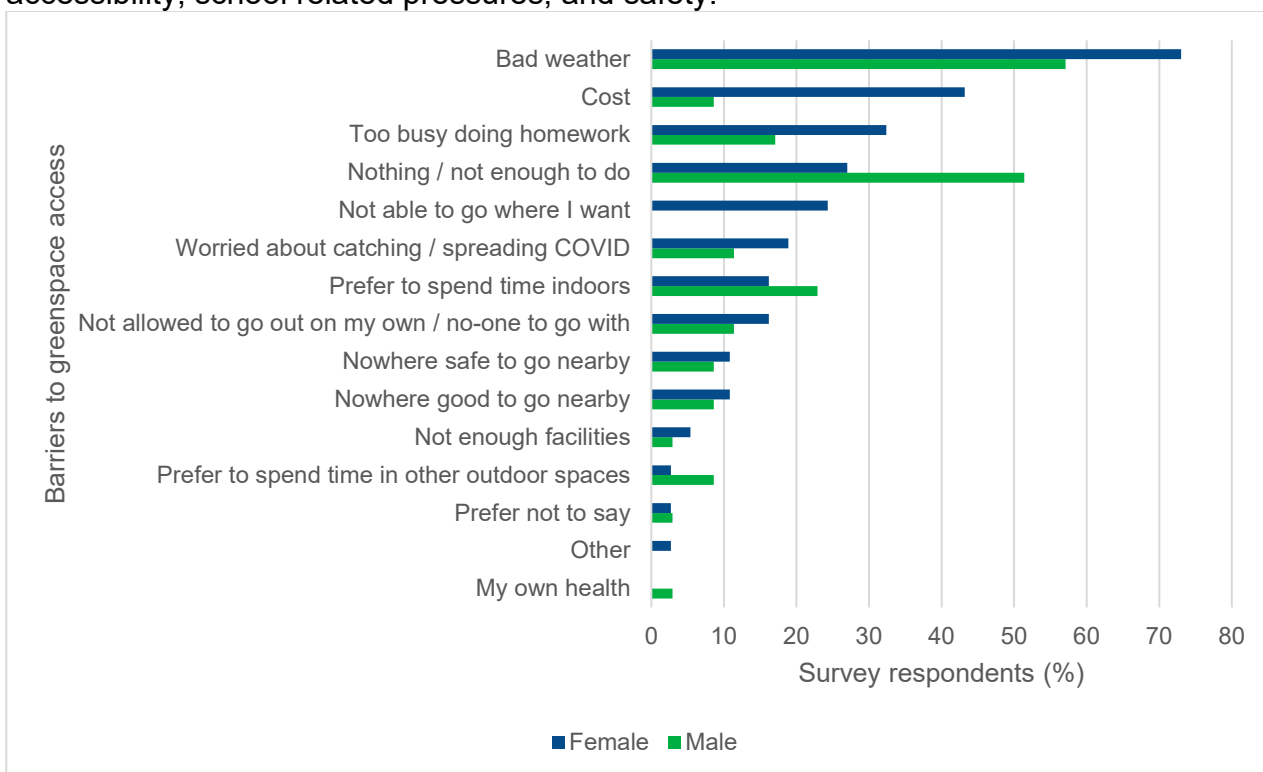
There was also a tendency to disagree that adults are doing enough to protect nature/greenspace (Figure 16), alluding to a sense of disempowerment felt by young people.



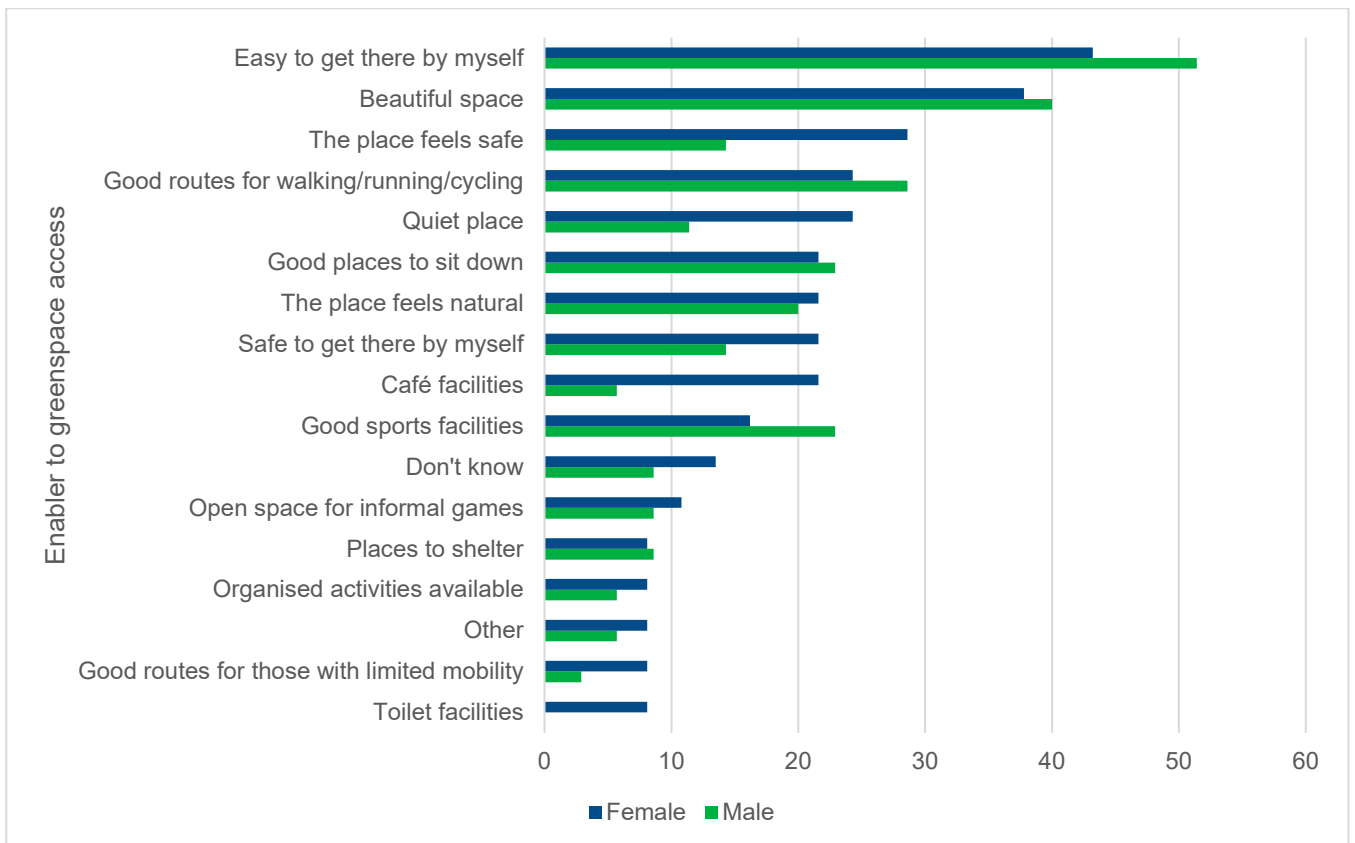
**Figure 16: Responses from survey question 'I think adults are doing enough to protect nature/ greenspace'**

## Understanding access to greenspace

Survey results offer an initial sense of the type and scale of barriers and enablers to greenspace access experienced by young people, as well as differences between genders (Figures 17 and 18). Whilst some issues are universal, those which stand out as disproportionately affecting girls and young women appear to be weather, cost, physical accessibility, school related pressures, and safety.



**Figure 17: Responses from survey question 'Do any of the following stop you from spending time in greenspaces?'**



**Figure 18: Responses from survey question ‘Thinking about the greenspaces that you visit regularly – what is it about them that makes you want to/helps you spend time there?’**

Table 1 summaries the barriers and enablers identified in both the survey and workshops framed through the lens of the COM-B model are outlined below. Each ‘behavioural influence’ and potential solutions are explored in more detail below. Of note, many solutions were highlighted by workshop participants themselves and included in the Greenspace & Us Manifesto, so are not necessarily ‘new’ ideas developed by researchers. Of issues initially identified as gender-related, only one (cost) did not feature significantly in qualitative discussions, such that we were unable to explain such a large difference in perspective between genders.

**Table 1: Understanding access to greenspace for young women using the COM-B model of behaviour change**

<b>COM-B element</b>	<b>Behavioural influences (barriers)</b>	<b>Behavioural influences (enablers)</b>
<b>Psychological capability</b>	<p>Lack of knowledge of local greenspaces or available activities.</p> <p>Lack confidence to claim a male dominated space.</p>	No enablers identified.
<b>Social opportunity</b>	<p>Competing priorities – school, social life and other activities.</p>	No enablers identified.
<b>Physical opportunity</b>	<p>Unable/unsafe to get to greenspaces.</p> <p>Lack of attractive and well-maintained greenspaces nearby.</p> <p>Greenspaces lack facilities to meet basic needs of young women.</p> <p>Lack of quiet and protected greenspace for young women to socialise in.</p> <p>Lack of play equipment aimed at older kids and teenagers.</p> <p>Not enough/high cost of outdoor sport clubs for girls.</p>	No enablers identified.
<b>Automatic motivation</b>	<p>Greenspaces are/can feel unsafe for young women.</p> <p>Lack of sense of ownership over local greenspaces and exclusion from democratic processes.</p> <p>Mixed feelings about 'nature' spaces.</p>	<p>Desire to participate in a wide range of activities in greenspace.</p> <p>Desire to visit a wider range of greenspaces.</p>
<b>Reflective motivation</b>	<p>Perception that there is 'nothing to do' in greenspace.</p>	Awareness of the wellbeing benefits of greenspace and nature.

## Capability to access greenspace

### Lack of knowledge of local greenspaces or available activities

As previously highlighted, young people in general appear to visit a limited number and type of local greenspace. When reflecting on the mapping exercise, with some exceptions, most participants did not recognise local woodland or nature reserves as places that were publicly accessible or of interest. Indeed, a popular nature reserve that was 'discovered' as part of the greenspace walkabout was only previously known to a minority of participants, despite its location next to a highly frequented recreation ground. Similarly, knowledge of organised activities available for young people in different local greenspaces was limited, and participants did not necessarily know where to find this information.

When developing the Greenspace & Us Manifesto, young women cited a need to be taught about their local greenspaces – what and where they are – and for better signage and general information so that more people can experience what these spaces have to offer. There was also a call to continue opportunities to take part in Forest School as part of secondary education to help young people connect with local nature spaces.

### Lack of confidence to claim a space dominated by other demographics

Throughout the course of the project, participants became more vocal about issues relating to equitable distribution of greenspace, which they see as being dominated by other demographics:

"[Greenspaces] are full of screaming 5-year-olds."

"What is stopping me from having fun is the boys, I think they take too much space for sport, activities etc."

This is partly due to the design of spaces and facilities, which young women see as catering more to younger children and 'male' ways of socialising and being active, but also a lack of confidence to claim the space for their own use:

"[There are] too many areas with 'no ball games allowed.'"

"I really liked the big open space, but not good that so much of it is reserved for football. It's difficult to relax even at the edge as you might get hit by a ball and there is a lot of shouting."

"Marsh Park is full of boys taking over playing football so not enough walking space."

"Women should have the right to move to what areas they want without getting shouted at and balls being kicked at us."

When discussing solutions both to inequitable distribution of space and issues around safety, a frequent and strong discussion theme was the desire for separate spaces for

young people – and specifically for young women, where girls can choose to be physically active or to relax in a space that is safe and free from judgment:

“[We need] a separate play area for older kids.”

“[We need] more greenspaces for girls/girls only areas.”

“We want a women’s only area, so we have our own area.”

This includes female only sports facilities, or dedicated times, to address male dominance and lack of confidence among girls to claim the space. There was also a call for more space for non-football sports such as basketball, dodgeball and netball:

“[We need a space where] girls are allowed to play football or basketball and boys not to come to the girls park.”

## **Opportunity to access greenspace**

### **Competing priorities – school, social life, and other activities**

As previously mentioned, a minority of young women (or boys) choose to spend time in greenspace, instead spending time at friends’ houses, shops, restaurants or cinemas (Figure 6). If greenspace is not the natural context of teenage social life, there is likely to be little incentive to ‘go against the grain’.

Young women clearly feel the pressure of school/study as impacting on other parts of their lives. ‘Too busy doing homework’ was the third most commonly chose barrier to spending time in greenspace for girls (32%, compared to 17% of boys) (Figure 17). Providing facilities to do this in greenspaces – including tables, shade and charging points – was identified as a way of bringing their daily routine outside, and one which they felt might help with concentration or just enjoyment of study.

### **Unable/ unsafe to get to greenspaces**

When asked what it is that ‘makes you want to/helps you spend time’ in greenspaces, the most frequently reported response by both girls (43%) and boys (51%) was ‘easy to get to by myself’ (Figure 18). This highlights not just the importance of location of greenspaces, but the need to ensure that they are well connected through travel options available to young people (i.e., affordable public transport or safe active travel). Specific enablers of access cited by survey respondents included “better buses” and “cheaper prices for transportation”. This may be even more important for young women: girls were much more likely to report ‘unable to get where I want’ as a barrier (24% girls, 0% boys) (Figure 17), whilst safety of travel was more frequently cited as an enabler (22% girls, 14% boys) (Figure 18).

Even though only 11% female and 9% male survey respondents cited ‘nowhere good to go nearby’ as a barrier, several individual comments alluded to the need for improved neighbourhood greenspaces:

“I rarely spend time in greenspaces, but I’d love there to be more of them local to me, e.g., a wide open field with a lot of trees and nature.” (Female survey respondent)

Whilst travel was not a major theme in workshop discussions, the particular inaccessibility of blue space activities was highlighted. Several young women had positive experiences of outdoor swimming but agreed that it was hard/impossible to travel to the other side of Oxford to access the local outdoor pool.

### **Lack of attractive and well-maintained greenspaces nearby**

After physical ease of access, both male and female survey respondents cited ‘a beautiful space’ as the second most important enabler of greenspace access (38% girls, 40% boys) (Figure 18). Yet many local greenspaces were perceived to be made up primarily of ‘lots of empty space’ (or space dominated by football pitches alone), impacting attractiveness, safety and usability.

“More ‘wilderness’ like trees and tall shrubs even thorn bushes would be better than an empty field.” (Female survey respondent)

In particular, young women noted an absence of natural features which makes some local greenspace less attractive, and made repeated calls for more flowers, trees, fruit bushes, butterflies and other wildlife. Some young women indicated a particular interest in water features, citing their calming and cooling effects, as well as offering activities such as feeding the ducks.

Maintenance of public greenspaces is also hugely important. Lack of upkeep creates unattractive spaces where you are more likely to experience dirty environments or equipment, vandalism, mud, litter or dog poo – leading to repeated calls for more bins to reduce litter or dog poo. Not addressing these concerns means less time spent in greenspace and lower likelihood of use of facilities that support physical activity. Poor maintenance is closely associated to perceptions of safety and lived experience of exposure to antisocial or misogynistic behaviour. Of particular concern were vandalism, drug and alcohol-related activity, the presence of gangs and gender-based violence (discussed in more detail below):

“Places like Spindleberry get vandalised a lot”

### **Lack of quiet and safe spaces for young women to socialise in**

Reflecting the desire to relax and de-stress, young women consistently highlighted the need for greenspaces that are quieter, more natural, and which facilitate groups of girls to socialise without being ‘bothered’ by boys or young children, or where they are likely to be hit by balls. Survey findings also suggest that quiet spaces are much more important to girls than boys, with 24% of girls citing this as an enabler, compared to 11% of boys (Figure 18).

“You can’t even walk across the field cos you’ll get hit by a ball.”

Young women clearly have a sense of the importance of multifunctional greenspaces, with a range of environments and facilities to cater for different activities and needs. This might



include different sports areas, biking areas, open spaces for picnics/events, spaces for public art, and spaces for relaxation. Importantly, it was felt that these areas should be clearly separated, so that use of each is enjoyable for different groups or demographics, but not so secluded as to be hidden from bystanders and therefore unsafe.

“I like Bury Knowle because of the fact that it has the divided parks.”

### **Greenspaces lack facilities to meet basic needs of young women**

One of the main disadvantages to spending time outside consistently highlighted in workshops was the lack of facilities that would allow young women to meet their basic needs – namely access to food and water, clean toilets, seating and shelter. This makes greenspace undesirable/inconvenient in the first instance, and limits the amount of time that one can spend there:

“Sometimes I get hungry and there is no food nearby.”

“[We need] more water fountains to stay hydrated.”

“Have to go home to go toilet.”

The limited availability of clean and functional toilets was a consistent and important issue in group discussions (in contrast to female survey respondents, only 8% of whom highlighted this as an enabler). Poorly maintained or dirty toilets are considered dangerous, and worse than having no toilets at all. Calls for clean and well-maintained toilets (with access to free menstrual products) were consistent across all small group discussions:

“[We need] toilets - proper ones and clean ones.”

With ‘bad weather’ the number one barrier reported amongst girls and boys (73% girls, 57% boys), consistent calls for shelter (man-made or natural) to improve access is unsurprising. Seating and tables are also considered necessary for the type of activities that young women want to do in greenspace (e.g., picnics, revising/studying, creative activities, just spending time with friends). Yet they felt that these are not readily available or they are designed in such a way that does not support their social needs:

“[We need] the city council [to] put more gazebos/shelters so we can revise and sit in the shade” (Female survey respondent)

“[We need] more sheltered and more comfortable spaces.”

### **Lack of play equipment for older kids and teenagers**

Survey respondents and workshop participants repeatedly cited a lack of play equipment for older children:

“The equipment is sometimes too small, and the older kids don’t fit.” (Survey respondent)

In particular, young women called for better access to equipment that offers independence and risk, often characterised as 'big' or 'dangerous' equipment, such as trampolines, swings, big climbing frames and zipwires. Access to more natural age-appropriate play equipment was also a prominent theme, particularly in more wooded areas, with calls for more treehouses, rope swings and dens:

"[We want] more swings and ziplines or really big slides."

Some young women expressed an interest in using outdoor gym equipment yet felt that this too did not cater to their needs and was generally considered to be too big, too dirty, or too exposed to feel safe for girls.

### **Not enough/ high cost of outdoor sport clubs for girls**

A minority (8%) of female survey respondents cited 'organised activities' as an enabler to greenspace access (Figure 18). However, some workshop participants who specifically indicated an interest in joining outdoor sports clubs said that they found this challenging – due to lack of information, high costs of participation, or lack of opportunities for girls:

"I like football, but there are not many girl clubs"

Young women also felt that sports clubs could be prohibitively expensive, which may also explain why 43% of girls cited 'cost' as a barrier to accessing greenspace (Figure 17). Improving access to sports and outdoor facilities for girls was voted on as a key manifesto point, with a call for better funding to support women to take up new sports.

## **Motivation to access greenspace**

### **Awareness of the wellbeing benefits of greenspace and nature**

Many workshop participants clearly held positive memories of time spent outdoors – shared as stories of beautiful walks with family members, amusing anecdotes or fun had at organised events. Words used to describe greenspace included 'fun', 'free' and 'fresh'.

Both workshop participants and survey respondents made frequent and specific reference to the positive impacts of greenspace on mental health, and were notably fluent in language relating to wellbeing:

"[Greenspace is] a good place to think and to clear your mind."

"It could be a place where when you're feeling upset or angry it's a good place to think or let out your emotions."

"We will get calm at the local greenspaces." (Survey respondent)

"[Greenspace is] a place to play without boundaries."

## **Desire to participate in a wide range of activities in greenspaces**

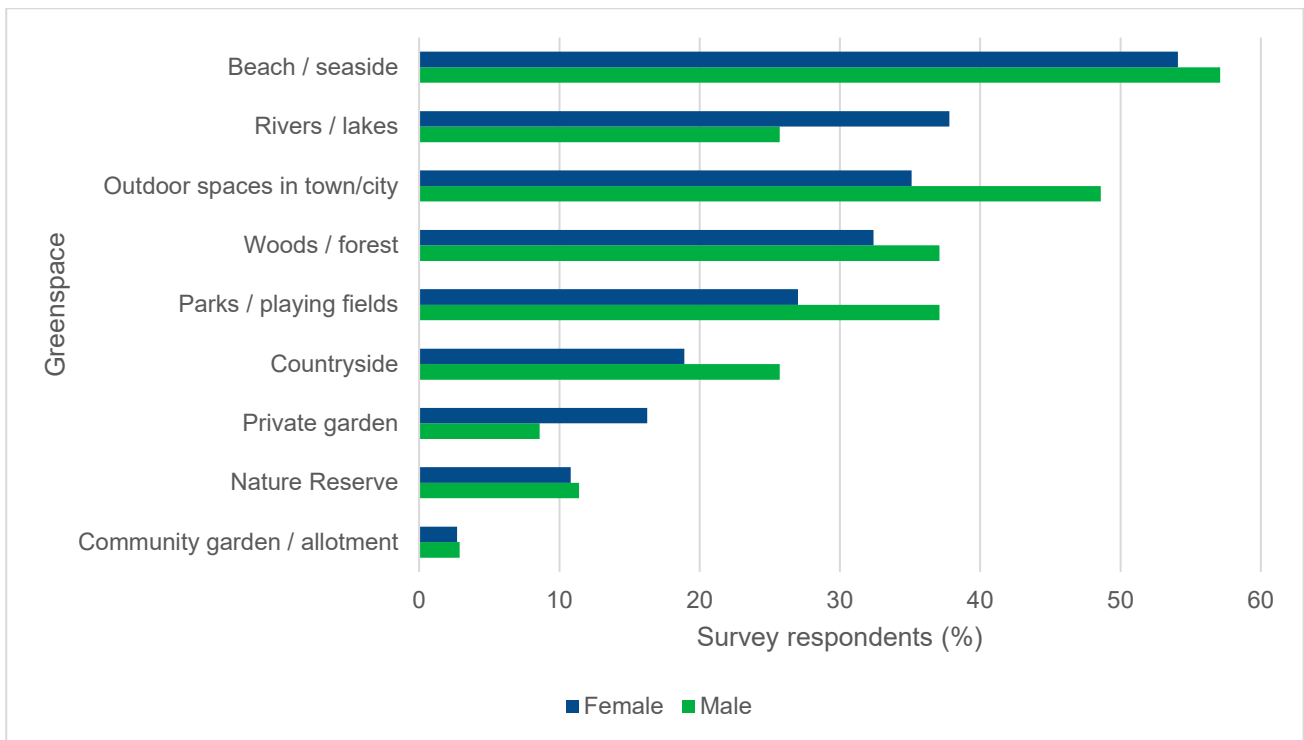
When asked what they want to be able to do in greenspaces, workshop participants cited a wide range of activities associated with relaxation, physical activity and creativity. These include:

- Active play, e.g., climbing, swinging, hopscotch
- Relaxing/spending time in a calm and quiet space
- Hanging out with friends
- Creative activities, e.g., drawing, chess
- Study/revising
- Enjoying beautiful places, e.g., those with good views
- Taking part in organised activities/events, e.g., festivals, outdoor cinema, camping
- Taking part in nature-based activities, e.g., climbing trees, looking at wildlife, planting flowers, campfires
- Sports/exercise, e.g., basketball, gym workout

Notably, in contrast to the limited number in the group who actively expressed interest in organised sport in greenspace, the desire to be active through play was evident. Young women clearly recognise the positive wellbeing benefits of play and called for more age-appropriate equipment to facilitate adventurous, physical and natural play (as previously discussed).

## **Desire to visit a wider range of greenspaces**

A striking survey finding was the contrast between the types of greenspaces that young people currently visit, and those which they would like to spend more time in in the future (Figure 19). More natural greenspace featured strongly here, including the beach/seaside (54% girls, 57% boys), rivers/lakes (38% girls, 25% boys) and woods/forest (32% girls, 37% boys). There is also a clear desire to visit more outdoor spaces in urban areas (35% girls, 49% boys).



**Figure 19: Responses from survey question ‘In the future, would you like to spend more time in any of these places?’**

The attractiveness of greenspace was often characterised by young women in terms of natural features and beautiful views:

“This is a really nice place to be in the summer – [there are] yellow flowers that grow really high.”

“I like to explore the Kidneys because it’s quite big and its very nature-y... I like places that are eco-friendly.” (Survey respondent)

“[I would like] more natural pathways, closer and bigger fields, more nature in the already local ones, a few fields just dedicated to wildflowers.” (Survey respondent)

Given the opportunity to explore different types of greenspace in a local walkabout (which also took in a recreation ground, play park and multi-use games area) workshop participants were most animated by the nature reserve – to the extent that facilitators struggled to encourage the group to return to base on time, since participants were too busy exploring and capturing their thoughts on photo. Reflecting on the popularity of this space, consensus was that it offered adventure, independence, and a calm natural setting:

“I liked learning something new – we came across a wooded bit that was something new and exciting.”

Following this experience, the group specifically requested further organised visits to other local nature reserves as part of their regular activities with the Name It Project.

## Greenspaces are/can feel unsafe for young women

Safety in greenspaces was highlighted as an issue that disproportionately affects young women. 'The place feels safe' was the third most frequently reported enabler for girls (29%, compared to 14% of boys, Figure 19), after ease of access and beauty. Similarly, girls were more likely to choose 'Safe to get there by myself' as an enabler (22% girls and 14% boys) and 11% of girls reported that there is 'nowhere safe to go nearby' as a key barrier to access (Figure 18).

A minority of girls reported that they would visit greenspaces by themselves (14% girls, 17% boys, Figure 16) and are also more likely to pass through, but not stop in greenspaces (11% girls, 6% boys, Figure 8).

In group discussions, immediate physical safety concerns were often characterised with respect to the impact of dogs and footballs:

"You can't have a picnic in the field cos the next thing you know there's a ball in your face."

"We need dog free areas."

Some young women also associated greenspaces with anti-social behaviour, such as drug taking or gangs, and suggested that lack of activities for teenagers could risk involvement or exposure to this:

"This park is full of 'crackheads'/lots of people taking drugs."

"If there's nothing to do teenagers will get in trouble."

General safety in greenspace was also framed with respect to awareness of wider societal problems around misogyny and gender-based violence, which they see as more likely in a typically 'male-dominated' space. As well as the perception of risk, some young women also had direct experience of gender-based harassment, bullying or intimidation in greenspaces:

"[I'm] scared to be alone around gangs and what's happening to many girls these days"

"A man took a picture of me and I wanted to go home."

"These boys got angry and kicked a ball at me."

Participants highlighted physical characteristics of greenspace that contribute to perceived and real risk of being harmed. These range from placement of open football goals next to walkways or seating areas, to lack of lighting, poor maintenance and vandalism, to the balance between 'hidden' and 'exposed' areas:

"I don't really like Florence Park because it is very hidden, and anything could happen."

"[We need] more streetlights to make us safe and more CCTV."

Suggestions for improved safety include better maintenance, more lighting and CCTV, availability of quiet secluded areas that are still visible to public bystanders, dog free areas, careful placement of paths away from goalposts, separated areas for sports (particularly football) with manmade or natural barriers such as hedging or trees.

### **Perception that there is ‘nothing to do’ in greenspace for young women**

Despite awareness of potential wellbeing benefits of greenspace, there is also a general perception that there is ‘nothing’ or ‘not enough to do’ for young people – as cited by both male and female survey respondents (27% girls, 51% boys) (Figure 17). This is partly related to the lack of age and gender-appropriate facilities and equipment, which send the message that parks are for younger kids or for boys.

Young women also highlighted the need for more social opportunities in greenspace, including those aimed exclusively at girls and young women. This might include organised physical and creative activities, social events such as outdoor cinema nights and festivals, and nature-based activities such as forest school. Young women also expressed a need for better information availability about what is already available – both in terms of physical infrastructure and social activities.

### **Lack of sense of ownership over local greenspaces and exclusion from democratic processes**

In group planning of how to present their ideas to key stakeholders, it became clear that there was limited knowledge or understanding of local democratic processes influencing the local built and green environment. Furthermore, some participants appeared unconvinced that local politicians would be interested in listening to their perspective or ideas about how greenspaces might better meet their needs. This was reflected in an initial reluctance, when building a ‘tree of change’, to identify a solution as ‘changeable’ rather than ‘unchangeable’.

It is likely that this sense of disempowerment is linked to a limited sense of ownership over, and therefore desire to engage with, local greenspaces. Yet several young women indicated that they enjoyed reflecting on what needed to change to create more inclusive public spaces:

“I liked the park visit – understanding that there are lots of things that we could change, but lots of nice things as well”

The Manifesto also specifically indicated that they wished to be consulted on such matters in the future, with a pledge to ‘tell you our ideas when you ask’.

### **Mixed feelings about ‘nature’ spaces**

As previously indicated, young people clearly articulated awareness of environmental issues and the importance of protecting nature. What was less clear was the extent to which their relationship with more natural greenspaces is primarily viewed through a lens of responsibility, as opposed to simply enjoying the environment:

“[Greenspace is] for everyone who is willing to take care of it”

“Greenspace is a place where you do not litter”

Despite clearly characterising the attractiveness of greenspace in natural terms, ‘spending time in nature’ was cited as something that they like most about spending time outside by only 19% of girls, compared to 40% of boys (Figure 11). One potential explanation for this is a popular conception around what it means to enjoy nature, or to be ‘outdoorsy’, that simply doesn’t reflect their lived experience – evidenced by the mainstream way in which young women initially characterised greenspace activities. When compounded by exposure to environmental messages that contribute to a ‘people vs nature’ narrative or frame active environmental protection as a condition of access, it is perhaps unsurprising that young people might feel unwelcome in natural spaces.

In the Greenspace & Us Manifesto, young women called for better teaching about nature at school and expressed a desire to have the option to continue Forest School activities into adolescence.

## Principles and recommendations

The following key principles and recommendations are drawn from an understanding of behaviour based on the COM-B model – and are therefore designed to increase capability, opportunity and motivation for young women to access greenspace. They are not directed at any one organisation or sector alone but highlight general approaches that are likely to require partnership working. It should be noted that these recommendations are directly informed by solutions that young women themselves identified and should therefore be credited for.

### Key principles for improving access to greenspace for young women

#### Prioritise equity in decision-making

Understanding of differential access should underpin all decision-making around the design and management of community greenspaces. This includes an honest acceptance of how facilities and the distribution of space meet the needs of different demographic groups.

#### Ensure meaningful co-production

We can, and must, get better at listening to young people and involve them in decision making about community outdoor spaces in an age- and gender-appropriate way.

#### Take safety concerns seriously

We must listen to young women's safety concerns about greenspaces and treat these with the same importance and urgency as any other setting.

## **Make nature normal**

We must build access to greenspace and conversations about nature into the daily lives of young people. We cannot rely on childhood exposure to maintain nature connection that is essential for wellbeing.

## **Recognise the right to play**

We have a responsibility to facilitate age- and gender-appropriate outdoor play for adolescents as much as younger children.

## **Deliver connected greenspaces**

Physical accessibility of greenspace for young women is as important as the characteristics of the space itself in influencing usage.

# **Recommendations**

1. Integrate greenspace access into the routines of young people and young women specifically – for example by taking youth work, school, creative activities or sports outside.
2. Promote opportunities for young women to discuss their relationship with greenspace, to develop and amplify their own narratives around what it means to connect with nature, and to build a sense of ownership over their local greenspaces.
3. Ensure adequate funding for free/low-cost women's only activities in greenspace – both sporting and social.
4. Work with young women's groups to co-design areas and sports facilities in local greenspaces specifically to meet their needs – considering the potential for women only spaces where possible.
5. Ensure adequate access to information that allows young people to find out about their local greenspaces and related social opportunities. This could be through school, youth work, web resources, maps or simply more welcoming and engaging signage.
6. Carefully consider the inclusion of greenspaces when planning affordable public transport or active travel networks and ensure that these are linked to key places of interest for young people.
7. Prioritise the development of greenspaces that are close to secondary schools or other places of significant interest to young women.



8. Take advantage of interest in spending time in outdoor spaces in urban centres by creating opportunities for young people to engage with natural features whilst meeting other social needs outdoors.
9. Explore the root causes of anti-social behaviour in specific greenspaces, seeking the opinion of young women to identify hotspots and potential solutions.
10. Invest in the maintenance of existing greenspaces to ensure that basic needs are met (clean toilets, water, seating and shelter as a minimum) and to reduce opportunities for anti-social behaviour.
11. Ensure that greenspaces, particularly those in residential areas and close to secondary schools, provide age-appropriate equipment and offer opportunities for adventurous and nature-based play for older children and teenagers.
12. Offer safe, quiet spaces for girls to spend time together, participate in social and creative activities, and enjoy the natural environment. These areas should include facilities that support the specific social needs of young women and should be separated from other areas in a way that still maintains visibility and the perception of safety.
13. Actively welcome young people into natural greenspaces such as woodland and nature reserves, by providing adequate information, signage and age-appropriate activities.

## Process and engagement

In addition to the findings presented here, the Greenspace & Us project provided some important insights into ways in which public authorities can engage with young people in matters relating to their built and green environment. This learning is outlined in a summary of evaluation findings (Appendix 5) – however a few key points are worth mentioning:

Firstly, perhaps the biggest strength of the project was partnership with a local youth organisation (the Name It Youth Project) who played a crucial role in project development, recruitment, and relationship building with young women. Similarly, our creative partners provided a vital medium through which to enthuse and energise discussions and to make the project fun.

Whilst we didn't get everything right, we have learned some important lessons around what it means to be led by young people – namely around investing time and resource to do things at their pace and on their terms, which impacts not only insights gained, but the sense of ownership that young people have over the process.

With a tight funding schedule, we were unable to fully co-produce our methods and outputs, which is perhaps the most significant change we would have made. Amongst other things, this would help to address the challenge of offering opportunities to empower young women, without creating unrealistic expectations of the scale or pace of change that is in the gift of a project of this nature to influence.

With the support of the Name It Youth Project, the 'Greenspace & Us' girls group will continue to meet regularly, and now has an established link with Oxford City Council's Greenspace Development Team, through which they continue to offer their views on greenspace developments in the city.

## Conclusions

The Greenspace & Us project provided an opportunity for young women to share and reflect on their experience of accessing greenspace, and for public health and other public stakeholders to learn about the lived experience of this important underserved group. Whilst this project was based in East Oxford, many of our findings are not site specific and are likely to be generalisable to other locations.

As a group of participants and facilitators, we identified a range of factors that influence not only behaviour, but also the relationship that young women have with greenspace. Whilst some of these factors (such as provision of age- and gender-appropriate play equipment) have an obvious solution, others (such as addressing real safety concerns in greenspace and lack of ownership over public spaces) do not have a simple fix. Rather, they require us to maintain the focus, make bold investment/resource allocation decisions and work together with young people to deliver equity in access to greenspace and public spaces in general.

Although initiated by public health, the findings of this project have implications for several sectors, agencies, institutions and organisations. Action to address barriers to greenspace necessitates a shared vision and partnership working across planning authorities, greenspace management teams, education, social work, youth work, environmental sector organisations and public health.

Rather than provide a set of answers, these insights offer a basis for more in-depth conversations about specific locations and spaces. They should also be regarded as an advocacy tool for a more equitable approach that is directly informed by those who have the most to gain.

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# Appendices

## Appendix 1 Greenspace & Us Survey Questions

### Welcome!

One of the roles of Oxfordshire County Council's Public Health Team is to make sure the places that we live in provide opportunities for all of us to stay healthy and happy. We know that spending time in greenspaces near to where we live is really important for our health and wellbeing, but not everyone has the chance to do so. We are interested in why this may be.

This survey is part of a bigger project designed to help us understand what young people do and don't like about greenspaces in and around Oxford and what changes you would like to see. Your responses will help us to think differently about how these spaces might be designed or managed, to make sure that they work for everyone, including young people!

### What do we mean by greenspace?

Greenspaces are community spaces that are made up mostly of grass, trees, land or natural waterways, rather than buildings. This can include several different areas, such as parks, gardens, playing fields, woods and other natural areas, rivers and canals and many more. Sometimes people use the word 'bluespace' to describe natural spaces that include or surround water (e.g. rivers, lakes, streams, the sea). To keep things simple, we won't separate out these terms in this survey - but remember the word 'greenspace' could also include those which you might think of as blue!

### What will the survey involve?

The survey should take approximately 15 minutes to complete.

Taking part is optional and you can stop at any point. We won't be asking any sensitive or personal questions, but if you feel like you aren't able to or don't want to answer any questions, just tick 'Prefer not to say'. Your happiness, and making you feel comfortable, is extremely important to us.

Please read the section below on data protection and privacy.

If you are happy to take part, please continue by clicking the '**TAKE SURVEY**' button at the bottom of the page.

### Data Protection and Privacy

Under the [Data Protection Act 2018](#), we (Oxfordshire County Council) have a legal duty to protect any personal information we collect from you. Oxfordshire County Council is

committed to open government and this may include quoting extracts from your consultation response in our report.

We will not however, disclose the names of people who have responded unless they have provided consent. For this purpose, we ask that you are careful not to disclose personal information in your comments – for example the names of other young people.

View Oxfordshire County Council's privacy notice online at [www.oxfordshire.gov.uk](http://www.oxfordshire.gov.uk) - search privacy notice.

**Thank you for your help!**

## **Section 1: First we want to start by asking some general questions about where you spend your time.**

Q1. Where do you like to go in your spare time? [Tick all that apply]

- Cinema
- Friend's house
- Gym/ leisure centre / swimming pool
- Greenspaces (including woods, rivers, nature reserve, countryside)
- Restaurants / cafes
- Shops / shopping centre
- Sports club
- Youth club
- Home
- Don't know
- Prefer not to say
- Somewhere else (please specify below)

Q2. What three activities do you most like to do in your spare time? (open text)

Q3. Which of the following best applies to you? [Tick all that apply]

- I have access to my own / someone else's garden
- I have access to a shared garden (e.g., within a block of flats)
- I have access to a private outdoor space, but not a garden (e.g., balcony, yard, patio area)
- I have access to an allotment away from home
- I don't have access to a garden or allotment
- Don't know
- Prefer not to say

Q4. What kind of greenspaces do you regularly spend time in? [Tick all that apply]

- Beach / Seaside
- Community garden / Allotment
- Nature reserve (protected area for plants and wildlife)
- Countryside
- Parks / playing fields / playground

- Private garden (yours or someone else's)
- Rivers / lakes / canals
- Woods / forest
- I prefer NOT to spend time in greenspaces
- Don't know
- Prefer not to say
- Somewhere else (please specify below)

Q5. When you go to greenspaces, who do you usually go with? [Tick all that apply]

- By myself
- Family
- Friends
- I don't go to greenspaces
- Prefer not to say
- Other (please specify)

Q6. In the future, would you like to spend more time in any of these places? [Tick all that apply]

- Beach / Seaside
- Community garden / Allotment
- Nature reserve (protected area for plants and wildlife)
- Outdoor spaces in town/city (e.g., pedestrian areas/town square)
- Countryside
- Parks / playing fields / playground
- Private garden (yours or someone else's)
- Rivers / lakes / canals
- Woods / forest
- I prefer NOT to spend time in greenspaces
- Don't know
- Prefer not to say
- Somewhere else (please specify below)

Q7. What do you like most about spending time outside? [Tick all that apply]

- Getting exercise or being physically active
- Getting some fresh air
- Getting time for / by myself
- Having an adventure / exploring
- Having a quiet time / relaxing
- Spending time with friends
- Spending time in nature
- Spending time with family or people I live with
- Taking part in group activities
- None of the above
- Prefer not to say
- Don't know
- Something else... (specify below)

Q8. Which of the following do you do regularly when you go to greenspaces? [Tick all that apply]

- Go for a jog / run
- Go for a walk with friends / family
- Go on a walk by myself
- Just hangout
- Play organised sport or exercise
- Ride my bike
- Roller skate / skateboard
- Play games (e.g., tag, frisbee, have a kick about)
- Take part in creative activities (e.g., arts/drama)
- Take part in conservation / nature-based activities (e.g., watching wildlife)
- Prefer not to say
- I don't go to greenspaces
- Other (please specify below)

Q9. Do any of the following stop you from spending time in greenspaces? [Tick all that apply]

- Bad weather
- Cost / too expensive for me or my parents
- I am not able to get where I want to go (no public transport, no-one to give me a lift)
- I am worried about catching / spreading coronavirus
- I am not allowed to go out on my own or no-one can go with me
- I prefer to spend time in other outdoor spaces (not a greenspace)
- My own health
- Not enough facilities (toilet / café)
- Nothing / not enough to do there
- Nowhere good to go nearby
- I prefer to spend free time indoors
- Nowhere safe to go nearby
- Too busy doing school / homework
- Don't know
- Prefer not to say
- Another reason (specify below)

## **Section 2: The next set of questions looks at how you use local greenspaces**

Q10. How often do you spend time in public greenspaces in or around Oxford? [Choose one option]

- Everyday
- A few times a week
- Roughly once a week
- A few times a month
- Once a month or less
- I pass through but don't stop to spend time there
- Never



- Don't know
- Prefer not to say

Q11. How often do you pass through a local greenspace on your way to get somewhere else? [Choose one option]

- Everyday
- A few times a week
- Roughly once a week
- A few times a month
- Once a month or less
- Never
- Don't know
- Prefer not to say

Q12. Which of the following greenspaces in East Oxford do you regularly spend time in? [Tick all that apply]

- Blackbird Leys Park
- Cowley Marsh Recreation Ground
- Cowley Marsh Nature Park
- Donnington Recreation Ground
- Florence Park
- Fry's Hill Park
- Gillian's Park
- Herschel Crescent Recreation Ground
- Littlemore Park
- Rivermead Nature Park
- Sandy Lane Recreation Ground
- Spindleberry Nature Park
- Rosehill Recreation Ground
- Don't know
- Prefer not to say

Q13. Are there any other greenspaces in or around Oxford that you regularly spend time in? This might be a place we haven't listed, somewhere else in another part of the city, or close to the city. If you don't know the name, you can describe the location instead. (open text)

### **Section 3: The next set of questions focuses on what you do/don't like about local greenspaces.**

Q14. Thinking about the greenspaces that you visit regularly – what is it about them that makes you want to/helps you spend time there?

- Beautiful space
- Café facilities
- Easy to get there by myself (e.g., foot, bike, public transport)
- Good places to sit down (e.g., bench/picnic bench)
- Good routes for walking / running / cycling

- Good routes for people with limited mobility (e.g., wheelchair accessibility)
- Organised activities for me to take part in
- Places to shelter (manmade or natural, including trees)
- Safe to get there by myself (e.g., foot, bike, public transport)
- The space feels natural / close to nature
- The space feels safe
- Quiet place
- Toilet facilities
- Good sports / fitness facilities
- Open space for informal games
- Don't know
- Prefer not to say
- Another reason (specify below)

Q15. What changes would help you to spend more time in local greenspaces, or go there more often (including passing through to get somewhere else)? (open text)

Q16. Is there anything else you would like to tell us about your local greenspaces?

#### **Section 4: These questions are about how connected you feel to nature**

Q17. How much do you agree or disagree with the following? (Strongly Disagree/ Disagree/ Neither agree nor disagree/ Agree/ Strongly Agree/ Don't know/ Prefer not to say)

- Being in nature / greenspace makes me very happy
- Protecting nature / greenspace is very important to me
- I think adults are doing enough to protect nature / greenspace
- I would like to do more to protect nature / greenspace

#### **Section 5: A few questions about you**

We would like to know a bit more about you, to help us understand which groups survey responses represent. If you do not wish to provide any of this information, please select prefer not to say.

All information given is anonymous and is governed by the General Data Protection Regulations 2018.

Q18. How would you describe your gender? [Choose one option]

- Female
- Male
- Prefer not to say
- In another way (specify below)

Q19. How old are you? [Choose one option]

- 11

- 12
- 13
- 14
- 15
- 16
- Prefer not to say

Q20. What is your ethnic group or background? [Choose one option]

- Asian or Asian British (Indian, Pakistani, Bangladesh, or any other Asian background)
- Black or Black British (Caribbean, African, or any other Black background)
- Chinese
- Mixed or multiple ethnicities (White and Black Caribbean, White and Black Caribbean, White and Asian, or any other mixed background)
- White (British, Irish, Scottish or any other White background)
- Prefer not to say
- Other ethnic background (please specify)

Q21. Do you have any physical or mental health conditions, disabilities or illnesses which reduce your ability to carry out day-to-day activities? [Choose one option]

- Yes – my life is affected a lot
- Yes – my life is affected a little
- No
- Prefer not to say

Q22. What are the first 4 characters of your postcode (e.g., OX4 3) (open text)

## Data Protection and Privacy

Under the Data Protection Act 2018, we (Oxfordshire County Council) have a legal duty to protect any personal information we collect from you. Oxfordshire County Council is committed to open government and this may include quoting extracts from your consultation response in our report.

We will not however, disclose the names of people who have responded unless they have provided consent. For this purpose, we ask that you are careful not to disclose personal information in your comments – for example the names of service users or children. If you do not want all or part of your response to be made public or shared with councillors, please state below which parts you wish us to keep confidential.

View Oxfordshire County Council's privacy notice online at [www.oxfordshire.gov.uk](http://www.oxfordshire.gov.uk) - search privacy notice.

Q23. Please use this space to tell us if there is any part of your response you wish to keep confidential (open text)

Q24. Finally, Oxfordshire County Council would like to keep you in touch with regular updates on news, events, and developments across the district. Would you like to sign-up to receive regular updates on news, events and developments across the county by email? (YES / NO)

**Thank you!**

Thank you for taking the time to answer these questions.

## Appendix 2 Workshop Programme Overview

### Session 1: Introduction – 5<sup>th</sup> March

- Goals: Introduce the project; relationship and confidence building
- Main activities: Registration paperwork; Icebreakers; Introduce the project; Agree on group rules; Group exercise to define greenspace and explore initial feelings; Introduction to evaluation
- Data collection methods: Flip charts; Facilitator notes

### Session 2: Greenspace Mapping - 12th March

- Goals: Map local greenspace assets, start to think about characteristics of the physical or social infrastructure that influence access
- Main activities: Review previous week's workshop; Individual and group mapping exercise; Group analysis and presentation of themes;
- Data collection methods: Annotated maps (individual and group); Flip charts; Facilitator notes

### Session 3: Greenspace Walkabout - 19th March

- Goals: Gather visual, audio and written data to illustrate thoughts and feelings about greenspace and access
- Main activities: Walk to local recreation ground and nature park; Collect photos, written notes, and audio data to reflect on the experience of being in a local greenspace; Group feedback and reflection on the experience
- Data collection: Annotated photos, written notes, audio data recorded by young women

### Session 4: Bringing it all together - 26th March

- Goals: Group analysis of themes and begin the process of translating this into a 'manifesto'
- Main activities: Identify specific barriers and enablers to access, and consider which are changeable/unchangeable – building a 'Tree of Change' (i.e. colourful cut out leaves with wishes and wants of change written on them by the girls and tied onto a real tree) in the process; Start to discuss ideas to build a manifesto
- Data collection: Flipcharts; Tree of change leaves; Facilitator notes

### Session 5: Building the manifesto/ Creative planning (1) - 2<sup>nd</sup> April

- Goals: Discuss and decide on the desired creative outcome

- Main activities: Discuss relevant precedents; Discuss the agreed potential creative lanes that could best accompany the manifesto; Identify constraints and opportunities that may shape the outcome.
- Data collection: Group scrolls

## **Session 6: Building the manifesto/ Creative planning (2) - 3<sup>rd</sup> April**

- Goals: Decide on all the aspects of the creative output to be presented to the project team and external partners.
- Main activities: Recap on written manifesto and design; plan the creative output accompanying the manifesto.
- Data collection: Group scrolls; Group artwork.

# Appendix 3 Young Person Participation Information Sheet

## Understanding needs around access to greenspace and nature connection for teenage girls in East Oxford (Greenspace and Us).

### Introduction

You are invited to take part in a study from Name It Youth Project, Fig.studio, The Resolve Collective, Oxfordshire County Council and Natural England.

This project has been designed to help us understand what young people do and don't like about greenspaces in and around Oxford and what changes you would like to see. This will help us to think differently about how these spaces might be designed or managed to make sure that they work for everyone, including young people!

### What's involved?

We will be running weekly workshops for girls aged 10-17 from March 5<sup>th</sup> through to April 3<sup>rd</sup> 2022 at Barracks Lane Community Garden.

The first four workshops will be hosted by the Name It Youth Project and will explore, through group activities, what greenspace means to you and how you use it.

The last two workshops will be led by the design group, Resolve Collective, who will work with you to translate the discussions you have had as a group in the first four workshops into a creative project.

A creative celebration day will be organised after the workshops have finished to thank you for being involved in the project and off the chance to work with Resolve Collective to realise your insights as a physical piece of work.

Workshop	Date & Time	Theme
<b>Workshop 1</b>	5th March 2022 1.00 – 3.00pm	Introduction
<b>Workshop 2</b>	12th March 2022 1.00 – 4.00pm	Greenspace Mapping
<b>Workshop 3</b>	19th March 2022 1.00 – 4.00pm	Greenspace Walkabout
<b>Workshop 4</b>	26th March 2022	Bringing it all together



Workshop	Date & Time	Theme
	12.00 – 3.00pm	
<b>Workshop 5</b>	2nd April 2022 12.00 – 3.00pm	Creative Planning 1
<b>Workshop 6</b>	3rd April 2022 2.00 – 5.00pm	Creative Planning 2
<b>Workshop 7</b>	14 <sup>th</sup> May 2022 1.00 – 3.00pm	Creative Celebration Day

### What are the possible benefits of taking part?

The project offers an opportunity for you to share your thoughts and opinions about the design and management of greenspace with organisations who are responsible for this. At the end of the project, your discussions and ideas will be written up as a report for Natural England, Oxfordshire County Council and Oxford City Council. These organisations want to hear your opinions to help them understand how to make greenspace more accessible for everyone.

You will also have the opportunity to work with the Resolve Collective to produce a piece of creative work based upon the workshop activities.

For spending your time taking part in this project we will reimburse you for attendance to each workshop in line with the table below. This will be added up and given to you at the end of the project as a gift voucher.

Workshop	Reimbursement
<b>Workshop 1</b>	£10
<b>Workshop 2</b>	£15
<b>Workshop 3</b>	£15
<b>Workshop 4</b>	£15
<b>Workshop 5</b>	£15
<b>Workshop 6</b>	£15

### What are the possible disadvantages and risks of taking part?

Ideally, we would like you to attend all the workshops, in order to get the most out of building ideas and opinions as a group.

There will be outdoor components to workshops, including time spent at Marsh Park (Workshop 3) so please be aware of the weather and dress accordingly.

To ensure your safety and wellbeing all workshops and activities will be supervised by Name It and their team of experienced youth workers.

## **Personal Information**

By agreeing to take part in this project we will look to collect some basic information about you including your age, ethnic group and school year.

We will record written insights from group discussions in the workshops.

We will also provide you with a project diary so you can record your own thoughts and opinions, positive or negative, about the workshops and subject matter. This can be given to us at the end of the project, without saying who wrote it, as evidence to help our research if you would like to.

We would like to take some photographs of the workshops and film some of the activities. We would also like to record spoken thoughts through an audio recorder. It is up to you if you would like to be included in these parts of the project and will not affect you taking part in the rest of the project.

If you are happy to be included by name (first name or full name) in a report there is an option for you to agree to 'attributed quotations' on your assent form. If we do mention you specifically you will be given the opportunity to review the attribution to make sure you are happy with it being used.

## **What will happen if I do not want to carry on with the study?**

You are free to withdraw from the study at any time without needing to provide a reason.

Thoughts and ideas provided in group discussions are unable to be withdrawn as they will not be linked to any specific person.

You may request we do not use any of the following information at any time without impacting your participation in the project:

- Appearance in photographs
- Audio recording(s)
- Video recording(s)
- Attributions
- Project diary

## **What will happen to the results of this study?**

Once completed, the Greenspace and Us team will publish a final report that will be made available to everyone involved. Links to the report and workshop information will be made available through Name It, Fig.studio and the Resolve Collective.

The information collected as part of the project may be used as part of an academically published article.

Anonymous data collected throughout the study may be used to help inform Natural England, Oxfordshire County Council, Oxford City Council, Name It, Fig.studio and The Resolve Collective about the workshops and/or specific greenspaces.

Information derived from the Greenspace and Us project may be used to support further funding applications to explore greenspace and community-focused projects.

## **Who is organising and funding this study**

Greenspace and Us is funded by Natural England.

The project is delivered by Oxfordshire Youth Enterprise, Fig.studio and the Resolve Collective in collaboration with Natural England and Oxfordshire County Council.

## **Greenspace and Us, Young Person PIS v1.0**

# Appendix 4 Young Person Assent Form

## Understanding needs around access to greenspace and nature connection for teenage girls in East Oxford (Greenspace and Us)

Participant Identification Number for this trial:

Please initial box

1. I have read the Greenspace and Us information sheet have had the chance to think about it and ask any questions I have about the project.
2. I understand it is my choice to take part in the project and that I am able to stop taking part without having to explain why.
3. I agree to complete a project diary which I may choose to give to the study team at the end of the project.
4. I am happy to appear in photographs of workshop activities. [optional]
5. I am happy to be filmed as part of workshop activities. [optional]
6. I am happy to be audio-taped. [optional]
7. I am happy for my name to be included in a report and know I will be given the chance view anything with my name on it before it is published. [optional]
8. I agree to take part in the Greenspace and Us project.

_____	_____	_____
Name of Participant	Date	Signature

_____	_____	_____
Name of Person taking assent	Date	Signature

# Appendix 5 Summary of Evaluation Findings

## Learning from the Greenspace & Us project: Top tips for a successful partnership project aiming to engage with young people and explore their relationship with their built and green environment

### Introduction

Greenspace & Us was a community insights project that used participatory and creative approaches to understand the barriers and enablers influencing access to greenspace for young women in East Oxford. The project was led by a diverse group of partners, including public health professionals, researchers, youth workers and creative partners. To develop a full understanding of the issues, we used quantitative and qualitative methods, including delivery of six 3-hour workshops with twenty young women aged 10-16. Workshops were designed to be fun, engaging, and flexible to the young women's needs. The project was developed and delivered in just three months – giving us an ambitious schedule to build the relationships and trust needed for positive outcomes for all. Whilst we delivered on the majority of our aims, we didn't get everything right, and would like to share some of our learning through some 'top tips' drawn from independent evaluation and group reflection on the process.

### Top tips for a successful project

#### 1. Build a team with diverse expertise and experience to fit meet all the needs of the project

Perhaps the biggest strength of the Greenspace & Us project was the development of a truly multidisciplinary working group. In particular, youth workers on the team played a crucial role in successful recruitment and relationship building with young women, whilst creative partners provided a vital medium through which to enthuse and energise discussions and to make the project fun.

#### 2. Involve young people from the beginning

Co-producing aims and methods, as well as project outputs, means that the right questions are asked of young people through a process that is meaningful to them. This is likely to improve the sense of ownership and empowerment experienced by young people, whilst also setting realistic expectations for the project and improving the depth of insights.

#### 3. Invest in building and understanding relationships between project partners as well as with participants

This is particularly important when a diverse team of partners bring different expertise and perspectives. One way of doing this could be through having an open discussion about why everyone got involved and what they bring to the project and creating a set of shared values or terms to work by. This process should strive to create a safe space to acknowledge any external pressures or barriers to

participation amongst colleagues, as well as any differences or inequalities (real or felt) in the group. The same process should be applied sensitively with participants at the beginning of the project, perhaps even before the main topic is introduced. Youth workers are experts in leading such discussions and creating a safe space for young people to be open with their peers.

#### 4. Be led by values, not tasks/delivery objectives

Although it may be important to demonstrate outcomes to your funders and have an overview of how the project is progressing in time, it is of equal importance to understand the experience of the project among different team members and participants. One way to do this could be to use qualitative systems based on an initial partnership agreement, including time for reflection and review of relationships and processes where necessary. This can also create space for a review of objectives, if within the course of the project these are deemed less relevant or inappropriate for any reason.

#### 5. Use research/facilitation techniques that prioritise relationships, over information exchange

Young people participating in the Greenspace & Us project engaged much more confidently and enthusiastically in craft-based, physical and creative methods than those which involved writing or answering specific questions. As experts in informal education, youth workers are particularly skilled at creating space for conversation that allows young people to bring their own agenda and participate in discussion without this feeling like a task. Integrating play/games and creativity throughout a project (i.e. from the start) sets a positive tone and is likely to make it a much more fulfilling experience for young people overall.

