

Reclaiming the Riverside: Women in parks too

Exploring the barriers women face to engaging in the park.

Location: Avenue Park, Cranford
August 2023 & October 2023



**Reclaiming the Riverside
Women in Parks too** 

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What: Join us for a morning of calm in Avenue Park park to enjoy a walk in nature, try some mindfulness and talk with others in a safe and green space.

Who: We are exploring the issue of Women in Parks with experienced women's life coach Apinder, who will lead this peaceful group session out in nature.

Where: Avenue Park,
High Street, Cranford



When: Saturday 5th August
10am - 12.00pm

For more information please visit <https://www.lgoal.org> or contact sarah.austin2@lgoal.org.uk or frances.bennett@lgoal.org.uk

We're grateful for the support of



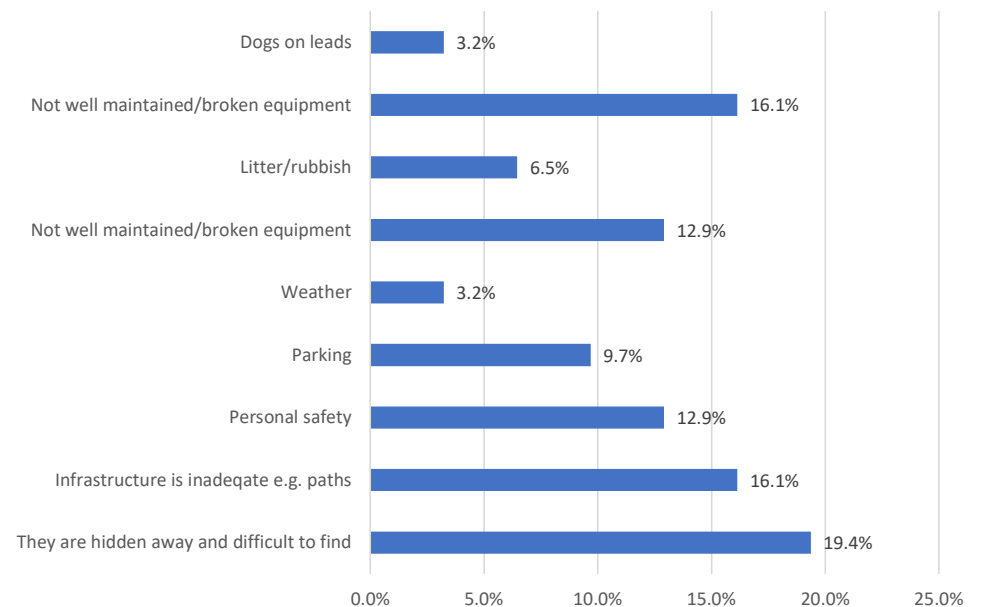
Aims of the consultation

In late Summer 2023, Let's Go Outside and Learn held two activities in Avenue Park, Cranford to engage women with the park.

Previous mixed gender consultations in Cranford had pointed to concerns for personal safety as one of the barriers for engaging with parks.

This was an opportunity to explore the issue in more detail with park users.

What are the barriers to visiting parks and open spaces?
Number of respondents = 31
July 2023



What we did

The activity offered the opportunity to spend time with a life coach who took the group on a mindful journey through the park. This was followed by a discussion of what participants liked about the park and what they disliked. Women were encouraged to bring their families to the session and women visiting the park at the time of the activity were encouraged to join in.

Bad weather and heavy rain at the time of the first activity meant that it was repeated in the autumn.

We had a small number of attendees, including one young person, enabling a detailed discussion and we were able to develop personal connections. Most attendees were known to the project.

We collated the comments from women attending the 2 activities.

August 2023



November 2023



Consultation questions: What I don't like.

Women were invited to tell us what they do not like about the park and in particular what makes them feel unsafe.

Their answers were categorised as follows:

What makes you feel unsafe?

Lack of equipment/facilities

- ❖ No bins on field, the mess can be intimidating
- ❖ No signposting so I am worried that I will get lost if I go any further than the playpark.
- ❖ No car parking, not everyone can walk.
- ❖ Lack of facilities including toilets and a café.
- ❖ No benches, some women struggle to walk any distance especially older people.
- ❖ The gym equipment was taken away and park equipment is not kept nice. The park needs to be nice for people to feel safe.
- ❖ No lights.

Lack of park maintenance

- ❖ It used to be lovely (bowls and toilets), now it looks unloved.
- ❖ There is a lot of litter.
- ❖ Broken equipment, antisocial behaviour and un-nice graffiti.
- ❖ Messy and weedy.
- ❖ The litter and rubbish puts people off coming [to the park].
- ❖ Not welcoming.

Fear for personal safety

- ❖ Feel unsafe first thing and towards end of the day.
- ❖ You never know who is hiding.
- ❖ Not much police presence to make me feel safe.
- ❖ I don't feel safe anytime
- ❖ I'm too scared to come here by myself.
- ❖ There are not enough people here to make me feel safe
- ❖ Where are all the people!
- ❖ It can feel like a lonely place and that puts me off visiting.

Consultation Questions: What I like.

Women were invited to tell us what they like about the park and in particular what makes them feel safe.

Their answers were categorised as follows:

What makes you feel safe?
Nature
<ul style="list-style-type: none">❖ Lots of wildlife❖ Nature, river, links to other parks, foraging❖ Different shades of nature and beauty❖ Nature (everything)❖ River, nature walks
Location
<ul style="list-style-type: none">❖ Good location and close to my home❖ Near lots of schools

Facilities
<ul style="list-style-type: none">❖ Play area is great for children but needs improvement❖ I like playing in parks
A place for people
<ul style="list-style-type: none">❖ Bring in other people, being invited helped me to come❖ A great place for schools❖ Picnics❖ Brings people together❖ Gives me sense of calm
A place for activities
<ul style="list-style-type: none">❖ Events in parks❖ A place to exercise

Consultation Question: What would make the park safer?

Some women made suggestions about what would make them feel safer in the park. Their answers were categorised as follows:

What would make you feel safer?

Activities to bring people into the park

- ❖ Set up walking groups especially at the weekend.
- ❖ A regular dog walking group to bring people together
- ❖ Lots of potential for family learning
- ❖ Need more organised activities like fitness and walking
- ❖ More group activities to bring people into the park

Equipment and facilities

- ❖ More fun in the playground
- ❖ More flowerbeds - that would bring people in
- ❖ Groups of benches and picnic tables
- ❖ More benches and picnic tables in open area
- ❖ Need toilets
- ❖ More paths for walkers, runners, joggers and cyclists
- ❖ Lighting

Tackling antisocial behaviour

- ❖ Clear the litter
- ❖ More police patrols or park wardens
- ❖ Fix the equipment

What have we learnt from this consultation?

The consultation with a small number of women reinforces many of the findings from other mixed gender consultations and consultations with young people held in Cranford green spaces.

People feel unsafe because of:

- ❖ Lack of facilities.
- ❖ Lack of maintenance of equipment.
- ❖ Lack of maintenance of the park.
- ❖ Evidence of anti-social behaviour e.g. litter and graffiti.
- ❖ Lack of people using the space.
- ❖ Being near the edges of parks or in the playground with others feels safer because you can be seen by other people.
- ❖ Other park users especially groups or individual men can be intimidating.
- ❖ The park is not a welcoming place – no signage.
- ❖ Secluded or hidden areas of parks feel unsafe because they can conceal threatening people, provide places to be trapped and impede being seen or seeing others.
- ❖ No lighting. Parks feel safer during daylight hours.
- ❖ Limited group activities.

Why is this important?

When parks feel unsafe or unwelcoming, women and girls are less likely to spend time in them, limiting opportunities to socialise, improve well-being or fitness or take greener journeys through the spaces.

Mothers are less likely to take their children to a space that they think is unsafe and will warn their teenage children from using the spaces. This negatively impacts the normalization of using green spaces for travel, leisure and health.

Parks and play spaces should be maintained, well-used, sociable places that offer activities and facilities that are welcoming to all park users, including women and girls.

UK research

The findings from this very small study reflect research in other parts of the country.

[What makes a park feel safe or unsafe?: The views of women, girls and professionals in West Yorkshire](#) concluded that *“when women and girls feel unsafe, they are less likely to use, enjoy and benefit from parks, particularly when alone and after dark. Parks and play spaces should be better designed and managed to be well-used, sociable places that offer activities and facilities that are welcoming to women and girls. Changes should support women and girls to feel safe throughout the day and all-year round. Changes to parks must be part of an holistic approach that tackles threats of violence against women and girls, to address root causes of women and girls’ unsafety.”*

Their analysis of the determinants of fear and perceived safety are given here for comparison.

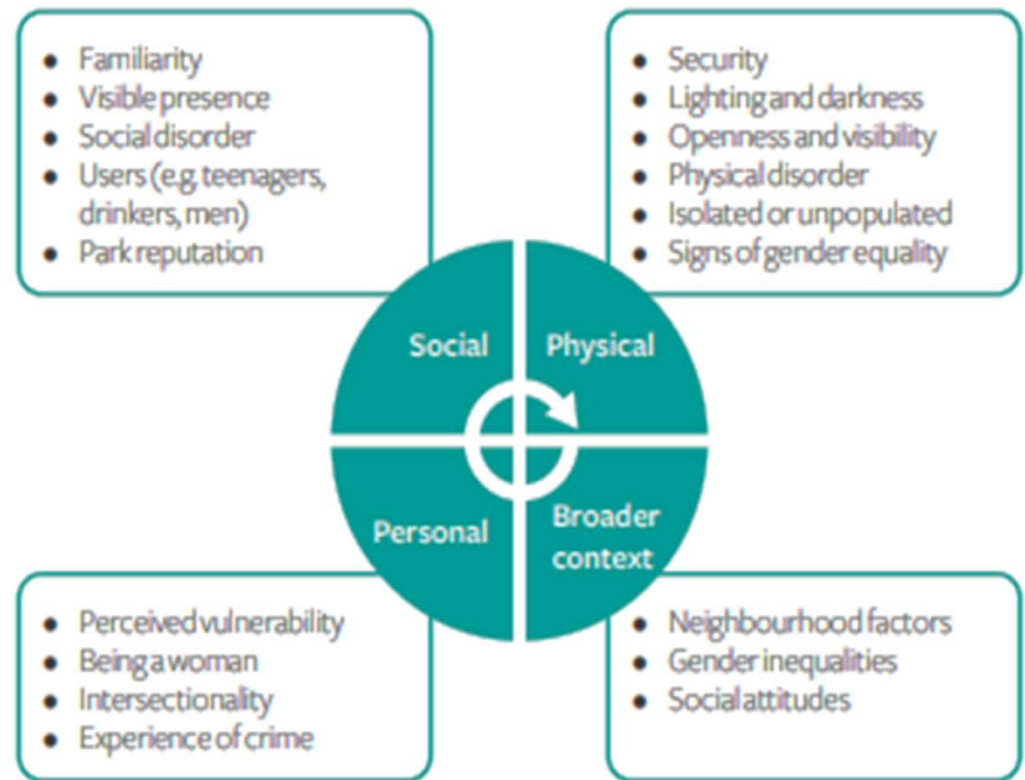


Figure 2.1 Determinants of fear and perceived safety

What can we do?

The consultation with a small number of women reinforces the need to continue the initiative begun by partners of Reclaiming the Riverside.

Project partners can:

- ❖ Work with the parks team to design the park for women's safety and independence. Well maintained facilities will bring more women and families to the park.
- ❖ Continue to deliver a programme of activities in the park as well-used parks feel safer because of increased passive surveillance and opportunities to seek help.
- ❖ Deliver activities as part of the wider programme of activities that support the presence of other women in the park. This should extend their use of the park, through choice and timing of activities.
- ❖ Where appropriate, encourage the use of mobile phone apps where women can allow trusted contacts to track their journeys.

Working with project partners

Reclaiming the Riverside project has a role to play in working with other partners to encourage more local women and girls into parks and to develop strategies that will help them to feeling safe.

This includes encouraging:

- ❖ Good and regular maintenance procedures for the park and equipment.
- ❖ Improved park design
- ❖ Greater visibility around equipment areas
- ❖ The presence of visible staff
- ❖ More family friendly and mixed-use facilities
- ❖ Inclusion of play equipment that will appeal to girls such as swings and hammocks, which allow them to socialize with their friends
- ❖ More organised activities that appeal to women and girls
- ❖ Encourage women to take sensible precautions, to avoid obvious hazards and report incidents where they have felt unsafe.
- ❖ Encourage positive stories that focus on the benefits of using the park
- ❖ Regular discussion of the issues affecting women



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With thanks to Apinder Sidhu

Personal Development Coach & Trainer

Apinder worked with us to develop and deliver the activity in Avenue Park.

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