

OUR LANCASTER WEST

THE YOUNG AMBASSADORS OF LANCASTER WEST ESTATE

This illustrated narrative is written, and illustrated by Julia King and Olivia Theocharides-Feldman from Social Place. It summarises the engagement programme and findings of an 'ambassadorship'-style project on Lancaster West Estate from June to December 2024. More specifically, it brings together the insights, concerns, desires, words, drawings, and proposals of the three young women residents of Lancaster West Estate – Catalina, Honey and Kayla (the Young Ambassadors) – who took part in the engagement.

The engagement was run by Social Place in partnership with Susannah Walker / Make Space for Girls; with additional support from landscape architects Turkington Martin. Funding was provided by Turkington Martin as part of a wider project in partnership with the Lancaster West Neighbourhood Team (LWNT).

Social Place was commissioned through Turkington Martin to run an in-depth engagement with a group of local young women to understand more about the concerns and desires that Lancaster West residents have about their estate. The engagement outcomes are intended to inform the future changes to the estate, and specifically, to inform Turkington Martin's landscape design for a series of sites across the estate. This work was born out of and builds on Lancaster West Neighborhood Team's commitment to meaningful co-design processes with residents as part of their overall approach to building a 21st century, model housing estate.

This engagement focused on working with individuals who identified as young women, due to their being largely absent from traditional consultation and engagement events, and from planning and design processes. By meaningfully investing in demographics marginalised from such processes we can broaden the inclusivity of many places and spaces and ensure that any future spatial changes do not further alienate already marginalised groups.

The cover has been illustrated by the three Young Ambassadors: Kayla, Honey and Catalina. The cover is about the estate they love and the future they imagine for it. This future is about celebration, peace, unity and culture - the culture of Lancaster West Estate in London.

We would like to extend a special thanks to Honey, Catalina and Kayla for their incredible generosity, thoughtfulness, insight, and thoroughness on this project; as well as to Make Space for Girls for their wonderful partnership; Turkington Martin for their attentiveness and readiness to respond to the design ideas of the Young Ambassadors; and last but not least, LWNT for commissioning this work.

SOCIAL PLACE

MAKE SPACE FOR GIRLS

PROJECT PARTNERS

turkington martin

LIGHT FOLLOWS BEHAVIOUR

LANCASTER WEST NEIGHBOURHOOD TEAM W11

OUR LANCASTER WEST *THE YOUNG AMBASSADORS OF LANCASTER WEST ESTATE*

When we – Social Place – first started working on the Lancaster West Estate it filled us with anxiety. What does it mean to work in the shadow of the Grenfell Tower, particularly when so many people are still waiting on answers? How can we run meaningful engagement with reciprocity in a place where so much has already been taken?

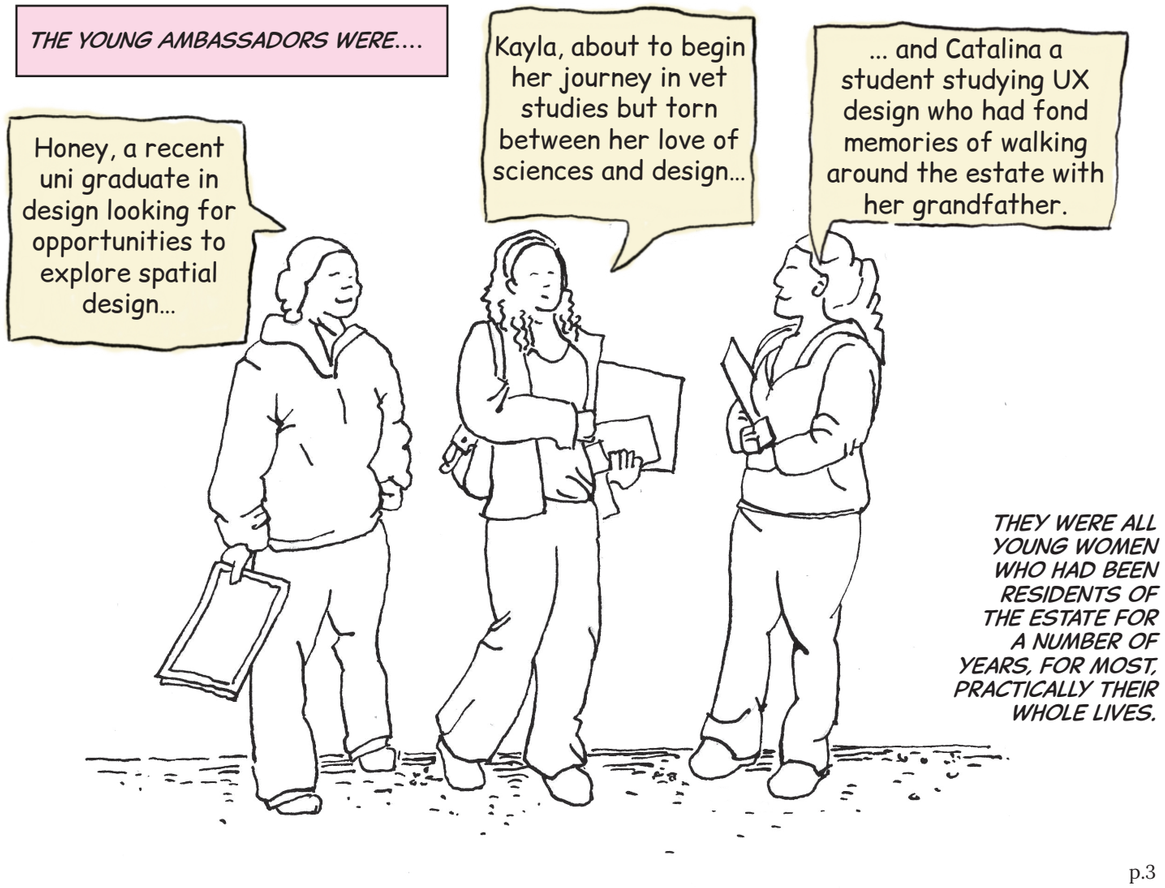
Moving tentatively, we thought – let's do what we know best – in a way that we know can be empowering. Let's run a paid design work experience – a 'young ambassadorship' of the estate– for a group of young women – statistically one of the most marginalised groups within planning and design processes – and put them at the heart of that process.

The team was us, Social Place, who devise tools and processes that enable diverse voices to contribute to design and planning decision-making, with Make Space for Girls, a charity advocating for better play spaces for teenage girls. We also worked with Turkington Martin, the landscape architect in charge of redesigning a significant portion of the estate's landscape, and the Lancaster West Neighbourhood Team (LWNT) team. An additional night walk with Light Follows Behaviour, lighting designers for the estate, was also included into the programme.

We thought that our engagement could positively contribute towards the experiences, voices and also CVs of some of the many residents of the estate. And as with every project, the bigger hope is always that the positive impact of this way of working seeps outwards; and that the recommendations put forward by the Young Ambassadors will resonate with the hopes and desires of others for the places in which they live.

We advertised the role through LancWest works (a jobs portal) and local jobs boards. While we originally set out to hire one Young Ambassador, three wonderful young women applied, and with little need to convince the project team they were all hired.

Together, over eight weeks we guided them through a curriculum we designed for them – a series of lectures, readings, and creative activities – which touched on social scientific and architectural methods. They explored questions about: the history of social housing and housing as a right; the relationship between gender, race and space; and design and its impact on our public lives. Each week their insights grew deeper; they were questioning aspects of their daily lives that they had previously normalised, and were speculating in new ways about the places in which they had lived.

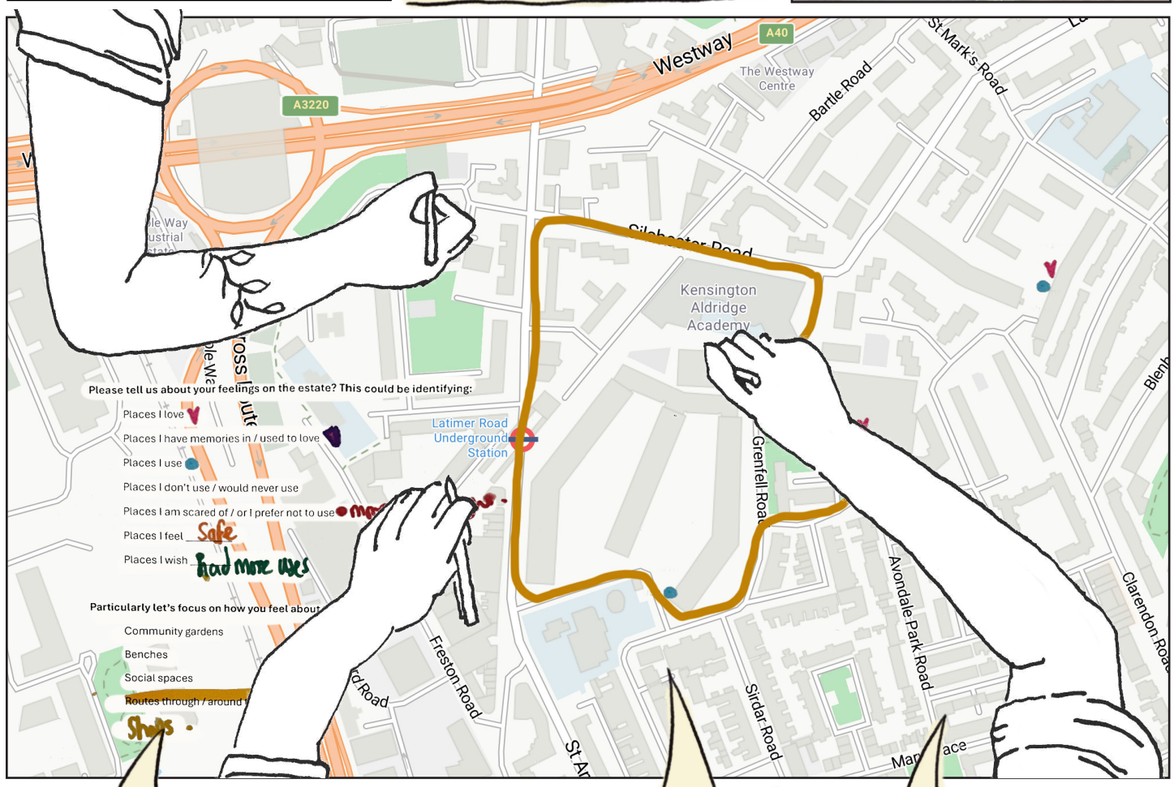


WEEK 1: LOCATING YOURSELF

The Young Ambassadors began their work by mapping the local places they used, the ones they didn't and those that they would like to use. We learned about key places to their local community infrastructure, how they moved around the estate and that they never lingered or 'hung out' around the estate. Instead, they used its spaces as a 'pass through' or 'for convenience'.

"Our community is made up of places like Maxilla, Buggsi's supermarket (now a Nisa), the tapestry of artworks under the Westway, the green hearts peppered around the area in remembrance and solidarity with Grenfell, and the Kensington Leisure Centre."





"We don't hang out around the estate - we go towards Westfield in Shepherd's Bush, Notting Hill, and if it's sunny, parks like Hyde Park or Holland Park to hang out."

"At first I thought I don't know where I go, but then I did a walk of where I usually go, and then thought... actually I would use that more... and where I go has shops, more green space and if that was in the estate I would stay more."

"I avoid areas like Ladbroke Grove or Shepherd's Bush after 10PM because the buses take a long time to arrive and walking home means walking through alleyways..."

WEEK 2 : JOURNEYS THROUGH

In our second week together, we went on a site visit around the area and the estate, the Young Ambassadors took notes and audio recordings (see page 14).

Later they mapped their thoughts and experiences of the area, and drafted trip chains – diagrammatic maps of how and where they journeyed on an average weekday and weekend.

"I would love there to be more spaces I could socialise..."

"It is weird I have never been here before..."



"I would like to see public spaces where residents can sit and chat, maybe with a neighbour, a few family members, or a couple of local friends..."

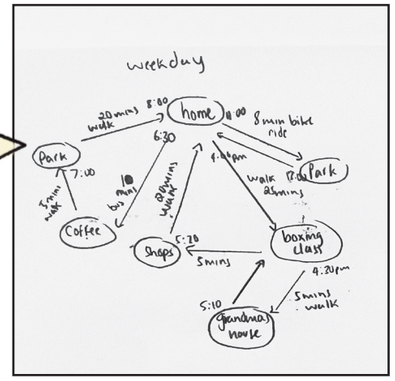
"It also makes the area at the bottom of the stairs quite blocked off / less visible. At night it would deter me from going as it gets dark."



"This was originally a nice straight pathway to the other walkway, but has been blocked off by the boiler system so is classed as somewhere we can no longer go. It makes the route much longer and probably discourages people from visiting areas of the estate they would have before due to the extra effort needed to go around it."



"Our trip chains show busy lives, multiple trips using different transport modes, and the impact of darkness and weather on how and where we go. When it's dark we often feel unsafe and have to change our routes home..."



The Young Ambassadors' maps disclosed that they had not previously realised the impact of the Grenfell Tragedy on how they moved around their local areas: 'temporary' boiler systems set up after the fire blocked their routes home, parks where they used to play had been absorbed into the blocked off Grenfell Tower site, and apartment blocks which had been emptied and subsequently abandoned due to their proximity to the Tower relegated entire parts of the estate and nearby greens to 'eeriness' and 'creepiness'. The Young Ambassadors avoided these areas entirely.

WEEK 3: PUBLIC(NESS)

In their third week of work, the Young Ambassadors studied public space, the notion of 'publicness' and the relationship between gender and public space. They conducted their own independent site studies of various areas of the estate that were significant to them: for example, a place they liked, didn't like or had fond memories of.

CATALINA REFLECTED ON THE AREA'S SENSE OF COMMUNITY ...



"This area has so many places to be a community, after Grenfell people just came together. The people at Buggsi's always know you and your family; there's lots of cafes with tables on the pavement and – it's just people mixing. But benches are disappearing from the estate, Buggsi's is now a Nisa, and even Armadillo cafe and the Curve community centre are shut down. We need these spaces for our community."

KAYLA FOCUSED ON PATHS AROUND HER ESTATE, ENTRANCES TO GREEN SPACES AND HER EXPERIENCE AS A DOG OWNER...



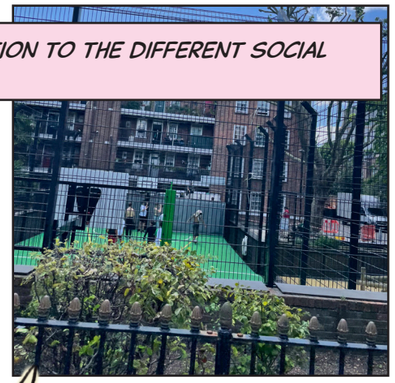


"I live near Hurstway Walk, it has a nice path running through it but the ground is so uneven... you can't really play and you can't really sit anywhere – there's just a few uncomfortable and cold metal benches that men often take over. Also, there's nowhere where dog-owners are allowed to bring their dogs so we have to use the green even though there's no dogs allowed..."



HONEY PAID PARTICULAR ATTENTION TO THE DIFFERENT SOCIAL SPACES ON THE ESTATE...





"There are actually some really beautiful spaces on the estate, like Camelford Walk Terrace Gardens, but they're almost always locked. I'm not sure if I'm allowed to use them, and who they're meant for..."

....All three young women felt that there was great potential for good and functioning public spaces on their estate but changes needed to be made to facilitate them.

WEEK 4: IDENTIFYING THE ISSUES

In week four we did another walk around the estate, this time pausing where the landscape architects had identified 'sites of interest' – particularly Hurstway Walk Green and the Verity Close Gardens of Life.

WE FOCUSED ON BENCHES...



"All our benches are being removed. It's like when something bad happens, or they think something will happen, they take them away... It's just 'wrong place wrong time' but its like they're punishing all of us... and the metal benches they've left feel like they're intentionally uncomfortable so people won't sit there."

"I do feel uncomfortable when it's dark and it's men drinking or smoking on the benches... but if there were more interesting benches in places and shapes that families and groups of friends wanted to use then maybe this wouldn't be so much of an issue..."



... "I would actually feel safer, because I would know I could be overseen."



"If I want to exercise I would do it early in the morning as I wouldn't want to feel watched or end up on someone's TikTok.. But if there were other people doing their own thing then maybe it wouldn't be so intimidating."

AND SAFETY...



"It's really tragic that a boy was shot in Verity Close... I want the estate to be a space where you're surprised that someone could get shot there."



Their journeys around and exiting the estate were not always pleasant. There were certain parts of the estate that they refused to cut across when dark out of fear, and fading lights in the underpass outside Latimer Road station made the young women feel uneasy. Physical changes to the estate as a result of the Grenfell Tragedy, had established a maze: novel deadends blocked their usual routes and gave them a sense of being trapped.

WEEK 4 CONT.



"I remember walking around the community gardens in Hurstway with my grandfather – he used to pick the vegetables and herbs. Now it's rundown, and overgrown, and the building along the garden is abandoned since it was evacuated during Grenfell. It feels like a creepy haunted house. I avoid the gardens now, but I wish that place could be the one I remember."

WE ALSO TALKED ABOUT PURPOSE AND CHARACTER OF THE ESTATE...



"Verity Close – it's the 'garden of life' – it should feel like it."



"There's really only a kid's playground in Hurstway, and nothing for anyone else. I wish the space had more purpose like a dog park, a beautiful water fountain or a picnicking area."

"There's not that many people actually using Verity or Hurstway greens, so it doesn't feel very inviting, welcoming or safe."



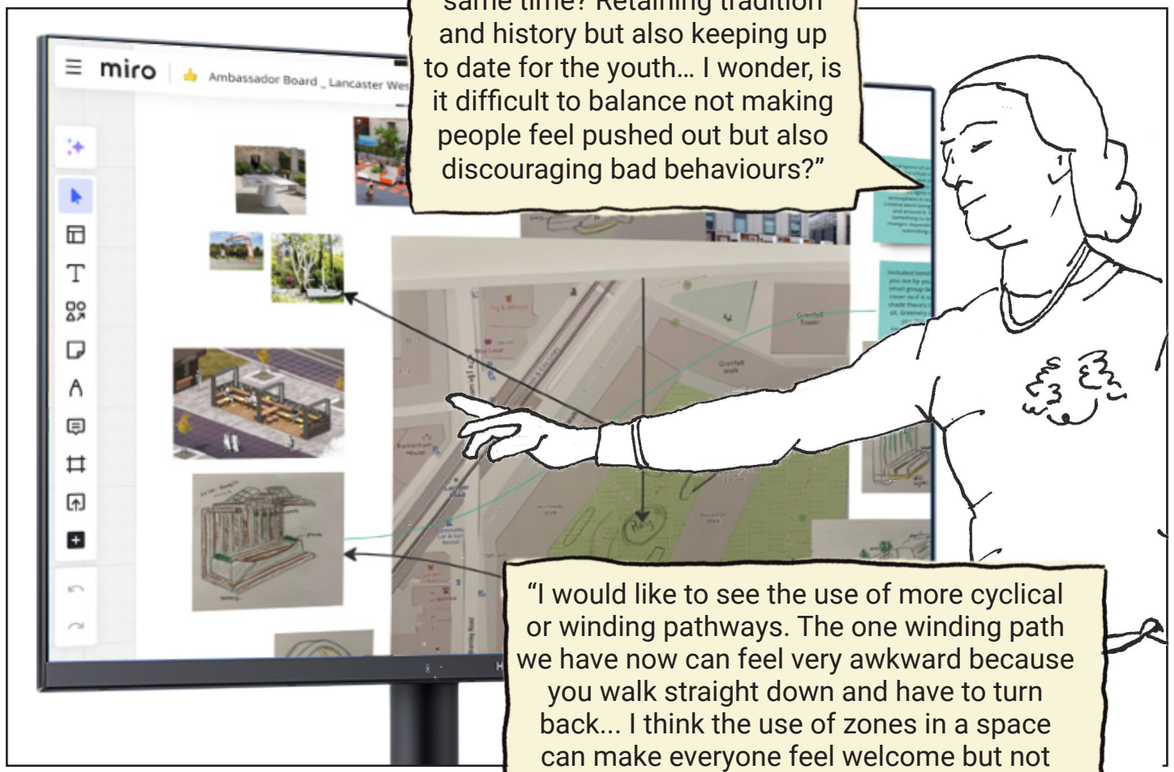
The entrances to both green spaces were problematic. In Hurstway, the entrance was under a walkway, hidden, and cluttered by large rubbish bins. Honey who lived in another part of the estate did not know Hurstway Green existed because, while fairly large, it felt so hidden that you needed "to know, to know". In Verity Close, the gates were tall which seemed intimidating. Across six visits, Verity Close's gates have only been open once, and we have never seen anyone in the park. Access, information on access, and a desire for these spaces to be used (as a form of defacto safety) emerged as critical aspects of desirable public spaces.

WEEK 5: WHAT COULD BE...

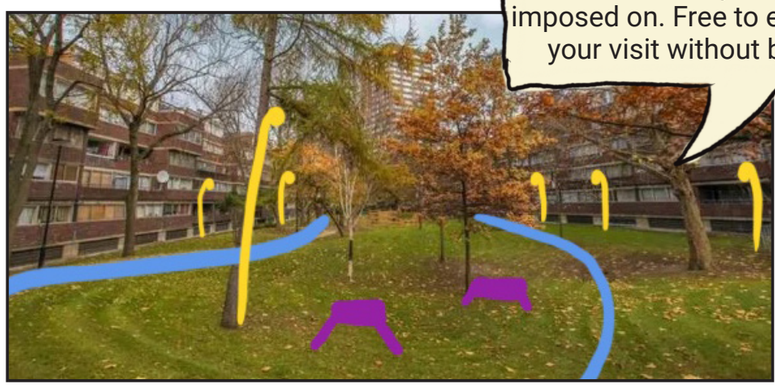
In week five, we focused on Hurstway Walk Green and the Verity Close Gardens of Life but this time thinking speculatively – shifting from what are these spaces like to what could these spaces be? The Young Ambassadors each sketched and mood-boarded a series of interventions that they felt would make the space a (more) ideal space for them.



"I wonder, how can public spaces cater to both young and old at the same time? Retaining tradition and history but also keeping up to date for the youth... I wonder, is it difficult to balance not making people feel pushed out but also discouraging bad behaviours?"



"I would like to see the use of more cyclical or winding pathways. The one winding path we have now can feel very awkward because you walk straight down and have to turn back... I think the use of zones in a space can make everyone feel welcome but not imposed on. Free to engage in the purpose of your visit without being self conscious."



NEXT PAGE...

We then did another site visit, talking through their proposals and the space as a whole. Following this, they collaboratively collaged their shared vision of both Hurstway Green and the Verity Close Gardens of Life (next page).

HURSTWAY WALK PROPOSALS

Walking Loop
- Create a walking loop connecting different parts of the space and enabling residents to walk and wander
- Integrate playful pathway markings (eg. hopscotch) and an aesthetic colour scheme along the loop
- Add interesting benches as stop points along the loop

Quiet space/ garden of meditation
- Colourful mural on empty building and planting to make space less eerie
- Better maintenance of and signage encouraging use within garden area
- Create well-lit cosy and calm seating / lounging opportunities

Family / Social Zone
- Replace current children's playground with a family/ social zone to have the central area of the park value all ages of residents and community members
- Install a fountain or aesthetic centrepiece (encouraging people to sit and linger)
- Include areas for picnics, and install social seating and tables for different groups of people to use

Dog Zone
- Integrate a gated dog area for residents with dogs to walk and let their dogs off lead

Seating
- Integrate seating – particularly around trees – throughout the green space to make this a safer place where users can linger and enjoy doing nothing
- The seating should be creative such as lounging seating, or green grass mounds

Play Dip
- Build new / move children's playground in the circular dipped surface in southeast part of the park
- Add tiered seating (eg. for parents) and children's slides along sloped hill going down to / watching over the playground

An Event
- Have space for a food / coffee cart to set up around entrance

Blank walls
- Have art murals on blank walls around green area created by local artists, residents or young people and reflecting the culture of the area

Entrance
- Make the entrance more beautiful, clear and open
- Add aesthetic lighting and a welcome mural chosen by Walkway residents
- Make the different ground levels at the entrance more inviting (eg. stepped seating) and consider removing the gate and bins
- Introduce QR codes linked to green space and wider estate information

VERITY CLOSE PROPOSALS

Leisure Centre Wall
- Activate the wall with a climbing frame or a large aesthetic mural

The Gym
- Expand gym area and add less stereotypically male equipment (eg. add yoga and callisthenics spaces, adult jungle gym)

The Tree of Life
- Creatively light the big tree in the park so the 'Garden of Life' has meaning with a 'Tree of Life'
- Include atmospheric lighting around, and calm seating (eg. swinging seating, curved)
- Make clear and celebrate that this is the exact centre of the estate

The Bridge
- Make bridge bigger and include features (eg. water, planting, children's play tunnel) underneath or around

Cosy Gazebo
- Expand Gazebo and add lights
- A book exchange
- Art mural celebrating local residents and culture

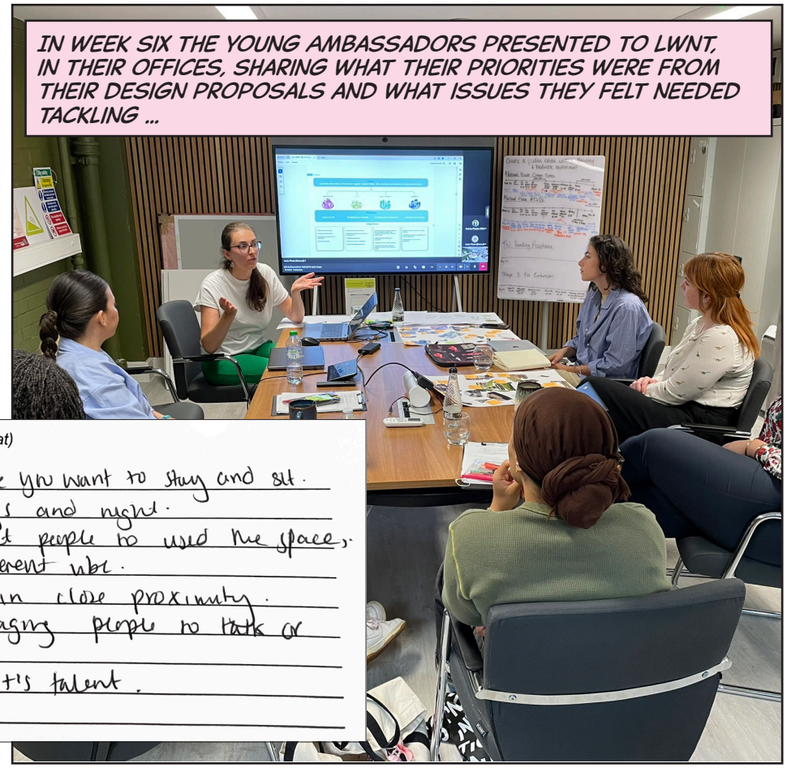
The Entrance
- List and ensure reliable and consistent opening hours / guardian details, consider QR codes linked to green spaces and wider estate information
- Replace tall and intimidating fencing with colourful playful climbing frames
- Place inviting seating by the entrance

The Park Extension
- Expand the park
- Reorganise the existing parking

WEEK 6, 7, 8 & 9 : REFLECTING AND SHARING...

Week six, seven, and eight saw the Young Ambassadors reflect on, present, and amend their design proposals with the client (LWNT), the landscape architects (Turkington Martin), and lighting designers (Light Follows Behaviour).

IN WEEK SIX THE YOUNG AMBASSADORS PRESENTED TO LWNT, IN THEIR OFFICES, SHARING WHAT THEIR PRIORITIES WERE FROM THEIR DESIGN PROPOSALS AND WHAT ISSUES THEY FELT NEEDED TACKLING ...

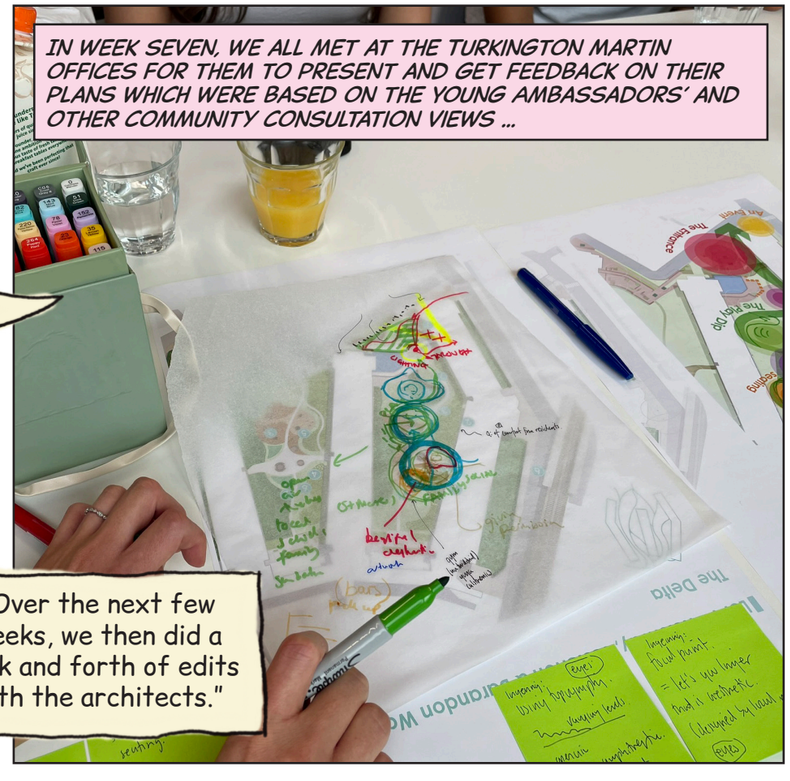


- What is my priority? *(*list or paragraph format)*

~~Create~~ Scenic spaces that make you want to stay and sit.
- good lighting for evenings and night.
- encouraging a mix of different people to used the space. So they can all bring a different vibe.
- convenient everything is in close proximity.
- social spaces encouraging people to talk or families to go out
- showcasing the area and it's talent.

"We discussed and amended plans, identifying places where there would have to be compromises because of the context and technical limitations of the site, conflicting views with other residents, or simply the budget."

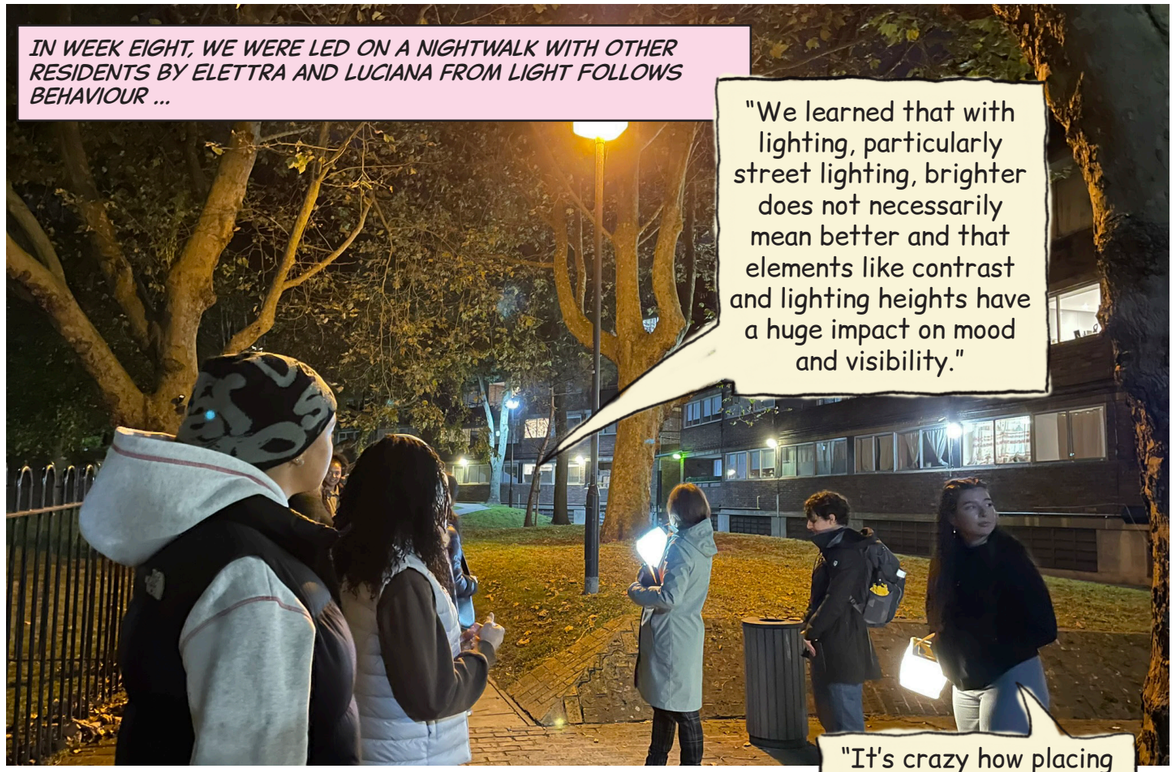
IN WEEK SEVEN, WE ALL MET AT THE TURKINGTON MARTIN OFFICES FOR THEM TO PRESENT AND GET FEEDBACK ON THEIR PLANS WHICH WERE BASED ON THE YOUNG AMBASSADORS' AND OTHER COMMUNITY CONSULTATION VIEWS ...





"Over the next few weeks, we then did a back and forth of edits with the architects."

IN WEEK EIGHT, WE WERE LED ON A NIGHTWALK WITH OTHER RESIDENTS BY ELETTRA AND LUCIANA FROM LIGHT FOLLOWS BEHAVIOUR ...



"We learned that with lighting, particularly street lighting, brighter does not necessarily mean better and that elements like contrast and lighting heights have a huge impact on mood and visibility."

"It's crazy how placing soft, warm lighting around a bench area makes that space feel instantly cosy and welcoming. I would gladly use that after dark."

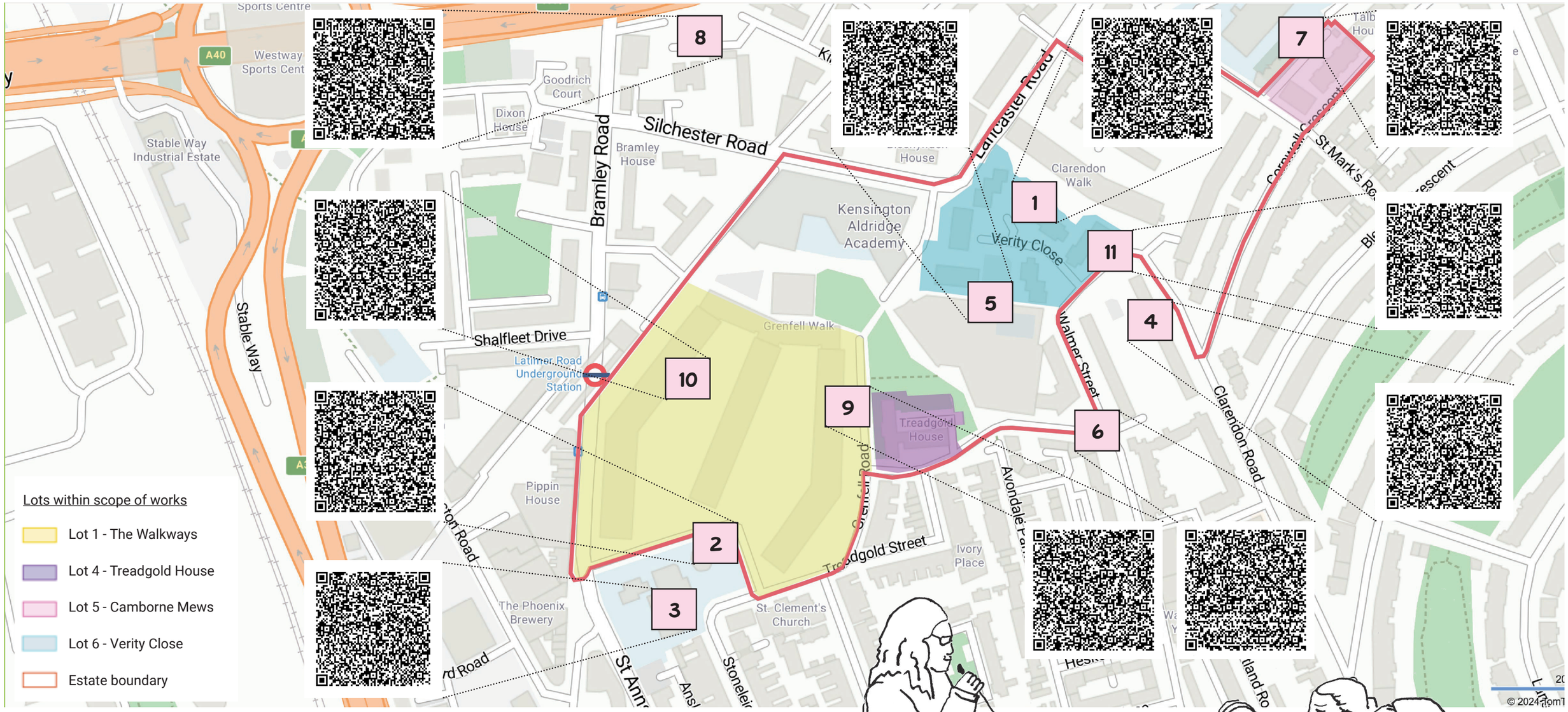
IN WEEK NINE, WE ATTENDED A COMMUNITY CONSULTATION EVENT AND TALKED TO RESIDENTS ABOUT OUR INVOLVEMENT IN THE DESIGNS, AND WERE INVITED AS GUESTS ON A PODCAST ...



"It was really great to show members of the community our work and how we influenced the designs... Residents really like that we were involved in this way"

While there were certainly parts of the estate that were underlit, more often than not the estate was overlit. The Young Ambassadors reflected on how this made the space feel darker as the contrast between what was in the spotlight's view versus what was immediately beyond it was so stark.

OUR ESTATE, A SOUND MAP...



1. BALANCING KEEPING SAFE AND FOSTERING COMMUNITY

2. MEMORIES AND EXPERIENCES OF HURSTWAY WALK GREEN

3. THE WEALTH DIVIDE OF WEST LONDON

4. WORKING OUT IN PUBLIC

5. THE PARK THAT WAS LOST IN THE FIRE

6. SOCIAL PUBLIC SPACE OUTSIDE KENSINGTON LEISURE CENTRE

7. PLAY ON LANCASTER WEST ESTATE

8. POLITICAL AND COMMUNITY SPACE UNDER THE WESTWAY

9. DESIGNING SOMETHING BEAUTIFUL IN HURSTWAY WALK GREEN

10. SAFETY, WE WANT TO BE LOOKED AFTER NOT WATCHED

11. VIOLENCE IN VERITY CLOSE



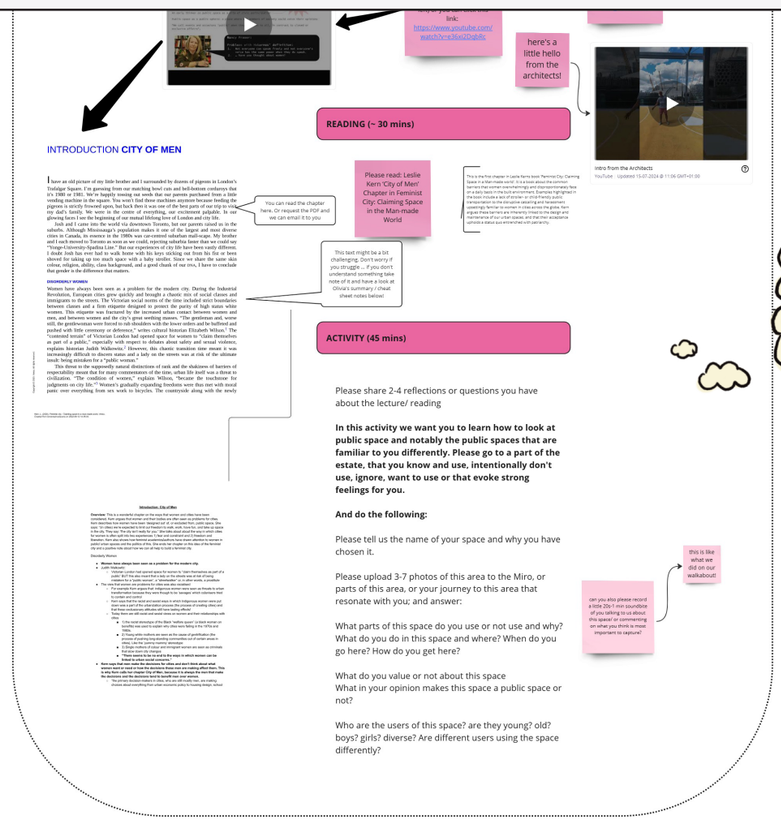
FINAL THOUGHTS...

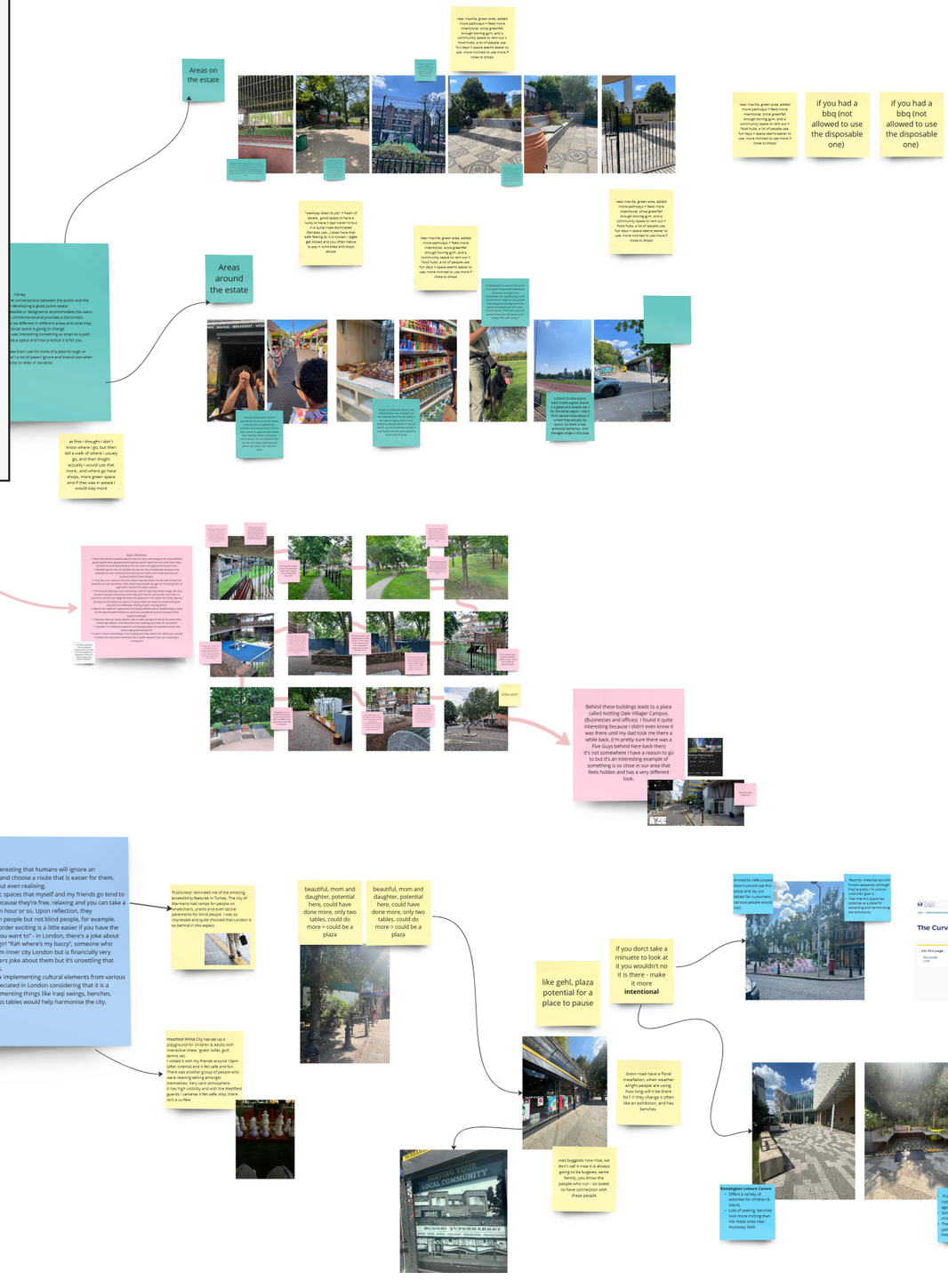
When we began this project, we were anxious about working in the shadow of Grenfell Tower. Now we see that anxiety as a helpful emotion, one that should accompany anyone doing engagement work with those who have been overlooked or even ignored. It is still particularly appropriate here. One of the many painful parts of the tragedy of Grenfell is that so many voices were not listened to and so it is essential that we think differently, and meaningfully about the methods we use and the ways in which we do engagement and carry out consultation processes.

By creating the paid Young Ambassador programme, with the opportunity to both work and learn, we have enabled the three young women residents involved to have time and space - but also the tools - to reflect on their own experiences as well as those of other residents in ways that feel genuine to them. But it has not just been about including their voices, they have been part of wider consultation events, highlighting their observations and exchanging ideas and concerns - whether shared or disparate - with other residents. And while their voices cannot speak for everyone, many of their experiences, concerns, and aspirations for the place in which they live are echoed across the estate.

We also believe that the process the Young Ambassadors have gone through has brought to light observations and design proposals that would likely have been missed in traditional consultation processes: for example on the stigma the young women residents of the estate feel about their postcode; the significance of an abandoned building at the back of a green space; the punishment they feel at the loss of a local bench; but also and with hope: the impact they feel thoughtful walking loops, creative social benches, and playful dog parks can have on their daily experiences of the places in which they live.

The next step is for the architects, clients and the borough to take on the Young Ambassadors' wonderful proposals and continue to address their concerns as Lancaster West changes and develops. We hope that the residents' voices will continue to be heard and that their ideas and insights will take up residence in the estate; but more than that, we also hope that the lessons of considered and long-term engagement, and the benefits that can bring for residents and participants, and clients, are developed and brought into many more projects on the estate, in the borough and beyond.





TO EXPLORE THE MIRO BOARD AND SEE MORE ABOUT HOW THE WORK WAS TRANSLATED INTO ARCHITECTURAL PLANS FOLLOW THIS LINK

IF YOU HAVE ANY QUESTIONS PLEASE DO NOT HESITATE TO GET IN TOUCH !

FURTHER RESOURCES

We see this work as contributing to, and part of a growing scholarship, and area of research and practice aimed at centring and amplifying the voices of young people, particularly young women, in design and development. The following further resources have influenced and offer context and further thought on the work presented in this illustrated narrative:

Reports/Handbooks

- Mayor of London, Safety in Public Spaces: Women, Girls and Gender Diverse People
- Mayor of London, Making London Child Friendly, Designing Places and Streets for Young People
- Arup, Cities Alive: Designing cities that work for women
- London Legacy Development Corporation, Creating places that work for Women and Girls
- Association for Historical Dialogue and Research, A Space of Our Own: A Handbook on Gender and Monument in Intersectional Public Spaces
- Arup, Racial Equity & the City: Experiences People of Colour in London
- Grosvenor Britain and Ireland, I live here too: Why young people want a stake in their neighbourhood
- The Young Foundation, Peer Research in the UK

Articles & Essays

- Bell Hooks (1990), Homeplace (A Site of Resistance)
- Alexandra Lange (2021), Teen Girls Need Better Public Spaces to Hang Out
- Harini Nagendra and Amrita Sen (2022), Our Cities Are Designed for Men, by Men
- Noele Illien (2021), How Vienna Built a Gender Equal City
- Pascale Lapalud and Chris Blache (2016), Gender & urban furniture: A bench is a bench is a bench?
- Scott Franklan, How Can We Better Understand Mobility of Care?

Research

- Theocharides-Feldman, O., & King, J. (2024). 'There's nowhere for us': spatial and scalar experiences of judgement amongst young women in the UK. Gender & Development, 32(1–2), 223–244.
- Kinnon R MacKinnon, Adrian Guta, Jijian Voronka, Merrick Pilling, Charmaine C Williams, Carol Strike, Lori E Ross. (2021). The Political Economy of Peer Research: Mapping the Possibilities and Precarities of Paying People for Lived Experience. The British Journal of Social Work, Volume 51, Issue 3, Pages 888–906
- Theocharides-Feldman, O. and King, J. (2024) "Locating Young Women in Public Space: A Feminist Spatial Researcher-in-Residence Model", The Journal of Public Space, 9(1), pp. 99–108.
- Make Space for Girls (2023) The Research Background.
- Walker, S. (2024) "Making Spaces for Girls : Their Right to the Public Realm" , The Journal of Public Space, 9(1), pp. 89–98.
- Miranda, Julia Vansetti, and Akkelies van Nes. (2020) "Sexual Violence in the City: Space, Gender, and the Occurrence of Sexual Violence in Rotterdam" Sustainability 12, no. 18: 7609.

Books

- Caroline Criado Perez (2020) *Invisible Women*
- Leslie Kern (2012) *Feminist City: Claiming Space in a Man-Made World*

Videos

- LSE Cities, Are girls being designed out of public spaces? - Are girls being designed out of public spaces?
- ICLD Sweden, The gendered landscape - in the town of Umeå
- BBC News, How to Build a City for Women

Podcasts

- Local Voices for Sustainability, Cultivating the Gender Equal City in Umeå
- Open City, Would young people design a better London for us all?
- Equality In Housing, Gendering the Housing Emergency


celebration
friendship
peace
culture
unity
Argan Tree Cafe
GRENFELL
FOREVER IN
OUR HEARTS
THE TRUTH WILL NOT BE HIDDEN
GRENFELL TOWER FIRE
Justice
72
GRENFELL