

EXPLORING ANGEL MEADOW, BROOMFIELD

WHAT WOULD MAKE ANGEL
MEADOW MORE WELCOMING
TO GIRLS AND YOUNG WOMEN?

JULY 2024



Safer
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Angel Meadow, Broomfield Park playground

Social Place (formerly Julia King & Associates) and Make Space for Girls would like to express their thanks to the amazing young women from Chelmer Valley High School for sharing their experiences, insights and creativity with us; Chelmsford City Council and the Essex Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner for funding this work; the councillors and officers at Chelmsford City Council, Broomfield Village Hall Charity and Broomfield Parish Council; the Essex Police Children and Young Persons Officer; Active Essex; and the staff at Chelmer Valley High School for all their support.

This report reflects the views of 11 participants, aged 13-14 who identified as women; while these views shed light on some of their perspectives, this demographic is very diverse and has varied perspectives and experiences. Where this report refers to boys and girls, young men and young women, these categories refer to gender identities; we recognise that the concept of gender is not binary nor invariable or biologically determined, but, rather, socially constructed. Where such a framing is used we consider this to contribute to an evidence base consistent with the legal framework of the Public Sector Equality Duty under the Equality Act 2010, which requires public bodies to proactively consider (among other things) reducing discrimination in the use of public spaces - like parks - in binary terms. Our hope is that by encouraging public bodies including all local authorities to consider potential discrimination in their decision-making that we will make the case for more inclusive public spaces.

In addition, while we primarily discuss age and gender throughout the report, we take an intersectional approach to our work acknowledging that other characteristics such as class, belief, race and disability also have an impact on experiences of public space. We believe the findings in this report build on a body of work which is contributing towards a step change and expansion of what constitutes teenage provision in public space which would improve offering for not only girls and young women, but a broad, diverse constituency of young people including gender diverse young people.

INTRODUCTION

This project explored with young women how Angel Meadow, Broomfield in Chelmsford could become a more inclusive place for more girls and young women. We asked 11 young women from Chelmer Valley High School to tell us what a good public space meant for them. Here's what they shared:

"A safe and calming space where you are able to be yourself"

"Where girls can go and feel safe at any time of day"

"A place where everyone is free to go and do what they want for little to no money"

"A place to get away and feel free and have fun; where we can do what we want without being judged"

"A space for everyone to have fun no matter what gender you are"

This is an important subject to explore, because research shows that many young people, particularly young women and gender diverse young people, do not feel welcome, comfortable or safe in public space and do not have a say when it comes to their local areas. For example:

- A 2022 Girlguiding survey showed that over 80% of girls and young women feel unsafe when they are out alone;
- Work by the YWL in Scotland in 2021 found that only 20% of girls and young women in Glasgow felt very comfortable in the park that they had chosen to use;
- A 2018 Stonewall report revealed that more than two in five trans people wholly avoid certain streets due to fear; and
- Research by Grosvenor in 2021 indicates that, 89% of young adults aged 16-18 have never been consulted about their local areas.

Parks form a vital component of public life, providing the opportunity for activity, social connection, interaction with nature, and community cohesion. But many young people do not use parks, and [research](#) shows that there is a marked difference based on gender. For example, research carried out by Julia King and Olivia Theocharides-Feldman of the London School of Economics and Make Space for Girls showed that:

- 63% of young men regularly used parks; compared to only 31% of young women;
- 50% of young men used football pitches / ball courts regularly; compared to only 6% of young women.

Provision for teenagers in parks is usually considered in terms of a relatively small range of facilities: skate parks, fenced multi-use games areas (sometimes called MUGAs) and other pitches and BMX or pump tracks. While no one actively sets out to make these places unwelcoming, in practice they often become gendered spaces. Typically taken over by boys and young men, teenage girls and gender diverse young people often feel that they do not have outdoor spaces that they can claim for play, relaxation and social interaction.

As reflected by some of the Participants in this project:

"If boys are playing football then the girls should have somewhere to play the sport they want to play and not feel let out. If the girls want to play a sport that boys play, then they should be able to play that without people judging them"

"Going out I dont always feel comfortable using the resources some places provide because of the amount of people (typically boys) who like to use them as well...there are many judgemental people who also watch your every move."

"Sometimes you feel as though you can't be yourself"

"Because I am a young girl I sometimes feel worried that someone will target me because I could be more vulnerable"

In a recent [survey](#) carried out by Make Space for Girls, they found that 92% of the teenage users of fenced pitches and over 84% of the teenage users of skateparks were boys and young men.

This gendered difference matters, it signals that many girls, young women and gender diverse young people's right to enjoy the benefits of parks are not being exercised. And it matters to Local Councils who want to comply with their duties under the [Public Sector Equality Duty](#) in the Equality Act 2010.

We need to think differently about what provisions are put in parks if we want our parks to be used more and by more diverse young people. To think differently, we need to listen to those young people who don't currently feel the park is "for them".



"Put up your hand if you don't use these (typical youth provision) spaces?"



Basket and football pitch with playground behind

SUMMARY

This project worked with 11 young people (the Participants) age 13-14 who identified as women. It asked the Participants to explore what interventions in Angel Meadow, Broomfield would make the park more welcoming to them. We hope that this report will form part of the local evidence base to inform developers and planners in Chelmsford when considering how, in accordance with the Chelmsford Local Plan, coherent networks of open public space can provide for informal sport, recreation, leisure and community spaces that are more inclusive of more young people, in a way that goes beyond the traditional teen provisions of MUGA, skatepark and BMX track.

In terms of teen provision, Angel Meadow has a fenced football pitch, hireable open field football pitches, a youth shelter, and a hard-court with hoops. These facilities, though some Participants had used them as part of organised sports events or clubs, were not identified by any of the Participants as something that they used or that would make them feel welcome in the park.

Through a series of 6 workshops delivered in the Summer term 2024 at Chelmer Valley High School, we worked with the Participants to focus on “a space for me”. The details of the workshops are set out in Appendix 1 to this report. To ensure that they were truly foregrounding their own needs, we discouraged the Participants from focussing on “a space for teenagers” or “an inclusive space for all”. This is because asking about a “teenage space” often results in a focus on skateparks and pitches; and asking about an inclusive space results in a focus on children’s playgrounds and accessibility for those with mobility impairments.

Through the workshops, the Participants developed three criteria against which they assessed whether a space was “a space for me”:

1. **Affordability:** they recognised the importance of affordability for them to be able to use a space, especially regularly. As park use is free, this may offer a particularly good opportunity to promote young women’s inclusion through amenities that are affordable to them.
2. **Feeling safe:** they distinguished actual safety or fear of crime from the experience of feeling safe which was impacting for example by number of people around, behaviours (eg. smoking), and lighting. It was essential to a space that was for them to feel safe, secure, and comfortable.
3. **Judgement:** it was essential to them that a space for them be non-judgemental. They felt judged in many spaces recognising that some spaces were more prone to their feeling judged such as on swings in a playground for being too old; or on football pitches for being girls.

The Participants assessed Angel Meadow, Broomfield against these three criteria. Their assessments (Figure 1) show that the park requires certain changes to become a space that is welcoming for more young women and girls.

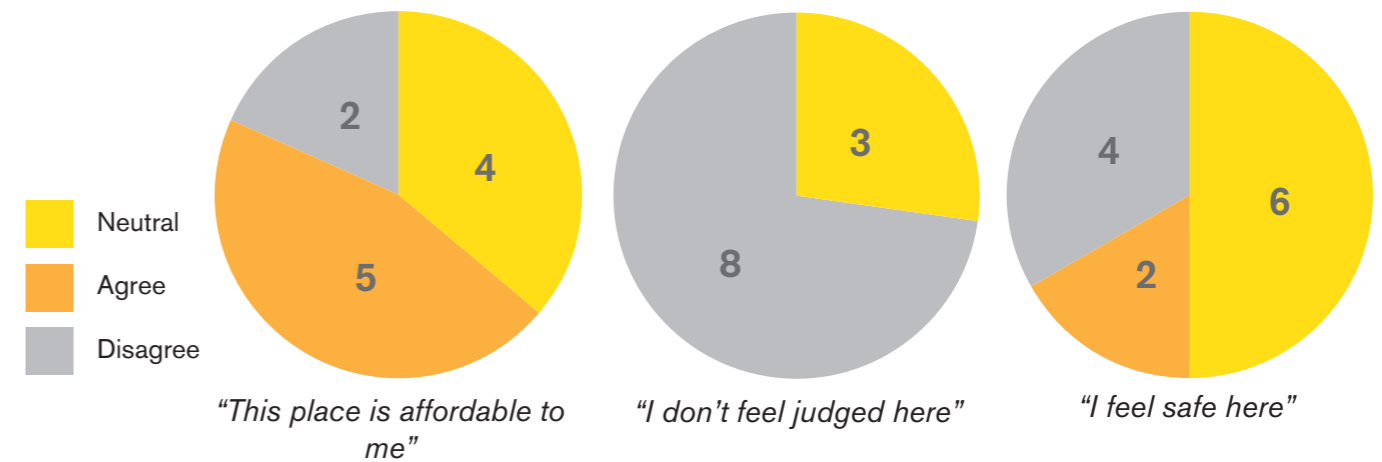



FIGURE 1


As part of the project, the Participants were tasked with studying the park. They focused on a few key areas: the open fields, the children’s playground, the outdoor gym, MUGA and hard court, the cafe, the woods, the new flower garden, and finally the youth shelter. They focused on assessing whether and when they would use such spaces, if it was “a space for me” and therefore considered various conditions, such as different seasons, times of day, being in groups versus alone.





'Voting' on feelings


In light of this work the Participants developed a series of proposals for making Angel Meadow more appealing as “a space for me”. It is important to note that due to the park being dominated by sport – notably a large unfenced pitch in the central green which is available for hire by the football club adjacent to the park, the Participants felt limited about where they could suggest putting their visions into place. Their key proposals were:

 **Shelter:** They wanted shelters (but not like the existing teen shelter); “I didn't realise this was for us”, “It looks like somewhere roadmen would hang out”, “Last time I used this was end of year six... it's sketchy, uncomfortable, the colour is boring and it has bad tags.” They proposed a larger creative and colourful shelter made of wood which included comfortable (not metal) seating, fairy lights and cushions, “a safe space you can talk without authority figures” and “a space you can escape to if you have an argument with mum.”


 **Lighting:** They all felt there was a need for better lighting and suggested connecting key areas of the park with a range of lighting proposals including: fairy lights, colourful LEDs, Geometric lighting linearly running playfully across the park, lighting built into seating, and lighting trees. They felt this would help make this “a place where you aren't thinking about ‘what ifs’ and you don't have to look behind you.”


 **MUGA:** The participants described the existing fenced pitch (which none of them used) as: “it's always locked, and with boys or really young kids”, “I'm not sure if I can use it”, “boys don't want to let us join because they think we're weak”. They wanted “more activities for sports that aren't dominated by boys”; such as the possibility of a retractable netball, tennis and badminton net, and floor inscriptions that could be used for alternative games and play, as well as colourful signage to tell you “if and when you're allowed to be there.”


 **People and Stewardship:** They all felt that having a range of different park users and knowing there was someone in the village hall during the day that they could turn to made them feel safer as well as seeing that the area was kept clean. As one shared: “We want lots of people there to feel safe.”


 **Seating:** It was a priority to them to have a place to be able to just hangout and they suggested a range of social seating: circular and creative seating to be in groups of friends or alone; swinging seating with tables where you can “eat, sit, hang out, be alone”;


hammocks; raised seating mounds and cushioned conversation pits. All Participants referenced needing sheltered and well lit seating for privacy, weather, and safety.

 **Non-sporting activities:** They requested non-sporting activities within the park as they felt that in the park: “There's not much to do because it's all for younger kids” and that “boys own the [sporting] space a lot more.” Their proposals included bookable or rentable board games, karaoke, and an outdoor library; and a temporary outdoor cinema in summer.

 **Aesthetic space:** They all wanted “something nice to look at”; which included water features, art (eg. street art mural), colourful painting and path schemes, and beautiful planting. They highly enjoyed the new flower garden for these reasons but wanted this aesthetic reflected throughout the park.

 **Teenage Playground:** They requested – in differing ways – a teenage playground with “a climbing frame but paint it pink so it doesn't get taken over by boys”; teenage size swings in a circle to both play and hang out. This was in light of the fact that while many still loved and felt safe in the children's playground, they had exceeded the age limit and felt judged by parents there: “parents and stuff – they give you looks – judgemental mums like you're trouble” “although I'm judged in the playground I'm not going to get jumped.”

 **Affordable food:** They suggested there was a need for more affordable food which catered to their demographic like food trucks on the central green (when not booked by the football club) or in the parking lot which sold chips, burgers, hotdogs, cold drinks: “A place to go no matter what you have or who you are”. They felt the existing cafe was too expensive and had inconvenient opening hours for schoolchildren.

 **Signage and Entrances:** They often felt that a lack of information made them more intimidated from using the park. They wanted an info board with park and safety information, a map, as well as ‘goings on’, events, and village hall info. Additionally in the wooded area a lack of clear – as well as too few – exits/ entrances dissuaded them from using the space due to safety concerns. Having information readily available they felt would not only enable them to feel safer in the park but also to get more involved in their local community.

SITE ANALYSIS

The most favoured areas (pink, 'places we use') in the park were the area just outside the cafe, the sides of the large green where the football pitches are, and the David Smith Memorial Recreation Ground, as well as the swings in the children's playground. None of these include any formal provisioning intended for young (teens) people.



RECOMMENDATIONS

1. ACTIVATING THE PARK

The Participants were also invited to put forward their ideas for an event to celebrate their work and encourage young women and gender diverse young people to see Angel Meadow, Broomfield as “a space for me.” The Participants based their event around fun and play, creativity and being social.

The Participants proposed the following:

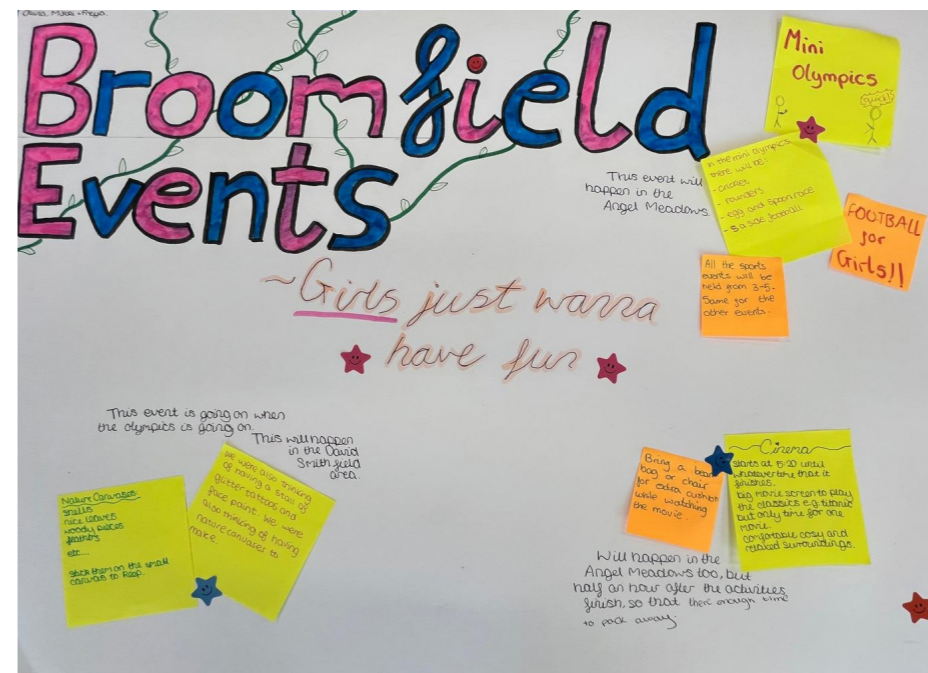
1. An event targeting teenage girls, gender diverse young people, and LGBTQIA+ young people; with a policy of “no judgement”.
2. A wrist band entry system or wristband system for organisers (the participants).
3. Crafting including: face-painting, glitter hair and tattoos, crochet, jewellery making, scrapbooking, design your own tote bag, and nature canvases.
4. Activities including: karaoke, cricket, high jump, dance classes, trampoline, campfire with smores, survival skills classes, DJ stand, 5 a side football, egg and spoon race, and rounders.
5. A quiet zone and a lounging area with bean bags and chill music, blankets, hammocks, and fairy lights.
6. A games area with games like Twister, Uno, Monopoly, and Cluedo.
7. Cheap or free food with vegan/ gluten free options including: a ‘foods of the world’ food truck, BBQ, ice cream, crepes and waffles, hot chocolate, and a pick n mix stall.
8. Gender neutral toilet facilities
9. A colourful and whimsical colour scheme, with fairy lights, flowers and bunting.
10. An event that goes into the early evening with a screening of a film in the park.



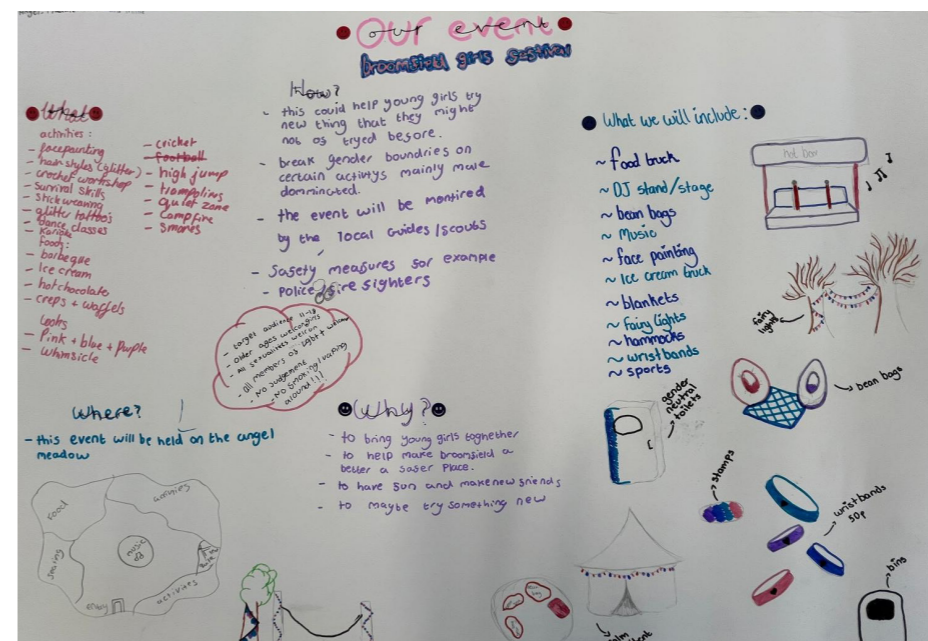
Presenting ideas for an event



SEPTEMBER FEST:
Describes an all day creative event filled with crafting (eg. tote bag design, face painting, scrapbooking), some boardgames (eg. Cluedo, Twister), karaoke stage, and a ‘foods of the world’ food truck and pic n mix.



GIRLS JUST WANNA HAVE FUN:
Proposes a day of games and mini-olympics style sporting activities (eg. egg and spoon race, cricket, rounders) with a few crafting activities (eg. glitter tattoos) in the afternoon, and a cosy cinema screening of classics in the park after dark.



BROOMFIELD GIRLS FESTIVAL:
Suggests a colourful and inclusive event with some crafting (eg. crochet, glitter tattoos), some active play (eg. trampolines, cricket, dance), a cosy ‘chilling’ tent/ area (eg. hammocks, beanbags, fairlights), a food truck and DJ stage with karaoke during the day and an evening of campfire and smores.

RECOMMENDATIONS

2. INTERVENING IN THE PARK

We set out below the information and ideas that the Participants shared with us during the workshops in the form of a series of designs for Angel Meadow, Broomfield.

These are not intended as final proposals but as a starting point for further discussion and development, ideally as part of a co-design process in which local young people bring their local knowledge and lived experience to the creation of a space for girls, young women and gender diverse young people in the park.

A few key themes dominated all the ideas. Principally their desires for a sheltered and aesthetic place with social seating to 'just hang out' as well as swings and teenage play equipment. In terms of location most of the interventions occupied the David Smith Memorial green, the area just outside the cafe and the perimeter around the football fields.

- All groups proposed a colourful and aesthetically lit social seating area to use with friends or alone.
- All groups proposed a cosy large hangout shelter for teens which often included the social seating mentioned above.
- All groups proposed some degree of active play space with the majority wanting swings but others proposing trampolines, large slides, and climbing frames.
- Other popular requests were a place to do karaoke, and a boardgame or reading space.
- All groups had ideas for lighting including fairy lights, eccentric geometric lighting schemes throughout the park, light up seating blocks and swings.



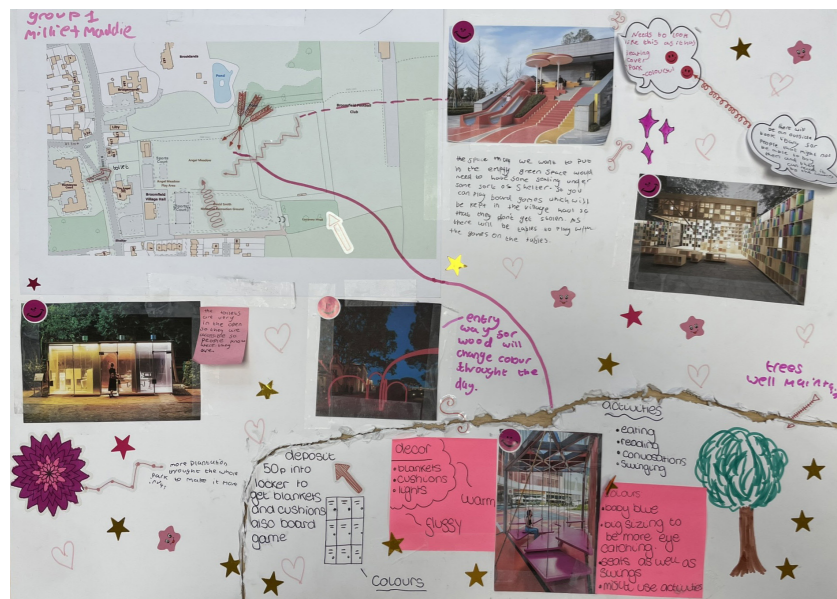
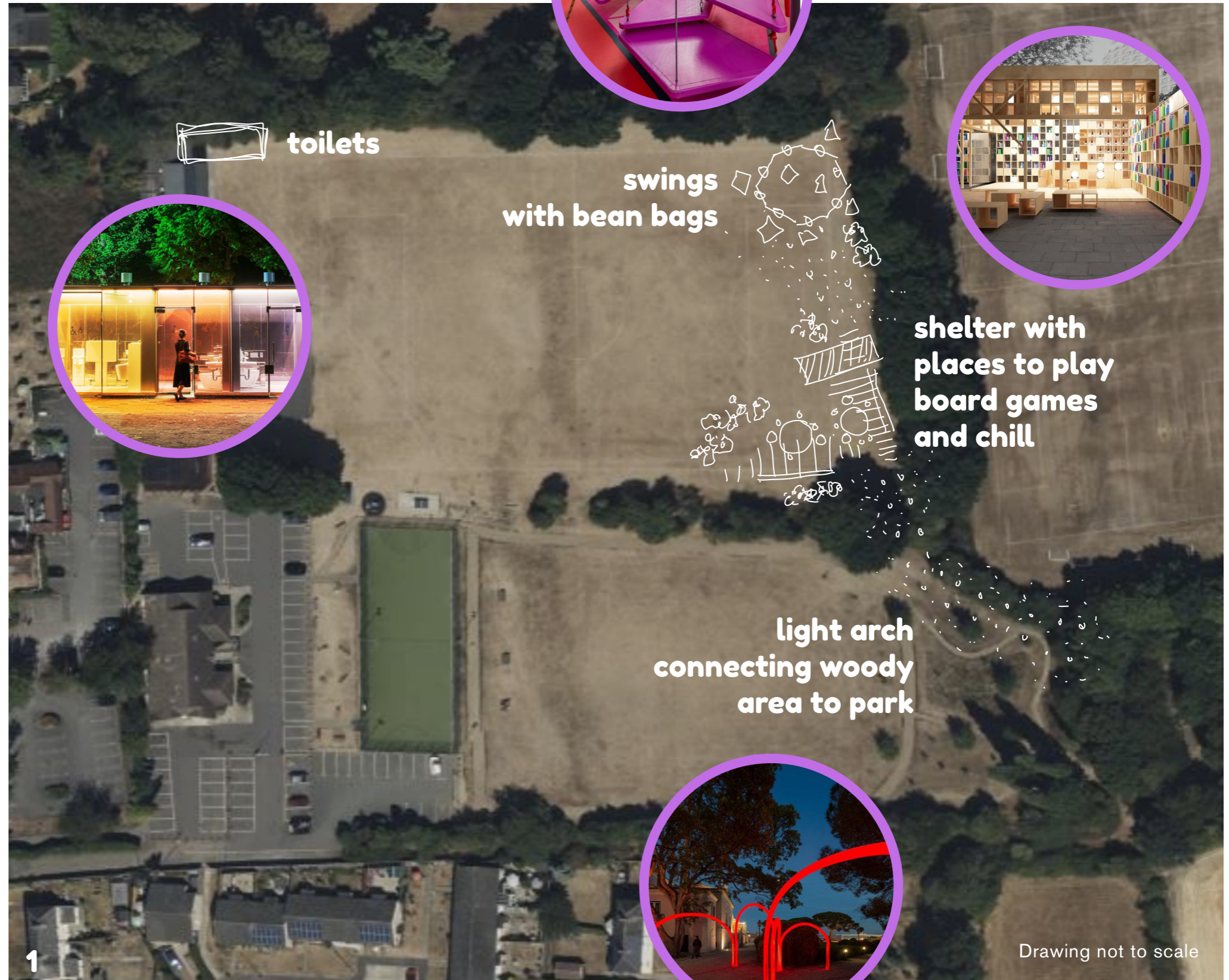
Architectural plans of the four proposals

RECOMMENDATIONS

2. INTERVENING IN THE PARK

1 : MADDIE & MILLIE

GROUP 1 PROPOSED TAKING OVER A PATCH OF THE LARGE FIELD TO BUILD: A SHELTERED SEATING AREA FOR BOARDGAMES (BORROWED/RENTED VIA LOCKERS) WITH AN OUTDOOR LIBRARY AND, A CIRCULAR TEENAGE SIZE SWING AREA WITH BEANBAGS FOR CHILLING, EATING, AND SWINGING. THEY ALSO WANTED AESTHETIC PLANTING NEARBY, OPEN TOILETS BY THE CAFE, AND A LIGHT ARCH CONNECTING VARIOUS AREAS.



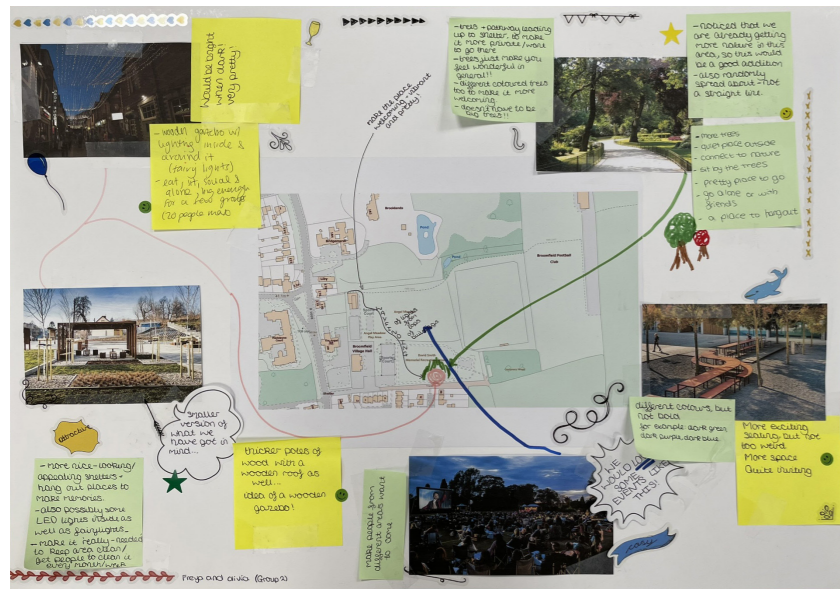
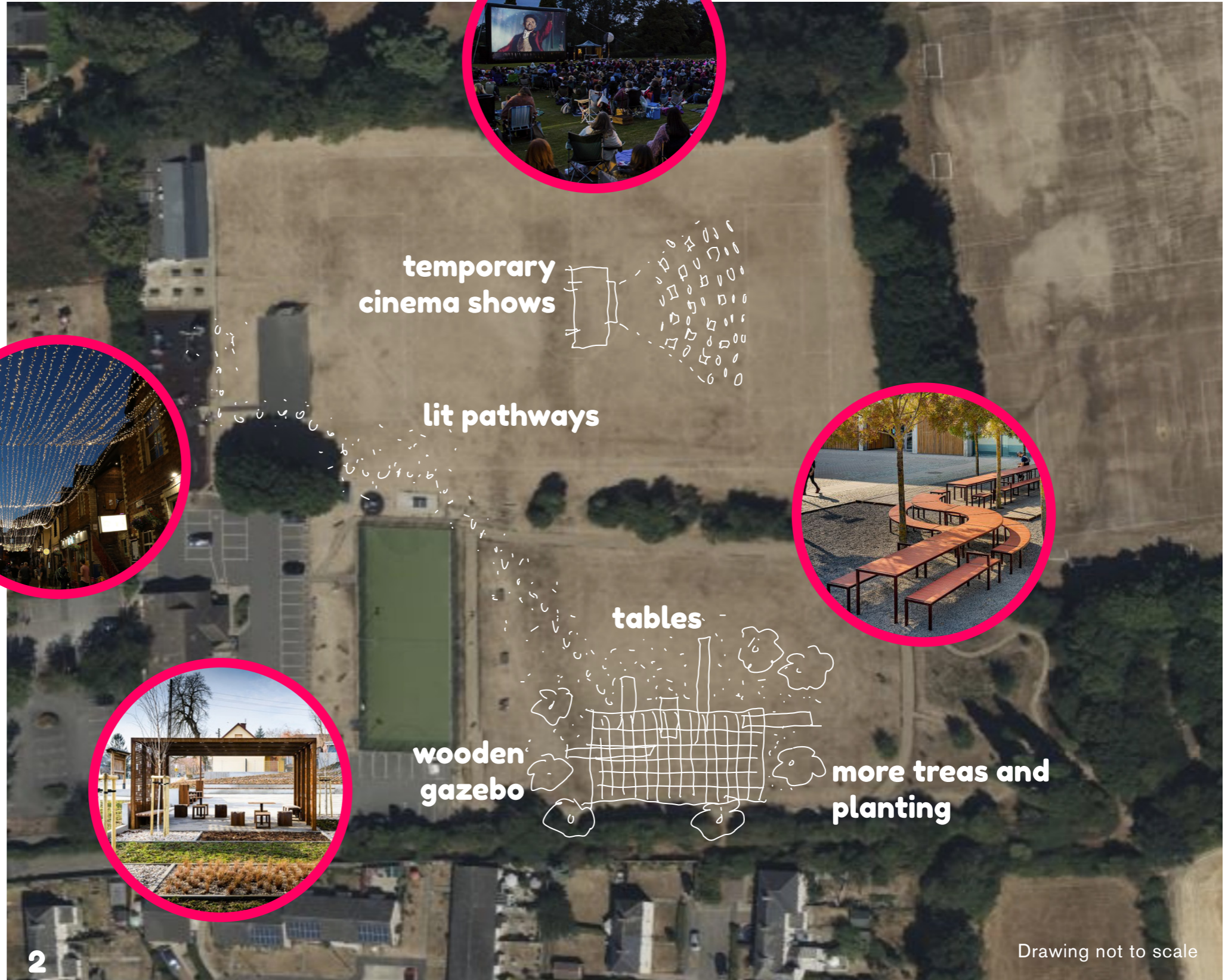
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RECOMMENDATIONS

2. INTERVENING IN THE PARK

2: FREYA & OLIVIA

GROUP 2 PROPOSED TAKING OVER DAVID SMITH MEMORIAL RECREATION GROUND WITH A WOODEN HANGOUT GAZEBO INCLUDING COLOURFUL SOCIAL BENCHES SURROUNDED BY TREES AND FAIRY LIGHTS CONNECTING TO OTHER KEY AREAS IN THE PARK. THEY ALSO WANTED TEMPORARY MOVIE NIGHTS IN THE LARGE FIELD IN SUMMER.

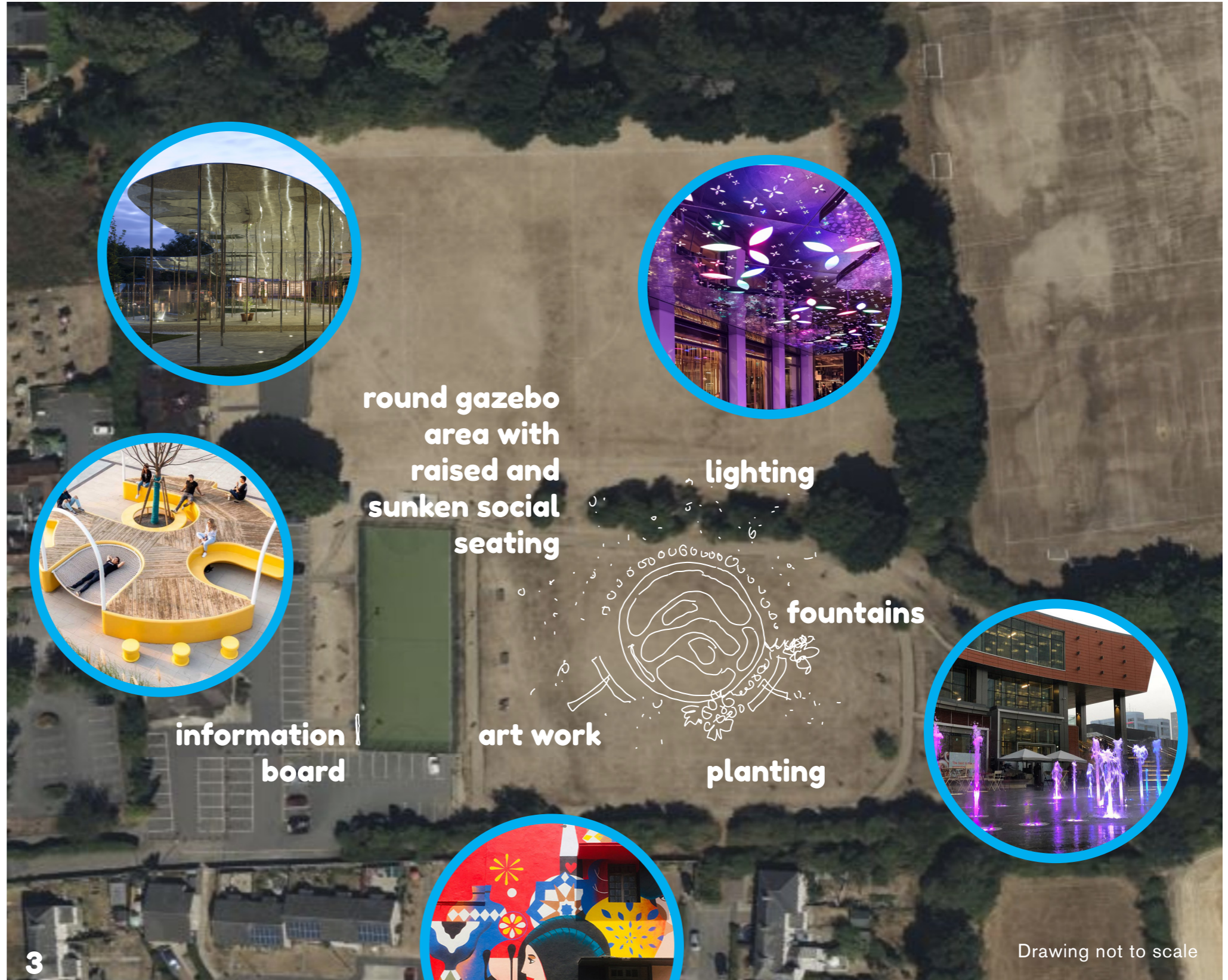


RECOMMENDATIONS

2. INTERVENING IN THE PARK

3: SOPHIE, EMILY & AASHI

GROUP 3 LIKE GROUP 2 PROPOSED TAKING OVER THE DAVID SMITH MEMORIAL RECREATION GROUND WITH A HANGOUT GAZEBO THIS TIME WITH MIRROR AND GRAFFITI ART SURFACES, RAISED AND LOWERED SEATING, PRETTY LIGHTING AND PLANTING AND A KARAOKE AREA (RENTAL FROM VILLAGE HALL).



RECOMMENDATIONS

2. INTERVENING IN THE PARK

4: EMILIA, NNEKA, HOLLY & ANGELINA

GROUP 4 LIKE GROUP 2 AND 3 PROPOSED TAKING OVER THE DAVID SMITH MEMORIAL RECREATION GROUND WITH A SIMILAR ROUND HANGOUT SPACE INCLUDING RETRACTABLE SHELTER, CIRCULAR SEATING AND TABLES IN PITS, HAMMOCKS, AND CIRCULAR SWINGS. THEY ALSO WANTED MORE SEATING OUTSIDE THE CAFE, AN OCCASIONAL FOOD TRUCK, SOCIAL SEATING AND A TEENAGE CLIMBING FRAME IN THE LARGE FIELD, AND GEOMETRIC LIGHTING CONNECTING KEY AREAS IN THE PARK.



Drawing not to scale

ASSESSMENT AND FEEDBACK

HOW CAN WE ASSESS THE VALUE OF THIS TYPE OF ENGAGEMENT?

We asked the Participants the following question:

Do you think it is important that young people get a voice, or the opportunity to share their thoughts about their local areas and how they could be better? Why or why not?

Here are some of their thoughts:

“Young people need to have a voice... they are using the space the most but feeling the least safe.”

“I think the best people to ask what teens want is the teens themselves. Everyone deserves to be heard and listened to. There are many stereotypes of teen girls that loads of people think are true but us teens can show they are false”

“If young people get to share their thoughts/opinions about their local area ... it could benefit the community”

In addition, we asked the Participants to complete a feedback form about their experience in the project, Appendix 2 is a summary of the Participants' feedback.

The key takeaways were:

- 100% of the Participants felt that they had been listened to, their thoughts taken seriously, and that they had been given an opportunity to explain what a “place for them” in Angel Meadow, Broomfield would be like.

- 91% of the Participants felt that they had learned new things or improved skills throughout the sessions.
- 100% of the Participants felt the sessions gave them more confidence to talk about what feels safe in Broomfield and why.
- 100% of the Participants would like to have more opportunities like this.

Overall this seems to have been a highly rewarding experience for the young women of Chelmer Valley High School. However, the final point that we would like to highlight is the response of the Participants to the last question on the feedback form:

Do you think there will be change in local parks as a result of the work you have done?

While the Participants remained overall very positive that things would change in Angel Meadow, these were the most mixed responses to this question with 82% of the Participants saying that they thought there would be change and 18% being unsure about this.

Young people have a degree of scepticism around their inclusion, and a key part of the legacy for this project will therefore be to see what can be done to make these hopes a reality and demonstrate to the Participants that if they take the time to engage with the Council and other key stakeholders, change can happen in the city they are growing up in.



Introducing mapping techniques



Discussing the park

APPENDIX 1: WORKSHOP STRUCTURE



WORKSHOP 1

An Introduction to public space: what counts as public space and why does it matter.

Quick fire exercise during which the Participants categorised various spaces and modes of transport by reference to frequency of use.

Using collaging and Zines to explore the Participants' initial ideas on the following themes:

- What is the public realm and why does it matter, generally and to you?
- What would you like to see in the public realm?
- Does how you experience the public realm differ depending on your gender identity?



WORKSHOP 2

A short presentation about the impact of architecture/design on experiences of space.

Mapping session using large scale map of Broomfield area to locate the places that the participants went during leisure time. Sites were chosen for a discussion around affordability, feeling safe and judgement:

Angel Meadow
Andrews Park
Town Centre

A “quick fire” session where the participants assessed on a spectrum from: strongly agree to strongly disagree, how well these sites met the criteria of:

- Affordability: “This place is affordable to me”
- Feeling Safe: “I feel safe here”
- Judgement: “I don’t feel judged here”

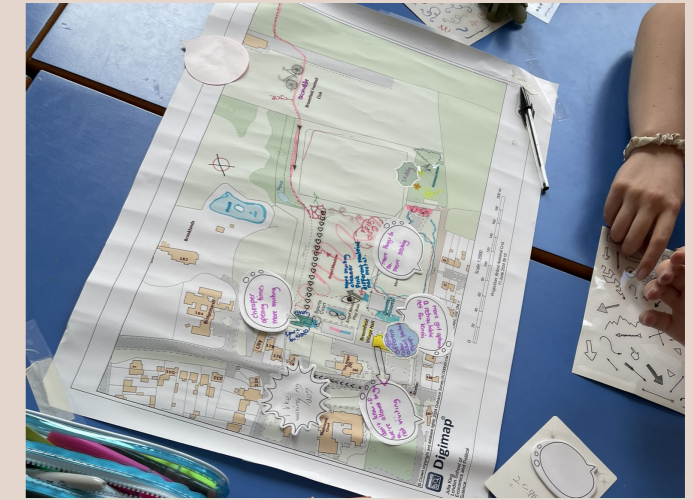


WORKSHOP 3

A short presentation on the importance and impact of mapping

A visit to Angel Meadow, Broomfield with local councillors focussing on a few main areas.

Small group annotating of maps of the park with: “I would use this as is”, “I would like to use but only if some changes made” and “I wouldn’t be interested in using.”



WORKSHOP 4

Following from the visit to Angel Meadow the Participants were asked to “Label places in the park that evoke a feeling for you and why?”.

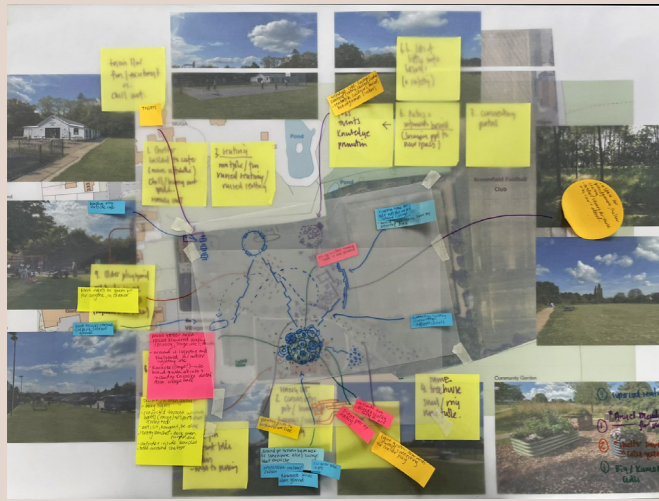
Short presentation on teen / urban realm design ideas.

The Participants were asked to think about how they might want to change the park to make it more welcoming to them.

The session was structured around the 3 key themes that had informed the visit to the park and asked the Participants to group their thoughts around 4 questions:

- What is in it?
- How should it make you feel?
- What does it look like? And
- How is it run?





WORKSHOP 5

The Participants were provided with a large bank of images of parks and facilities and objects found in parks and similar public spaces.

The images were grouped into themes (eg sports, food, swings, skateboarding, seating, lighting, toilets, play).

Working in groups the Participants selected up to 5 images that best reflected “a place for them”, and using these images, created a mood board that captured the core proposals for an intervention in Angel Meadow, Broomfield.



Site analysis



WORKSHOP 6

The Participants reflected on the previous 5 sessions and addressed the questions:

1. What is a ‘good’ public space to you?
2. Does your gender identity or other identity markers (eg. disability, sexual orientation, race, class etc.) have an impact on how you feel about or use public space? How?
3. How can/ does design have an effect on if/how you use and feel about public space?
4. Do you think it is important that young people get a voice, or the opportunity to share their thoughts about their local areas and how they could be better? Why or why not?

Working in groups, the Participants designed a poster for an event to be held in Angel Meadow to celebrate their work and encourage young women and gender diverse young people to see the park as a “place for them”.

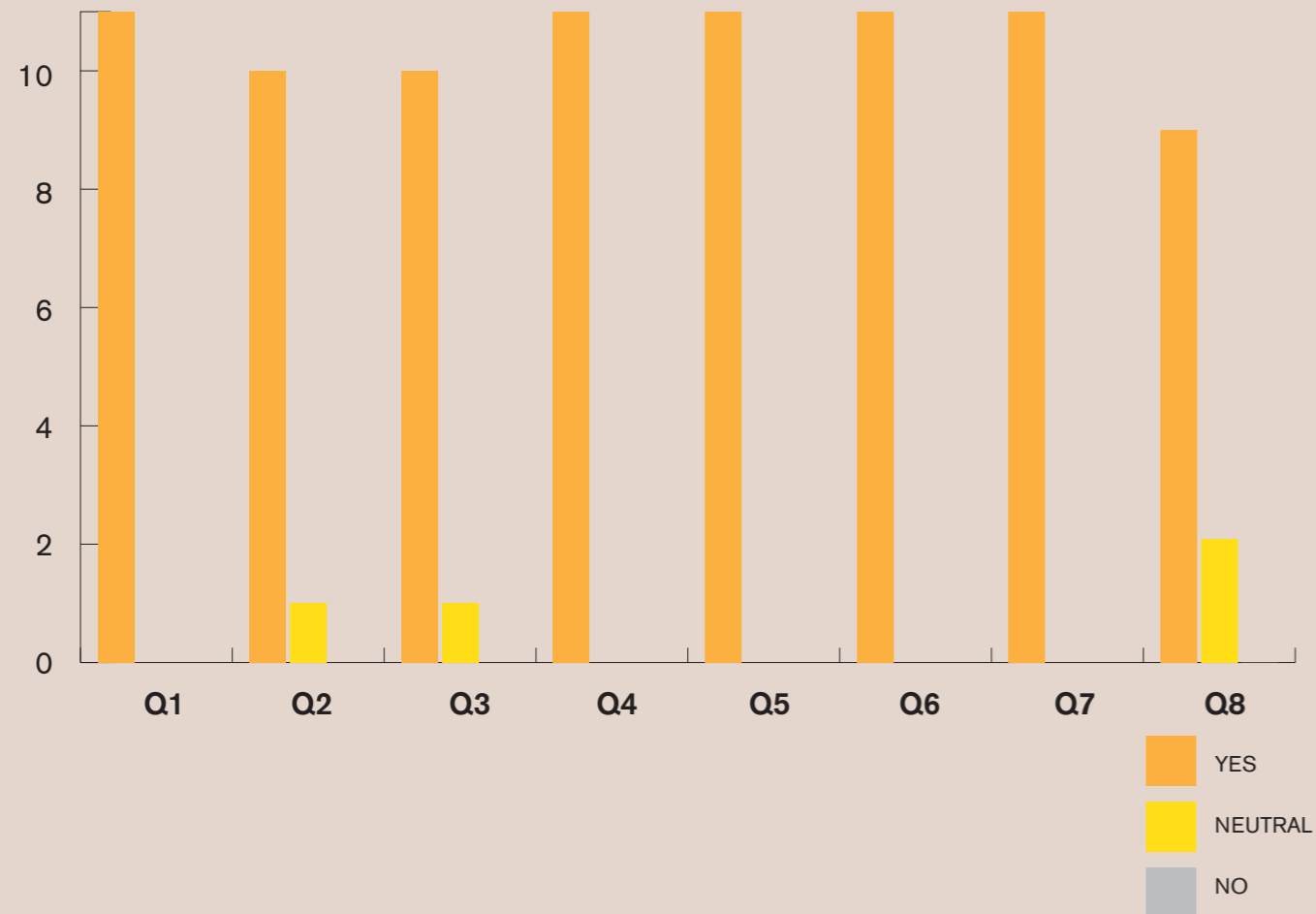


Collaging materials

APPENDIX 2: SUMMARY OF FEEDBACK FROM PARTICIPANTS

QUESTIONS

1. Did you feel that throughout the workshops you were listened to and heard / that your thoughts were taken seriously?
2. Did you feel comfortable and that you could speak openly and freely in the sessions?
3. Did you feel like you learned new things or improved skills through the sessions (eg. confidence building, how to read a map, knowledge of design or planning, etc.)
4. Do you feel the sessions gave you more confidence to talk about where feels safe in Chelmsford and why?
5. Did the sessions give you an opportunity to explain what a "place for you" in a park would be like?
6. Was it helpful to reflect on how age and gender identity might impact on how people feel in and about public space?
7. Would you like to do this type of project again/ have more opportunities like this?
8. Do you think there will be change in Chelmsford's parks as a result of the work you have done?



"I found the whole experience fun and it really helped me in some of my own skills, like communication."

"I felt comfortable speaking as there was no judgement."

"I definitely feel more confident to talk, design and plan."

"I would definitely do a project like this again as it was genuinely fun and allowed us to address anything we dislike."

"These sessions are very confidence boosting and help me express my feelings and ideas."

"All our opinions are heard and respected, and not judged!"



Presenting ideas

GLOSSARY:

TRANSGENDER (TRANS): a person whose gender identity does not align with the sex they were assigned at birth but still follows a gender binary (eg. transman: is a person who identifies as a man but was assigned female at birth).

NONBINARY: a person whose gender identity neither aligns with the categories of man or woman.

GENDER IDENTITY: means one's own internal sense of self and gender, whether that is man, woman, neither or both. Gender identity is about self perception rather than what is outwardly visible to others.

GENDER BINARY: the view that gender exists as either male or female – a binary where gender is often seen as biologically determined and synonymous with sex. This contrasts the more inclusive reading of gender, as socially constructed and existing along a spectrum.

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Freya
Olivia
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Mill
- cows, hang with friends, fields with a tree you can climb across river, eggs, netter, waterfall

fields - open fields, horses, quiet, walk & chat
⇒ footpath / cycle path that goes to the school

and on the grass - we talk & kids when sea of - couples / teens go into woods so a reveal

Broomfield Park
- go with friends
- woods secretly - we avoid a few of kids - we avoid 12 years max so 10-15 is best sort

frises only 7
opening and very skinny paths.
Broomfield park
- cafe always booked for parties

St Andrews Park
- sit there, read, meetup space, grass
live closely
sit, hang out, etc
don't full house
football

Andrews Park
would be good

