

SEEN AND HEARD
A CAMPAIGN LED BY THE BLUEPRINT
COLLECTIVE AMPLIFYING YOUNG
VOICES IN DESIGN FOR PUBLIC SPACES

VOLUME 3

POLICY

Seen and Heard Volume 3 of 4: Policy Recommendations

This document is complemented by a series of reports which cover various outputs of the project Seen and Heard. Volume 1 summarises the methodology and pedagogical approach behind the workshop sessions with members of the Blueprint Collective and Brent Youth Parliament. Volume 2, 3, and 4 contain the outputs of those workshops; the Blueprint Collective Youth Charter, a set of policy recommendations, and a Design Guide respectively. Volume 4 is to be published separately.

Authored by
LSE Cities
<http://www.lse.ac.uk/cities>

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FOREWORD

In February 2018, the London Borough of Brent was awarded the title of London Borough of Culture for 2020. Brent's winning bid stood out because it unashamedly placed young people at its heart – promising an exploration of what culture means to them in the 21st century. Fast-forward two years and there are over 100 young people driving Brent's year of culture. This group of young people are known as Brent 2020's 'Blueprint Collective'. A self-described part-pressure group, part think tank who are invested in every aspect of Brent 2020.

Whilst developing the programme, a common theme that our young advisors talked about was how many public spaces are not built to accommodate young adults or their needs. They described how they were more likely to be treated as a security risk than as users or stakeholders. It is the Blueprint Collective, along with Brent Youth Parliament, who have authored the Seen and Heard project. Together, they have explored how young adults could be supported to have their voices heard in the development of public spaces in the future.

Seen and Heard is now a Charter, written by young adults, for young adults. It is a series of policy recommendations and practical guidance tools for local authorities and developers to adopt into their city planning. Wembley Park developer Quintain, and Principal Partner of Brent 2020, sponsored the project and offered the group a plot of land to put their recommendations into practice. We partnered with LSE Cities to help us deliver the programme and guide the young adults through the design, policy and research processes as part of their journey.

From here, Seen and Heard becomes a campaign led by young people and amplified over 2020. Please help us by joining the debate, sharing the charter and inviting the Blueprint Collective to tell you more about their work.

Lois Stonock
Artistic Director, Brent 2020

APPROACH

The following set of policy recommendations is divided into two parts. The first part looks at design considerations and has urban planners, architects, developers and local authorities in mind. The second part is a set of strategic recommendations targeting local authorities, developers and national frameworks. These recommendations have been authored by a group of young adults between the ages of 13 and 24 who live, work and study in the borough. They represent a range of ethnicities and social demographics. The recommendation in their draft form were presented to various representatives from the Greater London Authority who shared their on-going work on public space and offered important feedback.

This study takes one of the most commonplace and everyday experiences of the city – public space – and explores its value from the perspective of young adults. In this study, we have understood ‘young adults’ to be a demographic that sits loosely between normative societal perceptions of a child and an adult. This in-betweenness, we find, is engendered not only by the age of those in question but also by blind spots in public realm design practices and disciplinary attitudes. While these practices and attitudes are ostensibly well equipped to cater for young children (often through the incorporation of ‘play’, but also physical safeguarding and public visibility) and adults (through leisure and consumption), they appear to categorically overlook the broad and varied needs of many of the participants of this study in a number of common ways. This in turn suggested the need to define a separate, although not necessarily fixed, group or demographic that are afflicted by a similar design bias, rather than merely an arbitrary association of those who

might be otherwise seen as older children and younger adults.

Public space is most commonly understood as places that are open and accessible to the public. Most often associated with parks and squares, public space also includes roads and public infrastructure such as train stations. A privately-owned public space – such as the public spaces within the Wembley Park development site – is a public space that is open to the public, but owned by a private entity, typically a commercial property developer. The property-investment and development business Quintain are the landowners and developers of Wembley Park.

Getting an accurate picture of perceptions, needs, and desires to design and plan for inclusive public spaces requires a mix of research methods. Secondary research drew on case studies and a desktop survey of the local area and the wider borough. Primary research and the focus of this report was conducted through eight workshops.

PRINCIPLES

This research identified a wide range of functions or 'principles' that are desired and valued by young adults and should be protected and enhanced through policy, advocacy and investment:

COLOURFUL AND CREATIVE: it needs to stand out

CONSIDERATELY ENCLOSED: to be hidden but seen

PROGRAMMABLE: music and food are important for us in public space

FUTURE PROOF: a space that remains 'ours'

FOR EVERYONE: but also with a sense of ownership

RELAXED: exempt from overbearing control and security

FOR US: a space for our specific age group where we can be kids without kids being there

INVITING: offering areas to hang out in

DECENTRALISED: offering many key areas as opposed to one central spot that can be territorialised easily

A BALANCE OF DEFINED AND UNDEFINED

USES: to attract groups of friends but also bring individuals together

INFORMATIVE: a place where we can find important information that's relevant to us

POSITIVELY SIGNED: permanent signifier that 'this is ours'

FLEXIBLE: able to be adapted for multiple purposes

GREEN: a space that values natural elements

PART OF A WIDER INVESTMENT: to not see public space in isolation but part of a wider infrastructure that needs resourcing.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

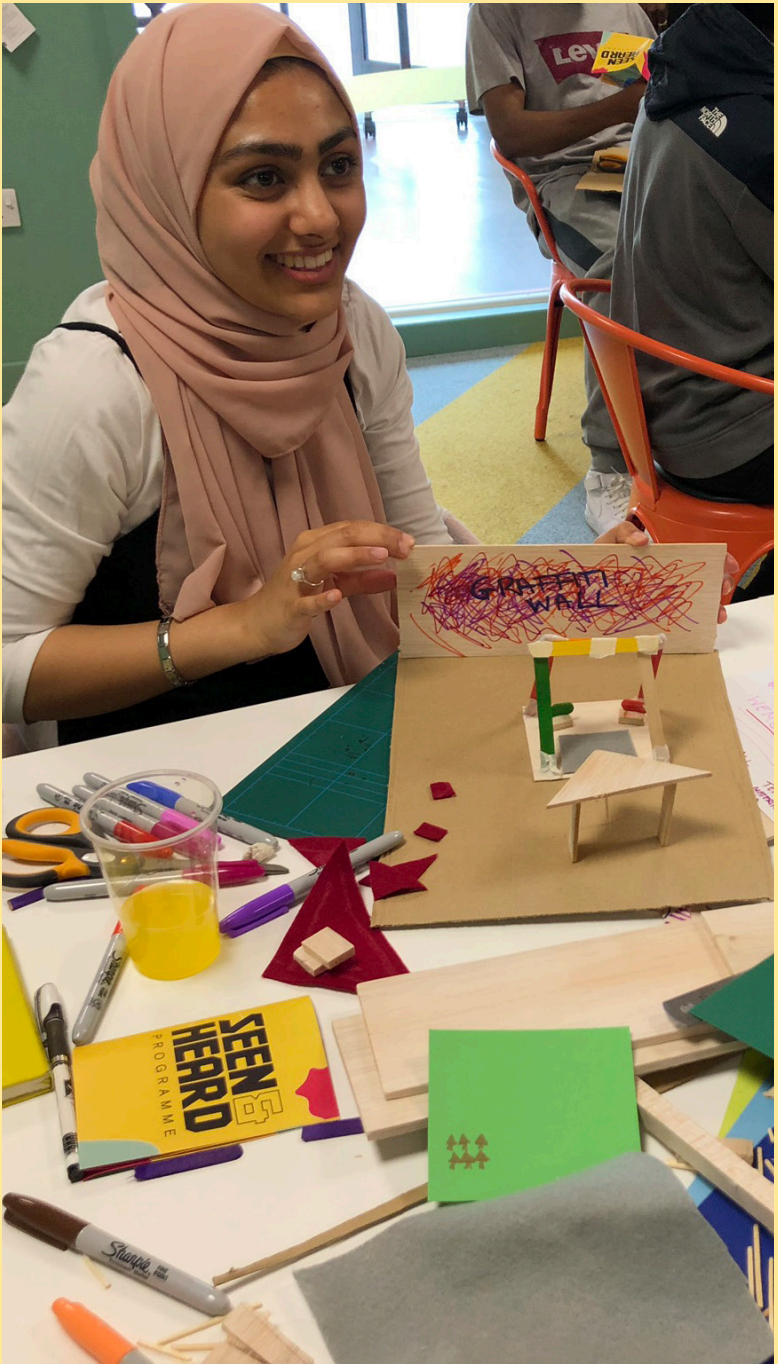
From the above principles, nine recommendations emerged to help public space stakeholders deliver inclusive, shared and locally-responsive design whilst planning and managing public spaces with young people in mind through policy, investment and advocacy. These recommendations, authored by the Blueprint Collective, specifically reflecting on public-private spaces, are divided into design-orientated and strategic policy recommendations:

DESIGN

THE WAY PUBLIC SPACES ARE DESIGNED DOES EFFECT WHETHER WE WILL USE IT OR NOT. SMALL DETAILS CAN HAVE A BIG IMPACT SUCH AS PUBLIC SPACES WHICH CAN EASILY BE TERRITORIALISED. WE'VE SEEN LOTS OF WAYS THAT 'PLAY' GETS DESIGNED OUT THROUGH OBSTRUCTION OR STRICT MANAGEMENT. IN ORDER FOR THE DESIGN OF PUBLIC SPACE TO BE INCLUSIVE OF US, WE RECOMMEND:

Consider defined and undefined play spaces when planning public spaces for us. Playscapes defined for a specific activity / purpose are good at bringing together a range of young people whilst undefined playscapes cater well for already formed, pre-existing groups.

We value a range of aesthetic and materials configurations. Whilst colour and pattern are attractive, we equally value natural and textured environments. Textures and materials that allow for 'hanging out' are important. As is ensuring we can use these places all year.



^Design session. Image: Catarina Heeckt

We look for privacy but equally visual safety.

The idea of 'seen but not seen' is key for us. We value privacy but also seek comfort in visual connections such as paths and routes. Seating where we are protected from behind but visible to the front is important. As such we recommend designers think about 'considered enclosures' to meet these contradictory needs.

Public spaces aimed at us should consider a range of zones as opposed to a concentrated 'central' feature.

Public spaces can be easily occupied (and dominated) by a single group at the expense of others. When designing for us, think about breaking up public spaces so they can't be dominated by one group of friends. Multiple entrances, seating and no one central feature are all ways to do this.

STRATEGIC

THE MOST IMPORTANT MESSAGE WE HAVE TO DEVELOPERS, COUNCILS, ARCHITECTS AND PLANNERS IS TO WORK WITH US: THE CHILDREN, YOUNG ADULTS, ADULTS AND MEMBERS OF THE COMMUNITY WHO LIVE IN THE AREAS YOU ARE REGENERATING

We want to get involved in shaping our physical environments.

Preconceived ideas of what we want in public spaces (way too often in the shape of skate parks) fail to acknowledge our actual needs and desires. If agents of change (developers, councils) want their spaces to be used by us, the starting point is to meaningfully include us at an early stage in the design and programming of these spaces.

WE FEEL WE ARE A FORGOTTEN/IGNORED DEMOGRAPHIC. FORMAL PUBLIC SPACES ARE EITHER FOR CHILDREN OR ADULTS. BUT WHAT ABOUT US? ALTHOUGH WE LIKE MANY OF THE SAME THINGS AS CHILDREN (PLAYSCAPES) AND ADULTS (SEATING, FOOD) CATERING FOR THESE GROUPS OFTEN EXCLUDES US

Designing for us must translate into management that allows for congregation and loitering. Management structures that are too controlled often discriminate against us with overly strict rules and regulations. More open management and policing is essential to include us; allowing for unsupervised, large groups, and not consumers to occupy public space. Positive signing and letting us know our rights (and the rules and regulations) is also important.

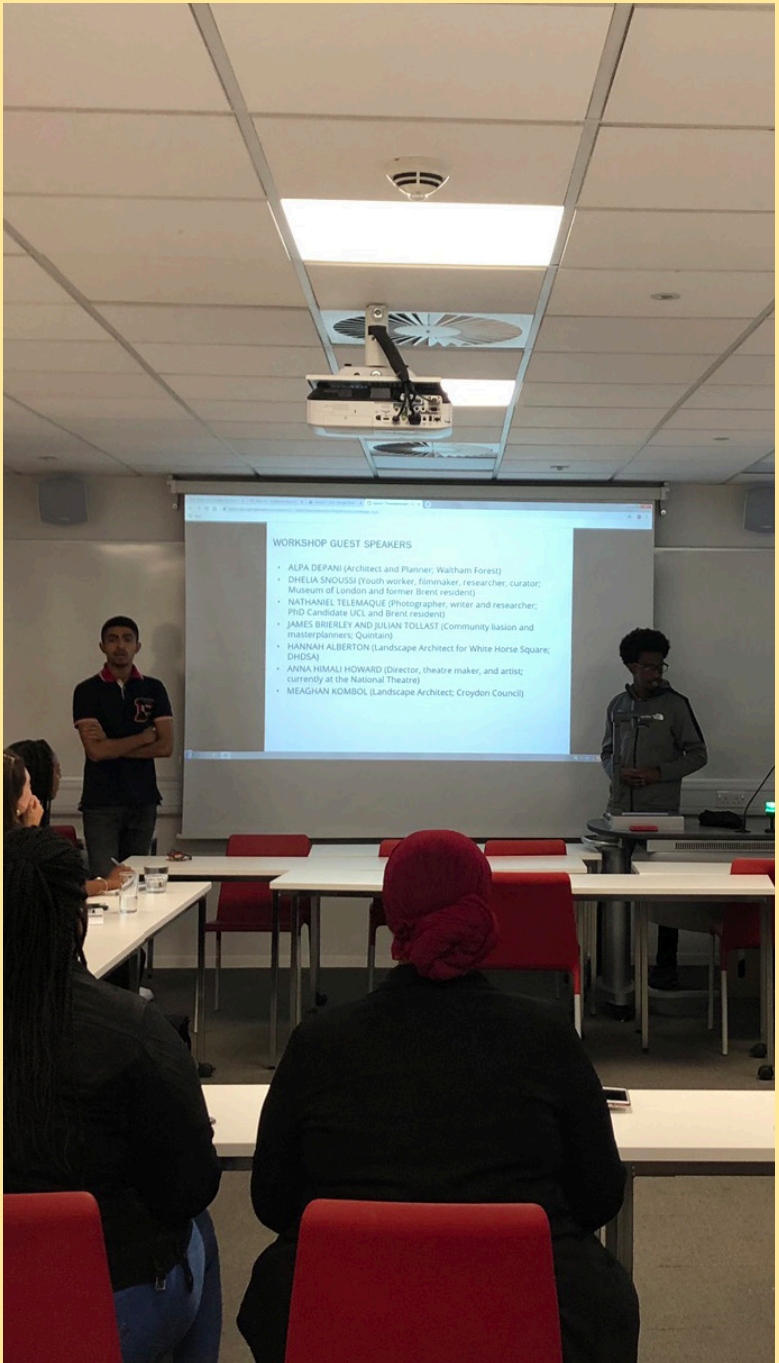
WHEN AREAS ARE REGENERATED, WE ARE AWARE OF THE NEGATIVE IMPACT THIS CAN HAVE ON OUR COMMUNITIES. WE BELIEVE FOR (PRIVATE) PUBLIC SPACES TO WORK THEY NEED TO BE PART OF WIDER EFFORTS TO IMPROVE OUR NEIGHBOURHOODS AND BOROUGH AS A WHOLE

In a context of declining services for us, public spaces are even more valuable as places to congregate and can play important roles as centres for information. Broadening the role public space plays in society – and thinking specifically about our demographic - could include offering certain places as centres for information and advocacy.

With the rise of large-scale redevelopment projects, and particularly in contexts of high social and economic inequality, investment in the public realm should extend beyond the red line of the development. Section 106 and Community Interest Levies - both measures for channelling a development's funds towards local communities - are insufficient to meet the challenges of the relatively recent phenomenon of large-scale developments. Public realm investments should take a holistic approach and connect with wider infrastructural networks.

DESIGNING FOR US MEANS ALLOWING US TO NOT ONLY OCCUPY THE SPACE, BUT TO BE PART OF THE PROGRAMMING

Designing public spaces 'for us' means including us in the long-term programming of these spaces. Programming around public space offers an opportunity to further connect young locals through co-designed and inclusive programming. It is important to ensure that public spaces designed with us in mind do not become co-opted by external, corporate programming which can further marginalise local populations.



^Presentations at LSE.



^Feedback session at LSE.

BLUEPRINT COLLECTIVE AUTHORS

Aleena Majeed
Ayan Abdi
Ayub Mohamed
Deanna Kerai
Debbie Kay
Emad Sadek
Halima Iqbal
Ismael Dahir
Jaynie Shah
Jermaine King
Khaleel Williams
Komaxi Quessou
Mehaira Abdelhamid
Raden Anandra Natalegawa
Sami Mohamed
Samir Ahmed
Samira Abubakar
Shreya Kachalia
Tyrique Tagoe Wyse
Xhes Kurtaj
Yusriya Abdullatif
Zaib Ahmed
Zeyn Alsukhny

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Lara Goldstein
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Blueprint Collective & Brent Youth Parliament

Aleena Majeed
Ayan Abdi
Ayub Mohamed
Deanna Kerai
Debbie Kay
Emad Sadek
Halima Iqbal
Ismael Dahir
Jaynie Shah
Jermaine King
Khaleel Williams
Komaxi Quessou
Mehaira Abdelhamid

Raden Anandra Natalegawa
Sami Mohamed
Samir Ahmed
Samira Abubakar
Shreya Kachalia
Tyrique Tagoe Wyse
Xhes Kurtaj
Yusriya Abdullatif
Zaib Ahmed
Zeyn Alsukhny

LSE Cities

Julia King
Akil Scafe-Smith

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