

***“It was our thoughts and ideas
which created this design brief”***

**Bringing Local Girls and Young Women into
a Co-Client Team: Waterden Green, Queen
Elizabeth Olympic Park, London**



**QUEEN
ELIZABETH
OLYMPIC PARK**



**1 Year
Anniversary
London 2012**



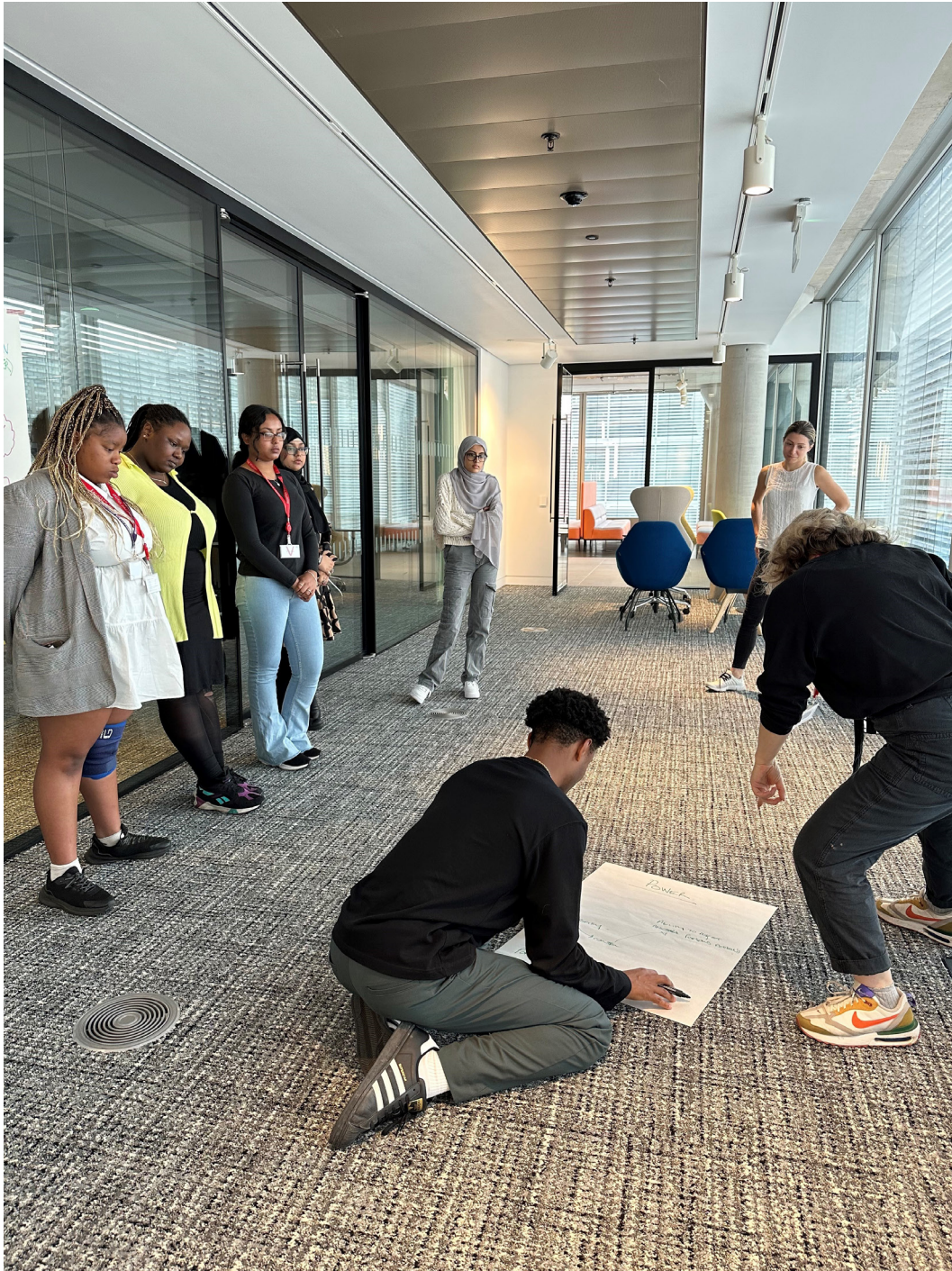
ELEVATE
SHAPING & UPLIFTING FUTURES

MAYOR OF LONDON



A few of the Young Clients, LLDC members and MDAs at a workshop in the LLDC offices





This report was written in the Spring / Summer 2024 by Olivia Theocharides-Feldman, Julia King and Associates and Imogen Clark, on behalf of Make Space for Girls. It was written based on a series of interviews with a group of young women from Elevate Youth Voice, members of the LLDC, and the GLA's Mayor's Design Advocates. The authors of this report would like to thank all the individuals who took the time to share their experiences about this project and on whose contributions this report is built. In particular we would like to thank Beulah, Fulgis, Hadia, Ayra, Fahmida, Lamisa, Zaara from the Elevate Youth Voice

Executive Summary

Waterden Green Co-Clienting Project

In 2022 and 2023 the LLDC innovated a 'co-clienting' process, to explore different ways of running community engagement and to test best practice. It was run with seven young women aged 17-23 years old from the Elevate Youth Voice (the Young Clients), supported by the Greater London Authority (GLA) and Mayor's Design Advocates (MDAs). The following report describes and reviews this engagement process and puts forward a roadmap for this model of engagement for those working in the built environment. We hope it will act as an inspiration for engaging with local people and communities within the planning and design process.

The project aimed to 1) explore different ways to engage with girls and young women (an inadequately provided for demographic) in the built environment; 2) to co-create a design brief with girls and young women for a space within Waterden Green that reflects the wants and needs of girls aged 12-18. Waterden Green is a green space specifically for teenagers, located in the Borough of Hackney adjacent to the East Wick and Sweetwater Development in Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park, London.

The 'co-clienting' method entailed that the LLDC team members and the Young Clients work together in a bespoke client team to develop a design brief, and to appoint a design team to bring their brief to life. The Young Clients will also, in due course, work together to implement that brief.

LLDC found that co-clienting offered the following key benefits, when compared to more traditional engagement:

Continuity:

- By including the Young Clients within a client team, their views and input could be embedded throughout the project.
- This ensured that the views of the intended end users of the space remained central as the project progresses.
- This has been supported and strengthened by organisation-wide support across the LLDC.

Shifting power:

- By virtue of being part of the client team, the Young Clients had a central role in decision making processes as opposed to in a more traditional engagement in which consultees provide feedback to a separate decision making body.

- The LLDC reinforced this by:
 - Intentionally keeping the engagement flexible and open ended to allow the Young Clients to have more control over the briefing process;
 - Taking steps back from their expert roles where appropriate and valuing the expertise of others (eg. Young Clients, MDAs);
 - Celebrating and managing difference within the group.
- This created collaborative and two-way exchange and learning.

Capacity Building:

- Due to the structure of the project, based around a small paid primary engagement group and multiple varied and engaging sessions (eg. role playing, walkabouts), the LLDC could better invest (time and resources) in and support the skills and knowledge of the Young Clients.
- The co-clienting team particularly focused on learnings around budgets, power dynamics, safety/ inclusion and different roles within a complex development.
- This structure and content made:
 - Planning and design processes feel more accessible and approachable to the Young Clients;
 - Was essential for building trust, confidence and skills and empowering the Young Clients;
 - Allowed for more informed and nuanced participation.

Grounded Findings:

- Co-clienting created briefing principles and a design brief that were much more grounded in the wants and needs of local girls and young women than the information that had been obtained through traditional engagement methods.

Foreword

"As the father of 11 and 13 year old daughters who love the Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park, I am delighted that young people are co-clienting to write a design brief for a space for teenage girls to enjoy in the Park.

Too often the voice of the intended end user isn't heard during the design stages, so women and girls are inadvertently excluded from spaces. This project, which has developed out of LLDC's work on women and girls' safety, has put the views of young people at the heart of the design process. That is not to say that they have been left to solve the problem on their own but that they have been an integral part of the team. As a result, this project has been shaped not only by LLDC Staff, but through co-production with our youth board (Elevate) with oversight from the Mayor's Design Advocates. Building on the work of championing organisations, like Make Space for Girls, LLDC is delighted that this project provides a model of co-clienting and the creation of spaces for young women and girls.

The world we live in has largely been designed by men as the 'trained experts'. This sometimes leads to designs that focus on the views of men rather than a wide community of users. Sometimes, even inadvertently, women and girls are excluded because men don't look at the world in the same way. As in the fable of the Emperor's new clothes or the story about the lorry that is too big for the bridge (the child's solution, let some air out the tyres) we need to see the world and plan interventions through fresh eyes."

Mark Camley
Executive Director of Park Operations and Venues

Introduction

“I feel like usually when they [built environment practitioners] plan things for the youth, they don't really engage the youth directly, they ask people who surround themselves by the youth, but not the youth themselves.” – Young Client

“A very key measure I've learned [from this project], is just because things are alright the way they are doesn't mean that they can't be improved.” – Young Client

This report is intended for developers and those working in the built environment. It describes and reviews the engagement process developed by LLDC and a group of young women from Elevate Youth Voice (The Young Clients), supported by the Greater London Authority (GLA) and Mayor's Design Advocates (MDAs) in 2022 and 2023. The engagement was developed with a view to implementing best practices and to incorporate different ways of running community engagement for the LLDC. We hope it will act as an inspiration for engaging with local people and communities within the planning and design process.

The project's primary aims were:

- To explore different ways to engage with girls and young women in the built environment.
- To co-create a design brief with girls and young women for a safe and welcoming space within Waterden Green, Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park, in London that meets the needs of girls aged 12-18 in the public realm.

Structure of this report

This report sets out the background and context of the project. It summarises the methods used, and the Briefing Principles developed by the engagement. It records feedback on the project from the young women who participated. Finally, the appendix includes interviews with a number of built environment practitioners who worked on the project to gain greater insights from their perspectives.



A workshop with the LLDC and GLA/MDA's at the LLDC offices

The Project

Why co-client?

There is plenty of evidence to support the proposition that if a developer works with members of the community in a “co-clienting” structure, this can empower the community; reduce the likelihood of conflicts during the development process; and result in smoother implementation during the build¹. Developers can also gain a better understanding of their development site, the context in which the site is located and the needs of those that will be using the spaces.

It is also clear that the term “co-client” can mean different things to different people.

“I remember when we first started this, and they were explaining our roles [...] a few of us, were all confused: ‘what is co-clienting, what do we have to do?’” – Young Client.

In this project, the team used “co-clienting” to refer to a process in which LLDC team members and young women worked together in a bespoke client team to develop a design brief for a small area within the Waterden Green site, each bringing different and complementary skills. Within the team, they shared decision making power. In this report we refer to the young women who were part of this team as the Young Clients.

Embedding young women into a bespoke client team with a clearly defined role:

- ensured the Young Clients had influence in the decision making; and
- created an ongoing and long-term role for the Young Clients in the development of the space.

“At first, I thought it was kind of just they [LLDC] do everything. And I just give like, a little input here and there [...] But, when we were actually doing the sessions, it kind of just felt like we were all equal. [...] We weren’t just like a consultation body. We were active participants.” – Young Client.

Why engage with young women specifically?

“This project has taken me back to why I became an architect. I always thought that, as an architect I’d work on projects that created social change. This is a really small project, but it has a really big heart behind it.” – Member of the LLDC team

Young women and gender diverse people have often been left out of planning processes and public space. Research shows that while 82% of girls thought they should be involved in designing open spaces², in reality, 89% of young adults in the UK aged 16-18 have never been asked about their neighbourhood³.

Existing data also evidences that there is an urgent need for our public realm to be safer and cater better for young women and gender diverse people. A 2020 study showed that in London 74% of women respondents feel worried about their safety⁴; and research in Glasgow describes that only 20% of girls and young women felt very comfortable in their chosen park⁵. Trans and nonbinary persons have even greater safety concerns. Stonewall reports that more than two in five trans people avoid certain streets⁶ and their risk of being victims of crime are at least two times greater than the rest of the population⁷.

LLDC views the safety of women and girls as a crucial part of their development planning (see their [2022 Women’s Safety Report](#)⁸, co-produced with Arup, centred on the Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park).

Beyond safety concerns, young women’s needs have often been left out of green and public spaces. Almost all facilities provided for teenagers (pitches, skateparks, basketball courts) tend to be dominated by boys and young men⁹. Young women often feel like green spaces aren’t ‘for them’ and tend to use green space far less than young men (see for example the [2023 report on Researchers in Residence](#)¹⁰). Because activity routines are developed in adolescence, this drop in activity for teenage young women can have lifelong consequences in terms of their mental and physical health and affect them well into their adult years¹¹.



A site visit with the LLDC and the Young Clients of Waterden Green and the surrounding area

What is the site and who was involved?

"I think the biggest thing with us being co-clients is just the amount our voices were heard and how much what we said impacted the design brief itself; because essentially, it was our thoughts and ideas which created this design brief, which would then be fed to the architectural team" – Young Client.

Waterden Green is part of the East Wick and Sweetwater Development in Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park (QEOP), London. It is intended to provide a Youth Open Space for young residents and visitors aged 12-18.

The design comprises of four zones or 'pods' accommodating a number of different teen focused activities. The initial design was developed in conjunction with extensive traditional engagement with young people and involved a variety of more conventional teen facilities. The intention for this project is to bring forward a design that meets the needs of girls and young women, and to change the design of one of the pods to reflect those needs, while ensuring the space is integrated into the physical setting of the wider Waterden Green.

The site was a good place to develop and trial such an open and in-depth process because:

- the wider development is a long term development,
- the timeline for the Waterden Green Youth Space was quite flexible, and
- there has been a separation of funding and programming for Waterden Green Youth Space from the rest of the development.

The London Legacy Development Corporation (LLDC): LLDC is the landowner of Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park. Ruth Lin Wong Holmes, Head of Landscape and Public Realm for LLDC, has helped shape the project, including building the internal team. Kuljeet Sibbia, an architect and senior design manager from the design team, and Ned Adams-Felton, a development manager, led the project together with project support from Jeanette Anderson. They acted as the LLDC part of the co-client team. Layla Conway, Head of Education, Careers, and Youth Engagement and Renea Henry-Kemp, community engagement manager, from LLDC's Regeneration and Community Partnerships team have been instrumental in bringing Elevate on board and guiding the co-client team through successful collaboration strategies.

Elevate Youth Voice (Elevate): Seven young women from Elevate formed the other part of the co-client team. [Elevate Youth Voice](#) is a youth collective which connects young East Londoners to opportunities to use their lived experiences to shape built environment change. Elevate is designed for young people, by young people, made up of a collective of young people who use their unique lived experience to drive innovation, shape change and elevate futures.

The Greater London Authority (GLA): Kathryn Timmins, is a Principal Policy Officer and Ash Rao, a Senior Project Officer in the GLA's regeneration team. The GLA collaborated with LLDC to trial some of the proposals made in the first GLA report "[Safety in Public Space: Women, Girls and Gender Diverse People](#)" authored by [Publica CIC](#). The trial findings are featured in the GLA and Publica CIC's recently produced second iteration of "[Safety in Public Space: Women Girls and Gender Diverse People](#)".

The Mayor's Design Advocates: MDAs are independent built environment professionals selected by the Mayor of London to support London's 'Good Growth' agenda. Three MDAs, Daisy Froud, Jayden Ali and Manijeh Verghese worked with LLDC and the Young Clients in the project. They brought extensive experience of different community engagement methods to the project and supported the co-client team to explore these and develop their co-clienting method. The MDAs provided the External Engagement Support to the workshops.

The background to the project

The initial designs for Waterden Green had been produced by the end of 2021 following more traditional engagement with young people from Elevate Youth Voice. This engagement, while constrained by the COVID-19 pandemic, had been well developed and collaborative, supported by appropriate professionals.

In early 2022, LLDC worked with the charity [Make Space for Girls](#) to explore young women's responses to these designs. While the young women liked the designs and appreciated the work that had gone into the engagement, they equally did not see the spaces as ones that they would use.

This prompted the question: given young women had been involved in advising on these designs as part of the engagement process in 2021 and they felt these were good designs, why didn't they think that the designs provided a place that would work for them?

LLDC undertook further discussions to explore this. At the heart of the contradiction seemed to be the request made as part of the traditional engagement: *"help us design a teenage space"*. This meant that the young people's input had been shaped by the *"teenage spaces"* they were used to seeing (pitches, skateparks, ball courts). This was also the case for the design professionals who had produced the designs in response to the engagement. The engagement had not provided a route via which young people or design professionals could engage with the question: *"what would a place designed to be welcoming to teenage girls look like?"*

LLDC wanted to explore this question; and more widely whether, if it thought about engagement differently, it could get more out of its engagement. The aim was to provide a dedicated safe and fun space for teenage girls and young women aged 12-18 in the park. A place that could be stitched into Waterden Green and add to the existing play elements established by the wider Elevate Youth Voice. LLDC decided to set aside one area within the initial design to find a way to engage with the end users and answer this question.

What did the project involve?

LLDC, with the support and experience of the MDAs, developed the idea of creating a client team for the design and delivery of this space for teenage girls, embedding young women in this client team. The role of this client team can be seen as split into 3 phases:

Phase 1

- Preparing the design brief:
 - Creating briefing principles to underpin the design brief;
 - Drafting the design brief with the development team, reviewing and challenging it.
- Preparing to tender for a design team and reviewing responses to the brief
 - Attending presentations by, questioning and evaluating the tender suppliers;
 - Working with LLDC to agree on a consensus on and thereby selection of the design team who will produce the design in response to the brief.

The co-client team has completed phase 1.

Phase 2

- Review engagement approach and collaborate in further engagement with local stakeholders;
- Receive and respond to the designs, reflecting back on the briefing principles.

Phase 3

- Have oversight of the delivery of the designs on site;
- Review the final design in use.

The co-client team will work together to develop a plan for Phase 2 and 3.

Phase 1 Workshop Outline

Workshop	Parties	Scope of workshop
Workshop 1: LLDC and External Engagement Support project planning 3 hours in person	LLDC and External Engagement Support	Initial session to shape the overall project with LLDC and MDA/GLA. Focussed discussions on participatory design; the importance of LLDC leads being self-aware and reflexive; moderating their own creative processes; and being sensitive to power, group dynamics, and the need to shift these.
Workshop 2: Introduction of project and site to participants 2 hours in person	LLDC and Young Clients	Introduction of the project; first site visit followed by group discussions about gendered needs; review of precedents.
Workshop 3: introduction of co-clienting process 3 hours in person	LLDC; Young Clients and External Engagement Support	Facilitated conversations with GLA/MDA to explore safety and gender in the public realm; to examine what the Young Clients already knew and identify knowledge gaps; to increase group knowledge on co-design processes and finally to support the group to produce a first draft of a set of key principles to underpin the design brief.
Workshop 4: introduction to new skills needed to co-client 2 hours on line	LLDC and Young Clients	The Young Clients were upskilled to gain an understanding of the construction process (including budgets, RIBA stages etc) and co-clienting structure; followed by initial conversations on the Briefing Principles.
Workshop 5: initial review of the briefing principles 3 hours in person	LLDC; Young Clients and External Engagement Support	The Young Clients presented the initial draft of the principles and the External Engagement Support feedback. External engagement support led power/influence dynamic exercise, and discussions on the power of co-design and development processes.
Workshop 6: collective rewriting of briefing principles 2 hours in person	LLDC and Young Clients	Rewriting the Briefing Principles together and questioning language used.
Workshop 7: testing the draft briefing principles with a wider group of young people 2 hours in person	LLDC, Young Clients and peers from Elevate	The Young Clients presented their work and led a site visit in small groups with their peers to review the briefing principles, question if they were understood/worded correctly. The site visit was followed by group discussion to reword and prioritise the draft principles
Workshop 8: introduction to and review of the Design Brief 1 hour online	LLDC and Young Clients	The team explored the draft Design Brief and allocated roles to the Young Clients to review and challenge relevant parts of the Design Brief.
Workshop 9: in-depth feedback on the Design Brief and intro to tender process 3 hours in person	LLDC and Young Clients	The team discussed feedback on the Design Brief and discussed how tenders would be evaluated, and the eventual supplier selected. An invitation to tender was issued to three tender suppliers.
Workshop 10: upskilling Young Clients for evaluation panel 3 hours in person	LLDC and Young Clients	Three Young Clients volunteered to be part of a smaller team for the presentation and appointing process. Upskilling of the three Young Clients through the procurement process (eg. nonbiased training).

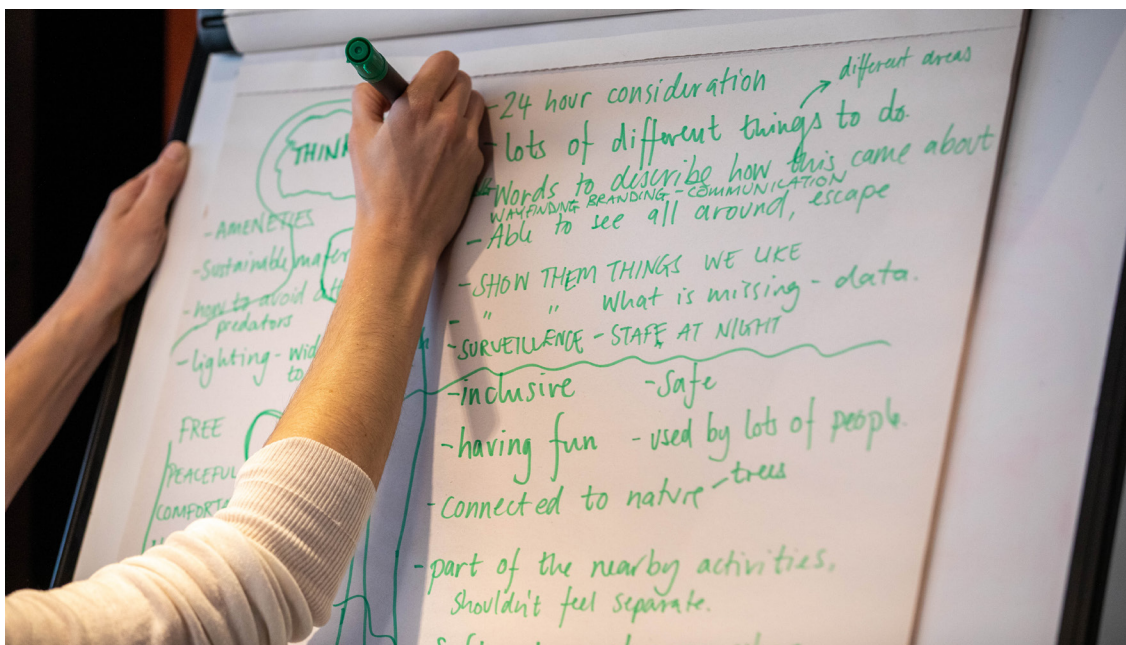
Workshop 11: presentations with tender suppliers 3 hours in person	LLDC, Young Clients, and two tender suppliers	Presentations at LLDC with the tender suppliers and the co-clienting team.
Workshop 12: co-client team discussion and consensus for appointing a tender supplier 3 hours in person	LLDC and Young Clients	Meeting between Young Clients and LLDC to discuss and come to consensus on grading the different teams and select successful team. LLDC evaluated the written applications and reported back to the Young Clients, while Young Clients and LLDC both evaluated the presentations.



An outdoor session with LLDC team members and the Young Clients in Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park

The Briefing Principles

1. A safe and welcoming space for all, that meets the needs of girls and young women.
2. The space should be accessible and inclusive, with furniture for all people to use with ease and comfort.
3. A space to be used to meet the social needs of girls and young women.
4. A space suitable for multiple people and different group sizes to use at the same time.
5. An adaptable space suited to different activities.
6. A space that is covered from the weather, such as rain and wind, but remains an open area.
7. A sustainable structure, sensitive to its environment, with suitable use of materials and building methods.
8. Light must make this space feel safe and welcoming to girls and young women.
9. The space should have informative signage highlighting directions, distance and opening hours to toilets, transport, Westfield shopping centre, retail units in East Wick and Sweetwater, and Stratford, and security measures.
10. A beautiful space using colour and soft landscaping, co-designed by girls and young women.
11. A space where you can leave a physical memory.
12. Connect and relate to the existing approved Youth Play Space.



A workshop with the MDAs in which the Young Clients began drafting briefing principles



A Meeting at the LLDC with MDAs, LLDC and Young Clients

“Your co-design is always a reflection of your brief. If your brief isn’t right, then the co-design is never going to be” – Member of the LLDC team

“We want to know what [the people tendering for the job’s] motivations are for doing this project...we want to see how creative a team is going to be interpreting our brief” – Young Client

“We want to have a designer who sticks to what we want”– Young Client

What was successful?

- **Organisational Support:** The LLDC team were given senior support to explore a new engagement process, to keep the process open and flexible and to lean into the unknown: *"[Try] not to have your own agenda... ensure you can be influenced by whoever you engage with. Because otherwise you're not being true to listening."* – Member of the LLDC team
 - The LLDC team trusted the process of engagement rather than trying to rush decisions.
 - This meant being comfortable with not always having clarity as to next steps and building the possibility of change into the overall structure of the work.
 - This allowed the process to be a fluid collaborative exchange and for the Young Clients to have more influence in determining the course of the briefing process.
 - Importantly this flexibility was balanced with providing clarity for the Young Clients about what was expected of them: *"Ned and Kuljeet, they gave us a timeline... each and every step of the way, we're not confused as to what is happening next"* – Young Client.
- **Stepping back from the Expert role:** The LLDC team were willing to step back from being "the expert" and accept how much the Young Clients could contribute: *"... you go, 'I'm an expert, I've had loads of experience, I can kind of short cut to something... But when you are working with others you need to bring them along... But that takes time and trust in the process"* – Member of LLDC team
 - The LLDC team recognised that their role in the co-client team was sometimes to take a backseat or to facilitate.
 - The LLDC team listened to the Young Clients and were open to learning from them. *"I think it [learning] kind of just worked both ways. The communication was just really good"* – Young Client.
- **Valuing the expertise of others:** The LLDC team valued the expertise of project partners, not only that of the MDAs and the GLA but crucially, the local and lived expertise of the Young Clients.
 - LLDC paid the Young Clients for their time involved in the project.
 - LLDC also explored different ways of working (eg. role playing, walkabouts, opting for outdoor sessions where possible) to enable the Young Clients to feel more comfortable.
 - LLDC trained and valued the Young Clients' assessment and grading of potential design teams.
- **Celebrating and managing difference:** *"We all come from pretty diverse backgrounds, so obviously, our viewpoints and experiences shine through our words. [...] It was really nice seeing how everyone acknowledges that we have different views on what comfort is and safety is, while we were still all able to create this kind of consensus, and, like, respect each other"* – Young Client.
 - LLDC and the Young Clients together embraced that the Young Clients would have different views and experiences and fostered a space where opinions were shared and respected. LLDC and the Young Clients were able to make decisions as a group, without always making compromises.
- **Being clear about budgets:** LLDC were very transparent about the budget and the sorts of physical interventions that could be created for the available budget.
- **Small groups can work well for engagement:** Sometimes it is suggested that engagement needs to involve groups of 12-20 and that, in smaller groups, young people may feel put on the spot or uncomfortable.
 - The experience of the project was that by taking time and building trust in a smaller group, the Young Clients became confident to express their views and voices that might not have been heard in a larger group were heard. *"I get a bit intimidated talking to people older than me. I'm just like, am I professional enough? And is this making sense? But... they allowed us to like, feel like, 'oh, this is a safe space"* – Young Client.
 - LLDC and The Young Clients benefited from having a more intimate space in which to discuss complex themes around gender issues and safety.

What was challenging?

- **Sharing the burden of addressing gender issues:** Too often responsibility for discussions about spaces for women and girls and their safety falls to women within an organisation.
 - The project made a conscious effort to address this by including two individuals who identified as men to create wider understanding of the issues within the organisation and greater depth of skills to tackle them. Taking part in the project held some challenges for the men involved.
- **Time and resources:** These limited the ability to upskill the Young Clients: *"We have to deal with the language of power in order to invert it, challenge it, reframe it."* – GLA/MDA contributor
 - It was difficult given the time and resources to expand the 'learning' component of the experience. However, it would have been beneficial to the project to have a greater discussion around: power and influence within a development and how gender plays out spatially; and a greater and more diffused training on procurement, and grading processes.
 - When introducing something complex as co-clienting, examples, extra materials and case studies could have accelerated the Young Clients' understanding of their roles. In terms of understanding gendered spaces, site visits to 'successful' and 'unsuccessful' spaces may be beneficial.
- **Managing the expectations of the Young Clients:** *"I had so many crazy things in mind. And then I was like, 'oh, so we can't do all of it'. I think I was disappointed for like the first few minutes. But then I was open to hearing what everyone else wanted too. [...] Maybe we can't do it the way I wanted to. Yeah. But there is other options"* – Young Client.
 - *"I don't think anyone understood that it was going to be small because we were all thinking it was gonna be the whole space."* – Young Client.
 - The Young Clients had big ambitions for the site, and there was some confusion as to how much of the site they could influence. To avoid disappointment, it is crucial to be very clear about the constraints, the size of the site, and the depth of influence over the space early on.
 - It is difficult to explain what budgets mean in 'real terms', in order to mitigate unattainable expectations, it is crucial to have transparency around budgets and give examples of what budgets have achieved on other existing sites.
- **Finding the best ways to hold sessions:** In practice all the participants interviewed for this report felt that in-person sessions had been more rewarding. *"I think we initially thought just online sessions would be okay"*– Member of the LLDC team.
 - *"Online just kind of reminds me of COVID. I don't need that reminder..."* – Young Client.
 - Online sessions were less engaging for all parties involved, felt more intimidating and awkward to them, and lacked many of the more creative methods of working that they enjoyed.
 - When meeting in person, it became clear that using LLDC meeting rooms could be intimidating. Running sessions outdoors or in neutral environments were more comfortable to the Young Clients.
 - *"I think one of the mistakes we made was actually sitting in the boardroom upstairs and doing our workshops ... in a very corporate looking room"* – Member of the LLDC team
- **Striking the right balance between expecting too much of the Young Clients and maintaining their involvement:** The LLDC and Young Clients recognised that the Young Clients could only give limited time to the project and the LLDC therefore had to manage how best this time should be used, what should be prioritised and what should be summarised for the Young Clients.
 - In order to feel more involved, many Young Clients wished they had access to documents (the tender and the written applications of the design teams) that ultimately contributed to the appointment of a design team.
 - This was significantly helped by the fact that the Young Clients already had pre-existing training and knowledge of planning and built environment processes by virtue of their being part of Elevate.

A suggested route map for bringing community members into a bespoke co-client team



Step 1: Internal preparation

- Identify key area for influence with a co-client structure and decide internally on the general structure (process, sessions, timelines, aims, related guidance and flexibility) of the co-clienting engagement.
- Identify project leads, any external partners and engagement groups and their roles.



Step 2: Recruitment

- Identify recruitment pool and numbers, draft engagement proposal focusing on the influence participants will have, and allow time and resources to recruit.



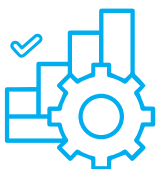
Step 3: Induction of participants

- Complete necessary admin and onboarding of engagement group including: introducing site details, project budget and timelines, as well as project role and where participants sit in decision making structure.
- Understand how you need to work with the participants to achieve an equitable co-clienting structure and address power imbalances between the built environment specialists on the team and the participants



Step 4: Upskilling participants

- Integrate upskilling throughout project, reacting to what knowledge, skills, and information need to be shared with the participants to enable effective decision making and influence within the project. This might be initiated by participants or proposed by the project team. In turn, this will ensure participants leave with greater knowledge or skills.



Step 5: Structuring Sessions

- Flexibly base timing and nature of sessions on participants' needs, provide a thoughtful safe space for exchange, and offer thorough but engaging and approachable session activities/ content.



Step 6: Review and Evaluate the Process

- Create an evaluation process which includes the participants. It is essential to assess strengths, weaknesses, and experiences of the engagement and work to address concerns.



Step 7: Maintain the Co-Client Team

- Retain and co-determine the role of individuals within the client team even after outcomes have been achieved. Create advocacy for the project/ ambitions amongst the community.



Step 8: Celebrate Achievement

- Reflect and celebrate what you've achieved through the process with those you engaged with

Please refer to the detailed route map (p.26) for expanded steps.

Conclusion

It is clear from the evaluation process that underpinned this report that the project was viewed very positively by the Young Clients:

“Originally, it just didn’t sound like something that I’d want to do. But I did it anyways and I don’t regret it.”

“Everyone came in with open minds and prepared to change their minds”

“[The sessions] weren’t boring ‘listen to me’ type sessions”

“I felt really comfortable talking to Kuljeet and Ned, they made it feel like a safe space and they really listened to us”

“Ten out of ten. I’d do it again”

In addition to this positive feedback, the project has succeeded in its two aims: to explore different ways to engage with girls and young women in the built environment; and to co-create a design brief with girls and young women for a space in Waterden Green that is safe and fun for girls aged 12-18. It has done so by taking the time and care to place local girls and young women into a bespoke client team with a clear role and suitable support. As a result, they have created a design brief that is much more grounded in the wants and needs of local girls and young women. The design brief does not include the pitches, courts or wheeled sports facilities often assumed to be the answer for teenage space. Instead, the design brief proposes a social, safe, sustainable and adaptable space, which welcomes a diversity of people, bodies, and activities and which differs from the original proposals gleaned through traditional engagement methods. The Young Clients have also appointed a design team they confidently feel will bring this vision to life.

While this project worked with girls and young women, co-clienting as a process which meaningfully engages with groups typically left out of development and planning, has the potential to be a good method to engage with other groups, whether young, old, women, men, gender diverse and so on.

What next?

For Waterden Green, the end of Phase 1 of the co-clienting process is just the start. The co-client team are very aware that the second phase (creating the space) is still to be done. The challenge will be to maintain the momentum and focus, to initiate and complete Phase 2, fitting it within the complex timetable for the wider development of the park.

“I want to see what the pod is going to look like- I want to see what a designer is going to do” – Young Client.

But in terms of a future for the project more widely, there is challenge of introducing this type of engagement into the wider processes within LLDC, and in due course development work more generally.

“.. for me the true value of the project is in capturing the process that was used. And for that process to feed into the wider agenda of starting to compose a constellation of projects that offer learnings which will incrementally nudge the dial towards a more inclusive city” – Mayor’s Design Advocate.

“Will our project create a knock-on effect? Will it allow other projects to be done on a similar basis?” – Young Client.

“I hope there’s more work like this. I’m definitely much more keen in being involved in projects where I’m acting as a co-client team or helping co-design something now” – Young Client.



One of the Young Client’s examples of a ‘good’ green space



Workshopping briefing principles with the LLDC and MDAs at the LLDC offices



An MDA workshop with the Young Clients to understand power and client structures within developments and planning



Workshopping power structures with Young Clients, MDAs and LLDC at LLDC offices

The Young Clients' Assessment

Why get involved in this process?

"When I saw the opportunity, I thought it seemed really interesting. We were actually going to be making a space, which is very inclusive. It's not excluding everyone else, but it's really trying to meet the needs of young women and girls."

"My thoughts inherently just went to what would I want in a space? Not just physically, but what would make me feel safe? And what goes into that?"

"It seemed that we would be really involved. We would be there every step of the process; we'd act as a client body which I wasn't familiar with. I don't think any of us really knew what that meant at the start. But I liked that we would be giving ideas about how the youth really think about things. Because I think we're not often engaged with directly, sometimes they talk to people who surround themselves by the youth but not the youth themselves."

What did co-clienting mean to you?

"To be honest, at first, I was so confused. It wasn't until we started really going into creating the design brief and discussing where our principles would be included, that I realised "hey, this is our role." I think the biggest thing with us being co-clients is just the amount our voices were heard and how much what we said, impacted the design brief itself. Because essentially, it was our thoughts and ideas, which created this design brief, which would then be fed to the architectural team."

"At first, I thought it was kind of just they [LLDC] do everything. And I just give like, a little input here and there [...] But, when we were actually doing the sessions, it kind of just felt like we were all equal. [...] We weren't just like a consultation body. We were active participants."

What do you think worked well?

"Kuljeet and Ned really listened to us and took the time to understand us. You would say you didn't agree with something in one session and then the next session we'd see that it had been changed, and really taken into account. What I also really liked was that we could comfortably talk with Kuljeet and Ned. I often get a bit intimidated talking to people older than me. I worry: 'am I professional enough? And is this making sense?' But they were very comforting. They allowed us to feel like it was a safe space."

"I think it was very easy to show opinions and honestly, it was actually really fun to share ideas. We all respect each other so, I think it was easy to share but also give feedback. We do have different views, but we would talk through the pros and cons of everything. And Ned and Kuljeet would help us think about 'Is this realistic? Can we implement this? Do we have any limitations on what we can do?'"

"Collaboration really worked well, and I think the structure of the sessions really helped with that. Like the mind maps for the brief, looking at examples, or we would breakout into pairs or trios and then come back together to share. Or the exercise where we role played who had power in the development process with the MDAs and we then discussed it and saw how much power we actually had in the process. I think the team did a really good job in explaining what specific roles were like and the MDAs really helped with that."

"Presenting our briefing principles to the wider Elevate group. Because everyone has different views, it's important that we got feedback from a wider group. And we felt proud to be presenting our hard work to them and supported."

"I think the main difference with this project versus others I have worked on is that we can really see that we've been listened to, and where changes and decisions have been made because of what we have shared. With other projects because it's not as frequent meetings, you don't always know if your ideas have been implemented. Kuljeet and Ned really kept us updated throughout the process and gave us timelines and shared 'this is what's happening next' 'now we're doing this.' Each and every step of the way, we're not confused as to what is happening next. They keep us informed as a client."

"We're being involved at every step, and we have a real say."

"I think that interviewing the design teams was a really fun and interesting but also humbling part of the process. We learned so much about our own biases, how to be impartial and really evaluate a team, especially because of our procurement training and in talking through our grading with the LLDC. Sometimes there will be one team that is perhaps more charismatic in interviews, but you need to think about 'will they be the best to take our vision forward?' and 'how much do they really hit the points that they need to be?'. I think we were trained and guided to think about these things, and we also felt really included in the final decision making."



Young Clients, MDAs and LLDC working together to create a list of initial Briefing Principles at LLDC offices

What were some of the challenges?

“Online sessions didn’t work as well. It was way less engaging. It feels like things are being talked to us, and then it’s hard to just jump in. I was more afraid to speak online because I think ‘am I saying the right thing?’ You have less confidence, and it’s easy to miscommunicate. And sometimes there are internet issues, where we couldn’t hear each other and that makes things awkward and ruins the flow.”

“I feel like in person meetings are much more proactive and we get a lot of work done. We’ve had two online meetings. It’s just, you don’t remember a single thing. I can tell you everything from our in-person meeting, but our online meeting is a blank. And online just kind of reminds me of COVID which I don’t need.”

“I also wish we had had maybe one more session on co-clienting. Or extra materials or case studies. If we had just one more session that would have helped me.”

“Personally, I preferred just getting into it. I think I

learned more about what a co-client was from just doing it.”

“I think we all felt that the area we were dealing with could have been made clearer. Because its only when we saw the 3D version of the space that I realised we weren’t informing the whole space but just one of the pods. So, we were like: ‘oh, my gosh, this place is small’. Everyone was thinking it was going to be the whole space.”

“Yeah, I won’t lie. I was a little disappointed. My imagination was running wild because I thought I could have more say in terms of what’s going in the pods, but we were just focusing on one aspect. So, I had to realise that ‘oh so we can’t do all of it.’ But I was open to hearing about what we could do with the space, and I actually think it’s more realistic for it to be this kind of smaller space, because it’s just a shelter, you know, you don’t want it to be overarching.”

“I think some bits about interviewing and appointing the design team went less well. For me, I wish I had seen the written applications of the design team and tender, even just to look through to feel more involved,

rather than Ned and Kuljeet just going through it and telling us key takeaways. I also think that the training was way too long to do in one go – like 3.5 hours! It needed to be broken up – especially because we were all fasting, and it was late when we finished– and we didn't get to have a clearer explanation of what the grading really meant."

Do you think you learned things throughout this process?

"I think that learning worked both ways. There'll be certain things that we just wouldn't understand, and we would spend a session with Kuljeet and Ned just going through it. And we wouldn't leave until everyone understood what we did. And then it might go the other way, where we had to break things down that were important for us to them."

"I think we also taught people things like how differently young people see the world. We all come from pretty diverse backgrounds, and so our viewpoints and experiences will be different and will affect what we consider to be like a safe, or a comfortable place. I feel like, it was really nice seeing

how everyone acknowledges that we have different views but there's still respect there."

"I just understand so much more about what a client does, what co-clienting is and how power works or could work. "

"Personally, originally, it just didn't sound like something that I'd want to do. But I did it anyways and I don't regret it. I think just keep an open mind. And just go for things that I wouldn't usually go for. I also think that a very key measure I've learned, is just because things are alright the way they are doesn't mean that they can't be improved."

What happens next?

"I'm really looking forwards for, if all goes well, the design team to reach out to the wider audience. Not just taking our opinion for it just because we're young. We don't exactly fit into the age range, because most of us are 17-18 and we are trying to reach younger audiences. So, in our brief we have suggested that they talk to schools for example and have their



Workshop at LLDC offices

opinions of what the space should look like. So, it isn't just our opinion that was taken up, because some of us do have different opinions out there.

"I hope there's more work like this. I'm definitely much more keen in being involved in projects where I'm acting as a co-client team or helping co-design something now"



Young Clients, MDAs and LLDC workshopping initial briefing principles at LLDC offices

Appendix

Detailed route map for bringing community members into a bespoke client team

We recognise that each project is different, and every process must be tailored to meet the needs and resources of the site, the development team and the local community.



Step 1: Internal preparation

- Internal discussions on general structure of engagement
 1. Secure understanding and buy in from internal and external stakeholders.
 2. Determine where local community members can and should make the most impact; consider whether it is appropriate to use existing resources or connections you have, and whether there are any particular communities that have been missed and should be prioritised in the engagement.
 3. Establish how much you want to predefine the engagement process (eg. number of sessions, session content, etc.), and how much you want to let it evolve through doing the work with community members.
 4. Establish the project's aims, and its constraints, opportunities and priorities.
 5. Develop general timelines, including scope for flexibility as wider development timelines shift.
 6. Consider suitable guidance (eg. Safety in Public Space: Women, Girls and Gender Diverse People).
- Select a project lead or project leads within your organisation ideally with a level of "fit" for the engagement group you plan to work with.
- Identify external partners. Consider, for example, whether engagement will include many stakeholders, and whether a gatekeeper or engagement consultant will be needed for your engagement group.
- Establish how you will value the time of your participants. LLDC chose to pay their participants; will you pay participants, and if so, how will this work within national minimum wage rules, tax and benefits provisions.
- Establish necessary processes for safeguarding- be aware that, for example, when discussing safety of women and girls, the team may hear something that would trigger the organisation's obligations in relation to a referral of a child protection concern; everyone in the team must understand the procedures to deal with these.
- Establish health and safety processes and undertake appropriate risk assessments.



Step 2: Recruitment

- Identify appropriate pools from which to recruit participants to take part in the engagement. Keep in mind potential site users, EDI considerations and widening of participation.
- Allow sufficient time and resources for recruitment.
- Be flexible and realistic about the number of young people who can commit to long term engagement.
- In larger groups/less intense engagement, there is the risk of just hearing the loudest voices. Working with a smaller group, to build trust and knowledge over a longer period can work well.
- Chose a recruitment time frame that fits the task you wish to co-client on.
- Recruit as early on as possible so there can be ongoing engagement throughout the lifetime of the project.
- Be aware of exam and revision periods, holidays and other times when engagement might be difficult for your target pool.
- Provide sufficient detail about the engagement to allow participants to understand what they are agreeing to be involved in.
- Be clear where the programme has flexibility to adapt to the needs of participants, and where possible be flexible with participant's timelines and availabilities; and consider food and drink and the maximum length of any one session.
- Determine what happens if a participant misses a session- *can they catch up? What about longer-term absences?*



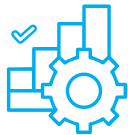
Step 3: Induction of participants

- Complete necessary admin for working with community members.
- Depending on how the participants will be rewarded for their time, this may include setting up suitable payment processes, appropriate vouchers for shops they actually use, contracts, right to work checks etc.
- On boarding other participants (eg. engagement specialist), completing logistics/their contracts.
- Introduction to the site and its context, participant roles and influence, intended outcomes, time scales etc.
- Ensure that there is clarity on site limits and constraints as well as budgets.



Step 4: Upskilling Participants

- Ensure that participants leave with more knowledge or understanding than when they first came in.
- Upskilling may be spread throughout the engagement, and in some projects, there may be scope for the participants to be involved in identifying areas where they feel upskilling is necessary or would be beneficial to them.
- Intentionally address power, the dynamics involved in a development, key terms (eg. a brief, co-design).
- Depending on the depth of engagement this may go from light touch to multiple sessions.



Step 5: Structuring Sessions

- Be flexible with the structure of sessions (eg. online, in person, length) based on the needs of the participants.
- Ensure that you create a safe space, where exchange and debate can be respectfully shared and valued.
- Sessions should include activities and structures that are approachable and engaging but retain the focus on contributing to the outcome.
- Sessions should not “dumb down” to only fun activities or shy away from frank or difficult conversations.
- If working with a smaller group, consider whether it may be beneficial to open up the engagement (potentially led by the participants) to a wider group through a – or a series of – workshop(s), discussion(s) etc. This may ensure that contributions are more representative of the general community.
- Be thoughtful about how and what language you use to present ideas.



Step 6: Review and Evaluate the Process

- Create a method to evaluate the experiences of stakeholders involved (eg. interviews, discussions, surveys).
- Capture lessons learned and document strengths and weaknesses.
- Review the process and identify if and where this evaluation may shape how the project evolves.



Step 7: Maintain the Co-Client Team

- Keep individuals within the client team even after outcomes have been achieved.
- Co-determine the role that those engaged with will play in the client team for the next stage of the project.



Step 8: Celebrate Achievements

- Celebrate what you've achieved through this engagement process with those you engaged with in a way that is appropriate and has maximum buy-in.

Interviews with Key Participants

Ruth Lin Wong Holmes: Head of Landscape and Public Realm for LLDC.

Can you tell us a little about the beginnings of this project?

The site was always earmarked to be for youth play. At LLDC we have a robust history of great community engagement and we had been undertaking our usual process. I started to think about whether we could get more out of our engagement if we tried to do something different. We had worked with young people as part of the initial co-design of the wider park – our Youth Board now called ‘Elevate’– and we had secured planning permission for the Waterden Green play area based on their input. But when we tested the proposed design with young women through an explicit gendered lens, they liked the design but were generally clear that it wouldn’t be a space that they would use.

We had asked the young people to design a place for teenagers: and when we think about teenage spaces the image that evokes is basketball courts, gyms because historically that was the commonly held wisdom to manage ‘anti-social behaviour’ among young people. The process hadn’t asked the young women to think about a space that was “for them”. So, I set up the project with the aim of finding a different way to engage with young women and girls and potentially gender diverse people. The other aim was that they would contribute to a design brief for one of the pods which would be a space targeting 12 to 18 year old young women.

I wanted the project team to be free to explore with the young women what it would look like. It was important to me that the team did not go into the process wedded to an idea of what the outcome would be. And to truly find ways to shift where power sat in terms of decision making, recognising that the process would not be a quick one. The timing was also good as it was independent of the development timeline and the GLA has a current focus on spaces for safety with girls, young women, and gender diverse people and they offered to support us with this project; this enabled us to bring in the Mayor’s Design Advocates.

What do you think are some of the challenges or perceived challenges with this type of process?

It can be uncomfortable letting go of a process to this extent – as a professional you have all this knowledge and experience – so it is hard to have to take a back seat. I think it’s also hard to be comfortable creating a process that allows a lot of movement within it. You need to build mutual trust between the participants and via that trust have faith that even though you don’t know how the process is going to evolve, it is going to evolve into something positive.

There can also be a fear that ‘deep’ engagement can lead to needing to satisfy everyone’s needs – which realistically can never happen. It is important to recognise that working in this way isn’t the same as designing by committee. It won’t be possible to meet everyone’s needs or aspirations and simply compromising can leave you with a bad design outcome that doesn’t work for anyone– it’s a question of negotiation and making collective decisions – not necessarily about achieving consensus.

It is also important that there is support at a senior level for this type of innovative process, which we had. If you don’t have this support, it can be very hard or feel like you are fighting a battle to get things moving. Designing for women and girls’ safety has full Board level support at LLDC and this has made a world of difference.

What do you hope for the legacy of this project?

I really hope that we managed to create a process where people didn’t feel “othered” or taken advantage of. I’d really like the eventual space to be something that the young women are proud of, that looks really good, that makes for a great sociable space and a place people identify with.

Kuljeet Sibia: Senior Design Manager LLDC

How did you get involved?

There was an open call to LLDC employees in several directorates to see who wanted to lead a project working with young women and creating a brief to co-design a space for teenage girls aged 12-18 in Waterden Green. I was excited by the projects potential and opportunity to be involved. I grew up in East London and I realised that I had stopped going to parks when I was a young teenager. And here was a chance to be involved in changing that and in a way that's directly relevant to East London.

The team and I had an initial meeting with the GLA and MDAs to scrutinise how we were going to structure the project engagement and design brief. From that initial meeting with the GLA we leaned into taking one workshop at a time and not overplanning or shoehorning our own ideas into the process. We trusted the process would develop as we went along the project journey; and the Mayor's Design Advocates were great in that respect – they pushed us to question what was needed to develop an effective process - how much of our influence over the process do we relinquish; what decisions can we realistically give up, what power should we share and how far should this go?

How did the concept of bringing young women into the client team come about?

Fundamentally, we wanted to ensure the design brief was informed by the voices of girls and young women, reflective of the end users. It was clear to us if the brief was not established with the relevant voices, even if it was grounded in advocacy of co-design, it was never going to achieve the project aims and safeguard a meaningful co-design process. We started with an open mind about how best to engage with girls and young women to co-create a design brief. We were fortunate LLDC had preexisting links with Elevate; we knew we wanted in-depth engagement as well as being open to developing new ideas about what this would look like.

The terms consultation and engagement are often used interchangeably, but for me they are very different. Consultation occurs when you have done something, and you want to get someone's opinion on it and you might only a group once. In all honesty it can be seen as a tick box exercise. In contrast, engagement is about involving someone in a wider process – you have to work much harder to create a meaningful role for them, find ways to draw out their views and inspire them to creatively contribute. However, we still find this process tends to involve the participants being asked to provide input or advice at set, discrete stages in the process. Traditionally the decisions, as to the extent of input into the brief and final design, are made by the developer or those who hold the purse strings. We wanted to experiment with something that went further than this, which meant thinking about where the power sat in the decision-making process.

The idea of girls and young women being part of a client team evolved through the initial workshops and discussions with GLA, MDA, and Elevate. We wanted to put the voices of the young women in a position where there was power and influence – and in this case, the client had a greater level of influence than the end user. We invited the girls and young women to site within the client team – within the team that are making the decisions and whose requirements must be met. This meant both LLDC and the girls and young women formed a co-client team, with the purpose of the team collectively producing the design brief, appointing a design team and establishing a co-design methodology.

When we set out in the process, we began looking for precedents to share with Elevate, but quickly realised it was a difficult task to find good examples in the UK, which actually got me excited; I kept thinking – I don't know what this is going to look like, but it has the potential to be groundbreaking.

What role did the young women play within the client team?

The LLDC team brought expertise in the built environment and the young women their lived experiences, knowledge of the local area, and insight into the end-user and how girls and young women want to feel in public spaces.

The intention was to share the power of decision making. However, we also needed to recognise that given where we were in the project, there was a limit on the scope of influence the client group could make. The site was set, the budget was set, and time frames were determined by factors outside of our control. Additionally, we didn't have the whole site to play with- we were working with one pod.

Within these constraints the core work of the young women within the client team was to create a set of briefing principles, which were developed and refined as a collaborative process and consulted on more widely with the larger Elevate Group. The "heavy lifting" on drafting the brief was written by the LLDC team members- inevitably we couldn't ask the young women to draft an entire brief. We also couldn't expect them to go through the written applications of the different design teams during the tender process. However, the design portion of the brief, including the principles, were reviewed and commented on word for word by the young women; and they were trained and had as much decision making power as LLDC when it came to interviews and then appointment of a design team. Furthermore, the young women set out how they wanted to be worked with during the design development phase and set briefing principles.

What makes the success of a project like this?

A big part of the success of the process was trying not to have my own agenda for what it would look like and keeping my mind open to be influenced by whoever we engaged with, otherwise we wouldn't really be listening, and that's the intension of the process. I think we worked hard to make it clear that we value the expertise the young women bring to the co-client team, respecting their opinions; the fact that they all might have different opinions; and providing a space where the young women felt safe to bring their skills to the team, ensuring they felt safe to say "I don't understand this" and "can you explain that again." It's important not to make someone feel unskilled or out of their depth, because that could be a blow to their confidence. I think upskilling comes into that too, we realised we had to address the power imbalances and the knowledge surrounding who holds the power. Therefore, we spent a lot of time going over: what is a brief and why is it important? What are the RIBA stages of a project and why do they matter? What are the constrains and the opportunities of the site/project. Talking about budget and what that means for our project; and so on.

For engagement to have meaningful impact when working with voices that have previously been excluded, you have to take the time to build up relationships and understand where the young women are coming from. Of course, the LLDC team also had a role as guardians of the process, acknowledging it's not simply a question of agreeing with the young women: it's about listening and having conversations about what's going to work and what's not. For example, the young women suggested a cafe and toilets on the site, and we knew we didn't have the budget for either. But rather than shut down those conversations, we explored why these were important to them and to think about what alternatives we could have.

What were some highlights of this process for you?

Working with the young women was incredible; learning how much ownership they want over decisions concerning spaces that are supposed to cater for them and being amazed about how much they have to contribute. We started with a group of about 20 young people at the first exploratory workshop and then following the call out it settled into a group of 7 young women who took the time to attend sessions regularly which was really rewarding, considering you can set up engagement processes, and no one turns up, or people attend and then they drop out. It was clear we were doing something different to retain their engagement. The young women are proud of the work they have done and that's special to see.

Working with the GLA's MDAs was incredibly insightful- it gave us the confidence to not follow the usual procedures of brief setting, but to think about things differently and take the opportunity to explore and hopefully create a new methodology. Something that has personally touched me from this project is how it has taken me back to why I became an architect. I always thought that, as an architect I'd work on projects that created social change. This is a really small project but it has a really big heart behind it.

Ned Adams-Felton: Development Manager LLDC

How and why did you get involved?

This was an opportunity to get involved in exploring aspects of gender from a professional and practical point of view (I'd had some exposure to gendered design issues in an academic context); and an opportunity to work with community partners to create something different. We already had a design for Waterden Green Park which involved four pods; but the question we wanted to address was: are these right for everyone or are they too influenced by the "typical design for teenagers"?

What's in a name?

I think a lot can come from the name you give a place. At first we described the area in the pod as a 'play shelter'. But talking to the Young Clients, the word "shelter" didn't feel right; and "play" feels too childish. It's a good example of how the lack of the right words to describe a place can be a real barrier to working out what it should look like. We still haven't found quite the right name for the space, but we are getting there.

What was interesting and rewarding about this project for you?

So much. For me, being able to take a step back and try to unlearn some of the things I have 'learned' about what a space for teenagers should be like was enlightening. I was in a space where the Young Clients are having these difficult discussions about feeling welcome and safe. It did feel uncomfortable at times; but also very beneficial. Coming in as a male to these conversations, it was a learning experience too – often it's a bunch of men in the room! – so you have to sit with that discomfort and figure out the role you should play in those discussions. I felt it was key that my role be to engage in careful and active listening. As professionals we can get used to being expected to come up with all the answers; to keep meetings short and focused; to close down options so that the team can get to a particular point etc; but the point of being part of these discussions was to focus on hearing what the Young Clients were saying, trying not to steer the conversation in any particular direction, and trying to keep the conversation open.

I think it was also learning to strip our discussions of jargon, and using shared, accessible language. I think doing the sessions in person and in different locations really helped with that. We thought that online sessions would work well but actually nobody is as switched on, you don't get as much from these sessions. And doing a session in a very formal meeting room might not have been the right decision at the start of the project; these were things we hadn't initially considered. But then when we did a workshop outside, we realised 'oh, where we are matters too'.

I think more generally, the level of commitment that the Young Clients have shown to the project is amazing! And working and learning from the MDAs, because they are designers who understand engagement and there aren't many people like that out there – has been really valuable to the process.

What do you think were the challenges of this work?

It was difficult designing the process as we went along. We knew we were trying something new, and we knew that we had to be flexible, which was a great opportunity- but also a challenge. We were learning as we went and in truth it did take up more time than what we had built into our already full-on schedules... and there were practical issues that we hadn't anticipated like the difficulty of getting dates in the diary with the Young Clients.

Fitting the engagement process within the wider time frame of the project was also a challenge. There are a lot of interdependencies that will dictate when the site can actually be developed. This is challenging in terms of scheduling a tendering process for example, and in terms of managing the expectations of the Young Clients. I am really keen that we don't lose momentum: delays in the project could mean that we risk losing the long-term engagement.

What do you think the legacy of this project should be?

I think it would be really fantastic to be able to share the knowledge about this process – creating some kind of blueprint that others can use and that we can refer back to on future projects. It's thinking about how we can codify what we did so that it could be fit into a less flexible timeline. It would have been lovely to start this process knowing what we know now; and I really think that how we've run this could work with so many other groups too – not just young women.

Kathryn Timmins: Principal Policy Officer in the GLA's regeneration team.

How did you get involved?

The GLA produced a report, which looked at the role of design in creating safer public spaces for women, girls and gender diverse people *Safety in Public Space: Women, Girls and Gender Diverse People*. This proposed a toolkit of 10 questions that public realm designers and developers could use to support the process of making more gender inclusive spaces. Phase 2 of this work involved testing this tool kit on live projects. We looked for appropriate projects and in discussion with LLDC identified Waterden Green as a test project. Make Space for Girls had already been involved; LLDC had already started to consider the role that gender played in how teenagers used space; so it seemed like a great opportunity towards a more radical approach to engagement.

Why involve the young women as part of the client team?

There are a number of issues with traditional consultation or engagement. The process is often very extractive: the consultees are asked to turn up, give the developer information and then leave. It's often very difficult for the consultees to find out what's happened to their input. Often engagement is hived off to a separate engagement team; by the time it comes to decisions on site, these are being taken by a different team and have to be taken quickly; as a result, the testimonies and experiences of the consultees, validly shared as part of the engagement, are simply lost.

If you place the testimonies and experiences of the participants within the client team, then those testimonies and experiences stay with the project – there is much less chance of them getting lost and much greater chance that they will play a role in the decisions that are eventually made about the site.

It is also about power. A lot of the work that we have done at GLA is focussed on shifting power dynamics in the design process: how can women, girls and gender diverse people have meaningful input into the design process if they don't have power? Traditional consultation does not involve giving the consultees any power. In contrast in this project, the intention is that by becoming part of the client team, the young women would have more power in the process: because of the status of the client role; and because the client role is involved throughout the process- not just at set points in the process as is the case with traditional consultation.

But you can't just "dump" the role of being a client in a design project on someone: you have to give them enough knowledge and skills to feel comfortable in that role.

What has stood out to you from this project?

This process was quite different – we didn't know how it was going to work, and we had to lean into the unknown. The process was messy at times, and we had to get comfortable with that. And I think that flexibility is something that LLDC really embraced as well, which was invaluable.

I also think that for a project like this to work, it is essential that there is sufficient support at a senior level to put the safety of women and girls on the agenda. LLDC has this. If asked, most organisation will say they value the safety of women and girls but if this support doesn't translate into allocating meaningful resources to the issue, then it doesn't really mean much.

We could explore topics that can be very triggering and need careful handling, like safety, in nuanced ways. It's important not to let the discussion get side tracked into conversations about crime statistics etc. It's about the wider conversations on safety: about do I feel welcome here? is this a space for me? Am I represented in this space?

Why do you think this type of engagement is not more common?

I think people are afraid to touch some of these topics and processes. This type of engagement is often a messy and sometimes uncomfortable process but that's not a bad thing! I also think that there is a fear of 'what happens if that safety agenda doesn't create a perfect safe place?' The thing is, there's no cookie cutter example of what safety looks like. Some people will say that "x" makes them feel safer, but others that "x" makes them feel more unsafe. That's OK- we just have to be able to think about how we work with that contradicting information in design terms. You have to remind yourself that perfect is not the enemy of good. You don't need to make a perfect space but take steps to create better ones.

What would you want as the legacy of this project?

That other developers see this work and are encouraged to adopt this type of engagement, to make it more likely that the voices of end users are truly incorporated into the public realm spaces that they create.

There is a lot of willingness among the developer community, but trying something new creates risk and there is a question about how we ease the burden of taking the risk of doing something different, both for an organisation and for individuals within the organisation who lead projects like this.

Daisy Froud and Jayden Ali: Mayor's Design Advocates supported by the GLA

Daisy and Jayden are both Mayor's Design Advocates. Jayden runs an architecture and design practice focusing on the cultural space of London, JA Projects. Daisy is a facilitator and strategist specialising in participatory design and the collaborative production of the built environment, and also teaches at The Bartlett on the politics of space. They, with input from fellow MDA Manijeh Verghese, worked on the Waterden Green engagement, running three workshop, one to support LLDC develop its initial thinking and two with LLDC and the Young Clients.

How did bringing the young women into the client team work?

Daisy: It was really fantastic. The process was helped by the fact that the young women already had established relationships, with themselves, with the site, with LLDC, and even with the knowledge and experience of working collaboratively. These things are so essential to build but they can also take time.

Jayden: I think the brief writing process was well rounded and the Young Clients had really brilliant insights. The initial work has been open and grounded. It is also a really big win that LLDC, as the developer, took responsibility for finding ways to do collaborative design on this project. Too often responsibility for collaborative design gets pushed further and further down the chain, away from the developer and where the power and decision-making sits. LLDC were willing to provide the resources to support exploring this, which should be celebrated.

Jayden, you identify as male: what are your reflections on how this impacted your role in this project?

Jayden: I think it is important to think about your role in a project like this. I believe that there is a role for those who identify as male within these discussions and projects. But it is important to listen diligently and ensure that you contribute in an appropriate and supportive manner. It isn't a question of saying "this is my field, and I think this would be a good thing for women and girls". Rather it is a question of supporting the participants who

have the local lived experience and offering that "based on my professional experience, maybe it could help to consider this type of thing, or advocate for best practice you have seen elsewhere. It's about recognising that whilst you have expertise, you are not the expert." and so on.

Is there anything you would do differently?

Jayden: I think LLDC have done a fantastic job on this kind of engagement and resourcing it. However, it takes practice and insight to challenge power dynamics, so I wish we had had a much longer session on power with the Young Clients and how it plays out in the built environment and generally. We have to deal with the language of power and understand its mechanisms in order to invert it, challenge it, reframe it. Because this is such a fundamental part of getting engagement right, it could have been really valuable to spend more time on this.

Daisy: I agree, I think it's always a challenge when working on projects with a finite time frame, but it's really important, to make time to talk about where the power lies. Sometimes people want to rush into design, what a space will look like etc, but you need to have the conversations about who has what power in the process before jumping into this sort of detail. If you don't, you find yourself part way through an engagement and one of the participants will say "Hang on, exactly what sort of power do we have in this process?"

It's also really important to define your terms at the beginning of a project- terms like co-clients and co-production, because these terms can mean something different to everyone. But I really also discourage people from going down big semantic wormholes of trying to find some sort of ultimate definition of terms like this. As long as you are using a process that seeks to redistribute power and decision making and everyone is clear what the process is, it's up to your project how you define these terms.

What do you think are the next steps or what would you like to see?

Daisy: I hope the Young Clients not only see their own influence on the actual space but feel they have learned and are taking away skills from their involvement in the project. Looking ahead strategically, I also often notice that a challenge on these kind of co-clienting or co-design projects is that, as a participant, you start off saying 'we don't speak on behalf of everyone', and stressing that other voices need to be heard. And then with the pressures of project delivery, before you know it, people both client and community side can start to assume that you're speaking on behalf of everyone, which can put you in an uncomfortable position. So, I'm also looking forward to those conversations we were having to be opened back up to a wider engagement, with that designed drawing on the young women's expertise re. what is likely to work for their peers and communities.

Jayden: I hope that the young clients feel valued, are involved in the commissioning process, and are supported throughout the design process to remain involved. The challenge will also be what will happen when the project goes through value engineering? Or when inevitable tensions between what the Young Clients want, and what LLDC/the council want, have to be resolved. In those ways it may be good for the Young Clients to have external mentors, or an external body that can provide them with guidance and support them throughout the process. If the final space works well, that is great. But for me, the true value of the project is in capturing the process that was used. And for that process to feed into the wider agenda of starting to compose a constellation of projects that offer learnings about how we can continue to deliver and develop this type of work, which will incrementally nudge the dial towards a more inclusive city.



Endnotes

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