

Meeting	Community Development Committee
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Report Title	Parks that work for Teenage Girls: Practical Approaches to Inclusive Engagement & Design
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Friends Garden Project: Proposal for the Co-design of a Community Space with Teenage Girls

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Purpose

To develop a "Friends Garden"; a community-designed outdoor space aimed at addressing an identified gap in provision for teenage girls and young women within Haydon Wick Parish as per the CLAP. This is following on from the discussion in the Community Development meeting on 7 July 2026 ([Agenda 17 - Practical Approaches to Inclusive Engagement and Design.pdf](#))

The project would involve:

- Consultation with local secondary schools and young people,
- Identification of a suitable site,
- Development of a funding strategy for future delivery.

Recommendation

Council is asked to:

- Approve the principle of developing a Friends Garden project.
- Authorise officers and councillors to undertake consultation with local secondary schools, youth organisations and residents during Autumn 2026.
- Support the investigation of suitable locations within Haydon Wick.
- Receive a further report following consultation containing concept designs, estimated costs and funding opportunities.

Background

Haydon Wick Parish Council has invested significantly in facilities for children and young people, including play areas, multi-use games areas (MUGAs), skate facilities and open green spaces. These facilities continue to provide valuable opportunities for recreation and physical activity.

However, national research demonstrates that adolescent girls are significantly less likely than boys to use parks and outdoor recreation spaces. Many existing facilities

are activity-led and sport-focused. While appropriate for many users, research suggests these spaces are overwhelmingly used by boys and young men.

Equally, teenage girls frequently report feeling they are "too old" for traditional playgrounds but do not identify with sports facilities. This can result in teenage girls becoming one of the least represented groups within local parks despite evidence showing that regular access to green spaces contributes positively to:

- physical health
- mental wellbeing
- independence
- social connection
- community belonging

The Friends Garden concept was successfully developed at Rowntree Park in York through co-design with local teenage girls and has since become recognised as national good practice.

Proposal

Rather than designing a facility for teenage girls, the project proposes designing a space *with* teenage girls but inclusive of all residents. The project would be delivered in four stages.

Stage One - Community Engagement

Consultation would take place during September and October following the return to school. Engagement would include:

- local secondary schools
- youth organisations
- community groups
- online surveys
- design workshops
- focus groups

The purpose would be to understand:

- barriers to park use
- preferred activities
- preferred design features
- safety concerns
- desired events and programmes

I have also reached out to Swindon Borough Council to request information on anti-social behaviour involving teenagers – especially young women – to identify potential concerns.

Stage Two - Site Assessment

Potential locations currently identified include:

- Windrush Road
- Francombe Play Area

Additional sites may emerge during consultation. Assessment criteria would include:

- accessibility
- visibility
- natural surveillance
- existing infrastructure
- biodiversity opportunities
- proximity to schools
- future maintenance requirements

Stage Three - Concept Design

The final design would be informed entirely by consultation. Previous similar project groups have suggest features including:

- communal swings
- grouped seating
- picnic benches
- informal climbing structures
- sensory planting
- wildflower areas
- shaded seating
- public art
- interpretation panels celebrating local young people's contribution

Stage Four - Community Programme

Alongside the physical space, the Council would explore an annual programme of activities based on consultation from teenage girls to encourage engagement.

Examples from other similar sites include:

- photography workshops
- yoga
- dance
- arts and crafts
- environmental volunteering
- wildlife events
- seasonal festivals
- wellbeing sessions
- outdoor creative activities

Programming would encourage sustained use of the space throughout the year.

Current Evidence Gathering

The following work is already planned before any final design decisions are made:

- consultation with local secondary schools
- identification of potential sites
- review of anti-social behaviour data from Swindon Borough Council, specifically relating to teenage girls
- review of existing youth provision across Haydon Wick

Equality Impact

This proposal supports the Council's commitment to ensuring public spaces are welcoming and accessible for everyone. Research indicates that, nationally, teenage girls are currently underrepresented in the use of parks and green spaces. The project seeks to reduce this inequality by involving girls directly in the design process while creating a space that remains open and welcoming to all members of the community.

The proposal complements existing provision rather than replacing or restricting access to current facilities.

Financial Implications

This proposal does not seek approval for construction funding. Initial expenditure would be in time and opportunity costs during consultation and project development. Future funding will depend upon:

- preferred location
- consultation outcomes
- final design
- potential external funding (options include Community Choices, National Lottery Community Fund, SBC through s106 contributions, Sport England Movement Fund, Sponsorships)

A further report will present detailed costings.

Risks & Concerns

Risk	Mitigation
Low engagement from young people	Work directly with schools and youth organisations
Community perception that the project excludes boys	Clearly communicate that the space is open to everyone while addressing an identified gap in provision. • Project is to be <i>led</i> by teenage girls but is for the whole community
Anti-social behaviour	Design for natural surveillance, consult police and SBC, and consider appropriate lighting and maintenance.
Funding not secured	Deliver consultation first, then seek external grant funding before committing capital expenditure
Design not meeting user needs	Co-design throughout the project rather than predetermined designs.
Environmental Considerations	The project provides opportunities to: • increase biodiversity • introduce wildflower planting • improve tree cover • encourage sustainable travel to parks

	• improve climate resilience through additional planting and shade
Danger of 'sign-posting' a space for young women	The aim is not to put teenage girls into a more vulnerable environment, but to help ensure they have safe access to a welcoming public space. From the outset, the design should have visibility to allow 'natural' surveillance. Creating a space that is well-used with a strong community presence – potentially through activities led by us and other bodies – can create the “eyes on the park” that research shows helps women and girls feel safe in public spaces. The site would also be subject to existing safeguarding and risk assessments Haydon Wick Council has for designed open spaces such as considerations for CCTV etc. The aim is to also work closely with SBC and the police - where appropriate and possible – to ensure all local risk are accounted for before a site is selected or designed.

Next Steps

If approved, the project would proceed as follows.

- September to October 2026 - Consultation with secondary schools and youth groups
- October to November - Analyse consultation findings. Assess potential sites
- Winter 2026 - Produce concept designs. Develop funding applications
- Spring 2027 - Submit grant applications

Appendix A

Accompanying Business Case for Grant Funders

Initial Project Vision

To create a welcoming outdoor space designed alongside local teenage girls where they can:

- meet friends
- relax
- participate in free activities
- connect with nature
- build confidence
- feel ownership over a valued community asset

The Friends Garden would complement Haydon Wick's existing parks and recreational facilities while addressing an identified gap in youth provision.

Project Summary

The Friends Garden Project will create Haydon Wick's first outdoor community space co-designed with teenage girls, responding to a recognised national decline in girls' use of parks during adolescence.

Through consultation with local schools and youth groups, the project will develop an inclusive, welcoming environment alongside a year-round programme of free activities that supports wellbeing, physical activity, social connection and engagement with nature.

The Need

Haydon Wick offers excellent facilities for young children and sports-focused recreation. However, there is currently no dedicated social green space designed with the needs of teenage girls in mind.

Research from organisations such as Make Space for Girls has shown that adolescent girls often stop using parks because existing facilities are either perceived as being for younger children or are dominated by competitive sport. This contributes to lower levels of physical activity, reduced confidence and fewer opportunities to socialise outdoors.

Project Outcomes

The project will:

- Increase park use by teenage girls.
- Improve access to free, welcoming community spaces.
- Enhance physical and mental wellbeing.
- Strengthen young people's connection with nature.

- Build lasting partnerships between schools, the Parish Council and community organisations.
- Create a replicable model for inclusive park design in Swindon.

Why Haydon Wick?

Haydon Wick has a growing young population, strong community partnerships and an established network of parks and open spaces. This project builds on those assets rather than duplicating existing provision, filling a recognised gap in recreational opportunities.

Legacy

The Friends Garden will become a permanent community asset, with ongoing programming delivered through partnerships with schools, local organisations and volunteers. It has the potential to serve as a flagship example of inclusive public space design within Swindon and could inspire similar initiatives across the borough.

Appendix B

Why Focus on Teenage Girls?

Background

Haydon Wick Parish Council has invested in a range of parks and recreational facilities which provide valuable opportunities for children and young people.

These include:

- Equipped play areas for younger children;
- Multi-Use Games Areas (MUGAs);
- Skate parks;
- Open green spaces;
- Sports facilities.

Whilst these facilities are open to everyone, research consistently demonstrates that teenage girls make significantly less use of parks and public recreational spaces than boys during adolescence.

The proposed Friends Garden seeks to address this recognised gap by involving teenage girls directly in the design of a welcoming outdoor social space, while remaining open and accessible to all members of the community.

National Evidence

Research commissioned by organisations including Make Space for Girls has found that:

- Only around 20% of girls aged 13 to 15 achieve the recommended daily levels of physical activity, compared with higher levels among boys.
- Girls' use of parks declines significantly during puberty.
- Many girls describe parks as spaces that are either:
 - designed for young children; or
 - dominated by organised or informal sport, particularly football.

Traditional park investment has often focused on facilities such as skate parks, MUGAs and football pitches, which studies have found are used predominantly by boys and young men.

During adolescence, girls increasingly value spaces where they can meet friends, talk, relax and enjoy being outdoors without needing to participate in organised sport or spend money.

Why Parks Matter

Access to high-quality green spaces contributes to:

- improved physical health;

- improved mental wellbeing;
- increased confidence and independence;
- reduced loneliness;
- opportunities for informal physical activity;
- stronger community connections; and
- greater connection with nature.

For many young people, parks provide an important "third place", somewhere that is neither home nor school, where friendships and independence can develop in a safe environment.

Learning from Rowntree Park, York

The Friends Garden at Rowntree Park in York is regarded as an example of national good practice. Rather than designing a space for teenage girls, the project worked with local girls to understand how they wanted to use parks.

Consultation identified several recurring themes. Teenage girls wanted: places to sit together;

- large communal swings;
- opportunities to climb or gain height;
- planting and natural surroundings;
- colourful, attractive landscaping;
- informal spaces rather than organised sports facilities; and
- programmes of activities that encouraged continued use of the space.

Importantly, the completed Friends Garden remains open to everyone while successfully addressing barriers previously experienced by teenage girls. The project has since inspired similar initiatives across the UK.

Local Context

Haydon Wick currently provides a range of recreational opportunities for:

- younger children through equipped play areas;
- older children and adults through sports facilities and skate provision.

At present, there is limited provision specifically designed around the social and recreational preferences identified by many teenage girls.

This project seeks to understand whether a similar gap exists locally before any permanent investment is made. The first stage of the project will therefore focus on consultation with local secondary schools and young people to determine whether national findings are reflected within Haydon Wick.

Principles of the Project

The proposed Friends Garden will be guided by the following principles:

- Co-design rather than consultation after decisions have been made.
- Inclusivity, ensuring the space remains open to all residents.
- Evidence-led decision making, informed by local consultation.

- Partnership working with schools, youth organisations and community groups.
- Long-term community ownership through ongoing activities and events.

Expected Benefits

If consultation supports the proposal, potential outcomes include:

- increased use of parks by teenage girls;
- improved wellbeing and confidence;
- increased physical activity;
- greater engagement with nature;
- stronger community cohesion;
- enhanced biodiversity through sensitive planting; and
- improved understanding of how different groups use public spaces.

Conclusion

The Friends Garden proposal is not intended to replace existing recreational facilities, nor to exclude any section of the community. Instead, it seeks to address an evidence-based gap in current provision by working directly with a group that is often under-represented in the design and use of public spaces.

By listening first and designing collaboratively, Haydon Wick Parish Council has the opportunity to create a welcoming, inclusive community asset that complements its existing parks while supporting the wellbeing of future generations.