



The Parks and Green Spaces All-Party Parliamentary Group

Women and Girls' Safety in Parks

21st June 2023, 14:30-15:30
Room O, Portcullis House

Minutes

Speakers

Allison Ogden-Newton OBE, Chief Executive of Keep Britain Tidy

Seema Malhotra MP

Dr Anna Barker (Leeds University)

Susannah Walker, Co-Founder and Trustee (Make Space for Girls)

Dr Saira Ali, Landscape Architect, Team Leader Landscape Design and Conservation (Bradford Council)

Present

Liz Twist MP (Chair)

Seema Malhotra MP (Vice Chair)

Afzal Khan MP (Vice Chair) – Representative

Guests

Ray Mills, Deputy Chair, Keep Britain Tidy

Vanessa Maselino, Trustee, Keep Britain Tidy

Paul Todd, Accreditation Manager, Keep Britain Tidy

Henry Bettley, Policy Officer, Keep Britain Tidy

Alice Bonifacio, Executive Assistant, Keep Britain Tidy

Imogen Clark, Co-Founder & Trustee, Make Space for Girls

<p>14:31</p>	<p>Welcome and introduction Liz Twist MP, Chair</p>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ms Twist MP welcomed members and introduced the speakers and the subject of the meeting. • She explained that votes on the Retained EU Law (Revocation and Reform) Bill and Strikes (Minimum Service Levels) Bill would be taking place during the session.
<p>14:33</p>	<p>Welcome and Girls' Safety in Parks: Lessons from research and practice Dr Anna Barker (Leeds University)</p>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dr Barker thanked Ms Twist for her introduction and Keep Britain Tidy for inviting her to speak at the APPG. • She presented newly published guidance on women and girls' safety in parks, which has been informed by research conducted in partnership with the Green Flag Award Programme as part of Keep Britain Tidy, the West Yorkshire Combined Authority and Make Space for Girls, as part of a wider strategy set by Mayor for West Yorkshire, Tracey Brabin. • She highlighted that we have arrived at an important juncture in public debate and policy, which is creating safer spaces for women and girls in the context of male violence and sexual harassment. • She acknowledged the importance of the APPG in bringing these issues together in the context of parks. • She highlighted that the benefits of the vital assets of quality green spaces are not equally shared, and that women and girls are held back because of concerns regarding safety and security. • She noted that a predictor of infrequent use of parks is being a woman. • An ONS opinions and lifestyles survey found that women and girls feel less safe in parks than in other public spaces, and that there was a stark contrast between men and women. • 4 out of 5 women feel unsafe in parks, compared to 2 out of 5 men.

- 35% of women reported that they stopped walking in parks after dark compared with 24% men, and that this was not just nighttime but early morning and late afternoons.
- This, in turn, limits women and girls' opportunities to exercise and socialise, and that these essential public goods are not being equally shared.
- 117 women and girls were interviewed for research and evidence was collected to inform policy and practice in this area.
- Dr Barker reported that what women agreed on most was the presence of other women in parks and public spaces. Better designed and maintained parks that address gender safety will also create positive feedback loops.
- She commented on the lack of facilities for women and girls in parks, which were generally more catered to male activities.
- She reminded members that women are experts in their own safety and that we want park designers to create these spaces through the eyes of women and girls.
- Women also reported that they felt safer during organised group activities, such as Park Run, as they also didn't feel judged when using these spaces.
- Women reported feeling safer in more major parks where there are more resources for outdoor activities.
- Dr Barker highlighted that these facilities are safely not accessible for everyone in terms of personal safety, and that there is a need to level up across all inequalities.
- In the guidance, informed by practitioners in wider organisations, eyes on the park, awareness and inclusion are all major themes.
- Dr Barker implored members to read the guidance, fund it and get behind it, and reminded everyone that safer parks for women are safer parks for all.
- She encouraged members to ask women around them about how accessible parks feel for them, and see how their lived experience matches up to the research and guidance.

<p>14:43</p>	<p>Seema Malhotra MP Listening to Women and Girls in Parks</p>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ms Malhotra MP thanked Keep Britain Tidy and Ms Twist MP for inviting her to address the meeting. • She added that she wishes to be more involved in the work of the APPG and commended the research presented by Dr Barker as an accessible and functional piece of guidance that she looks forward to sharing with her local authority. • She asked parliamentary assistants to write up questionnaires for mums at school gates and women in her constituency to address this particular issue. • She commented that overcrowding is not uncommon in public spaces and that the lack of space at home and the cost-of-living crisis is further driving up the need for equal and safe access to quality green space. • She commended the work and campaigns of her colleague, Tracey Brabin. • She commented that a huge chunk of the public realm is denied to women and girls because they don't feel safe, and that despite investments being made in these spaces, we are not feeling the benefits. • She made the point that it is important to see the long-term impact of investment in these spaces, which are essential for mental health and wellbeing. • Echoing the sentiments of Mary Wollstonecraft, women should be entitled to enjoy the wonderments of the great outdoors. • She added that well maintained public toilets and social seating for the disabled and elderly were additionally important, and that not all white, male, able-bodied policy makers have sufficient lived experience when it comes to making decisions about provisions within parks. • Ms Malhotra MP shared a story of the success of a new women's cricket league in her constituency of Hounslow, which has brought women out of domestic settings and allowed them to enjoy natural spaces. • She added that safer green spaces for women and girls were important for Local Authorities, Environmental Policy, improving biodiversity, community safety, health and wellbeing and required a long-term vision of the public realm and planning funding to support this.
<p>14:53</p>	<p>MPs left to vote</p>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ms Twist MP asked Ms Ogden-Newton to take over as chair whilst MPs left to vote. • Ms Ogden-Newton commented on the international research that fed into the guidance published by Leeds University, and noted that funding in parks was principally being spent on tackling male anti-social behaviour by providing men activities outdoors which is disproportionate to that of women. • She highlighted the Danish example of creating social spaces in parks for women and girls to converse with each other.

- Ms Walker commented that Women in Sport are doing some interesting work in gender budgeting, and that disproportionate funding has been found to take place favouring activities of men.
- Ms Ogden-Newton highlighted that the perceived elephant in the room is that you cannot do anything to combat male violence.
- She added that another interesting area of research, relating to the work of Keep Britain Tidy, is that the presence of litter and dog-fouling is additionally found to make women feel unsafe.
- Ms Walker commented on the example of Eve Kyle and social housing in Vienna that is designed to make women feel safe who are caring, saying that “We are aiming for utopia but we are building for where we are now”.
- Dr Ali added that at Better Start Bradford, they were focussing on changing behaviours to last an entire generation, and that through making it safer for mums to play with their children in open spaces, they were examining the impacts of this on the development of their children.
- She added that it was important to re-educate women to not feel that they need to experience parks in a hyper-sanitised way but that they should enjoy the natural elements of a park which is rich in biodiversity.
- Ms Clark added that there is a gap in policy and nothing for planners to refer to when thinking about women and girls’ usage of parks which will continue to be problematic in tackling this issue.
- Dr Ali added that as part of the Jump project in Bradford, they were improving green spaces for activity and wellbeing in the context of their local neighbourhood, which was being developed and informed by local communities.
- Ms Ogden-Newton added that it is so important to challenge what we think we know, using the example that dogs that are not kept on a lead additionally make women feel unsafe.
- Ms Clark added that planners need to be able to feel like they can take risks when designing parks for women and girls. It is important to also think more broadly in terms of creating spaces for outdoor activities that doesn’t have to be didactic (e.g. skateparks) but could also be for walking or going on a swing.
- Mr Todd that parks historically used to be safe for women, as they were well tended by park keepers and gardeners and were sociable spaces.
- Ms Clark added that the pro forma for park bylaws needs to be updated as they currently only seek to address the needs children up to the age of 14, as that was school leaving age at the time they were originally written, and that this should be raised to 18 in line with other legislation which today recognises that a child is under 18.
- Ms Walker added that women and girls do not feel welcome in MUGAs (Multi Use Games Areas) and skateparks and often feel judged or targets of sexual harassment. This in turn has negative impacts on physical and mental health, as girls are 3x more likely to have mental health issues than boys.

15:25

Sussanah Walker, Make Space for Girls

	<p>Making Space for Girls: Rejecting default male design for parks, play equipment and public spaces.</p>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ms Walker introduced the research that had been conducted by Make Space for Girls which has fed into the guidance on improving women and girls' access and safety in parks. • She highlighted the need for women and girls to feel a sense of belonging in these spaces and highlighted some examples of areas where this has been taken place in Europe. • In Rowntree Park in York, funding from LNER was used to create spaces for older girls, which had seen an increase in usage by this demographic. • In Fagley Park in Bradford, an excellent co-design with girls had allowed them to feel empowered in creating their own outdoor green space that they feel safe in. • She shared examples in Sweden of social spaces for women and girls that included shelters and catered for a wide and inclusive range of people and reflects immigrant communities in the area.
<p>15:38</p>	<p>Dr Saira Ali (Bradford City Council)</p> <p>Case study: Co-designing space in Fagley Park in Bradford with teenage girls from mixed backgrounds</p>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dr Ali outlined the rich history of Bradford as a city, indicating that many of the parks that are still available to the public were created during the Victorian period, with few private gardens available. • She highlighted that people's lifestyles have changed and that the demographic of Bradford is now significantly ethnically diverse, with 1 in 4 people identifying as South Asian and almost a quarter of the population are under 16 years of age. • Lifestyle changes over the years mean that people are less active than they used to be. • Dr Ali outlined the work that had been carried out with Bradford City Council which addressed health concerns within the city, including 22% of adults who are obese and 23% of adults who are inactive. • She highlighted that there are no statistics available on women specifically. • She added that on average a woman living in Bradford lives 7 years less than a woman living in Harrogate. • The focus of the research has not just been on how much time is spent in parks but how much time is spent outside more generally, using a bottom-up approach that is informed by the local community, building resilience from a young age and creating pride-of-place for locals wherever they live. • She highlighted examples where women and girls had also actively taken part in the formation of parks, including planting trees.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dr Ali outlined the multi-agency approach of the programme, where families are encouraged to take part in informal gatherings, building on local skills and pre-existing community events. • She underlined the importance of not just regenerating outdoor spaces but investing in local communities.
15:50	<p>Allison Ogden-Newton OBE, Keep Britain Tidy Making parks truly accessible through staffing, management and funding</p>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ms Ogden-Newton thanked Ms Twist MP for chairing the session and the speakers for their insights, adding that she was proud to incorporate Keep Britain Tidy's own thinking into encouraging the debate around better design and safety of green spaces specifically recognising the needs, not just of deprived communities, but specifically the needs of women and girls who we now know are further prevented from safely accessing vital green space. • She congratulated Mr Todd for his recent receipt of an MBE in recognition of his services to the Nation's parks and to Liverpool, alongside his unparalleled expertise in the Green Flag Award. • She added how much she enjoyed attending the symposium in Leeds, which had launched the recent guidance on women and girls' safety in parks, and highlighted that even in 2023, women are still being characterised as creatures of the home. • She added that access to parks combats a long list of health issues and is value for money, and that few other public health interventions can achieve this as successfully. • She highlighted findings in the WHO report in 2017, which outlined that urban green space is necessary for delivering liveable cities. • She added that over the last 12 months, some attempts have been made to support lack of funding in parks via the Levelling Up fund but that £9 million promised amounted £185 each for England's 27,000 parks so wouldn't go far. • She added that the work needs to be done now to address our green deserts which are planted areas turned to grass because grass is cheaper to maintain but lacks biodiversity and interest. What is required, after years of widespread funding cuts leading to the devastating loss of trained, knowledgeable professional park workers, is significant investment for the long-term to bring about true access for all to quality green space.
15:56	<p>Liz Twist MP Q&A and Close</p>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Owing to the time delay because of MPs voting, Ms Twist MP concluded that all questions be emailed to the secretariat in the interests of time. Comments and questions have also been shared with the panel. • She thanked the speakers for their important discussions and all members for attending the meeting.

- Ms Twist MP closed the meeting.