



Girls and Skateparks

A guide for councils,
developers, and funders



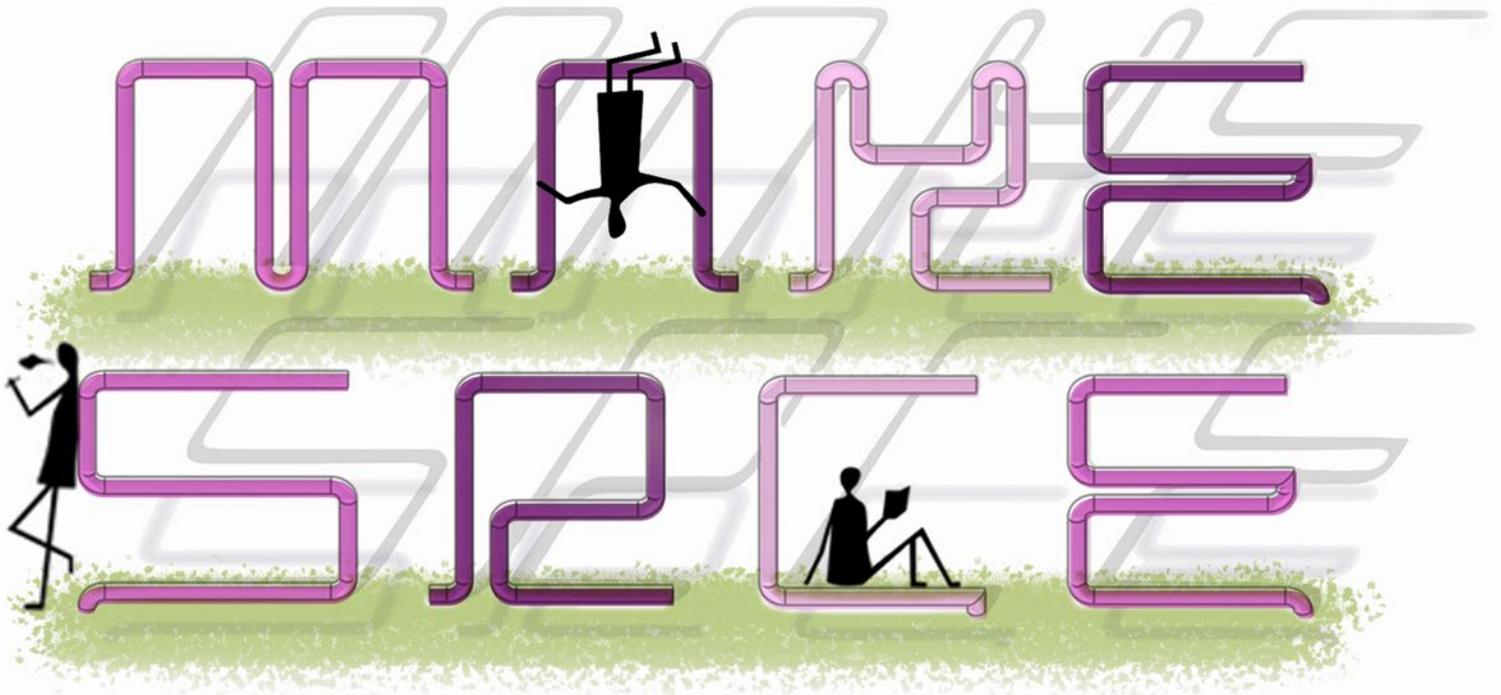
Introduction

Skateparks are perceived to be good provision for teenagers.

But research shows that they serve a relatively small proportion of the teenage population and are used by far fewer girls than boys.

This document sets out some basic data about skate parks in the UK and analyses why the data is as it is. It then looks at the questions that need to be asked before any new investment is made in a skatepark.

Finally, if a decision is made to build a skatepark, it sets out the steps that can be taken to make it more inclusive.



The data?

Who?

Most skateboarders are teenagers and the majority are male.

Only a relatively small proportion of the teenage population currently skateboard.

SEE INFOGRAPHIC FOR FULL STATISTICS

Where?

Skateboarding can take place on the street or in a skate park, but this document only covers designated skate park provision.

In 2020 there were:

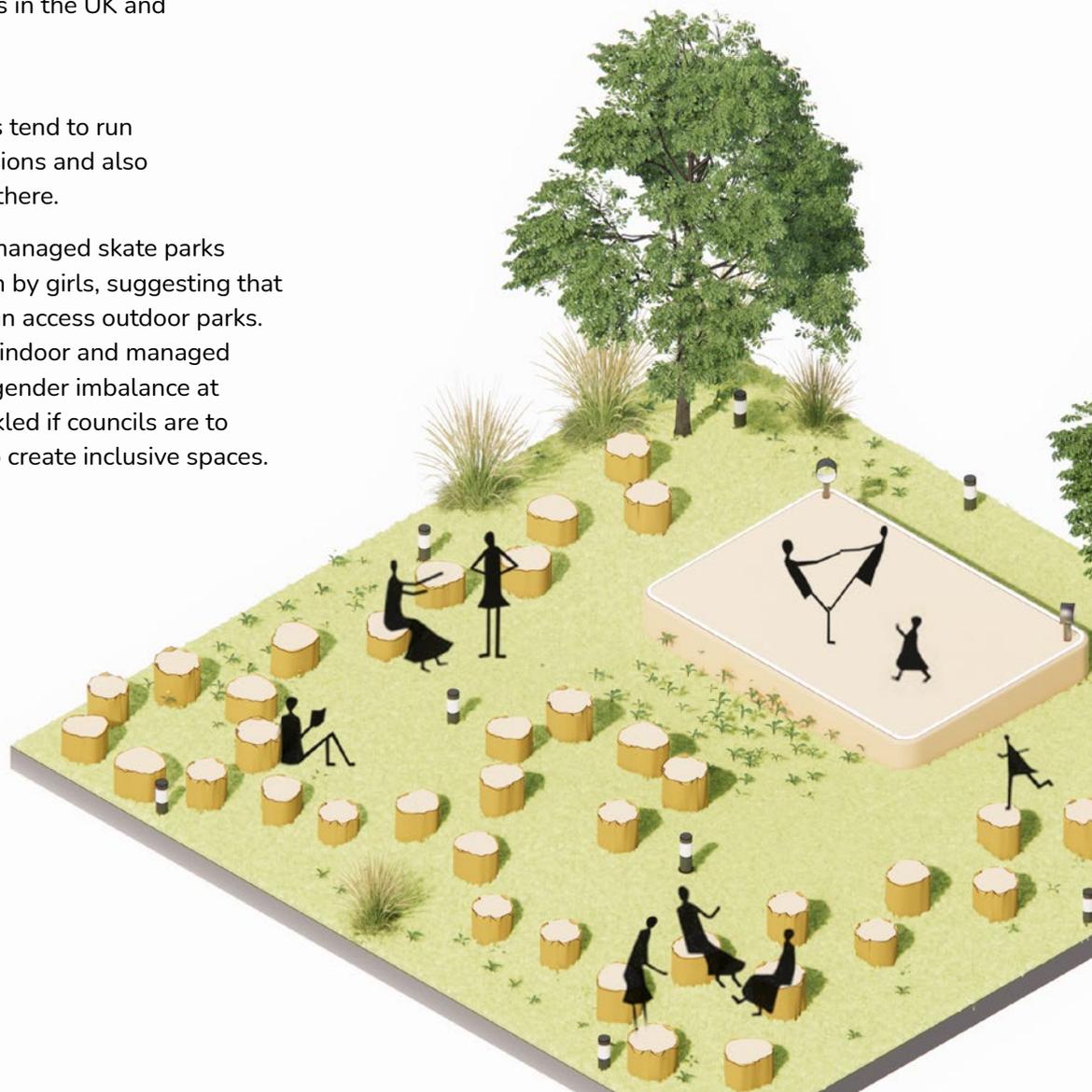
- c.1650 outdoor skateparks in the UK and
- c. 65 indoor skateparks.

Indoor/managed skate parks tend to run more girls/women only sessions and also feel safer because staff are there.

It also appears that indoor/managed skate parks achieve greater participation by girls, suggesting that more girls want to skate than access outdoor parks. But there are relatively few indoor and managed parks. This means that the gender imbalance at outdoor parks has to be tackled if councils are to deliver on their ambitions to create inclusive spaces.

When?

There is no UK data about the times at which boys and girls use skate parks. However, the anecdotal evidence is that girls who do use skate parks often choose to do so when boys aren't there, often first thing in the morning, and that this is also true for adult women who want to skate.



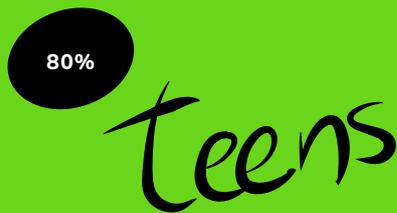
There are 750,000 skateboarders in the UK;



Female skateboarding grew by 24% in 2020 to approx. 112,000.



After this growth, 85% of boarders identified as male and 15% identified as female.

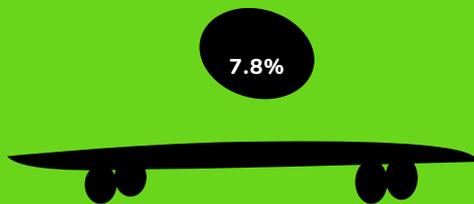


80% of skateboarders are under the age of 18.



Assuming male/female split across all ages, there are approx 90,000 under 18 girls skateboarding, and 510,000 boys.

ONS data indicates that there are approx 7.7 million young people between 8 and 18 in the UK. So, crunching the numbers this indicates that:



of 8-18s skateboard



A gender split of approx 13% of boys skateboarding; and 2.3% of girls.

We have used data from Cognosis which Skateboard GB shared with us in early 2021 and combined this with ONS population data.

Analysis

As the data shows, a relatively small proportion of teenagers are skateboarders, and very few of them are girls yet skateparks are often thought to be good overall teenage provision.

There are a number of potential reasons for this disconnect between the perception that skateparks are what teenagers want and what the data in fact shows.

What teenagers want?

First, adults may assume that a skate park is what teenagers want rather than asking them. Chester Borough Council surveyed young people in 2015 and only 17% of those asked said that more provision for wheeled sports was their top priority. Teenagers who engaged in workshops in Brent concluded that:

Preconceived ideas of what we want in public spaces (way too often in the shape of skateparks) fail to acknowledge our actual needs and desires.

Second: there are many organisations promoting skateparks as good and inclusive teenage provision. They advertise to themselves to councils, developers and funders as experts in what teenagers want/need, asserting the inclusive nature of skateboarding, but struggle to provide any data that supports this.

Third, skateboarders comprise a pre-existing special interest group who are afforded privileged access when it comes to consultation. Skatepark manufacturers provide a lot of support to young people – and also their parents – in how to lobby a council. But this may be commercially driven, not necessarily what the community most needs. The existence of a petition doesn't necessarily mean that a skatepark is the answer.

How boys behave

In many skateparks girls are excluded simply for being girls. Academic research is consistently clear that skateparks are highly male place. Boys are territorial about the space, and girls are seen as interlopers. Even girls who just sit and watch aren't exempt, being referred to as 'ramp tramps' or 'posers'.

This can become a circle of exclusivity: the more a park is dominated by boys, the more the girls will be excluded. As a result, female skateboarders will often find other places to practice, and are not served by the skatepark at all.

It's also worth noting that it's not just skateboarding girls who are put off; research has shown that the presence of a skatepark deters non skating girls from using other parts of that park.

17%

More provision for wheeled sports was their top priority.



Exclusive by design

Many skateparks are designed by and for experienced skaters and make no provision for learners and less confident riders.

Design guidance produced by SkateboardGB states that “skateparks are primarily intended for skilled users and those actively seeking to acquire those skills” and suggests that consultation with the local skateboard community is the best way of producing a successful design. As a result that group is privileged in the consultation and other voices, such as those of girls or novice skateboarders, are not heard.

This tends to mean that the final design is one that suits the existing experienced skateboarders; it is the more difficult option and will exclude many potential users.

Conclusion

Skateparks are currently seen as an essential component of teenage facilities in parks and public spaces, but this is not supported by either the statistics or the voices of teenagers themselves

In particular, skateparks are not used much by girls and can make a park less welcoming for them, so any decision to build a new skate park has to be considered in terms of equality.

Work needs to be done with existing skate parks in order to make them more accessible to girls and young women.



Some dos and donts.

Before the decision to build a skate park is made, the following issues need to be taken into account

Do:

Ask questions to be sure that a skate park is a good answer. Will it serve a large proportion of the population or just a small (if vocal) group? Can the money be spent on something more equitable?

Check that any local authority taking decisions about the skatepark (whether in a funding, planning or leisure/play provision role) has complied with its obligations under the Public Sector Equality Duty, in particular the need to have due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination and advance equality of opportunity.

Consult with as wide a group of teenagers as possible before any decision to invest in the skatepark. Seek out the teenagers to consult with: at schools, at youth groups, in their community groups.

Gather data how big the demand is for a skatepark relative to your local teenage population and what proportion of the budget would be used on the skatepark.

Understand the use of the facilities that currently exist, and how this is split by gender.

Ask questions of any provider bidding to build a skatepark. Do they have data that shows that they can deliver a skate park that is better than 85/15 boys/girls? Ask them what features of their skate park will make it inclusive and how they would bridge the gap between skate park design and use.

Don't:

Assume that a skatepark is the answer and consult with the skateboarders to check that assumption. Talk to as many different groups as possible.

Consult only at the park, make sure that you are talking to teenagers who don't currently go there as well.

Don't assume that what's been in the past is what needs to be there now.

Hand over the final say on which design goes forward to a group of skateboarders. Make sure that all groups are consulted at every stage



How can parks be made more inclusive?

If a new skate park is to be built, there are several ways to make them work better for girls.

The key one is to design an inclusive park. This covers several different aspects:

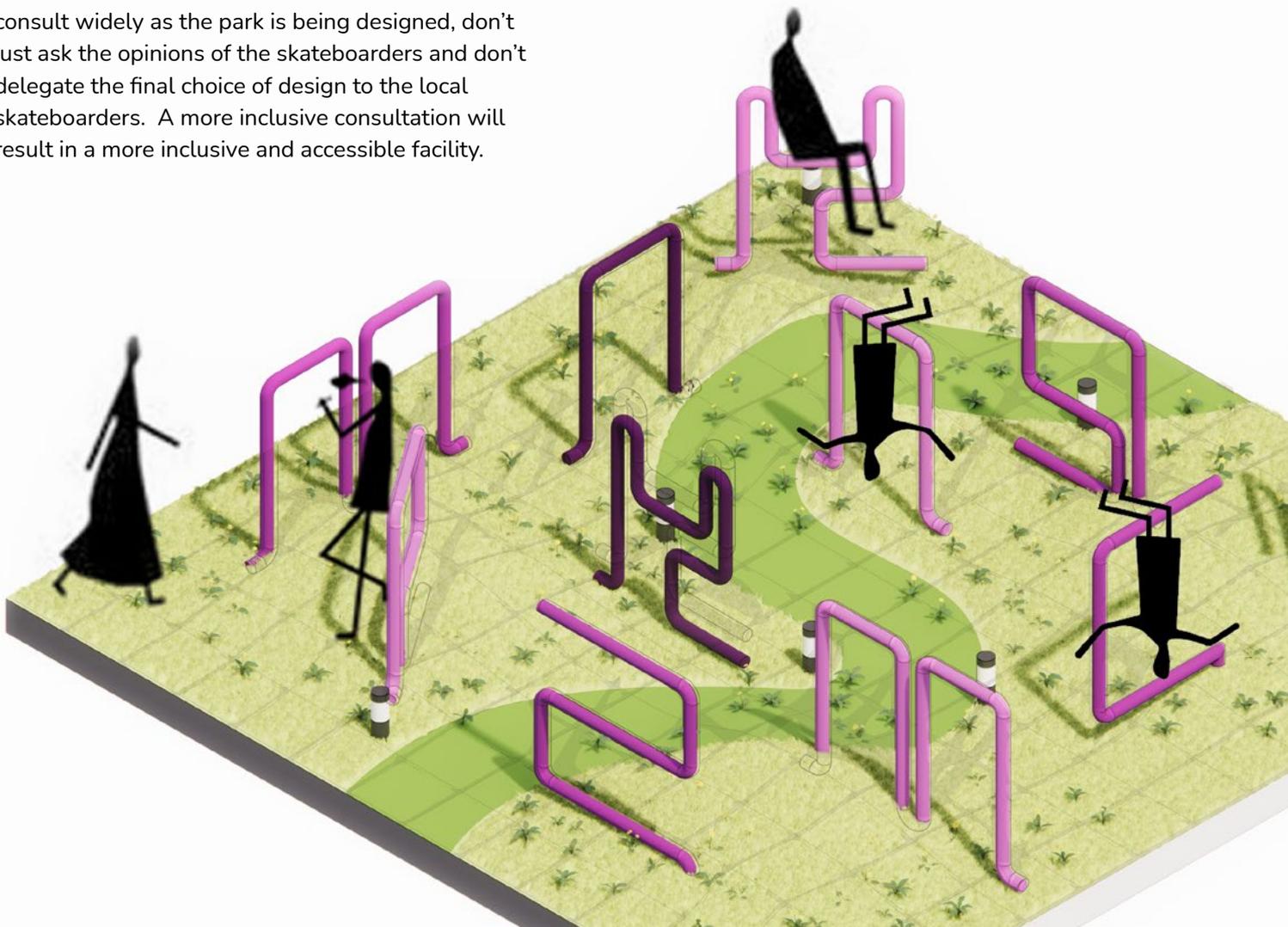
- A park should be designed for all wheeled sports, including bikes, scooters and rollerblading/skating;
- Areas for beginners and less experienced users;
- A space broken up into different areas so that one group cannot dominate;
- Located in a space which feels safe for all potential users, is well-lit and is used by other members of the public;
- There should be good toilets nearby.

Consultation shouldn't stop when once the initial decision to invest has been made. Continue to consult widely as the park is being designed, don't just ask the opinions of the skateboarders and don't delegate the final choice of design to the local skateboarders. A more inclusive consultation will result in a more inclusive and accessible facility.

The work does not end when the skate park is built. The overall plan should include measures to develop and maintain equitable use of the park.

This includes work to ensure inclusive behaviour at the skatepark, embedding better norms and ensuring that boys understand what behaviour is required from them. This will require engagement, classes or workshops, and staffing these, so funding has to be factored in.

Any plan must also find ways to support girl skaters in acquiring the skill and confidence to skate in the way they want to skate. Again, this will require staffing and engagement, so funding is essential.



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