

YOUNG PEOPLE 'HANGING OUT'

Organisation	Landscape Projects
Trigger	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Invitation by the Council to develop a city centre park to regenerate Hulme – a high crime area.
Objectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To ensure the park catered for people of all ages – including young people.
Tools/techniques	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consultation with local community and youth groups. • Consideration of images attractive to young people.
Enablers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The park was being completely redeveloped using European funding which allowed for more innovative design.
Tensions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Residents are often concerned about the placement of youth areas. • Creating a sense of ownership by young people can prove difficult. • Some groups of youths may continue to present problems which have to be tackled by other means.
Impact	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An attractive youth area created, which is used by young people and has suffered little crime.
Lessons	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Police and residents need to encourage consideration of the needs of young people – rather than simply moving them on and potentially displacing the problem. • Designers need to consult with young people and ensure that youth areas project an image attractive to the target age group. • The safety of the young people needs to be considered.

Synopsis

This case discusses the design of areas for young people, aged 12 to 18 years of age, focusing specifically on one developed within Hulme Park. The area for young people is designed around the concept of a swimming pool created by figures and coloured glass flooring. This creates an element of glamour and sexuality attractive to young people of both sexes. The use of curved benches and an overhead canopy provides an informal area where young people can meet to socialise and/or drink, without being in danger themselves or a nuisance to others. The location of the youth area near to a basketball pitch, football pitch and youth centres means that it can also double as an area for sport and coaching. The case was chosen because of its attractive design and the fact that it caters for the needs of young people, rather than seeing them simply as a problem and potential source of crime. The value of addressing the needs of young people is emphasised by Hampshire and Wilkinson (1999) 'Youth Shelters and Sports Systems'.

Background to Young People 'Hanging Out'

The development of areas suited to the needs of young people is a positive response to their needs. According to Hampshire and Wilkinson (1999):

“ ‘Hanging out’ is part of the natural process of growing up, an intermediate stage between the comfort and protection of a child’s home environment and the complete independence of adult life” (pp3).

The needs of young people are relatively modest, suggest Hampshire and Wilkinson (1999). Young people talk of having: “*Somewhere to go that is safe, where you don’t get hassled*”, “*A place away from the adults*” or “*somewhere to kick a ball about, a place to meet friends*”.

When Landscape Projects, a team of Landscape architects, was invited by Ian Simpson Architects to develop Hulme Park, it was told that the park should cater for a range of age groups including young people aged 12 to 18 years of age. Landscape Projects designed the area for young people, commissioning other companies such as Dunstar to build the benches and canopies. This case is based on an interview with Neil Swanson, Practice Principal, Landscape Projects, with further information gained from police, councillors and residents who attend the Hulme residents committee meetings.

Design Process

The Concept

Neil Swanson points out that designing for young people (i.e. 12 to 18 year olds) is notoriously difficult, as designs risk being too babyish or boring. The design team aimed to create an area for young people which would be neither tame nor patronising, but would be about young people coming together to play sports, socialise and express themselves:

“It’s all about kids coming together to play sports, but also sitting in the sun on a warm summers evening. All hanging about. It should not be babyish and should be attractive to both males and females” (Neil Swanson).

Design

An analogy to a swimming pool was used, as both sexes would see this as glamorous and sexy. The blue and green flooring was made of recycled, crushed glass, which was inexpensive, yet sustainable, as well as robust and relatively smooth. Figures of swimmers were placed around the area. The bench was specially commissioned by Landscape Projects and comprises a large flat bench made out of small pieces, to create an interesting junction. There were also slots cut into the bench for drainage. The structure overhead, which is made of plywood, provides some cover and was produced by a carpenter from Bristol. The whole structure was designed to be fairly robust and strong so that younger children could climb on it (see figure 1).

The local youth club had a football team which competed locally and might train in the park. The circular design of the chair and its location near to the football pitch was intended for use by football coaches for briefing their teams.

The football pitch, required by the Council, was carefully placed to reduce the potential for conflict with other users, as Neil Swanson explains:

“Football pitches are land hungry, yet only provide entertainment for up to 22 people – the rest are excluded. It therefore has to be placed properly. We also wanted to open the park out to other activities such as kids playing, wedding photos being taken etc”.

The area for young people was called ‘Proctor’s Corner’, after the local youth club.



Figure 1: Proctors' Corner

Other areas in the park where people could sit comfortably and safely supplemented Proctors Corner. For example, Landscape Projects developed ‘The Loggia’ pictured in figure 2. This provides shelter and seating, whilst its location at the edge of the park and the holes in the concrete ensure good surveillance.



Figure 2: Loggia

Addressing Tensions

In general, creating areas that are safe for young people means placing them in places overlooked by adults, yet far enough away to prevent young people from being seen as a nuisance by local residents and/or other park users. Local residents have to at least tolerate an area for young people, point out Roger and Wilkinson (1999). The park, which is open and overlooked by houses, was therefore a good location. A sense of ownership, important to ensure the use and effective maintenance of youth areas, was achieved by consultation with the local community and youth groups.

Impact

The areas in the park are used by young people and crime figures for the park are extremely low. Indeed, one police officer described Hulme Park as 'a triumph of design', a point echoed by some of the local residents. There remains a problem of crime on surrounding estates, where a small group of youths have been throwing stones at windows and breaking into parked cars. Local police suggest that although action needs to be taken against some individuals, the situation would be improved by an expansion of the activities offered by the youth clubs. In their view, diversionary activities for young people such as those provided by youth clubs and informal meeting places such as Proctors Corner are essential for tackling the causes of crime.

Lessons Learned

This case illustrates the long-term benefits of designing for young people, rather than ignoring their needs or viewing them simply as 'a problem'. The advantage of attractively designed areas is that they are perhaps more likely to be viewed positively by young people and residents alike, as well as generate a sense of pride in the area. Hulme residents are certainly positive about the park and its facilities. In addition, the local police officers support design-led solutions because simply moving young people on from an area does not solve the problem:

"Just moving them around doesn't work. Displacement happens. It's like a balloon. You squeeze in one area and they pop up elsewhere. This is why you need some kind of diversionary activities" (Police Officer, Hulme).

It also risks generating hostility amongst young people, who resent being seen as the problem, rather than a potential victim. In addition, convicting young people of an offence often requires local residents to make a statement to police and/or defend their statement in court, which many are unwilling to do. Thus, tackling the causes of crime by catering for the needs of young people is potentially a safer, more sustainable option.

References, Further Reading and Related Case Studies

Hampshire, R. and Wilkinson, M. (1999) *Youth Shelters and Sports Systems*. Thames Valley Police. London.

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Classification Index

Ekblom's crime classification	misbehaviour (violence against the person, criminal damage, anti-social behaviour).
BCS crime classification	Criminal damage and anti-social behaviour.
DAC	Catering for the needs of young people
Primary motivation	Cater for the needs of young people and local residents.
Type of designer	Landscape architect
Approach	Innovative approach to the needs of young people
Sector	Public spaces
Location	Park
Author	Caroline Davey

DAC youth areas