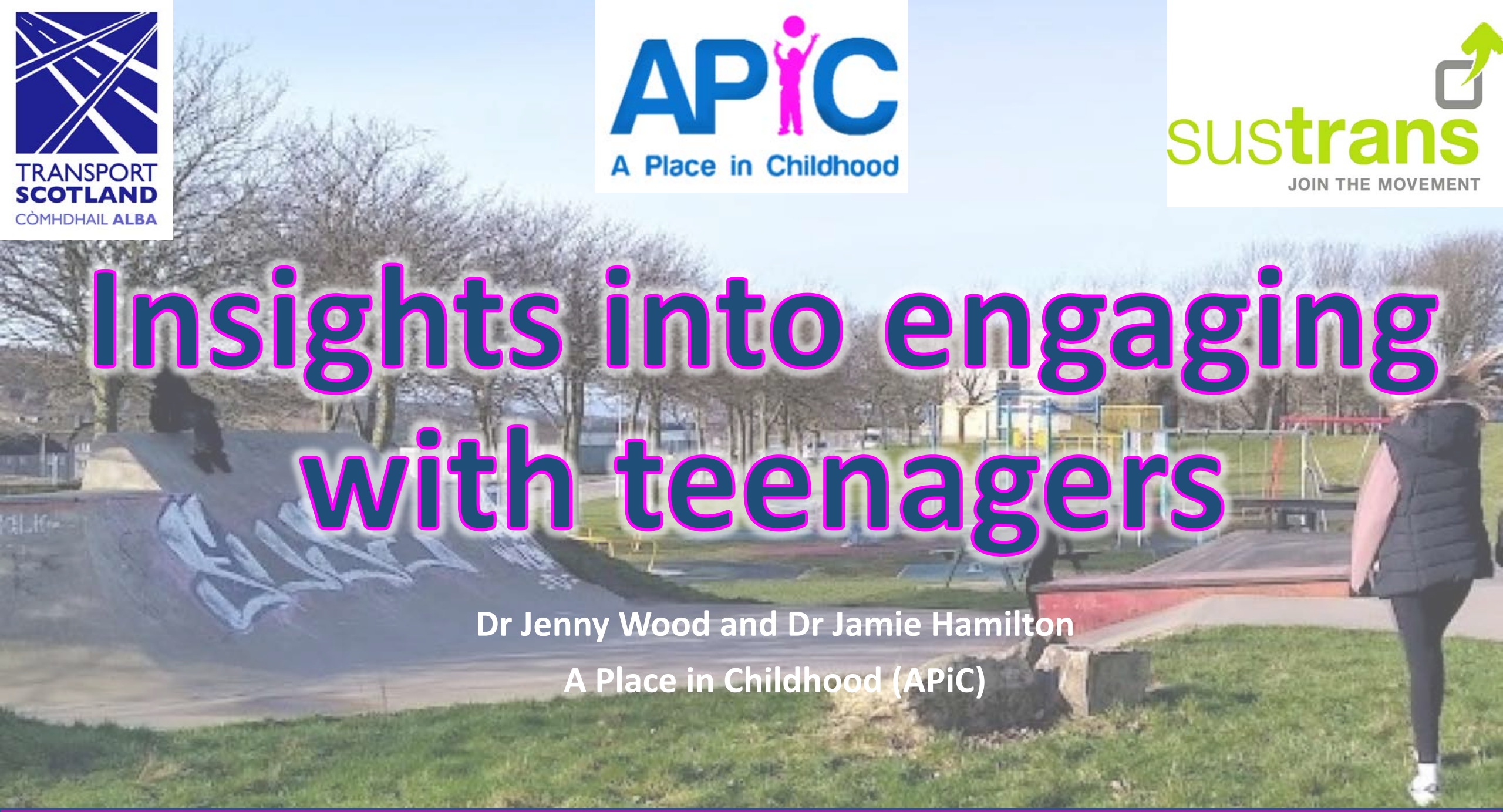

Insights into engaging with teenagers

Dr Jenny Wood and Dr Jamie Hamilton

A Place in Childhood (APiC)

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A Place in Childhood (APiC)

We bridge the gap between multi-disciplinary research, policy and project delivery, and the unique insights of children and young people

Task 1: Our Experiences

How Confident Are You Working With Teenagers?

On the arrow, add your name to a post-it and place it on the right end of the spectrum to reflect your confidence in working with teenagers:

Not at all

Very

Goals for this Session:

APIC
A Place in Childhood

To explore:

- The experience of being a teenager – both your own, and that of teenagers today;
- How best to harness the strengths and opportunities of engaging with teenagers on your project;
- How to overcome the difficulties/fears/prejudices that you may encounter; and
- What ‘good’ looks like in your own and others practice.

The Structure of this Session:

A Place in Childhood

1

Your Teenage Experience
(group activity)

2

Methods and Insights
gathered from the Teenagers and Public Space Research

3

Supporting Teens to Engage
(group activity)

Engaging Your Inner Teen *(group activity)*

APIC
A Place in Childhood

1

WHAT AGE ARE YOU?: Take a moment individually to feel into that mindset and what your life was like at that time.

2

WHAT WOULD MOTIVATE YOU?: Discuss on your table what might motivate you to be part of a community engagement process.

3

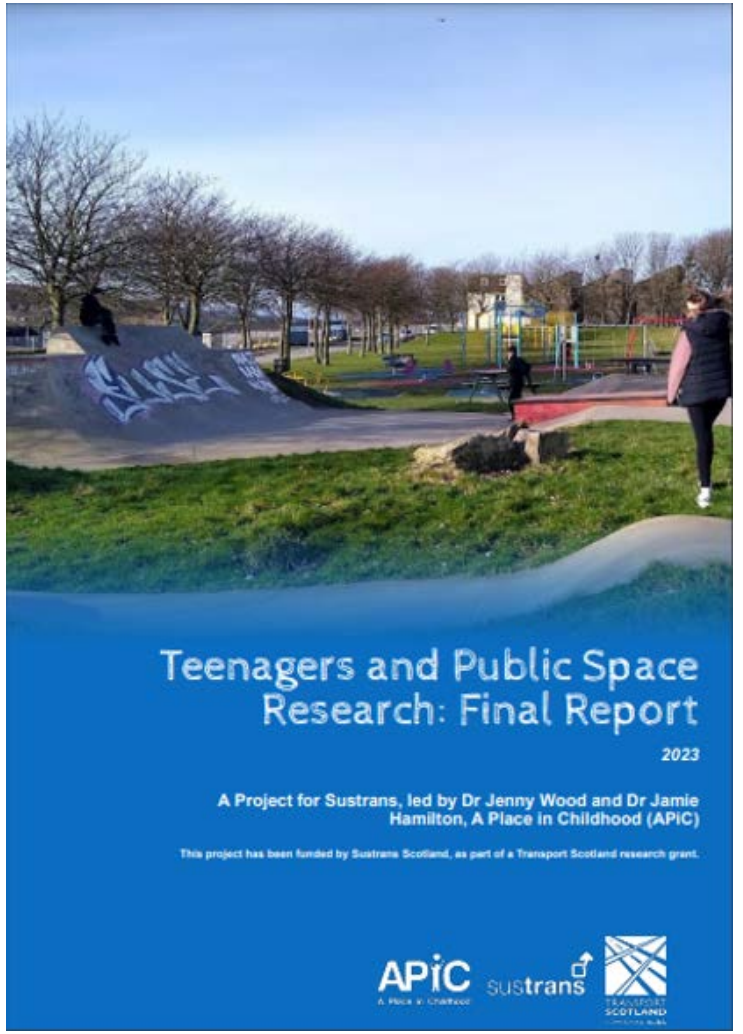
WHAT MIGHT HINDER YOU?: Discuss on your table what might stop you or get in the way of you being part of a community engagement process.

4

HOW COULD THIS BE OVERCOME?: Discuss on your table how adults might help you to overcome the things that could get in the way.

Key Considerations: Teenagers and Public Space

1. What are the needs of teenagers within specific communities in Scotland, and how might Sustrans infrastructure and placemaking activities best serve these?
2. What difference are there in terms of need between teenagers of differing UK protected characteristics? Specifically, Sustrans would like to understand age and gender differences.
3. What are the most appropriate methods of engagement with teenagers on infrastructure and placemaking projects?
4. How can practitioners mediate and balance potential conflicts within a community between the needs of teenagers and other groups?



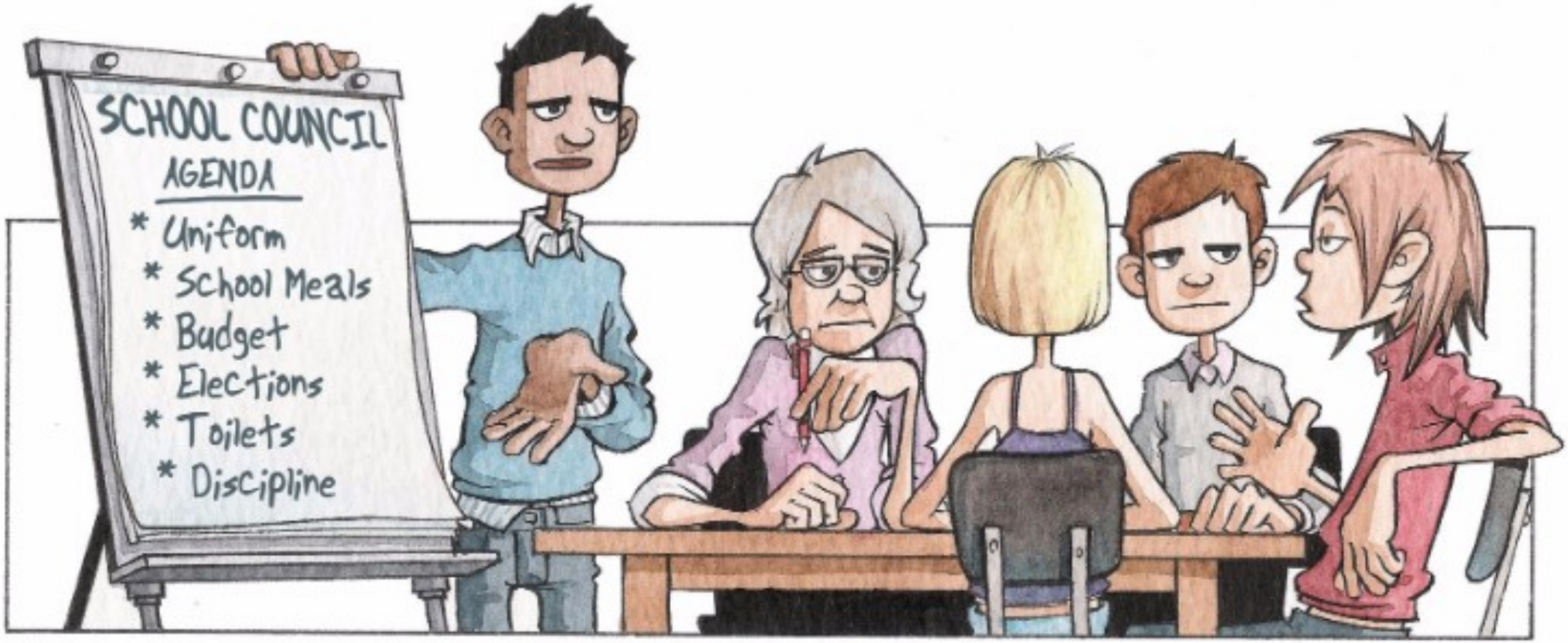


illustration : alex leonard

You should have a say in decisions that affect you

U.N. Convention on the Rights of the Child: Article 12

CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE'S Commissioner Scotland

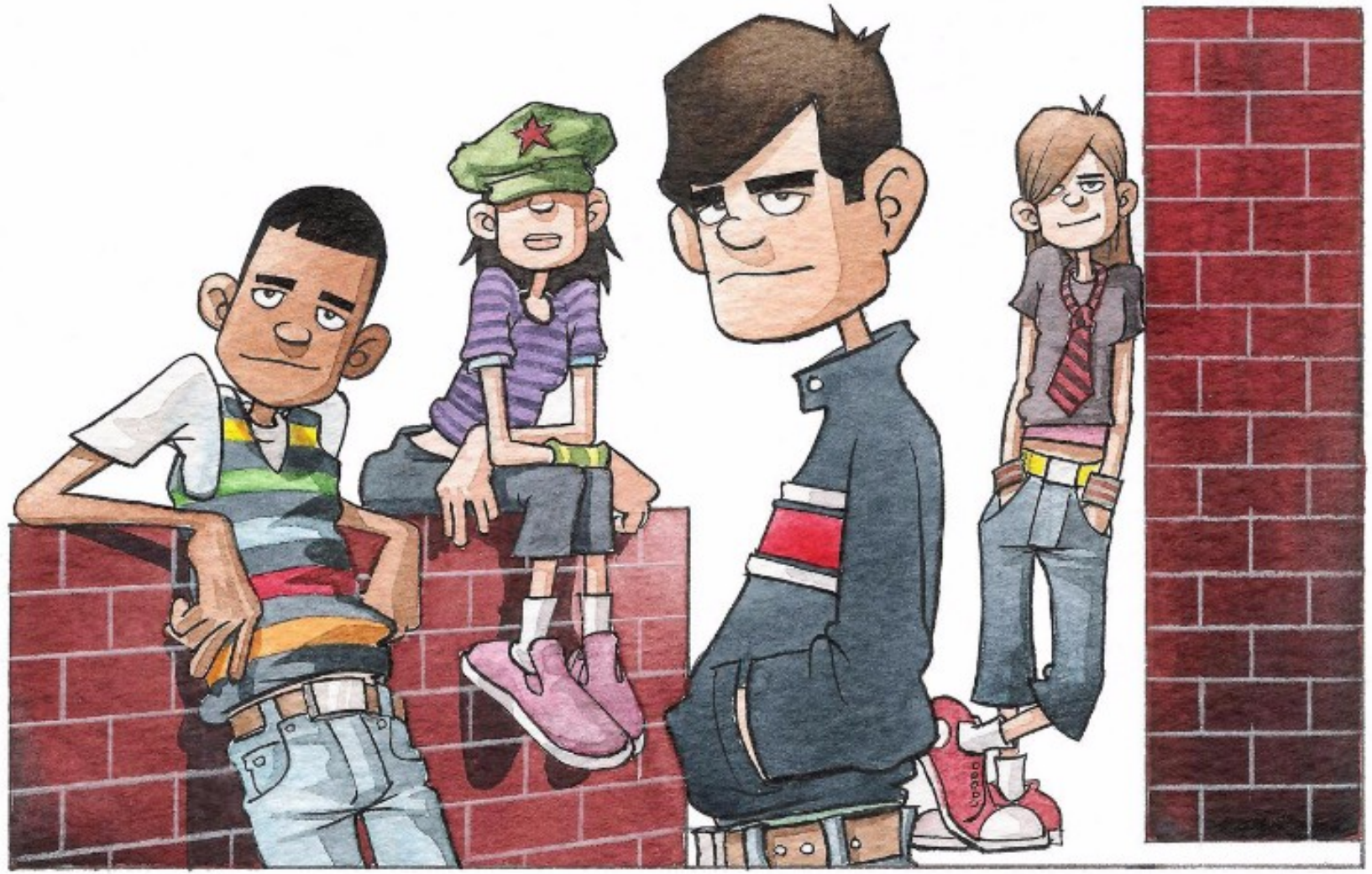
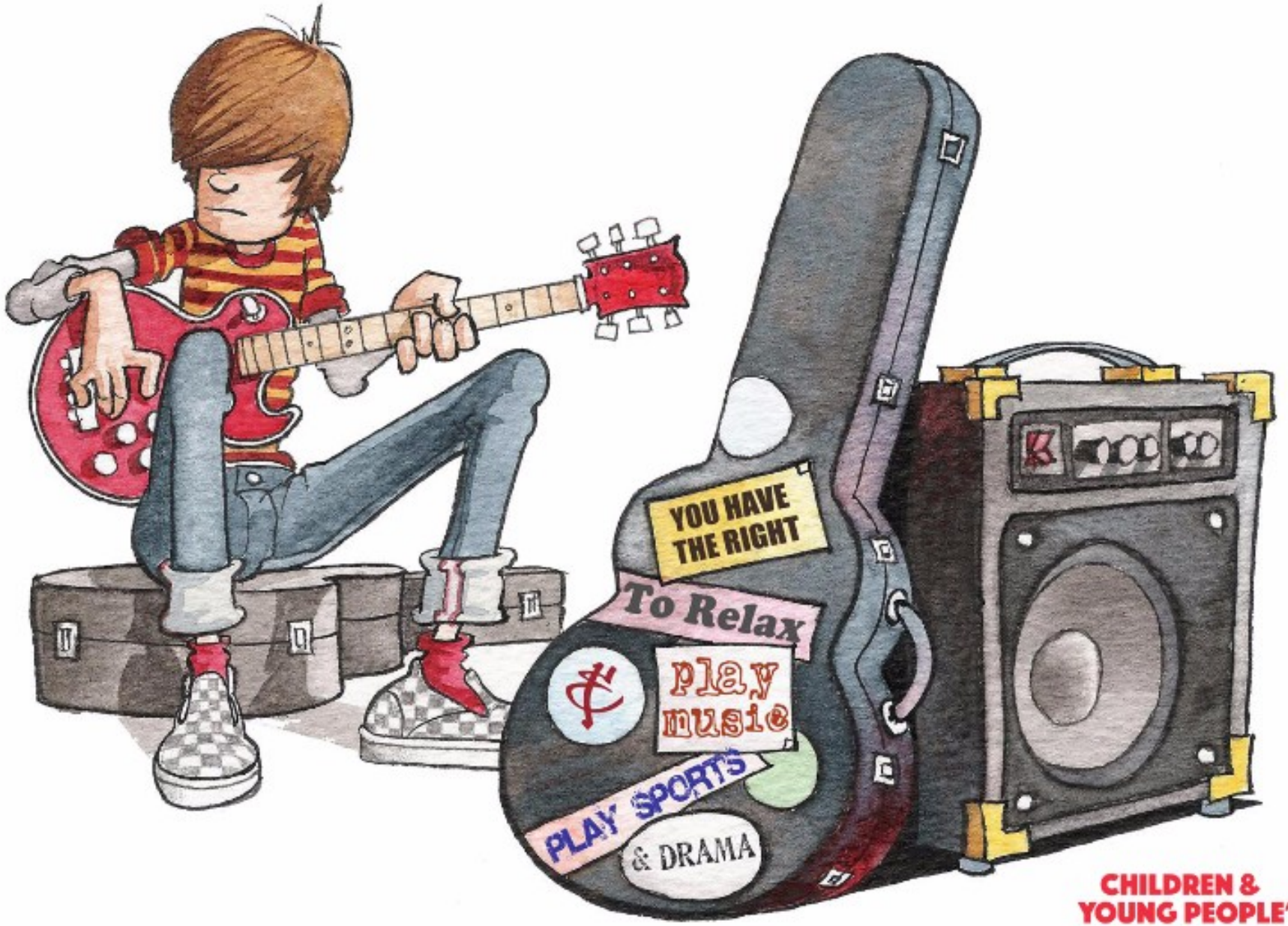


illustration : alex leonard

You should be able to join things and meet people so long as you don't endanger or threaten others

U.N. Convention on the Rights of the Child: Article 15

CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE'S Commissioner Scotland



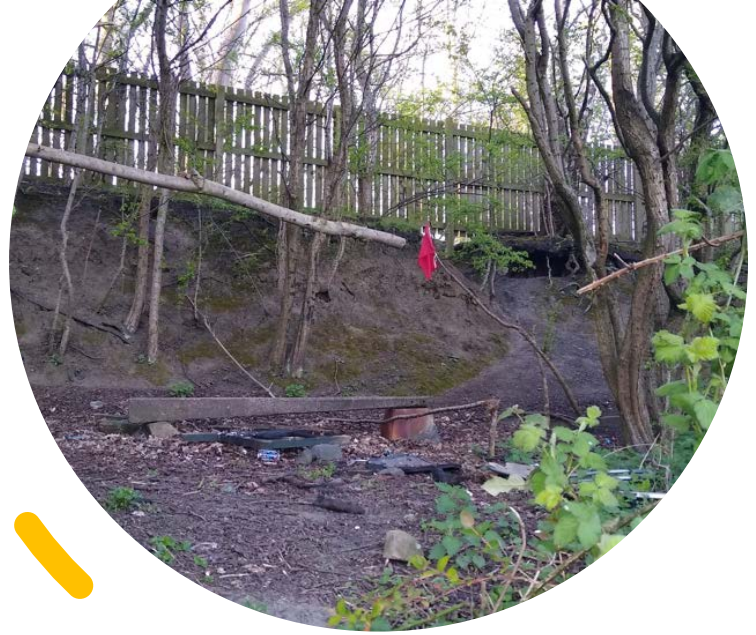
U.N. Convention on the Rights of the Child: Article 31

illustration : alex leonard

CHILDREN &
YOUNG PEOPLE'S
Commissioner
Scotland

Literature Review

- Many of the same needs, but some specific and overlooked.
- Likely to be considered culprits of anti-social behaviour.
- We need welcoming and adaptable spaces, where young people can feel some sense of ownership.
- Supportive features include quality access; varied facilities; natural areas; and places to gather.
- Detrimental features include heavy surveillance, limited use by others, isolation, and poor signposting and lighting.
- Extra attention required on the needs of girls, disabled young people, and young people with other protected characteristics.
- A bespoke approach *is* required BUT the biggest barrier is the *attitudes of adults*.
- We need to engage meaningfully within and across generations.



Methodology and Methods

Participatory Action Research:

- 3 Case studies – Huntly, the Denny area, and North Edinburgh, each in different stages of project development.
- Stage 1: Experiential Mapping
- Stage 2: Local Strategy Workshops
  - Project Addendum – Codesign in North Edinburgh
- Stage 3: National Workshop

Table 1 Young People Engaged in Each Case Study Area

North Edinburgh	Denny	Huntly
25 young people aged 11-16 were engaged face to face in both an open group session and a girls group session at PYCP. A family of 3 young people aged 13-16 were engaged online. A 17-year-old was interviewed over the phone about the area.	30 young people aged 13-18 were engaged face to face across two school-based sessions. On day one, APiC worked with boys and girls in S3 (first separately and then together), and on day two we worked with boys and girls in S5 and S6 (first separately and then together).	20 young people aged 13 and 14 were engaged face to face at The Gordon's School. Boys and girls were initially engaged separately and the brought together for the afternoon. 2 17-year-olds were engaged through an online workshop around their local place, and reviewed materials and ideas produced by the younger age group to establish level of consensus.

Girls Walk

Boys Walk

What We Think About North Edinburgh

Key

What's Important / Good?

What's Missing / Could be Better?

Things to Change

It's a nice place to live - it's never quiet and having lots of people around makes you feel safer. There are especially lots of families, and it's really diverse.

People also know eachother, and welcome people coming to stay from other places.

There are lots of local shops, a chippy and a McDondalds, as well as big shops like Morrisons and Lidl. We have local historical landmarks like the old train station (which will become a market/events space), and the Gas Tower.

We also have good local charities like The Pantry and Pilton Community Health Project. Places are easy to find and we also have beautiful sights.

We can get buses easily to town, to Leith, and there are some good activities to take part in.

The area is really walkable, and accessible to disabled people as well.

We have lots of local places with nature. We value being able to see trees and other vegetation.

The youth groups are all great. We go to PYCP, Ferrywell (we think John Gillan is an excellent person!), and Fetlor but we know people that go to the others. There's cool stuff to do and meet friends there. Some of us have been coming since P1!

There are lots of good primary schools

There are a lot of playgrounds we can play in. Good for lots of age groups.

Bumpy tracks on the beach promenade are fun to cycle on,

Views and the beach - Trinity and Granton

A direct path from Pilton to Granton Beach - it takes ages to get there!

Indoor basketball courts, more games, and better lighting down at the beach

Granton Pier is a great place to visit

Ocean Terminal - good to hangout in. Cinema and shops, and a free ping pong place.

Ocean Terminal - it used to be better for hanging out than it is now. Game has gone!

Beach near Gypsy Brae - no go at night. Feels creepy.

The Duck Pond can be dangerous if people aren't careful. Risk of drowning

The Duck Pond and whole Forthquarter Park area is great and gives us more natural space to enjoy. There's also woodland around and it's calm and peaceful. It will be even better when it's all finished.

The pond could be cleaned up - plants are overgrowing it.

Morrisons and Lidl - cheap food and place to meet

Granton Harbour

Granton

Beach here nice and calm - feels safe. Not a lot of sketchy people there.

Beachfront walkway

Buses and activities need to be more accessible.

It's really hard to cross the road in some places, especially with a wheelchair. It's also difficult to cycle and skate on broken tarmac.

Not very calm in the roads around here. Hectic, like in Pilton

Calmer out towards Trinity than in Pilton. Not a lot of trouble, even at night. Could go for a walk and no one would bother you.

Silverknowes golf course isn't a place for young people. It could be better used for stuff that includes us. An example is something like Blackpool Pleasure Beach with rollercoasters, shows and food. It could be another place we could hang out and have fun.

There needs to be more open-mindedness, especially in schools, towards people who are neurodivergent, LGBTQ+, disabled, different races etc.

World of Football is good!

Neighbourhoods are calmer near the main roads - Easier to sleep and avoid trouble

Fix the basketball court at Ferryroad Drive.

The Astroturf at Craigroyston High needs to be improved.

Craigroyston High could be a better place to go - more caring, and more modern style of teaching.

Craigroyston High - important to us as we go there.

'Motorcycle Highway' and congregating around car parks.

Young people ride up and down here, messing around, at night. And then police come and everybody wakes up.

Pilton Park is the best park - feels safest and has good play equipment and sports

Trinity

Pilton

West Pilton

Muirho

We don't think it's acceptable that Silverknowes is so rich and clean, with mansions near the beach, but Pilton is dirty and has mouldy homes.

Skatepark in Muirhouse need to be improved by asking local young people.

Muirhouse church provides projects that benefit people.

Community Centre in Muirhouse is good because it has lots of clubs and will also give for to people living in poverty.

Local buildings need better maintained as some in Muirhouse and Pilton are dangerous.

Empty the bins (they're always overflowing) and clean up the litter and dog poo.

More local businessness in the area and a sweetshop.

Cycle path to Craigleith - so much better than walking main roads. Feels a lot more comfortable. Natural surroundings.

Clean up the railway path - rubbish, broken glass, dog poo etc.

Bikes need to follow the same rules as cars, like not being able to pass you.

Drylaw

Davidson's Mains

Empty field in Blackhall - peaceful. Empty your mind. Get away from all the hectic places.

ASB around Drylaw shops - smoking, taking drugs, hassling people

Shop burnt down around here. Hassle around shops. Corner shops at the back. Not on the main front. People always there causing trouble

Drylaw Park doesn't feel safe and got loads of litter in it. Including smeshed glass and plates. Boys can't think of anything good about it - large groups of young people hanging around vaping and causing trouble.

Others think it's fine, if a bit boring, during the day. It can be calmer than other parks in Pilton.

Skatepark at Drylaw Park is good. But we need more and better local skateparks, that are redesigned by young people.

More nature, fewer new homes.

We sometimes hang out in the city centre, but there's not really anything there for us. The shops are expensive,

Craigleith really useful. Parks along the walkways to hangout. Sometimes go there to study. Calm and peaceful. The shops are also great and can get there quickly.

Little playpark for when parents shopping. Could be a couple of swings. Only two slides.

You see people robbing stuff at Craigleith

Cornely Bank

We need more places to go and things to do.

We aren't always welcoming, as a community, to people from other parts of Edinburgh.

Anti-social behaviour / High crime rates - people get up to anything and everything and always hassling folk. This includes gangs and young men coming from other areas to cause trouble here.

It's worst around the shops and in the parks, especially after dark.

People smash stuff and just leave it there, litter, leave their dog poo, set fire to stuff, throw up on the street (no one cleans it up and it stinks), throw rocks at windows, and dump stuff all over the neighbourhoods. There's lots of underage drinking and drug use.

It can stop children playing out during the day because of all the sketchy stuff lying about.

To stay safe, both boys and girls move around in packs. You'd rarely see any young people out and about alone.

We avoid gangs and other people up to no good as much as we can, but not always possible.

It feels more unsafe to girls and young women, but most of us wouldn't go out after dark if we could avoid it.

The Motorbike Problem - Most people are just showing off with their motorbikes - messing around but not a real issue. They're mostly bored.

There are some people on motorbikes when underage, driving recklessly. Sometimes the bikes are stolen. But we've also seen police take bikes off of people's properties without asking.

The police can make it worse by chasing around the ones that are just showing off, rather than focusing on the real crime.

New Homes Being Built - often on areas that had wild animals - deers, ducks and rabbits and/or on places we used to enjoy like the shopping mall.

The homes mostly aren't for people from our community and all this new development is 'ruining the environment, draining the earth'.

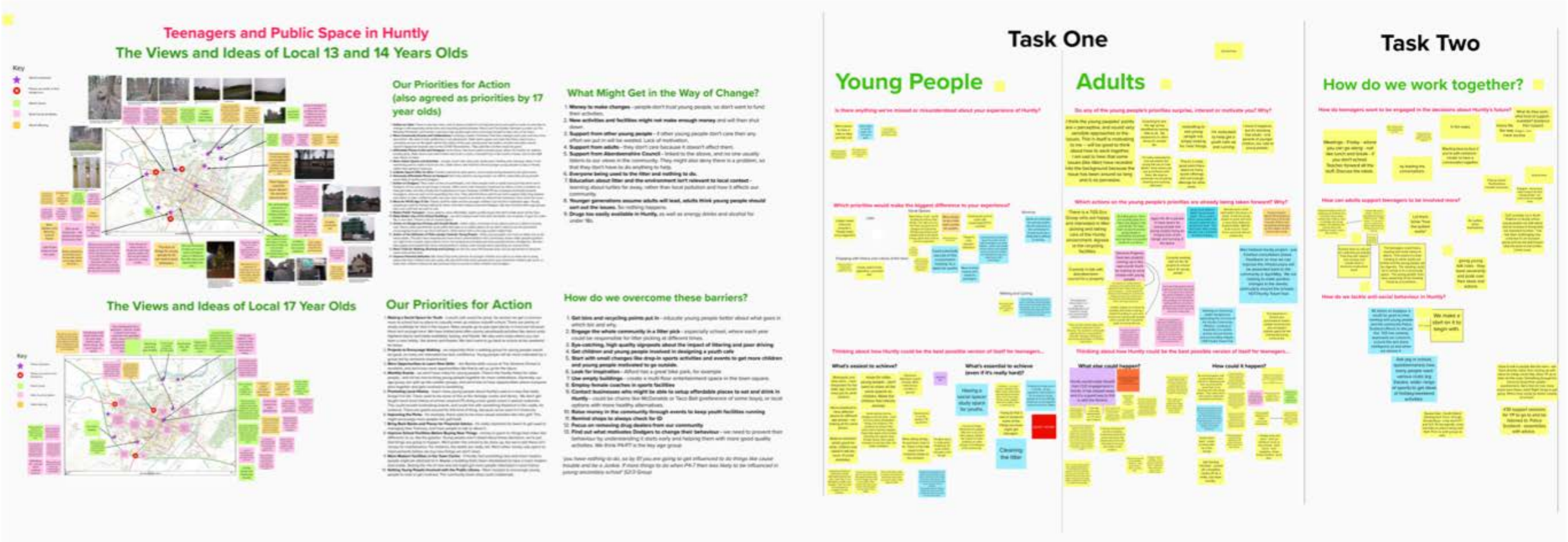
Other developments, like on the waterfront, are taking ages. It's been derelict for as long as we can remember!

Too many local houses have a mould issue that needs sortiing out.

Adults juding all young people badly.

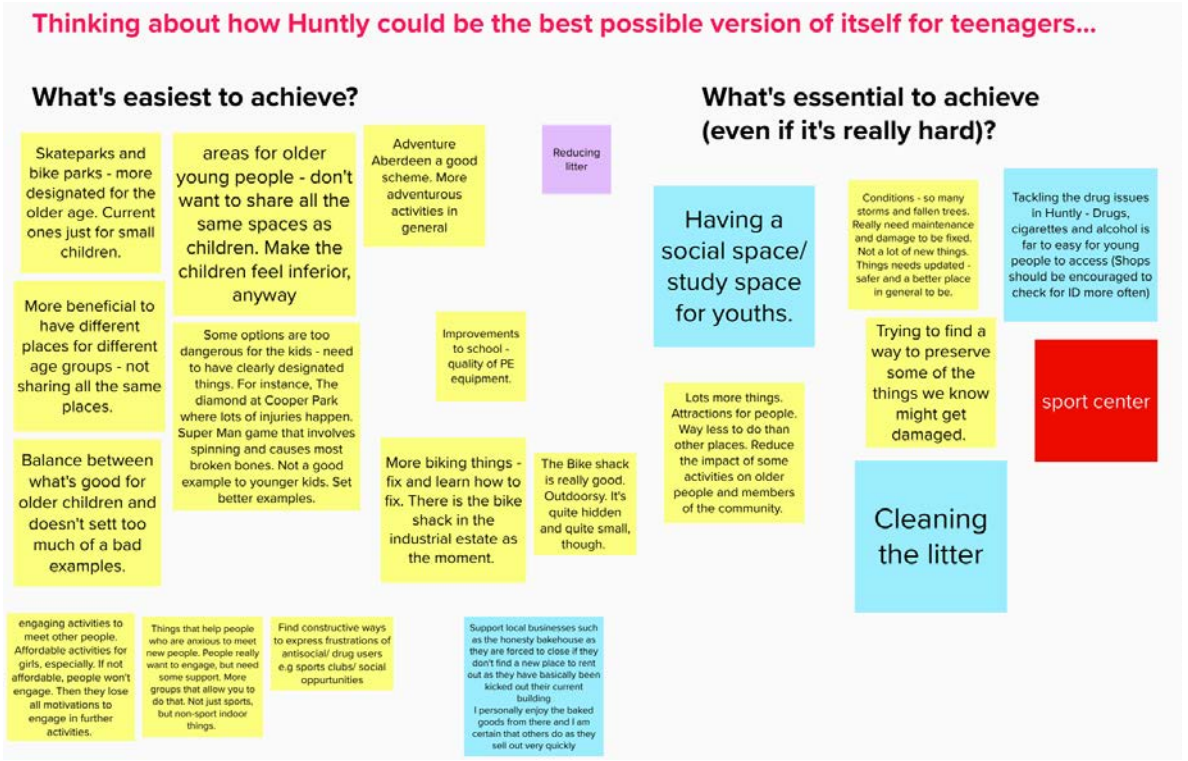
Local Strategy Workshops: Facilitating Shared Conversations

- Create a Youth-friendly environment, and invite adults in
- Remove jargon and define terms.



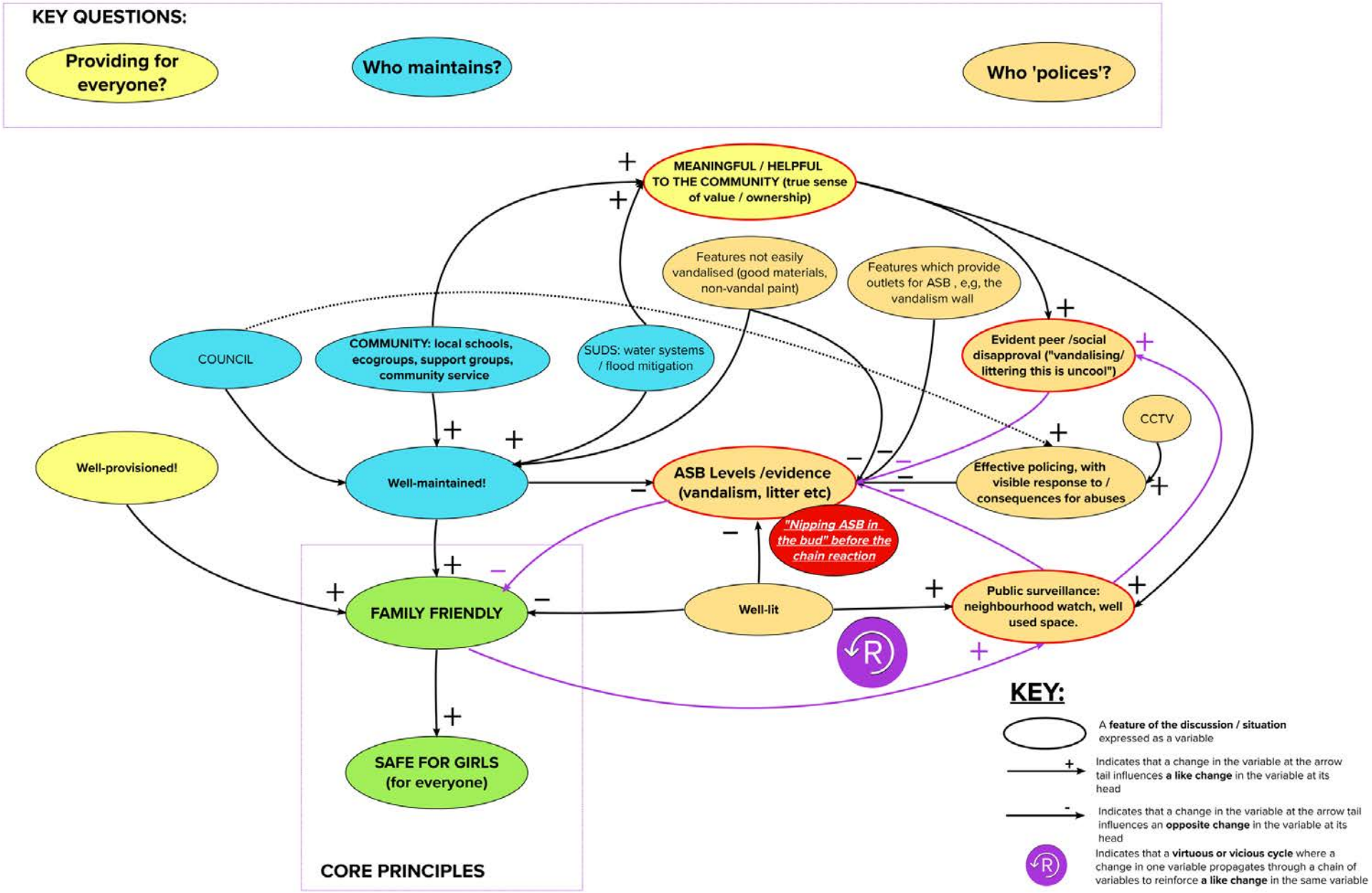
Young People and Adults Working Together

- Getting direct conversations with change-makers (and supporting young people into change-making roles!).
- Look for quick wins, as well as longer term goals.
- Keep communication clear, and nurture trust.
- Young people respect honesty! *Trustful Dialogue is a Core Principle.*
- Bring them on the journey – many young people are looking for meaningful and purposeful activities to be part of.



Codesign in North Edinburgh

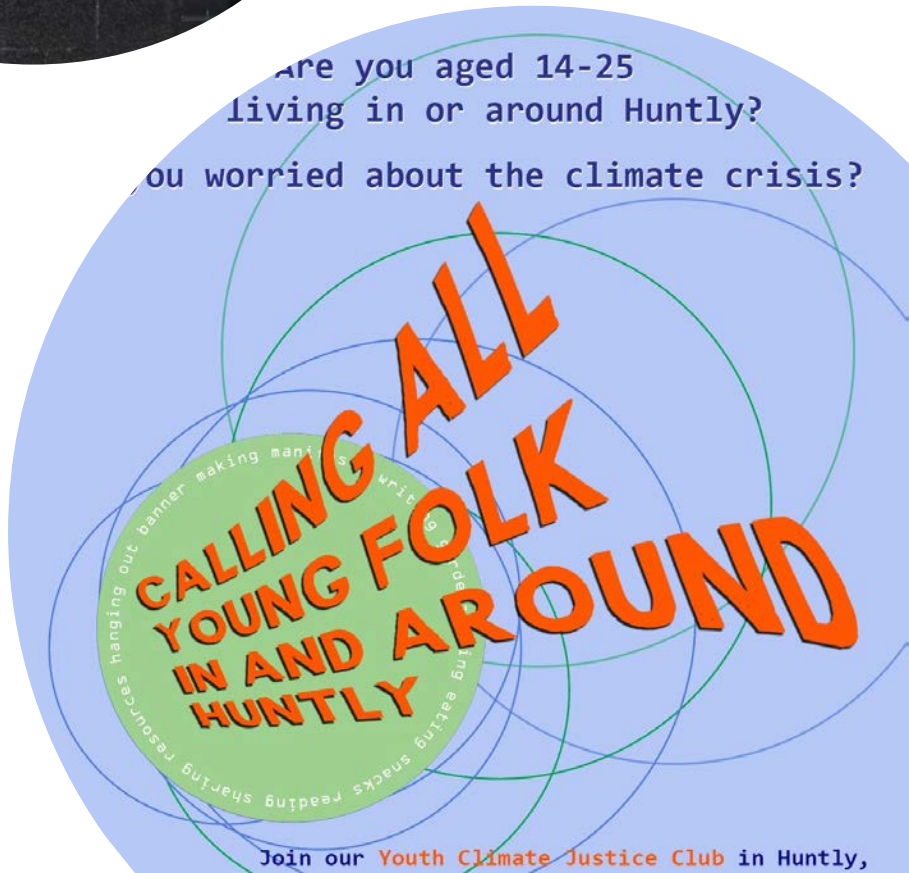
‘Reversing the Chain Reaction’



National Strategy Workshop

Common Themes and Priorities:

- Culture Change
- Provision
- Infrastructure
- Decision-making skills for us
- Meaningful decision-making for our community



National Strategy Workshop

Common Barriers to Overcome:

- Narrow remit and long timeframes of projects
- Short-term project funding
- Skills, knowledge and confidence of young people
- Space for young people to meet and organise their own activities
- Lack of follow-through and whole-project thinking from professionals

National Strategy Workshop: Route Maps

Improving things to do:

- Be Strategic
- Engage young people most interested first, and focus on points of agreement
- Empathise with young people
- Understand that young people want to feel a sense of purpose
- Facilitate young people's access
- Involve young people at the strategic level
- Bring back opportunities lost during the pandemic
- Advertise opportunities in a youth-friendly format

"I think it would be great if the adults could be able to understand the teenagers' minds more. Because a lot of people think differently… like if I am playing an online game, which I do quite often … like games where it's like live and with other people at the exact same time. And then if your parents asks you to pause it, you physically cannot pause it! Because it's online! If you pause it, you will die and you will lose." Young Consultant

"For a few years before COVID, I volunteered at a local youth club and so did [name of other young person] for a while as well. But I did that for a number of years, but then COVID obviously happened, and then you can't really do things like that anymore. And then if it opened up again, then it's not gotten much publicity or like I've not heard of it opening at all." Young Consultant

National Strategy Workshop: Route Maps

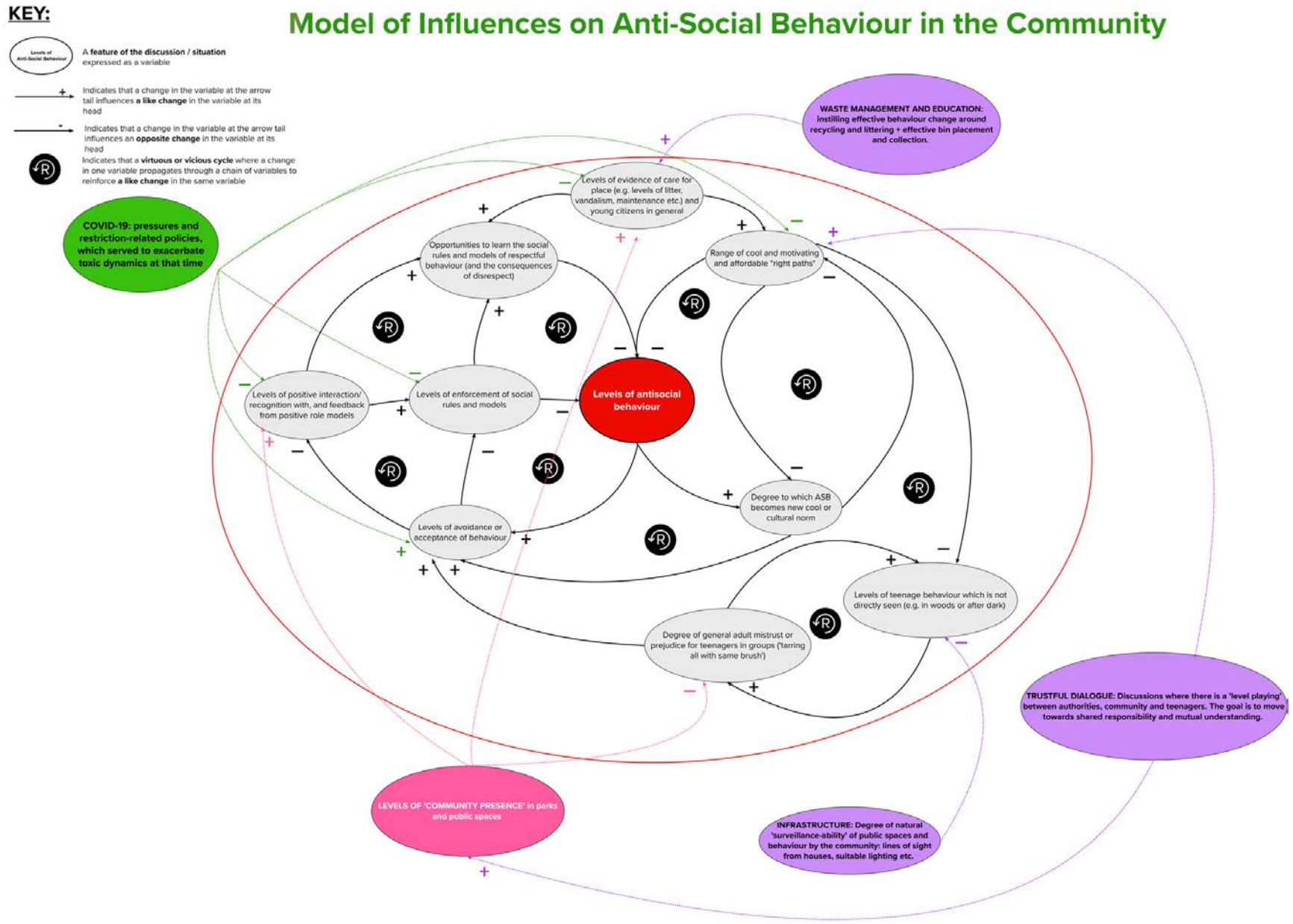
Tackling Anti-social Behaviour:

- Focus on improving things to do!
- Encourage good community role models to spread messages of respect
- Consistently enforce rules and laws around respectful behaviour
- Focus on infrastructural improvements that improve safety and respect for other people
- Recognise the impacts of the pandemic and cost of living crisis
- Recognise that anti-social behaviour also happens online
- Educate young people about the consequences of their behaviour.

"They're just like, following older people because it could be like boredom. Or it could be like, they're in a very low and dark place. It can be for many reasons, but I think the most common reason is probably boredom because there's not really much to do to be honest." Young Consultant

"I think in Huntly we definitely need to fix and address the waste and rubbish. Because there I think, as the years have gone on, it's just continuously got worse and it's just I think that it's no longer just a nice place to live anymore because of how much rubbish there is." Young Consultant

Teenagers and Public Space across Scotland



Recommendations to Sustrans

1. **Prioritise all measures that lead to improved community safety, especially recognising the positive impact this can have for girls and other communities who feel particularly unsafe in public space.**
2. **Prioritise all infrastructural and community-based actions that reduce anti-social behaviour.**
3. **Build the meaningful engagement of young people into Places for Everyone Programmes from RIBA Stage 0 and establish a plan of engagement for the entire project at the start.**
4. **Work on the principles of trustful dialogue and transparency when engaging with young people.**
5. **Acknowledge and work with the fact some communities will require more work to establish trust and meaningful engagement with young people.**

Supporting Teens to Engage (group activity)

1

WHERE CAN ENGAGING TEENAGERS SUPPORT YOUR WORK: Note down some key advantages as a group.

2

WHAT FEARS OR PREJUDICES MIGHT NEED TO BE OVERCOME?: Your own, or of those around you.

3

DO YOU HAVE EXAMPLES OF BEST PRACTICE TO SHARE?: Anything the rest of us can learn from?

Feedback: 1. WHERE CAN ENGAGING TEENAGERS SUPPORT YOUR WORK

- Teenagers are not just future adults, but valuable stakeholders on their own right. They offer unique insights and experience.
- Identifying gaps in the Active Travel Network and how they can be filled. It makes them more likely to use the new infrastructure.
- They can feed into the design of a new park so they will use the new area. There is a lot of ASB at the moment and dirt bike use so they can help us understand why.
- School projects and community development.
- Teenagers are progressive thinkers and really want societal change. They're also ecologically engaged and believe in the climate crisis!
- They're a demographic that mostly don't own cars.
- They bring variety of opinions and creative ideas.
- It can create hope in the community.
- They can help us push to get benches put in by helping to combat fear of ASB.
- Potentially give different perspective to adults.

Feedback: 2. WHAT FEARS OR PREJUDICES MIGHT NEED TO BE OVERCOME?:

- From teenagers – why both, are we really going to be listened to? Will this be a scary space? Lack of self confidence. Their experience of being disenfranchised is legitimate, and so it's understandable they may feel hesitant to speak with us.
- Prejudgement from adults – people think all teens are badly behaved and 'scary' when in reality there is nothing for them to do in the area. Some think teens are to blame for all the ASB but we find it is more young adults. Some forget or refuse to acknowledge teens as equal members of society.
- Fear of raising expectations – some will think there's no value in the long time frame of projects, and there could be harm in raising expectations that something could happen when it can't.
- Trauma of adults' own experiences of being a teenagers can lead to distrust of certain groups and demographics.
- The amount of time required and lack of budget may be prohibitive.
- The idea that 'nothing ever changes'.
- How to engage – can't use assumptions of general practice with adults such as a town hall drop in event.
- Adult fears of failure or lack of engagement.
- Facilitators bot feeling comfortable working with children and young people, but training and practice can overcome this!

Feedback: 2. DO YOU HAVE EXAMPLES OF BEST PRACTICE TO SHARE?:

- Planning Aid Scotland has built successful relationships with teachers, to make point of projects clear at the start.
- Focus groups with boys and girls in secondary school to find out what barriers for girls cycling are.
- Dominoes pizza – understand the food hierarchy!
- Engaging students at a cafeteria with incentives of pizza and free coffee! But only expect 5 minutes of interaction.
- Working with group to design mental health event for other teens in the park.
- Scottish Recovery Network's Conversation Cafes
- No, but I really want to hear some!
- Working with a group of teens who have behavioural issues to design features in the park.

Thank you

https://aplaceinchildhood.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/Teenagers-and-Public-Space-Report_FINAL.pdf

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