

# Right to the Streets – Creating a community-led Place Review tool

## Overview

**Key Project partners:** Open Data Manchester, Greater Manchester Moving, Trafford Borough Council.

**Project Duration:** October 2022 to September 2023

**Scope:** Developing a community-led Place Review tool as part of a wider initiative to create safer and more welcoming streets and public spaces in North Trafford, with a focus on tackling gender-based violence and harassment

## Methodology:

- Initial community survey
- 14 walkabout workshops
- Development and refinement of Place Review tool
- Feedback sessions and usability tests
- Data analysis and mapping

## Key Areas Explored:

- Gender-based perceptions of safety
- Physical and social activeness
- Sense of belonging
- Urban environment assessment
- Community language and concerns

## Key Outcomes:

- Development of a community-led Place Review tool
- Creation of six participant personas representing diverse experiences
- Identification of common themes affecting women and girls in public spaces
- Creation of a resource for community-led urban assessment
- Contribution to the wider Right to the Streets campaign and interventions

## Impact:

- Created a community-focussed urban assessment tool
- Empowered residents to identify and advocate for local improvements
- Contributed to the larger £490,448 Home Office Safer Streets Fund project
- Fostered community engagement and sense of belonging
- Provided a framework for ongoing community-led assessment and advocacy
- Developed a replicable model for community-led urban safety initiatives.

## Introduction

Open Data Manchester partnered with GM Moving and Trafford Council for the Right to the Streets project, which aimed to tackle gender-based violence and make streets, parks, and public spaces safer and more welcoming for women and girls in Trafford. The project, funded by £490,448 from the Home Office Safer Streets Fund, took place between October 2022 and November 2023, and was a collaborative effort involving several key partners.

Alongside Open Data Manchester, the project team included:

- GM Moving: Coordinating and supporting the team of project partners, as well as building and maintaining partnerships locally and systematically.
- Trafford Council: Maximising impact to local residents by connecting the project with local activity and partners, as well as informing wider policy and planning.
- MIC Media: Producing a podcast series focusing on raising awareness of local case stories and lived experiences.
- Publica: An urban design and public realm practice, bringing research and expertise on how the physical environment informs perceptions of safety and belonging.
- Diva Creative: Leading on the marketing and communications campaign, including delivering creative workshops with local organisations.

The project also encompassed a range of community projects and interventions, including

- Community grants for 21 local projects offering free activities such as football sessions, bushcraft workshops, and yoga in the park.
- Creative workshops and projects hosted by seven local arts organisations, including parades, photography, poetry, mural painting, and family fun days.
- Bystander intervention training to empower people to make informed decisions when witnessing gender-based violence or street harassment.
- The #NoPlaceForIt campaign to show there's no place for sexual harassment or violence against women and girls in Trafford.

Open Data Manchester played a crucial role in gathering and analysing data on the lived experiences of women and girls in public spaces. Our approach focused on direct community engagement and participatory methods to inform the broader project goals. Our team conducted mapping exercises and place reviews to explore how spaces were being used, with the resulting data contributing to other activities and interventions within the project. This approach aimed to provide valuable insights into the daily realities of women and girls navigating public spaces in Trafford.

## The Project

The initial objective was to conduct walkabouts to identify common routes and locations, which would then be subject to a formal place audit. However, based on the engagement with the community, Open Data Manchester pivoted our approach. Instead of using a pre-existing audit tool, we decided to create a new Place Review tool that the community could use themselves. This tool was co-created with the community, using the insights, language, and themes identified in the initial survey and walkabout workshops.

The methodology for developing this community-led tool included:

- Initial community survey (November 2022 to February 2023) to gauge interest and gather preliminary data.
- 14 walkabout workshops in different areas of North Trafford, involving over 50 participants.
- Indoor reflection sessions using pen and paper.
- Outdoor walks to experience the streets and incorporate physical activity.
- Mapping exercises where participants drew routes, highlighted areas of interest and concern, and noted their feelings.
- Analysis of recurring themes and language used by participants.
- Development of the Place Review tool (April to June).
- Feedback sessions with the community, project partners, and the Open Data Manchester team.
- Two usability tests (online and in-person) in June, focusing on content and ease of use.

This community-centric approach ensured that the resulting Place Review tool was tailored to the specific needs and experiences of the Trafford community, rather than relying on a generic audit tool that might not fully capture local nuances.

This pivot from using a pre-existing audit tool to creating a community-led Place Review tool proved invaluable for the project's goals. By co-creating the tool with local residents, we ensured that it accurately reflected the community's specific needs, concerns, and language. This approach not only produced more relevant data but also empowered residents to take an active role in assessing and improving their neighbourhoods, aligning perfectly with the project's aim of fostering community engagement and creating sustainable, community-driven change.

***“I think this workshop and the chance to talk is great!” – Participant feedback***

Data and insights gathered during this process both informed and was complemented by other interventions within the Right to the Streets project, including bystander intervention training, creative art installations, and walking, wheeling, and cycling initiatives.

## Insights

The project revealed recurring themes affecting women's and girls' experiences in public spaces, including:

- Street lighting issues
- Pavement conditions
- Road crossing difficulties
- Anti-social driver behaviour
- Safety concerns related to urban environment and social factors
- Importance of parks and green spaces
- Community and belonging

These themes highlighted two distinct areas of focus. Some, such as street lighting and the presence of pedestrian crossings, were directly related to the urban built environment. Others, like the behaviour of people in public spaces, pointed to the need for a deeper societal shift,

emphasising the importance of education and awareness-raising about safety issues for women and girls.

While some of these findings may not be surprising, they challenge the common view that safety, especially for women and girls, is primarily about CCTV cameras. Instead, they highlight many other factors that contribute to safety, such as access to green spaces and a sense of belonging to the community.

***"[The Place Review] made me think of things that I might take for granted" - Participant feedback***

In addition to identifying these common themes, Open Data Manchester developed six profiles representing the diverse participants engaged in the project. These personas captured the behaviours, frustrations, and needs of different women and girls in Trafford. While not an exhaustive representation of the entire community, these profiles provided a valuable snapshot of the project participants and their experiences navigating urban spaces.

These insights highlighted the multifaceted nature of creating welcoming public spaces and the importance of community perspective in urban planning. These findings informed not only the Place Review tool but also contributed to the project's broader understanding of issues faced by women and girls in public spaces across Trafford.

***"[The Place Review is] a useful tool for learning about the local area" - Participant feedback***

## Impact

The Place Review tool and the collaborative methodology through which it was developed, represents an alternative from traditional urban assessment methods which places the affected community at the heart of it. Key aspects of the tool include:

- Use of language and concerns familiar to residents, derived directly from community input
- Categories adapted to reflect themes identified in walkabout workshops
- Exercises for individuals and groups to identify their role in improving local areas, emphasising community empowerment
- Space for reflection and exploration of the local area, encouraging ongoing community engagement

This co-created tool allows residents to conduct their own place audits, focusing on issues important to them and exploring their lived experiences of the places they reside in. It goes beyond data gathering, providing tools and advice on turning insights into action.

***"[Doing the Place Review was] eye opening, I come through the area everyday but don't assess it apart from feelings." – Participant feedback***

The development of participant personas based on the walkabouts shows how Open Data Manchester's community-centred approach produced tangible tools that informed and enhanced other aspects of the Right to the Streets project. These personas, used in awareness-building

activities by other project partners, helped to translate individual experiences into broader insights about women's safety in urban spaces.

The Place Review tool and personas complemented other Right to the Streets initiatives, providing a comprehensive framework for residents to assess their local areas and advocate for change. Feedback from participants highlighted the tool's value in opening eyes to everyday surroundings, providing useful insights for learning about local areas, and potentially supporting further funding bids.

***“Could help with funding bids, providing the why” - Participant feedback***

While developed specifically for Trafford, the Place Review tool's community-led approach and flexible structure make it adaptable to diverse urban environments. Other communities could customise the tool to reflect their local concerns, language, and cultural nuances, creating a tailored resource for assessing and improving public spaces. This adaptability enhances the tool's potential for widespread use, offering a replicable model for community-driven urban safety initiatives across various cities and neighbourhoods.

## **Conclusion**

The Right to the Streets project shows the power of collaborative, community-driven approaches in creating safer, more inclusive public spaces. The project's multifaceted approach, involving various partners and community-led initiatives, resulted in a comprehensive set of interventions and resources that has the potential to create lasting positive change in Trafford and serve as a model for similar initiatives elsewhere.

The development of Open Data Manchester's Place Review tool, co-created with the community, enables residents to conduct their own place audits, focusing on issues important to them and exploring their lived experiences of the places they inhabit. Going beyond data gathering, it provides resources for turning insights into action. It has been well-received by the community, with feedback highlighting its eye-opening nature and potential usefulness for funding bids and local area improvements. The tool's accessibility on the GM Moving Resource Hub ensures its continued use and adaptation by various stakeholders.

***“[Doing the place review with others] would offer information share, people may not be aware of some stuff, you might get more out of it.” - Participant feedback***

Open Data Manchester's approach, involving community surveys, walkabout workshops, and collaborative development, has not only produced a valuable resource but also fostered community engagement, and contributed to the project's broader aim of enabling local residents to be active citizens in their communities.

## **Testimonial**

*“Open Data Manchester helped ensure that everything we did through the Right to the Streets partnership embedded the lived experiences of women and girls and grew local community agency and power.*

*Through the community walkabouts and careful design of the place audit, we were able to gather data and insight together in a way that felt generative, increasing people's connections to each other and pride in their neighbourhood. This was an important and welcome departure from more extractive and deficit focused processes."*

Eve Holt, Strategic Director, GM Moving