

Empowering Community-Driven Safety

Enhancing Women's Safety and Inclusivity
in Public Spaces in Beeston

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Foreword

PEOPLE
PLACES
PERSPECTIVES
A SAFER
BEESTON

Funded through the University of Leeds Research England Policy Support Fund, this report presents the findings of the project *Empowering Community-Driven Safety: Enhancing Women's Safety and Inclusivity in Public Spaces in Beeston*. The project is the result of a collaborative partnership between the University of Leeds and Hamara Healthy Living Centre, working alongside women from the Beeston community to better understand how public open spaces are experienced and how local knowledge can contribute to creating safer and more inclusive neighbourhoods.

Women's safety in public spaces has become an increasingly important priority for policymakers, practitioners and communities across the United Kingdom. While significant progress has been made in understanding the role of urban design, crime prevention and environmental management, much less attention has been given to how women themselves define safety and how their lived experiences can inform planning, policy and community action.

This project responds to that challenge by placing women's voices at the centre of the research process. Through community walking observations, behavioural mapping, surveys and creative participatory workshops, women worked alongside the research team to explore how safety is experienced in everyday life, the challenges they encounter, and their aspirations for creating more welcoming, inclusive and accessible public spaces. Rather than viewing women simply as research participants, this project recognises them as partners in generating knowledge and shaping future conversations about safer neighbourhoods.

The report brings together evidence from this collaborative research to provide practical insights for local authorities, planners, urban designers, community organisations and policymakers. While the findings focus on Beeston, they also contribute to wider national and international discussions on women's safety, community participation and inclusive placemaking. The report demonstrates that creating safer public spaces extends beyond reducing crime and improving physical infrastructure; it also requires fostering belonging, inclusion, community connections and opportunities for women to participate confidently in everyday public life.

This project would not have been possible without the generosity, trust and commitment of the women who shared their experiences, knowledge and creativity throughout the research. We extend our sincere thanks to all participants for their invaluable contributions. We also wish to acknowledge the dedication and support of Hamara Healthy Living Centre, whose longstanding relationships within the community were fundamental to the success of this project, and to thank our project team and partners for their commitment throughout the research process.

We hope this report supports ongoing efforts to create public spaces that are not only safer, but also more inclusive, welcoming and empowering for women and communities across Leeds and beyond.



Meet the team



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Executive Summary

This report presents findings from community-based research in Beeston, Leeds, examining how women experience safety in public open spaces and how their lived experiences can inform urban design, planning and local action.

The findings demonstrate that women's safety cannot be understood through crime or physical design alone. Women's experiences reveal how safety is shaped through the interaction between the built environment, everyday social life, perceptions of risk, community relationships and a sense of belonging. Together, these conditions influence not only whether a place feels safe or unsafe, but also women's freedom and confidence to move through, use and participate in public space.



What women told us

Women's perceptions of safety shape everyday decisions about where to walk, which routes to take, when to travel and which spaces to avoid. Poor lighting and visibility, neglected environments and particular spatial conditions can contribute to feelings of vulnerability and influence how women navigate their neighbourhood.

However, physical conditions are only part of this experience. The social life of public space also matters. Familiarity, opportunities for social interaction and connections to the wider community can contribute to confidence and belonging. At the same time, the research demonstrates that the presence of people or activity alone does not necessarily make a place feel safe. Who is present, how spaces are occupied and whether women feel comfortable and able to belong within them are equally important.

These findings point to safety as a relational and lived experience, produced through the interaction between people, place and the wider social environment rather than through any single design intervention.

What women imagined

When women were invited to imagine a safer Beeston, their aspirations extended well beyond surveillance and conventional security interventions. They envisioned greenery and well-maintained parks, children playing, families spending time outdoors, community centres, local shops, seating, places of worship and opportunities for social interaction.

Significantly, these were not simply proposals for making places less unsafe. They represented a positive vision of what a safe neighbourhood should enable: comfort, inclusion, familiarity, accessibility, community connection and the freedom to participate confidently in everyday public life.

This suggests that designing for women's safety should not focus solely on reducing opportunities for crime or managing perceived risks. It should also consider the everyday qualities that enable women to use, enjoy and feel that they belong in public space.

From lived experience to action

The findings call for a broader approach to women's safety in which urban design, maintenance, community participation and governance work together. Creating safer public spaces requires attention to lighting, visibility, pedestrian routes and the physical condition of places, alongside the social and community infrastructures that support active, welcoming and inclusive neighbourhoods.

The report translates these findings into recommendations for urban design and planning, community organisations, Leeds City Council, West Yorkshire Combined Authority and future research. Across these areas, it emphasises the importance of moving beyond consultation towards approaches in which women can actively contribute to identifying problems, shaping priorities and informing decisions about the public spaces they use.

Women's lived experiences should be treated as evidence that actively informs how public spaces are planned, designed, managed and evaluated.



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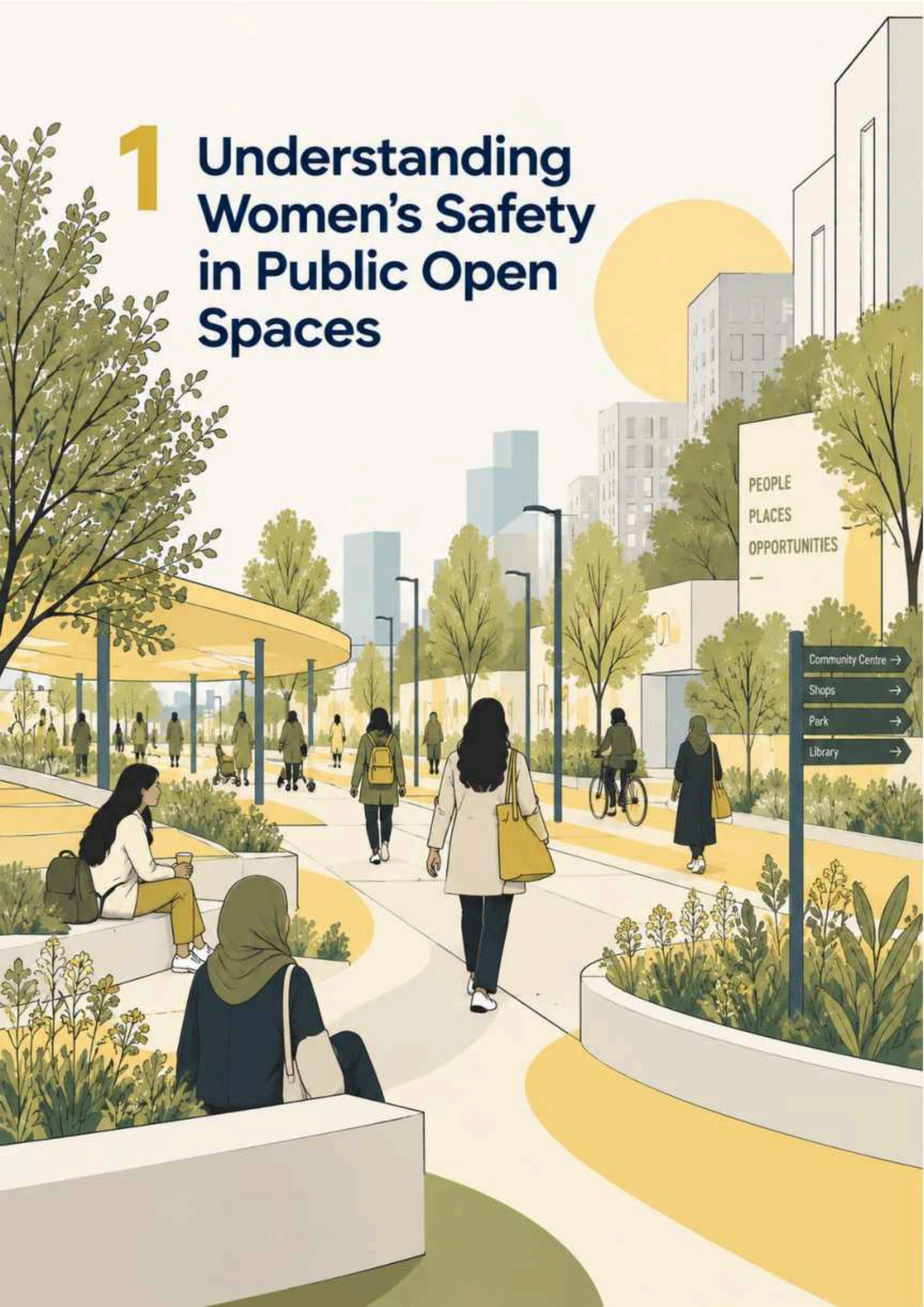
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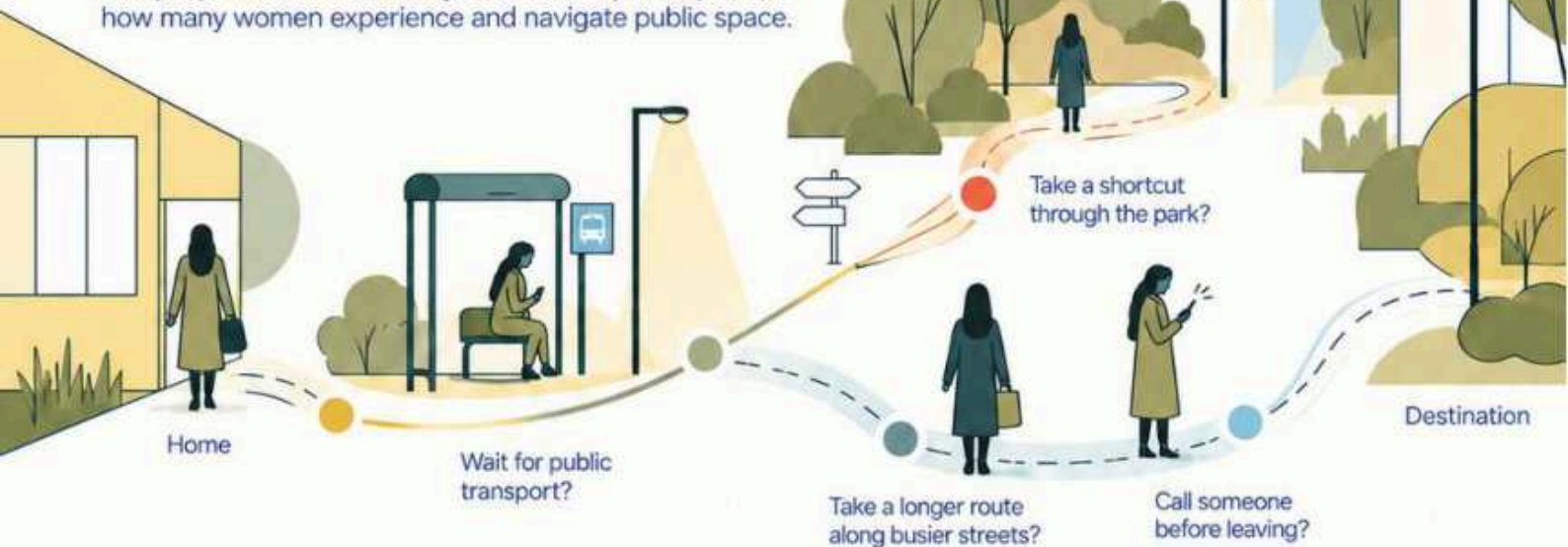
Understanding Women's Safety in Public Open Spaces



1.1 Why women's safety matters

Women's freedom to move through public space without fear is increasingly recognised as an important marker of a fair and inclusive city. For many women, travelling home after dark involves a series of decisions. It can mean deciding whether to wait for public transport or walk, whether to take a shortcut through the park or a longer route along busier streets, whether to call someone before leaving, or whether to avoid travelling altogether. These everyday calculations often go unnoticed, yet they shape how many women experience and navigate public space.

Different routes.
Different decisions.
The same goal — to feel safe.



A fairer and more inclusive city

A fundamental objective of sustainable and just urban development is to create public spaces that are safe, inclusive and welcoming (Figure 1). Planning, urban design and the management of public spaces all play a crucial role in shaping how women experience and navigate their everyday environments. These concerns influence how women use public spaces as well as highlight the importance of planning and design decisions in creating environments that support confidence, accessibility and everyday mobility.



Global and national context

The United Nations has embedded this concern within the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development through Goal 11.7, which calls for providing universal access to safe, inclusive and accessible, green and public spaces, in particular for women and children, older persons and persons with disabilities. The UN Women's Safe Cities and Safe Public Spaces (SC SPS) Global Initiative, currently spans 68 cities in 38 countries, has been implementing this ambition by working with local authorities to strengthen laws, invest in safer public space design, and shift the social norms that normalise harassment (UN Women, 2025).

88%

of women have felt unsafe walking at night.

YouGov, March 2026

71%

of women have adjusted their routes to avoid travelling in the dark during winter or other darker periods.

YouGov, March 2026

¹ Nationwide plans announced to design safer streets as 9 in 10 women report feeling unsafe walking at night.
<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/nationwide-plans-announced-to-design-safer-streets-as-9-in-10-women-report-feeling-unsafe-walking-at-night>

In relation to this, the UK government currently treats violence against women and girls (VAWG) as a national priority. The latest action plan¹ is built around three pillars: prevention and early intervention, relentless pursuit of perpetrators, and support for victims and survivors (Home Office, 2025). Significantly, the strategy positions VAWG as a societal issue that demands locally tailored and place-based interventions alongside national reforms to policing and the justice reforms. This report builds on this place-based approach by exploring how women's everyday experiences can inform planning, urban design and community-led action to create safer and more inclusive public spaces in Beeston.

Alongside improvements to policing and the criminal justice system, there is growing recognition that local planning authorities, urban designers and community organisations all have an important role in creating environments where women feel safe, included and able to participate confidently in public life.



A national priority

The UK government's VAWG strategy (Home Office, 2025) is built around three pillars:

- 1 Prevention and early intervention
- 2 Relentless pursuit of perpetrators
- 3 Support for victims and survivors

The strategy emphasises the need for locally tailored and place-based interventions alongside national reforms to policing and the justice system.



Figure 1. A place-based approach to creating safer and more inclusive public spaces (Author's own, 2026).

² Freedom from violence and abuse: a cross-government strategy.
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/freedom-from-violence-and-abuse-a-cross-government-strategy>

1.2 Existing initiatives in the United Kingdom

Over the past years, councils and combined authorities have increasingly published design guidance for safer streets and parks. A wide range of initiatives has emerged (Figure 2), from national strategies that set the overall direction, to design guidance that translates this direction into practical standards for streets and parks, and local partnerships that fund lighting, CCTV, and community-led safety measures on the ground. We studied the following UK initiatives which informed the design and approach of this research project in Beeston (Table 1).

Table 1. UK Initiatives informing this project

(Women Friendly Leeds, 2021; Safer Ealing Partnership, 2022; Safer Parks Consortium, 2023; Newisar, 2024; LLDC and ARUP, 2024).

Category	Initiative	Approach	Key contribution	Relevance to Beeston
 Community engagement	Leeds Women's safety Survey (Women Friendly Leeds, 2021)	Citywide survey of 1,371 women capturing perceptions, experiences, and behaviours.	Built the evidence base behind Leeds's civic safety tools, including WalkSafe and Ask for Angela.	The finding that 73% of Black, Asian, and mixed-heritage women linked their safety to race or culture informed this research's focus on identity and belonging.
	A Safer Ealing for Women (Safer Ealing Partnership, 2022)	Listening exercise identifying where women and girls feel unsafe, and what role the partnership should play.	Illustrates how local partnership developed its approach based on women's experiences.	Informed a working method to build the research around women's own testimony.
 Public space research	Safer Parks Project (Safer Parks Consortium, 2023)	Research with women, girls, and professionals across West Yorkshire, identifying visibility, staff presence, busyness, familiarity, and wayfinding as key factors.	Produced ten core principles under the themes of eyes on the park, awareness, and inclusion. The research also initiates a live Open Data Dashboard.	It provided a practical framework for the walk-along observations in Beeston.
	Women's Safety and Security Project, WeSaSpace (Newisar, 2024)	City-wide mapping of where women feel unsafe in Leeds, linked to design factors such as street furniture, lighting, and sightlines.	Identified Beeston itself as a priority neighbourhood.	Provided both the reason for focusing on Beeston and a set of key environmental factors, including lighting, sightlines and street furniture, that guided the walk-along observations.
 Planning and design guidance	Creating Places That Work For Women and Girls (LLDC and ARUP, 2024)	Participatory co-creation of gender-informed design guidance in London's Olympic legacy area.	Provided a model for using women's experiences to guide design decisions.	Showed the value of involving local women directly in the research process, which influenced the design of this project's walking sessions and workshops.
	Secured by Design (national, ongoing)	SBD provides design guidance to help developers build safer places and meet planning and building requirements.	Part of planning and building consent consideration in Leeds.	Helped guiding the participants to observe the built-environment features during the walk-along observation sessions.

Improving street safety for women and girls

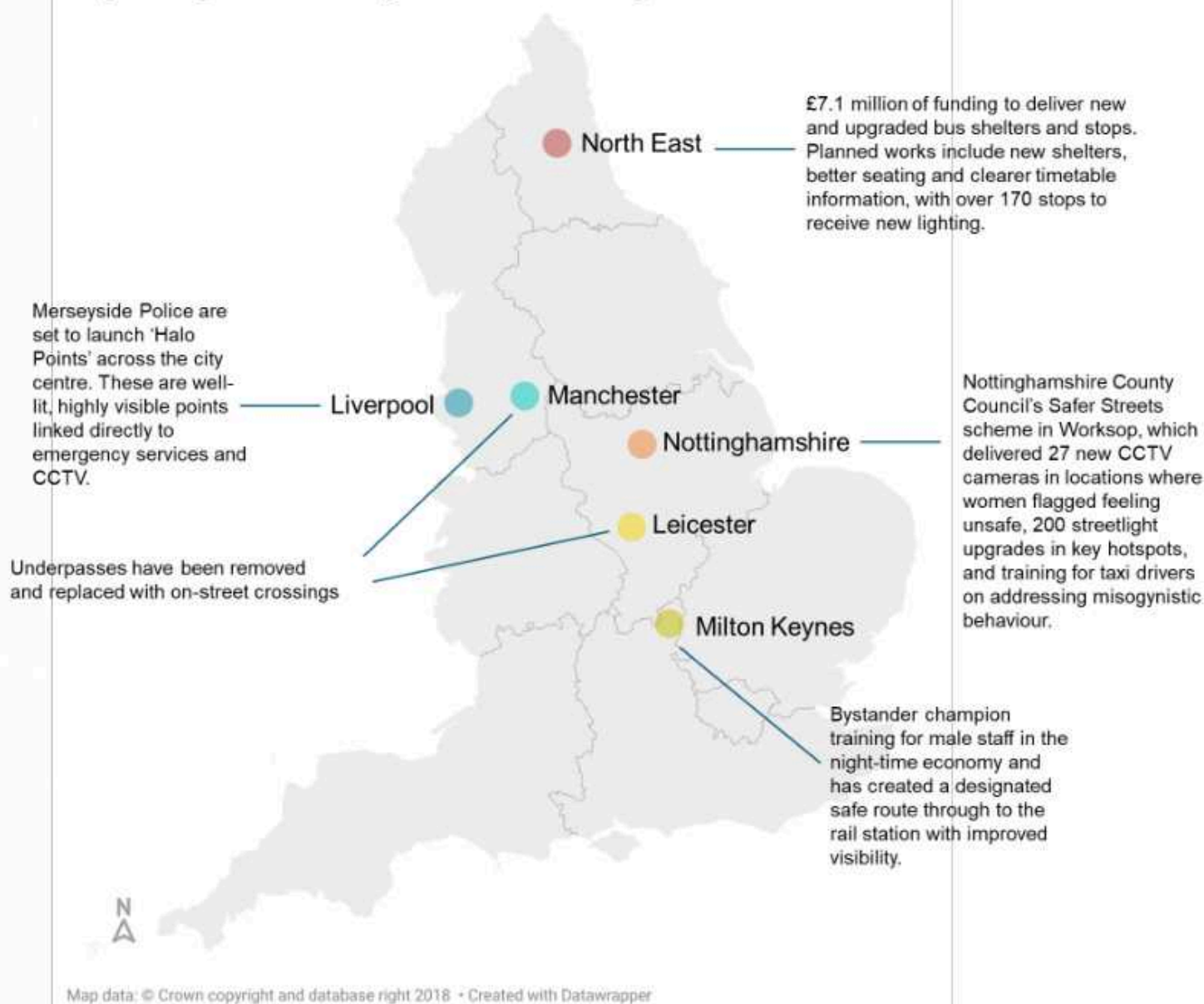


Figure 2. Active Travel England's improving street safety for women and girls' initiatives (Active Travel England, 2026).

These initiatives show that responses to women's safety in public spaces does not rely on a single approach. Some focus on gathering evidence through surveys and community engagement; others use observation and mapping. Some work through design standards and planning processes, while others depend on partnerships with the businesses and venues that women use every day. We learn that lasting change is most likely to thrive when these approaches are combined; evidence identifies the problem, design guidance sets a standard, and a delivery mechanism puts it into practice. This Beeston project ultimately aims to contribute to these collective initiatives.

1.3 A Brief Overview Of Current Research on Women's Safety

Many studies agree that women's safety perception is subjective and socially constructed with several spatial variables. It is shaped by factors such as personal experiences, social context, environmental cues, and temporal dimension (te Braak and van Tienoven, 2025). In simple terms, women are more likely to feel safe in places where they can see and be seen, and where they feel they belong (Gargiulo et al., 2020). Since similar dynamics recur across

Various geographic contexts, this project synthesises the growing studies of women's safety in three themes: built environment, fear and mobility, belonging and participation. These reflect the key questions we explored in Beeston, which include how the design of open public spaces affects women's sense of safety, how women adapt their behaviour in response, and how community and identity influence their experiences of places.

A substantial body of research links the physical design of streets and public spaces directly to women's perceived safety. Experimental and quasi-experimental studies in London found that interventions such as improved lighting, removal of graffiti and redesigned public toilets measurably improved women's perceived safety (Navarrete-Hernandez et al., 2021). Related work in Sheffield reveals that perceived safety deteriorates during the transition from day to night and is not directly associated with the actual crime rates (Navarrete-Hernandez et al., 2025). In Malaysia, street-level design features (particularly lighting, visibility, and activity levels) were found to significantly shape women's safety perceptions (Abdul Rashid et al., 2017). It echoes the finding from a Spanish study that identifies specific unsafe points along an urban corridor due to poor sightlines and vegetation (Gargiulo et al., 2020). In UK context, although existing work in this area has so far lacked intersectional diversity among the women studied (Henty and Peimani, 2025).

Several research reveals perceived safety actively reshapes women's movement through cities. A study in the US finds that women have different safety needs, often feel unsafe in certain transit settings, and change how and when they travel to avoid risk. Some groups of women feel especially vulnerable to harassment and victimisation, making these concerns even stronger for them (Loukaitou-Sideris, 2014). Similarly in Cairo's transit nodes, women perceive safety differently from men. They actively change routes, behaviours, and use of space based out of safety concerns (Cherif and Wahdan, 2025). In Northern England, women report higher levels of sexual violence and feel less safe than men. This is particularly at night and in city spaces beyond campus. This illustrates perceived unsafe hotspots restrict women's mobility which acts as barriers to accessing public spaces (Roberts et al., 2022).

A smaller but growing body of research foregrounds women's sense of belonging as central to how safety is experienced. Much of existing literature treats women as a homogenous group which risk overlooking culture, faith, ethnicity, and community context shape distinct safety experiences (te Braak and van Tienoven, 2025). The work on Jordan's neighbourhood parks and community-level perception studies elsewhere point toward the same conclusion that safety is not necessarily the absence of crime, but closely related to familiarity, social cohesion, and a sense of ownership over shared space (Min et al., 2022; Ahmad et al., 2025).

The above studies show that women's experiences of safety are shaped by the built environment, everyday travel, and a sense of belonging. However, there are still remaining gaps in the evidence. Much of the international studies comes from places with different planning approach and overall living conditions to Leeds. These studies highlight issues to look out for, but they do not always show what will work in a local context.



1.4

Remaining Knowledge Gaps In Understanding Women's Safety In Public Spaces

We identified several gaps that can be addressed through this project.



1. Scale

Although studies highlight the importance of built environmental factors, we need more knowledge that capture the social dynamics and cultural context being experienced in everyday life within specific neighbourhoods (Navarrete-Hernandez et al., 2021). This matters because places are shaped by the people who use them and the communities around them. Beeston study provides context-rich and neighbourhood-level insights grounded in the daily experiences of women.



2. How Women's Safety Is Studied

There is no standardised set of factors influencing women's safety. Existing research is dominated by quantitative surveys and statistical modelling (Ratnayake, 2017; Dubey et al., 2025; Ahmad et al., 2025). While these studies are highly valuable, the quantitative approach possesses the risk of flattening complex emotional and experiential dimensions of safety. Examining perceived safety is crucial because the feeling of unsafety alone can deter women from using public spaces which limit their participation and social interaction. Additionally, when look at statistics, they often are not representing the actual number incidents as many goes unreported due to fear and stigma (Dubey et al., 2025). This Beeston study uses creative participatory approaches to capture nuanced and symbolic dimensions of safety that surveys alone may not be able to reveal.



3. Representation

Many studies treat women as a homogenous group (te Braak and van Tienoven, 2025). This attitude overlooks the diverse experience and perception across different group of women on safety in public spaces. This is particularly important in Leeds where local communities are highly diverse. Beeston study offers an inclusive insight into safety experiences through a diverse and underrepresented community in Leeds.

These gaps are closely connected, and this project aims to address them by focusing on Beeston. Studying one neighbourhood in depth allows us to capture the nuances of women's experiences and reflect the diversity of the local community.

1.5

Objectives Of The Project

Based on the context outlined earlier, this project aims to:



understand how women experience and perceive safety in Beeston's public spaces, particularly its streets, parks and walking routes;



identify the environmental, social and community factors that influence women's feelings of safety and belonging;



explore how safety concerns affect women's use of public spaces and everyday travel choices;



use creative and participatory methods to capture local knowledge, experiences and ideas for change; and

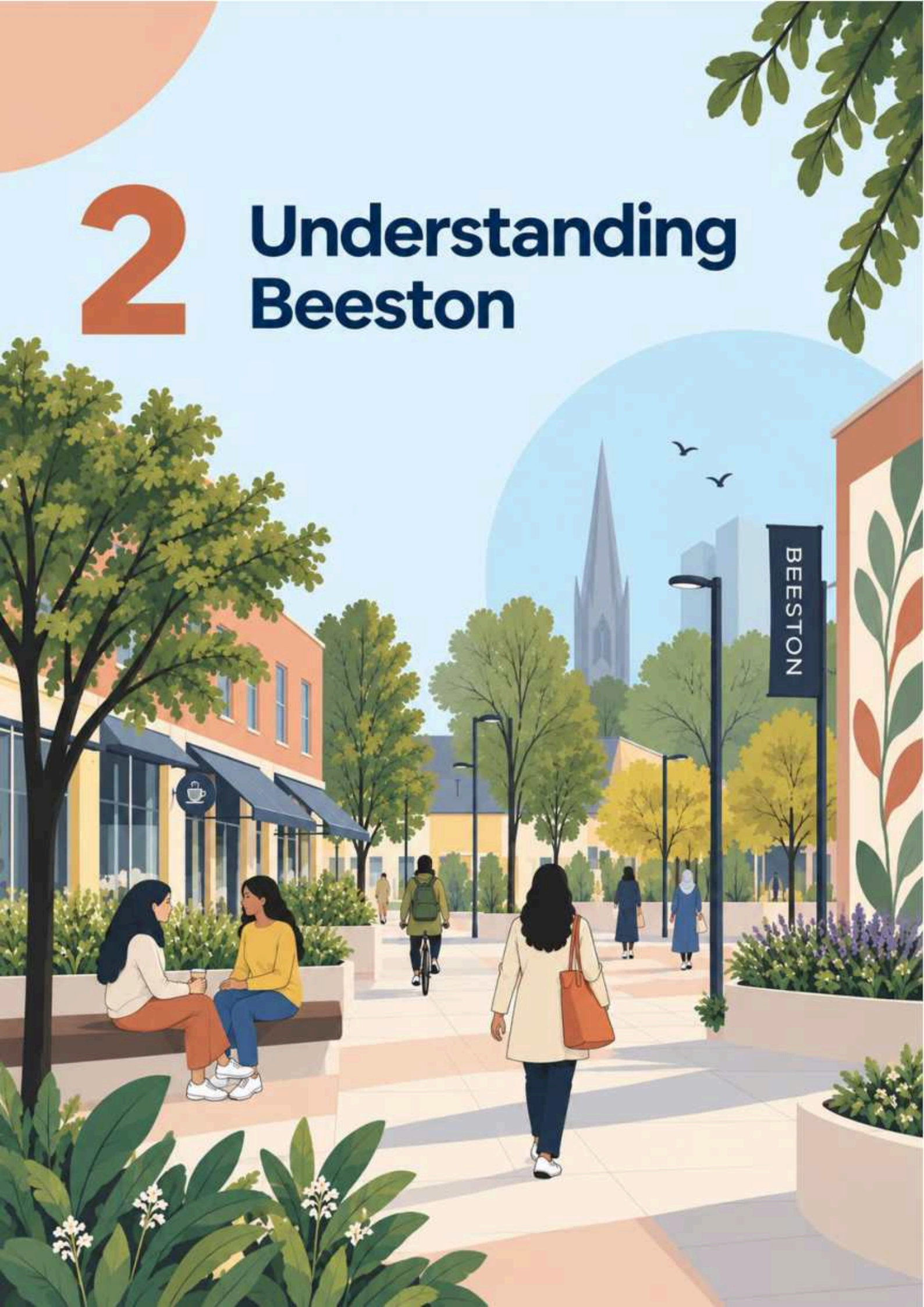


develop practical recommendations to help create safer, more inclusive public spaces for women.



2

Understanding Beeston



2.1 Why Beeston?

Before turning to what women told us about safety in Beeston, it helps to understand the neighbourhood itself. Who lives there, what the area looks like, and how people use its streets and public spaces all shape women's everyday experiences. Beeston is one of Leeds's most ethnically and culturally diverse neighbourhoods. It is located in the inner-city suburb about 2 miles south of Leeds City Centre as illustrated in Figure 3. As a ward, Beeston and Holbeck recorded a population of approximately 29,329 people in 2024. The area's ethnic composition sets it apart from the city as a whole, non-white ethnic groups make up around 35.1% of residents, notably higher than the Leeds-wide average of approximately 21% (see Figure 6). This diversity means that women's experiences of safety can vary. The same place may feel safe to some women but not to others, depending on their background and circumstances.



29,329
people in Beeston
and Holbeck (2024)



2 miles
south of Leeds
City Centre



Figure 3. Beeston location relative to Leeds.
Source: Census 2021 by Office for National Statistics.

Map legend (Leeds context)

Beeston (approximate boundary)	Green space
Leeds district boundary	Motorway
Built-up area	A road



Figure 4. Beeston neighbourhood boundary.
Source: Census 2021 by Office for National Statistics.

Map legend (Beeston detail)

Beeston neighbourhood boundary	Motorway / major road
Buildings / built-up area	A road
Green space (parks and open space)	Other road

Faith is similarly diverse and visible in daily life. Christians make up 42% of the population in Beeston, while 34% report having no religion. The remainder includes the Muslim community which account for 16% of the population, notably higher than the Leeds-wide average (Figure 6). This ethnic and religious diversity is central to how safety is experienced in Beeston. The area's ethnic and religious diversity brings questions of visibility, identity and belonging into everyday experiences of public space.

42%
Christian

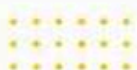
of the population
in Beeston

34%
No religion

of the population
in Beeston

16%
Muslim

of the population
in Beeston



Ethnic groups (2021)

Percentage of usual residents

Beeston & Holbeck

Leeds



Figure 5. High-level ethnic groups (2021).

Source: Census 2021 by Office for National Statistics, charts by Leeds Observatory

Population by religion (2021)

Percentage of usual residents



42%

Christian

Beeston & Holbeck (2021)



34%

No Religion

Beeston & Holbeck (2021)



5%

Not Answered

Beeston & Holbeck (2021)

Religion (excluding Christian)		Beeston & Holbeck (%)	Leeds (%)
	Buddhist	0.3	0.4
	Hindu	1.0	1.1
	Jewish	0.1	0.8
	Muslim	16.0	7.8
	Sikh	0.9	1.2
	Other religion	0.6	0.4

Figure 6. Population by religion, comparison of Beeston & Holbeck and Leeds.

Source: Census 2021 by Office for National Statistics, charts by Leeds Observatory

When compared with Leeds, Beeston stands out as one of the areas facing a great safety challenge (Figure 7). Several participants in this research noted that violent crime appears to have decreased in recent years, however anti-social behaviour such as public drinking and drug-related activity continues to be a regular issue in Beeston. This suggests that many women's feelings of unsafety in Beeston are driven less by the fear of violent crime, but more by the ongoing presence of visible disorder and everyday situations that make them feel uncomfortable.

This project was designed to capture these everyday experiences and better understand how they affect women's sense of safety.

Recorded crime rates (monthly)

Beeston & Holbeck compared with Leeds

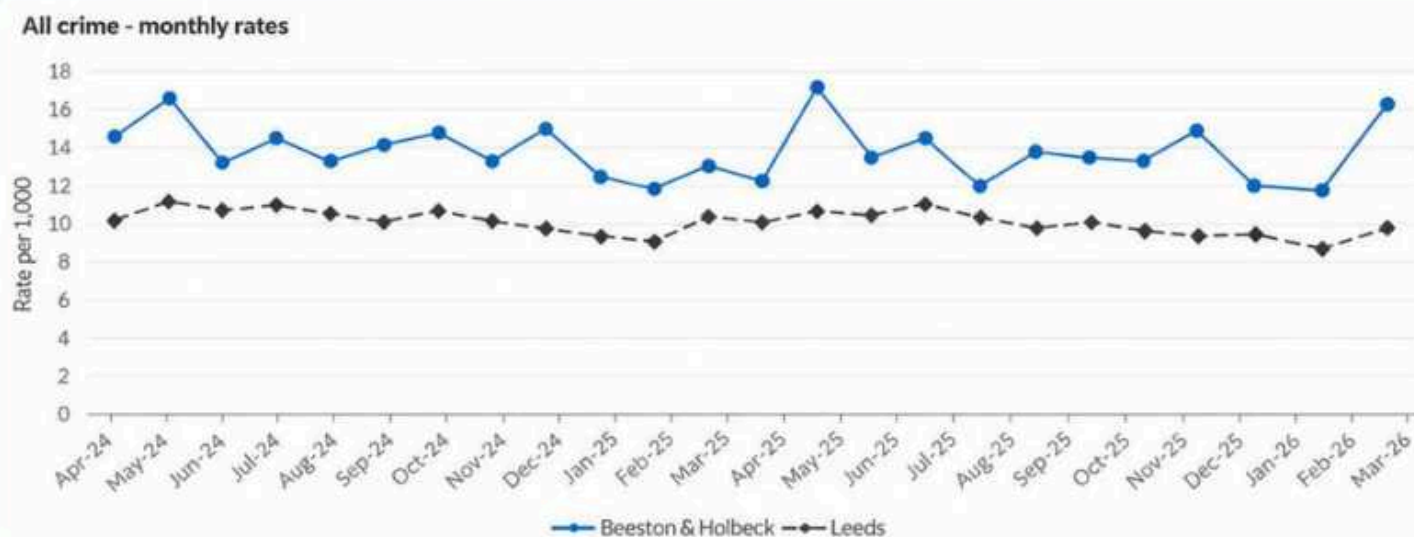


Figure 7. Monthly recorded crime rates in Beeston & Holbeck and Leeds, April 2024–March 2026.
Source: Leeds Observatory (2026).



Recorded crime rates in Beeston & Holbeck remained consistently above the Leeds average between April 2024 and March 2026, although the scale of the difference varied from month to month.

These data provide important context for the study but do not, on their own, explain women's experiences of safety. Participants described how anti-social behaviour, public drinking, drug-related activity and the condition and use of particular public spaces also shaped how safe or uncomfortable they felt in everyday life.

Alongside the above challenges, Beeston is well served by community infrastructure that shapes everyday life. The Hamara Healthy Living Centre, which is the delivery partner of this project, has operated in the neighbourhood for more than two decades. Hamara Centre is a vibrant community space dedicated to supporting everyday wellbeing, connection, and inclusion. Alongside Hamara, sit other valued community assets such as Asha Women's Centre, places of worship, schools, health centres, halal shops, and Cross Flatts Park. The latter is a large green space that anchors much of the neighbourhood's everyday movement and as this report's findings show, is also central to how women navigate safety concerns.



Beeston was therefore chosen for this project for several reasons. Previous city-wide research had already identified Beeston as an area where women's safety was a concern, providing a clear focus for further investigation. Its ethnic, cultural, and religious diversity also offered an opportunity to explore how experiences of safety vary between women. In addition, trusted organisations such as Hamara made it possible to carry out community-based research and engage women whose voices are often missing from safety studies.

2.2 Building on previous research

This project builds on research by the University of Leeds in 2024 named WeSafSpace (Women's Safety and Security in Public Open Spaces). The WeSafSpace explored where women across Leeds felt unsafe and identified key environmental factors linked to those feelings, including poor lighting, limited visibility, and the design and placement of street furniture. The findings from that project played an important role in shaping this study.

Beeston was repeatedly identified as an area where there are concerns about safety. The decision was made to go deep in the neighbourhood already flagged by women as needing closer attention. This project builds on that work by focusing on one of the areas highlighted by WeSafSpace (Figure 8) and asks a more localised questions such as what is it about Beeston's streets, parks, shops and community that shapes women's experiences of safety, and what could be done to improve them?

PARTICIPANTS PERSPECTIVES ON SAFE AND UNSAFE AREAS IN LEEDS

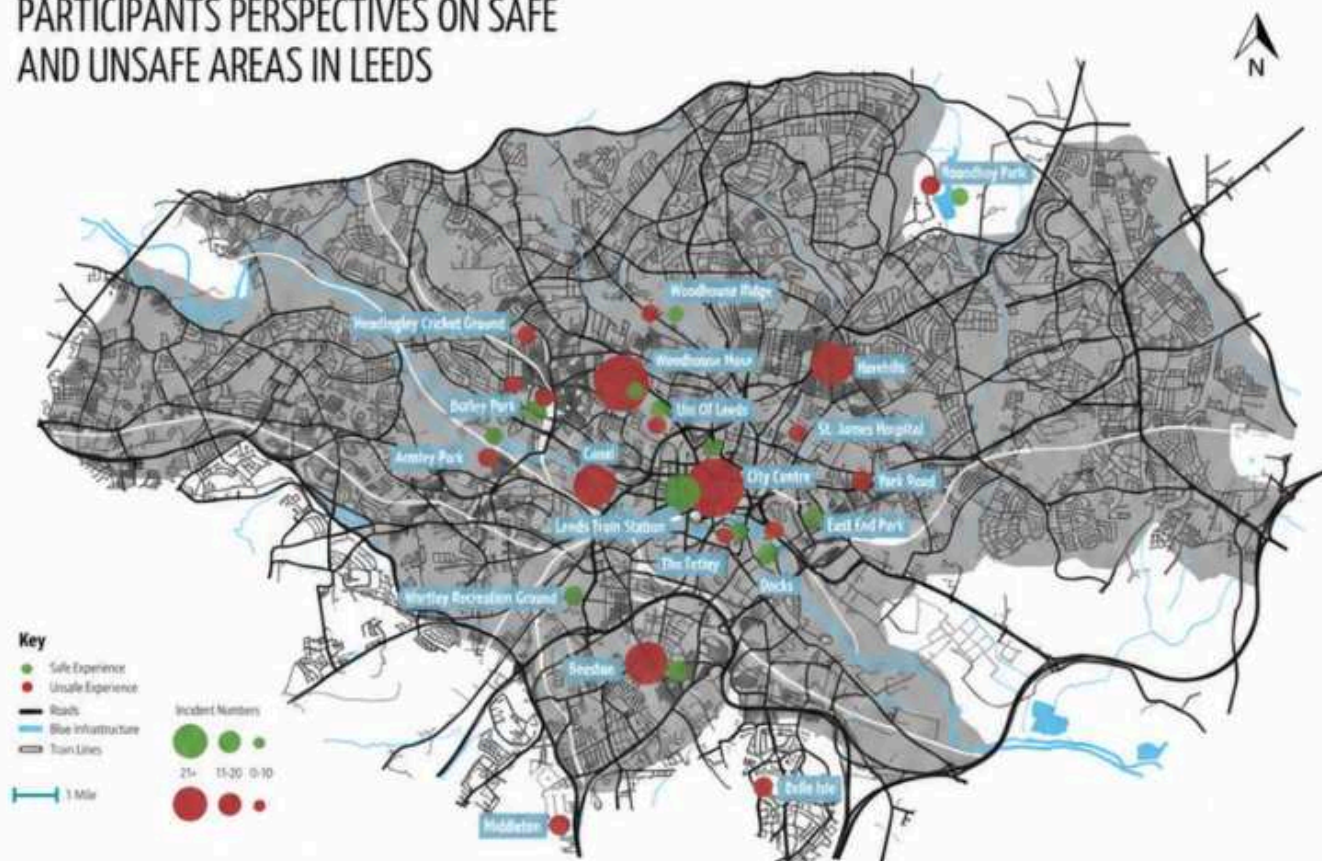


Figure 8. Insights from previous research project on safe and unsafe areas in Leeds (Newisar, 2024)

This project also builds on the Leeds Women's Safety Survey, carried out by Women Friendly Leeds in 2021. It remains one of the most comprehensive studies that give insights into women's safety in the city. While WeSafSpace identified where women felt unsafe, the survey provided a broader picture of women's experiences and concerns. The two studies provided a strong foundation for this project, with one pointed to the places that needed closer attention, and the other highlighted the issues women face in their daily lives.

97%

Almost all respondents reported that being a woman affected their sense of personal safety in the city.



91%

take measures to try to protect themselves from sexual harassment and assault, which impact on their daily decisions about where they go, how they travel, who they speak to, and what they wear.

Among women who identified as Asian/Asian British, Black/Black British, or mixed heritage:



73%

reported that their personal safety was influenced by their race or culture.

22%

felt it was affected by their religion.

22%

felt it was affected by being from another country.

These insights from Leeds-wide context are particularly relevant to this research project in Beeston as one of Leeds's most ethnically diverse neighbourhoods. The report highlighted priorities such as safer public transport, improved street lighting, and stronger reporting mechanisms which have since informed city-wide initiatives including WalkSafe app and the Women's Night Safe Space, delivered in partnership with Safer Leeds.

2.3

Methodology

The project adopted a participatory action research approach. It embraces the principle that women's own lived experience, local knowledge, and interpretive judgement should shape not only what data was collected but also more on the way it was collected, understood, and eventually translated into recommendations (Kindon et al., 2007; 2024). Central to this approach was the partnership with the Hamara Healthy Living Centre, a local community organisation in Beeston, Leeds. Its position as a trusted institution within the area's South Asian and North African was instrumental in building the trust needed for women to speak openly about sensitive experiences of fear and vulnerability. Hamara's staff also played a critical accessibility role with supporting translation and interpretation during sessions and creating a comfortable space for research activities to take place.



Participants

Participants were adult women (18 years and over) who live in Beeston or regularly use its public open spaces. They were recruited through the Hamara Centre to reflect the neighbourhood's multicultural population. Approximately 20-30 women participated in the project's group walking sessions and workshops. Participants represented a range of ethnic backgrounds, including White, Pakistani, Bangladeshi, Black, and Southeast Asian communities. All participants provided informed consent after receiving an information sheet outlining the project's purpose, data management procedures, and their right to withdraw at any stage. Fieldwork was conducted between January and April 2026, with participant recruitment commencing in December 2025.

Methods

The project combined walk-along observations, workshops and an online survey to build a rounded picture of women's experiences of safety in Beeston. Walk-along observations captured experiences and reactions in real time as women moved through local streets and public spaces. Workshops provided space to reflect on these experiences and discuss ideas for change. The online survey brought in views from women who were unable to take part in person. These methods helped capture both everyday experiences and wider perspectives from across the community.



Walk-along observations



Workshops



Online survey



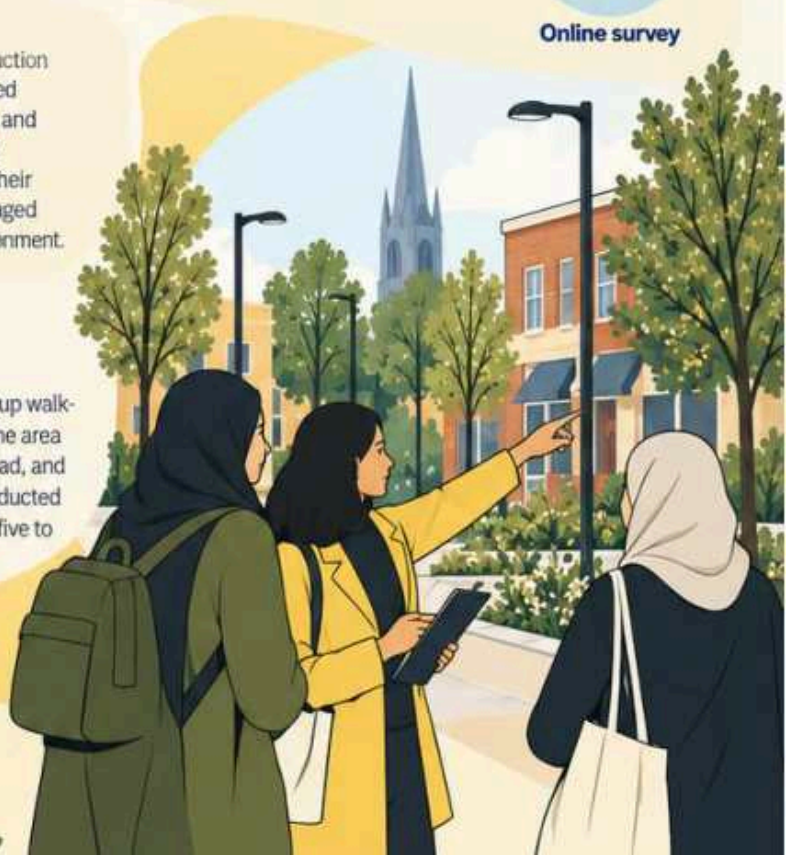
Induction training

Before fieldwork began, participants took part in an induction session at the Hamara Centre where they were introduced to the principles of behavioural mapping, safeguarding, and informed consent. The session was designed to prepare participants for the research process and also to build their confidence as part of a team. Participants were encouraged to actively observe, discuss, and interpret their local environment.



Walk-along observation

The core of the data collection consisted of repeated group walk-along sessions within a defined study area in Figure 8. The area bounded by Dewsbury Road, Tempest Road, Beeston Road, and Cross Flatts Park. The walk-along observations were conducted between January to March 2026 and involved groups of five to ten women (Figure 9).



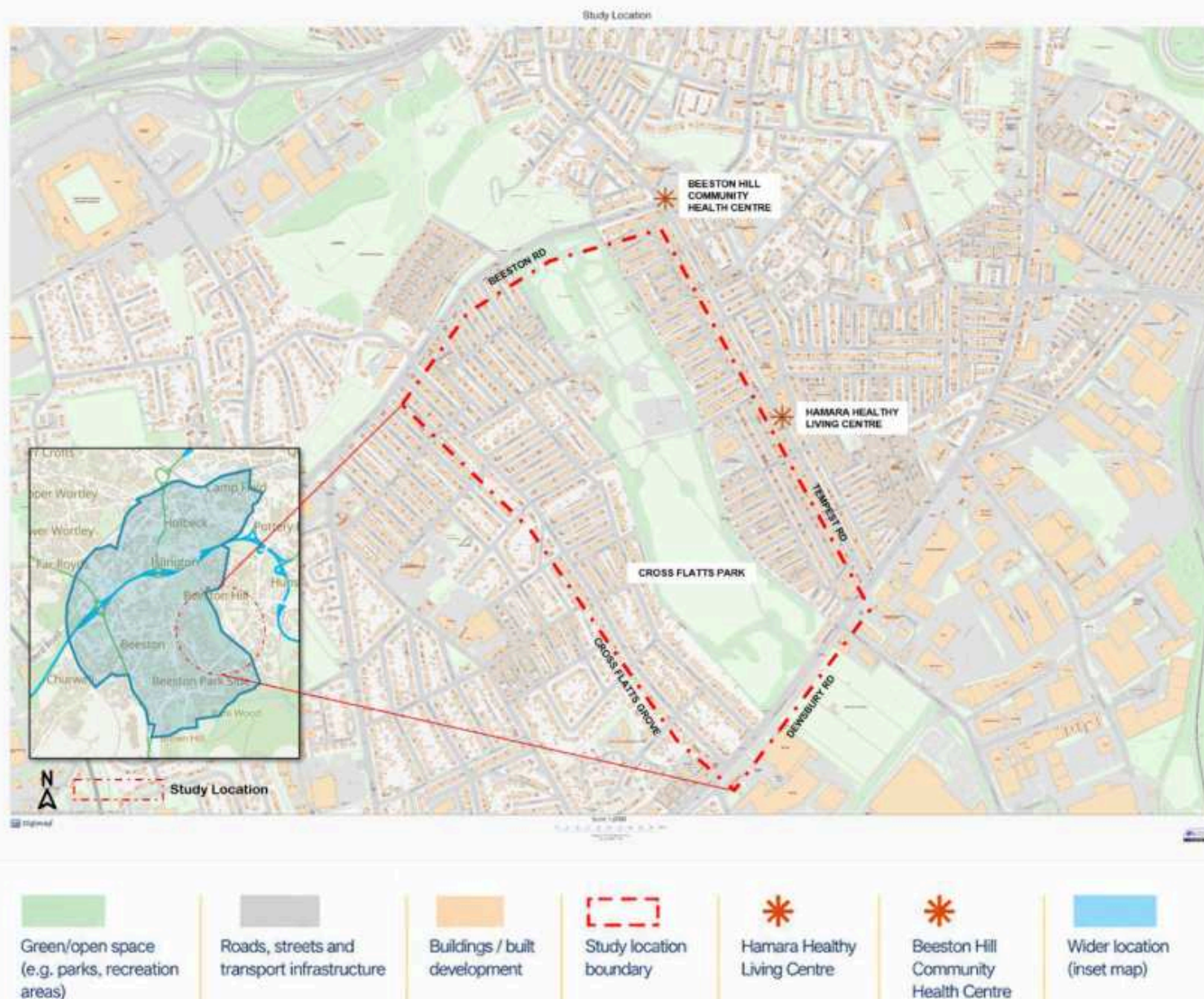


Figure 9. Study location in Beeston, Leeds (Authors own, 2026).

The core of the data collection consisted of repeated group walk-along sessions within a defined study area in Figure 9. The area bounded by Dewsbury Road, Tempest Road, Beeston Road, and Cross Flatts Park. The walk-along observations were conducted between January to March 2026 and involved groups of five to ten women (Figure 9).

This walk-along method was chosen for two complementary reasons. First, behavioural mapping that includes direct and structured observation of how people use and move through space is well established within urban design and environmental psychology studies. It has been used as a means of linking the physical design of a place to how it is used and experienced in practice (Ng, 2016).

Second, walking itself was treated as a data-generation method. Degen and Rose (2012) argue that people's experiences of the built environment are shaped not only by its physical design, but also by the act of moving through it. Walking can bring memories, emotions, and sensory impressions to the surface which influence how a place is perceived in the moment.

Reflecting on a street while actively walking through it, therefore can reveal an embodied sense of safety shaped by sounds, sightlines, pace, atmosphere, and proximity to others. These are the elements that may be overlooked or flattened in a retrospective interview conducted elsewhere. During each session, participants rotated between three focused roles: observing behaviours, assessing the built environment, and recording pedestrian activity. At the end of each walk, they reflected collectively on their experiences and documented their observations on a shared map (Figure 11).



Figure 10. Walk-along observation (Authors own, 2026).



Figure 11. Mapping exercise from the walking session (Authors own, 2026).

Survey

An anonymous online survey, hosted on the University of Leeds's platform was designed to gather responses from a wider sample of Leeds women on their perception of safety in Beeston. In practice, however, the survey received a limited number of responses ($n=6$) within the project timeframe. The findings from this method are therefore presented in this report as illustrative evidence rather than a statistically representative dataset. Nevertheless, several responses provided useful insights when considered alongside the walking and workshop findings.

Reflective and creative workshops

Reflective and creative workshops at the Hamara Centre invited participants to consider Beeston more broadly which draws on their accumulated knowledge about the area. This method saw participants attached drawings, collages/photomontages, into a blank canvas for them to visualise their experiences (Figure 12). This approach enabled emotional, sensory, and symbolic dimensions of safety and future-oriented aspiration to emerge that otherwise may not have surfaced through direct questioning alone.



Figure 12. Reflective and creative workshop (Authors own, 2026).

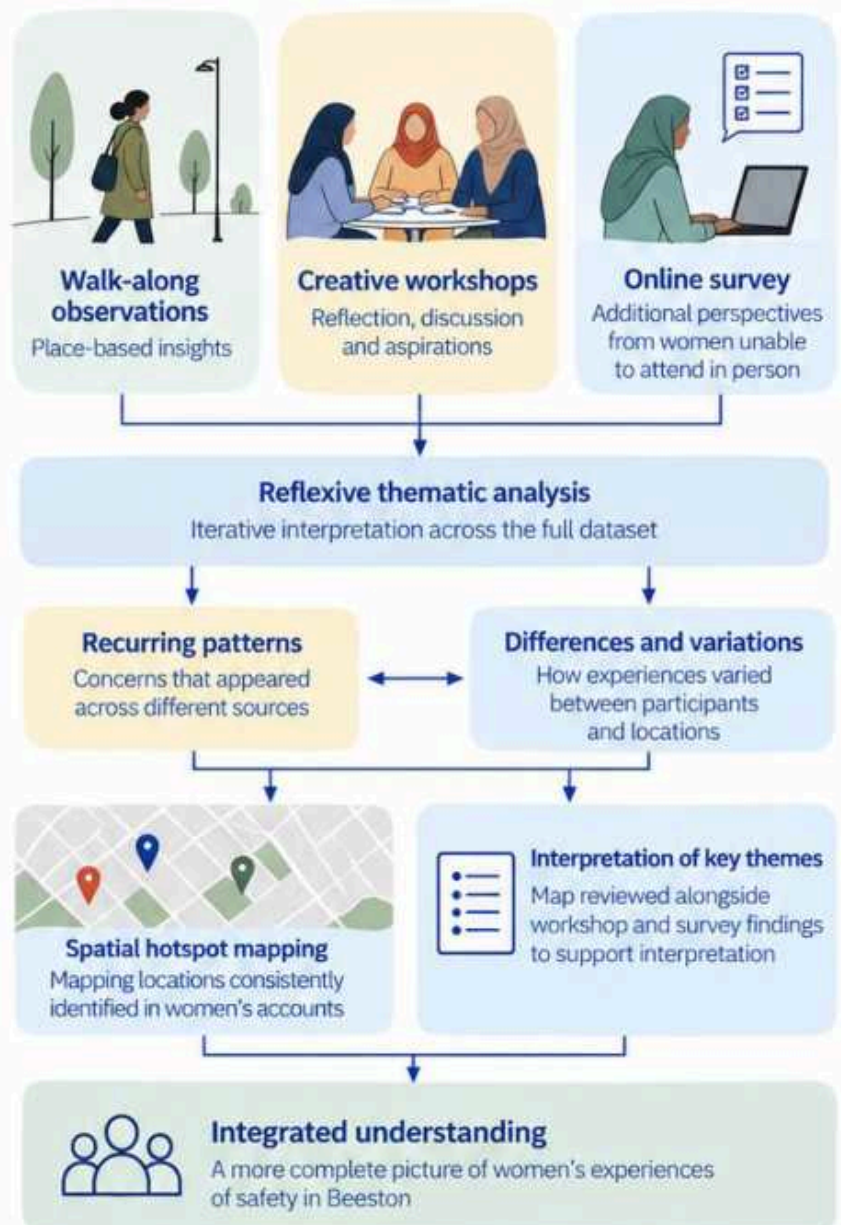
Analysis

All data from walk-along observations, creative workshops and the online survey were analysed qualitatively following Braun and Clarke's reflexive thematic analysis. The themes were established iteratively against the full dataset. In practice, this meant that concerns raised in one data source (for example, a location identified as unsafe during a walk-along session) were viewed more confidently when they also appeared in workshop discussions or survey responses. Equally, differences between the data sources were explored to understand how experiences varied between participants and locations.

This process helped build a more complete picture of women's experiences of safety in Beeston. The walk-along observations provided place-based insights, the workshops added context and reflection, and the survey offered additional perspectives from women who were unable to attend in person. Bringing these sources together helped identify both shared concerns and neighbourhood-specific experiences. The findings from the walk-along observations were also mapped to create an illustrative hotspot map, which highlights locations that consistently emerged in women's accounts across the study area. This map was then reviewed alongside the workshop and survey findings to support the interpretation of key themes.

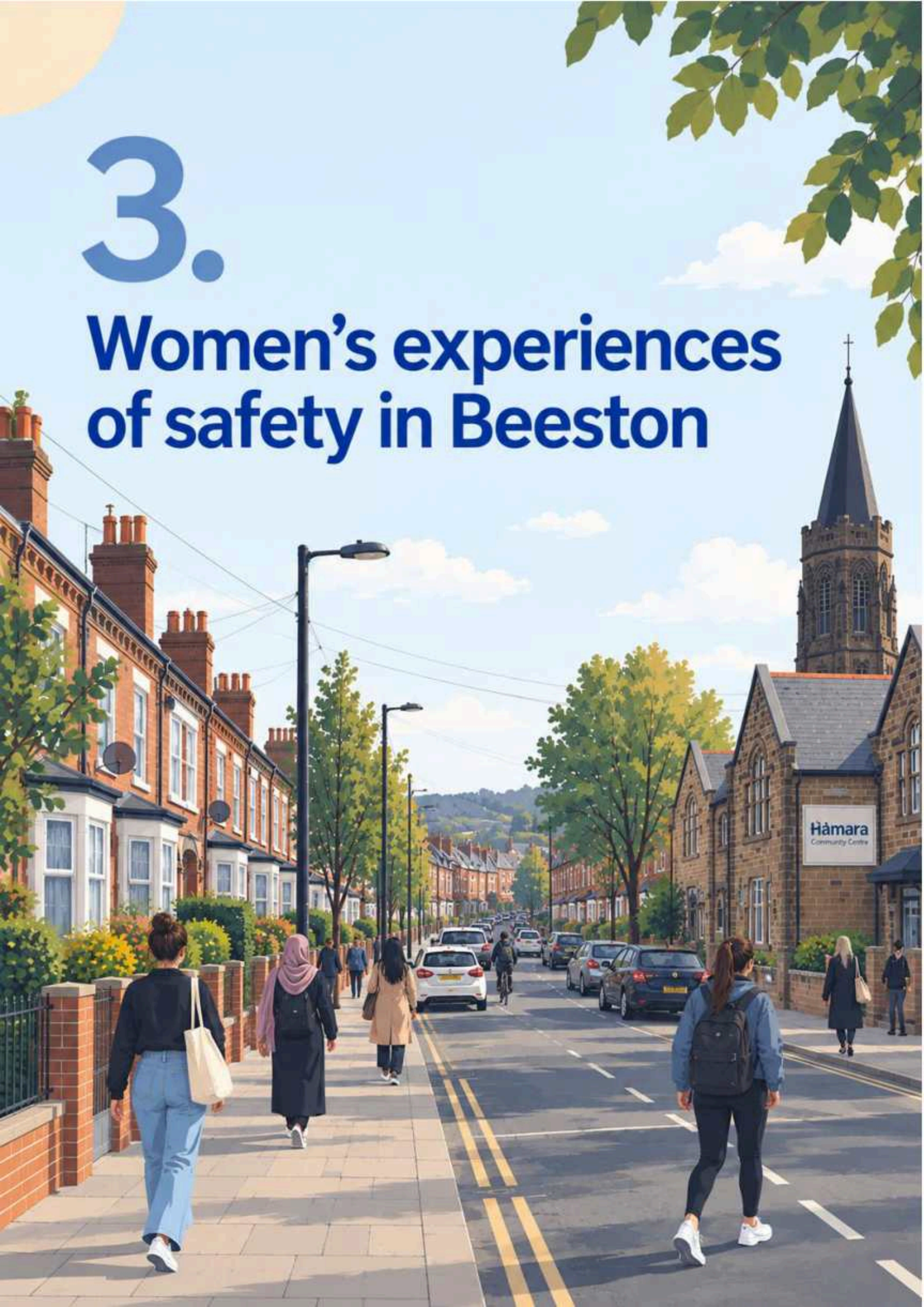
Integrating evidence across methods

From multiple perspectives to a shared understanding



3.

Women's experiences of safety in Beeston



This section provides some findings from multiple sessions of observation through women's group walk and survey in Beeston. The themes below follow reflexive thematic analysis method and are organised around what safety means to women, how they navigate everyday public space as they manage fear and risk day to day, what specific design issues underpin these experiences, and how community and belonging shape perceived safety (Figure 13).



Figure 13. Beeston women's experience of safety (Author's own, 2026)

THEME 1

Perceiving

Women's Perception of Safety

Women's perceptions of safety were shaped by how they read and interpret their surroundings. Visibility, everyday activity, the ability to understand what lies ahead and signs that a place is cared for all influenced whether women felt comfortable or uneasy.

Safety therefore emerged not as a fixed characteristic of a place, but as something continually assessed through physical and social cues.

Visibility & Legibility

Participants consistently associated safety with being able to see and be seen. Empty or inactive environments were often experienced as more unsettling because fewer people were nearby who might notice if something happened.

*...the street is too empty. No people...
you don't feel safe.*

Walk 10

Another participant described how ordinary everyday activity created reassurance:

*Because when you go, you see some people
going, somebody going downstairs, somebody
going outside... you feel comfortable.*

Walk 10



This was particularly evident in Cross Flatts Park, where low levels of pedestrian activity contributed to a sense of isolation. Across the walking sessions, participants repeatedly distinguished between spaces where everyday activity was visible and places that felt quiet, enclosed or disconnected. As shown in Figure 14, conditions within the park also varied spatially, from narrower routes enclosed by mature vegetation to more open areas offering longer views across the surrounding space.

Visibility was not simply about having an unobstructed view. Participants also valued social visibility: the sense that other people were present, could see what was happening and might respond if assistance were needed.

Active and inactive frontages shaped how women read the street. Shops, homes and occupied ground floors created everyday activity and opportunities for informal overlooking.



Narrower, more enclosed route



More open area with longer views

Figure 14. Contrasting levels of visibility and spatial openness within Cross Flatts Park (Authors' own, 2026).

While long stretches of inactive frontage could make adjoining spaces feel less inviting. Figure 15 illustrates this contrast between an active commercial frontage, where entrances and everyday activity connect the building to the street, and a route characterized by largely blank elevations and limited overlooking.

One participant described an inactive frontage as a solid wall, while another explained the reassurance provided by residential overlooking:

'I would feel safer with houses, because if anything was to happen, you're within shouting distance.'

Walk 8

She added that residents might not necessarily intervene directly, *but they can see you, they try to do something if anything happens.*

These experiences reinforce the distinction between informal visibility created through everyday occupation and formal surveillance. They support established arguments about active streets and natural surveillance (Jacobs, 1961; Cozens and Love, 2015), while more recent research continues to demonstrate that women's perceptions of safety are shaped by the interaction between visibility, spatial configuration and the presence of others.



However, visibility also depended on whether women could read what lay ahead and understand their options for movement. Poor lighting, dense vegetation, hidden areas and enclosed street proportions could increase uncertainty by limiting views of approaching people, adjoining spaces or possible routes away. Entrances, edges and transitions were particularly important because they could either provide clear sightlines and choices or create concealment and a sense of enclosure.

Environmental psychology research further shows that perceived safety is related to *prospect*, *concealment* and opportunities for movement or escape, particularly after dark (van Rijswijk et al., 2016; Tao and Lee, 2026). Recent studies of urban parks similarly demonstrate that vegetation, visibility, lighting and social presence interact in shaping how safe different settings feel rather than operating as isolated design variables. The issue, therefore, was not simply whether a place was open or busy. It was whether women could



Figure 15. Contrasting active and inactive frontages observed in Beeston (Authors' own, 2026).

read the environment, anticipate what they might encounter and retain choices about how to move through it.

Care & Maintenance

Women also interpreted the physical condition and apparent management of places as signals of safety. These signals did not always operate straightforwardly. Features intended to provide security could communicate that previous problems were anticipated, while signs of neglect suggested that a place was receiving limited care or attention.

CCTV cameras, window grilles, burglar alarms and other defensive features were therefore not automatically reassuring. As shown in Figure 16, some residential properties encountered during the walks displayed multiple visible security measures, including grilles, alarms and surveillance cameras. Rather than necessarily increasing reassurance, their concentration sometimes prompted participants to question why such measures were needed.

“The more security you have, it looks like you’re trying to hide something.”

Walk 1

Another participant interpreted the presence of numerous CCTV cameras as an indication that:

“There must be a lot of incidents, whether it be road incidents or burglaries.”

Walk 1

During the same walk, participants eventually stopped counting cameras along one street because “there was too many.”

This suggests an important distinction between security provision and perceived safety. Formal security measures may serve a protective function, yet their visible concentration can also act as an environmental cue through which women interpret the possibility of previous or ongoing problems.



Figure 16. Visible residential security measures, including window and door grilles, alarms and surveillance cameras, observed in Beeston (Authors' own, 2026).

anticipated risk. Their presence, therefore, did not automatically translate into a greater sense of safety.

Signs of physical neglect communicated a different, but related, message. Overflowing bins, litter, broken glass, fly-tipping and abandoned household items were repeatedly noticed during the walks and associated with environments that appeared poorly maintained.

'It gives you the feeling of not looked after, and that is not a place to go.'

Walk 9

Figure 17 shows one example encountered during the fieldwork, where overflowing waste containers and accumulated refuse substantially affected the appearance and usability of the surrounding space (Authors' own, 2026).

The significance of these conditions is not that visible neglect necessarily indicates higher levels of crime. Rather, maintenance became part of how women interpreted the wider condition and management of a place. This is consistent with recent research showing that women's perceptions of safety are shaped by the interaction of environmental conditions, including maintenance and physical disorder, with wider social and temporal factors (te Braak and van Tienoven, 2025).



Maintenance shapes how places are experienced.



Figure 17. Overflowing waste containers and accumulated refuse observed in Beeston (Authors' own, 2026).

Care and maintenance therefore operated as perceptual cues. Visible security measures could communicate anticipated risk, while persistent waste and deterioration could communicate limited stewardship. In both cases, women were reading the physical environment for indications of how a place was managed and what that might mean for their own experience of it.

Theme 2

Navigating:

Navigating Everyday Public Spaces

Women's experiences of safety were closely connected to their ability to move through Beeston comfortably, confidently and independently. Navigation depended not simply on whether a route existed, but on whether it was accessible and usable, and on the people and activities encountered along the way.

Together, these conditions influenced where women walked, where movement became difficult and when they adapted or changed their routes.

Mobility & Connectivity

Practical barriers to movement were a recurring concern. Narrow pavements, obstacles, difficult crossings and inaccessible entrances affected how comfortably women and other pedestrians could move through the neighbourhood.

Bins, household waste and other obstructions frequently reduced already limited pavement space. As shown in **Figure 18**, these conditions could narrow the usable footway and constrain pedestrian movement.

'We tried walking side by side on the pavement and there just wasn't enough space.'

Walk 12

During the same walk, participants concluded that there was insufficient space. Restricted space was therefore



The significance of these conditions is not that visible neglect necessarily indicates higher levels of crime. Rather, maintenance became part of how women interpreted the wider condition and management of a place. This is consistent with recent research showing that women's perceptions of safety are shaped by the interaction of environmental conditions, including maintenance and physical disorder, with wider social and temporal factors (te Braak and van Tienoven, 2025).



Figure 18. Waste, bins and other obstructions reducing usable pedestrian space in Beeston (Authors' own, 2026).

more than an issue of comfort: it could bring pedestrians into closer interaction with traffic and make everyday journeys more difficult for people requiring additional space.

These observations are also significant when considered against existing local accessibility guidance. The Leeds Transport SPD (2023) establishes a minimum footway and footpath width of 2.0 m and explicitly identifies narrow footways, bins, poorly located street furniture, uneven surfaces and indiscriminate parking as potential barriers to accessible movement.

Figure 19 illustrates how obstructions can reduce usable footway space and affect people differently according to their mobility needs.

**Accessible streets
create a fairer, safer and
more inclusive Beeston.**



Obstructed / restricted footway

Obstacles reduce the usable space and make it difficult for many people to pass



Clear / accessible footway

A wider, unobstructed footway allows everyone to move comfortably and safely



Figure 19. Illustration of how footway obstructions can restrict accessible pedestrian movement, based on Leeds Transport SPD guidance (Author's own, 2026).

The consequences of restricted or poorly designed pedestrian infrastructure were particularly significant for people with different mobility needs. Participants highlighted uneven crossings and poor pavement conditions as barriers for older people. During one session, an older woman was observed experiencing difficulty rising from a park bench where supportive infrastructure such as handrails was absent (Walk 6).

More broadly, the walking sessions demonstrated how age, disability and mobility could change the experience of seemingly ordinary pedestrian environments.

Figure 20 shows participants moving through the neighbourhood during one of the group walks, including a participant using a walking aid.

*"Designing for accessible movement
benefits everyone, not just those
with specific mobility needs."*

Similar difficulties were identified on Beeston Road, where restricted pavement space around a bus stop created a bottleneck for parents travelling with prams. Participants also described choosing longer routes where sections of pavement were difficult to navigate comfortably (Walk 11). A survey participant living with a disability similarly described uneven and steep park paths as increasing her personal risk.

Taken together, these experiences demonstrate that the existence of a route does not necessarily mean that it is equally usable by everyone. Age, disability, caring responsibilities and the design and condition of pedestrian infrastructure affected how easily people could move through the neighbourhood and, in some cases, whether alternative routes were preferred.

Accessible and well-maintained routes reduce barriers and enable all residents to navigate the neighbourhood more safely and comfortably.



Figure 20. Participants with different mobility needs taking part in a group walk in Beeston (Authors' own, 2026).

Accessibility therefore emerged as a safety issue in its own right, rather than simply a matter of convenience. Connectivity could not be understood only in terms of whether destinations were physically linked. It also depended on whether routes could be used with reasonable ease by people with different bodies, ages, mobility needs and caring responsibilities. In this sense, formal access did not necessarily amount to usable access.

Occupancy & Social Mix

Navigation was also shaped by who occupied public space, what activities were taking place and how those activities affected women's ability to move through it comfortably.

Participants referred to public drinking, drug-related activity and groups gathering around shops, benches and park entrances as situations that could make particular routes uncomfortable to use. Anti-social behaviour was often discussed as an everyday concern, distinct from less frequent incidents of serious violence.

"Groups around the shops can make it feel uncomfortable, so we take a different route."

Walk 11

Occupancy & Social Mix

Navigation was also shaped by who occupied public space, what activities were taking place and how those activities affected women's ability to move through it comfortably.

One long-term resident explained:

"Violent crime is actually going down... however, what's increasing is anti-social behaviour: fighting, smashing bottles, things like that."

Walk 3

Importantly, participants did not describe the presence of people itself as inherently unsafe. As discussed under Visibility & Legibility, everyday activity could provide reassurance through social presence and informal oversight. What mattered here was the nature of the activity, how space was occupied and whether that occupation affected women's own ability to use or pass through it comfortably.

This became particularly visible in women's route choices.

One participant described encountering groups gathered outside shops:

"If there's a lot of people outside the shop... I'm just like, I'm not going that way. I'm going to cross the road."

Walk 2

A co-participant responded:

"It's quite intimidating, isn't it?"

Walk 2

The significance of this account lies in the change to movement: the route remained physically available, but its social occupation influenced whether the participant chose to use it. **Figure 21** illustrates this relationship between an occupied threshold and the decision to take an alternative route.



Figure 21. Illustration of how the social occupation of a threshold can influence route choice (Author's own, 2026).

Thresholds were particularly significant in this respect. Participants described groups gathering around park entrances and benches, as well as intoxication and drug-related activity, as conditions that could influence whether they felt comfortable entering or passing through a space. Entrances therefore functioned not only as physical points of access but also as social thresholds, where patterns of occupation could affect decisions about movement.

These findings complicate the assumption that greater activity automatically produces greater perceived safety. Participants distinguished between everyday occupation that provided reassurance and forms of occupation that constrained their own use of space. This is consistent with feminist geographical research showing that fear and perceived risk have spatial consequences, influencing women's use of public space, movement and route choice (Valentine, 1989; Pain, 1991).

A route may therefore be physically connected and publicly accessible while becoming socially difficult to use. For women in this study, navigation involved negotiating not only the physical conditions of movement, but also the social conditions encountered along the journey.

Theme 3 Belonging

Emotional Safety and Connection to Place

Women's experiences of safety were shaped not only by the places they encountered, but by what moving through those places required of them emotionally and by the extent to which they felt familiar with, connected to and accepted within the neighbourhood.

For some women, familiarity and community connections provided reassurance. At the same time, moving through public space could require continuous awareness, anticipation and adjustment, particularly when alone or in unfamiliar situations.

Emotional Load

Participants described safety as something they actively managed as part of everyday life. Moving through public space could involve monitoring surroundings, anticipating possible risk and maintaining readiness to respond.

Women described keeping phones accessible, carrying keys in their hands, walking quickly and remaining alert:

"I have something for safety... usually it's keys or spray... and I'd walk fast. I'd have my keys in my hand, I'd have my phone right in my pocket on, recording probably."

Walk 8

These practices demonstrate how women could continue to use public space while undertaking considerable "safety work" to do so (Vera-Gray and Kelly, 2020). Safety was therefore not simply a question of whether an incident occurred, but also of the ongoing effort involved in anticipating and managing its possibility. **Figure 22** illustrates how this preparedness could be incorporated into otherwise ordinary movement through public space.



Figure 22 shows how everyday preparedness could be incorporated into ordinary movement through public space. This active management was also reflected in observations of how women moved through some spaces. One participant commented:

"The lady, for example... she doesn't look anywhere, she's just straight, very focused... all women we've seen have been like that."

Walk 8

Such purposeful movement could itself form part of how women managed exposure and uncertainty. Vigilance could also extend to situations where there was no identifiable or immediate threat. Sudden movement, somebody running nearby or an unexpected sound could prompt rapid interpretation of what might be happening.

One participant reflected:

"If I was in the night, I'd be a bit worried."

Walk 11

In another discussion, participants described how seeing somebody running might immediately raise questions about whether:

"...there's something happening and someone's following there, somebody's chasing."

Walk 9

The significance of these accounts is not whether the situations represented an actual danger, but the interpretive work that uncertainty demanded. Women described noticing, assessing and responding to situations that might potentially become threatening.

The intensity of this vigilance also varied according to time and companionship. Participants described feeling more vulnerable when alone and at night, and some preferred to travel with friends or relatives. The sensory workshop similarly recorded women remaining alert.



Figure 22 Everyday preparedness and safety practices described by participants during the walking sessions (Author's own, 2026).

even during short movements between their car and home and, in some cases, avoiding journeys alone.

Previous experiences could also continue to shape everyday behaviour long after an incident had occurred. One participant recalled an attempted mugging at a cash machine around ten years earlier. Although the incident was historical, it continued to affect how she accessed cash. **Figure 23** traces the relationship between that earlier experience and her subsequent decision to avoid using cash machines and instead access cash through a bank.

Fear was therefore not always attached to an immediate event. It could be anticipatory, cumulative and carried between journeys. Participants' own experiences, alongside knowledge of harassment, violence, vandalism or people being followed locally, could become part of how later situations were interpreted. This is consistent with feminist geographical research showing that fear and perceived risk have spatial and behavioural consequences for women's everyday use of public space (Pain, 1991).

The key finding is not that women were constantly afraid. Rather, the possibility of risk could require continuing preparedness, interpretation and vigilance. This emotional effort formed part of the experience of using public space itself.

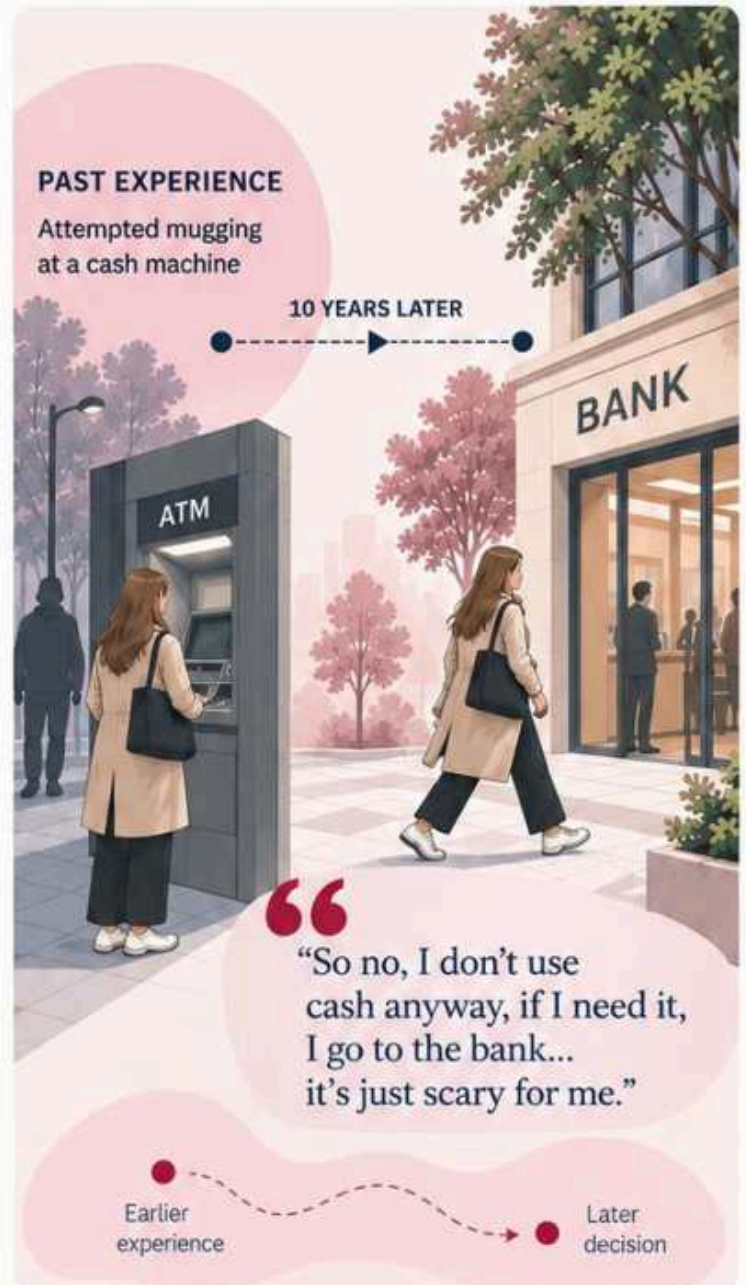


Figure 23 Persistence of a previous safety experience in shaping a later everyday decision (Author's own, 2026).

Belonging & Territoriality

The emotional demands of using public space were not experienced uniformly. Familiarity with Beeston could provide an important counterpoint to uncertainty, giving women knowledge of local routes, everyday patterns and the people and places around them.

Long-term residents described feeling comfortable within parts of the neighbourhood they knew well:

“I know all of this... when I go for my walks, I usually stay in this area anyway.”

Walk 4

Familiarity therefore functioned as a form of local knowledge. Knowing where one was going, recognising people and understanding how particular places normally operated could

reduce uncertainty. Newer residents, by comparison, sometimes approached the same environments with greater caution.

Community, faith and culturally familiar destinations also formed part of this everyday geography. Participants referred to community centres, places of worship, local shops and other familiar destinations as places embedded within their routines and connections to the neighbourhood.

Their significance here is not simply the services they provide, but their role in making the neighbourhood recognisable and socially familiar. This suggests that perceived safety was partly relational: it could emerge through repeated encounters, local knowledge and connection to place, rather than through physical design alone.



Figure 24 Illustration of familiar everyday destinations as points of neighbourhood connection in Beeston (Author's own, 2026).

Familiarity, however, did not necessarily mean that belonging was equally secure for everyone. Participants described experiences in which gender intersected with race, ethnicity and faith. During the April workshop, women raised concerns about racism and Islamophobia, including experiences of being targeted because they were visibly Muslim.

One participant described the vulnerability she associated with wearing a headscarf:

"...because I'm wearing a scarf, they can use that as an excuse... to grab and run and not feel bad about it because they think, well, what does she deserve?"

Walk 4

Participants also recalled hostile comments concerning immigration and their community. These experiences demonstrate that attachment to and familiarity with a neighbourhood did not necessarily remove vulnerability within it.

This is where territoriality becomes important. Public space may formally be available to everyone, while everyday interactions can still communicate whose presence is accepted, whose is questioned and whose is made more vulnerable. Belonging was therefore not simply about access to space, but about whether

women felt able to occupy it without their identity becoming a source of heightened exposure. **Figure 25** represents this relationship between familiarity, identity and public space, showing belonging as something produced through their overlap rather than through physical access alone.

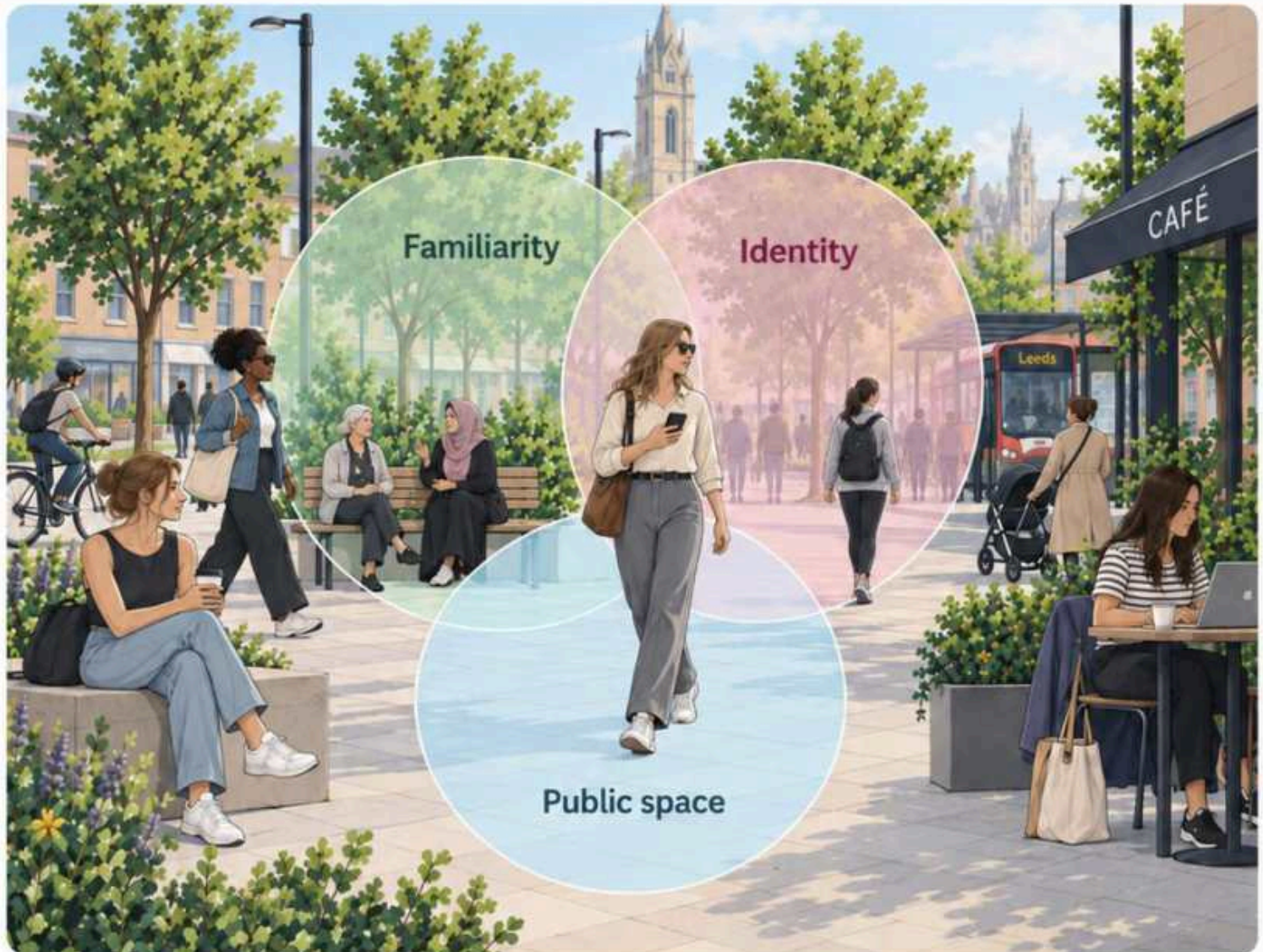


Figure 25. Conceptual illustration of the relationship between familiarity, identity and women's experience of public space (Author's own, 2026).

These experiences support an intersectional understanding of safety (Crenshaw, 1991). Gender, ethnicity and faith did not operate independently but could combine to shape how women experienced public space. For visibly Muslim women in particular, cultural familiarity could provide a strong connection to Beeston while visible identity could simultaneously expose them to racialised or religious hostility.

Belonging therefore involved more than familiarity with place. It concerned recognition, acceptance and the ability to occupy public space without feeling that one's identity increased vulnerability. In this sense, formal access to public space did not necessarily mean experiencing it on equal terms.

4.

Imagining a safer Beeston



4.

Imagining a safer Beeston



The previous section explored how women experience safety in Beeston today. This section looks ahead by focusing on what participants would like to see in the future and what would help them feel more comfortable, welcome and connected in their neighbourhood. This section draws on reflective workshops held at the Hamara Centre in April 2026, in which participants moved from documenting problems toward articulating what they actually want Beeston to look and feel like.

Creative and sensory methods were used for this stage involving a local artist-researcher and art psychotherapist, Thahmina Begum. Aspirations, emotional attachment, and sensory memory of place are notoriously difficult to access through direct questioning, since people often struggle to articulate what safety and belonging feel like in the abstract. The workshops revealed that participants viewed safety as part of a wider vision for a healthy, welcoming and well-connected neighbourhood. Their ideas centred on community, belonging, green space, family life and the quality of local public spaces.

4.1 Places that bring people together

Participants identified a strong connection between safety, pride and belonging. The places they felt safest were often the same places they valued most.

Community centres, places of worship, schools, local shops and parks featured prominently in conversations about both safety and neighbourhood pride (Figure 26). During the workshop, the Hamara Centre, local mosques, the Asha Women's Centre, schools and community groups were among the places mentioned most often. Participants also highlighted Beeston Festival, local shops and health services as valued parts of daily life.

PLACES OF WORSHIP

Churches, mosques, temples, gurdwaras and other places of faith bring people together and provide a sense of trust and belonging.

COMMUNITY CENTRES

Spaces for learning, support, advice and activities for all ages.

LOCAL SHOPS & MARKETS

Everyday places to shop, meet and chat – supporting local businesses and familiar faces.

SCHOOLS & NURSERIES

Places where children learn, play and build friendships, supporting families and stronger communities.

WOMEN'S GROUPS

Safe, supportive spaces to connect, share and empower one another.

HEALTH SERVICES

GPs, clinics and health centres provide essential care and peace of mind.

PARKS & GREEN SPACES

Green, well-kept spaces to relax, play, exercise and spend time together.

EVENTS & FESTIVALS

Celebrations and events that bring people together and strengthen community pride.

SAFE ROUTES & ACTIVE STREETS

Well-lit, walkable and welcoming streets encourage movement and everyday interaction.

COMMUNITY VENUES

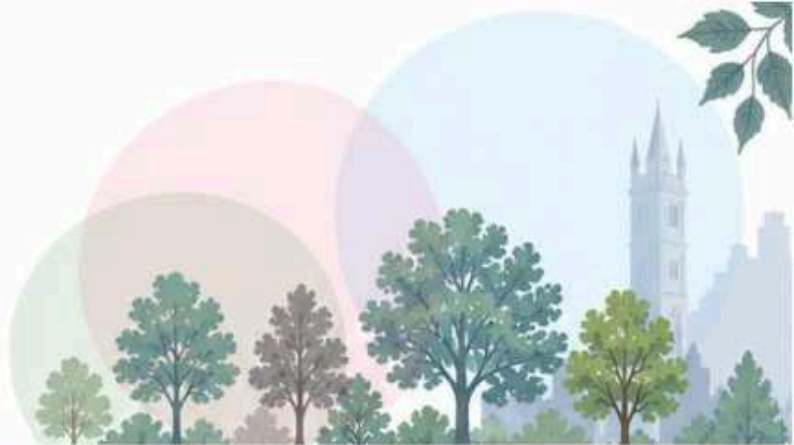
Libraries, youth centres and other venues for learning, culture and social connection.



Figure 26. Places as community anchor in Beeston (Author's own, 2026).

A lot of people don't like Beeston, but I like it because we have access to everything here... pharmacy, transport, hospital, GP, everything we have it here.
Workshop participant

This pattern emphasises a key finding emerging throughout the report: safety in Beeston is closely tied to cultural familiarity and community infrastructure. Faith spaces, women-only groups and culturally specific shops act as important anchors within everyday life. They provide trusted destinations, opportunities for social connection and a sense of cultural belonging. Participants' perspectives therefore support wider research suggesting that experiences of safety are socially and culturally situated, alongside the physical characteristics of the built environment (te Braak and van Tienoven, 2025).



4.2 Creative visions for a safer Beeston

Participants described safety as a neighbourhood that feels welcoming, green, active and well cared for.

The final workshop explored a more forward-looking question: what would a genuinely better Beeston look and feel like? Several aspirations emerged through participants' artwork and the discussions that accompanied it. **Figure 27** brings these aspirations together into a shared vision.



Figure 27. Vision for a safer and women-friendly Beeston (Author's own, 2026).



Nature and greenery

Participants consistently depicted well-maintained and flourishing green spaces, including flowers, trees and parks. They described wanting the neighbourhood to smell of fresh air and grass rather than traffic and pollution. This was one of the most visually prominent themes across the creative outputs.



A peaceful environment

Participants imagined streets, parks and walking routes where they could move comfortably and with confidence. Calm, well-maintained public spaces, supported by greenery, seating and everyday activity, were seen as places where people could walk, meet others and enjoy their surroundings. This vision reflects a desire for public spaces that feel welcoming, comfortable and easy to use as part of everyday life as described in Section 3.



Active and happy public spaces

Participants imagined public spaces that were well used and enjoyed by local people, with children playing outside and families spending time together in parks. This vision contrasts with spaces that are avoided or used only out of necessity. It also reframes the idea of activity in public space: not simply the presence of people, but activity associated with community, enjoyment and everyday social interaction.



Parks for everyday life

Practical ideas featured strongly in the discussions. Participants suggested additions such as ponds, beach-style features, picnic areas and more benches. More broadly, they wanted improved facilities that would encourage people to spend time in parks. These ideas reflected a desire for parks that support everyday life and community activity.



Community and belonging

Participants repeatedly highlighted the importance of community infrastructure. They spoke positively about community centres, places of worship, local shops and events such as the Beeston Festival. These places support everyday life, bring people together and strengthen connections within the community. As discussed in the previous section, the places women already value are also the foundations of their vision for a safer, more welcoming and inclusive neighbourhood.

'More green spaces, places to sit, a community centre and safe, happy parks for our children.'

Workshop participant, 2026



These aspirations were expressed visually through participants' individual artworks, bringing together ideas of greenery, community, safety, freedom, care and everyday neighbourhood life (Figure 28).



Figure 28. Participants' artworks exploring what a safer Beeston would look and feel like (Authors' own, 2026).

4.3 Community priorities

Strong community connections and places that support everyday life.

The workshops highlighted a shared vision for the future of Beeston. Participants described a neighbourhood with more greenery, inviting public spaces, and more opportunities for children, families and local communities to spend time outdoors. Clean streets, well-maintained parks and pleasant walking routes were seen as important features of a neighbourhood where people enjoy spending time.



Greener and cleaner spaces



Places to meet and take part



Safer, more welcoming routes



Participants also spoke about the value of community facilities and organisations that bring people together. Community centres, places of worship, local shops and events such as the Beeston Festival were frequently mentioned as places that help people feel connected and included. Many of the places identified as safe and valued also appeared in participants' aspirations for the future.

This has a clear practical implication for the recommendations that follow in Sections 5 and 6. Approaches focused solely on crime reduction or target-hardening, such as additional cameras, locks or enforcement measures, address only part of what women in Beeston are asking for. Equally important are positive investments in public life, such as maintaining parks and green spaces, creating places that families and children can actively enjoy, and continuing to support the community organisations that already play a vital role in making Beeston feel like home.

The following section considers what these findings mean for policy and practice.





5

What this Means for Policy and Practice



5.1 Key findings

Figure 29 brings together women's perceptions of safety identified through the walk-along observations and reflective workshop sessions. It spatially represents six interconnected dimensions of experience: social behaviour, physical-environmental conditions, movement issues, sensory experience, perceived risk, and safe spaces and community anchors.

Together, these patterns demonstrate that women's experiences of safety are not associated with a single environmental condition or location. They emerge through the interaction between the physical environment, everyday social activity, movement and accessibility, sensory cues, previous experiences and the presence of familiar community spaces.

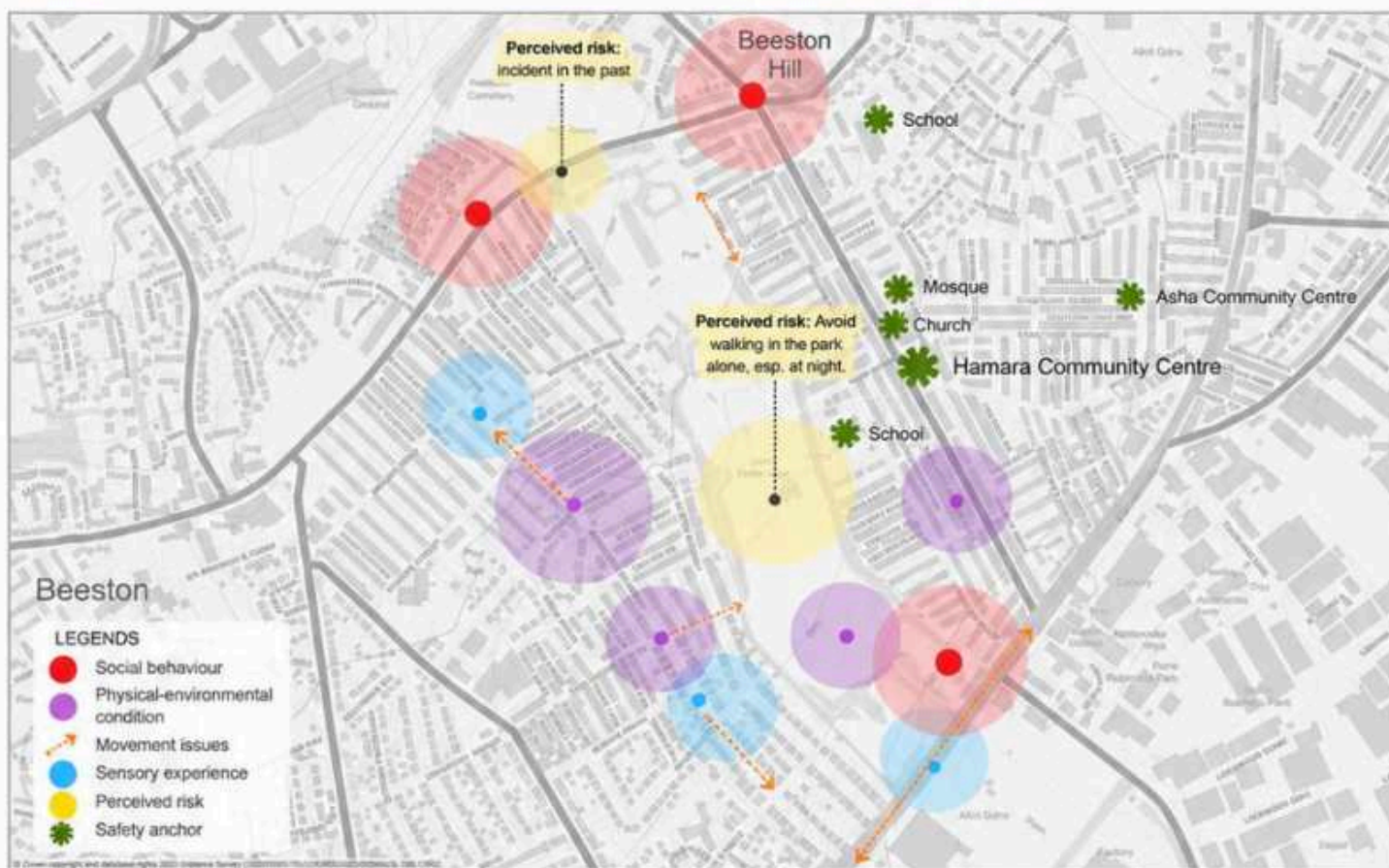


Figure 29. Places that shape women's experiences of safety in Beeston (Author's own, 2026).



Everyday conditions matter alongside recorded crime

Women's perceptions of safety in Beeston are shaped by conditions encountered repeatedly in everyday life, including poor lighting, environmental neglect, anti-social behaviour and particular patterns of occupation. Participants distinguished these experiences from more serious incidents of violence, demonstrating that recorded crime alone cannot fully explain how safety is experienced.

For policy and practice, this means that women's safety needs to be considered alongside the everyday management and experience of public space, including maintenance, cleanliness, lighting and responses to anti-social behaviour.



Spatial design influences how safety is experienced

Women's perceptions of safety were strongly connected to the physical characteristics of streets, parks and public spaces. Participants consistently described narrow terraced streets, tall buildings and isolated spaces with limited visibility as creating a feeling of confinement. In contrast, women felt more comfortable in places where they could see clearly their surroundings and where other people were present. Active streets with shops, homes and visible pedestrian activity created reassurance and confidence.

This suggests that women's safety should be considered within public-realm, transport and urban-design decision-making, rather than treated solely as a community-safety or crime-prevention issue.

In imagining a safer Beeston, participants expressed the importance of greenery, attractive and well-maintained parks, spaces where families and children can spend time together, and strong community and faith-based infrastructure. Their vision of safety therefore focused more on what should be created and supported and less about what should be reduced.

These findings show that community infrastructure is an important component of women's safety. Investment in trusted local organisations, community programmes, parks and shared public spaces can strengthen belonging and support positive experiences of public life.

5.2 Contribution to women's safety research

The above findings strengthen and extend existing research on women's safety. This project provides neighbourhood-level insight that makes two key contributions to the growing body of research on women's safety in public spaces.

Neighbourhood-level evidence

This project provides neighbourhood-level insight into women's experiences of safety in public spaces. Participants' emphasis on lighting, visibility and street-level activity mirrors findings from other places, suggesting that these are widely recognised influences on perceived safety rather than issues unique to Beeston. The findings also support research showing that women's caution in public space is a rational response to specific environmental conditions and that visible signs of disorder can shape perceptions of safety regardless of their relationship to recorded crime (Abdul Rashid et al., 2017; Gargiulo et al., 2020; Navarrete-Hernandez et al., 2021).

Safety as more than the absence of risk

One of the most distinctive contributions of this study is its emphasis on women's positive aspirations for safety. Much of the existing literature focuses on risk, barriers and experiences of harm. By contrast, participants in this research defined safety through community belonging, cultural familiarity, welcoming public spaces and opportunities for social connection. In this respect, the findings align with a smaller body of research that emphasises belonging and social cohesion as important dimensions of perceived safety (te Braak and van Tienoven, 2025), suggesting that future policy and research should focus not only on reducing risk but also on strengthening the social and community assets that help people feel safe and connected.



Finally, by combining walking observations with creative and sensory methods, this research project captures both the physical and emotional dimensions of safety. This approach highlights that safety is shaped not only by the absence of risk, but also by the presence of factors that support comfort, belonging, and wellbeing (Degen and Rose, 2012). We encourage action focused on designing welcoming streets, creating inclusive public open spaces, and strengthening opportunities for community participation.

Taken together, the findings point towards three interconnected priorities for translating women's experiences and aspirations into planning and practice: designing welcoming streets, creating inclusive green places, and enabling meaningful community participation (Figure 30). These priorities provide a strategic bridge between the evidence presented in this report and the more detailed recommendations set out in Section 6.



Figure 30. From vision to action: strategic planning priorities for women's safety in Beeston (Author's own, 2026).

6.

Recommendations



Improving women's safety in Beeston requires action across sectors and stakeholders. The following recommendations identify the roles that key organisations can play in implementing the findings of this study.

6.1 Urban design

Recommendation 1. Invest in positive place-making

Participants of this research project highlighted the value of additional benches, picnic areas, and well-maintained green spaces. Investment in these facilities may be pursued through Leeds City Council's Parks and Green Spaces Strategy 2022–32 or any other relevant programmes such as Safer Streets fund and the Mayor's Safer Communities Fund. In Beeston, feelings of welcome, presence, and belonging were shown to be as important to safety as the absence of threat.

Lead organisation:

Leeds City Council supported by West Yorkshire Combined Authority where appropriate.



Figure 31. Key elements of positive place-making for safer neighbourhoods in Beeston (Author's own, 2026).

Recommendation 2. Improve accessibility at entrances to Cross Flatts Park

Participants identified several entrances as difficult to use for people with prams, wheelchairs, and mobility scooters. Entrances should be widened or redesigned in line with inclusive design standards to ensure the park can be comfortably accessed by all users.

Lead organisation:

Leeds City Council.



KEY DESIGN PRINCIPLES

- People first**
Design streets and spaces to be easy to use for everyone, including older people and disabled people.
- Visible and connected**
Open sightlines, active frontages and regular activity create safer, more welcoming streets.
- Comfort and choice**
Provide seating, shade and greenery so people can rest, travel comfortably and spend time outdoors.
- Inclusive and accessible**
Step-free, continuous surfaces and accessible crossings support dignity for all.
- Safe and well lit**
Good lighting and a clean environment reduce fear of crime and increase confidence at night.

DESIGN GUIDANCE REFERENCES

- Leeds Transport SPD (2023)**
Local requirements for accessible pedestrian routes, including minimum footway widths and management of obstructions.
- Inclusive Mobility (DfT, 2021)**
Best-practice guidance for accessible pedestrian and transport infrastructure.
- Manual for Streets 2 (2010)**
Principles for people-focused, context-sensitive street design.
- Active Travel England Planning for Active Places (2022)**
Guidance for accessible walking, wheeling and cycling environments.

1 Generous clear footway



- A clear width of 2.5–3.0 m is recommended at busy entrances to comfortably accommodate prams, wheelchairs and mobility scooters.
- Keep footways clear of clutter and street signage.
- Maintain level, even surfaces.

2 Seating and resting places



- Seating at regular intervals supports social interaction, provides rest opportunities and encourages people to spend time outdoors.
- Provide benches every 60–100 m where space allows.
- Locate near lighting and activity.

3 Step-free access and crossings



- Dropped kerbs, tactile paving and level surfaces make streets easier to navigate for everyone.
- Use tactile paving at all crossings.
- Ensure continuous, level surfaces across side streets and entrances.

4 Tactile paving at crossings



- Tactile paving helps visually impaired people identify crossings and navigate safely.
- Use contrasting colour for visibility.
- Provide dropped kerbs and tactile paving at all crossing points.

This figure is conceptual and illustrates design principles rather than fixed dimensions. All designs should be developed in accordance with local standards, policies and context.

Figure 32. Illustrative footway principles for a safer, accessible street in Beeston (Author's own, 2026).

Recommendations for a safer Beeston

Improving women's safety in Beeston requires a combination of spatial design, maintenance and management interventions. The following recommendations focus on practical measures that can be implemented in both new and existing streets.

Recommendation 3. Improve sightlines and vegetation maintenance

Overgrown vegetation can create hiding places, reduce visibility and contribute to feelings of unease, particularly at night. Well-maintained planting and clear sightlines help to increase natural surveillance, enhance perceptions of safety and create more welcoming streets.

Lead organisation:
Leeds City Council.

DENSE VEGETATION CREATES CONCEALMENT

Overgrown hedges and dense planting restrict sightlines, creating hidden areas and increasing fear.



Restricted visibility increases fear and reduces the sense of safety.

LOW PLANTING AND CLEAR SIGHTLINES

Well-managed planting maintains openness, visibility and natural surveillance while still providing greenery and shade.



Clear sightlines and open space create safer, more welcoming streets.

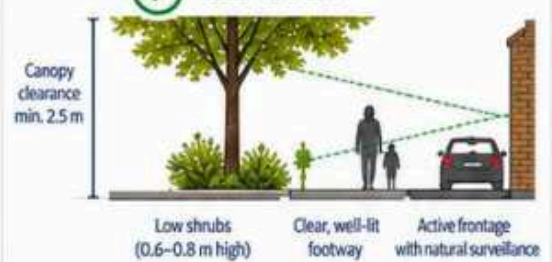
DESIGN GUIDANCE

-  Keep shrubs and hedges below 0.8 m near walkways, entrances, crossings and bus stops.
-  Use trees with canopies above head height (min. 2.5 m clearance).
-  Avoid dense planting near corners, entrances and seating areas.
-  Regularly maintain vegetation to sustain visibility throughout the year.

POOR VISIBILITY



GOOD VISIBILITY



 This figure is conceptual and illustrates design principles rather than fixed dimensions. All designs should be developed in accordance with local standards, policies and context.

Figure 33. Illustrative examples of vegetation maintenance and sightlines (Authors' own, 2026).

Recommendation 4. Prioritise lighting improvements

Good lighting is essential for creating safe, inclusive and welcoming public spaces. Well-designed lighting can improve visibility, reduce the perception of risk and support the use of streets and public spaces after dark, particularly around key routes such as transport stops, local centres and residential areas.

Lead organisation:
Leeds City Council.





Figure 34. Illustrative lighting principles for safer street in Beeston (Author's own, 2026).

6.2 Community organisations

Local community organisations often provide trusted, accessible, and culturally informed support that statutory agencies alone cannot deliver. As this report demonstrates, these organisations play an important role in helping residents feel both safe and connected to their neighbourhood. Their contribution therefore should be recognised as a core part of local safety provision rather than treated as a short-term addition.

Recommendation 1. Recognise community organisations as key delivery partners for women's safety initiatives

Trusted organisations such as Hamara Healthy Living Centre and Asha Women's Centre play an important role in supporting women who may be less likely to engage with formal consultation processes. Future safety initiatives should work through these organisations from the outset.

Lead organisation:

Leeds City Council in partnership with local community organisations.



Recommendation 2. Support community-based safety engagement and awareness activities

Community organisations should continue facilitating activities that bring women together to discuss local safety concerns, share experiences, and access information about available support services and safety initiatives.

Lead organisation:

Community organisations, supported by Leeds City Council and West Yorkshire Combined Authority.

Recommendation 3. Strengthen opportunities for women's participation in local decision-making

Many participants indicated that they were unsure how to influence decisions affecting public space. Community organisations should be supported to act as a bridge between local residents and decision-makers by facilitating consultation exercises, neighbourhood discussions, and participatory workshops.

Lead organisation:

Community organisations in partnership with Leeds City Council.

6.3 Leeds City Council

As the local planning authority, service provider, and place-making organisation, Leeds City Council has a central role in responding to the findings of this study.

Recommendation 1. Embed women's safety within planning policy and design decisions

Women's safety considerations should be incorporated into the preparation, implementation, and review of planning policy. New developments and public realm schemes should be designed to support inclusive, welcoming, accessible, and well-used public spaces through attention to lighting, visibility, active frontages, accessibility, and natural surveillance.

Recommendation 2. Translate city-wide safety strategies into neighbourhood-level action

Existing initiatives relating to women's safety should be promoted and delivered more visibly at neighbourhood level. Beeston provides an opportunity to pilot locally tailored interventions informed by community evidence and lived experience.

Recommendation 3. Continue community-led and participatory approaches

Future public realm projects, park improvements, and neighbourhood safety initiatives should continue to draw upon community engagement methods, including walk-along audits, participatory mapping, and creative workshops. These approaches help ensure that local experiences inform design and investment decisions.



Recommendation 4. Monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of interventions

The Council should assess whether implemented interventions improve perceptions of safety over time through periodic safety audits, repeat engagement exercises, and ongoing dialogue with community organisations and local residents.

6.4 West Yorkshire Combined Authority

Many of the issues identified in this study relate to transport, active travel, and the wider public realm. Regional partners therefore have an important role in supporting and scaling effective approaches.

Recommendation 1. Continue embedding women's safety within regional transport and public realm investment

Women's safety considerations should be incorporated into the planning, design, delivery, and evaluation of transport interchanges, walking and cycling infrastructure, and public realm improvement projects across West Yorkshire.

Recommendation 2. Use findings from Beeston to inform regional implementation

The evidence generated through this study should inform future transport and public space projects, particularly where communities experience similar concerns relating to accessibility, visibility, anti-social behaviour, and perceptions of safety.

Recommendation 3. Support knowledge sharing and practitioner learning

West Yorkshire Combined Authority is well placed to coordinate the sharing of good practice between local authorities, transport providers, planners, designers, and community organisations. Lessons learned from Beeston could contribute to regional guidance, practitioner training, and future project development.

6.5 Future research

The recommendations above focus on implementing change. Future research should support long-term learning by evaluating whether those changes improve women's experiences of public space.

Recommendation 1. Monitor changes in women's perceptions of safety over time

This study provides a valuable baseline for monitoring future changes in women's perceptions of safety following public realm, transport, and community-based interventions in Beeston. Repeating the study at regular intervals would provide evidence of whether interventions improve perceptions of safety, accessibility, and belonging.



Recommendation 2. Evaluate interventions using participatory methods

Future research should assess the effectiveness of implemented interventions through repeat walk-along interviews, participatory mapping, creative workshops, and community engagement activities. These methods were particularly effective in capturing the everyday and experiential dimensions of safety and should form part of future evaluation programmes.

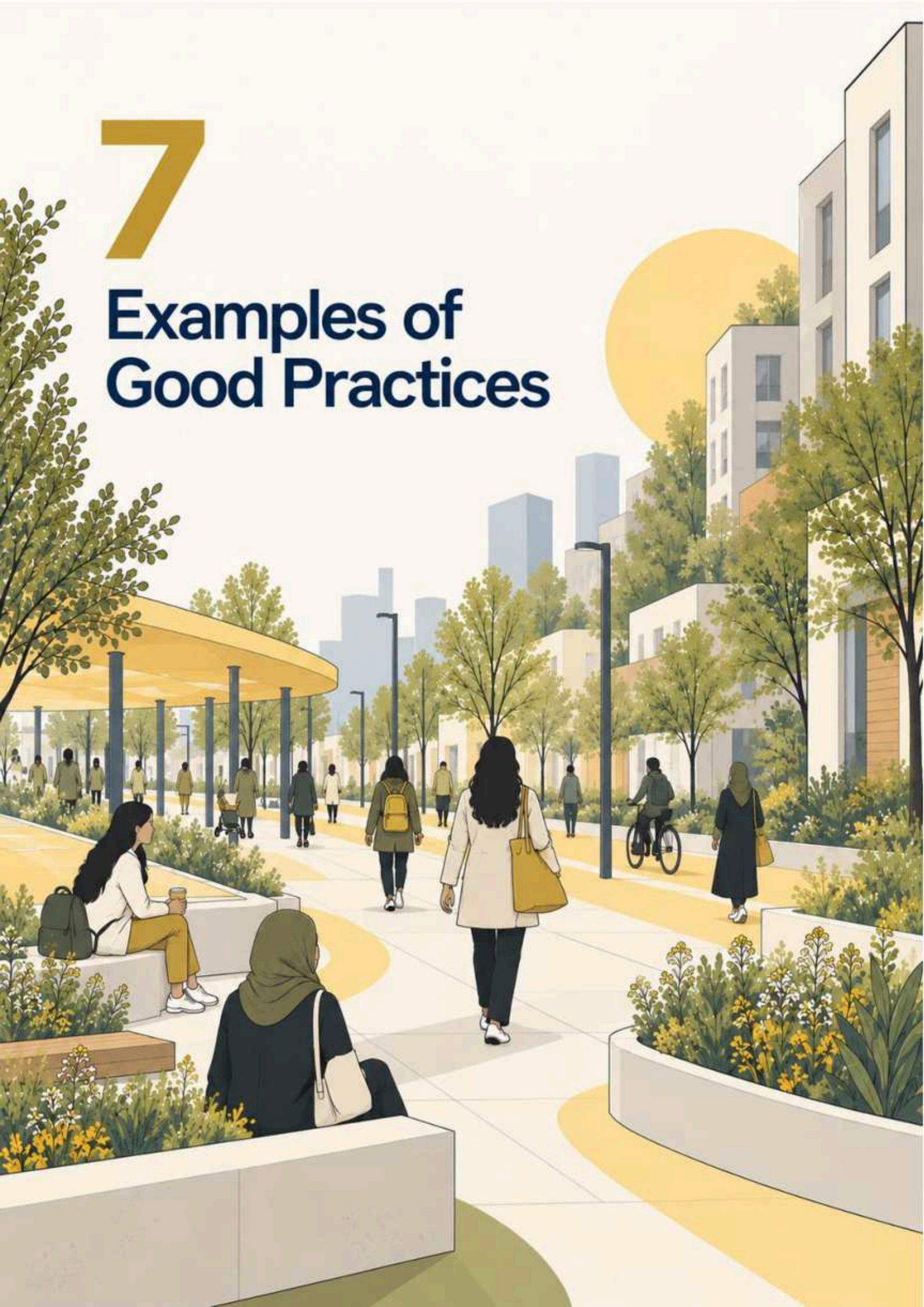
Recommendation 3. Expand understanding of diverse experiences of safety

Future research should also explore how women's experiences of safety differ across age, ethnicity, disability, faith, migration background, and other intersecting identities. A more detailed understanding of these differences would help inform inclusive planning, public realm design, and local safety policy, particularly in diverse communities such as Beeston.



7

Examples of Good Practices



7 Examples of Good Practices

The recommendations in this report build on existing work to improve women's safety in public spaces at local, regional, national, and international levels. The examples presented in this section demonstrate how organisations have addressed similar challenges through urban design, community engagement, transport planning, and partnership working. They show that many of the recommendations for Beeston reflect established practice while illustrating how this project contributes neighbourhood-level evidence grounded in women's everyday experiences.

1 Women Friendly Leeds

Women Friendly Leeds has developed the evidence base and delivery mechanisms to support many of this report's recommendations. The 2021 Leeds Women's Safety Survey provides valuable insights and has led to calls for attitude change, safer public spaces, and better reporting and response systems. It demonstrates how citywide strategies and neighbourhood-level projects can work together.

2 Safer Parks Consortium

Safer Parks: Improving Access for Women and Girls builds on research led by the University of Leeds in 2022, with ten principles under three sections: eyes on the park, awareness, and inclusion. The guidance has since been incorporated into the Green Flag Award standard and Secured by Design. In 2025, the Safer Parks Open Data Dashboard was piloted in Bradford and is now being expanded across the region with UKRI funding.

3 Active Travel England

Nationally, ATE has supported safer-street initiatives that combine infrastructure improvements with safety objectives. Examples include CCTV and lighting upgrades in Workop, Nottinghamshire, and bystander-training and safe travel route initiatives in Milton Keynes. These projects demonstrate that the type of improvements recommended for Beeston are already being funded and delivered elsewhere in England.

4 London Legacy Development Corporation's Handbook

Developed for London's Olympic legacy area, this handbook set out a participatory approach to embedding gender-informed thinking directly into urban design and planning practice. Its core message is that inclusive places should be co-created with women rather than designed for them. The same principle applies to this project through our walk-along and creative methods with the local women's group.

5 Transport for London Women's Safety Audit

TfL combines infrastructure investment (including instalments of CCTVs) with a participatory approach to improving women's safety. Partnering with the Mayor's Office for Policing and Crime, TfL commissioned the Women's Safety Audit Pilot Project to engage directly with affected communities in five London Boroughs. The audits form a central part of the Mayor's Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy and the Night Safety Charter.

6 Safetipin (India)

Safetipin enables women to share detailed information about safety in specific locations over time. It can identify wider patterns and recurring issues by bringing together individual observations. Their audit platform demonstrates the value of collecting detailed, going, and location-specific safety data directly from women. The hotspot mapping produced in this project shares the same spirit and may have potential to be developed as an open and accessible crowdsourcing platform.

7 UN Women Safe Cities and Safe Public Spaces

UN Women's global initiative demonstrates that the issues explored in this report are part of a wider international agenda. Questions about how urban design, transport, policing, and community strength influence women's safety are being asked and addressed in cities around the world. This places the Beeston project within that broader global movement.

The examples of good practice presented above highlight the contribution of this project to a growing movement focused on women's safety in public spaces. A key message here is that women cannot be treated as a homogenous group. Experiences of safety are shaped by a range of intersecting factors, including faith, cultural background, community relationships, and personal circumstances. Consequently, a sense of safety is produced not only through the design of the built environment but also through the social infrastructure in the community.

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Empowering Community-Driven Safety:

Enhancing Women's Safety
and Inclusivity in Public
Spaces in Beeston

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