



Hear HER Voice
Sandbach

Introduction

The Hear Her Voice Sandbach project was invited by the Mayor of Sandbach, Councillor John Arnold, to deliver a focused workshop with young women from Sandbach High School. The Mayor had heard about our previous Hear Her Voice sessions, where participants explored topics such as safe spaces, girls' participation in sport, and creating Her-Place- local services designed to support and empower young women and girls.

Findings from those earlier workshops showed that young women greatly valued being taken seriously and having their opinions heard by adults and decision-makers. They expressed that simply being listened to made them feel more respected, confident, and motivated to engage in their communities.

Building on this, the Sandbach session was a valuable opportunity for girls to share their experiences directly with the Mayor and contribute ideas that could shape how local funding is spent. The aim was to ensure that the voices of young women are not only heard, but also influence meaningful and lasting change within their town.

Our aim is twofold:

- To encourage young women and girls to use their voices confidently and see the value in their lived experiences as a force for positive social change- both locally and beyond.
- To ensure that decision-makers, professionals, and organisations have a clear reference point of girls' views, so their opinions, needs, and aspirations can directly influence policy, practice, and provision.



Safe Spaces

In this activity, young women and girls discussed how safe they feel in different public spaces across Sandbach and surrounding areas. They highlighted the places they avoid, the situations that cause concern, and the places they feel safe and comfortable. Across 12 groups, consistent themes emerged:

Safe

- Sandbach Library: consistently listed as safe across all groups, described as welcoming, well-lit, and with friendly staff.
- The Cobbles: seen as central, social, and safe during the day.
- The George Inn and Cubar restaurant areas: safe due to visibility, activity, and lighting.
- Waitrose area: considered safe in daytime because of staff presence and nearby amenities.

Overall, participants highlighted lighting, visibility, and people's behaviour as the main factors influencing safety.

Unsafe

- Sandbach Park: repeatedly mentioned as unsafe, particularly after dark, due to poor lighting, groups of teenage boys, and anti-social behaviour.
- McDonald's: concerns about "the people there," harassment, and unsafe behaviour, especially at night.
- Aldi / Well Pharmacy area: described as unsafe before and after school, with traffic/ unsafe crossings, and people loitering.
- Green Street / Welles Street: dark, rundown, and associated with drug use.
- Chapel Street and Orchard Hearing car parks: "scary" and lacking safe walking routes.
- St Mary's Church: mixed responses; some felt unsafe due to poor lighting despite its familiarity.

Ideal public space

When describing their ideal public space, participants identified a wide range of features that reflect a need for comfort, safety, inclusivity, and opportunities to socialise. Their responses fit several themes:

Facilities and Environment

- Sheltered seating
- Park equipment
- Plain field / open green areas
- Social area with toilets
- More street lights
- More bins
- Safe crossings
- Alcohol-free and smoking-free zones
- Clean, well-maintained spaces

Shops and Amenities

- Shops (including food, charity shops, bookshops, and cafés)
- More salons and fewer barbershops
- Hairdressers
- "Cosy café" (especially in the park but affordable)

Activities and Leisure

- Skatepark
- Youth centre
- Gym (with a women's-only area)
- Craft/arts room
- Bowling

Atmosphere and Inclusivity

- A safe space to socialise with friends
- "Green" areas
- Alcohol- and smoke-free zones
- Spaces that feel warm, welcoming, and community-led

Desired activities

When asked what kinds of activities they would take part in locally, the group shared a wide range of ideas that highlight their desire for inclusive, enjoyable, and varied opportunities. Their responses show that girls in Sandbach value spaces where they can be active, creative, and social in a safe and welcoming environment.

Indoor and Social Activities:

- Indoor spaces to relax (e.g. with games tables and TV)
- Social activities (talking, meeting new people, hanging out)
- Group activities
- Reading spaces
- Book club
- Shopping areas
- Cinema or place to watch films
- Bowling
- Music events or spaces to enjoy music

Creative and Educational Activities:

- Arts and crafts sessions
- Mental and physical wellbeing workshops
- Opportunities for creative expression (craft/arts room)

Sports and Physical Activities:

- Sports clubs
- Gym access (including a women's-only area)
- Walking groups
- Badminton
- Basketball
- Tennis

What Sandbach is missing

When asked what they feel their local area is missing, several key gaps were identified by participants, that include:

- Safe spaces for teenagers and indoor areas to socialise.
- Better lighting, crossings, and sheltered seating.
- A youth centre or similar safe indoor facility.
- Affordable cafés or creative community spaces (e.g. crafts, games, bookshops).
- Visible efforts to support girls; more things "aimed at women," quiet areas, and practical amenities like sanitary products.

Participants also highlighted a need for greater variety and vibrancy in the town itself, suggesting more shops that appeal to younger people, additional sports facilities such as tennis courts and bowling, and fun outdoor features like bench swings or green gathering spaces. They also expressed a wish to see fewer new housing developments and more visible community identity through things like public art or photographs celebrating Sandbach. Together, these ideas reflect a strong desire for a town that feels welcoming, lively, and connected, one that celebrates its young people and offers them meaningful places to belong.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The Hear Her Voice Sandbach workshop gave young women a valuable opportunity to share their lived experiences, highlight safety concerns, and influence how local funding could better meet their needs. Across all activities, participants showed a strong desire for safer, more inclusive spaces where girls can socialise, express themselves, and feel part of their community.

Recurring themes included the need for improved lighting and crossings, accessible indoor social spaces, and visible support for girls through practical amenities and inclusive programming. Sandbach Library stood out as a positive example of a trusted, welcoming space, while areas such as Sandbach Park, McDonald's, and local car parks were consistently described as unsafe, particularly after dark.

To build on these findings, it is recommended that:

- The council and local partners prioritise safety improvements (lighting, crossings, and CCTV) in identified unsafe areas.
- Investment is directed toward youth-led, multi-purpose spaces, providing indoor social, creative, and wellbeing opportunities.
- Future funding ensures equal access and representation for girls, including facilities, events, and outreach designed with their input.
- Ongoing collaboration between young people, the council, and community organisations continues to strengthen trust and ensure decisions reflect real local voices.

By acting on these recommendations, Sandbach can take meaningful steps towards creating a town that is not only safer for young women, but one in which they feel seen, supported, and empowered to thrive.



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To find out more about us visit:
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