

# Right To The Streets Podcast

## Series 3 Episode 2: Public Space Design

### Introduction

**Eve:** Welcome to the Right to the Streets edition of the GM Moving Podcast. Join the conversation about what makes our streets, parks, and public spaces joyful, welcoming places for people to be and to be active. Join me, Eve Holt, Strategic Leader at Greater Sport on the journey around the streets as we explore people's freedom to move about without fear.

In each episode, we hear about the roles we can all play to make where we live, work, and play places where all women and girls feel they belong and are invited to be active. We gather stories, experiences, and ideas as we speak to strategic leaders, decision makers, and lots of local people who are creating the conditions in place for everyday moving and active lives for all.

This episode of the Right to the Streets podcast series focuses on public space design. Including small neighbourhood changes we could all contribute to like street planting and keeping hedges trimmed. Getting the basics right, like good street lighting, clear smooth pavements, and well-placed and timed pelican crossings.

And also the larger, longer term redevelopment plans. We talk about the need to have conscious conversations about who we are prioritising in space, the tensions to be navigated, and how we can adopt more feminist design principles and language, and develop a more representative workforce working alongside communities. Recognising that they are bursting with creativity, love, ideas, and learning, and sometimes we just need to get out of the way, trusting them as guardians of place. You'll hear what it's like for people to navigate the streets as a wheelchair user,

**Sarah Brown-Fraser:** I'm really missing out because I live looking over the canal as well. One of the beautiful canals that we have in this region, and I can't get down to it, so I just look at it.

**Eve:** And how designing in accessibility from the start creates a blueprint for further development.

**Ben Andrews:** This isn't a never ending journey. This is very much once we know the best dimensions for a drop curb. That's it we know the best dimensions for a dropped curb. It doesn't go on forever. We don't have to keep redesigning that.

**Eve:** Then you'll come with me to North Trafford to find out what's in store for new public design around that area as part of Trafford Council Civic Quarter Action Plan.

**Elisabeth Lewis:** Well, they've called it a ceremonial route, so it will link the Cricket Ground to Old Trafford. What ceremonies and processions there will be, I don't know. In the future, hopefully lots.

## **Interview 1**

**Eve:** But first we are at Old Trafford cricket ground to chat about the fundamentals we need to consider when creating public spaces where we all feel we belong. We're joined by an expert in public space design.

**Ellie Cosgrave:** I'm Ellie Cosgrave and I'm the director of Publica Community Interest Company.

**Eve:** And also with us is a voice you've just heard. It's Trafford Council's Heritage Development Officer.

**Elisabeth Lewis:** I'm Elisabeth Lewis. I'm the Heritage and Urban Design Manager at Trafford Council based in the planning team.

**Eve:** You'll hear more from Elisabeth later on in the episode too. Old Trafford Cricket Ground is home to Lancaster Cricket Club, which at the moment is undergoing lots of new development, including a hotel extension and new stand and museum, which will explain the odd bang and clang you'll hear during this chat. We are sat in the boardroom overlooking the beautiful green pitch with a slight buzz of the air con in the background.

I start by asking Ellie, why does Safer streets matter to her, both in her professional role and personally?

**Ellie Cosgrave:** Oh, safer streets matters to me because I am a city girl and I grew up in cities and I love the freedom that a city offers me.

As a kid that involved going to the cinema with my mates. It was my own freedom to get around, and that was a place where I could express myself and become who I am. This really happened for me on the streets, but it's, I guess also a place where I have understood the vulnerability that comes with presenting as female in a public space.

The streets are a space where I've learnt how I'm not safe, and I guess I've dedicated my career to that dualism and that wanting these spaces to be a space where we can all become who we are and tackling some of those really harmful barriers of a feeling that we don't belong and how that can affect who we are.

**Eve:** So go on then Ellie tell us a little bit about what you are doing in your work to make our street spaces that are more joyful, are more free, are safer for women and girls.

**Ellie Cosgrave:** Yeah. So the first thing that I guess I'm doing is trying to build an understanding within the built environment community about what it means to build safety, build a sense of wellbeing, and build a sense of belonging into our design processes.

And there's a whole lot of feminist theory that I've enjoyed digging into, but turns out not everyone loves doing that. So what part of it is about a translation role into our sector about what does it actually mean to have a spatial design that includes feminist principles. The second area of our work is to think about how do we go beyond the simple basic designs to use spatial planning and use urban design to imagine a world in a future where we do truly all belong and that we can all get really excited about. That maybe it's not linked to individual project constraints of any given moment, but that really helps take us out of what we think is possible and into a realm of imagination so that we can have a goal, so that we can be transported.

And then I guess the final aspect of my work is bringing that down into real projects on the ground. So we've written some design guidelines for the Mayor of London, and we are now testing that out on ten projects across the capital to see what are the barriers and the constraints to delivering it. But what is the difference that can be actually made. So we have these demonstrated projects.

**Eve:** And we've had the pleasure of having you involved in Right to Streets from the very beginning. In fact, before the beginning, because it was the work that you did in conversations we had that helped form actually our initial bid. And the model that we now are sticking to really, and has proved really valuable.

And then the name, so Right to the Streets emerged. And obviously one of the joys of that is that then relates back to this idea of Right to the City. So you could tell us a little bit about Right to the City.

**Ellie Cosgrave:** The Right to the City is an incredibly powerful and important concept. We know what human rights are.

We know that we have a right to education, a right to access to food, to shelter. What does it mean when we translate that right into the Right to

the City? The Right to the City is a collective right to change ourselves by changing the city. We know in our own homes we change our experience once we get new furniture.

Once we paint it that colour, we've always wanted to paint. That right extends to the city. We know that how we get to work or what work we do or the type of education that we have, or who we meet day-to-day is absolutely wrapped up in the shape of our public infrastructure, in our access to green space into the types of transport that's available to us.

So we can, and we should be part of making those decisions that ultimately shape our lives and our communities. And so the Rights of the City is just about participation.

**Eve:** So, Elisabeth, we sat here obviously in Trafford. Part of your role is to help think about then how we design and change and lead on regeneration in this part of Trafford.

It'd be great to hear in terms of your experience. What does this mean? What does good design look like? How would we go about this process of ensuring that we have that right to the street that right to the city that we've just heard about?

**Elisabeth Lewis:** Yes. So I'm involved with the Trafford design code, which is a Pathfinder project, which has been funded by the government for twelve months.

And so we are looking at delivering a design code for local development to ensure that not just buildings but open space, public realm is inclusive and, accessible and attractive spaces really for everyone to enjoy. So the code will hopefully deliver that. It's a pioneering project really. We're one of only a few boroughs in the country, which are doing a borough wide design code. So it's very new, and we're hopefully delivering that government policy and that direction of travel on the ground locally.

**Eve:** And it feels really exciting cause one, we get to be involved in helping think about what that looks like and shaping that Pathfinder, and then knowing the influence that that can have as others then look to what you've done and the work in Trafford to inform what they do. I guess thinking about the design code or people listening, is there anything specific? Like what goes in a design code? What are the things that are really gonna anchor some of the key principles.

**Elisabeth Lewis:** I mean, what we want to deliver are streets and public realm. It's not just for people to get from A to B. It's not just for transport, but it's for people to enjoy and to have fun and to be invigorating in an exciting environment. And, not just the streets themselves as well, obviously that green space and open space and, and hoping that people will linger there, but will create an attractive environments.

I think quite often, what we experience in Trafford are developments which potentially could have a negative impact on how people experience the world around them. So through the code, we want to try and ensure that development, well improves on that and just creates that cohesion really.

**Eve:** Talk us through the time process. So when, when will the code be finished? What's the process for that? What happens after that? What would you like to see? What difference would you like to see that make?

**Elisabeth Lewis:** So it's a twelve month project, and we are due to have a draft of the code by the end of May. And then it'll hopefully be adopted September time, but it'll go out to public consultation.

And then it's not just that then that the code is finished, we will adapt, and change that. There are probably things that we haven't necessarily addressed. It's a really big project to deliver in a very short timeframe. So it'll be ongoing, it's gonna be part of a digital platform and so that we can

then change and adapt that to needs really and development that comes forward in the future.

Things like natural surveillance would be really important with development. So thinking about some of the points that you raised Ellie, that it's not just about lighting and CCTV, having natural surveillance is a way that street spaces can remain active, and people observing things and making sure that windows face the street rather than having blank elevations. Increasing, I suppose the visual contribution with landscaping and creating spaces where people can sit and spend time and dwell is really important as well.

And you can do that through public realm, through street furniture, through wayfinding, all those aspects.

**Eve:** I'm picturing Ellie, so I'm picturing you describing painting the walls in your room, I think how many times over my life so far I've gone, oh, I just want to change the positioning of something because it does impact on how we feel.

It's a lot harder when it comes to public space that is used by lots of people. And you can't unfortunately just pick up a tin of paint and a paint brush and have the freedom to change things.

**Ellie Cosgrave:** Of course, there are tensions. Of course we cannot design a space that feels absolutely safe for everybody, that meets everybody's multiple needs that they might have of public space.

At the moment, we are not making our assumptions clear about who this space is for, and so what we end up doing is without too much thinking, narrow the possibilities for that space. What I hope to do and what I suggest that we do is have a really conscious conversation about who are we prioritising in public space?

Who is it? Children? Is it people with physical disabilities? And what does focusing on those needs offer us to a new possibility for space. So at the moment we're narrowly focused on people who are probably accessing paid daytime labour market, who are probably physically able and who are quite transient in public space.

We're getting people through it. And so just having a gendered conversation or a conversation with specific lenses on it enables us to open out the possibilities. That's one thing. And the second is around how easy is it for to really to change these spaces. And of course there are long-term planning, big infrastructure projects that we need to shift in a new direction.

We need more accessible green spaces, we need low carbon transport options that are not polluting. We need active spaces and, maybe our street scapes needs to change entirely. There's also an opportunity to be a bit more tactical and be a bit more immediate and say, actually you know what, maybe I personally can't pick up a paintbrush, but we as a group could, we as a local authority could, we can put in temporary planting that can be seating and we can experiment and we can see what happens.

And we find when we have these tactical urbanism projects that maybe are plant pots that create segregated cycle lanes, that add a bit of joy, we come to expect it and we come to understand how it can be transformative rather than making a budgetary case. When we feel it in our bodies, when we feel it in the community, we get it.

**Eve:** So how to that point of all these different conflicts of how we use a space, how we perceive things, how do we wrestle with all of that?

**Ellie Cosgrave:** The first thing is that we wrestle with it, we contend with it, we get involved and we have those conversations. We need to not impose our one view about what a safe, vibrant community looks like for some people.



Some people do need car access. How do we include that in the conversation so that it doesn't become divisive and it doesn't become my needs against your needs. And, and this comes back to the point, there's no such thing as a safe city. There's no such thing as a perfect city. A city is perfect when we're engaging in it, when we are in it, and I guess the baseline of that is trust, care, compassion, trust that government has my interests in mind and is listening to what I say as well as trust from people with more traditional authority in the communities who know about what their needs are, who know where the difficulties are, where the tension points are, and that there's a beautiful collaboration that's possible.

That's not to say it's easy, like we don't solve this with plant pots. We solve it by talking to each other.

**Eve:** We're picking up this collective paintbrush. I mean whose job is it? When we think about the design of our places, whose business is that? Who does that fall to?

**Elisabeth Lewis:** I think it's a group of people rather than just one authority.

So we, as the local authority can contribute through policy and helping to shape those places. And with the built environment as well. The Gorse Hill project, the Amazing Ally's , was just a really great local symbol of how it's something so simple as as flowers and seating could create, and change a space. It was a brilliant project. So I think that that's the one that straight away as you mentioned that idea. That's what stick in my mind.

**Eve:** And that's the thing we can learn lots from what goes on under our own noses. And that's a great example. So the Gorgeous Gorse Hill stuff, again, finding those small pockets of spaces, one of them's on a big roundabout, isn't it? And then they've created this little gorgeous corner of growing and greenery and seating.

**Elisabeth Lewis:** Yeah. And they were really negative spaces as you tend to get at the backs of terraces. And children play down there now and it's just brilliant.

**Eve:** And that was an example of the people, local residents going this place is gorgeous.

**Elisabeth Lewis:** Yeah, absolutely.

**Eve:** And we're gonna show you it's gorgeous.

**Elisabeth Lewis:** And that from a local level it didn't need us as a local authority to intervene. It didn't need other organisations to help with that really it was a community project.

**Eve:** So sometimes it's about others getting out of the way rather than you need to do anything.

**Elisabeth Lewis:** Yeah. And sometimes, recognising that as a local authority as well is important.

**Ellie Cosgrave:** Yeah. I think its super key to understand that our communities and our cities are bursting with creativity, with community love, with ideas. And it is often about getting out of the way, a hundred percent. On the other realm, and the other scale is understanding the ways in which a local authorities or a city authorities vision for a long-term plan about where we are, what the trajectory is that can then enable people to get out of the way for local communities who are aligned with that vision is really important. So the example I often use is Vienna where since 1990 they've had a office within the city for gender mainstreaming, meaning taking ideas around gender inclusion and putting it into city policy across the city authority and that long-term vision.

So this started 1990, that's like thirty three years ago, is really clear how that's impacted across a variety of projects because in urban development terms, sometimes you do need that long-term view. One example is of many things that they've been doing is around their public parks programme, where they collected data, gender desegregated data about who was using the park, what time of day, what ages.

They found that up until about the age of eight years old, girls and boys were using the park at relatively similar numbers. After the age of eight, it tended to be just boys using the space and they're understanding their meaning making from that was that where space has to be socially negotiated. Meaning if you just have a field, then the traditional boys activities will win out. So the football, the basketball, the bigger space taking activities will win. And therefore, traditionally girls' activities will be marginalised and the space will not be there. So their solution to that was to create different or zoned areas within parks for different types of activity so that the space itself negotiated that use of space.

So there would be football pitches and there would be benches for talking and/ or more playful types of activities. And they found with that intervention, so with a gender lens and with gender disaggregated data after age eight, girls and boys were using the park at similar rates. Again, that took a long-term vision.

It took a willingness to collect data and really to understand what was going on, and then a financed set of work and projects to bring that to life. Of course, we don't want to then just create parks that have girls activities and boys activities. We want to go beyond that. We want to challenge that. So what you need to be able to do there is to manage and maintain spaces and create social programmes that support, for example, girls accessing football and boys accessing reading and talking.

That might be clubs that nurture and support that. So we really have to think the across the ways in which long-term strategic policy, vision and

action, data led design and community programmes work together to enable long-term change that we wanna see. So understanding that your gender presentation affects the way in which you experience space and that we need to design for those multiple types of experience.

The thing that comes up to me is public art of all kinds, renaming streets, plaques that tell the history of women in an area to make visible the diverse people that have shaped our space already. And to a sense of belonging for me is about an internal question is this space for someone like me and maybe of, and for someone like me.

And if I can see in murals and in plaques that someone like me is represented, then it helps me answer yes to that question. And so, I think we need to not undermine the power of that type of imagery. I was in a park with my nephew and it was on the site of an old school and there was a tuck shop that used to be there.

And there was an installation, sculptural installation, which was the footprint of the tuck shop that used to be there. And in it, a sculpture of a woman. And the plaque said, this is to represent all of the women who ran the tuck shop and who used to give a penny to kids on their birthday to buy sweets.

And to me that story of our history and and valuing the role of women in creating community and society was really profound and important and moving because we are used to memorialising war and the type of leadership that was actually quite destructive for our planet and history. And so if we can change the kinds of things that we esteem and represent is huge.

**Eve:** And there's so much, I mean, just that example, it's a beautiful example again, isn't it of what we value and different gendered perspectives on leadership there on contributions towards the city, towards a place. And I guess we see that play out as I think about public art and

heritage. One of the examples I remember when commissioning for the Emmeline Pankhurst statue in Manchester, which was to be only the second statue of a woman in Manchester, which seems phenomenal for a city that's been a trailblazer in women's rights, is there was a real tension in the conversation because it became about a statue of one woman and lots of women were saying, well, that isn't representative because women's cause has always been on the back of collective effort.

So why have we got a statue of one person? And their argument was immediately, that already wasn't a feminist perspective, it was never on her own that brought about the right to the vote. She was a important leader within a collective effort and collective action. So I guess it was just one of these many examples that it's not necessarily even just enough to go, okay, we can now have more statues of women or more murals of women.

It's also recognised there's probably gonna be big differences in how they're portrayed and in who's portrayed in their diversity.

**Elisabeth Lewis:** Yeah, it is, because also it is almost like a snapshot in time as well that you are showing in a statue or an action or a piece of art that doesn't necessarily tell the whole story. And you're seeing it through that lens at that time as well, aren't you? So, yes, it's a really difficult thing to portray and that's always the, the tension with heritage. Definitely.

**Ellie Cosgrave:** But this is the other thing that I think when we're taking feminist action so often we are fighting for the scraps of what's left over for, okay, we've got one statue that has to do the whole work of all of our storytelling and it will never get it right.

And so what we need is to be able to have a hundred statues or possibilities so that we don't have to fight over this one. So it needs to be part of everything that we do, and we have to acknowledge that there are

gonna be multiple ways and perspectives and tensions and disagreements. That's part of the process of taking action.

And let's not narrow it down to so myopic or so restricted that all we've got is this. If we can create a space where we can create change in all arenas of our lives. If we get it wrong, one in one statue, there's another statue that we're gonna be building next week as well. So you both

**Eve:** So you both talked a bit to the point that lots of people have a role in the design of our public sphere, public spaces, streets. What's the invitation? How can we invite more people to play a role? Cause often people don't have a sense of any power or agency around shaping even their streets. What can we do differently that opens up that invite?

**Ellie Cosgrave:** The way I think about it is a willingness to experiment in participation. So the way in which we do participation for design processes at the moment is often very much an afterthought. It's checking option A or option B, and there's very little difference between option A or option B, but you need to feel like you've had a choice or an input. I want to see the co-design at the beginning of projects where school children genuinely get to design their school street.

School children are the experts in what they need in terms of accessing their school environment, making sure that the ways in which we allow people to participate is not in our language, but in theirs. We don't know all of the best ways to do that now. And so we need to take a risk and we need to spend some time learning from communities about how they would think and how they would do various things.

So for example, we've been working in Wandsworth, Southwest London on their night-time strategy, and we worked with local community members to record the sounds of their night-time. What does the night-time sound like? What does your night-time sound like? We can think about it in a

different way, and we used that as a basis for conversation, a basis for meaning.

Rather than saying, what do you want to put in the night-time strategy? Which, what does that mean? This was one of the most amazing projects that I've been involved in because it showed to me the reality of the idea of the right to the city in its basic form. One of the people that we worked with, well, it was a mother and daughter who had experienced what they assumed as racial hate crime in their own area, just that summer, and the police had done nothing, but there was a sustained attack on their home, and as a result, the daughter didn't want to go out at night-time.

The mother described through participating in this project, working with the council to explain their experience of night-time, that that process of engagement, that itself told them that they're not alone and made them feel more connected to their community. And she describes watching her daughter, Wanting, saying, Mummy, Mummy, Mummy, can I go out after dark to record the sounds for this project we're participating in?

It shows me, and it shows us that participation itself is the end goal. Being able to have a right to say how I feel, describe my experience, is an output in itself. It's an added benefit. If we can put that into the night-time strategy, we can say, okay, police, what went on there? But it's an end goal in itself. Participating is the magical thing and it transforms our experience even when the city itself hasn't changed.

**Eve:** That's taken me to the story of the Owl that was afraid of the dark. Yeah, and I'm just thinking, I haven't thought about that for a while, since my kids are probably young, but that sense of, so we can't change the fact the sun will set every day and we'll have dark, and we've heard it repeatedly through this project so far.

How many women and girls and others feel that their places change and take on a different character and are not for them once after dark. And

there's things that are beyond our control. But that was such a beautiful story. An example of how you can shift your experience and perception of what you are hearing and what you're seeing, and make that celebratory instead.

So that we experience it differently. We own it, we belong, and then people gather and another key learning pillar, I guess, of this project so far as has been that piece about community, how the thing that makes the biggest difference is people feeling that they are part of a community and that makes them feel safe. So a place may not have otherwise changed, except if you gather and you feel community, then it feels like a place that you are welcome, are safe and belong.

**Elisabeth Lewis:** Through participation and contributing to that I mean we have done quite a lot of community engagement. But again, that's been a learning process for us because it's such a short timeframe for the project and that we've had various workshops, but one of the workshops that we did was in a school, and some of the things that the children said as part of that project were amazing.

They wanted houses on stilts in the quays, and, one child wanted to make sure that all houses could see a sunset, which just such a simple concept, isn't it? But seeing it through those different eyes. But as part of the planning process is there is that community engagement, there is that consultation, but sometimes it's limited.

And sometimes as officers, we feel like we're not really getting that message across, or we're not getting really the views and the voices of the people who need to be heard through that process.

**Ellie Cosgrave:** And that comes back as well to what I was saying at the beginning around educating our sector and learning within the sector about what is possible with a different type of engagement.



Because so often it becomes a statutory tick box. People maybe don't want it to be, maybe they want it to be more meaningful in their projects and they understand that development can be a much more social good than they're currently able to roll out in their own projects. So there is a piece around this, again, back to experimentation what is possible to change through a co-design process and starting to let go of some of the fears that come with how difficult community engagement can be, especially when you've never done it before. So lots of funding for experiments. That would be great.

**Eve:** And I mean there was a mention of risk before of fear, of tightly constrained processes that limit how much choice and flexibility.

So there's all these things that exist. Like, confines on what we can do and how people participate in shape and place. If we were to throw them all out, and if you were to say what could be possible have you got a sense of what you would like it to look like if all of that disappeared tomorrow?

**Elisabeth Lewis:** Yeah, I suppose the planning system's there to balance needs really. So it's not just considering one set of needs, you have to consider lots of different users of those spaces. So yeah, if it's none of those constraints, you might just favour one area of the community over another.

And that will be my fear really in doing that. So you do need some of those constraints I think to make sure that everyone has a voice as much as you possibly can. But I think, as you said earlier Ellie, that it's not always possible to make, to get everything right in one go. So I think it's making sure that you acknowledge where things have gone wrong and that things can change and that that process can change and evolve with it as well.

Yeah, I mean one of the things for the design code is leading with landscape. And that's something that we are really passionate about is bringing landscape forward in the borough and making sure that there are

hedges and trees and just even little pockets of landscapes really important to creating a better environment for everyone.

**Ellie Cosgrave:** Building on that point, I might suggest that we do focus on one user group, pick a user group, maybe the most marginalised group that you can imagine, and see what comes out when you design with those needs in mind. Because I think it's a yes and... improvisation mindset that there may well be a whole realm of possibilities that we can't even imagine.

It's why my fantasy is much is not at all about delivery. Maybe it would look exactly the same, but it would be of us, and that would transform our experience of it. Because at the moment I think we're just squishing it out with all of our requirements. That means that we've got like cookie cutter of the space that's being replicated globally. I think most cities are starting to look very similar.

**Elisabeth Lewis:** Yeah, I think that's a good point actually, that you get by trying to achieve too much. You are just becoming with a generic template almost, aren't you for some public space.

**Eve:** This discussion highlights yet again that we all have a role to play, to create a sense of belonging in our communities and streets, and the difference it makes when people in their diversity are involved in the design, planning and guardianship of places.

We need to design for diversity, accessibility, inclusion, heritage, culture, belonging, social interaction, movement, freedom and joy. We'll hear more from Elisabeth a little bit later when she takes on a little tour of some outside areas around the cricket ground. They're up for redevelopment soon as part of the council's civic quarter action plan.

## **Interview 2**

So you've heard from experts about the bigger picture, but what is it actually like to experience the streets first-hand and especially when the paths and places we use haven't been designed with accessibility in mind? I'm now joined online by resident of North Trafford, an advocate for accessibility.

**Sarah Brown-Fraser:** I'm Sarah Brown Fraser. I'm the External Affairs Manager for Activity Alliance, which is a national charity and leading voice for disabled people in sport and activity. I also live in Stretford in Manchester. I was born in Liverpool, but I moved to Manchester about fifteen years ago. I'm a wheelchair user as well.

**Eve:** And the founder of a Greater Manchester not-for-profit who supports active and healthy lives for disabled people.

**Ben Andrews:** My name is Ben Andrews. I'm Managing Director of a community interest company, Beyond Empower, and we help make mainstream provision in leisure and activity more accessible for disabled people. I'm not from Trafford. I'm over in Salford, just across the canal from Sarah. And I'm registered blind. So a real keen interest in access and inclusion.

**Eve:** I start by asking Sarah what safer, more welcoming and joyful streets look like to her.

**Sarah Brown-Fraser:** I think firstly, it's about a place I know I can go where I don't feel excluded, where I don't feel an afterthought, where I don't feel like, oh, if only they've just done that. A place where I can be me and feel like me without having to think about your daily lives and a place where I feel safe and supported, or that there is somewhere to go if I don't. And certainly I'm just not feeling like I'm left to everybody else to support me, but a place where I can go and think and just be me.

**Eve:** So in your experience, Sarah, as a woman and a wheelchair user who lives in the local area of North Trafford, anything in particular that you would say that adds to the mix because of your gender?

**Sarah Brown-Fraser:** I think it's an important point where you just raised as well, but the intersectionality of women and girls, we often forget I'm a woman first before I'm disabled, for example. So yes, when I think I'm thinking about safety. And if I am alone, I mean safe, have I got access to phones or somebody that can support me if I'm in trouble. I'd like to think as a woman that I'd have a place to go where it feels safe. There's somebody to go to if I need help, and I'm not alone.

**Ben Andrews:** Yeah, I think it varies from person to person. I think some of the things, whether people are disabled or not, are just standard good practice and make everyone feel a bit safer.

So, for example, good lighting. So my Mum was blind, my Mum was registered blind and dull lighting her as a woman who was registered blind. Similar condition to me, hers was a bit more progressed. I think it's just an extra level of anxiety because if you are in a position where you do need to get away quite quickly, as vulnerable as any woman would be in that position, I think it just adds an extra element of, I don't know, if I do try and get away, what am I going to run into?

Is it gonna be something that I'm gonna bang into? Is there something I'm gonna be falling over. So I think those are the additional elements that inaccess any additional uncertainty can add to disabled people.

**Sarah Brown-Fraser:** For me, I rely on the car so much because I reckon I could do some really quick routes. My office is five minutes down the road for example, but the pavement just doesn't warrant for me to arrive safely at work.

I'm really missing out because I live looking over the canal as well. One of the beautiful canals that we have in this region, and I can't get down to it, so I just look at it. I would definitely have a better way of life, a better way of living if things were improved in terms of access for pavements especially, and I'm probably not doing all the activity I could do.

**Ben Andrews:** I think if a service works for disabled people, then they will travel the extra distance to go to that service rather than a closer one. If the local leisure centre isn't accessible, but you've got one in another borough that is then disabled people will if they can travel that bit further to get there. So that then lengthens the amount of time it takes to get to the services. So it's not that the services don't exist in that place, it's just that they're inaccessible in that place.

**Sarah Brown-Fraser:** Or we actually would pay more to do other things that are just more accessible, and just a greater experience. So, for example, if we wanted to go to a park, I know people that would travel out of the area to get to a more accessible playground, for example, or a more accessible activity centre. So yeah, I do think we go where the places are that we know about and we've heard about.

**Ben Andrews:** Yeah, absolutely. Yeah. And even in there there is sort of an element of privilege in that some people can travel further distances to access those services, but for a lot of disabled people living in poverty, they might not have access to transport. They might be dependent on those services and unable to access them and not able to access anywhere outside of their area. So it's really important we're getting the local services right.

**Eve:** So we obviously want to take a whole life course approach to thinking about our streets and public spaces and things like, yeah, the joy of the journey play on the way. These things are really important. It's not just about how long it takes you to get there. It's a social element that is key for so many of us and how spaces help us to connect to each other, to

ourselves, to our local place, to sense of identity. And obviously that looks different. It looks different for a whole host of reasons, but it looks different over our life course. So in terms of play and disabled children and young people, it'd be great to hear any examples of what good looks like.

**Ben Andrews:** Yeah, I think when it comes to accessible play we know that disabled children are more likely to be excluded from play. And we know play is vital for development into adulthood.

And when it comes to accessible playgrounds, at least from my learning experience, it is getting better. So we've now got to a stage where people might be including swings that wheelchair users can access on the playgrounds or roundabouts and stuff like that. But I think it's important that you can't just stop there.

That is not an accessible place, that's an equivalent of saying a building completely accessible cause it's got a ramp out front. You need to be thinking about the colours of surfaces. How do they contrast with the equipment in the play area. As Sarah touched on, you need to think about how those opportunities are advertised, are they're being advertised in accessible format through council websites in the places where disabled children are accessing already. Special education needs schools, those types of environments and mainstream because of the integration agenda up the minute. So just making disabled children aware that some thought has been put into these places. They're an ongoing piece of work. Their wants and desires from the playground will be heard and listened to to make it, to improve it, but for now those considerations are being taken to make it a more accessible place for disabled children.

**Eve:** So you've mentioned a couple of I guess great assets you've got like the canal in theory and the park, but how they're not always accessible to everybody. So are there some things you can point to, I guess, coming to you first, Sarah, around things that do work well. What makes the difference?

**Sarah Brown-Fraser:** So if we talk about Longford Park, believe it or not, I've lived here for fifteen years and I only discovered Longford Park during lockdown. And that was because I live in an apartment, although I've got gardens around me being out and having that freedom during lockdown was really important to me, and I think everyone discovered that need for greater mental health during that period of time especially.

But during the good weather, I was like, where can I go and Longford Park. Actually, there's always bits of improvement you can make to anything, but it was flat surface, like pathways. There was an accessible toilet available. There's the coffee shop of course for ice cream. And all the areas were accessible to me just to just go out and have a walk and be in the fresh air.

And for me it just made me think about how much I like the fresh air and just being out, don't have to spend money just enjoying the bit of the free time. So Longford Park's definitely one of them and I'm very excited about the potential that Stretford especially is being spent. A lot of investments actually is going into our area and I'm very excited that hopefully that there's a lot of thought gone into it, accessibility and inclusion and that those new spaces that we're expecting are actually gonna be really considering the local community in all it's beauty.

**Eve:** And that's one of the things you've really helped facilitate Ben, in terms of making sure that when there are opportunities like that around redevelopment that more thought is given for to differing needs. So any examples of what good looks like then how can we design places, streets that do work for everyone. What's the process?

**Ben Andrews:** There's two sides to this. So I think short term is reaching out to local disabled people groups, who are interested in this space. I don't think it's good enough just to engage with any disabled person who might not be interested in this conversation because the large majority of disabled people are just going about their days.

They might be coming up against some of this stuff, but they might not want to spend their time thinking of solutions around it. And then I think the next stage is, although disabled people are all different, access needs can become quite similar. We're saying the same things over and over again in different localities, different disabled people saying the same thing.

Sarah is saying smooth pavements, I'm saying reduce the amount of street clutter that will be repeated over and over again by other wheelchair users and other blind and visually impaired people. So for me it's not really efficient just to keep having those conversations for the sake of saying we've done consultation. How do we collect all that information, bring it together in a really accessible way to the likes of planners, architects, infrastructure teams, so that we've just got collective standards that we can implement across the board so that there's not inconsistencies, it's not a postcode lottery.

I live here. So the access is really good. It's not a priority. So it isn't, it's just these are what we work to, because these have all been informed by disabled people, and we've worked together to ensure and endorse them.

**Sarah Brown-Fraser:** I think for me it's also having somebody who champions. So we talk about allies quite a lot, but somebody at every level within those systems, within the highways department, those departments that actually champion disabled people and the barriers to activity or the barriers to walkways, cause it's gonna take more than just Ben and I at a local level shouting up.

It's gonna take somebody with the budget, with the plan to say this doesn't work for a lot of our community. So yeah, championing at every level and you don't have to be disabled to champion that. So actually you've gotta be seen to be heard. And as much as I agree sometimes it sucks. It sucks to be disabled and sometimes you just think I'm fed up of telling everyone my problem and actually what you need to do to change it.



But sometimes it works. So sometimes actually saying, actually the next time you do it, can you make sure that you think about this for me or think about it for a lot more people and you'll get more customers. Cause I'll shout about it.

**Eve:** So are there, if you were to pick a couple of key things that you think need to change what would you point to Ben?

**Ben Andrews:** I think it goes back to what I was saying before, so consultation with local groups who are interested in this space and want to be part of the conversation. And I think making a consultation process if it is going to go ahead, as accessible as possible. So having tactile drawings, if there's any new design put in place, ideal drawings that have been informed by people before they've, they've actually been put together, making sure the venues that you're holding consultations are accessible.

There's ramps. It's good lighting. There's British sign language interpretation available if people want it. And then as I said earlier, all of us trying to get on the same page with what does good look like, because this isn't a never ending journey. This is very much, once we know the best dimensions for a dropped curb, that's it we know the best dimensions for a dropped curb. It doesn't go on forever. We don't have to keep redesigning that. Once we know that we need to leave a certain amount of space between a tree and a wall to allow a certain width of wheelchair to get through or to make it as easy as possible for people to navigate, that's it we can stick to that standard. So there is an end point to this, and its just people being willing to work through that process.

**Sarah Brown-Fraser:** If it's good for a wheelchair user, it's usually good for a mom with a pram or a dad with a pram, or somebody who's visually impaired who needs to get through, somebody with a pram can't walk through if there's a bin in the way.

**Ben Andrews:** Yeah, and I think also how the infrastructure in the way we're designing things supports our changing culture. So the more accessible places we create, the more people are able to access those places, the more normal and boring people accessing those places becomes. And that's what we want really in the end.

Disabled people just want to be getting around in as boring a way as possible like everybody else and just blend in in that type of environment, and I think until the infrastructure allows that to happen, there's always gonna be a lack of awareness. There's always gonna be a lack of understanding about what it means to be disabled.

And it always be a shock to people seeing disabled people getting around in these type of places. So I think it's just important to really acknowledge how infrastructure can support that change in awareness, understanding, and culture.

**Eve:** A big thanks to Sarah and Ben for joining me online to share their experiences and ideas, so involving people locally, making streets and spaces more accessible.

Really thinking about everybody and increasing visibility of our differing needs and wishes really do make places better for all of us. And then just think about the benefit we can all get when we see each other, meet each other, be outside, and maybe in Ben's words, in a very boring day to day way.

Hopefully we will all get a chance to see that in the future. And as Ben and Sarah mentioned, it's all about a joined up approach to making this a reality.

### **Interview 3**

So earlier in the episode, Elisabeth Lewis Heritage Development Officer spoke about Trafford Council's design code. Well, we're back with Elisabeth on the streets of North Trafford to see what the future has in store for the area around the town hall.

Hey, good to see you.

**Elisabeth Lewis:**

**Eve:** So we're here outside Trafford Town Hall on Warwick Road. And I'm with Elisabeth Lewis from Trafford Council. Do you want to tell us your role?

**Elisabeth Lewis:** So, yes, I'm the Heritage and Urban Design Manager for the council based in the planning department.

**Eve:** And for anyone who doesn't know where Trafford Town Hall is, we're just next to Old Trafford football ground and it's match day. So we've got a Manchester United and Leeds game, is that right?

**Elisabeth Lewis:** Yes. Yeah, it is.

**Eve:** So, and it's, it's now about four o'clock and the game's at eight o'clock. And it's interesting cause it's already a vibe, isn't there? There's already, you can see there's people turning up, there's scarves, there's stools being set up.

So there's a real sense that already in this place people are getting ready really for the game. And that's a dominant feel. And then we've got in the other direction, we've got the cricket ground. So we're in between these two big sporting assets in Trafford, and we're gonna go and have a little look around and we're gonna hear a little bit about some of the plans going forward for this site.

The Civic Quarter area action plan named after the area that we're standing in now, outside of Trafford Town Hall and up the road around Old Trafford Cricket Ground has just been adopted by Trafford Council. According to Elisabeth, it's the first policy plan they've adopted since 2012. A regeneration strategy.

It's going to deliver a master plan and regeneration strategy for the area. And Elisabeth who hit us here now to show us what's in store.

**Elisabeth Lewis:** We'll go down towards Talbot Road. Have a look at little look around there and then yeah, explain some of the things that are coming forward. Right, let's go.

We're walking towards the kinda intersection really between, Warwick Road and Talbot Road, right opposite the cricket ground and Trafford Town Hall.

And this is where there's gonna be a processional and wellbeing route coming forward in the plan. So that's gonna deliver huge improvements to the public realm. Lots of pedestrian and cycle route and lots more landscaping. We're gonna make it slightly wider. We're gonna create a fan zone in front of the cricket ground, and more landscaping as well, and trees just to improve the overall look and vision of the area.

**Eve:** So, processional and wellbeing route immediately. I picture literally procession.

**Elisabeth Lewis:** Yes.

**Eve:** What does that actually mean?

**Elisabeth Lewis:** Well, they've called it a ceremonial route. So it will link the cricket ground to Old Trafford. But I think it's just a mark really to that

route at the moment because when you step off the tram stop at Old Trafford, a lot of people don't really know where they are.

They come to these international sporting venues and it will define that route really. I mean, what ceremonies and processions will be, I don't know, in the future, hopefully lots, but it will really mark that route up to Old Trafford, so wayfinding and signposting will be massively improved there.

**Eve:** And more greening, cause I guess when you look around, actually one of the nice things where we are stood, which is just on the corner really, the town hall is there is some quite nice green landscaping just here, isn't there? And it does help to hide some of the noise of the vote. And we can even hear birds. I have to say I was quite surprised. So, it's gonna be even greener.

**Elisabeth Lewis:** It is, yeah. So when you look at Talbot Road, that will be wider. They will get rid of the pavement, the curbs, it will be all shared public realm, and they'll be more landscaping in trees and a wider space right in front of the cricket ground itself.

So there are already some trees down Talbot Road. it's not unattractive, but it will be improved with a more defined cycle route as well, because at the moment you've got these cycle wands that stick up for the roots. So visually it doesn't look great.

**Eve:** It's really busy, on Talbot Road. We've just nipped into the car park outside the cricket club.

**Elisabeth Lewis:** Yeah, so we're opposite the sunken garden at Trafford Town Hall. It's a space that gets really well used actually on match days and a lot of offices in the council use it for lunch and the college opposite. You get quite often get students coming and sitting in there.

So it's a good space. And it was refurbished as part of the new Town Hall extension quite a few years ago now. But walking along the A56 is not pleasant. There's lots of pollution and noise and there's quite a lot of barriers as well. It's very difficult to cross the road. So there's some improvements that could be made there I think.

**Eve:** What decisions do you make when you are walking to and from work?

**Elisabeth Lewis:** I mean, I tend to take the same route in that I go up Talbot Road and then cross the A56, but the crossings are very difficult and they take a long time. So quite a short journey, A short walk, those crossings when it takes five minutes to cross the road makes quite a big difference really.

So that's quite a limited way you can do that in terms of different times of the year. At the moment, it's dark when I leave work, so I do tend to think more about where I walk home and, I have to pass Gorse Hill Park. It gets quite dark near there. So yeah, it makes me more aware of I'm on my own.

I've gotta make sure I have my phone with me. So, yeah, sometimes that's not ideal. I've never experienced anything, but I'm very conscious that because it's such a busy road as well, there are not many people walking. So you can't quite often be on your own. And then with the barriers as well, you can feel, it feels a bit trapped sometimes. If you did need to cross the road suddenly you can't do that. It's difficult.

**Eve:** We continue our mini tour on walk a short distance from the Cricket Club and across a small road to UA92. It's a relatively new FE education college that opened in September, 2019. Their building, the one that we're standing outside of was once home to Kelloggs.

They had their UK headquarters here for 37 years before moving down the road to Media City in Salford. So there's quite a bit of construction work

that's been going on here already, and there's some big plans afoot. So do you wanna just talk us through those?

**Elisabeth Lewis:** Yes, so the building on site at the moment at the cricket ground, they've got permission planning permission for a new hotel and stand.

I think it includes a museum as well, which is great. It's an international sporting venue and that really is really important here for the area because there's a history of that. And it's an important aspect of the heritage generally in the civic quarter. And then behind us we've got the former headquarters for Kelloggs, which is now UA92, the University Academy, and again, that's sporting related, so it's great to have that in such close proximity to the cricket ground.

And behind that we've got a, we've got plans at the moment in for a mixed use development, so residential business, and retail as well. And I think there's gonna be a big energy centre as part of that. So it's quite an interesting vibrant neighbourhood that's coming forward there.

**Eve:** You're a woman that works and lives locally and are involved in the design, which is brilliant because we know as a workforce it's quite male dominated, isn't it still. So looking through that lens, what are the things that you see and that you'd like to see be different as this areas developed?

**Elisabeth Lewis:** I mean we've touched upon public realm. I think that's a really big issue. And I think in terms of things like lighting, and landscaping, just make that a more inviting environment for everybody really. And access is another issue here. Very conscious about people with mobility issues, but also Mum's, pushchairs, who he wants to come and bring their children down here.

It works really well at Salford Quays at the moment. There's a lot of children and parents go down and play there. It'd be great to have more of that section of the community, spend time and dwell down here as well in some of these bigger public health realm areas we can create and things like the fun zone, make sure it's accessible for everybody really.

**Eve:** So I've got a very different image in my head that you've just created now of this being a space where I can see kids playing and family sitting outside, which is not, it's probably not the current vibe really. So as we've got, I mean, we've got some, actually some really nice greening around us, but it doesn't quite invite that joy of the journey or play on the way at the moment, does it?

**Elisabeth Lewis:** It doesn't. And I think, I mean, I don't quite know, again, the detail of how this area would look, but I think it's important that we can make sure everyone can access this area, not just the fans for the sporting, but also, I mean, lots of children, lots of women attend football matches and the cricket grounds, so that should be encouraged more.

**Eve:** Definitely. Well, it sounds exciting. Sounds like a great opportunity. It's fab. I'm getting a bit cold, so I think we might need to walk.

**Elisabeth Lewis:** Yes, Carry on.

**Eve:** Leaving UA92 behind us, we wander just three minutes up a pedestrian walkway with the cricket ground on our right to the main tram stop Trafford Park.

It gets really busy here if there's a sporting event or concert, and it's one of the closest tram stops to Manchester United. And it's right behind the cricket ground.



**Elisabeth Lewis:** What is incredible is that at the moment people, we get people coming from all over the place to visit these sporting venues, but they get to the tram stop and they don't know where they are.

They know it's Old Trafford tram stop, but there's no sign that tells you where, you can see the cricket grounds in front of you, but there's no sign to Old Trafford. So quite often get asked where do I go? Which is just incredible when you think about it, that you can arrive here at this international sports venue and there's just no signage that, so with these improvements, hopefully people will have a much better sense of where they are in that sense of place as well, which is really important.

One of the policies in the Civic Quarter Area Action plan is to embrace and enhance the heritage, which is really hidden in this area. As I mentioned before, there's a real history of sporting and cultural buildings and attractions here. It started off with the Royal Botanical Gardens in 1831.

There's some remnants of that at White City Retail Park. There are some gates there. And so they were the original gates to the botanical gardens, they're listed. And so part of the plan proposes public realm around there and better access and connectivity to that. And then there were various exhibitions, and then Old Trafford, I think that was started in 1910.

So, there's a long history here of sports. There's a fascinating building just down Talbot Road, which is the Old Trafford bowling club, and that was built in 1877 and it's still going as a bowling club now. It's a brilliant building. We've got a listing application in for that at the moment.

We're waiting to hear on that. So, it's fabulous. It's still in use as its intended purpose all this time. So, survived the Second World War. Really, any developments that come forward want to try and enhance the heritage. How they do that and interpret them is obviously up to those individual sites. , but something more tangible really, that people can

understand the long, rich, diverse history that we have here. And really wanna see that in built form, which would be great.

**Eve:** Right. Let's keep moving.

So we loop back on ourselves and walk back to Trafford Town Hall and take a seat in the Sunken Gardens that we could see from across the road at the cricket ground earlier. We're not that far from Talbot Road that was really noisy and just the difference some greening and softening can make to sense of place. I can see why you'd come out here actually at lunchtime. It has an appeal now.

**Elisabeth Lewis:** It's very hot sometimes as well. And it's sunny, believe it or not, but I think because it's sunken as well, it's slightly lower down. That helps. You get a nice feeling from sitting out here. So it's good.

**Eve:** Someone knew what they were doing when they designed this.

**Elisabeth Lewis:** They did. And that was back in like the 1930s.

**Eve:** Yeah, it's a good example, isn't it of good design and there's lots of places to sit. To just hang out and be. There's stairs right in front of us. But it does look like there's an accessible route in just over there. If you had a buggy or a wheelchair user.

**Elisabeth Lewis:** They did make some changes to it when they did the refurbishment ten years ago. So they've improved some of the seating and put that ramp in that you've noticed.

**Eve:** So we've pointed some of the good stuff and some of the things that we're excited to see change. Anything else that you'd want to I guess point to in terms of within the Trafford area that are maybe examples of good design?

**Elisabeth Lewis:** I think one place that sticks out for me is Limelight, and the community village hub that they've created there.

They've made some improvements to the street as well, which I think worked really well. There's lots of landscaping and they created a garden out the front with some seating. And then I think the uses as well. There's a nursery, there's a new church, well I wanna say new, I think it's been there for a few years, but the St. Brides Church and they put a lot of activities and lots of events on there, which I've used as a Mum. I think that's really stands out in Old Trafford for me as a great bit of new design or recent design better.

**Eve:** A big thanks to Elisabeth for showing us around the new Civic Quarter Area Action plan. Lots of exciting plans afoot.

## **Outro**

Wow. What's a jam packed conversation! I'm really struck by the need to design for multiple experiences and perspectives and just how much better life can be when we design streets and spaces in a way that really do enable people to freely and actively move around. This podcast is just the start of the conversation.

We'd love to hear from you. Tell us what good design looks and feels like in your area. Where do you go that feels accessible for all? What do you see that ignites a sense of curiosity about the history of local people in place. What brings you nourishment, joy, wellbeing, or invites you to be active? Do you notice gender differences in the way people you know navigate space and talk about our streets and places?

Well, whatever it is, let us know and we'll share your thoughts on future episodes of this podcast. We've got a few ways you can get in touch. You can tell us on social media we are on Facebook and Twitter. Simply search GM Moving or GreaterSport.

Or you can leave us a voicemail. You can find the link in the episode show notes and our GM Moving website. Search Right to the Streets podcast.

A big thanks is ever to everyone who's contributed to this episode. We'll be releasing more episodes throughout the next few months so keep an eye on our social media pages for the next one, or simply hit follow or subscribe on whatever podcast player you are listening to right now.

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