

4. Why ask about gender?

Blog Series: Planning the Data Revolution

Why ask about gender?

During a review of our methodology, we realised that we weren't collecting data on the gender of respondents. It seems obvious now, but after looking at the wider market, including recent award-winning engagement exercises, it was clear that no one else was asking the question either.

Do men and women view development differently? Are they influenced by different aspects? Do they have different priorities? We didn't know and it looked like no one else did.

We have collected more than 3,000 records since we asked ourselves this question and there are a few insights we have been able to draw out.



Men or Women, is there a difference?

Over a range of different consultations, response rates come out within a few percentage points of 50/50. We have found that other factors are much more influential on whether men or women support development, such as age or the type of scheme.

For instance, a consultation conducted on the future of an industrial site saw 60% of respondents identify as male, which was representative of a workforce where a significant amount of the workforce was male.

What was more interesting, however, were the differences in how they respond to certain questions.

Changing Behaviours

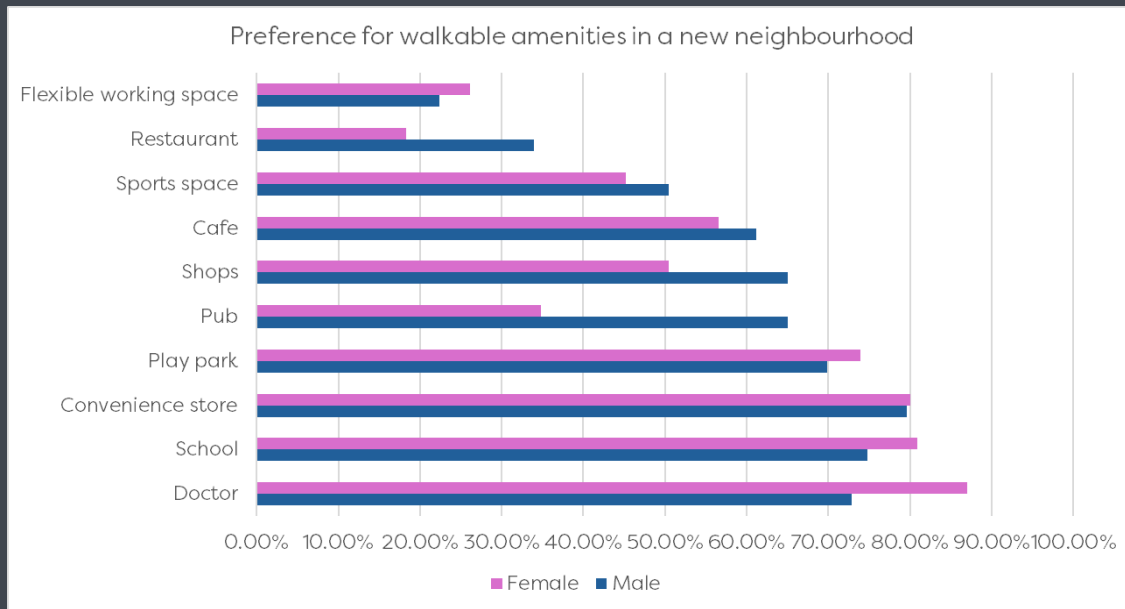
The provision of active travel infrastructure, such as dedicated cycle routes or hire facilities, is central to the design of healthy, sustainable places. In several consultations we have asked respondents if the inclusion of this type of infrastructure would change how they travel, such as for commuting or local journeys.

While the rates vary depending on where the consultation is conducted, women are less likely to say they will change their behaviour while men are more likely to say they will change how they travel for most journeys. In a recent consultation, women were 11% less likely to change their behaviour, whilst 19% of men said they would - over twice what women said.

There could be many different reasons that are influencing these responses. Research has shown that women overwhelmingly bear the responsibility for child and elderly care, which is more likely to necessitate the use of a car. Other research has suggested men are more confident cycling on the road.

Wants and needs

Something many developers are interested to find out more about is what amenities and services potential residents would like within a walkable distance. We have found a few differences between men and women, as shown in the graph below:



Findings from a recent consultation with 350 respondents

Men were almost twice as likely to choose ‘Pub’ or ‘Restaurant’. Shops, as opposed to convenience store, were also an amenity that men favoured. For women, ‘Doctor’ was the amenity chosen by most and documented the largest difference between the two genders, where women favoured it more.

Other amenities women favoured more than men, albeit by smaller margins, were ‘School’, ‘Playpark’ and ‘Flexible working space’.

Some of these differences are evident in other consultations where similar versions of this question have been asked. As we collect more data, this is an area that is likely to reveal other important trends.

Designing spaces for everyone

The industries that design and decide on our public places have traditionally been dominated by men, whether it be town planning, engineering or politics.

This is changing and as engagement specialists, we should be helping to speed up this realignment by breaking down barriers to participation and proactively seek responses from different demographics. For example, the London Legacy Development Corporation (LLDC) published a handbook detailing best practice for creating spaces for women and girls. When it was published in 2024, they were the only authority with this type of guidance available.

The best decisions are made when a plurality of ideas is considered, which can't be done if we don't even record the gender of our respondents.



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