



# Fair Play

A consultation on the play strategy

A commitment from  
**The Children's Plan**



department for  
**children, schools and families**



department for  
**culture, media  
and sport**

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# Foreword



## Foreword by the Secretaries of State for Children, Schools and Families, and Culture, Media and Sport

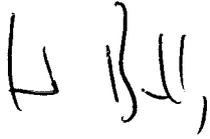
We all want our children to have fun and be safe as they play. It is fundamental to the successful development of every child. Play encourages creativity, teaches children to be innovative, to learn about risk and increases their sense of independence. It is essential to children's physical health and development, and helps children learn how to get on with each other.

The Children's Plan set out a new agenda on how our departments will work together to support children to play with the biggest ever investment in play of £225 million. We've now added an extra £10 million to this, meaning that over the next three years we'll be spending £235 million on helping children to play. This is a vital investment in our children and our shared future.

Every parent wants safe places for their children to play close to where they live. We need public play space that is safe but also exciting and stimulating. Play areas should be well looked after and respected by children and adults alike and all children – of all abilities and backgrounds – should be able to access them. We need children and their parents to be involved in the design of play spaces that are near where they live, and they should be able to help decide what is right for their communities.

We also want people who control what happens in local areas to think about play more, including those people who work in the planning, transport, housing and environmental sectors. We want local authorities to give a high priority to supporting and promoting outdoor play, with play and public play space being seen as an essential characteristic of a healthy community. This is why, from 2009, we will introduce a new indicator on what children think about the parks and play spaces in their local area.

This consultation document seeks to promote discussion about how we could all do better at this and build a society with more and better opportunities for all children to play. We want to hear your views so please get involved and tell us what you want.

Handwritten signature of Ed Balls in black ink.

**Ed Balls**

Secretary of State for Children, Schools and Families

Handwritten signature of Andy Burnham in black ink.

**Andy Burnham**

Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport

# Executive summary

1. Strong, vibrant communities should offer a variety of places for children to play, places in which children have a stake and that they can help shape through their active involvement in design and decision making. All children and young people should be able to find places, near their homes, where they can play freely and meet their friends. They should feel confident and safe to play, both indoors and out, and in a manner that is appropriate to their needs and interests. Play will support community cohesion and help keep children healthy.
2. Government's aim is that:
  - a. in every residential area, there is a variety of places for play, free of charge, supervised and unsupervised;
  - b. local neighbourhoods are, and feel like, safe, interesting places to play;
  - c. routes to children's play space are safe and accessible for all children and young people;
  - d. parks and open spaces are attractive and welcoming to children and young people, and are well-maintained and well-used;
  - e. children and young people have a clear stake in public space and their play is accepted by their neighbours;
  - f. children and young people behave in a way that respects other people and property;
  - g. children, young people and their families take an active role in the development of local play spaces; and
  - h. play places are attractive, welcoming, engaging and accessible for all local children and young people, including disabled children, children of both genders, and children from minority groups in the community.
3. Play is not only a vital part of the way children enjoy their childhood, but it is central to all the *Every Child Matters*<sup>1</sup> outcomes. Play is essential for children's good physical and mental health and development. Through taking risks whilst playing they also learn how to manage risk – helping them to stay safe. Play develops learning skills, central to achievement, and is essential

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<sup>1</sup> See [www.everychildmatters.gov.uk/aims](http://www.everychildmatters.gov.uk/aims)

for the development of the skills that children and young people need as they become adults and move on in education or into work.

4. However, while there are more opportunities for children and families now than ever before to use dedicated play facilities, a number of barriers still exist. Parents worry about children's safety if they are playing outside, access to good play spaces is still a problem, and the quality of parks and play spaces often puts families off going to these. The needs of children are not always taken into account when public spaces are designed, and estimates suggest there is much less play space per child than standards recommend.
5. This consultation sets out government's proposals on play, structured around the priorities identified by research and through consultation with parents, play experts, and children.

### Supporting play throughout childhood

6. Play should be at the heart of children's everyday lives and experiences throughout childhood. Children play at school and home, in parks and green spaces, and while travelling. They take part in games with their friends, play as part of learning, and in both supervised and unsupervised play. We want children to enjoy a healthy balance of both structured and unstructured activities in their leisure time.
7. Government believes that play should be an integral part of our wider policies for children and young people.
8. In order to support play throughout childhood, government has;
  - a. given children the opportunity to learn through play in **early years**;
  - b. made proposals to increase the support for play offered by **Sure Start Children's Centres**;
  - c. set out how we propose to support play through **schools**, including a focus on improving play facilities on school sites;
  - d. given children and young people more opportunities for **physical activity, physical education and sport**;
  - e. emphasised **creativity in play**;
  - f. set out the importance of **play for children visiting parents in prison**;
  - g. emphasised links between play-based activities and other provision for **young people**; and
  - h. set out how provision must support the inclusion of **disabled children**.

### More places to play

9. Having more high quality and safe places to play is a priority for both children and parents across England. Significant investment is already being made in improving access to play. £124 million has been allocated to local authorities through the BIG Lottery £155 million

Children's Play initiative to support development of free, local, inclusive play spaces, with the remaining funds being used to support play infrastructure and local projects.

10. The Children's Plan announced a significant programme of capital investment to make more play areas safe and exciting places to be. We are making our biggest ever investment of £235 million in play over the three years 2008–11. Exciting new public play areas will be developed with this investment, led strategically by local authorities working in partnership with district and town councils, the third sector, children, families and community groups. In April 2008, 63 local authorities will begin using their funding to improve local play offers, including 20 large scale pathfinder authorities<sup>2</sup>.
11. Play space needs to be of high quality and good design to attract children and families and become a valued part of the local environment. Poor quality, unimaginative space will not be attractive to children, will not be valued by the local community, and will fall into disuse and disrepair. Good design is a good investment.
12. In order to create more high quality places to play, we propose to:
  - a. invest £235 million over the next three years to **develop up to 3,500 public play areas**;
  - b. support **pathfinders to develop 30 adventure playgrounds** or play parks aimed at 8–13 year-olds in disadvantaged areas;
  - c. work with local authorities to ensure sites are stimulating, exciting, and attractive to children – including through closely **involving children, families and communities** in planning and design;
  - d. provide clear guidance on developing **interesting and fun places to play**; and
  - e. emphasise the importance of **maintaining sites**.

## Playing safely

13. Children need to take risks to learn how to manage risks. This is an essential part of growing up, and play is one of the most important ways in which they develop this vital skill. Riding a bicycle, climbing a scramble net, or pushing a friend on a swing all involve risk. It is essential that we do not try and remove all the risk from play or wrap children in cotton wool.
14. Concerns about safety are among the biggest barriers to outdoor play that children face, but this does not mean we should be stopping them from learning and exploring. The Government is committed to addressing these concerns and to tackling safety issues and perceptions that are preventing children from enjoying play.
15. Children and young people today are, in many ways, safer than in previous generations. Eighty seven per cent of young people responding to the *Staying Safe*<sup>3</sup> consultation thought children were safe, and rates of accidents are down, including on the roads. Yet three-quarters of parents say they think children today are more at risk than children five years ago.<sup>i</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> See Annex 1

<sup>3</sup> See [www.everychildmatters.gov.uk/stayingsafe](http://www.everychildmatters.gov.uk/stayingsafe)

16. We propose to help children play safely by:
  - a. **tackling bullying** in public places;
  - b. continuing to work with our partners to **improve safety from crime on the streets**;
  - c. improving **road safety** in a number of ways, including a focus on improving skills and behaviour and creating a safer street environment; and
  - d. increasing the availability of **supervised play**, including through working with the volunteering sector to test a new local volunteer infrastructure to support play.
17. We will focus on risk and the benefits of play through:
  - a. increasing parents' **knowledge and understanding of the risks and benefits of play**;
  - b. taking action to address **negative perceptions of children and young people**; and
  - c. investigating whether **excessive health and safety fears** can cause local authorities to buy unstimulating and unpopular play equipment.

### Child-friendly communities

18. Designated play areas must not be the only places where children are allowed or expected to play. It is important that the wider environment encourages play, and sometimes a pavement pattern or a grassy area can have as much play value as a piece of dedicated play equipment. Children's needs should be reflected in the planning of local areas, and local communities should be empowered to be involved in these decisions.
19. A community where children are playing is a healthy and sustainable community and, to support this, children need to be given the time, space, and opportunity to play. Yet children's needs can be ignored in public space design, reducing the opportunities available for them to play outdoors. Similarly, play is often inappropriately moved away from housing and adult activity because of concerns about noise and nuisance from children's play. We need to put an end to the culture of 'no ball games here'. We are determined to make it the rule, not the exception, that children's needs are reflected in local decision-making, and believe that this will encourage flourishing, confident and cohesive communities.
20. We propose to make public space more child-friendly through:
  - a. DCSF and DCMS working with the department for Communities and Local Government (CLG), the Department for Transport and others to include **a stronger focus on spaces suitable for play** in the planning system, including continuing to improve our parks and green spaces;
  - b. a programme of activity to provide **cross-professional training for people who design and manage public space**; and
  - c. making **play a focus of flagship developments** such as eco-towns, healthy towns, growth points and the Olympic Park.

21. We propose to empower communities to support children playing by:
  - a. supporting **local community ownership of space suitable for play** through harnessing CLG's community empowerment agenda;
  - b. helping to publicise **Grassroots Grants and Community Spaces**; and
  - c. supporting **more positive relationships between adults and children in public space**.

### Sustaining and embedding play

22. Play has historically had a low profile in many local services. The DCMS publication *Time for Play* (2006)<sup>4</sup> recommended that local authorities and other local strategic partners give play a much greater profile and priority in future than they had in the past.
23. Government wants the investment it is making to have a lasting impact and this can only be achieved through play provision being shared and managed by communities and local authorities and their strategic partners. Play needs greater prioritisation locally, the skills and capacity of the play workforce need to be increased, and play provision included in local authority policies and performance management.
24. This embedding of play in local policy has already begun. In response to the BIG Lottery Children's Play initiative, nearly all unitary and district authorities now have a play strategy in place<sup>5</sup>, and many local areas already offer a variety of exciting places for children to play.
25. We propose to sustain and embed play by:
  - a. introducing a **play indicator** to the national indicator set to encourage all authorities to prioritise delivery of better play opportunities;
  - b. using our **new funding to drive high-level planning and partnerships** on play locally, including the routine involvement of communities;
  - c. recognising play as an element of the responsibilities of **Children's Trusts, Directors of Children's Services, and local authority Chief Executives** and highlighting how local strategic partnerships can support play;
  - d. investigating how **Primary Care Trusts** can contribute to the play agenda;
  - e. clarifying **the role of Government Offices**;
  - f. professionalising the **play workforce**; and
  - g. working with **play pathfinders** to test potential solutions to barriers to play.

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<sup>4</sup> <http://www.culture.gov.uk/NR/rdonlyres/6113A6E7-458B-4D58-894D-9AAA62CACD01/0/DCMSPlayReport.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> Guidance to local authorities on preparing strategies for improving children's play opportunities was published by PlayEngland in 2006. See [http://www.playengland.org.uk/downloads/pdf/planning\\_for\\_play.pdf](http://www.playengland.org.uk/downloads/pdf/planning_for_play.pdf).

# Introduction

1. One of the principles underpinning the Children's Plan is that children and young people need to enjoy their childhood as well as grow up prepared for adult life. Play is something that children truly enjoy, and which their parents want to see their children enjoy. Government's ambition is that all children should enjoy playing in safe environments and live in communities where play is welcomed.
2. We use 'play' in this document to describe what children and young people do when they follow their own ideas and interests in their own way and for their own reasons, balancing fun with a sense of respect for themselves and others. These proposals are meant to improve outdoor play – to children this means things like going to the park, playing in cul-de-sacs, riding bikes, and looking for buried treasure<sup>6</sup>.
3. Government values play for its own sake, as a vital ingredient in a happy childhood, which is reflected in Article 31 of the United Nation Convention on the Rights of the Child. We increasingly understand the proven benefits that play brings in terms of a healthy childhood and the acquisition of some of the key skills that children and young people need as they become adults and progress in education or into work.
4. Play is not only a vital part of the way children enjoy their childhood, but it is central to all the *Every Child Matters*<sup>7</sup> outcomes. Play is essential for children's good physical and mental health and development. Through taking risks whilst playing they also learn how to manage risk – helping them to stay safe. Play develops learning skills, central to achievement.
5. Yet there is evidence that opportunities for play – particularly child-led, outdoor play – are falling. Concerns about safety, the loss of open green space, the poor quality and inaccessibility of many existing play areas, including for disabled children, and the increasingly structured use of children's spare time are all barriers to children engaging in more outdoor play.
6. One of the main messages fed back through the *Time to Talk*<sup>8</sup> consultation with children and parents on the Children's Plan was that there are not enough safe, challenging, stimulating places for children and young people to go, that children's needs are often ignored in public

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6 Plain English Research on Play, Sherbert Research for DCSF and COI, 2008.

7 See [www.everychildmatters.gov.uk/aims/](http://www.everychildmatters.gov.uk/aims/)

8 See [www.dcsf.gov.uk/timetotalk](http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/timetotalk)

space design, and that tackling this is one of the most important things that government can do to help families today.

7. This consultation sets out government's proposals for addressing these challenges through a £235 million play programme and through wider actions to promote play, particularly outdoor play for 8-13 year olds, where feedback suggests there is a lack of current provision. The purpose of this consultation is to raise awareness of issues relating to play, to set out what is already being done, and to invite your views on our proposals for improving children's opportunities to play.

### **Our vision and aims for play**

8. Strong, vibrant communities should offer a variety of places for children to play, places in which children have a stake and that they can help shape through their active involvement in design and decision making. All children and young people should be able to find places, near their homes, where they can play freely and meet their friends. They should feel confident and safe to play, both indoors and out, and in a manner that is appropriate to their needs and interests. Play will support community cohesion and help keep children healthy.
9. Government's aim is that:
  - a. in every residential area, there is a variety of places for play, free of charge, supervised and unsupervised;
  - b. local neighbourhoods are, and feel like, safe, interesting places to play;
  - c. routes to children's play space are safe and accessible for all children and young people;
  - d. parks and open spaces are attractive and welcoming, and are well-maintained and well-used;
  - e. children and young people have a clear stake in public space and their play is accepted by their neighbours;
  - f. children and young people behave in a way that respects other people and property;
  - g. children, young people and their families take an active role in the development of local play spaces; and
  - h. play places are attractive, welcoming, engaging and accessible for all local children and young people, including disabled children, children of both genders, and children from minority groups in the community.

#### ***Consultation Question:***

***Is this the right national vision and set of aims for play in England?***

10. In this consultation, we review the evidence on play and look at five priorities to help children have more and better play opportunities.

11. **Chapter 1** sets out the evidence on the benefits of play, making clear our rationale for central investment and greater local authority prioritisation.
12. **Chapter 2** sets out how we support all types of play for all ages of children through government's key programmes.
13. The £225 million capital investment announced in the Children's Plan is being spent on meeting child and parental demand for more play opportunities in their local area. **Chapter 3** describes how this investment – plus an additional £10 million – will be used to provide more places to play.
14. Concerns about safety are among the biggest barriers to outdoor play that children face, but this does not mean we should be wrapping children up in cotton wool and stopping them from learning and exploring. **Chapter 4** looks at proposals on playing safely.
15. **Chapter 5** looks at the medium to longer term changes needed in order to create child-friendly communities. These messages are carried through to **Chapter 6**, which looks at sustaining and embedding play at a local level.
16. In **Chapter 7** we set out how you can get involved. You can write to us, email us or visit [www.dcsf.gov.uk/consultations](http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/consultations) for more information and a summary version of this consultation. We welcome your views on what can be done to make public space more welcoming for play.



Play England

# Chapter 1:

## What children and families have told us and what the evidence says

### Introduction

- 1.1 This chapter summarises recent research and statistics on the experiences of children in play, looking at the benefits of play, activities children are currently undertaking, and barriers preventing children from playing.

### Definition of play

- 1.2 We use 'play' in this document to describe what children and young people do when they follow their own ideas and interests in their own way and for their own reasons, balancing fun with a sense of respect for themselves and others. We asked children what play meant to them, and they talked about activities inside and outside of the home, including football, playing on equipment at the park, playing on computers or the internet, watching TV, board games, and baking cakes.
- 1.3 This consultation is focused on outdoor play – when we asked children about this, they talked about football, playing in the garden, going to the park, playing in cul-de-sacs, nature walks, walking their dog, getting muddy in streams, hide and seek, riding bikes, and looking for buried treasure<sup>9</sup>.

### Benefits of play

*"It makes me feel free and happy."* (Girl, 10<sup>9</sup>)

*"You can get away from adults and decide what you want to do."* (Boy, 10<sup>9</sup>)

*"It can help you learn about how not to hurt yourself."* (Girl, 11<sup>9</sup>)

- 1.4 We know that children enjoy playing. Research for Playday 2006 showed that 80 per cent of children surveyed preferred to play outside<sup>ii</sup>. In a separate survey 86 per cent of parents agreed that 'on a nice day their children would prefer to go to the park than watch TV'<sup>iii</sup>.
- 1.5 The evidence clearly shows the importance of play in the emotional development of children. Playing allows children to develop a sense of well-being<sup>iv</sup>, develops their emotional responses<sup>v</sup>, and improves their interpersonal skills<sup>vi</sup>. It involves exploration and creativity<sup>vii</sup>, helping children

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9 Plain English Research on Play, Sherbert Research for DCSF and COI, 2008

think in a flexible manner<sup>viii</sup>, developing the creative process, language skills<sup>ix</sup>, and learning and problem solving skills<sup>x, xi</sup>. Playing in natural spaces is particularly beneficial as these are open to more opportunities for play – for example allowing children to construct dens.

- 1.6 Active play is also one of the best ways for children to burn calories outside of PE lessons<sup>xii</sup>, and is one of the most important ways of helping to prevent childhood obesity<sup>xiii</sup>. Hence play will help deliver the Government's public service agreement 12 to improve the health and wellbeing of children and young people.
- 1.7 Research suggests that children playing outdoors and establishing relationships with other children in their community can also have a positive effect on community cohesion. The more social networks children have in a neighbourhood, the greater the confidence parents have in the safety of that area<sup>xiv</sup>. Parents also establish their own networks through their children, meaning that play also supports community cohesion amongst adults. In Finland, over 70 per cent of parents saw their play park to be somewhere where they can get support and help with issues concerning their children<sup>xv</sup>.
- 1.8 Communities also have a role in providing activities and places to go, and these encourage greater interaction amongst people, fostering a stronger community culture.

*"Recognise the importance of children being able to play out with their friends in the local natural and built environment. It has positive health and community social capital building benefits which far outweigh any actual risk and danger to children."* (Work with children and young people)<sup>10</sup>

## The state of play

- 1.9 Children today lead busy lives. They are engaged in a wide variety of activities, and there has been an increase in the level of structured, organised activities they take part in. Parents are increasingly prescribing how their children should be using their activity time, and this affects affluent children particularly<sup>xvi</sup>. Children also have more sedentary options for their leisure time, although the impact of technologies such as television on unsupervised play is uncertain.
- 1.10 The vast majority of children say that they enjoy going outside to play, but the opportunities for outdoor play appear to be falling – around one in three parents will not allow children aged 8–15 to play outside of their house or garden<sup>xvii</sup> – and the average age at which children are allowed outside unsupervised has risen from around 7 years in the 1960s and 1970s to just over 8 years in the present day<sup>xviii</sup>. Research suggests that as many as one in four children aged 8–10 have never played outside without an adult<sup>xix</sup>.
- 1.11 There is also a difference between children and adults' preferred play spaces, with adults liking spaces that are safe, orderly and easily visible and children preferring spaces with disorder, cover and loose materials<sup>xx</sup>.

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10 Online survey, *Time to Talk*

## The barriers to play

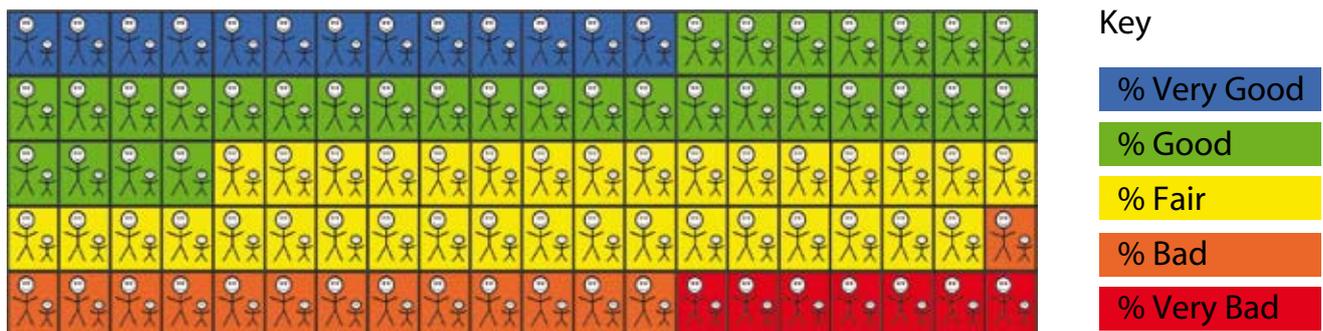
### Accessibility and quality

*“Make child-friendly facilities accessible to all children and young people regardless of their parents’ income.” (Parent).<sup>11</sup>*

*“Last time we went to the park most things were broken and the swings were tied up” (Girl, 11<sup>12</sup>)*

- 1.12** While most families have some play facilities within easy walking distance<sup>xxi</sup>, and this isn’t generally affected by the family earnings, access to a well-maintained green space *does* appear to be related to household income – just under half of households earning under £10,000 per year do not have access to this type of space<sup>xxii</sup>.
- 1.13** The attitudes of adults may also limit access to play in public spaces. In 2004 85 per cent of adults agreed that it was important that children could play safely in the street, but a high proportion would not park their cars an extra 50m away to facilitate this<sup>xxiii</sup>. Similarly, a quarter of adults have told a child other than their own to stop playing in the area near their home and over half of children have at some point been told to stop playing in area near their homes<sup>xxiv</sup>.
- 1.14** Where play facilities do exist, parents’ views on the quality of these are mixed, with under half of parents saying that the facilities in their area are good or very good<sup>xxv</sup>. When asked how facilities could be improved, over half of adults cited quality issues, identifying the need for a better variety of apparatus and cleaner grounds. Parents living within easy walking distance of good quality play facilities are significantly more likely to use them frequently; having poor facilities nearby does not increase the likelihood of outdoor play<sup>xxvi</sup>.

Figure 1.1: How parents rate their local play facilities



- 1.15** Access to play facilities can be difficult for many families with disabled children. Their outings may be limited because of a lack of funds, transport, and accessible facilities<sup>xxvii</sup> – for example suitable toilets and changing facilities.

11 Paper survey, *Time to Talk*  
 12 Plain English Research on Play, Sherbert Research for DCSF and COI, 2008

## Child safety

- 1.16** Children today are safer in many ways than previously. Rates of deaths from injury fell from 11.1 deaths per 100,000 children per year around the 1981 census to 4.0 deaths per 100,000 children per year around the 2001 census<sup>xxxiii</sup>. By 2006, the number of children 0-15 killed or seriously injured in road accidents had fallen by 52 per cent compared to the average for 1994-1998<sup>xxxix</sup>.
- 1.17** Children are acutely aware of areas that they consider 'rough', including some play areas and particularly parks, associating them with large groups of people, and anti-social behaviour<sup>xxx</sup>.
- "More supervision around the skate park as there's a lot of anti-social behaviour there – I don't go there because I don't feel safe."* (Boy, Leeds Time to Talk event).
- "Local parks are usually dangerous and attract trouble. They are perfect places to vandalise, as the local papers show. More police patrolling parks."* (Young Person)<sup>13</sup>
- 1.18** In fact, the safety records of play areas and parks seem to be relatively good. While a significant minority of young people have been a victim of crime, it is unlikely to take place in a park or other open space<sup>xxxi</sup>. Likewise, of the 2 million or so childhood accident cases treated by hospital each year, less than 2 per cent involve play area equipment<sup>xxxii</sup>.
- 1.19** Yet child safety continues to be parents' main concern, and this is impacting on the extent to which children are allowed to play outside unsupervised. Nearly two-thirds of parents report high levels of concern about allowing children out into unsupervised public space, and three-quarters of parents feel that children today are more at risk than children five years ago<sup>xxxiii</sup>. Those parents who don't allow their children to play outside most commonly cite concerns about traffic and threats by other adults as their reasons for this<sup>xxxiv</sup>. Even when parents realise the risk is low, they are unwilling to risk putting their child in any danger.
- "All you ever hear on the news is that a child has been snatched or that even another child has shot and killed them. I know it might be a bit of an over reaction, but I don't want to be one of those parents sitting at a news conference begging for their child to be returned."* (Mum<sup>14</sup>)
- 1.20** Safety is a particular issue for children living in deprived areas<sup>xxxv</sup>, with the risk of injury by traffic being more likely in disadvantaged areas, and children living in an area with disorder problems being twice as likely to be a victim of crime than children in other areas<sup>xxxvi</sup>.
- 1.21** Safety is a concern for children too, with children reporting that they are concerned about traffic and being hurt by their peers<sup>xxxvii</sup>. Bullying is consistently listed as a key concern for children<sup>xxxviii</sup>, particularly for disabled children.

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13 Online Survey, *Time to Talk*

14 Plain English Research on Play, Sherbert Research for DSCF and COI, 2008

## Negative perceptions

*“There are teenagers with plastic swords at parks and they can hurt you.” (Girl, 8<sup>15</sup>)*

- 1.22** When asked how local play facilities could be improved, around half of adults mentioned ‘fewer older children hanging around’<sup>xxxix</sup>. Adults in particular also say that anti-social behaviour is a problem, with nearly one in three saying that teenagers hanging around in the street was a problem in their area<sup>xl</sup>. Yet adults think that young people are involved in more crime and anti-social behaviour than is actually the case, saying that nearly half of all crime is committed by young people<sup>xli</sup> whereas in reality at most 20 per cent of crime is committed by this age group<sup>xlii</sup>. These perceptions could be partly driven by the media, with nearly three-fifths of the media coverage of young people focusing on negative stories<sup>xliii</sup>.

## Summary

- 1.23** Whilst there is a strong case for the benefits of play, there are signs that opportunities for play are falling. Poor access to, and quality of, provision, safety issues, negative attitudes of adults to play near their homes, and diversity of offer between regions all emerge as key issues that limit the amount of play that children are engaged in. The rest of this document focuses on the policy priorities suggested by this evidence.

# Chapter 2:

## Supporting play throughout childhood

### Introduction

- 2.1 Play should be at the heart of children's everyday lives and experiences throughout childhood. Children play at school and home, in parks and green spaces, and while travelling. They take part in games with their friends, play as part of learning, and in both supervised and unsupervised play. We want children to enjoy a healthy balance of both structured and unstructured activities in their leisure time.
- 2.2 The Government believes that play should be an integral part of our wider policies for children and young people. This chapter sets out how key programmes support all types of play, for all ages and abilities of children – from birth up to 19.

### Vision

- 2.3 In order to support play throughout childhood, government has:
- given children the opportunity to learn through play in **early years**;
  - made proposals to increase the support for play offered by **Sure Start Children's Centres**;
  - set out how we propose to support play through **schools**, including a focus on improving play facilities on school sites;
  - given children and young people more opportunities for **physical activity, physical education and sport**;
  - emphasised **creativity in play**;
  - set out the importance of **play for children visiting parents in prison**;
  - emphasised links between play-based activities and other provision for **young people**; and
  - set out how provision must support the inclusion of **disabled children**.

### Early years

- 2.4 Play for babies and very young children is a crucial part of their learning and development. This is how children learn. Parents are vital in supporting their children's development through positive interaction, talking, and play, from birth. The Department of Health has recently

published an updated version of the Child Health Promotion Programme<sup>16</sup>. This sets out the expectation that locally, the Child Health Promotion Programme will support parents to get the balance right between encouraging play and physical activity, and minimising the risk of injury, as set out in the *Staying Safe Action Plan*. The programme also promotes the benefits of groups that support opportunities for play and guided observation, and the provision of information to parents about play and appropriate activities for children of all ages from birth.

- 2.5** Many good early years settings offer children the chance to move freely between outdoor and indoor play, and make use of a range of toys, materials and environments that help them enjoy, learn and develop through that play. In these settings, practitioners allow children the freedom to make their own choice about how and where they will play, joining in to encourage children to try out new ideas and activities. Children will dictate the pace, length and focus of these activities with subtle support from the practitioners.
- 2.6** Alongside this, practitioners will plan and resource a challenging environment where they can support and extend children's play and where they are formal in planning but informal with children, using their observations of children's play to understand and celebrate what children have achieved.
- 2.7** Research is clear that this sort of free, child-driven play is the best way for children to learn about and enjoy the world around them. We believe firmly that children's early years experience should be through their own free play with high quality adult involvement and support, and we have embedded this principle and approach in the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS)<sup>17</sup>, which will become statutory for all early years provision from September 2008. The EYFS provides a framework for practitioners to ensure quality and consistency in care and development for children from birth to five. It is based on play, to support those caring for young children, to ensure that enjoyment and early learning are part of a single process of child development and wellbeing. Starting from the premise that every child is unique, and learns and develops at different rates and in different ways, it has been designed to be flexible in order to respond to individual needs.
- 2.8** A key requirement of the EYFS is that providers should offer access to outdoor play areas wherever possible, or undertake outings on a daily basis to allow children to play outdoors. All providers across the maintained, private, voluntary and independent sectors, including playgroups, will be required to deliver the EYFS and will be inspected by Ofsted, who will also review evidence on the impact of extended services on outcomes for children and young people, including day care. DCSF and DCMS will develop good practice material on play, which we will share with the inspectorates.
- 2.9** Each local authority has received an allocation of capital funding for early years and childcare from a national total of £893 million for the period 2008–11. This aims to improve the quality of the learning environment in early years settings, with a particular emphasis on improving play

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<sup>16</sup> See [www.dh.gov.uk/en/Publicationsandstatistics/Publications/DH\\_083645](http://www.dh.gov.uk/en/Publicationsandstatistics/Publications/DH_083645)

<sup>17</sup> See [www.standards.dcsf.gov.uk/eyfs/](http://www.standards.dcsf.gov.uk/eyfs/)

and physical activities. Local authorities are able to spend this funding on the provision of stimulating and accessible outdoor play space and equipment – including land – and full access to all children, particularly disabled children, is a key requirement.



The Janet Summers Early Years Centre, Friars Primary School.

## Sure Start Children's Centres

- 2.10** Sure Start Children's Centres provide access to high quality early years provision, health and other family support services to families with young children. By 2010, there will be a Children's Centre in every community. As part of the services they offer, Children's Centres present a range of opportunities for providing information on, and access to, play opportunities for young children from birth to five.
- 2.11** Children's Centres are encouraged to make maximum use of the outdoors, particularly the natural environment, at all times of the year. Where possible, Centres encourage physical activity through play, baby massage, and tumble-tots classes as a means of contributing to tackling childhood obesity and promoting healthy development from an early age.
- 2.12** Children's Centres provide important advice and family support services in the most disadvantaged communities. Free, open-access play provision can be a good way to engage hard to reach children and families. Similarly, Children's Centres provide important support to parents in providing play opportunities for their children.
- 2.13** **We will explore through the play pathfinders how parents can receive information from playworkers on what services and support they could receive from local Children's Centres.** In addition, there is scope for Children's Centres to help advocate the benefits of play

and sign-post good local play opportunities to families. We encourage Centres to provide information to parents on good local play areas and facilities.

- 2.14** Local play offers can be improved by looking at the planning and delivery of the final stage of the Children’s Centre programme in relation to the development of new public play sites and improved school facilities. **Our national Children’s Centre delivery partner, Together for Children, will ensure that local authorities link roll-out of Children’s Centres to these other capital programmes, and look at opportunities around locating services together.**

## Schools

- 2.15** The Government attaches considerable importance to children having recreational time during the school day when they can unwind and let off steam outdoors. Of course this already happens in schools. But there are ways in which the nature and quality of children’s opportunities can be enhanced.
- 2.16** Much school play is rightly unstructured. It allows friendship groups to form and children to use their own creativity and imagination to have fun. However, there is a need for supervision on the grounds of safety. Moreover, the best supervision will enable and support child-led play and activities, particularly in the primary years. There might be scope for schools to offer training to staff in playwork principles, and we will explore models for this in our pathfinders.



Play England

## Improving play facilities on school sites

- 2.17** We want school sites to offer good play opportunities for children in the form of good school playgrounds, playing fields and other facilities to support active and constructive play.

- 2.18** We have protected our school playing fields. Since 1998, all local authorities and schools in England have needed the Secretary of State's consent before they can dispose of a school playing field or any part of a school playing field. A sale is only allowed if the land is surplus to the needs of the school in question, other local schools and the community. All proceeds must be used to improve school sports or education facilities: they cannot be used for repairs.
- 2.19** Working in partnership with Fields in Trust (the new name for the National Playing Fields Association), and the independent School Playing Fields Advisory Panel, the criteria governing sale applications were toughened in 2004 to make clear that:
- the sale of a sports pitch must be an absolute last resort;
  - proceeds must be used to improve outdoor sports facilities where possible, and
  - new facilities must be sustainable for at least 10 years.
- 2.20** Since 1998, 192 approvals were made for sales, of which 91 were for schools which had closed. Eighty three of the remaining schools improved their sports facilities and the remaining 18 improved educational facilities. Millions of children are gaining from vastly improved sports and exercise facilities thanks to the Government's record seven-times real terms increase in capital investment in school buildings by 2011 – from under £700 million to over £8 billion a year. According to our audit of school building projects, since 1997 1,100 completely newly rebuilt schools have already been built - with brand new sports facilities and outdoor play areas, according to our audit of school building projects since 1997. Another 2,450 schools have made massive improvements to sports provision, with newly built sports halls, all weather pitches, gyms, playgrounds or changing rooms, in addition to the 3,000 schools that have benefited from BIG Lottery investment for this purpose.
- 2.21** In January 2008 we announced £30 million of new funding to help sports colleges to improve their facilities for physical education and sport. A key focus of this funding is to improve existing grass playing fields in schools. Other schools and the wider community will also benefit from this investment. An interest in sport can also help to improve children's literacy, numeracy, and information and communication technology skills, as shown through *Playing for Success*, an initiative where out of school hours study support centres have been established within top football clubs and at other sports clubs' grounds and venues.
- 2.22** Government has supported over 600 school playground projects in highly deprived areas through the Sporting Playgrounds and Zoneparcs programmes. Independent research in 13 Zoneparc schools has reported increased, and sometimes greatly increased levels of physical activity, especially amongst those children who had previously been inactive.
- 2.23** In addition, the Children's Plan (paragraphs 4.109 – 4.112) sets out government's aim to join up capital programmes so that local infrastructure, including play facilities, can be planned and delivered in a more coherent and efficient way. We want school sites to offer good play opportunities for children. Each school and local authority has devolved funding to invest in the school estate which includes the development of suitable play facilities. Guidance on the design

of play facilities can be found in a number of existing publications<sup>18</sup>. **To make it easier for head teachers and governors to access examples of good practice, we will pull together all relevant material into one place to encourage all schools to further develop their play facilities.**

- 2.24** The Building Schools for the Future and the Primary Capital Programme offer significant opportunities to improve play facilities, with total investment of £9.3 billion and £1.9 billion respectively over 2008–11. **We will work with Partnerships for Schools and other key partners to raise the profile and better embed the planning and delivery of play facilities into the strategic planning process in every local area.**

### Play and extended schools

- 2.25** Increased access to play facilities is also supported through the extended schools programme. Schools will need to work in partnership with other providers to complement and support access to existing services and activities in the community. Many existing facilities, such as adventure playgrounds, or services such as museums and galleries, that have exciting facilities for schools to make links with when looking to provide after-school (and even in-school) activities. By 2010, all schools will provide access to a core offer of extended services and a varied menu of activities around the school day, including play and childcare. The Council for Disabled Children guidance *Extending Inclusion*, to be published in April 2008, focuses on how to make services and activities in extended schools and Children's Centres accessible for disabled children.
- 2.26** Schools are required to consult widely, including with children, parents and local communities, in planning their extended school provision. We would expect this consultation to cover play opportunities, as well as community use of school facilities for activities, including play. Schools are encouraged to work closely with existing or new providers in the voluntary, community or private sector to provide these services together, to offer a greater range of activities and more sustainable provision. **We will review extended schools guidance to ensure that appropriate content on play is included.**



Learning through landscapes

<sup>18</sup> *Designing School Grounds, Designing Schools for Extended Services, Primary Ideas*, and on the *Learning through Landscapes* website [www.ltl.org.uk](http://www.ltl.org.uk)

### Case study – Special Needs and Inclusion Play Care Service, Sheffield

Special Needs and Inclusion Play Care Service (SNIPS) works with a variety of partners involved in delivering extended school activities to develop capacity and facilitate access for disabled children and young people to play, recreation and leisure services.

As well as the staff, the service offers mentors who support families in accessing clubs through giving information on local clubs and activities, accompanying families on visits to clubs to see what they are like, giving clubs advice on adjustments they can make, and working alongside staff in sessions to support them and build their confidence.

Alongside these activities, arrangements are in place for a range of other support to be offered to settings. These include specialist nurses based at Children's Centres to provide support for individual disabled children.

Feedback from parents and children is gathered in a variety of ways, through involvement in producing play and activity plans for individual children, as well as the completion of daily session reports.

*"It's the first time they have been anywhere except school on their own. They really enjoyed themselves and the staff were friendly and brilliant."* (Parent)

## Play and healthy schools

- 2.27** Schools have an active role in promoting the emotional health and well-being of their pupils. This role is strengthened through the healthy schools programme<sup>19</sup>. In promoting the well-being of their children, schools need to recognise that play is a significant element of children and young people's emotional health and wellbeing. They should actively encourage play, particularly in older children, and seek to remove barriers to play.

## Community access to school facilities

*"Schools should provide outdoor play areas with good facilities that could be open for community use in the evening and at weekends."* (Member of DCSF's Children and Youth Board)

*"My school has a huge field they should let us use it at weekends."* (Member of DCSF's Children and Youth Board)

- 2.28** In many areas, the facilities on a school site may be the best available local play provision and green space. We will explore with head teachers and other key stakeholders how school facilities might be opened up outside of the core school day. **Through the pathfinders we will collect and disseminate examples of the design, build and management of school play facilities that are available for wider community use.**
- 2.29** Strong communities are cohesive and resilient. Play will promote interaction between young people from different backgrounds, and can encourage and support cohesion. Schools' willingness to make their grounds and play facilities accessible to their local community outside of normal school hours supports their new statutory duty to promote community cohesion, to be covered in Ofsted inspections from September 2008.

<sup>19</sup> See [www.healthyschools.gov.uk](http://www.healthyschools.gov.uk)

### **Case study – Dudley Children’s Trust**

The Dudley Children’s Trust, based in the heart of the Black Country, has taken a lead in bringing together all statutory, voluntary, community and third sector providers in the development of its pioneering play strategy entitled *Just Enjoy!*

Over 6,000 children and members of the public were involved in identifying the key priorities for the borough including deciding where to spend the £700,000 Big Lottery Fund Children’s Play Initiative grant. In an area of only 38 square miles, and with a population of over 75,000 children and young people, school sites and playing fields form an essential part of the play provision and green space for children across the borough.

Many head teachers and governors have come forward to make sure their valuable facilities are available out of school hours. This includes one primary school that worked with the local Tenants and Residents Association to apply for over £100,000 of lottery funding to open up its school playing fields and build a new community multi-purpose games area and small children’s play area on their land. The school is planning to position the fencing for the new area on the school site, so that the new facility is open all hours and available for community use at all times. For details of the Dudley programme, visit [www.justenjoy.tv](http://www.justenjoy.tv) which also advertises the new lottery funded play activities across the borough.

## **Physical activity, physical education and sport**

- 2.30** Children’s play has a key role in instilling from an early age an awareness of, and enthusiasm for, healthy and active living, and thus is a significant contributor to reducing child obesity. Unstructured play as a form of physical activity in the early years supports the development of health and wellbeing and the subsequent benefits of this in later life.
- 2.31** Play, physical education and sport complement each other. Play is unorganised whereas sport is organised and usually played within structured rules. Play is what children do of their own volition, often making up their own informal rules. But it is through play that children often have their first experiences of sport and develop basic sporting skills such as kicking a ball around, racing their friends, or climbing.
- 2.32** Physical education (PE) is taught as part of compulsory education from ages five through to 16. It differs from sport, play and physical activity in that it is compulsory, has a structured, progressive programme of study, and, when taught properly, learning has to take place. In physical activity and sport, the emphasis is on the activity; in PE, the emphasis is on the child.
- 2.33** Eighty six percent of 5–16 year olds now do at least two hours of high quality PE and sport a week. The new PE and sport strategy for young people will offer all 5–16 year olds two hours of high quality PE and sport within the school day, and all 5–19 year olds who want it will have access to up to a further three hours of sport beyond the school day, delivered by a range of school, community and club providers. This new commitment will be supported by a total investment of £766 million revenue funding between 2008 and 2011.
- 2.34** Play can contribute to increasing the amount of physical activity, PE and school sport undertaken by children and young people by engaging them in physical activity that they enjoy. We want to see how new play arrangements can signpost children and young people

onto more structured PE or sport where they have an interest, particularly those pupils that are harder to reach. **We will ensure that links are made at local level between school sports partnerships, county sports partnerships and play providers so that supervised play in particular is one possible means of engaging reluctant groups in more physical activity.**



Play England

## Creativity in play

- 2.35** The arts and cultural sectors have an important role to play in providing play opportunities. Museums and libraries provide children and young people with access to stimulating and creative resources. Similarly the arts and other creative activities – which can be structured for specific learning outcomes as well as providing self-initiated learning activities – provide many opportunities for exploring the world and using imagination through play.
- 2.36** Examples of play related activities provided by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport sector bodies are detailed at Annex 2. The Government is committed to building on this provision to reach a position where all young people, no matter where they live or what their background, are able to take part in a range of cultural opportunities for at least five hours a week in and out of school.

## Play for children visiting parents in prison

- 2.37** Having somewhere to play is important for children and young people visiting a parent in prison. Over 100 prisons in England and Wales now offer supervised play areas for some visits, usually run by the voluntary sector. These play areas provide a child-friendly space, which can make the experience of visiting a parent in prison less stressful and more stimulating for children. Safeguarding them from harm is paramount, and strong partnership working is vital to ensure children are protected throughout their visit. Special child-centred visits usually take place in more relaxed surroundings than a normal prison visits room, and give the imprisoned parent and child quality time to play and bond together. In some prisons this is linked to family

learning, where imprisoned parents and children have positive activities which they can do together, enabling parent and child to learn at the same time. Children's Centres and schools can have a role in this by working with their local prisons to help improve the quality of these play schemes and child-centred visits, and the training of staff and volunteers.

## Young people

- 2.38** We want all young people to participate in positive activities in their leisure time, as we know this can make a significant difference to their life chances. *Aiming High for Young People*<sup>20</sup> set out a vision for improving places for young people to go. Along with the capital investment in facilities for younger children's play, the Children's Plan announced an additional £160 million of DCSF investment in youth facilities over the next two years, on top of the £60 million funding announced in *Aiming High*. The Youth Taskforce will ensure that £22.5 million of this investment is focused in 50 of the most deprived neighbourhoods. Our long term goal is to support all young people to participate in exciting, positive activities no matter what their background or income.
- 2.39** Play-based activities can provide a route for younger children into youth provision, and a route for young people into more structured positive activities. All children and young people need a balance of structured and unstructured activities in their lives, and enjoy both. *Aiming High* set out strong evidence that all young people, particularly the most disadvantaged, benefit from taking part in activities that involve structure and close adult engagement. But we know that children also need the space and freedom to play on their own terms and that this is important for their development. We want to provide enjoyable opportunities for both structured and unstructured activities locally, and support children, young people, and parents in making positive choices about how children and young people spend their leisure time.
- 2.40** The link between play and youth provision is therefore a key consideration for local authority strategies for improving local facilities for young people and for the preparation of their bids for capital funding.

### Case study – Islington

In Islington, the play and youth services are integrated, and traditional youth work practice in delivering recorded and accredited outcomes for participants is being drawn down into playwork.

For example, there is an Audit Commission target that 60 per cent of all young people using youth projects should achieve a recorded outcome. Islington use the same criteria for children using adventure playgrounds to achieve a recorded outcome which involves a clearly defined goal inspired by the child – such as a craft project, better interaction with other children or confidence to use a challenging piece of equipment – and a simple, subtle programme of work with the child to reach this goal.

<sup>20</sup> See [www.dcsf.gov.uk/publications/tenyearyouthstrategy/](http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/publications/tenyearyouthstrategy/)

## Disabled children

- 2.41** The Government is committed to improving the life chances of disabled children, and *Aiming High for Disabled Children*<sup>21</sup> sets out an ambitious programme for transforming services for disabled children and their families. We are investing £370 million over 2008-11 in improving short-break services, where parents get a break from their caring responsibilities, and disabled children and young people can undertake a range of positive activities. Disabled children are a part of their local community, and inclusive, safe and attractive play spaces are an important part of the provision that enable them to interact and participate in activities with their peers.
- 2.42** Full access to disabled children is a key requirement of government's capital investment in early years provision, and guidance from the Council for Disabled Children focuses on accessibility in extended schools and Children's Centres. Through the new youth sector development fund, we have provided a grant and business support to the youth body, Speaking Up, to help support disabled young people develop confidence, skills and independence and to contribute to change in their community.
- 2.43** In Chapter 3 we set out the requirement for local authorities receiving play capital funding to develop play areas to make these accessible to disabled children, and the attitudes and behaviours of those organising provision should support the inclusion of all children. A few small adjustments to the planning of play areas can make a big difference to the inclusiveness of these for disabled children – for example by designing toilets for disabled people that are big enough to also be used as changing rooms.



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<sup>21</sup> See [www.everychildmatters.gov.uk/socialcare/disabledchildren/aiminghigh/](http://www.everychildmatters.gov.uk/socialcare/disabledchildren/aiminghigh/)

**2.44** Making play areas accessible is about more than physical adaptations and buying equipment that disabled children can use. Local areas should ensure that their playworkers create a welcoming and inclusive environment for disabled children, addressing immediately any instances of bullying or discriminatory attitudes. Parents need to be confident that playworkers have the necessary skills to meet the particular needs of their disabled child and the inclusion of disabled children in ordinary play settings is an integral part of planning for children's play.

***Consultation Questions:***

***How can schools best support play, both for their pupils and for their local communities?***

***What more could be done, and in what settings, to support disabled children to be able to play?***

***Are there groups of children who do not have opportunities to play and what could be done to help them?***

# Chapter 3: More places to play

## Introduction

- 3.1** Having more high quality and safe places to play is a priority for both children and parents across England. Significant investment is already being made in improving access to play. £124 million has been allocated to local authorities through the BIG Lottery £155 million Children's Play initiative to support development of free, local, inclusive play spaces, with the remaining funds being used to support play infrastructure and local projects.
- 3.2** The Children's Plan announced a significant programme of capital investment to make more play areas safe and exciting places to be. We are making our biggest ever investment of £235 million in play over the three years 2008–2011. Exciting new public play areas will be developed with this investment, led strategically by local authorities working in partnership with district and town councils, the third sector, children, families and community groups. In April 2008 63 local authorities will begin using their funding to improve local play offers, including 20 large scale pathfinder authorities<sup>22</sup>. In this chapter we focus on plans for providing these purpose-built play areas across the country.
- 3.3** Play space needs to be of high quality and good design to attract children and families and become a valued part of the local environment. Poor quality, unimaginative space will not be attractive to children, will not be valued by the local community, and will fall into disuse and disrepair. Good design is a good investment.

## Vision

- 3.4** In order to create more high quality places to play, we propose to:
- invest £235 million over the next three years to **develop up to 3,500 public play areas**;
  - support **pathfinders to develop 30 adventure playgrounds** or play parks aimed at 8–13 year-olds in disadvantaged areas;
  - work with local authorities to ensure sites are stimulating, exciting, and attractive to children – including through closely **involving children, families and communities** in planning and design;

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<sup>22</sup> See Annex 1

- d. provide clear guidance on developing **interesting and fun places to play**; and
- e. emphasise the importance of **maintaining sites**.

### Develop up to 3,500 public play areas

- 3.5 Many of the thousands of play areas across the country are well-maintained and well-used by local children. But local play audits show there are many places where play deserts exist – areas where there is a high demand for play facilities but none are available.
- 3.6 This work is not starting from scratch. The BIG Lottery Children’s Play initiative has resulted in almost every council developing a local play partnership and strategy, including a needs analysis which highlights priorities for improvement. BIG’s investment has provided a timely and secure foundation on which to build, enabling us to invest immediately in the best prepared local authorities.
- 3.7 Government’s investment of £235 million over the next three years will offer every local authority capital funding that will **enable up to 3,500 play areas to be developed and made accessible all children including disabled children**. We expect that each local authority will develop at least 20 play areas, completely or substantially replacing old equipment for new or building a completely new play area. Thirty local areas will become play pathfinders and will test innovative approaches to promoting and supporting play spaces.

### Pathfinders to develop 30 adventure playgrounds

- 3.8 Large adventure playgrounds or playparks, supervised by qualified play staff, can make a real difference to the benefits that local children can gain from play, particularly in dense urban areas where space is at a premium.

#### Case study – Glamis Adventure Playground

Glamis is a voluntary sector-run adventure playground that regularly sees 40 children pass through its gates every day. These figures go up in the summer and down slightly in the winter. The playground has four playworkers, two of whom are part time, and a children’s committee that meets regularly to decide what they would like on the playground and what to spend money on.

The playground won the 2007 London Play award for Best Adventure Playground in the Capital.

*“I like coming here, because it’s something to do – there’s not a lot around here – and it’s for any ages up to 16. It’s an interesting place because you have the bridge, around the world and the ship. I helped build some of the equipment with some of the others including the platform decking under the bridge and the hammock. I built it myself, and it’s still standing after six months”.*  
(Playground user, aged 16)

*“It’s great coming here because you can make new friends and you can play. There’s nothing else like this around here. I love the bridge and the hammock. I wish all the children who live around here would come here too”.* (Playground user, aged 10)

Further information: [http://www.londonplay.org.uk/document.php?document\\_id=1055](http://www.londonplay.org.uk/document.php?document_id=1055)



Play England, Glamis Adventure Playground



Play England

- 3.9 Thirty play pathfinders will receive additional funding to develop a large adventure playground or playpark** for 8–13 year olds in disadvantaged areas – open-access, with children generally free to come and go as they please, and free of charge. Picking up messages from *Time to Talk*, some pathfinders will explore a model of ‘adventure playparks’ to better enable family use of parks and green spaces through sites where a range of adventure play, organised activities and wider facilities are on offer for children, young people and families to enjoy together.

### Involving children, families and communities

- 3.10** In all our work on play, we want local communities to be at the heart of delivery, through the involvement of community and voluntary groups, and through consultation with children, young people and parents. In particular, as we roll out our new funding to local authorities, we will expect them to invite proposals and bids from local groups as part of their planning and commissioning, and to involve children, families and communities in the design of new spaces for play. **We will involve a wide range of local representatives from communities, local MPs, faith groups, residents’ associations, district and town councils, and local parents’ groups as part of the consultation.**
- 3.11** Voluntary and community groups make a critical contribution to the quantity and quality of play opportunities, and are especially significant in making play accessible to all children, and in identifying needs that might otherwise go unmet. Through offering a focus for action, play can help to regenerate local areas and strengthen communities’ confidence. **We will promote community and third sector involvement as the capital programme rolls out. In addition, we will embed play into work at national and local level to support community empowerment and the third sector.**

## Interesting and fun places to play

*"It feels like you are invincible when you are playing outside, like you can do anything."* (Boy, 12<sup>23</sup>)

*"We love playing on the monkey bars, we try and beat each other. It is like doing an assault course in the army. You want to be challenged so that you keep trying and then you feel good when you have accomplished it."* (Boy, 12<sup>23</sup>)

*"Being outside and climbing trees is really exciting; you feel a bit like a bird."* (Girl, 8<sup>23</sup>)

- 3.12** The vast majority of children enjoy going outside to play. Research for Playday 2006 showed that 80 per cent of children under 18 surveyed preferred to play outside. In addition, play in natural spaces is more likely to be perceived by children as free from adult agendas and thus open to more opportunities for play – allowing children to recognise their independence – and children often prefer environments with disorder, cover and loose materials. Children enjoy playing in surroundings which they can manipulate and which develop knowledge of the natural world. *Time to Talk* showed a clear consensus that parents want more challenging, exciting activities and natural play environments that are close to home, and we also know that parents want sites that strike the right balance between safety and stimulating play.



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- 3.13** Government's new investment in innovative and stimulating local play areas will deliver a variety of play opportunities to the fullest range of children, with a particular emphasis on the needs of 8–13 year-olds. Basing investment on thorough local needs analysis will be key. **We want to see sites that encourage high physical activity levels, as well as site designs that incorporate sustainable refurbishment using natural and durable materials which encourage children to explore the natural environment.** Landscaping is shown to be as just as effective, if not more, than play equipment in providing spaces where children can use their

imaginations in a number of ways. Such landscaping is often more aesthetically pleasing to other people in public space.



Stirling Council

- 3.14** We expect developments to take the form of a complete or substantial replacing of old equipment for new, or the building of a completely new play area. We will ensure that local authorities are able to choose from a range of features and ideas depending on their local needs. This may involve a move away from notions of a ‘traditional’ play area, to something more creative that inspires play across a wider age range. Our national capital programme will support local procurement practice that is more innovative, informed and not constrained by unwarranted risk-aversion. We will also work closely with the play equipment industry (and other relevant service and materials providers) to ensure they can meet the demands of local authorities and their partners in relation to the type of play sites that we want to see developed. We will at the same time explore ways in which contracting can deliver savings and good value for money.
- 3.15** Parents told us through *Time to Talk* that they want to see versatile play sites that encourage a variety of different types of play; places where children and families can mix, with play opportunities that are clearly designed for specific age ranges. Parents also told us that they value other facilities on these sites, such as toilets and cafes. The provision of facilities such as toilets and changing rooms for disabled children is particularly important. Our new investment should support the creation of places where families can spend enjoyable leisure time together – which could even include the siting of green gyms for adults alongside children’s play spaces.

With Play England and other experts in the field, **we will be publishing early this summer detailed design guidance to help local areas make best use of the play areas and resources available to them.** This will underpin the roll-out of our capital investment. A central message is the importance of a deliberate design stage in the planning and procurement process. The use of expert play and landscape designers early on, working closely with the community, will lead to a better play space. Whilst this can have additional up-front costs, these will be more likely to deliver clear added value later on in terms of better suitability and usage

of the site. **We will use our national capital programme to develop and publicise further examples of high quality, innovative play facilities.** We will also join with high profile designers to showcase fresh ideas for play space, and run a design competition to be judged by children.



Play England

- 3.16** Play offers an excellent opportunity to ensure that all children in an area – of all ages, genders and abilities – participate in fun activities. Well designed play areas can meet the needs of disabled and non-disabled children: it is essential that facilities are accessible to disabled children and that the skills, attitudes and behaviours of those organising provision support the inclusion of all children, rather than acting as a barrier.
- 3.17** Play areas must be attractive to all children, and we also encourage authorities to think creatively about how they can increase the participation of girls and certain minority ethnic groups. Feedback from boys and girls shows that there are clear gender differences in play, with boys tending towards more active and competitive play involving team games, with a risk and fear factor. Girls tend towards more passive, talk-based interaction and prefer using their imaginations and role-playing. The design of play spaces should support these different preferences – for example by incorporating quieter areas where children can hang out and talk if this is what they want to do – but also challenge them, where possible, to encourage diversification of skills and interests.



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### Maintaining sites

*"They are unsafe due to glass being on the floor. Broken equipment and there are always drunk people around. There is also a very busy road nearby."* (Member of DCSF Children and Youth Board)

- 3.18** Children and parents say that a major barrier to their accessing existing provision is run-down, poorly maintained equipment and unclean and hazardous sites. As we allocate new capital funding into local authorities, **we will ask for reassurance that councils will take measures to ensure investment is sustainable, in terms of protection of sites against vandalism and ongoing maintenance of sites.** We want our new investment to create sites that use natural materials and environments, but we also need to see durability.
- 3.19** **We will explore through this consultation and in our pathfinders how children and communities can play a role in supervising how sites are treated,** and how they might help maintain clean sites that we would all want to be able to enjoy. We will expect children and young people to behave in a way that respects both public and private property.

#### ***Consultation questions:***

***What do parents and children see to be the biggest gap in the play facilities that are currently available to them?***

***What can we do to make play spaces more appealing – particularly for children aged 8-13?***

***How can communities be best involved in the design and running of new play spaces?***

# Chapter 4: Playing safely

## Introduction

- 4.1 Children need to take risks to learn how to manage risks. This is an essential part of growing up, and play is one of the most important ways in which they develop this vital skill. Riding a bicycle, climbing a scramble net, or pushing a friend on a swing all involve risk. It is essential that we do not try and remove all the risk from play or wrap children in cotton wool.
- 4.2 Concerns about safety are among the biggest barriers to outdoor play that children face, but this does not mean we should be stopping them from learning and exploring. The Government is committed to addressing these concerns and to tackling safety issues and perceptions that are preventing children from enjoying play.
- 4.3 Children and young people today are, in many ways, safer than in previous generations. Eighty seven per cent of young people responding to the *Staying Safe* consultation thought children were safe, and rates of accidents are down, including on the roads. Yet three-quarters of parents say they think children today are more at risk than children five years ago.
- 4.4 This chapter sets out practical steps aimed at addressing specific safety concerns with proposals to ensure families get the support and information they need to judge what is right for their child, and to reduce and manage risks.

## Vision

- 4.5 We propose to help children play safely by:
- tackling bullying** in public places;
  - continuing to work with our partners to **improve safety from crime on the streets**;
  - improving **road safety** in a number of ways, including a focus on improving skills and behaviour and creating a safer street environment; and
  - increasing the availability of **supervised play**, including through working with the volunteering sector to test a new local volunteer infrastructure to support play.

- 4.6 We will focus on risk and the benefits of play through:
- increasing parents' **knowledge and understanding of the risks and benefits of play**;
  - taking action to address **negative perceptions of children and young people**; and
  - investigating whether **excessive health and safety fears** can cause local authorities to buy unstimulating and unpopular play equipment.

### Tackling bullying

- 4.7 In developing the *Staying Safe* strategy, we identified a need for focused work to tackle bullying taking place outside school settings, including on the streets and in community areas. In response to this, we committed in the *Staying Safe Action Plan* to **launch new guidance and training for tackling bullying which takes place outside schools**. We will work with partners (such as the Anti-Bullying Alliance) to develop this guidance and training, starting this work in April 2008.
- 4.8 Community support officers increasingly have a role in ensuring the safety and cohesion of local communities and in tackling bullying which occurs in the community. We continue to support the work of the police and local authorities to tackle crime and anti-social behaviour, particularly work with transport operators to improve the safety of public transport.

### Improving safety from crime on the streets

*"There is a park not far from us...it is quite rough. People do drugs down there, play loud music and lob things at you if you get too close. I would never go there as I would feel too intimidated."*  
(Boy, 12<sup>24</sup>)

- 4.9 Government's proposals to help children stay safe on the streets were set out fully in the *Staying Safe Action Plan*:
- implement actions from the *Review of Policing* by Sir Ronnie Flanagan, the final report of which was published in February 2008. In both the interim and final reports, the review focused heavily on the need for an effective 'neighbourhood management approach' to partnership working between neighbourhood policing teams and their partners. This approach will make identification and resolution of local problems more effective;
  - continue the development of a preventative strategy as part of the forthcoming plan to tackle youth crime. This will recognise young people's concerns about their personal safety, taking forward work to tackle offending by young people and also to support young victims of crime. This will be published in summer 2008;
  - continue to support the work of the police, local authorities, and transport operators to tackle crime and anti-social behaviour on public transport;

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- provide additional investment for positive activities programmes in 2008–09 in 15 local authorities particularly affected by gang culture; and
- work on ways to better identify and support young victims of crime as a key part of the forthcoming plan to tackle youth crime.

**4.10** The evidence tells us that through creating attractive places where more families go to spend leisure time, levels of anti-social behaviour will naturally decrease. Therefore, government's proposal to invest £235 million in creating more attractive places to play for children and families will, by itself, help to create safer public spaces.



Play England

## Road safety

*"I'm not allowed to walk or cycle far because of the dangers on the road. It's often quite noisy and sometimes doesn't smell too nice."* (Member of DCSF Children and Youth Board)

*"You can't play outside as there are lots of fast cars speeding round corners."* (Member of DCSF Children and Youth Board)

- 4.11** Since 1994–98, the number of children aged 0–15 killed or seriously injured in road accidents in Great Britain has fallen by more than 50 per cent, to 3,294 in 2006 – of these children, 169 were killed. The Department for Transport's (DfT) child road safety strategy (February 2007) sets out details of how government is working to continue to improve levels of child road safety.
- 4.12** A significant part of improving road safety is about improving people's skills and behaviour when out using the roads. This includes the behaviour of children themselves, their parents and

carers, and all vehicle drivers and riders. There are a number of initiatives under way to address these issues.

- 4.13 DfT is working with educational consultants to provide a set of comprehensive road safety educational resources for children aged 4–16, and is also developing a dissemination package to encourage local authorities to deliver pedestrian training for younger children, preferably following the Kerbcraft model. This will teach children the key skills they need to cross roads safely, through practical roadside training in the real road environment.
- 4.14 Actions to encourage safer driving also help to improve safety for children. These include legislation, enforcement and publicity about issues such as speed, drink-driving, and mobile phone and seat belt use.
- 4.15 To help ensure that young people are better prepared before they start learning to drive, the Driving Standards Agency will be consulting on reforms to the driver testing and training system, designed to encourage safer driving attitudes and behaviour, rather than focusing mainly on mechanical driving skills. This should lead to safer roads for all, including children.
- 4.16 A new cycle training scheme, Bikeability, is designed to give children and parents the skills and confidence to cycle safely and well. Over the next three years £140 million will be invested in cycling. This will include enabling an extra 500,000 children in Year 6 to have access to Bikeability Training by 2012, as well as funding for more safe links to school via traffic calmed or traffic free routes.
- 4.17 As well as addressing the skills and behaviour of road users, the other main way of improving road safety is to make the street environment safer. The child road safety strategy, the Children's Plan and the *Staying Safe Action Plan* all encourage the wider use of 20mph zones in areas where children are present. Evidence shows these can reduce the number of child pedestrian deaths by up to 70 per cent.



Portsmouth City Council

- 4.18** Since 1999, local authorities have had the power to introduce 20mph speed limits without obtaining consent from central government and we know that many authorities have introduced these into their local areas. New guidance issued by DfT in 2006 further encourages local highway authorities to implement 20mph limits and zones. We want to encourage local authorities to provide more 20mph zones. To support those authorities who are in the process of implementing these changes, and to promote the benefits to those who have yet to do so, **the Government will commission a new assessment of the implementation process and effectiveness of 20mph zones, and update our best practice advice to authorities.**

#### **Case study – Portsmouth City Council**

Portsmouth City Council is the first highway authority in Britain to make almost all its residential roads 20mph, designed to make streets safer for pedestrians and cyclists.

Cllr Alex Bentley, Executive Member for Environment and Transportation, said: *“On most of our residential roads, it’s not safe or appropriate to drive at more than 20mph, because they’re narrow and lined with parked cars. . . This scheme has won Portsmouth lots of attention for its boldness in improving safety for our residents. I’m sure it could save lives, particularly those of children and elderly people, and get more people cycling.”*

- 4.19** As set out in the Children’s Plan, **DfT will write to all local highway authorities, highlighting the need to have regard to children’s well-being and safety when implementing transport policy**, while not deflecting from the primary aim of casualty reduction in areas of highest risk. This letter will emphasise the need to work together with other relevant local services.
- 4.20** **We will test a range of effective models through the play pathfinders to identify best practice on improving routes to play.** This will include supporting playbuilders to learn from the DCSF/DfT Travelling to School programme.

#### **Case study – Safe routes to play**

The EC1 New Deal for Communities regeneration programme in Islington has developed an area-specific play policy that is embedded in the public space strategy and the borough-wide play strategy. The policy includes a commitment to creating a network of pedestrian routes to play areas in parks and open spaces and within housing estates as part of a ‘green grid’ for the area in response to what parents and children said.

*“Put lights where it’s dark, like in the alleys. Make it nicer round where we live and see our friends. More greenery and colours would be good. Look after the parks better – sometimes there’s knives and needles in the flowerbeds.”* (10-year-old girl, EC1 play policy workshop).

A pilot programme of individual estate play and open space plans is being carried out on three estates with the aim of applying the learning to make every estate a child-friendly area. The plans will use local knowledge of needs for the whole estate population, the current and projected child population and the relationship with neighbouring parks and open spaces to tailor wider plans for housing and public realm regeneration.

## Supervised play

*“There should be more security for outdoor play because in the park near my house there has been violence and crimes.”* (Member of DCSF’s Children and Youth Board)

*“Maybe they could make some of the parks feel safer.”* (Boy, 12<sup>25</sup>)

- 4.21** Play should be child-led and able to take place in environments where children feel free to explore and test norms. We will explore how supervision of play areas can support this by exploring appropriate levels and types of supervision that:
- enable child-led play without being intrusive;
  - meet parental and child concerns around safety without raising unrealistic expectations; and
  - support the quality and upkeep of play areas and public space.
- 4.22** In *Time to Talk*, there was a clear call for greater levels of appropriate, arms-length supervision that still allows children to play on their own. We welcome views on where increasing levels of the different types of supervision would make a key difference in reassuring parents and children about safety, helping to enable more outdoor play.
- 4.23** **Pathfinders will explore how best to support those occupying supervisory roles in relation to public space, and we will establish a realistic and practical set of principles for their work in relation to children.** We will encourage local play partnerships to include the perspective of park-keepers, community police officers and other public sector workers in their membership. In addition, we will explore how playworkers could train volunteers in the principles of playwork to support their role as supervisors of public play-space – for example through involvement in ‘play ranger’ (roaming playworker) schemes.

## Volunteering

- 4.24** Local volunteer schemes could offer opportunities for adults and young people to help manage the risks to children of outdoor play, as well as promoting better community cohesion, building contact and trust between different generations, and allowing young volunteers to make a positive contribution to society.
- 4.25** **We will invest £1 million in the play pathfinders to investigate a number of different volunteering models,** aimed at creating a greater sense of safety in public space, and building confidence in parents about the safety of public space. This could cover supervision of public play spaces, as well as improving the quality of public play spaces through protection from vandalism and littering. We would not intend this to be a substitute for parent-supervised play, and the focus would be on creating safe opportunities for children to generate play for themselves rather than through using volunteers to direct play.
- 4.26** Working with partners from the third sector, we will ask pathfinder authorities to work with volunteer schemes that currently exist in their local area to find out exactly what these offer,

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and to identify the difficulties of running this type of scheme including how issues such as recruitment, training, sustainability, and insurance are managed. We will also ask pathfinder authorities to consult with children, parents and potential volunteers about what this type of scheme should deliver. **We will take the results of this work and use it to develop proposals for a national volunteering scheme.**

#### **Case study – Bath and North East Somerset**

The community play rangers in Bath and North East Somerset are funded by the Children's Fund and Bath and North East Somerset Council and managed by Wansdyke Play Association. Since October 2003 the community play rangers have been working and playing with children and young people in four areas of greatest socio-economic deprivation to:

- encourage children to make more use of parks and open spaces;
- reduce children's fear of bullying; and
- help children to feel that they have someone to listen to their needs and turn to for advice.

There are three teams of two play rangers working in parks and outdoor public spaces which operates on an 'open access' principle meaning that children are free to come and go as they please as there is no registration required. By being present in the park community play rangers do their utmost to ensure children are kept safe yet at the same time provide opportunities for them to be challenged, take risks and have fun outdoors come rain or shine or even snow.

#### **Case study – Mile End Park, Tower Hamlets**

Mile End Park currently has four full time park rangers. The rangers act as the first point of contact within the park and deal with all aspects of the park from managing park events to leading family orientated mini events.

In the holidays the rangers are at the fore of organised play activity in the children's play park.

Rangers also work with corporate and community volunteers on a range of environmental challenges from hedge planting to habitat creation.

### **Knowledge and understanding of the risks and benefits of play**

**4.27** In developing the *Staying Safe* strategy, DCSF consulted extensively with parents on their perceptions of risk and how this affected what they allow their children to do – particularly in relation to outdoor activity, resilience and independence. In response to the feedback, we have committed to a new communications campaign on children's safety, including information for parents and carers about risks to their children's safety. Managing risk is a key factor in ensuring inclusion of disabled children.

**4.28** We also think that more could be done to provide parents with information about the benefits of, and opportunities for, outdoor play. In the *Staying Safe* consultation, more than 80 per cent of respondents supported the idea of a separate communications campaign to encourage parents to let their children play outside. **DCSF and DCMS will work with local authorities,**

**Children's Centres, schools and youth services, to promote and spread information about formal and informal local play spaces**, and with the pathfinders to develop and test a local communications toolkit.

- 4.29 Nationally, and in support of local communications, we will work with partners in tackling the current perceptions and barriers which exist about freedom and play for children in our society. **Through our communications campaign we will endorse freedom and play for children**, supporting the *Staying Safe* campaign on children's safety which will include messages on children's safety being everyone's responsibility.
- 4.30 The Government's obesity strategy *Healthy Weight, Healthy Lives*<sup>26</sup> includes an integrated marketing programme to inform, support and empower parents to make changes to their children's diets and level of physical activity. In autumn 2008 the Department of Health will launch a campaign to emphasise the benefits of active family life, focusing on fun and relationships.

### Negative perceptions of children and young people

- 4.31 *"There's nothing for older children and young people to do so they congregate by the swings, slides and put off younger children."* (Member of DCSF's Children and Youth Board)
- 4.32 *"You don't play with children you don't know, especially those who are older than you, because they might hurt you."* (Girl, 12<sup>27</sup>)
- 4.33 Parents and children report that one of the things that stops them playing outside is groups of young people hanging around play areas. Young people too often get labelled by the behaviour of a few of their peers, and can start to feel alienated from the community in which they live. *Aiming High for Young People* sets out proposals on proactive action to address the challenge which young people face in growing up in a culture that has widespread negative perceptions of youth, and in which nearly three-fifths of the media coverage of young people focuses on negative stories.
- 4.34 **Government will counteract negative perceptions by generating a wider awareness of the positive contribution young people make to their communities.** This is linked to work to promote places to go and things to do for young people and involvement by young people in their local communities. Local areas are encouraged to consider the development of youth provision alongside roll out of the play capital programme to support these messages.

### Excessive health and safety fears

- 4.35 During the *Staying Safe* consultation, several local authorities and play organisations raised concerns about a perceived rise in litigation claims, understanding about risk assessment, and the effect this has – for example, the closing down of local adventure playgrounds. There is a lack of hard evidence on the extent to which this is a real issue, and so through this

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26 [www.dh.gov.uk/en/Publicationsandstatistics/Publications/PublicationsPolicyAndGuidance/DH\\_082378](http://www.dh.gov.uk/en/Publicationsandstatistics/Publications/PublicationsPolicyAndGuidance/DH_082378)

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consultation, as well as through work with key stakeholders, **we will ask about the scale of the litigation issue.**

- 4.36** The Children’s Plan states that the Government will ensure that schools and local authorities take a proportionate approach to health and safety to allow children to take risks while staying safe: play is one of the activities covered within this. **We are working with the Health and Safety Executive, and school and local authority partners to develop guidance on proportionate risk management.**
- 4.37** We will also work with the Play Safety Forum, a group of national agencies involved in play safety, to help play providers understand the importance of balancing the benefits of offering children opportunities to take risks in their play whilst ensuring the levels of risk are reasonable. Our customer insight work with parents and children suggests that both would support equipment which encourages risk taking in a safe environment.

***Consultation questions:***

***What needs to change for parents and children to be less concerned about outside play?***

***Where, when, and by whom should play be supervised, and where should it be unsupervised?***

***What further improvements to road safety and accessibility do parents and children want in order to support children’s play?***

***How can government and local communities support play through changing negative perceptions of children and young people?***

***Are worries about being sued leading to play areas that are dull and unstimulating?***

# Chapter 5: Child-friendly communities

## Introduction

- 5.1 Designated play areas must not be the only places where children are allowed or expected to play. It is important that the wider environment encourages play, and sometimes a pavement pattern or a grassy area can have as much play value as a piece of dedicated play equipment. Children's needs should be reflected in the planning of local areas, and local communities should be empowered to be involved in these decisions.
- 5.2 A community where children are playing is a healthy and sustainable community and, to support this, children need to be given the time, space, and opportunity to play. Yet children's needs can be ignored in public space design, reducing the opportunities available for them to play outdoors. Similarly, play is often inappropriately moved away from housing and adult activity because of concerns about noise and nuisance from children's play. We need to put an end to the culture of 'no ball games here'. We are determined to make it the rule, not the exception, that children's needs are reflected in local decision-making, and believe that this will encourage flourishing, confident and cohesive communities.
- 5.3 This chapter sets out the national support government is providing to ensure the needs of children are taken account of in local planning, and to enable local communities to be involved in the decisions that affect them.

## Vision

- 5.4 We propose to make public space more child-friendly through:
- DCSF and DCMS working with the department for Communities and Local Government (CLG), the Department for Transport (DfT) and others to include **a stronger focus on spaces suitable for play** in the planning system, including continuing to improve our parks and green spaces;
  - a programme of activity to **provide cross professional training for people who design and manage public space**; and
  - making **play a focus of flagship developments** such as eco-towns, healthy towns, growth points and the Olympic Park.

- 5.5 We propose to empower communities to support children playing by:
- supporting **local community ownership of space suitable for play** through harnessing CLG's community empowerment agenda;
  - helping to publicise **Grassroots Grants and Community Spaces**; and
  - supporting **more positive relationships between adults and children in public space**.

### A stronger focus on spaces suitable for play

*"Children need parks and areas to congregate, they need to socialise and be a part of their community."* (Practitioner, *Time to Talk* consultation)



Copyright: Tim Gill

- 5.6 New build housing densities increased by 60 per cent between 1997 and 2005<sup>xliv</sup>. In 2001 Play England estimated there was only 2.3m<sup>2</sup> of play space per child, despite acknowledged standards stipulating a minimum of 24m<sup>2</sup> play space per child (10m<sup>2</sup> in London). It has been argued that play needs are often marginalised in planning and design considerations.
- 5.7 **We will issue a joint CLG / DCSF / DCMS / DH letter to chief planning officers** which will highlight the importance of outdoor play for children and the critical role played by planning decisions in shaping environments that are either sympathetic or hostile to children's physical activity.
- 5.8 We also think that planners and designers would benefit from more detailed information from government on how they can support children's play needs. Later this year we will publish

**additional supporting guidance for planners**<sup>28</sup>, which will, for example, highlight current powers and duties and showcase good practice. The guidance will also consider national benchmarks around quality, quantity and accessibility of playable spaces, for local partners to draw upon when determining their standards for provision locally.

#### **Case study – Greater London Authority planning guidance**

The Greater London Authority has introduced a new standard that will require all new residential developments in London to include the provision of at least 10m<sup>2</sup> of high quality and accessible play and recreation space for every child and young person who will live there.

The standard is contained within new Supplementary Planning Guidance to the Mayor of London's London Plan and forms an essential part of the strategy to make London a more sustainable city, providing a good quality of life and improving the public realm for all its citizens.

Play space policies must be incorporated into local development plans and the guidance will assist boroughs, planners and developers in the design of accessible recreation and play space in new housing schemes in the capital. It has been developed in consultation with local authorities, key stakeholders and the Government.

The Supplementary Planning Guidance *Providing children and young people's play and informal recreation* is available at [www.london.gov.uk/mayor/strategies/sds/spg-children-recreation.jsp](http://www.london.gov.uk/mayor/strategies/sds/spg-children-recreation.jsp)

- 5.9** New guidance from the National Institute for Clinical Excellence sets out first recommendations on how to improve the physical environment in order to encourage and support physical activity. This is intended to guide future investment in urban design, transport routes, buildings and school playgrounds. The *Healthy Weight, Healthy Lives* strategy sets out plans to encourage local planning authorities, when considering planning applications relating to all types of outdoor space, to include open space and playing fields. It also sets out proposals to use the planning policy review announced in the Planning White Paper to identify where changes can be made, or additional guidance produced, to help tackle obesity and support healthy communities. **DCSF, DCMS and DH will work with CLG as they carry out this planning review, and ensure that children's play needs are considered appropriately.**

### Housing developments

- 5.10** Developers are key players in determining how well children's play needs are met within the immediate vicinity of their homes. CLG's policy planning statement on housing<sup>29</sup> aims to ensure that everyone has the opportunity to live in a decent home, which they can afford, in a community where they want to live. This guidance requires the needs of children to be taken into account in housing developments and sets the quality standard for designated and informal recreational areas, including play areas and informal play space, for children. These should be well-designed, safe, secure and stimulating areas with safe pedestrian access.

#### **Government will work with the Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment**

<sup>28</sup> Additional guidance to planners in support of Planning Policy Guidance 17: Planning for open space, sport and recreation and PPS3 Housing (CLG)

<sup>29</sup> Planning Policy Statement 3: Housing (CLG) para 17: *Particularly where family housing is proposed, it will be important to ensure that the needs of children are taken into account and that there is good provision of recreational areas, including private gardens, play areas and informal play space. These should be well designed, safe, secure and stimulating areas with safe pedestrian access*

**(CABE) and CLG to develop a dialogue with the development industry to encourage wider adoption of this standard as a minimum in all new developments.** It will also be the starting point for the new good practice guidance on planning for open space, sport and recreation.

- 5.11** As set out in the Children’s Plan (paragraph 1.53), **DCSF and DCMS will work with CLG in partnership with registered social landlords to improve the quality of play environments in some of the most deprived areas.**
- 5.12** We will also explore how policies on social housing can be used to support better opportunities for play. For example Neighbourhoods Green, funded by CLG, publishes guidance to promote wildlife on housing estates in which it suggests this can empower residents and promote community cohesion. Projects like this offer opportunities for children to experience the natural environment, which we know has significant benefits for mental health, and improving the outdoor environment for children provides a focus around which the whole community can unite.

### Green space

- 5.13** High quality green spaces are good for people and places. CLG is committed to improving the quality of parks and green spaces, so that everyone has access to good quality green spaces close to where they live. This includes **developing an urban green space action plan** that will continue to build capacity and skills within local authorities to embed a strategic approach to management and engage effectively with children and young people.
- 5.14** The Green Flag Award Scheme is the national standard for parks and green spaces and helps drive up quality across the country as more spaces reach the standard. CLG will continue to support its growth and its role as a national standard to drive up standards of management and maintenance.
- 5.15** CLG is developing a green space data-base and live mapping tool to strengthen the knowledge base related to Planning Policy Guidance 17<sup>30</sup> and allow the sharing of a full range of green space information. It will involve all stakeholders and local authorities in ensuring that information is used and maintained, and that their views are captured.

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<sup>30</sup> For details of PPG17 see Communities and Local Government web site at <http://www.communities.gov.uk/planningandbuilding/planning/planningpolicyguidance/planningpolicystatements/planningpolicyguidance/229224/>



Play Scotland



Sustrans

### Different kinds of streets

- 5.16** DfT's recent guidance on street design *Manual for Streets* offers a new approach to the design of residential streets, emphasising their role as places for the local community to spend time rather than as efficient routes for travel. *Quiet Lanes* published by the Countryside Agency aims to promote a similar approach in rural areas; both may help to make the space outside children's homes safer for play and safer for accessing designated play areas.
- 5.17** Home Zones are intended to change the way that streets are used in order to improve quality of life, for example through allowing scope for children's play. DfT has published best practice guidance on Home Zone design<sup>31</sup>, and the **Government encourages councils to support applications for Home Zones**. As set out in chapter 4, **DfT will be writing to all local highways authorities in the context of our play agenda**.

31 <http://www.dft.gov.uk/pgr/sustainable/homezones/cfos/homezoneschallengingthefuture5739>

### Case Study – The Methleys Home Zone

In 1999, the Government recognised the value of designating residential areas as different from normal roads, and chose the Methleys as one of nine national pilot Home Zone schemes. Home Zones are residential areas which have been designed to encourage very low vehicle speeds. The aim is to reduce the dominance of motor vehicles and, in doing so, create environments more suited to the needs of pedestrians and cyclists (including children).

Methleys Neighbourhood Action (MNA) is the residents group which came together to make the Home Zone a reality. MNA member Paul Doney said:

*“It has been a very successful partnership with the Highways Department, with both sides learning from each other. We could not have achieved what we have today without their support, but equally they could not have done a scheme like this without a co-operative community.”*

### Cross professional training for people who design and manage public space

- 5.18** It is critically important that we raise awareness of the implications of children’s need for unstructured play on the design of local public spaces among those who are responsible for planning and design decisions. The traditional children’s workforce also needs to understand the importance of unstructured play for children
- 5.19 We will negotiate, develop, pilot and roll out a programme of training** that will bring together professionals who design public space with children’s delivery partners, including the play sector. We will offer this programme to every local authority and will pilot it with the pathfinders in 2008-09. The involvement of expert organisations will ensure a strong emphasis on creating natural play environments and the training will also explore how to involve children, families and communities in planning, designing and managing public space. It will complement DH’s plans for training planners, trailed in *Healthy Weight, Healthy Lives*, as part of wider efforts to focus attention on the importance of using the built environment to encourage physical activity.
- 5.20** During the Play Strategy consultation **we will work across government and with Government Offices, CAGE, Play England and other organisations to communicate with relevant professional audiences.**

### Play a focus of flagship developments

- 5.21** The Town and Country Planning Association<sup>32</sup> will publish a worksheet on sustainable communities as part of their work on the development of eco-towns. This will highlight the importance of creating open spaces for children to play, making them accessible and safe, and ensuring they can be enjoyed by all children, including those with disabilities.
- 5.22** *Healthy Weight, Healthy Lives* includes a commitment to work with a number of interested local authorities to sign up to a £30m healthy community challenge fund. The fund will test and validate holistic approaches to promoting physical activity and could include increased

32 TCPA website – [www.tcpa.org.uk](http://www.tcpa.org.uk)

opportunities for play. Towns that sign up to the fund will be badged “Healthy Towns”. The Government is currently developing the process by which towns can put forward proposals to become part of this programme.

- 5.23 DCSF and DCMS are working with CLG to engage with representatives from growth areas and growth points** e.g. by disseminating best practice and guidance, so that they can reflect the importance of play space in their planning for development. This will build on CLG’s promotion of green spaces and green infrastructure in the growth areas and growth points; the growth fund will continue to be available to support the delivery of green infrastructure projects or the development of green infrastructure strategies.
- 5.24** Plans are being drawn up for the transformation of the Olympic Park including identification of opportunities for children’s play space following completion of the Games. The London Development Agency and Olympic Delivery Authority are working with CABE and Play England to prepare a strategy for play provision, which will inform work to develop and regenerate the Park following the Games. **We will promote the need for this to include play opportunities by jointly supporting an event for Olympic planners and children’s services departments** involved in the Olympics.

### Local community ownership of space suitable for play

*“Funding needs to be delegated to small community representative groups so that local solutions are worked out for local communities.” (Parent/worker with children and young people<sup>33</sup>)*

- 5.25** CLG’s national empowerment partnerships bring together key stakeholders to promote improvement in local community empowerment practice. This includes sharing and disseminating community-led feedback and research, promoting examples of best practice, and increasing opportunities for sharing learning, through a joint programme of activity developed by the National Empowerment Partnership’s regional empowerment consortia, in partnership with the regional improvement and efficiency partnerships and Government Offices.
- 5.26** Through this programme **we will encourage local authorities to apply community engagement and empowerment approaches to the creation of child-friendly public space, and disseminate their learning through regional consortia.** Where local authorities are both play pathfinders and empowering authorities, we will encourage them to pay particular attention to these two agendas and promote the learning from the empowerment work to the pathfinder network. Similarly we will identify local authorities who are both pathfinders or playbuilders and involved in the participatory budgeting pilots to encourage them to extend those principles to the planning of their capital investment.
- 5.27** The *Action Plan for Community Empowerment*, published last year by CLG and endorsed by the Local Government Association, sets out a comprehensive programme to empower local communities. Play could potentially benefit from many of the commitments in the action plan

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33 Online survey, *Time to Talk*

as it offers a strong, attractive and widely endorsed focal point for community empowerment activity. In addition, an empowerment White Paper, led by CLG, will be published in summer 2008. This will contain proposals to give people more influence in their community.

- 5.28 For example, in implementing the Sustainable Communities Act it will be important for high quality play opportunities to be included in the vision of the local area, shaped by the wishes of local children and families. **We will work with CLG to firmly embed play in community empowerment policy**, including the new duty to involve which, from April 2009, will require local authorities to inform, consult and involve local people in local decisions, policies and services.

#### **Case study – Mapesbury Dell Doorstep Green**

Mapesbury Dell, in the London borough of Brent, was a run down hidden away public space off Cricklewood High Street. Its narrow entrance and secluded nature made it attractive to drug users and other types of anti-social behaviour and, as a result, was little used by residents. Local residents were aware of the potential of the space and formed a group to raise funds to renovate the area.

Initial consultation with residents established what was wanted by the local community. The group engaged in a creative fundraising programme and asked children at Anson school to become involved in the re-designing of the park. They responded by making a model of the park at that time (May 2003), suggesting ideas for ways to sort out some of the problems in the park.

The Dell was designed to be an inclusive resource for primary and nursery school children, offering opportunities for natural play with planters, an interactive pond containing frogs, insects and fish, and a 'circle of learning' for story telling and talks about nature. The park also contains unusual play equipment such as a pirate ship, bamboo forest and treasure island to encourage imaginative play.

Local schools now use the park as an educational resource and the park has included art and sculpture including exhibitions from local colleges and universities. It demonstrates how effective schools can be in changing their community. The project was also commended in an Institute of Leisure and Amenity Management open space innovation award (September 2006).

See <http://www.mapesbury-dell.org/>

#### **Grassroots Grants and Community Spaces**

- 5.29 The new Grassroots Grants programme funded by the Office of the Third Sector will offer small grants, capacity building support and sustainable funding for small voluntary and community groups and organisations – grassroots groups. **We will encourage local funders to work with local play partnerships and Children's Trusts so that groups supporting play can be made aware of the programme.** Grassroots Grants could help to sustain play opportunities and complement local authority funding so that provision can be extended by, for example, recruiting and providing support for new volunteers, extending opening hours or increasing access by particular groups.

**5.30** Community Spaces was launched in March 2008 and is a £50 million open grants programme funded through the Big Lottery Fund's Changing Spaces initiative. The programme provides support and funding to community groups across England and responds to people's aspirations to have better places on their doorsteps. It aims to create more interesting places for children to play, safer spaces for people of all ages to enjoy, and greener spaces where people and nature can grow and flourish.

### **More positive relationships between adults and children in public space**

**5.31** To really make communities and neighbourhoods more child-friendly and playable, we need to do more than just change the built environment. We also need to work together as a society to create popular attitudes that embrace children in public space and challenge inappropriate 'No Ball Games' cultures.

**5.32** This means adults being willing to share public space with children and understand that play can, at times, test boundaries. But it also means children behaving responsibly – government is clear that unacceptable and anti-social behaviour will not be tolerated. Planners and designers need to think creatively about how to create spaces that meet the needs of communities, of which children are an important part. It also means supporting more balanced and positive perceptions of young people, for example through the media; chapter 4 described action we will take to support this. Crucially, through our capital investment and this play strategy we will develop attractive and absorbing places where children, families and communities can enjoy positive, social play together.

#### ***Consultation questions:***

***What needs to happen in order for the work we're suggesting on planning to make a difference on the ground?***

***What contribution should parents and communities make to support children playing outside?***

# Chapter 6: Sustaining and embedding play

## Introduction

- 6.1 Play has historically had a low profile in many local services. The Department for Culture, Media and Sport publication *Time for Play* (2006)<sup>34</sup> recommended that local authorities and other local strategic partners give play a much greater profile and priority in future than they had in the past.
- 6.2 Government wants the investment it is making to have a lasting impact and this can only be achieved through play provision being shared and managed by communities and local authorities and their strategic partners. Play needs greater prioritisation locally, the skills and capacity of the play workforce need to be increased, and play provision included in local authority policies and performance management.
- 6.3 This embedding of play in local policy has already begun. In response to the BIG Lottery Children's Play initiative, nearly all unitary and district authorities now have a play strategy in place<sup>35</sup>. This chapter sets out our proposals for ensuring this momentum continues, and that play is prioritised at a local level, and many local areas already offer a variety of exciting places for children to play.

## Vision

- 6.4 We propose to sustain and embed play by:
- introducing a **play indicator** to the national indicator set to encourage all authorities to prioritise delivery of better play opportunities
  - using our **new funding to drive high-level planning and partnerships** on play locally, including the routine involvement of communities;
  - recognising play as an element of the responsibilities of **Children's Trusts, Directors of Children's Services, and local authority Chief Executives**, and highlighting how local strategic partnerships can support play;
  - investigating how **Primary Care Trusts** can contribute to the play agenda;

34 <http://www.culture.gov.uk/NR/rdonlyres/6113A6E7-458B-4D58-894D-9AAA62CACD01/0/DCMSPlayReport.pdf>

35 Guidance to local authorities on preparing strategies for improving children's play opportunities was published by PlayEngland in 2006. See [http://www.playengland.org.uk/downloads/pdf/planning\\_for\\_play.pdf](http://www.playengland.org.uk/downloads/pdf/planning_for_play.pdf).

- e. clarifying **the role of Government Offices;**
- f. professionalising the **play workforce;** and
- g. working with **play pathfinders** to test potential solutions to barriers to play.

## Play indicator

- 6.5** From June 2008, the priorities for a local area agreed between central government and a local area will be set out in its Local Area Agreement (LAA). These will replace the existing national performance frameworks under which local authorities operate. Each area will agree up to 35 targets with government as part of their LAA, drawn from a set of 198 indicators – the national indicator set (NIS). The only way of measuring national priorities will be through use of this indicator set. We are making it clear to local authorities that play is now a national priority by building it into this new performance framework, using children’s views as the driver for local delivery **and from April 2009 an indicator will be included on what children think about the parks and play areas in their local area.** Information for the indicator is collected via the TellUs Survey which already provides data for a number of indicators for the national indicator set. The survey provides robust data at a local level, collected from a sample of children in years 6, 8 and 10.
- 6.6** There are a number of other indicators in the NIS where a focus on play could help with delivery. For example, active play will be a significant contributor to the delivery of the two indicators on child obesity, which are central to tackling that issue. Play in communities can also support public satisfaction with local areas (NI15). Where local authorities choose such indicators for their LAA it will clearly be important to think carefully in the context of delivery planning about how play opportunities can support performance, and to support and develop the local play agenda accordingly.

## New funding to drive high-level planning and partnerships

- 6.7** As we distribute our new play funding, we will look for authorities to show how they will embed this play investment programme into a broad, top-tier, strategic approach to planning and commissioning for play. We expect this to draw on existing unitary and district play strategies and to feed into Children and Young People’s Plans, sustainable community strategies, and to be linked to local spatial planning frameworks and relevant strategies on community safety and transport.
- 6.8** We expect this top-tier strategic approach on play to take account of:
- the need to ensure access to play for children across the area, with a focus on those most in need of better play environments and opportunities;
  - best practice on innovative design and production for play site equipment and landscaping;
  - the safety of children getting to and playing on new play sites; and
  - enabling the full involvement of local communities, including children and parents.

- 6.9 As play sits outside of children’s services in some local authorities, we will look for strong partnerships between Directors of Children’s Services and colleagues in environment, leisure, planning and housing, and transport. In two-tier authorities there will clearly be the need for strong joint working between top-tier and district councils, often also involving town and parish councils.
- 6.10 We know that a good deal of this type of partnership working is already happening through the local play partnerships at unitary and district levels, developed through the BIG Lottery Children’s Play process. We anticipate that our new investment will reinforce these partnerships at the top tier in every local authority.

**Case study – Worcestershire County Council**

This county strategy with its partner strategies in the district authorities seems an excellent blue-print for how counties and district councils can work together to enhance the quality of play for all children and young people. It has some innovative ideas and ways of working. The underpinning understanding of play shows evidence of good research into the play literature and contributes to the principles and values which underpin the strategy. There is a clear commitment to providing risk and challenge.

There is evidence of wide consultation and participation. These include stakeholder events, a county visioning day and the use of other consultations carried out over the last two years. A variety of issues raised during the consultation is listed.

The strategy covers a very wide range of provision including outdoor play, play at tourist attractions, play in pubs and restaurants, hospital play and school extended services.

**Children’s Trusts, Directors of Children’s Services and local authority Chief Executives**

- 6.11 Local authorities and their partners in Children’s Trusts and local strategic partnerships help to shape the places in which children live. Their decisions about how that space is to be used have a major impact on children’s play opportunities which in turn impacts on their wellbeing.

**We will issue updated statutory guidance on Children’s Trusts** which promotes improved cooperation between partners and agencies, who need to work effectively together to ensure integrated services deliver better outcomes for children and young people, and thus have a clear and sustained affect on their wellbeing.

- 6.12 As part of this, **we propose that Directors of Children’s Services (DCSs) work closely with their Chief Executives to champion children’s environmental wellbeing** as part of the process to develop the sustainable community strategy and, where appropriate, through the Local Area Agreement. In addition, DCSs should work with local strategic partnerships to secure and protect outdoor play opportunities, and work with transport, parks, planning and environmental agencies on action to secure children’s wellbeing in relation to green space, road traffic and climate change.

## Primary Care Trusts

- 6.13 The Department of Health is looking at the role of Primary Care Trusts (PCTs) and their specific contribution to the play agenda. We propose **a pilot study commencing in 2008-09 to demonstrate how PCTs can help to promote physically active play and address the barriers to play faced by vulnerable families**, by working through local partnerships and the supporting community action. This will include targeted information and advice for families, based upon a social marketing approach.
- 6.14 DH guidance to local areas on implementing *Healthy Weight, Healthy Lives* encourages PCTs to work with local authority planning departments to provide more opportunities for play, especially unstructured play. It suggests ways in which health professionals can work with other local partners, including local authorities and third sector organisations.

## Regional networks

- 6.15 Regional public health groups have a role in promoting physical activity. Encouraging play, in both structured and unstructured forms, can be an integral part of a wider, regional physical activity programme, which can benefit both children and their parents. **We will encourage health sector workers to link with their play counterparts** to ensure that local health services are aware of what play provision is available in their area, and to provide health professionals with an awareness of the importance and benefits of play. In particular, regional play leads should be encouraged to attend regional physical activity networks.

### Case study – Regional Public Health Groups

Play England East Midlands have been working with 40 local authorities on the development of their play strategies for the BIG Lottery Children's Play programme. The programme is bringing over £10.7 million pounds into the East Midlands to improve provision for children's play. Many of the local authorities have now drawn down their funding and are in the process of delivering a variety of projects from play ranger schemes to skate parks.

All 40 local authorities now have play strategies and Play England will continue to support their play partnerships in order to keep play a priority, ensuring the strategy is a working document. Health is a key driver for the play agenda as it makes an enormous contribution to a child's level of physical activity. It is therefore important that local authority play partnerships have a broad membership, including representation from the public health field wherever possible. Play England is therefore creating strong links with DH and NICE and are engaged with regional physical activity networks in order to share good practice and coordinate work plans.

## The role of Government Offices

- 6.16 We will promote understanding and active support of the government's developing policy on play and the benefits for children's outcomes through **embedding play in the Government Office business planning guidance from April 2008**. In this, we will ask that Government Offices:

- include play in priorities discussions, and support effective local partnership working through brokering/participating in effective regional networks and partnerships;
- support pathfinder local authorities, in partnership with Play England, regional coordinators, the Government Office Network and other government departments, to deliver new and refurbished play provision;
- work with children's services staff to support pilot training for place-shapers, and take forward work on developing the play workforce;
- encourage local authorities to give higher priority to outdoor play, reflected in their decisions on planning, place shaping and resource allocation, and inclusion of play in local strategic documents; and
- contribute to DCSF and DCMS policy development and implementation through effective twinning relationships with policy colleagues.

## Play workforce

- 6.17** A recent survey of employers<sup>36</sup> in the play sector found that while a large majority of employees held at least a level 2 qualification, over half (52 per cent) held no playwork specific qualification, with only around five per cent having a playwork specific qualification at level 4 or above. These findings suggest that although the play workforce is quite highly qualified, in many cases these qualifications are not in play-related subjects.
- 6.18** The small number of employees with play qualifications at level 4 or above is also a concern. Research by SkillsActive shows a decline of 30 per cent in the number of playwork entrants to higher education institutes between 1999 and 2004<sup>37</sup>.
- 6.19** To help tackle this gap, we are proposing three key actions:
- to introduce measures to enable 4,000 playworkers to achieve a level 3 play qualification by 2011;
  - to introduce measures to support the continuous professional development of leaders and managers in the play workforce, by developing a new playwork management qualification; and
  - the Children's Workforce Development Council to commission a research study to consider how graduates may be deployed most effectively within the play workforce.
- 6.20** Further details on these proposed actions can be found in *Building Brighter Futures: next steps for the children's workforce*, being published alongside this consultation.

<sup>36</sup> Playwork People 3, SkillsActive

<sup>37</sup> Assessment of Current Provision, SkillsActive Sector Skills Agreement

### Case study – NVQ in playwork

Danny Pitman of Barnet completed his CACHE Level 3 NVQ (National Vocational Qualification) in Playwork in spring 2007 at Barnet Playwork Assessment Centre. He started his career as a teenager helping out at a children's summer club run by his mother. Danny undertook training to become better qualified and when his mother retired, he took on the manager role at 'Busy Bees' play centre in Barnet which offers after-school play and holiday schemes. Danny said:

*"I got a taste for being a playworker at a very young age and put in a lot of hard work training, getting qualifications and setting up the play centre. I feel I've achieved a great deal in a relatively short space of time. I really enjoy running the play centre and making a difference to young children's lives and the NVQ has helped me to train to a high standard which enables me to deliver a high quality of playwork to the children at the centre."*

### Play workforce and early identification

**6.21** The playwork workforce forms a key part of the team around each child and they need to be able to support joined up local services by aiding in early identification and referral – this will support the gateway function into support services and positive activities. Knowledge and understanding of the Common Assessment Framework is an important element of this. **We will ensure that qualifications available through the Children's Plan commitment reflect the requirement for playworkers to understand the importance of assessment.** This is in addition to ongoing work, as part of the development of an Integrated Qualifications Framework, to ensure that all qualifications reflect the common core of skills and knowledge for the children's workforce (usually known as the common core).



Play England

## Play pathfinders

**6.22 We will work with pathfinder authorities to test out potential solutions to barriers to embedding play locally.** Through the evaluation of the pathfinder programme, we will identify the impact of our capital investment on children's wellbeing and positive activities, as well as identifying the most cost-effective way of implementing further national roll-outs of play areas and adventure playgrounds beyond 2010-11. We will learn from the experience of the pathfinders to identify those approaches to play which work best and which help to deliver better targeted play strategies that meet children's needs.

### ***Consultation questions:***

***How can we ensure that play is given a high priority by local areas?***

***What is the specific role of PCTs and primary care professionals in promoting healthy, active play?***

***What role should playworkers take in delivering this agenda?***

# Chapter 7: How to get involved

**7.1** This is an open consultation and we want to hear your views. A summary version of this consultation is available at [www.dcsf.gov.uk/consultations](http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/consultations). We welcome your views on what can be done to make public space more welcoming for play.

**7.2** Here is a reminder of the questions where we would like to hear your views:

## General

*Is this the right national vision and set of aims for play in England?*

*Are the areas we have identified for new action right? What other areas could be considered and what more could we do?*

*Who is responsible for helping children to play, and what are they responsible for?*

## Supporting play throughout childhood

*How can schools best support play, both for their pupils and for their local communities?*

*What more could be done, and in what settings, to support disabled children to be able to play?*

*Are there groups of children who do not have opportunities to play and what could be done to help them?*

## More places to play

*What do parents and children see to be the biggest gap in the play facilities that are currently available to them?*

*What can we do to make play spaces more appealing – particularly for children aged 8-13?*

*How can communities be best involved in the design and running of new play spaces*

## Playing safely

*What needs to change for parents and children to be less concerned about outside play?*

*Where, when, and by whom should play be supervised, and where should it be unsupervised?*

*What further improvements to road safety and accessibility do parents and children want in order to support children's play?*

*How can government and local communities support play through changing negative perceptions of children and young people?*

*Are worries about being sued leading to play areas that are dull and unstimulating?*

### **Child-friendly communities**

*What needs to happen in order for the work we're suggesting on planning to make a difference on the ground?*

*What contribution should parents and communities make to support children playing outside?*

### **Sustaining and embedding play**

*How can we ensure that play is given a high priority by local areas?*

*What is the specific role of PCTs and primary care professionals in promoting healthy, active play?*

*What role should playworkers take in delivering this agenda?*

**7.3** We will be running a series of events during the consultation period to discuss these issues, including focused work with children, young people, and their families. To submit your response to the consultation in email or writing, please send it to:

Play.Consultation@dcsf.gsi.gov.uk, or

Play consultation team

Department for Children, Schools and Families

Area 1A Castle View House

East Lane

Runcorn

WA7 2GJ

**7.4** We will use your responses to help shape the final play strategy, which we will publish in autumn 2008.

# Glossary

**Adventure playground:** An open access play setting staffed by trained playworkers where children can find materials and support to build and adapt their play space.

**CABE:** The Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment

**CLG:** The Department for Communities and Local Government

**Community:** Sustainable communities are places where people want to live and work, now and in the future. They meet the diverse needs of existing and future residents, are sensitive to their environment, and contribute to a high quality of life. They are safe and inclusive, well planned, built and run, and offer equality of opportunity and good services for all.

**DCMS:** The Department for Culture, Media and Sport

**DCS:** Director of Children's Services

**DCSF:** The Department for Children, Schools and Families

**DfES:** The Department for Education and Skills

**DfT:** The Department for Transport

**DH:** The Department of Health

**LAA:** Local Authority Agreement

**Neighbourhood:** Geographically localised community

**NICE:** National Institute for Clinical Excellence

**NIS:** National Indicator Set

**Open access:** Staffed play provision where children can come and go as they wish.

**Play:** What children and young people do when they follow their own ideas and interests in their own way and for their own reasons, balancing fun with a sense of respect for themselves and others.

**Play area/space:** A free and accessible space that provides unrestricted opportunities for play and informal recreation for children and young people. Play spaces include equipped playgrounds, kickabout areas, adventure playgrounds and skateparks.

**Playground:** The area provided by a school for children to spend their breaktimes

**Playworker:** Playworkers plan, organise and take part in play and leisure activities. They work in various settings, such as adventure playgrounds, after-school clubs and holiday playschemes. Their work could involve activities ranging from art, crafts or drama, to taking children on outings, and from cookery to outdoor games.

**PSA:** Public Service Agreement.

**Third sector:** Voluntary and community groups, social enterprises, and charities

# Annex 1: Play pathfinders

The following local authorities have been selected to become play pathfinders from April 2008. A further 10 authorities will be selected in autumn 2008.

## **London**

Camden  
Enfield  
Hackney  
Kensington & Chelsea  
Tower Hamlets

## **South East**

East Sussex  
Portsmouth

## **South West**

Bath NES  
Bristol

## **East Midlands**

Nottingham City

## **West Midlands**

Dudley  
Wolverhampton

## **East**

Cambridgeshire

## **North West**

Blackburn with Darwen  
Knowsley  
Rochdale

## **North East**

North Tyneside  
Sunderland

## **Yorkshire and Humberside**

East Riding  
Rotherham

# Annex 2:

## What government has already done

### Introduction

1. This consultation document sets out specifically targeted policies which will support delivery of play. However, play is also supported indirectly through a number of government's wider policies. Details of these are set out in this annex.

### Play and health

2. The new cross-government strategy on obesity *Healthy Weight, Healthy Lives* sets out a series of measures to help implement the guidance and ensure that health is built more robustly into the fabric of our lives. This strategy commits to:
  - encourage local planning authorities, when considering planning applications relating to all types of outdoor space, to include open space and playing fields to support the vision of a more physically active society; and
  - use the planning policy review announced in the Planning White Paper to identify where changes can be made or additional guidance produced, to help tackle obesity and support healthy communities. This will build on the agenda already set out in The Children's Plan to improve the usability of public spaces for play.
3. New guidance from NICE sets out the first recommendations – based on evidence of effectiveness and cost-effectiveness – on how to improve the physical environment in order to encourage and support physical activity. It complements previous NICE guidance on obesity and is intended to guide future investment in urban design, transport routes, buildings and school playgrounds.
4. Recommendations that refer to play include ensuring that:
  - school playgrounds are designed to encourage varied and physically active play;
  - pedestrians, cyclists and users of other modes of transport that involve physical activity are given the highest priority when developing or maintaining roads; and
  - public open spaces and public paths can be reached on foot or by bicycle, and maintained to a high standard.

5. The Government will work with a number of interested local authorities to sign up to a healthy community challenge fund. This will test and validate holistic approaches to promoting physical activity. Towns and cities that sign up – badged ‘healthy towns’ – will be expected to invest in infrastructure improvements to encourage physically active lifestyles and to implement the lessons of a variety of programmes.
6. Through the national healthy schools programme, schools will be able to use children and young people’s access to active play within the school as part of their evidence for meeting the physical activity criteria. Active play could also be promoted as an essential part of healthy schools’ breakfast clubs and other outside the curriculum time activities. Healthy schools would also link to wider communities where appropriate to encourage play for their pupils.
7. Local authorities have an important contribution to make in their ‘place shaping’ role, as planning authorities and through working in local partnerships with other agencies. Through local area agreements, they can set specific objectives for their communities. Moreover, specifically addressing diet and activity, including active play during early years will impact upon measurement of height and weight at reception year, thus influencing the delivery of LAAs which incorporate national indicators on obesity.
8. Upcoming NICE guidance on physical activity, play and sport for pre-school and school aged children (to be published in January 09) will make a valuable contribution to the supporting the evidence base around play. Recommendations will be made for children and young people up to the age of 18 years, with a specific focus on those aged seven years and under and 11 to 18 year-old girls.

## Transport and play

### Improving skills and behaviour

9. A significant part of improving road safety is about improving people’s skills and behaviour when out using the roads. This includes the behaviour of children themselves, their parents and carers and all vehicle drivers and riders. We want to help all road users – children and adults – to have the skills they need to use the roads safely. This includes road safety education and training for children, driver training and testing and publicity aimed at all road users.
10. The Department for Transport is now working with educational consultants to look at the best way to provide a comprehensive set of road safety educational resources for all age groups. This will include an audit of existing materials produced by local authorities, devolved administrations and commercial suppliers, the production of new materials (if necessary) to provide a unified set of materials that is suitable for all age groups, and a marketing strategy to encourage teachers and schools (primary and secondary) to make use of these materials
11. Between 2002 and 2007, DfT supported a wide scale pilot of the Kerbcraft child pedestrian training scheme. This teaches children aged 5–7 the key skills they will need to cross roads safely, through practical kerbside training in the real road environment. It has been thoroughly

evaluated and shown to deliver a lasting improvement in children's skills. DfT is now developing a dissemination package to encourage local authorities to deliver Kerbcraft training.

12. DfT's Think! campaign provides road safety publicity and information to all road users. This includes the long-running Hedgehogs road safety campaign, aimed at children aged 7–11. However, the Department is currently reviewing the future of this campaign, to ensure that road safety messages for this age group are delivered in the most effective way. Think! campaigns for teenagers include the camera phone advert of 2005 and the ad-idol campaign of 2007. In October 2007, the first campaign aimed specifically at parents of younger children was launched. Think! publicity addresses drivers, covering issues such as speed, drink-driving, mobile phones and seat belts. It also helps to improve road safety for all road users, including children on journeys to or from play areas.
13. In September 2007 we published a new edition of the Highway Code – the first major revision since 1999. This also provides updated information for all road users and includes more advice than ever before that drivers need to be aware of and look out for children and other vulnerable road users.
14. The Driving Standards Agency will be consulting on proposals for reforms to the driver testing and training system. This includes proposals for pre-driver training and qualification, which could be delivered in schools, to ensure that young people are better prepared before they start learning to drive, especially when it comes to attitudes to safe driving behaviour. It also proposes changes to the training and testing process, so that it encourages safer driving behaviour after passing the test and is not so focussed on mechanical driving skills. By aligning the training and the content of the test more closely with what is needed to drive safely, it should be possible to prepare new drivers better for the transition to solo driving, with the aim of improving standards of driving more generally. This should lead to safer roads for all, including children, including when on journeys to or from play areas.

### Improving cycle skills – Bikeability

15. Bikeability is the new cycle training scheme being promoted in England. It is designed to give children and parents the skills and confidence to cycle safely and well on today's roads.
16. To get their Bikeability award children (and adults) are taught how to ride to the government-approved National Standard for Cycle Training, which has been designed by the leading experts in the field of road safety as well as cycling.
17. Bikeability has three levels of training:
  - level 1: aimed at 7–9 year olds is off road and teaches basic cycling and balancing skills;
  - level 2: aimed at 10–11 years and introduces on road training, building on Level 1; and
  - level 3: aimed at older teenagers / adults. Includes tackling difficult road features (e.g. roundabouts) and the safe use of cycle facilities.

18. Completion of level 2 should allow most children to cycle to school (other than those with difficult journeys). Of course the skills learnt can also be used for other journeys, including those to play areas, and will become a life skill.
19. On 21 January this year, the Secretary of State for Transport announced that, through Cycling England, government is investing a record £140 million in cycling over the next three years. Amongst a variety of projects that Cycling England is taking forward, an extra 500,000 children will have access to National Standard Cycling Training by 2012.
20. We are also working with British Cycling to enable them, through their network of coaches, to deliver additional National Standard/Bikeability training alongside their existing GO Ride and other sport related cycle courses. This should increase the opportunities for children to get involved in sport cycling through British Cycling coaches both at school and elsewhere.

### Creating a safer street environment

21. The other main way of improving road safety, as well as addressing skills and behaviour, is to make the street environment safer. There is a range of different measures, each of which will be suitable in different circumstances.
22. The promotion of safe and considerate driving and encouraging motorists to adopt appropriate speeds is a major element of the Government's commitment to reducing road traffic collisions and injuries, and develop safer environments for all road users. We continue to use the award winning Think! publicity campaigns to push home to motorists the dangers associated with speeding on roads where children are most at risk.
23. The Government's road safety strategy acknowledges the requirement for lower vehicle speeds where children are present and therefore we strongly encourage and support 20mph limits and zones in residential areas. High levels of compliance with 20mph limits are best achieved through respect for the lower speed limits. Local authorities are therefore best placed to decide where 20mph limits are appropriate based on all local needs and considerations. As well as in residential areas, some authorities are implementing 20mph limits around schools, and others, such as Portsmouth, are adopting a more blanket approach with reduced limits over wider areas.
24. Local authorities have had the powers to introduce 20mph limits without obtaining consent from the Secretary of State since 1999. DfT Circular 01/2006 sets out new guidance to local authorities on setting local speed limits. They have been asked to review the speed limits on their A and B roads and implement any resulting changes by 2011 in accordance with the new guidance. The guidance is ultimately about better respect for, and therefore self compliance with, speed limits, and broadens the underlying principles to be assessed to include greater consideration of the needs of vulnerable road users.
25. DfT's new guidance further encouraged local highway authorities to implement 20mph limits and zones. It remains for local authorities to decide where best to provide 20mph zones, in order to deliver the greatest improvements in road safety. For the most part, this is likely to be

in residential areas. In many cases, they may help to improve safety on the journey to or from play areas.

26. Research published in 1996 shows that the number of accidents involving children reduced by 67 per cent in 20mph zones incorporating traffic calming measures. On the basis of this information DfT issued best practice advice on the implementation of 20mph zones. However, many more local authorities have since introduced 20mph zones, and over wider areas, and so an up-to-date assessment is needed of the implementation process and effectiveness. We are commissioning a new assessment and will produce further best practice advice to support those local authorities already implementing 20mph zones, and promote the benefits to those which have yet to do so.
27. Transport for London is also proposing to trial later this year the enforcement of 20mph zones through the use of time over distance camera systems as an alternative to traffic calming measures.

### Home Zones

28. Home Zones are residential areas where the streets are designed to be places for pedestrians and cyclists (including children), instead of simply corridors for motor traffic. The aim is to change the way that streets are used in order to improve the quality of life in residential streets. Introducing a Home Zone will allow scope for a range of social activities, such as stopping to chat and children's play, to take place in street space formerly considered to be exclusively for vehicles.
29. Modifications to the layout of the street should emphasise this change of use, so that motorists understand the need to share the street with other road users. This is achieved by creating an environment which encourages very low vehicular speeds. This natural traffic calming effect is realised through, for example, the placing of parking bays, street furniture, planting, and children's play equipment etc to create indirect routes through the area, and shortened driver sightlines.
30. Good and effective consultation with all sectors of the community, including young people, is important, and can help ensure that the design of individual Home Zones meets the needs of the local residents.
31. Whilst primarily aimed at improving quality of life, Home Zones can in theory generate road safety benefits. However, as Home Zones were only introduced where the safety record was already good, the reduction in traffic flow and speeds resulting from their implementation would only be likely to realise minimal safety benefits at best. Where successfully implemented, Home Zones have led to stronger, more vibrant and diverse communities, fewer empty properties and reduced crime.
32. In April 2001, the Prime Minister announced a £30m challenge fund to encourage the development of new Home Zone schemes in England. Many of the authorities identified additional funding from a range of sources resulting in a total budget of over £50m for the

61 schemes identified for implementation (two of which did not go ahead as a result of the outcome of the public consultation stage). The Home Zones Challenge came to an end on 31 March 2005. As well as creating a substantial increase in the number of Home Zones in England, it demonstrated the benefits that could be delivered and highlighted the issues which need to be considered when developing Home Zones.

33. The Government would always support plans to introduce Home Zones and DfT has published a document disseminating good practice in Home Zone design and scheme development, drawing particularly on the experience gathered from the Home Zones Challenge. It complements the Institute of Highway Incorporated Engineers' Home Zone Design Guidelines published in 2002.
34. However, retro-fitting of Home Zone principles to existing residential areas is relatively expensive. There may be more scope for including Home Zones in the design of new residential areas as they are built.

### Manual for Streets

35. The *Manual for Streets*, which was published by the Department for Transport in March 2007, provides guidance for practitioners involved in the planning, design, provision and approval of new residential streets, and modifications to existing ones. It aims to increase the quality of life through good design which creates more people-orientated streets. It represents a new approach to the design of residential streets, recommending a move away from seeing them purely as a means of providing movement, to one where the emphasis is on the street's community and place function. The place function could be thought of as a measure of how well the street performs as an area of interest and stimulation in its own right. It is the quality which can make the difference between somewhere to pass through and somewhere to spend some time in.
36. This emphasis on place, combined with an increase in priority assigned to the needs of pedestrians and cyclists, contributes to reducing the domination of motor vehicles. The aim is to improve road safety and make the street more accessible to all user groups. This should make journeys to play areas safer, but it could also help make the street itself conducive to children's play. The manual advocates controlling traffic speeds in much the same way as a Home Zone would i.e. using careful street design to encourage drivers to feel comfortable passing through at low speeds, preferably without having to resort to more obvious traffic calming features such as speed humps.

### Quiet Lanes

37. Quiet Lanes is a Countryside Agency initiative that aims to maintain the tranquillity and character of minor rural roads. They should be networks of rural roads which already have low traffic flows and low vehicle speeds and, where possible, should tie in to non-motorised user networks. There are three key elements to a Quiet Lanes project: intensive community involvement to change users' attitudes and behaviour, re-routing of through traffic away from

the lanes, and entry signing to inform users they are entering the Quiet Lane network. They may help to improve access to play in rural areas.

### Safer cycle routes

38. The increased funding for Cycling England mentioned above will include an infrastructure programme that will deliver an additional 250 safer links to school to approximately 500 schools via traffic calmed or traffic free routes, linked to the wider national cycle network, administered by the transport charity Sustrans. The routes, many of which will also serve other recreational venues, will help make the journey to school a far more positive experience for children and, with improved cycle training and cycle parking, should increase the number of children cycling to school. Many local authorities also have improved their local cycle networks again increasing the options for safer, more convenient cycle trips.
39. The additional safe links build on the £18.4 million central government has previously invested in this programme through Sustrans. The investment has in turn generated £31m from local authorities and others. By 2008 we will have linked over 600 schools via the national cycle network to residential areas. On average, schools with links have doubled the number of pupils cycling to school, while walking to school has increased by 8 per cent.

### Improving accessibility – Travelling to School Project

40. The Government wants as many children as possible to walk, cycle or use public transport to travel to school. In 2003 DfT and the then DfES therefore launched the joint *Travelling to School* project, which sets out how the Government wants all schools in England to develop a school travel plan in order to reduce car use for the journey to school and allow many more children to take regular exercise.
41. The *Travelling to School* project is based around the delivery of school travel plans and it is DfT's and DCSF's stated objective that all schools in England (including independent schools) should have an approved school travel plan by March 2010. 56 per cent of schools already have such a plan.
42. A school travel plan is a package of measures tailored to the needs of an individual school and designed to reduce car dependency and improve safety for journeys to school. Measures might include pedestrian and cycle training, walking buses and cycle trains, other walking/cycling incentive schemes, the provision of lockers and secure cycle parking and car sharing schemes. School travel plans are accepted as the key strategies for reducing car use for journeys to school.
43. *Travelling to School* project is supported by £7.5m per annum joint DfT/DCSF funding to enable local authorities to employ a network of around 250 school travel advisers and regional school travel advisers to work with schools and help them develop and implement school travel plans.
44. In addition DCSF is providing £20m a year for small capital grants for schools with approved school travel plans (£5,000 for a typical primary and £10,000 for a typical secondary school).

Funding was originally provided up to 2006, was subsequently extended to 2008 and now has been extended to 2010, the end point of the project.

45. The improvements delivered as part of a school travel plan help make it possible for more children to walk, cycle or use public transport to travel to and from school. This increases their independent mobility, which also has the potential to make it easier for them to access children's play.

## DCMS and play

46. DCMS supports the national play infrastructure through contracts which support an information service on children's play, playwork education and training and play policy and research; and DCMS sectors have an important role to play in providing play opportunities.
47. Museums and libraries provide children and young people with access to stimulating and creative resources and places that inspire curiosity, animate the imagination and can be the starting point for play. For example:
  - some regional museum services offer new interactive and imaginative ways of telling the stories of collections. Hands-on displays and dressing up collections help to capture children's imagination and can spark imaginative play;
  - the magic bus in the North East takes the hands-on experience of exploring objects out of museums and into local communities;
  - libraries offer children free access through their own library ticket to a limitless range of new experiences and other worlds to explore and discover. Characters in children's books have an important role in stimulating play. From super heroes to wizards to fantastic beings, libraries provide access to high quality creative books that can be the starting point for play;
  - chatter books reading groups provide children with the opportunity to explore stories further with their peers;
  - libraries play an important role in signposting parents and children to play opportunities in a local area.
48. The Youth Sport Trust has developed three programmes which develop playgrounds and outdoor spaces for children from the ages of 0 to 18 years old. These are:
  - Playzone: early years (0-5 years) playground programme;
  - Zoneparc: primary (4-11 years) playground programme; and
  - Personal Best Challenge Park: secondary (11-18 years) playground programme.
49. Each programme provides support to design and develop an exciting outdoor space, innovative equipment, training for leaders and key staff and informative supporting resources.

50. The arts sector also provides a number of play opportunities:
- Discover Centre<sup>38</sup> in Stratford. This has both outdoor and indoor creative play spaces, with basement space being redeveloped to support non-permanent play installations and family space. Discover also uses volunteers to support play – these are known as story builders;
  - Torbay play forum, which is regarded by Play England as a good exemplar project. This supports innovative creative play by mixing artistic activity and natural environment;
  - Arts Depot<sup>39</sup> in Barnet have installed a soft play area in their foyer which is extremely well used by families and children. Parents often have coffee in the cafe whilst overseeing their children's play; and
  - Snug and Outdoor<sup>40</sup> received funding to develop their experimental playground kit. This is large scale equipment that can be used in a number of ways, and was created by designers and sculptors in partnership with teachers, children and the corporate sector.

### Play in the natural environment

51. In the last few years play, and particularly nature play, has become a priority for the Forestry Commission (England). The FC commissioned a report (*Growing Adventure*, 2006) from Tim Gill, the former director of the Children's Play Council, to write guidance for FC managers on developing local play projects. The approach adopted from this report has been to create more naturalistic play spaces that act as a springboard for children to engage with forests and woodlands as a whole; encouraging them to explore the natural environment, and to take part in active play and create their own play environments and activities. Design guidance has been produced to set out principles for developing play spaces on Forestry Commission land. Guidance has also been developed on assessing and managing aspects of play that were perceived by managers as being more 'risky' e.g. rope swings, dens, tree houses and fires.
52. From these policy and guidance documents FCE landscape architects and forest managers have been designing new play spaces at different forest locations around England.
53. At present there are two pieces of work being undertaken to develop nature play and FC play provision. The first is an audit of recently constructed play spaces by consultants from PlayLink to assess the value of play spaces to young people.
54. The second piece of work is the development of a design guide *Nature Play Ideas* for Forestry Commission sites. The intention of this illustrated guide is to provide ideas for local forest managers to implement their own nature play elements. The ideas have been chosen so that materials can be locally sourced and could be undertaken by local crafts personnel, in some cases with a little help from specialist designers or contractors. Most of these ideas in this guide are suitable for all-ability use. Information is given on useful contacts, contractors and suppliers and training will be provided for staff on planning, construction and maintenance.

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38 <http://www.discover.org.uk>

39 <http://www.artsdepot.co.uk/>

40 <http://www.snugandoutdoor.co.uk/>

55. In addition to the above policy, guidance and play space provision the FC have been promoting play through den building events, play days and through its active woods programme <http://www.forestry.gov.uk/forestry/INFD-6ACE8M>.

## Play and the natural environment

56. There is now a body of evidence which shows the benefits of play in the natural environment:
- contact with the natural environment promotes imaginative and social play;
  - playing in a natural environment improves children's social, mental and physical development, with some evidence of less bullying behaviour and better concentration at school<sup>41</sup>;
  - children use the natural environment to recover from stress and this helps to reduce mental health disorders<sup>42</sup>;
  - children are more likely to maintain high levels of physical activity when they play outdoors<sup>43</sup>; and
  - playing in the natural environment provides opportunities for young people to experience, assess and cope with modest risks (eg deciding whether to jump over a stream) and so helps counter the play limiting effects of a risk averse culture<sup>44</sup>.
57. Natural England's aim is that every child in England should have the opportunity to enjoy and experience the local natural environment to benefit their mental and physical health as well as their social development. Action includes:
- making more and regular use of the outdoor natural environment within play, sport and Surestart programmes;
  - expanding programmes such as forest schools where the outdoors becomes the classroom (and providing relevant skills for teachers via changes to the curriculum for teacher training);
  - greening of school grounds to include natural features;
  - more nature-based play opportunities provided in green spaces, with less dependence on expensive factory made play equipment and more emphasis on low-cost natural features such as slopes, trees and water games and activities;
  - better networks of green routes and places for everyone to use which in turn provide safer places for young people to play;
  - planners requiring high quality, informal, small scale natural play areas in new residential developments which are well designed to encourage safe and regular use; and

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44 The Gulbenkian Foundation

- integrating use of the natural environment into sports and Olympic initiatives aimed at children.

58. Natural England is inviting partners to join in the design and testing of these actions.

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