

# ‘Defining Play’

## Isle of Wight Play Policy 2003



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Guided by: Defining Play Advisory Group

## Policy Statement

### The need for a policy

The importance, value and need for a Play Policy encompassing all of the Isle of Wight has grown in response to a number of factors, some local, some regional, and some national. Locally, factors include:

- Responses to the MORI questionnaire developed for the Community Plan, and sent to the Citizen's Panel highlight concerns that leisure facilities for young people are inadequate and impact on issues of community safety
- Funding bodies including Single Regeneration Budget, Rural Development Programme and Sure Start are being asked for funding by local communities to improve their play facilities for children and young people without an overview of Island need
- Planning and other departments within the Isle of Wight Council are looking for the support of a framework document for play as they develop other policy documents, including the Isle of Wight Council's Cultural Strategy
- Development of the National Childcare Strategy and the local EYDCP that has played an important part in the development of play within childcare.
- An awareness of the need for safe play areas at a time of increasing traffic in urban and rural areas.

The aim of the consultation process was to ensure that any play documents developed for the Island agrees principles, and definitions for play that could enable the development of a policy statement and a strategic vision that all those involved, whether directly or indirectly, can work to.

It concluded that these documents should focus on the needs of children and create a commitment to the development of provision now and in the future by offering a framework for the allocation of resources and highlighting issues of quality and best practice to ensure the safety of Island children.

**The contributors to this policy, with the Isle of Wight Council taking a lead role, recognise the significance and value of play in personal and community development. They are committed to ensuring that children and young people have access to rich, stimulating environments free from unacceptable levels of risk, thereby offering them the opportunity to explore, through their freely chosen play, both themselves and the world they inhabit.**

### Who the policy is for

This policy is for everyone involved or interested in children's play, whether at management or practitioner level, in the private, statutory, voluntary and community sectors and including:

- Education
- Community development
- Childcare
- Sport
- Leisure
- Special situations eg. hospital
- Recreational activities
- Arts activities

- Transport
- Highways
- Strategic Planning
- Building and Development

The document aims to be a practical working tool, to be referred to whenever decisions about play need to be made. It is therefore applicable to all forms of children's services whose objectives include the provision of play opportunities. These include, for example, after-school clubs, holiday play schemes, non-supervised fixed-equipment play areas and schools (in break-times). The document is also intended to support the development of other play opportunities such as play centres and adventure playgrounds.

## Principle aims of the policy

- To promote the importance of play for all children.
- To promote a wider understanding of the value of play.
- To provide a set of common definitions and values so that those working for the interests of children can act with clear common understandings.
- To recognise that all children have a right to play (as stated in the 1989 UN Convention on the Rights of the Child) and promote an awareness of that right.
- To provide a framework to ensure that all children in local communities on the Island have access to good quality, safe play opportunities
- To encourage partnership working between those individuals and organisations with an interest in play or whose decisions have an impact on the lives of children in the context of play.

## A definition of play

There are many definitions of play but to try to ensure consistency we have accepted the definition from the Children's Play Council ...

*"Play is an essential part of every child's life and it is vital to their development. It is the way children explore the world around them and develop and practise skills. It is essential for physical, emotional and spiritual growth, for intellectual and educational development, and for acquiring social and behavioural skills.*

*Play is a generic term applied to a wide range of activities and behaviours that are satisfying to the child, creative for the child and freely chosen by the child. Children play on their own and with others. Their play may be boisterous and energetic or quiet and contemplative, light-hearted or very serious."*

Whilst not mutually exclusive, we should remember that there is a difference play and childcare. "Good childcare" always strives to provide the best play opportunities but "good play opportunities" are, by definition, more often that not, to do with children's freedom of choice rather than within a supervised or directed context.

## All children have a right to play

In developing this policy document, consultation was undertaken with direct and indirect providers of play opportunities. 90% of the consultation respondents agreed that the Isle of Wight should adopt Article 31 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

The Isle of Wight Council will seek to endorse and adopt Article 31 of the 1989 United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child that was ratified by the United Kingdom in 1991.

Specifically, Article 31 recognises the rights of the child relating to play and recreational activities in the following ways:

- Parties recognise the right of the child to rest and leisure, to engage in play and recreational activities appropriate to the age of the child and to participate freely in cultural life and the arts.
- Parties shall respect and promote the right of the child to participate fully in cultural and artistic life and shall encourage the provision of appropriate and equal opportunities for cultural, artistic, recreational and leisure activity.

## Benefits of play

We need to support the development of a wide range of play opportunities on the Island to reap benefits for the individual, the family and our communities.

For individuals:

- Play promotes children's development, learning, creativity and independence
- Play keeps children healthy and active – active children become active adults
- Play helps children understand the people and places in their lives, learn about their environment and develop their sense of community
- Play allows children to find out about themselves, their abilities and interests
- Play is therapeutic. It helps children to deal with difficult or painful circumstances, such as emotional stress or medical treatment
- Play gives children the chance to let off steam and have fun

For families:

- Play and childcare settings offer parents the peace of mind to feel their children are safe and cared for whilst they have the opportunity to work and train, have respite, etc.
- Play can provide a focus for informal socialising and networks of family support

For communities:

- Play helps to reduce the involvement of children and young people in youth crime and vandalism
- Play helps to develop adults who are creative and effective socially and economically
- Play offers opportunities to explore cultural identity and difference
- Play fosters social inclusion.
- Play provides a focus for tackling social exclusion through community development.

## The case for public investment in play

By making a commitment to provide good play opportunities, the Isle of Wight Council as a leading partner, recognises that children and young people are entitled to a level of provision as members of our community in the same way that arts, sports and leisure provision has been developed and supported for adults.

**Accessibility to quality play opportunities should be available regardless of gender, background or origin, or individual capacities and abilities. Indeed special effort will be made to ensure that provision has not, and will not be unconsciously structured to limit or exclude access to it.**

The Isle of Wight Council also recognises the relationship between play and family and community life. Evidence suggests that the development of quality community play facilities can reduce youth crime and vandalism (Hampshire and Wilkinson 1999) as well as offer support to families by providing a focus for informal networks and contacts for adults and children alike and offering opportunities for parents to enable children to be noisy and energetic in open spaces and outside a domestic environment where sometimes children can feel constricted.

The development of quality public play provision will aim to provide a wide range of spaces and settings in which children can play safely in proximity to their homes, where play values and principles are put into practice and where children's rights and culture are validated. The provision will complement opportunities in a range of other settings, both formal and informal, but we believe that outdoor play, in both the natural and built environment, is of special value in providing children with freedom to explore their world and recognise their limitations through large-scale physical activities that provide a range of challenges.

Finally, public commitment to the development of play opportunities will encourage partnerships with those interested in play to ensure the development of sustainable funding for the implementation of the play strategy.