

‘Defining Play’

Isle of Wight Play Strategy 2003



Prepared by: Families First Ltd
Guided by: Defining Play Advisory Group

Executive Summary

This document should be read in conjunction with the Isle of Wight Play Policy document.

For a child, having the opportunity to play is of paramount importance to them as individuals and it offers opportunities to strengthen 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.

This document argues the case for play and offers a commitment to achieve best practice in play development lead by the Isle of Wight Council and Early Years Development and Childcare Partnership and working in partnership with private, voluntary and community sector organisations and individuals interested in play.

Play Strategy Objectives

The following objectives have been developed through the process of consultation with a wide range of individuals and organisations including:

- Childminders
- Out of School Clubs
- Pre-School provision
- Primary & Middle Schools
- Community Partnerships
- IW Council officers from a range of Directorates and departments
- Wight Leisure
- Ryde Development Trust
- Town & Parish Councils

This has enabled the development of a holistic set of objectives that encompass a range of different settings.

All organisations, services and departments that impact on play should acknowledge and work towards the objectives set out below to ensure that all children have a right to play and that good quality play opportunities are essential to a child's development.

It is important that these objectives are not seen as the sole responsibility of any one organisation but rather a set of values for all those involved in play to work in partnership to achieve quality play provision on the Island. The Isle of Wight Council and Early Years Development and Childcare Partnership will lead and encourage commitment from organisations to achieve this key principle.

'Best Play: what play provision should do for children' written by the National Playing Fields Association in partnership with the Children's Play Council and PLAYLINK highlight seven key play objectives which the Isle of Wight Council and EYDCP members will adopt to evaluate their provision to ensure it offers children good play opportunities. All play providers are urged to undertake the same commitment.

Beneath each broad statement of intent, we have added the detail and focus given to these play objectives by those respondents to the local consultation process. Many overlap with a number of the play objectives but we have decided to mention them only once.

The Seven Play Objectives

Objective 1

The provision extends the choice and control that children have over their play, the freedom they enjoy and the satisfaction they gain from it.

Objective 2

The provision recognises the child's need to test boundaries and responds positively to that need.

Objective 3

The provision manages the balance between the need to offer risk and the need to keep children safe from harm.

The strategy should also support the development of play opportunities and services that are safe, stimulating and appropriate for children's ages and stages of development. In particular it should ...

- Ensure that children and young people have the opportunity to play and take part in a range of activities where they can gain confidence and learn on their own terms

- Support and encourage children's own ideas and decisions about what they do and how they do it
- Ensure that staff and volunteers working with children have appropriate training, knowledge and experience for their duties and responsibilities
- Work towards safer communities so that all children are able to play safely outdoors, and older children able to get around safely on their own
- Develop varied play opportunities which challenge and stimulate children's abilities but not threaten their survival or well-being
- Identify specific shortfalls and identify how and when these will be tackled
- Seek adequate funding to ensure minimum standards prevail or are not compromised
- Ensure proper maintenance and on going safety and upgrading for all play space
- Link to current sports facilities where possible

Objective 4

The provision maximises the range of play opportunities.

- Ensure that providers of play opportunities operate to relevant national standards such as the Children Act 1989 and National Playing Fields Association '6 Acre Standard' and recognise good practice with clearly defined policies and procedures
- Consider issues for both urban and rural areas, including new housing developments, environmental and road schemes as well as public facilities such as open spaces, sports and recreation areas, clinics, libraries and shopping areas so that children can play close to home
- Encourage schools to develop play opportunities for children in the nursery, classroom and playground and to maximise resources through the use of school premises by the community after school and during school holidays
- Develop good play opportunities for children who are in strange surroundings (eg hospitals) or experiencing unusual or distressing circumstances

Objective 5

The provision fosters independence and self-esteem.

- Plan and develop play opportunities in consultation with children to meet their needs in local communities, and making best use of available resources
- Ensure that all children are respected and valued so that they can play free from racial or other types of discrimination or abuse

Objective 6

The provision fosters children's respect for others and offers opportunities for social interaction.

Objective 7

The provision fosters the child's well-being, healthy growth and development, knowledge and understanding, creativity and capacity to learn.

- Ensure that children are given appropriate adult time and attention during child-centred play.
- Promote the development of inclusive play opportunities which take into account and respond to children's different abilities and needs, their age, gender, cultural and religious backgrounds, social, family, economic and environmental situations

Vision for best practice

Through the National Childcare Strategy and the local EYDCP there has been a vision and quality framework for the development and maintenance of best practice in play in childcare and education settings.

There are currently not the same statutory guidelines for outdoor play provision although there is an interest in play at Government level through the Department of Culture, Media and Sport.

UNICEF promotes the following vision for best practice:

All children need to be provided with the opportunity to explore and discover the world around them, where risk taking in a safe environment, that may not always be in their favour, is actively encouraged giving children the ability to find their own level of safe keeping and to foster a sense of achievement, self esteem and independence. Outside play areas give the freedom and space a child needs to do this and it is important that the play area is not always a pre-constructed site (that can limit play, imagination and the freedom to explore) but a place that is free from traffic pollution and dog faeces and that is full of natural materials such as; grass, earth, trees, water, logs etc. A place where a child can explore, experiment and come to their own conclusions enabling them to make decisions and freely look at the options open to them, enabling the child to have a healthy respect for nature, environment and all living things. This will help to create a future generation who are able to think constructively and freely looking at all options that are open to them and the community they live in. *The development of Children is crucial to the future well being of any society.* (The rights of the Child - UNICEF)

Partners in play development will continue to review best practice from others areas around the country developing outdoor play provision, and as a minimum standard will seek ways to:

- Provide a primary play area within 15 minutes walk of all residents in the Island's main towns and villages* (a primary play area is a large play area within a park setting)
- Provide a secondary play area within 5 minutes walk of all residents in the Island's main towns and villages* (a secondary play area is a smaller play area with fewer elements that might exist within, for example, housing developments).
- Where provision of play space is impractical in remote locations, smaller villages, hamlets and isolated houses and/or suitable sites are unavailable, the Council will seek to promote alternative methods and opportunities of providing access to play facilities. This could include improved access to information and/or mobile play facilities.
- Ensure all Play Areas comprise safe, challenging and varied play equipment with appropriate safety surfaces and dog proof fencing. When developing and maintaining child-friendly facilities reference should be made to the Play Space Check List (developed from the Children's Play Council – Planning for Outdoor Play), particularly Q9 and Q10 (see Appendix 1).
- Improve maintenance and inspection regimes to include daily visual checks as well as weekly technical inspections.

* For the purposes of the play strategy, "main towns and villages" are defined as those settlements shown within the Isle of Wight Unitary Development Plan 2001 as having a development envelope boundary. These settlements are recognised as having a range of facilities (shop, pub, church, school, etc) where the development will enable them to function in a sustainable way.

The main towns and villages are as follows:

Arreton, Bembridge, Brading, Brightstone, Chillerton, Cowes, East Cowes, Freshwater and Totland, Godshell, Havenstreet, Newbridge, Newchurch, Newport, Niton, Northwood, Rookley, Ryde, St Helens, Sandown, Lake and Shanklin, Seaview and Nettlestone, Shalfleet, Shorwell, Ventnor, Whitwell, Wootton and Fishbourne, Wroxall and Yarmouth.

Prioritisation for play development should have regard to the outcomes of previous research undertaken by Families-First relating to available facilities and population density, and the new Census figures.

Existing play provision

All play partners will review their existing play provision and current practices, including management and training, to ensure that the objectives of this play strategy are met.

Personnel

The partners to this strategy recognise the benefits of appointing a play development officer and will seek funding to achieve this goal.

The partners to this strategy will also review the needs (skills, knowledge and resources) of their personnel, including management and training, to ensure that the objectives of this play strategy are met.

Quality Play Provision and Questions Of 'Safety'

Concepts of 'acceptable risk' and 'unacceptable risk' are critical to making informed judgements about what constitutes a best possible play environment. The local partners in play development are urged to make themselves familiar with the work of the Play Safety Forum and the Health and Safety Executive (HSE). In doing so they should work towards creating a framework within which a sensitive and self-critical practice will be developed.

The Play Safety Forum

Practical guidance can probably best be found from the Play Safety Forum. This brings together the main national organisations in England with an interest in safety and children's play. The aim of the Play Safety Forum is to build consensus on issues around risk and safety in relation to play provision.

The Forum is an independent body hosted by the Children's Play Council at the invitation of the Department for Culture, Media and Sport. Members include representatives from providers, regulatory bodies and expert agencies, including: *Association of Play Industries, Child Accident Prevention Trust, Children's Play Council, Health and Safety Executive, Institute for Sport and Recreation Management, Institute of Leisure and Amenity Management, Kidsactive, Local Government Association, National Early Years Network, National Playing Fields Association, National Family and Parenting Institute, National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children, PLAYLINK, Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents.*

In August 2002 the Play Safety Forum published "Managing Risk in Play provision". *They say, "Children need and want to take risks when they play. Play provision aims to respond to these needs and wishes by offering children stimulating, challenging environments for exploring and developing their abilities. In doing this, play provision aims to manage the level of risk so that children are not exposed to unacceptable risks of death or serious injury".*

The paper concludes with, *"Safety in play provision is not absolute and cannot be addressed in isolation. Play provision is first and foremost for children, and if it is not exciting and attractive to them, then it will fail, no matter how 'safe' it is. Designers, managers and providers will need to reach compromises in meeting these sometimes conflicting goals. These compromises are a matter of judgment, not of mechanistic assessment. The judgments should be based on both social attitudes and on broadly based expert opinion informed by current best practice. They should be firmly rooted in objectives concerned with children's enjoyment and benefit. And they should take into account the concerns of parents. Ultimately the basis of these judgments should be made clear in the policies of the play provider as written down in policy*

documents. These policies should in turn be understood and embodied in practice by all the key stakeholders”.

Health and Safety Executive

In April 2002 the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) published “*Playgrounds - risks, benefits and choices*”, Contract Research Report No. 426/2002 and it is available for download from the HSE website. This was the first study into playground safety in over a decade and the author of the report was Professor David Ball of Middlesex University's Centre for Decision Analysis and Risk Management (DARM). The aim of the research was to consider the effectiveness of the various steps taken to improve playground safety in recent years. Professor Ball's report confirmed that the risk of injury in UK playgrounds is low in comparison to the other risks to which children are exposed and they have changed little in the period of 10 years covered by his research.

European Standards

The new European standards for playground equipment and surfacing have caused concern. Some organisations were worried about the differences between the old and new standards. To avoid further confusion, the members of the Play Safety Forum (National Playing Fields Association, HSE, RoSPA, Association of Play Industries, Local Government Association, PLAYLINK, Child Accident Prevention Trust, Institute of Sport and Recreation Management, and the Pre-school Learning Alliance) have made the following statement: “*We have considered the most significant differences between the BS and EN standards and we recommend that the EN standards are fully adopted. Accident trends will be monitored and resulting recommendations will be given to the European Standards organisation (CEN) via the British Standards Institution requesting appropriate amendments*”.

Equality of Opportunity

The Isle of Wight Council and all other partners in play intend that play provision should operate on the basis of a presumption in favour of meeting the play needs of all its children within integrated provision and with recognition of the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995. Where this is judged not possible or desirable, full reasons will need to be given. It is council policy that children's services providing play opportunities will work towards ensuring accessibility to a wider range of children than is currently the case.

All providers of play facilities, including open spaces, must have in place an Equal Opportunities policy that all staff, children and families are made aware of.

All play provision will provide inclusive facilities that will have considered age, culture and background, ability, and individual specific needs. Access will be for all children and discrimination including bullying will not be tolerated.

Monitoring and evaluation

Monitoring and evaluation is a fundamental element to the provision of good quality play opportunities.

Partners in play development undertake to review this play strategy, and the process of its implementation, annually. In this it will consult with the private, public, voluntary and community sectors as well as parents and children.

Key issues/next steps

- **Seek to appoint a play development worker for the Island to achieve the aims of this strategy and encourage co-ordination and partnership working – private, public, voluntary and community sector**
- **Form an advisory group of no more than 10 members to support the Play Development Worker and that can make recommendations to the EYDCP and the Council concerning play and ensure that the principle stakeholders from Council and Voluntary and Private groups are participants.**
- **Listen to the views of parents and particularly children in the development, design and implementation of play activities**
- **Develop an implementation plan**
- **Look at the notion of risk-taking to ensure that children can challenge and extend their capacities, as well as safeguarding those responsible and keeping children safe from harm in accordance with the Play safety Forum, “Risk in Play”**
- **Ensure equality of opportunity for all children wishing to participate in play activities**
- **Seek creative and sustainable ways to achieve best practice in play**
- **Adopt Article 31 of the 1989 UN Convention on the Rights of the Child**
- **Work to ensure that all play activities on the Isle of Wight meet the seven play objectives laid out as best practice in ‘Best Play: what play provision should do for children’**
- **Develop monitoring and evaluation tools to ensure the development of quality play activities**
- **Put in place the processes that ensure children’s interests and needs to play are represented in strategic planning at all levels. (Cultural plans, local and town plans, service plans, development plans)**
- **Monitor the level of funding provided for children’s cultural resources (play areas, open spaces, open and closed access holiday play schemes, safe routes, play rangers), and work to ensure that children are receiving a fair allocation of those resources.**
- **Work with partner organisations to find the capital and maintenance budgets to ensure that sufficient funding is given to maintain and upgrade existing play facilities and make a long term plans to fill gaps in provision and services.**
- **Within the spirit of the strategy encourage all play providers to maintain and upgrade their provision/services to maximise play opportunities.**

Appendices

Appendix 1 : Play Space Checklist
Getting Started | Establishing What Needs to be Done | Making Changes

Appendix 2 : Criteria for Making Judgments about Play Provision

Appendix 3 : Who has Produced this Strategy?

Appendix 4 : Members of IW Play Advisory Group

Appendix 5 : References

Appendix 1

PLAY SPACE CHECKLIST

(developed from the Children's Play Council – Planning for Outdoor Play)

Whether planning to refurbish or develop a small neighbourhood play area, or improve outdoor play space throughout a neighbourhood, the process and principles remain the same. This checklist, taken from the publication, should help ensure agencies make the most of the resources available in developing effective, sustainable outdoor play space.

GETTING STARTED

Are you involving the right people?

These include:

1. Local authority departments, officers and members whose decisions and actions might affect the outdoor play space, including those with responsibility for:

- developing community strategies;
- developing cultural strategies and services;
- supporting regeneration and renewal;
- youth and educational provision;
- tackling social exclusion;
- granting permission for new residential developments;
- planning and developing residential areas;
- developing town or parish plans;
- ensuring quality social housing;
- promoting community safety and harmony;
- managing highways, traffic and transport;
- maintaining 'open spaces';
- providing dedicated services for children and young people.

2. Partnerships and initiatives that may have an interest in developing outdoor play space, including:

- Local Strategic Partnerships;
- Early Years Development and Childcare Partnerships;
- Community Safety Partnerships;
- Neighbourhood Renewal Partnerships;
- Children's Fund and Sure Start Partnerships.

3. Voluntary sector and other local organisations with an interest in services for children and young people and open spaces. Are all those involved working together to agreed values and principles? Are you involving children and young people and getting maximum benefit from their involvement?

- You can achieve this by: employing methods appropriate to the situation;
- ensuring the adults involved have the right skills and attitudes to children and young people;
- recognising and using the basic principles for any participative work;
- involving children and young people at the outset or in the early stages of planning;
- giving targeted attention to some groups where needed.

4. Are you developing clearly stated SMART objectives?

- **Specific:** clearly defined and easy to understand.
- **Measurable:** so you know whether or not you are successful.
- **Achievable:** within the timescale you anticipate.

- **Resourced:** achievable within the resources available.
- **Timed:** with a clear and realistic timetable.

5. Are you identifying and addressing potential barriers to success?

These include:

- concerns about potential safety issues;
- difficulties with insurance cover;
- conflict between different groups;
- problems over land use.

ESTABLISHING WHAT NEEDS TO BE DONE

6. You will need to carry out an outdoor play audit to find out about:

- children and young people in the locality – who they are, where they play and why they play in those places;
- existing plans for the development of local spaces;
- costs, funding and other resources involved.

7. You will need to compare the supply of and demand for play space, in order to:

- identify where needs of different groups currently being met and not being met;
- establish ‘what works’ now;
- identify problems with existing provision.

8. Are you identifying both capital and revenue funding if necessary?

MAKING CHANGES

9. Are you ensuring that the space/s you are developing follow the general principles for sustainable outdoor play spaces? Check they are:

- going to actively attract children and young people;
- located in sites which are: reasonably close to home, within sight of main travel routes, in spaces where there is ‘informal oversight’;
- easily accessible and usable by children who are disabled as well as those who are non-disabled;
- felt to offer personal security;
- accessible to all who may wish to use them;
- flexible enough to allow for changing play fashions, interests and needs;
- frequently cleaned and well maintained.

10. Do the spaces you are developing follow the essential design principles of a good play environment?

These include:

- both simple and complex environments to play in;
- play opportunities accessible to all those who might want to use them, in line with the Disability Discrimination Act 1995;
- creative and stimulating environments.

11. Have you considered all the possible types of dedicated play space you might provide, bearing in mind the ages and interests of the different groups of children and young people?

These include:

- playgrounds;

- skateboard and skate parks;
- bike tracks and jumps;
- hangout or youth shelters;
- adventure playgrounds;
- other open access play projects;
- city farms, woodland spaces and nature reserves;
- multi-use games areas;
- fun trails and activity courses;
- school playgrounds.

12. Are you looking at ways of improving other places where children and young people play?

These include:

- parks, green spaces and commons;
- residential streets;
- other open spaces.

Appendix 2

ELEMENTS OF A RICH PLAY ENVIRONMENT: CRITERIA FOR MAKING JUDGEMENTS ABOUT PLAY PROVISION

Children using council supported play provision should have access to a wide range of materials and the opportunity to experience the conditions that will allow them to play freely at times and in ways they determine for themselves, having regard to their safety, the service objectives of the provision, and the reasonable wishes of others. Children should, therefore, have access through their play to:

- (i) The elements: earth; fire; water; air
- (ii) Fabricated and natural materials: consumables, loose parts
- (iii) Challenge: in relation to the physical environment; within a social context and in private
- (iv) Movement: running; jumping; rolling; climbing; balancing
- (v) Emotions: sadness/gladness; rejection/acceptance; frustration/ achievement; boredom/fascination; fear/confidence
- (vi) Senses: hearing; smell; tactile experience
- (vii) Playing with identity - concepts of self; role play; dressing up; masks and face paints
- (viii) Social interactions: enhancing self-esteem and understanding through freely-chosen social interaction, not only with their peer group, but with a wide range of individuals and groups across age ranges, interests, abilities, gender, ethnic and cultural barriers
- (ix) Change: building/demolishing; transformation of the self and the environment; negotiating; co-operating; resolving conflict; experiencing the seasons
- (x) An interesting and varied physical environment: e.g. plantings; height and depth; enclosed and open; variety of surfaces.

The ten points above together constitute the criteria by which all play provision should be judged.

Appendix 3

WHO HAS PRODUCED THIS STRATEGY?

This document has been produced by Families First in partnership with an Advisory Group consisting of a range of organisations including the Isle of Wight Council, the Isle of Wight Economic Partnership and the Early Years Development and Childcare Partnership (EYDCP).

In February 2002 Families-First was asked to undertake research among direct and indirect providers of services and facilities for children on the Isle of Wight. This was to build on work undertaken in the previous year to research into outdoor play needs on the Isle of Wight.

Our goal for this piece of work was to discover ideas, attitudes and views from a broad range of people working with children about the content and perhaps structure of an Isle of Wight Play Strategy, and to provide a draft report by the end of September 2002. We were not required to make suggestions about equipment or layout of facilities.

The company was guided by an Advisory Group made up from specialists and representatives of many of the organisations we would be likely to approach. From the views offered and the guidance of the Advisory Group we hoped to be able to make suggestions concerning the nature and content of an Isle of Wight Play Strategy. (For a full list of Advisory Group members see Appendix 1).

To that end a questionnaire was created to elicit views and this was developed over a period of time with the Advisory Group maintaining an overview as it developed. We were helped in particular by input from Mary Scott-Jackson, Isle of Wight Council and Margaret Blamey, RCC and representing the local EYDCP.

Appendix 4

IW PLAY ADVISORY GROUP: MEMBERS OF ADVISORY GROUP

(in alphabetical order)

Margaret Blamey
Dave Chapman
Roger Craven

Ashley Curzon
Jo Dare
Sue Erridge
Cathy Foulkes
Kevin Gillett
John Metcalfe

Adrian Niemiec
Linda Payne
Joanna Richards
Mary Scott-Jackson
Brian Taylor

Rural Community Council and EYDCP representative
Ryde Development Trust and IW Economic Partnership
Rural Community Council, Playing Fields Association and Secretary
of the Town & Parish Councils
IW Council: Planning Department
Families-First Ltd
SureStart
Ryde Development Trust
IW Council: Property Services
IW Council: Assistant Director Education & Community
Development Directorate
IW Council: Contract Service Officer for Environment Services
SureStart
Isle of Wight Economic Partnership
IW Council: Education & Community Development Directorate
Families-First Ltd

Appendix 5

REFERENCES

The New Charter for Children's Play: Children's Play Council 1998

Policy & Process: The Play Link Play Policy (revised 1999)

Making the Case for Play: Children's Play Council 2002

More than Swings and Roundabouts: Children's Play Council 2002

Managing Risk in Play Provision – A Position Statement: Play Safety Forum 2002

Playgrounds - risks, benefits and choices - Prepared by Prof. D Ball of Middlesex University for the Health and Safety Executive

Best Play: Children's Play Council, PLAYLINK, National Playing Fields Association 2000

Play Policy: Portsmouth City Council 1997

Hampshire Play Policy: Hampshire Early Education & Childcare Unit 2000

Play Policy: Bath & North East Somerset Youth and Community Services 1999

Towards an Isle of Wight Play Policy: Families-First Ltd 2002