

# Good practice guide for play and early years



## Developing and managing Gypsy and Traveller Sites

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Play Wales is the national organisation for children's play, an independent charity supported by the Welsh Government to uphold children's right to play and to provide advice and guidance on play-related matters.

The Travelling Ahead project at Save the Children supports young Gypsies, Roma and Travellers to have a voice. Working with local partners across Wales such as Traveller Education Services, Equality Councils, Communities First, Play and Youth Services the project has developed forums where young people meet together and discuss issues that affect them; engaging with key decision makers to influence policy and practice to improve service provision and outcomes for them and their families.

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## Developing and managing Gypsy and Traveller Sites

Playing is central to children's physical, mental, social and emotional health and wellbeing and the right of all children to play is enshrined in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). Through play, children develop resilience and flexibility, contributing to physical and emotional wellbeing.

Resilience can be thought of as the ability to rise above adversity and resist serious challenges, stress and risks. It is a complex and dynamic concept involving not only psychological qualities of the child but also the child's family, social networks and neighbourhood.

For children themselves, playing is one of the most important aspects of their lives. Children and young people need and are entitled to quality places and time for play.

Play helps young children to learn and develop their physical, social, emotional and intellectual skills through doing and talking, which research has shown to be the means by which young children learn to think. It is also how they learn to socialise, as children engage in learning experiences with other children and adults.

For older children and young people, playing provides time to relax, explore the world, spend time and socialise with friends and push their boundaries.



# Who's it for?

The good practice guide has been designed for anyone who takes responsibility for or is involved in managing or developing new and existing Gypsy Traveller sites. This may be:

- Planning departments and officers
- Architects
- Local authority Gypsy and Traveller liaison officers
- Consultation and participation managers
- Site wardens and managers
- Play development workers/managers
- Neighbourhood Policing teams
- Gypsies and Travellers.

The guide should be used in conjunction with Welsh Government's *Good Practice Guide to Site Design and Site Management* (which includes reference to play areas).

# Why has this guide been developed?

There are currently 19 local authority Gypsy and Traveller sites across Wales in 13 local authority areas. There are approximately 370 pitches occupied by roughly 580 caravans.

The 2011 Census data suggested that 45 percent of Gypsy and Traveller households across England and Wales had dependent children, so it is likely that even the smallest sites will be home to half a dozen children.

Consultations with young Gypsies and Travellers have highlighted the importance that they place on space, time and permission for play. Whilst living on a site provides many children and young people with companions to play with, the lack of space and facilities to play is a recurrent problem identified by young people.

In surveys with parents, often the most common reasons why sites did not meet respondents' needs included the lack of a play area.

The consultations and surveys have also identified that services such as playgroups and staffed play provision can support integration, and address the issues of mistrust and lack of respect.

Many current sites across Wales do not have facilities such as a community building, which would enable formal early years and play provision to take place. This means providers do not

meet minimum requirements for registration purposes in terms of health and safety or space or because there is not a community facility on site.

In 2009 the Children and Young People Committee of the National Assembly for Wales held an inquiry into the provision of safe places to play and hang out. Gypsy and Traveller children and young people told the Committee that they were often unable to access organised play activities because of the distance to them from their homes. The Committee also heard that, as with other groups of parents, the parents of Gypsy and Traveller children can be protective of their children.

The 2007 Wales NGO report *Stop, look, listen: The road to realising children's rights in Wales* stated that Gypsy and Traveller children frequently face extreme racism making it harder for them to participate in leisure activities.

The suitability of existing space and the views of parents and others impact on the play opportunities that children can access. This guide is intended to support planners to address these issues.

# How has the guide been developed?

Play Wales, working with Save the Children's Travelling Ahead project, has developed the guide. We established and consulted with a focus group of providers during the drafting process and used their experiences to develop the models and address the most significant issues.

Travelling Ahead asked children and young people at their regional forum meetings about their ideas for improving play and leisure facilities on sites.

## How should it be used?

The guide is divided into two parts:

- 1. Models of play provision** – focuses on models of play provision. It has been developed using case studies of existing provision from across Wales. It provides the rationale, and identifies the benefits and key features of successful models of provision.
- 2. Tools to assist** – provides a range of tools to assist on new play provision development and management.

Throughout, it includes key features of successful models of provision based on practice from across Wales.

## What is it designed to do?

The guide is designed to provide clear and concise information to support local authorities to consider and include play and early years provision when developing new and existing Gypsy and Traveller sites. It contains specific information intended to help understand and address particular areas of concern. It also provides practical, step-by-step tools, templates and models of successful provision.

# What policy and legislation support this guide?

## Children's rights

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) sets out 54 articles that define how children and young people should be treated and how governments should monitor the UNCRC. The UK Government has signed up to the Convention and Wales adopted it as a basis for policy making in 2004. The Rights of Children and Young Persons (Wales) Measure 2011 places a duty on Welsh Government to take account of and promote the UNCRC in policy and legislation. A number of local authorities in Wales are also beginning to adopt the UNCRC. There are three articles in particular that are useful to consider when providing for children's play spaces:

### Article 31: The right to leisure, play and culture

Children have the right to relax and play and to join in a wide range of cultural, artistic and other recreational activities. The United Nations has published General Comment Number 17 on Article 31. This is an official statement that elaborates on the meaning of an aspect of the UNCRC that requires further interpretation or emphasis. The aim of the General Comment is to raise the importance of an Article and increase accountability among countries that have signed up to the Convention.

### Article 12: Respect for the views of the child

When adults are making decisions that affect children, children have the right to say what they think should happen and have their opinions taken into account.

### Article 15: Freedom of association

Children have the right to meet together.

## National Play Policy

The Welsh Government demonstrated its commitment to children's play in the national Play Policy (2002). The Policy states that:

*'Play encompasses children's behaviour which is freely chosen, personally directed and intrinsically motivated. It is performed for no external goal or reward, and is a fundamental and integral part of healthy development – not only for individual children, but also for the society in which they live.'*

## Statutory Duties

### Children and Families (Wales) Measure 2010

Section 11 of the Children and Families (Wales) Measure 2010 places a duty on local authorities to assess and secure sufficient play opportunities for children in their areas.

The Play Sufficiency Duty comes as part of the Welsh Government's anti-poverty agenda which recognises that children can have a poverty of experience, opportunity and aspiration, and that this kind of poverty can affect children from all social, cultural and economic backgrounds across Wales.

The Welsh Government has produced Statutory Guidance, (*Wales – A Play Friendly Country*) to local authorities on assessing for and securing sufficient play opportunities for children in their areas. The Guidance indicates that play assessments should cover the extent to which play opportunities are appropriate to the requirements of children from diverse communities and cultures, including Gypsy and Traveller children and young people. As part of their Play Sufficiency Assessments submitted in 2013, local authorities assessed to what extent it provides designated and well-maintained play space on Gypsy and Traveller sites.

In its Child Poverty Strategy for Wales (2011), the Welsh Government recognises the right to play and its contribution to children's development and resilience. The strategy values play as being a vital element in children's development and that it can provide a strong protective factor in children's lives. The strategy highlights that play can, to an extent, shield children from the negative aspects of poverty and allow them to develop their inner resources and build resilience to difficulties and uncertainties in their lives. Play contributes towards children's personal and social development, their physical and mental health, and their ability to learn and engage with education.

## Participation

The Children and Families (Wales) Measure 2010 requires local authorities to make arrangements to promote and facilitate the participation of children and young people in decision making. The National Participation Standards for Wales provide a basis of principles for involving children and young people in decision-making. The standards explain what children and young people should expect when having their voices heard in relation to information, choice, non-discrimination, respect, benefits to children and young people, how children and young people receive feedback and how service providers improve quality.

## Housing (Wales) Act 2014

Part 3 of the Housing (Wales) Act 2014 re-introduces a duty upon local authorities to provide Gypsy and Traveller sites where there is unmet need in Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Assessments. This replicates a similar duty under the Caravan Sites Act 1968, which was repealed in 1994. Since 1997 only one local authority site has been built in Wales.

To support the new duty the Gypsy and Traveller Sites Capital Grant will provide 100 percent Capital Grant funding (maximum of £1.5m per project) to local authorities to develop new sites. Local authorities are encouraged to apply for this funding to ensure sites are built.

To assist local authorities, Welsh Government developed and updated guidance on the design and management of Gypsy and Traveller sites. This guidance notes that local authorities should consider the welfare of children and young people and that an area for children and young people to play and gather is important. It encourages local authorities to consider including play areas and designing a site layout that encourages play opportunities.

## Travelling to a Better Future

The aim of *Travelling to a Better Future – Gypsy and Traveller Framework for Action and Delivery Plan* is to:

- realise Welsh Government's commitment to the Gypsy and Traveller community
- ensure equality of opportunity for Gypsies and Travellers in Wales
- think about new ways in which Gypsy and Traveller communities can be enabled to access resources not always available to them by ensuring services are flexible enough to respond to their needs.

'Lucy Smith was the member of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child who acted as a rapporteur when the Committee last examined the UK State Party in 2008.

In that role she made a visit to Wales and I had the pleasure of accompanying her while she was here. I learned a lot from her about the Convention (UNCRC) and how important it is to see the application of children's rights as a practical task, not an intellectual one. The intellectual rigour was there and Lucy used her abilities in this area really well but only as a means to an end. I remember her saying to me "A policy or new law is not the target, the target is making children's lives better than they are now".

Before her visit to Wales, Lucy telephoned me. She pointed out that when rapporteurs visit State Parties the tendency was to show off children's rights achievements. Lucy didn't want this when she came to Wales. "Show me the good and the bad", she said. "I want to get an honest picture of where you are at in Wales".

She met with children and young people, parents, carers and professionals at a number of sites across south Wales. She met with local and national politicians including a meeting with

Rhodri Morgan the then First Minister. She attended meetings and visits with an experienced eye including a visit to a Gypsy and Traveller site in Cardiff. A resident took us to the children's play area. The play area had been fenced off with corrugated metal sheets because it wasn't fit for children. The retaining sea wall was falling away and there were dead mice on the floor. Lucy reeled in horror at what she saw and took my arm as we walked back to the car. Ten minutes later we were outside the National Assembly for Wales. The juxtaposition of a filthy play area next door to the home of modern democracy in Wales was not lost on her.

Lucy also gave a powerful speech at an event in the Senedd. She looked out at us all, politicians, NGOs, children and young people, academics, officials from Welsh Government and the media. Her message was clear and so was her collective challenge to the children's rights community in Wales. Lucy told us we had made a lot of progress but that we had a responsibility for driving change here in Wales and by example to lead the way across the UK. If we couldn't make children's rights a reality here in Wales then nobody could.'

*Keith Towler, Children's Commissioner for Wales, 2008-2015*

## Part 1

## Models of play provision

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This part of the guide focuses on models of play provision. It has been developed using case studies of existing provision from across Wales. It provides the rationale, and identifies the benefits and key features of successful models of provision.

Most children will play without the need for adult intervention, even in the most barren of environments, but an environment rich in possibilities supports their play best of all. Some children need the support of others to make the most of the environment around them and the company of other children. A rich play environment is one where children and young people are able to make a wide range of choices; where there are many possibilities so that they can invent and extend their own play. A rich play environment is:

- a varied and interesting physical environment that maximises the potential for socialising, creativity, resourcefulness and challenge.
- a place where children feel free to play in their own way and on their own terms.

For various reasons, children and young people on Gypsy and Traveller sites may not be attending education on a

full-time basis but they are keen to learn. Early years and play provision has expanded future prospects by providing older children with opportunities to volunteer and gain childcare work experience and undertake training.

It is common for the eldest children in families similarly to have been given responsibility at a young age. Providing opportunities for playing and socialising enables us to meet the play needs of young people which may not have been previously met.

Due to the nature of the homes of Gypsy and Travellers on sites storage space is limited and families are not always able to provide a wide range of resources to support children's play. Often sites are overcrowded or in or surrounded by unsuitable and hazardous environments. Children and young people often do not live close to play facilities; transport, access, and inclusion is an issue for many Gypsy and Traveller children and young people.

# Section 1 Providing indoor places for playing on site

When planning community facilities as part of site design or refurbishment, it is important to consider how children and young people might use the space. Well-designed indoor spaces for playing are planned so that they can be used flexibly and offer an appropriate range of opportunities.

The provision of community facilities support community engagement, and good early years and play provision acts as a springboard for other services and community involvement. Being able to access quality early years provision, well designed and resourced play spaces and staffed play provision brings extensive benefits for the children, parents and the community.

### Key features of well-designed indoor spaces for play:

- Spaces provide rich experiences – children can explore, experiment, and learn basic knowledge through direct experience
- Spaces provide a sense of belonging – children and young people need to be close to people they know, have familiar and comfortable objects, and be in a setting that has a personal history for them
- Spaces contain resources which are appropriate, well maintained and accessible for all children
- Spaces are planned so that they can be used flexibly and a varied range of activities is provided.

# Section 2 Early years provision

The support families can access through early years play provision is extremely valuable in meeting the needs of the Gypsy and Traveller community.

Having quality early years experiences supports children to settle in new environments. This provides support for the transition into school, allowing the children to understand the social 'rules' when outside of the family unit and to form relationships with new adults and their peers. Playing allows children to enjoy challenging experiences, investigate and discover for themselves and therefore becoming independent learners.

Playing is important for children to gain confidence and self esteem; the play in early years provision is open ended and the children are encouraged to participate in activities without having to 'produce' an end product. Good early years play settings support children to have the confidence to try new things and develop an interest in learning. Playing in these settings promotes the enhancement of a range of skills including self-help, creative, mathematical, linguistic and expressive.

Providing a rich outdoor environment increases opportunities for learning and increased physical play. Staff in settings such as these have noticed an increase in socialisation and less aggression. Early years services staff build positive relationships with parents and this helps families gain confidence and access other services they and their children need.

### Key features of successful early years provision or things to consider:

- Qualified, passionate and enthusiastic professionals are employed
- Observations of each child are undertaken to ensure their individual needs are met
- Staff understand the need to be nurturing and supportive of each child's needs and help parents and children face the temporary separation that occurs when children attend
- Staff work closely with a range of professionals including: health visitors, speech and language therapists and Flying Start advisory teams
- Links are made with the local schools and transitions are supported to ensure that children access mainstream education at the nursery/reception stage
- A range of play opportunities are on offer and any outdoor space is utilised to best effect
- Staff have undertaken Gypsy and Traveller cultural awareness training.



# Section 3 Staffed play provision on site

Playworkers create opportunities and places where children and young people can play freely and with confidence. They are places where they can encounter a wide range of opportunities and possibilities – where the adults involved understand the nature and importance of all aspects of children’s play and work to support it.

Playworkers see children and young people as competent individuals. They understand the need for children to encounter and create uncertainty and challenge as part of their play. Playworkers neither direct nor organise play, they are trained to judge when or whether to intervene.

Playworkers enable children to extend their own play and they protect and enhance the play space so that it is a rich play environment. Playworkers ensure that the play space is inclusive by supporting all children to make the most of the opportunities available in their own way.

## Outreach playworkers on site

Peripatetic playwork projects are staffed by a small team of trained playworkers, visiting a site, once or twice a week for a couple of hours. They will be equipped with ideas and resources, and will work to help children create places to play in their local area, and to reassure parents that it is safe for children to take part in play sessions. These sessions may operate outdoors or in indoor facilities, where they exist.

Playworkers offer a range of play opportunities that children may not have access to, such as creative activities, messy activities, sensory activities and socialising.

## Mobile provision visiting the site

A mobile play service supports the delivery of play opportunities and resources to children in communities that have no local, easily accessible staffed play provision or play resources. It provides an ‘indoor’ space offering a range of opportunities for playing out and socialising that may not be available to children and young people due to the nature of their living accommodation. Mobile play services travel to these areas to meet the play and socialisation needs of children and families.

The play provision is usually timetabled so that children and families know when and where playworkers and resources will be available.

### Mobile play provision can also:

- Offer a space for consulting with children across a number of communities
- Offer a welcoming space where families can find out how to support their children’s play
- Provide a toy library or a scrapstore.

One well-known example of mobile play is the playbus. Playbuses are ‘community buildings on wheels’. A playbus can operate as a crèche, pre-school or parent and toddler group; twilight youth drop-in; out of school play service; and much more.

### Key features of successful staffed outreach and mobile play provision or things to consider:

- Playworkers have undertaken Gypsy and Traveller cultural awareness training and have a strong understanding of the culture and cultures of the community and the site
- Playworkers are flexible and able to cope with the fluidity of the site
- Playworkers should have a good understanding of the demographics of the site
- Playworkers should make contact with other service providers already known on site to be introduced to community members
- Playworkers should be clear about the nature of the provision and how parents can support it to help allay parental concerns
- Playworkers provide a wide variety of play experiences which provide new and novel experiences
- Playworkers provide support to challenge negativity should children and young people wish to express themselves in a way that moves away from a stereotypical way of playing
- It is flexible and creates a bespoke service to respond to children’s play needs in different communities
- It reaches isolated, disadvantaged and under resourced communities
- It can pilot projects in a range of different areas and with different groups of children.

# Section 4 Play equipment and play spaces

Good spaces to play within a community show the people in that community that playing is important. They create a hub for a community, offering opportunities for adults and young people to become involved and socialise together. Children and families value quality play spaces, the relationships they make through them and the contribution they make to communities.

Play equipment can offer shared experiences and some equipment, such as shelters provide space for socialising, while recognising the limitations of lack of availability of indoor space and inclement weather.

To make the most of a play space, children need to be able to adapt and shape it to meet their play needs and it needs to change over time and provide new opportunities for play. The addition of loose fill surfaces such as sand or bark, the inclusion of water, trees and bushes will provide a supply of loose parts that change with the seasons, which children will use in a variety of ingenious ways.

Loose parts are objects or components that can be moved around, adapted, built, demolished, mixed, or imbued with imaginary qualities – for instance:

Paper, stones, sticks, water, sand, leaves, feathers, tools, nails, boxes, fabric, ropes, wood, pots, animals, plants, metal, clay, mud, tables, chairs, blankets, everything and anything that can be moved or manipulated as part of play. The best play spaces contain a wide variety of loose parts and children are free to play with them as they wish.

In Statutory Guidance to local authorities on assessing and securing sufficient play opportunities for children in their areas, the Welsh Government defines a rich play environment as one which is flexible, adaptable, varied and interesting. It maximises the potential for socialising, creativity, resourcefulness, challenge, and choice. It is a trusted public space where children feel free to play in their own way and on their own terms.



For more information see Play Wales' information sheets: *Play spaces: planning and design* and *Play spaces: common complaints and simple solutions*.

Both are available to download at:  
[www.playwales.org.uk/eng/information sheets](http://www.playwales.org.uk/eng/information sheets)

Quality play provision offers all children the opportunity to freely interact with or experience the following:

- **Other children** – of different ages and abilities with a choice to play alone or with others, to negotiate, co-operate, fall out, and resolve conflict
- **The natural world** – weather, trees, plants, insects, animals and mud
- **Loose parts** – natural and man-made materials that can be manipulated, moved and adapted, built and demolished
- **The four elements** – earth, air, fire and water
- **Challenge and uncertainty** – graduated opportunities for risk taking; both on a physical and emotional level
- **Changing identity** – role play and dressing up
- **Movement** – running, jumping, climbing, balancing, rolling, swinging, sliding and spinning
- **Rough and tumble** – play fighting
- **The senses** – sounds, tastes, textures, smells and sights.

Key features of good play spaces or things to consider:

- Spaces are designed with the needs and characteristics of the local community in mind in identifying location and likely range of use and users
- Spaces have a distinct local character in terms of the particular design, material and features included
- The natural features, such as existing trees and natural puddles, of the spaces are respected and integrated
- The space and context as a whole is as important as individual play features in creating a successful play space
- Spaces include play materials and play features that are non-prescriptive and therefore encourage imagination and suggest many different ways of being played on or with
- Spaces do not rely mainly on manufactured play equipment for the play opportunities offered. Spaces use manufactured equipment to enhance what is on offer
- The design of the spaces ensures that when play equipment is used, it is integrated with and complements other site features
- The spaces incorporate opportunities for children to encounter or create challenge and risk.

# Section 5 Encouraging integration into local play provision

Sometimes, it is possible to work with local services to help integrate the parents and their children into the local community. This often focuses on health and wellbeing and play, but also supports Gypsy and Traveller families to explore their own culture and the Gypsy and Traveller community.

It is not uncommon for Gypsy and Traveller families to feel disengaged from the local community. The children can often feel isolated and discriminated against. When play projects have successfully supported integration, they have started by working on sites or perhaps taking the children on organised trips to local attractions. Successful integration projects often start by organising events for parents and younger children, as this helps to begin discussions about the importance of education and integration.

This approach helps playworkers to gain the trust and respect of parents and supports them to suggest that the children and young people may benefit from the use of local community based facilities.

In Wales, successful integration projects have helped to give children and young people a voice. Play services have supported the creation of local Gypsy and Traveller forums. These forums are part of the Travelling Ahead project, which has been set up by Save the Children to give Gypsy and Traveller children an opportunity to discuss issues that are important to them and understand their rights as children and young people.

These local forums have supported children and young people to gain the confidence and skills to engage with other children and professionals. Working in a participative way with adults has helped young people to take their skills and

learning back to others on site, and help them to understand the importance of rules and boundaries, while understanding their own rights.

This way of working has enabled playworkers to integrate the children into existing play provision and environments with fewer issues arising.

### Key features of successful integration or things to consider:

- Playworkers have undertaken Gypsy and Traveller cultural awareness training and have a strong understanding of the culture and cultures of the Gypsy and Traveller community
- Playworkers make contact with other service providers already known on site to be introduced to community members
- Playworkers are clear about the nature of the provision and how parents can support it to help allay parental concerns
- Playworkers consider arranging visits to provision for parents prior to organising sessions for children
- Any issues regarding transport are identified and addressed before the process of integration starts
- Playworkers understand that integration takes time and need to be aware that this may be challenging for all children.

'I have worked with the Gypsy and Traveller community to help integrate the parents and their children into the local community, focusing on wellbeing and play, but also supporting their own culture and the Gypsy and Traveller community at large.

I facilitated play sessions on two sites and worked with the parents, organising training in working with under fives, food and nutrition and discussing with them the importance of education and integration. The parents were on the whole receptive to my ideas and I made some very strong community relationships and was accepted as a part of the on-site community.

When we took the children out on organised trips, I was able to gain the trust of the parents and I felt able to suggest that the children started to use the facilities at the local play centre.

I heard about the Travelling Ahead youth forums and suggested to young people attending on-site sessions that they may wish to set up a local group. This enabled me to reintegrate the children into the play centre environment as meetings and events were held there.'

*Playworker*

# Section 6 Supporting community self build play spaces

Community build play spaces are developed, built and maintained by local people to meet the needs of their community.

Developing a play space which includes using manufactured equipment and surfacing can be an expensive process but often, with appropriate guidance, there are a range of skills that already exist in communities that can be employed to make quality play spaces and to make money and resources go further. At the same time, working together on a play space can nurture a sense of community cohesion and ownership.

Whilst there is guidance on safety surfacing and equipment to be used in play spaces it is often misunderstood and if negotiating bureaucracy proves difficult, it is worth obtaining professional advice. In addition, community build play spaces do not have to be entirely built by the community – some elements in the design and build process can be out-sourced.

### Key features of successful community build projects:

- Staff have undertaken Gypsy and Traveller cultural awareness training
- A culture of community cohesion is supported
- There is a response to local need
- Local skills and resources are utilised
- Skill sharing and skill building are supported
- There is a sense of pride and ownership in the space
- There is an enriched play space and experience
- A low cost option to provide a distinctive project
- Allows for natural features and landscaping which are characteristic to the site to be included.



For more information see RoSPA's Construction Notes for Self-build Play Equipment:

[www.rosipa.com/leisuresafety/adviceandinformation/playsafety/selfbuild-playequipment.aspx](http://www.rosipa.com/leisuresafety/adviceandinformation/playsafety/selfbuild-playequipment.aspx)



## Part 2

# Tools to Assist

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This part of the guide has been prepared to support us to consider ways in which time, space and permission to promote freely chosen play can be provided as part of site development or refurbishment. It provides a range of tools to assist the process.

## Section 1 Undertaking an options analysis

The use of an options analysis template can help planners to determine the best model and approach to take to provide good play opportunities for children and young people.

### Options analysis template

Option 1: Develop site based staffed provision			
Issues to be considered	Advantages (+1)	Disadvantages (+2)	Comment
What spaces are available to play? Is there a play service locally that can support this? What resources are needed? What are the community views? What is the impact on community relations?			
Option 2: Develop site based play area			
Issues to be considered	Advantages (+1)	Disadvantages (+2)	Comment
What spaces are available to play? Is there a specialist locally that can support this? What resources are needed? What are the community views? What is the impact on community relations? What skills exist within the community?			
Option 3: Offer integration into existing services			
Issues to be considered	Advantages (+1)	Disadvantages (+2)	Comment
Is there a play service locally with the skills and knowledge to support this? What resources are needed? What are the community views? What is the impact on community relations? What is the impact on the existing provision?			
Option 4: Consider a mix of provision			
Issues to be considered	Advantages (+1)	Disadvantages (+2)	Comment
Provide site based staffed play provision Provide site based play area Integrate into existing services			

# Section 2 Engaging with children

It may be helpful for facilitators to introduce themselves to families on site before undertaking any observation work or engagement with children and young people. This helps us to be clear about what we are doing and the benefits we hope this work will bring for the community.

For existing sites, it is important to involve children and young people living there. For new sites, Save the Children's Travelling Ahead project may provide a mechanism for engagement.

### Children and young people can help:

- undertake an audit of how, and more importantly which, parts of the site are already being used. The children are best placed to identify the potential for play
- tell us where else children and young people are spending their time in the local community off the site and what they do there – this will help to plan priorities
- identify the routes that they use to get to and from the places they play or may play off site and what method of transport they use
- identify the barriers that might prevent greater use of off site amenities, such as roads and water courses and also perceived community boundaries, cultural and ethnic divides.

The questions and notes for facilitators template on the next pages can be used to engage with children.



## Survey questions and notes for facilitators template

The sample answers are not exhaustive and facilitators can encourage more extensive responses.

**According to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) you have the right to say what you think should happen when adults are making decisions that affect you. These questions are to help us find out what you think about the places where you play or spend time with your friends near where you live.**

### 1. How often do you go out to play with friends?

*(Note for facilitator: this provides information which can contribute to information about the amount of time children play in their community and on the site)*

I play out with friends most days		I hardly ever play with friends outside	
I play out with friends a few days a week		I don't play with friends outside	

### 2. When you go out to play, what do you like doing?

*(Note for facilitator: this is designed to help children think about what they like doing before answering the other questions. You may choose not to use it for analysis, but it can be a useful tool to think about what you can be providing)*

Riding bikes		Playing in the water	
Chatting and being with my friends		Climbing things	
Running and chasing games		Building dens	
Playing hide and seek		Playing ball games	
Playing armies and soldiers		Being in the trees	
Playing in the mud		Making swings	
Rolling down hills		Fishing	
Exploring		Looking for dragonflies and butterflies	
Having a walk		Making bike tracks and courses	
Having adventures and exploring		Having a picnic	
Looking for bugs and stuff		Spending time with the grown-ups in my family	
Looking for bears, dragons, fairies and things		Being in the fresh air	
Making fires		Other stuff	
Playing with prams and dolls			

### 3. Playing makes me feel ...

*(Note for facilitator: this is designed to help children think about what they like doing before answering the other questions. You may choose not to use it for analysis, but it can be a useful tool to think about what you can be providing)*

Happy		Active		Sad	
Excited		Brave		Glad to be with friends	
Scared		Quiet		Glad to be on my own	
Bored		Peaceful		Glad to be with my family	
Lonely		Adventurous		Other feelings?	
Afraid		Loud			



### 4. When I am playing out on my site

(Note for facilitator: this is designed to help you determine to what extent children are satisfied with local play opportunities and experiences. You can suggest to children that they think about their answers to questions 2 and 3 and ask how much they can do these things near their homes)

I can do most of my favourite things		I can do some of my favourite things		I can do hardly any of my favourite things	
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### 5. Where is your favourite place to play when you are not in school?

(Note for facilitator: this is designed to help children think about what might be possible – they should tick the places they like BEST even if there are none of these in their neighbourhood)

On the plot just outside where I live		The woods nearby		In the trailer/mobile where I live	
On the plot just outside where my friend(s) live		Football field or sports pitch		Community centre or leisure centre	
Streets near my home		School playground		Beach, seaside or river nearby	
Local grassy area or field		Play area that has water or sand in it		Somewhere else?	
A place with bushes, trees and flowers		Cycle or skate park			
Play area with swings, slides and other stuff to play on		In old cars			

### 6. On the site where you live, which of these is true?

(Note for facilitator: suggest to children that they think about those places in the question above and ask how many of these are available in their neighbourhood)

There are lots of my favourite places to play or hang out		There are some of my favourite places to play or hang out		There are hardly any of my favourite places to play or hang out	
-----------------------------------------------------------	--	-----------------------------------------------------------	--	-----------------------------------------------------------------	--

### 7. When you go out to play

(Note for facilitator: this is designed to help children think about to what extent they can travel independently through their neighbourhood)

I can go out on my own		I can go out with my friends		I can only go out with my brother or sister	
I can only go out with an adult		I don't go out to play at all			

### 8. What stops you playing out?

(Note for facilitator: this is designed to help to identify some of the barriers to, or, reasons why children are not playing out in their neighbourhood)

I'm not allowed to go out to play		I don't like getting wet and muddy	
I'm too busy with homework		I'm not allowed to get wet and muddy	
I'm too busy with playing games on the Xbox/PS/Wii		There's too much dog mess where I like to play	
I'm too busy with clubs like football or other things		There's nothing to play with there	
I don't go out to play if it's raining or cold		There's nobody to play with there	
I don't go out to play as it's too dark		It's hard to cross the road to get there	
I don't go out to play because of bullies		I'm not allowed to cross the road to get there	
I don't go out to play because of other grown-ups		Something else?	

### 9. What stops you from playing indoors?

(Note for facilitator: this is designed to help you to think of some of the barriers playing children face in their local living space and may help to identify how to engage with families)

I'm just not allowed		Food is being cooked	
There's not enough space		I'm too messy when I play indoors	
The trailer/mobile has been cleaned		I'm too loud when I play indoors	

### 10. What stops you from playing away from the site you live on?

(Note for facilitator: this is designed to help inform the type of provision which is planned for)

It's too far away		Too many arguments	
There's too much traffic		There's nowhere to go	
Other people don't like Gypsies and Travellers		I don't know where to go	
Too many bullies		I don't want to	

### 11. How can we help you to play and socialise more often?

(Note for facilitator: this is designed to help you to think about initiatives or plans that could address some of the barriers playing children face in their local area)

Find safer ways to cross the roads to go out/get around		Ask dog owners to pick up the dog mess	
Talk to adults who tell us not to play out		Help my parents understand that it's okay to play out	
Help us deal with the bullies		Something else?	

# Section 3 Play Audits

It may be helpful for facilitators to introduce themselves to families on site before undertaking any observation work or engagement with children and young people. This helps us to be clear about what we are doing and the benefits we hope this work will bring for the community.

To understand what could be offered, it is important to consider the local community and environment in which children live. Given time, space and permission to play, children will naturally choose to play wherever and whenever they wish. Once what is available to children is known, it can be assessed against how children need to play.

Play audits provide a process to measure effectively children's play needs are being met within a community.

## Adults as auditors

As the plans for the site development or refurbishment progress, there will already be a good range of information available about the geography, demography and culture of the community. Finding out about other provision locally, such as scouts, will help to inform decisions about what is chosen to offer.

For existing sites, monitoring how the site is currently used will help to identify its potential for play. For instance questions that might be considered include:

- What happens on open space on the site?
- What happens on equipped space on the site?
- What do children gravitate towards?
- What parts of the site do children occupy and what spaces do they avoid?

The use of, or lack of space and resources can be observed and recorded. An area that isn't used much might benefit from sensory enhancement, an injection of colour or loose parts to more actively promote to children that this is a place where they can play.

The layout of a site, where things are, and how children have modified spaces and have moved things around, are all clues to children's need to play and individual preferences.

Regular observation of children can become a routine enabling the capture of children's natural play behaviour. Using a notepad, phone, or Dictaphone can all be useful methods for capturing the moment and need not be intrusive. The need to gather information should never significantly interfere with children's right to play. As well as planning when and where observations are undertaken, if the tools for observation are readily available, it is possible to capture and record events as they happen.

Whatever method is used for observations the following information should be recorded:

1. What is being observed and why. For example, watching how children use a particularly popular piece of equipment to find out why
2. The date
3. The time
4. The place
5. A record of what is actually happening (not what we imagine is happening)
6. A record of what is being said and by whom.

After the event it is valuable to reflect upon what has been observed, to begin to interpret what has been seen, and what it means in terms of the audit.



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### Children as auditors

A child at play will naturally and instinctively interpret a space and make changes to it, or else simply move on because the space doesn't offer, or has ceased to offer, what they need. For those responsible for auditing play spaces, the most reliable source of information will be the children. When auditing a play space it is important to remember that this is an adult activity and not children's. It is important not to infringe on children's time, but if they are to feel the play setting belongs to them, their participation is beneficial in supporting a sense of ownership.

Some children simply enjoy having a role to play. Their natural curiosity will cause them to ask what is being done when they see adults counting resources and they may want to help. Without duress and with some guidance there are a number of ways children can inform the audit of the play space.

Looking at maps with children can be a good way to look at the geography of an area and begin to understand how children are playing within it. It should be held in mind that this may reveal secret places which children value for playing.

#### Other methods that include children:

- Drawing pictures of what they like to do
- Interviewing other children about their interests
- Producing and completing questionnaires with their peers
- Taking photos of what's happening in the play space.

Going out into the community, sensitively observing children playing and chatting to them will also help gather information from children.

It is important to remember that with any children's involvement with auditing they do not feel they are being promised something that can't be delivered. Asking children a range of questions and encouraging participation will help children see the possibilities. This is a mapping stage that also involves interpretation of the space and what happens within it to support decision-making processes.

If at any point through the process mixed messages are conveyed, over the future development of the space or resources, children will feel disengaged and their sense of ownership damaged. Children across different stages of understanding will interpret things varyingly, so keeping participation developmentally appropriate will help reduce the risk of misunderstandings happening.

## Section 4 Identifying the potential for a space to promote play

### Play space audit checklist

A play space audit is a valuable tool to use when identifying the potential for playing. If children already use the space for playing, there will be evidence of this. This checklist is designed to help identify where children are playing, what they are doing and how often they use the space for playing. It should be noted that apparent signs of neglect such as litter, broken branches on trees and graffiti are, in fact, often signs of positive use by children.

A play space audit also helps in other ways. Firstly, it forms part of the participation and engagement process and can help the gathering of evidence to support what the community and children are saying. Secondly, conducted at regular intervals (for example six monthly) it can be used to help monitor how the space is being used and how often.

### How to conduct a play space audit

The play space audit template on the following pages is intended for an observation that should take a minimum of 30 minutes. Ideally, this should be undertaken during different times of the day to see how different age groups use the space.

For example, undertake an observation at a weekend or after school and another one during the day to observe pre-schoolers using the site with their parents or carers. Choosing when to undertake observations will depend on the site.

There are a number of play behaviours that are described in more detail below to help with the observation. There will be play behaviours that can be identified without needing to see children playing. For example, if children gather and meet on boulders or seated areas, there will be signs of wear from scuffing feet or holes dug with toes or sticks.

If the space is an appealing place for children it is likely there are a number of factors that contribute to this. Children say that issues such as how well lit the space is, how close it is to homes, and whether or not there are places to shelter contribute to a sense of feeling safe and appeal to a broad age range. If this is the case the space will need to be designed in a way that provides for that wide age range and provides for a changing demographic.

All children have different play needs and wishes that can change with time. Separating people into age and other groups

## Tools to Assist

is not necessarily beneficial (although some may need particular support to meet their own needs). Interaction between all age groups and members of society is a vital process that supports all children and young people to feel more confident about playing out and hanging out. Building relationships with other children and young people gives an opportunity to share knowledge of the people and geography of neighbourhoods and to share lore. For example, traditions of playing, rules of games, places for play – such as an old lamppost which has been used for generations as the base when playing games such as hide and seek or *What's the time Mr. Wolf?*

## Things to look out for

**Walking and travelling through space** – If there is a pathway running through the space it may be that children play as they move through it even if they aren't intending to stop. Behaviours can include jumping off kerbs on bikes or scooters, swinging off trees, jumping over things, running down a bank and free running/parcour. Actions which change the way children travel through the space, such as re-routing a pathway, can be considered as they may encourage better or more play opportunities.

**Sitting and gathering** – Even without formal seating areas there will be places where children choose to hang out. Look out for signs of wear on the ground near seating areas, under climbing frames, at the base of trees/boulders or items brought in to the space such as pieces of carpet, crates or buckets that could be used as chairs. Where there are no current obvious opportunities for formal seating areas, or gathering places, creating these will support to make the space a more social place that can be used by a wide range of ages – from families with younger children to older children hanging out and chatting with their friends. Seating should be placed in circles, U or L shapes to encourage social play – placing benches in a line does not reflect how people like to gather and socialise.

**Riding (bikes, scooters, skateboards)** – Children's use of bikes in the space can be observed whether they are used just as transport to the space or are being ridden in and around the site. What features are being used to ride down, jump, skid on? Is there evidence of construction by children such as mud ramps and timber and any improvements that have been made to support wheeled play opportunities in an informal way?

**Use of natural features (for example trees, bushes, mounds and hills)** – Use of existing natural features should be considered, for instance informal access points into wooded areas, and signs of litter or items brought in to the space under trees/bushes could show den building activity or secret spaces. Wear on bark or bases of trees and broken limbs on trees show evidence of children climbing trees, as do planks of wood, rope and fabric up in the trees.

**Playing with the elements** – Evidence of children having access to a range of natural elements to play should be considered. Children have a fascination with the natural world and should have the opportunity to experience water, earth (mud), fire and air. The site should be considered for access to any or all of these. It is important that these elements can be incorporated using a sensible risk management approach.

**Use of the senses (taste, smell, sight, sound and texture)** – Children moving through the space can be observed. Rustling leaves, sand, touching bark, feeling cold metal, rolling in grass, playing with shadows all provide opportunities for sensory play.

**Movement** – Evidence of how children move when they are in the space should be considered. There should be a range of opportunities to move in different ways in the play space, for example running, jumping, climbing, balancing, rolling, swinging, sliding, dancing and chasing.

**Rough and tumble** – Children learn about their own physical limitations, strength, controlling anger and boundaries through rough and tumble. This can come in many forms including play fighting, cops and robbers, chasing and hide and seek. It will be clear from laughter, smiles and other facial expressions that this is a game and the children are treating it as such.

**Risk and challenge (physical)** – Are children experiencing increasing levels of challenge? This doesn't need to be high-risk activity, it can be as simple as a toddler building up from jumping off the bottom rung of a ladder to the second and then the third. Where there are opportunities for children to take physical risks they will generally look for ways to improve and increase the challenge. For example, a bike ramp made of bricks and planks of wood will soon have more bricks added as children's confidence grows.

**Playing with props/loose parts** – Evidence of children bringing props in from outside to enhance their play may be seen. This could be rope for a swing or wood for a den, toy cars to build a road in the mud or using natural elements such as stones, flowers, leaves, berries to build small worlds, potions or simply to create a pile or sort and categorise items.

**Playing with identity** – Children will play with who they are and what they look like. This could be role play games, such as mummy and baby, doctors and nurses, soldiers, power rangers or changing how they look with mud on their faces, dressing up games or pulling faces.

## Play space audit template

Name of site:		Observation made by:		
Observations:	Observation day and date:	Observation period (e.g. half term/after school/during school day/weekend/evening):	Time of observation period:	Weather:
Key features of site:	Brief description of main features including access points (such as slopes, trees, shrubbery, vantage points, areas to hide, things to climb up or clamber over, seating and gathering points, level areas; as well as any manufactured play equipment features that may have been installed). Note any specific areas of usage shown, for example by worn grass, broken branches, bike tracks, litter, graffiti. These can be further detailed below in any activity observations made			
Usage by children and adults: (numbers)	Male:	Female:	Approx. age: (e.g. Under 5, 5-8, 8-13, 13-15, 15+)	Total:
Children/young people in a group:				
Solo children/young people:				
Accompanied by adults:				
Adult only:				
Activity observed by presence of children and young people:			If not present, record of signs of children and young people being there and making use of site:	
Walking, travelling through the space:				
Sitting and gathering:				
Riding bikes, scooters, skateboards:				
Use of natural features (e.g. trees, bushes, mounds, hills):				
Playing with elements (water, earth [mud], fire, air):				
Use of senses (taste, smell, sight, sound, texture):				
Movement (e.g. running, jumping, climbing, balancing, rolling):				
Rough and tumble:				
Risk and challenge (physical):				
Playing with props/loose parts:				
Playing with identity:				

### Play space action plan

Recommendations for developing and enhancing the site to increase 'playability', including any actions for protecting the way that children and young people are currently using the site, making reference to activities observed.

Actions for developing and enhancing playable space:	Actions for protecting playable space:
<p><b>For example</b> – Children are making use of the raised wooded area alongside the play space for building dens and playing tip. Access to this area is currently blocked by a wire fence that has been pushed down – explore formalising access to this space.</p>	<p><b>For example</b> – The existing swings are in need of refurbishment but are extremely well used. Refurbish and incorporate into new space design. Consider more natural safety surfacing (sand or bark).</p>

### Play needs action plan

How do the observations contribute to evidence about what children/the community want?

Evidence of need	Actions
<p><b>For example</b> – Observations show that children enjoy climbing trees at the edge of the site.</p>	<p><b>For example</b> – Ensure that design brief asks play designer to maintain access to the trees.</p>

# Section 5 Working with parents and families

Cultural traditions are extremely important to Gypsies and Travellers and understanding some of these can go a long way towards forging trusting and respectful relationships.

Different groups of Gypsies and Travellers have different traditions. The things that tend to be important for everyone are:

- The family
- Looking after children, the elderly or the ill
- Cleanliness
- Religion
- Travelling.

Gypsies and Travellers usually live in independent and self-sufficient ways, where they look after themselves. Men and women often have different roles, with women looking after the home and men going out to work, often in their own businesses.

Early years and play providers may find themselves working with a wide age range of children when they are working with a number of siblings or groups of children at the same time. This can help to support the involvement of parents or other family members and help put them at ease.

## Things to consider when engaging with parents and families

Be respectful of any special occasions, bereavements and travelling, and ask families if they would like play provision to continue at these times.

The area may be unknown to the family; parents may not have local knowledge of services and arrive without a support network or confident sense of belonging within the community.

Gypsy and Traveller parents may not have experienced early years or play services themselves and may not be familiar with or at ease with it.

Gypsy and Traveller parents may have concerns about the possibility of their children experiencing prejudice or racism. They may be concerned about the attitudes of other parents and professionals. These concerns can be intensified if parents have unhappy memories of their own play experiences.

Some parents may feel that they are not fulfilling their role by sending their child to an early years or play setting.

Sometimes, traditional gender roles have an influence in whether or not parents support their children to play. Mothers may wish to keep a child at home for as long as possible. This can be influenced by a sense of positive identity within her community associated with being a mother. Fathers sometimes prefer their boys not to attend play settings, but to remain with them learning a 'cultural role'.

## Tips for playworkers

- Ensure a relaxed and easy going approach
- Be prepared for unanticipated situations
- Undertake Gypsy and Traveller cultural awareness training
- Induct and support new playworkers well
- Ensure an understanding of the needs of individuals within groups of children who may be 'ranked'
- Listen to the needs of the community
- Ensure an understanding of site rules, particularly in terms of safety (such as fire drills)



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## Section 6 Working with the wider community

When considering the options for providing opportunities for playing on Gypsy and Traveller sites, it may be that a number of individuals and groups will come together to plan the arrangements.

It is worth contacting the Community or Town Council and other organisations in the area, including other departments of the local authority to identify what other play provision might be available locally and what support they might be able to offer.

Most local authorities have a Play Officer and there are regional play associations across Wales. They can potentially help with advice about the range of play provision that can be developed and promoted using the existing site. They may be able to offer short-term staffed play sessions. Staffed play provision teams in particular may be able to provide advice on concerns over fears of damage and vandalism. They may also help to organise a play event on site to promote playing and to answer questions that might arise.

Holding a community event may be a good way to help parents and others to understand what the plans are and how they can help. Here, ideas can be shared and the space that will be available for children and young people for their own free play can be discussed.

This may also provide a good opportunity to promote the importance of play to parents and the wider community and allay any fears they may have.

### Skills

Look at the skills in the group. Are there any gaps in knowledge that you may need to ask for specialist help? It may be necessary to ask for support to address certain skills gaps.

### Writing down roles and responsibilities

It is also essential to consider who will take direct responsibility for elements of the design and development process and the longer term management and maintenance. These can be defined in a document called a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) signed by the partners involved. An example MOU is shown on the next page, which can be adapted to meet needs. It may be necessary to develop two MOU's – one for the design and development stage and a second for management and maintenance as the roles and individuals involved may be different.

The MOU doesn't need to be a complicated document but it is good practice to use the headings and some of the points in the example as a guide.

### Agreements

A MOU offers a way for sharing an understanding of what is proposed. It is important to ensure that it is clear what each party or person is tasked with and who takes overall responsibility for critical elements such as insurance, maintenance and inspection.

### Skills audit template

Skill needed	Who has the skill?
Leadership	
Supervising workers	
Team building	
Time management	
Managing conflict	
Managing change	
Project management	
Monitoring work	
Evaluating work	
Administration skills	
Specialist play knowledge	
Specialist childcare knowledge	
Publicity skills	
Report writing	
Event organising	
Fundraising	
Risk management/assessing	
Planning and design	
Building	
Landscaping	
Maintenance and repair	

### Memorandum of Understanding template

#### Introduction

The aim of the project is to work together to ensure that the \_\_\_\_\_ site is suitable and accessible for children and young people in the community to use for playing.

*(Insert site name and address)*

#### Purpose of Memorandum of Understanding

The purpose of this Memorandum of Understanding is to define the method of working and roles and responsibilities of member organisations working in partnership to oversee, support and ensure the maintenance of contributing to its longer term sustainability.

The role of the partnership is to support the maintenance regime/design and development of \_\_\_\_\_ site to ensure that the space is able to continue to support and be effective at meeting children and young people's play needs. Through making risk-benefit assessments, any unnecessary hazards that may arise will be minimised by supporting the required actions needed to do so, including making checks, repairs, and environmental modifications. The members of the group have made a commitment to contribute to an environment of openness, active participation and understanding of the specific needs of each organisation and area.

#### Parties making the agreement

Landowner/any other parties working to support children's playable space are:

#### Methods of working

- 1) \_\_\_\_\_ will take primary responsibility for the management of the space and will work with partners to ensure it is well maintained and suitable for access to support children's play needs. This will include ensuring a budget to support any maintenance regime.
- 2) \_\_\_\_\_ will provide a caretaker to ensure a daily/weekly visual inspection of the whole play space. This will include the removal of any unnecessary litter and a visual inspection of any play equipment installed for wear and tear. Any concerns will be recorded appropriately, with identified actions needed. This will form part of any risk-benefit assessment made.
- 3) Risk-benefit assessments will be made and held on record by \_\_\_\_\_ and identified actions shared with appropriate staff and external parties supporting the maintenance regime.
- 4) Meetings (that will take place every \_\_\_\_\_) will be held with appropriate external parties supporting the maintenance regime, and will include sharing of any identified actions required for supporting the maintenance regime.
- 5) Meetings will identify the resources needed for taking any identified actions required to support the maintenance regime.
- 6) Appropriate external parties will be required to contribute to any risk-benefit assessments made.
- 7) Appropriate external parties will contribute to the maintenance of the playable space by ensuring identified specific actions are made (for example grass cutting and hedge trimming).
- 8) Appropriate external parties will take action to support contributing to a budget and/or resources necessary to support the maintenance regime.

#### Roles and responsibilities

Organisation – Who?	Role – What?	Responsibility

#### Declaration

We the undersigned agree to the arrangements in this document.

Signed \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

### Site play policy

Adopting a site play policy will make a significant contribution to providing rich opportunities for children and young people to play and socialise. A play policy will state the value that the community places on children and young people.

#### Site play policy template

This site recognises the importance of all the children who live here and their visitors having sufficient time and good places to play freely as part of their day.

To children, playing is one of the most important aspects of their lives. Playing contributes to children's health, wellbeing and happiness as well as to their learning and their ability to learn. Some children only have the opportunity to play with their friends at the site. Most importantly playing contributes to children's ability to thrive and survive.

We believe that we can make a very positive contribution to children's lives by valuing their urge and desire to play and providing for a broad range of play opportunities within the site.

This site recognises that children will naturally create and seek out challenging situations; while making the most of their play some children may have accidents, get dirty or wet or upset. We recognise that any potential risk of harm to children needs to be balanced with the potential for good that may come from their taking part in a particular form of play. We will do our best to avoid children coming to serious physical or emotional harm by carefully managing the play opportunities that we provide.

This site believes that adults' attitude towards, and understanding of, children's play behaviour will have a significant effect on the quality of the play opportunities offered within and outside the site.



# Section 7 Play space design principles

Following the development of a partnership and the involvement of local people in plans for the play space, we need to consider the design process.

“Children’s playgrounds often look remarkably similar across the UK, and the design process can be dominated by assumptions and stereotypes. A playground consisting only of basic equipment, fencing and rubber safety surfacing caters for a narrow range of play experiences. A widely held belief has developed that this is what play areas are supposed to look like.”  
(*Design for Play*, 2009)

## The 10 Design Principles

There is detailed guidance on the process of designing play spaces in Play England’s publication *Design for Play*. It highlights 10 principles for designing successful play spaces and states that successful play spaces:

- 1) **are bespoke** – they do not come straight out of a catalogue and are designed to integrate with their surroundings.
- 2) **are well located** – they are situated where they have the best chance of being used, close to homes and safe routes for walking and cycling.
- 3) **make use of natural elements** – trees and bushes, grass, mud, sand, rocks and boulders, landscaping – all encourage a range of different types of playing.
- 4) **provide a wide range of play experiences** – play areas with seated areas, shelter, spaces to create and space to run around provide far greater play value than a couple of pieces of equipment within a tightly fenced boundary.
- 5) **are accessible to both disabled and non-disabled children** – this is not just about providing wheelchair accessibility. Natural elements provide sensory stimulation, sand and mud pits provide areas where children who have limited mobility can engage with the natural world, and steep slopes provide a challenge for those whose life is spent on flatter ground.
- 6) **meet community needs** – a play space is, and should be, seen as a space for the whole community. After all parents and grandparents meet and congregate there so remember to include the whole community in the development of the space.
- 7) **allow children of different ages to play together** – children’s lives are often structured into age-groups, especially in school. Younger children learn best about the world from children older than them and older children benefit from the responsibility and empathy that playing with younger children brings. Intelligent play space design allows children to mix even if there are items that are more appealing to certain stages of development.

- 8) **build in opportunities to experience risk and challenge** – children learn from experience and taking small risks develops this learning. We’re not talking about swinging fifty children in the air, but opportunities to balance and climb and move around on uneven ground all build children’s capacity.
- 9) **are sustainable and appropriately maintained** – whether the play space is big or small plans need to be in place from the beginning as to how the space will be maintained and sustained into the future. Will the group continue to be involved in managing the space? Are regular inspections of sand required? Is there funding to continue to develop and maintain the space?
- 10) **allow for change and evolution** – children like to be able to change their environment to keep it fresh and exciting. This could be done by ensuring there are moveable items, including natural elements or by developing the space over a long period of time so it evolves rather than arriving on the back of a truck one day and then never changing.

## Maintenance

A regular programme of maintenance will be required for the play space. How this is arranged will depend on the local situation and level of use.

Daily/weekly maintenance checks will already be taking place – these regular daily or weekly checks which are quick and easy to undertake involve checking for signs of deliberate misuse, vandalism and removing litter or dangerous items.

## Maintenance considerations

Factors to take into account in relation to maintenance:

- Can a local organisation that can take responsibility for maintenance be identified?
- What general maintenance will be required? Litter picking, mowing, general repairs can all be undertaken by the local community.
- What specialist maintenance will be required? Replacement of worn out parts on play equipment is best left to a specialist.
- How much are the maintenance plans going to cost? Once the budget has been allocated it will need to be built into fundraising activities.

## Routine play space checks

Name of Site:

Frequency of check (Daily/Weekly):

Date	Problems/What has been done	Score (See Key)	Initials/Signed	Future Actions
	Picked up litter, removed broken glass, checked damaged swing seat	4		Recommend move to daily checks over the summer. Add damaged swing seat to routine inspection checklist

**Key - (Scoring)** Allocate a number of 1-5 to represent the level of damage/maintenance required at each visit.

**1 = little or no litter, no damage**

**2 = some litter, signs of regular use and wear**

**3 = Moderate litter, some removal of dangerous objects**

**4 = Significant litter and/or damage**

**5 = Signs of very heavy use, lots of litter, dangerous objects to remove, significant regular maintenance needed**

Note: As a guide if the site usually scores 1 or 2 they may only require weekly checks, if it's 4 or 5, daily checks may be needed. We can use this tool to monitor levels of maintenance needed and also seasonal changes.

### Risk management

In terms of health and safety, risk assessment and safety guidelines, there is a lot of misunderstanding and misinformation with health and safety often being blamed as a reason NOT to provide exciting play spaces.

The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) fully recognises the need for children to experience and create risk as part of their play. The Play Safety Forum (PSF) and the HSE have published a joint high level statement to promote a balanced approach to managing risk in children's play. The statement emphasises that when planning and providing play opportunities, the goal is not to eliminate risk, but to weigh up the risks and the benefits – no child will learn about risk if they are wrapped in cotton wool.

#### This statement makes clear that:

- Play is important for children's wellbeing and development
- When planning and providing play opportunities, the goal is not to eliminate risk, but to weigh up the risks and benefits
- Those providing play opportunities should focus on controlling the real risks, while securing or increasing the benefits – not on the paperwork
- Accidents and mistakes happen during play – but fear of litigation and prosecution has been blown out of proportion.



The Play Safety Forum has produced an easy-to-use Risk-Benefit Assessment Form to support play providers to balance the benefits of an activity with any inherent risk, taking into account the risks while recognising the benefits to children and young people of challenging play experiences. The form is available to download at: [www.playwales.org.uk/eng/managingrisk](http://www.playwales.org.uk/eng/managingrisk)

### Risk management policy

This policy has been developed to provide a coherent, consistent and balanced approach to the management of risk on \_\_\_\_\_ to ensure greater clarity of understanding around this issue.

In doing so, the policy aims to present some challenge to the existing risk averse nature of our society which can limit children's play experiences.

The policy is supported by the following statement issued by the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) in 2005:

“Sensible health and safety is about managing risks, not eliminating them all. HSE is not in the business of stamping out simple pleasures wherever they appear and at whatever cost. We recognise the benefits to children's development of play, which necessarily involves some risk, and this shouldn't be sacrificed in the unachievable goal of absolute safety.”

### Risk management systems

Risk Management in this policy is used to refer to *all* elements involved in the management of risk that can, and should, incorporate much more than paper risk assessments alone. Where all these elements are appropriately supported there is potential to develop more robust and better informed risk management systems.

### Providing for risk and challenge in play provision

recognises that childhood is full of new experiences, which necessarily involve some degree of risk taking, whether it be physical or emotional. Childhood is a continuous process of trial and error with the potential for achievement, but also the inevitability of accidents. Children would never learn to walk, climb stairs or ride a bicycle unless they were strongly motivated to respond to challenges involving risk of injury.

We have a duty of care to try and protect individuals accessing our services and facilities from the potentially, long-term, damaging effects of being exposed to serious and *unreasonable* physical and emotional harm. However in doing this we must not overlook, or seek it at the expense of, also enabling children to actively participate in their own personal development of health, wellbeing and resilience, as a result of engaging in situations with uncertain outcomes.

### Risk-benefit assessment

Decisions about what is *reasonable* and the desirability of children engaging with hazards will be made using a risk-benefit approach. This process involves considering the potential benefits afforded by an opportunity alongside any potentially negative outcomes and then making a judgement about whether the potential for injury is proportional to the benefits. That is, do the potential benefits justify allowing risk of injury to remain?

For the purpose of risk-benefit assessments, benefits can be physical, emotional, social or environmental (and are likely to be a combination of all of these). Risk of injury can be identified by considering the likelihood of any potential injury occurring together with the potential severity of that injury.

### Reasonable controls

During the risk-benefit process it may be necessary to identify control measures in order to reduce risk of injury to an acceptable level. However, the control measures that can reasonably be implemented will depend on the resources available. The cost of any potential control measures must be justified by being proportional to the risk of injury involved.

Prior to the implementation of control measures consideration should also be given to any potentially negative impact that may result from making that intervention. For example, it is important that children's need to use their environment in novel and unexpected ways is not constrained in the search for providing absolute protection from injury.

### Site checks and technical inspections

On unstaffed play sites intermittent checks can be made to identify and manage hazards. However, the frequency of these checks will depend on what can reasonably be achieved given the resources available, the type of facility and its location.

The table below shows the agreed frequency for routine and technical inspections.

Type of check	Frequency	Notes
Annual technical inspection	Yearly	Conducted by Register of Play Inspectors International (RPii) inspector
Full paper based risk-benefit assessment	Six monthly	
Routine inspection	Weekly	All equipment checked, surrounding area checked, all natural elements checked, any issues recorded to feed into six monthly risk-benefit assessment
Routine inspection	Daily	Visual equipment check, litter pick
Routine maintenance	Weekly	Litter pick, rake sand, check for dangerous objects
Mow grass	Monthly during growing season	Leave area nearest trees to grow wild

### Summary

- There is intrinsic value in children experiencing uncertainty and personal challenge through their play.
- Children need to feel free to experience risk and challenge of their own choice. They will only be able to do this if we allow some degree of uncertainty to remain.
- The play provision we create aims to support children to experience reasonable levels of risk for themselves.
- There is a need for balance between ensuring appropriate levels of protection and preserving reasonable levels of uncertainty.
- We aim to manage risk so that whenever reasonably possible the risk of injury children are exposed to is proportional to the potential benefits associated with the situation.
- Controls will be reasonable and realistic whilst ensuring unnecessary risks are minimised.
- Risk management incorporates a number of different elements which work together to form a continuous cycle, improving our practice.
- Children are capable of managing some risk themselves and their competency will develop as their experience grows.

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