

Play for Wales

Issue 57 Spring 2021

Play news and briefing from
the national charity for play



Space to play outdoors



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Thank you

A heartfelt thank you to everyone who contributed to this magazine – we couldn't do it without you.

This issue of *Play for Wales*, as well as previous issues, is available to download at www.playwales.org.uk

Editorial

Playing outside is an important way for children to be active, have fun and interact with the world around them. We have reported time and time again about the wealth of evidence that demonstrates that playing is essential for children's mental and emotional well-being – and for their physical health.

Sadly, but understandably, there is a prevailing feeling that children have been impacted, in a negative way, by COVID-19 and the restrictions (designed to constrain it) on their freedom and opportunities to play, particularly with friends.

Children aged 7 to 11 in Wales have told the Children's Commissioner for Wales that they played less and older children say they relaxed less in January 2021, compared to May 2020. Children also report that they are missing playing outdoors with friends.

Although we may not find these findings surprising, we must **all** be concerned to hear that the latest *Coronavirus and Me* survey shows a decrease in the numbers of children reporting having spent more time playing. Parents report that playing has helped children to cope with the pandemic and that outdoor play is the most popular way for them to help their child to play. However, many restrictions over the past year have impacted on opportunities for children to play and socialise with friends.

We have renewed our calls to the Welsh Government to put play at the heart of supporting children as part of the coronavirus recovery. Our *Manifesto for children's play in Wales* urges the new Welsh Government to continue its strong tradition of supporting children's right to play, particularly outdoors.

The manifesto was drafted at a time when we were reflecting on the reported positive aspects of the early days of the first national lockdown. For instance, streets were quieter and neighbours were more present. There were playful interventions in communities (remember all of the painted

stones?) and the importance of playing was valued.

Our manifesto calls for the Welsh Government to address the inequalities that the pandemic highlighted by prioritising better use of outdoor community assets.

The Welsh Government is already making progress to support outdoor play, for example through progressing the 20mph speed limit and placing health and well-being as an important Area of Learning and Experience in the new curriculum for Wales.

Survey upon survey of children, parents and those working with children continue to tell us that playing is vital to a healthy and happy childhood and that the coronavirus pandemic has impacted negatively on playing outside. There is now an urgent need to ensure that action is taken across programmes, institutions and all policy areas to ensure children's opportunities and ability to play outdoors every day increase and improve.

Mike Greenaway,
Director, Play Wales



News

Smoke-free playgrounds in Wales

On 1 March 2021, Wales became the first country in the UK to make it illegal to smoke in playgrounds, school grounds and outdoor care settings for children. Children can now enjoy playing and socialising with friends in smoke-free playgrounds across Wales.



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

Welsh Government guidance sets out what those responsible for the smoke-free settings need to do, including taking reasonable steps to stop a person who is smoking. Displaying 'No Smoking' signs is

required in playgrounds and school grounds. Signs do not have to be displayed in outdoor care settings.

www.gov.wales

20mph speed limit to be trialled in Wales

As part of plans to introduce 20mph speed limits in residential streets across Wales, the Welsh Government will trial the change in eight areas this summer. The trial will focus on community engagement with an emphasis on communicating the value of the new speed limit for all members of the community.



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

The trial areas, which are designed to be a 'representative sample' of villages, towns and cities across Wales, are:

- Abergavenny, Monmouthshire
- Central North, Cardiff
- Severnside, Monmouthshire
- Buckley, Flintshire

- Cilfriw Village, Neath Port Talbot
- St Dogmaels, Pembrokeshire
- St Brides Major, Vale of Glamorgan
- Llanelli North, Carmarthenshire.

A task-force group report commissioned by the Welsh

Government in 2020 recommended 20mph replace 30mph as the default residential area speed limit as soon as possible. The Welsh Government plans to implement the nationwide change by 2023.

www.gov.wales

IPA Special Award on Right to Play in Time of Crisis



In response to the effects of Covid-19, the International Play Association (IPA) launched a Special Award that recognises innovative projects and responses that support children's right to play during the pandemic.

The IPA Special Award has been created so people around the world can share ideas on how to best help all children thereby raising awareness of the importance of play during times of crisis. Its aim is to celebrate activity programmes, public awareness campaigns, media products, implemented national or local legislation, design of spaces, and design of play items.

Along with 22 other organisations and projects from 13 countries across the world, Play Wales has been recognised for its CoronaPlay Initiative. As part of our supportive response to the pandemic we focused on developing and distributing a range of new and timely practical resources for practitioners and families across Wales.

www.ipaworld.org

Playing at school storybook

Inspired by the fantastic reaction – by parents, families and those working with children – to our two right to play storybooks, work has begun on publishing a third.

Like our other two books, *Fun in the dungeon* and *Fun in the garden*, the new book has been developed in partnership with Petra Publishing, an established community-based publisher.

The book tells the story of one of the most important parts of the school day for many children – playtime. Supported by author and poet, Mike Church, the story has been written by school staff working and living in the Cwm Taf Morgannwg University Health Board region.

Sarah Rogers, Healthy Pre-School Practitioner for Cwm Taf Morgannwg remarked, 'As an early years teacher for over 25 years, I have always believed that children learn through play. The language of play is universal and everyone who works with children needs to understand the importance of play'.

The book will be available for free to anyone living or working in Wales. To pre-order a copy send your details, including a postal address, to admin@playwales.org.uk

Play Wales events go virtual

As part of our supportive response to the coronavirus pandemic, and cancelled live events, Play Wales has hosted three free online seminars which attracted almost 400 participants. By moving the events online, we have been able to reach a wide and varied audience in Wales, the UK and internationally.

The seminars have focused on a range of topics from design and management of good outdoor spaces for playing, to children's right to play in schools, to designing child-friendly neighbourhoods.

The events have been welcomed and the feedback from participants has been overwhelmingly positive. As a result, we are currently planning more events for later this year.

Keep an eye on our website for more information:

www.playwales.org.uk/eng/events

Outdoor Classroom Day 2021

20 May and 4 November

Outdoor Classroom Day is a global movement to inspire and celebrate outdoor play and learning, at home and at school. On Outdoor Classroom Day, which has two dates each year, children and their teachers celebrate by playing and learning outside their class.

Children are spending less time outdoors than ever before and this is affecting their health, well-being and development. Time outdoors – on Outdoor Classroom Day and every day – will make children happier and healthier.

At Play Wales, we encourage schools and families to commit the whole day to playing outside. Our **Top tips for Outdoor Classroom Day** aim to help make the day even more playful.



Get involved:

www.outdoorclassroomday.com

Playday 2021

The theme for this year's Playday is...
Summer of Play



The Playday 2021 theme recognises the challenges children have faced over the past year and the need to enjoy time for play free of restrictions, with their friends, having fun.

Whilst Playday is the national day for play in the UK, this year on Wednesday 4 August, we are encouraging families, carers, and communities to help children enjoy a Summer of Play.

- Playing is essential for children's mental health and well-being.
- Playing helps children cope with stress and anxiety and fosters resilience, enabling children to better deal with challenges.
- Playing gives children the opportunity to have fun, laugh, take time out, relax, and build friendships.
- Playing outside allows children to appreciate nature, the environment, and feel part of their community.

- Playing is fundamental to children's happiness, and happy children lead to happier communities.

We are looking forward to hearing about the creative ways you plan to celebrate a Summer of Play and Playday in your community.

For the latest updates on this year's campaign follow Playday on [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#) and share your plans using the hashtags #Playday2021 and #SummerOfPlay.

www.playday.org.uk

Playday is coordinated by Play England, Play Scotland, PlayBoard Northern Ireland and Play Wales.

Coronavirus and Me

Children's experiences in Wales



Comisiynydd
Plant Cymru
Children's
Commissioner
for Wales

The latest **Coronavirus and Me** nationwide survey undertaken by the Children's Commissioner for Wales shows that children aged 7 to 11 in Wales played less in January 2021, compared to May 2020.

The survey results also show that children are missing playing outdoors, especially in community spaces such as parks, playgrounds and beaches. Some children are also missing playing outdoors with friends, with many spending more time playing online.

The survey also found that young people relaxed less compared to May 2020. The word 'playing' was substituted for 'relaxing' in the survey for 12 to 18 year olds.

The latest survey gathered the views of almost 20,000 children and young people aged 3 to 18, in January 2021. Almost 25,000 children and young people participated in the first **Coronavirus and Me** survey in May 2020.

In the latest survey report, the Children's Commissioner, Sally Holland said:

'In my view these results provide a clear road-map for Welsh Government on what needs to be prioritised for children and young people over the next few weeks and months ... My request to those making and implementing pandemic responses is clear; whilst accepting that the over-riding priority must be on preventing death and serious illness, there are many more dimensions to children's lives that need to be considered. Listen and consider what we've heard through this consultation and take all measures possible to curb the crushing impact this pandemic is having on many young lives.'

www.childcomwales.org.uk

Manifesto

for children's play in Wales 2021

Ahead of the Senedd Cymru | Welsh Parliament elections taking place on 6 May 2021, Play Wales published its manifesto and an accompanying factsheet.

Our manifesto, *Wales – a play friendly place*, is calling for the new Government in Wales to continue to prioritise play, particularly playing outdoors. We are asking all political parties to carry on supporting the implementation of the statutory Play Sufficiency Duty.

We are calling on the Welsh Government to:

- recognise that children's freedom to play outside in their local communities is hindered when roads are dominated by car drivers and traffic. This can be addressed by:
 - implementing a default 20mph speed limit in built-up areas
 - developing guidance for councils about how to support street play projects.
- recognise that schools have an important role in children's play by:
 - directing school governing bodies to make their outdoor space available for playing (wherever practical) after school and at weekends
 - making it mandatory for the school day to include a minimum amount of time for play breaks.
- support the delivery of a public information programme explaining what play is and how important it is to the health and well-being of children and wider society.
- support the development of more opportunities for children to play by:
 - ensuring that all children and families initiatives clearly and explicitly recognise that play is essential, and support community-based provision for play, including staffed playwork
 - supporting initiatives to train all those whose work impacts on children, so they have a better understanding of their role in making sure children have the time and space for play.



- commit to responding to the current Ministerial Play Review and to implementing its recommendations, so that children's play is fully established as a cross-policy issue.

The manifesto **factsheet** points out that despite all the positive immediate and long-term benefits of playing, there are a number of factors in modern society that have contributed to a significant decrease in opportunities for outdoor play:

- increased traffic
- changes to the built environment
- increased educational demands
- the time children are expected to spend in structured activities
- concerns and misplaced emphasis of 'stranger danger' risk.

Play Wales asserts that children playing outside in their local communities brings opportunities for added social relationships for both children and adults. Children who experience everyday life outside in their own community have a greater sense of connection and belonging, and this in turn increases neighbourliness for the whole community.

Play Wales emphasises that supporting community interventions that enable more children to be outside, to be visible, playing out in their community will enable children to realise their right to play in Wales. Play Wales sets out that the Welsh Government can achieve this by:

- promoting the importance of play to parents and the general public
- ensuring national leadership and cross-policy working
- facilitating better use of community spaces, such as school grounds and streets
- providing sufficient playtime in schools
- valuing community based playwork.

The factsheet provides evidence for the range of community interventions that we are calling for. These interventions are needed to enable more children to be outside, to be visible and playing out in their neighbourhoods.

Why promote play?

Children have better opportunities to play when the adults in their lives and neighbourhoods understand the importance of play.

Why national leadership?

Wales has taken a global lead on play, being the first country in the world to legislate for it through the Children and Families Wales (2010) Measure.

Much has been achieved in terms of partnership working, raising awareness of children's right to play, and reconfiguring services and spaces to create opportunities for playing. This momentum must continue.

Why streets?

Street play projects help children to learn road awareness and cycle/scooting skills. Parents feel more confident in allowing their children to play outside in their community and drivers have a greater awareness of the presence of children and others in and around roads.

Why schools?

School grounds often represent the largest single outdoor space in many communities. Allowing children to play in school grounds at the end of the teaching day and at weekends creates spaces and time for play in a permissive environment.

Schools that apply a whole school approach to supporting health and well-being provide an environment, facilities and space to play, socialise and relax at break times.

Why playwork?

Staffed playwork provision contributes to stronger, more play friendly communities having wide reaching impacts on children, teenagers and adults.

www.playwales.org.uk/eng/playmanifesto

'We used to be able to play in the school grounds but now they are locked up. We only have our garden to play in otherwise my parents have to take me in a car to go somewhere.'

'People speed down the street, my street is now very busy ... The cars are very fast. I can't go out on my bike.'

'I don't play outside of my garden without my mam, dad or a family member watching me.'

'There will be no green spaces left for us to play. We will have to stay in on our computers and play online with our friends instead.'

Playing outdoors: what's policy got to do with it?

Many adults remember their childhoods as having time and freedom to play outside with friends and siblings and range within their neighbourhood freely.

Being able to play outside has always been important to children and that hasn't changed for children growing up in Wales today. Despite a common perception that children can no longer play out, they continue to tell us that playing outside with friends every day is important to them.

Having welcoming places, enough time and the company of others to play with every day, has benefits for all children and it contributes to a happy and healthy childhood. Adults need to foster environments that support this – here we highlight a range of play policies to help us do this.

International policy

The importance of play is recognised and protected in the **United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child** (UNCRC). Article 31 of the UNCRC states that the child has the right to play and to join in other recreational activities.

In 2013 the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child adopted **General Comment 17** to clarify the meaning and importance of Article 31 for governments worldwide. The General Comment is an official statement that elaborates on the meaning of an aspect of the UNCRC that needs further interpretation or emphasis. It also aims to raise the importance of an article.

General Comment 17 puts emphasis on the role of children's opportunity to play in their own way. It also positions the right to play within the fuller context of the other relevant articles in the UNCRC and sets out how it is crucially linked with other rights. In terms of playing outdoors, Article 12 and Article 15 are particularly important.



Article 12 (the right to be heard) stresses that when adults take decisions that affect children, children should be able to express their opinions, be listened to and taken seriously.

The Committee underlines the importance of providing opportunities for children to contribute to the development of legislation, policies, strategies and design of services to ensure the implementation of the right to play. This could include their involvement in consultations on:

- policies related to play and recreation
- legislation affecting educational rights and how the school day is organised
- the development of parks and other local facilities
- urban planning and design for child-friendly communities and environments
- opportunities for play or recreation and cultural activities within the school and the wider community.

Article 15 (the right to freedom of association and freedom of peaceful assembly). Children have the right to gather, socialise, and be with their friends in public and that this should not be curtailed or constrained for any other reason than breaking of laws or the diminishment of somebody else's rights.

General Comment 17 asserts that freedom of association represents an integral dimension of the right to play. It points out that:

- Children together create forms of imaginative play that are rarely achieved in adult-child relations
- Children need to engage with peers of all genders, as well as with people of different abilities, classes, cultures and ages, to learn cooperation, tolerance, sharing and resourcefulness
- Playing with a wide range of children creates opportunities for the formation of friendships and can play a key role in strengthening civil society, contributing towards development of the child, shaping culture and building communities
- Opportunities to enable children to meet freely with their peers at community level must be facilitated.

The General Comment stresses that public planning must place a priority on the creation of environments which promote the well-being of the child. To achieve child-friendly urban and rural environments, consideration should be given to the:

- Availability of inclusive parks and playgrounds that are safe and accessible to all children
- Creation of a safe living environment for free play, including design of areas in which players, pedestrians and bikers have priority
- Provision of access to landscaped green areas, large open spaces and nature for play and recreation

- Road traffic measures, including speed limits, levels of pollution, school crossings, traffic lights, and calming measures to ensure children's right to play safely within their local communities.

National policy

In 2010, Wales became the first country in the world to legislate for play. A section on Play Opportunities was included in the **Children and Families (Wales) Measure 2010**. The Measure places a duty on local authorities to assess and secure sufficient play opportunities for children.

The Welsh Government sees creating an environment where children can freely play as central to the aim of this section of the Measure. There is a recognition that society has changed significantly in recent years in the extent to which it is accepted as the norm for children to go out to play and organise where they go and what they do in their own time.

The Welsh Government aims to make Wales a country where every child has a wide range of interesting and challenging opportunities to play, as well as time and spaces to enjoy their leisure time. It has an ambitious aim to make neighbourhoods more play friendly by valuing and increasing quality opportunities for play throughout the community. The intended outcome will be more children playing so enjoying the health, social, cognitive and emotional benefits that play provides.

It the **statutory guidance** to local authorities on assessing for and securing sufficient play opportunities for children in their areas, the Welsh Government includes a detailed definition of a rich play environment:

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

- **Other children** – of different ages and abilities to negotiate, co-operate, fall out, and resolve conflict.
- **The natural world** – weather, trees, plants, insects, animals and mud.
- **The four elements** – earth, air, fire and water.
- **Challenge and uncertainty** – graduated opportunities for risk taking.
- **Movement** – running, jumping, climbing, balancing, rolling, swinging, sliding and spinning.
- **The senses** – sounds, tastes, textures, smells and sights.
- **Loose parts** – natural and man-made materials that can be manipulated, moved and adapted, built and demolished.

Playing outside in settings

Providing plenty of opportunities to play outside is a key step in ensuring children benefit from a healthy and happy childhood. Access to playing outdoors is largely dictated by the opportunities that adults and settings give children.

Playing outdoors contributes toward agility, balance, creativity, social co-operation, concentration and good emotional health. Children have always benefitted from access to the outdoors and natural world and it is incredibly important right now as we learn to live with the challenges presented by the coronavirus pandemic. More and more parents are seeking child centred settings which enable children to play for prolonged periods of time in rich play environments.

Children's opportunities for playing in all settings are dependent on a wide range of issues, which are arranged across three themes:

- **Permission:** fear, expectations, tolerance, and the way adults view childhood and play
- **Space:** the amount, design and management of space
- **Time:** how time is structured and the obligations children have on their time.

Permission

Children need permission from carers to play outdoors. Parents and carers are subject to powerful and sometimes contradictory messages about keeping children safe and busy. However, this should not result in a child not being allowed access to play outdoors. The benefits of playing outdoors greatly outweigh any risks.

- Encourage staff to be enthusiastic about outdoor play – don't dismiss it as frivolous and a waste of time.
- Engage with parents so that they understand the setting's commitment to outdoor play and why it is being prioritised.
- Take a balanced approach to managing risk in children's play – strict rules like 'no running' and 'no ball throwing' undermines the immediate benefits of playing.



- Don't stop thinking about and providing for play for children at a certain age. Children across all Key Stages, including older children and teenagers need time to play during the school day.

Time

For many reasons, children's time for outdoor play has decreased significantly in recent years. When children's time is highly scheduled by others it can hardly be seen as their time. By making time for children's outdoor play, we promote and value children's freedom, independence and choice.

- Outdoor play should be part of the regular daily routine rather than a one-off event.
- Encourage children to move freely between indoor and outdoor environments.
- Provide opportunities for more frequent short periods of outdoor play – children are most physically active during the first 10-15 minutes of outdoor playtime.
- Balance structured activities with opportunities for free play.

Space

A rich play environment is one where children and teenagers are able to make a wide range of choices – where there are many possibilities so that they can invent and extend their own play.

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

- Audit grounds to identify all usable space, especially small spaces, which can be good for quiet, creative, and contemplative spaces. Children are very good at this.
- Use fun equipment or visual referencing to promote physical distancing if necessary – use chalk for floor markings – 'who can draw/jump a two metre line?' or 'who can find a two metre stick?'
- Consider all available outdoor spaces – identify how the fields, car park areas and tarmacked areas can be better used.
- Barriers don't have to be boring – use bunting, fun shapes and patterns or hay bales.
- Provide loose parts play materials to allow for plenty of stuff for lots of children to play with. Not having enough resources can cause conflict and tension.
- View the weather in a positive manner, rather than as a barrier. Children generally enjoy being outside in all types of weather and seasons. Work with children, parents and staff to identify ways to overcome inclement weather.

Children as auditors (not designers)

Children 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.

Observing children at play is an important step in the auditing of outdoor space. Asking children what equipment they want or how the space can be changed is likely to lead to an unimaginative and unrealistic shopping list of equipment. For instance, many children like playing in light rainfall, but they are unlikely to ask for a puddle in their play space.

There are a number of ways children can inform the audit of the play space:

- Looking at maps and photos 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
- 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
- Asking children to take photos of important bits of the space and making photo/story books for discussion.

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 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 and developments.

Play Wales resources:

Loose parts toolkit

Physical activity in early years settings

Older children play too

Top tips for supporting play

Planning your play area on the Playful Childhoods website

Child-friendly streets, towns and cities

What are they like and how do we build them?

Tim Gill, an independent researcher and author of *Urban Playground: How child-friendly planning and design can save cities*, tells us what makes a neighbourhood child-friendly and better for all. Tim also shares examples of child-friendly approaches in Germany and in Wales.



Where did you used to play when you were a child? If you are over about 30, the chances are you spent a lot of time out of doors, and out of sight of adults. Often in places that offered adventure, thrills, and even a hint of danger.

The memories evoked by my question tend to be dismissed as mere nostalgia. But this is too quick. When children are allowed a taste of freedom, they find out what it means to take responsibility for themselves. They figure out where their limits are, and what they can do for themselves, while discovering what truly engages them along the way. They get to

exercise their hearts and minds as well as their muscles. Crucially, they find out how to deal with the everyday ups and downs of life.

Thanks to the pandemic, we all know what lockdown feels like. The truth is that the creeping lockdown imposed on children over the last few decades has been almost as severe. To be sure, the reasons are more complex than with coronavirus. Fear of crime, changing family working patterns and the growing allure of the digital world all play a part. But perhaps the biggest reason is the way that residential neighbourhoods are designed and built.

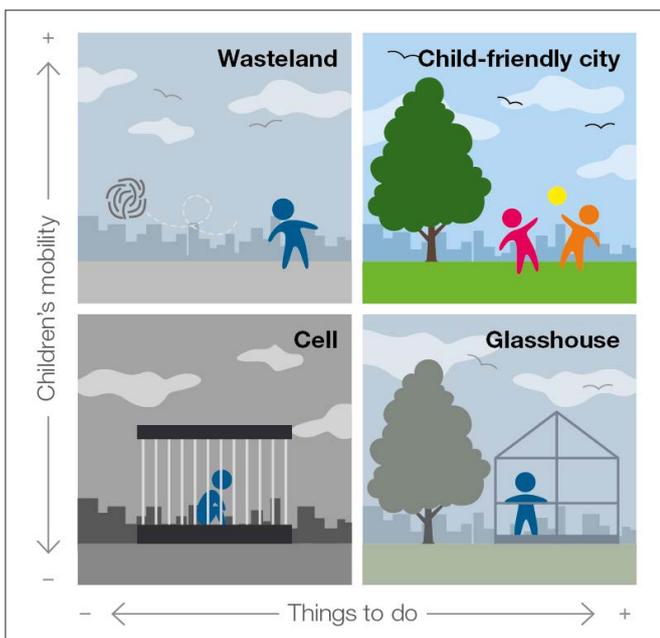
For decades, the places where we live have been shaped around the needs of the car. That may be fine for car drivers. But pretty much everyone else loses out. Children – especially those in disadvantaged neighbourhoods – lose out the most. Let's not forget, traffic danger leads to hundreds of child deaths and life-changing injuries every year. It also means a loss of freedom, unhealthy, sedentary lifestyles, increased air and noise pollution, and more atomised communities, where people feel isolated and unconnected from their neighbours.

The good news is that there is a growing call for healthier, more child-friendly towns and cities. Around the world, cities are striving to be better places for children to grow up. I've been lucky enough to visit many of these cities. My new book *Urban Playground* pulls together their most inspiring ideas and insights.

The core insight is that children are an indicator species for towns and cities. Just as salmon are a sign of the health of a river, so the sight of children is a sign of the health of human habitats. In other words, a place that is good for children is good for everyone. It is no wonder that the Netherlands, where a high proportion of children walk and cycle to get around, consistently comes top of global league tables of child well-being.

Child-friendliness is not just a matter of having lots of playgrounds. Space for playing and socialising is important – again, the pandemic has brought this home to us all. But what is even more vital for children – and what children themselves most value – is being able to range freely.

In a child-friendly neighbourhood, there is a wide variety of things to do and places to go, **and** it is safe and easy to get to these places, especially on foot or by bicycle – as this infographic shows.



The two dimensions of child-friendly neighbourhoods. © Sam Williams/Arup

What is the ultimate example of a child-friendly neighbourhood? For my money, the acclaimed eco suburb of Vauban in Freiburg, Germany, is hard to beat. Vauban is a compact suburb with a population of around 5,500, with apartment living and low car ownership (cars are mostly parked in peripheral multi-storey car parks). The district is full of parks and public space right outside people's front doors, alongside great walking and cycling links, and a direct tram service to the city centre. Intriguingly, there are few enclosed play spaces – for the most part, play structures blend into the wider landscape. As a result, Vauban's streets and green spaces are typically full of children of different ages, with and without parents and carers. There is plentiful evidence of children's extended outdoor play, in the form of 'play traces' such as toys left in sandpits, desire lines and wear marks on and around grassy areas, and chalk drawings on streets and pavements. Children and adults cycle through the area in numbers.

There is nowhere in the UK quite like Vauban. But well-designed, walkable, car-free housing areas are springing up in London, Cambridge and elsewhere. And a fresh approach to child-friendly public space is also emerging.

In Wales, the social housing agency Cartrefi Conwy has taken forward a series of schemes in two areas (Parc Peulwys in Llysfaen and Tre Cwm in Llandudno) that show what child-friendly public space might look like. The aim was to create multi-functional areas that mix biodiversity alongside play and socialising. One tired post-and-platform playground has been transformed into an inviting green space, while a featureless grassy space opposite a school entrance is now a gathering spot where children of different ages can stop, meet and chat.

Demand is growing for less car-dominant neighbourhoods. Just look at bottom-up initiatives like play streets and school streets (where residents and councils work together to exclude through traffic for fixed periods). Play Wales has worked with Playing Out to produce ideas and **practical steps**. The Welsh Government is on side too, with its Play Sufficiency Duty emphasising the key role of planners and designers (though more resources are needed).

In these fractious times, one thing we all share is that we were children once. This shared experience lays the foundation for building a shared vision of healthier, more sustainable towns and cities. Places that work not only for children, but for everyone.

No-one watching from the side-lines – creating inclusive spaces to play

Theresa Casey, play and children's rights advocate and co-author of *Free to play a guide to creating accessible and inclusive play spaces*, shares her expertise about how to create inclusive play spaces for all children.

Ensuring our play spaces are more accessible and welcoming has many benefits. They enhance a sense of community, support well-being and demonstrate respect for children's right to play.

We don't achieve this simply through the addition of a piece of accessible equipment or installation of ramps or rails. If we want play spaces in which all children can play, we need to consider physical, social and sensory factors.

Creating accessible play spaces illustrates accessibility alone is not sufficient to create an inclusive space. Social factors such as opportunities to play together, and play value including choice, variety, challenge, also need to be designed in.

'Let's make play spaces open to exploring, journeying, hiding and seeking and open-ended adventures.'

Parent quoted in *Free to play*

When ***Free to play – a guide to creating accessible and inclusive play spaces*** was in development, disabled children and their families helped to think about the things they felt were important in the spaces they wanted to play.

These can be summed up as follows:

- Freedom
- Variety
- Social experience
- Independence and access
- Sensory qualities
- Equipment and interaction.

One way to think about how we can achieve all of this is to think about play spaces as being made up of several layers.

- **At the base**, a space which people move into and around with accessible entrances, exits, paths, routes, landscaping, amenities and significant features. As well as moving across smooth, bumpy or crunchy surfaces, do surfaces invite children to lie, roll, sit and rest at ground level too?
- **In the next layer**, are the main features such as water play, equipment, structures, art pieces and planting.
- **Another layer of richness is added** in how the space will be used. Public play areas are designed to be safe and useable without supervision. The possibilities for inclusive opportunities can be multiplied however by experienced playworkers, play days and public events. Features like storage and noticeboards can be designed in to make these additional activities easier.
- **Sensory and sometimes ephemeral qualities can be what make a play space special for children:** the sound of bird song, textures from rough bark, smooth leaves or jaggy thorns, colours that change with the seasons or a view of the sky through the branches of the tree.
- **The final layer to consider is that children and teenagers bring the space to life by playing.** Children play in unexpected or unintended ways and the design should take that into account.

Accessibility is also a consideration for the adults who come to the play space with children. Can a dad using a wheelchair get around the equipment to play hide and seek? Can a grandparent with visual loss navigate the space? Are their places to sit together?



Visits to parks, playgrounds or public spaces can give a sense of what different spaces afford, especially if a family or group allows you to accompany them.

Equipment

To help with questions around equipment, in 2013 the British Standards Institution published a European guide entitled **Playground equipment accessible for all children**. The priority, it says, needs to be inclusion and the encouragement of all children to come together through play in good quality play environments. Play can be enhanced by specific pieces of equipment which should be chosen carefully and located thoughtfully to avoid creating separate opportunities for disabled children.

Some things to look for include:

- additional body support, hand grips, footrests

- sufficient space to move around equipment
- the play value in spaces underneath and connectivity between the levels of structures
- wider passing spaces on bridges and structures.

Toilets and changing facilities

Appropriate toilet and changing facilities can make the difference between a short, stressful visit to a play space or the chance to relax and play enjoyably for much longer. For some families, they are the deciding factor in a whether to visit a play area at all.

'Changing places are a must. We often have to leave play areas as we've had an accident. There are only TWO toilets at our local park for every man, woman, child, baby and they are always flooded so nowhere at all to change a child with support needs.'

Parent quoted in *Free to play*

The scale and location of a play space have a bearing on the decision about the facilities that can be provided. It may not always be realistic to provide Changing Places toilets but there are other options to consider, such as arranging access to facilities nearby, upgrading existing facilities, or providing better information and signposting.

Accessibility isn't about creating boring, unchallenging, undifferentiated spaces. There should be diverse community spaces in local areas which excite the imagination, are full of character and that embrace the whole kaleidoscope of ways children play.

Catherine Street Inclusive Park – welcoming, inclusive and naturally playful

Catherine Street Park is a small, town park in Dumfries. Its development into a truly inclusive space illustrates what can emerge from an initiative driven by families seeking inclusive opportunities for their children, in partnership with the local community and the local authority.

Opened in early 2020, after a community transfer of the park to the care of Include Us (a charity set up for the purpose), and within a year Catherine Street Inclusive Park was a finalist in the national Landscape Institute Awards. The vision for the park, nurtured through community consultation and workshops, was brought to life through the design process led by Include Us, which also manages and maintains the park. Include Us believes all children need the same thing from a play space – to be included. At

Catherine Street the aim is to make sure no-one is left watching from the side-lines.

Accessibility was improved by a gateway linking to the café where a Changing Places toilet is located, replacing steep ramps with gentle gradients and replacing old play equipment with well-chosen and imaginative equipment carefully sited amongst grass, plants and trees. Water courses, sand, playhouses, decks and planting create a stimulating and interactive experience, accessible to all. The group always wanted the park to be a space for people (including teenagers) to gather.

Staffed by a manager and a community gardener, with a dedicated committee and partnerships in the local area, it offers gathering space and supports volunteering and work experience which make it a hub of community activity, centred on and inspired by inclusive play.

Developing and managing play spaces community toolkit

The issue of space for playing outside has been highlighted by the pandemic and local authorities and community councils have been working hard to ensure local play spaces can remain open within current guidance on Covid-19.

Now in its fourth edition, we have published the completely revised and updated **Developing and managing play spaces** community toolkit.

The toolkit has been designed for anyone who takes responsibility for managing or developing a play space in a community. This may be community councils, local play associations or a residents' group.

It is intended to provide a single source of support for community groups to navigate some of the challenges of managing or developing a play space. In doing so, it aims to support people in creating and maintaining more and better designed community spaces, thereby improving children's opportunities for play.

The toolkit offers specific information on the design and management of play spaces as well as bespoke tools to help with this process. As this can be a complex field, it also signposts to further sources of support and, along the way, tackles some of the many 'myths' surrounding the management and design of play spaces.

Design

This section covers the process of developing new spaces and begins by learning from and observing how children use existing spaces in the community before moving on to the process of involving them in any plans. Along the way it also covers establishing permissions, involving others, principles of play space design and funding.

A specific section on inclusive design gives points for consideration and is further supported by one of our other toolkits – **Creating accessible play spaces**. The tools in this section include a thorough audit tool to look at how children play and how we can action plan to encourage more play and ensure any new developments do not curtail what children are already doing.

Another tool in this section provides a template questionnaire for getting children's views on their opportunities for playing in the community. A template Memorandum of Understanding supports those

Myth-buster

Sand causes problems with cats, dogs and foxes

Unless there are already problems with cat, dog or fox mess it is highly unlikely that adding sand to the space will bring in new animals. However, if we do have sand, regular inspection and raking will form part of our routine maintenance. How often we do this will depend on the level of use. Remember also that most pet owners are responsible. If there is a problem with dog fouling it is generally a small number of owners – target the small group of dog owners that are causing the problem. We can work with the community, ask school children to design 'no fouling' signs or start a campaign supported by the local dog warden.





who are establishing new groups to take on the task of developing a new play space and finally, a template tender specification to help those commissioning someone to do the work.

Management

This section covers the work that organisations who are taking on the responsibility for an existing play space need to think about. This includes responsibilities around risk management (health and safety), insurance and maintenance and inspection.

All of the guidance in the toolkit relates directly to the legislation that covers play spaces so where there are legal obligations these are highlighted alongside signposting to other organisations who can help. The tools in this section include templates for routine inspection and a draft risk management policy that embraces the principle of risk-benefit assessment as endorsed by the Health and Safety Executive and the Play Safety Forum.

The toolkit was originally developed by Play Wales as part of a project to improve play spaces, working with the Community Foundation in Wales and the Big Lottery's Fair Share Panel on Ynys Môn.

The *Developing and managing play spaces* community toolkit continues to be an important resource to support those with a responsibility for children's play spaces. We look forward to this edition

supporting groups to respond to children's needs to develop and adapt the play spaces where children are playing out.

www.playwales.org.uk/eng/publications/communitytoolkit

Slow development

Developing a new play space or refurbishing an existing one can be a very expensive process. If seeking all the funding in one go, it can be a long time before anything is developed – while the space is sitting empty and unused.

By following the design process recommended in this toolkit, we will have a good indication of how the play space will look upon completion. Look at which elements need to be completed and in which order, then develop them as and when funding is secured. It can be much easier to secure several smaller grants or raise a certain amount each year, than to apply and depend on one large grant application.

By developing a space over a period of time, as and when funding is available, it means we can see how new developments are being received and make appropriate changes to plans that respond to the needs of the community.

What children say about their outdoor spaces to play

In support of the 30th anniversary of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) in November 2019, Play Wales published *'I learn new things and climb trees' – What children say about play in Wales*. In this report children and teenagers tell us about what's good about the play opportunities in their local area and how satisfied they are about when, how and where they can play. Here, we highlight some of the views of children about the importance they place in their outdoor play spaces.

Children need spaces that are accessible to them where they feel safe and that facilitate the kind of play that they want. While these include 'formal' designated play spaces such as playgrounds, playing fields or games-areas, the places that children value the most are often places not formally recognised.

Where children play...

The survey asked children about the types of places they played or gathered in. Unsurprisingly, most children played or hung out in each other's houses or gardens.

Also popular were formal play areas with fixed play equipment. However, 60 percent of children played in local streets and many played in other outdoor unsupervised areas.

Given that the greatest health and social benefits come from 'playing out' we used the data to look at the proportion of children that played in different categories of space.

Overall, 28 percent of children mostly 'played in', 72 percent mostly 'played out'.

In their comments, many children and teenagers talked a lot about parks and playing fields as focal points within their communities where they could play and hang out. Nonetheless, some children clearly have difficulties in accessing these.



'In my village and the neighbouring village we have no park or playing area. It's really sad. We used to be able to play in the school grounds but now they are locked up. We only have our garden to play in otherwise my parents have to take me in a car to go somewhere. There's a lot of children who live in the village now and we have nowhere to play.'

'Near school and my friends there are green spaces to play on which won't last as it is now being demolished to make more houses or sold up to make a bigger school or be used to make into allotments. There will be no green spaces left for us to play. We will have to stay in on our computers and play online with our friends instead.'

The children also talked about a wide range of spaces away from designated areas that they used, from pavements outside their houses, to nearby hills.

'I live near the mountain where there is lots of wildlife.'
'Good mix of lake, grass, woodlands, clifftop.'
'I play on my bike in our street with my friends.'
'The forest is fun!'
'Making dens in trees and playing with my friends.'

Data for the report comes from surveys completed by nearly 6,000 children across thirteen local authority areas in Wales as part of their Play Sufficiency Assessments in 2019.

The *'I learn new things and climb trees' – What children say about play in Wales* report shows that overall, the picture presented by children across Wales is that when they are allowed out, and able to play in the places they want to, most children are happy with the choice of good quality spaces, and overall are satisfied with their play opportunities. Playing outdoors every day with friends is valued.

Workforce development

Top tips

Thinking sensibly about health and safety

Not being allowed to play out with or see friends will have been upsetting and unsettling for many children. The importance of being outside for physical and mental health has been highlighted throughout the pandemic. Across all settings for children, the guidance indicates that children should spend as much time outdoors as possible as this can limit transmission and more easily allow for distance between groups.

Guidance also notes that children are creative in their play and not all play can be planned for. Practitioners can manage freely chosen play through dynamic risk-benefit assessment – using their knowledge and professional judgement to respond appropriately whilst letting children have plenty of opportunities to play outdoors.

It is important to take a common-sense approach to health and safety. Accidents will happen but it shouldn't deter us – the benefits of outdoor play far outweigh the risks – scrapes, bumps and bruises are all part of growing up.

Prepare

Make sure the play environment is checked and that checks are recorded. Checks should be a mix of visual checking and physical testing. All settings should have clear procedures on what should be checked, by whom and how often. Use or adapt our [routine play space checks template](#).

Expect the best

You don't need a detailed plan of activities. If you can take a step back and supervise from a distance, children will be more likely to play in their own way and gain the benefits of experimenting and experiencing things for themselves.

Don't look for the smallest and most unlikely possibility of getting hurt in every activity. A very long chain of 'what ifs' are very unlikely to happen and they should not be the focus of our practice.

Practitioners should use a careful but positive and practical approach. We assess whether a child is competent to make decisions about risk and hazards for themselves and we support them in their decision unless there is a real risk of serious harm.

Enjoy

Early years practitioners, playworkers and school staff are privileged to be able to work in a setting where playing takes

precedence. One of the best ways we can work within the guidance is to enjoy the play process. The enjoyment of play for what it is, to play with enthusiasm when invited to play, and to be a passionate advocate for play, are the best ways to ensure an environment and atmosphere where children can have their needs and rights met.

Making sure that the physical needs of children and staff are met goes some way in equipping them to be outdoors. Making sure that each child and adult has appropriate clothing and shelter for wet weather, sun protection on sunny day, that water is available in warmer months, and that hats and coats can be accessed in the winter helps to ensure that playing outdoors is a positive experience for everyone.

For more information about play and risk, visit the [Play Wales website](#).

Read [Children's Play and Leisure: promoting a balanced approach](#), the joint statement from the Play Safety Forum and the Health and Safety Executive.

New playwork guides published

Play Wales has recently produced four new playwork guides as a collection of resources for all those who work primarily or as a part of their role with playing children. Equally, those not working with playing children but fascinated by children's play and wanting to learn more may also find them of interest.

In 2006, Play Wales began developing training and qualifications which resulted in the Playwork: Principles into Practice (P³) qualifications. To accompany the qualifications, we worked with some of the most notable thinkers in the world of playwork to produce a comprehensive suite of learning materials. To produce these new playwork guides, we worked with Ludicology to review the P³ learning materials, to update them and to develop new content.

The guides introduce and explore some of the core theories, concepts, ideas and practices that are at the heart of working with playing children. The guides are by no means an exhaustive account. Children and their play are complex, as are the multiple ways we can work with their play, so there is always much more to learn.

We hope that the guides will support the playwork approach to be understood and explored in more depth by playwork learners and all those with an interest in supporting children's play. The guides represent a drawing together of professional knowledge that has been developed by the sector over several decades and a comprehensive references section directs readers to the source texts if they wish to delve deeper.

In preparation for working with playing children, the guides begin with Volume 1, taking a look at some of the theories that influence the way adults understand children, the role of play and childhood, as well as the ethics of working with playing children. Having developed some foundational understanding, Volume 2 explores the multiple ways those working with playing children can create or enhance environments so that they are fit for play, and at practices for directly supporting playing children.



Following this, Volume 3 looks at planning, setting up and managing a staffed play project, whilst Volume 4 deals with issues related to the management of staff and working with other adults.

Playwork seeks to create environments that are suitable for good quality playing to happen and attempts to reduce any power imbalance between children and adults, aiming to create a parallel working relationship as opposed to the more common hierarchical one between adults and children. For many, playwork is their profession, their main work role, and their vocation – for others it is a role they occupy as part of other broader responsibilities.

We truly hope that the playwork guides will help to share the uniqueness of the playwork approach with all those whose desire is to support children with quality opportunities to play.

www.playwales.org.uk/eng/publications/playwork-guides

Spotlight on ... Manager of an outdoor day nursery

In each issue we talk to a professional in the world of play and playwork to provide an insight into the diversity of the workforce and the job roles available. **For this issue we spoke to Ben Webb, Manager at Ashfield Outdoor Nursery.**

Can you tell us a bit about yourself and how you got in to playwork?

I started working as a Play Ranger in Bristol 18 years ago. I wasn't sure what I wanted to do after university and had a vague thought that I'd like to work with children. I didn't even know what playwork was at the time but luckily, I stumbled across the play ranger job. I've been blessed to have some truly inspiring playwork mentors who have shared their passion with me.

What is your job title and what does your role involve?

I was fortunate enough to fall into a few managerial roles in the play sector and gained a great deal of experience in the strategic planning and project development behind play. This gave me the confidence to have a bash at setting up an outdoor nursery. My role is an interesting mix of manager, caretaker and bank staff. I have a really exceptional team of dedicated playworkers who make my job easy.

What is the most important aspect of your work in an outdoor nursery?

Getting children outdoors and giving them the freedom to be children. We are a nature based play setting. We don't deliver the foundation phase and our only real

structure is based around snacks and meals. The Playwork Principles form the foundation of our work and children own the space and their time within it.

How has your role changed as a result of Covid-19?

Thankfully, not too much. Being an outdoor setting, we have had to change a lot less than other settings. We already spend 90 percent of our time outdoors in all weathers where transmission rates are lower and research is overwhelmingly clear that children who spend more time outdoors are healthier and less prone to illness.

What's the best bit about your job?

I have young children, one of the reasons I set the nursery up was because of them. Despite having to do more washing, I love having my children come home muddy and tired, seeing them halfway up a tree or sat around the fire when I go to collect them.

Is there anything you find challenging about your job?

Yes, the fact that our role is so short in children's lives and the work we do is not always continued when children leave us. We would love to see more commitment to outdoor provision and to play as common place in the next stages of a child's development.

Chwarae o Safon – a new Playwork Quality Assurance Framework

Play Wales is currently leading the development of a new Quality Assurance Framework for playwork settings in Wales.

Titled using the Cymraeg, *Chwarae o Safon* (Play of Quality) will be piloted during the summer and will be available as part of a phased rollout from Autumn 2021. The framework is being developed with the support of an expert reference group including organisations and individuals involved in the broad range of settings where playwork takes place.

The intention is to develop a framework that is suitable for both registered and unregistered playwork settings as well as settings where playwork is not the prime function, such as schools that want to evidence quality playwork practice.

The framework will be available as a self assessment tool. Settings will be encouraged to go through a process of external assessment to receive a quality badge to demonstrate they have met the requirements of the quality framework. Play Wales is developing a new online system to support the framework where settings will be able to upload their evidence for an external assessor to view before an interview process that will ascertain whether or not the setting meets all of the quality indicators.

Settings will receive a digital badge that they can use in communications and evidence to parents, funders, inspectors,

local authorities and others that their setting meets the quality framework. Settings will be able to focus purely on the playwork practice elements of the quality framework or work towards the full quality assurance which covers the policies, procedures and organisational ethos that supports quality playwork practice.

Playwork quality assurance is the process of looking deeply at our playwork practice to improve the quality of children's play experiences in the wide range of settings where playwork takes place. It builds on playworkers' qualifications, training, experience and the Playwork Principles by looking critically at specific elements of our work (quality indicators) and analysing how we ensure these elements are realised in principle and in practice. This process of critical analysis is built into our professional ethos through reflective practice. *Chwarae o Safon* will formalise this process so that we can evidence to ourselves and others that our practice fits with the quality expectations of our sector. It is beneficial in its own right for our staff, setting and of course for children but also demonstrates to parents, funders, legal and regulatory bodies that our setting is of quality.

Playful Communities

The coronavirus pandemic has brought unexpected and unprecedented restrictions and uncertainties, but the need and desire to support children's play is as important as ever. This importance of spending time outside for health and happiness has been highlighted and encouraged.

Previous issues of *Play for Wales* have highlighted ways that playwork teams and organisations and their partners have been supporting children's right to play. Here, we tell a few more stories of projects that are being developed to ensure that children have opportunities to play outdoors.

In **Cardiff**, the Safe Play Lanes Project will see neglected alleyways converted into safe areas for children to play. The scheme has been developed to help reconnect communities, provide an opportunity for residents to reclaim the space and create welcoming, safe and attractive environments for everyone to enjoy. Cardiff Council hopes that the project will enable children to play near their own homes and see friends whilst being near their families. Also, as part of the Child Friendly City initiative, 1,000 rain coats will be distributed to primary schools to ensure those children who do not have a coat in school can go out during wet play and break times.

In **Swansea**, the Council's Parks, Play, and Sport and Health services have devised a Chalk Trail project. The permanent trails, piloted in four parks, with more to follow, encourage children and their families to enjoy park activity during the pandemic. Picking out sections of well-used paths, the trail gives an alternate playful option within the park, particularly when the play areas are busy. It also invites playing in the entire park, not just in the designated equipped area.

In **Merthyr Tydfil**, four schools will benefit from the provision of loose parts and other equipment to be used by children when the school day ends. As part of the Cwm Taf Morgannwg Outdoor Play project, primary schools will open their school grounds after the school day for children to play with their friends and families. Schools involved in the pilot programme recognise that the school grounds offer significant opportunities to satisfy many of the social and play needs for their communities, particularly in those areas where children may not have access to private gardens or outdoor space.

Right across Wales, play teams had resources that weren't being used in play provision, so many delved into their store cupboards and developed play packs.



They shared equipment with children and families to increase play opportunities within the safety of their family homes.

In **Wrexham**, the Venture Adventure Playground and Integrated Children's Centre didn't let the challenges of locating and purchasing resources get in the way of supporting outdoor play. Using supplies from the playground, staff put together and delivered den building and teepee kits containing willow sticks, large fabric sheets, tarpaulin, shredded tyres, rope and balls of string.

For more examples of playful communities in Wales visit:

www.playfulchildhoods.wales/about-playful-communities