

## STANDARDS FOR INVESTMENT IN PLAY PROVISION

### Introduction

*'Children play in many different ways according to their own interests and abilities and enjoy different forms of play at different times and places.'*<sup>1</sup>

Waverley Borough Council aspires to create and manage play space that enables children and young people to experience different types of play within a progressive and challenging environment. As a planning authority, the Council encourages developers to do likewise, where there is a recognised need for play, as part of the community infrastructure.

This section of the play area strategy deals with the standard the Council would like to ensure play provision meets, in order to maximise the benefit to children and families in Waverley. The section uses the framework defined in the PPG17 guidance; quality, quantity and accessibility. There is also a section about evaluation to those standards.

The standards should be applied when a new play area is being developed and also when pieces of equipment or landscaping are being used to enhance or refurbish a play area.

There are different tools for looking at the quality, quantity and accessibility of children's play space. The tool used most frequently by planning authorities is the former National Playing Fields Association (NPFA)'s 'Six acre standard', now revised and published as the Fields in Trust's "Planning and Design for Outdoor Sport and Play" (2008).

Between 2009 and 2011, while developing a the national play strategy, Play England and the Department for Culture, Media and Sport published advice designed to 'set out principles for creating imaginative, innovative and stimulating play spaces that ... enrich the lives of children and young people'<sup>1</sup>. They also published draft 'tools for evaluating local play provision'<sup>2</sup>, which included 'doorstep', 'local' and neighbourhood definitions of play space and a detailed guidance document about weighing the benefits of play against the risks<sup>3</sup>. There is much common ground in these standards and they are all referred to in this section.

The Council's PPG17 study (2010) concluded that the overall picture in Waverley is one of very good provision of natural open spaces, particularly in the rural areas of the Borough. The greatest deficiency is in equipped children's play areas particularly in the more urban areas. In the rural areas the deficiencies are to some extent compensated for by the large areas of natural and semi-natural and amenity green spaces which are a significant characteristic of the Borough.<sup>4</sup> The findings section and ward profile (appendix F) give a full picture of the quantities of play provision in different areas.

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<sup>1</sup> Children's Play Council, National Playing Fields Association and PLAYLINK 2000, quoted in "Design for Play: A guide to creating successful play spaces", DCSF 2008.

<sup>2</sup> 'tools for evaluation play provision' Play England, Ashley Godfrey Associates, INSPIRE, Bristol City Council, Oct 2009. <http://www.playengland.org.uk/media/202750/tools-for-evaluating-play-provision.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> 'Managing risk in play provision', Play England, Big Lottery Fund, 2008

<sup>4</sup> PPG17 study 2010 – paragraph 16.1

## Quantity of play space

The PPG17 study recommended a using the Fields in Trust standard of 0.25ha per 1,000 people for the quantity of formal (equipped) play space, whilst noting the 1400 Ha of accessible public open space (1400 Ha) in Waverley. Fields in Trust (FiT) full standard for play space provision is: 0.8 ha of children's play space for every 1000 people. The benchmark is broken down into 0.25ha/1000 of equipped play space and 0.55ha/1000 of informal play space. Currently, Waverley has an average of 0.06Ha per 1000 population of equipped play areas and 0.73Ha per 1000 population of informal play space.

To reach the PPG17 target of 0.25 Ha of equipped play space per 1000 population<sup>5</sup> an increase of 23.17 ha would be required. The shortfall in current provision is accentuated by the demand for new housing and related infrastructure requirements.

The Fields in Trust standard recommends 0.8 Ha of playable space (equipped/designated play areas plus informal play space) per 1000 population. Waverley has 0.79ha per 1000 people of play space overall. The borough offers over the recommended quantity of open space per 1000 for informal open space (having 0.73 Ha/ '000, against the recommendation of 0.55 Ha/'000). There is a lacks of informal play space in some areas and an overall lack of equipped play space, with an average of 0.06ha equipped play space across the borough.

Reflecting the Fields in Trust and 'Design for play' principles, the borough continues to develop a hierarchy of spaces for play to cater for different needs. The biggest need is in densely populated areas, where there is generally less private play space and play spaces are smaller.

### *Existing shortfalls*

"Existing shortages of infrastructure are not the responsibility of new developments and should not be remedied through developer contributions<sup>6</sup>." However, contributions might be used to expand existing play sites in the neighbourhood.

Appendix A shows the levels of play provision across the borough, measured against the PPG17 recommended standard and the average in the borough of 0.06ha per 1000 people. It shows that no ward in the borough currently meets the Fields in Trust recommended quantity standard for equipped play provision (0.25ha/1000 people). There is an existing shortfall of 23.17 Ha of equipped play space across the borough against this standard. However, 14 wards have the average Waverley provision of 0.06Ha of equipped playspace per 1000 people and 18 wards meet the FiT standard for informal play provision (0.55ha/1000 people).

8 wards fall below the Waverley average for both equipped play provision and the Fields in trust standard for informal play space. These are:

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<sup>5</sup> Waverley Borough Council PPG17, "Open space, sport and recreation study", February 2012

<sup>6</sup> Waverley Borough Council, Infrastructure Delivery Plan, March 2012

Cranleigh East, Farnham Hale and Heath End, Farnham Bourne, Farnham Moor Park, Farnham Shortheath and Boundstone, Godalming Binscombe, Godalming Charterhouse, Milford.

Wards are essentially administrative units that enable political accountability and an assessment of population. Residents regularly cross ward boundaries to access play and other facilities. The recommendations (on page 22) therefore stress the need to consider play for communities not only by ward and look at options for expansion.

### *Play provision and new residential developments*

'The selection of sites for children's play environments should be an integral part of the design process for all new housing developments. The pattern and landscape of streets, paths, open spaces, the gradient of footpaths, the size of steps, the height of handrails and other factors must all be considered from a child's perspective'<sup>7</sup>. Safe access to and from the designated play space should be incorporated into the design.

Current local planning guidance is that for developments of between 15 and 49 homes, a local area for play (or LAP)<sup>8</sup> should be provided and that for those of above 50 dwellings, a locally equipped area for play (LEAP) should be planned into the development. This could equally be defined as a 'doorstep space, with facilities for play and informal recreation. However, in line with 'Design for play' criteria, the type of play provision should be suitable to the neighbourhood and specific location in which it is situated.

It also needs to be borne in mind that children's need for play changes with age and that the best play spaces are those that can change to meet local needs. Therefore, in communities where there is no existing neighbourhood equipped area for play, land should be allowed, or a site identified, to enable the provision of a neighbourhood equipped area for play, to cater for children and young people as the housing development matures.

Where funding is made available to support the play infrastructure from smaller developments, thought will be given to how existing local play areas can be enhanced and also accessed. This might include footpaths for improved access, the provision of accessible equipment, the provision of crossings on busy roads, or combining the funding with other funding to create an enhanced or refurbished play area. Where there is a proven need for improved facilities for young people (14+), additional facilities may be added to skate parks or existing neighbourhood areas for play.

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<sup>7</sup> Fields in Trust, "Planning and Design for Outdoor Sport and Play" 2009, Ch. 6 - The Design of Outdoor play and sports facilities" para 6.1.6

<sup>8</sup> A **local area for play (LAP)** is a small area of open space, specifically designated and primarily laid out for very young children to play close to where they live. A **Locally equipped area for play (LEAP)** is an area of open space specifically designated and laid out with features equipment for children who are beginning to go out and play independently close to where they live. For full definitions, please see Appendix B.

## Quality of play provision

Waverley Borough Council's PPG17 study recommended that designated play spaces would incorporate equipment designed for toddlers, juniors (4-11's) and in some cases teenagers and include landscaped features that can be used for play. Sites should be clean/ litter free and provide a safe, fun and stimulating environment where possible for children of all ages. Areas should be set aside as dog free. Sites should be in areas easily accessible by foot to the local community they are intended to serve with limited barriers to access such as main roads.<sup>9</sup>

Play space will be in keeping with the principles of "Design for play", aspiring to create successful play spaces in their own right, specially designed for their location, in such a way as to provide as much play value as possible. As such a play space will be:

- Designed to enhance its setting – inspired by the background, whether that's a park, open space or urban landscape.
- Located in the best possible place – where children naturally play, away from dangerous roads, noise and pollution, but near through routes and well-used public footpaths.
- Close to nature – many studies have shown that children benefit from access to natural environments. In densely populated urban areas, the use of grassy mounds, planting, logs and boulders can help to make a more attractive and playable setting for equipment.
- Designed so that children can play in different ways, incorporating different ages, abilities and interests.
- Designed so that disabled and non-disabled children play together.
- Loved by the community
- A space where children of all ages play together
- A space where children can stretch and challenge themselves in every way
- Maintained for play value and environmental sustainability
- A space that evolves as children grow.

Given the pressure on land use, it is not always easy to choose the ideal location of play space, to change the fundamental layout of an existing play area or to separate types of play spaces, but these principles remain the basis of the Council's design, evaluation and development of play spaces.

The 2009 draft national play strategy, along with the investment in play sites through Playbuilder projects, led to a resurgence of interest in and demand for natural play areas, using natural materials and encouraging exploration of the outdoors and increased challenge as children develop.<sup>10</sup> This view was reflected in the consultation for the Borough Council's play area strategy (2007-2010) and fits well in a rural borough like Waverley.

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<sup>9</sup> WBC PPG17 study, February 2012

<sup>10</sup> Although there are many people for whom 'safety' in play areas is more important than risk and challenge, RoSPA figures show that accidents in play grounds are minimal compared to homes and many sports.

The current Fields in Trust standards reflect that view, particularly when read alongside 'Design for Play' principles and the 'tools for evaluating local play provision', published by Play England in 2009, which identified play space as:

'door-step spaces and facilities for play and informal recreation': a small space, within sight of home, where children, especially young children, can play within view of known adults.

'local spaces and facilities for play and informal recreation: a larger space which can be reached safely by children beginning to travel independently and with friends, without accompanying adults and for adults with young children to walk to with ease'.

'neighbourhood spaces and facilities for play and informal recreation': a larger space or facility for informal recreation which children and young people, used to travelling longer distances independently, can get to safely and spend time in play and informal recreation with their peers and have a wider range of play experiences.'

Appendix B gives a summary of the Fields in Trust criteria for local and neighbourhood equipped areas for play.

### ***Play value***

Play work theorists have identified sixteen different play types<sup>11</sup>, all of which are important to children's enjoyment and day-to-day experience. It is not possible to incorporate every play type into every play area design; some will only be revealed when children are playing, but in endeavouring to create spaces that maximise play opportunities, new designs and plans for refurbishment take the different types of play and different abilities into account.

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Waverley Borough Council commissioned RoSPA to undertake a play value assessment, along with an annual inspection, of all sites across the Borough in April 2013. The findings are summarised in the findings section of this strategy and shown in detail in the spreadsheets (appendix E). These assessments have influenced the recommendations for future investment.

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<sup>11</sup> 'A playworker's taxonomy of play types', Bob Hughes/PLAYLINK, 1996

<sup>12</sup> Children's Play Council, National Playing Fields Association and PLAYLINK 2000, quoted in "Design for Play: A guide to creating successful play spaces", DCSF 2008.

## Accessibility of play provision

The PPG17 target for accessibility is to use the Fields in Trust accessibility standard, which is defined in terms of walking distances from home to play areas:

Local Areas of Play (LAPs): accompanied walking distance 100m (straight line distance 60m).

Local Equipped Areas of Play (LEAPs): walking distance 400m (straight line distance 240m).

Neighbourhood Equipped Areas of Play (NEAPs): walking distance 1,000m (straight line distance 600m).

The survey undertaken for the PPG17 study found that 55.8% of respondents believed they should be expected to walk less than 10 minutes to use equipped play space. 35% of respondents thought that they should have to travel for less than 20 minutes. This finding is in line with the principles of the Fields in Trust recommendations.

In acknowledging the difficulty in achieving this standard, especially in urban areas, the study proposes that open spaces used for other purposes be opened up to play and that existing areas offer a greater variety of play opportunities where space allows. This is a policy that has been pursued at a number of play areas in recent years, for instance at: Hale recreation ground and Farnham Park (in Farnham), The Bury's/Phillips memorial field and Ockford Ridge/Aarons Hill (in Godalming); Snoxhall Fields/Cranleigh leisure centre (in Cranleigh). It requires a local solution, as play provision for older children and young people is often considered to disturb other uses of open space. There are many examples of villages investing in skate parks or multi-use games areas, as they acknowledge that older children and young people also need somewhere local to play. This should be supported as it is consistent with enabling play space to be adapted to children and young people's needs.

The other aspect of accessibility is ensuring that play spaces offer opportunities for children and young people of all abilities. It is tempting to invest more heavily in equipment that can be accessed by children with mobility difficulties at larger sites where there is access to car parking, changing facilities and refreshment facilities. However an 'NPFA' study by Rob Wheway and Alison John in 2004 found that disabled children have a desire to use their closest playgrounds for everyday play, locally with their friends, not only at neighbourhood or destination play areas, just like other children. They found that there are a number of social and educational barriers to this, beyond the design of the playground. They acknowledge that some playgrounds are situated in locations which are just less accessible due to the topography of the area and recommend that playground managers try to ensure reasonable physical adjustments to playgrounds, rather than closing small playgrounds and focusing only on neighbourhood or destination playgrounds. However, suitable design and adaptation is also important<sup>13</sup>.

Where possible, therefore, new and refurbished play areas will include equipment that enables all children and young people to experience different types of play, in keeping with Design for Play principles. It is also recommended that there is investment in larger sites

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<sup>13</sup> 'Can Play, Will Play', Fields in Trust, 2004, Wheway, R and John, A.

that have the capacity to provide inclusive play and access. Suitable sites include: Snoxhall Field (Cranleigh), Broadwater Park (Godalming), Farnham Park and Lion Green (Haslemere).

Depending on the size and location of the site and the views of users, this might include:

- double-width slides with suitable access (so carers or friends can slide down with children),
- roundabouts or carousels that are flush with the ground and have either seats with handrails or places in which to place wheelchairs (and buggies), or can be lain in.
- Swing seats that give support to children who can't hold their own weight – this might include specialist swing seats or nest swings, where children can be laid down.
- Wheelchair access to slides and to nets
- Low level nets on which children can be laid and swung
- Low-level play opportunities – panels with mazes, music, sounds
- Sand and water play with good access (eg ramps into sandpits)
- Clear boundaries to the play area – these do not have to be fences, they can be planted or mounds, but will help autistic children in particular to feel secure.
- Rockers with backrests, footrests and hand holds.
- Access paths that are firm and not too long, or with places to sit and rest along the way
- Self-closing gates (3-5 seconds) that are wide enough for wheelchairs or buggies to pass through (1m) or (if necessary) have latches that are easy to operate.
- firm, wide pathways (1.2m) to any playground that is within 20 metres of a road or path, balanced with the relative play value of the area itself.
- Provision of a dropped kerb near the entrance.
- Provision of internal paths and passing places.
- Ensuring an accessible entrance, wide enough for a wheelchair user, which is clear from the pathway or road.
- Use of bright or contrasting colours to identify sudden or unexpected changes of level, or barriers (including gates and swing barriers)
- At least one bench seat with backrest.