

INTRODUCTION

Rationale for play provision

Play is a process that is freely chosen, personally directed and intrinsically motivated. That is, children and young people determine and control the content and intent of their play, by following their own instincts, ideas and interests, in their own way and for their own reasons.' 'All children and young people need to play. The impulse to play is innate. Play is biological, psychological and social necessity and is fundamental to the healthy development and well-being of individuals and communities.'¹

Children's play is universal and something all or most of us did and remember doing - outside and inside. The right to play is recognised as a human right in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child². However, the more complicated, busy and risk averse our lives become, the more opportunities for children to play need to be protected.

'There are many barriers to play today - traffic, commerce, a public realm that takes little account of children, fear of predators and bullying, increased demands on their structured time and society's ambivalent attitude to young people.... Increasing anti-social behaviour and obesity may be just the tip of the iceberg in terms of the potential damage to our future generations.'³

The aims of this play area strategy are to:

1. give a rationale for investment in play provision as an important part of infrastructure in the Borough of Waverley
2. set standards for investment in play provision in Waverley
3. develop an action plan identifying priorities for future investment
4. consider investment in play areas that are not directly owned or maintained by the Borough Council

Why is the provision of outdoor play facilities important?

The last 15 years have seen academic research, qualitative and quantitative studies demonstrating the benefits of play for children and families. These influenced the National Play Strategy (published in 2008), which advocated the development of outdoor play opportunities, both supervised and unsupervised. It was backed with an investment of £235m nationally for developing outdoor, natural play opportunities, prioritised through local play area strategies between 2009 and 2011. It has also influenced guidelines published by Sustrans, Play England, RoSPA and the Health and Safety Executive.⁴

The following statements are taken from Play England's literature review, "A world without play" (2012). The review highlights "the importance of play, particularly outdoor play, for

¹ Playwork Principles Scrutiny Group 2005

² Article 31 of the UN Convention on the rights of the child, adopted, November 1989, in force from September 1990: 'States Parties recognize the right of the child to rest and leisure, to engage in play and recreational activities appropriate to the age of the child and to participate freely in cultural life and the arts.

2. States Parties shall respect and promote the right of the child to participate fully in cultural and artistic life and shall encourage the provision of appropriate and equal opportunities for cultural, artistic, recreational and leisure activity.'

³ Catherine Prisk, Director, Play England, April 2010 – British Psychological Society's Annual Conference

⁴ 'Routes to play – how to ensure children and young people can get to play spaces independently', Sustrans, Aug 2009. <http://www.playengland.org.uk/playstrategy>. 'Childrens play and leisure – promoting a balanced approach', HSE, September 2012.

increasing levels of physical activity, alongside other positive influences on a child's well-being, such as opportunities to understand and respect the natural world. However [it states] ... a combination of poor play environments, busy school schedules and an increase in structured activities has meant that this beneficial and basic children's right has become sidelined, often perceived as an 'unaffordable luxury' (Elkind 2008)."

... "obesity, rickets and attention deficit disorder are just some of the growing problems experienced by children, that health experts have recently linked to a lack of particular forms of play (Play England 2011)".

"Play enables children to form friendships and attachments to adults and to places, allowing for the development of familiarity and intimacy with both. It can provide opportunities for independent learning and building confidence, resilience, self-esteem and self-efficacy (Lester and Russell 2008; NICE 2010; Coalter and Taylor 2001)."

"Whilst play can bring families closer together, strengthening parent-child relationships (Gardner and Ward 2000), playing away from adult supervision is equally important, allowing children to acquire independent mobility, explore the world on their own terms and create their own identities (Armitage 2004)."

"Children simply don't get the opportunities that we did when we were children to play outside. Research - and common sense - tells us that play is vital for children's emotional and physical health, as well as helping them to develop both physical and social skills. However, to get the best out of their play children need space and opportunity. They need local play parks or spaces that feel playful. And they need people trained in developing good play opportunities so that their parents feel confident leaving them."⁵ Research in Waverley for the previous play strategy found that half of the children involved said they were not allowed (or did not think it was safe) to play outside, close to their homes, without a parent or someone older being present. Some mentioned that there are busy roads nearby, but others said that their parents would not allow them out alone.

Play and health

This section considers how play and green spaces can increase physical activity and contribute towards Surrey's Health and Wellbeing Board's priorities.

'Improving children's health and wellbeing' is the first of the priorities. The five outcomes include the following to which play can contribute:

- More families, children and young people will have healthy behaviours
- Health outcomes for looked after children and care leavers will improve
- More children and young people will be emotionally healthy and resilient.

Research by the British Heart Foundation supports active play as vital for children's learning, as well as their physical wellbeing. Indicators that help to measure this include: obesity levels in 4-5 year olds, obesity levels in 10-11 year olds (year 6), participation in at least 3

⁵ Catherine Prisk, Director, Play England, April 2010 – British Psychological Society's Annual Conference

hours of sport a week. Two of these indicators are now available at borough-level⁶; Waverley's obesity figures were below the national and Surrey averages in 2012/13 with 5.9% of 4-5 year olds and 10.4% of children in year 6 (aged 10-11) being classified as obese.⁷ The England levels were 9.4% and 19.1% respectively.

The current Department of Health physical activity guidelines recommend 3 hours a day of physical activity for children under 5, and at least an hour's physical activity each day for school aged children. The guidelines cite energetic play, such as climbing, bike riding, running, chasing games, walking and skipping, swimming, swimming and football as ways of achieving this target. "Active play is the most common type of physical activity that children take part in outside school and outdoors, unstructured play may be one of the best forms of physical activity for children."⁸ Data isn't currently being collected for physical activity among children, but in 2010, 61% of Waverley's children participated in at least 3 hours of sport a week, above the England average of 50%⁹.

Waverley Borough has more than 1400 Ha of accessible open space, which is a huge asset for the community. There is evidence to show that the more children are encouraged to use outdoor spaces, the more likely they are to continue to use them as adults. There is also evidence to show that a lack of opportunities for outdoor play can affect children's mental health¹⁰ as well as their physical health.

Tim Gill's study of the use of open space in London, found 15% of under 12's have no contact with nature, primarily because of parental anxiety¹¹. It is therefore important to re-establish parents' and children's confidence in using open spaces for play and exploration so that families use the open space that is around them. In the current climate of parental anxiety about children playing outdoors, due to traffic, 'stranger danger' and other fears, formal play spaces are a stepping stone to achieving that confidence.

The second priority of the Surrey health and well-being strategy is 'developing a preventative approach'. There are a number of outcomes associated with this priority to which play as a physical activity can contribute, such as helping more people to be physically active and helping more people to be of a healthy weight.

The department of Health guidelines for adults recommend daily physical activity, amounting to at least 2.5 hours each week, some of which should be focused on strengthening muscles. The examples given include brisk walking, cycling, running, sport

⁶ www.localhealth.org.uk

⁷ www.chimat.org.uk – child health profiles for local authorities

⁸ British Heart Foundation (2009) 'Couch Kids: The Nation's Future', London: BHF, Mackett, R and others (2007) 'children's independent movement in the local environment', Built Environment 33, 4, pp 454-68, both quoted in 'Play and children's health and well-being', National Children's Bureau highlight no. 265, November 2011.

⁹ 2009-2010 Physical Education, School Sport and Young People's Survey – quoted on Surrey – physical activity figures. The figures previously reported on www.chimat.org.uk for 2011 were 52.8% (Surrey) and 55.1% (England) respectively.

¹⁰ Layard and Dunn (2009) 'A Good Childhood: Searching for values in a competitive age' – quoted in 'Natural Childhood', Moss/National Trust (2012)

¹¹ www.londonsdc.org/news/4/Sowing-the-Seeds--Reconnecting-Londons-children-with-nature, Tim Gill for London Sustainable Development Commission, 2011

and exercises to strengthen muscles. However, recent research has shown that few adults achieve this amount of exercise regularly.

The public health outcomes framework (PHOF) identifies two indicators that are useful for measuring physical activity; the proportion of adults who are physically active and the proportion of adults who are physically inactive.

In Waverley 65.1% of adults are active, doing at least 150 minutes of moderate equivalent physical activity per week (compared to 60.1% for Surrey), while 19.5% are inactive, doing less than 30 minutes of moderate equivalent physical activity per week (compared to 23.1% for Surrey).¹²

Play and green spaces

Promoting emotional wellbeing and mental health is the third of the Surrey Health and Wellbeing strategy priorities. Play can contribute to a number of outcomes under this priority:

- More people will have good mental health
- More people with mental health problems will recover
- More people with mental health problems will have good physical health

The Marmot report (2010) found that:

*"Creating a physical environment in which people can live healthier lives with a greater sense of well-being is a hugely significant factor in reducing health inequalities.....Numerous studies point to the direct benefits of green space to both physical and mental health and wellbeing. Green spaces have been associated with a decrease in health complaints blood pressure and cholesterol, improved mental health and reduced stress levels, perceived better general health, and the ability to face problems. The presence of green space also has indirect benefits: it encourages social contact and integration, provides space for physical activity and play, improves air quality and reduces urban heat island effects."*¹³

The public health outcomes framework (PHOF) identifies an indicator that reflects the value of using green space. Although the collection of data for this indicator is not yet finalised, the Active People Survey results showed that 35% of adults in Surrey accessed the natural environment for exercise or health reasons in 2011 – 2012 (a 10% increase from 2009 – 2010 when 25% of adults in Surrey accessed for exercise or health reasons).¹⁴

Healthy walks across countryside and open space in Waverley are already organised in the main centres of community (Cranleigh, Farnham, Godalming and Haslemere)¹⁵ and a monthly programme of longer walks (over 6 miles) takes place from Godalming.

¹² Active People Survey results from January 2012 – January 2013 (Surrey, Waverley physical activity profile)

¹³ Marmot, M. (2010) *Fair Society, Healthy Lives: Strategic Review of Health Inequalities in England post 2010. The Marmot Review*

¹⁴ Surrey

¹⁵ http://www.waverley.gov.uk/info/200044/leisure_and_fitness/240/waverley_countryside-walks_for_health

There is a growing body of evidence for the benefits of outdoor gym equipment, targeted at adults, who would not otherwise use indoor sports and leisure facilities. Studies include evaluations by Camden Borough Council, which installed 9 outdoor gyms in 2009 and the evaluation of the Olympic legacy 'Adizone' project. Many of the adults who access these facilities (26% in Camden) did not previously exercise at all. Situating the gyms in parks, often near to playgrounds, meant they could be easily accessed by adults.

There are some open air gyms in Waverley, at Snoxhall fields in Cranleigh and at Farnham Park. There are also a number across Surrey and the south east. It may be beneficial to increase this in order to encourage more adults to exercise regularly, whilst their children play or whilst they're walking their dogs. The studies in Camden also showed the benefit of finding instructors to help people start to use outdoor gym equipment.

The Joint Strategic Needs Assessment priorities for Waverley are: reduction of alcohol consumption, stroke prevention, reduction of COPD, coronary heart disease and diabetes, reduced obesity, working with dementia, safeguarding – adults with learning disabilities and mental health. Outdoor activity can go a long way to alleviating the symptoms of a number of these conditions. As Waverley has so much accessible open space, it is vital to increase people's confidence in using and benefiting from it through improved access, healthy walks programmes, the installation of outdoor gyms and employment of fitness instructors to work with people using outdoor fitness equipment for the first time. These priorities are reflected in Waverley's Personalisation, Prevention and Partnerships plan.

Current play provision in Waverley

The 1400 Ha of accessible open space in Waverley consists of formal managed parks and gardens, recreation grounds, play spaces, outdoor sports facilities and allotments as well as natural and semi-natural green space; green corridors, nature reserves, amenity green space, churchyards and cemeteries and civic areas.¹⁶ Landowners include the Borough Council, the National Trust, the Forestry Commission, Surrey Wildlife Trust, Surrey County Council, the Ministry of Defence and parish and town councils. These landowners manage a variety of common land, woodland, ancient woodland, forest and open space.

Waverley Borough Council owns and manages approximately 1200 hectares of public open space on nearly 500 sites borough-wide. The council's ranger service runs sessions with schools and organised youth groups in Farnham Park to encourage enthusiasm for - and appropriate use of - the countryside. These include pond dipping, den building and willow weaving activities with schools and Farnham Museum Club. The countryside service is also open to early years' settings using open spaces for forest schools. Surrey Wildlife Trust also works with local children's centres to run Forest Schools on the land they manage in Godalming.

The parks and countryside service currently manages the upkeep and improvement of 55 play areas, 5 multi-use games areas and 5 skate parks across Waverley. Parish and town councils, 3 residents' associations and village hall trustees manage a further 19 play areas in

¹⁶ Waverley Borough Council Open Spaces Strategy – 2012

the Waverley area. Play provision for residential developments of over 25 homes is agreed at planning application stage and managed and maintained by developers and subsequently by management companies. Play provision is spread across the communities in Waverley and can be identified around the main settlements or areas of the borough, as it is on the Borough Council’s website.

Cranleigh area (including Ewhurst, Cranleigh, Shamley-Green, Bramley & Alfold, Ellens Green PC areas)	Godalming area (including Godalming, Farncombe, Blackheath , Wonersh, Busbridge, Milford, Hambledon, Witley, Chiddingfold & Dunsfold, Elstead & Thursley)	Farnham area (including Wrecclesham & Rowledge, Shortheath & Boundstone, Frensham, Dockenfield & Tilford)	Haslemere area (including Hindhead, Critchmere and Shottermill, Haslemere East and Grayswood)
5 WBC play areas	13 WBC play areas	25 WBC play areas	12 WBC play areas
	3 multi-use games areas	3 multi-use games areas	1 multi-use games area
1 skate park	2 skate parks	1 skate park	1 skate park
4 PC managed play areas + Ellens Green Memorial Hall trustees	6 PC managed play areas + 1 residents’ association + 2 management companies	3 PC managed play areas	1 Haslemere town council.

Residents’ views about the current level of provision

Residents’ views about play have been gleaned in a variety of ways in recent years, one of which is local consultation when play areas are refurbished. The following information is from research undertaken for the Open Space, Sport and Recreation Study (PPG17) in 2010 and the Council’s play strategy (2007-2010).

Responses to the PPG17 consultations showed that open spaces were highly valued by respondents for recreational, amenity, wildlife, health and wellbeing and other purposes, and are a key part of what makes Waverley Borough such a desirable place to live and work.

Most people felt the quantity of open space in the borough was about right, but there was some concern expressed about the quality and quantity of some provision, including play space for children and young people.¹⁷ The greatest deficiency was identified in equipped children’s play areas, particularly in the more urban areas. In the rural areas these 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.¹⁸

¹⁷ Ibid, para 4.24

¹⁸ Waverley Borough Council, PPG17 open space, sport and recreation study, 2012, paragraph 16.

http://www.waverley.gov.uk/downloads/file/2880/waverley_open_space_sport_and_recreation_study_ppg17_study_february_2012

There were also specific parks which were rated poorly¹⁹; 4 of these have since been fully refurbished.

The Council's play strategy (2007-2010) conducted research about play spaces with children and young people. Focus groups were held at eight junior & primary schools in the Borough, with representation from each of the four major population areas: Haslemere, Godalming, Farnham and Cranleigh.

The majority of children said playgrounds were an important aspect of their playtime. Although most could walk to play areas, others required a car journey to reach the nearest facility. The main issue surrounding playgrounds was the lack of facilities for the older age group who still enjoyed using playgrounds and playing on challenging equipment. Some of these said that they preferred to travel outside the Borough to visit play areas with a more diverse range of play facilities.

The children also stated that they particularly enjoyed going to playgrounds which were situated diverse areas such as a large open space, near a wooded area or river, as this enabled them to play football, cricket, ride their bikes, climb trees or just have the freedom to invent their own play.

Questionnaires completed by parish and town councils showed that fixed play equipment was well used and situated in good locations. They seemed generally satisfied with the play opportunities in Waverley.

Many of the respondents stated that most of the play areas are for the younger children and that there needed to be more areas to accommodate older children and teenagers.

Nearly all of the responses from skate park users showed that the skate parks are well used, as they visited the facility 2-3 times a week. All skaters wanted more ramps, rails and skating space at the skate parks.

Targets from the play area strategy and PPG17 study

Playground related targets in the 2007 play strategy included:

- Investigating the feasibility of developing a large adventure play area, with a mix of natural equipment & surrounding open space.
- Developing challenging play areas for children over 9 yrs.
- Increasing facilities for young people, including the development of multi use games areas, youth shelters and the improvement and development of skate parks.
- Upgrading equipment in local play areas where required across the borough.
- Including equipment for older children where feasible.
- Developing more 'natural' play areas including surrounding open space where possible.
- Increasing the amount of inclusive play equipment within the play areas
- Mapping distribution of current play provision

¹⁹ Waverley Borough Council, draft open spaces strategy, 2012, p 54

- Supporting existing play provision and respond to local need to develop further provision where appropriate.
- Planning for the development of an open space study. (PPG17) – see below
- Ensuring Best Play Objectives and the Enriched Play Environment Criteria are distributed to those who develop play areas and in the development control process when design briefs on new developments are established.
- Ensuring the Play Safety Forum position statement is taken into account when making judgements on managing risk in all play provision.
- Incorporating the play policy into WBC’s relevant Development Plans and Supplementary Planning Documents, to form parts of the Local Development Framework.

The Council’s PPG17 study into open space, sport and recreation mapped play provision across the Borough. It proposed the following actions:

1. Further identification of general quality and provision of children and young people’s open space
2. Making more effective use of LAP/LEAP/NEAP classifications
3. Looking at ways of providing new or extended playspaces in areas that fall below the average current provision in Waverley²⁰
4. Investigating options for play provision in areas with no existing provision and with limited provision: Godalming Charterhouse, Busbridge, Rushmoor, Wormley, Chiddingfold, Hindhead, rural eastern areas and North Farnham (particularly Upper Hale)
5. Investigating options for Thurbans Play area (Farnham)
6. Reprioritising the ‘Proposed investment programme for playground and recreational facilities for young people’ (2009-2011)
7. Further assessment of the value of outdated or redundant play equipment and improve the quality of nearby playgrounds where possible.
8. Promoting the potential of ‘natural play’
9. Supporting appropriate community-led campaigns to provide or enhance play facilities under Big Society Initiative, once it is established.

The Council’s current corporate plan (2012-2015) targets include:

- improving 30 play spaces within 3 years,
- reviewing the management of Waverley’s sports pitches and recreation grounds,
- encouraging residents to use our open spaces and countryside and
- working with them to develop appropriate management plans.

²⁰ Calculations from the re-measurement of equipped and informal play space in 2014 show a revised average provision of 0.06ha of play space per 1000 people.

Outcomes

Investment in the replacement, refurbishment and expansion of 16 playgrounds and 4 multi-use games areas, skate parks and basketball areas between 2009 and 2014 has vastly enhanced the play provision for different age groups in Waverley.

A further analysis of the council's equipped open space and informal play space has been completed, along with an annual play area inspection, play value and accessibility audit, conducted in 2013.

The play strategy action plan (p 34 – 38) prioritises future investment in play, based on the PPG17 study and the results of the 2013 annual inspection and condition survey.

The resources have not been available to investigate the use of the sites identified in the PPG17 study as options for enhancing the quantity of play provision, but this strategy recognises the need to identify funding from development to improve play provision in areas of need.