

Executive Summary Guildford Play Strategy

2016-2021



The Play Strategy 2016-2021 will help us to ensure that our play schemes and our play area facilities are of a high standard and are what is needed locally. The strategy will ensure that our play opportunities are provided through a co-ordinated approach, whilst making best use of resources.

What do we mean by the term 'play'?

Children's play needs are diverse and so too are people's definitions of what play is, or is not. We define play as:

'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.'

Playwork Principles Scrutiny Group 2005

The wealth of guidance documents developed by both play organisations and play professionals provides the framework under which this strategy and our current provision has developed. Such documents validate our investment in play. They also provide useful tools for evaluating play provision, which helps us in developing a better understanding of the play needs of children and young people so we can deliver better play opportunities to meet those identified needs.

Why do we need a play strategy?

Local authorities are one of the main providers of play provision and facilities. We recognise that play is a crucial part of a child's development and wellbeing. It is something adults take for granted that children do naturally – and they do. The more complicated, busy and risk averse our lives become, the fewer opportunities there are for children to play freely. Play provision is therefore part of the necessary infrastructure, which needs to be planned and sustained, in order to play its part in sustaining healthy communities. By committing to this strategy, we will ensure that we are adhering to the UN convention on the rights of the child.

Consultation and community engagement

To ensure residents had the opportunity to give their views on play opportunities and local facilities, a consultation and engagement process was undertaken. This included online questionnaires plus engagement with partners, stakeholders, parents, residents, children and young people. This has supported us in shaping and directing the play strategy 2016-2021.



Our vision for play in Guildford

- our communities have play spaces that are attractive, welcoming, challenging and accessible for all local children and young people
- our parks and open spaces are attractive and welcoming to children and young people and allow them opportunities for a wide range of play
- our communities have a range of accessible, supervised and unsupervised spaces and places for play
- local communities are safe and interesting places to play freely
- adults within our communities acknowledge the needs of children and young people and the positive contribution they make to community life
- children, young people and their parents take an active role in the development of local play spaces
- professionals who plan, design, build and manage our communities understand their role in, and the positive outcomes of, creating child friendly communities

What are the benefits of children playing?

Children are active participants in building their own understanding of the world around them. They mostly do this by experimenting, observing and participating with other children and adults through play. Children gain direct benefits to their physical health, mental health, wellbeing, risk awareness, social skills and holistic development through playing.

Play areas are part of the necessary infrastructure for healthy communities and contribute to cohesive communities when children's play is welcomed and respected. For these reasons; the Council is committed to preserving and improving open space play areas.



Influences on children's access to play

Adults affect children's play significantly. The role they play can take a number of forms; such as the permissions they grant children to play and in listening to children's play needs. Staffed provision can therefore provide a highly valued contribution to children's play.

It is important that play opportunities for those children with special educational needs, disabilities, learning, physical and developmental delay, social, poverty and economic disadvantage and those that are sometimes discriminated against due to their behaviour or family circumstances is planned for and embedded in provision.

There are a number of common barriers that stop children from playing outside in their communities such as parental anxiety, traffic, reduction in free time and outcome focussed play provisions. Potential solutions to these barriers have been considered by officers and will be addressed through an action plan.



Our playschemes

Our current play initiatives include an outdoor, term time after school scheme, Playrangers and FISH (Fun in the School Holidays) a four week school holiday provision.



Our play areas

In the last ten years, Guildford’s commitment to improving play spaces has resulted in the refurbishment and expansion of 23 play areas as well as an expansion in the range of facilities provided. The Fixed Play Equipment Strategy builds on this progress and takes it forward into the future.

Play England and Fields in Trust (FIT), have significantly influenced play provision and planning for play through established policy guidance. *Planning and Design for Outdoor Sport and Play, Guidance on Outdoor Play and Sport - Beyond the Six Acre Standard* (both FIT) and *Design for Play: A guide to creating successful play spaces* (Play England) provide the framework for the new policies for developing the future of the Council’s play areas. The Council will also encourage and support parish council’s to take the same objectives and design guidance forward in the provision of their own play areas.

The strategy’s consultation showed how important opportunities for physical activity and the use of natural features such as plants, rocks and sand are to residents. Support for the idea of increased challenge

for a range of ages in play areas was a popular response too. The Council recognises that if play spaces do not offer children the level of challenge they desire, they will play elsewhere, possibly in less safe spaces.

Exposure to risk is an essential part of ensuring children grow, develop, and are equipped with the skills and ability to fulfil their adult life. The Council takes a risk benefit approach to play provision. This approach weighs up the potential risk involved in a play area or item of play equipment against the potential benefit to children’s play.

The views of parents and children are incredibly valuable to delivering a successful facility in the community. The Council will ensure that a planned and coordinated approach to consultation underpins all new developments and refurbishments. Good design for play requires knowledge of the site, of local needs (based on local consultation) and technical skill. The play needs of different communities vary over time, so design for play areas needs to take a long term view and balance the benefits of different types of play with its inherent risks.

Ten principles for new play areas have been developed because of the consultation and established guidance.

- 1** designed to enhance its setting
- 2** located in the best possible place
- 3** close to nature
- 4** designed so that children can play in different ways, incorporating different ages, abilities and interests
- 5** designed so that disabled and non-disabled children play together
- 6** loved by the community
- 7** a space where children of all ages have the opportunity to play together where there is space to do so
- 8** a space where children can stretch and challenge themselves in every way
- 9** maintained for play value and environmental sustainability
- 10** a space that evolves as children grow where there is space to do so

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Using the most current FIT guidance will help the Council ensure that the provision of outdoor play is of a sufficient size for effective use; is located in an accessible location in proximity to dwellings; and of a suitable quality to maintain longevity for continued use.

The guidance recommends that equipped or designated play spaces are grouped under the following descriptions:

- 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 (i.e. within 1-3 minute walking time).
- A **Locally Equipped Area for Play (LEAP)** is an area of open space specifically designated and laid out with features including equipment for children who are beginning to go out and play independently close to where they live, usually within 5 minutes walking time.
- A **Neighbourhood Equipped Area for Play (NEAP)** is an area of open space specifically designated, laid out and equipped mainly for older children but with play opportunities for younger children as well. It is designed for children and young people who are used to travelling longer distances independently to get to safely on their own.

Play area assessments were commissioned on all play areas within our ownership and the ownership of parish councils, to inform the strategy. These independent assessments evaluated a range of criteria considered important within the established policy guidance. The play area assessments established priorities for improvement and investment and have guided the ten-year play area development plan. The plan has identified a need for £1,200,000 of future investment. A capital sum has been agreed to fund approximately half of this over the next five years. The remainder will need to be found from other sources, if the action plan is to be completed.

The Fixed Play Equipment Strategy summarises three key policies to take forward:

- 1 our approach to play area design**
- 2 the need to work in partnership, especially with parish councils**
- 3 the need to continue to sustainably deliver play spaces for the local community**



Our themes

The outcomes of the strategy are aligned to the strategy's themes. They are the principles on which we will develop our play provision to 2021 and beyond. The themes have come from our initial research and experiences from our front line staff. These have been considered in line with the resources we have available to us:

Widening accessibility and participation in play

Increasing awareness of opportunities whilst ensuring that our own provision is accessible and inspiring to all children by removing the barriers that restrict children's access to play.

To advocate for play

Promoting children's right to play through increasing understanding of the importance of play and embedding children's play needs into local communities.

Improve children's health and wellbeing through play

Promoting and increasing confidence in participation of a wide range of safe and physically active play opportunities.

Balancing risk in play

Embedding a risk benefit approach to managing the design, delivery and development of a broad range of challenging and inspiring opportunities for play.

Measuring success

In order to implement the strategy we have developed a coordinated and resource led action plan and a play area development plan. These will be monitored, evaluated and reviewed on an annual basis.

The Play and Youth Development Officer is here to:

- provide skilled professional advice on children's play for the Council
- design and manage play projects, schemes and events that promote a diverse range of play and leisure opportunities for children and young people
- promote opportunities for play within the borough
- provide information, advice and support to community groups wishing to develop community play provision within the borough

The Parks Team are here to:

- provide strategic direction for developing play spaces and to coordinate partners such as parish councils
- undertake planned improvements of sites
- develop areas identified as deficient in play space
- inspect, maintain and manage attractive play space provision within the Council's portfolio that children want to play in



The full version of the Play Strategy 2016-2021, action plan and appendix are on our website - www.guildford.gov.uk/playstrategy



Contacts

Play and Youth Development Officer

playdevelopment@guildford.gov.uk

01483 444764

Parks Team

parks@guildford.gov.uk

01483 444718



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