

Playing it naturally

Designing a natural play area

Leaders in play research, Play England, work to promote good practice in the development of play spaces across the country. Latest research from Play England suggests that successful play areas are those that encourage children and young people to use their imagination and to explore their surroundings.

To help you develop and plan your play space Play England has created some principles that everyone planning a play space should follow.

A play area that enhances the local environment

Make the play area bespoke - it should fit in with and enhance the local surroundings. Survey the site and identify any features that you should build around or any significant historic aspects of the site.

Think location, location, location

Your play area should be in a place that children are naturally drawn to. Ensure that the space is away from dangerous roads, noise and pollution.

Make it natural

Include natural elements in the space such as mounds, hollows, boulders, logs and ditches. Other natural elements like earth and water are also good to include and encourages children to explore.

Something for everyone

Provide a range of play experiences so that children of all ages and backgrounds can find something stimulating for them. The space should encourage creative and imaginative play. It should also offer a space for parents and carers to socialise, such as seating.

Ask Yourself?

Does the idea fit-in with the current environment?

Does the play space reflect local history?

Is the space somewhere that children will gather?

Does the play space encourage children to use their imagination?

Is there something for everyone - disabled and non-disabled, babies, children and young people as well as parents and carers?

Have local people and children been consulted and involved in the planning?

Have you included sustainable or recycled materials in the design?

Play spaces for all abilities

Play areas should be designed for disabled and non-disabled children and parents or carers. The space needs to be accessible by all. See www.kids.org.uk for more information about play facilities for disabled children.

Have you asked your neighbours?

Play areas should be welcomed by local communities not imposed. This is where consultation is paramount and local people, including the children, should be given a chance to have their say.

A play space for all ages

Is the area for all ages? Groups should be encouraged to make their play area available to a wide range of age groups and not limited to a particular age group, the spaces should try to cater for babies, children and teenagers.

A space that is challenging

Play spaces should encourage children to take risks and challenges in play. Although these should never be to the extent that they cause serious injury, play areas should create excitement and present a challenge.


Including recycled or sustainable materials

Play areas should be designed and constructed using recycled or sustainable materials. You should also think about how you would maintain a project that includes sustainable or recycled materials.

A play space that grows with the children

Play spaces evolve and change as children grow and to ensure your play space is well used in to the future you should try to introduce '**slack spaces**' - space within the play area that have no pre-defined use. Slack spaces can then be used to meet children's needs as they grow.

You may already have planned the kind of play area you'd like to see. If you haven't included the above principles in your planning we'd advise you to go over your plans again and think about where you could incorporate some of the above—doing so will mean your play space will be a well used local resource going into the future.

 All of this advice can be found in Play England's 'Design for Play: A guide to creating successful play spaces' a copy of which can be downloaded at: www.teachernet.gov.uk/publications

Elements of Natural Play Rogate Appeal for a Playground (RAP), Rogate, Hampshire.

A good example of a Community Spaces play area that has incorporated some of the guidance from Play England is the Rogate Appeal for a Playground project in South East England.

The RAP group installed a play area that has both traditional and natural play elements, with a slide coming down the side of a mound, 'slack spaces' and areas for parents and carers to socialise.

You can find out more about RAP and other Community Spaces projects via the 'Projects' section of the website:
www.community-spaces.org.uk

Information

For more information about creating play areas for children with disabilities please visit:
www.kids.org.uk