

Glossary of Terms

Adventure playground: A free to use play setting, staffed by playworkers, where children can play with friends in a purpose-built environment.

Free play: Spontaneous play that children engage in outside of structured activities or prescribed environments.

Play community: This includes the formal play sector (see below) but also extends to academia, play street organisers, museums etc.

Play provider: A group or individual that works to provide play services. This could range from free stay and play groups to commercial soft play centres.

Play sector: This describes organisations that have play provision or development as their core aim, for example a local play association, play group or adventure playground.

Play streets: A play street is a resident-led initiative supported by local councils. It enables residents to close their road to through traffic for several hours on a regular basis (weekly/fortnightly/monthly), to create a space for children to play on their doorstep as well as an opportunity for neighbours to socialise.



This play strategy was produced by London Play on behalf of Lewisham Council and Lewisham's residents.

Visit [londonplay.org.uk](https://www.londonplay.org.uk) to find out more about our charity's work.

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1

Young Person's Foreword

“Every child has the right to rest, relax, play and to take part in cultural and creative activities.”

Article 31–UN Convention on the Rights of the Child

The great outdoors. The original learning space for children. A place to develop young thoughts and grow together as individuals and as a community. A beautiful place of make believe, wild imagination and evolving friendships. A place that needs protecting by adults at all costs.

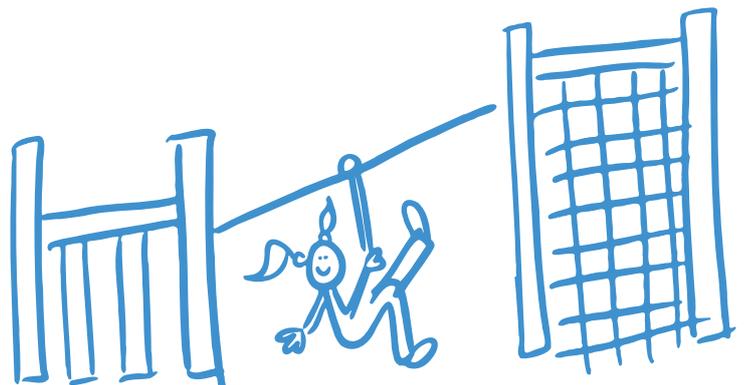
There are 190 learning days of school each year. Playing is a key part of education and learning is a key part of play. Playing outside with friends in good quality fresh air allows you to be happy and free.

Encouraging individual and team sports with excellent equipment helps to foster gamesmanship and sportsmanship. I am the London Youth Games Ambassador for Lewisham, a role that I am enjoying very much.

I want to play my part in making this borough more active and playful and look forward to meeting fellow young people in parks and play areas to discuss how to make sustainable improvements to these precious spaces. A comprehensive play strategy for children and young people in Lewisham is a great start, with the aim of having fun and upholding the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Emmerson Sutton, aged 15

London Youth Games Ambassador
Lewisham





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edf energy
London Eye
Sponsorship & Marketing

1



2

Councillor's Foreward



1. Play is crucial to children's development and wellbeing. Play is of course not something that a local council "provides" – children will play in all circumstances. But we can help to ensure local services take into account the importance of children's opportunities to play. We can also strive to lead the community to recognise play's importance and support a positive environment for it. I'm proud of the commitment we have made to:

1. Lewisham Labour manifesto (May 2022)

*"Launch a ground-breaking play strategy, to support children's quality of life, well-being and development, creating a new long term investment programme to refurbish or replace all Lewisham's play areas."*¹

2. This document sets in motion a five-year plan to put Lewisham on track to be a leading borough on play, with its importance for children and families recognised in everything we do.
3. As any child in a playground understands, not everything can be done at once. The strategy sets a long-term ambition, and outlines what can be tackled in the short to medium term. Some of our early priorities naturally focus on parks and playgrounds. But over time we want to be more ambitious than that, considering ways in which we can make the wider environment – streets, buildings and public space – as child and play-friendly as it can be.
4. We have developed this strategy in conversation with children and community. It is however only a first step, and we look forward to continuing the conversation as we go further.

Councillor Chris Barnham

Lewisham Cabinet Member for Children and Young People and Community Safety

"Play builds the kind of free and easy, try it out, do it yourself character that our future needs."

James L. Hymes Jr.

Author and specialist on child-rearing



3

About this Play Strategy

Play is an innate and universal human activity, regardless of ability, gender, ethnicity, or any other characteristic. It begins when we are babies and is at its most beneficial in childhood. How each individual plays is as unique as their fingerprint, so defining play is tricky. However, there are broad characteristics: it is a creative act, sometimes interior (e.g. imaginary worlds), and sometimes exterior (e.g. playing adventure games in the woods with friends). It is pleasurable, it can require a bit of pluck, yields self-learning and an understanding of the world around us. Often it has no end product. Play also gives children the opportunity to recognise and manage risk, a crucial skill for life; and develops social skills and builds confidence. Play, like art and music, is a process of expression limited only by our imaginations. Play also has a role in adult lives, particularly as an aide to better mental and physical health. In this play strategy, play is conceived of as a lifelong pleasure.

During children's early years, play is fundamental to a child's development and learning and it is a crucial factor in determining later academic outcomes for children. It is not just physical. It involves cognitive, imaginative, creative, emotional, communicative, and social aspects. It is the main way that children explore, experiment, and understand. Post-pandemic, it is more important than ever that children have as much space, time, and opportunity to play as possible. In Lewisham there is a focus on developing early communication, language, and literacy, as research has consistently shown that these are key aspects of closing the gap in outcomes for children. Across Lewisham residents enjoy their local parks. Families of younger children can find playgrounds that feature fun for under 5s set within a natural environment that children can enjoy exploring in all weathers. In local libraries, young residents and families start with Rhyme Time, Baby Bounce, and follow the opportunities that play offers throughout life with Summer Reading Challenges, arts and craft workshops, board games, modelling, and much more. Adult Learning Lewisham also offers a range of Family Learning courses which include activities such as Sensory Make and Play, Messy Play, Fun with Music

and rhymes, Arts and Crafts, Pottery, Cooking for Fun, Dance and Yoga etc. All of these are delivered across Lewisham in adult learning centres and community venues such as children's centres and schools.

This play strategy is launched in the same year that Lewisham was named Borough of Culture by the Mayor of London. This unifying honour celebrates the borough's history and rich diversity through public arts, music, dance and more. Play is likewise a universal creative act. From a baby's first joyful gurgle to the colourful storytelling of Aboriginal art, a playful mindset widens our creative potential. Indeed, David Hockney, perhaps Britain's greatest living artist, said, "People tend to forget that play is serious." It is serious and Lewisham is serious about play.

This play strategy aims to highlight opportunities for play in the borough, reflecting residents' views gathered during a month of public engagement and consultation. It will set in motion a five year plan that will put Lewisham on track to be a borough leader on play. Not everything can be achieved at once, but the strategy is a mechanism to set out what can be done within a short to medium term, and to take stock of opportunities and barriers for going further.

“Children need the freedom and time to play. Play is not a luxury. Play is a necessity.”

Kay Redfield Jamison

Contemporary American Professor of Psychiatry

To avoid this strategy running into hundreds of pages it has been necessary to limit its scope to the everyday places children play in their neighbourhood. It does not extend to include other expressions of play that take place in Lewisham every day, such as:

- Play street sessions
- Soft play centres or commercial play facilities
- Stay & play or baby & toddler groups
- Play in schools
- Play in children centres
- Play on screens
- Non-designated or incidental play spaces such as scraps of undeveloped land or shopping precincts (although play undoubtedly occurs there too)

The council has an aspiration in this borough to make its streets safe for children to play in, envisioning a place where children can play where they live and go to school, socialise and can move about these places with as much independence as possible. Council initiatives such as parking and sustainable transport improvements, cycle loan schemes and free cycle lessons contribute to creating a pleasant and balanced travel environment that children, along with all Lewisham residents, benefit from.

Play street sessions are now an everyday part of London life. Residents work together and with their councils to pause traffic for a few hours each week or month for children to play on their doorstep and for neighbours to get to know each other better. Lewisham supports residents to set up regular play streets via a dedicated webpage with an online application process. For more information visit:

www.lewisham.gov.uk/myservices/roads-and-transport/closing-a-road-for-a-play-street-event

That close cousin of play – sport, is also a significant part of Lewisham’s play offer that will get its own report soon. In its many parks and multi-use games spaces and outdoor gyms, the borough’s residents enjoy resources for keeping active and healthy with opportunities to jog, swim, kick or throw a ball and work out in the open air.

To find out more about parks in Lewisham you can find the councils Parks and Open Spaces Strategy 2020-2025 here:

<https://councilmeetings.lewisham.gov.uk/documents/s73570/Parks%20and%20Open%20Space%20Strategy%202020.pdf>

We also acknowledge that a lot of play happens in the home, so in Appendix 3 you’ll find 20 brand new play ideas to try out where you live.

Although this strategy doesn’t include in detail all the ways Lewisham plays, the intention is that it shows the council’s ambition to work toward growing a borough where obstacles to children playing freely are identified and altered or removed.

In writing this play strategy we have aimed to keep the language simple and accessible. However, through necessity some play jargon has snuck in. A brief glossary is included at the end of the strategy to explain a handful of terms that might be unfamiliar to some readers.





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Lewisham's Vision for Play

- All Lewisham children will have a variety of supervised and unsupervised places for play within walking distance of their home.
- These local play spaces will be safe, accessible, and well-maintained.
- In future, new, or renovated play spaces will feature considered designs developed in consultation with the community and characterised by bespoke and exciting features.
- Lewisham's children and young people, their families and community will play a key role in the development of local play spaces.
- Lewisham's parks and green spaces, as well as libraries and Adult Learning Lewisham, will promote play as a key offer.
- Lewisham is a proudly diverse borough, and all play opportunities should reflect this. Providers of play services and facilities will ensure their offer is welcoming, engaging, and accessible for all, particularly local children and young people, including disabled children and children from minority groups.

“People tend to forget that play is serious.”

G. K. Chesterton
British author





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Aims and Objectives of this Play Strategy

This play strategy aims to capture, in a single document, Lewisham Council's existing play offer and its vision for the future of play in the borough. It demonstrates the council's commitment to play for all its residents. To achieve this and sustain it over the coming years there are nine simple aims and objectives the council will work towards.

Aims

1. To oversee the development of a high quality, accessible play service.
2. To ensure that all residents have play facilities within walking distance.
3. To make sure that all play developments are created in consultation with users.

Objectives

1. Create a Play Advocacy Group that identifies budgets and reports monthly on play strategy aims.
2. To create a holistic cross-cutting approach to play, coordinated across all Lewisham Council departments.
3. Develop a consultation model which can be applied to all new developments.
4. Develop a cost-benefit analysis plan which outlines the most cost-effective way of managing adventure playgrounds.
5. Add recommendations for creating play opportunities to existing council guidance for new developers.
6. To seek and take up external funding that improves access and opportunity for play in the borough.

*You can't use up creativity.
The more you use, the more
you have."*

Maya Angelou
Writer and poet, 1928–2014



6

Why Play is Important

Children will play, if given the time and space. It is within local, regional, and national government's purview, in line with U.N. Convention on the Rights of the Child, to take account of the importance of facilitating that and enriching play. Those with public platforms such as local councillors should strive to secure recognition of play's importance in all the actions of the council and its partners. Play should not be an optional extra – it should be at the forefront of all considerations and plans that concern children's wellbeing.

Research has proven that play is important for a child's healthy development. Play makes crucial contributions to language and communication development, as well as vital cognitive and emotional processes.¹ The benefits children gain from play are vast, but include:

- **Cognitive development skills:** Problem solving, idea creation etc.
- **Behavioural development:** Cooperation, turn-taking, giving, and following instructions.
- **Relationship building:** Teamworking, making friends, sharing through play.
- **Building confidence and self-esteem:** Resilience and challenging themselves.

1. Vygotsky, L.S. (1978) *Mind in society: The development of higher psychological processes* (London: Harvard University Press)

2. Steptoe A, Butler N (1996) *Sports participation and emotional wellbeing in adolescents*. (Lancet)

3. For example, Berk, L. E., Mann, T. D., & Ogan, A. T. (2006). *Make-Believe Play: Wellspring for Development of Self-Regulation* (Oxford University Press)

4. Whitebread, D (2012) *The importance of play* (Cambridge University)

5. *Ibid.*

6. Issy Cole-Hamilton (2012). *The Power of Play: an evidence base* (Play Scotland)

7. *Ibid.*

These skills have a huge impact in adulthood. As children get older, play supports their understanding of the world and their ability to think through ideas as an adult – essential for study, work, and relationships.

Play is also proven to be extremely beneficial to psychological wellbeing and mental health in children.² Through play, children develop their emotional intelligence; learn how to express their feelings, build self-esteem, and understand emotional aspects of life. The concept of play helping children through stressful situations is supported by a large volume of psychological and physiological research.³

Mental health benefits also stem from children making friends and playing with others. These relationships are vital. In a similar vein, parent/child play helps secure family bonds and enhances a child's feeling of being loved and secure with their parents or carers. In the Cambridge University report

The Importance of Play Dr David Whitebread states: "playful children are securely attached emotionally to significant adults."⁴

A range of evidence has indicated that playfulness in children is both an indication of mental well-being and is supported by it.⁵ There is increasing evidence that spending time in natural environments can help children who are regularly exposed to stressful events to be less anxious and have a stronger sense of self-worth.⁶

The physical activity of play also provides multiple health benefits. Physical play throughout childhood helps build strong bones, muscle strength and lung capacity. It also helps to develop fine and gross motor skills and coordination. Play is an important and enjoyable form of exercise for children of all ages; and active play is the most common form of physical activity for children outside school.⁷ Active play therefore plays a vital role in helping children achieve a healthy

“The world of pretend play is one in which children can be free to express themselves, their ideas, their emotions, and their fantastic visions of themselves, of other people, and of the world.”



Sandra Russ
Psychologist

level of physical activity and maintain a healthy weight. There is also some evidence that if children are physically active when they are young, they are more likely to adopt healthy lifestyles as they grow up.⁸

Screen play has its place too in a varied ‘play diet’ with its social and creative benefits as well as giving children the opportunity to master skills and understanding that are crucial in the modern workplace.

Playing with words in seemingly puerile sequences builds incredibly effective language, logical, and expressive skills. Participating in storytelling develops imagination and creativity in the young, and recall and emotional exchange in the elderly (e.g. Lewisham’s Story-Friends to combat social isolation in older people through sharing stories and books). Lewisham recognises the power that promoting a love of books and reading can add to the play experience of residents throughout life.

Play deprivation (not playing enough) denies children experiences that are essential to their development. Those affected may be both biologically and socially disabled.⁹

Unfortunately, children suffering like this do not simply miss out on the benefits of play but can also suffer abnormalities in their neurological development.¹⁰

Research has proven that children living in urban environments suffer from play deprivation more than those living outside of cities.¹¹ This is enhanced for those in situations of poverty as they are likely to have other priorities which they are focused on such as housing, financial worries etc, all of which make it more difficult to make time, space or opportunity for play.

However, it is important to note that some of these negative impacts can be partially combated through the provision of public play opportunities,¹² underlining the importance of developing a play strategy for Lewisham that maximises the opportunities for all children and young people to experience the benefits of play.

Play deprivation is not limited to those children experiencing poverty. Children who are over-supervised and over-scheduled may not have the independence or freedom to play in a way that brings long-term benefits.¹³ Studies show that even in the more affluent households in cities, many children are suffering from play deprivation due to a lack of play space and perceptions of environmental risk.¹⁴

Play is important because it is integral for child development, psychological wellbeing, and physical health. Play is sometimes viewed as the antithesis of work, but play is the work of children. In all its rich variety, access to play will enable children to develop essential life skills and reach their potential. Coming out of the pandemic, many children have missed out on their usual play opportunities and all the benefits that come with them. Prior to this, access to play was already declining due to economic, social, and environmental factors. These include increasing urbanisation, stress in family life and education systems placing greater emphasis on testing against ever-narrower outcomes. Right now, providing play opportunities for children in London is more important than ever. They are needed to enhance mental and physical health, and ensure they enjoy all the developmental benefits play offers.

8. Issy Cole-Hamilton (2012). *The Power of Play: an evidence base* (Play Scotland)

9. Play Wales (2003). *Play Deprivation*

10. Whitebread, D (2012). *The importance of play* (Cambridge University)

11. Lester S and Russell W (2010) *Children’s Right to Play: An Examination of the Importance of Play in the Lives of Children Worldwide* (Bernard van Leer Foundation)

12. *Ibid.*

13. Veitech et al (2006). *Where do children play? A qualitative study of parents’ perceptions of influences on children’s active free-play* (Pubmed)

14. *Ibid.*

7

The Story of Play in Lewisham

Play is widely acknowledged as being crucial for healthy child development. Yet sadly, its importance is rarely reflected in political decision-making, particularly in this country. The UK ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1991. This includes Article 31, the right of every child ‘to rest and leisure, to engage in play and recreational activities appropriate to the age of the child.’ However, some 21 years later this right is yet to be enshrined in UK law.

There have been some positive developments since then; most notably in 2007 with the publication of the Children’s Plan. Marking a new level of commitment to play nationally, it announced the government’s intention to fund local authorities to build or upgrade 3,500 playgrounds and to publish the first ever national play strategy. This committed more than £235m to a three-year play building programme and set out a vision that by 2020, “children and young people will be able to access world-class play and recreation spaces near where they live, within communities that are child-friendly.”

During this period, every local authority in London developed a play strategy; and Lewisham was one of 122 ‘Playbuilder’ councils to be awarded £1m in government funding, with plans to develop 20 new natural play areas. The council was also awarded £700k from the Lottery to support play. This was real progress!

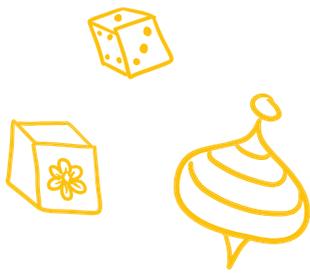
But this positive trajectory was short-lived. In 2010 the national Play Pathfinder and Playbuilder schemes were among the first sacrifices to be offered up as the incoming coalition government sought to implement its much-vaunted austerity drive; and set the tone for play for the next decade.

Since then, both Wales and (more recently) Scotland have imposed a Play Sufficiency Duty on local authorities to assess and secure sufficient play opportunities for children in their area. But in England, unlike

education or social care, play provision is not a statutory duty. Instead, many councils view it as an ‘optional extra’, making play services and facilities highly vulnerable to cuts. Inevitably, as local authority budgets were slashed dramatically, hundreds of playgrounds and play services have been downsized or closed across the country. Lewisham alone has endured budget cuts of more than 40% in the past decade and faces having to make another £40m in savings over the next three years.

Despite these financial pressures, Lewisham has staunchly resisted diminishing its play offer and will continue to invest in this sector. To protect and sustain its youth service and adventure playgrounds, it was one of the first boroughs to pioneer a staff-led mutual model to take over these services. As detailed elsewhere in this document, there are challenges; but while in other boroughs adventure playgrounds have closed permanently, Lewisham is one of the top five London boroughs for adventure play as it continues to keep the adventure play flame alive.

These past five years have been far from smooth sailing, with ongoing cuts and rising crises in social care, climate change and housing demanding ever greater focus from local authorities. Play moved further down the priority list for many. Then, as the coronavirus pandemic hit in 2020, children playing with their friends was literally made illegal. Play advocates were rightly in despair,



“In my day we would leave the house on a Saturday morning on our Choppers; they wouldn’t see us again for 36 or sometimes even 72 hours, we’d return starving, dirty, with a bag of comics gathered from far parts of east London with tales to tell.”

Jonathan Ross
TV presenter

but two years on, the pandemic has proven to be something of a double-edged sword. For while it placed unprecedented pressure on families, schools, charities, businesses, and government, perhaps one of the few silver linings is that, as children were stopped from playing together, many, many more people woke up to the vital importance of play. The profound impacts of play withdrawal are only now becoming clear in terms of the toll on young people’s mental and physical health, happiness, and future prospects. Wider society is finally understanding that play is a serious business.

So as we emerge from the worst of the pandemic, by committing to this strategy, Lewisham Council seeks to demonstrate its understanding that play is not a ‘nice to have’ extra. It is crucial. Despite all the challenges ahead, an investment in play is an investment in a strong and sustainable future for the borough.

Events in Lewisham

Annual play events in Lewisham include National Play Day, which takes place on the first Wednesday in August. The Early Years Alliance also has a National Week of Play in June.

Family Information Service

Lewisham’s Family Information Service is accessible via the council website, where you can get further information about play services near you.



8

Illustrated Lewisham Play Maps

- 1 Pepys Park
- 2 Deptford Park
- 3 Folkestone Gardens
- 4 Sayes Court Park
- 5 Evelyn Green
- 6 Mary Ann Gardens
- 7 Ferranti Park
- 8 Charlottenburg Park
- 9 Fordham Park Play Area
- 10 Margaret McMillan Park
- 11 Eckington Gardens
- 12 Hatcham Gardens
- 13 Telegraph Hill Park
- 14 Luxmore Gardens
- 15 Broadway Fields
- 16 Brookmill Park
- 17 Cornmill Gardens Playground
- 18 Hilly Fields
- 19 Blythe Hill Fields
- 20 Ravensbourne Park Gardens
- 21 Ladywell Fields
- 22 Lewisham Park
- 23 Manor Park
- 25 Edith Nesbitt Gardens
- 26 Mountsfield Park
- 27 Horniman Gardens
- 28 Horniman Triangle Playground

- 29 Baxter Field
- 30 Sydenham Wells Park
- 31 Mayow Park
- 32 Home Park
- 33 Southend Park
- 34 Bellingham Green Children's Park
- 35 Beckenham Place Park
- 36 Forster Memorial Park
- 37 Downham Woodland Walk
- 38 Durham Hill
- 39 Northbrook Park
- 40 Grove Park Library Gardens
- 41 Chinbrook Meadows

- 42 Bridgehouse Meadows
- 43 Blackheath Common
- 44 Frensbury Gardens
- 45 Riverview Walk and River Pool Linear Park
- 46 Kirkdale Green
- 47 Richard MacVicar Adventure Playground
- 48 Honor Oak Adventure Playground

- 49 Ladywell Fields Adventure Playground
- 50 Home Park Adventure Playground
- 51 Dumps Adventure Playground
- 52 Foxborough Gardens

- 53 Plough Way/Saint Georges Square
- 54 Longshore Pepys
- 55 Batavia Mews
- 56 Brockley Station Forecourt
- 57 St Norbert Green

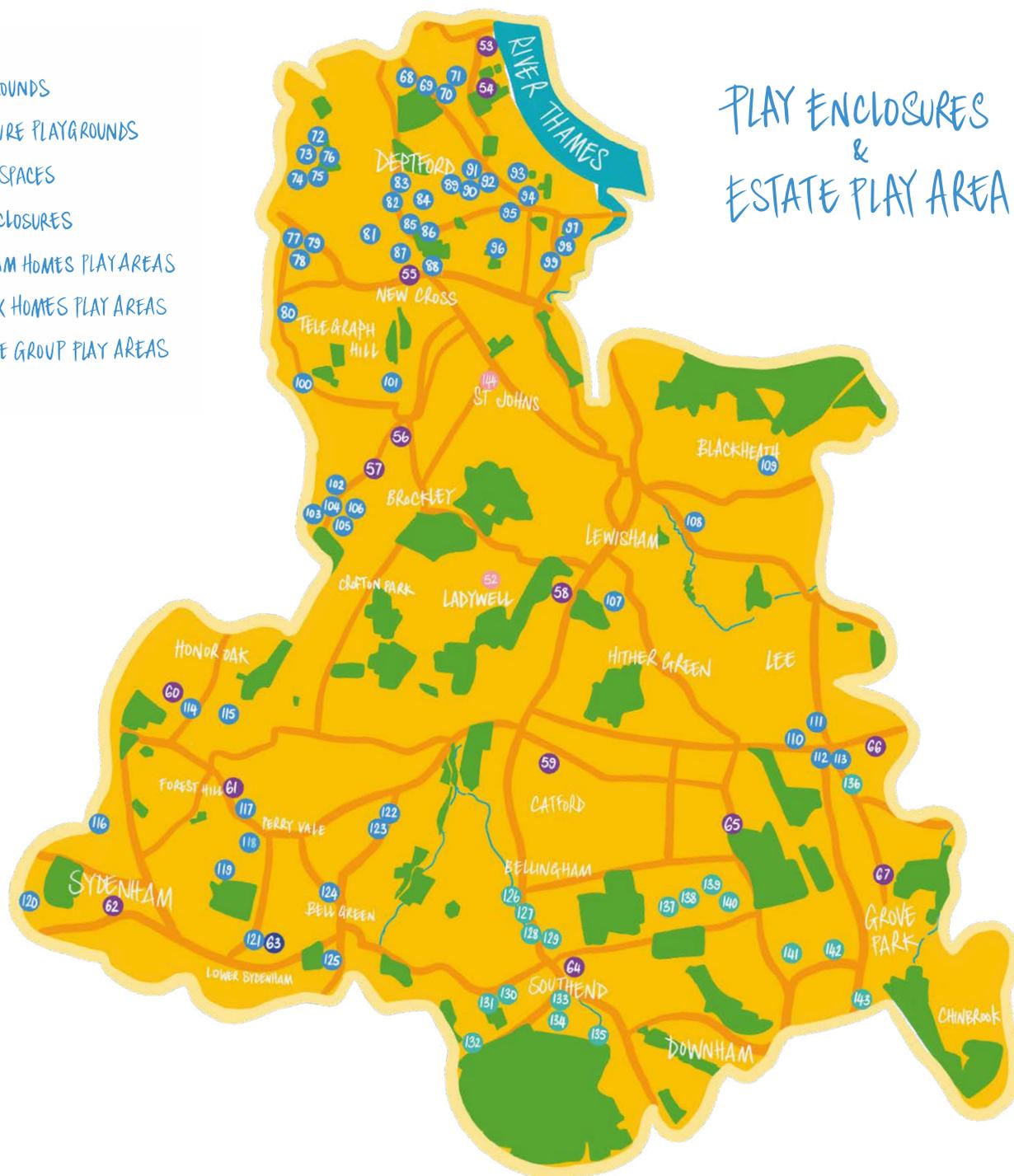
- 58 Lewisham War Memorial Gardens
- 59 Culverley Green
- 60 Rocombe Crescent Triangle
- 61 Westbourne Drive Enclosure



PLAYGROUNDS,
GREEN SPACES
& ADVENTURE
PLAYGROUNDS

- PLAYGROUNDS
- ADVENTURE PLAYGROUNDS
- GREEN SPACES
- PLAY ENCLOSURES
- LEWISHAM HOMES PLAY AREAS
- PHOENIX HOMES PLAY AREAS
- PINNACLE GROUP PLAY AREAS

PLAY ENCLOSURES & ESTATE PLAY AREAS



- | | | | | |
|--|---------------------------------------|---------------------------|-----------------------------------|---|
| 62 Beaulieu Avenue Green | 79 Gerard House | 97 Farrer House Kickabout | 116 Sydenham Hill | 131 Oslac Road Odds and Evens |
| 63 Addington Grove | 80 Edmond Court | 98 Farrer House | 117 Valentine Court | 132 Rokell House |
| 64 Beachborough Road | 81 Robert Lowe Close | 99 Browne House | 118 Radcot Point | 133 Bruner House Play Areas and MUGA |
| 65 Verdant Lane | 82 Milton Court | 100 Fern Court | 119 Clairville Point | 134 Bournside Gardens |
| 66 Woodyates Road | 83 Berwick Gardens | 101 Crossway Court | 120 Cambria House/Tarquín House | 135 Beverley House MUGA |
| 67 Exford Road/Burnt Ash Hill Triangle | 84 Milton Court Two/Woodpecker Square | 102 Turnham House | 121 Hazel Grove | 136 Corona Road |
| 68 Pomona House | 85 Ludwick Gardens | 103 Bessingham Walk | 122 Oakham Close | 137 Scarlett/Hexal Play Areas & Outdoor Gym |
| 69 Bence House | 86 Primrose Walk | 104 Barville Close | 123 Welland Court | 138 Gilton/Hexal |
| 70 Crandley Court | 87 Goodwood Road | 105 Kentwell Close | 124 Ardley Close | 139 Boundfield/Crutchley |
| 71 Argosy House | 88 Fenton House | 106 Skipton House | 125 Bell Green Lane | 140 Evans/Crutchley |
| 72 Camber House | 89 Lapwing Tower | 107 Benden House | 126 Randisbourne Gardens | 141 Shroffold Road |
| 73 Otford House | 90 Marine Tower | 108 Rawlinson House | 127 Duster House | 142 Reigate Road Play Area and MUGA |
| 74 Upnall House | 91 Grebe Court | 109 Prendergast | 128 Passfields Play Area and MUGA | 143 Wydeville Manor |
| 75 Lullingstone House | 92 Kittiwake Court | 110 Wildwood Close | 129 Falklands House MUGA | 144 Clare Estate |
| 76 Hever House | 93 Czar Street | 111 Mayfield | 130 Dunfield Gardens | |
| 77 Romney Close | 94 Grenville House | 112 Baring Road | | |
| 78 Palmer/Hammond House | 95 Mandarin Court | 113 Ashlee | | |
| | 96 Addey House | 114 Hamilton Lodge | | |
| | | 115 Drakes Court | | |

9

Lewisham Playground Audit Summary

Play happens across the borough within spaces designed specifically for play, but also in all its public spaces. Creating a public realm sympathetic to children's play, a child-friendly borough, is a broad ambition – but it is an ambition Lewisham council wants to pursue.

This strategy, however, looks at those deliberate play spaces available in Lewisham which are provided (in the main) by or for the council. This ranges from staffed adventure playgrounds to pocket parks where play is an expected activity. This first audit focussed on Lewisham's parks and open spaces and provides a benchmark for improvement in play spaces that will support future development across Lewisham. A second audit looks exclusively at the borough's staffed adventure playgrounds, and can be found in detail in Appendix 1. But it is acknowledged that play happens daily in other public spaces such as our public and community libraries across the whole of the borough.

For the consultation element of this strategy, we spoke to 902 adults and children. The vast majority said they appreciate and regularly use the borough's play spaces.

The audit of 50 Lewisham parks was undertaken over three weeks by the London Play team. For each space they recorded the following information:

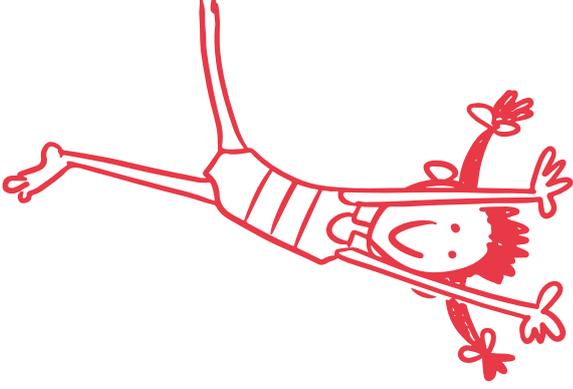
1. Description of the play space.
2. The age range at which it is primarily aimed.
3. The facilities available.
4. The condition of the play space/equipment.
5. Any incidental/informal play opportunities.
6. Suggested improvements to the space.

The detailed audit has been submitted to Lewisham Parks services to follow up on. Lewisham's parks enjoy robust and regular inspection to ensure safety and upkeep, but the

audit found areas for improvement. London Play's audit team made a series of recommendations for the council to consider.

London Play's audit team recommendations:

- Provide more details on signage to advertise existing play opportunities.
- Encourage an early years 'bike culture' in playgrounds for under-fives.
- Provide more opportunities for under 12s and under 16s, e.g. BMX tracks.
- Widen play opportunities to include river-banks, forest school activities, nature trails and incorporate more natural play elements.
- Celebrate popular or successful playgrounds and their play offer via social media.
- Expand the Mayor's water point initiative scheme to keep young people hydrated and reduce plastic bottle use.
- Add more 'loose parts' to playgrounds and sandpits with dedicated storage areas (e.g. pots and pans, bits of wood and rubber tyres). This facilitates self-led, inclusive and shared creative play.
- Provide basic structures to support youth fitness such as pull-up bars and wooden rings.
- Increase adventure playground provision – offering self-led play opportunities for local young people along with inspiring mentors and role models in staff.
- Develop opportunities in existing large green spaces to cater for observational or thoughtful activities such as nature study, reading and exploring.



“In the spring, at the end of the day, you should smell like dirt.”

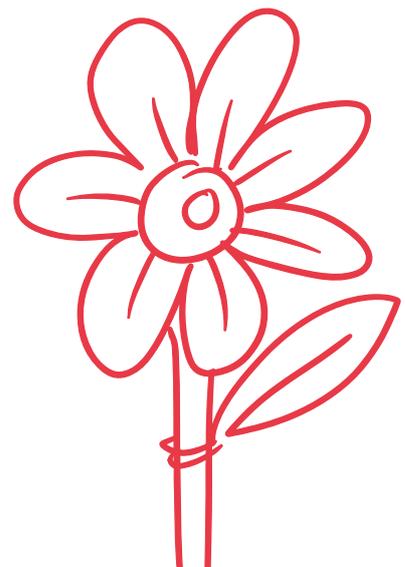
Margaret Atwood
Canadian author

Bright ideas from young people collected during consultation sessions:

- Baskets of balls: place a basket or bucket in play areas, for the community to donate pre-loved balls to be enjoyed by all.
- Canopies: more protection from rain and sun with covered areas and benches.
- Phone box library: place old phone boxes near play areas so local people can exchange pre-loved books and toys.
- The park is now so well used by families and children it feels like a much safer place; there is organic surveillance of what is happening in the space and there has been a significant drop in the anti-social behaviour including dog fouling, fly tipping and drug dealing seen in years past.

In May 2022 a case study (presented in full at Appendix 4) on a successful community and council collaboration demonstrated a commitment to children’s play through the development of a more adventurous play space in Luxmore Gardens. Using Section 106 funds, a steering group was able to attract match funding which enabled:

- The new play space in Luxmore Gardens has completely transformed the use of the park, creating a larger and more engaging play area. It has become a destination park as opposed to a cut-through with a tired and limited playground.
- The park is buzzing after school and at weekends and provides an engaging space for younger children during the school day when it is often frequented by childminders and local nurseries. Now children over 6 years old and up to 12 regularly use the play space, as well as older teenagers using the table tennis table and hanging out in the park.





10 Adventure Playgrounds

An adventure playground, at its heart, belongs to the children who use it. They are places for children to test themselves, be loud, messy, silly, creative... all the stuff that kids excel in. They are ever-changing landscapes that accommodate all types of play.

In these unique places, children learn to assess and manage risks. In doing so, they develop self-esteem, confidence, and resilience: 'I can do this'. Adventure playgrounds provide an environment where children can experiment and push their boundaries: try and fail and try again.

Adventure playgrounds provide a natural space for kids who might not have a garden or even a balcony to play outside on. They give children the experience of the elements – earth, air, fire, and water – in way that municipal parks do not.

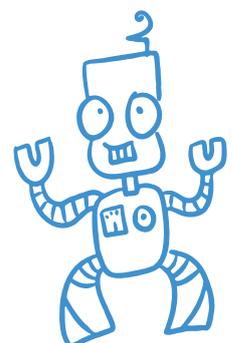
Adventure playgrounds are often located in economically deprived neighbourhoods where children can have difficult or complex lives. An adventure playground offers children a safe haven, with trusted adults who listen to and are interested in the children as people and the ideas they bring. Playworkers do not work to any agenda or specific outcomes; they are interested only in supporting the child, on the child's own terms. They are therefore often better at engaging kids who are marginalised than staff at other, more formal settings.

The goal of an adventure playworker is to facilitate children's play, not to direct it.

“Play gives children a chance to practice what they are learning.”

Fred Rogers

American children's television host



11

Adventure Playgrounds Audit Summary

Along with the national umbrella organisation Play England, London Play considers adventure play to be the gold standard in the field of play provision. This view is supported by the huge popularity of Lewisham's adventure playgrounds in London Play's public consultation for this strategy.

London Play commissioned its sister organisation London Play Design to audit Lewisham's current adventure playground provision and provide a cost-benefit analysis of different funding options.

What follows is an abbreviated executive summary. The detailed analysis can be found in the full text/Appendix 1.

Executive summary

Key recommendations in detail

1. Intent

As one of the top five boroughs for adventure play in the capital (only Islington, Southwark, Hackney, and Lambeth have more adventure playground sites), Lewisham Council should make a public statement and/or produce a formal undertaking to recognise adventure play as the gold standard for children's play, and commit to keeping its adventure playgrounds open, adequately staffed/operated and in good repair.

2. Staffing

Lewisham Council should consider various options including in-house or commission one or several organisations to provide adventure play at all adventure playground sites during core opening hours (after school, Saturdays and during school holidays). Staff from the organisation(s) in question should hold or work towards playwork or related-qualifications and facilitate all aspects of adventure play. This includes insurance for staff to carry out play structure maintenance and construction as well as den building and other adventure play activities with children and young people.

3. Sustainability

Lewisham Council should issue a tender for an appropriate site management organisation (ideally competent in adventure play or playwork, play safety regulations, design, construction and engineering, community liaison as well as procuring sources of low-cost labour) to increase the sustainability of its adventure playground sites and drastically reduce their maintenance costs.

Increasing sustainability would involve:

- a) Working with the site management organisation to devise a phased, costed design master plan to reduce the number of large telegraph pole play structures (and their corresponding significant repair bills) over a period of five years to a number that can be maintained by user groups with a set minimal yearly budget. Reducing the number of large wooden structures would also substantially increase the play value of sites in line with Play England guidance.
- b) Working with the site management organisation to maximise the number of community groups that use the sites outside of core adventure playground opening hours (e.g. schools, youth work providers, tenants' associations, community groups etc.) in



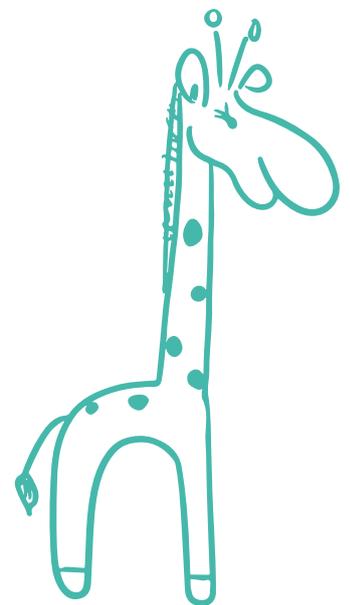
return for a contribution (monetary, labour, promotional/acknowledgements or in kind) towards the upkeep of the playgrounds.

c) Working with the site management organisation to carry out essential repairs to keep the sites safe and secure, in line with reports by independently-commissioned play safety inspectors. Where the nature of the repairs allows, they should be done with low-cost labour such as teams of corporate volunteers or probationers under the supervision of the site management organisation, to further reduce maintenance costs.

d) Working with the site management organisation to introduce a commercial premises hire programme (outside of core opening hours) such as children's parties, photo shoots or corporate team building days. Funds raised by the programme should be ringfenced for adventure playground site maintenance and the development of new features and equipment.

“Play is the highest form of research”

Albert Einstein
Physicist





12 21st Century Adventure Playgrounds

Lewisham Council has an ambitious mind set when it comes to play and is open to exploring new ideas to keep its adventure playgrounds sustainable. Recognising these valuable community spaces as locations for new partnerships to extend their range of services is part of this effort. The Richard MacVicar Adventure Playground (RMV) offers a recent example of innovation through collaboration.

Climate Home is a temporary creative space where young people in Lewisham gather with the community to build the future they want. It is a space co-designed, built and led by young people, where the community decides what matters and discover ways to act upon it.

Climate Home was created for the Lewisham Borough of Culture 2022 and is based at the Richard MacVicar Adventure Playground. Proposals include enhancing the indoor and outdoor space, as well as community engagement to deliver a new model of community space: a local cultural asset whose programme is shaped by residents and local organisations and where ideas and innovation can take root and grow. Climate Home will put the unique, vital experiences and imaginations of young black people and working-class communities in Lewisham at the heart of local culture and climate justice; using creativity as a tool to facilitate local solutions to the global climate crisis. The proposal aims to create a more sustainable and accessible space for residents in the heart of the Evelyn Ward community.

Concurrently across all Lewisham adventure playgrounds, the structures at RMV have been continually evolving since it was founded. Over the last decade, due to challenges with funding and in the context of austerity, timber structures at RMV have reduced in number but those remaining present a significant maintenance challenge to the local authority. They are in urgent need of adaptation, removal or repair.

There is a desire from stakeholders for adaptations to consider long-term maintenance costs and to take the opportunity to increase the variety of play opportunities within the landscape.

“You can discover more about a person in an hour of play than in a year of conversation”

Plato
Greek philosopher

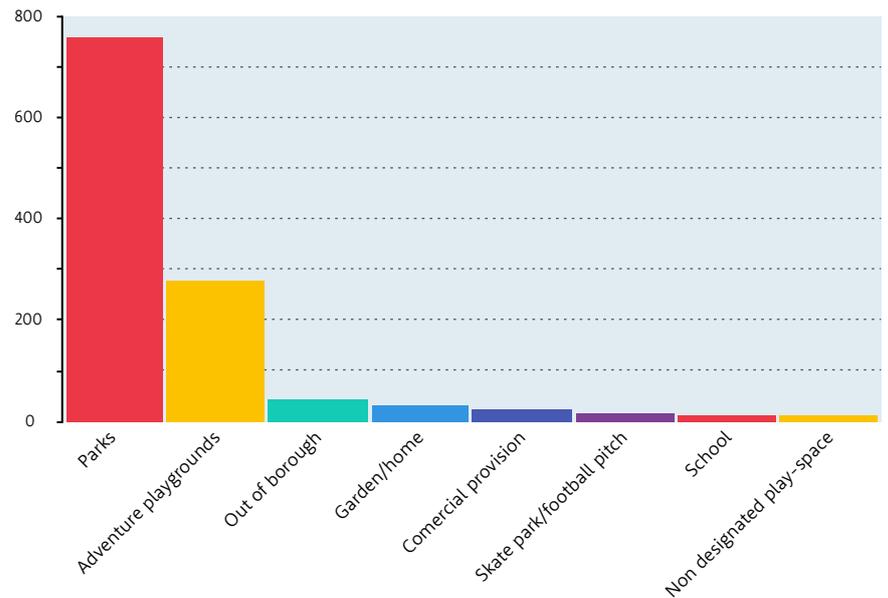


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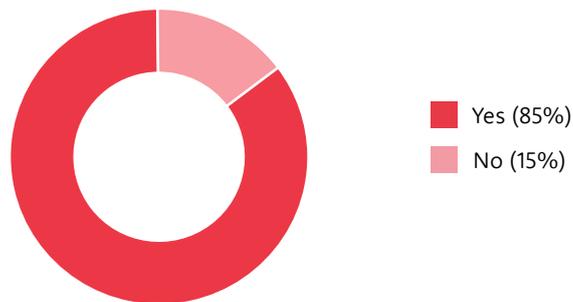
Consultation Results

The consultation process ran over one month. We asked 902 Lewisham residents of all ages the same five questions:

1. Where do you like to play?



2. Is this close enough to walk from home?



How people responded

427 adults completed the survey online via the council's Citizen Space consultation hub.

282 people (116 adults and 166 children) gave their views online via Survey Monkey.

79 people gave their views to London Play's survey team in person at Lewisham Shopping Centre.

35 parents, carers and children gave their views in person at a focus group session at Kelvin Grove and Eliot Bank Children and Family Centre.

21 people gave their views in person at an open forum hosted at Dumps Adventure Playground.

15 young people gave their views in person at a focus group hosted by the Young Mayor's Group at Unit 19.

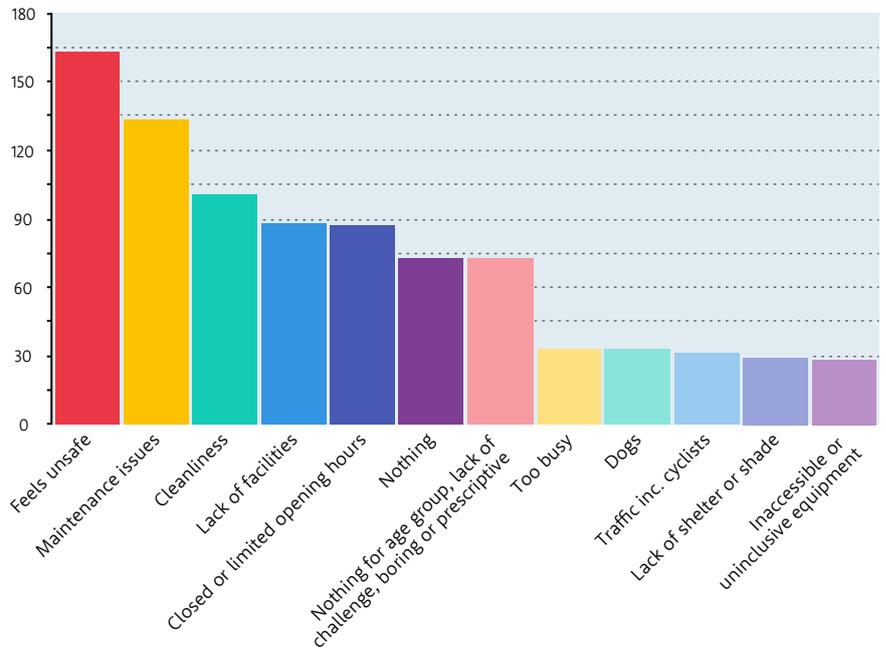
12 young people gave their views in person at a focus group hosted by Lewisham Young Leaders' Academy.

10 parents, carers and children gave their views in person at a focus group session at Ladywell Children's Centre.

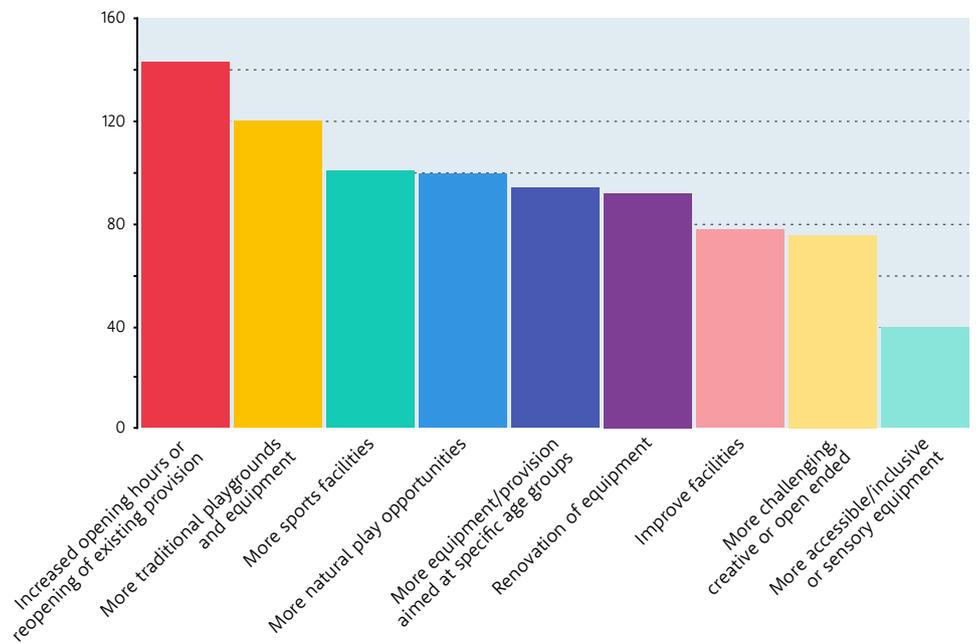
8 pupils at Watergate School gave their views in person at a focus group session.

2 consultation sessions provided Lewisham councillors with a forum to contribute their views and ideas.

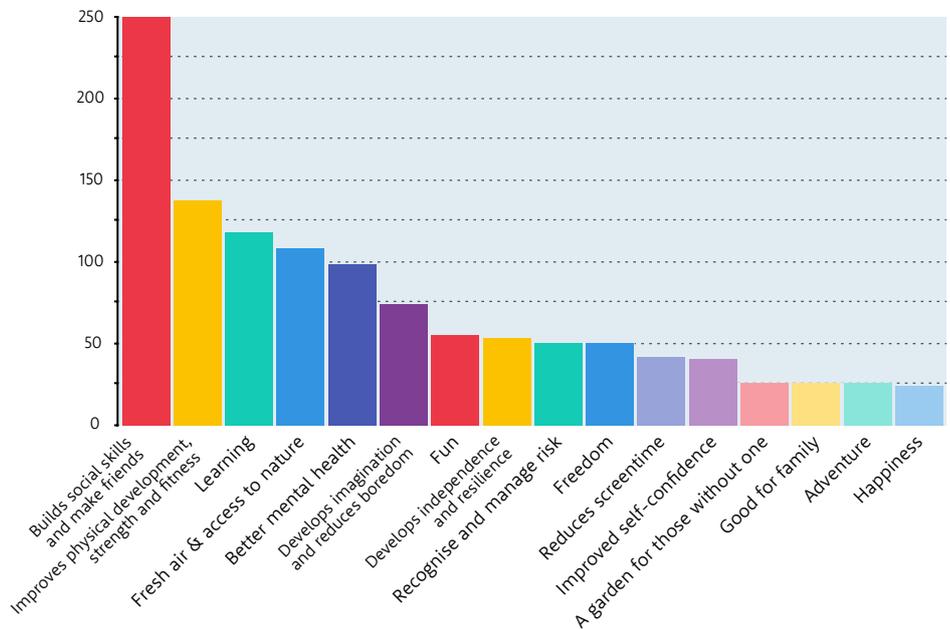
3. Is there anything that puts you off playing where you want to?



4. What new play things would you like to see in Lewisham?



5. Why is play important to you?





gravity coils

Sage guarding robot

wing + climb

rally coaster slide

Trampolines!!!

LOW GREAT PASTING SWISS

Good that there's no plastic

Alien says

Milk & bread

The garden

Milk to space

Space ball

Robot

Ice cream man

NEO 110
bring slide

Trampoline

flow

2 1 3
9 6 8
2 4

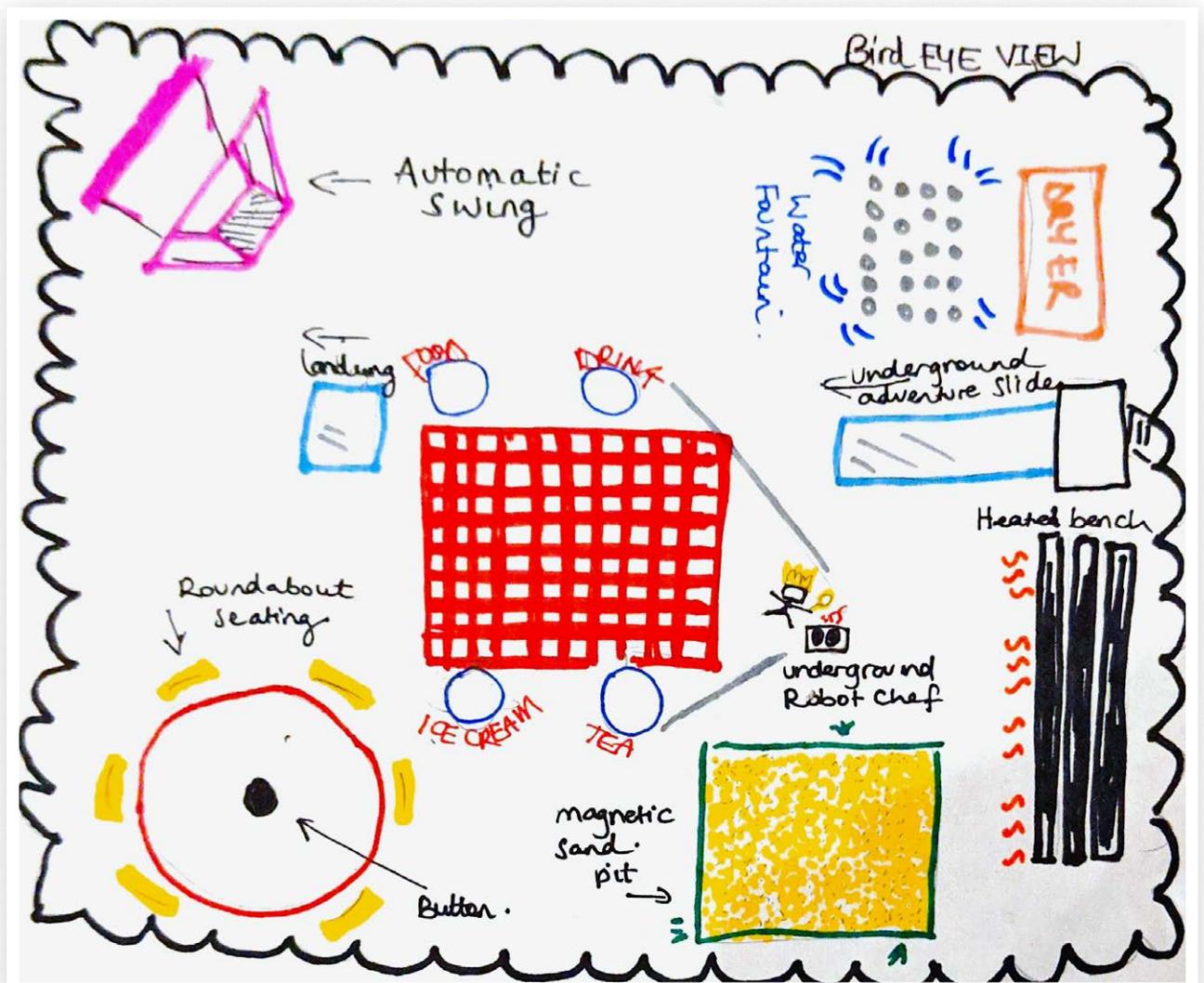
9 6
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14 Future Play

As part of the consultation process, Lewisham primary school pupils were invited to design a playground of the future to win a prize for their school.

The Lewisham schools that participated were Brindishe Green, Haseltine, Prendergast, Dalmain and Horniman primary schools. The winning design was by Nahla Mitchell Hylton at Prendergast Primary School.



Winning design: Nahla, Prendergast Primary School



15

Next Steps

The suggestions gathered during the consultation will feed into a prioritised action plan which will be overseen by the yet-to-be-formed council Play Advocacy Group. The group will publish an annual report on the council's website including updates on progress against the action plan's aims and milestones. Further public consultations regarding key points will also be scheduled in.

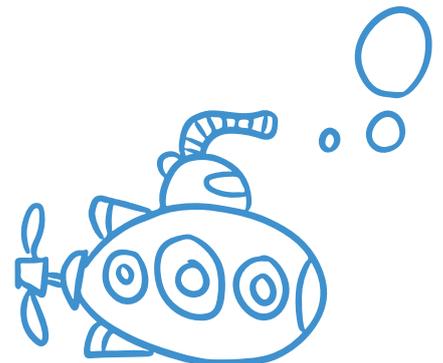
Key Recommendations from the Play Strategy

1. The council are committed first and foremost to developing and promoting play opportunities in the borough, and in doing so, we will ensure that this is undertaken through ongoing consultation and co-production with children and young people and their families, on design and development of new play provision and play spaces.
2. Ensure that our current play provision and spaces, including the adventure playgrounds, are in locations where they are needed, and for the council to consider how best to manage, maintain and drive their use including financial and legal implications and community engagement.
3. The council will ensure that consideration is given to 'play' in all plans, designs, and developments within the borough and making sure play is always in mind across all council activities.

“When children pretend, they’re using their imaginations to move beyond the bounds of reality. A stick can be a magic wand. A sock can be a puppet. A small child can be a superhero.”

Fred Rogers

American children's television host





Adventure Playgrounds Audit

Along with the national umbrella organisation Play England, London Play considers adventure play to be the gold standard in the field of play provision. This view is supported by the huge popularity of Lewisham's adventure playgrounds revealed during London Play's public consultation to inform this strategy.

London Play commissioned its sister organisation London Play Design to audit Lewisham's current adventure playground provision and provide a cost-benefit analysis of different funding options. These are the findings:

1. Key recommendations in detail

1.1 Intent

As one of the top five boroughs for adventure play in the capital (only Islington, Southwark, Hackney, and Lambeth have more adventure playground sites) Lewisham Council should make a public statement and/or produce a formal undertaking to recognise adventure play as the gold standard for children's play, and commit to keeping its adventure playgrounds open, adequately staffed/operated and in good repair. In order to follow best practice, examples from other London boroughs could be emulated, e.g. in Islington where adventure playground land is protected by a Deed of Dedication.

1.2 Staffing

Lewisham Council should consider various options including in-house or commission one or several organisations to provide adventure play at all adventure playground sites during core opening hours (after school, Saturdays and during school holidays). Staff from the organisation(s) in question should hold or work towards playwork or related qualifications and facilitate all aspects of adventure play. This includes insurance for staff to carry out play structure maintenance and construction as well as den building and other adventure play activities with children and young people. The organisation would need to provide a development plan

showing how it will deliver work to Play England standards. A phased return over five years to full-time opening during core hours (after-school, Saturdays and all-day during school holidays) should complement the phased five-year physical redevelopment of the sites (see below).

1.3 Sustainability

Lewisham Council should issue a tender for an appropriate site management organisation (ideally competent in adventure play and playwork, play safety regulations, design, construction and engineering, community liaison as well as procuring sources of low-cost labour) to increase the sustainability of its adventure playground sites and drastically reduce their maintenance costs. This recommendation is based on the cost-benefit analysis (see 3.) below.

Increasing sustainability would involve:

a) Working with the site management organisation to devise a phased, costed design master plan to reduce the number of large telegraph pole play structures (and their corresponding significant repair bills) over a period of five years to a quantity that can be maintained by user groups with a set minimal yearly budget. Reducing the number of large wooden structures would also substantially increase the play value of sites in line with Play England guidance, by creating opportunities for other play types currently missing at the playgrounds.

“Children need the freedom and time to play. Play is not a luxury. Play is a necessity.”

Kay Redfield Jamison

Contemporary American professor of psychiatry

b) Working with the site management organisation to maximise the number of community groups that use the sites outside of core adventure playground opening hours (e.g. schools, youth work providers, tenants’ associations, community groups etc.) in return for a contribution (monetary, labour, promotional/acknowledgements or in kind) towards the upkeep of the playgrounds. Additional user groups would likely bring additional funding to individual sites (as is already underway as of Spring 2022 at Richard MacVicar AP though the Albany Theatre/ Environmental Youth Hub scheme).

This measure, at small cost to the council, will save money, lever in external development funding, increase ownership and pride of place, improve community relations, and enhance the council’s reputation as a champion of grass roots groups and adventure play in accordance with 1.1 above.

c) Working with the site management organisation, to carry out essential repairs to keep the sites safe and secure, in line with reports by independently commissioned play safety inspectors. Where the nature of the repairs allows, they should be done with sources of low-cost labour such as teams of corporate volunteers or probationers under the supervision of the site management organisation, to further reduce maintenance costs. This would continue and expand the successful programme of low-cost

maintenance that has been established so far. As the design masterplan is implemented and high-maintenance equipment is replaced with low-maintenance features, play value increases and maintenance costs fall.

d) Working with the site management organisation to introduce a commercial premises hire programme (outside of core opening hours) such as children’s parties, photo shoots or corporate team building days. Funds raised by the programme should be ringfenced for adventure playground site maintenance and the development of new features and equipment.



2. Current state of the adventure play offer and assessment method

The basis for assessing the current adventure play offer in Lewisham is “[Adventure Playgrounds: the essential elements](https://static1.squarespace.com/static/609a5802ba3f13305c43d352/t/60b8beb51b7c4d7e9ff-dae86/1622720186909/Adventure-Playgrounds.pdf)”,¹ a guide to adventure play issued by national umbrella body Play England. The guide should be consulted in parallel with this document. It draws on the work of an expert group of play theorists and practising playworkers convened by Play England to identify the unique characteristics of the adventure playground model of play provision. The assessment of Lewisham’s sites uses the elements set out in the guide’s twelve sections.

The additional recommendations below are a result of consultation with the current service providers and visits to the playgrounds to assess the range and condition of the buildings, the outdoor space as well as the play equipment. In addition, we used the latest inspection reports for all sites (up to July 2021) compiled by independent play safety inspection company Children’s Play Advisory Service.

2.1 Health and safety, current state of repair and outlook

Indoors

The buildings and facilities at four sites (The Dumps, Richard MacVicar, Home Park, and Honor Oak Park) overall appear

to be in satisfactory repair, with the council implementing a regime of all necessary inspections, tests, and maintenance visits (further evidence of this are satisfactory inspections and risk assessments carried out by Health and Safety officers of HM Probation Service on behalf of Community Payback schemes). One exception is Ladywell AP where mould from a roof leak is impairing air quality indoors (an air quality report was commissioned by the council in 2021) preventing users from accessing the building except for brief periods of time (e.g. probationers using the toilet). A further exception is the workshop section at Honor Oak AP where a roof leak has led to the deterioration of the inner ceiling and electricity circuits. While the workshop isn’t essential for running adventure play sessions, future maintenance of the playgrounds would be made difficult if the workshop space deteriorated further.

Recommendations for indoors:

The council should install auxiliary roofs to the workshop section at Honor Oak Park (HOP) and at Ladywell AP. The inner ceilings at HOP and Ladywell should be replaced to restore air quality and make the indoor space usable again. Repairs to the electricity circuit at HOP should also be carried out. Within five years, the installation of auxiliary roofs at the other sites with container-style buildings (HOP main building, Home Park) is strongly recommended as leaks will develop

1. <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/609a5802ba3f13305c43d352/t/60b8beb51b7c4d7e9ff-dae86/1622720186909/Adventure-Playgrounds.pdf>

“Play is the work of the child.”

Maria Montessori

Italian physician and educator

in a similar fashion and damage to circuits is likely. Costs for simple auxiliary roofs can be covered via user group fundraising (for materials) and installation via corporate volunteer teams under the supervision of the site management organisation (see below).

Outdoors

Following repairs to the play structures commissioned by the council throughout 2021/22 and an implementation of regular basic maintenance by Community Payback, the structures appear to be in adequate repair. However, a forthcoming independent play safety inspection is likely to identify new issues and risks reflecting the deterioration from wood rot.

The outdoor play equipment at the sites mostly stems from a rebuilding scheme carried out around 2009. Unfortunately, the scheme was based on 1980s style designs that relied on large telegraph pole structures with timber foundations in ground contact and liable to wood rot. The design had some merit in the 1980s: timber then was protected against rot by creosote, telegraph poles would be donated for free by British Telecom, and staff had full time hours and skills for maintenance. Since 2005, timber treatment is far less toxic, but the downside is rot in the ground within 5–7 years. Staff from the current operators have neither the skills nor the necessary insurance, or spare hours for maintenance. Timber prices, already high before the pandemic, have nearly doubled. In short, the design of the play structures is highly unsustainable and produces excessive maintenance and repair costs.

Wood rot is having an effect across all sections, from telegraph pole supports and foundations to supporting joists and decking planks. Repairs in 2021/22 alone cost an average of £12.5k per site (£65k overall), involving less than five per cent of play equipment

timbers. A simple extrapolation for repairing 100% of the equipment gives $(5\% \times 20) \times £65k = £1.3m$ (a complete rebuild/replacement ‘like for like’, using other London APs as a guide, would cost an estimated £200k – £250k per site, resulting in a similar total). At the current rate of deterioration of the timber, this cost is likely to be incurred within the next five years (as the equipment was all built roughly at the same time, simultaneous failure across all sites is likely).

A basic maintenance scheme using teams of probationers is in place. While this will delay and mitigate the effects of wood rot, it cannot prevent it. As probationers cannot carry out the more complex repairs due to insurance restrictions (e.g. replacing heavy telegraph poles, working at height, using power tools etc.), repairs will have to be carried out using professional construction companies at great cost. A logical alternative would be to reduce the number of outmoded telegraph pole structures and replace them with low-maintenance features that also happen to provide higher play value (see below) according to a costed, phased design and maintenance plan.

Recommendations for outdoors:

- Commission an independent annual safety inspection for all sites for June/July 2022 as normal.
- Commission a phased, fully costed design and maintenance plan for the sites that looks at replacing, over a period of five years, the majority of old high-maintenance equipment with low-maintenance features, giving equal or higher play value in line with Play England adventure play guidance.
- Repair some of the equipment (by risk priority identified in the safety inspection reports) and remove other outmoded items, in line with the design plan.

“Play is training for the unexpected”

Marc Bekoff
Contemporary
American biologist

- Work with adventure playground operators (current and/or new) to establish high play-value activities such as den-building, mud kitchens, forest school zones etc. to change the culture at the APs, increase play value and compensate (in the short term) for the loss of some of the equipment until new features are established in the future.

2.2 Adventure play offer – current operators, staffing, and activities

Following funding cuts in 2021, the current operators are running an average of two staffed sessions per site per week in term time, with further sessions during the school holidays. The sessions have a youth work focus and are led by youth workers. Youth work with its strong focus on co-ordinated social and educational programmes and interventions is a very different discipline from adventure play where children freely choose their play and adults act as facilitators and providers of materials and tools, led by the children's actions.

While staff are diligent, experienced, and qualified in their field, a lack of playwork qualifications, adventure play ethos and absence of adventure play activities (den building, cooking outdoors, play with sand and water, children using tools to shape their own play environment, growing food, looking after animals etc.) is evident. The organisation is not insured for their staff to carry out playground maintenance, construct new equipment or work with children to allow them to shape their play environment – a key requirement in adventure play. This leads to an overall impression of the sites operating as youth clubs where old-school adventure play equipment happens to be in the vicinity.

An assessment using Play England criteria shows an absence of adventure play elements in key areas (playwork qualifications,

design/modification/maintenance of play structures by staff and children, creating a shared flexible space, involving children as co-creators and the use of risk-benefit assessments rather than traditional simple risk assessments).

This document does not intend to discredit youth work activities or their value and countless benefits for young people or society as a whole. However, it seems obvious that the running of adventure playgrounds should have an adventure play focus, be carried out by staff holding adventure play qualifications and facilitate actual adventure play activities. The current providers have indicated that the organisation would be keen to employ staff with playwork qualifications and get the necessary additional insurance. However, its funding is too short-term (currently a nine-month contract) to attract suitable candidates. These extremely short funding cycles are a major obstacle for any organisation to plan and deliver services and they need to be replaced with longer contracts to allow the commissioned organisation to provide a quality service along the lines described in this document.

Recommendations:

For change to come into effect, the current operators would need to obtain playwork qualifications for their staff (or employ additional qualified playworkers), embrace and implement Play England guidance for their sessions at the adventure playgrounds and get additional insurance that allows the activities described.

If this is not feasible, the current operators should share the sites (and possibly overlap session times) with another operator with playwork-qualified staff and suitable insurance, e.g. with youth work sessions being delivered later in the day during term time (such as currently happens at Ladywell

“Children learn as they play. Most importantly, in play children learn how to learn.”

O. Fred Donaldson
Play Specialist

Adventure Playground). This would also be a step towards the multi-use scenario (described in key recommendation 1.3 b) in the executive summary above). Regardless of the means, the delivery of actual adventure play as described throughout this document needs to be phased in by way of a service level agreement of at least five years, to allow the operators to employ and retain suitably qualified and experienced staff.

It is highly desirable that the playgrounds return to full-time opening, with genuine adventure play being delivered during core opening hours after school, on Saturdays and all-day during school holidays. Options to achieve this with budget considerations in mind are described in section 3.4 below, with a phased five-year implementation suggested to run in parallel with the phased five-year physical redevelopment of the sites.

2.3 Play offer – indoor and outdoor physical space, grounds and play equipment

Based on the Play England guide, the physical space at the adventure playground sites offers a number of features listed under ‘Section 7 – a rich play environment’ (the guide cites Hughes, B. (1996) *Criteria for an Enriched Play Environment*, in *Play Environments: A Question of Quality*. London: PLAYLINK).

On most or all sites, indoor spaces have:

- Accessible toilets
- Washing and cooking facilities
- Storage for tools, equipment, and materials
- Space for a range of play opportunities
- Space for rest and relaxation
- Recycled and other materials for arts, crafts, dressing up and ‘messy’ play

- Opportunities for children to be involved in cooking, music, and drama
- Areas where children can ‘chill out’ with friends
- Areas for being quiet, contemplative or reading in peace

The only feature on the list that is missing is ‘sensory areas or specially furnished rooms to help disabled children enjoy the indoor area’.

Outdoors similarly features a number of desirable items such as:

- Challenging play structures and features
- Quiet ‘chill-out’ areas
- Wild and cultivated natural areas
- Informal sports areas
- Accessible play equipment (i.e. wheelchair-accessible walkways)
- Changes of level in landscaped features as well as in built structures
- Nooks and crannies, natural features, and forms
- Opportunities to experience the elements (air/height, earth/soil/sand, water, and fire) as part of their play

However, some key adventure play features are missing (see recommendations below). In addition, a key obstacle is the nature of the large telegraph pole play structures. Because of their size, it’s almost impossible for children to change, extend or develop them using their own (smaller-sized) tools and timber. They also take up the lions share of the space where other adventure play activities (den building, mud kitchens, cooking fires etc.) could happen. Gradually removing some large structures would both address the maintenance cost problem and

“Play is the beginning of knowledge.”

George Dorsey
US Congressman

introduce a much wider variety of adventure play opportunities.

It is also noted that, while there are basic features to allow disabled children to join in (such as accessible walkways, some ‘basket-style’ swings), additional play features, better access and sensory equipment, materials and spaces should be introduced. This can be done using low-cost materials (fabric, herbs, and flowers) sourced from neighbourhood groups such as scrap projects or community-run gardens and allotments.

Recommendations:

- a)** Phase in materials, equipment and features that facilitate adventure play currently missing from the offer, namely:
- Tools and materials and corresponding storage to build and modify a flexible and evolving play space.
 - Regular access to bonfires and cooking outdoors.
 - ‘Loose parts’ materials and objects such as (usable, not rotten) lengths of timber, fabric, rope, re-usable discarded equipment (such as cable drums, tractor tyres, old prams etc.).
 - Den building opportunities.
 - Performance spaces/stages (exception: The Dumps where this already exists).
 - Dressing-up and costume making materials and storage.
- b)** Phase in better provision for children with disabilities. This should be included in a delivery plan of activities and staff training by adventure play delivery organisations. The phasing in of a.) and b.) should happen parallel to the phasing-in of increased opening days and times and the phasing-out of high-maintenance play structures as per the suggested five year design and maintenance master plan.

3. Cost-benefit analysis

The following analysis explores different cost options for improving the future running of the adventure playgrounds based on the findings in Section 2 above. It aims for a qualitative comparison of options rather than an exact prediction of costs. It looks at four scenarios across the full range of funding (from closures to full funding/repair) including a middle-ground solution to maximise value for money.

Following the qualitative overview is a table with estimates for the different options, giving the total cost of repairs, maintenance, and construction for years one to twenty from when this strategy is implemented.

3.1 Option one: Playground closures

This scenario imagines the permanent closure of all sites and a 100% cut to operator funding.

Benefits

- Revenue cost savings (cutting two days per week of funding for current operators).
- Routine maintenance and operation cost savings (e.g. for plumbing or roof repairs, fire extinguisher inspections, electricity, and water costs etc.).

Costs

- Ongoing repair costs for outside play structures (to keep them at a very basic level of safety to avoid injury to trespassers).
- Alternatively, demolition and site clearance costs.
- Potentially spiralling costs for site security if squatting/anti-social behaviour/trespassing starts to occur as a result of a perceived abandoned site and building (approximately £500/day or £180k per year per site for 24-hour security guards, as happened after

*“A little nonsense now and then
is cherished by the wisest men.”*

Roald Dahl

Children's author

Lambeth closed Loughborough Park Adventure Playground in 2018).

- Loss of an important service to young people and their families.
- Likely negative impact on community and public relations.
- Likely rise in local youth crime and anti-social behaviour.
- Land may not be suitable to repurpose or sell.

3.2 Option two: Continuing the status quo

This option continues the current state of affairs with playgrounds opening two sessions a week run by the current providers and basic site maintenance by probationer teams/Community Payback.

The cost estimate table for option 2 below assumes ongoing patch repairs of the deteriorating wooden play equipment. Patch repairs will lead to a 'critical mass' moment in year five when the majority of the timber will fail simultaneously and incur a large repair bill. From years 6–10, the cycle will repeat, as repairs carried out in year one (and so on) will, in turn, have deteriorated and need repairs. The end result after 10 (viz. 20) years will be 'zombie' playgrounds being held together by steel splints, patched boards, and other provisional repairs.

Benefits

- Relatively low services and operator costs (staff, water, electricity etc.).
- Basic presence of staff twice a week is likely to delay trespassing, anti-social behaviour and squatting for a time.
- Youth worker-led sessions twice a week offer a limited service to children and young people.

Costs

- Youthwork-only focus, absence of playwork qualifications/ethos as well as insufficient insurance (play structure building by staff is no longer covered by the current operators' insurers) severely restricts the potential of the adventure playground facilities.
- Outmoded 1980s style play equipment with an emphasis on large telegraph pole structures are very costly to maintain (yearly repair bills are over £65k for five playgrounds and rising) and restrict the play value of the sites.
- The play structures at the five sites are of similar age and state of disrepair. Damage from wood rot is progressing and will result in the need for complete replacement or repair of most structures within the next five years, with a repair/replacement cost of £185k – £265k per site, i.e. an overall cost of £1.2m (some of these costs can be delayed or slightly lowered by continuing work with teams from HM Probation Service/Community Payback but the structural complexity means low-cost labour teams cannot carry out the more technical repairs, such as pole replacements).
- Necessity for building roof repairs at two sites (immediately) and a further three sites within five years.
- Continuation of difficult community and public relations, as the sites are closed for most of the week.
- Deteriorating and unwelcoming 'zombie' playgrounds barely made safe by provisional repairs.



3.3 Option three: Return to full funding for current operators and site maintenance

This option describes a return to the service as it was pre-2021, with funding restored to the current operators to run sessions every day.

Investing £1.2m in a complete rebuild of the outside play equipment 'as is' and replicating the old design would drastically reduce repair costs from year five onwards, but the cycle of deterioration and rising repair costs would repeat after year 10, giving the highest overall construction, repair, and maintenance costs of the four options over the 20 year total.

Benefits

- Sites seen to be open and used again full-time will improve community and public relations.
- Likely fall in youth crime and anti-social behaviour.
- Presence of staff all week is likely to prevent trespassing, anti-social behaviour and squatting out of hours.
- Sessions every day offer a service to young people with a focus on youth work.
- New playground structures (albeit in an outmoded design) will initially reduce maintenance costs.

Costs

- See option two – lack of actual adventure play, high maintenance costs, roof repair costs for buildings, looming repair/replacement bill for play equipment in region of £1.2m.
- Return to high revenue costs to fund operators.
- Repeat of the deterioration cycle of the play structures due to outmoded design, resulting in previous levels of wasteful repairs after year 10 despite a substantial reconstruction investment.

3.4 Option four: A mixed funding/operating model

This option aims to combine the advantages of the three options above while trying to reduce their disadvantages. It describes a state of affairs likely to occur after the key recommendations above (1.1 – 1.3) have been implemented.

Benefits

- Sites seen to be open and used to their full potential will improve community and public relations
- Almost certain fall in youth crime and anti-social behaviour

“Do not... keep children to their studies by compulsion but by play.”

Plato

Greek philosopher

- Presence of staff all week is very likely to prevent trespassing, anti-social behaviour and squatting out of hours and prevents excessive security guard bills.
- Sessions by qualified adventure play workers will offer the full range of adventure play activities as outlined by Play England. A phased return over five years to full-time opening during core hours (after-school, Saturdays and all-day during school holidays) would complement the phased five-year physical redevelopment of the sites.
- Use of the sites outside core opening hours will offer additional services to the community (e.g. school classes using the site for informal PE in the morning, community groups running allotment or food growing schemes in the early afternoons or Sundays, youthwork providers offering sessions in the evenings (or during core opening hours shared with playworkers).
- Sense of local ownership, pride of place and increased sustainability.
- Different community groups are likely to lever in funding for maintenance and site development at no cost to the council.
- Redesign of sites and targeted maintenance using low-cost labour (corporate volunteer teams and Community Payback) will bring maintenance costs down to a nominal yearly minimum.
- Ringfenced returns from a premises hire scheme will lower maintenance costs further.
- Admin work by council officers for maintenance is likely to be reduced due to dealing with a single site management organisation rather than many different user groups.
- Any investment in new play equipment will be safeguarded by modern design principles which will prioritise durability and low maintenance costs while putting children in control of their environment.

Costs

- Funding will be needed for one (or several) organisations to deliver adventure play activities. Options include to commission the current providers (with the above provisos), or to commission additional providers to deliver further sessions. Costs for the latter could be lowered if the organisation(s) in question already have funding to deliver services and/or will accept support in kind, such as free or subsidised tenancy at one of the playground sites (a current example would be the adventure play activities provided by the charity BuildUp at Richard MacVicar AP during the February 2022 half term which were run at no cost to the council). Organisations like BuildUp could be offered the use of some of the playgrounds' facilities/premises in return for delivering regular adventure play sessions.
- Funding will be needed for a service level agreement with a site management organisation to implement recommendations 1.3 (a to d). However, it is anticipated that the savings associated with this would far outweigh the costs of implementing either of the options one to three above (closures, status quo or return to full funding).
- In order to use the sites to their full potential and work with as many groups as possible, funding is needed to carry out repairs to some site buildings, e.g. installing auxiliary roof structures at Honor Oak Park and Ladywell AP to stop leaks and replace the inner ceilings. However, some of these costs can be reduced by working with users and community groups to fundraise for repair materials, and the work could be carried out by corporate volunteers and/or Community Payback teams under the guidance of the site management organisation.

4. Estimated repair, maintenance, and construction costs for the external play equipment at the five Lewisham adventure playgrounds

											Totals		
	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5	Year 6	Year 7	Year 8	Year 9	Year 10	Years 1–10	Years 10–20	Years 1–20
Option 2	£60k	£90k	£120k	£150k	£180k	£60k	£90k	£120k	£150k	£180k	£1.2m	£1.2m	£2.4m
Option 3	£60k	£450k	£465k	£255k	£5k	£5k	£5k	£8k	£10k	£15k	£1.28m	£1.2m	£2.48m
Option 4a	£125k	£125k	£125k	£125k	£125k	£75k	£75k	£75k	£75k	£75k	£1m	£750k	£1.75m
Option 4b	£95k	£95k	£95k	£45k	£700k	£750k	£1.45m						

Notes on the figures above

General

The figures above are estimates for play equipment maintenance and construction costs only. They do not include costs for buildings or operators/playworkers.

Option 1: Permanent site closures

This option is not listed in the table as the monetary cost of land lying unused is difficult to determine. However, please note the cost of security guards to prevent squatting/illegal parties described in 3.1 above.

Option 2: Status quo and continuing patch repairs

The figures are based on recent repair costs (2017 – 2022) and assume that continuing patch repairs will lead to the bulk of the aging timber failing simultaneously in year five. Even after year five's large bill, the deterioration/repair cycle will repeat leading to 'zombie' playgrounds. Option 2 has the second highest cost overall.

Option 3: Return to old funding levels and replacing play equipment with identical structures 'as is'

The figures assume patch repairs in year one (while reconstruction is planned and organised), followed by the reconstruction of Honor Oak Park (est. construction cost £265k) and Home Park (est. construction cost £185k) playgrounds in year two, Richard MacVicar (est. construction cost £225k) and Ladywell (est. construction cost £240k) playgrounds to be rebuilt in year three and The Dumps (est. construction cost £255k) in year four. From year five to year 10, maintenance costs would be comparatively low (at £1k per site in years 6 and 7) but rising by year 10. The same deterioration and patch repair cycle as in option 2 would recur from year 10 due to the life span of the outmoded design timber equipment. Option 3 has the highest cost overall, in return for new (but quickly deteriorating) structures.

Option 4: A mixed funding/operational model

The figures denote costs for employing a management organisation to deliver key recommendations 1.1 – 1.3. In terms of maintenance and construction costs, this would include a mixture of essential repairs in years one to five, but more importantly, delivery of a design masterplan resulting in the reduction in numbers of large telegraph pole structures and installation of low-maintenance features that require little maintenance and provide for genuine adventure play in line with Play England guidance. Consequently, the yearly costs would fall to £15,000 per site (£75,000 overall) from year five onwards (or £9,000 per site and £45,000 overall if you count premises hire income). The investment would include all the other services and benefits listed in 3.1, namely:

- Liaison with teams of probationers carrying out weekly free maintenance at all five sites (delivering approx. £140k of free maintenance per year at equivalent minimum wage)
- Delivering one-off corporate volunteer days for larger repairs and construction tasks (approx. 60 days per year, at 25 volunteers per day, across equalling 9,000 volunteer hours per year)
- Liaising with additional community groups using the sites outside adventure play hours, maximising sustainability, and site use
- Implementing a commercial premises hire scheme which would generate around £30,000 per year to be ringfenced for site maintenance (example calculations assume a conservative 20 days of premises hire per year across 5 sites, at 3 hours per hire and £100 per hour hire charge). This would result in a reduction of the actual site maintenance cost to £45,000 for all five sites (£9,000 per site, per year) from year five.
- The figures in blue (option 4a) denote the gross cost, the figures in green (option 4b) are net costs taking into account income from premises hire.

Despite the range of additional services and benefits (absent in options 1–3), option 4 is over **30% cheaper** than the other options, due to the extensive use of free labour from corporate volunteers and probationers.



20 Ideas for Play in the Home

Shooting Stars

Get complete darkness in a room, lie on the floor with torches and play chasing the spots of light across the ceiling, like a luminous 'tag'. For a take on Hide and Seek, everyone shuts their eyes except one person who shines their torch as out of sight as possible. Then on the word 'go' everyone else opens their eyes and the first person to spot the light and put their light on it wins. Another game is for one person to suggest how the light beams move across the ceiling such as in zig zags, or like bees or moving without bumping into each other.

Are you there Moriarty?

You need two or more players: both are blindfolded and given a rolled-up newspaper or foam hand or similar. Players lie on the floor, heads about a metre apart. Player one says 'Are you there Moriarty?' When player two says, 'Yes,' player one tries to hit them and vice versa. The object is to avoid being hit as long as possible. Most fun for those watching.

Bath Tub Boats

There are many ways to build boats from junk materials – the simplest being an empty margarine tub with a pebble taped to the bottom of it for Ballast. For a more sophisticated design, create a catamaran using two empty plastic bottles with their lids on. Glue or gaffer tape them together, then add a cabin and with chopsticks or wooden skewers, make a mast with a bit of scrap material as the sail. Make it your way, luxury yacht or even a pirate ship and then fill up a bathtub and float those beauties me hearties.

Giant Puppets

Use recycled plastic bottles, cardboard boxes, and yoghurt pots etc. to create a puppet. Thread string through the materials to create arms, legs, and a head for a, dog, robot, or

astronaut figure. Eventually you will have around five strings (e.g. two arms, two legs and a head) that you can attach to a coat hanger or stick. Decorate the puppet with paint, buttons, feathers etc.) then stand on the bed, climb a tree, or go to the upstairs bannister and dangle the puppet over and try it out.

Eyeball

You'll need round stones and acrylic paint and brushes. Paint your stones as much like an eyeball as you can. Spend the next few months hiding your eyeballs around the house to scare your parents: when they open the cupboards; find it in their shoes or in their lunchbox.

Bubble and Hoop

Hang a hula hoop or a similar ring shape in a doorway or balance on a flat surface. Make some bubble mix using washing up liquid and place in a shallow bowl. One by one each player makes a circle with their thumb and forefinger, dips it in the bubble solution and takes aims at the hoop. If the bubble goes through the hoop the player gets a point and another go and continues until their bubble misses the hoop.

Remote-Control

On a rectangle of card draw a few simple remote-control buttons, forward, rewind, pause, go etc. Someone volunteers to be the robot and when a button is pressed on the remote control (the instruction has to be said out loud too) the robot has to obey. Send Dad to the bathroom or Granny under the stairs. Add pick or grab buttons and have a snack brought to you.

Bridges

You need a shoebox with a variety of building materials like ice lolly sticks, Bluetack, string, paperclips, pegs; as well as pebbles

“Our brains are built to benefit from play no matter what our age.”

Theresa A. Kestly

Contemporary American psychologist

and a bowl of water. The game is simple – each team or player needs a building kit and a bowl of water. You have 20 minutes to build a bridge that crosses your bowl of water. At the end of the 20 minutes, each bridge is tested for strength by adding pebbles one at a time, until the bridge collapses – the strongest bridge wins!

Spider’s Web

You need masking tape and a doorway. Build a spider’s web/criss cross mess of masking tape spanning the doorway – sticky side facing the room you’re playing in – make sure you leave enough space to crawl in and out of the room. Take it in turns to catch stuff in the web- soft toys, socks, flies made from tissue, paper balls, your little brother...

Fishing

You need a big bowl, chopsticks, and dominoes (or any matching pair game). The aim is to ‘fish’ out the pairs from a bowl using chopsticks, just cause we all need a little extra challenge in life hey?

Fortune Sticks

You need a cup/can, lots of lolly sticks and pen and paper. Using stickers or paints, number your lolly sticks and decorate your can. On a piece of paper come up with as many ‘fortunes’ as you have lollysticks – (stuff like “you will uncover a great secret” or “beware one-eyed cats” is good). To play, a person shakes the can (tilting it slightly downward) until one stick falls out or sticks slightly above the others. To read their fortune match the number on the stick with your oracle. I foresee this being a good game.

Balloonies

Place notes inside un-inflated balloons. Each note has a different animal named on it. Blow up the balloons – now each containing a note – and throw them in the air (keeping

all the balloons in the air at the same time is a game in itself). Everyone grabs a balloon, pops it, and gets their note; and one by one everyone acts out their animal for others to guess.

Bag Grab

Into a paper bag put several small items such as 10 Lego minifigures, smooth pebbles or herbal tea bags. Blindfold one person and hand them one of the items in the bag. Give them a few seconds to feel it, sniff it, taste it, listen to it, and then put it back into the bag. The blindfold is removed, the contents of the bag emptied and see if they can guess which item they chose earlier. You can add a time limit for extra thrills.

Flour Mountain

Fill a bowl with flour, and pack firmly. Empty the flour mound onto a large plate or small tray, so that it retains the shape of the bowl. Place a small toy on the top. Players take turns to use a spoon to slice a part of the mound and slide it away from the rest. Eventually, one person will do it and the toy will fall into the pile of flour. That person must remove the toy from the flour with their nose or chin.

Grape Gob

Players have to see how many grapes (or marshmallows/peas/raspberries etc.) they can stuff into their mouths and still coherently say “I’m a smooth talker”. The winner is the one who can manage the highest number.

Mud Balls

Find or make a small hole full of water outdoors. Everyone makes a ball using mud, leaves, twigs, feathers etc. Find a space clear of passers-by, test by throwing each one at a time in the air, the higher the better, to see which ball splats the best or which survives the drop.

“One of the luckiest things that can happen to you in life is, I think, to have a happy childhood.”

Agatha Christie
British author

Egg Roulette

Sacrifice a cheap box of six eggs for this game. Hard boil three of them, leaving three raw and put them all back in the box (you might choose to decorate the eggs but do it knowing they will get smashed at some point). Find a space and stand three footsteps apart. Pick one egg at random. Everyone starts the games with six points. Gently throw the egg from player to player. After each round everyone takes a step back, increasing the throwing distance. The first player to miss a catch (which may result in an egg splattering) loses a point. The winner after six eggs have been destroyed is the player with the most points.

Banana Surgery

Each player or team needs a banana, cutting board and plastic knife. Each group should cut the banana into four or five equal-sized pieces. (don't tell them what the next steps are at this point). Then hand out banana surgery kits: pins, string, tape, toothpicks, rubber bands etc. The game is for each team of banana surgeons to reassemble the 'nana, bringing it back to life!

Makeup Artist

You will need some makeup (maybe check before you steal anyone's best lippy) and a blindfold. Take it in turns to be the blindfolded makeup artist; we find that dads seem to love being painted with lipstick the most!

Paint Pop

Fill up small balloons with water and poster paint. There two ways to play this. The first involves hanging an old sheet or large sheet of paper on a wall with four or five circles of differing sizes, the smaller the circler the more points gained. Each player then takes turns from a distance to hit the targets. Most points win. Or lay the sheet or paper on the floor/lawn, lob the paint bombs on it (stomp

on the balloons that don't explode automatically) and create a work of art. Other ideas – if it rains throw the paint bombs in to puddle and best of all dispatch them when snow has fallen.

Hide and Listen

Everyone makes a shaker (e.g. rice or lentils in a bottle or small container). One player is the listener and is blindfolded. The listener sits in the middle of the room. Everyone else moves around shaking their shaker. When the listener says “Stop” everyone freezes but keeps shaking. The listener's job is to find all the shakers by either moving around the room or pointing from where they sit. To make it harder, when the listener says “Stop” the shakers freeze and go silent. When the listener says “Shake” everyone must shake their shaker giving the listener a chance to identify the shakers' whereabouts. The listener only gets to ask for three shakes.



Play Strategy Case Study

May 2022

Friends of Luxmore Gardens (FoLG), LBL, Glendale

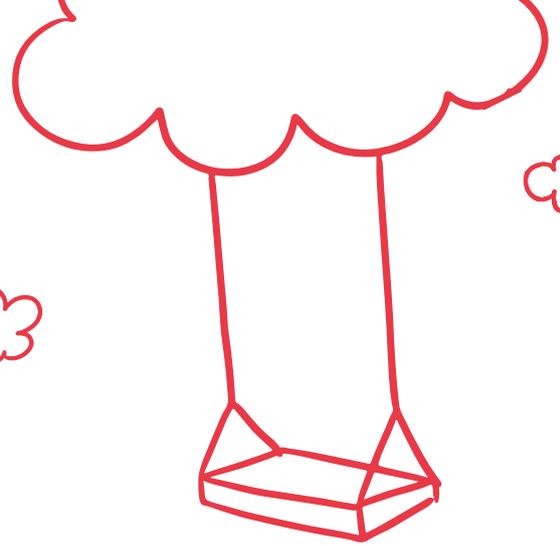
A community-led project to improve the local park and playground

Why?

FoLG and Lewisham wanted to create more exciting and adventurous play opportunities in Luxmore Gardens using natural and recycled materials and to increase the age-range catered for in the park. They also wanted to be as sustainable as possible, repurposing any existing play equipment that was still in good order and enjoyed by children.



Play area before improvement project



How?

FoLG ran a series of public consultation exercises and surveys. In July 2017 FoLG used Brockley Assembly money to conduct face-to-face surveys in the park:

- 90 people over a two-week period were questioned over different time periods to ensure representation of a diverse range of park users. 46 people also completed the survey online. 70% of users questioned had children in their household and 51% wanted improved play space (highest ranked on the wish list).
- 300 people attended the Garden Party community engagement day in 2017, 70 of whom confirmed the importance of improved play opportunities.
- FoLG created a vision document for play in Luxmore, looked into how they could work with Lewisham Council to use Section 106 funding as match-funding for external funders. FoLG put in successful bids to Veolia and Sport England who agreed to fund the improvements to the play space and an outdoor table tennis table.
- In 2018 various events were held in the park to build up community engagement. Every household in the surrounding area was leafleted asking people to have their say on the plans for the park at a summer Garden Party. This event was hugely successful, attended by 500 local people.

Next Steps

A steering group was set up including Chairs of FoLG, Lewisham Council Parks and Open Spaces officer, Glendale representative and local Brockley Ward Councillor to help direct the progress of the project.

- In 2018 members of FoLG visited other recently created playgrounds e.g. in Bethnal Green and attended Natural Play training from Groundwork
- A workshop was held with children in the closest primary school, Myatt Gardens. This, alongside the collated feedback, was fed into the brief sent out to prospective contractors in October 2018. Four contractors were approached, and each made a site visit and drew up plans. The FoLG committee discussed the options and decided that a local designer was their preference as they best fulfilled the brief. FoLG presented their favoured design to Lewisham Council and the steering group, who agreed and approved the design to go ahead.



Play area after improvement project

Outcome

This project is an example of a group successfully using Section 106 funds to attract additional match funding, pro-actively engage with the local community and effectively assess feedback, data and gear aims to those responses.

- The play space in Luxmore completely transformed the use of the park, creating a larger and more engaging play space. It has become a destination park as opposed to a cut-through with a tired and limited playground.
- During the pandemic it provided an incredible hyper-local outdoor resource for local families, particularly those with limited space of their own and when travel restrictions prevented people going further afield.
- The park is buzzing after school and at weekends and provides an engaging space for younger children during the school day and often frequented by childminders and local nurseries. Now children over six years old and up to 12 regularly use the play space, as well as older teenagers utilising the table tennis table and hanging out in the park.
- The park is now so well used by families and children it feels like a much safer place, there is organic surveillance of what is happening in the space and there has been a significant drop in the anti-social behaviour of dog fouling, fly tipping and drug dealing seen in years past.



Play area after improvement project

“When we first arrived in Brockley six years ago, some people told us that Luxmore wasn’t safe enough to be alone there at dusk or in the night. Its transformation has made it a routine stop for our young family, a place for picnics and playing, a vital venue for connecting (and reconnecting after the last two years) with the community.”

Park user

“Luxmore has been transformed from a space that was relatively hidden and unused, to one that is now known to and accessed by many. It is a safe, picturesque communal garden, park and playground that now benefits a much larger part of the local community. It is a fantastic hub for residents.”

Park user



The Lewisham Play Strategy is a collaboration between Lewisham Council, London Play and London Play Design.

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