

Oxfordshire Play Strategy 2009-2011

1 Introduction

Article 31 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child recognises *'the right of the child to rest and leisure, to engage in play and recreational activities appropriate to the age of the child and to participate freely in cultural life and the arts.'*

The first Oxfordshire Play Strategy was launched in May 2007. This is an extension of that strategy to 2011.

The first strategy presented a lengthy argument supporting the need to prioritise play and analysing some of the issues preventing children and young people from being able to access good quality opportunities to play. We set ourselves the following challenges:

- Enable more people to participate
- Promote playgrounds and other play spaces including informal and natural environments
- Bring people of different ages and backgrounds together
- Include everyone regardless of background or disability
- Make it easier to play in urban areas
- Make it easier to play in rural areas
- Allow children to take more risks when they are playing
- Provide more supervision and support
- Introduce more play into out of school activities, childcare and extended schools
- Try out new ideas
- Improve information, publicity, training and public awareness
- Improve coordination and partnership working

Since then, a great deal of work has been undertaken nationally and locally to raise the profile of these issues. There is a new policy environment and a completely different resource base locally to support play development.

This strategy has been created by the Oxfordshire Play Partnership, which includes representation from all local authorities in the county, voluntary and community sector (VCS) organisations and children and young people (Appendix A). Each member of the partnership will have its own action plan reflecting its area of specialism or geography. This strategy focuses on activity, which has a countywide significance.

This strategy should be read in conjunction with the 2007 strategy and two other new documents: the Oxfordshire Play Policy and the Oxfordshire Play Action Plan 2009-2011:

Oxfordshire Play Policy

In order to ensure that the development of play opportunities delivers what we want for children, young people and communities we need to agree a set of values and principles, which are established for the long term and inform our strategic planning and delivery.

Oxfordshire Children and Young People's Trust and all Parish, Town, District, City and County Councils have adopted or are being asked to adopt a relevant version of this policy.

In essence the policy identifies 7 core principles:

- I. We recognise the importance and **value of play** in the development of children and young people and for the benefit of society as a whole. Play is essential for physical, emotional and spiritual growth and for intellectual and educational development.
- II. We believe that all children and young people want and need opportunities to play. Play provision should be welcoming and **accessible** to every child, irrespective of gender, economic or social circumstances, ethnic or cultural background or origin, or individual

abilities. Although play spaces should be accessible to all, this does not mean that all children need to be able to do everything within a play space.

- III. We recognise that the best play provision is designed to offer all children and young people access to a wide range of experience in settings, which support acceptable level of risk. This means that children should not be exposed to unacceptable risk such as death or permanently disabling injury. Other kinds of risk may be acceptable if the social benefit is evident. We acknowledge the need to allow **challenge and risk** in play settings and we will always assess risk in conjunction with the possible benefit of any provision.
- IV. We want people of all ages to be able to share play spaces where possible. This may not always be appropriate but, subject to local discretion and conditions, there should be no presumption against children, young people and adults of all ages having access to quality play opportunities.
- V. We wish to create beautiful spaces that inspire, engage, challenge and are well cared for. We will seek to commission experienced play **landscape** designers in the process of developing or upgrading play spaces. We will ensure that an appropriate budget is allocated to the design and build of external space when creating or redeveloping an early years setting, a school or a young people's centre.
- VI. We will **engage** local children, young people, parents, carers and residents in the development of play spaces and will put their views at the heart of developments
- VII. We want children and young people to be able to organise their own play but we recognise the importance of supervision and support and will encourage the development of an adequately resourced **workforce** that is confident, well informed, properly trained and that understands concepts around risk, safeguarding, inclusion and participation.

Oxfordshire Play Action Plan 2009-2011

This plan sets out in more detail how the strategy will be implemented over the next two years.

2 What has changed since 2007?

Nationally, the Government produced a *Children's Plan*¹ in 2008, which has placed greater emphasis on the word 'Enjoy' within the five outcomes of *Every Child Matters*. The plan has five principles of which this is one:

'Children and young people need to enjoy their childhood as well as grow up prepared for adult life.'

This was followed by the recent launch of a national *Play Strategy*², which sets out a vision and a plan for delivery under five headings:

- More places to play
- Supporting play throughout childhood
- Playing safely
- Child-friendly communities
- Embedding play in local priorities.

These headings provide the framework for Oxfordshire's local strategic aims, which are outlined in 4 below, and detailed in the *Oxfordshire Play Action Plan 2009/11*.

The national strategy is supported by two helpful guidance documents on design³ and risk⁴ Alongside this strategy, Government has created funding streams called *Pathfinder* and *Playbuilder* and appointed Play England as a resource to support play development throughout the country.

¹The Children's Plan, DCSF + DCMS www.dcsf.gov.uk/childrensplan

²The Play Strategy, DCSF + DCMS www.dcsf.gov.uk/play

³Design for Play, Shackell, Butler, Doyle and Ball, Play England, DCSF + DCMS
www.playengland.org.uk/resources/design-for-play.pdf

⁴Managing Risk in Play Provision, Ball, Gill and Spiegel, Play England, DCSF + DCMS
www.playengland.org.uk

There is also a new *National Indicator (NI 199)*, which will ask local authorities to measure children and young people's satisfaction with parks and play areas. Play indicators can also contribute to many of the other national indicators.⁵

*Aiming High for Disabled Children*⁶ is a government programme with significant additional resources, which aims to ensure that disabled children and young people will have the same opportunities to develop and fulfil their potential as all other children and young people. In particular, universal children's services will be more genuinely inclusive of disabled children, including those with complex needs.

*Change4Life*⁷ is a movement to reduce obesity by encouraging everybody to 'Eat well, Move more, Live longer'. It is primarily a marketing campaign with a sub brand, *Play4Life*, promoting the health benefits of play. The *Healthy Weight Healthy Lives* guidance additionally requires all PCTs to have a plan for tackling obesity in under 11's.

*Building Schools for the Future 2008*⁸ is a major Government programme, which Oxfordshire has applied for funding from for a major building programme in Oxfordshire schools. It includes an emphasis on school grounds and inside/outside environments.

The Government *Youth Crime Action Plan and Youth Task Force Action Plan July 2008*⁹, includes 3 strands, one of which is for better and earlier prevention, ensuring young people having safe but challenging leisure opportunities locally to where they live. The *Positive Activities*¹⁰ duty sets out LA's responsibilities to provide all under 18 year olds with educational leisure-time and sufficient recreational leisure-time activities.

Locally, the Oxfordshire 2030 Sustainable Community Strategy includes a commitment to improve access to play. This Play Strategy supports the priorities of the Children's Trust: raising achievement, safeguarding and narrowing the gap. The Trust has endorsed the adoption of a play policy. Four workshops were provided to promote play policies. These were facilitated with PLAYLINK¹¹ and attracted 63 people from the County Council, all five district councils, six town councils, sixteen parish councils, Thames Valley Police and four other organisations.

The County Council has created a Strategic Lead for Play and successfully attracted approx £2.5 million for Playbuilder projects countywide and a large Play Park in Barton, Oxford. The county is one of three local authorities in the South East with Pathfinder status.

All five district authorities successfully attracted Big Lottery Funds to improve play spaces and Oxford City Council has embarked upon a further ambitious redevelopment of its playgrounds.

Community-led plans in rural areas in Oxfordshire have highlighted activities and playgrounds for children and young people as a high priority.¹²

Oxfordshire PCT has joined with local authorities and Learning Through Landscapes¹³ to support a campaign called *Oxfordshire Outside*, which seeks to make it easier for everyone to get outside. The campaign will support the Play Strategy by focussing on the improvement of children centres, young people's centres and school grounds to support play and learning. Play Pathfinder and Oxfordshire Outside are jointly commissioning a large research project to help identify what stops

⁵ <http://www.playengland.org.uk/resources/play-national-indicator-set.pdf>

⁶ www.everychildmatters.gov.uk/socialcare/ahdc

⁷ www.nhs.uk/change4life

⁸ www.dcsf.gov.uk

⁹ <http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/documents/youth-crime-action-plan>

¹⁰ Education and Inspections Act 2006 S6

¹¹ www.playlink.org

¹² Community-led plans in Oxfordshire, a report to the Oxfordshire Partnership by University of Gloucestershire.

¹³ www.ltl.org.uk

children and young people from going outside and how they benefit if they do. The campaign supports the Director of Public Health's obesity and mental well-being strategies.

Local Development Frameworks, transport plans and public realm strategies are increasingly incorporating the need for inter-generational playable space.

Engagement with children, young people and communities about the importance of play is central. Children and young people have been involved in the implementation of Playbuilder, the running of Play Day 2008, have shaped the upcoming re-commissioning of services through a 'Better Play' workshop and have been trained to run the Play Pot. The next meeting of the Children and Young People's Involvement Network (ChYPIN) will bring 100 children and young people together with senior service leaders to discuss the importance of playing and learning outside. Children and young people are involved in the development of all Playbuilder sites.

Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) organisations lead the way in both delivering play opportunities and in the support for the voluntary play sector. Oxfordshire Play Association and Oxfordshire Playing Fields Association provide key roles, including support and advice for Parish and Town Councils, training, emergency cover for play services, information, payroll and insurance support, outreach advice and play promotion.

The Oxfordshire Play Partnership has brought all relevant bodies together to improve coordination and accountability. It also organised a successful Play Day challenging risk aversion and attracting over 5,000 people of all ages.

Perhaps the greatest change, stimulated by the national changes, has been the growing public recognition of the intrinsic value of play and the need to allow children and young people the space to play. There is increasing concern that we are not doing right by our children as evidenced in the findings of *An Overview of Child Well-being in Rich Countries*¹⁴ and *The Good Childhood Inquiry*¹⁵. There is also a growing desire to allow our children the same freedoms that their parents had to play safely without being anxious about risk.

3 Our vision

We define play as children and young people following their own ideas and interests in their own way and for their own reasons, having fun while respecting themselves and others.

We share the vision of the national Play Strategy¹⁶.

- In every residential area there are a variety of supervised and unsupervised places for play, free of charge;
- Local neighbourhoods are, and feel like, safe, interesting places to play;
- Routes to children's play space are safe and accessible for all children and young people;
- Parks and open spaces are attractive and welcoming to children and young people, and are well maintained and well used;
- Children and young people have a clear stake in public space and their play is accepted by their neighbours;
- Children and young people play in a way that respects other people and property;
- Children and young people and their families take an active role in the development of local play spaces;
- Play spaces are attractive, welcoming, engaging and accessible for all local children and young people, including disabled children, and children from minority groups in the community.

We also want

- Opportunities for families to play together

¹⁴ UNICEF, February 2007

¹⁵ www.childrenssociety.org.uk

¹⁶ The Play Strategy, DCSF + DCMS www.dcsf.gov.uk/play

- Opportunities for child-led play within early years settings and schools both indoors and outside
- A local workforce that is confident and skilled in supervising and supporting play
- Children and young people who have least opportunities to play to benefit most from this strategy. These include those facing barriers such as location, disability, poverty and cultural or family attitudes to play.

THE STRATEGY

4 More places to play

Overarching Aim

To ensure

- every residential area has a variety of safe, accessible and exciting places to play
- the external environments of Children's Centres, Schools and Young People's Centres offer inspiring opportunities to learn and play
- children and young people who have least access to child-led creative and inclusive play opportunities, are targeted

By March 2011

- 4.1 We will increase the number of well-designed play spaces by delivering the Play Barton project and play space developments through the County Playbuilder programme and through City, district, town and parish council programmes.
- 4.2 We will spread good practice in design and engagement by offering technical support from OPFA¹⁷ and through a grant funded design project. We will ensure sites that we commission or develop
- Are bespoke
 - Are well located
 - Make use of natural elements
 - Provide a wide range of play experiences
 - Are accessible to both disabled and non-disabled children
 - Meet community needs
 - Allow children of different ages to play together
 - Build in opportunities to experience risk and challenge
 - Are sustainable and appropriately maintained
 - Allow for change and evolution¹⁸
 - Involve children, young people and communities
- 4.3 We will improve the external environment of buildings by influencing Early Years, IYSS, Primary, Secondary and possible MyPlace capital developments by introducing external space design into all briefs and feasibility studies and through initiatives such as Oxfordshire Outside and Extended Services so that external design, use and maintenance is valued and prioritised
- 4.4 We will re-commission contracts for all providers of play services and infrastructure support through a tender process aimed at targeting opportunities at those least able to access high quality play

5 Supporting play throughout childhood

Overarching Aim

To ensure

- play provision is welcoming and accessible to every child, irrespective of age, gender, economic or social circumstances, ethnic or cultural background or origin, or individual abilities
- it is easier for families to play together
- all children and young people have access to creative child-led play opportunities within early years settings, schools, young people's centres and other out-of-school activities
- the wider children's workforce is trained to understand the value of play and the crucial role of play in child development
- the VCS is able to deliver play in local areas and infrastructure organisations have the capacity to support them
- all young people have access to positive activities which are young person led

¹⁷ Oxfordshire Playing Fields Association www.oxonrcc.org.uk/partners.php?smid=42

¹⁸ Design for Play www.teachernet.gov.uk/publications

By March 2011

- 5.1 We will target play opportunities at particular groups and aim to reduce identified barriers. Specifically we will use opportunities within *Aiming High for Disabled Children* to improve access to play for disabled children and young people, alongside the tendering process and Pathfinder opportunities. We will additionally target groups of children and young people who experience barriers as a result of other issues, e.g. cultural, geographical, transport, gender etc
- 5.2 We will re-commission all play work services to ensure they are delivering in line with this strategy
- 5.3 We will ensure that high quality play training is increasingly available to all play workers, as well as those working informally in play and the wider children's workforce to ensure recognition of play in meeting ECM targets
- 5.4 We will improve infrastructure support for the sector through OPA¹⁹, OPFA²⁰, the Childcare Development Team and the OCC Participation and Play Team.

6 Playing safely

Overarching Aim

- To reduce anxiety about safety by tackling bullying, improving road safety and reducing risk aversion in the design of play spaces and the delivery of play work.
- To help children keep themselves safe by offering them opportunities to learn how to assess and manage risk.

By March 2011

- 6.1 We will use the Oxfordshire C&YP Survey 2009²¹ to measure progress about children and young people's perception of safety in public space, and to target particular groups/areas as a result
- 6.2 We will support the implementation of our anti-bullying strategy²² and work with the police, all local authorities and communities to tackle crime and vandalism in and around play spaces. In particular we will seek to design out vandalism by making play spaces more welcoming to young people.
- 6.3 We will ensure that children's rights to play inform new road layout design and we will continue to develop travel plans with schools.
- 6.4 We will challenge risk aversion by adopting a Play Policy. This will raise public awareness of the need to allow children to take risks, improve design, offer training and introduce risk/benefit assessment protocols rather than simply risk assessment.

7 Child and young people-friendly communities

Overarching Aim

To ensure

- the public realm is welcoming for children and young people
- it is easy for families and people of different generations to enjoy being together
- children and young people are central to decision making about the development of play opportunities.

¹⁹Oxfordshire Play Association www.oxonplay.org.uk

²⁰ Oxfordshire Playing Fields Association

²¹ *Your Voice 2009*: Oxfordshire C&YP Survey (Participation and Play Team OCC)

²² Anti-Bullying Strategy, OCC

By March 2011

- 7.1 We will influence the design of major housing and urban developments such as the Oxford Partnership Public Realm Action Plan and Future Didcot Green Space Plan to allow for playable space.
- 7.2 We will ensure new play space developments are welcoming to people of all generations, where appropriate.
- 7.3 We will make it easier for everybody to get outside through the Oxfordshire Outside campaign.
- 7.4 We will involve children and young people in the design, development, allocation of funding and evaluation of Playbuilder sites.
- 7.5 We will continue to offer funding to play initiatives through the Play Pot scheme, which is managed by children and young people.
- 7.6 We will research what stops children and young people from playing outside and how it helps when they do.
- 7.7 We will support play initiatives that encourage children and young people to play in public space such as Play Rangers and Play Buses, and through prioritising geographical areas through the tendering process
- 7.8 We will consult children and young people regularly and specifically through a focussed event using the ChYPIN mechanism.²³

8 Embedding play in local priorities

Overarching Aim

To ensure

- all relevant bodies have effective play policies and strategies.
- partners such as PCT, police and planners with no direct responsibility for play recognise the significance of play to (for example) health, community safety and public realm.
- the public understands the importance of play and how to make it easier for children and young people to play.
- activity is coordinated, effective and properly evaluated.

By March 2011

- 8.1 We will adopt a play policy and actively encourage all our partners to do the same.
- 8.2 We will ensure that Play has a much higher profile within the new C&YP Plan 2010
- 8.2 We will research where playable space exists and how it is used, to provide sustainable planning tools to local authorities, through a partnership with Groundworks which involves Oxfordshire in a national GIS pilot project
- 8.3 We will introduce information about opportunities to play through the new Family Information Service
- 8.4 We will raise public awareness of the meaning and value of play through public events and media work and by involving communities in the development of play spaces
- 8.5 We will strengthen the Oxfordshire Play Partnership and find meaningful ways of involving children and young people in the Partnership
- 8.6 We will evaluate our activity and devise ways of testing the satisfaction of children and young people through a major partnership project with Oxfordshire Outside.
- 8.7 We will work to ensure that CYPFD sustains its funding commitment to play post 2011 to ensure its vital contribution to meeting the ECM targets is recognised and acted upon

²³ ChYPIN is the Children and Young People Involvement Network