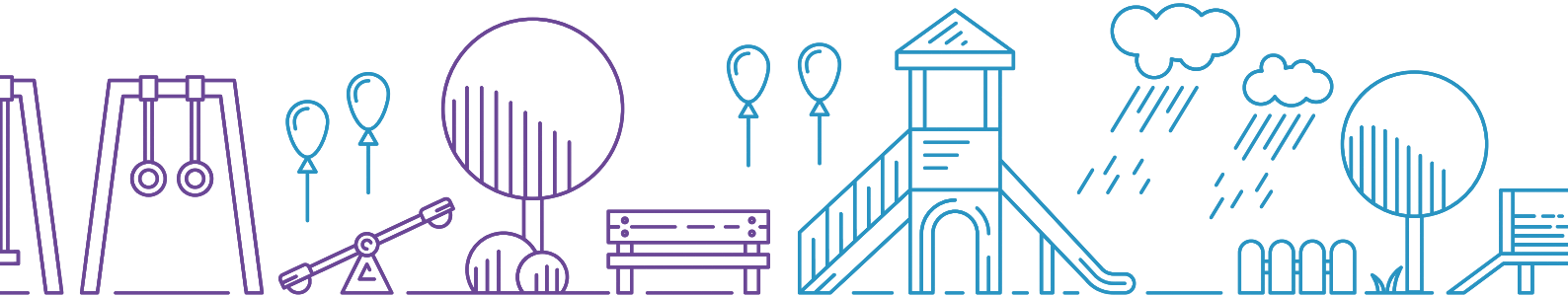

Play Strategy 2021-2026



Summary



Foreword

Play allows children to experience fun, joy and laughter in a way that is important to them. It is a vital part of their growth and development. Active Play lays the foundation for a healthy lifestyle and helps children develop essential social skills through sharing, respecting others, patience and tolerance. It is also often through play that children develop their imagination and creativity. I am sure we can all remember with great fondness playing as children and the fun and happy memories it evokes.



Janet Turner
Leisure and Cultural Services Portfolio Holder

What is play?

Play is described as '*what children and young people do when they follow their own ideas and interest, in their own way, and for their own reasons*' (Play England, 2018). This is underpinned by the Playwork Principles, the professional and ethical framework for play work where:

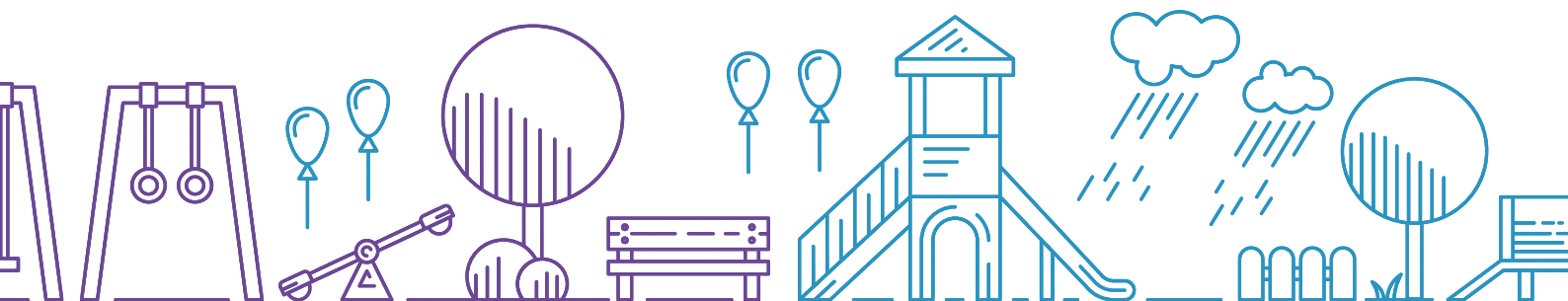
Play is freely chosen – children choose when, how and what to play

Personally directed – children control the content of their play

Intrinsically motivated – play is a process and undertaken for its own sake

Playing is a primary need for children, closely linked to their innate need to express themselves, to explore, learn about and make sense of the world around them. The benefits of play derive from children choosing and doing it for themselves. The adult role in play provision is to enable rather than to direct.

According to Article 31 of the United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child, a child has a right to play and '*the public authorities shall endeavour to promote the enjoyment of this right*' by investing in the provision of activities whether structured or non-structured and creating time and space for children to play safely to develop, essential to health and well-being (United Nations, 2013).





(Play England, 2018)

Play and children's health

There is growing concern over childhood obesity with 16.6% of children aged 5 to 6 years being overweight/obese in Surrey (Surrey-i, 2019) and *'in the last year of primary school, on average, six children out of a class of thirty are obese and a further four are overweight, twice as many as thirty years ago'* (Davies, 2019). In Elmbridge, 16% of reception children are overweight/obese/severely obese, and by year 6 this has increased to 25% who are overweight/obese/severely obese (Davies, 2019).

Davies' report stresses that action is needed to improve child health as the level of obesity is increasing as children progress through primary school (Davies, 2019). By providing access to play children have the opportunity to achieve the recommended physical activity required for health and well-being and to combat childhood obesity. Encouraging physical activity and the social interaction through play can help a child get the best start in life, an ambition of the Health and Wellbeing Strategy (Surrey Health and Wellbeing Board, 2019).

Play development in Elmbridge

Leisure and Cultural Services has a well-established programme of play activities throughout the year and free play events managed by the Play Development Officer.

Shout! Out

In 2017 Shout! extended its provision to offer free play sessions in recreation grounds around the borough during the summer holidays. They are free to attend and children over 8 years can attend unaccompanied. The sessions are generally attended by up to 40 people at each session. There were 9 sessions offered in summer 2019.

Play Events

These are annual events organised during the summer holidays. The Teddy Bears picnic is held in Hersham, organised in collaboration with a local nursery and in 2019 drew 420 attendees. Play Day is an annual event in Hurst Park, Molesey to celebrate National Play day. It has been running since 2013 and in 2019 had 37 stalls with up to 3000 children and adults attending. These events are popular with residents and well attended each year.

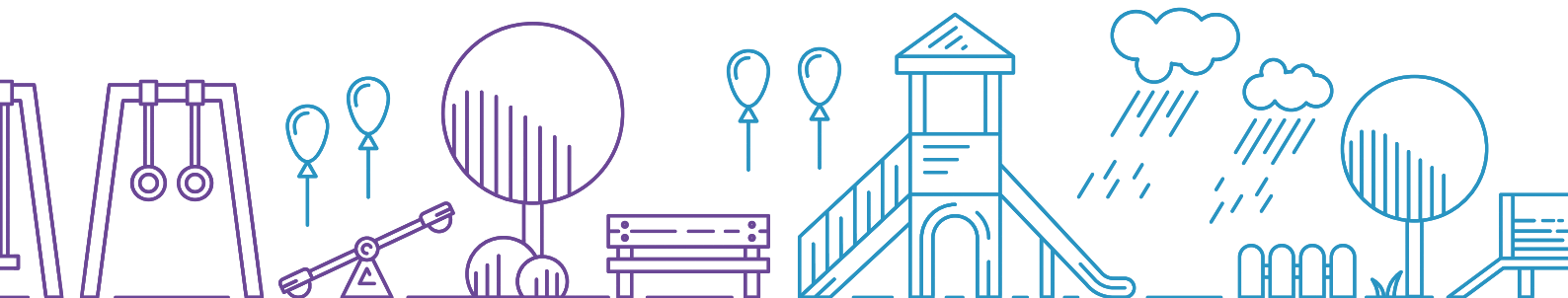
In 2018, the Elmbridge's Shout! holiday activities scheme worked in collaboration with PA Housing to provide a week of free access play for children in the St John's area for 6 hours each day. The morning session offered arts and crafts followed by an afternoon session of sports coaching. The sessions were well attended for a new venture with 15-20 children per day.

For the unprecedented times of 2020, play development moved online with activities for children using their dedicated Shout! Facebook page. 'Virtual' Play Day saw 99 posts with over 6000 reaches and an 823% increase in post engagement and October half term activities saw 60 posts with 1357 reaches and a 96% increase in post engagement. Similar activities were planned during all school holidays, including arts and crafts, games and activities. With this significant increase in reach to residents, this methodology will be repeated in future years.

Elmbridge vision for play

This vision was developed in collaboration with stakeholders.

Developing strong partnership working with parents and professionals to ensure that all Elmbridge's children and young people have an equal right to play opportunities through a range of enjoyable, creative, stimulating and safe provision to develop their health and well-being and future life chances.



The key objectives highlighted as part of the stakeholder consultation and research were to identify opportunities in:

- Widening participation in play in Elmbridge
- Advocating for play
- Improving children’s health and wellbeing through play
- Bringing play into the closer community/neighbourhood

You said.....	we listened.....
<p>You wanted more opportunities for children to play outdoors.</p> <p>In the survey, 60% said ‘stranger danger’ was a deterrent and 85% of respondents showed an interest in the scheme being introduced.</p> <p>70% of children consulted said they would be interested in street play.</p>	<p>Research and deliver ‘street play’, an initiative developed by Play England. It is a simple and low-cost way for children to be able to play out in the streets where they live. Local authorities allow temporary road closure and local parents and the residents act as marshals while children play in the road</p>
<p>You wanted to receive more information about activities available by delivering a broad programme of holiday activities information on the website</p>	<p>Shout! web page will be updated regularly.</p> <p>‘Subscribe’ to Shout! mailing for email updates available.</p> <p>Shout! Facebook page posts to share information. We now have over 1000 followers.</p>
<p>You wanted us to provide opportunities for reading and communication skills</p>	<p>We will add story time to stay and play events (already at Play day and Teddy bears picnic) and also explore providing story CDs for the younger age group at holiday camps held at Elmbridge Xcel leisure complex</p>
<p>You wanted more sports and activities for older children (age 10+)</p>	<p>We will explore, in collaboration with the Sport and Health Development Team, opportunities for free sports during the summer holidays</p>



Fixed play equipment

The challenge in respect of play areas and play spaces is to make sure they deliver a good experience for their users. Children want play spaces they can enjoy. Adults want play spaces where children can develop physical and decision-making skills that will help them in all parts of their lives. To do this, the play area must have an element of risk otherwise, the learning opportunities derived from risk-based decision making are lost and it reduces the fun.

The Council needs a plan to maintain the existing play areas to the best standard they can. Residents naturally regard play areas as valuable community assets and so do we. These assets must be maintained so they can meet the expectations of the community that use them. We need good parks in the right places and this strategy will help to ensure this is the case going forward.

In order to be able to set out a plan to maintain and develop excellent play spaces, we need to understand the overview of the current position including the different types of play space and the guidelines that set out the best practice. We must be aware of the planning context so that new developments can have suitable facilities to help build new communities. We also have to understand the nature and quality of the existing play spaces so we can target resources at the locations most needing them.

We have profiled the key demographic information for each ward within the borough and mapped each play area to identify gaps in provision, so that we can plan for the future. Excellent play provision has to meet the needs of the local community and in order to find out what is important to the users, we have consulted on this strategy and will continue to consult during the refurbishment or installation of play areas to meet local needs as best we can.

A plan to manage assets can only be successful if it recognises the availability of resources to deliver it. The plan for the first five years of this is set out in Appendix C, in the Cabinet Report.

In summary, this Fixed play equipment strategy:

- Gives a rationale for investment in play provision as an important part of infrastructure in the borough
- Identifies the play provision that exists, and its play value.
- Sets standards for investment in play provision in Elmbridge
- Presents a development plan identifying priority for future investment.

The Play Strategy establishes that play provision is part of the necessary infrastructure for healthy communities.

It outlines the evidence for the enormous value of outdoor play for healthy learning and development.

Rationale for investment

The Council acknowledges that children's play areas are one of the safer activities in which children engage. The protection, enhancement and management of children's play areas are set out in the local plan, under Policy CS14 'Green infrastructure'.

The approach to future provision will continue to be underpinned by risk-benefit assessment.

The Play Strategy establishes that play provision is part of the necessary infrastructure for healthy communities.

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Research has evidenced the positive role of open space and physical activity for children and adults alike in reducing health inequalities and improving mental as well as physical health. Outdoor activity has been shown to benefit children who find it difficult to concentrate indoors, to benefit mental health and general physical health and thereby contribute to healthy communities. There is also evidence that the more children play outside, the more likely they are to use outdoor spaces as adults and therefore go on to encourage their own children to play outside. This research is reflected in the physical activity guidelines for children and adults produced by the Department of Health.

We are fortunate in Elmbridge to have a diverse range of outdoor spaces for children to play. Overall, 55% of respondents were satisfied with the provision of traditional play equipment/play areas in the borough. When asked to make additional comments about the existing traditional equipment/play areas in the borough, the main recurring aspects mentioned were that the equipment was outdated / tired, there was not enough age appropriate equipment and that maintenance needed to be improved.

Existing Play Provision

The need to provide quality play provision within Elmbridge is recognised. These play areas need to be refurbished or replaced in order to continue to provide a safe environment which provides sufficient play value. An independent review by RoSPA has been carried out to assess the play value and current risk level. The order which these play areas are replaced will be made against set criteria.

1. **Play equipment life expectancy** (likelihood of failure where repair is no longer viable).
2. **ROSPA Play inspection report** - risk level
3. **Unforeseen wear & tear / vandalism** e.g. failure of internal parts on roundabout where parts are no longer available.
4. **Available funding** – i.e. the combination of funding available such as two medium sized play areas OR one large and one small.
5. **Play value** – replace equipment / play areas which have a low play value (assessed within the independent ROSPA report)
6. **Local requests / complaints** over a 5-year period.
7. **Large changes to local population**
i.e. population increase – more likely to be funded by planning obligations (section 106 agreement) where there is requirement for further play areas.

The Council will continue to replace and refurbish its play spaces in order to provide for local community needs. Improvements will be based on available funding, inspection reports, play value assessments, life expectancy and needs identified through local consultation, with a view to creating play provision for young children, juniors, and young people in any given community.

There are currently 33 equipped play areas (excluding 4 skate parks) managed and maintained by Elmbridge. These have been assessed as in Appendix C in the Cabinet Report, against the criteria.

Standards for development

Play space design will reflect the Design for Play guidelines, balancing the benefits for children's play and the needs of a local community with the risks involved. Wherever possible natural play will be incorporated within the play areas.

1. **Designed to enhance its setting** - inspired by the background, whether that is a park, open space or urban landscape
2. **Located in the best possible place** - where children naturally play, away from dangerous roads, noise, and pollution, but near through routes and well-used public footpaths.
3. **Close to nature** - many studies have shown that children benefit from access to natural environments. In densely populated urban areas, the use of grassy mounds, planting, logs, and boulders can help to make a more attractive and playable setting for equipment.
4. **Designed so that children can play in different ways, incorporating different ages, abilities, and interests.**
5. **Designed so that disabled and non-disabled children play together.**
6. **Loved by the community.**
7. A space where **children of all ages have the opportunity to play together** where there is space to do so.
8. A space **where children can stretch and challenge themselves** in every way.
9. **Maintained** for play value and environmental sustainability.
10. A space that **evolves** as children grow where there is space to do so.

The Fixed Play Equipment Strategy seeks to provide guidance for the Council's decision-making processes related to play space provision for the next 5 years (priority to be reviewed on an annual basis).

Sustaining and delivering new play provision

Developers of all new housing within the Borough will be required to contribute to on or off-site play provision in accordance with the standard of 0.8ha per 1000 people.

On-site provision will be made where possible or off-site contributions to additional or improved play space will be sought where we are able to secure it by planning obligations (section 106 agreement).

The Council will secure clear conditions with developers for ongoing maintenance of on-site play spaces that are adopted by management committees/residents' associations, rather than the Council.

All existing play areas should be retained, unless it is identified through consultation with residents that there is an over provision within certain locations within the borough, or that the provision is no longer needed or can be sustained through a different mix of play facilities within an area.

Investment required from 2021 – 2026

The play area development plan produced by RoSPA's assessment and other criteria has highlighted that the estimated capital investment required over the next three years (2021 – 2024) is £419,000 for replacement of individual play equipment only, within 12 play areas. This figure excludes day-to-day maintenance and staff costs and is for the Council owned and managed sites only. Further funding will be sought for 2024 – 2026, dependent upon a condition assessment of the play equipment requiring replacement. There is a requirement for flexibility within the schedule of replacement due to the unforeseeable degradation of equipment within the next 5 years.

In addition to this **Funding for refurbishment/new sites** will be sought from planning obligations - S106 and CIL - Developer funding is dependent on the developments that will take place and their locations. As a result, likely figures for income from the developing Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) or S106 for the next five years are not guaranteed. Additionally, it may be unlikely that the funding will be specifically aimed at those play areas requiring urgent refurbishment.

Funding to support the provision of play within the borough can also come from **External Funding** such as:

- Grants
- Awards
- Loans
- Corporate donations

These are usually available for not-for-profit organisations such as social enterprises, community groups and charities. Sometimes funds are available for statutory organisations including local authorities. These may come from grants awarded by charitable trusts or foundations, new initiatives delivered from central government, the National Lottery, and local businesses. Opportunities for sourcing additional external funding will be explored where feasible. It is therefore imperative that the Council develops effective partnerships with external organisations to secure such funds for the benefit of communities.

The priorities for replacing existing sites are shown in Appendix C in the Cabinet Report, and the development plan is based on criteria assessments. However, these will be balanced against available resources, knowledge about the lifespan of equipment gained from regular inspections and opportunities that may arise (for example from external funding).

The Council will continue the inspection and maintenance of play areas to British and EN standards and its ongoing capital investment (CIL funding) for improving existing play areas to ensure they meet local needs.

Strategic Community Infrastructure Levy funding for play area refurbishments will be sought alongside other sources and opportunities for funding as necessary in order to carry out the development plan.

The Council will continue to improve both access to, and the quality of information relating to play provision through signage, social media, press releases and the Council website.



Measuring success

In order to implement the strategy, we have developed a 5-year play development action plan and a Proposed 5-year playground refurbishment programme and costs. These will be monitored, evaluated and reviewed on an annual basis.

The Play Development Officer is here to:

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

The Green Spaces Team are here to:

- Provide strategic direction for developing play spaces
- Undertake planned improvements of sites, dependent upon success of Strategic CIL funding.
- Inspect, maintain and manage attractive play space provision within the Council's portfolio that children want to play in.

