

PITSTONE PARISH COUNCIL

Play Policy & Strategy

1. What is play?

The Children's Play Council (2001) defines play as "freely chosen, personally directed, and intrinsically motivated behaviour that actively engages the child. Play can be fun or serious. Through play children explore social, material and imaginary worlds and their relationship with them, elaborating all the while a flexible range of responses to the challenges they encounter."

It can include opportunities to run, climb, skip, hide, play with ropes, jump, practise cartwheels, throw and kick balls, make friends, fall out, tell stories, climb trees, take risks, get wet or dirty, build dens, dress up, pretend, dig holes, swing on tyres, shout, fight, invent games, make things, paint, talk with their friends or just sit.

2. Good play opportunities

Good play opportunities promote good social, mental and emotional health, giving children the chance to try out and experience a range of emotions in a "safe" way. It allows them to learn and develop emotionally by promoting resilience and fostering self-esteem. There is growing research evidence that increased opportunity for free play is the most effective way to ensure that children achieve at least 60 minutes of moderate-intensity physical activity each day (as recommended by the Chief Medical Officer).

Children prefer play space to be visible and readily accessible, at the heart of the community and in an environment with which they are familiar and feel secure. They also like the option of accessing or creating secret places such as dens. Children also tend to play where they are likely to meet friends eg outside shops, on street corners etc and attempts to corral young people to "safe" areas are unlikely to succeed. Whilst fixed equipment playgrounds provide vital opportunities the play strategy takes a much broader view of play areas within the community.

Good play opportunities recognise the child's needs to test boundaries and responds positively to that need. The Play Safety Forum cites that "children need and want to take risks when they play. Play provision aims to respond to these needs and wishes by offering children stimulating, challenging environments for exploring and developing their abilities. In doing this, play provision aims to manage the level of risk, so that children are not exposed to unacceptable risks of death or serious injury."

It is accepted that during play provision, children may be exposed to the risk of minor and easily-healed injuries such as bruises, grazes or sprains. Facilities for older children, such as wheeled sports, may also expose children to accidents such as broken bones. Furthermore, such experiences are seen to have a positive role in child development as they can test the extent of their abilities and competences within a controlled environment where the risks are obvious to them (eg when climbing, the height risk is clear but it provides the child with the opportunity to overcome any fears and feel a sense of satisfaction in climbing) – these are deemed to be good risks. Situations where risks are not apparent to children or are impossible for children to assess for themselves, (such as equipment that can trap heads or weak structures) are categorised as bad risks and avoided.

Play provision also helps the parents and carers. By providing an alternative place, outside the home, where children can play, as this has been found to relieve stress and help reduce conflict. Play areas also act as a community gathering point, helping build neighbourliness and a sense of community.

3. Parish audit

See the attached spreadsheet, which outlines the provision within the parish and identifies areas for ongoing development. The elements marked in red type and bold are the current priorities for the parish council. Some of the less formal play areas are outside the control of the parish council but where development issues are highlighted the council will try to work with the relevant parties.

4. Aims and objectives

The parish council aims to ensure:

- There are safe and accessible places where all children and young people can play and socialise.
- A range of affordable, accessible and rewarding recreational opportunities is provided.
- That the cost or availability of transport are not undue barriers to participation.
- Recreational opportunities reflect the needs and interests of the community.
- That the value to the community of all the available public open space is maximised.
- That the risk-benefit assessment of the facility concerned is favourable.

5. Risk-Benefit management system

The goal is not for absolute safety, as taking risks is an essential feature of play provision and of all environments in which children legitimately spend time playing. Our play provision aims to offer children the chance to encounter acceptable risks as part of a stimulating, challenging and controlled learning environment. However, we aim to manage the balance between the need to offer risk and the need to keep children safe from serious harm.

All parish council owned equipped play areas and open space receive a weekly inspection from a member of parish council staff for wear and tear, litter hazards and damage. The public are welcome to report any issues they identify, at any time, to the parish clerk whose contact number is provided at each site as well as on all our noticeboards, website and media channels. The play areas also receive at least weekly visits from a litter picker employed by the parish council, with frequency increasing during the summer or periods of heavy use.

Each equipped play area receives an annual independent inspection to ensure that the equipment is safe and complies with the latest standards. This will also help to identify any issues that are not immediately visually apparent that may otherwise be missed, thus eliminating invisible risks.

There is also an annual risk-benefit assessment of all play facilities against the objectives stated above. The underpinning question being “how well do the sites provide the play opportunities our Parish Council aims to offer, while managing the risks?”

The two play areas within the Castlemead estate were provided by Taylor Wimpey as part of their residential development and were subsequently adopted by the parish council. The grassed areas outside these play areas remain within the ownership of either Buckinghamshire Council or Taylor Wimpey.

The largest play area on the recreation ground underwent significant investment in 2021 and 2022 to upgrade the space from a LEAP (Local Equipped Play Area) to a NEAP (Neighbourhood Equipped Play Area). The old play equipment was removed and a more challenging & exciting play space installed by Huck Teck on behalf of the parish council during 2020/21. The parish council installed a concrete skate park / wheeled sport area between the MUGA and play space during 2021-22. A multi-use games area (MUGA) has been installed by Nicholas King Homes (2021) as part of their residential development but there are several issues to resolve before this can transfer to the parish council. This site provides families with a freely accessible space where all members of their family can play and be active.

The council will also eventually adopt the play space constructed within the Bellway Vicarage Road residential development once it has completed its maintenance period with the developer.

The Play Policy & Strategy, along with the supporting audit and identified development areas, will be the subject of a risk-benefit assessment on an annual basis. The results of the above will be recorded.

6. Equality in play

An essential feature of our play strategy is that it promotes inclusion and access for disadvantaged and disabled children and young people. Inclusive principles and good practice are essential, as is compliance with the Disability Discrimination Act.

Our equipped play areas feature multi-purpose equipment with tunnels and slides etc, rocking equipment, roundabouts and springers that can be enjoyed by the majority of children. All sites are fully accessible.

Where the parish council installs new play areas or renovates play spaces, DDA features will be included. For the play area by the recreation ground this has included: a sunken trampoline suitable for wheelchairs, a cantilever nest swing, extra roomy DDA bike & buggy springers, wide embankment slide so carers & children can slide together, benches with backs & arm rests, lots of colour and texture contrasts, cradle swings in 2 sizes, a toddler nest carousel and the installation of a concrete access path to the contrast gates.

The parish council will consult on a bi-annual basis with this sector of the community regarding any problems they may have experienced or any additional features that would be of benefit. Residents with children who have a specific need are also welcome to contact the parish council at any time to discuss individual requirements.

7. Legal and public policy context

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) gives all children the right to “rest and leisure; to engage in age-appropriate play and recreational activities”. In line with the age definition adopted in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), and the remit of the “Every Child Matters: change for children” agenda, a child is somebody under the age of 18.

The provider of the play equipment is ultimately responsible and accountable for decisions taken, even where these are based on the opinions or expertise of others.

Play provision is deemed to be governed by the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 (criminal law) and the Occupiers’ Liability Acts of 1957 and 1984 (civil law). These statutes impose a duty of care on providers and occupiers, captured in the notion of “reasonableness”. Regulations require providers to carry out appropriate risk assessments.

Local Authorities in England have a statutory duty, under the Children Act (2004) to co-operate in their provision for the enjoyment of play and recreation as part of the five key outcomes for all children.

Play provision must meet the requirements of the Equality Act 2010. These do not alter the basic duty of care.

The key standards for play provision are BS EN 1176 (on fixed play equipment and surfacing), BS EN 1177 (on a method of testing for impact attenuating surfaces), BS EN 14974 (for wheeled sports facilities) and BS EN 15312 (for ball sports facilities). However, the tightening of a standard does not mean that older equipment constructed to previous versions suddenly become more dangerous and these facilities can still be included “if a rational process of risk assessment, together with a balance of cost, risk and benefit can justify it” (Playlink 2006).

8. Parish Audit

Refer to separate document.

9. Risk Assessment

Refer to separate document.

10. Review

This play policy and strategy was adopted by Pitstone parish council on13/7/23.....

minute reference ...SL32/23.2..... and will be reviewed on at least an annual basis.

Signed on behalf of Pitstone Parish Council by:

R Saintey

Chairman