Armagh City
Banbridge
& Craigavon
Borough Council

Armagh City, Banbridge & Craigavon Borough Council

PLAY STRATEGY

2018 - 2026



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

THE PURPOSE OF THE ARMAGH CITY, BANBRIDGE AND CRAIGAVON BOROUGH COUNCIL PLAY STRATEGY IS TO ESTABLISH A STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK WITHIN WHICH ALL DECISION MAKING AS IT RELATES TO THE PROVISION OF FIXED PLAY AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF NON-FIXED PLAY CAN TAKE PLACE.

At its core the Play Strategy acknowledges that play is a natural and fundamental aspect of children and young people's lives that supports growth and development across a range of developmental areas including:

- Physical and mental health and wellbeing
- Social development
- Intellectual growth and learning
- Practical skills development
- Personal resilience, and
- Establishing a connection to wider society and the community in which children live.

Despite the importance of play, children and young people all too often face a range of barriers that prevent them from playing in a way that meets their needs. Such barriers typically include a lack of accessible play spaces within communities; increased levels of traffic restricting street play opportunities; uninspiring fixed play areas that lack challenge and fail to engage or encourage children to play; a lack of inclusive play provision for children with disabilities and, at societal level a lack of tolerance amongst some adults for children at play outdoors in their community.

In developing the strategy council has taken into consideration a broad range of local, regional, and international policies and strategies including Article 31 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (often referred to as the Right to Play).

Recognising that council does not have the power to address all of the issues that impact upon or restrict children's play, responsibility for overseeing the roll-out of the strategy will fall under the auspices of the cross-sectoral Community Planning Partnership. This will help to ensure the support of wider statutory agencies and will establish a connection to the community and voluntary sector across the borough.



In developing the Play Strategy council commissioned PlayBoard NI to undertake a number of key pieces of work including:

- The completion of a play value audit of all existing fixed play areas across the borough to identify those that offer limited play value and require remedial action to enhance their play value
- Completion of an evaluation of underlying demographic need and settlement patterns to identify potential gap areas that may require the development of fixed play provision over the duration of the strategy, and
- An assessment of underlying demographic need and settlement patterns in areas of existing fixed play provision to identify potentially redundant fixed play areas that are no longer required.

Following completion of this work council have established a capital works programme for the coming 5 year period aimed at enhancing play value in those fixed play areas in most need, filling geographical gaps in provision and removing redundant fixed play areas and transforming the resultant sites for community use.

The strategy outlines a framework for council to advocate for and champion the right to play and identifies key priorities for the enhancement of play opportunities and removal of barriers to play. Underpinning the strategy is an:

- Acknowledgement and commitment to fulfilling the child's right to play as enshrined within the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (Article 31)
- Acknowledgement of the wider local, regional and national strategic environment as it relates to play
- Acknowledgement of the importance of play to the lives of children and young people, and acknowledgement of the critical role of play in supporting positive growth and development
- Acknowledgement of the full range of approaches open to council to meeting play need, both fixed and non-fixed
- Acknowledgement of the need to ensure that children and young people have an opportunity to express their views and opinions in relation to play and how council meet play need, and
- Acknowledgement of the need to ensure that play opportunities offer challenge that is developmentally important for children and young people.

With regards to fixed play provision (i.e. equipped play parks) the strategy:

- Provides a rationale for future investment in fixed play areas Identifies the location of current fixed play provision and, through an assessment of population demographics identifies areas of over/under provision
- Provides an overview of the play value of current fixed play provision, identifying those in need of replacement or enhancement
- Establishes an agreed set of criteria to guide future investment in fixed play provision, and
- Presents a development plan identifying priorities for future investment.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

KEY OBSERVATIONS

- From a demographic perspective children and young people (0 to 18 years) represent a significant proportion of the district population accounting for approximately 21% of the resident population
- Based on demographic and settlement patterns, fixed play development would appear historically to have been well targeted by legacy councils in order to meet underlying population demands with no significant examples identified of development within areas with little or no underlying population demand
- The population of Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Council area is a combination of rural based (village, small settlement and rural dispersed) and urban with a number of larger settlements including Armagh, Banbridge, Craigavon, Portadown and Lurgan
- The rural nature of the population has implications for the play strategy as it means that fixed play is not always a viable option for meeting play need, necessitating the development by council of alternative non-fixed approaches
- A number of potential gaps in fixed play provision have been identified across the borough and these will require consideration within the council's capital planning process over the duration of the strategy
- Based on play value assessment and analysis of underlying demographics/ settlement patterns a capital upgrade programme has been identified to enhance play value levels across the lowest ranked play areas over the duration of the strategy, and
- Based on play value assessment and analysis of underlying demographics/ settlement patterns a number of play areas have been identified for review due to low demand for play.

OVERARCHING RECOMMENDATIONS

In addition to the individual recommendations made for fixed play areas (based on play value audit findings), a number of overarching recommendations have been made within the strategy.

STRATEGIC

- **Participation of Children and Young People** - It is recommended that council seek to establish a mechanism for engaging with children and young people on an ongoing basis in order to allow them to actively participate in decision making relating to, or impacting upon their play experience (whether fixed or non-fixed).
- **Risk/Benefit Approach to Play** - Traditionally an over - emphasis on health and safety considerations has led to the creation of play areas which offer minimal challenge for children at play. Whilst consideration of risk remains important, it is now recognised at a UK level that there is a need to create play areas that offer more challenge in order to nurture health, wellbeing and essential skills. This has resulted in a shift towards a risk/benefit approach which focuses on a weighing up of both risk and benefits as a means of introducing more challenge in play.
  It is recommended that the council should work towards the adoption of the risk/benefit approach for use in all future fixed play development.
- **Alternative Non-Fixed Approaches to meeting play need** - Whilst fixed play offers an economically viable approach to meeting play need within built up residential areas they do not provide a cost-effective means of addressing play need within all rural areas, particularly those with more dispersed populations. As such, it is recommended that council proceed with the development of a range of alternative non-fixed approaches. Approaches identified for consideration within the strategy include:



- Establishment of a dedicated post to support the roll-out and implementation of the play strategy
- Establishment of a Community Play Volunteers Programme
- Piloting of community and street play initiatives
- Consideration of how Council and partners can better integrate play opportunities into the Public Realm
- Active promotion and support for National Play Day.

- **Design Principles** - Council should implement the good practice design principles outlined within the strategy with a view to enhancing play value at existing sites and ensuring that future new development delivers a quality play experience.
- **Inclusive Play Opportunities** - Council should implement the principles outlined within the strategy as they relate to ensuring that play provision recognises and seeks to meet the needs of children with disabilities.
- **Residential Planning** - Council should seek to ensure that developers incorporate suitable fixed play provision/natural green space allocations within developments as outlined in Planning Policy Statements 7 and 8.
- **Land Availability for Fixed Play** - It is recognised that in some areas of fixed play need (current and future) council may not have access to land sufficient to develop fixed play provision. In such cases council should engage with statutory partners to identify potential sites in the ownership of other bodies (e.g. schools etc.)
- **Capital Plan and Play Strategy Review** - The capital plan associated with the play strategy should be subject to adjustment on an annual basis to take into account changing local circumstances. The overall strategy should be reviewed every eight years to ensure that the underlying principles remain sound with mid-point review after four years.

OPERATIONAL

During the period of the Play Strategy council should initiate a programme of works aimed at enhancing fixed play provision including:

- **Commence Consultation on Development of New Fixed Play Areas** - The strategy has identified a number of areas that **potentially** require new fixed play development. Council should initiate consultation to confirm need and assess land availability within each area (both council and statutory partner owned).
- **Upgrading of Low Play Value Play Areas** - Council should initiate a capital works programme aimed at enhancing play value at such sites incorporating consultation with children, young people and the local community as part of the process.
- **Commence Consultation in areas of low demand** - Council should initiate consultation over the duration of the strategy with a view to potential removal and site transformation to meet the needs of the resident population.
- **Green Spaces** - Where green space adjoins fixed play areas council should seek to maximise playability by enhancing the space through minor landscaping, planting, incorporation of natural materials and features etc. This would create additional natural play space for children and young people; would complement the fixed play area and would provide an alternative free play experience.

FOREWORD



PLAY IS CENTRAL TO THE LIVES OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE.

THROUGH PLAY CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE EXPLORE THE PHYSICAL AND SOCIAL ENVIRONMENT IN WHICH THEY LIVE; LEARN AND DEVELOP NEW SKILLS AND ABILITIES; TEST OUT IDEAS AND CONCEPTS; AND LEARN HOW TO ASSESS AND RESPOND TO RISK OR SITUATIONS THAT TROUBLE THEM.

MOST IMPORTANTLY PLAY SHOULD BE **FUN**.

FOREWORD

Play supports learning; enhances health and wellbeing; supports the development of self-confidence; enables children and young people to make sense of the world around them; and gives them a sense of themselves as individuals.

It is our firm belief that collectively we as a society have a responsibility to ensure that our children and young people have access to the widest possible range of play experiences and we affirm our commitment to play through this play strategy. Through the strategy we aim to provide a clear sense of direction and focus for the future planning, development and delivery of play across the Armagh, Banbridge and Craigavon area.

The strategy is based firmly on the belief that play should not be viewed narrowly as a destination activity limited to fixed play areas, rather that play should be a part of the everyday life and experiences of children and young people.

As a council we recognise the right to play (as enshrined within Article 31 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child) and commit to pro-actively work towards delivery of the right to play for all children and young people across the borough.

This strategy should be viewed as an active document which will change over time to reflect the changing play needs and demands of children, young people and geographical areas.

We recognise that council does not on its own have the strategic or operational remit to address all of the issues which impact upon play. It has therefore been agreed that overall delivery of the strategy and monitoring of its implementation will fall under the Community Planning process. This will provide a vehicle for wider agencies and communities to input into the delivery process helping us to fully realise the strategy.

Through the implementation of this strategy our goal is to send a clear message that Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council not only values but leads the way in making the provision of play in all of its forms and across all environments a priority.

It is important to state at the outset that ongoing community consultation has been built into the core of the strategy. Council affirm that none of the recommendations outlined within the strategy will be enacted upon without prior local consultation which will explore the potential impacts of such action. A critical component of this community engagement process will be consultation with children and young people in order to ensure that the actions we take best meets their play needs.

The strategy will be subject to ongoing annual review and will be a rolling document, subject to change based on underlying demographic or social circumstances.





ARMAGH CITY, BANBRIDGE AND CRAIGAVON BOROUGH COUNCIL RECOGNISES THE IMPORTANCE OF ENSURING THAT OUR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE ARE ABLE TO PLAY IN A WAY THAT SUPPORTS THEIR DEVELOPMENTAL NEEDS, NO MATTER THEIR AGE, ABILITY OR THE COMMUNITY IN WHICH THEY LIVE.

PLAY STRATEGY WE HAVE SOUGHT TO ESTABLISH A MECHANISM TO SUPPORT US IN MEETING THE PLAY NEEDS OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE BOTH NOW AND INTO THE FUTURE.

The strategy seeks to address those needs by:

- Providing an overview of the play value and demographic coverage associated with existing fixed play areas alongside recommendations on enhancing play delivery or making more effective use of existing fixed play sites for the benefit of the community
- Establishing a set of core underlying principles which will govern the future design and delivery of fixed play areas across the council, enhancing play experiences for children of all abilities
- Identifying geographical gaps in fixed play provision and establishing an associated capital works program aimed at meeting identified need over the coming 5 year period, and
- Establishing a series of non-fixed play approaches aimed at broadening the ability of council to meet the specific challenges of meeting play need within a largely rural area characterised by often dispersed settlement and household patterns.

1.1 WHY DO WE NEED A PLAY STRATEGY?

The development of a play strategy is important not only for enhancing access and addressing barriers to play but also in order to ensure that all available resources are invested in a manner that best meets play need. Key considerations for the strategy include:

- **Establishment of Agreed Criteria to Identify Areas of Need**

  The development and installation of fixed play areas has been at the core of council investment in play over many years. Whilst fixed play areas containing swings, roundabouts, slides etc. are the most recognisable form of play provision, given the level of capital investment required their installation is not always appropriate to an area due to the underlying levels of demographic demand.The play strategy establishes for council a set of criteria which will be used to assess the applicability of fixed play based on underlying population demographics, guiding future capital investment to ensure that it matches those areas of highest need.

- **Establishment of a Common Design Approach**

  Whilst council have traditionally been the main providers of play provision and play facilities, in recent years additional investment in fixed play has come through a number of non-council funding routes, for example through Neighbourhood Regeneration funding or funding secured by community organisations.

  Whilst additional funding has been welcomed, at times it has brought challenges in terms of the differing approaches applied to the design and development of play areas by various funders. Through this play strategy we will establish a set of core, quality based design principles which when applied across all fixed play provision (regardless of funding source) will enhance associated play value and play delivery.

01 INTRODUCTION

- **Establishment of Partnership Approaches to Meeting Play Need**

  The play strategy will provide a firm basis for the development and growth of partnership based approaches to meeting play need, particularly in areas were land availability is scarce.

  Within the legacy Armagh City Council area a number of fixed play area development pilot schemes took place in partnership with local primary schools. Under these dual use schemes both schools and the wider community have access to fixed play area facilities located on school land. Through the strategy, consideration of the viability of such partnership approaches will be applied to future decision making regarding new fixed play provision, particularly in areas with low availability of land.

- **Responding to Changing Needs**

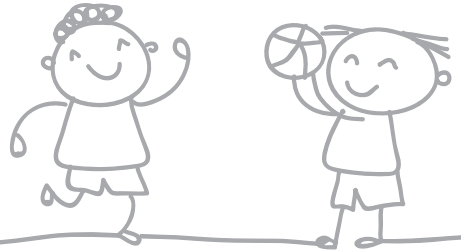
  Experience has shown that play needs and the type of play children and young people require changes on a continuous basis as they grow and develop towards adulthood. This brings about key challenges for council including the need to establish appropriate play and leisure space for older children and teenagers and addressing concerns from communities regarding noise and perceived nuisance. The strategy will provide a vehicle for identifying and addressing such challenges over its duration and beyond.

  We recognise that locational need for fixed play provision changes over time in line with population changes. As such in some areas play provision that was once essential is no longer required due to decline in the number of resident children and young people. The strategy will support council to identify such locations and will provide a mechanism for assessing ongoing levels of need.

- **Introduction of Non-Fixed Approaches to Play**

  Traditionally council has focused investment in fixed play provision i.e. in the development and maintenance of play parks containing fixed play equipment. Recognising that fixed play areas are limited in terms of both capital outlay and in their applicability to all geographical areas, the strategy will allow council and its partners to explore the establishment of a series of non-fixed approaches to meeting play need.

  Such approaches may include the establishment of a dedicated play officer post, provision of non-fixed play equipment 'pods' for loaning to local community organisations to facilitate play sessions within the community; training in play approaches and play session delivery to support community play volunteers to deliver non-fixed play within their own area; and exploration of the potential for street/community play initiatives as a means of enhancing access to safe play spaces within more built up areas.



1.2 AIMS OF THE PLAY STRATEGY

In rolling out this strategy we aim to ensure that children and young people living in or visiting the council area are best able to meet their play needs. Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council have therefore agreed a number of key aims:

- To make our parks and open spaces attractive and welcoming to children and young people, allowing them an opportunity to engage in a wide range of play activities within the natural environment
- To ensure that fixed play areas are attractive, welcoming, safe, challenging, accessible and inclusive whilst providing a high level of play value for all children and young people
- To ensure that all future fixed play provision is targeted at those areas of greatest need, based on an ongoing review of underlying demographic requirements
- To encourage adults within the community to acknowledge the play needs of children and young people and recognise the positive contribution play makes to society
- To provide children, young people, parents and communities with opportunities to engage in the planning process as it relates to meeting local play need
- To establish a portfolio of approaches to meeting play need, incorporating not only fixed play but also street and community play, play volunteer schemes and other non-fixed approaches
- To ensure that all appropriate council staff receive the training they require in order to implement and oversee the roll-out of the play strategy
- To embed the play strategy within the emerging Community Planning process ensuring broad, collective responsibility for meeting play need across the partnership.

Given the need for flexibility this strategy will be an active document which will change over time to reflect the shifting play needs of children and young people and changing demographic patterns across the council.

02 WHAT IS PLAY

THE TERM PLAY IS USED TO DESCRIBE THOSE ACTIVITIES THAT CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE DO IN THEIR FREE TIME, IT CAN AND DOES HAPPEN ANYWHERE. IN ORDER TO ESTABLISH AN OVERARCHING FRAMEWORK FOR DELIVERING AND DEVELOPING PLAY ACROSS THE COUNCIL AREA COUNCIL HAVE AGREED TO ADOPT THE DEFINITION SET BY THE PLAYWORK PRINCIPLES SCRUTINY GROUP IN 2005:

PLAY IS A PROCESS THAT IS FREELY CHOSEN, PERSONALLY DIRECTED AND INTRINSICALLY MOTIVATED. THAT IS, CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE DETERMINE AND CONTROL THE CONTENT AND INTENT OF THEIR PLAY BY FOLLOWING THEIR OWN INSTINCTS, IDEAS AND INTERESTS, IN THEIR OWN WAY AND FOR THEIR OWN REASONS. ALL CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE NEED TO PLAY. THE IMPULSE TO PLAY IS INNATE. PLAY IS A BIOLOGICAL, PSYCHOLOGICAL AND SOCIAL NECESSITY AND IS FUNDAMENTAL TO THE HEALTHY DEVELOPMENT AND WELL-BEING OF INDIVIDUALS AND COMMUNITIES.



02 WHAT IS PLAY

For children, play is an activity that can take place at any time and in any location; from a designated fixed play area to open green space within a housing estate; and from fields, woods and natural locations to the streets in urban areas.

2.1 THE IMPORTANCE OF PLAY

The importance of play to the lives of children and young people has been highlighted through a growing body of research which has highlighted its positive impact in:

- Supporting positive physical and mental health development1 and maintaining healthier lifestyles
- Supporting the development of brain capacity[2] in early years enhancing learning capacity and educational achievement
- Supporting a connection between the child and the natural environment[3]
- Supporting broad holistic development, incorporating areas such as physical literacy, cognitive skills and creativity[4], and
- Enabling children and young people to assess and manage risk for themselves[5].

In addition, play supports children and young people to develop social skills; develop and maintain friendships; grow and develop self-confidence; and increase their understanding of the world around them. Play has also been shown to contribute to active citizenship; the development of community cohesion and can be a vehicle for increasing cross-community and cross-generational sharing and understanding.

It is important to recognise that play is not restricted to younger children but remains a key part of young people's lives right through into their late teenage years. Research by PlayBoard NI carried out under the 'Young Life and Times Survey'[6] showed that a majority of 16 year olds still equate what they do in their recreation and leisure time as being play, albeit that the activities have changed over time. The Play Strategy recognises this and takes into account the changing play needs of children and young people as they mature.

2.2 BARRIERS TO PLAY

All too often we make an assumption that play is something that children do naturally - and to some extent this is true. However as our lives have become more complicated, busy and risk averse the opportunities for children to play freely within the community have been reduced significantly.
As a result, despite the many benefits associated with play, many children and young people face a wide range of barriers that restrict their ability to fulfil their play needs on a daily basis. Common barriers include:

- Heavy traffic within residential areas which restricts or negates street and community play opportunities

1 Hughes, B. (2001) Evolutionary Playwork and Reflective Analytic Practice, London; Routledge
Prout, A. (2005) The Future of Childhood, Abingdon: Routledge Falmer
2 Prout, A. (2005) The Future of Childhood, Abingdon: Routledge Falmer
3 Physical - Children's Play Council (2004) Children's exercise and play A Children's Play Council Briefing March 2004 London; Children's Play Council Mental -
Winnicott, D.W. (1971) Playing and Reality, Harmondsworth:Penguin
4 Abbott, L. & Langston, A. (2005) Birth to Three Matters. O.U.P. Berkshire.
5 Drummond, M.J. (2002) Assessing Children's Learning. David Fulton. London.
6 O'Loughlin, J., Stevenson, B. and Schubotz, D. (2011) Playscapes at 16 Young Life and Times Survey ARK Research Update, 74, pp 1-4, Belfast



- A loss of accessible public open spaces previously available for children's play
- A lack of tolerance and respect for children and young people at play from adults within the community
- For parents of children, the conflicting time pressures and constraints associated with modern living reducing the time available for play with their children
- An increasingly risk averse society reducing opportunities for more challenging play and restricting the play movement of children, and
- Limited opportunities for the inclusion and integration of children with disabilities or additional needs.

In developing this strategy Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council not only acknowledge the barriers that restrict play but make a commitment to taking real steps towards addressing those barriers over the duration of the strategy.

2.3 APPROACHES TO MEETING PLAY NEED

In seeking to meet the play needs of children and young people a variety of potential approaches are available to council and its partners. These range from formal to informal approaches including:

- **Fixed Play Areas:** Fixed play areas are a type of formalised play provision based around the installation of fixed play equipment within a designated play area

  Typical examples of fixed play equipment range from more traditional equipment such as swings, roundabouts, climbing frames etc. to more extensive play structures such as fort style installations and activity panels.

  Fixed play areas can be tailored towards the needs of specific age groups, for example for younger children and toddlers (rockers, sand play, low level climbing frames, slides etc.) through to more challenging play equipment for older children of all abilities e.g. witches hats, zip lines etc.

  Fixed play areas are typically fenced off for both safety and security purposes and can be closed at set times of the day, potentially limiting access opportunities.

- **Non-Fixed Play:** Whilst fixed play is focused on the use of play equipment which is fixed both in terms of its location (i.e. it cannot be moved freely) and in terms of its purpose (i.e. it has a limited set of play actions associated with it e.g. swinging, sliding etc.), non-fixed play (sometimes referred to as 'free play' or 'loose parts' play) refers to the wider use of available space within communities for the purpose of play.

  Non-fixed play revolves around the concept of enabling children and young people to play in a manner that meets their specific play needs at a specific time without the formal direction of adults or the limitations of fixed play equipment. As part of the play process children are able to make use of the wider environment (natural or synthetic) and loose parts (cardboard boxes, balls, skipping ropes, art and craft materials etc.) in order to create their own play experience.

  Loose play parts are by definition non-prescriptive and flexible, offering limitless opportunities for children to play in a manner that meets their play need.

  In supporting loose parts play the role of the adult if present (be they a playworker, a community volunteer, parent etc.) is to help to create play space and assist as requested whilst not leading the play experience.

02 WHAT IS PLAY

There is a growing body of evidence (Hyndman, Benson, Ullah and Telford, 2014) highlighting the benefits of loose parts play which include:

- Increasing levels of creative and imaginative play
- Children playing more co-operatively and socialising more
- Children becoming more physically active
- Supporting the development of communication and negotiation skills.

- **Natural Play**
  Natural play approaches revolve around the use of natural landscaping and natural materials in order to create a play environment which stimulates children and young people.

  Natural play opportunities may - and often do - occur without direct human intervention, for example a wooded area with bushes, trees and other vegetation can lend itself to den building, tree climbing etc.; whilst natural green spaces can provide play opportunities with minimal or no outside influence enabling children to run, jump, play with balls, play chasing etc.

  Increasingly natural play constructions are being integrated into fixed play areas which, whilst man-made are constructed from natural materials such as wood, boulders, tree logs etc. which enhance the playability of the area.

- **Street Play**
  Street play takes place within the immediate environs of the home and is for many children the first real opportunity to explore the community in which they live through play.

  Whilst street play opportunities have reduced in recent years due to increased levels of traffic and parental safety concerns, a number of approaches have been adopted which aim to bring street play back into the lives of children.

  In 2012 PlayBoard delivered a street play scheme in the Torrens area of North Belfast. Through the use of community volunteers and working with a range of partners streets were closed to traffic at set times each week enabling the children to play outdoors within their own community, often for the first time.

- **Public Realm Play**
  It is important to recognise that for children play is not something that takes place only in a designated play area - children will naturally seek play opportunities at all times regardless of where they are.

  Public Realm play approaches are focused on creating public environments e.g. within town centres, shopping areas etc. which are playable and encourage children to play.

- **Youth shelters**
  Acknowledging that play remains relevant to young people into their teenage years, youth shelters represent a play approach which is focused on meeting the social and less formalised play needs of teenagers.



2.4 PLAYABILITY

Playability, sometimes referred to as play affordance, relates to the inherent qualities of a location (either man-made or natural) which lend themselves to supporting and encouraging the child at play.

Playability does not simply refer to the designed function of a site or piece of play equipment. By way of example, from an adult design perspective the primary playability attribute associated with a swing is the ability for a child to sit on the seat and swing back and forth. From a child's perspective the playability value may be much greater i.e. the swing presents an opportunity to climb the frame, swing from the top bar using their arms etc. For older children the swings primary playability purpose may simply be somewhere to sit on whilst conversing socially with peers. In both cases the playability of the equipment can lead to other concerns for play providers including concerns regarding risk, health and safety and perceived anti-social behaviour.

From a location perspective, children view the environment around them in its entirety as a potential play place; therefore a playability assessment cannot be confined to the play equipment which is present within a location or the designed play purpose. By way of example, trees and bushes within a play area can provide a stimulus for imaginative and creative play or an opportunity to gain privacy in play; a raised platform or mound may suggest to the child at play a stage or a platform for performance etc.

Functional items when located within a play area (or indeed the wider environment) can also have a playability value, for example a seat within a play area may be viewed by children as another play item to be climbed on, stood on, jumped off etc. Whilst the primary purpose of a fence around a play area is to regulate entry, in reality it can provide children with an additional challenging play experience, for example climbing over the top and down the other side.

It is critical in assessing the playability of a fixed play area or play location that consideration is given to the play needs of children with disabilities and differing ability levels. Children with disabilities have the same right to play as all other children, therefore it is important that an assessment of playability focuses on play opportunities/equipment directly provided for children with disabilities, whilst considering the accessibility of play in the wider environment.

2.5 PLAY TYPES

Access to a range of play types is critical for children and young people if they are to meet their natural play drive. There are 16 acknowledged play types which were devised by Bob Hughes in 2002[7]. Each play type provides the child or young person with an opportunity to, by way of example explore new experiences; develop and learn new skills and abilities; engage socially with other children, young people and adults and stimulate their imagination and creativity.

7 Bob Hughes, published in full in 'A playworker's Taxonomy of Play Types'



PLAY TYPE	DESCRIPTION
Rough and Tumble	Close encounter play which is less to do with fighting and more to do with touching, gauging strength etc.
Socio-dramatic	Acting out real and potential experiences of a personal, social, domestic or interpersonal nature.
Social	Play, during which the rules and criteria for social engagement/interaction can be revealed, explored and amended.
Creative	Play with an element of surprise e.g. the transformation of information, making of new connections etc..
Communication	Play using words or gestures for example, mime, jokes, play acting, singing, debate, poetry.
Dramatic	Play which dramatizes events in which the child is not a direct participation.
Symbolic	Play which allows control, exploration and increased understanding without a risk of being out of one's depth.
Deep	Play which allows the child to encounter risky experiences, to assess risk, develop survival skills and conquer fear.
Exploratory	Play which involves manipulative behaviors e.g. handling, throwing, banging objects etc.
Fantasy	Play which rearranges the world in the child's way, a way which is unlikely to occur.
Imaginative	Play where the conventional rules, which govern the physical world, do not apply.
Loco motor	Movement in any or every direction for its own sake.
Mastery Play	Control of the physical and affective ingredients of the environments. For example digging holes, changing the course of streams, constructing shelters, building fires
Object Play	Play which uses infinite and interesting sequences of hand-eye manipulations and movements.
Role Play	Play exploring ways of being, although not normally of an intense personal, social, domestic or interpersonal nature.
Recapitulative Play	Exploration of history, rituals, stories, fire etc. enabling access to play of earlier human evolutionary stages.

02 WHAT IS PLAY

2.6 PLAY VALUE ASSESSMENT

As part of the strategy development process council undertook an assessment of the overarching play value of all fixed play areas. Play value is a critical consideration as a play area with low play value will provide little appeal to children and young people, is likely to have low levels of usage and will not enhance children's play experiences or support their development. Play value assessments take into account a range of information relating to the play area and its location including:

- The range of play types supported by the play area including all ability play opportunities;
- Wider locational and site factors including the attractiveness of the site for play, overall condition, indicative level of usage, damage to equipment through vandalism, environmental factors etc.
- Accessibility of the play area for those who would wish to use it.

In conducting the assessments a number of key areas were scored including:

- Locational factors
- Accessibility factors
- Environmental factors
- Physical play opportunities
- Creative play opportunities
- Inclusive play opportunities
- Social play opportunities



2.7 THE STRATEGIC CONTEXT FOR PLAY

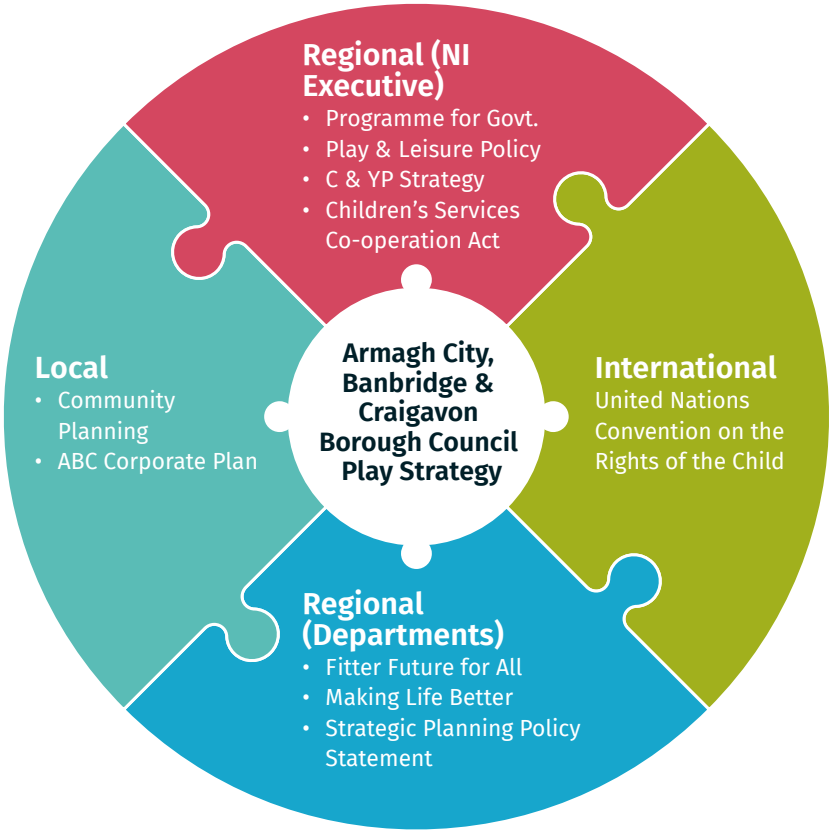
In addition to the individual and wider societal benefits of play, council operates within a wider International, Regional and Local strategic context which increasingly highlights the importance of meeting play need.

At an international level the UK government signed the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) on 19th April 1990 and ratified it on 16th December 1991 with the convention coming into force on 15th January 1992. The UNCRC is an international treaty that grants all children and young people a comprehensive set of rights, including the right to play.

At a regional level, a number of key strategic policies have emerged over recent years all of which recognise the importance of play in the lives of children and young people.

At a local level the emergence of the new council structure and community planning mechanism has further highlighted the importance of play and recreational activity in supporting the development of children and young people.

The diagram highlights the key strategic drivers considered in developing the play strategy with a more detailed overview provided in Appendix A of this document.







3.1 DEMOGRAPHIC OVERVIEW

BASED ON THE 2011 CENSUS FIGURES, THE OVERALL POPULATION OF THE COUNCIL AREA ON THE 27 MARCH 2011 WAS 200,702, EQUATING TO 11.09% OF THE OVERALL POPULATION OF NORTHERN IRELAND. AT INDIVIDUAL LEGACY COUNCIL LEVEL THE DEMOGRAPHIC BREAKDOWN WAS AS FOLLOWS:

Armagh City and District Council - The resident population in the Armagh City and District Council area on census day 2011 was 59,340 equating to 3.28% of the population of Northern Ireland. This figure represents an overall increase for the area of 9.36% on the figures obtained for the 2001 census of the population. Based on the age profile of households, 21% of the population (equating to 12,494 individuals) were aged 14 years or under. A breakdown of population based on age and gender can be seen in the table below.

ARMAGH	MALE	FEMALE	TOTAL	% OF OVERALL POPULATION
0 - 4 years	2,262	2,214	4,476	7.5
5 - 9 years	1,992	1,916	3,908	6.5
10 - 14 years	2,118	1,992	4,110	7
Total	**6,372**	**6,122**	**12,494**	**21**

Banbridge District Council - The resident population in the Banbridge District Council area on census day 2011 was 48,339 equating to 2.67% of the population of Northern Ireland. This figure represents an increase of 16.78% on the figures obtained for the 2001 census of the population.

BANBRIDGE	MALE	FEMALE	TOTAL	% OF OVERALL POPULATION
0 - 4 years	1,778	1,766	3,544	7.5
5 - 9 years	1,646	1,620	3,266	7
10 - 14 years	1,702	1,547	3,249	6.5
Total	**5,126**	**4,933**	**10,059**	**21**

03 LOCAL AREA CONTEXT

Craigavon Borough Council - The resident population in the Craigavon Borough Council on census day 2011 was 93,023 equating to 5.14% of the population of Northern Ireland. This figure represents an increase of 15.31% on the figures obtained for the 2001 census of the population.

CRAIGAVON	MALE	FEMALE	TOTAL	% OF OVERALL POPULATION
0 - 4 years	3,840	3,521	7,361	8
5 - 9 years	3,063	2,969	6,032	6.5
10 - 14 years	3,093	2,902	5,995	6.5
Total	**9,996**	**9,392**	**19,388**	**21**

3.2 SETTLEMENT PATTERNS

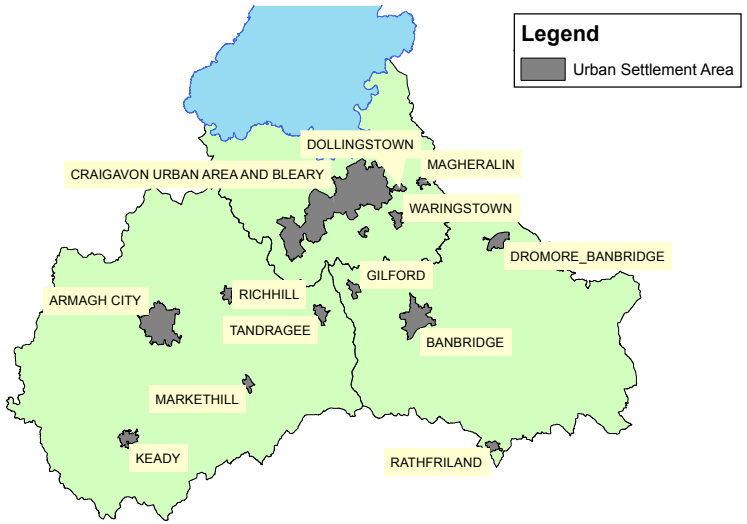
Based on the designated Settlement Development Limits (SDL) classification (a statistical delineation of settlements in Northern Ireland defined by the Planning Service), the council area comprises a combination of rural and urban areas with the population located across a range of residential classifications including rural settlement based, dispersed rural living and urban residential.

Key settlements identified within the SDL include:

SETTLEMENT NAME	SETTLEMENT NAME
Armagh City	Keady
Banbridge	Magheralin
Craigavon Urban Area and Bleary	Markethill
Dollingstown	Rathfriland
Dromore	Richhill
Gilford	Waringstown



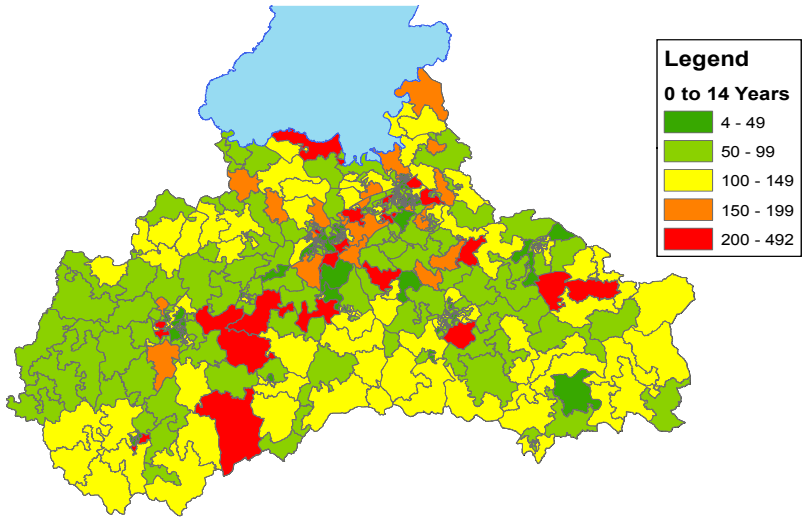
Map 1: Map of Borough showing Urban Settlement Development Limits



Map 1 shows the council area with designated settlement areas based on the agreed SDL classification. Based on the SDL classification the council area comprises a combination of rural and urban areas with the population located across a range of residential classifications including urban residential, rural settlement based and dispersed rural.

The rural dispersed nature of the resident population brings particular challenges for council in seeking to meet play need through traditional fixed approaches (equipped play parks) but offers potential for the development of non-fixed, mobile and Community based approaches.

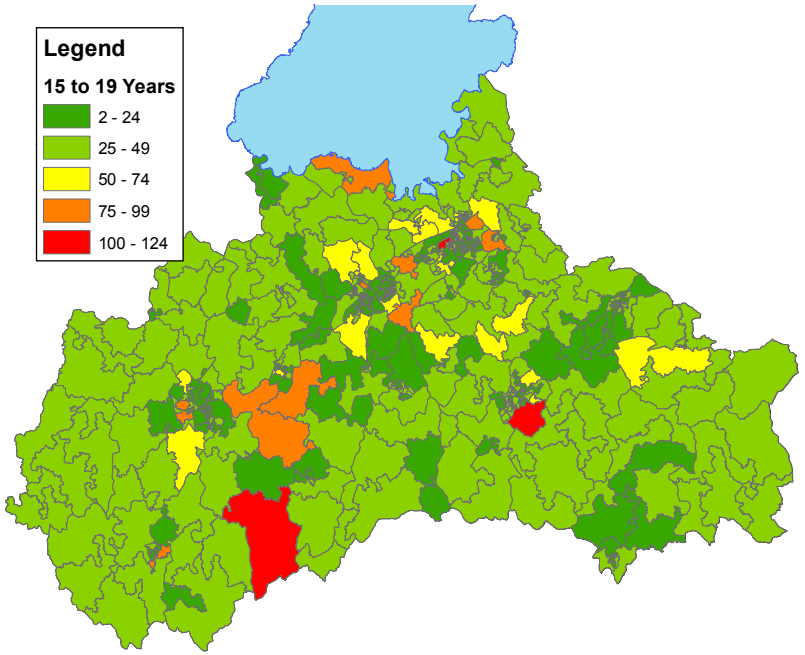
Map 2: Distribution of Children & Young People aged 0 - 14 Years across the Borough



Map 2 shows the distribution of children and young people aged 0 to 14 years of age residing within the Armagh, Banbridge and Craigavon area mapped according to small area boundaries. The map highlights the relatively dispersed rural nature of the population with a significant proportion of the overall area having less than 149 resident children or young people aged 0 to 14 years. This has implications for council and other providers seeking to meet play need through formal, fixed play provision (i.e. playgrounds) which have been shown to be effective primarily in areas of higher population density.

03 LOCAL AREA CONTEXT

Map 3: Distribution of Young People saged 15 - 19 years accross the Borough



Map 3 shows the distribution of young people aged between 15 to 19 years. For this group the ability to access play and recreation remains a key element of physical, social and wider development

Existing play provision (in the form of fixed play areas) often fails to meet the needs of the older age group, providing insufficient social engagement space or being subject to controls which restrict access by age (often to 14 years or under). In addition to the barriers facing the older age group, the combination of lower population numbers and the dispersed nature of the population presents a significant challenge to council and other providers in meeting the play, leisure and recreation needs of the group.

Given the growing nature of the resident population base and the number of children and young people, it is clear that the demand for accessible play and recreational opportunities, both formal and informal will continue to be significant over the coming years.







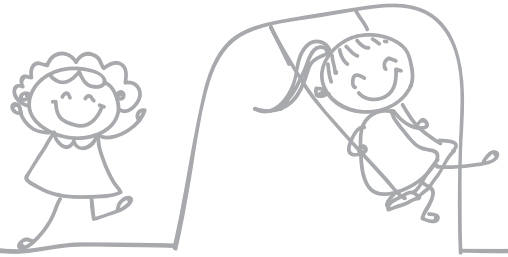
FIXED PLAY AREAS ARE A TYPE OF FORMALISED PLAY PROVISION BASED AROUND THE INSTALLATION OF FIXED PLAY EQUIPMENT WITHIN A DESIGNATED AREA.

Examples of fixed play equipment range from more traditional equipment (for example swings, roundabouts, climbing frames etc.) to more extensive play structures such as fort style installations and activity panels.

Fixed play areas can be tailored towards the needs of specific age groups, for example for younger children and toddlers (swings, low level climbing frames, slides etc.) through to more challenging play equipment for older children e.g. witches hats, zip lines etc.

Fixed play areas are typically fenced off for both safety and security purposes and can be closed at set times of the day limiting access opportunities to set times. Play areas may also incorporate within their environments provision for older teens, for example through the provision of a covered hang-out or seated area.

04 LOCAL AREA CONTEXT



4.1 FIXED PLAY WITHIN THE PLAY STRATEGY

Whilst the overarching Play Strategy is based on a recognition that for children play can, and does take place anywhere and at any time, council recognise the value and importance of fixed play provision in providing more formal environments for play.

Traditionally the three legacy councils placed a focus on the installation and maintenance of fixed play areas. As a result there are currently 95 fixed play areas located across Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council. These range in size from small play parks located in rural areas and areas of low population density through to larger parks located in urban areas that offer a wide range of fixed play equipment and play opportunities.

It is important to recognise that for council the development and installation of fixed play areas represents a significant financial commitment, both in terms of the initial capital outlay and ongoing maintenance costs. In addition, it is worth noting that over recent years additional funding for fixed play area installation has come through non-council routes, for example through Neighbourhood Regeneration funding and funding secured by community organisations.

It is critical that a strategic approach is applied to both the ongoing management of existing play areas and to the establishment of new fixed play areas, whether through council or non-council funding.

4.2 QUALITY OF FIXED PLAY PROVISION

As part of the strategy development process, and in seeking to establish a baseline for the quality of current fixed play provision across the borough, council have undertaken play value assessments of all fixed play areas. Based on assessment against a set of key play values, the play value assessment process enables council to determine the degree to which a fixed play area is likely to meet children's expectations for play, is enhancing their enjoyment of play and is encouraging them to make regular use of the play facility. Play value assessments take into account a range of information relating to the play area and its location including:

- The range of play types supported by the play area including all ability play opportunities;
- Wider locational and site factors including the attractiveness of the site for play, overall condition, indicative level of usage, damage to equipment through vandalism, environmental factors etc.
- Accessibility of the play area for those who would wish to use it regardless of individual ability.

The play value assessments will be used as part of the council's ongoing mechanism for determining priority play areas requiring immediate or future investment.

STRATEGIC ACTION

COUNCIL WILL INTEGRATE PLAY VALUE INTO ITS ONGOING REVIEW OF FIXED PLAY AREAS IN ORDER TO ENSURE THAT FIXED PLAY PROVISION OFFERS A RANGE OF PLAY OPPORTUNITIES THAT MAXIMISE THEIR VALUE FOR PLAY.

04 FIXED PLAY PROVISION

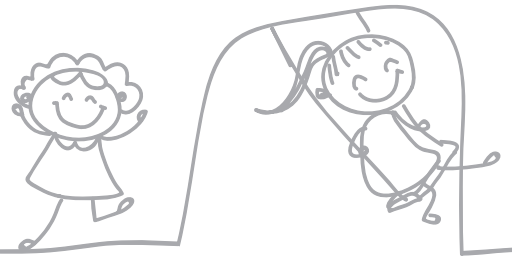
4.3 LOCATION, ACCESSIBILITY AND DEMOGRAPHIC COVERAGE OF FIXED PLAY

In order to determine the level of geographical accessibility afforded by existing fixed play areas council have established a GIS mapping system which enables underlying demographic data to be mapped over play area locations.

Through the GIS system council are able to determine the level of population coverage associated with each fixed play area. This has allowed for the identification of areas of over and under supply.

In order to establish an effective means of determining the level of population coverage associated with each fixed play area, council have reviewed the predominant accessibility standard in use across the UK, the Fields in Trust 'Accessibility Benchmark Standards'.

The Fields in Trust 'Accessibility Benchmark Standards for Outdoor Play' (also known as the Six Acre Standards) has been used across the UK to provide a means of determining the geographical catchment to be served by a fixed play area based on its size and scope. The Accessibility Benchmark Standard (ABS) is based around 3 identified types of play area and establishes a set of distance thresholds which set the catchment area for each 'type' of play space.



TYPE OF PLAY	DISTANCE CRITERIA (METRES)	
	WALKING DISTANCE	STRAIGHT LINE DISTANCE
Local Areas for Play (LAPs) are specifically designated and laid out for very young children (<5 years) with the express purpose of providing somewhere to play close to where they live.	100	60
Local Equipped Areas for Play (LEAPs) are areas of open space designated and laid out with features and equipment for children who are beginning to go out and play independently (5 to 12 years) close to where they live.	400	240
Neighbourhood Equipped Areas for Play (NEAP) are areas of open space specifically designated, laid out and equipped mainly for older children (including 12+) but with play opportunities for younger children as well.	1000	600

Whilst acknowledging the value of the Fields in Trust ABS in establishing a set of distance criteria, there has been a long-standing view across local government that the standards do not naturally translate across to the situation within Northern Ireland. This is primarily due to differences in population spread, in particular the largely rural, dispersed nature of settlements and the population base in Northern Ireland.

As a result council has sought to develop its own tailored categorisation for fixed play areas with associated distance criteria which relate more closely to existing local fixed play provision, underlying demographic patterns and local geography.

04 FIXED PLAY PROVISION



ARMAGH CITY, BANBRIDGE AND CRAIGAVON COUNCIL PLAY AREA DESIGNATION	RADIAL DISTANCE CRITERIA (M)
Local: Small scale fixed equipment playgrounds that offer a limited number of fixed play opportunities (ranging from 1 to 4 pieces of fixed play equipment). Typically Local Play Areas are located within rural areas, areas of low population density, villages and smaller urban estates. Given their small scale nature, local playgrounds serve a catchment area of 600m or less and are targeted primarily at the younger age group (6 years and under)	600
Neighbourhood: Neighbourhood play areas are designed to meet the needs of a wider catchment area - up to 1,000m - and are larger in size and scale, offering a greater variety of, and number of fixed play equipment pieces. Neighbourhood play areas are targeted at a wider age range, offering fixed play opportunities for children up to the age of 14 years	1,000
District: District play areas represent the largest fixed play provision in terms of both size and scale, offering a wide variety of fixed play opportunities (in terms of the number and variety of fixed play available) and also offer non-fixed play opportunities through the availability of grassed areas or natural landscaping. District play areas will typically incorporate support facilities, for example dedicated car-parking, toilets, picnic areas etc.	5,000 (*)

* Given the large scale nature of a District Play area in terms of size and scope, it would be expected that it would attract users from across (and indeed in some cases beyond) the council area. The presence of a District play area within a locality would not automatically negate the need for continued or additional local or neighbourhood fixed play provision should a need be demonstrated (through demographic analysis etc.).

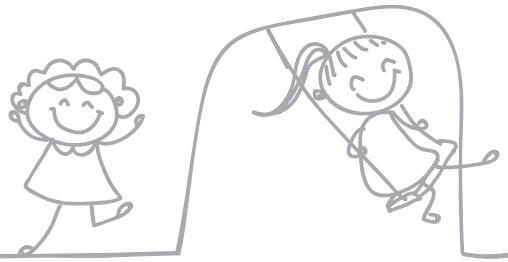
STRATEGIC ACTION

01 **Council will apply the revised Play Area Designation and radial distance criteria to those sites that are due for refurbishment and as part of the agreed assessment process for determining the need for new fixed play installations.**

02 **In the case of existing fixed play areas this will include consideration of the population served within the identified radial distance measure prior to making a final decision relating to renewal, significant upgrading or closure of the play area.**

03 **In the case of new fixed play development, the level of population served within the radial distance will be a key factor in determining whether fixed play represents the most appropriate means of meeting play need.**





4.4 CURRENT LEVEL OF FIXED PLAY PROVISION

The bringing together of the 3 legacy council areas brought with it an existing portfolio of outdoor fixed play areas ranging from small play parks in rural locations to larger urban based play parks which offer a range of fixed play and free play (green space) opportunities.

Within the legacy Armagh City and District Council area there were 28 fixed play areas; within the legacy Banbridge District Council area there were 31 fixed play areas whilst within the legacy Craigavon Borough Council area there were 36 fixed play areas, totalling 95 across the new council. In addition to fixed play provision, Craigavon Borough Council had in place a number of play schemes that continue to operate from 5 centre based locations within the Craigavon area.

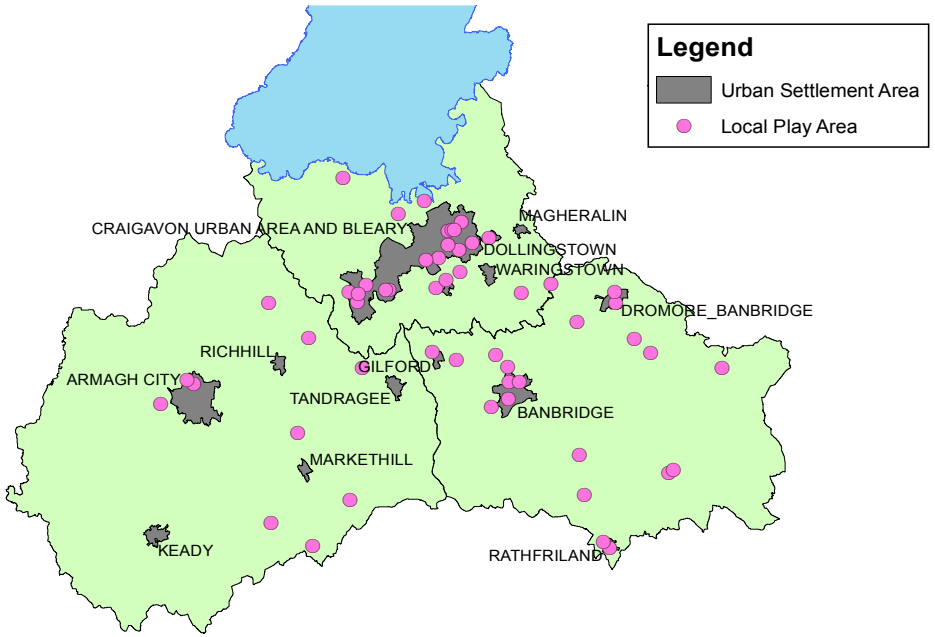
CLASSIFICATION OF FIXED PLAY AREAS

Based on the agreed system, the table shows the current level of fixed play provision across the council area by classification.

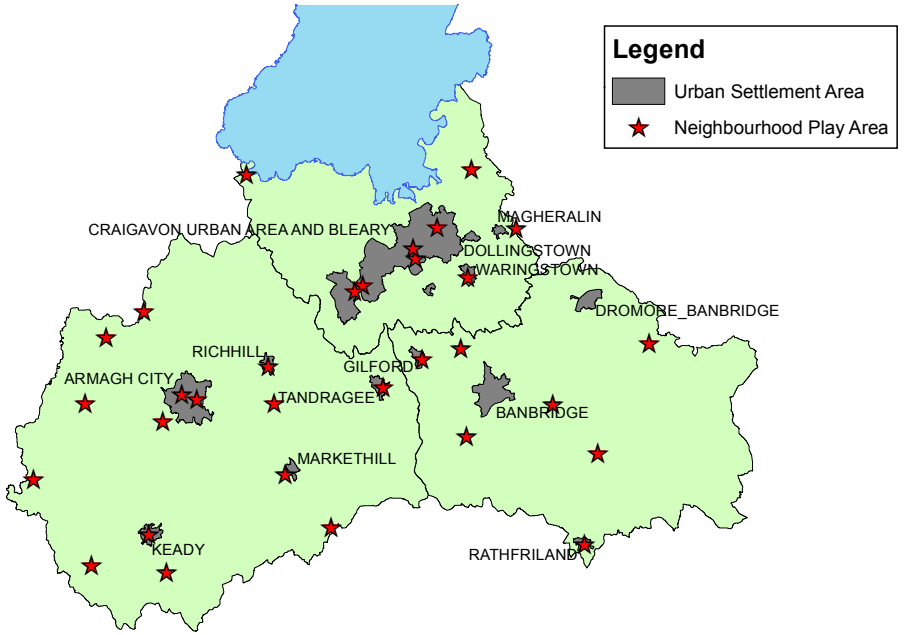
CLASSIFICATION	NO. OF PLAY AREAS
Local Play Areas: Small fixed play parks aimed at toddlers and younger children. Local Play areas cater for a specific, defined residential catchment area of no more than 600m and consist of a small number of pieces of fixed play equipment;	54
Neighbourhood Play Areas: Fixed play areas located within larger scale residential locations and housing estates. Typically provide fixed play for a wider age range and have a larger catchment area of around 1,000m;	31
District Play Areas: The largest type of fixed play installation caters for children and young people up to and including teenagers, typically have a catchment area of around 5,000m and will include a variety of play and leisure options including natural play opportunities.	10
TOTAL	**95**

04 FIXED PLAY PROVISION

Map 4: Location of Existing Local Play Areas across the Borough



Map 5: Location of Existing Neighbourhood Play Areas across the Borough

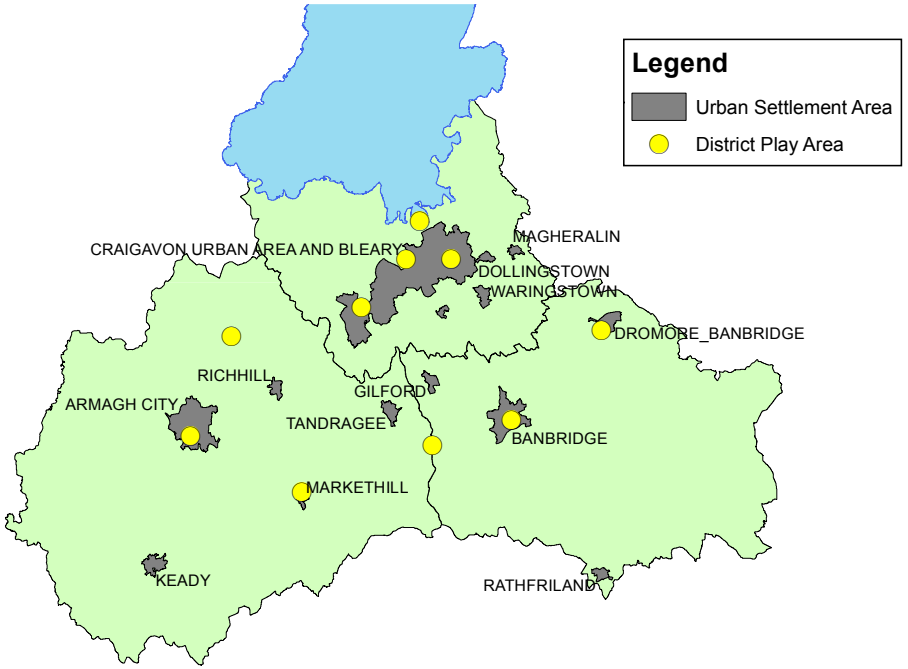


Map 4 and 5 (above) **and 6** (overleaf) show the locations of existing local, neighbourhood and district fixed play areas whilst **map 7** (overleaf) shows the location of fixed play areas relative to the underlying population demographics for children and young people aged 0 to 14 years (the target age for fixed play areas).

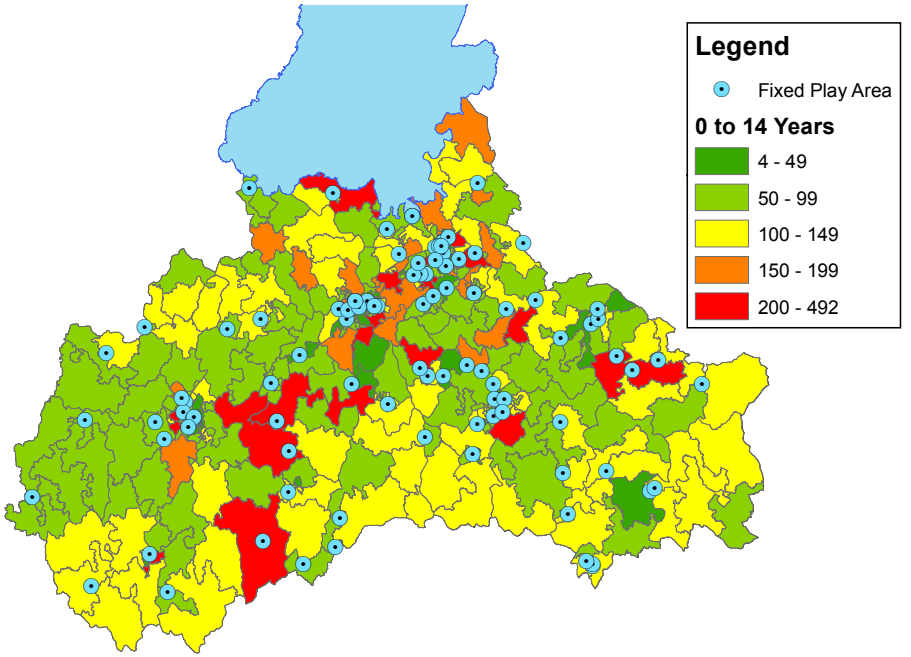


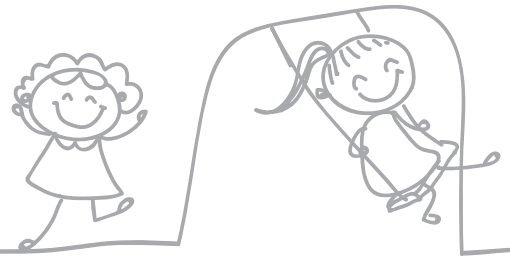
04 FIXED PLAY PROVISION

Map 6: Location of Existing District Play Areas across the Borough

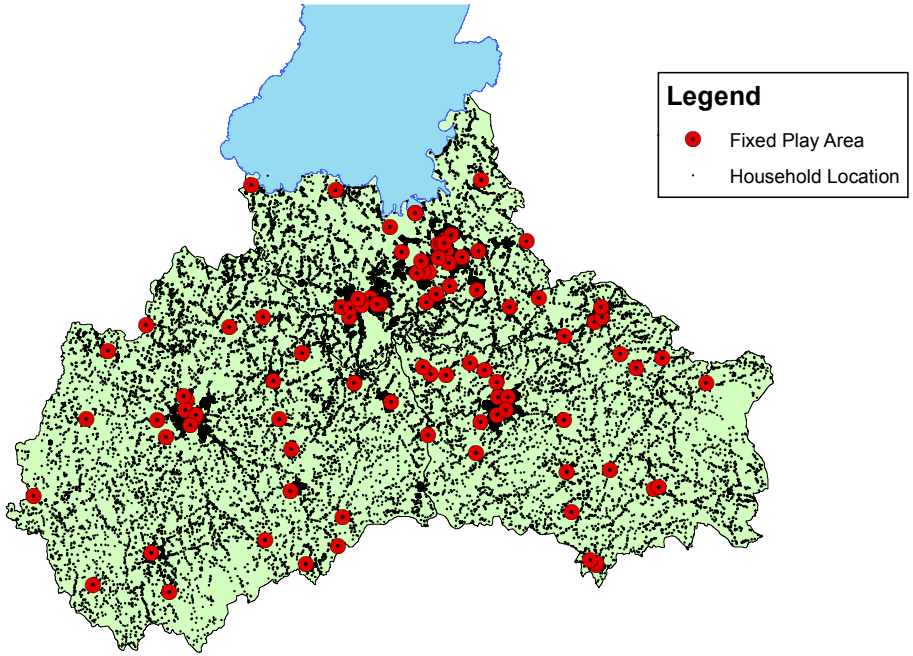


Map 7: Location of Fixed Play Areas mapped against the number of Children and Young People aged between 0 to 14 Years





Map 8: Location of Fixed Play Areas mapped against Household Location



Map 8 introduces household location data which allows for an additional analysis of demographic coverage using household distribution patterns (with less dispersed patterns indicating higher population levels). Map 8 shows the location of fixed play areas mapped against household pointer data.

It should be noted that in order to assess current coverage levels, and to identify potential gap areas, council established two criteria to determine those areas which potentially require fixed play provision:

- Urban Areas: Minimum 200 resident children/young people cross-checked against household pointer data (settlement pattern analysis)
- Rural Areas: Given the dispersed rural nature of the district a rural assessment level of 150 children/young people was introduced, cross-checked settlement pattern analysis. With regards to the location maps provided over the previous pages a number of key observations can be made:

With regards to the location maps provided over the previous pages a number of key observations can be made:

- In line with expected practice, legacy council fixed play area development has largely focused on settlements and areas of high population density where the number of children and young people will be greatest.
- Under the general requirement for fixed play criteria, analysis at district wide level highlights a number of potential gap areas (rural areas denoted on map 7 in orange and urban areas denoted in red).

04 FIXED PLAY PROVISION

4.5 QUALITY OF FIXED PLAY PROVISION

In assessing the degree to which fixed play provision meets the needs of the local population it is important to consider not only the location of play areas but the play value associated with each.

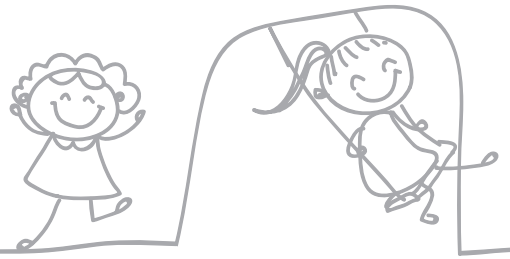
Play value is a critical consideration as a play area with low play value will provide little appeal to children and young people, is likely to have low levels of usage and will not enhance children's play experiences or support their development. Play value assessments take into account a range of information relating to the play area and its location including:

- The range of play types supported by the play area including all ability play opportunities;
- Wider locational and site factors including the attractiveness of the site for play, overall condition, indicative level of usage, damage to equipment through vandalism, environmental factors etc.
- Accessibility of the play area for those who would wish to use it.

As part of the strategy development process all fixed play areas were assessed against a number of key areas including:

- Locational factors
- Accessibility factors
- Environmental factors
- Physical play opportunities
- Creative play opportunities
- Inclusive play opportunities
- Social play opportunities

The maximum score possible was 800, however it should be noted that a perfect score is unlikely due to the range of factors being assessed and the assessment criteria applied.



4.6 POTENTIAL GAPS IN FIXED PLAY PROVISION

As part of the play strategy the level of radial coverage afforded by existing fixed play areas was reviewed in order to identify potential areas of need for new fixed play provision.

In assessing potential need two key pieces of population data have been analysed:

1. Population data highlighting the number of 0 to 14 year olds mapped by statistical boundaries; and
2. Household location data in order to facilitate analysis of the spread and density of households across the council area.

By combining both data sources it is possible to identify those small areas with a higher number of resident 0 to 14 year olds and conduct an assessment of household density/spread - a key factor in determining the appropriateness of fixed play for an area. Under the agreed criteria, in order to be eligible for consideration for new fixed play development the number of resident children and young people (0 to 14) within an urban area should exceed 200.

In the case of rural areas, in recognition of lower population density levels this has been reduced to 150 children or young people (aged 0 to 14 years) or more.

Based on population figures and settlement pattern 5 areas have been identified across the council area as having a potential need for fixed play development. Over the five years of the strategy, council will commence a series of actions aimed at identifying the true level of demand in each of the five areas, assessing land availability options and exploring how best gaps in fixed play provision can be met.

In addition to the five areas identified, a number of additional locations for fixed play provision had been identified by legacy councils and capital funding applications submitted to the Department of Social Development. Council have been advised that departmental funding is not currently available and are working to identify the best way to proceed in each case.



IN DEVELOPING AND MAINTAINING FIXED PLAY PROVISION THE KEY CHALLENGE IS TO ENSURE THAT PLAY AREAS DELIVER AN EFFECTIVE AND POSITIVE PLAY EXPERIENCE FOR ALL CHILDREN, YOUNG PEOPLE AND THEIR PARENTS/GUARDIANS.

In order to meet play need play areas must deliver enjoyable and versatile play experiences that enable children and young people to develop their physical health and wellbeing, support their growth and development and enhance the acquisition of skills and abilities.

The principles outlined below will underpin the provision of fixed play across the council:

- **Accessibility:** Provision of safe and convenient access to play areas will be provided through appropriate placement and by providing access for people with a range of abilities.
- **Site Selection:** Where possible play areas will be placed in appropriate open space settings and will consider highly visible and high profile sites for the development of play opportunities.
- **Quality of provision:** Priority will be given to developing play areas of high quality that are distributed according to demographic need and that do not duplicate existing provision.
- **Diversity:** A diverse range of play opportunities will be provided to create variety within the community and cater for children of varying ages and abilities.
- **Quality:** Quality playground equipment and settings provided to facilitate interesting and stimulating play experiences for children and families.
- **Safety:** Playgrounds developed, managed and maintained to a safe standard in accordance with relevant guidelines and regulations.
- **Integrated Play:** A range of ages from young children through to older teens will be provided for through the range of Local, Neighbourhood and District play areas.
- **Partnerships:** Partnership opportunities will be supported where it is in the best interests of the community, accessibility to play opportunities is enhanced, and play areas are developed to a high quality.
- **Amenities:** The provision of supportive infrastructure will be consistent with the classification of each playground (Local, Neighbourhood and District play areas).

This section of the strategy further outlines the key underlying principles that will underpin the further development of fixed play across Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council.

05 GUIDING PRINCIPLES FOR FIXED PLAY

5.1 ASSESSING NEED FOR FIXED PLAY

Within the strategy council has identified a number of locations which, based on the criteria applied are eligible for the development of new fixed play provision.

As a rolling strategy council will over the coming eight year period continue to review the need for additional fixed play provision across the district. This review process will be based around the criteria established within the strategy i.e. minimum of 200 children aged between 0 to 14 residing within the associated catchment radial from a potential play site in an urban area reduced to 150 for rural areas, and a minimum of 100 households within radial (as per PPS guidance).

In applying distance catchment radials, council has developed its own tailored categorisation for fixed play areas (based on the Fields in Trust 'Accessibility Benchmark Standards') with distance criteria which relate to existing local fixed play provision, underlying demographic patterns and local geography.



ARMAGH CITY, BANBRIDGE AND CRAIGAVON COUNCIL PLAY AREA DESIGNATION	RADIAL DISTANCE CRITERIA (M)
Local: Small scale fixed equipment playgrounds that offer a limited number of fixed play opportunities (ranging from 1 to 4 pieces of fixed play equipment). Typically local play areas are located within rural areas of low population density, villages and smaller urban estates. Given their small scale nature, local playgrounds serve a catchment area of 600m or less and are targeted primarily at the younger age group (6 years and under)	600
Neighbourhood: Neighbourhood play areas are designed to meet the needs of a wider catchment area - up to 1,000m - and are larger in size and scale, offering a greater variety and number of fixed play equipment pieces. Neighbourhood play areas are targeted at a wider age range, offering fixed play opportunities for children up to the age of 14 years	1,000
District: District play areas represent the largest fixed play provision in terms of both size and scale, offering a wide variety of fixed play opportunities (in terms of the number and variety of fixed play available) and also offer non-fixed play opportunities through the availability of grassed areas or natural landscaping. District play areas will typically incorporate support facilities, for example dedicated car-parking, toilets, picnic areas etc.	5,000 (*)

*Given the large scale nature of a District Play area in terms of size and scope, it would be expected that it would attract users from across (and indeed in some cases beyond) the council area. The presence of a District play area within a locality would not automatically negate the need for continued or additional local or neighbourhood fixed play provision should a need be demonstrated (through demographic analysis etc.).

05 GUIDING PRINCIPLES FOR FIXED PLAY

5.2 NON-COUNCIL FUNDING FOR FIXED PLAY

Council recognise that funding for fixed play development may become available over the duration of the play strategy from non-council sources. Typically in order for such developments to precede council must agree to undertake responsibility for post installation maintenance and inspection. It is important that any such development meets the underlying criteria established within the Play Strategy.

In such cases, prior to agreeing to undertake responsibility for maintenance and inspection, council will require that fixed play design and development adheres to the good practice guidelines outlined within this section of the strategy.

5.3 LAND AVAILABILITY FOR FIXED PLAY DEVELOPMENT

Should demand for a new play area be identified council will initiate a review of available site options in order to identify the most appropriate location for fixed play development. In undertaking this review council will engage with the community partnership members in order to identify potential sites not in the ownership of council but for which there is potential for land transfer from another public body. An example of a potentially viable option in an area of low or nil council land availability includes the development of a fixed play area on school grounds with joint community and school access points.

5.4 FIXED PLAY AREA DESIGN

Achieving variety and diversity in the range of play opportunities available within a play space are both essential requirements for an effective fixed play area. Studies have highlighted that many children view much of the fixed play equipment they encounter as both boring and unchallenging. Research has further shown that the average time children spend engaging with fixed play equipment prior to boredom setting in ranges from 11 to 15 minutes with approximately 93% of their time within a play area spent on non-fixed play.

Despite these concerns, fixed play equipment does still have relevance in that children are attracted to it and it can, when designed appropriately fulfil a variety of play needs.

In designing an effective play space four key elements are required:

1. Active Play: Provision of equipment or other natural play elements that allow children to engage in aerobic activity, develop co-ordination and balance, develop gross/fine motor skills etc. as well as supporting social and sharing play opportunities. This may include the provision of informal sporting elements for example goal posts, basketball hoops etc.
2. Open Space: Open spaces provide opportunities for informal ball games, chasing/running around and spontaneous physical and social play activities. It is important that open spaces are incorporated and protected within the play area planning process. Open spaces often appeal to older children and teenagers and adequate provision should be made to cater for the needs of this older age group.



3. **Adult Supervision:** In considering play space design it is important to recognise the needs of those carers who are accompanying their child to the location. This includes the provision of adequate seating that allows for easy visual supervision as well as providing a degree of comfort and access to amenities appropriate to the size and scale of the play area. Not only will this make the carers stay more comfortable, it has been shown that if a play area appeals to carers, the child's stay will be extended, more fulfilling and more likely to be repeated on a regular basis.
4. **Creative/Explorative Spaces:** Providing creative/explorative spaces encourages children to explore, develop a sense of wonder, engage and interact with the natural or built environment, engage in make-believe play and ultimately take greater control over their own play experience. Importantly, incorporating creative elements ensures that the child can change their play experience on each subsequent visit to the play area.

The key challenge for council is to ensure that, as far as possible given the limitations of sites and locations, these four elements are incorporated into play area design.

The guidance document *'Design for Play: A guide to creating successful play spaces'* was developed by Play England in association with the Free Play Network and explains how good play spaces can give children and young people greater freedom to play creatively, whilst enabling them to experience risk, challenge and excitement.

The guidance is underpinned by ten guiding principles for creating a successful play space:

SUCCESSFUL PLAY SPACES ARE...

1. Designed to enhance its setting whether it be in a park, open green space or within an urban landscape
2. Located in the best possible place where children naturally gravitate to play, away from dangerous roads but near through routes and well-used access routes
3. Close to nature, providing opportunities for children to engage with the natural environment and natural play materials
4. Provide a wide range of play experiences enabling children of all ages, abilities and interests to play in a way that meets their needs
5. Are accessible and enable disabled and non-disabled children to play together
6. Meet wider community needs and are accepted as an integral part of the community
7. Enable children of all ages to play together where space permits
8. Build opportunities for children to challenge themselves through play
9. Are appropriately maintained to ensure high play value and environmental sustainability
10. Continues to meet children's play need as they mature and develop.



GUIDING PRINCIPLES FOR FIXED PLAY 05

The guidance recognises that not all current or prospective locations for play lend themselves to full adherence to the design principles. It is not always possible for council to choose an ideal location for play due to issues of land ownership, nor is it always possible to reconfigure existing play areas due to space or environmental considerations. The principles do however provide a sound basis for the design, evaluation and development of fixed play areas.

The guide 'Best Play - What Play Provision should do for Children' was developed at UK level through funding from the Department for Culture, Media and Sport and is endorsed by the main play organisations across the UK including PlayBoard NI. The guide contains seven key objectives that providers should seek to achieve in developing good play opportunities:

1. The provision extends the choice and control that children have over their play, the freedom they enjoy and the satisfaction they gain from it.
2. The provision recognises that children need to test boundaries and responds positively to that need.
3. The provision manages the balance between the need to offer risk and the need to keep children safe from harm.
4. The provision maximises the range of play opportunities.
5. The provision fosters independence and self-esteem.
6. The provision fosters children's respect for others and offer opportunities for social interaction.
7. The provision fosters the child's well-being, healthy growth and development, knowledge and understanding, creativity and capacity to learn.

STRATEGIC ACTION

COUNCIL RECOGNISE THE NEED TO ENSURE THAT PLAY AREAS ADHERE TO GOOD DESIGN PRACTICE. COUNCIL WILL APPLY (AS FAR AS POSSIBLE) THE TEN UNDERPINNING PRINCIPLES AND SEVEN KEY OBJECTIVES FOR CREATING A SUCCESSFUL PLAY SPACE, BOTH IN TERMS OF DEVELOPING NEW AND RENEWING EXISTING FIXED PLAY AREAS. IN ADDITION COUNCIL WILL REQUIRE NON-COUNCIL FUNDED FIXED PLAY INSTALLATIONS TO ADHERE TO THE 'DESIGN FOR PLAY' PRINCIPLES.

IN DESIGNING PLAY SPACES, COUNCIL WILL SEEK TO INCORPORATE (AS FAR AS POSSIBLE GIVEN THE LIMITATIONS OF THE SITE) THE FOLLOWING KEY ELEMENTS:

- Equipment and active play elements that facilitate and encourage swinging, sliding, climbing and spinning;
- Open spaces that encourage running, chasing and playing informal ball games;
- Creative/Explorative play opportunities through, by way of example landscaping of the natural environment, creative planting and the incorporation of interactive elements such as sound making equipment, sand and art works that encourage intellectual and imaginative development;
- Awareness of the needs of carers including sight lines and a degree of comfort and amenity appropriate to the size, scale and location of the play area;
- Integration of opportunities and amenities for children with disabilities that enable sensory experiences and not just physical access to the play area.



5.5 INCLUSIVE PLAY

A fundamental aspect of ensuring accessibility to play for all is the need to ensure that play areas offer opportunities for children and young people to play together regardless of individual ability or disability levels.

The provision of inclusive play is a legal requirement under the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) 1995 which laid down rights for disabled people to have the same access to 'goods and services' as other members of the public. From 2004 the DDA also required schools and service providers to make 'reasonable adjustments' to overcome barriers and to ensure that disabled children and young people are not disadvantaged.

Despite some progress in recent years, children with disabilities still face significant barriers to accessing play opportunities. Some of these barriers are practical or environmental, for example physical access issues, whilst others are attitudinal or social in nature.

Inclusive play means more than simply providing physical access to play areas or open spaces. In order to be truly inclusive a play area must be open and accessible to all, providing high quality physical, creative and social play opportunities for children regardless of their needs and abilities.

The play environment should provide a range of sensory experiences, have open access to play opportunities and offer opportunities for all children to extend their capabilities and explore possibilities through play. Expensive, specialised equipment is rarely needed; rather equipment should be multi-functional and open to all abilities e.g. inclusive roundabouts etc.

	Possible Impact on a Child's Ability to Access and Utilise a Play Space	Design Principles
Children with Vision, Hearing or Other Sensory Impediments.	Impairments to vision, hearing and touch have several implications for children's access to play, depending on their severity and whether children have a combined sensory loss. Children with varying degrees of sensory loss may be affected in their ability to communicate with others, balance, navigate a play space and find and use activities that interest them. They may also be more vulnerable to some hazards.	• Use different textures, tactile indicators or strong colour cues on paths, steps and level changes to improve legibility and help children identify different play activities. • Construct paths with raised edges, patterns and textures on paths which meet at right angles (instead of curves) to assist children who use canes to position themselves and gain a sense of direction. • Provide hand grips with high luminance contrast to help children orientate around a space. • Incorporate sensory play activities involving sound, texture, light, movement. • Consider using ramps to elevated areas (rather than ladders or stairs) to assist children with difficulties balancing.
Children with a Range of Intellectual and Cognitive Abilities	Children with intellectual or cognitive impairments may have difficulties perceiving a challenging situation or potential hazard in a play space. They may find it difficult 'reading' social situations, so they may find it harder to play with a group or create their own imaginative play. Sometimes children who are physically older enjoy activities typically provided for younger children and, therefore, require larger seats or equipment.	• Provide a good range of physical challenges, balancing and stepping activities so all children can find their own level of comfort with height and movement • Provide adult-sized seats on play components to allow older children to use them. • Consider making elevated decks reachable by stairs and ramps (in addition to more challenging climbing equipment) to enable a greater range of children to access elevated activities. • Define clear boundaries to the play space (via fencing, vegetation etc.) • Provide good protection from falls, especially at the openings on elevated decks (including additional handgrips, a change of direction before encountering the opening, or a hurdle or a barrier over which children must climb before they can exit the deck). • Provide items and activities side-by-side (e.g. double slides, two-seater rockers, two steering wheels at a time).



	Possible Impact on a Child's Ability to Access and Utilise a Play Space	Design Principles
Children with a Range of Physical Abilities	Different types of physical ability that need to be considered when designing play spaces are: • ambulant (i.e. able to walk) but possibly with some balance impairment and needing physical support such as rails; • ambulant, and using mobility aids such as walking frames or sticks; • dependant on a wheelchair, and including those needing support in sitting and head control; • restricted in the use of their arms and hands. Limited ability to move freely often affects independence, access and participation. It also limits which parts of a play space a child can use, and the speed at which they can move around and play with a group. For children who use mobility aids such as sticks, wheelchairs or walking frames, there are minimum requirements for them to be able to fit into spaces. Designs may also need to accommodate someone to assist them. Frailty and limited muscle control affects some children's stamina, balance and coordination. They may need more support and time to use certain activities, and spaces to relax or gain their composure at intervals during play. Children who are frail or have limited muscle control are more vulnerable to being knocked down by others. Some children who have physical impairments may also have a sensory or intellectual disability.	• Provide elements which are easy to manipulate for creative play and do not require great physical strength or fine motor skills. This may include: • wheels, spinning items and steering wheels with spokes or knobs to grasp; • play panels and musical instruments which can be struck and continue to move for some time; • musical elements such as gongs, chimes and large key pianos, and • levers, pulleys and other gadgets. Consider the degree of exertion required to reach special parts of a play space. Hand rails and grips on ramps, access ways and some play equipment provide added security for children with limited balance or muscle control. Easily-negotiated choices of route within climbing structures up to elevated levels, including ramps, wide step decks, flat treads and stairs. Back support and good handgrips on swings, spring rockers/ see saws, rocking and spinning items and sand pit edges to assist children with limited muscle control to sit independently, hang on or get on and off safely. For children using wheelchairs, provide: • A seamless path of travel (including impact absorbing 'wheelable' surface) into the park and to the play space from the footpath, street or car park into social areas (i.e. picnic shelters, BBQs) and into the play space and to a choice of key play activities. • Items that can be reached or manipulated from a wheelchair such as a shelf, shop counter, steering wheels, musical items, speaking tubes and other play things. • Sufficient space to manoeuvre/ turning spaces for wheelchair use. • Adequate space to park the wheelchair or mobility aid at activities such as at swings and beside climbing structures. • Access to natural elements such as dirt, sand, flowers, wildlife.

Source: The Good Play Guide "I can play too"

05 GUIDING PRINCIPLES FOR FIXED PLAY

In developing new fixed play areas and upgrading existing fixed play areas council will seek to ensure that core consideration is given to the needs of children with disabilities including (but not restricted to):

- The provision of multi-ability fixed play equipment which offers play opportunities with children of wide range of ability levels
- Presence of at least 1 ground level, accessible and inclusive moving fixed play piece, for example ground level seated roundabout, ground level and wheelchair accessible play trampoline
- The incorporation of a variety of sensory play elements (visual, sound and tactile)
- The use of gentle landscaping and the incorporation of natural play elements, and
- Creation of a play space that allows for and encourages play interaction between all children and young people regardless of individual ability or disability.

In line with 5.2 of this document, council will require non-council funded fixed play installations seeking post-installation maintenance agreements to give core consideration to the needs of children with disabilities including but not restricted to the above.

STRATEGIC ACTION



ALL NEW FIXED PLAY AREAS WILL BE DEVELOPED WITH CORE CONSIDERATION GIVEN TO THE PLAY NEEDS OF DISABLED CHILDREN, BOTH IN TERMS OF THE EQUIPMENT AVAILABLE AND IN THE CREATION OF A PLAY SPACE THAT ALLOWS FOR INCLUSIVE PLAY INTERACTION BETWEEN ALL CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE REGARDLESS OF INDIVIDUAL ABILITY.



5.6 SOLAR RADIATION

There is an increased level of awareness of the risks associated with prolonged exposure to solar radiation. Consequently, there is an increased expectation that shade and shelter will be provided in and around play areas.

Where possible, the design and siting of playgrounds will seek to locate play facilities near existing shade (e.g. trees) or will incorporate the planting of new trees.

5.7 MANAGING RISK AND CHALLENGE IN PLAY

Children and young people have a natural thirst for challenging play. It is through challenge and risk in play that they test the boundaries of their limitations; develop new skills to help them meet and overcome the challenges they face and develop the ability to better manage risk based on individual capacity.

Unfortunately for many children growing adult anxiety over their safety has significantly reduced opportunities to challenge themselves through risky play. These fears rest not only with parents and guardians, but also with play providers were the fear of blame or litigation over injury has often led to a watering down of challenge and risk based play opportunities.

In reality, removing elements of risk and challenge from play impacts negatively on children, reducing their capacity to address and deal with the risks and challenges they face as they grow up. In making a case for a more balanced approach to offering challenge and risk through play, most experts agree that:

- Risky and challenging play does not automatically equate to dangerous play
- Encounters with risk and challenge through play supports children to learn from an early age how to manage those risks and challenges. If the experience is removed, a valuable learning opportunity is missed

05 GUIDING PRINCIPLES FOR FIXED PLAY

- Children have a natural appetite for risk-taking which, if not fed through the provision of appropriate challenging play opportunities can lead them to seek out situations which expose them to greater risk
- From the perspective of a risk-benefit approach, engaging in active, outdoor play with an element of risk brings other health and developmental benefits. In such cases it is argued that the benefits of the activity outweigh the often minimal risk of injury or harm, and
- In the longer-term, exposure to risk and challenge through play have been shown to have a range of benefits for the individual child including the development of resilience, self-reliance and has been connected to entrepreneurialism.

The implementation guide 'Managing Risk in Play Provision' was developed by the Play Safety Forum which includes representation from the 4 national play organisations (PlayBoard NI, Play Scotland, Play England and Play Wales), Fields in Trust, the Association of Play Industries and the Health and Safety Executive.

The guide was developed based on recognition that children need and will often seek challenge through play, often choosing locations that may place them in an inherently risky situation. The publication offers guidance to play providers on how they can develop a risk management approach that takes into account the benefits children gain from engaging in challenging, sometimes risky play experiences. 'Managing Risk in Play Provision' advocates for, and provides access to an implementation toolkit for play providers aimed at supporting them to introduce a 'Risk Benefit' approach to play provision. By adopting a 'Risk Benefit' approach providers are better able to offer and enable children and young people to take part in challenging, exciting play opportunities whilst ensuring that they are not exposed to an unacceptable level of risk. The adoption of a Risk Benefit approach has been endorsed by the Health and Safety Executive at both UK and Northern Ireland level and is supported by the NI Executive.

STRATEGIC ACTION



IN ACKNOWLEDGING THE IMPORTANCE OF RISK AND CHALLENGE IN PLAY, ARMAGH CITY, BANBRIDGE AND CRAIGAVON BOROUGH COUNCIL COMMITS TO THE ADOPTION OF A 'RISK BENEFIT' APPROACH TO FIXED PLAY PROVISION OVER THE LIFETIME OF THIS STRATEGY.

IN WORKING TOWARDS THE IMPLEMENTATION OF A RISK/BENEFIT APPROACH, COUNCIL WILL PAY CLOSE REGARD TO THE GUIDANCE AND ASSESSMENT PROCEDURES ISSUED BY THE PLAY SAFETY FORUM AND ENDORSED BY THE HEALTH AND SAFETY EXECUTIVE.

IN WORKING TOWARDS IMPLEMENTATION, COUNCIL WILL UNDERTAKE A NUMBER OF KEY ACTIONS:

1. A COMPREHENSIVE REVIEW OF PRINCIPLES, PROCEDURES AND PRACTICE ACROSS COUNCIL DEPARTMENTS, INCLUDING LEVELS OF UNDERSTANDING ABOUT THE IMPORTANCE OF PLAY TO CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE AND THE IMPORTANCE OF CHALLENGE AND RISK IN PLAY;
2. PROVIDE RISK/BENEFIT IN PLAY TRAINING FOR KEY STAFF TO ENHANCE UNDERSTANDING AND EMBEDDING OF THE PROCESS;
3. ENGAGE WITH INSURERS IN ORDER TO IDENTIFY ANY POTENTIAL IMPLICATIONS OF ADOPTING A MORE BALANCED RISK/BENEFIT APPROACH AND TO SUPPORT INSURERS UNDERSTANDING OF THE IMPORTANCE OF A RISK/BENEFIT APPROACH TO PLAY;
4. RE-EVALUATE THE DESIGN APPROACHES ADOPTED BY COUNCIL AND EXTERNAL APPOINTEES IN ORDER TO INTRODUCE MORE CHALLENGING PLAY ELEMENTS AS PART OF ONGOING PLAY AREA RENEWALS AND NEW PLAY AREA PROVISION.

05 GUIDING PRINCIPLES FOR FIXED PLAY

5.8 MAINTENANCE OF FIXED PLAY AREAS

Fixed play areas include a wide variety of components ranging from traditional playground equipment including slides, swings, climbing frames etc. through to ancillary items such as fences, gates, litter bins and bicycle racks.

Council has a legal and moral responsibility for ensuring that fixed play areas for which it is responsible are planned, designed and maintained in a safe condition. In order to meet its responsibilities council must adhere to two European standards for play equipment BS EN 1176:2008 (Playground Equipment and Surfacing) and BS EN 1177:2008 (Impact attenuating playground surfacing - determination or critical fall height).

It is important to note that whilst the standards are designed to ensure safety they are not designed to eliminate risk in play. The purpose is to ensure that children and young people are able to engage in adventurous and challenging play without coming to harm as a result of poorly designed or badly planned play facilities.

The standards represent best practice and provide a basis for council to defend itself in cases of litigation for injury resulting from an accident within a fixed play area which involves play equipment or ancillary items.

In order to ensure that a strategic approach is adopted to the management and renewal of all fixed play areas, the play strategy establishes a set of core principles which will guide the maintenance of fixed play areas.

In order to ensure that council fully meets its legal obligations with regards to the maintenance of fixed play areas, play area inspection will be conducted on the basis outlined below:

- **Regular Inspection:** Dependent on the level of usage and/or identified issues, subject to risk assessment inspections which will be conducted by trained staff in order to review equipment's basic condition and to identify any faults arising from breakage, vandalism etc. Following each inspection a check list will be completed and remedial works undertaken to address any identified issues;
- **Formal Inspection:** Council will undertake a more rigorous inspection of fixed play area equipment in order to identify wear and tear to equipment and to provide a quality control check. Inspections will be undertaken by an appropriately trained member of staff for each fixed play area;
- **Annual Maintenance Inspection:** All fixed play areas will be subject to an annual maintenance inspection conducted by an independent external specialist in order to identify those pieces of equipment and/or ancillary items requiring replacement or remedial works in order to comply with statutory health and safety requirements. Following this inspection a written report will be produced.
- Annual maintenance inspections will be required to provide an overarching risk benefit assessment alongside an assessment of each individual fixed play areas remaining life span in order to assist with the capital renewal process.
- Staff training will be provided on an ongoing basis by an appropriately qualified training provider in order to ensure that staff are able to meet the maintenance inspection requirements as outlined.





5.9 DESIGN, DEVELOPMENT AND INSTALLATION OF NEW FIXED PLAY AREAS

As noted previously, fixed equipment play areas are expensive to develop and install and require a long-term maintenance commitment in order to ensure that equipment remains in satisfactory working order. Where council is to make an investment in a new fixed play area it must be assured - as far as possible - that there is a sufficient level of local demand and that a fixed play area will meet the play needs of children and young people in the area, both now and in the immediate future.

Identification of the potential need for new fixed play provision may come through a variety of sources including:

- Direct identification of need for fixed play by a local community organisation, statutory partner, parent or political representative;
- Through council officers, partner organisations or third party led community consultations;
- Through children and young people within an area identifying a need for fixed play within ongoing consultative work and community engagement undertaken through the Community Planning Partnership.

Upon the identification of an area of potential play need, council will initiate an agreed process aimed at ensuring that any new fixed play provision is targeted at the optimum location and meets the needs of children, young people and communities within the area. The process will incorporate a number of key stages as outlined overleaf.

STAGE 1: Review of Demographic Need & Land Availability	• Council recognise that fixed play areas do not always represent the most appropriate mechanism for meeting play need - particularly in areas of low population density or dispersed residential population. • In order to determine the level of potential need for fixed play council will undertake a demographic review of the area to identify the potential user base and underlying age profile. • In reviewing demographics, council will apply the appropriate radial measurement from the identified location. In order to be eligible for consideration for a new fixed play area the level of demographic need within the radial must be equal to or in excess of 200 children (aged 0 to 14 years) in the case of urban areas and 150 in the case of rural. • Installing a fixed play area requires a suitable piece of land in terms of both size and location. Council will complete a land use survey of the area in order to ascertain whether suitable land is available, either in ownership of council or a statutory partner e.g. a school. • If land is in the ownership of a statutory partner council will hold preliminary discussions regarding potential land transfer to council or, in the case of a school the co-location of community accessible fixed play should local demand for fixed play be confirmed.
STAGE 2: Community Consultation	• Where demographic need for fixed play is demonstrated and a potential location identified, council will conduct a community consultation within the identified radial. Consultation will be conducted through an appropriate mechanism (e.g. door to door survey) and will be integral to: - Informing the community of the proposed development - Determining the views of the community on fixed play develoment - Identifying any opposition to the development of fixed play - Gathering views on the appropriateness of potential locations - Encouraging community discussion and debate on the issue - Reviewing plans and seeking community views as the process develops.
STAGE 3: Participation of Children & Young People	• Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council recognise that children and young people are the experts when it comes to play. In keeping with our commitment to participation, council will proactively seek to ensure that children and young people have an opportunity to become involved in the play area development process. This will include: - Identification of play types and activities fixed play areas should provide for - The identification of fixed play equipment that best meets their play needs - Opportunities to actively engage in the design process for fixed play areas.
Proceed to Design and Installation	



5.10 CONSULTATION ON REMOVAL OR UPGRADE OF FIXED PLAY

In the case of potential removal of a play area, council will engage with local communities in order to determine the true level of demand for fixed play within the area (through for example door to door survey). This will help to update the available demographic data which has been used in the strategy and will ensure an accurate reflection of local need.

Should it be determined that there is no longer a need for a play area within a specific location council will initiate a consultation process aimed at ensuring that communities have a say in the transformation of the site to maintain value for the community.

Where a play area has been identified for upgrade council will seek to engage with the community as part of the redevelopment process and will work to ensure that children and young people, parents, and carers and the wider public within the area are able to feed their views into the process of design and development.

5.11 RENEWAL AND UPGRADING OF FIXED PLAY AREAS

Whilst acknowledging that each individual fixed play areas life span will be dictated to some degree by the level of use, wear and tear it receives, the agreed **standard life span review point** for a fixed play area will be **15 years** from initial installation.

Once a fixed play area reaches the 15 year review point it will be assessed in terms of both its play value and its physical condition. Should the play area be found to have a sufficiently low play value or to be in an inadequate physical condition it will become eligible for replacement **provided** that an underlying, continued demographic need can be demonstrated. Should the review identify that the level of play value remains sufficiently high and the physical condition good, council will continue to monitor both aspects on an annual basis until the play area becomes eligible for replacement.

Should a fixed play area be identified through review as being eligible for replacement, in order to demonstrate continued underlying need the council will undertake an assessment of local demographics against the agreed accessibility framework (as outlined at 5.1). This process will also include a wider review of the location of other fixed play areas available within the wider locality in order to ensure that duplication of provision does not occur.

5.12 RENEWAL OF FIXED PLAY AREAS OUTSIDE AGREED LIFE SPAN

Council recognises that in some cases a fixed play area may require complete renewal in advance of the 15 year life cycle being reached. This may be due to a number of reasons including a high level of usage resulting in premature degradation of the play equipment beyond a maintainable standard, vandalism or unforeseen natural events. Council will review on an ongoing basis maintenance inspection reports in order to identify those fixed play areas which fall into this category and will initiate at the appropriate point a review of underlying need incorporating an assessment of local demographic need, the agreed accessibility framework and fixed play provision within the wider locality.

06 A PARTNERSHIP APPROACH TO MEETING PLAY NEED

ARMAGH CITY, BANBRIDGE AND CRAIGAVON BOROUGH COUNCIL ACKNOWLEDGES THAT IT HAS A CLEAR ROLE IN PROVIDING FOR PLAY THROUGH THE PROVISION AND MAINTENANCE OF FIXED PLAY AREAS, GREEN SPACES AND PLAYING FIELDS AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF EMERGING NON-FIXED PLAY APPROACHES.

It must however also be acknowledged that responsibility for meeting the play needs of children extends beyond the sole remit of the council.

For children play does not take place only during specific times or at specific locations. Play can, and does take place at all times of the day and in many diverse locations including at school; on the streets and in the wider community; on green spaces and playing fields; in public buildings and in towns and shopping centres.

In recognition of the diversity of locations in which play takes place and the range of agencies with a responsibility for those locations, at the core of the Play Strategy is a desire to work in partnership with a broad range of stakeholders including colleagues from across the statutory, voluntary and community sectors, local communities and private sector organisations.

6.1 COMMUNITY PLANNING DUTY

The Community Planning duty came into effect on 1st April 2015 as part of the full implementation of local government reform arising from the Review of Public Administration. Under the Community Planning duty councils are required to act as lead partner in developing an effective community plan.

The ultimate aim of Community Planning is to provide a framework for council, government departments, statutory bodies, voluntary organisations, communities and other relevant agencies to work together to develop and implement a shared vision for promoting the economic, social and environmental well-being of their area. Central to this process is establishing effective engagement with the community.



06 A PARTNERSHIP APPROACH TO MEETING PLAY NEED

6.2 COMMUNITY PLANNING PROCESS

Central to the Community Planning process is the establishment of a Community Planning Partnership which draws broad membership from across the council area. The Community Planning Partnership has a joint responsibility for the development and delivery of a community plan for the area.

Community involvement within the process is critical and a statutory requirement is placed on Community Planning Partnerships to ensure that the views of the community are sought and taken into account as part of the process. Statutory guidance highlights a particular need for partnerships to 'encourage and promote the role that can be played by children and young people in Community Planning' highlighting the need for partnerships to establish appropriate methods of engaging with, and involving children and young people within the process.

Following a series of partnership meetings and workshops which took place over the summer of 2016, Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council is in the process of finalising its first community plan.

6.3 EMBEDDING THE PLAY STRATEGY WITHIN THE COMMUNITY PLANNING

Given the need to establish a partnership approach to meeting play need and the recent development of the Community Planning Partnership, council has agreed that the most effective mechanism for progressing delivery of the play strategy will be through the Community Planning Partnership.

Embedding delivery of the play strategy within the Community Planning process will reduce the need to establish a new play strategy partnership (thereby avoiding duplication) and will benefit from the already established high level, cross-sectoral representation on the Community Planning Partnership.

STRATEGIC ACTION



COUNCIL HAS MADE SIGNIFICANT PROGRESS TOWARDS THE ESTABLISHMENT OF AN EFFECTIVE COMMUNITY PLANNING PARTNERSHIP WITH BROAD STAKEHOLDER REPRESENTATION. IT HAS BEEN AGREED THAT RESPONSIBILITY FOR IMPLEMENTATION AND MONITORING OF THE PLAY STRATEGY WILL FALL UNDER THE COMMUNITY PLANNING PROCESS.

07 NON-FIXED APPROACHES TO MEETING PLAY NEED

NON-FIXED APPROACHES TO MEETING PLAY NEED

One of the underlying, long term aims of this Play Strategy is to create a public environment which is more conducive to, and supportive of children and young people at play.

As stated previously, for children play and the drive to play is a constant part of their everyday lives. A key focus for the strategy over the coming eight years will be to work towards the creation of more play friendly and playable communities which recognise and celebrate play as a key aspect of community life.

In seeking to deliver this aim council will roll out a series of initiatives aimed at enhancing understanding about the importance of play, championing play and its role within society and supporting the development non-fixed, community based approaches to meeting play need.

7.1 APPOINTMENT OF A PLAY DEVELOPMENT OFFICER

In recognition of the importance of play to the lives of our children, young people and communities, council will seek to appoint a dedicated Play Development Officer.

The Play Development Officer will be responsible for leading the roll-out of the Play Strategy; engaging internally with council departments and staff teams and externally with statutory, community and voluntary representatives. The officer will act as the key focal conduit within council for all matters relating to the play strategy.

INTERNAL COUNCIL FOCUS

The Play Development Officer will provide an internal focus on play, engaging with and supporting departments across ABC Council to develop a culture of:

- Understanding of the importance of play for children, young people, families and local communities
- Recognition of the impact broad council activities have on increasing or decreasing play opportunities
- Ensuring that consideration of play need is built into strategic thinking and operational activity across council, and
- Developing innovative approaches to enhancing access to play opportunities across the council in its entirety.

EXTERNAL ORGANISATIONS

In addition to developing the capacity of council departments to better meet play need, the Play Officer will be responsible for developing connections to other organisations involved in the Community Planning Partnership who have an interest in, or whose work impacts on play across the council area.



The Play Development Officer will be responsible for supporting the development of partnership action as part of the overarching Community Planning process, monitoring progress and identifying gaps within the partnership structure.

With a view to developing the capacity of the council to further enhance play opportunities, the Play Development Officer will have a responsibility for identifying potential sources of funding which could support the development of a staffed play unit within the council, enhancing capacity to deliver real and lasting change over time.

COMMUNITY FOCUS

The Play Development Officer will act as the key liaison point for children, young people and communities in relation to the development of play opportunities across Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council in their widest sense.

This will include:

Participative engagement with children and young people to identify areas of play need and to ensure that they have a say in the development of play opportunities

- Pro-active engagement with communities and parents regarding the importance of play
- Providing guidance and support for those wishing to develop non-fixed approaches to play within their community, and
- Liaison with play providers to identify local need as it relates to training and qualifications.

7.2 COMMUNITY PLAY INITIATIVES

Council recognise that for many children and young people the most accessible play spaces are those located in the area in which they live. These could take the form of a communal green space or the street on which they live. Across the borough area there exists communal and shared spaces within communities which could, with an element of support be better utilised for play by children and young people.

As part of the play strategy, the Play Development Officer will work to establish a number of pilot community play initiatives. These initiatives would work with partners and local communities to identify geographical areas that potentially lend themselves to play and will support communities to enhance such spaces. Pending evaluation of impact, the further roll-out of non-fixed approaches would be considered by council over the duration of the play strategy. Approaches to be considered include:

COMMUNITY PLAY VOLUNTEERS

Under a community play volunteer programme members of the community would be provided with training and support across a range of areas including play types, play techniques and child protection. Volunteers would then be supported to deliver 'free' or non-fixed play sessions within their local area, utilising those spaces which lend themselves to children and young people's play.

07 NON-FIXED APPROACHES TO MEETING PLAY NEED



STREET PLAY

Recognising the factors that restrict opportunities for outdoor play in built up urban areas (traffic, adult intolerance of children and young people at play etc.), street play projects have been shown to be effective in opening up streets for safe play.

Using existing examples of good practice, pilot programmes would work to support local communities to establish a street play project based on:

- The closure of streets for a set time period (1 to 3 hours) on set days to enable children and young people to play freely on the road and pavement within their community without risk from traffic
- The support of local community play volunteers to oversee and support street play sessions through the provision of focused training and support, and
- Council provision of a mobile play equipment pod containing a range of loose parts play materials which can be used by children to create their own play experience.

PLAY IN THE PUBLIC REALM

Council recognise that play can and does take place at a wide variety of locations and at any time. Across the council area we have an abundance of public spaces which could lend themselves more clearly to play and could actively promote play activity. These spaces range from retail and town centres to parks and forests.

PLAY PODS

With a view to supporting the development of community play initiatives, council will consider the purchase and making available of a number of mobile play pods which will contain a range of loose play parts to support the delivery of play sessions.

Play Pods will be located with and maintained by the council with communities able to book a pod for a play session before their return to the council.

NATIONAL PLAY DAY

National Play Day takes place on the first Wednesday of August each year and provides a national focus for children and young people's play.

Each year hundreds of play celebration events take place across the UK ranging from large scale play days to smaller community play events. Over recent years each of the legacy councils have promoted and supported a range of events on National Play Day.



AS PART OF THIS STRATEGY COUNCIL GIVE A COMMITMENT TO:

HOST

A MINIMUM OF 3 LARGE SCALE COMMUNITY PLAY DAY EVENTS WHICH, IN ADDITION TO PROVIDING A WIDE RANGE OF PLAY OPPORTUNITIES, WILL PROVIDE A FOCUS FOR POSITIVE MEDIA COVERAGE OF THE IMPORTANCE OF PLAY.

ENCOURAGE

COMMUNITY GROUPS TO MAKE USE OF THE ESTABLISHED FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE POLICY (WHICH ALLOWS GRANTS UP TO A MAXIMUM OF £250) IN SUPPORT OF FOCUSED PLAY DAY CELEBRATION EVENTS, AND

PROMOTE

PLAY DAY THROUGH THE EXISTING NETWORK OF CHILDCARE PROVIDERS AND COMMUNITY GROUPS ACROSS THE COUNCIL AREA, ENCOURAGING ORGANISATIONS TO PLAN AND DELIVER THEIR OWN PLAY DAY EVENTS.



7.3 CHAMPIONING PLAY

As a council we are committed to championing play by raising its profile and encouraging partner organisations and communities to place a greater value upon it.

By actively championing play we aim to increase understanding of its critical importance to the lives of children and young people, ultimately supporting the development of a play friendly community that values play and expects to see children playing outdoors and within the public realm.

Over the period of the Play Strategy, the Play Development Officer will deliver a number of key activities aimed at promoting the Play Strategy and championing play, namely:

RAISING AWARENESS OF THE IMPORTANCE OF PLAY

- Hold a public launch of the Play Strategy to raise awareness of the strategy and its key objectives
- Disseminate and make available information relating to the importance of play to the growth and development of children and young people to stakeholder organisations across the community and statutory sectors, including existing partnership bodies
- Disseminate and make available guidance materials focused on supporting play opportunities within the community aimed at parents, carers, teachers, youth and community workers, and
- Work in partnership with local media outlets to make information relating to the benefits of play publically accessible and to promote positive news stories regarding the contribution of children and young people to the Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon area.

GAINING A COMMITMENT TO PLAY

- Hold a series of seminars aimed at promoting the Play Strategy and the importance of play to elected members, council officers and external organisations across the community and statutory sectors with a view to securing a commitment to play
- Deliver focused training on key aspects of play and the play strategy to council departments and wider partner and community organisations, and
- Secure a cross-sectoral commitment to the implementation of the Play Strategy through the Community Planning Partnership.

POLITICAL CHAMPIONING

- Political support for the Play Strategy will be critical to its success and ongoing development
- The Play Development Officer will work closely with elected members of the council, local MLA's and MP's in order to ensure that they are aware of the key issues impacting upon children's play at a local level, and
- Cross party political representatives from council will be sought to act as political champions for play, advocating for the child's right to play and seeking to pro-actively address issues which impact upon the right to play.



IN ADDITION TO THE INDIVIDUAL RECOMMENDATIONS MADE FOR EACH FIXED PLAY AREA (BASED ON PLAY VALUE AUDIT FINDINGS), A NUMBER OF OVERARCHING RECOMMENDATIONS ARE MADE FOR CONSIDERATION BY THE COUNCIL:

STRATEGIC

- **Participation of Children and Young People** - It is recommended that council seek to establish a mechanism for engaging with children and young people on an ongoing basis in order to allow them to actively participate in decisions relating to, or impacting upon their play experience (whether fixed or non-fixed)
- **Risk/Benefit Approach to Play** - Traditionally, across local government health and safety considerations have led to the creation of play areas which offer minimal challenge and risk in play. Whilst consideration of risk remains important, it is now recognised at a UK level that there is a need to create play areas that offer challenge in order to nurture health, wellbeing and essential skills. This has resulted in a shift towards a risk/benefit approach which focuses on a weighing up of both risk and benefits as a means of introducing more challenge in play
- It is recommended that the council should work towards the adoption of the risk/benefit approach for use in all future fixed play development.
- **Alternative Non-Fixed Approaches to meeting play need** - Whilst fixed play offers an economically viable approach to meeting play need within built up residential areas they do not provide a means of addressing play need within all rural areas, particularly those with more dispersed populations. As such, it is recommended that council proceed with the development of a range of alternative non-fixed approaches. Approaches identified for consideration within the strategy include:
- Establishment of a dedicated post to support the roll-out and implementation of the play strategy
- Establishment of a Community Play Volunteers Programme
- Piloting of community and street play initiatives
- Consideration of how Council and partners can better integrate play opportunities into the Public Realm, and
- Active promotion and support for National Play Day.

08 OVERARCHING RECOMMENDATIONS



- **Design Principles** - Council should implement the good practice design principles outlined within the strategy with a view to enhancing play value at existing sites and ensuring that future new development delivers a quality play experience.
- **Inclusive Play Opportunities** - Council should implement the principles outlined within the strategy as they relate to ensuring that play provision recognises and seeks to meet the needs of children with disabilities.
- **Residential Planning** - Council should seek to ensure that developers incorporate suitable fixed play provision/natural green space allocations within developments as outlined in Planning Policy Statements 7 and 8.
- **Land Availability for Fixed Play** - It is recognised that in some areas of fixed play need (current and future) council may not have access to land sufficient to develop fixed play provision. In such cases council should engage with statutory partners to identify potential sites in the ownership of other bodies (e.g. schools etc.)
- **Capital Plan and Play Strategy Review** - The capital plan associated with the play strategy should be subject to adjustment on an annual basis to take into account changing local circumstances. The overall strategy should be reviewed every eight years to ensure that the underlying principles remain sound with mid-point review after four years.

OPERATIONAL

During the period of the Play Strategy council should initiate a programme of capital works aimed at enhancing fixed play provision including:

- **Commence Consultation on Development of New Fixed Play Areas** - The strategy has identified a number of areas that potentially require new fixed play development. Council should initiate consultation to confirm need and assess land availability within each area (both council and statutory partner owned).
- **Upgrading of Low Play Value Play Areas** - Council should initiate a capital work programme aimed at enhancing play value at such sites incorporating consultation with children, young people and the local community as part of the process.
- **Commence Consultation regarding Removal/Site Transformation of fixed Play in areas of low demand** - Council should initiate consultation over the duration of the strategy with a view to removal and site transformation to better meet the needs of the resident population.
- **Green Spaces** - Where green space adjoins fixed play areas council should seek to maximise playability by enhancing the space through minor landscaping, planting, incorporation of natural materials and features etc. This would create additional natural play space for children and young people; would complement the fixed play area and would provide an alternative free play experience.



09 APPENDIX A - WIDER STRATEGIC CONTEXT

THE STRATEGIC CONTEXT FOR PLAY - IN ADDITION TO THE INDIVIDUAL AND WIDER SOCIETAL BENEFITS OF PLAY, COUNCIL OPERATES WITHIN A WIDER INTERNATIONAL, REGIONAL AND LOCAL STRATEGIC CONTEXT WHICH HIGHLIGHTS THE IMPORTANCE OF MEETING PLAY NEED.

INTERNATIONAL

1. **United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child**

   The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) is an international human rights treaty that grants all children and young people (aged 17 and under) a comprehensive set of rights.

   The UNCRC was ratified by the UK government in 1991, committing all branches of government to ensuring that children are afforded the rights and protections contained within its articles. The child's Right to Play is specifically highlighted in Article 31 which states:

   "That every child has the right 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.

   "That member governments shall respect and promote the right of the child to participate fully in cultural and artistic life and shall encourage the provision of appropriate and equal opportunities for cultural, artistic, recreational and leisure activity"

REGIONAL

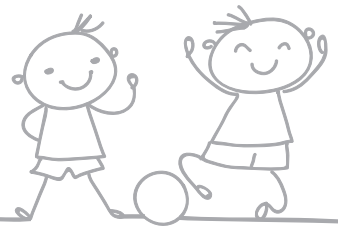
1. **NI Programme for Government**

   The second stage consultation for the NI Executives Programme for Government (PfG) closed on 23rd December 2016. Whilst suspension of the Assembly means that the PfG remains in draft form, it is important to note that it acknowledges and recognises play as an important aspect of childhood, noting its importance in terms of development, well-being and enjoyment of childhood.

2. **NI Executive Play and Leisure Policy and Implementation Plan**

   In 2009 the NI Executive published its Play and Leisure Policy Statement, highlighting its commitment to delivering against the play and leisure needs of children and young people. This was followed in March 2011 by the Executive's endorsement of the 'Play and Leisure Policy' and an associated implementation plan.
   The policy was the culmination of an inclusive, collaborative process which brought together stakeholders from across government departments, councils, the community sector and children and young people.

   At the heart of the policy is a recognition that play is not only critical to the individual child in terms of their health and wellbeing; but also that play has a key role in creating cohesive communities and tackling a range of issues including anti-social behaviour, inter-generational issues and the legacy of community division left over by the troubles. The policy recognises and highlights the importance of risk in play to allow children to explore boundaries and test abilities in such cases where it can be shown that the benefits to the child outweigh the potential risks.



3. NI Children and Young Peoples Strategy

Entitled 'Our Children and Young People - Our Pledge' the children and young people's strategy (2006 - 2016) is based around 6 key outcomes areas which if achieved will ensure that children and young people thrive and look forward with confidence to the future:

- Healthy
- Enjoying, learning and achieving
- Living in safety and with stability
- Experiencing economic and environmental well-being
- Contributing positively to community and society
- Living in a society which respects their rights

The strategy recognizes the importance of play and adequate provision for play as a means of supporting healthy growth and development highlighting a range of benefits including improved physical health and mental wellbeing; enhanced emotional resilience; improved educational capacity; and the wider community benefits which come from children and young people being visible and active through outdoor play.

The Executive are currently in the process of developing a further 10 year strategy to run from 2016 to 20126 which will place play as one of its seven key outcome areas.

4. Children's Services Co-operation Act (2015)

On 9th December 2015 the Children's Services Co-operation Act (Northern Ireland) received Royal Assent and became operative. The Act was introduced to improve co-operation between government departments and a range of other public bodies including Councils, HSC Trusts and Board, the Education Authority, NIHE and PSNI.

The Act identifies 8 general parameters which impact on the well-being of children and young people:

- Physical and mental health
- Enjoyment of play and leisure
- Learning and achieving
- Living in safety and stability
- Economic and environmental well-being
- Making a positive contribution to society
- Respect of rights and
- Promotion of good relations

The Act also outlines how the Children and Young Peoples strategy should be monitored, requires the programme for government to take account of reports on the strategy, and provides powers for statutory bodies to pool budgets to supports services for children and young people.

5. DHSSPS Fitter Future for All Framework (2012 - 2022)

The overarching aim of 'Fitter Future for All' is to support people to make healthy choices, reducing overall levels of obesity and improving health and wellbeing amongst the general population.

The Strategy recognises the critical role of play in reducing childhood obesity levels and highlights the importance of rural and natural landscapes as well as urban design and planning in delivering playable, green infrastructure (which encourages outdoor activity levels), accessible play areas and play activities, and active travel routes.

09 APPENDIX A - WIDER STRATEGIC CONTEXT

6. Making Life Better (2013 - 2023)

'Making Life Better' outlines the NI Executives objective of creating the conditions for individuals, families and communities to take greater control over their lives, enabling and supporting them to lead healthy lives. The focus of 'Making Life Better' is on collaborative working between individuals, communities and partner organisations to address the range of factors that impact on health and wellbeing in Northern Ireland. Underpinning 'Making Life Better' are 6 key themes:

a) Giving Every Child the Best Start
b) Equipped Throughout Life
c) Empowering Healthy Living
d) Creating the Conditions
e) Empowering Communities
f) Developing Collaboration

The importance of play is outlined under outcome 2 of thematic area 1 entitled 'Healthy and confident children and young people' which gives a commitment to "Promote the benefits of play and leisure and increase opportunities for children and young people to enjoy it" on a cross-government basis including key Executive departments and local government.

7. Strategic Planning Policy Statement

The planning system has been reformed and restructured from a unitary system where planning powers rested with the Department to a two tier model of delivery whereby councils have responsibility for the implementation of key planning functions.

The Strategic Planning Policy Statement for Northern Ireland (SPPS) was published on the 28th September 2015 and reduces 20 separate planning policy statements to one, setting out objectives for open space, recreation and leisure. The SPPS also states how the Local Development Plan plays a role in terms of open space i.e. adequate provision for green and blue infrastructure, identify and designate areas of open space etc.

Under the SPSS the policy provision of PPS 7 (Quality Residential Environments) and PPS 8 (Open Space and Outdoor recreation) are retained.

- PP7 (Quality Residential Environments)
PPS 7 highlights the need for developers to consider the play needs of future residents within development plans outlining that:

i. Play facilities should be seen as part of local neighbourhood facilities and (where required) should be incorporated into design and layout, designed to high standard and located to provide focal points and landmark features

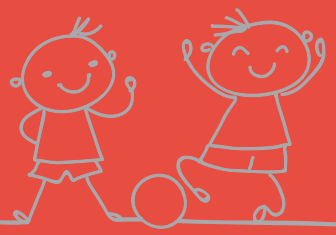
ii. It is considered reasonable to expect developers to contribute to the cost of provision and/or to set land aside for use by local community

iii. Regard should be given to integrating pleasant, attractive and landscaped areas of open space, including children's play-spaces, as an intrinsic element of any new residential development.

PPS 8, (Open Space, Sport and Outdoor Recreation)

PPS 8 develops on the strategic guidelines included in PPS7 and states:

"For residential development of 100 units or more, or for development sites of 5 hectares or more, an equipped children's play area will be required as an integral part of the development. The Department will consider an exception to this requirement where an equipped children's play area exists within reasonable walking distance



(generally around 400 metres) of the majority of the units within the development scheme."

Paragraph 5.1 emphasises the importance of providing for children's play stressing the need for play areas to be located within a reasonable walking distance of where they live whilst not being located so close to dwellings that that they are likely to cause nuisance for residents.

LOCAL

1. Community Planning

Introduced under RPA, Community Planning is a new responsibility for Councils and brings local authorities in Northern Ireland into line with their counterparts in England, Scotland and Wales.

Community Planning provides a framework for councils, government departments and other public bodies to engage with local communities and the voluntary and community sectors with a view to developing and implementing a shared vision for the area.

In order to be fully representative it will be essential that children and young people have an opportunity to feed directly into the Community Planning process, influencing decisions on matters that impact on their lives including play.

Within Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Council the Community Planning process has commenced in partnership with a wide range of stakeholders groups and bodies.

Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council Corporate Plan

Introduced under RPA, Community Planning is a new responsibility for Councils inaugural corporate plan (2015 - 2017) identifies 3 corporate priorities, namely:

1. **Place** - Increasing prosperity through developing the economy, employment, connectivity and environment
2. **People** - Improving everyone's quality of life, opportunity, safety and wellbeing, and
3. **Position** - Giving leadership to tackle the issues that matter and influencing decision makers at all levels.

Meeting the play needs of children and young people falls primarily within corporate priority 2 which states that people are our most important resource and gives a commitment to providing people centred services that will improve quality of life and health and well-being; offering varied leisure and recreational facilities; celebrating culture and arts; and supporting communities to develop a sense of belonging, safety and cohesion across our area.

Under corporate priority 2 sit a number of associated priorities - Well Being; Community; Culture and Quality. A review of these priorities highlights the important role play can have in supporting delivery, namely:

09 APPENDIX A - WIDER STRATEGIC CONTEXT

PRIORITY 1: WELL BEING

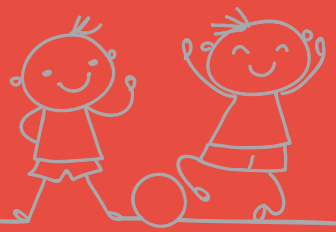
- **Promote Wellbeing and Reduce Health Inequalities:** The opportunity to engage in regular physical play has been shown to be one of the most effective ways for children to establish and maintain good health and wellbeing. Physical play encourages children to be more active, helping to reduce childhood obesity, improving self-confidence and impacting positively on mental health.
- **Facilitate Healthy Lifestyle Choices:** Research has shown that patterns of physical activity established through childhood play impact on activity levels in later life. By enabling children to be more active through play it is possible to introduce healthy lifestyle and exercise patterns which persist into adulthood.
- **Encourage Recreational Use of Open Space:** Despite the growth of technology based play (games consoles, I-pads etc.) research has shown that the majority of children still prefer being able to play outdoors[1] where possible.

  There remain a number of impediments to children making greater use of open spaces for play e.g. intolerance of adults, accessibility issues etc. which if addressed in a pro-active manner would encourage greater use of open spaces for play, contributing significantly to achievement of the priority.

PRIORITY 2: COMMUNITY

- **Create Welcoming Communities and Neighbourhoods:** Play and the natural desire to play is a factor that unites all children regardless of community, socio-economic or ethnic background. For communities play, in particular communal approaches to play (street play, community play sessions etc.) can provide a common focus for parents and adults generating community cohesion, breaking down barriers and encouraging volunteering.
  Play and the availability of play are consistently seen to be one of the key factors in creating more welcoming and child friendly neighbourhoods. Research[2] indicates that communities place a high level of value on play and, when given the opportunity to identify potential improvements to an area, play is often seen as a priority matter.
  The development of play opportunities, both traditional and innovative can contribute actively to the fulfilment of this council priority area.
- **Develop Community Planning capacity and involvement in local decision making:** One of the key challenges for the council in developing an effective Community Planning process will be securing the active involvement of children and young people.

  Play has consistently been shown to be one of the most effective means of engaging children within planning processes and has been used extensively by PlayBoard NI to enable children to input into strategic and policy decision making. By actively engaging with children and adopting a participative approach to the development of play the council would be able to place children's voices at the heart of the community planning process and significantly enhancing local involvement in decision making.



PRIORITY 3: CULTURE

- **Celebrate diversity, promote equality and good relations to build a shared society:** The desire and need to play is integral to childhood, regardless of community background. Play provides the ideal foundation from which to develop cross-community connections. Through play children are able to come together on a cross-community basis supporting the development of social connections and friendships between children from different community backgrounds.

  In addition to supporting children and young people to engage on a cross-community basis, play as a non-contentious activity can enable parents and carers to meet and engage across community boundaries on shared space.

'The Right to Play - Young Researchers investigate Article 31' by PlayBoard NI's Young Research Team, 2013

'The Play Return: A review of the wider impacts of play" by Time Gill, 2014



For further information please contact
Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council

0300 0300 900
info@armaghbanbridgecraigavon.gov.uk
armaghbanbridgecraigavon.gov.uk
Find us on Facebook and Twitter

ACBCBC 1114