

21. The majority of people believe that play areas should be within walking distance of children's homes. Challenging, attractive play areas with a mix of traditional and modern equipment providing opportunities for different movement and a range of stimulation are supported by parents. Vandalism lack of cleanliness and poorly maintained or damaged equipment are barriers to participation for both children and parents.
22. Less than half of the responding Town and Parish Councils believed the quantity of provision in their area to be insufficient and for many such Council's, play provision appears to be of limited concern, perhaps for a number of reasons such as lack of available space, the local population of children and young people being low, a set vision of what play provision is, a perceived lack of relevance and other issues such as transport and crime being considered as of more importance.
23. There is no common consensus amongst children and young people or adults in terms of the desire for organised out of school sport and school holiday play activities. Barriers to organised provision are believed to include transport issues and lack of awareness and knowledge of how to access information. Where organised play provision is provided, a great deal of importance is placed on the quality of the associated staff. On-site supervision in open spaces and suitable provision for adults accompanying children is desirable. The majority of those accessing this type of provision value it.
24. Service providers and those that can facilitate play opportunities are concerned with issues such as transport in the rural areas, inadequate appreciation of the benefits of play and ability to create play opportunities independently, the level of awareness amongst parents and the children of available opportunities and the capacity of local providers to bring about positive change in terms of play.

The Play Strategy

25. The Play Strategy has been developed with consideration to the key policies and strategies on a national, county-wide and local level that have a bearing on the way in which we provide services for children and young people. These include; Every Child Matters: Change for Children, the Local Area Agreement 2006-09, the East Sussex Children and Young People's Plan, the Rother District Council Corporate Plan, the Rother Community Plan 2004-2009, the Rother District Local Plan and Local Action Plans. The Strategy also takes into account issues that affect the provision of play services, the Open Spaces Study and the consultation findings.
26. A range of stakeholders were involved in setting the Strategy's objectives. These reflect the themes of the Play Policy and take into account consultation with children and young people, the general public and those involved in delivering services for children, young people and their families. In summary, the Objectives are;
 1. A culture of dialogue
 2. Promoting the value of play and the right of every child to play
 3. Maximising opportunities and innovation through partnership working and external funding
 4. Quality provision for all
 5. Increase awareness of the opportunities available
27. **Objective 1; A culture of dialogue**

To consult with children and young people at a local level about their needs and wishes for play provision particularly whenever changes are proposed in their area.

This will avoid prescriptive solutions and promote empowerment and ownership, reflecting theme v. of the Play Policy; Dialogue with children and young people. Actions include;

- Work with those involved in developing Local Action Plans to encourage play provision to be addressed in the consultation process
- Aim to achieve representation of all 3 Rother Local Partnerships for Children and the Bexhill Consortium on the Rother Play Partnership.

28. Objective 2; Promoting the value of play and the right of every child to play

(a) To raise awareness and understanding of the importance of play, facilitate play opportunities and increase participation.

The importance of play is now recognised and accepted on a national level as demonstrated through Every Child Matters and we believe that this needs to be reflected in local agendas. This objective particularly reflects themes iii. and vi. of the Play Policy; Important and equal to formal education and Promotion of physical and mental health benefits and well-being. Actions include;

- Use play events as a means of reaching parents and encouraging them to engage in their children's play.
- Encourage the Primary Care Trust to provide play opportunities in health care settings providing support where possible.

(b) To create environments in the heart of the community where children and young people are accepted, welcomed and encouraged to use public open spaces to play or spend their time.

We recognise that children and young people are part of, and contribute to, the cultural life of their communities and as such have a right to be seen, heard and provided for in shared public space to the same degree as adults. Fears and misconceptions about young people need to be addressed to create healthy, vibrant communities that can coexist and interact in open spaces without conflict. This reflects the Play Policy theme v.; Children and young people: Part of the community. Actions include;

- Work with the media to produce good news stories to counter the negative perception of children and young people and promote their right to be seen and heard in shared public places.
- Encourage and support the East Sussex Children's Centres in holding family events in open spaces.

29. Objective 3; Maximising opportunities and innovation through partnership working and external funding

We realise that by improving links and working with other service providers, we have a better chance of enhancing and increasing the play opportunities available to children and young people and of securing funding to boost the budgets set within our organisations. This objective and those sub-objectives within it reflect the ethos of the working culture that underpin this Strategy and that will be needed to implement the Action Plan.

(a) To deliver maximum benefit through effective communication and a joined up approach between stakeholders.

The formation of the Rother Play Partnership in order to develop this Play Strategy demonstrates the progress that can be made when those services with agendas that have common aims and which impact upon each other work together to tackle provision in a holistic way. Actions include;

- Explore opportunities for children and young people's play facilities in schools to be used for the wider community out of hours, at weekends and throughout school holidays.
- Facilitate the design of innovative play environments and added learning for children and young people, for example through an arts-based approach to the design of play environments.

(b) To investigate opportunities to exploit the natural resources of the countryside.

There are potential benefits to be gained by thinking more creatively about how the rural nature of the district could be utilised to increase the play opportunities available to a huge number of children, particularly in our rural communities. Actions include;

- Determine the feasibility of private land owners of agricultural land making uncultivated areas accessible for children and young people to use for play.
- Encourage landowners such as the Forestry Commission to extend successful initiatives to other settings.

(c) To work in partnership to support other organisations such as Town and Parish Councils and Housing Associations in delivering play opportunities.

This sub-objective seeks to ensure success in the initiation and delivery of play provision through the exchange of information and expertise wherever possible. Actions include;

- Investigate sustainable solutions to the problems of facility maintenance in the Parishes.
- Promote the Playful Ideas stream of Big Lottery funding to organisations and offer support with making applications where possible.
- Design a simple toolkit to assist in the creation/refurbishment of play areas.

(d) To encourage and support training.

The voluntary sector could potentially make a significant positive contribution to achieving the Strategy's aim if adequate support was provided. This sub-objective supports outcome 18.4 of the Local Area Agreement; To increase the number of people from all sections of the community involved in volunteering and is a means to achieving Play Policy themes i. and ii. Actions include;

- Increase the capacity of community groups to deliver play services and become sustainable

(e) To research and apply for grants to enable specific projects to be implemented.

Whilst added value can be obtained through partnership working, financial resources are necessary to drive up standards. Grants from external funding bodies are an important means of enabling new opportunities to be provided, and to a lesser degree, sustaining existing services. Actions include;

- Submit an application to the Big Lottery Fund for eligible play projects.
- Encourage and facilitate the setting up of a 'Friends' group for a play area(s) which would benefit from improvement, but for which no funding has currently been identified.

30. Objective 4; Quality provision for all

To provide free, inspiring, accessible and inclusive play opportunities for all ages of children up to 16 years in a secure environment where children are challenged and the element of risk is valued.

This objective is in-line with Play Policy themes i.; Quality play opportunities, ii.; Inclusive provision and iv.; Adhering to 'Best Play' criteria. We want to make the play value of play provision as high

as possible within the constraints of the available resources through a more informed and creative approach to provision. We seek to ensure that our play provision reflects the needs of the communities it serves in terms of inclusion.

We know that children and young people want to spend time outside and that generally speaking, they want to be able to walk to places where they can play or hang out. We aspire to providing outdoor equipped places for children within a 10 minute walking distance from their homes, outdoor teenage facilities within a 15 minute walking distance from their homes and to provide an element of supervision in open spaces to facilitate play and increase the real or perceived feeling of security amongst users. Actions include;

- Utilise and disseminate the best practice guidelines set out in 'Best Play' to inform the provision of play opportunities.
- Ascertain local needs in terms of inclusive provision when embarking on play projects and seek advice from specialist bodies such as the Hastings and Rother Disability Association, ESCC and Sensory Trust, as appropriate.
- Minimise the adverse impacts of risk assessment by managing risk in line with the Play Safety Forum's recommendations.
- Act upon the findings of the PPG17 Open Space Study to increase the quality of existing equipped play areas where the need is greatest and provide additional play areas where resources allow.
- Ensure that satisfactory play provision is made within reasonable access of new residential developments.
- Work in partnership with sympathetic organisations to advocate and campaign on behalf of children and young people for improved access to play opportunities.
- Address the safety and security of open space users, particularly children and young people, for example, by reviewing the role of the Park Ranger posts within the RDC grounds maintenance contract.
- Strive to address the issue of access to organised play opportunities for older children/teens through the development of a multi-centred programme of free, organised play provision.

31. Objective 5; Increase awareness of the opportunities available

To ensure that parents and young people are aware of the free and open access play opportunities that are available in their area.

The Strategy identifies that there are a considerable amount of existing opportunities in terms of organised play for the 0-5 age range, and whilst there are much fewer opportunities for children and young people over the age of 5, particularly in terms of freely directed, free of charge organised provision, there are still some opportunities available. As service providers we are aware that one of the barriers to participation is the lack of knowledge of what opportunities are available. We recognise that improving and increasing provision must go hand in hand with initiatives to raise the awareness of this amongst the potential beneficiaries, particularly those who may be harder to reach than existing service users. Actions include;

- Make better use of all forms of media as a means of informing people, for example, by contributing to websites including the Active Rother website.
- Use existing networks such as Rother Race Forum and the Hastings and Rother Disability Forum as a means of raising awareness amongst 'hard to reach' groups of the play opportunities available.