



# Mark Hardy

Chairman - Association of Play Industries

## PLAY AREAS – A practical Guide

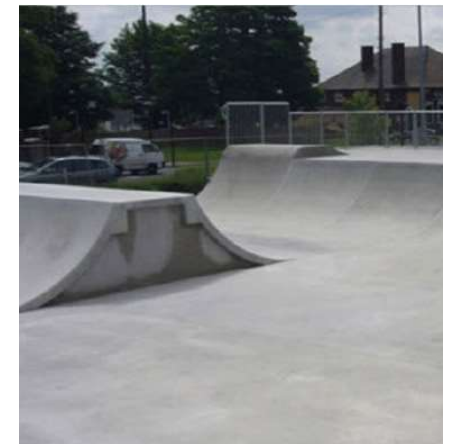
**API**

Supporting the  
UK Play Industry

**NCALC**

COUNCILLOR  
DEVELOPMENT  
FRAMEWORK

- Lead trade association for the UK play industry
- Operates under the umbrella of the Federation of Sports and Play Associations
- Promotes best practice and high-quality play provision
- Represents approximately 85% of the UK market
- Works alongside other professional bodies and lobbying groups:
  - *APPG on a Fit and Healthy Childhood*
  - *Children & Young People's Mental Health Coalition*
  - *Children First Alliance*
  - *Children's Play Policy Forum*
  - *Play Safety Forum*
  - *Register of Play Inspectors International (RPII)*
  - *Fields in Trust*



## Playgrounds through the decades



It is widely believed that distinct public children's play areas, as we now know them, were developed to give children their own space to play safely in the aftermath of the Second World War, away from the dangers created by the bomb sites that remained.

In fact, play areas originated in Germany in the 19th century and the first UK play area appeared in Manchester in 1859.

## Playgrounds through the decades



In the post-war period of the 50s through to the late 80s, the boundaries of risk were stretched and playgrounds proliferated.

## The impact of Health & Safety

In 1990 BBC's "That's Life" spearheaded a campaign to make playgrounds safer. The need to remove concrete and other "hard" surfacing and replace with "safer" surfacing became a standard Health & Safety requirement.



The increasing Health & Safety lobby had a significant impact throughout the 1990s with much of the more exciting playground items disappearing. International safety standards were widely adopted and as a result play areas became more formulaic.

## Early 2000s – KFC ???



A strong lobby of Playwork orientated academics coined the derogatory phrase “KFC” to describe areas that were formulaic and just simple “Kit + Fence + Carpet”. Images like these were used to decry public playgrounds in general and to propose a more natural design led approach.

Most often, these sad, uninspiring areas were provided as a result of housing developers “ticking the box” in their statutory requirements.

**How can areas such as these inspire kids to get active?**

## 2000s – Playbuilder / Pathfinder Funding Streams

**API** Supporting the  
UK Play Industry



## The rise of “Natural Play” areas

The published design advice extolled the virtues of “Natural Play” areas and used images such as these to show the types of areas that should be created.



OR...worse  
become  
**DANGEROUS**

The PRACTICAL implications were often overlooked or ignored and as a result many of the areas created during this funding period have fallen into disrepair or been removed ...



# Conceptual Design – Initial Thinking



## Design for Play: A guide to creating successful play spaces

Aileen Shackell, Nicola Butler, Phil Doyle and David Ball

## The 10 principles for designing successful play spaces

### Successful play spaces...

- are 'bespoke'
- are well located
- make use of natural elements
- provide a wide range of play experiences
- are accessible to both disabled and non-disabled children
- meet community needs
- allow children of different ages to play together
- build in opportunities to experience risk and challenge
- are sustainable and appropriately maintained
- allow for change and evolution.

Are designed specifically for the location (but may make use of COTS (Commercial off the shelf) items)

## The Golden Rule

*A successful play space is a place in its own right, specially designed for its location, in such a way as to provide as much play value as possible.*

### The 10 principles of

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## 1 Planning

Many local authorities allow play areas to be constructed without planning permission, **except for structures over a certain height (4m?)**. Others require planning applications for all new play spaces, especially those involving a change of land use. It is advisable to discuss the scheme with a local authority development control officer at an early stage to establish whether a planning application is necessary.

## 2 Health and Safety

[Children's play and leisure: promoting a balanced approach \(hse.gov.uk\)](https://www.hse.gov.uk/childrensplay/)

An appropriate Risk assessment **must be** carried out by a competent individual and compliance with the relevant standards (see below) is often used as evidence to support the activity. If the standards are NOT used then the thoroughness of the RA is critical to protect the owner / operator.

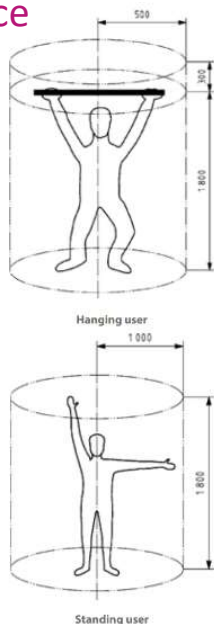
## 3 Standards

EN 1176 and EN1177 (and other recognised standards) are not retrospective or a legal requirement in the UK, but represent good practice particularly in the event of an accident claim.

# Formal Considerations – EN1176/77



## Space



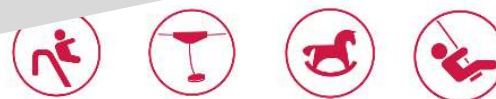
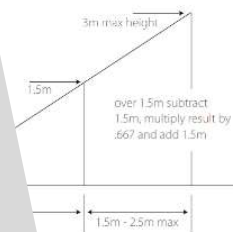
## Obstacles



## Surfacing / Installation

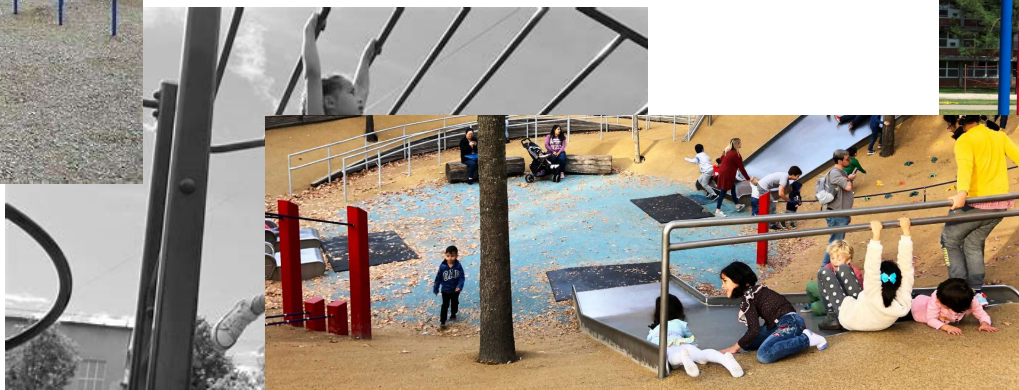
**STOP PRESS.**

**BS ISO 4980:2023 – ‘Benefit-risk assessment for sports and recreational facilities, activities and equipment’,** has now been published. This publication reinforces the approach that has long been promoted in the UK, for sports and recreational facilities, in particular with Childrens Play Spaces. For these facilities, where participation risks offer user benefits, these risks need to be considered hand in hand with the benefits. (This is different to an industrial factory setting, where risks generally offer no benefits, giving the primary objective to eliminate them).



Reference material may be found by “googling” EN1176 and EN1177

# What does “good” look like ???



## NATIONAL STUDY OF PLAYGROUNDS

THE INFLUENCE OF DESIGN ON USE AND PHYSICAL ACTIVITY  
IN 60 PLAYGROUNDS IN 10 US CITIES

What does “good” look like ???

**HALF**  
OF PLAYGROUND  
**USERS ARE**  
NOT CHILDREN

**THE MOST**  
**POPULAR**  
PLAY EQUIPMENT  
FOR ALL AGES IS  
**SWINGS**

EACH PICNIC TABLE  
**ADDS 9%**  
**MORE USERS**

PLAYGROUNDS  
WITH HIGH **SPEED**  
FEATURES HAVE  
**18% MORE**  
USERS

EACH CLIMBER  
**ADDS**  
**4% MORE**  
USERS  
**6% LONGER**  
STAY TIME

PLAYGROUNDS  
WITH **TOWER**  
FEATURES HAVE  
**17% MORE**  
USERS

PLAYGROUNDS  
WITH SPINNERS HAVE  
**31% LONGER**  
STAY TIME

PEOPLE LIVING  
WITHIN **1/2 MILE**  
OF A PLAYGROUND  
ARE **5X MORE LIKELY**  
**TO VISIT WEEKLY**  
THAN THOSE LIVING FURTHER AWAY

## **inclusivity**

/ɪnˌkluːˈsɪvəti/

*noun*

1. the practice or policy of providing equal access to opportunities and resources for people who might otherwise be excluded or marginalized, such as those having physical or mental disabilities or belonging to other minority groups.

# Inclusivity – Girls !

## Primary girls

- A significant minority of girls and young women feel unsafe when they go outside. Over a quarter (26%) of girls aged 7 to 10 feel unsafe when they go outside.
- A third (34%) of girls aged 7 to 21 say they feel worried to do things outside on their own.
- Almost one in ten girls aged 7 to 10 say they are often stared at and receive unwanted attention when they're outside.
- This trend continues into adolescence and beyond.



Girlguiding Attitudes Survey, 2020

## Teenage girls

- Globally, during adolescence, 'girls' worlds shrink, while boys' expand'. One study finds that the map of 14-yo girls' day-to-day movements is 2/5 the size of that of their 11-yo selves, and only 1/3 the size of 14-yo male peers' movements.
- The shrinking of teenage girls' access to public space correlates to reduction in girls' ability to exercise. This sets a trend for life.
- Park features that attract boys and men – such as 'organised sport settings' like courts – are repeatedly shown to deter girls. Teenage girls are often seen to gravitate towards playgrounds.

Source: Dr Rachel Hewitt, University of Newcastle





# Inclusivity

Joint Children's Play Policy Forum and  
UK Play Safety Forum Position Statement

## Including

### Disabled Children in Play Provision

#### Introduction

All children need and have a right to play. Play is vital for children's health, wellbeing and happiness – particularly for children facing barriers like discrimination and exclusion.



The beauty of play is that every child can play in their own way, at their own pace, following their needs, wishes, instincts and imagination. Through play children explore and learn about the world around them.

Play can involve a wide range of different experiences including social, physical, sensory and creative. Play can be loud and boisterous, or quiet and introspective. It can take place in natural or manufactured environments. Children can play on their own, or in groups, independently or with a parent or carer.

Good play provision will make everyone – children and adults of all ages – feel welcome and comfortable in the space, with a wide range of opportunities and experiences for all abilities.

Playgrounds and play spaces have huge potential to provide important opportunities for disabled children to be included in their communities, breaking down barriers and building relationships. This brings benefits for non-disabled children too, as they learn through their interactions and engagement with disabled friends and peers.

We believe that everyone can help disabled children and their families feel welcome and included in their local play spaces. Those involved in designing and managing play spaces have a key role to play in leading change, in partnership with disabled children, their families and the local community.

**A positive, solution-focused attitude is essential to include disabled children – listening and engaging with families, prioritising the needs and wishes of disabled children, making adaptations to increase accessibility and remove barriers, changing public attitudes, creating a welcoming space and maximising the range of play opportunities offered by the equipment and the environment as a whole.**

The terms accessible and inclusive should not be used interchangeably. Using these terms interchangeably can lead to confusion and disappointment

**An Accessible Play Space is a space which is barrier-free, allows users access to move around the space and offers participation opportunities for a range of differing abilities.**

Not every child of every ability will be able to actively use everything within an accessible play space.

**An Inclusive Play Space provides a barrier-free environment, with supporting infrastructure, which meets the wide and varying play needs of every child.**

Disabled children and non-disabled children will enjoy high levels of participation opportunities, equally rich in play value.



[including-disabled-children-in-play-provision-2022.pdf \(wordpress.com\)](#)

# Materials - Equipment

## Steel ?

## Plastic ?

## Timber ?

### Considerations

- Budget
- Location
- Durability
- Life Span
- Maintenance
- Vandalism
- Sustainability

## Combo ?



# Materials - Surfacing



## Considerations (Similar to Equipment)

- Budget
- Location
- Play Value
- Durability
- Life Span
- Maintenance
- Vandalism
- Sustainability

## Bark?



## Wetpour?



# Materials - Fencing ???



## Considerations

- Budget
- Community requirements
- Location
- Maintenance
- Inclusion / Accessibility
- Vandalism

# Supplier Selection Considerations



Ensure your supplier has the capability AND capacity to deliver to your satisfaction



Understand the supply chain implications – Self supply and delivery ? Design and Subcon ?, Distributor, Installer etc etc



Ensure your supplier can show you a similar scheme or piece of equipment in use and demonstrate the longevity of the equipment concerned.



Understand fully the warranties offered and what obligations you have related to these



Satisfy yourself of their trading stability



Satisfy yourself of their reputation....ask other users



Check their credentials



.....Use an API member company for peace of mind ☺

## Supplier Selection - A Shameless Plug 😊

All member Companies adhere to a STRICT code of conduct and meet STRINGENT membership criteria that INCLUDES these two specifically ;

In order to be admitted to the Association of Play Industries, all members must meet the required standards of experience, proficiency and commercial competence appropriate to their section of membership. Member Companies may be required to demonstrate that they continue to comply with these membership criteria on an annual basis. (This includes adherence to the relevant safety standards)

All members within API are required to comply with the Association's criteria for financial stability. The Association will carry out financial checks on its members randomly, or where they have reason to believe that financial stability of a member is in question.

The API maintains a Mediation Panel to assist in providing impartial assistance in resolving disputes between member companies and their customers. This service is restricted to technical rather than contractual aspects.

Parties requesting and agreeing to mediation are expected to be bound by the findings.

# Build / Construction Considerations

**The majority of issues occur during and as a consequence of the installation / build activity. It's therefore important to ensure sufficient importance is assigned to this activity....**

- Ensure your supplier has the capability AND capacity to deliver to your satisfaction
- Understand Who will perform the work (Supplier, Distributor, Installer, Subcontractor) and the implications
- Ensure adequate supervision is being provided
- Keep local community informed of access or otherwise, delays, anticipated completion etc
- Site security / Fencing / H&S etc etc
- Are the contractors appropriately vetted and are they “getting on” with the public
- Maintain an active oversight...let them know you are watching
- Are they fulfilling the brief....does the area look as you anticipated? If not ensure there is communication between yourself, supplier / designer and installation team



# Maintenance / Inspection / Repair Considerations

## Post-installation inspections

New playgrounds and equipment should be carefully checked for compliance with claims, specifications and installation procedures before being accepted. Owner / Operators should not accept handover of a play area until such an inspection has been carried out and compliance agreed to YOUR satisfaction

## Manufacturer's instructions

No playground equipment should be purchased without details of inspection and maintenance requirements. A note should be kept of the age of the equipment and a special inspection carried out before the expiry of the warranty.





# Maintenance / Inspection / Repair Considerations

## **Routine inspection**

This looks at the equipment's basic condition, especially faults due to recent vandalism. Such inspections may be carried out by the manager or his/her staff and should be recorded on a simple sheet or book. The equipment supplier should provide a checklist –Frequency will vary with the site and local usage although weekly should be seen as a minimum.

## **Operational inspection**

This looks in more detail at the equipment, essentially at vandalism and certain types of minor wear. Such inspections may be carried out by the manager or his/her staff and should be recorded. With a good, routine hands-on check linked to the annual inspection, the quarterly check may not be necessary.

## **Annual inspection**

This should be carried out by a specialist not connected with the playground operator or manager. Essentially it looks at vandalism, minor and major wear, long-term structural problems, changes in Standard compliance and design practice, risk assessment etc. Such inspections are offered by insurance companies, playground equipment manufacturers, commercial companies and specialist safety organisations.



## In case you missed it:

The tragic accident at Mile End Children's Park has been featured in the BBC 'Defenders' TV programme. The relevant segments start at approx.. 7:45 and then again at 19:52. The programme highlights the importance of regular inspections and choosing the correct materials in the design and manufacture of play spaces.

[VIEW PROGRAMME](#)

## Don't get Conned



Don't pay for things you don't need.

Watch perspective

Be aware of fancy lures

## Useful Reference Links (Not included elsewhere)

[Home - Association of Play Industries \(api-play.org\)](https://api-play.org)

[Useful Publications - Association of Play Industries \(api-play.org\)](https://api-play.org)

[Register of Play Inspectors International - Making Play Safe](https://www.registerofplayinspectors.com)

[Play safety – RoSPA](https://www.rospa.co.uk)

[Home - The Play Inspection Company \(playinspections.co.uk\)](https://www.playinspections.co.uk)

[BS EN 1176 - Playground Equipment and Surfacing | BSI \(bsigroup.com\)](https://www.bsigroup.com)

Q&A