

# Design for Play:

A guide to creating successful  
play spaces

**Free Play Network**

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**Free Play Network**  
[www.freeplaynetwork.org.uk](http://www.freeplaynetwork.org.uk)

# Design for Play:

## A guide to creating successful play spaces

### Introduction



Photo: Nicola Butler

### Design for Play

This presentation is based on the forthcoming Play England publication: *Design for Play: A guide to creating successful play spaces*, by Aileen Shackell, Nicola Butler, Phil Doyle, and David Ball.

# Design for Play:

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### Inspiring play spaces



Photo: Aileen Shackell

### The golden rule:

A successful play space is a place in its own right, specially designed for its location.

Designers should take a holistic perspective on designing for play.

Play opportunities should be embedded in the site as a whole.

# Design for Play: Ten design principles

## Successful play spaces

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



# Design for Play:

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Photo: Nicola Butler

#### Principle 1

### **Imagine a play space designed to enhance its setting**

In a rural area, Balmaha Play Landscape, near Stirling, uses natural contours of the hillside.

It uses colours found in the natural surroundings. Equipment is carefully chosen to fit the setting.

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**Photo:** Stirling Council Play Services

#### Principle 1

### **Imagine a play space designed to enhance its setting**

Balmaha Play Landscape uses rounded granite boulders and long grasses and ferns, which are found naturally in the area, to provide play opportunities for all ages and to create a pleasant environment for all users.



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Photo: Nicola Butler

#### Principle 1

### Imagine a play space designed to enhance its setting

In an urban area, Milton Keynes Bus Station Skate Park blends seamlessly with its setting.

The site uses good quality materials and colours that complement the existing architecture of the city.

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Photo: Phil Doyle

#### Principle 2

#### **Imagine a play space in the best possible place**

Children need places to play close to their homes.

One way of filling gaps in play provision in built-up areas is to create more doorstep spaces, such as Invermead Close, in Hammersmith and Fulham.



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Photo: Nicola Butler

#### Principle 2

#### **Imagine a play space in the best possible place**

Facilities for older children and young people don't have to be located far away from the rest of the world.

Masthouse Terrace skate park and ballcourt in Tower Hamlets is located near to housing.

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Photo: Nicola Butler

#### Principle 2

#### **Imagine a play space in the best possible place**

The central location is key at Milton Keynes Bus Station Skate Park.

There are good transport links and plenty of people around.



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**Photo:** Stirling Council Play Services

### Principle 3

#### **Imagine a play space close to nature**

In Chapelfield Play Area, near Stirling, a previously level site on the edge of the village was transformed into a playable and playful arrangement of mounds, ditches and hollows, inspired by the archaeological history of the site.



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**Photo:** Stirling Council Play Services

### Principle 3

#### **Imagine a play space close to nature**

At Chapelfield Play Area, the new changes in ground levels provide opportunities for exploring, climbing, hiding and chasing.

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Photo: Nicola Butler

### Principle 3

#### **Imagine a play space close to nature**

Planting creates opportunities for sensory stimulation and play. It can transform sites, particularly in urban areas, such as this housing estate at Wyvis Street, Tower Hamlets.

It is relatively low cost and children and the community can be involved in planting.



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Photo: Nicola Butler

### Principle 3

#### **Imagine a play space close to nature**

Planting can be used to create a play space that changes with the seasons and that is appealing to people of all ages.

This slide shows autumn colours at the Diana, Princess of Wales' Memorial Playground in Kensington.



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Photo: Stuart Wallace

#### Principle 4

**Imagine a play space where children can play in different ways**

Trefusis Playing Field in Kerrier, provides a range of play opportunities for different age ranges.

This curved concrete structure can be used for skateboarding, seating, or for children to run along.

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Photo: Stuart Wallace

#### Principle 4

**Imagine a play space where children can play in different ways**

Boundaries at Trefusis Playing Field have been designed that are playable, attractive and suit the place.

This cost per metre of this traditional Cornish wall is similar to that for standard fencing.



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Photo: Nicola Butler

#### Principle 4

**Imagine a play space where children can play in different ways**

Waverley Park in Stirling combines play equipment with sand and grit surfaces.

Different types of surfacing can enhance equipment and provide additional play opportunities.



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**Photo:** Stirling Council Play Services

#### Principle 4

**Imagine a play space where children can play in different ways**

Different elements and surfaces can be used in combinations.

Causewayhead Park in Stirling uses water, sand and planting in combination.

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Photo: from *Inclusion by Design*, KIDS

#### Principle 5

**Imagine a play space where disabled and non-disabled children play together**

Children with different abilities should be able to play together in well designed play spaces.

Try to choose non-prescriptive equipment that can be used in different ways.



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Photo: Aileen Shackell

#### Principle 5

**Imagine a play space where disabled and non-disabled children play together**

There are many different types of disability or special need.

At the Diana, Princess of Wales' Memorial Playground children with differing needs can enjoy a range of play experiences.



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Photo: Nicola Butler

### Principle 6

#### **Imagine a play space loved by the community**

At the Cowley Estate in Brixton, the designers worked closely with the community to develop an imaginative design where different elements can be used in different ways.

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Photo: Nicola Butler

#### Principle 6

#### **Imagine a play space loved by the community**

Space for ball games is included, but the site also offers opportunities cycling, climbing and seating.

The final design is attractive for all.



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Photo: Nicola Butler

#### Principle 6

#### **Imagine a play space loved by the community**

Spacemakers in Bristol was designed with teenagers as a teenage space.

It also works as a space for all the community.

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Photo: Nicola Butler

#### Principle 7

**Imagine a play space where children of all ages play together**

At Wyvis Street Play Space the tyre swing is used by children of all ages, from older teenagers to very young children, with assistance from their parents.



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Photo: Nicola Butler

#### Principle 7

**Imagine a play space where children of all ages play together**

The sandpit is used by younger children and by older children - sometimes just to hang out and chat.

The play area is pleasant to walk through and pleasant for people of all ages to sit.

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Photo: Nicola Butler

#### Principle 8

**Imagine a play space where children can stretch and challenge themselves in every way**

Children and young people need opportunities to experience challenge and excitement in their play.

The Climbing Forest at Cutsyke provides challenging play opportunities for all ages.



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Photo: Aileen Shackell

#### Principle 8

**Imagine a play space where children can stretch and challenge themselves in every way**

Risk assessment was carried out throughout the design process at the Climbing Forest in Coombe Abbey Country Park.

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**Photo:** Stirling Council Play Services

#### Principle 9

#### **Imagine a play space maintained for play value**

Greater commitment to maintenance is needed to increase the range of play opportunities offered.

Stirling Council's integrated approach enables them to design and maintain features such as this paddling pool at Causewayhead Park.



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Photo: Aileen Shackell

#### Principle 9

#### **Imagine a play space maintained for play value**

A bit of wear and tear is perfectly acceptable.

For example the erosion of grass under these seats at Horsham Park due to heavy use is completely acceptable, particularly in the context of a well looked after park.

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**Photo:** Nicola Butler

#### Principle 10

**Imagine a play space that evolves as the children grow**

At Dilkes Park, Thurrock, play equipment is unfenced. The flexible layout means that it is relatively straightforward to add to and extend the play space.

Equipment is integrated with its woodland setting.



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#### Principle 10

**Imagine a play space that evolves as the children grow**

At Dilkes Park equipment has been added over time.

There is no sense of where the play space begins and ends, making it more inviting to explore. Children can move easily from one part of the park to another.

Photo: Andy Furze

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### Conclusion



**Photo:** Stirling Council Play Services

### Summary

Good play spaces are designed as places in their own right.

Well designed play spaces are good for all of the community.

For more information on *Design for Play* visit the **Free Play Network** or the **Play England** websites.