

ROSPA
The Royal Society for the
Prevention of Accidents

RoSPA Playsafety Limited
The Old Barn, Wicklesham Lodge,
Faringdon, Oxfordshire SN7 7PN
Telephone 01367 244600 Fax 01367 244112
Email info@rospaplaysafety.co.uk
www.rospa.com/playsafety

ROSPA
The Royal Society for the
Prevention of Accidents

David Yearley, Head of RoSPA Playsafety asks, "Are we getting sustainable playgrounds for children with the Playbuilder funding programme?" In the following article he thinks the answer to this question depends upon your viewpoint. It is both Yes and No. It will be interesting to know how many readers agree or disagree with him.

On the one hand the Playbuilder scheme is leading to imaginative provision for children that follows the 'Design for Play' document. This guidance is intended to help to transform the design of play spaces now and into the future. It has a clear intention to ensure that landscaping, planting, community art installations and so on are provided as they can provide as much play value as traditional play equipment. How much more these sites will appeal to children if all of these elements are combined.

On the other hand manufacturers have worked hard over many years to ensure that the equipment that they provide is sustainable and will last for many years. There are many swing units and other play equipment in our parks that were installed back in the 1960s; and much of it has many years left in it yet. But what about this new wave of landscape features, natural objects such as logs and boulders, planting and the like? Will planting that is installed now still be offering the same play value after forty years have elapsed? Will logs or fallen trees stand up to the test of time?

Of course, only time will tell and this is why the answer to the original question is yes and no. Our play areas will be sustainable if we have the commitment to make them so. This can be through clever design to ensure that features last as long as possible. But it also requires a will and a determination to keep the maintenance up to the required levels. Logs will need to be replaced in time; planting may need to be renewed, loose materials will need to be topped up periodically.

If we have the money, resources and determination then we will see these play areas as being sustainable and successful.

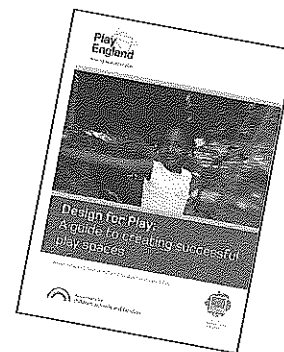
At one end of the equipped play provision spectrum may be a traditional playground that is populated only with manufactured equipment and synthetic safer surfacing. This has a high capital outlay, but offers potentially and relatively low revenue budget requirements for many years.

At the other end may be an almost totally 'natural' space that includes landscaping, planting, community art, perhaps augmented with minimal equipment provision and the use of natural grass surfaces.

This has a relatively modest capital outlay (although the costs of landscaping should not be underestimated), but may require a greater revenue budget to ensure that it remains well-maintained.

It is possible that providers see the traditional equipment as more sustainable. The potentially larger capital outlay is offset by the smaller revenue requirements of maintenance. They may not have the revenue budget to sustain some of the sites that they have provided; or worse, they may not even provide them in the first place.

This may lead to the removal of features that provide enormous play value to our children. If an holistic, whole life cycle approach is taken when considering how much it costs to provide play space we may find an equality between both ends of the spectrum.



Some of the constraints on budget may be due to adults' perceptions of what a play space should look like. For example, money may be spent on cutting the grass seventeen times per year. This keeps the play space looking tidy and conforms to adult perceptions of what grass should look like. However, it may be that we could save a lot of this money by not cutting the grass and allowing it to grow into a play feature in itself.

The long grass, perhaps planted with wild flowers, will offer opportunity for children to explore. There may be other examples of where this monetary saving may actually transform into a positive benefit for the intended users.

The ideas expressed within 'Design for Play' may, to quote the guide itself, "seem unrealistic and unattainable" for some people. However, if all responsible departments can work together to design, build and maintain exciting play provision then such playgrounds will be sustainable.

For more details of all RoSPA's services contact us at the addresses shown at the top of this page.

*David Yearley,
Head of RoSPA Playsafety*