



DRAFT DOCUMENT

Appendix A

Brent Play Strategy

(2005 - 2008)

"We are committed to ensuring that all Brent's children have access to a variety of good quality play environments which offer challenge and stimulus".



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

LONDON BOROUGH OF BRENT

PLAY STRATEGY 2005-2008

Summary

Play is an essential part of every child's life. Through play children learn about their world, and develop into healthy and independent adults. Play space builds the fabric of communities and increases young peoples confidence, skills and self-esteem.

Children who grow up in communities scarred by crime and violence and lacking in safe activities are severely disadvantaged. A consistent theme of consultations with children and young people is the importance of having communities where there is 'somewhere safe to go and something to do'. *Every Child Matters* (2003).¹

The time that children spend at school is only a fraction of their lives. In any year children are only at school for 6 months. The Children's Play Council states: 'between birth and sixteen, children attend school for nine minutes of every waking hour'.² Play dominates children's lives in the other fifty-one minutes of that waking hour.

A Key priority in Brent's Corporate Strategy is supporting children and young people. It says: 'We will invest in our children and young people to secure their inclusion and achievement, ensuring they have access to the best possible life chances. Every child deserves the best possible start in life, with access to good health care, a secure home environment and quality child care and play services.'³

This strategy aims to:

- bring together a range of activities, disciplines and interests to promote closer working around the key theme of children and young people's enjoyment of play and recreation
- support children and their families and engage and empower the local community
- establish effective networks between the public, private and voluntary sectors to support the development of play
- support the learning and personal development of children leading to the enrichment of their communities
- support parents when taking up training and employment
- identify gaps in local provision
- provide the basis for a consistent approach that contributes to a strategic overview within Brent's current priorities

This strategy commits Brent to considering the impact of decisions and activities on children's play opportunities. The development of the strategy has been informed by the values in the Charter for Children's Play⁴. The 'implementation plan' (section 9 of this document) is about transforming the values and principles in this strategy into action. Over the next three years, Brent Council and other local agencies involved will work to address these key issues and achieve the strategic objectives. The play strategy sets out a shared vision for play in Brent. It is a practical working tool which aims to promote values, raise awareness and support the development of good quality play opportunities.

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1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 THE SCOPE OF THE STRATEGY

Play is important in its own right and is also a cross-cutting issue. Play spaces and play provision are not the responsibility of a single service area. Strategic planning based on a corporate play policy is important if all children are to have access to a range of high quality play opportunities. It will support the development of play opportunities by securing an effective, efficient and coordinated play service and prevent the duplication of services.

This strategy will need to dovetail with Brent's developing Open Space Strategy, its Children and Young Peoples Plan as well as reflecting its Corporate strategies and link with Brent's Community Strategy and Cultural Strategy.

This strategy has been produced in line with the government review of children's play: *Getting serious about play – a review of children's play* produced by Department of Culture, Media and Sports (2004),⁵ which included the outline of a proposed funding stream from the New Opportunities Fund (now called The Big Lottery) to enhance and develop play provision. A key recommendation of the review was the designation of a local 'Play Champion' from within the elected members to advocate the strategy and provide political leadership.

Producing a play strategy is a key recommendation from The Children's Play Council document: *The Future for Children's Play*. It states: 'every local authority (should) work... with local partners to develop and promote a corporate play strategy as described in Play as Culture'.⁶

1.2 THE CONTEXT OF THE STRATEGY

The National Context

The national policy context for the play strategy occurs in a variety of legislative enactments. The Children Act (2004) specifies recreation as one key outcome for the newly designed Children's Services. The play strategy will play an important role in contributing to the improvement of children's well-being (as defined by reference to the five key outcomes in the Every Child Matters framework – being healthy; staying safe; enjoying and achieving; making a positive contribution; and achieving economic well-being.) Within the framework, 'a range of recreational provision for children and young people' is a key criterion of the 'Enjoy and Achieve outcome'.⁷

National planning policy is set out in Planning Policy Guidance Notes (PPGs) and circulars. PPG17 (Office of the Deputy Prime Minister 2002), declares that 'well designed and implemented planning policies for open space, sport and recreation are...fundamental to delivering broader Government objectives'.⁸ Brent has set out its strategy for preserving and enhancing open spaces and playing fields and children's play areas within its Unitary Development Plan 2004, which in turn informs and is informed by its 'Playing Fields Strategy' 'Parks Strategy' and in its developing 'Open Space Strategy'.

The extended schools initiative will look at opening school grounds for activities including children's play.

OFSTED regulates playschemes including open access provision for under 8's under the National Standards for Out of School Care.⁹

The Regional Context

A local strategy for play in Brent is a crucial part of a regional policy framework to make London better for all children and young people. This is based on the belief that all young Londoners should be able to play within their local neighbourhoods and have safe and attractive play spaces within easy walking distance of their homes. Regional policy is set out in the Mayors' Children and Young People Strategy (2004)¹⁰ as well as other documents such as the Walking Plan for London (2004) which advocates the increased introduction of 'Home Zones'.¹¹

The Local Context

The play strategy is linked to many local strategies (section 6 below) and it can crucially contribute to meeting the aims and objectives of Brent's Corporate Strategy:

- Supporting Children and Young People

Engaging and involving young people is a core aspect of the strategy.

Supported play facilities fill a crucial need for all children (see the consultation results below), but in particular they offer activities to many children at risk from social exclusion including those already excluded or absent from schools and can be a stepping stone to that child returning to school.

- Promoting quality of life and the green agenda

The Strategy supports the aim of ensuring green spaces and quality play areas and equipment to be available for all children. Play has a crucial role in encouraging children to be more active.

- Regeneration and priority neighbourhoods

The Strategy aims to develop play facilities in the most deprived communities and reducing the play gap between disadvantaged and other areas.

- Tackling crime and community safety

Good local play and sports facilities steer 'hard-to-reach' young people away from crime and social exclusion.

Best Value

The Audit Commission identifies the development, adoption and implementation of an appropriate play policy and strategy as a Local Best Value Performance Indicator (LIB115 – in the library of local performance indicators in the *Quality of Life* category.) The development of this strategy should prove useful to Brent's Best Value reviews.

1.3 THE PURPOSE OF THE PLAY STRATEGY

This document aims to be a practical working tool, to be referred to whenever decisions about play need to be made. It is applicable to all forms of children and young people's services. It is intended that the strategy will have an impact on individual council departments, key partner agencies (such as Brent Primary Care Trust) and voluntary sector organisations.

The purpose of the strategy is to:

- address the play needs of children and young people in Brent
- act as a clear outline of how Brent intends play provision to develop from 2005-2008
- be flexible and able to respond to future change and development.
- improve the basis of quality in play provision
- provide a framework for allocation of resources
- continue to emphasise the close co-operation between all agencies in the provision and development of a play service

1.4 WHO WILL BENEFIT FROM THE STRATEGY?

This strategy will focus on children of all ages. It must take account of children's different abilities, their age, gender, and cultural backgrounds, social, family, economic and environmental situation.

The strategy will therefore benefit:

- children, their parents and communities as services and facilities are improved and developed, addressing their needs
- members and managers of the authority by creating the basis for working in a more efficient, effective and co-ordinated play service.
- those working in the service, bringing clarity to their daily working environment, allowing good practice to be shared and providing consistency throughout the whole playwork field

1.5 LISTENING TO CHILDREN'S VOICES

This strategy was developed in response to a request by The Children's Forum for a play strategy for Brent to be prepared. The strategy has been informed and shaped by the children's consultation reported in detail in Section 5 of this document. It is implicit in the strategy that the development and future direction of planning for children's play should be informed by the involvement and engagement of children and young people. And that not only should children be consulted and listened to but that where appropriate projects should be children-initiated and directed, as well as child-centred!

The Government's research, by the Children and Young Peoples Unit (DfES, Children's Consultation Report, 2002), found that children under 12 rated more activities and parks as the most important things that Government could do for them.

2 BACKGROUND

2.1 WHAT IS PLAY?

Children and young people of all ages play. Children and young people are playing when they are doing what they want to do. Play is a vital component of a child's life; it is vital to their quality of life in childhood and vital to their development into healthy and independent adults. Play may take place within the home; the street or local community; the school premises including the playground;¹² and in a supervised setting. Children have distinct needs and play is a key aspect within children's free time. Although play is not the only way children spend their leisure time, it remains the dominant activity. The different aspects of play and other activities in a child's free time allow children to broaden their experiences and come to understand the world around them.

The following definition of play is given in *Best Play*: 'Play is freely chosen, personally directed, intrinsically motivated behaviour that actively engages the child'. A version of the formula is included as an underpinning assumption in the National Occupational Standards for Playwork. The assumption goes on to highlight the importance of play to children's development: 'by playing children learn and develop as individuals and as members of the community'.¹³

'Work consists in whatever a body is obliged to do, play consists of whatever a body is not obliged to do' Mark Twain

2.2 THE VARIETY OF PLAY ENVIRONMENTS

For children to get the maximum developmental and experimental benefit from their play, they need to play in a variety of ways and be involved in different types of play. Children play in a variety of public spaces as well as in dedicated provision. Children themselves tend to be very clear about their need and desire for a range of play opportunities and activities to be available to them (see the results of Brent's Play Consultation below). Therefore, there must be an understanding of what different types of space offer children at different times.

2.3 THE IMPORTANCE OF PLAY

Article 31 of The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child¹⁴ (ratified by the UK Government in December 1991) recognises the importance of play for the child: 'States parties recognise the right of the child to rest and leisure, engage in play and recreational activities appropriate to the age of the child and to participate freely in cultural life and the arts'. Allowing children adequate play times and appropriate play opportunities gives children and young people a number of benefits:

2.31 REDUCING CRIME, ANTI-SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR AND SOCIAL EXCLUSION

Quality play provision has the potential to significantly contribute to tackling social exclusion and promoting social and community development. This is particularly relevant to Brent's environment with the problem behaviours of youth crime, school-failure, teen pregnancy and drug misuse.

There is evidence to suggest that access to play opportunities is a significant compensatory factor in alleviating the effects of disadvantage on young people's well-being. *State of London's Children Report (2001)*¹⁵ In addition, evidence, supported by the Police Crime Prevention Unit,¹⁶ indicates that good local play and sports facilities steer 'hard-to-reach' young people away from crime and social exclusion.

Tackling crime and community safety is a key priority in Brent's corporate strategy, and the successful implementation of this play strategy will have a role in supporting this goal.

Anti-social behaviour is a problem that disrupts the lives of many people bringing misery and despair. 'Young people are often represented as the perpetrators of crime, but in parks and play spaces they suffer from anti-social behaviour in the form of bullying from other age groups, from adults who let their dogs roam free in play areas, and from threats of attack'.¹⁷

2.32 BENEFITING THE COMMUNITY

Play also benefits the wider community allowing parents to train and work giving economic benefits to Brent. Play services can be seen as a focal point for communities offering opportunities for social interaction and developing a greater sense of community spirit. Promoting social inclusion can encourage inward investment and economic growth.

2.33 IMPROVING HEALTH

Research indicates that the current generation of children are less physically active than their predecessors. Television, computer games and the motor car combined with a fat rich diet has caused a reduction in time spent outdoors involved in active play, and a marked increase in child obesity. Research goes on to predict an increase in coronary heart disease in adulthood as a consequence if this is not addressed. Active children's play can help address these issues.¹⁸

Play is essential for children's healthy physical and emotional development. The Chief Medical Officer in *At Least Five a Week (2004)*, advises that 'children and young people should achieve a total of at least 60 minutes of at least moderate-intensity physical activity each day'.¹⁹ There is growing research evidence that increased opportunity for free play is the most effective way to ensure this for children, and that a range of increasing health problems are associated with the decline in such opportunities.²⁰

The development of the Governments 10-year plan for improving children's health - The National Service Framework²¹ is part of their explicit commitment to improve the lives and health of children and young people and it acknowledges the importance of varied and proactive initiatives to make maximum use of early years settings, schools,...extended schools and the Healthy School Programme for health promotion and early intervention to ensure improved long-term health outcomes for children and young people. Standard four of the framework identifies the need for age-appropriate services which address children's social and emotional needs.

2.34 SUPPORTING EDUCATIONAL ACHIEVEMENT

Outside School Hours

Play provision can support the objective of raising educational standards of achievement, by extending opportunities for learning outside the normal school day and year. Play experiences outside of school time can help to motivate and

enthuse pupils; building their self-esteem and helping them reach high standards of achievement and thus raise educational standards. (This relates to Brent's *corporate strategy's* vision for supporting children and young people and the Education Arts & Libraries [EAL] first *strategic objective*).

'We are completely at one in the importance we attach to play as a developmental aspect of children's lives in terms of learning and enjoyment...' Baroness Andrews - Children Bill Amendment Debate 2004

In Educational Settings

The importance of play to learning is highlighted in the principles of Early Education as outlined in the Curriculum Guidance for the Foundation Stage, QCA, 2000.²² The guidance states: 'Well-planned play, both indoors and outdoors, is a key way in which young children learn with enjoyment and challenge. In playing, they behave in different ways: sometimes their play will be boisterous, sometimes they will describe and discuss what they are doing, and sometimes they will be quiet and reflective as they play. Through play, in a secure environment with effective adult support, children can:

- explore, develop and represent learning experiences that help them make sense of the world;
- practise and build up ideas, concepts and skills;
- take risks and make mistakes;
- think creatively and imaginatively;
- communicate with others as they investigate or solve problems;
- express fears or relive anxious experiences in controlled and safe situations.'

2.4 PLAY FOR ALL CHILDREN

In supporting The New Charter for Children's Play²³ we believe that every child has the right to adequate and appropriate play opportunities. In the values and principles section of this document, we acknowledge that the play needs of different groups of children and young people differ.

'The right to play is a child's first claim on the community. Play is nature's training for life. No community can infringe that right without doing enduring harm to the minds and bodies of its citizens.' David Lloyd George

2.41 AGE AND GENDER

Providing a range of provision for all ages is crucial. As children get older, they begin to move further away from home as they play. Their interests change and their physical and mental capacity is extended. It is often these older children whose play needs are not being adequately met.

Girls and boys tend to choose different types of activity. The Children's Play Council review²⁴ indicates that girls were more likely to enjoy activities such as dance and drama, whereas boys preferred more sport-based activities.

Therefore, in order for play opportunities to be utilised to their fullest potential and hence provide maximum benefit for users, they must complement the characteristics of the group they are targeting. Children's needs at different ages must be taken into consideration when planning provision.

2.42 BLACK AND MINORITY ETHNIC COMMUNITIES

Children from black and ethnic minority communities play needs may be different. These must be identified and taken into account when developing play opportunities. Kapasi in *Asian Children Play* (2001)²⁵ found that Asian children sometimes preferred to play out on the streets than go to supervised provision. This is because they did not feel comfortable in staffed provision and did not feel a sense of belonging. Kapasi in *Playing in Parallel* (2002)²⁶ found that a play environment with a positive environment and good quality staff with representation from Black and Minority Ethnic groups attracted most black and ethnic minority children.

2.43 HOMELESS FAMILIES

These children face barriers to adequate opportunities such as lack of space, transience and dislocation.

2.44 REFUGEES

Research shows that refugee children do not pursue leisure activities and are less likely to spend time outside with friends, suggesting that their free play opportunities may be curtailed.

2.45 CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS

Including children with special needs is about focusing on diversity and responding to the individual rights of every child. It is about ensuring that each child can join in play activities with other children and that appropriate staff and resources are there to support them. Inclusive play can give ordinary childhood experiences to the child, and reduce social isolation for children and parents.²⁷ Brent's Play Consultation results (Section 5) show that parents and children with disabilities want to be able to access specialist as well as inclusive provision.

2.5 BARRIERS TO PLAY

Play opportunities are under threat right across Britain and play space is being lost. In Brent the lack of any supervised open-access playgrounds and adventure playgrounds is keenly felt. (see the results of Brent's Play Consultation - Section 5). Children and young people commonly identify many barriers to play, recreation and their enjoyment of public space. [*cf.*, *The State of London's Children report* (2001)]. These include: fears for their safety, especially from bullying; traffic; dirty and/or run-down play areas and parks; lack of choice; and lack of access.

For parents, fear of 'stranger danger' is often cited as a major reason why children are not allowed to play out, but other studies have shown that traffic is the more significant factor.

Research in Zurich compared children aged five who could play out by their own homes, with those who could not. It found that where they could play out, the children and their parents had more friends, and the parents had three times as many people they could call on to look after their children. The children who could not play out had less physical and social development and were less autonomous. (M Huttenmoster and D Degen-Zimmermann, Zurich 1994)²⁸

The growth of out of school activities and focus on providing care and increasing attainment through study support means opportunities for free play are being squeezed out.²⁹

Increasing physical and psychological restrictions on children's ability to travel caused by increase in traffic and the widespread fear of 'stranger danger' places greater importance on local and easily accessible play facilities. The lack of playing facilities within walking distance must therefore be considered a priority when deciding upon future improvements.

2.6 QUESTIONS OF RISK

Children need and want to take risks. Concepts of "acceptable risk" and "unacceptable risk" are critical to making informed judgements about what constitutes a best possible play environment. This strategy supports the statement *Managing the Risk in Play Provision* from the Play Safety Forum³⁰ and therefore play providers must take steps to ensure that the risks are managed and controlled so far as is reasonably practicable while allowing the potential benefits to be delivered.

All children both need and want to take risks in order to explore limits, venture into new experiences and develop their capacities. It is the job of all those responsible for children at play to assess and manage the level of risk, so that children are given the chance to stretch themselves, test and develop their abilities without being exposed to unacceptable risks. If we do not provide controlled opportunities for children to encounter and manage risk then they may be denied the chance to learn these skills. They may also be more likely to choose to play in uncontrolled environments where the risks are greater. Therefore it is acceptable that in play provision children may be exposed to the risk of minor and easily-healed injuries such as bruises, grazes or sprains.

Providers should strike a balance between the risks and the benefits. This should be done on the basis of risk assessments.

3 ABOUT BRENT

3.1 GENERAL SUMMARY

- The London Borough of Brent is an outer London borough and is bounded by seven other London boroughs. Although classed as an 'outer' London borough it has many 'inner' London characteristics. It covers approximately 4,325 hectares.
- Brent has a population of 272,448, living in approximately one hundred thousand households.
- Brent is the second most ethnically diverse population in the country: over half of the population are from black and minority ethnic communities.

3.2 DEPRIVATION

- Overall, Brent is the 13th most deprived London borough, with five wards falling within the ten per cent most deprived in Britain.
- The unemployment levels in these wards are nearly six times the national average. These wards are generally in the south of the borough.
- Significant regeneration activity is currently taking place in the borough to address these issues.

3.3 CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE IN BRENT

- There are 34,539 children aged below 10 years and 34,800 who are between 10 and 19 years old
- Infant mortality in the five most deprived wards in Brent is significantly above national average levels
- Educational achievement in Brent primary schools is in line with the national average, but there are significant differences in the achievement of girls and boys
- Improvements in secondary education have seen a steady increase in the proportion of students achieving five GCSE's at A-C. However there are wide variations in the achievement of children in different communities and wards in the borough
- 73% of pupils in Brent schools are from ethnic minority communities, with over 130 different languages being spoken. Gujarati, Hindi, Punjabi, Somali and Urdu being the main minority languages. A growing proportion of children are from refugee families
- 1,337 pupils in Brent have statements of special educational need
- There are 354 children currently looked after by the council
- The burden of unemployment falls disproportionately on the young with 9.4% of under 20 year olds being unemployed. This rises to 30% in the five most deprived wards of the borough.

4 PLAY IN BRENT - CURRENT PROVISION

4.1 BACKGROUND TO PLAY IN BRENT

Within the borough, there are a wide variety of agencies that are involved in children's play. These include Brent Council, the voluntary sector and the private sector.

4.12 BRENT COUNCIL

Within the local authority, many departments contribute to the range of play opportunities available and others work in areas that impact on play opportunities as play is a cross-cutting issue. The units and areas highlighted below are key but not exhaustive. Children's services in Brent have been reorganised into a Children and Families Services department.

- CHILDREN AND FAMILIES -

Children's Play Service

Brent Children's Play Service provides support for the voluntary sector including: free training, free quality assurance mentoring, business support, the maintenance of a play register for the provision of suitable staff, the production of a newsletter and regular providers forums. The Council also provides free recruitment advertising.

The Play Service is also involved with direct provision through its partnership with Brent Play Association, offering out of school clubs and holiday playschemes for children aged 4-11 (and up to 19 for children with special needs). The Service is the direct deliverer of the Surestart out of school programme.

The Service also has the lead role in developing the play strategy.

Early Years Service and Surestart

Brent's Early Years Service aims to 'give every child the best possible start in life and all vulnerable children the care and protection they need (0-16 years)'. It provides support for the development of Children's Centres, to childminders, playgroups and nurseries. It is responsible for developing and implementing the Early Years Education and Childcare Strategy.

The Service has responsibility for delivering Surestart targets through administration of the General Surestart Grant (which replaces the earlier Early Years and childcare Grant). Thus it has a managerial role in the delivery of the Surestart out of School programme.

Youth Service

Brent Youth Service is a part of the Council's Education, Arts & Libraries Directorate. The age range for Brent Youth Service is 11 to 25 years with the target ages being 13 to 19 years. Local authority funding is directed mainly at this age group. Brent Youth service works closely with the voluntary sector and supports voluntary organisations which provide informal education opportunities for young people. The Youth Service is committed to the inclusion of young people as partners in determining and developing services both at a Borough level and within youth centres and projects.

Social Services Team

The Children and Young People with Disabilities Team assess the needs of children with disabilities and refer children to holiday play provision run by the Council's Play Service in partnership with Brent Mencap, and to Care Choices who provide summer holiday playschemes based out of one of their respite units. Brent Social Services refer "children in need" to Brent's Play Service for out of school provision.

Children's Fund

The Children's Fund support a number projects that include play and is primarily aimed at children aged 5-13 years and their families. Its primary aims are to provide preventative services that run in addition to mainstream statutory services; to engage and overcome the effects of poverty and social exclusion. When things go wrong (later in a young persons life), people often say "if only someone had helped those children when they were younger". Such early intervention is exactly what the Children's Fund aims to do.

- ENVIRONMENT AND CULTURE -

The Parks Service

The Parks Service manages unsupervised play provision in parks and open spaces.

Good playgrounds need to meet very high safety standards, be visually stimulating and offer a range of activities which allow children to use their muscles actively through climbing, swinging, balancing and jumping while having lots of fun outside in the fresh air at the same time. Such facilities are expensive and require a high level of maintenance.

Planning Services

The Planning Service has responsibility for protecting *existing* facilities from the harmful development of new facilities, whilst protecting other interests and ensuring that all new developments include appropriate provision addressing the relevant children's play needs. Brent's Unitary Development Plan 2004 provides the statutory planning framework to protect and enhance the borough's environment by ensuring that all new development will be sustainable and will not harm existing amenities. This strategy generally aims to: preserve and enhance Brent's open spaces.

Transportation

The unit promotes awareness of safety issues, concentrating on Child Road Safety Education and Accident Prevention. It operates a network of over 30 school crossing patrols outside Brent's schools, runs a Safer Routes to School project (SRtS) in local schools which raises travel awareness in children and encourages them to travel to school safely and sustainably, through, (for example) safe, healthy walking. It undertakes small-scale capital works (where practical) on streets within a school's locality, usually directly outside a school.

Sports Service

Brent's strategy for Sports and Physical Activity provides a detailed audit, a set of objectives, and an action plan for involving young people (inside and outside schools), to take part in sports and physical activities.

A key theme of the strategy is to increase physical activity and sports opportunities for young people and ensure they are accessible and affordable. According to A Strategy for Sport and Physical Activity in Brent 2004-2009, evidence shows that if

foundation skills and an interest in sport are developed at an early age it is more likely that that person will develop a lifelong involvement in sport and remain physically active and lead a healthier lifestyle.

- CORPORATE SERVICES -

Policy and Regeneration

There are several large scale regeneration projects in Brent that involve many partners. The local authority has a crucial role in ensuring that major projects such as the redevelopment of South Kilburn fulfil the hope in the South Kilburn Masterplan for creating home zones and a public realm generally conducive to children's play and health.

The Unit can channel funding into new play facilities via such funds as Neighbourhood Renewal. For example, the young people in the neighbourhood area of St Raphaels, Brentfield and Mitchellbrook requested a skateboard facility in response to their local consultations.

- HOUSING AND CUSTOMER SERVICES -

Estate Services Monitoring Officers from Brent Housing Partnership have responsibility for the health and safety and maintenance of play areas and public areas in the authority's housing estates. They maintain links with other big social landlords in the borough such as the Metropolitan Housing Trust and Paddington Churches Housing Association.

4.13 BRENT PRIMARY CARE TRUST

Health Development Managers have a strategic role in identifying need in local communities and promoting health in settings which include children and young people's settings amongst others. Improving healthy eating, increasing physical activity and improving emotional health may well involve developing play opportunities. E.g. a Child Health Clinic running at a venue with play facilities. Health visitors work predominantly with families who have children under the age of five years, undertaking a full assessment of the family's health needs, allowing them to plan and provide individualised care. This can vary from giving advice on safety in the home to intensive work with children who have special needs. While assessing the development of children they may well identify children requiring additional stimulation through play. They educate parents and carers on safe and age-appropriate play. They may liaise with providers of play and childcare services, and refer to services (e.g. social services day care provision) and signpost families to local play provision. In addition, health visitors carry out health promotion activities, and are part of the Surestart teams.

The trust has an important role in assessing health impact. For example, in December 2003, Brent Primary Care Trust commissioned a health impact assessment (HIA)³¹ of the Wembley redevelopment proposals. The objective was to make an independent assessment of the actual and potential health impacts. One of the key issues that emerged as a high priority for the local population was concerns around overcrowding – the need to ensure that Wembley area did not become an urban environment in a suburban setting, with few green spaces and play areas for children.

4.14 VOLUNTARY SECTOR

Brent has a long history of voluntary involvement in playwork. Many playgroups, after-school clubs and drop-in clubs are organised by voluntary and community groups. The council provides funding via the Voluntary Sector Support Team of funds from John Lyon's Charity and the Edward Harvest Fund to provide for voluntary groups to run holiday Playschemes both inside the borough and (traditionally), at holiday camps in Brent's own Gordon Brown Outdoor and Environmental Education Centre. Though after school provision (at a cost) for working parents has risen, holiday playschemes for all children have been decreasing year on year.

4.15 PRIVATE SECTOR

There are several privately run play areas. However, these are often operated as part of a commercial health club or an extension to a pub or bowling alley. Prices tend to be high and many children are therefore excluded from using them. Fantasy Island is a large purpose-built indoor play facility with ball ponds, soft play areas and offers drop-in sessions as well as a playgroup.

4.2 CURRENT RANGE OF PLAY OPPORTUNITIES

4.21 UNSUPERVISED PLAY

The council is almost exclusively the only provider of unsupervised play facilities.

4.211 PLAY AREAS AND PLAYGROUNDS

Most of the children's play areas in Brent are provided either within public open spaces or on housing estates. Many of the more recent open space acquisitions in the south of the Borough are being used primarily for children's play. Despite the laying out of new play areas and the improvement of many more, a large number of the play areas in Brent are poor, lack modern equipment, safety surfaces and not all are fenced to make them dog free (see Section 5.4 below). Some residential areas do not have reasonable access to any play areas at all (Brent's Unitary Development Plan - 2004)³²

Sites managed by Brent Council

There are 39 play areas in the borough which are managed by the Parks Service. They are located within parks, sports grounds or as standalone dedicated playgrounds.

All Brent's children's play facilities meet with Health and Safety regulations. Recorded weekly inspections are carried out and an external playground specialist also undertakes an annual audit, producing a schedule of maintenance and repairs. All play areas currently meet Audit Commission standards and a schedule of work is in hand to raise standards to meet recommended European Community Safety Standards. All new equipment installed meets the latest European Standard. The Parks Service try to add custom parts to ensure easier access by wheelchair users.

Brent's Park Service has undertaken a recent audit of existing play facilities. The Green Flag Award Standard was used as a demanding and independent benchmark against which to judge play areas. Scores are out of a potential 10 with the pass mark for Green Flag being 6.5. Brent's play areas score an average of 8

across the Borough. Play areas appear to be an aspect of Brent's parks which is above average quality, when compared with other elements within parks.³³

Site managed by the Corporation of London

The Corporation of London's Queens Park is located in the south of Brent. It is a Green Flag Award Park and is a significant park in this location. The Park has a children's Play Area and a paddling pool (as well as 6 tennis courts and a pitch and putt course). The park has a particularly high children's play satisfaction rating. According to the Corporation of London's Queens Park Management Plan: 'All visitor survey results suggest that the playground is one of the most popular facilities in Queen's Park'.³⁴

4.212 SPORTS GROUNDS

Parks have traditionally provided grass playing fields, sometimes with associated changing facilities, to cater for competitive sports such as football, rugby and cricket, and hard courts designed specifically for tennis.

The provision of affordable open air sports facilities has traditionally been an element of the service provided by Brent Parks Service.

According to Brent's 'Playing Pitch Strategy' in 2003 there were 81 pitches available for community use. It was noted that only 5 of educational sites made their pitches available for community use. Only 17 schools out of 73 had playing pitches at all.³⁵

4.213 MULTI USE GAMES AREA

A double multi use Games Area (MUGA) has been created on the site of the old basketball courts in Roundwood Park. The Parks Service is looking to improve existing MUGA's at Bramshill Rd and Hazel Rd and secure funding for new MUGA's in the Borough.

4.214 SKATEBOARD FACILITIES

A skateboard facility including a Youth shelter at St Raphaels open space has been installed in 2005 and improvements to the hard court area at the Shrine in Brentfield Way is underway. The projects are being managed and the facilities maintained by the Councils Park's Service.

4.22 SUPERVISED PLAY

Play in Childcare

Supporting children's play is a vital component of good quality childcare from birth onwards. Practical guidance for Early Years Practitioners - such as playgroup, nursery staff and childminders, is available through major resources such as Surestart's: Birth to Three Matters pack,³⁶ which highlights the importance of play and how children learn through play.

The Government's new ten-year strategy for childcare³⁷ proposes to create a single quality framework for services for children from birth to five. 'The new framework will take an integrated approach to care and education...It will be underpinned by a play-based approach to promoting children's development and learning, building on children's experiences to help them extend their skills and develop their understanding and confidence. The new framework will strengthen

the links between *Birth to Three Matters* and the Foundation Stage, and incorporate elements of the national standards for daycare.'

This rest of this section gives an outline of supervised play provision within the borough of Brent. (Brent's Children's Information Service provides a comprehensive information service on childcare in Brent.)

4.221 OUT OF SCHOOL CLUBS

There are currently about 40 out of school clubs in the borough. Many sites deliver breakfast club, after school and holiday schemes at different times of the year. Most schemes are based in schools, other schemes are based in Church or Community halls and two in purpose built Playcentres. Some non-school based schemes provide a pick-up service from nearby schools. Therefore nearly all children in the borough have access to an out of school club.

The local authority does not run any provision directly; the biggest single provider is Brent Play Association - a charitable company that runs 9 sites based in schools, and an after school club and playscheme at Stonebridge Centre. Other clubs are run by private providers, schools or charities or religious groups. Some private providers have portfolios of two or more clubs.

After school and out of school provision has been rapidly expanded by the New Opportunities Fund 'new places' programme and the infrastructure is now supported by the Brent's General Surestart programme.

The Governments ten-year National Childcare Strategy (see note 37 above) promotes an 8am to 6pm 'wraparound childcare offer', for all parents. That is, the strategy contains the expectation that in time **all** schools will offer an extended schools programme providing childcare either side of the school day.

4.222 PYRAMID CLUBS

These are small after school clubs run by Ontrack, currently in two schools, working with targeted Year 3 pupils aiming at raising their self-esteem and confidence.

4.223 NURSERIES, PLAYGROUPS, CHILDMINDERS, MOTHERS AND TODDLERS CLUBS, CRECHES

Within Brent as of December 2004 there were 72 OFSTED-registered nurseries and playgroups run by private, voluntary or neighbourhood groups providing full day care. A further 18 provided part time care and there were three fulltime nurseries run by Brent Social Services.

There were 15 registered crèches running in colleges, fitness centres and shops. There are about 30 unregistered parent and toddler groups. There are about 310 registered childminders in Brent and one new Children's Centre in Stonebridge.

4.224 POSITIVE ACTIVITIES FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

P.A.Y.P (Positive Activities for Young People) is an organisation that was set up to provide activities for young people at risk during the holiday periods (Christmas, Easter, Summer and half term breaks).

4.225 YOUTH SERVICE

Brent Youth Service manages three centres, Granville Youth Arts & Training Centre, Chalkhill Youth and Community Centre and the Roundwood Club, each with a different programme aimed at young people. They also run part-time youth projects at 14 other sites, including community centres and schools.

The Youth Service runs a Summer University which also provides some limited specialist activities for children with special needs

4.226 MOBILE PLAY OPPORTUNITIES AND OTHER COUNCIL-MANAGED PLAY PROJECTS

John Lyon Narrowboat

The Children's Play Service manages the 'John Lyon' - a Narrowboat owned by a local charity and based at Alperton on the Grand Union canal. It offers an unusual play and educational opportunity for Brent's children.

The 'Magical Starship' multi-Sensory Room

Based in the Children Play Service at Middlesex House. This is a fully equipped state of the art multi-sensory room, especially suitable for providing stimulating play opportunities for children with sensory impairments.

The Sure Start Play and Learn bus

The bus provides a free service for children under the age of 4 years and their parents/carers residing in the Sure Start Central Brent catchment area. It provides opportunities for children interact with other children, engage in educational play activities and learn computer skills. The Play and Learn bus is an orange double-decker with a book and toy library, sandpit, painting area and a baby unit.

Equipped 2 Go Bus

The project is delivered on a mobile resource centre that is attractive and equipped to provide a young person friendly environment. One of its primary aims is to reach out to young people between the ages 11 – 19+.

Welsh Harp Environmental Education Centre

The centre runs a programme of holiday playscheme activities.

Middlesex House Play Centre

The Centre runs special projects for refugee children, children from homeless families and for children with special needs.

4.227 SPORTS SERVICES

There are 4 local authority sport centres and 6 private sport and leisure facilities in Brent. Activities such as swimming and gym sessions are offered to children in school holidays

Brent Council's Sports Development Team are currently involved in a number of projects and activities across the borough to encourage youth participation in sports ranging from under 11's to 24 years of age. Some projects and activities are run in partnership with other voluntary organisations. Projects include: the St Raphael's & Brentfield Neighbourhood Renewal Project; training courses in partnership with Middlesex Football Association - Football Level 1 Coaching course; and Basketball Level 1 Coaching course in partnership with England Basketball.

4.228 CULTURAL PROVISION

Brent's libraries offer a programme of children's activities which can have play elements in school holiday periods.

4.229 CORPORATE SERVICES

Summer activities at the town Hall aimed primarily at accompanied primary school-aged children.

4.2210 PROVISION FOR CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL NEEDS

- There are two specialist after school clubs in the borough. One based at Manor Special School and one at Hay Lane Special School. There are several holiday schemes for children with special needs. In 2003 the Children's Play Service in partnership with Mencap ran holiday schemes at Woodheyes Community Hall, Manor Special School and Hay Lane Special School. Play schemes for children with special needs are supported with funding from the Childrens Fund and other strands of social services funding.
- Care choices (which provides respite services) also runs a summer Playscheme for children with special needs.
- Other mainstream provision includes children with special needs but usually cannot offer one-to-one support.
- Brent Mencap has a dedicated Play and Leisure Team and manages a range of play activities during school holidays.
- The Carlton Handicapped Club based at Gladstone Community Centre provides educational and fun activities as well as trips and outings for young people with severe learning difficulties.
- The Gateway Club based at Woodheyes Community Hall, is a voluntary organisation providing for a wide age range of young people (and adults). They also run summer projects for their members. Also based at the hall are the Hands in Unity project which provides some weekend play activities.

4.2211 PROVISION FOR CHILDREN 'IN NEED'

Brent Social services refer children 'in need' onto playschemes and afterschool clubs supported by the Children's Play Service.

In addition the Service runs a holiday scheme for children at risk of offending. This includes a summer camp away. Referrals are taken from head teachers and social workers. This service provides a significant early intervention for a number of children with very challenging behaviour.

4.2212 TRAVELLER ACHIEVEMENT PROJECT

The Ethnic Minority and Travellers Achievement Project provides support services for children in this group. It runs a play project at Brent's travellers site in Neasden.

4.2213 OTHER TARGETED PROVISION

There are a number of targeted out of school or holiday schemes run by groups as diverse as the Asian Women's Resource Centre and the Raphaels, Brentfield and Mitchellbrook Neighbourhood Renewal Team.

4.3 STAFF AND TRAINING

4.31 PLAYWORKERS

Playwork is a highly skilled and demanding profession, requiring an unusual combination of skills as well as an ability to understand children and their needs. Brent Children's Play Service run an National Vocational Qualifications Assessment Centre that offers City & Guilds accredited Qualifications in Playwork, at NVQ levels 2 and 3. All playwork education and training is flexible and reflective of existing good practice in playwork.

Training sessions are formulated around the NVQ units and topics including: the protection of children, diversity issues, health & safety and play activities among others. Certificated courses in First Aid, food & hygiene are also offered. The NVQ 3 qualification also has sessions on record keeping, management and marketing. Over the last 20 years as supervised open-access and adventure play areas in Brent have closed or been transformed into childcare most playwork-trained staff have gone into working at after school and other settings that have childcare as a crucial component.

The need for supervisory and managerial staff to have an NVQ level 3 qualification (required by the National Standards as regulated by OFSTED) for out of school settings offering places to under 8's, means that provision of sufficient well trained staff to maintain services is crucial. Brent Surestart is providing funding to support a staff development programme to build capacity in this area.

In Brent there is a high turnover of staff and retention is seen as a bigger issue than recruitment. Many staff say they feel undervalued. Wages are generally low; Playworkers are paid at rates from around £6.00 per hour for unqualified staff, up to £9.00 per hour for qualified Supervisors. Positions are all part-time and there is little upward career ladder. Free childcare is often the only staff benefit.

Occupational pensions, for example, are unknown within the Playworker workforce in Brent.

Most new staff being recruited in Brent are unqualified but overall the percentage of qualified staff in the workforce has risen markedly in the last five years.

In Brent recent research has shown that black and ethnic minority staff are proportionately represented in the workforce, including club management level.

The majority of the workforce is female and the lack of male role models in settings is seen as a key recruitment issue.

4.32 PARKS STAFF

In Brent Council managed park sites

The 39 play areas in parks are unsupervised but the recent introduction of the Parks Warden Service with 17 full time equivalent staff covering 8 key sites and 3 mobile patrols covering the rest of the Borough have enabled the service to target Graffiti and vandalism and problems associated with dog control issues.

There are no playwork staff associated with the fixed playground and play areas in Brent.

In Queens Park managed by the Corporation of London

According to the Corporation of London's 2003 Queens Park Management Plan:

'There are specific personnel allocated to the playground and they are trained in first aid, playground inspection and maintenance. The attendants are also trained in the maintenance of the paddling pool. When the paddling pool is open between May and September, a qualified lifeguard is employed as a full-time attendant.'

5 THE PLAY CONSULTATION

5.1 THE CONSULTATION PROGRAMME - THEMES AND METHODS

There was a wide consultation on play with Brent's children and parents in 2004.

Part One - Transition from Primary to Secondary

There was a children's consultation event held on June 22nd 2004 at the college of North West London, Wembley. The event included children from years 6 and 7 from schools throughout Brent.

It was professionally facilitated, and an adult group observed the proceedings and took notes of the event. The focus of this event was 'Transition from Primary to Secondary school'.

Part Two - Summer Playscheme Consultation

During the 2004 School summer holidays each holiday playscheme for children in the borough was given the task of designing their 'perfect play environment'. staff teams at each Playscheme were asked to involve the children in a 'consultation project' to ascertain their views.

Five playschemes were involved, over a 3 week period, with about 100 children per scheme participating making a total of about 500 children. Playworkers facilitated the discussions, feedback and presentations of the children's work. The results of these discussions and activities, formed the basis of drawings, diagrams, and written descriptions of what the children considered good quality play activities and opportunities in a wide range of settings and provisions.

Part Three - Play Options

A one day event held by the Children's Forum at Coram's Fields with representation from the Primary Schools in Brent, again focused upon the children's preferred play options.

Part Four - Parent and children surveys

Surveys to parents and carers, identified through current databases were circulated during the Summer of 2004.

Surveys were also sent to parents and carers of children with special needs in December 2004 and January 2005

5.2 RESULTS FROM THE CONSULTATIONS

Children in all the settings were very specific about what Play they enjoyed and wanted to see more of within the Borough. They unanimously preferred facilities where a combination of action and relaxation were available.

The results of the children's consultation have been collated into the following categories: A. Outdoor Play, B. Playing Sports, C. Indoor Play, D. Access. (Graphs representing children's most desired equipment and activities in the four areas are given in Appendix E)

A. Outdoor Play

- Children particularly enjoyed the challenge of the aerial runway, and the more adventurous climbing frames and tunnel slides.

- Swings were the third most popular item of outdoor play equipment, with many children making the point that swings need to be in a range of different sizes to meet the needs of different age groups.
- Animal and/or Pet areas were frequently mentioned. Many children prioritized being able to look at and touch animals.
- The difference between the needs of under 8s and over 8s was often highlighted by the children who wanted separate areas for different age groups, offering greater risk and excitement for the 8 and overs, and more security, safety and 'age appropriate activities' for the younger age group. Examples of this include: Over 8's / Play area for 'big kids' with big bouncy castles and fun fair / rides.
- Go Karts, Quad bikes, Scooters, Paint-balling, Water Fights, Flower gardens, Ponds, and Rock Climbing were all suggested but overall Sand and Water were the two most regularly requested play activity materials.

We liked the slides and the aerial runways, the football pitches and the animals. (8-11 year old)

B. Playing Sports

- Children's preferred sporting activity was Football, with Basketball, Cricket, and Netball all suggested as popular team games which children would enjoy if facilities were provided.
- Swimming pools were also very popular with a particular reference to wave machines, warmer water, and safe changing rooms.
- Many children saw sports as an important play opportunity especially at weekends and during school holidays.
- They also requested more 'open space' to run and play in the form of big gardens or fields. Many children described play in terms of being able to 'run around'.
- Interestingly the parents of children with special needs emphasized the positive aspects of involving all children in outdoor sports, games and Borough events.
- The forthcoming 2012 Olympics was mentioned as a focus for developing better outdoor play, team games and sports opportunities for children outside of school.
- Many children and parents wanted to see more supervised activities for children within local parks and open spaces.
- Suggestions of 'Teams' of qualified people who could facilitate play in parks, organise games etc.
- Suggestions of 'designated play areas' where traffic was prohibited.
- Suggestions of initiatives to provide Borough-wide events such as community fairs, tournaments.

We would like to be able to organise things ourselves, to have ideas and start activities so that when we are grown up we can do things for ourselves (9-11 year old)

C. Indoor Play

- Ball ponds featured prominently in many suggestions from children and parents.
- Refreshments were important to both children and parents. Children asked for dispensing and / or vending machines

- Fast food and purpose built seating areas. Parents suggested the availability of hot, nutritional snacks and subsidised meals.
- Playstation, X-box, computer games, TV, and DVD were the most favoured indoor activities by boys.
- Many children suggested various types of cinema, or Plasma Screen, with DVD and games libraries, computer work stations and internet access.
- Music was also extremely popular with many children, and was particularly mentioned by parents of children with special needs as being a vital component for indoor play. Music was also highlighted in the playscheme surveys where children included 'Dance Mats' as essential items of indoor play equipment, and Karaoke machines were also a firm favourite. Musical instruments were also popular, and these were identified as essential equipment for children with special needs.
- The most popular items of indoor play equipment were: football tables and pool / snooker tables.
- Cooking was the preferred indoor activity and children who focused upon the design of indoor facilities frequently mentioned 'fully equipped kitchen'
- Access to plenty of drinking water was the second most popular demand in terms of the facility.
- Sensory / Soft Play room/ Quiet room was mentioned by many children. This was often incorporated into the facility design and given names such as 'Chill out and Comfort Zones' and in one case The Groovy Chic room' where entrance was restricted to girls only. Mood-lighting, music, cushions were all components of this aspect of the facility.
- Many children suggested designs for an 'Under 8's room' with Sleeping or bean bags and toys for this younger age group.
- Drawing, painting, colouring, craft, and sewing were essential to the design of the children's indoor facility. The children suggested Art and Craft areas which could be 'closed off' from other aspects of the facility, with a wide range of creative play opportunities on offer to all age groups.
- Table tops games such as Scalectrix, Connect 4, Dominoes, Jenga and a range of other board games were identified, and dedicated rooms or areas for these kinds of activity.
- Play Kitchen, Home Corner and Dressing up are very popular.
- Toys particularly Lego and construction toys were frequently mentioned.
- Books / library or reading area were often mentioned in conjunction with quiet room/ area.
- Children particularly asked for carpeted floors where they could sit and play. Carpet and rugs were also mentioned frequently in the responses from parents of children with special needs.
- Pets featured in indoor as well as outdoor play environments.
- Purpose built rooms / dens / play areas: The children submitted designs which show a wide range of preferred decorations from hotel style rooms with en suite bathrooms to fun fair type settings, with roller coasters.
- Rooms set aside for relaxing, and sleepover areas were also suggested.
- Children also designed 'state of the art' toilets with automatic flush, showers and jacuzzi pools.
- They wanted shops (selling exclusively items for children).
- Jacket and bag areas were mentioned.
- Push button dispensers.
- A 'behaviour corner'.
- Recycling machine (old trainers to new).

- Nike sponsored track suits.
- Everyday themes where people wear clothes to match the theme.

D. Access

- The Children's overall response to this was to request 7 days per week opportunities after school and at weekends and during all school holidays. Many of them wanted opportunities to 'sleepover'.
- Adventure Playgrounds came out as the single most requested type of play facility by both children and parents.
- Parents of children with special needs particularly requested the same opportunities for play as mainstream children.

I think (the playground) should be supervised. If someone got hurt there would be no-one around to tell (8-11 year old)

5.3 KEY ISSUES FROM THE CONSULTATIONS

This section outlines the key issues arising from the Play Consultation. These key issues will be addressed in the action plans.

Places to Play

- Children across the age range spectrum and their parents agreed that an ideal play environment consisted of indoor and outdoor provision.
- Parents of children with special needs want more Holiday Playschemes and more park-based equipment suitable for their children.
- Play facilities must be organised to meet the needs of a wide age range of children.

Playgrounds

- There are currently no supervised open-access adventure playgrounds in Brent and yet this was the single most desired facility in the children's responses to the consultation exercise.
- School playgrounds exist in every community and are an underused resource.
- Animals, sand and water were the three most desired features of outdoor play areas. Brent is particularly limited in play facilities with pet or animals.
- 'Teams' of qualified staff could facilitate Play in parks, organise games etc.

Choice & Availability

- Play has diminished in Brent as priorities have shifted toward childcare. Childcare is only available to those parents who require this service and can afford to pay the charges. Thus children whose parents who do not require a childcare service or cannot afford to pay, miss out on play experiences.
- No one type of provision can meet all the needs of children in equal measure and it is therefore essential to strike a balance of services to cater for all children's needs.

Accessibility

- Fears of road safety and perceived "stranger danger" were identified as having a significant impact on the access to play facilities. Therefore, we have a local responsibility to provide help-points, improve lighting, prioritise traffic calming,

develop safer routes to play areas and encourage the development of “Home Zones”.

Co-ordination

- For effective implementation of the strategy, a play development officer should be responsible for the developing, coordinating, liaising and managing the play strategy.

5.31 KEY ISSUES FROM THE CONSULTATION WITH CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES AND THEIR FAMILIES

Disabled children and young people have significantly worse access to good play opportunities in Brent. Currently, there are no specialist playgrounds, and whilst many disabled children and young people, supported by their parents and carers, want to be able to go to the same places as all other children, a roughly equal number said that their children require special provision which will cater to their particular needs.

Play Facilities

- There is a need for at least **one** specialist play facility designed to accommodate children with a wide range of disabilities and special needs. Such a facility would need appropriate equipment and specialist staff
- There is a need for more Holiday Playschemes and collective events organised during school holidays
- There is a need for more park-based equipment suitable for children with disabilities.

Choice & Availability

- There is a need to develop mainstream play provision so children with disabilities and special needs have a greater choice about where they can experience play. Improvements within play facilities may involve physical modifications to equipment and buildings and the provision of specialist staff and higher staff ratios. But there also needs to be an improvement in communications with disabled children and young people, their parents and carers and support for existing play staff to help disabled users get the most out of the existing set up.
- Though no one type of provision can meet all the needs of children in equal measure, children with disabilities need to be offered as much variety as possible in terms of access, challenge and sensory stimulation.

Access

- There is a need to take into account the transportation needs of children with disabilities when organising play facilities and activities.

5.4 THE PLAY AREA AUDIT

Brent Parks Service has recently undertaken a baseline assessment of children’s play areas using the ILAM/KMC Green Space Performance Management System. This audit of children’s play areas (see: A strategy for Brent’s Parks 2004-2009) found that there is a deficiency of play areas in Brent. A total of 39 unsupervised play sites were audited, (including sites with no play equipment).

5.41 BOROUGH WIDE SPREAD OF PLAY AREAS – DEFICIENCIES

The Replacement Unitary Development Plan (UDP) adopted by Brent Council, January 2004 states:

‘... there is a considerable deficiency in children’s play provision in Brent, not only in terms of the land area devoted to play facilities and the quality of provision but, more importantly, in terms of its distribution around the Borough.’

The Plan sets out the policies and proposals, (10.11 Indoor sports & Recreation & Other Outdoor Uses – OS18 Children’s Play Areas, page 218) as follows: ‘The provision of suitable play areas for pre-school and junior children to NPFA (national playing fields Association Standards) will be sought in residential developments over 10 units (or 0.3 Ha in size) or in large scale mixed developments. Where such provision may not be appropriate, contributions to their provision in a more appropriate location will be acceptable.

Arrangements for the long term maintenance of these play areas will be sought through planning obligations.

Redevelopment of existing play areas will only be considered where they are provided within the development site or at a more appropriate location.’

A mapping exercise shows a deficiency in play provision in many parts of the Borough. The largest areas of deficiency are in Barnhill and Northwick Park wards where there are no playing facilities, the majority of Kenton, Fryent, Welsh Harp, Tokyngton, Dollis Hill, Mapesbury, Brondesbury Park, Queens Park and Harlesden and large parts of Queensbury, Stonebridge, Kensal Green and Kilburn.

5.42 KEY ISSUES FROM THE BRENT PARKS SERVICE PLAY AREAS AUDIT

- Analysis of deficiency in play provision against the 2001 Census data for Brent indicates that there are imbalances in play provision across the Borough. Consideration of child density by ward in relation to number of play facilities revealed that wards such as Stonebridge, Harlesden and Queensbury have a very low playground provision in relation to child density. Key areas of deficiency which are a priority for the establishment of new facilities are therefore those which are both further than 400 metres from an existing facility and in an area of high child density.
- Consultation results show that one of the most common reasons for visiting Brent’s parks is to take children to use park play areas and this is emerging as a clear area of improvement.
- There is a lack of either supervised open-access play areas or supervised adventure play areas and play areas which provide the necessary level of support for children with disabilities

6 DELIVERING THE STRATEGY

6.1 LINKS WITH OTHER PLANS AND STRATEGIES

The play strategy has links with other plans and strategies within the Council and with external agencies. It needs to link to the departmental service plans which impact on the delivery of play. This avoids duplication of resources and ensures that there is a joined up approach to achieving the aims of the play strategy. The play strategy will contribute to meeting the aims and objectives of Brent's Corporate Strategy:

- Promoting quality of life and the green agenda
- Regeneration and priority neighbourhoods
- Achieving excellence
- Tackling crime and community safety
- Supporting Children and Young People.

Play clearly has a role to play within these priorities (as outlined in section 2 of this document) and in particular to the aim of supporting children and young people. Brent's Corporate Strategy says: 'We will invest in our children and young people to secure their inclusion and achievement, ensuring they have access to the best possible life chances. Every child deserves the best possible start in life, with access to good health care, a secure home environment and quality child care and play services.'

The play strategy is informed by Brent's Community Plan which aims to enhance the quality of life of local communities, through promoting and improving the economic, social, and environmental well-being of the borough.

The play strategy also links to many other local strategies and initiatives. It links to Brent's Parks Strategy 2004-2009 which gives the results of an audit of play areas in the borough, an identification of gaps in the provision, and an action plan to develop and improve provision. It is informed by Brent's Unitary Development Plan which sets out the statutory planning framework on the development and preservation of Brent's urban and green environment, and in particular its outdoor space and indoor sports facilities. That plan informs Brent's Playing Pitch Strategy and Parks Strategy which will inform its forthcoming Open Space Strategy, which will audit areas in the borough where children like to play but do not fall under the scope of the play area audit.

The plan must also make links with the Children's Fund Strategy, and the Early Education and Childcare Strategy.

6.2 WORKING IN PARTNERSHIP

The aim of working in partnership with all organisations that have an impact on children's play, is to provide a range of play services and opportunities which meet the needs of all children, young people and their families.

To do this we must:

- Support local networks and neighbourhood partnerships associated with children and young people and recognise the need to increase involvement in national networks
- Continue to consult with the voluntary sector, children and young people, their families, schools and local communities
- Continue to work closely with and seek opportunities for joint working with different departments within the Council

6.3 RECOMMENDED FUTURE STRUCTURE

To ensure an efficient and effective strategic delivery of play services, there should be a clearly defined management infrastructure in place. This strategy recommends that service decisions that could have an impact on children play should be referred through to the Play Development Officer in the Play Service for recommendations and that a stakeholders group in the form of a Play Forum should be created to monitor the implementation of the play strategy and make recommendations for future development.

The Play Development Officer would be responsible for:

- Raising the awareness of play
- Publicising, promoting and disseminating the play strategy
- Developing a coherent, cohesive and co-ordinated approach to the development of play opportunities
- Ensuring that Council funded or play provision provided directly by the Local Authority will make decisions with reference to the play strategy
- Encouraging and supporting all play providers to adopt the values and principles highlighted in the play strategy
- Developing partnerships across different forms of provision and between departments, sectors, organisations and projects
- Identifying additional funding sources for play and disseminating funding information to relevant groups
- Stimulating the creation of joint projects and partnerships in support of children's play

6.4 RESOURCES

A commitment to children's play implies there will be adequate, secure and ongoing resourcing. The best use of resources can be made through coordination of council departments and external agencies in their effort to provide suitable play opportunities.

A strategy is directly instrumental in the Council's ability to attract new resources and to focus on works programmes, leading to more efficient service delivery.

We therefore need to:

- Continue to give grants as part of the holiday playscheme programme
 - Develop resources to support the strategy
 - Aim to increase funding for staffing, equipment and training
 - Bid for central government funding to develop open-access play in Brent
- This will be an opportunity for Brent to fund the local solutions in response to the needs, problems and issues we have identified in the strategy.

6.5 MONITORING AND EVALUATION

Appropriate monitoring procedures will be developed and implemented as an ongoing and integral part of service delivery and will include active involvement of service users in identifying and responding to children's needs.

A framework needs to be in place that ensures:

- Delivery against targets and objectives is monitored
- Progress is reported back to management and stakeholders
- The strategy is reviewed annually with a comprehensive review at least every three years

7 VALUES AND PRINCIPLES

SUMMARY

This section sets out Brent's understanding of the role of play in children's lives, and the values and principles which underpin this borough-wide Play Strategy.

Context

We recognise play as fundamental to the life of every child: play is vital both to children's quality of life during their childhood, and to their development into healthy and independent adults. It is also therefore essential to the health of the wider society in which they live.

This strategy reflects our commitment to ensuring that children and their wants and needs are central to policy making, and that provision is made to meet those wants and needs.

This Strategy is founded on the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (ratified by the UK Government in December 1991), which recognises the significance and importance of Play in children's lives. Article 31 of that Convention committed its signatories to supporting the child's right to engage in play and recreational activities, and to the promotion of appropriate provision. In the UK the child's right to play is articulated in the Charter for Children's Play, developed by the Children's Play Council.

We believe that:

Play is fundamental to children's health and well-being throughout their childhood and during their transition to adulthood. Children and young people engage in play for its own sake, not for any external goal or reward; it is a significant part of children's culture.

Play is critically important to children's development and learning. Children and young people have an instinctive desire to play. Through play children learn that which cannot be taught- that which can only be learnt through experience, such as self-confidence and resilience. A child's development, and their future capacity as an adult, will be affected by their access to a range of play opportunities.

"Play is a natural and universal activity. It is a process with no necessary outcome. Play is:

- *freely chosen* (i.e. entered into by the child because s/he wishes to do so);
- *personally directed* (i.e. under the control of the child playing);
- *intrinsically motivated* (i.e. is undertaken because it is satisfying for the child playing). "Through play children and young people find out about themselves, their abilities and interests. Play, therefore is one critical way children come to understand themselves and the world around them.

Play helps children and young people to cope with difficult and stressful situations, and fosters social inclusion. "To support the child's right to participate fully in leisure, recreation and play, the child's participation, opinions and views must be sought, listened to and taken into account. " Risk-taking is an essential feature of children and young people's play; children and young people both need and want to take risks in order to explore limits, venture into new experiences and develop their capacities

We recognise that:

- "Children and young people want to play, and are entitled to do so, in a variety of public spaces near to their homes. This includes both places designated for play and shared public space.

- “The impact of modern, urban society on children’s lives significantly restricts their opportunity to play freely, and has resulted in a poverty of play opportunities in the general environment.
- “Children, their families and society as a whole, benefit from an environment in which children and young people are able to play in public spaces free from unacceptable risks
- “Designated play spaces can provide a range of play opportunities for children and young people beyond that which is available in public spaces
- “Staffed play provision can extend the range of children and young people’s play opportunities and experiences by enabling them to undertake a wider range of activities, and take more risks, physically, mentally and emotionally than would otherwise be the case
- "Ensuring that all children and young people have access to stimulating and challenging play environments where they can take acceptable levels of risk, but where they are not exposed to unacceptable risks of death or serious injury, is an important objective of the Brent’s play provision. (We support the policy statement ‘Managing risk in play provision’ published by the Play Safety Forum and endorsed by the Health & Safety Executive)
- “Some children, due to their personal or family circumstances, or their social and physical environment, have more limited access to play opportunities than others, and that the play needs of these children must be catered for". All play provision should reflect and meet the needs of the boroughs diverse cultural community.

VISION STATEMENT

“We are committed to ensuring that all Brent's children have access to a variety of good quality play environments which offer challenge and stimulus”.

8 OUTCOMES AND OBJECTIVES

We have identified a set of objectives below which fall under the overarching Every Child Matters Outcomes. They are key to the development of play opportunities in the borough.

Outcomes	Key Aims	Play Strategy Objectives
Be healthy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ physically healthy ▪ mentally and emotionally healthy ▪ healthy lifestyles 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Promote the importance of play to children’s health, well-being, and their learning, to parents and carers and those working with children.
Stay safe	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Safe from accidental injury and death ▪ Safe from bullying and discrimination ▪ Safe from crime and antisocial behaviour 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Work to ensure that play spaces, routes to school, parks, thoroughfares, housing estates and other public spaces within the borough are as safe as, and as conducive as, possible to children’s play. ○ Ensure that all children and young people have the chance to encounter acceptable risks in stimulating and challenging play environments.
Enjoy and achieve	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Achieve personal and social development and enjoy recreation ▪ Achieve stretching national educational standards at primary and secondary school 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Create, develop and maintain a variety of safe, local, and high quality play spaces and play provisions. ○ Support schools, childcare providers and other children’s services to develop opportunities for, and recognise the value of play within their provision. ○ Work to ensure that an expanding range of play opportunities is available to disabled children and young people, and that all provision aims towards becoming fully inclusive and accessible.
Make a positive contribution	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Engage in decision-making and support the community and environment ▪ Engage in law-abiding and positive behaviour in and out of school ▪ Develop positive relationships and choose not to bully or discriminate 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Ensure children are consulted and involved with the development of new provision ○ Work to ensure that play providers actively seek to address the needs of children from “hard-to-reach” communities and those at risk from social exclusion. ○ Work with agencies to develop activities to divert children from anti-social behaviour.
Achieve economic well-being	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Live in decent homes and sustainable communities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Work with partners and providers to that the needs of children are met in the provision of play spaces and open green spaces and other public spaces within the borough and that play provision is sustainable.

9 IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

The implementation plan is about transforming the values and principles underlying the strategy and the key issues from the consultation into action.

The implementation plan laid out in this document is set out the following way:

- A series of actions have been established under the objectives derived from the ECM outcomes (see table in section 8)
- Specific targets together with Lead responsibility, partners, and timescales are identified. The source of additional resources is identified where this falls outside existing budgets.

BE HEALTHY				
Actions	Targets & Indicators	Lead Responsibility	Timescales & Resources	Links
Promote recognition of play as an essential part of a healthy lifestyle for children and young people	Produce leaflets and provide presentations. Develop website on play.	Play Service	Ongoing	Children & Families, Surestart, PCT
Promote recognition of the importance of play for children's physical and mental health	Produce leaflets and provide presentations	Play Service	Ongoing	
Promote play as a learning process in children's early years	Incorporate into Early Years training programmes	EYS	2005-6	
Incorporate the importance of play into health promotion materials	Promotion materials highlight the importance of play to health	PCT	Ongoing	
Review current provision of play opportunities within health service premises eg: Health Centres, Surgeries, Hospitals	Produce report	PCT	2006-7	

STAY SAFE				
Actions	Targets & Indicators	Lead Responsibility	Timescales & Resources	Links
Raise general awareness on issues relating to safety and acceptable risk in play	Seminar on risk as part of 'out of school providers' meetings	Play Service	Ongoing	Schools, Environmental services, parks
Ensure that risk assessment is a key element of all playwork practise	All NVQ programmes to incorporate RA training. At least 30 candidates training per year. All registered providers carry out RA's	Play Service	2005	

Support implementation of a programme of School Safety Zones outside all schools in the borough by 2010	Meet national and regional (Mayoral) road safety targets	Transport	By 2010	
Work with of schools on the development and implementation of School Travel Plans	All schools to be supported. Schools receive Safer Routes to School funding	Transport	Ongoing	
Work to develop safer routes to play areas	Reduce accident numbers	Transport Play Service	End 2006	
Review role of neighbourhood wardens in relation to play space in town centre areas	Evaluation at end of pilot	Environmental Services	2006 - Funds from ODPM	
Improve park security to ensure that safe sports and play areas are provided throughout the Borough.	Extend Park Warden scheme. Produce analysis of successful safety programmes in other boroughs	Parks Service	2004-9	

ENJOY & ACHIEVE

Actions	Targets & Indicators	Lead Responsibility	Timescales & Resources	Links
Publicise, promote and disseminate the play strategy across Council departments and to the wider public	Publish & distribute strategy. Incorporate play principles and values into Councils planning and procedures	Play Service C & F	2005 Ongoing	Parks Service Sports Service Libraries Planning Brent Mencap
	A member designated to be a 'play champion'	Members	2005	
Disseminate and promote the play strategy to key officers and members	Hold internal seminars and presentations	Play Service	2005	
Raise the awareness and value of play to all by working in partnership with parents and the local community	Publish & distribute strategy. Expand partnership working	Play Service	Ongoing	
Work with all childcare and play providers and individual schools to develop play policies	Produce & disseminate model policy	Play Service	2005-6	
Encourage voluntary organizations working with children and young people adopt the values and principles of play as outlined in the strategy.	Produce & disseminate a model statement of values & principles Produce leaflets, hold seminars	Play Service	2005-8	
Complete funding bid to create new Adventure	Complete bid, needs of disabled	Play Service	2005 (Big	

Playground (with suitable indoor and outdoor facilities), ensuring needs of disabled children are fully met	children identified and met		Lottery)
Seek to resource the development of innovative play projects	Complete bid	Play Service	2005 (Big Lottery)
Disseminate information about funding sources for play to all relevant groups	Produce BOOST newsletter, hold providers meeting	Play Service	ongoing
Plan the improvement of children's fixed play areas	Identify a priority list and develop action plan. Gain external validation	Parks Service	2004-2008
Look to develop and improve sports and recreational facilities for young people, including multi-sports areas	Sports facilities expanded	Sports Service Parks	2004-2008 Funding bids
Develop skate boarding facilities within parks and open spaces.	Build a minimum of two skate boarding facilities	Parks, Sports	2005-8 Funding bids
Develop a feasibility study of staffing existing fixed playgrounds	Complete study	Play + Parks	2005-6
Complete feasibility study on developing a plan to maintain a fixed number of Playworkers per head of children	Complete study	Play service	2005-6
Work with libraries to actively support the value of play within the services they provide	Joint meetings held	Libraries	Ongoing
Develop training, quality assurance schemes and support resources for playworkers	NVQ programmes delivered to at least 30 candidates per year.	Play Service	Ongoing
Work to support out of school settings being accredited by Investors in children quality assurance scheme.	12 settings to be accredited	Play Service	2006
Develop enhanced training to support mainstream provisions that cater for and support children with disabilities	Training materials produced	Play Service Brent Mencap	2006-7
Negotiate with social services (and other agencies) to secure long-term funding commitment to playschemes for children with disabilities	Current level of playscheme provision is maintained each year	Play Service, Social Services	Ongoing. C & F funding
Ensure that when planning permission is	All successful requests address	Planning	Ongoing

sought for play facilities the needs of disabled users are addressed	the needs of disabled users			
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MAKE A POSITIVE CONTRIBUTION

Actions	Targets & indicators	Lead Responsibility	Timescales & Resources	Links
Work with children and groups and agencies (such as the Children's Consultative Forum and the Children's Fund to develop and implement a Children's Participation strategy)	Production of Children's Participation Strategy	CCF	2006-7	CCF, Schools, Play Service, Brent Mencap Met Police, Sports Parks
Consult with children and young people including disabled children and a range of disability organisations on proposals for changes to parks, open spaces and leisure facilities	CCF meets on a regular basis. % of children participating increased	CCF	Ongoing	
Consult with children and young people and other service providers and local networks to identify the needs of 'children in need'	CCF meets on a regular basis. % of children participating increased	CCF	Ongoing	
Support projects aimed at hard-to-reach groups and those at risk of social exclusion	Maintain current level of support	Children's Fund	2005-6. CF budget	
Support childcare providers to include all children with a particular focus on managing behaviour.	All NVQ programmes to incorporate managing behaviour training. At least 30 candidates training per year.	Play Service	Ongoing	
Encourage joined up work with the police and other relevant agencies to provide activities which divert young people from crime.	Participation in joint working party	YOT	Ongoing	

ACHIEVE ECONOMIC WELL-BEING

Actions	Targets & Indicators	Lead Responsibility	Timescales & Resources	Links
Improve quality for play of public spaces and built environment	complete impact assessment into how play strategy will affect Parks, Estates and other Council managed public areas	Play Service	By end 2006	Housing, Parks, Social Services,

	Develop “welcome to play here” signs in appropriate public places	Housing		Schools
Negotiate provision of new play facilities, or enhancement of existing facilities, as part of planning permission for residential developments	% of new play facilities in new residential facilities increases	Planning	ongoing	
Review scope to provide play facilities in new social housing	Ongoing review	Housing	ongoing	
Improve parks in areas of Open Space Deficiency	Six parks improved	Parks Service	2004-8	
Maintain quality of existing play space	Conduct play area inspections. Gain external validation	Parks Service	2004-8	
Negotiate wider use of school grounds for local groups/communities in light of the extended schools strategy	Schools Clusters in extended schools programme make play opportunities a priority	EAL		
Develop funding strategy to ensure the building of sustainable play provision	80% new play provision stays open after 3 years	Play Service	2005-8 (external funding bids)	
Establish links with providers of play facilities and negotiate access for children living in temporary accommodation	Increased % of children accessing play facilities	Play Service	Ongoing	
Maintain the level of provision for “children in need” and explore ways to increase provision	Current provision maintained	Social Services	Ongoing	
Plan for improved play provision for socially excluded children and young people	Create effective working links with both local and national organisations/networks	Play Forum	Ongoing	

10 NOTES AND REFERENCES

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