



East Cambridgeshire
District Council

Inclusive Playground Toolkit



01

About this toolkit

This toolkit is intended to support local councils, open space planners, housing associations and other playground and open space providers to develop and upgrade accessible play spaces.

The toolkit brings together the standards and principles that should guide inclusive play projects, practical help for providers, and funding information.

The toolkit focuses on spaces that have been designed specifically for play, such as playgrounds and play areas. However, it can be applied to many spaces throughout our communities and public space whether or not they have been specifically allocated for children's play.



02

Play value

The term play value describes the range and quality of play opportunities and experiences offered by a play environment. It is also used to describe the value a space, or piece of equipment, brings to children to help them extend their play. A space rich in play value creates opportunities for a variety of physical, social and sensory play experiences. It offers all children and teenagers the opportunity to freely interact with or experience the following:

- ◆ **other children and teenagers**, with a choice to play alone or with others, to negotiate, co-operate, fall out, and resolve conflict
- ◆ **the natural world**, weather, the seasons, bushes, trees, plants, insects, animals and mud
- ◆ **loose parts**, natural and man-made materials that can be manipulated, moved and adapted, built and demolished
- ◆ **the natural elements**, earth, air, fire and water
- ◆ **challenge and risk taking**, physical and emotional
- ◆ **playing with identity**, role play and dressing up
- ◆ **movement**, running, jumping, climbing, balancing and rolling
- ◆ **rough and tumble**, play fighting
- ◆ **senses**, sounds, tastes, textures, smells and sights

Key features of good play spaces include:

- the space and context as a whole is as important as individual play features in creating successful play spaces
- spaces include play materials and play features that are non-prescriptive and therefore encourage imagination and suggest many different ways of being played on or with
- spaces do not rely on manufactured play equipment for the play opportunities offered (spaces use manufactured equipment to enhance what is on offer)
- the natural features of the spaces, such as existing trees and natural puddles, are respected and integrated
- the spaces incorporate opportunities for children to encounter or create challenge and risk

03

Balancing risks and benefits

The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) has published a high-level statement to promote a balanced approach to managing risk in children's play (Health and Safety Executive (2012) Children's Play and Leisure: promoting a balanced approach).

The statement emphasises that when planning and providing play opportunities, the goal is not to eliminate risk, but to consider the risks and the benefits.

Risk management in play provision involves balancing risk and benefits in a strategic way.

When play spaces have the right equipment and materials, in the right place, with the right policies and procedures in place for inspection and maintenance, then the play provision will be as safe as is reasonably practicable, which is what the law requires. It is important to put issues of safety and risk into context. Many children and teenagers actively seek adventurous, exciting play experiences with a degree of risk.

04

Steps to developing inclusive play spaces

The following step-by-step process is designed to help councils, schools, developers, and community organisations plan, design, deliver and manage an inclusive playground where children and families of all abilities can play together.

In addition to the step-by-step guide there are organisations that work nationally that can support with some of the work around inclusive playgrounds such as PiPA Play or charities such as Scope. Play equipment providers can sometimes offer information and case studies around what has worked well elsewhere and what type of equipment might be most suited to the project in mind.

Projects should address inclusive access, inclusive play experiences, comfort and stay, social interaction, dignity, safety and long-term management. This should include consideration of arrival and parking, pathways and gradients, boundaries and gates, surfacing, inclusive seating and resting points, shelter and shade, quiet or less stimulating spaces where appropriate, accessible information, and equipment that supports shared play.

Stage	Key questions	Actions	Outputs
1. Identify the need	Who is currently underserved?	Review local demographics, existing play provision, accessibility gaps and community priorities.	Needs assessment
2. Build the team	Who needs to be involved?	Establish a project team including children, disabled people, families, access specialists, maintenance teams and local stakeholders.	Project Governance and Stakeholder Plan
3. Determine a budget	How will the project be funded?	Identify funding opportunities, prepare a business case and develop a realistic capital and lifecycle budget to cover maintenance and inspection costs.	Funding Strategy and Budget
4. Select the site	Is the site accessible, safe and suitable?	Assess access, transport links, topography, utilities, biodiversity, drainage and opportunities for future growth.	Site Assessment Report
5. Engage the community	What do local people want?	Carry out inclusive consultation, take care not to raise expectations and be honest about what can be achieved.	Community Engagement Report

Stage	Key questions	Actions	Outputs
6. Develop the design	Does the design provide play for everyone? What is the access like?	Prepare an inclusive design brief that includes a range of physical, sensory, imaginative, social and nature-based play opportunities, accessible routes, seating, shade and clear wayfinding. Include access for pathways and parking.	Concept Design and Design Brief
7. Fundraising	How will the work be paid for?	Revisit and revise budget, carry out fundraising activities, submit grant applications.	Funding Applications
8. Procure the build	How will quality be assured?	Prepare specifications, appoint experienced contractors, monitor construction quality and undertake accessibility inspections throughout the build.	Completed Inclusive Playground
9. Open and remote	How will the community use the space?	Launch the playground and promote it through local networks and encourage ongoing community use.	Community Launch Plan
10. Maintain and improve	How will the playground remain inclusive?	Implement regular inspections, maintain equipment and landscaping, collect user feedback and review performance annually to inform future improvements.	Maintenance Plan and Annual Review

05

Access to playgrounds, design considerations

Access to playgrounds should be designed in at inception or addressed in any improvement plans. The following should be considered:

- approaching and use of the space, adequate space around the equipment
- gates and other entrances should be wide enough and manageable for wheelchairs and buggies
- paths and routes around the space
- surfacing must be wheelchair and buggy friendly
- access to spaces for gathering and socialising, seating for all
- facilities (such as parking and toilets)

It is important to remain mindful of the range of individual, multiple or a combination of medical impairments and conditions, which need consideration for children, siblings, family members and those who might be accompanying them.

Mobility issues

Things to consider

Limited ability to move freely affects participation and independence. Design may require someone to assist, accompany or transfer children to and from play equipment and features.

A reasonable design may consist of:

- a good path into the space from the path, street or car park
- ease of travel to spots for socialising
- surfaces that are able to be 'wheeled on' and allow access to as many structures and features as possible, but still offer variety and fun
- items that support interaction and that can be reached from wheelchair height, such as sand or water trays and musical items
- there is head room under structures
- there are turning spaces for wheelchairs, especially in areas for socialising

- there are items, such as loose parts play materials, to play with at ground level
- there are opportunities for those that use a wheelchair to get out and reach items such as sand, water, loose parts and other items that are easy to manipulate and don't require fine motor skills or strength
- access to natural elements
- there are tunnels that a person can be wheeled through or navigate through with some independence
- there are good hand-grips and rails
- adequate facilities for assistive or service dogs
- consider tactile features
- narrow paths through unmown areas of grass can help exploration



Sensory issues

Things to consider

Sensory impairments affect communication and navigation, requiring careful lighting and noise management while avoiding overwhelming combinations of sounds, scents and visual stimuli.

A reasonable design may consist of:

- planting that stimulates the sense of smell and touch
- a mix of materials that offer a range of textures and shapes to touch
- careful consideration of surfacing so that it is not acoustically overwhelming
- raised edges and textures can help with direction
- strong cues of colour at level changes, steps and on hand grips
- the use of strong colours and light
- features, resources and materials that offer sound and gentle vibration
- quieter spaces shielded from excessive background noise
- the opportunity to explore elements such as sand, water and other natural features
- features that block out the noise of wind and passing traffic
- clear and concise information on any signage
- adequate facilities for assistive or service dogs



Mental health issues

Things to consider

All children benefit from a sense of security and stability, which can come from good community resources and play spaces. These can facilitate trust, respect, self-esteem, and independence.

A reasonable design may consist of:

- a range and choice of different types of activity within the space, such as active and quiet, enclosed places and open spaces
- natural features
- spaces which support children to be 'on their own' without stigma attached
- a range of loose parts play materials to support exploration, creativity and contemplation
- sensory features, such as water, sand and loose fill

Cognitive processing conditions

Things to consider

Children with cognitive conditions may need extra supervision, tailored equipment and support to recognise danger, manage social situations and access age appropriate play opportunities.

A reasonable design may consist of:

- the space is designed so that it is easy to understand how to get around and use it
- signage, when needed, is clear and uses symbols or pictures
- provide choice in spaces, ones that are busy and active and quieter ones
- the use of natural boundaries to help prevent wandering off
- consider fencing some spaces, particularly if they are close to hazards
- a good range of physical challenges so that children can identify what feels right for them
- equipment that enables side-by-side activity for those that require a greater level of supervision
- spaces which support children to be 'on their own' without stigma attached

06

Kennett case study

The playgrounds at Kennett are the result of the former landowner's determination to make them very special. After 2 years of intensive research they chose an independent contractor to provide the equipment. The brief was to create a play space which thrilled the children and provided seating and social opportunities for parents and carers. Each playspace in Kennett has a different theme. The village green centrepiece is a bespoke 'Fort Kennett' which has proved hugely popular. It was also important to them to create an inclusive space and these adaptations were achieved easily and seamlessly. The play roundabout is wheelchair friendly and the picnic tables are also wheelchair (and pushchair) friendly with grid matting removing the obstacles that deter access to many play spaces.

The second playground to open (close to the station) has a train theme with the centrepiece being a bespoke train, the 'Kennett Flyer'. Sensory boards enhance learning opportunities and are deliberately inclusive (for example a butterfly designed to appeal to visually impaired children). The colours are bright and appealing and again there is a wheelchair picnic bench as well as ample attractive painted seating.





07

Planning for reasonable design when refurbishing play spaces

There may be opportunities to consider accessibility when existing play spaces are being changed or upgraded.

Things to consider include:

- assess and improve the general play value through the provision of natural elements or loose parts play materials that can be accessed easily by the largest number of children
- include and improve paths, and in particular, provide access to popular activities
- provide opportunities for socialising and for children to play together
- build in shade
- consult the community profile and assess the need for features such as toilets and boundaries
- assess the value that current users apply to play items and features. It may be that some features will be retained even if they cannot easily be made accessible
- determine if the adjustment achieves a number of goals such as participation, challenge and play value

Factors to take into account when deciding whether a design feature is reasonable:

- whether taking any particular step would be effective in preventing the substantial disadvantage
- the practicability of the step
- the financial and other costs of making the adjustment and the extent of any disruption caused
- the extent of the financial or other resources needed
- the availability of financial or other assistance to help, such as partnership funding
- the potential impact on the range of users



08

Funding sources

Delivering inclusive playground improvements will usually require a combination of funding sources rather than reliance on a single grant. Applicants should develop a clear project plan, supported by an inclusive play audit or needs assessment, community consultation, realistic capital costs, arrangements for future inspection and maintenance, and evidence of any match funding required. Funding can come from a variety of sources such as council investment, developer contributions where appropriate, external grants, charitable funding and community fundraising.

The information below is not an exhaustive list but gives details of a number of funding sources and organisations that can support with identifying funding and funding applications.

East Cambridgeshire District Council has a [Inclusive Play and Open Spaces CIL Fund \(opens in new window\)](https://www.eastcambs.gov.uk/services/planning-and-building-control/community-infrastructure-levy/cil-information-parish-1) (eastcambs.gov.uk/services/planning-and-building-control/community-infrastructure-levy/cil-information-parish-1) specifically intended to improve accessibility in playgrounds and open spaces. It can support capital projects that provide new facilities or create additional capacity in response to local growth. Projects must be located in East Cambridgeshire, include accessibility improvements, be supported by an inclusive play audit or needs assessment, and secure at least 10% match funding. The level of grant awarded will reflect the scale of growth in the relevant parish, town or city.

The council has other [grants for community projects \(opens in new window\)](https://www.eastcambs.gov.uk/services/community-safety-and-wellbeing/grants-and-community-projects/grants-community-projects) (eastcambs.gov.uk/services/community-safety-and-wellbeing/grants-and-community-projects/grants-community-projects) including the Facilities Improvements Grant and S106 Grants.

[Support Cambridgeshire \(opens in new window\)](https://supportcambridgeshire.org.uk/) (supportcambridgeshire.org.uk/) and [VCAEC \(Voluntary and Community Action East Cambridgeshire\) \(opens in new window\)](https://vcaec.org.uk/) (vcaec.org.uk/) can help eligible organisations identify suitable funding and develop or review applications. Applicants should confirm current criteria, secure any required match funding and allow for future inspection and maintenance costs before work begins.

[My Community \(opens in new window\)](https://mycommunity.org.uk/funding) (mycommunity.org.uk/funding) is a helpful website which brings you the latest tools, tips and ideas to help make your community a brilliant place to live. It includes lots of information on how to fund grants and tips to improve your chances of getting one.

[Cambridgeshire Community Foundation \(opens in new window\)](https://cambscf.org.uk/) (cambscf.org.uk/) is a hub for local funding opportunities who work to understand the needs of local communities.

[The Thalia WB Community Fund \(opens in new window\)](https://cambscf.org.uk/funds/thalia/) (cambscf.org.uk/funds/thalia/) offers financial assistance to local not-for-profit organisations that deliver benefits to the general public, biodiversity or the environment, within a 10-mile radius of a landfill site.

[The Biffa Award \(opens in new window\)](https://biffa-award.org/) (biffa-award.org/) supports a wide range of community and environmental projects across the UK.

[The Big Lottery Fund \(opens in new window\)](https://tnlcommunityfund.org.uk/) (tnlcommunityfund.org.uk/) awards grants to UK organisations to help improve their communities.

[FCC Communities Foundation \(opens in new window\)](https://fcccommunitiesfoundation.org.uk/) (fcccommunitiesfoundation.org.uk/) is a not-for-profit business that helps benefit the lives of people who live close to landfill sites by awarding grants for community, biodiversity and heritage projects.

[The National Lottery Awards \(opens in new window\)](https://tnlcommunityfund.org.uk/funding/funding-programmes/national-lottery-awards-for-all-england/) (tnlcommunityfund.org.uk/funding/funding-programmes/national-lottery-awards-for-all-england/) for All England with grants of £300 to £20,000 for projects lasting up to two years. Playground projects may qualify where they improve community spaces, bring people together or help children and young people thrive.

[National Lottery Reaching Communities England \(opens in new window\)](https://tnlcommunityfund.org.uk/funding/funding-programmes/reaching-communities-england/) (tnlcommunityfund.org.uk/funding/funding-programmes/reaching-communities-england/) with grants from £20,001 upwards for larger, community-led projects. Inclusive play schemes could qualify where they create welcoming community spaces, support children and young people, tackle health inequalities or improve access to quality outdoor spaces.

[Tesco community Groundwork grant programmes \(opens in new window\)](https://groundwork.org.uk/apply-for-a-grant/) (groundwork.org.uk/apply-for-a-grant/) offers small grants that may support equipment and activities benefiting children and young people. These are more likely to support a defined element of a playground project than a complete refurbishment, and applicants should check which Tesco programme is currently open.

[Co-op Local Community Fund information \(opens in new window\)](https://co-operative.coop/media/news-releases/community-groups-invited-to-apply-to-co-ops-local-community-fund-as-applications-open/) (co-operative.coop/media/news-releases/community-groups-invited-to-apply-to-co-ops-local-community-fund-as-applications-open) has periodic UK-wide funding for local charities and community organisations. Playground projects may be suitable where they create opportunities for young people, improve wellbeing, strengthen community cohesion or support sustainable community spaces.

Contacts

For more information regarding Inclusive Playgrounds in general, or specifics such as the process of undergoing an audit you can reach out to the following.

Play England

Play England is the national charity in England that promotes and protects every child's right to play. They work with national partners and other organisations with shared aims to raise awareness about the importance of play and have built up considerable experience and resources to help support individuals and organisations.

www.playengland.org.uk
(opens in new window)
info@playengland.org.uk

PiPA

PiPA (Plan Inclusive Play Areas) is a social enterprise with the sole aim of helping to improve accessible and inclusive play facilities for children and families across the UK. PiPA is the only tool to independently assess inclusive provision in outdoor play areas. PiPA exists to empower the true meaning of inclusion, equality and diversity in play area design.

www.pipa-play.org (opens in new window)
info@pipa-play.org

Scope

[Scope \(opens in new window\)](https://scope.org.uk/campaigns/lets-play-fair-16ef55/campaigning-for-inclusive-playgrounds-guide) (scope.org.uk/campaigns/lets-play-fair-16ef55/campaigning-for-inclusive-playgrounds-guide), the disability equality charity, have produced a Campaigning for Inclusive Playgrounds Guide with parents of disabled children. This guide is part of their Let's Play Fair campaign.