

Agenda Item	9
Report No	CP/29/23

The Highland Council

Committee: Communities and Place

Date: 29 November 2023

Report Title: Playpark Strategy

Report By: Executive Chief Officer, Communities and Place

1. Purpose/Executive Summary

- 1.1 This report introduces the Playpark Strategy 2023 – 2033 and sets out the key aims, vision and actions which will support the implementation of the strategy.
- 1.2 The benefits of playparks are considerable in improving the health and wellbeing for all children through providing local facilities. The strategy is based on engagement with Highland children and stakeholders, discussions with other Councils and in-depth literature research.
- 1.3 This strategy recommends an approach to playpark provision that defines 3 types of parks:
 - Neighbourhood parks;
 - Settlement parks; and
 - Destination parks.

The aim is to demonstrate equity of provision as well as enable better financial planning across the estate.

- 1.4 Delivering Play Parks within affordability remains paramount and recognising the significant financial challenges, revenue and capital. There is no capital budget other than the Scottish Government capital allocation which was considered and Ward allocations agreed at the Communities and Place Committee in February 2023. The Council's revenue budget is £176,900 and unfortunately will not cover all the ongoing maintenance needs. A flexible approach is therefore important to deliver sustainability and creating further capacity for communities to be more involved in fundraising for the procurement and maintenance of play equipment is important.

2. Recommendations

2.1 Members are asked to:

- i. **Note** the contents of the report;
- ii. **Agree** and adopt the Playpark Strategy and action plan 2023-2033 (Appendix 1 of the report); and
- iii. **Note** that an annual update on progress will be reported to the Community and Place Committee.

3. Implications

3.1 **Resource** – The service has limited revenue budget for maintenance of £176,900 for all sites. For materials in 2023/24 it is £18,300, which equates to around £57 per playpark, per year. The Scottish Government is providing Councils £60m over the lifetime of the current parliament. The Council's allocation is £2.9m to 2026 and the phasing of this is detailed in appendix 4 of the strategy. There is currently no capital funding identified post 2026 so there is a risk that some playparks may have to close or items of play removed as equipment reaches end of life and cannot be repaired. Thus, securing new capital funding, identifying ways of income generation and working closely with communities to support fund raising etc. are key solutions to deliver medium to long-term sustainability.

3.2 **Legal** – Play areas/parks are not a statutory service; however, where they are provided, they must comply with the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 and the Occupiers Liability (Scotland) Act 1960 for employees and members of the public attending play areas.

The Council must also comply with duties under the Equality Act 2010 and the Fairer Scotland Duty. 3.6 Article 31 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child states that children have the right to relax and play, and participate in a wide range of cultural, artistic and cultural activities. The Council's earlier approach to support these rights was set out in the Play Strategy 2016-20. This also recognises the value of informal spaces.

3.3 **Community (Equality, Poverty, Rural and Island)** – The Strategy proposes 3 types of playparks, which will, over time, create equality in play across Highland. Local neighbourhood playparks support the 20 minute neighbourhood ambition by providing equity of playparks for all children. All children will have access to small playparks.

Inclusivity will underpin the renewal of playparks when considering the re-provision of new play equipment and any landscaping of parks.

Actions within the strategy will support creating capacity and ambition within communities and encourage participation in projects that will benefit their young people.

3.4 **Climate Change / Carbon Clever** – In line with the Council's net zero targets, consideration will be given to the environmental impact of the production and maintenance of new pieces of play equipment. A focus will be on natural play, including the planting of grassed areas and using items of natural play. Natural surfacing will be used where appropriate, as will reusing and recycling equipment. Local playparks that can be accessed by foot will reduce the need drive to access play.

- 3.5 **Risk** – Inspecting and maintaining and/or replacing playpark equipment will prevent injury to children and claims being made against the Council. The revenue budget will need to be considered when planning the replacement of play items and their expected maintenance requirements over their lifetime.
- 3.6 **Health and Safety (risks arising from changes to plant, equipment, process, or people)** – There are no risks arising from this report.
- 3.7 **Gaelic** – New signage will comply with the Council’s policy. Gaelic history, culture and language will be incorporated into play where we can. We will also look for opportunities for additional funding to enable this.

4. Background

- 4.1 The Council has 319 playparks and 2083 pieces of play equipment. The Council agreed in January 2021 that the budget and decision-making for play areas be devolved to Area Committees. Since then, officers have been working with Members to identify investment priorities for the playparks in their Wards.
- 4.2 The Council aims to provide a Highland wide playground strategy that considers the needs and expectations of communities and supports the active play, wellbeing and social activity of our children and their families.
- 4.3 The Scottish Government made a manifesto commitment to renew playparks across Scotland, so that all children have access to quality play in their own community, backed by £60 million over the period of the Parliament. Highland Council’s allocation is £2.9m across the 5 years to 2026. The phasing of this is set out at Appendix 4 of the strategy.

5. Funding and Budget

- 5.1 As part of the Government’s 100-day commitments, £60m was allocated to Councils to refurbish their playparks. A paper to this committee in November 2021 set out the strategy for this investment and the criteria that supported this.
https://www.highland.gov.uk/download/meetings/id/79017/13_investment_in_play_parks_and_developing_a_play_park_strategy.

This also included additional funding allocated from Covid Ward funds and Ward Place Based investments.

- 5.2 An update was provided to the committee in August 2022
https://www.highland.gov.uk/download/meetings/id/80296/item_9_playpark_funding_update. Section 6 of that report highlighted Ward funding towards playparks. A further report regarding future allocation across Highland to 2026 was approved as part of the service Capital report in February 2023.
https://www.highland.gov.uk/download/meetings/id/81238/6_capital_budget_monitoring_report_202223_quarter_3

- 5.3 The Scottish Government funding cannot be used for revenue repairs so there remains a significant challenge for the Council in relation to day-to-day repairs. Nonetheless, this funding does provide opportunities to improve our Play Parks.
- 5.4 Additional funding will be necessary to maintain and deliver a sustainable playpark estate into the medium and long-term. This will, for example, include supporting communities to fund raise and seek sponsorship from businesses with all efforts working to the vision and aims as presented in the proposed Strategy.

6. Playpark Strategy 2023 - 2033

- 6.1 The proposed Playpark Strategy covers a 10-year period and sets out a vision for parks across Highland. It includes a detailed Action Plan. Further details can be found in the Appendices.
- 6.2 The strategy highlights the importance of working with communities to reshape provision. The current condition of many playparks is poor with many pieces of play equipment about to reach end of life and removal. The estimated cost to *refurbish* playparks, bringing all existing equipment back up to a compliant standard (BSEN1176) is £3m. The figure to *replace* all equipment stands at £20,389,359.
- 6.3 So this is evidently unsustainable. This Strategy therefore endeavours to provide a balance and ambition of Play Park provision and the many benefits that they provide, with existing funding and strategic direction on what further funding could be used for such as via sponsorship, fund raising and application to external funds. The benefits of playparks are well documented with physical and mental wellbeing and social connections stated as key outcomes.
- 6.4 The strategy supports 6 objectives. Playparks are to be:
- Safe;
 - Inclusive – both in design and use;
 - Environmentally sustainable;
 - Financially sustainable;
 - Developed with increased collaboration with children and youths on the design of their playparks; and
 - Officers to complete Play Sufficiency Assessments for the Scottish Government funding received.
- 6.5 The strategy has been informed through:
- Engagement - All ages community questionnaire, the results are included as Appendix 1 of the strategy;
 - Literature review and research;
 - Prior child development knowledge;
 - Professional Development;
 - Local, national and international guidance/requirements;
 - Learning from the Pandemic;
 - Classroom engagement on local projects;
 - Site visits;
 - Member workshops;

- Peer engagement;
- Workshops;
- Presenting to peers and networking opportunities; and
- Engagement with partners.

- 6.6 The strategy is ambitious in its vision to reshape play provision in partnership with communities across Highland and to create 3 types of parks;
- Neighbourhood
 - Settlement
 - Destination

This will help create equality of play across Highland and assist with financial planning. Devolving decision making regarding the locations of the different sizes of parks will recognise and reflect individual wants and needs of each community.

- 6.7 The Amenities team have also been working with local Members to design a programme for improvement of playparks within each ward across Highland. There are differences between areas in terms of the number of playparks, the condition, and future requirements. Members have identified the playparks in their areas that will be invested in going forward.

- 6.8 Officers are also encouraging communities to apply for further funding and Council Officers will provide support in completing applications where required. This could include local fundraising initiatives, or applying for grants or windfarm community benefits funding, where available.

- 6.9 Members will be aware of the difficulties and delays experienced in the procurement and installation of new play equipment. This is a national issue and officers are working with colleagues from other Scottish Councils to seek ways of improving on the procurement, delivery, and installation process.

- 6.10 The Amenities team has also developed a web page to support partnership working with local communities by signposting them to funding opportunities, such as the National Lottery, and advising them on suitable equipment choices, site layout and inclusive provisions for playparks. <https://www.highland.gov.uk/playareas>

- 6.11 Where playparks are identified by communities as surplus they can, subject to appropriate approval process, be used for other purposes locally, for example food growing projects.

Designation: Executive Chief Officer - Communities & Place

Date: 9 November 2023

Authors: Caroline Campbell, Head of Community Operations and Logistics,
Lynn MacGillivray Playpark Strategist,
John Mackay Amenities Manager (North),
Debbie Sutton, Amenities Manager South

DRAFT

The Highland Council Playpark Strategy & Action Plan 2023-2033



Index	Page
Executive Summary	3
Introduction	4
Part 1: Local, National and International Guidance	6
Part 2: Strategy Development	9
Part 3: Strategic Vision for the Future	13
Part 4: Transition to a Sustainable Future	15
Conclusion	19
Action Plan	21
Appendices	24

Executive Summary

The importance of children being able to access playparks and meet their friends was brought into focus during the Covid 19 periods of lockdown. Various pieces of research are now concluding on how the impact of this has affected the development of children and in particular the effects on their mental wellbeing.

The strategy is underpinned by the findings from a recent survey “Let’s Talk About Playparks” (Appendix 1) which involved seeking the views of all ages of the community throughout Highland, from nursery aged children to adults.

This strategy addresses many different factors and is framed around the approach set out below.

The vision for the future of playparks is child-centric and community minded but also set out in the context of financial challenges, and the importance of securing funding out with the Council to deliver the vision.

OUR PHILOSOPHY IS:

Playparks are a place where all children can intrinsically learn about their own abilities and how to progress those abilities independently, at their own pace, free from benchmarks and competitive pressures.

OUR VISION IS:

To provide children and communities with the opportunity to design their own sustainable and inclusive playparks within the constraints of ongoing financial pressures.

OUR MISSION IS:

To increase children’s health and wellbeing through playing in the outdoors.

OUR GUIDING PRINCIPLES ARE

1. Inclusiveness
2. Creative, progressive, and independent play
3. Holistic play – supporting the senses, play is the work of a child
4. Creating sustainable playparks

OUR CHILDREN’S GUIDING PRINCIPLES ARE (taken from community questionnaire results)

1. Working equipment
2. Varied all age/ability equipment
3. Safe
4. Well maintained
5. Close to home

OUR FAMILY’S GUIDING PRINCIPLES ARE (taken from questionnaires):

1. Working equipment
2. Varied all age/ability equipment
3. Safe
4. Well maintained
5. Close to home

OUR OPPORTUNITIES ARE:

1. Our natural and varied landscape
2. Additional one-off funding from government
3. Our extensive community organisations
4. Our extensive business organisations
5. Upcoming business and housing developments
6. Upcoming council initiatives e.g Inverness Castle development

OUR STRENGTHS ARE:

1. Friendly and passionate communities
2. Resilient communities
3. Communities investment attitude towards our children’s health and learning
4. Highland children want to play outdoors more

OUR CHALLENGES ARE:

1. Wide spanning area and remoteness
2. Weather
3. Play equipment is reaching end of life
4. Council Maintenance budgets do not cover costs

Introduction

Highland Council actively supports children and youth by valuing, protecting, and developing their individual and unique skills as they journey towards learning the skills of adult life and the workforce.

During COVID-19 youth socialisation and playpark play were restricted. Children were encouraged to stay indoors to keep safe. We are only now beginning to see the effects this lack of socialisation and 'learning through play' has had on children's physical, social and mental health development. The Highland Children's Services Plan 2023-2026 identifies that Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) have been under pressure since Covid-19. In Highland, 1 in 5 children are affected by poverty, 30% of young people did not feel they were achieving their potential and 43% of children were identified as having additional support for learning needs. http://www.forhighlandschildren.org/index_76_3582374046.pdf.

One thing that all children know what to do well, and is totally self-directed and free, is to play.

Playparks and schools are the main locations of play for children of all ages. The Council's 319 free playparks (Appendix 2) are an important environment to support children's' physical and emotional learning. They are easy to get to, safe, free to access and easy to meet friends in. "Play is the highest form of research" (Albert Einstein). Playparks support children in learning to develop adult and workforce skills such as negotiating, communication, building positive relationships, creativity, teamwork, problem solving, resilience, knowing how to have fun, and community belonging. Such skills help create young intrinsic learners, many who will remain in our communities through their innate sense of belonging to our amazing region. Interestingly, The World Economic Forum list those skills amongst the 10 most important skills for future jobs. <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2023/05/future-of-jobs-2023-skills/>

By carefully designing playparks for **all** children, **with** children, we can support important educational, social, psychological, and emotional life skills which children and youth need to acquire to successfully transition into adulthood and the workforce. Due to COVID-19, our current youths may have gaps in their progressive adult skills, and we acknowledge that it is important to help bridge those gaps and ensure future youths have continual, regular play opportunities through using our play parks. Appendix 3 "Bringing it back to the Child" explains the benefits to children of providing local playparks as well as explaining how children learn through the art of playing in playparks.

The information below provides some background on our Play Parks.



Table 1 Life Expectancy of Play Equipment

Life Expectancy	Number of Pieces	%
<12 months	59	3
1-3 years	168	8
3-5 years	496	24
5-10 years	837	40
>10 years	523	25
Total Pieces of Equipment	2083	100

Table 2 Life Expectancy of sites with Play Equipment (based on most of the equipment at a site)

Life Expectancy	Number of Play Parks	%
3 years	30	9
5 years	70	22
5-10 years	149	47
>10 years	70	22
Total Number of Playparks	319	100

The key objectives for this Strategy are:

- Play areas to be safe;
- Play areas to be inclusive – both in design and use;
- Play areas to be environmentally sustainable;
- Play areas to be financially sustainable;
- Increased collaboration with children and youth on the design of their playparks; and
- Complete Play Sufficiency Assessments.

Part 1

Integration with Highland Council, National and International Guiding Documents



image by Jordan Whitt unsplash

These principles integrate with and support other Highland Council strategies:



Integration with National and International Guiding Documents

The Scottish Government's Manifesto

In 2021 The Scottish Government (SG) made a manifesto commitment to renew playparks across Scotland, so all children could have access to quality play in their own communities. The SG allocated £60m across Scotland over 5 years, £2,918,003 to Highland Council from 2021-2026 (Appendix 4, allocation of funding). Funding is required to be used to improve playpark and play area opportunities (equipment, access, ground covering, toilets, nature play etc); it cannot be used towards maintenance costs. We are also required to follow the SG "National Principles for Play Park Renewal" (Appendix 5). The Scottish Government have extended the importance and requirements for local authorities to provide quality play, for all children, by being one of the first countries in the world to consider incorporating the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) into Scots Law.

Scotland's Play Strategy

In conjunction with the SG manifesto funding, the SG and Play Scotland produced a strategic document called 'Scotland's Play Strategy' along with an Action Plan <https://www.playscotland.org/policy/play-strategy/>. The strategy has been written to support Local Authorities to improve play opportunities within their regions for all children under the age of 18. Scotland's Play Strategy protects a child's right to play within their community and identifies and acknowledges that "Children's play is crucial to Scotland's wellbeing; socially, economically, and environmentally for Scotland as a whole. Our people are our greatest resource and the early

years of life set the pattern for children's future development". This correlates with our first objective of improving health and wellbeing outcomes for all children and youths through the provision of sustainable playparks.

United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC)

The Scotland Play Strategy has been written in alignment with many national and international guiding documents including the Equalities Act, Disability Discrimination Act and UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). In 2023, the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child issued recommendations to the UK and Scottish Government following a recent review. The Scottish Government (SG) adheres to those recommendations of:

- Develop a strategy, with sufficient resources, aimed at ensuring children's right to rest, leisure and recreation, including free outdoor play;
- Strengthen measures to ensure that all children, including children with disabilities, young children, children in rural areas and children with disadvantaged socioeconomic backgrounds, have access to accessible and safe public outdoor play spaces.
- Involve children in decisions regarding urban-planning processes, including public transportation, and the development of spaces for children to play (No. 48 Full Report)
- A summary of the UNCRC Articles and how they can relate to playpark provision is provided in Appendix 6.

National Planning Framework 4 (NPF4)

The majority of SG and Highland Council's Strategies and Frameworks focus on the need to create better health and well-being outcomes to communities through creating aesthetically pleasing recreational green spaces where people can exercise, relax, and congregate in. When discussing forward planning cities, towns, and villages, we note playpark and leisure provision is mentioned in most of our leading documents. Playparks are one of our most major and largest assets regarding recreational spaces, family play spaces and health and wellbeing outcomes which is why now is the time to invest in them. Evidence suggests children living within one kilometre of a playpark were 5 times likelier to be a healthy weight than children who lived further away from playparks. Subsequently, this Playpark Strategy has been designed around Health and Wellbeing Outcomes.

In doing so, it will support 10 out of 14 themes of identified within the Place Standard, thereby supporting the Six Qualities of Successful Places outlined in NPF4 Policy 14 (Design, quality and place), Policy 15 (Local Living and 20 minute neighbourhoods) and Policy 21 (Play, recreation and sport).

Appendix 7 describes how our newly designed playparks will actively support those themes.

Part 2

Strategy Development



Photo by Andrew Seaman unsplash

Community Engagement

Extensive professional and community engagement has contributed to this strategy.

Play Highland

The Play Strategy Coordinator has initiated and co-chairs this working group. The purpose of the group is to work collaboratively to improve play opportunities across all sectors using Scotland's Play Strategy as the focus. Members include Planning Department, Education, NHS, Third Sector, Disability Groups.

Professional Sharing of Best Practice:

The Play Strategy Coordinator will continue to share and present to other Councils on newly developed PSA's at the Open Space Strategy Workshop and the Park Managers Forum.

Children and Youth School Surveys

Consulted with over 100 children when discussing Whin Park and various other individual re-developments. A simple PowerPoint presentation has been created to inspire children to really think about what they want to see in their playparks. Children and youth appear to be annoyed by equipment breaking/not getting fixed and vandalism. They wish for simple equipment and more holistic equipment.

Others

Other Council Departments which collaborated closely and have influenced this strategy have been numerous but include Education, Educational Psychology, Play Technicians, Landscapes for Play, Community Food Growing, HighLife Highland Rangers, Play Scotland, Third Sector Groups and numerous Playpark professional groups. Consultation has taken place with over 100 children when discussing Whin Park and various other individual re-developments.

Planning Department

Creating close ties with the Planning Department has been instrumental in the extensive work required for the PSA's. A joint approach with Planning will support the shared goal of ensuring new housing developments are equipping playparks to the required standards, amongst other goals.

Net Zero

Working alongside Highland Council's Climate Change and Energy Team to ensure planning, designing, and purchasing of the best equipment to support net zero.

Liaising with industry experts from the Institute for Infrastructure and Environment for their recommendations on equipment that will support Net Zero most efficiently.

Play Equipment Suppliers

Liaised closely with various play equipment suppliers. Sharing the basic concepts of Net Zero and Inclusivity with them. Positive changes in the designs being presented.

Site Visits and Community Members

The Play Strategy Coordinator has begun supporting communities with choosing appropriate equipment and managing equipment suppliers. This has been done through onsite visits with community members.

Literature Review and Questionnaire

We expect our Literature Review and questionnaire to become part of a worldwide sharing of informative Research.

Literature Review

An evidenced based approach to our Strategy

Play is fundamental to the healthy development of children, partly because it enables them to learn how to engage with and interact with their environment (Veitch et al., 2020). One primary way that children engage in play is through the use of playgrounds. It has been established that playgrounds hold significant value for children due to providing an essential space where they can encounter challenges, engage in sensory experiences, social interactions, and imaginative play (Prellwitz and Skar, 2007). However, playgrounds also have many positive secondary benefits on children’s health, wellbeing, and development (Seltenrich, 2015). Using an evidence-based approach, we outline how playgrounds enhance children’s health and wellbeing by promoting physical activity, development and cognition, social skills, and form social connectiveness amongst communities. For the full literature analysis, please refer to **Appendix 9**.

Table 3: Summary of Main Findings

Physical Activity	Playgrounds increase the level of physical activity in children, which results in: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lower levels of obesity • Lower levels of mental health conditions
Cognition and Development	Cognition and development are supported using playgrounds.
Social Skills	Playgrounds promote a various range of social skills, which leads to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learning skills such as teamwork, conflict resolution, empathy, and emotional understanding • Decreased levels of racism and prejudiced attitudes
Inclusive Playgrounds	Inclusive playgrounds help: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nondisabled children learn empathy, acceptance, and social understanding • Disabled children to be included and form social networks
Social and Community Networks	Social networks for both children and parents can flourish through playgrounds, which is essential in our rapidly changing world.
Socioeconomic Health Gradient	Playgrounds can help to reduce the socioeconomic health gradient between low SES (socio-economic status) and high SES children, resulting in better health outcomes.
Features of Playgrounds	Children enjoy play features which have: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An element of risk and adventure • Nature based play

Table 4: Developing Workplace Skills, at every child’s individual pace

Cooperation	Many playground activities require children to work together, such as pushing a swing, playing team games, or pushing each other on a roundabout together. Through cooperative play, children learn to share ideas, learn from each other, achieve common goals, and work in teams.
Shared Spaces	Playgrounds are communal spaces where children from different backgrounds come together to play. This diversity encourages children to interact with peers they might not encounter in other settings, promoting inclusivity and social awareness. This is a prominent example of the application of Allport’s (1954) Contact Hypothesis, where contact between various groups of people reduces prejudiced and discrimination.
Conflict Resolution	Playgrounds are not immune to conflicts and disagreements between children. Learning to navigate conflicts and find peaceful solutions is an essential social skill that children develop through interactions with others in the playground.
Empathy and Emotional Understanding	Interacting with peers in the playground exposes children to a wide range of emotions in themselves and others. Empathy and emotional understanding grow as they respond to the feelings and needs of their playmates.
Inclusivity	Inclusive playgrounds, designed to accommodate children with various abilities, promote interaction between children with and without disabilities. For typically developing children, this encourages empathy, acceptance, and social understanding (Mara and Brown, 1956). Additionally, for children with disabilities, playgrounds promote social network inclusion. For example, one study revealed an association between social network inclusion and playground engagement in children with autism spectrum disorder (Santillan et al., 2019). In a similar vein, it is important to emphasise that every child, including children with disabilities, has the right to actively participate in community life (United Nations, 1989). Nevertheless, research has revealed that children with disabilities face obstacles concerning the accessibility and usability of playgrounds, as well as difficulties in social interactions with other children (Lynch et al, 2020). This underscores the importance of designing playgrounds that cater to the diverse needs and abilities of children (Dunn and Moore, 2005).

Part 3

Strategic Vision for the Future



Our research tells us that when people have easy access to local playparks it supports community cohesion and collaboration. In turn this supports adults and children to create local friendships and support networks so everyone can look out for each other and care for each other.

Continuing to work with an evidenced based approach, our vision is to create 3 different types of playparks – neighbourhood, settlement, and destination. This will begin over an initial 10-year period and will provide a framework for communities to consider and adopt as playparks are identified for renewal and when further funding becomes available.



Destination Park

- Within each Committee Area, it is proposed there will be one Destination Park
- Approximately 12 pieces of equipment
- Larger climbing frame which should have step access included
- At least 4 pieces of quality equipment which could be used by wheelchair users
- Increase of biodiversity, natural boundaries, natural play, quiet spaces and wheeling paths
- Community groups to contribute towards maintenance if they want extensive pieces of equipment.
- Cost in excess of £250,000 (at time of writing and to be reviewed annually)



Settlement Park

- One in each settlement
- Approximately 10 pieces of equipment
- Larger climbing frame which should have step access included
- At least 3 pieces of quality equipment which could be used by wheelchair users
- Increase of biodiversity, natural boundaries, natural play, quiet spaces and wheeling paths
- Community groups to contribute towards maintenance if they wish for extensive pieces of equipment in regional town parks
- Cost up to £150,000 (at time of writing and to be reviewed annually)



Neighbourhood Park

- Sustain small neighbourhood playparks
- Replacing like for like
- Approximately 6 pieces of equipment
- Doesn't need to have a climbing frame but if it does it should be one to cater for all ages and abilities
- At least 2 pieces of quality equipment which could be used by wheelchair users
- Increase of biodiversity, natural boundaries, natural play, quiet spaces and wheeling paths
- Community groups to contribute towards maintenance if they want more equipment
- Cost up to £80,000 (at time of writing and to be reviewed annually)

There will be a place -based approach with Members agreeing which playparks fall into each category. Using an evidenced based approach from our literature research and engagements activities, and by involving communities and children in the design of play parks, we will aim to provide safe and inclusive sites that are environmentally and financially sustainable and increase all-age and ability play.

Part 4

Transition to a Sustainable Future

Resilience



Learning at own pace



Creativity



Caring



Real Imagination



Table 5 Transition to a Sustainable Future

<p>Play parks to be safe</p> <p>A founding principle of the play park strategy is the provision of safe and accessible playparks, and we will continue our routine inspections of play parks. Our equipment is continuously reviewed to meet Health and Safety Standards.</p> <p>Sustainable Future: We will seek funding opportunities and support communities to fundraise towards the replacement of play equipment. We will seek to recycle play items between playparks and 'repair over replace', where it is appropriate to do so.</p>
<p>Play parks to be inclusive – both in design and use</p> <p>Highland Council fully support all children's learning, health and development, no matter who they are or where they live.</p> <p>The strategy will support a holistic approach to equipment provision so all children can develop their skills, at their own pace according to their own individual abilities. We will ensure the type of equipment, so as far as practicably possible, is inclusive; it will be physically accessible as well as accommodating children who are neurodiverse.</p> <p>We are required to provide play for children up to the age of 18. We will review the way teenage play is provided. As play parks are redesigned there will be fewer segregated age play spaces which limits younger children's views of their capabilities and limits older children's ability to care for younger children. Younger children must have the opportunity to learn skills from older children by watching them and being helped by them. Equally older children need to learn adult skills of compassion, manners, kindness, and integrity to develop into a strong workforce.</p> <p>Sustainable Future: We will create a template for what constitutes the 3 different types of park discussed above. This will outline equipment for all age, all ability local playparks. We will consider all aspects of inclusivity, close to home, pathways and surfaces, accessible equipment, natural play and collaborative play. We will engage with children in the design of play parks. We will aim that play parks meet the criteria for inclusivity and learning.</p>
<p>Play parks to be environmentally sustainable</p> <p>This strategy supports the Council's Net Zero Strategy and the Corporate Plan to reduce our environmental footprint. Classifying playparks to three different types (Neighbourhood, Settlement and Destination) will enable us to focus on reducing equipment, increasing natural play, increasing biodiversity, reducing plastic ground covering, recycling equipment between play parks, and repairing and extending the lifetime of our equipment so reducing what is sent to landfill. When procuring play equipment, we will consider the whole life cost and environmental impact of what we purchase.</p> <p>Increasing natural play supports children in many learning outcomes which focus on children's senses, imagination and creativity. Natural play elements include sand, water, trees, flowers, bushes, pathing, grass, leaves, boulders, planting etc. Natural play is fantastic for enabling children to develop skills at their own pace, free from benchmarks and competitive pressures. An increase in natural play will require a Risk Benefit approach to play. We will create a Risk Assessment Management System to support natural play. Increasing natural play will also support cost effective playparks by decreasing maintenance and renewal costs of fixed equipment.</p> <p>Sustainable Future: A 'whole life' approach will be taken when selecting play equipment and materials. Our strategy focuses on increasing biodiversity and natural play. Ground covering around play equipment will be of natural material where appropriate.</p>

Play Parks to be Financially sustainable

We have a duty to provide basic outdoor play and leisure. Our playparks are all different so require an individual approach that considers affordability and funding opportunities. This will differ depending on location, size, condition of play equipment and usage.

Budgets. The strategy sets out the vision for a 10 year period. Capital funding of £2.9m is provided by the Scottish Government. It is important that additional capital and revenue funding opportunities are identified, and maintenance costs minimised.

Standardising Equipment. Developing the principle of 3 types of play parks with guidance on the number and type of play equipment will contribute towards this. Research tells us children need local play and simple equipment. We will install fewer pieces of equipment with a focus on all-age, all ability equipment, but equipment which children will want to use again and again.

Sustainable Future: We will support, encourage and work with communities that wish to fundraise to upgrade and enhance their park. We will look to increase sponsorship and advertising opportunities. We will investigate additional funding channels:

- Cultural, Gaelic, Nature and Historical Funding – enhance depth of play opportunities and learning to our parks.
- Biodiversity – increasing natural landscaping and natural aesthetics
- Planning Service – working together to ensure new housing development playparks meet this strategy. Additionally, we will investigate potential greenspace play areas which we can promote
- Tourism – investigate potential funding opportunities
- Professional Partnerships – we will investigate ways of working together to enhance increased play opportunities through Highland e.g. High Life Highland, third sector, and other departments

We will create templates for what constitutes a neighbourhood park, a settlement park, and a destination park. We will discuss and agree an approach to maintenance with Members and communities.

Increased collaboration with children on the design of their play parks

The success of the strategy depends on continuing to involve all stakeholders and children. We are required by the UNCRC and the Scottish Government to involve children in decision making regarding the communities in which they live in and their thoughts on future developments.

Our literature search has told us that children's health and social outcomes can improve if they have access and can utilise a playpark, near to where they live. It emphasises that parks don't need to have a lot of equipment, more just a safe place to hang out with friends. Play is not restricted to swings and chutes, having greenspaces that encourage children to run around is also important.

All our leading documentation discusses the need for accessible and equitable play. To improve accessibility and equity of play, we want to keep as many existing small local playparks as possible. This is consistent with the Planning Service's Department's National Planning Framework 4 and 20-minute neighbourhood.

Sustainable Future: The strategy will help ensure collaboration with children as well as community groups. We will present information about budgets and sustainability to children in such a way they understand it and can have their voices heard on what they think is useful for their own play, in their own communities. We will develop a flowchart and model engagement tools to support consultation with children and community groups. This will ensure high play value equipment is installed. We will focus on Progressive Play by providing play environments where children can learn new skills when they gradually develop in both the confidence and ability. A good example is an all-age and ability climbing frame. A toddler will be able to climb the steps and go down a low slide, but in time, many of them will be able to get to the highest

point of the climbing frame and climb along a net or jump off a high point. There are lots of ways we can provide progressive play through equipment and creating natural play. A by-product of offering multi-age equipment is that younger children get to observe older children and older children need to use their manners to be mindful of younger children.

A web page has already been set up to assist communities.

https://www.highland.gov.uk/info/283/community_life_and_leisure/987/play_areas

Assessing our Estate (Play park Sufficiency Assessments)

The Council is required to provide Play Sufficiency Assessment (PSA) to the Scottish Government. The Play Strategist and colleagues in the Planning Service have already developed an innovative, useable tool to assess each playpark and its play quality and inclusiveness. The Highland Children's Services Plan states that 1 in 3 children under the age of 18 live in remote and rural areas and 1 in 5 children are living in poverty. Children living in poverty may not always have access to after school activities such as swimming, football, music lessons etc.

Sustainable Future: We will continue to roll out the Play Sufficiency Assessment Tool (PSA) so we can map all play areas and equipment and report on improvements in the quality of play provision. This will improve our ability to report on the condition of our play equipment as well as the play value each park delivers. We will continue the Member led review to prioritise play parks for retention and investment. Existing parks will, over time, be equipped with core equipment which can be supplemented by alternative funding opportunities from sources such as biodiversity, and tourism fund or businesses the way of sponsorship and advertising.

Part 5

Conclusion and Action Plan



Through significant and engagement, we conclude that:

1. Living close to a playpark reduces disease and increases health, social and well-being outcomes.
2. Along with schools, playparks are a major aspect of children's 'learning through play'.
3. Children need simple and local play opportunities, not hugely fancy playparks, a long way from where they can't travel too independently.
4. Children want more natural play, ball play and wheel play.

Through the strategy 2023 – 2033, a long-term plan will be developed for all play parks for when funding is identified. The guiding principles are:

- Play areas will be safe;
- Play areas will be inclusive – both in design and use;
- Play areas will be environmentally sustainable; and
- Play areas to be financially sustainable;
- There will be Increased collaboration with children and youths on the design of their playparks; and
- Completed Play Sufficiency Assessments will be prepared for the Scottish Government funding.

This Play Strategy has been built and fully supports Natalie Don's (Minister of Children's Affairs) speech at the International Play Conference 2023 - "We must embrace and deliver radical change so we can tackle and adapt to climate change, restore biodiversity loss, improve health and wellbeing, build a wellbeing economy and create great places."

We have done this by presenting a vision of what playparks could look like in the future, supporting future funding models for maintaining neighbourhood, settlement and destination parks to allow children to learn the life skills they need to learn to become adults with transferrable skills for our future workplace.

The Highland Council Playpark Action Plan 2023-2033



Table 6 Action Plan

Outcome	What do we need to do?	Due/Review Date	Responsible
<p>Objective 1 Playparks to be financially sustainable.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Continue to work with stakeholders on plans to invest the Scottish Government funding, to 2026. 2. Continue to support communities to seek external sources of funding, and support communities to fundraise to improve playparks. 3. Discuss and agree approach to maintenance with Members and communities. 4. Liaise with Planning Service to ensure best outcomes for playparks within new developments. 5. Liaise with Education Service to establish supporting community play. 6. Develop a plan to create an equitable provision of play parks across Highland that can be implemented as funding becomes available. 	<p>Review April 2024</p>	<p>Amenities Managers</p>
<p>Objective 2 Playparks to be environmentally sustainable.</p>	<p>Support Net Zero Reduce Waste by:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Continue to repair, reuse, and recycle equipment. 2. When refurbishing a playpark, apply the criteria for play equipment for that size and location of playpark. 3. When purchasing equipment, consider the whole life cost and net zero target. <p>Increase biodiversity</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 4. Increasing natural play opportunities. 5. Create a Risk Benefit Management System. 	<p>Review April 2024</p>	<p>Amenities Managers</p>
<p>Objective 3 Playparks to be inclusive – both in design and use</p>	<p>Develop a process to follow when planning to refurbish a play park:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop a tool kit for stakeholders on child development and the theory of play regarding playparks; • Refer to the Play sufficiency Assessment to identify and address current gaps in inclusivity; and 	<p>Ongoing as and when parks are refurbished.</p>	<p>Play Strategist</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consider Active Travel Wheeling Paths for all wheel users. 		
Objective 4 Playparks to be safe	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Ensure safety inspection and maintenance programme is implemented. Create a Risk Benefit Management System. 	Ongoing	Amenities Managers
Objective 5 Increased collaboration with children on the design of their playparks	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Produce educational material to support stakeholders understanding of child collaboration. Develop an engagement toolkit for communities to use when engaging/collaborating with users of play parks. Continue to co-chair newly established Play Highland working group. 	Ongoing	Play Strategist
Objective 6 Assessing our Estate (Playpark Sufficiency Assessments)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Create Play Sufficiency Assessment (PSA) Questionnaire. Complete PSA. Analyse and Report to Members on PSA. 	December 2023 June 2024 November 2024	Play Strategist

Appendices

Appendix 1 Community Questionnaire

Appendix 2 Map of Highland Council Play Parks

Appendix 3 “Bringing it back to the Child”

Appendix 4 Allocation of Play Park Funding 2021-2026

Appendix 5 National Principles for Play Park Renewal Programme

Appendix 6 United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC)

Appendix 7 Investing in play and leisure – linking to National Planning Framework 4 and Place and Wellbeing Outcomes

Appendix 8 Highland Council Corporate Plan 2022-2027

Appendix 9 Literature Review

The Highland Council

Let's Talk About Playparks –

Analysis of Community

Questionnaire

(November 2023)

Introduction

The questionnaire was developed to inform The Highland Council Play Strategy to support recommendations within the strategy. It was designed for all age groups to be able to complete, as they were able to. Photos were used for all school aged children to create conversations about what they liked playing on at playparks. Nursery aged children were asked fewer questions to retain interest. As well as photos, different coloured questions were used to support teachers and caregivers to guide beginning readers to complete the questions independently with their own thoughts and opinions. Teenage questionnaires intentionally had less questions but more open questions so as that age group could express their individual thoughts and solutions towards playparks. Adult feedback was equally important because we identify many children need adults to accompany them to the playpark!

The distribution of the questionnaire was sent with a covering letter through all primary and secondary schools within Highland, as well as, Council Nursery's, CALA nurseries and Council contacts. We had a high return rate of 1151 responses. 49% were from primary school aged children, followed by 30% of over 18's (adults), 14% nursery aged and 7% secondary school aged children. By the amount of extensive additional comments from all age groups, we know the community are passionate about playparks as well as being keen for Council to hear what they have to say about their own communities.

The Play Coordinator and the Educational Psychology Department have analysed both the qualitative and quantitative data. The initial section in this analysis reports on quantitative data, followed by qualitative data. The quantitative analysis has been created with different colours and photos so it can be easily understood by most children and adults, with the qualitative analysis presented more formally leading to overall recommendations.

The full analysis will be shared as an annex within the Playpark Strategy 2023-2033. The analysis will be sent out to all schools and CALA for teachers and carers to share with children and young people. In addition it will also be placed onto our website for public viewing and will be shared amongst professional colleagues.

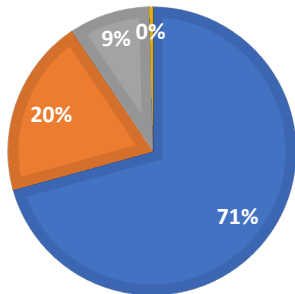
Lynn MacGillivray (Play Strategist)

James McTaggart (Educational Psychology)

Interesting Highlights

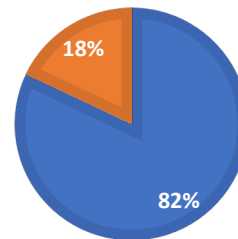
71% OF CHILDREN ARE PLAYING OUTSIDE DAILY

■ Daily ■ Weekly ■ Not much ■ Doesn't like playing outside



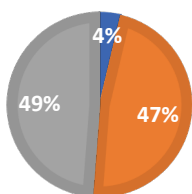
82% OF PEOPLE WANT MORE OUTDOOR PLAY OPPORTUNITIES

■ Teenagers and Adults



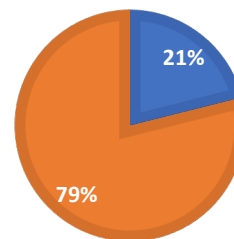
ONLY 3% OF TEENAGERS WOULD LIKE MORE INDOOR PLAY OPPORTUNITIES, PENDING WEATHER

■ Indoors ■ Outdoors ■ Depends on weather



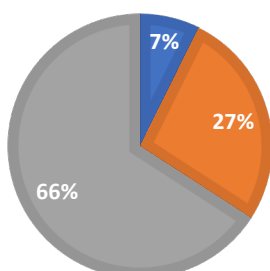
MORE PARENTS THAN TEENAGERS WOULD PREFER MORE INDOOR PLAY

■ Indoor ■ Outdoor



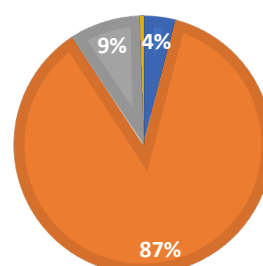
54% OF TEENAGERS THINK PLAY IN THEIR VILLAGE OR TOWN IS 'BORING'

■ Good ■ Ok ■ Boring with not much to do

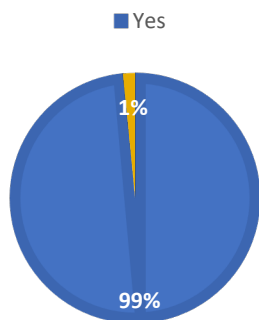


MORE ADULTS THAN TEENAGERS THINK THERE ARE NOT ENOUGH TEENAGE PLAY OPPORTUNITIES

■ No ■ Yes ■ Don't know



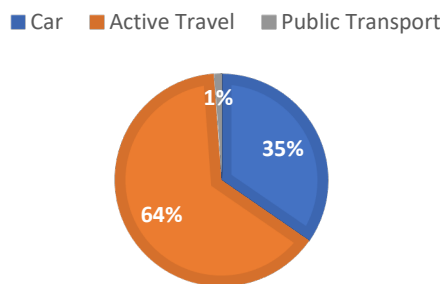
99% OF PEOPLE WANT MORE INCLUSIVE PLAY OPPORTUNITIES SO EVERYONE CAN PLAY TOGETHER



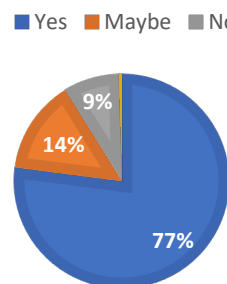
PREFER LOCAL PLAYPARKS

- 59% - Nursery Age
- 45% - Primary
- 76% - Secondary
- 58% - Adults

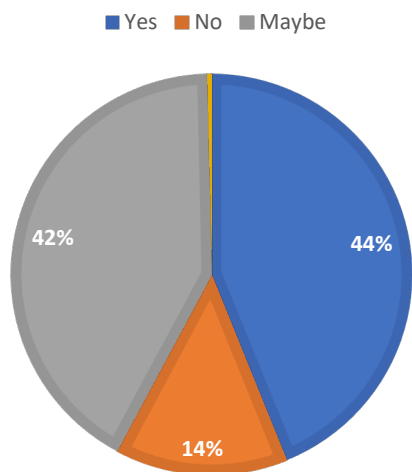
64% OF PEOPLE ARE USING ACTIVE TRAVEL TO GET TO LOCAL PLAYPARKS EG SMALL WHEELS OR FEET



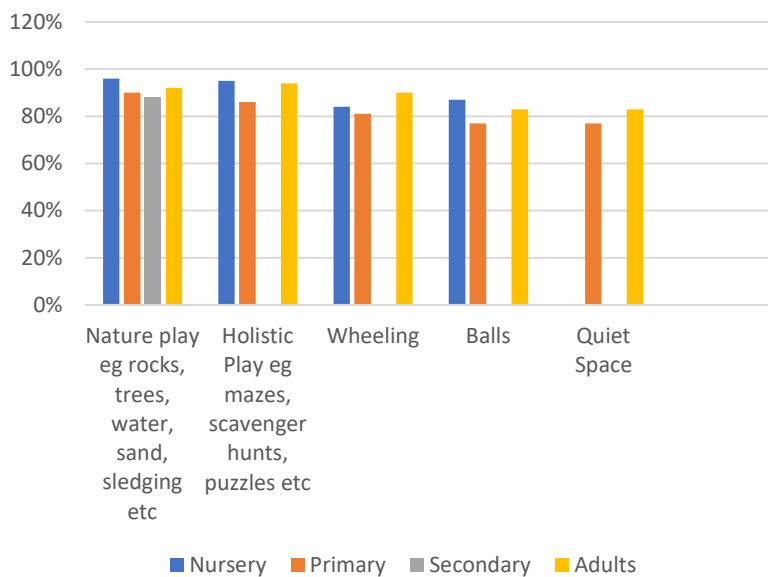
91% OF PARENTS WOULD VISIT SHOPS, COMMUNITY SITES AND VISITOR ATTRACTIONS IF THEY OFFERED FREE PLAY



86% OF PARENTS SAID THEY WOULD OR MAY BE KEEN TO FUNDRAISE TO IMPROVE PLAYPARKS



It's not just about swings and slides, children also like playing on:



Teenagers would like our help to have:

- All age and all ability equipment
- Standard equipment eg slides, swings, spinning things etc
- Shelters and seating
- Safe parks, cctv, lighting
- Bike/skate stuff without it needing to be specific and extensive areas
- Multi-purpose ball areas
- Assault courses
- Natural Play eg trees, logs, boulders, water etc
- Fun stuff eg zip lines
- Cool artwork – street art

Parents with children who have difficulty playing in playparks would like our help to:




- Generally improve playparks
- Maintain playparks – repair equipment, clean rubbish etc
- Quiet spaces
- Fenced areas
- Sensory play
- Pathing
- All-age and all ability equipment
- Wheelchair accessible equipment
- More stimulating equipment eg puzzles etc
- Local playparks which are easy to get to (and get home to)
- Lower climbing equipment (safety)
- Challenging climbing equipment
- Less focus on climbing equipment
- Maintaining equipment
- Keeping dogs on leads
- More social interaction opportunities
- Allergy friendly signs not to allow food on play equipment
- Help communities fundraise for inclusive equipment
- Provision for adults (? Shelter, seating etc)

Section 1 – Quantitative Results






Favourite places to play

(Scale = 1-5th favourite with most favourite starting first)





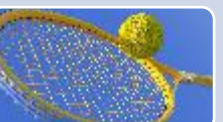
Primary Age

				
Playparks	Nature	School Playground	Wheeling	Sports Fields

Secondary Age

				
Nature	Sports Fields, clubs, gym, youth club	Playparks	Streets and grassy areas near home	Wheeling parks

Adults

				
Playpark	Nature	School fields and playgrounds	Streets or grassy areas near home	Clubs - football, tennis chess, youth clubs etc

Favourite stuff to play on

(Scale = 1-5th favourite with most favourite starting first)

Nursery



Slides



Swings & Hammocks



Nature Play



Holistic Play eg
music, puzzles
scavenger hunts
etc



Tunnels

Primary Age



Swings & Hammocks



Climbing



Zip Lines



Slides



Nature

Secondary Age



Wheeling



Ball sports



Shelters



Teenage play stuff



Lights

Adults



Slides



Swings



Climbing



Holistic



Tunnels






What people don't like about going to the playpark

				
Broken equipment	Equipment being taken away and not replaced	Rubbish and Vandalism	Older children being unkind	Local parks closing down





What people want playparks to look like

(Scale = 1-5th favourite with most favourite starting first)

Primary age

				
Colourful	Lots of different types of play	Safe and well kept	Inclusive	Nature Play

Secondary Age

				
Colourful art works	Lots of different types of play	Shelter and privacy	Balls	Inclusive

Adults

				
Investment needed	Safe and Well maintained	Different types of play	Local	Inclusive

Interesting Facts about nursery aged children

- Playparks are their favourite play place
- Despite all children “loving” going to the playpark, 63% of nursery aged children wanted to tell us about things that they didn’t like about going to the playpark. Common themes were broken equipment, equipment not being replaced, vandalism etc. See section on qualitative data for further analysis.
- Other enjoyable outdoor play ideas were wheels, building dens, water, sand and mud
- 44% children wanted to tell us more about their favourite outdoor play ideas. This means very young children think or hope their voices will be listened to.

What can we do about it?

- Have funds available to repair or replace equipment efficiently
- Support teenagers to be proud of their local playparks
- Create all age wheeling paths within playparks

Interesting Facts about primary aged children

- Playparks are their favourite play place
- Despite 82% stating they “liked” playing in playparks, 72% of children had comments about what they didn’t like about going to the playpark. They were similar themes to the nursery aged children of broken equipment, parks closing down, not enough equipment and vandalism.
- Their vision of what playparks should look like is colourful, fun, natural, different types of equipment, accessible to all, planting.

What can we do about it?

- Have funds available to repair or replace equipment efficiently
- Ensure we have a mixture of local and destination parks
- Increase natural play opportunities with planting, boulders, trees, pathing etc
- Repaint old equipment to make it look inviting

Interesting facts about teenagers

- 66% of teenagers thought their local play opportunities were ‘Boring with not much to do’ and 87% of parents thought there was not enough teenage play available.
- 76% of teenagers wanted to play more at playparks
- 76% of teenagers told us they would get more use out of local playparks, close to home
- When asked what indoor or outdoor stuff teenagers would like, only one child gave an example of an indoor play idea. All other ideas were specifically outdoor ideas.
- Teenagers want more wheeling, ball games, shelter, safety and age appropriate playpark equipment

What can we do about it?

- Create ways for teenagers to feel involved in the design and subsequently the ownership of playparks
- Increase teenage play opportunities within playparks with wheels, balls, shelter, cooler equipment and collaborative and competitive play.

Interesting Facts about Adults

- 98% of adults thought children enjoyed playing indoors, whereas only 3% of teenagers wanted to hangout with friends indoors.
- Inclusive play percentages became higher the older and perhaps more socially aware people became
- Parents of children who had difficulty playing in playparks want more fencing and accessible and holistic play opportunities
- Similar to all age groups, parents in general want more natural play (boulders, logs etc) and educational and holistic play (scavenger hunts, puzzles, wheeling paths, mazes, nature boards etc),
- 91% said they would visit businesses and tourist attractions if they offered free play opportunities to the local community
- 86% said they would consider fundraising to improve their local playparks

What can we do about it?

- Increase accessible and inclusive play opportunities
- Increase natural, educational and holistic play opportunities
- Meet with business and tourist organisations to share this survey and support them in increasing play opportunities within the community
- Establish a way to connect with parents to support them in initiating fundraising opportunities.

Section 2 – Qualitative Results

Discussion of Qualitative Information Received

Each age group from nursery age to adult was asked open-ended questions about their experiences of play parks and suggestions for improvement. This section shows the main themes that are found in responses, with illustrative quotations. Most themes were shared across age groups – where there are differences, these are highlighted.

The majority of all users preferred to have a playpark, close to home where they could walk too. It must be noted, this supports Council with Net Zero by reducing car emissions. Only 3%of teenagers prefer to hang out indoors

Theme 1 – Space to move

Children, young people, and adults all spoke of the importance of space to move about and do things in. For younger children this had a sense of adventure, including exploring, hiding and climbing, with many respondents enjoying building dens. Primary and secondary aged children and young people valued spaces in which to ride bikes, play ball and other games. A strong subtheme for primary and secondary aged people was that of active bodies – looking for scooter, bike or skateboard parks, multi-purpose areas for team games, as well as slides, climbing walls, zip lines and even fireman poles.

“I want somewhere to ride my bikes with bumps and fun things” (Primary aged respondent)

Theme 2 – Things to do Subtheme - age appropriateness

All age groups offered complaints that their local provision of play spaces did not have enough for their own needs. Younger respondents pointed to a lack of nursery aged equipment, reducing the scope for independence and suitable risk taking:

“Some of the play things are too big for me” “Can’t climb the slides”

“I don’t like things that go too fast”

“the monkey bars are too high because i [sic] almost broke my neck” (Primary aged respondent)

Some younger children experience difficulties accessing spaces when they are shared with older and larger young people. As one primary aged respondent commented, **“Big kids can be a bit rough and take all the play things”**.

Adults expressed a similar concern, with a degree of fear of teenagers on behalf of their children:

“Older kids/ teens are ruining the parks, putting the swings around so kids cannot get on them, horrid graffiti on kids play equipment, laughing at kids when they are playing ...”

Teenage respondents were, interestingly, aware of the needs of younger children:

“need separate area for young kids/learners so they don’t get hurt”

But they also, along with primary aged children, pointed out that they needed equipment suitable and big enough for them, as well as highlighting the developmental need mentioned under Theme 1 for larger spaces to move about in. Children overall balanced a desire for equipment and opportunities that matched their age and stage with a valuing of spaces where all ages could be together. One respondent highlighted a “lovely play park in Perth that has every[thing] for all ages”.

Subtheme – Enough to do

Putting these perspectives together chimes with a subtheme of there being **enough things to do**, both for the basic quality of the experience and to promote shared play without frustration or conflict as everyone has something interesting to do. This was a particularly strong theme for primary aged respondents:

“Most parks don't have enough swings etc. Always only a couple and when busy during holiday periods. Your [sic] there waiting forever” (Primary age respondent)

A nursery aged respondent told us that they had abandoned their play park, **“We just play on the hill because there’s nothing in the park to play on”**.

Theme 3 – Being together

All age groups valued play spaces, or would value them, as places to be together with each friends and families. One primary age respondent said it should be:

“friendly for all kids and happy with lots of things to do, it makes my happiness bucket full to play with my friends”

Another remarked that:

“It's about the other people who are there. If there are no people there the playpark is boring.”

Secondary age respondents showed a balance of wanting space for teenagers to go and hang out, including with shelters for bad weather, with a desire for other spaces where ages and generations could be together, with “stuff that young and old can do”. Along with this, respondents called for benches and seating areas for families. Lack of these impact on the children’s experience of play:

“Sometimes there's no bench or seats for my mum and baby sister to sit on while I play” (nursery age respondent)

This is not a need only for the adults, as children also highlighted a desire for, **“some benches so we can sit and chat if we want a break”**, underling the social aspect of play for all ages.

Adult respondents highlighted play parks and spaces as places to meet up, and that they should be designed as **“interactive spaces where all ages want to come together.”**

Respondents also showed a desire for spaces to be inclusive. As one primary aged respondent remarked:

“not everyone can use all the stuff if they are disable or have disabilitys [sic] so not fun for everyone”

“i [sic] think it should be suitable for all ages and disabilities so everybody can have fun together.”

“I think play parks should have things for people that find it a bit hard to walk so they can play on the thing that other people can play on” (Primary aged respondents).

Another expressed the vision of a **“a fun place that shod eve lots of stuff for kids and kids with disability's [sic]”**.

Theme 4 – Maintenance

Whatever is provided or available, the theme with the most related responses is this one – the need for it to be maintained. Adults pointed to a lack of investment, or a failure to allow for maintenance costs when making plans:

“Lack of investment has left our local playpark with minimal equipment with most being phased out over the years. It's boring, lacking interest with dangerous fencing. It's not drained and the gates don't close properly. A disaster.”

Parents are highly aware of the lack of safety of local spaces, whether through worn equipment or a lack of cleaning or care:

“I would love to be able to walk around the corner to go there with my toddler but the last time we went there was a bin tipped over, condom wrappers and condoms everywhere, fence planks with rusty nails all over the ground and all the play equipment is very the worse for wear. It's gutting that this doesn't feel like a safe place to take my child.”

Similar points are made by younger respondents, **“I don't like rubbish, broken bits”** (nursery age), with glass, graffiti, weeds and very long grass also being mentioned, as well as unsafe equipment:

“I don't like to fall off if the sea-saw handle is broken” (nursery age respondent)

“I wold [sic] like if play parks have clean areas to play in like no glass or dog poo” (primary aged respondent)

Children also noticed that the effect of broken equipment tends to be that is it removed rather than replaced so that there is only **“half a park left”**. A secondary age respondent put it more starkly – **“our good park got taken away”**.

Perhaps the clearest summary of the theme comes from a primary aged respondent:

“We would like all equipment to be fixed, more bins, more space for babies, more slides, more seats for people to sit on, and softer ground for a soft landing if we fall.”

Theme 5 – Natural spaces

This was a particularly strong theme for younger children, but also expressed by secondary aged respondents in a different way.

Young children talked often about nature, the enjoyment of being in woods and fields, and the affordances these provide for activities such as den building, seeing wildlife, watching or feeding ducks, picking fruit, having adventure walks - as well as all the things trees offer such as climbing, bouncing on branches, collecting leaves and making

tunnels. It is not just a matter of having some natural spaces over against built parks – respondents also pointed to the need for play parks to be natural spaces with, for example **“more trees for climbing”** (primary aged respondent).

Other aspects are basic features of the outdoors. One primary respondent simply wanted **“A Hill To roll down in summer and sledge down in winter”**. For others, just being outside was what was wanted – **“for people to go outside more [than] play games on screens”** (primary aged respondent).

If we re-express the theme as “found spaces” in the sense that they are not built or provided playparks, but just places such as fields, woods, beaches, etc, then the theme is common to all age groups. For teenagers the spaces also become a place to be, to be together, and to be out of the house. They also therefore needed to be safe spaces – as well as the need for shelter mentioned already, some respondents pointed to the need for lighting.

Theme 6 – Creativity

This is a double edged theme. For nursery and primary aged children and their adults it has a negative aspect, as concerns are expressed about graffiti, or older children repurposing equipment and thus breaking it.

Secondary aged respondents pointed in contrast to the need for their play to include creativity. This means opportunities for, among other things, graffiti and other forms of street art.

Theme 7 – Local efforts

This was a relatively thin but still important theme expressed by adult respondents, including points such as concern that the local authority had retreated from supporting play parks. Respondents highlighted the willingness of local groups to try and make improvements to play spaces, but also their limited capacity and knowledge:

“A local group has been formed to repair and reinvigorate the park but assistance from HC is non-existent”

“Community group is trying but will probably fail”

Recommendations

The qualitative data is consistent with the messages that can be gained from the statistical analysis, and recommendations that can be made include:

- Design spaces with children and young people. We did not have room in this report for the hundreds of constructive suggestions that were offered for what should be in play spaces and how to structure them, none of which was outrageous, silly or actually that expensive.
- Create materials to support local groups to audit and plan play spaces and parks, including guidance on consulting with children and young people, planning, costing, and maintenance.
- Consider the value of already existing natural or open spaces, including physical features such as hills and trees, paths or tracks and how these can be enhanced to become play spaces
- Think beyond putting equipment in a park to creating shared family and social spaces with things for all ages to do separately and together
- Pay attention to the needs of all age groups, be this for smaller and easier equipment for young children, or safe and dry hanging-out spaces for teenagers

- Plan and budget for maintenance when any new spaces are creating or existing ones improved. This needs to be over the expected lifespan of the space
- With new developments, planning requirements should think beyond requiring a minimal “park” and consider play spaces across a development for different ages, including spaces for biking, skateboarding and other demands.

Recommendations for specific nursery age children’s responses

- Have funds available to repair or replace equipment efficiently
- Support teenagers to be proud of their local playparks
- Create all age wheeling paths within playparks

Recommendations for specific primary age children’s responses

- Have funds available to repair or replace equipment efficiently
- Ensure we have a mixture of local and destination parks
- Increase natural play opportunities with planting, boulders, trees, pathing etc
- Repaint old equipment to make it look inviting

Recommendations for specific secondary age children’s responses

- Create ways for teenagers to feel involved in the design and subsequently the ownership of playparks
- Increase teenage play opportunities within playparks with wheels, balls, shelter, cooler equipment and collaborative and competitive play.

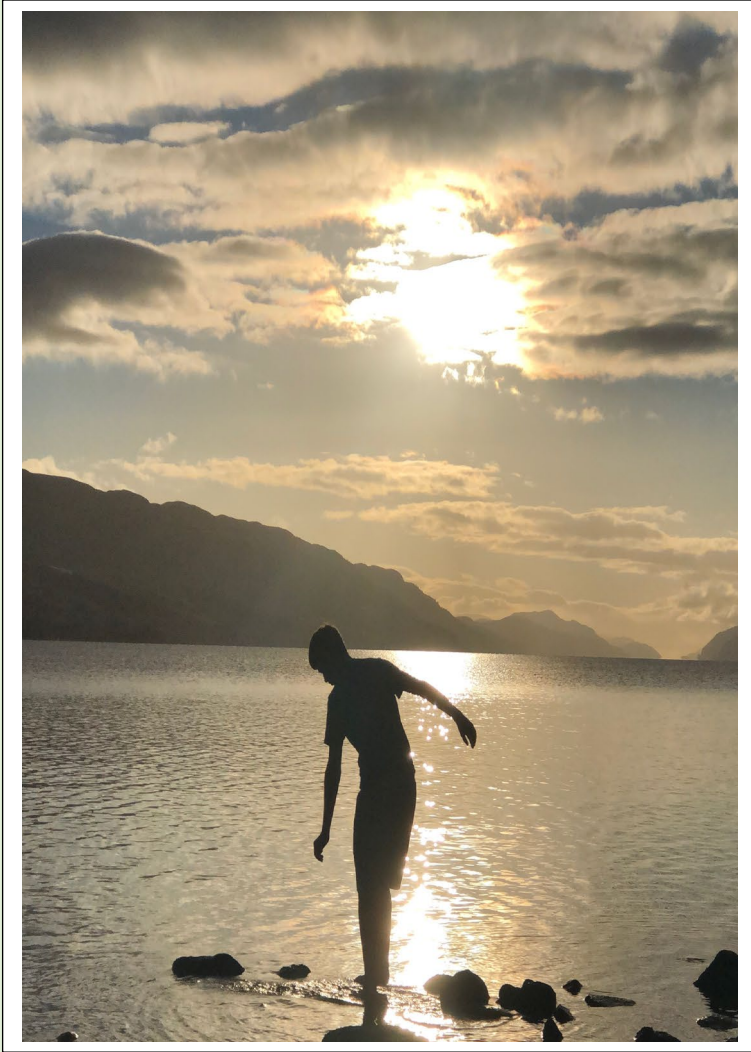
Recommendations for specific adult responses

- Increase accessible and inclusive play opportunities
- Increase natural, educational and holistic play opportunities
- Meet with business organisations to share this survey and support them in increasing play opportunities within the community
- Meet with Education Department to discuss feasibility of accessing school playparks out of hours
- Establish a way to connect with parents to support them in initiating fundraising opportunities.

(Photos by unsplash, dreamstime, pexels, Word 365, lynn macgillivray and Timberplay)

The Community Vision for the Highland Council Playparks



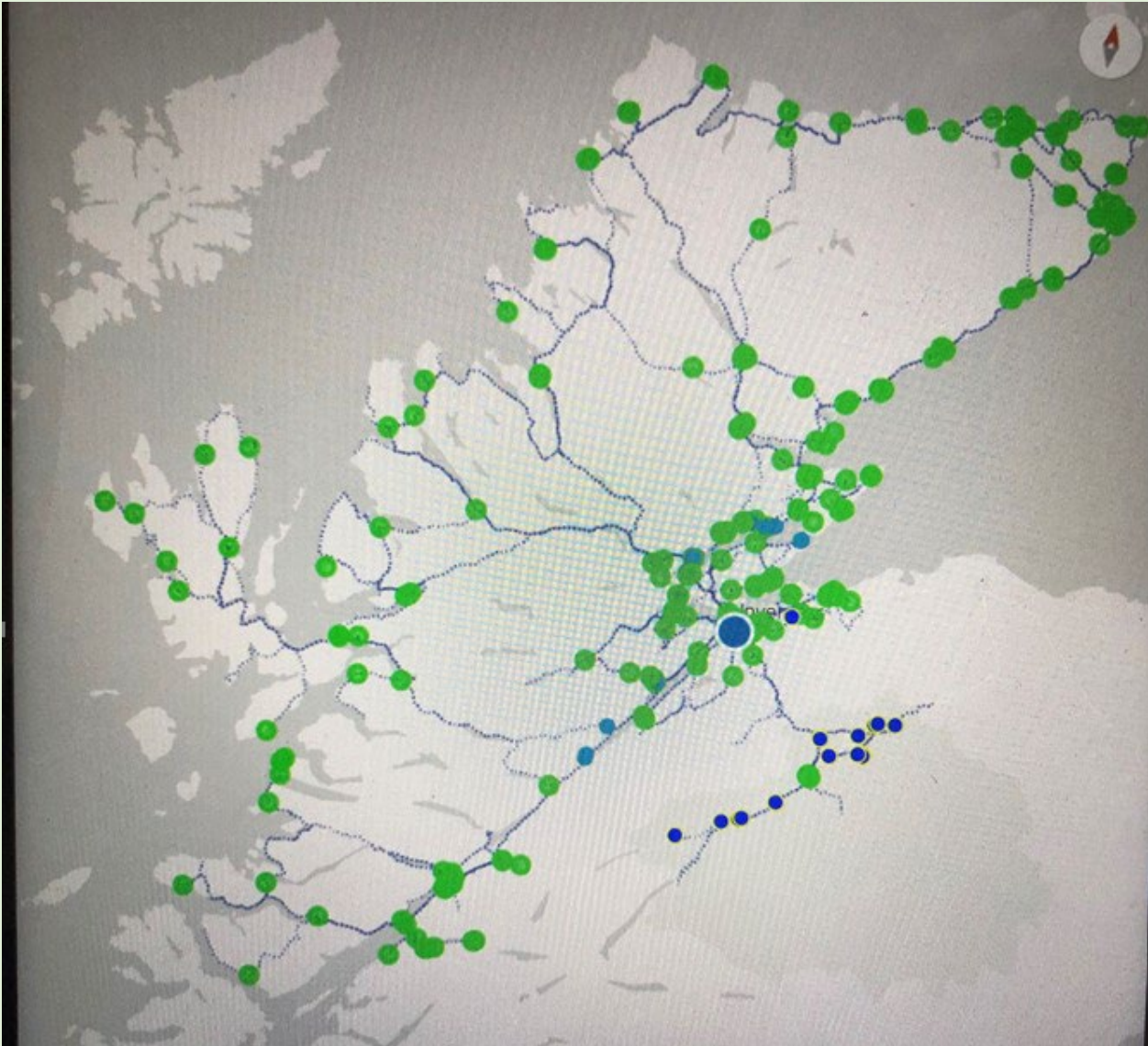


“Free the
child’s
potential and
you will
transform him
into the world”

Dr Maria
Montessori

Appendix 2

Map of Highland Council Play Parks



Appendix 3

Bringing it Back to the Child

We know that children are becoming more insular with an increased dependency on technology. This can result in a loss of family and community connections as well as an increase of mental health and unhealthy physical habits. Our strategy focusses on giving children the progressive opportunity to learn, through active play, as they develop in age. It is about enabling **all** children to have a choice of different play opportunities whether they are experiencing social, physical, developmental, or mental health challenges, or just merely wanting to have fun playing. A consistent focus on the UNCRC, Scotland's Play Strategy and this strategy is on protecting vulnerable groups of children's rights to play alongside other less vulnerable children. A place where every child can learn, in their own time, at their own pace, free from competition and competitive pressures. The most effective way of doing this is by moving away from static or fixed equipment to providing holistic, progressive, and educational equipment. In addition, we need to be introducing natural environments into our playparks for all children to be able to learn important life skills through natural play.

How do children learn life skills through playparks? Creating a community of creative thinkers and lifelong learners

Stop and have a think about your most fun times as a child. Was it playing on a piece of play equipment by yourself, or was it being around other people, interacting, taking risks, and having fun? What did you learn through those experiences? Navigating yourself out of potential trouble (problem solving), making friends (building relationships), being silly (developing humour), taking risks (risk benefit assessment)? Now think about your family and your job and how those skills which you learnt as a child have shaped your future. Play hasn't changed over the years. Children continue to yearn for social connection and a sense of belonging to their community and their country.

Playparks are a great way to learn lots of necessary life skills if the equipment is educationally driven. An example of static or fixed play would be a climbing structure. Most children master the skill of climbing by age 7. After that, they are merely learning how to climb higher and faster (risk and physical agility). Some children can never learn the skill of climbing which means if a playpark only has a steep climbing frame, there is nothing for them to learn; apart from the frustration of watching more physically abled children climb.

People learn by watching, experiencing, and trying. It may be a child is selling their imaginary ice-creams to an unknown child and subsequently creating a new friendship with a less confident child. Because it was such fun, the less confident child, who may never have thought of this type of new friendship play, may try it themselves, the next time they are at the playpark. It may not be as fun as the more confident child but in time, and with practice, they will grow in confidence (creativity, communication, resilience, and reflective learning). This is a direct learning experience. The more positive examples of creating better play value pieces of equipment, highlights the progressive learning skills of inner confidence, intrinsic learning, developing friendships, problem solving, resilience, risk taking and imagination over merely the skill of risk, with just a climbing frame.

Investing in good quality, holistic, progressive, inclusive play is investing in developing our youths' skills as they learn how to develop into adults.

Appendix 4

Play Park Funding 2021-2026 from the Scottish Government – allocation per Ward (as agreed at Communities and Place Committee in February 2023)

Area Committee	No. of play parks	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25	2025/26	Total
Badenoch and Strathspey	20	9,474	£8,945	£17,810	£27,620	£47,200	£111,050
Black Isle	11	8,394	£8,103	£16,134	£25,020	£42,756	£100,407
Caithness	50	22,813	£23,898	£47,582	£73,789	£126,097	£294,179
City of Inverness	83	66,167	£67,987	£135,363	£209,919	£358,726	£838,161
Dingwall and Seaforth	13	8,343	£7,727	£15,385	£23,860	£40,773	£96,088
Easter Ross	32	22,946	£22,449	£44,695	£69,313	£118,448	£277,851
Isle of Skye and Raasay	9	7,462	£7,864	£15,657	£24,281	£41,493	£96,756
Lochaber	33	37,919	£40,225	£80,088	£124,200	£212,242	£494,674
Nairnshire	9	7,926	£8,121	£16,169	£25,075	£42,850	£100,140
Sutherland	38	12,591	£13,122	£26,126	£40,516	£69,236	£161,590
Wester Ross, Strathpeffer and Lochalsh	21	14,968	£14,059	£27,991	£43,409	£74,180	£174,607
Retained for play park officer post		15,000	22,500	45,000	45,000	45,000	172,500
Highland	319	234,000	£245,000	£488,000	£732,000	£1,219,000	£2,918,000

Appendix 5

National Principles for Play Park Renewal Programme

Principle 1: Children, young people, and families are best placed to inform what quality play looks like to them, and should therefore be involved throughout the process, from the review of parks through to helping design the renewal of individual play parks. This is in line with Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) which sets out that every child who is capable of forming his or her own views has the right to express those views freely. The views of children, young people and families provide valuable insight into how they interact with parks and facilities.

Principle 2: All children have the right to play under the UNCRC Article 31. Access to play should be as wide-reaching and inclusive as possible, ensuring that children, young people, and families have easy local access to play spaces where they feel safe and comfortable to use them. Inclusiveness looks different for everyone, so meaningful engagement with the children who will be using your play parks is fundamental.

Principle 3: Play parks and spaces should seek to bring together local communities, children and young people of all ages and abilities, creating a greater sense of place and cohesion. The design and renewal of play parks should be done in a way that best meets the social and environmental needs of communities and its children and young people.

Principle 4: The renewal programme will be strengthened by sharing and learning from best practice and making use of existing national resources. There are several other tools that can help local authorities to take a strategic and evidence-based approach to the design and renewal of their local play parks. Tools such as Play Value Assessments, an internal audit and inventory of play parks, and existing legislation and standards can provide a helpful basis for prioritising work.

Appendix 6

United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC); and how they can apply to Play Provision

The Scotland Play Strategy has been written in alignment with many national and international guiding documents including the Equalities Act, Disability Discrimination Act and UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). Many of the UNCRC agreed Articles apply to protecting every child's right to learn through play. Playparks are an important part of play. A summary of the relevant articles and how they can relate to playpark provision is provided below.

Article 1	All children under 18
Article 2	No child should be discriminated against whatever their family background is, or their abilities are
Article 3	Best interests of the child regarding decisions and actions which affect children
Article 4	Governments creating systems to promote and protect every child's right to the UNCRC
Article 5	Providing opportunities for children to increase their capacity to learn to develop their abilities to their own choices, safely
Article 6	Ensuring children develop to their full potential
Article 12, 13	All children have their views taken seriously
Article 15	Every child's right to meet other children and to join groups of other children
Article 18	Creating supportive environments for parents to raise their children
Article 19	Providing environments which are free from abuse from carers
Article 23	Supporting disabled children's rights to play an active part in their community through living a dignified life and as much of an independent life as they can.
Article 24	Improving health and well-being for every child
Article 27	Every child's right to have a standard of living which is good enough to meet their physical and social needs to support their development. Governments must help families who cannot afford to provide this.
Article 28	The right to education
Article 29	Through the environment, education must develop every child's different ability to their full potential
Article 30	Protecting indigenous groups – the right to learn about the language, culture, and heritage of the country where they are living
Article 31	Leisure, play and culture – all children's right to relax, play and take part in a wide range of cultural and artistic activities

Appendix 7

Investing in play and leisure - Linking National Planning Framework 4, the Place Standard and Place and Wellbeing Outcomes to Playparks

“The principles of equality, net-zero emissions and sustainability underpin all of these themes, and all themes should be embedded in policy and action”.

Place & Wellbeing outcomes	Playparks
<p>MOVEMENT Active Travel – wheel, walk and cycle through routes that connect homes, destinations ...</p>	<p>Playparks are a major destination in every community. By installing paths for wheeling (walking with prams, scooting, biking, wheelchairs), we will be encouraging Active Travel. By using wheels, children experience the sensation of speed and the skills of judgement, risk, balance, and coordination.</p>
<p>SPACES Streets and Spaces – Everyone can access public spaces that create an attractive place to use, enjoy and interact with others and streets and spaces that are well-connected, well-designed and maintained, providing multiple function and amenities to meet the varying needs of different population groups.</p> <p>Natural Spaces – Everyone can access good-quality natural spaces that support biodiversity and are well-connected, well-designed, safe, and maintained, providing multiple functions and amenities to meet the varying needs of different population groups. Access community food growing opportunities and prime quality agricultural land is protected.</p> <p>Play and Recreation – Everyone can access a range of high quality, safe, well-maintained, accessible places with opportunities for play and recreation to meet the varying needs of different population groups and the community itself.</p>	<p>Our model for play parks will exceed this outcome. Playparks are free for everyone to use and with our design will be accessible and inclusive.</p> <p>Incorporating natural play will result in a natural, attractive place for communities to meet. Natural and static all-inclusive play will meet the varying needs of different population groups. By growing trees for shelter, shrubs to hide behind, wildflowers to pick and fruit trees to gather fruit from we will be supporting biodiversity and providing an element of holistic learning and free fruit. Picnic benches and shelter will encourage people to congregate to socialise with each other.</p>
<p>RESOURCES Services and Support – health enhancing, accessible, affordable and well-maintained services, facilities and amenities. These are informed by community engagement. A range of spaces and opportunities for communities to meet indoors and outdoors.</p> <p>Work and Economy – access to assets and resources that enable people to participate in the economy such as good health and education. The resources that enable people to participate in the economy such as good health and education.</p>	<p>Our playparks will be educationally driven so children can learn the life skills they require for a future workforce – collaboration, team work, resilience, patience, creativity, problem solving. Providing local playparks has been directly evidenced to create increased and better health outcomes.</p>

<p>CIVIC Identity and Belonging – everyone can benefit from a place that has a positive identity, culture and history, where people feel like they belong and are able to participate and interact positively with others.</p> <p>Feeling Safe – everyone feels safe in their local community.</p>	<p>Playparks are a primary example of identity and belonging and help children experience a sense of identity and belonging from a young age. Parks are a place where children play regularly and can meet each other time and time again. Whilst parents watch their children play, they can form friendships with other parents which can last for life. This gives increased support for children into their teenage years and beyond because more people are looking out for them. Parks are safe because of the wide range of ages and abilities which use them. Often, they are close to housing with regards to additional safety.</p>
<p>STEWARDSHIP Care and Maintenance – everyone has access to spaces that are well cared for in a way that is responsive to the needs and priorities of local communities.</p>	<p>People become disgruntled when playparks close or items of play equipment are removed for safety reasons. From our engagement exercises we know people want playparks in their communities. Identifying sources of funding to replace and support, care and maintain of our playpark is vital.</p>
<p>Influence and Control – local outcomes are improved by effective collaborations between communities, community organisations and public bodies. Decision making processes are designed to involve communities as equal partners, community organisations co-produce local solutions, communities have increased influence over decisions</p>	<p>We will provide a framework to support and assist communities to provide evidence of community collaboration with children.</p>

Appendix 8

Highland Council Corporate Plan 2022-2027

A Fair and Caring Highland – Working together to Improve Quality of Life and Opportunities for Highland People		
1.1	Improve outcomes including attainment, achievement and positive destinations for all children, and our most vulnerable learners	Through our literature search, we know playparks are the building blocks of children learning the life skills they require for future employment and general adult wellbeing.
1.2	Tackling child poverty	Providing playparks within all local communities will mean we are providing equity to our most vulnerable learners.
1.3	Secure positive destinations	Playparks are a place of happiness and communities coming to together to get to know each other.
1.4	Suicide Prevention	Playparks can create communities of support: adult to adult, child to child, adult to child. By encouraging families to look out for each other's children, we create a network of support. Play can allow children to learn how to fail and to become resilient in failing and subsequently being able to pick themselves up.
1.5	Encourage a diverse range of traditional and emerging sporting activities and active lifestyles	Play is one of our oldest traditional physical activities for children, families, and communities. Playparks are places where children can test their abilities, at their own pace.
1.6	Promote fair access	As we renew playparks we will remove bark and create wheeling paths to support fair access to playparks.
1.7	Improve the levels of Mental Health and Wellbeing	Our literature study evidences how playparks improve mental and health and wellbeing goals.
1.8	Develop whole family support	Our literature study explains the high priority playparks take for encouraging family and community cohesion.
1.9	Early Intervention for drug and alcohol reduction	By encouraging communities to care for each other using playparks, we create communities where people learn to know each other and look out for each other. This outcome is prior to early intervention.
1.10	Facilitate strategic sports and cultural planning	'Play' is the most common children's sport there is.
1.11	Promote Gaelic language and cultural development	By creating natural play into our playgrounds, we can also create cultural play such as native planting, local scavenger boards, standing stones, cairns, and carvings
1.12	Promote and enhance the Highland's rich heritage and culture	As above
Resilient and Sustainable Communities – Help our communities to be prosperous, sustainable and resilient, making a positive difference to the lives of people		
2.1-2.3	Transport and Rooding	By incorporating paths into our parks, we will be encouraging more families to walk or wheel amongst their local neighbourhoods. We can create playpark road safety awareness through creating wheeling paths with painted road safety/code signs for children to practice on.
2.4	Develop place-based plans that focus on quality	We will be working alongside Planning Department to support PSA's and the development on playparks.

	neighbourhoods and direct local funding	
2.5	Support communities to help each other live well and independently	In alignment with our literature search, by sustaining local playparks, we will be encouraging community cohesion where people look out for each other.
2.6	Work with partners to promote visitor management	The Play Strategy will work with Planning Department to enhance play through tourism. Many families with children travel to the Highlands and post photos on social media.
2.7	Work with communities and partners to keep public spaces clean and safe	Community involvement with playparks will increase the sense of ownership and belonging, and help keep the parks clean and safe.
2.9	Work with the SG on the delivery of improved transport infrastructure through the Highlands	By creating wheeling paths, we are activity supporting transport infrastructure whilst also increasing health outcome opportunities.
2.10	Inward Investment	Through tourists creating great social media play postings on social media, more families will consider coming to the Highlands for a holiday (perhaps even to stay).

Accessible and Sustainable Highland Homes		
3.7	Work to ensure a fair balance of residential, recreational and commercial use of properties to sustain vibrant local communities	Working with Planning Service to formalise future play opportunities through new housing developments. This will create enjoyable and supportive recreational spaces.

A Sustainable Highland Environment and Global Centre for Renewable Energy		
4.1-4.2	Promote Active Travel Infrastructure	The play strategy fully supports active travel through creating wheeling paths to encourage active travel within communities.
4.3	Work with communities to find local solutions and lever funding	Communities will not only be supported but encouraged to lever funding for playpark equipment and landscaping. An emphasis will be on inclusivity and environmental sustainability. In addition, we will require all communities to provide evidence of good quality collaboration with children and young people when planning renewal of play parks.
4.4	Encourage greater use of land and seas being well managed for nature and adaptation	We will work alongside organisations to increase biodiversity and nature within and around play parks.
4.6	Reduce residual waste and increase re-use, repair, recycling and upcycling	By primarily using steel for our new play parks we will be actively reducing unnecessary landfill. We currently re-use equipment where and when we can.
4.7	Achieve our Net Zero targets	We will be reducing consumption through installing less equipment and less maintenance whilst also increasing biodiversity.

A resilient and Sustainable Council – Work with partners to address service delivery challenges with a positive approach to change		
5.1	Grow and retain our own talent	Our literature search evidences how important play is regarding creating a strong and resilient workforce. Play is about practising future life skills. In addition, the literature search lists many of the skills the World Economic Forum states are needed in 2023. Access to local playparks has shown to increase health and wellbeing outcomes. Through creating caring communities whilst enhancing cultural learning, will help children to feel a sense of pride and belonging in their villages, towns, and cities.
5.4	Actively redesign service delivery in response to constrained budgets to ensure the sustainability of the Council	The strategy sets out how we will redesign playpark provision to meet our obligations. We will be utilising alternative funds to provide a sustainable play park estate.
5.5	Work together with communities and partners to produce local plans which meet communities' needs	This will be done through working closely with Planning Service and the use of Play Sufficiency Assessments. In addition, we will be actively collaborating with children and youths to determine what their needs are.
5.6	Develop place-based partnership strategies to coordinate investment and rural repopulation	We are currently working closely with Planning Service on place-based partnership strategies. Through sustaining our local playparks, we will be supporting rural play opportunities to attract families.
5.8	Accelerate the delivery of our Asset Management approach to increase efficiency and reduce overheads and carbon impact	By supporting communities to apply for windfarm funds, playparks will become more sustainable. Support will be given to communities to reduce our carbon footprint through playpark development
5.10	Broaden the Council's income base through taxation and delivering more commercial Value for Money services	Our financial package written within the strategy is based on Value for Money through providing basic playparks with high play value equipment. We will seek additional funding sources and other income opportunities such as sponsorship.
5.11	Implement the tourism levy as an enabler to a vibrant attractive visitor experience	This could provide benefit for leveraging income to invest in playparks for tourist destinations.

Appendix 9

Literature Review: An evidenced based approach to our strategy

Why we are choosing to prioritise funding for our Playparks

Like all Councils, Highland Council have limited funds which need to be spent wisely. We have established:

- our legal obligations to provide varied outdoor play opportunities to children under 18 years of age;
- Playparks and schools are a fundamental place of play within our communities; and
- Highland Council are committed to increasing health and wellbeing outcomes for children and youth.

Highland Council prioritise children and young people's health and wellbeing because we know that by doing this, we are investing in preventative health. This strategy has been developed and based on increasing health and wellbeing outcomes through an evidence-based approach.

Background and Purpose

Play is fundamental to the healthy development of children, partly because it enables them to learn how to engage with and interact with their environment (Veitch et al., 2020). Unsurprisingly, the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child emphasises that every child has the right to play (OHCHR, 2023). One primary way that children engage in play is through the use of playgrounds. It has been established that playgrounds hold significant value for children due to providing an essential space where they can encounter challenges, engage in sensory experiences, social interactions, and imaginative play (Prellwitz and Skar, 2007). However, playgrounds also have many positive secondary benefits on children's health, wellbeing, and development (Seltenrich, 2015). Using an evidence-based approach, we outline how playgrounds enhance children's health and wellbeing by promoting physical activity, development and cognition, social skills, and form social connectiveness amongst communities.

Physical Activity

Inevitably, the amount of time that children spend playing in parks is associated with increased levels of physical activity. Nevertheless, many children worldwide are facing reduced opportunities for outdoor play and are not meeting physical activity guidelines (Tandon et al., 2012). It has been well established that regular physical activity contributes to beneficial health related outcomes, such as decreased levels of obesity, type II diabetes, chronic illnesses, depression, and anxiety (Cohen et al., 2016).

2.1. Obesity

A large body of literature has found that children who engage in physical activity are less likely to be overweight or obese. For example, a study conducted in Canada found that children who lived within a kilometre from a playpark were five times likelier to be a healthier weight (calculated in BMI) than children who lived further away from playparks (Clayton, 2012). Interestingly, the researchers controlled for variables such as type of neighbourhood, parents BMI, age, and gender; meaning that the effect size was maintained when these variables were taken into consideration. This finding is particularly important because obesity levels are rising, with almost 1/5 children in Scotland being at risk of obesity (Scottish Health Survey, 2021). Not only does obesity negatively impact individuals (by causing cancer, diabetes, and cardiovascular disease), but is also a massive burden on the Scottish economy (Lockyer & Spiro, 2019). Specifically, between £363 million to £600 million is spent annually treating obesity related conditions in Scotland (SPICe Briefing, 2015). In this light, it is essential that children have access to playparks to increase levels of physical activity and therefore reduce health and economic burdens on society.

2.2 Mental Health

In a similar vein, physical activity is also associated with positive mental health outcomes in children and adolescences. For example, in a large systematic review, authors analysed data published from 2010 onwards which examined the relationship between physical activity with anxiety, depression, and self-esteem in children (Dale et al., 2019). Unsurprisingly, the authors found that increased levels physical activity was associated with lower levels of both depression and anxiety, and higher levels of self-esteem and physical self-concept (Dale et al., 2019). It has been indicated that at least 10% of children living in Scotland have a mental health problem that could be clinically diagnosed by a practitioner, with this number rising due to the impact of COVID19 on mental health (Pierce et al., 2020; Mental Health Foundation). Further, research has suggested that mental health issues costs at least £8.8 billion annually to the Scottish economy (Mental Health Foundation and London School of Economics and Political Science). It is of utmost importance that we invest in prevention (such empowering children to engage in physical activity) rather than waiting to treat people who become unwell.

Development and Cognition

Play is essential to development and cognition in children for a variety of reasons (Nijhof et al, 2018). It is not just a frivolous activity; rather, it serves as a fundamental and natural way for children to learn, explore their world, and develop critical skills for workforce succession (Youngman et al, 2018). Play parks promote the development of a wide range of competencies such as cognitive skills, resilience, problem solving, confidence, and imagination (Youngman et al, 2018). Evidence supporting this can be drawn from multiple studies, such as one conducted by Mather and Anderson (1999) which found that creativity and multitasking skills were superior in children who actively played for one hour per day, compared to those who did not. Similarly, results from a randomised controlled trail where children aged 7 to 9 revealed that children who participated in physical play for nine months had greater cognitive flexibility, executive control, and attentional inhibition than children who were in the control group (Hillman et al., 2014). Nurturing these abilities in children equips them with the tools that they need to thrive academically, socially, and emotionally, leading to healthier and more successful lives in the long run (Youngman et al, 2018)

Children's Social Skills

Play parks create a dynamic social environment where children can practice and refine their social skills. These interactions contribute to the development of social competence, emotional intelligence, and the ability to build and maintain positive relationships with others. To be specific, playgrounds enhance social skills in children by:

Cooperative play	Many playground activities require children to work together, such as pushing a swing, playing team games, or pushing each other on a roundabout together. Through cooperative play, children learn to share ideas, learn from each other, achieve common goals, and work in teams.
Shared play spaces	Playgrounds are communal spaces where children from different backgrounds come together to play. This diversity encourages children to interact with peers they might not encounter in other settings, promoting inclusivity and social awareness. This is a prominent example of the application of Allport's (1954) Contact Hypothesis, where contact between various groups of people reduces prejudiced and discrimination.
Conflict resolution	Playgrounds are not immune to conflicts and disagreements between children. Learning to navigate conflicts and find peaceful solutions is an essential social skills that children develop through interactions with others on the playground.
Empathy and Emotional Understanding	Interacting with peers in the playground exposes children to a wide range of emotions in themselves and others. Empathy and emotional

	understanding grow as they respond to the feelings and needs of their playmates.
Inclusive Play	Inclusive playgrounds, designed to accommodate children with various abilities promote interaction between children with and without disabilities. For typically developing children, this encourages empathy, acceptance, and social understanding (Mara and Brown, 1956). Additionally, for children with disabilities, playground promote social network inclusion. For example, one study revealed an association between social network inclusion and playground engagement in children with autism spectrum disorder (Santillan et al., 2019). In a similar vein, it is important to emphasize that every child, including children with disabilities, has the right to actively participate in community life (United Nations, 1989). Nevertheless, research has revealed that children with disabilities face obstacles concerning the accessibility and usability of playgrounds, as well as difficulties in social interactions with other children (Lynch et al, 2020). This underscores the importance of designing playgrounds that cater to the diverse needs and abilities of children (Dunn and Moore, 2005).

The impact of COVID-19 on children’s social connections was significant and multifaceted, which will likely have long lasting effects. To buffer these potential effects, it is essential that children are given safe spaces to develop their informal social skills.

Parents Social Networks

Parks can also provide an environment for parents and family members to form social networks. For example, a study conducted in the United Kingdom found an association between visits to local parks and social networks communication (Kazimierz, 2013). This is thought to be because the readily available and cost-free nature of green spaces offers possibilities for interpersonal interactions among individuals (Peters et al., 2010). It is particularly important that we work towards fostering social networks because social connections among urban neighbourhood residents are decreasing as a result of shifting work patterns, greater mobility, and advancements in communication (Kazimierz, 2013). It seems important to note that loneliness has been defined as the next public health epidemic in the 21st century, because of its serious health implications. Specifically, a 2010 metanalyses revealed that people with social relationships had a 50% increase in odds of survival as a function of social relationships (Holt-Lundstedt et al., 2010). To put this into context, the impact of loneliness on health is comparable with risk factors for mortality such as smoking and drinking and exceed physical inactivity and obesity (Holt-Lundstedt et al., 2010). This compelling evidence depicts the importance of providing parks where members of the community can form social networks.

Socioeconomic Status

Interestingly, researchers have established that children from lower socioeconomic status (SES) have lower access to outdoor play equipment and have a decreased odds of spending over two hours outside during the weekend than children who belong to a higher SES (Dumuid et al, 2016; Tandon et al, 2012). Unfairly, children from lower SES already experience many inequalities which can lead to serious ongoing social, cognitive, and health challenges. To be specific, the socioeconomic health gradient can be applied, where for every decrease in SES, there is a larger decrease in health (for example, children raised in households with a lower SES face a greater risk of cardiovascular disease, as well as a higher all-cause mortality, compared to their counterparts from higher SES households). Put simply, ensuring children who belong to a low SES have access to playgrounds may help to close the gap between SES and health by:

1. **Increase physical activity in children from lower SES:** A study conducted in the United Kingdom found that children from lower SES neighborhoods participated in less physical activity than those from higher SES neighborhoods (Gorely et al., 2009). Thus, it is unsurprising that in the UK, child weight follows a distinct SES pattern, with children from lower SES being disproportionately overweight or obese (Lockyer & Spiro, 2019).
2. **Decreasing stress related hormones:** Children from lower SES statuses tend to have higher levels of stress related hormones (i.e., cortisol). For example, one study revealed that by aged 10, children from a low SES had almost double the number of circulating glucocorticoids than high SES children (Sapolsky, 2007). High levels of stress related hormones mediate a most of the SES health gradient and can lead to a wide range of serious consequences such as depression, anxiety, cardiovascular disease, dementia, inflammatory bowel disease, as well as cognitive and developmental impairments. Importantly, it has been found that access to parks can reduce levels of stress related hormones. Specifically, the results of one study revealed that cortisol levels decreased after a visit to the park, with a visit of a higher duration being significantly associated with a lower reduction (Gao et al., 2021).

With a 2016 report revealed that the knock-on effects of child poverty costing the UK £6 billion, it is essential that mechanisms are put in place to try and reduce this cost (Bramley et al, 2016).

Types of Playground Features

Playground features can vary significantly across playgrounds. In an attempt to understand what playground features were important to children, Veitch et al (2020) interviewed a sample of children. Two main themes were identified:

(1) Risk and Adventure: children preferred playground equipment which involved an element of risk, such as large swings, slides, and flying foxes.

(2) Nature Based Play: the children participating in this study mentioned liking activities like rolling down hills, playing hide-and-seek behind trees, playing with water, and climbing on rocks. They also expressed a preference for spacious areas where they could ride bikes, engage in fun games, and participate in sports. These findings align with earlier research, which demonstrated that the implementation of nature-based playground substantially boosted children's visits to parks and their engagement in physical activities (Cohen et al., 2015).

Summary of Main Findings

Physical Activity	Playgrounds increase the level of physical activity in children, which results in: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lower levels of obesity • Lower levels mental health conditions
Cognition and development	Cognition and development are supported through the use of playgrounds.
Social skills	Playgrounds promote a various range of social skills, which leads to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learning skills such as teamwork, conflict resolution, empathy, and emotional understanding • Decreased levels of racism and prejudiced attitudes.

Inclusive playgrounds	<p>Inclusive playgrounds help:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nondisabled children learn empathy, acceptance, and social understanding. • Disabled children to be included and form social networks
Social and Community Networks	<p>Social networks for both children and parents can be flourished through playgrounds, which is essential in our rapidly changing world.</p>
Socioeconomic Health Gradient	<p>Playgrounds can help to reduce the socioeconomic health gradient between low SES and high SES children, resulting in better health outcomes.</p>
Features of Playgrounds	<p>Children enjoy play features which have:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An element of risk and adventure • Nature based play

Appendix 10

LITERATURE SEARCH – HIGHLAND PLAY STRATEGY 2023-2027

Bibliography

- Archer, T. (2014). Health benefits of physical exercise for children and adolescents. *Journal of Novel Physiotherapies*, 04(02). <https://doi.org/10.4172/2165-7025.1000203>
- Clayton, S. D. (2012). *The Oxford Handbook of Environmental and Conservation Psychology*. Oxford University Press.
- Cohen, D. A., Han, B., Isacoff, J., Shulaker, B., Williamson, S., Marsh, T., McKenzie, T. L., Weir, M., & Bhatia, R. (2015). Impact of park renovations on park use and park-based physical activity. *Journal of Physical Activity and Health*, 12(2), 289–295. <https://doi.org/10.1123/jpah.2013-0165>
- Convention on the rights of the child*. OHCHR. (n.d.). <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/convention-rights-child#:~:text=Article%2031,-1.&text=States%20Parties%20recognize%20the%20right,cultural%20life%20and%20the%20arts>.
- Dale, L. P., Vanderloo, L., Moore, S., & Faulkner, G. (2019). Physical activity and depression, anxiety, and self-esteem in children and youth: An umbrella systematic review. *Mental Health and Physical Activity*, 16, 66–79. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.mhpa.2018.12.001>
- Dumuid, D., Olds, T. S., Lewis, L. K., & Maher, C. (2016). Does home equipment contribute to socioeconomic gradients in Australian children's physical activity, sedentary time and screen time? *BMC Public Health*, 16(1). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12889-016-3419-9>
- Gao, J., Mancus, G. C., Yuen, H. K., Watson, J. H., Lake, M. L., & Jenkins, G. R. (2021). Changes in cortisol and dehydroepiandrosterone levels immediately after urban park visits. *International Journal of Environmental Health Research*, 33(2), 206–218. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09603123.2021.2013454>
- Gorely, T., Atkin, A. J., Biddle, S. J. H., & Marshall, S. J. (2009). Family circumstance, sedentary behaviour and physical activity in adolescents living in England: Project stil. *International Journal of Behavioral Nutrition and Physical Activity*, 6(1), 33. <https://doi.org/10.1186/1479-5868-6-33>

- Hillman, CH., Pontifex, HB., Castellie, DM. (2014). Effects of the FITKids randomized controlled trial on executive control and brain function. *PEDIATRICS*, 134(4).
<https://doi.org/10.1542/peds.2013-3219d>
- Każmierczak, A. (2013). The contribution of local parks to neighbourhood social ties. *Landscape and Urban Planning*, 109(1), 31–44. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.landurbplan.2012.05.007>
- Lockyer, S., & Spiro, A. (2019). Socio-economic inequalities in childhood obesity: Can community level interventions help to reduce the gap? *Nutrition Bulletin*, 44(4), 381–393.
<https://doi.org/10.1111/nbu.12410>
- Mather, J. A., & Anderson, R. C. (1999). Exploration, play and habituation in octopuses (octopus dofleini). *Journal of Comparative Psychology*, 113(3), 333–338. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0735-7036.113.3.333>
- Moore, L, Roux, A. D., Evenson, K., McGinn, A., & Brines, S. (2006). Availability of recreational resources in minority and low socioeconomic areas. *American Journal of Epidemiology*, 163(suppl_11). https://doi.org/10.1093/aje/163.suppl_11.s160-c
- McCurdy, L. E., Winterbottom, K. E., Mehta, S. S., & Roberts, J. R. (2010). Using nature and outdoor activity to improve children's health. *Current Problems in Pediatric and Adolescent Health Care*, 40(5), 102–117. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cppeds.2010.02.003>
- Nijhof, S. L., Vinkers, C. H., van Geelen, S. M., Duijff, S. N., Achterberg, E. J. M., van der Net, J., Veltkamp, R. C., Grootenhuis, M. A., van de Putte, E. M., Hillegers, M. H. J., van der Brug, A. W., Wierenga, C. J., Benders, M. J. N. L., Engels, R. C. M. E., van der Ent, C. K., Vanderschuren, L. J. M. J., & Lesscher, H. M. B. (2018). Healthy Play, better coping: The importance of play for the development of children in health and disease. *Neuroscience & Biobehavioral Reviews*, 95, 421–429. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.neubiorev.2018.09.024>
- Obesity in Scotland - parlamaid.scot. (n.d.).
http://www.parlamaid.scot/ResearchBriefingsAndFactsheets/S4/SB_15-01_Obesity_in_Scotland.pdf
- Pierce, M., Hope, H., Ford, T., Hatch, S., Hotopf, M., Kontopantelis, E., John, A., Webb, R. T., Wessely, S., McManus, S., & Abel, K. M. (2020). Mental health before and during the COVID-19 pandemic: A longitudinal probability sample survey of the UK population. *SSRN Electronic Journal*. <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3624264>

- Preedy, P. (2019). Enhancing physical development through play. *The Physical Development Needs of Young Children*, 185–203. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429469831-15>
- Potwarka, L. R., Kaczynski, A. T., & Flack, A. L. (2008). Places to play: Association of Park Space and facilities with healthy weight status among children. *Journal of Community Health*, 33(5), 344–350. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10900-008-9104-x>
- Santillan, L., Frederick, L., Gilmore, S., & Locke, J. (2019). Brief report: Examining the association between Classroom Social Network Inclusion and playground peer engagement among children with autism spectrum disorders. *Focus on Autism and Other Developmental Disabilities*, 34(2), 91–96. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1088357619838275>
- Seltenrich, N. (2015). Just what the doctor ordered: Using Parks to improve children's health. *Environmental Health Perspectives*, 123(10). <https://doi.org/10.1289/ehp.123-a254>
- Tandon, P. S., Zhou, C., Sallis, J. F., Cain, K. L., Frank, L. D., & Saelens, B. E. (2012). Home environment relationships with children's physical activity, sedentary time, and screen time by socioeconomic status. *International Journal of Behavioral Nutrition and Physical Activity*, 9(1), 88. <https://doi.org/10.1186/1479-5868-9-88>
- Veitch, J., Flowers, E., Ball, K., Deforche, B., & Timperio, A. (2020). Exploring children's views on important park features: A qualitative study using walk-along interviews. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 17(13), 4625. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph17134625>
- Youngman, M., Garner, A., Hutchinson, J. (2018). The Power of Play: A Paediatric Role in Enhancing Development in Young Children. American Academy of Paediatrics. 3, 142. <https://par.nsf.gov/servlets/purl/10119315>

General Research

Extensive literature search on different types of play, play value, play parks

Government regulations on Open Space Strategy and Play Sufficiency Assessments
<https://www.gov.scot/publications/consultation-open-space-strategies-play-sufficiency-assessments-regulations/pages/2/>

Play Strategy for Scotland 2013 - <https://www.gov.scot/publications/play-strategy-scotland-vision/pages/6/>

Play Strategy for Scotland 2020 Review - <https://www.youthlinkscotland.org/media/6000/play-scotland-play-strategy-review-2020.pdf>

Scotland Play Strategy and Updates - <https://www.playscotland.org/policy/play-strategy/>

Play Strategy for Scotland 2021 Review - <https://www.youthlinkscotland.org/media/6001/play-scotland-play-strategy-review-play-in-covid-2021.pdf>

Highland Play Matters 2012-2015

Highland play strategy 2016-2020

Highland Map of Play Areas -

<https://highland.maps.arcgis.com/apps/webappviewer/index.html?id=2eb6d71cbd5a4d52bd2f3fe0e8c65025>

Play Scotland - https://www.playscotland.org/resources/print/Power-of-play-Toolkit.pdf?plsctl_id=13148

United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) Article 31 - <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/convention-rights-child>

Designing Streets - <https://www.gov.scot/publications/designing-streets-policy-statement-scotland/pages/2/>

[Open Space Strategy and Pay Sufficiency Assessments Regulations: consultation 2/11/22](#)

[Stirling Council Local Development Plan](#)

<https://www.gov.scot/binaries/content/documents/govscot/publications/factsheet/2018/06/stirling-council-planning-authority-core-documents/documents/sg01-placemaking-sep-2014/sg01-placemaking-sep-2014/govscot%3Adocument/SG01%2B-%2BPlacemaking.pdf>

Play Scotland Power of Play Toolkit - https://www.playscotland.org/resources/print/Power-of-play-Toolkit.pdf?plsctl_id=13148

<https://www.ourplace.scot/resource/good-places-better-health-new-approach-environment-and-health-scotland#:~:text=A%20new%20approach%20to%20environment%20and%20health%20in%20Scotland,-Good%20Places%2C%20Better&text=This%20document%20recognises%20that%20to,the%20physical%20environment%20influences%20health.>

[SG Designing Places and Designing Streets Scottish Planning Policy](#)

<https://www.gov.scot/binaries/content/documents/govscot/publications/corporate-report/2010/03/designing-streets-policy-statement-scotland/documents/0096540-pdf/0096540-pdf/govscot%3Adocument/0096540.pdf>

[About Place - https://www.ourplace.scot/about-place](https://www.ourplace.scot/about-place)

Highland Council Committee: Communities and Place Date: 23 February 2023 Report Title: Capital Budget Monitoring Report

Building Bulletin 102 Designing for disabled children and children with special educational needs –

<https://www.ourplace.scot/resource/good-places-better-health-new-approach-environment-and-health-scotland#:~:text=A%20new%20approach%20to%20environment%20and%20health%20in%20Scotland,-Good%20Places%2C%20Better&text=This%20document%20recognises%20that%20to,the%20physical%20environment%20influences%20health>

SCOTLAND'S GOOD PLACES, BETTER HEALTH

https://www.understandingglasgow.com/assets/0000/4841/Good_Places_Better_Health.pdf

HIGHLAND PLACE MAKING BEST PRACTICE

<https://www.google.com/search?client=safari&rls=en&q=HIGHLAND+PLACEMAKING&ie=UTF-8&oe=UTF-8>

SCOTLAND PLACEMAKING – INCLUDES NATIONAL PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

<https://www.ourplace.scot/about-place>

SCOTLAND GOVERNMENT DESIGNING STREETS <https://www.gov.scot/publications/designing-streets-policy-statement-scotland/pages/2/>

HIGHLAND INTEGRATED CHILDREN'S SERVICE 3 YEAR PLAN FOR A SHARED VISION

http://forhighlandschildren.org/index_69_464745328.pdf

WHO - GLOBAL ACTION PLAN ON PHYSICAL ACTIVITY 2018-2030

<https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/272722/9789241514187-eng.pdf>

[LEARNING FOR SUSTAINABILITY -](https://education.gov.scot/improvement/Documents/LearningforSustainability-Vision2030ActionPlan.pdf)

<https://education.gov.scot/improvement/Documents/LearningforSustainability-Vision2030ActionPlan.pdf>

PATHS FOR ALL – HELP WITH FUNDING ACCESSIBLE PATHWAYS

<https://www.pathsforall.org.uk/community-paths>

EDUCATION SUSTAINABILITY SCOTLAND

<https://education.gov.scot/improvement/Documents/LearningforSustainability-Vision2030ActionPlan.pdf>

CHILDREN IN SCOTLAND <https://childreninscotland.org.uk/member-directory-full/> -

NETWORKING, POLICY CHANGE AND ENGAGING WITH CHILDREN

VERY SUSTAINABLE <https://www.kompan.com/en/gb/inspiration>

https://www.timotayplayscapes.co.uk/play_park-design/?gclid=CjwKCAjw8JKbBhBYEiwAs3sxN27ND2KaLVD78CATzbLGOZucQiboVNpLvSS2I0JcQzMZq9t7oNiEexoCCCAQAvD

Images and Photos supplied by Pexel and Unsplash