



# 'Something to do'

**A strategy to improve play opportunities for children and young people in Coventry**



## Glossary of Abbreviations

APA	Annual Performance Assessment
BME	Black and Minority Ethnic Community
CABE Space	Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment
CAFES	Children and Family Education Service
CD	City Development Directorate
CtS	City Services Directorate
CS	Community Services Directorate
DCLYP	Children, Learning and Young People's Directorate
DCMS	Department for Culture, Media and Sport
GIS	Geographical Information System
MORI	Market Opinion Research International
MUGA	Multi Use Games Area
NEAP	Neighbourhood Equipped Area for Play
PSA	Public Service Agreement
YNM	Your Neighbourhood Matters

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## 1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 Modern living has thrown up a range of barriers to children playing. More traffic, less open space, real and perceived dangers from crime, changes in family life and new patterns of work have all restricted the opportunities that previous generations of children took for granted.
- 1.2 The consequences of this are significant. Increasing childhood obesity, 'anti-social behaviour' and mental health problems have all been attributed at least in part to young lifestyles that are more sedentary and restricted than at any time in recent history.
- 1.3 The Government has recognised the need to make better provision for children's play and acknowledged the fact that it is an integral aspect of other policy agendas from planning, regeneration, open spaces and transport, to health, education and childcare. Most significantly, the enjoyment of 'recreation' including play is one of the key outcomes for children that authorities are required to consider in drawing up co-ordinated children and young people's plans under the Children Act 2004.
- 1.4 *Getting Serious About Play: A Review of Children's Play (2004)*, commissioned by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) to advise on lottery funding for play, recommended that 'authorities should take the opportunity...to improve the planning and operation of play facilities across their areas...in partnership with other local agencies, children and young people and local communities...'
- 1.5 Last year, Big Lottery announced a £155m funding programme to improve children's play opportunities broadly based on this review. Indicative allocations have been made to local authority areas, which may be drawn down to support the delivery of projects once a play strategy has been put in place. Coventry's indicative allocation is £790,000, to be spent over three years.
- 1.6 The provision of play opportunities, particularly play space, is a complex issue. Play areas often become a focus for anti-social behaviour, from both young people and adults. Vandalism is a recurrent and frustrating problem. Children and young people need places to play where they feel safe, yet residents object to them being located too close to homes. Parents do not always understand the benefits of playing outside and getting messy.
- 1.7 Complex problems require complex solutions. Many services have an impact on the quality, quantity and accessibility of children's play: Parks Service, Planning and Transportation, City Services, Environmental Services, Regeneration Services, Police. Children's play has a critical role in supporting the objectives of many partners: Children's Centres, Primary Care Trust, voluntary sector, schools.
- 1.8 Coventry's Play Strategy has been developed by a range of Council services working in partnership with the voluntary sector. The production of this strategy and the submission of a portfolio of projects to the Big Lottery's Play

Programme should not be viewed as the end of a process. It is just the beginning.

- 1.9 The action plan at the end of this document is key to the implementation of the strategy, and to creating more and better play opportunities for children and young people in the city.

*...it should be remembered that strategies alone do not create a single extra play space or provide even one part-time worker to work alongside young people. In the end it is the political willingness to make things happen and the enthusiasm of people working in the field to be bold and ambitious that makes the difference.*

Ken Worpole, *No Particular Place To Go?*

## 2.0 Overview

- 2.1 The city of Coventry covers an area of 38 square miles and is the 19th largest local authority in England, with a population of 304,189
- 2.2 21.7% of the population come from minority communities, with 23% of young people aged 0 – 19 from BME communities.
- 2.3 The profile of asylum seekers, refugees and new arrivals to the city has changed significantly since 1999. In 2005/06 approximately 1,000 school age children and young people arrived in the City.
- 2.4 The population is younger than average, with 42% under the age of 30 compared with the all-England average of 38%.
- 2.5 This is the result of students in our two universities, an exodus of working age adults in the 1980's, who would now be approaching retirement, and an ethnic minority population who are predominantly young adults and children.
- 2.6 In recent years, the city has been successful in reducing unemployment levels and has become more affluent. It now ranks 64th out of 354 authorities in terms of socio-economic deprivation (1 being the most deprived).
- 2.7 There is considerable deprivation and economic disadvantage in some areas of the city – generally in the north and north-east, with smaller pockets in other locations.
- 2.8 Figures from the 2001 Census show that 9% of Coventry's population and 20% of our 0-19 year-olds live in areas ranked within the top 10% most deprived in England.
- 2.9 The Wood End and Hillfields neighbourhoods are identified in the top 100 most deprived areas in England.
- 2.10 Despite increased prosperity in recent years:
- 22% of our children and young people live in households where none of the adults are employed
  - 15% live in overcrowded households
  - 23% live in households without access to a car or a van
  - 27% live in lone parent households, a majority of whom are unemployed
  - 22% live in rented social housing
  - 10% of babies born in Coventry in 2004 weighed less than 2.4 kilos (c. 5lbs)
- 2.11 The following page maps areas of multiple deprivation in the city i.e. those that are within the 10% most deprived nationally. It shows how Coventry's wards differ with respect to total population, 0 – 19 year old population, numbers of black and minority ethnic children, crime rates, household income, lone parent households and level of qualifications.

Bablake	
Population	20,631
% 0 – 19 y.o	25%
% BME children	9%
Crime rate (per 1000)	79.2
Household Income	£32,495
Lone parent Households	4%
% 5 GCSE's A* to C	59.5%

Radford	
Population	15,278
% 0 – 19 y.o	26%
% BME children	25%
Crime rate (per 1000)	103.2
Household Income	£27,634
Lone parent Households	10%
% 5 GCSE's A* to C	32.7%

Holbrook	
Population	14,021
% 0 – 19 y.o	29%
% BME children	24%
Crime rate (per 1000)	75.1
Household Income	£29,024
Lone parent Households	10%
% 5 GCSE's A* to C	40.8%

Longford	
Population	19,581
% 0 – 19 y.o	28%
% BME children	23%
Crime rate (per 1000)	115.6
Household Income	£27,579
Lone parent Households	10%
% 5 GCSE's A* to C	35.8%

Henley	
Population	20,531
% 0 – 19 y.o	29%
% BME children	12%
Crime rate (per 1000)	192.9
Household Income	£28,397
Lone parent Households	13%
% 5 GCSE's A* to C	35.6%

Sherbourne	
Population	14,929
% 0 – 19 y.o	24%
% BME children	11%
Crime rate (per 1000)	106.4
Household Income	£31,445
Lone parent Households	6%
% 5 GCSE's A* to C	58.2%

Woodlands	
Population	16,687
% 0 – 19 y.o	25%
% BME children	6%
Crime rate (per 1000)	57.7
Household Income	£31,389
Lone parent Households	7%
% 5 GCSE's A* to C	56.3%

Whoberley	
Population	14,183
% 0 – 19 y.o	21%
% BME children	12%
Crime rate (per 1000)	73.0
Household Income	£30,875
Lone parent Households	5%
% 5 GCSE's A* to C	61.2%

Westwood	
Population	15,743
% 0 – 19 y.o	27%
% BME children	8%
Crime rate (per 1000)	99.4
Household Income	£30,960
Lone parent Households	9%
% 5 GCSE's A* to C	40.3%

Wainbody	
Population	17,035
% 0 – 19 y.o	29%
% BME children	20%
Crime rate (per 1000)	62.2
Household Income	£38,291
Lone parent Households	4%
% 5 GCSE's A* to C	73.2%

Earlsdon	
Population	16,667
% 0 – 19 y.o	23%
% BME children	16%
Crime rate (per 1000)	68.6
Household Income	£39,109
Lone parent Households	4%
% 5 GCSE's A* to C	80.9%

St. Michael's	
Population	19,911
% 0 – 19 y.o	27%
% BME children	42%
Crime rate (per 1000)	526.4
Household Income	£24,624
Lone parent Households	13%
% 5 GCSE's A* to C	26.4%

Cheylesmore	
Population	15,706
% 0 – 19 y.o	22%
% BME children	20%
Crime rate (per 1000)	85.5
Household Income	£32,155
Lone parent Households	5%
% 5 GCSE's A* to C	51.7%

Binley & Willenhall	
Population	17,685
% 0 – 19 y.o	28%
% BME children	9%
Crime rate (per 1000)	146.9
Household Income	£28,882
Lone parent Households	10%
% 5 GCSE's A* to C	34.4%

Foleshill	
Population	18,397
% 0 – 19 y.o	33%
% BME children	61%
Crime rate (per 1000)	167.8
Household Income	£23,760
Lone parent Households	14%
% 5 GCSE's A* to C	36%

Upper Stoke	
Population	16,332
% 0 – 19 y.o	26%
% BME children	27%
Crime rate (per 1000)	148.7
Household Income	£27,081
Lone parent Households	9%
% 5 GCSE's A* to C	44.8%

Wyken	
Population	15,453
% 0 – 19 y.o	25%
% BME children	16%
Crime rate (per 1000)	98.9
Household Income	£31,097
Lone parent Households	7%
% 5 GCSE's A* to C	57.8%

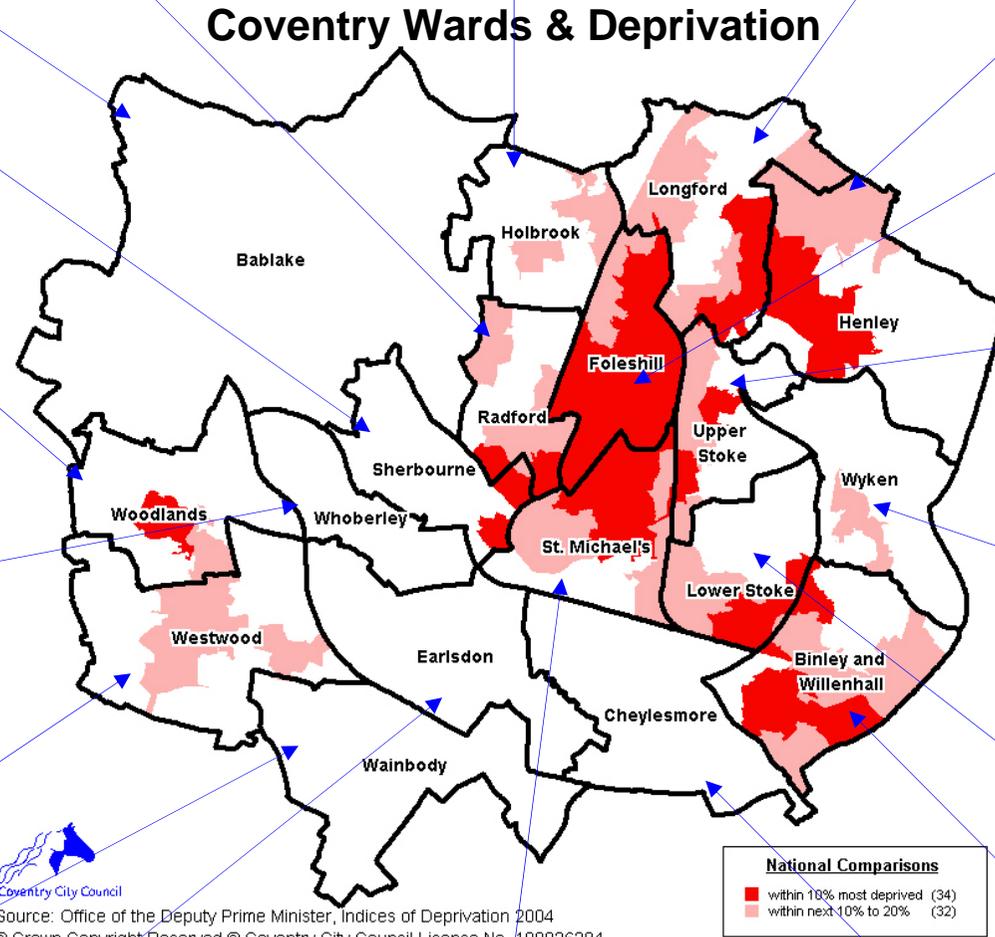
Lower Stoke	
Population	15,283
% 0 – 19 y.o	27%
% BME children	16%
Crime rate (per 1000)	129.3
Household Income	£30,643
Lone parent Households	9%
% 5 GCSE's A* to C	45.5%

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Crime rate (per 1000)	146.9
Household Income	£28,882
Lone parent Households	10%
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**National Comparisons**  
 ■ within 10% most deprived (34)  
 ■ within next 10% to 20% (32)

Source: Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, Indices of Deprivation 2004  
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### 3.0 Purpose and scope of the strategy

3.1 The purpose of this Play Strategy is to help Coventry City Council and its partners:

- **Develop more and better local and inclusive play spaces and opportunities;**
- **Create a more child-friendly public realm;**
- **Improve understanding of the importance of children's play across the range of policy areas that have an impact on children's lives;**
- **Embed play within key strategic plans and initiatives;**
- **Make effective use of funding.**

3.2 Whilst the production of a Coventry Play Strategy will trigger the release of Big Lottery funding, its most important task is to create lasting change and improvement in the way that play opportunities are delivered in the city.

3.3 The Big Lottery funding alone cannot be relied upon to make all the improvements that are necessary. It must be used strategically to pilot new approaches and to stimulate new ways of working across Council Services and external partners.

#### **What Do We Mean by 'Children's Play'?**

3.4 In April 2006, a group of Coventry play practitioners and policy makers came together and pooled their definitions of play. Definitions and phrases that they suggested included:

*"Informal learning and socialisation"*  
*"Play is freedom to choose"*  
*"Play is experiencing the world around us"*  
*"Play is confidence building, making friendships"*  
*"Being able to choose"*  
*"Through play children understand and make sense of their world and therefore play can be a vehicle for therapy"*  
*"Having fun"*  
*"In physical play, children's health can be enhanced"*  
*"Play is a fun experience providing emotional well-being"*

- 3.5 Play is not just about physical activity, but can have a cognitive, imaginative, emotional, creative and social dimension. Young people may not describe what they do as play, but they need the same time, space and freedom associated with play as younger age groups.
- 3.6 **This strategy has adopted the following definition of play, taken from the Big Lottery's *Planning for Play* document:**
- 3.7 ***" Play is what children and young people do when they follow their own ideas, in their own way and for their own reasons."***
- 3.8 The Big Lottery funding allocation is available for projects which promote 'free, open access play', which means 'play opportunities which are free of charge, where children are free to choose what they do and free to come and go as they please'.
- 3.9 This strategy therefore takes as its first priority 'free, open access play'. It recognises however, that this definition potentially excludes very young children, who may not be able to come and go as they please, and children with disabilities, whose complex needs might require closed access settings. These groups are therefore specifically included within the scope of the strategy.
- 3.10 The strategy does not cover organised sport, groups, clubs or classes, or play within school or childcare settings (unless the play is free and open access), although it recognises that these environments have an important role to play.
- 3.11 The strategy covers all children and young people aged 0 – 19 years, but recognises that disadvantaged groups need a special emphasis to ensure that they have equality of access to available play opportunities.

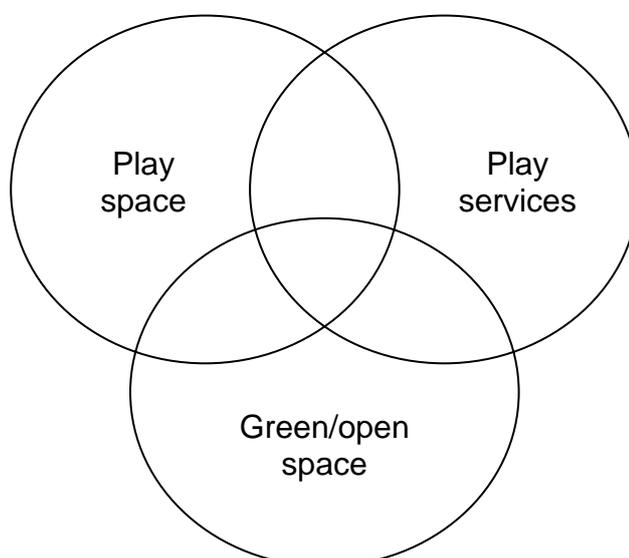
### **Where Do Children Play?**

- 3.12 Children play wherever they are: at school, at home, inside or outdoors, in childcare and play provision, in the street, in public and private places.
- 3.13 When we talk about play provision, the type that most obviously comes to mind is the public play area or playground within a park or open space setting. This is generally unstaffed. Other provision can include adventure playgrounds, holiday play schemes, parent and toddler groups, mobile play projects, which are generally run by adult staff. Some of these staffed services are 'open access', allowing children to come and go as they please.

- 3.14 Informal leisure facilities include play areas, parks and open spaces, skateparks, basketball courts, kickabout areas, BMX tracks and multi-use games areas. Many forms of childcare, including nurseries, pre-schools, afterschool clubs, breakfast clubs, aim to provide play opportunities for the children in their care. Schools, nurseries and other educational settings, including wildlife centres, also provide space and time for play. Research shows that only a small proportion of school premises, playgrounds, areas and equipment are open out of hours for wider community use.
- 3.15 Much play does not take place in designated play spaces. Many children play at home or in the garden, use local streets or any local spaces and buildings from which they are not excluded. This can be particularly important for children with little or no play space at home, and means that transport policies should ensure that children on foot and on bikes have high priority in local streets.

*"increasing urbanisation has left our children with far fewer opportunities than previous generations to play freely outdoors and experience the natural environment. Good quality public spaces – including well-designed schools grounds – can help fill this gap, providing children with opportunities for fun, exercise and learning."*  
CABE Space (The Value of Public Space)

- 3.16 *Getting Serious About Play (2004)* argues that 'the visible presence of children and young people making harmless and inoffensive use of public spaces is a sign of a healthy community'. What a planner or developer may feel is an unused brown field site may turn out to be a major informal play area, whose disappearance would deprive local children. Safeguarding the freedom and safety of children to play should run through local public agenda.
- 3.17 The Big Lottery Play Programme Guidance suggests that play strategies should cover:



## 4.0 Vision for the children and young people of Coventry

4.1 Coventry and its partners share the Government's vision of Every Child Matters. All children in Coventry should be able to be healthy, stay safe, enjoy life and achieve success, make a positive contribution and benefit from economic well-being. A sixth outcome has been developed in Coventry – that of having supportive, friends and communities.

4.2 Coventry's vision, developed with children and young people, is:

*Working together to find out what children want to make their lives better*

and

*Working to keep families together*

'Working together' means improving the way we work so that:

- there are clear **accountability and governance** arrangements across and within all partners;
- children and young people and their families **participate** at a strategic and operational level in the planning and delivery of services, and we **respond to what they say**;
- services are **co-ordinated and integrated** as appropriate, experienced as a 'single organisation', and made **accessible**;
- services are organised around **communities**, whether geographically or around communities of interest, enabling **effective local targeting**;
- we recognise and value **diversity** and plan services accordingly;
- we jointly commission services (and therefore **pool resources**) against high standards;
- we improve **efficiency** and reduce **duplication**, freeing resources to fill gaps;
- we strengthen and **sustain the local voluntary and community** sectors;
- we focus on making a difference to the lives of children and young people.

4.3 Underpinning the way we work are the following values:

- demonstrate good leadership;
- put the customer first;
- provide good value for money;
- value diversity, social justice and community cohesion;
- work in partnership.

4.4 The Play Strategy will contribute to this vision, adopting the underpinning values and the ways of working outlined above.

## **5.0 Play Policy**

5.1 Coventry does not have a formal play policy. However this strategy has been developed using the Best Play 'seven Best Play objectives' as a reference point. These focus on the benefits that children gain from their play and the role of public provision in creating spaces and services that enable these benefits to be achieved.

5.2 The strategy focuses on improving outcomes for children and on ensuring that their views and needs are taken into consideration.

5.3 The seven 'Best Play' objectives are listed below:

### **The seven 'Best Play' objectives**

#### *Objective 1*

Extend the choice and control that children have over their play, the freedom they enjoy and the satisfaction they gain from it

#### *Objective 2*

Recognise the child's need to test boundaries and responds positively to that need

#### *Objective 3*

Manage the balance between the need to offer risk and the need to keep children safe from harm

#### *Objective 4*

Maximise the range of play opportunities

#### *Objective 5*

Foster independence and self-esteem

#### *Objective 5*

Foster children's respect for others and offers opportunities for social interaction

*Objective 7*

Foster the child's well being, healthy growth and development, knowledge and understanding, creativity and capacity to learn

**Best Play (Children's Play Council, 2000)**

- 5.4 It has also taken into account the Play Safety Forum's position statement, 'Managing risk in play provision'. The summary statement is set out below:

Children need and want to take risks when they play. Play provision aims to respond to these needs and wishes by offering children stimulating, challenging environments for exploring and developing their abilities. In doing this, play provision aims to manage the level of risk so that children are not exposed to unacceptable risks of death or serious injury.

**Play Safety Forum, August 2002**

- 5.5 Further work will be done through the Play Strategy Action Plan to continue the debate on acceptable risk and challenge in relation to children's play provision.

## 6.0 The Case for Play

- 6.1 Research increasingly shows that for children and young people to stay healthy, be safe, enjoy their childhood, achieve their potential, contribute to society and achieve economic well-being, they must have opportunities for free play and informal recreation throughout their childhood.
- 6.2 Play is important in its own right, but also is critically relevant to other policy agendas and has specific links to strategic documents such as open space strategies, cultural strategies, community plans, children and young people's plans.

### Play and Learning

- 6.3 There have been many studies on the educational benefits of play in the development of young children. It is also widely believed that play has wide-ranging benefits for all children, particularly in relation to emotional and social learning e.g. sharing and learning tolerance. Play complements schooling by providing an opportunity for children to review and absorb and to give personal meaning to what they learn in formal educational settings.

*"What is acquired through play is not specific information, but a general mind set towards problem solving" where "children string bits of information together to form novel solutions to problems requiring the restructuring of thought or action" (Sylva 1977)*

### Play, Health and Well-being

- 6.4 Play is crucial to the development of good physical and mental health. The Chief Medical Officer recommends that *'children and young people should achieve a total of at least 60 minutes of at least moderate-intensity activity each day'*. Evidence suggests that ensuring opportunities for free play is the best way of achieving this.
- 6.5 The Government White Paper Choosing Health (2004), noted that *'many children appear to have less time being physically active....because of the increase in car use and heightened concern about the potential risks of unsupervised play outdoors....'*
- 6.6 The British Medical Journal reported in 2001 that there is *'an obesity epidemic in young children'* and the main solution should be to *'reduce television viewing and promote playing'*. The report identifies that *'opportunities for spontaneous playing may be the only requirement that young children need to increase their physical activity'*.

- 6.7 The joint report from the National Audit Office, the Audit Commission and the Healthcare Commission *Tackling Child Obesity – First Steps (February 2006)* notes that play has a significant role in helping to meet the child obesity PSA target.
- 6.8 Many of the attributes enhanced by play are found to be helpful in developing resilience to mental health problems. Lack of outdoor play and supervised play provision has been identified by the Mental Health Foundation as a causative factor in the rise of mental ill health in young people.

### **Play and the Environment**

- 6.9 A research report by Demos and the Green Alliance has found that the lack of access children from urban backgrounds have to natural environments is proving to be detrimental. The report recommends that there should be increased access for children from disadvantaged backgrounds to good quality open space and its design.

*"Children are losing their connection with the natural environment and their well-being and environmental quality are inextricably linked. The worse an environment looks, the less able children are to play freely." (A Child's Play – why environment matters to children, Green Alliance/Demos, 2004)*

- 6.10 Most adults who are asked to recall childhood memories would probably think back to playing outdoors in natural spaces. This might have included climbing trees, building dens, picking fruit, paddling in rivers and many other experiences. Children today are, in general, less likely to be able to experience such 'wild play' experiences.

*"The barriers facing today's children to playing in outdoor spaces with natural elements (wild spaces) are numerous and varied. In general, these barriers comprise both restricted access to - e.g. increased urbanisation, a rise in parental fears of children's safety outdoors - and the attraction of indoor, sedentary lifestyles - the rise of televisions, computers and cars..... A lack of outdoor play opportunities threatens children's physical, mental and emotional development. Furthermore, meaningful connections to the natural world, an intrinsic human ingredient, have become limited by a lack of first-hand experience in wild spaces."(Breaking down barriers and building bridges through environmental playwork: Martin Maudsley, Wild About Play)*

**Wild spaces are green outdoor**

**places** where some areas are growing **wild**.

**They** may be completely natural such as ancient **woodland**

**or** be mixed in with artificial elements such as urban parks. **Wild**

**spaces** come in many different shapes and sizes, and **can**

**be** large or small, wet or dry, open or enclosed, near **or**

**far**, tall or short, messy or tidy, green or brown ... **wild**

**spaces**, country lanes, hedgerows, **woodland**,

**city** farms, grassland, **beaches**,

**heathland**, **gardens**,

**rivers**, **shrubs**,

**verges**, **ponds**,

**fields**, **hills**,

**parks**,

**trees**,

**farmland**,

**sand dunes**,

**village greens**, **muddy hollows** ...

(Wild About Play 2004)

## **Play and Anti-Social Behaviour**

- 6.11 Adults often perceive children and young people 'hanging out' or playing in public spaces as a nuisance or a threat. Consequently, children and young people often feel scapegoated and excluded from space that they have a right to share.
- 6.12 A report from Groundwork for the Urban Green Spaces Taskforce, 2002, stated 'Young people are often represented as the perpetrators of crime, and yet it is clear that in terms of parks and green spaces they see themselves as the victims. They suffer anti-social behaviour in the form of bullying from other age groups but also on the part of adults – ranging from the possibility of attack in unlit areas to adults allowing their dogs to roam loose in children's areas. Contrary to expectations, young people are also very concerned about issues of maintenance in parks and green space.'
- 6.13 Research commissioned by CABI Space argues that 'place-making' – improving the design, maintenance and supervision of parks and other public spaces – is a more effective solution to anti-social behaviour than simply increasing security measures.

- 6.14 Organisations such as CABI Space and the Children's Play Council argue that children and young people and their local communities need to be more involved in the design process of play spaces to create a sense of ownership. Equally, ways need to be found to cater for all ranges of children and young people. If young people feel they have no space of their own, and nothing to do for example, they will tend to occupy space designed for younger children.

### **Community Cohesion**

- 6.15 Good play provision is of value not only to children themselves but also to their families and the wider community. As well as helping to reduce the involvement of children and young people in anti-social behaviour, play can play a part in promoting social cohesion in the longer term.
- 6.16 It supports families and communities by providing a focus for informal networks and by allowing children autonomy within an environment which parents feel secure about. It makes an important contribution, in parallel with education, in developing adults who are creative and effective in the social and economic sphere. It offers opportunities for exploring cultural identity and difference and can provide a focus for tackling social exclusion through community development. Evaluations of play projects have shown how they can contribute to improving connections and building trust between local communities (Youlden and Harrison 2006). *Prove It* is an approach to evaluation that has been piloted in outside play and recreation spaces and has been shown to have a measurable impact on local interaction, new friendships, community know-how and community safety (New Economics Foundation 2001).

## 7.0 Key Issues Around Play

### Safety

- 7.1 'Activities for young people' are the single most requested improvement to local services by adults, according to a 2001 MORI survey.
- 7.2 Other surveys show that parents believe that their children's access to play opportunities is far more limited than theirs was. They believe that this is because children today spend too much time watching TV or playing on computers, instead of going out and getting physical exercise.
- 7.3 Ironically, surveys also indicate that parents are very concerned about the safety of their children and reluctant to let them out of the house, due to fears about traffic and strangers. Although traffic is a big problem, with 112 child pedestrians killed and 3,390 seriously injured in each of the years between 1998 – 2003, **hardly any children are ever seriously harmed by a stranger in a park or playground**. Children and young people also say that they are concerned by traffic and bullying. Both adults and children are keen on adult supervision.

### Risk versus Challenge

- 7.4 The fears and concerns of play providers have also grown, in the face of a culture which encourages blame and litigation. In some cases this has led providers to minimise the chances of even minor accidents for fear of being taken to court. Play areas which are unexciting do little to encourage children's development, and may lead children to seek excitement elsewhere.
- 7.5 A leading play expert underlined at the Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents International Play Safety Conference on 15 June 2006, that exciting and stimulating play areas not only contribute to the physical and psychological development of children, but also discourage children from playing in dangerous locations such as railway lines, canals and riverbanks and alongside busy roads.
- 7.6 Five local authorities, together with the national organisation PLAYLINK and a play equipment manufacturer have jointly commissioned legal advice on a number of safety related issues, including what constitutes 'reasonableness' when judging what might be acceptable and unacceptable levels of risk in play. This advice is available to other local authorities that wish to formulate policy on this issue.

## **'Postcode Play'**

- 7.7 Wide variations in the provision of play opportunities and the amount spent per child exist between local authority areas. Many local authority officers who participated in the Children's Play Council research programme, *Making The Case for Play* (Issy Cole-Hamilton and Tim Gill, 2002), say that they have little knowledge of the activities of other providers of supervised play provision such as schools and voluntary organisations. Play has frequently been given a low priority by local authorities, in the face of other pressures, leading to a lack of basic local information on play, a reduction in play staff and few comprehensive play strategies.

## **What Children Want**

- 7.8 Although children and young people are increasingly being involved in the planning and development of their own play spaces, activities and opportunities, there is evidence that this is not as effective and widespread as it should be. Where play facilities and services have continued, they have rarely had sufficient resources to respond to changing local needs and circumstances. Local authorities have tended to purchase off the shelf fixed play equipment, even though there is good evidence that children and young people enjoy more natural materials and elements, such as sand, water, wood, trees and landscaping as much, if not more, than fixed equipment. There are examples in countries such as Germany, Denmark, but also in London of exciting, natural play spaces. More locally, a new adventure play area has been developed at Coombe Park, designed by young people in collaboration with the manufacturer.

## **Inequality and Exclusion**

- 7.9 Children generally are saying that they are prevented from playing because of fears for their safety, especially from bullying; traffic; dirty and/or run down play areas and parks; lack of choice; and play provision that is too far away.
- 7.10 Some groups face significantly worse access problems. A key concern in the recent policy reports and studies on play is those groups of children who are excluded from play opportunities. For disabled children, negative attitudes and inaccessible environments compound the general problems experienced by most children. A recent survey of 1000 parents of disabled children showed how their children were excluded from ordinary leisure opportunities. Parks and playgrounds were the least user friendly, with few facilities for disabled people. Other studies have shown that disabled children and young people often feel threatened in open spaces and that the design of play equipment often limits their access.

- 7.11 Research suggests that children from certain ethnic minority groups are excluded from play provision because they do not feel it is suitable for them, or they are concerned about racism and lack of staff awareness and training to deal with this.
- 7.12 Enjoyment of the public realm is significantly compromised for many black and ethnic minority children who still report experiencing overt and implicit racism. Asylum seeker and refugee children and traveller children are also disproportionately excluded from play opportunities.

### **Quality and Local Standards**

- 7.13 Agreed quality assurance mechanisms are needed to ensure consistency and equality of opportunity for children's play. But quality control and assurance in children's play provision varies widely across the country. Setting robust local standards based on assessments of needs and audits of existing facilities will form the basis for redressing quantitative and qualitative deficiencies. Government guidance stresses that standards should be founded on three core components: quality, quantity and accessibility. Standards should capture how engaging and enjoyable spaces and services are for children and young people, and hence how popular and successful they are. There is an on-going debate about how to measure and assess quantity, quality and accessibility. The Children's Play Council is carrying out work on play indicators that will take this work forward (see below).

### **Market Failure and Design**

- 7.14 According to the national organisation PLAYLINK, the factors discussed above converge to produce market failure in the provision of play space ie a tendency for the demand side (local authorities and other organisations commissioning, purchasing and providing play spaces) to specify what it should not want. At the same time, suppliers (equipment providers, designers, architects) produce what it should not be encouraged to offer. This tends to result in the unimaginative, identikit play areas that are seen everywhere.
- 7.15 One solution to this is to create a design process that recognises the expertise that laypeople (children, young people and adults) have and truly involve them in the design process, working together with the specialists (designers, artists, architects, play specialists). The design brief is the document for setting out in layman's terms what a particular site aims to achieve, the 'sense of place' to be created, how it should feel, what experiences it should offer and it should allow in use. The design process is the vehicle for looking at what a particular authority, group or community thinks about play, and for extending that understanding so that it informs the design.

## **8.0 Play in Coventry**

### **Introduction**

- 8.1 In Coventry, play is high on parents' agendas, with 'more activities for young people' featuring as the most important issue in the Household Survey in 2004 and third most important issue (out of 10) in 2005. Facilities for teenagers have ranked as the fifth most important issue in both years. In the most recent survey (2006), 'activities for teenagers' and facilities for young people' ranked first and second in terms of importance. Requests for play provision feature highly in the 24 neighbourhood plans for priority neighbourhoods in the city, and are being fed into Coventry's new Neighbourhood Forums.
- 8.2 The theme of having 'something to do' when school is not available, recurred throughout the consultation undertaken for the Children and Young People's Plan (2006 – 2010). The impact of this on positive outcomes is demonstrated through the Street Crime Initiative, established between the Youth Offending Service and the Children's Fund. The range of activities provided during the summer of 2002 correlated with a 42% reduction in youth crime in Coventry, and 48% in 2003. In both national and local consultations around Every Child Matters outcomes, children and young people have talked about the need to prioritise the 'enjoy' dimension of 'Enjoy and Achieve'.

### **Who Provides Play?**

- 8.3 The Culture, Leisure and Libraries Division of Community Services Directorate within the City Council is the largest provider of play space in Coventry, although other providers such as Whitefriars Housing Group, Groundwork, Warwickshire Wildlife Trust and community centres also provide play areas. City Services Directorate currently maintains Council-owned play areas. Neighbourhood Wardens (employed by the Chief Executive's Directorate), the Police, and the new Police Community Support Officers, also play an important supporting role in keeping play areas safe and clean.
- 8.4 A range of activities for children and young people are provided by City Council services such as the Children and Family Education Service, the Youth Service, Culture, Leisure and Libraries, Youth Offending Service, Children's Centres, the Excellence in Cities initiative, and by voluntary organisations and community groups in the city.
- 8.5 Until 1999 a Play Officer post with responsibility for both indoor and outdoor play provision existed within the former Leisure Services Department, and regular Play Panels took place, which brought

together the Play Officer, other Council services and the voluntary sector. This is no longer the case. A lack of information and co-ordination are therefore issues that will need to be addressed through this strategy.

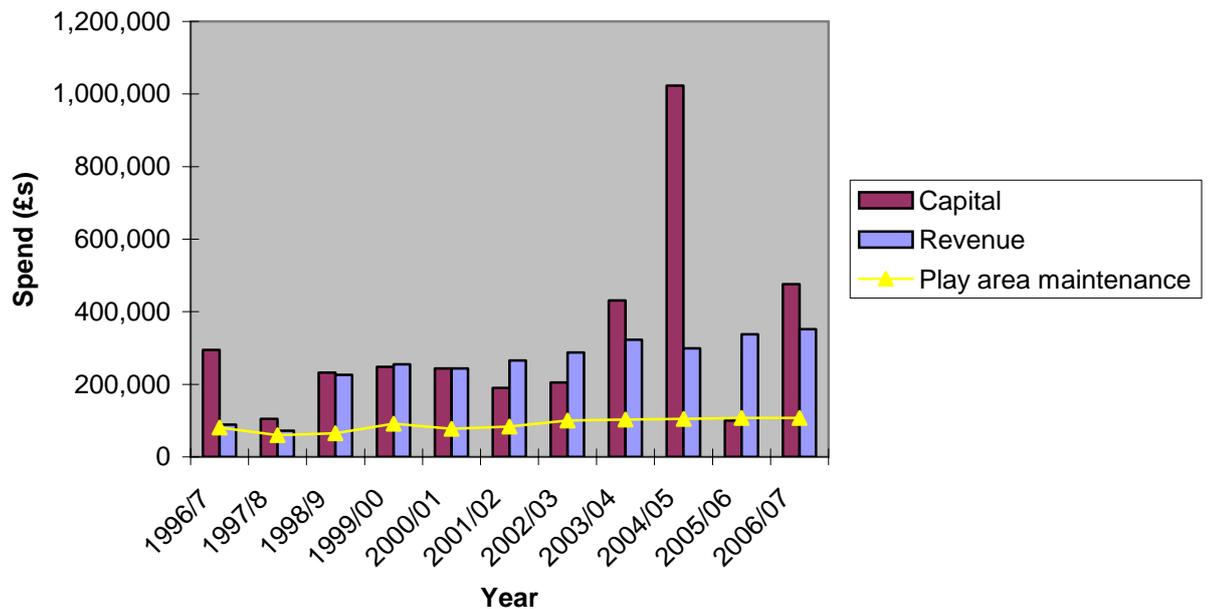
- 8.6 The removal of this post and the Play Panel has left a gap in terms of the co-ordination and strategic overview of play in the city. It is also clear that no one Council service can in isolation ensure that children's play space is well-used and effectively maintained. This is more likely to be achieved by Council services working more effectively together and actively engaging with other partners such as the police. Moreover, no one Council Directorate is currently responsible for providing leadership in the area of children's play.
- 8.7 There is concern at national level that greater use could be made of school grounds out of school hours. In general, this tends to be partly because the main priority for schools is high educational standards, but also because of fears of vandalism and arson, and the high cost of security.
- 8.8 In Coventry, schools have worked hard in recent years to develop their sites to provide pupils with exciting and interesting things to do during the unstructured parts of the school day e.g. lunchtimes. These have included fitness trails, sensory gardens, quiet areas and play space.
- 8.9 Many schools have employed play leaders or trained support staff or used partners such as Creative Partnerships and the Children and Family Education Service (CAFES) to encourage playground activity. Many of these schools have developed their own play strategies. Often the impetus to do this has been to address inappropriate behaviour, including bullying, during those unstructured times. There are many examples of good practice in schools where external partners including Groundwork, Learning Through Landscapes and the Warwickshire Wildlife Trust have supported playground design. Schools are increasingly making use of grounds during the extended day. For example, Park Gate School is currently investigating the feasibility of re-fencing an area of its grounds to create play space that the local community can use out of school hours.
- 8.10 The Play Strategy will complement the Extended Schools Strategy as schools increasingly open their sites up for a varied menu of activities and for communities to use. This may provide opportunities for local play providers. Childcare is part of the core offer of extended schools and play workers will need to support the development of freely chosen play alongside other activities. Further, where play services exist we need to ensure that such

services complement those in extended schools and do not duplicate provision.

### Funding for Play

8.11 In Coventry, play has perhaps not suffered the significant decline in investment reported in other parts of the country. Coventry is entering Phase 3 of a play area renewal programme that started in 1994. Approval has recently been given for a two-year £1.2m programme to improve infrastructure in parks, and develop play areas and a multi use games area (MUGA). Figure 1 shows spend on outdoor play over the last 11 years, together with maintenance spend. The key issue here is that despite the general trend to increase capital spend over the last 10 years, the maintenance spend has remained roughly at the same level. Savings generated by the closure of small areas containing obsolete equipment have been re-invested to support the renewals programme, which has helped to offset this.

**Figure 1: City Council Spend on Free, Open Access Play Facilities**



8.12 On-going maintenance is a key concern for providers and users alike. One of the key messages from consultation events is that children and their parents will not use play areas *unless they are well-maintained*. On-going maintenance is clearly an important issue that will have to be addressed through the annual Strategy Action Plan.

## 9.0 Local Provision Examined

### The method

9.1 In order to map provision of play services and play space across the city, the following audits were carried out:

- A mapping exercise of the City Council's dedicated play areas (including equipped play areas, Multi Use Games Areas, skate parks, teen shelters and informal, non-equipped areas such as playing field locations), linked to age ranges. Areas of incidental open space which children and young people can access, but where formal play is not a prime function were also mapped.
- A survey by questionnaire of play services offering 'free, open access play' in the city.
- An inspection of the condition of dedicated play spaces took place in February 2006 by an independent play inspector following a tendering process. Those tendering were professionally accredited play inspectors.
- A desktop assessment of accessibility and equality and inclusiveness. Accessibility was judged on a physical basis on the need to cross busy roads or other obstructions that prevent easy or safe access by unaccompanied children. Equality and inclusiveness were assessed on whether the play area had a range of equipment suitable for children or varying abilities, within the range of equipment available at the time.
- A snapshot survey of usage of all local authority play areas in the City on a given day, at a given time, with approximate ages of children, ethnicity, disability, number of parents/carers present being noted.
- A week-long survey, in three priority neighbourhoods, of types of play undertaken by children and young people outside of designated play areas in open and green space.
- An analysis of spend on 'free' play provision over the last 10 years, including both capital and revenue projects and programmes.
- A household survey of quality of life in the 6 most deprived Coventry neighbourhoods ('Your Neighbourhood Matters' areas).

## 10. Audit Analysis: Key Findings

10.1 Detailed findings from the play audits are set out in Appendix 1.

### Play Space

10.2 The audit showed that there are currently 68 dedicated Council run play spaces for children and young people in Coventry, as follows:

Equipped Play Areas	Number
4 – 7 years	12
8 – 12 years	1
4 - 8 and 8 –12 (on the same site)	20
Teen areas – basket ball hoops and shelters	15
<b>Skate Parks</b>	
Skate Parks	4
<b>Multi Use Games Areas</b>	
Existing MUGAs (includes double court areas)	16
Proposed MUGA	1

10.3 Figures 2, 3 and 4 show a summary of the condition, accessibility and equality and inclusiveness of the 68 play areas.

Figure 2: Condition

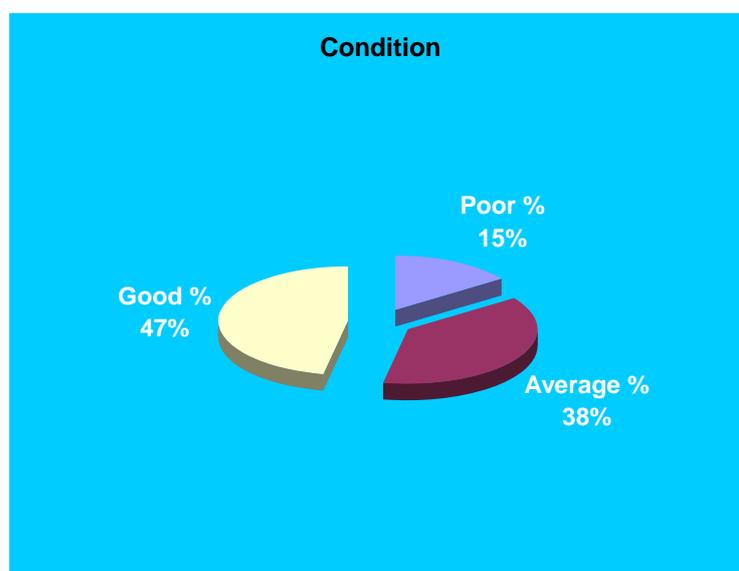


Figure 3: Accessibility

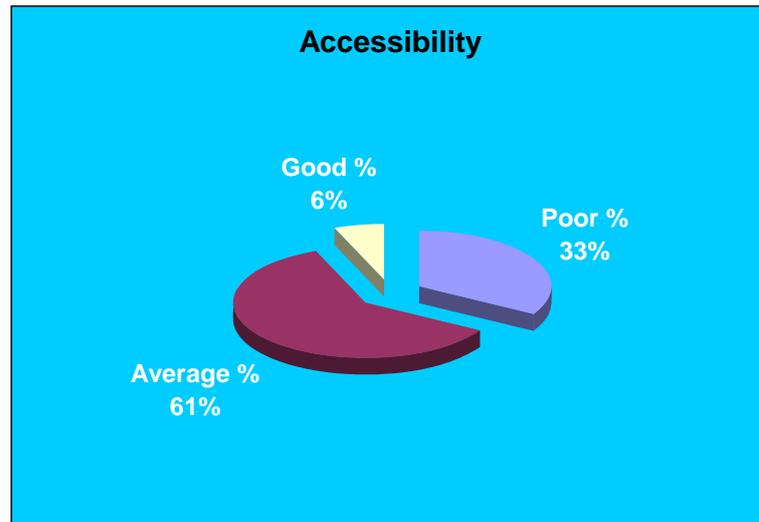
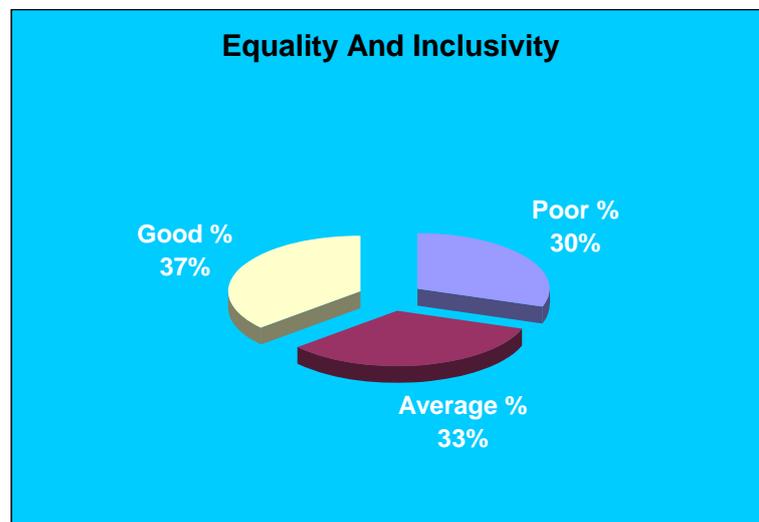


Figure 4: Equality and Inclusiveness



## 10.4 Play Space

- The City Council's policy has been to provide a play area with 10 pieces of fixed equipment within half a mile (ie 15 minutes walking distance) of all children in the city. This aims to cater for all age ranges. Based on this mapping exercise, this aim has almost been achieved, and with the provision of two planned play areas, it will be achieved.
- The Council provides predominantly fixed play equipment in traditional playground settings.
- The open play area equipment used by the City Council is not designed to be suitable for children under 4 years of age. Nevertheless the Wardens' Snapshot Survey indicated that 24% of children surveyed on that particular day were under 4.
- Data on numbers of children using play areas is not usually collected. There is no data collection in relation to disadvantaged groups. So for example, where there is equipment accessible to children with disabilities, there is no data collected on numbers of children with disabilities who use it.
- Accessibility is an issue, with only 6.1% of play areas being classed as 'good'.
- Inclusivity and equality are also of concern. 82% of play areas for 4 – 8 year olds were rated as 'poor'. 19% of MUGAs were rated 'poor'. In the case of the MUGAs, the average age is 10 years, whereas the average age of a play area for 4 – 8 year olds is only 4 years.
- Condition may also be an issue. 53% of play areas were rated 'average' or 'poor' in terms of their condition.
- The age of play areas and the availability of compliant play equipment at the time will have been a factor in these findings ie the older the play area, the less likely it is to be inclusive. However, these findings still indicate the need to examine how Coventry can improve its play provision for all children and for disadvantaged groups in particular.

### Play Services

- This survey involved a small sample and a diverse group of respondents. Some of the organisations that responded were small, voluntary organisations. Four were city wide council services.
- Nevertheless it raises issues that need to be addressed, although there may be a need for further data to be collected.
- There is a need to do further work to establish how many services offer free, open access play.
- There is a need to link with the Early Years Service to identify whether there are gaps in the provision of after school clubs, holiday clubs, extended school provision, which may not be classed as free,

open access play, but which nevertheless has a key contribution to make to the play agenda.

- The survey indicated a lack of provision in the west of the city.
- There appears to be a bias of delivery in favour of boys. In view of the fact that girls under 11 are a group at risk of obesity, this may be of concern.
- There seems to be a lack of data collection in relation to certain groups of children and young people that are a priority for the city – looked after children, children with disabilities, refugee and asylum seeker children, traveller children.
- Some services do not encourage children to take risks, although this is generally accepted to be an important aspect of free, open access play.

### **Wardens' Snapshot Survey**

- Most of the children seen on this particular day were under 8 (64%) with 24% being under 4. Children aged 15 plus were seen least frequently in the play areas. This might correlate with Household Survey findings, where 'facilities for young people' features highly.

### **Wardens' Weeklong Case Study**

- The case study confirms that children play in public and open spaces, as well as in parks and playgrounds, and children as young as three can be found playing in the street.
- This underlines the need to address the issue of play through the Green Space Strategy.

### **'Your Neighbourhood Matters' Household Survey**

- The survey included questions on satisfaction levels with the **quality** of parks and open spaces and **access** to parks and open spaces.
- In all cases the YNM levels of dissatisfaction are at least double the comparable parental citywide figures.
- Parents in Spon End, Hillfields and Bell Green were the most dissatisfied.
- Parents of pre-school children (0-4 years) in Hillfields and Spon End are the most dissatisfied with the quality of parks and open spaces, 41% and 48% levels of dissatisfaction. Compared to a citywide parent figure of 19.2% dissatisfaction.
- When looking at parents of primary school age (5-11 year olds), residents in Hillfields were the least satisfied; half of them (50%) are dissatisfied with the quality. Compared to 20.9% city wide parental figure.

- It was in the areas of East Bell Green and Spon End, that parents of older children (12-16 year olds) were most dissatisfied with the quality of parks and open spaces. (49% and 42%), compared to 21.4% city wide parental figure.
- As far as access to parks and open spaces, the results follow a similar pattern, parents of (0-4 year olds) and (5-11 year olds) in Hillfields are the most dissatisfied, 41% and 44%; and parents of the older age group (12-16) in East Bell Green are the most dissatisfied (32%). Again the YNM findings are double the citywide findings.

## **General**

### ***Local findings reflect national issues***

- 10.5 This data and initial analysis provide a starting point from which Coventry can work towards improving its play provision. Baselines for performance in relation to quality, quantity and accessibility need to be established and from there targets set for improvement. The possibility of benchmarking against Coventry's statistical neighbours should also be investigated.

## 11. Consultation and involvement

### Method and approach

11.1 Children and young people, parents and carers, and stakeholders were consulted in a number of ways to find out what they thought the Play Strategy should address. There were three main approaches:

- city-wide consultation event followed by a series of focus groups;
- survey of children's views carried out by the City Council's Neighbourhood Wardens in play areas;
- stakeholder event for policy-makers and practitioners involved in the delivery of play opportunities in the city.

11.2 More information on these approaches and the detailed findings can be found in Appendix 2.

### Hot Topics and Emerging Issues

#### Parents' Fears

*"(It's not fair that) my parents wont let me out in my front garden without them watching me" – child*

*"We can't go out on our own"*

*"It's not fair that we can't play at the park because it's not safe"*

*"Dubious characters hanging around"*

*"Can't trust other people"*

However this was recognised as symptom of something larger:

*"Breakdown of community – don't know people in own street"*

#### Safety and Security

*"Not being able to play in the streets"*

*"Not allowed on my bike around the block"*

*"Not safe because of broken glass litter etc."*

*"Too much traffic going too fast for kids to play in the street"*

*"Too dangerous in some areas"*

#### Access to the natural environment

*"Loads of play space. Explore different places" – child*

*"(I'm) not allowed to play in trees or climb in trees – child*

*"Can't make dens because less trees and less things to build with"*

*"That we have no trees to climb"*

**Maintenance and Hygiene**

*"Parks are vandalised and dismal" – parents*

*"Graffiti in parks"*

*"Rather travel to Stratford/Warwick as they are cleaner and safer"*

**Play Opportunities for All Ages**

*"Nothing for older children to do"*

*"There could be youth clubs for children"*

*"Playground ruined by older children who have nothing to do or nowhere else to play"*

**Inclusion**

*"Accessibility for son"*

*"Play equipment is not wheelchair friendly"*

*"(I would want) disabled children to get as much fun as able bodied people" – child*

*"Parks have no disabled toys/equipment"*

**Accessibility**

*"No playground in our areas. Used to be three"*

*"No near to home parks"*

*"Where the locations of them are. Not based locally"*

**Play for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century?**

*"Parks and play equipment...not much scope for kids to be creative" - parent*

*"Uninteresting equipment. Out of date"*

*"Old fashioned see-saws and roundabouts"*

**'Being Seen as Trouble'**

*"People saying no you can't"*

## 12. Strategic Aims

12.1 Drawing on the findings from the above consultations and survey, together with the audit findings and national research and consultation, the Play Project Team drafted a set of ten strategic aims for the Play Strategy. The strategic aims are:

1. Widen the range of play experiences available to children and young people by increasing the opportunities for informal and natural play
2. Identify, understand and work to remove the barriers to free, open access play
3. Ensure City Council, partners and citizens understand and value the benefits that play can bring to children and young people
4. Fully engage children and young people, parents and carers in the design, development and delivery of play opportunities in the city
5. Improve co-ordination and management of the delivery of play across Council services and partners
6. Address inequalities in play
7. Encourage healthy play
8. Ensure that play opportunities offer a balance between risk and challenge and safety
9. Build on best practice and research innovation in play
10. Develop children's capacity to play independently and together, and promote intergenerational play

12.2 A stakeholder event was then held to consult on these priorities on 12 October 2006. Twenty-nine individuals attended, representing schools, the Primary Care Trust, Council services, voluntary organisations, the local hospital. A full list of attendees is attached at Appendix 3.

- 12.3 The stakeholders were asked to rank the 10 priorities in order of priority and importance. Stakeholders were then asked to take part in a 'visioning' exercise, where they were asked to describe what they would see and experience if they woke up and play opportunities for children and young people had been miraculously transformed for the better. Once they had done this, they were asked to think about the actions that would change the current situation for play to the one they had described in their 'miracles'. Many of the proposed actions have informed the Plan Strategy Action Plan which forms the implementation plan for this strategy.

## **13. Outcomes**

- 13.1 The outcomes that we are trying to achieve are set out below:

### **Outcome 1**

- More children and young people have access to informal, natural and environmental play areas

### **Outcome 2**

- More children have the opportunity to access parks and open spaces

### **Outcome 3**

- Increased awareness of the importance of play amongst City Council staff and councillors, partner organisations, parents and residents

### **Outcome 4**

- More children and young people are actively involved in the design, development and delivery of play opportunities

### **Outcome 5**

- Better co-ordination and management of the delivery of play opportunities

### **Outcome 6**

- Fewer children and young people experiencing barriers to play

### **Outcome 7**

- More children leading healthy lifestyles

### **Outcome 8**

- More children and young people have the opportunity to experience 'safe risks'

### **Outcome 9**

- A wider range of better quality and constantly improving play opportunities for children and young people

### **Outcome 10**

- More opportunities for families to play together

## 14. Big lottery funding

14.1 The projects being put forward for funding under the Big Lottery's Children's Play Programme are the result of the local audits of provision and identified gaps, and local consultation with children and young people, parents and carers and stakeholders.

The portfolio comprises:

<b>Project 1</b>	A Play Activator post will work with children and young people from disadvantaged groups to break down the barriers that prevent them from accessing free, open access play. The post will focus on: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Children with disabilities</li><li>• Children from black and minority ethnic groups</li><li>• Looked after children</li><li>• Asylum seeker and refugee children</li></ul>
<b>Project 2</b>	The development of 6 pilot informal, natural or environmental play spaces in disadvantaged areas of the City. The evaluation of these play spaces will inform the development of future play areas in Coventry.

14.2 The City Council's Cabinet approved the proposed locations for the pilot play areas on 6 March 2006).

## 15. Local plans, strategies and initiatives

15.1 Good quality play provision, as a cross-cutting policy issue, contributes to meeting various government agendas for the reasons described elsewhere in this document.

15.2 Priorities within the plans of other partners and stakeholders have been reviewed and mapped against the priorities of the Play Strategy and set out in the table at Figure 5.

Figure 5: The Planning Framework

**Play Priorities**

<b>Strategic Plans and Priorities</b>	Widen the range of play experiences	Remove barriers to free access play	Ensure City Council, partners & citizens understand value of play	Engage CYP, parents & carers in all aspects of play opportunities in the city	Better co-ordination & management of the delivery of play	Address inequalities in play	Encourage healthy play	Ensure play opportunities offer a balance between risk, challenge & safety	Build on best practice and research innovation in play	Develop children's capacity to play independently & together; promote intergenerational play
Community Plan										
City Council Corporate Plan										
Cabinet Member Plan for Children's Services										
Cabinet member plan for Culture & Leisure										
Children & Young people's plan										
LAA										
Health tPCT 3 year plan for CYP										
Open Space strategy										
Coventry Development Plan										
Youth Matters 2006										
Health care needs assessment for Children										

15.3 A number of plans, strategies and initiatives are of particular relevance.

**Green Space Strategy**

15.4 The City Council has recently appointed a specialist consultant to review the existing Coventry Green Space Strategy Supplementary Planning Guidance and related planning policy guidance. This work will include an open space needs assessment and quality audit, including all outdoor sport and recreation and a review of the Draft Coventry Playing Pitch Strategy. The Consultant will produce the new Draft Strategy with an evidence base and recommendations that will inform the preparation of the City's Local Development Framework and associated Supplementary Planning Documents, justification for Section 106 agreements, and guide the future provision and management of green space and associated resources in Coventry. The Coventry Play Strategy can help to inform this process. Informal, environmental play for example, could

be improved simply by changing the way some of Coventry's open and green spaces are maintained.

### **Section 106**

- 15.5 In Coventry, a review of S106 contributions is long overdue and this will affect the level of contribution that potential developers could provide. There is a need to establish a revised policy that will be competitive in the regional market. Developers' contributions are currently invested in interest bearing accounts. When a play area development is planned, Culture, Leisure and Libraries identify if there are any unallocated S106 funds that could help fund the new facility. There are then incorporated into the funding for the project. All S106 income within a half-mile radius of the development would be considered for the new project. S106 funding is spent predominantly on 'play areas'. This definition should be extended to also accommodate 'natural and informal' play opportunities for children and young people.

### **Growing the City**

- 15.6 Coventry has recently been identified as one of the local authorities to receive support under the Government's Growth Points Initiative (also known as Partnership for Growth.) This support includes funding to undertake a Green Infrastructure Study. The Government has stated that the Council should work closely with Natural England to:

- Ensure that the impact of growth on green assets in the Coventry sub-region is positively managed; and
- Harness the benefits of green infrastructure to enhance existing and new development.

One of the Government's criteria for identification as a New Growth Point was that proposed levels of growth should be 20% above 2003 plan levels. In Coventry's case, this equates to about 9,000 houses between 2006 and 2016. The approach in Coventry will be to collate the necessary data to inform final decisions on how best to deliver the growth points initiative. If Coventry is to attract families to relocate to the city, it needs also to ensure that it can offer attractive and well-maintained spaces for children and young people to play. Major new regeneration projects such as the Swanswell Initiative (providing new homes, job opportunities, and improved community, health and education facilities) need to incorporate adequate and appropriate opportunities for children's play.

## Children and Young People's Strategic Plan

15.7 Local authorities in England have a statutory duty under the Children Act (2004) to co-operate in their provision for the enjoyment of play and recreation as part of the five key outcomes for all children.

The Department for Education and Skills emphasises that the Play Strategy should link to the Children and Young People's Plan, which forms the basis for the *children and young people's block* in the Local Area Agreement.. From April 2007, the review of the Children and Young People's Plan will form part of the self-assessment of the Annual Performance Assessment (APA). This will help meet the requirements of the Joint Area Review of the Ofsted Children's Services inspection framework, which includes key judgements in relation to children's enjoyment of play and recreation.

Key Judgement	Evidence
<p>Parents and carers receive support in helping their children to enjoy and achieve</p> <p>All children and young people can access a range of recreational play activities, including play and voluntary learning provision</p>	<p>Target guidance and support is provided to parents and carers, in line with their expressed wishes, in helping children and young people to enjoy play, achieve educationally and make productive and enjoyable use of leisure time.</p> <p>There are safe and accessible places where children and young people can play and socialise.</p> <p>A range of affordable, accessible, challenging and rewarding voluntary learning opportunities is provided.</p> <p>Action is taken to ensure that the cost or availability of transport are not undue barriers to participation in recreational and voluntary learning activities.</p> <p>Recreational and voluntary learning opportunities reflect the needs and interests of individuals as well as groups.</p>

15.8 In Coventry, the Play Strategy will be managed by a Play Project Team, which will report to a Project Board. These two structures will comprise representatives from the following Council services and partners:

- Parks Service (Community Services Directorate)
- Neighbourhood Management Service (Chief Executive's Directorate)
- City Services Directorate
- City Development Directorate
- Children and Family Education Service (Children, Learning and Young People's Directorate)
- Early Years and Childcare Service (Children, Learning and Young People's Directorate)

- Youth Service (Children, Learning and Young People's Directorate)
- Strategic Services (Children, Learning and Young People's Directorate)
- Voluntary Sector
- Teaching Primary Care Trust

15.9 The Project Board will report to the Professional Advisory Group of the Coventry Children and Young People's Strategic Partnership.

### **Your Neighbourhood Matters**

15.10 This programme has been set up using Government funding from the Safer, Stronger Communities Fund. The aim is to: *'improve the quality of life for people in the most disadvantaged neighbourhoods and ensure service providers are more responsive to neighbourhood needs and improve their delivery.'*

15.11 Coventry has a secondary objective which is to: *'increase the capacity of local communities so that people are empowered to participate in local decision-making and are more able to fully engage in service delivery and delivering value for money and efficiency improvements within local neighbourhood service provision'.*

15.12 There are certain key building blocks which need to be put in place to stabilise deprived communities and lay the foundations so that other interventions have a better prospect of success. They involve taking practical measures to:

- Improve liveability – encompassing crime, fear of crime, anti-social behaviour, environmental quality, housing management, basic leisure provision for young people.
- Tackling poor public services to reduce educational underachievement, worklessness, poor health, teenage conceptions and offending.
- Empowering local people to enable them to have a say in local decision-making.

15.13 A key outcome will be the development of 'neighbourhood contracts' between local communities and service providers.

15.14 Your Neighbourhood Matters will run until 2010 in the following areas of the city. These neighbourhoods fall within the top 3% of disadvantaged neighbourhoods nationally:

- Spon End and Lower Coundon
- Hillfields

- East Bell Green
- Willenhall and Willenhall Wood
- Stoke Aldermoor
- Edgwick and Paradise

15.15 There is an important opportunity to bring Your Neighbourhood Matters together with the Play Strategy to deliver improvements for children's play. The 5 natural, informal play spaces to be funded through Big Lottery will be developed in the Your Neighbourhood Matters areas. Year 1 of the Play Strategy Action Plan will focus on developing neighbourhood contracts in relation to play and on resolving issues around safety, security, anti-social behaviour and maintenance.

## **16. Local standards**

16.1 The approach taken by the City Council has been to provide a play area within half a mile of all homes. This is generally a NEAP according to the National Playing Fields Association's definition ie ten pieces of fixed equipment within 15 minutes walk. This has largely been achieved. Where it has not been achieved, this is due to the unavailability of suitable land. In 2006/2007, the Parks Service is providing two new play areas, and the provisional programme for 2007/2008 includes a further two full sized equipped areas, which will bring provision in line with this local standard.

16.2 Play areas are designed to suit different age groups. Play areas suitable for:

- 4 – 8 year olds are enclosed with a gate and usually have a bench for parents or carers to sit and watch their child play;
- 8 – 12 year olds are open areas that allow freer play next to the enclosed younger child area;
- Younger teens (up to 16 years) involve fitness equipment such as a skatepark. MUGAs are used for younger teens as they act as a form of exercise. There is some evidence to suggest that MUGAs act as a form of diversion for anti-social behaviour.
- Open play equipment is not designed to be suitable for children under 4 years. There is no official delivery for them in Coventry's parks and open spaces.

16.3 A series of 'play Indicators' have been piloted with six local authorities since summer 2006. This project has piloted four performance indicators, methods of collecting data to establish baselines, and a tool to evaluate the quality of play spaces. The indicators may be adopted for use within the Government's Comprehensive Performance Assessment of local authorities.

16.4 The pilot indicators are set out in Figure 6, together with proposed methods of data generation:

Figure 6: The Pilot Performance Indicators

<b>Pilot Indicator 1</b>	<b>Participation</b>	<b>Method of Generation</b>
Description	The percentage of all children and young people aged birth to 16 (ie from all social and ethnic groups, including those who are disabled) who play out for at least four hours each week.	School and Household Survey
<b>Pilot Indicator 2</b>	<b>Access to a Variety of Facilities and Spaces</b>	<b>Method of Generation</b>
Description	The percentage of children and young people aged birth to 16 that have access to at least three different <b>types</b> (type A, type B and type C) of space or facility, at least one of which is a dedicated place for play and informal recreation, which are all within easy walking or cycling distance (to be defined).	Open Space and Play Strategy Audits  GIS Mapping
<b>Pilot Indicator 3</b>	<b>Quality of Facilities and Space</b>	<b>Method of Generation</b>
Description	The proportion of facilities and spaces meeting the quality criteria for 'excellent' and 'good' ratings.	Assess against standards based on agreed quality criteria (drawn from criteria in Draft Play Indicator Guidance)
<b>Pilot Indicator 4</b>	<b>Satisfaction</b>	<b>Method of Generation</b>
Description	The percentage of all children and young people (ie from all social and ethnic groups, including those who are disabled) who think that the range and	School and Household Survey

	quality of play facilities they are able to access in their local neighbourhood is good/very good.	
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16.5 Coventry is well placed to adopt the above performance indicators having carried out a GIS audit for the play strategy together with a quality and equality/inclusiveness audit.

16.6 Development of baselines for the performance indicators will also enable evaluation of the effectiveness of Coventry's play strategy.

## **17. Implementation**

### **Management Structures**

17.1 Implementation of the strategic aims will be through the strategy action plan (see overleaf). This is an organic document which will change and develop as work progresses.

17.2 The strategy, action plan and Big Lottery projects will be managed through the following structures:

17.3 A Project Team made up of representatives from the following services:

- Strategic Services, Children, Learning and Young People
- Youth Service, Children, Learning and Young People
- Children and Family Education Service, Children, Learning and Young People
- Early Years, Children, Learning and Young People
- Extended Schools, Children, Learning and Young People
- Services for Schools, Children, Learning and Young People
- Parks Department, Culture and Leisure Services
- Planning, Transport and Planning
- Neighbourhood Management
- City Services
- Voluntary Sector

17.4 A Project Board comprising senior managers from the following services:

- Strategic Services, Children, Learning and Young People
- Culture, Leisure and Libraries, Community Services
- Transport and Planning, City Development

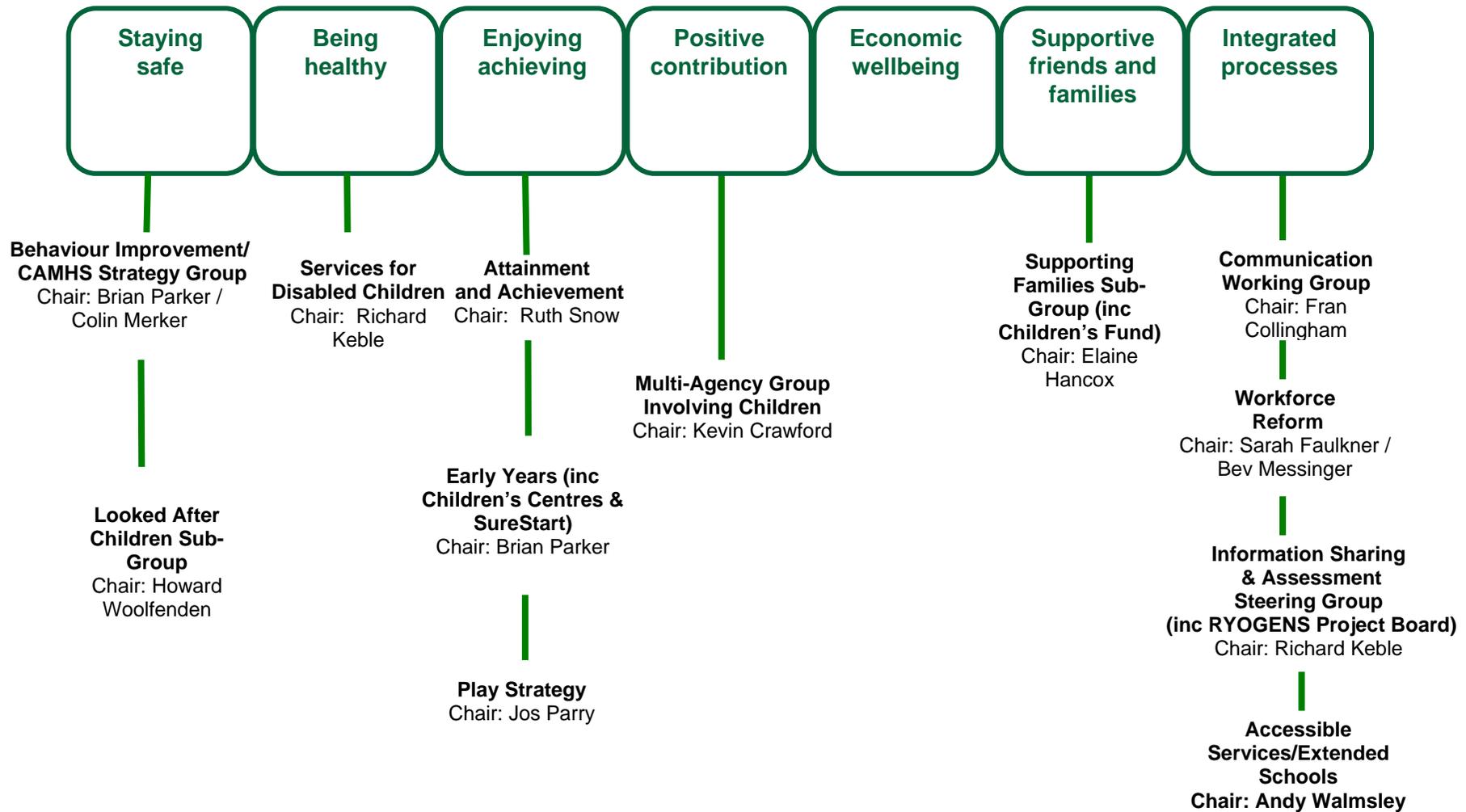
- Neighbourhood Management, Chief Executives
- City Services
- Groundwork, Coventry and Warwickshire Wildlife Trust

17.5 The Project Team will meet monthly, and the Board bi-monthly. The Project Team will effectively be Coventry's 'Play Partnership'.

### **Governance**

17.6 The Project Board will report to the Joint Commissioning Board of the Children and Young People's Strategic Partnership. It will also link into the Enjoy and Achieve Sub-Group of the Partnership (see Figure 7).

## Children and Young People's Strategic Partnership work streams



## **18. Monitoring, Evaluation and Review**

- 18.1 The strategy document and action plan will need to be kept under regular review in order to be effective. The action plan will be regularly reviewed at Project Team meetings, with bi-monthly reports being taken to the Project Board. Reviews will focus on progress, timescales and budgets. An annual review of the action plan will be presented to the City Council's Cabinet and the Children and Young People's Strategic Partnership's Joint Commissioning Board.
- 18.2 The strategy will be updated annually in the light of any changes in policy, funding or legislation, other strategies or plans. Local consultation with communities will also be fed back into the strategy.
- 18.3 Output and outcome indicators will be developed for each of the actions in the action plan, and these, together with the Children's Play Council pilot indicators will form the basis of the monitoring and evaluation framework.
- 18.4 Evaluation will focus on:
- Whether the strategy is meeting its stated outcomes
  - Whether there are any additional benefits eg community cohesion
- 18.5 Through the Project Team and the Project Board there will be a multi-agency approach to evaluation. Findings will be disseminated locally and nationally through a range of events and media. A communications plan has been drafted.

Coventry Play Strategy (March 2007)

For further information contact:

Sally Giles, Policy Development Manager  
Children, Learning and Young People's Directorate  
Civic Centre 1  
Council House  
Coventry City Council  
Earl Street  
CV1 5RS  
Tel: 024 76691688  
Email: [sally.giles@coventry.gov.uk](mailto:sally.giles@coventry.gov.uk)

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