



WildPlay TOOLKIT

A guide for
setting up a
wild play space

Our Past, Our Future
Working together for the New Forest



New Forest National Park Authority | 2021



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Section One

Practicalities



Introduction

Play is integral to children's enjoyment of their lives, their health and development. In fact, it is so significant that a child's right to play was recognised and protected under Article 31 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Wild play is playing outside within a natural environment. This could include building dens, jumping in puddles, hunting for minibeasts, making mud pies and clambering over logs or fallen trees. Wild play is all of these and much, much more! Opportunities for self-directed, free play within nature offer countless benefits to children and can often create stand out childhood memories. Think back to your own childhood; what do you remember the most?

The focus on children's interactions with the natural world helps encourage the development of self-directed, child-led play. There is a freedom within wild play that supports a much wider range of play types than more traditional, fixed play equipment such as swings and slides. As well as providing a solid play base, playing out in a natural environment has also been shown to provide numerous benefits to the children's health and wellbeing.

Children today have significantly fewer opportunities for wild play than the generations before them, typically spending increased amounts of time playing within the home environment and utilising digital technology and social media (Moss 2012). A study carried out by Natural England (2006) found that only 10% of children

today play in natural spaces, compared with 40% of adults when they were young.

A key part of the wild play project is developing natural play spaces within or near New Forest communities, equipped with low-key, natural resources and loose parts such as large logs for balancing and climbing and brash for den building. These community-based sites are intended to enable local children to access opportunities for wild play on a regular basis.

Who is this toolkit for?

This toolkit is for everyone: parish councils, groups, organisations and individuals who would like to develop wild play opportunities within their community. The toolkit will help to guide you through the process of setting up a wild play site or event, from the very first steps through to ideas for your project and ongoing tasks. Whilst the toolkit is designed to guide you through your wild play journey, each section can also be referred to individually depending on what you need. It will also direct you to other publications or resources that may be of use.





The benefits of wild play

The benefits of wild play are seemingly endless, with the potential to support both the physical and mental health of children, whilst also promoting child development and social inclusion. It is because of these numerous benefits that wild play is increasingly seen as an essential part of childhood. However, in a modern society where there is an increasing obesity epidemic and one in eight children and young people are being diagnosed with a mental health disorder (NHS 2017) children are also spending significantly less time out in nature than any generation before them.

Health

There is strong evidence to suggest that nature is a major motivator for exercise and time spent in the outdoors has a strong correlation to levels of physical activity, especially amongst pre-school children (Grey et al 2015). Whilst some of the health benefits of wild play are obvious, such as increased physical activity helping to address childhood obesity, others are perhaps less apparent.

Children with Autistic Spectrum Disorders (ASD) often experience reduced levels of muscle tone, balance and strength. Providing the opportunity to participate in physical activity helps to exercise their muscles and encourages both gross and fine motor skills. Spending time outside also gives them the freedom to work off their energy and frustrations which can help them to become calmer (Li et al 2019). This could, of course, be said for all children!

Mental health has become an increasing issue for children and young people over recent years. Time spent playing out in wild places has been shown to help reduce levels of anxiety and depression in children, as well as promoting healthy sleep patterns. A child's general sense of self-worth increases the more time they spend out in nature, and the negative impacts that stressful life events can have are reduced (Preuß 2019).

These are just a few of the many, potential health benefits of wild play. Time spent playing among nature can also help reduce levels of diabetes, heart disease and many other health conditions (White et al 2019).

Child development

The non-prescriptive nature of wild play helps to promote a wide range of developmental domains, including gross and fine motor skills, imagination, creativity, language and general cognitive development. This type of self-directed play helps children to develop a sense of independence and autonomy, as well as increasing levels of concentration, self-esteem and self-discipline. The development of such characteristics helps to

form a solid developmental base for the transition into young adulthood and beyond (Gill 2014).

The opportunities within wild play to experience and take on an appropriate level of risk and challenge enables children to develop their own, practical sense of risk and how to assess and manage it, especially when they are balancing simultaneous feelings of excitement and fear. Without such experiences of risk during childhood, they will have no sense of how to deal with levels of risk later, in the adult world (Play England 2012).

Fostering social inclusion

"If a child is to keep alive his inborn sense of wonder...he needs the companionship of at least one adult who can share it, rediscovering with him the joy, excitement and mystery of the world we live in."

(Carson, 1965)

Secure connections to people and places within their community help to develop a child's sense of self-esteem and resilience, attributes which are significant for children moving into young adulthood. Wild play not only holds the potential to benefit the children directly involved in the play cycle, but also the wider community in which they live. Engaging in wild play helps to increase a child's social interactions and fosters the presence of more positive feelings about their peers and closer bonds with their family (Izenstark & Ebata 2017).

The freedom within wild play enables children/ young people of all ages to either play together or alongside one another. The ability to appeal to all age groups also helps to encourage maximum

usage of a wild play site. During school hours, the space can be used by toddlers and pre-school aged children; after school, the space is more likely to be used by older children and teenagers.

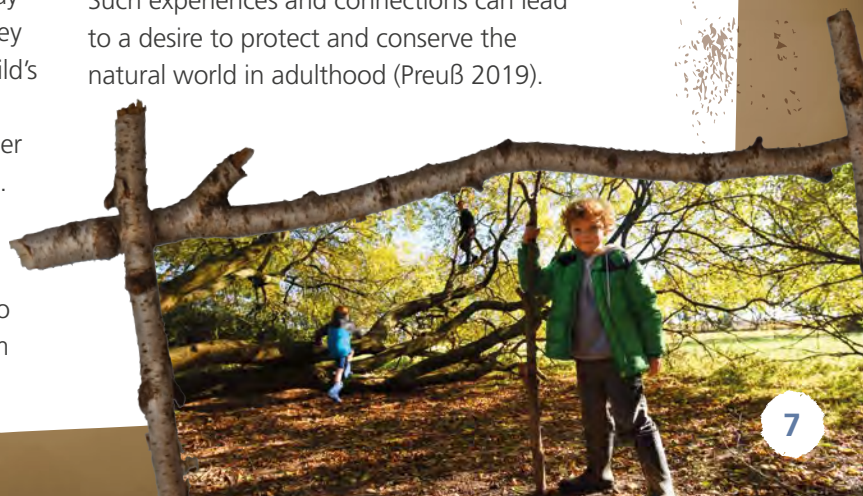
Caring for and protecting the environment

"No one will protect what they don't care about and no one will care about what they have never experienced."

(David Attenborough 2010)

Children have an instinctive interest in and attachment to the natural environment, however, this is an instinct that needs to be nurtured through positive early experiences. A lack of natural play during childhood can even result in an irrational aversion to nature. Children who have anxious parents, or those who did not independently visit woodlands are less likely to enjoy nature later in life (Gill 2014).

Wild play provides endless opportunities for engagement and connection with the natural environment and can instil a sense of peace and being at one with the world. Such experiences and connections can lead to a desire to protect and conserve the natural world in adulthood (Preuß 2019).





Education

The benefits that engaging in wild play has on a child's education extend further than purely an increase in knowledge and understanding of the natural world. Children who have contact with nature have been seen to experience an overall improvement in their learning. Known as the 'countryside effect', this was first described by child psychologist Aric Sigman. He observed that children knew and understood more, felt and behaved better, worked more cooperatively and were physically healthier as a result of being within a natural environment (Moss 2012).

For children who may experience difficulties maintaining focus within a classroom environment, such as those who are affected by Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), spending time engaging in activities within a natural environment can improve concentration levels by 30% when compared to an outdoor urban environment, and a huge threefold improvement over indoor activities. In fact, this increase in concentration levels has been shown to 'roughly equal the peak effects of two typical ADHD medications' and have been seen to extend back into both the home and school environment (Taylor & Kuo 2011).

Getting started

When thinking about developing a wild play space, it is likely that you already have a site in mind for your project. If not, then this should be one of your starting points. Whether you have a site in mind or not, points to consider are:

- How is the site currently used? How do the current users feel about a wild play space?
- Is the site easily accessible to the community? What about buggies and wheelchairs?
- Can the site be accessed by foot or is there space for parking?
- Is there already open access to the site or would this need to be arranged?
- Are there children in the local area looking for somewhere to play?
- Are the landowners in agreement with the wild play space?
- Who currently manages the site? This could be a different organisation to the landowner. Ownership of land can be discovered by visiting the government website:
www.gov.uk/government/organisations/land-registry
- What do any neighbours think of the planned wild play space?
- Is the site in an appropriate location e.g. away from busy roads and other major hazards?
- Are there any environmental considerations to be aware of?



Once the use of a site for wild play has been agreed by all relevant parties, you can start to think about the details of the project and how it may progress.

Thinking about the site

Every site will be unique with its own characteristics and may lend itself to a particular style or design of wild play. There may be certain features that are already used within play that could be incorporated into the design of the site, such as changes in ground level or fallen trees. It is worth taking all of these into consideration from the start of the process. Equally, there may be sources of potential conflict such as dog walking on site which will also need to be taken into account.

Talking to people who know the site well can be invaluable to the planning phase of the project, as they may be aware of things that may not be initially obvious. They can also help to advise you on any preparatory work that may need to be completed, such as tree safety surveys. Consulting with local experts can also help to ensure that there is nothing environmentally sensitive in the area that could be impacted.

As each wild play site will be different, the strategy that you adopt to conserve and improve the wildlife value of the space should be specifically tailored to your site. However, there are some guiding principles that can help.

Firstly, try to find out what is already present on your site, from there you can work out how to maintain and encourage wildlife, whilst also providing an amazing wild play space. Contacting local wildlife organisations can be invaluable for this, groups to consider might include:

- The National Park Authority
- Local Wildlife Trust



- Local authority countryside service
- Local voluntary wildlife groups

Even if these organisations are unable to help you directly, hopefully they should be able to point you in the direction of somebody who can.

Insurance

However well planned a play space is, accidents happen and as such, it is crucial that an appropriate level of insurance is in place. If the site is already an open-access site, it is likely that the landowner will have a level of public liability insurance in place. It is important to check with the provider what this covers and if it needs expanding to include the wild play site.

Other parties involved in the project may also need to have their own insurance in place depending on their role in the project; it is always worth seeking professional advice to make sure that there is an appropriate level of cover. There is a wide range of insurance options available, so take your time to do your

research and perhaps speak to other groups involved in managing play spaces in your area.

Community

Engaging the local community is vital to the success of any wild play space, not only is it where the children live who are likely to use the site, but it is also a potential source of volunteers for the project. Without the support of the local community, it may be difficult to get your project off the ground. Raising awareness of the project and getting the community involved from the start helps to provide them with a sense of ownership of the site and can help promote the longevity of the project.

Play England's resource *Creating Playful Communities* (2011) is a great starting point for community engagement.

Volunteers

Bringing together people and agencies from within the community to work on your wild play project can have a huge impact on its achievability,

creativity and longevity. It is worth dedicating time to recruiting some volunteers to help and there are lots of potential avenues to consider approaching:

- Community members, both adults and children
- Schools including teachers, parents and pupils
- Community groups such as early years, youth, conservation and special interest
- Organisations such as local authorities, parish councils and housing associations

Once you have put your group together, utilising people's individual skills and interests for fun, achievable tasks will help to keep them engaged in the project, making the project more sustainable in the long run. Remember, anyone that will be working directly with children (including volunteers) may need to have a Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) check to ensure that they are not banned from working with children and young people.

Advice and the application process can be found at www.gov.uk/government/organisations/disclosure-and-barring-service



Giving the community a voice

If possible, it is a good idea to involve the community in all stages of the project and to seek out the views and ideas of all sectors. Naturally, children should play a key role in this and have a right to be consulted on things that impact their lives under Article 12 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Play areas designed for children by adults are significantly different from those that children would design for themselves. Involving local children in the design stage is particularly important and there are many ways to go about this, both informally through talking to children about their ideas, to more formal consultation where written evidence is produced. Visual evidence of children's thoughts and ideas can be invaluable to your development process whether it be written, drawn, filmed, recorded or collaged.

Children's views are likely to be limited by their experience, so it is important to help provide inspiration through pictures or visits to other play spaces to enable children to make an informed decision. You may also need to adopt several different approaches to your consultation, ensuring that all ages and abilities are accounted for and not just those best able to express themselves.

Raising awareness

The need to raise awareness of your wild play project is obvious. If people do not know that the play space exists, no one will come to play. How to go about raising awareness, however, takes a little more thought, especially when considering two different primary target audiences: parents/carers as well as the children themselves. You will raise a certain amount of awareness of your project through your consultation programme, especially if you are working with local schools and community groups or hosting events. Additional avenues include local papers, community magazines/leaflets in the local shops/amenities, social media (including Facebook and Twitter) and holding organised play events on site once it has opened.



Getting inspiration

Whilst the internet can provide you with a vast array of ideas for your wild play space, do not discount the value of going out to see similar play spaces in person. Find out what natural play provision is available locally and go on a visit to see what other people have done and what aspects might work for your project. We have developed three wild play spaces within the New Forest National Park which could provide you with some inspiration:

- Holbury Manor, Holbury
- Stanford Rise, Sway
- Ashurst recreation ground, Ashurst

You can find out more about these sites within the case study section of this toolkit. Local country parks and the National Trust are often also a good place to start. Visits can help provide children with the hands-on experience that they need to develop an informed opinion.

Play England's 10 design principles

When designing your wild play space, you should aim to put together a design that provides children with the opportunity to experience a wide variety of play experiences whilst also enabling them to form a connection with the natural environment. Play England (2008) have developed 10 guiding principles to help you achieve this. Play spaces should:

1. Be bespoke
2. Be well located
3. Make use of natural elements
4. Provide a wide range of play experiences
5. Be accessible to both disabled and non-disabled children
6. Meet community needs
7. Allow children of different ages to play together
8. Build in opportunities to experience risk and challenge
9. Be sustainable and appropriately maintained
10. Allow for change and evolution



Designing for Play

Thinking about the space

Every wild play space is different and one of the major influencing factors will be the space available to you. The good news is that wild play spaces can come in all shapes and sizes, but it is a good idea to think about the space and resources available to you when you are considering the design of the space.

You may be lucky enough to have part of an established woodland at your disposal, in which case you could think about how wild play might be encouraged within the wider site, outside of the boundaries of the play space itself. One idea is to introduce a play trail within the wider woodland, which can help to provide an even 'wilder' play experience (see Holbury Manor case study).

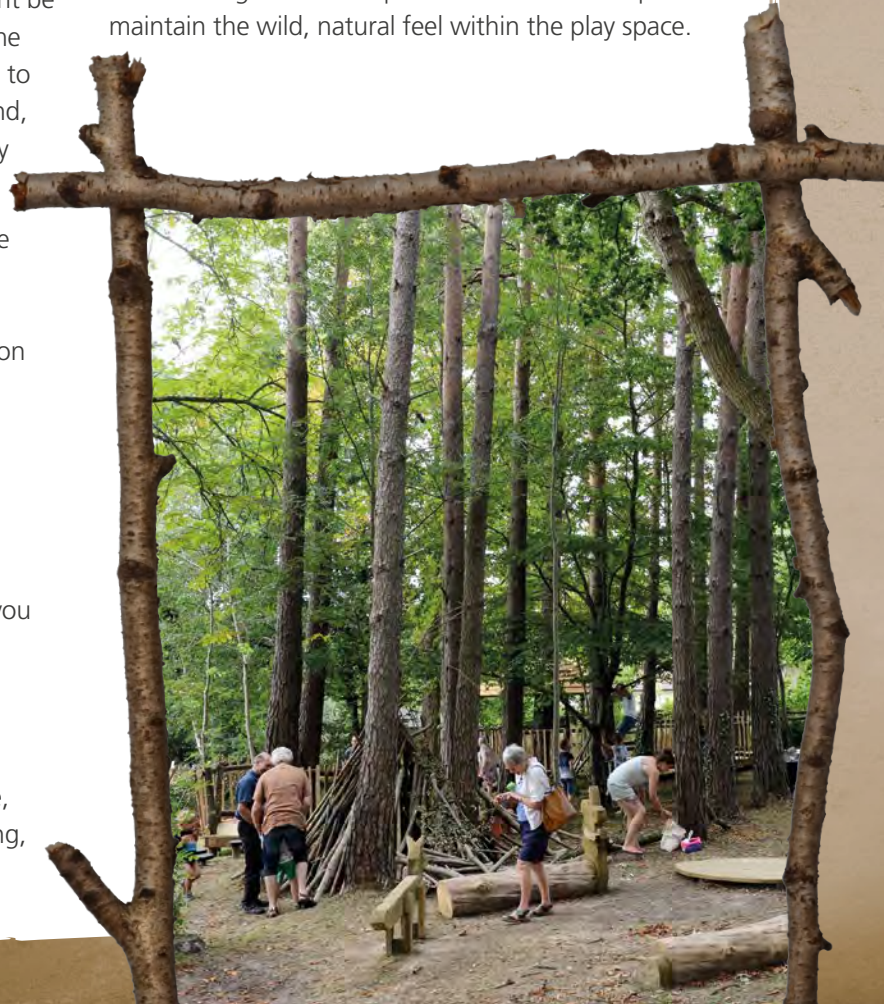
Alternatively, it may be that the space you have available is a section of parkland and a bit of a blank canvas. Natural play elements can easily be introduced into a site with a little imagination and other aspects of the park can be used to your advantage such as providing a ready-made audience to use your wild play site (see Stanford Rise and Ashurst case studies).

Boundaries

It is worth taking some time to consider how you are going to manage or mark the boundaries of your wild play space and if, in fact, you need to do so at all. Fencing off a play space can lead to an unwanted separation from the surrounding environment. There are, of course, some situations that require appropriate fencing,

such as where the play space is next to or near a road or car park that could otherwise introduce an unacceptable level of risk.

The use of soft edges for a play space, instead of fencing, helps to suggest a boundary to the area intended for play, without restricting children to that specific spot. Resources such as pathways and clever planting can all help to create this type of fuzzy edge to a wild play space. In this photograph you can see how, at our Holbury site, a wide section of ground cover was left in place between the fences alongside the car park and road. This helps to maintain the wild, natural feel within the play space.



Take a minute to think about maintenance

The ongoing maintenance of the site should be taken into consideration when putting together the design of the site. What resources will you have available to maintain the site? Inevitably there will be demands on both time and money, and the elements that you include within your design can have a significant influence on the level of future input that is required.



Health and safety

Taking on risks and challenges play an important role in the play and development of children. It is important to recognise that the aim when designing a wild play space is not to remove all possible risks but to balance appropriate risk-taking with the associated benefits to child development and play. The health and safety goal for wild play spaces is not absolute safety, but to provide children with opportunities to test and develop their abilities, whilst also protecting them from unacceptable risks.

The legal position

There is a legal duty placed on play space providers under the Health and Safety at Work Act (1974) to ensure there is a 'suitable and sufficient assessment' of the risks attached to the play space and that this assessment is acted upon. It is important to be aware that legally, it is the play providers and managers who are responsible for the risk management of the site and activities. Whilst external advice and expertise are valuable, it is the providers who have the final decision.

Ground surfacing and fall heights from play structures should be a key consideration when designing your play space. If the fall height from a play experience is under 600mm then no safety surfacing is required. However, if the fall height exceeds 600mm then it becomes an important factor and whilst there is no legal requirement for safety surfacing, it is recommended by safety organisations such as RoSPA. In a wild play space, you would need to look at the more natural options such as grass, woodchip or potentially sand in

order to maintain the 'naturalness' of the play space. These more natural options do have their own limitations and it is important you research the best option for your design and space.

There is a duty under the Occupiers' Liability Act 1984 to ensure that there is appropriate signage within a play area. Whilst there are several different functions that signs can fulfil, there are certain points that you must include, such as the operator of the site and contact details to report any damage or accidents. You should also try to ensure that the wording used on a sign does not suggest that the play space is safe for all children of a certain age and above, as this does not take into account the differing mental and physical capabilities of children that are of a similar age.

This toolkit is aimed at wild play spaces with low-key, natural resources such as those discussed in section 2. However, if you choose to introduce more complex play experiences (such as those with moving parts or tree-climbing) there are additional British and European standards that you need to be aware of. Plays England's (2012) 'Managing Risk in Play Provision' is a good place to start your additional research.



RoSPA (Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents)

RoSPA's play safety department provide advice and information on the safety of play areas, both indoors and outdoors. Depending on the composition of your wild play space and any equipment or resources that you decide to install, there is likely to be a need for an annual inspection by an independent body such as RoSPA or another appropriately qualified organisation.

RoSPA also offer a design-checking and post-installation inspection service if you feel that your project would benefit from these.

www.rosipa.com/play-safety

Managing risk

When considering health and safety, a wild play space should seek to be a 'safe but not risk-free' environment. By taking on a suitable level of challenge and risk, children can test and develop their abilities, as well as learning the skills to assess risk for themselves. It is worth remembering, however, that not all risks are positive. Good risks are generally those that are engaging and beneficial to a child's growth, development and learning. Whereas bad risks are those not easily predictable by children and hold little or no value to their development.

In today's society, risk assessments are commonplace, particularly in the workplace. However, the consideration and management of risk within play differs in one crucial way. When assessing risks within play, the presence of risk can often be beneficial to a child's development. In fact, accidents within a play space are not necessarily seen as a problem, as such experiences can have a high value to learning (Play England 2012).

The Play Safety Forum (2014) suggests that play providers should focus on the significant risks present within the play space, specifically those that:

"...are capable of creating a real risk to health and safety which any reasonable person would appreciate and take steps to guard against."

(Play Safety Forum 2014)

It was from this standpoint that the Play Safety Forum introduced a more balanced approach to risk assessment within a play provision.



Risk-benefit analysis

Risk-benefit analysis provides play providers with a framework to consider the risks and benefits alongside one another, enabling both aspects to inform decision-making.

www.playengland.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/psf-risk-benefit-assessment-form-worked-example.pdf

Maintenance

Whilst you are likely to have considered maintenance from the start of your planning, it will be the risk assessment/risk-benefit analysis that has the greatest impact. You will be able to utilise outcomes from your risk-benefit analysis to draw up a monitoring and maintenance schedule. Often there are separate lists for weekly, monthly and yearly checks, depending on what level is required. The checks and maintenance carried out on site should be clearly recorded and your records stored as they may be asked for if an accident were to occur.

The provision of natural play resources should be decided upon due to their suitability for the site, their potential to inspire self-directed play and the needs and wishes of the community. The resources discussed within this toolkit focus on natural, low-key resources rather than more complex, fixed play features.





Section Two

Resources and ideas



Children play in many ways, depending on their individual interests and abilities. In fact, around 16 different play types have been identified, including creative, social, locomotive and fantasy play. Non-prescriptive play features, such as those discussed in this toolkit and generally found within wild play sites, put play in the control of the children themselves, providing them with some independence in how they experience the world around them.

Every wild play space is likely to be unique with its own characteristics and its own specific level of 'wildness.' When deciding what to include within your space, it is worth thinking about how wild you would like your space to be. Play features such as fairy glades and tree forts introduce a wide range of play opportunities and can provide a degree of familiarity for families who may not be used to accessing the natural environment. However, they also introduce 'non-natural' elements into the space and it is important to achieve the right balance so your space still maintains an appropriate level of 'wildness.'

Whatever resources you choose to include within your wild play space, they should be able to be maintained in the long term. For some resources, this will mean monitoring and physical maintenance; for others, such as many loose parts, it is likely to require a topping-up of materials as they break down to ensure they are still available for use within play. Wherever possible, additional loose parts should be gathered from the same site as the wild play space to help ensure that new 'alien' species are not inadvertently introduced to the site. If this is not

possible, great care should be taken to establish the suitability of the source and materials themselves.

Loose parts are materials within a play space that can be moved, carried, put together, lined up and taken apart. They have no set direction of use and as such inspire creativity within play. Within a natural environment, loose parts might include logs, leaves, twigs, pebbles and soil. Loose parts allow flexibility within children's play, as they can be used in whatever way a child's imagination directs them.

The rest of this section is filled with ideas for resources that you may like to include in your wild play space.





Tree forts

The main thing that always comes up when talking to children about playing outside are treehouses. Treehouses are great, but can often be elaborate, expensive and if they are raised up in the canopy come with the potential for a significant fall height. Our solution to this at our Ashurst recreation ground wild play site was to install a series of three tree forts, connected by stepping logs and bridges.

Sitting much lower to the ground, with more open sides make tree forts a more realistic option for a public play space. They provide the feel of a tree house as well as the vast scope for the imagination. There will still be safety considerations to be aware of, which will vary according to design, so it is important to get the structures appropriately assessed for both safety and risk.

Tunnels

An entrance to another world? An escape from being chased? A tunnel can be so many different things to children of all ages. They are a great play feature on their own or combined with other pieces such as a den or stepping logs.

As a more manufactured natural play feature, like tree forts, there will be additional safety considerations. These are likely to include a minimum head height within the tunnel, potential fall height from on top of the tunnel as well as the overall stability of the tunnel itself.

It is often easiest to get the manufacture of the play feature to install their tunnel as they will have the best knowledge of its design and its associated stability and safety.





Log circles

Log circles can serve many purposes within a wild play space, from simply providing a space to sit and socialise to an opportunity to balance and climb.

Log circles can be a primary feature that draw children and their families into a space, creating a point of focus within the area and are often one of the first resources that are considered.

Log circles can vary in both size and design, so it is worth thinking about how your site is likely

to be used and by whom. If you think your site is likely to be used by groups of children, such as schools or nurseries, then a large log circle can prove invaluable, providing not only a focus for activity but also a place to congregate and reflect.

Long logs provide more flexible seating than short stumps, however, short stumps can provide a useful flat surface for other activities. It may of course depend on what resources you have available to you and you could always consider mixing the two together. Both have potential for balancing and moving around the circle.

Balancing logs

Dead and fallen trees can provide a dramatic inclusion within a wild play space. Children often do not need much encouragement to explore a fallen tree, and within minutes are likely to be clambering all over it. Give it time and the tree may well become so much more: a castle, a base or even a dragon's home. Providing non-specific play features such as this opens children's play beyond what the original plan may have intended.

Fallen trees tend to be extremely heavy and cumbersome. Unless you are lucky enough to already have something on site that you can use, you will need to consider how you are going to source, transport and install such a large item.

Local tree surgeons may be a good starting point to source appropriate material to create balancing logs. Once they are on site, you need to ensure that they are stable and secure enough for climbing on. This may be as simple as digging a trench under the log but may require additional securing to the ground.



If sourcing large pieces of tree proves to be too difficult or costly, you could consider using several smaller individual logs. With careful placement, these too can provide numerous opportunities for balancing, climbing and all the other things that children imagine.



Tree stumps

Tree stumps hold many different potential play opportunities, not least that of a natural climbing frame. Having a variety of heights and widths of stumps can introduce challenge to a variety of ages. A small height off the ground may seem easy for some older children but can be a great challenge for young children with little legs.

Tree stumps can be heavy. You should take care to ensure that they are as flat and stable as possible to aid children climbing over them, especially younger children who may not yet have developed a solid sense of balance. Making sure stumps are sunk an appropriate depth into the ground and solidly backfilled can make a

huge difference to their stability. Siting the end on a layer of shingle at the bottom of the hole promotes drainage and can help reduce rotting.

Keeping the height of tree stumps sunk into the ground below 0.6m means that you do not need to worry about the ground surface around them. Above this height and you need to be considering safety surfacing.

If you are lucky enough to have some tree stumps already on site where trees have previously been felled, their position may well influence the positioning of any introduced stumps.

Small tree stumps can also make great loose parts in children's play and are often one of the most moved-about items in a space.

Loose parts – leaves, etc.

Loose parts are a vital element of children's self-directed play; these are moveable features within the play area that can be utilised for a variety of tasks. Within a wild play site, loose parts are likely to include - but not limited to - leaves, twigs, pinecones and stones. These are particularly useful for creative play such as making pictures and sculptures on the ground.



If it is likely that your site will get heavy usage, smaller loose parts such as leaves and pinecones may break down quicker than you would expect. If you are fortunate to have a larger site, you may be able to transfer some loose parts from beyond the wild play area when they need a top-up. Be conscious, however, that dead material is an important part of the ecosystem, so try not to strip an area bare!

Loose parts – brash

Dead branches and leaves left on the ground hold many possibilities for imaginative play, not least for the construction of dens and nests. Ideally you will be able to make use of felled or coppiced material from elsewhere on site that can be left within the wild play area. If this is not a possibility for you, there may well be organisations and woodlands in your local area that are happy to help provide you with this type of material.

Brash will inevitably be used and moved around by children, some of whom may be particularly young, so it is best to avoid anything that is too heavy. You should also

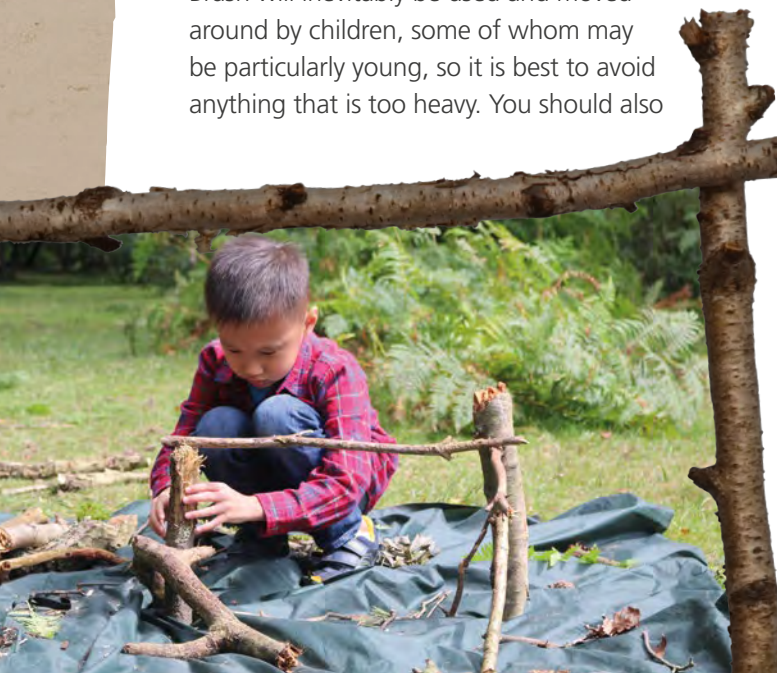
be on the lookout for any particularly spiky or sharp edges and remove them. As time goes on and the wild play site gets used, the brash is likely to break down and will need ongoing replacement.



Minibeast habitats

Minibeast habitats provide an opportunity for children to get up close and personal with some of nature's smaller creatures. Such encounters can not only spark curiosity but also help to engage children with nature and foster a desire to conserve it. If it is possible to get the children involved in the design and creation of the minibeast habitat you will have their interest engaged from the start!

A log pile provides a great habitat and opportunities for minibeast hunting. They are a more natural resource than a minibeast hotel. However, within a wild play site, it is likely that piles of sticks will soon disappear into den-building material before too long. The more structured appearance of a minibeast hotel can help prevent this occurring.



If you choose to include a minibeast hotel within your wild play site, it is best to keep a careful eye on the associated minibeast population. If it is noted to be declining you should consider introducing a second minibeast hotel into the site which can then be used on a rotating basis, marking one off with a sign such as 'Shh! Minibeasts sleeping.'

Fairy glades

The use of fairy glades and trails within woodlands is an increasingly popular resource for imaginative play, particularly for younger children. Fairy glades can be as simple as a miniature door attached to the base of trees to more elaborate creations including pathways, gardens and even doors that open onto miniature staircases rising into the tree. Primarily utilised as sparks for the imagination, the potential use for fairy glades within wild play is only limited by the children's imaginations.

Fairy glades introduce a non-natural element to a wild play space and whilst it is a low-key resource, this should be considered within the wider plan for the space. It also requires fixing to trees within the area, so it is worth discussing with whoever looks after the site and knows the trees before proceeding.



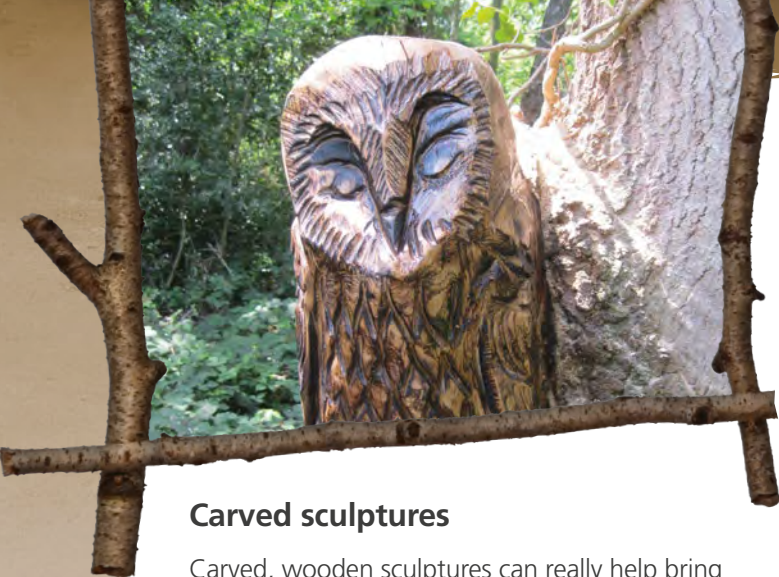
Living willow

If your site is more open than some woodland areas, you may wish to consider the use of living willow. Willow can be a great way of introducing natural play elements into an area that is a bit of a blank canvas and can be used to create features such as tunnels, domes and even chairs. The introduction of height into the area will immediately catch people's interest.

Creating living willow structures is a bit of an art and you may wish to get an expert to create it for you, or why not ask them to run a session with community members and their children to create it together? The willow will need some upkeep as it grows, weaving in some of the new growth and trimming off bits where they are not wanted. Once it is established, re-weaving and harvesting the willow is a great opportunity for a community event. The harvested willow could be used for craft activities with local children or help provide you with pieces of brash to top up loose parts!

When considering introducing living willow into your site, always check with the landowner to see if there are any pipes running under the ground. If there are, you should avoid planting over them as within two or three years the roots may have penetrated the pipes.





Carved sculptures

Carved, wooden sculptures can really help bring a space to life. They do not have to be purely aesthetic. With some careful thought and design then can be really playful too. Children love to clamber and sit on sculptures, so it is important to make sure they are robust enough to withstand lots of small feet. We have installed both a giant smooth snake and sand lizard in wild play spaces, both of which have gone down a storm, even being given a name by local children.

Benches

Younger children are most likely to be accompanied to a wild play site by their parent or carers and as such we need to take them into account as well. If parents and carers are happy and comfortable, they are more likely to allow their children to play for longer. The provision of benches at the wild play site will enable parents to sit fairly comfortably and watch their children play. Think carefully about the type of benches that are used. It is likely that low-key, naturalistic designed benches will fit better into the feel of a wild play site than plastic or metal benches would.

Where you locate benches within play space has the potential to impact the level of opportunity for free play by children. Parents of younger children will understandably want to be close enough to see their children and what they are doing, but it is important that they do not impinge too far into the play space. Equally, you do not want the benches to be inaccessible to children who may wish to include their parents within their play. Think about using space around the edge of the site that has a clear view of the area.



Signs

Signs can achieve a number of functions, not least in letting people know that there is a wild play space available and children are encouraged to use it. They can also be useful to provide information regarding who to contact if there are any issues or problems, or if people would like to get involved and help on the project. It may be that you want to make use of signage to help provide some inspiration for play itself.

Think carefully about the purpose of the sign and likely audience. A sign designed to encourage children to make use of the space for wild play is likely to be very different to one targeting adults: setting out rules, discouraging dog walking, etc. It may be that you need one sign to fulfil both functions, in which case you may need to be creative in your composition.

Signs do not have to be permanent, temporary or changeable. Signs can be really effective if they are regularly updated and any old information is removed or amended. Temporary signs can be a good way to promote upcoming events or provide inspiration for wild play.



START your

Wild Play

Adventure HERE

Section Three

Activities



The very best resources for wild play are time spent in a natural space and a child's imagination. For some families, however, wild play is unfamiliar territory. Providing ideas of activities which encourage children and parents starting on their own wild play journey can help increase their confidence in an unfamiliar environment. Activities such as those discussed in this toolkit are designed to be steppingstones to help bridge the way to children's own, independent, self-directed play.

There are numerous ways of promoting wild play ideas to your community, one of which is by holding wild play events at your play space. Events provide the opportunity for people involved in the wild play project to lead activities, enabling families to experience wild play first-hand and to take away ideas that they can replicate on their own on future visits to the site or other natural spaces.

Another great way to get your message out there is by using social media, such as Facebook and Twitter. Why not set up a page for your project and use it to keep the community updated on progress as well as to promote events and provide information on specific activities?

Build a den

Den building is an ever-popular activity with children and young people. Use the loose brash around on the ground to construct a den against one of the trees in the area. Try to make it as solid and weatherproof as you can (tepees are a popular design). If it is warm, why not test out how waterproof your final den is by pouring water over

it?! You could even add special design features such as an entrance path and seating area.

When constructing dens, it is important to ensure that they do not become too top-heavy or unstable and likely to fall in on you. A major influence on this will be size, both of materials that are used and of the den itself. Try to encourage appropriately sized den by providing materials that are not too big or heavy and removing any large or unstable shelters that are built. It is also important not to pick anything living when constructing a shelter. Within the New Forest, for example, bracken may be concealing ticks and can cut hands.





Natural portraits

Natural portraits are a great, creative activity that can be done either individually or in groups. First, lie down on the forest floor and ask one of your friends or family to mark your silhouette with twigs and sticks. Once they are finished, carefully stand up and you should have an outline of a person... you! Now all you need to do is collect items from around the forest to 'colour' it in.

Variation: Instead of portraits of your family and friends, why not create the outline of an animal that lives in the New Forest and create an animal portrait instead?

As with all wild play activities, remember that it is important to only use items that are already dead and on the forest floor and not to pick or use materials that are still living. This helps to ensure that our habitats stay as balanced and healthy as possible. Whenever you are collecting materials within a natural environment, you should always be conscious that there could be litter or debris on the ground which you do not want little hands collecting.

Minibeast hunts

Search high and low, under logs, in the bushes, even in the air, you will be amazed what minibeasts you can find once your eyes are tuned in. You do not need any equipment for a fantastic minibeast hunt, but if you have access to a magnifying glass, bug pot or identification guide, why not take them along to help you get a closer look?! If you find a creature and you are not sure what it is, take a photo and look it up on the internet when you get home.

When looking for minibeasts, make sure you handle them with great care and always return them to where they were discovered. If you move any logs or rocks, remember to replace the minibeasts homes to how you found them.



Nature's rainbows

Nature is full of greens and browns, right? Why not have another look and see how many different colours you can find in nature? Paint-colour sample strips from DIY shops can help to get little eyes focused on all the possible different colours around. You could take photos of the colours you find or lay out those that are already dead on the forest floor (so you don't need to pick anything) to create your own nature's rainbow. If you are feeling inspired, you could have a look at some of the artwork created by artists who use natural materials, such as Andy Goldsworthy, and then have a go yourself.

Variation: Autumn is a great season for finding different colours. During other seasons when there may be less variety, why not concentrate on how many different shades of green or brown you can find instead?



Meet a tree

Think you can tell one tree from another... what about if you could not see it? Challenge yourself in this great game.

Guide your friend to a tree with their eyes closed or wearing a blindfold. Let them really get to know a tree using their senses of touch and smell ... not sight of course. Once they have had a good explore, lead them away from their tree and see if they can find it again once their vision is restored.

Why not come back and visit the tree again and see how it changes through the seasons. You could take bark rubbings from the trunk or record what animals you can see in or around the tree.

When guiding someone to the tree, remember that they cannot see and will therefore not be aware of any bumps in the ground or logs they might trip over. Take care and warn them if something is coming up. If you place their hands on your shoulders and have them walk behind you, they should also be able to feel you step over anything on the ground.



Feely boxes

Using an old egg box carton as a collection box, collect items that feel opposite to each other, such as 'tickly and prickly' 'rough and smooth' or 'soft and hard.' Once you have collected three of each, see if your family or friends can guess what you were collecting. The skin on the inside of your wrist is particularly sensitive and is a good place to really feel the textures of your items. Remember, only collect items that are dead or on the forest floor (you don't need to pick anything) and to return them when you are finished.

Variation: You can still use this activity even if you don't have access to old egg boxes. Decide on your pair of describing words then collect items into two piles before asking people to guess what they were.



Micro hikes: an ant's-eye view

Imagine that you are an ant on the ground; how would you see the world around you? What would things look like if you were really small? Choose an area and mark out an interesting trail through landmarks (you could use twigs with leaves attached as flags). Puddles could become great lakes; weeds and plants huge forests. You are only limited by your imagination. Get down on your hands and knees and start looking.

Once you have marked out your trail, why not take your friends and family on a guided tour?

Sculptures and pictures

You can use nature as both your inspiration and materials to create pictures and sculptures. First, find a clear patch of ground, decide on your design then start collecting materials from the floor. As always, remember when collecting materials to use dead items and nothing that is living. If you are making a sculpture, remember that it should be 3-dimensional; think about how you might be able to make it stand up from the ground.



Camouflage (hide-and-seek with a twist)

This is a great game if you want to keep everyone within a fairly limited area. It works similarly to traditional hide-and-seek in that there is one seeker and the rest of the group will go and hide. Agree something central for a base such as a tree (if there is nothing obvious, pop something like a jumper on the ground). The seeker must stay in contact with the base as all times during the game. So, for instance, they would be able to move around a tree as long as they were touching it, but would not be able to move away from the tree completely.

The seeker starts the game by closing their eyes and counting to 30 (or an agreed number appropriate to the group); during this time the rest of the group must find a hiding space, preferably fairly close to the seeker. Once the seeker has finished their count, they look around to see if they can spot anyone, calling them out with their hiding position when they do.

The seeker has three tools to help them find the hiders: firstly, they can ask the hiders how many fingers are being held up, the hiders may need to poke their head out of their hiding spot for a minute. Once the hiders have called out the number of fingers, the seeker can have another look around for hiders.

Secondly, the seeker can call out 'animal noises' at which point all hiders must loudly make an animal noise such as a monkey, dog or wolf. These noises may give the seeker some clues about where to look. After this, the seeker can then close their

eyes and call out 'Tag me in 30' and proceed to count aloud to 30. During this count, every hider must come out of their hiding spot, tag the seeker and quickly find a new hiding spot. Once the seeker has reached 30, they can open their eyes.

Once these three options have been used, the seeker can go through them all again; when they get to 'Tag me' it can be reduced to 20 and then 10. The last hider to be in the game is the seeker for the next round.

Whether you play camouflage or another version of hide and seek it is always worth setting some ground rules first. Some areas to think about are:

Boundaries – Agree with the group a set area for play, away from hazards such as lakes or streams for the game which participants must not stray out of.

Heights – Discuss where hiding spaces should be.

Ending the game – It is always worth agreeing a phrase that signals the end of the game, even if all the hiders have not been found. Some children can be very good at squeezing themselves into small spaces that make them very hard to find!

Age appropriateness – depending on the age/ability mix within the group you may benefit from making a few adjustments such as if you have particularly young children who may need to hide with an adult or more experienced hider.



Section Four

Case Studies



One of the key parts of our wild play project was developing three community-based wild play sites. The focus of these sites was to increase children and families' engagement with nature, through play, on a regular basis. Our three sites were chosen as they were open access and within easy walking distance of the local community, often on the walk home from school.

The sites aim to be stepping stones for families for whom engaging with nature is not a familiar activity. When planning our sites, it soon became clear that introducing elements of familiarity within the space would help engage those families not used to engaging in wild play. So, whilst you might not find benches, sculptures or stepping logs within a truly wild space, they can be key to engaging with the community.

All three of our sites were located within spaces with different characteristics and therefore have a unique feel and approach to wild play. Holbury Manor wild play space is set within wider woodlands; Sway within an open grassed area of park; Ashurst is in a recreation ground, within a copse of trees. Wild play can be introduced to any space, and every space will have characteristics that guide the style of wild play features that are introduced.

The three case studies included here are intended to give a flavour of the sites and how they came to fruition. But remember, nothing quite beats experiencing it for yourself, so why not go and visit them or other similar play sites near you for some inspiration?





Holbury Manor Wild play site

Background

Holbury Manor wild play site is located in a section of woodland, within a much larger 10.45 hectare of parkland. Holbury Manor is a Site of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINC) and is owned and managed by Fawley Parish Council. Set inside the boundaries of the New Forest National Park and on the doorstep of the local Holbury community, we felt that Holbury Manor was an ideal venue for our first wild play site.

Fawley Parish Council were extremely supportive of the project from the outset and, in addition to the Wild Play project, have also worked in partnership with the New Forest National Park Authority on another, woodland conservation project also set

within the Holbury Manor park. As part of this second woodland conservation project, a 10-year Forestry England-approved management plan was put in place to help create a more diverse habitat and improve access for local people.

In addition to the funding from the Heritage Lottery Fund, we were lucky enough to secure some additional funding from the National Grid's Landscape Enhancement Initiative. This enabled us to extend our plans to a second phase which included a wild play loop within the wider woodlands, increasing play opportunities to the local community as well as improvements to footpaths, fencing and the main car park.

Wild Play Site

The first stage of the project at Holbury manor was making health and safety preparations, both for potential users and any wildlife living within the woodlands. A tree safety survey was carried out which highlighted the need for safety work to be carried out on some of the trees within the boundaries of the wild play space. Due to the nature of the habitat, we also commissioned a bat survey, to ensure that no roosting sites would be disturbed during the work. Whilst this work was being carried out, a bees' nest was discovered on site that was safely relocated to another part of the woodlands, so that the bees would not be disturbed, as well as a reduction in the risk of stings to children using the site.

The woodland floor of the wild play space was a dense blanket of brambles and ferns concealing a vast amount of abandoned rubbish and smashed glass which had accumulated over the years. An amazing band of volunteers worked hard to clear the site of all this rubbish and vegetation, making the ground suitable for children to access.

The brief for the wild play space at Holbury Manor was 'low-key, blending in with the surrounding woodlands', however, we needed some inspiration as to what this would actually look like. Having consulted with local children about what they would like to see in their wild play site and after lots of online research and visits to different sites, it was a visit to a natural play area within Kew Gardens, Richmond, that helped to inform our final design.

The staff at Kew Gardens provided us with support and guidance on how to achieve the natural clamber area and were delighted to have inspired us to adopt their ideas. Our plans were finalised through discussions with other organisations such as Forestry England, Moors Valley Country Park, local building companies and a playground design business.

"We wanted to engage the local community, encourage them to enjoy, play and interact with nature which is on their doorstep. This was ideal as it blended into the surroundings and was open to all to use."

Clerk, Fawley Parish Council

The natural clamber area was constructed by the arboriculture contractor completing the tree safety work, alongside staff from Fawley Parish Council and local volunteers. Utilising timber produced by the tree safety works not only meant that costs were kept relatively low but also that materials for the play space did not need to be imported from a different woodland. To complement the natural clamber play feature, a

**Stepping and
balancing logs at
Holbury Manor**





Some of the
clambering
elements installed
at Holbury Manor

timber tunnel feature and den-building materials were also incorporated into the play space.

Once the wild play space had been completed, an independent safety inspection was undertaken and successfully passed before the site was opened for public use. Fawley Parish Council staff also completed playground safety inspection training so that regular safety inspections and maintenance could be carried out on site.

Community Engagement

We sought to engage the local community from the very first stages of the project. Whilst the initial safety work was being completed, we visited three local primary schools, and local children provided their thoughts and ideas about the wild play site and what it could look like. We also used these links with local primary schools to talk to parents about their views on wild play and what they would like to see provided within site.

Once the site had passed the independent safety inspection, a pop-up opening event was held and the local community invited to join us

and take part in wild play activities. The event was held over the Easter holidays and attended by approximately 100 people from the local community, despite very wet conditions. A bit of mud certainly never stopped wild play!

Throughout community engagement work we were on the lookout for potential volunteers from within the local community who could get involved in the project, future events and take on an ownership of the site in the future. Once we had collected a group of individuals, we held an 'ideas meeting' to see how we should progress with future events and resources for the wild play site.

Lessons Learnt

Two key lessons emerged from the development of the wild play site at Holbury Manor:

1. 1. Effective partnership working can make an enormous difference to a project such as a wild play site. Positive communications between the New Forest National Park Authority and Fawley Parish Council, along with a supportive flexibility on both sides meant that when obstacles and delays were encountered, they were overcome with minimal stress and disruption.
2. 2. Delays to a project such as this are almost inevitable and being prepared for them and able to accept them as part of the project can help to minimise frustrations. Again, this also links back to having open and honest communication with your project partners. In the case of Holbury Manor, the timings of the project meant that delays were encountered whilst waiting for the woodland works to

be completed, which could only be done outside of the bird-nesting season. Delay was also introduced whilst we were applying for additional funding for the project. To minimise this additional delay, we decided to approach the project in two stages, with the wild play loop and additional works being completed once the main site was up and running.





Stanford Rise green wild play site

Background

Stanford Rise Green is owned and managed by Sway Parish Council and located at the heart of the Sway community. Prior to the wild play project, the site was an open, grassed area which tended to become wet and boggy over the winter. The parish council acknowledged that the site was underused by the community and had already conducted community consultation to ascertain what the community would like to see within Stanford Rise Green. Natural play for local children came out high on their priority list.

As a result of their consultation, Sway Parish Council also undertook considerable drainage work on site, with the aim of making the site accessible and

useable year-round. These works were completed prior to the start of the wild play project and needed to be considered when siting play features so that the site could continue to drain appropriately.

Following their community consultation, Sway Parish Council were fully supportive of natural play being introduced at Stanford Rise Green, however, they were also conscious of the other potential user groups on site as well as its use as a base for fetes, carnivals, etc, throughout the year. As such, the design for the wild play site needed to complement these other uses of the space.

Wild Play Site

The brief for the Stanford Rise Green wild play space was natural play, balanced with the more formal, multi-use nature of the site. The 'grass space' nature of the site, alongside the drainage work that had been completed, meant that there was little preparation required prior to starting the project. The design of the site was therefore the initial focus of the project.

Through discussions, it became clear that the parish felt a need to maintain a level of 'tidiness' to the site and as such it was decided to avoid a loose parts element to the play space. Subsequently, the design followed a natural play through fixed features focus and a plan was put together incorporating: a stepping log circle, grassy mound with tunnel and stepping logs feature, balancing carved snake, minibeast hotels and carved log seating.

Community Engagement

Community engagement was a priority from the start of the project and at Stanford Rise, we were fortunate that the parish council had already sought to initiate a 'Friends of Stanford Rise' group, with a local volunteer heading up the group. This was a great source of initiating practical support for key tasks and they were always successful in coordinating volunteers to move logs, spread woodchips and water turf!

The community consultation that had already been completed prior to the wild play project meant that there was a reduced need to complete any further consultation about the design of the play space. The friends' group again provided invaluable support in making final design decisions.

Storytelling in a log circle at Stanford Rise

A celebratory opening event was held over the summer, once the site had passed its safety inspection. The parish council again contributed time and money to help create a community event. The celebration was a great success, with approximately 80 people attending for an afternoon of nature play, storytelling and crafts.

The Parish Council

"Sway Parish Council worked hard to help create the much-improved open space at Stanford Rise Green, alongside the NFNP and with a huge amount of effort from volunteers and local businesses as well. Using £106 funds to initially improve the drainage and to contribute towards the wild play installation, the Parish Council was able to oversee the project on behalf of Sway residents who had voted for it during a village consultation.

The official opening in July 2019 included Councillors past and present, alongside the Junior Parish Council and many residents. A hand-carved, locally sourced oak sign was unveiled to mark the occasion. Sway Parish Council continues to manage and evolve the open space with the inclusion of a wildflower meadow and additional native planting to further enhance the natural look and feel of the space."

Clerk, Sway Parish Council





Play tunnels at
Stanford Rise

Lessons Learnt

Two key lessons that emerged from developing the wild play site at Stanford Rise were:

1. Wild Play can be introduced in almost any space. The approach that you take will need to be tailored to the space available and the needs of the community. The initial 'blank space' of the Stanford Rise site led us to consider how we could introduce natural elements into the space. The need for a slightly more formal version of wild play to fit with the multi-use aspect of the site led us to consider a more set play feature style to the play space. What we ended up with is a lovely, natural play space within a community site that is used by all generations.
2. Access to a group of children and young people such as a junior parish council can be invaluable for gaining access to children's own thoughts, ideas and opinions for a project. They can also be a great resource for children's participation in events such as the official opening of the play space.







Ashurst wild play site

Background

Ashurst wild play site is owned by Ashurst and Colbury Parish Council and is located within a larger community recreation ground. The recreation ground already incorporated various leisure facilities within the site, including a grassed kick-about area with football goals, traditional fixed play equipment and an outer wooded section of land. The recreation ground was also frequently used for dog walking. The recreation ground is within the boundaries of the New Forest National Park and, at the heart of the Ashurst and Colbury community, the wooded section of the site was felt to be an ideal community wild play space.

Ashurst and Colbury Parish Council were extremely positive about the potential for the wild play project from the beginning and were able to contribute some additional funding from their s106 developer contributions, which enabled us to increase the play provision and improve the accessibility for children with restricted mobility. The parish council were also happy to have a tree safety survey and any associated works carried out prior to the project starting, meaning that our time and budget could be focused on the play provision directly.

Wild Play Site

The wild play space at Ashurst recreation ground was to be the third and final site created within the wild play project. The site itself was identified

Families enjoying Ashurst Wild Play site

and agreed on relatively early in the project which provided about a year's lead-in time for planning before the site was scheduled to be constructed. This extended planning phase meant that the parish council were able to carry out the tree safety survey and associated works over the winter before construction was due to take place and a clear design and plan for the site was in place and contractors lined up for the works.

There were clear benefits to having an extended timeframe for the planning phase and whilst a full year was excessive and unneeded, it is worth making sure that you allow enough time for preparation and planning. Particularly if there is a seasonal limitation to some required works such as conducting tree works outside of the bird-nesting season.

The brief for the design was flexible, with the aim being to utilise the ideas and wishes of children and families living in the area. We conducted an online survey to start collecting the community's thoughts and attitudes around wild play and followed these up with two community meetings on site to discuss and develop the information collected. The response from the local community was amazing and we finished with a clear brief of providing opportunities for exploration, den-building, clambering, balancing and engaging with nature. From this a design was developed incorporating some low-level tree forts, balancing logs, den-building and a minibeast hunting area. The initial designs were taken to the community meetings and warmly received.

The tree safety survey carried out by Ashurst and Colbury Parish Council indicated that a significant amount of associated works was needed on

site. The resulting material, including numerous willow poles and pine logs, were subsequently available to use within the wild play site itself. Following discussions about the project, the tree surgeons were happy to cut the willow poles and pine logs to appropriate sizes required for the various play features. These were predominantly used to create den-building material, balancing logs and an area dedicated to minibeast hunting. Two volunteer sessions were held to sort through the poles and logs and move them into position to start creating the wild play space.

Three major play features were created by external providers and included a giant carved sand lizard, a wildlife seating circle with mini stage and a series of tree forts and balancing logs. Once they were installed, an independent play safety inspection was undertaken. The inspection was arranged to take place on the final day of installation meaning that any snagging issues were able to be addressed straight away whilst the contractors were on site.



Community Engagement

The Ashurst and Colbury local community were extremely supportive of the wild play project from the start, not only providing thoughts and ideas for the design of the space but also offering practical support to help achieve our aims. Volunteer support can be invaluable in getting tasks done, whilst minimising costs to the project, particularly, as in this case, where tree works had provided some free resources to be utilised.

During the development phase of the project, time was spent on site, engaging with community members who already utilised the site for various activities, particularly dog walking, to discuss the project and uncover any potential conflicts within the site. Dogs and play areas have the potential to cause conflict among site users. Concerns from both sides were perhaps reduced in this case as both user groups are already present on site. Concerns raised by families regarding dogs off-lead approaching children were taken on board and will be monitored and incorporated into future outreach work onsite if required.

Once the site had passed the post-installation safety inspection, it was officially opened with a pop-up wild play event over the summer holidays. The event was well attended by the local community, with approximately 120 people joining us for the celebration. We have received lots of positive feedback about the site from children and families and it has quickly become part of families' lives.



Ashurst Wild
Play site tree fort

The Parish Council

"When the NFNPA Wildplay Project Officer first came to one of our monthly full council meetings to talk about the wild play project, the council was immediately enthused and keen to work with them to find a suitable location. After exploring many small corners of the parish, the recreation ground was identified as the best location as it was an existing play area and it was felt that the wild play would be a great enhancement to the facilities already offered there.

We were delighted with how involved the community became and how they embraced the idea. Claire had some great ideas for the area and the design of the components, which were further enhanced by the contractor's input.

The works were completed quickly and the whole area was very well received on the open day and since; we have received numerous compliments about the equipment and the extra dimension it has brought to children's play."

Clerk, Ashurst and Colbury Parish Council

Lessons Learnt

Three key lessons have emerged from the development of the wild pay site at Ashurst recreation ground:

1. Setting aside enough time for the planning phase of the project can result in a much smoother installation phase, as installations by different contractors can be coordinated with each other. Being able to arrange the safety inspection at the end of the installation phase also meant that any snags were identified and dealt with immediately as the contractors were still on site.
2. Community engagement can have a huge impact on a project. The positive response from the local community resulted in a play space that hopefully meets the community's needs and wishes, and that was developed with a good momentum and positive spirit within the local area.
3. Working in partnership with other organisations from the start and identifying common goals and objectives not only facilitates the planning and development of a project but may also enable additional funds to be utilised from within the other organisation. Without the additional funding from Ashurst and Colbury Parish Council, we would not have been able to include as much within the site or make the tree forts as accessible to children with limited mobility.



Section Five

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