

Developing Accessible Play Space: Final Research Report

On 5th May 2006 the responsibilities of the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) transferred to the Department for Communities and Local Government.

Department for Communities and Local Government
Eland House
Bressenden Place
London SW1E 5DU
Telephone: 020 7944 4400
Website: www.communities.gov.uk

Documents downloaded from the www.communities.gov.uk website are *Crown Copyright* unless otherwise stated, in which case copyright is assigned to *Queens Printer and Controller of Her Majestys Stationery Office*.

Copyright in the typographical arrangement rests with the Crown.

This publication, excluding logos, may be reproduced free of charge in any format or medium for research, private study or for internal circulation within an organisation. This is subject to it being reproduced accurately and not used in a misleading context. The material must be acknowledged as Crown copyright and the title of the publication specified.

Any other use of the contents of this publication would require a copyright licence. Please apply for a Click-Use Licence for core material at www.opsi.gov.uk/click-use/system/online/pLogin.asp or by writing to the Office of Public Sector Information, Information Policy Team, St Clements House, 2-16 Colegate, Norwich NR3 1BQ. Fax: 01603 723000 or e-mail: HMSOlicensing@cabinet-office.x.gsi.gov.uk.

This publication is only available online via the Communities and Local Government website: www.communities.gov.uk

Alternative formats under Disability Discrimination Act (DDA): if you require this publication in an alternative format please email alternativeformats@communities.gsi.gov.uk

The findings and recommendations in this report are those of the consultant authors and do not necessarily represent the views or proposed policies of Communities and Local Government.

Contents

[Front cover](#)

[Acknowledgements](#)

[Glossary](#)

[Summary](#)

[Chapter One: The Research](#)

[Chapter Two: Key Findings and Analysis](#)

[Chapter Three: Discussion](#)

[References](#)

[Appendices](#)

The findings and recommendations in this report are those of the consultant authors and do not necessarily represent the views or proposed policies of Communities and Local Government.

Go to table of contents

Front cover

Research on developing accessible play space - Final Report

A report to the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister by:

Karen Dunn, Michele Moore and Pippa Murray
Inclusion, Childhood & Education Ltd.

Office of the Deputy Prime Minister: London, January 2004

The findings and recommendations in this report are those of the consultant authors and do not necessarily represent the views or proposed policies of the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister.

The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister has actively considered the needs of the partially sighted in accessing this document. The text will be made available in full on the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister's web site in accordance with the W3C's Web Accessibility Initiative's criteria. The text may be freely downloaded and translated by individuals or organisations for conversion into other accessible formats. If you have other needs in this regard, or you are a carer for someone who has, please contact the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister.

The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister
Eland House
Bressenden Place
London SW1E 5DU

Telephone 020 7944 4400

Web site www.communities.gov.uk

© Queen's Printer and Controller of Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 2004

Copyright in the typographical arrangement rests with the Crown.

This publication, excluding logos, may be reproduced free of charge in any format or medium for research, private study or for internal circulation within an organisation. This is subject to it being reproduced accurately and not used in a misleading context. The material must be acknowledged as Crown copyright and the title of the publication specified.

For any other use of this material, please write to HMSO Licensing, St Clements House, 2-16 Colegate, Norwich NR3 1BQ Fax: 01603 723000 or e-mail: licensing@hmsso.gov.uk.

This is a value added publication which falls outside the scope of the HMSO Class Licence

The findings and recommendations in this report are those of the consultant authors and do not necessarily represent the views or proposed policies of Communities and Local Government.

[Go to table of contents](#)

Acknowledgements

This report was written by Karen Dunn, Michele Moore and Pippa Murray of Inclusion, Childhood and Education Ltd. It details the project that produced the Good Practice Guide on Accessible Play Space published by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister in November 2003. Both are based on information, advice and support provided by many people. These include:

An advisory group: Joanne Allison (Office of the Deputy Prime Minister), Colin Canon (London Borough of Bexley), Issy Cole-Hamilton (Children's Play Council), Rachel Conner (Office of the Deputy Prime Minister), Helen Crofts (Office of the Deputy Prime Minister), Carol Foster-Middleton (Disability Unit, Department of Work and Pensions), Helen Groombridge (Children and Young People's Unit), Anita Onyeledo (Department for Education and Skills: Community and Inclusion Team), Margaret Prythergch (Department for Culture, Media and Sport), Philippa Russell (Council for Disabled Children), Richard Vaughn (Children and Young People's Unit), Jacqueline Winstanley (Bolton Metropolitan Borough Council), Kevin Woods (Department of Education and Skills).

Workshop participants: disabled children and their families, campaign groups, playground amenity officers, equipment manufacturers, policy makers, planners, community play providers

All members of the ICE research and consultancy team including Cambridge Architectural Research Ltd for their contribution to the early stages of the project.

Blake Williamson and Dr Claire Tregaskis deserve special thanks for the inspiration they have provided throughout.

A note on language

Throughout this report we have deliberately used the language of social model of disability when referring to disabled children and young people. This means that we have used the term 'disabled children' rather than 'children with disabilities'. This language has been chosen because it does not locate the 'problem' of disablement within the individual with impairment. Where it is necessary to denote the nature of impairment we use terms such as 'children with learning difficulties' or 'children with sensory impairments' which place the child before the impairment. Where the document makes use of quotation and different language, for example the term 'children with disabilities', is used we have not changed this.

The findings and recommendations in this report are those of the consultant authors and do not necessarily represent the views or proposed policies of Communities and Local Government.

[Go to table of contents](#)

Glossary

Accessible Play Space

A play space in which physical and environmental barriers which could exclude children with impairments - such as uneven surfaces, narrow gates and steps - are removed by good environmental planning and design.

Inclusive Play Space

An accessible play space in which disabled children and their non-disabled peers feel comfortable being together in the ways they choose. Making play spaces inclusive refers to actively circumventing social barriers such as fear, embarrassment or discriminatory attitudes which could exclude children with impairments from otherwise accessible places to play. It is important to note that the term 'inclusive' is also sometimes broadened to refer to other factors such as ethnicity, for example when social inclusion is being referred to.

Section 106 Agreements

Types of Planning Obligation authorised by **Section 106** of the **Town and Country Planning Act 1990** as amended by the **Planning and Compensation Act 1991**. When a developer seeks planning permission a Section 106 agreement is negotiated between the developers and the planning authority. These agreements are the main instrument for placing obligations on developers, often to require them to spend money on providing community benefits. Section 106 agreements are usually in force for 15-20 years but can be appealed after 5 years.

Planning Policy Guidance 17 (PPG 17)

A planning framework for providing, protecting and enhancing open spaces. It sets out how the government expects local authorities to plan for delivery of open spaces and puts forward a needs-based approach. Central to PPG 17 is the requirement for local authorities to assess current and future needs of local communities for a range of types of open spaces. Planning Policy Guidance is not statutory but should be taken into account when a local authority is preparing its development plan.

Local Areas For Play (LAPS)

A small area of unsupervised open space designed to give accompanied young children up to 6 years old play activities close to where they live; that is one minute walking time from home along pedestrian routes (60 metres in a straight line). LAPS typically have no play equipment.

Local Equipped Areas For Play (LEAPS)

An unsupervised play area for accompanied children of early school age, up to 8 years. These

should offer at least 5 types of play equipment. LEAPs should be located 400 metres or 5 minutes walking time along pedestrian routes (240 metres in a straight line), from nearby dwellings. Seating should be provided for accompanying adults.

Neighbourhood Equipped Areas For Play (NEAPS)

An unsupervised play area servicing a substantial residential area, equipped mainly for children between the ages of 8 and 14. NEAPs should offer at least 8 different types of play opportunity including a kick about area, wheeled play opportunities, and seating for accompanying adults and teenagers to use as a meeting place. NEAPs should be located 1,000 metres or 15 minutes walking time along pedestrian routes (600 metres in a straight line), from nearby dwellings.

Community Plans

The **Local Government Act 2000** places a duty on principal local authorities to prepare a **community plan** for promoting the economic and environmental well being of their areas and contributing to the achievement of sustainable development in the UK.

European Standards BSEN 1176 and 1177

BSEN 1176 1177 are European safety standards that have been adopted in the UK. They are not mandatory but compliance represents good practice. The standards cover general safety requirements and test methods relating to equipment, the spacing between play structures and areas of impact absorbing surfacing.

Local Strategic Partnerships (LSPS)

A **Local Strategic Partnership** (LSP) is a single body that brings together at a local level the different parts of the public, business, community and voluntary sectors so that different initiatives and services support each other and work together. Core tasks of an LSP are to prepare and implement a **community strategy** for the area, identify and deliver the most important things which need to be done, keep track of progress, and keep it up-to-date; bring together local plans, partnerships and initiatives to provide a forum through which mainstream public service providers work effectively together to meet local needs and priorities.

The findings and recommendations in this report are those of the consultant authors and do not necessarily represent the views or proposed policies of Communities and Local Government.

[Go to table of contents](#)

Summary

In February 2003, the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) commissioned Inclusion Childhood and Education Ltd (ICE) to produce a non statutory good practice guide on accessible play space. *Developing Accessible Play Space: A Good Practice Guide* published by ODPM in November 2003, gives advice which can be tailored to individual settings on developing accessible play space disabled children can use. This summary describes the research conducted to inform development of the Guide.

Background

Where children play in their local communities, and how they can be supported to play safely in public spaces, is of concern to all children and young people as well as to Government and parents. Improving access to public play spaces for disabled children and other groups who currently under use them is central to the development of sustainable and inclusive communities (ODPM, 2003).

Enabling disabled children to access play spaces helps them and their families build relationships and neighbourhood networks that can bind communities and promote social inclusion. When children play together, parents invariably talk together and new community alliances are forged.

Research objectives

The objectives of the research undertaken were to:

- assess current advice and guidance to play space providers and review current practice relating to accessible play space for disabled children;
- clarify the existing and possibly conflicting legislative and regulatory frameworks that are relevant to the provision of play spaces ;
- consider other relevant policies and initiatives;
- develop a good practice guide for play space providers, including practical advice on improving accessibility.

It was envisaged the guide would help explain current and future duties under the access provisions in Part III of the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA, 1995) in relation to the provision of play spaces.

Approach

The approach taken to this project was based on the social model of disability that focuses on

the barriers encountered by people viewed as having impairments. This approach encourages play space providers to concentrate on dismantling barriers that create segregation, exclusion and disablement rather than worrying about the complexities of impairment.

Consultation is key to building an understanding of and removing disabling barriers people with impairments face. For this reason disabled children's views on accessible play space were sought first and then put to other groups of key stakeholders to see where consensus could be reached to work towards meeting children's aspirations. The aim was to show through research practice how consultation with disabled children assists the development of accessible play space.

Literature, legislation and policy

The report provides a review of relevant literature that concentrated particularly on the key areas of play, legislation and policy and risk and safety issues. It establishes the central importance of the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) (1995) which will be extended, from October 2004, to cover adjustments in relation to any physical features that create a barrier for disabled people, and will help in the drive to make play spaces fully accessible.

Research methods

Telephone interviews with playground amenity officers

Telephone interviews were conducted to collect data from local authority workers across all English regions. The purpose of telephone interviews was to:

- assess current practice on accessible play space provision and identify a range of best practice projects;
- enable key providers to identify existing (possibly conflicting) legislative frameworks that impact on the provision of accessible play space;
- familiarise playground amenities officers with the aims of the project and forthcoming good practice guide.

Stakeholder workshops

Key stakeholder groups with an interest in developing good practice guidance on accessible play space for disabled children took part in consultation:

- Disabled children, their families and friends
- Campaign Groups
- Policy makers
- Playground Amenities Officers
- Equipment manufacturers

- Planners
- Representatives of accessible play spaces in England.

Consulting disabled children, their families and friends

Disabled children and their families were invited to consultation events held in public open play spaces. The aim was to talk with and observe disabled children, their brothers, sisters, friends and parents playing together. Not all disabled children can (or want to) talk about their experiences and so disposable cameras were given to children and families to record their experience and the researchers watched children play and played with them. Indicative activities used to elicit children's views on accessible play space are provided in Appendices. Families were contacted through national and local support groups, care-giver networks and social groups. Contact details have been included in the Good Practice Guide so that interested parties might extend their own networks.

Consulting other stakeholder groups

Representatives of all of the other stakeholder groups were invited from across the regions of England to participate in workshops facilitated by the ICE Project Team. The purpose of these events was to establish baseline data, allow a 'taking stock' of each group's point of view and facilitate a sharing of ideas for a good practice guide.

Matters arising and preliminary findings were shared and reviewed through further consultation with a mix of stakeholders. This allowed for cross fertilisation of responses to emerging findings and for ideas to be shared across the focal stakeholder domains on the content and format of the good practice guide.

Key findings

The section of the report summarises key themes and headline findings which shaped production of the Good Practice Guide. It also identifies issues that need further exploration if accessible play space are to be developed in ways that can support and enhance the lives of all children and their families.

There is broad agreement that:

- Outdoor play is of crucial importance to children's development, health and well-being.
- Disabled and non-disabled children should equally be able to access and use public play spaces.
- Good play spaces enable disabled and non disabled children to play together and make use of play equipment designed for both disabled and non disabled children.
- Enabling disabled children and their non-disabled siblings and peers to use play spaces together has wider benefits for social inclusion and community building and networking.
- The Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) and the Code of Practice attached to it need to be clearly understood in relation to the development of accessible play space. The Act is

perceived as an influential driver in initiatives to develop future accessible play space policy.

- Although there is no specific policy agenda on accessible play space, the development of accessible play space connects to many other policy agendas apart from those related to open and public space - such as health, education and sport and leisure.
- Policy statements on accessible play space for disabled children are relatively thin on the ground. Although it is appreciated that in some areas the process of drafting policy is emerging, this is often in response to concerns around meeting the requirements of the DDA.
- Where policy does exist on accessible play space, this is often structured around existing guidelines such as National Playing Fields Association (NPFA) standards. Increasing accessibility of play space has not tended to focus specifically on children with impairments.
- In spite of a lack of specific policy agendas on accessible play, work in practice is in evidence. Therefore, many developments are taking place outside of an agreed policy context or play strategy.
- The importance of good design in developing accessible play spaces, which will give value for money, cannot be underestimated.
- Post holders with responsibility for taking forward the development of accessible play space can be difficult to locate. Responsibilities are often shared across departments and understandings of the functioning of these relationships are sometimes unclear. This hinders accessible play space development.
- The main barriers to the development of accessible, open public play space are felt to be lack of funding, staff resources and understanding of what disabled children want and are entitled to.
- A vital stimulus for accessible play space development is observed in the commitment and enthusiasm expressed by a broad range of stakeholders in making play spaces accessible.

Issues that arose in the research which are considered further in the guide include:

- The importance of embedding understanding of the difference between disability and impairment.
- Interpretations and understandings of **risk and safety**. Disabled children, like all children want and need to take risks in play and many of their parents want this to be possible for them. Gaining a balance between risk and safety in play spaces provokes a wide range of views and disagreements discussed in the report and Guide.
- How to link up accessible play space development with **essential subsidiary services** such as toilets and parking.

- **Funding** for play spaces, particularly in relation to revenue costs and lack of clarity about relevant funding streams to promote and develop work on improving accessibility.
- **Responsibility for play** and how this is understood at local authority level, particularly at senior levels.
- How able and confident people feel to **consult with disabled children and their families**.
- Issues of **maintenance** of play space in respect of design and funding.
- How developing a few '**show case**' accessible play spaces compares to working to increase accessibility in **neighbourhood** parks.

Discussion

Attention is drawn to different models for the development of services and facilities to support disabled children's access to and inclusion in everyday life, which have important ramifications for the future development of accessible play space. It became clear through the research that good practice emerges where disabled children and their families are seen as full citizens with all the rights and responsibilities that are implied. It is observed that when a citizenship model (Oliver and Bailey, 2002) is enacted in policy formulation, patterns of consultation and community involvement and commitment to service provision, good practice in the development of accessible play space ensues.

The findings and recommendations in this report are those of the consultant authors and do not necessarily represent the views or proposed policies of Communities and Local Government.

[Go to table of contents](#)

Chapter One: The Research

Background

1.1 In February 2003 the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) commissioned Inclusion Childhood and Education Ltd (ICE) to produce a non statutory good practice guide on accessible play space informed by and useful to a wide range of stakeholders including disabled children, young people, their parents and caregivers, campaigners, playground amenities officers, equipment manufacturers, planners, play providers and policy makers.

1.2 The commission arose as part of the commitment to improving public spaces including parks and green spaces as set out in **Living Places: cleaner, safer, greener** which was published at the Urban Summit in October 2002. This report highlighted certain groups including disabled people, minority ethnic groups and the young and elderly who do not always benefit from green spaces, and proposed the development of a good practice series to address these and other issues.

1.3 Despite this, until recently, there has been little recognition of disabled children's entitlement to the same opportunities for development through play as other children. Consequently, insufficient attention has been paid to their interests when planning and designing public play spaces. Since 1996, the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) has made it unlawful for service providers to treat disabled people less favourably and increasingly 'reasonable adjustments' are being required which give legislative effect to the drive to make open public play spaces fully accessible.

1.4 Notwithstanding the legal and human rights context that situates this work, where children play in their local communities, and how they can be supported to play safely in public spaces, is of concern to children and young people as well as to Government and parents. Improving access to public play spaces for disabled children and other groups who currently under use them is central to the development of sustainable and inclusive communities (ODPM, 2003).

1.5 Feeling included as a child through experiences acquired in your local community gives a sense of belonging and self worth which later influences attitudes towards participation and citizenship (Swain et al, 2003). Many disabled children go to schools away from their own neighbourhood and so using local play space may provide the only opportunity to develop friendships with other local children and therefore to build and foster community identity.

1.6 Moreover, enabling disabled children to access play spaces helps them and their families build relationships and neighbourhood networks that can bind communities and promote social inclusion. When children play together, parents invariably talk together and new community alliances are forged.

Objectives

1.7 The objectives of the research ICE undertook were to:

- assess current advice and guidance to play space providers and review current practice relating to accessible play space for disabled children;
- clarify the existing and possibly conflicting legislative and regulatory frameworks that are relevant to the provision of play spaces;
- consider other relevant policies and initiatives;
- develop a good practice guide for play space providers, including practical advice on improving accessibility.

1.8 It was envisaged that the guide would help to explain current and future duties under the access provisions in Part III of the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA, 1995) in relation to the provision of play spaces.

1.9 It was established that the guide would reflect the views of disabled children and their families as well as feedback from the play sector. In addition, it would make reference to wider access issues, such as travel and toilets. It would be aimed at play space providers, which are mainly local authorities and town and parish councils, but also include developers, housing associations and open space trusts in its remit. It was acknowledged that the guide may also be relevant to other groups and organisations working to create or improve play space provision.

Approach

1.10 The approach taken was based on the social model of disability which provides a way of understanding and responding to exclusions and oppressions experienced by disabled children and young people and their families. It emerged in the 1970's as disabled people struggled to understand their own situations, to define their own problems and to develop their own aspirations for change. It is based on the idea that:

It is society which disables physically impaired people. Disability is something imposed on top of our impairments by the way we are unnecessarily isolated and excluded from full participation in society.

Union of the Physically Impaired Against Segregation, 1976

1.11 Social model thinking increasingly underpins the work of the British Government initiated Disability Rights Commission (Barnes, 2003). It involves focussing on nothing more complicated than the barriers encountered by people viewed as having impairments and enables play space providers to take a creative approach to dismantling barriers that create segregation, exclusion and disablement rather than worrying about questions of impairment.

1.12 When working to understand and remove the disabling barriers that people with

impairments face, a premiss of consultation is a key. For this reason, a broad consultation informed the development of the guide, including consultation with disabled children and their families.

1.13 The work of the **Children's Play Council** (2002) asserts that finding out about children and young people's preferences and aspirations will create the best chance that play space development will be accessible. Campaign groups working to develop inclusive provision such as **KidsActive** emphasise the particular importance of consultation with disabled children so that they are 'active contributors to a setting in which they truly belong, rather than being a passive presence in other people's provision' (Douche, 2002).

1.14 The manner in which disabled and non-disabled children are brought into consultation with agencies working to support them is crucial. Recent shifts in policy direction towards consulting with and maximising the participation of children in planning for the services and facilities they use is important to bear in mind. For this reason we have attached considerable importance to placing disabled children at the heart of the consultation and making their views and experiences of play space a key reference point for all other stakeholders.

1.15 In practice this has meant that we have taken disabled children's views on accessible play space first and then put these to other groups of key stakeholders to see where consensus could be reached to work towards meeting children's aspirations. We have aimed to show through our own research practice ways in which consultation with disabled children will assist the development of accessible play space. This approach reflects our endorsement of the citizenship approach identified by Oliver and Bailey (2002) that calls for consultation with disabled children to be the starting point for development of their services. This is discussed fully in Chapter 3.

Review of literature, legislation and policy

1.16 In order to place the data we collected within an appropriate context and to provide a suitable backdrop for the good practice guide we undertook a review of relevant literature which concentrated particularly on the key areas of play, legislation and policy and risk and safety issues. Here we set out factors from this body of work that have influenced our thinking.

Play

1.17 It is widely acknowledged that play has developmental and therapeutic benefits to children and that it is crucial to a child's development on every level (Cole-Hamilton et al 2002; Dunn, 2001). Play is what children do when not being directed by adults. It is a natural part of their daily life and healthy development and impairment does not reduce the child's capacity or desire for play opportunities as Heseltine and Hicks (2001) have pointed out:

Being disabled does not reduce personal vigour or remove any inherent sense of adventure. The aspiration of those providing play facilities must be to create challenges for all and barriers for none.

Heseltine and Hicks, 2001

1.18 Cole-Hamilton et al (2002) carried out extensive research to gather evidence on children's

play, covering a total of 14,000 children and young people between the ages of five and sixteen. The strongest message to emerge from this research was that children and young people want to spend more of their free and playing time outside.

1.19 Outdoor play offers children many unique developmental opportunities (Wood, 2001). It plays a part in reducing the long-term health consequences of a sedentary lifestyle as well as potentially facilitating the learning of key social, emotional and life skills. The more diverse the natural and physical surroundings, the greater the range of learning and developmental opportunities.

1.20 Huttenmoser and Degen-Zimmerman (1995) reported that young children who were not in the habit of playing outside their homes with their friends were restricted in their social relationships, were less able to occupy themselves and were more likely to watch television in their free time, than those children who played out in the street or near their homes in parks. This study showed that good play provision can facilitate good community relations as parents whose children play together come to know their neighbours thus adding to the 'social capital' of a neighbourhood. Accessible play space extends these possibilities for social inclusion to disabled children and their families.

1.21 When children are deprived of opportunities to play detrimental effects on their learning, health and development are inescapable (Brown, 2003; Hughes, 2001).

1.22 Heseltine and Hicks (2001) point out that 'accessible play' and 'inclusive play' are not the same things. Removing environmental barriers helps make play spaces accessible, whilst social barriers have to be dealt with to make them inclusive. KidsActive have emphasised that in addition to this, inclusive play does not focus on particular needs:

Inclusive play is not about meeting 'special needs' it's about meeting all children's needs in the same place and in a variety of ways

Douche 2002

1.23 In light of the above, a guide commissioned by the Children's Play Policy Forum defines good quality play provision thus:

Good play provision offers a welcoming space where children can meet on a more equal basis. For this reason play provision can be the starting point for tackling social exclusion, engaging with marginalized families and communities and working to build their capacity to improve their social, economic and environmental circumstances.

Children's Play Policy Forum, 2001

Legislation and Policy Context

1.24 Our review of legislation dealing with the development of accessible play space included: The Disability Discrimination Act (1995), The Children Act (1989), Valuing People (2001), the European Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) the Human Rights Act (1998), health and safety legislation including the Health and Safety at Work Act (1974) and Management of

Health and Safety at Work Regulations (1992) and European Standards BSEN 1176 and 1177.

1.25 The essential components of the above-mentioned legislation that specifically relate to play space development have been incorporated into relevant sections of the Good Practice Guide where they can benefit providers in understanding the context of the work they are undertaking.

1.26 However, it is important to note here, the central importance of the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) (1995) which is discussed in greater detail than the above in the Guide. Since 1996, the DDA has made it unlawful for service providers to treat disabled people less favourably, and, since 1999, there has been a duty to make reasonable adjustments in certain circumstances. This will be extended, from October 2004, to cover adjustments in relation to any physical features that create a barrier for disabled people, and will help in the drive to make play spaces fully accessible.' The DDA is the law and, where a service is being provided, the DDA must be taken into account.

1.27 The *DDA Code of Practice on Rights of Access to Goods, Facilities, Services and Premises* provides guidance for service providers on how the duties under the Act might apply in practice. It recommends an inclusive approach to service development involving consultation with disabled people and those representing them.

1.28 In addition, it is important to signal here the importance of the *Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations* (1992) which obliges play providers to carry out risk assessments for children whilst using play facilities. As will become obvious later in discussion of research findings, interpretations and understandings of risk are fundamental to the development of accessible play space.

1.29 **Policy initiatives** reviewed include: Quality Protects, the National Service Framework, Planning Policy Guidance Note 17 (PPG 17), Planning for Open Space, Sport and Recreation (ODPM 2002), Improving Urban Parks, Play Areas and Green Spaces (DTLR, 2002) and Living Places, Cleaner, Greener, Safer (ODPM, 2002). Key issues have been incorporated into relevant sections of the Good Practice Guide and are briefly mentioned here.

1.30 The health value of play and the importance of enabling all children to access outside play activities is key to the brief of the **Department of Health** (DOH). A key sub-objective of the **Quality Protects Programme** is to increase opportunities for access to mainstream play and leisure, and out of school services, and there is considerable funding to support this.

1.31 The **National Service Framework** has a clear focus on inclusion.

1.32 *Living Places: cleaner, greener, safer* (ODPM, 2002) draws on the work undertaken following the Urban White Paper **Our Towns & Cities: Delivering an Urban Renaissance** (2000) and sets out the Government's response to the final report of the *Green Spaces, Better Places: Final Report of the Urban Green Spaces Taskforce* (DTLR 2002)

We need stronger local communities and an improved local quality of life. Streets where parents feel safe to let their children walk to school. Where people want to use the parks. Where graffiti, vandalism, litter and dereliction is not tolerated. Where the environment in which we live fosters rather than alienates a sense of

local community and mutual responsibility.

Prime Minister, Croydon April 2001

1.33 The **Urban Green Spaces taskforce** identified components that assist the provision of successful and sustainable public space. Committed leadership, strong partnerships, active community involvement, a desire for quality and innovation and better communication of ideas, along with strong community involvement are seen as key to successful development of open public spaces.

1.34 The **Living Spaces Scheme** aims to facilitate the involvement of local communities in improving their local spaces. The Community Enablers Scheme is identified as a potential vehicle that will help to carry forward projects to improve public spaces including accessible play spaces.

1.35 **Planning Policy Guidance Note 17** (PPG 17) sets out ways in which the government expects local authorities to plan for delivery of open spaces. Central to this guidance is the requirement for local authorities to assess current and future needs of local communities for a range of types of open spaces, and to undertake audits of existing provision of open space considering both its quantitative and qualitative elements. These audits should identify areas of deficient provision and opportunities for improving that provision.

1.36 *Valuing People: A New Strategy For Learning Disability for the 21st Century* (Department of Health, 2001) is important as it is based upon the citizenship entitlements of people with learning difficulties to social inclusion in local communities, choice and opportunity to be independent in daily life. It recognises that 'disabled children want support to do the things their peers do' and identifies ways in which the government is taking action to widen all children's access to good quality play opportunities.

1.37 The Children's Green Paper *Every Child Matters* (DfES 2003) sets out for consultation a framework for improving outcomes for all children and their families and offers the chance for play providers and service managers to ensure that play is on the agenda within the new frameworks for children's services.

1.38 *Improving Urban Parks, Play Areas & Green Spaces* (DTLR May 2002) commissioned by the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions to inform the work of the Urban Green Spaces Taskforce, indicates a general lack of accessible play facilities. It showed that 32% of people in urban areas were either non-users or infrequent users of green spaces and that disabled people make up a high proportion of the above.

1.39 The **Children and Young People's Strategy** aims to improve services for all children and does make specific reference to disabled children. Accessible play opportunities and inclusive leisure services are viewed as important mechanisms for delivery of the strategic aims of ensuring enjoyment and fulfilment are key determinants of a child's developmental experience.

1.40 The national **Sure Start** initiative places high emphasis on the importance of play for younger children. **Sure Start** new build projects and converted space projects offer potential for the development of accessible play space which may be linked to the use of the use of

schools premises in extended capacities.

1.41 The **DCMS** and **DfES** have jointly sponsored a children's play review which will inform the future Lottery funding for children's play.

Risk, Safety and Equipment

1.42 Central to any discussion on accessible play space, is the body of literature associated with risk and safety. Within this literature, issues of best value inevitably surface and consultation is once again found to be vital.

1.43 Risk is, of course, an integral element to play (Play Safety Forum, 2002). Children playing outdoors are certain to encounter physical, psychological and social challenges. As they do so they learn through experience, how to look after themselves and how to react and behave in different situations. Learning to confront difficult situations and test boundaries through the experience of play benefits all children. If disabled children are prevented from learning how to understand and manage risk it is arguable they will be disadvantaged in terms of social development.

1.44 The literature asserts that disabled children are entitled to encounter risk and this offers them many benefits:

All children both need and want to take risks in order to explore limits, venture into new experiences and develop their capacities, from a very young age and from their earliest play experiences. ... Children with disabilities have an equal if not greater need for opportunities to take risks, since they may be denied the freedom of choice enjoyed by their non-disabled peers.

Managing Risk in Play Provision (Play Safety Forum 2002)

1.45 It is important to recognise that play spaces are **not** generally dangerous places for children to use. A position statement from **The Play Safety Forum**, a grouping of national agencies involved in play safety, makes the point that of the two million childhood accident cases treated in the UK annually, less than 2% of these injuries were sustained using playground equipment. It points out that participation in sports involve a much greater level of risk than outdoor play, which is generally deemed to be acceptable.

1.46 In **Developing the Children's Playground** Heseltine (2001) provides specific guidance on the selection of equipment and the impact this has on risk and safety. Although recommendations are not specifically targeted towards disabled children they are equally valid to this group as to their non-disabled peers. Similarly, Potter (2001) in **Playground Management and Safety** usefully outlines safety management systems for play spaces providing detail on technical aspects such as siting, drainage, parking, choice of surfaces and equipment. Potter pays specific attention to types of equipment suitable and safe for use by disabled children and draws attention to the fact that disabled parents and carers must also be able to access play spaces if their children are to play in them.

1.47 Generally, this literature agrees that risk assessment strategies are essential. Safety

features enhance access to play spaces and improved access promotes inclusion:

The aim in play setting is to provide for play, not provide for safety. Safety is an issue only where the nature of the physical environment might threaten a child's ability to play freely without coming to harm. As such, safety is a consideration in the planning, design and management of the play environment. It is extremely important but it is not the only or the first consideration.

Melville, 1997

1.48 There is no code of practice, set of procedures or checklist of dimensions that can guarantee safety. A child's safety at play within play provision is the result of a balancing act between the responsibility to foster children's development and pleasure and the responsibility to ensure children do not come to harm. The balancing act requires constant exercise of personal and professional judgment, monitoring and response. It is one of the dynamics of creative and thriving play provision.

Research Methods

Telephone interviews with playground amenity officers

1.49 We conducted a series of telephone interviews to collect data from a geographically scattered sample of 40 local authority workers (for example, Playground amenity officers, Parks, Landscape & Leisure Managers, Senior Parks Services Officers and Planners) selected from across the regions of England. The telephone interview schedule can be found in Appendix 1.

1.50 The purpose of telephone interviews was to:

- Assess current practice on accessible play space provision and identify a range of best practice projects from around England.
- Enable key providers to identify existing - and possibly conflicting - legislative frameworks which impact on the provision of accessible play space.
- Familiarise playground amenities officers with the aims of the project and forthcoming good practice guide.

Stakeholder workshops

1.51 We took stock of the perspectives of key stakeholder groups with an interest in developing good practice guidance on accessible play space for disabled children:

- Disabled children, their families and friends
- Campaign Groups

- Policy makers
- Playground Amenities Officers
- Equipment manufacturers
- Planners
- Good practice representatives (those involved in the successful development of accessible play spaces already established in England).

Consulting Disabled Children, Their Families and Friends

1.52 Creative thinking is always required to maximise consultation with disabled children and their parents. Families with complex commitments may find it difficult to prioritise attendance at evening meetings, complete questionnaires or participate in protracted discussions. In view of this we sought to develop consultation strategies that would fit in with ordinary family life and not take up too much hard-pressed time. Indicative activities used to elicit children's views on accessible play space can be found in Appendix 2.

1.53 Families with disabled children were identified through a range of agencies either run by, or tasked with supporting them. These included national and local support groups, care-giver networks and social groups, some of which agreed to encourage participation through their meetings and newsletters. We have been careful to include contacts for all of these individuals and groups in Section 2 of the Good Practice Guide so that interested parties might follow these up subsequently to extend their own consultation networks.

1.54 We invited disabled children and their families to consultation events to be held in public open play spaces. Our aim was to talk with and observe disabled children, their brothers, sisters, friends and parents playing together. Not all disabled children can (or want to) talk about their experiences and so disposable cameras were given to children and families to record their experience and the researchers watched children play and played with them.

1.55 At each consultation event a room was set aside for refreshments and a quiet space was provided with art materials. Children and families spent time looking at pictures of play spaces and talking about their experience of going to them. These conversations were taped and any drawings or writing collected. Children were given folders with activities to take home and work on in their own time. Stamped addressed envelopes were provided to encourage them to send their work back.

1.56 A week later, participants were invited back to the same play space to look at their photographs and to comment on them. Once again information was picked up in a variety of ways children and parents talked, told stories, drew pictures, and played in the play space.

1.57 The events were written up and summaries sent out to participating families for comments prior to feeding our sense of the data into the wider research process.

Consulting Other Stakeholder Groups

1.58 Representatives of all of the other stakeholder groups were invited from across the regions of England to participate in workshops facilitated by the ICE Project Team. The aim of each workshop was to review and evaluate aspirations for a good practice guide on accessible play space from a specific stakeholder perspective. The purpose of these events was to establish baseline data, allow a 'taking stock' of each group's point of view and facilitate a sharing of ideas for a good practice guide.

1.59 The aims of the information gathering exercises were to encourage stakeholders to self assess, in broad terms, ways in which public open play spaces should be accessible to disabled children and to examine expectations and preferences with regard to a good practice guide.

1.60 An initial working document was produced following each workshop, reviewing the perspectives contributed. Once the document was agreed to provide a fair and accurate account of the issues aired, it was disseminated to other stakeholders - enabling each of the different stakeholder groups to gain insight into the perspectives of others.

Consultation with Mix of Stakeholders

1.61 Matters arising from the documents presenting preliminary findings were shared and reviewed through a 'Mixed Group Workshop'. For this data gathering session representatives from each Stakeholder Group were invited to come together to discuss key issues. Representatives from each stakeholder group took part in this exercise. This workshop allowed for cross fertilisation of responses to the findings from the workshops and for ideas to be shared across the focal stakeholder domains on the content and format of the good practice guide.

1.62 The aims of the Mixed Group Workshop were to continue work with key stakeholders to utilise data collected via participation in the workshops to build on self-assessment, demonstrate effective consultation and further develop ideas for good practice. Our objective was to develop a draft of the good practice guide based on the emergent and collective priorities of participant stakeholders. The workshop was also intended to ensure that those who had taken part in the research process were supported in their capacity to respond to what they had learned from each other.

The findings and recommendations in this report are those of the consultant authors and do not necessarily represent the views or proposed policies of Communities and Local Government.

[Go to table of contents](#)

Chapter Two: Key Findings and Analysis

Introduction

2.1 This chapter is intended to provide readers with insight into the data that shaped the development and key messages of the guide. It presents:

- a summary analysis of data collected through telephone interviews with playground amenity officers
- a summary analysis of key debates arising through consultation with seven stakeholder groups
- a drawing together of key themes which determined the structuring of the Good Practice Guide.

Summary analysis of results of telephone interviews

2.2 Data collected through telephone interviews provided a mapping of the perspectives of amenity officers on current practice, familiar difficulties and best practice underway.

Policy matters

2.3 Telephone interviews revealed that specific policy statements on accessible play space for disabled children are relatively thin on the ground. Informal policy agreements are said to be in existence, for example 'we don't have a written policy, but every new area must be accessible for all children' or accessible play space issues were loosely described as 'generally included in the local plan'. Most respondents indicated uncertainty about policy on accessible play space or were aware of only limited development in this area. In some areas policy was said to be in the process of being developed to address the requirements of the DDA.

2.4 Where policy on accessible play space does exist, close attention is paid to existing guidelines provided by the **National Playing Field Association** or to **European** and **British safety standards**. References for these are in the references section.

2.5 Some weaknesses of current policy frameworks on accessible play space were identified where, for example, policy only covers new play areas not existing ones, does not adequately take into account the needs of local communities, is not backed up by money for play provision, or the 'policy' is not formalised. Initiatives to develop future policy vary and there is a gap between reports of 'nothing at this stage' and specific development, for example, 'strong policy, backing of right people, evidence from reports'.

2.6 Support for rolling out of policy on accessible play space is variable, but most of those who took part in a telephone interview were aware of ongoing initiatives to develop policy for open and accessible public play spaces. The DDA is described as the key driver of these developments.

Provision

2.7 Respondents made clear that accessible play space provision does not focus specifically on access for children with impairments. It may be that this is because access issues are seen as transcending the requirements of disabled children as a segregated group - in which case this trend is indicative of the strongest commitment to advancing the project of inclusion. On the other hand, it may be that children with impairments are not centrally placed in thinking about accessible play space provision. Nevertheless, the snap-shot provided by the telephone interviews on accessible play space development does show some impressive responses:

We don't differentiate between users - all sites have to be and are accessible as much as possible - since 1994 there has been a great degree of accessibility for everyone.

Playground Amenities Officer

Examples of good practice

2.8 Not everyone interviewed knew of good practice on accessible play space in their area, but frequently respondents could point to good practice examples they knew of in other locations. Good practice on making use of accessible equipment and enhancing safety features to assist access is more familiar.

2.9 Good practice in thinking around issues for disabled children and their families was evident where officers referenced the importance of ensuring access to play spaces for disabled parents as well as children or the provision of seating for caregivers accompanying children with impairments in play spaces. This suggests attention is being paid to thinking about the dismantling of barriers that create social exclusion over and above those which impede children with impairments by some amenity officers.

2.10 Respondents expressed commitment to prioritising the aspirations of disabled children and young people, their families and their representative agencies in the development of accessible play space.

2.11 A few interviewees were aware of a programme within their local authority for professional development relating to the development of accessible play spaces for disabled children and more had attended external training events. Most described themselves as inexperienced with regards to accessible play space matters and felt more training and information, particularly if informed by disabled people, would be advantageous.

2.12 Equipment manufacturers are known to be making some input into training for those seeking to develop accessible play space.

Obstacles to good practice

2.13 Resources were commonly identified as a key inhibitor of accessible play space development and funding for play space development typically described as 'hard to come by'.

2.14 Other commonly mentioned obstacles to developing good accessible play space identified include: limited or unsuitable sites available for a play space, British and European safety standards which are perceived as ambiguous, ROSPA guidelines which the amenity officers we spoke to perceived as restrictive, and institutional and organisational barriers such as a lack of clarity about who is responsible for accessible play space development.

2.15 Lack of knowledge on disability issues sometimes means accessible play space development is neglected. Most of those interviewed said they did not have enough knowledge about the DDA to develop accessible play space with confidence. In part this was understood to be because the DDA remains untested in the courts and thus its full ramifications are unknown.

Summary analysis of stakeholder perspectives

2.16 What can be seen from our analysis of the data collected from various stakeholder groups is that key themes emerge, albeit often with different emphasis. Sometimes these present as consensus or as debate that is constructively underway between groups. At other times they reveal conflicts and possible tensions between different groups and in relation to constraints groups experience. In designing the Good Practice Guide we tried to provide realistic and practical guidance grounded in the experiences reported to us and in the examples provided of how barriers to developing accessible play space can be circumvented.

2.17 Discussion of the data provided by each stakeholder group is based around the following themes:

- understanding disability
- benefits of improved accessibility
- planning
- consultation
- safety issues
- design and environment
- funding matters
- partnership working
- how a guide could help

Understanding disability

2.18 Playground amenities officers, planners, manufactures and other professionals with a role to play in developing accessible play space often feel that a lack of knowledge about the implications of particular impairments inhibits their ability to develop accessible play space. They feel they need to know more about impairments before they can effectively develop provision for disabled children. This view is in sharp contrast with the way in which disabled children, their families and their representative campaign groups we spoke to look at things.

2.19 Families with disabled children and campaign groups wish play providers to shift their focus away from trying to make sense of 'the problems' that impairments are presumed to cause to children and young people and to concentrate instead on removing the social and environmental barriers that lead to segregation, exclusion and disablement. Campaign group representatives point out that this view, which is at the heart of 'the social model of disability', helps those involved in developing accessible play space to think beyond the functional limitations of an individual child or young person and to look more creatively instead at ways of circumventing the problems caused by disabling environments, barriers and cultures:

Disability occurs because of the way we design the environment. It's not a given. Children have impairments, but disability is a moveable thing depending on how environments are designed and what people's attitudes are.

Campaign group representative

2.20 Campaign groups know that disabled children and young people currently miss out from supposedly inclusive and accessible provision because they have impairments regarded by play space providers as 'too complex'. They are sure that the social model of disability holds the key to fresh thinking on this matter:

Anything that promotes an understanding of the social model - that changes hearts and minds and gets people to question initial assumptions about disability is crucial. Otherwise it's 'let's create an environment for children and then try and include the ones we've excluded to start with.

Campaign Group representative

2.21 Campaign groups realise that the long history of segregation of disabled children and young people in England has rendered their entitlements invisible to many service providers and the confidence of staff to engage with issues concerning impairment and disablement is consequently often low. Training for key providers, including disability equality training, is felt to be key to the development of good open accessible play space.

2.22 Playground amenities officers say they find it useful to think about disability as what a child experiences if they encounter disabling attitudes and disabling environments. This approach to thinking about disabled children's access to play enables providers to concentrate on questions of 'what are the barriers to play for any child who might wish to access a play space and how can those barriers be dismantled?' Good practice guidance on accessible play space can then be interpreted as about ways of making play spaces open and accessible to **all**

children.

2.23 During the course of the consultation, those with a role to play in developing accessible play space increasingly came to regard the job of developing accessible play space as about recognising the ordinariness of disabled children and accepting the ordinariness of their entitlement to play. Promoters of current good practice in accessible play argue no child or family should ever find they can not access a public play space.

Benefits of improved accessibility

2.24 Disabled children, their families and their representative campaign groups are clear that inclusion is the major benefit to be derived from making playspace accessible. For these groups, accessible play space development is connected to the rights of all disabled children and their families to inclusion in public places. They assert that inclusion is not the same as access and that whilst good practice guidance on accessible play space may physically facilitate disabled children wanting to access play settings, it will not necessarily follow that they can or will be included in play and social opportunities within the play space. An important first step towards making play spaces inclusive will be taken by making them accessible but the removal of physical barriers (enabling access) must be intimately concerned with the removal of social barriers (encouraging inclusion).

2.25 Disabled children and their families point out that accessible public play spaces offer a unique opportunity for the building of children's relationships. Many disabled children and young people attend schools outside of their neighbourhood and visits to playgrounds provide a way of cementing their presence in the community.

2.26 All of the children and young people who took part in this consultation were clear that they want to enjoy access to play spaces. Disabled children feel it is important that they have access to open accessible play space in which they will not be laughed at, rejected or made fun of, but included as ordinary children.

2.27 Brothers and sisters of disabled children express sadness and discomfort at exclusion of their brothers and sisters from a play space. Parents of those disabled children who prefer not to play with other children still wish their children to be **entitled** to play in the same places as everyone else.

2.28 Policy officials are also clear that there are important gains to be made from developing accessible play space. The **DCMS** view increased access to play for children with impairments as entirely fitting with their strategic priority to enhance access to a fuller cultural and sporting life for children and young people and give them the opportunity to develop their talents to the full. The **Children and Young People's Unit** is committed to promoting emotional well-being in children and views play and the provision of safe spaces to play as crucial in this. The importance for children to test out social, emotional and physical barriers through play is acknowledged to be central to the **Quality of Life** agenda.

2.29 For the **ODPM**, the value of play in building sustainable communities cannot be overestimated. Play can provide a way of producing, articulating and sustaining a sense of community membership for children. Similarly, spaces to play often become the focus of

shared action engendering new and transferable skills for community members and groups.

2.30 For the **DOH** the provision of outdoor play opportunities is linked to the reduction of obesity in childhood for both disabled children and their non-disabled peers. The **DOH** recognises that accessing mainstream leisure services and facilities is a priority for disabled children and their families. The fact that play opportunities are often inaccessible creates vulnerability for families with disabled children. This impacts directly upon other services, ultimately increasing demand for costly respite provision. Simply put, improved access to outside play spaces that could be used by children and families at weekends could reduce the stresses which lead families to require service intervention.

Planning

2.31 Planners who took part in this consultation feel that for effective strategic planning of accessible play space, greater understanding of green space provision, the network of green spaces and how they link together in urban and rural areas is required at local level. The process of developing formal outdoor play provision is felt to often be a matter of serendipity and where resources are scarce and best use of money is a priority, greater understanding of the issues would mean resources could be better employed where they are most needed.

2.32 The lack of children's play spaces in deprived areas is a major concern to planners, families and campaign groups who recognise that experiences for children with impairments in deprived areas may be very different from those in more prosperous areas. Planners feel many of the playgrounds and facilities in the most deprived areas of England are incapable of being regenerated and need to be started again. They would like to see a more integrated approach to play generally being pushed higher up local authorities agendas for change. Now that Local Strategic Partnerships are in place it is agreed that an excellent opportunity exists to influence community plans in this direction.

2.33 Planners are concerned that the extent to which parish councils will be enabled to take forward the development of accessible play space depends on the guidance they receive and the help they can enlist from local authorities.

2.34 Problems with developers putting play areas in the wrong places need to be avoided. When playground amenities officers talk to developers they need to agree on provision of a space that will lend itself to construction of a play area that meets with local authority and national standards. Officers report that existing national and European standards do not provide a dependable yardstick for development.

2.35 The extent to which local communities are involved in planning for and developing play spaces varies considerably from area to area. What also varies is the level of community facilities planners negotiate and secure in respect of play provision from developers. In order to secure better community facilities from developers clarity is needed about who actually does the negotiating and the status this has. Planners take the view that a far more assertive approach in negotiating community facilities is going to be necessary in order to help support and develop good, accessible play spaces:

I think it's a big missed opportunity in terms of the whole of the planning Section 106 process. We could be asking for far better community facilities, in terms of

direct and off-site provision. However you need a clear and robust policy framework, preferably supported by appropriate adopted supplementary planning guidance to achieve this.

Regeneration officer

2.36 Planners stress that improving the planning process as part of the project of developing accessible play space will depend on better consultation between planners and other groups in order to improve partnership working. The timing of this consultation, and whether or not it is early enough in the development process to facilitate the best use of space and design, is central here.

Consultation

2.37 The importance of consultation with disabled children and their families is recognised by all policy officials who took part in our consultation. Beginning steps are being made to draw disabled children and their families into meaningful consultation on policy issues. For example, disabled children are, on occasion, being included in **Advisory Groups**, campaign groups such as **KidsActive** are being regularly consulted. **Groundwork** were commissioned by the **ODPM** to undertake consultation with children and young people to feed into the report of the **Urban Green Spaces Taskforce**. The **DOH** funded the **Children's Society** to develop a CD rom '**Ask Us**' as a tool for engaging with disabled children in questions that relate to all aspects of life including their use of play space.

2.38 The **DCMS** place emphasis on the importance of having play viewed seriously at senior levels within local authorities. Guidance making clear how disabled children and their families can be brought into consultation and showing how channels of communication with local authorities should connect with each other would be valuable.

2.39 Campaign groups feel playground planners sometimes look too much towards physical access and not widely enough at access to the social experience of play. They assert that disabled children and their families need to identify with new accessible play space initiatives and comprise a key advisory resource vital to the success of a development project. Participation of disabled children and young people and their families in planning and implementation of accessible play space projects and then in evaluating and monitoring the play space is crucial to good practice.

2.40 Campaigners and representative of good practice projects point out that creative consultation strategies need to be developed as for many families with disabled children communication may not be an easy or comfortable process. Being prepared to consult with children and young people, including those who are differently articulate, takes time and effort and involves adapting processes used with adult groups.

2.41 Representatives of good practice projects assert that consulting effectively and widely is imperative in working to develop accessible play space yet difficult to get right. They see a flexible and imaginative approach to consultation, coupled with a resolution not to be discouraged when attempts at consultation are poorly received, as essential ingredients for eventual success. In their experience, consulting widely within communities and utilising the skills and resources of as many people as possible culminates in the best and most

sustainable projects. They have learned that consultation needs to be viewed as an ongoing and interactive process, rather than as a one-off information gathering exercise:

People should feel their voice is valued and heard - that you have taken notice and are interested enough to respond. It is even more important for children and young people to feel that too, as they need to be able to trust the process of consultation. It must feel genuine and be ongoing.

Representative of good practice project

2.42 The importance of establishing **two-way consultation** processes between users and providers is stressed by those already involved in successful accessible play space projects. Setting up mutually beneficial mechanisms for the giving and receiving of advice is found to be crucial. Timing of consultation is a sensitive issue and representatives of good practice are particularly careful about not inadvertently raising unrealistic expectations where systems are unpredictable and this could damage good will generated and the work underway.

2.43 Playground amenities officers agree that good consultation between different stakeholder groups involved in developing accessible play space both constitutes good practice and makes for effective working environments. They particularly wish to develop their skills for engaging with disabled children and their families who may find participation in consultation difficult and increasingly work through **Play Forums** where these exist at local level, which can advise on play space development projects.

2.44 Planners and designers say good practice in accessible play space provision involves including as many people as possible in consultation about what is needed and in providing support to deliver it. Manufacturers welcome a climate of consultation and open debate on accessible play space development to avoid constant reinventing of the wheel and maximise efficient use of resources.

Safety issues

2.45 Safety is always high on the list of priorities with regards to play space. Parents have been keen to say that making play space risk free for their disabled children is not necessarily their main concern. They wish their disabled children to encounter the risk value of play in exactly the same way as non-disabled children do. Meeting with risk is a factor of daily living that families with disabled children are used to negotiating:

Everything he does is a risk. Walking on a pavement is highly risky as he often drops with no warning and falls hard. He splits his head open 3 or 4 times a year by just walking along. It is so important to us to find safe places to play because of this. But even in safe places he is always having to take risks because he has so much energy and loves to run around. I take the decision that he just has to live with risk. Obviously, I try and minimize it as much as possible but I want him to be able to enjoy things and have a good time.

Parent

2.46 Campaign groups lead the way in asserting that the opportunity for children to experience

challenge must be accessible to everyone. Not all children need to encounter risk and challenge in the same way but the social experiences offered in the play space must be accessible to everyone:

Recognising this tension and working with it is what makes play environments as beautiful and as adventurous as they might be. Failing to recognise it and failing to build in risk, sort of running away from it, leads to rather tedious and monotonous and uninteresting play spaces.

Campaign group representative

2.47 Manufacturers and playground amenity officers know the risk of litigation is ever-present in discussions about disabled children and young people having access to a wider range of experiences. The opportunity for adventure is seen as one of the most valuable features of an accessible play space and all stakeholder groups are keen to guard against developers being too restrictive in what they provide. Nevertheless there is concern that fear of litigation may block local authorities from thinking about accessible play space installations:

In my experience insurance companies stop a lot of local authority officers ordering anything interesting. They are terrified of getting sued and the insurers not backing them and I think that is a major problem that does need to be tackled.

Manufacturer

2.48 Equipment manufacturers point out that even if EU Section 1176 standards are complied with, immunity from prosecution is not guaranteed in the event of a serious accident. Key to the debate surrounding insurance and litigation are concepts of responsibility and tensions therein between the private and the public domain. There is much to be resolved between the commercial interests of manufacturers (who may suffer from litigation) and insurance companies (which may rely on the success of litigation).

2.49 Playground amenities officers are clear that risk cannot be eliminated from accessible play space for any child, including disabled and vulnerable children. A balance has to be found between accepting that all children face a degree of risk in open and accessible public play spaces and dealing with the pressures of the increasingly litigious climate in which officers work.

2.50 Parents point out that through lifting and handling they frequently risk their own health and safety as they help their disabled child to access certain pieces of equipment. They and their children have first hand insights to share on how access to equipment could be made easier.

2.51 Representatives from the manufacturing industry worry about how to develop accessible play space that complies with safety standards. Risk assessment, as opposed to a standard compliance approach, is felt to be a more helpful tool to the development of accessible play space. Perceived relaxation in guidance issued by **ROSPA** on risk in play is viewed by playground amenities officers as supportive. The **Children's Play Policy Forum** are opening up a dialogue between insurers and the play sector which will inform future planning and lessen the tendency for rigid application of policy to inhibit children's access to play.

2.52 The Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) is recognised as legislation that takes precedence over British and European safety standards. Manufacturers articulated the need for a greater understanding of the DDA amongst local authority officers; the need for specific targets with regards to the development of accessible play spaces; the updating of British and European safety standards and manufacturers own guidelines where appropriate, to take into account the DDA. Dissemination of information and training about the DDA and its implications for accessible play space development is seen as imperative.

Design and environment

2.53 Playground Amenities Officers emphasise that good accessible play spaces need careful design. The accessibility of any given play space can be spoilt by poor detail. Campaign groups say accessible play space should be designed with flexibility in mind to suit a variety of users.

2.54 According to campaign groups, children and their families are looking for accessible play space in close proximity to their homes that they can use spontaneously, in contrast with 'showcase' playgrounds they might make a day trip to use. This view contrasts with that expressed by playground amenities officers who find resource constraints lead them to argue that fewer, better accessible play spaces might become the goal for some local authorities rather than broader local provision.

2.55 Playground amenities officers report that creating separate playgrounds or purchasing special equipment for disabled children leads to segregation. They have found that taking the focus away from calls for specialist equipment and facilities promotes inclusion and can make the task of developing accessible play space much more manageable.

2.56 They acknowledge opportunities for making accessible play space when refurbishing existing areas by rethinking safety surfacing, widening gates for double buggies and wheelchairs, using brightly coloured gates so that people with visual impairments can see their way in. Good practice in the development of accessible play space is not seen as needing to involve new build projects or the latest and most fabulous pieces of equipment but to involve dismantling whatever barriers exclude disabled children from open accessible play spaces.

2.57 Playground amenities officers may have to contend with constraints imposed on the extent to which they can make play space accessible to disabled children. For example, where they are obliged to put fences around playgrounds this can restrict the size of the play area.

2.58 Playgrounds that are integral to a park are popular with both children and their parents. For parents the possibility of finding a shelter near to a playground increases the length of time they are likely to spend there. This is particularly true for families whose children have complex impairments. A nearby café that offers shelter and warmth is a popular feature of the top-rated play spaces for all families, and for those with vulnerable children can be a key determinant of whether a play space is viable. Storage places for wheelchairs and buggies are helpful.

2.59 For parents it is imperative that play spaces are clean. Whilst litter, graffiti and dog mess are concerns for all children and families, an unpleasant environment can particularly disadvantage disabled children, for example those who may explore the environment through

touch, smell or taste.

2.60 Parents say signs and notice boards can make a big difference in welcoming disabled children and their families to public play spaces.

2.61 Parents feel wider access issues which impact on the access they have to play spaces, such as the need for easy parking and clean toilets, are rarely understood by others. A lack of toilets often means disabled children cannot use play spaces. Similarly for parents whose children cannot walk any distance a lack of parking facilities renders even accessible play spaces inaccessible. Campaign groups know that the provision of accessible toilets, parking and transport are crucial to the development of accessible play space:

There is no point in having accessible play facilities if we don't have accessible toilets, places for changing, places which are safe and warm for children and young people with medical needs and good transport and parking facilities.

Campaigner

2.62 There is widespread concern shared by all stakeholder groups, that lack of accessible toilets in accessible play space threatens the dignity and well-being of children and young people and would lead to exclusion of disabled children and young people from even the most otherwise accessible provision.

Equipment

2.63 The design of equipment is central to the development of accessible play space whilst also being the 'bread and butter' of the manufacturing industry. The challenge facing manufacturers is that of designing equipment that is saleable, challenging **and** accessible to disabled children.

2.64 Families and campaign groups know that when taking account of the wide-ranging consequences of different types of impairment, it is unrealistic to expect all pieces of equipment or indeed all areas of a playground to be accessible to all children. Just as with non-disabled children, children with impairments require a wide range of different play opportunities. Not all pieces of equipment in a given play space need to be accessible to all disabled children in order for that play space to be an inclusive one.

2.65 Those involved in good practice initiatives have observed that non-disabled children like equipment they can use at the same time as their disabled siblings and friends. They find that non-disabled and disabled children overwhelmingly want to play together. Parents welcome opportunities for children of different age ranges to play on equipment together and a hallmark of high quality in an accessible play space development is that it will enable disabled children to take risks alongside their non-disabled friends.

2.66 For parents and caregivers, being able to keep an eye on what's happening without being conspicuous or 'crowding' a child is important. Campaign groups point out that a bench is much cheaper than a piece of accessible play equipment - and it may be the factor which encourages a parent to bring a disabled child into the space.

2.67 The space around different pieces of equipment can impact on children's access to and use of the play space. This does not simply relate to space for manoeuvring large wheelchairs. For example, the lack of space between items of equipment can prevent children with learning difficulties from freely wandering around the play space. Some children enjoy watching rather than playing and consideration of the space between pieces of equipment can assist this.

2.68 Playground amenities officers see the accessible play space debate as about more than physical access within play spaces. They acknowledge that equipment plays an important role in the development of good play space but know children also want to do things other than use equipment in play spaces. For disabled children this may be particularly true if they are excluded from most of the equipment. The most important feature of an accessible play space is thought to be that it should offer all children access to the social experience of play.

2.69 Play spaces can be experienced as places of disappointment and failure by any child if none of the equipment provided is accessible to them. For children who find equipment difficult a more generic approach to the design of accessible open play spaces is helpful so that they can play with or alongside other children without the distraction of equipment which is not appropriate for them. The requirement for design of 'comfortable spaces' within or near equipped play facilities is recognized.

2.70 Families, campaign groups and playground amenities officers are aware of the availability of items of playground equipment such as double width seesaws and springers with back supports that can be accessed by children with impairments. Some 'specialist' equipment on offer is considerably more expensive than standard units which limits the scope playground amenities officers have when seeking to develop accessible play space. Accessible surfaces can incur substantial additional expenditure.

2.71 Budgetary restrictions imposed on local authorities restrict manufacturers in fully developing equipment accessible to all children:

One of the limiting factors is the maintenance regime for playgrounds. We all know that children enjoy moving equipment more, but that takes more maintenance. We all know that children love playing in sand pits but sand pits mean maintenance. Unfortunately with playgrounds over the last 10 to 15 years there's been much more of a move towards like a zero maintenance feeling. This is a real limiting factor in design.

Playground amenities officer

2.72 Equipment manufacturers often offer their clients planning, design and installation services. Whilst some feel clients benefit from this way of working, others feel the skills of designers and landscape architects can prove invaluable to an accessible play space project. The most useful kind of design expertise is agreed to be located firmly within community needs and aspirations.

Natural Resources

2.73 Disabled children - in exactly the same way as their non-disabled peers - use play spaces in a multitude of different ways depending on their age, impairment, health, preferences and

mood of the moment. They like using equipment, making dens, climbing trees and making use of the natural environment. In addition to the aesthetic value added by trees, shrubs, flowers and plants, disabled children often find a natural environment offers them accessible opportunities for play. Representatives of good practice projects have found that provision of quiet areas in a play space enhances accessibility for disabled children.

2.74 Campaign groups are keen to point out that planting can be an important feature in good play space design. Playground amenity officers acknowledge that planting can be overlooked in play space development because there are additional costs associated with the maintenance of planted play spaces. Similarly water play is regarded as providing accessible play opportunities but maintenance costs of traditional water play facilities such as paddling pools, which need regular inspection and cleaning, can be prohibitive.

2.75 Disabled children and their families point out that what makes a play space accessible for one child inevitably can make it difficult for another. For example, a play space offering little in the way of texture, light and shade or planting can limit the experience of play for some young people with sensory or cognitive impairments. On the other hand, playgrounds designed to maximize sensory enjoyment may compromise access for other children - those using wheelchairs can be impeded by frequent changes in surfaces for example. According to children and their families, the trick to designing good accessible play spaces is about making sure there are contrasting play opportunities so that there is 'something for everyone' - there might be sensory planting, but also empty space and so on.

Who's in the Play Space?

2.76 Manufacturers and safety representatives recognise that play spaces are not just for children but also for parents and care givers. All stakeholder groups pointed out that disabled parents or guardians need access to play spaces as well as disabled children. The experience held by campaign groups affirms that the social world of disabled children comprises more adults than a non disabled child's social world, and improving accessibility to plays spaces needs to acknowledge and take account of this fact.

Heaven know how many times I froze to death sitting with the dog behind a tree - in theory enabling my son to do something, but equally I might have picked that particular play facility on the grounds I could actually park my car without it being towed away or because there was a tree with a bench to sit behind rather than sort of skulking in the background

Parent and Campaigner

2.77 Manufacturers argue that maintenance and supervisory personnel within the play space is key to both accessibility and sustainability. Many parents would also welcome some kind of supervisory presence, particularly to reduce bullying.

2.78 Campaign groups point out that, irrespective of accessible play space design, many disabled children and young people will need some kind of personal support or facilitation to be able to access it. This is not simply a matter of lifting and handling issues, but rather a matter of skilled play work to bring children together and to facilitate shared play experiences.

Working in partnership

2.79 Effective consultation signifies the need for joined up working, collaborative enterprise and strengthening of partnerships. Although partnership working is successful in some areas many playground amenities officers feel like lone pioneers in the task of accessible play space development and feel working in partnership with others from an early stage would be beneficial.

2.80 Lack of integrated working at local authority level can often mean leisure and cultural strategies seem to be almost directly at odds with the local planning process and responsibility for play spaces can get lost. Those we consulted report that whilst there is often the will in an organisation to promote joined up working, the absence of a policy framework doesn't allow it to happen in practice. The lack of a clear framework within which individual officers across departments can work together means that there is a lot of unnecessary duplication and failure to learn from good practice elsewhere.

2.81 Policy commitments can help and playground amenities officers would like to see every local authority adopting a play strategy that informs and directs the way in which it can support play. Monitoring and evaluation strategies are seen as integral to a strong play policy. Lack of clarity around policy is found to be holding up the development of accessible play space. Manufacturers and safety representatives feel a lack of strategic direction with regards to play within local authorities, particularly within the smaller parish councils, is a key barrier to the development of accessible play spaces. In their experience, a lack of specific policy on play means that the value of play in children's lives goes unrecognised and is consequently under resourced.

2.82 Some playground amenities officers are keen to have guidance on how to measure how accessible playgrounds are. Current ROSPA guidelines provide useful indicators but more information is needed on how to assess the extent to which play spaces are accessible - and /or inclusive.

2.83 Joining professionals and disabled children and young people to work together on the development of accessible play space is felt to be the mechanism of choice for optimising sustainability.

2.84 **Local Friends Groups** are increasingly being established to advocate and develop accessible play space initiatives. These groups can be extremely successful and mutual benefits are to be had when they work in close collaboration with supportive playground amenities officers.

2.85 Playground amenities officers report difficulties in their relationship with **planners** and more effective partnership working between these professional groups is desired. Where partnership working is established and planners and **designers** work in partnership with other services, outcomes and the experience of the development process are enhanced.

2.86 Some local authorities provide annual inspections for **parish and district councils** and act as an advisory resource but many playground amenities officers would like to strengthen links further.

2.87 Some playground amenities officers have found **equipment manufacturers** to be unresponsive to their requests for development on accessible play space, although this situation is felt to be gradually changing for the better.

2.88 The role of **community wardens** and **community safety officers** is valued in supporting communities to become involved with maintaining play spaces. Playground amenities officers recognise that the **police** could usefully be brought into partnership with to maximise sustainable development.

Funding matters

2.89 Actually getting the money to get on with the work of developing accessible play spaces is described by all stakeholders as a major issue. The cost of developing accessible play space is described by playground amenities officers as the most problematic issue they face. Many playground amenities officers have no capital programme, a very small repairs budget, and rely on Sure Start and Lottery funding for new development. They are reliant upon receipt of Section 106 monies (planning obligation / planning gain) yet feel this source of income is rarely optimised.

2.90 Amenities officers have found that where play is included as a focus for discussion within Local Strategic Partnerships and community plans, workers on the ground are best placed to argue for rolling programmes and capital financing which can make accessible play spaces a reality. Once policy is in place and developing accessible play space can be considered one of an Authority's priorities, funds are far more likely to follow.

2.91 Playgrounds already in use are often not accessible in their design. Frequently there is no rolling programme of funding to replace old equipment and amenity officers find the issue of replacing equipment is hard to get raised in relevant policy arenas. Replacement of existing equipment that has outlived its useful function is not given the same priority as the provision of new equipment. This funding focus inhibits the possibilities of enhancing accessibility within existing play space and ways need to be found of circumventing financial barriers.

2.92 Some playground amenities officers encounter fewer financial constraints than others but there is consensus that not enough government funding is available to develop accessible play spaces. Value for money is an important issue but can be difficult to establish when grant funding becomes available at short notice.

2.93 It is recognised that funding streams typically involve significant amounts of paper work that can be off putting for non-professional groups. Another problem can arise when money is available, but access to it requires guidance and skills those entitled to apply for it may not have. Representatives of good practice projects can provide support tailored to take account of these difficulties.

2.94 Revenue funds to support maintenance are often not made available even when there are funds for capital work. Representatives of good practice projects find this situation can lead to the termination of an otherwise viable project. Targeting available funding to run into existing programmes, and looking for multi-agency funding, can be effective ways of circumventing this barrier.

2.95 Hard bargaining with developers to secure better community facilities for play is something which representative of good practice projects know is crucial if accessible play spaces are to become commonplace across the regions of England.

How A Guide Could Help

2.96 Supporting local authorities to develop good practice is of key concern to all Government departments. They are keen not to instruct local authorities on how to do things but rather to help promote consultation to encourage local authorities in finding out what local communities want. A premise of consultation is prioritised - finding out what local communities want involving them in design and then throughout every aspect of the process.

2.97 In the spirit of commitment to support local authorities to consult widely when developing accessible play space, policy officials agree that the focus of the good practice guide on accessible play space should not be the DDA. Whilst departments want to encourage local authorities to do as much as they possibly can in making play spaces accessible policy officials agree that the emphasis of the good practice guide should be on encouraging wider good practice and allowing local authorities the freedom and flexibility to develop what works best for the communities they serve.

2.98 In spite of the general consensus that the DDA should not be fore grounded within the good practice guide, there is general agreement that it is nevertheless part of the picture. From 2004, providers have a duty to develop accessible environments. Part 3 of DDA is untested in the courts and therefore there is no clear definition of 'reasonable steps' that can be usefully translated into the Good Practice Guide. What is key however is that the Code of Practice advises service providers to **consult** with disabled people in making judgements.

2.99 What we have omitted here are perspectives on what the guide should look like, and the formats which participants felt would be most useful. As far as possible, these views have been translated into the design brief the publishers have worked to. It was hoped that the guide would be easy to navigate, eye-catching and include checklists and practical examples.

Summary of Key Themes

2.100 This final section of this chapter summarises the key themes and headline findings which the data we collected revealed and which shaped our thinking in producing the Good Practice Guide. It also identifies issues, also aired in the Guide, which need exploration and further understanding if accessible play spaces are to develop in ways that can meaningfully support and enhance the lives of disabled children and their families in England.

Areas of Consensus

There is broad agreement that:

- Outdoor play is of crucial importance to children's development, health and well-being.
- Disabled and non-disabled children should equally be able to access and use public play spaces.

- Good play spaces enable disabled and non disabled children to play together and make use of play equipment designed for both disabled and non disabled children.
- Enabling disabled children and their non-disabled siblings and peers to use play spaces together has wider benefits for social inclusion and community building and networking.
- The Disability Discrimination Act and the Code of Practice attached to it need to be clearly understood in relation to the development of accessible play space. The Act is perceived as an influential driver in initiatives to develop future accessible play space policy.
- Although there is no specific policy agenda on accessible play space, the development of accessible play space connects to many other policy agendas apart from those related to open and public space - such as health, education and sport and leisure.
- Policy statements on accessible play space for disabled children are relatively thin on the ground. Although it is appreciated that in some areas the process of drafting policy is emerging, this is often in response to concerns around meeting the requirements of the DDA.
- Where policy does exist on accessible play space, this is often structured around existing guidelines such as NPFA standards. Increasing accessibility of play space has not tended to focus specifically on children with impairments.
- In spite of a lack of specific policy agendas on accessible play, work in practice is in evidence. Therefore, many developments are taking place outside of an agreed policy context or play strategy.
- The importance of good design in developing accessible play spaces, which will give value for money, cannot be underestimated.
- Post holders with responsibility for taking forward the development of accessible play space can be difficult to locate. Responsibilities are often shared across departments and understandings of the functioning of these relationships are sometimes unclear. This hinders accessible play space development.
- The main barriers to the development of accessible, open public play space are felt to be lack of funding, staff resources and understanding of what disabled children want and are entitled to.
- A vital stimulus for accessible play space development is observed in the commitment and enthusiasm expressed by a broad range of stakeholders in making play spaces accessible.

Issues for further consideration

Issues that arose in the research which are considered further in the guide include:

- The importance of embedding understanding of the difference between disability and impairment in the minds of key stakeholders

- Interpretations and understandings of risk and safety. Disabled children, like all children, want and need to take risks in play and many of their parents want this to be possible for them. Gaining a balance between risk and safety in play spaces provokes a wide range of views and some disagreement.
- How to link up accessible play space development with essential subsidiary services such as toilets, public transport and parking.
- Funding for play spaces, particularly in relation to revenue costs and lack of clarity about relevant funding streams to promote and develop work on improving accessibility.
- How seriously play is taken at local and national level and what the implication of this is for work in practice.
- Responsibility for play and how this is understood at local authority level, particularly at senior levels.
- How able and confident people feel to consult with disabled children and whether or not this is possible and or desirable.
- Issues of maintenance of play space in respect of design and funding.
- How to balance the relative merits of developing a few 'show case' accessible play spaces compared to families' wishes for increased accessibility in neighbourhood parks.

2.101 The following chapter reflects on these issues and offers a model that summarises what we have observed during the course of the research. By way of conclusion an approach to move forward the development of accessible play space is suggested.

The findings and recommendations in this report are those of the consultant authors and do not necessarily represent the views or proposed policies of Communities and Local Government.

Go to table of contents

Chapter Three: Discussion

3.1 This section of the report differs from the traditional format of a research report conclusion in that it does not provide explicit recommendations. All the recommendations of this research have been translated into information, advice and good practice examples included in the Guide. Rather we would like to reflect briefly on the key observations we have made throughout the project and the lessons learned which may be useful to further work and initiatives to develop accessible play space in the future.

3.2 We observed during the course of the research an extended and genuine interest across a broad range of stakeholder groups involved in developing accessible play space in learning from what disabled children say. People wanted to know - in detail - what disabled children had told us about their experiences of using play spaces and what they would like to see play spaces looking like in the future. At all of the workshops we held we used photographs that disabled children had taken, their commentaries and ideas, pictures they had drawn and so on, and the interest in these was enormous. It shaped discussion and often held us up in getting at other issues - so keen were people to return to comment on something a child had said.

3.3 Alongside this ran a deep interest in 'how to' consult with disabled children, how to find them, who to approach, and how to avoid making them or their families feel uncomfortable in the process of consultation. We have concentrated a chapter of the Guide specifically on these issues and have used Section 2 of the Guide to signpost to the many individuals and organisations who have expertise in consulting with disabled children and young people that they are willing to share.

3.4 The mixed workshop opened with a comment from a disabled young man who after reading the summary of the perspectives of all stakeholder groups, was struck by the generosity of the different groups who had contributed to the project, each working hard, as he put it to 'take small steps' towards making play spaces more accessible to disabled children and young people. This comment set the scene for discussions about how best these various efforts might be joined up to develop accessible play space further - and specifically to produce a Guide which would facilitate this process. The workshop concluded with participants reinforcing how valuable they had found the process of the research to be in its capacity to 'bring people both within groups and across groups together to reflect on their work and the dilemmas they face'.

3.5 Our feeling at the end of the project was that there were two overarching interests which participants highlighted and saw as key to developing accessible play spaces which all children can enjoy. These were:

- the desire to learn how to learn **from** disabled children
- the need to make efforts and develop mechanisms to bring together various individuals and groups each taking small steps towards improving accessibility

3.6 By way of conclusion, we draw attention to the discussion outlined below which contrasts different models for the development of services and facilities to support disabled peoples access to and inclusion in everyday life. This discussion is adapted from the **Report on the Application of the Social Model of Disability to the Services provided by Birmingham City Council** written by Mike Oliver and Peter Bailey (2002) which we think has important ramifications for the future development of accessible play space.

The Humanitarian Approach

3.7 Under this approach accessible play spaces are developed and provided out of goodwill and the desire to help individuals and groups perceived as less fortunate. When these individuals or groups are children and young people - parents become the key recipients, and consultation is often aimed at and with them, so children are effectively 'out of the loop'. This leaves providers - whether this be an LEA or voluntary group in control of these services and users are expected, although often not explicitly, to be grateful for receiving them. The outcome of this is often that providers think they are doing a good job but users, when asked, can be critical and seen as ungrateful. This experience was shared with us by both users and providers during the course of the research. When play space providers feel they have expertise that others can benefit from and disabled people are perceived as a problem for whom extra work needs to be undertaken we found conflict ensues between providers and disabled people resulting in poor levels of satisfaction with services and facilities.

The Compliance Approach

3.8 Under this approach, services are driven by government policy and legislation. Obviously the DDA is of prime importance here in respect of services to disabled children, their families and other caregivers and policy commitments to improve accessibility to open, public spaces. This often means that providers adopt a minimalist approach both to the principles and practice of service delivery and do only what is necessary to comply with the law or government regulations 'to cover their backs' so to speak. Service users often feel disgruntled because they think they are being denied something they are entitled to or are confused about the providers' intentions. Again, this experience was shared with us by both users and providers during the course of the research. When providers feel constrained by rules and regulations a check list approach to accessible play space development can emerge and adherence to meeting minimum standards takes precedence over commitment to meaningful partnership. For disabled people this approach means their entitlements are not fully met as services and facilities are service rather than needs led.

The Citizenship Approach

3.9 This approach requires disabled children and their parents to be seen as full citizens with all the rights and responsibilities that are implied. There are three dimensions to this approach:

- disabled children and young people are seen as valued members of society - which means that they are actively consulted with and their views on and experiences of play spaces are given equal status to those of their non disabled peers;

- disabled children and young people and their parents are recognised as empowered individuals - and voters and;
- disabled children and young people are seen as active citizens with all that implies in terms of rights and responsibilities.

Only where this experience was shared with us by both users and providers during the course of the research is the relationship between providers and users of services a truly harmonious one in which play spaces develop in a truly accessible way.

3.10 During the course of the research it became clear to us that good practice emerges where the **citizenship model** is enacted in policy formulation, patterns of consultation and community involvement and commitment to service provision. To us, the citizenship approach, which reiterates key principles built in to the good practice guide, is the only approach likely to lead to the development of successful accessible play space.

The findings and recommendations in this report are those of the consultant authors and do not necessarily represent the views or proposed policies of Communities and Local Government.

Go to table of contents

References

Barnes, C. (2003) What a Difference a Decade Makes : reflections on doing 'emancipatory' disability research. *Disability and Society*. Volume 18, (1) pp. 3-18

Brown, F. ed. (2003) *Playwork Theory and Practice*. Buckingham: Open University Press.

Children Act (1989) London: HMSO.

Children's Play Council (2002) *Managing Risk in Play Provision: A position statement*. London: Play Safety Forum.

Children's Play Council (2002) *More Than Swings and Roundabouts: Planning for outdoor play*. London: Children's Play Council

Children's Play Policy Forum (2001) *Play as Culture. Incorporating play in cultural strategies*. Children's Play Policy Forum

Cole-Hamilton, I. Harrop and Street, C. (2002) *Making the Case for Play: Gathering the evidence*. London: National Children's Bureau.

Department of Health (2001) *Valuing People : a new strategy for learning disability for the 21st century*

Disability Discrimination Act (1995) *Code of Practice: Rights of Access - Goods, Facilities, Services and Premises*. London, Stationery Office

Douche, P. (2002) *It Doesn't Just Happen - Inclusive management for inclusive play*. London: KidsActive.

Department for Education and Skills (2003) *Every Child Matters*. Norwich: The Stationary Office.

Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (2002) *Living Places. Powers, Rights, Responsibilities. Options for reforming the legislative framework*. London, Defra Publications

Department of Health, *National Service Frameworks*. <http://www.doh.gov.uk/nsf/index.htm>

Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions. Urban White Paper *Delivering an Urban Renaissance*. London, HMSO

Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions. (2002) *Improving Urban Parks*,

Play Areas and Green Spaces. London, HMSO

Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions. (2002) *Green Spaces, Better Places. Final Report of the Urban Green Spaces Taskforce*. London, HMSO

Dunn, K. (2001) *Child Development and Education: different experiences, new voices*. Sheffield: Philip Armstrong Publications.

Heseltine, P. (1999) *Regular Inspection of Children's Playgrounds*. ROSPA.

Heseltine, P. (2001) *Developing the Children's Playground - A basic management guide*. (ROSPA)

Heseltine, P. and Hicks, J. (2001) *Playgrounds for Children with Special Needs*. ROSPA.

Hughes, B. (2001) *Evolutionary Playwork and Reflective Analytic Practice*. Brighton : Routledge Education

Huttenmoser, M. & Degen-Zimmerman, D. (1995) *Lebensraume fur Kinder*. Maria Meierhofer-Institut fur das kind: Zurich

Melville, S. (1997) Presentation to *National Playing Fields Association Conference*.

Moore, M. (Ed) (2000) *Insider Perspectives on Inclusion : raising voices, raising issues*. Sheffield: Philip Armstrong Publications.

National Playing Fields Association (1998) *Legislation and Children's Play - The Essential Guide*. NPFA

Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (2003) *Developing Accessible Play Space : A Good Practice Guide*

Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (2002) *Living Places - Cleaner, safer, greener* London, HMSO

Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (2002) *Planning Policy Guidance 17* London, HMSO

Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (2003) *Sustainable Communities: Building for the Future*. London: ODPM

Oliver, M. (1996) *Understanding Disability: From theory to practice*. London, Macmillan Publishers

Oliver, M. and Bailey, P. (2002) *Report on the Application of the Social Model of Disability to the Services provided by Birmingham City Council*. Birmingham City Council.

Play Safety Forum (2002) *Managing Risk in Play Provision: A position statement*. London: Play Safety Forum.

Potter, D. (1997) *Risk and Safety in Play - The law and practice for adventure playgrounds*. Playlink.

Potter, D. (2001) *Playground Management and Safety*. NPFA

Quality Protects (2003) Department of Health, *The Quality Protects Programme : Transforming Children's Services 2003-04*. London: Department of Health Publications.

Swain, J., French, S. and Cameron, C. (2003) *Controversial Issues in a Disabling Society*, Buckingham : Open University Press.

UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, Article 23(1), (3); Article 31. London, Children's Rights Development Unit, (www.unicef.org/crc/crc.htm)

UPIAS (1976) *'Fundamental Principles of Disability'* London: Union of the Physically Impaired Against Segregation.

Wood, P. (2001) *Growing Spaces for Play - The value of play in the natural environment*. ROSPA

The findings and recommendations in this report are those of the consultant authors and do not necessarily represent the views or proposed policies of Communities and Local Government.

[Go to table of contents](#)

Appendices

Appendix 1: Telephone interview schedule

This appendix are available separately for download in Word Format from the foot of this page.

Appendix 2: Indicative materials used in consultation with disabled children and their families

This appendix are available separately for download in Word Format from the foot of this page.

