

# What are adventure playgrounds?

Adventure playgrounds are unique and special play spaces, with many fantastic benefits for children and young people.

## The importance of adventure play

The opportunity to be able to access a rich play environment, and assess and take risks, is paramount for the healthy development of all children, physically, mentally, emotionally, socially and creatively. Sadly, and increasingly, children are unable or not allowed to go out to play, and engage freely in play activities that a generation ago would have been taken for granted.

There is a serious danger of serious and long lasting damage to a whole generation of children by denying them opportunities to explore, experiment, and experience the wide, wonderful world around them. Being 'wrapped in cotton wool', children are deprived of the most natural part of childhood - playing and taking risks. It is only by direct personal experience that children learn to assess and overcome danger and hazardous situations, and gain varied and flexible responses to the different situations they find themselves in.

Today's children are also leading increasingly sedentary lifestyles - a significant contributing factor to obesity and health problems among the young. By running around and playing, children can achieve the 60 minutes of daily activity recommended by the Chief Medical Officer for healthy development.

A good adventure playground aims to achieve such benefits: opportunities to experiment and explore; providing risks for children to take. Risks are assessed and in a controlled environment, supervised by trained, professional playworkers who are always on hand to help out if needed, who know when to intervene, but also know when to stand back and let children work things out for themselves. After all, children are the experts at playing.

## The benefits of adventure playgrounds

### Chosen by children

Adventure playgrounds are open access, meaning that children decide to use the playground themselves, when they choose. Adventure playgrounds are designed specifically to respond to the needs and wishes of children, rather than their parents, which makes them more popular with children than the 'fixed' playgrounds.

### Improving quality of life

The majority of adventure playgrounds are situated in deprived areas where children can face problems in their families, housing and quality of life. Adventure

playgrounds contribute to improving the children's play, learning and social opportunities.

### **Local and free**

Adventure playgrounds are mostly free to use and typically based within neighbourhoods, ensuring all children can visit often and without travelling far from home. Playgrounds have space for large numbers of children and welcome children and young people from a wide age range. This encourages neighbouring and related friends to play all together.

### **Accessible**

Many adventure playgrounds are accessible for wheel-chair users and non-disabled children alike. They enable disabled children to share in the sense of freedom and adventure.

### **Child development**

Adventure playgrounds contribute to a child's growth and development, by encouraging them to discover and test themselves against the environment and with other children. Adventure playgrounds can be the first place where many children learn to climb, jump, swing and hang.

### **Life skills**

Using tools and materials to adapt the outdoor space is an important feature of adventure playgrounds. Activities include building camps and dens, cooking on open fires, digging gardens, tending animals and growing food and generally playing with and in the outdoor space.

### **Staff**

Skilled, permanent playground staff are always on hand to ensure the safety of the children. The staff are significant adults in the lives of many of the children, providing a stable and positive adult relationship.

### **Ownership**

Children play a part in the ongoing design and construction of their adventure playground. This gives children the space to explore, test, create, build and rebuild their play space, and encourages children to feel at home in the playground and treat it well.

### **Childhood obesity and adventure playgrounds**

The Tackling Childhood Obesity conference in 2007, organised by the cross-government obesity team highlighted how children can achieve moderately intensive activity in adventure playgrounds.

# South Leeds proposal for an adventure playground

The Big Lottery Fund (BLF) Playful Ideas programme, focuses on innovation and new ways of providing for childrens play. It offers up to £250,000 in grants over 3 years, and is open to voluntary acommunity groups, the social enterprise sector, and town and parish councils.

The Children's Leeds South, Play and Leisure sub-group are proposing to submit a bid to build an adventure play ground in South Leeds.

Some work has been undertaken by members of the sub-group in identifying suitable sites, in both inner and outer south, including site visits. The nominated sites were assessed against an adventure playground spec (see appendix 1), and Middleton Park has been identified as offering the appropriate location for an adventure playground.

Whilst the funding from the BLF would meet the running costs of the adventure playground over the next 3 years, resources would need to be committed to this project beyond this period.

The BLF Playful Ideas bid needs to be submitted by 31<sup>st</sup> December, and the sub-group are in the process of inviting expressions of interest from voluntary sector organisations who have the capacity to host such a project.

Adventure play features in the Children Leeds Play Strategy, and therefore, this adventure playground would be a flag bearer for adventure play in the city, and it is hope the success of this will act as a springboard towards the development of other adventure playgrounds across not only South Leeds, but the city as a whole.

Members are asked to note and comment on the proposal

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Criteria for Leeds South Wedge Adventure Playground

The first AP in Leeds will need to be a demonstration project, hitting targets for sustainability and success. To do this, the following requirements are essential:

- 1. The AP will need to be located in a neutral area; this will limit rivalry or territorial issues that can limit numbers using the project.**
- 2. Provide evidence of need; child (under 18) population/demographic profile. Levels of play deprivation in a selected area. Social evidence; accidents, child abuse, health problems, truancy stats.**
- 3. Location needs to factor in issues around traffic systems, pedestrian flow routes, close to housing. Accessible physically and visually. Ideally the AP should be situated in the accepted pedestrian travel range of young children (they should have to rely on their parents to take them there)**
- 4. Topographical features, undulations, mounds and hollows make for more stimulating imaginative play.**
- 5. Full details of underground supply lines etc should be researched. When digging deep holes for telegraph pole for structures, it could prove a problem if such cables etc were below. But also to see if there is access to electricity and water supplies**
- 6. Approximate size of the site should be 1 acre minimum**
- 7. The land has to be in public ownership, long term lease arrangement 10-15 years would be desirable.**

## **Content of site initially**

1. Base for the playworkers to work from i.e. converted container, something substantial for office space, make cups of teas etc.
2. Toilet facilities for staff
3. Perimeter fence for the Adventure Playground