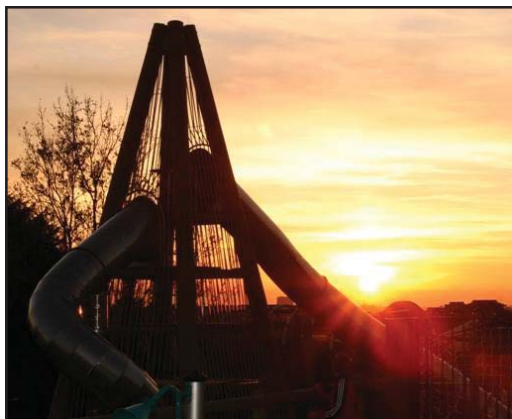


“Children Allowed! - Play Allowed! - Games Allowed!” proclaim play areas

As destinations, especially for children, play provision in parks and open spaces is vitally important



**Association of
 Play Industries -
 Reader Enquiry: 37**

Ex-local authority parks and play manager, Andy Furze, is now a consultant in children's play, strategies and consultation. Mr Furze, who was responsible for children's play and parks in a unitary council for more than ten years says, "Playgrounds are more than places to put and keep play equipment." He bases his views on the experience of starting play schemes, introducing (via the local voluntary play network) play containers as the bases for play work, consulting children widely and developing a 'design a space' scheme modelled on the work of the Learning through Landscapes Trust.

Mr Furze states, "Some assumptions about play equipment are based on narrow views of their use by children and do not reflect the wider role a playground has, particularly as a destination and meeting point, and signposting that an area is specifically meant for children. The playground has an important social role for children and the parents of younger ones. As adults we will probably recognise the fact that often 'we meet new people through children and animals'. Many parents and families have become friends through meeting in the playground".

In his paper, 'In Praise of Playgrounds', Mr Furze explains, with well-researched reference material, twenty-one benefits provided by play areas in public areas and parks. He demonstrated that play areas provide; play and recreation opportunities, destinations for children to go to which empowers children, a chance for girls to get out, a destination to take children to for parents, grandparents and carers and a place for play in the winter when children might otherwise stay indoors. His evidence shows play equipment can give children a sense of achievement, the opportunity to practice skills and can reduce anti-social behaviour in an area. Importantly a play equipment area provides a place for children to meet and socialise and an area safeguarded for the future. He maintains that play equipment can enable parents to be involved with their children and sends an important message to children that they matter to the community. Play equipment areas can also help to bring a community together, be a source of local community pride and help in neighbourhood regeneration. Playgrounds, he demonstrates, are part of the local heritage and source of shared memories while day-to-day they can help to reduce serious accidents by providing a safe place to play that can be sited close to home as a lasting environment with sustainable play equipment.

"Most importantly of all", argues Andy Furze, "Play equipment is valued by children". He cites Robin Moore, who states, "When asked for their regular and favourable play places children consistently referred to green open spaces (parks, fields) and, if there was one available locally, an equipped play area," and Kim Susan Blakely findings, "The most frequent activities.... were football and cycling, closely followed by use of playground equipment, playing in trees, and other active games." In closing, Andy Furze notes Heseltine and Holborn, who state, "In describing the ideal place to play, equipment was of key importance, (most popular first) were, swings, slides, climbing frames, roundabouts, seesaws and assault courses."