

PRESS RELEASE

DATE: Embargoed 13th April 2017 00:01am

Hundreds of playgrounds set to close

Research undertaken by the Association of Play Industries has uncovered the extent to which local authorities across the country have been closing children's playgrounds.

This new research revealed that between 2014/15 and 2015/16 local authorities across England closed 214 children's playgrounds, and when asked about future plans they admitted their aim to close a further 234.

These closures come at a time when childhood obesity and wellbeing are high on the Government's agenda.

Commenting Mark Hardy, Chairman of the API said: "With increasing childhood obesity and the health benefits of activity and play well known, now is not the time for community playgrounds to be closing. This action goes against the Government's clear intention to get children more active and needs to be stopped as quickly as possible. Our survey revealed a 37% cut in Government funding to local authorities."

Their report published today, 'Nowhere to Play', shows that £100 million could reverse the decline and get us back on track to increase the number of playgrounds available to children across the country. We are also realistic in realising in this period of austerity that direct government support may simply not be available and therefore urge government to support reinstatement of funding from the Big Lottery.

"We know that money is tight for councils across the country, but we can't just stand by and watch as children's playgrounds close. We are calling on the Government to halt this decline and invest in the next wave of playgrounds to ensure our children have access to free play and activity," adds Hardy.

----- END -----

EDITORS NOTES

A Freedom of Information Act request to all councils, carried out by the Association of Play Industries, revealed the following number of playground closures:

- 2014/15: 112
- 2015/16: 102

The request also asked for future plans to close playgrounds and revealed the following number of playgrounds earmarked for closure:

- 2016/17: 80
- 2017/18: 103
- 2018/19: 51

Figures for 2017/18 and 2018/19 do not include information from over a third of councils questioned as they had yet to make plans for this time.

The full report 'Nowhere to Play' is attached and will be available online Thursday 13th April 2017 here <http://www.api-play.org/news/nowhere2play-campaign>

Many leading figures in the world of children's play and activity have endorsed this report and its recommendations, including:

"Play is the first step children take towards physical literacy and an active lifestyle and therefore investing in play spaces and securing their future should be a priority in combating the negative health impacts of a sedentary population. Parks and playgrounds are vulnerable to closure in these challenging times and it's important that we revalue the enormous contribution they make to our communities. Fields in Trust welcomes this new research from the API and supports the call for increased investment that will positively impact the health and wellbeing of children and young people." **Helen Griffiths, Chief Executive, Fields in Trust**

"Any reduction of play facilities in communities is short-sighted and detrimental to the development of future generations. Outside play is a vital component of a balanced play diet - it's like the fruit and veg of a nutritional diet- very difficult to get too much of. Playing outside increases activity -helping in the fight against obesity, promotes social interaction - helping in the fight against mental illness and social isolation, reduces stress and makes the neighbourhood safer for everyone - the more people using outside spaces, the closer the community and the safer it becomes. With cars being made safer for drivers (leading to higher speeds) and increased traffic on the roads, it's more important than ever that children have safe spaces to play." **Dr Amanda Gummer, Founder, Fundamentally Children**

"This report highlights a deeply concerning trend away from children's playgrounds. At a time when we are all trying to combat childhood obesity and promote exercise we need to encourage children's play. I think it would be most helpful if the likes of the Big Lottery fund could be persuaded to look again at projects which promote children's play." **Julian Knight, MP for Solihull and former member of the Communities and Local Government select committee**

Councils are committed to promoting healthy lifestyles among young people and recognise that access to playgrounds and sports facilities are an important part of that. They want to do everything they can keep our parks and playgrounds intact but are doing this in the face of unprecedented budget constraints. Given ongoing funding reductions, many councils continue to have to make difficult decisions about which services are scaled back or stopped altogether. Decisions like this are never taken lightly and councils are exploring new ways to fund and maintain these facilities. Many are also working with their communities to help maintain them, or through crowdfunding for new equipment **Lord Porter, Chairman of the Local Government Association**

“The British Association of Landscape Industries fully endorses this excellent report by the API. As we witness the likely degradation of our cherished parks and public spaces through lack of investment, so, too, will we see a generation of young people and adults with mental and physical health problems exacerbated by lack of access to outdoor play and physical activity. The loss of playgrounds up and down the country is unforgivable. We should look at a different model where outdoor ‘play’ and exercise for all ages is somehow integrated so that a trip to the local playground involves the entire family, from children to grandparents.” **Wayne Grills, BALI's Chief Executive**

“**YORKSHIRE PLAY**, the not-for-profit charitable organisation promoting play across Yorkshire and the Humber, endorses the API's report highlighting the deficiencies in funding for the ongoing maintenance of children's play across the country. Yorkshire Play echoes the call for the Government to act on this report by allocating targeted funds to ensure that the current level of provision can be maintained and to recognise the significant health benefits which outdoor play brings at a time when childhood obesity is at a critically high level.” **Peter Barlow, Director Yorkshire Play**

“The RPII (Register of Playground Inspectors International) has seen first-hand the decline in play provision and the steady worsening of the condition of many play areas around the country. Play is absolutely vital to children’s health & wellbeing and public provision of such facilities has an important role to play in helping to ensure that children learn about risks in environments where the level of risk can be managed. The RPII welcomes this new research from the API and encourages the call for increased investment to help ensure the wellbeing of children and young people.” **Keith Dalton, Vice Chairman, Register of Play Inspectors International**

“The National Counties Playing Fields Association and Shropshire Playing Fields Association welcomes this new research from the API and supports the call for increased investment that will positively impact the health and wellbeing of whole communities including children and young people.” **David Kilby, National Counties Playing Fields Association**

“The FSPA welcomes this important and timely research and joins with the API in calling on the government for a clear show of support for play and activity and the benefits it brings to children. A government investment of £100m now could turn the tide and ensure that children in all areas can access good quality areas in which to play.” **Jane Montgomery, MD Federation of Sports and Play Associations.**

Key Contacts:

Mark Hardy, Chairman, Association of Play Industries M: 07933 686222

Helen Griffiths, Chief Executive, Fields in Trust M: 07946 188371

Dr Amanda Gummer, Managing Director/Founder, Fundamentally Children M: 079683 27099

Peter Barlow, Director Yorkshire Play M: 07549 179995

Deborah Holt, Association Manager, Association of Play Industries M: 07969 533915

The Association of Play Industries (API) www.api-play.org is the lead trade body within the play sector and campaigns at the highest levels for policy recognition for play. Its members are leading manufacturers, installers, designers and distributors of both outdoor and indoor play equipment and safety surfacing. Founded in 1984, the API currently has 66 members.

Follow us on **Twitter**: [@apiplay](https://twitter.com/apiplay) [#Nowhere2play](https://twitter.com/Nowhere2play)

The API operates under the umbrella of the Federation of Sports and Play Associations (FSPA), the national trade body responsible for representing 13 Associations in the UK’s sport and play industries. www.sportsandplay.com