

12 April 2021

Rt Hon Boris Johnson MP
Prime Minister
10 Downing Street
London
SW1A 2AA

Dear Prime Minister,

I am writing on behalf of the UK play industry to call upon the Government to do more to secure the future of children's outdoor play. You will no doubt be aware of the recent pledge made by Nicola Sturgeon - for a £60m fund to renew every play park in Scotland, so that all children have access to a place to play in their own community – and urge you to match this commitment to children throughout the UK.

Away from the home, children spend more time playing in public playgrounds than any other place. And yet, there has been an alarming and sustained decline in the number of playgrounds in recent years¹, leaving millions of children with nowhere to play. Children from the most disadvantaged areas, and those from the 1 in 8 UK households without gardens, are the most affected.

The SNP have seized upon the groundswell of public appreciation for shared, public spaces such as parks and community playgrounds. Lockdown has made the public acutely aware of the vital role these spaces have in the nation's health and wellbeing. Free-to-access, local playgrounds are crucial for children's physical, mental and emotional health and never more so than now, after over a year of restrictive measures.

The pledge made to the Scottish electorate is also a timely response to the growing calls for children to be placed at the heart of Government policies to 'Level Up' and 'Build Back Better' post-pandemic, beginning with a 'Summer of Play'. Children and young people have experienced severe disruption and hardship for a virus which barely affects them, and every attempt should be made by Government to reverse these effects so that they are not blighted by them for the rest of their lives.

The Government is now presented with a rare opportunity to mitigate the damage to children caused by lockdown and to support their health and wellbeing for generations to come, with one simple yet powerful public health measure: the UK urgently needs a national network of sustainable public play spaces to support children's health.

The creation of a central ring-fenced funding stream to create and enhance local, doorstep play spaces would be a hugely popular measure and produce a high return on a relatively modest investment. 72% of parents of children with health issues such as obesity said that the lack of outdoor play facilities in their area played a role in their children's problems². This is an issue about which parents care deeply, turning to crowdfunding to restore their playgrounds as the funding crisis deepens³.

¹ <https://www.api-play.org/posts/nowhere-to-play-obesity-warning-as-playground-closures-go-into-freefall/>

² <https://www.api-play.org/posts/childhood-obesity-poor-mental-health-and-sleep-problems-linked-to-playground-decline/>

³ <https://www.theguardian.com/education/2021/apr/03/parents-forced-to-crowdfund-to-stop-playgrounds-from-crumbling>

Association of Play Industries

Under the auspices of the Federation of Sports and Play Associations Ltd.

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As a final note, there are many who would spend time and money to theorise and strategise about the best way to enhance children's play experiences beyond simple playgrounds. At the Association of Play Industries, we fully understand and support the Government's view that responsibility for public playgrounds should be at a local level; Local Authorities are ideally placed to know what is best for their communities. However, town and parish councils are often deprived of the funding they require to sustain their local outdoor play provision and it is for this reason that the establishment of a central and ring-fenced funding stream for public play spaces is urgently needed.

It is now essential that the Government sets out a clear plan for investment in outdoor play, so that all children from all backgrounds across the UK have access to community, doorstep playgrounds. There is a real danger that these spaces could disappear for good with catastrophic effects on children's mental and physical health and I would welcome the opportunity to discuss future funding with you further.

Yours sincerely,



Mark E Hardy
Chair, Association of Play Industries



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