

Part 5 Play Areas

Technical Guidance and Standards



Stockton-on-Tees
BOROUGH COUNCIL

Introduction

Play should be at the heart of children's everyday lives and experiences throughout childhood. New developments should deliver imaginative, innovative, and stimulating play spaces that will enrich the lives of children and young people. Design should create safe, accessible and inclusive spaces where children and young people can develop crucial physical, social, emotional, and imaginative skills necessary to gain self-confidence, improve coordination, and advance critical thinking capabilities. It is only through the delivery of well-designed spaces within new developments that these benefits can be achieved and maximised.

Policy for play provision is generally based upon three levels of provision:

- **Local Areas of Play (LAP)** aimed at very young children (small-scale with a relatively small number of play items).
- **Local Equipped Areas of Play (LEAP)** aimed at children who can go out to play independently (comprise a medium number of play items).

- **Neighbourhood Equipped Area of Play (NEAP)** aimed at older children. These can be complemented by other facilities including Multi Use Games Areas (MUGAs) and skateboard parks (large number of play items).

Stockton-on-Tees has several locations which could be considered to constitute destination sites owing to the scale of provision and ancillary facilities which attract those from a wider catchment. Such areas include Preston, Ropner, John Whitehead and Wynyard Woodland Park.

Not all provision will fit neatly within one of these definitions and the nature and level of provision to be provided will be determined by what is already within the vicinity and demand created by the proposed development (standards are included within our Open Space, Recreation and Landscaping SPD). For instance, there may be cases where something between a LAP and a LEAP is the most appropriate form of provision or a standalone MUGA.

It is not the purpose of these technical standards to provide recommended distances that homes should be from Areas of Play as these are provided locally within our Open Space, Recreation and Landscaping SPD and nationally by Fields in Trust. However, when designing a new development, it will be important to ensure provision is in areas which can be easily accessed and there are no locations within a development which are devoid of provision. We support bespoke approaches such as natural play, adventure play, play for older children including teen play, the concept of doorstep play (especially within higher density housing) and integrated approaches to play with nature and the built environment

Natural play

Research has demonstrated that children benefit from being able to play in natural environments. They tend to be more active, and evidence suggests that contact with natural environments supports positive mental health.

Natural play spaces are often comprised of some well-chosen items of equipment, connected by mounds of grass, bridges, boulders, logs and so on. These natural areas provide less structure than a traditional playground. Therefore, when well designed, they can encourage more physical and creative challenges such as climbing, rolling, hiding and den building.

A well-designed natural play environment will allow access to natural objects and features in a managed, well-maintained setting, which will allow for a different range of play opportunities from those offered by conventional equipment. However, for many aspects they are no specific standards meaning there will be a necessity to appropriate risk-based assessments (more information is available online at the Health and Safety Executive website).

It is acknowledged that truly natural play will not be a preferred option within many locations not least owing to the fact that certain aspects age and weather more quickly than man-made ones. Therefore, a hybrid approach is advocated which seeks to mix natural objects and features with more traditional equipment.



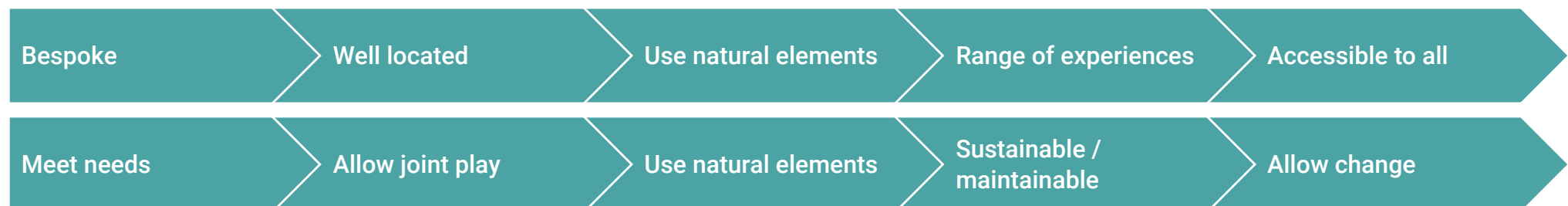
Design-led approach & principles

Designing a play space is not as simple as it may first appear. Historically, the design of play spaces has focused on locating a range of fixed play equipment within a fenced site to provide a variety of play activities. Whilst this approach has achieved well used spaces these fixed items (swings, slides and climbing frames etc) on their own will not deliver the benefits of a carefully considered scheme which fits within the landscape setting.

The importance of a design-led approach is increasingly being recognised. Through this approach it is possible to create play spaces offering a wider range of play opportunities and far greater choice for children about how they play. Successful play spaces are located and designed with reference to their surroundings with play equipment and features chosen for the way they can complement and enhance their setting as well as for their play value.

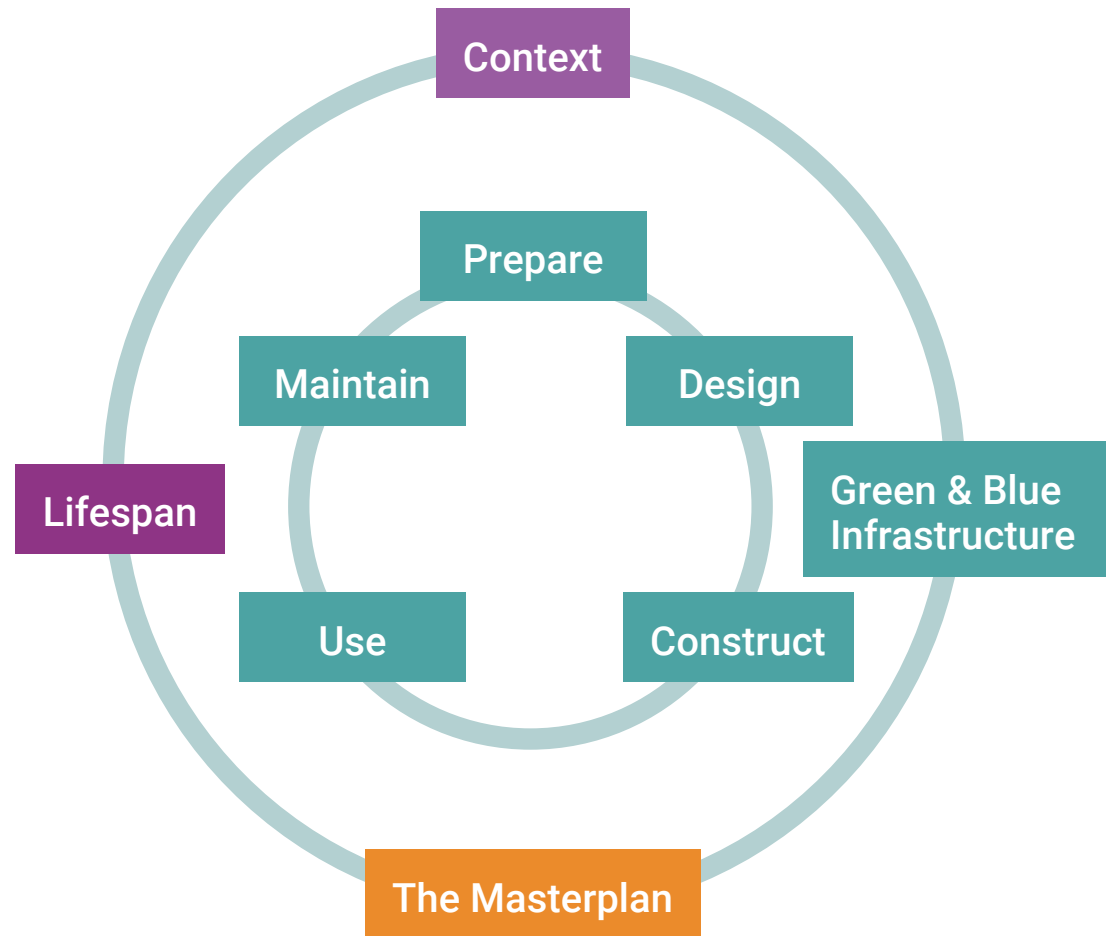
We advocate a design-led approach which provides consideration of the principles outlined below.

The 'Design Process' within this SPD advocates the creation of a design team from a variety of disciplines. Such a team should include a professional designer experienced in play and landscape design so that play value, landscaping, equipment, and features are all embedded in the designer's thinking from the outset. This will allow play spaces to be designed for its location, with equipment and other features enhanced by the landscape setting.



Designing for play needs cannot be considered as a linear process which ends when a scheme has been delivered on the ground as it is a much more circular and ongoing process. Careful thought is required in both the design, construction, care and maintenance to ensure play value does not deteriorate over time. The adjacent image seeks to demonstrate the parallels between designing for play and the 'Design Process' advocated through this SPD.

The provision of play spaces should always be undertaken in consultation with prospective residents and the local community. We also support early engagement in the planning process with the local authority to ensure provision meets local needs and compliments provision within the wider locality; this is essential where there is potential for the provision to be transferred to the local authority.



Prepare

This should begin at the 'context' stage where a contextual analysis, site appraisal and baseline assessment will be undertaken. At this stage an understanding will be gathered not only the site itself but its relationship and connectivity with play spaces within the adjoining areas. Key questions to ask at this stage are:

- What existing provision exists?
- Are there any gaps in provision?

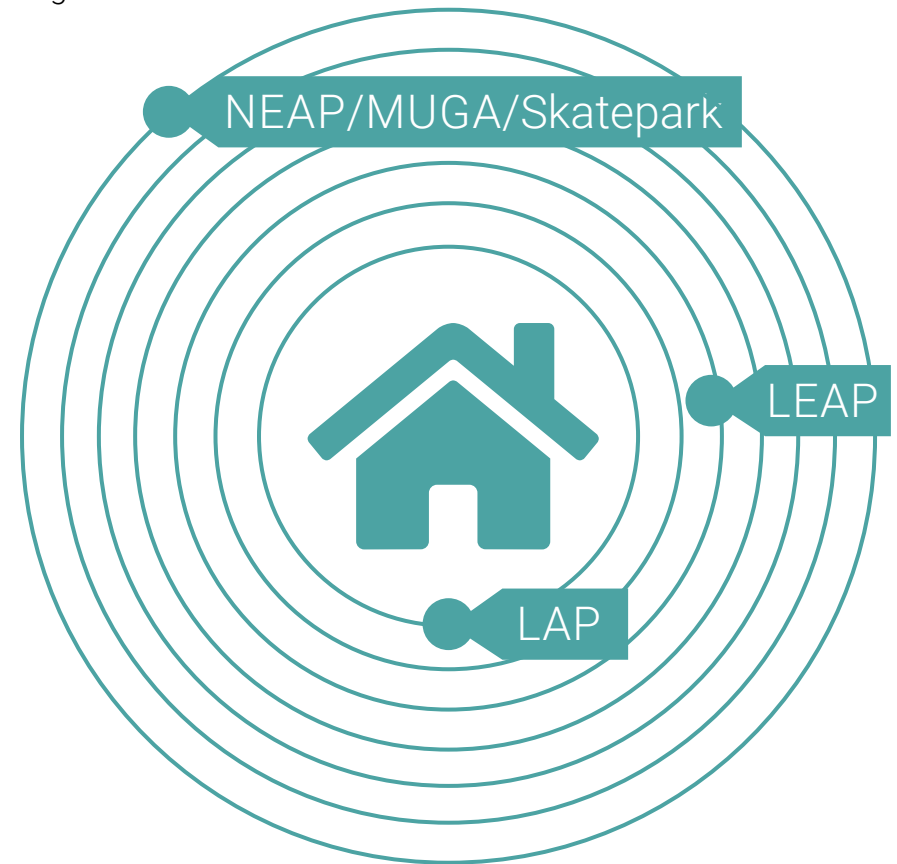
The final step within the 'context' stage will be the development of a framework plan which will communicate the proposed layout of a scheme. Having answered the above questions it will be possible to determine preferred locations to locate Areas of Play. Successful play spaces are located carefully 'to be where children would play naturally' and away from dangerous roads, noise and pollution. No matter how well designed a play space is, in the wrong location it will be neither used nor usable. Specific considerations will include:

- ensuring no gaps of provision within the new development
- existing gaps in provision are addressed within the wider area (where possible)
- provision is aligned with spaces of appropriate scale
- linked with pedestrian and cycleway routes

The table overleaf provides some indication of potential locations for Areas of Play across the hierarchy of provision. It is generally accepted that Areas of Play higher within the hierarchy should be placed within larger areas of open space within central locations of a development near other facilities/uses to ensure accessibility is maximised, conflicts with adjacent users are minimised, and a landscape for play approach can be achieved.

Having this high-level understanding of the locations for Areas of Play will establish the foundations for more detailed design stages.

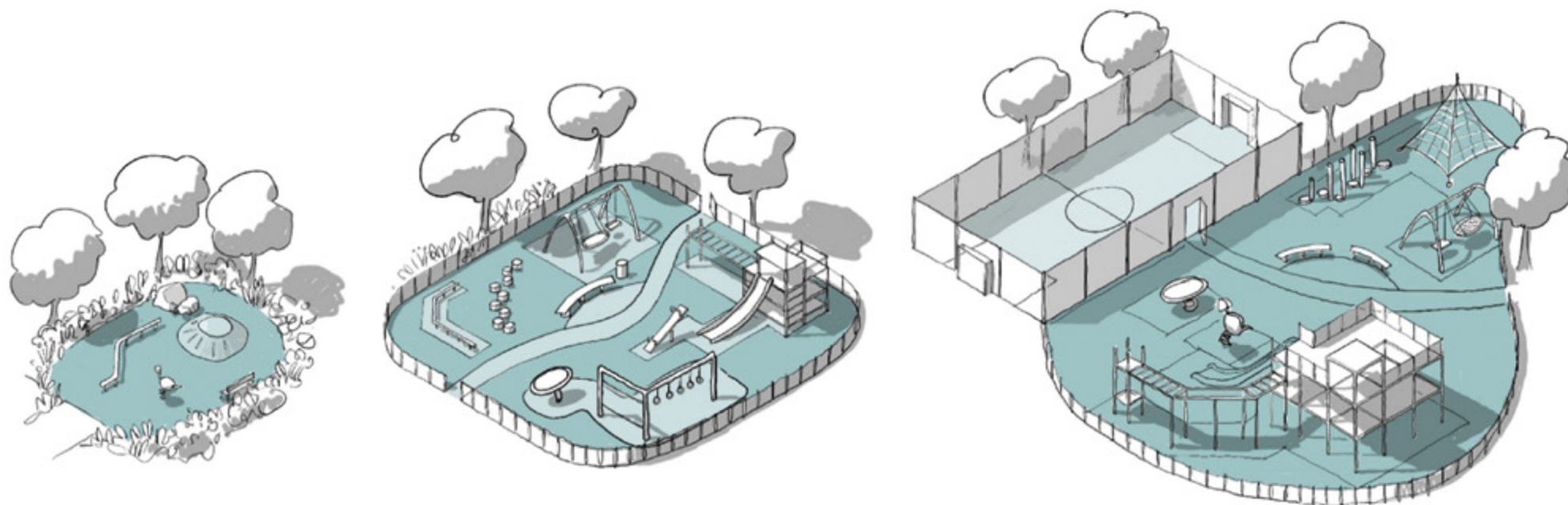
We support the delivery of additional play alongside core elements of the movement framework (pedestrian routes) as part of the wider landscape design as this can encourage play and physical activity. This can work particularly well in higher density developments where land is at a premium and within other areas alongside routes linking uses such as larger areas of play and educational sites.



Hierarchy	Likely location	Additional guidance
NEAP	Strategic open spaces (parks, greens or larger areas of green infrastructure)	<p>These locations could be formally laid out or be within a more natural landscape setting. Importantly any provision should be:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • designed to fit within its setting • located within the heart of the community • alongside main routes within the cycle and pedestrian network
LEAP	Amenity open spaces	Owing to the scale of provision these areas will generally be located within areas of amenity open spaces within the green infrastructure network. Provision should be positioned within spaces to ensure residential amenity is preserved.
LAP	Smaller amenity open spaces/ landscaped areas	Located close to people's homes such provision should be located within a safe and accessible environment.

Example LAP, LEAP & NEAP

(scale and design of provision must be linked to the need and site circumstances)



Design

As the design evolves through the 'Design Process' and it begins to be developed and refined it will be necessary to give more detailed consideration to the precise location of Areas for Play and how they will be tailored to their context, anticipated users, and position within the hierarchy of provision. The design of Areas of Play should not be considered in isolation but with consideration of the wider layout and specifically how provision can be incorporated within the sites green and blue infrastructure to enhance play value and deliver a landscape for play approach.

While children often enjoy feeling as if they are away from adult oversight, there is a fine balance between a space that is pleasantly secluded and one that is remote and hidden away. As with our advocated approach for designing open spaces for people Construct, Use and Maintain' a guiding principle is the achievement of natural surveillance; however, in locating Areas for Play it is equally important to ensure that residential amenity is given appropriate consideration.

Areas for Play should be designed to be as inclusive as possible, considering the needs of a whole range of users of different abilities. Well-designed inclusive play spaces and parks welcome people and especially children of all abilities to play, learn and grow together. When designing play Areas for Play the following criteria need to be considered:

- Selecting the most appropriate surfacing
- Placing equipment and features at varying heights
- Allowing users to easily transfer to and from the play equipment
- Creating wide enough routes throughout the play space
- Providing flush transitions to allow people using mobility aids to move freely
- How individuals and families access the play space itself
- Future maintenance and local availability of replacement products throughout the expected lifecycle of the play area

The Equality Act 2010 requires reasonable provision to be made for equal opportunities for disabled people except where it affects the safety of others. The Act does not require that all play areas are suitable for disabled children as it is impossible to make a play area totally suitable for all forms of impairment. What is required is that all reasonable measures are taken to make a play area as suitable for disabled children as possible.

Whilst it is not considered appropriate to provide defined thresholds that Areas for Play should be from dwellings, as each will need to be considered based on the site's context and the level of provision provided, it is suggested that the larger the provision and greater the anticipated use the further Areas for Play should be from the nearest dwelling. In the case of MUGA and wheeled sport it is recommended that they always be more than 30 meters from the nearest dwelling.

When designing open spaces for people and locating Ares for Play it will be necessary to consider:

- how children and young people can reach it safely and easily
- how provision will relate to other intended uses within the open space
- where water bodies and SUDS are nearby whether the location is appropriate (i.e. can risks be mitigated to a sufficient level) or an alternative location is required

It is the obligation of the developer within the CDM Regulation to appoint a Planning Supervisor at the early planning / siting stages of the proposal. The Council require copies of the relevant risk assessments associated with the siting and design of the play area.

Through the planning process we support the use of independent Play Value Assessment (by RoSPA or similar accredited association). The aim should be the achievement of an 'excellent' rating as an indicator of high play value. Such assessments can be provided through the planning process to support planning applications.

The next two pages provide further guidance on equipment selection, surfacing, fencing and gates, and ancillary facilities.



Equipment selection	Surfacing	Fencing and gates																	
<p>Equipment should be appropriate for the age group and match their developmental needs - as well as being fun to play on. Examples include</p> <table border="1" data-bbox="107 304 705 762"> <thead> <tr> <th></th> <th>Younger children</th> <th>Older children</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>Scale</td> <td>Smaller</td> <td>Larger</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Types of provision</td> <td>Sand-play, swinging, climbing, sliding etc</td> <td>Large group swings, cable runways, roundabouts etc Flat areas for ball games and places for wheeled sports</td> </tr> </tbody> </table> <p>All equipment should conform with and be tested against the most recent and appropriate standard which is currently BS EN 1176.</p> <p>Equipment selected be designed to have longevity.</p>		Younger children	Older children	Scale	Smaller	Larger	Types of provision	Sand-play, swinging, climbing, sliding etc	Large group swings, cable runways, roundabouts etc Flat areas for ball games and places for wheeled sports	<p>Appropriate surfaces shall be provided within play spaces as a core design element in creating safe playgrounds. The main types of surfacing to be used under play facilities:</p> <table border="1" data-bbox="779 331 1402 1209"> <thead> <tr> <th>Younger children</th> <th>Older children</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>Grass</td> <td>Good all-purpose surface but lacks impact absorbency in dry conditions and wear resistance</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Loose-fill</td> <td>Includes sand, wood products and pea shingle. Whilst easy to lay and have good impact absorbency they do disperse and break-down over time.</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Synthetic</td> <td>Tiles - generally efficient, long-lasting but can be expensive and difficult to lay. Wet-pour - generally efficient, long-lasting but expensive and very difficult to lay. Layered - generally efficient but require some maintenance and can be subject to vandalism and wear problems. Requires expert laying.</td> </tr> </tbody> </table> <p>Protective surfacing shall be laid in the areas recommended by EN 1176 (Items covered by any other standard shall have protective surfaces to standards not less than EN 1176) having been tested in accordance with BS 7188 and EN 1177.</p>	Younger children	Older children	Grass	Good all-purpose surface but lacks impact absorbency in dry conditions and wear resistance	Loose-fill	Includes sand, wood products and pea shingle. Whilst easy to lay and have good impact absorbency they do disperse and break-down over time.	Synthetic	Tiles - generally efficient, long-lasting but can be expensive and difficult to lay. Wet-pour - generally efficient, long-lasting but expensive and very difficult to lay. Layered - generally efficient but require some maintenance and can be subject to vandalism and wear problems. Requires expert laying.	<p>Fences and gates are generally utilised to provide three functions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> To contain children within the relative safety of the play area To keep dogs off the play area To give children a sense that it is their area and separate from the surrounding <p>It is important to remember that not all play spaces or grounds need gates and fencing. Where they are provided, they should be of a good quality and suited to the context of the site. Alternatives to gates, such as floor grids or mesh at pedestrian access points can be considered.</p> <p>Fences should be constructed and erected in accordance with the appropriate part of BS 1722, with a minimum height of 1.0m recommended and comply with EN 1176.</p> <p>Where gates are provided a minimum of two should be incorporated at different points on the boundary. Gates need to be considered within the context of access for all, safety and ensuring emergency access can be achieved. The following guidance in relation to gates is provided</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Minimum of 1m open width to allow passage of wheelchairs and should not hinder the passage of wheelchairs or pushchairs Located to allow ease of access, not directed to hazards (internal or external), consider slopes.
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Ancillary Features

A range of appropriate ancillary items, such as seats and litter bins suitable for the intended use shall be provided as required. The use of anti-tamper fixings is recommended which should be installed as per manufacturers instruction. Seats and litter bins must be a minimum of 1m away from the fencing. Litter bins to be a minimum of 1m away from seats.

Local residents are often concerned about the potential impacts of anti-social behaviour in and around play spaces. CCTV can help mitigate potential anti-social behaviour, provides authorities with a quick response if required, and provides evidence for prosecutions if required. Where CCTV provision is considered necessary it should have the capacity to send a live signal to managers of the play area.

A well-designed Area for Play will only deliver upon its play value and be sustainable over time if it is installed, managed, and maintained appropriately. It is now common that Areas of Play within new developments are managed and maintained by management companies separate to the local authority. Title transfer to the local authority can be considered where an appropriate commuted sum is paid to the Council



Construct, Use and Maintain'

Installation

The installer shall provide written evidence that the equipment has been installed in accordance with the manufacturers or designers' instructions. A transferable manufacturer's warranty for mechanical failure of 20 years is required for all equipment to ensure it can be transferred to any proposed management company or in appropriate instances the local authority.

Test and installation certificates must be provided alongside warranties covering a sufficient period to ensure the material will maintain its absorbency levels for the warranty period.

Whilst all products will have to be load tested to achieve a TUV certificate, testing for repeated moving loads (provided by playing children) is crucial to ensure durability of all products. The Council will require evidence to ensure this testing has been carried out on all products for a minimum of six months. Test results and evaluations for selected products must be provided to the Council.

Post installation inspection and testing, of the play equipment, shall be required, by an approved testing house and all certification forwarded to the Local Authority.

The developer shall be required to undertake a post installation equipment and site risk assessment, through an approved/ accredited testing house eg: ROSPA, etc. Any errors or omissions found shall need to be rectified and retested for compliance, at the developer's expense, prior to any acceptance by the Council.

Signage

Signage will be required at all Areas for Play with the precise detailed and size to be agreed with the Council prior to installation. Generally, signage will be 900mm by 450mm of appropriate construction/fixing and include the following information:

- Name of the play facility, address, and postcode.
- Name and address of the operator of the facility to report any incident or damage to the play equipment.
- Symbol to indicate dogs are excluded from the area
- The age range facilities are designed for.
- Indication that it is not a supervised facility.
- Restrictions regarding use (no dogs, no smoking or vaping, no glass or alcohol etc.)
- This site is being monitored by CCTV (if installed)

Warning signs may be required depending on hazards nearby to the site.

Management

Play spaces should be managed and maintained as follows;

- A visual inspection should be undertaken by a RPII registered play inspector with appropriate training every 5 to 10 working days (dependant on the size of the play area, usage etc.).
- An 'operational inspection' should be undertaken quarterly, by a RPII registered inspector.
- A complete annual inspection should be undertaken by an independent organisation.
- Play area equipment should be inspected and maintained to EN1176 standard.
- Safety surfacing should be inspected and maintained to EN1177 standard.
- Failures due to natural reasons and/or vandalism should be repaired/replaced as soon as practical.
- The play area should be regularly cleaned/maintained, daily or weekly depending on the size and use of the area.
- Soft landscaping within the play area should be maintained according to an approved grounds maintenance plan.
- litter bins should be emptied at regular intervals to be agreed based on the size and use of the area



