

# Involving young people in the design and care of urban spaces

What would you do with this space?

May 2004

CABE Space and CABE Education

## Contents

- 5 Introduction
  - Why is public space important for children and young people?
  - What role should children and young people play?
  - Why is good design important?
  - Identifying barriers and finding solutions
  
- 9 Addressing the key issues
  - Villain or victim?
  - Making time for young people
  - Different types of involvement for different young people
  - Imagining something new
  - Young people need 'slack space'
  - Creating sustainable projects
  
- Case studies
  
- 14 Taking the initiative
  - Freemantle Lake Park, Southampton
- 16 Including disabled children
  - Evergreen Adventure Playground, Hackney, London
- 20 Safe and secure
  - Lister Park, Bradford
- 23 Opening up a dialogue
  - Skate parks, Edinburgh and Perth
- 26 Learning through doing
  - Cowley Teenage Space, Brixton, London
- 30 Once upon a time in a playground
  - Daubeney Primary School Playground, Hackney, London
- 33 The importance of wild space
  - Railway Land Junior Management Board, Lewes, East Sussex
- 35 Learning through experience
  - SPACEmakers, Bristol
- 39 Nature's playground
  - Two children's spaces, Copenhagen
- 42 Building community
  - Weaver's Green, Coventry

44	Growing awareness David Lister Gardening Group, South Coates, Hull
46	Developing a new place Kendray Youth Play Project, Barnsley
48	Managing to accommodate young people Queen Elizabeth Hall Undercroft, London
51	By children, for children Discover Story Garden, Stratford, London
	Guidance
54	Summary
55	Policy guidance and planning guidance
58	Useful organisations
60	References
62	Useful publications
64	Acknowledgements

## About this guide

If you are involved – or would like to get involved – in improving or designing public space, this guide is for you. It is aimed at architects and landscape architects, local authority officers, community groups, youth and play workers, regeneration agencies, children and young people. The strong case that it makes for the ongoing involvement of children and young people in the design, development and management of public space also makes it relevant to policy makers, funding bodies and decision makers.

This publication aims to provide an inspiring and practical guide for practitioners. Through the stories of sixteen different projects, it explores creative and constructive ways to involve children and young people in public space and sets out some of the key issues that projects may face. It does not aim to have all the answers, but hopes to provide a useful and inspiring starting point for projects, however big or small.

It should be stressed that development of the key issues and advice within the guide has been led by the opinions of young people involved in these projects. The input from a range of stakeholders with experience of working in this field compliments what is essentially advice from young people to those leading projects or getting involved in them.

This guide is also a call to action – not only is it right that children and young people should be involved in public space, but it is also the duty of all of us to ensure that they are involved in a meaningful and ongoing way.

## Foreword

I am delighted to introduce this guide to involving young people in the design and care of urban spaces, produced by CAFE Space in partnership with the charity CAFE Education.

The interactions that take place in public space provide children with a rich education about the world around them. Children and young

people often feel the need to make their mark and establish their right to using public space - whether constructively or destructively. The young people involved in this guide make it clear that involving them in the design process has had a significant and positive effect on their use of local spaces.

It is easy to forget that young people are well-informed users of public space, and all too often we prioritise adult needs over that of children. However, a key finding of this guide is that if young people are given a chance to design public space they do so with the interests of all ages in mind, and not just their own.

In the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister's Learning to Listen: Action plan for children and young people, I stated that "we cannot promote the ODPM's vision for 'thriving, inclusive and sustainable communities' unless young people play a meaningful role in their development."

I hope that the examples in this guide inspire local authority officers, youth workers, social housing providers, architects and landscape architects to involve young people in design and maintenance processes. We will all benefit from their ideas and enthusiasm.

Yvette Cooper MP

Parliamentary Under Secretary of State, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister.

'Imagine this... you walk through an arch; smooth stone entwined with wild flowers climbing to reach the dazzling sunlight. As you enter the garden, a sweet, fresh smell – like that of fresh dew, or autumn leaves – wafts upon the summer lights. Birds' song resounds through the air, quavers on the wind. All worries and stress of city life are lost on the waves of tall grasses, into the branches of the oak, which towers above, blurred by mists and clouds. The roe deer resting in the back of a glade pricks its ears in your direction and settles back down on the mossy earth, he knows you are no threat. Like him you have only come to savour the simple beauty of nature.'

Josie Vallely

Scottish Regional Winner, Young Environment Champion of the

Year 2003 (see end).

## Introduction

Given the right support and opportunities, children and young people are capable of playing a major role in creating inspirational and thriving public space. At the moment, children are rarely encouraged to make use of public space or expected to contribute to the improvement of it. There is a gap between what they actually do and what they are capable of doing.

In order to develop creative and successful ways of involving young people in improving public space, it is helpful to understand the current situation and context. It is important, first of all, to understand why public space is important for this age group. Second, it is useful to consider the current and potential role that children and teenagers play in public space. Third, the importance of good design needs to be understood. And finally, we need to identify the barriers that can prevent children and young people from getting involved, in order to overcome them.

Why is public space important for children and young people?

Children and young people need space away from their homes where they can socialise and spend time with their peers. Public space – which is different from a back garden or a school playground – is important, as it is accessible to everyone in the community. The interactions that take place in public space provide a rich education for children about the world around them and the people who live in it.

Parks, street corners, playgrounds, football pitches, pavements and open patches of grass and trees provide space for children to meet and play, to establish a world for themselves independent of their parents and to explore the natural and built environment around them. Access to good public space can help children to stay healthy and tackle problems of obesity by providing opportunities for exercise and getting fresh air.

It is not only parks and playgrounds that are important. Children need to be able to use the whole public realm safely and without fear. For many children, particularly children who have little or no experience of trips or holidays further afield, their local environment is their main experience of the outside world. “For these young people, the freedom to walk around defines the limits of their world,” writes Mayer Hillman (ref 1) Public space links together the space outside the front door of a child’s home with the playground around the corner or their friend’s house across the road. An attractive child-friendly park is of less value if it surrounded by busy roads with no safe ways for children to get to it. These issues need to be considered at all stages of development.

What role should children and young people play?

Children’s current role in public space is generally seen as one of passive user rather than active player in its development. But children do act, and often feel the need to make their mark and establish their right to using public space – whether constructively or destructively. In Britain at the moment, children and young people are commonly portrayed either as potential victims or as frightening, out-of-control delinquents (ref 2).

Adult uses of public space are often prioritised over that of children – parked cars take up open space and ‘No Ball Games’ signs proliferate – and conflict between adults and children using public space is common. Research by the Children’s Society found that while two thirds of children aged seven to sixteen like to play outside daily, 80 per cent say that they have been told off for doing so, and one in three says that this stops them from playing outdoors (ref 3). Children are too often seen as a nuisance and too rarely as fellow citizens who can make valuable contributions to the welfare of their communities.

However, some progress is being made. Groundwork’s recent publication No particular place to go? (ref 4) makes a strong argument for the inclusion of children and young people in public space and describes the importance of that space for their welfare and development. It highlights the opportunities that public space can

provide for adventurous play and describes how this can help to limit anti-social behaviour.

Getting Serious about Play (see Policy Guidance and ref 5) the first ever government-sponsored review of children's play, was published in 2004 and looks at the best ways to spend the £200m of lottery money pledged for children's play facilities. The review consulted children and found that most would like to get outdoors more, that they favour smaller play spaces close to where they live and prefer facilities with adult helpers. The review recommended that local authorities' proposals for new and improved play spaces must be prepared in partnership with children and young people.

Other signs that the importance of children's participation is being increasingly recognised in many areas of government include the establishment of the Children, Young People and Families Directorate and the creation of a Minister for Children, within the Department for Education and Skills. The Learning to Listen core principles, developed by the Department for Education and Skills, have been used by each government department to create an action plan that will increase the involvement of children and young people in central government policy making. Accordingly, ODPM has produced its Learning to Listen: Action plan for children and young people (ref 6). At a local level, Hear by Right, the voluntary set of standards for local government, sets out ways to increase the involvement of children and young people in local government and in the development of local services.

In parallel with these developments, there is also the anti-social behaviour agenda. Anti-social behaviour orders (ASBOs) can be used to break up groups of young people or to exclude certain young people from particular areas. While anti-social behaviour by a small number of people can cause real distress and disruption, there are worries that use of ASBOs may serve only to displace the problem. Anti-social behaviour needs to be tackled, but there is a danger of disconnecting young people from their surroundings by physically excluding them. Effective schemes are being pioneered that use good behaviour contracts and support for families as an alternative. Involving children and young people in creative projects that promote



responsibility and ownership of public space can only reduce anti-social behaviour, as the case studies in this guide illustrate.

Why is good design important?

Good design of public space means creating spaces in which people want to spend time and that they enjoy using. Above all, good design takes advantage of the opportunity to create environments that are truly inspirational. Public space is now the subject of renewed interest and debate. This is therefore a crucial time to think about and discuss the ways in which young people can and should be involved in both the design and maintenance of it.

Over the last twenty years there has been chronic under-investment in parks and other public space. The employment of full-time on-site staff at all major parks and green spaces is no longer taken for granted, and maintenance is often undertaken by a contractor who has no particular attachment to one place or another. The importance that children attach to the presence of sympathetic adults in public space has been highlighted. In *No particular place to go?* Ken Worpole points out that, “children and young people themselves often express the wish to have adults or other responsible figures fairly close to hand if trouble should arise.” Although schemes to reintroduce official adults to public spaces are to be welcomed – such as the neighbourhood wardens, park rangers and play rangers – these are by no means as widespread as park keepers once were.

In reaction to this decline, government has shown increased interest over the last few years in encouraging better-designed public and green space. The Urban Green Spaces Taskforce report, *Green Spaces, Better Places* (ref 7) published in 2002, highlighted the benefits of public space and informed a programme of action for national and local government outlined in *Living Places: Cleaner, safer, greener* (ref 8).

Other important publications on the design of public space include the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions’ (DTLR) manual, *By Design* (ref 9) in 2000 and the report of the Urban Taskforce, *Towards an Urban Renaissance*, in 1999 (ref 10). For the initiatives they identify, new funds are available from the Heritage

Lottery Fund, the New Opportunities Fund and other lottery bodies. The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister's (ODPM) Sustainable Communities Plan (see Policy Guidance and ref 11) has pledged money for the improvement of public space and funding is also available from the Neighbourhood Renewal Fund and other area-based regeneration schemes.

## Identifying barriers and finding solutions

All children and young people have ideas about how their areas could be improved. This doesn't always mean that they get involved in projects for designing or improving public space. There can be a number of reasons why they don't get involved. They may not know about what is going on (depending on how it is publicised) or they may feel that it is not their kind of thing; they may not feel confident about sharing ideas with others; or they may already have other commitments and responsibilities. Participatory projects are about finding ways of allowing different young people to develop and communicate their ideas at times and places most appropriate for them and in which they feel comfortable.

In developing this guide, some barriers were found to be common to all the different projects visited. These must be recognised and tackled if we are serious about creating public places where children are active and visible and where they share responsibility. Some of the main issues are outlined in this guide, and the case studies that follow demonstrate a range of creative solutions that involve children long-term in a meaningful way.

## Addressing the key issues

### Villain or victim?

One of the major barriers to young people's participation is the way that adults see them. Adults often regard children as weak and passive and in need of protection, so adults readily take decisions on their behalf and 'in their best interest'. At the other extreme, adults may see young people as destructive and anti-social and unlikely to do anything useful. Although all children need protecting to some degree and young people can be destructive, the assumption that

they all belong to one extreme or the other excludes young people from fully participating in the decision-making process.

All the case studies in this guide show children and young people taking positive action and defying these stereotypes. Two projects in particular demonstrate ways in which young people have successfully changed adults' perceptions. In Freemantle Lake Park in Southampton, young people initiated the building of a pavilion for the use of everyone who comes to the park. The project helped to improve the way local residents, police and park maintenance staff perceived young people. The Edinburgh Skate Park Project involved young people in talking to workers, councillors and other adults to promote better understanding of each other's point of view. They wanted not only to generate support for their project but also to make sure that when the skate park was built, it would be sustainable and widely supported.

### Making time for young people

Involving children in public space projects takes time and commitment. Traditional forms of consultation and decision-making systems tend to be adult-oriented and assume a basic knowledge that children and young people do not always have. Young people are able to understand and engage with adults, but they will sometimes need help in understanding new concepts or explanations of particular terms and processes. An open and supportive atmosphere needs to be cultivated that encourages young people to ask questions and allows enough time for proper explanations.

This is already happening in a number of projects, for example the SPACEmakers project in Bristol, where young people have been involved at all stages and have been given responsibility to make presentations to funders, councillors and planners. Project workers have been open about any problems that have arisen and have taken time to make sure that young people understand what is going on at each stage.

In South Bristol, the board that distributes Urban II European Funding is an excellent example of making systems accessible to young people. Over half of the places on the board are reserved for young

people and the current chair is fifteen years old. Young board members – including two members of the SPACEmakers project – are paired up with adult members who act as mentors, and training is provided to help young people make informed decisions about the eligibility and merit of the projects that apply.

### Different types of involvement for different young people

Involving a diverse group of children brings a richness and breadth to a project that can help to create a place rooted in the community in its broadest possible sense. Children from black and minority ethnic communities, disabled children and children from low socio-economic groups may encounter many difficulties in getting involved in public space design projects. In order to involve many different children and young people, it is important to hold events in different venues and to provide a choice of different kinds of activities.

Children of all ages are capable of contributing to design projects, and age-appropriate activities should be developed – for example, younger children may find it easier to show what they like, whereas teenagers may also be happy to write or talk about their ideas.

Disabled children often experience a high degree of exclusion. The ODPM's good practice guide, *Developing Accessible Play Space* (ref 12) states that failure to understand what disabled children want and are entitled to is one of the main barriers to developing accessible play space. It goes on to emphasise the importance of good design in developing accessible play spaces. Children should be allowed to participate where, when and how they feel most comfortable.

One example of a truly inclusive and participatory project is Evergreen Adventure Playground in Hackney, which was redeveloped a few years ago to make it suitable for disabled children. Play workers and architects worked with children in different ways, from using the site itself as a map to having one-to-one discussions with autistic and non-verbal children. Arnold Mahoney, play worker at Evergreen, says that, "all children have ideas; it's just a question of finding out what they are."

Involving and listening to young people from an early stage and seeing them as part of the solution are central to a successful project. In Bradford's Lister Park young people were engaged in places and at times of their own choosing. Ian Day, manager of the regeneration project, comments that, "there are no hard-to-reach groups, only expensive to reach." Involving children and young people effectively can add to the initial costs of a project. However, there is increasing evidence that creating a high-quality, locally "owned" design is likely to reduce the lifetime costs associated with public space, because of reduced vandalism and the increased care and respect of its users.

### Imagining something new

Overcoming young people's lack of experience is a vital part of re-imagining and redesigning a space. One way to do this is to take children out of their own environment to new and different places. This not only helps them to get new ideas but can also encourage them to look at familiar places in a new way. The SPACEmakers project took young people on trips to open spaces near Bristol, where the project is based, and also on study tours to Glasgow and Rotterdam. The young people directly experienced some of the most cutting-edge examples of modern landscape and urban design, which have fed into their design process.

A different approach is to challenge people's perceptions of a site by introducing temporary props or unusual uses. The experimental playground on Cowley Estate in Brixton introduced wooden boxes, chalk, plinths and platforms into a disused car park for two weeks. Young people came every day to move and manipulate these props, changing the feel and topography of the site and so working step by step to an innovative and radical design solution.

### Young people need 'slack space'

Young people will spontaneously select and then appropriate open space. Their use of space that accommodates this informal appropriation, or 'slack space', treads a fine line between asserting ownership and behaving anti-socially. It is a challenging issue that needs to be tackled head on, as an understanding of the importance of 'slack space' can have a significant effect on the design and

participation process. Getting Serious about Play talks about “informal play locations” and states that, “any effort to improve children’s play opportunities must recognise as a fact of life that most play does not take place on sites formally designated as play spaces.”

Meeting and talking to young people in spaces that they have selected can be a useful starting point for getting them more involved. “Start with something they feel an attachment to,” says Marc Silver of Yeast (ref 13) an organisation that runs video projects for young people where they “sample their surroundings”.

Examining the key features of the spaces that they select and finding out from them what makes a good ‘slack space’ can help ensure that designs will reflect the ways that young people really use public space. The Undercroft at the Queen Elizabeth Hall in London is a space that was not designed for skating or biking. In fact, it was not even designed for young people – but it has turned out to be a space perfect for their activities. The sympathetic management of the space and the tacit understanding between its young users and the managers of the site demonstrate how successful and important ‘slack space’ can be.

### Creating sustainable projects

A public space is an incomplete space, one that is endlessly “completed” by the people who use it. It is a space that requires constant negotiation if it is to remain used and maintained. The involvement of children and young people in this negotiation, even after the project appears to be “finished”, is vital to the continuing successful use of the space. Their involvement can be formal and structured or it can be built into the design and its later development.

Discover, a hands-on creative centre in east London, has a Children’s Forum that meets once a month to raise issues and feed into the management and development of the centre. The South Coates gardening project in Hull, has involved young people in redesigning several open spaces in their area and in actually implementing their designs. They continue to maintain these spaces and at the same time acquire new skills. Two children’s gardens in Copenhagen are

designed to allow children to change and control their environment by providing “natural” elements – big and small rocks, plants, fire-pits, water and logs – which can be moved and manipulated.

All these projects demonstrate creative ways of giving children an ongoing role in public space. They recognise that the ever-changing nature of these spaces is what makes them a continual joy to the people who use them.

### Case Study 1 Freemantle lake park, Southampton

Taking the initiative: Freemantle Youth Forum has designed a pavilion that is a place for everyone who uses the park and a catalyst for further improvements.

Young people have no shortage of good ideas. Often their problem is getting anyone else to take their ideas seriously. However, when a group of young people in Freemantle approached their local youth worker, about getting a new shelter built, she listened to what they had to say and agreed to help them give it a go. “I didn’t promise anything at first,” she says “because I wasn’t sure if it was going to come off, and you should never promise what you can’t be sure of delivering. But I agreed to give it a try.”

Freemantle Lake Park, a local pocket park, had become quite run-down – the playground was derelict and parents and children had become afraid to walk through the park. Working with the artist Pete Codling, Freemantle Youth Forum – as the group had become known – has now created a pavilion that is not just another youth shelter, but a place for everyone who uses the park and a catalyst for further improvements.

#### Young people take the lead

Over the eighteen months it took to get the pavilion built, members of the Youth Forum were encouraged to get involved in every part of the project, and played a key role in getting it accepted by local residents. Given that the last youth shelter – a small off-the-peg model installed ten years earlier – had been burned down, they were determined that

the new one should be fire- and vandal-proof and rejected the models that they found in catalogues as “too boring and not big enough”.

The public arts officer and youth workers acted as advocates for the Youth Forum, taking their ideas out to public meetings and to the residential homes that surround the park. Eventually, their hard work paid off, and when four of the Youth Forum members made their presentations to the planning meeting, the committee passed their application by four votes to one, praising the young people who had come along to present their project. The Youth Forum met at the youth centre every month over the course of the project, to discuss what was happening and to deal with any issues that came up. “It was hard having to go into meetings when the other kids were just playing about,” said a member of the Forum “but it was worth it because now we’ve got somewhere to go.”

### Working with an artist

Getting involved in the design of the pavilion has given the Youth Forum a real sense of ownership. Working with the artist, the Youth Forum looked at images of contemporary buildings, including the Imperial War Museum in Manchester and the Guggenheim in Bilbao, and built up a strong sense of what they wanted the pavilion to look like. They also spent time in the park choosing the best site (a lot of the park was too muddy most of the year) and identifying the needs of other local people who might use the pavilion.

After sketching initial designs together, the artist made a series of three-dimensional models showing the different ideas that they had discussed. This really helped members of the Youth Forum to visualise how the pavilion might look. Using the models to talk about what they did and didn’t like, the young people sent the artist away to create a new design. After a few more sessions, they came up with a design that everyone liked.

### Successful outcomes

Since the pavilion opened in October 2003, many more people have begun to use the park. Parents sit and chat in the pavilion while their children play in the new playground, and dog-walkers use it to shelter



from the worst downpours on rainy mornings. Southampton City Council has demonstrated its commitment to the park by introducing a more intensive cleaning programme – the maintenance staff clean out the pavilion every other day and report that there has been much less vandalism since it was built. In addition, new paths are to be put in. The expected complaints from local residents have failed to materialise, and members of the Youth Forum recently received a Taking a Stand award (ref 14) from the Home Office for their hard work.

### Key points

The Freemantle Pavilion project was initiated by young people living locally.

Youth workers strongly supported and encouraged young people and advocated on their behalf.

The project led to the formation of Freemantle Youth Forum and provided a catalyst for further improvements of the park.

### Case study 2 Evergreen adventure playground, Hackney, London

Including disabled children: Play workers wanted the new playground to be a more inclusive place for all to play in.

“Mostly kids just come here and do their own thing,” explains Arnold Mahoney, play worker at Evergreen Play Association, which has been providing an open access space for children on the Holly Street Estate for more than two decades.

The estate has undergone complete redevelopment over the last ten years, including the demolition of most of the high-rise tower blocks, which Arnold Mahoney, play worker at Evergreen, says has “improved the estate one hundred per cent”. The downside was that when a new access road was laid across their site, Evergreen lost part of their playground and their main piece of equipment had to be demolished. With the compensation sum they employed Adams & Sutherland Architects, who were selected from a shortlist of four

different designers, “because they looked at the space, not just the equipment,” explains Hayley Bangs, who used to be a play worker at Evergreen. “Their designs weren’t fixed and they came with a selection of ideas.”

### Playing together

Play workers wanted the new playground to be a more inclusive place where disabled children could also come and play. They anticipated the ODPM’s guide, *Developing Accessible Play Space*, which states, “Good play spaces enable disabled and non-disabled children to play together.” They linked up with local groups, who were invited to visit the playground and meet the children at Evergreen, and took the Evergreen children to visit playgrounds specially designed for disabled children.

Having several exchange visits meant that the children “got past the staring stage”, as Hayley says. “It was a process of integration, learning to accept disability.” Some of the workers did Makaton courses, a programme that uses signs, symbols and speech, and then taught it to the children to help them communicate with each other. “All children have ideas, it’s just a question of finding out what they are,” says Arnold.

The architect, explains, “It’s not about making every piece of equipment accessible, it’s about making the whole of the landscape accessible.” Three years later, special members of staff are employed to support disabled children to come and use the playground, and one boy with ataxia (lack of muscular coordination) loves the tree-top walkways. “Another little boy with autism has come on so much since he’s been coming here. When he first started, he had a lot of problems being around other children and found it really difficult – and now he’s really comfortable here, and comes often,” says Hayley.

### Creating space for the imagination

“This is the forest where me, Mahmoud, Gerrard and Connor had our first war,” says Richard, aged twelve, who regularly comes to Evergreen. “And we used to make camps over there.” One of the most important things that Adams & Sutherland were asked to do

was to create an imaginative space for play. Because the money came in dribs and drabs, Adams & Sutherland first proposed to create a bumpy new play landscape, which was designed by talking to the children and looking at the different routes they took across the playground. The landscaping was done for free by a contractor who was working on the estate, who said it was the best thing he'd ever done, and the turf was laid by a team of corporate volunteers working with the children.

Throughout the process, the play workers always talked to the children about what was going on, and Hayley confirms this is because it's really important to keep young people informed. The architects regularly visited the playground with models and drawings to show the children how the design was developing and to discuss ideas with them. "The models were really good – kids can understand the designs much better with them," says Arnold.

Boards showing the designs at every stage were pinned up on the wall, so that children who couldn't always make it to the workshops could see what was going on and feed back. "We learned an enormous amount from informal observations of the children using the landscape about where to locate the structures," says Liz.

Using the idea of the playground as a journey or a story, and the equipment as events along a journey, they worked with the children to look at the way they used the space and to create maps of their routes across the site, with different colours to show the different zones. The final design developed to include "towers, nests, dens, cranky walkways with views and look-out points." Finally the lottery funding arrived, and just before the equipment was built and installed, a girl, aged eleven, suggested swapping around the two dens as "one was too big to go over there, there wasn't enough room." In fact, she was right, and the architects quickly changed the design.

Using the playground

"The kids will always be involved," says Arnold. "If you don't involve them, they won't use it. Simple as that." And use it they do. Three years later, the playground is still there and still going strong – about

twenty-five children visit the playground every day after school, and up to a hundred and fifty during the holidays or on a sunny Saturday.

“The playground is always changing,” says Arnold. “We’re just building a walkway over there (between the totems) to play off-ground catch. It’s a really good place for making dens too.” The playground’s particular success is to have created a space that makes children feel safe and secure, but also gives them enough room to be independent.

Children who are now sixteen or seventeen still come back to visit the playground and see what’s going on. “I really enjoy coming to Evergreen,” says Ashley, aged fourteen, who moved away from the area four years ago. “You have your own freedom. The staff are very nice and helpful, and there are lots of sports to play. I love this place.” “There’s a lot of people around, and there’s a lot of people looking after us,” adds Mahmoud. “Here I feel safe.”

### Key points

Play workers encouraged and supported all children who used the playground to get involved in the design process.

Links were made with disabled children and their carers, and the playground was developed with their views and needs in mind.

Using models helped children to understand the designs and allowed them to comment on them and suggest changes, which were often taken on board.

### Useful information

Evergreen Play Association  
Beehive Close, London E8.  
T 020 7275 9004

Adams & Sutherland Architects  
Studio 3c Highgate Business Centre,  
33 Greenwood Place, London, NW5 1LB.  
T 020 7267 1747 F 020 7482 2359

E info@adams-sutherland.co.uk www.adams-sutherland.co.uk

Makaton courses

MVDP, 31 Firwood Drive, Camberley, Surrey GU15 3QD England.

T 01276 61390 F 01276 681368

E mvdp@makaton.org

www.makaton.org

National Lottery Funding

[www.community-fund.org.uk](http://www.community-fund.org.uk)

### Case Study 3 Lister Park, Bradford

Safe and secure: Successfully involving all the community has created an award-winning park.

“This is our park and you’re not going to change that,” said one young man in response to questions about the regeneration project that was starting in Lister Park. The manager of the project had gone down to the park at night to talk to the groups of lads who hung out there.

Although in its heyday families had flocked to the park to go boating on the lake and picnic on the grassy hills overlooking the city, the park had got run-down in recent years and people had stopped using it. Users didn’t like the fact that they couldn’t see past the overgrown shrubs, and they were frightened of those young men who hung around together in the park at night.

When Bradford City Council put together a bid to the Heritage Lottery Fund in 1997, it wanted to make sure that local people were properly involved in what was going on and that the regeneration of the park would provide real benefits for the local community. Workers reached over 3,000 people by visiting local organisations, including neighbourhood and women-only forums, and sending out questionnaires. The Council made an effort to involve both schoolchildren and young people as the programme progressed, taking a positive and inclusive approach.

## Working together

Many locals saw the groups of young people who used the park as a problem, but councillors realised that excluding them from the regeneration process or from the park was not a solution. Instead, workers spent time in the park talking with the young people on their own ground, listening to their views and finding out what they wanted from the regeneration process. They also talked to the Manningham Youth Forum and went into schools to listen to the views of younger children.

As a result, six of the tennis courts (generally unused except during Wimbledon fortnight!) have been turned into multi-use games areas, and each of them has been fitted with four entrance/exit points in response to young people's worries about getting trapped on courts with only one exit. Use of the games areas is free and you don't have to book, which means that they are now really well used, particularly by young people who don't often have much spare money.

Other facilities include a new playground with equipment chosen by schoolchildren, and new boats on the lake, which again draw children and families to the park all summer. The park is not locked at night, and people can now see into and across the park due to sensitive shrub removal, that increases their sense of security. Although their suggestions were taken on board, the project manager explains, "It's really important to be honest, especially with young people. We were clear that the Council made the final decisions, but that we would take on board people's views."

## Ongoing involvement

The physical regeneration of Lister Park has proved to be just the starting point in reviving the park. There has been a huge increase in the number of users, including children and members of the local Asian community. Last year, over fifty different schools visited the park to plant bulbs and follow the geological trail in the botanical gardens, which has been updated to relate to the National Curriculum. This pride is evident in the way that the officers talk about the park, in the high quality of maintenance and in the lack of vandalism. Children now feel safe enough to use the whole park.

“They especially like the Mughal Garden,” says the project manager, “and the playground is heaving on a sunny day.” The park has been awarded the Green Flag Award (ref 15) by the Civic Trust (CABE Space is the key funder of the award scheme) for two years running in recognition of the successful involvement of the community and excellence in park management. In an area suffering from high levels of deprivation and very little green space, the park has become a real resource for local people – young and old – in a place that really needs it.

### Key points

Young people especially from ethnic minorities can be unwittingly stereotyped for example being seen as being anti-social. Only actual contact with young people will realise what they are like, while ongoing dialogue will continue to extend the relationship.

The physical regeneration provided a starting point for continuing participation by local people in the park’s management and maintenance.

Full-time on-site members of staff provide a high level of maintenance and help to create a safe and secure atmosphere for children and young people using the park.

### Useful information

The Black Environment Network (BEN) works to make landscape and environment projects more accessible to ethnic minorities. It can provide case studies, fact sheets, information and advice:

BEN UK Office, 1st Floor, 60 High Street, Llanberis, Wales LL55 4EU.

T & F 01286 870 715

E [ukoffice@ben-network.org.uk](mailto:ukoffice@ben-network.org.uk)

[www.ben-network.org.uk](http://www.ben-network.org.uk)

National Lottery Funding

[www.community-fund.org.uk](http://www.community-fund.org.uk)

## Case Study 4 Skate parks, Edinburgh and Perth

### Opening up a dialogue:

Young people can become more connected with political structures and gain an understanding of decision-making processes and their timescales through a public space project.

Until now skaters in Edinburgh have had to use the streets if they want to skate in the city. This doesn't always make them popular with local adults, but as there is currently no dedicated skate park they don't have much choice. All this is soon to change, however, thanks to the hard work of the skaters themselves, who decided it was high time they got a place they could call their own. Letters from skaters and their parents and the findings of a survey of over four thousand young people proved the need for better facilities and provided the catalyst for the Edinburgh Skate Park (ESP). Since October 2001, the city's youth services team has been working together with the ESP Action Group to make things really happen.

Young people have been instrumental in campaigning for the park and raising the profile of skaters, opening up a dialogue with the Council and developing a good design in collaboration with the landscape architect Clive Bowman. Although finding an appropriate site has been difficult, the project is still going strong, and they hope to be on site before the summer of 2004.

### Building on existing networks

The skating community is pretty tightly knit in Edinburgh – people tend to know each other and often go to the same places. A youth worker who has been involved in the ESP from the start, explains how they used these existing networks to get young skaters involved in the project. “For the first public meeting, we handed out flyers to skaters in Bristol Square, and put up notices in the skate shops, which are like wee hubs of the community. Word spread fast, because on the night about 130 people turned out.”

Following the meeting, two groups were formed – the action group, to take the project forward and to design the skate park, and the communication group, to keep people informed by setting up a



website. Day-to-day decisions are taken by the twenty-strong action group, but any major decisions are opened up for consultation with the wider skating community via the website and the skate shops and by emailing a database of more than five hundred skaters.

“It’s really important to keep skaters interested and involved,” explains Marc. “You can set people tasks for them to do, to get back for the next meeting.” At their AGM in October 2003, new officers were elected to the action group, and some new skaters joined the group, ensuring that young people will continue to be involved at every stage. The strength of the community means that the action group can pull in extra help and support when they need it – for example, when the design needed some more experienced input, some of the older skaters joined the group to contribute their knowledge and expertise to the process.

### Creating a dialogue

“Getting the skate park built has increased the young people’s awareness of all kinds of issues and got them engaged in the political structure,” says a senior youth worker. “Although it’s frustrating at times, at least they know what’s going on, and they realise things aren’t going to happen overnight.”

The action group’s first task was to promote the better side of skaters to the Council and the public. “We spoke to the local papers to give a skater’s point of view, and I had to do two presentations,” explains Marc, who was fifteen when he first got involved in the project. “One was to a meeting of about five hundred people. But we were helped in preparing notes and stuff, so it went all right.” Members of the group were given training to help them take on responsible roles and to make them more effective lobbyists.

It has also been a learning experience for the councillors and officers who have been involved. They have tried hard to accommodate young people’s involvement – for example, meeting at times and places that were suitable for the skaters, as most of them are still at school – and to listen and take their ideas on board.

## True collaboration

Perth Skate Park shows the success of giving young people a central role – not just because of the benefits of the process, but also because it produces a better design. “It’s very good, the concrete is really smooth,” comments Marc, veteran of the Edinburgh Skate Park Project, who has used Perth Skate Park on many occasions.

“The skaters were desperate to get involved, to make sure they got a good end product” says Clive Bowman, who as well as his involvement in the Edinburgh Skate Park, also worked with Perth Concrete Collective (PCC) – a group of ten young skaters – to design this skate park. They met every two weeks for about twelve months, with regular public meetings to feed back to the wider interested group. “Sometimes it was just a social meeting,” says Clive, “but it was important to keep the contact going so that it wasn’t an ‘us and them’ kind of relationship, and so that guys from the Concrete Collective felt comfortable coming to me with ideas.”

The Skaters were committed to creating a really state-of-the-art facility that combined the best of street skating and the more traditional bowl skating popular in the US. Hours of research were put in by Clive and the PCC – trawling the internet and skating magazines for the best and most up-to-date ideas – new suggestions were brought every week, and advice was received from skaters across the world. In addition, the design process consisted of brainstorming sessions, visits to existing skate parks, marking out proposals on site (in the snow at one point) and sketching plans.

Since opening in August 2002, Perth Skate Park has been used by over half a million people and has had a really positive response both from the skaters and in the skating press. Clive tells of how he has met people from Australia and America there and even showed around a skater from Israel, who plans to build a skate park there. The success of Perth Skate Park is testament to the hard work and commitment of all the people involved, in particular the Perth Concrete Collective, and to the truly collaborative nature of the design process.

## Key points

Building on existing youth networks was an effective way of involving young people in the design and development of Edinburgh Skate Park.

The political will to involve young people was critical to creating a dialogue between the Council and teenagers.

Young people and designers together created a better public space than either could have done on their own.

## Useful information

You can keep up to date with developments by going to the websites at:

Edinburgh Skate Park [www.edinburghskatepark.org.uk](http://www.edinburghskatepark.org.uk)

Perth Skate Park [www.pkc.gov.uk/skateparks](http://www.pkc.gov.uk/skateparks)

(The Perth Skate Park website provides details of the design process and advice to skaters and designers about how to get a skate park built in their local area).

For more details of the Perth Concrete Collective visit:

[www.newcastle.gov.uk/skate.nsf/a/sofar](http://www.newcastle.gov.uk/skate.nsf/a/sofar)

## Case Study 5 Cowley Teenage Space, Brixton, London

Learning through doing:

A lack of places to go prompted the development of the experimental playground project.

“In order to think about a space differently, you need to experience it differently,” says artist Hattie Coppard of Snug & Outdoor (a team of two artists and a writer), explaining the idea behind the experimental playground project on Cowley Estate.

A couple of years ago the manager of Cowley Estate, noticed that more and more teenagers seemed to be hanging out in the stairwells and playing football in between the parked cars. There had been a number of complaints, because, as Ronke Ayoola explains, “big groups of young people blocking your path can be intimidating, even for me!” When she went to talk to them, they explained that they needed somewhere to hang-out.

Part of the problem was that a lot of children live on Cowley Estate but there is not much open space to play on. The Estate Management Board decided to open up an old depot site on the estate to create a space especially for young people. “But we didn’t want to build something that we thought they needed, we wanted it to be something that they would like – so we needed to consult with them” says Ronke who was very clear from the start that it was important to value young people’s input and take them seriously. In the summer of 2002, artists Snug & Outdoor and Levitt Bernstein Landscape Architects were invited to come and work directly with teenagers on Cowley Estate to run the experimental playground project, and to develop a design for the space.

### Valuing young people’s time and input

To start with, Ronke wrote to all the teenagers living on Cowley to let them know about the project and invite them to come along to a meeting to find out more. This meeting was specifically for the young people to introduce the project workers to their area and as they went around they took photographs to record the places that were important to them. Six of the teenagers who came along were invited to become paid volunteers to help set up the experimental playground. “They took it very seriously,” says Ronke. “I think it was good, because it showed them that we were being sincere in wanting their input, and it provided an added incentive to get involved.”

Employing young volunteers was also a good way of getting other young people interested, as the volunteers proudly invited their friends and brothers and sisters to come along too. It was not really the money that was important – although a bit of extra pocket money is always welcome – but the sense of responsibility that it gave to the

teenagers involved. They were treated as if they had valuable skills to contribute to the project and could be trusted to do a good job.

### The experimental playground

“It struck me how difficult it is for children to think beyond their experience,” says Hattie, “so we created a new temporary experience that gave young people the chance to change the space themselves in some way.” Blocks, stages, steps and ramps appeared in the playground and stayed there for the next two weeks. The young volunteers set up the playground by building a temporary shelter and painting wooden blocks in bright colours. Teenagers came along every day during the half-term week and in the evenings the following week.

“That’s why it’s important actually being there – you can come in and out, because it’s actually on the estate. So you can come for an hour, or you can come for two weeks, or you can just look down from the flats and see what’s going on,” explains Hattie. “Anyone who’s got any relationship with that space will be involved.”

The young people used the objects in different ways – they put all the wooden boxes together under the shelter to create cosy ‘dens’, then piled them all up to create a high space for sitting. They built a huge ramp, which was popular with owners of bikes and scooters – so popular in fact, that one boy kissed it goodbye when it was taken down. Vassall Youth Centre staff came during half-term to run activities – football, basketball and table tennis – which helped young people to see how the space could be shared between different activities.

This sharing is important because of the number of children in disparate groups who don’t tend to combine that much – they all go to different schools, so there is no particular thing that connects them. Drawing, model-making and graffiti workshops gave rise to various suggestions including “a place to graffiti so we don’t get into trouble” and a “roofed-over but open-sided building, a wavy up-and-down road that you can ride your bike and skateboard on.”

All the ideas, suggestions and uses that emerged during the experimental playground project have fed into the final design, which at time of going to press is being constructed. It includes a ramp/mound for 'looking-out' and cycling over, a five-a-side football and basketball pitch, a covered 'inactivity zone' for older kids to sit around in, and – “most difficult to design, but most precious,” according to the landscape architect – an inside-outside sculpture for making dens and sitting on. All of this makes for a space that can be used for a long time to come.

The whole process has been vital to the creation of such an innovative design, because it has taken people with it step by step, and because it has helped children to understand and articulate on a much deeper level what they want. There is also a sense that it has awakened young people's ideas of what they can do in their environment.

### Key points

Paying some of the young people to help set up the project showed respect for their time and gave them a sense of responsibility.

Using moveable objects to change the space physically enabled young people to understand the effect of structure and volume and helped them to think about the space in a different way.

Actually doing things on site allowed everyone who used the space to get involved in the design process. It helped people to understand and support a radical and innovative design.

The use of a variety of activities that appealed to different groups and users of the space meant as wide a range of young people as possible was included.

### Useful information

Visit: [www.cowleyteenagespace.com](http://www.cowleyteenagespace.com)

Snug & Outdoor  
127 Rathcoole Gardens, London, N8 9PH.

T 020 8374 2176 F 0870 7064654  
E [hattie@snugandoutdoor.co.uk](mailto:hattie@snugandoutdoor.co.uk)  
[www.snugandoutdoor.co.uk](http://www.snugandoutdoor.co.uk)

Levitt Bernstein  
1 Kingsland Passage,  
London, E8 2BB.  
T 020 7275 7676 F 020 7275 9348  
E [post@levittbernstein.co.uk](mailto:post@levittbernstein.co.uk)  
[www.levittbernstein.co.uk](http://www.levittbernstein.co.uk)

Case Study 6 Daubeney Primary School Playground, Hackney,  
London

Once upon a time in a playground: Implementing the children's amazing and imaginative ideas has increased concentration in the classroom and cooperation in the playground.

“Once upon a time in a playground...”

So began the story of the fairytale project to redesign the playground at Daubeney Primary School. One summer Monday morning, the children arrived to find – in six-foot-high letters, painted right across the playground floor – the words “Once upon a time...”. This marked the beginning of a project initiated by the organisation Learning through Landscapes and began one magical week, in which the children, staff and parents, with the help of Snug & Outdoor (a team of two artists and a writer), transformed their playground from a bleak, open and aggressive expanse of tarmac to a colourful, patterned, playful and moveable world where the children's imaginations could run riot.

Each day, a new element was introduced that could easily be used, moved and manipulated by the children to create a new and totally different playground. On the first day, pieces of coloured chalk were used by children to cover every surface of the playground that they could reach – floor, walls, columns, doors and window frames – with patterns, words, pictures, signs and symbols.

It was as if the children were storing up all this creativity and had suddenly released it in an amazing sea of colour across the playground. All at once, instead of fighting, children were playing and co-operating with each other. “It was really fascinating how quite small changes could quite dramatically affect the dynamics of the playground,” says Hattie Coppard of Snug & Outdoor. “We were able to understand the effect that 500 kids have on a space – and the children were able to as well.”

### Working with objects

On the second day, a fleet of traffic cones gave rise to a whole set of running, spinning games, then were piled up to create high poles and pulled together to make private dens. On the third day, wooden pallets covered with carpet were used to create stages for dancing and singing, bases for jumping off and sofas for lounging and sunbathing. On the last day, theatrical lights and blackout curtains were set up under the shed, and children walked through little rooms each lit with a different colour, watching the effect that the lights had on the colour of their t-shirts and toys.

“You could react to what was happening, rather than it being theoretical or symbolic,” explains Hattie. “Understanding design, space, structure and volume is really difficult to do, unless you actually tangibly experience it – especially for children.” Hattie teamed up with landscape architect Lynn Kinnear to develop a permanent design for the playground that would incorporate all the best elements of the experimental one. In June 2003, the new playground opened – with vertical poles, stripes painted horizontally across the floor, giant moveable ‘pebbles’ made of resin and rotating stage blocks.

The poet Kit Wright and the African Arts Company held workshops to introduce the children to the playground. “The arts project got the children thinking about games – and using the playground in a physical way. Poetry allowed them to think about it in a much more imaginative way – it got the playground embedded in their imagination. The children came up with these amazing, beautiful ideas about what the objects were, and what they could be used for,” explained Hattie.



According to the staff at the school, the playground has transformed the children's behaviour. "When they come back into class, they are able to concentrate more, and the number of detentions has gone right down." "What a difference it has made – the kids are playing, and there is no aggression. It is quite amazing how it has changed the whole school."

### Key points

Involving parents alongside the children and staff meant support and buy-in from all sides.

Using moveable objects to change the space physically enabled the children to have fun while learning about design and use of space.

Getting poets and artists involved alongside designers and landscape architects helped the children to use all their senses and sparked their imagination.

### Useful information

Learning through Landscapes works with schools, individuals and organisations across the country to help them improve and develop their school grounds:

Learning through Landscapes in London, Environmental Curriculum Centre, 77 Bexley Road, London, SE9 2PE.

T 020 8850 3112 F 020 8859 2180

E [london@ltl.org.uk](mailto:london@ltl.org.uk)

[www.ltl.org.uk](http://www.ltl.org.uk)

Kit Wright can be contacted through

Jan Powling at Speaking of Books

T 020 8692 4704

The African Arts Company,

T 0207 241 2558

E [DancemasterGozi@aol.com](mailto:DancemasterGozi@aol.com)

## Case Study 7 Railway Land Junior Management Board, Lewes, East Sussex

The importance of wild space: Being involved in the natural environment inspires young people to protect and enhance it, and size and complexity of a project is not daunting to them.

Commons, woods, streams, marshes, ponds and meadows – all these places where bio-diversity and natural types of environments are encouraged and protected – provide fantastic spaces for children to explore nature and experience wildlife at close quarters. They offer an important and different kind of space to play – free from many of the constraints that children often come across and full of the possibility for adventure. “I like an unorganised area with lots of good climbing trees,” says Catherine, a member of the Railway Land Junior Management Board. “I like things with no strict paths and streams and ponds. I like secret places with a bit of exciting history.”

### The junior management board

Fifteen years ago, following a successful campaign to save the site of a disused railway marshalling yard from redevelopment, the Lewes Railway Land Nature Reserve was created. From the outset, the Management Trust recognised the importance of the area for children and set out its commitment to encouraging “a genuine working relationship with younger people for the benefit of the site and the people of Lewes.”

Dr. John Parry, Chair of the Trust, was inspired by the Norwegian approach to involving children in their environment. Working in collaboration with Lewes District Council, he set up the Junior Management Board (JMB) in 1996, to give children an official and structured way to feed in ideas and to influence the management and maintenance of the site. Children aged between eight and fourteen are recruited on to the Board from local primary and secondary schools, and meet about four times a year, sometimes more often if they are working on a specific project. There are generally about ten children on the Board, but John stresses that, “there will be times when there is a lot going on and more children are involved, and

times when there's not much happening, and it just ticks over for a while. It's important not to get too worried about the quiet periods."

"I joined the JMB because I like wildlife," explains Christy, aged eleven. "I joined because it's important that we protect the land that was saved," says Beth, aged ten. Thanks to the involvement of the Junior Management Board, small but significant changes have been made to the disused railwayland. Meetings with dog owners helped, for a while, to reduce the amount of dog mess on the site, "which is an issue that really affects children, and that they feel very strongly about," as John says.

The manager of a local sports centre was persuaded to switch off its floodlights when it is not being used to reduce light pollution of the site and to minimise energy wastage. Local teenagers helped design footbridges across the ditches, which were then built by students at the University of Brighton. "They designed them to be open on one side," points out Beth, "to make you think a bit more when you use them – to make small children stop and think."

### Ongoing input and involvement

An important part of the JMB's role is to think about how other children might use the disused railwayland, and to encourage them to use it in a responsible way. In May 2000, they played host to forty children from around the world, who were attending the International Children's Conference on the Environment at Eastbourne. More recently, they have produced a Lewes Railway Land Kids' Guide, which introduces children to the site and tells them about the kind of wildlife they can find there.

At their meeting in January 2004, the JMB responded to ideas about creating a 'fire site' on the nature reserve, to encourage people to make fires on one part of the land only. "The Woodcraft Folk want to make sculptures and create a mosaic on the fire site," explains Amy. "We like the idea, but we're a bit worried it might get vandalised. We asked them to develop their designs a bit more and then come back and show them to us again."

It is often the day-to-day decisions and the seemingly small issues that make a real difference to how accessible and enjoyable a place is for children, and listening to children is the best way of ensuring that their needs and desires continue to be met. “We are really trying to give the children their voice and to listen to that voice,” explains John, “which is why it is so important that the children run the meetings themselves and know that they are being taken seriously.”

### Key points

Wild spaces like the Lewes Railway Land Local Nature Reserve provide important places for children to explore nature and experience wildlife close up.

Children are recruited to the JMB from local primary and secondary schools.

The JMB works in a structured way alongside the Trust and the Council to feed into decisions about the management and maintenance of the Lewes Railway Land.

### Case Study 8 SPACEmakers, Hartcliffe, Bristol

Learning through experience:

What do you see? A group of kids up to no good? Or a group of kids desperate to seize ownership of a place in their community?

Asked by workers where they normally hang out, the young SPACEmakers said that they meet “at the green boxes”. It’s a good place to meet, “because they’re warm, and the trees keep the rain off a bit.” The green boxes – electricity transformer boxes – are near enough to home to be accessible, but far enough away for the young people to feel independent. This kind of knowledge and ideas that spring from it can come only from young people themselves. It is currently being put to good use in the SPACEmakers’ design for a new public space in Hartcliffe.

In October 2002, the project workers posed the challenge ‘Would you like to change the Space?’ In response, 16 young people joined the

SPACEmakers design team. The project aims to enable young people to get involved in decisions about their environment, by working on a live design project. Over the last sixteen months, the young SPACEmakers have had an intensive introduction to public space, contemporary design and how to get things done. They are currently working with Loci Design – who were interviewed and appointed by a panel that included the young SPACEmakers – on the final design stage of the project.

### Strong organisation and good local knowledge

“Having different organisations involved has been crucial, it’s a really excellent set-up,” says Kathrin Boehm, SPACEmakers project artist. Initiated by the Glass-House and then established jointly by Bristol Architecture Centre, Hartcliffe Community Campus and Bristol City Council, the combination of national design focus and local community-based organisations has given the project a breadth of expertise while keeping it firmly rooted in Hartcliffe.

Dan Jones, project coordinator at the Glass-House explains how “a strong local partnership between the City Council and the Architecture Centre in Bristol has ultimately proved capable of realising this project on its own, but this has emerged from a creative and strong team of partners established to steer decision making.” Knowing the locality and involving workers who know the young people have been vital to the success of the project and have helped to leapfrog what could otherwise have been a much more difficult period of recruitment and getting to know the group.

“It takes time for kids to trust you – you’ve got to put the hours in,” explains the local youth worker. The local secondary school is also involved in the project. “I think it reassured a lot of the parents to know that the project was associated with the school,” says a learning mentor. “It’s really important that the parents are on-board and supportive.”

### Experiencing something new

The SPACEmakers meet every few weeks during term time for workshops, meetings and discussions or to prepare for presentations

and trips. One of the key principles of the project has been to enable young people to experience directly how different kinds of places feel and the impact that design can have. Residential trips to Chester, Glasgow and Rotterdam, plus day trips to London, Cornwall and local spaces, have helped young people to build up a broad experience of design projects. “Just being in these spaces is important,” explains Mark. “For some of these kids it was the first time they’d ever been on a plane.”

They have also generated a buzz and excitement to the project, which has kept twelve out of the original sixteen young people involved for over sixteen months. “Kids get so much from informal learning and from being in a fun environment,” explains Paul. Following every trip, a session is spent looking at photographs, talking about what worked and what didn’t work and consolidating the young people’s ideas into a set of key design principles.

#### Doing stuff on site

“Some young people are actually quite fearful of public space – they think it’s kind of scary and nasty,” says Kathrin. “Part of our role is to support them in using public space. It’s really important to actually do stuff on the site.” Over the summer of 2003, the young SPACEmakers made models and installations on the site, including casting a concrete platform and building a temporary shelter.

As well as getting them more used to being active in public space, it has also provided them with a good introduction to the physical design process. Their original proposal for a concrete ramp/bench was turned down by the planning department, and they ended up having to build something much smaller than they wanted. The lack of vandalism to the platform has given the young people confidence and built up a kind of mystique around the project. “When we built the platform, we thought it was going to be trashed that night,” says Shane, one of the SPACEmakers. “But when we went to have a look in the morning, no one had touched it.”

## Meaningful involvement

Throughout the project, the young SPACEmakers have been given decision-making power and responsibility. They were recently awarded a Building a Better Bristol prize in recognition of their hard work and commitment. From choosing a site to interviewing the landscape architect, from making presentations to funders to sitting on the board of the local Urban II funding body, this project has given the young people involved real skills, real experience and real confidence.

“We want to encourage young people to become more confident and active citizens,” explains Mark Pearson, director of the Bristol Architecture Centre. “You can’t manufacture these things quickly. A slow-burn approach is needed to ensure that the project is integrated and embedded. It needs time.”

## Key points

The involvement of several organisations with different areas of expertise helped to create a project that is both strong in design and strongly rooted in the local community.

Trips to different public spaces helped young people to develop ideas about what could happen in their own area.

Young people were given responsibility and support to make decisions and present the project to external organisations.

## Useful information

Loci Design  
2 Clifton Street, Glasgow G3 7LA.  
T 0141 353 2288

The Bristol Architecture Centre  
Narrow Quay, Bristol, BS1 4QA.  
T 0117 922 1540 F 0117 922 1541  
[www.arch-centre.demon.co.uk](http://www.arch-centre.demon.co.uk)

The Glass-House at  
The Architecture Foundation  
60 Bastwick Street, London, EC1V 3TN.  
T 020 7253 3334 F 020 7253 3335  
E [glasshouse@architecturefoundation.org.uk](mailto:glasshouse@architecturefoundation.org.uk)  
[www.theglasshouse.org.uk](http://www.theglasshouse.org.uk)

Urban II funding  
[www.southbristolurban2.co.uk](http://www.southbristolurban2.co.uk)  
[http://europa.eu.int/comm/regional\\_policy/urban2/index\\_en.htm](http://europa.eu.int/comm/regional_policy/urban2/index_en.htm)

### Case Study 9 Two children's spaces, Copenhagen

Nature's playground: Creating a space for children to explore, manipulate and control.

The two playgrounds described here show the range of children's spaces designed by Helle Nebelong, a landscape architect, working for Copenhagen City Council.

Each is distinct, but both are concerned with using nature and natural materials to create stimulating and seasonally changing environments, and are designed to be used in a hands-on way, "to give children possibilities to play different roles and to create social relations to one another." Although "the focus on safety is essential," Helle warns in her lecture to the Free Play Network, it "must not lead one to forget to care about design and atmosphere... I am convinced that standardised playgrounds are dangerous, just in another way. When the distance between all the rungs in a climbing net or a ladder is exactly the same, the child has no need to concentrate on where he puts his feet. Standardisation is dangerous because play becomes simplified and the child does not have to worry about his movements." (For more from Helle's speech to the Free Play Network, see useful information).

These playgrounds were designed not with children, but to enable children to change and develop their space, and to encourage them to explore, manipulate and control their own environment.



## The Garden of Senses, Faelledparken

The Garden of Senses in Faelledparken was created in 1996 when the mother of a disabled child asked the City Council “to make places where families with disabled children could come.” The idea for the garden originates in the first sensory gardens in Copenhagen, which were developed to give disabled children the opportunity to get out and experience ‘real nature’ near their homes.

When the playground in Faelledparken – one of the city’s most popular parks – was redeveloped, an accessible sensory garden was created in its place. The garden is designed as a maze, with paths winding between different types of spaces and sculptures relating to the different senses. It is a place that “you can’t overview at once, with a lot of possibilities to discover natural elements and use your own imagination,” explains Helle. “If you open your eyes, prick up your ears, widen your nostrils and give full rein to your curiosity, you experience a garden full of surprises where you can make use of all your senses.”

Eight years later and the playground is well used by nursery school children during the week and families and children of all ages and abilities at the weekend. “The playground is still in a good condition,” says Helle. “Some of the original perennials didn’t thrive and other plants were chosen. Though the garden is a bit worn, it is still appealing. The old sculptures have been vandalised a bit, but are still okay.” The garden is continually changing and is continually changed by the children who use it.

## The Nature Playground, Valbyparken

The Nature Playground in Valbyparken covers 20,000 square metres of reclaimed land, on the site of an old rubbish dump. It is a supervised playground that is “very beautiful and very popular.” The playground has been constructed over six years as part of an unemployment-training scheme for people in the city.

A long wooden 'bridge' – constructed from the wood of the elm trees that had to be felled to create it – floats above the ground and links together five towers. These encircle a series of smaller playgrounds: the playground of sand and gravel, a village of woven willow, a wildflower area and a high place with a look-out point. The earth removed during the reclamation process was used to create a series of small hills that separates the playground from the rest of the park. The playground is not designed to be controlling or didactic because "it is important that children be allowed to find out the nature of things by themselves. Everything should not be explained and demystified beforehand."

Elements such as branches, flowers and stones can be picked up, moved and changed. The success of these playgrounds can be partly attributed to the open approach of their design and to the fact that, being "unfinished", they were left for children to come and "finish off". "Don't trust your imagination on what is good for children," advises Helle. "Talk to children and listen to the desires they express... children are very ingenious in creating their own ways of playing."

### Key points

In the two gardens in Copenhagen, safety is very important and standardised equipment is not used.

Creating spaces that are accessible to disabled children was an integral part of the design process.

Moveable elements were included to enable children to manipulate and interact with their environment.

### Useful information

A full transcript of Helle Nebelong's address to the Free Play Network's Designs on Play conference is available at [www.freeplaynetwork.org.uk/design/nebelong.htm](http://www.freeplaynetwork.org.uk/design/nebelong.htm)

Managing Risk in Play Provision: a position statement  
National Children's Bureau  
Available to download from [www.ncb.org.uk/cpc](http://www.ncb.org.uk/cpc)

Best Play: What play provision should do for children  
National Playing Fields Association, Children's Play Council and  
PLAYLINK, 2000

Available to download from [www.ncb.org.uk/cpc](http://www.ncb.org.uk/cpc)

## Case Study 10 Weaver's Green, Coventry

### Building community:

Space between social housing has been redesigned, providing places that young people can relate to.

Hillfields is a multi-cultural inner-city area of Coventry, with a high proportion of social rented housing and a fairly transient population. "Families tend to stay in the area for two or three years before moving on," says Lorella Medici, chair of the Weaver's Green Residents Group. "Any project to involve children has got to recognise that. Involvement has therefore got to be ongoing, to involve new people as they move in."

Weaver's Green was created in the 1970s when a row of old weavers' cottages was demolished. Several different private landlords owned the land, and parcels of it were gradually sold off for development, reducing the already small amount of open space in the area. The local community resisted these sell-offs and eventually, with a grant from the Countryside Agency, managed to save the last piece of land to create a Doorstep Green for children and families living in the area.

### The Design Process

The design for Weaver's Green grew out of a holiday project for local children, which has been running since 1999. When they were first asked what they wanted, children said things such as swimming pools, skate parks and sweet shops. This led to a conversation about the limits of the project and questions about how the children would feel if they were living right next door to the site. "Children are very reasonable," says Lorella. "If you explain something to them, they will understand."

A series of drawing and model-making workshops with artists encouraged children to think about the idea of “my house” and then “your house, our street, our green.” The models were used as a tool for a wider discussion about what should happen on the green and what the design should be like. “Children have limited experience,” says Lorella. “You need to talk to them to share different visions and possibilities that are out there. That’s why it’s good to involve artists, because they have a wider visual repertoire.” The children’s ideas and input from the wider consultation fed into the final design, which included a sandpit, a flat grassy area for sitting or playing, an orchard, a seated picnic area and a new fence incorporating the children’s drawings.

### A culture of positive use

Young people have used the green for years. In recent years the green had become quite overgrown, so the children held a clean-up day to make the green accessible for playing and holding events. “Kids in the area weren’t used to playing together,” explains Lorella, “and so we wanted to create a space where they could learn to be together, where the whole community could come and socialise.” In the summer of 2002, children and their families were involved in activities on the green including Jubilee celebrations, picnics and games.

The aim was to build a culture of positive use and to create a dialogue between adults and children about the use of the green. Lorella is clear as to the benefits. “It’s conversation between the different generations that creates a bond. I think all generations have a lot to learn from each other – including adults! For every person complaining about the noise of kids playing, there will be others saying that it’s really good. But you have to keep adults on board too, even if they seem uninterested or even dead set against the idea. You have to give children time to prove them wrong.”

### Key points

Community support for the Weaver’s Green project was built up slowly over a long period of time, largely through a holiday scheme for local children who worked with artists to create the design.

Supporting a dialogue between adults and children was vital to the success of the project.

Encouraging positive uses of the site – through events and organised activities – was important to creating a successful project.

Useful information

A fact sheet on Weaver's Green and details of other Doorstep Green projects are available at [www.countryside.gov.uk/Images/05\\_tcm2-6687.pdf](http://www.countryside.gov.uk/Images/05_tcm2-6687.pdf)

Case Study 11 David Lister Gardening Group, South Coates, Hull

Growing Awareness:

Giving young people the chance to learn new skills develops their sense of pride in the local area.

The David Lister Gardening Group is a vocational training programme run by David Lister Secondary School, Hull City Council and the Yorkshire Wildlife Trust. It gives young people who may be having problems at school the chance to get out for a morning, to learn new skills and to develop a sense of pride and ownership in their local area.

Overcoming tensions

The group is made up of Year 10 and 11 pupils – all boys at the moment, although there have been some girls involved in the past – and as the older pupils leave, new ones are introduced. There is a waiting list for pupils wanting to participate, and the system seems to work well as you don't ever have a whole new group starting at any one time.

“To start with, some of them play up a bit, and think it's just a morning off school,” comments Joyce Harman, a member of staff at David Lister School. “But after a while, you get some of the boys taking it really seriously and they keep the others working.” The gardening

gang have worked on three sites. Two bomb sites between terraced houses have been turned into little gardens, and they are now working on redeveloping the local park.

The bombsites were being used as football pitches, which was causing friction with the local residents. Their conversion into gardens is part of a deal to try and relieve the tensions that were building up between adults and young people in the area. "You'd get about twenty kids on that tiny space, all playing football and banging it against the houses, and a poor old lady living there would be afraid to go out of her house," explains Sue Green, Community Participation Officer for Hull Council. "We offered to get five-a-side football goals installed in the park, if the young people would help us turn the bombsites into gardens," says Gordon Scaife of the Yorkshire Wildlife Trust. The idea seems to have worked, and the gardening group designed, built and now maintains the sites.

### Gaining skills and experience

"We used CAD on computers to draw the designs," explains Jeff, a member of the group, "and then we spray-painted on to the grass to mark out where the five-a-side and the flower beds were going to go." The gardening group worked alongside the Council's design team and learnt how to use the software to design and produce their own site plans. During the marking out, they discovered that some of their ideas didn't work so well on the ground, and changed their plans accordingly.

The design includes a five-a-side football pitch, a new children's playground, a wildlife area and a shelter. They are now working with the parks and gardens maintenance department to implement their designs – from choosing the planting scheme, to painting the children's playground, to laying paths. "It's important to keep the activities varied," says a member of the maintenance department. "For a couple of weeks we had them clearing a flowerbed so they could plant it up, but when they weren't finished by the end of the second session they started getting a bit restless. I got the maintenance team to come in and finish it off, and then they could start planting when they came back after Christmas."

Although the group expresses worries about the park being vandalised, Sue Green explains, “People know that they’ve put the work in, and the kids would know who vandalised it, so that puts them off a bit.” The project has helped give these pupils a new sense of pride in their area and in improving things in their community. “It used to be really rough around here,” says Billy, “with dumped cars, rubbish and all sorts. We’ve helped to clear it up, and put in those bollards to stop cars driving on to the park.”

### Key points

Young people were involved in the David Lister Gardening project through the vocational programme at a local secondary school.

The project has helped to overcome tensions between adults and young people in the local area.

Young people have acquired social and technical skills as a result of the programme, as well as designing and maintaining public space for the benefit of the whole community.

### Useful information

Yorkshire Wildlife Trust,  
10 Toft Green, York, YO1 6JT.  
T 01904 659570 F 01904 613467  
E [info@yorkshirewt.cix.co.uk](mailto:info@yorkshirewt.cix.co.uk) [www.yorkshire-wildlife-trust.org.uk](http://www.yorkshire-wildlife-trust.org.uk)

### Case Study 12 Kendray youth play project, Barnsley

Developing a new place: The best way to get young people involved is to include the project in a wider programme of events so it becomes a regular part of their social life.

“There’s good outdoor space, but there’s nowt to do in it. I’ve been designing it to make it look better, to have more to do,” explains Ryan, who has been working on the design of a new open space in Kendray for the last eighteen months, along with other young people in the area. “We used to just muck about... and kids would go into

skips at the business centre and chuck it all over,” adds Jody, “but now it’s a design of what we want but could never have had before.”

Kendray has been changing over the last few years. Large-scale housing demolition has created a completely new open space in the heart of the neighbourhood, and Barnsley’s Voice & Influence programme is giving young people a say in the changes taking place in their neighbourhood. “Young people are not apathetic,” says Andy Fleming the manager of the programme. “You can see their eyes light up when it’s an issue about them under discussion.” In addition, the manager of the Kendray Youth Play Project, sees wider opportunities for bringing the community closer together through the programme.

### Reaching the hard-to-reach

The Kendray Youth Play Project started in 2002 with a series of events to identify young people’s priorities for the area. The events were held in different venues and included detached youth work to engage young people hanging around on the streets. “It was quite hard to start with,” says a project officer of Groundwork Dearne Valley. “For one of the first events only two people came along, but now there’s a core group of about fifteen.”

A youth worker on the Play Project, says that the best way to get young people involved is to make the events fun and tie them in to other activities. The manager explains that it is really important to engage as wide a range of young people as possible. “You have to make sure that who you’re involving reflects the diversity of the neighbourhood,” adds the manager of the Voice & Influence programme, “Otherwise they’ll just be seen as an elite.”

### Location and design

The initial consultation found that young people wanted a place for activities like football and skateboarding and somewhere they could hang around and meet friends.

Two sites were identified – one on Farm Road recreation ground for sports-based activities, and one in the central area as a performance space and hang-out spot. A series of workshops was held to develop



the design and trips were organised to give young people a chance to experience different parks and playgrounds.

Good communication has been key to building trust between workers and young people involved in the project. They are always given the truth and told if there are going to be delays, even when it may not be what they want to hear. As the group became more experienced, they were able to take on more responsibility, including presenting their designs and models to other young people and residents in the area. They've also learned how to work together. "Since April I've seen a real difference," says the youth worker. "Socially they're much better with each other." The project is now in the final stages of development and due to go on-site in 2004. The young people feel that having designed it, the space will have more things they want to do in it and therefore they will look after it more.

#### Key points

Youth workers held several events over a period of time and in a range of different venues to involve a broad group of young people.

Detached youth workers went out to involve and talk to young people on their own ground.

Young people were given the responsibility to make their own choices about the location and the design of the space and to present their ideas to the wider community.

#### Useful information

Groundwork Dearne Valley  
Elsecar Workshops, Wath Road, Elsecar, Barnsley, South Yorkshire  
S74 8HJ.

T 01226 740 077 F 01226 740 088

E [dearne.valley@groundwork.org.uk](mailto:dearne.valley@groundwork.org.uk)

[www.groundwork.org.uk/dearne](http://www.groundwork.org.uk/dearne)

## Case Study 13 Queen Elizabeth Hall Undercroft, London

Managing to accommodate young people: building in flexibility and accommodating needs of successive generations will guarantee active and vital spaces.

How you feel about a space often depends on how you use it and what you use it for. The Queen Elizabeth Hall Undercroft has been variously described as the “best skate spot in Britain”, by a skater, an “ugly underground wasted space (used as a skate park by children)”, on a theatre website, one of “a number of suburb spots... found by the intrepid”, in an introduction to skateboarding in London (ref 16) and an “arid concrete space under the Queen Elizabeth Hall” in a book about children and the city. It could also be argued that the Undercroft is a prime example of a space that has found its purpose in life by appropriation of the user.

What is ‘slack space’?

This is a space that accommodates spontaneous and informal appropriation by young people. The knowhere guide gives a perfect description of ‘slack space’ – they call it a “hook-up spot”, “that hallowed spot where everyone hangs around with their mates, dreaming of the time they can get into pubs or clubs – a bench, a corner, you name it.”

The sorts of places that young people select tend to be reasonably sheltered, lit at night, separate from places adults use and clearly definable. The Undercroft fulfils all these criteria, and is covered too, making it ideal for skateboarding, which you can’t do when your wheels get wet. It has been colonised by skaters since the 1970s. In 1978, Colin Ward described how “slowly, in the crowded city, the skaters have discovered places smooth enough and sloping enough to develop the art. There is the broad walk in Kensington Gardens, the traffic island at the south of Wandsworth Bridge, and the arid concrete spaces under the Queen Elizabeth Hall on the South Bank (already in use by young cyclists for bronco-riding from steps to slopes). News of usable sites passes from mouth to mouth among the members of the skateboard cult.” (ref 17).

## Accommodating young people

'Slack space' is spontaneously selected – 'found' or 'discovered' – but whether or not it continues to be used by young people and to flourish as an active and vital space depends on the people who manage it. While anti-social behaviour orders (ASBOs) are introduced to break up groups of young people, £20 on-the-spot fines are introduced if you're found skating anywhere in the Square Mile and every railing and kerb in London gets increasingly bumpy to stop people skating down it; the managers of the Undercroft seem to take it all in their stride.

There was some conflict in the early 1990s when, according to one skater, "the South Bank administration tried to wreck the bank by building fences along the main banks. The banks remain, so do the steps, and flatland antics, boardslides and so on keep the security guards busy. Last attempt at institutionalised vandalism causes grief to those wearing stiletto heels, but not skaters." (The knowhere guide, see useful information).

Now, a tacit agreement seems to have been reached, and the skaters – and their admirers – have become an accepted and integral part of the spectacle that is the South Bank. "The South Bank Centre's relationship with skateboarders has evolved from one of hostility to cohabitation" explains Mike McCourt at the Royal Festival Hall, that manages the space. "This year, for the first time, we plan to tailor part of our artistic and education programmes to engage skateboarders directly with our main cultural purpose."

There could be lessons to be learned here about ways of managing to accommodate young people and their needs, and reaching compromises around the use of public space that are acceptable to everyone. Ultimately, these compromises enhance rather than dilute public space and, through increased civility and mutual respect, help to create a more real, more representative and much more thriving public realm.

## Key points

The Queen Elizabeth Hall Undercroft was not designed as a skate park – but provided a space that could be spontaneously selected and appropriated by young people – a ‘slack space.’

‘Slack space’ can be contentious, but the QEH Undercroft provides an important space for young people in the centre of London.

The sympathetic management of the Undercroft by the Royal Festival Hall enhances the civic quality of the South Bank for everyone who uses it.

## Useful information

The knowhere guide can be sourced at [www.knowhere.co.uk](http://www.knowhere.co.uk)

## Case Study 14 Discover Story Garden, Stratford, London

By children, for children: Children’s stories and drawings became the plans for a new garden project in Stratford.

Tucked away behind Stratford High Street, where four lanes of heavy traffic rush past, there is a garden. It is a Story Garden designed by children, for children. “You wouldn’t believe that we are right in the heart of Stratford,” says Eleanor Walford, operations officer at Discover. “There is hardly any green space near by, so the garden provides a really important place for families to come and play together and let off steam.”

The London Borough of Newham is home to families from all over the world, speaking over a hundred different languages, and has a high proportion of children and young people. The Story Garden serves as a creative meeting place, where the many diverse communities of Newham and beyond can play and learn together.

## The Story Garden

The Story Garden is part of Discover, a hands-on creative centre for children, which is all about making stories. It was developed in collaboration with local schoolchildren and the Discover Children's Forum. "Before the garden was here, it was just a dump," says a member of the Forum who lives near by. "We created the garden for children to play in."

Primary schoolchildren that worked with sculptor Andy Frost and landscape designer Vanessa Barker designed the garden. They created stories about the garden, and made models of what they wanted the garden to be like. The character of 'Hootah' and stories about his origins – from the planet of squiggly diggly – were developed by the children and used as a basis for Discover.

The garden is a rolling grassy landscape, with space for running, climbing and sitting quietly. As well as climbing equipment, it also has running water, a willow walkway and plants and flowers. "The best bit was when we planted all these flowers," says another Children's Forum member. "We had to dig the holes and then water them all and we got really muddy."

The garden has been open since August 2002 and has suffered very little vandalism. "It's always full of children after school," says Eleanor. "We've had a bit of a problem with mud this year, but the children don't seem to care – they seem to like getting muddy."

## The Children's Forum

"It's good because we get to come and have our say," says another child who has been a member of Discover Children's Forum since it was set up in 2000. It is a standing forum for children aged four to eleven, who feed into the development and operation of Discover. They help the staff and management board to make it a "fun, entertaining and relevant place for all children from East London."

"We come here every month," explains another member of the Forum, "and we decide what it should be like." Children were initially recruited through schools and community and youth organisations on

local estates. “The Forum aims to be representative of all the children in Stratford,” says Eleanor. “It’s important to make sure that Discover is relevant and appropriate for children from all communities.” Initially 40 children were recruited, and now there are about twenty regular attendees per month.

Eleanor says that the most important things are, “to be creative about how you involve children, and to have a clear dialogue – not everyone will agree, and not everyone’s views will always be acted upon. It’s up to adults to allow these discussions to go on, and to be clear about why they might disagree.” The Children’s Forum has been crucial to the success and popularity of Discover with other children. Many of the original children are still involved in the Forum, and Discover is in the process of setting up a young volunteers programme for children over eleven so that older Forum members can still be involved.

The Children’s Forum also gets involved in projects that are related to the local area. For example, members are currently working with Curiosity & Imagination on a Create Your Own City guide, and will be providing a children’s view on the Stratford City development. One young member of the Forum, says, “I like coming to Discover because it’s fun. If I didn’t come to Discover, I’d just be sitting at home watching the telly, it would just be really boring. I like coming here.”

### Key points

Primary schoolchildren and the Discover Children’s Forum in Stratford, both working with artists, designed the garden.

The garden provides an important place for children and families of different communities, many of whom speak different languages, to meet and play and learn to communicate.

The Discover Children’s Forum is a standing forum for children aged four to eleven who feed into the management of Discover.

## Useful information

Contact Eleanor Walford at Discover,  
1 Bridge Terrace, Stratford,  
London E15 4BG.  
T 020 8536 5555  
E [team@discover.org.uk](mailto:team@discover.org.uk)  
[www.discover.org.uk](http://www.discover.org.uk)

## Summary

Playing outdoors and having access to a range of different types of places is vital for children's development and well-being. By exploring and playing in public spaces, children and young people are able to develop their imagination and independence and learn about the communities and societies in which they live. In many public spaces – parks, street corners and grassy plots – children and teenagers are the main users, but too often they are excluded from making decisions about what happens to these places. It is important that they have a continuous involvement in the design and management of public spaces.

First, it is important for them to be allowed to contribute to their communities and to be able to make decisions about what happens in their environment. In this way, children can develop respect for different members of their community and for differences of opinion, learn about the workings of local government and, crucially, develop a sense of self-worth by being taken seriously and valued by other people. Only by being involved and feeling that they can affect what happens will young people feel a sense of ownership and responsibility in using the public realm. And only by being involved as children will they as adults feel the same sense of responsibility and pride in their environment.

Second, children will play everywhere, and therefore their “buy-in” to any public space project is vital. As regular users of streets and parks, children and young people know a lot about how and when places are used and have valuable knowledge and ideas to contribute. Children can help to develop better, more creative designs

for public spaces that will enhance the day-to-day lives of everyone who uses them.

The research that supported production of this guide shows that children and young people are both willing and able to get involved in the design and development of public space. They can understand and discuss complex issues. They are capable of judging risks, taking decisions and making things happen. They are often concerned about local issues and the needs of other people, and are keen to do something to make a difference. By getting involved in improving open spaces, young people can see the real and concrete results of their contribution. This experience can give them the confidence to speak up and make their voices heard in other areas of public and civic life and can help to create a culture of strong and meaningful participation. All children and young people should be valued as important members of their community and they need to be supported and encouraged to take on a more powerful and responsible role.

### Policy guidance

Getting Serious about Play is the Department for Culture, Media and Sport's (DCMS) report of the first ever government-sponsored review into children's play. It renews the pledge that £200 million of lottery money will be distributed to local authorities for new and improved children's play facilities. Funding will be focused on areas and groups with the poorest access to good-quality play equipment. The review states that proposals for the use of funds "must be prepared in partnership with other local agencies, children and young people and local communities in the neighbourhoods concerned." It also states that, "programme plans should reflect existing provision and future proposals such as green space plans, early years development, childcare and community plans and strategies."

The Sustainable Communities Plan produced by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) states that, "where children play in their local communities, and how they can be supported to play safely in public spaces, is of concern to all children and young people as well as to government and parents. Improving access to public play



space for disabled children and other groups who currently under-use them is central to the development of sustainable and inclusive communities.”

A needs analysis and audit or mapping of existing provision can be a useful tool to find out about local needs. Policy Planning Guidance Note PPG17 sets out that, “assessments and audits will allow local authorities to identify specific needs and quantitative or qualitative deficits or surpluses of open space, sports and recreational facilities in their area.” The Children’s Play Council publication *More than Swings and Roundabouts* includes advice on undertaking an audit and getting started.

Under Best Value, local authorities are required to assess their own performance and put in place measures to improve services. In its annual Best Value Performance Plan, each local authority must show that it is consulting local service users and residents on their expectations about the service. Local service users and residents include children and young people.

### Planning guidance

The Town and Country Planning (General Development Procedure) Order 1995 (as amended) sets out the legal requirements for consulting on planning applications. Third parties have the right to make representations if they wish, and for some types of application the authority has an additional duty to consult certain organisations with relevant expertise or interest, such as the Environment Agency or the Health and Safety Executive.

For many years, it has also been considered good practice for developers – especially of larger schemes – to consult voluntarily with the community. Although at present there is no legal requirement for private developers themselves to carry out any consultation (beyond notifying other parties who may own the application site or part of that site), proposed legislative changes in 2004 would amend the development plan system to bring about early and more inclusive involvement of the community in the preparation of local plans. Planning Policy Guidance Note 12, *Development Plans*, already

advises that plans should recognise the need to make provision for community facilities. When planning applications come in, the local planning authority has to assess each one in the light of its development plan and any other “material considerations” (that is, relevant factors).

To invite comments from local people, local authorities are required to publicise each planning application they receive, under arrangements explained in Environment Circular 15/92. This publicity can either be by notice pinned up near the site of the proposed development or by letter to those with land adjoining it. Larger developments must also be advertised in a local newspaper. Within 21 days of this notification by notice or letter or within 14 days of publication of the newspaper advertisement, anyone may comment on the scheme being proposed. The government recommends, however, that local authorities consider doing more to attract comments than these minimum legal requirements.

Authorities must take account of the comments they receive from third parties, provided the issues raised are relevant to planning. Local objections would not compel a local planning authority to reject a proposal that would be beneficial in planning terms, unless that opposition is based on genuine planning grounds (such as a likelihood of increased noise or traffic). Naturally, if a developer has from the outset devised a scheme that takes account of local sensitivities and the likely reactions of residents, the chances of success may be increased.

Local planning authorities can make agreements with developers for the developers to provide items such as social or educational facilities, public open space or other environmental improvements such as new paving and street furniture. These are commonly known as “planning obligations” and are usually negotiated, though a developer can also simply offer them as a “unilateral undertaking”. Planning obligations usually occur with reference to a planning permission for a new development proposal. The relevant legislation is section 106 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990, as amended by section 12 of the Planning and Compensation Act 1991. The government also recommends that planning authorities involve the local community when deciding whether to designate a

conservation area, that is, an area of special architectural or historic interest, the character of which should be preserved or enhanced. The government is supportive of involving communities in the planning process. Effective public involvement in the early stages can have beneficial results. The young people in Kendray, Barnsley, make specific reference in this guide to their homes' close proximity to the site for which they put forward their own designs. It is clear that their input to the design of the space is inspiring them to care for it, and to identify more closely with the area. To take another example, a report was commissioned by the London Borough of Newham to look at improving small open spaces with a view to making them attractive to young people. One key finding was that the use and attitude to public art by young people was very positive.

### Useful organisations

Black Environment Network  
BEN UK Office, 1st Floor, 60 High Street, Llanberis, Wales LL55 4EU  
T & F 01286 870 715  
E [ukoffice@ben-network.org.uk](mailto:ukoffice@ben-network.org.uk)  
[www.ben-network.org.uk](http://www.ben-network.org.uk)

CABE Space & CABE Education  
The Tower Building, 11 York Road, London SE1 7NX  
T 020 7960 2400  
E [education@cabe.org.uk](mailto:education@cabe.org.uk)  
[www.cabespace.org.uk](http://www.cabespace.org.uk)  
[www.cabe-education.org.uk](http://www.cabe-education.org.uk)

Centre for Social Action  
Room 1.01, Hawthorn Building, Leicester, LE1 9BH  
E [dmucsa@dmu.ac.uk](mailto:dmucsa@dmu.ac.uk)  
T 0116 257 7777  
[www.dmu.ac.uk/~dmucsa](http://www.dmu.ac.uk/~dmucsa)

Children's Play Council  
National Children's Bureau,  
8 Wakley Street, London EC1V 7QE

T 020 7843 6016  
[www.ncb.org.uk/cpc](http://www.ncb.org.uk/cpc)

The Countryside Agency  
Doorstep Greens National Project Team, 1st floor Vincent House,  
Quay Place, 92–93 Edward Street, Birmingham B1 2RA  
T 0121 233 9399  
E [laura.moore@countryside.gov.uk](mailto:laura.moore@countryside.gov.uk)  
[www.countryside.gov.uk](http://www.countryside.gov.uk)

The Glass-House National Design Service  
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[www.wildlifetrusts.org](http://www.wildlifetrusts.org)

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