

# Play Strategy for Frome 2021-2025



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## Executive summary

Often play is seen as something only children do, but the definition can and should be extended to adults. Through this Play strategy Frome Town Council strives to make Frome a town that values and provides opportunities to play for all its residents.

The benefits of play across different play age ranges are huge; from improved mental health, wellbeing and physical fitness to increased confidence, skill sharing, understanding and community cohesion.

Despite the many benefits of play, opportunities have decreased over generations. Freedom and encouragement to be outdoors, across all ages, has diminished or been displaced by the loss of space; perceptions of risk and safety; volume of traffic (moving and parked); technology; and a decrease in a sense of 'community' and neighbourhood.

This Play Strategy is underpinned by Frome Town Council's Strategic vision for "a positive and inclusive town where no one gets left behind; a clean, healthy and happy town, and a town that actively encourages local people to participate in and feel ownership over ideas, spaces and assets." ([FTC Strategy 2019 – 2023](#))

The strategy sets out principles for future playful development.

A well-designed play space will be appealing to the senses, providing physical stimulation and / or be conducive to relaxing. People need choice, variety and flexibility. When designing for play, the elements of time, space and freedom are essential.

This strategy sets a series of ambitions that will provide Frome with a holistic play offer for the whole community. Providing increased opportunities for freely chosen, intrinsically motivated and personally directed playful opportunities for all its residents.



# Context:

In 2020, Children's Scrapstore responded to Frome Town Council's brief and were contracted to create a Play Strategy for Frome, supporting the vision to develop a playful town for children, young people and adults.

## Introduction

Frome aspires to be a brilliant place to grow up and an inspiring place to live and work. The town is progressive and forward thinking, looking for new ways to do things. Frome Town Council has an ambition to broaden people's understanding of play and what it means to play regardless of age; play is for life, not just for children.

Everyone needs the time, space, freedom, and inspiration to play. The ambition of this strategy is to engage the community, voluntary sector, statutory services and businesses to develop a playful town informing and directing local and wider policy.

The Play Strategy is grounded in what play means and the many emotional and physical benefits it affords children, young people, and adults of all ages. All residents and visitors to Frome will have more inclusive opportunities for play, to explore, reclaim and rediscover what play means to them.

It will work to improve choice and access to play to ensure everyone can play as part of their everyday lives.

The Play Strategy identifies the assets and opportunities on offer across the town and provides design principles for future improvement and development. Its principles will be considered across all aspects of infrastructure building and partnership working.

The recommendations within the strategy have been written in collaboration with residents, FTC and other partners, based on a participative approach with a broad demographic of residents, through the Choose Play survey conducted over the summer of 2021 and subsequent focus groups.

Where play is referenced within this document, it means in the broadest sense, to include adults as well as children and young adults.



# Methodology

As part of the preparation of this strategy, the main play spaces, equipment and opportunities in Frome were audited using a bespoke play methodology.

Each area and assessment element were given a total score, making it easy to see strengths and gaps in provision across the town.

Children's Scrapstore reviewed available guidelines and assessment tools and produced an adapted assessment methodology to meet the play needs of both adults and children.

The outdoor space audit has indicated:

- The town has beautiful natural playscapes giving good opportunities to access and experience nature.
- There are a variety of parks and green spaces that are valued by residents. (See Choose Play Survey findings).
- There is a lack of accessible play equipment across the town to offer excitement and challenge and limited outdoor space that offers creativity, performance and expression.
- There is a need to increase opportunities for risk and challenge for older children as well as increasing social gathering spaces. These need to ensure they are accessible and safe all year round.

## Frome Play Assessment Methodology



### Newness/Change & Starting Points

- Imagination
- Possibilities
- Fantasy



### Sand, Water & Earth

- Sensory
- Manipulation
- Creativity
- Investigation



### Focussed Areas

- Reflection
- Structure
- Mindfulness
- Connection



### Creativity, Performance & Expression

- Collaboration
- Identity
- Confidence



### Nature Access

- Topography
- Senses
- Variation
- Seasonal



### Risk & Challenge

- Excitement
- Managing risk
- Self-esteem
- Resilience



### Social Spaces

- Collaboration
- Communication
- Building relationships
- Connection



### Physical Wellbeing

- Exercise
- Motor skills
- Teamwork
- Co-ordination
- Cardiovascular



### Loose Parts

- Manipulate the environment
- Creativity
- Problem solving



### Journeys & Connections

- All-weather access
- Flow
- Invitations
- Opportunities



## Vision:

To become a town which values play as a life-enhancing daily experience for all residents. To protect and develop an accessible network of diverse play provision, offering challenging, engaging, safe spaces and opportunities for play across the town.

## Why Play?

Play England's Charter for Play describes play as 'what children and young people do when they follow their own ideas and interests, in their own way, and for their own reasons. Having time and space to play gives children the opportunity to meet and socialise with their friends, keeps them physically active, and gives the freedom to choose what they want to do.' (Play England 2020)

Article 31 of The UN Convention of the Rights of the Child states that every child has the right to "rest and leisure, to engage in play and recreational activities appropriate to the age of the child and to participate freely in cultural life and the arts" and that children have the right to "participate fully in cultural and artistic life and shall encourage the provision of appropriate and equal opportunities for cultural, artistic, recreational and leisure activity" (UN Convention of the Rights of the Child, 1992).

Play is a process that is freely chosen by an individual. It can be an experience, or it may involve an outcome or a product at the end, but this is not essential. Often play is seen as something only children do, but the above definition can and should be extended to adults too. Play is what adults do when they choose how to spend their free time, away from the constraints of everyday life.

## The Benefits of Play

Everyone, regardless of their stage of life, is entitled to quality opportunities that afford them the many benefits of play, not least the following as laid out by Play England. Again, where children are mentioned, adults can be added.

Research shows that play has many benefits for children, families and the wider community, as well as improving health and quality of life.

- Increase their self-awareness, self-esteem, and self-respect
- Improve and maintain their physical and mental health
- Give them the opportunity to mix with other children
- Allow them to increase their confidence through developing new skills
- Promote their imagination, independence and creativity
- Offer opportunities for children of all abilities and backgrounds to play together
  - Provide opportunities for developing social skills and learning
  - Build resilience through risk taking and challenge, problem solving, and dealing with new and novel situations
  - Provide opportunities to learn about their environment and the wider community



Play for all acts as a protective factor against poor mental and physical health: Playing "promotes positive feelings, builds resilience, improves concentration, helps develop and maintain healthy relationships and improves undesirable behaviours" (Canadian Public Health, 2021).

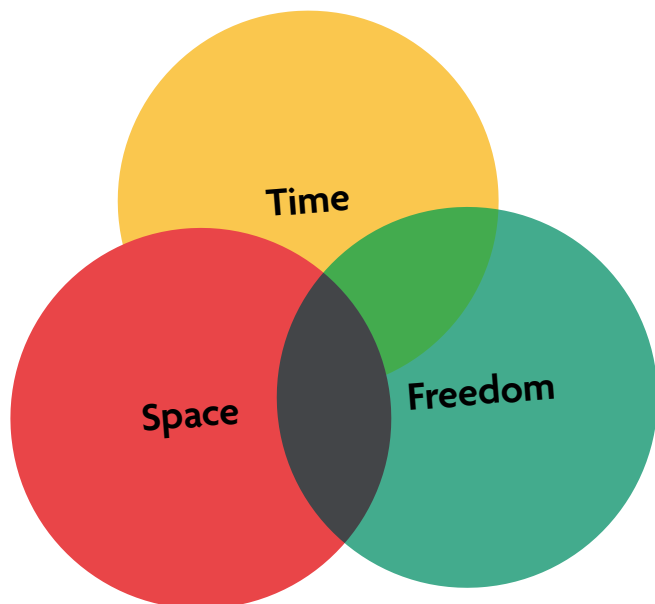
The decline of opportunities for free play over the past half century has been linked to an increase in mental health problems (Peter Gray, 2011). A review published in 2015 supports this, finding that free play contributes enormously to children's physical and mental health, stating that "in adventurous outdoor play, children can challenge themselves, test out their limits, and learn to self-regulate their emotions" (David Whitebread, 2017).

# A playful town

A playful town, one which strives to meet the needs of everyone, at every stage of life creates an attractive, active, and supportive community which brings people together.

This Play Strategy is underpinned by Frome Town Council's Strategic vision for "a positive and inclusive town where no one gets left behind; a clean, healthy and happy town and a town that actively encourages local people to participate in and feel ownership over ideas, spaces and assets." (FTC Strategy 2019 – 2023)

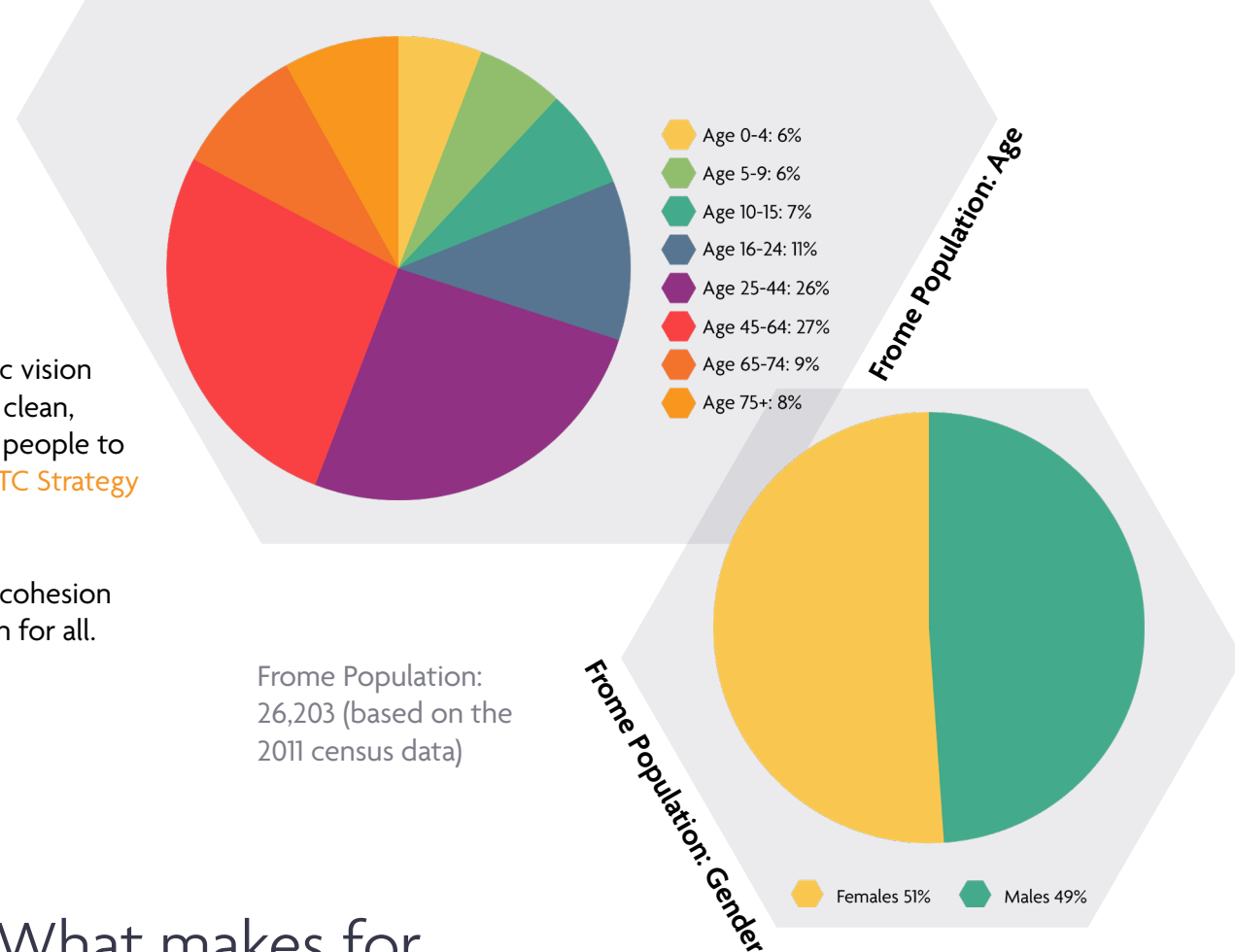
It sets out how Frome can maximise opportunities for community cohesion and inclusion to foster a sense of belonging, safety, and satisfaction for all.



## What makes for quality play?

Creating good spaces for play requires consideration and planning. A quality place for play understands the needs of its users and is designed to provoke interaction with the environment.

A well-designed space will be appealing to the senses; provide physical stimulation and / or be conducive to relaxing. People need choice, variety and flexibility. When designing for play, the elements of time, space and freedom are essential.





# Chapter 1

## Make Time for Play



Photograph by Luke Jerram



# Time:

to engage; connect; practice or develop new skills and increase confidence

A playful town therefore considers how to meet the requirements for:

- ◆ 'Open access' opportunities (where residents are free to come and go).
- ◆ Regularity of experiences and opportunities.
- ◆ Opportunities to play close to home.
- ◆ Flexibility – consideration to a range of days and times.
- ◆ Year-round opportunity, ensuring access, safety and visibility during evenings and winter.
- ◆ A workforce to enhance and support provision and access. For example, to run one o'clock clubs and social prescribing for play to support children and young people.
- ◆ Increased opportunities for open ended, unstructured play.





# Ambition: To increase play opportunities & make them visible

Frome Town Council, its partners and the community will consider how to increase play opportunities based on the 'Choose Play 2021' findings and Play Space Audit.

People don't know what they don't know, provocation and innovative ideas will increase playfulness across the town.

Ensuring resources are available for play will enhance experiences.



Street Pianos | St Pancras Station

# Ambition: To have a dedicated play organisation to support time, space and freedom to play

Children and young people need to be compensated for the reduction in opportunities to play freely. They need engaging and challenging spaces enhanced further by skilled adults who understand playwork and how to extend play opportunities. This is not to be confused with structured activities provided by adults with a specific aim or outcome e.g. after school dance class.

From the 'Choose Play 2021' survey there is a desire for more events within the town. These, and a lack of open ended play opportunities, will be supported by a play organisation.

A play organisation will develop and provide play opportunities, both regular and through one-off events across the town. It will also support the development of those who impact on children's play through training and support. A play organisation will also run and support consultation on play and playful opportunities/developments.

# Recommendations

- ◆ To increase the capacity of the third sector to deliver play opportunities in Frome.
- ◆ Map and categorise spaces, resources and opportunities to ensure visibility and choice. E.g. design a tube style map linking parks, green spaces and play opportunities.
- ◆ Create a '50 things to do' in Frome challenge (with intergenerational & community focus)
- ◆ Add simple additions to the environment such as sand toys, trail kits, geocache boxes and maps. This can be made available locally using the existing share boxes or library of things.
- ◆ Work with local businesses to promote the importance of play and its benefits for the workforce – includes increased productivity, well being and reduction in stress.
- ◆ Provision of training will support families and organisations to understand and promote the importance of play.
- ◆ Create or signpost to a tool/process for supporting third parties to plan for effective play provision, especially indoors to ensure opportunities are open ended.



Green spaces map Bristol



Photo: Markus Spiske



Photo: Chris Bailey



# Chapter 2

## Make Space for Play



# Space:

to access a variety of experiences and opportunities, providing flexibility inside and out, in a diverse range of spaces and venues.

## A playful town therefore considers how to meet the requirements for:

- ◆ Physical challenge and stimulation which offers progressive provocation and risk for all. (Regardless of sex, gender, age or ability).
- ◆ Shared spaces that offer flexibility of use for a multiple of users and activities at the same time, or at different times. (Regardless of sex, gender, age, or ability).
- ◆ Play spaces, indoors and outdoors, close to homes to increase play and socialising. Make use of existing community buildings and spaces where possible, e.g. schools and libraries.
- ◆ Engaging cultural and arts venues to offer more playful open-ended opportunities.
- ◆ Improve and develop streets for play, e.g. play streets, bike streets, home zones, pocket parks, play lanes, school streets.
- ◆ Identify formal spaces, of adequate size for dedicated activities as well as informal spaces for incidental opportunities.

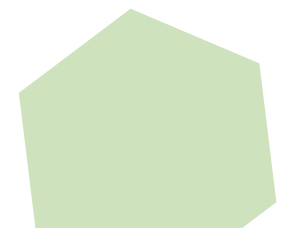
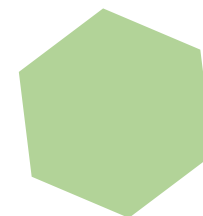






- ◆ Create journeys and connections to and from spaces that are safer, playable, inviting and accessible. (Increasing usage and playfulness creates more footfall and therefore natural surveillance for safety.)
- ◆ Safe walking and cycling routes.
- ◆ Well-connected public transport links and parking facilities for essential car users.
- ◆ Ensuring pavements, entrances and pathways to venues and spaces are wide enough for buggies, wheelchairs and multiple users to share comfortably.
- ◆ Ensuring surfaces between play equipment/areas are accessible to all.
- ◆ Ensuring all public spaces are well-lit for ease of use, increased length of usage time when dark and increased visibility for safety.

- ◆ Provision of adequate toilet and changing facilities across the town. (Regularly maintained; well positioned; welcoming; well-lit and with conducive opening times).
- ◆ Provide areas of shade, shelter and lighting in prominent and visible positions for safety of users.
- ◆ Provision of social gathering spaces that offer flexibility of use through design, position and location. (Versatile in use and in multiples to encourage play whilst gathering, e.g. swings/hammocks; fixed gym equipment positioned to encourage a group; benches that can be clambered on by younger children; components that can be moved by older children).
- ◆ Provision of accessible and inclusive play equipment for mixed age use in parks to offer excitement, challenge and risk.
- ◆ Spaces where children and adults of all abilities can play and learn together. e.g. an urban farm or community garden.
- ◆ Every residential area to have a variety of places for play, free of charge, supervised and unsupervised and a defined geographical reach.
- ◆ Future developments are designed to work with existing natural resources/elements for play and where possible use sustainable materials.
- ◆ Utilising natural loose parts as play resources e.g. water, sand, bark, leaves, gravel, earth.
- ◆ Ensuring future developments place the towns play needs central in their design and planning.



## Ambition: To enhance existing play spaces

Improve existing play spaces in Frome to cater for a wider range of people, especially older children and teenagers to offer more challenge, choice and equity for all.

Based on the Frome Play Space Audit findings and the 'Choose Play 2021' survey the key areas for development are **better inclusion and access, especially for those who are Disabled; increased risk and challenge; staffed provision; connecting and coming together.**

Develop existing play spaces, moving away from special equipment in separate areas, to ensure inclusion.

Improve opportunities for risk and challenge for all ages to offer graduated levels and types of risk.

Design out inequality to ensure inclusion and increase experiences for all. Play spaces to offer more access, e.g. ramps and bridges, wide enough for wheelchair access and turning; wide slides where the top is easily reached; swing baskets, seats with straps and swings for wheelchairs.

## When designing successful play spaces, the following should be applied:

- 1 Designed to enhance its setting** - successful play spaces are designed to fit their surroundings and enhance the local environment, complementing attractive spaces and enhancing poorer environments.
- 2 Located in the best possible place** - successful play spaces are located carefully 'to be where children would play naturally'. While children often enjoy feeling as if they are away from adult view, there is a fine balance between a space that is pleasantly secluded and one that is remote and hidden away.
- 3 Close to nature** - grassy mounds, planting, logs and boulders can all help to make a more attractive and playable setting for equipment, and planting can also help attract birds and other wildlife to bring the play space to life.
- 4 Designed so that children can play in different ways** - successful play spaces can be used in different ways by children and young people of different ages and interests; they can also be important social spaces for parents and carers, as well as for children.
- 5 Geared towards encouraging disabled and able-bodied children to play together** - children with different abilities can play together in well-designed play spaces, and parents and carers who are themselves disabled should be able to gain access to play spaces if they are to accompany their children.
- 6 Loved by the community** - a successful community engagement process will help create a site that the community likes and which meets its needs.
- 7 Children of all ages play together** - good play spaces avoid segregating children based on age or ability and are laid out so that equipment and features can be used by a wide range of children.
- 8 Designed to enable children to stretch and challenge themselves in every way** - Children and young people need opportunities to experience challenge and excitement in their play.
- 9 Maintained for play value and environmental sustainability** - good play spaces are designed and constructed using sustainable materials and maintained to encourage different play experiences.
- 10 Flexible and able to evolve as the children grow** - Building some 'slack space' into the layout - areas with no predefined function - can help introduce the potential for change and evolution.

Public space lessons: Designing and planning for play. Cabe Space



## Ambition: To develop a wider range of spaces for play

Have a wide range of different spaces for play including destination parks, local parks, nature areas and indoor opportunities to increase the play offer across the town.

Reclaim and enhance incidental spaces and local spaces where children, young people and adults play and connect will make them more appealing and interactive. E.g. Pocket parks.

Improve playable spaces to increase footfall and natural surveillance making them feel safer.

Identify future spaces to be developed for play to fill the gaps within the existing offer. E.g. Develop a staffed playground offering risk and challenge.



Source: 'Maybe Something Beautiful' by Rafael Lopez

## Ambition: To benchmark future developments

The Play Strategy will be included in the Frome Town Council Strategy and the Neighbourhood Plan to support planning applications where development impacts on play for all.

Frome Town Council to advocate for design principles and tools to be followed by planners and developers, to include lighting & safety; provision for teenagers; accessibility; challenge & risk; using natural elements and intergenerational opportunities to ensure quality play provision for all.

Developers to be encouraged to include design elements identified from: the play audit methodology and latest findings; 'Choose Play 2021' survey and recommended mapping/categorisation findings into future developments.



Source: 'Kew Water Garden' by Duncan & Grove



# Recommendations

- ◆ Plans to improve each play space to include a variety of exciting and physically accessible play opportunities. Each park does not need to be the same, look at the offer across the town to ensure diversity across the spaces. Consider how to offer more equitable opportunities in Frome for both Disabled and non-Disabled people.
- ◆ Maximise opportunity for newness and seasonal change through the maintenance and development of green spaces. E.g grow a berry maze
- ◆ Consider how Frome could offer an adventure playground to increase risk and challenge; create open ended opportunities and support play environment for older children
- ◆ Consider street art initiatives for creativity and vibrancy, whilst bringing dull spaces to life. E.g. street art
- ◆ Consider working with local schools to assess their play offer (using methodology tool), so that all spaces for play are developed to compliment and increase the community play offer. This could also include opening their school grounds for community use or for specific events.
- ◆ Pilot staffed play projects for a mix of ages on a regular schedule. Specifically thinking about open ended play, creative opportunities for young people and adults and intergenerational opportunities.
- ◆ Include findings from the Public Play Space Audit in the annual work plan and identify when to reaudit spaces in the future.
- ◆ Create categorisation framework – to quantify; audit further and identify future needs for planners and developers. Good examples include Fife Council Play Spaces Strategy & Southend on Sea Play Strategy play spaces categorisation.



Photo courtesy of Landscape Structures Inc.





# Chapter 3

## Freedom for Play



Source: 'Kew Children's Garden' by  
All Urban and Handspring Design





# Freedom:

to choose and permission to play.

## A playful town therefore considers how to meet the requirements for:

- ◆ A variety of choices for how and where to play. Organisations enable open ended play opportunities as part of their offer to allow for expression and creativity.
- ◆ Risk and challenge through design and policy for play across all spaces.
- ◆ Regular and timely consultation for current spaces/assets and future developments to ensure they meet the needs of all users (current and prospective).
- ◆ Signage that supports messages of exploration, engagement and interaction with a space. (Removal of messages that discourage play - 'no ball games'. Explicit messages which encourage play here – 'Sit here' etc.)
- ◆ Ease of physical access for all, e.g. pathways and parking for those with limited mobility or adults with young children and buggies.
- ◆ Straightforward systems and readily available information and resources to close streets for play/street parties.
- ◆ Event promotion to reach residents across all areas and ages.
- ◆ Support to develop the skills, ability and confidence to increase participation and remove barriers for underrepresented groups.
- ◆ Specific events held to introduce new initiatives/activities and to model opportunities.
- ◆ Encouraging people into spaces and opportunities where they may not feel they have a place by developing a sense of belonging to increase feelings of safety, inclusion and reduce antisocial behaviour. E.g teenagers welcome to congregate; older people welcome to stop and sit.
- ◆ Community involvement in managing and supervising spaces to generate a sense of safety.
- ◆ Safer streets – speed limits; traffic free; well lit; wider paths; welcoming.
- ◆ Creating attitudinal change that encourages rather than discourages play and how this can be shared across the town.

## Ambition: To build a 'brand' & spread the word

Frome inspires to create a Playful town message, redefining and encouraging play for all. A message embedded in all that we do and promoted by partners across the town.

Continuing to promote play opportunities, sharing 'what's on' across different platforms/media for far reach. (Consideration here for how to meet all resident's communication needs).

Considering local and national platforms which support information sharing and quality standards. E.g. Family Arts Campaign

## Ambition: To encourage more 'doorstep' play & connection

Frome recognises that playing out close to home increases social connection within communities and makes for more playful neighbourhoods, bringing everyone together.

Continuing to develop opportunities for communities to utilise streets for play and celebration. Building parental and neighbourhood confidence through training, modelling and promotion, to support playing outside in their local areas.

Creating playful journeys, invitations and links allowing playful flow through various spaces within the town.



Source: 'Mokša' by Simo Lahtinen and Suvi Saastamoinen



## Ambition: To increase sense of belonging for teenagers

Teenagers need increased independence; mobility; trust; safety and a sense of belonging. “Many of the open space strategies developed by local authorities have demonstrated that provision for teenagers across the UK is particularly limited. Often deemed too old for ‘play’, teenagers need more than youth shelters and areas for ball games. More places where they can congregate and socialise with their friends are especially important.” (Play England - Design for Play)

A play organisation to increase provision of opportunity and support for young people to ‘take their place’ in the community is needed. It will also ensure timely and tailored consultation.

## Ambition: To ensure equity of play provision

Play spaces and opportunities across Frome adhere to the duties of the Equality Act 2010 ensuring that all protected characteristics are supported. Barriers to inclusion to be identified, not least for those who are Disabled; girls and women and all those within other potentially underrepresented groups. Plans to be developed that work on reducing identified barriers.

Future play spaces will be subject to an Equality Impact Assessment (although this is not a statutory requirement of the Town Council, it is seen as best practice in ensuring equity) to prevent and minimize any possible effects on those with protected characteristics.

Attitudinal change to be supported to counter negative stereotyping; prejudice and discrimination that impacts access to spaces and opportunities.

## Ambition: To continue to build participative engagement, with a focus on play

Frome will continue to reflect, evaluate and consult on its play provision to ensure it is up to date and meets the needs in changing times. Participation from all residents to be actively encouraged, not least those from identified underrepresented groups.



## Recommendations

- ◆ Create a Charter/Manifesto for Play – for local organisations; businesses; schools; early years setting etc. To sign up to/make a pledge towards having more freedom to play and opportunities for play.
- ◆ Work towards developing Age Friendly status & Child Friendly Cities status.
- ◆ Promote street closures, play streets/street parties/reclaiming backstreets for play. Consider areas where this may be harder for the local community to achieve and offer tailored support.
- ◆ Develop social spaces to allow for young people to gather, face to face in comfortable and playful ways. Designing seating and spaces that include incidental play opportunities for teenagers.
- ◆ As best practice, develop an Equality Impact Assessment tool for future design and development of play spaces and opportunities.
- ◆ Consider how to reduce discriminatory attitudes and behaviours that impact on access to play and spaces, e.g. sexual harassment.
- ◆ Develop consultation processes to ensure breadth of reach.



# Support for future inspiration, design & development of play spaces

This list is in no particular order and is not exhaustive but a good representation of initiatives and inspiration.

[Play England](#) – Design for Play: A guide to creating successful play spaces\_ People make play

[Play Wales](#) – Developing and managing play spaces – community toolkit

[Play Wales](#) – Play and Challenge

[Simply Play](#) – Play Space Evaluation Tool

[Play Scotland](#) - Quality of Play Environment – Provider Assessment Tool

[Play Scotland](#) - Getting it Right for Play - A toolkit to assess and improve local play

[East Lothian Play Association](#) - Its ok to play here

[Managing Risk in Play Provision: Implementation Guide](#)

[Play Scotland, Inspiring Scotland and the Nancy Ovens Trust](#) - Free to Play – A guide to creating accessible and inclusive public play spaces

[Playing Out](#)

[Make Space for Girls](#) - Summary of Research findings

[Love exploring app](#)

[Inspiring Scotland](#) - Guide to accessible and inclusive play spaces

Rob Hopkins (2019) From what is to what if. ISBN 978-1-64502-028-8

Tim Gill (2021) Urban Playground. How child friendly planning and design can save cities. ISBN 978 1 85946 929 3

Checklist for teen friendly parks pg. 162 – 163

Ten actions that will improve streets for children pg. 136

Ten landscape led play design objectives pg. 158





# Ideas, stories and case studies

[Creating Parks and Public Spaces for People of All Ages](#) – “AARP is a nonprofit, nonpartisan organisation that empowers people to choose how they live as they age.”

[8 80 Cities](#) – “8 80 Cities improves the quality of life for people in cities by bringing citizens together to enhance mobility and public space so that together we can create more vibrant, healthy, and equitable communities.”

[Tinker Town](#) – “#TinkerTown began in July 2016 as part of the summer festival ‘Archi-Fringe’ in Pollokshields, Glasgow. It began as a pop-up den building event - inspired by the original Adventure Playgrounds - giving children and families the time, space and freedom to design, build and play as they like with real tools, pallets and scrap timber!”

[Heeley people’s park](#) is the largest community run park in the country. It’s not paid for or managed by the council, but by the people and businesses who live there.

[Barcelona city’s plan for play](#) in public spaces aims to improve the city’s play facilities and to make the city as a whole more playful.

[Cardiff play lanes](#) pilot study in Cardiff.

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- Tim Gill - Urban Playground, 2021, pg. 29
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