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FOREWORD



Welcome to the Worcester Play Plan!

Worcester City Council knows that play is important for children and young people of all ages. Play helps people make friends, stay healthy and connected to each other. Play means different things to different people. If it's fun, it's your choice and it's free, then it's play. This Play Plan sets out a vision for outdoor play across Worcester, to meet the needs of all our children and young people. Not forgetting their parents and carers, of course.

Why do we need a Play Plan?

We want some fresh thinking about the outdoor play spaces that the Council looks after. We also want to encourage

other organisations to help us provide better playable spaces. The Play Plan has been developed following consultation with people in the city and with our design team experts. It gives us a local picture of what works well in Worcester and what needs to be improved. It provides guidance on best design principles and learning from elsewhere. The Play Plan will help us make play spaces more inclusive, accessible and safe.

To deliver the Play Plan, we need to listen and work closely with lots of groups and individuals. It is a long-term plan and a commitment to investment. Thank you for reading the Play Plan and helping us to make Worcester better for our children and young people.



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1.0

INTRODUCTION





In 2019 the South Worcestershire Open Space Assessment (SWOSPA) revealed a deficit in children's play spaces in Worcester. It identified an 18% shortfall in the provision of play space for younger children, based on a metric of open space per child resident in the city¹. For older children, the deficit was 86% below the expected provision. The assessment goes on to note that of the 347 play assets in the city, 86% of these have an 'end-of-life date' from summer 2027². Whilst this places Worcester City with both a an overall deficit, and assets reaching their end of life in the near future, it presents an opportunity to rethink the city's approach to play from the ground up. In recognition of this, Worcester City Council (WCC) has highlighted play provision as a priority in the newly revised Worcester City Plan 2022 – 2027.

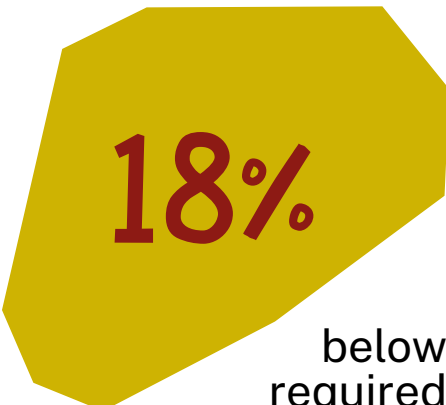
¹ The SWOSPA calculated a city wide figure for required acreage of play space. The metrics are based on Worcester's population of young children aged 12 and under, and older children aged 12-17. The report identified a shortfall of 0.94 hectare in play space for younger children and a 4.38ha shortfall in provision for older children. South Worcs Open Space Assessment 2019 (Updated March 2021).pdf ([swdevelopmentplan.org](https://www.swdevelopmentplan.org))

² (Public Pack)Supplementary Agenda Agenda Supplement for Place and Economic Development Committee, 14/03/2022 19:00 ([worcester.gov.uk](https://www.worcester.gov.uk))

The Worcester City Play Plan will provide an evidence base on which to strategically plan the delivery of high-quality play and outdoor youth facilities to meet the needs and aspirations of children, young people and their families and carers. Drawing on case studies and best practice examples from beyond Worcester, it will offer recommendations for improving play, and access to play, taking account of the need to accommodate the diversity of needs and desires represented across the city.

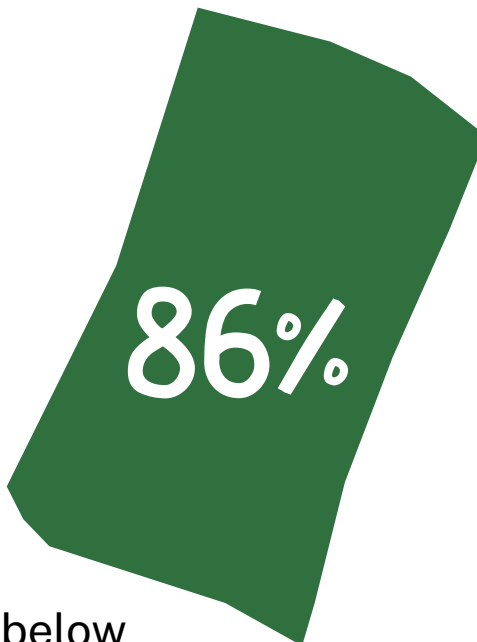
Planning and Play

Worcester City Council's emphasis on play reflects growing recognition amongst planning and urban design practitioners of the need to integrate playable spaces as a part of the everyday public realm of towns and cities. It follows a slow evolution from the early 20th century designation of playgrounds as separate and contained spaces for children within neighbourhoods. Playgrounds were conceived as a response to a perceived need for



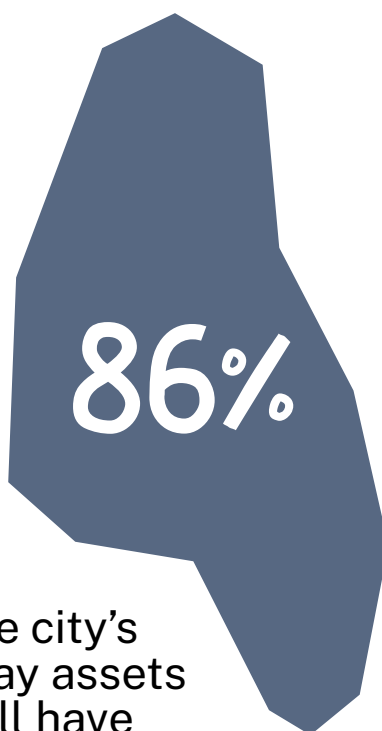
18%

below
required
hectarage
for children's
play provision



86%

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for youth play
provision



86%

of
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greater control of children, to curb children's freedom to roam. During the 1970s and 80s the narrative became safety driven, 'stranger danger', danger of traffic and children being seen by their parents as vulnerable to external threats. Socially and culturally families started to retreat into private spaces, as private gardens and home entertainment became more prevalent. In turn children became less likely to participate in outdoor play and state provision of play spaces entered into a period decline and austerity. In the early years of the twenty-first century the value of play in society saw something of a resurgence. Research by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation (2006)³ found that a focus on play and public space was a key factor in making new and regenerated neighbourhoods attractive to families. The Commission for Architecture in the Built Environment (CABE, 2005)⁴ drew similar conclusions from its research into the views of residents of new housing. More recently, influential texts such as Tim Gill's *Urban Playground* have prompted a focus on children's right to enjoy the city and the need for more inclusive approaches to the design of public spaces for children and adults alike⁵.

As the local planning authority, Worcester City Council have responsibility for the ensuring access to, quality and quantity of

playable spaces across the city area. Guidance and policy is locally defined, through Supplementary Planning Documents, local planning policies, site specific allocations of land and Area Action Plans, as well as developer contributions and s106 agreements. In addition, national standards are prescribed by Play England. Whilst the system can be effective at ensuring minimum standards and space allocation for play provision, it is a relatively blunt instrument and has been largely ineffective at delivering the detailed design decisions needed to support the social, physical, intellectual, cognitive, creative and emotional development of children and young people and their overall health and wellbeing.

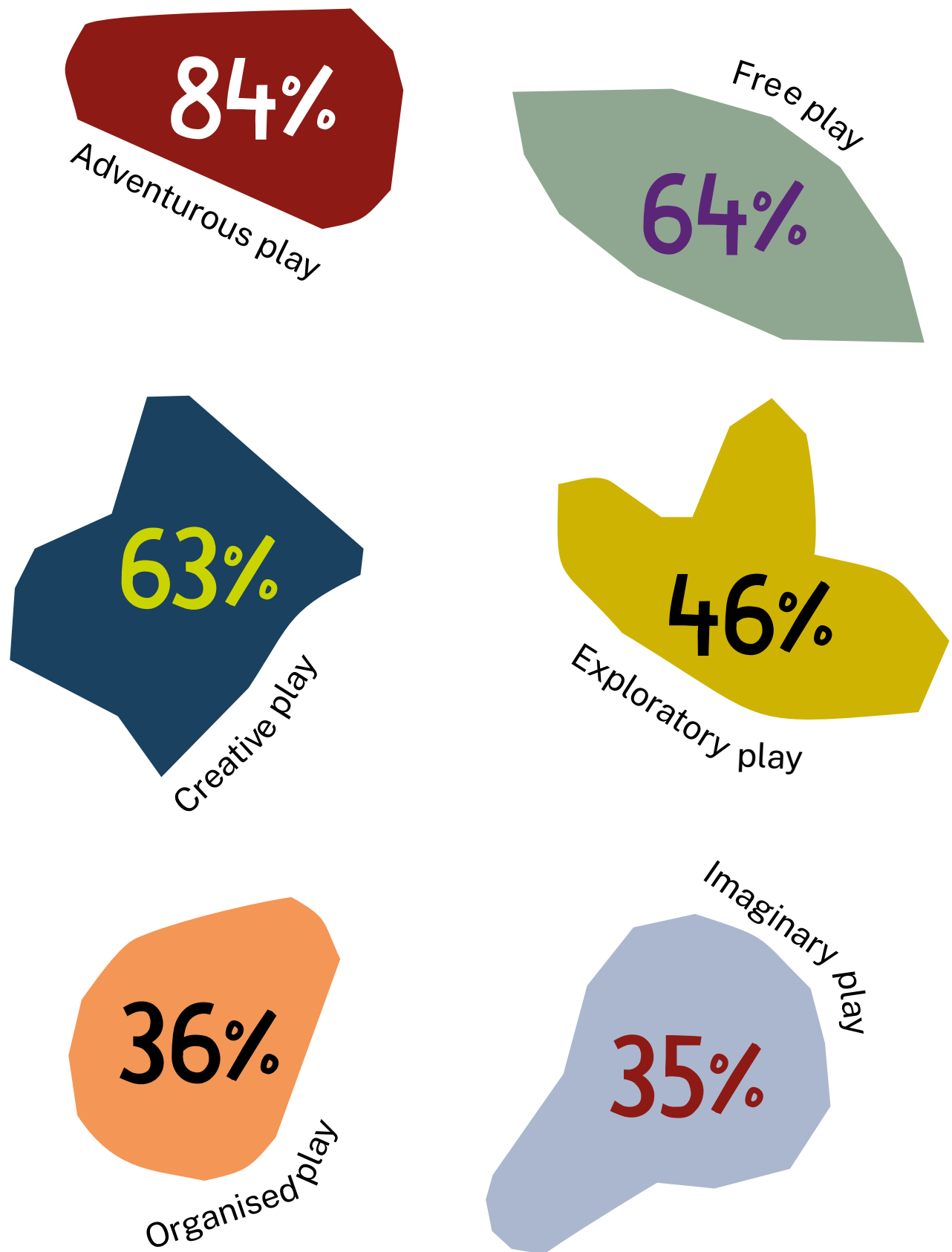
This Play Plan document is intended to provide an evidence base for better understanding how play spaces across the city are experienced by those using them, and how they could be improved. The activity of play has a crucial role in supporting the social, physical, intellectual, cognitive, creative and emotional development of children and young people and their overall health and wellbeing. It is intended to support Worcester City Council as they develop projects in the public realm to incorporate a rich variety of play opportunities, beyond

³ JRF_Summary_2050.indd

⁴ What it's like to live there (CABE 2005)

⁵ Tim Gill (2021) *Urban Playground: How child-friendly planning and design can save cities*. RIBA: London.

1.0 INTRODUCTION



Source: Worcester Play Council
Report on Findings of a Survey to Discover
How Children in Worcester Like to Play

the formal and structured playground. The charity, Play England, suggest that “landscaping, planting and community art installations (can) offer children as much play value as apparatus”⁶. Informal and incidental playable spaces can make innovative use of the public realm, allowing children to engage in play throughout their city and not just at specific play sites. By embedding play within the public spaces of the city, it is demonstrated to children that they are valued, and their presence within their city is welcomed.

Overview

Section 02 documents existing play provision across Worcester. We have mapped and analysed current play provision to better understand the existing geographical distribution, including peripheral edges, recording play spaces and facilities for younger children and older children. The aim of this section is to identify the highlights as well as shortfalls in provision identified across the city at three different scales; destination play, local and doorstep. This is further elaborated in Section 04 with a series of maps used to identify gaps in play opportunities by location.

Section 03 sets out a review of research on the role of play, both for children and their physical, emotional

and cognitive development, and for the communities it supports. It considers, and expands a definition of play to incorporate an array of types of activity – undirected, explorative and open-ended – that can constitute play. It also considers barriers and limits that affect play opportunities, and introduces case studies that offer good examples of play design.

Section 05 records the engagement events that we have undertaken as part of this study, to understand better the experience of those using play facilities across the city. We gathered responses from children, parents and care-givers about their experience in relation to access to play, perceptions of safety, places where they feel welcomed and unwelcomed, barriers, opportunities, and how they find their place in the City.

Section 06 sets out a strategy for how play in Worcester should be developed, establishing new benchmarks that will define what makes a good play space. It makes a number of recommendations around the location, design and method for delivering play in Worcester. It is supported by assessment criteria using the ‘Building for Healthy Life’ methodology for the local authority to assess play sites brought forward by developers.

⁶ Design for play: a guide to creating successful play spaces playscotland.org

2.0

EXISTING PLAY IN WORCESTER





Today local authorities and their strategic partners are responsible for working with others to support the well-being of all children in their locality. This includes planning for building, refurbishing and maintaining playable spaces as well as delivering support for play provision.

Recommendations on the amount, type and distance to access play is set out in guidance published by Play England. Specifically, they outline 3 types of space that all children and young people should have access to; doorstep (within 60m of the home), local (within 240m) and neighbourhood (within 600m)⁷.

Our analysis of existing play provision in Worcester includes both a measured analysis, mapping locations, types and distances to residential areas, alongside qualitative, observational readings of these places. These processes have been further supported and elaborated through conversations with young people and parents/ carers (see section 5).

As Worcester plans to invest in a new generation of play provision for its children and young people it is important to consider the factors that shape what play provision currently exists across the city, and people's experiences of, and access to play.

Play Destinations

In late 2022 we undertook a mapping survey to locate and document public play spaces across the city of Worcester. The city has an abundance of open green space and parks across the city, offering areas for unstructured and informal play. Public sites like Worcester Woods Country Park, encourage natural play in meadows and woodland, whilst Parks, such as Cripplegate Park, Fort Royal Park, Gheluvelt Park, Riverside Park, and Perdisswell Park provide a range of activities from informal and formal play areas, to sports courts and equipment. These main parks act as destination play sites meaning that people and families living elsewhere in the city, and from further away, will travel to them. Whilst these sites are popular and well-used, access to them is often limited to daylight hours, with gate closures or lack of artificial lighting inhibiting use in the evenings.

⁷ NCB for Play England (2009). Better Places to Play Through Planning, p12. <https://www.bl.uk/britishlibrary/~media/bl/global/social-welfare/pdfs/non-secure/b/e/t/better-places-to-play-through-planning.pdf>

2.0 EXISTING PLAY IN WORCESTER

The challenge for Worcester is to increase its youth provision and diversify the range of play facilities for older children and young people (12–17 years old), deciding what form this new generation of play provision will take, and where these play spaces should be located to benefit the most people.

Worcester Community Trust is a registered charity that runs six community centre sites, or Hubs, providing facilities and services for people of all ages, including play areas, hard courts, sports pitches and outdoor sports and gym equipment⁸. The hub sites at Dines Green, Horizon hub (Cathedral ward), King George V (Rainbow Hill), Ronkswood, and Warndon are significant neighbourhood centres within the city's hierarchy of playable spaces. They provide larger facilities for informal recreation which children and young people, used to travelling longer distances independently, can get to safely and spend time in play and informal recreation with their peers and have a wider range of play experiences.

WCT Hubs perform a critical role in the city's play hierarchy at a neighbourhood scale. Five hub sites (The Green Hub, Horizon hub, King George V, Ronkswood Hub, and Warndon Hub) provide play facilities for older children/young people (12–17 year

olds) in the form of MUGAs (Multi-use Games Areas), sports pitches/playing fields and outdoor gym equipment. MUGAs are also located in some of the city's destination sites such as the city's main parks.

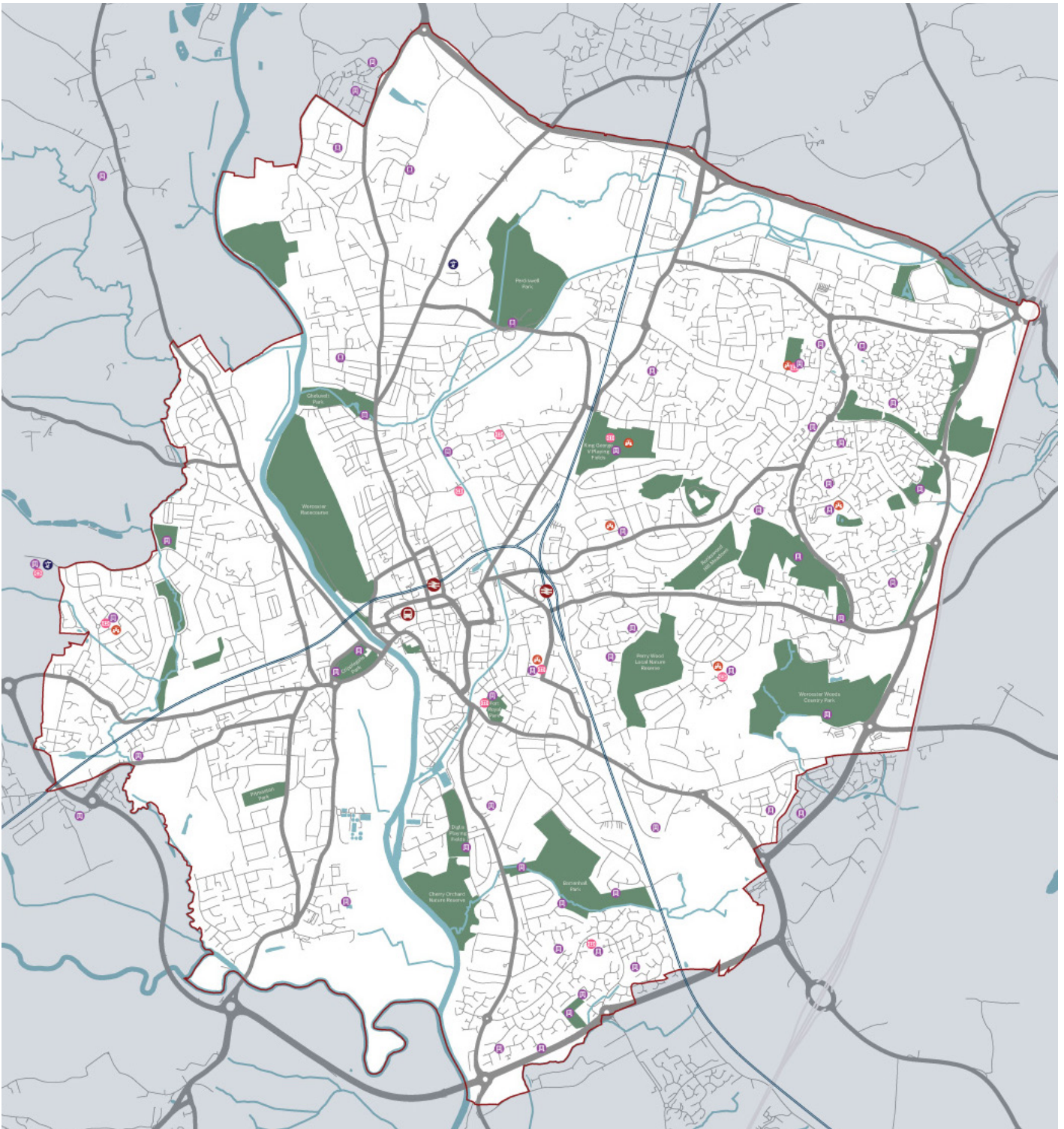
Other facilities that contribute to the city's provision of outdoor play and youth provision can generally be categorised as sports and fitness related, including Skate Parks at Howard Road and Perdiswell Young People's Club, public tennis courts, public and private leisure centres.

Away from the main destination sites, play provision is much more variable in its geographic distribution, function and in the type and condition of play equipment. Section 4 – Mapping the Gaps identifies the areas without sufficient access to play and feedback from our engagement events in Section 5 elaborates on how this current play provision is experienced by the young people that use it.

Recommendation 1:

The most significant challenge for Worcester is how to engage with older children. Time and resources will be required to work closely with them on a neighbourhood by neighbourhood basis to meet specific local needs. There is no one size fits all solution.

⁸ Worcester Community Trust
www.worcestercommunitytrust.org.uk/



Map 1: Existing play sites

Key

- | | | | |
|--|-------------------------------|---|------------------------------|
|  | Worcester City boundary |  | Existing MUGA locations |
|  | Train line |  | Existing skatepark locations |
|  | Existing Playground locations |  | Community Hubs |

2.0 EXISTING PLAY IN WORCESTER

Local Play

At a local level play opportunities are largely provided in the form of local playgrounds, and the city's abundance of open spaces. In many instances these overlap, where play areas have been provided as points of interest within the local open space network. Whilst mapping Worcester's play spaces has shown a deficit in terms of gross area allocated for play - 0.94 hectares against the required provision of 5.12 hectares – there is generally a good level of coverage in terms of access to local playable spaces.

We found relatively few examples of dedicated doorstep play spaces during our study. There are, however, many grassy spaces that could provide valuable play space with the introduction of seating and some basic landscape interventions. In other instances, the role of cars would need to be better considered or reduced to make the green spaces, and routes to them accessible for younger children who would particularly benefit from these doorstep play spaces.



Local (doorstep): Debdale play area, a small, well integrated play area in close proximity to housing. Catalogue equipment that has been adapted to make use of the natural topography and landscape



Neighbourhood: Warndon Hub combines flexible indoors space, a wide range of play for different age ranges, open playing fields, outdoor gym equipment and 'The Building Block', a training centre for young people and the construction industry



Local (doorstep): *Oakmont Drive, design and provision of new play area as part of new housing development is of basic quality, unimaginative, difficult to access/maintain and hidden out of sight*



Destination: *Ghuluvelt Park, a highly popular park with multiple play attractions from splash pads, a range of age appropriate play, tennis courts and importantly a cafe and public WCs*

Characteristics and condition of existing play provision

The review found a relatively narrow spectrum of play across Worcester's existing provision. There is heavy reliance on manufactured play equipment, the associated lifespan of which creates ongoing maintenance pressure. Access to capital to upgrade, refurbish, and replace equipment is currently on a 15 – 20 year cycle. The difficulty of funding maintenance and upgrades is particularly challenging for doorstep and local playable spaces where the justification for investment can be difficult to uphold.

Existing provision tends to support physical and recreational-based play activities, although the key characteristics of social, creative and reflective play are all present to varying degrees across the existing hierarchy of playable spaces or Worcester's excellent calendar of city-wide public events (Paint Festival, Light Night etc).

The following characteristics are found pepper-potted across existing provision, and should be protected and/or enhanced as part of this strategy:

2.0 EXISTING PLAY IN WORCESTER

Landscape-led:

Playable spaces designed to fit their surroundings and enhance the local environment e.g. grassy mounds, planting, logs, and boulders making a more attractive and playable setting for more conventional and naturalistic play equipment.

see Diglis Playing Fields



Biodiverse:

Planting can also help attract birds and other wildlife to literally bring the play space alive. In densely populated urban areas with little or no natural or green space, this more natural approach can help soften the hard urban landscape.

see Cripplegate play area



Risky play:

Allowing children to participate in creative play that allows them to take calculated risks. Play designed to challenge children out of their comfort zone, allowing them to build confidence and overcoming previous failure.

see Battenhall Rise play area



2.0 EXISTING PLAY IN WORCESTER



Imaginative play:
Play opportunities, and playable spaces which attract children, capture their imagination and give them scope to play in new, more exciting, and more creative ways. Open-endedness – spaces and activities that children can re-imagine and do it differently over-and-over again.

see Fort Royal Park



Local identity:
Linked to events in local history and the heritage of an area are a successful means to tell important stories about Worcester's heritage.

see Perdiswell Park Play Area.



Competitive games:

Play opportunities for children of all ages, but typically older children and in particular boys. Sport and exercise is just one element on the play spectrum.

see Brecon Ave MUGA

Photo credit:
Worcester City Council

3.0

DEFINING PLAY



‘The key characteristics of play are fun, uncertainty, challenge, flexibility and non-productivity.’

United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child,
Article 31

‘Play is an intrinsic part of being human.’

Michael Rosen, *Book of Play*, p25

Recommendation 2:

Play happens everywhere. It is not dependent on designated areas or spaces.

Recommendation 3:

Cultural, social and artistic activities are of equal importance to physical activities.

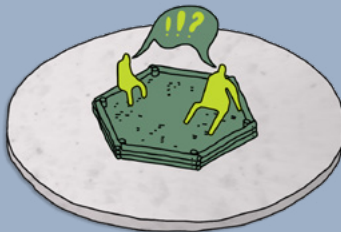
Play is an open-ended activity which can happen at any time and take place anywhere. It is instinctive and impulsive and can happen for no particular reason or outcome and without regard of any particular goal or consequence. Play can therefore take an infinite number of forms, from participation in sporting activities, through to imaginative play with children role playing scenarios, to just messing about with whatever is at hand. Rest and socialising, too, perform a vital role in play, benefitting children’s wellbeing and relationships with other children and adults. Fostering children’s autonomy, empowering them to decide how to fill their play time as “actively or inactively as they choose”⁹ instils in them self-confidence, spatial awareness, greater cognitive abilities and resilience. Engaging children in cultural and artistic activities is similarly important.

Children’s participation in activities such as festivals, storytelling and dance aids children’s own cultural understanding, as well as providing “opportunities to broaden their horizons and learn from other cultural and artistic traditions”, and in so doing to developing a “mutual understanding and appreciation of diversity”¹⁰ and allows children to participate fully in public life as citizens.

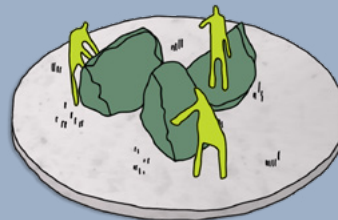
Play is how children learn how to build relationships with others, explore the physical world around them and understand the limits of their bodies to jump, climb, swing etc. Play can therefore be both risky and joyful. Play is a universal language, with the right support it can help overcome barriers of language, gender, age or ability.

⁹ International Play Association: Summary of UN GC article 31 Micro-soft Word -IPA Summary of UN GC article 31_v.3.docx (playwales.org.uk)

THE PLAY SPECTRUM



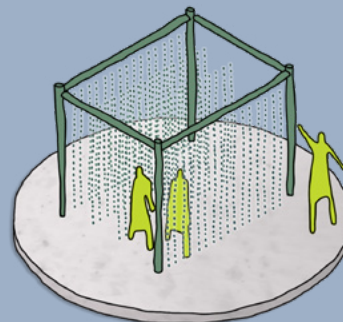
1. Social play
Developing social skills, learning to collaborate, regulate emotions and understand cause and effect. Example: playing with others.



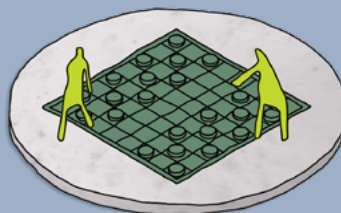
2. Mental health and wellbeing-based play
Play with opportunities for children to develop their skills in expression, adaptability and resilience.



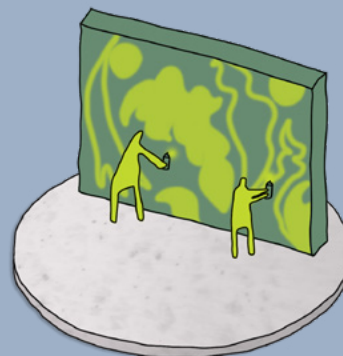
5. Creative play
Creative pursuits that develop emotional and social skills. Example: performance.



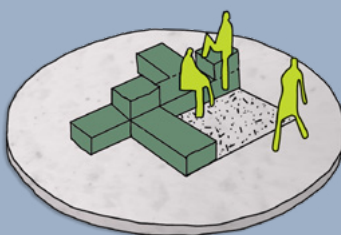
6. Cultural play
Engaging children in festivals and cultural activities, embracing individuality, traditions, and different communities. Example: light festival.



9. Intellectual play
Learning through play, nurturing independence, persistence, creative thinking, and problem solving. Example: board games.



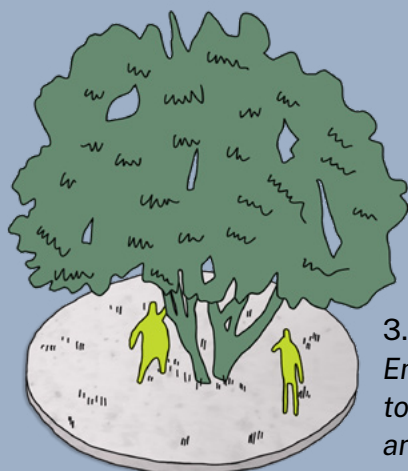
10. Artistic play
Playful experiences that allow children to improve their observational and physical motor skills. Example: painting.



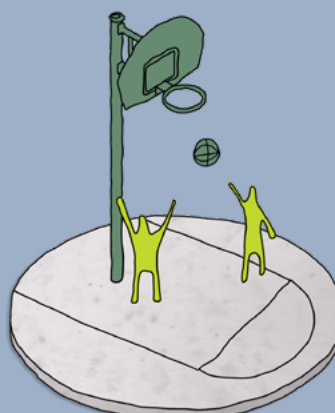
13. Recreational play
Engaged with in a child's free time it can be passive or active, and strengthens physical, ethical, emotional, and social capacities. Example: dancing.



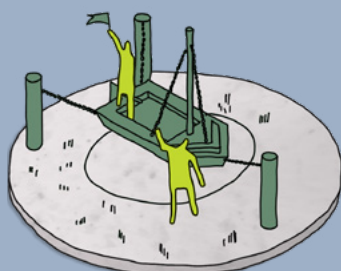
14. Reflective play
Times of rest and reflection, improving a child's ability to regulate their behaviour and emotions. Example: quiet play.



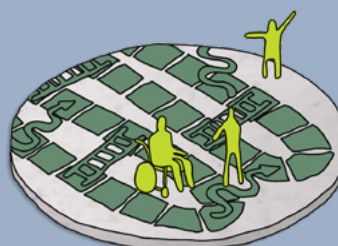
3. Autonomous play
Empowering a child to learn responsibility and nurture cognitive growth. Example: self-directed play.



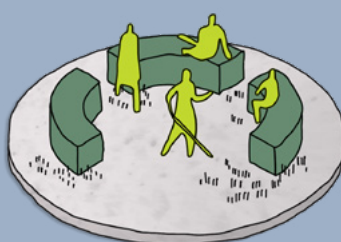
4. Competitive play
Developing emotional regulation, fairness, and learning to manage setbacks. Example: group sports.



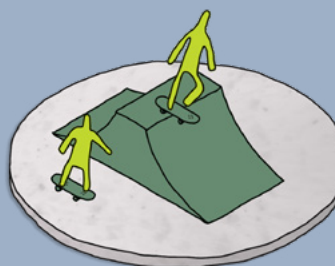
7. Imaginative play
Acting out experiences, learning decision making, creativity, and developing interpersonal skills. Example: role playing.



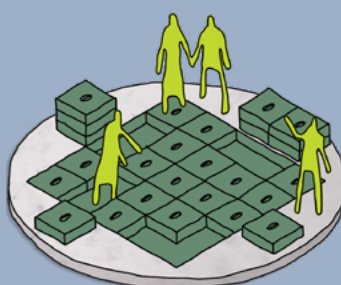
8. Inclusive play
Valuing the diversity of children's abilities and experiences. Example: accessible play spaces.



11. Non-compulsory play
Play that is driven by intrinsic motivation, rather than with an objective or predefined output. Example: resting.



12. Physical play
Movement-based play that stimulates both gross and fine motors skills. Example: skateboarding.



15. Cognitive play
The cognitive growth of a child through play, improving – among other things – language skills and problem solving. Example: memory games.



16. Emotional play
Developing a child's emotional awareness, including learning to deal with anxiety and fear in a safe playing environment. Example: natural play.

The importance of play

Children's access to play is a well-established human right¹¹. The UN convention states that a child – classified as a person under 18 years – should have access 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”¹². This Play Plan uses the terms “older” and “younger” children to describe under 18s without assigning fixed age ranges to them, recognising that age does not solely determine how children want to play. The charter defines play as an “activity that is freely chosen, intrinsically motivated and distinguished by means and not ends”¹³. It bears an important role in a child's development, enabling a child to be creative, enhancing their self-motivation, supporting a child in being physically active and improving a child's social and motor skills development. However, play is not just a future-focused activity, it is also important for children's wellbeing in the present, with moments of play being “vital life-enhancing processes for the time of playing”¹⁴. Play therefore supports the health and wellbeing of children in addition to supporting their social, physical, intellectual, cognitive, creative and emotional development.

Barriers to play

How our towns and cities make space for children is a test for how much we value their lives in society. Despite the unbounded potential and benefits of play, it is not always well supported by society or the built environment. Children need time, space and permission to support their play and possibilities to play with other children and adults. These requirements are interrelated and need to be addressed holistically to maximise play opportunities.

The decline in doorstep play and childhood freedoms in the late 20th century can be inversely mapped against the rise in car ownership. A 2007 report found that 71% of adults had played in the streets and neighbourhoods as children, compared with just 21% of children today¹⁵. Street space which was previously used by children for play and was once highly diverse, multi-functional space (for socialising, meeting family or friends) has gradually been reallocated to car storage and car movement resulting in a reduction in the available space for children to play and to move around their neighbourhoods safely. Permission to play is highly dependent on parents and carers feeling that their children will be safe. The rise in car traffic has led to increased car

Recommendation 4:

The built environment and spaces in-between our buildings can be considered as a barrier to the freedom of movement of children (and their ability to play). To promote and support children we need to rethink the fundamental assumptions of our streets, roads and urban spaces.

¹⁰ CRC-C-GC-17_en.pdf (crin.org)

¹¹ The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, source

¹² <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/crc.pdf>

¹³ <https://www.gov.scot/binaries/content/documents/govscot/publications/strategy-plan/2015/10/scotlands-play-strategy-play-ing-quality-equality-review-inclusive-play-scotland/documents/inclusive-play-scotland-con-text-concepts-current-research/inclusive-play-scotland-con-text-concepts-current-research/govscot%3Adocument/00488164.pdf>

¹⁴ Stuart Lester, 2020, *Everyday Playfulness*, Jessica Kingsley Publishers, London, p. 40

¹⁵ Playday, ‘2007: Our Streets too’. Playday from Tim Gill, *Urban Play-ground: How Child-Friendly Planning and design can save lives*, RIBA

Case Study: Westbury Pocket Park

A community park design, delivered and managed by volunteers. The park is comprised of a simple, cost-effective and easily maintainable construction of timber sleepers that form planters and benches the provide a quiet setting along the canal.

As well as the garden providing edible fruits and vegetables shared by the community, the sleepers are a playful offering for children to sit, climb and walk along, safe from traffic, in close proximity to housing and in a natural setting.

The park demonstrates a successful community-led intervention, championed by local councillors, supported by the council and private community grants, that celebrates and make visible local history.



Also known as Arboretum
Pocket Park

3.0 DEFINING PLAY

dependency where streets are so unsafe that children are driven to activities further away from home, limiting the time available for play, their independent access to it and placing additional burdens on parents and carers. Children who live in households which do not have access to a car have reduced access to opportunities to play where the streets in their neighbourhoods are considered unsafe. One consequence of the lack of confidence in the safety of streets and of children being driven to activities, is that fewer children are available for local play at any given time. This is significant given the importance of other children to play with in supporting and sustaining community play.

Barriers to inclusivity and diversity

There is a tendency towards prioritising competitive sports-based provision in designated play spaces for older children in the UK. This frequently takes the form of catch-all solutions such as MUGAs, sports pitches or skate parks. There is an emerging body of research that considers these gendered spaces, largely dominated by boys¹⁶. The physical presence of MUGAs by definition as 3m tall cages with few entrances/ exits are a well-meaning, but intimidating construction that

are likely to be dominated by a narrow group of users. This is not to say that girls do not want active places to play, but that attention needs to be given to their design. Similarly, these spaces can feel dangerous and intimidating to many boys who would also benefit from more thoughtful situation and design. Boys from Black, Asian and minoritised ethnic communities, for example, are significantly more likely to be stopped and searched and are disproportionately negatively affected by knife crime. These issues, therefore, all need to be taken into account in providing spaces for older children to play and hang out.

Barriers for younger children

Younger children are more likely to be guided or supervised in play by adults or carers. This limits their play opportunities. Some children will be inherently disadvantaged owing to their geography in the city (and nearby access to open space or play) or housing (access to private or communal open space or play). Other factors to play come from adult perceptions - whether or not they consider conditions (footpaths, crossing, junctions etc) safe, relaxing, enjoyable enough to walk, wheel or cycle with children on a regular basis. Very young children who are learning

Recommendation 5:

Children should be able to walk safely and conveniently to access local play sites (in some cases) without parental oversight, and certainly without needing access to a car or the cost of a bus.

Recommendation 6:

Play is not sport. New and renewed facilities need to broaden the spectrum of play opportunities on offer to appeal to a wider and more diverse range of users.

¹⁶ The campaign group Make Space for Girls have documented research on this issue from an international context. They suggest that spaces for competitive sport are dominated by boys but little provision is made for non-competitive sport or play activity that would be welcomed by both girls and a large proportion of boys too. Research Report (2023), p8-9.



Case Study: Heritage Cycle Trail

A pedestrian and cycle trail taking in key historic sites of the city devised by Worcester Civic Society. The project shows the potential of how active travel can be prompted (with the supporting infrastructure) to connect up and tell the history of Worcester.

heritagetrailworcester.org.uk/



Artist: Angry Dan www.angrydan.com

Case Study: Worcester Paint Festival

Successful, yearly art festival celebrating street, mural & graffiti artists in the city. Alongside showcasing renowned and emerging artists to create a vibrant outdoor art gallery, the project engages a teenage audience in creative play.

worcesterpaintfestival.co.uk/

Case Study: Play Streets

Play Streets – or ‘playing out’ sessions are informal neighbour-led short road closures, creating a safe space for children to play freely together on their doorstep. Play streets typically allow children to play without organised games or activities. In practice, this means children cycle, scoot, skate, chalk, skip, hopscotch, kick a ball around and make up games.

This model was first developed by parents (co-founders of Playing Out) on one street in Bristol in 2009 and has now been taken up by hundreds of street communities all over the UK – and beyond – supported by councils and local organisations. They offer:

- Short, regular road closures
- Free, child-led play
- All neighbours consulted and included
- Road legally and safely closed to through traffic
- Stewarded by residents
- Car access at walking pace
- Simple, ‘normal’ – not a street party!

playingout.net/



Credit: Playing Out

Recommendation 7:

Spaces for younger children to learn to walk/ride/scooter often begin on the doorstep or immediate street. Making these spaces safe to explore are as equally important as destination play areas.

to balance, pedal or propel themselves, need safe streets to develop these skills. The perception of safety and experience of travel will therefore be shaped by factors such as the width of pavement, buffer from traffic, availability of crossings and the speed and volume of traffic. Adults accompanying the children are frequently managing multiple children of varying ages carrying bikes, scooters, bags and manoeuvring pushchairs or prams (and often all at once). Making the environment safe, comfortable and convenient is therefore all the more important.

Barriers for older children

Older children are often considered more autonomous, finding their way in their wider neighbourhood or wider city with increasing independence. Children's "independence" is complex, and often interpersonal in nature. Older children are often with friends or siblings when exploring, socialising or playing. When they are not, they are indirectly connected to their parents via agreed protocols, or through phones and applications. They have a knowledge of spaces in their neighbourhood; popular places to gather, or unsafe and dangerous no-go areas. They also have greater mobility options - to walk, cycle or to use public

transport - which greatly increases their catchment. However, physical and social safety and the negative attitudes of adults can be a major barrier to older children's mobility and access to public space.

Environmental risks

Road Safety

Road traffic is the second highest cause of death for children aged 5-14 worldwide. The UK has seen a decline in traffic deaths and accidents year on year, however to a great extent this is largely because younger children are no longer travelling independently¹⁷. Young children in the most deprived areas are over five times more likely to be killed or seriously injured than those in the least deprived areas¹⁸. Transport planning has historically prioritised the movement of motor vehicles over people walking, wheeling or cycling. Levels of traffic, a lack of protected cycle lanes, narrow pavements dominated by parked cars, a lack of crossing points and the low priority of pedestrians at pedestrian crossings all make walking, wheeling and cycling less attractive, more difficult and dangerous. Making streets safer for children so that they can access play is therefore crucial.

¹⁷ Ian Robert, 'Why have child pedestrian death rates fallen?'. *British Medical Journal*, Vol 306, 1993, pp 1737-1739

¹⁸ Nicholas Rees, *Clear the air for children: The impact of air pollution on children*, United Nations, New York, 2016, p.45

3.0 DEFINING PLAY

Air Pollution

Poor air quality is the largest environmental risk to public health in the UK, as long-term exposure to air pollution can cause chronic conditions such as cardiovascular and respiratory diseases as well as lung cancer, leading to reduced life expectancy¹⁹. Children are more susceptible to the negative effects of air pollution than adults and equivalent exposure to adults has a multiple affect. A 2018 report by UNICEF described children's health being compromised by toxic emissions in the UK, impacting upon their right to play²⁰. For play to actively serve children it is therefore vital that access and siting of places to play should be away from unsafe, hazardous, or polluted environments which can directly inhibit a child's access and long-term health.

Noise Pollution

Noise pollution is a significant health problem, predominantly as consequence of motorised traffic. Noise is not just a mere annoyance but is linked to stress reactions in the body²¹. Noise has been seen to discourage children from playing outdoors and may also discourage people of all ages from walking or cycling²². It is therefore important to consider the siting of places for play in relation to local noise conditions.

Interventions which support play: Focus issues for Worcester City Play Plan

Children need to be able to access play spaces safely and they need a diverse range of affordances – affordances are physical features which offer different opportunities for interaction, and can be interpreted by individuals differently²³. To facilitate the changing needs of children, it is also necessary to provide recreational spaces that support a range of opportunities for play and socialising, and which also meets the needs of adults accompanying younger children.

Urban design and transport

Recent local and national policy in the UK has attempted to address the lack of access to play opportunities in the urban environment. Play streets, supported by the charity Playing Out²⁴, have allowed over 45,000 children to play out in their own streets since 2009. Given that children prefer to play close to home – on the 'doorstep' – and that street play is also good for community sociability, play streets can play an important role in increasing play opportunities. In addition, all journeys start from the front door and play streets can help build skills such as scooting and cycling in a

¹⁹ Public health England, www.gov.uk/government/publications/health-matters-air-pollution/health-matters-air-pollution

²⁰ Thomas Bateson and Joel Schwartz, 'Childrens response to air pollutants', *Journal of Toxicology and Environmental Health, Part A*, Vol. 71, no. 3, 2007, pp 181

²¹ Tim Gill, *Urban Playground: How Child-Friendly Planning and design can save lives*, RIBA Publishing

²² Paul Tranter and Rodney Tolley, *Slow Cities: Conquering our speed additction for health and sustainability*, Elsevier, Amsterdam, 2020

²³ Kyttä, Marketta, "The extent of children's independent mobility and the number of actualized affordances as criteria of a child-friendly environment", *Journal of Environmental Psychology*, 2004, 24:2, 179-198.

²⁴ <https://playingout.net/>

Case Study: Baltic Street Adventure Playground

Baltic Street is a constantly changing playground made up of tyre swings, tree houses, balancing lines, tunnels and a large climbing frame. There is big collection of loose parts, including ropes, crash-mats, tunnels, nets and balls. sand pit, a fruit and vegetable garden and food preparation. The playground is staffed by playworkers who have intimate knowledge of the site. Importantly, the project distinguishes between potential **risks** and **hazards**.

balticstreetadventureplay.co.uk/



Credit: Baltic Street Adventure Playground



Aspern Seestadt, Vienna: wider pavements and less traffic throughout the cities new neighbourhoods to make it easier to navigate with children or prams

Case Study: Vienna

Vienna is a good example of a city which has attended to ‘gender-mainstreaming’ in all walks of public life from public spaces, to transport, language and housing. Gender mainstreaming is the concept of ensuring women and men are accounted for equally in policy, legislation and resource allocation. As part of this ongoing plan, they have developed a range of projects looking at public safety in parks in less privileged and more ethnically diverse neighbourhoods. In practice, implementation is wide ranging from new neighbourhoods (Aspern Seestadt) to new public squares (Reumannplatz).

Reumannplatz combines play areas, extensive planting and trees and a dedicated Mädchenbühne (girls’ stage) that is open to everyone but was developed through workshops with nearby schools.

www.aspern-seestadt.at/en

Also see: Glasgow as the first feminist city

Recommendation 8:

Play must be inclusive and offer opportunities for all children, parents and carers. This often means that the environment around play sites needs supporting facilities from lighting and location, to toilets and shelter.

safe environment. Change is also afoot in a wide range of transport planning initiatives, from the Welsh Government's adoption of 20mph speed limits in built up areas through to school streets and the UK government's Gear Change²⁵ policy and associated LTN 1/20²⁶ guidance. This recommends Low Traffic Neighbourhoods (LTNs) to remove through traffic and promote active travel in residential areas and the construction of cycle lanes on main roads. Reductions in the cost of public transport for children, in places such as London, has also widened access to it²⁷.

Environments for play

Environments for play can be informal or structured. What is vital is that they meet a diverse range of needs through offering a range of affordances. Formal play spaces do not have to rely on traditional off-the-peg equipment, and landscaping or art installations can afford children with as much play value as traditional play equipment. Informal and incidental playable spaces can make innovative use of the public realm, allowing children to engage in play throughout their city and not just at specific play sites. Embedding play within the urban context demonstrates to children that they are valued and their presence within their city is welcomed. The cities of Rotterdam,

Barcelona and Tirana offer examples of including incidental play in urban contexts²⁸.

Inclusivity and diversity

Play spaces should offer opportunities to all children. In the UK, the Equality Act 2010 lists age, disability, gender, race and sexual orientation as protected characteristics. In addition, children growing up in disadvantaged neighbourhoods are less likely to have access to parks and open spaces. These factors must all be considered when designing and prioritising play interventions. For example, this can mean attention to the location of play spaces, lighting, shelter, toilets and access for disabled children, parents and carers.

²⁵ https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/904146/gear-change-a-bold-vision-for-cycling-and-walking.pdf

²⁶ https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/951074/cycle-infrastructure-design-ltn-1-20.pdf

²⁷ <https://tfl.gov.uk/fares/free-and-discounted-travel>

²⁸ Tim Gill, *Urban Playground: How Child-Friendly Planning and design can save lives*, RIBA Publishing qualities of outdoor play spaces. These terms were devised to offer local authorities' technical guidance

4.0

MAPPING THE GAPS



The South Worcestershire Open Space Assessment (SWOSA) report has already established that there is an existing deficit in access to play for young children and teenagers. This is shaped by the geography of where you live - some areas have overprovision, others underprovision.

The aim of the following section is to analyse in more detail where play is located and who has access to it. This will provide an evidence base to inform where new play provision is required.

Methodology

The SWOSA identified gaps by wards with key findings when it comes to children's play spaces that two thirds of the wards fall below the Green Flag standards. When it comes to Youth Play spaces,

all wards fall short of the standards with half having no provision at all. Whilst it was a helpful methodology to the quantum across Worcester, we consider the breakdown by wards unhelpful as residents move fluidly and often unaware of boundaries.

Our approach continues with the Green Flag assessment criteria, but instead of quantities and hectareage, focuses on resident access using the pedshed.

What is a pedshed?

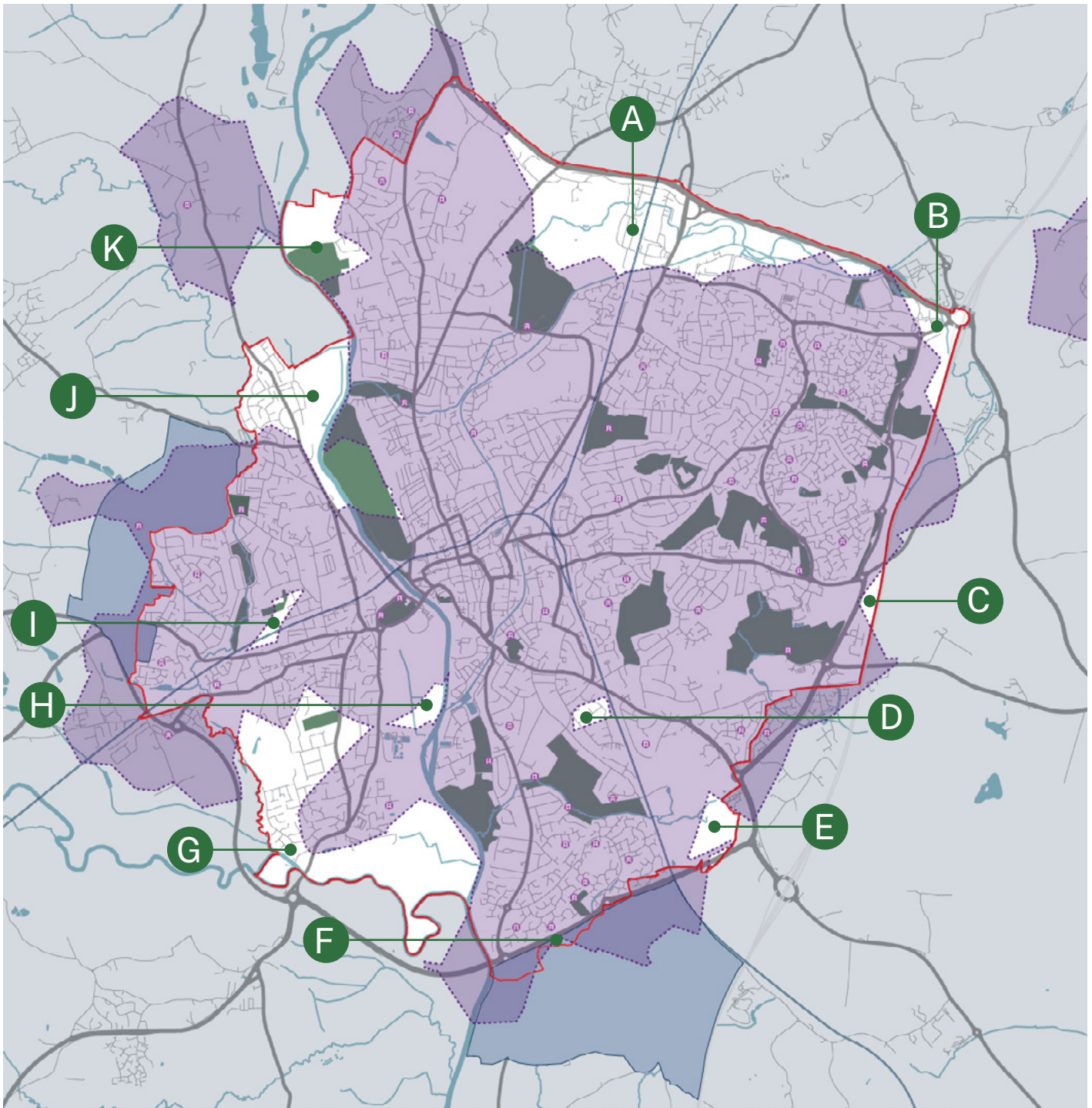
Ped shed is short for pedestrian shed. A ped shed is an area defined from a certain location point (in this instance, play area sites) by a standard distance or time. The outline catchment shape of a pedshed is defined by a walking distance or time (in this instance 12 minutes from young childrens play sites and 15 minutes from teenager play sites).

Traditionally, these catchment shapes would have been drawn as perfect circles without taking into account the context and conditions of the built environment that defines the walkability of a place. A pedshed on the other hand takes into account the actual travel time by analysing the time it takes to walk down indirect streets, the time it takes cross a busy road or navigate roundabouts on foot and barriers such a trainlines, canals or rivers and crossings.

The results are an accurate methodology that creates irregular (isochrone) shape maps that represent the accessibility for residents of Worcester to play sites. This allows the city to better understand coverage and build an evidence base to identify gaps in provision and plan for the future.

4.0 MAPPING THE GAPS

Young children: existing 12 minute pedshed



Key

- | | | | |
|--|-------------------------------|---|---|
|  | Worcester City boundary |  | Existing 12 minute pedshed |
|  | Train line |  | South Worcester Development Policy (Housing delivered as part of the 'Urban Extension') |
|  | Existing Playground locations | | |

Our analysis of young childrens play (left) indicates a deficit (the unshaded areas) in children's play in a few small pockets on the periphery of the city .

There is a shortfall in play spaces in the north of the city (A.) in Claines and Warndon wards, a result of the Golf Club and the Trading Estate, but non-residential.

To the north-east of the city, in Warndon Parish North (B.), the confluence of the industrial estate and the A4440 results in a shortage, but is non-residential.

Between the M5 and A4440, the site of Worcester Livestock Market (C.), in Warndon Parish South is a gap, but is non-residential.

In Battenhall ward (D.), the train line, and surrounding cul-de-sacs results in a small area of the ward being short. This gap impacts a small number of residential properties on Battenhall Drive,

Agricultural land to the north-east of St. Peter's ward (E.) is short, but non-residential.

The south of St Peter's, the ward is divided by the A4440, resulting in a small area with no play facilities (F.). However, the development 2,600 new homes just to the south of Worcester's city boundary (as part of the Worcester South Urban Extension).

Portions of south and west Bedwardine (G.) are short, partially shaped by the River Severn that divides the city longitudinally. To the west the suburb of Lower Wick which is impacted. Although children and adolescents in this area do have access to open green spaces, there are no sites specifically demarcated for play .

To the east of Bedwardine is a site defined by Worcester Sewage Works (H.), and non-residential.

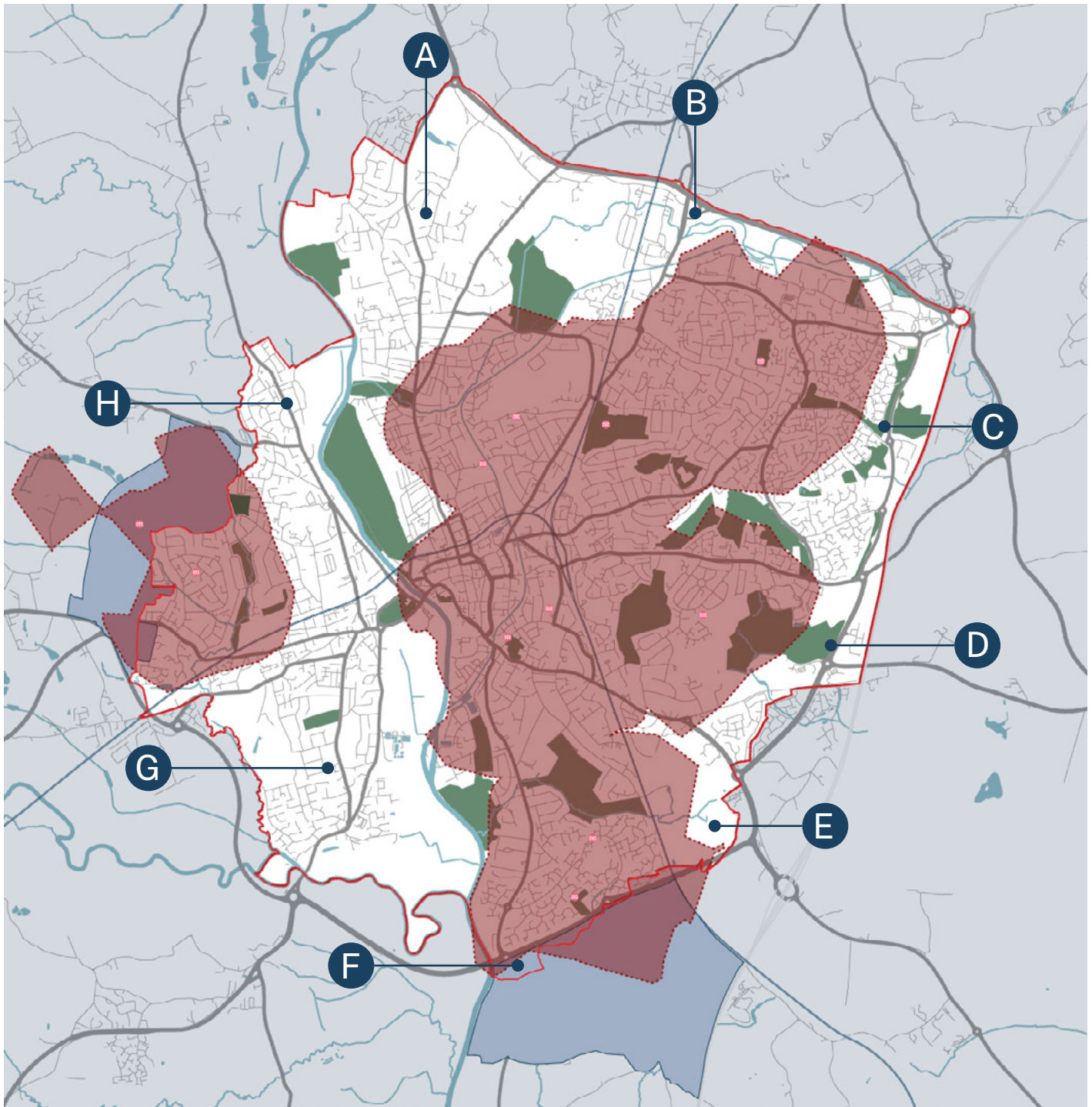
St. John's ward has close to full play coverage with a small exception surrounding the train line, St. John's Cemetery, and the Everoak Trading Estate (I.), leading to a few properties on Hopton Street, Rowley Hill Street and Buck Street being short.

In St. Clement ward the River Severn creates a gap in access to play (J.), with the most northerly affecting access to play spaces. However, plans for Kepax Bridge (a new pedestrian and cycling crossing) will largely correct this.

In Northwick, to the west of Claines ward (K.), a number of properties have no access to play within the ped shed. Similarly, to St. Clements, the River Severn prevents access to neighbouring areas of play, such as the play space at Hallow to the north-west of the ward.

4.0 MAPPING THE GAPS

Older Children: existing 15 minute pedshed



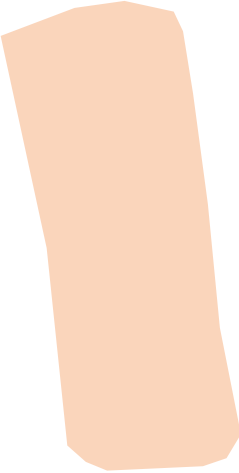
Key

- | | | | |
|--|-------------------------|---|---|
|  | Worcester City boundary |  | Existing 15 minute pedshed |
|  | Train line |  | South Worcester Development Policy (Housing delivered as part of the 'Urban Extension') |
|  | Existing MUGA locations | | |



The ped shed diagrams indicates that Worcester's youth play provision is centralised, with a greater number of facilities to the east of the River Severn. Wards on the city boundaries have markedly limited access to facilities, with Claines, St. Clement and Bedwardine wards particularly affected by this deficit.

To the north, a sizable portion of the city (A.) has no access. As with the young children's play ped shed, the shortfall covers an area that includes the Racecourse, Ravenmeadow Golf Club and parts of the Blackpole Trading Estate West. However, the mapping also indicates that a majority of residents in the north of city have no access within 15 minutes of their home.



Blackpole Trading Estate East and Blackpole Retail Park (B.) and sit adjacent to agricultural land. Whilst these are non-residential a small number of dwellings to the north of Warndon ward sit beyond the ped shed boundary, with young adults needing to walk to the far east of the ward to access play amenities.

In the north-east of Worcester (C.), beyond the A4440, is Warndon Woodland Local Nature Reserve, with agricultural land located to the north, warehouse units and farming land to the south. These areas sit beyond the

youth play ped shed, but are non-residential. By contrast, to the east of the A4440 Warndon Parish North and Warndon Parish South have a substantial scarcity of youth play in their residential areas, with no youth play located within these ward boundaries.

D. The warehouse and business units in Nunnery Park, and the fields that run parallel, are located outside of the youth play ped shed. Residential properties in these areas (south Warndon Parish South and south Nunnery wards) have no local youth play facilities.

E. Contains farmland with no residential within.

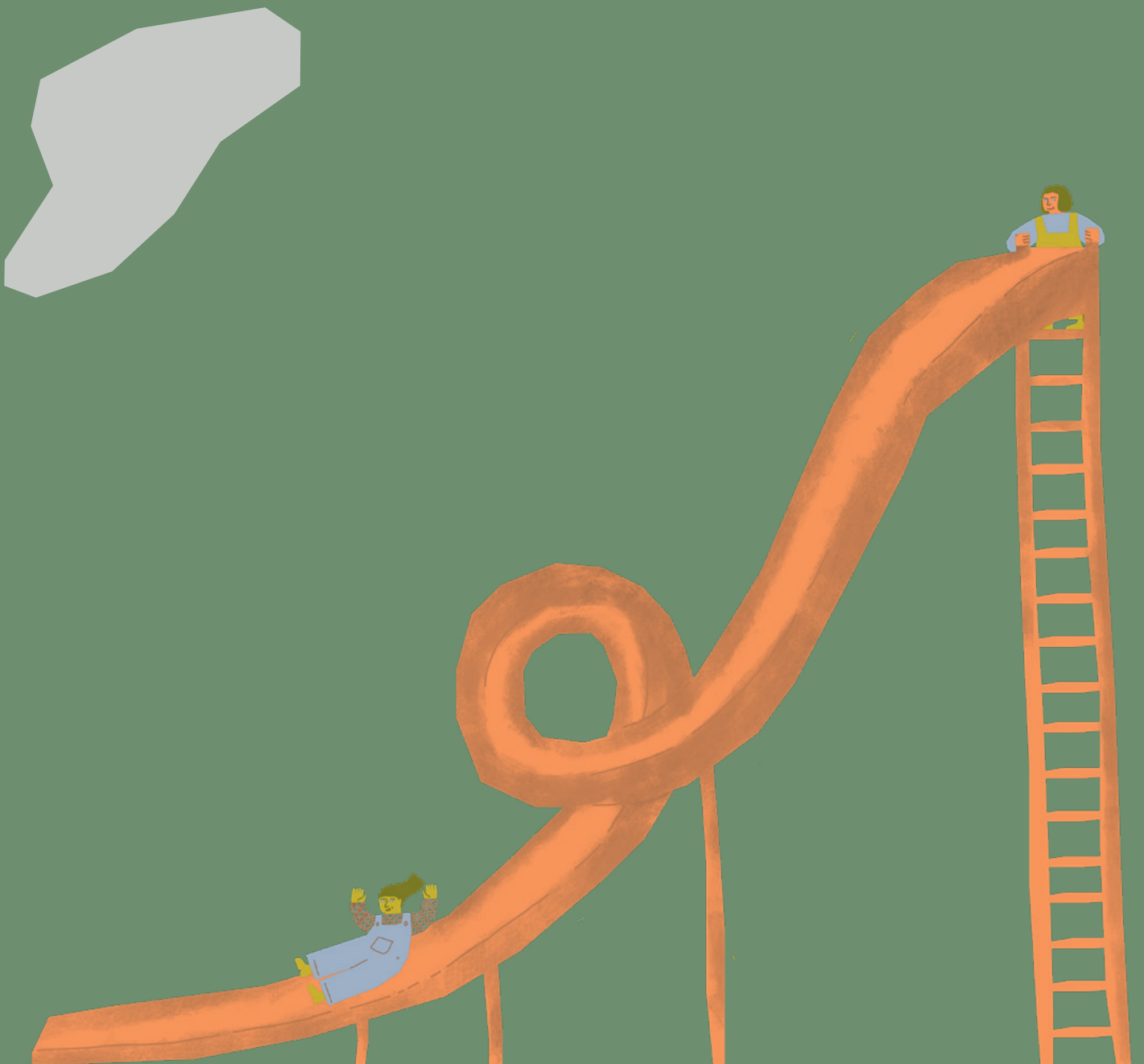
F. Small pocket of current farm land that will part of the emerging urban extension.

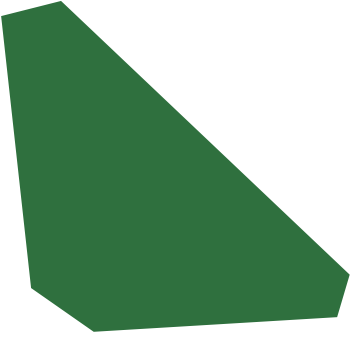
G. Large suburban inter-war housing currently without any provision. Flanked to the west by the Country Club golf course and to the east chapter meadows.

H. Dines Green Skate Park and MUGA (to the far west) sit beyond Worcester's city boundary, however, they have been included due to their utilisations by residents in neighbouring wards.

5.0

ENGAGEMENT





The shaping of the future of play in Worcester requires the voice of children young and old to be elevated. To begin the process, the Play Plan is shaped by a series of engagement exercises that combined in-person events with online mapping.

The events took place between January and March 2023. Worcester City Council also ran supplementary events in schools, with Ward Councillors, and flash mob consultation in parks during February half-term.

In-person engagement activities provided qualitative input and the opportunity to hold face-to-face discussions with residents of all ages and backgrounds about play spaces in their local area and city-wide, ways in which they're currently travelling to, and accessing play opportunities, and their ideas for future play in Worcester.

The spatial element (the large map) helped participants think about how the geography and characteristics of Worcester impacts on their travel choices and play behaviours. The interactive and tactile element of the engagement method encouraged participants of all ages to give us their creative input in terms of big ideas for future play in Worcester.

The sessions helped us to gain a deeper understanding of the current state of play provision and how it is being accessed, used and enjoyed

and its importance within the city's public spaces and sense of community. It emerged that there is an appetite for evolving play provision, duplicating certain popular facilities and a desire to include a broader spectrum of play provision in the future.

There is a consistently held perception that existing provision does not adequately engage the interest of older children. This perception was generally backed-up by speaking to older children who gave detailed descriptions of their own experiences in what was on offer and how safe they felt. The level of insight was articulate and revealing and has subsequently translated into both site-specific and strategic recommendations.

Consultation responses at each of the five in-person events are summarised below. Direct quotations are included to bring the voices of participants into the document.

5.0 ENGAGEMENT

Event 1

*Tuesday 24 January (am) at
Tudor Way Family Centre,
Dines Green*

The session focussed on meeting and talking with parents, grandparents and guardians and pre-school aged children. A supervised visit by the local pre-school brought lots of colourful and imaginative ideas. Themes emerging from the feedback included that there is limited access to play spaces for children with disabilities as well as consideration of the needs of Children with Special Educational Needs (SEN).

Adventurous, natural and messy play is popular and the County Park/Worcester Woods was often given as positive case study. Adults prefer play spaces and destinations with wider amenity facilities such as WCs, café, warmth/shelter. The Splash pad at Gheluvert is seen as a top attraction but very busy and the city could do with another – to the west of the city. Concerns amongst this audience centred around play spaces meant for younger children being dominated by older children with nothing else to do and the amount of traffic on the roads causing a fear of walking, scooting or cycling to access play spaces.

There is limited access to play spaces for children with disabilities. Needs greater accessibility for wheelchairs and push chairs.

'Big kids' dominate the play spaces at the Green Hub and there is lots of smashed glass.

Parent

Could do with something more for 'little ones', with more sensory play... something for children between 3-7 years.

I only go to the city centre to buy stuff and eat. I wouldn't stay there.

Older child

A display for parents and carers of what activities and classes are on for children across Worcester. Would help parents find classes, as currently relies on word of mouth.

Warndon Hub is great. The play space has/had moveable elements for play, great for nonverbal and neurodivergent children.

Young people get relegated to quieter/less safe areas in parks.

Older Child

Having access to toilets makes a difference with young children who are being potty trained... Having changing facilities and coffee is important!

Like mud kitchen and forest school activities.

More benches please (don't design them out because of anti-social behaviour)

* A comprehensive record of comments can be found in the appendix



Parents and Younger Children Drop-in event at Tudor Way Children's Centre



Drop-in event at The Hive

Event 2

*Tuesday 24 January (PM) at
Perdiswell Young People's
Leisure Centre*

This session combined users of Perdiswell Young People's Leisure Centre and members of Worcestershire Youth Cabinet. Valuable contributions were received around the design of social spaces intended for young people, feelings of safety and the importance of the river to young people in the city. At this event (as at subsequent events) Diglis Playing Fields was praised by participants.

The notion of youth spaces becoming scenes of territorial behaviour was raised. This theme has re-emerged at subsequent events and is an issue experienced by many of the young people who participated across the engagement events. Youth Cabinet members' discussed the idea of having a series, or cluster, of social spaces (landscaped seating areas) that allow for a number of smaller groups of friends to sit and chat, nearby to other groups, yet with a degree of separation granting several groups autonomy over their own space. This suggestion was in response to youth shelters and other spaces such as MUGAs, that tend to be designed around a single focus and are susceptible to being dominated by a particular group, or whichever group gets there first, often a group of young males.

More places for mums to feed

Accessible and inclusive play spaces where children with disabilities can join in.

Children with SEN needs struggle with transitions. A board that could allow non-verbal children to communicate and allow parents to explain the sequence of play and leaving would be good.

Not all children are into sports. Would be good to have places to socialise, like libraries and cafés.

Older child

Could we have a central database of sports groups? Especially for girls.

Older child

Play spaces should be walkable and safe to cycle to.

Older child

More natural and imaginative play that uses natural materials... challenging, tactile... a place for adventure!

Play to be in close proximity of play facilities and food.

A welcoming city centre for teens.

A place to climb, balance, and take risks.

* A comprehensive record of comments can be found in the appendix

Event 3

*Friday 3 February (PM)
Perdiswell Leisure Centre*

This session sought to take advantage of high footfall through the leisure centre at one of the busiest times of the week during after-school swimming lessons. Participants included parents and school children from both the local area around Perdiswell, but also those that travel to the pool from elsewhere in the city. This mix resulted in a good geographic spread and a diverse range of issues raised.

Worcester Woods Country Park - we like the tyre swings, monkey bars - lots of variation. We also like open wild spaces where we can walk.

I don't know where my local play spaces are...need to be more visible. An online database?

Diglis Park - Loads of skateboarders, but nowhere for them to play. Could there be a skate park here?

Ronkswood hub not safe on your own. Always looks dodgy, but it is improving.

We want an indoor space we can hang out in. Like with a pool table. We often get moved on from McDonalds or the bus station.

Older child

Horizon Hub area needs investment, for kids, youths and adults. It needs new play areas, new play pitches and a community garden.

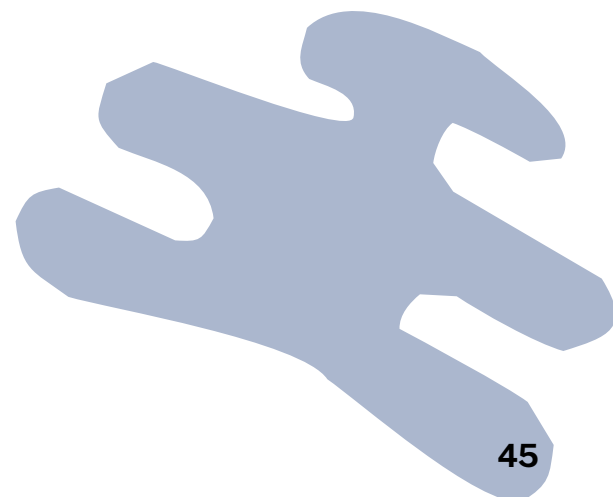
Swings and slides. Play needs to engage with the imagination.

Could you make more/better use of space around the Hive? Places for young & teens. The balconies are underused.

Parks are either aimed at early years or teens. What is there for children in-between?

More benches please (don't design them out because of anti-social behaviour).

* A comprehensive record of comments can be found in the appendix



5.0 ENGAGEMENT

Event 4

Saturday 4 February city centre public drop-in exhibitions at The Hive (10am – 2pm) and The Guildhall (12 – 4pm).

Drop-in exhibitions were held at two city centre locations and the overlapping timings meant the busy Saturday period was covered. Volunteers from Worcester City Council stationed in busy streets helped to raised awareness of the events taking place. The Hive session was well-attended by younger children, parents and guardians who use the children's library, story times and café. The Guildhall was attended by a cross-section of residents as you might expect from Saturday afternoon footfall along High Street. This session include a high representation of young people (11-17).

Cripplegate Park needs a hang out space for teenagers

Older child

Picnic spaces should be essential - allows people to bring their own food (useful in the cost-of-living crisis)

Parent

Facilities for parents e.g., coffee shops and toilets needed to support parents and carers use of play areas

Parent

Good walking and cycling links needed. Not everyone has access to a car. Sometime I have to take a two buses across town

Carer

Teenagers need more stimulating play.. pump tracks, skate parks and big swings.

Older child

Houses and huts – more creative play is needed

Parent

Integrating play into the city.

Parent

Better signposting for toddler classes. Could we have one place for people to find out what is happening in the city?

As a new resident of Worcester we don't know where our local or nearest play areas are. How do we find this?

Parents

We need better spaces for girls. Where do they go?

* A comprehensive record of comments can be found in the appendix

"It's really annoying that I have to think carefully about where I go just because I was born a girl"

Older child

"We like to play in the street!"

Older child

"I always need to know where my exits are"

Older child

"Sports cages [MUGAs] – not attractive to girls, dominated by teenage boys"

Older child

"We avoid the alleyway between the Station and JD sports - its unsafe"

Older child

"Curved benches where girls can sit together in groups"

Older child

"Next skate park in Bromsgrove – you have to take the train there. It's not convenient. We really want one here – food and toilets"

"Like to cycle by the river."

"Places to charge phones is very important – keep in touch with carers. Pod in Crowngate is too forced!"

Older child

"We want an indoor space we can hang out in. Like with a pool table. We often get moved on from McDonalds or the bus station. Worcester needs more sitting spaces".

The majority of the feedback during this session related to recent experiences and ideas about future provision. Several themes emerged from talking to an audience of primarily young people/teenagers, many of whom spoke to us in large groups. Themes include how the river is an attractive destination for young people to meet, sit, eat, walk and talk. Seats and benches are popular but must be designed in a way that accounts for safety concerns. Issues concerning gender exist in terms of access to, and use of public space, a lack of provision and consideration for teenage girls is a particular issue. Many of girls spoke about safety concerns and the importance of being in a group, avoiding certain areas, knowing where their exits are, and being able to charge their phone. There is an aspiration for space(s) in which young people can legitimately and safely gather together for music, hanging out or watching televised sport.

* A comprehensive record of comments can be found in the appendix

5.0 ENGAGEMENT

Placechangers

Online portal, open to access between 20th January to 19th March 2023.

To increase the audience and offer the opportunity to shape the future of play to those unable to attend in-person events, we worked with online engagement tool Placechangers to map existing play sites across Worcester. The tool was widely promoted locally in the press, online and directly through schools and youth groups with support of the councils community engagement team. The online tool also allows participants to tag new areas and leave site specific comments giving the city a good data set for the current lie of the land and public opinion on play and parks.



*Older children from Rivers School make comments using Placechangers.
Photo credit: Worcester City Council*

Play isn't just for children. It would be great to see play equipment for seniors using equipment. Young and older could play together in Worcester.

Some play areas feel unsafe as they are not overlooked or 'out of the way. Natural surveillance needed.

In reference to Ronkswood Hub

Not enough places for children to be in the city centre other than fast food restaurants. Need places to chill with seating and somewhere to charge your phone.

Please provide a park we can walk (and cycle) to. Driving to a park ... with small children isn't achievable.

More facilities for play for disabled children would be welcome, specially adapted swings for example

Skate Park Needed! The amount of skaters that use cathedral square is annoying, but you can't blame them using it as their only option is Perdiswell, which is quite a distance away.

Nowhere for children to play in the city centre. Families may spend longer in the city centre if they can have a break for play. Families live in the city centre too.

Space around the Hive underused. Current facilities are too far away from the centre. Invest in urban sports and give young adults somewhere safe and central to go and have fun.

Can we find a place for a Forest School or natural play-down by the racecourse?

There should be facilities for more female focused activities and a more balanced sports offer.

522
Responses

1542
Sessions (visitors)

480
Respondents

4
Schools responded

4
Youth clubs
responded



Word map of the most frequent terms from respondents on Placechangers

6.0 PROPOSALS



‘One should be able to play everywhere, easily, loosely, and not forced into a playground’,

Colin Ward, *The child in the City*

The vision for Worcester is one that leads by example. It sets out a plan for play that is inclusive, accessible, engaging and supportive, and sets out a pathway for incremental change across the city.

This section sets out proposals for future play provision in Worcester, for older and younger children, helping the city to target delivery in the places that need it most and respond to the aspirations of children and their parents and care givers. The proposals are set out under three main categories;

- | | |
|--|--|
| <p>i) Where: establishing priorities for the location of new play spaces and facilities and the integration of play as part of wider public realm and urban design plans for the city.</p> | <p>Overarching all of these recommendations is the principle that play ought to be thought about in the broadest sense; as a provision that makes the city available, accessible, welcoming and supportive of children. The proposals in this section aim to establish spaces for children to be, to have a visible presence within the city and become powerful stakeholders in shaping the future of their city.</p> |
| <p>ii) What it is: design principles for improving the variety of play provision and supporting a wider range of individuals needs and interests</p> | |
| <p>iii) How to: a framework for delivering play provision through the planning process to ensure that investment is well-used, targeted where it is most needed, and brings maximum benefit.</p> | |

WHERE...

‘Children are an indicator species for cities... The presence of children shows the quality of urban habitats, in the same way that the presence of salmon in a river shows the quality of that habitat’.

(Tim Gill, p7)

Attitudes to accessing play are determined by perceptions and experiences of moving around Worcester. We found that parents will often travel across the city to access preferred parks or play areas with the facilities they need. Often these journeys are by car. Whilst teenagers may have freedom to travel further to specific play destinations such as skateparks by themselves, in conversations with older children and their families many said they felt uncomfortable about walking or cycling around and beyond their neighbourhood. As such, older children are regularly being driven to skateparks and other specific destinations to access play.

The first priority for improving the play landscape of the city should be a focus on improving access. Our mapping has highlighted certain areas where local play provision is lacking, or due to poor access connections is outside of the

distances recommended by Play England for accessing play spaces. New spaces for play are therefore needed, alongside a focus on improving childrens ability to access it without reliance on cars (‘parent taxis’).

Given the scale of the mapping that we were able to carry out, we have documented gaps in play provision at the ‘destination’ and ‘local play’ scales. We also identified an overall lack of doorstep play and what we have termed ‘on the way’ play in civic spaces which are addressed in our proposals below.

Connecting Places

Focusing on children’s mobility, particularly their independent and interdependent mobility, promotes thinking about the safety and the quality of experience of moving around the city. Making routes safer and more enjoyable for children also makes them

Recommendation 9:

Establish city-wide standards for creating safer streets for children/ child-safe routes to be implemented in all neighbourhood and public realm projects across the city. Standards should be developed in collaboration with landscape, ecology, highways and active travel teams and primarily address schools, neighbourhood streets and city centre routes.

‘Children who walk to primary school develop road safety awareness and are less vulnerable when they walk independently to secondary School’.

Sustrans

better for adults too, helping to encourage more active travel journeys with wider benefits for public health, well-being, air quality, and the enjoyment of living in the city.

How it is manifest depends on the context and types of routes.

Within residential neighbourhoods, a simple exercise in plotting a typical journey from home to school (primary and secondary), the local play park or shop, neighbourhood to neighbourhood, is the starting point for making improvements that create safer and more welcoming streets for children.

Wider, obstacle free pavements, preferably with a segregated barrier of planting, sustainable drainage systems (SuDS), trees or landscaping features create protected pavements and the perception of safety along roads, particularly for young children learning to bike or

parents with buggies and children.

The safer people feel, the more likely they are to move more frequently around their neighbourhood and play areas. This means reducing the volume of traffic on residential streets, and where this cannot be achieved ensuring there are appropriate crossing points.

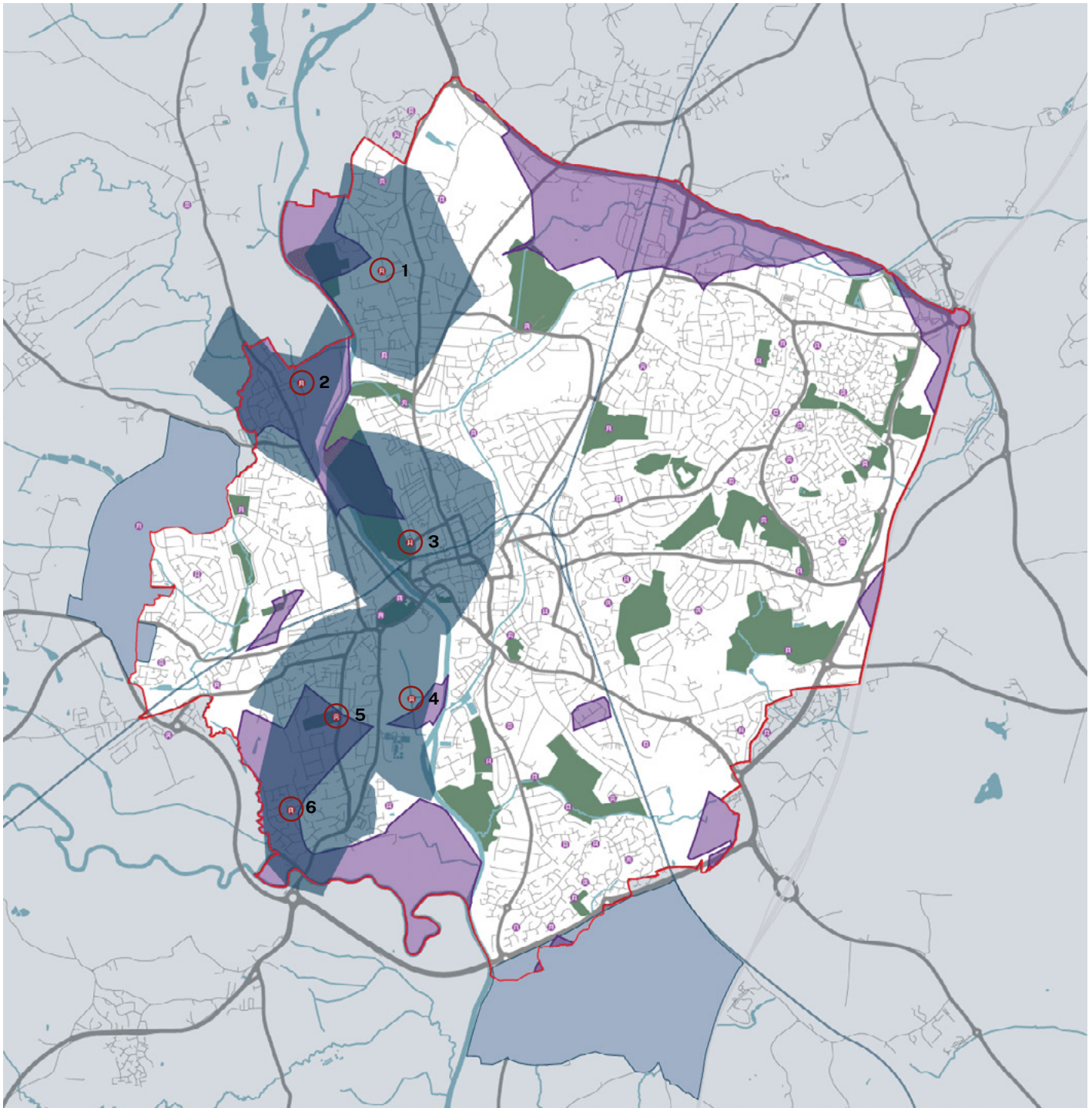
In the city centre, active travel routes to destinations that are popular with young people, such as the high street, cathedral and river walk should be designed to enable young people to travel independently. They should be safe (well-lit, populated and overlooked), segregated from traffic, direct (walkers and cyclists shouldn't have to take the long way around), and easy to access for all (gentle gradients, smooth

Recommendation 10:

Establish city-wide standards to prioritise pedestrians and cyclists at crossing points along active travel routes and at all busy junctions near play spaces, schools and neighbourhood hubs (e.g. local high streets, community centres).

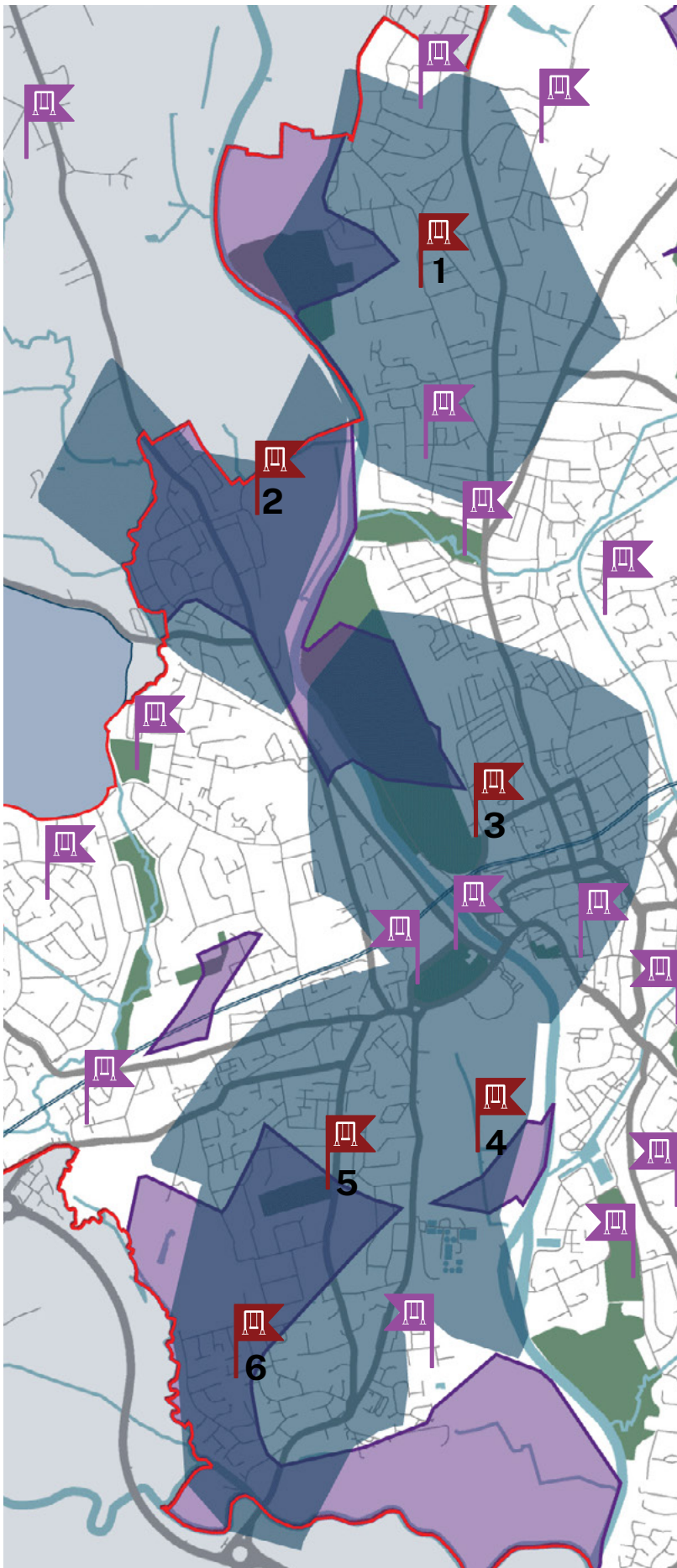
6.0 PROPOSALS

Young children: proposed playground locations



Key

	Worcester City boundary		Area identified as being beyond the 12 minute pedshed		12 minute pedshed as a result of proposed playground location
	Train line		Proposed Playground locations		South Worcester Development Policy (Housing delivered as part of the 'Urban Extension')
	Existing Playground locations				



Suggested new locations

1	Northwick Playing Fields
2	Area north of Hallow Recycling Centre
3	Area near Pitchcroft car park
4	Area near Chapter Meadows
5	Pitmaston Park
6	Green south of Weyburn Close

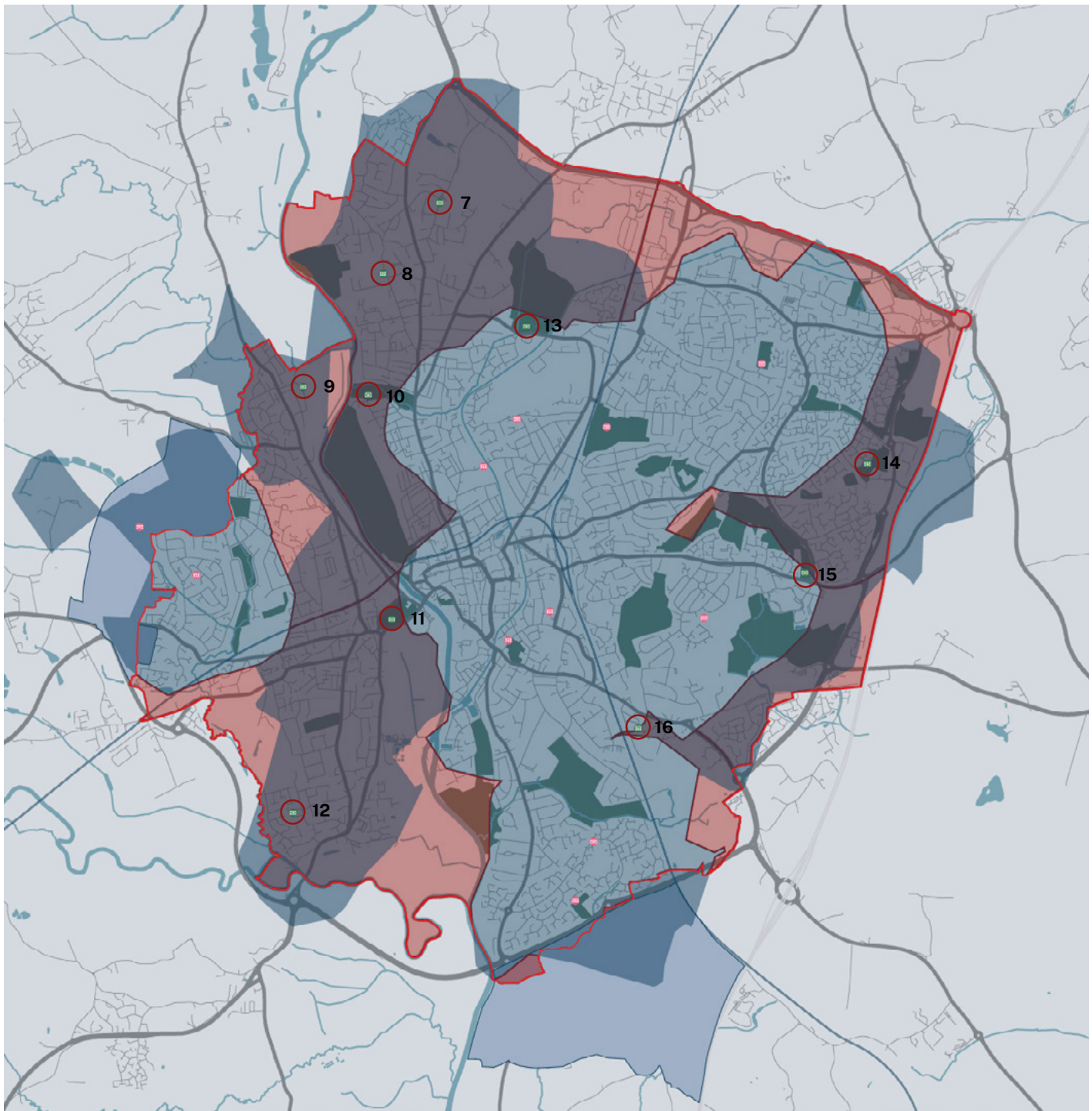
* These are suggested site locations to achieve a 100% coverage for the young children of Worcester to access play sites within 12 min walking distance. Actual sites would be subject to detailed assessment and design. There is flexibility in actual locations

Key

- A Gheluvelt Park
- B Worcester Racecourse
- C Cripplegate Park
- D Pitmaston Park
- E Diglis Playing Fields
- F Cherry Orchard Nature Reserve
- Worcester City boundary
- = Train line
- 🚩 Existing Playground locations
- 🚩 Proposed Playground locations
- Area identified as being beyond the 12 minute pedshed
- 12 minute pedshed as a result of proposed playground location
- South Worcester Development Policy (Housing delivered as part of the 'Urban Extension')

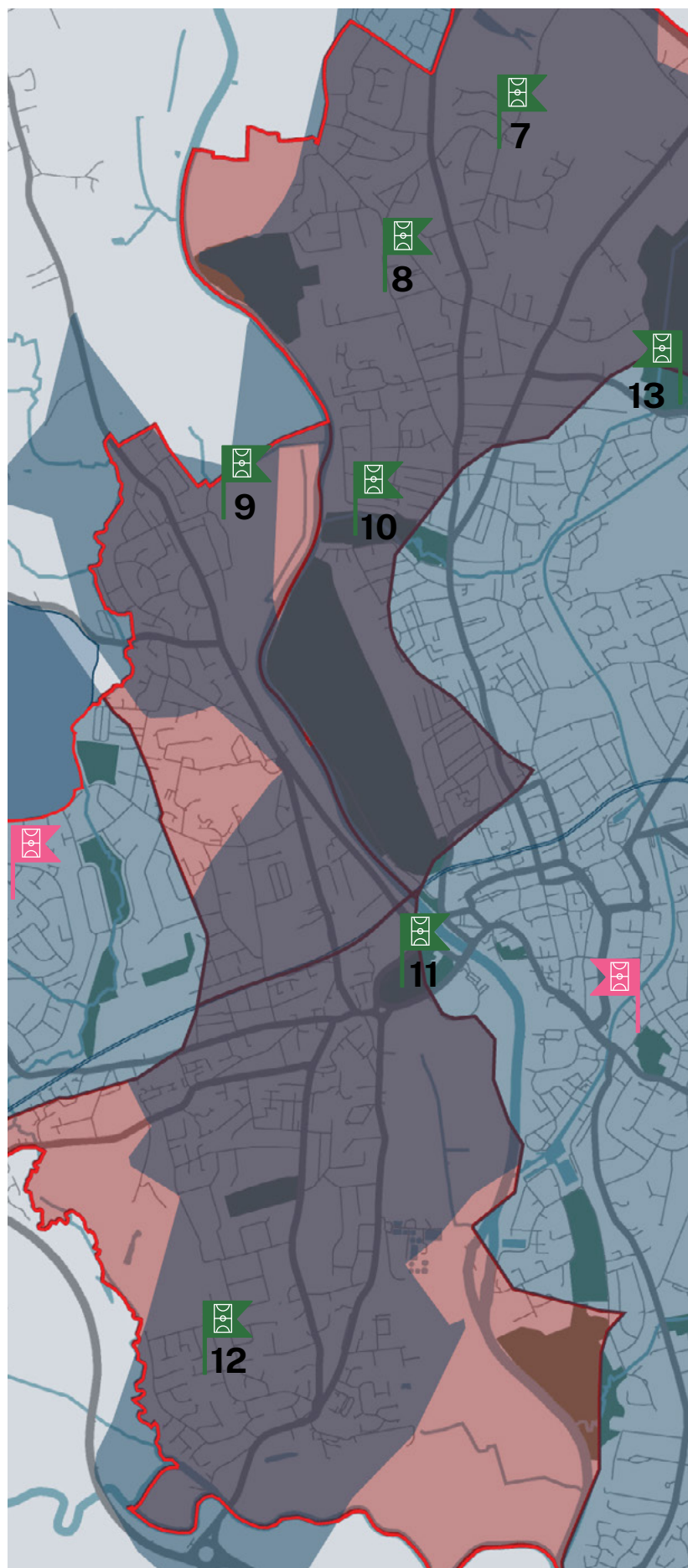
6.0 PROPOSALS

Older children: proposed play locations



Key

- | | | | | | |
|--|----------------------------|---|---|---|---|
|  | Worcester City boundary |  | Proposed youth play locations |  | South Worcester Development Policy (Housing delivered as part of the 'Urban Extension') |
|  | Train line |  | 15 minute pedshed as a result of proposed youth play location | | |
|  | Existing MUGA locations | | | | |
|  | Existing 15 minute pedshed | | | | |



Suggested new locations

7	Area near Cornmeadow Lane
8	Northwick playing fields
9	Near Hallow Recycling Centre [^]
10	Gheluvelt Park [^]
11	Cripplegate Park area
12	Area south of Weyburn Close
13	Area south Perdiswell Park

* These are suggested site locations to achieve a 100% coverage for the older children of Worcester to access play sites within 15 min walking distance. Actual sites would be subject to detailed assessment and design. There is flexibility in actual locations

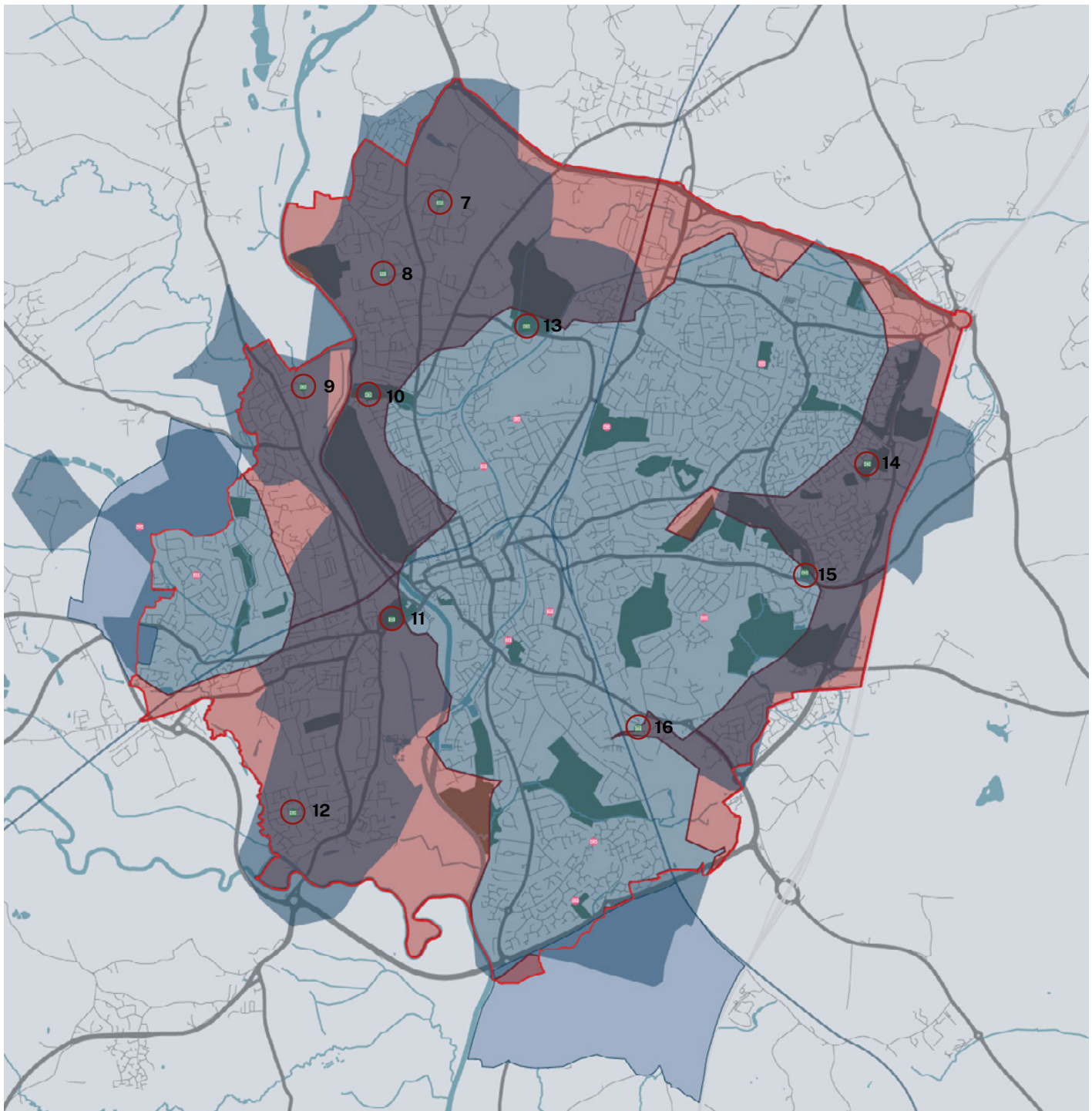
[^] Once the Kepax bridge is completed, only one of sites 9 and 10 is required.

Key

A	Gheluvelt Park
B	Worcester Racecourse
C	Cripplegate Park
D	Pitmaston Park
E	Diglis Playing Fields
F	Cherry Orchard Nature Reserve
	Worcester City boundary
	Train line
	Existing Playground locations
	Proposed Playground locations
	Area identified as being beyond the 12 minute pedshed
	12 minute pedshed as a result of proposed playground location
	South Worcester Development Policy (Housing delivered as part of the 'Urban Extension')

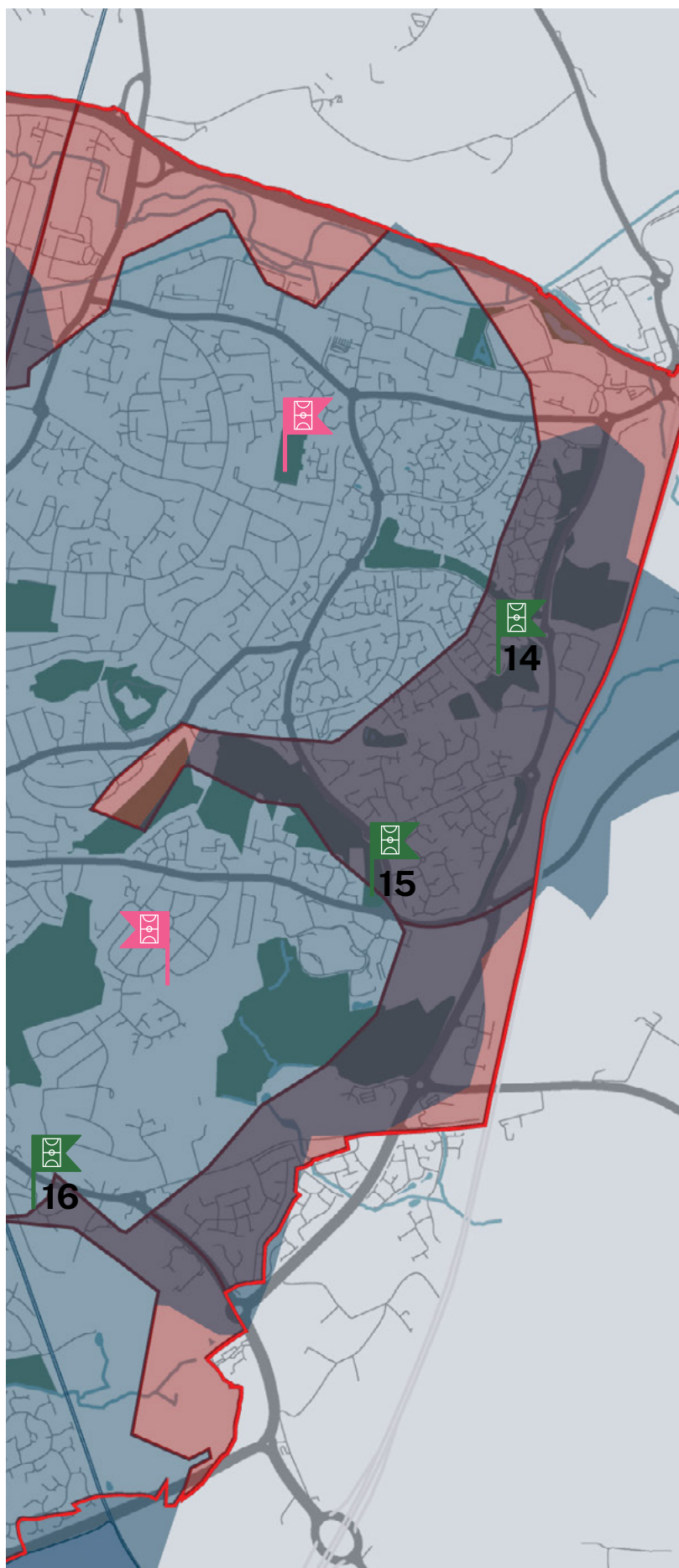
6.0 PROPOSALS

Older children: proposed play locations



Key

- | | | | | | |
|--|----------------------------|---|---|---|---|
|  | Worcester City boundary |  | Proposed youth play locations |  | South Worcester Development Policy (Housing delivered as part of the 'Urban Extension') |
|  | Train line |  | 15 minute pedshed as a result of proposed youth play location | | |
|  | Existing MUGA locations | | | | |
|  | Existing 15 minute pedshed | | | | |



Suggested new locations

14	Area near Trotshill Field
15	Area south of Aconbury Orchard
16	Area around Cromwell Crescent Park

* These are suggested site locations to achieve a 100% coverage for the older children of Worcester to access play sites within 15 min walking distance. Actual sites would be subject to detailed assessment and design. There is flexibility in actual locations

Key

G	Ronkswood Hill Meadows Local Nature Reserve
H	Perry Wood Local Nature Reserve
I	Worcester Woods Country Park
	Worcester City boundary
	Train line
	Existing youth play locations
	Proposed youth play locations
	Area identified as being beyond the 12 minute pedshed
	15 minute pedshed as a result of proposed youth play location
	South Worcester Development Policy (Housing delivered as part of the 'Urban Extension')



Credit: Sheffield City Council

Case Study: Grey to Green, Sheffield

Grey to Green is a City wide initiative to transform tarmacked area into a green public space that encourages cycling and walking. The project combines economic development (connecting up key routes in the city and improving the public realm and desirability around potential new sites) and repurposes redundant highways to make the city more flood resilient. The resulting streets provide safer, people focused routes for all.

www.greytogreen.org.uk/

‘Thinking in terms of affordances stimulates creativity in play design... Children constantly, actively seek out novel, stimulating ways to engage with whatever is around them (hence the enduring attraction of walking along the top of low walls by the side of pavements).’

Tim Gill, p21

Recommendation 11:

Establish a landscape standard that promotes a range of naturalistic play elements as part of all active travel and public realm projects across the city.

surfaces, step free).

Existing and new routes through the city should be enhanced to achieve better segregation from traffic and make the journey enjoyable, easy and safe. Use could be further encouraged by creating opportunities (or affordances along the way).

Adjusting traffic lights at road junctions in favour of pedestrians and cyclists is a quick, low cost win. These small changes can make significant changes to the way that people choose to travel and help to encourage active travel more generally.

Play on the way

Enabling children to travel more independently is one element, but active travel can also be encouraged by creating affordances that make the journey into a play experience itself. As

the urban scholar Tim Gill suggests, this does not mean fixed play equipment, but thinking creatively in terms of landscape and natural elements that provide opportunities for incidental ‘play on the way’. Examples would include:

- Regular seating areas that offer spaces for older children to hang out (regular rest points would also benefit a wide range of people)
- Natural elements such as boulders, tree stumps, logs and low walls that children might balance along and jump off making a walk into the city an obstacle course adventure!
- Low embankments for lolling on and rolling down
- Planting strategies that create a variety of sensory experience (colour, texture,

6.0 PROPOSALS

and smell) along a route

Visibility

Current information on play sites is limited. Signage is often absent, poorly located, or unclear. Some play areas within housing developments are located deep within cul-de-sac layouts, reducing their visibility. Locations that are secluded and lack natural surveillance (visibility) can also feel less safe – this was reflected in feedback, particularly from girls.

Where play spaces are being redesigned, or new play spaces are being sited, sites should be chosen that are naturally surveilled by a regular flow of passers-by, or from buildings or kiosks adjacent to the play space. Naturally overlooked spaces will feel safer for many groups.

Locating different play facilities close together can also contribute to natural surveillance, as well as making it easier for carers with children of different ages or abilities. Co-locating different types of play spaces for children of different ages, and different interests, can also alleviate competition in the use of play equipment, giving children the autonomy to use equipment that best meets their needs.

Placing WCs and cafes alongside play spaces also benefits parents/ carers watching over children and

provides additional activity in the area.

Some older children also commented on the lack of online visibility through WCC's website, and in the public domain (via search engines or online maps). As a result, many sites are unknown even to nearby residents.

Signage should be improved for all play spaces and could become part of a wider strategy to improve the legibility of the city for children and young people (a wayfinding strategy – 'Wondering Worcester'). Physical signage should be augmented by digital mapping tools recognizing that the growing reliance on digital wayfinding amongst younger people. These maps should provide information about play destinations across the city, about access routes and public transport, opening hours, anticipated age ranges, open space, woodland walks, access limitations and the facilities available. Locations should also be uploaded to key online mapping platforms such as google maps. Investing in a comprehensive wayfinding strategy for children is a key signifier to children that they are welcome in the city, it supports their growing independence and will also improve wayfinding for many adults with different accessibility needs.

Recommendation 12:

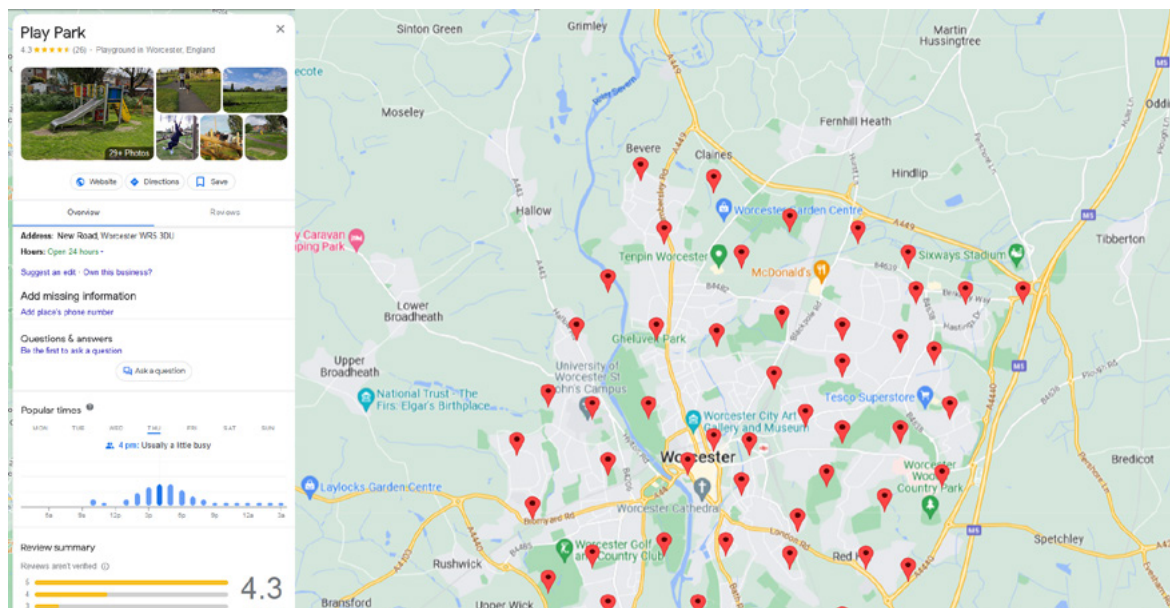
Improve physical signage with a wayfinding strategy to make the city more legible and accessible for children and young people.

Recommendation 13:

Establish accessible online maps or play portal side of Worcesters website that detail key play destinations, access routes and information on facilities available and key local events at each site.

Recommendation 14:

Siting of new play facilities should be visible and have natural surveillance, either from park facilities or adjacent paths.



Mock data map: Play site information should be mapped in a number of ways including public digital maps like OpenStreet, Google and Bing displaying location, photos, facilities to make play sites more visible.

Carlsbergbyen, Copenhagen

A sunken play area within a new urban housing development provides equal opportunities for people to either socialise, non-participate, play games or explore and climb the structure. The design combines soft landscape of natural grass and trees to provide canopy coverage alongside concrete retaining structures and softer timber seating.



Credit: Schønherr/Juan José Palma-Alvarez

DESIGNING GOOD PLAY SPACES

The city council, young people and their families are keen to see play provision improved; made more diverse and supportive of a wider range of activities and interests and abilities. The recommendations for design are relevant across all scales and provide overarching principles only. The response for each site will depend on the size, location, context and local needs.

1. Inclusive – Space for all

All people should have access to play no matter what their mobility needs. Children want to play with other children and should not feel excluded. Access to play (section 1) is one element that can contribute to users with mobility or sensory differences being excluded before they even arrive at the play destination. All play spaces should be inclusive, designed to enable children with different mobility needs and sensory divergences to access and enjoy a wide range of play opportunities – not just one or two specialist pieces of equipment. Essential aids such as sign cards and Braille signage should be included as standard.

- Surface materials, entrances and slopes should be carefully considered to enable children with wheelchairs or other mobility aids to move independently around the play space.
- There should be space for everyone with a range of seating and layouts that cater for different users as well as the storage of pushchairs and mobility scooters.
- There should be space for non-participation, relaxation or socialisation around play areas allowing children to step out of the play environment. Significant weight should be given to these spaces and in some instances they would be main event.
- Open sided, and robust, shelters should be delivered to allow children and families to congregate in a protected environment. Shelters are particularly important for older children, offering a space for socialising.

Recommendation 15:

Provide sign cards at all play sites to allow children with speech and communication impediments to communicate through pointing. Parents and carers at engagement events raised communication at play sites as an easy win to improve inclusivity.

**Recommendation 16:**

Ensure all play spaces are designed to offer a range of opportunities or children with different sensory or physical requirements – these should not be ‘specialist’ but offer opportunities for inclusive play with and alongside other children.

2. Place specific

Play spaces should increasingly be treated as urban design elements and be given the same consideration in terms of context, setting and exploiting opportunities afforded by site. Worcester has an abundance of green spaces, mature landscape, and distinctive features such as the river and woodlands – these should be utilised wherever possible to create play environments that are distinctive to Worcester. Play opportunities, and seating, should be located in places

that capture views from high points, explore woodlands with creative interventions, or create opportunities for play and rest in key civic locations within the city centre.

Play can be a way of knowing your city. Being place-specific also extends to recognising and responding to the local community. Play spaces might respond to different cultural expectations and preferences expressed by different communities.

3. Nature-led

Natural environments inspire and foster many different types of play for younger and older children. More diverse landscapes – spaces with different types of plants, habitats and groundspace will be rich in opportunities for play. Trees can be climbed (or integrated into designed climbable structures), mounds can be climbed up and slid down, wildflowers can be gathered and mixed together in pretend potions and pies. Large expanses of grass are unlikely to cultivate as many

different types of play and lack incidental shelter and focal points that might be favoured by individuals or small groups.

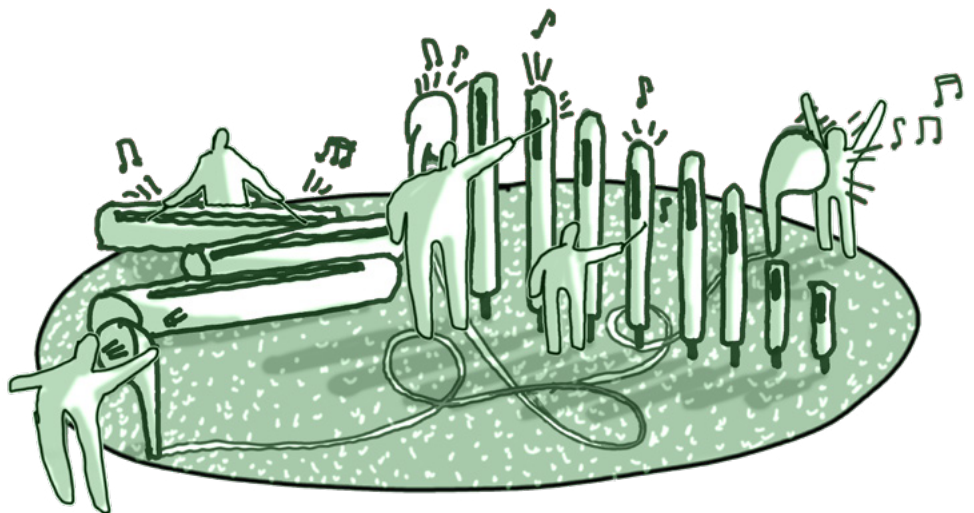
The use of natural materials, (aside from being a common desire for consultant respondents) will help the council lower its embodied carbon footprint as materials can be sourced locally and will naturally decompose (wood chip/trees) or can be repurposed (stone).

Recommendation 17:

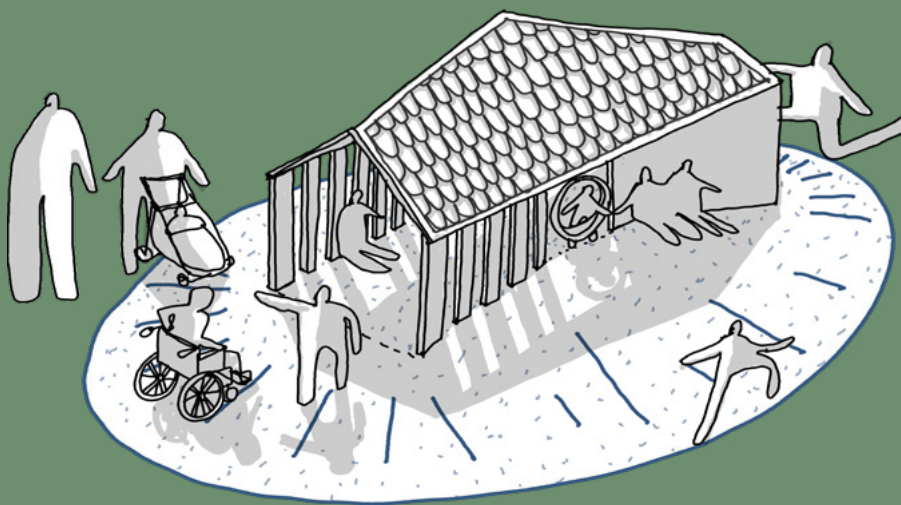
Require new playable spaces and improvements to existing play spaces to include a biodiversity strategy, encouraging a range of planting and landscape types that also offer a diversity of play opportunities.

4. Creative and unique spaces

Play spaces should be varied. In the same way that you would not expect all adults to be satisfied if all the cafes in the city offered the same limited menu, the same should be true of play spaces. New playable spaces should be designed to address gaps in the existing play provision, but that should not be about a checklist of equipment or sport facilities. Creatively designed spaces should offer variety across the city that may address particular local themes or proximity to institutions. Setting themes with local residents will help create unique and diverse play offering.



Restrictive	Open ended
Climbing net and slide	Large climbing boulder to accommodate different levels of difficulty.
Pirate ship	Platform with hut that could be a mountain hut, artists studio, princess castle, or a pirate ship.
Tunnel	Assorted elements like tyres, pipes and cable drums that could be climbed in, crawled through, sat on.
Cognitive activities such and tell-the-time clocks	Assorted textures and elements that offer an auditory experience – metal panels, hanging tubes, coloured shades that create changing light patterns across a space.
Chicken on a spring	Water and sand-based play facilities – ‘messy’ play that encourages collaboration between children.



5. Open-ended

Design spaces that encourage creative responses to them – exploring and inventing ways to interact with simple of elements is a play activity in itself. Catalogue play equipment is often quite restrictive, offering relatively little scope for being used differently, and enculturating the idea that there are ‘normal’ or ‘correct’ ways to play. Offering more open-ended activity spaces enables children to respond in different and creative ways, and also extends the life of play facilities, by allowing children of different ages to engage with it differently.

Developing playable unstructured spaces as well as spaces with apparatus.

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6. Supported / connected

Providing appropriate seating and shelter to encourage 'parents and carers [...] to relax, linger and allow their children to play for extended periods if they want'.

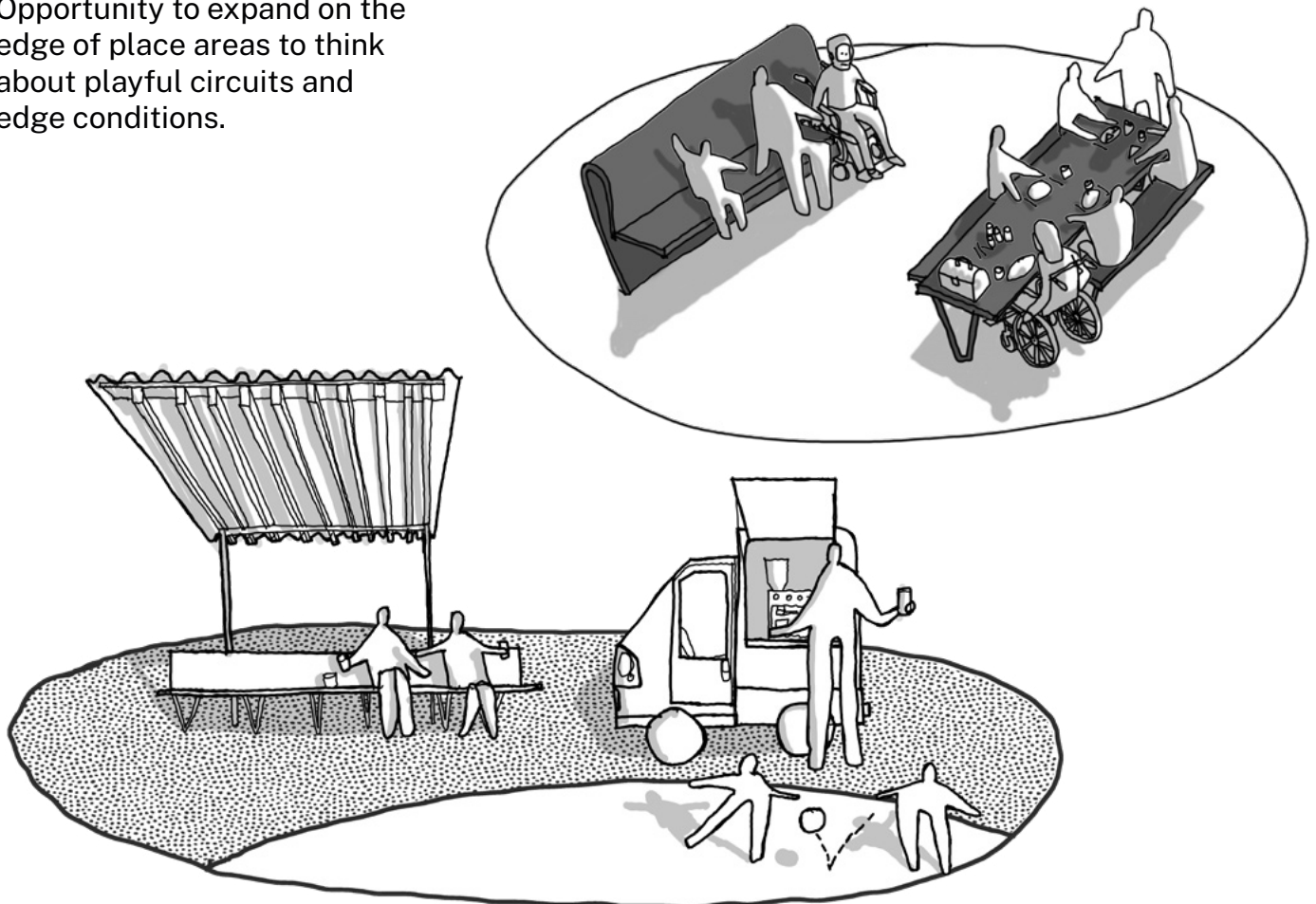
Improved facilities are a major concern by residents who would like to see WCs, cafes, shelters and seating to accompany play areas.

Proximity between different play spaces can be beneficial for carers with children of different ages/ abilities. However, balanced against the need to discourage older children dominating spaces intended for younger children.

Opportunity to expand on the edge of place areas to think about playful circuits and edge conditions.

Recommendation 18:

Conflict between dog owners and children using play areas was a clearly identifiable issue raised through our consultation. In particular, parents and carers of neurodivergent children responded at engagement events highlighting the fear of dogs nearby childrens play areas. We recommended that all play areas exclude dogs (with the exception of assistance dogs) and their owners at all times. Designated spaces for dog walkers can be provided elsewhere out of sight of play areas.





7. Safe, and feels safe

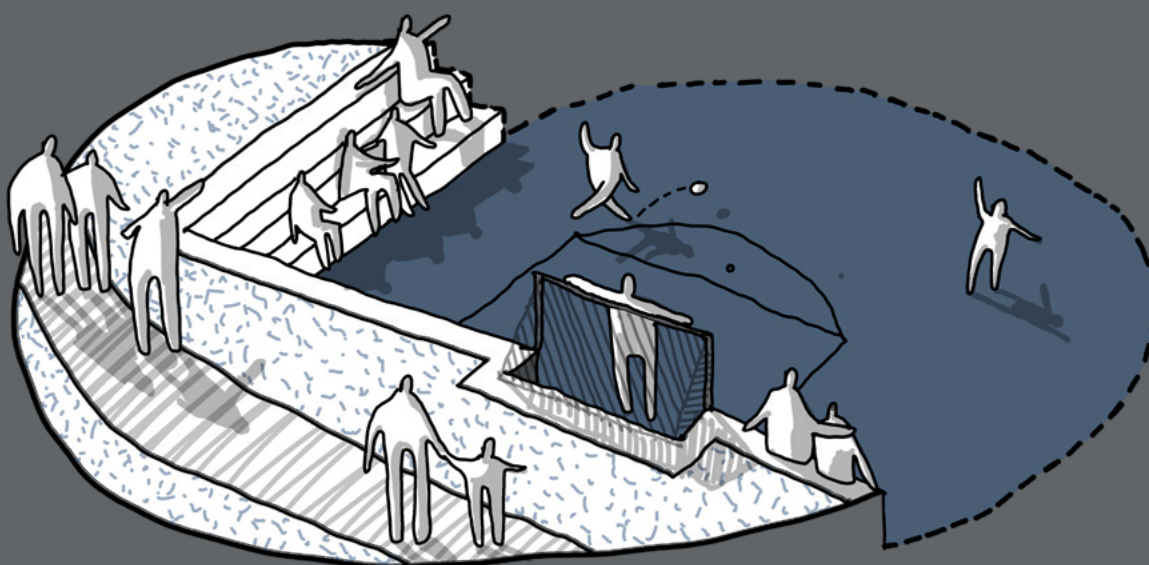
Fenced enclosure is often considered as a means to keep children safe (separating them from cars, dogs, steep sites, etc.), yet there is no legal requirement or recommendation in current play guidance or standards to do so. Fences should not be used to compensate for poorly sited locations, proximity to hazards or unsafe environments. Instead, a range of options should be appraised by the design team to determine how the play area should be defined and whether any enclosure is necessary. For younger children they have the effect of assigning space for them, creating the idea that the (much larger) area outside of the enclosure is dangerous, or not for them. In play spaces for older children, fences can make spaces feel too enclosed, intimidating or

even threatening. Fenced-in spaces such as MUGAs can be particularly exclusionary, especially for girls and young women, impacting directly on engagement with sport and activity.

Better designed, more open spaces, such as sunken basins enclosed by landscaped mounds or terraced seating can offer the same sheltered space for ball games, along with additional space for watching, waiting, gathering in smaller sub-groups. Supporting these perimeter uses helps to improve the perceived safety of these spaces, broaden the range of activities supported and encourage participation more generally.

Open edges

In larger parks or woodland settings where children would be expected to be free to move on their own, edges could be loosely defined through level changes, topography or



6.0 PROPOSALS

natural features, carefully placed seating or landscape. Benches instead of fences, creates space for carers to observe children playing, whilst expanding the play options beyond the defined play enclosure.

Natural edges

Timber or stones provide low-level delineation of space allowing free movement. Implemented well, they can in and of themselves become a play feature for games to run in-between, climb or jump to and from.

Hedges

Planted hedges of non-hazardous, low maintenance species can add to the sensory experience of play. Guidance recommends that they are clipped to a maximum 1m height to maintain visibility between spaces, however, in spaces for very young children this should be much lower.

Boundaries

Sometimes it is necessary to demarcate site boundaries to play areas for a range of reasons (security and safety, or proximity to trafficked roads). Boundaries can also be seen as an opportunity to be inventive - space for children to climb or navigate over or play with others on the other side.

Lighting

Well-considered lighting can both attract more young people to use play spaces, making them feel more welcoming, and make them safer to use by enabling better visibility of the space around. Where to place lighting should be carefully considered, and balanced against the impact on biodiversity in parks and planted areas. Some spaces are better located for evening use by older children and lend themselves much more readily to being properly lit – city centre spaces in the public realm, for instance, are already located in populated areas with access already lit by street lights. Focused lighting strategies to make particular spaces more inviting could help to deter use of more secluded, and less safe spaces after dark.

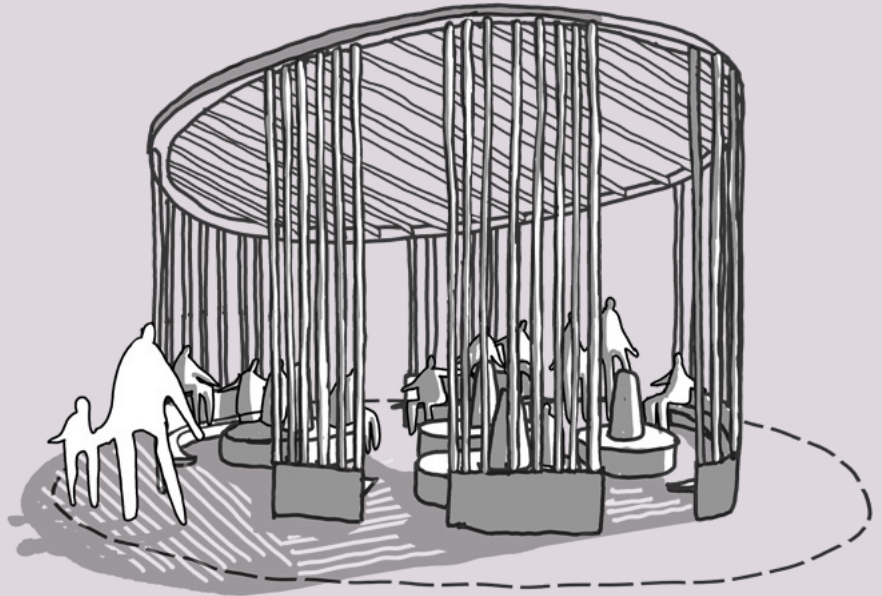
Recommendation 19:

Children have an equal right to city, and space should be made to allow them socialise and play in well lit and overlooked areas.



8. Urban

Playable spaces should be integrated into all public realm strategies. From our engagement exercise, we found that many children felt that there was little reason to visit the city centre (other than as a consumer), that there was no space for them or at worst, some felt unsafe and unwelcomed. Play for older children can take the form of safe spaces to socialise, hang out or play music. Well placed and overlooked seating and shelter support social life of older children.



Credit: De Urbanisten

Watersquare Benthemplein, Rotterdam

Benthemplein is an urban public square that combines social seating, flexible sports space and acts as a water storage facility to increase climate resilience during extreme weather events. The square combines hard and soft landscaping to provide multiple different zones for social meetings.

9. Maintainable

A mixed strategy of renewal and maintenance will take place as part of the already identified issue that 86% of all play equipment will reach its end of life by 2027. It is unlikely that all play areas will overhauled outright, but will evolve through a replacement programme.

Phase out single use/limited use play equipment at the end of life, replacing with

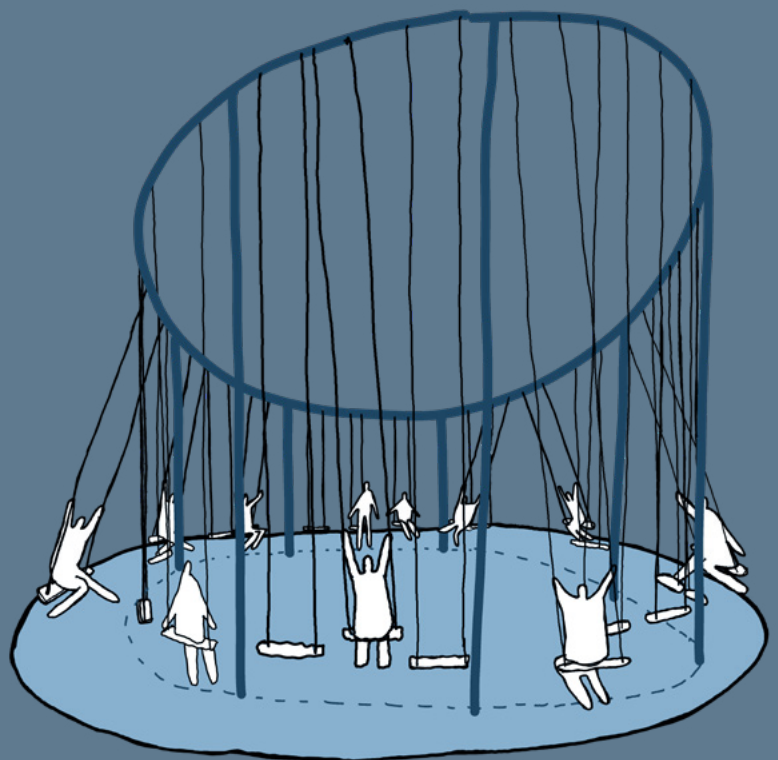
Regular maintenance and management of play facilities need to be established as part of the design process from inception, with information provided on aftercare for all maintainable elements to:

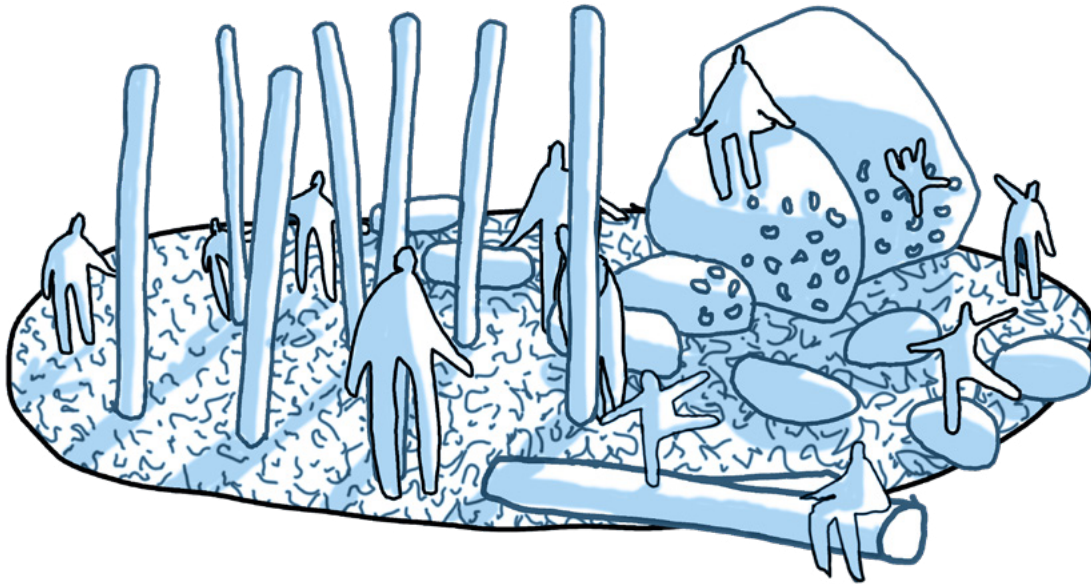
- Ensure sufficient resource is budgeted for regular maintenance and management of new play spaces
- Ensure new play spaces remain fit for purpose and safe for the duration of their intended life span
- Ensure future maintenance operations are consistent with the design intent of the scheme.

This is important for water features, sandpits and or any non-standard play items that may require additional or more frequent maintenance regimes.

To ensure the long term success of the scheme, the following information will be required prior to transfer of completed facilities:

- Land ownership and boundary responsibility
- As built drawings
- Details of any routine monitoring and inspection requirements for the play area including trees
- Maintenance schedule and any equipment warranties setting out the frequency and types of operation.
- Detailed specification (ie. NBS) for all hard and soft landscaping maintenance operations





Recommendation 20:

Play should offer a degree of managed risk to allow children to take calculated dangers. This could range from balancing, climbings, jumping across or swinging in ways they hadn't previously.

10. Risky play

Play should challenge children through a variety of physical ways; crawling, climbing, swinging, jumping and balancing. An appetite towards 'risk' was a key finding from our engagement work. All play comes with a degree of risk and a balance should be agreed from the outset for each play area.

Risks are dangers or dangerous situations which children intentionally confront or engage with, where they have opportunity and capacity to measure or understand the likely extent and quality of the danger. Climbing a tree is a potential risk.

Hazards are dangers or dangerous situations that children cannot measure or understand, or that they cannot see or control. A rusty nail concealed in a piece of timber is a hazard.

- Risk challenges children emotionally, physically, and cognitively as they learn to face barrier, obstacles and challenges.
- Risk embraces the concept of failure and resilience promoting longevity and endurance of play options for children to return to and try again.

DOING THINGS DIFFERENTLY: PROCUREMENT & COMMISSIONING

Given the ambition of the project to invest in, and improve play provision across the city, this is an opportunity to rethink how play is commissioned, delivered and what roles young people can play in shaping it.

The best play spaces are integrated within the wider landscape and public realm, and provide a variety of play opportunities. The current delivery of play apparatus in the UK is reliant on equipment providers who deliver standardised, catalogue kit. This can result in the delivery of overly complex play equipment that requires regular maintenance (electronics), or overly simple apparatus (chicken on a spring) that has limited affordances. To rethink procurement, we need to rethink the process of how we commission and deliver play.





*Photo credit: Dwellbeing Shieldfield and
The NewBridge Project*

Reimagining the MUGA, Shieldfield, Newcastle Upon Tyne, 2023

A series of workshops led by a resident representative to rethink an existing cage-like MUGA with a local youth programme. Initiated by the community organisation Dwellbeing Shieldfield, the exercise involved a talk about the existing space alongside best Europe-wide case studies. The design team then walked the site with the group talking about how it is currently used/misused. The group returned to develop ideas of how to adapt, modify and rethink the play site using physical models and modelling clay. The ideas will inform the evidence base for the design team to further develop proposals to take forward for funding.



Credit: Mike Hewson

‘Rocks on Wheels’, Southbank Boulevard Play area, Melbourne by Mike Hewson

A play area designed to give the illusion of risk combining natural, as-found and standard play equipment materials. The design give the appearance of precariously assembled objects, but is a very carefully engineered project. The urban project combined swinging, sliding, places to climb and jump and sand pits for free play and abundant interpretation for children encouraging increasing degrees of adventure and exploration.



Healthy Streets
Assessment tool

Engagement and process

The design of play is more than the end product, it is a process. How the design team engages with community and end users is critical. Projects need to be developed with direct input from the end user where there is a partnership between the designer and children that gives them control and autonomy over the outcomes. Binary choices or tokenism should be avoided as it is passive and may lead to mistrust or play that isn't accepted or used by a community.

Engagement is critical tool to addressing the needs and desires of local children and teenagers. These needs will vary from one area of the city to the other and there is no catch-all solution. Critical to the process is listening to and designing to meet the needs of their experiences, from doorstep to destinations.

Preferred methods would be in-person, site specific workshops that delegate a degree of control to children as equal partners in the process. Design teams should deliver imaginative workshops. This process should be considered as means of providing a sense of ownership in the delivery process and voice to children that otherwise feel excluded or whose voices are marginalized.

Overly simplistic or tokenistic processes should be avoided whereby children are offered simplistic choices, informed of, or asked to comment on detailed designs or processes where decisions have already been advanced or determined should be avoided at all cost.

Tools for Engagement – there are a wide variety of methods and resources available to design teams. Teams should be encouraged to devise and develop their methods depending on the audience and areas of the city they are working with.

- Games -exploring
- Workshops –educational
- Modelmaking –can be an inexpensive and creative tool which allows children to think spatially and site specific. Encourages participants to think about context, topography, orientation etc to test and trial idea as part of the process of making.
- 1:1 Making –live on-site exercises could be considered as a means of children scoping projects out and understanding scale. Rope, cones, chairs (whatever is at hand) can be used by the children and designers to layout

Recommendation 21:

Process over product. The delivery of future play must be led by the end users without preconceptions of what the end product is. The city can harness in-house engagement and community leaders alongside design consultants to test, make and deliver new play that children young and old can be invested in and have ownership over.

PROCURING PLAY IN WORCESTER

New play opportunities will be brought forward as a result of the planning system which can require onsite play provision as part of major planning applications. New play provision may also come about as a result of a strategic investment decision by the local authority, or via a project delivered by, or on behalf of, a charitable and/or community based organisations.

In these scenarios too planning permission should be sought and procurement is likely to play a critical role in terms of the quality and appropriateness of new play opportunities.

Whether commissioning, procuring or delivering play provision, Worcester recognises that the true clients of this new provision will be the children, young people and families that will adopt these playable spaces as part of their everyday experiences.

For this reason involving children and young people and their families has been critical in producing the Worcester Play Plan. All stakeholders must now ensure that children and young people retain a meaningful voice at every stage in planning new play

provision, are empowered to shape the design of new playable spaces, and are given agency to provide feedback and learning post-occupancy.

The following twelve-stage plan of works provides guidance on how, when and what play opportunities should be considered as part of a major planning application process. It can be applied to any development scenario whether council-led, community-led or private developer-led. It can be adopted for the delivery of a play-specific investment, or used alongside, or as interchangeable with the development management process. For this reason cross-reference is made to both RIBA stages of work and stages of the planning process.



Case Study: Camel Road Playground, Muf Architecture/Art

Local children and adults co-cliented muf in the refurbishment of a run down, but much used playground in the Drew Road Estate, North Woolwich.

Alongside new and refurbished play equipment, the 740m2 space now includes an obstacle course, community planting beds, and an events area for street parties centred around a custom-built table tennis table.

Those well designed pieces of the original metal work play equipment and the surrounding fence were retained and reused, with bespoke metalwork fabricated to link the old with the new.

Planting was designed and undertaken by local resident and gardener. The table tennis table and bespoke seating were designed and built in the community with young people through a series of workshops.



Photo credit: muf architecture/art LLP



Photo credit: muf architecture/art LLP



Photo credit: Byron Maher

6.0 PROPOSALS

1. CONTEXT

Core tasks to include assessing existing provision and identifying gaps; understanding definitions of play and the spectrum of opportunities at different scales; defining a project business case, project budget and identifying project risks. All of which to be kept under review. Appoint team to lead.

2. LOCAL NETWORKS

Starting local and set out collaboration networks that will make the process effective and efficient. Finding out what goes on in the local area, where do people gather, where to find stakeholders, especially marginalised groups.

12. POST OCCUPANCY

Return regularly to evaluate and gather user feedback including input from the stakeholder group (3.) and in particular the local network (2.).

11. DETAILED DESIGN

Defining some details of the design once the proposal has obtained permission. This could include final specification, environmental issues, circular economy, end-of-life disposal, or arrangements during construction such as phasing. An opportunity to involve locals in the delivery to reinforce a sense of ownership.

Building Regs/ Planning conditions /

10. DEVELOPED DESIGN

Produce or co-produce a more developed proposal based on the work and evidence produced to date. This may be a play specific proposal or play opportunities as a component of a larger whole (such as a proposal for new housing).

To safeguard the design quality and integrity of the process detailed design must be submitted as part of a planning application (and not left to condition post-approval).

Detailed Planning

Engagement

9. CONCEPT DESIGN

Design team produce or co-produce a concept design based on the work and evidence produced to date. Test and re-test the concept with all the design agents from the local network and stakeholder group. Sharing outcomes from this stage through formal pre-application with the LPA is also recommended.

Pre-app / Outline

Engagement

RIBA - PLAN OF WORK

RIBA Stage 0

RIBA Stage 7

RIBA Stage 4-6

PLANNING / POST

INITIAL

1 2

6

10

11

12

Engagement

4. PLAY VISION

Initiating an idea of a vision for what the project will be, the role it will have and the needs it will meet. At this stage it is less about what it will look like, but rather how it will function and for whom it is for. A play vision should be co-produced with representation from the local network (2.) and stakeholders (3.). It is useful to think about play opportunities as a component of a larger whole and consider the short, medium and long term.

5. SITE ANALYSIS

Conducting legislative, technical, geographical and ecological site investigations. May involve SWOT analysis.

6. DATA GATHERING

Understand of the social, economic, political, historic and cultural circumstances in which the project is taking place. Data can be classified by theme with a system devised to share this information with those who might need it at different stages in the process. This stage should not be overlooked as it is an understanding of place and it's communities that will be used to inform design approaches later in the process.

Engagement

7. DEVELOPMENT FRAMEWORK

At this stage the client team will agree project parameters, and refine the business case, project budget and identified project risks. A development framework can take several forms but should include design criteria to deliver the play vision (4.); relevant processes and procedures (project/quality management etc.); participation and engagement methods to be deployed and formal stakeholders and consultees; additional funding sources; delivery phasing plan; minimum environmental credentials; expected social outputs; information of preferred ownership and management arrangements; and appraisal tools and methods to be adopted.

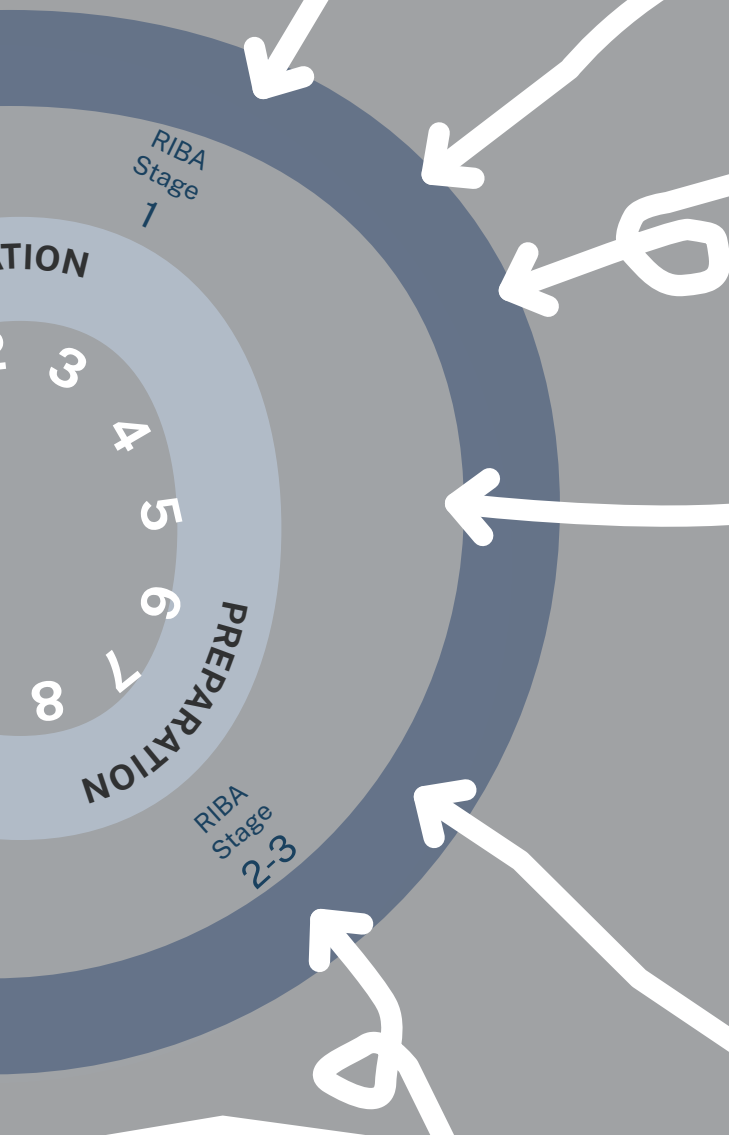
Once the development framework is agreed by the client team, it should be discussed and agreed at pre-application meetings with the LPA.

3. AGENTS AND INFLUENCERS

Co-ordinating collaboration between all the different parties that will become involved in the process including authorities and organisations, statutory bodies and communities. It will be useful to understand the influence and motivation of each stakeholder. At this stage additional funding support and/or opportunities can be identified via stakeholder group.

8. DESIGN BRIEF

Producing a summary of work to date (1. to 7.) to convey the whole process and its outcomes, and how this information led to various design ideas and the chosen play vision. The success of later stages will depend on the strength and clarity of the brief given to new team members brought onto the project at stage 8. It is likely that following client approval of the brief a procurement exercise will take place to identify the skills needed to progress between stage 8 and 12.



STEPPING STONES

What is the purpose of the assessment tool?

This assessment tool provides a structured appraisal for all stakeholders to consider and discuss the effects that the design of proposed new development will have on the rights of children and young people to play and socialise.

It will help those responsible for the design and delivery of new playable spaces to demonstrate how their proposed development will address the need for play at the appropriate design scales: doorstep; street or play on the way; and destination. Whilst providing the local planning authority and other stakeholders a guide for appraising the quality and acceptability of play as part of proposed new development.

The *Play Quality Assessment Tool* is intended to be used as a design dialogue tool and will be most effective when used as a basis for discussion at the beginning of, and throughout the pre-application process. In this regard it can be used alongside and to compliment the use of Building For A Health Life design tool kit.

Who should use the tool and when?

It is to be used by all parties involved in the commissioning, delivery, review, and approval of new play provision in Worcester. It is recommended Worcester City Council apply the assessment to all planning proposals that are likely to generate a child yield of 10 or more.

At the earliest stage it can be used to allow a broad range of people – from members of a local community, local councillors, developers, commissioning organisations, design teams and local planning authority officers – to focus their thoughts, discussions and efforts on the things that matter most when creating playable spaces.

In proposals for new development requiring planning permission an applicant and their team must discuss how they intend to respond to the *Play Quality Assessment Tool* at the pre-application stage with the local planning authority.

At planning submission stage the applicant will need to demonstrate their design approach to playable spaces within the design and access Statement and through an appropriate level

of design detail and resolution submitted as part of plans and drawings.

Using the tool

Worcester City Play Plan describes play as an open-ended activity which can happen at any time and take place anywhere. It is instinctive and impulsive and can happen for no particular reason or outcome and without regard of any particular goal or consequence. Playable space can take an infinite number of forms, from participation in sporting activities, through to imaginative play. In this regard an assessment of the quality of play provision cannot be overly prescriptive, nor can it rely on quantitative data alone. Rather this assessment tool provides a process for collaborative thinking between developers, local authorities, communities and other stakeholders by interrogating play opportunities at three spatial scales.

The best way to use the tool is to use the three scales of play as a starting point and for those involved to agree what is needed to secure unanimous support for each consideration recording this at the pre-application stage.

SCALE: DOORSTEP Does the proposed development incorporate the following play opportunities:	Traffic Light Appraisal			Score
	Missing (0)	Unresolved (1)	Good practice (2)	
Near to homes there are opportunities to play outside the front door and be seen from inside homes and by neighbours, making it feel safe to play or hangout there.				
Near to homes there are spaces for children to play under informal adult supervision helping them develop a sense of ownership and autonomy.				
Near to homes there are transitional spaces that support the gradual increase in a child's confidence and ability to meet peers and form friendships and start to navigate their immediate environment.				
Spaces immediately outside front doors create opportunities for everyday social interactions.				
Ground floor apartments with their own front doors and semi-private amenity spaces.				
Spaces and activities that enliven and connect front doors to the wider neighbourhood (taking into account thresholds, walkways, paths, courtyards, soft landscaping).				
Boundary treatments that offer contact with nature and/or provide ambiguous playscapes.				
Near homes some of the landscape elements are made of natural elements like willow, logs and earth mounds to create fun moments for informal play or places to hang out.				
Near homes the shared spaces are big enough to support a range of activities such as scooting, skateboarding, hanging out, playing different games and socialising.				
There are no left over spaces with no clear public or private function.				
There are no poorly considered spaces between the back of the pavement and front doors that erode the quality of the street environment.				
Near to homes vehicles are not dominating the spaces and vehicles are not moving too fast through this space.				
TOTAL				/24

6.0 PROPOSALS

SCALE: PLAY ON-THE-WAY Does the proposed development incorporate the following play opportunities:	Traffic Light Appraisal			Score
	Missing (0)	Unresolved (1)	Good practice (2)	
Places to sit, space to chat or play within the street that encourage multigenerational, social interactions and neighbourliness from the doorstep to key destinations (parks, playgrounds, bus stops, local shop, childcare, school etc).				
The design of pavements, paths and walkways mean everyday transit time turns into moments of playfulness and fun through playful forms, natural elements, bespoke street furniture, lighting, and artworks.				
Landscape design that can be an opportunity for play, helps children to develop cognitive skills, provides children with everyday contact with nature, and a sensory richness to a place – visual, scent and sound.				
Wider paths on sunnier sides of the street.				
Streets that can be designated as ‘play streets’ at certain times with temporary restrictions.				
Repurposing conventional parking spaces and areas into parklets, seating areas, planting, art canvases, games areas and/or cycle and scooter parking.				
Street design that favours active travel, making non-motorised journeys feel convenient and safe.				
Pavements and cycleways that continue across side streets.				
Layout and street hierarchy that offer a web of connections and a choice of routes to various destinations.				
Streets designed for vehicle speeds of 10mph (or lower).				
A child or young person would feel safe crossing the road safely.				
Important walking and cycling routes are well lit, easy to find even when it becomes dark outside.				
			TOTAL	/24

SCALE: DESTINATION	Traffic Light Appraisal			Score
	Missing (0)	Unresolved (1)	Good practice (2)	
Does the proposed development incorporate the following play opportunities:				
Layouts that 'start with the park' i.e. play destinations form an integral part of the site layout in busy places, ideally at the convergence of several pedestrian desire lines.				
Locating play destinations in well-overlooked locations with a strong sense of enclosure provided by surrounding buildings to ensure they feel safe and are well overlooked by buildings.				
Covering a user group spectrum of both 0-11 years and 12-18 years and integrating in way that avoids conflicting activities.				
Actively and consciously designing out both perceived and physical barriers. Giving consideration to the spaces around the edges of play ensuring these spaces are versatile, visible and accessible. Changes in levels, seating/ watching areas, boundaries, surfacing, and lighting should ensure edge spaces encourage social interactions.				
Avoids unnecessary uses of physical or restrictive barriers, such as walls and high fences or railings.				
Play destinations that are not marginalised. A perception of nuisance has not been used to justify a peripheral location.				
Spaces that can be shared and used positively during daytime and evenings.				
'Pro-gathering' and support the legitimate right to hang-out and belong.				
Consideration of safety in terms of clear sightlines, connected paths (no dead ends), multiple entrances and exits, natural surveillance from passers-by and surrounding buildings.				
Not relying on play equipment alone. Play apparatus is often appropriate but should be designed alongside creative and imaginable landforms, landscaping and furniture for example.				
Communal storage for bicycles, tricycles, scooters and pushchairs.				
MUGAs that are designed through effective engagement with, and input from, local youth organisations, sports and performative clubs. MUGAs should benefit from the greatest levels of visibility and accessibility for children and young people living in existing nearby communities i.e. not exclusive to the new development.				
TOTAL			/24	

DELIVERY PLAN

Existing play in Worcester is in a healthy place, but there are noticable gaps (particularly for teenagers) with residents asking for more varied, challenging and inclusive play opportunities.

This Play Plan document identifies where new provision should be focused, what it should look like, and how it should be delivered, creating a framework for the future of play in Worcester. Below we have identified five 'priority projects' through which to begin implementing these principles and beginning the process of improving and enhancing play across the city.

1. Identify and prioritise new sites in areas with the poorest current provision for young children and teens (see maps on p52-57).

- Budget for initial 1-2 year plan (short term) and 3-5 year (medium term) to:
- Identify sites with suitable ownership
- Appoint teams to develop projects with local community and residents with design briefs in which the end goal is determinable by all involved, but capped in terms of budget.

- Identify pilot project(s). Assess and learn from process including designers and end-users. What worked well, what was challenging, what would you do differently?
- Projects for all sites should be commissioned within 5 years.

2. Renew existing equipment as it reaches its natural end of life, avoiding a like-for-like strategy. Instead

- Where a significant number of play equipment pieces are being replaced, consider a complete overhaul and redesign with appointed design team

- Where a few pieces are being replaced, carry out an audit of the types of play experience available at the site and ensure new installations address any gaps - for instance adding opportunities for creative, cultural or risky play

3. Embrace, not chase.

The city centre is a popular destination for teenagers, but currently has a limited play offering.

- Identify opportunities within all public realm projects to create welcoming and inclusive spaces where older children feel able to gather,
- Develop a list of play opportunities for older children in the city centre and potential sites, in anticipation of future funding opportunities as part of public realm projects.

4. Ensure quality through the planning system.

Play strategies in new developments to be scrutinised and quality ensured through the planning process.

- Detail design of play interventions/ structures to be required at planning (not conditioned)
- All proposals to be reviewed by Worcester City Council Contracts Team to ensure quality of offering/access

5. Establish a framework for play as part of active travel and public realm strategies

- Create a design guide/ framework of play interventions as part of adopted planning policy to ensure play is included in all public realm and active travel route plans
- Embed 'play provision' in relevant SPDs such as landscape, public realm, highways, active travel and housing. Most new play provision will be delivered within wider landscape strategies rather than as dedicated 'play area projects'.

7.0

GLOSSARY





Accessibility

Convenient, inclusive and safe accessibility to outdoor facilities, particularly for children and the less mobile.

Amenity Greenspace

Informal recreation spaces, communal green spaces in and around housing, and village greens. 'Considered to include those spaces [...] open to free and spontaneous use by the public, but neither laid out nor managed for a specific function such as a park, public playing field or recreation ground; nor managed as a natural or semi-natural habitat.'

Children's Play Space

'Areas of play that cater for the needs of children up to and around 12 years of age.'

CIL

Community Infrastructure Levy.

Designated Play Area

Designated areas for children and young people containing a range of facilities and an environment that has been designed to provide focused opportunities for outdoor play comprising casual or informal playing space within housing areas. These play areas comprise LAPs, LEAPs and NEAPs.

General Residential Use

Residential use within Class C3 of the Town and Country Planning Use Classes Order but excluding specialist forms of housing such as housing aimed at specialist groups (e.g. sheltered housing, student accommodation etc.) or housing not permanently occupied such as holiday homes.

7.0 GLOSSARY

LAP

Local Area for Play (and informal recreation)²⁹

-a play space for young children located close to their home. Play equipment is not required, and sites traditionally allow for informal supervision.

0.01ha, 10 x 10 metres
(minimum activity zone of 100sqm)

5m min separation between activity zone and nearest property containing a dwelling.

LEAP

Local Equipped Area for Play (and informal recreation) aimed at children who

can go out to play independently.

0.04ha, 20 x 20 metres
(minimum activity zone of 400sqm)

20m min separation between activity zone and..

LPA

Local Planning Authority

MUGA

Multi Use Games Area

0.1ha, 40 x 20 metres

30m min separation between activity zone and the boundary of the nearest property containing a dwelling

A Multi Use Games Area is a fenced space that can host numerous sporting activities.

Natural Green Space

'Partly or wholly accessible spaces including meadows, woodland and copses all of which share a trait of having natural characteristics and wildlife value, but which are also open to public use and enjoyment.'

Green space performs both important recreational activity space and important environmental functions, such as moderating surface water run-off, air pollution and wind speeds, as well as providing wildlife habitats to aid biodiversity

NEAP

Neighbourhood Equipped Area for Play (and informal recreation, and provision for children and young people) aimed at older children

0.1ha, 31.6 x 31.6 metres
(minimum activity zone of 1,000sqm comprising an area for play equipment and structures & a hard surfaced area of at least 465sqm (the minimum needed to play five-a-side football)

30m min separation between activity zone and the boundary of the nearest property.

Non-specialist residential use

Dwellinghouse occupied by a single person or by people regarded as forming a single household, not including residential accommodation where care is provided, purpose-built student accommodation or holiday homes.

²⁹ NOTE: In the 1980s Fields in Trust coined the acronyms LAP, LEAP and NEAP to define different spatial qualities of outdoor play spaces. These terms were devised to offer local authorities' technical guidance on standards for play areas associated with the development new housing.

Fields in Trust sets benchmarks for play spaces by setting walking distance guidelines in metres. In line with the South Worcestershire Open Space Assessment, this strategy sets play distances by minutes walked, with access standards based on Green Flag criteria. Classifications such as those developed by Fields in Trust, have been used extensively as the provision of new play areas has largely been delivered through the planning system that enables local planning authorities to secure planning obligations, or developer contributions, from new housing development, to regulate the development and use of land in the public interest.

NPFA

National Playing Fields Association.

NPPF

National Planning Policy Framework.

NPPG

National Planning Policy Guidance.

Other Outdoor Provisions

Other outdoor provision comprises MUGAS, skateboard parks and other outdoor provision.

Other Outdoor Sports

Courts and greens comprising natural or artificial surfaces, including tennis courts, bowling greens, athletics tracks and other outdoor sports areas.

Parks and Gardens

Formal green spaces including urban parks, country parks, forest parks, and formal gardens.

Park and Recreation Grounds

‘Park and Recreation Ground is defined as an open space that has as at least two facilities e.g. a children’s play area and tennis courts, or has provision for formal sport e.g. football or cricket pitch.’

Playing pitches

Pitch sports including football, rugby union, rugby league, hockey, lacrosse, cricket and American football.

Quality

The needs, expectations and experiences of users, and the design, management and maintenance of facilities.

Quantity

A measure of the amount of open space provision which is necessary to meet the needs of the local residents.

SuDS

Sustainable Drainage Systems are landscaping features designed to manage stormwater. They are designed to mimic natural drainage and contribute to attenuation of water locally reducing the impact of storm water on local infrastructure. They can take the form of artificial below road crate systems, large pond or above ground visible planning strips alongside pavements and roads.

SPD

Supplementary Planning Documents (SPDs) are planning documents that provide more detailed advice or guidance on specific topics to support high level local plans.

Youth Play Space

‘Informal recreation opportunities for, broadly, the 13 to 17 age group, and which might include facilities such as skate parks, basketball courts, ‘free access’ MUGAs, but could also be defined by social spaces or general leisure such as swings.

Credits

The Worcester Play Plan was commissioned and delivered by Worcester City Council.



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Harper Perry



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harperperry.co.uk/

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urbandesignworks.co.uk/

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