



Open
Spaces

Registered Charity

Play in Epping Forest Policy Statement

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Aims

1. This policy statement provides guidance for applicants for purpose-built play facilities on Epping Forest land and guiding principles for the promotion of play in Epping Forest.

Background

2. The right to play is set out in Article 31 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, ratified by the UK Government in December 1991, and in the UK five outcomes for all children's services defined in Every Child Matters: being healthy, staying safe, enjoying and achieving, making a positive contribution, and achieving economic well-being.
3. Research shows that play has many benefits for children, families and the wider community, as well as improving health and quality of life. Recent research suggests that children's access to good play provision can:
 - increase their self-awareness, self-esteem, and self-respect
 - improve and maintain their physical and mental health
 - give them the opportunity to mix with other children
 - allow them to increase their confidence through developing new skills
 - promote their imagination, independence and creativity
 - offer opportunities for children of all abilities and backgrounds to play together
 - provide opportunities for developing social skills and learning
 - build resilience through risk taking and challenge, problem solving, and dealing with new and novel situations
 - provide opportunities to learn about their environment and the wider community.
 - Providing play in an environment that, is safe, stimulating and provides access to nature can help a child to develop, encourages healthy lifestyles, prevents health problems such as obesity and contributes to mental wellbeing.ⁱ
4. The Mayor of London's London Plan shapes a London wide approach to play: The Mayor and appropriate organisations should ensure that all children and young people should have safe access to good quality, well-designed, secure and stimulating play and informal recreation provision, incorporating trees and greenery wherever possible. ⁱⁱ
5. The City of London Corporation Open Spaces department recognises its role in contributing to spaces for play in London and provides children's play equipment at its formal parks at Highgate Wood; Queens Park and West Ham Park, in addition to the Parliament Hill Playground at Hampstead Heath.

Policy Statement

6. The City Corporation as the Conservators of Epping Forest have responsibilities to maintain the Forest as an open space for the recreation and enjoyment of the public and has the power to provide facilities and apparatus for games and recreations, while maintaining the natural aspect of the Forest. In addition, around two thirds of the Forest is designated as SSSI and SAC which provides further protection for the unspoilt, unbuilt on nature of the Forest.
7. Epping Forest provides a vital green space for at least a dozen small towns and parishes that it borders. In some cases it is the only nearby open space and as such can be seen as the logical location for formal play equipment by local proponents of such a facility.
8. Such formal play equipment is seen as an urban intrusion on the 'natural aspect' of the Forest and as such there is a general presumption against such provision.
9. In Epping Forest we encourage children to play and explore this wild space on their doorstep and to use the natural landscape as an ever changing and stimulating play space in preference to formal structured play facilities.
10. The City of London Open Spaces Department seeks to create inclusive play opportunities which inspire children to connect with green spaces. Epping Forest supports the following Play Outcomes:
 - Children are free to play, explore, be imaginative and take part in fun and enjoyable experiences
 - Children feel safe, confident and empowered to learn
 - Children begin to connect with green spaces
11. To help children and adults engage with the natural play opportunities provided throughout Epping Forest we will:
 - Leave suitable branches and logs in the Forest after lopping to provide material for den building, provided fire risk is low.
 - Provide fallen trees in suitable locations for climbing
 - Provide articles and information on our website and publications suggesting ideas for play in the Forest such as; den building, climbing, finding and collecting, making stories, playing with texture (sand, bark, mossy places), paddling in streams, making natural collages etc.
 - Support local authority and other partners with provision of playworkers and similar opportunities (such as Epping Forest District Council's Play in the Forest scheme).

- Develop informal play trails and seek funding for play opportunities through the Open Spaces learning team and other partners.

Scope

12. Formal play provision remains the duty of the local authority and the City Corporation in Epping Forest does not have a duty to provide land for this. In most cases such formal provision will detract from the preservation of the natural aspect and as such is not generally permitted.
13. In some rare instances the Epping Forest and Commons Committee has specifically consented to children's play areas in the past. These permissions have been given as an exception to the general presumption against built play facilities based on consideration of their individual merits. In all instances the full installation and maintenance costs are met by the local authority.
14. All applications for built play facilities on Forest land will be considered on their individual merits however the City Corporation's Epping Forest and Commons Committee will continue to presume against applications for formal built play facilities. Any exception to this general presumption against built play facilities can only be determined once the following considerations have been evaluated:
 - Suitability of location in terms of the aesthetic protection of the natural aspect
 - Impact on the SSSI, biodiversity or general conservation aims in the location
 - Proven absence of suitable nearby local authority open space capable of hosting constructed children's play
 - Design, ambition and scale of the proposed facility. A preference will be for a facility to be of sufficient scale to meet current and future needs and therefore warrant the need for the use of Forest land.
 - Latent demand identified in the relevant Local Plan; Neighbourhood Plan or Local Authority Open Spaces or Play Strategies.
 - Public consultation has been completed with the local community
 - Proof of sufficient local authority or local community capital funding to meet the full costs of constructing a built natural play facility
 - Agreement of Heads of Terms for a licence to occupy Forest land with the local authority which addresses the funding, insurance; inspection; litter clearance; equipment maintenance and scheduled replacement of play equipment and play surfaces and process and timescale for decommissioning, not usually beyond 10 years.
 - The relevant consents have been secured under
 - the General Permitted Development Order;
 - Town & Country Planning Acts

- consent regimes associated with Site of Special Scientific Interest status (where relevant).
 - consent regimes associated with Registered Parks and Gardens (where relevant)
 - consent regimes associated with Conservation Area status (where relevant).
15. Further to these requirements the only play equipment that may be considered will be 'natural play' facilities in keeping with and landscaped according to the surroundings.
16. It is not anticipated that further exceptions will be made in the Forest other than where there is an existing built footprint or within the curtilage of such
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ⁱ Play England

ⁱⁱ Supplementary Planning Guidance 3.6