

## **SPP 11 Physical Activity and Open Space Barnardo's Scotland response to consultation:**

Barnardo's Scotland manages over 60 children's services throughout Scotland, assisting 13,000 children, young people and families. The services provided are diverse covering all age groups from early years through to young adults. Services include working with children's behavioural difficulties, providing educational support, providing family support, assisting families affected by disabilities, HIV, youth offending and homelessness and working with looked after children and those leaving care.

We welcome the new planning policy and the opportunity to comment on the draft proposals. Our involvement in this policy area stems principally from our interest in opportunities for children to play, expressed for older children and young people in terms of "things to do", and our response is framed accordingly.

### **Background:**

Barnardo's Scotland has identified children's play to be a priority area requiring political action. We believe that play is much more than an enjoyable way of filling children's time – and giving children appropriate opportunities to play can provide a targeted and effective response to the needs of children and young people in Scotland.

With 33 per cent of 12-year-olds in Scotland classified as obese or overweight, the physical exertion involved in most play provides exercise, promotes physical co-ordination and develops motor skills. The British Medical Journal reported in 2001 that there is 'an obesity epidemic in young children' and that the main solution should be to 'reduce television viewing and promote playing'. The report identified that 'opportunities for spontaneous play may be the only requirement that young children need to increase their physical activity'.

The open-ended learning through play has been linked to psychological and personal development, building crucial skills (physical, language) and attitudes (concentration, tolerance, perseverance). The Mental Health Foundation has reported that the increasingly limited amount of time children have to play outside, or to attend supervised play projects, was a causative factor in the rise of mental ill health in young people.

Play has a social dimension, and the interaction, negotiation and teamwork promoted by group play can make an important contribution to developing children's social skills. Lack of access to play space deprives children of important opportunities to socialise and risks leaving them bored and frustrated while the Commission on Architecture and the Built Environment (CABE) has stated that investing in the creation and care of high quality public spaces is more effective in tackling anti-social behaviour than the blanket use of tough security measures. A recent Scottish Children's Reporter Administration report stated that "A lack of structured leisure activities was cited in social work reports as a factor contributing to offending behaviour for 59% of the sample."

Yet in the Scottish Children's Commissioner's "Keeping Promises" consultation, the top priority amongst nearly 15,000 respondents was the need for more "things to do" and the Executive's recent Youth Work consultation highlighted the need for young people to have a range of positive opportunities in their local area.

Despite these benefits, a combination of overprotective parents, hostile neighbours and a lack of quality, accessible play space is gradually eroding opportunities for children to play. In a study carried out for National Play Day in August 2005, the National Children's Bureau found that children said that poor provision of play spaces, and the fear that the outdoor world is unsafe, leads them to stay indoors. With the launch of the Welsh Assembly Government's new Play Strategy, and the injection of significant funds to the new Play England project, there is a danger that Scotland's children will be left behind.

In response Barnardo's has called for a Play Policy - effective government action to ensure that every child has somewhere safe, challenging and accessible to play. The provision of good quality, accessible open space is crucial to meeting this goal and to this end we have supported a group of parents from Glasgow in submitting a petition to the Scottish Parliament calling for all children to have access to a safe, challenging and accessible play environment.

Therefore Barnardo's welcomes the publication of this new planning guidance with its stated goals to protect and enhance networks of open space, support opportunities for passive and active recreation and to set standards for the quantity and quality of open space in new developments.

#### **General Comments on the Draft SPP 11:**

The requirement on local authorities to conduct an open spaces audit is welcome. To date most local authorities have not done so and efforts to promote play spaces have been hampered by the fact we do not know how much space we have. Although we have much anecdotal evidence of losses we have never had comprehensive picture of what is happening to it. Audits will enable an informed discussion with regard to open space.

Barnardo's Scotland also welcomes Open Spaces strategies for local authorities. To date many spaces have been taken for granted and a formal policy will help to ensure public scrutiny of the action taken to protect them. Having worked with local residents concerned at the lack of open spaces for their children to play, we welcome the proposal that "local authorities should assess how well the needs of local communities are being met and identify any changes needed".

We further welcome the broad definition of open spaces, to include civic spaces such as squares and market places and other paved or landscaped areas. Children can be flexible in their play and we should not define a play environment solely in terms of swings and grass.

We welcome the extension of Sportscotland's remit to include tennis courts, bowling greens and other community sports facilities. However we do remain concerned over the less robust monitoring and protection for informal recreational and play space, which continues to be the poor relation of formal sporting facilities.

## **Specific Consultation Questions:**

*1) We propose that the audit and strategy should be updated at least every five years. Do you consider there is a need for annual monitoring of changes in local provision of green/open space?*

Yes. While it makes sense to fully audit and review strategy every five years, in advance of the local development plan, there is also a need for closer, ongoing scrutiny of changes, and progress in implementing the existing strategy. Recording of planning decisions and changes should provide information which can be compiled annually to produce progress reports.

*2) Do you agree that the SPP should include a model development plan policy for protection of open space?*

Yes. Provided the protection provided by such a plan is sufficiently strong, the provision of a model plan will aid scrutiny and assessment of the plans produced at local authority level.

*3) For development proposals likely to affect other types of open space not included in the remit of Sportscotland, is there a need for further consultation arrangements, for example with Scottish Natural Heritage or Greenspace Scotland?*

Yes. It remains of concern to us that informal play spaces will not receive the strength of protection already afforded to formal sports facilities through Sportscotland. Many of the development benefits of play stem from its unstructured, child-led nature and so informal play spaces should not be considered as less important.

*4) Should controls extend to demolition of facilities, to avoid the potential for removal of sports facilities without consultation with sportscotland?*

Yes.

*5) Do you consider the proposed standards and thresholds to be appropriate?*

The 6-Acre Standard is a guide for developers produced by the National Playing Fields Association. It has an important advantage over the proposed standards in that it talks of quality of space as well as quantity. So, for example, a thin strip of land around the edges of a housing estate does not provide the same quality of play environment as a central space overlooked by housing. It would be useful to see similar considerations added to the standards for new development.

*6) Should there be a different set of minimum standards for the quantity of open space required in rural areas?*

No. It is welcome that the standards set out are minimum standards, which local authorities can choose to exceed as part of their open space strategy. A rural location is no guarantee of access to a quality play environment, for example through roads acting as barriers or parental reluctance to let children roam. Play spaces need to be locally based and accessible and hence should be integrated into every development.