

Play better: A vision for better play facilities in Southend

Decades of research have shown that the first eight years of life, particularly the first 1000 days, are the most important period of human development. During this time, children are developing cognitive skills, emotional wellbeing, social skills, and forming the base of their future mental and physical health. Most of this early-years development is not gained through formal education, but through play, where children learn and thrive interacting and discovering with the world around them.

Public playgrounds offer a valuable safe space for children to play, and importantly play together, which builds fundamental social skills. The physical exertion used by the children in these spaces is also good for their health, and the whole family can draw benefit from the time together in the fresh air.

Whilst playgrounds vary in age and form, modern play spaces utilise the findings from cutting-edge research and offer stimulating environments for a broad spectrum of children.

In theory, as public play spaces are free of charge, they should be open to all children regardless of the socio-economic position of their household. However, not all children are in easy reach of a suitable playground. Some children may be excluded as there is insufficient equipment to meet their needs, for instance for children with neurodiversity or physical disabilities. Other children may not have additional needs, but the local play area does not have age-appropriate equipment.

Southend City Council notes:

- That easy access to suitable play spaces is important in the development of all children in Southend;
- In Southend we have 36 play areas, of which fewer than half have access friendly equipment;
- That 6% of children are considered disabled, and over 30% are believed to be neurodiverse.

Therefore, Southend City Council resolves:

- To form a new vision and costed strategy to improve all play areas in Southend by 2030;
- That all play spaces should offer some equipment that is accessible;
- That we create a flagship playground in the city for neurodiverse children.

Proposed by: Cllr Lydia Hyde

Seconded by: Cllr Daniel Cowan and Cllr Anne Jones