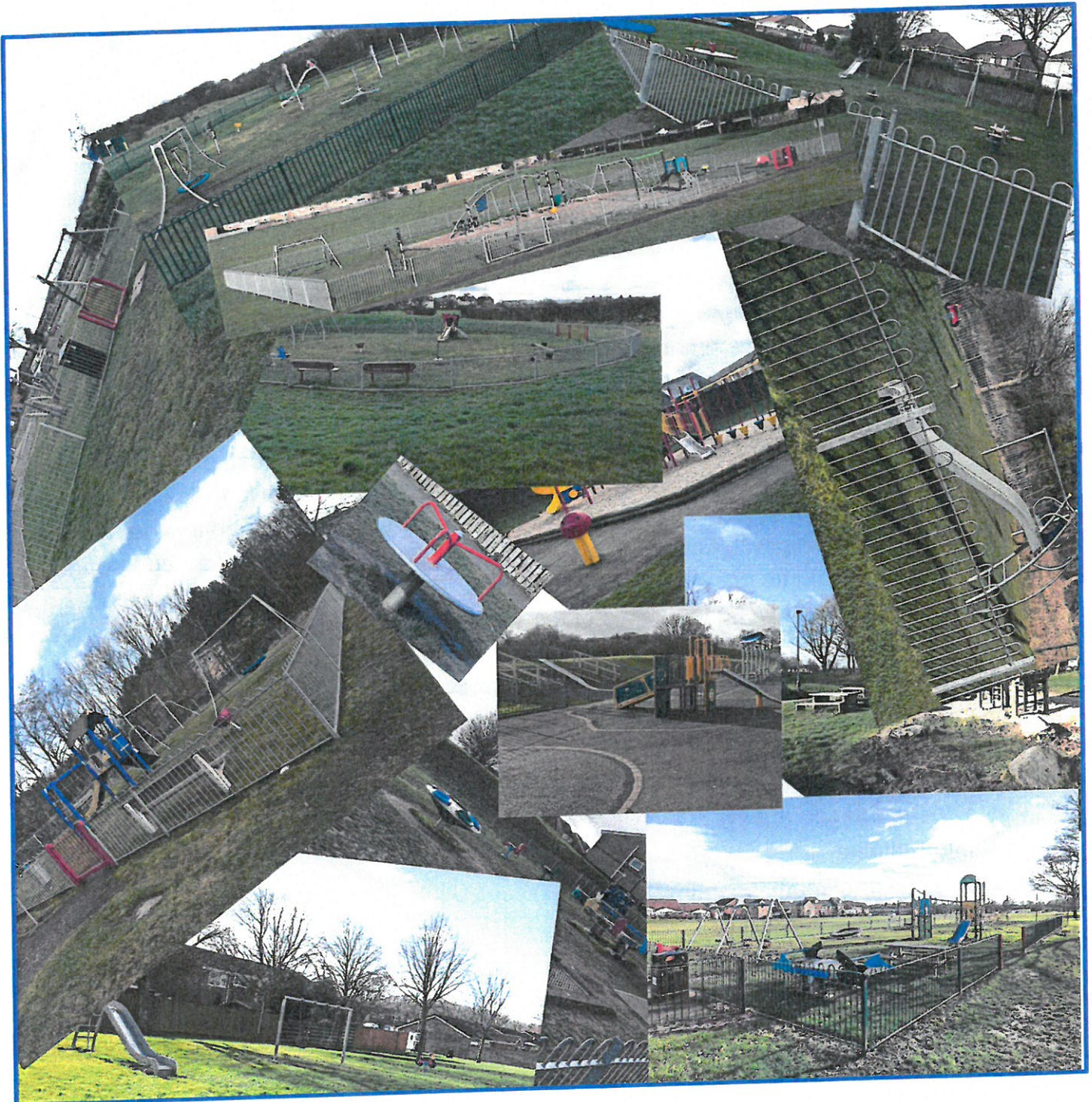


# **TOWARDS A CHILD FRIENDLY CRAMLINGTON**

## **DEVELOPING INFORMAL, CREATIVE AND ACTIVE PLAY OPPORTUNITIES**

### **INTERIM REPORT**



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# **TOWARDS A CHILD FRIENDLY CRAMLINGTON**

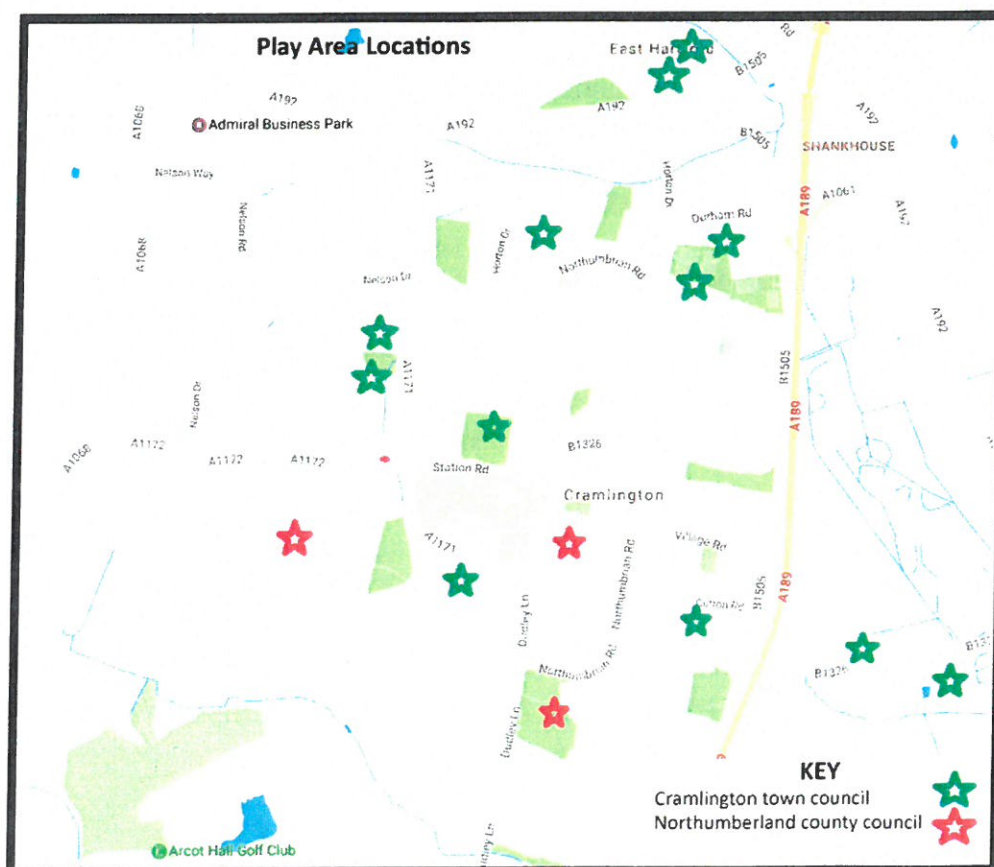
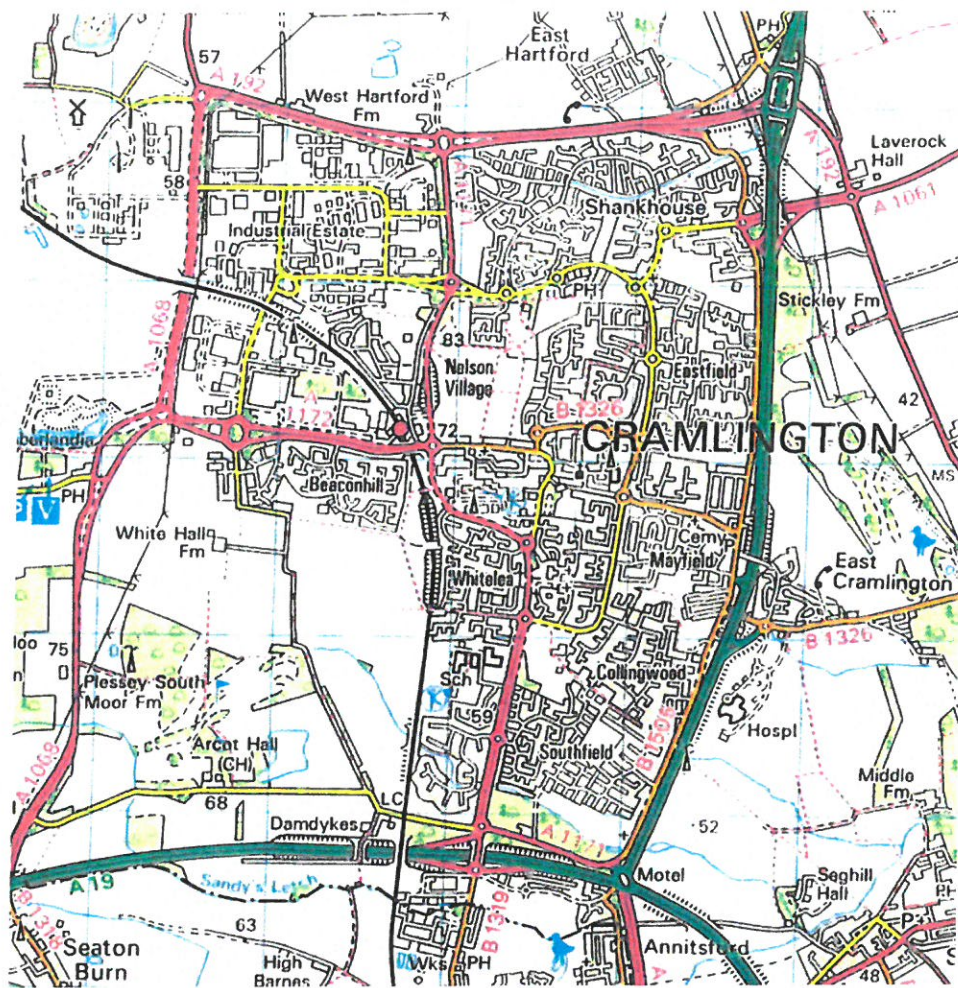
## **DEVELOPING INFORMAL, CREATIVE AND ACTIVE PLAY OPPORTUNITIES**

### **1. Aims and scope of the feasibility study**

In October 2016, the Cramlington Town Council decided to commission a **“Creative and Informal Play Feasibility Study.”** Jackie Boldon, a play consultant working in the North East of England was commissioned in January 2017 to carry out the study and to present an interim report to the Cramlington Town Council Service Committee on Thursday March 16<sup>th</sup> 2017. Jackie has over 37 years experience working in the play and playwork sector in Yorkshire, Liverpool, London and North East England. She worked as a Senior Lecturer in Early Years and Playwork at Northumbria University from 1994 to 2016, where she wrote and managed one of the countries few Degrees in Playwork. Jackie was also founding chair of Play England through which the first Government Play Strategy was developed, 30 new staffed adventure playgrounds were built and £350 million was invested in new or refurbished play areas. Jackie has recently been involved in a number of play initiatives in North Tyneside including fundraising and evaluation for the Shiremoor Adventure Playground Trust, project managing the North Tyneside Play Friendly Borough Project and developing the North Tyneside Youth Offer. Jackie is a member of the International Play Association and through this network has developed a partnership with London Play, with the possibility of a project funded through Sport England to promote active play in Cramlington. This possibility arose as a direct consequence of this study, so the scope of the report was expanded to include active play. During early discussions with the Town Council, the possibility of Cramlington Town Council becoming a recognised Child Friendly Town was proposed, so the final section of the report outlines some first steps on the road to Child Friendly status.

Ideas and recommendations are presented in the report under 5 themes:

-  The importance of play
-  Informal play
-  Creative and imaginary play
-  Active play
-  Child Friendly Cramlington





## 2. The importance of play

Children's health and well-being, their social, physical, cognitive, creative and emotional development, learning and attainment and most importantly their happiness and enjoyment of their childhood are all affected by the extent to which they have time, space and permission to play. If you ask any adult to recall their happiest childhood memories they are almost always memories of playing, often being outside and of having the freedom to play, to invent their own games, create their own stories and role plays and to be with their friends or siblings. The creation of happy childhood memories through play is an important aspect of adult well-being and contributes to our stock of personal stories that we pass on to our children and grandchildren.





Play is an important aspect of culture and children's own culture is lived and created through play. Princesses, dragons and dinosaurs are all important ingredients in childhood culture and the culture of play.

There is now a substantial body of evidence that supports claims that play is good for children, but also good for families and good for communities. Play is both a need and also a right. The right to play is enshrined in article 31 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. Article 31, recently enhanced by General Comment 21, places a duty on governments to protect and promote play opportunities for all children. It states that

**“all children have the right to rest, leisure, play and recreation and to take part in cultural and artistic activities.”**

Local Authorities at all levels have a key role in supporting the Child's Right to play. Planning, transport, housing, children's services, environmental services, family services, leisure services, early years services, schools and sport all have an impact on play opportunities.

In order to support implementation of the right to play, Play England has developed a **Charter for Children's Play**, which is underpinned by four understandings:

-  Play is an essential part of every child's life and vital to their development. It is the key way they explore for themselves the world around them; the way they naturally develop understanding and practice skills.
-  Play is essential for healthy physical and emotional growth, for intellectual and educational development, and for acquiring social and behaviour skills.
-  Play may or may not involve equipment or have an end product. Children play on their own and with others. Their play may be boisterous and energetic or quiet and contemplative, light hearted or even serious.
-  Children's own culture is created and lived through play.

Definitions of play have been much debated, but in 2004 a consensus was reached which was adopted by the government at the time in the Play Strategy and Children's Plan and continues to underpins the Play England Charter and other play sector publications.

***“Play is what children and young people do when they follow their own ideas and interests, in their own way and for their own reasons.”***



It is recommended that Cramlington Council adopt the Charter for Children's Play which is made up of the following principles:

1. Children have a right to play
2. Every child needs time and space to play
3. Adults should let children play
4. Children should be able to play freely in their local areas
5. Children value and benefit from staffed play provision
6. Children's play is enriched by skilled playworkers
7. Children need time and space to play at school
8. Children sometimes need extra support to enjoy their right to play

Individual children will play in different ways depending on their individual interests and the opportunities which are presented to them. Playworkers (the profession dedicated to supporting freely chosen play for school age children) have developed a taxonomy of 16 play types to assist in unpicking the different types of play: communication play, creative play, deep play, dramatic play, exploratory play, fantasy play, imaginative play, loco motor play, mastery play, object play, recapitulative play, role play, rough and tumble play, social play, socio-dramatic play and symbolic play.

This report looks specifically at active play, creative play and informal play. It should be noted that there is no play sector agreed definition of these terms. For the purpose of this report, the following explanations are offered.

**Active play** can be described as encompassing locomotor play and rough and tumble play. Locomotor play is defined by Hughes as play which involves movement in all directions e.g. tag, climbing and spinning. (but not passively sitting on a swing while being pushed) Rough and tumble play might include play fighting, tickling, chasing and arm wrestling. In relation to the design of play areas, they can include opportunities for a range of active play: spinning, climbing, swinging, bouncing, balancing and sliding. Whilst play areas support some types of active play, they also present limitations such as space for play activities such as football, hide and seek, frisbee and parcour or free running.

**Creative play** involves creating something and using the imagination. It helps children in developing their identity, can be cathartic and therapeutic. It is often interactive and therefore promotes social skills, allows free expression and can uncover hidden gifts. Creative play can be supported through a range of mediums including art, music, drama and story telling.

**Informal play** Taking the definitions of play above, it could be argued that all play is informal play. Informal play undoubtedly involves freedom and choice. For the purpose of this report informal play is defined as any type of play which is freely chosen, but can include games which are facilitated by an adult such as informal games of football, parachute games or chase.

As part of this study, children from Northburn school were asked to define play and included in their definitions "*having fun*" and "*being active*".

The ideas which are outlined in this report have been drawn from a wide range of sources, good practice in the UK and from other countries, from the play and playwork profession but also from other professions such as planning and community arts. However, no apology is made for the perspective adopted which is a playwork perspective informed by the authors 37 year background working and volunteering in the play and playwork sector.



### 3. Informal play

#### 3.1. Improving the existing play areas

Cramlington Town Council has responsibility for 12 equipped play areas across the 5 electoral wards. In addition Northumberland County Council has responsibility for 3 equipped play areas: Alexandria Park, Seven Oaks Park and Beaconfield Adventure Playground. There is currently a very effective partnership between the Cramlington Town Council and the highly regarded Danish Playground company Kompan. During the period of this project the East Hartford play area was being developed by Kompan with replacement grass matting and a new see saw. Kompan have over the last few years replaced or made improvements to several of the 12 Council play areas. Community consultation events have been held to inform each refurbishment and attempts made to ensure that each play area offers a different play experience through installation of different equipment.

The key elements of an equipped play area are catered for in most of the play areas: swinging, sliding, balancing, spinning and climbing. The design of Kompan products and playgrounds is influenced by the Kompan Play Institute which is located in the Child Friendly City of Odense in Denmark. The Kompan design philosophy is based on 3 pillars embedded in the design of each playground:

- **Learning**
- **Health**
- **Environment**

Kompan recently acquired the Play Practice, which was established by highly regarded landscape architects based in Scotland. The expertise of the Play Practice includes consideration of the very important aspect of play area design: **Flow**, which is also included in Kompan design principles.

Good practice in the design of play spaces was pulled together by Play England in 2008 in "**Design for Play: A Guide to creating successful play space**", which was developed to influence the £350 million government investment in the Play Builder programme. The 10 principles advocated for designing successful play spaces are listed below.

#### **Successful play spaces:**

- 1. are bespoke**
- 2. are well located**
- 3. make use of natural elements**
- 4. provide a wide range of play experiences**
- 5. are accessible to both disabled and non-disabled children.**
- 6. meet community needs**
- 7. can be used flexibly**
- 8. build in opportunities to experience risk and challenge**
- 9. are sustainable and appropriately maintained**
- 10. allow for change and evolution**

The guide goes into more detail about each of these principles. Chapter 2 – Inspiring play spaces, provides guidance on designing places for play and chapter 3 provides guidance on making other spaces more "playable". A number of case studies illustrate excellent play space designs.



A further very useful toolkit when considering the design of play areas has been developed by another playground company, Timber Play in partnership with Sheffield Hallam University. The toolkit looks at Play Value and includes a 12 point guide to play value.

Play value is defined as:

*“the opportunity provided by an object, exchange, experience or environment for an individual or group to immerse themselves in play. It is not about the amount of play equipment but the value of the available play opportunities within any given site. Play value can be found in any location and needn’t be confined to designated play spaces.”*

One good example of an environment with play value in bucket fulls is the beach.

As part of this study, each play area was visited and photographed. Ad hoc consultations were carried out in February around the play value of the existing play areas and ideas were sought for improving play opportunities in and around the existing play areas. Consultees included: parents, grandparents, dog walkers, young people, youth workers, playworkers, teachers and grounds maintenance workers. Year 5 children from Northburn school were shown the photographs of each play area and asked to give each a score out of 5. The exercise provoked considerable debate. Some children loved the trampoline in their local play area, others thought it was dangerous and others thought it didn’t have enough bounce. There was also controversy over the spinner – one child asked if cushions could be added to the seats and back rest as *“it hurts your back when it spins fast”*. Beaconfield Adventure Playground was given the highest votes. One of the children said *“that’s what I call a proper playground”*.

Children have considerable insight when it comes to play. Insight into their own play preferences for risk and challenge or safety and security, but they also often have a good understanding of the play preferences of younger children. Good consultation processes need to combine the expertise of children with that of play experts. Limitations such as budget constraints, maintenance, health and safety considerations, standards and the potential for vandalism all need factoring into the design process, but involvement of children and the community in the design process can be an empowering learning process and result in a stronger sense of community ownership and follow up engagement.

One way forward could be to look in more detail at each individual play area, carry out a community consultation and make recommendations for investment and improvement, however a more strategic approach to play is recommended. Children and parents need good play areas in their community and most children enjoy swinging, climbing and sliding, but most play areas will only hold their attention for a maximum of 45 minutes.

Play in the wider public realm, play in schools and play in the home should all be considered as interlinked aspects of provision for play. Play areas and any adjacent spaces can be good places for active play, but a good play strategy should also consider other play types such as imaginative and creative play. Children of different ages and children with different interests need different opportunities. As children get older, the play area will be of less interest, except as a place to meet their friends and “hang out”. Social meeting spaces for young people are also needed to complement the play areas and to prevent resentment and vandalism.

Children and Young people also need child and youth friendly adults to support them in their play and leisure time with positive things to do and welcoming places to go. Animation of parks and play areas in the summer is discussed later in this report, but can be a more effective way of preventing vandalism to play areas than the installation of CTV cameras.  
(See Section 3.3. of this report for suggestions around creating playful communities).



The three parks maintained and owned by the County Council each have a strategic location in relation to the overall play area web, the active travel web and the green infrastructure. In the workshop with children from Northburn school, **Beaconfield Adventure Playground** was given the highest score. The Beaconfield Adventure Playground includes a number of elements which would be considered by play experts as of high play value such as opportunities for risk and challenge, use of sand and loose parts for mastery and manipulative play, enough space which is not fenced in for different types of play including games of chase. The adventure playground is also adjacent to a school and a community centre which should make it easier to organize play days or events in the park.

The **Seven Oaks Play Area** was scored 4 – very good. The children liked the inclusion of the pirate ship and sand, but the play area could benefit from repainting and a general up grade, particularly given its location adjacent to the shops and other town centre amenities. There have been reported issues of young people using the pirate ship for socializing and drinking. Young people comment that they have nowhere to go and would like a social space with a roof for summer and winter and possibly equipment aimed at young people. Discussions were held with young people from the Cramlington Voluntary Youth Project around their ideas for improving Seven Oaks Park with some very interesting proposals: sound play features, split level sand pit, zip wire and interactive puzzles. (see drawings in section 5) The young people volunteered to do litter picks at the park and to organize play days as part of their Duke of Edinburgh Award. Another suggestion included a tree house or wooden shelter for young people away from the play area (by the stone wall) with recycling bins made by the young people which could be used for “target practice”. Any consultations and refurbishment of the Seven Oaks play area could involve both the local school and a consortium of local youth organisations including Cramlington Voluntary Youth Project, North East Youth, Doxford Youth Association and the Cramlington Learning Village. Support from the young people of Cramlington may help reduce inappropriate use of the play area, vandalism and help in changing attitudes to young people as part of the problem rather than as part of the solution.

**Alexandria Park** also scored 4 in the children’s consultation, but some of the children commented that they did not always feel safe in this park. As well as a play area, the park includes opportunities for a range of other activities including skateboarding, tennis and outdoor theatre. There are plans for star spots for star gazing and plans for a sensory garden. Again through community consultation there is considerable scope for enhancing the range and quality of play by for example introducing natural elements in other corners of the park. One of the children from Northburn school would like to offer her ideas around a sensory garden. A number of young people suggested adding musical features to the parks and play areas.

It was no surprise to discover from these consultations that play in Cramlington is a highly contested topic surrounded by a diversity of views on the inter-related issues of safety, risk, acceptable and unacceptable or anti-social behaviour, value for money, play with a purpose or play for it’s own sake, adventure and challenge, freedom, supervision, “good” parenting, health and acceptable levels of physical activity, screen time, curriculum, education and well-being.

The following photographs attempt to capture each of the play areas in the context of the surrounding green spaces. Each play area is located within or between one of the estates or communities which make up Cramlington. However, with the limitations of a small area and a surrounding fence, most designated play areas have only limited appeal and cater for a limited number of play types. Children and especially supervising parents rarely want to stay at a formal play area for longer than one hour. However, larger parks with other attractions, other children to play with, cafes and events can hold the attention of children and families for a full day. Some play areas have scope for the addition of an informal play zone (see section 3.2.)

# North West Cramlington Nelson village



## **Nelson Avenue Play Area**

Located on Nelson Avenue with 6 pieces of play equipment .  
(limited scope for informal play zone)



## **Chichester Avenue Play Area**

Located in large green space with allotments and animals.



## **Chichester Avenue Informal Play Zone**

Potential for informal play with trees and gentle undulations.  
Informal Play Zone sign to be added with play prompts and play partners.



## **Chichester Avenue play area**

Kompan plan



## North East Cramlington East Hartford village



**East Hartford Welfare Park**



**Mortimer Chase Play Area**



**Mortimer chase informal play zone**

## Shankhouse Community



**Abingdon Square Play Area**

## Northburn Community



**Horton Park Play Area**



## Eastfield Community



**Alderley Way Play Area**

## Parkside Community



**Norwich Way Play Area**

## **South East Cramlington Mayfield Community**



**Clifton Road Play Area**

## **East Cramlington Village**



**Marjorie Street Play Area**



**Weldon Road Play Area**

**Collingwood Community– No Play Area**

**Southfield Community– No Play Area**



## **South West Cramlington**

### **Whitelea Community**



**Mainstone Close Play Area**

## Northumberland county council play areas

### Beaconfield Adventure Playground (SW)





## Alexandra Park Play Area (SE)





## Seven Oaks Play Area (Town Centre)





## 3.2 Creating Informal Play Zones

According to Play England's design guide:

***“providing play opportunities is as much about creating general public space that offers play opportunities as it is about designing and creating designated play spaces.”***

In chapter 2 of Design for Play, the following principles are suggested for making other spaces more “playable”.

### **Good informal play zones are welcoming to children and young people.**

Interpretation boards which are designed and created by the local children and the community can be an excellent way in which to create a welcoming **Informal Play Zone** alongside generating community ownership. Instead of the current outdated signs, signs which encourage children to play informal games and be active could be installed.

### **Good informal play zones can include informal play features**

Boulders, logs, planting and trim trail style play equipment can be used to enhance the Informal Play Zones and can act as a signifier that play is welcome. 9 out of the 20 children from Northburn school said that football was their favourite play activity and requested more goal posts or things like trees that they could use as goal posts. Other favourite play activities included: tag, skipping, bike riding, tree climbing, dance and tumbling/gymnastics. All these activities could be encouraged in informal play zones with adult encouragement.

### **Good informal play zones can encourage nature play and appreciation of mini-beasts and the environment**

Children often love climbing trees, making dens and rolling down hills. The area adjacent to Mortimer Chase Play area includes a very interesting shaped tree which could be a central feature in an informal play zone. The local children could be encouraged to give the tree a name which could then appear on the sign. Over time and with imagination the tree can be involved in experiences and adventures as part of a story and the “children’s tree” could be integrated into the myths and legends of Mortimer play area.

Other features such as the horses and allotments near Chichester Avenue Play area in Nelson village could also be incorporated into an informal play zone through cooperation with the community and horse owners. Planters with flowers and/or vegetables could be created to enhance interest and community ownership. Boulders, logs and insect hotels can all encourage mini-beasts. Trees might be home to birds. Certain plants can attract butterflies and burns can attract dragon flies. Encouragement of nature play is an important stepping stone to environmental awareness and sustainable living.

**Good informal play zones are shared spaces** with opportunities for inter-generational play from games of frisbee and skipping to family football and family cricket.

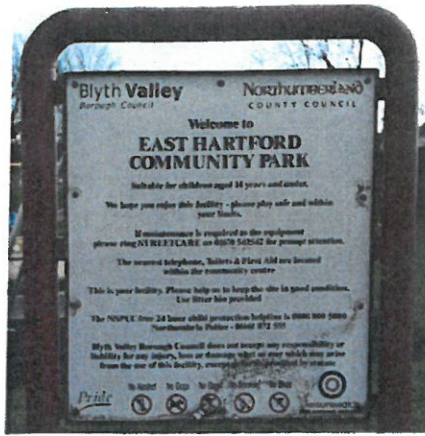
**Good informal play zones can encourage active play** which meets the Chief Medical Officers guidelines on activity level. (60 minutes per day for children from 5 to 18)

### **Good informal play zones need regular maintenance**

Whilst the Town Council green space maintenance team are very efficient at litter picking and maintaining the green spaces of Cramlington, it may also be possible to incentivize community litter pickers.

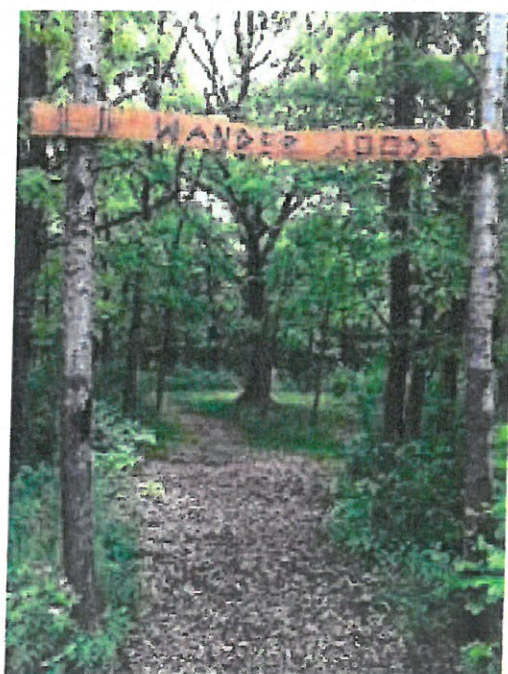
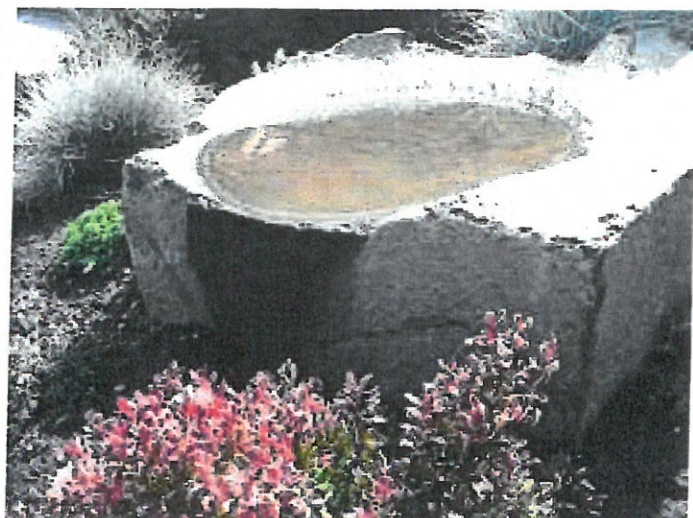


## Play Area Signage





## Informal Play Zones – Nature Play Features





### 3.3 Creating Playful Communities

Play England in their 2011 report: **Creating Playful Communities** claimed that:

*“the social and physically active childhoods that earlier generations could take for granted are now denied to growing numbers of children, with potentially serious consequences for their health.”*

***“Communities which are good places for children and young people to live in are good places for everyone to live in.”***

*“Play spaces (formal and informal) are part of the fabric of community life. Children’s play is part of the life blood of our culture. Children playing are happier, healthier and more resilient than children who are not.”*

Children, young people and adults who make up a community often have ideas, expertise and the vested interest of living in that community to get involved in actions to create more playful communities. With support, neglected neighbourhoods can be revitalized and divided communities can be united. Recent initiatives in Scotland around **Place Shaping** include some innovative approaches and ideas. The notion that communities themselves should be involved in owning and caring for their play areas and their wider community is part of the current government vision for a “big society”, but local communities need the support of enlightened Council’s and of professionals.




Whilst the 2007 Children’s Plan which included a ten year play strategy is not currently recognised by Government, the aspirations in the Plan are still relevant today:

***“that by 2020 in every residential area there are a variety of places to play, free of charge, supervised and unsupervised”***

The 2010 Play England report: **People Make Play**, provided compelling evidence that the presence of qualified playworkers and volunteers can considerably enhance the range and quality of play opportunities available to children within the context of their community. To realize the Play Strategy vision within the current very challenging financial context will require partnership working and innovative approaches to attracting the necessary funding.

Schools, as well as being communities for learning are also important community hubs and can play an important role in the creation of community partnerships to enhance play opportunities both in the school and in the wider community. Good schools are built on good partnerships with parents and with the local community. Schools can also provide a mechanism for keeping children involved and informed.

Through discussions with year 5 children at Northburn Primary School, with young people from the Cramlington Voluntary Youth Project and with professionals and play experts, the following ideas are suggested for further consideration in relation to developing informal play opportunities within the context of a creating playful communities:

-  Further exploration of strategies to support schools to become vibrant **community play hubs** with support from play experts for play in school and in the wider community.
-  Exploration of community partnerships to support the existing Council managed play areas and creation of allied Informal Play Zones including **creation of new signage**.  
(see photo of out of date play areas signs above)
-  Support from Northumberland Council to close streets for monthly resident led **Street Play**



session.

- ✚ Support for **Community Play Days** including **Inter-Generational events**
- ✚ Promotion and development of **active travel**, including extending the cycle and walking network to link primary and secondary schools, neighbourhoods, shopping hubs and leisure activities.
- ✚ Support for children, young people and families to explore places beyond Cramlington including the CVYP initiative in Kielder Forest and cycle links with Holland.
- ✚ Support for community led and partnership initiatives to **enhance the green infrastructure** and presence of wildlife in Cramlington including community planters, bug houses, community gardens, wildflower meadows, community woods and community litter picks. (see Malls Mire Community Wood – Urban Roots [www.urbanroots.org](http://www.urbanroots.org) )
- ✚ Making it easier for people of all ages to **become recognised volunteers** and get involved in initiatives to create a more playful community.
- ✚ **Training and awards schemes** for children, young people and adults which recognize community activity and active life styles.
- ✚ **Meaningful consultation** (including with children and young people) on new developments which will enhance the community including the development of parks and green spaces. (examples of good practice in Playful Communities includes Go4Play and Connect4Play)
- ✚ Support for initiatives to help **children feel safer in parks**, green spaces and the wider public realm.
- ✚ Exploration of initiatives such as “**Play Watch**” and “Play champions” to monitor problems in play areas and encourage community support.

### 3.4. Creating a Cramlington Play Area Web

Whilst Cramlington is made up of several communities: Nelson Village, East Hartford Village, Shankhouse, Northburn, Eastfield, Parkside, Mayfield, East Cramlington, Whitelea, Hall Close Collingwood, Southfield and Beaconhill, it is also a cohesive town with a strong sense on place and history. The first records of Cramlington date back to the 12<sup>th</sup> century (1135) when it consisted of a few farm houses and a church. It remained a rural community until the 19<sup>th</sup> century when it was transformed with the introduction of coal mining and the development of collieries such as Collingwood. The history of Cramlington includes stories of exploitation by mine owners, poor working conditions and pit fires with resultant loss of life. The history of Cramlington also includes an important role in World War 1, including a military base and airship station in Cramlington Village. Cramlington was the base of No 36 Home Defence Squadron. Reference is made to Cramlington in the Biggles series of adventure books.

It's location on the rail line to Edinburgh meant that it was regularly visited by famous trains such as the Flying Scotsman and was the site of two major rail accidents. In 1926, the Merry Hampton engine and 5 carriages, which made up the Flying Scotsman were derailed by striking miners during the General Strike.

The creation of the New Town in 1965 involved the building of new housing estates, including Beaconfield, Collingwood, Mayfield, Eastfield, Shankhouse, Southfield and Whitelea, by developers such as William Leach and J.T Bell. The Manor Walks shopping centre was constructed in 1970's and expanded in the 90's. Further developments in 2014/15 included building The Vue Cinema, 2 new restaurants and a re-opening a prominent pub – John the Clerk of Cramlington (previously The Travellers Rest) with the aim of boosting the visitor and leisure economy. In 2015 a new hospital was built by the Northumbria Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust. Plessey Woods Country Park is just to the North of the town and Northumberlandia, a huge sculpture in the form of a reclining woman, is on the outskirts of the town. Both offer endless play opportunities as do the nearby magnificent beaches of the Northumberland coast.

The design of Cramlington with it's extensive network of interconnecting green spaces, cycle ways and walk ways and it's rich history, it's 15 play areas and central shopping and leisure hub provide the ingredients to create an interconnected **Play Area Web**. This could be a conceptual play area web, a physical play area web or an imaginary the play area web. The concept of the imaginary play area web is outlined in the next section. It is recommended that the Town Council through the establishment of a Play Working Group explore further how the connections between the different play areas could be further developed alongside the other ideas in this report

**Recommendation 1:** Establish a Cramlington Play Working Group with the aim of:

- \* encouraging community engagement, ownership and involvement in the improvement of the existing play areas, informal play zones and playful communities.
- \* building a dynamic partnership between the Town Council, County Council and the local community in order to further develop the concept of a play area web.



## 4. Promoting creative and imaginary play

If you spend any time with young children, you will quickly become introduced to their imaginary worlds. Some children hop backwards and forwards between the real world and a world of dragons. Some children, inspired by Disney princesses, weave princes, princesses, castles and palaces into their imaginary worlds. Battles between plants and zombies may be taking place in the school playground and dinosaurs are more than likely to be encountered in the park.

So how can we as adults and as professionals with influence over the public realm, respect and make connections with this imaginary world, appreciate its significance in the everyday lives of young children and recognize its potential for encouraging creativity and for helping children to develop their communication and language skills.

Creative and imaginary play can be promoted in play areas and in parks and green spaces through the inclusion of play equipment such as pirate ships or “choo choo” trains. Natural play features and elements such as trees, leaves and streams can also stimulate imaginative play.

When the children of Northburn school looked through the photographs of play areas, they were particularly excited by the unusual shaped climbing tree adjacent to Mortimer Chase Play Area in East Hartford and were quick to provide the tree with a name (Tim Peak, The Claw or Dorris) and a personality. Through the incorporation of existing features or by adding new features at each play area or adjacent informal play zone, the potential for supporting creative and imaginative play could be enhanced considerably. It would also be possible to build on the concept of a play area web through the use of a story to create an **imaginary play area web**.

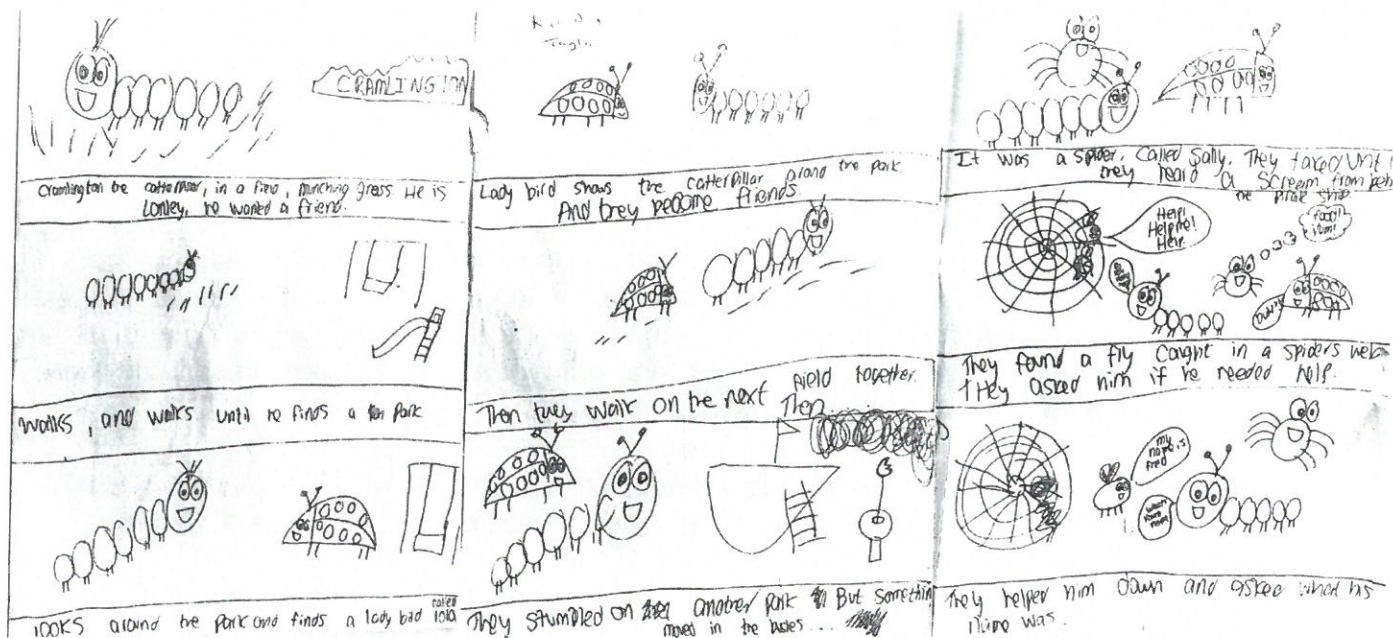
One very powerful tool for exploring fantasy and imaginary worlds is story. Stories can also be used with children to explore issues such as space, culture, bullying and the environment. Stories and story books are key to learning – learning to read or learning about the plight of the polar bear. Most children also have regular access to computers and Ipads, which can be used to access the fantasy world of pokemon and minecraft. However, there is growing concern that too much time is being spent by children on digital technology and more efforts need to be made to get children outside and appreciating nature, if we are to prevent what Richard Louv describes as Nature Deficit Disorder ([www.richardlouv.com](http://www.richardlouv.com))

Very useful discussions were held with the Events Organiser for Manor Walks Shopping Centre around the creation of a Cramlington mascot with an associated story. The starting point could involve a Town Council and a Manor Walks Shopping Centre sponsored **story writing competition** leading to a **Story Telling Festival**. The winning entrants could read their story at the festival or have it read for them alongside the telling of a story written collaboratively by the young people of Cramlington and a story teller.

Informal discussions and workshops with children and young people provided an opportunity to discuss the use of story to enhance creative and imaginary play connected to Cramlington's 15 play areas. Two of the young carers from the Cramlington Voluntary Youth Project got very enthusiastic about developing a story involving Cramlington the Caterpillar and began to create a story for Cramlington:



## The story of Cramlington the Caterpillar



### Cramlington the lonely caterpillar

"So Cramlington the Caterpillar is in a field in Cramlington with yellow walls and he's munching some grass, but he's really lonely and he wants to find a friend."

### Finding a friend – Lola the ladybird

"So he walks and he walks until he finds the closest park and he looks around the park until he finds a ladybird called Lola."

### Being helpful – Sally the spider and Fred the fly

"The Ladybird shows Cramlington round the park and they become friends. Then they stumbled into another park. It's got a pirate ship and some cool things, but something moves in the bushes. It was a spider called Sally. They talked and they talked until they heard a scream from behind the pirate ship. They found a fly caught in a spider's web and they asked him if he needed any help. They helped the fly out of the spider's web and they asked him what his name was ..... and his name as Fred!"

The end (for now)

Written by Kiera with recording by Taylor (Young Carers -Cramlington Voluntary Youth Project)

Cramlington also save a bee called Barbie. (added by Katie aged 6)

So Cramlington became a hero and was honoured in this town called Cramlington Added by Jacob (aged 8yrs)

To explore this idea further, a highly regarded local story teller and environmentalist, Malcolm Green was approached. Malcolm was, in a previous life, the manager of the very successful and innovative Rising Sun Countryside Centre in North Tyneside. For the last 15 years Malcolm has been a freelance story teller and runs workshops for schools, young people and community groups. A project has evolved from these discussions involving:

- two or three story writing workshops with young people who are interested in working with children.



- ✚ making connections with the natural world and geography of Cramlington through cycling and exploration.
- ✚ working with the young people to develop their skills as young story tellers.
- ✚ the young story makers would then co-create a Cramlington based story with Malcolm which would then be performed as part of a **story telling festival**.  
(Funding for the project would need to be identified.)

Over time the stories created for the story festival could evolve into a story trail which incorporated some of the play areas, the shopping centre and other key locations. The story trail could be comprised of visual story boards or be paper based or be linked through marker posts to a digital story. With further enhancements, the story posts could also be adjacent to geocaching points and be developed into a treasure trail. Informal discussions with young children also resulted in two further ideas to enhance creative play in Cramlington:

- ✚ Developing a **pop up play shop** in Manor Walks for children to engage in creative play and make inventions. This could be linked to the North Tyneside based House of Objects Inventions Sheds project. ([www.houseofobjects.org](http://www.houseofobjects.org))
- ✚ Designing a **"play tray"** to place on the back seat car tray for the car journey to Cramlington. The play tray could be paper or cardboard based with a drawing of a trail to connect the shopping centre with Seven Oaks Park, the Vue and Concordia. The play tray would double as a marketing tool for the four locations. A small fluffy caterpillar would accompany the play tray providing the play tools of "a character" and "a place" to keep young children entertained on their way to the Cramlington Town Centre.

The further development of one or more of these ideas for promoting creative and imaginative play could have the following benefits:

- For **Manor Walks Shopping Centre**, a story project could be the starting point for the creation of a mascot for the shopping centre. The mascot could be a regular visitor to the shopping centre and be involved in the events programme with the potential of attracting more shoppers to Manor Walk shops and allied recreational facilities.
- For **Manor Walks Shopping Centre** the creation of a play tray with toy caterpillar could create a marketing opportunity for an integrated shopping and leisure offer with the added benefit of reducing the stress on the journey to Cramlington
- For **children and schools**, a story project could aid school and home based literacy work and create an opportunity for the Cramlington schools to work together with the community.
- For **young people**, a story project could provide opportunities for volunteering, developing employability skills and challenging negative views about young people.
- For the **Town Council** a story project could add to the annual programme of Town Council events and contribute to the Cramlington culture offer.
- For the **community**, a story project could provide opportunities for different communities to work together and socialize through a story telling event.
- For **society**, story making and story telling can play an important role in tackling issues such as the environment, racism, sexism and community cohesion.:

## **Recommendation 2: Establish a Cramlington Play Working Group to investigate**

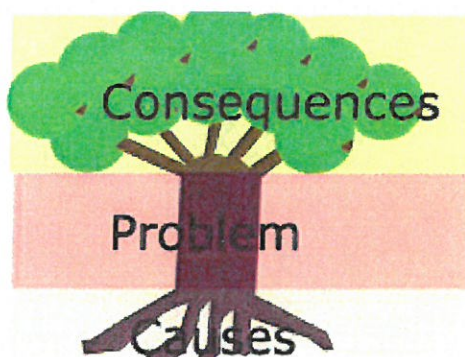
1. Funding for a story telling festival project
2. The development of an imaginary play area web
3. Other initiatives to promote creative and imaginative play through further consultations with children and young people



## 5. Active Play

The UK Chief Medical Officers have brought out new guidelines for children and young people between 5 and 18 to keep active as part of their Start Active – Stay Active Strategy. The guidelines recommend at least 60 minutes of physical activity each day, which can include active play. In December 2015 the Government launched it's new Sports Strategy – Sporting Future – A New Strategy for an Active Nation. The government are funding 10 pilot projects through Sport England to get the nation active and London Play has been approached to develop a bid to lead one of these pilots. As a direct result of this Cramlington Town Council sponsored project, Cramlington Voluntary Youth Project have been approached to be a local delivery partner for the London Play pilot project. The key ingredients of the bid include a progressive town council, an ambitious and well managed voluntary sector project, a range of other potential partners, the particular characteristics and geography of Cramlington and very good play based idea to trial outside of London.

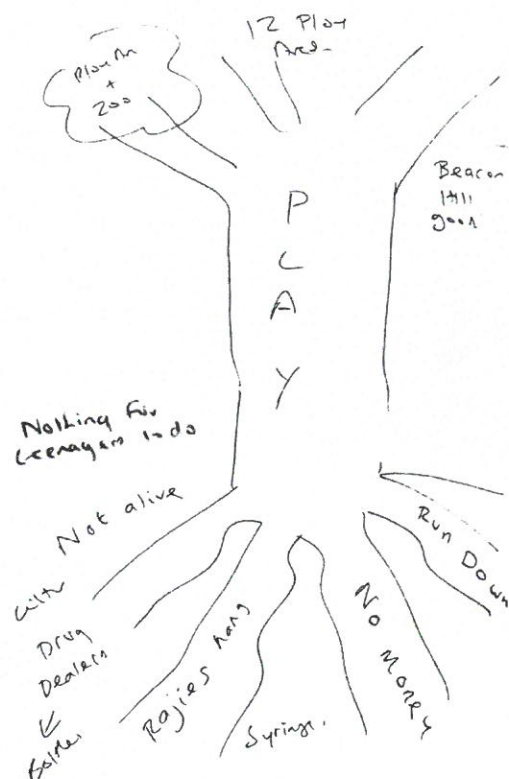
With the possibility of attracting funding for a play based initiative in Cramlington, discussions were held with one of the youth groups supported by Cramlington Voluntary Youth Project to explore some of the problems and issues which had come to light during the project and to see if the young people had any ideas to increase levels of physical activity.



Using a "problem tree", some of the issues surrounding the 12 Town Council owned play areas and the 3 County Council owned play areas were quickly explored.

Comments included:

- "Raggies hang out in the play areas"
- "There are drug dealers, syringes and broken bottles"
- "There is no money to make them exciting, adventurous and interesting"
- "There's nothing for teenagers to do"
- "They are run down and there is litter left lying around"
- "Beacon Hill adventure playground is great."

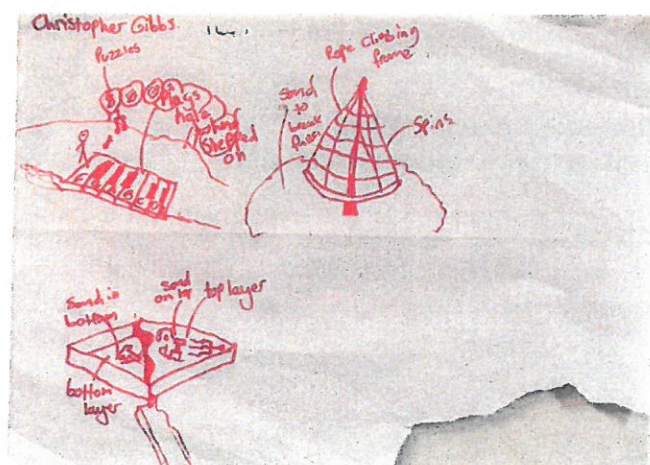
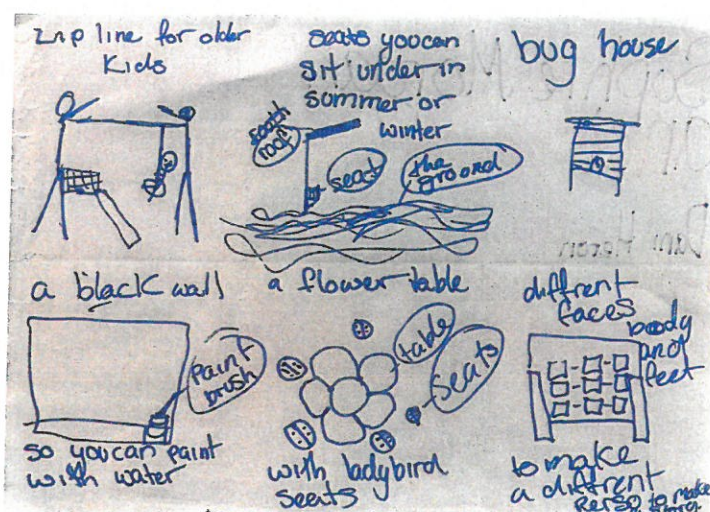
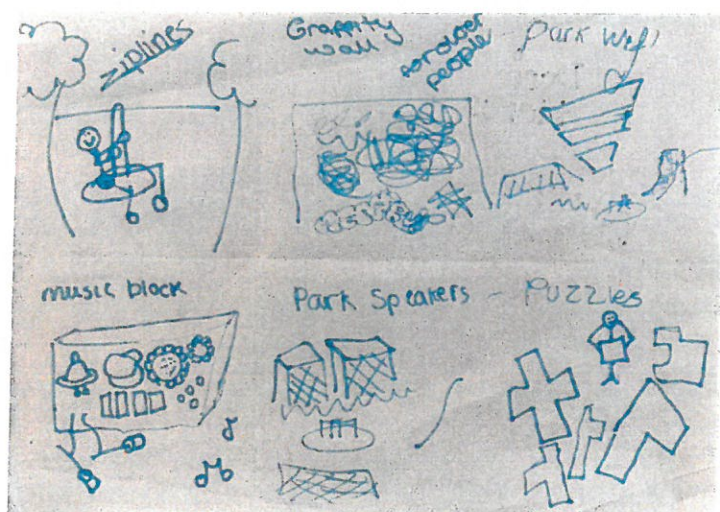




We then explored ideas which could be built into a Sport England funded project to get the nation active.

Using 6 ideas in 3 minutes methodology the following ideas emerged:

- Zip lines x 2
- Graffiti wall for older people
- Park wifi
- Giant jig saw puzzles
- Park speakers
- Music blocks
- Seats you can sit under in the summer or winter
- Bug houses
- Mixed up people puzzle (head, body and feet 3 x 3)
- Spinning climbing net
- Ladybird seats around a flower table
- Outdoor painting wall
- Multi-layered sand box with loose parts, buckets, spades and tubes.
- Musicle stepping stones



**Recommendation 3:** The Town Council provide a letter of support to London Play for their bid to Sport England to run a Cramlington play based pilot.



## 6. Child Friendly Cramlington

According to Unicef the concept of a Child Friendly City includes communities and other systems of local governance such as Town Councils. It is a city, (or Town) committed to fulfilling children's rights, including their right to:

1. Influence decisions about their city/town/community.
2. Express their opinion on the city/town/community they want
3. Participate in family, community and social life
4. Receive basic services such as health care and education
5. Drink safe water and have access to proper sanitation
6. Be protected from exploitation, violence and abuse
7. Walk safely in the streets on their own
8. Meet friends and play
9. Have green spaces for plants and animals
10. Live in an unpolluted environment
11. Participate in cultural and social events
12. Be an equal citizen of their city with access to every service, regardless of ethnic origin, religion, income, gender or disability

A child friendly city is the embodiment of the **Convention on the Rights of the Child** at the local level, which in practice means that children's rights are reflected in policies, laws, programmes and budgets. In a child friendly city/town/community, children are active agents; their voices and opinions are taken into consideration and influence decision making processes.

***“Children shape our cities and our cities shape our children”***

([www.childfriendlycities.org](http://www.childfriendlycities.org))

In the short period of time in which I have been getting to know Cramlington in order to produce this report, I have been incredibly impressed by the friendliness of the people of Cramlington, the accessible and helpfulness of the Town and County Councils and the wide range of services and amenities available to children. Despite the challenging financial context within which Councils across the UK are currently operating, there are ambitious aspirations for Cramlington and an enlightened vision. There are several excellent schools, a network of community centres and inspiring voluntary sector projects such as the Cramlington Voluntary Youth Project, Doxford Youth Association and Cramlington Kids Club.

There is the opportunity to influence the Cramlington Neighbourhood Plan and the beginning of an ambitious project with London Play to get people more active through the development of the concept of **Play Quarters** through which a range of play initiatives including street play, play days and cycling could be supported.

Many young people in Cramlington are involved in voluntary work and citizenship schemes. Achievements of young people are celebrated through awards schemes such as the Duke of Edinburgh Award, Key Fund and the John Muir Award. Several Young People from Cramlington have also won national awards and taken part in national challenges such as the BBC Children in Need Rickshaw Challenge and Young Volunteer of the Year Events. (Youth Focus and NE Youth) 25 Young People have progressed to the Gold Duke of Edinburgh Award including young people with learning disabilities who are also Young Embassadors. The project also operates a Young Apprenticeship Scheme to train young people in youth work and outdoor pursuits.

If Cramlington Council were to become a Child Friendly Town, initiatives would need to be put in place to:

-  audit the strengths and weaknesses of the town in relation to child friendly criteria.



- ✚ raise awareness amongst children, young people and adults of children's rights.
- ✚ develop mechanisms to involve children and young people in decision making and
- ✚ celebrate the strengths of the Town.

One way of celebrating the assets of Cramlington and it's surrounding environs would be through a playful Sarah Farooqi style map/greeting card:

The greeting card map could include:

- ✚ Cramlington as a gateway to Northumberland
- ✚ Manor Walks Shopping Centre
- ✚ Concordia Leisure Centre
- ✚ Azur Garden Centre
- ✚ Plessey Woods,
- ✚ Northumberlandia,
- ✚ Bedlington Country Park
- ✚ Kirkley Hall



**Recommendation 4:** Cramlington Town Council take the first steps in creating a Child Friendly Town by organising a world café style event to listen to the views of children and young people.

## 7. With thanks

This report and the ideas it contains would not have been possible without the ideas and enthusiasm of:

Cramlington Kids Club: Helen Welsh

Cramlington Library

Cramlington Town Council: Cllr Wayne Daley, Bob Baker and Daryl Wood.

Cramlington Voluntary Youth Project: Rob Hall, Claire Gascoigne, Stacie Cox and the Young Carers

Kompan: Paul Taylor and the play installation team

London Play: Paul Hocker and Catherine Nicholson

Manor Walk Shopping Centre: Sarah Turnbull

Northburn School: Clare Scott, Tony Hall and year 5

Northumberland County Council: Mike Jeffrey and the park maintenance team

Peter Boldon: Photographer

Story Teller: Malcolm Green





**CRAMLINGTON TOWN COUNCIL**

**CRAMLINGTON PARTNERSHIP BOARD**

**Minutes of meeting held on 22<sup>nd</sup> February 2017 at 3pm**

**Town Council Offices, Surveyors House, Cramlington Village.**

Present:

J Whisson, J Collins

J Harvey, D Wood, A Harvey (Cramlington Town Council Officers)

T Garnick (Northumberland County Council Officers)

Apologies:

W Daley, E Micheson, B Baker, G Gavin, L Danskin

**1. Minutes.**

The minutes of the last meeting held 22<sup>nd</sup> February 2017 were agreed as a true record.

**2. Manager's Report**

T Garnick reported that the Winter Works Schedule is currently on target. He stated that Northburn Edging has now been completed and the Partnership Teams are currently carrying out Shrub Maintenance in Beacon Hill Park and Mayfield Dale. T Garnick continued to report that additional works such as Litter Picking and Fly-Tipping removal have also been completed; T Garnick added that NCC's Environmental Enforcement Team have prosecuted an offender for Fly-Tipping within the Cramlington area.

J Harvey stated that Fly-Tipping has also been removed by CTC's Services Team; D Wood stated that CTC currently attend 3 Fly Tipping's per week.

T Garnick stated due to concerns raised in January's meeting about Partnership Staff wasting time, NCC have taken appropriate action to address the boards concerns.



### **3. Northumbrian In Bloom**

A Harvey reported that the Services Committee have approved that the Partnerships will lead the Northumbrian in Bloom preparations and continued to outline the report.

A Harvey stated that he will be approaching local businesses in the village square to encourage them to participate in the competition whereby the Town Council would sponsor a floral hanging basket; the board agreed.

D Wood asked T Garnick if NCC are able to design and price a Sensory Garden for Alexandra Park; T Garnick stated that NCC can provide a design and a cost for a Sensory Garden however a further discussion is needed.

A Harvey stated that the Council are currently making efforts to liaise with Cramlington's History Society to progress the History Board Project; A Harvey added that the initial board will be located at the Village Square.

D Wood reported that the Star Spots project is currently underway and three locations have now been identified (Alexandra Park, Horton Park and Valley Park) D Wood added that he is currently in talks with Cllr W Daley and North Tyneside Council to establish project approaches.

A Harvey reported that community engagement is high on the agenda and due to the short fall of engagement it reflected as a negative in last year's competition. A Harvey added that he is currently in talks with Northumberlandia and East Cramlington Nature Reserve volunteers.

D Wood reported that the underpass grassed embankments are looking unsightly and under maintained; T Garnick stated that the Council could implement a low maintenance ground plant scheme such as Yellow Rattle. D wood asked T Garnick if NCC could provide a cost for Yellow Rattle Planting for the underpass embankments; T Garnick stated that he will come back to the board with costings.

A Harvey reported that the Resident Garden Competition will go ahead as part of the Northumbrian In Bloom Competition and the criteria is currently being designed.

**The Partnership board approved the proposed schemes.**

### **4. Members Questions.**

J Whisson asked officers for an update on the Partnership Agreement. J Harvey reported that the Town Council and the County Council have agreed the revised Partnership financial and operational reporting. J Harvey stated that to be effective all reports should be forwarded to the Board members so that they have sufficient time to absorb the information.

D wood stated that the Town Council have received an invoice for Wildflower seeding during the Summer period, he asked NCC to clarify the invoice. T Garnick stated that Town Clerk agreed to pay for the seeding of Station Road embankments.

**Meeting Ended at 16:30**

## **Cramlington in Bloom 2017 Preparations Update Report**

**16<sup>TH</sup> March 2017**

### **1. Purpose**

1.1 The Purpose of this report is to update members on the progress that has been made and to ask members for confirmation of funding towards proposed projects.

### **2. Background**

2.1 Cramlington's spring judging will take place on Thursday 20<sup>th</sup> April and East Hartford spring judging will take place on Wednesday 19<sup>th</sup> April. At the last Services and Events Committee Meeting held 19<sup>th</sup> January 2017, the Committee agreed that all Bloom preparations would be delegated to the Cramlington Partnership Board.

### **3. Projects**

The initial projects are aimed at improving Cramlington's community participation as raised by the Northumbria in Bloom judging report comments. To respond to this advice it is proposed:

- To encourage the participation of businesses in Cramlington Village via offering £200 grant to each business front in Cramlington Village to be used on floral displays. The businesses will be responsible for the instillation and ongoing maintenance of floral displays. Eleven businesses have been identified to be offered the grant; the total cost of the project would be £2,200.
- To hold a Residents' Garden Competition: the highest placed entrant of Cramlington and East Hartford will be entered into the Northumbria in Bloom Special Awards Garden Category. The resident who finishes in 1<sup>st</sup> place will receive a £150 voucher, 2<sup>nd</sup> will receive £100 voucher and third will receive £50 voucher for Azure garden centre. The competition will be judged by an independent body.

### **4. Recommendations**

The Committee is asked to:

4.1 Note the report and progress of Bloom preparations.

4.2 To approve the project and agree provisional costs of £2,200 to support the engagement of businesses.

4.3 To approve the project and agree the provisional arrangements for a garden competition and costs of £300.





## **CRAMLINGTON TOWN COUNCIL**

### **Planting and Environment Works Programme Update 2017/18**

#### **1. Purpose**

1.1 The Purpose of this report is to update members on the progress of the Town Council's Planting and Environment Works Programme 2017/18 (PEW).

#### **2. Gateway Improvements**

2.1 As part of the PEW programme, the Council agreed to upgrade Gateway signage. The Services and Administration Managers have met with Tony Hardy of "Canny Creations" who designed the gateway signs for Seaton Valley and is currently in the process of designing similar signs for Blyth Town Council. Cramlington's heritage of mining and aviation will influence the design as well as Northumberlandia and Manor Walks. The estimated cost for design, making up and installation of eight signs for Cramlington is £4,900

#### **3. History Boards**

3.1 Three locations are suggested for the History Board Project. It is proposed to install boards at:

- Cramlington Village which will focus on what the village used to look like
- East Cramlington Nature Reserve which will focus on the mining heritage and
- The former airfield site which will focus on Cramlington's aviation heritage.

#### **4. Star Spots Project**

4.1 Three key locations are proposed:

- Alexandra Park
- Horton Park
- Valley Park

These areas have been selected due to the opportunity provided by open space and low level lighting.

#### **5. Sensory Garden**

5.1 Northumberland County Council have agreed to design and cost a Sensory Garden for Alexandra Park on a specification which will be provided by the Cramlington Partnership board. As part of the project it is proposed to engage local residents, schools and local organisations. An initial budget of £10,000 to provide layout and infrastructure is proposed. Further expenditure may be required in future years but external grants to fund the scheme will be sought.

#### **6. Underpass Embankments**

6.1 The Underpass grassed embankments are currently maintained on a frequent basis by the Cramlington Partnership Team. Nevertheless they do frequently look under maintained and unsightly. It is proposed, however, that we introduce a ground cover planting scheme. It is



suggested to plant Yellow Rattle which is a low maintenance ground cover plant. Alexandra Park has been identified as a pilot area as this particular embankment is on the Northumbrian in Bloom Route.

## **7. Recommendations**

7.1 The Committee is asked to:

(a) To note the report.

(b) To commission Canny Creations to undertake the design the artwork for gateway signs at a cost of £900 and make –up and installation costs of £4,000 to be undertaken by NCC.

(c) To approve proposed locations for history boards and star spots set out in paragraphs 3.1 and 4.1.

(d) To approve the preliminary budget for a sensory garden set out in paragraph 5.1