

Playful Places: Designing for Movement

Case Study: Houlton Play Park,
Rugby, Warwickshire



Context

This Play Park was commissioned by Urban&Civic in 2017, in the first phase of community infrastructure, as part of the largescale sustainable urban extension of Houlton and soon became a popular amenity for new families and neighbouring residents alike.

The 1,400m² Play Park initially included the playground itself, woodland walks, wildflower meadows and informal open space together with a newly imagined multiuse games area (MUGA) which will be coming forward soon. This is all connected into the strategic green infrastructure network of wildlife corridors, schools, and neighbourhood hubs.

The strategic location of Houlton Play Park ensures that children and families can safely walk or cycle to the site, reducing reliance on cars and encouraging healthy, active travel choices.

Within the space, circulation is shaped to encourage movement-rich play. Pathways, mounding, bridges and equipment loops form continuous play journeys, inviting children to climb, clamber, balance and slide as they move across the site.

A woodland walking loop and mown pathways extend these opportunities, enhancing the development of Fundamental Movement Skills (FMS) and the development of physical literacy as well as the connection between movement and landscape.



We leave for school at 8:30



Mummy gets a coffee at the cafe at Dollman Farm



We stop off at the Co-op to pick up some shopping



We play on the way to school



We arrive at school at 8:45



We play some more at school



Walk home through the wildlife corridors



We have lots of fun on the big play area before home

Landscape Strategy

The brief to Bradley Murphy Design was to employ a landscape-led ethos, creating a space that felt both natural and structured, and that balanced play, ecology and community needs.



Play Design

The 1400m² play space is accessible for all users with opportunities for intergenerational use. It provides for different age groups from sand play for under 6s to climbing structures for older children



Reimagining the Multi Use Games Area (MUGA)

Urban&Civic and Jupiter Play have embarked on a co-design project with young people in years 7-10 at Houlton School to re-imagine the space allocated to the construction of a MUGA and build on research in the sector around inclusivity and gender balance in play.

Young people were placed at the centre of the design process using an interactive KORE tool where participants shaped their own space through grid-based designs and activity tiles. Their ideas were photographed, analysed and translated into final designs with particular attention given to perspectives of girls in the consultation.



The revised design will need planning approval to deviate from the traditional MUGA and will see a bold design combining active, social and creative zones including an interactive football and hockey arena, climbing structure, multi-height basketball hoops, a DJ booth and social zone. Distinctive surfacing subtly separates areas for safe transition whilst encouraging collaboration and play across interests and abilities.

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