

Play Space Report – Knowle West Alliance

September 2021

'Space where children can play outdoors is important, for three reasons. First, because it is such a universal demand from children themselves. Second, because of play's contribution to children's well-being, health, and development. Third, play is a potent expression of children's culture and their place as urban citizens, taking their rightful place in the public life of a city.'

Urban Playground, Tim Gill

Knowle West Health Park

This is a large and varied green space surrounding some NHS health facilities buildings. It includes a grass football area, basketball hoop, fenced children's play areas, Park PlayPod, outdoor gym, walking fitness trail and varied topography including boulders, large mounds, and tarmac paths. There is also a low circular amphitheatre.



This great green space provides a wide range of play opportunities for all ages. It offers a fenced space to play football on grass with designated goals as well as a basketball net. It has a good variety of climbing, whether on a climbing frame, climbing net or grass mound. There are opportunities to swing, balance, spin, roll and traverse. It offers some good seasonal change and a feeling of space

and awe. The tarmac paths enable people to bike and scooter around the space and the walking trail and outdoor gym provides adults with exercise and physical activity options.



There are some opportunities for risk and the paths and desire lines invite you to take a variety of journeys around the space. The amphitheatre provides a good social space as well as opportunity to traverse around the circle. There are also other areas where people can sit and gather such as boulders and mounds.

This space felt safe because it was well managed, is away from the main road and there are people working in the surrounding buildings.

We observed some young people cycle to the park and ride over the mounds before playing football and families in the play area with children of a wide range of ages.

This space is easy to access via car, bike or on foot, links well to the community in which it sits and leads to a further natural/ unstructured green space. There is huge potential to develop this area further to provide more opportunities for play and exploration.

Larger play spaces providing multi-generational facilities are becoming rare, but the benefits for the community are huge. Based on what this space offers, the benefits include access to physical activity, climbing, swinging, and balancing which improve gross motor skills and in turn reduces obesity. There is space for directional sport which build teamwork skills for a range of ages. The seating and varied landscape provide social spaces which encourage social skills. The amphitheatre which is on hardstanding provides opportunity for performance which helps build confidence and allows exploration of self-expression. It also provides all weather space of other community activity.



The space also offers an appropriate place for children to challenge themselves and experience and manage risk. This in turn develops resilience.

In this space there are multiple opportunities for mixed ages playing and exercising together from toddlers to the elderly. Multiple ages using the same space leads to a greater understanding and empathy for each other. It offers scaffolded learning opportunities for the young and opportunities to develop a caring nature and leadership skills for youth and greater understanding for the elderly. These all build a stronger community and a sense of belonging and caring about their surroundings, which leads to a reduction in anti-social behaviour

Connection to nature is a major offer in this space which can improve mental health. It also provides a safe place to be, somewhere to learn new skills and socialise with others.

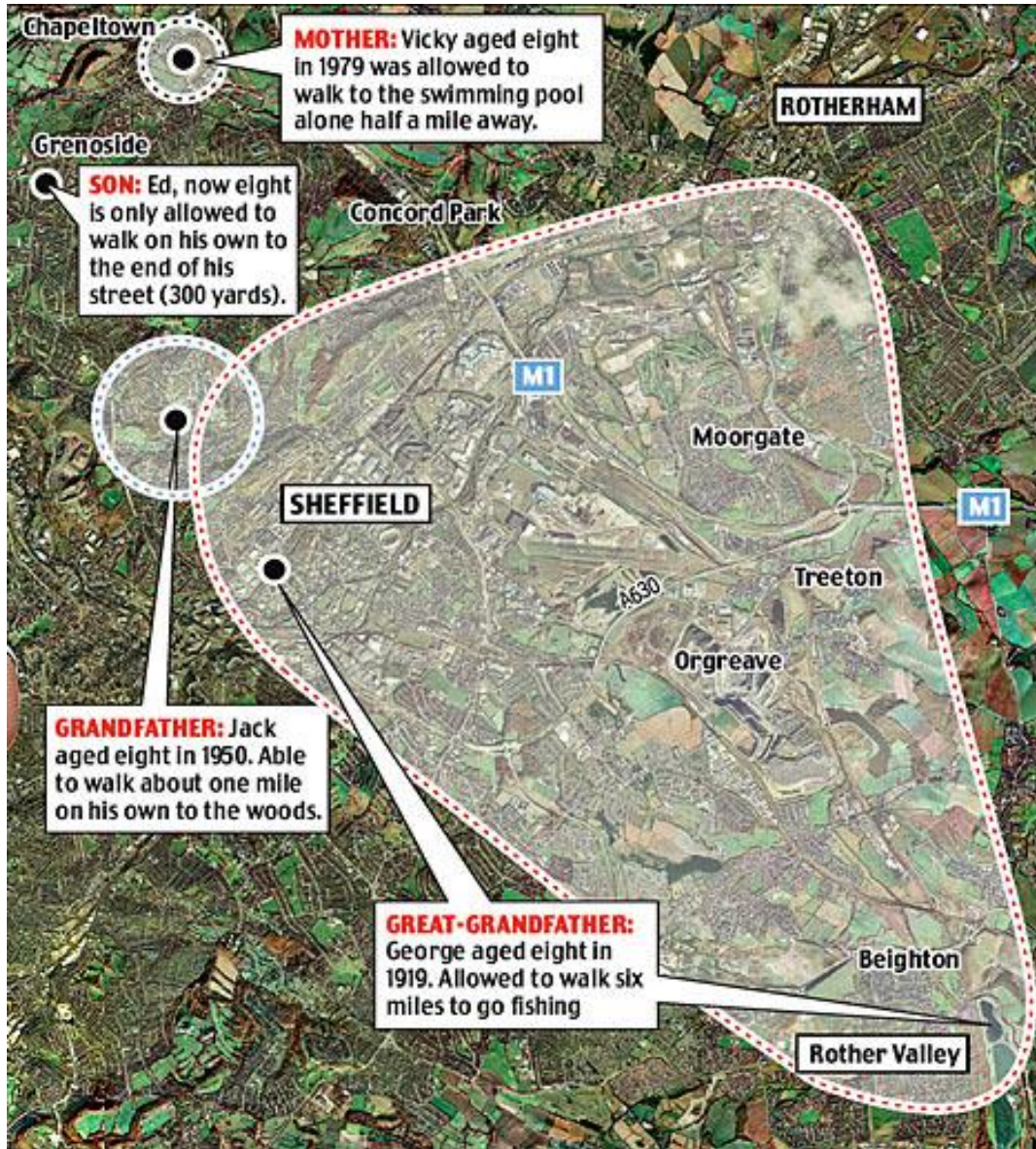
...a growing body of evidence shows that environmental factors such as green space and nearby nature have a direct impact on mental health and may also influence children's academic attainment. One study that tracked over a million Danish people found that children who lived in greener neighbourhoods had a 55% lower risk of mental health problems later in life...

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The preservation of this beautiful and varied green play space is vitally important for the health and development of the young people and community in this area. Through our years of experience, we have found that children are rarely allowed to travel more than a street or 2 away from their homes in order to play unaccompanied due to parental fear. Some parents will not let their children travel through certain local areas due to increased traffic, previously reported antisocial behaviour, local

gangs, or street crime. This forms a barrier to children's travel across areas. Therefore, some children will be unable to access destination parks and rely on very local areas in which to play.

The following image highlights how the area that a child is typically allowed to roam has shrunk dramatically.



Daily Mail (2007) Generational Difference article

The development of large play spaces, often known as 'destination parks', while providing an exciting offer to those who can travel, by no means replace the opportunities lost by the removal of very local neighbourhood provision. Destination Parks are most often used by children and young people accompanied by adults. This presents of their responsible adult alone affects the type of play and experiences available.

'If you live in a deprived inner-city area, you have access to five times fewer public parks and good-quality general green space than people in more affluent areas.'

Commission on Architecture and the Built Environment