



**Play  
England**

Freedom to play



# It All Starts with Play!



# Eugene Minogue

Executive Director



## Introduction

Once upon a time . . . children had the freedom to play!

I was one of the lucky ones. Growing up in the 1980s and 1990s, I had a play-based childhood. Fond memories of playing with friends and family, freely in the street, local park, school, adventure playground, and the wider community.

Arguably, we were the last generation that had the freedom to play, as the decline of play-based childhood began in the 1980s and accelerated in the 1990s.

We have reached a tipping point — a moment of cultural change and policy shift — recognising the dangers of a phone-based childhood and the vital role of free play and childhood independence.

## The Decline of Play: The Facts

How play was once a social and cultural norm

- Unregulated, celebrated, and part of everyday community life
- Streets, parks, and open spaces as natural play areas

What changed?

- Safety concerns, urban design, shifting societal attitudes (No Ball Games signs)
- Institutionalisation of childhood activities (structured play vs. free play)

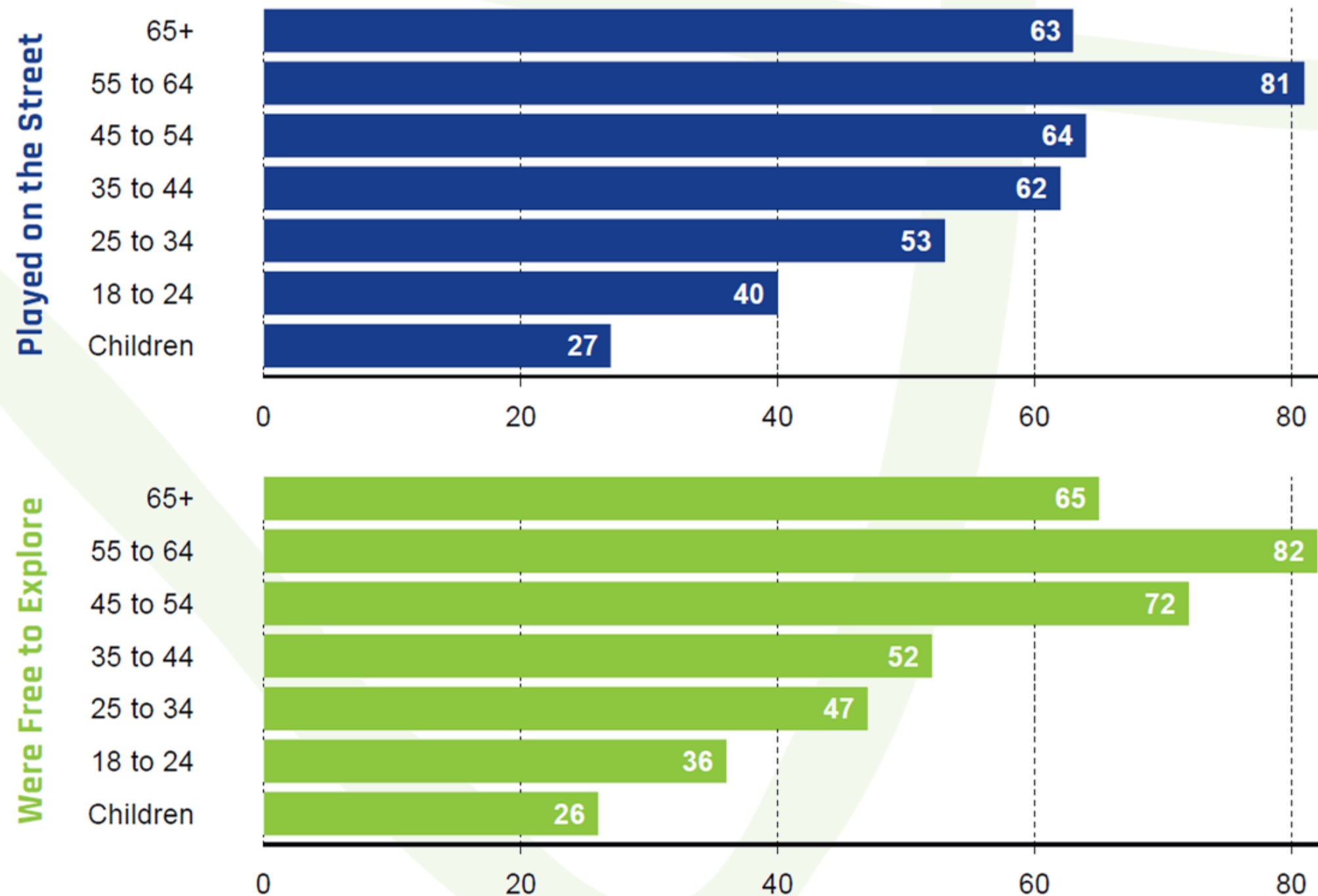


## The Decline of Play: The Facts

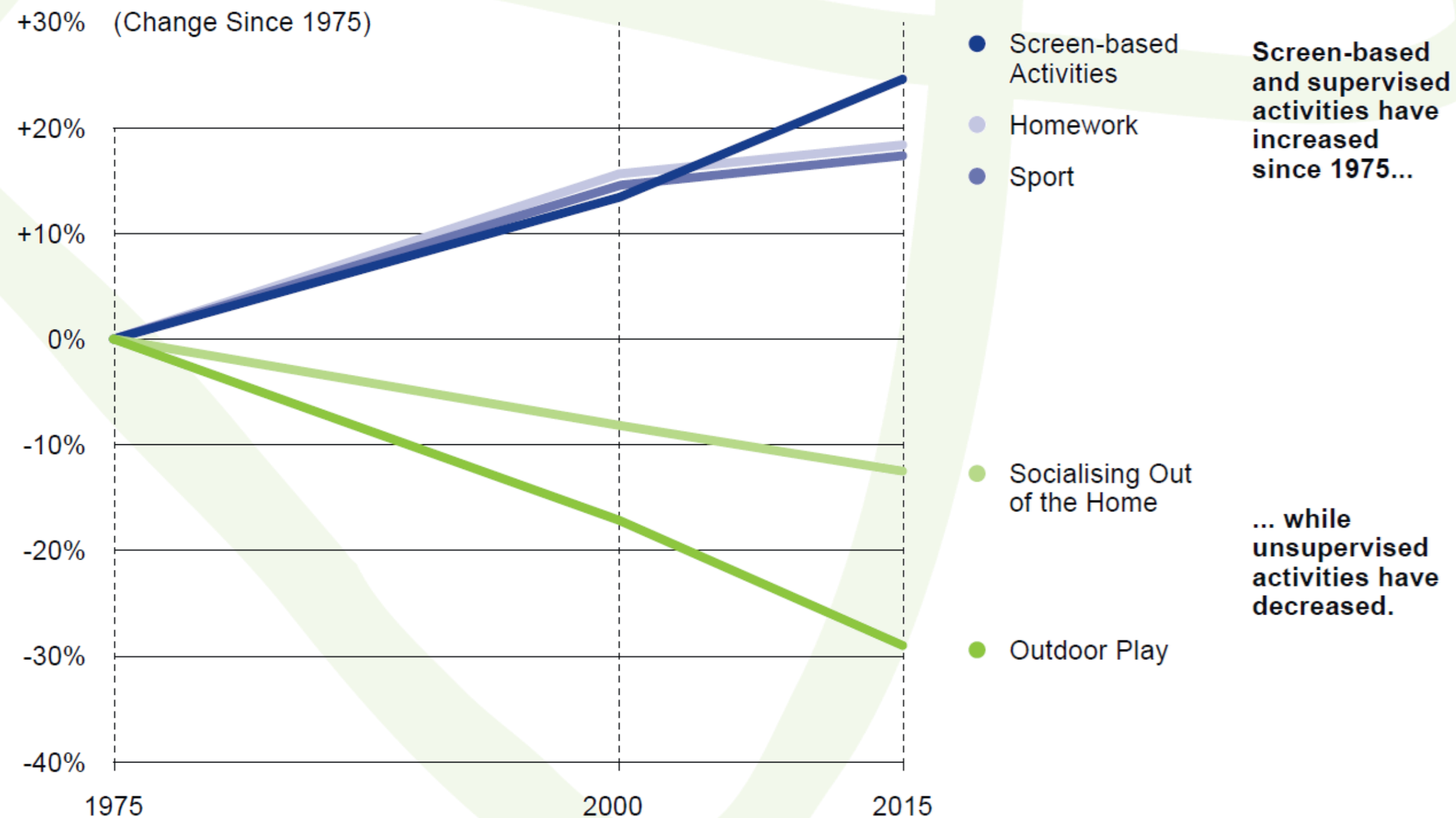
- Time spent playing outdoors has declined by 50% in a generation.
- Less than 3 in 10 children play outside on their street.
- 400+ playgrounds closed in England (2012-2022).
- 2 million children lack access to a playground within 10 minutes of home.
- Park budgets fell by £350 million (2011-2023).
- Play funding dropped 44% between 2017/18 and 2020/21.
- The distance an 8-year-old is allowed to roam shrank from 6 miles to just 300 yards over four generations.



## Children have less freedom than their parents and grandparents

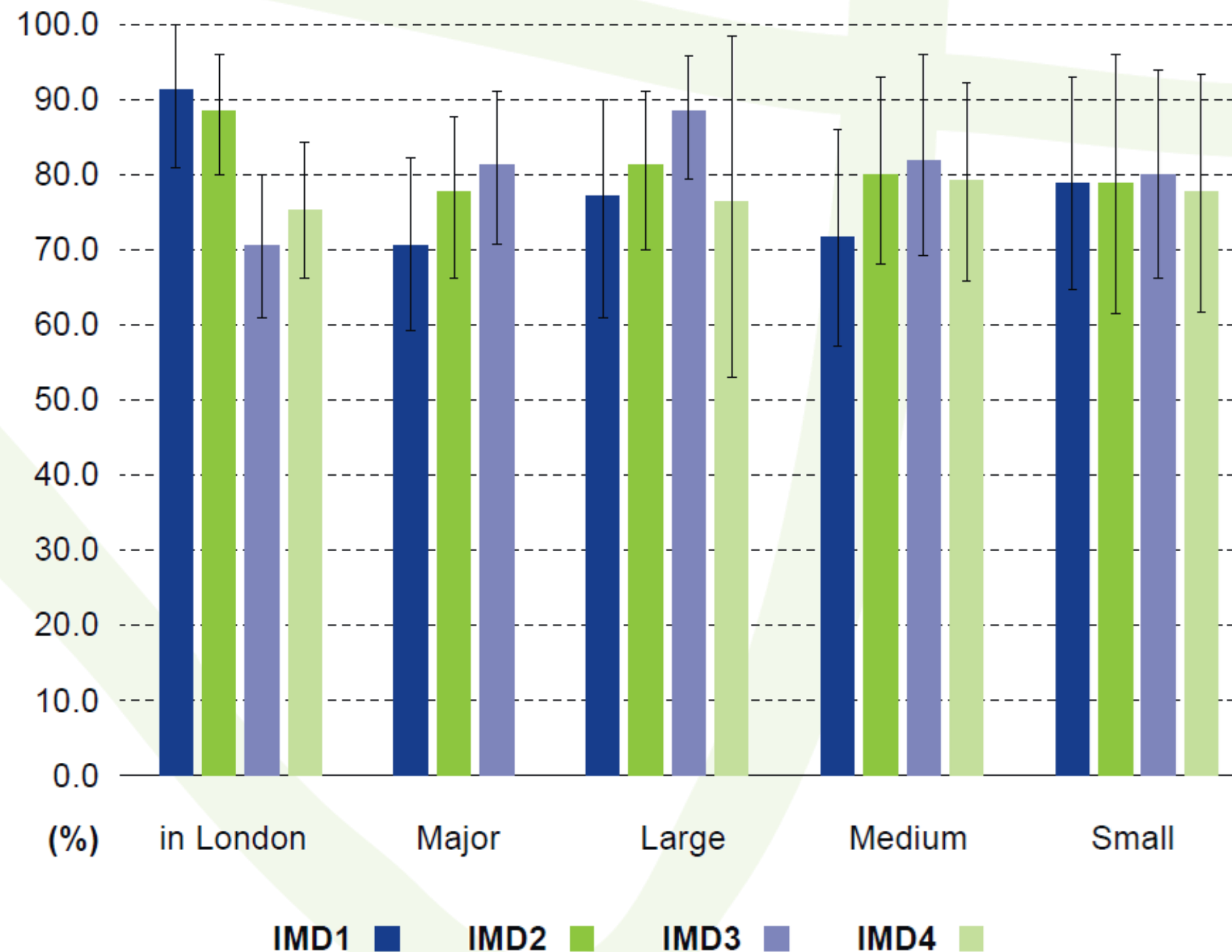


## UK Children's Daily Time Use (1975 - 2015)

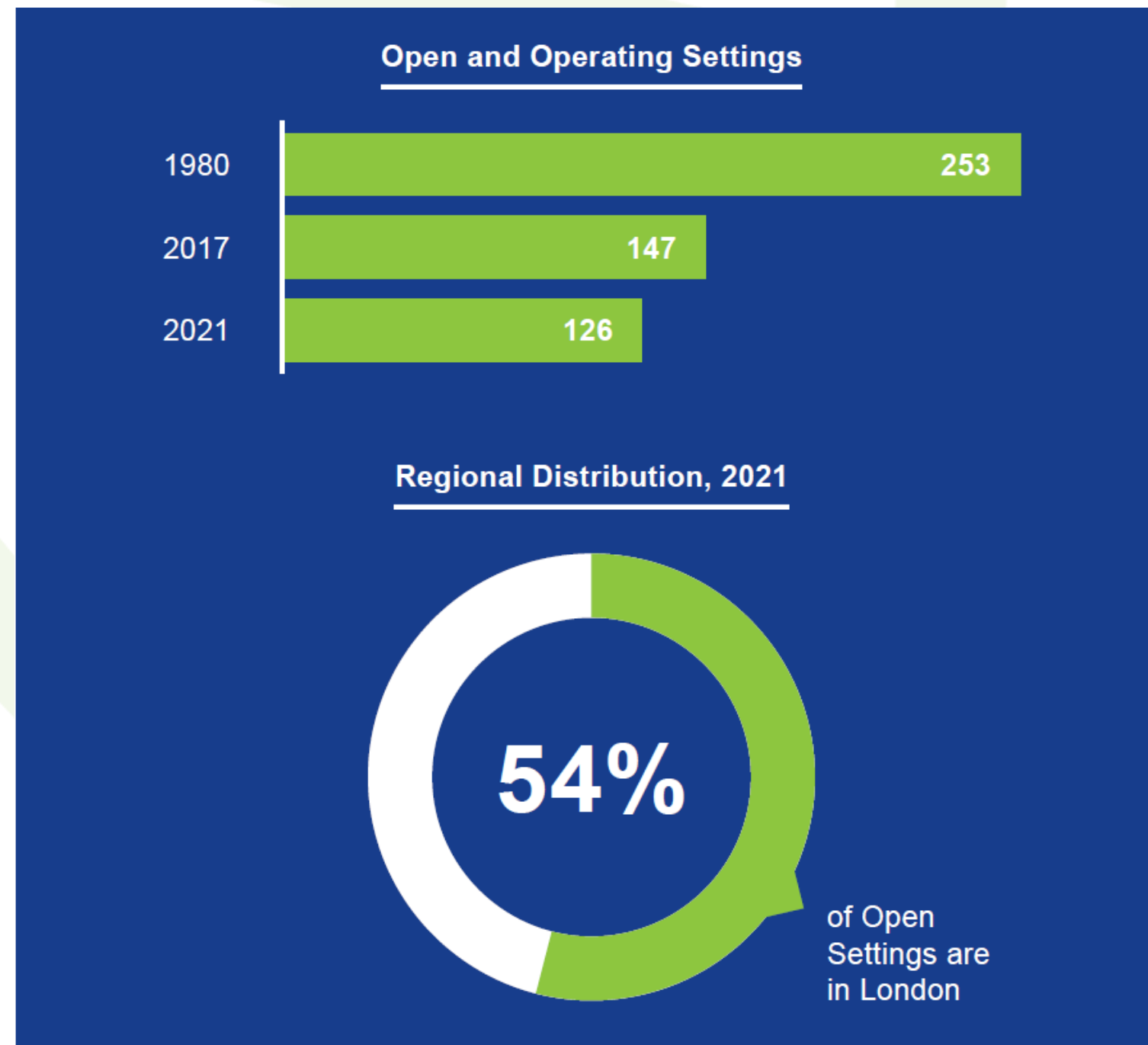




## The Percentage of Children (Under 16) within 500m of Playgrounds



## Decline in Adventure Playgrounds Since 1980





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**NO**  
**BALL GAMES**  
ALLOWED BY ORDER  
DIRECTOR  
OF LEISURE SERVICES

  
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[www.playengland.org.uk](http://www.playengland.org.uk)







## The Decline of Play

The decline of play has been normalised — but it is not inevitable. It is the result of choices.

Restoring a play-based childhood is not about nostalgia. It is about restoring the conditions and opportunities children need to thrive.

It's time to give children their childhood back. And it all starts with play!



## The Impact of Play Deprivation

When children are denied time, space, opportunity and freedom to play, the consequences ripple through every aspect of their lives — across the systems that surround them, and across wider society.

Play deprivation is not just about missing out on fun. It means missing out on: Connection, Expression, Independence, Movement and Risk



## The Impact of Play Deprivation

Play deprivation has been linked to:

- Increased childhood inactivity and obesity.
- Rising mental health issues, including anxiety, loneliness and depression.
- Higher stress and behavioural difficulties, particularly among younger children.
- Delays in social development, language and emotional literacy.
- Lower confidence and reduced independence, particularly in girls and disabled children.



## The Impact of Play Deprivation

When children are denied play, they are denied a vital developmental opportunity — one that underpins physical and mental health, emotional wellbeing, and cognitive growth.

Play deprivation is both a social justice issue and a public health one.



An aerial photograph of London, England, featuring the River Thames, the Houses of Parliament, Big Ben, and the London Bridge. The image is overlaid with a semi-transparent blue rectangle in the top left corner containing the Play England logo and text, and a large white star-like graphic in the bottom left corner.

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# A new Government



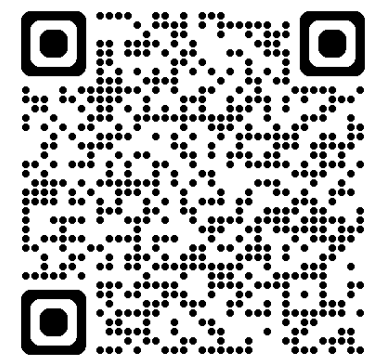
## The Importance of play – Play England’s ‘ask’ of the new Government

There are nearly 12 million children living in England, yet they have no effective voice within, or mechanism for influencing, the planning system.

Therefore, Play England are calling for meaningful change within England’s planning system as part of the government’s legislative programme

- Play Sufficiency legislation in England

This would ensure that all children, young people, and families have access to enough time, space, opportunity, and permission to play and recreation throughout all aspects of their daily lives. It would protect, provide, and enhance opportunities for play and recreation at home, at school, in parks and public spaces.





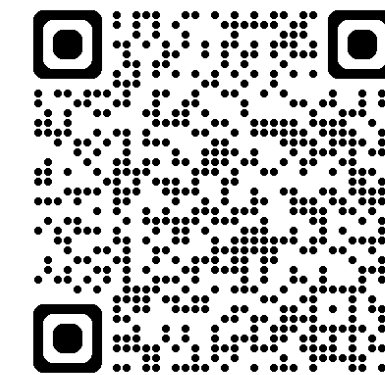


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# Play England





## Our New Strategy

# Vision:

**A society where all children have the freedom to play.**

This is the society we want to rebuild – a society where play is no longer the exception, but the accepted norm. A society where all children have the freedom to engage with their surroundings, their peers, and themselves in ways that are both creative and meaningful.

# Mission:

**To make play a normal, accepted, and visible part of everyday life again.**

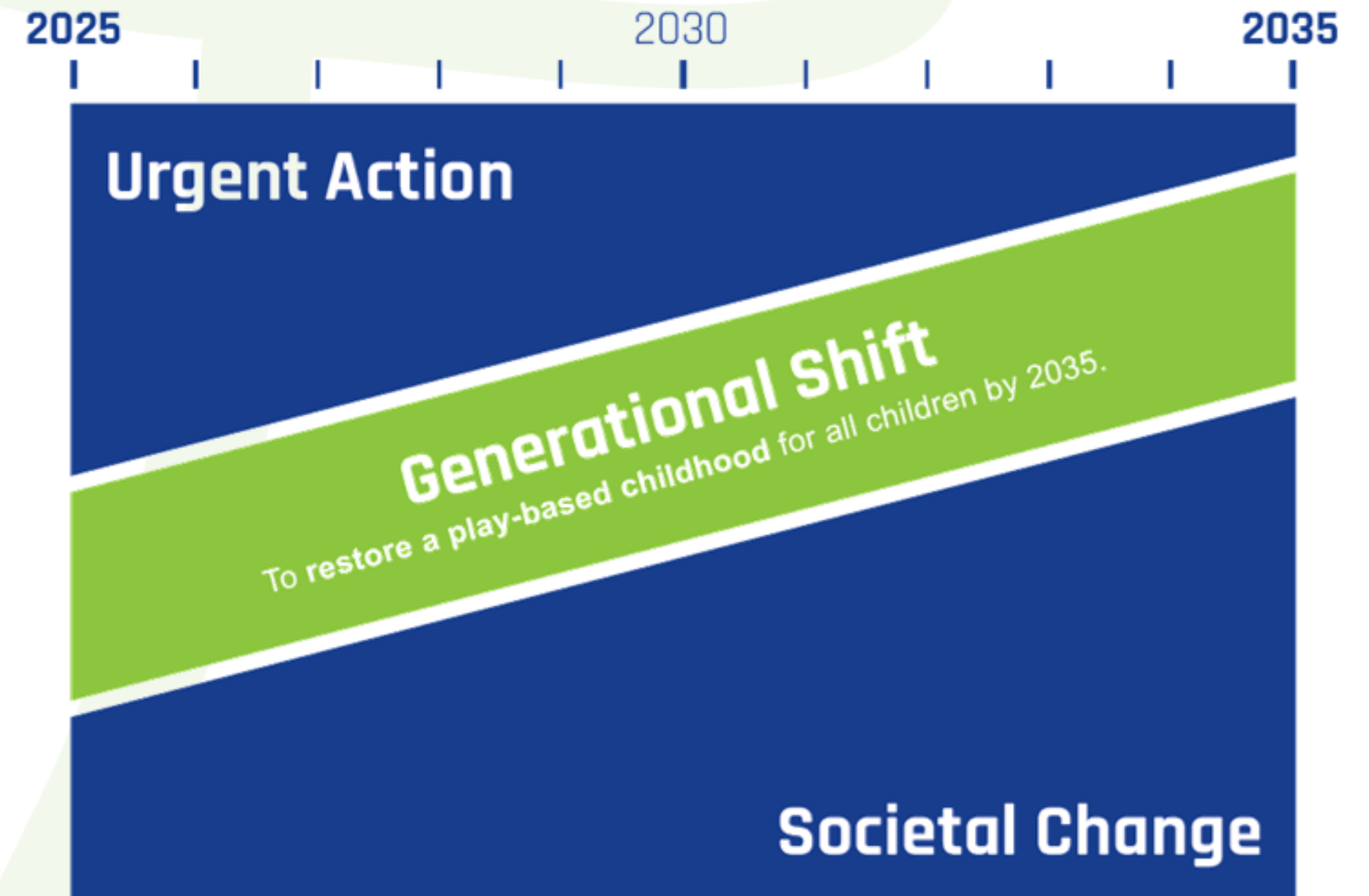
To shift society to a culture where play is recognised, accepted, and protected – at home, at school, in our streets, in our neighbourhoods and communities. A society where play is seen as essential, and is embraced by families, communities, professionals and policymakers alike.



## Our New Strategy

# Our Objective

To restore a play-based  
childhood for all children  
by 2035.







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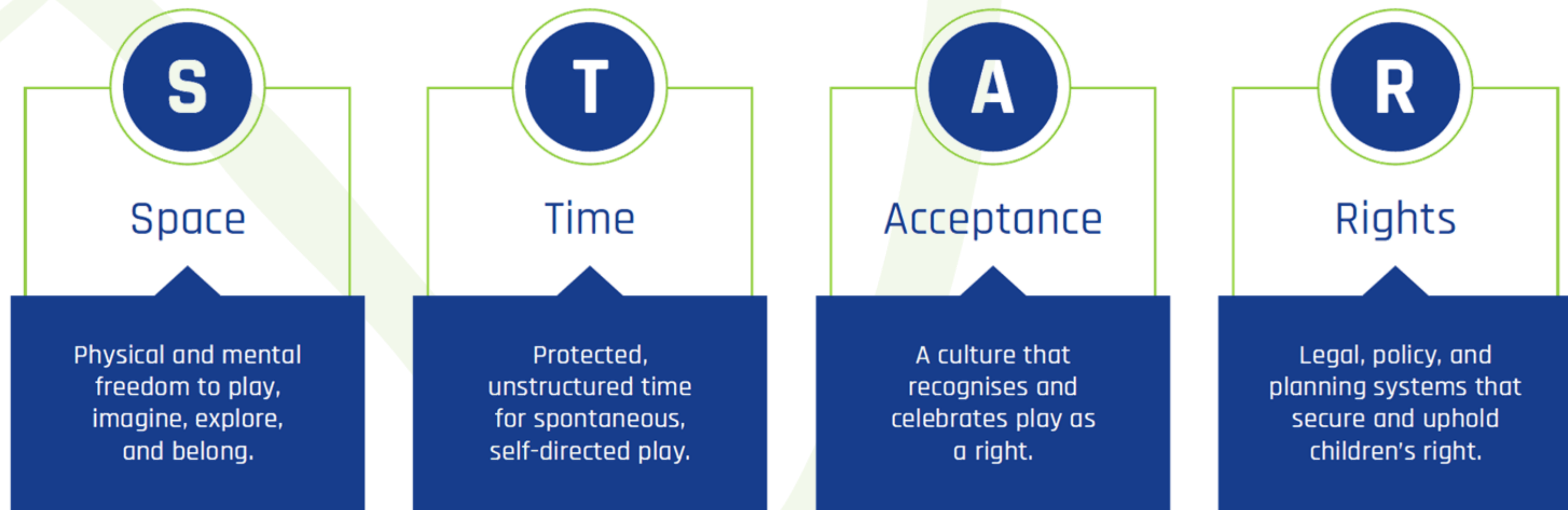






## Our Framework for Change

# Lott's STAR Framework for Implementing the Right to Play





## Our Strategy: Four Interconnected Priorities

### **Spaces**

Creating play-friendly environments wherever children are — at home, at school, on the street, in parks, their communities and digital spaces.

### **Skills**

Recognising and supporting people who enable play opportunities — with playworkers at its core and a wider ecosystem of play enablers.



## Our Strategy: Four Interconnected Priorities

### Systems

Building a resilient play sector — rebuilding the infrastructure for play through national policy, legislation, research and funding.

### Society

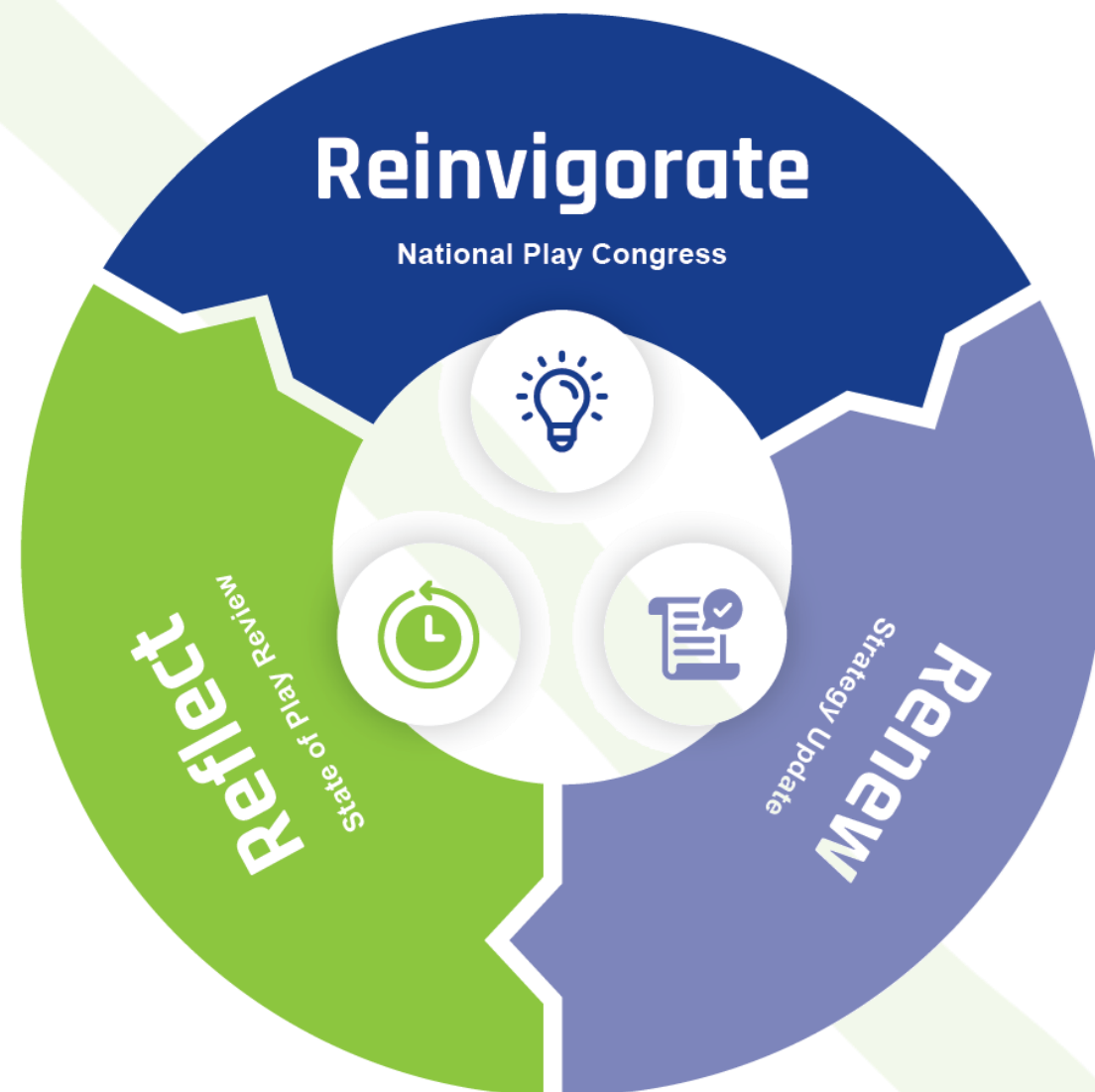
Re-norming play as an essential, accepted part of childhood — shifting culture from risk-aversion and control to trust, freedom and joy.



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## How We'll Work

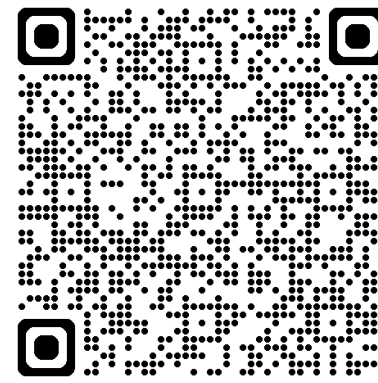
### Three-year Cycle



### Children's Assemblies







**RAISING**

**THE**

**NATION**

**PLAY**

**COMMISSION**



A photograph of a child swinging on a swing set at a playground. The child is in mid-swing, wearing a grey and white striped shirt and dark trousers. The swing chain is in sharp focus in the foreground, while the child and the background are slightly blurred. The background shows a grassy field, other playground equipment, and a blue sky with some clouds. There are large, faint, stylized white shapes overlaid on the image, resembling abstract letters or symbols.

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# appg on play

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[www.appgonplay.uk](http://www.appgonplay.uk)



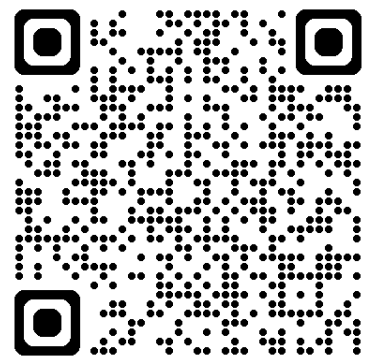












LIVE

**Eugene Minogue**  
Chief Executive, Play England

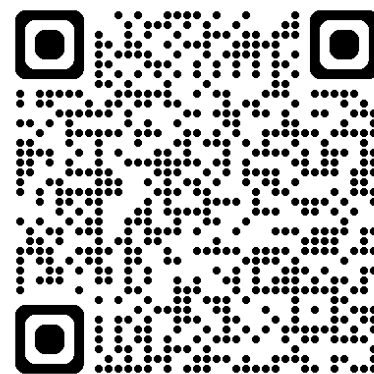
**BBC PARLIAMENT**

2 SEP

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT COMMITTEE

CHILDREN'S PLAY





## Planning & Infrastructure Bill 2025: Play Sufficiency Amendment (June 2025)

 **UK Parliament**

**Parliamentary Bills**

[UK Parliament](#) > [Business](#) > [Planning and Infrastructure Bill](#) > [Stages](#) > [Report stage](#) > [Amendments](#) > Amendment NC82

**★ Tom Hayes' amendment**

**Planning and Infrastructure Bill**

Report stage

Amendment number: NC82

**Lead member**

 **Tom Hayes**  
Labour, Bournemouth East

**Decision**

**No decision**  
The House has not considered this amendment.

### Amendment text

To move the following Clause—

#### “Play Sufficiency Duty

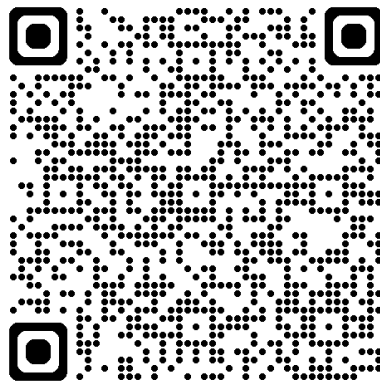
- (1) A local planning authority in England must, so far as reasonably practicable, assess, secure, enhance, and protect sufficient opportunities for children’s play when exercising any of its planning functions.
- (2) In fulfilling the duty under subsection (1), a local planning authority must—
  - (a) undertake and publish play sufficiency assessments at intervals to be defined in regulations;
  - (b) integrate the findings and recommendations of such assessments into local plans, relevant strategies, infrastructure planning, and development decisions;
  - (c) not give permission for any development which would lead to a net loss of formal or informal play spaces except where equivalent or improved provision is secured;
  - (d) require new developments to provide high-quality, accessible, inclusive play opportunities which incorporate natural features and are integrated within broader public spaces; and
  - (e) consult regularly with children, families, communities, and play professionals regarding play provision.
- (3) A play sufficiency assessment produced under subsection (2)(a) must specifically evaluate and report on the quantity, quality, accessibility, inclusivity, and integration of play opportunities within the planning authority’s area.
- (4) The Secretary of State may, by regulations, specify—
  - (a) the frequency, methodology, content, and publication requirements of play sufficiency assessments;
  - (b) minimum design standards and quality expectations for formal and informal play provision;
  - (c) developer obligations regarding play infrastructure contributions to be secured through planning conditions.
- (5) For the purposes of this section—

“play” means activities undertaken by children and young people that are freely chosen, self-directed, and carried out following their own interests, in their own way, and for their own reasons;

“play opportunities” include formal and informal play spaces, parks, open spaces, streets, schools, neighbourhood spaces, natural green areas, active travel routes, supervised play settings (including adventure playgrounds), and community recreation facilities;

“sufficient” means adequate in quantity, quality, accessibility, inclusivity, and integration within community infrastructure.”





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## Planning & Infrastructure Bill 2025: Play Sufficiency Amendment (July 2025)

 **UK  
Parliament**

### Parliamentary Bills

HOUSE OF LORDS

[UK Parliament](#) > [Business](#) > [Legislation](#) > [Parliamentary Bills](#) > [Planning and Infrastructure Bill](#) > [Stages](#) > [Committee stage](#) > [Amendments](#) > [Amendment 179](#)

## Baroness Bennett of Manor Castle's amendment, After Clause 52

### Planning and Infrastructure Bill

Committee stage

Amendment number: 179

#### Lead member



**Baroness Bennett of Manor Castle**  
Green Party, Life peer

Lords

#### Decision

**No decision**

The House has not considered this amendment.

### Amendment text

#### After Clause 52

insert the following new Clause—

#### “Play sufficiency duty

- (1) A local planning authority in England must, so far as reasonably practicable, assess, secure, enhance, and protect sufficient opportunities for children’s play when exercising any of its planning functions.
- (2) In fulfilling the duty under subsection (1), a local planning authority must—
  - (a) undertake and publish play sufficiency assessments at intervals to be defined in regulations;
  - (b) integrate the findings and recommendations of such assessments into local plans, relevant strategies, infrastructure planning, and development decisions;
  - (c) not give permission for any development which would lead to a net loss of formal or informal play spaces except where equivalent or improved provision is secured;
  - (d) require new developments to provide high-quality, accessible, inclusive play opportunities which incorporate natural features and are integrated within broader public spaces; and
  - (e) consult regularly with children, families, communities, and play professionals regarding play provision.
- (3) A play sufficiency assessment produced under subsection (2)(a) must specifically evaluate and report on the quantity, quality, accessibility, inclusivity, and integration of play opportunities within the planning authority’s area.
- (4) The Secretary of State may, by regulations made by statutory instrument, specify—
  - (a) the frequency, methodology, content, and publication requirements of play sufficiency assessments;
  - (b) minimum design standards and quality expectations for formal and informal play provision;
  - (c) developer obligations regarding play infrastructure contributions to be secured through planning conditions.
- (5) A statutory instrument containing regulations under this section is subject to annulment in pursuance of a resolution of either House of Parliament.
- (6) For the purposes of this section—

“play” means activities undertaken by children and young people that are freely chosen, self-directed, and carried out following their own interests, in their own way, and for their own reasons;

“play opportunities” include formal and informal play spaces, parks, open spaces, streets, schools, neighbourhood spaces, natural green areas, active travel routes, supervised play settings (including adventure playgrounds), and community recreation facilities;

“sufficient” means adequate in quantity, quality, accessibility, inclusivity, and integration within community infrastructure.”





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# The importance of Play!

Play England campaigns for all children and young people to have freedom and space to play throughout childhood.

We work with national partners and other organisations with shared aims to raise awareness about the importance of play. We lobby government to make fundamental policy changes to protect and promote play, and encourage everyone who has an impact

on the lives of children and young people to recognise and plan for children's play.

Play England has also built up considerable experience and resources to help support individuals and organisations that work in these particular areas:

- Government
- Local Authorities
- Schools
- Playwork



## We need your support

The new UK government is making positive noises about understanding the importance of play. However, against this positive backdrop, Play England is suffering from a lack of funds to pay for our essential work campaigning for children's right and freedom to play.

Donate today to support our work.  
[www.playengland.org.uk/donate](http://www.playengland.org.uk/donate)

