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Erewash Borough Council

Survey of children and young people

1 Methodology

A survey of children and young people in Erewash was carried out in the spring of 2007, using an online survey accessed through a hyperlink from the Council's website. Although this was available to people completing the survey independently, most of the response was co-ordinated through local schools and the Council and its partners made enormous efforts to engage local schools in this study to try and maximise participation, especially after a slow start. The survey ran through the spring term and closed just before Easter, by which time 709 responses had been received.

A copy of the questionnaire itself is attached as an appendix to this report.

2 Confidence intervals and margin of error

There are a total of 16,250 children and young people aged 5-15 in the borough¹; a response of 709 individuals from this population gives an error margin of +/- 3.6% at the 95% confidence interval. This means that we can be confident that, for any given result in this report, the figure for the whole population is within +/- 3.6% of the result achieved in this study. In other words, a reported result of 50% indicates that the result for the whole population would lie between 46.4% and 53.6%. The normally accepted margin of error for surveys of larger populations is +/- 3%, so this sample is reasonably close to the industry standard; we can be 90% certain that these results are within 3% of the result for the population as a whole.

In some instances, the total response to a question adds up to more than 100%. This happens when multiple answers are permitted, but can also arise through minor rounding errors.

¹ 2001 Census

3 Profile of respondents

3.1 Age

The age profile in this sample is shown in this table:

Age group	Proportion of response
6 – 10	49%
11 -12	26%
13 – 14	15%
15 - 16	8%
17 or over	3%

Participation in the survey reduces with age, but nevertheless around half of the total response is from children of primary school age, and about half from the younger year groups at secondary school. Older teenagers would be less likely to take part in a survey of this nature and there is additional work being undertaken to secure the views of older teens.

3.2 Gender

51% of the sample are male, and 49% are female. This is very close to the proportions of each gender in the population as a whole, and indicates that there is little difference between the genders in terms of predisposition to take part in this survey.

3.3 Ethnicity

The vast majority of respondents are white (94%) but there are small proportions of Asian (2%) and Black (2%) children in the sample, meaning that Asian children are slightly underrepresented in terms of their overall presence in the population.

3.4 Disability

One in eight (12%) of children responding said they had some kind of disability that affects their play, but a large number of respondents skipped this question suggesting that the true proportion of children with disabilities in the sample is around 10%.

3.5 School type

The school type attended reflects the age structure of the sample, as this table shows:

School type	Proportion of respondents
Primary school	34%
Junior school	31%
Secondary school	29%
Special school	2%
College	2%
<i>Base (=100%)</i>	<i>642</i>

3.6 Geography

Respondents were asked to indicate whereabouts they live, and this table shows a reasonably good geographical spread of responses:

Location	Proportion of respondents
Ilkeston	27%
Long Eaton	20%
Sandiacre	32%
Rural Erewash	18%
Elsewhere	2%
<i>Base (=100%)</i>	<i>628</i>

The small proportion living elsewhere gave a home address outside the boundaries of Erewash, usually in Stapleford, Nottingham or Derby.

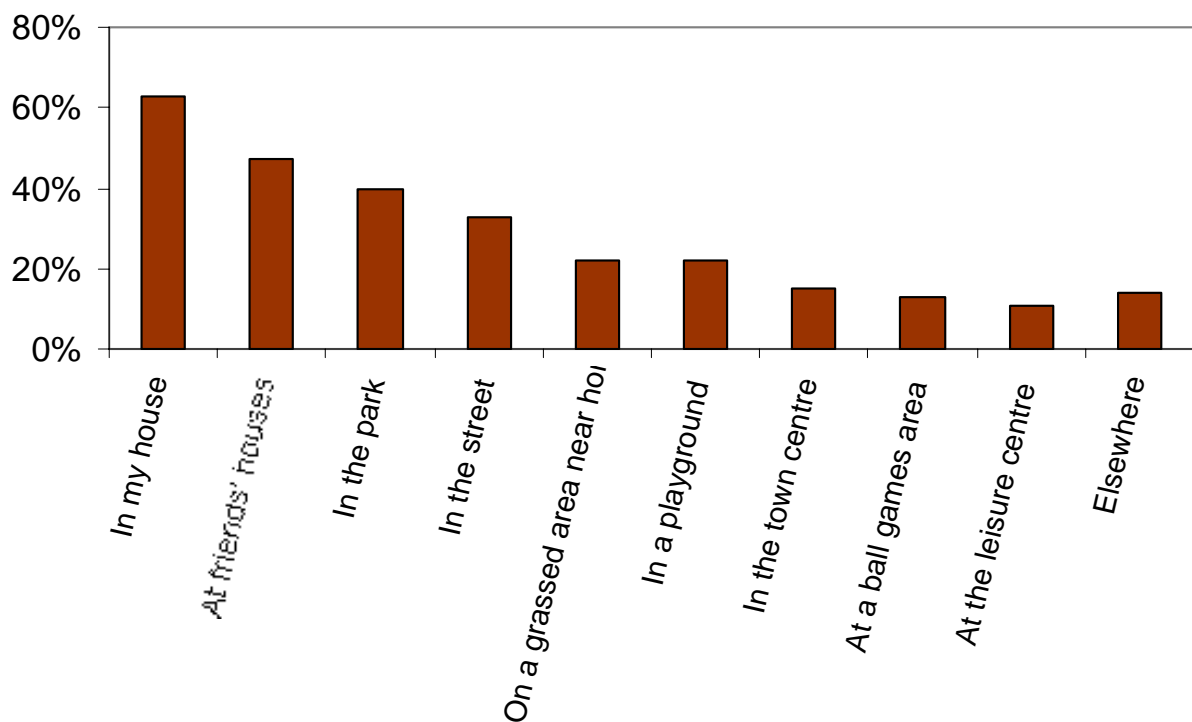
3.7 Weighting

The results have not been weighted.

4 Where children play

Children were asked where they generally play in a typical week. The overall results are given below:

Play location	Proportion of respondents
In my house	63%
At friends' houses	47%
In the park	40%
In the street	33%
On a grassed area near home	22%
In a playground	22%
In the town centre	15%
At a ball games area	13%
At the leisure centre	11%
Elsewhere	14%
<i>Base (=100%)</i>	<i>700</i>



The answers add to up to well over 100% because children choose a variety of places to play, even in an ordinary week.

By far the most likely venue for play is **at home**, but even so only two out of three children said they played at their own homes. This is the most popular choice in all age groups and for both genders, although it is noticeable that the 11-14 age group are less likely to be playing at home than their younger or older counterparts; interestingly, 71% of over 15s said they play at home.

Around half of all children play **at friends' houses**, and this proportion rose to nearly 60% of all those children who played at their own homes, so friends' houses are by no means a preferred alternative to the child's own home; those who play at home are much more likely to be playing at friends' homes. Just 29% of those who do not play at home play at friends' houses; these children were much more likely to be in the street or in the park. Use of friends' houses mirrors the use of children's own homes, reducing slightly for the 11 – 14 age group but rising again for older children.

Two in five children play **in the park**, and about half this proportion use a **playground**. Both the park and the playground were a little more popular with girls, and use of these venues falls away with increasing age, especially playgrounds which are used by 33% of children age 6 – 10, but just 6% of over 15s (no doubt as a hanging out location, rather than because the equipment is targeted at this age group). The park is also less popular with older children, but even so a quarter (26%) of over 15s use it. **Games areas** are used by one in eight children (13%) but are vastly more popular with girls (20% of girls, 5% of boys).

Playing **on the street** has reduced substantially in recent years, with increased concerns over safety. However, about a third of children play in the street, and this is a proportion that does not change much with age. It is also popular with both genders. **Grassed areas** near home attract about one in five children, and appear much more popular with girls than boys; 28% of girls play here, in comparison with just 17% of boys. Usage here is higher with the 11-14 age-group than with their younger or older counterparts. The **leisure centre** is used by one in nine children in a typical week

(11%), and again seems a little more popular with girls (13% of girls use it, against 8% of boys).

The **town centre** is not an especially popular play venue, attracting 15% of children, and appears a little more popular with boys than with girls; the town centre is not at all popular with younger children, but one in five 11 – 14s use it and a third of older teens do so.

Although one in seven respondents identified **other places they played**, for the most part these were confined to “my back garden” or similar responses; there were some other play locations mentioned such as the canal bank, the woods and other natural locations, and organised activities such as Brownies or at the local stables. There were also some less obvious choices for play, including “Tesco”, “Derby railway station”, and “the arcade” mentioned by individuals.

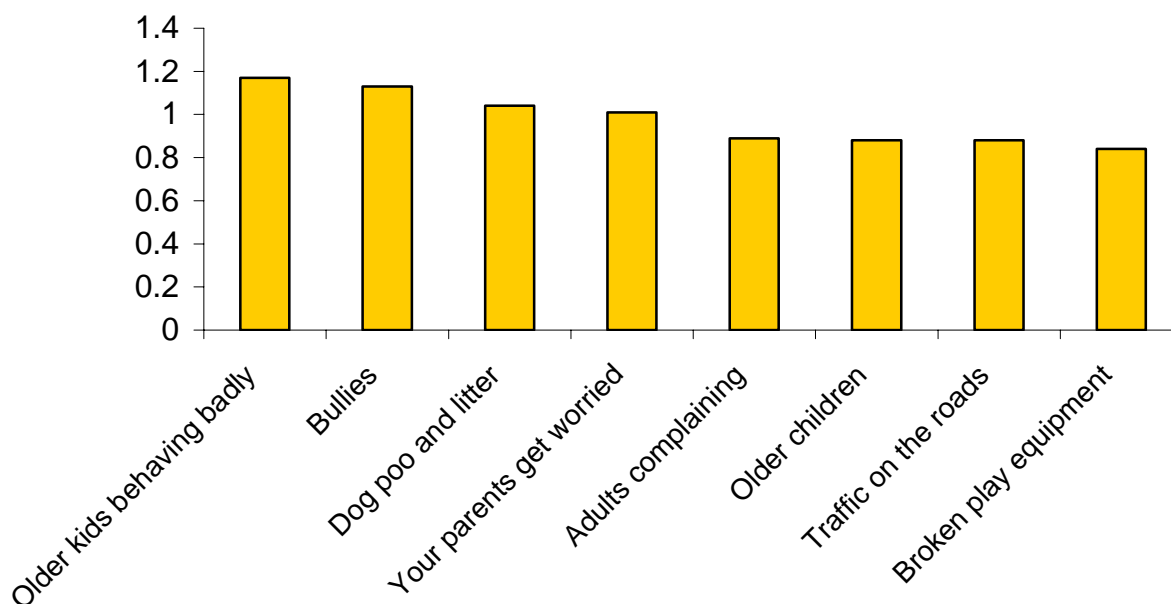
It is also interesting to note the differences in the variety of spaces being used. Girls identified an average of 3 different places used in a typical week, but boys’ activities were more curtailed and they only identified 2.7 play spaces on average, and 11-14s seeming to have less variety in their play than either younger or older children in the borough.

5 Inhibitors to play

Respondents were given a list of possible obstacles to play, and asked to indicate how big a problem they thought each was. The results are shown below:

Obstacle	A serious problem	A bit of a problem	Not really a problem	Mean score ²
Older kids behaving badly	43%	31%	26%	1.17
Bullies	47%	19%	34%	1.13
Dog poo and litter	35%	34%	30%	1.04
Your parents get worried	30%	41%	29%	1.01
Adults complaining	28%	33%	39%	0.89
Older children	28%	32%	39%	0.88
Traffic on the roads	28%	32%	40%	0.88
Broken play equipment	28%	28%	44%	0.84

Base (=100%) varies from 575 to 601



² The mean score is calculated by assigning a score of 2 to each “big problem” answer, 1 to each “bit of a problem” answer, and 0 to each “not really a problem” answer. The result is the average score assigned to each problem, ranging from 0 to 2; the higher the score, the bigger the perceived problem.

There is a clear distinction here between different types of problem. At the top of the list of issues, by a clear distance, is the difficulties children have with their peers, both in the form of **anti-social behaviour** by other children, and from **bullying**. This highlights the point that is often made, that children themselves are very often the victims of this type of behaviour, even though the voices of adults are the ones usually heard most loudly.

Two issues are seen as presenting a bit of a problem. **Litter and dog poo** inhibit play to a degree but are not seen as a serious problem, and it is also apparent that children are aware of their **parents' concerns** about certain play locations and activities, and that these sometimes get in the way of children doing what they would otherwise choose for themselves.

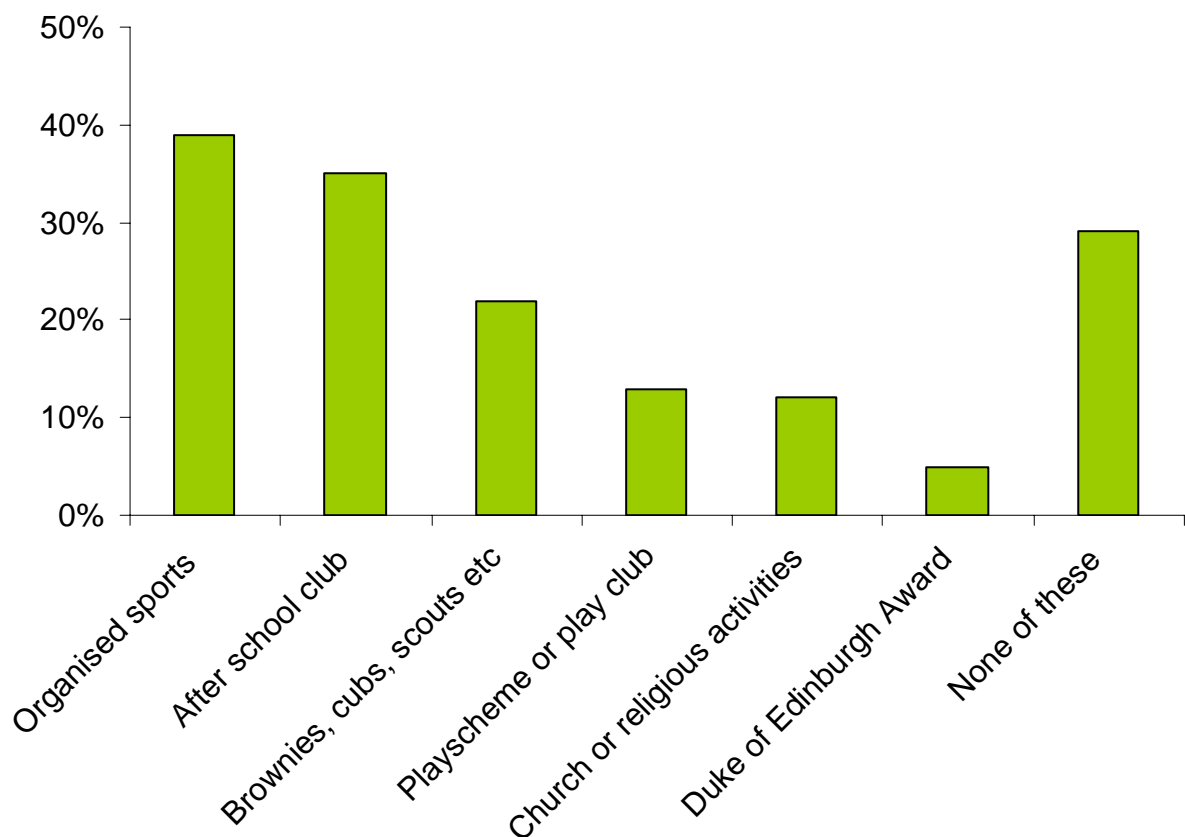
The other issues suggested to children are all present to some extent, and are a serious problem for significant minorities of children, but overall do not present the same challenges. Nevertheless it is interesting that one in four children feel their play choices are affected by **adult complaints**, a very substantial proportion, and that a quarter of children identify **broken play equipment** as an inhibitor.

Looking at the differences between different groups, the results are not vastly different between genders, although girls seem a little more restricted by their parents, and by the complaints of adults, whilst boys have a slightly larger problem with bullies. It is noticeable though that problems reduce in scale with increasing age; all the mean scores fall dramatically as the age of the respondent increases. This is particularly true of traffic, where a mean score of 1.12 among under 11s reduces to just 0.47 for over 15s. In fact the only issue for over 15s where the score is comparable to other age groups is for adult complaints, which reduces from 0.92 for under 11s to 0.83 for over 15s – this issue is a bit of a problem for all children, regardless of age or gender.

6 Organised activities

The table below shows the proportions of children who take part in different organised activities.

Activity	Proportion of respondents
Organised sports	39%
After school club	35%
Brownies, cubs, scouts etc	22%
Playscheme or play club	13%
Church or religious activities	12%
Duke of Edinburgh Award	5%
None of these	29%
<i>Base (=100%)</i>	<i>658</i>



Two out of five young people say they take part in **organised sport**. This is an activity that is popular with all ages and both genders, and the proportions taking part are consistently at this kind of level. That is not the case with the other popular activity here, **after-school clubs**. These attract children in all age-groups in similar proportions, but are much more popular with girls than with boys – 40% of girls attend, but just 30% of boys do so.

Roughly one in five children attends a **uniformed organisation**. Again these are much more popular with girls than with boys (27% of girls participate, just 17% of boys do so), but here interest tends to be higher with younger children, and falls off with increasing age – a quarter of 6-10s (26%) attend, but just 15% of over 15s do so.

No other activity approaches these in popularity. One in eight children attends a **play scheme** or play club, and almost all of these are under 15 years of age (presumably the small number of older children attending do so as helpers). One in eight children is involved in some way in **organised religion**, but the proportion falls from 15% of children aged 6 –10 to just 9% once children reach secondary school age. Girls are a little more likely to be involved in religion, but the differences are not marked.

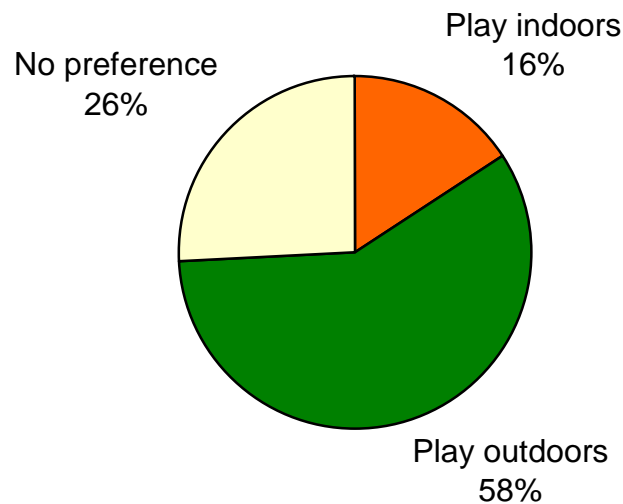
The **Duke of Edinburgh Award** is aimed at older children and teenagers, and this is reflected in the take up which is almost exclusively concentrated in the 15+ age group. Even here, though, just one in eight children (13%) take part.

Well over a quarter of children take no part in organised play. There was very little difference between any of the age or gender groups here except that children over 15 were rather less likely to participate.

7 Preferred activities

A short series of questions was put to respondents inviting them to indicate their preferences between different pairs of activities. The first of these explored indoor versus outdoor play, with these results:

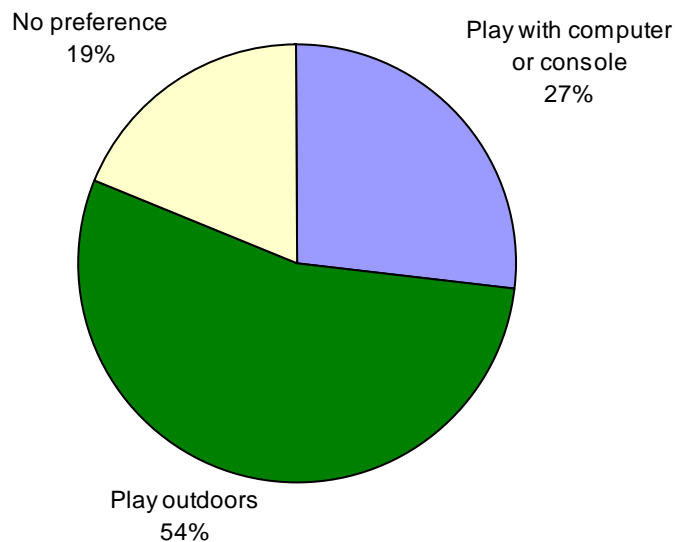
Preference	Proportion of response
Play indoors	16%
Play outdoors	59%
No preference	26%
Base (=100%)	664



Although one in four respondents had no preference between indoor and outdoor play, the clear preference for most children is to get outdoors – nearly four times as many children prefer outdoor play to indoor play. Only the 11-14s show any difference to the overall result, and they prefer the outside by an even bigger margin, of 65% to 12%.

The second comparison was between playing on a computer or games console, and playing outside, and the results were these:

Preference	Proportion of response
Play with computer or console	27%
Play outdoors	54%
No preference	19%
Base (=100%)	649

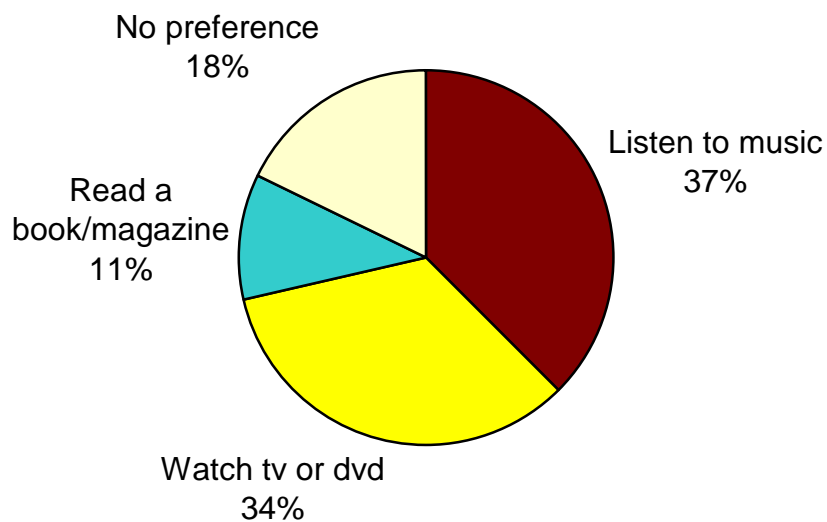


The difference is not so marked, but the preference is still clear and strongly in favour of outdoor play. A quarter of children would find the games console more attractive, but they are still outnumbered two to one by those who want to play outside – an interesting finding in view of the common perception that computers and consoles are eroding

interest in play. However, the overall figures mask an enormous difference between girls and boys – just 19% of girls expressed a preference for the computer or console, but twice as many boys (36%) did so. Interest in computers also seems to fade with age – one in three (34%) of under 10s prefer to play on a computer, but this falls to 23% of 11-14s and 15% of older children.

A third comparison was between different types of indoor play, and the results were these:

Preference	Proportion of response
Listen to music	38%
Watch TV or DVD	34%
Read a book/magazine	11%
No preference	18%
<i>Base (=100%)</i>	<i>655</i>



One in five respondents shows no preference, but among those who do the preference is strongly in favour of music, TV or DVD. These attract two in five children, whilst reading books or magazines appeals to just 11% of respondents. There are significant differences between the different genders on this question:

Preference	Proportion of boys	Proportion of girls
Listen to music	29%	47%
Watch TV or DVD	44%	24%
Read a book/magazine	7%	14%
No preference	20%	16%
<i>Base (=100%)</i>	324	310

TV or DVD are actually the preferred activity from this list for boys, and nearly half would opt for this. Music is still popular at 29% but is some way behind. The figures are almost reversed for girls, with nearly half opting to listen to music and just a quarter choosing TV or DVD. Reading is a lower preference for both genders, but two girls choose reading for every boy who does so.

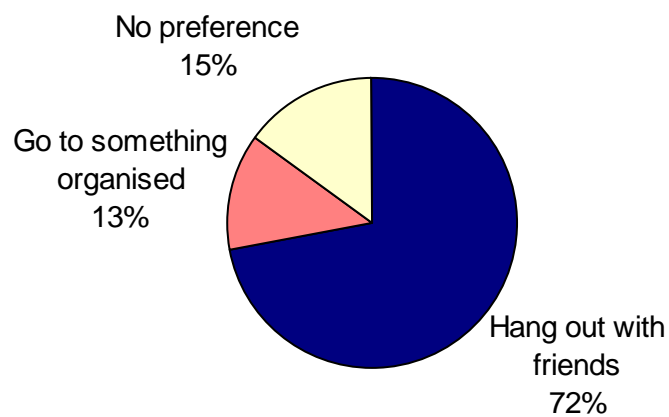
There are also significant differences in terms of the age of the respondent:

Preference	Proportion of 6-10s	Proportion of 11-14s	Proportion of 15+
Listen to music	32%	41%	54%
Watch TV or DVD	39%	31%	23%
Read a book/magazine	12%	11%	7%
No preference	18%	18%	16%
<i>Base (=100%)</i>	309	254	69

Two in five younger children choose TV/DVD, but older children relegate this to second place after music, and among over 15s more than twice as many choose music ahead of the TV. On the other hand, reading falls from the preference of one in eight under 10s to just one in fourteen older teens.

The final preference was between informal and formal activity:

Preference	Proportion of response
Hang out with friends	72%
Go to something organised	13%
No preference	15%
<i>Base (=100%)</i>	<i>657</i>



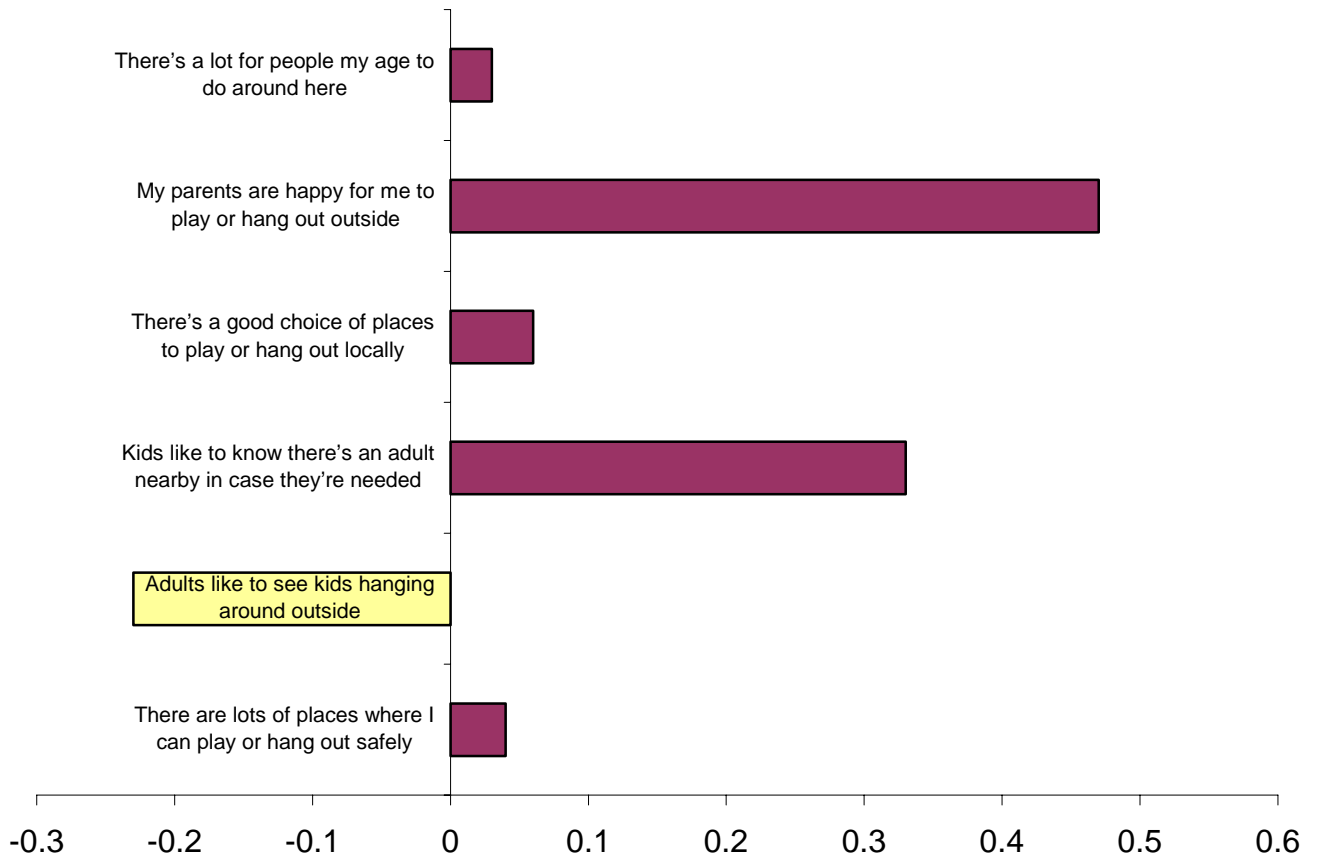
The preference here is very strong; three quarters of children would prefer to play in an informal setting rather than in an organised activity. There is very little difference here between any of the age or gender groups.

8 Play opportunities

Children were asked to indicate whether or not they agreed with series of statements. The answers they gave are shown here:

Statement	Agree	Not sure	Dis-agree	Don't know	Mean score ³
There are lots of places where I can play or hang out safely	34%	23%	30%	14%	+0.04
Adults like to see kids hanging around outside	19%	20%	42%	19%	-0.23
Kids like to know there's an adult nearby in case they're needed	52%	16%	19%	13%	+0.33
There's a good choice of places to play or hang out locally	40%	18%	34%	9%	+0.06
My parents are happy for me to play or hang out outside	60%	18%	13%	9%	+0.47
There's a lot for people my age to do around here	37%	17%	34%	12%	+0.03
<i>Base (=100%) varies between 605 and 633</i>					

³ The mean score here is calculated by assigning a value of +1 to each "agree" response, and -1 to each "disagree" response. Neutral and don't know responses are ignored for scoring. The result ranges from +1 to -1, with a higher score indicating a higher degree of agreement.



One in three children think that they have a lot of places where they can play or hang out safely, but the choices of another 30% seem much more limited, and the result is a mean score very close to zero as a result of a polarised view. The same is true of the statement about a choice of places, and the view that there's a lot to do for people my age. In each of these instances, the overall opinion is more or less evenly balanced between those who agree and those who disagree, suggesting that provision is not evenly spread across the borough.

Positive agreement is achieved on two of these statements: most children agree that their parents are happy for them to play outside, and relatively few disagree; there is also a measure of agreement on the perception that a nearby adult is an advantage. Children do not think adults feel the same, however, with a modest disagreement on the perception that adults like seeing kids hanging around outside.

These overall results mask some differences between age and gender groups, as the comparison of mean scores demonstrates:

Statement	Mean scores				
	Boys	Girls	Under 10s	11-14s	15+
There are lots of places where I can play or hang out safely	+0.07	0.0	+0.14	+0.01	-0.25
Adults like to see kids hanging around outside	-0.17	-0.29	-0.04	-0.34	-0.54
Kids like to know there's an adult nearby in case they're needed	+0.37	+0.33	+0.63	+0.12	-0.09
There's a good choice of places to play or hang out locally	+0.11	+0.02	+0.18	+0.06	-0.32
My parents are happy for me to play or hang out outside	+0.52	+0.42	+0.42	+0.51	+0.55
There's a lot for people my age to do around here	+0.07	+0.02	+0.17	+0.04	-0.47

As far as gender differences are concerned, the main ones are on the perceptions of adults, where girls are less confident about adult happiness than boys are, and on the choice of places, which boys take a slightly more positive view of than their female counterparts. Boys' parents also appear a little more confident about their children playing outside.

The differences between the age groups are especially marked, however, and in some cases vary between positive and negative answers. On the range of places for safe play, perceptions range from fairly positive among younger children to quite seriously negative among older teens; the same pattern is evident in the perceptions of choice of places to play, and even more strongly so for the perception that there's a lot for people my age to do. The message here is a very clear one; teenagers perceive that their opportunities and choices are excessively limited – a view which coincides with the opinion of adults, incidentally, from the survey undertaken in the borough last year.

As age increases, so too does the hostility of adults, apparently – and again moving from a positive view among young people to a mildly negative one of older kids. A

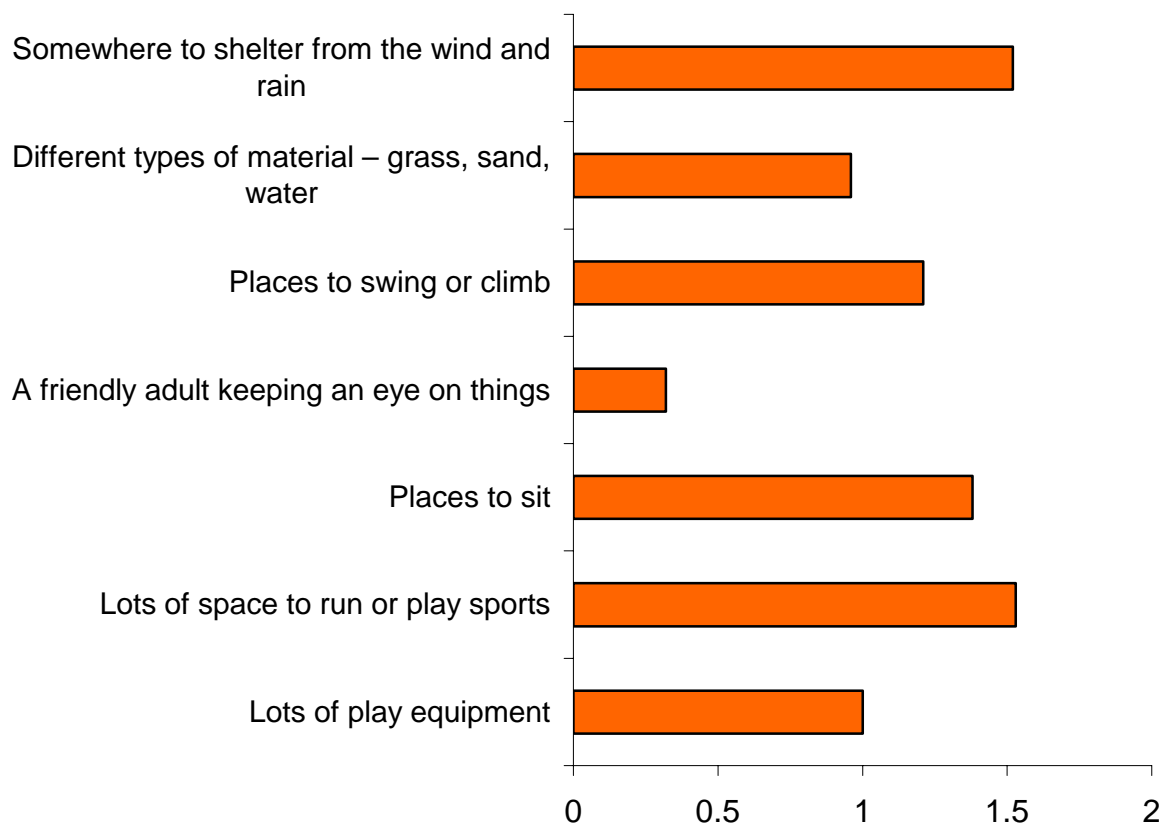
similar pattern is evident in the perceptions of having an adult around – over 15s seem to prefer to be out of range of adults, and 11-14s are fairly equivocal on this. On the other hand, parental anxiety seems to diminish a little as children get older.

9 Desires for play space

Respondents were given a list of possible attributes of a new play space, and asked which they thought would be essential and which were optional. The results are shown here:

Attribute	Percentage of respondents				Mean score ⁴
	Must have	Nice to have	Not needed	Not wanted at all	
Lots of play equipment	42%	40%	12%	6%	+1.00
Lots of space to run or play sports	67%	27%	4%	2%	+1.53
Places to sit	58%	34%	6%	3%	+1.38
A friendly adult keeping an eye on things	30%	30%	22%	18%	+0.32
Places to swing or climb	54%	32%	9%	5%	+1.21
Different types of material – grass, sand, water	46%	34%	12%	9%	+0.96
Somewhere to shelter from the wind and rain	72%	20%	4%	4%	+1.52
<i>Base (=100%) varies from 178 to 394</i>					

⁴ The mean score here is calculated by assigning a score of +2 to each “must have” answer, +1 for each “nice to have” answer, and –1 and –2 respectively to “not needed” and “not wanted”. The result can range from +2 to –2, with a higher score indicating a stronger opinion either positively or negatively.



As is common with this type of question, most people are positive about most of what might be on offer. The value of this question lies in the relative importance of different attributes, as represented by the mean scores. The results would clearly endorse an increase in play equipment, but demonstrate that space is actually much more important than equipment, and that provision on that space would best be focussed on shelter, seating and on providing opportunities for strenuous activity such as climbing or swinging. There is much less endorsement of the idea of different materials, whilst the friendly adult receives a fairly equivocal score in comparison with the others, especially if those who didn't answer on this attribute are treated as not wanting it.

There are also different perspectives from different age and gender groups, as this comparison of mean scores indicates:

Attribute	Mean score				
	Boys	Girls	Under 10s	11-14s	15+
Lots of play equipment	+1.11	+0.90	+1.33	+0.79	+0.54
Lots of space to run or play sports	+1.57	+1.45	+1.66	+1.45	+1.13
Places to sit	+1.32	+1.47	+1.31	+1.41	+1.50
A friendly adult keeping an eye on things	+0.35	+0.30	+1.03	-0.28	-0.49
Places to swing or climb	+1.27	+1.17	+1.47	+1.16	+0.35
Different types of material – grass, sand, water	+1.02	+1.03	+1.18	+0.94	+0.23
Somewhere to shelter from the wind or rain	+1.42	+1.59	+1.43	+1.61	+1.54

Boys highlight their desire for space to run and play, and for shelter; these two attributes, in reverse order, are also the most popular choices for girls. Boys are a little keener on play equipment, and on swinging and climbing opportunities, whilst girls come out more in favour of places to sit.

Younger children are much more positive about play equipment, and more positive than older children about swinging or climbing – activities which appear quite *passé* to older children. They are also positive about the presence of a friendly adult, in contrast to children aged 11 or above who would on balance prefer not to have this. Older children vote in favour of shelter and seating far ahead of any other attribute, and the middle age group add that they would like to have more space to run and play sports.

10 Improvements wanted

Respondents were asked an open ended question seeking their views on what would most help them to enjoy playing or hanging around outside. The results range widely across a number of possibilities, some more realistic than others, but largely reflect the issues that have already emerged – people want more, better equipped space, and want to feel safer when using it, both from traffic and from the antisocial activities of “evil people”. Typical comments include these:

“more area to play on and a friendly person in case we need them “

“nise people not so menny dogs a nise big play area with swings no bullies” (sic)

“Somewhere you could go with your friendswithout someone being there watching you or having a go at you for....having fun”

“more places for people my age to hang around and more things to do”

“More shops, and a youth club that anyone is allowed to go to even with my disability. It’s horrible when it’s wet and cold and we have nowhere to go, we feel like tramps.”

Whilst the more unique comments include these:

“ a water fountin to look at” (sic)

“a boyfreind” (sic)

“a comfortable place to lie down”

“lots of hairy toys”

The full list of comments is attached as an appendix to this report.

11 Conclusions

- 1 Children chose a wide range of play opportunities, including a mix of indoor and outdoor facilities. Playing at home is the most common choice, but even so over a third of children said they did not play at home. The park, the street itself and amenity green space are the most common outdoor choices. Although equipped sites such as playgrounds and leisure centres are used, they are less popular than other places. Girls identify a wider range of opportunities than boys.
- 2 The main obstacles to play are caused by children themselves, in particular through anti-social behaviour and bullying. Cleanliness and parental worry also inhibit play, as do the complaints of adults. It is evident from the comments children made that they frequently feel these complaints are unjustified and unreasonable. All the obstacles tend to reduce in significance as a child gets older, with the exception of complaints from adults.
- 3 A substantial proportion of children take part in organised play, usually in the form of sports. Uniformed organisations and religious activities are more common with younger children but fall away quickly in teenage years.
- 4 Children's clear preference is for outdoor play. Although computers and games consoles are more attractive than indoor play generally, they still come second to playing outdoors. Indoors, music and TV are much more popular than reading, but music is the girls' preference while the boys would prefer to watch TV or a DVD. Children and young people would very much prefer informal play or hanging out with their friends than taking part in an organised activity.
- 5 Children do not feel welcome outside because of the negative views of adults. However, outside is where they want to be, and their parents are quite happy on the whole for them to be there. Children and young people feel frustrated by their perceived lack of choice and opportunity to play or hang out outside,

and this is especially true of older children and teenagers, who see the borough offering them very little opportunity.

- 6 Asked to decide which attributes would characterise an ideal play space, children and young people focus much more positively on space than on equipment. The priorities emerging are for more space, with seating and shelter facilities, well ahead of equipment, landscaping, or supervision.