



habitats for play - inspired by nature

Design proposal for Larkhall Park Play Area

Prepared for

Lambeth Council

Location

**Courland Grove, London,
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18 July 2022



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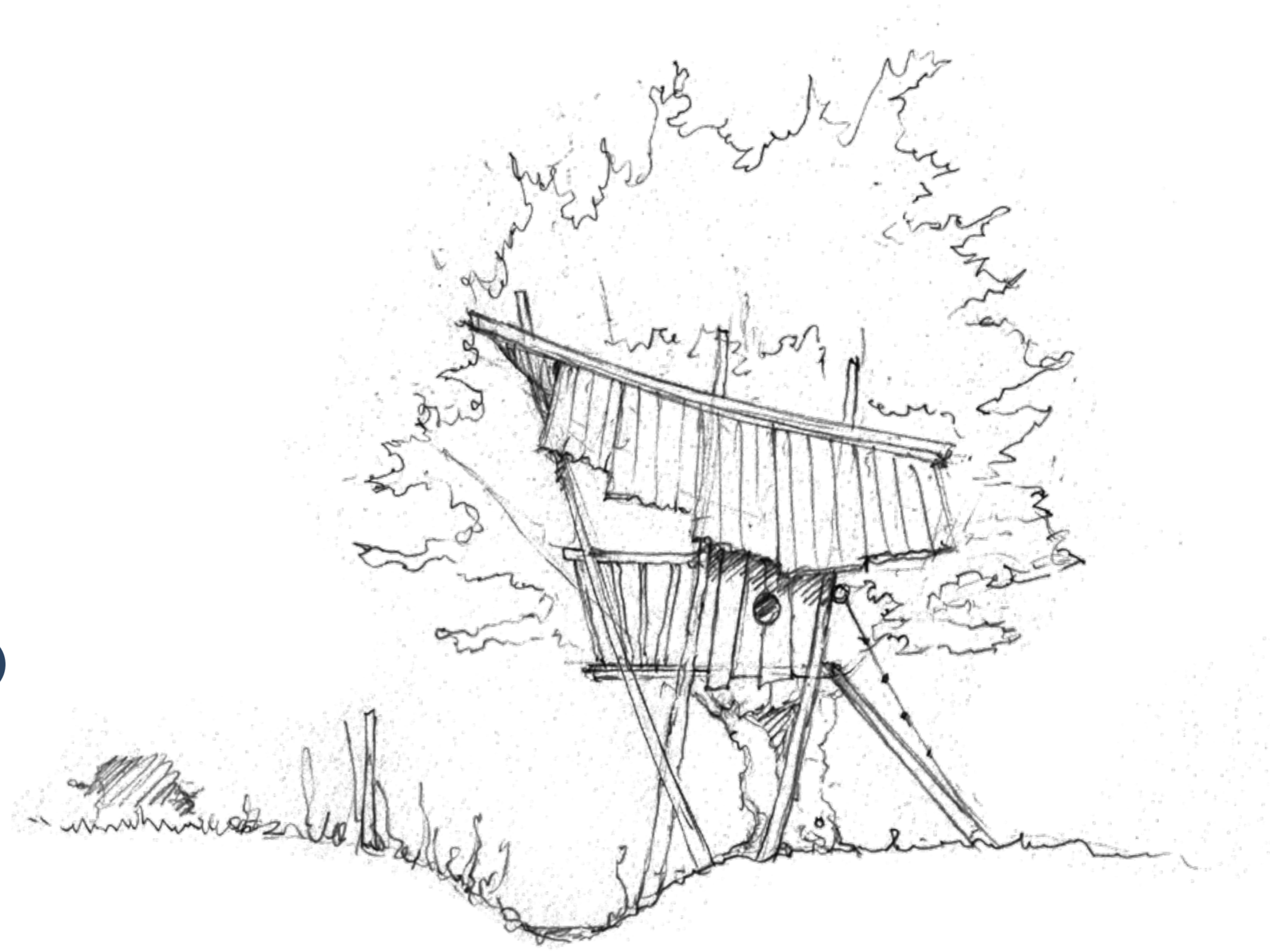


Our ethos

Children deserve imaginative, natural play spaces where they can explore and experiment in unstructured and self-directed ways.

With over three decades as pioneers in our field, we understand the importance of different types of play* and create stimulating 'habitats' that can accommodate children's differing and changing play needs - from wild and physical to quiet and imaginative.

Earth Wright's designs are invitations for children to play freely in a world of their own imagination, while stimulating their innate love and appreciation of the natural world.



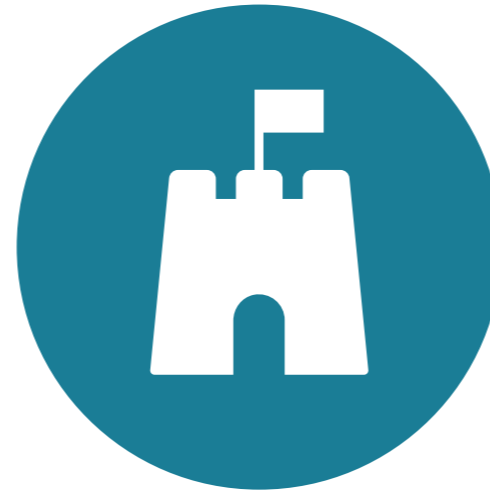
*For further information about play types please see our website

How we work



We listen to your ideas

Our goal is to create the best possible play experiences within the space and budget you have available. In order to do so we invest time in discussing your needs and desires while taking note of the existing potential in the space and surroundings.



We increase play value

Having clarified your vision we will work to enhance existing features, add more shape to the space that children can explore and discover through structures, planting and earth forms and so increase opportunities for different types of play.



We create a place for everyone

We are committed to being fully inclusive and our designers are trained in SEND to maximise participation of all abilities. Boundaries between the play area and wider community are designed to feel fluid and make access easy for all.

Your project

The following pages show your project's design plans together with a visualisation and supporting photographs to give an impression of how these elements of the play space will look.

Additional disclaimer for concept drawings

These drawings represent design intent and concept only and do not represent a final quote for design services, build or installation. For every installation, natural materials and the effects of environmental uncertainties are part of the beautiful, bespoke appearance of our work.

All of our play equipment is constructed using highly durable, chemical free Robinia logs and sawn timber.

Design methodology

We believe that children (and adults!) deserve better than the commonplace metal and plastic play areas, so we design with an area's surroundings in mind, using natural and sustainable materials to bring nature back into play, creating magical spaces that children, parents and the wider community will cherish.

With over three decades as pioneers in our field, we understand the importance of different types of play and create stimulating 'habitats' that can accommodate children's differing and changing play needs - from wild and physical to quiet and imaginative.

Earth Wrights' designs are invitations for children to play freely in a world of their own imagination, while stimulating their innate love and appreciation of the natural world.

Designing a play space for the entire community

One of the greatest satisfactions of our work is to see it being used and enjoyed by as wide a cross-section of the community as possible. This can only be achieved by providing a rich and varied environment which offers challenge and

engagement across the whole spectrum of access and ability.

For all children, regardless of ability, play is essential for their physical and emotional development. Children with disabilities have the right to experience the same challenges and to experience the same sensations as non-disabled children.

We feel that playgrounds should therefore be places where children of different abilities can meet and play together. Socialising is an important function of play areas as it is through playing with others, children develop social skills and they learn about behaviour, acceptance and friendship.

We ensure that our equipment and environments contain not only multiple types of play, but also multiple entry points. There is a spectrum of access, from easy through to challenging that enables children of all ages and abilities to play together.

Creating networks of play

As a species, we evolved in nature's fluid, cyclical, unpredictable settings where there are no straight lines or hard edges; and studies clearly show that children play in flowing patterns, moving through a space, creating play narratives as they go.

To encourage the kaleidoscope of play, our designs mimic nature's curves and

flows. In addition, our play experiences are not segregated into different zones, but networked together, encouraging overlap between say physical and social play or quiet and imaginative play. This interconnectedness creates a circular flow providing a sense of endless, unrestricted play

Designing with risk and safety in mind

Risk and challenge are key ingredients of a good play experience and essential for healthy development. In today's prescribed and structured world, opportunities for risk are few and far between. Nature provides infinite shapes and forms so that everyone may find their level and interest and is able to take those child-sized risks that help us prepare for challenges in the future.

Risk and challenges are not confined to physical play and the variety of play locations within the site allows children to engage with social and emotional risk - 'how far do I dare roam from mum and dad?' or 'am I feeling brave enough to go over there and play with that group of children?'

Safety is also a primary concern. All of our work is in line with the latest European play safety standards EN1176 and EN1177. While we encourage children to take appropriate risks in play, we certainly do not take any in our designs. A post-installation inspection by RoSPA guarantees compliance with the standards.

Play value statement for Larkhall Park

The main focus of the Larkhall Park design is two high play towers linked by a network of climbing ropes, log tangles and two smaller intermediate deck platforms which provide destinations along the way.

Attaching the zip wire to one of the towers transforms it from being a stand alone piece of equipment into an integrated part of the play experience. In real terms this means that once you have climbed up the tower you can get onto the launch ramp and have the experience of a fast descent across the play space.

We have made the zip wire as steep as possible to make it faster and hence increase its appeal to older children. We have linked the tower and deck structures with a network of ropes and climbing elements so that play can flow across the site rather than being interrupted by gaps between structures.

In addition to climbing between structures there are webs of ropes that enable children to climb under and around the tower legs. For a relatively small additional cost the play value of each tower is optimised.

By providing complex climbing networks we enable children to play off ground chase and to explore the space without touching the ground. Some tower legs also have climbing pegs and footholds offering a tricky, challenging way for children to scale the tower.

One of the main towers also has a 2.5m high slide offering a fast, exhilarating descent.

In one corner of the play area, surrounded by suggested planting is a large cantilever swing with a basket which will allow groups of children and teenagers the best, most exciting multi-directional swinging experience. Not only does a swing like this move in all directions, but it also spins around as it swings.

A wide buffer of suggested planting around the perimeter will help to create a green natural play space. Blocks of robust, native shrubs within the play area help to break up the space into green 'rooms' which both make it feel bigger and give children the opportunity to run around and engage in exploratory play.

Children's play can be cut short if the adults they are with have nowhere to sit. With this in mind, we have included some comfy benches and one picnic table to ensure families and carers are catered for. In addition the lower decks afford perching places for children and adults alike.

Larkhall Park

Proposed Plan

Key

1. Tower with integrated zip wire.
2. Intermediate towers.
3. Network of traversing ropes.
4. 2.5m slide tower with challenging climbing routes.
5. Cantilever basket swing.
6. Picnic table.
7. Timber benches.
8. Grassy mound.
9. Robust planting.
10. Shade trees.
11. Tigermulch surfacing.

Anticipated
desire lines

As a guideline the carrying capacity for the structures is as follows:

- Main zip wire tower - 20 children.
- Zip wire - 2 children at once.
- Slide tower - 17 children.
- Linking network of ropes and logs - 16 children.
- Cantilever swing - 4 teenagers.
- Play landscape - 20 children.



Larkhall Park

Proposed Plan (detail)

Key

1. Zip wire & launching ramp.
2. Tower with corrugated steel roof
3. Log tangle.
4. Tower with traversing wall.
5. Network of traversing ropes.
6. Intermediate deck platforms.
7. Balance beams.
8. 2.5m stainless steel slide.
9. Rope stairs.
10. Monkey rings.
11. 2.5m tower.



Bird's eye view 1

Sketch View



The main focus of play within the space is two high play towers linked by a network of climbing ropes, log tangles and intermediate deck platforms which provide destinations along the way.

Attaching the zip wire to one of the towers transforms it from being a stand alone piece of equipment into an integrated part of the play experience.

We have linked the tower and deck structures with a network of ropes and climbing elements so that play can flow all across the site rather than being interrupted by gaps between structures.

Bird's eye view 2

Sketch View

Planting

The design incorporates wildlife friendly, biodiverse sensory and shrub planting around the drip-line of the trees creating secluded spaces to shelter and picnic in the shade. No equipment or furniture will be installed within the RPAs in order to protect the roots.

Flow of play

Blocks of robust, native shrubs within the play area help to break up the space into green 'rooms' which both make it feel bigger and give children the opportunity to run around and engage in exploratory play.

Careful consideration has been given to anticipated desire lines to help minimise any damage to planted areas.

View towards zip line tower

Sketch View



Zip line tower

Sketch View

Tower clusters

Using 'wonky' cladding & a corrugated steel roof, and taking inspiration from the classic adventure playgrounds from the late 20th century, the side cladding on each tower provides a careful balance between providing some privacy for young people to socialise whilst maintaining sight lines to discourage unintended use.

Direct access point for adults to quickly assist children.



Traversing & climbing

By providing complex climbing networks we enable children to play off ground chase and to explore the space without touching the ground.

Zip wire tower

The tower has many ways up to the top from which a tangle of logs cascades down one side. The tangle is carefully designed to mimic the irregularity and challenge of climbing a natural element such as a tree or rocky outcrop.



Intermediate deck platforms

Sketch View

Traversing ropes

This network of ropes provide a fun way to navigate the space. The movement in the ropes adds excitement for all ages.



Incidental seating

As well as more traditional seating in the design, many of the elements within the play clusters, for example the two decks illustrated here and the balance beam, provide opportunities for less obvious seating, helping discourage after hours social gatherings.

Monkey rings

Sketch View

Stepping pegs & foot hold notches

In a world of regimented structures and uniform play equipment, these present a unique way to climb up and down. Their small size means you have to concentrate.



Monkey rings

Children love monkey rings. They provide opportunities for developing upper body strength and coordination. Our rope ones have the added fun of allowing for more movement.

View through to the swing.

Sketch View



Cantilever basket swing

Sketch View



Basket swing

Basket swings are both inclusive and offer many play-type opportunities, from exciting and physical play through to quiet and social.

The basket swing will be large enough to admit up to 4 teenagers at a time.

Entrance to the park.

Sketch View



Post & rail fencing with chain-link infill

Self-closing metal gate

Bench seat

Sketch View

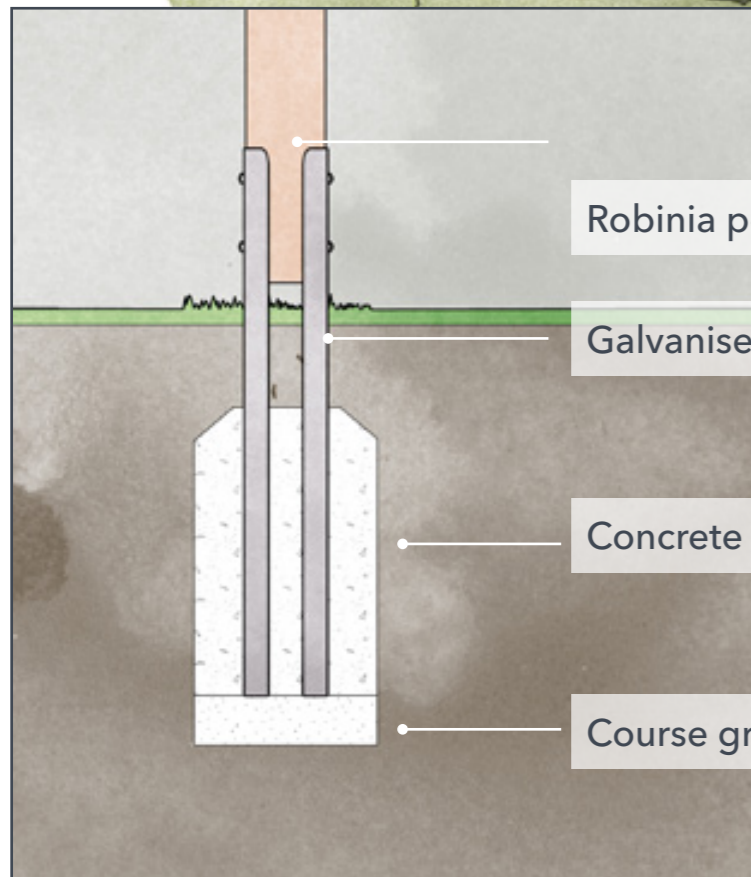


Seating areas

Children's play can be cut short if the adults they are with have nowhere to sit. With this in mind, we have included some comfy benches and one picnic table to ensure that families and carers are catered for. In addition the lower decks afford perching places for children and adults alike.

Metal post shoes

Sketch View



Robinia post

Galvanised steel post support

Concrete

Course gravel

Diagram showing post installation

As well as using very durable Robinia timber in our construction, all posts that will be installed into the ground will be anchored with metal shoes.

Supporting photographs

As all our designs are bespoke, the finished playground may vary from these supporting photographs.



Log tangle leading up to a tower



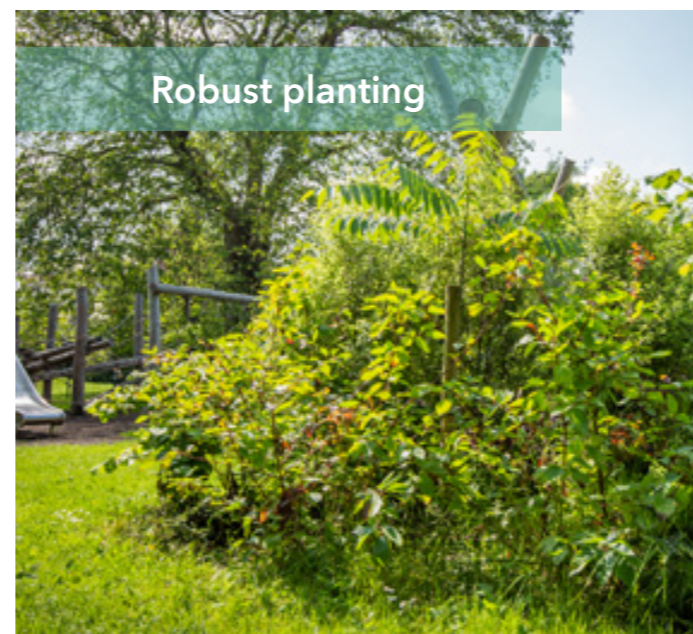
Traversing ropes under a tower



Log tangle



Traversing ropes



Robust planting



Cross ropes



Ropes under tower



Zip wire



Stainless steel slide



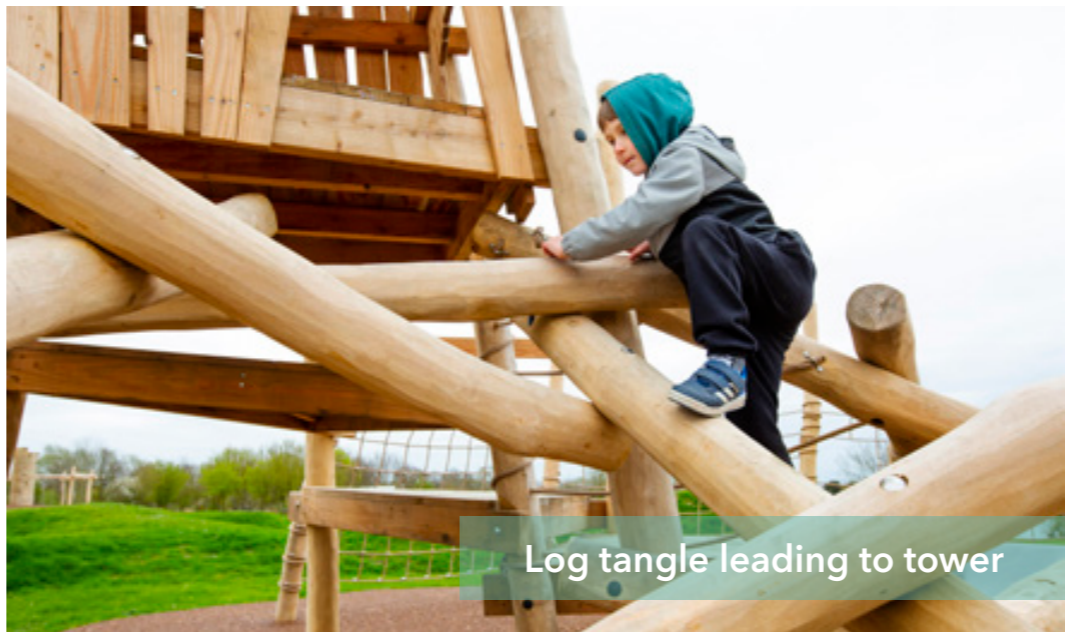
Monkey rings



Cantilever basket swing



Post & rail fencing with chain link infill



Log tangle leading to tower



Detail showing rope fixing



Steel ground supports



Corrugated steel roof



Self-closing gate



Craft and durability

Our skilled carpenters have many years of experience using elegant and effective build techniques that keep costs down and allow damaged parts to be easily replaced.

All our play spaces are made to EN 1176/77 specifications using Robinia, which can withstand wild weather and wild play. Our Robinia products are guaranteed for 10 years with an expected service life in excess of 25 years.

We also offer a full maintenance service.

New planting

At Earth Wrights we create “Habitats for Play”. These are natural spaces where active, social and imaginative play arises naturally from the environment. Our planting schemes are designed to enable connection with nature, where children can get close to and interact with plants and wildlife.

Enhancing biodiversity, increasing play value, providing sensory stimulation, creating shade and shelter, and tapping into our innate Biophilia (the connections that human beings subconsciously seek with the rest of life) are all outcomes we plan for when we design planting schemes.


Our plant selections vary according to the site conditions, the season and the desired function. We often use non-native as well as native species, paying close attention to the soil, climate and context of any site.

Safety is paramount and where appropriate we will avoid specifying poisonous and thorny plants (especially in early years settings). Sometimes, however, these plants are appropriate (for example, in wildlife conservation areas) and we are very careful in their use.

Some plants can only be planted in certain seasons (eg. bare-root trees or living willow cuttings in the winter) and at other times only container-grown plants are feasible. This can affect the plant species available, the specimen size and the aftercare requirement.

We prefer to plant smaller sized plants as they will establish more easily and will grow into more robust, healthier plants. This does not give the immediate ‘garden makeover’ impact that you might expect and the initial design proposal you receive is indicative of how the site will look once established. This is also a more cost-effective approach, enabling us to achieve a greater impact in the long run.

We are very experienced in implementing planting schemes, using best practices in ‘organic’ approaches to soft landscaping as well as more innovative techniques.



When we create natural play spaces, both humans and nature benefit.

Designing for all types of play

To make sure we provide for children's varied play needs we draw on extensive research in the field of play, in particular the work on play types.

For the purpose of our designs we focus on the 6 types shown opposite. These play types also serve as guides for clients to assess existing playground features and identify gaps in provision. We design our play spaces in ways that allow several play needs to be met simultaneously.



Play types explained



Exploratory Play

Exploratory play: This happens when children decide to investigate their physical surroundings, exploring new spaces and 'ranging'. What they require are places that provide spatial diversity and interest, opportunities to move into unknown territory and environments that stimulate their curiosity and imagination.



Physical Play

Physical play: Children's minds and bodies grow in relation to their physical environment and require experimentation and challenge to reach their full potential. Physical play helps children understand what their bodies are capable of and allows them to take the necessary risks required for healthy development.



Social play

Social Play: Making friends, sharing stories, learning the rules of a new game - children are social beings and play is a perfect way to learn about yourself and other people. In social play children can explore relationship dynamics, learn how to communicate their needs, establish boundaries and resolve differences.



Imaginative Play

Imaginative Play: Playing pretend allows children to stretch their imaginations, create their own worlds and explore real life situations in ways that are manageable for their stage of development. They need flexible environments they can adapt for their own purposes and which stimulate all the senses.



Loose Parts Play

Loose parts play: Banging on pots, making mud pies, building dens - these activities teach children about the physical and textural qualities of materials and how different elements fit together. Loose parts play offers sensory pleasure as well as developing hand eye coordination and problem solving skills.



Quiet Play

Quiet play: We all need time and space to be still and relax. For children this time is vital for integrating the many sensory impressions they encounter throughout the day. Quiet play allows them to rest, dream and refuel their brains and bodies. They need spaces that feel safe, comfortable and contained.

Our design team

Our design team is led by Mike Jones (BA Hons, Dip LA, Landscape Architecture & MA Public Art and Design) with 30 years of experience in designing and building children's play spaces. Tim Rolison, our play space designer, Josh Reeves, technical designer and landscape architect, Sam Williams, complete the team, working closely with Earth Wrights' experienced crew of talented playbuilders and account managers to make sure your play space is delivered on time and within budget.

Years of research and experience have given us a well-rounded understanding of what children need and the importance of outdoor play to childhood development, particularly in a post-Covid world where connection to the outdoors and nature is increasingly valued in our society. We are always adding to our knowledge base by keeping up to date with current research and contributing to the wider discussion around natural play through talks and articles.

Because of our high level of design capability and our ability to innovate within constraints of budgets and settings, we are regularly specialist consultants brought in to support architects, developers and organisations such as Westonbirt Arboretum and Kew Gardens as they design their ideal play experiences for children of all ages and needs.

Our designs can be experienced in hundreds of locations from London to Land's End, including Kimberley Park in Falmouth, National Trust properties such as Lanhydrock and Cotehele, the Eden Project and Forestry Commission settings, including the likes of Moors Valley Country Park.

In December 2019, we were thrilled to be awarded the RoSPA Play Value Award for our immersive nature play design at Sacrewell Heritage Farm.

Successes have continued over the years, with Earth Wrights providing the complete design and installation of play at 130-acre Stubbers Adventure Park in Essex, acting as the concept design contributor for the Children's Garden at Kew; and most recently, leading on indoor and outdoor play installations within the £2M regeneration plan for Occombe Farm in Devon.

We continue to delight in the creation of innovative play to suit each of our individual customer's needs and look forward to being a part of your future journey in the design of play.



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