

Play Builder in Somerset

As a result of the first national Play strategy for England published in 2008 the government launched a three year Play builder grant programme running from 2008- 2011.

The grants were awarded for the development of new or significantly refurbished play spaces which were:

Innovative and Adventurous ~ Inclusive ~ Attractive to girls – Aimed at 8 to 13 year olds

Somerset County Council with the support from Barnardo's was amongst the first local authorities to be awarded Play builder status in April 2008. By the end of the three years Somerset received £965,031 capital and £32,307 revenue using this grant to develop 29 play sites across Somerset.



Windmill Hill, Glastonbury



Taunton Green Play Area, Taunton

Alongside children, young people and their parents we recognise that play is a vital ingredient of a happy and healthy childhood, supporting children's physical, emotional, social and educational development.

The Play builder programme put the views of children and local communities at the heart of each new play space. Too many play spaces have become sterile and under used. They are often designed primarily with Health & Safety issues in mind and give little consideration to the play value of the space or how it will support children's development.

Play builder believes that children are the 'experts' on play and consultation work led by Barnardo's and the District Councils ensured that each site was designed in response to local children and young people's needs. Alongside the views and ideas from the local communities the Play builder group in Somerset used their collective professional knowledge about play and it's importance to facilitate the design of play spaces that offer opportunity for physical activity, risk, challenge, social interaction and which aim to inspire and stimulate.

In Somerset the Play builder funding was awarded to Somerset County Council. An Executive Group was formed to oversee the programme; facilitated by the children's charity Barnardo's and including representatives from each of the five District Councils, the Somerset Play Forum and Somerset County Council.

The Play builder Executive group met regularly throughout the three years of the project, working together using the District Play strategies, play audits and the Play Principles to identify play spaces throughout the county that were in need of development or requiring significant refurbishing. The group oversaw the complete consultation, planning, designing and building process of 29 play spaces across the county successfully ensuring that they were completed on time and on budget.

Below are case studies, one from each of the five districts giving an overview of one of their Play Builder play spaces.

Barnes close Play Area, Dulverton

West Somerset District Council

Play builder funding - £17,000

Completed – March 2011



This was the last of three projects to be delivered in West Somerset and was halted until central government clarified if there would be any future Department of Education funding. As no further funding was forthcoming, it was essential to make the most of the funds which were available. Dulverton Town Council taking on the project management role achieved significant savings and maximised the amount that could be spent on new equipment. They successfully completed the installation by 16th March 2011. The aim was to provide young people with a play area that was challenging but also blended with the local environment.

Angela Lamplough – Climate Change and Community Liaison manager, West Somerset DC

Dulverton's new adventure play area in Barnesclose is a magical place to swing, glide, romp, chill and meet. Variations on tunnels, slides, ropes and swings, all designed and chosen by the 40 children and young people and 20 adults involved. They have turned a soggy field, with post-war equipment, into an attractive site to meet and hang out between the houses and school.

At the Annual Town Meeting Chris Nelder, the Mayor, and Bern How were praised for their speed and persistence in managing such a creative completion during the 10 wintry weeks between Christmas and Easter. Councillors said they "can be proud of Dulverton's two recreation grounds now."

Leslie Silverlock - Town Councillor and Govt Localism Advisor

Stratton Community Garden, Stratton on the Fosse

Mendip District Council

Play builder funding - £17,500

Completed – March 2011 (Phase 1)



The first meeting of the Stratton on the Fosse Community Garden committee was held in the local village pub, the Kings Arms, on 14th May 2008, when officers were elected and the basic idea for the garden discussed. Three years later, and the first stage of the garden – a jungle climber – is open and ready for play, much to the delight of the many village children.

The idea for a garden in Stratton which all the villagers could enjoy, young and old and everyone in between, began when mother-of-two, Clare Bendall, was walking home from school with a group of other mums who decided that it would be a great idea to have somewhere that their kids could safely play outside and run off steam before tea, while they were able to sit and chat together.

Village consultation meetings, land discussions, planning and fundraising began with a vengeance. With the help of Downside Abbey Trustees, the local Parish Council, MP's and councillors helped us to obtain the Play Builder funding to kick start the project. Plans for phase 2 of the garden are now being drawn up and will include a basket swing, slide and tunnel for the children, while the adults will be able to enjoy seating, a shelter, natural planting and a boule court.

The Committee hope to declare the completed garden open in October 2011.

Claire Bendall - Chair of Fosse Community Garden Committee

Chamberlin Avenue Play Area, Sydenham, Bridgwater

Sedgemoor District Council

Play builder funding -
£63,000

Completed - March 2011



The park sits in one of the most deprived wards in Bridgwater and the Council's Play Strategy had identified the site as a priority for investment with a high potential to improve.

The aim of the project was to engage young people (8 -13 years of age) on the estate in an imaginative design process which ensured that their needs were taken into account. The consultation was carried out at the park and the houses in the surrounding estate and drew assistance from two local PCSO's and the local Roller Coaster Youth Centre.

Ideas from the above consultation process have been built into the park design, including basket swing, super nova (slanting, spinning ring), 5 way swing, timber climber, stilts and sleeper balance beam, play boulders, picnic bench and seating, thus providing an inclusive, innovative, adventurous and sustainable environment for young people to play in.

The scheme has helped young people and adults bond together and ultimately preserved and enhanced an existing play area that was constructed in 1994 and reached the end of its life expectancy.

Harley Cook - Parks and Open Spaces Policy Officer, Sedgemoor District Council

Taunton Green Play Area, Taunton

Taunton Deane Borough Council

Play builder funding –
£22,500

Completed - April 2011



Taunton Green playground is situated on the northern edge of Taunton and attracts large numbers of regular local users. Before the refurbishment the on-site play space consisted of a kindergarten separate area for older children both of which were starting to show their age and high use. The two areas were side by side but separated by a hedge, both areas contained traditional fixed playground equipment.

The new play area has a separate fenced playground for the under fives, next to a larger open space for older children. It is a fully accessible play site with an accessible changing facility within the nearby pavilion, accessed by a radar key, offering a safe and private area for public use. The facility incorporates an individual hoisting system and a height adjustable changing bed.

Play equipment within the site consists of a cradle, flat, basket and agility swings, trampoline, tractor climbing frame, activity climbing frame, roundabouts and sand pulley.

Creating a new landscape to meet the needs of all with play related desire lines within the park environment has given the new facility a sense of place.

Debbie Arcscott – Community Leisure Officer, Taunton Deane Borough Council

Flagship Playspace, Yeovil

South Somerset Council

Play builder funding -
£40,000

Completed – August 2009



The Flagship Playspace is situated at Yeovil Recreation Centre and now attracts around 60,000 visitors each year. The play area is based around an adventure theme and aims to inspire children's imaginations by providing an extensive environment for role play and games. Somerset Life Magazine described the play area as a 'Don't Miss' venue for anyone with children visiting Yeovil. The play area focuses as much on the use of the natural environment for play as it does on more traditional play equipment. Play features include a tree top walkway, rope nets and bridges, dragon and skull slides, zip line, ship wreck, large sand pit, swings, climbing frame, see-saw, roundabout, exciting landscaping with trees, mounds and boulders. Water play is included in the design but due to the intensive management of this feature, it is only put into operation at peak times in the summer.

Visitors to the play area benefit from free car parking, public toilets and a refreshments kiosk 'The Galley', which serves hot/cold drinks, ice cream and general snacks. For more details visit www.southsomerset.gov.uk/ycrc

Rob Parr - Senior Play & Youth Facilities Officer, South Somerset District Council

By ensuring that children and communities were thoroughly consulted meant that the Play builder play sites were designed in response to local children and young people's needs, ensuring that the sites are popular and spaces that the whole community use.

Below is a table showing the 29 completed play sites which received funding from the Play builder programme.

	Play Builder - Year 1 Sites	Year 2 Sites	Year 3 Sites
Mendip District Council	Windmill Hill	Street	Stratton on the fosse
	Glastonbury Skate Park	Hillmead	
Sedgemoor District Council	Ilex	East Huntspill	Chamberlain avenue, Bridgewater
	West Huntspill		
South Somerset District Council	Bondfield Way, Chard	Yew Tree Park	Bracey road, Martock
	Nine Springs, Yeovil	Jocelyn Park, Chard	Birchfield Road Park, Yeovil
		Yeovil Vision Flagship	Happy Valley, Crewkerne
West Somerset District Council		Merriot	Slowdown Park, Chard
	Belle Vied in Westford	Crowcombe	Dulverton
Taunton Deane Borough Council	Higher Holway, Taunton	Oake Village	Taunton Green
	Howard Road, Wellington	Lyngford Park	Greenway
		Hamilton Gault	



Barnes close Play area, Dulverton



Taunton Green Play Area, Taunton

With the support of the children's charity Barnardo's and Somerset County Council the Play builder programme in Somerset has enabled District councils to transform play spaces across the county, creating play equipment and parks that are more accessible, challenging and inspiring and that communities can use and enjoy together.

For further information please contact –

Barnardo's Somerset Play and Participation Service and Somerset Play Forum - 01749330 533

Somerset County Council - 0845 345 9122

Taunton Deane Borough Council – 01823 356356

Mendip District Council – 01749 343399

West Somerset Council – 01643 703704

Sedgemoor District Council – 0845 4082540

South Somerset District Council – 01935 464462

