

Alliance for Childhood (1942) written statement on Matter 51 Social Infrastructure

M51. Would Policy S1 provide an effective and justified approach to the development of London's social infrastructure?

Policy S1 would be an effective and justified approach to the development of London's social infrastructure if it highlighted the need for children's social infrastructure. Involving children's needs will result in better social infrastructure for the whole community.

Children's social infrastructure can be described as follows:

Children's infrastructure is the network of spaces, streets, nature and interventions which make up the key features of a child-friendly city. They are critical to a more inclusive, equitable, healthy and resilient public realm. This network is as important as transport, energy, water, and waste infrastructure; all underpin urban functions and a city's ability to attract and sustain strong, healthy, family-orientated communities. By promoting connected, multifunctional, intergenerational and sustainable public spaces for cities, children's infrastructure can generate a substantial range of benefits for all urban citizens.

A key focus area for children's infrastructure are the streets and the spaces in front of people's homes. On average, these make up at least 25% of a city's space and have the greatest potential to encourage everyday freedoms and social interaction. This means looking beyond just playgrounds and instead focusing on an intergenerational and multifunctional public realm that families and communities can enjoy together. Cities should aim to enhance a child's connection to nature through green and healthy environments. They should also influence and impact a child's everyday journeys, including through routes to and from school or to and from community facilities such as youth centres, parks, leisure and recreation areas. (Ref 1)

The construction of a functioning children's social infrastructure is not a luxury. It is essential for the healthy development of children. The built environment plays a huge part in forming the life chances of children. Creating an environment where they feel welcome and included deters older children from being taken into alternatives such as criminal gangs in order to have a feeling of belonging.

They have different needs at different stages of their lives. The social infrastructure must include children's centres such as SureStart centres which have proven to give children a solid start in life but which are closing due to underfunding (Ref 2). Youth clubs within easy access of the home, places to play and hang out for older children are also necessary to give them an alternative to being drawn into violence and knife culture.

Older children are likely to withdraw from public spaces if they feel threatened or unwelcome, leading to a sense of disconnection from society. Also, as Professor of Psychology Peter Grey argues, a decline in children's time, space and permission for play may be responsible for dramatic increases in adolescent mental health problems. (Ref 3)

In particular would it be effective in meeting the objectives of policies GG1 and GG3 in creating a healthy city and building strong and inclusive communities?

Policy S1 would be more effective in meeting the objectives of Policies GG1 and GG3 if children's social infrastructure were included, because it determines a better balance between growth and creating a healthy city and building strong and inclusive communities.

Implementing a children's infrastructure policy includes projects and programmes serving needs at the neighbourhood scale and improving children's key journeys, for example space standards, road user hierarchies and enhanced green infrastructure networks (Ref 1, see also Ref 7.)

It would also have an effect on the scale of developments.

A child grows up along the spatial scales of the home, the street, the neighbourhood and the city. The scales reflect the social ecological model that children's development specialists use to build strategies to ensure children's rights. The access to appropriate urban services needs to be adjusted accordingly to a child's age, needs and the daily patterns of its caretaker. In both dense and low-dense urban settings, there is a growing lack of the human scale of the neighbourhood. (Ref 4. See also Ref 5 & 6).

In particular:

a) Would Policy S1, in requiring a needs assessment of social infrastructure and encouraging cross borough collaboration provide an effective and justified strategic framework for the preparation of local plans and neighbourhood plans in relation to the development of social infrastructure?

S1 would provide more effective and justified strategic framework if the needs assessment specifically included the needs of children. This would also encourage cross borough collaboration as children's social infrastructure crosses boundaries.

b) Would it provide a justified definition of social infrastructure?

S1 would provide a more strongly justified definition if the requirements of children's social infrastructure were included for the reasons already given.

c) Would it provide an effective development management framework for boroughs, particularly with regard to Policy S1D, F and G?

D Development proposals that seek to make best use of land, including the public-sector estate, should be encouraged and supported. This includes the co-location of different forms of social infrastructure and the rationalisation or sharing of facilities.

As it stands, D gives no specific protection for children's play spaces and other aspects of children's social infrastructure. Children's play areas are classed as brown field sites and housing is being given priority, resulting in the loss of space for children. Play areas need to be within sight or a short walk of their homes. Children should be consulted over the potential loss of their play areas to see what would work for them. This would respect their rights under the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, especially the right to play and to be listened to in matters which concern them (Ref 8).

F Development proposals that would result in a loss of social infrastructure, in an area of defined need as identified in the borough's social infrastructure needs assessment required under Part A should be refused unless:

- 1) there are realistic proposals for re-provision that continue to serve the needs of the neighbourhood and wider community, or;
- 2) the loss is part of a wider public service transformation plan which requires investment in modern, fit for purpose infrastructure and facilities to meet future population needs or to sustain and improve services.

We recommend to add after 'a loss of social infrastructure', 'in particular children's social infrastructure'

G Redundant social infrastructure should be considered for full or partial use as other forms of social infrastructure before alternative developments are considered, unless this loss is part of a wider public service transformation plan (see Part F2).

This creates the danger that Children's infrastructure will be lost if it is convenient for adults to consider something redundant. It should be made clear that children must be consulted in the case of their social infrastructure to determine whether or not it is redundant in their terms, as a right. (Ref 8)

References

1. Cities Alive Designing for Urban Childhoods Report by ARUP
<https://www.arup.com/perspectives/cities-alive-urban-childhood?query=cities%20alive>
2. Report on First 1,000 Days of Life by Health and Social Care Parliamentary Committee
<https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201719/cmselect/cmhealth/1496/1496.pdf>
3. Older Children Play Too Play Wales Information Sheet
<http://www.playwales.org.uk/login/uploaded/documents/INFORMATION%20SHEETS/Older%20children%20play%20too.pdf>
4. UNICEF Shaping Urbanisation for Children Handbook
https://www.unicef.org/publications/files/UNICEF_Shaping_urbanization_for_children_handbook_2018.pdf
5. More Children are Living in High Rise Apartments So Designers Should Keep Them in Mind
<https://theconversation.com/more-children-are-living-in-high-rise-apartments-so-designers-should-keep-them-in-mind-100756>
6. High-rise parenting: experiences of families in private, high-rise housing in inner city Melbourne and implications for children's health Research Paper
<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/23748834.2018.1483711?journalCode=rcah20>
7. The Global Health Foundation report on Road Traffic and Children's Health
<https://www.fiafoundation.org/media/551645/unfinished-journey-report-spreads.pdf>
8. UN Convention on the Rights of the Child
<https://www.unicef.org.uk/what-we-do/un-convention-child-rights/>

Contact name: Marion Briggs Email: marion@allianceforchildhood.org.uk Phone: 020 8858 3421

28th February 2019