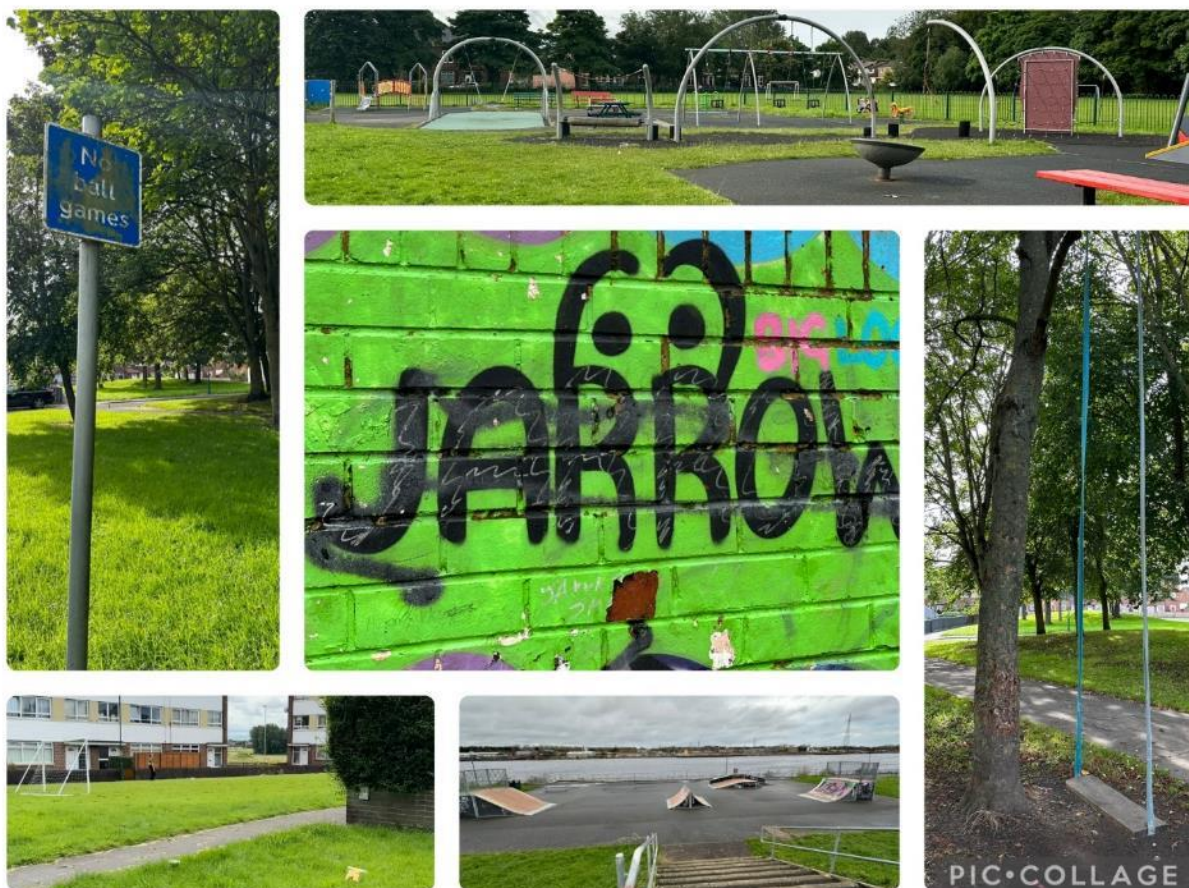


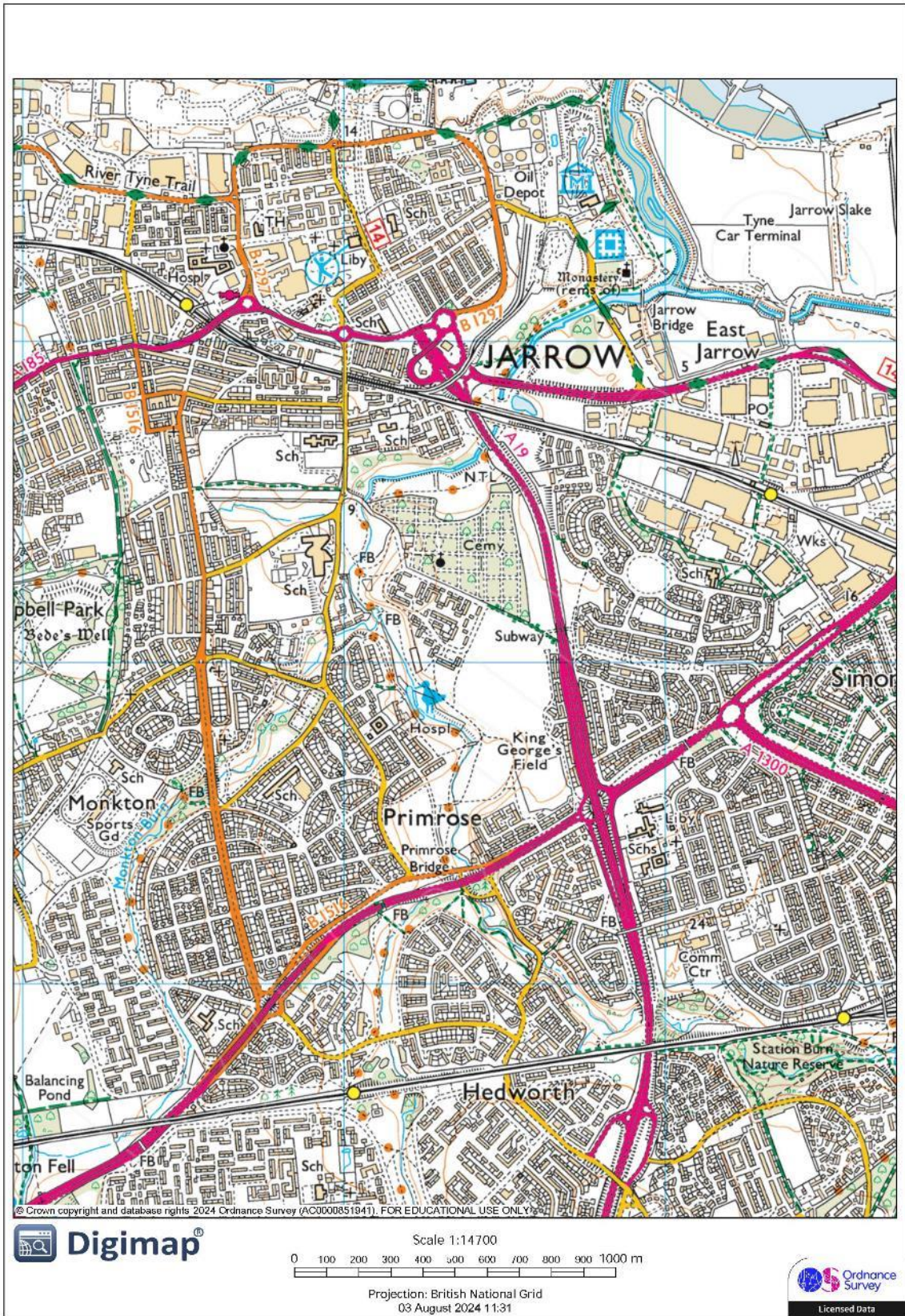
Play and Youth Sufficiency in Jarrow

Spaces for Children and Young People to Play and Hang Out

Project Report April 2026



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Map of Jarrow

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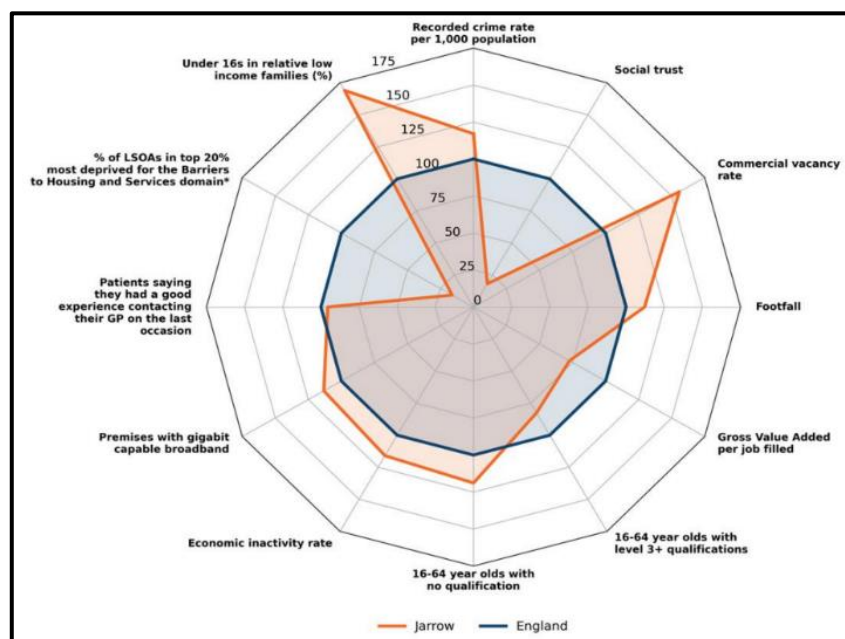
1. INTRODUCTION

This report reflects on recent research which brought together community and academic partners to explore issues of neighbourhood play and of play and youth sufficiency in Jarrow.

Jarrow is a town of approximately 30,000 people, part of the Tyneside conurbation and located about 5 miles east of Newcastle upon Tyne, on the south banks of the River Tyne. Jarrow expanded particularly with the growth of heavy industry, especially shipbuilding, from around 1850 to 1930. The Great Depression hit the town and its industries hard, and while some investment and industrial success was achieved as World War Two approached, the post-war period was marked by continuing decline and the town's last shipyard closed in the 1980s. Today, over 80 percent of Jarrow's smallest census tracts are in the top 20 percent most deprived in England. It can be best described as a town that continues to struggle, despite its location in a major urban region, severely impacted most recently by austerity, as South Tyneside Council "[lost 44 per cent of its spending power](#)" between 2010 and 2019, more than twice the English average.

It is also a town with a strong sense of pride, in its connection to the Venerable Bede, its labour history, its diversity, and its community. There is a rich network of community and voluntary organisations and a powerful sense of connection within communities. 18.6% of people in Jarrow are under 16 years old, equal to the English average. Across Jarrow, 96.8% of people identified as White ethnic group, 1.2% as Asian, 0.4% as Black, 1.1% with Mixed or Multiple ethnic groups, and 0.4% with other ethnic groups.

In this context of social and economic need, the town was recently allocated £20m over 10 years from the **Pride in Place** programme (initially as part of the Long-Term Plan for Towns in October 2023). Jarrow's [Local Data Profile](#), prepared by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government in support of the town's Pride in Place work confirms some of the challenges it confronts. The diagram below, from the Local Data Profile, shows how Jarrow's indicators (orange) compare with national averages (dark blue; scaled to 100), suggesting, amongst other indicators, higher proportions of under 16s in low-income families, very low social trust, high levels of commercial vacancies, and above average recorded crime.



Jarrow Forward, the 'Town Board' established to manage this programme, highlighted the need for better youth and recreational provision in its earliest documents. This created an opportunity to engage decision-makers and connect provision for play and youth to wider policy debates, including poverty, inequality, health and wellbeing, physical activity, and care.

There is a developing debate about the place of play in the Pride in Place programmes, with [Play England](#) and others drawing attention to the possible synergies in this sphere. In September 2025, Play England called for these programmes to deliver on play and “to allocate a fair and proportionate share — ideally at least 20 per cent — to children’s play spaces, reflecting the proportion of children in their local population”. Play England argued for plans for play to extend beyond playgrounds, to include play sufficiency assessments that take into account “all the spaces and places where children play: formal and informal play areas, parks and open spaces, school grounds, streets, neighbourhoods, natural areas, active travel routes, supervised play settings (such as adventure playgrounds), and community recreation facilities”.

Longstanding play and playwork research underlines that children’s and young people’s play is the primary way in which they develop a connection to and a sense of belonging in their communities: “play is the principal way in which children participate within their own communities” ([Lester and Russell, 2010](#)). Play is how children engage with and make sense of their neighbourhoods, how they develop connections with and within them, and how they start to make a claim on them. Research suggests that children and young people who grow up with a sense of connection and attachment to their neighbourhoods and environments are much more likely to be active and connected within their communities in later life.

In this context, we can argue that play is how children and young people develop pride in their places.

2. PLAY AND YOUTH SUFFICIENCY

The concepts of play sufficiency and youth sufficiency both concern whether children and young people have adequate opportunities to thrive within their communities. While related, they operate at different scales and focus on distinct, though overlapping, dimensions of development.

Play sufficiency refers to whether children have sufficient time, space, permission and opportunity to play as part of everyday life. It is an idea developed out of work to embed children’s right to play (established in Article 31 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child) in policy and practice and is grounded in the recognition of play as a fundamental right and a vital element of healthy development — socially, emotionally, physically and cognitively. Play sufficiency considers whether neighbourhoods offer accessible, inclusive and stimulating environments where children can engage in freely chosen, self-directed play, particularly outdoors.

Youth sufficiency, by contrast, is broader. It concerns whether young people have adequate access to the social, physical and structural conditions that enable them to flourish as they move toward adulthood. This includes education, health, safety, relationships, participation in decision-making, and access to supportive services and facilities. Youth sufficiency therefore addresses a wider ecosystem of opportunity and support.

For older children and teenagers, play often evolves beyond traditional playground activity. It becomes more social, relational and spatial. Time spent sitting together in parks, meeting at

skateparks, congregating in town centres, walking neighbourhood routes, or occupying edges and thresholds of public space can represent important forms of play.

For the purposes of the report, in relation to youth sufficiency, we narrow our scope to one critical and often overlooked dimension: young people's access to informal, freely accessible places to gather and play, spaces to "hang out".

We are focused in this research and report on mapping and exploring children and young people's opportunities to play and hang out in their neighbourhoods. We have been interested in organised activities (such as sport and youth clubs etc.) but placed a particular focus on more informal opportunities such as doorsteps, streets, parks, playgrounds, and other neighbourhood spaces. From our conversations with children and young people, however, we do know that they value not just places to play and hang out, but also the playworkers and youth workers whose skills and relationships makes those places more playable, safer and more welcoming.

Play sufficiency (for children and young people of all ages) is shaped by local practices and cultures, political priorities and funding decisions, public space design, investment and maintenance, risk aversion, commercialisation of leisure, surveillance, and decades of disinvestment in space for play and hanging out. As a result, questions of play and youth sufficiency cannot be separated from questions about spatial justice and the right of young people to exist visibly and legitimately within public space.

In the last year, the Play Commission and Play England have both underlined the value of play sufficiency approaches. The Play Commission's [recommendations](#) include: "A statutory Play Sufficiency Duty for local authorities ... This duty would require local authorities to regularly assess and secure adequate play provision, particularly in communities where access is limited", whilst Play England sets "embedding the principle of play sufficiency in place-based planning" as a priority in its [new strategy](#).

The findings presented align with the framework outlined in [Youth Matters: Your National Youth Strategy](#) published in 2025. That strategy places young people's prospects, wellbeing and civic involvement at the heart of national renewal, recognising that opportunity is influenced not only by formal provision but also by the quality of the everyday settings in which young people grow up. A central priority within the strategy is addressing inequality and ensuring that communities experiencing sustained disadvantage are not overlooked. In this respect, the focus on Jarrow as a locality benefiting from sustained investment reflects the strategy's endorsement of place-based approaches that strengthen access to safe environments, dependable relationships with trusted adults and purposeful activity.

The strategy further highlights the importance of participation and amplifying young people's voices in decisions that shape their lives. This study's examination of how young people inhabit parks, streets, thresholds and other informal spaces speaks directly to that commitment. Recognising play and socialising as valid expressions of participation affirms the broader aim of viewing young people as active members of their communities rather than simply recipients of services.

Finally, the strategy draws together wellbeing, physical activity, mental health and social cohesion. By framing play sufficiency and youth sufficiency in terms of spatial justice and rights, this research contributes to a wider national dialogue that understands the improvement of children and young people's environments as fundamental to progress in health, education and social mobility.

Most Play Sufficiency Assessments (PSAs) are carried out by local authorities. PSAs are a statutory obligation for Welsh and Scottish local authorities, but not (yet) in England. However, some English local authorities (such as [Leeds](#) and [Sandwell](#)) are taking a lead on the introduction of Play Sufficiency Assessments in England.

When undertaken by local authorities, Play Sufficiency Assessments would assess children and young people's lived experiences, the socio-political context, cross-cutting agendas within council departments, the built and natural environment (including planning and housing), the wider policy sphere (education, health and social care, community safety), as well as play, leisure and recreation services. In short, such assessments would involve a more holistic review of local authority services and provision, in the context of research focused on children's and families' experiences of space to play.

This project was undertaken by academic and independent researchers and practitioners. Apart from as interviewees and interlocutors, local authority officers were not involved in devising or carrying out this research. As a result, this report is not a standard Play Sufficiency Assessment, but reflects detailed, rigorous research into key aspects of landscapes for play and hanging out in Jarrow, focused on qualitative, ethnographic, participatory, and observational work (see below). It could well be developed into, or supplemented by, a fuller Play Sufficiency Assessment led or commissioned by Jarrow Forward and/or South Tyneside Council.

3. THE RESEARCH

The research supporting this report was carried out within the context of two related research projects, funded by small grants from Newcastle University.

The first project which started in November 2023 and continued to around July 2025 was focused on **neighbourhood play in South Tyneside**, with a focus on South Shields (Marine Park Primary) and Jarrow (Dunn St Primary). This was a collaboration between Professor Alison Stenning and Paula Turner, a community artist, with the active support of then executive head Alison Burden and other school staff. This project engaged Year 5 (and into Year 6) classes in each school, based on a range of activities over a series of school visits and trips, which were both focused on play and deliberately playful.

At Dunn Street Primary, this included:

- going out to play in the children's neighbourhoods (MUGAs, play parks, streets, car parks, etc.)
- playing in the classroom, with different games and equipment
- drawing playfully
- telling funny stories about play
- making playful maps
- playing in the early years' playground
- playing at Shiremoor Adventure Playground in North Tyneside

These activities were documented in research notes and reflections, children's writing and drawing, recording of conversations and activities, taking photographs and videos, and capturing children's work on whiteboards.

The second project drew in additional team members: Michelle Trotter from Dunn St Primary, Gemma Lockyer Turnbull from NE Youth, Gerard New from Tyneside Outdoors, and Jackie Boldon, an

independent play consultant and campaigner. This project was focused on **play and youth sufficiency in Jarrow** specifically and ran from July 2024 to July 2025.

It was a multi-method research project and included:

- Regular observation and mapping of play and play space across Jarrow
- Youth work and playwork in parks and public space (e.g. West Park, fishing on the riverside)
- An engagement session at Jarrow School, carried out with Youth Council area representatives
- Conversations with parents and carers (across Jarrow at events, at Dunn St Primary)
- Meetings with stakeholders (including play and youth providers, council officers, councillors, community organisations, etc.)
- A small-scale survey of providers, parents and children and young people

ARE YOU INTERESTED IN SPACES FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE TO PLAY AND HANG OUT IN JARROW?



What are we doing?
We are trying to research ideas of “play and youth sufficiency” in Jarrow. What we mean by ‘sufficiency’ is that children and young people should have **enough** opportunities for play and recreation in their neighbourhoods, for all ages. Children and young people have a right to play and to recreation and this is a way of trying to understand if children and young people in Jarrow *really* do have that right in practice. We’re interested in organised activities (such as sport and youth clubs etc.) and more informal opportunities such as parks, playgrounds, and other neighbourhood spaces.

To do this, we’re mapping spaces for play, fun and hanging out across Jarrow, researching what opportunities do exist where, talking to local organisations, creating opportunities for play and recreation, engaging with children and young people, and talking to parents, carers and the wider community.

Why are we doing this?
We think this is a really important issue, for all children and young people, and their families and communities, but especially for places like Jarrow that are perhaps underserved in relation to play and youth provision. We believe that children and young people in Jarrow deserve to get their fair share of opportunities for play and recreation, and we think this will benefit the wider community in all sorts of ways too.

What will the research do?
We’re going to work throughout the process with children and young people, their families, wider communities, local organisations, the council and so on, to develop a conversation about play and youth sufficiency. We’re hoping to engage directly with the new Jarrow Town Board to try to find ways of ensuring that play and youth provision are part of the programme developed. We also hope that our research will make the case to support all sorts of opportunities for play and recreation.

Who are we?
We’re a group made up of university and freelance researchers, play and youth workers, a community artist, and a local headteacher, all committed to making space for play and recreation in Jarrow. The research is funded by Newcastle University in support of community-based research and has been approved by its ethics committee.

For more information, to suggest ideas, or to get involved in the research, please contact Professor Alison Stenning at Newcastle University (alison.stenning@ncl.ac.uk).

Project Flyer

4. SPACE FOR PLAY IN JARROW

The project team spent considerable amounts of time in Jarrow, not only as part of the research but, for some, also in their professional lives as youth workers and teachers. In the context of the research itself, as a team we arranged and attended events with children and young people, visited providers and other local organisations, and visited different parts of the town to map, observe and document space for play.

The town, from the Tyne in the north to the green metro line in the south, and between Hebburn to the west and South Shields to the east (see map above), is characterised by residential areas with distinct identities and geographies. Central Jarrow includes some nineteenth century terraces, some

post-war developments, and some smaller newer neighbourhoods, along with the shopping centre, the Viking Centre, and Jarrow metro station. The Viking Centre was regularly identified by children and young people as an important part of their everyday lives, visiting either with friends or with family. To the east of the centre, we find Jarrow Hall, the slake and industrial land. Central Jarrow is separated from the rest of the town's residential areas – Primrose, Hedworth, Fellgate, the Hill Park Estate, the Scotch Estate and Perth Green – by the A185 and the Tyne Tunnel access.

The riverside, the slake, the River Don and Monkton Burn shape Jarrow's geographies and offer numerous green and blue spaces for play and leisure. Formal parks – West Park, Springwell Park, Monkton Dene, and Campbell Park – afford both green space and designated play space (play parks and ball courts/multi-use games areas). The cemetery and the King George V playing field on Lindisfarne Road add to the town's green space.

Each of the town's residential areas possesses considerable amounts of incidental green space, between houses and near local amenities. These may be small patches of land or bigger playing field-sized spaces, but all offer some play value, and signs of play (goals, balls, trolleys, tree swings, etc.) are often seen in these spaces. Many of these spaces are also, however, furnished with No Ball Games signs, appearing on many of the open, accessible green and grey spaces (such as car parks and garage complexes) and denying children space to play. These No Ball Games signs exist not only in places where play might, by some, be seen as a nuisance, but also in spaces where neighbourhood children might safely play.





Snapshots of spaces for play in Jarrow

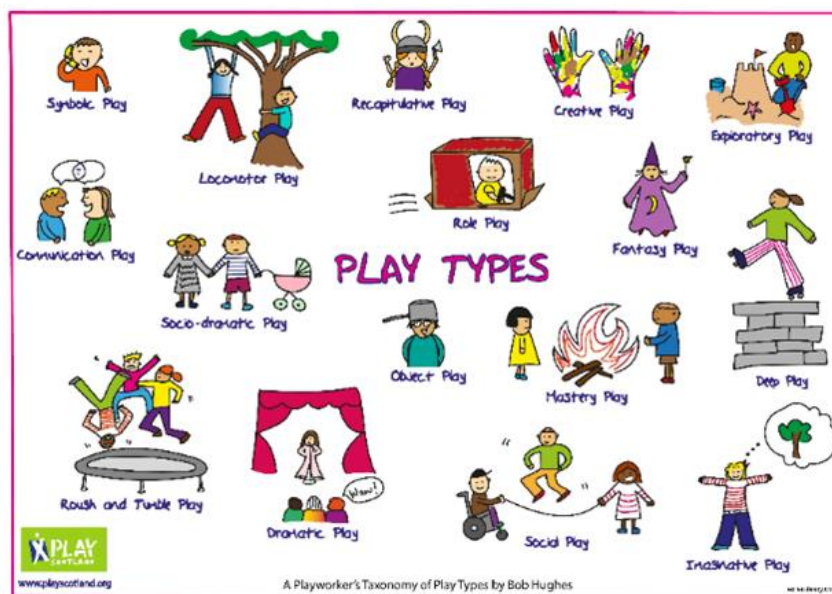
These neighbourhoods are also, in places, characterised by litter, fly tipping, potholes and damaged pavements, graffiti, and overgrown paths and alleys. These undermine the possibility of neighbourhood play, making it risky and unappealing, and also reduce levels of social safety for children and young people hanging out and moving around the town. Poorly-maintained paths (for pedestrians and cyclists), grim underpasses, and badly-lit routes make it difficult for children and young people to get around confidently and independently.

Roads and road traffic can also be significant obstacles to safe play; the A185 is crossed by hostile crossings or underpasses, whilst the 'ring road' around the town centre – while keeping much road traffic out of central Jarrow – can be dominated by fast driving, heavy traffic and large vehicles. These can make access to Jarrow Hall and Drewetts/Charlie's Park, the slake, the River Don, and the town's parks risky and off-putting for children and families. For much of 2024 and 2025, the pedestrian crossing from the riverside to central Jarrow was out of order, meaning access to and from the river, the pedestrian tunnel and the skate park was uncontrolled and dangerous.

5. WHAT IS PLAY FOR JARROW'S CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE?

How children imagine play varies, of course, by age, interest, gender and much more, but for the children and young people we worked with and heard from in Jarrow, we can identify the following ideas:

At **primary** age, children listed diverse forms of play: digital, physical, structured, sporting, passive, active, social, imaginative, creative, serious and silly. These included, for example, tag, football, skipping ropes, chess, trampolining, tree climbing, hanging out, hide and seek, swimming, coding, cycling, Lego, Pokémon, Roblox, music, dressing up, building dens, and rollerskating, and reflected all of Bob Hughes' play types.



Bob Hughes' Play Types

The children we worked with described seamless connections between their digital play and their 'real world' play, playing with friends online (together or at a distance) and drawing their digital play into their physical and social play.

When we spent time with them in and around school grounds, we saw them take every opportunity to play, to balance, jump, get muddy, run, and climb, and to interact not only with each other but also with their environments (kerbs, puddles, hills, play equipment, shopping trolleys, sticks, and much more). They revelled in opportunities to play.

Asked to explain what play meant to them, these were some of their answers:

"Playing is important because it entertains us and makes us feel like time went by fast because we had such fun while playing games 8.5/10"

"Fun"

"For fun – for energy – play with friends – we play cuz we play with friends for fun 9/10"

"To have fun and enjoy 5/10"

"To exercise – to relax – FUN – to spend time with friends 6/10"

"To have a break – to have fun – to be with friends – to take up time – to get friends – to keep you healthy 9/10 quite important"

"To have a fun life – You can find new hobbies – So you can bond with more people – To learn new things – To be active – To create a better lifestyle – To stop using too much electronics – To bond with your family – To learn new things/get better at hobbies"

"To have a great childhood! To have friends!"

"The point of playing is to have fun"

"To have fun 9/10"

The children we worked with primarily saw play as fun and as social, but they also recognised that play was linked to new skills, to family and other relationships, and to being well.

For the **secondary** age children and young people we worked with, play was increasingly characterised as hanging out, in their neighbourhoods, near school, on public transport, in the town centre and other local centres (including Newcastle), but many still identified particular forms of play – team sports, fishing, gymnastics, etc. – that they valued.

The older children valued play as a way of having fun, being with friends, doing what makes you happy, being outdoors and getting fresh air.

6. WHERE DO JARROW'S CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE PLAY AND HANG OUT?

Most of the children and young people we worked with, from late primary onwards, told us that they are permitted to play out without adult supervision. For some, this was shaped by certain conditions, including being with friends or family, staying close to home, maintaining contact (and location-sharing) via their phones, and returning before dark. There were more restrictions in bad weather and on winter afternoons.

Some children noted that their parents' anxieties, particularly about strangers and social risks, limited their ability to play out, and this was especially true for younger children and for more vulnerable communities (such as migrants and asylum seekers).

Those who did play and hang out did so regularly, most days for a couple of hours after school, until dark in winter, but for longer afternoons in the summer. Amongst the comments, young people noted:

“there is no lighting to play in the evening during the winter”
“it gets very dark and cold and there's nowhere to go and get out of the cold/damp”

Many also talked about playing and hanging out on the way to and from school, making the most of incidental opportunities to play.

For the **primary children** we worked with (aged 9-11 at the time of the research), the recurring places for play included:

- The “three swing park” (Ferry St)
- Charlie's (Drewetts) Park
- Outside front door/on street at home or near friends' homes
- The court (MUGA) and Saxon (toddler) Play Area on Priory Road
- The library at Jarrow Focus
- Jarrow Skate Park
- Viking Centre
- West Park

For the **older (secondary) young people**, in survey work, observations, consultations at Jarrow School, and at pop-up events (on the riverside and at West Park), the following locations recurred:

- West Park
- Biking around Jarrow
- Viking Centre
- Valley View/Monkton Dene/Primrose Park
- Streets and alleyways – “kicking about the council estates”
- Green spaces near school
- Jarrow Metro
- The slake and the Don
- Charlie's (Drewetts) Park
- Jarrow Skate Park
- The pedestrian and cycle tunnel

- The riverside (including for fishing)

7. PLAY PRIORITIES

In all our forms of research, we asked children and young people where they would like to play and hang out and what additional forms of provision they wished for.

During face-to-face contact in local parks, young people requested:

- More places to socialise (safe and welcoming spaces, youth clubs, chill-out spaces)
- Access to toilets – young people in West Park, had to walk to Morrisons to use the toilet
- More events in parks
- Sheltered seating areas (“the bandstand floor is concrete and it’s cold to sit on”)
- Occasional food stalls (such as hot dogs or ice cream van)
- Space and activities for teenage girls (e.g. dancing and yoga)
- Intergenerational opportunities (e.g. “Bowling with the old people”)
- Youth workers supporting play and hanging out in the parks

A respondent who had grown up in Jarrow wrote:

“I’m 25 now so don’t necessarily play but now and when I was younger, there was very few opportunities for socialising unless you had someone’s house to go to. Youth clubs and community centres shut down, library knocked down etc.”

More generally, themes and concerns that recurred across our varied engagements with young people echoed these, and included:

- Having places to go and just hang out
- More public play equipment, for older children
- Concerns around safety (including bullying)
- Being able to get around by bike
- Better bike facilities (BMX and mountain bike trails, bike repair)
- Safely getting to friends’ houses
- “People to play games with us”: youth workers and playworkers
- Toilets and water fountains
- Covered/sheltered seating areas
- Conflict between different groups and different age groups
- Road risks
- Adult disapproval
- Intergenerational activities
- Girl-friendly spaces and possibilities

Towards the end of our **work with Dunn St Primary**, we drew up a set of 17 play-related ideas that reflected closely the ideas that had recurred, in various activities and conversations with the class. These were all ideas that the children had identified and discussed during our work with them, and all reflected issues that were important to them. In class, we asked the children, in four groups, to discuss the ideas, discard the ones they felt were not the most important, and rank the five most important, reflecting on why they made these choices. The table below depicts their rankings. Children valued ideas that related to their doorstep environments, that offered designated spaces for play, the role of adults in enabling and supporting play, and time to play.

RANK	PLAY IDEA			
1	Better courts/MUGAs for all kinds of games	Our neighbourhood needs to be cleaner and tidier	There should be more time to play at school	Make it safer for us to walk or cycle (without an adult) to places to play
2	Adults need to know why play is so important so that they don't complain when we play out	Better space for adults (e.g. benches) while we play	Take down the "No Ball Games" signs	Our neighbourhood needs to be cleaner and tidier
3	Let us hang rope swings on trees	Make it safer for us to walk or cycle (without an adult) to places to play	We need places we can play outdoors, even when it's really hot, really cold, really wet or really dark	We just need more spaces to hang out outside safely and comfortably
4	There should be more time to play at school	Build an adventure playground	Make it safer for us to walk or cycle (without an adult) to places to play	Build an adventure playground
5	We just need more spaces to hang out outside safely and comfortably	Adults need to know why play is so important so that they don't complain when we play out	We should have more time to play before and after school	At school, all the playgrounds should have as much play stuff as the early years' playground

8. PARENT AND CARER PERSPECTIVES

At pop-up events, in schools and in conversations throughout the research, parents and carers reiterated many of the issues and concerns identified by the children and young people:

- The state of playgrounds (quality of equipment, poor maintenance)
- Be Not knowing what's available and accessible
- Behaviour of older children
- Cost of paid activities
- Travel to opportunities across Jarrow/the borough – cost, time and safety
- Social safety (especially for more vulnerable groups)
- Struggles to find spaces for sibling groups of different ages
- More spaces and opportunities for diverse needs and interests
- Youth workers and playworkers to support their children: "there is a need for kids to be engaged with, rather than simply providing playground equipment"

9. STAKEHOLDER PERSPECTIVES

In the course of our research, we spoke to youth workers, community organisers, school staff, council officers and elected members, "friends of" West Park and the Primrose Park Alliance, and other local stakeholders.

Their recurring responses included:

- Children and young people assumed/expected by adults to be misbehaving
- Long walks to parks – safety aspect for parents
- Pressures on parents/carers from long working hours
- Older kids on metro
- Removal of play space for housing development (e.g. MUGA on Scotch Estate)
- Perceptions of ASB (e.g. parks, estates, metro stations)
- Cohort of children (13-18) without access to youth provision as a result of austerity and covid
- Loss of playworkers, despite continuing support for youth work and youth services
- Safety in public spaces and parks, especially for girls and young women
- Underutilised spaces in parks (e.g. vacant buildings)
- “Friends of” parks working hard to support children and young people

10. PARTICULAR CHALLENGES FOR PARTICULAR PLAY SPACES

Streets and Neighbourhoods

- The presence of No Ball Games signs, which deter all play and make children and young people feel unwelcome.
- Jarrow’s residential estates have considerable green space, on street corners, between residential buildings. Sometimes these are marked with No Ball Games signs, but children do claim these spaces with rope swings and other traces of play (balls, goals, shopping trolleys, etc.).



No Ball Games Signs

- Litter, flytipping and damage from cars undermine their appeal and safety. Much more play could be invited in these doorstep spaces.
- Younger children told us they had tried to build dens near their homes and these had been destroyed (they believed, by the council). Evidence of other spaces where children and young people were regularly hanging out could be seen across Jarrow – at the very least, such activity should be condoned (assuming there is no evidence of anti-social behaviour).

- Children and young people feel that they are being watched and judged by adults on their streets and in their neighbourhoods. They may be closely-observed or told off, and their presence in the public space in their communities may be challenged.

Playgrounds

- Whilst there are 12 playgrounds in Jarrow, according to South Tyneside Council’s website, they are not especially accessible nor appealing to children and young people. Without adults, children and young people may be limited to those playgrounds closest to their homes, and these may not afford the kinds of play desired.
- Concerns around social and physical safety for children and young people walking and cycling around Jarrow recurred, relating both to ‘stranger danger’ and to the risks of traffic. The controlled crossing from Jarrow town centre to the skate park (and the riverside) was out-of-order for over a year across 2024/25 – Chaytor St/Priory Rd is a busy stretch on which heavy vehicles drive fast, and is a real obstacle to safe access to space to play.
- In particular, neighbourhood playgrounds (outside of parks) tend to be designed for younger children and have little to offer tweens or teens. Where teens do use playgrounds, it is often at the expense of younger children.
- In relation to the Ferry Street play area (what the children call the “three swing park”), Dunn St children asked for:
 - “A swing for 9-15 year old children. A slide. A clean playground. A bin. New seats made from wood. Bigger playground. More swings 5 or 6.”
 - “It could have been better: Clean, unrusty seats. The 3 swings. Older children swings. More running around space”
- Throughout the research, children and their parents noted that maintenance and repair is a real issue for Jarrow’s playgrounds, with equipment being damaged, dangerous and out-of-action for months at a time (despite being reported).

Parks and Green Space

- Jarrow’s parks and green spaces were popular with children and young people, who visited both with their families and, for older children, with their friends.
- In our work with Dunn St Primary and Jarrow School, West Park was frequently talked about. It appeared to be by far the most used and useable space for children and young people. The “friends of” community group is supportive of young people’s use of the park, however, they are not in a position to provide the support needed. Access to an adjacent building, where there is reportedly an unused pool table was highlighted as a space that could be utilised for young people’s activities.
- In observational work in West Park, groups of teens were regularly seen at the bandstand, making the most of the shelter it provided; younger children were playing in the playground (often with parents/carers present); football was being played on the grass; teen girls were seen chatting and looking for opportunities to play, in the playground, but also in the trees and other features of the park.
- We observed a large group of young people playing hide and seek in the dene near Jarrow School (along the River Don); they were a mix of young people from Brockley Whins, Scotch Estate and Primrose. A large group of young people made use of the bandstand, due to it being covered and slightly protected by a fence, as a hang-out place. They had their own music playing on speakers, to which some of them danced, from time to time.
- Survey responses highlighted recurring themes around the (lack of) clear opportunities in Jarrow’s parks, and the potential for conflict between different groups, often of different ages:
 - “I love playing in the park but there isn’t a lot to do. There is lots of kids though.” (survey)
 - “not much room for multiple groups to have their own space” (survey)

- The green space above the A19 is underused – children and young people could at times be seen playing and hanging out, sitting on benches, for example, but it is a very accessible green space, close to the town centre, schools and residential estates, and could easily be animated for play.

Other Public Spaces

- Observational evidence confirmed the regular presence of tweens and teens around the Viking Centre and Jarrow Metro Station, hanging out, consuming, and passing through. This included boys (particularly) on bikes and scooters, but also children and young people with their parents and carers.
- There are opportunities for the Viking Centre to better meet the needs of children and young people; this includes work around acceptance and opportunity for play in the town centre (and moving away from narratives about anti-social behaviour) but also improving key facilities, such as access to toilets and to drinking water.
- As part of our research, we organised a fishing event on Jarrow Riverside, adjacent to the skate park. Around 25 young people attended, ranging in age from around 8 or 9 to about 15, predominantly boys. Some were with parents, but many were with friends. All were enthusiastic to try fishing for the first time or develop more skills, with the support of youth workers from Tyneside Outdoors; we have received requests for more similar events. The number of participants was difficult to accommodate on the riverside due to overgrown shrubs on the edge and wall of the quay restricting access – some young people got their lines caught on the trees!
- Fishing recurred as a popular choice of activity for tween boys, who spent time both by the riverside and at various locations along the River Don; parents raised concerns about both water safety and risks from ‘strangers’ but were very supportive of their children getting out and about to fish.

11. RECOMMENDATIONS: SUFFICIENT OPPORTUNITIES FOR PLAY AND HANGING OUT IN JARROW

As we outlined in the introduction, the idea of play sufficiency extends well beyond the provision of designated spaces for play (playgrounds, MUGAs, etc.) and considers whether neighbourhoods offer accessible, inclusive and stimulating environments where children and young people can engage in freely-chosen, self-directed opportunities to play and hang out. The focus is on a breadth of spaces, within neighbourhoods, and on safe and accessible routes to these spaces too. The result of a play sufficiency approach should be a dense network of playable spaces, accessible to children and young people, meeting diverse needs, in all seasons and at all times, and, it is hoped, supported by the wider community whilst also enabling familial and intergenerational community connections.

To put the play sufficiency approach into practice, Play England employs the STAR framework, developed by Dr Naomi Lott and predicated on SPACE, TIME, ACCEPTANCE and RIGHTS. We have used this framework to make our recommendations.

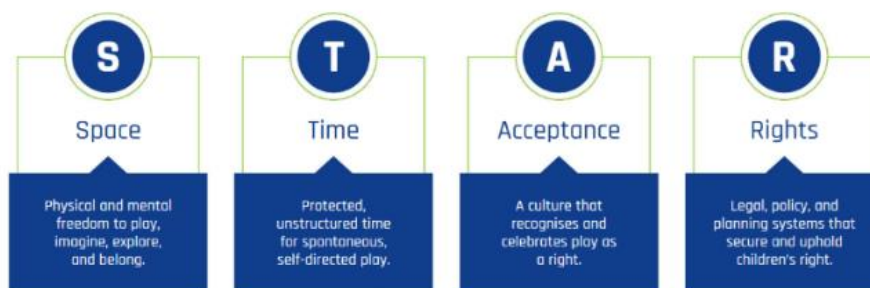
Framework for Change

STAR Framework for Implementing the Right to Play

The right to play is universal and non-negotiable, as established by Article 31 of the UNCRC and General Comment 17. To realise this right, children's needs must be met across four essential areas: Space, Time, Acceptance and Rights — the STAR framework.

Together, these conditions form the foundation of a society where play is visible, valued, accepted and protected.

The STAR framework[®] was created by Dr Naomí Lott, Lecturer in Law at the University of Reading. It offers a practical, rights-based model for creating a society where play is no longer a privilege, but a universal reality for every child.



Play England's STAR Framework for Change
(<https://www.playengland.org.uk/strategy>)

Space

- Pay attention to children's doorstep spaces (cleanliness, risks and hazards, etc.)
- Play-friendly neighbourhood spaces with opportunities to develop child-led play and just hang out, safely and comfortably in all weathers and all seasons (lighting, benches, shelters)
- Improve play value and permission to play in and around the Viking Centre
- Ensure safe everyday mobility for children and young people, by tackling road danger and maintaining and developing pedestrian and cycle infrastructure (including signalised crossings)
- Repair damage to play parks as a matter of priority, and improve the quality of provision (especially for over 8s)
- Promote neighbourhood play with support from detached youth workers and playworkers, improving safety and extending opportunities
- Build an adventure playground
- Develop a play streets programme

Time

- Embed play even more consistently in the school day, including for older children (late primary and early secondary)
- Enable 'play on the way' to make the most of small bits of time (on the way to school, at the shops)
- Improve toilet and drinking water provision, so that children and young people (and their families) are not wasting time traipsing to find facilities
- Integrate play strategy into child poverty work, in the hope that parents' time might be freed up to facilitate children's play
- Create spaces that enable neighbourhood play in bad weather and darker afternoons, extending the play day
- Make neighbourhood play possible in all seasons, extending opportunities for outdoor play

Acceptance

- Remove all No Ball Games signs

- Work with community and resident groups and other stakeholders, across a range of neighbourhoods and circumstances, to explore and embed the value of everyday play, including for older children and teenagers
- Develop a pro-play policy within the council, such that the council and its officers start from a premise that play should be permitted

Rights

- Integrate children’s right to play (Article 31 of UN Convention on the Rights of the Child) into a full range of council policy and practice
- Embed the right to play in child poverty work, acknowledging the impact that poverty has on realising children’s right to play
- Explore the possibility of adopting a play sufficiency approach to put the right to play into practice
- Ensure that more children with additional needs, children from migrant and refugee families, and others with protected characteristics are equally able to access space to play.

12. CONCLUSIONS

Jarrow is a town with considerable potential for play – children and young people were enthusiastic and excited about play and what it meant to them. They played often and all over the town, notwithstanding some of the challenges we have outlined. Play providers, parents and carers, and other local organisations (including South Tyneside Council) are committed to creating diverse and rich opportunities for play, despite the many local challenges.

Yet, children and young people want – and deserve – more.

It is clear that there are gaps and obstacles in the provision of sufficient opportunities to play and hang out in Jarrow, reflecting the built environment and local amenities, play provision, play permission and acceptance, and the wider social and economic context.

Our report highlights many of these, in often very local detail, and makes recommendations to improve and invest in space for play and hanging out in Jarrow.

Of all these recommendations, we believe that three key actions are the most important:

- 1. A recognition of the right to play in Jarrow, reflected in a Play Sufficiency Assessment that guides action to make Jarrow a playful and playable town;**
- 2. A plan for the care and maintenance of informal space for play within the town centre and Jarrow’s residential neighbourhoods;**
- 3. An adventure playground for Jarrow, which could sit at the heart of a plan for Jarrow as a playful town.**

Whilst comprehensive, our project could nevertheless be complemented by further research around the spaces, people, organisations, opportunities, barriers, hopes, and contexts for play and hanging out in Jarrow, to build on the work we carried out, as plans for the Pride in Place regeneration programme develop. As we noted in the introduction, a fuller Play Sufficiency Assessment, led or commissioned by Jarrow Forward and/or South Tyneside Council, could usefully build on the foundations established here.

13. FURTHER READING

For more on play sufficiency, please explore Ludicology's website (<https://ludicology.com/>) and the webinar series coordinated by Ludicology, Play Wales and Dr Wendy Russell (https://youtube.com/@exploringplay_sufficiency).

Leeds City Council leads the way on play sufficiency work amongst UK local authorities: <https://cfl.leeds.gov.uk/play/play-sufficiency>.

Another English local authority, Sandwell, has just launched their Play Sufficiency Assessment: <https://goplaysandwell.co.uk/sandwell-psa-report-2025/>.

Play England's 10-year strategy *It All Starts With Play!*, including the STAR framework, is available here: <https://www.playengland.org.uk/strategy>.

The Raising the Nation Play Commission report *Everything to Play For: A Plan to Ensure Every Child in England Can Play* is available here: <https://www.centreforyounglives.org.uk/play-commission>.

The possibility of councils adopting pro-play policies is explored here: <https://playingout.net/take-action/as-a-council/council-wide-playing-out-policy>.

The new national youth strategy *Youth Matters* is here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/youth-matters-your-national-youth-strategy/youth-matters-your-national-youth-strategy>

The Playing and Being Well literature review is a comprehensive review of contemporary evidence and debates around the value of play: <https://play.wales/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/Playing-and-being-well-summary.pdf>.