

RURAL ECONOMY AND CONNECTIVITY COMMITTEE

RESTRICTED ROADS (20 MPH SPEED LIMIT) (SCOTLAND) BILL

SUBMISSION FROM PLAYING OUT AND PLAY SCOTLAND

Playing Out is the UK-wide organisation dedicated to championing children's right to play out and regain the freedom of movement that they have lost over the years.

Play Scotland is the national organisation for play and playwork, working to make children's right to play a reality in Scotland. Play Scotland works to promote the importance of play for all children and young people, and campaigns to create increased play opportunities in the community.

Playing Out and Play Scotland welcome this Bill and the immediate positive impact it could have on children's health, wellbeing, and right to play.

Simply 'playing out' – having the freedom to step out of your own front door and kick a ball about – is nothing new. There are still some streets and estates where this happens and that's great. But the reality is that most children have far less freedom to play out than their parents or grandparents had. Children gain much through this free outdoor play: resilience, physical exercise, independence, skills, friendship and confidence.

The main reason that children aren't allowed out these days on their own is traffic, and parents' rational fear that children aren't safe to play outside their own homes due to the speed of cars in residential areas. This bill is a great step towards reducing speed of traffic and so will give parents confidence that it will be safer to let children play out as they used to.

Background

"Children's play and learning, their close relationships and social interactions are dependent on the quality of spaces and places they inhabit". (Brooker and Woodhead, 2013)

The spaces available to children and young people have an important influence on their health and wellbeing and, therefore, impact on levels of health inequalities in the UK. Whether a place nurtures good health or contributes to poor health depends on a variety of factors that also impact on play:

- Place - the buildings, streets, public spaces and natural spaces that make up the physical environment of neighbourhoods
- Communities - the relationships, social contact and support networks that make up the social environment of neighbourhood (The Place Standard)

In addition, the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child gives all children the right to play, rest, leisure and access cultural life (Article 31). This means children have an internationally recognised, universal right to access outdoor environments that

nurture their play needs. With this, the definition of play stretches beyond the provision of discrete areas such as playgrounds, to their streets and communities.

For many children outdoor play is their favourite type of play, allowing them to experiment, take physical risks and have a sense of freedom. It also offers them better opportunities to build relationships, it is fun and they can run around and be active, and play with friends and family. Children need space to play with balls, ride bikes and play games in the streets where they live unconstrained by traffic dominated environments.

Current position

- Scotland's Play Strategy values play as a life-enhancing daily experience for all our children and young people; in their homes, nurseries, school and communities, and supports the reduction in speed limit to enable children to play safely in streets around their communities.
- Play Scotland leads Scotland's Play Council who produced a manifesto for Play for 2016 elections calling on all politicians to make street play a priority by -Providing guidance on street play to Local Authorities to ensure that children are able to play and feel welcome in their communities (eg interpretation of the Road Traffic Regulations Act to allow street closures for play; removal of No Ball Games signs; giving children and young people a role in Community Planning)
- Research carried out for the **UK Children's Play Policy Forum** by Prof John McKendrick 2017, "*The Transformation of Play in the UK*", highlighted children's retreat from wider neighbourhood, the demise of outdoor play and less informal play spaces for children to play with friends. **More street play is part of the solution to this problem and introducing this Bill will support this.**
- The **UK Children's Commissioners'** joint written statement –urges everyone to play their part in ensuring we create the best possible opportunities for all children and young people to embrace their right to play;

"As Children's Commissioners, we have all had the privilege of hearing from children about the great opportunities they have to play and some of the excellent work that is happening to promote and facilitate play in family and community life. Unfortunately, we also aware that these are not available to all. Some of the reasons for this include;

- *children and young people feeling that they do not have enough time due a range of factors including school work;*
- *that the outdoor and indoor spaces do not always encourage or enable them to play – this is particularly the case for children with disabilities but also others including older children;*
- *that people around them do not always give them the permission or support they sometimes need."* (Playday 1st August 2018)

This Bill will assist in supporting more opportunities for children to play.

- **In 2018 the Children's Commissioner for England's** report, '**Playing Out**' made a strong case for increased government support for outdoor play generally and street play in particular, emphasising the social, emotional and physical benefits of playing out for children.