

Response to formal complaint: Lack of Fencing Regarding Park Play Area.

The Clerk has researched the background to the play area and the decision not to enclose it.

The existing play area was installed and opened in 2017.

The original play area, pre-2017 was not fenced, pictured below.



The existing (2017) play area was designed by CW&C Landscape Officers and the Clerk contacted the Officer for information on the decision not to include fencing.

He provided the following information:

The design is shaped by **Play England Design Guidance**.

Play England guidance promotes a risk–benefit approach in which fencing should only be provided where clearly justified by site-specific hazards. While fencing can offer containment and perceived safety, it can reduce play value, create segregation, and discourage use by some groups. Unfenced or ‘soft’ boundaries are often preferred, as they integrate play into the wider landscape, support inclusive and imaginative play, and allow children to explore and manage risk more effectively.

Other benefits from not including fencing can be summarised as

- 1) Supports **better play value**. Open spaces allow:
 - freedom of movement
 - exploration beyond boundaries

- more creative and less prescriptive play
- 2) Unfenced play: blends into parks and public spaces creates “**playable landscapes**” rather than isolated playgrounds

This makes spaces feel: more natural and more inviting.

3. Increases inclusivity and use. Open sites:

- feel welcoming to all ages
- avoid labelling spaces as only for certain groups

4. Encourages children to use wider environments

Children: don’t just play in playgrounds use **paths, planting, landscape features**

Removing fencing allows:

whole-site play, not just contained areas Children often play more widely when boundaries are opened up and integrated.

5. Supports healthier attitude to risk

Open environments: expose children to **manageable real-world conditions** help them **learn boundaries and judgement**

6. Alternative boundaries can be better

Play England strongly promotes “**fuzzy edges**” instead of fencing:

Instead of fencing, use:

- planting / hedges
- mounding
- level changes
- walls for sitting

These: define space **without restricting it** add **play value**

Play England - Where fencing is justified.

Use fencing where:

- There is a **significant safety hazard**, such as:
Close to roads and water
- For **very young children needing containment**
- Where a **controlled boundary is essential**

The decision should always be **site-specific and risk-based**.

RoSPA Guidance on Risk in Play Areas

RoSPA supports the same overall approach as Play England: Play should be as safe as necessary, not as safe as possible.

Risk is a normal and essential part of children's play

The aim is to: prevent serious harm and to allow challenge and learning.

Fencing should ONLY be used when it clearly reduces risk.

RoSPA guidance (aligned with BS EN 1176):-

RoSPA View on Fencing

- Fencing is NOT always required
- RoSPA explicitly states:
- Not all playgrounds need fencing -refer to Play England Guidance.
- Decision must be:

It should be site-specific and based on risk assessment.

If there were a requirement for fencing this would have been picked up on your annual ROSPA Inspection. I attach the initial ROPSA inspection for the park which does not identify a requirement for fencing.

Other sites without perimeter play area fencing include:-

- **Lime Wood Fields, Chester**
- **Saxons Lane, Northwich**
- **Town Park, Winsford**

In addition the Park's location in the Conservation area influenced the choice of design and materials used to reduce visual harm on this sensitive location/ park setting.

The Clerk also contacted the **Play Inspection Company** who undertake the play area inspections they provided the following response:

There is no requirement within BS EN 1176 for play areas to be enclosed by fencing. Whether fencing is provided is a design decision based on the site-specific risk assessment and the particular circumstances of the location.

The level of supervision required is ultimately the responsibility of the parent or supervising adult, who is best placed to assess the needs, abilities and behaviour of the children in their care. Playground designers cannot determine the level of supervision that individual children require, and playgrounds are designed on the basis that appropriate supervision will be provided where necessary.