

WELSHPOOL TOWN COUNCIL

OPEN SPACES RISK ASSESSMENT

Open Spaces and Public Parks

Open Spaces

Thousands of sports grounds, playing fields, parks and open spaces exist throughout the country and little thought is given to safety aspects associated with them.

These areas can range from large public parks in a town or city with a multitude of formal and informal activities and elements to a small grassed area within housing used for casual play. Many of these sites have been developed over a long period with changes introduced to reflect the changing trends in sport and play. In many cases the space used for recreation or sport has existed for 100 years or more and was originally just an open field. Many new playing fields were introduced in the 1920's and 30's following the establishment of the National Playing Fields Association. Prior to this our Victorian forebears had the foresight to provide parks where their "workers" and families could have some form of recreation. Since then the pressure to provide more housing to accommodate the increasing population, more leisure time and greater general participation has increased the pressure on existing spaces. The provision of new publicly available recreation space is lamentably short of that needed and has been, regrettably, due to the lack of foresight of successive governments. There is considerable concern over the increasing obesity and lack of fitness in children and yet many school playing fields are still being sold off to developers as a means of raising cash. This factor adds significantly to the pressures on existing recreation spaces.

The results of these continuing pressures are that often the safety aspects are overlooked. RoSPA strongly believes that these areas should be as safe as necessary – not as safe as possible. Taking this view RoSPA has, for a number of years, undertaken inspections and risk assessments for playing fields and public open spaces. There is now an even greater need for these to be considered. A number of the major insurance companies dealing with the public sector recognise the need for periodic Risk Assessments carried out by an independent organisation. RoSPA recommend that its specialist team carries out this work every four or five years unless major alterations to the site have been undertaken in the meantime. RoSPA recommend a rolling programme spread over four or five years (i.e. every area assessed every four or five years). This helps to spread costs over a reasonable period of time.

Open spaces account for the majority of play space for children. This can range from formal areas to rough open land. At present these account for a significant number of injuries to children but are not subject to any inspection regime. The insurance industry is becoming increasingly concerned about their liabilities. RoSPA strongly recommends independent inspections and risk assessments of these areas and its specialist team is fully trained to undertake such work.

Section 106 Agreements often include open space provision. RoSPA strongly recommend that a Post installation inspection of such open space should be undertaken before an authority adopts such space from a developer. This ensures that any safety measures necessary have been undertaken before the authority becomes responsible for the site.

Public Parks

Public Parks present particular problems. Often they have been in existence since Victorian times and have older structures etc. They are also used for a very wide range of recreational pursuits and often include water areas etc.

RoSPA recommend that these have RoSPA expert assessment every four or five years. If the authority has more than one park a rolling programme of assessment spreads the cost over a period of time and assist with budgeting. Again an independent RoSPA inspection helps to prevent successful litigation.

Actions:

All open spaces are inspected by STRI or ROSPA annually and any findings acted upon.

There is a lake next to the Country Park (by the Flash) site but not within the ownership of the site of the Country Park.

R A Robinson
Town Clerk
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