

10 May 2024

Sadiq Khan, Mayor of London
Kamal Chunchie Way
London E16 1ZE

Dear Mayor Khan

The best city in the world to grow up in: an offer and an invitation from London Play

I am writing to you from the charity London Play to congratulate you on your decisive re-election as Mayor of our great city. We were delighted to hear the pledge you made in your Declaration of Office address, to make London 'the best city in the world to grow up in'. This is an aim we share; in fact it is the overarching request included in our manifesto to the next mayor of London published ahead of the elections.

We hope that you also share our conviction that play is absolutely central to your vision. London will *only* be a great city to grow up in when every child has the space, time, and freedom to play outside daily, near to where they live. This is not currently the case.¹ Good quality free, local play services and infrastructure bring communities together and develop resilience, creativity and uncover potential in children, particularly those with difficult lives. Rising problems with mental and physical health would also be mitigated if children spent more time playing.

London Play has been working for the past 25 years to support anyone and everyone who works, lives with or cares about children to help them create more and better play opportunities. We have vast experience in supporting and promoting adventure playgrounds and play streets, developing and advising on play policies, running children's consultations, play campaigns and playful events. You may recall we had the privilege of supporting the reopening of London in the wake of the pandemic with our 'Formula Fun' pop up go kart events, as part of your Let's Do London campaign.

We have many ideas about how we could help make your vision of London as the best place to be a child a reality – the starting point being the 'Five Ways to a Playful London' outlined in our manifesto. We would very much welcome the opportunity to meet with you or your team to discuss these in more detail.

Our invitation: London Parade for Play, Tuesday 11 June, Trafalgar Square

Firstly, we would like to make you aware of an imminent opportunity to make clear your commitment to children and young people and play in London. As you may be aware, the UN recently declared June 11 as the new annual International Day of Play².

London Play is working to bring together the 'play community' – children, adventure playground groups, play street organisers and participants, parents and carers,

¹ Only [27 per cent of children regularly play out](#) (Save the Children); and [over half London's 5–16-year-olds](#) are not getting enough daily exercise. (London Sport).

² <https://www.internationaldayofplay.org/>

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community groups and others – to mark this inaugural event in the centre of London with a Parade for Play. Groups will gather at Parliament Square at 4.30pm, and will parade via Whitehall to Trafalgar Square where we will have speeches and more until 6.30pm.

We would be delighted if you could join us. It will be a great opportunity to share your vision with young Londoners, and perhaps even some of your own memories of play as you grew up in Tooting? Please let us know if you can attend: fiona@londonplay.org.uk

Our offer: Five Ways to a Playful London

Whether or not you are able to join us on June 11, we would welcome an opportunity to expand on the Five Ways to a Playful London outlined in London Play's manifesto:

- 1. Implement a London-wide play strategy.**
A city-wide strategy for play would drive change and stimulate collective action across boroughs, sectors and interests – establishing London as a global leader for playful cities. It would also help realise the other four manifesto points.
- 2. Act to promote, protect and celebrate London's unique adventure playgrounds.**
London has a unique claim as 'adventure play capital of the world' with 72 staffed adventure playgrounds. They engage and inspire children and provide an anchor in some of the city's least affluent communities. Yet we are losing them. Those remaining face an existential threat. Urgent action is needed to save them.
- 3. Enforce the recommendations set out in the London Plan relating to the quantity, quality, and accessibility of play provision.**
Too many new playgrounds are 'tick box' exercises, several were nominated in our 'London's Saddest Playground' campaign. Please also see London Play's submission to the government inquiry on children in the built environment³.
- 4. Continue to work to reduce the speed and volume of traffic on all roads, to enable children to access all their daily needs, safely and independently.**
We have been delighted over recent years to work with City Hall to offer Londoners the chance to experience their own streets as playful social spaces on Car Free Day. We hope you are committed to continuing this great event.
- 5. Elect a young Mayor for Play**
London Play has plans in the works to harness the views and creativity of young people not usually consulted, via London's adventure playgrounds. A permanent Mayor for Play would make it clear that London is serious about play.

We hope the above piques your interest enough to warrant further discussion. We very much look forward to working with you over the next four years towards our shared goal of a playful London, the best city in the world to grow up in.

Yours sincerely



Fiona Sutherland, Director
Cc Joanne McCartney, Will Norman

³ https://londonplay.org.uk/our_news/government-inquiry-into-children-and-the-built-environment/