

The LOCAL Project

Green Communities

5.1 Reimagine public spaces to create community ownership and pride



**Lancashire Schools Sustainability Forum:
Sustainability Learning Conference
Date: Thursday 27th June 2024
Venue: Blackburn Rovers Football Club**

Overview:

The Schools Sustainability Conference (<https://www.school-sustainability.org/>) is an annual event. To date the Schools Sustainability Forum has delivered more than 15 conferences reaching over 5000 students across more than 200 schools. The first conference was held in 2007 but the current conferences, now needing a significantly larger venue, have been hosted by Blackburn Rovers since 2017.

The Forum is a platform for sharing skills, knowledge and experience in promoting education for sustainable development in schools and other learning communities for both primary & secondary school pupils. It encourages environmental education and learning outside the classroom with an emphasis on real life links to jobs & future career prospects but also offers CPD opportunities for staff.

This Schools Sustainability Learning Conference offers tailored eco-focused learning programs for primary and secondary students, featuring workshops, presentations, competitions, and marketplace activities.

This year LOCAL Project was asked to take an active role in the organisation and delivery of the conference, which was attended by 600 pupils from 68 primary & secondary schools from across the area.

We wanted to explore the voice of young people, who will be the custodians of our green spaces for the future, and asked them what they imagined their ideal green space to be who they think should own and maintain it.

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Summary:

During our engagement with pupils at this event we asked approximately 90 young people about their proximity to green spaces at home and how they interact with those and other green spaces.

We asked pupils –

- Did they have a green space ie playground, park, near to where they live?
- Do they like the space?
- Did they use that space?
- Did they visit the space on their own or with family or friends?
- Does the space have play equipment ie swings, slide, etc?
- Is the equipment in good order and the space well kept?
- Who did they think looks after your park, playground, playing field?
- Who do they think should look after the space ?

88% of respondents said they had a park or playground or playing field near their house with equipment that was working. They thought it was maintained by the Local Authority, but most pupils didn't really know who maintained it.

Some pupils travelled to outdoor spaces by car to walk dogs or for exercise & fresh air.
Some pupils used green spaces like football fields for team sports & recreation

The majority of pupils did like their green spaces and did use them with their family or friends
Issues that affected them liking it or using it included –

- overgrown grass,
- broken equipment,
- the behaviour of older kids
- having someone to go with
- bad weather

Acorns Primary School said -

They had their own school trampoline, trim trail, Forrest School and Willow Classroom

Wouldn't it be nice if all schools had similar equipment or adopted their local play facility

Pupils said that their ideal outdoor place to play was a park but also mentioned

- playing fields where they play football
- Lytham St Annes & Blackpool
- Fields
- Mountains
- A desert
- "A soft and fluffy cloud"

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The older young people chatted more about the broken play equipment. They also reflected on their outdoor spaces, with one group of young people describing how as a class they spent some time tidying their local park, but that it didn't stay looking tidy for long. They spoke about how they would love to spend more time, regularly looking after their green spaces.

Wouldn't it be wonderful for schools & pupils to adopt their local parks and play a part in their upkeep.



Pupils were then asked to design their ideal outdoor space to play
We had 34 drawings of pupils ideal outdoor space, including the examples below:



Image (1)

Image (1): This drawing included games in a play area as pupils seem to expect more than just playground equipment now

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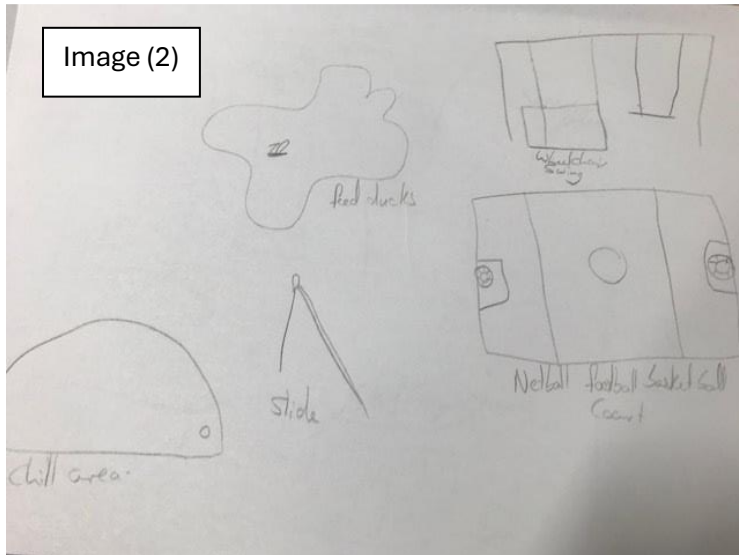


Image (2)

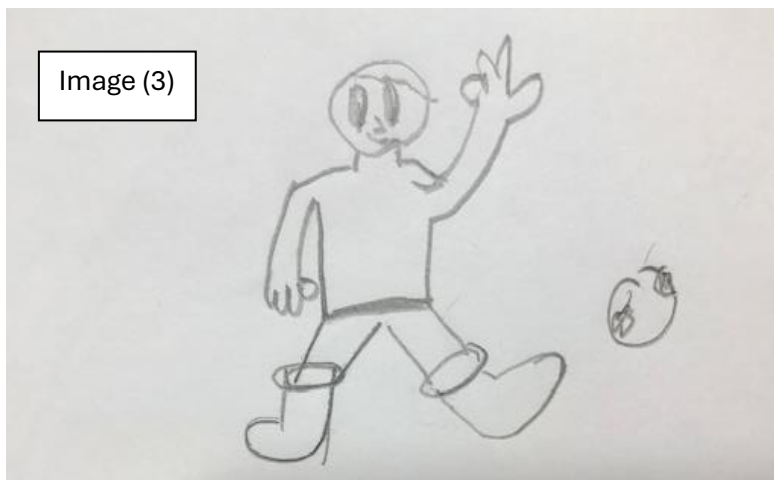


Image (3)

Image (4) Pupils seemed to understand and acknowledge the importance of nature and conservation.



Image (4)

Several pictures like image (2) represented the pupils understanding of inclusivity with play equipment to accommodate disability and impairment but also included animals like ducks showing their appreciation of wildlife and their place in green spaces

Both image (2) and image (3) acknowledge the pupils association of green spaces and sporting activities especially football, netball & basketball and how they appreciate the provision of good, safe equipment to enable people to exercise, maintain fitness and have fun.

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Image (5)

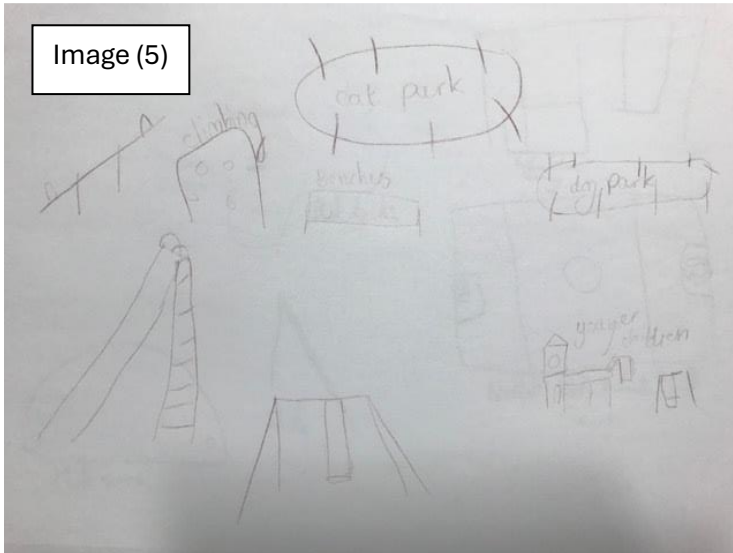


Image (5): Pupils had ideas to include pets in recreation and understood the need to offer age-appropriate equipment to provide a safe recreational space for all age groups including benches to sit on.

Image (6)

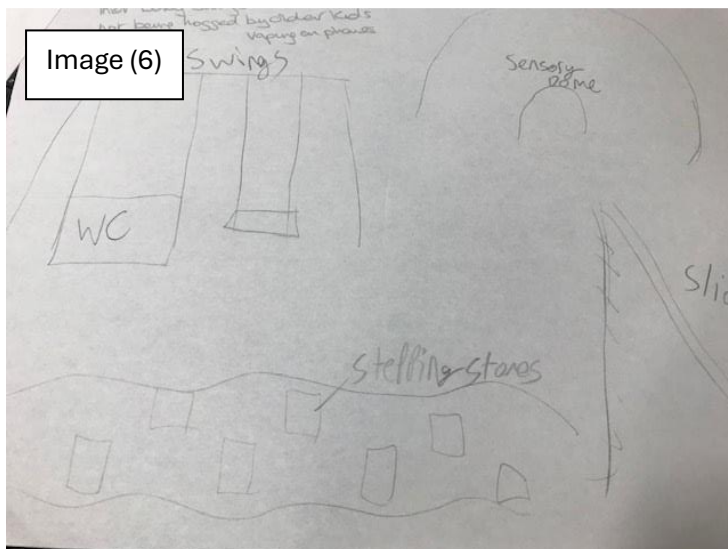


Image (6): Pupils recognised that when recreational areas are unrestricted teen aged young people often misuse spaces and equipment causing distress to others.

Comment was made that the baby swings should not be hogged by older kids “vaping and on their phones”

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Image (7)

Image (7): This outdoor space was very much designed with inclusivity in mind.

Some of the schools that visited the event were from special schools and very much aware of how the general design of a public park or recreational area does not always cater for people with additional needs of any age. Ways they thought of to address this were textured pathways, a sensory garden dome, swings & equipment with wheelchair access as well as alternative provision for older young people to remove sense of intimidation and attract them away from equipment meant of young children to an area designed with them in mind.

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Challenges:

- To ensure we are listening to all voices within our communities.
- To ensure we take time to listen to young people
- To involve young people in creative ways, that are appropriate and easily accessible.

Opportunities:

- To further enhance our listening work with young people.
- To build on our work and connections with Sustainability Learning CIC and the Schools Sustainability Conference.
- To ensure we are listening to all ages we have identified additional opportunities to engage with young people and strengthen connections including through the Lancashire Climate Action Network.

Notes & Further Links:

Schools Sustainability Learning Conference 2024 (video) <https://youtu.be/hxr70PC6yeY>

Sustainability Learning CIC <https://www.sustainabilitylearning.co.uk/>

Established in November 2022 it aims to assist learning communities in implementing the Government's Sustainability and Climate Change Policy

Lancashire Climate Action Network <https://sites.edgehill.ac.uk/lancscan/>

Linked to VCFSE Manifesto:

Priority 5 Green Communities <https://www.locallancashire.org.uk/green-communities/>
Reimagine public spaces to create community ownership and pride

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