

FROM PLACEMAKING
TO PLAYMAKING:

**ENCOURAGING
COMMUNITY PLAY
ACROSS THE UK**





FOREWORD BY DR HELEN DODD

Professor of Child Psychology at Exeter University

A recent UNICEF report revealed the sobering statistic that the life satisfaction of UK children is ranked third from bottom when compared to over 30 other high-income and EU countries. The UK is also in the bottom third when it comes to childhood obesity.

In my role as a Professor of Child Psychology I work to better understand what affects children's healthy development and what we can do to make sure that children have the best chance at a healthy and happy childhood. Motivated by this work and influenced by my own experience of becoming a parent, I have become a passionate advocate for the importance of children's play.

Entire books have been written about the definition and nature of play, but I like the simple definition that play is what children do when adults stop telling them what to do. Play can be creative, physical, messy, dramatic, imaginary, social, everything in between and none of the above. Ideally children have a healthy 'play diet' which includes a variety of play. And yes, it is okay if some of their play happens on screens as long as it is balanced with other types of play!

Outdoor play is an important part of a healthy 'play diet' because there is more space outdoors to be physically active, it provides an opportunity for children to connect with nature and, when children play outdoors, they are more likely to meet and play with a range of other children.

It has been clear for a while now that children's outdoor play, especially street play close to their homes, has been declining. In our recent work we found that, when they were children, parents were allowed out alone around age 9 but that their children were not being given that same independence until they were almost 11. The data in this report provides further evidence of this decline, with two-thirds of parents saying their children play less than they did.

Within the findings of this report, I was struck by the high proportion of parents who recognised that play was beneficial for children's development, including their physical and mental health, and that 21% of parents had considered moving to a cul-de-sac to give their child more opportunity for outdoor play. Parents often get blamed for the decline in children's play but these results don't align with that idea. Instead, the data suggests that it is the physical environment that matters; children need safe access to space for play close to home.

Interestingly, when children play outdoors close to home, it also helps parents to build friendships with one another. This shows that safe spaces to play benefit not only children themselves but help to build a stronger sense of community more widely.

I hope through my work with Redrow, all house-builders will be inspired to create environments where children feel welcome and safe to play outdoors.





FROM THIS... ..TO THIS

Over the last ten years, conversations about the all too familiar 'No Ball Games' signs plastered across driveways and residential roads have divided neighbours, parents and councils in the UK.

This has been particularly prevalent in higher-density, more urban areas such as Greater London, South Wales and Birmingham. It has raised concerns around children's development, experiences outside and their access to safe play spaces near their home.

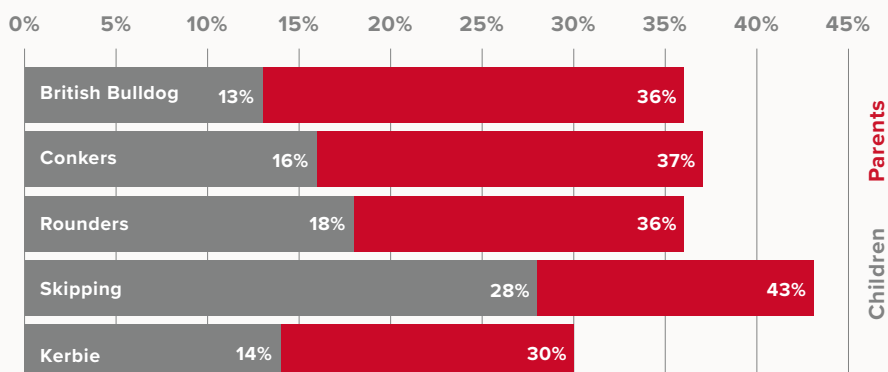
We have a generation of children now seeing the greater knock-on effects of the Covid-era, where staying at home was encouraged and social media use sky-rocketed. Outdoor play took a significant blow, with playgrounds, museums and other public spaces closed. There were less chances for young people to meet others their own age, or parents and friends to connect. Social, mental and physical development has suffered as a result.

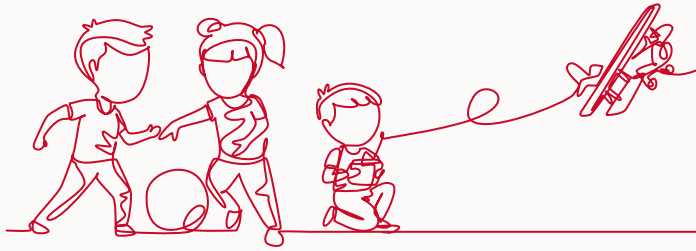
We recently commissioned research amongst 2,000 parents to understand the many barriers they and their children face when it comes to play and reclaiming their streets. Two thirds of parents say their child plays outside for less time than they did when they were growing up; which rises even further to over three quarters (76%) for over 50's. When asked about common areas they played out in when they were young, all have seen a notable decline but the biggest decrease was in street-based play. Only 65% of children would play on their street, compared to 88% of their parents' generation.



ANOTHER GAME BITES THE DUST

The lack of outside play is leading to the demise of many classic childhood games that parents used to play compared to their children.



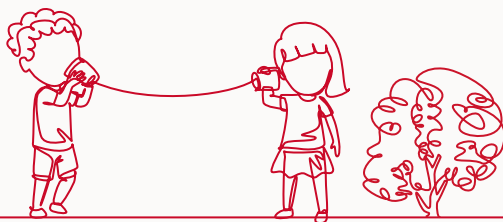


Parents don't think social media use or 'No Ball Games' signage is entirely to blame, rather access to safe street spaces is one of the biggest reasons why street play has declined so sharply.

Three quarters (73%) of parents say roads are too dangerous now to consider allowing children to play outside, and one in two (59%) don't think it's safe for children to play on the street or in public places anymore.

Worryingly, over a quarter (27%) of parents say they do not have enough safe spaces near their property to play out at all.

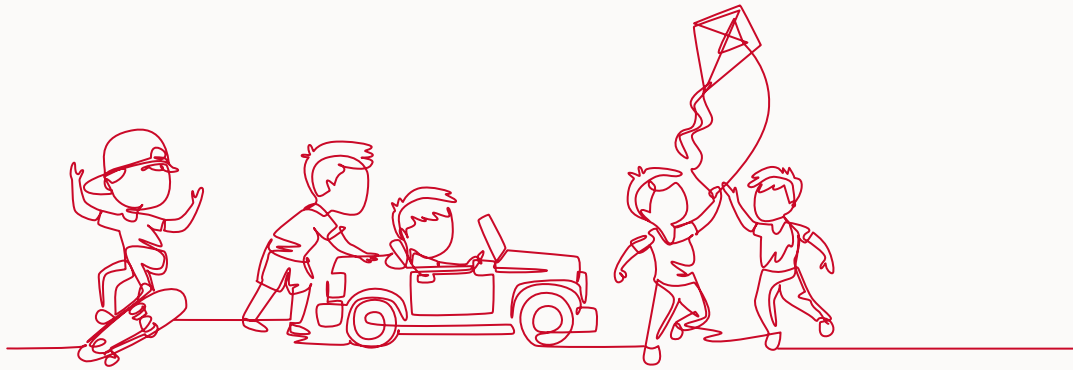
This strongly aligns with a report from [Save The Children](#) which also reported a stark generational divide towards play, with children reporting being told to stop making noise, playing ball games or climbing trees when playing outside.



“ For some children, opportunities to play and meet up with friends outdoors beyond their gardens are limited. Several common trends and issues impact on children's ability to play outside in their neighbourhoods, such as:

- changes in communities – including increased car use, increased traffic (moving and parked), lack of friends living nearby, difficulty getting to places to play and changing work patterns
- increased intolerance towards children playing and meeting up outdoors, with children being seen as 'out of place' in public spaces. ”
- parental restrictions due to fears about safety, traffic and 'stranger danger'

Marianne Mannello at Play Wales



WHY PLAYING OUT IS SO IMPORTANT FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

The importance of play in the physical, social, emotional and cognitive development of children and young people has become more widely recognised in recent years. Expert studies, including by many who have contributed to this report, have shown that play is more than just practising skills for adult life and is in fact, a behaviour that has its own fundamental development role. At its heart, play is something enjoyed and loved by children everywhere, and should be encouraged accordingly.

Play can deliver a range of physical benefits, including muscle strength and lung capacity, however some of the greatest benefits of play to children are on the cognitive side. Through play, children can form attachments, take risks and negotiate, building their thinking power and understanding of the world around them.¹ **Playing with others can also help develop relationships and friendships and form a sense of belonging or attachment.** All of which contribute to their overall well-being. Even as early as the 1930s, the idea of a child engaging in active play was considered a sign of good mental health.²

Outdoor play in particular has its own set of benefits and for many children, is their favourite type of play. **Some experts believe there is a direct link between children who are outdoors more and their confidence and competence in wider environments.**³ The constant change in play environment, whether that be due to the weather elements, new plant growth, or different play provisions

makes outdoor play naturally interesting and stimulating for children. The ability to interact with new people who enter the space offers better opportunities to practice social skills and build relationships.

Playing out also encourages increased physical activity levels, which is also linked to well-being and higher levels of self-esteem in young people.⁴ Some studies have shown that children who were active as toddlers continue to foster an enjoyment of physical activity, especially in natural environments, and may have better health and a longer life compared to those who were sedentary.⁵

Unsurprisingly, parents agree on the need to prioritise playing out, with parents who took part in our research having a sense of overwhelming benefits to outdoor play. **One in two (54%) think it's positive for their child's physical health, helps get them away from screens (53%) and is positive for their mental health (51%).** They also recognised how outdoor play helped their children to develop social skills (50%), meet more friends (43%) and learn about nature (41%).

As well as the benefits to children, research has shown playing out can deliver much wider benefits for the community, including parents becoming more social and able to make friends, the mixing of different social groups and increased well-being, to reduction in anti-social behaviour, vandalism and crime.⁶



HEAR FROM THE EXPERTS



“ In truly child-friendly communities, children can gradually spread their wings and have everyday adventures in their neighbourhood as they grow up. They are places where toddlers and their parents and carers can find fun things to do as soon as they step outside their front door. Where kids can walk, bike or scoot to school, their friends’ houses or the local park without having to cross busy roads. And where teens can hang out with their mates in places that do not annoy their neighbours. ”

Tim Gill at Rethinking Childhood and author of Urban Playground: How Child-Friendly Planning and Design Can Save Cities

“ Children of all ages consistently say that playing and meeting up with their friends is important to them. The outdoors continues to be their favourite place to play.

Providing opportunities for children and teenagers to play outside and meet up with friends is crucial for their physical, mental and social health and well-being. It also affects their happiness and helps them develop social skills.

Having the freedom to play outdoors and meet up with friends in their neighbourhoods helps children develop their confidence and independence. It also helps them get to know and understand the world around them. The places where they play and meet up not only include playgrounds, parks and other public spaces are important too. ”

Marianne Mannello at Play Wales



TIPS FOR PARENTS LOOKING TO PRIORITISE PLAY

Here are Professor Helen Dodd's top three tips for parents looking to encourage their children to play outside:

- 1.** Aim for your child to have a healthy diet of different types of play. It is okay for them to have some screen time but combine it with time spent playing outdoors and in your local area. Setting clear expectations on this can be helpful.
- 2.** Try and arrange to meet up with other families and children, or go to places where there will be other kids; most children will play for longer when there are others for them to play with; it is a fun way to spend time and usually means less work for parents!
- 3.** Go and explore local play parks or open spaces near your house, especially if there are places you haven't been before. You could even let your children use a map or choose the route. If you are considering moving, check if there are places for children to play nearby.



WHAT NEEDS TO CHANGE



Tim Gill at Rethinking Childhood and author of Urban Playground: How Child-Friendly Planning and Design Can Save Cities:

“ We know how worried parents are about traffic. So the top task for house-builders is to make sure the cars are out of the way. Smart planning that puts walking, cycling and attractive green space before cars and parking can open up places for play and socialising on people’s doorsteps, as well as encouraging lifelong healthy, active travel habits.

When it comes to creating spaces for play, variety is the spice of life. Everyone loves trees, and I am a fan of natural designs, with landscaping, plants and bushes that bring a bit of nature into all our lives. Beyond that, a mix of welcoming, well-designed and well-connected play areas with lots of choice and stimulation for boys and girls of different ages and abilities is the way to go. Not forgetting plentiful places for grown-ups to sit!

As a Design Council Ambassador, I have visited some of the most child-friendly neighbourhoods in Europe and beyond. At their best, they offer a powerful positive vision for villages, towns and cities: places that work not only for children and families, but also for people and the planet. I am very happy to be working with Redrow to share my expertise and show what’s possible. ”



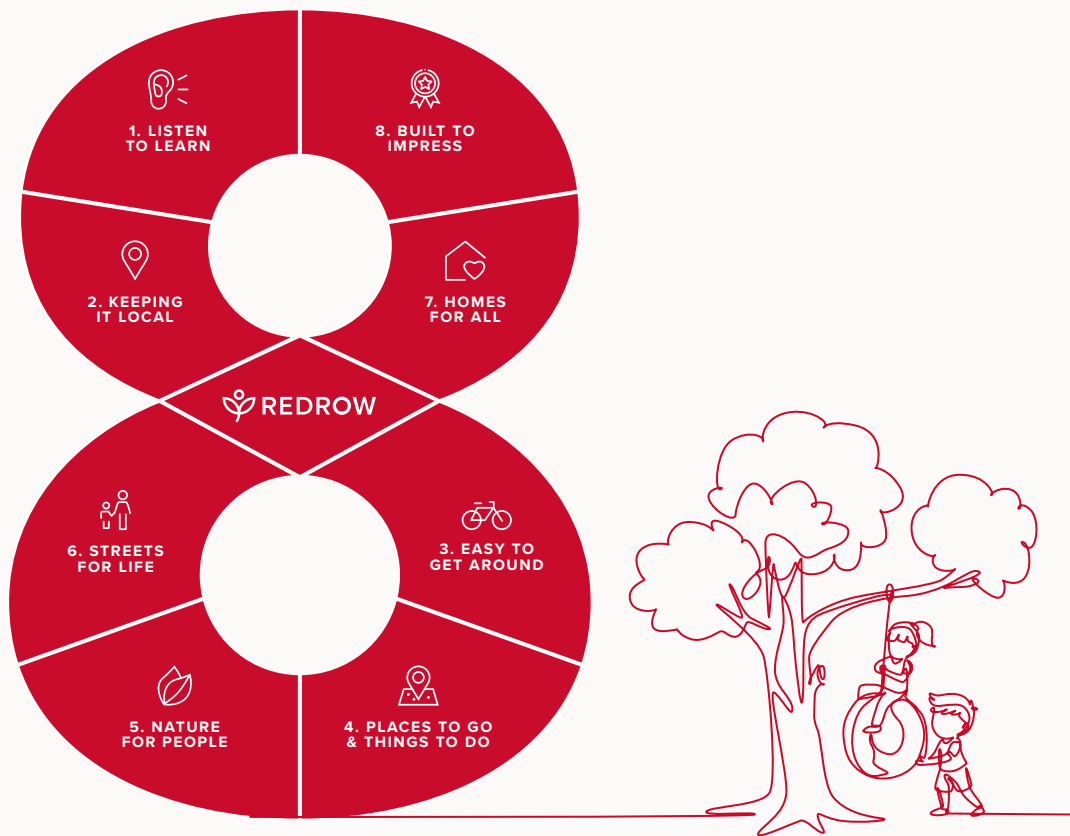
Marianne Mannello at Play Wales:

“ Play Wales calls for better use of public places – so that children and teenagers can explore and play in their neighbourhoods. Developers and house-builders have a vital role to play in creating access to places where children can play and meet up with their friends. When these spaces are designed and considered from the outset, communities become more tolerant of play. Supportive and caring adults who understand and are tolerant of play can strengthen children’s experiences of play and their development. ”

Over half (55%) of parents have considered taking drastic steps to help their child play out more, such as moving to a cul-de-sac to allow them to play in the street (21%), moving house due to grumpy neighbours who complained about outdoor play (15%) and moving closer to friends to encourage play (15%). One in ten (14%) admit they have shown old films focused on outdoor or physical play in a bid to encourage their children outside.

There are many residents in areas across the UK, including Bristol, who are joining forces and campaigning to close streets to cars to make space and allow children the freedom for safe doorstep play within their communities. In fact, having a safe space for children to play is within the top three things that would attract parents to a new home (40%). Other play-related features that could sway a purchase include properties with large open spaces nearby (33%), walking paths (30%) and seeing other children playing outside (20%).





PLAYMAKING AT REDROW

A large majority of children’s outdoor play occurs in the streets and open spaces near their homes.

Safe, street play, where children can walk to their destination, coupled with attractive and inviting environments can deliver a world of benefit for young people, their families and the wider community. This is even more important for children following the pandemic, and highlights the importance of community and neighbourly spirit.

As a large housebuilder and creator of communities across England and Wales, Redrow is in a strong position to cultivate and nurture these outdoor play experiences, and encourage local governments and others within the industry to do the same.

As part of our **Redrow 8 Placemaking Principles**, we want to go further than the current minimum requirements to incorporate play and fully respond to the needs of our customers and the communities we serve.

These principles help us plan and design a happy and healthy place to live, which complements the surrounding area. They ensure we design and deliver to the same consistent high standard across every new development. We are actively working with experts, councils and young people to ensure there are safe, accessible and dedicated places for children, young people, neighbours and communities to come together across our developments.

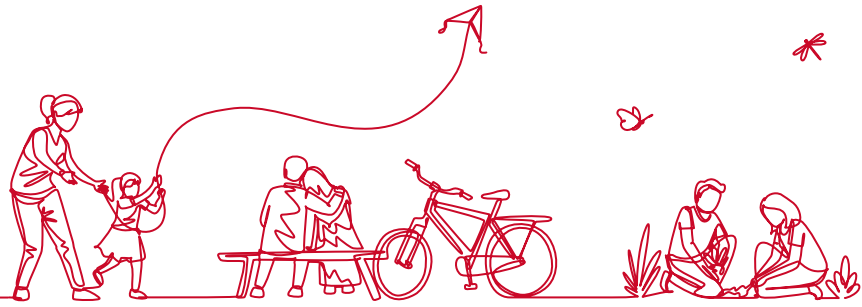


REDROW'S COMMITMENTS

Under consultation with a panel of experts, Redrow will be developing and delivering on the following recommendations to better enhance play across their developments.

Our Playmaking Commitments

1. Prioritise play spaces being in easy walkable distances from homes.
2. Create and up-weight Play on the Way and Natural Play spaces for children of all ages and genders to encourage physical activity and a sense of connection to their local communities.
3. Place multi-functional green spaces and corridors where play is actively encouraged through the design of the space.
4. Design new play areas collaboratively with local children, including the appointment of Redrow's Junior 'heads' of play, to deliver creative, interesting and engaging spaces that the local community are invested in.
5. Encourage physical and active play through the provision of exercise activities for adults and teenagers such as outdoor gyms and trim trails.
6. Facilitate play in all seasons through events, partnerships, and creation of new spaces at our developments.
7. Actively consider the importance of safe streets and street play when designing routes through our developments.
8. Regularly maintain and evaluation of play spaces to ensure children can find new and interesting experiences that challenge and engage them as they develop.



“ We strive to build amazing places that deliver a sense of community and a better way to live.

We take a holistic, Listen to Learn approach, when designing our communities and ensure that the engagement and community connection doesn't stop once the final brick is laid. But we want to do more. We want to help people connect, feel safe, and enjoy the communities we create.

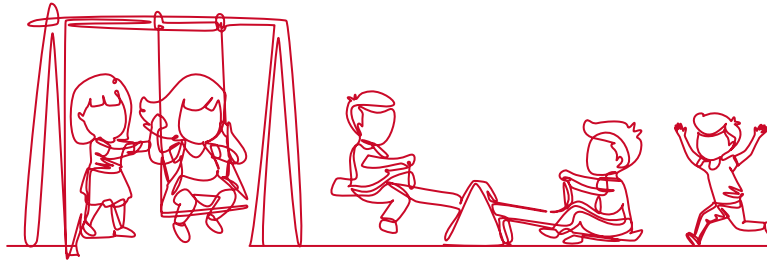
Getting outside to play is one of the best ways to connect. It provides the building blocks for children's confidence, and gives them an opportunity to learn about the world around them. Parents meet other parents. Foster their friendships over a swing, a coffee in the park or kicking a ball in the field.

Whether it's a play park, a walking track, a community garden bed, or a bench to watch the world go by. In new communities like ours, these play and community spaces are more important than ever.

So we're taking a stand for play. We're taking a stand for getting outside. We're taking a stand for getting to know your neighbours. For picnics and Spike Ball in the park. We want to take a stand for community and we're going to put play and community connection at the heart of our developments. At the heart of a Better Way to Live. ”

Kevin Parker
Group Master Planning Director at Redrow





MEET REDROW'S NEW JUNIOR HEADS OF PLAY

Willow and Indy, aged 9, live at Woodborough Grange development in Winscombe and were recently appointed as Redrow's Junior Heads of Play.

The appointment follows a nationwide search for young Redrow residents across the country to design their dream play area, and share tips and ideas with the house-builder to help encourage more play across

Redrow's developments. We want to ensure we are listening to the real experts – the children themselves – to ensure the play equipment and spaces are designed with them at the heart.

HEAR FROM PLAYGROUND DESIGNERS

“Parks, playgrounds and playing fields play a vital role in building healthy neighbourhoods contributing to the physical, mental and emotional well-being of local people. Without access to these spaces the quality of life and well-being of residents is reduced.”

The Rt Hon. The Lord Coe CH KBE
www.fieldsintrust.org

idverde incorporates the Fields in Trust guidelines as minimum standards to create a sense of place within a development. Infusing a sense of place into the play area will spark the imagination of children and place roots in the neighbourhood they live. Children use play to understand the world and comprehend life skills.

Following the report, we understand that there is a considerable decline in children playing outside. The commissioning of the report delights our Play division as it shows a keen interest from Redrow to promote awareness of the importance of designated play areas. In our day to day work we see that sometimes the creation of outside space is considered almost an afterthought. The data clearly highlights that the open and play spaces are a huge factor when buying a new home.

On occasions the drive to meet budgets, particularly when there is competition can remove the individuality and wow factor of a play area, which in turn can lead to children viewing the space as uninteresting. These spaces should engage the child, not be designed in a way or budgeted for as a basic 'tick box exercise'. The main aim is to attract people to use the space more often and for longer.

The report highlights the importance of a strong relationship at an early stage (planning) with us as a play provider. This type of relationship is well established with Redrow, and we have plans in place to expand this further following the findings of the report.

Emily Lovell, Relationship Manger at idverde



PLAY IN REDROW COMMUNITIES



Tudor Meadows, Sawston

We ran a workshop that involved local school children designing and laying out the public spaces and play areas. We asked the students to choose what play equipment they wanted, to draw their designs for the play spaces and list three things they thought the development had to include. Prizes were awarded for the best designs and used the feedback from the workshop to inform our final design for the play areas, and included nine of the top choices for play equipment.

“ I am very pleased to say that Redrow has been a pleasure to work with. They were able to translate the children’s ideas into the final design, resulting in genuine youth participation. ”

Dr Bonnie Kwok Principal Urban Designer/Youth Engagement Lead,
Greater Cambridge Shared Planning Service



Frenchay, Bristol

Fantastic facilities, destinations and activities for a wide range of age groups. The new community includes a ‘trim trail’, tennis courts, a destination play area, pocket parks, picnic tables, allotments, a community orchard, a woodland walk and a new cycle route.



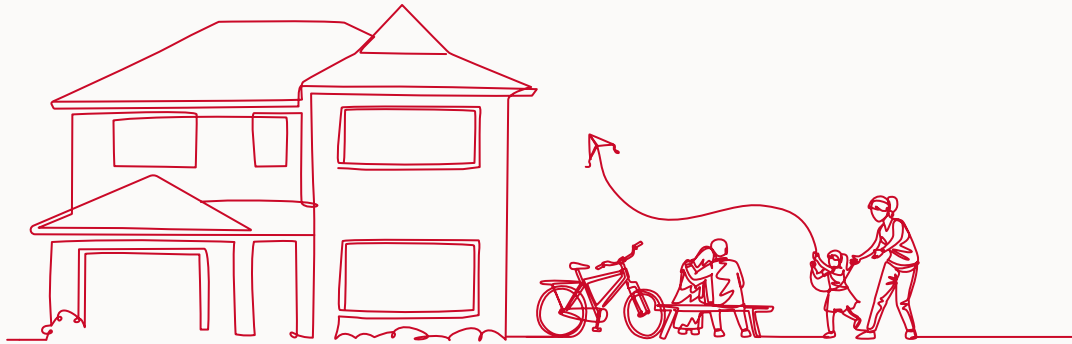
Penlands Green, Sussex

Our design and layout creates a beautiful focal green space and central play area for residents. This much-loved community space features a large mature oak tree, which is a key focal feature.



Barton Seagrave, Northamptonshire

The network of large open spaces, natural areas and a lakeside play area makes this development a great example of an established thriving community. A recent survey of the development showed 87% of residents felt there was a good sense of community and 93% said it was easy to access nature in their local area*.



ABOUT REDROW

Redrow was established in 1974 and today is one of the most successful and acclaimed home-builders in the country. For the year to 3 July 2022, the company built more than 5,700 new homes across England and Wales.

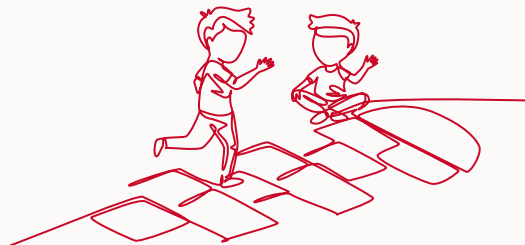
Over Redrow's history, spanning almost 50 years, it has earned a unique reputation for delivering high quality, award-winning homes that are built in well-chosen locations with excellent place making.

Redrow's purpose is to create a better way to live. It has a robust strategy in place to deliver on this aim, which is based on three core pillars: Thriving Communities, Building Responsibly and Valuing People.

Redrow was included in the FT's annual listings of both Europe's Climate Leaders and Diversity Leaders 2022 for achieving significant reductions in its greenhouse gas emissions and leading in workplace diversity and inclusion respectively. It was also included in the FTSE4Good Index Series, for demonstrating strong Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) practices.

In 2022, Redrow became one of the first house builders to implement the New Homes Quality Board's new code of practice, an independent not-for-profit organisation that has been set up to offer better protection and increased transparency for customers.

Redrow is consistently rated as 'excellent' on Trustpilot and once again achieved the Five Star Customer Satisfaction award from the Home Builders' Federation (HBF). Visit [redrow.co.uk](https://www.redrow.co.uk) for more detail.



ABOUT THE RESEARCH

Consumer research conducted by Opinium on behalf of Redrow. Nationally representative sample of 2,000 UK parents of children aged 4-17, the survey was conducted online between 9th and 14th June 2023.

¹ Lindon, J (2007) Understanding children and young people: Development from 5-18 years Hodder Arnold London

² Susan Isaacs & Smith, P et al (2003) Understanding Children's Development, Oxford, Blackwell

³ Zigler, E and Bishop-Josef (2009) "Play under siege. A historical perspective" in Zero to Three, vol 30, no 1 (pp 4-11), National Centre for Infants, Toddlers and families, Washington DC

⁴ Sustrans (2009) Active play and travel: the benefits of active play and active mobility in childhood Bristol, Sustrans: quoting Mutrie and Parfit 1998

⁵ Pretty, J et al (2009): Nature, childhood, health and life pathways, University of Essex, Colchester

⁶ Thigpen, B (2007) 'Outdoor play: Combating sedentary Lifestyles, Zero to Three vol 28, No 1 pp 19-23 National, centre for Infants, Toddlers and families Washington DC (quoting from National Association for the Education of Young Children - 2007)

