

Quotes from local community about the value of the community green space: North Kelvin Meadow and Children's Wood

Since moving here a few years ago I have gone from being a skeptic to thoroughly appreciating what the Children's Wood do for the local kids. And the kids themselves have impressed me when challenged and their response. Many are from backgrounds that don't care, and now they do care. Teaching them resilience and respect. It's not perfect, many kids still get in trouble but without this stable safe place to go they would have less chance of feeling relevant and that their lives matter. The team and project to me is what a community like Maryhill needs more than ever.

Local community member

The land means hide and seek although we live in a flat. It means climbing trees is not confined to stories in books. It means being able to run when you're three and not have to watch for traffic. It means visiting trees and lighting a campfire and growing food and learning things that are about experience, not words. It means freedom in a big city with no place for kids to be free.

Local community member

Somewhere you can both say hello to strangers and meet familiar faces. A place to watch nature change over the seasons. Somewhere for kids to tree climb & mud dive

Local community member

The Children's Wood have spent the last 8 years managing the land with the wider community, organising gardening and growing, community events, playgroups and they support our dog walking community. Each part of the land is integral to the community and we work together and use the land in our own different ways. So many different people use the land for recreation and learning. It is truly unique and a model for other cities to replicate.

Local dog walker

Quotes from other groups about the value of the North Kelvin Meadow – Children's Wood

Marguerite Hunter Blair - CEO Play Scotland (MSc in Community Education, Diploma in Developing and Managing Play Provision)

We know that play is fundamental to healthy child development (Cole-Hamilton, 2012) and while children everywhere will find some way to play, as parents, families, and professionals we can and should provide an enabling environment. Play also has a crucial role in contributing to tackling inequalities in the areas of health and wellbeing, learning, employment and the economy. It is central to many areas of public policy in Scotland such as improving attainment, health and reducing inequality (The Play Return, 2014).

Freedom and independence to play is restricted for many children and young people despite growing evidence of the long-term health benefits of playing, including

boosting physical activity levels which helps to tackle child obesity, and supporting children to become more resilient. Local play initiatives can benefit the wider community by encouraging neighbourliness and improved community spirit. Local place making such as The Children's Wood includes innovative design and use of spaces where play is happening in order to support children, young people and families' wellbeing, in line with Creating Places and Designing Streets guidance.

“We want Scotland to be the best place to grow up. A nation which values play as a life-enhancing daily experience for all our children and young people; in their homes, early learning and childcare settings, schools and communities.” Scotland's Play Strategy(2013)

The vision in Scotland's Play Strategy can deliver the challenge in the UNCRC General Comment 17 on Article 31 :

(We).. “need to create time and space for children to engage in spontaneous play, recreation and creativity, and to promote societal attitudes that support and encourage such activity.”

All of our children and young people should have the opportunity to play every day in and around the streets where they live. Improving opportunities and removing barriers is central to how we can realise our ambitions for play which are set out in Scotland's National Play Strategy for Scotland. We know the benefits of play both to the wellbeing of our children and to the community, from improved social and learning skills and better health outcomes to enriched community cohesion. **The Children's Wood has ample evidence, case studies and anecdotes to underpin local benefits across the community.**

‘Playing out is not just for the children. It is equally important that it gives an opportunity to neighbourhoods of all ages to get to know each other and support each other. .. the role of playing out in bringing people together and giving our children the chance to laugh and play together is hugely important to our future.’ (*‘Policing the streets and playing out.’ 29th May, 2015*).

Kind regards

Marguerite

Statement from CEO Play Scotland

RSPB Scotland is part of the RSPB, the UK's largest nature conservation charity. We protect threatened birds and wildlife through working with land managers, policy makers, communities and individuals, through our own network of nature reserves, and through inspiring everyone to give nature a home.

My role in RSPB Scotland was to encourage people to enjoy nature and inspire more people to get involved in nature conservation. My team and I do this via media work, education, engaging people on, and off, nature reserves, creating interpretation, publicity and leaflets to bring people to our reserves and projects, and working with people in the cities of Glasgow and Edinburgh to show them

nature right where they live. This final part, going to the cities to engage people with nature and conservation where they live, is a vital part of our work because we know that the vast proportion of people living in cities will not get out to our nature reserves, and many don't even get out to enjoy nature within the city.

The North Kelvin Meadow – Children's Wood is an unusual case for us to be involved in, as our involvement with planning would usually involve opposing significant threats to nationally or internationally important conservation interests. This is a former playing field, now a meadow, with a regenerating birch and ash woodland at the edge filled with logs for kids to scramble on and mud for kids to play in. So, if this site isn't the type of site that we would usually engage with, why are we involved? Well after years of working with North Kelvin Meadow and the Children's wood through our Giving Nature a Home in Glasgow Project, we have seen firsthand the key importance of this site as a place of inspiration for local people, children, teachers and future teachers, parents and grandparents, and, crucially, for other urban communities wishing to improve their own local environments. Staff from RSPB Scotland have joined local volunteers in delivering events and other activities at the site. The Children's Wood is a partner in the Glasgow Wildlife Garden Festival, just entering its third year, and they sit on our festival steering group. The Children's Wood was a runner up in the Nature of Scotland Awards for best community initiative in 2015.

This site may not have eagles and adders, natterjacks or nightjars, curlews or corncrakes: but it has worms and robins and beetles and sparrows and it is where people living in city flats can get out and get close to nature. Even in the Dear Green Place, North Kelvin Meadow and The Children's Wood stand out as special, because of what the local community have made of it. We need more places in our cities where people can get close to nature not fewer. RSPB Scotland is representing in this case, not only because we are involved with delivering activities around the Meadow and Wood, but because it is one of the rare occasions that a planning decision affecting some urban greenspace is challenged by a community and these arguments for keeping nature accessible to people in the city are being heard.

The core of our Giving Nature a Home in Glasgow Project is to support existing community groups and schools who manage (or have a say in managing) greenspaces like community gardens, school grounds, allotments groups, stalled sites, and local parks to improve the biodiversity value of their sites, and to encourage more local access and involvement and volunteering. We also support and encourage new community groups wishing to create spaces for wildlife in the city. It is this last point where North Kelvin Meadow and The Children's Wood are so important to creating the city we want to live in as they are leading the way in demonstrating what is possible.

We consider access to semi natural greenspace extremely important for the wellbeing of children, and adults, and that a disconnection to nature is a real threat to the future of conservation.

It is for this reason that children and education are absolutely central to the work of RSPB Scotland and linking up schools to local greenspaces and creating opportunities

to demonstrate the benefits of teaching children out of doors is vital to our urban projects. These are two things that The Children's Wood has done in spades and it is bringing benefits to children in some of Scotland's most deprived schools

What schools and children get at the Meadow and Children's Wood is not a closely managed piece of parkland or, Botanic Garden, it is somewhere wild, where children can dig for worms, build dens and find beetles in a rotten log. They can climb a tree to get a birds-eye view and dig a hole to see what's down there. It is through these investigations that children develop a love and a connection to nature, and not through the formal play areas in our city parks. What the Children's Wood does especially well is that they have many organised activities and groups on site to help local people to engage with the nature of the site, which helps people for all backgrounds benefit.

Through our project we want to inspire more communities to create wildlife rich havens for people to enjoy on their doorsteps right across the city, in back courts and lanes, in gap sites and on larger spaces like North Kelvin Meadow. North Kelvin Meadow offers an example of how that is possible, along with all the benefits it brings for community building, health and wellbeing, community safety,

In conclusion, RSPB Scotland may be more usually associated with the conservation of rare and wonderful species in wild and remote places, but it is only by helping people connect with the nature that is close to where they live that we will encourage people to value nature in the wider countryside. If we don't have places local to us to experience nature; to get stuck in, get muddy, get involved and to see that first snowdrop of spring, then we are the poorer for it. And our planet will be the poorer for it, if our children and grandchildren do not have an experience of nature to give them a fascination for wildlife and to teach them to love and care for our planet in the future.

RSPB

Scotland needs not only to protect our open spaces but we need to encourage far greater use of them Our nation has one of the lowest life expectancies in Europe and whilst lack of exercise is not the only factor few would argue that it's not a major factor. Exercise plays a crucial role in the physical, mental and emotional development of young children.

Fields in Trust.

Quotes from local young people (aged 12-18) about The Children's Wood charity work.

"the fact they were trying to help me get a job and that man, instead of being like a random wee bam from Maryhill I think they are trying to get me somewhere, help me see I can make something of myself"

“everything has been amazing and they have done so much for us like they stick by us even when we are being absolute idiots to them. And they always give us chances after chances after chances after chances and they’ve always they never give up on us they always try their hardest to help us”

“at least people know I’m actually doing something with myself”

“I feel relaxed when I’m in The Children’s Wood and Meadow”

“I love coming to the land for Forest School, it gets me out of my bed and gives me something to do”