

untypical
GROUP



Universal Play Guidance

Play with Purpose

Because play should feel possible for everyone

untypical Group Universal Play Guidance

2026 Edition



Universal Play Guidance

Play with Purpose

Because play should feel possible for everyone

Contents

1. untypical foreword.....	3	11. Fields in trust guidelines.....	12
2. Kompan foreword.....	3	12. What is a LAP?.....	13
3. Introduction.....	4	13. An untypical LAP.....	14
4. Safety notes.....	5	14. What is a LEAP?.....	15
5. Inclusion for all.....	6	15. An untypical LEAP.....	16
6. Inclusive blueprint.....	7	16. What is a NEAP?.....	17
7. Universal Play Principles.....	8	17. An untypical NEAP.....	18
8. Supporting neurodiversity.....	12	18. What is informal play?.....	19
9. Inclusion the untypical way.....	9	19. untypical informal play.....	20
10. Universal play equipment.....	10	20. untypical Surfacing.....	21
11. Inclusive checklist.....	11	21. Conclusion.....	22





01 | untypical Foreword

Play with Purpose

At untypical, we believe that play is a fundamental part of building healthy, connected communities. Every child deserves spaces where they feel welcome, included, and able to explore with confidence. As a housebuilder, we have a responsibility to create environments that support families and strengthen the places people call home.

This *Universal Play Guidance* reflects that commitment. It moves beyond minimum standards and sets out a clear, practical approach to designing play spaces that are accessible, intuitive, and genuinely inclusive from the very beginning. Through our partnership with KOMPAN, we combine industry leading expertise with our ambition to create neighbourhoods that feel human, thoughtful, and future-ready.

For me, this work is shaped not only by professional responsibility but by personal experience. I've seen the difference that well designed, inclusive spaces can make, and those moments guide the values behind this document.

By embedding inclusion into every decision — from layout and access to sensory experiences and long-term usability — we can create play areas that bring people together and leave a legacy for generations.



Gary Ennis, CEO, Untypical Group

02 | KOMPAN Foreword

Happier, healthier communities



At KOMPAN, our core belief is that play is a universal right, an essential part of childhood, community, and wellbeing. Every child, regardless of ability, background, or experience, deserves access to play spaces that are welcoming, engaging, and safe.

This guidance is designed to support the design and implementation of Untypical play areas that truly include everyone. It combines practical advice with a children first approach, offering insights on equipment selection, layout, accessibility, and long-term usability. By embedding inclusion from the very start, we can ensure that every play area becomes a place where children can explore, connect, and grow together.

Play is more than recreation; it's a way to foster confidence, creativity, social skills, and a sense of belonging. With this guidance, we hope to inspire spaces that leave a lasting, positive legacy for children, families, and communities for years to come.

KOMPAN is proud to partner with Untypical in making inclusive, joyful play a reality for everyone.

Stuart Pettit - Managing Director - KOMPAN





03 | Introduction

Play with Purpose

untypical Group has proudly partnered with **KOMPAN** to create this Universal Play Guidance document. untypical is committed to reimagining play spaces where every user feels welcome and valued. This guidance is rooted in the belief that play is a fundamental right for children and is part of healthy and happy communities.

At its heart, this document is about removing barriers and opening possibilities. It supports moving beyond minimum standards and instead creates play spaces that are accessible and genuinely inclusive from the outset. These are places that invite exploration, spark imagination, and encourage social connection for everyone.

Covering every stage of play provision, from equipment choice and spatial layout to accessibility, inclusivity, and long-term use, the guidance offers a clear and practical framework for creating play areas that stand the test of time. By embedding inclusion into every decision, it helps ensure that each play space delivers meaningful social value, strengthens community bonds, and leaves a positive legacy for generations to come.

Universal Design Principles

The universal design principles were developed in the 1990s by design practitioners. The principles have become widely acknowledged as a way of working with facilities that everybody can use to the widest possible extent.





04 | Safety Notes

Play with Purpose

Every play area that is designed, installed and adopted should be safe, accessible and inclusive. Safe design allows children to explore, interact and take risks without unnecessary harm.

Design considerations

When reviewing your play area for safety, you should check that the play area is designed for the right age group, provides the correct surfacing for the play at hand, and is set within a location free from fall risk. Further actions, such as ensuring a robust inspection and maintenance programme is included, should be considered at the point of design.



Safety Standards

EN1176 - Play Equipment Standards
EN16630 – Outdoor Fitness Standards

Core Safety Principles



Design for age: Match equipment to children's abilities.



Safe surfaces: Use impact absorbing materials under play zones.



Sturdy equipment: No sharp edges, pinch points, or loose parts.



Spacious layout: Prevent collisions and overcrowding.



Fall protection: Guardrails, barriers, and appropriate heights.



Clear visibility: Easy supervision for caregivers.



Inclusive access: Ramps and sensory friendly features for all children.



Durable materials: Nontoxic, weather resistant, and long-lasting.



Regular maintenance: Inspect, repair, and replace faulty equipment.



Emergency readiness: Access and clear safety signage.



Mixing Standards: Check if play & fitness equipment has been mixed



Further Learning & CPD's

Principles of inclusive design
Play space planning
Safety & compliance workshop
Play Value & child Development
Play areas & Regeneration
Urban Micro play spaces

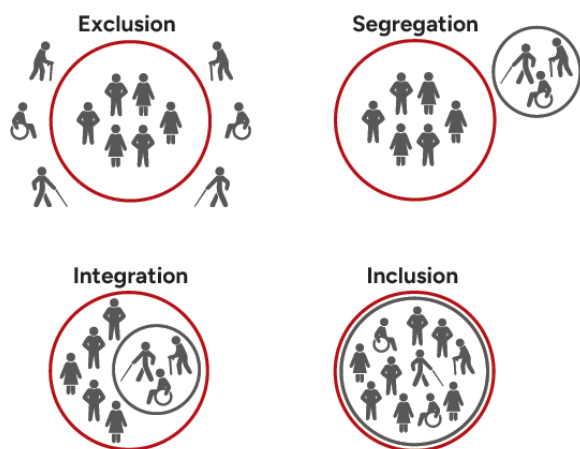




05 | Inclusion for all

Play with Purpose

A Playground is only as good as the individual child's experience.



Inclusion Explained

Inclusion focuses on what people of all abilities can contribute instead of what they cannot do. People of all abilities should be able to access, be included and be invited to play in public playgrounds.

What does true inclusion look like?

Exclusion

Some people are entirely left out. The main group is formed without them, and they remain outside the space altogether, unable to participate.

Segregation

Everyone is present, but not together. Certain individuals are separated into their own area or experience, reinforcing difference rather than shared belonging.

Integration

People are brought into the same space, but only partially. Some are included on the edges, often requiring adaptation to fit into a system that wasn't designed with them in mind.

Inclusion

Everyone belongs from the outset. The space is designed so that all people can participate together, equally and naturally, without separation or special treatment





06 | Inclusive Blueprint

Play with Purpose

Inclusive design centres around three core questions:

Can people get there, can people stay, can people play?

01 Get around

Paths with guidance to make it possible to get around the equipment and navigate the overall playground



02 Stay

Make staying for all with clear marking of functionality and respite areas.

03 Play

Make play possible by offering varied play options with clearly marked functionalities.



The latest World Health Organization update on the categorisation of disabilities, for one, will make it considerably easier for practitioners to understand what to consider when designing inclusive play environments and playgrounds.



07 | Universal Play Principles

Play with Purpose



Design for all, from the start

By committing to design for all at the start of the design process, access, dignity, and usability are embedded early on.



Barrier free access

When selecting the play space location, it's essential to consider how people will get there. The route leading to the play area should be step free and easy to navigate, providing safe, well overlooked access that feels welcoming to everyone. Consider the provision of adequate parking opportunities, such as a disabled bay for more complex requirements to access the play area. With ample space and step free access from the parking location.



Design shared spaces

Create places where people can gather, play, and participate together. Consider the inclusion of the supervising adults and their needs, such as seating and access. When places are designed for shared experiences, they feel safe, welcoming and inclusive.



Thoughtfully integrated into the natural environment:

Time in nature is proven to benefit physical health, mental wellbeing, and emotional wellbeing. Play that is integrated into the natural environment creates more meaningful experiences for users.



Promote exciting, equitable equipment

Offering a mix of equitable and thrilling play equipment invites every child, regardless of ability or experience, to join in, explore, and connect. While offering challenge and thrill over a range of ages and abilities. it helps build a welcoming space where friendships grow, imaginations spark, and children learn valuable skills like teamwork, problem solving, and navigating challenges together.



Supporting active families

Multiple access points to the play area encourage families to explore and enjoy the wider open space. Along these routes, features such as wayfinding, interpretive lecterns, and small play elements can create an engaging journey that supports initiatives like the Daily Mile, helping families spend more time outdoors, moving, and connecting with nature together.



Long Term Legacy

Careful selection of materials, surfacing, and seamless integration with the surrounding open space helps manage long term maintenance costs. Thoughtful design ensures the play area remains safe, inviting, and enjoyable for children and families for many years to come



All Weather inclusion

Design play areas with changing weather and seasons in mind. Ensuring routes, surfaces, and equipment remain safe and usable all year round, so children can continue to play and explore, even in winter or wet conditions.



Supporting neurodivergent inclusion

Design spaces that nurture calm, curiosity, and focused exploration. Include quiet corners, sensory planting, winding sensory paths, and opportunities for solo play, giving every child the freedom to engage at their own pace. These thoughtful spaces encourage children to spend more time in nature, discovering and enjoying play in ways that feel right for them.



08 | Supporting Neurodiversity in Play Areas

Play with Purpose

Neurodiversity-friendly navigation

Accessibility as a neurodiversity-friendly asset means help with wayfinding in the playground. Maps, signs and play-zone guidance will help many users, especially those with difficulties navigating many sensory impressions at a time, including many users with AD(H)D or ASD. Good maps for wayfinding at the entrance and an entrance that offers seating will help. Recognisable markers of routes to wilder and quieter play areas and respite areas are helpful.

The rise in neurodiversity diagnoses, such as attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), attention deficit disorder (ADD) or autism spectrum disorder (ASD), calls for additional measures to be considered.



Neurodiversity design considerations

Sensory play:

Tactile, auditory, visual, vestibular, and olfactory experiences. Good examples of sensory play are sensory paths, scented planting, and outdoor music equipment such as chimes.

Thrillzone:

An area of fast-paced wild play in the play area, providing challenge and risk, such as a balance trail, climbing units, and swings.

Quiet Zones:

Providing play opportunities within designated quiet zones promotes respite, emotional well-being, and inclusion. A good example is providing play panels near the seating at the entrance of a play area.

Wayfinding:

Clear signage and use of colour contrast and communication panels will assist users in navigating the play area successfully.

Barriers:

A common concern for supervising adults accompanying neurodiverse children to play areas is elopement. Consider the use of perimeter fencing to prevent this, which will provide the opportunity for independent play and increase dwell time within the play area.

Neurodiversity-friendly stays

When designing neurodiversity-friendly playgrounds, edges of functionality should be signalled. Using planting, colour, and texture contrasts around play zones and signalling changes in types of play activities will help guide users in seeking out or avoiding certain activities. Responsive play activities, such as swings, rotating equipment, or slides, can be marked out with contrasting colour dots in the surfacing under them to assist users. For users with vision impairment, the textures of the ground and contrasting colours around play zones can help with wayfinding and functionality indications; for example, explanatory signs that aid communication will help many.





09 | Inclusion the untypical way

Play with Purpose

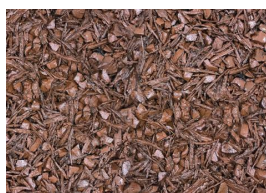
untypical benchmark

How to identify an untypical inclusive play area

- Welcoming layout with adequate space
- Step-free access to the play area
- All-weather inclusive surfacing
- Sensory elements and quiet zones
- Social integration zones
- Clear sightlines



Because play should feel possible for everyone





10 | Universal play equipment

Play with Purpose

What defines an inclusive item of equipment?

01 Ground-level accessibility and usability

Interesting activity offered at ground level or from ground-level access point

Playground centrepieces' accessibility



02 Responsive or thrilling

Physical: responsive and/or

stomach-tickling, e.g. spinning,

sliding, swaying, bouncing

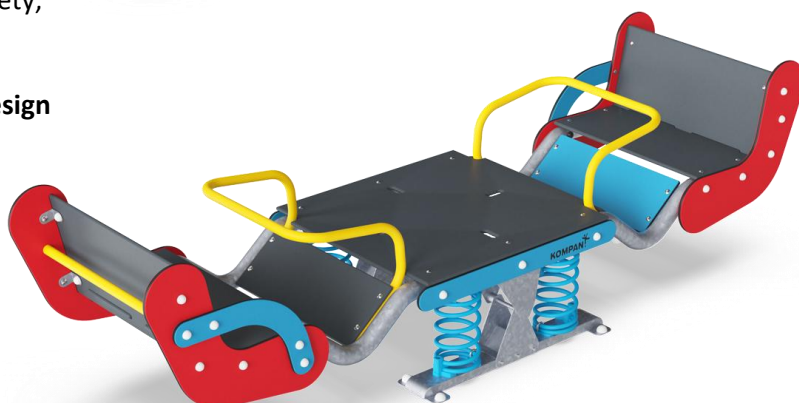
Social-emotional: motivates and facilitates social thrill or interaction

Cognitive-creative: manipulative elements, sound, tactile or visual variety, explorative play items

03 Play from all sides: 360-degree design

Play from all sides: equipment can be played with from all sides

More than one entrance and exit



04 Explorative and dramatic play

Equipment offers options for play exploration

Equipment has recognisable themes

Play panels offer activities that can be used from both sides if desired. This enhances and motivates social interaction

05 Transparency in design

Clear colour and design signals.

This supports orientation for a range of users

Transparent to the widest possible extent. This facilitates communication through, in and around equipment



06 Multifunctional whenever possible

Offer space for varied body positions

Offer individual and group usage

Offer independent use whenever possible

07 Sensory Play

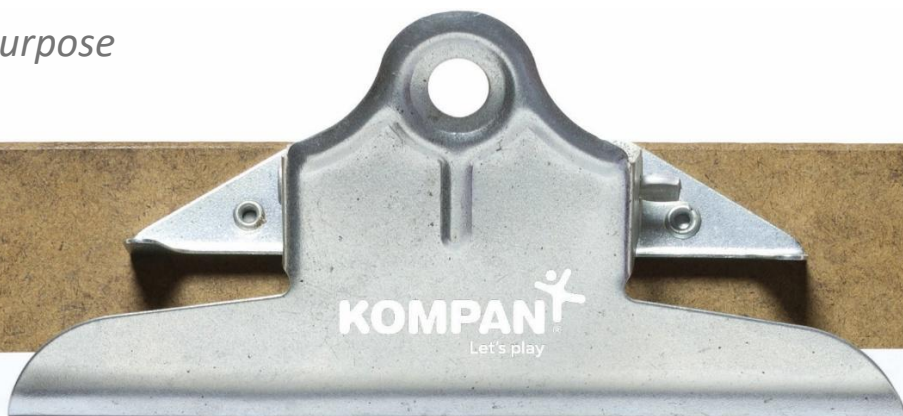
Ensure sensory play variation, e.g. tactile, visual, auditive and proprioceptive play variation





11 | Inclusive Checklist

Play with Purpose



Can users get around the playground?

Check for the following playground design features:

Yes No

Gates okay for assisted access and assistive devices:

- Entrance wide enough to pass through with assistant? ☐ ☐
- Opening handle placed within reaching distance? ☐ ☐

Features incorporated to aid spatial orientation, communication and guidance ☐ ☐

Transparency in design enabling easy overview and navigation of the playground ☐ ☐

Easy access to and around all play equipment ☐ ☐

Edges in contrasting textures and colours to aid visually impaired users ☐ ☐

Height of slopes used with consideration for assistive mobility devices, e.g. wheelchairs ☐ ☐

Accessible seating options along paths, seating and table options at the entrance and near play equipment ☐ ☐

Enough space for assistants and wheelchairs to pass each other, on paths and around play equipment ☐ ☐

Can users stay in the playground?

Check for a playground that offers:

Yes No

Toilets and drinking water close by ☐ ☐

Shading ☐ ☐

Accessible seating and table options ☐ ☐

Colour contrasts on surfaces to assist guidance ☐ ☐

Signage that aids communication ☐ ☐

List of play ideas, how-to-use guides ☐ ☐

Social play areas – things to do together regardless of ability or age ☐ ☐

Solitary play areas, e.g. play panels or individual rotation pieces ☐ ☐

Quiet areas to withdraw to ☐ ☐

Natural elements, e.g. plants with a clear scent, to help wayfinding and orientation ☐ ☐

Can users play in the playground?

Check if equipment is designed with:

Yes No

Ground-level accessibility and usability ☐ ☐

Play from all sides (360-degree design) ☐ ☐

Transparency and clear design signals ☐ ☐

Spaciousness to support diverse body sizes, abilities and positions ☐ ☐

Multifunctionality: more ways of use, access and egress ☐ ☐

Independent use for all ☐ ☐

Variation in play functions: (Solitary play, Social play in smaller and bigger groups) ☐ ☐

Accessible themed play equipment ☐ ☐

Sensory play variation ☐ ☐

Thrilling play functions; e.g. speed, height ☐ ☐

Users involved in design ☐ ☐





12 | Fields in trust guidelines

Play with Purpose

Most open space designs are influenced by the Fields in Trust guidance, which provided a benchmark for LAPS LEAPS and NEAPs. This guidance was updated in 2024 increasing emphasis on the importance of welcoming parks and green spaces, highlighting the impact against loneliness, mental and physical health. Green spaces provide health benefits of £34 billion every year saving more than £111 million just on reduced GP visits.



Equipped designated play spaces: Traditional play types include Local Area of Play (LAPs), Local Equipped Area of Play (LEAPs), Neighbourhood Equipped Areas of Play (NEAPs). The concept was evolved by Fields in Trust and partners in the 1990s as a way to inspire the creation of better play opportunities for everyone and address the lack of access in many areas. The definitions are based on the age of children they are designed for, location, size and type of experience.

Developments:

- up to 20 homes should provide informal play spaces
- between 21 and 100 homes should provide Local Areas of Play (LAPs) and informal play spaces
- between 100 and 500 homes should provide Local Areas of Play (LAPs), Local Equipped Areas of Play (LEAPs) and informal play spaces
- of more than 500 homes should provide all types of play spaces for all ages



Accessible,
safe, and
inclusive



Promote
active
healthy
lifestyles



Support
mental
wellbeing



Resilient
to climate
change



Provide
space for
nature to
thrive



Adaptable
to
community
needs





13 | What is a LAP?

Play with Purpose

LAP Guidelines

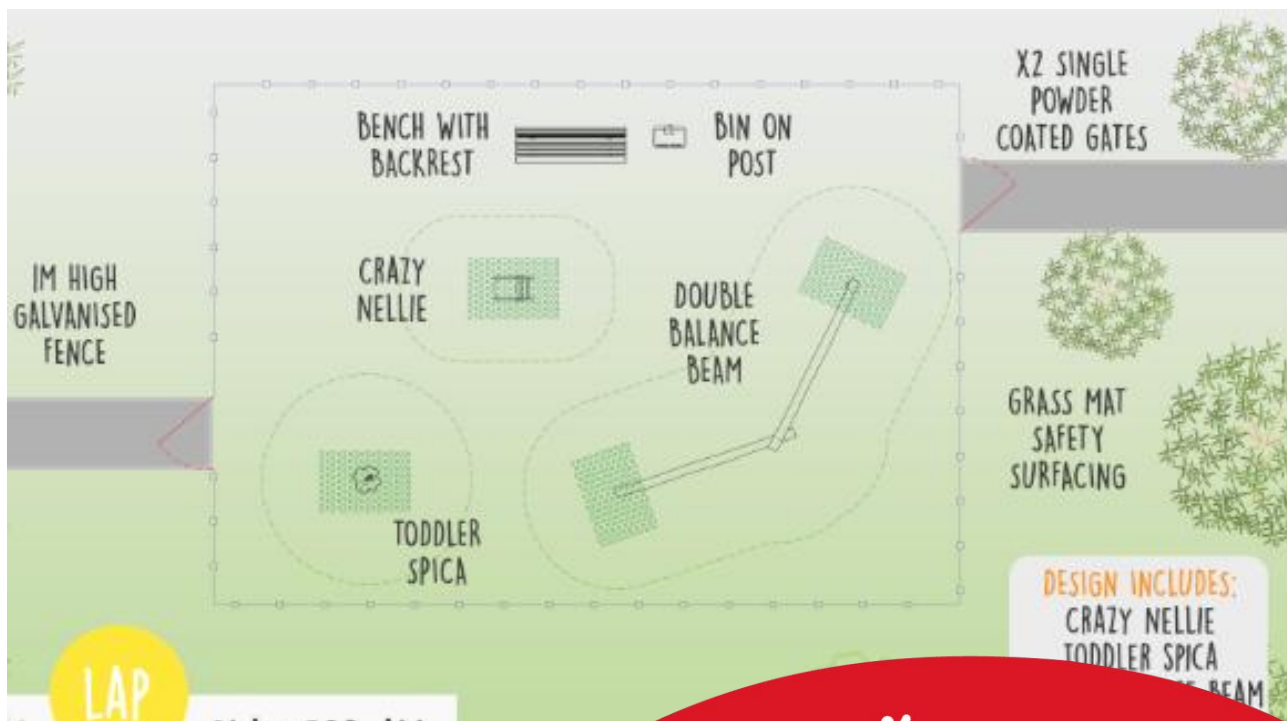
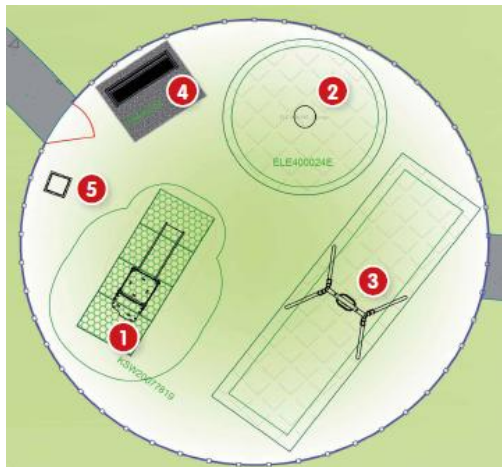
Age Range: For very young children. From 0 years.

Location: Close to where the children live, within 100 meters.

Observation: LAPS allow for informal observation and supervision functioning to encourage informal play and social interaction for toddlers.

Play equipment level: A LAP requires no formal equipment, relying on demonstrative features indicating play is possible.

Size: A LAP should meet a minimum of 100 square meters; this can be distributed within a development as part of playable routes.





14 | An untypical LAP

Play with Purpose



Minimum Guidance

- ☐ Informal observation
- ☐ 100M² total space
- ☐ No defined equipment
- ☐ Near walking routes
- ☐ Not defined
- ☐ No defined surfacing requirement



untypical are boldly redefining what LAPS are, by creating spaces that inspire growth, connection, and discovery.

LAPS are designed to be fully equipped, inclusive play areas crafted from natural and recycled materials, weaved seamlessly into the surrounding open landscape where children's imagination is sparked, confidence nurtured and children thrive.

The layout gently encourages turn-taking, builds social bonds, and invites movement in ways that feel joyful and instinctive.

Developing richer experiences, stronger communities, and meaningful opportunities for every child to grow.

untypical Guidance

- ☒ Inclusive supervision, for all abilities
- ☒ 100M² space per LAP with clear zones
- ☒ Minimum of 2 inclusive play features
- ☒ Fully accessible with multiple entry points
- ☒ Location with accessible parking
- ☒ All-weather, year-round usability

Play is more than recreation; it's a way to foster confidence, creativity, social skills, and a sense of belonging. With this guidance, we hope to inspire spaces that leave a lasting, positive legacy for children, families, and communities for years to come





15 | What is a LEAP?

Play with Purpose

LEAP Guidelines

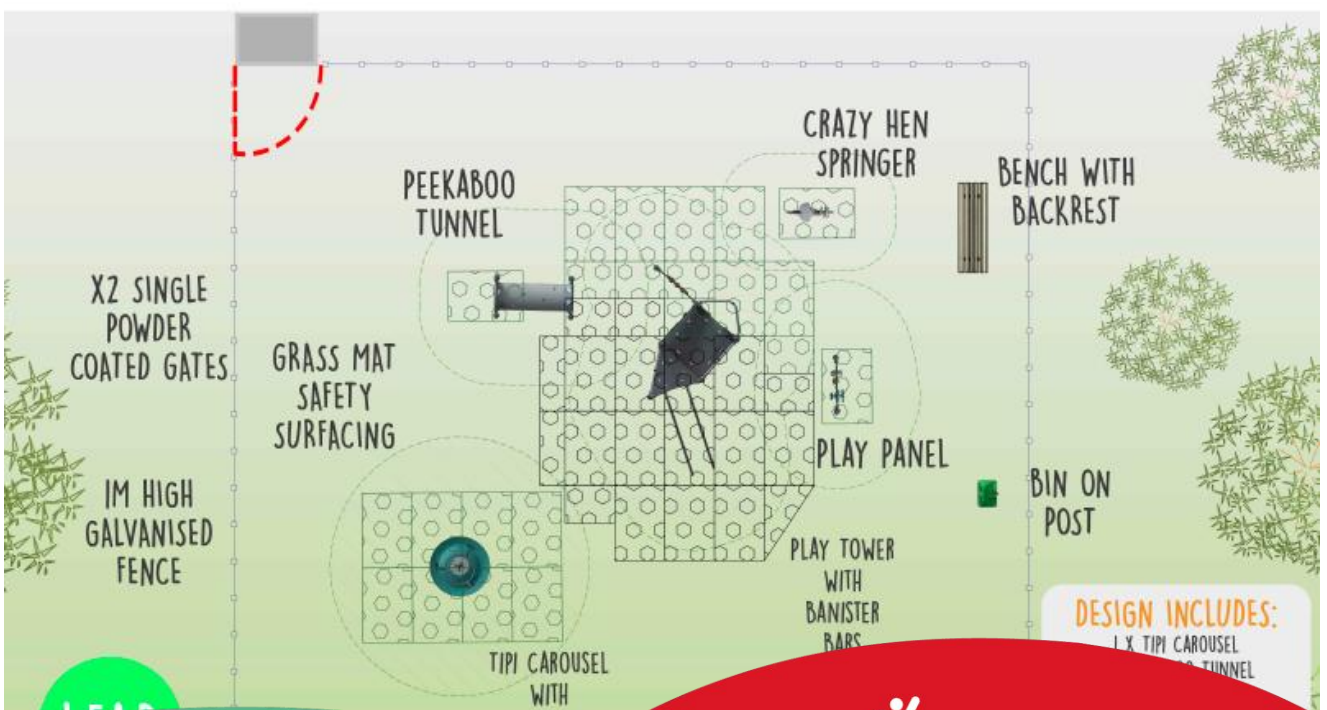
Age Range: Children beginning to play independently, usually from the age of 6+

Location: within 400m walking distance from every home, located at the heart of the development. No significant barriers such as main roads.

Observation: LEAPs provide a space for children to play independently with friends, without accompanying adults, and for adults with young children

Play equipment level: Spaces should provide for informal recreation and varied, stimulating and challenging play experiences

Size: A LEAP should meet a minimum of 400m² of play space.





16 | An untypical LEAP

Play with Purpose



An **untypical** LEAP is a place where independence begins, confidence grows, and every child feels they belong.

Designed to deliver genuine, meaningful play value, each LEAP invites children, regardless of ability, to take those first brave steps into independent exploration. It's a space where curiosity is celebrated, where limits are tested safely, and where both mind and body are gently challenged to grow stronger.

Every element is thoughtfully created to spark cognitive development and build physical confidence. Children are encouraged to navigate obstacles, solve problems, take turns, and discover what they are capable of. The journey through the play area becomes a journey of growth, with natural moments to stretch a little further and achieve something new.

untypical offers more than just play; they offer progression, resilience, and the joy of discovering "I can do this."

Minimum Guidance

- ☐ Independent observation
- ☐ 400M² total space
- ☐ Varied recreation provision, providing stimulating and challenging experiences
- ☐ Near walking routes
- ☐ Not currently defined
- ☐ No defined surfacing requirement

untypical Guidance

-  Inclusive supervision, for all abilities
-  400M² space per LEAP with clear zoning
-  A minimum of 3 inclusive play opportunities and increased challenge across the play equipment for more independent users.
-  Fully accessible with multiple entry points
-  Provision, where possible, of a minimum of 1 disabled parking space next to step-free access to the open space. Allowing for children or supervising adults who can not otherwise navigate to the play space or access it.
-  Provision of breakout space and quiet regulating play on the periphery of the play area, creating a space of included quiet.
-  All-weather, year-round usability





17 | What is a NEAP?

Play with Purpose

NEAP guidelines

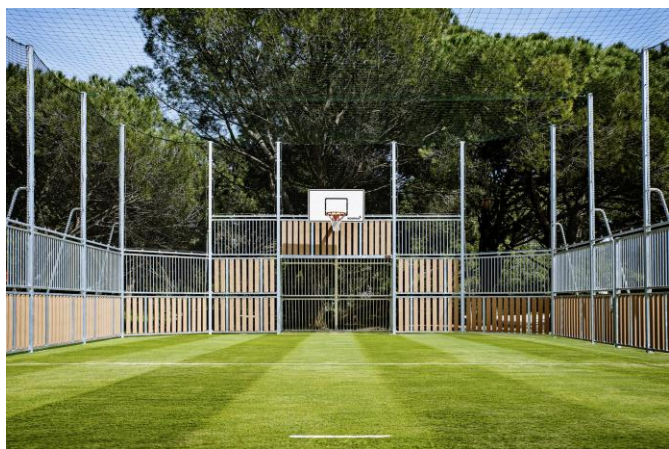
Age Range: For older, more independent children, while providing opportunity for younger children/siblings to play.

Location: within 1000m walking distance from every home, located at the heart of the development. No significant barriers such as main roads.

Observation: NEAPs provide a space for children to play independently with friends, without accompanying adults, and for adults with young children

Play equipment level: Spaces should provide a wider range of play experiences than a LEAP with age-appropriate play and informal recreational experiences for children and young people. There are likely to be more challenging items of equipment and features that meet the needs of older children and young people and sufficient space to play larger group games and seating and shelter to enable young people to socialise with their friends.

Size: A NEAP should meet a minimum of 1000m² of play space.





18 | An untypical NEAP

Play with Purpose



An **untypical** NEAP is a vibrant, inclusive space where children of all ages and abilities can come together, connect, and grow. Here, children don't just play alongside one another; they learn from one another. By observing each other climbing higher, balancing longer, and taking bolder leaps. They see courage in action. They see resilience, and slowly, inspired by what they see, they step beyond their comfort zones to try something that once felt just a little too big or a little too scary.

Every element within an Untypical NEAP is carefully composed to create a true destination for play. There are thrilling zones that ignite adrenaline and adventure, quiet spaces that offer calm and reflection, and welcoming breakout areas where children and adults can gather and rest. It's a landscape designed for movement, with imagination, and welcome belonging.

untypical offers more than equipment, untypical creates journeys. Journeys of progression, of growing confidence.

Minimum Guidance

- ☐ Independent observation
- ☐ 1000M² total space
- ☐ Wide range of age-appropriate play and informal recreation. Aimed to meet the needs of older users, group play, and sport play zones. Seating and shelters for socialising.
- ☐ Accessible without barriers
- ☐ Not defined
- ☐ No defined surfacing requirement

untypical Guidance

- ☒ Inclusive supervision, for all abilities
- ☒ 1000M² space with clear zoning
- ☒ Minimum of 6 mixed-age inclusive play features, respite areas, and clear zones of activity. Equipment that provides the opportunity to develop skills over time. Sports provisions provided are gender neutral and offer a wider variety of sports options compared to traditional MUGAs.
- ☒ Fully accessible with multiple entry points
- ☒ Location with accessible parking
- ☒ All-weather, year-round usability





19 | What is informal play?

Play with Purpose

Informal play for all

This includes facilities specifically designed for informal recreation such as pump tracks, parkour elements, bouldering walls, social areas for teenagers, ball courts, multi-use games area or skateboard areas which can provide the opportunity for a variety of experiences to young people with differing skill levels. Playful features integrated and distributed within a development along active travel routes, within playable streets or open spaces may include play trails, sensory routes, playable public art or changes in levels and textures that encourage interaction with nature. These can create joyful and playful routes connecting destination play spaces, schools and local facilities that encourage active lifestyles. Informal play spaces should be reached safely by children and young people. Larger games areas for older children should be within 700m walking distance from home and have a minimum area of 1000 square metres (for example a typical MUGA court dimension is 40 x 20 metres).



20 | untypical informal play

Play with Purpose

At **untypical**, we believe that informal play must inspire movement and interaction. Too often, trails are unimaginative softwood timber that lacks inclusion and often sees very little use.

Sports should provide vibrant, inclusive spaces with opportunities that invite every user in. The sport provision should be varied and provide opportunities for all genders, ages, and abilities. Moving beyond the classic basketball and football provisions will encourage more use of outdoor sports areas by providing options to play a variety of sports, including Football, basketball, tennis, badminton, and netball.

Getting communities outside and moving is more than providing play areas and installing sports spaces. Schools already champion walk to school and daily mile initiatives, with thoughtful design and intelligent master planning untypical can champion these initiatives from the school gates and into the development. By integrating landscape-led exploratory trails that weave naturally through the development. Creating this provision to cater for families, walkers and children, the open space encourages residents to walk out in their community, connecting with nature through art, interactive lecterns and storytelling points.

By creating safe step-free signposted walking routes that link homes to key destinations, schools, and mass transport zones, barriers to movement are removed. Well, considering sightlines, safe road crossings, and accessible pathways make initiatives such as walking busses possible, supporting the local community with considered physical movement, an increase in wellbeing and social value across the development, while reducing NHS costs.

untypical Guidance

- Inclusive supervision, for all abilities
- Naturally blended into the open spaces
- Provision that supports local schools and NHS movement initiatives.
- Signposted activities throughout the development.
- Barrier-free and step free access through walking routes with sensory elements such as scented planting and tactile posts.



untypical
GROUP

In partnership with



21 | untypical surfacing

Play with Purpose



Wetpour

Wetpour provides a smooth, safe, and durable surface that children of all abilities can enjoy. It reduces trip hazards, cushions falls, and allows independent play, ensuring everyone can move, explore, and have fun rain or shine.

Bonded Rubber mulch

Bonded rubber mulch creates a soft, stable, and accessible surface that supports children of all abilities. It cushions falls, remains level underfoot, and allows safe, independent play, helping everyone explore and enjoy the space with confidence..



Grass mat

Grass matting provides a soft, even surface that is accessible and safe for children of all abilities. They support natural play, reduce trip hazards, and allow everyone to move, run, and explore the outdoor space with confidence.

Natural Grass

Natural grass offers tactile stimulations, creating a soft welcoming surface, Not in wet conditions.



Loosefill

While offering great tactile stimulation, Loosefill is often considered ill-suited for inclusive journeys and fall zones due to the difficulty in navigating through it. This doesn't mean that there isn't an inclusive element to the sensory benefit of this, as a surfacing around specific items of equipment.

