

Kickstarting Kingsbridge



The Eden Project is an environmental education charity and a regeneration project. They have developed a range of approaches for engaging the public with the issues and opportunities that a sustainable future presents.

Location

Kingsbridge

Aim



Influence in the design of a play space



The ancient market town of Kingsbridge lies in the heart of the South Hams district between Plymouth to the west, Torbay to the east and Dartmoor to the north. The town sits at the end of the Kingsbridge estuary which flows out to the coast at Salcombe.



Eden's involvement began in 2008 with a request to deliver play activities in Duncombe Park as part of an event to engage children and their parents about their play needs throughout the town. Eden provided den-building as the main event but also carried out a participatory video exercise with the children while they played in their dens.

Following the success of this event, which received local media attention, Eden was asked to deliver a similar event in the Recreation ground, a space that was continually under threat of flash floods and dominated by tennis courts. Eden's play team had an interest in setting up play activities in unusual, adventurous locations. On inspection of the site it was noted there was a steep-sided slope under cover of a canopy of trees that, at some time in its history, had been accessible via steps that had led to the top of the site. This part of the site lent itself to nets being hung from trees, rope walkways, swings, dens on hills... a whole lot of fun!



After considerable talks about risk and adventure, it was agreed Eden would set up play activities on the slope and use the event as an opportunity to demonstrate the playability of the space, and thus invite children and young people to see it as a playable space.

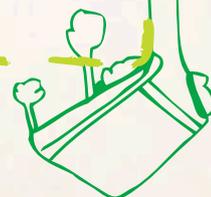


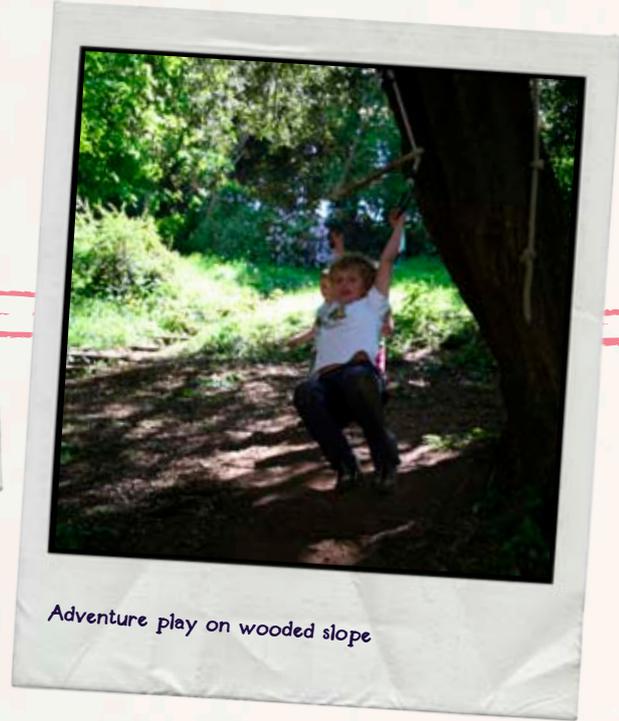
Engagement Events



Part of the reason Kingsbridge Community Action group requested Eden's involvement was to ascertain people's views about play so that they could secure funding to develop play areas both in Duncombe Park and at the Recreation Ground. Eden's role, while it involved participatory activities, was more about creating a 'wow' factor; the catalyst for conversations and dialogue. This was delivered using a festival approach that would draw the community together.

Although this was an open-ended consultation exercise, the choice of location inadvertently played an influential role in the process. The initial plan for the recreation ground was to develop a play-park for young children where all play experiences would take place on a flat grass area in front of the tennis courts. However, our activities on the slope proved so popular that children and adults immediately wanted playground features to be focused on this part of the site. Their requests were immediately picked up by the playground designer and resulted in play features being installed at the bottom of the slope; bits of kit and landscaping that would invite children to venture into the trees.





Adventure play on wooded slope

While Eden certainly played a part in the formal engagement activities, it was more the provision of activities that inspired the children's desires. Creative approaches in the use of space, with the courage and conviction to test ideas, are the influencing factors in this process. Interestingly, these are the very elements you cannot always plan for. Engagement is an experiment. It's supposed to be that way; because once you have a formula it suddenly no longer works in all situations. That's the point really, participation works in context. It's like a memorable meal out; memorable not just for the food, but for the location, the company, the conversation, the ambience, the music, the occasion, and even the weather. In the context of this case study, place was the influencing factor, the magic ingredient, we just took advantage of it; we added a bit of excitement and left the players to their own imaginations.

Techniques



Animation of spaces
Festival approach
Courage, conviction and a little inspiration

Key concepts



-  Make use of spaces, especially those that have a little magic about them.
-  Have conviction in your beliefs and act with enterprise and inspiration - creativity really is the spice of life.
-  Know when to let go of the stick - participatory activities can sometime take on a life of their own; trust in the process.
-  Let your actions be the influencing factor; you might not even have to open your mouth.