

## A Culture without play!

### Shropshire Playing Fields Association

On the 8<sup>th</sup> May 2019 Shropshire Playing Fields Association represented by their Secretary David Kilby were invited to a discussion regard the cultural strategy at the Shirehall Offices with Clare Featherstone the Leisure and Tourism Manager and Sue Finnegan Head of Culture, Leisure and Tourism at Shropshire Council.

As part of the discussion SPFA championed the value, benefits and importance of play in our local communities putting forward the viewpoint that play due to its innate qualities, underpins all cultural activities, therefore would be of critical importance in any future cultural strategy that Shropshire Council might at that time be proposing.

At the end of the discussion Dave Kilby provided Clare Featherstone and Sue Finnigan with a draft copy of SPFAs 'Freedom to Move Strategy' document to help demonstrate how **play** could be integrated with culture in our local communities, the specific example we used being to integrate cycling through the use of play and enterprise zones across Shropshire, in order to increase levels of physical activity in society and affect positive use of our rural countryside and outdoor public spaces.

As an Association Shropshire Playing Fields Association were disappointed to see that the proposed Cultural Strategy has excluded the word 'play' and also excluded mention of the discussion between the **Shropshire Playing Fields Association** and their officers that took place in May 2019.

### The case for play

The Dutch historian, Johan Huizinga, argued in his 1938 book *Homo Ludens* that 'play is older than culture'. Huizinga's argument is compelling in that it suggests that **play and culture are intertwined**, and he pointed to the way in which play is found across many aspects of culture in areas such as sport, music, business, law, politics and the arts. We learn about our culture through play and we also have an opportunity to be playful with regard to cultural norms and values through play. (Huizinga 1938)

**Play is recognised as a universal right of all children, as outlined in Article 31 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), which states that:** '*Children have the right to relax and play, and to join in a wide range of cultural, artistic, and other recreational activities*'.

Play contributes to the social, cultural, and economic development of society as a whole. The right to play, recreation, rest, leisure, and participation in cultural and artistic life is not only a fundamental right of every child, but its realization will bring significant individual and societal benefits.

#### Play should be included.

*Huizinga (1949 Page 46) proclaims that 'in the twin union of play and culture, play is primary, and that culture arises in the form of play..... that is, it is played from the very beginning'.*

*Freud S writing in 1922 observed that much play is motivated or driven by pleasure, therefore we engage in play for hedonistic reasons, to pleasure our senses.*

*Brown S (2009) states that 'play in its most basic form proceeds, without a complex intellectual frame work, like digestion, breathing and sleep, play is its own reward, its own reason for being, play is internally generated and is one of the most advanced methods by which the complex brain creates itself.*

*What is critical in the application of play is to take great care not to use the term 'play' in the same interchangeable manner as these terms, but instead work on the same premise put forward here, that **play is a quality experience within an activity** therefore should be understood and **applied in partnership with each activity rather than in isolation.***

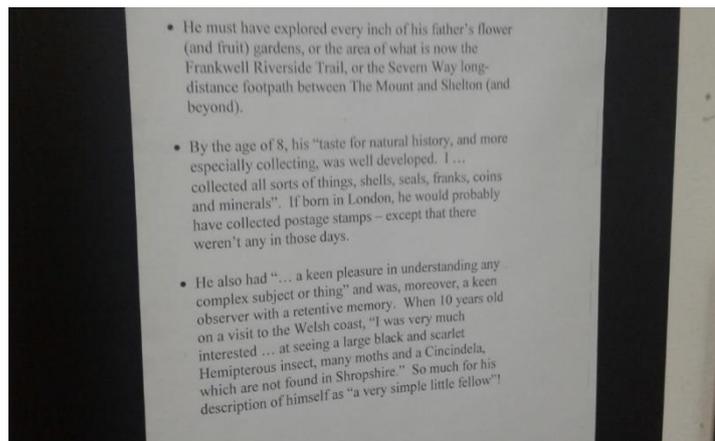
*Lord Wolfendon 1960*

*In 1960 Lord Wolfendon, published a significant defining report commissioned by the CCPR which in its opening statement provided positive rhetoric regard to the role of play, acknowledging that it has appeal to both adults and children, that it can show itself in any product of the imagination or through a range of forms which might include nature, art, craft, drama, music, sport or drama amongst others.*

*The key to play is not the activity itself in which the individual is involved, but **the actual experience**, the pleasurable feeling they are getting from doing the activity a key consideration when promoting and designing cultural activities across a wide diverse population.*

### Charles Darwin

Charles Darwin became renowned for being a collector, director and explorer throughout his lifetime emanating from his early childhood days when exploring and playing in his Shrewsbury garden.



(Extract from the Civic Society Darwin's early life exhibition at the Bear Steps Gallery, Shrewsbury February 2019)

The 'collector': Is one of eight key characteristics of play that Shropshire Playing Fields Association believe will help authors understand how 'play' could be intertwined into the Shropshire cultural strategy

The 'Organiser/Director' is another one of the eight characteristics of play demonstrated which Charles Darwin demonstrated by way of his meticulous documentation of all things he collected, both in child and adulthood.

These two key characteristics of play were allowed to flourish in Charles Darwin's childhood here in Shropshire along with his visits to the Welsh Coast.

The other six characteristics of play identified by Stuart Brown an eminent play theorist include:

- *The explorer*
- *The competitor*
- *The artist/creator*
- *The storyteller*
- *The Joker*
- *And physical activity*

(Adapted from Brown S – Play 2009 pp65-68)

### Wilfred Edward Salter Owen, (18 March 1893 – 4 November 1918)

Owen was an English poet and soldier. He was one of the leading poets of the [First World War](#). His [war poetry](#) on the horrors of [trenches](#) and [gas](#) warfare was much influenced by his mentor [Siegfried Sassoon](#)

The railway station, marks the start and end of a walk, featured in his poem 'The Send Off'.

Key to the walk's points of interest:

1. **Railway Station Forecourt**
2. **Platform 3 of the railway station**
3. **Dana Footbridge**
4. **Howard Street steps**

5. River Severn towpath and Castle Walk footbridge
6. Cherry Orchard
7. 26 Underdale Road
8. 1 Cleveland Place, Cleveland Street
9. Tankerville Street and 69 Monkmoor Road
10. Whitehall Mansion
11. Shrewsbury Abbey Gardens with memorial to Wilfred Owen
12. Shrewsbury Abbey with plaque
13. Shropshire World War One Group panel to the German prisoner-of-war camp

Born in Oswestry at the age of four Wilfred Owen Moved with his family to the Monkmoor area in Shrewsbury.

The family would walk from their home in Monkmoor to Uffington, walking along the river to catch the ferry which would take them to church on the opposite side of the River Severn. The whole cultural mix between the rural and urban environment captured the imagination and creativity of Wilfred Owens early childhood which enabled him in his young adult life to express his thoughts and experiences through his poetry.

Wilfred's creative skills were nurtured by these early days on the banks of the Severn and by expeditions on foot and by rail with his father Tom and brother Harry including his concessionary rail tickets.

#### **The Send-Off**

BY WILFRED OWEN

*Down the close, darkening lanes they sang their way  
To the siding-shed,  
And lined the train with faces grimly gay.*

*Their breasts were stuck all white with wreath and spray  
As men's are, dead.*

*Dull porters watched them, and a casual tramp  
Stood staring hard,  
Sorry to miss them from the upland camp.  
Then, unmoved, signals nodded, and a lamp  
Winked to the guard.*

*So secretly, like wrongs hushed-up, they went.  
They were not ours:  
We never heard to which front these were sent.*

*Nor there if they yet mock what women meant  
Who gave them flowers?*

*Shall they return to beatings of great bells  
In wild trainloads?  
A few, a few, too few for drums and yells,  
May creep back, silent, to still village wells  
Up half-known roads.*

*Source: Poems (1921)*

#### **Summary**

Shropshire Playing Fields Association strongly believe that play should be utilised fully in the production of the Shropshire Cultural Strategy 2021-2031 towards social intervention for the positive benefit of individuals, families, communities, cultures and from generation to generation, helping to create social cohesiveness, social bonding, social transmission and through it positive learning and evolution.

We believe that play is the 'engine' that provides the foundation from which culture can prosper, culture being the vehicle the activities through which play can travel, individuals being the drivers who choose which vehicles to drive, where to drive, when to drive and who with.

Everyone is born with the instinct to play, it is accessible to all – everyone has a play drive, play is an innate part of each individual rather than a learnt mechanism, or learnt activity, enabling each individual to interact naturally with the differing environments in which they find themselves.

17.12.20

## Agenda Item 11b Shropshire Playing Fields Correspondence

Play is motivated or driven by pleasure, therefore we engage in play for hedonistic reasons to pleasure our senses, leading to complex cognitive thinking as a result of purposeful activity, collectively producing culturally diverse communities that helps to create a sense of place, a sense of identity, a sense of purpose and a sense of belonging in each and every one of us.

Without play, cultural activities are meaningless lacking cohesion or direction often being left to flounder, or vulnerable to exploitation, at present a number of well-established institutions are suffering from this lack of purpose and direction both locally and nationally, we leave it to you the reader to determine which ones would benefit greatly from play being included and integrated in their paradigms as they move through such difficult defining times.

**Dave Kilby M.A Sport, Policy and Community Development B.A (Hons) Business Enterprise, PGCE  
Shropshire Playing Fields Association  
Secretary**

**November 2020**