



# PLAY STREETS IN HOUNSLOW

Do you want a friendlier neighbourhood, more active, happy children and regular fun on your doorstep? Play streets - where neighbours agree to temporarily close their street to through traffic - do all this and more. And in Hounslow it's easy to make it happen. Read on to find out how...

## 1 TALK TO YOUR NEIGHBOURS

- Catch a neighbour while they're putting out the rubbish or getting home from work, and see what they think
- Flyer the street and invite them to a meeting (on the street) to talk about the idea
- Do you want to do it monthly,

## 2 APPLY FOR PERMISSION

- In Hounslow you can apply online: [www.hounslow.gov.uk/info/20109/roads/1520/play\\_street](http://www.hounslow.gov.uk/info/20109/roads/1520/play_street)
- For more information call Hounslow Council  
020 8583 2405  
[ayesha.hameed@hounslow.gov.uk](mailto:ayesha.hameed@hounslow.gov.uk)
- Or visit [www.londonplay.org.uk](http://www.londonplay.org.uk)

## 3 PLAY IN THE STREET!

- Make sure everyone knows about the first session
- Organise a rota to ensure the road closure points are attended
- Enjoy meeting your neighbours
- Check out these tips for ways to make your play street even better.



Adults often worry that children will get bored if they don't provide activities or toys on their play street. But kids are usually excited about their road becoming a play space, and new play mates. They will amuse themselves, bringing out toys, bikes and things to share.

If you do decide to provide anything, keep it cheap and simple. Often the items that offer the best 'play value' are those that are open-ended and encourage children to use their imaginations. Here are a few ideas.

01 LOW COST, HIGH VALUE PLAY  
**PLAY STREET POINTERS**

**Pavement chalks**  
 No play street is complete without some chalks. Draw pictures; make a hopscotch; outline each others' bodies or shadows; play noughts and crosses; draw a target for throwing games; make a 'tightrope'; draw a finish line for scooter races; draw a train track or a chess board... the possibilities are endless.

**Bouncy children?** Yes they are, and without the need for castles! Bouncy castles can suck the life out of the rest of the street and reduce creative interaction. There are so many better options.

**Inflatable balls**  
 Blow up balls won't cause any damage but can be used for so many games - volleyball, football, catch, piggy-in-the-middle, dodge ball, target practice (with a cardboard box) and more.

**Get to know the ropes**  
 Rope is cheap and – literally – very flexible. Children can be very inventive with this most adaptable piece of play equipment. Whether for skipping, tug-o-war or tying one another up in knots, rope is a most versatile material; a basic, simple play street essential.

**Invent some games**  
 Plastic bottles filled with water can double as cones/skittles; elastics, skipping ropes, balls, chalks or small beanbags can all be used as game props.

**Recycled/waste materials**  
 Bring out old boxes, pieces of material, cardboard tubes, newspapers, plastic pots or bottles and any other unused materials you have lying around. Add a bit of parcel tape and string, and children can let their imaginations go wild - dens, spaceships, boats, robots and go karts are just some of the creations that we've seen come to life on London streets.

**Water water everywhere**  
 If you don't mind the kids getting a bit soggy, a few buckets of water and some water squirters, water bomb balloons or plastic containers will have them entertaining themselves for hours.

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Children are undoubtedly the catalyst for play streets. 'Pollinators' of communities, they bring adults together as they chalk, cycle and flit between neighbours' homes.

But play streets cannot just be about children. To thrive in the long term, they need to appeal to everyone on the street - from young professionals to older residents and everyone in between. The most successful play streets have something for everyone. How do you do that? Read on....

**Cup of tea?**

Bring a couple of chairs out onto the street with a pot of tea or coffee and some cups - and invite your neighbours to sit and have a chat while the children play. It's the simple things that often work best and being able to sit down makes people more relaxed.

**Who's got the greenest fingers?**

Planting bulbs or seedlings is a great activity to bring people - of all ages, backgrounds and cultures - together. Councils often have small pots of money to give residents for environmental projects and in some cases provide bulbs and planter boxes. Find out if yours does!

**Celebrate!**

Mark birthdays, holidays or other celebrations for a special flavour on the street. For example carol singing, Diwali lights, Easter egg hunts or an Eid feast.

**Get creative**

Bring out some art materials - clay or paint or old boxes or bits of material - and see if you have a shy Picasso in your midst.

**Exchange table**

Get neighbours to bring out unwanted items such as gardening tools, kitchen equipment or books; and do a swap.

**Have a skill swap**

Maybe one of your neighbours would be happy to babysit in return for some help in the garden or a bit of DIY. Why not use the play street as a chance to swop skills?

**Tasks for t(w)eens**

Offer older children the chance to take on responsibility. They can help out with stewarding or run games with the littlies.

**Bake Off - or just eat**

Have a barbecue on the street and invite people to bring something to put on it. Or you could all agree to bring a plate of food from your country or culture, or just something you would enjoy sharing.

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We think play streets are great - not just for children but for the whole community. The evidence available supports this.

But some people find the idea of children playing in the street worrying. In our experience, most change their minds once they see a play street in action. We know of more than one early opponent who went on to become a staunch supporter. But in the early stages of planning it can help to have some answers to common concerns and objections. Here are a few...

**But there's a park down the road!**  
We're all for visits to the park – but they often require an adult escort and the kids you meet there may not live nearby. Play streets allow children to play regularly outside their front doors – fostering independence and allowing them and their parents to build friendships with neighbours.

**I've never heard of this!**  
Legislation for play streets was first passed into English law in 1938. There were more than 700 play streets in England and Wales during the 1950s but the rise of private car ownership spelt their decline. Until now of course!

**Why should I stop driving my car?**  
Play street residents can drive in and out at any time during sessions - they are escorted at walking pace for safety.

**My street will become a magnet for unwelcome visitors**  
If anything, play streets make it more difficult for outsiders to slip past unnoticed. Some parents are always out on the street during the sessions, neighbours get to know each other better and it actually becomes easier to spot strangers and monitor their behaviour.

**Kids will think it's ok to play on the street at other times**  
Give children - and their parents - a bit of credit here! It is very clear when play street sessions are actually in progress – parents will tell their children, and the street will transform with other children, wardens and road blocks. Play streets also provide a great excuse to talk to kids about road safety.

**My car/property will get damaged**  
We promote the use of inflatable balls and other toys which will not damage property – and have not heard of any problems arising on streets.

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Most councils ask that a majority of your neighbours are happy for a play street to go ahead before they will agree to it. So you will need to consult with everyone on the street.

This can feel a bit daunting if you don't know many of your neighbours. But if you go with an open mind and plenty of information to hand, it is likely to be the beginning of a beautiful new relationship with your street and the people who live on it. Here are our top tips for consultation.

**First send a friendly flyer**

A brief flyer explaining what a play street is and how it will benefit your street is a great start. It should have a nice colourful photo; details of how to contact organisers; and where to go for more information. London Play has templates that you can adapt.

**Offer to meet face to face**

Invite your neighbours (via your flyer) to an informal meeting on the street to talk through ideas and plans. Be prepared - have an idea of what's involved; what the benefits of play streets are; and answers to some common concerns. All found in London Play's Guide to Play Streets.

**Visit a neighbouring play street**

If there is a play street already running nearby, approach the organisers to see if you and your neighbours can get an invite to their next session. Seeing a play street in action and chatting over a cuppa with those involved is a great way to ensure people know what they're signing up for and feel good about it too.

**Going door to door**

Most councils need evidence that you have consulted neighbours directly so you will need to collect signatures of support (or objections). Ideally pick a time which fits with your proposed play street timings; bring leaflets and a smile!

**Get a few people onside**

If you can recruit a small group of supporters to help you consult - ideally representing a cross-section of people on the street - it will help residents see that play streets are about everyone.

**Acknowledge people's concerns**

Those who have never seen a play street before can have very real fears about it. Noise, lack of access, damage to property and unwanted visitors are a few common worries. Most are based on a lack of understanding about what's involved and can be dealt with by taking time to provide more information and sometimes making small compromises on timings, frequency or simply agreeing that only soft balls will be used!



Until we achieve play street nirvana - that is, when motorists expect to find children playing in the street and drive accordingly; when children see it as their right to play in their road; and our streets have become social spaces rather than parking lots and thoroughfares - until then, play streets need committed adults to keep them going.

That can be a challenge - but is not impossible if you keep a few things in mind. Interested? Read on...

# PLAY STREET POINTERS

05 KEEPING IT GOING

### Plenty of organisers

This is important. Often it is one or two people who have the enthusiasm to start a play street and do most of the legwork in getting it up and running. But for it to work in the longer term, the pool of people prepared to flyer, steward and organise needs to be big enough that things don't grind to a halt when someone goes on holiday, moves out or just doesn't feel like it for a while.

Asking any new residents to get involved also keeps things fresh and makes them feel welcome. Email and/or social media groups can help keep people connected in between play street sessions.

### Make it appeal to everyone

Not everyone on your road will have children; some may have older children. Even those with children will see their needs and interests change as they grow. For the play street to survive in the long term, it needs to be about more than just children. Food, gardening and celebrations all have universal appeal. See Play Street Pointers 02 for ideas.

### Have a bigger annual event

Many of the longer-lived play streets have a bigger annual celebration - for example at Christmas, or a summer street barbecue party - which everyone knows about and plans to attend. The feel-good vibe goes well beyond just that day.

### Seek out other local play streets

Find and connect with other play streets in your area and support one another. Could you consider developing your neighbourhood as a child-friendly Play Quarter where children have the confidence and support to roam?

### Involve local organisations

Your local church, school, community group or even corner shop is your ally. Some local institutions have helped by storing outdoor toys; schools have a yearly influx of new play street customers and their parents to tap into; and can sometimes help with stewarding or volunteering during play street sessions.

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Lets face it, rain is part of life on our little green island. It happens, and it happens often. So why let it dampen the fun? As long as children are wearing proper wet weather gear, rain can actually add to the opportunities for creative play.

On rainy days it can help to have a few activities and props up your sleeve; so here are a few ideas to get kids outside playing - even in a deluge.

06 RAINY DAY PLAY  
**PLAY STREET POINTERS**

**Rivers of colour**

Use chalks to draw outside in the rain, watch how the rain washes them away and how different the marks look in the wet. Add food colouring or non-toxic paint to puddles and watch it spread.

**Collect and funnel**

Put out old containers of different shapes and sizes and watch which ones fill up first and talk about why. Use funnels, buckets, half tubes, plastic straws and get the kids to hold them up and make a water race. Add detergent to make big bubbles.

**Build shelters**

Bring out tarpaulins or old shower curtains – good for making waterproof dens or for playing parachute games.

**Make music!**

Get some different materials - metal baking trays, plastic bottles etc and use water to make an orchestra.

**Turn explorer**

Hunt for mini beasts: snails and worms love the rain, and with snails you can race them against one another. Plan a 'treasure' hunt - leaves, stones, sticks etc.

**Umbrella choreography**

Dancing (and singin') in the rain! Get the kids to create an umbrella dance routine and film each other.

**Puddle fun**

Jump, skip, hop, run, gallop, walk, through or over puddles – make it into a competition for who can make the biggest splash

**Make a mud kitchen or cafe**

Give the children some old pans and spoons and a pile of mud. If you're worried about cleaning up later, put a plastic sheet down or use some old baking trays.

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**LONDON PLAY**



The input of volunteers is vital to the ongoing success of a play street. Most crucially, stewards must be stationed at each closure point for the duration of the session. Some streets use a rota for this - others take a more casual approach.

Other roles for volunteers which can enhance and sustain a play street include: posting flyers; organising a tea stand; storing play equipment and signs in between sessions; running a mailing list or social media group; or providing activities. Read on to find out more....

**PLAY STREET POINTERS**  
07 RECRUITING & RETAINING VOLUNTEERS



**PLAY**  
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**Plant the seeds early**  
When you are out consulting neighbours about your proposed play street, ask anyone who seems keen for their ideas. Then invite them to help make their ideas a reality. Perhaps they have experience, skills or materials to contribute.

**Assign specific tasks**  
Got a big kettle? You can be the tea-maker! Good networker? Can you sort the mailing list? Promote ownership over tasks to make people feel invested.

**I'll do it if you will...**  
It's likely that some of your neighbours are already friends with one another or connected in some way. If one of a group volunteers, it is more likely that others will too. If you can identify and recruit connected people they'll be key allies.

**Use your first play street to recruit**  
People may be reluctant to volunteer before they know what they are getting into. Your first session should eliminate that doubt and generate lots of enthusiasm. It's a great time to get people to agree to play a part in making it happen - so talk to everyone and get their details so you can follow up before the next time.

**Plan well in advance**  
Your road closure order will apply to specific dates over a year.. Make sure you get dates in people's diaries and identify any clashes (eg holidays) early on.

**Mutual appreciation society**  
People volunteer for a reason! It could be making friends; changing the neighbourhood for the better; or just feeling useful. Acknowledge everyone's contributions and ensure they feel good.

**Spread the responsibility**  
It's better to have a larger group of volunteers to share the jobs around rather than spreading one or two people too thin. It means if someone is ill, or on holiday the session can still go on. And no one should get burn out!

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