

Councils: Get ready for resident-led play streets in 2021

Play streets as part of covid-recovery programmes

Councils are seeking ways to support a safe, positive recovery for children and communities, from the huge challenges of the covid-19 pandemic. [Research presented to SAGE](#) in November recommends the temporary pedestrianisation of streets as a safe, equitable alternative to cramped indoor socialising.¹ Play streets create extra public space. In this context, we invite local authorities to actively support play streets in 2021. [Play streets](#) are temporary street closures led by residents and therefore low-cost for councils but high impact for communities.

Why is this important now?

- **Children's well-being**

Play is essential for children's wellbeing – it's how they socialise and make sense of the world around them. It is vital for their mental health and their main form of physical exercise. These are all especially important now, as children have experienced a long period of semi-isolation and sedentary time indoors, to the detriment of their mental and physical health. The Children's Commissioner Anne Longfield and Play England have consistently called for children's outdoor play to be protected in all current and future lockdowns.

- **Community resilience and cohesion**

Communities now need support to build resilience, connection and trust again, preventing further crises of loneliness and isolation. Play streets have huge potential for emerging and healing from this time; bringing neighbours back together and giving children the chance to be active and let off steam.

- **Active travel and a shift away from car dependence**

Play streets, like School Streets (but much cheaper and resident-led), support the current local and national government focus on active travel and safe streets. They help shift attitudes and pave the way for more [permanent changes to our streets](#) which need community buy-in, such as Low Traffic Neighbourhoods. Play streets could be even used as a community engagement tool for such initiatives – do talk to us if you're interested in doing this (lucy@playingout.net)

How play streets support social distancing

Play streets are in essence simply additional safe outdoor space for children to play on their own doorstep. In this way, they are no different to a park, playground or other public space, where different households can easily distance. Play streets are for neighbours only; they are not public events and never feel crowded. Play street organisers are extremely responsible citizens and with guidance, play streets can be socially distanced and safe. For added peace of mind, have a look at our webpage [Play Streets and Covid19](#) and our [top tips for running a play street](#) at this time on our website. You are welcome to link to this page in your guidance notes.

How to get started

If your council doesn't already have a play streets application process, see our [Info for Councils page here](#) to get started, and contact lucy@playingout.net (Play Streets Development Officer) for more guidance and signposting.

If your council does already have a play streets application process:

- start the conversation about re-opening applications - send this document to colleagues
- consider how might you [promote it](#) or make it easier for residents to do?
- talk to Lucy at Playing Out- lucy@playingout.net for signposting and support

¹ See page 6 [here](#)