



Play streets Local Area Model

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What is the Local Area Model?

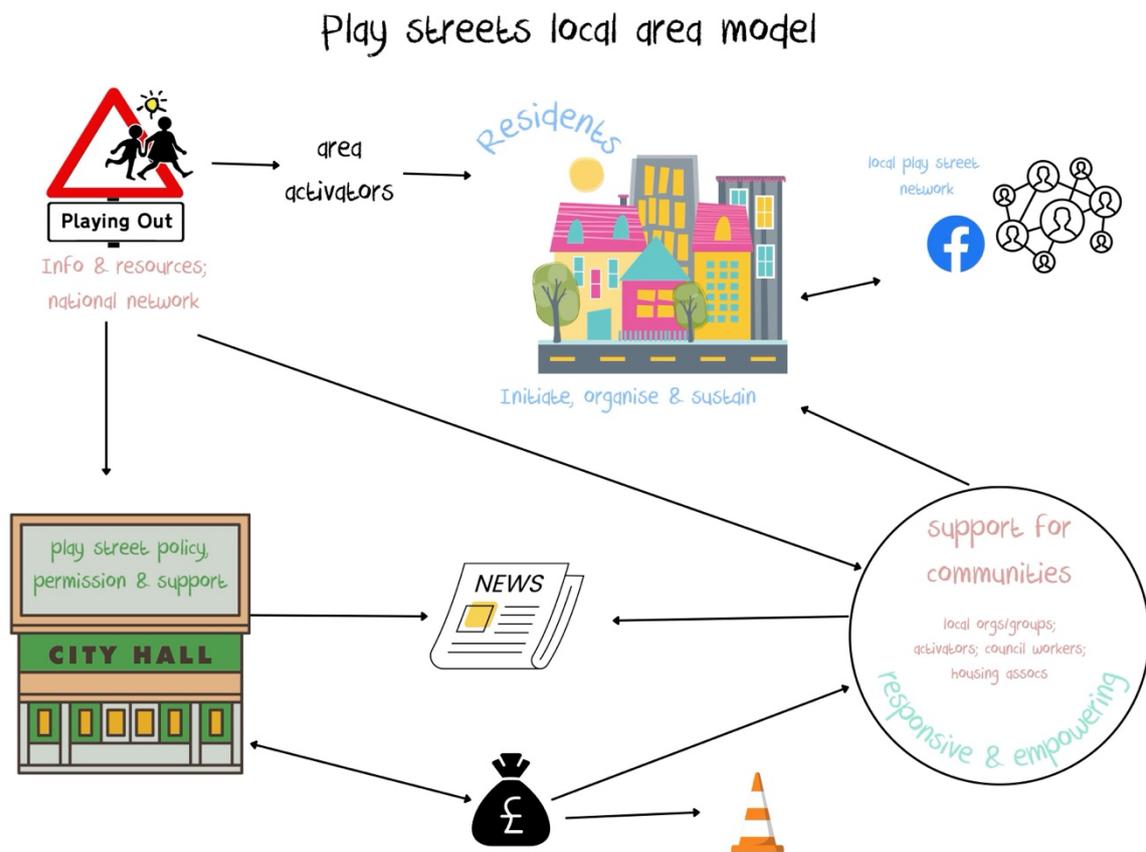
A system which creates the ideal conditions for play streets to flourish in a local area.*

This model is based on our 16 years of experience supporting play streets, directly in Bristol, and across the UK (and beyond!). We have observed the elements of a successful local play streets scheme, based on those areas which have flourished. We also know that where certain ingredients are missing, play streets don't grow beyond a few very confident street communities.

**A "local area" in this case usually means a council area but, depending on the size and nature of your council area, it might be better suited to a district (if in a two-tier council), or large neighbourhood.*

Who is the model for?

It is for anyone considering, planning, commissioning or supporting play streets in any way. This could include but not limited to regional or local authorities, councillors, officers, funders/ commissioners, local community organisations, activators (or potential activators), third sector organisations, VSCOs or other regional bodies such as Active Partnerships. This model should help anyone who needs to consider all the stakeholders/ ingredients required, and to seek to connect with others within that system and build capacity to make play streets successful.



Within each part of the model we provide specific guidance below to help those who need to dive deeper into the detail.

See below for detail and links to further guidance.

The different parts of the model

Active Residents

Residents and parents are core and crucial to play streets happening. Everything you do when setting up a play street scheme must consider the needs of those who will be initiating and setting up the play street. They do this in their own voluntary time, for enormous benefit to their community, so they must be enabled, supported and encouraged. For councils it is most important to think how can we “get out of the way” or “beat a path” for residents to do this, in the simplest way possible?

Those early play street organisers who are willing to stick their neck out and take this action on their street, are the ones you must recognise, nurture and support the most. You can learn along with them how play streets work, and what is needed to support it. If their play street succeeds, they will provide inspiration for others locally and they may support others who want to do it too. In other words, these people are gold dust! Make sure you involve them in setting everything up and get their feedback.

See all our [guidance for residents here](#).

If you are an organisation supporting play streets, it's important to familiarise yourself with this and signpost to it in your own guidance.

Local authority / council policy

The local authority (LA) is an essential ‘enabler’ of play streets, in the sense that they usually own the highway on which the play street will take place, so they need to give permission for it. Additionally, local authorities all have a remit to support public health, community, and well-being for all, including children and elderly people. As play streets have shown time and again how much they [contribute to these outcomes](#), local authorities have a strong motivation to support play streets (as demonstrated by the over 100 in the UK who already do).

The first thing an LA might do is support a trial play street. This may have been requested by a resident, or it may be that the council has decided to initiate it. Any play street should always be ‘owned’ by a resident/ street community, and the LA is in a supportive role. The long-term aim is to have a universal play street ‘policy’ / application process, so that all residents can apply for multiple closures per year, on one form.

Our [best practice for a council play street policy is here](#).

Find all our [Info for Councils](#), including [Legislation and Liability](#), [Setting up your play street scheme](#), case studies, downloadable templates and more.

Community Support

This is a crucial piece of the puzzle, as without it, play streets often won't grow beyond a few very confident streets. Residents need differing levels of support and encouragement, mostly light touch and often peer to peer works really well. All support should be responsive and empowering, not formulaic or prescriptive.

If you want to reach those communities who are facing the biggest challenges you will need to consider carefully who is best placed to offer support, ideally someone/ an organisation which already holds relationships and high levels of trust within that community.

There are different models of support around the country. In those areas which have flourished there is usually a well-placed third sector or community organisation involved, who have funding to support residents directly on the ground. If you have a good local organisation who want to support play streets, nurture and support them because they could really help unlock many more play streets, particularly in communities who face the biggest challenge. Read about the work of Youth and Community charity [The Magic Club in Blackpool here](#).

We have lots more information about [types of support and who is best placed to do this support work here](#).

For those working with communities facing the biggest challenges, we have a free downloadable toolkit: [Play streets for community development](#).

Road closure kit

Part of offering support for residents/ communities, is making sure they have easy, free access to road closure kit (cones and signs etc). Some local authorities or community workers drop kit off to streets. Others have local hubs / collection points (usually children/ community centres), which loan them out for the duration of a play street (which could be up to a few years).

We have lots more info about [road closure kit here](#).

We strongly encourage local authorities to opt for the best option for residents, which is usually light-weight, easy to store ['banner' signs](#), hung onto wheelie bins. Alternatively, [rigid cone mounted signs](#) are a second best option, as they can hopefully be tucked down the back of a sofa/ elsewhere when not in use. Heavy duty road signs used for road works are bulky and difficult to carry/ store, and not necessary for short, low-key residential closures.

Promotion of play streets locally

Before play streets have taken off in a local area, most people have never heard of them. Once parents of young children hear about them they're interested, because it meets a strong need for them and their children; to play and connect, on the doorstep.

[Read all our guidance about promotion here](#), including a downloadable comms pack.

Area activators

[Activators](#) are usually parents/ residents who want to change things for children, on their own street and beyond. They might be the first person to organise a play street in a new area, and/ or they might be lobbying the council to introduce or improve a policy, and/ or they might decide to spread the word and support other residents locally to organise play streets.

You can read our [inspiring activator stories from around the UK here](#).

Some activators have been able to become paid community workers either in a freelance capacity or working for/ creating their own community organisation. You may be in a good position to support them in this.

The Playing Out website and national network

After the first resident-led temporary play street took place in Bristol in 2009, Playing Out spent 17 years supporting and growing play streets in all kinds of ways across the UK. Although Playing Out CIC closed in March 2026, our website full of rich resources for all audiences remains fully intact, as do various peer-peer networks we set up.

For residents it is very powerful to see that they are part of a national (and international!) movement, as organising a play street can feel like sticking your neck out locally. So we encourage councils and organisations to signpost to [our resident facing resources](#) and guidance in all your communications where relevant, and avoid reinventing the wheel.

We hope that any Local Area Model will make full use of the website, guidance and [networks](#) we have made available.

Local play streets network

You may find that local play street organisers appreciate being networked together, via a Facebook or Whatsapp group, and occasional meetups. It can be very supportive to know that other parents / residents are doing the same thing locally, share tips and resources, boosting morale, sharing cones etc!

Funding – how much does it all cost?

Play streets are very low cost given the amazing benefits they create. This is because residents do the bulk of the work in their voluntary time.

Many councils worry about having the capacity to support play streets, but in reality they are mostly very easily absorbed into existing workloads.

Find below a summary of costs, and more detailed info below in each area.

Type of cost	Detail	How much
Council officer time, usually:	Set up costs	Varies from one council to the next, see detail below the table. Mostly absorbed into existing workloads.
• Public health	Coordination	
• Comms	Promotion (light touch)	
• Highways or business admin	Processing applications	
Cones and signs	Depends on types of cones/signs required and number of streets	£1k for first few streets £5k for 20 streets
Support for communities	Part time salary for a community worker/ activator, plus on-costs Materials – printing, basic play equipment	Depends on the organisation £15k per year is useful minimum

Council officer time

To support a trial should be a small amount of work/ meetings, especially if you already have a street party offer. Once you've decided to set up a universal play street offer, set up costs in the early days would involve [cross-departmental meetings](#) to create the policy. It depends on how each council works, but it should be fairly straightforward if you follow all of [our guidance](#) and you have strong political leadership. Council officers have told us that managing play streets is easily absorbed into existing workloads.

Ongoing, one team should 'own' the policy, ideally a team which has health and well-being of communities as part of its remit e.g. Public Health is the popular choice in most councils. One officer would need some time to coordinate play streets from the council perspective, organising steering group meetings, dealing with objections/ issues, ensuring that cones and signs are available and checking the council is generally doing a good job of enabling play streets. They may also coordinate evaluation and reporting and provide data/ feedback to senior leadership teams.

Once the policy is in place, you will need officer time for processing applications, usually done by Highways but sometimes outsourced to Business Admin teams. In the first couple of years play streets tend to grow quite slowly, so won't take up much time at all. Once a scheme is up and running with around 20 streets per year, estimates vary but seem to average at around 0.5 days a month.

You will need a small amount of officer time for communications, e.g. a press release each year telling residents that play streets are on offer to them, and any other council communications channels you have. We have more info about [promoting your scheme here](#). Most of the promotion is best done by community organisations/ residents.

There should also be steering group meetings (twice yearly, or one a quarter), with all relevant council teams involved: Public Health, Communities, Transport / Highways, Comms and any other teams who may be relevant e.g. Children and Young People/ Play. These meetings should involve any key residents/ activators or local community organisations.

Cones and signs

Cones and signs represent a small upfront cost, as they can be loaned out and returned/ shared between streets. To start with you may only need 3-4 kits, or your Highways team may already have some suitable kit to use.

As your scheme grows, you may need a stash of kit. It depends on what types of signage you use (see above section called "Road closure kit"), but for about 20 streets to play out, you will need around £5000 worth of cones and signs.

You can buy road closure and other play street kit from [Brightwayz here](#); this may not be the cheapest option but it is all packaged up and ready to go. Talk to your Highways team who will know where to source cheaper road closure kit.

Community support

For play streets to succeed and reach all streets beyond the most confident/ well-resourced, there needs to be funding to support communities on the ground – see above for more detail.

The funding could be for a local community organisation, freelance activator or council community worker (trained in empowerment methods). We estimate that this would cost in the region of £15,000 per year, to include a part time salary (e.g. 2 days p/w), materials (e.g. printing, basic play materials like chalk and hoops) and other basic costs like travel.

We have a template Job Description for an activator based on years of hiring them at Playing Out and a template budget / breakdown of work spreadsheet we can share.



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