



Croydon Play Streets

A step-by-step guide to organising a play street in your area

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With thanks to **London Play** and **Playing Out** for useful material, and Croydon play street organisers for photographs and help with writing this guide.

Introduction

What is a play street?

A play street is when neighbours close a residential street, perhaps on a Sunday afternoon, so that children and families can use the space to play.

Volunteers make sure that any cars that need to drive in or out drive slowly, after the children have moved out of the road.

Play streets can be a “one-off” or a regular event. Often neighbours choose to have a play street once a month.

“Older people will remember with fondness how ‘playing out in the street’ brought neighbours together and forged genuine, lasting friendships,”

Councillor Kathy Bee, cabinet member for transport and environment.

Why have a play street?

Play Streets have a number of benefits:

- Building stronger communities and promoting a real feeling of neighbourliness.
- Children playing in safe, traffic-free streets within sight of parents reassured that their little ones can be easily called.
- Improving children’s fitness and reducing childhood obesity through regular physical activity.
- Setting up and operating the play street brings together parents and other adults who, despite living in the same road, might not otherwise have the chance to meet and get to know each other.

How do you set up a play street?

Closing a road is an official process. But getting a play street is quite straightforward, if you follow the stages in this guide.

The main parts of the process are:

- checking that other neighbours are interested
- writing to everyone on your street to consult them
- applying to close the road.

The whole process, from having the idea to the first session, takes around 2-3 months.

The whole process, from having the idea to the first session, takes around three months. This is mostly due to the time it takes to consult your neighbours and get permission to close the road.

You apply for three play streets to start with, to see how they work. If these go well, you can apply to carry on with play streets, to make “playing out” a regular feature of life on your street.

You can start the process at any time of year. There are some made-up examples in the *Useful Documents* so you can see how the timings work.

Where can I get help?

The diagram on the next page is a good place to start. The rest of this guide takes you through the process, step-by-step.

- You can get advice at any stage from Croydon Council, by emailing cfp@croydon.gov.uk or calling 020 8726 6400 (extension 63371).
- The *Useful Documents* pack has lots more about the benefits of play streets, leaflets, and all the documents you will need to apply, including template letters.
- The Playing Out (www.playingout.net) and London Play (www.londonplay.org.uk) websites have lots of information about street play and why playing in streets can be good for children.
- You can also get support from other people in Croydon who have set up a play street. They have set up a group in Facebook called “Croydon Play Streets” (<https://www.facebook.com/groups/134490256908129/>).



How to Set up a Play Street

1. Chat with your neighbours

Check there is enough interest in starting a play street and agree who will do what.

2. Check your road is suitable

Contact Croydon Council to check your road is suitable, in principle, to be closed for a play street. cfp@croydon.gov.uk

3. Make some decisions

Decide when to have the play street, and who will manage the next steps.

4. Consult – write to your neighbours

Adapt the letter (in the *Useful Documents*) to consult your neighbours. Include your details and those of the Council contact. Allow at least 2 weeks for responses.

5. Plan to prevent problems

While you're waiting for responses, think about what you can do to prevent potential problems, using the risk assessment template in the *Useful Documents*.

6. Check the responses

The Council will let you know if they have received any responses.

7. Apply for trial road closures

If the responses to the consultation were positive, you can apply to close the road for 3 trial play streets, using the form in the *Useful Documents*.

8. Organise your 3 trial Play Streets

You need stewards and somewhere to store signage and equipment. You'll also need to remind your neighbours of the dates.

9. Hold your 3 trial Play Streets

Your first trial play street will generally be around 2 months after the consultation. This guide has lots of tips for making your play streets successful.

10. Apply for a regular road closure

If the trial play streets go well, apply for a regular event, perhaps monthly (using the form from in *Useful Documents*).

1. Chat with your neighbours

You need to make sure that there is enough interest in your road to get a play street going.

There needs to be a small group of people who will actively support and promote the play street.

It's useful to ask as many of your neighbours as possible for their thoughts, informally, so that you can talk through any questions or concerns.

Later on you'll need more people to help with running the play streets, so make sure you make a note of the names and contact details of anyone who is interested.

The rest of this guide explains what will need doing – think about who will do it.



2. Check your road is suitable

Roads are closed (for a set period of time) for play streets.

Some, like busy dual carriageways, can't be closed like this. The Council has to decide, and must think about safety and traffic management, as well as the views of residents.

But most residential roads could be play streets.

Croydon Council is keen to support play streets and will work with you to try and solve any problems.

Send an email to cfp@croydon.gov.uk to ask the Council if they think your road would be ok to close for a play street.



3. Make some decisions

Play streets are organised by the people who live there, so can be arranged in the way that works best for you and your street.

Once you've heard from the Council that your road is suitable, you can start to think about how you want your play street.

When?

A play street is usually a regular closure of a road for a few hours.

This might be once a week or once a month, on a week day or a weekend, for a certain period in the year or the whole year.

This is your decision but you will need to make sure you have enough volunteers and you must be clear with other residents about what you are proposing to do.

Most play streets in Croydon run once a month, for a few hours on a Sunday afternoon.

Plan time to get ready and tidy up afterwards. For example, if you would like children to play on your street from 2 – 4pm, think about applying for the road to be closed from 1.30 – 4.30pm.

If the Council agree to your play street, you must not have the road closed for longer than agreed. But you can decide to not to have a play street one day or to finish early, perhaps if the weather is bad.

Where?

The Council will need to know exactly what section of road you would like closed.

Most play streets use the whole road, and so the neighbours apply to close it from one end to another. You can describe this to the Council by telling them the roads at both ends of yours.

You might decide to just have a play street on one part of your road, perhaps if it's very long or has businesses that will need normal road access for customers. If so, the Council will need to know which part of the road you would like closed. You can describe this using junctions or street numbers.

Most play streets in Croydon run once a month, for a few hours on a Sunday afternoon.

- It would be hard to have play streets more often than once a month, as you would need a lot of volunteers.
- If you chose the same day every month (e.g. "the first Sunday of the month" or "the last Sunday of the month") it will be easier for everyone to remember.
- The Council will tell you if there are other play streets in your area so that you don't close your roads on the same days.

How?

This is also a good time to think about...

- *Who will do what and when?* Think about the dates for your consultation and application. Make sure you allow enough time between the different stages, and around holidays (e.g. Christmas). The example timelines in *Useful Documents* should help you plan.
- *What's special about your street?* There may be things that it would help to think about now, to avoid problems later. [Section 5 Plan to Prevent Problems](#) has information about how to do this.
- *Where will you store things?* There are some things you'll need for every play street. The 'road closed' signs can be quite big – think about where these can be kept safe between play streets.



4. Consult – write to your neighbours

You must write to your neighbours to explain your plans and give them the chance to say what they think.

There is an example of a consultation letter in the *Useful Documents*. You can adapt this or write your own.

Your letter must include:

- Your contact details
- Details for the Croydon Council contact
- A deadline – you must give people at least 2 weeks to respond.
- When you are planning to hold your play street

You don't need to give the letters in person or by post – you just put them through your neighbours' letter boxes.

You need to send a copy of the letter to:

- Your neighbours, and anyone that can't just use a different route if your road is closed. Think about:
 - people that live on your street
 - any businesses
 - people who use your road for access, for example to get to garages.
- Your local councillors. You can find their names and contact details on the council website: www.croydon.gov.uk/democracy/elected/allcouncillors

Responses to the consultation

You might not get any responses from your neighbours. But some people may think having a play street is a bad idea.

In the *Useful Documents* pack there is a leaflet of 'frequently asked questions' with answers to common concerns.

Listen and try to respond constructively. Remember, there may be issues you hadn't thought of – and dealing with these early on can only make your play street better.

Keep a note

The Council need to know who you gave letters to and any responses you got, when you apply to close the road.

5. Plan to prevent problems

You need to send the Council the risk assessment with your application to close the road.

There is a simple template that you can use in the *Useful Documents* pack. It's been filled with some examples.

You need to think about how they fit for your play street:

- *Do all the examples apply* – or are there any that aren't right for your street?
- *Is there anything special about your street?*
 - Is there a steep hill that children might try to race down too fast?
 - Is there waste ground that might have broken glass or other hazards?
- *Are the suggested solutions sensible for your street?*
- *If there are damage to the road which could be a hazzard, this should be reported to the Council at:*
https://my.croydon.gov.uk/Services/SLWPReporting/report.aspx?sconf=Reporting_HighwayDefect&utm_source=interaction&utm_medium=report-it&utm_campaign=potholes-road-damage. *It should also be included on your application form.*

A risk assessment is just a way to...

...think through what might go wrong

and

...what you can reasonably do to prevent anyone getting hurt.

Don't add every risk

You don't need to think about everything that might possibly happen – just those that you could reasonably expect to happen and that (if not thought about) would result in someone or something getting hurt.

Remember: as usual, parents will be responsible for their children during a play street.

A meteorite strike or a flash flood might happen, but is too unlikely to worry about for your risk assessment!

You don't need to do anything amazing for the risks you identify – just think about what would be sensible steps to take.

Make sure that all of your stewards have read the risk assessment, and had the opportunity to comment on it – as they will be putting it into practice during the play street.

Do we need insurance?

Croydon Council recommends you have insurance for your play street, but you don't have to.

You should make it very clear that parents remain responsible for their children.

The best way to make your play street safe and avoid any problems is to plan well.

Having public liability insurance may give you peace of mind, but it's good planning, not insurance that stops things going wrong.



6. Check the responses

You tell the Council about any responses you get to your letter. And the Council will tell you about any responses they receive.

Responses to the Council are confidential so we will not tell you who said what unless your neighbours have said we can.

If your neighbours are not generally in favour it is probably the wrong time to go ahead.



If there are a few objections you may decide to go ahead with the application but you should think about what you could do to resolve the concerns.

7. Apply for trial road closures

Once you've thought about the risks and the consultation responses, you can apply to close the road for three play streets.

- Fill out and sign the form (in the pack of *Useful Documents*.)
- Send it to the Council – either by post or scan and email it.
- You also need to send details of your consultation, and your risk assessment.

The Council has to follow an official process if they want to give permission to close the road – to make sure it's safe and won't cause problems. The Council have to check all the information they have, and then, if they think the road can be closed, they publish their decision and put up notices in your street.

The Council has to make sure they follow the official process exactly so that the road closure is legal.

The Council will provide four road barriers and two 'Road Closed' signs. If you need more, or fewer signs or barriers this should be indicated on your application form.

Make sure you give the Council at least 6 weeks for this stage.

8. Organise your 3 trial Play Streets

When the Council publish their decision to close your road, you need to start organising your three trial play streets.

The main things to do are:

- Recruit your volunteers
- Arrange barriers and signage (including storage)
- Gather your 'play street kit'
- Advertise your play streets.

Recruit your volunteers

- How many?

Parents are responsible for their children during a play street.

Volunteer stewards are responsible for making sure that vehicles do not enter the road except in a controlled way. They have to be clearly identifiable and visible for example, by wearing high visibility ('hi-viz') jackets and carrying whistles. There is more information about the stewards' role in section 9, [Hold your 3 trial play streets](#).

The number of stewards you need depends on your road. You will need at least one steward for every point at which a road is closed. You might want extra stewards, to make it easier to communicate (particularly if it is a long-ish road).

There needs to be a steward at all the 'road closed' points at all times during the play street. So it can be useful to have one 'spare' steward for each play street, because if a car needs to come in or out one steward will need to stay at the barrier while the other escorts the car.

You will also need people to help move children when a vehicle is parking, to make sure everything is going well and to clear up afterwards. But there should be plenty of parents around to help. And having too many stewards might make the event feel too 'official'. Play streets are about children playing freely in their road, supervised by their parents – as they would in a park or playground.

So you need to strike a balance. Once you have decided how many you need, you can sign people up for your three trial dates. You might decide to have two 'shifts' of stewards, if your play street is going to be long, but this means you need twice as many volunteers for each date.

You must have at least one steward for every 'road closed' point or your play street can't go ahead.



- **Sign-up and briefing**

A sign-up sheet for volunteers and a leaflet for stewards are included in *Useful Documents*. If the stewards agree, share their mobile numbers so that they can communicate with each other on the day.

You might want to meet all the stewards before the first play street. You should share the *Information For Stewards* (in the *Useful Documents*) and your risk assessment, so that they all understand the role and the plans you've made, to make sure the play streets are fun and safe.

Arrange barriers and signage

The Council will contact you to arrange delivery of the barriers and signs you need to close the road safely.

It is your responsibility to make sure these are erected and removed. You also need to make sure there is somewhere secure to store them between play streets.

Advertise your play streets

You will want to tell your neighbours and people who regularly park on your street that the play street is happening. You can do this with leaflets and/or posters.

Examples are included in the *Useful Documents*. If you use posters, only put these up in your road – as a play street is meant to be for your neighbours rather than the whole neighbourhood.

Gather your 'play street kit'

A play street is about children playing freely in the street. They will bring their own toys and, more importantly, their own imagination. You do not need to provide play equipment or to organise games.

If you feel the need to get things started, some chunky chinks work well.

You will need a small 'kit' for stewards to use during play streets. Gathering this into a box or bag will keep it all together.

You may want to take photos. If you get permission to share them, you could send them to the Council so that they can promote play streets to other people.

Suggestions for your play street 'kit':

- 'Hi-viz' vests/jackets
- Whistles
 - one for each steward
- *Guide for Stewards* leaflets
- Copy of your risk assessment
- Stewards' rota
- Stewards' contact details (if they have given permission to share - house /mobile numbers)
- Leaflets about play streets
- First aid kit
- Notepad and pens (to note any new volunteers' contact details)
- Bin bags (to collect any rubbish).

Other useful things are thermos flasks,

9. Hold your 3 trial play streets

On the day of your play street:

- The stewards meet
- Close the road
- Play!
- Clear up and re-open the road.

The stewards meet

About 20 minutes before the play street starts, the stewards should meet to:

- check that they all understand their role and have read the *Information for Stewards*
- get their equipment (eg road sign, hi-viz vest and whistle)
- agree how they will communicate (eg by mobile phone).

Stewards have an important role in managing any cars – talking to drivers and escorting vehicles in and out.

Occasionally, drivers may be unhappy, confused or even mildly aggressive, so it is important the stewards are capable of dealing with this and that they know how to get back-up if needed. There is information about this in the *Information for Stewards in Useful Documents*.

If there are two shifts, the first stewards are responsible for briefing their replacements and passing on any equipment such as high visibility vests and whistles.

Close the Road

Stewards then take the signs to the closure points.

On the way, it's a good idea to have a quick look at the road before the play street starts, to make sure that there is no broken glass or anything else that might hurt someone.

Try to put all of the signs in place at the same time – to avoid any cars getting stuck in the closed area.

Example timings for a play street 2pm – 4pm

Council agreed road closure 1.30 – 4.30pm.

1.40pm	Stewards meet.
1.50pm	Stewards take their signs to the road closure points (checking the road as they go).
1.55pm	Stewards put the road closed signs in place.
2 – 3.40pm	Play Street! Children play. Stewards wait by the 'road closed' signs and escort any vehicles.
3.40pm	Children tidy their toys, rubbish is cleared away.
4pm	Play street finished! When children are all off the road, stewards remove the 'road closed' signs. All equipment is safely stored away.

Make sure:

- the writing on the signs is clearly visible to approaching drivers
- you can move the signs swiftly if an emergency vehicle needs access.

Once the road is closed, the stewards should stay by the signs, except to walk cars in and out.

Play!

During the play street:

- Children play!
- Stewards stay by the 'road closed' signs – watching for cars, and children straying outside the closed area.
- If a car (or other vehicle) needs to move in or out, stewards:
 - explain to the driver that they need to travel at 'snail's pace'
 - shout 'car coming!' and/or blow a whistle
 - wait until parents have moved children out of the road
 - walk in front of the car
 - when the engine is turned off shout 'safe to play!'



If your neighbours come out to see what's happening, take the opportunity to talk to them about the play street and to get more volunteers.

Most play streets are just fun, with no problems. Rarely drivers might be irritated, but are usually fine if you explain that the play street is approved by the Council, legal and only for a short time. There is more advice for the stewards in the leaflet (in *Useful Documents*).

Parents are responsible for themselves and their children during a play street, but you have some responsibility for the event overall. So strike a balance. You, and any of the stewards, have every right to let a child or parent know if you think they are acting dangerously or disruptively.

Clear up and re-open the road

At least 20 minutes before re-opening the road:

- Tell everyone that the play street is finished and ask that they start clearing their toys and any rubbish away.
- Once everything is tidied away tell everyone to clear the road as the cars are coming back in.

You can choose to finish the play street early (eg if the weather gets bad) but you must make sure that you have the road re-opened by the time the Council agreed.

Once everyone is off the road the stewards can remove the barriers. Try to move all of the signs at the same time to avoid any cars getting stuck.

Ensure your play street kit and the signs and barriers are put away securely, ready for your next play street.

10. Apply for a regular road closure

Hopefully your first three play streets go brilliantly, and you will be keen to make play streets a regular part of life on your road.

You need to make another application to keep going with play streets. As before:

- Fill out and sign the application form (in the pack of *Useful Documents*) - giving the days/dates that you want to have a regular play street for up to one year
- Send the form to the Council - by post or you could scan and email it.



If you have your play street once a month, apply for your permanent play street after your *second* session.

This means (assuming your third session goes well) the Council will approve your fourth play street in time.

If your original consultation letter said that you would hold more play streets if the pilot was successful you don't need to consult again.

The Council do need to go through the same official process, which can take up to 6 weeks.

This means that you will probably have to apply for your ongoing play street before you've had all three trial sessions – to avoid having a gap between your third and fourth play streets.

Learn and share

Play streets are new to Croydon. We want to learn from your experiences so we can help other people set them up, and have children playing in their streets all over the borough.

It would be great if you could tell us:

- how your play street went
- what worked well and
- especially, what you might do differently in future.

You can contact us at cfp@croydon.gov.uk.



Croydon residents have also set up a “Croydon Play Streets” Facebook group. This is a good place to share tips with other people who have set up play streets in Croydon (or are thinking about it). (<https://www.facebook.com/groups/134490256908129/>)