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7. **INTRODUCTION**

**1.1 What is World Car Free Day?**

World Car Free Day is an international day of celebration that promotes the idea that streets should be reclaimed so that they benefit all road users equally, and that we can all help to reduce car use resulting in a happier, cleaner world.

**1.2 What is Play Streets?**

Play Streets is an opportunity for residents to apply for their street to be closed so that the space can be used for children to play safely. They help bring the community together, give children a safe exciting place to play, as well as helping to reduce pollution on your road.

Play Streets are reliant on volunteers who make sure that any drivers who need to drive in or out of the road are marshalled slowly and only once children have moved out of the road.

**1.3 What are the benefits of having a Play Street?**

There are many benefits associated with organising a Play Street but some of the benefits are:

* Allowing children to play in a safe, clean and traffic free environment.
* Building stronger communities and promoting a real feeling of neighbourliness.
* Improving children’s fitness and reducing childhood obesity through regular physical activity.
* Bringing parents, carers and other adults together who, despite living in the same road, might not otherwise have had the chance to meet and get to know each other.

**1.4 How do you set up a Play Street?**

Closing a road in Merton does require an official ‘temporary traffic regulation order’ however the application process is relatively simple if you follow the stages in this guide.

**1.5 How long does it take to set up a Play Street?**

The application process from start to finish usually takes around six to eight weeks to complete. Consultation with neighbours and the application and advertising process to produce the temporary traffic regulation order to close the road is normally what takes the most time.

1. **HOW TO ORGANISE A PLAY STREET**
	1. **Engage with your neighbours**

Find out and see if your neighbours are interested in Play Streets and if they have any reservations?

* You will 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.
* Once the decision is taken to apply for a Play Street you will need more people to help with running the day, so make sure you make a note of the names and contact details of anyone who is interested.
	1. **Check your road is suitable for a Play Street**

Contact Merton Council at network.co-ordination@merton.gov.uk stating which road you have chosen for Play Street. The Network Coordination Team will endeavour to respond within 10 working days with a response as to the suitability of the road.

(Note: Roads which have bus routes, planned works, strategic routes or special engineering difficulties may be refused)

* Roads are closed (for a set period of time) for Play Streets.
* Some roads like busy dual carriageways and high speed roads can’t be closed.
* The Council has to decide and must consider safety and traffic management, as well as the views of residents but most residential roads could be used for a Play Street.
* Merton Council is keen to support as many Play Streets as possible and will work with you to try and solve any problems.
* Send an email to network.co-ordination@merton.gov.uk to ask the Council if they think your road would be ok to close for a Play Street.
	1. **Consult with your neighbours**

Send a consultation letter to affected neighbours and residents to find out their observations, questions or queries with regards to holding a Play Street.

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

Your letter must include:

* Your contact details
* Details for the Merton Council contact
* A deadline – you must give people at least 2 weeks to respond.
* When you are planning to hold your Play Street
* You will also need to send a copy of the consultation letter to:
* People that live on your street
* Any affected 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: <https://democracy.merton.gov.uk/mgFindMember.aspx>
	1. **Risk Assessment**

While you are waiting for your neighbour’s consultation responses, start planning your day; start to think about how to prevent potential problems on the day of the event.

We believe that Play Streets are an important part of improving the quality of life for residents, promoting good mental health and reducing social isolation. The risk of Street Party enabling virus transmission needs to be balanced against these benefits.

We continue to support applications for Play Streets that can be managed appropriately with due regard to the additional risks and obligations that Coronavirus presents.

Play Street organisers need to be aware of the latest government guidance and ensure they have sufficient experience and capacity to ensure they are followed.

You will be required to complete a Coronavirus Risk Assessment following your initial application. A template can be found at Merton’s Play Street webpage with examples of risks to be considered.

See [(COVID-19) Coronavirus restrictions: what you can and cannot do - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/covid-19-coronavirus-restrictions-what-you-can-and-cannot-do?gclid=EAIaIQobChMIjLXf4qmc8QIVCZntCh1S6wtdEAAYASAAEgIca_D_BwE)

For the general risk assessment, you need to consider:

* Is there anything special about your street?
* Is there a steep hill that children might try to race down too fast?
* Is there a blind bend?
* Is there waste ground that might have broken glass or other hazards?

Note: Are the suggested solutions sensible for your street?

* 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 getting hurt or something getting damaged.
* You don’t need to do anything amazing for the risks you identify; just think about what would be sensible steps to take to address the issue.
* 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.

**2.5 Do we need insurance?**

Merton Council recommends you have public liability insurance for your Play Street.

* You should make it very clear that parents remain responsible for their children.
* Having public liability insurance may give you peace of mind, but it’s good planning, not insurance that stops things going wrong.
* Public liability insurance is relatively cheap
	1. **Check your neighbours responses**

Any questions or queries raised as part of the consultation should be responded to in order to ensure the event goes ahead safely and without hindrance.

Responses to the consultation should consider:

* You might not get any responses from your neighbours but some people may think having a Play Street is a bad idea.
* On Merton’s Play Street webpage 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 had not thought of and dealing with these early on can only make your Play Street better.
* Keep a note -The Council may need to know who you gave letters to and any responses you got, when you apply to close the road.
	1. **Apply for ‘Traffic Order**’

Once the consultation exercise has been completed and Merton Council is satisfied that adequate stakeholder engagement has been performed, Merton can start to prepare the traffic order.

* The Council has to follow an official process if they want to give permission to close the road to make sure it is 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 will 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.
* Make sure you give the Council at least 6 weeks for this stage.
	1. **Organise your Play Street**

Start thinking about recruiting volunteers, what activities you intend to put on, how to make the best use of your road closure and how to make the day go by safely but most of all, how to make the day fun!

* 1. **Recruiting volunteers and how many do you need?**

Volunteers are crucial to ensuring:

* 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-vis’) jackets and carrying whistles.
* 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 road which is being closed).
* There needs to be a steward at all the ‘road closed’ points at all times during the Play Street. It can be useful to have one ‘spare’ steward for each Play Street, because if a driver 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 driver is parking, to make sure everything is going well and to clear up afterwards but, there should be plenty of parents around to help.
* 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 might decide to have two ‘shifts’ of stewards if your Play Street is going to be long. This means you might need twice as many volunteers.

**2.10 Sign up and briefing**

* 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 day of the actual event to discuss roles and tasks for the event.
* You should share the Information for Stewards and your risk assessment, so that they all understand the role and the plans you have made, to make sure the Play Streets are fun and safe.

**2.11 Arrange signage**

Ideally you will have ‘Road Closed’ signs and cones at each entry/exit point for your closure. There will typically be two such points; one at each end of the road. Merton Council have a small supply of ‘Road Closed’ signs but see also [Road Closures (streetparty.org.uk)](https://www.streetparty.org.uk/road-closures/#Road_Closure_Signs)

It is your responsibility to make sure these signs are erected and removed on completion of the Play Street.

The relevant ‘notice’ issued for the Play Street will legally allow you to close the road. This will be erected on a lamp column and on display to the general public.

**2.12 Advertise your Play Street**

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.

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.

**3. ON THE DAY TASKS**

**3.1 Holding your Play Street**

About 20 minutes before the Play Street starts, the stewards should meet to check that they all understand their roles and have read their guidance documents.

Tasks required to prepare for event will include:

* Get their equipment (eg road sign, hi-viz vest and whistle)
* Agree how they will communicate (eg by mobile phone or walkie talkie).
* 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.
* If there are two shifts, the first stewards are responsible for briefing their replacements and passing on any equipment such as high visibility vests.

**3.2 Closing the road**

At the allotted time of the closure, as stipulated on the ‘temporary traffic regulation order’, 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.

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 drivers in and out.
1. **PLAY STREET TIME**

**4.1 During the Play Street:**

* Stewards stay by the ‘road closed’ signs – watching for approaching vehicles and children straying outside the closed area.
* If a driver needs to move in or out, stewards:
* explain that they need to travel at walking speed
* 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. On the odd occasion drivers might get 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.
	1. **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 will be coming back in.
* 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.

**5.0 LEARNING AND EXPERIENCES**

* We want to learn from your experiences so we can help other people set Play Streets 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. Please consider showing us how the day went via Twitter #MERTONPLAYSTREET
* You can contact us at network.co-ordination@merton.gov.uk

**6.0 ASSISTANCE IN ORGANISING A PLAY STREET**

There are lots of resources available online to assist with planning your Play Street event. For ideas and additional information, please take a look at:

* [www.playingout.net](http://www.playingout.net)
* [www.londonplay.org.uk](http://www.londonplay.org.uk)
* [www.streetparty.org.uk](http://www.streetparty.org.uk)