

LONDON PLAY

Play Streets Past & Present

Brooke Road, Waltham Forest

Brooke Road is a typical road of Victorian terraced houses in E17. It's a diverse community, with a mixture of long-established families and others who have moved there more recently from other places in the UK or abroad.

A dedicated group of parents in Brooke Road have been running monthly Play Streets since 2013, following a successful trial in the autumn of 2012. The Play Streets take place on the first Sunday of every month during British Summer Time from 3pm – 5pm.

The road is closed to through traffic by resident stewards using traffic cones and temporary signs; and an Experimental Traffic Order by the London Borough of Waltham Forest. The children who live on the road come out to play while the adults chat and steward.

The group is motivated by the desire to create a space in their neighbourhood where their children can safely play outside, near their homes, with other children, without having to organise structured, closely supervised activities.



The Brooke Road reminiscence session

The Brooke Road reminiscence session was attended by a mixture of people from the road, most of whom wanted to share their diverse childhood memories and pass them onto their children to take with them into the future.

Keith grew up in Walthamstow and remembers that Brook Road used to flood once or twice a year, by as much as three feet. Flood gates were erected but these were manual, and if they weren't closed the road would often still flood, as it still does, periodically, today. Keith recalled how when he was young the kids used to paddle and chuck buckets of water at each other. Although Waltham Forest wasn't far away, it was still off limits for many children as a place to play, and after the road got too busy with cars, many of the kids played in the playground of the local school. Bikes, skipping, role play games such as Star Wars, Knock Down Ginger and Hide and Seek were all popular games.

Delia, who settled in Brooke Road from Jamaica, recalled the skipping games of her childhood. They used two ropes which they swung faster and faster. The skipper would run in and out, and they would chant: 'Room for rent apply within', or 'Salt, pepper, mustard, vinegar'.

Barry moved to Brooke Road in the early 80s. It was one of his stories, about a favourite game with an old teddy called Primo (which still exists today!), which particularly touched hearts and chimed with many people's affectionate memories of their own bears.

The children would put him in the tree, and they would dress as ambulance men. They would knock him out of the tree, they would fetch a pillow case as a stretcher, carry him inside to operate on him.



Primo rises again!

The play workers adopted Primo as a totem of childhood. On the day of their play street session, the children of Brooke Road brought out their teddies to recreate the story of 'Primo'. Like Barry had with the original Primo, they placed their teddies in a tree and bashed them out.

The playworkers recreated the skipping games from Delia from Jamaica – 'salt, pepper, mustard, vinegar' and 'room for rent'.

They also made an obstacle course. All the children brought out their bikes some had a go on the obstacle too. Stick games were played that led to load of drawing with chalk on the street.

Marble games were played on the giant manhole covers on the street.