

When play came to the forest streets

The London Borough of Waltham Forest has a population of 265,000. One of the capital's most ethnically diverse boroughs, it is also relatively young, with 22 per cent of its residents aged 15 or under. London Play's involvement began in 2008 with supporting residents to stage street parties. This sowed the seeds for change and seven years on, the borough's streets are becoming literally transformed through play. Around a dozen play streets are up and running and the council is fielding a steady stream of applications from residents wanting to launch new ones. This is the story of one borough's journey.



august: The play street journey in Waltham Forest begins with London Play supporting residents of Marten Road in Walthamstow to stage a street party. It is one of 100 events that will take place across London during our three year Big Lottery funded Street Play Project. The road is closed to traffic, bunting hung between houses and barbecues lit. With the street transformed into a social space, activities both planned and spontaneous brings neighbours together - in many cases for the first time. Go-karting, face-painting, a cake bake-off, tug-of-war and road chalking transforms and animates a space where earlier in the day, traffic had dominated.

2009

october: London Play establishes a forum of experts to advise on its Street Play Project. Waltham Forest's road safety officer is on the panel.

2010

july: The second street party in the borough is held on Pearl Road, Walthamstow, supported again by London Play.

august: London Play provides funding and support to Badlis Road residents, enabling the staging of a third Waltham Forest street party.

october: By now some Waltham Forest residents are wondering why they can't close their streets more often! Brooke Road resident Gemma Hughes approaches London Play on behalf of residents to ask for help in making play a regular activity on the street.



London Play and Gemma work closely with Waltham Forest's senior traffic engineer Dorota Kolasinska, and Chris Harrison, traffic regulations manager. Both understand and support the concept of play streets. Having received the play street request from Brooke Road residents, Chris writes to them confirming the council's 'full support' for the scheme. Chris and Dorota organise a meeting in a local church for Brooke Road residents to talk about the idea and hear from London Play. Of the 20 residents attending, two are initially against the idea because of concerns about unruly children and opportunities for criminal behaviour. But after an open discussion, their fears are allayed and it is agreed to hold a trial play street session to test the reality.

The Brooke Road trial session goes ahead shortly after the meeting. It is a successful and peaceful afternoon of what Gemma calls 'fun on the street'.



november: Gemma organises a follow-up meeting with her neighbours. Everyone is behind the idea of staging regular Sunday sessions during the summer. Chris tells Gemma that the council will install permanent play street signage: literally a sign of the council's commitment to play on the street.

april Brooke Road has its first regular play street session. It goes well despite one incident involving a motorist driving around one of stewards at speed, in defiance of being asked to drive considerately and slowly.

june London Play provides play street advice and support to residents of Nottingham Road.



december With play street sessions in Brooke Road going strong, Gemma sets up an @E17PlayStreet twitter account to inspire others and share ideas.

London Play and Play England jointly stage a '21st Century Play Streets' event at City Hall. Gemma and Chris make a joint presentation on the play street picture in Waltham Forest. Chris talks about clusters of play streets focussed in one area offering children more play street sessions. Over tea Gemma reminds Chris of his play street signage promise.



march Chris delivers on his promise! Gemma sends London Play a photo showing the new Play Street sign in place on Brooke Road.

june London Play begins a new three year project, funded by the Big Lottery's Reaching Communities programme, to work with residents and promote the development of play streets in 12 London boroughs - one of which is Waltham Forest. We are able to bolster already successful play streets in Nottingham Road and Brooke Road with a small amount of funding - for hi viz jackets, water toys, balls and other loose parts and objects to inspire play.

october Play streets are included in Waltham Forest Council's TFL funded 'Mini Holland' plan, which aims to make cycling and walking easier and more enjoyable across the borough.

december Resident demand for play streets is increasing rapidly. London Play provides advice to residents on Stoneydown and Cleveland Park Avenues. We also set up an email network of Waltham Forest play street residents so they can share experiences, learn from and support one another.



april More Waltham Forest play streets are established with London Play support on Melbourne Road and Griggs Road. Wigram Road and Pearl Road follow soon after.

may London Play starters - new recruits to the world of play work - bring additional energy to Waltham Forest's streets. Two of the starters attend play street sessions on Stoneydown Avenue, Cleveland Park Avenue and Melbourne Road to support residents. Several local councillors are also showing interest and London Play meets with Cllr Grace Williams to look at supporting the development of play streets on the Priory Road Estate.



By early summer 2015, Waltham Forest has eleven play streets up and running and at least another three in development. With as many as 30 children and 20 adults attending each session, the numbers of residents seeing the benefits - more active, happy children and friendlier, safer communities - is creeping towards a thousand. This is a borough where, Gemma says, London Play has been "essential in getting play streets going." We look forward to continuing the journey.