



A community newspaper for East Finchley run entirely by volunteers.

East Finchley pioneers safe playing out



Reclaim the streets: Bikes, games and hopscotch take over the whole of Leopold Road as it was closed on a Sunday afternoon to give families a chance to play outside in safety. The pilot project will run once a month in East Finchley through to September. Photos Monica Wells

By Ruth Anders

The sight of children playing in the street was once common as some readers will remember. Since that happy time, car numbers have exploded, vehicles speed down residential streets, and children may prefer screen time to playing outside.

In the face of these trends, East Finchley resident Kathy Batten has spent the past two years negotiating with Barnet Council to launch a pilot scheme to introduce so-called Play Streets in the borough. These are temporary but regular closures of residential roads to enable children to play out safely.

many residents were in active support. Volunteer stewards in high-vis jackets were stationed at both ends of the road and the thoroughfare itself buzzed with bikes, balls, chalk, skateboards and laughter. Lasting from 3pm to 5pm, the Play Street will be repeated on the last Sunday of each month until September when,

Kids get a chance to meet other children they might not otherwise meet, parents meet other parents, and neighbours meet neighbours. A sense of community transforms city living for young and old, and initiatives like this are to be commended and encouraged."

They made it happen

Kathy, who as Chair of the Friends of Market Place Playground is involved in the playground's planned development, told *The Archer* about the delays and frustrations she has met getting the pilot off the ground. She said: "Our wonderful Councillor Arjun Mitra supported the idea from the start, but no progress was made until another volunteer in North Finchley and I combined forces to ask Councillor Alan Schneiderman, Chair of Barnet Council's Climate and Change Committee, how we could push the pilot forward." He gave permission earlier this year, and the requisite forms were submitted and approved.

The Play Streets initiative began life in Bristol in 2009 and has since spread across the country. Find out more at londonplaystreets.org.uk and at playingout.net/about/



Their popularity is spreading across London and other towns and cities but until now Barnet has not tried the idea. Then on Sunday 26 March, Leopold Road in East Finchley, well known for its community spirit, was the scene for the first of a series of trial runs.

Positive feedback

Despite poor weather,

hopefully, it will have been proved successful and will be rolled out to other roads across Barnet.

Feedback on the first trial was overwhelmingly positive, with one Leopold Road neighbour commenting: "This isn't an alternative to parks, it's an addition, and the initiative has different but related benefits.

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