

Play streets and parked cars



Some of your neighbours who use the street to park their private cars may be worried about them being damaged during play street sessions. What can you say to them?

It is important not to dismiss your neighbours' concerns. Being sympathetic to their fears will reduce the chances of conflict and make it more likely you can agree on a solution together.

Firstly, we can say that we have rarely heard of damage being done to parked cars during play street sessions. Children are under the supervision of adult parents and carers throughout. They are also encouraged to play with soft or inflatable balls rather than heavy footballs which could cause damage; and are told to take care around vehicles.

Secondly, in the unlikely event that damage does occur, it is unlikely to go unnoticed due to the number of people on the street. So, there is no 'getting away with it' and everyone knows where everyone else lives! Parents and carers are responsible for their children, as they are in any other public space.

Clearly however, it is not possible to guarantee 100% that cars will not be damaged during a play street session. Accidents can and do happen. So you could try saying something like this:

It's very unlikely that your car will get damaged. But if you are worried, would you consider parking it elsewhere for the duration of the play street sessions?

Residents are not required to move their parked cars during a play street session. However, if someone is very worried about the possibility of damage, they may be willing to do so. It may be a minor inconvenience, but as play streets only usually only run for three hours a month, less than 0.5% of the time, this does not seem an unreasonable compromise.

Over the page are some further observations and clarifications on the role and purpose of our streets and the rights that people have over them which may be useful in your discussions with nervous car owners.

Some observations about streets: their role and purpose

1 The street is a shared public space

Streets are public spaces. They are for all the people who live there and use them, not just those who own private cars. Car owners' 'right' to park their car outside their property does not trump their neighbours' right to use the street for activities other than parking or driving cars. For a play street to go ahead, it must have a significant level of support from residents. They have an equal claim on the street and may or may not be drivers themselves. Play streets and other 'social uses' of the space additionally bring a wealth of public benefits as befitting use of a public space.

2 Children's freedom & independence is routinely compromised by cars

Most of the time it is children who must compromise their activities because of cars – retreating indoors away from dangerous traffic and having their freedom to walk independently to school or the park curtailed. Children are also most affected by pollution caused by cars. Reasonable car owners will recognise this and accept the very minor inconvenience caused by a play street. And remember, play streets do not prevent residents from accessing the street by car at any time.

3 A play street is a legally sanctioned event with majority support

Before being allowed to go ahead, all affected residents will have been consulted and given the opportunity to comment on the play street proposal. Councils will only approve a play street application if a significant level of support for the idea is demonstrated. Any objections are considered but fear of damage to cars is not sufficient reason for permission to be denied.

4 Natural surveillance increases: during and outside play street sessions

Parents and carers remain responsible for their own actions and those of their children. On a play street there plenty of adults on the street and in the unlikely event of damage being sustained to a vehicle it would be difficult for this to go unnoticed and the culprit identified. This is more than can be said of anonymous vandals outside play street sessions, whose popular pastimes may include keying panel work, breaking windows or damaging wing mirrors. But once your street becomes a play street, you are more likely to hear from your neighbours to warn you about the latter threat.

5 Play streets benefit all residents, not just children

Play streets mean more active, happy children with friends on their street. But they also create stronger connections between adults on a street, including those in households without children. We hear many stories about neighbours who have never previously met becoming friends, elderly and vulnerable people feeling less isolated, or people self-organising to make other improvements to their street. People tend to experience improved mental wellbeing and feel good about knowing their neighbours.

6 We all pay for roads and there is no such thing as 'road tax'

Vehicle Excise Duty is paid by most car owners; but it goes into a general taxation fund and the sum raised through it is not sufficient to cover government investment in road infrastructure. So all tax payers pay for roads. Further, drivers of zero emissions cars do not pay any VED. Hence the charge is actually a 'pollution' tax more than anything else.