

Sustainable St Albans

Meet Your Neighbours 2023 Review Report

It has been another great year for the Sustainable St Albans Meet Your Neighbours projects in St Albans District! The team supported over 100 separate street gatherings. They helped at least 47 streets to hold street parties, most of which were for the King's Coronation in May. 18 streets applied for short street closures for Playing Out, allowing children to play outside in their own streets while adults met and got to know one another.



Summary

The Meet Your Neighbours Projects

- We believe that strong street communities are the foundation stone for building sustainable, resilient town and city communities. The Meet Your Neighbours Projects enable residents from all backgrounds and ages to gather and connect in a safe, local space. Temporary road closures give children a large car-free space outside their home for play and healthy exercise, including learning to ride a bike or scooter and taking a first step towards independent active travel.
- [Playing Out St Albans District](#) is a project from [Sustainable St Albans](#). It supports St Albans District residents to close their own road for up to 8 short closures a year to enjoy play and neighbourly chat. Residents are informed and supported by Sustainable St Albans who also process the applications which are ultimately authorised by [St Albans District Council](#).
- [Our Street Party](#) supports Hertfordshire residents to hold street parties. It is a Hertfordshire-wide community group, supported by Oakman Inns. The St Albans District branch is also supported by Sustainable St Albans and is run by the Meet Your Neighbours team. Residents send Street Party applications directly to Hertfordshire County Council for authorisation.
- [Festive Streets](#) is a project from Sustainable St Albans that encourages neighbours to decorate the windows of their street in the wintertime.

2023 successes

It has been another great year for the Sustainable St Albans Meet Your Neighbours projects in St Albans District!

- The October 2023 survey showed that, because of street gatherings supported by us, 93% of respondents knew more people on their street and 89% felt more involved in the community in which they live. It also evidenced that our activities have a long-lived “ripple effect” - even a single street gathering positively changes a street community and leads to increased social contact, community activities and empowered active citizens.
- We supported over 100 separate street gatherings. They helped at least 47 streets to hold street parties, most of which were for the King’s Coronation in May. 18 streets were granted permission to close their streets for Playing Out sessions. This represented 72 community gatherings in 2023 for children and adults where they live.
- Following the huge success of the Festive Streets initiative in the winter of 2020 (during Covid), support was once again offered to streets that needed it in the winter of 2023.

Plans for 2024

- During 2023 we saw some streets having stalls and sharing or offering items for re-use between neighbours on streets. We intend to positively promote these kinds of activities in 2024; they will provide indirect financial benefits to residents as well as additional environmental benefits. Examples we will encourage include shares and swaps of tools, furniture, books, games, clothes, plants/seeds, food or undertaking activities such as litter-picks, leaf clearing or initiatives to encourage wildlife. We are collaborating with groups including [Wilderhood Watch](#) who support wildlife related street-based activities.
- As in 2023 there will be four rounds of application for Playing Out Streets. We will continue to run zoom information sessions and are adding some in-person information sessions.
- There are no significant royal events for street parties in 2024 so we will positively promote the [Big Lunch](#) and [Great Get Together](#) as “hooks” for street parties.

How you and your community can get involved.

The Playing Out team is supported by an Advisory Group of representatives from councils, community groups and professionals in areas such as public health and sport. If you, your organisation or community group would like to find out more about organising events on your street, supporting our project (eg through joining the Advisory Group), or partnering with us for mutual project promotion, please contact us at playingout@sustainablestalbans.org.

Sustainable St Albans

Meet Your Neighbours Project Review 2023

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1. Meet Your Neighbours Resident Activities in 2023

Playing Out Streets

- 18 streets were granted permission to close their streets for Playing Out sessions.
- This represented 72 community gatherings, totalling over 160 hours in 2023 for children and adults where they live.
- A total of 37 streets in the district have now been supported to apply for Playing Out and kitted out since 2019.
- 96% of St Albans District resident responders to the national Playing Out survey in October 2023 said that more than 10 children attended each session, with 33% seeing more than 20. 70% said more than 10 adults attended each session.
- Streets are actively supported by the Playing Out team from first enquiry through to first session, including help with neighbour consultation, application forms and maps, equipment and signs, and general guidance.
- Streets also receive ongoing support to re-apply as well as any other support or new equipment they need. Two renewing streets this year had completely new street organisers.

Street Parties

- Street party applications are sent to Hertfordshire County Council, so Sustainable St Albans does not see information about which streets apply, and therefore cannot measure the full impact they have.
- Road closed signs were lent to 41 streets in 2023, most of which were for the coronation. In addition, at least 6 Playing Out streets held street parties using our kit.
- 29 electronic Street Party Information Packs were sent to enquirers by email, some of which probably went on to hold street parties without borrowing road signs from Sustainable St Albans
- In summary at least 47 street parties were supported with equipment and an additional unknown number with information and ideas. For the 2023 Coronation, 25% of the Hertfordshire's Street Parties were in the St Albans District (which has 12% of the county's population).
- For a photo collage of St Albans District street parties supported by Our Street Party, please visit www.ourstreetparty.org/stalbans.

Festive Streets

- Our Festive Streets Project encourages streets to decorate windows, sustainably, in the wintertime, often around Christmas, as a community activity within, and for the general enjoyment of, the local neighbourhood.
- Following the huge success of the project in the winter of 2020 (during Covid), the initiative has continued with support offered to streets that needed it in the winter of 2023.
- 18 residents requested an information pack for their street. There are no statistics available as to how many streets across the district took part in 2023.

2. Impact of Meet Your Neighbours initiatives in 2023.

The Meet Your Neighbours initiatives are unique in the district in providing free accessible street-based activities which are inclusive – they bring together all cultures, abilities and ages and often benefit the most vulnerable, particularly the elderly, lonely, isolated, or ill. The regular neighbourly contact results in support networks being built and in human beings who live near each other caring about each other and the place they live.

27 residents from St Albans District responded to the national Playing Out survey in October 2023. Data was totally anonymised but gave us some useful statistics and anecdotes about the impact of the Playing Out St Albans District project. We would assert that many of the impacts listed below would also be found to have occurred as a result of our other Meet Your Neighbours projects.

Impact – Children’s Health and Wellbeing

- In terms of skills, 74% agreed partaking children had learnt or improved skills in scooting/roller skating/skateboarding and 67% agreed they had learnt or improved in cycling.
- 63% agreed that Playing Out has positively impacted on the partaking children’s physical health.
- 81% agreed that Playing Out has positively impacted on the partaking children’s social confidence.

Impact – Increased involvement in local community and sense of belonging

Due to Playing Out sessions...

I know more people on my street	93%
My street feels like a friendlier, safer place to live	89%
Children on my street have made new friends	70%
I feel like I belong more in my neighbourhood	85%
I feel more involved in the community in which I live	89%

Impact – Increase in Neighbourly Social Contact

78% agreed that play street sessions on their street had led to neighbours having more social contact (outside of the play street itself).

Quotes from survey:

- *“It’s sparked a few ideas for other play sessions, Christmas drinks etc.”*
- *“More sharing of resources.”*
- *“We have a lively WhatsApp now. “*
- *“People know more of their neighbours and friendships have developed.”*
- *“As a result of the sessions, I know other local parents enough to stop and have a chat when we pass them in the street / in town which is really lovely and helps us feel more settled here in our community.”*
- *“We’ve now got a street WhatsApp group and have organised a number of playdates for the children at neighbours’ houses, given the stronger friendships made. Also great for the adults!”*
- *“The elderly people go on to have tea after playing out. “*

Impact – Increased involvement in other community activities and campaigns

41% said play street sessions had led to them or their neighbours getting involved in other community activities, groups, or campaigns. Quotes from survey include:

- *“Neighbourhood watch.”*
- *“Local plan discussions.”*
- *“Charity activities.”*
- *“Became a charity trustee. “*
- *“Street WhatsApp group has been used to discuss local planning issue re 55 new houses proposed further down the road.”*
- *“Safe streets initiative.”*
- *“Hedgehog highway.”*
- *“General support for local initiatives.”*
- *“Playing Out has made the neighbours more aware of the problem of speeding on our road and has prompted several residents to take action to address this issue. “*

Impact – Memorable and enjoyable things from Playing Out sessions.

Quotes from the survey in response to the question “What was the most memorable or enjoyable thing(s) that happened during a play street session?”.

- *“Sharing lovely cakes and drinks. Meeting new families [...] so delighted to get to know many people on their street in one afternoon. “*
- *“Seeing the children having fun.”*
- *“Just seeing loads of kids out playing. People from some neighbouring streets coming.”*
- *“Seeing people get to know each other generally and enjoying themselves.”*
- *“Community spirit.”*
- *“Watching my children develop confidence riding and scooting.”*
- *“Meeting new neighbours.”*
- *“Seeing kids of all ages on our road interacting. The older ones helping the littles, and just seeing neighbours come together like family.”*
- *“Children of all ages doing races together.”*
- *“The kids love the street races, marking out a start and finish line in chalk. They also love the chalk pavement drawing. The adults love the coffee and cake!”*
- *“All the children wanting a ‘group’ photo at the end of one of the sessions, so they could have a picture of all their new friends.”*
- *“A neighbour bringing out a box of apples from their tree and everyone enjoying them together. “*
- *“Our Christmas Playing Out, neighbours turned on their lights & decorations and we all wore Christmas hats!”*
- *“Older people volunteering, even though they don’t have small children.”*
- *“I love it all! Halloween Playing Out was the best.”*
- *“Just the fun and laughter of the children.”*
- *“Children selling lemonade, making lavender bags, playing with large skipping rope, adults joining in games.”*
- *“A child with a serious illness coming out to play.”*

3. Meet Your Neighbours Project activities.

Local Collaboration

We have built relationships with other local community groups, local charities, local police, residents’ associations, faith groups, playgroups, children’s centres, schools, early years networks, councils, and councillors at all levels to grow and evolve the project. We have invited a selection of representatives from these groups to sit on our Advisory Group. We have particularly collaborated with hyper-local community groups who work in the areas that face the greatest challenges in our district and who work with protected groups. For example, we are invited to attend community meetings and parent fora sessions; we hold stalls at local events and playgroups, and we write for local publications recommended by these groups. Activities in 2023 included:

- stall at St Albans Cathedral Showcase 10th June with 50 other local charities
- attending a Leeanna’s Wish coffee morning at the Cottonmill Community Centre in Sopwell
- presenting the project at a City & Neighbourhoods Committee meeting at St Albans District Council chambers (attended by a number of Residents Associations from the St Albans city area)
- presenting the projects at the St Albans District Family Centre meetings - District Partnership meeting and Early Years Forum meeting
- discussions with groups such as Herts Sports Partnership and Wilderhood Watch
- participation in the St Albans District Sustainability Festival
- discussions with St Albans District Council Housing
- working with a number of local, district and county councillors.

We held our second Playing Out Advisory Group meeting in March 2023. Advisory group members include local specialists, council officers and councillors.

Meet Your Neighbours Information Sessions

We run Meet Your Neighbours information sessions to enable residents to find out how to close their road for play, socialising and getting together as a street community.

- Six Playing Out online information sessions were held in February, April, and June; a mix of day and evenings and four drop-in chat sessions were held at Cottonmill Community Centre, Harpenden Sustainability Market and The Beech House pub.
- Two Street Party online sessions were held in February – one daytime and one evening.

Playing Out and Our Street Party publicity

The Meet Your Neighbours Projects are widely promoted to encourage everyone in our district to connect with their neighbours and build stronger street communities. The projects were promoted through:

- **Paper and electronic newsletters including** St Albans District *Council Community News*, *What's On St Albans and Harpenden*, *Sandridge Neighbourhood News Winter 2022-3* (Festive streets promotion), *St Albans News* June 2023.
- **Radio interviews** with both [Environment Matters](#) and [The Parent Show](#) on Mix 92.6.
- **Playing Out leaflets delivered door-to-door** targeting individual streets recommended by local community groups or councillors.
- **Posters** including at play areas around Harpenden.
- **Mailchimp** newsletter - subscriptions number over 600; newsletters are sent approximately monthly.
- **Sustainable St Albans newsletter** – inclusion most months to their newsletter to over 1,800 subscribers.
- **Social Media** - Active on Twitter, Facebook, Instagram plus Next Door
- Facebook [@PlayingOutStAlbansDistrict](#), X (formerly Twitter) [@PlayingOutStA](#), Instagram [@SustainableStA](#) plus Next Door.

National Collaboration

At a national level,

- we actively engaged with Playing Out's Community of Learning group throughout the year - which particularly focuses on sharing experiences of working with communities facing greater challenges
- we participated in the national [Playing Out](#) Activators' Day in Bristol in October.

Meet Your Neighbours 2023 Funding

Project management and equipment for 2023 was funded via Sustainable St Albans by the following bodies with thanks:

- [National Lottery Community Fund](#), Awards for All funding, June 2023 to May 2024.
- [Playing Out CIC](#), Bristol, Microgrant Award, 2023,
- [Hertfordshire Community Foundation](#), 5-year St Albans Fund for the Future grant, 2020-24.

Additionally, we are very grateful for the ongoing support of [Oakman Inns](#).

- [Our Street Party's website](#) is kindly provided and maintained by Oakman Inns. [The Beech House](#) pub in St Albans (owned by Oakman Inns) offers us a venue to hold information sessions and get-together events as well as evenings for distributing and returning road signs; they kindly provide refreshments for these events.

4. Meet Your Neighbours Project looking forward.

Plans for 2024

- During 2023 we saw some streets having stalls and sharing or offering items for re-use between neighbours on streets. We intend to positively promote these kinds of activities in 2024; they will provide indirect financial benefits to residents as well as additional environmental benefits. Examples we will encourage include shares and swaps of tools, furniture, books, games, clothes, plants/seeds, food or undertaking activities such as litter-picks, leaf clearing or initiatives to encourage wildlife. We are collaborating with groups including [Wilderhood Watch](#) who support wildlife related street-based community activities.
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Lesley Flowers, Trustee, Sustainable St Albans

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Meet Your Neighbours Projects

<https://sustainablestalbans.org/meet-your-neighbours/>

14 January 2024