

Background information

- Existing laws allow some UK residential roads to be closed to through traffic between certain hours. This means that, while residents are able to use their cars to drive on and off their streets, no other traffic is allowed to drive down these streets. This makes it possible to create 'open streets' for play schemes and for public events such as street parties.
- The proposal here is to increase the number of 'open streets', especially on Sundays. This would follow the example of Colombia, which closes certain roads to traffic **every Sunday**, so that public activities can take place on them.

Document 1

Close roads on Sundays for 'open street' activities?

'Open street' schemes began almost 40 years ago in the South American Colombian city of Bogotá. A 70-mile route of main roads running through the heart of the city is closed to all cars every Sunday and public holiday, to open up streets for the public to become healthier through exercising, training and socialising. A third of the population, about 2 million, take part each week on foot, bikes and roller skates and in wheelchairs. Other countries, including the USA, Australia and New Zealand, have successfully adopted similar practices where they are sometimes called 'Sunday Streets'.



In Bogotá stages are set up for musicians and instructors to inspire people to take part in activities such as mass public aerobic classes.

Following discussions with Colombia, the

UK public health minister has proposed 'open streets' in the UK, explaining, "On Sundays, the Colombians close certain roads to traffic so that everybody can play in them. This is an outstanding idea. Before UK voters e-mail to complain about their road being closed, I should say that I accept that this proposal would not work everywhere. It could, however, work in some places. We have to encourage more people to want to lose weight and to stay at a healthy weight." She quoted the latest Department of Health figures, which showed that in England 61% of adults, and even 28% of children aged between two and ten, were obese. The Department of Health subsequently announced that closing residential roads to traffic as part of anti-obesity moves "would be something for local councils to consider."

The context of the proposal was reducing obesity, but opening residential streets for play and community events can also bring many social benefits, like networking, since neighbours meet and get to know one another. This is an important issue because the General Household Survey has reported that 20% of people have neither a satisfactory friendship network nor a satisfactory relatives network. The **Deputy Prime Minister** has claimed, "Every parent understands the importance of a secure environment for their children and the need for places where different generations can meet, binding the community together. If you ask adults if they used to play near their homes as children, 71% will tell you they did. That compares to just 21% of children now. It has to change." Play is also a key aspect of child development. Not surprisingly an ICM poll for Play England found that almost 1 in 4 children and young people thought that traffic was the main factor that stopped them from playing outside near their homes.

Document 2

'Keep Sunday Special'

We are adding our support to the call for quieter streets on Sundays. Reducing traffic on residential roads and high streets on Sunday has the potential, amongst other things, to strengthen communities and support child health and development. Local Authorities already have powers under the Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984 to make streets into 'Play Streets' by closing roads to through traffic between certain hours to give children a valuable space to play.

The **Director of Keep Sunday Special** said, "The legal powers are there, so all that is needed is for local people to call on our councils to do it. Residents do not need to be concerned because the closures must allow for residential traffic. Sunday has traditionally been a time for families and communities in the UK."

Keep Sunday Special is an alliance of faith groups, small shopkeepers and trade unions. It campaigns for a return to the slower pace of the Great British Sunday. It claims that for personal health and wellbeing everyone needs a shared weekly day off.

Document 3

Responses to the proposal

The idea has not proved a hit with everyone. The **AA's Head of Road Safety** said, "The plan would be difficult to implement ... The car is part of life, and Sunday is part of the 24/7 society. Alternative routes would have to be provided, and there might be many battles about which streets get the traffic ban and which ones get the traffic."

A **Surrey shopkeeper** complained, "The health minister should know that obesity is caused by poor eating habits, not car use. I'm not a fan of encouraging children to play in the street. Apart from noise and inconvenience to pedestrians, it could lead to more road accidents."

Action group **Safe Speed** expressed concern. "We need to be responsible by teaching children to respect the roads rather than teaching them that roads are sometimes playgrounds. Closing these roads off would also require police services, which are already stretched."

A **Conservative MP** said in support of the proposal, "On the day of the fantastic royal wedding of Prince William, on Friday 29th April 2011, I went to visit a number of street parties where communities had reclaimed the streets as open spaces. While parents sat around drinking to the honour of the happy occasion, the children ran around and were extremely active. This shows the benefits of having 'open streets' on Sundays."

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