

# Enabling Play Streets in England's most deprived neighbourhoods: a Leeds case study

## What are Play Streets?

- A resident-led opportunity for children to play freely on a traffic-free street (usually their own)
- Held regularly throughout the year, managed by volunteers
- Supported by local authorities via temporary traffic orders
- Require a process of community consultation
- Started in Bristol around 2012. Active in Leeds since 2015, with about 100 active applications citywide by 2019

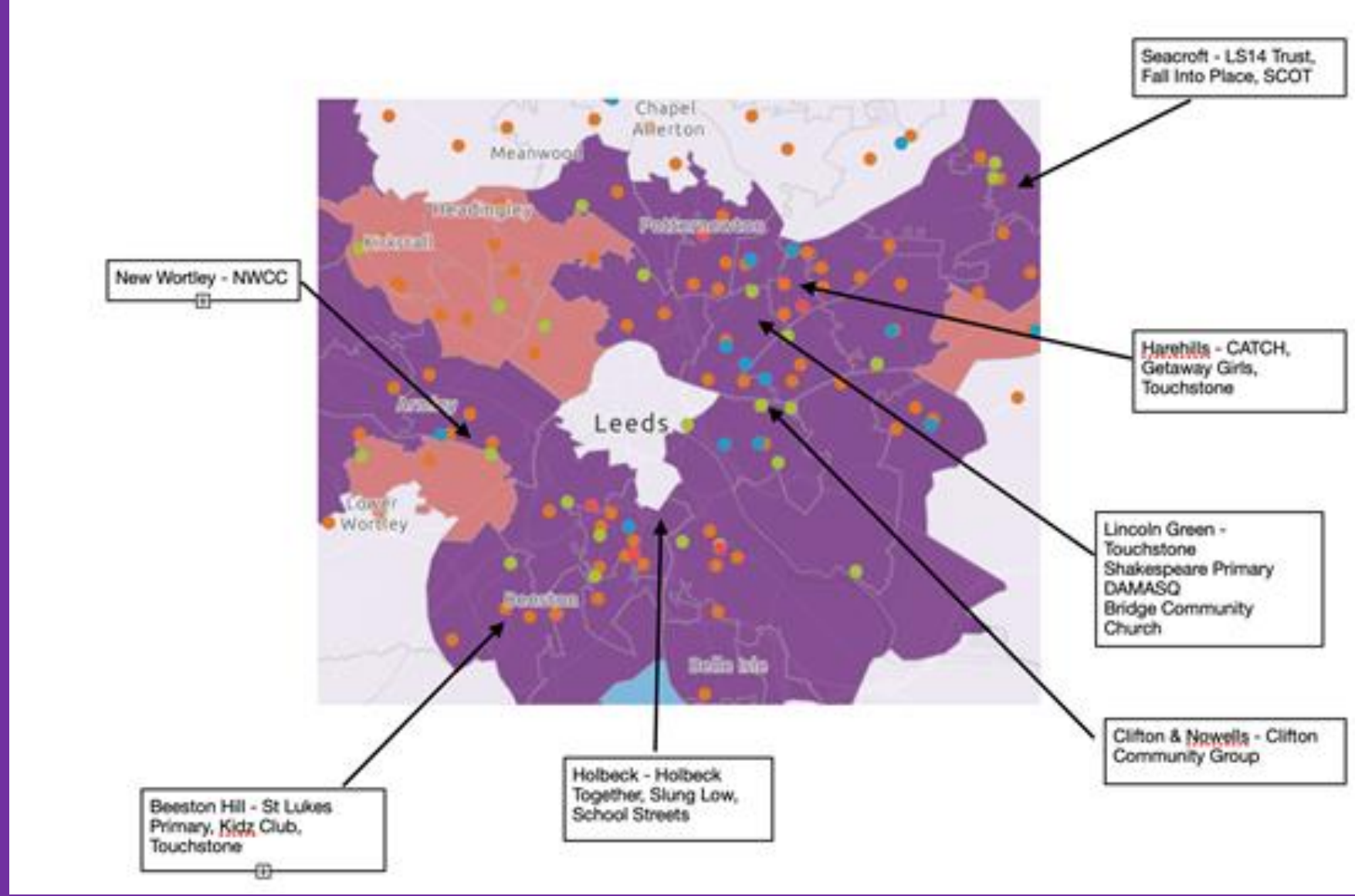


## Play Streets Enablement Project in Leeds

- Launched March 2021 using £6,500 from Better Care Fund, awarded to promote physical activity in Leeds
- Project covers Armley/New Wortley, Beeston/Holbeck, Hunslet/Riverside, Seacroft, Harehills, all 1% most deprived LSOAs
- Uses Participant Action Research (PAR) methodology to explore barriers and envisage solutions
- Led by third-sector organisation **Fall into Place**, working directly with partners in each locality
- Offers local support and a free Play Street kit box to residents who wish to set up a Play Street



## Asset-Based Approaches



An asset-mapping exercise was carried out for each area and potential partner organisations identified. Partner organisations were funded to offer support and embed the Participant Action Research component. Partners had strong, trusting relationships with local families.

## Benefits of Play Streets

- Playing Out survey report (2017)**
  - 88% of children reported learning or improving physical or social interaction skills during Play Streets
- Page et al (2017)**
  - Street play can deliver meaningful health and social benefits at scale
  - Play Streets are less likely in deprived LSOAs
- Stenning (2020)**
  - 'Strong evidence Play Streets create new & important connections between neighbours'
- Meyer et al. (2019)**
  - Systematic review shows strong evidence for increased physical activity
- Page et al. (2017)**
  - Children 5x more active during Play Streets
- Ferguson (2019)**
  - Sustainable, low-cost, universal
  - Improving children's health and wellbeing through free play
  - Active citizenship/community connect
- Gill, 2017**
  - Traffic-free streets embed active travel policies, improve air quality, reduce road danger, create culture change
  - Free play enables resilience, independence, connectedness



Play Street in Lodge Lane, Beeston Hill, Leeds, summer 2021

**Yip et al, 2016**  
Social cohesion promotes physical activity

## Participant Action Research methodology

Meetings of local residents with an interest in play and community issues, using the Look/Think/Act framework (Stringer, 1996) to reflect on issues and construct approaches to overcoming barriers. Use of 'flashcards' to quantify process development. Insight from this incorporated into overall evaluation/report.

### Look

- Barriers to Play Streets
- Needs and priorities of participants
- Issues with crime & grime, confidence to consult/apply
- Cultures around play

### Think

- What will enable Play Streets?
- Who needs to be involved?
- What else needs to change? (environment, skills, confidence)
- Capture motivations

### Act

- Led by participants
- Could include running a Play Street
- Other actions: share opportunity in networks, highlight issues to Leeds City Council

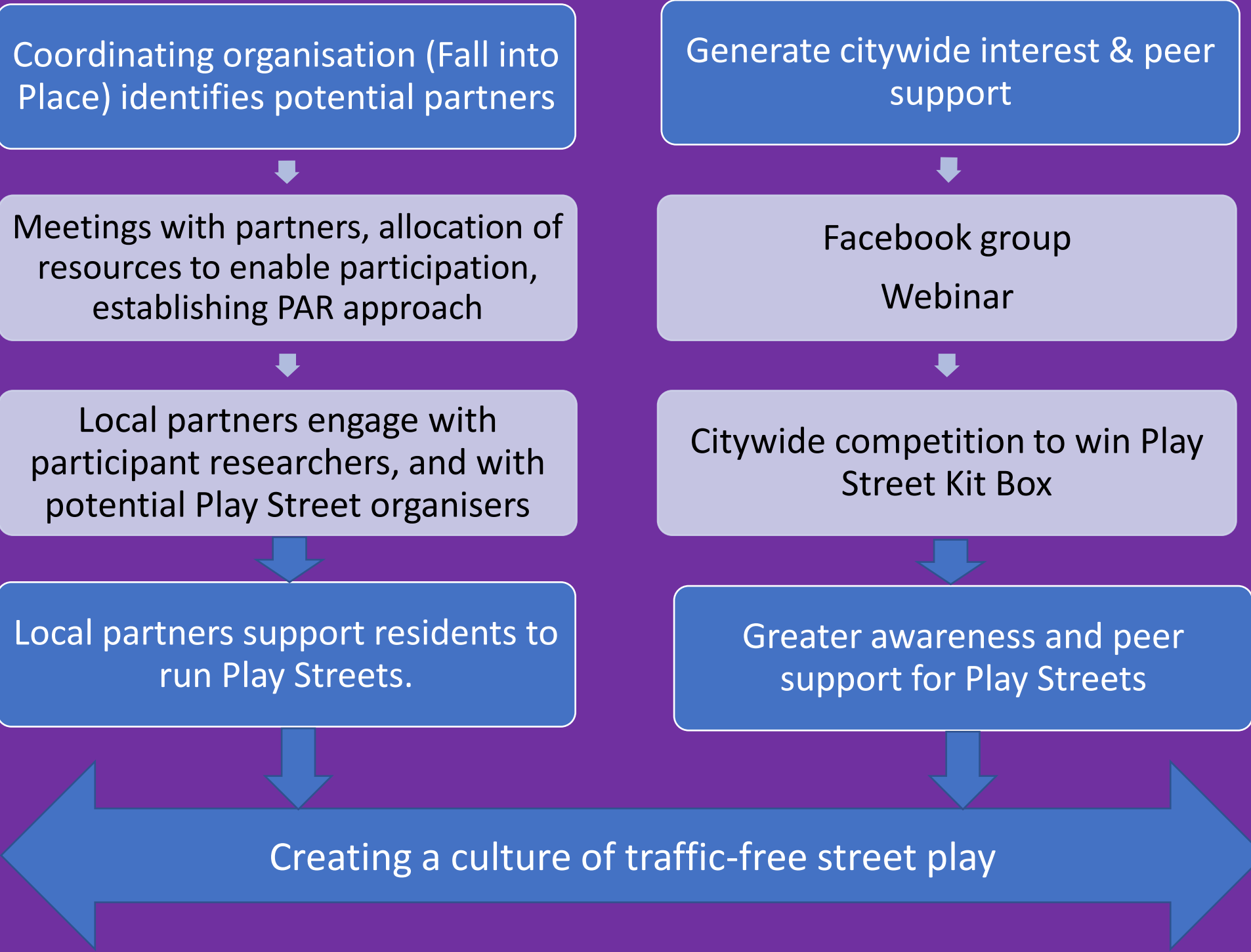
## Play Streets in areas of deprivation

- Less access to green space & greater impact of road danger = more benefit
- Impact is greater in disadvantaged areas, where children are most at risk from obesity
- Families face multiple barriers – these must be understood for Play Streets to be realistic
- Greater support is needed to facilitate street closures – consultation, application & hosting
- Success is built on trust and relationships
- Sustainability is a realistic goal – the exit strategy is built into the model



Hovingham Mount Play Street, Harehills, Leeds

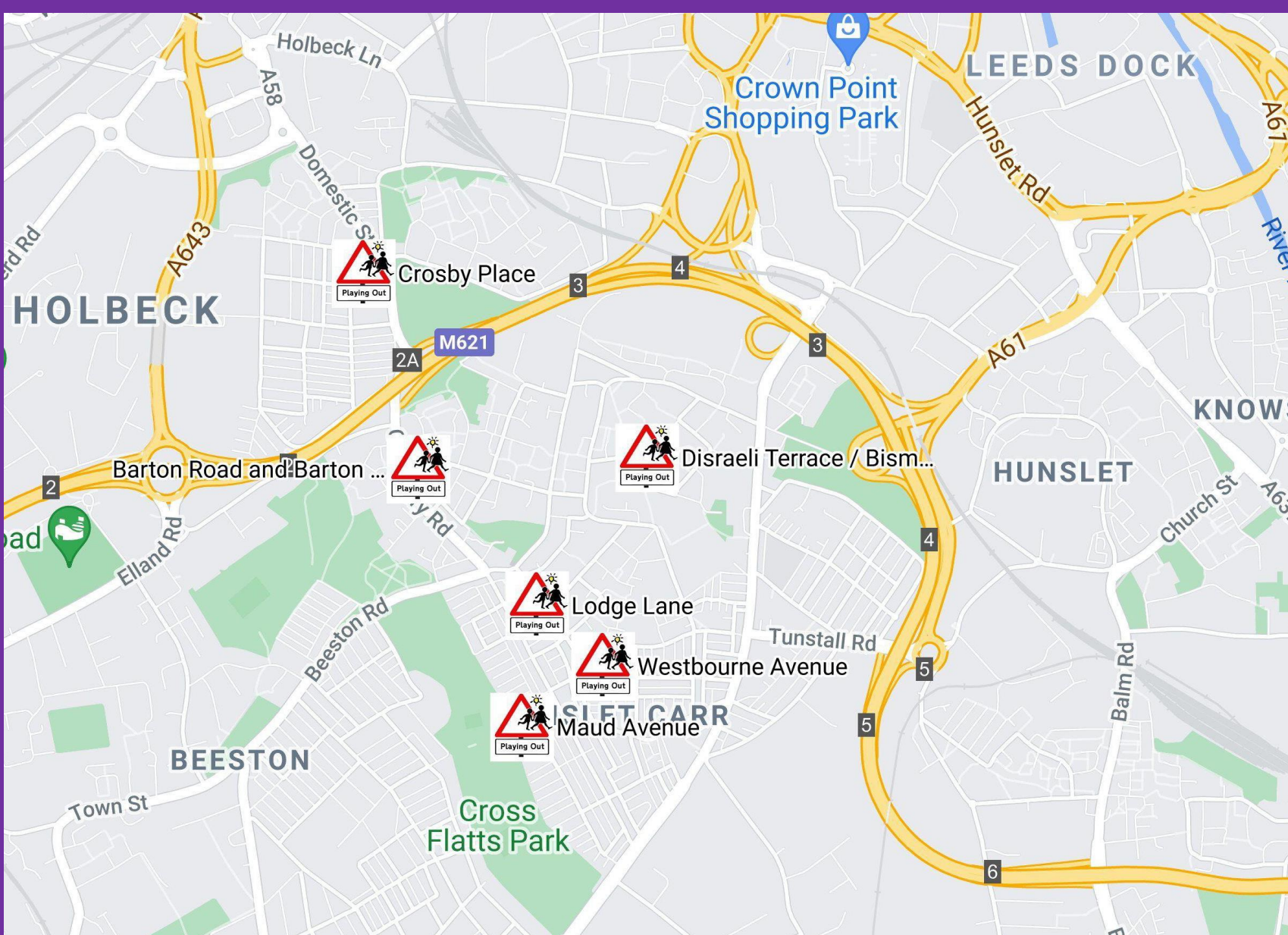
## Play Streets Enablement Project: Processes



The Play Streets Enablement Project was complemented by a citywide activation of Play Streets, which opened up additional resources such as a peer-led Facebook group. In the Enablement project itself, three approaches emerged:

- Resident-led;** partners supporting residents directly with consultation, application and stewarding Play Streets
- Partnership;** working with residents, the partner organisation managed application processes initially with a view to residents taking over leadership
- Showcasing;** starting with a 'showcase' Play Street to generate interest and engagement.

## Outcomes and Learning



By October 2021, 7 regular Play Streets were occurring in Beeston/Holbeck and Hunslet/Riverside. Two Play Streets had started in Seacroft and one in New Wortley. Prior to the project, there were no regular Play Streets across the 6 LSOA neighbourhoods. Additional funding was secured from the Holiday Activity and Food (HAF) fund to extend the project to other areas of the city. Play Streets activist Professor Alison Stenning is currently evaluating the project.

References: Page et al, 2017; Gill, 2012; Meyer et al, 2019: all hyperlinked above

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