# **Yes, Ball Games – One Council’s mission to make the borough more open to activity**

Back in 2015, Haringey Council decided it needed an action plan to tackle obesity.  A plan that brought together all the organisations across the borough that could impact on reducing the spiral towards an overweight, even obese population. This whole systems obesity plan started from an approach to embed ‘health in all policies’, systematically considering the health implications of decisions being made across the council. This led to the launch of the much needed and championed [Haringey Obesity Alliance](http://haringeyobesityalliance.com/) (HOA) which now has over 70-member organisations. Members include local schools, businesses, NHS, [Tottenham Hotspur](https://www.tottenhamhotspur.com/), local [Fire Brigade](https://www.london-fire.gov.uk/) and community and voluntary organisations, all wanting to do something as collective to show residents how serious they are about tackling this issue.

In Haringey, obesity affects 1 in 3 children about to start secondary school, along with most adults. This is of particular concern in the east of the borough where children are 2.5 times more likely to be overweight or obese than their peers in the west. Every stakeholder has pledged their own commitment to the alliance and the Council was determined to lead by example by also making a bold pledge that felt like it belonged to the residents of Haringey, and would help Haringey be a better place to live.

Over those first few months, it became clear that there was a lack of understanding on how the environment can impact the health of residents. This made for the first big, borough wide project; helping everyone understand how the public space could help residents be active together and then help create more usable space.

**More usable space**

No Ball Games are a sign of the times, old times, when estates were being developed, when rules were being put in place for acceptable, neighbourly behaviour. These signs whilst unenforceable, did, and still do, nudge people into certain behaviours. Specifically, nudging residents away from being active and interacting with each other in the spaces around their own homes, schools and workplaces.

[Haringey Council](https://www.haringey.gov.uk/), working in partnership with [Homes for Haringey](https://www.homesforharingey.org/) pledged to remove the ‘No Ball Games’ signs, and encourage residents to take ownership of the ‘green’ and ‘grey’ space around their street. This was no rush job, instead each sign is reviewed in partnership with the resident associations and local community groups, it’s assessed against the original reason it was put in place.

As of 2017, 230 signs have been reviewed impacting on 21,000 properties across the borough. So far, 131 signs have been removed and no new signs have gone up over the past 5 years.

Each signs removal is accompanied by community engagement events and health action days, they’ve led to regular food growing projects, health champions volunteering to run activities, and the now annual play weekends where streets close and they, along with local parks are animated with games designed to get people using their local patch in ways they may not have considered before.

HOA is determined to intensify efforts, now primarily focussing on the themed areas of sugar, walking and play. This has led to a bigger, more diverse programme of engagement with schools and communities closing streets to use the space for games, cycling and sports. Further support has been applied in East Haringey, where space is often severely limited on the estates, and the obesity levels are higher. In these areas, there’s work going on with resident associations to develop the space around the estates for health benefits. Homes for Haringey / teams across the council are working to support resident associations to develop activity days, promote safe outdoor play and work closer with schools to set up play streets nearby. Friends of the park groups and local community organisations have been instrumental in hosting events and building bridges between communities and their fabulous open spaces.