

Complaints about football and ball games

Every spring and summer there is a rise in complaints about children playing ball games in public places.

Are ball games a problem?

Ball games are fun for young people. But they can disturb and frustrate others and cause friction in neighbourhoods that are usually very peaceful.

Children have the right to play as well as a need to enjoy physical exercise and interaction with other youngsters. Play is crucial to children's development, making them more social and confident members of society and it should be encouraged. But everyone has a right to be treated respectfully and to enjoy their home and know their property is safe.

Luton has some wonderful green spaces and parks where ball games can be enjoyed safely. But green spaces surrounded by houses, flats or garages are not always the best place for ball games. It is important to remember that quiet residential roads are used by cars and if a moving car has to swerve to avoid a ball or a child, the results can be serious and even fatal.

Football and other games are not antisocial behaviour. In most of the complaints we receive it is not playing ball games that is the problem, it is the way in which they are conducted. The key to tacking this conflict is to reach a compromise that satisfies everyone.

Tips for keeping the peace:

- respect the right of other residents to enjoy a peaceful and safe environment - not everyone will enjoy your game as much as you
- older children should go to the park for football matches
- if you have to play in the street, use a soft ball to prevent damage to your neighbours' fences, gardens and cars and ask before retrieving play equipment
- where possible, play outside your own house not anyone else's
- keep the noise and the ball down and do not let your game become antisocial
- don't use foul or abusive language
- take care of your own safety and that of other road users
- small grassed areas outside homes may only be suitable for younger children
- parents should check where their children are playing and ensure other residents are not disturbed
- compromise - agree with your neighbours on a time and a place for games.

Residents, spectators and passers-by please remember:

- playing ball games is not antisocial behaviour
- respect people's right to play in their own neighbourhood
- remember - parents/guardians may wish their young children to play nearby within reason, expect the noise of the children/youths playing after school, at weekends and in the evening
- it is not illegal to play football on a grassed verge or open space
- there may be only one grassed area for children to play safely in their own neighbourhood

- sometimes it is better for young people to divert their energies into playing sport rather than doing other things
- compromise - speak to your neighbours to find and agree a location to play
- open spaces are for everyone to use
- parents – check where your children are playing and ensure your children are respectful and understand the way ball games can affect others.

Action the council can take

Playing ball games is not against the law and the council will not be installing 'No ball games' signs because these are not enforceable. However, ball games deliberately and persistently played recklessly and leading to property damage can be classed as antisocial behaviour, something the council takes very seriously.

We take a neutral, balanced view on the issue of ball games and expect residents to take responsibility in their own neighbourhood and work together to reach a compromise. However, in extreme cases of deliberate nuisance, we may use our powers to intervene.

Full details, forms and advice are available from:

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