

Fight to save playground!

GLENN MCMAHON

WORLD heavyweight boxing contender, Audley Harrison took time out of his busy schedule to get behind a kids' adventure playground earmarked for closure.

The former Olympic gold medalist from Kingsbury, who will be fighting David Haye for the WBA Crown on Saturday, joined play worker, Colin Hunter, amid chaotic scenes as the children fought to get close to the star at Stonebridge Adventure Playground last week.

Audley said: "Keep the Stonebridge Adventure Playground open forever. The fight starts now."

The playground, off Hillside, Stonebridge, which Audley visited as a child, is expected to close in February after its Big Lottery funding dries up.

Mr Hunter said: "The council is allowing the adventure playground to close but they have not heard the last of this. We will be planning protests and marches."

"There are a lot disadvantaged kids in Brent and on the Stonebridge Estate and the playground is a good way to mentor them; it's safe and they can take risks here."

Brent Play Association has run the playground for 40 years for five-year-olds to late teens and is open seven days a week.

A spokesman for BPA said: "In 1988 Brent Council cut funding support to the Adventure Playground. Since this time the BPA charity has



Battle: Audley Harrison with play worker, Colin Hunter, Cllr Zaffar Van Kawala and kids at the adventure playground

kept the site going. Over the last three years funding from the Big Lottery has been used.

"The entire community now wish Brent Council to give support to keep the centre open, so it can continue its good work."

"The council did give us £200,000 in August but this was for after school and holiday activities."

Cllr Zaffar Van Kawala, Stonebridge ward, welcomed the boxer to the playground saying 'it gave a real boost to everyone' but disputed the council's responsibility.

He said: "The council has already pledged its support to BPA."

"In August 2010, the council's

Executive agreed to give BPA £200,000 to provide play services in Brent, including agreeing to pay the running and utility costs relating to BPA's use and occupation of the Stonebridge Centre for the running of play schemes.

"The site is also council owned which BPA have used for the last 30 years rent-free."

A council spokeswoman said: "The Stonebridge Adventure Playground is funded by the Big Lottery Fund until March 2011."

"To date there has been no discussion or decisions taken about how funding will be designated next year."