



#ConnectMe – Resource Pack 3

Celebrate your street – together!



Unit 6 - Getting the invitation right – how to interest your neighbours

This is where we return the Unit 1 – Getting Started and that list of things that your neighbourhood is discussing today. Now that you've used the resources here to uncover more hidden histories of your place, you'll be able to begin to map the present with the past and see where the best fit is for your place.

This will generate a range of possible options for shared activities but you might want to trial them via social networking or possible by dropping some cards into letterboxes. Here are some of the ways you can test ideas out:-

Using the “Did you know?”

One of the great ways of stimulating the interest of your neighbours is the good old “Did you know?”.

- Did you realise that from the top of our road you can see on the horizon?
- Did you know that in 1943 there was a surgical support business in your home?
- Did you know that 100 years ago a stream ran along the bottom of this road?

A note on inter-generational conversations

Plug into any green themes that you have uncovered but tie into yesteryear themes, e.g.:-

- “Jumpers for goalposts” - playing out in the street/traffic calming
- “Digging for Britain” - allotments, seed-swaps and community gardening
- “Make Do and Mend” – re- and up-cycling

These will be particularly attractive for younger families and have the added advantage that they'll appeal to older residents too.

This is where your topographical and heritage research comes in really handy. If you've been able to prepare some fun, stimulating statements to include with your invitation to get active then you're more likely to catch people's attention.

It's worth remembering though, using a heritage theme by itself won't appeal to everyone. Some people adore history, others are left cold by it. You may need to cast that theme into the present day as above for that inter-generational appeal.

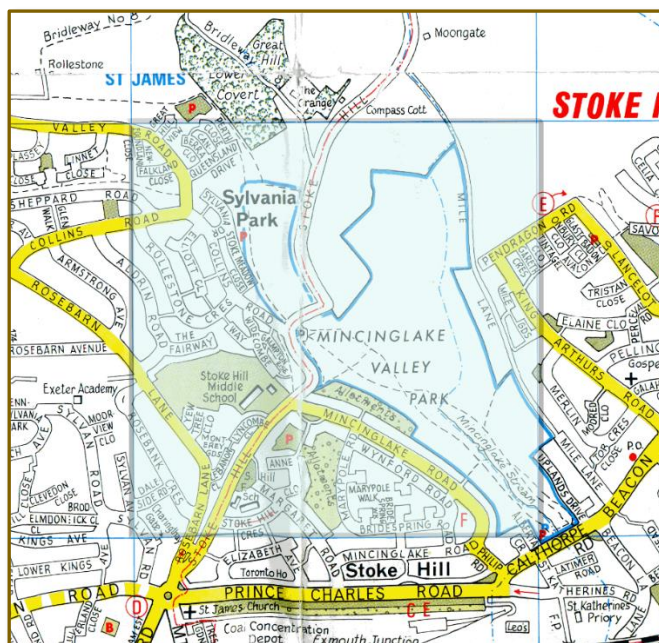
For instance, have you found a story about Digging for Britain in your newspaper search – relating to your street. Can that be used to prompt a community gardening idea. Or, is there a story about a street party or playing out in the street that can be used to prompt a temporary traffic order or a parklet idea?

By linking the past with the present you open up the opportunity to engage with your older neighbours and allow them to share what was good, and not so good, about living on the street in times gone by. This then can be used to stimulate ideas for how things could be in the future.

Questions are more inviting than answers

Alternatively you might like to try posing a question. Questions are often even more stimulating than "did you know's" because they invite ideas and discussion. They are a call to action and that's the beginning of engagement.

For example we did some investigations in the Mincinglake area of Exeter, using the resources described in previous Unit 1 – 5.



Our investigations turned up a range of interesting questions that can be used to stimulate community activity:-

Question – When was the valley used as a tip? Which housing estates were there? Who would remember what it was like?

These type of reminiscence questions can be very popular with those who just want to say “I remember when”. The trick though is to then turn the discussion back to how things are today – or indeed how they could be in the future.

Potential activity – community nature-watch and trails - a celebration of all the wildlife species that have now populated the valley.

Younger families will love the nature-watch but their understanding of what has changed there and what has been achieved will be greatly enhanced by the memories of older residents.

An invitation is always more welcome than a flyer

If you're going to pop something into people's letter boxes then consider printing on A6 card with the words “YOU ARE INVITED” prominently shown, rather than an A5 flyer.

We're all inundated with junk mail and most flyers go straight to the recycling bin. Something that looks like a genuine invitation though is more likely to be glanced at. Try to limit the information you squeeze on but include full links and contact details so they can find out more online.

“Garden Gate Gabs”

It is difficult to keep up with advice about how long the Covid19 virus might remain on paper and card. Added to this, many people are currently put off handling stuff that comes in the door.

So until we are all told that it is safe it might be better instead to use social networking. Or, alternatively, you could chalk an invitation on the pavements to some “Garden Gate Gabs” – offering up a time when you'll be out on the street, ready to have a chat over the garden gate – socially distanced of course.

The rule of 3

Most people don't respond to the first invitation they receive, nor even the second. We normally need to see a call to action in 3 different ways and at 3 different times before we consider responding. It's important that the time between invitations isn't too long, or people will forget; nor too short, or people will feel inundated. Usually around a week is a good interval.

It is also important to try and think of 3 different ways to issue that call. For instance, if you start via your street whatsapp or facebook group, make sure to follow it up with either an invitation through letterboxes or a friendly chalked message on the street. You might also like to start a pebble trail or cairn:-

You can start by leaving a trail of decorated pebbles, being very sure that they are not causing any kind of obstruction or trip hazard, with a little note inviting people to add their own. When you know people are visiting the trail or pile of pebbles then you can leave notes there – laminated or in plastic poly-pockets – to protect against the rain.



A note on pebbles in coastal areas

If you're not near the coast then the chances are pebbles are coming second-hand from garden centres but if you live near a pebbled beach you might like to skip this particular option. It is illegal to remove pebbles from some beaches and using them can stir a local negative reaction.

Every street is multi-vocal

Finally, it is important to remember that every street is "multi-vocal". That means every single individual will have a potentially different attitude to what you propose. They might also have different reasons why taking active part is difficult. For instance, is their physical mobility impaired, do they need help with signing or language interpretation. By encouraging individual conversations though, and this is usually possible if you keep to just one street, then you should be able to ask what it is that they want to see on their street **and what they need** in order to participate.