

## Agenda item 5

### For Information - Community Development Update

Author: Hannah Stopford, Community Projects Officer

This report provides a summary of the work to date in the area of Community Development and includes an update on the Neighbourhood Network and the Restorative Group, who will also be represented at the meeting

The last community development report to Town Matters was in April, and the world has been on another big journey since then. We've been able to be out and about a lot more, but still with the complications and hesitancies that the pandemic has brought about.

#### Background

We continue to work in the participative and asset-based way that has been built on from the ethos on IfF and the community development projects referenced in April's report. Our focus is to connect people, identify and mobilize assets, so that communities can build their own power and resilience.

#### Why?

- Community resilience has become ever more important in a world of stretched resources.
- There are well-researched positive impacts and health benefits of connection versus isolation.
- Well-connected communities find their own solutions – individuals are less likely to find themselves in crisis when they have a strong network around them.

#### How?

Using a strengths-based and participative approach. Top-down change is superficial and impermanent. We recognise communities have the assets, skills, and resources within them to make the changes they want to see. We support them to uncover and utilise those, whether by creating opportunities for connection, offering facilitation or skills building. This way of working often takes time but some may recognise the phrase 'go slow to go fast': once these connections are meaningfully in place, things can happen quickly. But in fact, life hasn't felt very slow at all since April.

#### Neighbourhood Network

The Organisation Building group of the resident-led Network has been committed to steering it through the changing landscape of the post-lockdown world. They had a busy summer, supporting several street parties across the network. They also engaged with Frome residents at the Picnic in the Meadow in July. There has been FTC support via the compilation of the Networker-produced content for a monthly newsletter, and the admin for meetings. They have benefited from a range of skills within the Network, with members experienced in facilitation, marketing, etc. There was a decision after the summer to upgrade the wider Network catch-ups to monthly 'Toolkit' Sessions: more specific 'how to' sessions with FTC support to organise and host. There was varying attendance with positive outcomes and a

reach beyond the usual Network attendees. The play street session saw 3 new streets skilled up and ready to run their own in early 2022. The Wild Neighbours session has spawned the 'Wild Bunch' initiative, discussed later. They were also involved in the development of the People's Budget by hosting an 'Ideas Exchange' session online for people to get support for their neighbourhood ideas.

### Street Parties

There has been a lot of hard work behind the scenes liaising with Mendip District Council in an attempt to ease the process for streets to put on events, especially those that require a road closure. We managed to cut the lead in time down to 4-6 weeks from 12; fund training in the Chapter 8 accreditation that is a requirement for their closures, as well as create a strong link with the Carnival Club in this process for resident support and make the Mayor's Grant available for streets to apply to fund their public liability insurance. We also put on support sessions and linked networkers who had gone through the process with those who were about to start providing peer support. There were 12 street parties that we know about between July and September. Some feedback from residents:

*"In a period of only six months our neighbourhood has truly become just that. Thanks to the support of the Town Council initiative, many friendships have developed, there have been instances already of people helping one another - and now we look forward to other social gatherings and other interactions in the future."*

*"Over the course of the last 18 months we have really developed as a connected neighbourhood and many people now know many more of their neighbours than they did before."*

*"It's amazing how closing the road to traffic can completely transform a place. Almost immediately after the road was closed kids (of all ages) were out on the street on scooters, bikes and roller skates."*

*"The children ran feral. Going in and out of houses like it was 1978. Hordes of them, faces painted and sugared up. 3yr olds playing with 9yr olds, all of them enjoying the freedom on playing carefree on their own street."*

*"I met many people on the street that I didn't know, and some new friendships were forged."*

*"Well, I liked the engagement, the opportunity to meet my neighbours, some of whom I had not seen before. It makes a street less lonely."*

### Play Streets

In a similar vein there has been a lot of work with Somerset County Council, who have taken even bigger steps, and have agreed to let Frome be a play street trial area, which is going to mean running a play street here will be free and easy to apply for. They have withdrawn the requirements for a first aid qualification, PLI (although still recommended) and Chapter 8 accreditation for closures without diversion. We've created templates that are easy to use for the simplified paperwork.

Alexandra Road have been the most amazing street to trial this, because theirs is one of the most complicated closures, needing 18 signs to label the diversion! The regular Sunday morning road closures have been hugely successful so far.

Alexandra Road Networker Josh Lee says:

*"It was wonderful to see children making up games together, having bike races, making chalk drawings, playing music, bringing their own toys out to share – really finding out what they want to do together in the freedom of the street. Similarly for the adults, planning and co-ordinating the event gave us a chance to spend a lot more time talking to each other and communicating rather than just saying hello as you walk past – working together as a community and a team to make the event happen has been the thing that's created friendships and long-lasting relationships."*

Josh came and took part in the November toolkit to share this story – and despite the cold weather not feeling very outdoor-play inductive, we now have a list of 4 streets who are getting their plans together for spring play streets.

### Green Spaces

There have been strong crossovers with the Wild About Trees work and communities connecting over shared green spaces. We've been supporting the Friends of Egford Park group to grow and bring in skills they need to organise themselves and put on community events and park improvements. We linked them in with Restorative Conversation group members to help with facilitation and Networker Andy Jones has been supporting the formation of a constituted group. We've also been liaising with Somerset Wildlife Trust about some specific MDC owned green spaces, supporting residents who have approached us and want to manage their shared green space differently.

More recently the land next to the Griffin pub, previously owned by SCC and managed by the LA, has been transferred to FTC and is now in the care of the community. This has been an opportunity to support the Trinity Community Group to engage over ideas for this land and grow in capacity.

### Restorative Conversations (tbc!)

Back in April this group had only just got started – connected by an introductory training session about restorative conversations, they were inspired by how the RC tools could help a person in any situation (work, family, neighbours) have tricky conversations together and navigate conflict. There is a very strong core group of about 14 who are meeting every couple of weeks to shape a meaningful offer for their community – as well as spending time together learning more about the RC tools and approach. Although it's taking time, it feels like a necessary part of this process. The group are looking to offer a 'toolkit' for tricky conversations, which might include a leaflet, workshops, and drop-in sessions for people wanting to practice.

### People's Budget

There has been a focus for the Town Vote on neighbourhood and street level projects. The Neighbourhood Network linked into the development stage, to offer support to people who had ideas or wanted inspiration. It was also an opportunity to reconnect with new streets groups or those who had been 'quiet' on the Network, and there have been some great

applications and new neighbourhood groups as a result. There will be an opportunity to continue to support these projects once funded.

### **Wild Bunch**

The Wild Neighbours Toolkit held in October sparked huge enthusiasm. The attendees were keen to meet again and to spend some energy together promoting and exploring how to 'garden for wildlife'. It's a beautifully specific and tangible goal. Subsequent meetings have included a visit to a member's 'wild garden', as well as the composting project Loop. The group have since put in a PB application for neighbourhood bird and bat boxes and are planning some events in spring for anyone interested in finding out more about gardening for wildlife. They'll be linking with the Rangers and Jo our new resilience officer who has a background in gardening for wildlife, as well as other aligned initiatives, such as Frome Hoedown and Sustainable Frome. They'll come under the organisational umbrella of Neighbourhood Network.

### **Training since April:**

- Traffic Management for Community Events
- Restorative sessions on Effective Feedback and Drama Triangles
- Facilitation for Groups
- Resident information session for Play Streets (led by Playing Out)
- Charity and Community Group Governance.

### **Numbers**

115 people signed up the NN – representing 95 groups, 26 new groups in the last 7 months.

### **What's next**

We will continue to work alongside the Neighbourhood Network, specifically to support them to become an independent organisation as well as codesigning toolkits including an asset-based community development kit. We will work in areas to develop new networks as well as support existing groups with resources, training, events, grants and neighbourhood focused projects. We will support the Wild Bunch and Restorative group to grow and build capacity. Our participative approach aims to build neighbourhoods equipped to support each other and enable grass roots activity. We expect that this approach will reduce isolation, reduce demand on statutory reactionary services, create healthy happier neighbourhoods, and build food environmental and social resilience.