



Missional Listening Proposals April 2026



SEEDS
FOR
GROWTH



CINNAMON
NETWORK

Background

In March 2025 we began a “community audit” to engage and listen to our community about local needs and hopes. This project was funded by the Church of Scotland’s “Seeds for Growth Fund” so that we could bring in The Cinnamon Network as an outside facilitator to train and support us over the project – Diane’s help was invaluable and all the team are deeply thankful for her wisdom, encouragement and training. Diane encouraged us to use the language of “missional listening” - listening to the community and listening to God – to discern where we could serve and seek the flourishing of our community, as ways to grow the Kingdom of God in our parish.

Introduction to the Proposals

Through interviews, online surveys, focus groups and wider research, our missional listening has consistently highlighted a central theme: Upper Braes is a friendly place, but many relationships remain surface-level. Beneath this, there is a clear

experience of loneliness, isolation, and fragmented community life.

At the same time, around 75% of our parish are working-age adults (those aged 16–65), and approximately 27% live in single-person households. These groups are largely underrepresented in our current ministry centres and activities. We offer many ministries for under 18s and for upper generations, but our intentional investment of time, resources and relationship-building with the local working-age population is significantly less.

There is also a growing shift in how people live—more home working, fewer informal interactions, and an increasing number of new residents through housing developments. Many people no longer naturally “bump into” others in the way they did.

Taken together, this suggests that the primary need is not simply more programmes, but more opportunities for meaningful connection.

Therefore, our proposals are shaped by four guiding principles:

- Relational over programme-based – prioritising connection, conversation, and belonging
- Low-barrier and accessible – easy to attend, with no pressure or expectations
- Every day and scalable – able to be sustained and multiplied by the church family
- With particular attention to engaging the 18–65 age range, who are currently least represented

As we have listened, we've become aware that our role as a church is to increasingly act as a host, connector, and catalyst, creating spaces where relationships can begin and grow, and where faith can be expressed naturally through presence, hospitality, and everyday relationships. We believe the ideas below form a complementary set of *Connection Pathways* — some creating initial connection, others deepening relationships, and others equipping people to live missionally in everyday life.

Idea 1 – Menopause Café

Across our community many women are navigating the physical, emotional and relational impact of menopause, often on their own (including the transitional perimenopausal stage). Despite an increasing awareness and openness to discuss this universal stage of life, it still often remains hidden, misunderstood, or unsupported.

The impact of menopause affects everyone: those going through it, and those close to them. Many women report feeling alone, anxious, or unsure about the changes happening in their bodies. Others face practical challenges in their work and home lives. Their family and friends are often unsure about how best to support them.

Creating a Menopause Café would allow our church to help meet a real and growing need within our community, including those in our church family. The café would not be a clinical or advice-led space, but a relational one—where conversation, shared experience, and mutual support are central. Over

time, it could also become a gateway into wider networks of care and friendship within the community.

Jesus regularly drew near to people at vulnerable, transitional moments in their lives, showing them compassion and restoring their dignity. Jesus calls us to carry on his work in the world; to love one another; to carry each other's burdens. We have an opportunity to do this for those affected by menopause. By providing a safe, welcoming space for men and women of all ages to gather, to share experiences, and feel heard without judgement we can be a gentle presence in the community, reflecting Christ's love and compassion.

There is an opportunity here for people to step forward and help shape a safe and welcoming space. Those with lived experience, a heart for supporting others, or a willingness to host and facilitate conversations could play a key role. Others may prefer to help through hospitality, set-up, or connecting with local organisations.

Idea 2 – Advocacy for Road Crossings

As part of the community listening exercise, families raised concerns about road safety in the local area. For example, three locations where safer crossing points might make a real difference are the entrance to Quarry Park playground, the crossroads where Quarry Brae meets Maddiston Road and Station Road by the Sainsbury's Local.

Permanent crossings at these three locations would help families reach the beautiful new playground at Quarry Park, help children get to school and nursery safely, and make it easier for everyone to enjoy the green spaces, local shops, and even get to church with confidence. These three sites could be just the beginning of something bigger for the whole Upper Braes community.

Alongside the practical goal, this initiative offers an opportunity to build relationships—bringing neighbours together around a shared concern, strengthening community voice, and creating new connections through collective action. This also

positions the church as a visible advocate for the wellbeing of the whole community.

This is an open invitation. People are warmly welcome to champion this cause, gather the community behind it, and make the case to local councillors for change. Whether you would sign a petition, write a letter, or feel called to help take this forward, all are encouraged to take part in any way they can.

"Then you will go on your way in safety, and your foot will not stumble." Proverbs 3:23

Idea 3 – Online Meeting Space

During the community listening exercise, loneliness came through as something many people experience quietly and privately. Those working from home, people who find it hard to get out, and folk who simply don't see others as often as they would like shared that this matters more than we might realise.

Upper Braes Parish Church already has a wonderful online presence, from Thursday evening prayer to a live-streamed Sunday service, and this idea would build warmly on that foundation. A relaxed online coffee catch-up, open to anyone, could offer thirty to forty-five minutes of friendly conversation with no agenda and no pressure. Church family, neighbours, and anyone who would welcome a friendly face during the week would be genuinely welcome to join. The emphasis would be on warmth, familiarity, and continuity—helping people recognise faces, build trust, and transition over time into deeper relationships, whether online or in person.

If you have a heart for helping people feel connected, this could be something to step into and bring to life. A small team of hosts and regular participants could help create a relaxed and welcoming space where people feel recognised and valued over time.

"And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching." Hebrews 10:24-25

Idea 4 - Christmas Tree-Lighting Event and Market

As mentioned, our missional listening has consistently shown that while Upper Braes is friendly, many relationships remain at a surface level. As well as loneliness and isolation, there is a lack of meaningful connection, particularly among working-age adults and one-person households who are largely underrepresented in current church activities.

So it is proposed that we run a Christmas Tree-Lighting Event and Market for people of all ages to gather in the front grounds of Brightons Ministry Centre in early December (or around the start of Advent) for a simple, welcoming neighbourhood moment—singing carols, sharing in a countdown, and lighting a community Christmas tree. Following this, people are invited indoors for hot chocolate, refreshments, and a relaxed marketplace featuring local groups and businesses.

More than a one-off event, this gathering is designed as a catalyst for connection—creating space for

neighbours to meet, talk, and begin forming relationships that can continue beyond the evening.

This event responds not simply by offering a programme, but by creating an accessible, low-pressure environment where connection can naturally grow. It provides a shared moment that draws people out of their homes and into community, particularly in a context where home working, post-Covid patterns, and new housing developments have reduced opportunities for informal interaction.

The focus of this event is on presence rather than performance: creating space for conversation, encouraging hospitality, and enabling people to move beyond “knowing of” one another to actually knowing each other. The church’s role is to host and facilitate, helping neighbours encounter one another in a warm, inclusive environment. We would look for partnerships in the local community too, by inviting stall vendors, etc.

In doing so, the event becomes more than seasonal—it acts as a starting point for deeper relationships, ongoing connection, and a more relational expression of community life across Upper Braes. We would also intentionally, yet gently, encourage simple next steps—such as invitations to future gatherings or opportunities to reconnect—so that initial conversations can grow into ongoing relationships.

Bringing this event to life will take a range of contributions. People may want to get involved in planning, music, hospitality, or welcoming on the day, while others could help build connections with local groups and businesses. This is a chance to contribute to something that helps neighbours meet and connect, if members of the congregation will step forward and take up this idea.

Idea 5 – Litter Pic(k)nics

The Litter Pic(k)nic is a simple, accessible way for our church to engage with the local community while responding directly to what we've heard through our missional listening. The idea is to meet at Brightons Ministry Centre on a Saturday morning, head out in small groups to collect litter around the local area, and then return to the church halls to share food and time together. This creates natural, low-pressure opportunities for conversation side-by-side, making it easier for relationships to form organically. It also provides a simple way for church members to invite neighbours into something shared and purposeful.

This activity builds on clear themes that emerged from our listening: people value the outdoors, take pride in their local environment, and are looking for easy, low-pressure ways to invite friends along. The Litter Pic(k)nic meets all three. It is non-strenuous, suitable for all ages, and requires minimal organisation or cost—making it an ideal entry point for wider participation.

Practically, the church already has access to essential equipment such as litter pickers and high-vis vests, and the event can be run with little to no funding, especially if refreshments are donated or supported by local businesses.

More importantly, this is about Kingdom presence. By caring for our environment, we demonstrate love for God's creation, model servant-hearted leadership, and show tangible care for our community beyond the walls of the church. It is a visible, relational expression of faith that invites conversation, builds connection, and opens natural opportunities for invitation and belonging.

This is a simple way for anyone to take part. Some may come along and bring a neighbour, others might help organise routes or provide refreshments. For those willing, there is also scope to take a lead in helping this become a regular rhythm.

Idea 6 – Men’s Wellbeing Space

Over the past year, our missional listening has identified a clear gap in provision for men’s wellbeing across Upper Braes. A recurring theme was the hidden nature of mental health challenges—including among men. Local insight highlighted the need to reach men and help them see that talking can help, alongside wider concerns around isolation, some use of addictive substances, and limited support networks. Many people are seeking connection as much as support, often using services simply to meet others.

This need is reinforced by local demographics, including a strong working-age population and a significant number of one-person households, increasing the risk of social isolation. Economic pressures and local employment changes further contribute to reduced wellbeing and community disconnection.

Models such as Andy’s Man Club or Men’s Sheds offer a simple, proven response. These groups

provide informal, peer-led spaces where men can meet regularly, build relationships, and talk openly without stigma. They remove barriers to engagement by focusing on belonging rather than ‘problems’. The aim is not primarily to ‘fix’ problems, but to create consistent spaces of belonging where trust can grow over time, and where deeper conversations can emerge naturally.

This proposal aligns with the wider community’s desire for accessible gathering spaces and stronger social connection. Establishing a men’s group—through partnership or a locally shaped model—offers a realistic, scalable step towards reducing isolation and strengthening community life in Upper Braes.

There is an opportunity to explore and shape what this could look like locally. Those who feel drawn to supporting men, creating spaces of belonging, or simply showing up consistently could help form the core of this new initiative.

Idea 7 – Intentional Neighbouring

We have seen the clear tension across Upper Braes, between strong community pride and friendliness, and surface level relationships. This suggests that the primary need may be to develop deeper, more intentional relationships.

Intentional neighbouring offers a simple, scalable response to this need. Drawing on principles from the Art of Neighbouring, it encourages people to move from being “friendly” to being truly present—knowing neighbours by name, sharing life, and building genuine relationships within everyday rhythms. This approach recognises that transformation often happens not through events, but through proximity, consistency, and trust.

Many churches are beginning to recognise this and so are reframing mission as beginning with love rather than pressure to attend events. This model encourages us to identify a small number of people, pray for them regularly, and learn to listen deeply to their stories. In a culture that is often wary of institutional religion, compassionate presence—

expressed through hospitality, attentive listening, and ordinary conversation—becomes a powerful and credible form of witness. Being truly heard is closely connected to feeling loved, making listening itself a missional act.

This proposal therefore centres on equipping those who engage with this opportunity with simple, repeatable practices so that over time these rhythms reshape how we inhabit our community—not as occasional visitors, but as present, attentive neighbours.

By pursuing intentional neighbouring, we can respond directly to the community's longing for deeper connection, while naturally creating pathways for faith, belonging, and transformation to emerge. Over time, this approach could be gently shared across the wider congregation, enabling many people to take small, intentional steps in their own streets and networks, multiplying impact across the parish.

This begins with small, personal steps. Each person feeling a call toward this idea could consider who they are already connected to and take simple actions to take that forward, with the support of like-minded other members. As this grows, there will be opportunities to share stories, encourage one another, and help others take similar steps.

Idea 8 – Slamannan Specific

For our Local Mission Church in Slamannan, our recent conversations and the Thrive Sunday process, have generated a wide range of ideas and energy, alongside a recognition that not everything can or should be taken forward at once.

One theme that has emerged is that of attentiveness: listening well to the community, investing in prayer, and strengthening confidence in faith among those already part of the church family. Our times together have reminded us that we are seeking to discern where God is already at work and join in there — both within the church and across the village and surrounding area.

This next phase is therefore likely to focus on three simple priorities:

- Listening to the community by taking time to ask what is needed, rather than assuming, and so we've been doing a survey of local people.

- Growing a culture of prayer and faith by creating space for people to deepen their relationship with Jesus and confidence in sharing faith with others.
- Taking small, sustainable steps by beginning with what is realistic, relational, and rooted in local capacity, bearing in mind there is a wider church family to draw support from.

There are already some early indications where this might lead, such as making more use of Martha's Pantry as a relational hub, developing small groups or prayer rhythms, and exploring simple ways to connect with adults in the wider community.

At this stage, the invitation to the wider church family is to consider investing in the life of Slamannan — through prayer, presence, and participation. Some may feel drawn to help listen to the community, others to strengthen the prayer life of the church, and others simply to show up consistently and encourage what is beginning to grow.

We are seeking, not just to do more, but to discern well, laying strong foundations, and allowing something sustainable and Spirit-led to emerge over the coming months.

Shared Language

It has also been realised that some shared, succinct language could be helpful for our conversations amongst the church family, so we propose using:

- *Connection Pathways* – a broad term for all ways to connect with our community, whether through:
 - *Connection Groups* – a group, event or ministry that helps form connections with the community through something we organise and invite people to be a part of. These could be both *existing* Connection Group (like Pre5s, Friendship Plus, Belong, SU groups), or a *new* Connection Group (ideas 1-6 above).
 - *Neighbourhood Connections* – idea 7 above.

So, what now?

Taken together, these ideas are not intended to be a list of programmes to be delivered, but a set of opportunities to be discerned. Each one represents a possible way of responding to what we have heard through our missional listening — opportunities to create space for connection, build relationships, and share faith in natural and meaningful ways.

What should each of us do?

The next step is not to do everything, but to notice where there is energy, curiosity, or a sense of God's prompting. We want to invite the whole church family to pray, reflect, and talk together about which of these *Connection Pathways* we each feel drawn towards in this season of change. This could lead to different responses from each of us.

Some may sense a personal and individual nudge towards a particular new idea. If you do, please complete the feedback form on the back page – tell us which idea resonates and we can help bring together interested people.

Or maybe, you are part of an existing *Connection Group* which usually focuses on caring for one another and growing your relationship with God — such as fellowship groups, book groups, or other long-standing ministry activities — could you talk together about gathering around a new *Connection Pathway* as a group? The example of Jesus is to weave together care, learning and mission, after all!

Some areas of church life are already primarily outward-facing (an existing *Connection Group*) – so, in this season, maybe God’s invitation is to reflect on how things are going, and whether there are ways to sharpen or refresh your outward focus? Could your existing *Connection Group* explore how to deepen relationships, invite people to other church activities, or engage with the community in a new way? Your *Connection Group* might not get involved with any of the eight ideas shared above, but maybe there are ways you can have more impact locally.

Of course, all of us are already placed within a street, a network, and a set of relationships – we may already have *Neighbourhood Connections*, or we could develop them, if we invest time and intentionally seek to build relationships with our neighbours. Maybe God’s invitation for you, is to notice where He has already placed you and to take some steps towards the people around you. We would be interested to hear from those who wish to pursue this and whether any training or resources might be helpful.

Conclusion

In this season of change, some of us may be drawn to starting a new Connection Group, and others to focus on Neighbourhood Connections; and of course, some might feel able to do both, whilst others may wish to use this time to reinvigorate an existing Connection Group to connect better with, and have greater impact in, the local community. Please share where today's update and invitation connects with you, and how you will respond, by returning the feedback form on the back page.

In all of this, we are not expecting everyone to make the same choice, but we do hope we'll move forward together — prayerfully, relationally, and in faith. Because the Elders have shared that they are convinced now is the time to develop the life of our church family, and especially in terms of partnering in God's mission in our local community. So, may we trust that God is guiding, and that He is ready to help us – and our community – to thrive.

Missional Listening Feedback Form

Please tear/cut off and return to Elders, Ministry staff or Team Conveners.

Name:

What idea(s) stirred up curiosity or challenge for you?

How might you move forward in exploring that idea?

Tick all that apply:

By myself

With an existing group/team (*please name*):

As part of a new team

Once we have names of those interested in a new team, we will help bring people together.

How can we help you move forward? Tick all that apply:

A workshop to help you discern next steps

A facilitated conversation with an existing group/team

Something else (please detail on the back of this page)