

Frome Cheese and Grain **www.cheeseandgrain.com**

The Cheese and Grain has seen the biggest transformation in its history, although mostly the changes have, so far, been in *bricks and mortar*. It's what these changes give us the opportunity to do that matters. In terms of using the new facilities to fully achieve what's possible: that has barely started.

In terms of changes and developments, these are the main points so far

- The Cheese and Grain is in the process of transforming from an event based building to one that still will still host big events, but which is also open every day and every evening. A public space that's fine just to drop into and visit – to see “what's happening”; a place to meet up, and a truly inclusive community centre for everyone in Frome and it's visitors.
- It is implementing the extremely challenging task of running without a public revenue grant while remaining an accessible not-for-profit social enterprise relevant to the general public in Frome and accessible to all. The danger in losing public subsidy is that we become entirely, cynically “commercial”. So far, on the contrary, it has become more accessible, more strongly based in the local community and it better encompasses the totality of our community by being neither particularly “old” nor “new” Frome.
- It is expanding the range of activities: it is hosting a Children's Festival, adult education classes, children's roller skating, drama workshops, yoga and belly-dancing classes and gigs aimed at whole family audiences (*kids come free*).
- The C&G is working with the Health Service and putting on health promotion activities. We have designated Mondays at the C&G “Healthy Mondays” with exercise classes, support groups and a weight-loss programme called “community pounds”.
- The C&G has set up a new website and new facilities for purchasing tickets on-line. The new website is a net income generator in contrast to the old site that cost money to run.
- The C&G is diversifying its income sources through marketing meeting rooms, hot desks and increasing its advertising revenues through a new, linked, second website called (but only a working title) “Live in Frome, Shop in Frome”.
- The C&G is planning to invest in new telephone and front-of-house ticketing systems. These are very expensive to buy and install, and it will cost money to retrain staff, but our current systems cannot cope with the new volumes.
- Changes to telephone systems and booking systems will only be a small part of a much needed, but challenging, transition in customer services that will need to include new practices in staff training, supervision, accountability and leadership.

Appendix 1

- The Cheese and Grain has more than doubled the opening hours of its box office. The box office used to close at 2.30pm but now stays open to 8pm (later, of course, if there is a performance).
- The C&G has created the equivalent of six full-time jobs in the last four months. This includes a new part-time post with responsibility for marketing and promotion.
- In January the C&G created its first internship and now recruited the intern to a new full-time post. More internships, and then, apprenticeships, are planned. We hope to reach a target of five apprenticeships by the autumn of 2015.
- The C&G now employs 22 people directly. All but two are part-time. This does not include the café or bar and contracted out work like security, cleaning and sound engineering. In all over 40 people work, in one capacity or another, at the C&G.
- The management team is in the process of being restructured into three new teams: (1) marketing and programming, (2) building and event management and (3) finance and administration. The General Manager's post is now re-designated as the C&G Director.
- The C&G has won a national award for excellence in business planning and creative social enterprise (the Santander Bank sponsored SEDA Award). It has also won a Green Apple Environmental Award. See: www.thegreenorganisation.info/green-apple-awards
- The "footfall" – the number of visits by the public to the building continues to grow. In a busy week there will be well over 2,500 "visits". Obviously we have some frequent users – and many people coming to the markets and gigs are from out of town (brilliant for the local economy) but still, it's an extraordinary number for a town of this size – an awful lot of people in Frome are using the Cheese and Grain. It puts a huge strain on the building, and our maintenance budget, and the staff, but, nonetheless, the aim is to increase the footfall further.
- In 2014 there will be at least 60 more live music performances than there were in 2013.
- For the first time the Cheese and Grain is running an ambitious August programme. This includes live music, a Cider Festival and an adult's summer school with crèche facilities.
- In the old format the C&G would generate about £125,000 a year in income, topped up by a £37,000 FTC subsidy. The projection this year is for a (trading) income of £210,000 with, of course, no subsidy. Gross revenue income in the first two months of this financial year was just under £40,000, which looks very good but is misleading because of seasonal variations and other factors. More careful analysis suggests there is still a lot more work to do in terms of income generation and costs control. It should be noted that these figures are only those monies that the C&G nets: for example if a £20 event ticket is sold, only the £1.50 that the C&G charges the promoter for selling the ticket appears in the annual turnover figures above. Likewise the

Appendix 1

bar's turnover will about £190,000 a year, but only a small proportion of that finds it way back into the C&G balance sheet (i.e. the franchise fee and rent).

- The Cheese and Grain is now putting on regular free music – performed by excellent professional musicians in our new foyer bar (most Wednesday nights). We are doing this for free because we like the music and we like the audiences and because it's not all about the money!

The newest and most exciting development this year has been an emerging partnership with the Bert Jansch Foundation to transform the empty “tower” at the back of the C&G.

With help from the Foundation and the Frome Development CiC we are taking the first steps to develop the tower end of the building to create rehearsal, recording, ITC/media development and training and accreditation spaces. One aim is to give local young people a chance to acquire the skills and qualifications they need to benefit from Frome emerging job markets. We will need the fullest support of FTC in this venture, starting with help with the lease and help with the planning application.

The late Bert Jansch is renowned as an innovative, influential, very successful songwriter and guitarist who synthesized folk, blues and jazz. His work was inspirational, fusing innovation with the traditional. He is, therefore, the perfect musician to capture and represent the vision of using an old building for training a new generation of music industry professionals.

Steve Macarthur
Director
Frome Cheese and Grain