2014 Town Benchmarking Report

Executive Summary

- **A1 Shops;** Frome has a higher proportion of A1 Shops (64%) than the National (51%), Regional (55%) and Typology (53%) averages.
- **Comparison Shops;** 88% of the A1 Shops mainly sell comparison goods which is 7% higher than the National Small Towns figure.
- **A Local Town;** Frome is a local town centre with 70% of the A1 shops being independent and 18% regional, a 12% increase on the National Small Towns average. 93% of Town Centre Users reported that they visited Frome at least once a week and 49% on foot. 95% of the Post Codes gathered by businesses at the 'point of sale' were from those living within a 30 minute drive of Frome.
- **Vacancy rates;** 5% of the commercial units in the town centre were vacant at the time of the 2014 retail audit which is lower than 2013. To place this data in context, in February 2015 the Local Data Company reported that the vacancy rate for all town centres in Great Britain was 13%.
- **Zone A Rents;** Zone A Rents are slightly higher in Frome (£35 per sq. ft.) compared to the National (£27), Regional (£33) and Typology (£29) figures. The 2014 figure is £3 per sq. ft. higher than in 2013.

Positive

- **Market with impact;** The weekday market in Frome houses more traders (33) than the National (21), Regional (28) and Typology (31) averages. The market has grown in size from 20 traders in 2013 and also has a positive impact upon footfall in the town centre providing a 69% increase from the Non Market Day counts. Market Day footfall has increased from the 214 persons per ten minutes in the 2013 Benchmarking audit. Car parks are also busier on a Market Day with vacancy rates dropping to 36% in 2014 from 48% in the 2013 Frome audit.
- **High Footfall;** Footfall in Frome is higher than the National, Regional and Typology averages on both a Market Day and Non Market Day. The Market Day figure of 231 persons per ten minutes is noticeably higher than the National and Regional figure of 134. Perhaps a greater indication of healthy footfall is that the Non Market Day figure (137), one taken as a baseline for normal trading conditions, is 40% higher than the National Small Towns average.
- **High average spend;** 38% of town centre users spent £10.01-£20.00 on an average visit to Frome, which is an 8% increase on the National Small Towns figure.
- **A Safe Town Centre;** 90% of town centre users reported that Safety was a positive aspect of the locality

- **Customer Service;** 88% of town centre users rated customer service as a positive aspect of Frome, exactly double the National Small Towns average.
- **Cafes/ Restaurants;** Nationally 51% of town centre users reported that Cafes/ Restaurants were a positive aspect, in Frome this figure is noticeably higher at 87%.
- **Retail Offer;** Within the National Benchmarking System qualitative suggestions for the improvement of town centre concentrate on the retail offer. However, in Frome, 77% of town centre users rated the retail offer as positive aspect of the locality, more than double the National Small Towns average of 35%.

<u>Room for Improvement</u>

- **Car Parking;** Car parking vacancy rates in Frome follow the National trends. As in 2013, 26% of all on and off street spaces were available during the Market Day audit, 2% higher than the National average, whilst the Non Market Day figure of 37% is also a 2% increase on the National Small Towns figure. In 2013 at a British Parking Association event it was reported that the optimum level of car parking vacancy if pricing, provision and policy are all set correctly is 15%. 37% of town centre users felt that car parking was a negative aspect of the locality.
- **Free Car Parking;** Following on from the 2013 Benchmarking suggestions from Businesses and Town Centre Users, when asked to comment on how Frome could be improved, cheaper car parking was the key theme.
- **Leisure Facilities;** 66% of town centre users stated that Leisure Facilities were a negative aspect of Frome, a 34% increase on the National Small Towns figures and a 28% increase from the 2013 report.
- **Cleanliness;** 44% of town centre users reported that cleanliness was a negative aspect of Frome. In the 2013 report a specific question concerning cleanliness was asked with 28% of town centre users offering a rating of poor and 5% very poor.
- **Clothes Shops;** As in 2013 a key theme of the town centre user qualitative comments was the need to improve the 0verall retail offering in Frome. In 2014 there was a specific reference to increasing the number of clothes shops.