

TOWN CENTRE PANEL

Note of meeting 1 11 August 2015, Cheese & Grain

Introduction

Mel Usher as Chairman of the Panel introduced the session explaining the purpose of Panels. They are: short term; focussed on outcomes and projects; not decision making bodies; made up of a variety of backgrounds and experiences; open to the public.

The Town Centre Panel members were confirmed as:

Cllr. Mel Usher – Chair
Neil Howlett – Frome Chamber
Jude Kelly – Frome Chamber
Andrew Prince – Westway Centre
Steve Macarthur – C & G
Mark Brierley – NVB Architects
Juliet Solomon – Access expert
Cllr. Pippa Goldfinger
Cllr. Nick White
Cllr. Tricia Golinski
Cllr. Colin Cobb
Cllr. Sheila Gore
Cllr. Cath Puddick
Cllr. Des Harris (district Cllr for Market Ward)

Panels will own their findings and therefore members must be given the opportunity to discuss, engage and contribute throughout the process.

Contributors were asked to join one of six workshops to discuss issues around the town centre with a nod to future ambitions. Where an issue/ambition has been covered by one group, this has not been repeated in this note but there was a high level of consistency.

Notes of the workshops

The Physical Condition of the Town Centre

Negatives

It's tatty and scruffy.
Difficult to cross the Market Square
Wheelchair access can be difficult
Some historic buildings are not looked after
Some publicly owned buildings are a disgrace especially the toilets
The Cattle Market Car Park is bleak
Too much flyposting, weeds and rubbish
Poor timetabling of and information on buses
Uncoordinated street furniture which is poorly maintained and plastic bollards in Stony Street

Not enough bins, seats, trees or hanging baskets
Shopfronts are often poorly designed and empty shops are an eyesore
Drains on Catherine Hill, Stony Street and Park road all blocked and are a flooding risk (Jane Llewellyn to report)

Positives

Westway transformed by Cordero Lounge
Visitors often remind us how beautiful the town centre is (or could be)
When traffic is stopped for events the Market Square is transformed.

Ambitions

Calm the traffic and make pedestrian friendly
Make plainer redirection of through traffic
Co-ordinate street furniture through a design guide
Restore the Cockey Lamps
More flowers and trees
Kingsway to learn from Westway
Redesign heritage trail
Encourage landlords to maintain specific buildings by highlighting good/bad practice
Encourage mixed uses to increase vibrancy and allow more pop ups.
Keep Town Clean

Quality and Range of shops and other facilities

Issues

Short on diversity and variety especially mainstream clothes shopping
Everyday products like Wilkinson's missing
Nightclub and other late night venues
Teenage all weather shelter and facilities
Requests for spa, bowling alley, laundry and baths.

Ambition

Make town more attractive by making more pedestrian friendly
Move the bus stops to Cork Street
Produce more resting points and plant more trees
Need a "hard" public open space for variety of uses.
Ensure conditions are right for investment by keeping the town attractive and marketing
Saxonvale could provide much of this if developed sensitively.

Access

Issues

Need to replace free parking lost at Boyles Cross
Difficult to cross at top of Bath St and Lidl's at Portway.
Lack of dropped kerbs
Parking on pavement outside St John's Church
A Boards are a hazard for wheelchair users
No real pedestrian access to river
Sparse info on travel needs

Ambitions

Traffic calming

Joined up public transport

An island at the top of Bath Street for pedestrians

Electric bike club and make more of the Car Club

Secure bike parking.

Crossover in Cheap Street across the stream for wheelchairs.

Parking

Issues

Costs driving people away

There is an impact on local businesses

Only one exit from the Cattle Market car park

The appearance of the car parks and maintenance are poor

No coach or overnight parking

Need to look at possibility of multi-use car parks

Domestic parking in the town centre is poor

What free parking there is, is distant from the centre

Ambitions

Some may be prepared to pay more Council tax for free/cheaper parking.

1 hour free parking or similar time limit

Pay on departure parking to take pressure off shoppers

Resident parking permits

Increase parking enforcement

Markets and Events

Issues

Wednesday and Sat markets are weak

Smaller towns nearby have bigger/better markets

Need to encourage "Independent Market" traders to attend Sat/Wed

Festival seen by some as for "highbrow" Frome

Monthly market is an example of a new use for the Town Centre but may have a knock on effect for permanent traders

Ambitions

Scrap Wed and concentrate on Sat market?

Or preferably revitalise weekly markets

More events, beer festival, wool fayre, tunnels day, historic days, literary days, street events etc.

Make as many events as possible inclusive and easily reached by all

Events need a permanent hard base home perhaps outside C and G but events also need to be undertaken across various parts of the town too.

Promotion and signage

Issues

Contradictory signage at railway station

Lack of signage relating to toilets

The need for more town maps in the car parks directing people to things that they can see and do

Directional signage is misleading in places – a Working Group involving the Chamber, MDC, SCC and FTC in 1995 reviewed all signage

The need for a more managed internet presence – there is a question as to who is best to operate

Ambitions

To be determined but given that to achieve results will require MDC and SCC approval, officers and portfolio holders should be invited to the penultimate meeting of the Panel. They should be asked what the obstacles are to progress and how can they be overcome?

Current projects

Peter Wheelhouse & Mark Brookes provided an update on current projects.

These included:

- Saxonvale regeneration
 - Market Place remodelling
 - Bert Jansch Media Centre, Cheese & Grain
 - 'Cultural Quarter' – a feasibility study to consider how new facilities can be provided and the car park and other spaces between the venues can be improved
 - Town Maps – Several large town maps positioned in key sites. Copies of the map with local information to be sold from dispensers alongside the maps and throughout the town in shops and Frome Information Centre etc.
 - Events – a series of one day public events designed to increase footfall throughout the town from September – December 2015
 - Shop Local Week – campaign to increase awareness of the importance of shopping locally – Autumn 2015
 - Christmas Extravaganza – Friday 27th November, professionally managed and well-funded event to launch Christmas trade in the town
 - Marketing – through myhigh.st, Discover Frome & Visit Somerset
 - Revitalised retail group growing from 4 attending in April to more than 30 attending in July.
- Key issues affecting retail businesses discussed and solutions found including:
- Monthly market V access to Cheap Street issue - solved
 - Litter and dumping of refuse bags in key streets
 - Commercial recycling /commercial food waste audit
 - Events to increase trade
 - PR for new retailers via Town Council social media
 - Visit Somerset input
 - Improving the St Catherine's sign in Stony Street
 - Expanding community toilet scheme

Dates of future meetings

Thursday 3 September, 7.00 p.m. at Elliott Building, Frome Town Hall

Thursday 24 September

Wednesday 21 October

Thursday 19 November