

Agenda item 9

For information: Review of 2016/17 work programme

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Summary

This report is a review of the current work programme eight months into the year.

There should be no cause for concern; Frome Town Council continues to deliver excellent results and is also able to react to new opportunities that may arise over the year. The, sometimes, difficult task of prioritising is continuous and this means that, inevitably, some planned actions will be delayed or not developed.

Many of the planned actions are ongoing, some have been completed, there are a few that we are unlikely to be completed by the end of March, and, there are one or two that have been overtaken by events.

Progress on each of the three pillars in the strategy – environment, prosperity and wellbeing – is summarised below. The line by line progress is detailed in Appendix 2.

The proposed work programme for 2017/18 is the next item on this agenda.

1. Pillar one: Environment

Frome's parks & green spaces: the FTC estate

With the (known) exception of Weylands, FTC's main parks and green spaces all have management plans in place.

These plans provide the framework that's enabling the Town Rangers to look after the Council's estate to a consistently high standard.

Each plan is drawn up following public consultation; and each plan is then discussed and approved at the Town Matters Committee.

Across the town, the plans are being implemented in a phased way, with notable projects at Rodden Meadow, The Dippy & The Old Showfield in the last six months.

And the next step for Weylands is public consultation; after which we'll be drafting a plan for the site in spring 2017.

Recent projects

- The new community tennis courts on the Mary Baily Playing Field have been completed and now complement the all-weather games area next door. In conjunction with the tennis club, we were also able to offer 400 hours of free tennis over the summer
- We have invested significantly in new footpaths at the Showfield and the Dippy
- We have installed new fitness equipment at Showfield, creating a free-to-use outdoor gym

- The careful management of Rodden Meadow in recent years means that it is becoming increasingly biodiverse, with the grassland management based on advice from Somerset Wildlife Trust
- Over the summer, we completed a joint project in Rodden Meadow improving the riverbank and river channel habitats; creating berms; and providing improved access to river by building steps and platforms. Perfect for swimming dogs!
- In conjunction with the Critchill School Rangers, we're supporting the Millennium Green Trust in the day-to-day management and maintenance of the Green
- We've also organised and supported various events, including the rather wet launch of the Showfield; the Willow festival; and scything workshops

Within the next six months we're expecting to acquire additional green spaces and play areas at the Mount (Tower View); Packsaddle; Chapmans Close; to the north of Rodden Meadow; and potentially behind the TH White site on Vallis Road.

However, it has not been possible to secure the land behind the youth centre.

The Rangers work with Critchill epitomises their efforts in engaging with local schools and other users of our green spaces; and looking ahead, we're going to be considering more ways in which to offer practical conservation tasks for volunteers.

Improving the quality of the environment and public access to other open spaces and green corridors in the town.

The Frome Missing Link cycle path project continues to progress. Grant applications have been submitted that, if successful, will help extend the route from Great Elm to Hapsford Mill. The next phase is extending the path from Whatcombe Fields to Spring Gardens, and successful applications for funding will mean that this could be completed in the next couple of years.

Supporting the FML is an example of how we're supporting the establishment of improved cycle routes and footpaths around the town - and we will continue to react to requests for support if we can.

Outstanding actions include a review of the Council's Open Spaces Strategy; creating interactive maps of green spaces and corridors; and developing a network of green corridors. We will be looking at options for progressing all of these in the future.

Progress on delivery of Sport Panel recommendations

The Sports Forum is up and running (if you'll excuse the pun) and is creating effective relationships between the various sports groups and stakeholders in the town. It's been particularly important and beneficial that the Manager of the leisure centre has regularly attended these meetings.

SASP (Somerset Activity & Sports Partnership) is supporting Frome with a dedicated post in the town – and is working with the football clubs and the rugby club with the aim of enabling more football pitches at the rugby club's site.

Coming up, Purple Elephant has been commissioned to run the Sports Festival in April 2017, which will include the "this Girl Can" campaign. We're also supporting the town's effort to bring parkrun to the Old Showfield in 2017.

Keep Frome Clean panel recommendations

We are continuing to work hard with Mendip DC and their grounds maintenance contractors, id verde (formerly The Landscape Group).

The level of cleanliness in the town centre remains inconsistent – and is below the standard detailed in MDC’s contract too often. We will continue to work with MDC and id verde, but also put pressure on both parties to deliver the contract for the town.

It’s important that we do as much as we can to play our role in the town and as part of this we have recruited a Town Ranger who primarily focuses on the town centre and who picks up work that either isn’t a priority or a requirement for other organisations in the town. Examples, include re-painting the bollards at the top of Paul Street.

The idea of a ‘Frome Broom’ civic award has not been developed yet and will not progress this year, but could be part of the discussions looking at a Frome BID.

2. Pillar two – prosperity

The highlight so far this year was the referendum on the Neighbourhood Plan; 86% voted in favour of adoption. The task now is to make sure the NP is considered in planning applications. It will also be used by FTC in early discussions with developers.

The scale of improvements to the Market Place will be dependent on winning the planning appeal and we are confident that we will. But even if we don’t, it will still be possible to deliver highway improvements e.g. courtesy crossings and traffic calming which County Highways have already approved in principle.

Progress continues to be made on the Saxonvale project. We have established good working relationships with MDC and SCC. We have also just received a Feasibility Study which focusses on possible land uses for FTC’s land at Saxonvale which we need to analyse will share with cllrs shortly. The relationship with the Somerset Skills and Learning CIC, who are based on part of the FTC land, remains good. Similarly, we have worked with Fair Frome and have received temporary planning permission for them to add a furniture store to their existing Food Bank.

We continue to work with businesses in the town to support economic development. The Business Improvement District project is making steady progress and our Frome Business Breakfast and Discuss and Do programmes delivered in partnership with the Chamber continue to be well attended.

We work closely with Frome College to maximise the potential of young people. Our joint programme around apprentices is successful and this is being expanded to include a project to place young people into work places so that they can be “work ready” – this may lead to apprenticeships for those that do well.

We continue to support the Frome independent Market which regularly brings in 8-10,000 people. However, the remaining markets in the town are not all as healthy. The Wednesday market continues to provide a poor offer and, while the Saturday market is more lively, it has the potential to be bigger. MDC has commissioned a piece of work on how to improve markets in the town and we will work closely with them to find a way.

Our resilience work is also going well. The Share Shop and The Community Fridge continue to generate a lot of good publicity and provide a good service. Our work on encouraging more sustainable transport is also showing the way forward: The Co-Wheels car club is running well, pilot bus services linking local villages are becoming popular and electric car charging points are springing up around the town (including one that will be in the car park at Frome Town Hall).

We have staged a green energy conference and launched a challenging project based on reducing energy consumption called "A Green and Healthy Future". Our work with local businesses and schools to reduce energy consumption has been popular.

3. Pillar Three – Wellbeing

The Wellbeing Forum continues to meet and monitor progress. It provides perhaps the only place where public and charity sector people can compare notes and identify areas of joint work.

Excellent progress has been made on delivering the current work programme. The work programme is divided into four:

1. Improving communication

We have recruited Meg Mosley who is developing the work in this area. A report from Meg outlining the upcoming work on this is on this agenda.

2. Increase participation and engagement

We continue to experiment with the layout and style of council meetings and are succeeding in making them more engaging. Not having a regular room for these has made it harder to achieve and it anticipated that the Town Hall will help significantly.

We have hosted two meetings for neighbouring parishes to come together and these have been well received. Similarly, two meetings where all Frome Cllrs from the town, district and county, come together have also been successful.

We also staged a successful youth conference which will be replicated next year.

Developing street level engagement is ongoing. We provided a "how to" pack for neighbours to run a street party and continue to support and work closely with the Mendip Health Connectors.

We are planning our Participatory Budgeting project and there will be a focus of activity in February and March and the projects chosen will be implemented in 2017/18.

3. Increasing volunteering

The Volunteer Frome project will be launched before the end of March and will encompass a lot of our ambitions for increasing volunteering. We also held a lovely event in Victoria Park called VolunTea in the Park which celebrated volunteering and plan to stage this again in 2017.

4. Providing direct support for organisations

Perhaps the most successful project to date has been the programme of training and fundraising support for local groups. We have provided training on DBS checks, the role of the trustee, 1st aid and how to recruit volunteers. We also continued to run our community grant scheme that will progress this year and next via the Crowdfunder project.

Our community fundraiser is providing support to local groups and focusing more on getting them grant ready and signposting them to grant schemes rather than writing the application.