

Agenda item 4

For information & discussion – Update on economic development work

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Summary

The purpose of this report is to provide an update on the work to support the local economy, meet the needs of local businesses, create new jobs and encourage businesses to support each other and become more engaged in the community. At the meeting, Peter Wheelhouse and Charlie Orr will provide some examples of projects being delivered including images as well as an update on the Mendip Economic Development Strategy which is due to be published on 12 June.

Background

FTC's strategy is to develop a 'thriving business community, connected with each other and with the town, providing employment and prosperity.' In our projects, the focus is not just on the economy but also health and wellbeing and the environment

The work programme that we have developed sets out how this will be achieved and here is an overview:

1. **Land and premises** - Safeguarding existing employment sites and encouraging the development of new workspace to provide new job opportunities in the town. A key project is our pursuit of a joint venture development partner to bring forward new business space on FTC's land at Saxonvale. In line with the resolution at the last Town Matters Committee, we are also exploring with MDC and landowners how we can bring forward new development on other sites in the town to address the fact that a large part of Commerce Park has now been developed out.
2. **Improving the image of and pride in Frome** – through public realm improvements e.g. in the Market Place and Station Approach (see agenda item 8) that will make the town centre more pedestrian and cycle friendly, marketing the town as a place to live, visit and as a place to site businesses and other enterprises (see agenda item 5), working with the Frome Chamber of Commerce and the Town Centre Retail Group to encourage more town centre footfall and trade.
3. **Resilience programme** – Working with businesses and their employees to help make the town more resilient by reducing waste and energy consumption, encouraging the use of low carbon alternatives to the private car and renewable energy generation, encouraging investment in bus and train services, promoting car sharing and electric vehicle use and promoting walking and cycling. See agenda item 6.
4. **Developing a community of businesses and other organisations** - Bringing businesses, social enterprises and community organisations together, through 'Frome Business Breakfast', 'Discuss and Do' and other specialised events - not only to help identify and

meet their development needs but also enable them to support each other, contribute to the wider community and improve skills. As part of this, we are exploring some new ways of supporting micro-enterprises (employing under 10 people) that are a growing part of Frome's economy.

5. **Strengthening the way education and training can underpin the future for those entering and re-entering the workplace** – Building links between education and employers to help create new opportunities for young people through the development of work experience programmes, traineeships and apprenticeships. Strengthening links with local universities and college and community education schemes to create a 'joined up' approach. This area of work will be covered at a later meeting of Town Matters under a theme called 'supporting individuals'.
6. **Seeing Frome as part of the wider world** – taking note of the changing wider socio-economic landscape and ensuring we are alert to shifts in policy, are able both to seize opportunities, mitigate threats and build alliances.

Our work in this area is presented in more detail in '[Our agenda for economic development 2017/18](#)' which can be found on our website. There follows, some highlights of the projects the Economic Development & Regeneration Manager and colleagues have been involved with in recent months.

Mendip Economic Development Strategy 2017-20

Jean Boulton and Peter Wheelhouse recently met with a consultant who is advising MDC on the revision of their Mendip Economic Development Strategy. We took the opportunity to highlight our objectives to influence MDC's thinking in terms of investment in Frome. The draft Strategy will be published on MDC's website on Monday 12 June and we will ensure that cllrs have sight of it as soon as possible. Peter Wheelhouse will provide an update at the meeting and invite comments.

Saxonvale regeneration

In response to the growing demand for business space in the town, a project aimed at delivering office space or mixed office/residential accommodation on FTC's land at Saxonvale has started. A joint venture developer/investor partner is being sought with the assistance of Jones Lang Lasalle (JLL) who have a strong record in delivering brownfield regeneration in Bath, Bristol and other locations. The focus is on the market for 'grow on' space to enable established businesses in the town to grow, many of whom we have already contacted. The hope is that such an investment will be a catalyst for the regeneration of the remainder of Saxonvale after many years of stagnation.

Town Centre Benchmarking

To help assess the performance of the town centre and benchmark its performance against similar centres nationwide, FTC has participated in a national Town Centre Benchmarking exercise on an annual basis. The 2016 results have just been published, the highlights of which are:

- Frome has a higher proportion of Class A1 shops than the national and regional averages, a large percentage of which are independent (72%).

- Vacancy rates in Frome (2%) are much lower than both the national and regional averages and are the lowest that Frome has seen since our participation in benchmarking began 5 years ago.
- Frome has a high footfall on both market and non-market days, which is double the national average.
- Cafes, restaurants, and Frome's retail offer have been highlighted by town centre users surveyed as attractive aspects of the town, with 95% of users reporting customer service as a positive feature of Frome which we will promote as part of our Discover Frome initiative.
- Businesses surveyed are calling for cheaper car parking – this has been a consistent demand over many years.

'Frome Business Breakfast'

Now in its 3rd year, the Frome Business Breakfasts are monthly sessions that present bite sized talks on topics that are of interest to both businesses and community enterprises. They are delivered in partnership with Frome Chamber. The schedule this year has addressed topics ranging from the local media, supporting micro-enterprises to improving health and wellbeing in the workplace. The events are well attended each month, attracting 30-35 people on average.

'Discuss & Do'

Discuss & Do, which is now in its 2nd year, is an initiative supported by FTC, Frome Chamber and MDC. The monthly sessions aim to help local enterprises develop through the sharing of information, skills, and tools. This programme is about businesses and community enterprises learning from each other. So far, this year, there have been several popular sessions that have focused on how to get involved with crowdfunding, social media and developing organisational skills. The sessions attract on average 40 attendees.

Retail Group

The Retail Group meets once a month and FTC, Frome Chamber and town centre businesses use the meetings to explore ways in which the sector can be supported. At recent meetings, we have discussed trade waste and how its collection can be rationalised, the provision of visitor information and events such as Small Business Saturday and FTC's Christmas Light Switch On event for 2017. A workshop to explore some of the medium-term issues impacting on the sector e.g. Brexit, the growth of online sales etc. and practical strategies that retail businesses can adopt is going to be organised as part of our new 'pop-up- workshop series.

'Soul Traders'

'Soul Traders', targeting those who work alone in Frome, will be trialled on the 14 June at the Town Hall. The first session will invite 12-15 local people and will offer the opportunity in a relaxed setting to meet with people that share similar work routines, discuss key issues that may affect their day-to-day lives and share strategies for coping with lone working. If successful, the sessions will be repeated monthly.