

Agenda item 5

For decision - Discover Frome information point – Frome Town Centre

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Summary

This report sets out proposals for a package of measures that will make it easier to obtain information on what's happening in Frome and where to go serving both visitors and residents. The package includes: establishing a new 'Discover Frome' information point in Frome Town Centre staffed by volunteers in partnership with Black Swan Arts; further development of the Discover Frome website and the production of a new annual guide in partnership with The List; the provision of a phone 'hotline' in the library to provide another way in which people can speak to our customer service advisors at the Town Hall.

This package will be complemented by other measures that are already in train and which will improve access to information. These include: the work of the Marketing & Tourism intern who is due to start on 3 July and who will be helping to promote walking and cycling and take forward the recommendations from the performing arts panel; the installation of new wayfinding fingerposts between the railway station and town centre funded by GWR; a rationalisation of our noticeboards in the Market Yard and library to improve community and visitor information

Background

Until February of this year, FTC operated a staffed Information Centre within Frome Library. The Centre served both residents and visitors and was open from 09:30 – 17:00 Monday - Saturday. This information service has now been relocated to the Town Hall on a Monday to Friday basis. There is still a requirement for the provision of visitor information in the town centre as this is where most of our visitors arrive especially at weekends when people attend events and markets including the Frome Independent.

At the same time, there is a need to further develop the Discover Frome website to reflect the town's identity and to have something in a print format that truly represents Frome as set out at Council Matters Committee on 7 June. We also need to better cater for those who wish to speak to our Customer Service Advisors but who may be unable or unwilling to attend the Town Hall.

A proposed new 'Discover Frome' information point

An opportunity has emerged to partner with Black Swan Arts (BSA) to deliver a 'Discover Frome' information point utilising a ground floor 'maker studio' within the complex. The primary focus of the information point would be on 'what's happening in Frome' especially exhibitions and events, where to go including shops, cafés, nearby places of interest and how to get there; it would also help to coordinate the promotion of local events in the town building

on the recommendations of the Performing Arts Panel that brought together many partners in the performing arts world in Frome.

The advantage of this location is there is already significant footfall attracted to the BSA gallery, café and maker studios where local artists can work and display their products. It also has great visibility within the Cattle Market Car Park, a key arrival point for visitors. BSA is also a key partner within the arts world in Frome which is an important part of Frome's offer to visitors and so this is an opportunity to support their development too.

BSA are proposing to offer an initial 3 months tenancy but the trustees have indicated that they would be committed to extending this arrangement if the first period of occupancy proved a success. The plan is to get the information point established by the start of the Frome Festival in July.

How the information point will work

- The information point will be under the established Discover Frome brand.
- The information point will be staffed from 10:00 -15:00, 6 days a week including weekends by volunteers supported by Frome Town Council and BSA.
- The set-up and first year running costs are expected to be funded by Mendip Tourism
- Wayfinding fingerpost signage is being installed between the station and the town centre (funded by GWR)
- The establishment of the information point will be complemented by the further development of the Discover Frome website and a printed annual guide in partnership with The List which will have a much greater emphasis on events in the town. The bulk of the funding is being sought from Mendip Tourism with the balance (estimated at £4k) coming from the approved Marketing budget.
- We are also rationalising our noticeboards in the Market Yard and library to provide improved community and visitor information
- A phone 'hotline' in the library would enable those who visit the library to speak directly to a member of our Customer Services Team. It is expected to cost £150.

Much of the work on the website and guide will be undertaken by a Marketing & Tourism intern from Bath University who will be working with FTC for one year starting on 3 July (this post is being part-funded by Mendip Tourism and the Mendip Lodge Hotel s.106 agreement).

Recommendations

That councillors support:

1. The establishment of the Discover Frome information point at Black Swan Arts for an initial 3-month period but subject to a successful trial, support its continued operation for at least a further 9-month period with funding being provided by Mendip Tourism
2. The installation of a phone 'hotline' within the library to enable users of the library to speak to our Customer Service Advisors
3. The further development of the Discover Frome website and the production of an annual guide in partnership with The List that reflects the full Frome offer utilising the approved Marketing budget and funding from Mendip Tourism