

Agenda item 3

For information: Fair Housing for Frome

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Summary

The purpose of this report is to update Town Matters on outcomes of a series of events held by Fair Housing for Frome (FHfF), to raise awareness of housing problems in Frome.

The FHfF campaign was funded through the Town Councils Participatory Budgeting and was voted for by the community as a priority. The funding is for the hire of 7 venues to hold themed discussions.

The report sets out some information about the group and summarises each event, its findings, outcomes, and FHfF goals in a 'wish list'. The report also includes what steps Frome Town Council are taking to help bring forward more housing in Frome.

This report will be followed by a discussion - *How might Frome Town Council in its enabling role support this 'wish list'?*



Fair Housing for Frome is a community group that has been running a campaign during 2017 to raise awareness of and find realistic, achievable solutions to housing problems in Frome, particularly for young people and families. The idea came after Edventure, a school for community enterprise, had a meeting about problems that their students were having in finding affordable housing.

A few facts:

- Housing prices went up by 14.5% in Frome last year – the third highest rise in the UK
- Rents have increased by 13% over the past three years – much more than local incomes
- There were at least 9 street homeless people in Frome last year – and many more 'hidden homeless'

The campaign has been far reaching and over one hundred and fifty Frome residents have attended the seven events so far, offering an opportunity to raise awareness of some of the problems in Frome, to offer information, network and create some resources. There was an initial gathering over lunch where a group of professionals and residents of Frome got together to find out more about what was going on and explore some of the issues. This was followed by a half day event in Rook

Lane Chapel where over sixty individuals came together to tell their stories, gather ideas and offer some solutions.

Over the next six months each evening has had a topic, speakers invited, and ideas and stories gathered. The topics have been: Self Build, Homeshare, Homelessness, Tenants and Landlords, Building More Homes and 'What if' (a solution for Frome). Out of each of the evenings came potential solutions to some of the problems. A Fair Housing for Frome website www.fairhousingforfrome.org.uk and a Facebook page www.facebook.com/FHfF2017 have been developed.

A Landlord's organisation has had an initial meeting and are talking about creating a contract that landlords can use. Fair Housing for Frome recognise that Frome Town Council have been lobbying for affordable housing and have established a good reputation for their planning recommendations. It is important that they continue to work with FHfF to achieve the possible goals below.

Below is the 'wish list'

Self-Build

- Publicise the FTC self-build survey and encourage more people to fill it in (FTC have already been proactive in this)
- Promote ongoing self-build and training opportunities, particularly for young people.
- Identify small bits of land owned by MDC and FTC – Collaborate with Landstory (Simon Brown) to include housing in their forthcoming Mapping project for the town, this will require funding.
- Lobby MDC – they have an obligation to provide land for people on their self-build register.
- Identify land within the boundaries of Selwood and Beckington Parish councils that could be used for self-build.
- Focus on exception sites, and the process for allocating exception sites. Could we demand an open exception policy?
- Campaign for Help to Buy funding to be available to small schemes and self-build not just developers
- Encourage Mendip to use its powers for the compulsory purchase of unused land to free up land for self-build. (Supported by David Warburton at the Frome hustings).

Shared Living

- Set up an intergenerational housing scheme that supports older people with large homes to take in younger lodgers, possibly including payment in kind – Fund a Homeshare in Frome?
- Research the possibility of rooms for young people within housing schemes for older people (as in the Netherlands)

Homelessness

- Ensure there is effective publicity and information in Frome about homelessness, both for people in distress and the general population. Promote general knowledge about people's rights and what is available.
- Support Elim Connect Centre who are looking for more volunteers with homes to offer emergency accommodation, particularly for placing single homeless people in families

- Offer support to Elim Connect Centre's Scheme for homeless under -25s in Frome
- Recruit and train a team of community advocates for families/individuals in housing distress. If possible, this should include people who have had the experience themselves. FUNDING?

Tenants and Landlords

- There is a Frome-based investment company. This might be able to buy up rental properties and makes them available at a fair rent, while giving investors a modest return
- Publicise the Fair Landlords club.
- Establish a scheme to promote fair practice from letting agents, such as a charter (Acorn, Bristol). Research examples of poor practice such as intimidation or inefficiency
- Set up a website offering info and support for tenants
- Campaign for rent payments to be factored into each individual's credit rating
- Support Shelter's upcoming campaign to increase the average lease to three years, not six months

Building new homes

- Investigate Community Land Trusts – public meetings to sign up to be members.
- Identify empty commercial space that with imagination can be used as housing
- Mixed dwellings – i.e. live/work
- Establish a local 'group'/voice that will attempt to influence (with FTC) all potential developments in and around Frome. The group would:
 - demand high quality design, recognising that what is being created is not just a bundle of homes but a community
 - insist on the 30% 'affordable' target being reached
 - aim for imaginative, mixed tenure developments, with social rented housing and other 'affordable' housing properly integrated
 - be a positive voice within Frome for welcoming quality development to meet the needs of local people, rather than always resisting.
 - Investigate the possibility of further community-led new-build, possibly via a new Community Land Trust.

What if?

Tiny Homes in Frome (is on November 20th 6.00pm – 8.00pm at Rook Lane Chapel where there will be a 'Tiny Home' put together in an afternoon, plus further information re other Tiny Home projects).

- Develop a dialogue with social landlords about working creatively with tenants and the wider community to help address the housing crisis and meet local needs. Develop relationship with Housing Association group in Mendip.
- Establish a site for tiny homes in Frome

What are Frome Town Council doing?

The Town Council respond to all planning consultations, concentrating on applications that have a wider impact on the community. For those applications that include housing, we campaign to try and ensure that where required, the full amount of affordable and appropriate housing is provided. We encourage residents and developers to come and talk to us before submitting applications, to try and ensure that appropriate types of housing are included. We have produced a Town Design Statement with the aim of improving the quality of existing and future developments in Frome and a Neighbourhood Plan which contains specific policies that support community housing and self-build. A self-build register has also been established and we are in ongoing discussions with the Mendip District Council about land allocations for housing and employment.

Discussion:

How might Frome Town Council in its enabling role support this 'wish list?'