

Agenda item 8

For decision and information: Update on Discover Frome Information Point at Black Swan Arts and to decide whether to publish The Annual in April 2019

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Summary

The primary objectives of the Discover Frome project and our work that sits under this brand is to continue to improve the welcome that we provide to visitors, support the arts scene including events, festivals, exhibitions and shops and to support our Walkers are Welcome status.

This report provides an update on the Discover Frome Information Point: how it is running, what its offer is, assessment of its value and possible next steps to make it, in partnership with Black Swan Arts, a digital information point fit for the 21st century.

The Annual is also discussed and Cllrs are asked to approve the publication for a second year from April 2019. The Discover Frome website is an integral part of the Discover Frome offer but has been discussed in detail at previous meetings recently and is not considered here in any detail.

Background

From the end of June 2017, FTC has operated the Discover Frome Information Point at Black Swan Arts (BSA). We have a 5 hour a week volunteer co-ordinator who has succeeded in establishing a core group of excellent volunteers and the Information Point is open Tuesday to Saturday 10:00 -4:00 and on Independent Market Sundays. The job of the Information Point is not to replace the Information Service at the Town Hall but rather to complement it. It is open on Saturdays when the Town Hall is not and was developed to be a complementary offer to our Discover Frome website and The Annual, which we produced in partnership with The List. The primary focus of the Information Point, The Annual and the website is to provide information 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.

The location of the Information Point at the BSA is an ideal space to offer this service and has proved popular with visitors and residents alike. The location also means that there is a significant footfall attracted to the BSA gallery, café and maker studios. It also has good visibility within the Cattle Market car park which is a key arrival point for visitors. Our current lease with BSA take us up to June 2019 although Council did agree last year to underwrite the project until March 2020, if these are not met by a grant in future. It must be acknowledged that due to its small stature the Information Point is not a Tourist Information Centre in the

traditional sense. Businesses, particularly those involved in the visitor economy and the Chamber of Commerce are supportive of the Information Point being in the town.

Volunteers

Since July 2017, the Information Point has been staffed by a Volunteer Coordinator and is manned by Discover Frome Ambassadors who are volunteers. The customer service staff at the Town Hall support the volunteers on a day to day basis with the Volunteer Coordinator visiting the Town Hall weekly to discuss matters arising and to bank. A member of the Marketing & Communications team visits the Information Point weekly to maintain a cohesive brand and maintain links with BSA. We now have over 30 volunteers who are well placed as ambassadors. Their wealth of knowledge around Frome is extraordinary. As we move forward to implement a digital payment system we are implementing quarterly training socials to support our volunteers. It will be an opportunity for team building and help ensure a sense of ownership by the volunteers.

We are also looking to pair some of the volunteers with young people from Frome College in an initiative supported by Volunteer Frome. This has been a little while in the offing but now the Privacy Policy has been adopted it is hoped that we will be able to DBS check interested volunteers and implement this before Christmas.

Visitor numbers

	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	Ma	June	July	Aug
2015/16	270	271	175	100	144	185	178	308	265	264	337	417
2016/17	286	246	220	129	103	9	56	38	40	76	339	384
2017/18	226	70	184	65	146	128	133	173	299	272	316	459

Figures in green represent visitors to the library service. Figures in red represent the visitor figures at the Town Hall as there was no Information Point service at the time.

Budget April 2018 – April 2019

The Information Point is totally funded until Apr 2019 with a grant from Mendip Tourism and Leisure. There is an additional grant for £4.5k to produce a series of maps as part of the Walkers are Welcome project. See below a table of the budget for the running of the Information Point.

Expense	Cost 2018/19
Rent to BSA	3000
Volunteer Coordinator	400
Printer + inks	360
Training & volunteer expenses	100
Mobile (£30 per month)	240
Additional shelving	100
Maintenance	100
Total	4200

Improvements

There is work to be done particularly around sign posting to the Information Point and other points of interest in the town. The finger posts are funded by GWR and we are working with SCC Highways to put them in place by the end of the calendar year. Promotion of the service to residents and visitors alike remains key to our ongoing work.

Next Steps

In future, the primary focus of the Information Point is likely to continue to be around providing details about “what’s happening in Frome”. Over time, this information will continue to move from a leaflet paper-based offer to an online offer in line with our sustainability goals.

We are exploring a possible Discover Frome app which would build on the content on the Discover Frome website. As well as serving as a digital guide an app would enable shops and business to give special offers to visitors and residents alike. An app would also be able to provide virtual guided walks and is the next logical step to our packaging of Frome’s visitor offer. We are also exploring if the Information Point could provide an interactive digital screen. We are just about to trial an interactive screen borrowed from Wells Museum.

The Annual

The Annual (2018) was funded by a grant from Mendip Tourism & Leisure and is essentially a printed guide to Frome. It complements the Discover Frome website by listing town centre businesses, venues, accommodation providers, pubs & restaurants, all the markets held in the town and town walks and places of interest. The grant of £5000 enabled us to expand

what was originally planned and provide maps of walks and comprehensive listings. It also meant that we could print 20,000 copies. The Annual was delivered to every household in the town as well as to shops, businesses and accommodation providers and of course to the Information Point.

This financial year, 2018/2019, there is £3000 in the budget to support this project and are looking to work more closely on the maps and extend the attractions pages to reflect more of the Discover Frome website work. Our feedback has also suggested that maps which are slightly less stylised providing more street names would be welcomed but our walks pages have been received very well.

In the recent benchmarking survey, the overwhelming majority of respondents said that they thought that the Annual represented our town well and promoted positive image. From that same study over 32 businesses said that they actively wanted to be listed in the Annual. Finally, if imitation is the best form of flattery that there is, we have had enquiries from other Town Councils regarding replication for their towns which Rose Langley, who produces The List, is currently looking to take forward. All good for both Frome businesses and profile. Some Cllrs were worried about the environmental impact of producing The Annual when it was published in March 2018. Despite there being an allocated budget, this is the opportunity for Cllrs to confirm they still want to publish the Annual in April 2019. The recommendation is to publish to ensure that we have a good quality representation of our town in print form as well as online.

Recommendations

1. Note the success of the Discover Frome Information Point and in particular the excellent work of the Volunteer Coordinator and the volunteers.
2. Continue to enhance the Discover Frome brand by providing high quality information through digital and online content
3. Continue to enhance the Discover Frome brand by publishing The Annual in April 2019
4. Delegate the above to the Marketing and Communications Manager in consultation with Cllr Usher.