

FROME TOWN COUNCIL

Minutes of a meeting of the Town Matters Committee

Wednesday 01 August 2018 at 7pm

Frome Town Hall, Christchurch Street West, Frome BA11 1EB

Present:

Councillors: Kate Bielby, Jean Boulton, Gary Collinson (Chair), Mark Dorrington, Sheila Gore, Mel Usher

In attendance:

Nicola Cretney (Health and Wellbeing Manager), Laura Flaherty, (Executive Assistant to the Town Clerk and Mayor), Laura Hales (Marketing and Communications Assistant), Jane Llewellyn (Planning and Development Manager), Charlie Orr (Project Officer), Peter Wheelhouse (Deputy Town Clerk), Paul Wynne (Town Clerk)

20 members of the public: Pepita Collins, Des Harris (MDC Cllr), Neil Howlett, Sue Klepper, Andrew Prince, Sandy Usher +14 others

Minute Ref	Agenda Item	Action
2018/28/TM	<p>The meeting started at 7:04pm</p> <p>1a. Apologies for absence Received from Rich Ackroyd, Ali Barclay, Tricia Golinski, Nick White</p> <p>1b. Declaration of members' interests Cllr Mel Usher declared a non-pecuniary interest in Frome Community Education (item 3).</p> <p>1c. Minutes from the last meeting on 20 June 2018 The minutes of the Town Matters Committee meeting held on 20 June 2018 were approved as a true record of the meeting and signed by the Chair.</p> <p>Proposed by Mel Usher, seconded by Kate Bielby, agreed unanimously</p>	
2018/29/TM	<p>2. Questions and comments from the public and Cllrs A member of the public suggested more seating at the Boyle Cross, otherwise it seems like a waste of space. He proposed a minimum of three more benches and more planting for health and wellbeing. Mel Usher indicated that we are still in phase 1 of a larger scheme and that the Boyle Cross itself is a listed monument; the conservation officer at Mendip District Council was not in favour of 'littering' the area with more seating. That said, Mel generally agreed with the above comments and said that we should aim for a resolution on more seating and planting by summer 2019.</p>	

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	<p>Sheila Gore asked what else could be there and if there are restrictions on what happens at the Boyle Cross.</p> <p>Mel answered that the land is owned by MDC who see it as a means of profit. There's nothing stopping anyone from putting up market stalls, but they would have to pay the MDC fee. FTC is trying to formulate a quick method for someone to put on an event but it's still early days and FTC needs to push MDC.</p> <p>Mark Dorrington mentioned that there will be a meeting on 5 September of the Boyle Cross Project Group to talk about these issues.</p>	
2018/30/TM	<p>3. Q&A session with multi-year agreement recipient Frome Community Education</p> <p>Frome Community Education (FCE) representatives Sue Klepper and Sandy Usher presented the following:</p> <p>FCE was set up in 2011 as a response to local authorities no longer providing a wide selection of adult learning classes. It was set up as a community education initiative and volunteer run. At that time, FCE started off advertising and providing computer skills classes. It has progressed well since then and this autumn, FCE are offering 50 classes ranging from pottery to yoga to languages. They employ tutors and people pay a small fee to take the classes. FCE runs on a financially sustainable model, but they don't make a huge profit, so they aren't able to offer concessions. They received additional funding to run additional wellbeing classes and IT classes. Currently, FCE have established a computer suite at the Cheese and Grain to run the classes as well as free IT drop-in classes which provide basic internet skills. These are especially valuable to clients searching for jobs and claiming benefits both of which are online activities.</p> <p>FCE noted until recently nobody was offering English language classes in the area and now FCE runs two ESOL classes in Frome; they had 25 students representing 13 countries from April to June. FCE thanks FTC for supporting the ability to offer these classes.</p> <p>Jean Boulton asked if they helped with numeracy. Sue Klepper mentioned they obtained a grant to help with literacy and numeracy, but students were more interested in learning IT skills. FCE refer literacy and numeracy enquiries to Somerset Skills and Learning.</p> <p>Kate Bielby said that no one else is offering this service in Frome and the community gets great value for the funding that FTC gives. It's an example of what FTC should be funding in future.</p>	

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2018/31/TM	<p>4. For information and discussion – conclusions from the Frome Town Centre Benchmarking survey</p> <p>Charlie Orr presented the background behind the benchmarking survey which compares the economic performance of the town centre with similar centres elsewhere. He also presented the key findings from this year. The results are from 10 different surveys around the town centre; data is collected by FTC which is then sent to an organization called ‘People and Places’ for comparison with regional and national statistics.</p> <p>The main findings are that Frome has many independent businesses at 72% compared to less than 10% average in the region. More than half of the businesses in Frome are over 5 years old and 96% are micro-enterprises. Shop vacancy rates are generally lower in Frome, compared to the region and footfall in Frome town centre is double the regional and national averages. Both town centre users and businesses see parking costs as a negative and this had increased from last year.</p> <p>Jean Boulton spoke of how independent businesses provide employment and other opportunities, but small businesses don’t always do so well. FTC is investing in the vibrancy of the town and therefore feels it’s important to support these businesses. Jean highlighted the things that FTC does, including the very successful ‘Frome Business Breakfast’ and ‘Discuss and Do’ programmes. Working with the Frome Chamber of Commerce, these events revolve around what businesses need, what they can share and how they can give back to the community. FTC also offers the Good Business framework, which supports local businesses with a free audit to help them think about practices that benefit individual enterprises, are socially and environmentally responsible and lead to prosperity for Frome.</p> <p>FTC are also involved in the marketing of Frome as a visitor destination and put on and support events drawing people into the town centre. For example, the recent Frome Busks resulted in a really busy Saturday on a very wet day for many businesses. Jean feels pleased as these activities are not very expensive and develop goodwill between the businesses, the Chamber and FTC, and so feels that they are very worthwhile to continue.</p> <p>Peter Wheelhouse concluded that the data suggests that Frome is relatively resilient, as demonstrated by low vacancy rates and high footfall figures compared to national rates. However, there is a concern about footfall and trade in 2018. Therefore, FTC needs to continue supporting town centre businesses, for example in marketing and events. FTC is also actively lobbying MDC for a wholesale review of its Car Parking Strategy in line with Chamber of</p>	
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	<p>Commerce goals and lobbying SCC for a transport strategy review as Frome is growing and becoming increasingly congested, citing Taunton as a precedent.</p> <p>Peter highlighted some points for attendees to think about ahead of the debate. Increasingly, experience is crucial; the most successful town centres are the ones that can offer plenty of opportunities to eat, drink, socialize, and enjoy events, the cinema and theatre. The Chamber of Commerce have drafted a manifesto, notably asking for an audit of signage and how easy it is to get around town, parking and cleanliness. The town centre is a desirable place to be for businesses, but there needs to be work spaces for them to operate. There's an increasing trend for collaboration between online and bricks-and-mortar retail; perhaps this could work for Frome.</p> <p>Groups then split into separate groups discussing three questions around working to support Frome town centre's economy. The key points that were fed back were as follows:</p> <p>Group 1 discussed how the experience for those using the town centre—residents and visitors alike—can be improved. One main concern was the need to improve signposting for visitors especially between the railway station and the town centre. FTC plans to have new finger posts installed by the end of 2018. Additionally, the importance of listening to visitors' perspectives was mentioned and looking at pedestrian crossing points, not just in the town centre but also for roads leading into the centre as this is part of the journey (experience). It was suggested that we make better use of the creative talent within the town to improve interest on the street and explore the possibility of planting more trees with MDC.</p> <p>Group 2 discussed how the link between young people and town centre businesses can be strengthened. The importance of work experience was recognised and the suggestions revolved around creating more chances for young people to meet businesses. A central hub listing opportunities and/or a monthly event for businesses and young people were suggestions to address this.</p> <p>Group 3 discussed how businesses can be 'future proofed' in a changing environment. It was mentioned that because of the relatively small retail units available in the town centre, Frome is not as interesting to larger, national companies that have a strong online offer. But we can compete on experience, for example, if you want a picture framed and you want to discuss the range of options, you can't do that online, but you can in the centre of Frome. 'Deadly as The Female' was brought up as a good example of a retail business with a strong online and bricks-and-mortar presence. For small shops, it is important to 'find your niche' and provide specialist goods</p>	
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	<p>not widely available. Infrastructure in Frome also needs to be looked at. Transport routes into Frome should be considered and with regard to widely raised parking concerns, it might be worthwhile to plan for new modes of transport to which private motorists can switch. Business rates, and how to keep them low, were also brought up.</p> <p>A member of the public also mentioned that bigger stores are looking at reducing overheads by stocking smaller amounts and having the ability to order into the store, which could be a way of future proofing.</p> <p>A full list of ideas raised in the group discussions is attached as Appendix 1.</p> <p>Following discussions, Jean Boulton thanked Charlie Orr for his work over the past two years and presented him with a bottle of champagne.</p> <p>Mel Usher said that there's a need to get things done that have been on the list for years as well as more events to bring people into the town centre, whether it's helping people put them on or FTC putting them on.</p>	
2018/32/TM	<p>5. For decision – support for the Parish Village Bus Service FTC has supported a community bus service connecting surrounding villages and Frome town centre. Of late, numbers using the service have dropped considerably it is no longer justifiable for FTC to underwrite the service at £550 per year. FTC will be exploring other options to help people get into town.</p> <p>Michael Gay from Wanstrow said that the main demographic of the bus service users has been the elderly and bus pass users that don't have access to a car. For people who were enthusiastic in the beginning, the service doesn't suit them anymore as some regulars are now housebound or can't walk very far. Trudoxhill had a tight budget and couldn't continue its contribution. Michael feels content that the idea has run its course and is supportive of FTC's decision. He thanked FTC for the support that made it viable and for making the journeys valuable to people and commended the officers who have been very helpful throughout. Peter Wheelhouse thanked Michael for his efforts in getting it going and helping to sustain it.</p> <p>The recommendations were:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. That FTC no longer underwrites the weekly community bus service linking Wanstrow, Trudoxhill, Witham Friary with Frome 	AF

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	<p>2. That FTC works proactively with users and other parish councils to enable residents to use lift share and volunteer drivers</p> <p>Proposed by Kate Bielby, seconded by Mark Dorrington, agreed unanimously.</p>																									
2018/33/TM	<p>6. For approval – recommendations of the Grants Advisory Panel</p> <p>Nicola Cretney presented on applications for the first grant round of the year; the Grants Panel reviewed eight applications for over £15K and there is a total of £25K to spend over three rounds. Feedback and support will be provided to groups that were not funded or only partly funded.</p> <p>A member of the public asked what The Pod is and if it is located in the Hub and Kate Bielby answered that it is a youth club; more of a group rather than a location.</p> <p>The recommendation was to approve the grants detailed in Table 1 of the report:</p> <table> <tr> <th>Applicant/Project</th><th>Amount requested</th><th>Amount agreed</th></tr> <tr> <td>Get Set Wet Frome</td><td>£1870</td><td>£600</td></tr> <tr> <td>Edventure Frome – Local Entrepreneurs Forum</td><td>£2000</td><td>£2000</td></tr> <tr> <td>Baby Café</td><td>£2000</td><td>£500</td></tr> <tr> <td>Nova Sport – Frome Inclusive Sports Project</td><td>£1935</td><td>£1935</td></tr> <tr> <td>The Pod – The Pod Plus</td><td>£2000</td><td>£2000</td></tr> <tr> <td>Critchill School – Felt Pictures, Exhibition, Greetings Card Project</td><td>£1880</td><td>£530</td></tr> <tr> <td>Total funded</td><td></td><td>£7565</td></tr> </table> <p>Proposed by Sheila Gore, seconded by Jean Boulton, agreed unanimously</p>	Applicant/Project	Amount requested	Amount agreed	Get Set Wet Frome	£1870	£600	Edventure Frome – Local Entrepreneurs Forum	£2000	£2000	Baby Café	£2000	£500	Nova Sport – Frome Inclusive Sports Project	£1935	£1935	The Pod – The Pod Plus	£2000	£2000	Critchill School – Felt Pictures, Exhibition, Greetings Card Project	£1880	£530	Total funded		£7565	
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2018/34/TM	<p>The next meeting will be at 7pm on Wednesday 19 September 2018 at Frome Town Hall</p>																									

The Chair closed the meeting at 8:45pm