

Agenda Item 6

For decision - Environmental Resilience Transport and Energy Proposal

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Summary

In December 2018 Frome Town Council (FTC) unanimously declared a climate emergency and committed to becoming a net zero carbon town by 2030. In response, a climate emergency strategy and action plan were developed in partnership with the local community and tabled at the March Council meeting but was deferred due to the uncertain financial future caused by the Covid-19 emergency.

Two key elements of the Strategy are transport and energy. Transport and the need for safer walking and cycling routes is also a key need arising from the 'What Next for Frome' community survey.

It is proposed that Frome Town Council implements a new permanent cycle route and seeks support from Mendip and Somerset for developing a Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure to enable the town to benefit from funding for safer walking and cycling routes in the longer term. It is also proposed that the council signs a letter of support for active travel and community energy and supports a landscape sensitivity analysis for renewable energy and tree planting.

Context

FTC's Strategy for 2020-2024 states 'In the face of a climate emergency, we will strive to make Frome carbon neutral by 2030 by implementing a robust Action Plan.' Enabling and encouraging people to travel actively instead of driving is a key part of this and also helps to increase wellbeing and reduce air pollution. The need for action in this area is reinforced by the responses to the What Next for Frome survey which outlines the community's experiences and needs arising from the Covid-19 lockdown and identified transport and safe walking and cycling as high priority. The council's interactive map also now has over 1000 comments which outline a range of needs and ideas around safer walking and cycling in the town.

Clean community energy is another important area. In 2016 Frome Town Council committed to becoming a zero carbon town and commissioned a 'Clean and Healthy Future' study to explore how this could be achieved. The study reveals that 8-10 wind turbines would be needed to meet the community's need for electricity. Community ownership enables the local community to benefit directly from local renewable energy installations through reduced energy bills and a community fund.

New permanent cycling routes for Frome

Cycle infrastructure in Frome is currently very poor. The town lacks a coherent cycle network, there are almost no dedicated cycle lanes and signage is also limited. The need for safe cycle routes has increased due to the risks around using public transport and the need for social

distancing. While some funding has been available for pop up measures via Somerset this has been very limited and is already allocated. It is unlikely that future funding will be secured in time for implementation over the summer months.

Implementing new measures over the summer is important for several reasons:

1. People are currently walking and cycling more, providing infrastructure will enable them to continue these habits and embed these behaviours while traffic levels are on average 30% lower than pre-lockdown
2. Cycling is always more popular in summer months
3. Making towns and cities safer for walking and cycling is a high priority for central government and the public. Installing a new cycle route will enable us to measure the impact of new cycle infrastructure, providing an evidence base to enable us to secure national government funding for additional routes later in the year.

Building on the feedback from the interactive map and ideas from the local community, it is proposed that Frome Town Council works with Somerset County Council and funds the construction costs of an initial cycle route linking the centre of town with the Medical Practice, hospital, leisure centre, Frome College, Stonebridge estate and the cycle path from Stonebridge to Commerce Park. This will also enable Stonebridge residents to cycle to the centre of the town safely.

It is therefore proposed that the council prioritises this infrastructure and reallocates £20,000 of the existing Resilience budget to cover these costs. It is anticipated that Somerset County Council will manage the process, adopt the route, and cover additional costs such as legal fees.

Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan

In the short term it is proposed that £2000 from the existing resilience budget is spent on developing detailed costed proposals for at least four other cycle routes and temporary 'playing out' road closures outside schools. This will ensure that there are fully costed feasible projects to take forward when further funding is announced from central government.

In the longer term it is proposed that the council commissions a Local Walking and Cycling Infrastructure Plan to develop a comprehensive network of safe walking and cycling routes. This plan will incorporate the ideas outlined in the council's interactive walking and cycling map: www.walkridefrome/commonplace.is and will involve detailed consultation with the local community. To date areas with Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plans such as Taunton and Bridgwater have been prioritised for funding. This will be the first LCWIP in Mendip and will significantly increase funding opportunities for implementation in Frome. The cost of the plan is £18,000. Anna will work actively with Mendip and Somerset to explore funding opportunities to support this plan.

As part of our work around enabling safer walking and cycling it is proposed that Frome Town Council signs a letter of support for the Safer Walking and Cycling Manifesto put together by Bruton Town Council (see [appendix 3](#)).

Community Energy

Frome Town Council was a founder member of Frome Renewable Energy Co-op (FRECo) which was setup in 2014 to fund clean energy projects that benefit the local community. FRECo's current projects at Frome Medical Practice and Frome Football Club have saved the organisations over £20,000 in reduced electricity bills, co-funded a new community football stand, will generate £100,000 for the community fund over 25 years and save 1500 tonnes of CO₂.

However, since 2015 and the reduction of the Feed in Tariff, finding owners of large roofs who are happy to sign long term leases has been challenging. FRECo has therefore been working actively with local land owners to explore opportunities for wind and has asked the Town Council to sign a letter of support. Indicative benefits include: £200-300k for FRECo's community fund to support local activities around fuel poverty and carbon reduction, opportunities to enable the community and businesses to buy cheaper, cleaner electricity, boosting local farmer income by £10-20k per year and enabling the local community invest directly and receive a 4-6% return on their investment.

Recommendations

1. Approve funding for the Connecting Stonebridge cycle route. Budget: £20,000 from existing resilience budget.
2. Commission detailed proposals for four other areas to enable the council to secure funding from Somerset and national government to implement. Budget: £2,000 from existing resilience budget.
3. Explore funding opportunities for a Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan
4. Support the Walking and Cycling Manifesto
5. Sign the letter of support to link FRECo with local landowners to explore opportunities for wind