Feedback from meeting with the public regarding Green Breather Days

Meeting held on the 10th February 2022

Key issues raised:

Respondents showed particular concern regarding the impact of these arrangements on Catherine Hill businesses and residents. These were multifaceted, with businesses being concerned that deliveries would arrive on Saturdays at irregular times, such that a Green Breather Day closure could not be mitigated against. Residents felt their home access was a major concern. If Catherine Hill was exempt from the proposals, then there were concerns that it would become a rat run for vehicles.

Catherine Hill will remain fully open, as will Cork Street and the upper half of Bath Street. This will enable those businesses to continue loading and unloading at irregular hours.

People were clear that a strong information campaign would be useful to encourage people to experiment not using their car. Therefore, Frome Town Council will work out a clear and wide reaching Comms plan.

There were also many concerns that the traffic would simply move to a different part of Frome, shifting the emissions-burden to residential areas and potentially worsening the net-emissions as cars take longer to pass through. There were also concerns that street parking would rise across other parts of the town, like when the Frome Market is on. People also felt that those visiting Frome would have no idea that the road would be closed, thus the Days would not show a meaningful change in the number of drivers

FTC plans to measure the changes to vehicle usage. To do so, the numbers of vehicles will be measured before the first Green Breather Day, on the first Green Breather Day and before the last Green Breather Day as well as on the last Green Breather Day, as well as the levels of emissions in different relevant areas. This will mean that any data collected will be able to measure not only the change in vehicle usage of particular roads, but also how travellers change their behaviour as they adjust to the centre being pedestrianised more often. Traders will be asked to collect data on footfall, and will be given support to do so.

Others spoke of the threats to bus services. One member of the South-West Public Transport Network spoke of how average bus passenger loads are at 60% of pre-pandemic levels, and that this comes after financial difficulty during lockdowns and restrictions. There were also concerns raised for taxis.

Based on many of these comments and suggestions from the public in these meetings, FTC has suggested that the road closure is kept to a minimum, with buses still retaining access to Market Place, albeit by having to travel through a bus gate and being restricted to one single lane. This would enable those who need to be driven right into the centre of Frome to still do so.

Another area of concern was that it could pose a threat to health and safety. With a limited road closure, pedestrians walking out of Stony Street onto an open Bath Street/Cork Street might think that it would be pedestrianised and therefore not look carefully before crossing. Others mentioned that when the road closure ended there may be confusion among the public who would believe they could still walk in the road when it was still a place of danger. It was felt by some that removing road access would have a negative impact on the elderly and disabled people who may have accessibility issues.

The costs of these plans were also raised, with people wondering how much Frome Town Council would need to commit to make these plans a reality. At the same time, many felt it was important to encourage people into the centre of town on these days to mitigate the costs.