

Minutes of a meeting of Frome Town Council

Wednesday 6 December 2023, 7pm
Frome Town Hall and Zoom

Present:

In the Town Hall: Tracey Ashford, Anita Collier, Fiona Barrows, Philip Campagna (Chair), Carla Collenette, Anne Hills, Lisa Merryweather, Ben Still, Steve Tanner, Mel Usher, Max Wide

In attendance:

Emma Rice (Wise Children), Poppy Keeling (Wise Children), Simon Baker, Dawn Denton (SC Cllr), Martin Dimery (SC Cllr), Adam Boyden (SC Cllr, online), Peter Wheelhouse (Deputy Town Clerk), Jane Llewellyn (Planning and Development Manager), Laura Flaherty (Executive Assistant to the Town Clerk and Mayor), Sean Powell (Town Hall Steward)

3 members of the public were in attendance at Frome Town Hall
2 members of the public were in attendance on Zoom.

To watch to the discussion in full visit: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qOSn8h3XMH8>

Minute Ref	Agenda Item	Action
2023/88/FC	<p>The meeting started at 7pm.</p> <p>1a. Apologies for absence Fiona Barrows proposed to accept apologies from Sara Butler, Mark Dorrington and Nick Dove, seconded by Anne Hills, agreed unanimously.</p> <p>1b. Declaration of members' interests Anne Hills director of Frome Independent, declared an other registrable interest in Agenda Item 4.</p> <p>1c. Minutes from the last meeting on 15 November 2023 The minutes of the Frome Town Council meeting held on 15 November 2023 were approved as a true record of the meeting and signed by the Chair.</p> <p>Proposed by Ben Still, seconded by Steve Tanner, agreed by majority. Andy Jones abstained.</p>	
2023/89/FC	<p>2. A short presentation from Wise Children A short a video from Wise Children was shown at the beginning of their presentation.</p> <p>Emma Rice, artistic director, presented an introduction from Wise Children. Emma wanted to create a touring theatre</p>	

	<p>company, so created Wise Children. The company bought the old Portway Methodist church a year ago. They initially opened the week before to friends and family for dress rehearsal, then to neighbours. They had been recently showing performances to local schools and community groups such Purple Elephant and Frome Welcome Hub. Wise Children’s aims were to put down roots, to embed in Frome and be truly local and they were looking forward to working in partnership with everyone in the town. Keeping making friends, community and art is the lifeblood in what they do.</p> <p>Lisa Merryweather was interested to know how many people fit into the space at the old Portway church? Emma Rice explained currently 60, but after implementing fire safety improvements it was expected that this would rise to 120.</p> <p>Mel Usher asked how they used the space, was it for rehearsals or performances? As well as for rehearsals and performances, Emma explained they ran a school called School for Wise Children for emerging artists over 18 years of age. Every place was funded by Wise Children to ensure no barriers.</p> <p>Fiona Barrows asked if they had any plans to work with older schools and children? Emma said it would be fantastic to work with older children and to get the colleges to come and see the work.</p> <p>Tracey Ashford thanked Emma for being so open to discussions, conversation and suggestions of groups to work with. She noted it was in the company’s remit to reach out to communities and provide which they had done successfully.</p> <p>Philip Campagna thanked Wise Children for their presentation and welcomed them to Frome.</p>	
<p>2023/90/FC</p>	<p>3. Question from public and Cllrs, including Somerset Cllrs Matt McKabe updated Council on True Speed’s plans to extend WI FI connection to Badgers Hill. At the moment, they were not currently expanding into new areas in the town.</p> <p>Andy Jones noted he and Anne Hills had been elected as directors at the recent AGM of Somerset Association of Local Councils (SALC).</p> <p>Philip Campagna announced that on Monday evening FTC had won the Non-League Club Award at the Football Supporters Association Awards in London. The award recognised the work done to save the grounds at Badgers Hill. Lisa Merryweather</p>	

	<p>thanked everyone who had contributed, especially Mel Usher. She noted it was an important award for the whole town. In their acceptance they had said they were looking forward to making it more of a community asset beyond football, and the audience talked about it as the way forward for councils, sports teams and communities to work together. Peter Wheelhouse noted that John Murray – a BBC commentator - had said to the team at the ceremony that our story was the best he had heard during the evening. Mel Usher noted how significant the award was because they weren't usually about small clubs.</p>	
<p>2023/91/FC</p>	<p>4. For information and discussion - Update on work to reinvigorate the town centre A summary of the report was given by Lisa Merryweather and Peter Wheelhouse.</p> <p>Lisa, Peter and Rachel Griffin presented the progress report for the area of the programme on the town centre. He noted there was still some work to do.</p> <p>Peter noted that there had been no progress on getting additional pedestrian crossings in the town centre. He noted that, unfortunately, there was no budget within Somerset Council. In future it was hoped that Dept of Transport grants might available to do this. Other measures to make crossing in the Market Place safer included using Speed Indicator Devices (SID) and Anita Collier said that it was expected that more would be made available using grants from the police.</p> <p>FTC officers would be happy to pick that up again and would welcome the support from SC Councillors representing Frome. Peter cautioned it would be a difficult ask in current times, as this would be a new project and SC will probably not have available funds.</p> <p>Adam Boyden suggested looking into campaigns like 'Love Your Town' and Business Improvement District projects. Lisa Merryweather confirmed lots of options had been considered and the amount of money generated from businesses to run successful BID was not sufficient. Other ways to replicate a similar system or service that relies less on business income could be explored. Lisa noted that other sources of external funding were being explored.</p> <p>Andy Jones said that some local residents regularly stepped in to look after their own neighbourhoods, cleaning up bus shelters and a group of school parents had recently tidied up paths around Trinity School. This community led approach was very</p>	

	<p>much the Frome way of doing things and would likely to be more important as public money becomes increasingly short.</p> <p>Martin Dimery said he was pleased to see progression with constructive measures and that FTC was taking initiative on traffic management. He did note his frustration about how urban tree management was conducted through SC. He suggested FTC could look longer term about taking on management of trees.</p> <p>Rachel Griffin gave an overview of empty shops – there were 17 empty shops in December which was the same as in June. Footfall in November was down by 16% compared to the same time last year, which equated to roughly 500 people per day but October’s data showed a 10% increase. Dwell time had been higher in 2023 than in 2022. Rachel also gave a brief overview of Discover Frome, what it provides at the moment and plans for reviewing and refreshing it in the coming year.</p> <p>Lisa Merryweather talked about the importance of the town centre and highlighted the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We need to do something about the state of the empty shops. • We talk to those that live here, those that have already chosen Frome as a destination. But we need to do more to encourage those that haven’t chosen Frome. • Events and footfall are valuable to the town centre as they increase spend. We need to think more about partnerships with businesses to support to the town centre. • One of these partnerships might be with Xplore and we have had early discussions with them about the challenges our town centre faces. We have discussed whether they could help with digital solutions, a website and an app, someone on the ground, and help all of our independent businesses to be supported. • If we want increased value delivered, we will have to pay for it. We want to talk about whether this something you want to look further into or do we look at more inhouse ways to sort the challenges that have been identified. <p>Fiona Barrows had a few points to express, as an overall issue, she felt like the advisory groups had not been enacted across all programmes and that there was a gap in decision making. She suggested looking back at previous decisions and whether they were followed through.</p> <p>Lisa clarified the advisory group for Discover Frome had not yet been set up. Fiona asked if a local economic development</p>	
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	<p>strategy for the whole town was being looked into. Lisa explained not just retail in the town centre had been thought about, a strategy to increase footfall, visibility outside of Frome and an increase in businesses had also been considered.</p> <p>Ben Still said he was intrigued as to whether Xplore and FTC had other metrics of success other than just increased spend. Lisa noted if there was a company that could deliver on all the challenges facing the town it would be well worth spending a sizeable chunk of money. She explained the conversations with Xplore and anyone else comes to the table in the future is about working in partnership. It would be an opportunity to co create something and we need to identify those and need to have a discussion.</p> <p>Andy Jones felt if we wanted a thriving township we needed to pull people from outside of the Frome town boundaries to help spend their money here. He also felt FTC could help support two organisations that had a positive impact on Frome and with ambitions to become a CIC, Frome Festival and The Frome Independent.</p> <p>Carla Collenette asked in the report a potential strategy had been eluded to and asked what is the radical thinking being suggested. Lisa explained part of it was to look at whether we continued to do work in house or do we look at partnerships. Also opportunities to think outside the box.</p> <p>Tracey Ashford asked for more information on Xplore. Lisa clarified they were not selling FTC anything, they wanted to create something new with the technology that they had. They wanted to work with town councils to provide an opportunity and FTC was looking at co creation.</p> <p>Mel Usher noted the discussion proved there was not enough support within the Council to make this happen properly. The point of the report was for Cllrs to decide if they wanted to take this work seriously, where was the line in the budget to make it happen and if they wanted to pursue a partnership with Xplore. Mel felt town centres were more important than just shopping. If FTC missed the next budget, another 12 months were lost. He asked Cllrs to show a bit of optimism.</p> <p>The recommendation was, following the discussion and steer from the meeting, Cllrs Merryweather, Dove and Usher with Rachel Griffin and Peter Wheelhouse to draft a workable strategy to support this area of work. To report back to Council in February 2024 with recommendations.</p>	
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	<p>Proposed by Anita Collier, seconded by Steve Tanner, agreed by majority.</p>	<p>PWh/RG</p>
<p>2023/92/FC</p>	<p>5. A verbal update on the planning and development programme Jane Llewellyn presented. Highlights from her presentation included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Since the planning update in October, the Planning Committee had considered 25 applications, with another 20 to be discussed at the December Planning meeting. SC had proposed three new houses at Cranmore View, FTC objected due to the loss of green space. Also at they were not affordable homes. • The Committee also considered an application for 17 Bath Street for conversion into five flats, objections were made for multiple reasons including lack of suitable fire escapes and loss of a town centre employment space. • Regarding the application at Packsaddle Way for the erection of 74 dwellings, Jane was still waiting for a decision, but lots of objections from residents had been received. • A response was given to a draft biodiversity net gain guidance note. In general, FTC agreed with most of the proposals but did want to see tighter control to ensure that the biodiversity net gain was maintained in perpetuity, so that essentially when someone puts their biodiversity on another site, that site then doesn't get developed. • Jane was looking at a consultation from Historic England. They were consulting on Climate Change and Historic Building Adaptation. The draft was something FTC had been waiting for guidance from for a long time, as there were always issues with climate change adaptations on listed buildings. • An update on Victoria Park toilets – the work was nearly finished and there was a new drainage ditch going in around the back as there had been some problems with flooding. • And finally, the finger posts had been installed. <p>Fiona Barrows noted it was a massive success to get the Victoria Park toilets and finger posts over the line and congratulated all involved.</p> <p>Martin Dimery asked suggested acknowledging funding given by Great Western Railway for the fingerposts. He felt the goodwill would engender others receiving funding and sponsorship from them in the future. Jane confirmed their funding would be acknowledged.</p>	

	Philip Campagna wished everyone a Merry Christmas and a happy New Year.	
2023/93/FC	The next meeting will be at 7pm on Wednesday 17 January 2024, Frome Town Hall and Zoom	

The chair closed the meeting at: 8.45pm

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