

Minutes of the Frome Annual Town Meeting

Wednesday 6 April 2022, 7pm

Frome Town Hall and Zoom

In the Chair: Andy Wrintmore, Mayor of Frome 2021/22

In attendance:

60 members of the public at the Town Hall

5 members of the public on Zoom

Frome Town Councillors: Rich Ackroyd, Ali Barclay, Anita Collier, Mark Dorrington, Sheila Gore, Anne Hills, Paul Horton, Andy Palmer, Steve Tanner, Scott Ward, Andy Wrintmore (Chair)

Frome Town Council Officers: Paul Wynne (Town Clerk), Rachel Griffin (Marketing and Communications Manager), Laura Flaherty (Executive Assistant to the Town Clerk and Mayor)

1. Welcome from the Mayor of Frome

The meeting began at 7pm and Andy Wrintmore welcomed all attendees.

2. Agree the minutes of the last meeting on 7 April 2021

Minutes of the meeting held on 7 April 2021 were signed by the Chair as a true record of the meeting. They were proposed by Anita Collier, seconded by Mark Dorrington, and agreed by majority.

3. Presentation from Cllr Andy Wrintmore on his year as Mayor

Andy spoke about the beginning of his year as Mayor with his first event being the well blessing of at St John's Church, a right of passage for every new Mayor.

He was delighted to have teamed up with Flow Bar and devised a cocktail called 'The Mayor,' £1 of sales went to Fair Frome.

Andy was once a drummer in a punk rock band, and therefore earned the nickname 'The Punk Rock Mayor' and received lots of press because of this which included articles in the New York Times, Kerrang and The Mirror. He said he saw the Mayor as being the representative of the town? and to stay in the press.

The Mayor's Column was a real challenge to write for Andy due to his ADHD (which he had been open about) but he was pleased to receive some great comments and people stopping him to say they read the column. He always felt proud once they had been written as the columns were a great way of communicating with people, in his words 'a powerful vessel'. He was pleased to have had the opportunity to have been vulnerable and human in his writing.

The Glow in the Park event had been a highlight of the year for all the town. The idea had been Andy's and he thanked the great team at FTC who turned it into reality.

One of Andy's personal highlights was Remembrance Sunday, as he was a former Army Cadet. He had been invited to march with the veterans which was a great honour and one of his proudest moments.

Christmas time was always a big part of the Mayor's year. Andy had enjoyed the process of having a Mayor's Christmas card designed by a Frome school pupil. He showed a video of the Light the Night event. He said the best part of the event was to share it with former Mayor Anita Collier as she missed out during her year due to lockdown.

Andy talked about his high regard for the High Sheriff of Somerset, Thomas Sheppard. They had met at the Glow in the Park event, . Thomas and Andy visited Vallis youth club, North Hill House School together and Thomas was a guest on Andy's podcast.

Andy thanked the Deputy Mayor, Sara Butler. He said he appreciated her firecracker energy, punk rock spirit, her dependability, passion and fun nature.

Other event highlights had been Window Wanderland, The Kindness Festival and the vigil for Ukraine. The vigil particularly had been an emotional and poignant evening. A candle was lit, and people gathered and discussed the state of the world. They were joined by Ukrainian women from Bridgwater who were gracious to share their stories.

Andy finished his presentation to thank everyone for their love and support. He felt he had grown, evolved and matured. He said it was a strange thing being a figurehead while weaving in your own sense of self. He had found ways of being open to criticism and not letting ego get in the way. For him it had been a real honour to be Mayor.

4. Presentation of the Mayor's Civic Awards

Jim Parsons

Jim is the secretary of the Dissenters Cemetery. This unique place is located on Vallis Road and is the burial place of many past Frome residents. Dissenters were Christians who did not accept the 1662 version of the Book of Common Prayer. Since 2002 the cemetery has been restored by Jim and many volunteers. The award was for the continuous dedication and passion to preserving and maintaining the beauty, peace, tranquillity and dignity of the dissenters cemetery.

The award was accepted on behalf of Jim by his son Graham.

Paige Starr

Paige is the Platoon Leader for the Frome Branch of the Somerset Army Cadets. The cadets are close to Andy's heart as he was a member in his teen years. Paige gave Army experience, provided pastoral work, moral leadership and support.

Jan and Ann Taylor

The Gateway Club is a wonderful Frome institution and has been running for over 50 years! It is currently run by Ann who is ably assisted by her husband Jan. The club supports adults with learning difficulties via social activities. Andy had been lucky enough to be invited to some of their events over the past year including a Caribbean evening. Ann and Jan were so welcoming to the various events invited to. Love the energy and everything about it.

Justin Worringham

Justin is chair of the Frome Twinning Association. The Association works hard to encourage relationships and links with the towns of Rabka in Poland, Murrhardt in Germany and Chateau Gontier in France. Justin plays a key role in this visiting all the twin towns, hosting and coordinating the other twinning association members who host, and generally spearheading the whole twinning movement. For tireless efforts representing Frome.

On behalf of Rabka Justin thanked the people of Frome for their huge generosity.

Grace Maddrall

Full confession I have not had the pleasure of meeting Grace in person but when my colleagues suggested them as a person to recognise I was in full agreement. Grace is only 16 years old and can teach us all a thing or two about activism. They have already written and published a book called 'Tomorrow is too Late.' In the book Grace collects testimonies of activism and hope from young climate strikers, from Brazil and Burundi to Pakistan and Palestine. The book is an inspiring collection of essays from young people in the search for climate justice, and offers a manifesto for how you can engage, educate, and inspire change for a more hopeful future. Grace can often be found campaigning and had held weekly strikes to save the Congo Rainforest. Grace can't be here tonight, but we will meet up in a couple of weeks where I will present their award in person.

5. Questions and comments from the public and Cllrs

A member of the public commented that FTC did a really good job, and everyone should be really proud. They were always impressed with the Rangers and thanked staff and Cllrs for everything they did.

Alan Denison asked about the possibility of twinning Ukraine. Justin Worringham, Chair of Frome Twinning Association said it could be possible with the help of FTC.

6. Presentations from FTC grant recipients in 2021/22

Organisations and community groups who had been successful in their applications for Mayor's grants, community grants and substantial grants were invited to give a one minute presentation about the work and projects the grant enabled them to do.

There was a fantastic turnout out which included:

Make the Sunshine

Evolve Music

Frome's Missing Links

Edventure

PACE

Shared Earth Learning
Rare Species
Fair Housing for Frome
Science Boost
Friends of the Mount, Marston & Keyford
FACLT
St Mary's Church
Nova
Jackdaws
Trio Paradis
Frome Tennis Club
Cultivating Community (Walled Garden Nursery)
Frome Birth Talk
Frome Festival
Life Education Wessex & Thames Valley
Loop:Frome (Frome Compost CIC)
Frome Town Band
Frome Station Friends
We Hear You
Photo Frome
Jellyfish Theatre
Young People Frome
The Write Place
Frome Field to Fork
The Good Heart Frome
Frome Swimming Club
Active & In Touch
Frome Selwood Tennis
Openstorytellers
Focus Counselling
Purple Elephant
The Pod
Friends of the River Frome
Frog Life Trust
Memorial Theatre
Save Our Open Spaces
Horton Street Neighbourhood Group
Gateway Club
South Oakfield Road Virus Assistance Group
Victoria Road Neighbourhood Group
Trinity Street North Neighbourhood Group
Alexandra Road Neighbourhood Group
Packsaddle Community Group
Frome Open Art Trail
Frome Neighbourhood Group
Phoenix House and Court
Macular Society
Rook Lane Arts Trust

Andy thanked all for their attendance and contribution. All agreed it was a wonderful demonstration of all the wonderful activities, projects and services available in Frome.

7. Presentation from Cllr Andy Palmer, Leader of the Council

2021/22 really marked the beginning of our first steps out of 'pandemic life' and multiple lockdowns, returning to a much more normal way of life. This presented both challenges and opportunities for all areas of Frome Town Council's work.

This has been one of the busier years for our Planning Manager, co-ordinating with the Chair of our Planning Committee, and the committee itself, in order to provide our Statutory responses to a high volume of planning applications, as well as working on some of the biggest single applications the town has seen in many years. Such as the proposed development under the working title of Selwood Garden Community & associated Solar Park.

Pre-application discussions with the developers and public engagement events for this development started in 2020 and were a major area of work. The planning applications were formally submitted in August 2021. Our aim throughout the process is to ensure that stakeholders and residents are fully informed about the proposals and have the opportunity to engage with the town council and the developers. A series of Stakeholder workshops took place in November 2021, together with public engagement events. These events were held online due to Covid restrictions at the time.

As a result of those workshops and engagement events and the feedback received, amended plans will be submitted shortly for the residential development and the Solar Park application has been withdrawn. A further round of workshops and public engagement will then take place.

The Community Team have led, developed and delivered a new play strategy for Frome which sets out ambitious aspirations to create a playful town for adults and children alike, coordinated and enabled a place based approach to the development of mental health services for children and young people. They have supported the development of the Neighbourhood Network, The Restorative group and the new Wild Bunch focusing on support street level ecology. The Year 8 Make It Happen conference took place recently and 350 young people participated in a series of practical workshops enabling them to use their voices to feed into a number of topics, including placing their votes for the People Budgets events.

Over the last year we have continued to support community organisations through one-to-one support and strategic development days for boards of trustees. Alongside this we have administered £70,473 in Community Grants, £63,000 in Substantial Grants and £3,690 of Mayors Grants to many local community groups and organisations.

Over the past 9-months the Resilience Team has been working with Somerset County Council and Sustrans (a cycling and walking charity) to design a School Streets scheme around Trinity, Critchill, Oakfield and Avanti schools. The aim of the project is to make the roads safer for active travel- walking, cycling and wheeling- to create positive health and environmental outcomes.

This will be the first School Streets scheme in Somerset and will provide a blueprint for other schemes across the county. An inclusive approach has been taken to designing the scheme, with Sustrans running 6 community co-design sessions across September and October last year, supported by the team at FTC. The feedback received in these sessions has informed the draft design which is now out for public consultation. We expect the scheme to be installed for an 18-month trial period no later than Spring 2023. There have been significant delays and challenges associated with the project which the team has worked hard to resolve, and we're pleased to now be able to present a design to the public.

This year the Ranger Team have been supporting the climate change and ecological emergency initiative by facilitating the Wild About Trees project whereby FTC have planted hundreds of trees and hedging plants around our green spaces including, Packsaddle, Chapmans Close, Egford, New Road, Weylands and the Old Showfield.

The team have also continued to change our work strategy to promote wildlife habitat creation and protection, this includes leaving more of our lawn areas to grow into wild meadow, being sensitive in completing tree works by leaving wood stacks for habitat and hedge laying at the Muriel Jones/Birch Hill allotment site, which greatly improves the biodiversity of the hedgerow.

This year Rangers installed a pond at the Otherside area of Welshmill to increase diversity in open spaces and we are looking to expand on this by installing one in Rodden Meadow. In our beds and planters, they have planted pollenating perennials to create a rich environment that supports the wildlife of Frome.

Local businesses have been through a difficult time with various external events disrupting trade. However, the Economic Development and Regeneration team have worked hard to support the business community and those seeking employment and training as part of the local recovery effort. They have ensured that businesses have had the latest information on Government grants and how they can apply, signposted to sources of advice and have worked with the Chamber to lay on events at which business owners can obtain the support they need from either specialist advisers or fellow business operators.

Many lost their jobs through the pandemic and our economic recovery work has extended to supporting those that need to get back into training or work. In September, the Council worked with Jobcentre Plus and local training providers to coordinate the Spring Forward event to showcase training opportunities in and around Frome at the Frome Carnival Fun Day and the work continues through the Vocational Training Group led by the Council.

Underpinning all of the aforementioned areas, is how we communicate what we are doing, and plan to do. Frome Town Council would be unable to achieve any of the things we do, without a professional, agile and dedicated Marketing & Communications Team.

As well as spreading the word around all things Frome and the Town Hall the team have been super busy delivering and promoting over 85 events. There have been workshops, conferences and information evenings. Alongside larger events – the picnics highlighting our green spaces, the We Feed Frome event, the ever-popular Frome Buses, the lantern parade

signalling the Christmas Light Switch On and very importantly, a presence at other people's events.

However, the jewel in the crown of this year was the production of the first live audience drone show in the country – an extraordinary effort by the team for a truly impactful and accessible event. As ever, it was designed to deliver across our strategic objectives: supporting the community to come together, showcase our amazing public open spaces, working with partners to produce exceptional work and highlighting the town in a way that the whole of Frome can be proud of.

Apart from maintaining strong financial controls and stability throughout another unpredictable year, the Business team have supported flexibility and co-operation between budget holders. They have also enabled FTC and the Town Hall to offer high quality hybrid meetings so that Councillors, staff and residents alike can attend more meetings either in person or remotely, at a variety of times throughout the day and evenings, from a variety of locations. Access, openness and opportunity have been our goals.

After what seemed like an age, the Government decided in Somerset to merge the county and the district councils and to create a new Somerset Unitary Council. For us in Frome that means Mendip District Council and Somerset County Council will become Somerset Unitary Council with the elections for Somerset Council taking place on 5th May.

We have positioned ourselves well in the unitary debate and the Business Plan that the Unitary project team are following used virtually all of our recommendations about what the relationship between us in the town and parish council sector should be like. We were asked to pull together one of four pilot Local Community Networks (LCN) to explore this relationship. The Frome Area LCN covers Frome and the surrounding parishes, and we are working together to address issues around children and families. The other area that we have been working on is to decide whether to expand the role of FTC by taking on assets and services from the unitary council. We've had some very useful help from two senior ex-district council employees on which to base a discussion following the elections at the town level.

There has been much going on over the last 12-months and what makes the areas highlighted so much more impressive is that it shows just how much Frome Town Council punches above its weight. It's a very much-repeated point, but as a Parish Council, Frome Town Council's statutory responsibilities are actually only to provide allotments and hold an Annual Town Meeting.

But, as you can see, Frome Town Council provides, and enables and encourages, so much more than that. Due to the combination of a little-known clause of the Localism Act, known as the general 'Power of Competence,' whereby a Parish Council is able to do anything an individual can, as long as it is legal, and a highly professional Staff and dedicated Councillor Team, we have been able to deliver so much more for the people of Frome.

As we move into a new Council year – 2022/23, and the prospect of a new Council Administration, and Local Government Reorganisation, we must remember the difficulties that people will face ahead. A cost-of-living crisis is before us, and the work of our Community Team, our Resilience Team, our Economic Team and our Marketing and Comms Team will be

even more important; helping those who are in need, signposting people to services and help that they require, assisting local businesses to stay in business, and making sure we get the messages out there that the people of Frome need to see.

So the hard work begins again!”

Meeting closed: 9.04pm