

Agenda item 5

**For decision– Frome Riverside Market Yard Toilets engagement update and next steps**

Authors: Peter Wheelhouse, Town Clerk and Rachel Griffin, Marketing and Communications Manager

**Summary (incl recommendations)**

This report sets out the findings of public engagement around the Market Yard toilets and proposes next steps to deliver a long-term, accessible and reliable solution for town centre toilet provision.

**Recommendations**

To delegate authority to the Town Clerk in consultation with the Chair/Leader to:

1. Establish a Frome Riverside Advisory Group to take forward a project to provide new toilet accommodation within the existing Market Yard toilet block including the reimagining of the other parts of that block and adjoining apron. The Advisory Group to also oversee the development of a vision for the wider Frome Riverside area. The following to be members of the Advisory Group: Cllrs Fiona Barrows, Steve Tanner, Nick Dove, Lyndsey Mayhew, Sara Butler and staff including Peter Wheelhouse, Jane Llewellyn, Sarah Williams, Rachel Griffin, Alastair Findlay
2. Press Somerset Council to provide a 25-year lease for the block and apron on terms that are acceptable to FTC particularly with regard to the requirement for Public Works Loan Board (PWLB) funding
3. Develop a costed design for the development to be agreed by the Advisory Group
4. Invite tenders for the development
5. Submit an application for PWLB funding for this project
6. Bring a paper back to Council to report on progress to include an Equalities Impact Assessment and at an appropriate point seek authority to draw down funding and proceed to contract stage

**Background**

Frome Town Council assumed responsibility for the Market Yard toilet block in April 2024 following Somerset Council’s decision to close all public toilets in Somerset. However, we inherited toilets which proved increasingly unreliable and costly to maintain, with annual costs exceeding £66,000 alongside ongoing issues with ageing infrastructure and anti-social behaviour. Therefore in July 2025, councillors agreed to close the block and put in place interim provision with the Cheese and Grain to provide public toilets within their building, alongside the Your Welcome scheme where local businesses make their toilets available to the public. As part of this arrangement, the Cheese & Grain agreed to maintain the Changing Places toilet facility at the Market Yard. At the same time, Frome Town Council committed to undertaking public engagement to inform the long-term future of provision.

## Engagement

This engagement was undertaken using a mix of online and in-person methods to reach a broad range of residents, visitors and stakeholders. This included a detailed survey hosted on My Frome, a shorter “quick survey” for wider participation, and a series of pop-up conversations in the town centre to capture real-time feedback. Stakeholders, including nearby organisations and regular users, were also engaged directly to understand operational impacts and specific needs. This approach ensured both quantitative data and qualitative insight were gathered, providing a well-rounded evidence base to inform the next stage of decision-making.

## Overall preference

Analysis of both quantitative and qualitative data showed a preference for:

- Creating a reimagined site incorporating new toilets (weighted average 2.15)
- Refurbishing the existing Market Yard toilets (weighted average 2.18)

These two options were significantly more popular than:

- New standalone facility (2.61)
- Partnership-only approach (2.94)

Overall, there was a strong public preference for dedicated, central toilet provision, rather than reliance on partnership schemes alone.

Further details of the data from the engagement exercise can be found in [Appendix 5.1](#)

## Key themes

The consultation highlighted a strong demand for central, reliable public toilet provision, with clear dissatisfaction around the current reliance on the Cheese and Grain alone. While partnership schemes are valued, they are widely seen as a supplement rather than a sufficient solution, particularly in terms of accessibility, confidence and visitor use.

Feedback also raised concerns around accessibility, capacity and opening hours, especially during peak times and events, alongside poor awareness and signage for existing provision. There is some scepticism about cost, but this is balanced by a clear desire for pragmatic, value-for-money solutions. A smaller but notable number of respondents expressed interest in a reimagined, multi-use site, although most prioritised the need to restore reliable basic provision first.

Taken together, this points to a clear expectation that any future approach should deliver high-quality, accessible and dependable toilet facilities in a central location as soon as possible, while balancing short-term pressures with long-term value for money. It also highlights the importance of retaining and enhancing Changing Places provision, responding to wider opportunities for the Market Yard and Frome Riverside area, and ensuring that

proposals are deliverable, including consideration of maintenance arrangements and a suitable procurement route.

## **Discussion**

The engagement results present a clear direction but also require careful interpretation. While refurbishment ranked highly, this largely reflects a desire for the quickest route back to central provision, rather than a detailed understanding of the limitations of the existing building. From an operational perspective, the current configuration of the Market Yard block presents ongoing challenges:

- Layout and design that contribute to anti-social behaviour
- Ageing infrastructure with limited lifespan even if refurbished
- Ongoing maintenance risks and revenue pressure

A like-for-like refurbishment risks addressing symptoms rather than underlying issues and may not represent best value over the medium to long term. By contrast, and just pipping refurbishment marginally, the reimagined approach to the site provides an opportunity to:

- Deliver modern, accessible and robust toilet provision
- Retain and enhance Changing Places facilities
- Improve natural surveillance and reduce anti-social behaviour
- Integrate the building more positively into the wider Market Yard and Frome Riverside area (the area bounded on one side by the river and on the other by the Westway, Library, Black Swan Arts and Frome Museum)
- Explore complementary uses of the building that support activity, safety and long-term sustainability
- And provide other people in the space to counter antisocial behaviour

Given the strength of feeling around central provision and the known limitations of the existing building, it is the recommendation that a reimagined scheme incorporating new toilet provision represents the most balanced and future-proof approach.

## **Proposed Advisory Group – role and brief**

To progress this work at pace and with appropriate councillor oversight, it is proposed that a Frome Riverside Advisory Group is established.

The purpose of this advisory group would be to guide the development of a deliverable scheme for Market Yard toilet provision and the wider vision for Frome Riverside as a cultural and community destination, including design, cost, funding and procurement.

The Frome Riverside Advisory Group would:

- Oversee the development of proposals to deliver high-quality, accessible and dependable toilet facilities in the toilet block as soon as possible and reimagine how the other parts of the block and adjoining apron could be used/animated as part of a wider vision for Frome Riverside

- Ensure that proposals reflect engagement findings, operational requirements and best practice
- Provide councillor input at key design and decision points
- Bring periodic progress reports to Council and reports for decision when necessary

It is proposed that the following would be members of the Advisory Group: Cllrs Fiona Barrows, Steve Tanner, Nick Dove, Lyndsey Mayhew, Sara Butler and staff including Peter Wheelhouse, Jane Llewellyn, Sarah Williams, Rachel Griffin, Alastair Findlay

### **Lease for the property**

Somerset Council have agreed to provide a 25-year lease for the existing toilet block and adjoining apron, an essential pre-requisite to securing Public Works Loan Board (PWLB) funding. However, we are currently waiting for a draft of the lease. It is also essential that the terms of the lease minimise the financial risk to the Council. In particular, it would be important that either there is no break clause or Somerset Council commit to compensating Frome Town Council with regard to the PWLB loan required, should a break clause be included. Otherwise, the Council could find itself with a liability for loan repayments but no benefit in terms of a lease on the property. It will be critical to press Somerset Council for the provision of a lease on terms that are acceptable to FTC.

### **Other options considered**

- Refurbishment of the existing Market Yard toilets on a like-for-like basis; discounted due to the limitations of the current building layout, ongoing maintenance risks and its contribution to anti-social behaviour
- Development of a new standalone facility elsewhere; discounted due to cost, delivery timescales and the importance of retaining provision in this central location
- Reliance on partnership/community toilet schemes alone; discounted as a primary solution due to clear feedback that this does not meet need, particularly for accessibility, confidence and peak demand
- Do nothing / continue with interim arrangements; not considered viable as a long-term solution

### **Links to Council Plan and Medium-Term Financial Plan**

- Supports the Council Plan priority of a thriving town centre by enabling access, dwell time and visitor experience
- Contributes to community wellbeing through inclusive, accessible facilities
- Aligns with environmental sustainability through the opportunity to deliver efficient, low-impact infrastructure
- Reflects commitment to effective asset management and long-term financial planning
- Medium-Term Financial Plan implications include capital investment and potential borrowing, balanced against reducing ongoing reactive maintenance costs

### **Financial and Risk Implications**

- Capital investment required to deliver a reimagined scheme (subject to design and costings)
- Potential application for PWLB borrowing to support delivery – it would be essential to secure a lease from Somerset Council that restricts the financial risk to FTC to an acceptable level.
- Opportunity to reduce ongoing revenue costs associated with maintaining an ageing and unreliable building
- Risks include cost escalation, procurement challenges and lease uncertainty
- Reputational risk if provision is not addressed or remains inadequate

### **Legal / HR Implications**

- Requirement to secure appropriate lease arrangements with Somerset Council  
Procurement to be undertaken in line with relevant regulations and Council procedures
- No direct HR implications at this stage

### **Equalities Implications**

- Provision of accessible toilet facilities is a key equality consideration
- Maintaining and enhancing Changing Places provision is a core requirement
- Next stage to include a full Equalities Impact Assessment to inform design and decision-making
- Engagement feedback highlights the importance of accessibility for disabled people, older residents and families

### **Community Safety Implications**

- Existing layout contributes to anti-social behaviour and poor natural surveillance
- Reimagined design presents an opportunity to improve visibility, safety and management
- Potential to reduce incidents through design, materials and operational approach

### **Climate Change and Sustainability Implications**

- Opportunity to incorporate water-saving, low-energy and durable materials
- Reduced need for reactive maintenance and replacement
- Potential to align with wider sustainability goals within the town centre
- Could form part of an active travel hub.

### **Health and Safety Implications**

- Improved facilities will support hygiene, cleanliness and user safety
- Reduced risks associated with poorly maintained or unreliable infrastructure
- Design to consider safe access, lighting and visibility

### **Health and Wellbeing Implications**

- Access to clean, safe and reliable public toilets is essential for dignity, inclusion and participation in public life
- Supports older people, families, disabled users and those with medical needs
- Contributes to a more welcoming and usable town centre

### **Constitutional Requirements**

- Decisions relating to capital expenditure, borrowing and contract award to be taken by Full Council (or relevant committee in line with scheme of delegation)
- Delegations proposed to enable timely project development, with appropriate reporting back

### **Reasons for Recommendations**

- Engagement demonstrates clear demand for central, reliable provision
- Reimagined option balances public preference with operational realities
- Addresses long-standing issues with layout, anti-social behaviour and maintenance
- Provides opportunity for a future-proof, accessible and sustainable solution
- Enables structured development through Advisory Group oversight

### **Conclusion**

The engagement demonstrates a clear public expectation for reliable, central, accessible toilet provision. While refurbishment appears attractive in the short term, a reimagined approach offers the opportunity to address long-standing issues, improve the quality of the town centre environment and deliver a more sustainable solution.

### **Report sign off**

Peter Wheelhouse, Town Clerk and Cllr Fiona Barrows, Leader & Chair 16/04/26

## Recommendations

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