

Agenda item 5

For information – Update on the Climate Action work programme

Authors: Matt Mellen - Climate Action Lead, Jo Morris – Resilience Officer, Caroline Wajsblum – Energy Advice and Retrofit Support Coordinator, Will Reynolds – Renewable Energy Coordinator

Summary

This report is an update of the Climate Action team's area of work since the presentation to council in December 2025. Over the last twelve months, Green and Healthy Frome (GHF) funding has enabled new initiatives to be trialled, the impact of which is presented in this report. This experience has influenced the framing of objectives within the new Council Plan and points the way in terms of our future work programme.

Background

Frome Town Council (FTC) has been taking action on climate change for over fifteen years. This work also improves people's lives - making them healthier, better off and more resilient whilst building community cohesion and helping to prepare our town for the future. A focus on sustainability "win-wins" gained new momentum with Green and Healthy Frome (GHF) and is aligned with FTC's overall strategy and objectives.

Frome Town Council has launched two new services in GHF Year 3: the Solar and Beyond Renewables work package led initially by Linnea Hopkins and now by Will Reynolds (Renewable Energy Coordinator) who was previously an energy advice champion. This scheme works with householders, businesses and community groups to identify opportunities for solar and other renewables, including advice on working with installers and contractors.

Alongside this, Caroline Wajsblum (Energy Advice and Retrofit Support Coordinator) has developed a retrofit support service to households who have received a retrofit assessment. This service has seen good uptake and positive early outcomes.

Our Healthy Homes team continues to recruit and train energy advice volunteers, with new modules in retrofit becoming available. Frome Town Council now hosts 10 volunteer Energy Advice Champions in addition to trained staff, enabling greater outreach via community events and home visits, and disseminating skills and knowledge into the community via personal and professional networks. The team celebrated at a Summer Social which was also a send-off for Linnea.

A work programme for changing times

Acting on climate change is complex. Global heating interacts with all aspects of town life and there are a huge number of ways we could respond. Based on a thorough review of what has worked and had the most impact over the past year it is important for FTC to focus on key areas where we feel we can make progress.

Over the last 12 months our focus for work has been: engaging the town with information and events; renewable energy and energy efficiency work; Cycle Together and supporting and evaluating Green & Healthy Frome (GHF). Next year we want to dedicate more time to materials and reuse and supporting the emergence of a circular economy under our Keep It Frome banner.

1. ENGAGE & ACT

FTC keeps the town informed with up-to-date climate science and coordinates planning for how we can collectively respond and prepare for the changes happening around us. New work will help to bring real time sustainability data to life for Frome residents. We want to help everyone to see how their efforts fit into the overall movement of the town towards our Net Zero goal.

People in Frome are anxious about climate change. There is a rich ecosystem of people taking community action - for example - Sustainable Frome, FRECO, Frome Families for the Future etc. FTC plays an important role coordinating and convening these groups.

Our series of climate events in 2025 were very well received and attended. Our *Adaptation Workshop* in May had 130 participants and generated intense interest in how we prepare our town for hotter summers and wetter winters. In October our *Vision the Future* workshop with Rob Hopkins similarly captured attention and focussed minds on the challenges ahead. Exciting plans are in development for next year's event series, and we are mindful to increase our efforts around inclusivity and accessibility.

A Green Open Homes event will be held in 2026 which will have more than 10 homes open to public visits to demonstrate retrofit and solar installations in 'real life'. A previous Frome GOH event had over 200 unique visitors, and we're aiming for a similar reach, and expect this to be a significant opportunity to provide and publicise our advice and to support renewables and retrofit in Frome.

2. ENERGY & ENERGY EFFICIENCY

The core driver of climate change is the burning of fossil fuels to create energy. The fundamental response is to use energy more efficiently and transition to renewable energy. These steps are therefore the two main areas of Frome Town Council's climate action work.

Energy

Led initially by Linnea and now by Will Reynolds, Solar and Beyond launched in April 2025 and within three months had made good progress in bringing the potential of solar and renewables to local householders and businesses, including engagement of suppliers. During the six months to September 2025, public engagement at various events highlighted the scheme to a total of around 250 people in Frome alongside further reach via press releases, radio shows and a leaflet in every edition of the Frome Times (12,000 addresses).

Alongside key advisory organisations in the SW and beyond, over 20 installers were contacted, 9 interviewed and 5 of these have developed into close working relationships providing consultancy and information to FTC. Over 30 businesses and commercial estate agents (reaching over 50 landlords) were contacted directly to discuss opportunities and barriers and a Solar for Business event in July had ten attendees. Twelve householders and four businesses have sought advice and guidance from the scheme.

The Cheese and Grain was supported to apply as part of a Somerset Council bid to the Rural Prosperity Fund and discussions are underway with other venues in Frome as well as the local Schools Academy Trust. Follow up will be needed to see which businesses and households proceeded to quote/feasibility stage following advice from the programme.

A small number of enquiries have been received for advice from local community organisations, and a few prominent community-centred organisations in the town have been contacted directly, with the majority keen to take up advice on installing solar panels. Advice to community organisations could support the installation of over 100kWp of rooftop solar. The Lucky Chance theatre has provided a case study, which will soon be completed and published on our website.

A desktop survey of the solar potential of FTC owned/managed sites showed that most area not suitable, but possibilities for the Ranger Base and Depot (17kWp) and cattle market toilet block (10kWp) are being explored. A similar desktop solar-potential survey of community sites identified by the 2024 Locality survey will be carried out in the new year.

A good relationship has been developed with the Somerset Council (SC) energy contracts manager, and we are jointly exploring two major solar canopy projects. Following this initial work, SC have applied for funding for a feasibility study which includes the Cattle Market car park. We are now exploring solar at the Leisure Centre and its car park. EV consultancy Prop Sustainable have developed (pro-bono) materials demonstrating the benefits of increased EV charging to Frome & SC, and this has been taken to SC, with a view to SC first installing more fast charging in public car parks in Frome and then investigating lamp-post/kerbside charging options.

Achievements summary

- Ad-hoc support available by contacting renewables email address/FTC help desk (6 homes supported with advice covering technical and planning questions re solar & batteries)
- Update to FTC web pages including launch of Solar and Beyond
- Solar and Beyond leaflet delivered to every home via Frome Times
- Support given to Cheese & Grain re. Somerset Council funding application for solar (Rural Prosperity Fund) and tender/installer selection/system design. Resulting in planned installation of an additional 50 kWp solar system.
- MNSP - supporting re. financial and technical feasibility for solar plus batteries at 5 schools in Frome.
- Continued to support FRECo including funding secured for new wind turbine feasibility study

- Solar for Business event in the summer proved popular, and attending the Planning Network networking event provided several important contacts and demonstrated significant interest in renewables and energy efficiency

Energy efficiency

The Healthy Homes strand of GHF has been providing tailored energy advice through home visits and face-to-face conversations during regular energy advice drop-ins in town. To date Healthy Homes Energy Advice team has reached 426 residents through energy advice events and provided in-depth support to 269 households. Of these, 66 cases have been referred to the Centre for Sustainable Energy for further assistance, including grant applications for energy efficiency measures, complex situations requiring specialist casework, resolving disputes with energy suppliers, and support with energy-related debt.

So far, Healthy Homes referrals have delivered over £140,000 in financial benefit to Frome residents. This includes installed energy-efficiency measures, estimated annual energy savings based on type of advice given and energy efficiency measures installed, and direct financial support such as pre-payment meter fuel vouchers. The Home Energy Advice Team consists of Resilience Officer (Jo Morris, working on the project 2.5 days a week), Energy Advice Volunteer Coordinator (Caroline Wajsblum, 1 day a week) and 10 Energy Advice Champion Volunteers.

In the second year of GHF, FTC has offered homes in Frome the opportunity to sign up for a free Retrofit assessment. This work started with our in-house retrofit lead - Sally Richards. These full retrofit assessments were too long and detailed overwhelming people. When SR left, we switched to a lite model - shorter and sharper. To date, over 100 homes have taken up this opportunity. The data collected is very useful helping homeowners become more sustainable. It also provides FTC with a better understanding of our town's housing stock's overall performance. Making homes more energy efficient is a national priority and an opportunity for economic and employment growth.

When GHF budget underspend became available in early 2025 due to personnel changes, we reallocated resources to go back to the homes that had been surveyed and understand what they had done with their home energy assessments. These conversations help us to better understand the barriers to making our homes more sustainable whilst also presenting an opportunity to offer further support to people who have the information about their homes performance but may have stalled in taking the next steps.

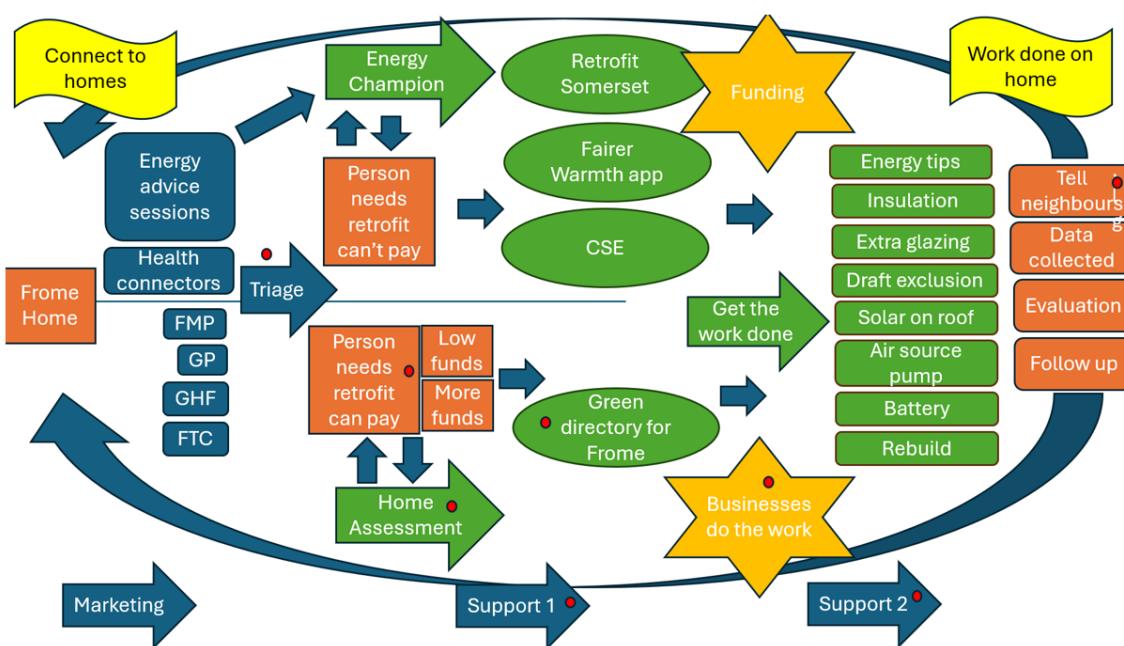
To this end, Caroline Wajsblum, was allocated an extra 17.5 hrs/week of work funded by the Lottery to focus on Retrofit Support. This strand has grown significantly over the past six months, developing from early test visits and data consolidation to a full schedule of home support visits and community engagement strategy.

The new streamlined data systems have improved preparation for visits and enabled more consistent and comprehensive recording of household progress. Each home visit typically lasts between one and one and a half hours, with tailored advice reports taking up to two days to

complete depending on complexity. Feedback from participants led to a new, more accessible next steps guidance structure with a summary of key suggestions upfront.

Partnership work has continued to strengthen, particularly with the Centre for Sustainable Energy (CSE), who have provided essential advice and expertise. Collaboration with the Neighbourhood Toolbox and the Frome Neighbourhood Network has also expanded the reach of the project, with upcoming joint events planned to promote practical retrofit knowledge and showcase local examples through the *Green Open Homes* Events being planned for Feb 2026.

This diagram illustrates possible client retrofit journeys; we are shifting our focus further to the right – helping people get work done on their homes –



Achievements summary - Healthy Homes: Retrofit Support April – Sept 2025

Retrofit Support:

- An Energy Advice and Retrofit Support booklet was researched and written (which could also be used as a welcome pack for estate agents), 18 householders received in-depth retrofit guidance through energy advice events or home visits (the Energy advice strand of this work), and 22 people were signposted to apply for the free retrofit assessments.
- Of the original 52 households who received a free retrofit assessment in 2023 and 2024, 25 have been contacted so far, 64% of those contacted requested continued support, while 9 chose not to proceed, mainly due to financial constraints.
- 16 households have received retrofit support home visits with in-depth tailored next-step recommendations. Across all households 15% of recommended measures have been completed (carbon calculations to follow), 82 recommended measures are being worked on in total, this is 50% of recommended measures (15% being worked on by householders alone and 35% of measures are needing further support from us).

- A further 5 in depth phone conversations, plus 16 retrofit assessments and 25 follow up calls have been completed by CSE.
- 3 pop up advice events were also organized in partnership with the Neighbourhood Toolbox, 49 adults and 9 children / 34 households were engaged with directly over the three events.
- 1 DIY Retrofit Guide has been produced by NTB with FTC input and has been given to everyone who attended the sessions, engaged with the events, and distributed across Frome.

Retrofit Industry:

- 13 installers and contractors recommended by householders have been added to the growing database for signposting and creating updated green directory with a further 6 companies added to database from retrofit advisor support research.
- Signposting to these companies occurs in an estimated 60% of conversations/home visits. Working on a report on gaps in the market and Frome Retrofit Directory.

Retrofit Community:

- Half of support home visits participants expressed interest in joining a Retrofit WhatsApp group, while 44% would like to join a specific DIY Retrofit group, and 31% have signed up for the Air Source Heat Pump/Solar newsletter (3 emails have gone out so far to this group).
- 5 households have agreed to be used as case studies, and 4 have offered their homes as potential GOH venues, and 5 Neighbourhood Retrofit Champions have been recruited, with engagement to follow around the planned Green Open Homes (GOH) events (19th to 28th Feb).

Research and Development:

- Researching and documenting the retrofitting process, tech, policies, grants, industry, other examples of community energy initiatives, tracking trends and issues to plan ongoing support and strategy.
- Regular monitoring of UK news and the CSE newsletter is carried out on a weekly or monthly basis, and 6 online forums are also being observed to keep track of the retrofit industry and administration of grants, and participation in 4 webinars and workshops.
- Working on a spreadsheet to track other national community retrofit projects to learn from them.

3. Cycle Together

Frome Community Bike Project (FCBP) and Cycle Together supports our community to cycle more and drive less, cutting carbon footprints, saving money, and boosting health. FCBP continues to work with volunteers in varied roles including bike mechanics and ride leaders, with ten new ride leaders trained in the six-month period April to September 2025. This summer the Project recruited four new Directors to help the project grow revenue streams and develop a business model for the future. Services on offer have included - Dr Bikes popping up at markets and Book a Buddy for confidence training. E bike loans and facilitated bike rides are ongoing.

FCBP undertook an online survey to seek the perspectives of parents and carers and to identify which types of support could encourage children to access and enjoy cycling. There were around 80 respondents, generating clear evidence that cycle training and support for family

cycling would be a welcome addition in Frome. This data has informed FCBP's plans for both GHF's Cycle Together strand and for future funding bids.

A new agreement has been signed with Station Approach Limited to build a new bike shed on land near the station. This is going to house a cargo bike as well as normal push bikes available to borrow. The shed will also be a notice board and function to signpost the workshop.

A recent GWR funding bid was successful which will help to connect the train station with FCBP. A bid has also just been submitted to Active Travel England – focusing on families and young people. The mission remains to change culture and get more people cycling.

4. GHF Evaluation

Frome Town Council's Climate Action Researcher Owen King left the project in April 2025. In September 2025 Frome Town Council engaged Abi and Ben (The Conscious Project) to complete the Year 3 and final project evaluation. The evaluation inception report details the processes, outputs and milestones for this process. The evaluation questions have been reviewed and agreed by the partnership. A regular meeting schedule is in place between Abi, Ben, Matt and Becky (Project Manager).

Alongside review of existing and emerging data, Abi and Ben are interviewing key informants including GHF delivery and management teams, the project advisory group and wider stakeholders. Early evaluation findings which can inform the rest of the Project's delivery to March 2026 will be shared as they arise and the first draft report will be shared internally in January 2026. GHF delivery will continue until March 2026 so the final Evaluation Report will be published in April or May 2026.

With budgets repurposed from both Retrofit and Evaluation, Frome Town Council has processed significant changes in Year 3 and has needed to pivot quickly to embed new services and structures. These are: - Launch of Solar and Beyond - Launch of Retrofit Support - Commissioning of external evaluation - A new storytelling project aiming to create a national media moment and amplifying the messages and stories of GHF (happening March 2026).

Objectives within the Council Plan

Our work in this area has already influenced the Council Plan and there are some clear objectives that reflect our focus on renewable energy and energy efficiency. The impact that we have demonstrated through our work in these areas to date points the way in terms of the shape of the work programme next year that will be presented to Council in February.

Climate & Ecological emergencies	
Aim: To co-ordinate town action to mitigate and adapt to climate change	
Objective: ENGAGE & ACT - Enable individuals and organisations to make changes that contribute towards a net zero carbon Frome in 2030 and make a difference to their health, wellbeing and economic sustainability	
Project	Status
Research and understand the impacts of climate and ecological breakdown on Frome, what initiatives have been successful to date and how we can encourage behaviour and system change.	On track
Through community engagement develop a new and ambitious town-wide climate action plan (CAP) and coordinate actions by organisations in the town to implement it. Put in place an evaluation framework.	On track
Support organisations working in climate action in Frome to access grants and other sources of funding. Develop a scheme to provide grant funding for community action building on the new town-wide climate action plan.	On track
Develop and implement a communications plan that encourages individuals and organisations to make changes	On track
Objective: ENERGY - Enable the scaling up of energy efficiency measures and renewable energy generation	
Project	Status
Engage the local community including those already working in this field to imagine how our neighbourhoods might be retrofitted and adapted and the EPC rating of homes can be improved. Raise the profile of retro-fit	On track
Investigate the opportunities to install solar on public and commercial buildings in Frome at scale	On track
Frome Green Energy	On track
Objective: FOOD - Develop food resilience through a thriving local food network and an increase in the amount of food consumed in Frome that is grown in Frome	
Project	Status
Promote and support food resilience initiatives and strategies developed through the Frome Food Network and other organisations	On track
Objective: TRAVEL AND TRANSPORT - Encourage greater take up of active travel and sustainable transport	
Project	Status
Encourage greater take up of active travel and sustainable transport.	On track
Objective: MATERIALS & WASTE - Develop a circular economy in Frome, reducing the amount of waste leaving Frome and encouraging reuse and recycling.	
Project	Status
Explore potential Re-use Centre. Promote and support circular economy initiatives developed through local community organisations	Project no longer on track without amendment
Mitigation: Following a phase of research and community engagement, we are shifting focus to a feasibility study to highlight precisely the most important next steps to make a reuse centre happen.	Project has been unsuccessful or stopped

Key:



On track



Project no longer on track without amendment



Project has been unsuccessful or stopped