

Agenda item 7

For decision – repurposing of Climate Action underspends

Author: Matt Mellen, Climate Action Lead

Summary & recommendation

As the 2025/26 financial year ends, FTC’s resilience team is working on how important climate action work can be sustained on considerably reduced budgets. The Lottery funded Green and Healthy Frome programme is ending which has been the main source of funding for the last three years. To remedy the situation, the Climate Action Lead is planning to immediately prioritise securing new external funding. In the meantime, this proposal details the plan to repurpose underspends to bridge the gap in funding and enable us to maintain momentum on important work that is achieving good results.

The recommendation is that Climate Action underspends in 2025/26 and the balance of funds within the Sustainability EMR totalling £11k (or the balance remaining following completion of reporting to Lotto) are utilised to enable the following work to progress:

- Fundraising support
- School engagement and wildlife parade to launch the next phase of sustainability work set out in the approved Work Programme 2026/27
- A Green Open Homes initiative to bolster the work programme around home energy efficiency & renewable energy
- Workshops in schools around Plastic Free Periods which will lever in £7k external funding from the community

Finalisation of the funds available will be alongside finalising accounting reports to the National Lottery.

Background

Over the last three years much of Frome Town Council’s climate action work has been funded by Green and Healthy Frome. This £1.8 million National Lottery funded project is ending on March 31st, 2026, and this marks the end of this important funding source. Much work over the last year has been preparing for this time and there are plans in place to mark the end of the project and ensure that its legacy helps to shape the evolution of our town over the years to come.

The innovative Green and Healthy Frome (GHF) partnership has enabled FTC to pioneer a new approach to climate action which links sustainability with health. This approach connects with new people and helps to shift the dialogue in a way that is engaging and positive. Our new work programme for 2026/27 has captured the best elements from the GHF era including home energy efficiency, renewable energy support and climate adaptation and we are pushing forward with a pioneering suite of activities which can keep driving impact across the town. Our climate action activities packaged up appropriately have good potential to appeal to funders. So, an immediate priority for Matt Mellen, Climate Action Lead and his team is to scope out new funding opportunities and put some bids in.

In the meantime, it has been identified that additional resources are needed in order to support this fundraising activity, launch the next phase of sustainability work, showcase the benefits of home energy efficiency and renewable energy projects and maintain the momentum of the Plastic Free Periods project leveraging in funding from the community.

Underspend available for this purpose

There is a potential £3k budget underspend in the FTC 2025/26 Climate Action budget as well as £8k in a Sustainability EMR. The FTC climate action budget was not fully used because of an unexpected surplus of Lottery funds available to GHF due to changes in the programme.

Proposed use of part of the underspend

1. Fundraising support - £4k

FTC has an exciting and pioneering approach to townwide climate action. The town has a track record of trying new things and leading the way. Our size and unique culture make us an excellent place to try new things. We believe that our programme of activities is well positioned to secure funding. We plan to invite three local fundraising consultants to bid for the work to help us to now secure more funding to help us keep the momentum going. Our target is to raise £200k. We are looking at a range of funding sources including the possibility of corporate sponsorship from a clean energy company.

2. School engagement and wildlife parade - £4k

Engaging young people and schools in climate action remains a top priority. Young people will be the most impacted by climate change and their involvement in creating solutions is vital. Furthermore, engaging children represents a good activation route for parents. A plan was developed as part of the schedule of GHF closing events to engage all of Frome's first schools in specially prepared lessons that support teachers around human connection to the natural world and how we can contribute to stabilising the global ecosystem and atmosphere.

The plan was developed and trialled as part of the Avanti Creative Arts Festival. The process culminated with a wildlife dance which brought children, parents and teachers together in an important moment to remember nature and commit to taking further action for the planet. FTC now has an opportunity to do this work independent of GHF over the coming months culminating at the closing of the Frome Festival (July 11th).

Local children will make wildlife masks in school in the weeks leading up to the event working creatively with recycled and sustainable materials, while learning about the living world, biodiversity, climate change and the importance of sustainable design, working with - and for - nature.

The Wildlife Parade will bring children, families and the wider community together to celebrate our place in nature on the last day of the Frome. The children will parade through the town centre showcasing their creations while helping to raise awareness of our place in nature and sharing their love for the more-than-human world.

The benefits of this proposal include:

- Engagement of young people in Climate Action and the importance of our human connection with nature
- Launch of our climate adaptation and nature recovery work set out in the approved Work Programme for 2026/27 as part of a much bigger event – the Frome Festival
- Complementing our programme of events in the town and generating additional footfall

3. Green Open Homes - £2k

The resilience team developed plans to produce a Green Open Homes (GOH) event before the end of GHF. For a variety of reasons including reduced capacity due to evaluation requirements the GOH event has now been pushed back to autumn 2026. We want to roll the funding allocated (and unspent) for this in the 2025/26 budget forward for use in the new 2026/27 year. GOH events have a proven track record of driving forward climate action on homes by providing local case studies for people to visit and investigate. The best way of motivating people to take action on their homes is to show how neighbours have done this successfully and showing the benefits - most notably - reduced bills. The money will be spent on volunteer expenses, the printing of materials and Neighbourhood Toolbox Surgeries. This proposal will help to bolster our work around home energy efficiency and renewable energy.

4. Plastic Free Periods - £1k

Over the last two months a proposal has emerged from Frome Medical Practice (FMP) and other stakeholders that the partnership group keep a Plastic Free Periods service on offer for the young women of Frome. It is proposed that a stripped back version will run using approximately 6 days of resilience team staff time and substantively help approximately 1000 young women whilst providing useful information and advice to many more. This will be matched with an equivalent effort at FMP so this work will embody an important continuation of GHF partnership after the project ending highlighting the importance of the link between climate and health. Should this work continue, Peter Macfadyen has secured £7k which would cover materials. This additional £1k would enable us to hire the facilitator to carry out workshops in schools. Amongst other things, this project would help to further build the working relationship with Frome Medical Practice.

TOTAL = £11k

Consultation and feedback

- The community have been engaged in developing these proposals

Links to Council Plan and Medium-Term Financial Plan

- This proposal is aligned with Aim 3 of the Council Plan – Cultivate Environmental Sustainability

Financial and Risk Implications

- None – these funds were anticipated to be spent by year end 31/03/2026 and had not previously been counted as surplus in year-end forecasts.
- The effect on the 2026/27 budget will be cost neutral, subject to finalising Lotto project reporting.

Climate Change and Sustainability Implications

- This will provide an important boost to climate action work at a time when a key source of funding is ending.

Background papers

Green Open Homes initiative

<https://www.greenopenhomes.net/>

<https://www.cse.org.uk/my-community/community-projects/green-open-homes/>

Plastic Free Periods

<https://greenhealthyfrome.org/plastic-free-period/>

Report sign off

Matt Mellen, Climate Action Lead - 19/03/26

Peter Wheelhouse, Acting Town Clerk – 19/03/26

Recommendations

1. To approve the use of Climate Action underspends in 2025/26 and the balance of funds within the Sustainability EMR totalling £11k (or the balance remaining following completion of reporting to Lotto) to enable the following work to progress:
 - a. Fundraising support
 - b. School engagement and wildlife parade to launch the next phase of sustainability work set out in the approved Work Programme for 2026/27
 - c. A Green Open Homes initiative to bolster the work programme around home energy efficiency & renewable energy
 - d. Workshops in schools around Plastic Free Periods which will lever in £7k external funding from the community