

Agenda item 10

For decision - Town centre community art programme

Authors: Councillor Nick Dove, and Rachel Griffin, Marketing and Communications Manager

Summary (incl. recommendations)

Graffiti and tagging continue to have a significant impact on the appearance of Frome's town centre, particularly on utility boxes and other items of street infrastructure. This report proposes commissioning a series of artist-designed utility box murals and a creative community art education programme for targeted young people. Together, these creative placemaking initiatives will build on Frome's strong cultural identity whilst helping to reduce repeat tagging, improve the public realm and support local artists.

Recommendations

1. Approve the Utility Box Public Art Programme with a budget of £8,000.
2. Approve the Community Street Art Programme with a budget of £20,000.
3. Approve the allocation of £15,000 from the Town Centre Investment budget (600-7962) to support both projects.
4. Approve a transfer of £13,000 from General Reserves to complete the funding package.
5. Delegate authority to Marketing and Communications Manager, Town Centre Coordinator and the Children and Young People's Project Officer in consultation with Cllr Nick Dove to work together to appoint artists, agree final locations, work with the Conservation Officer, obtain any necessary permissions, and oversee delivery of both programmes.
6. Following due diligence, to waive financial regulations to enable a local artist from The School of Graf working with other local artists to be commissioned to deliver the Community Street Art Programme.

Background

At Community and Place Committee on 22 July 2026, we considered a wider report on graffiti and heard from residents, local businesses and artists about the impact of tagging on the town centre and the opportunities for responding differently. There was broad recognition that graffiti and tagging is a problem in Frome and that there is no single solution. Graffiti is a long-standing issue that requires a balanced approach, combining timely maintenance, education, positive creative activities and opportunities, and partnership working.

The purpose of this paper is to seek approval for two complementary public art initiatives that will seek to improve the appearance of the town centre, celebrate Frome's creative identity, support local artists and young people, and help tackle illegal graffiti and tagging through positive creative intervention and activity.

Improving the quality of the town centre is a strategic priority for Frome Town Council. Investment in the public realm not only makes the town more attractive for residents and

visitors, but also supports local businesses, encourages footfall and strengthens civic pride. The proposals have been developed by the Town Centre working group as part of its ongoing work to improve the quality of the public realm and reinforce Frome's reputation as a vibrant, creative and welcoming market town.

Frome has begun to establish a reputation for high-quality public art. Previous mural commissions have transformed otherwise ordinary or neglected spaces into valued landmarks - the Westway mural, the Mary Baily mural and the mural on the side of the Griffin have demonstrated the positive impact that well-designed artwork can have on the character of the town.

The proposals below seek to build on that success through two distinct but complementary projects.

Project One – Utility Box Public Art Programme

One proposal that received widespread support at Community and Place Committee was the creation of a series of artist-designed utility box murals across the town centre. We heard that professionally designed artwork is significantly less likely to be repeatedly tagged than blank surfaces, both because it improves the appearance of the public realm and because, within graffiti culture, there is generally a strong respect for completed murals. As local mural artist Tom explained during the discussion, "You don't tag over a mural." While this will not eliminate graffiti altogether, it represents a practical form of harm reduction that can help protect vulnerable infrastructure while celebrating Frome's creativity.

The utility boxes are a necessary part of the town's infrastructure but often detract from the appearance of the streetscape and are frequent targets for tagging. This proposal will commission approximately ten artists to transform selected utility boxes across the town centre into small pieces of public art.

The proposal also creates an opportunity to invest in local artistic talent. Frome has a long tradition of street art and mural painting, with several highly regarded artists whose roots lie within graffiti culture itself. Commissioning local artists not only strengthens the town's creative economy but also demonstrates positive and legitimate pathways into creative careers.

Each box will be designed by a different artist, creating a trail of distinctive artworks celebrating Frome's creativity, independent spirit, heritage, nature and community. Artists will be selected through a tender brief process and will be paid a professional commission to design and deliver their artwork.

The project will be mindful of the fact that the boxes will remain in most cases as live pieces of operational infrastructure. Artists will therefore be required to work safely within public spaces, following an agreed method statement and risk assessment to ensure both public and contractor safety. All proposed designs will need to be submitted for approval prior to installation, helping to ensure a cohesive and appropriate overall approach. Given the outdoor nature of the project, all artwork must also be created using durable, weather-resistant materials suitable for long-term public display.

The project aims to:

- improve the appearance of the town centre
- reduce opportunities for tagging
- support local artists and the creative economy
- create interest and encourage exploration throughout the town centre
- reinforce Frome's identity as a creative destination.

The estimated cost of this project is £8,000.

Project Two – Community Street Art Programme

Alongside this project, Community and Place Committee also identified the potential for a complementary programme of education and creative engagement aimed at young people. Further to the discussion, a local artist shared his own experience of becoming involved in graffiti as a teenager before being supported through a community mural programme led by an experienced artist. That intervention redirected his skills into education, ultimately leading to a First-Class Fine Art degree and a successful career as a professional mural artist. His experience demonstrates that whilst tagging cannot simply be prevented, early intervention, positive role models and opportunities to develop creative skills can redirect young people towards legal and productive forms of artistic expression.

We have received a proposal from a local artist from The School of Graf working with other local artists to deliver a year-long community street art programme which would provide young people with opportunities to work with local artists and to develop a community art project that encourages creativity, builds respect for public spaces and provide positive outlets for young people interested in aerosol art. As this proposal is based on a unique collective of Frome-based artists and is a specialist, collaborative offering, it is not considered feasible to obtain directly comparable quotations from alternative providers. The supplier will therefore be selected on the basis of the unique expertise and local artistic partnership they are able to offer and we are therefore asking for the waiver of financial regulations.

The proposal would provide a yearlong programme of weekly after-school workshops and introduce young people to graffiti and street art in a safe, outside of school, structured and legal environment. Participants would develop practical artistic skills while learning about the history, culture and positive potential of street art before working alongside a professional artist to create a series of public murals across the town.

The programme is intended to:

- engage young people in positive creative activity
- develop artistic skills and confidence
- create pride in our town centre
- improve the appearance of public spaces
- reduce illegal graffiti by transforming existing tagging hotspots into commissioned artwork.

There are many locations that could benefit from intervention subject to the conversation officers and landowners' approval – these include ETB Tyres' rear doors, the former slaughterhouse building at Saxonvale and hoardings, the former Redrow site hoardings, the side wall of the Cheese & Grain, Ellenbray roller shutter, the library footbridge yard wall, the railway bridge linking Welshmill Park and the Canoe Club and their containers. Other suitable assets and locations will be agreed at the scoping of this project and during the programme.

All final locations will be agreed with landowners and will be subject to any necessary permissions.

The estimated cost of delivering this twelve-month programme, which includes weekly workshops for one year, artist time, project management, paint and materials and delivery of up to twelve community murals is £20,000.

Evidence from elsewhere

Utility box programmes have been delivered successfully across the UK. Gloucester City Council transformed 75 utility boxes into a public art trail, Newcastle-under-Lyme commissioned artists to decorate utility boxes through its Artbox project, and the City of Edinburgh commissioned local artists to create murals on utility cabinets along Leith Walk. More recently, North Northamptonshire Council expanded a utility box art programme across 11 towns as part of its high street regeneration work. These projects have demonstrated how relatively small investments in public art can enhance the appearance of town centres, support local artists, celebrate local identity and encourage civic pride.

Community graffiti art projects are intended to provide positive creative opportunities for young people while improving the appearance of the town. Evidence suggests that participation in structured arts programmes can improve confidence, engagement and skills, all of which are recognised protective factors for young people. There is also anecdotal evidence that commissioned murals are less likely to experience repeat tagging than untreated walls, due to a sub-culture narrative of respect, although outcomes vary according to location and local context. For this reason, the project should be viewed primarily as a youth engagement and placemaking initiative, and part of a package with the potential to contribute to graffiti reduction at specific sites rather than as a standalone anti-graffiti solution

Budget

The total cost of both projects is £28,000.

It is proposed that the Utility Box Public Art Programme will be funded from the existing Town Centre Investment budget (600-7962). This year in the Economic Regeneration and Town Centre work programme, Council had agreed a budget of £25,000 for the installation of recycling bins. Since that decision was made, the proposal to install recycling bins has become unviable due to ongoing operational difficulties with Somerset Council emptying additional bins. The Town Centre working group has already indicated its support for this budget to be vired to enable alternative town centre enhancement projects and improvements to the public realm, Scott Road improvements and mural projects to proceed. It is therefore proposed to allocate:

- £8,000 towards the Utility Box Public Art Programme; and
- £7,000 towards the Community Street Art Programme;

giving a total contribution of £15,000 from the Town Centre Investment budget (600-7962).

To deliver both projects in full, a further £13,000 is requested from General Reserves, bringing the total available budget to £28,000.

A summary of the funding proposal for these projects is set out below:

Cost item	Cost	To be funded by
Utility Box Public Art Programme	£8,000	£8,000 from Town Centre Investment budget
Community Street Art Programme	£20,000	£7,000 from Town Centre Investment budget £13,000 from Reserves
Total cost	£28,000	£28,000

Conclusion

The Community Street Art Programme represents a significant investment in young people, the public realm and the town's creative sector. Alongside the physical improvements delivered through the murals, the programme will also provide skills development, creative education, community engagement and the reduction of graffiti at known locations. It also provides a strong visible response to our current issues with graffiti and tagging and adds to our toolbox for tackling these issues giving a more rounded community wide approach.

Other options considered	Continue with the current repainting programme in the town centre as a periodic reset. This option will be delivered alongside this programme to increase the success of the community response to mitigating against graffiti and tagging, as discussed at Community and Place Committee. Assuming that these new initiatives reduce the incidence of tagging, there should be less remedial work for the Town Centre Ranger to do.
Key considerations for the Council	The project seeks to improve the appearance of the town centre, celebrate Frome's creative identity and reduce repeat tagging through positive placemaking activity. Success will depend on securing permissions from utility companies and appropriate stakeholder support.
Consultation and feedback	Initial discussions have taken place with staff and councillors within the Town Centre Working Group. Consultation will continue with utility companies, the Conservation Officer and local artists as the project develops.

Links to Council Plan and Medium-Term Financial Plan	Links to Aim 2 of the Council Plan (Support a Thriving Town). Supports the Council Plan by improving public spaces, supporting a thriving town centre, celebrating culture and creativity and investing in community wellbeing. Funding is proposed from the Town Centre Investment Budget and reserves.
Financial and Risk Implications	There is a risk that we may not get the support of property owners and/or the Conservation Officer. The work to secure their support and clarify whether planning consent is required will therefore take place before any work is procured. A budget of £28,000 is requested to commission up to 10 utility box murals and to deliver the Community Art Project for a year. There is a risk of future vandalism; however, evidence suggests artwork is less likely to be repeatedly tagged than blank infrastructure and may reduce ongoing maintenance costs over time. The expectation is that there will be very limited ongoing maintenance costs with a life expectancy of 5 years. The Town Centre Investment (dept 600-7962) budget line on row 13 of the 26/27 work programme detailed installing 20 new recycling bins. This project cannot now go ahead due to insurmountable issues surrounding Somerset Council emptying the bins and it is proposed to use £15,000 from this budget will fund the utility box mural project and public art in Scott Road as agreed by the Town Centre Working Group.
Legal / HR Implications	Permissions will be required from utility box owners and relevant statutory bodies. Artists will be commissioned in accordance with the Council's procurement procedures and will be required to provide appropriate insurance and risk assessments.
Equalities Implications	An Equalities Impact Assessment will be carried out. The project will create a more welcoming and attractive public realm for residents and visitors. The artist brief will encourage applications from a diverse range of artists, including emerging local talent.
Community Safety Implications	Improving the appearance of the public realm and reducing opportunities for repeat tagging can contribute to increased civic pride and perceptions of safety.
Climate Change and Sustainability Implications	The project enhances existing infrastructure rather than replacing it, contributing to a more sustainable approach to improving the public realm. Durable materials will be specified to maximise the lifespan of the artwork.
Health and Safety Implications	Appropriate risk assessments and method statements will be required. Artists will work safely within public spaces and around operational utility infrastructure.
Constitutional Requirements	Council approval is required for the proposed budget allocation and project progression.

Background Papers	Review of Graffiti Situation in Frome; Council Plan 2025–2027.
Report Sign-Off	Peter Wheelhouse, Town Clerk 29/07/26

Recommendations

1. Approve the Utility Box Public Art Programme with a budget of **£8,000**.
2. Approve the Community Street Art Programme with a budget of **£20,000**.
3. Approve the allocation of **£15,000** from the **Town Centre Investment budget (600-7962)** to support both projects.
4. Approve a transfer of **£13,000** from **General Reserves** to complete the funding package.
5. Delegate authority to Marketing and Communications Manager, Town Centre Coordinator and the Children and Young People's Project Officer in consultation with Cllr Nick Dove to work together to appoint artists, agree final locations, work with the Conservation Officer, obtain any necessary permissions, and oversee delivery of both programmes.
6. Following due diligence, to waive financial regulations to enable a local artist from The School of Graf working with other local artists to be commissioned to deliver the Community Street Art Programme.