

Frome – creating a vibrant and sustainable economy

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1. Introduction

My name is Peter Wheelhouse and I am the Economic Development & Regeneration Manager working for Frome Town Council. My presentation is about Frome's unique approach to economic regeneration.

In national terms, Frome's economy is doing well. Unemployment is low at under 1% and economic activity is high at 74%. People are attracted to Frome because of the lifestyle it offers. This year, Frome was voted by The Times newspaper as one of the best places to live in Britain.

2. Why is economic regeneration necessary in Frome?

Firstly, there are some challenges to our economic resilience and sustainability:

- As job opportunities in places such as Bristol and Bath grow, so we are likely to see more commuting out of Frome with a negative impact on our environment
- Nationally, there is a big drive to build more houses; this is beginning to have an impact in Frome. In general this is a positive trend – Frome's population is expected to grow by 25% in the period to 2028 and so we will need more houses. But it is important that the growth in employment keeps pace with housing growth so that we see a balanced development of the town

There are also some opportunities. Frome is becoming a centre for:

- Science based and environmental technology businesses
- Renewable energy generation
- The manufacture of new and sustainable modes of transport
- Creative businesses involved with the visual arts and music
- Food and drink production

3. How are we dealing with the challenges and harnessing the opportunities?

By developing and promoting 'One Planet Frome.'

Our vision is that Frome becomes a place in which 'One Planet Living' is the focus of life in the town, encourages future investment and helps to reduce the cost of business operations.

4. What is 'One Planet Living'?

One Planet Living is a term developed by Bioregional and Worldwide Fund for Nature (WWF). The idea is that we have only one planet and we have a responsibility to live within its capacity. Ten clear principles have been developed:

Zero carbon – making buildings more energy efficient and delivering renewable energy

Zero waste – reducing and reusing waste

Sustainable transport – encouraging low carbon modes of transport and reducing the need to travel

Sustainable materials – using sustainable healthy products, sourced locally, made from renewable or waste resources

Local food

Sustainable water – using water more efficiently

Land use and wildlife – protecting natural habitats

Culture and community – reviving local identity and supporting the arts

Equity and local economy – creating economies that support fair employment and fair trade

Health and happiness – encouraging active, sociable lives

5. How will we achieve our vision?

Here are a few examples of what we are doing:

Zero Carbon

- We have set up a community owned renewable energy business – FRECo – projects include a new solar powered stand at Frome Football Stadium, new solar panels at Frome Medical Centre and a hydro scheme on the River Frome
- At Saxonvale – a 5.6 hectare site on the edge of the town centre, we plan to deliver energy efficient homes and workspace
- We are working with Frome College students to build awareness of the importance of 'One Planet Living'
- We are exploring with the College how we can develop incubation and research facilities to support students interested in starting their own businesses in this field, businesses such as 'Plant Notes' who will be presenting to you tomorrow at Workshop 3.

Zero waste

- Frome based Protomax are world leaders in the technology and production of recycled boards. They are the only company to have developed and patented their own range of machinery and processes to upcycle mixed plastic waste. We are currently working with innovative local companies such as this to develop new uses for waste plastic

- The Council has led an audit of business waste and will shortly be launching a food waste initiative to reduce and reuse food waste generated within local cafes and restaurants

Sustainable transport

- Frome is now home to Cycles Maximus, a company who have developed a worldwide reputation in electric trike production. We are exploring with them how a cargo version can be used to move goods around the town
- We have installed electric vehicle charging points to encourage the use of electric vehicles in the town including those operated by the electric car club

Local food

- A Frome Food Assembly has been established. The way it works is that people register and buy local food products online and then collect from the Food Assembly held at Frome's Memorial Theatre every Wednesday evening. Products include fruit and vegetables, dairy products, meat, baked products and chocolate all sourced within 35 miles of Frome

Culture and community

We recognise that the visual arts and music are already an important part of the economy and life of Frome. We are supporting these sectors in the following ways:

- Frome Festival – the Council is the biggest sponsor of this 10 day arts festival
- Cheese & Grain – the Council has invested £0.5 million in the refurbishment of this important music venue and is now working with the Cheese & Grain to develop a recording studio
- Frome Independent Market – held on the first Sunday in every month from March to December, is now the largest curated street market in the south west and is helping to incubate and develop many small craft and food businesses
- Public realm improvements in the Market Place are due start in 2016 making Frome town centre a better place to hold cultural events
- Apprenticeships – in partnership with Frome College we are working with businesses in this sector to create new apprenticeship opportunities

Thank you for listening

Any questions?