



Frome & District CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

Director's Report For Frome & District Chamber of Commerce Annual General Meeting Tuesday 21 October 2021

Welcome

The Chamber represents and supports the business community in and around Frome. We will cover both 2020 and 2021 in this Director's Report after we did not have an AGM in 2020.

Pandemic and last AGM

2020 proved to be an extraordinary year for everyone and the Chamber tried to be a source of information for the business community. We set up a Covid-19 hub on our website to collate useful links to the latest advice and used our Facebook page to share that information in a timely way, as well as sharing to Facebook business groups as well. We also ran FB campaigns after the first lockdown lifted and at Christmas to encourage people back into Frome town centre and its businesses.

Like everywhere, Frome is changing as a result of the pandemic, from businesses opening and shutting, to new people arriving into the town, which is undoubtedly having a knock-on effect on both commercial premises and domestic properties.

Events

During 2020 we managed just two of our Discuss and Do events in person – looking at business awards and using LinkedIn for business, which proved very popular. Then like everyone else we turned to Zoom and delivered 7 events online looking at how to use social media such as Facebook and Instagram to reach customers and a session on podcasting. We tried to focus on training that would be useful to help people reach customers online when they couldn't face to face! These proved very popular with workshops often being attended by more than 30 people at a time.

This year we worked with Frome Town Council on a programme of four Discuss and Do events. Our first – Writing a social media strategy - was again online. With restrictions lifted our last three will be in person. We have already delivered one in September on sources of finance and there are two more – looking at employing staff and delivering great content in November and December.

There are a lot of training events being organised, so for 2022 we intend to work with Frome Town Council to deliver more and better events.

Representation

An important function of the Chamber is to be the business voice for the town and we have to thank Neil Howlett for the work he has done putting in submissions on a number of issues to local councils.

Saxonvale – we continue to talk to Mendip District Council about this scheme and have made it clear we want to work positively with all involved to ensure the scheme delivers the best it can for the town and for local businesses.

Boundary Commission – we have supported the idea of allying Frome with Radstock and beyond. This seems a much more logical constituency than the current Somerton and Frome.

Unification of council – the decision has been made for a single unitary council covering the whole of Somerset. We will work to ensure that promises made about greater local involvement in decision making actually happen. We will play our part in representing the business voice for Frome in the stakeholder consultations promised by Somerset County Council.

Housing scheme on North Parade car park – we have raised concerns about this because of the loss of valuable car parking in the town, particularly for season ticket holders. We have also made representations to Mendip District Council about having a car parking review.

Selwood Garden Community – this is another planning application with big implications for the town and we will monitor it and work with the town council.

Priorities for 2021

We have decided our strategic priorities for the Chamber and you can read about those [here](#).

Articles of Association

Our Articles of Association have been in place for about 24 years so needed updating. I'd like to thank committee members Neil Howlett, Amanda Brown and Nigel Harris for working on our proposed new Articles which we bring to this meeting for adoption.

Finances

Our finances remain strong. We did not receive our grant funding from Mendip District Council's economic development team in 2020 or 2021. With unification of the various councils into one for Somerset it remains to be seen whether this type of grant funding to support business training, events etc. will continue. Therefore, income from Membership of the Chamber will be even more important in the future.

Our membership currently stands at 74.

Committee

We said goodbye to two committee members who stood down earlier in the year and I would thank Steve Burry of Dennis Maps and Becky Preston of Legacy Antiques and Collectibles for their support. Our stalwart committee member Neil Howlett is standing down from the committee after a decade of membership. We have to thank Neil for his huge commitment and contribution to the Chamber over that time. He will be sorely missed.

Our committee meetings are joined by Cllr Andy Palmer, who attends as a representative of Frome Town Council.

We are happy to welcome Lucy Milton-Downes from Solstice Legal Services who is being proposed as a new committee member at this AGM. Additionally, Adam Scott the Branch Manager of Cooper and Tanner in Frome, has also kindly agreed to be proposed as a new committee member.

Therefore, the committee members who are putting themselves forward are myself, Nigel Harris, Mike Mori, Amanda Brown, Lucy Milton-Downes and Adam Scott.

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