

Building a Picture of Frome

Community Engagement Project 2024

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Introduction



In Autumn 2023 the Communities Team in Frome Town Council began working towards a goal to create a picture of ‘what matters’ to Frome, culminating in a two-month period in May and June 2024 of extended town-wide community engagement and data collation. This report will set out the methodology of the work, outline thematically grouped highlights and headlines from the results, and suggest some possible next steps, both for the Town Council and the wider community to take together.

The full secondary data report and sets of intelligence gathered from face-to-face engagement are available as appendices or hyperlinks. The purpose of this report is to inform the reader of the results of the project rather than perform an analysis or recommend priorities. The conclusion will outline the next steps for the town council in that respect, and the transparency of the findings here will enable other local organisations to use the information for their own purposes.

Background

The work was initiated when councillors began to look ahead to the renewal of the current Council Plan. Within the staff and councillor team there is already a breadth of knowledge and experience and a good understanding of the priorities for the town. There was a strong desire to engage widely with our community so that the town council can be confident that the goals and projects they are working towards are what really matters to the town. In the context of previous engagement projects (Vision for Frome in 2008, Participate Frome in 2013, Have your Say in 2019, Choose Play 2021) – it felt timely to reach out to the community and update our intelligence.

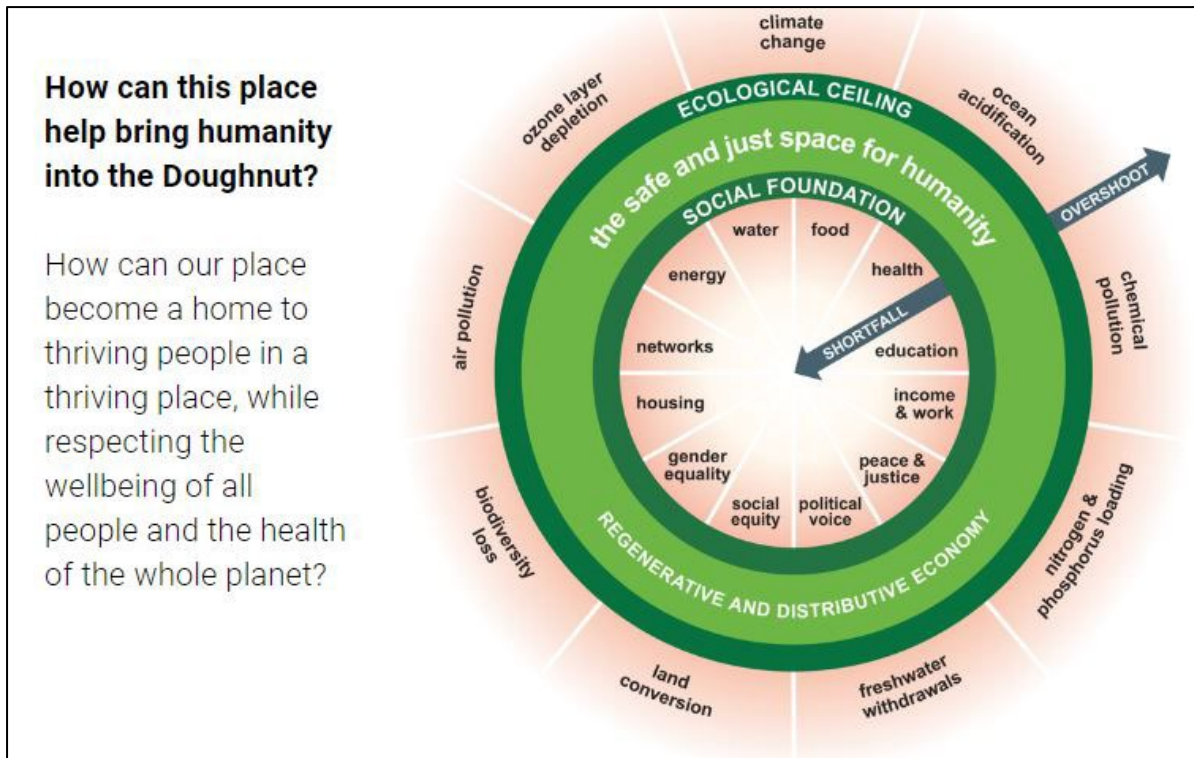
This was a concise, short term project - it offers a ‘snapshot’ of where we are at and can be used as a starting point on which to build further engagement, inform decision making, set targets, identify gaps and look for trends. There will be some suggestions for some next steps in the conclusion, including future partnership work in fleshing out the picture. The intention is to make as much of this available publicly as possible: we are aware that sets of Frome-specific data will be of huge value to our wider community organisation network and their work and fundraising efforts.

Approach

The approach to community development at Frome Town Council has been developed over the years to be as participatory and strengths based as possible. This means that, where we can, we work to empower residents to take action themselves, doing things alongside people rather than ‘to’ them. This ethos was at the forefront of the work that we did both internally and externally.

The Framework

Various examples of good practice and models were helpful when shaping options for a framework on which to hang the engagement data. These included Cornwall County Council, Leeds, Devon, Nanaimo in Canada, Amsterdam, among othersⁱ. In the process of our research, we were directed to the Doughnut Economicsⁱⁱ model, which has been used by governments and organisations all over the world in various ways. The ‘Doughnut’ offers suggestions for establishing what communities need to provide for residents so that they can thrive (a ‘social foundation’: based on the UN sustainable development goals) but without ‘overshooting’ the resources that are available to them (the ‘planetary boundaries’). It is increasingly used by towns and cities all over the world as a starting point for creating community and data portraits – recognising that you can’t decide where you want to go if you don’t know where you are.



We used this model and the tools available to help us kickstart some internal conversations. We hosted three workshops with staff and councillors to map what we know collectively and refine the framework to suit our specific locality. This brought out the first set of emerging themes to go out and test with the community.



The Questions

We kept the main questions open and consistent throughout the various engagement activity, in order to allow unbiased themes to emerge. They were:

- What are your favourite things about Frome?
- What are the challenges for you (and your family) at the moment?
- What would help you to live well here/What should we focus on as a town?

With the online survey and with focused interest groups, we took a deeper dive into various themes (health, travel, housing etc) with more specific questions to build a fuller picture around identified topics.



Methods

A range of methods were used to ensure we reached a wide range of people and with opportunities to reach out to people where they are, instead of expecting them to come to us.

Face-to-face events, organised and run by Liz and Emily our Engagement Officers, included pop ups in various neighbourhoods, visits to community groups, community organisation workshops and interviews with individuals. A wide spread of events across the town and at different times were carefully planned in order to reach a range of neighbourhoods and demographics.



An online survey was opened for the month of June, which asked people the three open questions as well as more in-depth questions around the various themes. This allowed us to quantify some of the opinion data, and reach people that might find it easier to engage digitally. Despite a relatively short window of opening, we had 355 respondents.



A secondary data portrait was commissioned. As part of the internal workshops, we began to refine a set of data that would be an important part of the building picture of Frome.

This process was continued with Locality, the national membership organisation who took on this work. They have built a set of data that are all comparable on a national or regional level with other places, and produced an in-depth report that can be read in partnership with this one. The tables of references that are reproduced in this document use Locality's icons to show how Frome is doing in relation to other areas or nationally.

There are lots of things to consider when looking at quantitative data. We should keep in mind that various factors impact numerical data, and we can only guess at some of them – for example, is blood pressure higher in Frome because it is being more efficiently recorded here? Are the shoplifting figures high because of prolific individuals?

There are also variations in when the various data sources were published. By focussing on comparable data, there are some data sets which we haven't been able to use here but may be useful in future for measuring local progress. It is also worth noting that even if we are doing 'better' than the national average or neighbouring towns, it doesn't necessarily mean it's 'good'! This secondary data set becomes truly valuable when looked at alongside the community engagement results, rather than as a standalone piece of work, hence collating the findings in this report.

▲	Values are better than national or regional comparators.	
●	Values are similar to national and regional averages	
▼	Values are worse than national and regional averages	
▲	▼	There are significant differences of performance within Frome or across regions

Our rounded, multi-faceted approach to reaching out meant that we were able to hear the views of 973 people. The appendices will show there are some demographic gaps in the voices heard, partly explained by the time constraints and capacity of the project.

Total number of people reached: **973**

- Survey respondents: 355
- Conversations in 16 engagement pop ups: 302
- 2 Community organisation meetings: 160
- 10 Focus group sessions: 152
- Interviews: 4

1. Healthcare and Mental Health Support
2. Activities and Facilities for Young People
3. Housing and Affordability
4. Transport and Infrastructure
5. Community and Social Spaces
6. Safety and Policing
7. Environmental Concerns
8. Shops and Local Economy

Overall themes from open question responses

Looking across all of the comments as a whole (rather than separated in the three questions) the top 3 most discussed topics were all positive references.

1. Community connections (443 or 4.79% of all recorded comments)
2. Art, culture, play and sport (399 or 4.32% of all recorded comments)
3. Access to nature (2.13% of all recorded comments)


These were followed by concerns or negative comments around Housing, Cost of Living, Road Safety, the offer for Young People and Public Transport, Diversity and Inclusivity and Healthcare, as well as positive comments on the offer of the Town Centre. We will look at these in more detail in the themes that follow.

Thematic grouping has been essential for capturing information and for identifying trends, gaps, and significant issues. However, there are of course varied and nuanced overlaps and intersectionality between these themes. For example, when people talk about the 'cost of living', they can be referring to a mixture of rising food prices, income disparity, housing affordability, etc.

Many comments covered multiple themes, such as those about young people needing more choice and things to do in order to improve their mental health. We have coded comments carefully to be as accurate and representative as possible and we have used AI tools in some distillations to avoid human bias. The quotes that are replicated in this report have come from both the survey responses and the face-to-face engagement.

Emerging Themes

Health

Theme	Indicators	Comparative Performance
<p>Health</p> 	Residents reporting very good or good health	●
	Emergency hospital admissions	▲ ●
	Nbr of people over 65 with bad or very bad health	●
	Years of Potential Life Lost	▲
	Deaths under 65	▲
	Life expectancy	▲
	Level of physical activity	▲
	Personal Independence Payments (Mental Health)	▲ ▼
	Universal Credit claimants on a Health Journey	▲ ▼
	High blood pressure	▼
	Depression	▼
	Intentional self-harm	▼

Source: Locality Data Report 2024

The secondary data shows that Frome compares favourably across multiple health related outcomes compared to the national average. However, there are some notable differences within the town itself (for example, significantly more emergency hospital admissions in Northwest and Southeast Frome compared to Northeast). It also shows that hospital stays for self-harm are higher than average, as is the number of people experiencing depression.

From the conversations on the ground, access to GPs and NHS dentists are of concern to many. Older people tell us they find navigating the online booking system at the Health Centre difficult, and several said that they don't use the internet. Survey respondents reflected similar views, but there was also praise for the quality of care received from individuals and healthcare settings. Many residents are unable to access NHS dental treatment at all or are waiting too long.

People are worried about the lack of support for mental health, particularly for young people. Young people tell us they are experiencing increasing levels of anxiety, which can mean they find it hard to go to school or take part in social activities. The concern around mental health is corroborated by the secondary data portrait and was of particular concern to the community organisations we engaged with.

I'm not unwell, but I don't like the idea that I can't talk to a doctor without filling in a form. A lot of older people won't be able to, and they might not make a fuss even if they are really ill.

The staff at the local clinic are very helpful, but there are not enough of them.

People can't get the mental health support they need. They get 8 sessions of CBT, but after 8 sessions the person has unloaded and they've got all this stuff in their heads, and then the sessions end and there's no more help.


Very good in the main. Accept I have to wait sometimes but when I've really needed attention more quickly it has always been available.

Accessing the GP has been really difficult, long wait times and appointments are hard to get.

When survey respondents were asked specifically about their experience of healthcare in the town, their responses were about:

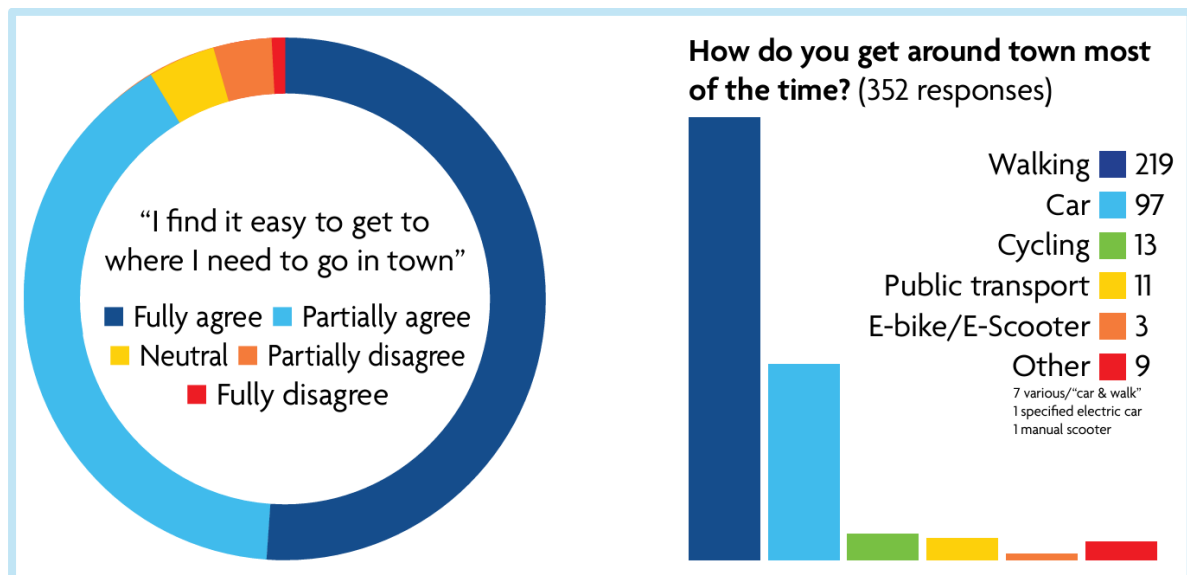
- Access to Health Care Services: 20%
- Quality of Health Care Services: 15%
- Wait Times and Availability: 20%
- Mental Health Services: 15%
- Dental Care: 10%
- Cost and Financial Concerns: 5%

Travel

<p>Travel</p> 	Job access score (travel time to jobs)	▲	▼
	Households with no cars	▲	●
	Travel times to key services (hospital & large employment site)	▼	
	Travel times to key services (all other)	▲	

Locality Data Report 2024

The secondary data focuses on distances to key services, and this is generally in line or better than other areas, with the exception of distances from a hospital and a large employment site (which aligns with findings in the health and work themes).

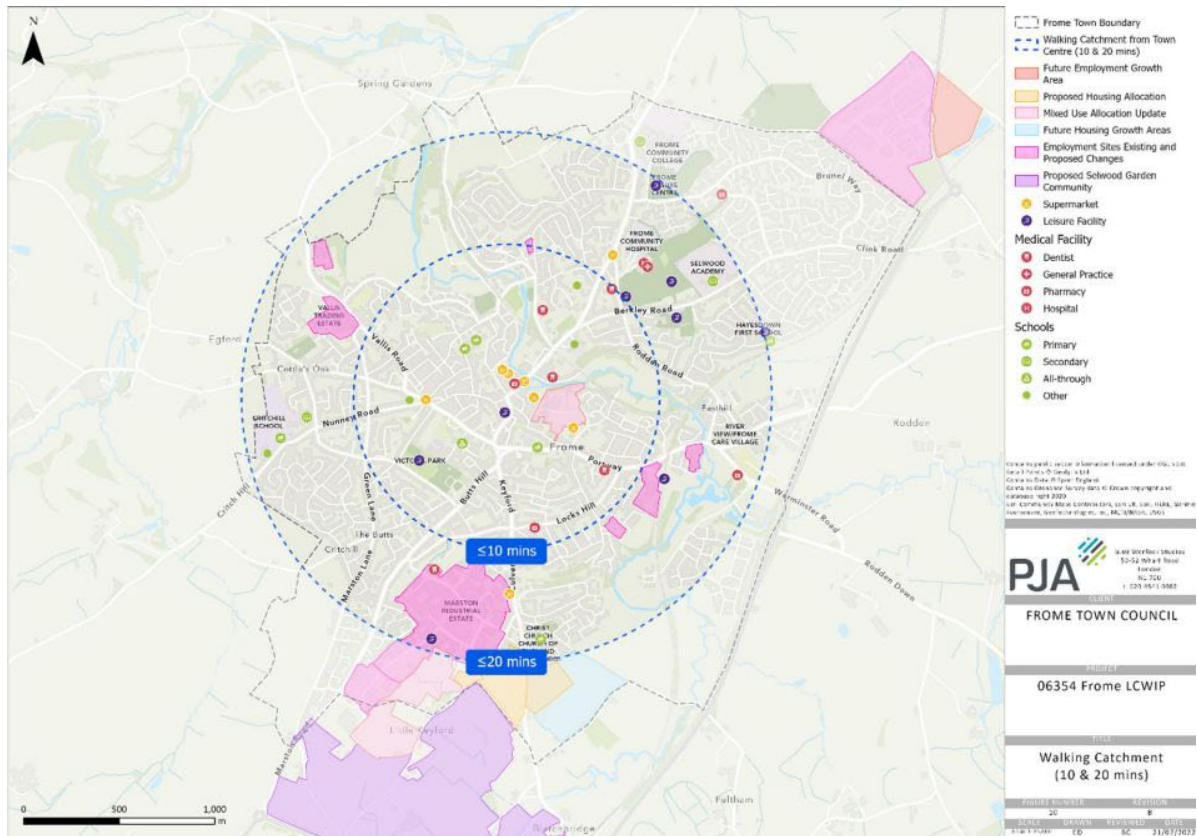


Frome Community Survey 2024

When talking face-to-face, people are generally positive about the bus services in and around Frome, although greater choice and longer timetables would be welcomed.

Road safety was a big concern. Traffic and parking issues in the town centre are frequently mentioned across the engagement responses. There are also neighbourhood-specific concerns about parking, as well as speeding and dangerous driving throughout town. The physical state of roads is frustrating for people, with potholes frequently mentioned in places like Fromefield and Selwood Road.

There was a lot of interest in active travel networks, both praising how easy it is to get around town, but also wanting to prioritise improvements in this area. There is a lot of information from the LCWIP (2023 report) on this topic (see links in Appendix).



10-20 minute walking catchment from Town Centre – SOURCE: LCWIP report 2023

Being a pedestrian here is very difficult and dangerous. There is a lot of traffic moving at speed. Cars race up Bath Street in the day like it's a game.


Prefer to travel more sustainably. Want to have exercise when travelling. Don't want to use car as it creates an anti social environment as well as pollution, health problems and congestion in town. It's more fun, I can chat with my kids whilst cycling.

So many potholes now I dread taking the car out.

When asked to elaborate on their **travel choices**, survey respondents referred to

1. Proximity to Town Centre
2. Public Transport Challenges
3. Cycling infrastructure
4. Reasons for car usage
5. Health and mobility
6. Environment and Health choices
7. Cost concerns
8. Road safety

Food

 <p>Food</p>	Priority Places for Food Index	▲
	Food for Families	▼
	Proximity to food stores (both non-supermarket and supermarket)	▲
	Ecommerce access (online groceries)	▲

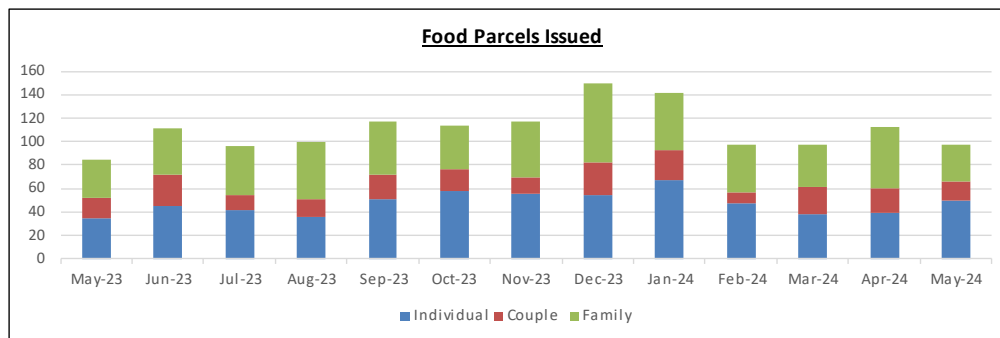
Locality Data Report 2024

Frome generally comes out well when it comes to the available data on food security and food access. There is a notable outlier when it comes to family food support needs. The rank in Frome shows that there is a higher need for food support than in the South West and higher than in Somerset. Interviews with the local food bank suggest this is an accurate picture. There are differences across the town too. Food insecurity was much lower in the Northeast of town than that Southwest.

As a distinct topic, food is not mentioned that often in face-to-face engagement, although people are concerned about the increased cost of living. Many people mention the rising cost of food as a significant challenge, affecting their ability to buy groceries and other necessities. At one group we visited, the staff gave the example of a parent who has recently lost weight. Her friends were complimenting her on weight loss, how had she done it? She replied 'benefits', indicating that she had not been able to afford to eat and feed her children.

I've started growing veg to try to help. There are lots of people who are newly poor because of how much everything costs now


The cost of living is making feeding everyone difficult. Supermarket prices have gone up significantly.



Fair Frome May 2024 Report

In the survey, although there wasn't a question specifically on Food, 22.75% of the respondents mentioned issues related to food, including accessibility, food prices and cost of living, and an interest in growing projects and community initiatives such as Fair Frome, the Pantry and the Community Fridge.

Housing and Infrastructure

 <p>Housing and Infrastructure</p>	Housing affordability gap	▼
	House price / salary ratio	▼
	Average house prices	● ▼
	Proportion of social rented housing	▲
	Housing Condition	▲
	Overcrowding	▲ ▼

Locality Data Report 2024

Housing was the most significant topic of conversation at all the pop-up events. People talked about their personal circumstances, ranging from imminent homelessness to adult children living with family because of the cost of housing. There were also conversations about the perceived shortage of social housing, the cost and insecurity of private sector renting, and the lack of affordable family housing. This is generally aligned with the evidence from the secondary data and survey responses, which shows a large affordability gap between average salaries and entry level house prices. Many people we spoke to believe that the affordability of renting and buying is increasingly out of reach for local families, and this is often accredited to new people moving in who can afford higher prices.

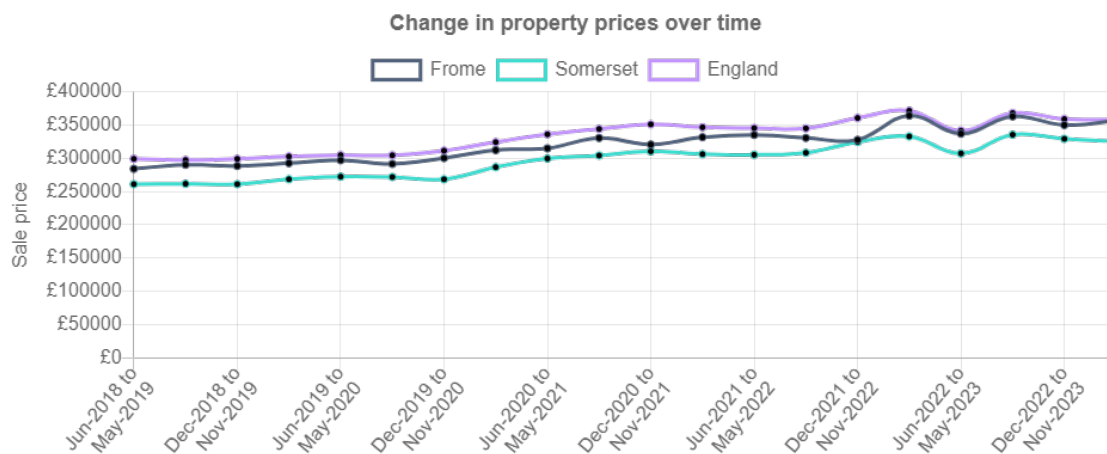
People also talked about wider reaching impacts of the housing situation, such as family members having to move out of the town making it harder to support older family members or make informal childcare arrangements.

On the other hand, there were also concerns about the ability of the town's infrastructure to cope with new housing developments. The loss of the banks and a central post office are frequently mentioned, particularly around the impact this is having on older people's independence.

Good to see new homes being built but we need medical and dental services which can deal with the expansion. More social housing would be helpful.

There are no banks or post offices left in town. How will we get access to cash?

My kids would have loved to have lived here but they can't afford it. The town is losing the younger generation.



Source: Land Registry/ Locality 2024

When survey respondents were asked what, if anything would improve **their** housing situation, these were the main themes (aside from 'nothing'):

Affordability and Financial Concerns (40%)

Can't afford to rent a flat or house on my own.

Housing Supply and Availability (25%)

More social housing and more realistic chances of getting it in an area you prefer.

Maintenance and Quality (15%)

Improved insulation and maintenance services.

Parking and Traffic (10%)

More parking spaces are needed in residential areas.

Safety and Crime (5%)

Increased police presence to reduce crime.


Neighbourhood and Environment - (5%)

More green spaces and community gardens.

When asked to comment on **housing more generally**, survey respondents talked about:

1. Impact of Second Homes and Short-Term Rentals
2. Quality, Design and Environmental Considerations of New Developments
3. Affordability and Accessibility including affordable and social housing and rent control or support.
4. Community Impact and Infrastructure Strain including roads, schools, and medical services and loss of green spaces.
5. Parking.
6. Social issues such as neighbourhood drug use and crime.

Access to Nature

<p>Access to Nature</p> 	Total greenspace coverage	▲
	Average number 4 Parks, Public Gardens, or Playing Fields within 1,000 m radius	▲
	Accessibility of blue spaces	▲
	Accessibility of active green spaces	▲
	Accessibility of passive green spaces	●

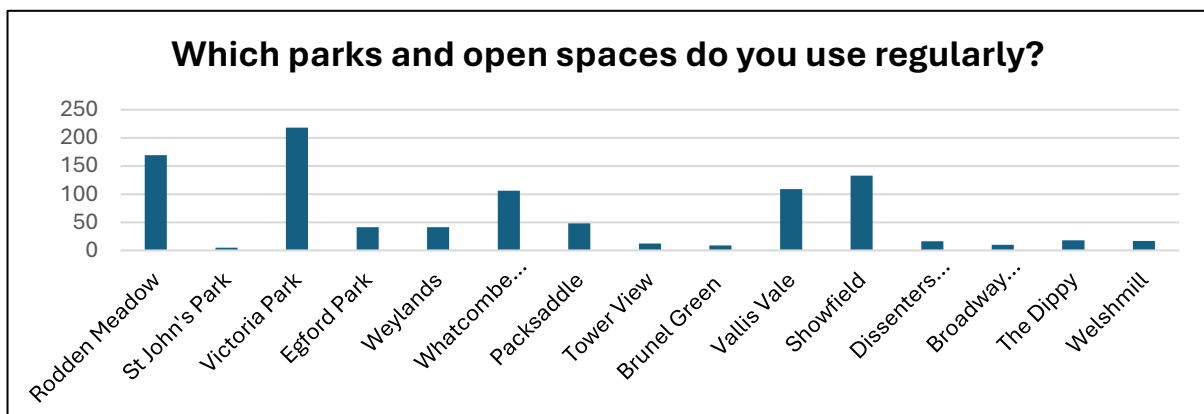
Locality Data Report 2024

Overwhelmingly, people are positive about access to, and the quality of, open spaces in Frome, and this was one of the most talked-about topics in response to the open questions. People tell us that, as well as the managed sites like the Showfield, Dippy and Rodden Meadow, they enjoy the ease of access to the countryside. People have concerns about building on green field sites around the town, particularly at Packsaddle Fields and the proposed Selwood Garden development. The River Frome is a valued natural resource, and people are worried about the impact of pollution. People tell us that they love and value the work of the Town Rangers, and their approach to managing the open spaces in town. Many people love the ‘light touch’ of the rangers at Rodden Meadow and the Showfield and welcome the planting and maintenance of Frome Town Council managed sites to support wildlife.


Love it here. Moved down from Lancashire in 1973. When I come home from holiday I just love coming back to Frome, to the beautiful greenery everywhere.

I love the river, but why doesn't the town make more of it? Rivers draw people to them for leisure, nature, sports, work. The river could be a cultural centre.

We love all the parks, especially with sand - good for children with sensory needs.

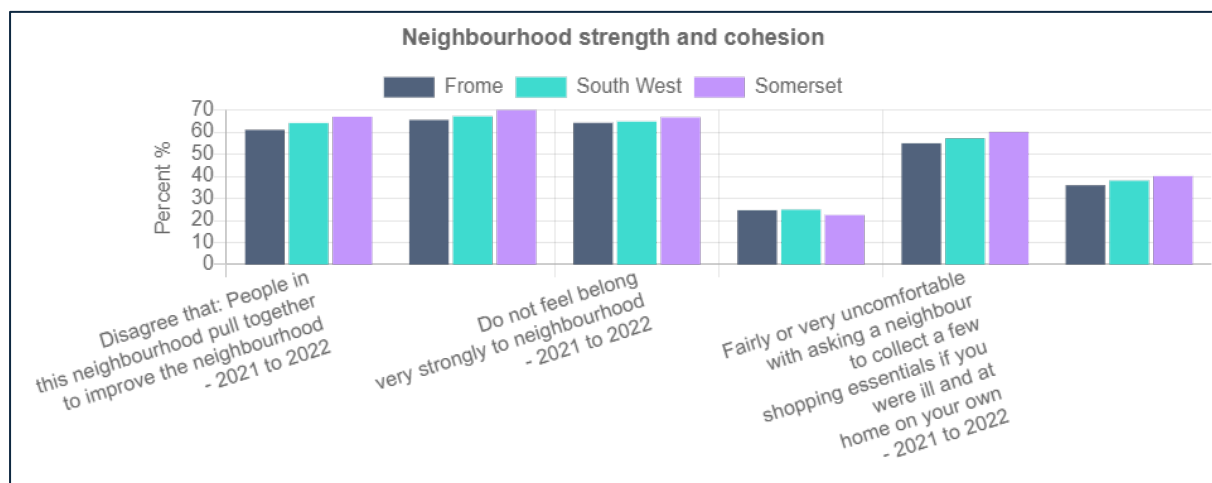


Community connections

Theme	Indicators	Comparative Performance
Community Connections 	Community Needs Index	▲
	Connectedness rank (CNI Index)	▲
	Neighbourhood strengths and cohesion	▲
	Number of people aged 66 or over living alone	●
	Number of charities	▲ ▼
	Grant funding from major grant funders	▼
	Big Lottery Funding	▼
	Community owned assets	▼

Locality Data Report 2024

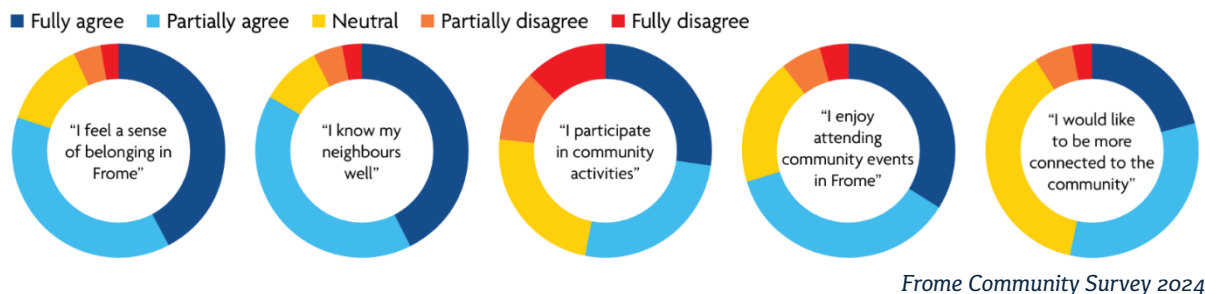
Community spirit is strong, and people feel it makes Frome special. References to community spirit, kindness, generosity, and ‘looking out for each other’ top the list of most often-mentioned subjects. People value the friendliness, range of support and voluntary groups and places that feel safe and welcoming, like Shared Earth, Victoria Park Cafe and Men’s Shed. People feel well-supported by services such as the food bank, pantry and community fridge. Most value the sense of belonging and connections in the neighbourhoods where they live, although some, like Edmund Park say they feel a little cut off from the rest of town.



Community Life Survey/Locality 2024

The huge variety and offers of community organisations are celebrated, but the secondary data suggests Frome has fewer charities operating than in the South West and Somerset – this could be because fewer of the active organisations here are registered as charities. Community organisations in particular highlighted the need for an increase in accessible and affordable community venues in town.

The other outlier in this area is around neighbourhood cohesion. According to the Community Life survey in 2022, 60% of respondents in Frome said that they do not belong very strongly to the neighbourhood. In the same survey, over 50% would not feel comfortable asking a neighbour to collect a few shopping essentials if ill or home alone. This is very much at odds with what we heard on the ground.



You can't get a taxi but if you put it on Facebook someone will give you a lift. That's the kind of community we are.

We lost a dog. The response of the town to help find her was overwhelming. People still ask after her now.

I have lovely neighbours, the children all play together in the cul de sac. There are also lots of social groups for mothers and single parents.

I've lived here for 14 years. I think Frome is a supportive place to live. It has things like the Pantry and the Fridge which are universal, so they don't discriminate. People are supported.

Asked when they **felt a sense of belonging** in Frome, survey respondents mentioned:

- Community Events and Festivals: 35%
- Volunteering and Participation in Local Organizations: 25%
- Neighbourhood and Local Interactions: 20%
- Support During Difficult Times: 10%
- Creative and Cultural Activities: 5%
- Specific Community Groups and Initiatives: 5%

When survey respondents were asked what would **improve** their sense of belonging, they mentioned the following (aside from nothing):

1. Community Events and Social Activities – 30%

"More town events which are open to all eg lantern parade."

"More different types of workshops in Frome festival (not just meditation). E.g art workshops bee keeping dancing gardening etc."

"A central events website/internet."

"More activities aimed at adults not just families."

2. Inclusive and Accessible Opportunities – 25%

"Better networking and cooperation between community groups."

"More activities for teenagers."

"Events that are more inclusive."

"If people were more welcoming to diverse groups."

3. Better Communication and Information Sharing – 20%

"Access to everything available in Frome such as charities/volunteering opportunities/clubs / sports available all in one place."

"More notice should be taken of lifelong residents."

"More community events locally in parts of Frome."

"A volunteer hub awareness of all the local groups that meet up and where."

4. Safety and Public Services – 10%

"Feeling safer."

"Police Presence."

"Less antisocial behaviour in the streets and parks."

"Accessibility."

5. Housing and Economic Factors - 10%

"Being able to purchase a home here."

"Cheaper access to and more sporting event access for families."

"Feeling out priced low income family cannot afford to go to events locally as no extra income."

"Having my own home."

6. Volunteer and Engagement Opportunities -3%

"Volunteering alongside others."

"More volunteering opportunities for working people ie at weekends and evenings."

"Spending more of my time volunteering or participating in community organisations/groups."


7. Support for Specific Demographics - 2%

"More events giving a chance to new locals to meet and make friends."

"A more constructive/engaging Facebook group where you feel safe to share ideas and make connections."

"More activity aimed at single people- currently seems strong focus on people with kids/ family set up."

Work Enterprise and Income

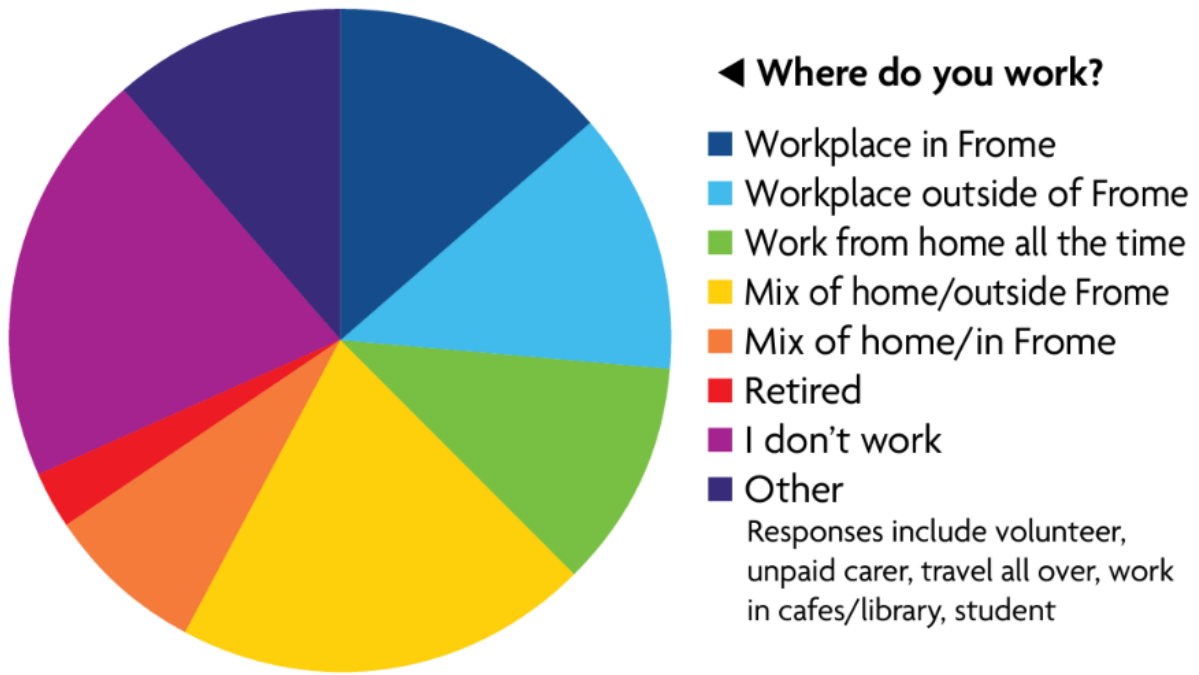
<p>Work, Enterprise and Income</p> 	Unemployment to available jobs ratio	▼
	Job Density (percentage of local jobs)	▼
	People aged 16-64 claiming DWP benefits	▼
	People aged 16-18 claiming DWP benefits	▼
	Indices of Deprivation (income domain)	▲
	Debt (mortgage, unsecured and SME)	▲
	Private sector employees	▲
	Public sector employees	▼
	Jobs in retail	▲
	Gross Value Added (economic activity)	▼
	Part-time employees	▲

Locality Data Report 2024

Unemployment figures are higher in Frome and job density lower than other towns and regionally. The economic activity (measured by Gross Value added) is lower, and the need for DWP benefits is increasing and higher than the average in Somerset and the Southwest, especially amongst young people. This is reflected in perceptions about lack of work opportunities in the town, especially for young people, gathered across the engagement. People feel local jobs are hard to come by, especially with the closure of industry, while people moving into the town often work from home. High rents are also affecting small businesses who are struggling to cover their overheads, along with the maintenance and repair of commercial premises.

The secondary data also tells us that there are fewer areas in Frome that experience greater levels of deprivation relating to low income compared to Somerset and the Southwest, and levels of debt are generally lower.

There are more part time employees and jobs in retail here, and the survey responses indicate a wide variety of working type and patterns, with about 40 'other' responses to the question 'Where do you go to work?'



Frome Community Survey 2024

The cost of living is an ongoing issue, with many people personally affected or knowing someone who is struggling. There is a lot of empathy for people struggling financially, and this is reflected in the range of groups and services aiming to support them, such as those provided by Fair Frome.



Frome Community Survey 2024

When asked how the **Cost of Living** has affected them, survey respondents referred to:


- Increased Living Costs and Reduced Disposable Income: 35%
- Housing and Rent Affordability: 20%
- Energy and Utility Bills: 20%
- Changes in Shopping and Consumption Habits: 15%
- Impact on Savings and Financial Stability: 5%
- Mental and Emotional Stress: 3%
- Impact on Social and Leisure Activities: 2%

My income is not keeping up with inflation. Despite being further along in my career than a few years ago I now save less. I feel my financial position is more precarious.

We can live here only because I can work remotely. If that changes we would have to leave as it's too far to commute and there aren't the jobs in IT here.

[We need] More job opportunities for young people.

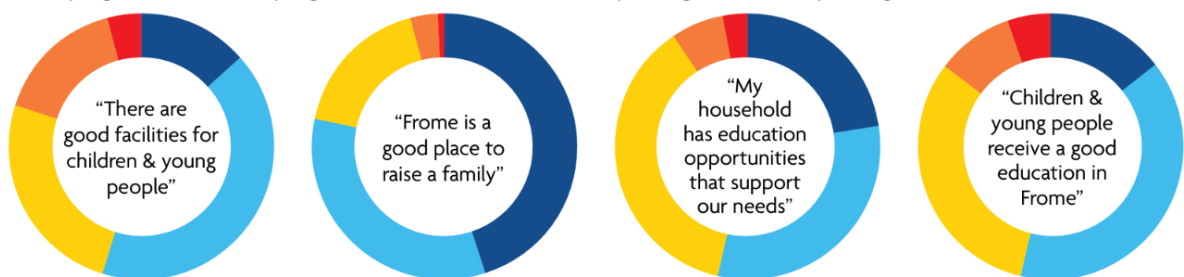
Young People and Families

<p>Young People and Families</p> 	Income Deprivation Affecting Children Index	▼	
	Rate of children in relative low-income families	▲	●
	Obese children aged 4-5	●	
	Obese children aged 10-11	▲	
	A&E attendances for every 1,000 children	▼	
	People aged 16+ have no qualifications	●	
	IoD education skills and training domain	▼	
	Participating in higher education	▼	
	Change in qualifications	●	▲

Locality Data Report 2024

Since overall income deprivation is comparatively low in Frome, it is all the more surprising that income deprivation affecting children is high when compared with the South West and Somerset. Again, there are significant differences within the town – there are more children living in poverty in the Northwest of the town. Another indicator of note is the high number of A&E attendances. This indicator is important because A&E attendances in children aged under five years are often preventable, and commonly caused by accidental injury or by minor illnesses which could have been treated in primary care.

■ Fully agree ■ Partially agree ■ Neutral ■ Partially disagree ■ Fully disagree



Frome Community Survey 2024

However, there was lots of positivity about Frome being a good place to raise a family, and satisfaction with the offer in town, especially for younger children and babies. It can sometimes be a challenge to access in person support. Families value the choice and affordability of baby and toddler groups, along with free or low-cost events such as the Children’s Festival.

Parents have mixed views about school provision, with some concerns noted around SEND support within and outside of school. Transition within the three-tier system in relation to behaviour and bullying is also worrying some families.

People are concerned about young people's mental health, especially the impact of the pandemic on their social and emotional wellbeing and behaviour. Linked to this is a desire to increase the choice and availability of open-access activities and spaces for young to mid-teens. People feel that a traditional youth club is not suitable for everyone and would like to see a range of affordable activities on offer, including swimming and bowling.

Young people echo this view, with arcade games and risky play featuring highly and golf becoming increasingly popular. Their own hang-out space is important; not necessarily a building but somewhere safe they can express themselves and not feel like a nuisance.

When asked to describe what it is like to **have a family** in Frome, survey respondents talked about the following:

1. Community and Friendly Environment (30%)

"Frome has been a great place to raise a family. There is a real sense of community and connection."

"Great place friendly and good community."

"I love the sense of community and knowing other people in the town."

"It's lovely bringing my children up in Frome."

2. Availability of Activities and Facilities (25%)

"There's plenty to do and enjoy locally, and it's a good place to live."

"Young children have loads to do. The parks are brilliant."

"Lots of good baby groups and lots of children's clubs."

"Loads to do and keep busy. Lots of family-friendly places to eat visit and meet friends."

3. Safety and Security (20%)

"It feels relatively safe for our children."

"Mostly it's felt safe and supportive."

"Relatively safe place to raise children."

"It's a nice place for children to grow up."

"We have a huge child violence issue in Frome."

4. Challenges with education (10%)

"The schools are good but not that happy with the three-tier system."

"I was quite shocked to experience the Frome school system after attending good schools in Sussex before we moved."

"Great on the whole schools could be better."

"Lovely and worrying for the future. I am concerned about limited options for secondary schools."

"There are so many more people being diagnosed with Autism but the Park Road centre has closed - how can we look at this as a town?"

5. Teen and Youth Services (10%)

"Outside of school, there's nothing for them. All the facilities we had when I grew up here such as youth clubs are gone."

"Better since I moved into town as my kids can be more self-sufficient to access things. Drugs are a huge issue for teens."

"Nothing after preteen it is amazing. However, there is nothing after."


"It's nice but need more to do for teenagers."

6. Impact of cost of living (5%)

"Expensive nursery fees are astronomical, and the service they deliver is getting worse."

"Bloody expensive if you want to treat them to out-of-school activities!"

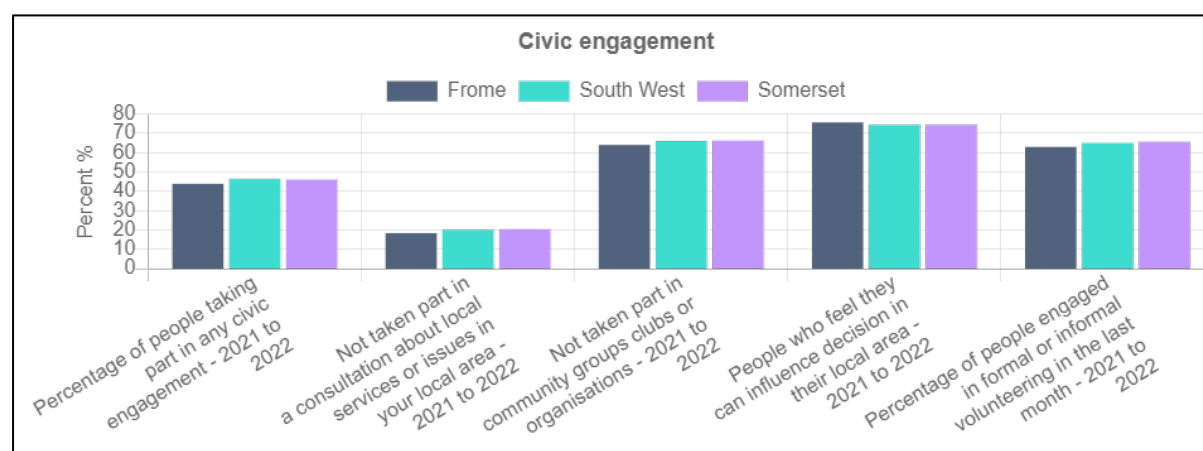
Feeling Welcome and Feeling Heard

Theme	Indicators	Comparative Performance
<p>Feeling welcome, feeling heard</p> 	Proportion of people taking part in any civic engagement	▼
	Active and Engaged Community score	▼
	People who feel they can influence decisions in their local area	▲
	Local election voter turn-out	● ▼
	Total crime offences	▲ ▼
	Total anti-social behavior	▲
	Shoplifting offences	▼
	Violent and sexual offenses	▲ ▼

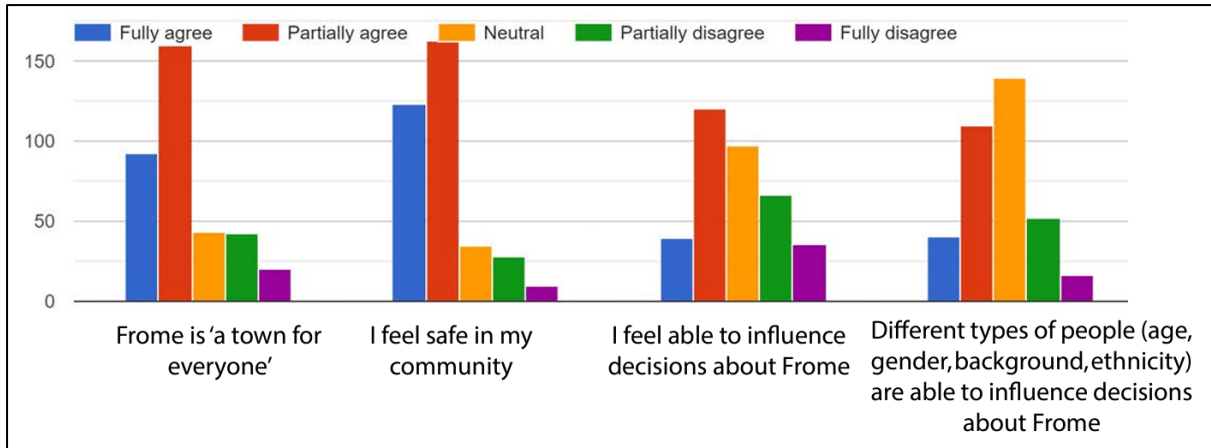
Locality Data Report 2024

This is a broad theme that encompasses a range of connected topics such as: how much people feel they have a voice, are included, how safe they feel and how diversity is embraced.

There was another surprise with the secondary data here as Frome scored lower than Somerset and the Southwest in civic engagement across several indicators. This is in quite stark contrast to the perceptions recorded in conversations and the survey that this town has a ‘can-do’ and active spirit.



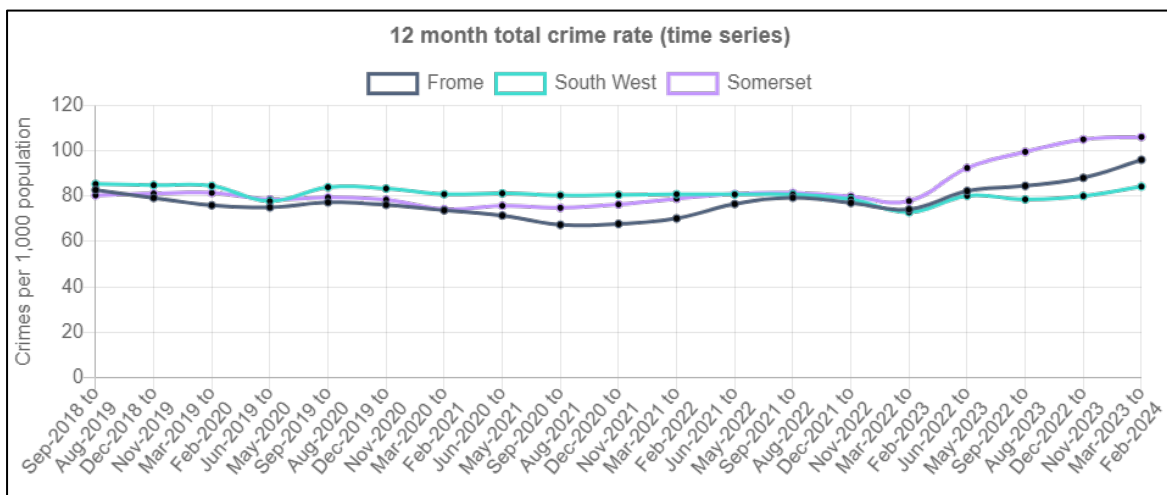
Community Life Survey/Locality 2024



Frome Community Survey 2024

Another contrast is that our engagement work picked up on a commonly held perception that there are a lot of newcomers to Frome (and some who see that as a source of tension and rising costs). The secondary data however tells us that in Frome, the proportion of migrants was 9.45%. This is less than the proportion in the Southwest (11.11%) and similar to the proportion in Somerset (9.81%). (A migrant is defined as a person with a different address one year before the Census to that on Census Day).

People we spoke to had different views about feeling welcome in the town. For some people, the lack of 'ordinary' shops in the town centre reflects a changing Frome, leaving 'old' Frome behind and catering for new people moving into the town. They feel the town lacks affordable clothes and shoe shops available in Westbury or Trowbridge. Survey respondents were much more likely to praise the town centre offers in the open questions, enjoying the independence and variety.



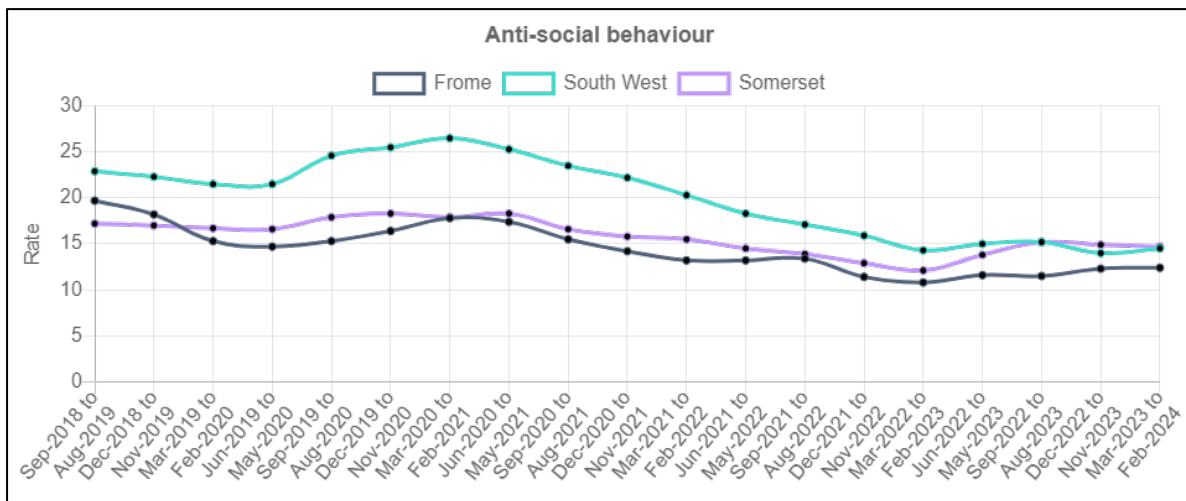
Police UK / Locality 2024

Face-to-face participants generally feel safe in the town, with a few exceptions. A small number of women shared their experiences of being subjected to racist or sexist language and gestures, particularly in the centre of town. Illegal drug-use in town centre areas is a worry for people in relation to their personal safety. Some feel the number of police

officers in the town is inadequate and many would like to see more lighting in public spaces, particularly in the town’s parks.

The safety of young people in Victoria Park is a common concern. People have experienced intimidating or bullying behaviour from a minority of children and young teens in groups. This is affecting people’s enjoyment of the space and parents tell us it influences their decisions about where their children can go.

Overall crime rates are going up in Frome at a higher rate than in Somerset and the Southwest, which is reflected in people’s concerns about perceived poor police resourcing. Anti-social behaviour, in comparison, has been relatively stable since 2022 and has improved over the past 10 years with a decreasing number of offences. Anti-social behaviour is lower than the average in Somerset and the Southwest. This is in contrast to perception of the town.



Police UK / Locality 2024

There is frustration for disabled people about accessibility, especially the placement of drop-kerbs, inconsiderate parking and accessing suitable toilets and parking spaces. People with a learning disability can’t always access shops as they may not have a bank card, shops are increasingly cashless, and the closure of banks and post offices makes it difficult to get cash.

There is a lot of positivity about Frome Town Council’s proactive and communicative approach and people were pleased to be asked for their views on the town. There is some scepticism about decision-making and value-for-money in local democracy.

People moving in to Frome have brought more diversity and it's much less narrow-minded than when I young. I never thought Frome would have a pride month!

Make Victoria Park safer

Drugs are an obvious issue, but not as bad as Taunton where we came from.

I use a wheelchair some of the time and it's impossible to get into places and the hills are too steep. I'm going to have to move.

When asked what would help them to get **their voice heard**, survey respondents talked about the following:

1. Communication and Transparency (25%)

“Clearer information about who is and not responsible for what and the best way to contact them.”

“Make it more obvious who to contact; the local vs district vs county stuff is confusing.”

“More transparency over budget and spend.”

2. More public forums and meetings (20%)

“Town Hall type meetings.”

“General meetings in local areas.”

“Opportunities to have a say in decision making that is local to Frome.”

3. Better access to councillors and representatives (20%)

“Regular calls from town councillors.”

“More involvement and prompt reaction from the elected councillors and town council when matters are raised.”

4. Increased Use of Surveys and Polls (15%)

“Surveys like this where councillors actually take comment into account.”

“More surveys personally as well as polls.”

“Surveys like this, but advertised more.”

5. Enhanced online and digital platforms (10%)

“Properly hosted and moderated online community interest groups.”
“A community forum online NOT Facebook.”
“An online group like this survey where people can share their thoughts.”


6. Community Involvement and Outreach (5%)

“More outreach to community groups.”
“A job here. I work in policy & public health.”
“More support groups.”

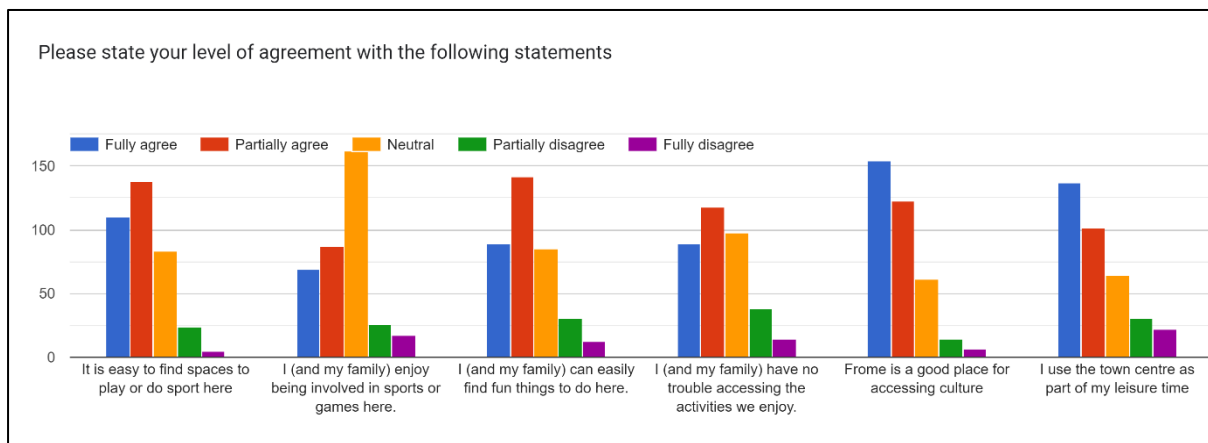
7. Anonymous feedback options (5%)

“Being heard anonymously.”
“A suggestion box for example.”
“Comment/criticize council policy and projects anonymously.”

Art and Play

<p>Art & Play</p> 	Access to Civic Assets	●	▼
	Employments in arts, entertainment & leisure	▲	
	Average distance to the nearest Park, Public Garden, or Playing Field	▲	

Locality Data Report 2024



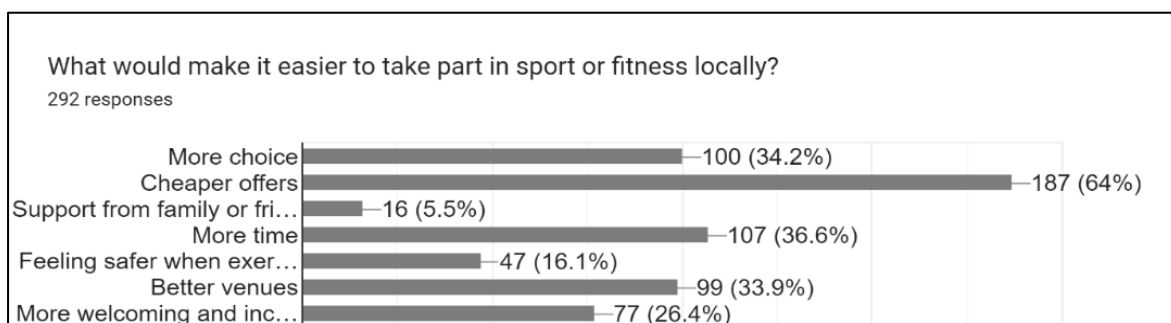
Frome Community Survey 2024

Shops down Catherine Hill and Cheap Street, frome festival, coffee in the sun at the black swan, the planting in the park, the hidden gardens, Friday evening in the summer with all the bars open on Palmer Street, the street music, Frome Busks, Frome facebook account (makes me laugh), the streets being so higgledy, the chair at Parsons which says Hugh Grant sat here, the fact my family live here, the Frome fridge, Vallis Vale, the Frome Independent, the Cheese and Grain being so cool, being the notice board monitor for the town, the Blatchbridge fields, the Frome Tunnels tour.

For a town of its size, it's culturally above its weight.

The comparable secondary data available was around access to cultural venues, and Frome’s score suggests that people in Frome have less access to civic assets compared to people in Trowbridge, Warminster and England. This is surprising because there was a huge number of positive comments about the cultural, creative and active offer in Frome across the face-to-face engagement and survey respondents. People told us they enjoy the variety of cultural opportunities, including the theatres, Cheese and Grain, free events, festivals and the lively restaurant and music scene, the creative and independent spirit, and the 'things to do'. (399 positive mentions or 4.32% of all open questions - second in number only to community spirit). Suggestions for improvements or priorities in this area were around affordability, accessibility and inclusivity of these offers.

Play opportunities in Frome’s parks and green spaces are loved and appreciated, particularly the new play areas at the Showfield and Welshmill. Families with young children love the availability and variety of outdoor play spaces. Young teens (age 10+) and people who care for or work with them tell us that there is not enough provision for them. They want ‘riskier’ play opportunities, as well as more skate ramps, indoor bowling, a water park and places they can gather without ‘always being told off.’



Frome Community Survey 2024 - There were 38 other answers. The main recurring theme was cheaper and higher quality swimming facilities. Several people mentioned wanting better public transport links to sports facilities or better parking provision.

When asked where they go to be **playful** in Frome, these were the most popular answers from survey respondents:

1. Parks and Green Spaces (45%)

"Victoria Park, Fields, Allotment."
 "Rodden Meadow, parks."
 "Parks, galleries, green spaces, community events."
 "Packsaddle Play Park."

2. Sports and Leisure Facilities (20%)

"Leisure Centre, Welshmill bike track, Victoria Park."
 "Sports clubs, cheese show."
 "Showfield and swimming pool."
 "Boulder rooms, Vobster Quay, Whatcombe fields."
 "Frome Ladies Hockey Club / Frome Tennis Club / Frome Leisure Centre."

3. Cultural and Community Centres (15%)

"Cheese and Grain local parks restaurants."

"The Merlin Theatre and the Memorial Theatre."

"Cinema cheese and grain pizza night at the station."

"Cheese and Grain through the woods to Mells most of the pubs."

4. Outdoor Activities and Countryside (10%)

"Walking & cycling locally."

"Mostly just outside of Frome. Its location is its draw."

"The footpaths and fields around Frome."

"We also often walk to Tytherington."

5. Dining and Socialising Places (5%)

"Pubs, parks, local countryside."

"Pubs, parks, cinema."

"The Three Swans."

"Pounds/ cafes/ cheese and grain/23 Bath st."

6. Challenges and Barriers (5%)

"We get out of Frome to avoid youth yobs."


"We tend to go out of Frome but do use the pool."

"It's not safe for the majority anymore."

"We can't really go anywhere as a family."

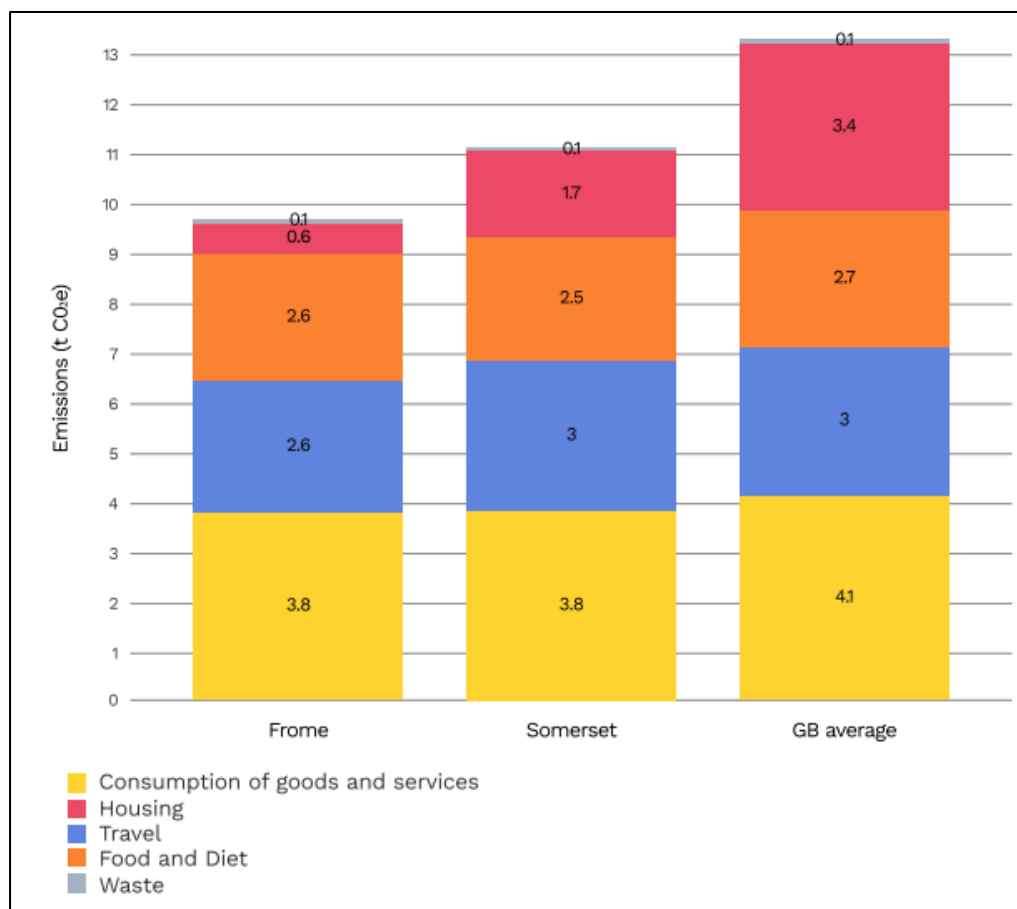
"I don't like the atmosphere of Victoria park and don't feel I can give my kids independence when we go there and so I tend to avoid."

Environment and Climate

<p>Environment</p> 	Carbon footprint per person	▲	
	Community Consumption Footprint	▲	
	Domestic energy consumption (electricity)	▲	
	Domestic gas consumption	●	
	Energy efficiency of dwellings	▲	
	Air quality	▲	▼

Locality Data Report 2024

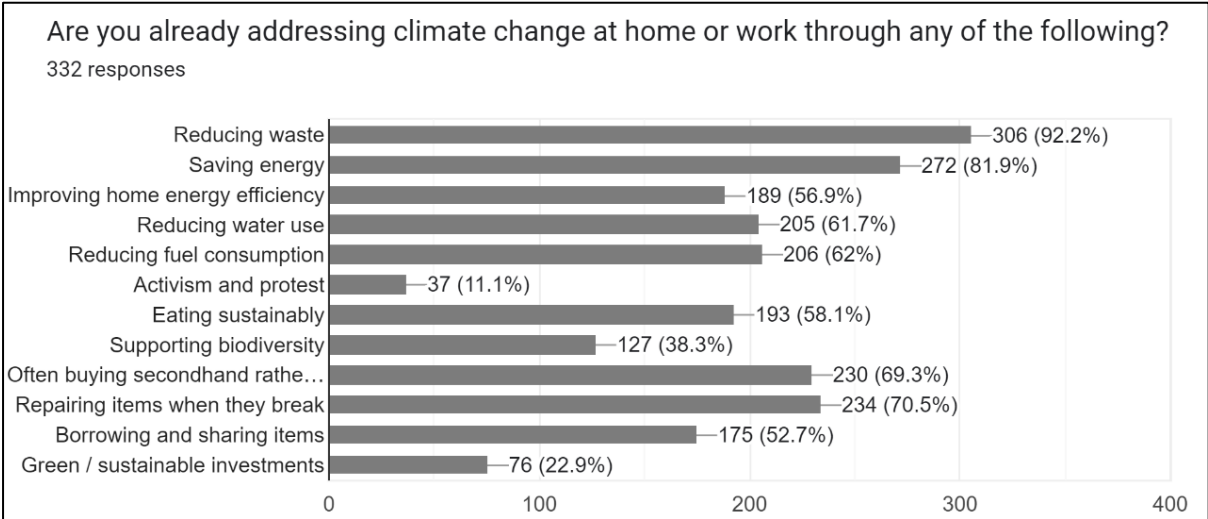
Comparable secondary data for Frome on environmental indicators are not widely available, but where they are, Frome’s headlines for carbon footprint, energy consumption and the energy efficiency of dwellings seem to be favourable. There are differences across town (energy consumption and carbon footprint are both higher in the Northeast of town) and air quality varies across comparators and within Frome.



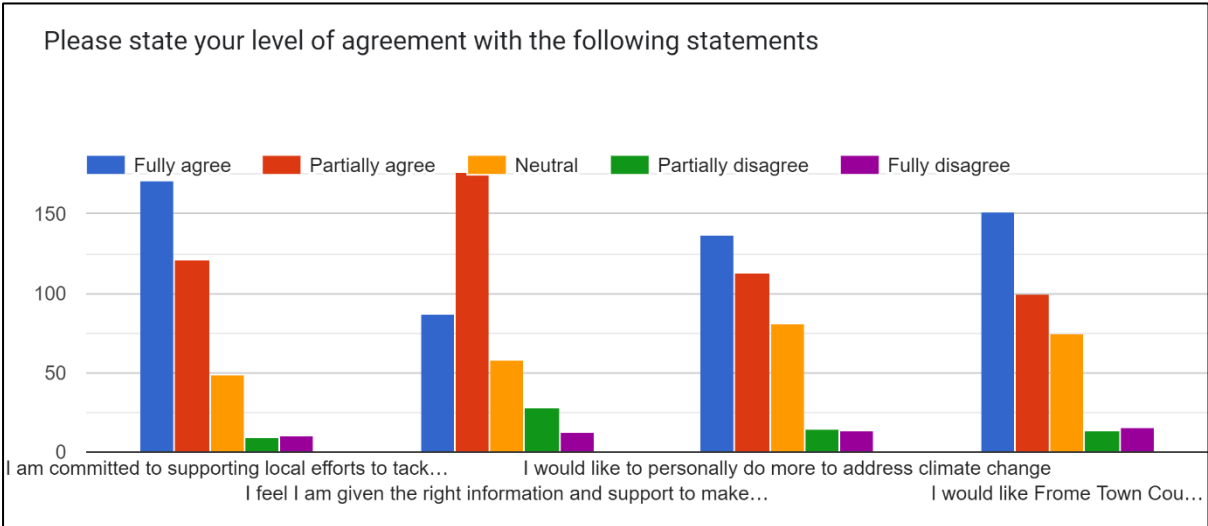
Centre for Sustainable Energy / Locality

There were some positive comments about action being taken on climate change in town, but the emphasis was on doing more and prioritising these issues. There was a significant number of people expressing concern about the impact of new housing developments on the environment. Overall, there were fewer comments about climate resilience that we had anticipated, but this may be to do with the framing of our questions around direct challenges.

The state of our world politically, climatically, environmentally - THE FUTURE for us and our kids and our kids' kids.



Frome Community Survey 2024



Frome Community Survey 2024

In terms of our surrounding environment in town, in the survey and engagement work there was a lot of appreciation for our natural and built environment, particularly the river and historical architecture.

Some people are unhappy about the amount of litter and graffiti they see throughout Frome. Overflowing bins and piles of bags of dog poo are mentioned as issues in many places. We heard from people in residential areas who are concerned about the lack of weeding and clearing of road gutters and how this is exacerbating flooding, as well as

‘making the place look uncared for.’ People pointed out issues with overgrown hedges forcing them off pavements and into the road, as well as the ‘wildness’ of green areas at junctions and roundabouts impacting on visibility and safety.

We clean our own street of weeds (Avenue Road). It would be nice if it was done occasionally.

Dog poo is a real problem round here. More bins. Signs up to remind people to pick up!

More action and proactive initiatives on climate change. Protection and management of green spaces for nature and biodiversity not for mass housing.

When survey respondents were asked about what the local area can do to **address climate change**, this is what they said:

1. Active Travel Infrastructure (25%)

"Facilitating better travel choices."

"Priority for people over cars."

"Increase public transport options to reduce the need to use cars."

"Encourage people to walk more and use public transport."

2. Promoting Renewable Energy (20%)

"Local solar farms."

"Expand the Frome Energy Company to provide to residents."

"More energy efficient streetlights."

"Consider using more solar and wind power."

3. Enhancing Recycling and Waste Management (15%)

"More recycling, more accessibility at the tip for the disabled."

"Fine McDonald's and KFC since most of the litter blowing around seems to be branded with their logos."

"More bins, more bin emptying."

4. Protecting and Expanding Green Spaces (15%)

"Plant trees."

"Create more green spaces and protect the ones we have."

"Continue to plant more trees, encourage meadows rather than cutting them back too much."

"Protect waterways, air, and biodiversity."

5. Supporting Local Food Production (10%)

"Give people the opportunity to grow their own food."

"Making sure everyone who wants one gets an allotment."

"Plant fruit trees where it's required that trees are planted."

6. Education and Awareness Campaigns (5%)

"Information campaigns highlighting benefits (for self/others)."

"Talk about it in terms of our (grand)children's lives calmly but occasionally being a bit apocalyptic."

"Educate everyone at all levels through all media."

7. Sustainable Building and Infrastructure (5%)

"Ensure that any local housing developments are sustainable."

"All new buildings should have solar panels fitted as standard in the planning permissions."

"Build all new houses with solar panels."

8. Community and Policy Initiatives (5%)

"Work with people like Friends of the Earth to find whatever works."

"Make weekends pedestrian-only along Market Place."

"Support the Share Shop to find new premises in town centre."

Conclusion and Next Steps

The various elements of the engagement have built a well-rounded picture of what matters to Frome in this snapshot of time. Many of the results and themes are what we expected to see, but there are also some contrasts, surprises and gaps.

The findings from this project will be used internally at Frome Town Council to inform our work and priorities, both at a strategic level and in short- to medium- term decision-making, planning and partnership working.

Lots of themes have emerged that are hugely valued by the town and should continue to be celebrated and supported: the quality and access to our parks and open spaces; the strength and power of our community networks; the cultural and creative offer in town; the wide range of 'things to do' and town events. There are also challenges that have been highlighted (several were anticipated): housing affordability and availability; road safety and active travel; the impact of the cost of living; inclusion and accessibility; the mental health of our population especially younger people; lack of face-to-face support and community venues. Alongside these, there are topics that warrant further examination, due to contrasting results or lack of information, or because they are huge areas with many contributing factors that need digging into: climate resilience; housing issues; meaningful work opportunities; the voice of children and young people.

As outlined in the introduction, the approach to this work was purposefully 'open' in order to elicit unbiased responses. Unsurprisingly, some important topics have emerged which are beyond the scope of a town council response, sometimes at the mercy of powerful national or global influences. Partnership working, participation and collaboration are at the core of the Town Council approach and there is opportunity here to continue to explore the variety of roles we can step into as an organisation (convenors, champions, advocates, etc) and to further expand on our strengths-based and community-led approach to engagement and action. There are continually evolving approaches and methods to enable deliberative and inclusive participation, and we may find it is a good time to be innovative with some of these tools. We will continue to create opportunities for face-to-face engagement across the town and to work to fill in the gaps left by voices that are missing from our findings.

There is more we can do in terms of analysis on what has emerged from this work, and also to examine trends and contrasts across previous engagement projects (such as Vision for Frome and Participate Frome). As a town, it seems prudent to make the most of the connections between our organisations and agencies to keep building relevant and meaningful intelligence sets together. It would be helpful to build capacity to be able to somehow hold and share this information effectively and efficiently.

One of the biggest take-aways from this work has been the value to be found in actively listening to our community. It is often very easy to try and jump to solutions and ‘fix’ things, or to make assumptions based on what has been heard. We have found that not only do people hugely appreciate the space given to them when being truly listened to – you often get to core of an issue by asking more questions and digging a bit deeper. As we move forwards, we will endeavour to stay curious, and to keep listening.

Appendices

Locality Data Report

<https://www.frometowncouncil.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/08/Frome-Data-Profile-July-2024-by-Locality-2.pdf>

Dashboards of the collated results and quotes

<https://www.frometowncouncil.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/Building-a-picture-of-our-town-dashboards-for-web.pdf>

Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan

<https://www.frometowncouncil.gov.uk/our-community/our-sustainability-work/sustainable-transport/local-cycling-and-walking-infrastructure-plan/>

FOOTNOTES

ⁱ <https://www.getinvolvednanaimo.ca/>
<https://letstalk.cornwall.gov.uk/the-cornwall-we-know>
<https://www.climateactionleeds.org.uk/leedsdoughnut>
<https://www.devon.gov.uk/impact/>
<https://www.kateraworth.com/wp/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/20200406-AMS-portrait-EN-Single-page-web-420x210mm.pdf>

ⁱⁱ <https://doughnuteconomics.org/>