



River Vision Project



Project Title	River Vision Project
Stakeholders	Key – Future Shed, Friends of the River Frome, Frome Town Council. Others – The Environment Agency, Wessex Water, Wild Trout Trust, Frome Canoe Club
Coordinator(s)	Gemma Annan
Start and End Dates	July 2023 - Summer 2024

Introduction

Our local river is a precious natural resource that holds significant potential to enrich our community's quality of life. The health of our river directly affects our community's resilience to climate-related challenges, such as floods and droughts. By restoring and preserving its health, we can better protect ourselves and our local ecosystems from the impacts of an increasingly unpredictable climate.

By making a part of the river more accessible and hosting engaging events and activities, we can create a vibrant, sustainable, and inclusive space for everyone to enjoy, ultimately promoting physical and mental well-being among our community members.

This proposal seeks improved access at a specific River Frome location, funded by Frome Town Council. This aims to regain a sense of pride and stewardship for our environment.

Background

This project is led by Frome Families for the Future (FFFF) working in partnership with Edventure Frome Future Shed. Future Shed is part of Green & Healthy Frome, a partnership programme of Edventure Frome, Frome Medical Practice and Frome Town Council taking action on health and climate, funded by the National Lottery's Climate Action Fund. FFFF are 'in residence' with Future Shed and the GHF project in 2023-24, meaning we have a small pot of funding to work on a project (with public activities) that connects climate and health.

This initiative will focus on enhancing the accessibility and appeal of one section of the River Frome. We hope this will encourage positive engagement and respect for the river. As well as increasing awareness about local river health and how to improve it.

FFFF chose to focus on improving river access as it has many benefits such as environmental engagement, [improving mental health](#), increasing child (and adult!) play and encourages community ownership. This project is in harmony with Frome Town Council's Play strategy, presenting a cohesive approach to community development and enjoyment.

FFFF wishes to unite the residents of Frome around a positive and shared vision for the river, building a collective sense of belonging and responsibility towards its preservation. Recognising the river's significance in the town's climate strategy should further amplify the commitment to its well-being.

To date FFFF have linked with the Friends of the River Frome, Wild Trout Trust, Frome Town Council, Frome Canoe Club and Wessex Water to identify a suitable site, gain knowledge from and to strengthen the project. Attempts have been made to build a relationship with Frome and District Angling Association and an in person meeting is being confirmed with Fromes MP, Sarah Dyke to discuss the governments plans to reduce river pollution.

Scope

We hope to initiate the construction of improved access (path and steps) to a central point of the River Frome, we have been exploring the feasibility of this by connecting with and learning from local organisations.

Alongside access, our objective is to organise a series of impactful events that promote awareness and connection to the river with Frome residents. Each of these events will centre around one of the following key themes: biodiversity, recreation, and river health. In November 2023 we have organised a lantern making workshop with the founders of the

Lantern Parade, we will make a large otter and medium sized fish to show off in the parade as a large group on Nov 24th. 2024 events are likely to include a guided river mammal walk, an educational water treatment plant tour, citizen science surveys and river themed Independent Market on May 7th (confirmed).

Furthermore, we are committed to enhancing the protection of the river by implementing meaningful initiatives. We are already working on installing a litter picking station outside Frome Library and may achieve one or more of the following ideas: a targeted awareness campaign, the creation of an informative short video, collaborating with young people in the community and working with FoRF to reinstate the River Watchers program, with a family friendly focus.

We have applied for a grant from Wessex Water (WW) Community Fund for £4,000 in order to run a planned community engagement strategy, allowing us to consult with the community on how they would use the new river space, and then we can design the perfect vision based on the community's desires. The funding would also allow us to raise further awareness and build connection by hosting arts based engagement activities, in the form of 'Lunchtime river gigs'.

Our overarching goal is that this project will reinforce ongoing efforts to encourage polluters to adopt environmentally beneficial practices, ultimately contributing to the improvement of our local environment.

Access

Five sites were considered and compared to assess which would be most suitable for an access point. We took into consideration location of sewage outlet sources, the riverbed, surrounding vegetation, location in the town (up/down stream of town centre), and impacts on local environment and wildlife. The Rodden Meadow bend (site 5) was favoured. The locations and comparisons are displayed in the appendices.

Rodden Meadow is a natural wildflower meadow that sits next to a stretch of the river Frome and connects the neighbourhoods on the east of Frome with the town centre. Used for sheep grazing and teasel cultivation to support the textile trade in previous centuries, it is now a place for a weekend picnic, scenic dog walk, and peaceful strolls to and from town.

While there are a small number of places to access the river, and steps have been built into the bank in one location, the river remains quite difficult to access and is physically disconnected from the meadow. A tarmac public footpath runs along the top of Rodden Meadow, but soft uneven ground make accessing the meadow with a wheelchair or buggy difficult, especially in wet weather. There is enthusiasm amongst the community for spending time at the river, either paddling, or simply being next to the water and at the moment this is not possible.

Phase one and two – Our request to FTC involves the construction of an accessible pathway connecting the public footpath, to a new access point at a natural bend in the river. At present, the river here is accessed by dogs chasing sticks and playing in the water, and the bank is being eroded into steep gullies by enthusiastic paws. We would propose the addition of steps leading from the meadow to the river, with either a handrail or a shallower gradient and greater tread depth to support safe access down to the water. We would engage with our community to ensure both the path and access point were inclusive by design. At present, the access site has an arc of benches looking onto the meadow. We propose the installation of an extra bench to complete the semicircle and provide additional seating capacity. (Phase one – path and bench. Phase two – steps).

Phase three – Our broader vision is for a river-viewing platform set halfway between the level of the meadow and the river, providing a closer connection to the river without entering it, ideal for those concerned about water quality. In a unique position by the river and at eye level with the meadow, we can imagine the platform being used for contemplation, small scale performance, art or nature study and a plethora of uses yet to be discovered. The design will be shaped by the feedback we gather through our community engagement efforts (extent of engagement is determined on whether we are successful in landing the WW funding) and the preferences of the community regarding the space's usage. Fundraising for this platform will be addressed at a later stage.

Phase one and two should be designed in a way which enables phase three to happen when funding is obtained. Constructing the full vision will ultimately achieve the best value for the community.

Please see indicative illustrations of the path and access point in the appendices attached. We have also included a vision board with example images.

The access point aligns with the "Nurture our Open Spaces" component of the FTC work program. By constructing a pathway to the river, it becomes more accessible to individuals who may struggle with grass or mud, thus promoting inclusivity within the broader community. These steps facilitate a wider range of outdoor activities, including paddling, river exploration, and direct engagement with nature and biodiversity. The platform will enhance these objectives greatly.

The new path would also give greater access to events carried out on the meadow such as dancing, summer yoga, baby sign, etc.

UK examples of improved river access include the [Overcote riverside project](#) and [Town Mills Riverside Park](#) in Andover. These show that local councils see the value in creating closer connection and access to the river. Frome may yet again be the leading town in constructing a raised platform on a river bank to encourage close connection!

River health

The River Frome has undergone significant alterations, characterised by deep incisions, frequent presence of hazardous waste, and has compromised water quality due to elevated levels of bacteria and various biological and chemical pollutants originating from legacy pollutants, agriculture, urban runoff and waste water plants.

We have spent time speaking to various stakeholders who regularly engage with the River Frome to understand more about the current health of the river:

The Wild Trout Trust (WTT) and Environment Agency (EA) are supportive of the concept of enhancing public access to urban blue-green spaces in Frome. However, we are acutely aware of the health and safety challenges associated with urban and post-industrial rivers.

WTT and the EA state that anecdotal evidence suggests that bacterial levels could exceed the requirements for safe water interaction, potentially posing a health risk to individuals who come into contact with the river. This information emphasises the need to understand the associated risks of activities in watercourses that do not meet bathing water standards.

Milly Strong, a member of FFFF with professional expertise in environment and water policy has [documented River Frome pollution levels](#) from Environment Agency information available online.

Milly's assessment is that pollution levels in the River Frome make it risky to encourage families with young children to paddle in it. Appropriate information about the risks should be provided to allow people to make educated decisions about paddling.

Some families will consider the risk too high. To ensure an inclusive approach, other opportunities to connect with the river could be provided (e.g. river festivals, arts based engagement and giving the river a voice), to make sure that these families still benefit from increased access.

Wessex Water (WW) have provided us with [outlet source and spill information](#), we have added our knowledgeable response of the information provided. A bigger cause for concern is agricultural and legacy pollutants. We hope that this project will help raise awareness and support efforts to reduce agricultural pollution.

Our hope is that [if paddlers are sensible](#), e.g. avoiding the river for at least two days after high rainfall, wearing correct footwear, avoid splashing in the face, cover cuts and wash hands following time in the river, then the risk of serious harm is low. They should also judge the depth and flow speed and only enter if safe to do so. A depth stick would be useful to gage an accurate depth.

Signage and awareness raising would be needed to state appropriate ways to engage with the river and current pollutant concerns, that way residents can make more informed decisions and FFFF would take no responsibility for access related incidents.

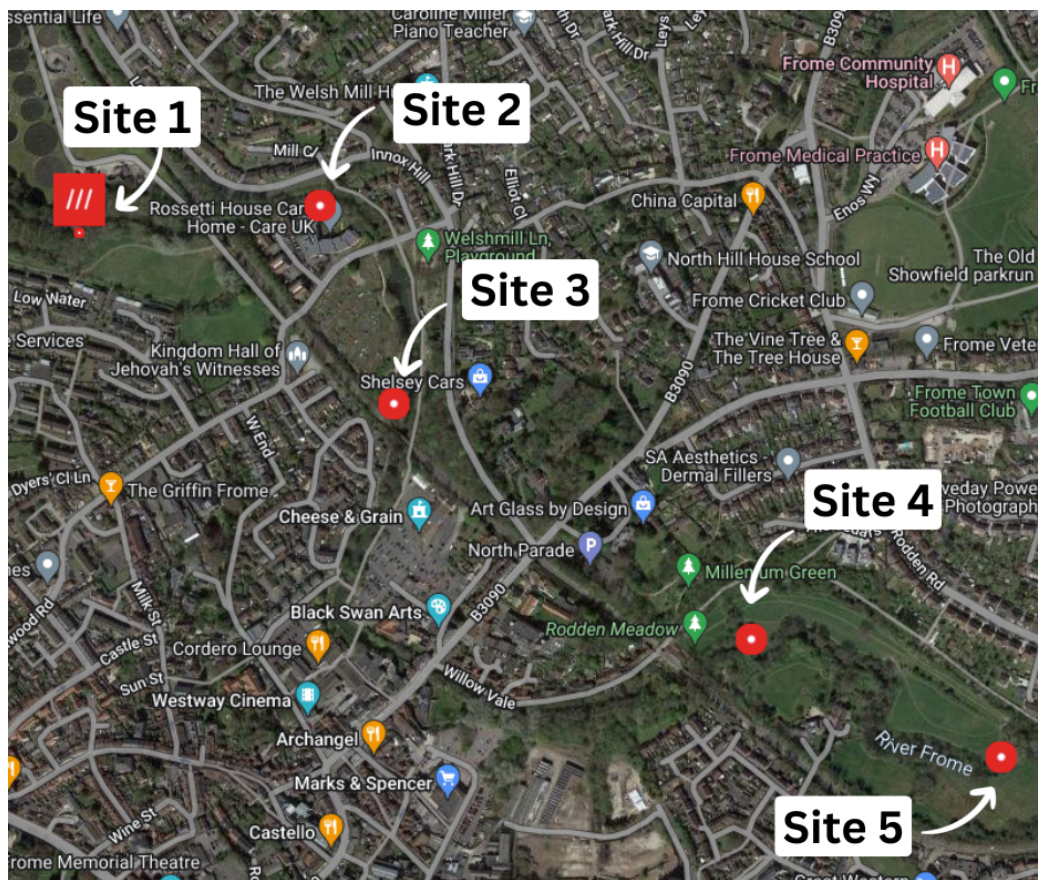
Providing an area where people can get 'to the river', rather than 'in the river', as suggested with a platform, it would provide a happy solution for those concerned about the health of the river.

Water quality testing is needed to determine a true indication of local pollution levels. FoRF are working with WW on a monthly sampling project which will gather that information, this started on 1/10/23.

Cultural activities at the river play a crucial role in nurturing a holistic understanding of rivers, inspiring actions that contribute to the overall health and well-being of these vital ecosystems.

Appendices

Map 1.



Map 1. shows the location of sites compared for access.

Table 1.

Site	Pro's	Con's
<p>Site 1, Weylands</p> <p>(51.2365188, -2.3258437)</p> <p>///empire.stick.gifted</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Construction of steps would be straightforward - Nature - Aesthetically pleasing - Very shallow, can see much of the river bed 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Directly downstream (0.16km) of CSO (Combined sewage outlet) – higher risk of pathogens being present particularly after storms in the summer - Additional hazardous materials from overflow pipes - Trees with overhanging branches - Boulders by island to prevent erosion - Beaver lodge on the island? - Out of sight - Downstream of town, likely that litter will end up here form urban environment
<p>Site 2, Lower Innox</p> <p>(51.2367388, -2.3227012)</p> <p>///kite.packet.curving</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Visible /more footfall and could be semi monitored by Rossetti care home? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Downstream of CSO (nearest - 0.29km) - Construction may be more difficult, remove trees? Overhanging trees/branches - Noise affect Rossetti care home? - River bed - rocks?
<p>Site 3, Welshmill</p> <p>51.234794, -2.320654</p> <p>///force.improving.fuel</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Construction of steps may be straightforward. Remove gradient - Central, visible - Already has the pond and nature area so would sit well with that ethos 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Downstream of CSO (nearest - 0.33km) - Impact otters? They are spotted in this patch often? - Too deep for paddling, more for taller teens and older - Spaty - clay

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - More central 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Canoe club come down this far? - Would it be affected if the weir was removed?
<p>Site 4, Rodden meadow steps</p> <p>51°13'56.1"N 2°18'52.4"W</p> <p>///spray.deals.banks</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Upstream of town - Wild trout Trust bringing level up for spawning brown trout and to make access into river easier (avoid bank erosion) - Central - Med/high footfall? - Already has steps so these could be improved 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Downstream of CSO (nearest - 0.43km) - Metal structure in the river bed, spiked edges, would need removal by a machine - Disturb nesting birds and other wildlife? - How would Mayday/Saxonvale impact this? - Litter/sharps - Gets deep quickly to the left of the paddling area
<p>Site 5, Rodden meadow bend</p> <p>///pipe.famed.fakes</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Upstream of town - Avoid continued erosion of bank - Sandy area, shallow for a stretch - Popular dog walking spot - good spot for educating on safe river engagement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Downstream of CSO (nearest - 0.44km) - Nesting kingfishers? - boulders to left, deep on opposite side - Litter/sharps

Table 1. shows the comparisons between the five sites.

