

Chairman's Column - 7th February 2019

Winter's icy blast swept in this week and caused a great deal of disruption locally. On Friday, Shepton was effectively cut off with lorries stuck in the snow and ice, blocking all main routes. We need to acknowledge the excellent work of our emergency services in dealing with these severe weather conditions. We are very fortunate that highly professional and committed people work under very testing conditions to keep us safe and clear our roads.

Many minor routes, including the steep pedestrian section of Town Street, were badly affected, and were extremely challenging to negotiate throughout last weekend. Somerset County Council have been responsible for salting our roads, and to be fair, did their best to keep major routes open. However, the county council is cutting back its services and have decided to remove support for road and pavement salting. As a result, the town council is exploring ways to fill the deficit in this vital facility. Regrettably, this will incur additional costs for the town.

Your town council already provides salt bins throughout Shepton. We make sure they are topped up, and this allowed me to salt my own road. But one of the major challenges we face is storing enough salt to service the whole of the town. It must be stored dry and, in bulk, is considered to be a noxious substance.

Looking forward to Summer, Neil Shearn has taken on the event organiser rôle for Collett Park Day. This follows on from Jon Hardy's recent Scrutiny Report that looked at how we celebrate John Collett's wonderful gift of our park. For 2019, the council has chosen to organise just a one day event. I'm sure Neil wants to hear from people who wish to volunteer to stage this and from all community groups that want to be involved.

Our wonderful Snowdrop Festival goes from strength to strength. I am looking forward to participating in this now annual tribute to Shepton's world famous horticulturalist, James Allen. Preparations are well advanced for a weekend of *galanthus* (or snowdrop!) celebrations on 16th and 17th of February. This special community event is a tremendous all-year-round effort supported by a growing (!) team including leading lights, Chris Kennedy, Dominic Weston, Simon Edwards and Angela Morley, Zena Pollard and Sarah Thomas. They depend on many more to help, and of course, want everyone to come along to enjoy the festival.

Chris Inchley, Chair, Shepton Mallet Town Council