

Chairman's Report

Last weekend we saw Shepton at its absolute best. The now well-established Snowdrop Festival has developed into a very special event. With volunteers planting thousands of snowdrops each year, more and more of these lovely little nodding harbingers of Spring are popping up in green spaces all over town.

The Festival drew snowdrop collectors, or galanthophiles, from all around Britain, with visitors coming from as far away as Scotland who stayed to enjoy the festivities for the whole weekend.

Over a packed 2 days of snowdrop-themed events, the atmosphere in the town was exceptional. On Saturday we were treated to a series of wonderful poetry recitals in St Peter and St Paul's Church, and there was a constant stream of people visiting organised workshops. Sunday included the first of our special monthly markets where snowdrops were celebrated or sold on many of the stands.

I pay special tribute to the festival organisers and their dedicated team of volunteers and supporters, and my thanks to everyone who took part and welcomed our visitors to the town. It was also a joy to see our very popular Town Crier Andy Neal in his new uniform. The town council is proud to have such an excellent Sheptonian disseminating the town's proclamations and looking magnificent doing so!

While the town centre was alive with music and entertainment over the weekend, we can still make improvements for future events. On the positive side, I have spoken to many of our dedicated shopkeepers who tell me that their takings were up dramatically. This proves that if we supply high quality events, there are tangible economic benefits to the town. We need to find ways to broaden and strengthen the market, and that can include providing more and varied entertainment to attract increased footfall and encourage people to linger in the town longer.

We also have a challenge to try to maintain the recent wide range of events and entertainment in our lovely park. In the next few weeks we can look forward to welcoming Shepton's first junior parkrun to Collett. This event, over a 2 kilometre course, will take place every Sunday morning for children aged 4 to 14. However, with the closure of the very popular Collett Park Café and the consequent loss of entertainment that the owners had organised over the past years, we urgently want to find ways to continue to offer more special and regular events. This is particularly important since we are proud to have recently gained the first Green Flag Award in the Mendip area for Collett Park.

Last Friday I joined the Friends of Shepton Mallet Library in a meeting with Somerset County Council to discuss the library staying in its present location. I impressed on the county council's officers that the town council is fully committed to maintain the library in the town centre. The town council has made the necessary finance available to help meet the shortfall in the county's budget, and we intend to make a powerful case that the library, like our weekly and monthly markets, brings community and economic benefit to Shepton.

Chris Inchley, Chair, Shepton Mallet Town Council