

Chairman's Report 21st March 2019

Sunday was a particularly nippy St Patrick's Day, but our hearts warmed as we were treated to some wonderful Irish jigs from the Blackrock School of Irish Dance in the Market Place. It was the latest Sunday Market, also featuring blue grass band, Lost in the Grass, and John Line providing varied entertainment.

Once again our loyal volunteer stewards, Zena and Mike, were there, helping to set up and make the event run smoothly. Jude Jackson organised and coordinated all the entertainment that had been sponsored by the Town Council. With her partner, Jon Carpenter, Jude was in the square from early morning setting up gazebos for the performers.

It was slightly disappointing that the number of stalls was less than usual, but this didn't stop Sheptonians and visitors turning up to support the event. We were hoping to have an Easter Market in April but the local organising team have not had a response from Mendip District Council who book the traders. The next Sunday Market will now be in May. The Town Council is fully committed to work closely with the local volunteer team to bring the market back to full-blown strength.

At the last Town Planning Committee we discussed an important scheme to extend the Strawberry Line (the multi-user cycle and pedestrian path that follows the route of the old Strawberry Railway line). The plan is to join up Millennium Way (next to Tadley Acres and Collett Park) passing through Mendip District Council's car park and then going under the railway bridge to Station Road. It would create a safe off-road link, but Mendip District Council had refused a previous application to extend the path.

The Strawberry Line project team wants to see Shepton connected to Wells and create a link right through to Cheddar, finishing at Yatton. Cycle paths and safe walking routes attract tourists and help regenerate communities so I'm pleased to report that your town council fully supports this application. It is now down to Mendip councillors to reconsider this plan to create a green link to connect east and west Shepton, and eventually extend to all of North Somerset.

The Town Council has a capital fund to help make the local linkages a reality. No money has yet been allocated, but if the planning application is successful then I expect early discussions to unlock grant funding.

With fellow councillor, Jon Hardy, we held further discussions with Somerset County Council's officers about the future of Shepton's Library. Positive progress is being made to secure the facility in the town centre. However any final decision will have to wait until after the upcoming Town and District Council elections in early May.

Mendip District Council are consulting on the Local Plan Part 2. One aspect of this important document is designating local open spaces. 10 green areas have been highlighted, while land on Fosse Lane has been allocated for employment use. Proposed changes to these areas can be examined at www.mendip.gov.uk/localplanpart2

Chris Inchley, Chair, Shepton Mallet Town Council