

Chairman's Report 30th May 2019

Every year the Town Council holds a Town Meeting to inform residents of the work of the council and to showcase some of the community groups in Shepton. The Chairman reports on the progress made in the previous year. This is a summary of what I said at the Town Meeting on Tuesday this week:

Following councillors electing me as Chair of the Council in May 2018 I promised that there would be improvements to the Council's policies, with better financial controls, improved identification and delivery of priorities, and a relaunch of Shepton's Neighbourhood Plan.

In the past year we have made good progress around staffing issues and better financial controls. We have been working to be fully compliant with GDPR, offering training to councillors on this complex data protection legislation. We have also implemented new management policies (including controlling financial risk), as well as devising an anti-corruption and fraud strategy.

We are immensely fortunate to have recruited Charlotte Starkie as our Town Clerk. Charlotte is a highly professional local government practitioner, with extensive knowledge of finance and legal issues. We have also recently hired Jo Swift as our new Financial Officer. In line with neighbouring towns and parishes, we have separated the rôles of Town Clerk and the statutory function of Responsible Financial Officer to provide further safeguards for our increasingly busy Council.

The council has spent your money on maintaining and making improvements to Collett Park and other areas of the town through its ground care contract. We gained the prestigious Green Flag award for Collett Park and have conducted a feasibility study into how to improve facilities for the long term future of this public space. We are proud that Shepton now has the only Green Flag in the Mendip Region, and we are the only Mendip town to hold 2 parkruns (senior and junior) every weekend throughout the year.

Last year's all-weekend Collett Festival consisted of the traditional Collett Day, a Children's Festival and an evening concert. Taken together, the events turned in a small profit, were all well attended and successfully delivered by the Event Management Team of Garfield Kennedy, Mike Daniells and Wayne Frapple.

In the past year, the Town Council has helped fund the resurfacing of the BMX Track in West Shepton Playing Fields, and we have agreed to provide support for a further three years of youth work in our town. When none of the higher levels of local government were willing to fund the rebuilding of Eden Grove Bridge, the town council organised and paid for essential repairs and reopened this important link in our town.

Part of the rôle of a Town Council is to encourage activities and add to the quality of life of residents. To that end your Council granted money to the following groups: Shepton Mallet Radio - £1500, The Festival of Dogs - £666, The Lantern Festival - £450, Junior parkrun - £1000, The Snowdrop Festival - £1000, South West Eating Disorders - £700, The Rubbish Art Project - £1900, Bowling School Art Project - £1305, Ups & Downs South West - £880 (supporting parents working with children with Down's Syndrome), and The Royal British Legion - £150 (for marshalling at the World War 1 Commemorations).

The Town Council also helps to fund the Tourist Information Centre, Citizens Advice, Mendip Community Transport, the Carnival Committee, the Mid-Somerset Show, CCTV in the town, and we

support the monthly Sunday Market by paying for a varied programme of entertainment. We also maintain the Market Cross, the Cenotaph and the Shambles.

Last year we marked the 100th Anniversary of the ending of World War 1 with a weekend of special commemorations. The Council spent £10,000 on the “Armistice 100” event, which included a tree planting ceremony, the unveiling of a bench in Collett Park and afternoon tea where residents and visitors were entertained with music and dancers from HMS Heron. In addition permanent plaques were placed on all the houses where those lost to the town in the Great War had lived. I would like to thank Jeannette Marsh, Deborah Towner, Ray Pett, Mike Perry, Jonathan Hunter-Dunn, Andrew Ransom and Jan Crewe for their hard work to make all this possible.

It has proved to be a very busy year with a series of initiatives and projects being delivered by your council. Our biggest thanks must go to the many volunteers, clubs and groups in our town who contribute time, skills and efforts to make Shepton an increasingly busy, confident and thriving township. I would like to express my thanks to all of our town councillors, now on the council or who have served in the past year. In particular, my gratitude goes to Jon Hardy, Garfield Kennedy, Martin Lovell and John Parham who have chaired the Council’s committees throughout the past 12 months.

Chris Inchley, Chair, Shepton Mallet Town Council