

Chairman's Report 20 June 2019

Over the past year or so I have deliberately concentrated on the many positives that have happened in Shepton. On so many occasions the town council has played an important role in many initiatives that have added to the life of our community. Yet, often the contribution of councillors and our hard working staff can go unrecognised. Where we can help community events to flourish, we will provide support both financially and in-kind. So it is with a sense of frustration and disappointment that I have to report that our once successful Sunday Market is struggling to survive.

Street markets across our region are run by Mendip District Council. These events in our town centres help and encourage economic regeneration. The Mendip Council markets in Wells are well attended and Frome's Sunday Independent Market (run by a not-for-profit limited company) is flourishing. Yet even in Frome the regular weekly markets are struggling, so sadly we are not alone in facing the challenge of keeping these events alive.

I cannot deny that there is a sense that the current management arrangements for Shepton's Sunday Markets are allowing this community event to wither. This is despite a really committed group of community champions and volunteers who work for free to help stage the monthly events. However I feel their enthusiasm is fast wearing thin as the number of stalls have plummeted.

Despite this being a Mendip Council service, your town council remains committed to our Sunday Market. We have paid for banners and advertising, provided a regular programme of varied entertainment, and councillors have helped set up and have regularly been present and assisted at the events. But it is apparent that a new energy is now required. It is time to re-evaluate how the Sunday Market is organised and how this initially community-driven initiative can be given a much needed boost with high quality promotion, consistent support and an effective management structure matched with a long term plan.

The newly elected town council has agreed to produce a community plan for Shepton, and the future of our street markets is bound to be included in our proposals. It is important that we include townspeople's thoughts and opinions to allow the council to match key community aspirations with a financial plan to turn the best ideas into reality. In the coming months I would expect the town council to engage with the community to develop a plan that can be implemented to make improvements in many aspects of life in Shepton.

In the meantime, the town council continues to support our excellent community groups. We have agreed three years of funding for the now well established Snowdrop Festival, allocating it an annual grant of £4000. This commitment will secure this ever popular festival for the future and allow it to plan ahead and attract sponsorship.

We have also agreed to part-fund a community arts project called "B-Wing". This will provide support for an ambitious arts event to be held in the prison. It further extends our funding and commitment to the arts in Shepton beyond the support we have already given to the Art Bank and the "Rubbish Arts Project". We have also agreed to provide modest funding for the ever popular Christmas Lantern Parade.

Modest financial contributions like this make these events much more secure for the long term and ultimately add to the richness of the life of our community.

Chris Inchley, Chair, Shepton Mallet Town Council