

## **Chairman's Report 11th July 2019**

A recent study has shown that planting billions of trees across the world is by far the most effective and cheapest way to tackle climate change. Trees are really good at offsetting our carbon footprint, and scientists have now made the first calculation of how many more trees can be planted without encroaching on land used for crops or buildings and infrastructure. The area they have identified is about 11% of all land, equivalent to the combined size of the United States and China. Tropical areas could have 100% tree cover, while others can be more sparsely covered.

There are currently about 3 trillion trees in the world which is half the number that existed before the rise of human civilisation. We are still losing about 10 billion trees each year, and if this is not reversed then we face runaway rises in temperature and subsequent catastrophic degradation of habitat.

Avoiding monoculture plantation forests with only one species of tree and respecting local and indigenous people will be crucial to ensure that worldwide reforestation succeeds in cutting carbon and boosting wildlife.

Here in Somerset we urgently need to find ways to add to our mixed woodland and make more space available for trees and forests. One of the initiatives that I was involved with was the creation of the community woodland on Gold Hill, but we need to do much more.

It is clear to me that we need to plant tens of thousands of trees in and around Shepton. This could mean acquiring ground that is not prime agricultural land and appropriate to becoming woodland. Protecting green corridors like the Strawberry Line must now become a high priority, not just to provide safe routes for people but to create essential arteries for wildlife.

Trees and plants have other hidden benefits for people too. They release chemical compounds called phytoncides that act to defend them from bacteria, fungi and insects. Recent research has shown that these phytoncides have positive effects on natural killer cells found in humans. These cells fight tumours and viruses, so trees not only connect us with nature but actually do us good!

The Mid Somerset Showground is going to accommodate 600 new homes. Here there must be an opportunity to create an environment rich in trees, and also a chance to encourage the developer to offset their carbon footprint with a large scale tree planting scheme.

There are many other opportunities for tree planting in Shepton both on a large and small scale. Collett Park already has a tree planting policy allowing local people to donate specimen trees and we are also examining opportunities to create a brand new wooded area.

The town council needs to take action to tackle environmental issues within our community. It is necessary that we plant more trees to improve and protect wildlife habitats and add to biodiversity. We want to encourage and help our community make good decisions for the long term that improve our environment. We can all contribute to making a difference, not just for our benefit but for our children, grandchildren, and all future generations.

The General Data Protection Regulations Act (GDPR) came into law in 2018. This means that all companies and organisations have to hold data in a way that complies with this new legislation. It is extremely important that the Town Council complies to ensure that it is accountable, transparent and processes individuals' data correctly. If the council fails to do this it can leave itself open to substantial fines.

One key aspect to ensure compliance and accountability is that councillors know how to process data lawfully. You will be pleased to know that your councillors received the appropriate training last week.

**Chris Inchley, Chair, Shepton Mallet Town Council**