

Chairman's Report - 18th July 2019

Shepton Mallet Town Council was proud and delighted when Collett Park became the first recipient of an annual Green Flag Award in the Mendip Region in 2018-19. This honour is awarded by expert judges for high quality parks that are well managed and of high quality.

The Green Flag Award committee recently revisited our park, and it's my great pleasure to announce that once again we have been considered to meet the very highest standards in green space. The new flag for 2019-20 is now adorning the park!

Your town council is not resting on its laurels. Last year we commissioned a feasibility study and an associated series of public consultations to make improvements to the quality of facilities and planting scheme in Collett Park. Last Tuesday the council established a working party to take forward the best proposals to improve the infrastructure of the ground care depot and community facilities within the park.

The newly elected council, working closely with our professional staff, is keen to get on with making our park fit for the 21st Century. Matt Harrison gave an update on fundraising and procurement of new play equipment, and Garfield Kennedy outlined the proposals to improve the buildings and other infrastructure within the park.

The park's Management Committee also agreed that Collett Festival would return in strength in 2020. The council wants to give this annual celebration certainty, and the proposal is to hold at least a three-event festival for the next four years. This will allow time to schedule and book participants, seek sponsorship and generate extra income.

Councillors heard positive feedback from the Town Clerk on this year's Collett Day, when thousands of residents and visitors enjoyed the annual fair, and many local groups raised much needed funds for the benefit of the community. Collett Park Day will remain the highlight of subsequent festivals but the popular children's day and evening concert will be returning to add to this annual celebration of all that is best in Shepton.

Sadly Mendip District Council's bid for the government's Future High Street Fund for Shepton Mallet was unsuccessful. Realistically we always knew this was going to be a long shot since it's never easy to win these country-wide bids for finance. However all is not lost. We can build on the focus and the creative thinking that this bid process has generated. We have, in the pipeline, the developing Neighbourhood Plan for Shepton, and we will see benefits from the imminent resurfacing of the High Street. We have a golden opportunity to build on the growing art scene with the year-round Art Bank going from strength to strength in the Market Square. We will also work with Mendip Council to connect up cycle ways and improve safe walkways into and through the town.

We have heard from many people who are concerned about changes to the Post Office in the High Street. Officially the Town Council has not been informed of any details of what they envisage, but we have learned they plan to move to an unstaffed self service system with a consequent reduction in human support and assistance. There has not been any public consultation with local people or councillors to have our views heard. We are very concerned that these changes will affect older and vulnerable people disproportionately, and for all users, there will be a loss of privacy and a downgrading of what we have come to expect from this vital public service. We intend to lobby the Post Office to get some much needed answers to local people's concerns.

Last, but not at all least, please come to Shepton's July Sunday Market this weekend. It's themed as a "Summer Sizzler". Let's hope the weather delivers on that score!

Chris Inchley, Chair, Shepton Mallet Town Council