

Chairman's Report 25th July 2019

Following my column last week, I have been contacted by many people who are very troubled by the new reduced and sub-standard provision of Post Office service in our town. The self-service arrangement seems unfair on overworked staff and offers a poor level of service to customers. Shepton is a growing community with approaching 11,000 people yet it seems the town is being treated shoddily, and many users will suffer as a result.

I e-mailed the Post Office some weeks ago via their website yet have had no response. Mendip District Council have also made contact, yet bosses at the Post Office have been very slow in their response, and have yet to offer any good explanation for deciding to make this cut to our local service.

Many residents are clearly very unhappy and we need an explanation of their rationale to so drastically reduce service provision. One of the strengths of any town centre is the quality and range of services on offer. I'm sure people will stop using the Post Office if what is offered is sub-standard. We hope we can resolve these issues, and the Town Council and District Council will continue to try to contact the Post Office.

Sadly, if these cuts to service are carried through, this will be yet one more reason for people not to visit our High Street at a time that our town centre library remains under threat.

As I promised some weeks ago, finally we have a date to discuss the funding arrangements for the library. The Town Council has been at the forefront of trying to keep our library in the centre of Shepton. A viable option to keep this public service in its current location is still on the table. But this would mean the Town Council spending £100,000 over the next five years making up for the cuts imposed by the County Council of around £120,000.

There are many opportunities for greater and more imaginative use of the library building by the community, all with the aim of attracting more users and visitors into the town centre. In a series of public consultations with residents, many people have indicated they are willing to pay a little extra to keep the library in the town centre. Councillors will have to decide whether the £20,000 a year investment in an expanded service is value for money and whether the loss of footfall into the town centre would be too high of a price to pay for not making this investment.

On Friday the public enquiry into the Local Plan Part 2 will take place. Shepton Mallet Town Council will be represented by Martin Lovell who will present our case for protecting the precious green open spaces within our town. This is of vital importance since once a parcel of land is designated as open space it gains protection in law. It makes it much harder for green space to be grabbed and infilled by developers.

Locally and nationally we have had a great sporting summer. We have seen our cricket team win the World Cup in thrilling style. Closer to home many of our local sporting clubs have performed exceptionally well. Our Gymnastic Clubs have had a remarkable year with our young athletes achieving fourth and fifth places at the National Finals. Also St Pauls School have been presented with a Gold Award for their sporting achievements. Meanwhile, our Junior parkrun is going from strength to strength, and our local football clubs, including the girls' team, are in great form. It's a reminder that these sporting achievements in our town only happen with the support of great people who volunteer and give up their time to make it all happen.

Chris Inchley, Chair, Shepton Mallet Town Council

