

Chairman's Report 8th August 2019

The Shepton Mallet Leisure Centre on Charlton Road is a key community asset, now managed by Whitstone Academy. One of the many sporting and health-giving activities within the leisure centre is squash. The squash courts are there because of the dedication of the original trustees, including John Gilham, Alan Bailey and Gordon Murray. These individuals were far sighted enough to take a financial risk to turn a community aspiration into a much valued reality.

Over the years the trustees have allocated significant sums to maintain and upgrade the courts, and have just granted £25,000 for a further programme of refurbishment this month. This investment will keep squash alive and well in Shepton. This is all happening at a time when courts in other areas have closed down. The recent work in the Leisure Centre also includes an upgrade to the changing facilities. All these alterations will allow squash players to enjoy their sport in the highest quality surroundings. The courts are open to all members of the community and everyone is welcome to get involved. There has never been a better time to play or take up squash.

A presentation will be held in the library in the Market Place this Thursday at 4.30pm for local businesses that become dementia-friendly. Led by the Dementia Action Alliance (DAA), this meeting is intended to attract more enterprises to sign up and join in. DAA are planning to get many more businesses to become dementia-aware. This initiative is supported by Christopher Young Opticians and local solicitors, Bartlett, Gooding and Weelan, and is led by Peter Hillman, Sister Ann and Ross Pratten. The town council has already conducted a dementia awareness training day, and Shepton is becoming better prepared than many other towns to be a community with a high level of dementia-awareness.

The Mid-Somerset Show takes place on Sunday 18th August. It will probably be the last time this annual event will be held on the current showground on Cannards Grave Road. The likelihood is that phase one of construction of 600 new houses will have started by this time next year on the existing site. The Mid-Somerset Show will then move further up Cannards Grave Road near to the "rock sheep" roundabout.

The planning application for the 600 new homes still needs to be approved. People will still be able to have their say on details of the new development. Concerns have already been raised about flood protection to make sure that drainage is capable of taking all the waste from the new homes and systems do not get swamped by surface run-off. Existing residents in Compton Road and other nearby streets are also worried about parking over-spilling from the new development. We must also be insisting that the carbon footprint of this new development is completely offset. This will require significant tree planting both on the development site itself and on nearby land.

It behoves all new developments to be much more responsible and aware of the need to address the negative impacts on the environment. Equally parish and town councils need to encourage and support tree planting to address the pressing problems of habitat loss, flooding and global warming.

Last week, a local organisation called "Reimagining the Levels" invited local councillors to a Tree Conference in Walton Village Hall. It comes as a shock to learn that Somerset has only 6-7% tree coverage as compared to the already low national average of 12%. Planting many trees in our area and across Somerset is essential if we are to address climate change. Mass planting of trees on the Mendip Hills is of paramount importance to help prevent flooding on the Levels, restore habitats and increase wildlife diversity.

“Reimagining the Levels” provide financial support for local initiatives to create community woodlands. The Town Council plans to involve the local community in making Shepton a greener, healthier place.

Chris Inchley, Chair, Shepton Mallet Town Council