

Chairman's Report 5th September 2019

I'm not the biggest fan of this time of year. With the onset of autumn, the days get shorter, the sun gets lower and the flush of summer starts to fade as winter creeps up on us and the year comes to an end. When the school summer holidays finish, some of the joys of life seem to be a bit on hold until Christmas. It's also a time of great uncertainty in our country. Even at the time of writing, who can predict what will have happened in Westminster this week? And what will be the implications for all our futures as a direct result of all the unprecedented shenanigans going on there?

Here in the calmer waters of Shepton, we are also entering a crucial period in terms of the town council's work and our aspirations for the future of our community. With the recent elections in May now well behind us, and with most councillors back from summer holidays or other distractions, it is the right time to be planning the projects that can best bring benefit to the town. This will then dictate what we have to budget for in the coming year.

Many of the newly-elected councillors are bringing lots of their enthusiasm and ideas to the council. It's therefore important that we produce a strong financial plan that can deliver high-quality projects that will improve the town, and protect and provide high quality services for the people of Shepton. To this end, we will be holding meetings to establish which projects councillors wish to support and then match aspirations to what is achievable and deliverable within the four year term of the present council.

One of the town council's key functions is to act as a consultee on planning matters. Town councillors are asked to judge what is best for our area, and then make formal recommendations to Mendip District Council officers and councillors. This week the town council's Planning Committee considered several applications including one for a new infill housing development in the Ridgeway Estate. Aster Homes have sold a set of garages in Monmouth Road to a developer, and there are potential problems of access for existing residents as well as concerns about overdevelopment if plans go ahead.

The Ridgeway already has ongoing difficulties with parking on the estate. Infilling with more houses with the loss of existing garages could well exacerbate these issues. A key part of any development must be to focus on maintaining the character of a settlement, not just packing in more buildings that can have a negative impact on existing residents. This is exactly why we need to have a neighbourhood plan to provide protection for open spaces, maintain design standards and preserve the integrity of our communities.

The town council planning committee unanimously voted to refuse the Monmouth Road scheme. We will have to wait and see what the District Council now decide. If necessary, I am ready to speak at Mendip Planning to support the Town Council's recommendation.

The Town Council has been asked if we will support an independent community interest company to run and manage Shepton's Sunday Market. Mendip Council control all town markets and therefore they have the ultimate decision, but the town council is prepared to continue its support for the cost of entertainment each month, and help with promotion and start-up costs of setting up a new organisation to move this proposal forward.

There is little doubt that the initial momentum to keep our once thriving Sunday Market going dissipated in recent months. We hope that injecting new energy and resources, delivered by a new community-based company, will invigorate and improve what's on offer. The aim is to attract as

wide a range of traders as possible and welcome visitors to the town, and of course, deliver a great monthly event for residents.

The next meeting of the full Town Council will be held next Tuesday 10th September at 7pm in the Council Chamber on the SHAPE site. Please come along, listen and participate since this is where many decisions that affect the future of our town are discussed, considered and decided.

Chris Inchley, Chair, Shepton Mallet Town Council