

Chairman's Report 12th September 2019

Concerns have been raised by residents who have been turned away when they tried to visit the Cemetery on Waterloo Road. Contractors using heavy trucks loaded with soil will be on site for the next 2-3 weeks (depending on weather conditions). This is to increase the availability of future burial space. After we passed on residents' concerns to Mendip District Council, it has now been agreed that mourners and families wishing to pay their respects can have access to the cemetery between 9am and 5pm on weekdays.

Due to health and safety concerns, only one family at a time will be allowed on site. Anyone wishing to visit should go to the Waterloo Road entrance. The contractor has now been instructed to accompany visitors to ensure their safety. We can only hope that the current works are completed in a timely fashion.

The Devon and Somerset Fire Service is currently holding a public consultation on changes to their operations. Central to their proposals is a reduction in service cover in our neighbouring settlements which will have a direct bearing on us here in Shepton. At present, along with Wells and Frome, we have two fire engines on call 24 hours every day. It is now proposed that the hours that part-time "retained" firemen are on call will be curtailed. This will result in Wells and Frome losing one of their appliances during the hours of daytime.

The retained fire service is a cost effective way of delivering round-the-clock cover. It relies on part-time firemen giving up their free time and depends on sympathetic employers allowing them to leave work at a moment's notice. The proposed cuts to service will save some money, but the firemen's union argue that the savings are insignificant when set against the increased risks associated with these changes.

The implications of the current proposed changes are as relevant to us in Shepton as they are to the residents in Wells and Frome. An incident in Wells or Frome could involve our Shepton appliances more often in future. The time from first call to attendance at an incident could increase. If there was an emergency near to home, it is also possible that our local fire tenders may be elsewhere and therefore not be available.

I have a particular interest since my father was a fireman in Shepton for over 25 years. Since he left the service there have been various alterations to firemen's contracts. Some of these changes have resulted in higher rates of turnover of retained firemen. My concern is that any change to this vital emergency provision needs to be made with great care. Getting it wrong can expose firemen, the population and our infrastructure to greater risk.

Details of the changes to the fire service, including the seven options offered, can be found at <https://www.dsfire.gov.uk/SaferTogether/ServiceDeliveryConsultation/documents/Consultationdocument.pdf>

The town council's Policy and Resources Committee has recently awarded three grants to local organisations: first of all, the very successful Festival of Dogs receives a grant of £400 to cover the cost of arranging an event that attracts many dog owners and visitors and raises awareness of the responsibilities of dog ownership.

The second award for £1200 is given to the Forest School in Shepton that offers wide ranging hands-on experience to young people on wildlife and bushcraft. Many of our local schools are involved and your money will be used to purchase new equipment for teaching sessions. The final award is for a

food and foraging project based off the Old Wells Road. A grant of £250 award will be used to equip a new teaching room.

The Town Council, led by our Clerk, has continued to revise and update our policies and working practices to improve our service delivery. Responding to recommendations from the report we commissioned from the independent South West Audit Partnership in 2018, the council has tightened its expenses policies for staff and councillors. We have also updated our standing orders to eliminate duplication and revised the terms of reference for each committee of the council, all with the aim of improving the quality of service to our community.

Chris Inchley, Chair, Shepton Mallet Town Council