

Chairman's Report 19th September 2019

The Town Council has ratified a new and much clearer policy for awarding particular individuals the Honorary Freedom of the Town. Over past decades Shepton has given the accolade "Honorary Freeman" to just two of our citizens. These are former councillors John Gilham, who has sadly passed away, and Colin Lockey. They have been recognised for their exceptional service to the town. Both men undoubtedly deserved this award as they proved themselves to be proud and well respected Sheptonians.

Of course this honour is not only meant for councillors and is open to all women and men in our town. We are now looking for other notable candidates from the wider community who have made long-standing contributions to Shepton.

The policy that councillors have recently agreed clarifies and regularises the process for giving this status to individuals who have given service to the town. This title of Honorary Freeman is a prestigious award designed to be given no more than once in the 4 year term of the Town Council. If any citizen wishes to nominate an Honorary Freeman or FreePerson (?) then please contact our town council staff.

To complement the exceptional award of Honorary FreePerson, the Town Council has also agreed to hold annual achievement awards. The intention is to recognise individuals who have delivered good things for the community or supported a great project for the town. Essentially this is to praise and honour individuals who have contributed to making Shepton a great place to live, work or visit.

I am delighted to inform readers that the Town Council has made a long term commitment to hold a minimum of three events at future Collett Festivals. Over at least the next four years, this popular event is now secure. We also want to extend this annual summer show of everything that makes Shepton a great community by encouraging organisations, businesses and groups to take the celebration into a week-long programme of events. We are exploring the potential to hold a Fringe Festival in various venues in town in the week preceding Collett Day.

Our decision to bring the multi-event festival back will allow us to attract more support from sponsors, advertisers and stall holders. It will see the return of the very popular free children's festival day and the evening music event, and of course the traditional Collett Day fair will remain the centrepiece. This decision will allow proper planning with a longer lead time to organise and manage the events. It offers certainty after a year when only Collett Park Day was held.

On Sunday I went to a service in St Peter and Paul Church to remember the anniversary of Battle of Britain. These days we often take our values and way of life for granted. Yet around the world we see democratic struggles in Hong Kong and the merciless carnage in Syria where the Russians are responsible for crushing thousands of innocent victims. The importance of maintaining our role in NATO and having a common defence policy across Europe remains as important as ever.

A new factionalism in politics in many countries in the world (sadly including our own and the USA) and the associated drift to extremes is bringing new challenges to us all. It is only by working with other countries that we can make progress in defending democratic and liberal values. Our security and the protection of the world's fragile environment are at great risk if we are unwise enough not to learn from the lessons of the past.

It is worth remembering that those brave airman who brought peace to Europe eight decades ago did what they did for all us who are alive today. I can only hope that our politicians have the sense and integrity to remember that failure of statesmanship, as often as not, leads to conflict, and worse, even to death and destruction.

Chris Inchley, Chair, Shepton Mallet Town Council