

Chairman's Report 26 September 2019

The Town Council is producing a Corporate Plan. This will inform what our priorities are and where we will allocate your money in the next four years. For the plan to have wide support and legitimacy, we want as many residents as possible to have their say. This will inform us what local people wish their council to do as we plan for Shepton's future.

We will be asking people in the coming weeks what they like and dislike about our town and the surrounding area. With the higher authorities at County and District levels retreating from many of their original responsibilities, town and parish councils are increasingly being asked to do much more than they ever did in the past.

We know there are many areas where improvements can be made in the town. We are reaching out to our citizens to identify what they would like us to focus on, improve and change. All ideas will then be considered and costed leading to the formation and publication of a 4 year plan.

A significant priority must be our environment. With the rest of the world, we face an uncertain future unless we make changes to our lifestyles and the way we are using up the earth's resources. Last week in Wells, hundreds of people came together to protest at the lack of action to tackle climate change. Many Sheptonians attended. This week at the United Nations, 16 year old Greta Thunberg berated world leaders for their inaction in caring about young people's future. Locally Mendip District Council has signed up to acknowledge and act on the climate emergency.

Last week town councillors agreed on a new Environmental Policy. Like all authorities, it is vital that we evaluate how we can reduce the impact on our environment. The government has identified that we must plant 1.5 billion trees in the UK to stand any chance of the country becoming carbon neutral.

In terms of local priorities, planting many more trees has to be high on any list. Personally, I would like to see a new country park developed here. This could deliver space for significant tree planting, ideally with the help of the local community, including many of our young people. It would also extend space for leisure and wellbeing in our expanding town.

Another key environmental priority will be to look at all aspects of transport. The aim would be to reduce pollution and cut back on car journeys. According to a recent survey, one in three people regularly use their cars for short journeys that could be completed on foot or by using reliable public transport. 45% of those in the same poll said they would consider using a bicycle if cycleways were separated from busy roads.

To reduce short and unnecessary car journeys, we need to create safe multi-user paths across the town. Your local district councillors have already made the completion of the Strawberry Line cycle and pedestrian loop around Somerset a key priority. This will also allow safe travel from east to west in Shepton. Over the years, Garfield Kennedy and I have campaigned under the banner "Don't Cut Us Off!" to improve local public transport. Sadly Somerset County Council have withdrawn much of their support for vital rural bus services. We will continue to challenge decisions in Westminster and at County level that have failed time and again to improve travel options for rural communities like ours.

I'm sure your readers will join me in wishing parkrun director and councillor, Edric Hobbs, our very best wishes as he recovers from a heavy fall in a recent accident at a downhill cycling event he

attended in the North West. After spending a week in hospital he is now back at home in Shepton. We wish Edric a full and speedy recovery.

Chris Inchley, Chair, Shepton Mallet Town Council