

## Chairman's Report 10th October 2019

Sunday was one of those memorable autumnal days. The sun may now be losing its warmth yet it was still strong enough for me to enjoy a glorious day out before winter sets in.

Like the majority of your local councillors, I was out delivering the town council's corporate plan questionnaire. Aply assisted in getting the leaflets into letterboxes by many public spirited volunteers, we are reaching out to the public to get your opinions. If you have not yet received one of our little A5 cards, copies can still be picked up from the Town Council office on Park Road. Alternatively, go to the Town Council website ([SheptonMallet-TC.gov.uk](http://SheptonMallet-TC.gov.uk)) and you can fill in the questionnaire there.

This exercise in public participation offers Shepton residents a chance to influence the future priorities of the council. We want as many people as possible to respond. It will give councillors much to think about and ensure that as many of your diverse views as possible are taken into account as we plan for the next 4 years and beyond.

Many of your local councillors invest more hours in a week than many people realise to try to improve our town. On Sunday I delivered the questionnaire to the whole of the St Peters Estate, covering 8.32 miles in the process. One resident asked me why I was up so early to get these leaflets out, and the answer is quite simple: like my colleagues and many civic-minded individuals, we want only high quality well-managed change for Shepton.

One of the most important projects that has my full support is to see the Strawberry Line join up. This partially completed cycleway and safe pedestrian path closely follows the old railway line across an extensive swathe of Somerset. I took our new puppy, Herbie, down the existing stretch between Dulcote and Wells. He absolutely loved it. He met fellow dogs and I met fellow walkers, with runners and cyclists all enjoying this magical multi-user path.

I also came across Richard Jones, one of the leading members of the Strawberry Line committee. Richard is a volunteer who for many years has been lobbying and battling against all obstacles to deliver this safe traffic-free route across Somerset. He was clearing brambles to keep the path open and joy to be in.

We had a very positive conversation about what was needed to make rapid progress on the completion of the path in and through Shepton. The Town Council has been setting aside financial support to create and protect safe pedestrian routes that will make it easier to traverse from West to East and North to South in the town.

With Richard, I also discussed what was needed in order to complete all the remaining sections of the Strawberry Line from Shepton to Wells. Not only could this pedestrian link cut down on car journeys, but it will also provide important habitats and deliver a vital part of a continuous environmentally friendly corridor across Somerset. By joining our towns and settlements, without the obvious dangers of mixing pedestrians, cyclists and vehicular traffic, this also offers a wonderful opportunity to attract tourists to our area.

This weekend local businesses are asking people to shop totally locally. If every household was to spend just £5 then this alone would make a real difference by making an important contribution to the regeneration of the local economy. When more people and businesses use local suppliers, this isn't just good for the economy, it's also great for the environment and encourages healthy living. By cutting down on car journeys and getting people to walk or cycle, it's a win-win.

Keep Sunday 24th November free since this is the first of the truly Independent Shepton Sunday Market days. The new team of volunteers need your support to make this ambitious project a success. With all their new energy and enthusiasm, this venture is set to really give a boost to our town centre.

**Chris Inchley, Chair, Shepton Mallet Town Council**