

## Chairman's Report 28th November 2019

As I reported last week, our Sunday Market returned to fill the town centre for a few busy hours last weekend. It was great to see and hear the buzz of local people and visitors enjoying a happy Sunday in Shepton.

This was the first market under the new brand name, "The Shepton Experience". Mendip District Council has handed over the reins and control of the market to a community interest company led by Jude Jackson. The relaunched monthly event is now under the independent management of Jude and her team of hard-working volunteers.

The Town Council wants the Sunday Market in Shepton to be a successful event that fits into the overall market offering within the Mendip District. We have supported the Sunday Market from the start with support for advertising and promotion, and provision of a varied programme of entertainment. We are continuing to grant funding for the Shepton Experience to establish this new venture. In any practical way we can, we want to attract more visitors to our town centre to support our independent retailers, and increase the range of events in the town.

The good news is that our shopkeepers reported good footfall and a boost for sales throughout this first Shepton Experience day. This is just the start and the plan is to attract more stalls to enliven future Sunday markets. We may not be able to attract as wide a range of traders as regularly attend the monthly "Frome Independent" or the City of Wells markets, but we can put on a convincing and lively monthly show that captures the great spirit of our town.

We want the Shepton Experience to be a unique and successful event that can attract locals and visitors alike. If we give it our support and the chance to flourish then it can bring energy and add value to the high street and bring benefit to the whole community.

It seems unbelievable that the Shepton Mallet Lantern Festival is holding its tenth anniversary parade next month. It has become firmly established as one of the joys of the Christmas season. I never cease to be amazed at the inventiveness of our lantern makers of all ages.

This year the first of the lantern-making workshops is being held on Saturday 30<sup>th</sup> November and Sunday 1st December. They continue into the following two weekends. All take place between 10am and 4pm at the Paul Street Community Centre. The cost for the workshops is just £2 and this includes a basic lantern-making kit. I'm really looking forward to the 21st December to see this year's crop of glowing creative marvels.

Two years ago Somerset County Council consulted the Town Council to obtain our input to their proposed plan to upgrade the roundabout at Commercial Road and Old Market Road. Few doubt that this busy intersection is dangerous. It has been the site of many accidents, but thankfully to date no casualties.

The Town Council duly reported back to Somerset Highways that we felt their scheme was inadequate. We strongly recommended that the junction needed a more comprehensive restructuring to make the roundabout wider with a solid centre for vehicles to circulate around. This could have been achieved by using a small part of the land at Great Ostry Car Park and a section of the grassed area on the opposite side of the road. Sadly, Somerset County Council ignored our input.

To be honest, I can't see how the money they have spent on this scheme has achieved much. It doesn't appear to have made the roundabout safer, and seems to me to be a questionable use of public money.

Finally, it is "Small Business Saturday" this weekend. It's a great chance to visit our bespoke independent retail outlets in the town and show them you support their enterprising spirit. Remember, small businesses work hard at their own risk. When you buy from local traders we keep our money in the local community, and by supporting them you can pick up some great Christmas presents or treats for yourself.

I had a chat with Father Christmas last Sunday at the Shepton Experience. He tells me that there is still a lot of shopping opportunities in Shepton before the big day, including the December Shepton Experience on Sunday 22nd December. Father Christmas said he's open and willing to take late requests for locally sourced presents. Strangely, Mike Perry, one of the regular volunteers who always helps at all the Sunday Markets was no-where to be seen last Sunday.

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