

Chairman's Report 12th December 2019

General elections aren't normally held this close to Christmas or in the depths of winter, but after so much turmoil in Westminster, this is no ordinary election. Today we get the chance to influence the future shape and direction of our country for at least the next 5 years.

Despite the long hours of darkness and heavy rain forecast, it is important that every resident who is eligible to vote should vote. It only takes a couple of minutes. We can't grumble about the government we get, if we don't participate in the decision. All Shepton residents can cast their vote at Mendip District Council's SHAPE site. The polling station is open from 7am to 10pm.

With Christmas barely 2 weeks away, hopefully we can put politics to one side after Thursday and join in the town's festive spirit. Nearly all the public Christmas celebrations in Shepton get help and support from the Town Council and are made possible because of a wonderful group of volunteers who deliver festivals, carol singing and markets, making Shepton a better place to live in, work in and visit.

You've still got plenty of time to participate in the Lantern Festival workshops next Saturday and Sunday in the Paul Street Community Rooms. It's already possible to see some of the wonderful and inventive glowing creations for this year's parade previewed on social media sites. Once again, we are guaranteed a real treat on the 21st December.

To mark the beginning of the traditional Christmas festivities, the Church of St Peter and St Paul is holding a Carol Service at 6pm on Sunday 15th December. Then the week after, the Shepton Experience will be staging their Victorian Christmas Market on Sunday 22nd December. The event has attracted a record number of traders and stall holders. It will be a great opportunity to buy last minute presents and meet up with friends and family. Come along and soak up the atmosphere. There'll be a host of festive food and drink, accompanied by a programme of lively entertainment.

One of the many services the Town Council supports is our Tourist Information and Heritage Centre at the top of the High Street. Lorraine Pratten and her knowledgeable staff manage the last remaining Tourist Information Centre (TIC) in our district. They help to promote Shepton Mallet and many of the activities that happen in our area. The success of the TIC is largely down to the commitment and passion that Lorraine and her team feel for Shepton.

Maintaining this service has not been straightforward. Changes in technology, including online booking for accommodation and ticket sales for events on the Internet, has taken away some of the TIC's key revenue. It has left them seeking new sources of money in order to continue. Currently the Town Council gives a grant of £6000 per annum to part-finance the service, and Lorraine also fundraises in various ways, including the very important annual TIC Christmas Draw. Many local businesses donate some really great gifts since they recognise the value that Lorraine and the TIC bring to the community.

Tickets for this raffle, which has very good odds of you winning a prize, are now on sale at the TIC. On behalf of the Town Council I have been asked to draw the winning tickets on Monday 16th December at 2pm. Please support the great service the TIC delivers by buying tickets. Don't miss your chance to scoop up the star prize!

Another project funded exclusively by the Town Council is our annual Christmas Lights display in the town centre. The glowing banners and garlands that swathe Town Street make a real impact as you travel down Waterloo Road. This is the final year of the contract with a specialist firm who have

supplied different displays over the past three Christmases. We will be tendering for next year's display soon, and welcome all suggestions and opinions on what people would like to see in our town for Christmas 2020.

Chris Inchley, Chair, Shepton Mallet Town Council