

Chairman's Report 2nd January 2020

Many of us make new year resolutions about how we are going to drink less, exercise more, help others in need, or just become a better person. But 2020 is no ordinary new year. We are marking the passing of a decade that will be remembered for endless austerity and a widespread decline in trust of politicians and our system of government.

The coming year brings a lot of uncertainty but could herald a fresh start for all of us. During the next 10 years we are going to see great change as we leave the European Union and begin to seriously address the climate emergency.

We can only hope that in our rural communities, there will be a focus on getting better and more reliable public transport, and see the completion of safe cycle and pedestrian paths linking our towns and villages. The Town Council wants to see more trees planted in and around Shepton, and we are planning to roll out a series of initiatives to help to shift us towards a more sustainable future.

The Town Council's rôle in our community has grown to take in many of the services that were once the responsibility of higher authorities. This includes providing Youth Services, increasing our support for Citizens Advice, being expected to pay for infrastructure, including bridge repairs and road surfacing, and most recently, entering a partnership with Somerset County Council and local activists to keep our library in the Market Square. We have had to transform the Town Council into a more professional and strategic organisation to manage these new responsibilities and to allow us to be ready to protect and foster a positive future for our community.

In the next few months, we have much to look forward to. First, we have the Lantern Festival that had to be postponed in December for the first time in its 10 year history. The weather forecast promised heavy rain and the bands that were due to lead the parade pulled out. The organisers wisely decided this much-loved annual event would be better held early in the new year.

Coming up in February we then have the ever flourishing Snowdrop Festival which has become an essential fixture in Shepton's annual calendar. In 2019 lots more snowdrops were planted around the town by teams of volunteers. Look out for the first of these little nodding gems poking their heads up in the next few weeks.

Just prior to Christmas, we learnt that we have secured the future of our library. This was after months of uncertainty and concern that this facility could be lost to the town, or be relocated to a room within Mendip District Council. With a commitment to provide substantial financial support by the Town Council and a generous 5 year cash injection by Michael Eavis, Somerset County Council has agreed to continue to provide the service in Shepton in partnership with the Town Council and volunteers. This will ensure that the library stays in the existing building in the heart of the town.

Plans to run more events and turn the building into much more of a community hub are afoot. Many members of the community deserve our thanks for their help in ensuring the library has been saved. These include Jon Hardy, Jan Karpinski, Lesley Rowan, Steve Barlow and too many more community stalwarts to name here. It proves that Sheptonians care passionately about the community in which we live and are willing to do everything possible to protect vital services and the facilities that help to make a society thrive.

I hope that 2020 brings hope and opportunity to our community and I wish everyone a Happy New Year.

Chris Inchley, Chair, Shepton Mallet Town Council