

Chairman's Report 23rd January 2020

Just to remind everyone that the wonderful Lantern Festival and Parade, that had to be cancelled due to wet weather conditions before Christmas, will now be held on Saturday 1st February. It starts at 6pm in Collett Park. For all who poured their energies into making hundreds of amazing lanterns it's their opportunity to show off their fantastic creations. It will be the 10th anniversary of this annual celebration. Everyone in Shepton and visitors from near and far are welcome to come and join in the postponed event.

Wherever it can, the Town Council tries to be responsive to the needs of Shepton's residents. But some issues are far from easy to resolve. We often get complaints, or are informed about incidents, of anti-social behaviour (ASB). This can be anything from graffiti appearing on walls and buildings, to drug taking in the town, or just incidents where we are made to feel uncomfortable or unsafe.

Speeding vehicles, dog mess and litter are high on the list of people's concerns. This can cause upset and can even be dangerous. Sadly we are not alone in facing these intractable issues and most, if not all, councils wrestle with trying to deal with this type of low level ASB.

One of the main problems brought to us is cars and lorries speeding within the town. This produces anxiety and concerns within families, who worry about the safety of their children, friends and relatives. The Town Council has a budget for SpeedWatch and we have a number of regular volunteers who help us to actively monitor speeds in town in the hope of trying to reduce the numbers of vehicles breaking the law. We are always looking for more community-minded citizens to assist us with this initiative. If any resident wishes to become involved please contact the council at info@sheptonmallet-tc.gov.uk.

Communities always want town and parish councils to take action on dog mess. In Shepton, we now set aside a budget to install more dog waste bins each year around the town. You should be able to identify these by the town council sticker asking dog owners to "Bag it, tie it, bin it". Hopefully people will use these bins and clean up after their four-legged friends. Not to do so is extremely unpleasant, selfish and anti-social and a serious public health menace.

The amount of litter that people drop onto our streets causes a real problem, and makes the town look unkempt and untidy. It costs us all a lot of money to clear up the mess left by a few. The council's contract with our current service provider is coming to an end in a couple of years. We are considering how we can improve cleanliness in and around Shepton, and are looking at how other local authorities have tackled this and a range of other ASB challenges.

One of the options we are considering is the appointment of a Neighbourhood Warden. Many towns and parishes have found this to be an effective way to deal with low level ASB. This person would be a visible presence of the Council on the street. They would be a reassuring presence to deter crime and address the range of issues that can diminish our experience of living in a wonderful part of the country.

Each year, the Town Council gives grants to many community groups and partner organisations. Again our aim is to enhance the experience of living in a community that is safe, open and caring. In 2019 the council signed a three year service level agreement to support youth work in Shepton. This was after Somerset County Council withdrew financial support for this vital provision. With our backing, the YMCA now runs the youth club, provides outreach work and delivers an online

service. The county council now plans to cut another £250,000 from funding for youth work. I predict that these shortsighted savings will cost our communities much more in the long run.

The town council is going through a process to improve the way we provide funds for local groups and initiatives. In future we will have formal agreements for service delivery for secured funding. Our aim is to have openness and transparency for tax payers to be able to see that an effective service has been delivered for the money provided.

I can't remember seeing snowdrops flowering so early. Looking around the town, it looks like many of these little spring flowers have forgotten that the annual Shepton Snowdrop Festival is not held until mid-February. Many have popped up their heads a month ahead of schedule. Having said that, they are advertising the event celebrating them that will be held on February 15th and 16th and I'm absolutely certain this year's festival will be the best ever!

Chris Inchley, Chair, Shepton Mallet Town Council