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WEEKLY COLUMN – 19 NOVEMBER 2020

At an extraordinary town council meeting last Tuesday 10 November, Shepton Mallet Town Council elected a new chair and vice chair following three resignations from the Council. Councillor Matt Harrison was elected chair and Councillor Sharon Hale elected vice chair.

Councillor Harrison said “It is a real honour and privilege to become chair of Shepton Mallet Town Council.

As a society, we have huge change coming our way in the next few weeks, let alone months. We are still in the midst of the biggest health pandemic in living memory with a winter to get through. The long term economic impact will be profound; big challenges for businesses and the way people shop, travel, work is seeing dramatic, long-term shift. Unitary changes (the changes to the structure of County and District councils) will almost certainly change the responsibilities of the town council over the next couple of years. The National Planning Policy Framework plans for a further 800 houses to be built in our town over the next 9 years. That’s an 18% growth in housing stock. This alone could fundamentally change the way Shepton is for ever. And finally, the climate changes around us. Whether it’s flooding in winter, draught in summer or a collapse in the insect population, the situation is getting worse.

These challenges sound immense and of course, we can only influence parts and not change everything. But as a Town Council, we have spent the past 18 months developing our ‘Investing in Shepton’s Future’ Town Plan to focus on making sure we deliver on what we can influence. For example, our announcement last week of the market place resurfacing is just one project we have in the pipeline.

With all this forthcoming change, my absolute key priority initially is making sure the Council operates in the most effective way possible. My focus for the next few weeks is therefore to engage with all Councillors to ensure we have the most effective ways of working possible. I want all Councillors to contribute to our plans to help improve Shepton and welcome input from any resident who wants to make a positive difference to the town.”

Shepton Mallet Town Council

NOTES TO EDITORS

Shepton Mallet Town Council, Town Clerk – Ms Charlotte Starkie
Shepton Mallet Town Council Chairman – Councillor Matthew Harrison