

SHEPTON MALLET TOWN COUNCIL

Meeting	Full Council Item 10.10
Date	13 th January 2021
Author	Council Chair. Cllr Matt Harrison and C Starkie, Town Clerk
Subject	Town Plan Update

1.0 PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To update Councillors on current progress on the Town Plan.
- 1.2 To communicate to Councillors that the Council needs to decide on the order of priority to deliver the next stages of the Town Plan (in context of the 2020/21 budget).
- 1.3 To re-visit the structure of Working Parties to ensure each has clear aims and objectives and the required number of Councillors.
- 1.4 To request that Councillors think about how Council can improve day to day communication between Councillors.

2.0 CURRENT PROGRESS OF THE TOWN PLAN

- 2.1 The Town Clerk is preparing a midyear progress report of the achievements that have been accomplished against the objectives agreed in the Town Plan. These are contained at Appendix A, and will be refined for distribution to a wider audience.
- 2.2 In addition it has to be noted that this has been an extraordinary year and the council has responded to the demands of the pandemic on the community with support and assistance. Meetings were quickly adapted on the zoom platform and a small emergency team of councillors was established that had delegated authority to make emergency decisions that would benefit the staffing team or community. Grants were given to groups that were supporting the community, and a free phone line was introduced for the purpose of signposting people to agencies for support. At the same time a brand new community website was created to provide valuable local and wider information in relation to the pandemic, and the town was decorated with bright banners to offer this information to the community at large.
- 2.3 There were some changes to the makeup of the staffing team, welcoming the new project officer and the departure of the admin assistant. A proposal was submitted to the HR committee in September to bring on board a full time Communications Officer in the new year. All staff continue with their continuous professional development, were provided with the necessary tools and ICT to continue to work from home, and have participated in workshops on how to deliver the town plan, as well as improve their understanding of communications and project management.

3.0 PRIORITISING NEXT STAGES OF THE TOWN PLAN

3.1 Now that some key legacy initiatives (such as the Market Place resurfacing, signage and branding projects) are nearing their implementation stages, Council needs to decide what areas to focus on in the Town Plan for 2021 and beyond. This needs to be in the context of the 2021/22 budget and monies within Earmarked Funds. A facilitated workshop for councillors (ie not in public) has been arranged for Tuesday 9th February 2021 at 7pm (on zoom) and will be led by the consultant who assisted with the implementation of the Town Plan. The purpose of the workshop is for councillors to discuss the priorities of each committee and share thoughts and ideas with colleagues and produce a scheme of work that can be realistically delivered over the coming 2 years. All councillors will receive further communication on this but are encouraged to attend this valuable workshop.

4.0 WORKING PARTIES

4.1 With the change in number of Councillors on the Council, and with some Councillors resigning from certain Working Parties, there is a need to re-visit which Working Parties are needed, what their aims and objectives are and who will be on each Working Party.

4.2 Working parties (with their parent committee) that were established in 2019/2020 include:

- Devolution Working Party (Full Council)
- Environmental Action/Climate Change Working Party (Full Council)
- Christmas Lights Working Party (Place Making)
- Remembrance Day Working Party (Full Council)
- Collett Park Feasibility Working Party (Collett Park Management)
- Collett Festival Working Party (Collett Park Management)
- People's Fund Working Party (Policy and Resources)
- Business Awards Working Party (Full Council)
- Planning Consultation Working Party (Town Development and Planning)
- Signage Working Party Working Party (Place Making)
- Branding Working Party (Full Council)
- Market Resurface Working Party (Place Making)
- Art Project Working Party (People and Promotion)

4.3 Some of the Working Parties have served their purpose and closed, others have not met or had insufficient interest from members to hold meetings and not met their required brief. Therefore, further work needs to be done as part of the prioritisation workshop to determine whether the working parties are folded and the work undertaken at committee level, whether the working party remains but with new membership and leadership, or working parties are reduced in number and subject matters merged, and also renamed as Task and Finish groups.

5.0 IMPROVING COMMUNICATION

- 5.1 It is recognised that communication from Officers to Councillors is robust and efficient but communication between Councillors within Working Parties and throughout the Council and Committee structure is often intermittent, inconsistent, and non-inclusive. Some councillors are thorough and read their reports and ask questions of officers, others do not attend many meetings. Some have experience and are willing to get involved, some are busy with other priorities and unable to make a greater commitment. Training opportunities are advertised but take up could be improved.
- 5.2 Councillors are asked to give consideration to working practices to improve the communication across the committees and working parties, and to identify opportunities to be more engaged and to participate in training, meetings with external agencies and working parties.

6.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 6.1 For Councillors to note the contents of the report and be willing to attend a workshop to be held on Tuesday 9th February 2021 at 7pm. To attend that meeting having given consideration to prioritising the objectives within the town plan, to consider the number and composition of working parties, and to consider improved methods of communication and working.