



Evesham Conservation Area and its Listed Buildings.

Notes of a meeting on Tuesday 25 May 2021 between Paul Clements and Jim Burgin, Wychavon District Council and Gill Pawson, Brian Chilver, Ian Stanton and Colin Tether of VECS.

Itinerary and issues for discussion

Market Place: Vale of Evesham Civic Society: an introduction was given on the current interests and activities of VECS.

VECS is keen to see improvements in the town centre and Conservation Area, to support the initiatives of others, namely the Town Centre Prospectus/Story of Evesham/Riverside redevelopment/Abbey restoration/Enlighten

VECS highlighted issues for discussion on the tour, as follows:

1. Ongoing Enforcement cases – shop front film/Brian Steele/others
2. Condition of the buildings, especially Listed Buildings
3. Role of Adopted Shop Front Guide
4. Role of Conservation Area Management Plan

The tour started in Vine Street to show 2 examples of building improvements – the old gun shop (16 Vine St) adjacent to the Old Red Horse PH and the building now occupied by Delicious (2 Vine St). Also, to show the poor, deteriorating condition of the Church gate posts; large lumps of stone have now fallen off. VECS pointed out the display of Planning Application notices. Commonly these are posted on posts and lamp columns, fixed with sticky tape. They are difficult to read and difficult to remove when sticky tape is used. Frequently the paint on the post comes away with the sticky tape on removal and the post then looks shabby. VECS requested that an improved method of displaying Planning Applications be considered, possibly with a weatherproof laminated board or inside the window of the relevant building.

High Street to show examples of the shops with external film covering their windows, which are ongoing Enforcement cases. WDC reported that all shops identified in the report submitted by VECS in December 2020 have been written to, informing them of the need for permission for external window film. In some cases second letters have been sent; no progress report has yet been received by VECS. VECS urged WDC to deal with the Listed Buildings cases as a priority. It is apparent that there is a language barrier with some shop keepers. Perhaps versions of the letter in some of the Eastern European languages is needed, to get the message across? VECS was advised to seek investigations by Trading Standards if there is any sign that the shops so screened are selling illegal goods. Examples of poor Shop Front designs were shown; the new Job Centre unit and the Chef and Skewer restaurant, despite representations by VECS that they did not meet the standards of the Shop Front Guide. WDC explained that the Guide is indeed only guidance, but VECS awaits examples of where poor shop front designs are refused/only allowed once they have better met the advice in the Guide. Without such action, the Guide is useless. Ways to get the message about the existence of the Guide out to local shop owners/tenants/letting agents need to be agreed.

Bridge Street to highlight the number of poorly maintained buildings, with particular problems at first/second floor levels. VECS is undertaking a condition survey of all of the units in the Conservation



Area, with a view to writing to all landlords to bring the problems to their attention. Shawn Riley had offered the services of WDC to identify the property owners. VECS to complete its survey and submit the report to WDC. Once landlords have been identified, VECS to liaise directly with them to alert them to the condition of their buildings.

Avonbridge House: Listed Building. Its condition is deteriorating year on year. A VECS member is hoping to persuade the owner to undertake an overhaul of the building, given its prominent location for users of the river and visitors from the south.

Workman Bridge now has 6-7 shrubs/small trees growing out of the stonework. WCC highways to be contacted by VECS, with photos, to seek urgent action to prevent a dangerous situation developing.

Port Street is the worst part of the Conservation Area for shops with external film. These are now all listed as enforcement cases. It also has many examples of poor building maintenance. The lack of funds for grants to landlords to improve their premises was identified.

Discussion:

1. How can VECS work with WDC Enforcement Team to speed up action? VECS will continue to identify and notify WDC about potential enforcement cases – the eyes and ears for the authority. However, more feedback is needed so that VECS can see what WDC is trying to do to take action. A regular report was discussed – monthly/quarterly (as done by other LPAs) with all live enforcement cases and Enforcement Notices for the District are tabulated with a progress note beside each. This could form a report to the Planning Committee and made available on the website to download for any interested party. Alternatively, VECS representatives would be prepared to meet WDC Enforcement Officers once a quarter to receive a progress report. This proposal to be further considered at the Zoom meeting between Civic Societies/WDC Planners on 1 June.
2. Can WDC work with Trading Standards on the shops with exterior film? VECS to inform TS direct of any properties of concern.
3. How can VECS help WDC to bring about building condition improvements? It was agreed that VECS will seek to finalise its report within the next few weeks and submit to WDC for help in identifying landlords. The timing of the follow up initiative of VECS contacting landlords direct to co-incide with the launch of the Town Centre Prospectus, which is due soon. It would help to be told the date of the public launch, to provide a deadline for VECS action. The Prospectus and the buy-in by WDC it is hoped will lead to additional resources to help with the improvements to the town centre/conservation area being called for by VECS.

Handouts: VECS Exhibition Panel Posters
VECS report on shop fronts with applied film.

Gill Pawson
Chair, Vale of Evesham Civic Society