

Vale of Evesham Civic Society The first 50 years – a potted history.

The inaugural meeting was held in the Town Hall on 15 March 1972, attended by over 150 people. Mr G W Watton was elected as Chairman, with 4 officers and 11 committee members. At the outset, the Society was mindful of the need to get a good cross-section of the community as members, to encourage schools to be involved in projects, to lead and not be led and not to complain.

Following the initial meeting, the committee met at the Evesham Club in Dresden House until 1976 when they moved to Prospect House and Evesham High School in 1977 and Prince Henry's School in 1980.

In June of the first year, the minutes record that the Society had requested involvement in the preparation of the Town Plan. A draft plan was produced in 1973 but no reference was then made to the Town Plan following local government re-organisation, when responsibility for planning changed. A new plan was started in 2012, 40 years later and was completed in 2015, with the active involvement of a Society member in the section on the Environment.

Fundraising, the condition of buildings in the conservation area and responding to proposals for development in the town were regular items on meeting agendas and remain so today.

A car parking survey of the town centre was carried out by pupils of Evesham High School and Prince Henry's Grammar School, under the leadership of two of the Society's committee members, Mr S English and Mr M N Duffy, who it is believed were teachers at the schools.

The committee responded to the proposals in the County Structure Plan, in particular in respect of traffic in the town and to the suggested boundaries for the new local government authorities that were to come into existence in 1974.

After the first year, Mr Watton became the President and Mr English took over as Chairman. Mr Way first joined the committee in 1974.

Committee meetings were held once every 2 months, with two social events for members during the year.

In 1975 Mr English stood down as Chairman and was replaced by the Vice Chairman, Mr Duffy and Mr Wahle had joined the committee.

In 1975 the first edition of the Evesham Mini Guide was published by the Society and placed around the town for visitors to purchase; it was a great success. An up to date version is still available. A Town Trail booklet was also proposed at this time and appeared in print in 1977; it was also very popular.

Efforts were made during this period to seek restoration of the Town Hall.

In 1977 a project to make a photographic record of significant buildings in Evesham was started, led by Mr Wahle (257 pictures collected by mid 1978) and in this year efforts were started to change Bridge Street to pedestrian priority.

By 1977 the membership had fallen to 67.

In 1978 discussion started on the issue of an Evesham by-pass. The east route was chosen in 1979 by government with completion due in 1986.

In 1979 Mr Wolfe Wahle took over as Chairman, following the resignation of Mr Duffy.

In 1981, the first reference to the Awards Scheme is recorded.

Sadly, records of the decade 1981 to 1991 have gone missing. Newsletters for 1991 onwards provided the source of the Society's activities from 1991 until 2021

In June 1991, David Way took over as Chairman. Topical at this time was a scheme to enhance the Market Square.

Member visits that year were to Tewkesbury and Cirencester. A plea for new members was made in the summer newsletter. At this time the committee included Brian Chilver, who remains a member 30 years on, and John Goodwin, who only retired in 2019.

A detailed response was submitted to Wychavon District Council following its consultation on the Draft Town Plan for Evesham, in particular drawing attention to the need for a bus station and a better deal for pedestrians. The Society was involved in the subsequent public inquiry into the Plan.

Action was taken to support the Council in its refusal of housing south of Pershore Road, in the narrow between Evesham and Hampton. An appeal was turned down. However, 30 years later the site is again subject of a similar development; will it receive the same fate?

The Society was also influential in getting improvements to the housing scheme on the old Jewson's site southeast of the river near Workman Bridge.

Pedestrianisation of Bridge St was on the agenda at this time. The Society kept pushing for a scheme. Work was promised in 1992, with the Society supporting the proposed alternative traffic management arrangements.

1992 was the year when the national Civic Trust had major financial issues and was scaled down; no glossy monthly newsletter and staff reduced to 4.

A long-standing campaign for a better standard of shop fronts continued in 1992. It continued again in 2022.

To celebrate 20 years, a photographic survey of all of the Listed Buildings in the town was carried out. The records are usually available to accompany the current exhibition, when it is put on display at events in the town.

Visits to the Commandery, in Worcester; Ombersley; Chipping Campden, Winchcombe.

1992, like 2020/21, was a year when it was noted that the prevailing economic climate was not conducive to spending money on enhancement projects.

The Society objected to a scheme of development which would have removed the right of way to the river down the old slipway.

Members celebration of the 20th anniversary was a strawberry fair party in the garden of 58 Broadway Road, the house then owned by Brian Chilver.

In 1993 the Society was involved in the proposals to enter the Britain in Bloom competition.

In 1994 the Society's noticeboard in the Library Arcade was installed. It was also reported this year that a scheme for improvements to the town centre (e.g market square, Bridge St and station approaches) was put forward by David Lovejoy and Partners.

In 1995 Brian Barry was appointed Chairman, with Wolf Wahle continuing as treasurer and David Way took on the secretarial role. Plans were made this year for a Millennium Trail. Work started on repaving Market Square as a precursor to the other planned improvements. At the same time the Bengeworth Urban Renewal Scheme brought improvements to Port Street frontages. There is a report that the Chairman of WDC – John Payne was to have a blitz on poor quality shop fronts in the conservation area.

In 1996, the Society changed its logo to include reference to the Vale of Evesham.

1997 celebrated the completion of the Bridge Street pedestrianisation and the associated traffic routing around Mill Street and Swan Lane, with an opening ceremony and street party. This was the 25th anniversary year of the establishment of the Society, celebrated with a party at Limelight's café bar.

In 1998, the Society learnt that its proposed Millennium Trail and new river footbridge was not to be funded as part of the 2000 celebrations. The town suffered its worst ever floods and a fire in Bridge St. The success of Vale Park was welcomed, including Evesham Micros building. (the company ceased business in 2008)

In 1999 the Society lobbied for a surfaced footpath along the north boundary of the river, from Workman Bridge to Hampton Ferry (completed in 2003, upgraded in 2018-21). Schemes for affordable housing were put forward in the late 1990's on the site at the southeast corner of Waterside and Coopers Lane; both were withdrawn following extensive objections.

A renewal of the scheme to extend the Northwick Hotel onto the former bowling green was applied for. The Society put on an exhibition showing its ideas for the whole of Waterside, arguing that it should be included in the Conservation Area.

In November, two trees were planted at the southern end of Abbey Road, one on either side, as the Society's contribution to the Millennium celebrations.

2000 - The Society put on another exhibition about the future of the riverside areas of the town and shared the funding for the refurbishment of the weather station on the wall of the Town Hall. The Society also prepared and exhibited a collection of 1900 photos of parts to the town, alongside 2000 photos. Another scheme for development in Fairwater Gardens was put forward, which the society objected to and was refused.

2001 - Work of Wychavon Preservation Trust on 31 Cowl St was recorded. Initial scheme for highway improvements on High Street was discussed and commented on. Support was given to the improvements brought about by the Market Towns Initiative

2003 – Ideas for a network of footpaths was put forward in an exhibition for the Medieval Festival.

2004 – The Society supported a call for a river ferry link from the Country Park into town. Concern was expressed at the bright colour of Pomodoro but WDC responded that there is nothing that it can do. Concern was also expressed about the deterioration of the façade of the Town Hall.

2005 – A sketch scheme for landscaping improvements at the entrance to the country park were put on display for comment.

2006 – This year saw the beginning of discussions relating to the repairs/replacement of the Abbey Road bridge, which the Society was actively involved in. Another scheme for the redevelopment of land Waterside/Coopers Lane was refused on traffic impact grounds.

2007 – The Society made comments on the review of both the Evesham CA and Offenham CA, but the points put forward were not accepted.

2008 – It was noted that there was a move to convert properties on Port St to housing, due to problems of letting retail. Concern was expressed at the reduced scale of improvement on High St and an absence of a new bus station or layover area for buses between services. The formation of VECTA welcomed and its meetings were attended by a representative of the Society. A list was compiled of buildings for local listing, but WDC had not adopted a scheme of local listing.

The Wychavon Preservation Trust was wound up leaving £4300 to the Society. Some of this legacy was spent on daffodils in the verge of Abbey Rd.

An updated website was launched.

The Society lobbied for the maintenance of Market Square, improvements to Bridge Street improvements and the retention of Castle Quay.

The Society released a report on 'Linking Town and River'.

2009 – The problem of empty shops in Riverside shopping centre was identified. The Society co-ordinated a protest to keep the tree in market square, following proposals by AXA to remove it. The Society launched a campaign to remove posters/banners from lampposts, railings in the Conservation Area; the outcome was not reported. The demise of the Civic Trust was commented upon.

2010 – Work started on High Street refurbishment. Replacing the Civic Trust, Civic Voice was launched on 17 April. A proposed development of 500 houses off Offenham Road did not include any local centre, shops or community centre, although a new school was included. Comments were submitted about the lack of community facilities.

Colin Tether took over as chairman after death of Brian Barry.

The Society funded 4 planting troughs in High St, to correct what was seen as a deficiency in the overall improvement scheme. A report was submitted to WCC on the proliferation of traffic signs, with suggestions on improvements plus other issues following completion of scheme. This report may be useful to inform comments on proposals for another High Street improvement scheme due out in 2022.

2011 – The Society campaigned, with others, for improvements to the Town Hall; some repainting was done. A scheme for a footbridge from Offenham Rd housing to the station was submitted, which was included in the Local Transport Plan, lobbying for it to be built before the closure of Abbey Road bridge. Pressure was put on BT to improve the Telephone Exchange. The Society became involved in the Cotswold Line Promotion Group. A representation was made to WCC about its use of wide yellow lines in the Conservation Area when these should be narrow. Calls were made for more cleaning in the town centre.

2012 – Success was reported in WCC clearing unnecessary street signs and adopting narrow yellow lines. Steps were taken to encourage ETC to prepare a Town Plan, which was agreed at the end of the year. The Society was involved in the scheme for expansion at Twyford, with holiday chalets, extra parking, successfully influencing improvements by re-siting chalets further from river and providing a footpath/cycle link to the town centre. The Society held an exhibition on Our Town Our Future – what next? It was involved in working out a scheme for rerouting traffic when Abbey Road bridge was closed. This year saw the beginning of the Abbey Road housing proposals and work started on the new bridge.

2013 – The Society was involved with developing the Town Plan. It was successful in lobbying for trees to be planted around the boundaries of the car parks of the leisure centre. Joined the campaign to improve Market Square. The Society welcomed the agreement to fund a footbridge over the river from Hampton to Abbey Road from S106 money from the developer of the new housing in Hampton. The footbridge at Bengeworth only received a low priority for funding in the review of the Local Transport Plan. A fight over inappropriate shop signs gained momentum, with limited success.

2014 – The Society made a range of comments on the initial proposals put out for consultation on Abbey Rd development. It supported a proposal for spring cleaning Market Square. David Way became temporary chairman. A Facebook page was launched.

2015 – A scheme of improvements works at Bengeworth fountain was drawn up, involving the cleaning and painting of the lettering. Evesham Town Plan was adopted. David Way and Jill Haycock agreed to share the Chairmanship. The Society launched a new website and participated in the 750 years since the Battle of Evesham celebrations.

2016 - David Way stood down and Jim Powell took over as Chair. A meeting was held in the town hall, attended by over 100 people to discuss ideas to improve the traffic situation in the town, especially the centre.

2017 - Reference was found to the 'Evesham Landmarks' series in the Evesham Observer, with articles by Sue Campbell on the Cross Keys Inn and by Colin Tether on cattle troughs and drinking fountains. A Planning Application was submitted on land at Abbey Road for 220 houses and 60 extra care units (cf 200 houses as in the adopted DP); objections were submitted on the scale of the development. Members joined in the Litter Pick initiated by Town Plan team. Bengeworth drinking fountain restored and new plaque in the old church area. The Society discussed its possible involvement in the re-opening the Public Hall.

2018 – The Society contributed to a new information board at the old St Peter's Churchyard. Bloor Homes permission granted for 460 houses off Cheltenham Rd, despite objections by the Society. The Society accepted a collection of 230 photos of historic buildings in Evesham taken by Wolff Wahle, donated by his daughter; they are now catalogued and presented in a folder for display at events. The Society carried out a recruitment drive, delivering 2000 flyers to new houses in the town; with very little result on membership. The Abbey Road housing scheme was approved eventually for 200 houses following lobbying to reduce the number and removal the care home and the employment element. A representative of the Society attended the newly formed Evesham Transport Stakeholders Group. Committee members attended the Love Evesham event and the Battle festival weekend. Jim Powell's one-way traffic scheme for the town was announced. A detailed response was submitted on the Review of the South Worcestershire Development Plan - Issues and Options.

2019 - An objection was submitted to the application for a truck stop off the A44. The website was updated. A detailed response was submitted on the Review of the South Worcestershire Development Plan - Preferred Options consultation. A public meeting was held to discuss JP's one-way traffic scheme.

2020 – Gill Pawson agreed to act as Chair until the AGM, which was delayed due to the Covid 19 lockdowns. An exhibition was put up in the library, until it was shut for the lockdown. Work started on an audit of the Conservation Area and a campaign started on shop fronts, seeking enforcement action on those with external posters.

2021 – The Civic Society Awards were made at the AGM. Direct action was taken to repaint the Workman Bridge plaques. The Society was consulted on the Evesham lighting trail. A garden party was held for members and friends and talks for real started in September once the lockdowns had ended. The Conservation Area audit was replaced by a comprehensive building condition survey; letters were sent to the owners of those in the worst state. The Facebook page was resurrected and is in regular use.

Activities/issues of that recur throughout most of the 50 years:

Consultation responses on local and national planning policies

Involvement with a wide range of planning applications in the town and the Vale.

Representation at local events – e.g. Riverside Festival, Battle of Evesham Festival, Medieval Market

Traffic

Support for the Heritage Open Days

Enforcement issues e.g. compliance with planning conditions

Involvement with local groups; Evesham Town Council, VECTA, Evesham Transport Stakeholder Group, Evesham Historic Society, Simon de Montfort Society.

An annual programme of events for members and friends is provided, with monthly talks and trips arranged for the summer months to places of historic interest.

Logos used during the period

Original logo



Current logo

