



Vale of Evesham Civic Society 54th Annual General Meeting,

7.30pm Tuesday 14th April 2026

Present: Pat and Ian Stanton, Brian Chilver, Paula Bowden, Zoë Stephens, Tim Haines, Anne Albright, Betty Ballard, Richard Stubbs, Alan and Noelle Chambers, Barbara and John Goodwin, Chris Bloomfield, Jenny Salcedo, Dougal Chestnut, Jim Powell, Franco Scimeca, Sylvia Melville, David Osborne, Judy and Peter Richards, Brenda and Warren Percival, Neal Cartwright, Mark Pickering, Roger Bowden

1. **Apologies received:** Gill and Ken Pawson, Adrian Peake, Olga Allen, Colin Tether, Sue Ablett, William and Carolyn Petts, Sue Campbell, Janet Osborne.
2. **Approval of previous AGM minutes:** Minutes from the 53rd AGM meeting on 08th April 2025 were approved (proposed by Dougal Chestnut and seconded by Peter Richards).
3. **Matters arising from previous AGM meeting:** Paula stated that over the past year efforts had been made by the Almonry team to communicate better about the restoration works eg in the local press, Facebook and public meetings. A “Friends of the Almonry Museum” group had been established and Gill had joined the committee. Brian commented that the non-working grass clock outside the Almonry had thankfully been removed in order to make space for the scaffolding.
4. **Chair’s Annual Report:** This had been circulated to members in advance of the AGM. As Gill and Adrian were on holiday, Paula said she was acting as Chair and Treasurer as well as Secretary for this AGM. Paula presented highlights from the report which had been produced by Gill and herself, plus other items of information.
 - There have been 6 new members in the last year, and it was nice to see some of them had come to the AGM. Overall membership is between 120 and 130.
 - Business membership – our leaflets and an accompanying letter had been distributed alongside the new Evesham Town Centre Business Guide. As a result, so far we have one new business member, Evesham Jewellers.
 - Our constitution allows us to have 14 committee members so as we only have 7 there is opportunity for members to join the committee. Equally, providing help promoting VECS at events eg Medieval Market is another way of participating. Paula said her experience has been very positive as many visitors (and residents) have positive things to say about Evesham and its an opportunity for members to share information about what VECS does and our built heritage. Brian has the rota and would be glad of extra volunteers.
 - The committee arranged 9 visits and talks in the last 12 months, and Gill and Paula wrote 5 bulletins. Paula asked members to let us know if there was anything they didn’t like in the newsletters or anything they would like to include in the future.
 - The new VECS website was up and running; it looked much better and was easier for Gill to update.
 - Our Facebook following has grown (now >310), particularly as a result of the popularity of the posts relating to the Letters of Commendation handed out to local shop/business owners
 - Ian and Gill spend time each month reviewing planning applications and submitting comments (in favour and/or objecting). Ian also reports planning matters of concern to the WDC Enforcement Team eg the shutters and signage on the new Bargain Valley shop on the High Street.

- Members were all pleased that WDC had recently bought the Riverside Shopping Centre. Paula stated that WDC has arranged a public meeting on 16th April 4-7pm at the Town Hall to share information about the proposed demolition of the Riverside Shopping Centre.
 - Gill is an active and valued member of the Evesham Place Board. Claire Edwards, the WDC Place Projects Officer for Evesham, had kindly joined us and spoken about the EPB's work at our December social at The Red Lion.
 - Over the last 2 years Brian had single-handedly raised £4,500 through the limited-edition prints in aid of the Almonry Museum refurbishment, and we had also raised £129.70 this year selling Christmas cards and notelets.
 - The committee had supported ETC throughout the year litter-picking etc.
 - VECS and the Historical Society are creating 3 booklets of historical/heritage walks around Evesham. These will be available to purchase soon.
5. **Hon Treasurer's Report:** This had been circulated in advance of the AGM. Paula presented the highlights of the report on behalf of Adrian.
- Our financial year runs 01 March – end February.
 - Gill had donated £150 (her fee for 3 guided walks), and Paula's competition at the Medieval Market had raised £46. Some of Gill's money had been used to pay for black and gold paint which had been used to repaint the bollards, gates and posts on Church Street, Bengeworth. Paula noted that 3 town councillors and an apprentice had carried out the work at no cost. Members expressed their appreciation for this, noting how much better Church Street looked.
 - The VECS website had cost £1440 (of which £900 had been a 2024 grant from ETC, and £540 of VECS money).
 - We had spent £96.09 on Ordnance Survey maps for the 3 new historical/heritage walk booklets.
 - The bank balance is currently £3,517.70. We've spent more than our income but that is due to the cost of the website. We have been running at a loss since 2022 but that is because we've had some large items to purchase over that time. We have no current plans for any significant expenditure for next year.
 - Paula finished by stating that these accounts for the year ending 28 February 2026 had been examined and approved by Peter Gay.
6. **Election of Executive Committee:** Paula stated that all existing executive committee members (Gill, Brian, Adrian, Pat, Ian, Zoë, Tim and herself) had agreed to stand again and we were pleased Zoë had joined last year. The election of committee members was approved (proposed by Dougal Chestnut and seconded by Peter Richards). Although no additional members opted to join the committee, Peter and Judy Richards and Jackie Threshie took up the offer to attend May's committee meeting to give them a feel for how we operate.
7. **Election of Officers:** Gill, Brian, Adrian and Paula had agreed to maintain their current roles of Chairman, Vice Chairman, Hon Treasurer and Hon Secretary respectively. The election of the officers was approved (proposed by Peter Richards and seconded by Franco Scimeca).
8. **Appointment of Auditors:** Paula reported that Peter Gay had agreed to act as Auditor for the following year.
9. **Annual Membership rates for 2027/28:** These will remain the same as the last 2 years with effect from 01 March 2027: Member £12, Joint Members £18, Business Member £30. Paula reported that some members were still paying at 2024's rates either because they had again forgotten the increase in membership fees or hadn't yet changed their standing order, even though the reminder had been in newsletters. Paula also reminded members that fees are due on 1st March annually (not April, May or even later)! Wrong and/or late payment of membership fees is an admin headache for Pat, so Paula asked that members check and/or update their

records ready for 1st March next year (or now if they've still not paid this year's membership fee).

10. Any Other Business

- **Vote of Thanks:** Judy Richards stated how much members appreciate the efforts of the committee.
- **High Street shops:** Judy also commented on improvements to some of the shops eg those near to Nostalgia.
- **Town Hall clock:** Richard Stubbs asked about repairs to the Town Hall and the clock in particular. Paula explained that the clock does work but it requires a volunteer to go up a ladder twice weekly to wind it and the area to stand on is no longer safe and the owner hadn't carried out any repairs. As members know, the Town Hall has recently been purchased by WDC as part of the Riverside Shopping Centre purchase so repairs could now be undertaken. The ETC Town Clerk had got a quote last year to replace the clock workings which was almost £10,000. This would be part of a wider set of works as the Town Hall is in a very poor state of repair eg leaking roof and it's a matter of priority and available funds. Paula reminded attendees that these repairs have to be paid for through our council tax. Some of the members attending the AGM stated that they would be willing to donate towards the clock's repair.
- **Abbey Road:** Jackie Threshie commented on the untidy state of the Abbey Road petrol station, former Vauxhall pub and former police station.
- **Round House:** Warren Percival asked about the future of the Round House once the NatWest bank leave on 25 August. Paula commented that she's not aware of any formal proposals, and noted that hopefully the new occupants would be appropriate for the building.

11. Talk by Lise Evans, Evesham Observer News Reporter and Sub-Editor

We welcomed Lise Evans to the meeting. By way of introduction Lise (pronounced Lisa) said that Gill Pawson was a "superstar collaborator" and her knowledge of Evesham is "exceptional". She also said that Cllr Craig Reeves and Mick Hurst (Battle of Evesham) were also excellent contributors to her work on the newspaper. Below are the key points from her enthusiastic and insightful talk:

- Lise champions and is inspired by place, people, community and history. In 2002, she was the chair of the Alcester market town partnership, Advantage Alcester, which gave her a huge insight into issues affecting town like Evesham. She lives in Alcester and loves Evesham. She was thrilled to be given the Love Evesham Community Journalism Award last year.
- Lise has a background in PR and communications. She became a journalist in 2022 (having turned down journalist jobs in her 20s and 40s), coming top in her course and winning a NCTJ journalism prize.
- She began working for the Evesham Observer, part of the privately-owned Bullivant Media Group, in May 2024 after a two-year stint with the Stratford Herald. Mrs Bullivant, aged 78, still comes into the office every day! VECS had invited Lise to our summer party in 2024 and from that point onwards, we've enjoyed a successful partnership.
- Lise loves the variety in her role, having to find and tell stories for the newspaper (weekly paper edition, online and on the Observer's Facebook page). She has to produce 7 pages of news each week (approximately 20 separate stories). She feels the weight of reporting tragic events and finds it an honour to report on wedding anniversaries and obituaries. She is yet to report on a 100th birthday in Evesham.
- She has taken particular interest in reporting on matters relating to Evesham town centre buildings such as the Almonry, town hall and round house as well as community events and festivals such as the Battle of Evesham events.

- Professional journalism adheres to the 16-point Editors' Code of Conduct with the top objective being accuracy. Like any responsible journalist Lise endeavours to be objective and fair.
- The newspaper industry has its challenges (social media and distrust of mainstream media by many people) so it's really important we all champion local news. The government has recently launched a "Local Media Strategy" as 37 local authorities don't have a local newspaper to scrutinise and hold politicians and decision-makers to account. Research has shown that where there is a local newspaper, the local democracy is better, voting at elections is higher.
- The Evesham Observer prints 1,500 free copies per week which are available in some supermarkets in Evesham plus Gummy Gumdrops on Bridge Street. It costs just £75+VAT for a ¼ page advert so it's worth considering as an option for advertising events.
- In the Q&A that followed Lise's talk, Zoë thanked Lise for creating a "proper newspaper". Gill writes a monthly column for the Observer (published the 2nd Friday of each month). Paula asked members to suggest items for these articles to Gill. Independent Cllr Craig Reeves also has a monthly column, and there's one on farming and growing, and local animal charities.

Paula Bowden, VECS Secretary