



Winter Bulletin January 2025

Programme

The programme for the year is now available as a printed card, which we hope will help you to keep track of when things are happening. If you haven't received yours by the time that you read this, please let us know.

As a reminder the meetings for the next 3 months are included below.

- February 11th 2025 – Talk by Nick Daffern, Associate Archaeologist of Dalcour Maclaren, consultants to infrastructure companies: Evesham's Roman Ford?
- March 11th 2025 – Talk by Georgia Smith, the Tewkesbury Town Centre Programme Manager for the Tewkesbury High Street Heritage Action Zone.
- April 8th 2025 – AGM and talk by Ashleigh Jayes who will be giving us an update of the progress of the restoration of the Almonry and the raising of the necessary funds.

Annual Subscription

Please remember to change your Direct Debit or Standing Order to our new annual rates of £12 for an individual member, £18 for a couple and £30 for a business. These rates will apply from 1st March, but please don't wait until then to make the changes. We will keep reminding you, but we do not want to have to contact members who have forgotten come March. Those who usually pay by cash or cheque, Pat will remind you.

Your Civic Society on Social media <https://www.facebook.com/EveshamCivic>

We continue to use our Facebook page to promote our programme of events and activities by us or others that are trying to improve our town eg new benches, Christmas shop windows or highlight where change is urgently needed eg Riverside Shopping Centre. Our following has increased: an additional 5 page likes and followers (now 96 and 111 respectively). Where appropriate we have also been sharing our posts with much bigger Facebook groups eg Evesham Noticeboard and Evesham Vale Local – for example (1) a post promoting the sale of our Almonry limited edition prints and how to order them has so far received 3,379 views and (2) a few non-members came to our January social at The Red Lion because they'd seen the event online.

The Almonry Restoration Project: fundraising

Our deputy Chairman, Brian Chilver has been very effective in persuading members, friends and members of his family to invest in one, or more, limited-edition prints of the Almonry. He has also persuaded others to make donations to the fundraising effort, if they do not wish to buy a print. So far, the total raised is nearly £2000, although half of this has been donated by a very generous member.

Pictures are still available to purchase and we will be promoting their sale at our various meetings and events throughout the year.

We will shortly be making available packs of sets notecards, with these Almonry pictures, together with other Almonry images. Their availability will be announced in the next month or two. These too are to be sold to raise money for the refurbishment of the museum.

Evesham Place Board <https://www.wychavon.gov.uk/business/evesham-place-board>

At the VECS social meeting on 14 January at The Red Lion in Market Square, Tom Tarver, Chief Executive of Johnsons Property Consultants and Chairman of the Evesham Place Board (EPB) joined about 25 members over a drink and a jacket potato to explain about the setting up of the Board, its achievements over the last 2 years and what work is continuing. Our Chair Gill Pawson represents VECS on the Evesham Place Board.



He praised the work of Phil Maclean, The Valley Centre Manager and his team, and Caroline Tredwell, WDC's Evesham Place Projects Officer, at short notice, to make and distribute 'Nutcracker' models to 20 outlets in town and The Valley over the Christmas period. The aim was to encourage visitors, especially families, to follow a trail to take them into shops that they might not otherwise go into, in the hope of boosting their Christmas trade. Was the hoped for 1 million views on Facebook achieved? An update will be provided in the next newsletter when the final figures are available.

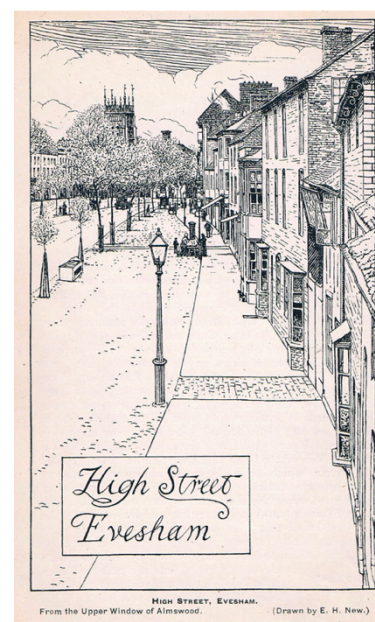
One of the main areas of EPB work is to make the High Street more people friendly. Projects include the following:

- Improving the public realm – cleaning and repairing the bus shelters; better information in the noticeboards; new benches; removing old posters/notices.
- Providing grants of not more than 50% towards the cost of changing or refurbishing business premises frontages.

In the next year or two the EPB will be looking at improving parking provision, improving signage and promoting active travel, especially provision for safe cycling.

One of the main areas of concern is the Riverside Shopping Centre and the Public Hall. However, until the current owner reaches a deal to sell the site, hopefully to Wychavon District Council, nothing can be done about what might replace it.

A 1902 image of Evesham High Street found recently on the internet neatly summarises the case for improvement.



High Street 1902

Planning update – National Changes: with thanks to Coventry Society.

As found on the Coventry Society's website.

Nobody could accuse the Government of not being busy this Christmas season! Since it took office in July, we have had a plethora of announcements about planning, housing and local government policy. And these are now being crystalized into a raft of White Papers, regulations and policy consultations. Between 5th and 19th December this year there were no less than fifteen policy announcements relating to planning and housing.

Driving all of these changes is the commitment to build 1.5 million homes by 2029. The government seems to believe that planning is the main constraint on development. But at least for the moment it has failed to address the main problem – getting builders to build houses. The housing market works to keep prices high by restricting the amount of house building! Housebuilders are known to postpone the development of schemes with planning permission or adopt slow build out rates to keep prices high. Added to this, where are the skilled craftsmen to build all these houses?

At the forefront of the Christmas policy changes is the National Planning Policy Framework, or NPPF as we have fondly come to know it. Revisions to this were put out to public consultation in the summer and there were over 11,000 responses. Presumably these were all supportive, as the document has come back with very few changes.

This revised framework replaces the previous National Planning Policy Framework published in March 2012, revised in July 2018, updated in February 2019, revised in July 2021, updated in September 2023 and revised in December 2023. So we can expect this new one to last at least a few months, or even a year.

The new NPPF reinstates mandatory housing targets for every local planning authority. This was originally introduced by the last government, but then abandoned. There is a new method for assessing housing need.

The NPPF also has a requirement to produce up to date "agile" local plans and has a sequential approach to the use of land for housing development: Brownfield first – grey belt – green belt. There are "golden rules" for development in green belt e.g. infrastructure and maximum of 50% affordable housing. It also gives higher priority for social rented homes.

As well as the NPPF itself there are new and revised planning practice guidelines (PPGs), that set out expectations about how local authorities will deal with planning matters.

The government has also published a discussion paper on modernising planning committees. The paper invites views on proposals to increase and standardise the delegation of decisions to officers and require compulsory training for planning committee members. The Society would certainly support this last proposal.

The last Christmas present to arrive was the complete restructuring of local government in England. The Devolution White Paper focusing on existing and future mayoral city regions / sub-regions. Smaller local authorities will be reorganized into unitary authorities with a population of 0.5+ million. It is to be hoped that the new super-councils will not find themselves in a financial emergency as Somerset was after its reorganisation. Mayors will have a central role in the creation of strategic development strategies, which will guide where new housing is to be built. They will also set the strategy for future Affordable Homes Programmes (AHPs). They will also direct Homes England activities.

Looking forwards to 2025, we can expect the update of the national design guide, a national design model code, the Planning & Infrastructure Bill, a Devolution Bill and a 10-year housing plan in March. So quite a year ahead!

South Worcestershire Development Plan Review

At last, there is a timetable for the completion of this stage of the Development Plan. Inquiry hearing Sessions will commence at 09.30am on Tuesday 4th March 2025 within the Worcester Guildhall, High Street, Worcester, WR1 2EY. The hearings are scheduled to take place over a four-week period with Weeks 1 - 3 held in the Guildhall and Week 4 within the Council Chamber of Wychavon District Council, Queen Elizabeth Drive, Pershore, WR10 1PT. The Inspectors have produced a draft Hearing Programme, Guidance Notes, and Matters, Issues and Questions. All of the relevant documents can be found at <https://www.localplanservices.co.uk/swdpreview>.

Since the delayed inquiry, due last autumn, the councils have been working on a range of issues, to bring them up to date, as requested by the Inspector. The Inspector's report is due in the summer, with a view to adopting the new document this year. However, under the new requirements to deliver increased numbers of houses, a review of the Plan will have to start straight away.

The Government's proposed method for calculating housing need would mean 2,152 homes a year will need to be built across Worcester City, Malvern Hills and Wychavon districts by 2041. But the current housing methodology, produced under the existing National Planning Policy Framework, plans for only 1,193 homes a year. For Wychavon, provision will need to be made for 959 houses per year, up from 436: more than double. VECS will be keeping a close eye on where the Council proposes to accommodate all of these properties.

In Defence of NIMBYs

A few weeks ago our Patron, Alistair McGowan (now a resident in Ludlow), had a letter published in The Times newspaper as follows:

Sir. The word 'nimby' is increasingly thrown around pejoratively (especially by our Prime Minister) and needs reassessing. Nimbys are not selfish, parochial, growth-blocking, middle-class reactionaries. They are standing up for the environment but also for common sense when they see that building endless sprays of extra houses on the edge of towns without building any other infrastructure leads to clogged roads, overburdened sewage and waste water systems (contributing to river pollution) and gives teachers and doctors an impossible number of people to deal with. As a result, towns and villages quickly lose their beating heart; housing developments are always just too far from a town centre for anyone to actually walk in to it and use what dwindling facilities and shops may be left there. Bus services barely exist. We have no Underground! These town centres are generally full of empty shops and offices that could and should be converted to housing, which would simultaneously revive many of those dead and dying centres. The new estates become nothing more than distant dormitories; car parks with houses on them. Those living in London who complain about 'nimbyism' should get out of the city and see the effect that the easy use of this dismissive, pinched word is having on people's lives in towns and villages around Britain.

Sentiments that I am sure we will all agree with and which need much wider and louder voices.