



Spring Bulletin March 2026

Programme

Our next meeting is the AGM, which is on 14th April. After the usual business, Lise Evans will be talking about her work with the Evesham Observer. The papers for the meeting will be distributed at the end of March.

All talks continue to be at 117 High Street, Evesham, starting at 7.30pm.

Annual membership fees

Membership renewal is due on 1 March each year. To help us to reduce our bank charges, which have now been introduced by Lloyds, please set up a Standing Order or pay by BACS. The fee for 2026-27 will remain at £12 for an individual and £18 for a couple. Business membership is £30.

Long-standing members – who are you?

Those of you who have been members of the Society for many years, please read on.

Do you think that you might be the longest-standing member? If so, please get in touch with us by emailing mrspaulabowden@outlook.com and let us know when you think that you joined. We do not have membership records further back than the last 7 years, due to the requirement of the Data Protection Act that requires us to delete any records that are no longer needed and are more than 7 years old. We would like to acknowledge the winner with our thanks and a small gift.

2026 VECS Merit Award and Letters of Commendation

A single Merit Award was awarded to Churchill Living in recognition of its re-development of the underused land on Swan Lane by building retirement homes reflecting the character of the Conservation Area. The handing over of the Award was celebrated with a reception laid on by the company in Charles Lodge. Residents, Civic Society committee members and staff from the company were treated to a glass of bubbles and cakes. In addition, seven VECS Letters of Commendation have been awarded to local businesses recognising their efforts in taking on empty properties, providing attractive shop fronts and playing a positive role within the Conservation Area. Those businesses were: Nostalgia, Reid's Boutique, Louise's Florist, Estetica, Osborne Opticians, Sour Power Bakery and Sany Seam and Stitch.

Your Civic Society on Social media <https://www.facebook.com/EveshamCivic> Since the last newsletter we have increased our Facebook followers from 191 to 256. This is primarily as a result of posting photos of the winners of this year's awards (see above) and asking their Facebook followers to follow us. We clearly struck a chord with Evesham residents with this year's chosen recipients. In addition, we posted items relating to the Almonry, Riverside Shopping Centre, etc.



VECS Business Members



The Almonry Museum refurbishment: fundraising

The Friends of the Almonry will be undertaking fundraising activities this year, which VECS will support. At the end of this month, on Thursday 26th there is an open meeting to find out about the work going on now at the Almonry and to discuss ideas for fundraising and events. Do come. It starts at 6pm in Wallace House.

February Members meeting

On 10th February members were entertained by Chris Wilkinson of the Worcester Civic Society who recounted the history of how they became the owner of the Worcester News Archive. As part of a relocation to smaller premises in 2019, the Worcester News team were about to throw away much of their archive, including old items from the Berrow's Worcester Journal when the Worcester Civic Society were tipped off. The Civic Society sprang into action and rescued as much as they could (approximately one third of the total). They are now the proud owners of more than one million negatives (dating from 1968), 1500 glass plates (dating 1936-1968), 450 CDs full of photos, and 250 bound Berrows journals (dating 1805-1990s).

Chris's talk was full of anecdotes and photographs including some of Evesham in 1936, the flooding on Waterside and Port Street in 1947, and some in the 70s and 80s showing Port Street, various societies eg bowling, and market gardening. There have been some benefactors who have paid the costs of storage, and this is currently the Bransford Trust. The Worcester Civic Society has an Archives Sub-Committee that meets every Monday at the Crowngate shopping centre where the archive is stored (in the basement). The Sub-Committee usually archive 5,000 black and white photos annually and document the contents in a spreadsheet. Many of the Worcester items are/will be available on the "Changing Face of Worcester" website <https://cfow.org.uk> and on Ancestry website. The archive is open to visitors if members wish to view it and the current archival work; a group visit can be arranged for members if so wished.

March Members meeting

Our March talk was by Jack Hegarty, Chairman of the Avon Navigation Trust (ANT). He has been Chairman for 10 years and has seen much progress even during that time. He joined despite not being a boating or waterman, having led the restoration of the Droitwich canal when he was at Wychavon District Council. He gave us a potted history of the Navigation, illustrated with a large number of old photographs of features from the whole 47-mile length of the waterway.

The river was navigable for hundreds of years and Evesham was an important 'port' along its length. But in the late 19th and early 20th century it silted up and became impassable. It was not until 1950 when Douglas Barwell started to clear the obstacles in the lower reach, most notably by diving into the river with gelignite to blow them up. The restoration of the upper reach was led by David Hutchings, starting in 1964. ANT was not established until 2010, when the Lower and Upper Navigation Trusts were amalgamated.

ANT is an independent body, which is small scale thus able to respond quickly to problems and opportunities. It has 9 paid staff and an annual budget of £1m but has 400 members and over 100 volunteers. Evesham is at the centre of the navigation. It now has a restored Lock Cottage, which has become the centre of activities for the ANT Squad, the youth wing. ANT is running education initiatives, as it is the young who will become the river users of the future. This summer the Information Centre, housed in an old barge, will be coming to stay for a period. Corsair will be

available for river trips, as a tourist attraction as well as a fun outing for locals. Also, Neptune will be moored alongside the Lock Cottage, which houses a Royal Yacht Association training base.

In addition to the problems of climate change causing more flooding, aging historic structures, poor water quality, Pennywort infestation and increased demand for residential moorings, ANT sees many opportunities by tapping into the enthusiasm of its youth and volunteers. Maybe not during Jack's Chairmanship, but perhaps for the next chairman, is the possibility of opening up the navigation as far as Warwick.

Evesham Place Board

Look out for new town maps, soon to be appearing in a number of noticeboards around town and on various tourist websites and publications. The fingerposts will also be refurbished and rationalised within the next few weeks, weather permitting. Other projects are progressing, as reported in the previous news bulletin.

Planning and Enforcement – VECS comments submitted by Gill on behalf of its members

So far this year we have only commented on three planning applications. We objected to the proposed signage on the highway elevation of the new Tesco Store on Elm Road. We supported the proposals for repair and improvement work on the Red Lion PH in Market Square and we supported the proposals for a replacement entrance area at Morrisons Supermarket.

Ian has recently brought to the attention of the Enforcement Team the unauthorised air conditioning units fitted on the outside of the ground floor of the Town Hall, a Listed Building.

A new mural



Do take a walk along the river and pass under Abbey Road Bridge. Quite a transformation. A project started by the Evesham Place Board but brought to fruition by WDC's Communities team.

We need to take steps to attract new businesses

WE START the year in campaigning mode.

If Evesham is to continue to attract new businesses to the town centre, which means empty shops filled and properties maintained, then we need to do more to improve our public realm.

A more attractive town centre will help encourage shoppers and visitors back into our historic market town which has seen a lot of new independent shops and cafes open in the last 12 months.

Yet as I start this month's column, the urgent need to find a solution to vehicles entering Bridge Street and Market Square in contravention of the traffic regulations applying to these two pedestrian priority areas is ongoing.

Worcestershire County Council decided not to fund the installation of new automatic rising bollards that are currently stored in their highways yard due to financial constraints.

We now learn, following the Observer report last week, that the combined intervention of our local district councillors means that the £23,000 funding shortfall



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has hopefully been secured.

All we need now is a commitment for the bollards to be maintained. Who is going to pay for this I ask?

Let's hope this is swiftly resolved as traffic using a pedestrian street is a public health issue and gives the image that we cannot look after our town.

Throughout the year we also need to achieve a much more co-ordinated approach to keeping our streets clean.

At the moment, we have three levels of local government working on different aspects, which includes a Wychavon District Council contract with FCC waste management for the daily cleaning of the town centre.

Evesham has an active anti-litter volunteer group who do sterling work but can only do so much.

We also have residents doing their bit, having signed up to Wychavon's 'adopt a street' initiative.

Evesham Place Board is buying a piece of cleaning kit with powerful suction to attack some of the 'grot spots' in the retail area of the town.

Members of the civic society regularly do their bit by removing out of date fly posters from windows and street furniture, but despite all this effort, many pathways and streets are missed.

At the end of the autumn, once all the leaves have fallen, the pavements become strewn with wet, slippery leaves, which combined with litter to leave an unattractive and often dangerous stretch to navigate.

Last year was worse than ever and in December, at the Vale of Evesham Civic Society's request, Wychavon District Council cleared Port Street pavements of its weeds.

It seems we cannot rely on the councils to sweep pavements clean throughout the town. So how should we tackle this problem?

This is an issue that needs to be not only on the agenda of civic society meetings, but at meetings of all three tiers of local government.



New Evesham women entrepreneurs - from left to right Renata Gala, Anna Wielgat, Lucy Król, Klaudia Zajackowska, Joanna Sergan, Natalia and Uia Kuc. Photo Phil Maclean



Bridge Street, Evesham. Picture by Claire Edward

Guide to a better Evesham

by Lise Evans
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A NEW guide has been produced to help Evesham businesses improve the look and feel of the town centre.

The document is designed to help business owners and managers make the best decisions when it comes to improving their street-facing properties, to enhance the visual appearance of the town.

Published by Evesham Place Board, the guide highlights the fact the whole of the town centre is designated a conservation area – meaning there are special policies in place to preserve its character and heritage.

It also emphasises that Evesham has more than 100 listed buildings,

denoting structures with special architectural or historical interest, and which have added legal protection.

The document attempts to address shops that currently contravene planning policy with gaudy window vinyls, insensitive signage and inappropriate advertising.

It covers all of the common regulations businesses need to work with when setting up or making changes to shopfronts, in a clear and easy-to-read format.

The guide is the brainchild of Wychavon councillor Craig Reeves, who co-opted former town planner Gill Pawson – from the Vale of Evesham Civic Society – to help produce the guide.

Coun Reeves told the Observer: "We know parts of our town centre no longer reflect the character set

out in our conservation policies and design guidance.

"We hear it in conversations on the street and read it in reviews, that the town felt like it had lost some of its identity and 'was not what it once was'.

"Shopping habits, however, have shifted online and town centres must evolve.

"For Evesham, that evolution should be rooted in what makes the place special.

"It's vital that existing businesses, property owners and future investors recognise the value of character, embracing our heritage and working in harmony with the unique architecture and history the town offers.

"The new business guide champions that heritage and character and is designed as a digestible, prac-

tical resource for businesses old and new. It is one piece of a much larger jigsaw – a step toward bolstering confidence in Evesham and supporting the long-term investment our town centre deserves."

Gill, who has offered to sit down with business owners who need help understanding listed building and conservation area rules, added: "It is clear from the number of properties in the town centre which do not comply with the various regulations relating to the running of a business, that this guide is long overdue."

Evesham Place Board will be making sure all 250 town centre businesses receive a guide.

In the meantime, see eveshamplaceboard.org.uk/projects/eveshamtowncentrebusinessguide, to download an online copy.

Positive approach needed to help our shopping streets

NO ONE can fail to notice the poor and declining state of our country's main shopping streets.

Evesham is no different. It is a combination of a significant number of empty units or occupied ones that may not generate enough income to allow owners to invest in essential repairs and maintenance.

Or is it that some owners have no intention of ever investing in building maintenance?

Unfortunately for Evesham, all its shopping streets are situated in the core of the town's conservation area. In other words, it is the buildings which are our most historic and architecturally interesting.

Much has been said nationally about this problem. Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, Steve Reed, is encouraging councils to use compulsory purchase powers to buy up empty shops and bring them into community ownership.

He highlighted the problem of property owned by overseas investors being twice as likely to be empty and run down. In Evesham, although I am unable to quantify the problem, it is well-known many of our poorly maintained and empty properties are owned by 'absentee landlords', who are not here to see the problems first hand.

Before the creation of the Evesham Place Board (EPB) four years ago, members of the Vale of Evesham Civic Society carried out a building condition survey and followed this up by writing to the owners/occupiers of those in the worst condition that were also Listed Buildings. We drew attention to the urgent need to do some-

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thing. Out of about 15 such letters, only two units received some attention - Boots and the then WHSmith. Many of the owners of the units had contact addresses many miles away.

EPB has devoted some of its limited funds to offering grants for building front improvements, but even with this incentive, it is hard work persuading owners to take it up.

I agree a more positive approach by Government is needed to address this nationwide problem, but putting the onus on local councils and the communities to take on unused buildings is in my opinion likely only to be a 'drop in the ocean'.

Town centres have an economic purpose, but these days also have a very important social purpose - by providing space and services for people to get together, both in the day and evening.

We need businesses to be given more help by Government.

While waiting for this help (which may never come) we need to do all that we can as residents to 'buy local' and as visitors to come and enjoy Evesham's our unique heritage whilst spending some money.

More free parking is needed - this plea has been ringing in my ears for years. Perhaps we can make this happen by lobbying our district councillors?



Old O2 shop in Bridge Street. Picture by Craig Reeves

High Street in April 2025 prior to the opening of Nostalgia Cafe (far left). Picture by Lise Evans

Permitting street art in approved areas could set graffiti vandals an example

GRAFFITI can be defined as an art form and illegal vandalism. Unfortunately, the graffiti that predominates in Evesham is perpetrated by vandals. It creates a negative, unsafe impression of an area.

Residents, business operators, workers and visitors must have noticed the graffiti tags that adorn walls, fences and telecoms and utility boxes.

This type of graffiti is a form of antisocial behaviour and is a scourge up and down the country, with local police seemingly unable (or not sufficiently resourced) to identify offenders and put a stop

to it. Alongside parents and carers, do local schools and colleges educate children sufficiently that this form of graffiti is wholly unacceptable?

Last year, Evesham Place Board commissioned a contractor to remove the graffiti in prominent locations in the town centre.

That has not been a deterrent to prevent further graffiti, which remains a problem in the town centre as well as in residential areas. It is a thankless, never-ending and expensive job to keep removing it.

There are, however, examples of wall painting as an art form in our town that have been com-

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missioned and authorised, but we appreciate that even this is not acceptable to everyone.

A few years ago, Evesham Abbey Trust commissioned the Garage Art Group to paint a mural on boards big enough to fully screen the side of a shipping container that was being used to store tools in what is now Abbey Gardens.

The mural depicts Evesham's

first abbot in a riverside setting. When the mural was no longer required, it was moved to a permanent location on a frame in Abbey Park, beside the children's play area.

The Wychavon Communities team worked with and paid for an artist to engage with the local community to produce a mural and graffiti wall in Charity Brook Park.

At about the same time, Evesham Place Board commissioned a mural to be placed on the shop front of the old Argos store, on High Street.

More recently, the youth groups Outside Youth Association and You Turn Centre have engaged

members in painting murals at the premises they use.

The latest initiative is a stunning three-part mural that has been painted on the wall and pillars on the park side, underneath Abbey Road Bridge.

Outside Youth has again been involved, discussing designs with artist Tech Moon, aka Krishna Malla, that Wychavon funded. If you are in town, it is well worth a look.

By engaging young people in positive, creative work, let us hope they will set a good example to peers and steer them away from destructive graffiti tagging, to participating in creative endeavours at approved locations.

Graffiti tags snapped by Evesham resident Peter Stewart around Davies Road in 2025. 4