

Early winter Bulletin
November 2026

Programme: Our next meeting is a social gathering at The Red Lion PH, Market Square, on Tuesday 8 December from 12.15. Mince pies will be provided and Tom Doggett of The Red Lion will bring us up to date with his relaunch of the market in Evesham and what brought him to become a publican of this historic pub. Next year's programme card will be available to collect on the day.

On **14th October** the Chairman of the Cheltenham Civic Society, Andrew Booton, gave an inspiring talk entitled **From Civil Niceties to Civic Influence: Becoming an effective civic society**.

In the times of George III Cheltenham was known for its spa and has been a centre for tourism and festivals ever since. It has 120,000 inhabitants and 5,000 businesses.
Andrew Booton first became a member of the civic society movement as a teenager living in Stourport-on-Severn. He is now their chairman as well as Chairman of Cheltenham Civic Society (CCS) since 2018. CCS has 400 members with a small, but very active, core committee with other sub-groups eg an active planning forum which enables them to work upstream in the planning process.
On taking up the CCS Chair role, he set out his two golden rules:

1. He wouldn't chair as a NIMBY civic society (Not In My Back Yard).
2. Civic Societies too often are tarred as NIMBY and reactive. Therefore, if CCS do object to any planning applications, they always have to put forward an alternative better proposal showing the "what could be", even if these aren't often taken forward.

He isn't shy of taking active action, publicly claiming that "Cheltenham is a dump". This got local and national media interest. He feels Cheltenham's public realm is in an appalling state primarily due to the poor relationship between Gloucestershire County Council and Cheltenham Borough Council. CCS produced its own "Town Centre Manifesto for 2024-2025", and has put forward a vision for the redevelopment of the former Cavendish House, which is owned by Canada Life.

Their PR/Comms committee member often deliberately takes a provocative line eg highlighting the "tarmac cowpats" all around town, issuing civic and "uncivic" awards with the latter challenging developers and planning officers. In 2025 they received 1,000 signatures on a petition to sort out the paving on The Promenade. They produce a quarterly newsletter "Our Town" primarily focussing on their initiatives and vision for Cheltenham.

EVESHAM signworks
EAGLE ONE
RST
Evesham Jewellers

VECS Business Members

What has Andrew learned over the last few years? Civic Societies thrive when they have a CAUSE; Civic Societies fail when they don't. They operate on three Cs: Campaigns (especially with catchy phrases); Comms; Courage (physical and moral).

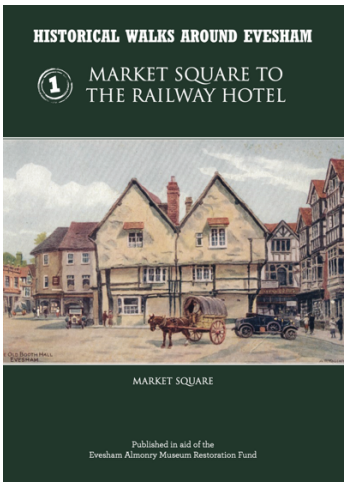
Unfortunately, the talk on **10th November** by Tom Ravenhall, had to be cancelled as he no longer works on the Almonry restoration and his replacement Project Manager was not available.

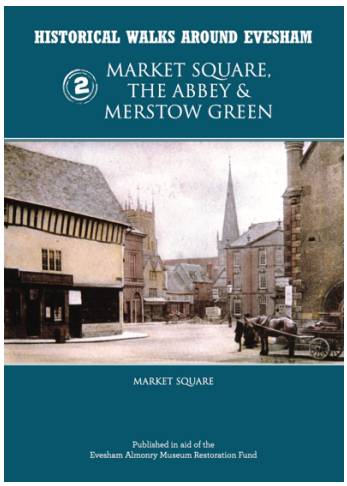
Your Civic Society on Social media https://www.facebook.com/EveshamCivic.
Since September we have increased our following from 450 to 526. This is primarily due to our posts about Adrian and Paula clearing out the rubbish from the former Tequila and Lime (247 likes and 22.9k views!). In addition, other posts included asking our followers if they wanted the Town Hall clock made operational again once critical building repairs are done (124 likes and 15.4k views); Gill and Zoë cleaning the Eof statue; the blue plaque unveiling on Prospect House; and Remembrance Sunday (95 likes and 4.9k views).

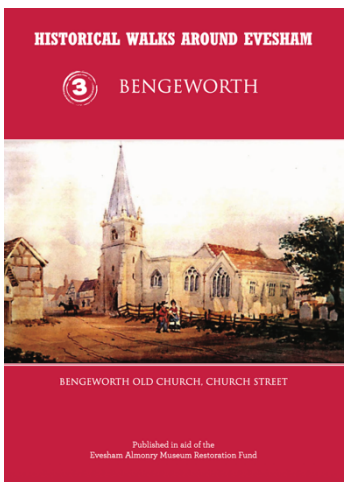
The Almonry Museum refurbishment: fundraising
The fundraising auction on 24 October raised an impressive £5200!! The success was due to an interesting and eclectic mix of over 50 lots, all donated, together with an excellent raffle. Lots for events and hospitality were popular, especially a day at Stratford Races, Richmond Village Wood Norton Spa morning, and meals at local hotels. Activities donated included a beekeeping experience, a day learning dry-stone walling, heritage plastering, a day blacksmithing and many others. Items included pictures, ornaments and baked goods.

The room at the Club was full on the night. Everyone enjoyed a ploughman's supper provided by the club's catering staff. The whole event was led by our excellent auctioneer, Steven Bruce, who had very kindly given his time and some lots for free. He was a very amusing and effective auctioneer, persuading people to part with more money than they probably initially expected to!

The Friends of the Almonry Museum will be working on the next event/activity to raise further funds, probably in early 2027. Meanwhile, VECS and VEHS have had printed a set of three booklets – Historical Walks around Evesham. These were written and compiled over the last two years, by two members of each Society; all of the old photographs are from the Historical Society's archive.







These are available from either Society and are also stocked in the Tourist Information Centre Shop, costing £3 each or £8 for the set. All proceeds will go to the Museum restoration fund, as the cost of printing has been fully paid for by the Societies, with financial support in the form of a grant from Evesham Town Council. Ideal as a Christmas or Birthday gift!

Evesham Place Board

The joint Place Project Officers, Caroline and Claire are still working on business front improvement scheme projects, the most significant at the moment being a grant towards the work on the front of Clarks shop at 7 Bridge Street. Other schemes under consideration are the restoration of The Red Lion PH; 35 High Street - Evesham Pharmacy; Bargain Valley, plus a mural on the gable above the Sue Ryder shop. The project officers are also working with Evesham Town Council and officers at Wychavon District Council to co-ordinate a suite of Christmas events, with the lights switch-on in Market Square on Friday 27 November. The team is also providing social media support to new businesses and community groups (including VECS).

Planning and Enforcement

Consultation has taken place recently on the proposals for a 500MW solar farm in the Arrow Valley. A small section of this scheme is located in South Littleton, otherwise the majority is in Warwickshire. Comments have been submitted to the developers on the area proposed in South Littleton. The final scheme will be submitted to the Planning Inspectorate for a decision; it is unlikely to be submitted until spring 2027.

The full vinyl wraps on the shop windows for Clarke Aquatics and Clarke Electrics at 57 Port Street (former Carrick Travel) have now been removed and work to make safe the frontage of 35 Port Street (next to The Regal) has been carried out although the District Council is in discussion with the owners (who also own the Regal Cinema adjacent) about some repairs and maintenance.

Riverside redevelopment: WDC announcement 15 October 2026

"We've appointed a contractor to carry out the demolition of the Riverside Shopping Centre as part of our plans to transform Evesham town centre. DSM Demolition Ltd, one of the UK's leading demolition specialists, has been appointed to dismantle the centre. The company has more than 35 years' experience and has worked on major projects including the former White Hart Lane stadium, Paradise Circus in Birmingham and the Royal Shakespeare Theatre in Stratford-upon-Avon. A detailed demolition plan will now be developed, with work expected to begin in spring 2027 once the remaining businesses and organisations have moved out. The demolition will be carried out in phases due to the complexity of the site and the need to protect neighbouring buildings, including Evesham Public Hall.

In other updates:

✅*There are currently no detailed plans or designs for what will replace Riverside. These are not expected until a development partner has been appointed and detailed design work begins.*

✅*We are working with our commercial partner Savills to develop a brief for a development partner, with the aim of making an appointment in spring/summer 2027.*

✅*Residents, businesses and stakeholders will have opportunities to help shape proposals before any plans are finalised.*

✅*Claims circulating online the site will be filled with high-rise flats or that all homes will be social housing are incorrect. No decisions have been made about the future mix of homes, retail or leisure uses.*

✅*Community workshops to help design artwork for the site hoardings will be be announced soon. Find out more and read the latest FAQs* 👇 ***https://bit.ly/4mEhT6v #Evesham #Riverside #TownCentreTransformation #Wychavon #Regeneration***"

The Round House: Report by Evesham Town Councillor Mark Goodge, on 13 October 2026

"One of the most important decisions we made at last night's town council meeting was to go ahead with an options appraisal for the Round House. As you already know, NatWest have closed their branch there and are looking to donate the building to an organisation which is able to preserve it for the future and make use of it. I know that many people would love it if we could bring the Round House into community ownership, along with other key town centre assets such as the Almonry, Town Hall, Bell Tower and Public Hall. It is, though, a massive project. NatWest have completed all the work required now to fix the roof and ensure that the structure is stable and in good condition. But owning a Grade I listed building will inevitably come with significant long term ongoing costs. So before the council can make any decisions, we need to be sure that all of the sums add up.

The questions we need to have answers to include

✳*What are the realistic options for future use of the building? Not just a wish list, but things which are demonstrably practical and implementable.*

✳*What are the expected future costs of ownership? This needs to include a "worst case" scenario of the building needing further major repairs.*

✳*How much lottery and grant funding can we realistically expect to get to help maintain the building, and over what kind of timescale?*

✳*Do the people of Evesham support the idea of the town council taking ownership of the building, and if so what kinds of future use would be preferred?*

We are fortunate to have a partner in the work. West Midlands Heritage Trust is an organisation which specialises in bringing historic buildings into use for the benefit of the public, as well as managing the grant application process necessary to tap into lottery and heritage funding.

Over the next four or five months, WMHT will be working on an options appraisal for the town council. This will include a public consultation event at which you will be able to give your own feedback on your preferences for the future of the building - including whether you think the town council should take it on.

Once we've got all that information, we will then be in a position to make a realistic and informed decision on whether to go ahead with the acquisition.

It's important to emphasise that getting an options appraisal doesn't commit us to taking ownership. If the appraisal comes back with a negative report, we can simply walk away. But it's an essential first step.

I'll try and keep you updated with the project over the weeks to come, especially when we get to the public consultation stage. And then we should be in a position to make a final decision some time in spring next year.

In the meantime, WMHT will also be discussing potential interim options with NatWest. It would be really nice if we could arrange some public open days, ideally alongside or before the consultation stage, so that people have the opportunity to see the interior for themselves. That's up to NatWest, so I can't guarantee that will happen. But it is something we're keen to do.

Also, I particularly want to thank my colleague Cllr Charlie Homer, the local Wychavon ward member, for all the work he's done behind the scenes while this was still in the confidential stage. He's spent a lot of time talking to NatWest, WMHT and other parties about the future of the building and without his input we wouldn't have reached this point. And I know that some people

have thought the council wasn't doing anything, because of the time it's taken to get here. But there has been a huge amount of work done in the background, and now we're in a position to move forward in public.

VECS Listed Buildings booklets

Some sets are still available, priced at only £15 for a set, to cover Gill's costs. If you would like a set, please let us know.

New Blue Plaque: Prospect House, Elm Road

On 1 October we put up a Blue Plaque on the boundary wall of Prospect House, to commemorate three well-known, one-time residents of the house.
The plaque reads as follows:



Vale of Evesham Civic Society
Muzio Clementi 1752 (Rome) – 1832 (Evesham)
Composer and father of the pianoforte
George Day 1764 – 1830
"Merchant of Evesham", landowner, builder
Mayor 1803, 1815, 1826.
John Gibbs 1805 – 1881
Lighting the town with gas
All lived at some time at Prospect House.

The plaque has been sponsored by Alistair McGowan, President of the Vale of Evesham Civic Society, who has a special interest in Muzio Clementi and his piano music; by Jill Phipps and her family, who spent their childhood at the house; by Will and Julia Scott who also have an interest in Muzio Clementi; by VECS and most importantly by the current owner of the house, Derek Baptiste.



Evesham's new pedestrian/cycle bridge

The bridge construction is progressing well, but is not due to open until summer next year.

VECS out and about



We were represented at the Remembrance Day service by John Goodwin, who laid our wreath.



Paula volunteered with traffic management duties and to help visitors at the event.

Paula, Zoë, Jackie and new VECS members Dave and Lesley helped to clear up litter on the morning after the Evesham bonfire and fireworks on Corporation Meadow.

Zoë cleaned the information board in the churchyard, explaining about St Lawrence's Church.

Colin Everall, who joined the committee a couple of months ago, is undertaking a single-handed campaign of removing graffiti around the town. The materials needed are being funded by Evesham Town Council. What a difference he is making! Where we find offensive graffiti on council property it is been reported for action. Recently, WDC has painted over graffiti on many of the stanchions under the Abbey Road bridge and Paula and Colin have successfully met with WDC's Head of Client Services resulting in the removal of graffiti on the Viaduct Meadow toilets.

Gill and Paula represented VECS at the Love Evesham and Pershore Awards event at the Vale Golf Club, as VECS was a finalist in the 'eco heroes' category. Anti-litter Evesham were worthy winners in this category noting that quite a few of our members are also part of the Anti-Litter Evesham group. There were many other community and business winners on the night, as you will probably be able to read about in the local press and social media

Evesham Town Plan and Town Council activities

In a bid to help Port Street cope with the retail pressures of the 21st century, the Town Council has agreed to prepare a Neighbourhood Plan. This will establish some policies and include some proposals for change in the area, which once agreed should carry some weight in the planning decision-making process. Gill is actively assisting the council staff, with other volunteer stakeholders, to progress the necessary work.

Gill, Zoë and Jackie have started to record details of all of the use and condition of the buildings within the designated area, as shown on the following plan. We need more help. If you are prepared to join in, please contact Gill, who will provide guidance and company in this task; vecs1972@gmail.com. Gill is also able to provide more information on this work for anyone interested.

Paula and Gill met with the Town Clerk recently to discuss a wide range of issues of mutual interest, including the future of the Round House, progress on the Almonry restoration, bus shelters, noticeboards, repairs to the Town Hall, Neighbourhood Plan for Port Street and the restoration of the K6 telephone box in Market Square.

Evesham Observer articles: October 2026

Backward steps must not be allowed to spoil the progress



Civic Matters

Gill Pawson, chair of Vale of Evesham Civic Society, writes for The Observer



Aerial view of Evesham overlooking the River Avon towards Bengeworth. Picture by Craig Reeves

VERY SADLY, in the last few days, we have had a new spate of vandalism.

Damage to award-winning, public toilets on Oat Street, the upending of two of the large planters on Bridge Street and the forced opening of the large noticeboard near Workman Bridge, removing our new town map. It is therefore reassuring to read on the Observer online that arrests have been made by Evesham Police.

I am hoping this is a case of one step back as we make two steps forward.

On a positive note, the long-promised work to replace the automatic rising bollards at the bottom of Bridge Street and vehicle entrance to Market Square has now started. This is an issue VECS has campaigned for over many years so we are delighted to see this matter looks soon to be resolved.

We welcome the announcement of resumption of Evesham's Charter Market which closed temporarily in June.

The new operator Tom Doggett, also landlord of The Red Lion public house, has committed to a whole new approach to the twice-weekly event. Starting on November 28 with a Christmas market, it will focus on quality fresh produce and there are plans to introduce live music and give each month a special theme.

It will be wonderful to see Market Square being used for its original purpose once more as well as the events continuing on High Street as per usual.

We will be getting a 'Love is in the Air' in February, 'All things asparagus' in April and 'Schools out for summer' in July, among other topics. If this initiative does not bring new life and trade into the town, I do not know what will. Please support it.

On another positive note, after much deliberation Evesham Town Council has committed to starting a Neighbourhood Plan for the Port Street area of Bengeworth.

Neighbourhood planning gives communities the opportunity to develop a shared vision for their neighbourhood and shape the development and growth of their local area. Background work is under way with support from Wychavon District Council.

The Vale of Evesham Civic Society is happy to support this activity and, during the next few weeks, eagle-eyed readers should see members out in the area, with high-visibility tabards and clipboards, surveying the general condition and use of each building.

This will enable us to build a picture of the current retail activity in the area, with a view to making recommendations to the local community for changes of use. Under planning policy for Port Street, there is an expectation it will be retained for shopping use.

Owners and their agents, however, are looking to convert some empty shops into housing, which should mean there is a reason to invest in building repairs and maintenance, sadly lacking in recent years.

Will the local community and the resulting Neighbourhood Plan support this?

Last week, Wychavon District Councillor Craig Reeves commented on the government's pausing of local government re-organisation. I hope this will mean in Evesham we can continue to benefit from both the authority's financial and officer support for the many and various projects that are starting or under way.

Evesham Town Council will seek a grant towards the cost of the Neighbourhood Plan work, so fingers crossed this will be offered before Wychavon's significant reserves get subsumed by any future larger unitary authority.

Civic Voice and West Midlands Amenity Societies Association

The latest newsletter of WMASA is now available and will be uploaded to our website for you to download if you wish to read it.

The AGM of Civic Voice was held on 21 November. The outcome will be reported in the next newsletter.