

Worcester Civic Society: Planning Panel Report to the AGM November 2024

During the last year the Panel has continued its consideration of, and comment on, key strategic policy documents and schemes affecting the development of the city in the future. It has also considered individual major developments and smaller developments affecting listed buildings and conservation areas in the city through its engagement with the Conservation Advisory Panel (CAP).

Planning policy/strategies & major schemes

- **Historic City Conservation Area (appraisal document)** – this year we have been coordinating a key project to begin development of appraisal documents for the Historic City Conservation Area. Launched at a member event in May, 14 volunteers undertook assessments during July, August and September for two initial parts of the historic city – Angel Place and The Butts/The Arches utilising ideas from the Oxford Character Assessment Method. Thanks to Adrian Gurney for coordinating this work and to Carl Jukes for offering his expertise in leading the walks. The aim is to produce a report with map and photos summarising findings and including recommendations. We will also be looking to add some buildings to the City’s Local List of historically important buildings. Key suggestions will be, Joseph Wood Building, Fruit and Veg Market, Clarkes Brewery Building.
- **Arches** – We have been liaising with city offices regarding further plans following demolition of the former chicken shop. City have confirmed some further works – paving, making exposed wall good and repairs to exposed arch with historic features to bring into use (old parcels office). Also, some signage/wayfinding. Link should be open before Christmas. No capacity/appetite from the City at present to develop design guidance for the Arches – therefore noted that what we put in our appraisal document may provide important guidance for future development.
- **Scala/Corn Exchange:** the funding available was revised and a ‘scaled down’ scheme approved in April 2024 – some concerns expressed about this revised scheme; viability of some of the spaces, less use of Corn Exchange building, lack of link between the buildings, internal treatment to Scala, roof treatments, ventilation ducting, external ramp to Scala). Further funding for more extensive use of the Corn Exchange and link to Scala came forward later this year which was welcomed. Further public realm works to be undertaken, specifically to Angel Place - including space for market, seating and an outdoor performance space.
- **SWDP Review:** - work by the planning authorities has been ongoing throughout 2024 to refresh the evidence base in several areas, particularly retail patterns, employment and informal recreation policy at request of the review inspector. There is also further transport modelling being undertaken, and the sustainability appraisal is being updated. The three planning authorities continue to work together through the joint advisory panel with all required documents due to be completed by end of 2024. All inspection materials updates are detailed on the examination website: <https://www.localplanservices.co.uk/swdpreview>.
- **Shrub Hill SPD.** Contributed feedback on the draft Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) in March 2024. Restated a number of points made in 2023 workshops about building heights, design guidelines, respect of the area’s historic fabric and character, issues of mix and location of proposed uses (e.g. need for offices and loss of small industrial units) and issues of transport, connectivity and parking. There were some welcome recommendations in the document about further listing of buildings and suggestion of seeking to designate the area as a conservation area, although we felt more survey work relating to historic fabric and character and assessment of important views needed to be undertaken (need to acknowledge important views into the historic city and to the cathedral from the area). Feeling that there needed to be better design guidance for new buildings offered. The SPD was adopted by the city in the summer of 2024.
- **Shopfront Design Guidance** – we sent some draft ideas to the City for guidance back in 2023. Work on producing a document for consultation has been delayed due to SWDPR work. However, in

November a planning policy officer will be focussing on this with a view to have a working draft policy out soon for internal and then external consultation.

- **Draft Streetscape Design Guide** – Finally, Worcester County Council have requested public engagement feedback on the Streetscape Design Guide (SDG) that was last updated in 2018. We would appreciate member comments on this guide so that the Planning Panel lead can coordinate our feedback and submit a response on behalf of the Worcester Civic Society. Please send your comments to: worcestercivicsociety@gmail.com You can also complete the survey at: <https://www.worcestershire.gov.uk/council-services/travel-and-highways/highways-licences/streetscape-design-guide-and-specification/designing-worcestershires-streets-and-highways> closing date is 27th January 2025.

Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas

During 2023-24, CAP commented on a range of applications, from a few major schemes to applications for new signage and shopfronts. There continues to be a relatively small volume of major schemes coming through, and consequently a number of meetings were cancelled. The lack of meetings is a concern in terms of monitoring change, although we have fed back in writing on a number of proposals on behalf of the Society. We have been vigilant in commentating on shopfront proposals to ensure good design and raising concerns about roller shutter applications and also unauthorized works to listed buildings – the City has undertaken site visits and enforcement action as a result of concerns we have raised.

Some of the key applications commented on have been:

- **Lowesmoor Wharf** – we received notification from Paul Round from the City Council in February that application had been formally withdrawn. A great victory from all those, including the Society, who campaigned vigorously against this awful proposal which would have done great damage to the city.
- **Isaac Maddox House** – refurbishment application (welcomed as a good refurbishment scheme with excellent heritage statement and plans).
- **Porcelain Works** – Berkeley Homes site offices application for demolition and new dwelling, objected as had not considered heritage value of building fronting Mill Street and new scheme overbearing – application was subsequently withdrawn. Gilding House, refurbishment of second part of this building for housing, reasonable conversion sympathetic to building but disappointing no reference to former use in proposal. Fate of the Bone Mill still uncertain.
- **7 Newport Street** – new build revised application. Noted still too dominant and window treatment did not resolve overlooking issues. A pity that a modest but sound older building was being demolished. Panel feel that there is a need for some policy/guidance on retention and embodied carbon.
- **2 The Cross** – change of use to upper floors (Skipton Building Society) – largely sympathetic to GII* building but raised concerns regarding internal alterations and key features such as the stairs – Historic England also raised objections here and plans were amended.
- **Saracen's Head, Tything** – fed back on plans for internal alterations, signage and small extension into walkway to side of building. Initial concerns about lack of detail in plans and works commencing before approval. Secured more detailed plans and site visits to monitor change.

Dr Heather Barrett

Planning Panel Chair, on behalf of the Panel

November 2024.