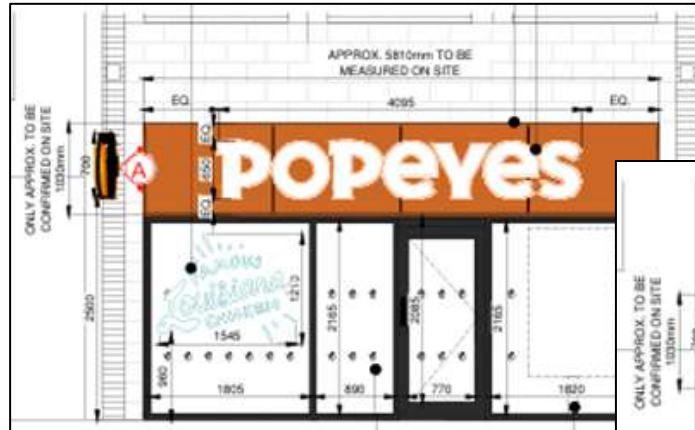




NEWSLETTER

Spring 2026
Issue no. 107

A New Shopfront Design Guide for Worcester



Securing Proportional Signage; revised plans for smaller fascia and projecting sign at Popeyes, Cathedral Square



Worcester Civic Society has been at the heart of the development of a new Shopfront Design Guide for Worcester. This Guide will help to ensure that as our High Street evolves, it will do so in a way that remains rooted in our local character. Read more about this Guide on pages 2 to 3.

Content

Spotlight – A New Shopfront Guide for Worcester

Planning Watch

Heritage at Risk - Powick Old Bridge update

The Worcester Sturgeons

Events

Worcester Civic Society-
Vacancies & Contacts

Spotlight: A New Shopfront Design Guide for Worcester

A New Shopfront Design Guide

Oversized plastic fascias and uninspiring frontages are creeping into our streetscape. Worcester's commercial centre is a vital part of the city's story, and high-quality design is essential if we're to protect the character that makes it unique.

Why It Was Necessary

Worcester Civic Society felt a formal Shopfront Design Guide was essential for several reasons. Primarily, well-designed shopfronts are a cornerstone of economic vitality. As online shopping continues to compete with physical retail, creating an attractive, welcoming environment is more important than ever to encourage visitors to return to our streets.



Devaluation in action – examples of poor existing shopfronts in Worcester

At the same time, too many modern shopfronts have become "bland" or "cluttered," often omitting traditional features like pilasters, consoles, and cornices that help apportion elevations correctly.

Without clear guidance, the city risked further loss of historic fabric and the continued installation of garish, poorly proportioned signage that devalues our city. This guide aims to reverse that trend by setting out clear expectations that support good design, celebrate Worcester's heritage, and help businesses contribute positively to the cityscape.



Worcester Civic Society Striving for Progress

The Civic Society's Planning Panel has been at the heart of this initiative from the start. We produced an initial draft version of the guide for Worcester City Council as early as June 2023. This provided the foundational support and early engagement necessary to get the project off the ground.

Worcester City Council's Place and Economic Development Committee then formally picked up this work in November 2025, approving a draft for a four-week statutory public consultation. Following this period, which drew responses from 85 consultees, a revised version was presented for adoption in January 2026.

Now adopted, this Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) becomes a material consideration in determining planning applications, giving decision-makers the tools to resist inappropriate developments.

Turning Feedback into Policy

We were pleased that the Worcester City Council dealt constructively with the specific comments raised by the Civic Society during the consultation in December 2025. Several of our key recommendations have now been integrated into the final document:

- **Metric for Window Vinyls:** The Council adopted our suggestion to establish a clear threshold, specifying that advertisements and posters should not obscure more than 20% of the overall shop window to maintain visibility and "active frontage".
- **LED Dot Matrix Fascias:** Following our concerns about digital proliferation, the SPD now explicitly states that LED dot matrix displays are unacceptable and should be resisted.
- **Railway Arches:** We successfully campaigned for a new dedicated subsection (4.1.5) to protect the character of the city's Victorian railway arches, ensuring new frontages are recessed and lightweight.



A current proliferation of LED dot matrix moving image signage fascias in Birmingham

Spotlight: A New Shopfront Design Guide for Worcester cont/...

Turning Feedback into Policy cont/...

- **Signage Proportions:** The guide now includes specific metrics we advocated for, such as the principle that lettering height should generally be $\frac{3}{8}$ the depth of the fascia and individual letters should not exceed 300mm.

The adoption of this guide is a significant win for Worcester Civic Society and the city of Worcester. It strikes a balance between conservation and creativity, ensuring that as our high street evolves, it does so in a way that remains rooted in our local character.

Real-World Impact: The Guide in Action

Even prior to its final formal adoption, the Shopfront Design Guide was being given

consideration in the determination of planning applications. Recent delegated reports from the Council's planning services demonstrate how these new standards are already being applied:

- **Securing Proportional Signage:** In the case of 7-8 High Street (Popeyes), the draft guide was instrumental in resisting oversized branding. Officers identified that the original scale of the fascia lettering was "excessive". By citing the emerging guidance, the Council successfully negotiated revised plans that reduced the lettering height to 450mm, ensuring it aligned more closely with the established character of neighbouring units.



Revised plans for smaller fascia and projecting sign at Popeyes (Cathedral Square)

- **Enforcing Traditional Materials:** The application for 45 The Tything (The Wilde Poet) highlights the shift away from modern plastics. The Civic Society and Heritage Officers raised concerns over a proposed acrylic hanging sign that was too large for the listed building. Consequently, the applicant was required to reduce the sign's dimensions to 400mm x 600mm and change the material to painted timber to be consistent with policy.

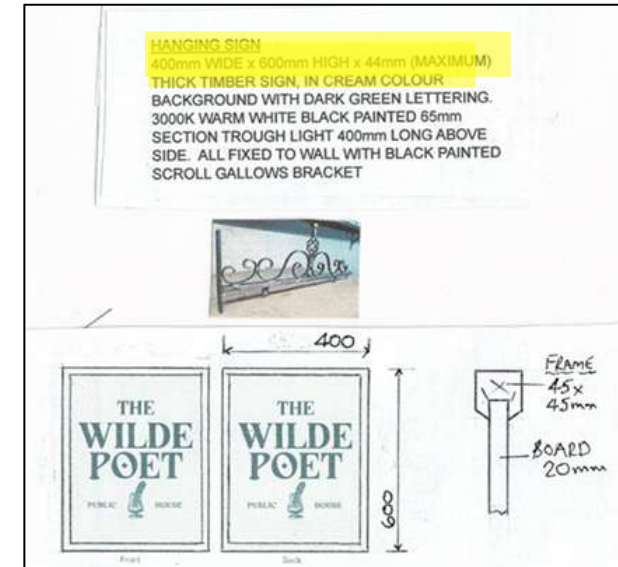


Revised plans for reduced size and more traditional materials

Worcester Civic Society's Planning Panel, led by Chris Evans (Chair), examines and comments on key strategic documents affecting Worcester's and its historic assets. It also examines individual major developments and minor developments affecting listed buildings and conservation areas in the city through its engagement with the Conservation Advisory Panel (CAP).

These examples demonstrate that this new Shopfront Design Guide is an active tool that gives our planners the leverage to protect Worcester's historic fabric and ensure that new commercial developments contribute to a high-quality, attractive city centre.

Article by Chris Evans, MRTPI, Worcester Civic Society



Planning Watch: “More Homes Please”

The Planning Panel have served up a classic two-course special: “More homes, please”—with a side order of “and can we do it properly?” The Panel has responded to two recent applications, broadly welcoming the direction of travel while nudging the fine print into better shape.

First, 8 Angel Street—a site with a colourful past (from theatre days to retail and beyond) now pitched for a fresh start. The proposal would replace the above-ground structure with four new residential floors over a ground-floor café, delivering 30 apartments. It’s the kind of town-centre reuse many people want to see: activity at street level, homes above, and a chance to tidy up an awkward bit of the cityscape.

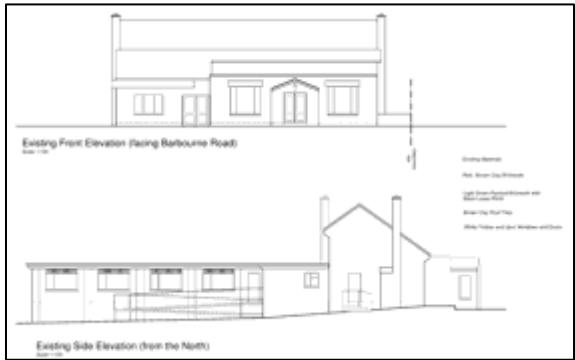
The Panel’s comments in short: good idea – now make it a great building. In

particular, it asks for clearer confidence on materials and architectural detail, and for careful handling of how the new block sits near the Grade I Berkeley’s Hospital chapel, so that its setting remains legible and respected. In heritage terms, it’s a request for a little more breathing space and a little more craft.

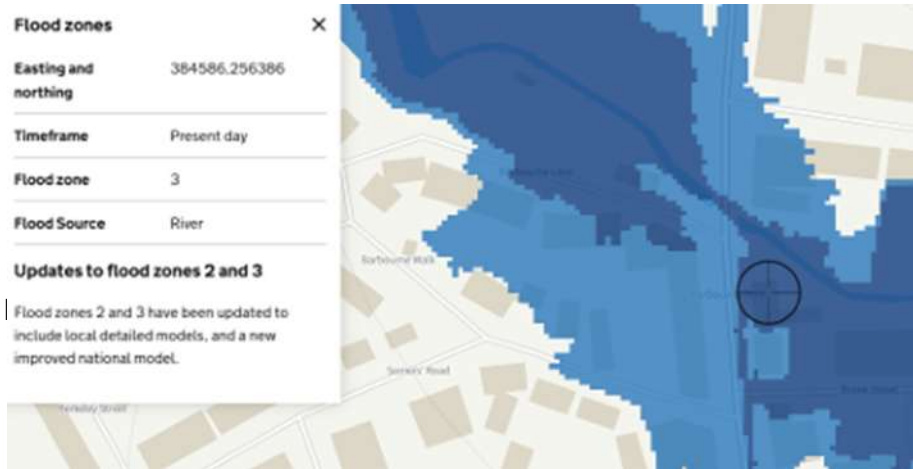
Then we stroll to The Swan Inn, 78 Barbourne Road, where plan here is to demolish part of the existing building and add a three-storey block of 25 serviced apartments, including 11 accessible units at ground level - an inclusivity win that deserves applause. Sounds tidy - until you notice it sits in Flood Zone 3, the sort of place where, if you’re not careful, the whole proposal can end up [Cue it, Ed] *rolling on the river*.

And that’s by present day standards, not modelled flood risk up to 2070. Anyone who used to play skittles there will tell you the alley used to smell damp. The Panel’s response focuses on need for the applicant to supply the standard planning “homework”.

no serious attempt to prove this couldn’t go somewhere less splash-prone), and no flood risk assessment to show it stays safe over its lifetime as climate risks rise. The application has since been withdrawn.



Existing vs proposed (Source: Darren Hall Architects)



Environment Agency’s Flood Maps for Planning, with the site depicted by the black circle



Artist impression of the proposed redevelopment (Source: Nick Carroll)(Left), An AI articulation of the same viewpoint aligning with the Panels ideas for the street scene (Source: Google)(Right)



Planning Watch – Spatial Development Strategies

Spatial Development Strategies a 'coming

The Planning and Infrastructure Act 2025, introduces the concept of “*Spatial Development Strategies (SDSs)*” - new plans which “*must include a statement of the strategic planning authority’s policies (however expressed), in relation to the development and use of land in the strategy area, which are of strategic importance to that area*”.

Draft National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)

The draft NPPF puts meat on those legislative bones on, for instance, what goes into SDSs, how they get examined, and how they fit into the wider system. Now we know that SDSs are a 20+ year vision for a “*sustainable pattern of growth*”. They set “*objectively assessed needs*” for things including housing for that period. They identify broad locations for new settlements and major urban extensions.

Spatial Development Strategies give spatial expression to Local Growth Plans and the National Industrial Strategy. They identify the general extent of Green Belt boundaries, and broad locations for

changes to those boundaries. Spatial Development Strategies also set out the strategic infrastructure needs to support all of this growth. They communicate all of that using maps and pictures.

There is a huge amount to unpack in all of this, including a new “soundness” test for examining SDSs (PM14).

Strategy Geographies

And what, you ask, are these “*strategy geographies*” meant to be? Step forward the Ministry of Housing Communities & Local Government (MHCLG), which in February published a colourful map showing four possible groupings for the new geography.

Some look practically pre-ordained — Surrey and the devolved mayoral areas — while others feel more like “*aspirational shapes*” drawn with a hopeful ruler.

Our beloved Worcestershire lands firmly in the latter category (shock!). Note the boundary line too: there it is, the ghost of a “One Worcestershire” unitary, hovering politely in the background.

Worcestershire North & South

To be fair, this is a consultation, and MHCLG says it’s keen to hear proposals for the “appropriate” boundary — which is government-speak for “*tell us what you want and we’ll decide later.*”

So, if we can, together, persuade them that Worcestershire’s remaining geography should follow the two sensible north–south options the Society supported, we might yet avoid plan-making in South Worcestershire turning into a full-contact sport.

But for now, what you need to know is that they’re coming, and this NPPF tells us how. If the Government sticks around long enough to see this change through, SDSs could be the most powerful driver for strategic growth in the planning system in the last quarter of a century. Big stuff!

Planning Watch articles by Chris Evans, MRTPI, Worcester Civic Society



Heritage at Risk: Powick Old Bridge Update

Since our last update in the Winter 2025/26, Worcester Civic Society is continuing to campaign to save Powick Old Bridge.

Flood Debris Mitigation Measures

Following our initial requests for support from Worcester MP Tom Collins to help safeguard Powick Old Bridge, Tom brought together key organisations on the 5th February to discuss long-term solutions to protect the from debris damage during future flood events.



Flood debris build-up 31/12/2025

The following organisations attended this meeting on the 5th February:

- Worcester Civic Society
- The Environment Agency
- Worcester Civic Society
- Bransford Trust & Bennetts Farm
- Battle of Worcester Society / Battlefields Trust

Representatives from Worcestershire County Council were invited to this meeting but did not attend.

The group discussed the importance of putting in place flood debris mitigation measures to avoid more damage to the bridge now and in the future. This included consideration of the use of 'tree catchers' upstream to intercept large debris before it reaches the bridge (as referenced in the Winter edition of this newsletter).

Three potential upstream locations were identified and discussed at the meeting. As the River Teme is a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), debris mitigation measures will need to be discussed with Natural England. Tom Collins MP will be arranging a follow-up meeting to include Natural England and hopefully representatives from Worcestershire County Council will also attend.

Media Coverage of Debris Build-up

Following the significant build-up of debris at the bridge from 21 December, public concern grew rapidly. Updates shared by Worcester Civic Society on its Friends of Powick Old Bridge Facebook campaign page attracted strong media interest, resulting in the following recent coverage:

- 23 January – ITV Central News
- 27 January – BBC Midlands Today
- 6 February – BBC Hereford & Worcester Tammy Gooding, morning show interview

This media coverage has helped raise awareness of the ongoing risks to the bridge; the need for flood debris mitigation measures and for coordinated action.

Update by Liz Demaison, Vice Chair



On-going flood debris build-up 30/1/2026



Liz Demaison, Vice Chair & Bruce Dee, Membership Secretary, Worcester Civic Society - BBC local news website, 27/1/2026

The Worcester Sturgeons

In October 1835, Charles Hastings stood before the Worcestershire Natural History Society with quite a tale: a colossal sturgeon — 250 to 300 pounds and 8ft 4' — had been hauled from the River Severn that summer.

Today, that great fish presides in Worcester City Museum and Art Gallery, often spoken of as if it were the Severn's final sturgeon. But the river had one more surprise in store.



8ft sturgeon caught in Tewksbury, 10/6/1843
Source: Worcester Evening News (Newsquest)

Watergate Sturgeon Carving

On 10 June 1843, The Monmouthshire Beacon reported that two Worcester fishermen had netted a young river sturgeon near Diglis Lock. At 4.5ft long and weighing 72 lbs, it was hardly small — but compared with the 1835 giant, it was a juvenile.

The men tied their catch to the side of their boat and towed it upriver to College Ferry, where entrepreneurial instinct took over. They carved the fish's outline into the Watergate wall and charged curious onlookers a penny to view it. The newspaper didn't name them, but the Jenkins family — long-established fishermen of Frog Lane (now Severn Street) — fit the bill perfectly.

The carving is still there, low on the south wall of the Watergate. Weather and river spray have softened its edges, but the shape remains unmistakable — and its length matches the 1843 sturgeon exactly. The cathedral's 2026 repair programme now includes plans to conserve this quietly remarkable survivor.

Later tales of sturgeon caught in Worcester — in 1848, 1869 and 1877 — appear in the local press, these may be urban myths as after the Severn Improvement Works at Diglis were completed in 1845, increased river traffic and pollution, along with the new locks and weirs, would have interfered with the sturgeons' traditional migration routes. A post-1845 sturgeon in Worcester would have been a rare visitor indeed.

Which brings us back to the Watergate. Strip away the myths, and one story stands firm: the 1843 sturgeon described in the Monmouthshire Beacon and Gloucester Journal is the very same fish whose outline is carved into the stone.

The dimensions match, the location matches, and the timing is perfect. It is a small but vivid moment in Worcester's river history — preserved, quite literally, in stone.

Article by Carolyn Clarke, Worcester Civic Society Member

Newspaper References

- 10/6/1843 *The Monmouthshire Beacon*
- *Gloucester Journal* 10/6/1843 page 3 cites the 'Watergate Sturgeon' and a further much bigger one caught at Newham-on-Severn, Glos.
- *Post 'Locking the Severn' Worcester Journal* 20th July 1848, page 4: Cites a sturgeon with an injury caught at Newnam, about 40 miles from Diglis. The article suggests it may be the same sturgeon reportedly wounded a year earlier in the Severn near Diglis, based on the similarity of the injuries.
- *Worcestershire Chronicle* 14 April 1869 page 2. (naming George Jenkins (d. 1853) as the man who caught a sturgeon at Worcester
- *Birmingham Daily Post* 12 March 1877 page 6

CAPTURE OF STURGEONS IN THE SEVERN.—On Wednesday se'nnight, a sturgeon, 4½ feet long and weighing 72 lbs. was caught close to Diglis lock, Worcester; and on the same day, a much larger sturgeon, measuring 8 feet long by 2 feet 10 inches in girth, and weighing 144 lbs. was caught near Tewkesbury.

Source: *The Gloucester Journal* 10/6/1843

Programme of Events – Spring & Early Summer 2026

Date & Time	Event (please see our website for more detail & updates with more events to follow – www.worcestercivicsociety.org.uk)	Location
Thursday 16th April 2pm to 3pm arrive by 1:45pm to allow for payment.	Private guided tour of Worcester Cathedral's Grounds & Gardens. This tour includes the Bishop's Palace gardens which are normally closed to the public. The tour also includes seeing the medieval ruins of the old Guesten via the cloister's central garden. The tour will cover some of the planting and plant mythology as well as finding out more about the Cathedral's history including the former monastery on site. Price: £5 for members (subsidised by Worcester Civic Society) and £8 for non-members Access: there are a number of steps down to gardens down by the river Severn. Meet at the welcome desk access through the North Porch entrance.	Worcester Cathedral, College Yard, Worcester WR1 2LA. Nearest car park is Copenhagen Street WR1 EY
Tuesday 21 st April Arrival for 6:15pm for a 7pm prompt start. Finish at 9:15pm	Worcester's Blue Plaques and Hannah Snell, Female Soldier 1750, a one woman show by Dr Georgina Lock. Worcester Civic Society is excited to announce the relaunch of the Worcester City Blue Plaques and to celebrate their digitisation, making it easier to find out more about the blue plaque holders online together with a new updated leaflet that you will be the first to receive. Following the 45 minutes blue plaque presentation, there will be a short break and then an amazing 45 minutes one woman show by Dr Georgina Lock on the life of a Worcester City blue plaque holder. Hannah Snell born in Worcester, enlisted in the British Army in the 18th century and her story is one of determination and courage. A bar is available. Price: £5 members (subsidised by WCS) £10 non-members. The venue is wheelchair accessible and the event is on the ground floor.	Henry Sandon Hall Worcester WR1 2NE Nearest car park is King Street (Sidbury) WR1 2NE
Tuesday 12 th May 11am to 12:30 pm	Private guided tour of Tudor House Museum followed by tea/coffee/cake in the tea rooms. A beautiful 16th century timber framed building now a museum. Visitors will see a series of fascinating displays as well as the remarkable architecture of the building including the original wattle and daub walls. Price: £5.00 for members (subsidised by WCS) and £10 non-members. Limited wheelchair access.	38 Friar Street, Worcester WR1 2NA
Friday 5 th June 1:30pm	Private tour of Madresfield Court House & Gardens. Guided tour of this historic house in Malvern. It has been home to the Lygon family for over 900 years. The house was first mentioned in a charter of Henry I, dating from the 1120s. Price: £10 members and £17 non-members (this fee will be reduced to £10 for those who join Worcester Civic Society on the day. Please be aware there are a lot of stairs on the house tour route and very limited opportunities to sit down during the tour.	Madresfield Court, Malvern WR13 5AJ

Ticket Source – helping to enable effective management of our events programme. As part of our ongoing efforts to enhance our event speakers, locations and attendance, we are now using a new free booking system, Ticket Source. This system is used by many other charities including Malvern Civic Society, This booking system is free to the Civic Society as well as to users. Please note we are only using this system to ascertain the numbers of attendees to an event to help us plan-ahead. You will never be asked for a payment via Ticket Source.

<https://www.ticketsource.co.uk/worcester-civic-society>

Executive Team – Vacancies

We are delighted to say that our membership numbers continue to increase and we now have over 210 members.

Worcester Civic Society is going from strength to strength, with excellent initiatives being developed by the Society such as the new Shopfront Design Guide for Worcester (pages 2 – 3) and increasing media coverage for our Save Powick Old Bridge campaign.

We need more volunteers to join us to help us to grow even stronger to provide a collective voice for Worcester. If you would like to volunteer to help us with our events programme or join the Executive Committee, please let us know. Our email address is worcestercivicsociety@gmail.com

Worcester Civic Society Treasurer – would you consider volunteering?

At last year's AGM, our Treasurer, Stephen Inman, indicated his wish to step down from the role. We are therefore beginning the search for his successor now, so that we can ensure a smooth handover over the coming months to start in November 2026.

We welcome expressions of interest from anyone comfortable with basic bookkeeping and simple IT tasks.

- The role involves keeping our financial records up to date, preparing brief reports for the Executive, managing our bank and building society accounts, submitting the annual Charity Commission return and Gift Aid claim, ensuring insurance is in place, and supporting the smooth running of the Society.
- On average it requires around two to three hours a week and is an excellent way to contribute to the Society's work.

If you might be interested—or would simply like to know more—please do get in touch our current Treasurer, **Stephen Inman on 07970 860167**.



Contacts:

Chair: Dr Heather Barrett

Hon. Treasurer: Stephen Inman

Hon. Secretary: John Wickson

Vice-Chair & Newsletter Editor: Liz Demaison

President: Phil Douce

Vice-President: Nicola Gibbons

Membership Secretary: Dee Bruce

Events Officer: Lorraine Preece

Chair of Planning Panel: Chris Evans, MRTPI

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General Consultant: David Birtwhistle

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Please contact the Newsletter Editor for comments, articles or ideas at worcestercivicsociety@gmail.com

2026 content deadlines:

Summer – 10th June

Autumn – 7th September

Winter – 4th December

Worcester Civic Society is a registered charity (No. 505346) and is independent of political parties. Our members meet jointly with the City's Conservation Advisory Panel (CAP) and regularly meet with the City's Planning and Regeneration Officers. The Society is a member of the national body Civic Voice.