

City Councillors' report for Warndon Parish Council meeting, Monday 4th March 2024

Two City Council consultations to note:

1) Shrub Hill Development Plan

The public can now have their say on ambitious plans for the major regeneration of Worcester's Shrub Hill Quarter.

A six-week public consultation has been launched into a draft Supplementary Planning Document (SPD), which sets out proposals for the revamp of the 14-hectare site, including more than 500 new homes, new public spaces, and the capacity for the creation of up to 5,000 new jobs.

People can read the SPD and give their views on it at www.worcester.gov.uk/voicait, or come along to the Guildhall from Monday 5 – Saturday 10 February to see an exhibition of the proposals in the document.

Councillor Robyn Norfolk, Chair of the City Council's Place and Economic Development Committee, said: "The vision set out in the Supplementary Planning Document is for a dramatic regeneration of the Shrub Hill Quarter, one that will shape it into an appealing location to live, work and relax.

The SPD focuses on the type of place Shrub Hill can and should be. It is essential that local residents, businesses and other stakeholders have their say, to help us to ensure we get this important document right, so I would encourage them to participate in this consultation."

The City Council is working in partnership with Worcestershire County Council on the plans.

The Shrub Hill Quarter lies to the west of the railway line, extending across the canal, and is bordered by Tallow Hill, George Street, Pheasant Street and Tolladine Road. It includes the existing Shrub Hill Industrial Estate, the historic Engine Works building and the railway station. It does not include the site of the neighbouring Sheriff's Gate development.

The railway station and the Engine Works are among several listed buildings on the site, all of which would be preserved under the proposals set out in the draft SPD.

The document sets out clear expectations for developers who want to purchase land in the Shrub Hill Quarter or submit a planning application for the area. It clarifies where built development is expected to take place and, importantly, where no development is likely to be allowed.

The SPD also provides a coherent and integrated approach to the whole site, to assist in attracting future funding applications to support public infrastructure.

Anyone who is not able to complete the survey online can collect a printed copy from the Guildhall, or call 01905 722233 to request one.

The consultation is open until 17 March 2024 at <https://form.jotform.com/240313388148052>

2) Community Infrastructure Charging Levy consultation

The draft updated Community Infrastructure Charging Levy document for the three south Worcestershire councils (Malvern Hills, Worcester City and Wychavon) sets out details of contributions towards the funding required to deliver the joint South Worcestershire Development Plan (SWDP), adopted in 2016.

A public consultation on the proposals in this document is being held, it ends midday on 25 March 2024.

Interested residents are invited to read the documents and submit their responses to it in this consultation at <https://www.worcester.gov.uk/planning/planning-policy/community-infrastructure-levy>

Survey commissioned to help give a clearer picture of housing in Worcester

Worcester City Council has commissioned a study to assess the condition of people's accommodation and is urging householders to respond if they receive a survey.

The survey is being carried out by Opinion Research Services which has sent out letters to 4,000 randomly selected properties across the city asking residents for their opinions on their current housing.

The Worcester Housing Stock Condition Survey will assess the overall adequacy and condition of accommodation in both privately rented and owner-occupied properties. It includes questions about the type,

age and condition of the property; energy efficiency details and whether it is a House in Multiple Occupation. It will also help draw up a socioeconomic profile of residents.

Each letter sent out has an access code allowing the householder to log in to the survey. After completing the survey, they will be contacted to arrange a suitable time for a visit from a surveyor. They will then receive a £20 GiftPay voucher as a thank you. Those unable to complete the survey online have the option of doing it via a freephone number.

The stock condition survey is being undertaken across all districts of Worcestershire and information gathered will help in forming the new Private Sector Housing Strategy due in 24/25. The last stock condition survey was undertaken in 2015.

Chair of Worcester City Council's Communities Committee, Cllr Jabba Riaz, said: "We would encourage any resident who receives a letter to complete the survey and have the surveyor attend. The overall results will give us a clearer picture of the condition of people's homes in Worcester and will inform policies to help improve housing in the city. The information will be shared with the Council for the purpose of producing and publishing statistics and it won't identify any property or individual."

<https://www.worcester.gov.uk/news/survey-will-help-give-clearer-picture-of-housing-in-worcester>

Get your entries in for this year's Worcester Show!

Competitors of all ages are invited to start submitting their entries for this summer's Worcester Show.

This year's show will be held at Pitchcroft on Sunday August 11 and promises an excellent day out.

Gates open at 10am and the fun will continue until 5pm, with over 180 stalls, lots of free activities and live entertainment on stage – not to mention a wealth of tantalising food and drinks on offer.

Stalls are now available to book and keen gardeners, cooks, artists and crafters are invited to check out the schedule of more than 140 competition classes on the website in order to plan their entries.

Classes are free to enter and an exhibitor may enter up to two entries in most classes.

This year there will be a new Youth Skills & Creativity Section for under-18s. This will include a Literature section which will be judged and sponsored by former Worcester poet laureate Leena Batchelor, owner of Worcester's independent bookshop Script Haven, recently voted the UK's 3rd best independent bookshop by The Times readers.

Leena said: "We are beyond excited to be sponsoring a new class for the Worcester Show. Our ethos is to bring the value and magic of creativity to everyone, of all ages and groups, and to inspire people to engage with all artistic styles, especially creative and literary forms.

"The shop has a strong culture of promoting community links through creative forces, and to be in a position to enthral and promote the people of Worcester and collaborate with the myriad vibrant groups bringing us the delights of Worcester Show each summer is a privilege."

The show is delivered by Worcester City Council, supported by the Friends of Worcester Show. Admission will be £2, but free for under-16s.

Last year's event was a huge success, attracting an estimated 20,000 people. You can find out more about this year's Worcester Show, enter a competition class or book a stall, at <https://www.worcestershow.org.uk/>

Mayor of Worcester, Cllr Louis Stephen said: "Whether you're an artist, a keen gardener or a fantastic cook, Worcester Show is the perfect place to show off your talents in the competition classes – with more than 140 to choose from, there really is something for everyone, no matter what age you are! "

<https://www.worcester.gov.uk/news/get-your-entries-in-for-this-year-s-worcester-show-1-1>

Council makes Compulsory Purchase Order for route linking St Martin's Quarter and Shrub Hill

Worcester City Council has published a Compulsory Purchase Order (CPO) to acquire land required to create a new pedestrian and cycling route between Pheasant Street and Shrub Hill Station.

The new five-metre wide pathway will start opposite the Asda car park and run across Padmore Street and the existing Cromwell Street bridge over the canal. It will create a straight-forward and attractive new way of getting between the city centre and Shrub Hill without having to use a car or bus.

The CPO covers land on the route which is not currently in public ownership:

- A section of the First Bus garage at Padmore Street
- Part of a private street between Padmore Street and the canal footbridge
- The access to the Farmfoods service yard
- Parts of the landscape at the Shrub Hill Retail Park car park and the Farmfoods service yard
- Land on the east side of the canal.

Read the full details of the CPO here

<https://www.worcester.gov.uk/planning/planning-policy/supplementary-planning-documents-and-guidance>

Objections to the CPO must be made in writing to the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, Planning Casework Unit, 23 Stephenson Street, Birmingham B2 4BH or by email to pcu@levellingup.gov.uk on or before 4 March 2024 and should state the title of the Order, the ground of objection and the objector's address and interests in the land.

The new pedestrian and cycling route is a joint project between Worcester City Council and Worcestershire County Council. Planning permission for the scheme was approved last year

<https://plan.worcester.gov.uk/Planning/Display/23/00595/DW3> and it is due to be open by March 2026.

The new pathway is part of the proposals to regenerate Shrub Hill Quarter, which are currently the subject of a separate public consultation visible at <https://www.worcester.gov.uk/council/consultations>

Worcester city's new election boundaries approved by Parliament

Changes to the electoral ward boundaries for Worcester City Council have been given their final approval in Parliament and will be in place for the local elections on 2 May 2024.

Under the changes, there will continue to be 35 councillors on Worcester City Council, but they will be divided across 16 wards instead of the current 15. Three of those wards will have three councillors, while the others will all have two.

The changes have been drawn up by the independent Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE), which reviews each council in the country approximately every 20 years. The LGBCE carried out multiple public consultations in Worcester over an 18-month period before making its final recommendations for the city to Parliament.

Shane Flynn, Returning Officer for Worcester City Council, said: "We are grateful to both the LGBCE and Parliament for their conduct of this important process and we are pleased that these changes have been written into law in plenty of time before the election campaign begins.

"We will now be writing to each household in Worcester that will be in a different ward in this year's election, to make them aware of the changes."

The main changes to Worcester's electoral wards are:

- The current Cathedral ward will be split in two new wards, named Fort Royal and Cathedral
- The current Gorse Hill and Warndon wards will be merged to form a new ward named Warndon & Elbury Park
- The boundary between the current wards of Bedwardine and St John is being significantly changed to allow the creation of a new ward, named Dines Green & Grove Farm. The southern part of the old Bedwardine ward will be renamed Lower Wick & Pitmaston.

Some of the remaining wards are being renamed. Warndon Parish North becomes St Nicholas, and Warndon Parish South becomes Leopard Hill.

Finally, there are minor boundary changes between most of the remaining wards.

Visit <https://www.worcester.gov.uk/councillors-democracy/ward-map> for an interactive map showing full details of the new wards.

<https://www.worcester.gov.uk/news/worcester-s-new-election-boundaries-approved-by-parliament>

Find out more about becoming a councillor in Worcester

People who are considering standing as a councillor for Worcester City Council, Warndon Parish Council or St Peter's Parish Council are invited to a special online briefing session.

The event will give prospective candidates – and their potential agents – all the essential information they need to know about the elections.

The online briefing will be held at 6pm on Monday 11 March. Would-be candidates and agents must book in advance.

Anyone interested in standing as a candidate at the upcoming elections is asked to email the Council's election team to sign up for the briefing, including their name, email address and which election and ward they hope to stand in.

Invitations to join the virtual briefing will be sent out via email a few days before the event.

The briefing will run through essentials like how to complete nomination papers, how postal votes work, the new voter ID rules and many other important matters.

There will also be a West Mercia Police officer on hand to discuss the risks of electoral fraud.

This year's Worcester City Council elections will take place on Thursday 2 May, alongside polls for the West Mercia Police & Crime Commissioner and the parish councils, if the latter are contested.

This is the first year that the City Council will hold all-out elections, meaning that all 35 councillors will be elected on the same day and will serve four-year terms until 2028.

Recent changes to Worcester's electoral ward boundaries mean there are now 16 wards, three of which will have three seats while the remaining 13 will have two.

<https://www.worcester.gov.uk/news/chance-to-find-out-more-about-becoming-a-councillor-in-worcester>

Inspectors provide update on SWDP Review process

Inspectors scrutinising the South Worcestershire Development Plan Review have provided an update to the three South Worcestershire Councils on their progress.

The Plan was submitted to the Planning Inspectorate for independent scrutiny towards the end of last year, a process known as examination.

Dates for public hearings to provide inspectors with the opportunity to ask questions on parts of the plan and the evidence supporting it were expected to be announced this month.

But while inspectors say they have made good progress on preparing for the hearings they have asked for some evidence documents to be updated first. This will avoid delays further in the process and ensure people making representations at the hearings have the latest information available to them.

In a letter to Malvern Hills District, Worcester City and Wychavon District Councils, inspectors raised concerns that some of the evidence was 'at risk of being overtaken by events' since work on the plan started and recent changes to planning rules and regulations needed to be included.

Inspectors are also requesting more information about the impact of increased traffic generated by the plan on the surrounding road network. They also want to review the analysis of the Worcestershire Strategic Transport Model.

Worcester City, Malvern Hills District and Wychavon District Councils are now working on a timetable for providing the new and updated evidence.

Cllr Pat Agar, Chair of the Joint Advisory Panel for the SWDP Review, said:

"This Plan will shape how our communities develop right up until 2041 so it's important to us it is based on the most robust evidence possible and properly scrutinised and tested during examination so people can have confidence in it.

"We will now work on producing the new and updated evidence requested as soon as possible so we can proceed to the next stage of the examination process at the earliest possible opportunity."

<https://www.worcester.gov.uk/news/inspectors-provide-update-on-swdp-review-process>

Worcester City Council sets £12m budget

Worcester City councillors have approved a £12.7 million net budget for 2024-25, including a range of initiatives to support residents' top priority of enhancing and sustaining this beautiful city for future generations.

The year ahead will see the City Council investing in the city's heritage and riverside, a new bike hire scheme for the city, new sports facilities, a new bridge across the river Severn and much more.

The budget includes a small rise in Worcester City Council's element of residents' Council Tax bills.

Councillor Lynn Denham, Labour Joint Leader of the City Council for the Labour Party, said: "We know that Worcester residents continue to need our support, so it is important that in our 2024-25 budget we will continue to support a range of community organisations, including the Worcester Foodbank, as well as retraining and upskilling services for residents who are looking to change careers. We will also continue to give financial support for those most at need through our Discretionary Welfare Assistance Scheme."

Cllr Marjory Bisset, Joint Leader of the City Council for the Green Party, said: "Once again residents have told us that their top priority is enhancing and sustaining Worcester for future generations, so I am pleased that we have included several important schemes in the budget to boost active travel in our city. The new bike hire scheme and the completion of the Kepax pedestrian and cycling bridge will be important contributions to achieving the aims of the City Council's Environmental Sustainability Strategy."

As part of the preparation of the budget, the Council carried out an extensive public consultation. This showed that, for the third year running, the most popular of the five themes in the Worcester City Plan was "enhancing and sustaining our beautiful city for future generations".

This is reflected in the 2024-25 budget, which will see the City Council:

- Invest up to £1.9 million in community centres and other facilities to provide opportunities for Worcester residents to re-train and upskill
- Launch a new bike hire scheme, to boost active travel opportunities in the city
- Take steps to enhance Worcester's heritage and riverside through the investment of up to £259,000
- Support the completion of the new Kepax pedestrian bridge at Ghelvuelt Park, opening new routes around the river and further boosting active travel opportunities
- Build and open a new 3G all-weather pitch at Perdiswell, enhancing Worcester's sporting facilities.

During 2024-25, the City Council will continue to invest the £17.9 million it has secured from the Government's Future High Streets Fund. The funding will be used to regenerate the northern part of the city centre, resurfacing the paving around Angel Place, The Cross and the surrounding area; bring empty properties in that quarter back into use; and create a new arts venue in the Scala and Corn Exchange buildings.

The Council will also use £100,000 of its allocation from the UK Shared Prosperity Fund to support the continued running of its Discretionary Welfare Assistance Scheme (DWAS). DWAS supports vulnerable low-income city households with the cost of food, energy, white goods or other essential items.

Council Tax

The City Council's element of Council Tax will increase by around 1p a day, as permitted by the Government, giving an annual rise of £6.19 for a band D property.

The increase in the City Council's element of residents' Council Tax bills for each property band is:

- Band A - £4.12
- Band B - £4.82
- Band C - £5.50
- Band D - £6.19
- Band E - £7.56
- Band F - £8.94
- Band G - £10.31
- Band H - £12.38

<https://www.worcester.gov.uk/news/worcester-city-council-sets-12m-budget>

New accessible toilet opens in Worcester city centre

Worcester City Council's bid to make the city centre accessible to all has taken a step further with the building of a new Changing Places Toilet amenity in the Cornmarket.

Funded by Government grant and the City Council, the Changing Places facility is a large accessible toilet with equipment such as ceiling track hoists, adult-sized changing benches and space for carers. The toilet is fully peninsular, meaning it is surrounded by plenty of space on both sides.

The facility is the third Changing Places Toilet building in Worcester, with others available in the Hive and on the University's St John's campus.

Over 250,000 people in the UK with profound and multiple learning disabilities, as well other disabilities that severely limit mobility, cannot use standard accessible toilets.

Cornmarket car park was chosen as the location for the new toilet as it is in a central location for the city centre. It also has adjacent disabled parking spaces.

Worcester City Council's Member Champion for Equality, Diversity and Inclusion, Cllr Robyn Norfolk said: "We are delighted to have this new Changing Places toilet right in the heart of the city centre. We know how vital it is for many people with disabilities and their carers to have access to a facility like this and we hope to deliver more inclusive facilities in the coming years as part of our commitment to ensuring Worcester is an accessible city for everyone."

Worcestershire Association of Carers (WAC) is a registered charity providing a range of information, advice and support to carers, offering practical support, carer wellbeing, getting a break and understanding legal and financial issues.

Kate Webb, Carer Voice team lead with WAC, said: "We are pleased to support the launch of the new Changing Places. It is essential for families and carers accessing the community to have the appropriate facilities available to enable them to take care of their loved ones who cannot access a standard accessible toilet in a safe, clean, and accessible environment.

"Changing Places allows families to enjoy time together, because without such specialist facilities, taking trips and spending time together is limited. As it becomes increasingly difficult for carers to get a break, this can be a vital lifeline as it is ever more important families and carers are enabled to remain part of their community."

Visit <https://www.changing-places.org> for more about Changing Places.

<https://www.worcester.gov.uk/news/new-accessible-toilet-opens-in-worcester-city-centre>

Andrew Cross 01/03/2024

(April's city councillor report to Warndon Parish Council is due to be written by Cllr Sarah Murray)