

Our Ref: SK/ETC

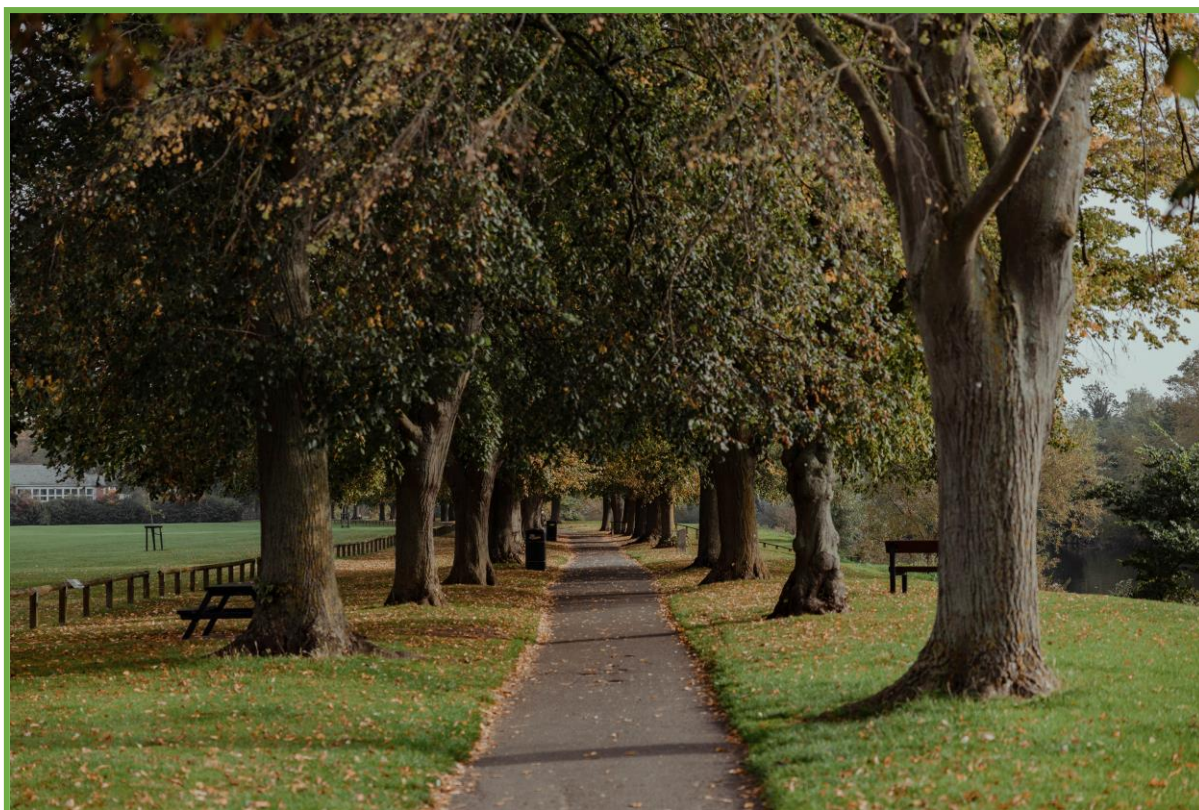
7 November 2023

Ms Jo Adams
Evesham Town Clerk
Evesham Town Council
Unit 6 - Abbey Lane Court
Abbey Lane
Evesham
WR11 4BY

Dear Ms Adams

**Re: Evesham Town Council/ Wychavon District Council Joint Projects Report
2023/24 and proposed projects for 2024/25**

I have the pleasure to enclose the Wychavon District Council (WDC) Regeneration team's report to Evesham Town Council (ETC). This report reflects the period since the WDC Place Project Manager's previous report submitted in November 2022 and proposals for continued joint working in 2024/25.



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Executive Summary

Over the past 13 years, Wychavon officers have submitted this annual report to Evesham Town Council and in that time, our joint ambition to improve the viability and vibrancy of Evesham Town Centre has been consistent. The strategy has been to provide immediate support for the town whilst the longer-term activities of securing new structural investment are undertaken.

As per previous years, WDC allocated resources to Evesham and ETC matched this with a contribution of £15,000 to be used as an enabling resource to lever additional resources from elsewhere. ETC was asked to support three specific project themes:

Attracting Inward Investment (£3,000); Business Support Grants (£3,000); and Local Distinctiveness (£9,000).

This fund was provisionally allocated to promote Evesham's investment potential nationally, to developers and investors; bring greater focus on marketing Evesham to its visitor economy and support festivals and events; provide start-up or business development grants to Evesham businesses and engage businesses and schools to promote and help fund new apprenticeships.

Following the launch of the Evesham Inward Investment Prospectus in 2022 and the subsequent creation of the Evesham Place Board, there are now new mechanisms to assist the town via new projects funded via the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) to complement the traditional activities funded by both councils.

It is in this collective context we respectfully request that Evesham Town Council contributes to funding the continuation of this work in 2024/25 on the following basis:

- Inward Investment – £3,000;
- Business Start-up / Development Grants and Skills Development – £3,000; and
- Local Distinctiveness – £9,000.

On behalf of Wychavon District Council, I would be most grateful if Evesham Town Council would kindly contribute to the above projects for delivery in 2024/25 and respectfully request a total contribution of **£15,000** is made to the overall project.



Looking back

Below are the outcomes of projects jointly funded by ETC and WDC in the financial year 2023/24.

Business Start-up / Development Grants and Skills Development

Skills Development

We work with Worcestershire Apprenticeships who organise the skill show and the apprentice show, both are held at Sixways. We help to promote these to the schools in Evesham and also help man the shows on the day. These shows are attended by both TDMS and Prince Henry's high school - we offer funding to help with transportation to these shows, without this they wouldn't be able to attend.

WDC has given £160 to 3 schools in Evesham who wanted to take part in the STEM schools challenge, this enables school children within the Wychavon district to take part in the Worcestershire-wide engineering challenge, the final this year was held at Mazak.

WDC also offers a bursary to eligible apprentices who live in the district of Wychavon - we have paid £500 to 2 apprentices who live in Evesham, this is to help towards the costs of travel, tools or clothing.

We are currently looking to help with the Young Enterprise funding for Prince Henrys and TDMS, to enable them to take part in this year challenge, the total cost would be over £500 per team.

We are currently promoting our business grants aimed at local businesses to take apprentices on, we offer up to £2000 in grants for each apprentice recruited, so far Evesham based SME's have not applied for any of these grants. It is relevant to also note that recruitment of apprentices across Wychavon is significantly lower than in recent years.

Business Grants

Following the announcement of the UKSPF, WDC has allocated £360,000 over three years to fund a flexible business grant programme. The programme includes grants to support Business Start-ups, Business Growth, Reducing Energy Consumption and grants to assist in business decarbonisation. This programme is administered of behalf of WDC by Worcestershire County Council.

WDC has also allocated £154,000 over three years to provide support and guidance to businesses as well as assistance in identifying the most appropriate grant programme to suit individual needs. The Worcestershire Growth Hub is delivering this support on behalf of WDC. Any business in need of support can contact the Worcestershire Growth Hub at www.worcestershiregrowthhub.co.uk.

In addition to the grant programme above, WDC has maintained delivery of the £1,000 Growth Grant. ETC supported this initiative with a contribution of £3,000. In 2023, eight small businesses located in Evesham have received a grant so far.

The Pillar

Only one of the five office units remain to be let in The Pillar business hub at the Civic Centre, Pershore. Details of the centre are on our website [here](#).

Inward Investment

As members will be aware, we were unsuccessful in our application to secure a £20m Levelling Up Grant to fund the redevelopment viability gap in the Riverside Shopping Centre. Despite this set back, WDC remains committed to resolving the failed shopping centre and its detrimental impact on the vibrancy and viability of Evesham Town Centre. The council is continuing to work closely with the shopping centre owner, central government bodies, and potential developers to identify a workable solution for this site.



Vale Park continues to thrive with the two units mentioned in last year’s report now occupied by Harrison Products and MP Filtri. Harrison Products have long been established on Vale Park and needed additional space to grow, whilst MP Filtri - who provide highly specialised hydraulic oil filtering technology - have relocated to Evesham from Gloucestershire and in doing so have expanded significantly and created 70 jobs locally.



On the back of continued occupier interest Chase Commercial has secured investment funding to build three mid-sized speculative industrial units, two at 50,000sqft and one at 60,000sqft. All three are now complete and interest from potential occupiers is extremely encouraging.

In April, The Lost Valley - a new Adventure Golf and High Ropes course – opened at The Valley and is proving to be a smash hit with visitors. The leisure facility is run by Worcester-based leisure operator Aztec Adventure and further enhances The Valley’s existing leisure offer.

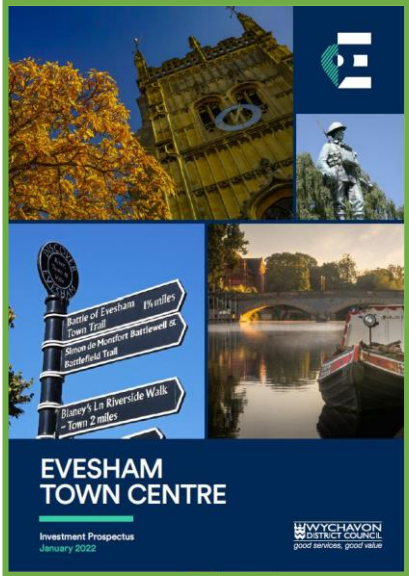


Prospectus and Place Board

In May 2022, WDC were proud to launch the Inward Investment Prospectus for Evesham after working closely with CBRE and Thinkingplace. The comprehensive document’s aim is to help generate future investment into the town and ensure the right type, scale and diversity of development comes forward over the next 20 years. The prospectus identifies primary opportunity or change zone sites as well as ‘softer’, non-development-specific opportunities for intervention.

In addition to the development sites, place branding experts Thinkingplace led on the creation of a ‘vision’ for Evesham and a set of strategic objectives to help achieve this vision. The objectives revolve around developing Evesham as a leisure destination; enhancing the evening economy; showcasing a coherent Evesham offer; positioning Evesham as a centre for the sub-region; recognising the town as somewhere that welcomes walkers and cyclists; and climate resilience.

To help meet these objectives, Thinkingplace recommended the creation of Place Boards consisting of local stakeholders who would identify projects that would help implement the vision. Developed from the original steering groups, the Evesham Place Board has since been set up and involved a range of partners who look to deliver against the objectives with the prospectus and to recommend projects as part of the UKSPF. The Place Board are pleased to have a good working relationship with ETC, as demonstrated by a range of projects that have been worked on.





The UK Shared Prosperity Fund

In June 2022, the Wychavon district was told it had been allocated £3,999,058 of UK Shared Prosperity Funding (UKSPF) and in January 2023, WDC had confirmation that their investment plan – explaining how the money would be spent, why and what would be achieved during the timescale of the funding between April 2022 and March 2025 – was successful.

All objectives within the plan will need to meet various outcomes and outputs but also features a split between capital and revenue spend. The Evesham Place Board plays a leading role in identifying projects and have recommended them to WDC to receive funding from the UKSPF, specifically via the E1 intervention – improvements to town centres and high streets.

The Evesham place board had their first meeting in September 2022 and have been meeting bi-monthly since then. The projects they have worked on include:

- Commissioned a mural for 41-43 High Street which has been vacant for some time. The mural tells various stories from Evesham's history using humour and fantasy.
- Distribution of a 'What's On in Evesham and the Vale 2023' flyer with over 50 local events to over 22,000 households in the WR11 postcode.
- Provision of funding to enable the purchase of two additional dragon-themed pedalos to enhance the river activity
- Funding the Brass Bands in the Park programme, featuring 12 performances over the summer - it was the first time bands have been back in the park since before the pandemic.

- Commissioned 100 flags to be put up around the town for the Coronation of King Charles and then also 100 Baron's flags ready for the Battle of Evesham.
- Ran a social media campaign promoting the opportunity to come to Evesham to try Vale of Evesham Asparagus which had a reach 324,386 people across Worcestershire, Gloucestershire, Warwickshire and Oxfordshire.
- Commissioned a contractor to refurbish all of the noticeboards around the town and bring them back into regular use.
- Committed to match fund getting the churchyard gate pillar fixed at All Saints Churchyard.
- Supported Wychavon to commission an accessibility audit of the public realm in the town centre.
- Launched a business front improvement grant scheme where properties in High Street, Vine Street and Merstow Green can apply for between £500 and £10,000 to improve their business frontage.
- Arranged for a survey to town centre businesses to better understand some of their challenges and aspirations and how these could align with the strategic objectives for the town set out in the prospectus.



Looking ahead, the Evesham Place board is looking to launch an Ambassador Programme - an opportunity to bring together all the people doing great work in Evesham to share good news stories and discuss how we can work together to improve the town.

They would also like to develop a place brand for Evesham that all local businesses and organisations can use so when we are promoting ourselves to potential visitors, investors or anyone else we are giving a clear message of what Evesham offers.

Depending on the success of the business front improvement grant, they may recommend further funding towards this.

They are supporting the action plan coming out of the accessibility audits and are particularly interested in improving signage, interpretation and wayfinding around the town.

They plan to meet with all the stakeholders making things happen on or around the River Avon in Evesham so we can all work together to develop an action plan to make the most of the river setting.

As part of the agenda to support carbon reduction, the Place Board are also looking at a solar lighting in Abbey Park.

Local Distinctiveness

ETC's contribution of £9,000 allows Evesham to typically have the pride of offering an unrivalled array of events within the county – with widespread appeal to a number of audiences. With the increased prices for services and materials, together with less disposal income through the cost of living crisis, events in 2023 weren't void of challenges meaning the support provided to events is as important as ever.



Through an intervention from the UKSPF, combined with ETC's contribution towards local distinctiveness, the events supported include:



- Asparagus Coach Tours (as part of the Vale of Evesham Asparagus season |
- Battle of Evesham Medieval Market |
- Battle of Evesham Festival |
- Battle of Evesham Banquet |
- Blossom Trail |
- Evesham Angling Festival |
- Evesham Christmas Artisan Fayre (upcoming, 25 & 26 November) |
- Evesham Christmas Lights Switch on (upcoming, 18 November) |
- Evesham River Festival |
- Evesham Walking Festival |
- Festival of Words |
- Free Outdoor Cinema |
- Vale of Evesham Food & Drink Festival |
- Wartime in the Vale |
- Tuesday and Sunday Bike Nights.

The value of initiatives and events is aided with access to footfall counter software across areas within the district. This has been a useful tool to monitor the recovery of the town since the pandemic and will be extremely helpful for future marketing with the information available.

The table below shows that according to the software, 2023 has continued the recovery trajectory until the summer months are reached. This is likely explained by the extreme weather faced during this period, with the Met Office stating Summer 2023 was the eighth warmest on record, wetter than average, with mixed conditions. These factors, including the extremely high temperatures for longer periods, would have undoubtedly impacted visitor movements.

| EVESHAM | 2020 visits | % diff. to prev. yr | 2021 visits | % diff. to prev. yr | 2022 visits | % diff. to prev. yr | 2023 visits | % diff. to prev. yr |
|---------|-------------|---------------------|-------------|---------------------|-------------|---------------------|-------------|---------------------|
| Jan | - | - | 159243 | n/a | 294876 | 85.2% | 375249 | 27.3% |
| Feb | 376536 | - | 141982 | -62.3% | 304969 | 114.8% | 365611 | 19.9% |
| Mar | 183070 | - | 173081 | -5.5% | 336364 | 94.3% | 361592 | 7.5% |
| Apr | 179079 | - | 218489 | 22.0% | 350303 | 60.3% | 361045 | 3.1% |
| May | 152461 | - | 224900 | 47.5% | 363905 | 61.8% | 367664 | 1.0% |
| Jun | 185361 | - | 217970 | 17.6% | 358996 | 64.7% | 370709 | 3.3% |
| Jul | 166582 | - | 236137 | 41.8% | 370626 | 57.0% | 352522 | -4.9% |
| Aug | 230218 | - | 209243 | -9.1% | 347752 | 66.2% | 343567 | -1.2% |
| Sept | 230619 | - | 296031 | 28.4% | 379849 | 28.3% | 368915 | -2.9% |
| Oct | 244515 | - | 280220 | 14.6% | 382838 | 36.6% | tbc | tbc |
| Nov | 207498 | - | 304799 | 46.9% | 426272 | 39.9% | tbc | tbc |
| Dec | 233059 | - | 302828 | 29.9% | 459971 | 51.9% | tbc | tbc |

Evesham has been heavily included in marketing material and publicity with campaigns run including regionally printed publications including magazines and bedroom browsers, together with a host of local publications and online blogs. In addition, the town has received national promotion through features within the country's largest newspapers via events, namely the Battle of Evesham. Furthermore, by gaining the status of 'Walkers are Welcome', Evesham becomes the first Worcestershire town to achieve the accolade and will widen the appeal to this sector. Huge credit must go to all involved with this achievement.

2023 saw the area's Blossom Trail celebrate its 40th anniversary and a special press familiarisation visit was organised by WDCs tourism department to mark the occasion. Tourism journalists and influencers visited and stayed in the area over a weekend in April to experience the beautiful natural delight in the hope they will then provide greater promotion of it in 2024. Staying at the Wood Norton hotel near Evesham, the group visited the town meaning they will hopefully also write about it too next spring.

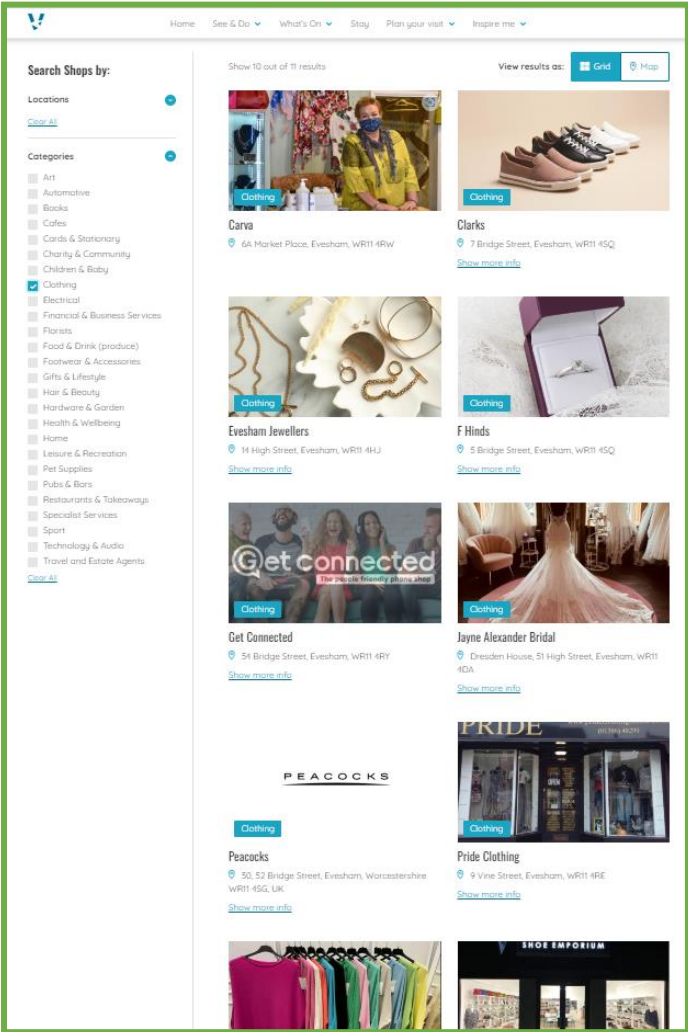


Social media continues to demonstrate its value and effectiveness with many events and initiatives promoted through paid adverts on the Worcestershire's Vale & Spa Facebook account, enabling great interaction and engagement.

During the upcoming festive period, Evesham's businesses and events will again be promoted. A Christmas Events guide has recently been produced and will be distributed via our distribution partners, tourist information centres and via the town centre primary schools. Following its success in recent years, elements from the 'be curious this Christmas' campaign will be utilised again, aimed to encourage people to rediscover their High Street.

The Worcestershire's Vale & Spa website accommodates a shopping directory (www.valeandspa.co.uk/shopping), showing the latest town centre businesses. This will be a key component of the Christmas campaign too and can be searched for via the type of business they are.

Whilst we recognise there is a delicate balance that needs to be struck between encouraging people to spend money locally but also to save for struggles with the cost of living, we are conscious that the festive season does see an injection in spending and that every effort should be made to encourage people to choose to support local traders where possible.



Request for Evesham Town Council's Support

2023/24 has seen continued progress on many fronts with significant items including the development of the Evesham Inward Investment Prospectus via the Evesham Place Board and the implementation of the UKSPF. It's important to continue the momentum of the success and build on the foundations created to ensure 2024/25 accelerates success measures. Thus, the Inward Investment, Skills Development and Local Distinctiveness projects are proposed for ETC and WDC to fund jointly.

- WDC will continue to work hard to actively encourage businesses to choose to invest in Evesham, whether this be existing or new.
- The skills funding will remain in place to continue support for the businesses and apprentices based in Wychavon, and specifically in Evesham.
- Local distinctiveness will remain a priority theme around the tourism promotion of the district, offering that unique perspective which largely is portrayed through the high quality and quantity of events within the town and to capitalise on the ongoing initiatives such as the Blossom Trail and the asparagus season.

The real strength of collaborative working via the Evesham Place Board will continue to be demonstrated with the variety of projects being worked on. The close working relationship with ETC has been, and will continue to be, imperative for the success. In addition to the UKSPF funds that the Place Board make recommendations from, WDC will look to allocate a further £10,000 in the core WDC 2024/25 budget to the Evesham Place Board to fund projects that don't fit with UKSPF outputs, but are seen as beneficial to the town. Note that this is in addition to the other core WDC funding used to provide general event support and tourism marketing.

Summary

The WDC Regeneration Team would be most grateful if ETC would kindly contribute to the above projects for delivery in 2024/25 and respectfully requests a total contribution of **£15,000**. The ETC contribution will heavily assist with the projects that WDC are committed to funding, to the value of over £100,000.

Finally, I sincerely thank Evesham Town Council for its support in my capacity as the Place Projects Manager. I look forward to continuing and developing the close working relationship between ETC and WDC in 2024/25.

Yours sincerely,



Steve Knight
Place Projects Manager