



Report to: Council, 20th February 2024

Report of: Councillor Dr Adrian Gregson – Heritage Champion

Subject: REPORT OF HERITAGE CHAMPION

1. Background

- 1.1 "Member Champions" are elected members of the Council appointed to act as advocates or spokespeople for particular themes or particular communities which should be of interest to the Council in delivering its functions. About three-quarters of all local authorities have a Heritage Champion, responsible for promoting all aspects of the historic environment within its administrative area. I was first appointed to this role for Worcester City Council in 2023.
- 1.2 Heritage Champions can be very influential, generating enthusiasm and raising awareness of the historic environment's importance and potential across all of the local authority's functions. It is important to be able to express its values and its role in achieving the wider objectives of the authority. The importance of our heritage in the City is formally recognised in the City Plan. The Heritage Champion is expected to make the case for the historic environment and to demonstrate the opportunities for heritage to play an increasingly more important role in the objectives of the City Council.

2. Information

- 2.1 Worcester is one of England's leading historic cities and has a rich heritage of historic buildings and archaeological remains. The site has been occupied since prehistoric times and the town was an important Roman industrial centre. The medieval City was surrounded by stone walls and had a dozen churches as well as the magnificent cathedral.
- 2.2 The historic core has one of the largest concentrations of listed buildings in the country (there are over one thousand listed buildings in Worcester) and is one of nineteen designated conservation areas in Worcester. The city centre and its medieval suburbs include many timber-framed and Georgian brick buildings. Other conservation areas cover Regency suburban developments, historic villages and hamlets, the river meadows and the Worcester and Birmingham Canal. Of the 19 Conservation areas in the city. 10 have been reviewed in the last decade. Three have not been reviewed since the last century including the Historic Core of the City. This is now work long overdue in my view.
- 2.3 There are a number of Scheduled Monuments within the City boundaries which include the city walls as well as moated sites including at Middle Battenhall Farm and earthworks such as at Tamar Close dating from the Civil War. The sites of the first and last Battles of the Civil War in 1642 and 1651 are on the register of historic battlefields as well.

Gheluvelt Park, a memorial park opened after the Great War, has also been added to the register of historic parks and gardens. Scheduled monuments, listed buildings, registered parks and gardens, registered battlefields and conservation areas are known as designated heritage assets. Other heritage assets are undesignated. Some of these are included in the City's local list of Heritage Assets.

- 2.4 Worcester City Council also maintains a 'Heritage at Risk' register which identifies those buildings or structures whose condition has given rise to concern. The City Council aims to collaborate with owners and funding bodies to identify solutions for these assets, including repair and new uses. This always being updated. The 2023 register was adopted on 20 July 2023. Although no entries were removed from the register this time, the Priority of 8 sites has been downgraded. Work progresses well at the Ice Factory in Bromyard Road. Nos. 1, 1a and 3 Angel Street, the Scala Theatre and the Corn Exchange lie within the Future High Street area through which opportunities for enhancement are ongoing. Worcester City Council has also purchased both the Scala Theatre and the Corn Exchange, and a detailed scheme for their joint use has been developed. Three other buildings with approvals will remain on the Register until the successful completion of their schemes. Applications for two more of the sites are imminent. The current 'Heritage at Risk' register has also been harmonised with those produced by Historic England and SAVE Britain's Heritage, and the following sites added from SAVE's version: -
- 13 The Tything and Farm building (St Cuthbert's Chapel) Malvern Road, Lower Wick. Both of which are grade II listed.
- 2.5 There is also a National Heritage at Risk Register and on it is Lowesmoor, St Helen's Church in the High Street and various parts of the City Walls
- 2.6 In October 2023, the Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill became an Act of Parliament. This stated for the first time that local authorities have a statutory duty to manage and maintain an Historic Environment Record, after many years of campaigning within the heritage sector. The full implications of this duty will become clear as guidance is released in the coming months. Information on Worcester's archaeological remains and historic buildings is held on the Worcester City Historic Environment Record (HER). This is searchable via the Heritage Gateway and can also be consulted at The Hive. Records of historic and archaeological monuments can also be searched via the interactive map on Know Your Place Worcester, alongside a wealth of historic photographic material and community-generated information. A full audit of the HER was commissioned by Historic England in 2023, part of an ongoing cyclical programme of auditing. Historic England noted that improvements had been made against most outcomes, with all areas 'in the green'.
- 2.7 Heritage is not just buildings; we also have Royal Worcester with its unique Porcelain Museum and I was pleased to attend the unveiling of the new teapot sculpture at the Porcelain works in September. This event also marked the launch of a new public interpretation and art project at the site, funded by S106 contributions. This will see more of the worker's stories and interpretation of the factory buildings made available in and around the site in the coming months, working alongside council officers, the internationally-renowned public artist duo Musson Retallick and oral historian Julia Letts. Music plays a great part in the city with the Three Choirs Festival every 3 years as well as celebrating Elgar Day each year along with the Elgar Festival. We should not forget the River Severn which flows through the heart of the City and its Riverside Park, now enhanced by the installation of 15 totems at each of the key entry points to the park.

Each one celebrates a man or women associated with the City as well as aspects of Worcester's unique history and sites along the river. Further interpretation is under development for the new Kepax Bridge site. Events in living memory were also commemorated in July, with the unveiling of an information panel and memorial to the individuals who lost their lives in Worcester's only fatal bombing raid. Audio recordings of two eye witnesses recounting their stories have now been made available via [Know Your Place Worcester](#).

- 2.8 Other industries, such as glove making, have ceased in the City and the museum service has recently delivered a project around the manufacturing of gloves and the memories of the people who made them. The wider social history and memories of local people have also been captured through the National Lottery Heritage Funded project Worcester Life Stories, which has provided a catalyst for reminiscence and improved wellbeing, through collaboration with the Herefordshire and Worcestershire Health and Care Trust.
- 2.9 The Worcester Life Stories project which launched in 2020 came to the end of its Lottery funding in June 2023. While the main project has concluded, the huge public interest and momentum that this generated has been kept alive, feeding the learning and outcomes from the initial project into ongoing public engagement and activities around the city. This includes the use of Know Your Place Worcester (a final product of the project) in interpretation and signage around the city, enabling the provision of live and editable content to be accessed via QR codes (such as in city parks and on the Riverside Totems), and a second published coffee table book Worcester Life Stories – The Big Quiz Edition. These new approaches have also enabled greater engagement with groups from the Afro Caribbean community and the Worcester Mela, providing a supporting role in events such as Our Cultural heritage at the Guildhall in October (part of Black History Month) and Melting Pot. Further events are planned to celebrate the cultural heritage of our European residents as well as to commemorate the 80th anniversary of D-Day in June. Looking forward, I am keen to support commemoration of the establishment of the first Guildhall of 1227.
- 2.10 Historic England encourage local authorities to appoint a heritage champion, usually an elected member of the council. The role of a heritage champion is to promote all aspects of the heritage and historic environment within the council area, including through plan-making, development planning, promoting awareness, and liaising with and supporting the local authority's historic environment service.
- 2.11 I meet with officers of the council regularly to keep up to date on heritage related projects and any planning and heritage related issues affecting the City. Whenever possible I also attend the monthly Conservation Advisory Panel meetings, which are held virtually. I have also been kept informed of any heritage updates around emerging Historic Environment planning policy being a member of the Joint Advisory Panel (JAP) for the South Worcestershire Development Plan Review (SWDPR).
- 2.12 In my Heritage Champion role I have also been attending meetings with the Museum Service, and am Chair of the Joint Museums Committee. It is welcome news that the Mercian Regimental Museum has been awarded £243,000 for the relocation of the Worcestershire Soldier gallery to The Commandery, taking this project a step further forward. The Worcestershire Soldier display will close at the Art Gallery & Museum, where it has been on display in its current format since 2001 and is now showing its age.

A new display will be created at The Commandery, where it will be able to maximise connections with its heritage attraction neighbours, align naturally with The Commandery's audience, and use the space and resources with schools and community groups.

- 2.13 I attended a talk by Ian Green of Historic England launching a report on Balancing growth and Heritage last June. It was submitted to the Council and for me looks very interesting reading. Heritage has been a hot topic nationally over the last few months, with events such as the unauthorised demolition of the Crooked House making national news and opening wider debates around heritage protection.

A Crooked House scenario could happen in Worcester City because the issue at Himley was down to the actions of the owners, not directly to the lack of action or diligence on the part of the Local Authority. Thus, a similar scenario could play out in Worcester, or in fact anywhere. However, this would be less likely here since neighbours, Parish and Ward Members, plus other interested parties keep Council Officers and myself as heritage Champion, well informed.

All historic buildings are not protected when they are in the private sector but hopefully in Worcester, they are less open to Crooked House scenarios through a combination of factors, including the fact that our major land owners – church, schools, Municipal Charities, railways, the Council, etc. – have good managing agents and architects. Plus the various interested groups including Civic Society and Conservation Advisory Panel keep a wary eye on things.

- 2.14 I have recently had meetings with the Civic Society and also with Conservation Advisory Panel officers with discussions towards a Heritage Strategy. I see heritage as a key spoke in Worcester's development. We have a Tourism strategy and an Arts and Cultural Strategy and I think it is time for a Heritage Strategy to sit alongside these other contributions to the local economy, visitor management and quality of life. Meetings have also been ongoing with the Battle of Worcester Society to discuss their proposed Banners project and the Worcester Heritage Forum, a meeting of the heritage venues and partners from around the city.

- 2.15 It is a very exciting time to be Heritage Champion, with significant levels of investment being made in the City supporting a large number of exciting restoration and redevelopment projects such as the Cultural Quarter around Angel Place including the Corn Market and the Scala Theatre, the Heritage and Riverside developments which included the Commandery and the Museum and Art Gallery, Towns Fund works now started at the Cathedral and in due course we will see the regeneration of Shrub Hill including the Station, with SPD now out for consultation. I would like to thank professional colleagues who are doing so much to further the important "Heritage Matters" message and support me in my Heritage Champion role.

Name: Councillor Adrian Gregson
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