

THREE YEARS ON: STOURPORT CIVIC SOCIETY IS FINDING ITS VOICE

By Stourport Civic Society Chairman, Andrew Booton

It is worth pausing occasionally to recognise just how far Stourport Civic Society has come over the past three years.

Our membership is now around 30% higher than it was three years ago — a clear indication that more people care about the future of Stourport and want an independent voice speaking up for the town.

We are also increasingly recognised for effective campaigning. That means we are now being asked to work with others on issues that matter to the wider community, including our partnership with environmental organisations over the proposed Wildlife Park Meadows scheme. Working together gives local campaigns a stronger voice and brings expertise and experience that no single organisation can provide.

We are also professionalising the Society itself, with a new image and branding and a renewed focus on how we communicate, campaign and engage with the town.

Perhaps most importantly, we are becoming increasingly prepared to hold the authorities to account and to speak up for Stourport when we believe decisions are not in the town's best interests.

That is what civic societies do. We are not elected representatives, and we do not claim to speak for every individual resident. That is what councillors are for. Our role is different: we speak for the *place* — its character, heritage, environment and future — and we make the case for good decisions that will leave Stourport a better place for the people who live here.

There is plenty still to do. Stourport faces significant challenges, from the future of its high street and heritage buildings to development pressures, public realm and the consequences of local government reorganisation.

But the Society is stronger, more confident and better connected than it was three years ago.

That is good news for Stourport.

Please share this newsletter with your friends and neighbours. Encourage them to join the Society — or, better still, bring them along to one of our meetings so they can see for themselves what we are doing.

The more people who care about Stourport and take an interest in its future, the stronger its voice will be.

Also in this edition:-

Proposed controversial disposal of part of Burlish meadows by WFDC

The visit of Pershore Civic Society And our return one!

New membership renewal form

Application to demolish listed building in Cheapside

Canal & River Trust work in Stourport

Our new programme

More control over our High Street



Programme September 2026—July 2027

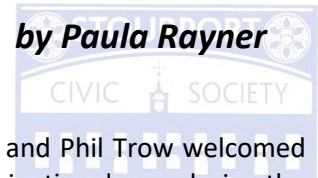
10th September 2026	Worcestershire Remembered	<i>Ray Sturdy</i>
	A nostalgic look at changes to town and country ways of life	
8th October 2026	Building Conservation	<i>Tim Bridges</i>
		<i>Conservation Advisor Birmingham & West Midlands</i>
	Victorian and Edwardian Buildings of the West Midlands	
12th November 2026	The River Stour	<i>John Billingham</i>
	Our Stour from Clent to Stourport	
10th December 2026	The History of Dudley Castle	<i>Max Keen</i>
January 2027	Festive Event	
11th February 2027	Archery	<i>Leslie Smeeton</i>
	(Pointing the way!)	
11th March 2027	Lost Worcester	<i>Marguerite Collins</i>
	A virtual tour of the city, looking at the changes to buildings and streets which have happened over the past 80 years	
8th April 2027	Blood, Vomit and Body Parts	<i>Anne Booth & Hilary Thompson</i>
	A brief history of the Rose Theatre & a look into the world of props	
13th May 2027	The Stourport Wesleyan Chapel	<i>Jo Roche</i>
	(Meet at the Chapel)	
10th June 2027	Highways and Waymarkers	<i>Jan Scrine</i>
	Annual AGM will also take place	
8th July 2027	Summer Social	

Another varied programme put together by our Programme Secretary, Paula Rayner. It includes some returning speakers but also talks on Building Conservation, Stourport Wesleyan Chapel and also the Rose Theatre in Kidderminster and much more.

Pershore Civic Society's visit to Stourport

"One of England's finest examples of canal heritage."

by Paula Rayner



On Tuesday 9 June, two of the Stourport Civic Society's trustees, Paula Rayner and Phil Trow welcomed twenty two members of Pershore Civic Society to Stourport. They enjoyed a fascinating day exploring the remarkable canal heritage of our town which included visiting the Lock Cottage and going inside the Ticket Office Museum in York Street. Here we were joined by Gill and Shirley of Stourport Forward, who spoke to the group about the Ticket Office, the Stables and the Tontine. Gill and Shirley have a wealth of local knowledge of the town's history and the development of the canal, the canal basins and surrounding buildings and we were very fortunate that they were able to join us.

After an enjoyable walk around the town, with much chatting about what had been seen and discussing such topics as Stourport Civic Society's campaign for the development of the Bridge Street Car Park, we concluded our walk at The Severns Club for some well-deserved refreshments.

Stourport Civic Society's visit to Pershore

"Not simply a place to visit, but a place where more than a millennium of English history comes vividly alive"

On a day when rain was threatened but, thankfully, did not materialize, Tuesday 4 August was the day of Stourport Civic Society's reciprocal visit to explore Pershore, courtesy of our hosts, Pershore Civic Society.

About a dozen Society members met in the afternoon for a guided tour of the town. Split into two groups and ably led by Michael Hodges and Val Wood, along with other Pershore Civic Society volunteers, we were treated to a wonderful walk from the Bridges Car Park meeting point, along to the town centre and, ultimately, the Abbey. As we walked up Bridge Street admiring the wonderful Georgian facades of the grand buildings along the road, it was a surprise to find the River Avon was close by. We ducked down a lane between the buildings and were totally amazed that the Avon, hidden from view from the road, was flowing along the length of Bridge Street. In times gone by the river was hugely important for local merchants to transport their goods between Worcestershire and larger commercial centres. In contrast, on the opposite side of the street, again behind decorative Georgian fronts, we discovered that most of the buildings still retained their original medieval timber framed structures; another surprise hidden from view.

On reaching the High Street we encountered another unexpected delight at "Number 8", a community arts centre which features a 250-seat auditorium for films, live music, theatre as well as a welcoming coffee shop in the foyer area. Here we were treated to delicious home-made cake and a refreshing cuppa! The existence of "Number 8" is testimony to how a dedicated group of volunteers can create such a wonderful community centre from a derelict building.

Our final destination was the Abbey. It is the town's greatest landmark and sits proudly behind the High Street. Although a fraction of its original size of what was as an important Benedictine monastery in medieval times, the remains are what the people of Pershore saved to be their parish church. Thanks to Dr Judy Dale, president of the Pershore Civic Society, for her knowledge and enthusiasm in speaking to us about the Abbey; its origins, its special features (such as the ringing platform) and its current use – a truly spiritual place – the heartbeat of a very special town which is Pershore.

As Michael Hodges, Chairman of Pershore Civic Society put so well, perhaps the greatest value of visits such as these is the opportunity to exchange ideas with fellow Civic Societies that, across the country, face many similar challenges.

Planning Issues

by Phil Trow, Civic Society Secretary and planning advisor



July has been a busy month for us in many ways. In terms of planning applications, there haven't been that many and few of any consequence - **except one we got right at the end of the month for the demolition of 1 and 2 Cheapside.**

For those that don't know, Cheapside is behind The Angel public house, at the end of Severn Road by the "dZine Exhibition Furniture" units.

The proposal is to demolish these grade II listed buildings on the basis that they are not economically viable to repair and replace them with an apartment block comprising 5 flats. They have a very striking curved brickline. You can see a similar brickline at either end of Moorhall Lane. These buildings are special in that they are unusual and interesting from an architectural perspective, dating from around 1800; but they are also important remnants of the industrial heritage of Cheapside. They have been in this state for several decades! We are studying the details of the application and preparing our objections. We will update you as the application proceeds.



LISTED BUILDINGS ARE NOT DISPOSABLE

By Andrew Booton

The application to demolish 1 and 2 Cheapside is completely unacceptable.

Stourport Civic Society has already set out its concerns in our earlier press release, but one point deserves repeating. Buildings are not listed so that they can eventually be demolished when an owner has failed to look after them. Listing exists to protect buildings of special architectural or historic interest for future generations.

Thankfully, the demolition of listed buildings is extremely rare. The one example in Wyre Forest that we are aware of, the former library in Kidderminster, appears to have resulted from a technical error rather than physical neglect or an agreed decision to demolish. That rarity should be reassuring.

But you never quite know with WFDC. Only recently, the Council demolished the former bakery in Raven Street. Although it was not listed, it stood within a conservation area and had been identified for restoration in the recent conservation area review. WFDC therefore had to apply to itself for retrospective planning permission for the demolition.

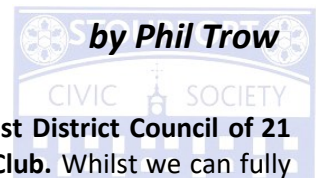
What an embarrassing position for a planning authority to find itself in, and sadly, it is indicative of the slipshod way in which heritage is sometimes treated.

The answer for 1 and 2 Cheapside is not demolition. It is investment, imagination and a determination to bring these important historic buildings back into productive use, just like the old weavers' cottages in Horsefair, Kidderminster.

We will be strongly objecting to this application and encourage others to do the same.

Email Stourport.Civic.Soc@gmail.com

Burlish Meadows



Another significant issue at the moment is the proposed sale by Wyre Forest District Council of 21 acres (8.5 hectares) of Burlish Meadows to Kidderminster Harriers Football Club. Whilst we can fully support our local football club, especially now they have been promoted to the National League, it should not be at the expense of a biodiversity rich country park!

Burlish Meadows is in the Green Belt and has existed as a natural green space separating Kidderminster from Stourport. During the Second World War some of the site was occupied by the American military of Camp Bewdley. It was then farmed for over 50 years. There was then an outline plan for sand and gravel extraction but fortunately it was preserved as a green space by the creation of a golf course, with full public access. After the financial failure of the golf course, WFDC took over management of the site as a nature reserve, with the long-term objective of returning it to heathland.

This has proved to be very successful and it, together with the designated Burlish Top Nature Reserve, is the largest span of natural open space in Stourport. Today it boasts a wide range of fauna and flora which would be destroyed by the proposal to sell. Just as our built heritage is important to the character of the town, so is our natural heritage. Stourport boasts some of the most impressive and regionally important heathland of which Burlish Meadows is a part. Once this is lost to developers it is lost forever. There is already a large housing development planned on the other side of Kingsway, close to the allotments, and this planned disposal reduces it even further.

There has been an extensive Social Media campaign to raise the awareness of the meadows, with an online petition and encouragement to send in letters of objection to the council.

We will know by the late autumn what decision the Council will come to and if they sell, a planning application will follow. We will keep you updated on developments.

MIKRON

THEATRE WHERE YOU ARE

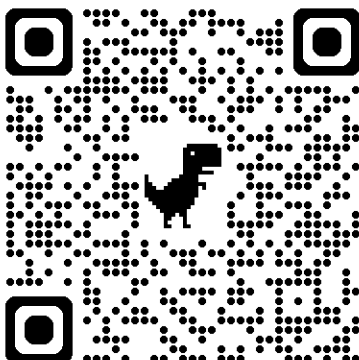
**A date for your diary Friday 28th August 7 — 9pm
In Tontine Gardens, Stourport**

Stourport Forward is once again sponsoring the visit of Mikron Theatre to Stourport where four talented actors playing a multitude of musical instruments perform their show “Wensleydale Whey”.

Bring your chairs and wrap up warm for an evening of music and laughter. If you love your shows, you’ll love Mikron.

As usual you pay nothing to come in and donations are requested when you leave.

Below is the QR code, which will take you to the trailer for the show, if you are reading this online.



**We tell stories of social justice, social history
and the issues of today.**

*“Always a very entertaining show
and another brilliant performance
from Mikron”*

David & Annette More



MORE CONTROL OVER OUR HIGH STREETS — BUT WILL COUNCILS USE IT?

By Andrew Booton



At last, a little more control over what comes to our high streets.

The Government's proposals to give councils greater control over vape shops, betting shops and premises associated with criminal activity are welcome. They recognise something communities have been saying for years: local people and councils have far too little influence over what happens to the shops and premises that make up the heart of their towns.

But, as so often, it feels like too little, too late.

For years, high streets have changed around us, often with little ability to influence what replaces the shops and services that disappear. Planning rules can be remarkably permissive when what a town actually needs is the ability to say: "No, we don't want another one of those. We need something different here."

Stourport Civic Society knows the problem only too well. We saw it when the former Kwik Save/Old Factory Shop was given planning permission to become yet another takeaway — precisely the sort of use that, in our view, Stourport did not need more of.

Cumulative impact matters

The question should not simply be: "Is this business acceptable?" It should also be: "Is another business of this type what this street or town centre actually needs?"

One takeaway may be acceptable. Ten takeaways can fundamentally change a high street. The same applies to betting shops, vape shops, phone shops, mini-markets, nail bars and other narrowly focused uses. None may be unacceptable in isolation, but their concentration can undermine diversity, character and vitality.

This is not about being anti-business. It is about recognising that a town centre is a collective asset and needs a healthy balance of shops, services, food and drink, community and cultural uses, homes and public spaces.

Occupied is not automatically better than empty

Nor should we simply fill every empty unit at any cost. A high street full of low-quality or inappropriate uses can be more damaging than a small number of temporarily vacant premises.

Councils need to be more imaginative. They already have tools including local plans, conservation policies, licensing and enforcement powers, town-centre strategies, Article 4 Directions where justified, and High Street Rental Auctions.

Since December 2024, councils have been able, in defined circumstances, to use High Street Rental Auctions to tackle persistently vacant commercial premises. These powers can give local businesses and community organisations opportunities to bring empty properties back into productive use.

So where is the ambition to use them in Stourport?

The latest Government announcement should not become another excuse for waiting for yet more powers. Stourport already has powers that could be used.

The question is whether Wyre Forest District Council is willing to use them — and whether Stourport Town Council will press it to do so.

Crime is a place-making issue

We particularly welcome the Government's recognition that premises associated with organised crime can damage high streets.

Illegal tobacco and vape sales, money laundering, illegal working, drug dealing, fraud and other criminal activity undermine confidence, drive out legitimate businesses and contribute to the deterioration of the wider street environment.

Crime is a place-making issue continued

This cannot simply be treated as a policing issue. Planning authorities, police, immigration, HMRC, Trading Standards, licensing authorities and landlords need to work together more effectively, with councils willing and able to enforce the powers they already possess.



The proposed one-year maximum closure period for premises associated with criminal activity should not become a ceiling. Where there is evidence of repeated offences, phoenix companies or continuing links to organised crime, longer exclusion periods should be possible.

Give communities genuine control

The Government should not treat this simply as a problem of vape shops and betting shops. The objective should be high streets that are diverse, attractive, safe, economically viable and reflective of what local communities actually want.

Communities need more than the right to object to individual applications. They should have a meaningful role in deciding the mix of uses they want for their town centre.

A high street is too important to leave to the accident of whoever happens to want the next empty shop.

The Government has taken a step in the right direction. But after decades of watching high streets hollow out, we need much more ambition.

And councils need to stop waiting for the next new power before acting.

Stourport should be able to decide what kind of town it wants to be.

Too often, it cannot.

HERITAGE NEEDS OWNERS WHO CARE AND COUNCILS THAT ACT

Stourport has a remarkable historic environment, but its heritage is not protected simply because a building is old or listed. It also depends on owners taking their responsibilities seriously.

Ignorance should not be an excuse for neglect. Nor should being an absentee or out-of-town owner mean that a building can simply be allowed to deteriorate.

The Swan is a good example. Our concerns relate to the owners of the wider site, not the tenants running the pub. Then there is the former Lock Shop/Bluebells Café, which has already been chopped about and defaced and is now being allowed to deteriorate. Wyre Forest District Council tells us that action is being taken against the owner. We hope that is the case but too often we see a slow and overly cautious response when what is needed is firm, decisive action.

Enforcement matters not just because of the individual building. It sends a message to every other owner: neglecting a historic building is not an acceptable way of managing property.

Stourport Civic Society will therefore be taking a more proactive approach. We will be identifying buildings at risk and bringing them to the attention of Historic England, where appropriate, as well as the national amenity societies (including the Victorian Society and the Georgian Group) so that neglected heritage does not simply disappear through inaction.

Our historic buildings belong to the story of Stourport. Owners have a responsibility to pass that story on.

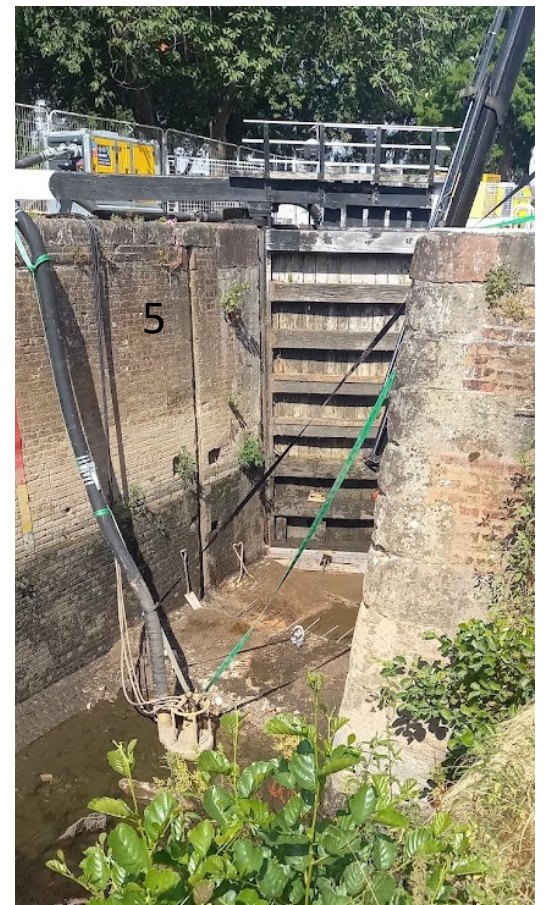
**Don't forget to renew your membership,
rates held again this year**

Local canal repairs work this year

by David More

As a Canal & River Trust volunteer I wanted to let you know some of the extensive work CRT have done this year to keep the canal and basins operating normally.

In the spring the locks by Blossoms Tea Rooms were replaced (photos 1&2). Early summer, Bullocks Lane bridge by the WFDC tip was repaired (photos 3&4). Finally following a large, serious and potentially dangerous breach (leak) underneath the bottom set of broad locks onto the River Severn repairs have just finished. The repair to the top set of gates in this lock was also brought forward to coincide with this emergency work (photos 5&6).





Stourport Civic Society

Application for Membership

2026/27

Individual £12.00 Joint £20.00 (valid until August 2027)

Cheques: -payable to Stourport Civic Society

Bank transfer: - Pay: Stourport on Severn Civic Society
Sort Code: 204606
Acct No: 30835447
Ref: *Your name*

Please PRINT

Mr/Ms/Mrs

Name

Address

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Postcode

Telephone

e-mail

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*Signature

Date

Mr/Ms/Mrs

Name

Address

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e-mail

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*Signature

*GDPR By signing this form you consent to Stourport Civic Society retaining these details and sending out Society information to you (by email if supplied).

Please return completed to:

Paula Rayner, Membership Secretary
Stourport Civic Society
c/o Elizabeth Mills Centre,
Sion Gardens,
Stourport, DY13 8BH

Or Email to Stourport.Civic.Soc@gmail.com

Charity No: 1092842