

KING'S LYNN CIVIC SOCIETY

www.kingslynncivicsociety.co.uk



A new chapter for our library?

**NEWSLETTER
Autumn 2025**

Chairman's report

Alison Gifford

Dear members and other readers

I know how pleased you must be that your pressing concern for the last few years has finally been recognised. When you were having lunch with your family or painting signs for the 'Make Hedgehogs Fun Again' riots, at work, queueing up in A&E and taking out a mortgage to go to the pub, your main topic of conversation was local government reorganisation and how a good shake up lasting five years while nothing else gets done would fix all our woes. Of course, it's a well-known disgrace that your aunt Ethel doesn't know who collects her bins.

The consultation went well too. Question one was do you want your new councillor to have no idea where you live – you ticked YES

Question 2. Do you want a political Mayor of Norfolk and Suffolk with a shed load of money and lots of power – after a whisky and a gin and tonic – you ticked YES

Question 3. Do you think this will save money – you ticked NO.

To the multiple-choice question. Is Local Government Reorganisation a) a very good idea b) a really super idea and c) Just what the doctor ordered – you ticked all three.

Well done because here it comes.

I'm still not sure if Civic Society members and the general population of King's Lynn and West Norfolk have any idea about what is going to happen to Local Government by 2028.

Under the Government's plans, district, borough, county and small unitary councils will be replaced by new unitary councils which will provide all council services to the communities they cover.

There will be **no** King's Lynn and West Norfolk Borough Council. It will go. Whatever happens – it will cease to exist. To whom you pay your council tax, find out about recycling centres, have planning applications decided is undecided. Who will be responsible for picking up litter, planting the parks and gardens, mowing churchyards, running swimming pools, the Corn Exchange, Lynnsport and the Town Hall, we do not know but it will not be as it is now. Who will look after the South Gate or the Red Mount? We may now have the last Lynn Mayor after over 800 years.

But we will have an elected Mayor for the new unitary authority who you will never meet and who will have to use Google to find out where King's Lynn is. This Mayor will be elected by the poor beleaguered voters to lead a new, single authority of Norfolk and Suffolk responsible for services like economic growth, transport, and skills, replacing the existing two-tier structure of district and county councils. The election is anticipated in May 2026 (county council elections were cancelled in May this year ready for this), after Norfolk and Suffolk were accepted into the government's Devolution Priority Programme.

All the district councillors will go, none of the council employees at King's Court and around the borough have any idea if their jobs are safe, probably not.

The best we can hope for is that the six current district councils manage to lobby for three medium-sized authorities. Working together as 'Future Norfolk', the councils – Breckland Council, Broadland District Council, Great Yarmouth Borough Council, the Borough Council of King's Lynn and West Norfolk, North Norfolk District Council and Norwich City Council – have worked together to develop a better more local plan where three geographically aligned councils replace the six. I sincerely believe our local representatives have worked this up to be the best option, but it is up to the government to make the choice – three districts, a single county council based in Norwich, or a Norfolk and Suffolk unitary.

For residents of King's Lynn and West Norfolk, it would mean forming a new district with North Norfolk and Breckland. It doesn't take much

imagination to see that only one chief executive, one chief planning officer, one economic development department, environment, etc. will be needed. Any money saved will be spent on expenses as they crisscross each other driving around to meetings.

Naturally Norfolk County Council don't want that to happen. Norfolk County Council's cabinet has agreed to submit a business case which details how 'a single council for Norfolk would save £39.8 million per year and deliver the biggest benefits' which you might think very optimistic for an authority which is £800m in debt as I write.

But we might get a Town Council out of it all. Cllr. Alistair Beales, leader of the Borough Council, said: 'King's Lynn has had 832 mayors, we need to preserve this civic pride. At the moment King's Lynn has not a parish council or town council. It will help solve a democratic deficit we have had in this unparished area.'

But as this is apparently a money-saving exercise, it's hard to see how a Town Council can be given enough money to do more than Hunstanton and Downham Market, very well in their way. King's Lynn functioned like a city state for most of its history due to its significant port, wealth, and maritime influence, which made it a powerful and independent hub. It struggled until Henry VIII to ditch the Bishop of Norwich who was hated so much for his tax grabbing that on his visits to Lynn to collect his money he travelled with armed guards! And now this historic town may be reduced to a future dealing with fly tipping and stray dogs.

Let's hope for the best. The three-council option and a Town Council with money and significant powers. If you have any thoughts on the Local Government Reorganisation and how it will affect King's Lynn, it would help the Committee to represent our members views at any future consultation if you let us know what they are. Most particularly if we have a chance to influence the chance of a strong Town Council. Email the secretary, Anna Gunn, info@kingslynncivicsociety.co.uk.

I hope it's not churlish under the circumstances to wonder why the town is still such a neglected mess. The High Street paving still not resolved

with a set of work lights on a pole which dazzle like a football stadium at night, the Purfleet neglected with buddleia growing out of the bridge, empty shops or vape shops, bins out all week, cars parked on pavements, weeds in all the pavement cracks and those dreadful pop-up cabins in Purfleet Street. What happened to the Rail to River project – ‘High Impact’ public realm improvements? They said, ‘Apart from making the town look more appealing and easier to get around, we expect that this project will increase footfall into the town centre’. Did you notice? The promised Purfleet arch – where is that?

The £25 million Town Deal money which was supposed to fix all our problems has been pretty underwhelming in its effect. Its mission was ‘funding improvements such as revitalizing buildings, creating a new library and community hub, and restoring historic sites. There is also a focus on enhancing the town’s heritage, which is seen as a key strength, and on improving public spaces, seating, and green areas’. They did manage to do the one thing no one asked for or wanted – a so-called new library which is really for social service delivery ‘of adult learning, business support, and flexible spaces for events and workshops. It will also feature a training kitchen and King’s Lynn’s first town centre Changing Places toilet for improved accessibility. The goal is to create ‘a modern, vibrant community asset that provides learning, support, and opportunities all in one accessible location on the high street’. Somewhat ironic that the new hub meant abandoning part of the town’s heritage.

There have been no new buildings in King’s Lynn town centre for 20 years since the very generic new shopping centre was built. That was nothing special but the new so-called library looks as if children have built it out of Lego!

Town regeneration should come from the people who rent and own shops, work and live in the town and see it and use its facilities day by day. No consultants can have that feel for the place, they want to impose a ‘vision’ designed on their computer. If all the money given to consultants over the years was given to the actual people whose income

and welfare rely on a thriving prosperous local economy, then we would see real change and engagement.

This bottom-up approach should focus on what a town already has—its people, businesses, historic buildings, and natural surroundings—and work to enhance these assets. Community participation and collaboration projects to revitalise the High Street should involve local artisans, tradespeople, and community groups, making the community an active partner in its own revitalisation. Perhaps a new Town Council will come out of it all and genuine transformation made possible.

We have undertaken an empty shop review which Kim Leonard will tell you about on page 7.

Talking of consultants, they have been at it with the Custom House. What hubris persuades anyone to attempt to improve on Henry Bell I do not know. We want this iconic building open and useful; how hard can that be? See page 19 where there is also a report on planning matters.

Residents and visitors love to visit King's Lynn. Heritage Open Day proves that again. Anna, Laura and Kim worked their miracle again and will tell you about it on page 23.

Please make a note of our spring lectures on page 6.

Lecture Series

2026

Thursday 05 February: The Dutch Stranger community in King's Lynn
(Professor Chris Joby)

In the late 1560s and early 1570s thousands of people, mainly Calvinists, fled from the Low Countries to England because of religious persecution and economic necessity. Several hundred of them arrived in King's Lynn. In this presentation, Professor Christopher Joby provides a history of these migrants or Strangers in Lynn. He reflects on questions such as where they came from in the Low Countries, why they came to Lynn, what they did there and local responses to their arrival. The Strangers established a church community which met for worship in Lynn Minster. Professor Joby discusses what we know about the minister, elders and deacons of the church community and how some of them contributed to building up the Dutch Reformed Church in the Low Countries.

Thursday 05 March: Taste (Dr Robert Anderson)

Members are invited to a preview of Dr Anderson's Summer Exhibition for the King's Lynn Festival. We all have good taste, don't we? Come along and find out.

Thursday 02 April: The Permanent Residents (Steph Hall)

A short history of Hardwick Road Cemetery, how it came about and some interesting local characters laid to rest there

Thursday 21 May: AGM followed by an update on what Civic Society have done this year

All lectures at Thoresby College, South Quay at 7.30. Members free.
Visitors £2.50

Empty Shops Survey 2025

Kim D Leonard

Introduction

Please find below this year's Empty Shops Survey. This has been an exercise carried out by the Civic Society over many years and is a good barometer to test the health of our main retail streets by identifying the number of empty units.

I would like to thank Anna Gunn and Inge-Lise Greaves for their support and input into this year's survey.

We have taken the opportunity of reviewing the information we collate about the individual retail units and for the first time we have engaged a much more detailed approach to identify the main activity of the businesses that make up our 'High Street'.

The term 'High Street' has become a nebulous term and has come to mean the main shopping area of a town. In the case of King's Lynn, this encompasses ten thoroughfares as detailed further below.

This detail is important, as whilst the trend in 'empty shops' is useful, the overall economic health of a town can be reflected in the type and proliferation of the main business of the shops that are attracted here and that remain viable.

With thanks to Anna, the first detailed survey was conducted in April 2025 and Inge-Lise and I conducted another detailed survey at the beginning of October 2025. This has allowed at least some comparison over seven months, rather than the traditional annual analysis in past years. Future years will benefit from this additional detailed work.

There are local and national factors that impact on the vitality or otherwise of our High Street and hopefully some of these will be brought out in this report. In fear of a report that lasts 50 pages, I may not have explored some of the factors that impact the High Street in depth and I will leave those for members to identify and consider for yourselves.

Detailed Analysis and Diversity of Businesses

Appendices A and B give a detailed breakdown of the type of businesses and the number of units in each street broken down into activity for April and October 2025 respectively.

A total of 341 retail units were identified spread across the 10 main shopping streets.

Whatever we may say about the health of our High Street, it was surprising to note that when the 'Hospitality', 'Hair and Beauty' and 'Financial' headlines are broken down further, there were an amazing 75 different types of business activity represented in King's Lynn.

'Health and Beauty' units, which includes hairdressers, barbers and nail salons, are the most prolific but is explainable as, so I am told by someone who regularly uses these services, hair needs to be cut and styled and nails cut, polished and painted on a very regular basis!

Another explanation for this high incidence may be due to the proximity of the College of West Anglia which regularly produces qualified health and beauty technicians. There may not be enough permanent jobs in the town for these graduates and therefore another (or perhaps the only) option seems to be to start your own business, some at home, some mobile but certainly some in shops in town and should be applauded. The activity appears to cluster in the roads where rents are perhaps more affordable. Whether there are too many of this type of business activity or not will be determined by pure supply and demand.

An urban myth has developed that High Streets are now only made up of charity, vape, tattoo and barber shops. Whilst this may be true elsewhere, it is not necessarily the case in Lynn where these units combined make up only 9% of the total.

We currently have 14 charity shops and even these are not safe from wider economic pressures with one charity shop in Broad Street changing hands this year. In addition, Cancer Research UK are actively looking at closing High Street shops all over the country and opening out-of-town 'super-warehouses' due to increased staff costs, competition from online sites such as Vinted, and falling footfall in town centres.

Empty Shops

As in previous years our survey covered the main shopping streets as detailed in the following table. The number of empty units is given for both April and October 2025.

Street	Total number of units	Number of empty units April 2025	% of total	Number of empty units October 2025	% of total
High Street	87	11	12.64	12	13.79
Norfolk Street	81	11	13.58	7	8.64
Broad Street & St Dominic's Square	48	6	12.50	5	10.42
New Conduit Street & Purfleet Street	37	4	10.81	4	10.81
Tower Street	28	4	14.29	3	10.71
Blackfriars Street	15	3	20	3	20.00
St James Street	36	8	22.22	8	22.22
Saturday Market Place	9	2	22.22	1	11.11
TOTAL	341	49	100	43	100

As can be seen there were a total of 49 empty units in April 2025 which reduced to 43 in October 2025, an improvement despite all the challenges facing the High Street, of which we will explore later.

The table below records the results since 2018.

Date of survey	High Street	Norfolk Street	Broad Street / St Dominic's Square	New Conduit Street / Purfleet Street	Tower Street / Blackfriars Street	St James Street / Saturday Market Place	Total
August 2018	9	9	8	4	4	10	44
February 2019	12	12	9	2	1	8	44
September 2019	12	12	12	1	1	5	43
October 2020	8	5	13	3	2	6	37
April 2021	12	8	16	4	1	8	49
April 2022	15	8	7	4	2	8	44
September 2023	8	8	6	3	4	7	36
August 2024	10	13	4	5	4	9	45
April 2025	11	11	6	4	7	10	49
October 2025	12	7	5	4	6	9	43

Whilst having one in 12 units or 12.6% empty is never anything to write home about, the current position is better than six months ago and no worse, and in fact is exactly the same, as the average position over the past nine years.

Again, whilst we would all like to have all shops occupied and a thriving, vibrant town centre which supplied everything we could possibly want, this is difficult to foresee ever happening unless there are some seismic local and national changes and a complete reversal in our current buying habits.

However, trying to put a positive spin on what is possibly a gloomy outlook, as a town we compare marginally favourably with the rest of the UK as the national average empty shop figure is 13.8%. We are a lot more fortunate than some towns in the country, which have up to one in five shops vacant.

The table below shows the empty shops statistics for a number of local and other towns and like King's Lynn Town Football Club we hover around mid-table.

Town	% of Empty Shops
Southend	15.4
Ipswich	14.2
Northampton	14.0
National Average	13.8
King's Lynn	12.6
Chatham	12.0
Norwich	11.8
Peterborough	10.8
Cambridge	8.5
Bury St Edmunds	6.0

Local Challenges

Having just spent time comparing King's Lynn with other towns, it is accepted that direct comparison is difficult. Each town has its own distinct benefits and challenges: its catchment area, the demography and spending power of its residents; transport links; ability to attract outside visitors, etc. We will never be a Bray High Street in Berkshire, which has a higher per capita of millionaires than anywhere else in the UK, for example.

Local challenges stem from the lack of footfall in the town centre. Our out-of-town retail parks have large national stores, where customers don't have to pay for parking or battle the traffic into the town centre.

Paying for parking is a real disincentive and it is highly unlikely that the Council will offer free parking to improve the situation as this is such a big cash-cow earner. Perhaps offering free parking for certain days leading up to Christmas might just provide a welcome although a very temporary boost.

Dead End of the High Street

As highlighted in a recent *Lynn News* special report (see edition dated Friday 5 September 2025) entitled 'Dead End of the High Street', there are areas in town where the number of existing empty shops gives a run-down, dilapidated feel. This is well illustrated by the closure of Debenhams in 2020, known as 'an anchor store' which while it was open attracted other businesses to the area. Conversely now that it has been shut and neglected, it is turning the area in a no-go area for potential businesses. This is despite the attractiveness and efforts of the shops and businesses that remain there.

It is said that efforts are being made to find a solution to the eyesore that has become the Debenhams building as it takes up so much of the street. Converting into (or better still) knocking it down to build a hotel has been mooted as a potential use. This could be especially useful as when the St George's Guildhall development is complete and the expectation of thousands of visitors start arriving from all over the world, they do not currently have many places to stay.

To attract income to the town for day visitors is one thing, but the big prize is for visitors to stay overnight or over the weekend, injecting more income into the local economy. To enable longer stays, we need more hotel beds. The Somerfeld and Thomas Hotel, perhaps?

There is a danger that other areas of town are already in the same boat or heading the way of the Saturday Market Place end of the High Street. Blackfriars Street with the ongoing debacle of the unoccupied old Post Office and St James Street are good examples.

Many of King's Lynn's shop premises are owned by absent and even landlords based overseas. The Government announced the introduction of new powers to revitalise High Streets by introducing High Street Rental Auctions. (As an aside it would certainly improve our Carbon Emissions if politicians stopped just talking but started actually doing something!)

This initiative enables local councils to take ownership of long-term empty shop premises and make them available to local businesses and

that would certainly help. This option was mentioned as a possibility in the *Lynn News* article. Whether it will be enforced or not is a different matter. We will see where we are next year.

When Alfred Jermyn opened Lynn's first department store in 1872, I wonder how many local shops which sold the goods he now sold closed down? Empty shops as a consequence of changing retail practices and advances has therefore been going on for a long time and is not a new phenomenon. Jermyn's and Sons were acquired by Debenhams in 1943.

Pop-Up Shops

We have a total of five 'pop-up, prefab' shops in Lynn, including the two situated in Purfleet Street. Last year, those of you with good memories might recall I commented about the installation of these 'pop-up, prefab' shops.

Three of these shops remain vacant including the two in Purfleet Street which appear to have only been occupied for a short period of time over the past year. I questioned last year why we had invested so much in creating additional retail space when there is suitable space available in any street in the Town Centre, whilst destroying the view of the Custom House from the High Street at the same time.

The two Purfleet Street pop-up shops were empty at the time of the October 2025 survey and there appears to have been little occupancy during the period leading up to Christmas 2024 and the whole of 2025. These now look like rusted and abandoned site huts from exhausted mine workings, waiting for a bulldozer and appear to have been a waste of our Council Tax payer's money.

I have put in a Freedom of Information Act request as it would be very interesting to see how much these units cost to purchase, instal and maintain against occupancy rates and rental income. I will let members know the results in the next Newsletter and on our website.

Wider Challenges

As identified in previous reports, the wider challenges facing the High Street are not new. Buying online will continue to grow. I am guilty, if guilt needs to be confessed, of buying online. One would go to the Amazon website on your mobile phone; choose what you want from the seemingly infinite choice; pay instantly and it arrives the next day at a far cheaper price. The alternative would be to get in my car or on my bike, pay for parking and hope that the shop has what you want. In our busy lives, minutes compared to hours without any inconvenience really matter.

We have all become lazy shoppers. However, you cannot replace the benefits of the exercise, the social interaction and the chance to bump into someone you know when you shop in town. Although for me, sitting outside TK Maxx (other shoe shops are available) for an hour while my wife chooses yet another pair of shoes, you can see why Amazon has its benefits!

Increases in Employer National Insurance rates and reductions in the qualifying threshold, along with Minimum Wage increases in the last Budget, have had a significant detrimental impact on all small businesses. And more pain is no doubt yet to come. A report by Begbies Traynor (the corporate insolvency and recovery group) estimates that up to 50,000 British businesses are on the brink of going bust with retail and the hospitality sectors bearing the brunt, with the worrying potential that 17,000 shops could close. Good news for the Begbies Traynor share price, but ominous news for those who own or work in a small business.

Along with the closure of the shop and yet another empty unit comes the loss of the local spending power of the employees who have lost their jobs. Household incomes are also under pressure from food inflation and some of the highest energy costs in Europe which reduces our catchment area's spending power and must be having an impact on the number of visits to town.

The Government and Opposition both announced policies to help the High Street at their recent conferences. The Shadow Chancellor said they would introduce a policy to abolish Business Rates for High Street shops

where many retail outlets are already exempt and which in any event would cause a gaping £4 billion hole in local Council incomes, which would need to be replaced from elsewhere.

The Government's Communities Secretary of State announced ahead of Labour Conference that they will introduce new powers to give local authorities more control over how many vape shops, bookmakers, and barbershops can open in a local area. As King's Lynn has only a total of 15 such outlets out of 341 shops, this smacks of nanny state interference and deciding how many ice cubes you should have in your gin and tonic whilst sitting on the deck of the Titanic. It will be of no use to King's Lynn and more hot air.

A recent blog entitled 'Will the Conservatives or Labour save the high street?' by Anthony Breach for the Centre for Cities website (www.centreforcities.org) and published on 8 October 2025 argued that neither policy will save the High Street. (I highly recommend this organisation if you are interested in what happens in our towns and cities.)

He continues that to help our High Streets, any policy has to tackle the root causes of the problem. This lies in expanding the purchase power of the local economy by allowing local incomes to grow, with a particular focus on attracting more higher wage jobs and industries. The physical make-up of the High Street will also need to change in some places by adapting to leisure, experience, and food and drink.

Conversion of empty retail to residential use as seen in Norfolk Street may also be option.

A report, also from the Centre For Cities website entitled 'Checking out: The varying performance of High Streets across the country' published on 10 July 2025 by Paul Swinney, Oscar Selby and Luka Kovacevic identifies four key reasons why High Street vacancy rates vary so much across the country and I recommend reading it for the detail that cannot be included in our newsletter.

They conclude by saying that a struggling High Street is the outcome of a struggling economy, not the other way round and therefore any policy

interventions to save the High Street shouldn't start with the High Street itself, but the wider economy. The way things are going some may be struggling for some time yet.

Reading back on my report, I hate to sound too negative as we have a lot going for us. There are parts of the town that are doing well and are very busy. We have an historic old town with a high number of unique Grade I and Grade II Listed Buildings and are surrounded by beautiful countryside.

However, the stark reality is that it would seem that we might all have to accept that for all the challenges facing us, the bottom line is that there are now simply just too many shops chasing too little income. It is down to basic supply and demand that a fully occupied High Street may never be realised again and we need to forget when the High Street was the only shopping experience available.



OCTOBER 2025 - ANALYSIS OF SHOP TYPES
ACTIVITIES WITH MORE THAN ONE SHOP

APPENDIX A

Activity	High Street	Norfolk Street	Broad Street / St Dominic's Square	New Conduit Street / Purfleet Street	Tower Street	Blackfriars Street	St James' Street	Saturday Market Place	TOTAL	%
hair & beauty	3	13		5	9	1	11	1	43	12.61
empty	12	7	5	4	3	3	8	1	43	12.61
hospitality	10	10	5	4	4	1	2	4	40	11.73
clothes & shoes	13	2	6	5	1				27	7.92
takeaway	3	6	3			2	1	1	16	4.69
charity	6	3	4	1					14	4.11
homeware	1	4	4	1	3		1		14	4.11
financial	6			4			1		11	3.23
health	3	1		2	1	2	1	1	11	3.23
food		5	3	1			1		10	2.93
phone	4	4	2						10	2.93
2nd hand		5	2		2		1		10	2.93
jewellery	3	2	1	1	1				8	2.35
chemist	3	1	1	1					6	1.76
estate agent	2			1		3			6	1.76
optician	2	2		1		1			6	1.76
vape	4	1							5	1.47
cards	2		2						4	1.17
gambling			2	1	1				4	1.17
pawn broker	2		1		1				4	1.17
recruitment	1	1					2		4	1.17
travel agent	2		2						4	1.17
newsagent/books		2	1					1	4	1.17
tattooist		1			1	1	1		4	1.17
craft		1	1		1				3	0.88
building maintenance		2							2	0.59
records	1						1		2	0.59
toys		1	1						2	0.59
Instances of 1 activity per street - see Appendix B	4	7	2	5	0	1	5	0	24	7.04
	87	81	48	37	28	15	36	9	341	100
% of shops	25.5	23.8	14.1	10.9	8.2	4.4	10.6	2.6	100	
% Empty Shops	13.79	8.64	10.42	10.81	10.71	20.00	22.22	11.11		

OCTOBER 2025 - ANALYSIS OF SHOP TYPES
INSTANCES OF SINGLE SHOP ACTIVITIES

APPENDIX B

Activity	High Street	Norfolk Street	Broad Street / St Dominic's Square	New Conduit Street / Purfleet Street	Tower Street	Blackfriars Street	St James Street	Saturday Market Place	TOTAL
art				1					1
book		1							1
books/stationery		1							1
clothing alterations		1							1
computer sales and repairs							1		1
dry cleaner	1								1
education				1					1
exhibition - pop up				1					1
florist							1		1
funeral						1			1
gifts	1								1
hardware		1							1
keys locks and shoes etc.			1						1
laundrette							1		1
legal				1					1
office							1		1
perfume				1					1
Phone/vape			1						1
photos		1							1
printer							1		1
stationery	1								1
taxi		1							1
test centre	1								1
toys/baby		1							1
Total	4	7	2	5	0	1	5	0	24

Planning round-up – Autumn 2025

Although we haven't submitted comments on many planning applications since April, an important one related to plans for the Custom House (ref 25/01327/F). The general plan is to provide a lift for access to the first floor along with other alterations which BCKLWN hope will make the building more attractive for events and functions. The planning application was quite specific. We objected to a proposed suspended walkway over the Purfleet that we considered utilitarian and not in keeping with this unique building. We also objected to an external service box. As yet a decision is still pending. Our letter can be read on the BCKLWN planning portal.

We also sent a strongly worded letter in relation to an application for paving around the new 'Library' or *Multi-User Community Hub* (ref 25/01496/F). This sounds like a fairly innocuous little scheme, but amounted to a complete deviation from the much-promoted masterplan for Baxter's Plain. That is a scheme that has been developed by BCKLWN and their consultants, BDP, over several years and that KLCS and many other groups/individuals have been extensively consulted upon. Moreover, the proposed paving type is not found anywhere else in the entire town centre as far as we can tell – despite another expensive consultant report, the *King's Lynn Public Realm Action Plan* (Graham Massie, 2021) specifically recommending that BCKLWN adopt a consistent materials palette. This lack of liaison/coordination between our public authority departments is deeply worrying.

As an aside on this 'library' project, we noted in the press recently that the expected cost is now **£17.3 million** – a new increase of £2.2 million (of public funds). In our 2022 Autumn newsletter (when the estimated cost of the project had recently risen to £12.4 million), we said: *Cost escalation on such projects seems almost inevitable and has troubled similar schemes up and down the country – even before the current inflationary trends began...* hmm. Meanwhile, what will happen to the Carnegie Library is still not confirmed. Again, it seems inevitable that a

large amount of public funding (of some form) will need to be found to repurpose that building too.

In other planning applications – we remain concerned about the growth of applications for multiple occupancy housing in the town centre (which appear to offer very basic accommodation and in our view are unlikely to result in happy, healthy Linnets). We have also commented on several shop frontage applications.

Transport: We sent an eight-page response to the recent *King's Lynn Transport Strategy 2025–2035* consultation. KLCS has supported the need for a clear strategy for transport infrastructure for King's Lynn and West Norfolk for many years. Our executive summary read as follows:

- *The Strategy report has much useful information within it and hints at commitment to delivering a multi-modal approach to transport that we have not seen before in previous reports. It is good to see reference to 2050 net-zero commitments and the need to reduce air pollution and protect the environment.*
- *Nevertheless, as a strategic document we feel it is weak. It fails to define even a broad order of priorities and actionable steps that will ensure development of the Vision proposed at Page 10.*
- *Of the 'List of Projects' it is apparent that five of the largest and most expensive are road building projects. More specifically they are road building projects that we believe will have little or no benefit to the town of King's Lynn and are very likely to exacerbate problems at key junctions – notably the Hardwick roundabout. They will not promote a shift to a multi-modal transport network (and will most likely hinder that shift).*
- *Whilst the report acknowledges that Devolution/LGR will shortly replace all the principal decision makers for regional infrastructure planning and delivery, the Policies are all about NCC committing to work with other bodies (many of which will*

also be replaced within three years). These commitments are therefore almost entirely worthless.

- *This Strategy provides the outgoing Transport Authority with an opportunity to use its experience, contacts, and expertise to set down clear goals and programmes that the succeeding decision-making bodies can pick up and immediately begin to implement. It fails to set out that pathway.*

If you would like to read our full response, it is available on our website.

Swimming Pool: You may have heard that BCKLWN have promoted a plan to replace the St James Swimming Pool with a new one at Lynnsport. The thinking seems to be that the existing pool is 50 years old and will need to be replaced at some point and that piling all of the district's principal sporting facilities onto one site will result in reduced operational costs. And, they will be able to sell-off the St James site to an (as yet unidentified) developer for an (as yet unidentified) new purpose.

Whilst this seems to have logic from a very simplistic property management point of view, we have written to Councillors and officers and expressed a number of concerns. The existing site is central, well served by different transport systems and provides the type of attraction in the town that we are consistently told increases footfall in the town centre. Lynnsport is difficult to get at and surrounded by residential streets that don't need any more traffic. We also think that a downstairs pool in a sports centre may not represent aspirational progress over 50 years, when the St James pool is generally seen as a very good quality facility that (older residents will remember) replaced an outdoor pool in The Walks.

Thinking more laterally, what this is really about is the diminished financial capability of public bodies (and the stresses on the national tax-base in general). If we want excellent public facilities in future, we may have to embrace more public/private partnerships. Before 1945, public amenities were regularly funded by local benefactors and philanthropists.

We doubt if local swimming enthusiasts would blanch at visiting the *Adrian Flux Aquatic Centre* if it was a high-quality facility.

If you would like to read our full response, it is available on our website.

West Winch Growth Area (WWGA): The outline planning consent for the first 1,100 houses in the WWGA was eventually confirmed in May – following, as we understand it, agreement of Section 106 arrangements to be provided by the developers. We understand that NCC hope that their £110 million ‘Housing Access Road’ will also have planning consent by the end of this year. The road might be open by 2028, which is likely to lead to other housing applications coming forward. Neither BCKLWN or NCC will exist by the time the first houses at this proposed 4,000-dwelling community are occupied.

It is clear that the WWGA scheme will be very dependent on road transport and we fear that the impact on the frequently congested Hardwick Roundabout will be significant and permanent. We contrast this scheme with the development being planned at Waterbeach north of Cambridge. That scheme for 6,500 dwellings already has high quality cycle and pedestrian connections and a bus hub and in future will have its own railway station and park-and-ride interchange...

Neighbourhood Board

KLCS have attended a couple of workshops held by the Neighbourhood Board (formerly the ‘Town Deal Board’) regarding the government’s ‘Pride in Place’ programme. The Board hope that this can deliver £20 million of investment for King’s Lynn over the next ten years.

The funding is particularly aimed at ‘deprived neighbourhoods’. The Board must submit their plan to government by the end of the year and confirmation of the first £2 million is expected to be next April.

Obviously, we are supportive of investment in Lynn. We hope that the programme can survive changes to local and national government over the next few years.

King's Lynn Masterplan

KLCS have already had a preliminary discussion with BCKLWN consultants about the proposed 'King's Lynn Masterplan'.

As we understand it, this document will be a 'brochure' setting out key projects and regeneration opportunities for King's Lynn and will be available to slap on to the desk of our new Norfolk/Suffolk Mayor next May. (The Mayor is expected to have a considerable budget and powers over transport, adult education, skills training, housing, and economic development.)

Whereas it is easy to regard this as yet another consultant report outlining dreamy concepts for the town, we do understand the need to prepare an up-to-date 'aide memoire' for the incoming authorities that will be in charge of our destinies in only a few months' time ...

King's Lynn Heritage Open Day – 14 September 2025

Once again we had a busy and successful day, although the day ended on a slightly damp note. However, there were unexpected benefits – the King's Morris relocated indoors, to the Assembly Room in the Town Hall, and looked properly at home there!

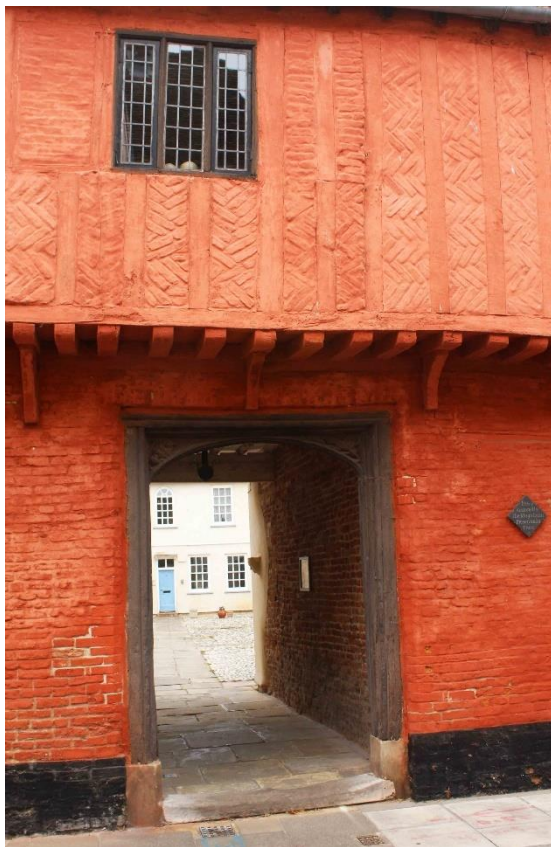
We are very grateful to the Borough Council for opening some of the finest buildings in King's Lynn (the Custom House, South Gates, Red Mount Chapel, the Town Hall, St George's Guildhall – open for the last time for a while before closing for major renovations) and for the support of their staff both beforehand and on the day. We would not be able to have such



a great day without the support of other organisations – King's Lynn Town Guides, the King's Lynn Preservation Trust, Friends of St Nicholas' Chapel – as well as museum staff, church staff and many other volunteers who helped out on the day.

This year's theme (set by Heritage Open Days national organisation) was 'Architecture', which we felt was rather a broad theme to grapple with! Dr Paul Richards gave a talk on how the face of King's Lynn changed through time (1500–1900), and the King's Lynn and District Camera Club had a fascinating exhibition at the Hanse House. And of course we had some of the best architecture in King's Lynn open and on show.

As ever, there was a range of entertainment on offer – including music (Chanter's Jigge, Rachel Bea, Regis Saxophone Quartet, u3a Shanty Singers, The Kentwell Players amongst others), to dancing (King's Morris), re-enactors (the Knights of Skirbeck (medieval) and King's Lynn Under Siege (civil war) in The Walks, East Norfolk Militia (Napoleonic war) on the Purfleet, Norwich and Norfolk Medieval Association in South Gates), and a range of others including Fens Falconry, Lavender Hill Mob Theatre Group and Lavender Lacemakers. The vintage bus service was once again very popular. The Town Guides





offered free walks around the historic town centre, a walk up the High Street, and a walk round Gaywood – all very well attended. The support of organisations like the Town Guides is invaluable to the success of the day.

We had our usual market of Norfolk producers in the Saturday Market Place, offering everything from cake, curry, honey, beer and chocolate to macrame, jewellery and beautiful art and photographs.

Thanks to our main sponsor – the Borough Council of King's Lynn and West Norfolk, as well as our other sponsors – Steele Media, 4Way Group, Riverbank Bakery, Kenneth Bush Solicitors, Kip McGrath Tutoring, Bepak, Guy-Raymond,

King's Lynn Website Design and Norfolk Sound Systems. The support of all our sponsors is very gratefully acknowledged.

Many visitors were local, from King's Lynn, Docking, Shouldham, Titchwell, Watlington, Heacham, Southery, Downham Market, Castle Acre and many other places.

Others came from further afield – London, Essex, Suffolk, the New Forest, Aylesbury, Cambridge, Oxford, Northampton, Buckinghamshire, Leicester, Lincolnshire and even as far afield as Tenerife, Cordoba, Portugal, the Netherlands, Sri Lanka, the USA and Tasmania.

We asked how people found out about our Heritage Open Day and the answers ranged from 'online', 'local paper', 'friend', 'newspaper', 'Tourist Information', 'Facebook', 'Insta', 'word of mouth', to 'come each year', and 'happened to walk by'.

Some visitor comments:

By email: My husband and I enjoyed a fascinating brisk march property to property to be informed, inspired and amazed by the architecture, stories and history shared in Kings Lynn last weekend.

Please know how much we value what you've done, and what all the hosts did to make it such an amazing opportunity.

By email: I attended the open day and enjoyed looking around many of the very interesting buildings that were open for the day. Great tea and cakes too. Town has a wealth of history and heritage. Clearly takes a lot to organise it all.

From the visitor books:

Very informative and interesting – driven by hundreds of times and had no idea you were here (Jewish Cemetery)

A beautiful church full of history. Thank you Father Adrian for a very informative talk (All Saints Church)

Very interesting and great to have characters to inform about medieval times (South Gate)

Great to see it open again after so long – always loved it (St Nicholas' Chapel)

Interesting to see inside a building I've walked past many times (Lath Mansion)

Thank you for sharing and explaining this extraordinarily elegant building (Evershed House)

Workshop was amazing and really fun (GroundWork Gallery)

A great visit to a house I worked on! (Valiant Sailor)

A really interesting day. We love it!

Really interesting learning about our home town.

These are the buildings that were open and a breakdown of the numbers we have received (not everyone had the time to record numbers, or chose not to):

Property name	Number of visitors
10 Tuesday Market Place	—
19 Tuesday Market Place	—
28–32 King Street	540
All Saints' Church (open from 12)	58
Bank House	501
Borough Archives	386
Burkitt Homes Board Room (open 10–12)	212
Church of Our Lady of the Annunciation	—
Clifton House (open from 12)	434
Corn Exchange	—
Crown & Mitre	—
Custom House	—
Evershed House (open 10–1)	356
Ferry Lane Social Club (open from 10.30)	—
Friends Meeting House (open from 12)	43
Greenland Fishery	—
GroundWork Art Gallery	35
Guildhall of St George	1,565
Hampton Court secret garden	329

Property name	Number of visitors
Hanse House	–
Hardwick Road Cemetery (open 10–3)	46
Highgate Methodist Church (open from 12)	2
Jewish Cemetery	166
King Edward VII Academy	–
Lath Mansion	639
Lattice House	–
Live and Let Live (open from 11)	–
London Road Methodist Chapel (open from 12)	61
Lynn Museum	665
Majestic Cinema (open 10–1)	–
Marriott's Warehouse	–
Minster (open from 11.30)	1,196
Pilots' Office & Tower	336
Red Mount Chapel	910
Sommerfeld & Thomas	826
South Gate	591
St Ann's House	–
St Faith's Church (open from 11.15)	–
St John's Church (open from 12)	–
St Nicholas Chapel	550

Property name	Number of visitors
St Peter's Church, West Lynn	–
Stories of Lynn	1,423
Thoresby College	485
Town Hall & Guildhall	3,454
True's Yard Fisherfolk Museum	601
TS Vancouver	–
Valiant Sailor, 2 Nelson Street	1,099
WhataHoot	558
World War II Air Raid Shelter	–

PS Date for your diaries – next year's Heritage Open Day will be **Sunday 13 September**.

Our Local List: an update to think about

Liz James

This article is based on a report on the Local List position which I presented at this year's AGM in May. It began with a reminder of what a Local List is:

- It lists, with brief supporting info, heritage assets, unlisted by Historic England but locally or regionally important, according to a set of parameters or categories drawn up by the compilers.
- Ideally it is checked, as ours has been, by an independent panel.
- It may be adopted by the local planning authority perhaps as a supplementary planning document; however BCKLWN has not

adopted ours, although they are sympathetic to it and we have some slight evidence the planners refer to it.

Where is ours? Go to the Civic Society website, look for Local List and follow the instructions, via the interactive map, to the general area introduction and from there to individual properties or sites. It was also fed in on request to the compiler of the King's Lynn Urban (archaeological) Database (KLUD), which was part of the first Heritage Action Zone. That database doesn't seem to appear in its own guise online, but if you google it, the KLUD is stated to be incorporated in the Norfolk Historic Environment Record. However, entries from our list which do appear there (with information unlikely to have been picked up elsewhere) are very brief. Our own house is on our Local List for good reasons but when I tried to find it on the HER, our next-door neighbours were there but not us! This shows how important it is that our Local List is on the Civic Society website.

Special situations to deal with:

1. Historic England's 'also-rans', rejected for National Listing: HE advised sites rejected for formal Listing be included in a Local List. Rejection for National importance does not mean they aren't of Regional or Local importance. An example is the old Gaywood Infant School of 1849, St Faith's church office until a few years ago. It wasn't put on the Local List initially because it was thought to be included in the curtilage of the two 17th-century Grade II Listed cottages to which it is attached. That proved not the case, and so a Listing application was made in 2024 but rejected; the old school needs to be put on the Local List.

Applications for National Listing are likely to include pictures, a detailed historical résumé, and a full description of the building. If accepted, much of this would be part of the List entry on the Historic England website or obtainable from them. If rejected for Listing however, this material stays with the applicant and is generally inaccessible. This is vital stuff – but including it in a Local List entry would make the entry too long. We need to see how we can address this conundrum.

2. Something on our list but in danger: an example is Silfield House, no 85 Gayton Road. An intention to demolish, made apparent in 2023,

was shown to be unpreventable if it were to go ahead, unless the application for Listing made in 2024 goes through – at present it is still pending. Its main interest is NOT its tenuous connection through the former Silfield School with Princess Diana, but that it is a very fine house of the 1920s connected with the Jermyn family and designed for Lady Jermyn after Sir Alfred's death by Carnell and White, designers also of the Majestic Cinema and Gaywood Clock (both Listed). However, its background and importance are part of a building concept very difficult for non-specialists to pin down, which has its roots in the English vernacular Arts & Crafts movement, sometimes called 'a set of ideals rather than rules'. In addition, it is very hard to get a 20th-century building Listed anyway: remember we didn't manage it with the Post Office. Both applications led to a whole raft of records.



Silfield House

3. **‘Vanished before anyone realised’:** What do we do about demolitions? Darley Dale, the converted railway carriage once on Low Road, slipped away almost unnoticed, but its former existence should be permanently recorded. These ‘houses’ are very rare survivals of cheaply obtained ‘homes for heroes’ introduced after World War I. Apart from our list, has it left any record? It does have an equivalent to the Listing application essay: I have in my hard copy file a local newspaper feature which details its history. Added to this is the – fortunately very rare –



Baines Road brick kiln

‘de-listing’ process, which led to the de-listing and eventual demolition of the Baines Road brick kiln, last survivor of an important local industry.

4. Changes great and small in appearance since the list was finalised:

One of our houses on Gaywood Road featured the unusual survival of mid-19th century marginal glazing. The windows have been replaced by timber-framed bisected sashes albeit of good quality. They are not out of place and the originals may have become irreparable. The house is still on our List with a change in the description, but it is very important that the old picture stays on the record – it may be the only record of the original marginal glazing, which you don’t see very often.

We don’t know what changes the forthcoming new Unitary Authority will bring to planning procedure OR to things like the status of a Local List, whether currently adopted or not. Before the AGM, I emailed Historic England to find out their current stance on local listing: are they still pushing it? There was nothing to say so on their website except the general guidance on the subject which only dates from 2021. I have not had an answer.

The important thing to remember however is that our list’s role as a record will remain vital whatever happens and we must keep that record up to date as far as possible. No Local List carries any protection or conservation rules of its own, but it does flag up properties, sometimes otherwise unnoticed, as important.

Such records are things which ALL members can help with: Look up on our website map your street/road/neighbourhood or the places you pass regularly and see what, if anything, has been picked out for the list there and get to know it. If you see changes – let us know via the Society’s email address so it can be passed on for updating.

These might be: Window-changes as featured above, or loss of original leaded glass from a front door; change – or more likely loss – of an original house name from above the door; removal of eye-catching period chimneys (pots and/or stacks); loss of little non-structural ornamental features, e.g. of wrought iron. A note of these in an entry marks the former presence of an otherwise unrecorded original feature. If you're unsure whether it was original, still let us know!



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Every time you buy online for insurance, holidays and many other items you have the chance to help support us. In a short space of time, we have raised over £170 for the Civic Society.

Please go to <https://www.easyfundraising.org.uk/how-it-works/> for full details and thank you in advance for your support.

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