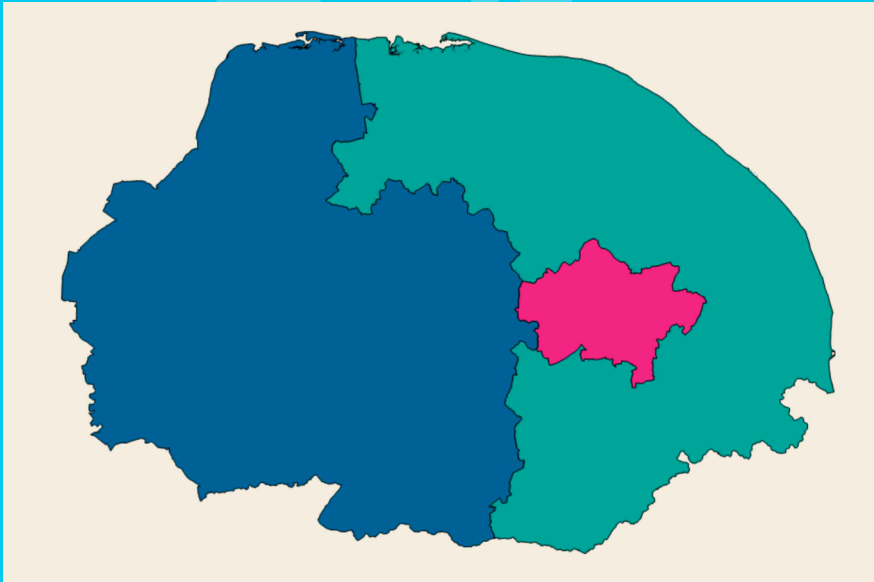


KING'S LYNN CIVIC SOCIETY

www.kingslynncivicsociety.co.uk



The shape of things to come

ANNUAL REPORT
2025–2026

Chairman's report

Alison Gifford

We started the Civic Society year with some concern about our finances, but I am happy to report, as you will see, that the committee and treasurer are content that we have improved the situation and can carry on with our work and projects. A small society like ours has to navigate a situation between being tempted to accumulate money like a savings account or spend and hope for the best. But kind grants, bequests, money-raising events and of course your membership fees have enabled us to carry out a year's programme and still have a few pounds in the bank. Kim Leonard is our busy treasurer and I thank him for his work during the year.

One change during the year which we all regretted is that the Conservation Areas Advisory Panel (CAAP) was disbanded. We have sent a representative to this panel since its inception. It was where informed ordinary members of the community look at certain plans for large developments in conservation areas and comment in a meeting with planning officials Desmond Waite was our diligent member for many years, Ken Hill, Jean Tuck, Ian Price and latterly Kim have all attended the panel. The reason for it now ceasing is given officially as:

The CAAP panel has been in existence for a long time and while the input of the panel has been invaluable, the National Planning Policy Framework now places greater emphasis on specialist advice on design, which this panel are not qualified to deliver.

But here is the odd thing – we all know that not a single building will be improved by 'specialist design'. Someone who cares about buildings and loves their town can spot a good sympathetic design from a bad one. It's hard to trust people who think that rusting shipping containers add to the look of Lynn, and yes, they did have planning permission (23/01497/F).

What still concerns many local people is the Old Post Office and number 33–39 St James Street. The latter was listed grade II by Historic England in 2019. I asked a question at the Council meeting

on 26 March about the future of the Old Post Office and there was much nodding of heads but no plan. Our local authority has the power in the case of both buildings to compulsorily purchase them (CPO), such powers are given for these situations. I've written a few paragraphs on enforcement on page 8.

And we don't know what the future will bring within our local planning departments. Local government reorganisation (page 11) is meant to save money so it seems unlikely that the new enlarged West Norfolk Council will retain the planning staff from the three former small authorities. With local planning departments potentially facing funding cuts and loss of specialist conservation staff, amenity societies like the Civic Society must become more proactive in filling gaps in knowledge, enforcement and design rigour. Perhaps they may have to act as the main source of heritage expertise in planning decisions.

So it was with foresight that Anna Gunn and Rick Morrish, concerned about the near collapse of Civic Voice, the main Civic Society national organisation, have been working hard to set up a local forum of Civic Societies in Norfolk and Suffolk. This has been a popular initiative with interest shown by local Societies from Beccles to Great Yarmouth to share knowledge and increase our combined influence. It's good work! Page 19.

During the year we had a successful fund-raising lunch in Queen Street. Please join us again this year. The advertisement is in this report on page 4.

Our lecture programme got off to an odd but I hope interesting start when I told you about 'Troy and King's Lynn'! Rick will review the lecture series on page 27. Our autumn 2026 lectures are listed on page 7.

Heritage Open Day is a continuing huge contribution to the town events calendar. It may seem contradictory but an event on this scale could not be organised by council staff were they ever so willing. It takes hours of dedicated volunteers time both before and on the day. Massive well done and thank you to Anna, Kim, Laura and new arrival Lindsey and all volunteers and stewards. We also had helpers from the

Civic Society at the Hanse Festival in June. A diary note – this year the date is 24 May which is in line with the other European Hanse towns. I was not surprised so much as saddened that at a recent committee meeting the council wanted concrete blocks to separate the road from people. We modified the plan to avoid this but it will happen at future events, I am sure, and if the organisers can't comply, the event will be cancelled.

The Visual Image subcommittee (Liz James, Fr Robert Fayers, Lindsey Berthoud and Alison Gifford) have finally got down to work on our new project. Six new green plaques and an interactive map on our website showing the whereabouts of each current green plaque, over 100, and giving much more information are planned. There will also be a paper fold-over walking map for visitors. The Town Guides have been invaluable taking photos and uploading them for us.

As you read through this annual report you will see how much is done by the hard-working committee. The Civic Society has adapted and I hope will continue to do so, it's not about the past, but learning from the past, good and bad, to inform how our town looks and feels in the present and for the future.

Our AGM is 21 May. Do come along to support the committee and learn more about our work and plans for the future.

Annual General Meeting

This year's AGM will be held on

Thursday 21 May at 7.30 p.m.

Thoresby College, South Quay

The business of the meeting will be followed by an update on what Civic Society has done this year.

You are invited to the

Civic Society annual fundraising lunch

Thursday 9 July at 1pm

£15 per person

Queen Street garden – enter through Clifton House door

Bring wine or beer (glasses and soft drinks provided)

Raffle

Email alisongifford@btinternet.com

Text 0787 0139315 or call 01553 763983 to book a place

Cash or cheques (made out to King's Lynn Civic Society) through 21 Queen Street letterbox

Gift Aid Declarations

Kim D Leonard – Treasurer

As a charity registered with the Charities Commission and HMRC, we are able to reclaim Gift Aid from UK taxpayers for any subscriptions or donations made by our members and by members of the public.

This will allow the Civic Society to reclaim 25p in the pound, therefore (and I know you can all divide by 4!) for subscriptions of £18 and £25 this results in additional much needed income of £4.50 and £6.25 respectively. It is also very satisfying to get something back from the government.

There is a requirement to ensure all our records are up to date, but I also want to make sure that we are not missing out on any of this ‘money for old rope’. Last year we reclaimed £330, but I am confident we could claim more with a full set of current declarations.

On the next page is a Gift Aid Form that I shall be grateful for all members to complete and return to me at the address provided. I can then be assured we have accurate records for one thing, but as importantly we can claim our full entitlement of Gift Aid. Please complete the form even if you are ineligible for Gift Aid.

If you are able to copy this declaration into an email, my email address is also given.

Thank you in advance.

Charity Gift Aid Declaration

Boost your donation by 25p of Gift Aid for every £1 you donate.

Gift Aid is reclaimed by the King's Lynn Civic Society from the tax you pay for the current tax year.

Your address is needed to identify you as a current UK taxpayer. In order to Gift Aid from your donation you must tick the relevant box below:

I am a UK taxpayer and understand that if I pay less Income Tax and/or Capital Gains Tax in the current tax year than the amount of Gift Aid claimed on all my donations it is my responsibility to pay any difference.

I want to Gift Aid my annual subscriptions and any donations.

☐

I am ineligible to claim Gift Aid

☐

Please complete the following details irrespective of your tax status:

Title _____ First name or initial(s) _____ Surname _____

Full Home address

Postcode _____

Date _____

Please notify the King's Lynn Civic Society if you:

- want to cancel this declaration
- change your name or home address
- no longer pay sufficient tax on your income and/or capital gains.

If you pay Income Tax at the higher or additional rate and want to receive the additional tax relief due to you, you must include all your Gift Aid donations on your Self-Assessment tax return or ask HM Revenue and Customs to adjust your tax code.

Please return this form whatever your tax position to:

Kim D Leonard

Treasurer, King's Lynn Civic Society

Smithfield Cottage, 6 Cottage Row, Gayton Road, Gaywood, King's Lynn, PE30 4EQ

or email treasurer.civicsociety@gmail.com

Autumn Lecture Series

Thursday 1 October Judith Merrill: ‘A.F. Scott the individualist and his architecture’

Architect A.F. Scott (1854–1936) designed from the traditional to reinforced concrete. Kings Lynn has one of a very few pre-First World War surviving buildings using reinforced concrete at 33-39 St James Street. The Victorian Society consider this A.F. Scott building to be of European importance. His great granddaughter will explain how his religious beliefs, independent travels and fantastic knowledge of structural engineering informed his work in Norfolk and beyond.

Thursday 5 November: Kathy Hipperson tells us about Catherine Walpole, wife of Robert Walpole, Houghton, married in 1700. ‘She had beauty and wit without vice or vanity, and cultivated the Arts without affectation.’

Thursday 3 December A talk exploring the King's Lynn Library Historic book collections. See our website closer to the time for more information.

Mulled wine and mince pies.

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

Tackling our Neglected Buildings

Alison Gifford

England's propensity for pettifogging rules is often exasperating, especially when it comes to building infrastructure. Everything is made a little slower and that inevitably costs money.

But it's also at the core of how we see our collective responsibility and why Britain in general has functioning towns and cities. Relaxing planning rules has to be carefully considered.

All over the world huge highways are built into cities with no corresponding pavements, pedestrian infrastructure or joined-up services. These cities look fantastically futuristic but on the ground outside the very small central business district they are often litter-strewn sewer-soaked slums.

It doesn't take many such examples to see that building regulation is essential and that, in general, the notion of public good is entrenched in our society and we mostly understand that our actions impact on others. For those who can't or won't grasp this, we have enforcement. There is a Borough Council enforcement team for planning breaches here

https://www.west-norfolk.gov.uk/info/20000/planning_and_development/42/planning_enforcement

You can report unauthorised building works, tree felling, tacky signs and a lot more. It's all about people doing things they don't have permission to do.

But we don't seem to have any way of making owners actually use and maintain their buildings. The Old Post Office, 33–39 St James Street, soon to be Debenhams and for many years Purfleet Street can deteriorate and blight the street and area with no official action to ameliorate the situation. Yet powers exist – and action to bring these buildings back into use would be massively effective and popular because we understand we need to look after the foundations of our

town before new schemes take priority. We mustn't normalise the slow rot of decay because we have got used to it. It's not just large buildings, a run of very ordinary shops in the Saturday Market Place end of High Street show no sign of being used or let and depress much of the street.

A functioning society depends on rules, and enforcement of those rules, and most people instinctively understand the benefit of them whether it's buildings, food safety or parking. If enforcement can tackle inappropriate windows, then surely the blight of derelict buildings should come pretty high up the scale to be tackled.

When you read this, four people will have gone round the moon. Fifty years ago people actually landed on it – I'm sure you remember this line from JFK 'We choose to go to the Moon in this decade and do the other things, not because they are easy, but because they are hard.'

Yes, Compulsory Purchase Orders are difficult, bureaucratic and probably expensive but neglect of our built environment by absentee owners should not be rewarded with apathy.



Heritage Open Day 2025

Sunday 13 September 10.00 a.m. – 4.00 p.m.

The national Heritage Open Days theme this year is ‘**Everyday histories**’. We are hoping to celebrate the stories of ordinary working people of King’s Lynn. We will have a wide range of buildings open, from churches and museums to pubs and private homes. There will be walks and talks, and a market of local producers in Saturday Market Place, as well as a selection of entertainers in different locations. And of course the ever-popular buses will be travelling their usual routes. Do come and join us!



More volunteers needed!

Several of the buildings require stewards. We need more people to offer two hours of their time to ensure that we can continue to organise a successful Heritage Open Day. If you haven't already offered to volunteer and would like to participate, please contact Laura Gunn. laurajg237@btinternet.com

Planning round-up 2025–2026

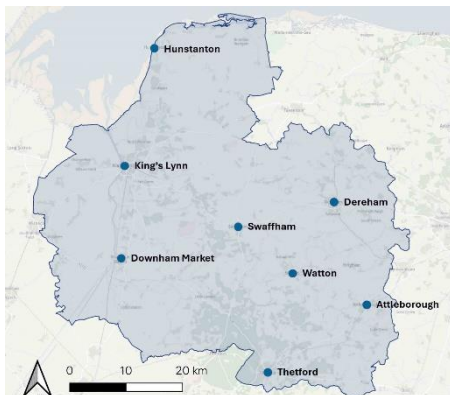
Planning sub-committee

It is difficult to overemphasise the magnitude of changes that have been occurring (or are about to occur) in local government and with the planning system. The changes can be expected to alter the nature of local democratic process and, we fear, may further distance communities from meaningful representation in national, regional and local plan making.

Local Government Reorganisation (LGR): The government announced on 25 March that Norfolk would be divided into three unitary authorities – Greater Norwich, West Norfolk and East Norfolk. This is expected to be set into law in the autumn, with new ‘shadow’ unitary councillors to be elected in May 2027 and the existing district and county authorities to be abolished in April 2028.

The new West Norfolk Unitary Council

(incorporating Breckland and part of South Norfolk) will have jurisdiction over an enormous area (2,860 km² or 1,104 square miles – larger than many whole English counties). The number and size of wards is not yet confirmed, but the goal is to reduce the number of councillors for each area drastically. At present, the area has well over 100 district councillors, plus county councillors, and this number is likely to be reduced by at least 50%.



Even if we have highly motivated, energetic and efficient new unitary authority councillors (?), it seems inevitable that they will be stretched thin by the role and distanced from their constituents and their issues, in every sense.

There are, as yet, many unanswered questions about how the reorganisation will actually work. How will county-wide services (e.g. Highways, Adult Services, Education, Waste Management, and specialist areas such as Biodiversity Planning) be run by three different unitary authorities? There is no one model from reorganisations that have already occurred. It may be that these services remain centralised and are ‘shared’. It may be that they come under the new Norfolk/Suffolk Combined Authority (the new Mayor – who is now due to be elected in 2028). Or they may be split up between the unitaries (likely to be expensive and retrogressive?).

Services that the districts presently undertake will presumably be ‘up-scaled’ to address the larger areas. We can assume there will be an overall reduction in the number of staff to cover essentially the same jobs. This is particularly likely to impact services like Planning, Housing, and Leisure and Amenities. At worst, services might be outsourced completely. Breckland have previously used Capita and Serco to undertake technical services and grounds maintenance – with very ‘mixed reviews’. (After a 15-year ‘experiment’, their *Technical Services* are now back in-house.)

Spending cuts have been challenging for local authorities for many years. The Borough Council have done well to maintain a reasonably high number of technical staff and many of their key services in-house. Reorganisation can be expected to cause significant, and probably long-lasting, disruptions to service delivery.

Changes to planning legislation: As well as rearranging local government, Westminster continues to fiddle with planning legislation. This means that planning departments are constantly needing to review and amend local policy and practices. Critics note an apparent trend to reduce opportunities for local community involvement in plan-making.

- Planning and Infrastructure Bill (2025). This bill came into force last December and the government have sold it as ‘streamlining’ the planning system. It requires strategic planning across wider areas and proposes a central ‘nature recovery fund’ to mitigate

environmental impacts of large projects. But a range of groups (including Civic Voice) raised concerns about the extent to which existing environmental legislation and the local democratic planning process can now be circumnavigated by the Act. It is perhaps a particular concern for East Anglia where large infrastructure projects are presently numerous.

- The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) is being revised again – with the government wanting to speed up urban growth and housing delivery. Emphasis is placed on denser development within settlements (which can be expected to impact on trees and gardens).
- The current BCKLWN housing supply target is 554 house completions a year, but from 2030, it is proposed to be raised to 989 a year. The strategic planners have therefore begun a new Local Plan Process – and have already sent out two ‘Calls for Sites’. It is not clear how LGR will impact on plan making and housing targets – but it will clearly alter the playing field.
- When ‘Neighbourhood Planning’ was launched in 2011, it was promoted as a *powerful tool to empower local communities*. It would give *residents, parish councils, and community groups direct power to shape the development and growth of their local area*.
25 parishes in the Borough have now prepared Neighbourhood Plans, but last year the government withdrew funding for these projects. This seems likely to be a precursor to dropping them completely – which is disappointing, as it was a good way to engage communities directly and proactively in considering planning policy and development.
- The government have recently consulted upon a draft ‘Design and Placemaking Planning Practice Guide’. It supposedly consolidates previous guidance (although it is 161 pages long!). We welcome good design guidance – but we feel that the key to good outcomes is planning departments and planning committees that understand what good design looks like and insist on having

it. As noted elsewhere in this annual report, the CAAP design review panel has now been disbanded, but no new design review panel has replaced it, even though it was previously suggested this was the plan. The Borough Council have never had a district Design Guide (although Breckland and South Norfolk have).

Planning applications: The KLCS planning committee have only prepared around 20 comments on planning applications this year. We stopped short of objecting to the two proposed ‘cycling hubs’ at Baker Lane and adjacent the Nar Ouse Way at NORA. However, we pointed out that even though KLCS strongly support investment in cycling infrastructure, two expensive bike sheds were unlikely to be the catalyst for a significant uptake of cycling in King’s Lynn. What we need first is a great expansion of safe cycling routes (like they have been rolling out in Cambridgeshire for more than 20 years). We have said this repeatedly since the hub idea was first floated about five years ago – as have the King’s Lynn Bicycle Users Group (BUG). The Baker Lane hub was refused planning permission and we think the NORA one might go the same way. It was disappointing that some members of the planning committee questioned investment in cycle infrastructure in general, and even more disappointing to hear the leader of the Council saying they would review the scheme and submit it again. We are still not clear who thinks this is such a great idea.

Most recently we supported the application for 19 new dwellings to replace the old garage at South Lynn Plain. It is frustrating to note that the project appears to be held up by Anglia Water. Privately owned utility providers, generally owned by foreign investment companies, often seem to want developers to pay for improvements to their infrastructure. This can slow or even kill development delivery. It is a significant problem on many projects and adds another burden to building costs.

A similar matter has arisen with the West Winch Growth Area, where costs quoted by National Grid Transco to move two gas pipelines to facilitate construction of the housing access road, rose from an initial estimate of £6m to over £24m. NGT are a monopoly – only they can do the work. But they are now owned by Australian and Canadian

investment companies, who will no doubt enjoy the profits whilst British taxpayers stump up the cash. It doesn't seem right.

King's Lynn Masterplan: KLCS provided a number of responses during the first consultation process for this BCKLWN project, which *will bring together opportunities identified from previous plans, strategies, studies and recent consultations into one coordinated vision for the town to help guide growth and investment over the next 20 years.* Stated key sites being considered are:

- The former Debenhams store KLCS see this site as an urgent priority, but we are quite sure it will need substantial public investment to get a good outcome.
- St James Swimming Pool site This seems to be a new priority of the current administration. As outlined in the November newsletter, we have significant misgivings about amalgamating all sports facilities at the Lynnsport site and 'flogging off' this site for an unspecified use.
- Common Staithe Quay We have supported the idea of enhanced public realm design in this area, but any development must maintain Corn Exchange access and integrate the Conservancy Board building.
- Church Street Car Park We have long supported the idea of mixed-use development on this site.
- Port and Timber Yard area Details about the extent and status of this site remain cloudy. However, we now know that Patrick and Thompsons have been bought by the Rose Group (general builders' merchants), and the sawmill has been closed, ending a 160-year tradition at the site. KLCS supported previous plans for residential development at this site back in 2011.
- West Lynn (former Del Monte and dredging sites) We have queried why these two sites have been 'de-allocated' for

housing due to flood risk. Surely appropriate design could make them flood resilient? The Dutch manage it?

- Riverfront We understand that the consultant team have developed a new plan for the section between King's Staithe Square and Millfleet and look forward to seeing it.

We understand that **all of these plans will shortly be consulted upon again** – but with the pending LGR process and current economic pressures, one cannot expect any rapid progress.

On a more positive note, we understand that the Masterplan funds are being extended to provide a review and re-write of the King's Lynn Conservation Area statements, some parts of which date from the 1960s. The review could suggest extensions to the Conservation Areas – something that we have lobbied for in the past.

We also understand that the consultants will develop an illustrated and more comprehensive Shopfront Guidance document. Again, we have lobbied for this in the past and last year we submitted local analysis and examples from elsewhere.

King's Lynn 'Pride in Place' Regeneration Plan: BCKLWN confirmed in March that their 'Pride in Place' plans had been approved to receive up to £20m of government funding over 10 years. It would be churlish not to congratulate officers for completing the Chinese puzzle of unlocking government money for investment in the town.

However, when you consider the breadth of tasks and initiatives they say they want to achieve with £2m per year, you have to question how much each project can possibly be awarded. Even the goals for the first four years sound onerous:

- A review of community assets and further community engagement to support priority neighbourhoods to develop their own individual Neighbourhood Action Plans
- Work to identify a wider range of uses for the town centre

- The next phase of regeneration along the Riverfront, building on the plans under way for the Custom House and dryside facilities
- St George's Guildhall & Creative Hub

When you consider that BCKLWN have already allocated £17m to the St George's Guildhall (and now say they need another £15m); that they have already spent £1.1m on consultation and consultants in relation to the Custom House (and that no works have actually begun yet) and that the new Library is already known to have cost £17m (final cost not disclosed as yet), it makes £20m over 10 years look like a very small pot.

Gyratory / Baxter's Plain: It was announced in February that NCC/BCKLWN had secured £18.73m in funding for the *King's Lynn Sustainable Transport and Regeneration Scheme* (STARS). NCC will contribute an additional £2m. This is touted as an initiative to improve walking and cycling infrastructure in the town and we understand will include alterations to the Railway Road / Blackfriars Road 'gyratory' and deliver planned public realm enhancement to Baxter's Plain. KLCS have broadly supported both these initiatives and look forward to learning more.

New 'Library': The 'multi-user community hub' opened in March. For the record, the KLCS planning committee have been broadly supportive of the external design throughout the planning process. We think it is a great improvement on the previous setting, although use of new materials can sometimes lead to problems nobody foresaw.

Our main concern with this building is whether the business plan, apparently depending on a host of rather vaguely identified third-party users, will be sustainable. As noted above, the building has already cost us over £17m and this large new public facility looks set to be dependent on the public purse long after NCC and BCKLWN cease to exist.

Meanwhile, the former Carnegie Library has been handed to 'The Workshop' to be a *creative hub*. We were told (by NCC) that the

Carnegie building was unfit for purpose and would be too expensive to modernise and run sustainably as a library, the implication being that NCC had limited resources and could not afford to operate a ‘high maintenance’ building.

‘The Workshop’ is run by The Garage Trust, a charity that runs on grants and donations. Historically it appears that the two largest funding bodies by far have been the Arts Council (in turn mainly funded by central government) and ... NCC. Yup, it is mainly dependent on public funding.

The Workshop now plans to undertake a comprehensive renovation of the building (indicating a budget of £10m in recent reports) and has initially secured a new grant from the Architectural Heritage Fund (yup – another body largely funded by government).

KLCS are, of course, strongly supportive of developing arts and cultural infrastructure in King’s Lynn. And we are quite sure that our entire membership believes in progressive taxation with a suitable proportion allocated toward expanding our civic amenities. Which is good, because that is certainly what has happened in this case...

Civic Voice / Norfolk and Suffolk Civic Forum

Civic Voice is our national representative body for local civic societies in England, promoting better design, protecting heritage, and growing community engagement and ‘civic infrastructure’. KLCS pay to be a member – a cost derived from the number of members each society has.

Civic Voice, and the predecessor, Civic Trust, have operated with staff, an office and a board of voluntary trustees. It has become increasingly evident that this organisational structure is not viable with the available income.

At the AGM last November, delegates from over 40 societies concluded that we must continue to have a national body but that it must be restructured. Inevitably this means more volunteer support for the Trustees, and more targeted goals and initiatives. Sponsorship may be sought. KLCS have committed to support the restructuring.

A stated goal is to have stronger regional representation. Regional *Civic Fora* exist in Yorkshire, London and the West Midlands, representing more than 100 separate societies.

KLCS have contacted other societies in our region and concluded that it would be appropriate to form a **Norfolk and Suffolk Civic Forum**. With LGR and the new Norfolk/Suffolk Combined Authority now imminent, with think this is an appropriate and opportune moment to establish the group.

We held a first meeting in Norwich in March, with nine societies present, and we plan a second meeting in Ipswich in June. Sharing knowledge, information and experience will be at the top of every agenda.

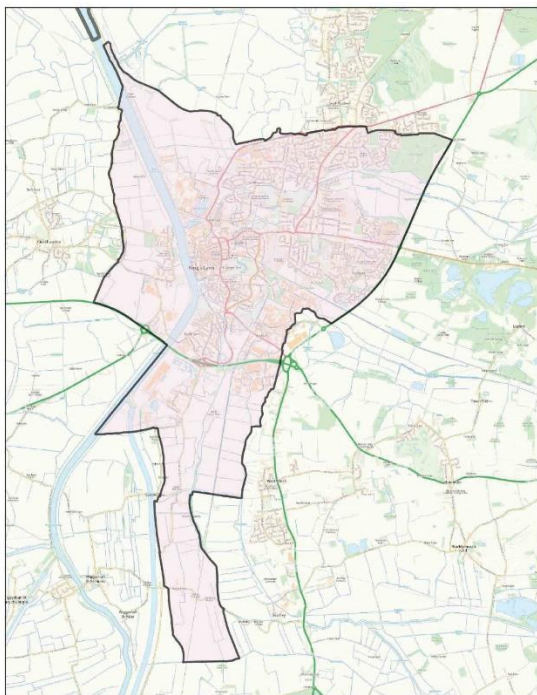
We hope that KLCS will learn and grow through this new association. As set out in this newsletter, we think we need a community-focused civic movement more than ever in today’s changing world.

The case for a Town Council

The Borough Council has recently run a consultation to ascertain whether as part of the proposed Local Government Reorganisation (LGR), King's Lynn should have a Town Council.

King's Lynn Civic Society (KLCS) are strongly in favour of this. We have prepared a statement of support that you can read in full on our [website](#). We have also prepared an open letter to the press that we hope will gain wider publicity.

The unparished area of King's Lynn (see map) has a population of around 46,000 which continues to grow. Since 1974, these residents have been represented by 10 borough councillors (and 5 county councillors). It is anticipated that under the new unitary authority, the number of councillors will be reduced – whilst their role will be to work for the entire district.



Other major towns across Norfolk have their own Town Council. Town and Parish Councils provide an additional and important level of local representation with accessible councillors, meetings, and staff. They should not be seen as an additional cost burden. The duties and tasks they undertake will need to be fulfilled anyway. They are typically a very cost-efficient way of delivering important, resident-focused services that support and build community cohesion and civic pride.

We think this is a once-in-a-generation opportunity to introduce a new elected body that can focus solely on representing and developing King's Lynn, its assets, its community and its culture. It will ensure that residents have accessible local representatives who will be advocates for the town in any future negotiations with the higher authorities – including the new unitary authority and the combined North/Suffolk authority and its new mayor. If we don't take this opportunity, we are likely to be the only community in Norfolk lacking this level of representation. We have a chance to create a long-term champion for King's Lynn – as well as retaining the traditional Mayor!

Empty Shops Update

Kim D Leonard

In the Autumn 2025 Newsletter, we presented an analysis of our annual survey into the number of Empty Shops in the main shopping streets in Lynn. This survey has been used as a litmus test to follow the health of our town by looking at these trends over the years.

Below is merely a snapshot of the current position to update members. The traditional full survey will be presented later the year.

I carried out a quick stroll around town (believe it or not more than two miles!) in mid-March 2026, to compare the April and October 2025 results to the current to see if there was any change, as shown in the table below:

Street	Total Number of Units	Number of Empty Units April 2025	Number of Empty Units October 2025	Number of Empty Units March 2026	Change since April 2025 (+/-)	Change since October 2025 (+/-)
High Street	87	11	12	14 (see Note 1)	+3	+2
Norfolk Street	81	11	7	8	-4	+1
Broad Street and St. Dominic's Square	48	6	5	3	-3	-2
New Conduit Street and Purfleet Street	37	4	4	6 (see Note 2)	+2	+2
Tower Street	28	4	3	2	-1	-1
Blackfriars Street	15	3	3	1	-2	-2
St. James Street	36	8	8	5	-3	-3
Saturday Market Place	9	2	1	1	-1	0
TOTAL	341	49	43	40	-9	-3
Percentage		14.36	12.60	11.71		

Note 1 – Coneys vacated the large shop on the corner of the High Street and Purfleet Street and downsized to a unit in Broad Street.

Note 2 – The Garage vacated a unit in New Conduit Street and moved to the Old Library.

Our survey may not have much scientific value compared to the information pumped out by the Office of National Statistics for example but it does show that, if the number of empty shops is an accurate barometer, there was an improvement in October 2025 and this has continued into 2026.

The use of the word ‘boom’ in the headline in the *Lynn News* article of 12 December 2025 may have been a tad hyperbolic, but the gradual improvement is encouraging. There is a lot going on with the economy that may yet bite us on the behind, so let’s wait for the October survey to see if the improvement is sustained before we start to get excited.

Pop-Up Shops Freedom of Information Request Results

Kim D Leonard

Our last newsletter included my report on the situation that pertained to the health, or otherwise, of our town centre during 2025, by analysing the number of empty shops.

In that report I commented on the installation of the two pop-up portacabins masquerading as shops that had been installed in Purfleet Street. Paraphrasing, I felt that the idea in installing additional retail space when we already have excess space and empty retail premises was bonkers. I was also interested in establishing whether, in addition to being an unnecessary eyesore, this was a value for money decision, or not.

Freedom of Information Request: As you may know, the Freedom of Information Act was passed in the year 2000 and created a public right of access to information held by public authorities. In 2024 alone there were over 83,000 requests made. This is a powerful piece of legislation which compels public bodies to disclose information that was previously hidden.

Our request was made soon after the Empty Shops Survey was published in our autumn newsletter and the response included information up to 25 November 2025. A summary of the information provided is shown on the next page.

Whilst it is appreciated that up until very recently there have been local challenges in Purfleet Street with the scaffolding and building works, my estimation is that based on the income over the past 58 weeks prior to 25 November 2025, it will take close on 27 years to recover the initial outlay and that does not include any maintenance costs that the shops have yet to incur.

I would imagine the defence to any criticism will be the building works and it is likely we will see an increase in income when the street is fully open again, as it is now. Please see the photographs.

As at 20 March 2026, none of the four small units that make up the two pop-ups seems to be occupied, but at the same time there will be ongoing maintenance costs as well.

The rental return of £14,400 was overly ambitious in my view, as it assumes that both will be occupied for all but four weeks of the year. By their very nature, pop-up shops will be for short stays and there are certain to be gaps whilst tenants come and go.

I asked AI (although I prefer RI – Real Intelligence – myself) how many days a year a typical pop-up shop is likely to be unoccupied and it said ‘potentially several months in a year’.



I don't know what brand of Colombian whoever made these decisions was inhaling at the time, but wouldn't it have been far more cost effective to do a deal with an absentee landlord to rent a couple of empty shops? Kill two birds with one stone?

This would appear to be far more achievable than spending nearly £80,000 on two eyesores that looked like the site huts for the now completed building work and which on current projections will be demolished before the Return on Capital is achieved.

I wonder if decisions like this would be made if we had our own Town Council.

Item	£
Cost, modification, internal fit out, door correction, steps, delivery and install.	£37,700
Finishing – corten steel, manufacture and installation	£14,200
Installation works, e.g. Electrical and Drainage	£26,399
Maintenance	£0
	£78,299

Business Plan (page 32) – estimated income per year

3 x pop-up units rental @ £100 per week for 48 weeks of the year = **£14,400**

Pop-up shops income over a 58-week period 2024/2025

Income – Tenant 1	£62
Income – Tenant 2	£1,920
Income – Tenant 3	£950
	£2,932

Breakeven based on current rental income (assumed that 58 weeks = one year for ease of calculation)

income/cost £2,932/£78,299 =

26.7 years

This year's Civic Society lectures

Rick Morrish

Our first lecture of the year, from our chairman Alison Gifford, was entitled *Where Troy Once Was?* She postulated the idea that when Homer (a person who may, or may not, have existed) transcribed ancient oral stories for the epic Greek poems the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, they falsely placed the events in their own homeland – the eastern Mediterranean.

But in fact, many aspects of those stories and cultural references don't really fit the settings they supposedly took place in – something that literary scholars have bickered over for many years. Alison described the theory that the Homeric legends actually make more sense when set in the Celtic lands of East Anglia – a theory that was first promoted by Iman Jacob Wilkens in his book *Where Troy Once Stood* (1990).

The bigger picture is of course that for thousands of years all human knowledge, culture and tradition was passed down the generations via the spoken word. When written texts began to be the dominant form for storytelling, power was transferred to the pen (and more specifically, the few people who wielded the pen!). It is entirely logical that the ancient Greeks may have 'Greekified' oral stories that had much older origins and may have been based on events from completely different regions.

Alison's talk should make us reflect on our current 'post-truth world', where seemingly any story can be placed in a new 'landscape' and any fact can be 'reimagined'. The 'pen' can be poisonous!

In November Dr Dustin Frazier-Wood, a cultural historian at Roehampton University, gave an enthusiastic account of the work being undertaken to renew the collection and original aims of the **Spalding Gentlemen's Society (SGS)**.

Established in 1710, SGS is the oldest provincial learned society in Britain. From the start, the members set out to collect, catalogue and study a vast range of books and artefacts. As well as collecting items from around the world, they had a strong commitment to local education, local history and charitable causes. They visited, documented and sought to protect local sites of interest. Today's collection is estimated to have more than 20,000 books, 15,000 documents and many thousands of other artefacts.

But all is not well with the collection or the building that has been home to the SGS since 1910. It has been impossible for most people to see the collection in its cramped conditions, artefacts are deteriorating and the building is collapsing under the weight.

In a great *Spaldonian* community effort (that should inspire us all in Lynn!), volunteers have moved the collection to nearby Ayscoughfee Hall, raised money to rebuild the SGS building and are moving ahead with an ambitious plan for outreach and education. We should all go to visit them and for further information, visit their website: <https://www.sgsoc.org/>

For our Christmas lecture, we welcomed back Kathy Hipperson, performer, educator and historical interpreter, to tell us about her varied work – including the *Time Will Tell* theatre group (who have presented interpretative theatre all over the country but especially for English Heritage and of course, King's Lynn Civic Society!).

She became a YouTube 'sensation' when portraying Avis Crocombe, the real-life former head cook at Audley End in the late 19th century. As a female head cook in a large house, Mrs Crocombe was both unusual and evidently highly thought of. One day whilst Kathy performed the role at Audley End, a visitor announced that they were a direct descendant of Avis and handed over her original recipe book – complete with handwritten notes and comments. This enabled the team to present cookery that accurately reflected Victorian dishes of

the day. The resulting videos have become popular all over the world and have attracted more than 1 million views!

Kathy also told us about her latest character – Mrs Wilding, who is currently demonstrating how to cook in the 1950s at the recently rebranded *Food Museum* at Stowmarket (formerly Museum of Rural Life). Hopefully KLCS will be working with Kathy and *Time Will Tell* in future.

In February, Professor Christopher Joby from UEA came to tell us about his studies into the so-called **Dutch ‘Strangers’** who established a community in East Anglia in the late 16th century. Following disputes between the Dutch and their Spanish overlords (where discontent about taxes turned into sectarian violence), thousands of people, principally Calvinists, fled to England. It seems that after an economic downturn, the Elizabethans welcomed this influx of skilled persons.

The Dutch immigrants brought a range of expertise, especially in the textile trade. Norwich began to reap the economic benefits and it appears that the burghers of Lynn actively courted the growth of a similar ‘Stranger’ community in West Norfolk. The 1571 census indicated that this new exile community had more than 200 members. It has not been established whether they built their own church, but they are known to have worshipped at St Margaret’s and possibly in their own houses.

It seems that the community did not remain in Lynn for very long. One reason may have been that the burghers of Norwich actively worked to suppress the establishment of an alternative textile-producing centre within Norfolk. Another reason may be that some of the Lynn community were leading ministers in the Calvinist church and returned to Holland when hostilities abated.

Dr Joby's interesting research can be found online: *The Dutch Exile Community in King's Lynn: A Forgotten Moment in Anglo-Dutch Contact*.

In March, we welcomed local resident Dr Robert Anderson to ask what constitutes *Taste*. Not one of the five senses, but the concept of taste in discerning aesthetic quality (or sometimes the lack of it). Robert has immense experience in the sphere of art and science going back to the early 1960s; has been curator and director of museums and colleges and is currently Board members of the King's Lynn Festival and Vice-Chair of True's Yard Fisherfolk Museum.

Robert's lecture was based on his upcoming exhibition for the King's Lynn Festival – which will also be entitled 'Taste'. Whilst some beautiful objects may become design icons, they may not necessarily be functional. Robert delivered a thought-provoking talk, followed by the highest number of questions and audience discussion we have witnessed and showed that what is considered 'Good Taste' is certainly in the eye of the beholder.

Our final talk of the winter was appropriately about the final resting place of many historic Linnetts – in the **Hardwick Road Cemetery**. Steph Hall of the Friends of HRC presented an entertaining history of the cemetery, first opened in 1849 by the parish of All Saints and becoming the official cemetery for the whole town by 1855. Although the original chapels have been lost, the stories of the *Permanent Residents* reflect the history of Lynn over the ensuing period.

Notable graves reflect Victorian entrepreneurial endeavour with grand statements of personal success left by Thomas Carter, Frederick Savage, Alfred Jermyn and others. However, other corners of the cemetery feature the unmarked graves of children, reminding us of the grim prospects for many 19th-century Lynn residents. (In fact, it has been estimated that there might be up to 15,000 unmarked graves of 'lesser folk' in the cemetery.) Steph also noted memorials to a number of Lynn tragedies, not least victims of bombing raids in the First and

Second World Wars and a tragic end to a day at the seaside when a train returning from Hunstanton de-railed.

Hardwick Road Cemetery is a fascinating repository of Lynn history and also a wonderful place to visit at any time of year. The Friends group organise open days and tours of the cemetery. You can find out more at their website www.hardwickroadcemetery.co.uk

Thanks to all those who attended – and remember, if you can recommend a good speaker who might be suitable for Civic Society, please forward your suggestions.

Fundraising for KLCS

Please consider signing up for the **West Norfolk Wins** lottery. We have registered as a ‘good cause’ and hope that you will join the lottery – for a chance to win £25,000! – but also as a way to help support King’s Lynn Civic Society. It’s easy to join and can cost as little as £1 per week.

Our other online fundraising effort is via **Easy Fundraising**. If you ever shop online, whether for groceries, products or financial services like insurance, you can help to raise money for King’s Lynn Civic Society.

Click on the links on the homepage of our website for more information.

Subscriptions

If you have already paid, thank you very much. Your contribution helps us to continue our valuable work.

If you haven't paid yet, please do so now.

Please note the new fees – if you pay by standing order, please amend it!

Individual membership £15

Joint membership (two people at one address) £25

Please consider setting up a standing order. Forms available from the membership secretary (see below) or send a cheque to:

Sandra Coleman

17 Trinity Quay

Page Stair Lane

King's Lynn

PE30 1NQ

Please note: the executive committee has decided that we will no longer send out membership cards.

King's Lynn Civic Society

Registered charity 298916

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Chairman: Alison Gifford

Vice Chairman: Rick Morrish

Secretary: Anna Gunn

Treasurer: Kim Leonard

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