



Wem Civic Society

The White Horse – a submission to Wem Town Council.

This report gives some context to the debate, summarises the views of Wem Civic Society with regard to the future of the White Horse; and includes a compilation of comments about the White Horse and the High Street received from Facebook pages, via e-mail, vox pop, and from the debate held by in Wem Town Hall, on Tuesday January 16th, 2024.

The White Horse

This is a listed building, an old coaching inn, that once was a focal point of activity in the town and occupies an important position in the town's layout. In its present dilapidated condition, it has a negative impact on the appearance of the town.

Context

Everyone realises that Wem Town Council is punching above its weight regarding the provision of services in Wem. A significant level of provision that should be provided at county level is being provided by the town council.

Allocation of resources: Shrewsbury seems to get the lion's share of any development money available. The justification is that Shrewsbury is much larger than the other towns. However when the combined populations of the main market towns are considered, from Ellesmere to Oswestry, they are larger than Shrewsbury. In all fairness, a more equitable distribution is needed.

Developments need to look to increasing the footfall in Wem. A multi-focus approach that delivers not just on individual events or projects but on rolling programmes would be the better long term approach.

There is a danger that the present WRAC crisis in the county will direct resources away from Wem.

Summary - *This summary is partial in that it reflects the views of Wem Civic Society regarding the future of the White Horse.*

The White Horse, a listed building of great historic value to the town, must be renovated and restored to provide a focus for the town. This renovation must be in keeping with the listed status of the building. It must also be informed by the wishes and needs of Wem – a repeat of the Town Hall debacle is to be avoided.

The upper floors should be converted into flats to provide additional affordable homes in Wem plus an income stream for the owner.

The ground floor should be turned into a community asset. There are a number of possibilities:

- ✓ Move library into ground floor, explore European approach to libraries – library as town's living room, as the 3rd space; home is 1st space, work is 2nd space. Books and other materials should make up the bulk of the site but other features could be incorporated – a children's area, including a soft play area; reading corrals; small informal meeting areas; a display area; a museum. A facility to make hot drinks is a possibility but not a café, there are sufficient in town.
- ✓ Co-operation or a link between Wem Town Hall and/or Wem Library is worth exploring.

Once the White Horse project is nearing completion – the town should look to the rest of the High Street and its renovation/restoration.

Comments from multiple sources

Wem High Street - Need to decide what Wem wants to be: heritage centre, tourism centre, sporting centre, residential, employment hub. Need not be just one focus. There is a danger of all eggs being in one basket.

We need something to draw everyone to the High Street.

- ✓ A bank would be good but that's not going to happen the rate they are closing.
- ✓ The biggest mistake was moving the post office off the High Street.
- ✓ The set up in the main car park means you can park up, do Co-op, post office, chemist and food then get back in your car and drive away, not touching the High Street shops and they try so hard.
- ✓ Police station, shut the one on car park, sell the land to Aldi and see Co-op's prices drop - everyone's a winner or sell it to fund pothole repair! S.C. being as useless as they are will probably just leave it to rot.
- ✓ Need more parking slots on the High Street.
- ✓ Parking system (charges) needs to be more helpful to Wemians including traders.
- ✓ Pavements need to be improved – broader and fewer potholes.
- ✓ More regular events needed, such as Vehicles of Interest, specialist markets, arts, historical functions.
- ✓ One-off events are of limited use, need a regular cycle, monthly, yearly, whatever.
- ✓ More specialist markets.
- ✓ More evening events.
- ✓ Longer opening hours.

Ownership of the White Horse should stay in the public domain, whether local government or some form of community trust.

Future of the White Horse – must be in consultation with Wemians – not another town's development imposed on Wem.

- ✓ The upper floors should provide affordable accommodation and an income stream for SC.
- ✓ The renovation of the White Horse needs to be something sustainable. Another pub or restaurant is not. I am sure none of the current pubs want further competition in this current climate. There are empty shops already in Wem, so the need is not here.
- ✓ Affordable living for families would make complete sense
- ✓ I think a community Pub would be good, local people running it together, giving out jobs for younger people to get a bit of experience such as waiting on, clearing etc, so they can find something more permanent, many jobs require some sort of customer service experience, a lot of doors would be opened. You can't get a job these days with zero experience, yet you can't get experience without a job. Also have some history in it, things found from around the town, Wem brewery sort of items hanging round with info.
- ✓ Back into a pub or something useful to the people of Wem. We don't need flats. There's 10 miles of fields in every direction to build them on.
- ✓ We need a high street, a few flats is not going to make things any better, look at all the houses that they have built & are we any better off? No!
- ✓ Would like to see, a bar facility, with the front, representing, a Victorian theme, representing the opulence of that era, with decor curtains etc. To the back more Georgian, the old cellar converted into a cellar bar (access from outside as well as in side.) The inside A museum of Wem history in artifacts and picture. Upstairs museum rooms. Outside a carriage, Horse Drawn down the side, depicting its importance as an early transport building.

- ✓ A place for independent businesses to hire a room such as the craft people in Wem (like lots of little shops all under 1 roof).
- ✓ Subdivide ground floor into artisan workshops and sales outlets.
- ✓ Wem museum (could have pictures of Wem ghosts & stories) perhaps older pictures of Wem.
- ✓ Museum with space for circulating exhibitions and small meeting area.
- ✓ Ground floor – community space, including an informal area for people to drop in when shopping; play area for toddlers, particularly soft play area.
- ✓ Linkage with Wem Library and/or Community Arts Centre.
- ✓ Move library into ground floor, explore European approach to libraries – library as town's living room, as the 3rd space; home is 1st space, work is 2nd space.

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Hon. Sec.: Wem Civic Society

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