



2024



# WYCHAVON

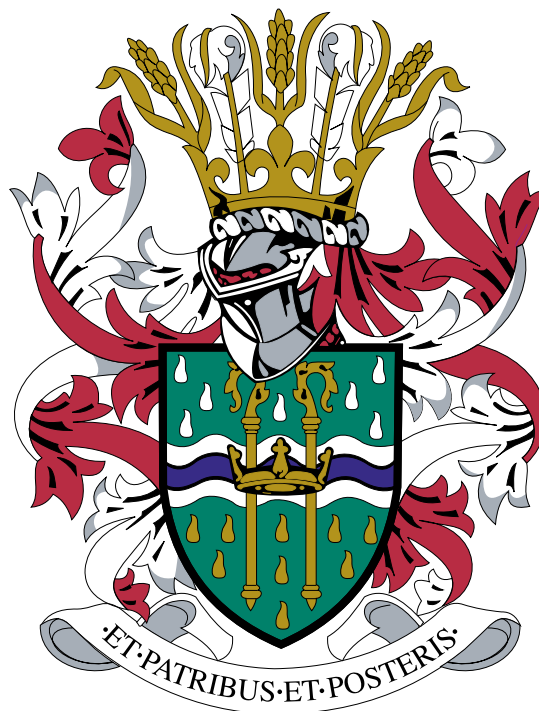
50 years of making a difference

1974



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Wychavon's coat of arms was granted on 17 December 1981.

Wychavon is made up of two boroughs, Evesham and Droitwich, which have ancient royal connections. They are symbolised by the ostrich feathers coming out of the side of the shield, which are royal ensigns. The wheat in the crown at the top symbolises the Rural District Councils of Pershore, Droitwich and Evesham that also formed Wychavon. The Saxon crown is for the Hwicce (also spelt Hwicca) tribe, from which the first part of the district's name is taken.

The green shield refers to the district's rich agricultural heritage, with the silver drops at the top of the shield representing rain. The gold drops symbolise the crops that grow as rain waters the land.

The wavy band across the shield references the River Avon from which the second part of the district's name is taken. The two crooked staffs in the shield (called crosiers) represent the two great abbeys, Evesham and Pershore, that once dominated the area.

**The Latin motto – Et Patribus et Posteris – means 'Both for (our) ancestors (the past) and posterity (future generations).'**

# Reflections on 50 years of Wychavon

Being Chairman of Wychavon in our 50th year is a tremendous privilege. My Chairman's 50th anniversary tour has been a wonderful opportunity to get out and discover more about this fabulous district of ours. When you are busy with work, life and council business you don't often get much further than your own town or parish. But this experience has been one I will cherish forever.

I have enjoyed many new experiences from kayaking to gliding, learnt a lot about our heritage and history, been in awe of the ambition and ingenuity displayed by some of the great businesses we have in Wychavon, as well as discovering more of our natural environment I never knew existed.

But the thing that has struck me the most during this last year, is the dedication of the people of Wychavon. Whether it's running charities, caring for sick animals, looking after village halls, installing new play areas, creating new green spaces to protect our environment - you do it all with dedication, enthusiasm and very often not a word of thanks or recognition.

So let me take this opportunity, on behalf of everyone in our district, to say a huge thank you to all our volunteers and dedicated community leaders who put in their time and effort – both today and at any point over the last 50 years - to make Wychavon the wonderful place it is.

We've played our part in shaping Wychavon over the last five decades, as you will see on these pages. But we have only been able to do this by working together with you. Your contribution has been, and will continue to be, invaluable.

On the night before Wychavon came into existence, councillors and senior officers visited Pershore Abbey and made a pledge to dedicate themselves to service. We renew that pledge as we look ahead to another 50 years of serving alongside you, to make a positive difference to the place we all call home.

**Happy 50th Birthday Wychavon**  
Cllr Robert Raphael, Chairman  
Wychavon District Council 2023/24

Cllr Robert Raphael (right) with some of Wychavon's longest serving staff members Dana Coulson (47 years), Maureen Simmons (33 years), Tracy Perkins (41 years), Amanda Ladds (39 years).



# Chairman's 50th Anniversary Tour

To celebrate our 50th anniversary our Chairman Cllr Robert Raphael set out to visit every parish in the district to celebrate projects we have funded over the years, amazing work by volunteers, brilliant businesses and our beautiful environment. We visited 77 in total. Here are some of the highlights. You can find out more about his visits at [www.wychavon.gov.uk/fifty](http://www.wychavon.gov.uk/fifty).

- 1. Meeting Obi the puppy**  
Dogs Trust, Wickhamford
- 2. Raising a pint at community success story**  
The Queen Elizabeth Inn, Elmley Castle
- 3. Taking to the skies**  
Bidford Gliding and Flying Club, Bickmarsh
- 4. Getting 'arrested' on a tour of**  
West Merica Police HQ, Hindlip
- 5. Learning about climate friendly farming**  
Overbury
- 6. Celebrating 100 years of Ombersley Memorial Hall**  
Ombersley
- 7. Checking out the play area we helped fund**  
Norton and Lenchwick



Droitw

11



12



8



13



9



14



- 8. Learning about new plans for the Pear Tree Fields project we helped fund  
Badsey
- 9. Tree planting in an historic orchard  
Naunton Beauchamp
- 10. Trying out bellringing  
Offenham
- 11. An amazing greenspace created by the community  
Cookhill
- 12. Learning it's more than just rubbish  
Hill and Moor Household Recycling Centre
- 13. Learning about the amazing world of testing machines  
ZwickRoell in Tibberton
- 14. Viewing a community space we helped transform  
Stock and Bradley
- 15. Playing walking tennis  
Cutnall Green
- 16. Caring for our wild animals  
Vale Wildlife charity, Beckford

15



16



10



- 17. Celebrating our link to the BBC's popular radio series The Archers Inkberrow
- 18. Learning about plans for the future of Spetchley Park and Gardens Spetchley
- 19. Taking on the disc golf challenge Hadzor
- 20. Pistol shooting Broughton Hackett
- 21. Crowle Village Hall and Shop, which we helped fund Crowle
- 22. Morris Commercial Hinton on the Green
- 23. Tree planting and World Book Day with Upton Snodsbury First School Upton Snodsbury



▼ 24



▼ 20



▼ 25



▼ 21



▼ 26



▼ 17



▼ 18



▼ 22



▼ 23



▼ 19



- 24. Aztec Adventure Upton Warren
- 25. Droitwich Transmitting Station Dodderhill
- 26. Hartlebury Castle and Museum Hartlebury



▼ 27



▼ 28



▼ 31



▼ 29



▼ 32



▼ 30



▼ 33



▼ 34



Evesham!

- 27. **Jinney Ring Craft Centre**  
Hanbury
- 28. **Opening of Pebworth Play Area, which we helped fund**  
Pebworth
- 29. **Wick Care Farm, our first visit**  
Wick
- 30. **Simply Alpaca**  
Flyford Flavell
- 31. **Celebrating our volunteers at Shorthorn Woods**  
Bishampton and Throckmorton
- 32. **Meeting England bowls star Jack Pullin**  
Bredon Bowling Club
- 33. **Enjoying the view at Kemerton Nature Reserve**  
Kemerton
- 34. **Trying out new exercise equipment we helped fund**  
North and Middle Littleton

# In their own words

Everything Wychavon has achieved over the years as a council is because of its amazing staff and their positive partnership with elected councillors. When Wychavon was formed it employed 601 people. Today more than 263 staff work for the council with 34 having served 20 years or more. Here staff past and present explain how they feel about Wychavon, in their own words.



I can only hope that in 50 years time a strong, locally elected, locally aware authority will still be administering the community services of the area now known as Wychavon.

**Pat Rust MBE, Wychavon's first Chief Executive, writing in 1984 (Started in 1974 and retired in 1990)**



I always say that I'm like a piece of rock and if you broke me in half it would say 'Wychavon'.

I have had the pleasure and privilege of doing some incredible things including meeting HM Queen Elizabeth II at Windsor Castle on my birthday.

One of the main highlights for me has been the creation of the Blossom Trail. It has been the source of so much media coverage and is the reason thousands of people visit our area so early in the year.

Another extremely proud achievement is my work associated with the Vale of Evesham Asparagus which really puts our area on the map. The Pershore Plum Festival is my other great love. It has won many awards and has grown beyond all our wildest dreams.

None of my work with these 'projects' would have been possible without the help of some wonderful people who I'm now proud to call my friends.

The years have just flown by, and I have enjoyed it all – making memories and making friends and hopefully helping to put Wychavon on the map.

**Angela Tidmarsh (Started in 1976 to 1981 and then again from 1982)**



I have worked for Wychavon for nearly 47 years, starting as a clerk typist in the Treasurers Department, working out of 97 High Street, Evesham, which is now a care home. I remember all the staff moving to the Civic Centre in 1991 and the Duke of Gloucester visiting to officially open the building.

We were the first at the council to switch from a manual typewriter to an electronic word processor. I can remember being sent on a course to learn how to use a word processor 8801 and we then helped to roll it out to others.

Wychavon to me has been a happy, caring, flexible place of work and most definitely one of the reasons why I have been here for so long has to be the people, some who I have made lifetime friends with where we have laughed and comforted each other, and that is priceless.

**Dana Coulson (started in 1977)**

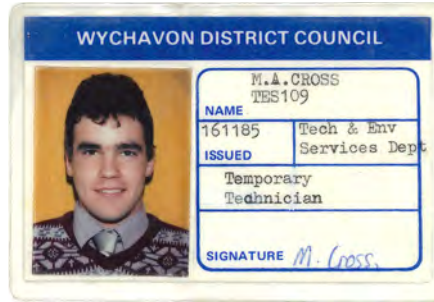




I started working for Wychavon on a Youth Training Scheme for six months in the personnel department and I have now been here for 41 years. There have been so many highlights over the years but the one that stands out is the floods of 2007 as I feel we really made a difference. I waded through floods to help at the rest centre in Evesham from 7pm to 10am the next morning, signing people in, making sure they had warm clothes, food and drinks, looking after their pets, their medication and keeping them reassured. It was difficult and emotional but extremely rewarding.

I'm also proud of all the funding, such as New Homes Bonus and Community Legacy Grants, we have given out to communities to help with their projects. The variety of work and opportunities I have been given are two of the reasons I have worked for Wychavon for so long. But the main factor, without a doubt, is the many lovely people I've got to know over the years and I'm still friends with some I started working with from the beginning.

**Tracy Perkins (started in 1983)**



There has always been something new, interesting or challenging to do which is why I have worked for Wychavon for so many years. The work we did on the Harvington Flood Alleviation Scheme stands out as a highlight, especially seeing it featured on BBC Midlands Today. To be honest though, I have too many favourite memories to list – something good happens most days.

**Martyn Cross (started in 1985)**

I started just a few months after the Civic Centre had opened. I only intended to stay for six months to pay off some travelling debt, but I ended up getting various promotions and stayed for 32 years. I have lots of highlights, but winning the Golden Seat title at the Loo of the Year Awards is the standout one.

The best thing about Wychavon is the people. I had the pleasure of working with so many fantastic people dedicated to providing a good service and making a difference.

**Sharon Casswell (Started in 1991 and retired in 2023)**



I am delighted Wychavon has reached the 50-year milestone. It has been a beacon of high quality, responsive and financially prudent local government since 1974 and hopefully will continue for another 50 years serving and delivering for the urban and rural communities across the district.

Wychavon was a very large part of my working life. I expected to stay for two years but stayed for 20! That is because it was fortunate to have strong local leadership, a highly committed workforce and was always ambitious for its communities. It was also because I thoroughly enjoyed working here. While all the external recognition of success such as Council of the Year was welcome, the real satisfaction was the 'Team Wychavon' approach from councillors and officers.

**Jack Hegarty, former Chief Executive (Started in 2000 and retired in 2020)**

# 1974 - 1989

## Our story begins

On 31 March 1974, a group of senior officers and councillors made their way to Pershore Abbey, where they pledged to dedicate themselves to service, before crossing their fingers and hoping for the best. At midnight, 1 April 1974 Wychavon – both the place and the district council – was born. Created out of the 1972 Local Government Act, the new district covered more than 256 square miles, and brought together the three towns of Droitwich Spa, Evesham and Pershore, along with about 100 smaller villages and hamlets. That wasn't the original plan though. Wychavon started out life called District No.9. and was made up of Evesham Borough Council, Evesham Rural District Council and Pershore Rural District Council. But the Boundary Commission had other ideas and added on Droitwich Borough and Rural District Councils. This created a unique challenge for the new council to blend rural market towns with an urban area which had been designated for significant expansion under the Town Development Act 1952. Indeed, people may well have been heard to remark 'salt doesn't go on plums'. Bringing communities together was a key guiding force for the new council's early decision-making. Although there is no record of who

came up with the name Wychavon, it was deliberately chosen to represent all parts of the district. Wych comes from Hwicce and relates to a tribal kingdom of Anglo-Saxon England that included what is now Worcestershire. Wich is also the Anglo-Saxon name for Droitwich. Avon represents the main river that runs throughout the majority of the district.

The coat of arms also includes nods to the area's heritage with sheafs of wheat symbolising the old rural district councils and ostrich feathers the old boroughs Wychavon replaced.

Planning for the new council began in earnest on 7 June, 1973 when a shadow council was elected. On June 21, in Pershore Youth Fellowship Hall, Lieut-Col R.G.Burlingham OBE became Wychavon's first Chairman. On 16 July 1973, Wychavon had its first Chief Executive when Gloucester-born solicitor, and Chief Executive of Redditch Urban District Council, Pat Rust was appointed to lead Wychavon.

**"I didn't know what to expect. I thought the problems of creating Wychavon were by far the most interesting job in the new county of Hereford and Worcester, with the advantage of having an expanding town as well as the rural areas.**

**I had been operating as a Chief Executive in a wholly political New Town situation and I regarded the task of putting together five dissimilar authorities as a very interesting challenge,"**

**Mr Rust remarked some years later.**

Some early decisions set the tone for how the district would come together over the years. At a gathering of senior officers and councillors at The Raven Hotel in Droitwich, Mr Rust asked if the new council wanted to follow the trend set by other local authorities and have housing and planning issues split by geographical area - Vale councillors would deal with planning and housing issues for the Pershore and Evesham area and Droitwich Spa councillors for their area. The answer was a resounding no. Every Wychavon councillor was to be responsible for everything that went on within Wychavon. There was to be no empire building. Good working relationships with parish and town councils were considered critical and there was to be no Wychavon mayor, lording it over the town mayors like some sort of super citizen. Wychavon would be a different beast altogether. Being born against a challenging economic backdrop for the UK, the economy was one of the top priorities for the new council.

# THE WYCHAVON WAY



**MASTER PLAN RE**



Wychavon's forward-thinking development plan produced in 1974 led the way in creating land for industrial and business use, so companies could grow and thrive. Wychavon's first budget in 1974 included £137,000 (equivalent to £1.2 million today) to create the Four Pools housing and industrial estate in Evesham. Others followed over the years at Droitwich Spa, Hampton Lovett, Pershore, Hartlebury, Vale Park in Evesham and more recently Worcester Six just off the M5 in Tibberton parish. They have not only provided thousands of jobs over the decades but attracted major companies such as Viking Packaging (Droitwich Spa) and Wall's Meat Products (Four Pools, Evesham).

There was also a focus on town centre investment. In 1978 when the responsibilities of the town development scheme for Droitwich Spa passed to Wychavon, 48 separate land deals were completed to help transform the town centre. In that first decade, Norbury Theatre was also extended.

Evesham residents felt the benefit of having a larger council with more human and financial resources to serve them. In the first two years, the council allocated £155,000 (equivalent £1.4 million today) to support a volunteer fund-raising effort to create a much longed-for new modern indoor swimming pool for the town. It opened in December 1977 and facilities were expanded over time to become more of a leisure centre complex.

Pershore residents had fund-raised for their own pool too, and Wychavon's first decade would also see investment at Avon Valley Swimming Pool with fitness facilities, squash courts, a solarium and sauna added.

In 1977 the Wychavon Way footpath was created to celebrate The Queen's silver jubilee. Stretching 40 miles from west of Droitwich Spa to Winchcombe in Gloucestershire, it not only added to the leisure offer in the area but helped put the name 'Wychavon' on the map.

Housing was a key focus in the first decade of the new council with an average of 150 new council houses being built a year to add to the 8,503 inherited.



Wychavon's first budget also included £4 million (£36 million today) for housing projects. Raising the standard of properties was a priority as the quality of maintenance was mixed and 1,760 households still used septic tanks. By 1980 improvements had been made to all but 49 of the 613 pre-war homes that needed upgrading at a cost of £3.7 million (more than £15 million now).

Wychavon already offered a voluntary council house sale scheme long before Right to Buy was introduced in 1980. Some 2,000 council homes were sold during the council's first ten years - 599 of them before the new law was introduced.

The planning department was also kept busy during this early period.

The 1975 county structure plan established the principle of concentrating housing in and around the district's towns. As a result, a significant number of either new or extensions to existing housing developments appeared in urban areas including Four Pools in Evesham, Chawson Lane and Boycott estate (now Westlands) in Droitwich and Mill Lane in Pershore.

The seeds of Wychavon's reputation for investing in communities can also be found in these early years. Motorcycling, film, photography, ballet, sports and music were among the activities Wychavon funded.

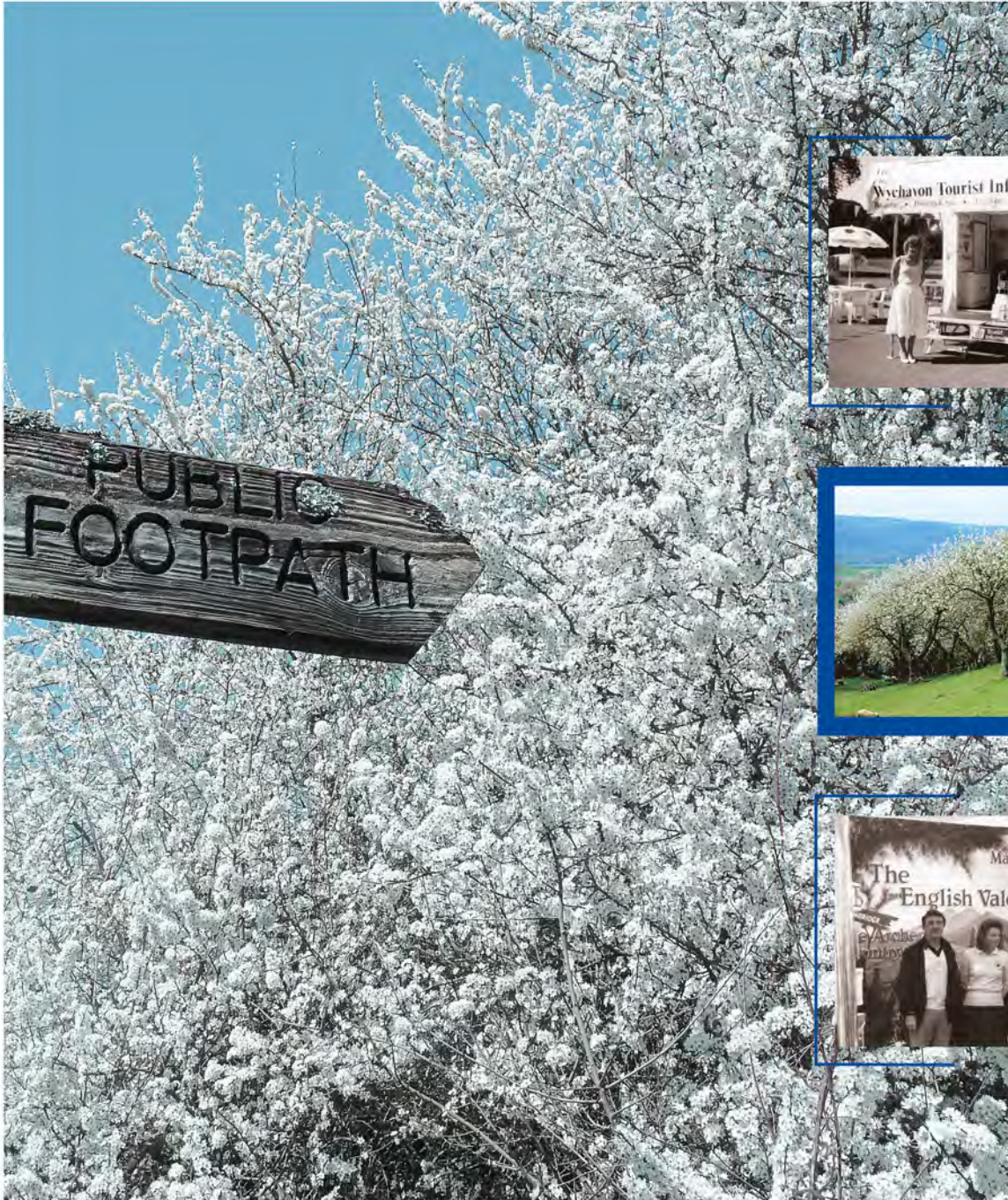
There was also a new community centre for Droitwich Spa. Records show in 1984 Wychavon spent £55,000 (more than £170,000 now)

funding everything from 'a new banner for the brownies to a new car park for the village hall'.

With unemployment rising sharply in the early part of the 1980s, Wychavon responded by creating a community programme to support unemployed workers to recapture skills by supporting community projects.

## COUNCIL STAFF'S CHARITY MATCH





By the early 1980s the potential for growing the district as a destination for visitors was gaining ground and it led in 1983 to the creation of the Vale of Evesham Blossom Trail. Starting out as an eight-mile route around the Lenches, it has now grown in popularity to cover more than 50 miles and takes in two thirds of the district.

It is one of only five blossom events on earth, with visitors having to go to Japan or America to see a similar sight. Not bad for an idea that was created out of a small office in Pershore to capitalise on the district's horticultural heritage.

Angela Taylor was one of the creative minds behind the trail and still works for Wychavon today as Pershore and Rural Tourism Regeneration Officer.

**"We never expected when we came up with the idea it would still be going 40 years later," she said.**

**"Pre-1983 we realised there were already a lot of people coming from the West Midlands to enjoy the blossom and our beautiful district. We're world famous for our horticulture and our produce so it was a natural step to take that and build on it.**

**"You try things and you put something out there and you hope, but to see it grow and develop the way it has – it gives me a lot of pride."**

Shortly after Wychavon's formation, Droitwich's popular brine baths in St Andrew's Road closed. It was an opportunity for the new council to demonstrate its flair for innovation and entrepreneurial spirit. A deal was done with BMI Healthcare to provide a brine bath facility for the public as part of permission for a new private hospital on the site. The new baths opened in 1985. It won praise from Eric Forth, MP For Mid-Worcestershire between 1983 and 1997, who wrote at the time the deal demonstrated 'a positive and practical approach'. Internally, one of the biggest challenges facing Wychavon in that first decade and a half was where to base the workforce. With more than 600 staff spread out over several buildings throughout the district, it became clear a single purpose-built building was needed to bring everyone together and improve efficiency.

A site in Pershore was chosen and construction work was underway as a new decade dawned.



# The 1990s

## The birth of an entrepreneurial council

The decade started with Wychavon saying goodbye to Chief Executive Pat Rust who retired in 1990 after an incredible 16 years at the helm and a staggering 47 years in local government, for which he was given an MBE.

Tony du Sautoy was next in the hot seat and oversaw the move to a new home at the Civic Centre bringing staff together under one roof for the first time.

Tracy Perkins, Wychavon's Communities and Engagement Officer but who was working as a clerk typist at the time, made the following note in her diary on 13 May, 1991.

**“Started working at the Civic Centre, spent all day unpacking and was quite surprised because when we plugged the word processor in it actually worked!”**

The building was officially opened by HRH The Duke of Gloucester on 2 October 1991.

The decade marked the start of Wychavon's transformation into the entrepreneurial council it is today with a series of groundbreaking decisions.

They included forming partnerships with the private sector to deliver improved services for residents, while also delivering savings for the taxpayer. Today Wychavon has several commercial partners

looking after everything from bin collections and toilet cleaning to maintaining award-winning parks.

It wasn't just with the private sector Wychavon was forming new partnerships though.

In 1994 Wychavon was one of the first councils to transfer its council houses to two housing associations. The money from the sale was reinvested and used to fund many of Wychavon's major investment projects.

Another first came in 1999 when Wychavon transferred the day-to-day running of its leisure centres to Wychavon Leisure. It followed an investment of about £2 million four years earlier to create a new modern six-lane swimming pool for Droitwich Spa to replace the original pool built in 1976. This was an add on to the gym, sports hall, hockey and football pitches Wychavon had funded in the mid-1980s.

Wychavon's support for its communities was not forgotten during this time and in 1998 the council bought an old shop unit on Pershore High Street for £210,000 in support of a community campaign to develop an arts venue for the town. After a major fund-raising campaign by the committee, Number 8 Community Arts Centre opened in 2004 and has been entertaining delighted audiences ever since.

Grant funding was also used to help breathe new life into rural areas. Schemes supported included providing a new computer, scanner and software for the village shop in Bishampton to help people access a relatively new idea that was soaring in popularity – the internet!

Community support of a different kind was needed in Easter 1998 when an incredible 74mm of rain fell on the district in just 14 hours. More than 320 properties were flooded. After dealing with the immediate aftermath, a £1.2 million fund was created to support flood alleviation schemes.

Wychavon forged strong links with agricultural businesses in the district during this time after securing funding from the European Union for the ADAPT programme.

Starting in 1998 and running for six years, the scheme supported horticultural growers to meet new industry quality standards and to help improve IT skills. The council also helped establish farmers' markets in Evesham and Droitwich.

Towards the end of the decade Wychavon's first CCTV network was also installed in response to a residents' survey which suggested people did not feel safe in the district's towns. Initially 24 CCTV cameras were installed which have been added to over time.



The '90s also saw the birth of one of the best-loved events on Wychavon's social calendar – Pershore Plum Festival, which celebrated its 25th anniversary in 2023.

The '90s also marked the start of a major drive by Wychavon on environmental issues. This included adopting its first environmental policy in 1996, giving out environmental sustainability grants, recycling schemes, cycle projects and activities for Environment Week. It led to Wychavon being named among the 'cream of local authorities' in 1998 after being given a prestigious Bronze Green Apple Award for Environmental Best Practice by the Chartered Institute of Environmental Health.

During this time Wychavon swapped Chief Executive twice. Stephen Nott joined in 1996 and set about creating the Wychavon 2000 Plan – Wychavon's first council-wide strategic plan which guided how the council would direct its efforts and resources. Wychavon continues to produce a strategic plan every four years.

When Mr Nott moved on in 1999, it was up to Sid Pritchard, a local government veteran with almost 40 years' experience, to take Wychavon into the new millennium.





## The 2000s

### The best council in Britain

The first decade of the 21st century for Wychavon can be summed up in three words – projects, environment and Jack.

In 2000, family man Jack Hegarty from Londonderry would join the senior management team at Wychavon with the task of turning around a failing planning department. Having successfully done that, in 2004 he would take over the helm from a retiring Sid Pritchard and go on to become Wychavon's joint longest-serving Chief Executive (or Managing Director as he was called in those days).

His time in charge would be marked by some of the most ambitious projects Wychavon – or arguably any district council of its size – has embarked on.

They included the decision to build a new Waitrose supermarket in Droitwich Spa to help support the regeneration of the wider town centre, while delivering a return for taxpayers at the same time. In partnership with Wychavon Leisure – and the support of Droitwich Town Council and SALT (Save a Lido Today) - Wychavon invested

£1.5 million into bringing Droitwich Spa Lido back into use in 2007 after it had closed at the start of the decade. Users were able to enjoy a brand new remodelled heated outdoor swimming pool with a beach area and fountain, new changing facilities, toilets and showers. A wet play area and café were also created. The water still benefits from a natural brine feed, while the 1930s Art Deco fascia was left in place as a nod to the venue's history.

The new £4.5 million Pershore Leisure Centre was also opened during this time as well and in



2009 the new £11 million Evesham Leisure Centre, complete with indoor climbing wall, welcomed users through its doors for the first time.

The most high profile of all these projects though was the building of Pershore Hospital. After South Worcestershire Primary Care Trust announced they intended to close the town's much-loved cottage hospital and instead provide accommodation at a nearby care home, Wychavon intervened.

A plan was formed and £6.5 million of Wychavon's money was used

to turn part of the Civic Centre car park into a 26-bed hospital with GP surgery to benefit the community. The project proved it was possible to deliver modern health facilities without saddling the NHS with the costs associated with PFI schemes.

In early 2007, Wychavon's decades of innovation, business support and investment in their communities was recognised with the presentation of the prestigious Local Government Chronicle Council of the Year award.

Judges described Wychavon as 'overflowing with energy, ambition

and a positive attitude to everything it does', adding 'It punches above its weight in wider partnerships and its commitment to staff is rewarded with loyalty and commitment.'

Those skills were tested just a few short months later when in July 2007 the district was hit once again by devastating flooding when an unprecedented 143mm of rainfall fell in just one day.

A total of 1,600 properties and 200 businesses were flooded while the road network was also badly affected leaving many



motorists stranded, including when part of the B4084 at Cropthorne collapsed. Some 1,700 residents were cared for by Wychavon staff in our rest centres.

In the aftermath, Wychavon announced more than £300,000 in flood funding – on top of money from the Government – to support clean-up work and help parish and town councils to identify flood recovery projects in their area. There was also funding for more than 200 residents to help them buy their own flood prevention solutions as well as a crackdown on landowners to

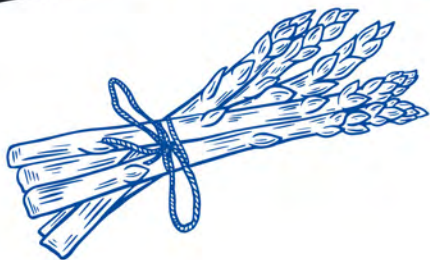
make sure they were maintaining their watercourses properly.

Almost £400,000 was invested during this decade into flood alleviation schemes across the district, with another £300,000 plus following in the early years of the 2010s.

Environment Agency figures suggest more than 1,500 homes are at risk of flooding in this area and climate change will only increase that figure. It is perhaps fitting then that this decade saw the strengthening of Wychavon's commitment to tackling sustainability and environmental issues.

Wychavon signed up to the Nottingham Declaration on Climate Change in 2005 and worked with the Energy Saving Trust to introduce a 42-point action plan to cut energy usage and help the council become more environmentally friendly. In the first five years of the plan, staff travel reduced by 70,000 miles a year and the Civic Centre's energy usage was cut by 8%.

Bin collections underwent two significant changes during the decade with the introduction of separate kerbside recycling collections in 2001 and fortnightly



collections in 2008. These changes have helped Wychavon achieve the highest recycling rate of any council in Worcestershire.

The first years of the decade saw Market Town Partnerships created for Evesham and Pershore backed by £500,000 of funding each, largely from Advantage West Midlands and the national Market Towns Programme, to be spent over four years to support regeneration projects. In 2006 when the scheme came to an end, they were changed into Local Strategic Partnerships with a new Droitwich

Spa Area Partnership having been set up the previous year. Wychavon gave them £30,000 a year to help deliver their projects and priorities. They had a strong track record of achievement including supporting the regeneration of Evesham and Pershore High Street, funding for Number 8 in Pershore, the Regal Cinema refurbishment in Evesham and various events and festivals.

It was also the decade three more key events were added to the district's social calendar. The British Asparagus Festival launched in 2006 as a way of celebrating the Vale's growing heritage and helping

to put Wychavon on the map. The same year Droitwich Salt Festival was born to promote and celebrate the town's unique salt heritage. In 2007, Wychavon played a role in making the St Richard's Festival a reality, marking the life of the Spa's patron saint who legend has it made the town's brine well flow again in the Middle Ages.

Elsewhere, a unique partnership with Worcestershire Wildlife Trust and Pershore Town Council was formed to turn 24 hectares of floodplain into Pershore Wetlands, which today is a thriving nature reserve.



It complemented Wychavon's other big environmental project of the decade – the planting of 23,000 trees on 11 hectares of land at Stoulton to create Millennium Wood.

Major investments were also made in our parks and open spaces. This resulted in Abbey Park in Evesham winning its first Green Flag Award – a sign of quality and excellence – in 2005.

Today, all of Wychavon's main parks have Green Flag status as well as Droitwich Community Woods, which we manage in partnership with Worcestershire Wildlife Trust.

The view of the district's young people gained more prominence during this decade too. In the early 2000s, a series of roadshows asked young people what they wanted to see for them in the district. The result of that work led to thousands of pounds worth of funding specifically for youth projects ranging from new skate parks to new youth clubs, music concerts and projects to improve employment opportunities.

More than 400 children a week benefitted from our community sports sessions which ran for more

than a decade and thousands of people attended Wychavon's Party in the Park events.

More than 500 young people were also given the opportunity to express their creativity through the W Factor Talent Contest which ran for 14 years.

In Droitwich Spa, Wychavon helped set up the Youth Zone in 2009 by turning an empty high street building into a place where more than 200 young people a week could meet and take part in activities and awareness-raising sessions. Feedback from young



people also led to the creation of the Wychavon Youth Bus in 2010.

Fitted with game consoles, a music system and internet access, it would tour the district each week providing somewhere for youngsters in rural areas to spend time with each other.

The youngest of Wychavon's residents were not left out and various funding schemes were used over the years to help build play areas of all shapes and sizes, along with four skate parks.

The creation of Community Safety Partnerships in 1998 added a new function to our list

of services – supporting the police in the fight against crime.

A survey found a high fear of crime despite crime levels being low (and they continue to be low today).

In response, Neighbourhood Wardens were introduced in the early 2000s to provide a reassuring visible presence, security advice, identify potential issues and give out thousands of pieces of security equipment to vulnerable people through Wychavon's Safe and Sound scheme.

If the decade started with plenty of money to invest in major schemes

to improve the district, the global financial crash in 2008 would ensure it ended with councils across the country facing a squeeze on funding not experienced for decades.

Could Wychavon protect services, while continuing to invest and improve the district at the same time as cutting costs?

# The 2010s

## A time to grow

From day one supporting businesses has been a priority for Wychavon. From allocating land for new industrial space and backing the district's key agricultural sector, to regenerating high streets and providing millions of pounds in funding to create jobs and apprenticeships, Wychavon has always understood you cannot have good services without a strong local economy.

So, when faced with a 59% reduction in government funding as a result of austerity measures and a £4 million budget gap to

close, it's no surprise that growing the economy was where the senior management turned.

The answer was Wychavon's innovative Grow, Save, Charge Plan. There would be no slashing and burning of services as in some other areas. Instead, Wychavon would invest its money to help existing businesses grow and support new start-ups. Efficiencies would be looked for in the way the council did things, while protecting the quality of services for residents, and opportunities sought to provide work for other councils Wychavon could do on their behalf.

The Grow in Wychavon campaign was launched to highlight the diverse range of businesses on offer in the district and promoted to residents and private investors. The highlight was the Grow in Wychavon book which featured the stories behind 52 businesses, some of which also offered 12 month work placements to young school leavers as part of their involvement. The book was officially launched in Parliament with local companies providing samples of their produce to MPs and dignitaries, while a copy was also presented to then Prime Minister David Cameron.





An ambitious economic plan was drawn up with the newly created Worcestershire Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) and from there a joint venture was embarked on between Wychavon, Worcestershire County Council, the LEP and Stoford Developments to create the £120 million Worcester Six business park. Once fully let it would create hundreds of new jobs.

There was also further expansion of Vale Business Park and the building of Wychavon's second supermarket when Waitrose agreed to come to Evesham in 2018. Wychavon also

provided a £150,000 loan to support the re-opening of Evesham's Regal Cinema to breathe new life into the Port Street area of the town.

Droitwich Salt also went on sale for the first time in 100 years after Wychavon agreed a deal with The Brine Heritage Group and local company Churchfields Farm for its extraction and use. The project was featured on national television.

The importance of tourism was not lost during this period and on 1 July 2011, Wychavon was proud to join partners in celebrating the official re-opening of Droitwich Canals for

the first time in more than 70 years.

The Droitwich Canals Trust was formally established in 1973, and in 1980 Wychavon invested £200,000 (more than £800,000 today) to help fund work in Vine's Park including a mooring basin. But real progress wasn't made until a conference held by British Waterways in 2002 concluded it was possible to carry out a full restoration of the canals but some £9.5 million in funding would be needed. The final total was about £12 million with more than £4 million coming from The Heritage Lottery.



Wychavon contributed £1 million to the project which involved the construction of a new tunnel under the A449 dual carriageway, silt removal, installation of new footbridges, lock gates and lock walls, a 500 metre stretch of new canal along the River Salwarpe, reedbed removal, hedgerow planting and the relocation of great crested newts!

In 2015, Wychavon supported the creation of a new event when the Battle of Evesham Festival was held for the first time to mark the battle's 750th anniversary. It became an annual event in

2018 and has grown in popularity since, attracting thousands of visitors to the area each August.

Opportunity Vale of Evesham was launched in 2010 to improve the lives of disadvantaged households in parts of Badsey, Broadway, Harvington, Norton and Evesham. Backed by £470,000, the project focused on providing advice and practical support on everything from reducing energy bills to getting active and improving skills. Over four years the team knocked on the door of more than 1,000 households and referred more than 400 people for support. Help on offer

included vouchers to attend college courses, money management courses, computer education sessions, home insulation, energy audits, boiler replacements, home insulation and fire safety checks.

Despite the economic turmoil which formed the backdrop to much of the decade, the environment did not get overlooked during this period.

In 2012 Wychavon launched its first Intelligently Green Plan. The phrase was used to express that saving the planet also made good financial sense. The plan introduced Wychavon's first electric vehicle charging points and first



electric vehicle for staff to use. Solar panels were installed on the Civic Centre and Wychavon began putting them on public toilets.

Grants were available to residents for solar panels and home energy efficiency schemes as well as green projects. This included £300,000 Wychavon invested in the Pershore hydroelectric power scheme which provides energy to the nearby leisure centre.

In 2014 Wychavon broke new ground again by supporting Rooftop Housing to build the district's first Level 6 (zero carbon) Code for Sustainable Homes in North Littleton.

There was another housing first that year as Wychavon invested £55,000 to support Rooftop Housing to create ten energy-efficient affordable homes at Norton Barracks to provide accommodation for ex-service men and women.

A year later we granted planning permission for a ten-home affordable housing scheme, with some private market sale homes, a village hall and allotments in Tibberton.

What made the development unique was the scheme was led by Tibberton Community Land Trust, a charity created by local residents to develop new

facilities to benefit the community. Wychavon supported the project through the gifting of their land.

In 2016 a major landmark was reached when the first South Worcestershire Development Plan was formally adopted. The document had been ten years in the making and was a joint effort between Wychavon, Malvern Hills District and Worcester City Councils to meet housing growth for the area up to 2030 with plans for 28,400 new homes.

But the decade also marked the start of an ambitious expansion in Wychavon's community investment.



Over the previous four decades Wychavon had invested heavily in creating new play areas, supporting village halls and local groups through its community grants programme. The introduction of New Homes Bonus funding – money given to councils for every new home built and occupied – gave Wychavon an opportunity to do more.

While other councils used New Homes Bonus money to support their day-to-day budgets, Wychavon's strong economic plan allowed them to allocate the money to communities so they could benefit directly from the proceeds of new house building.

Between 2011 and 2014 more than £3.3 million was invested in a variety of projects. They included a flood alleviation project in Broadway and the conservation of Evesham Bell Tower.

The scheme was replaced in 2018 with Wychavon's Community Legacy Grants, which attempted to go one step further than New Homes Bonus funding and support projects that would have a lasting benefit for communities. Some £3 million was allocated in the first three rounds to help create new village halls in several locations, a new minibus service in the Norton area, a new burial ground and community orchard in Badsey and

the creation of a new woodland, wetland and other natural habitats on land in North Claines.

The decade also saw an opportunity to bring people together through sport with Wychavon hosting 33 community games across the district to mark the London Olympics in 2012, as well as the Tour of Britain in 2014 and the Women's Tour of Britain cycle race in 2018.

Tribute was also paid to HM Queen Elizabeth II with the re-opening of The Wychavon Way walking route to mark her Diamond Jubilee, having originally been created for her Silver Jubilee in 1977.



A renewed focus was also put on the district's young people during this period. After a report flagged the district for having poor social mobility, a major project was launched to tackle the problem.

In 2017 Wychavon's social mobility programme was founded and more than £600,000 has been invested since into a variety of schemes to ensure young people have the chance to make the most of their talents, no matter where they live in the district.

Projects have included screening more than 2,000 children for speech and language issues so they can be dealt with early and not become a barrier to education in future

years. Social mobility grants have helped schools fund programmes to improve writing, aspiration and achievement for those most in need and the breakfast club grant scheme has helped schools feed 1,000 children every term.

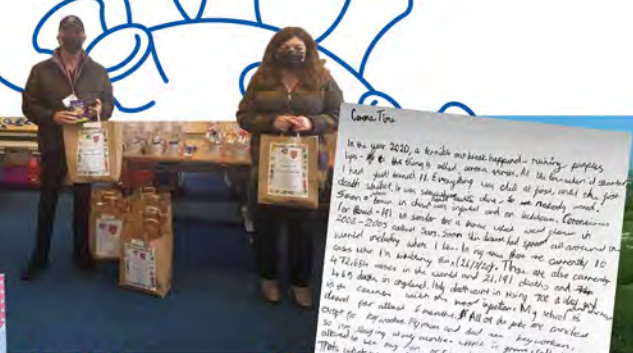
A new project got underway to help fight crime in 2015 when Crophorne became Wychavon's first SmartWater village. Residents are given free kits with the SmartWater solution that they use to mark their property with a unique code. This can then be used to help return property if it is stolen and signage is used to deter potential burglars. There are now 29 SmartWater villages across the district.

In-between all that, Wychavon formed a partnership with neighbouring Malvern Hills District Council to share a Senior Management Team and other services to save about £1 million annually to help deal with funding cuts.

With a new decade fast approaching, work was well underway on creating a new, ambitious strategy to take Wychavon into the 2020s. What happened next would change everything.



We're on the way out...



## The 2020s

### An ambitious road to recovery

The new decade started with the creation of one of the most ambitious strategic plans in the council's history. It included a series of major projects ranging from building new affordable homes to creating new woodlands and wildlife habitats.

There was also an update to the Intelligently Green Plan in response to the climate emergency with Wychavon setting ambitious targets to reduce their own emissions and support for residents and businesses to do the same.

All that was put on hold in March 2020 when Prime Minister Boris Johnson announced the first national lockdown in response to the Covid-19 pandemic. Overnight the council's energies switched to focusing on how best to support residents and businesses through the crisis.

During the 16 months restrictions were in place, Wychavon provided £53 million of support grants to businesses, spent £230,000 on projects to support people back on to our high streets, £449,000 in self-isolation payments and £775,000 to help residents with their Council Tax.

Wychavon also funded 67 laptops so children could continue learning during lockdown and prevented 39 people from ending up on the streets. Working with other organisations through Worcestershire Here 2 Help, Wychavon was also able to offer advice and practical support to those in emergency need. Staff also supported the NHS with the rollout of the Covid-19 vaccination and one of the car parks at the Civic Centre became a Covid-19 test centre. Services were maintained throughout, with residents keen to post messages of thanks on bins for collection crews.



Don't just be  
another **BRICK**  
in the wall



There was one moment of cheer during the pandemic though as Wychavon won the 2020 'Golden Seat' at the Loo of the Year Awards after being named as having the best public toilets in the UK.

It was the culmination of a ten year investment programme in Wychavon's public loos that had seen a series of refurbishments and new builds, including installing solar panels, water saving measures and Changing Places facilities, for people with a variety of disabilities. There was further success in 2022 and 2023 when

Wychavon won the Best Local Authority Toilets in the UK Award.

During this time, there was a change at the top as Jack Hegarty retired, saying an emotional goodbye to staff by video call in July 2020. Deputy Chief Executive Vic Allison was appointed to the top job and tasked with steering the council through the remainder of the pandemic.

When Covid-19 restrictions ended in July 2021, a recovery framework was drawn up and the process of building back better began.

£1.4 million was invested in creating ten new small industrial units at

Vale Park near Evesham to support the district's economic recovery, with all of them being let within 12 months. The Pillar business hub also opened at the Civic Centre in Pershore to provide affordable space and on-site support for promising microbusinesses.

A welcome back campaign was created to encourage people to get back to the high street and support local businesses while a £150,000 Covid-19 recovery fund supported projects that helped communities become more sustainable.



Wychavon also opened its first youth homeless project with the charity St Basils in Evesham in 2021.

With the arrival of 2022, it was time to get back to delivering those ambitious plans that had been put on hold.

New investment prospectuses for each of the district's town centres were launched setting out a blueprint for how they would be supported to meet the challenges of a post-pandemic world. They were backed by £1 million of funding.

Evesham VeloPark, a world class cycling hub, was opened and millions more pounds was invested into

sports facilities with a new 3G pitch and pavilion at Droitwich Spa, new 3G pitch in Evesham and a new 3G pitch and hockey pitch in Pershore.

When war in Ukraine broke out in February 2022, Wychavon residents stepped up to play their part to support those fleeing the conflict and the council's staff did too.

A range of emotional, financial and practical support was offered, and continues to be provided, to 350 Ukrainian guests and their hosts as they build a new life in the district.

In response to the cost-of-living crisis, Wychavon paid out more than £6 million to help people

with their energy bills while grants for school breakfast clubs helped feed thousands of children. More than £800,000 has also been issued through the Household Support Fund.

The year also saw Wychavon sadly having to put into action Operation London Bridge – the plan that had been in the pipeline for many years to prepare for the death of HM Queen Elizabeth II. When the news was announced in September 2022, Wychavon led the district in mourning and also in proclaiming a new monarch, HM King Charles III.





Climate change returned to the top of the agenda with a series of major projects launched including a partner scheme to create new habitats with the Heart of England Forest and neighbouring councils. There were also trials of electric waste collection vehicles and hydro-treated vegetable oil replaced diesel in part of the fleet to cut carbon emissions. The Civic Centre received an energy efficiency upgrade and £1.2 million was secured to help residents decarbonise their homes. Housing has been a key feature of the early part of this decade with Wychavon helping deliver another

1,000 affordable homes since 2020 through the planning system. Wychavon is also set to build its first homes in decades at Laurels Avenue in Offenham and another affordable housing project is underway to bring the historic Willow Court in Droitwich Spa back into use. The revised South Worcestershire Development Plan Review is also in the process of being adopted which will deliver more than 13,000 extra homes across the district up to 2040. Since 1980 Wychavon has helped deliver more than 24,000 homes of all types for people to live in.

Another £1 million is also being invested in community projects through the Community Legacy Grant scheme.

**The arrival of 2024 has brought with it the creation of the ambitious We Are Wychavon Plan, which covers the council's priorities up to 2028. It builds on all the things that have made Wychavon a success for the last 50 years – supporting people, growing the economy and enhancing the district's environment. Long may it continue.**

# Looking to the future

When you look back at Wychavon's story over the years, there is one theme that jumps out at you – making a difference. That's the reason the Government of the day created us in the first place.

Whether building a new hospital or supermarkets, helping re-open a canal network or providing quality places for people to live and things for them to do, we've played our part in the success story that is Wychavon – both the council and the district.

So, what of the future? Wychavon is built on sound financial management, an entrepreneurial spirit and a commitment to doing things with our communities, not to them. So, we will continue to do just that.

Our We Are Wychavon Plan is our most ambitious yet and is the blueprint for how we will continue to support our residents, invest in our communities, back our businesses and boost our natural environment.

The Review of the South Worcestershire Development Plan will bring new settlements to the district over the next 20 years, creating more opportunities to forge new communities.

There are challenges ahead as we help shape a new purpose for our town centres, adapt to emerging technologies and play our part in supporting the growing health and wellbeing need of our residents.

The financial envelope we will be working in will be much tighter over the coming years and we will have to use all our creative energy to meet that challenge while continuing to deliver for our residents.

There will also no doubt be continued speculation about the role of district councils with more talk of devolution deals and the like. It's interesting when Wychavon was formed in 1974 nobody expected us to last ten years, let alone fifty. The fact we have is testament to the difference we have made to

shaping the place Wychavon is today. We believe we have only been able to do that because we are a district council.

There were no district councils planned in the original 1972 reorganisation act.

The Government inserted them later on because it felt larger authorities would be too remote from their residents. In our opinion, that belief was correct then and remains true today. District councils have a distinct role in local government structures. We are big enough to invest in the things that will drive change, but close enough to the communities we serve so we are always listening and responding to their needs. This unique combination gives us an unmatched ability to support residents across a wide range of areas, and not just focus on the services we are directly responsible for.

We can't predict the future. But we can say Wychavon is well placed to meet the challenges of the future.

And for as long as there is a Wychavon, we will continue to go on making a difference.

**Cllr Christopher Day**

Leader

Wychavon District Council



**Vic Allison MBE**

Chief Executive

Wychavon District Council



## **Past Chairmen of Wychavon District Council**

**1974-1976** Lt Col R G  
Burlingham T.D.J.P.  
**1976-1978** R J Beckley  
**1978-1980** W B Ashton  
**1980-1982** R J Chandler  
**1982-1984** D Brooks  
**1984-1986** Mrs J M Jones  
**1986-1987** E A Townsend  
**1987-1988** D S Lawley  
**1988-1989** Mrs C J Brackston  
**1989-1990** R G Cartwright  
**1990-1991** Mrs E C Hope  
**1991-1992** G E Moore  
**1992-1993** G J Barnett  
**1993-1994** P Coley  
**1994-1995** M Matthews  
**1995-1996** V M Isaacs B.E.M.  
**1996-1997** R Mason  
**1997-1998** S J Selby  
**1998-1999** J D Payne  
**1999-2000** Mrs E C Hope  
**2000-2001** D W Folkes  
**2001-2002** A Hotham T.D.  
**2002-2003** J H Smith OBE  
**2003-2004** M C J Barratt J.P.  
**2004-2005** D S Noyes  
**2005-2006** Mrs P E Davey  
**2006-2007** Mrs J C Dowty  
**2007-2008** D S Lawley  
**2008-2009** Mrs J E Sandalls  
**2009-2010** A L Dyke  
**2010-2011** Mrs L Robinson

**2011-2012** A P Miller  
**2012-2013** R J Morris  
**2013-2014** G O'Donnell  
**2014-2015** L Duffy  
**2015-2016** V Wood  
**2016-2017** F Smith  
**2017-2018** E Eyre  
**2018-2019** T Rowley  
**2019-2020** F Smith  
**2020-2022** R Raphael  
**2022-2023** A Sinton  
**2023-2024** R Raphael

## **Leaders (post 2000 Act)**

Malcolm Meikle MBE  
Martin Jennings  
Paul Middlebrough  
Linda Robinson  
Bradley Thomas  
Christopher Day

## **Honorary Alderman**

John Grantham MBE  
Don Lawley  
Malcolm Meikle MBE  
V J Smith  
Peter Pinfield

## **Chief Executives/ Managing Director**

**1974-1990** Pat Rust MBE  
**1991-1995** Tony du Sautoy  
**1996-1999** Stephen Nott  
**1999-2004** Sid Pritchard  
**2004-2020** Jack Hegarty  
**2020-pres.** Vic Allison MBE

## **MPs representing Wychavon since 1974**

### **1974-1997**

#### **Worcester Constituency**

**1961-1992** Peter Walker MBE (Con)  
**1992-1997** Sir Peter Luff (Con)

### **1974-1997 South**

#### **Worcestershire Constituency**

**1974-1997** Sir Michael Spicer (Con)

### **1983-present**

#### **Mid Worcestershire Constituency**

**1983-1997** Eric Forth (Con)  
**1997-2015** Sir Peter Luff (Con)  
**2015-pres.** Nigel Huddleston (Con)

### **1997-present**

#### **Redditch Constituency**

**1997-2010** Jacqui Smith (Lab)  
**2010-2015** Karen Lumley (Con)  
**2015-pres.** Rachel MacLean (Con)

### **1997-present**

#### **West Worcestershire Constituency**

**1997-2010** Sir Michael Spicer (Con)  
**2010-pres.** Dame Harriett Baldwin (Con)

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