

Worcestershire Archive & Archaeology Service Annual report 2024-25



Welcome

Welcome to the first annual report of Worcestershire County Council Archive and Archaeology Service. This report is for everyone who shares an interest in the work and wider impact of the Service. It provides a transparent overview of key activities and achievements over the past year, from our statutory services, e.g. holding and making publicly accessible the county's original archive collections, to our varied programme of outreach and educational activities, much of which is funded through external sources.

About our services

County Archives

Statutory service, enhanced with grant funded projects

We care for and provide access to over 12 miles of records relating to Worcestershire's past, including material that the local authority has a statutory duty to hold. Conservation and digitisation work is also undertaken for external organisations at commercial rates.

Historic Environment Record

Statutory service, enhanced with grant funded projects

Worcestershire's primary public resource for archaeological and historic environment information, the HER hold approximately 83,000 records.

We support the councils' statutory planning function by delivering specialist advice and information for strategic and policy planning, development and land management.

Worcestershire Archaeology

Commercial service

An accredited provider of professional archaeology and heritage services to commercial clients in the construction, civil engineering and minerals extraction industries Worcestershire, the West Midlands and beyond.

The service also works as consultant and contractor on County Council-led infrastructure projects.

Community engagement

Council, commercial and grant funded service

We connect local communities with Worcestershire's past and present, with the aims of fostering a stronger sense of place, community cohesion, belonging and exploration of identities. We run school workshops, public events, talks, exhibitions and workshops, as well as developing and delivering community heritage projects.



Service strategy 2023-26

Our Strategy defines our goals, providing direction, focus, and a framework for decision-making. We aim to:

1. Create a heritage hub for Worcestershire

Engage and collaborate with heritage partners countywide to establish a Heritage Hub for Worcestershire at The Hive, where the service is based, and online.

2. Provide heritage for all

Grow the audience and reach of our services to increase service participation, improve representation and build a stronger sense of place across Worcestershire.

3. Educate, connect and enrich Worcestershire's communities

Develop new services that provide opportunities for residents of all ages to learn, develop new skills, connect with others and grow their understanding of local heritage.

4. Preserve, protect and enhance Worcestershire's environment

Deliver new archaeological services that support the County Council's environmental and open for business priorities, ensure more sustainable development in the county, and protect and enhance Worcestershire's environment for future generations.

5. Sustain heritage services for Worcestershire

Secure more commercial income and streamline service structures and delivery models to secure the future of Worcestershire's heritage services.

Overview

2024/25 was a busy year with Worcestershire Archaeology topping £2 million in turnover and the core areas of the service bringing in around £300,000 in grants, fees and commercial work to enhance our statutory duties.

3,577 people attended events with us, which ranged from curriculum-linked primary school visits, to work experience, art workshops, skills training and online talks.

In the County Archives, three collections projects are underway and significant changes are taking place to improve user access and experience, both digitally and within The Hive.

The Historic Environment Record team completed a large project to support tree-planting in the county, a key objective in the Corporate Plan, and enabled the excavation of several exciting archaeological sites through working with developers.

“WAAS is the single best public sector service I’ve ever experienced working with.”

Comment from 2024-25 user survey



**Worcestershire Archaeology
£2 million income generated**

£96,000 reinvested in WCC



**29% increase in Archive
opening hours**

2230 Archive enquiries
Busiest year since 2014/15



**3577 Event attendees and
project participants**

Highest since 2019/20



**Highly rated services by
users**

Net Promotor Score of 76
based on 2024-25 survey

Archive services



Search room open hours
29% increase on last year

~ 30.25 hours per week



2230 archive enquiries

Busiest year since 2014/15



Over 4 million views of
Worcestershire records
on Ancestry.co.uk



87 digitisation jobs
completed

Increased commercial projects
compared to 2023/24

"I am absolutely astounded at the amazing and complete response to my enquiry. I have never received such a comprehensive and well considered reply. I wish that I had come to you earlier." **Business user**

Adoption Service representative: "Most organised local authority" out of those archive services that they work with.

"Within 24 hours I received the digital copies of the documents I require. A brilliant and very fast service at a reasonable cost... I'm very impressed." **Public user**

"Thank you so much for the high quality reproduction of the bishop's registers. It's a really great pleasure for me to be in touch with such an amazing archive team!" **International user**



Access to the Archives

- Open hours have been extended for the Original Archive Area, to allow access every Saturday rather than on alternate weeks.
- Self-service area in The Hive is now staffed Monday – Saturday, with staff presence more visible due to relocation of the desk.
- Popular programme of workshops, tours and drop-in events attended by 1080 people.
- Autumn 2024 user survey results:
 - 32% said their experience had ‘greatly improved’ since last visit, and 9.5 out of 10 overall satisfaction score.

Archive Collections

- **New Jerusalems project:** Redditch is one of eight New Towns nationally to be the focus of a Wellcome Trust funded cataloguing project, which concluded with local public events in autumn 2024.
- **New Burdens project:** improving access to historic public records thanks to funding from The National Archives. A change in legislation means that certain public records must now be deposited with an Accredited Record Office in 20 rather than 30 years.
- **Sandys Archive:** 2 year project funded by the Ombersley Conservation Trust is underway to catalogue and raise awareness of this important archive for future research.

Measure	Total for 2024/25
Archive search room open hours	1573
Sign-ins to Original Archive area	1217
First time visitors to Original Archive area	276
Documents issued	4195
Archive enquiries	2230
Worcestershire record page views on Ancestry.co.uk	4,183,852

Measure	Total for 2024/25
Quantity of archive material deposited (m3)	8.547
Quantity of archive material catalogued (m3)	3.018
Quantity of digital material deposited (gigabytes)	11.81
Number of archive deposits retro-converted	110

- **Digitisation commission** highlights include 11,270 images taken for Wyre Forest District Council Cemetery Records Project and work on The Church of the Sacred Heart and St Catherine of Alexandria. This involves church mosaic plans up to 22 x 10ft in size, which require stitching digital shots in a single image.

Historic Environment Team



Highest number of visitors to
HER desk since pre-Covid



367 HER searches
completed



1863 planning applications
checked



Forestry Commission project
completed



- We welcomed 35% more visitors to the HER desk this year, compared to 2023/24, showing growing interest and engagement in what we can offer.
- 5,442 records were created or enhanced on the County Historic Environment Record, the database that guides and informs our heritage advice. This is helping us build a richer, more detailed picture of our shared history.
- We enhanced a heritage dataset (**SHINE**) to assist woodland creation in Worcestershire, thanks to Forestry Commission funding. As a result, the SHINE dataset increased by 28%. This improved dataset now supports the planting of new woodland, as well as the funding of agri-environment schemes, whilst ensuring archaeological features are protected.
- When a human skeleton was unexpectedly unearthed in a railway embankment, we acted to ensure a full and respectful investigation, working closely with experts to uncover the story behind the remains. Find out more in our blog series called **Body on the Bromyard Line**.

"Thank you for your pragmatism over the site and for stating your intentions going forward. I really enjoyed communicating over this one." **Archaeological consultant**

"This is the best experience I have had with an HER ever!!! Incredibly quick turnaround and the amount of information provided is amazing - the tithe maps are especially gratefully received. Thank you so much, if only all HERs could be as good as Worcestershire!!!" **Archaeological consultant**

"Thanks again to you all for the hard work on the Project, you've been a pleasure to work with and it's great to have access to that enhanced SHINE data." – **Forestry Commission**

"You are a star, the government needs a lot more people like you working for them. Thank you very much for your help"
Landowner ref SHINE data

Worcestershire Archaeology



£2 million income generated

£96,000 reinvested in WCC



**85 external client projects
won with a value in excess of
£2.5 million**



Major reports completed

Excavations at Lowesmoor and
Worcester Southern Link Road



Investment in technology
New drone with multispectral
imaging capacity

Comments from our clients

"We're very pleased with the results and it is clear that the role you played in inputting into our statement of significance was an important factor."

*"Very big thank you to the team for such a brilliant open day... the site and finds are incredible and it is so lovely to see how well attended the open day was – **fabulous PR**"*

*"I would also like to thank you and the team at Worcestershire Archaeology for **your great work on my projects this year** (including your outreach team for their great event at Keresley recently). It is always a pleasure to work with you all"*

"Thank you for going above and beyond on this project, particularly giving up time on your day off.

I never doubted your ability to be dynamic on what proved to be a rather tricky site, for several reasons.

You and the field team offered up solutions and carried out the work swiftly and pragmatically – that's key for us consultants.

*"The whole team has worked incredibly hard and this is very much appreciated. The **professionalism**, standard of excavation and the preciseness of the sections cannot be faulted."*

Yourself, the field team and Worcestershire Archaeology as a whole continue to demonstrate what a knowledgeable, pragmatic and trustworthy unit you are."

"I've yet to work with a more professional, able and friendly group of archaeologists!"

Community engagement



3577 event attendees and participants

Highest since pre-Covid



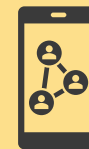
1695 volunteer hours

Busiest year since 2017/18,
financial value of £22,281



**Community Archaeologist
post created**

700 people attended
excavation open day



**Social media growth faster
than in 2023/24**

Instagram and Facebook

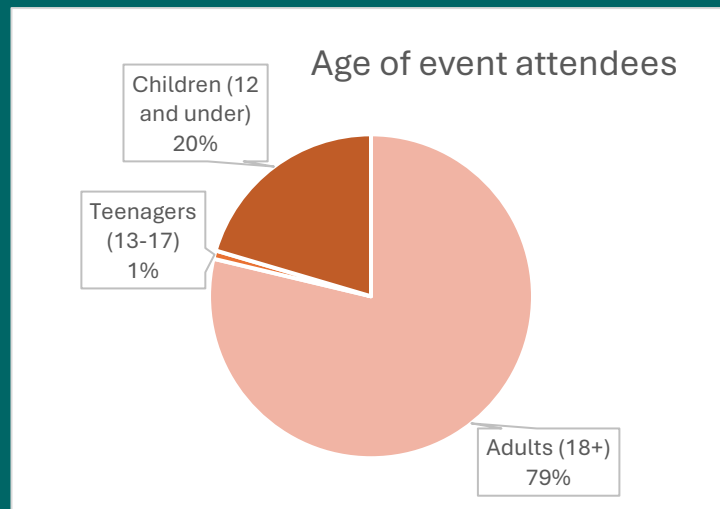
Public events

Event type	Number of events	Total attendees
School workshop	18	612
Further/ Higher Education session	6	146
Children's event	1	25
Workshop	18	129
Open day	3	965
Talks	13	798
Tours	18	303
Walk	1	3
Drop-in event	13	498
Other events	8	98

- **99 events** were run during 2024/25, which were attended by 3577 people – the highest number since 2019/2020.
- **School workshops** returned to pre-Covid levels.
- **Broadway excavation open day** was the most popular event of the year, with 700 attendees from Worcestershire and further afield.

*The class “loved the workshop – I can’t thank you enough.” **Year 6 teacher***

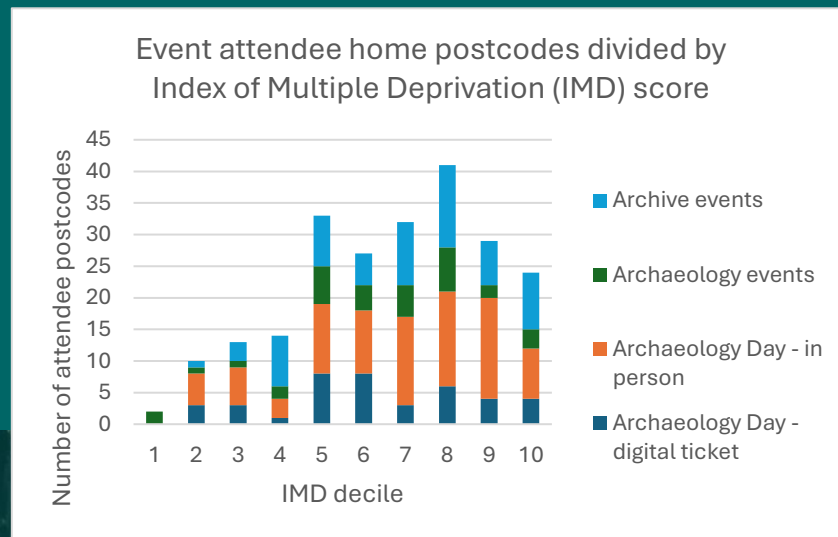
*“Thank you once again for offering our students an interesting and lively intro to Explore the Past” **University of Worcester lecturer***



Postcode data from a sample of 225 attendees to events held in The Hive shows a wide geographic reach across Worcestershire and neighbouring counties.

Postcodes were also compared against [2019 Index of Multiple Deprivation \(IMD\)](#) data to gain an indication of attendee's socio-economic circumstances. The sample data is shown below, with attendees divided by the type of event that they came to. There is a broad spread of IMD scores, indicating that we reach local people in a range of different socio-economic situations. However, more deprived communities are still under-represented and it is a key aim of the Service Strategy to make our events more accessible to all.

The Index of Multiple Deprivation is a government scale that uses seven measures to rank each small area in England from most to least deprived. 'IMD decile' groups each 10% of areas, so 1 = 10% most deprived areas nationally, whilst 10 = least deprived 10% of areas.



Left: Graph showing the distribution of attendee postcodes by IMD 2019 score



Above: Orange dots show the location of attendee's home postcode. Background map data © Google 2025

Grant funded projects

- **Artists in the Archive:** follow-on sessions from the creative heritage **History in the Making** project have been a successful format for engaging new audiences with Worcestershire Archives – 93% of participants had not used the archives before yet all intended to in future.
- **Careers Insight weekend and training excavation** in July 2024 were over-subscribed. These were valued experiences by the 16+ year olds who took part, with all developing skills and gaining knowledge of careers – 87% found it ‘more useful’ than expected.
- **Roots in Time** finished with Ourside Youth Centre creating a geocache series at WCC’s **New Farm Nature Reserve** near Evesham. Positive visitor feedback on both the geocaches and community artwork ‘Sanctum’ is regularly received, highlighting the success of this community project in enhancing a new Council-owned public green space.
- **National Lottery Heritage Fund support** has been awarded to update and improve our volunteer offer, alongside publicity work and long-term planning to ensure that more local communities can engage with and are represented within local heritage.



“We have been getting lots of feedback about the new site, from local people and other visitors, it is a great example of our two services working together, thanks for your input.” **WCC Countryside Team**

Commercially funded programmes

Worcestershire Archaeology undertake fieldwork in advance of sites being developed. There is a growing shift towards commercial clients supporting engagement with this archaeology. Highlights:

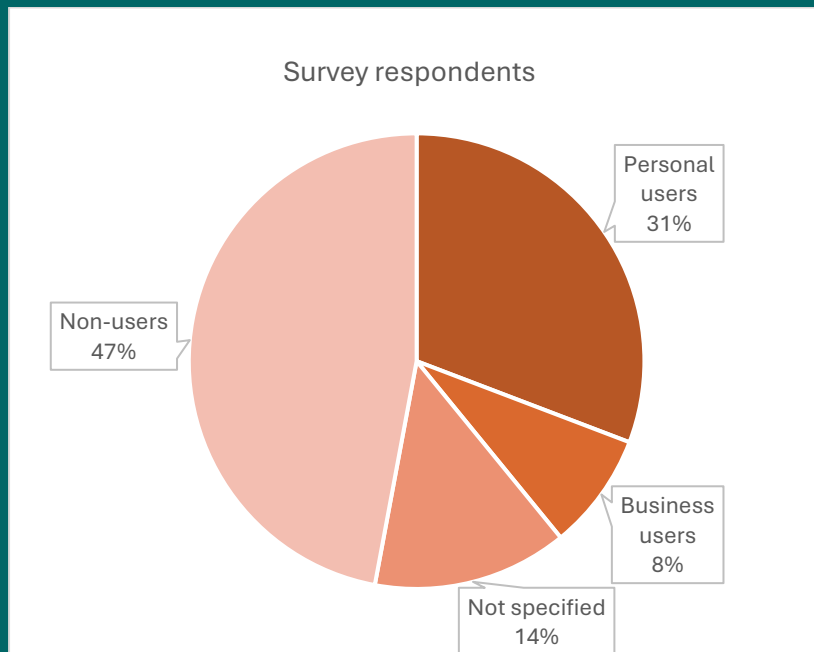
- **Milestone Ground, Broadway** excavation: Open Day attended by 700 people, site visits by schools and local groups, update panels on site fencing and media updates.
- **Sansome Walk swimming pool site**, Worcester: oral history programme to record local memories and site information panel.
- **North Gloucestershire excavation:** primary school session.



Insights survey 2024-25 overview

An online survey ran during February and March 2025. It was enabled by a grant from The National Lottery Heritage Fund, with analysis undertaken by Fresh Nous and Engaging Heritage.

There was a wide spread of responses from across Worcestershire. Demographic data shows that most respondents were aged 55+ and engaged library users, so the views of some under-represented groups are not reflected.



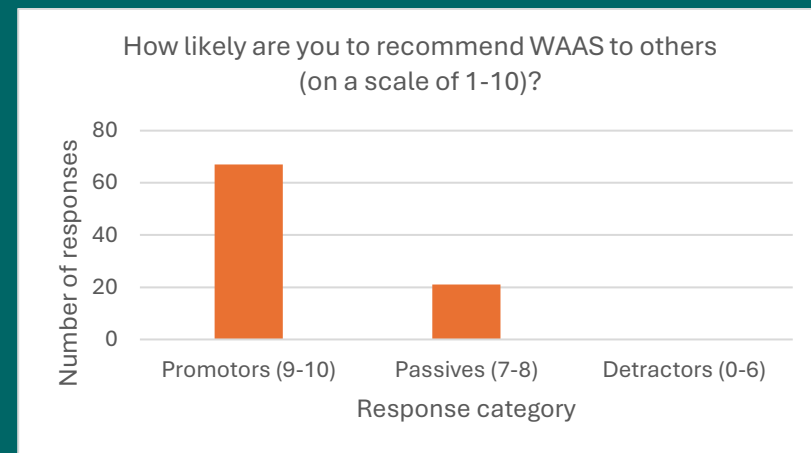
Total responses: 289

Main benefits experienced by public users

1. **Greater awareness/** understanding of Worcestershire's heritage (69% of all users)
2. **Increased sense of place** and local identity (43% of all users)
3. **More confident** to navigate or evaluate information independently (23% of all users)

How likely are you to recommend WAAS to others?

Survey responses indicate a Net Promotor Score (NPS) of 76, which reflected high user satisfaction and a strong likelihood for users to recommend our services to others.



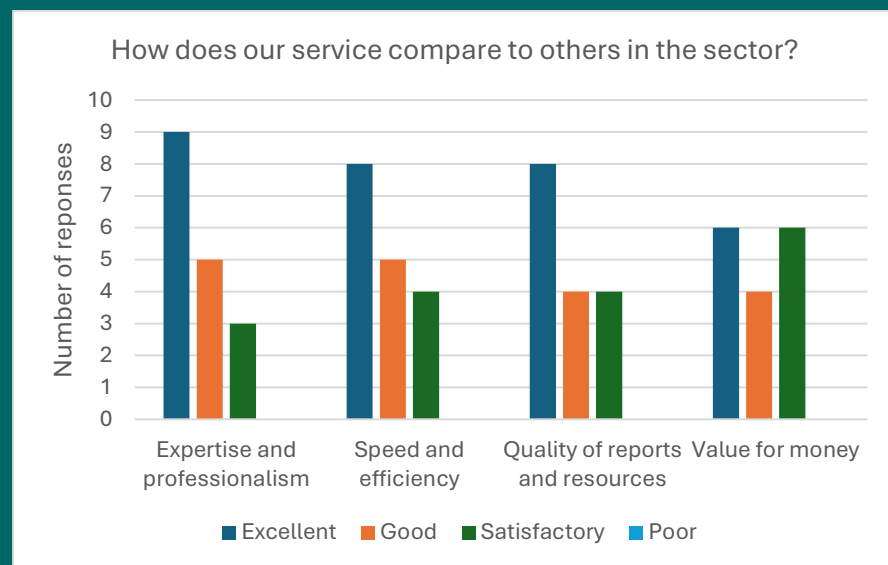
Benchmark comparisons: UK museums reported an average NPS of 66 (Coves Aggregate Report FY24). Cultural sector average NPS of 74 reported (Campaign for the Arts' 2024 State of the Arts).

How would you describe our services?

Service users were asked to choose from a list of 15 positive, negative and neutral descriptors, as well as a free text option.

Top 5 choices
1. Professional
2. Helpful
3. Accessible
4. Trustworthy
5. User-friendly

Quality of professional services



Summary of suggested improvements:

- Improved digital access to the archives
- Brand clarity and greater service awareness
- Better signposting to existing user guidance
- More varied event locations
- Focus on preferred communication channels

Funders 2024-25

Worcestershire Archives, the Historic Environment Record and community engagement services are enhanced through external grant funding. We are very grateful to the following for funding received during 2024-25:

- Arts Council England
- Forestry Commission
- Historic England
- National Lottery Heritage Fund
- Ombersley Conservation Trust
- The National Archives
- Wellcome Trust
- Worcestershire Archaeological Society
- Friends of Worcestershire Archives
- Wychavon District Council
- UK Shared Prosperity Fund (allocated by Worcester City Council)
- The Elmley Foundation
- Council for British Archaeology Marsh Award
- National Manuscripts Conservation Trust