

National award means The Lanes are top of the shops in the whole country

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Business leaders are hoping the success of a vibrant and eclectic independent shopping quarter in Norwich at this year's Great British High Street Awards will help to ensure the city keeps its position as one of the UK's top shopping destinations.

The Norwich Lanes was crowned top of the shops in the city category of the national awards competition which celebrates the achievements of local people in making their high streets great places to live, work and shop.

The Lanes, a series of medieval streets, alleyways and open spaces, which boasts more than 300 independent retailers, cafés and bars, was one of seven winners selected by judges across a range of categories for its ability to innovate, collaborate

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Stefan Gurney

and adapt to changing consumer habits.

A spokesman for the Norwich Lanes said: “We're over the moon, absolutely delighted. Well done to the committee for all their hard work.”

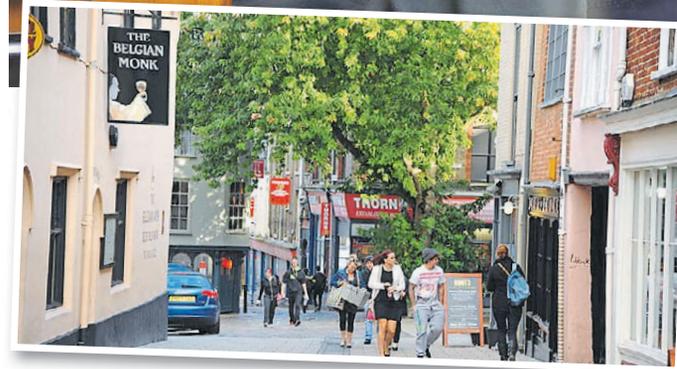
The awards win has been welcomed by business leaders who hope the victory is not only good news for the Norwich Lanes, but also the rest of Norwich and Norfolk too.

Stefan Gurney, chief executive at Norwich BID, which nominated Norwich Lanes, for the award, said: “I am delighted that through the work of Norwich BID, the Lanes has have been successful in winning this prestigious award which recognises Norwich on a national level. The



■ Duane Dibartolomeo, Grosvenor Fish Bar co-owner, puts up a poster for support of the Norwich Lanes in the Great British High Street Award.

Picture: DENISE BRADLEY



Lanes is a truly unique shopping experience, unlike anywhere in the UK, with a diverse range of creative independent retailers.

“The campaign received overwhelming support from the business community, public and celebrities

including Stephen Fry. We have seen a real buzz in the city during the campaign process and we hope that winning the Great British High Street of the Year Award will continue to attract visitors into the Norwich Lanes.”

The Norwich Lanes, along with the other winners will receive a share of prize money and support from a fund worth £50,000 as well as dedicated support and mentoring from industry experts. This could range from one to one coaching or advice on creating business plans, to workshops on digital marketing.

The awards, launched by the Future High Street Forum, attracted more than 135 entries from across the UK – more than a third of local town teams – which revealed new and inventive ways to boost high streets in the UK.

→ **What do you think about the Great British High Street Award for the Norwich Lanes? Write to the Letters Editor, Prospect House, Rouen Road, Norwich NR1 1RE**

Judges give their Norwich Lanes verdict

The Norwich Lanes Association, working in partnership with traders and Norwich BID developed a strong brand and presence in the city which was key to the Lanes's city category win. Judges were impressed with the enthusiasm and passion of the volunteer ambassadors, and the exciting events they held for shoppers.

They said the association demonstrated real innovation in using digital tools, such as the Droplet, a mobile payment service which allows people to buy goods on the high street

using their smartphone – giving a much needed boost to small traders.

Prime minister David Cameron, who congratulated all winners, said high streets could help secure brighter futures for people across the country. He said: “Britain's High Streets have a long and proud history – and a special place at the heart of many communities. This competition celebrates the excellent work that is reinvigorating many of our High Streets and highlights ideas that other places can use.”

Emma Harrowing's Norwich Lanes verdict

My first encounter with Norwich Lanes was in the 90s when I would spend a Saturday browsing in Andy's Records on Lower Goat Lane, before shopping at Beaujangles and Head in the Clouds to get an outfit fit for a night out at the Waterfront. I would always stop by the Blue Jean Company window to see what entertaining display it would present – the papier-mâché man sitting in a bath full of beans is a vivid teenage memory.

A university degree and stint in London later, I returned, and Norwich Lanes had prospered and grown into a series of streets and alleyways stretching from Upper St Giles through to Bedford Street. Several transformations of shops and businesses later, and the Lanes have become the place to be and be seen.

It's a place where social media provides channels of communication not just for those visiting, but between the plethora of retailers and businesses that thrive within

the cobbled streets, and a place where businesses work together to collaborate on spectacular events such as the Norwich Lanes Summer Fayre and Norwich Fashion Week. It would be easy to name drop the many great and good that line the many streets that make this historical area of Norwich worth visiting, but there are far too many to list for this column.

Needless to say that whether you want to find a piece of Vivienne Westwood for your wardrobe, find home accessories or even an interior designer to revamp your home, enjoy a cup of some of the best (and award-winning) coffee in the city, dine in a restaurant that serves fresh locally produced dishes, taste a cocktail that will become your favourite tippie, have a makeover to reveal a whole new you, get fit, discover new local talent or just while away the hours people watching – there are few places better than Norwich Lanes – after all they now have the award to prove it.