

BACKGROUND TO CIVIC VOICE

There is information on the background to Civic Voice and the civic movement below, including a summary of the governance arrangements being established.

A new body for the civic movement

Civic Voice is being set up as the national charity for the civic movement in England. This follows extensive debate and discussion led by the Civic Society Initiative following closure of the Civic Trust in April 2009.

The Civic Society Initiative was set up in June 2009 as a response to the groundswell of concern for the future of the civic movement which arose from the loss of the Civic Trust. The work was supported financially and in-kind by the National Trust, CPRE, RIBA, North of England Civic Trust, Esmée Fairbairn Foundation and donations from over 135 civic societies. Over 920 civic societies have registered with the Civic Society Initiative which compares with the 656 registered with the Civic Trust when it closed.

The conclusions of the debate were published in October 2009 as *Own the future* (copies can be downloaded from the website, along with the responses). There is strong support for the creation of a strong and independently funded new national body for the civic movement as part of the proposals.

Civic Voice is being launched on 17th April in central London. It will be registered as a charity and is a company limited by guarantee. Its primary area of benefit will be England. Its primary voting membership will be civic societies.

Civic Voice works to make the places where everyone lives more attractive, enjoyable and distinctive. We speak up for civic societies and local communities across England and promote civic pride.

Civic Voice is being established very differently to the Civic Trust. Its priority is to champion and support the civic movement and the civic society network – providing a stronger national voice and increasing the capacity and capability of local volunteers and their networks. While many individual civic societies flourish they also recognise the value of having a national body to represent their views, provide advice and information and strengthen and extend the whole civic society network.

The success of the new body is dependent on it building a momentum of support from within the civic movement early on to provide core funding in the long term. This requires a shift in culture among civic societies to work more collectively together and contribute more financially. Each civic society is being asked to contribute £1.50 per member (excluding life members and subject to an overall cap of £500) in the first year. Transitional funding support is being sought from other sources to provide the core funds needed

while the support from civic societies grows to the point where Civic Voice is independently funded for its core work. Funding for the Civic Society Initiative ends in May 2010. We are planning on Civic Voice having at least two staff in the first year.

What is the civic movement?

The civic movement is based on a network of over a thousand local civic and amenity societies in the warp and weft of local communities. They have over 250,000 individual members and comprise one of the largest community networks in the country. The first civic society was set up in the 1840s and the movement has similar roots in the nineteenth century to those of bodies such as the Open Spaces Society and the National Trust.

Duncan Sandys gave the movement a national voice in 1957 with the creation of the Civic Trust as a champion for the character and diversity of the buildings and places that make up our cities, towns and villages. From the outset, the Civic Trust focused not only on conservation, but also on bringing about positive change and promoting higher standards. The Civic Trust's work included drafting the legislation which created conservation areas from 1967. Its work also spawned the Architectural Heritage Foundation and the network of Building Preservation Trusts and it was the inspiration behind the pioneering Lee Valley Regional Park. The Civic Trust became dependent on external grant funding for projects and went into administration in April 2009.

Civic societies provide a focus for voluntary and community action to improve the places where people live, work and relax. They champion the importance of these places to decision makers and opinion formers in business, politics, government, the media, the voluntary sector and elsewhere. They play an essential and voluntary role in helping individuals and communities to understand and take action to improve the quality of their life through the place where they live. Civic societies promote and celebrate the best of what is inherited from the past and what is developed for the future. They are a fundamental source of civic pride.

Civic societies can be provocative, stubborn, forceful, inspiring and outspoken on behalf of the places they care about. They are fiercely independent and grassroots organisations, often providing the grit in the oyster which stimulates people to think, reconsider and widen their horizons. They will celebrate and encourage positive action and be forthright in resisting damaging change. They are also a store of knowledge and expertise about local places which is an essential starting point in recognising and strengthening their identity. Civic societies are the most numerous participants in the land use planning system and civic society volunteers frequently act as trusted intermediaries between local government and local people in planning, transport and other decision making. Many civic societies campaign for better management of local assets (buildings and open space) and find solutions to their long term management.

The civic movement's full potential to help the nation discover and listen to its communities and its roots remains untapped. This is at a time of renewed political interest in localism and the benefits from empowering communities.

Governance and voting arrangements

The constitution for Civic Voice establishes a governing body comprising 6 trustees elected from civic societies and the potential for two co-opted members. The Chair and Treasurer are appointed by the governing body and ratified at the AGM. There is also scope for an additional trustee to be appointed by a group of 10 not-for-profit partner organisations and flexibility for a further trustee to be appointed at some point in the future.

Please contact Tony Burton, Director, Civic Society Initiative on tony.burton@civicsocietyinitiative.org.uk or 020 7981 2881 if you want an informal discussion about the background.