

Initiative Bulletin
Issue No. 8
February 2010



Welcome

Welcome

Welcome to the eighth Civic Society Initiative Bulletin which follows on quickly from the announcement about Civic Voice www.civicvoice.org.uk

It will be a busy few months for the Civic Society Initiative as we lead up to the formation of the new national body in April.

Civic society projects and campaigns

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The Coventry Society joins Civic Voice as first member, David Tittle, Chair, explains why.

The Coventry Society is proud to be the first civic society to join the new national organisation Civic Voice. While the Civic Trust did much good work we are looking forward to having a dedicated professional organisation, focused on the grass-roots work of local civic societies.

When we saw the proposals for Civic Voice we felt that a good balance had been struck between affordability and ambition. We know we will have to pay more in future to get the sort of national organisation we need, but the proposals give us time to work on raising our income.

While we have been loyal supporters of our regional body we are also attracted to idea of being able to network with societies around the country who face similar issues to us.

We hope that Civic Voice will help to modernise the movement and transform it into a mass campaign for built environment quality, based on sound urban design principles. We are a small but lively society and we are sure that affiliation to Civic Voice will help us grow.

David Tittle, Coventry Society

You can become a founder member of Civic Voice by clicking http://www.civicsocietyinitiative.org.uk/join_civic_voice_online.html

Sponsor Tony - support Civic Voice

Tony Burton is running the Bath Half Marathon on 7 March 2010 to raise funds for Civic Voice. Sponsor Tony and get Civic Voice off to a flying start. He is hoping to raise over £1,000 as he runs around the World Heritage Site and "enjoys" the hills and views!

You can sponsor Tony online at http://www.civicvoice.org.uk/sponsor_tony_burton.html or send your cheque payable to "Civic Voice" to Civic Voice, Unit 101, 82 Wood Street, The Tea Factory, Liverpool L1 4DQ

Formby and Freshfield through time

Written by Reg and Barbara Yorke, of the Formby Civic Society *Formby and Freshfield Through Time* provides an intriguing glimpse of the rapidly changing face of this delightful coastal community. A fascinating selection of more than 180 photographs traces some of the many ways in which Formby and Freshfield have changed and developed over the last century. Most of the early photographs, some a century old, are from the vast photo-archive the Society has built up over its half century of existence.

You can buy this book at http://www.amazon.co.uk/Formby-Freshfield-Through-Time-Yorke/dp/1848682956/ref=sr_1_1?ie=UTF8&s=books&qid=1265801697&sr=1-1

Carrying out a paving slab survey! - St James's Conservation Trust

Deeply concerned by the degraded nature of the paving in the streets of London's historic St James's, the St James's Conservation Trust carried out a survey of the footways in the area in 2008. A little known fact is that St James's contains the highest concentration of listed buildings in the country. Yet many of the finest buildings the country has to offer are beset by poorly paved footways which detract from the buildings' aesthetic qualities.

The survey was carried out over a five day period in May and June 2008 and can be read at http://www.civicsocietyinitiative.org.uk/a_z_c.html#P

Workington Civic Trust bids to protect Curwen Park from bypass road

An initiative has been launched to have Workington's Curwen Park legally designated as a village green. The move is being made by the Workington Civic Trust as a precaution against possible plans for a road through the park. The group fear that the building of the Tesco Extra store on The Cloffocks will mean that a proposal for a road will be put forward.

The group is taking legal advice and are in regular contact with the Open Spaces Society. An essential part of the campaign is to gather evidence from the public of the use of the park as an unrestricted common, or village green, for recreational use over 20 years.

Peter Smith, Workington Civic Trust has produced a report detailing the campaign on the Civic Society Initiative website, underneath campaigns. You can read the report at http://www.civicsocietyinitiative.org.uk/a_z_c.html#C

Twitter: "We've never had to deal with this before"

Twitter marked its 3rd birthday last year and is quickly on its way to being the fastest growing social network of our time. In the early days active participation by users was mainly for the IT world but it is now changing the way we communicate forever. Whether you are contacting your MP or promoting a campaign Twitter can help your society.

The Brierley Hil Society and Coventry Society both use Twitter but we thought you would be interested in this blog, which has been produced based on the experience of one civic society and twitter.

The future of the Internet is very exciting and it is opening us new forms of engagement and transparency.

Read the blog at <http://www.joniayn.com/?p=60>

Our Living Heritage - Rotherham Civic Society

Rotherham District Civic Society stands for all that is best in the heritage of Rotherham and improving the environment for the present and future generations. It has produced a video [Our Living Heritage](#) looking at some of the ways in which the rich heritage of Rotherham is being conserved.

The video can be watched at http://www.rotherhamcivicsociety.org/our_living_heritage.php

Hereford's regeneration is "fatally flawed" says Hereford Civic Society

A report commissioned by Hereford Civic Society has exposed devastating inadequacies in Hereford's Edgar Street Grid Regeneration Project.

The report takes into account, community engagement, sustainable development principles, evidence based planning, and legislative requirements. Hereford Civic Society has researched and examined the evidence and finds that "*The ESG project is fatally flawed and totally unsuited to the task of regenerating the City of Hereford*"

You can read the full report at <http://www.herefordcivicsociety.org.uk/> - you will need to navigate to Edgar Street Grid

What is a civic society for?

A civic society will consist of a group of friendly, like-minded individuals (and organisations) who care about a local area, its buildings, its heritage and its environment. If this is the case, why not join with other groups who all care about a local area and share resources as many civic society members will be involved in other groups anyway? David Jeffery, The Petersfield Society explains why this is not the right way forward!

I am occasionally asked why The Petersfield Society does not consider merging with other Societies in the town. What people have in mind is a sharing of resources and responsibilities with, for example, the Historical Society or the Museum, the Friends of the Heath or Petersfield in Bloom.

Such comments ignore both the nature and aims of our Society, as well as our historical and, hopefully, future achievements. The question remains: what is distinctive about the Society? To my mind, the answer is simple: we are primarily a campaigning society, vigilant over many aspects of the town and, as our advertising leaflet says, "dedicated to enhancing the quality of life in Petersfield and the surrounding area". Briefly, we are far from being a single-issue organisation, unlike the above groups, and we attempt to ensure that as many comments and criticisms as possible of the way our town and environment are managed are addressed correctly and effectively.

A cursory glance at our recent involvement in local government (in a non-political sense) - the publication of the Town Design Statement and the achievement of the inclusion of Petersfield in the South Downs National Park, for example - demonstrate how deeply we have been involved in contributing to recent debates on topical issues for our area. But we are also

implicated in more parochial (but equally valid for our quality of life) topics: planning regulations and enforcement; green spaces and trees; street signage; structural and peripheral damage through vandalism; traffic management; and enhancement of the environment.

This suggests an involvement at least as important as that of the local councils (town and district), and no doubt accounts for the confusion in many of our visitors' minds when they visit our display stands ("Are you the council?"). However, our relationship with the councils is purely complementary: we are in constant touch with individual councillors and the councils themselves and work always to coordinate our aims. But, and this is the crux, we are independent, non-party political, and consist entirely of volunteers keen to see the best for the town and its environs. This presupposes a good deal of expertise within our ranks and, happily, I believe that we have that to offer.

Nonetheless, there is always room for many more volunteers who can make our organisation run even more smoothly!

Commemorative plaques

Nearly one third of civic societies are involved in a commemorative plaque scheme and there is a lot of experience to share. We have established a new section on the website to highlight the wonderful work being done to promote local heritage through commemorative plaques. Visit the site [here](http://www.lgcplus.com/news/council-news/prestons-new-media-blue-plaque-tour/5010818.article) and see what you think. Some of the wonderful work in this area includes Preston and South Ribble Civic Trust helping to develop an iPhone application to enable visitors to learn more about Preston's people and history. all through a portable piece of technology. You can read more about Preston commemorative plaques at <http://www.lgcplus.com/news/council-news/prestons-new-media-blue-plaque-tour/5010818.article> .

English Heritage are also welcoming civic society views on a draft Commemorative Plaques document. This document takes in all aspects of work on commemorative plaques, from setting up a plaque project to plaque maintenance and promotion. You can read the document at [http://www.sam-culture.com/downloads/DRAFT_Celebrating_People_and_Place_Guidance_on_Commemorative Plaques and Plaque Schemes.pdf](http://www.sam-culture.com/downloads/DRAFT_Celebrating_People_and_Place_Guidance_on_Commemorative_Plaques_and_Plaque_Schemes.pdf) and can respond to plaques@english-heritage.org.uk Remember to copy the Civic Society Initiative into your response.

Corsham Civic Society society and a succesful £22,000 Heritage Lottery Fund project.

Charles T Mayo was a public-spirited Victorian entrepreneur who lived in Corsham from 1868 to 1895. After Mayo's death in 1895, Corsham Parish Council built a memorial in recognition of his life and works. This high-quality Bath stone memorial fountain, designed by the architect Harold Brakspear was erected in 1896/7 at a focal point in Corsham's High Street. Unfortunately 100 years later the once proud and grand monument recognising this famous resident had deteriorated significantly due to many years of exposure to the elements.

To read this in full, this account of how Corsham Civic Society managed to succeed in this HLF project, click http://www.civicsocietyinitiative.org.uk/a_z_c.html#H

Keep calm and carry on - but differently perhaps?

Many civic societies approach us and tell us about aging membership, lack of IT skills and not enough volunteers. Through the Initiative BULLETIN and our helpdesk support we hope we are giving you the help you need. However **Aidan Turner-Bishop, Preston and South Ribble**

Civic Trust writes an inspiring article about how you should never give up and that a little change may make a big difference!

Many civic societies are thriving with active memberships and lively events programmes. Some own property and are financially secure. But there are some groups who may feel that they are struggling and have a declining or ageing membership. There may be few young people or 'ethnic minority' members. Why is this? Does it matter if the group is run mainly by oldies? What can be done apart from giving up and closing down?

Many community groups have a similar age profile and local political parties have withered greatly, indeed membership of political parties is less than 25% than it was 10 years. Interestingly, there are more members of the National Trust than of all political parties together. Some heritage group meetings seem to have many white-haired members. This may be inevitable as the demographics of the country gets older.

There are fashions in issues. Concern about the civic environment was especially strong 20 or 30 years ago, perhaps as a reaction to radical reconstruction in the 1960s and 70s. I'm in Friends of Earth; younger members in FoE don't seem to be as bothered about nuclear issues as my generation in the 1980s. They are into climate change now. This is fine: we must expect each generation to have different passions about issues that directly concern them.

Older people may care more about their towns and cities because they are more settled and they identify with an area. They have roots. Younger people are more mobile and they can't afford houses with mortgages. First generation immigrants are just establishing themselves in a difficult and sometimes hostile foreign country. They may not identify closely with a town and the older ones may have a self-myth of return to the 'mother country'.

Recent retirees have energy, skills, confidence and often sufficient time and money to take up civic work as a self-financing hobby. Oldies may be more committed and experienced with committee work. They're not raising families so they have more time.

The style of civic societies may be old-fashioned and cumbersome. Back in the 1980s and before, I remember our civic trust worrying about designing and obtaining headed notepaper (who types formal letters in the email age now?); a membership leaflet (in the age of the internet?); Charity Commission status (the Commission isn't interested in time-wasting tiddlers any more); minutes of meetings (has no one heard of laptops?) which are posted out to members (what, no email?); and attendance at meetings in the evening (have you seen the price of car parking? would you walk through streets of town centre drunks at night especially if you were a woman or Asian? And miss Corrie on the telly?). And for what: a boring committee meeting at night?

The content of meetings is more competitive now. It struck me recently that my local historical society achieves attendances of well over a hundred at its monthly talks. The Friends of the Harris Museum & Art Gallery in Preston can pull in about 150 for an evening event and I know that the Manchester Modernist Society has about 50 for its walks around central Manchester. Why? Because the events and meetings are fun and there may be nice nibbles and drinks.

Events may need to be more attractive and open to the public. Do you have a programme of town walks or jaunts elsewhere? Maybe your local NHS is keen to promote healthy walking? Our Society visited Liverpool One to get the 'feel' of a large shopping development scheme, like the promised Tithebarn in Preston. 'Benchmarking' is the management jargon for that. Exchange visits with other civic societies may be an idea. You can have a really good day on an exchange visit and they are useful to share experiences. No commitment walks and events can recruit new members. Joint-events can work with other civic societies to.

Walks don't have to be about the traditional topics. The Manchester Modernists like 1960s tower blocks and I once went on a coach tour of motorway service stations. On a Twentieth Century Society walk in Blackburn we had a look at the 1960s market hall's roof and the 1970s health centre. Events must appeal to younger people; the history of rock and pop

music is often attractive.

A shortage of traditional officers may be a liberation and an opportunity. We live in the age of the web, Facebook, Bebo, blogs, texts and Twitter. We may not need meetings so often with officers, minutes and all that 'stuff'. That cuts down the need for financing room hires, secretary's expenses and so on. The Manchester Modernists operate through Facebook and their web site. They just don't meet; they don't need to. The best local campaign (to stop the development of the lower Ribble floodplain and the construction of a river barrage) was the Save the Ribble blog at <http://save-the-ribble.blogspot.com>. This was very successful. It stopped the barrage plans (we hope) and led to the creation of a countryside park in South Ribble. An email alert to a recent blog can bring about 50 people out to an action easily.

The new Louder campaigning website www.louder.org.uk enables campaign groups to establish a web presence for their work and it links to e-petition, You-Tube and social networking sites. Cool stuff!

Lazy or busy journalists rely heavily on instant sound bite phone quotes and web information. A quickie interview on the phone at 9am becomes a post on the web by the afternoon and a story in the newspaper by next day. Not a piece of paper has moved to create the story and it's then on the web for everyone in the world to read and for web forum bloggers to comment on. A civic society can have a virtual campaigning existence. Bloggers do get read especially if they're good for a quote and are well informed.

We may be in the age of a new type of decentralised organisation: one that is a loose flexible network, based on digital links, rather than solid institutions. The military call it assymetric warfare and it can be very effective. We're involved in a campaign to prevent the ruinous development of Winckley Square in Preston, a charming but neglected Georgian square. We've had thousands of planning objection postcards run off and distributed through a network of sympathisers and related organisations. Well over a 1000 cards have been received by the planning office but we don't have 1000 members. The network, based mainly on email and contacts, was activated with only a few small informal meetings. I know that if necessary we could assemble a crowd of demonstrators for direct action or a flash-mob using Facebook, Twitter and texts. Save Preston Bus Station has about a 1000 Facebook fans.

Like other towns we have a sizeable Asian community in Preston. We don't have any members but we do have amiable contacts with local Islamic and Hindu key people. The awards certificates of merit are good for developing contacts when we award schemes developed by local Asian families and companies. Is there a striking new mosque or temple; perhaps they deserve an award or two? People like to be praised and feted especially if their pictures and details are published locally.

We've been on visits to a temple and mosques. They are fun and the hospitality is always gracious and welcoming. Maybe your civic society could arrange a visit to a mosque during Heritage Open Days? Perhaps it might be an idea to suggest this and then visit the mosque to discuss the idea? In Preston the second generation Asians are often astute and energetic developers. There is sometimes also some barely disguised racist resistance to their plans. We try to be fair to all developers and we have written in support of schemes being developed by local families, including a multi-millionaire who is regarded locally as a pantomime villain. Communities which may feel threatened may respond to better support and positive approaches.

My main point is 'don't give up': you may be surprised what you can still do with limited resources, especially in the age of the internet. Oldie indignation is a great fuel for action. Keep calm and carry on.

Aidan Turner-Bishop
Preston and South Ribble Civic Trust

The Wessex Civic Society Network is born!

A new grouping of civic societies has been created called the Wessex Civic Society Network. Taking its name from the homeland that it primarily serves, the group's first "Wessex Muster" will be on Saturday, 6th March 2010, at the Midsomer Norton Town Hall from 10.00am to 3.00pm. Hosts for this event will be the Midsomer Norton Society.

The forthcoming 'Muster' looks set to break new ground with a programme of informative speaker topics including 'Generating pride in your place' and 'Frome - a case study in the Local Listing'. In addition there will be a skills and experience sharing session entitled 'How do you as a group promote yourselves?' - which we hope will encourage new ideas and general networking amongst like-minded people involved at a grass roots level. In short a forum to share the practical day to day experiences of being in the civic society movement.

Host society participation will offer opportunities for individual civic society groups to 'showcase' their town or village. As well as inviting the media to the lunchtime event the Network also hopes local civic dignitaries will attend. Meetings will commence at 10:00am and conclude at 3:00pm with lunch included in the attendance price of £4.00.

Overall the aim is to create a vibrant local group with welcoming events that focus on networking and information exchange without having the overhead in time and money of a very formalised organisational structure. This means that the network will live or die on the level of support, enthusiasm and energy of those attending its Musters rather than establishing a "card carrying membership".

The initiative follows the local cluster meeting held in Bath in November 2009 where it was agreed that a small group would come together to arrange quarterly networking events for 2010.

Consistent with its decision not to operate under the confines of a formal constitution, we (Peter Tapscott, Paul Myers and John Peverley) will be acting as the Network's 'Maintenance Group' in conjunction with a different 'local host group' for each quarterly meeting.

So, if you're in a civic society and would like to send a representative to our Muster on the 6th March, all you have to do is to email Peter Tapscott at peter@charlwoodroad.freeserve.co.uk and provide a contact name, group and email address. In order to keep costs to a minimum all communication from the Network will be by email.

We look forward to an interesting meeting of civic enthusiasts in Midsomer Norton on the 6th of March - wish us luck!

- Written and submitted by:
Maintenance Group
Wessex Civic Society Network
Paul Myers, John Peverley & Peter Tapscott

How can a town make good use of its river? Saturday 17 April at 10.00 for 10.30 am

A meeting hosted by the Ipswich Society at the Waterfront Building, University Campus Suffolk, Ipswich IP4 1QJ
More information available [here](#)

Civic Societies in the news

[Battling BT's blot on the St Albans landscape](#)

[Leeds park mansion awarded blue plaque](#)

[Preston becomes first UK city to launch iPhone app for blue plaque sites](#)

[St Albans Civic Society loan £2,500 to ambitious cinema plan](#)

Forthcoming events

Civic Society Initiative talking to Kenilworth Society, February 23

Civic Society Initiative talking to Wilmslow Civic Trust, 17 March

Wessex Muster, Midsomer Norton, 6 March

Civic Voice Launch Event, April 17

Making use of rivers, Ipswich, April 17

For more information on any event admin@civicsocietyinitiative.org.uk