

Welcome

This special communication presents our conclusions after the intensive debate with civic societies and others that followed closure of the Civic Trust last April. It provides a summary of the main decisions and our plans for the new national body. There are links to further information on the newly revamped website.

We are enormously grateful to the hundreds of civic societies and volunteers who have fed in views, provoked discussion, provided funding and helped build a new momentum of support for the civic movement that will make it stronger than ever before. We now ask you to join the new national body and help get it off to a strong start.

There will be a specially extended **Civic Society Live** running on the Discussion Forum between **11 and 12.30 on Thursday 18 February** where you can raise issues directly with the Civic Society Initiative's Director, Tony Burton, and exchange views with other civic society volunteers. You can start posting any questions you have at <http://tinyurl.com/CivicSocLive>.

The key decisions

- We will launch a new national body for the civic movement on Saturday 17 April - less than a year after the closure of the Civic Trust
- It will be called **Civic Voice** and be registered as a charity and set up as a company limited by guarantee. The name Civic Voice attracted more than twice as many first choice votes as any other option in the recent ballot
- Civic Voice will be launched at a special event for civic societies to be held at the **Building Centre in central London on 17 April**. Griff Rhys Jones will be present at the launch. Book your place now and be at the birth of a new chapter for the civic movement - further details are available at www.civicvoice.org.uk/launch.html
- Civic societies can learn how to join Civic Voice from today via the website at www.civicvoice.org.uk/join.html
- The cost of membership in the first year is £1.50 per member (excluding life members and up to a maximum cap of £500)
- Civic societies joining as "founder members" before the end of May 2010 will receive a 10% discount on the membership fee and their membership will run till the end of April 2011
- Civic societies joining before the end of March 2010 will receive a free place at the launch of Civic Voice
- Civic societies joining Civic Voice are asked for a donation of £1.50 per existing life member on joining and for new life members in subsequent years
- Civic societies are asked to donate more than the initial £500 cap if they are able
- Members of Civic Voice will be eligible for bespoke civic society insurance provided by **Bluefin** and details of the new, more affordable, insurance products for 2010/11 will be sent out with reminders by Bluefin shortly. Civic societies will also benefit financially from Bluefin insurance products taken out by their members
- A new partnership with **NCVO (National Council for Voluntary Organisations)** is being announced today which grants automatic free membership of NCVO and free access to its services (including free telephone support) to all civic societies joining Civic Voice
- A new partnership with **The Co-operative Bank** is being announced today which will provide free current account banking services at a premium interest rate to civic societies joining Civic Voice

- Individual members of all civic and amenity societies joining Civic Voice will be eligible for the offer of a free day access pass to the **National Trust** (which can be transferred to family or friends)
- Civic Voice will set up and host a website for any member civic society that wants one
- Important changes have been made to the constitution of Civic Voice in response to the feedback from civic societies -
 - reducing the number of civic societies needed to raise an issue at the AGM or request a General Meeting
 - ensuring trustees not elected by civic societies are never in a majority when conducting business
 - and introducing weighted voting according to the size of each civic society.
- Civic Voice is being registered as a charity and has been set up as a company limited by guarantee
- In response to feedback we can confirm Civic Voice will provide development funding for civic societies and their clusters and networks (including regionally where appropriate) subject to the resources being available.

We hope you agree this is an exciting and affordable package which will bring real benefits to civic societies across the country. There is more information on the newly revamped website at www.civicsocietyinitiative.org.uk

We will be writing shortly to civic societies with further information about the benefits of membership. A summary is available <http://www.civicsocietyinitiative.org.uk/tenreasons.html>

Board of trustees – recruitment and voting

We are also advertising for people to put themselves forward as trustees of Civic Voice and for a Chair and Treasurer. Details of how to apply are available here www.civicvoice.org.uk/governingbody.html and the closing date is **14 March**. Please think about the civic society volunteers you know and encourage people to put themselves forward.

Each of the 922 civic societies registered with the Civic Society Initiative at the end of January will be eligible to vote for the new trustees. We expect to invite your votes during the two weeks between **22 March and 9 April**. We recognise that not everyone will have meetings scheduled for this period and would ask you now to make arrangements to ensure that your civic society agrees who to vote for. This is your opportunity to have a say on who runs Civic Voice.

If you are unsure if you are registered with the Civic Society Initiative, please email admin@civicsocietyinitiative.org.uk and we can confirm for you.

Future plans

Own the future estimated that the cost of meeting civic societies aspirations for the future would be in the order of £300,000 to £400,000. We believe this estimate remains robust. We are aware, however, that the level of funding required is significantly greater than that previously provided by civic societies to the Civic Trust and that a transition period will be required. We have also responded to feedback encouraging us to build the organisation over time from a small but strong base.

We are budgeting for £180,000 in Civic Voice's first year. This excludes project funding and will be spent on two staff, office costs, meetings of societies and volunteers (including a national AGM and convention), development of a website, events, travel and publications. This is considerably more than the Civic Trust used to provide for civic societies. We will be able to mount one or two campaigns (such as Street Pride) and lobby on the highest priority issues as well as building a stronger media profile.

We will also be able to provide targeted advice to civic societies on policy and planning issues and offer support on strengthening the civic society network. We are seeking financial support from other organisations in the event that the number of societies joining in the first year does not provide sufficient funds and are planning for Civic Voice to be on a sustainable financial footing, independently funded by the civic movement, after 3 years.

We are expecting the annual membership fee will rise to £2 per member from April 2011 and the cap to £800. This will allow time for civic societies to adjust and determine how best to raise the necessary funds. We also expect that a Civic Forum will be established as a means of involving civic societies in debating and discussing issues and priorities with Civic Voice in addition to the AGM. We also expect to run a number of Open Forums around the country each year for members to meet each other and trustees and staff from Civic Voice and debate priorities. Civic Voice will also have provision for 10 not-for-profit partners to nominate a single trustee between them if desired as previously proposed. Each of these issues will be for Civic Voice's Board to decide later in the year. We are planning for the first AGM of Civic Voice in Autumn 2010 and would welcome suggestions for the venue.

Underlying principles

There are some important principles which lie behind these decisions. They reflect a desire to:

- set up the framework necessary to make a success of Civic Voice while leaving as many important decisions as possible to the new Board (e.g. on the role of partner organisations in its governance)
- reflect the principles which commanded support during the debate around the new body being campaigning, responsive, light footed and grassroots (e.g. changes to the constitution to reflect the views of civic societies and enhance their role)
- establish a new national voice for the civic movement with a clear public purpose and a focus on the important role to be played by civic societies (e.g. establishing it as a charity working for public benefit).

Civic Societies in the news

Fleetwood Civic Society

Piece of history to be protected <http://tinyurl.com/FleetwoodCivicSociety>

Lytham St Annes Civic Society

Street trading row ended by pledge <http://tinyurl.com/LythamStAnnes>

Stourport Civic Society <http://tinyurl.com/Stourport>

Stourport 'deserves better' than building plans

St Albans Civic Society

St Albans Civic Society loan £2,500 to ambitious cinema plan

<http://tinyurl.com/StalbansCS>

Salisbury Civic Society

Salisbury Civic Society Awards <http://tinyurl.com/SalisburyCS>