

OWN THE FUTURE – ADDRESSING SOME OF THE QUESTIONS

You are asking civic societies to contribute more financially – what tangible benefits will they get?

The benefits of an effective national body are that your local civic society will be stronger because:

- you will have a voice lobbying and campaigning on the national policies and issues that you can't change locally and raising the media profile of the movement
- your members will get the offer of a free day access pass to the National Trust (worth up to £14)
- your society will have access to the tailored insurance policy provided by Bluefin
- your members will be able to take out personal health insurance and home/contents/pet/travel insurance with Bluefin at good rates and this will financially benefit your local society
- you will have access to tailored information bulletins
- you will have access to support on issues like fundraising, finding volunteers and addressing legal questions
- you will know more about what other civic societies are doing and have opportunities to meet and debate with them
- you will be able to use the logo of the new national body and get authority from saying you are a member

In all this you will become part of a wider movement championing the importance of the places where we all live.

In a small way we hope the Civic Society Initiative has begun to give a taste of the benefits which could come – providing a website, two information bulletins, raising the media profile, securing the support of celebrities, building partnerships with nationally important organisations like English Heritage and the National Trust, helping civic societies get together, securing funding and lobbying on key issues such as the review of planning policy on the historic environment.

Do we have to increase our membership fee by £3?

We are consulting on the principle of raising funds through a fee for civic societies joining the new national body based on something between £1 and £3 per member. It will be for each civic society to decide how to raise these funds – you do not have to pass the fee on to your membership and a number of societies have alternative funding available, such as by charging for events or through fundraising activity. We will make a decision on the fee per member – which will be the same for all societies early next year.

Membership of our civic society is less than £5 – how can we afford to increase this by £3 to fund the new national body?

There are a number of civic societies who have low membership rates. We recognise this and that there may be a need for a transition period. On the other hand some societies have already put up their membership rates in anticipation of the changes being introduced. Others recognise that they may not be valuing themselves and what they do by charging such low membership fees. And as one contributor to the online discussion forum says:

“£2.50 is the cost of a pint of beer. If we are serious about having a national body which is independent we need 250,000 members to sacrifice one pint (or its equivalent) out of a year's consumption - surely not a huge sacrifice!”

If we put up our membership fee won't we lose members?

Not necessarily. In fact many people value being members of something that charges a reasonable fee because they think it is likely to provide more benefits. There is lots of evidence from membership organisations to show that it is what they offer rather than the fee they charge which matters. If we provide what is needed then people are willing to join - and it is often this rather than the actual cost of membership that influences people's decisions, especially when the sums of money involved are so small. With the free day access pass to the National Trust worth up to £14 and personal insurance now available through Bluefin the extra membership costs should not seem so significant.

We are a small village society and feel the approach favours the larger cities who can afford to do more

There is no reason for the benefit of joining a local village society to be less than a big city one - there are lots of examples of thriving small societies. And the proposal is to charge a fee per member which means it is the same however big the city or village.

The offer of a free day access pass from the National Trust is interesting but we are already members so how will it benefit me?

We are pleased to say that the free day access pass that will be offered to the members of societies who join up with the new national body can be transferred to a friend or relative who isn't a member? It should make for an enjoyable day out and will help civic societies recruit new members.

Why do civic societies have to pay so much? Can't you find other sources of funding?

We can look for financial support elsewhere to top up our core funding. But the message from civic societies is clear - you want the movement to be

independent and unfettered in its views. This means paying for its core costs from civic societies and tapping in to the 250,000 plus membership more effectively than we do at the moment. If we rely on external funding – even if it were available – then we run the risk of collapsing again like the Civic Trust.

What will happen if too few societies join up with the new national body?

We hope that the majority of civic societies will join in the first year as this will mean we can get the benefits of a new national body very quickly. It may be hard for some but we do need a critical mass of support. Ultimately, if the core funding for the movement doesn't come from the civic societies then we will fail. It would be wrong to become reliant on external funding again and leave the movement's future subject to the vagaries of other's decisions. This was a major criticism levied at the Civic Trust – that it lost its independence. Do we really want to start off down this road again?

Will the levy per member also apply to life members?

What do you think? The more funds we can raise the better the services and the lobbying voice we can provide. A number of civic societies offer life membership at very low rates and making this more realistic is one of the issues that might need addressing moving forward. We all need to be smarter in tapping in to the support which we should be able to raise from over 250,000 members.

Who will run the new national body?

Governance is the next big issue. It was a major point raised at the national convention. If we get support for the basic approach in *Own the future* in the responses received before 20 November then we will focus in on the details like legal structure, governance, voting and other issues. We plan to consult further on all this before the end of the year and talk with civic society volunteers about what will work best. Some of the principles are laid out in *Own the future* – above all it must feel federal and grassroots and we would expect a majority of trustees to have first hand experience of being in a civic society.

It felt as though the Civic Trust wasn't accountable to civic societies – what is going to change?

The new national body will have a very different feel to the Civic Trust. Its main focus will be on supporting and representing civic societies and civic society members are likely to be in a majority on its Board. There will be an Annual General Meeting where civic societies vote on who is in charge and they will also be able to change the Board if it isn't delivering. We will be looking for people with the right mix of skills and experience to put themselves forward for election to the new board early in 2010.

What is the new national body going to be called?

This is a popular question – and there are lots of choices. We need to avoid picking personal favourites and base things like the name and the aims of the new national body on firm foundations. *Own the future* records an overwhelming demand from civic societies to find the golden thread that unites us and to have a clear mission and purpose for the movement. We are going to do some more work on this in the next two months, working with civic society volunteers - not least because it will help provide firm foundations for things like our name.

When and how will the new national body be launched?

With a fair wind we hope to establish the new national body around Easter and there is likely to be a national meeting of civic societies to agree the approach and launch it.

Will the new national body be a charity?

There are real advantages in being a charity – it the best expression of its altruistic purpose, reflects the reality that around 50% of civic societies are registered charities, continues the tradition of charitable endeavour for the movement and is likely to be more attractive to grant-giving charitable trusts, philanthropists and individuals. Most charities are also companies limited by guarantee and for practical purposes it may be easiest to set this up first and become a charity within the first year of its operation. We will be consulting on this.

How big is the new national body and where will it be based?

Own the future concludes an organisation of 3 or 4 staff requiring up to £400,000 for the core work is what will be needed. The location is yet to be decided. The strong support from civic societies for it to be lobbying and campaigning would point to needing a presence London since this is where the key political, policy and media audiences are focused but there are many options and the staff may not all need to work in the same office. It will be important to keep the overheads to a minimum.

Do we need such a big national body? Ian and Tony seem to be achieving a lot with much less money

Thank you. The new national body will be playing a very different role to the Civic Society Initiative, although we hope things like *Civic Matters*, *Initiative Bulletin*, the website and the Street Pride campaign are a taster of what is to come. Even with just two staff and a lot of free in kind support in terms of office space and support services the Civic Society Initiative is costing around £200,000. We are very fortunate to have had this financial support from others in our hour of need and it runs out in May.

Will Tony Burton and Ian Harvey be employed by the new national body?

It will be for others to decide who staffs the new body when it is set up. Ian and Tony are both excited by the potential and role of the new national body and it will need the resources identified to be able to do it well.

Will individuals be able to join the new national body?

It seems sensible to be open to support from individuals, other organisations, local authorities and corporate bodies and there will be a number of people who may want to get involved in the new national body but not their local civic society. The bulk of the membership though will be with individual civic societies and there are no plans to change this.

Who will be given voting rights in the new organisation?

We will be consulting on this. The principle of one society one vote has attractions and we may start with those who have registered an interest in the Civic Society Initiative. The new national body will want to consider whether partner organisations should also be represented in some way, as they are with the Ramblers Association, Youth Hostels Association and National Trust.

Why is it taking so long to set up the new national body?

It is a tricky line between "imposing" and "consulting". Some want more debate and involvement and others want quick decisions. We're trying to tread this line carefully, especially given the need to bring people together at this crucial stage in setting up the new arrangements, but we may not always get it right. If it helps – we will be clear what we want by February at the latest and aim to establish the new national body around Easter. The Civic Society Initiative's funding comes to an end in May so there is a looming deadline!

Who will make the final decisions?

It will be for each civic society to decide whether it wants to join the new national body on the basis of the proposals to be put forward by Tony Burton who will base them on the feedback from civic societies and others with an interest in the movement. Once it is established the new national body will have its own governance arrangements with civic societies at their heart.

What is happening to the regional associations?

One of the most keenly debated issues during the debate that led up to *Own the future* related to the role of the regional associations. As *Own the future* concludes:

“...the conclusions of the debate do not suggest this is the only or indeed the best way forward. This is because civic societies cluster naturally together at a more local scale and because there is uncertainty over both the impact of civic societies on regional policy

debates and the political future of the Government's regional structures themselves"

There has been considerable interest in the proposal that civic societies might "cluster" together at a more local level and also "network" on issues of common interest.

At the end of the day there is unlikely to be a one size fits all arrangement and the existing regions will continue as useful arrangements in some areas of the country and not in others. It will be for civic societies to decide how best to cluster together and also to fund the arrangements.

How will clusters of civic societies be created for smaller areas than regions?

Cluster will be set up in response to interest from civic societies. There are already moves to cluster civic societies in the Dorset, Wiltshire, Bath, Bristol, Gloucestershire area and to look at the potential of three clusters in the south east. Merseyside civic societies are also looking at clustering more together. We know others are looking to work together at a county level or around the potential of new "city-regions".

We are interested in the idea of networking with other civic societies on issues of common interest – how do we do it?

The potential for networks on common issues has triggered a lot of interest. For a start why don't you put your ideas down in the thread on the discussion forum on the website? Ideas already suggested include: planning policy, education, new civic societies, street pride, housing, traffic in historic towns, buildings at risk and many more. We will look at what is suggested and you can also meet and chat with other civic societies on the forum and set up your own arrangements. Civic societies for the "core cities" have already got together and found it useful. Keep us in touch with what you do.

I don't like using the internet and am not on email – how will I keep in touch?

This is a tricky one. In an ideal world we would love to be able to provide everyone with the same level of information. It is impractical, however, for us to do this and running parallel electronic and paper information systems would be expensive looking ahead. It is also important the new national body starts as it means to go on- addressing the challenges of the 21st century in a modern and progressive way which reaches out to people and involves them in ways unheard of before email and the internet. The decisions on all this will be for the new national body.

We like *Civic Matters* – will it continue?

Thank you. Providing tailored information which meets civic societies' needs is a central benefit of the new national body. This means *Civic Matters* or

something better than it will continue if we can secure the resources we need. Do let us have feedback on *Civic Matters* so we can keep improving it.

Is the insurance arrangement with Bluefin changing?

Yes – for the better. The existing insurance arrangements for civic societies are secure and we have negotiated better cover from April next year. It is also now possible for individual members of registered societies to take out private health insurance (and soon this will be extended to home, motor, travel and pet insurance) at good rates and the added bonus of a financial contribution automatically going to the local civic society and the national body for each product taken out.

There is further information about all this at:

www.civicsocietyinitiative.org.uk/civic_society_insurance_and_financial_services.html

Are you taking on Heritage Open Days or the Civic Trust Awards?

There will be lots of demands on new national body and it is important not to take on too much or get distracted by projects that aren't central to what civic societies want. It will be for the new national body to decide where to put the emphasis and to raise one-off project funding where necessary. Civic societies will play an important role in shaping the priorities of the new national body, including at an annual meeting.

The Civic Trust Awards are now being run by a private individual but there are lots of local awards run by civic societies. Do you have any ideas for how we could make more of these?

There is a debate to be had with English Heritage about the future of Heritage Open Days. The view that the country's largest voluntary cultural event should not be run by the state is widely held with other heritage bodies but English Heritage is keen to continue and will be the prime funder whatever happens in future.

Will you be offering support in creating new civic societies?

Yes. It is important we spread the movement as widely as possible. As HRH The Prince of Wales said in his message to the Civic Societies National Convention in Blackpool, *"Nowhere should be without its civic society and no-one should be without the voice you can provide."*

Why have you chosen the Street Pride campaign for 2010

The problems of street clutter came up time and again during the discussion with civic societies over the summer and lots of you are already involved in running some impressive campaigns. Street Pride provides an opportunity for civic societies to work together as a movement – addressing the issue in a way that can make a difference locally and combining the local activity to raise

the profile nationally. We have already secured extensive media coverage – in *The Times*, *Daily Telegraph* and on BBC Radio 4's *You and Yours* among others – even before we get going. We also have funding from English Heritage to run some campaign workshops and provide societies with the campaign materials that will be needed.

What happens next?

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| November | – | consultation on <i>Own the future</i> till 20 November |
| December | - | consultation on structure and governance options |
| January | - | consultation on structure and governance closes |
| | - | conclusions of work on mission and purpose |
| February | - | announcement of arrangement for new national body |
| | - | seek nominations for trustees/directors |
| | - | civic societies asked to join new national body |
| March | - | preparations for new national body |
| April | - | launch of new national body |

We are planning to run a monthly Civic Society Live on the discussion forum on the website where you can ask questions directly of Tony Burton and raise issues with other civic society members and get instant feedback. The October Civic Society Live has already been viewed over 600 times so why not sign up and get involved at www.civicsocietyinitiative.org.uk

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