



Annual General Meeting

MINUTES

First Annual General Meeting
9 October 2010
Great Northern Hotel, Peterborough

The first Annual General Meeting of Civic Voice was attended by 121 people and 51 civic societies (45 members of Civic Voice).

1. Welcome

Paula Ridley (Chair) welcomed everyone to the first Civic Voice AGM and reflected on the successful tours of Stamford and Peterborough on the previous day and the evening reception hosted by the Mayor in Peterborough Town Hall. She thanked all those involved in making the events a success.

Councillor Matthew Lee, Deputy Leader of Peterborough City Council and with lead responsibility for heritage, welcomed delegates. He affirmed the Council's commitments to caring for Peterborough and welcomed the work of Peterborough Civic Society and the work of civic societies across the country.

2. Apologies

Apologies were received from 38 groups and 2 individuals - Aldershot Civic Society, Banbury Civic Society, Bath Preservation Trust, Berwick Upon Tweed Civic Society, Beeston and District Civic Society, Buckingham Society, Chesham Society, Cheltenham Civic Society, Chorley Civic Society, Farnborough Society, Frome Society, Grimsby and Cleethorpes Civic Society, Harrogate Civic Society, Market Harborough Society, Maidenhead Civic Society, Malmesbury Civic Trust, Melton Mowbray Civic Society, Merseyside Civic Society, Newport and District Civic Society, Norwich Society, Nottingham Civic Society, Oxford Preservation Trust, Oxford Civic Society, Oxton Society, Portsmouth Society, Peter Spawforth, Peter Diplock, Salisbury Civic Society, Scarborough Civic Society, Skegness Civic Society, Sonning and Sonning Eye Society, Street Society, Sutton Coldfield Civic Society, Swindon Civic Trust, Tony Hillier (Heath and Hampstead Society), The Ramsgate Society, Warwick Society, Wavertree Society, Windermere and Bowness Civic Society, Workington and District Civic Trust, Yorkshire and Humber Association of Civic Societies.

3. Chair's presentation

Paula Ridley addressed the meeting with a wide ranging review of what Civic Voice has achieved and the role of the civic movement. The AGM was only the third time in 30 years that civic societies have come together and the last two occasions – in Blackpool in October 2009 and in London for the launch of Civic Voice in April 2010 – demonstrated the value of working together as a movement. She thanked the Board for its hard work and welcomed the opportunities to meet and visit civic societies across the country. Paula stressed the importance of putting Civic Voice on a sustainable financial footing if it is to be independent and highlighted the need for more members and also for individual civic societies to think whether their own subscription levels truly value the important work that they do.

Paula drew attention to the opportunity the civic movement now has to respond to a revitalisation of localism and for it to strengthen itself to match the environmental movement in its effectiveness. She cited the importance of planning and the opportunities to shape the impending legislation nationally but also to take advantage of the new approach locally. Drawing on her experience of the Liverpool Heritage Bureau she encouraged civic societies to develop partnerships with local councils, developers and other conservation groups. Paula also stressed the need for eternal vigilance as illustrated by one of the country's largest ever planning applications recently being submitted for Liverpool docks. She emphasised the importance of addressing the social as well as environmental implications of new development and regeneration schemes.

Looking ahead Paula highlighted the opportunities presented by Civic Day and other initiatives for civic societies to become stronger and raise their profile. She also announced the creation of two awards supported by Marsh Christian Trust to recognise the outstanding contribution made by volunteers and civic societies – the Marsh Civic Volunteer Award (£500) and the Marsh Award for Civic Societies (£1,000). Nominations would open at Easter 2011 and the first presentations would be made at the autumn AGM.

4. Director's report

Tony Burton (Director) expressed his pride in what the civic movement has achieved in the last year and drew attention to the 258 civic societies that have joined Civic Voice (with 68,000 individual members) in its first 6 months. Tony ran through a series of issues demonstrating how Civic Voice has responded to the expectations of civic societies raised during the debate in 2009 for:

- A raised profile
- Influence where it matters
- Campaigns on things that matter to civic societies
- Support for groups which strengthens the whole movement
- Financial independence
- Being part of something bigger

He invited views on a series of proposals for addressing each of the issues over the next few months and years and announced a fresh workshop programme with events across the country.

Tony stressed the importance of everyone working together to square the circle of financial independence through more members and support from within the movement. Tony thanked the Board for its support and – to acclamation – Ian Harvey (Co-ordinator) for all that he does for the civic movement. He concluded by expressing his admiration for the amazing voluntary work done by civic societies across the country and how the movement might be surprised by what it can achieve with a new confidence about its role.

[Tony Burton's presentation is available at <http://www.civicvoice.org.uk/about/meetings/peterborough-2010-agm>]

5. Discussion

There was a wide ranging discussion from delegates.

Hunstanton raised the issue of working with other voluntary and Government bodies

- ☛ Civic Voice is regularly meeting and working with other organisations and the Civic Panel of not-for-profit organisations with an interest in place has been established

Formby highlighted the challenge of breaking down negative perceptions of civic societies

- ☛ This was agreed and Civic Day was identified as an important opportunity

Guildford drew attention to the changes to planning which the Coalition Government would be introducing and how these will require more active civic society involvement

- ☛ Civic Voice is working hard to influence the planning reforms and all groups can expect more to be asked of them under the new system and should be prepared

Wimbledon was struck by the small number of London civic societies at the AGM and the importance of showing how the roles of the London Forum and Civic Voice complemented each other rather than overlapped. The value of campaigns which directly benefit civic societies, such as Street Pride, was highlighted

- ☛ It was agreed a discussion between Civic Voice and the London Forum would be useful and everyone was invited to suggest follow up campaigns to Street Pride

Peterborough asked for a stronger environmental and sustainability dimension to the civic movement and this was generally supported

- ☛ The civic movement's contribution to the sustainability debate is important and needs to focus on where it can add value to other voices by addressing the practical implications of how it affects the look and feel of places and new development

Huntingdon called for the abolition of VAT on the maintenance of historic buildings

- ☛ It was agreed this would be welcome but there was little immediate chance of a campaign success. Civic Voice would contribute to work with heritage organisations to ensure a sympathetic fiscal environment

Chelsea suggested it would be helpful to have a persuasive summary of the benefit of Civic Voice and proposed a competition to find the country's most ugly petrol station

- ☛ The need for a persuasive summary was agreed and attention was drawn to the existing "Ten reasons to join" on the website. Ideas were canvassed on possible competition themes

Ipswich asked for copies of Tony's presentation which made a powerful case for Civic Voice

- ☛ Copies of the presentation would be made available

Blackpool added to the calls for a stronger green dimension, citing work to make new homes more energy efficient and use solar panels

- ☛ A number of civic societies are doing similar work and it was suggested it would make a good focus for a volunteer group if someone came forward

Chester emphasised the value of groups working together and **Barton** supported local fora

- ☛ This was agreed, citing the Liverpool Heritage Bureau mentioned by Paula in her presentation

Halifax wanted to know more about the mix of skills and experience in civic volunteers and explained how views of Peterborough had been transformed by the previous day's tours

- ☛ The quality of the tours was widely praised

[A number of other issues were raised on the comments board during the day and responses to these have been posted on Civic Voice's discussion forum at <http://www.civicvoice.org.uk/forums/viewthread/23>]

6. Financial update

Martin Meredith (Treasurer) introduced the interim accounts for Civic Voice to September 2010 and presented breakdowns of the expected income and expenditure. He highlighted the need to grow income from civic societies to achieve greater financial independence. In response to questions Martin explained that expenditure on Governance related to functions such as Board meetings and the AGM. He also explained that income from civic societies worked out at less than £1 per individual member because of the £500 cap on the membership fee and the exclusion of life members.

[The interim accounts and Martin Meredith's presentation are available at <http://www.civicvoice.org.uk/about/meetings/peterborough-2010-agm>]

7. Appointment of independent examiners

Martin Meredith proposed the appointment of Hargreaves and Woods as Civic Voice's independent examiners at a fee to be agreed by the Board of Trustees. This followed a discussion by the Board of three alternatives. In response to questions he explained that Civic Voice's low turnover meant an independent examination rather than a full audit of the accounts was required by the Charity Commission. The resolution was seconded by the **Chelsea Society** (Terence Bendixson) and agreed unanimously.

8. Ratification of Chair and Treasurer

Freddie Gick (Deputy Chair) proposed ratification of the Board's appointment of Paula Ridley as Chair and Martin Meredith as Treasurer of Civic Voice, emphasising the qualities they had already brought to the roles. The resolution was seconded by **Hunstanton Civic Society** (Andrew Murray) and agreed unanimously by acclamation.

9. Any Other Business

There was no other formal business.

Paula Ridley presented the first Civic Voice awards for best newsletter to **Cambridge Past Present and Future** and best website to the **Brighton Society**.