



2012 AGM

The third AGM was hosted by the Coventry Society

October 15th 2011

MINUTES

The third AGM was attended by 124 people and 58 civic societies (54 members of Civic Voice).

1. Welcome

Colin Walker (The Coventry Society) called the meeting to order and welcomed everyone to Coventry before handing over to Paula Ridley (Chair, Civic Voice). Paula welcomed delegates and thanked Colin and his colleagues for the extremely enjoyable and exhausting visits of Coventry that had been arranged the previous day.

2. Apologies

Apologies were received from Alwick Civic Society, Bath Preservation Trust, Berwick Upon Tweed Civic Society, Birmingham Civic Society, Bournemouth Society, Caldby Society, Chelmsford Society, Dorchester Civic Trust, Earls Court Society, Gidea Park & District Civic Society, Hereford Civic Society, Lechlade and District Civic Society, Mitcham Cricket Green and Community Heritage, Ripon Society, Sale Society, Scarborough Civic Society, The Petersfield Society, Torbay Society, West Derby Society, Wigan Civic Trust

3. Minutes of 2011 AGM, Sheffield

The minutes were proposed by **Chelsea Society** and seconded by **Bristol Civic Society** and signed as a true record.

4. Annual report and accounts 2011-12

Chair's presentation

Paula Ridley introduced the trustees' report and accounts and reflected on the impact of Civic Voice and the successful work undertaken by civic societies during the previous year.

She updated the meeting on a number of changes for Civic Voice, nonemorso than the change in Director. Paula placed on record our thanks to Tony Burton who has moved onto the Design Council.

The campaign against the Government's changes to the planning system (National Planning Policy Framework) was highlighted as a particular success and demonstrated the impact we can have when pulling in the same direction. She expressed astonishment that the Government appeared not to expect a row over its planning policy reforms which put everyday England at risk. Paula highlighted the key role which Civic Voice was playing influencing discussions on planning and localism and the expected plans to grow the All Party Parliamentary Group for Civic Societies. Paula placed on record our thanks to Laura Sandys MP who has been a huge supporter of Civic Voice since we set up.

Paula thanked all the civic societies she had visited for their hospitality and welcomed and paid tribute to the work of civic volunteers across the country. She encouraged civic societies to make good use of the support provided by Civic Voice, and that over 15,000 free passes have been issued to groups as part of their members of Civic Voice to the National Trust and English Heritage. She also pointed out her role in helping to identify a sustainable way forward for the future of Heritage Open Days now that this had returned to being co-ordinated by the voluntary sector. She explained that Civic Voice manage Heritage Open Days in partnership with the National Trust and Heritage Alliance.

Paula continued by emphasising the importance of two-way communications and inviting views on how this could be improved so information was circulated and feedback provided by more than a few officers in each civic society.

Paula paid particular thanks to the Trustees and staff for the support they have offered in the previous twelve months. She concluded by saying she was optimistic about the future with the appointment of Steve Graham who joins us having raised huge sums of money for other charities.

Director's report

Steve Graham, Civic Voice Chief Executive made a presentation which looked at the work undertaken by Civic Voice during the few months he had been in post:

- 👉 Becoming more sustainable and independent
- 👉 Improving the way we work
- 👉 Raising our profile and influence

Steve highlighted some of his initial thoughts on the movement as "a newcomer" to the network emphasising that the membership need to give consideration to the "brand it is selling" adding it needs to be more professional.

Looking ahead, Steve highlighted the importance of Civic Day and urged as many civic societies as possible to get involved. He stressed the importance of neighbourhood planning and emphasised that he knows this is something that Ministers are interested in so we should be participating.

Steve asked for the meeting's support for the new Campaign for fair planning which was intended to help maintain pressure on the Government as it decided on the future national planning policy framework. 70% Civic Groups say they are well informed about Localism but Steve said the movement should be asking how it can help implement the Act for Government.

He concluded by expressing his constant amazement at the commitment and creativity of civic societies around the country and the potential of bringing this together as an even more influential voice in the land.

Motion

Members attention was drew to the recent proposals of the Government to relax planning rules further, which would allow large extensions (up to 26m) to be built without the need for planning approval. Some Local Authorities are already objecting to this change, details of which are due to go out for consultation shortly.

In a clear message from the AGM, delegates voted unanimously to back a motion calling on the Government to withdraw its proposed reforms, particularly measures to allow home owners to build larger (up to 26m) extensions without the need for planning permission.

Members also voted against plans to allow developers to appeal directly to the Planning Inspectorate rather than local councils.

Paula Ridley urged Societies to study these proposals and make appropriate comments based on a briefing that will be shared by Civic Voice.

Discussion

There was a wide ranging discussion on the trustees report and the presentations:

On planning, **Guildford** urged the need to get the balance right in the growth of our towns and the impact this has on our town centres

- It was clarified that the civic movement should be a movement that has a central role in the debate around town centres and high streets. Members were reminded that they should sign up to the Civic Voice Save our High Streets campaign. Delegates were steered towards the website for further information on the Campaign

The Chelsea Fleet explained backed their campaign on the rise and fall of **pubs** in Chelsea and wanted to hear feedback from others on this issue. Several groups including **Manchester** and **Wakefield** explained they are also experiencing this issue

- It was discussed that while this is an issue for some groups, is the issue of pubs more closely aligned with CAMRA and discussed whether we should be focusing our priorities.

Blackpool encouraged groups to look at the range of people involved in their work and encourage different communities to join in and said that we must not take

ourselves too seriously. It has to be something people will want to do, otherwise they will switch off. **Oxford** agreed with this.

Todmorden highlighted the importance of the First World War and a discussions agreed that Civic Voice should investigate how we can participate in this area

☞ This would be provided investigate further by the Board of Trustees

Lytham raised the issue of the loss of conservation staff across the country and wanted to know whether we could do anything as a movement. **Market Bosworth** agreed with this and pointed people to the IHBC survey on the current stats of this issue. **Peterborough** mentioned the importance of local lists and said groups should adopt these as they can support the local authority.

☞ It was agreed that it was important for civic societies to have an open approach and act as a critical friend with the local authority.

Treasurer's report

Martin Meredith introduced the 2011-12 accounts by reviewing the actual results against budget and providing a breakdown of the main income and expenditure lines. He emphasised the importance of continuing to grow the support from civic societies. He indicated (to save time) he would be happy to deal with more detailed questions outside the meeting.

5. Ratification of Annual report and accounts 2010-11

Chester Civic Trust proposed and **Huntingdon and Godmanchester Civic Trust** seconded the trustees' report and accounts for 2011-12.

6. Appointment of independent examiners

Hargreaves and Woods were proposed by **Martin Meredith, Treasurer** and seconded by the **Manchester Civic Society**.

7. Board elections

Paula Ridley announced the results of the ballot for trustees to join the Board which had generated a response from x civic societies.

She welcomed John Bothamley (Hereford Society) and John Kershaw (Manchester Civic Society) to the Board and thanked all those who had participated.

There was no further AGM business.

8. Any other business

Paula Ridley introduced Jo Winyard from Marsh Christian Trust and announced the results of the second Marsh Christian Trust Civic Awards for "outstanding contribution" as follows:

Marsh Civic Society Award

Winner: The Highgate Society

Marsh Civic Volunteer Award

Winner: Elaine Smith (Blackpool Civic Trust)

Paula thanked Jo Winyard and Marsh Christian Trust for its support.

President's address

Griff Rhys Jones (President, Civic Voice) gave an inspirational speech that highlighted the importance of the community voice in protecting our historic environment. He said that the Government will no doubt continue to "erode" the planning system so it is essential that civic groups support the national body to ensure we speak as one movement. It is with this united voice that will ensure we influence the policy of the Government.