



Launch event at Houses of Parliament demonstrates importance of being civic

An invited audience of over 40 representatives from civic societies across England, MPs and invited guests attended the launch of Civic Day 2013 at the Houses of Parliament on June 10. The event was hosted by the *All Party Parliamentary Group for Civic Societies* and was Chaired by Eric Ollerenshaw MP the Vice-Chair of the group and was addressed by Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, Eric Pickles MP. MPs in attendance included Andrew Stunell MP, Nicola Blackwood MP, Gordon Marsden MP and James Arbuthnot MP, and Chris Skidmore MP. A number of MPs, including Laura Sandys MP, sent apologies.

Opening the event Eric Ollerenshaw MP explained his longstanding interest in the civic movement and mentioned the work of Lancaster Civic Society and Fleetwood Civic Society who are both located in his constituency. Eric then shared his experience of civic societies from his role as a Planning Committee member with a local authority. This, he said, made him recognise that civic societies have good ideas and alternative solutions to offer and came to appreciate how much civic societies contributed to their local communities. He concluded by congratulating Civic Voice on its progress to date.

Paula Ridley, Chair of Civic Voice provided an important Civic Voice perspective on the importance of Civic Day and how after only three years, it has become the central date in the civic movement calendar to raise our profile. Paula also shared her own experience on how she is currently helping Merseyside Civic Society deliver a Civic Day event for June 2013.

The Secretary of State continued the theme recognising the role of the civic movement and urged everyone to use their power as constituents to put pressure on decision makers to take action. He also reaffirmed the attendees that he is keen to hear from Civic Societies and their successes, including those involved in neighbourhood planning and those putting localism on the map. He praised last years' Civic Day efforts by the civic movement and that he was looking forward to hearing about the success of this year's activities from Civic Voice. He finished by emphasising that the time is right for the civic society movement and that he wants them to "seize the day".

The audience then had the opportunity to hear from speakers from three civic societies Hale, Blackpool and Oxford. The three groups shared with the room their activities during Civic Day 2012 including references to Olympic torches, scarecrows, youth involvement and neighbourhood planning. Such examples demonstrated the variety of the civic society movement and how it helps to engender local civic pride across communities.

Paula Ridley told the room that as well as raising Civic Day to raise awareness, Civic Day is a great way to influence decision makers and pointed out the John Bercow MP, (Speaker of the House of Commons), Gordon Marsden MP, Boris Johnson, Mayor of London and Mary Creagh MP had all confirmed they would be participating in a Civic Day event. Eric Ollerenshaw MP accentuated Paula's point and said that groups should be communicating with their MP on all their activities as without knowing it is happening, MPs cannot be expected to attend!

Steve Graham, Director, concluded by thanking all present for their enthusiasm for and commitment to the civic movement saying that one of our ambitions should be that Civic Day to be part of the calendar for everyone, not just civic societies in 10 years' time. It is with the energy, commitment and enthusiasm from civic societies such as those in the room that the movement can make a real difference locally and nationally.

The importance of the civic movement was not only evident in the speeches but throughout the event with the geographic spread of civic societies present with representatives from Malvern, Fleet, Oxford, Hale, Scarborough, Marple, Blackpool and Bristol. This really showed that the civic society movement is truly a national network.