



Civic Voice Regional Forum Meeting
The Pen Museum, Birmingham - 14th December 2017
11.00am - 4.00pm

Helen Kidman (Chair)
Vanessa Gregory,
Jane Maggs,

Elizabeth Allison,
Kathy Fishwick,
Andrew Murray,

Paul Cartwright,
Richard Bennett,
Karen Rowland,

Peter Pickering,
Vernon Porter,
Nicola Daniel.

In attendance:

Ian Harvey, Sarah James, Lisa Crisp-Ullah

1. APOLOGIES:

Joan Humble, Peter Eversden, Gavin Orton, Denise Laver.

2. MINUTES FROM THE LAST MEETING & MATTERS ARISING:

The draft minutes were agreed. IH explained that all action points had been fulfilled and highlighted:

- David White couldn't attend today's meeting, but he led a well-attended workshop at the Civic Voice Convention on community led conservation area appraisals.
- IH drew attention to the Civic Voice website at and a dedicated section on Local Heritage Listing <http://www.civicvoice.org.uk/campaigns/local-heritage-list/>
- IH explained that Sarah James had undertaken a MSc Dissertation on Local Heritage Listing and had produced a blog for Civic Voice available at <https://civicvoiceblog.wordpress.com/2017/12/01/why-is-a-local-heritage-list-relevant-to-my-local-conservation-area/>

3. REGIONAL REPORTS:

There was a discussion on the paper submitted by West MASA around the relationship between regional organisations and Civic Voice. HK highlighted that there is patchy regional coverage across the country with the NE and SW regions being particularly difficult, but Civic Voice cannot force regional groups to set up, it is up to local groups to form themselves.

EA asked whether Civic Voice wanted regional groups? IH confirmed that yes, Civic Voice welcomes and encourages civic societies to network as it makes the movement stronger but there is no one-size fits all approach. Lots of groupings are currently forming around themes or along different geographical boundaries to regions. PP suggested that civic societies in the areas covered by directly elected mayors should use that as a focus for networking and influence.

It was noted:

- Civic Voice, with such a small team, couldn't be expected to manage/support all different networks, however, we welcome local networking where it arises and would be happy to partner with groups to deliver and promote events.
- Any new group, if requiring Civic Voice support, would need to be discussed by the Civic Voice board.



4. CONFERENCE FEEDBACK:

HK summarised the feedback received on the Regional Forum from members at the Convention and posed the question about what this forum should be called? There was general agreement that the forum is developing into more of an advisory forum for Civic Voice with a better level of representation across the civic movement, including an associate member and a rural civic society, and not solely restricted to 'regional representatives'.

VP suggested that the forum should have a wide as net as possible and facilitate information flow between groups and Civic Voice.

IH clarified that the group has 2 aims:

1. To enable members to share information and experience with each other and take that back to their communities.
2. To shape Civic Voice's critical thinking about the strategic development of the civic movement.

PC asked whether there was a Terms of Reference for the group as he felt a clear TOR was critical to provide direction for the group and to prevent repeated discussions on this topic in future meetings. IH clarified that if the forum felt that a new TOR was needed for the group, it needs to put one forward for the Board to consider and it doesn't have to wait for a review of the Civic Voice constitution, as it could well feed into that during 2018.

HK highlighted that a point had been raised at the Convention about whether there should be a regional grouping around the Oxford – Cambridge corridor in light of proposed transport improvements and development pressures. It was re-iterated that if there is a demand for sub-regional groupings, it is for the local groups to push for this, not Civic Voice. There was some discussion around the use of Facebook and Twitter and how this can help facilitate conversations. IH added that Civic Voice has focused on Twitter as we found it the most effective means of engaging with MPs and influencing policy.

Action:

- Civic Voice to share information on the power of social media and example of how civic societies can utilise to grow members

5. BCC STRATEGY AND ACTIVITY

IH gave a presentation on Civic Voice's Big Conservation Conversation, confirming that this will continue to be our main campaign for 2018. He explained that Karen Rowland and Helen Kidman have been paying a key role in helping Civic Voice to drive forward this campaign.

He highlighted:

- Heritage Counts 2017 which shows that there are 512 Conservation Areas at risk.
- IH also explained that there is a high proportion of LAs with few or no conservation staff. KR suggested the number of conservation officers within LAs is often down to the political will of the authority and this information could be used to encourage local MPs to attend the APPG. VG also expressed concern over a lack of conservation training for town planners, highlighting an example of a local university which doesn't currently incorporate conservation within the course.
- IH concluded saying that we are approaching a perfect storm of challenges facing Conservation Areas. We won't solve the problem on our own, but if we come together as a movement, all taking action locally, we can achieve a lot.
- The group praised the work of Civic Voice and encouraged them to keep the campaign going



6. 6a WORKSHOP: CIVIC VOICE'S COMMUNITY CONSERVATION AUDIT

IH provided an overview of a new toolkit that Civic Voice has been developing in response to demand from communities as part of our Big Conservation Conversation. It would essentially allow communities to assess the condition of their local conservation area. The idea behind the conservation area audit is that communities can help LAs to more accurately assess the condition of a conservation area, and use the audit to identify the key issues facing the area. This could then be used by the local group to develop a community conservation action plan, helping to address those key issues.

Half of the group road tested the toolkit on a walkabout of part of the Jewellery Quarter Conservation Area. There was a good discussion and the group agreed that the toolkit was an idea worth developing further. Feedback received included:

- It would be difficult to use the audit for the whole of a Conservation Area, particularly one as large as the Jewellery Quarter, so it was suggested that separate audits could be completed for the different character areas of a Conservation Area.
- We should develop different audits for different types of Conservation Areas e.g. rural, suburban, industrial, town centres etc.

It was agreed:

- That Civic Voice should continue to develop the tool as it could be a significant membership offer for Civic Voice as well as be a key tool in the campaign
- For Civic Voice to speak with EA and ND who offered to help review and refine the conservation audit toolkit so that it was relevant to their areas.

6b WORKSHOP: CIVIC VOICE'S MEMBERSHIP BENEFITS

The remainder of the group participated in a workshop with SJ looking at the current membership benefits for civic societies. Participants prioritised the benefits in order perceived value. The group highlighted the most important benefits in order as:

- APPG; policy development and having influence; insurance; Civic Update; National Civic Day, Civic Voice Design Awards and local networking through the regional forum, larger and smaller societies meetings.

PP queried whether the insurance policy was the best value and SJ confirmed that Civic Voice is currently in discussions with Lockton ensure that the policy remains competitive. Other points raised included:

- The Civic Voice Design Awards were good for profile raising;
- The Co-op bank account could be particularly beneficial for newer/smaller groups,
- Civic Voice should consider charging for speaker requests.
- Voting rights at the AGM and an opportunity to vote on campaigns should be seen as a basic right of being a member of Civic Voice, not as a benefit.
- The group highlighted that providing data protection advice to members, signposting members' good practice e.g. Heritage Open Days and providing social media training, focussed on making societies more media savvy so they have better influence, could be potential extra benefits.

7. CASE STUDY: LOOK! ST ALBANS



Vanessa Gregory from Look! St Albans, an Associate Member of Civic Voice gave a presentation on ‘Look! St Albans Our Community Voice on Design’ which is a community group that actively promotes community engagement on significant developments in central St Albans.

In January 2013 Look! St Albans published, draft design codes for central St Albans, co-authored by the community and The Prince’s Foundation for Building Community. These design codes inform landowners, developers and the planning authority what is acceptable and unacceptable to the community. They inform our design charrettes, and provide a community-led framework for placemaking and design decisions.

8. CIVIC VOICE ACTIVITIES: CONSULTATIONS & DISCUSSIONS

IH explained that the Civic Voice board had met the day before and had agreed that a consultation would be taking place with civic society members about the possibility of increasing the membership fee. It was explained that with the discussion only taking place yesterday no paper was available to discussed:

- The group thanked IH for sharing the information and understood the difficulty in not presenting information.
- It was queried why this was not announced at the Civic Voice AGM when trustees were available to take questions.
- It was explained that some groups would review CV membership if any increase happened.
- The forum agreed a set of words to be shared with the Civic Voice board that *“We support the CV fee review but it is pointed out that member organisations may be lost if the fees rise considerably.”*

9. KEY MESSAGES TO THE CIVIC VOICE BOARD & ACTIONS:

- The CV tool on conservation area assessment was road-tested with a walk round the Jewellery Quarter led by Ian Harvey. The methodology was deemed very useful, but some fine tuning is needed.
- A workshop on Membership Benefits prioritised benefits into three categories based on their perceived value.
- A discussion on the areas of England not represented on the Forum considered alternative means of inclusion. Facilitating a meeting of societies in proximity to the Oxford-Cambridge development corridor was suggested.
- Conservation areas at risk and the loss of conservation officers were discussed with details of the growing body of data being put together by Karen Rowland, Phil Douce and Helen Kidman. There are many opportunities here for civic societies to become more involved.
- We support the CV fee review but it is pointed out that member organisations may be lost if the fees rise considerably.
- We consider that CV should emphasise the benefits of the Locktons insurance deal as not all people are aware of these.
- A formal thanks to the hard-working Civic Voice team for their inputs into supporting this Forum and being a pleasure to work with.

10. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

- 6th February 2018 (11am – 4pm (with lunch provided) - Birmingham

Minutes to be posted to <http://www.civicvoice.org.uk/about/meetings/>