



BACKGROUND

What is Civic Voice?

Civic Voice is the new national charity for the civic movement. We work to make the places where everyone lives more attractive, enjoyable and distinctive. We promote civic pride and we talk civic sense. We speak up for civic societies and local communities across England. We believe everyone has the right to live somewhere they can be proud of. We know how people feel about places because we feel the same way.

Where has it come from?

Civic Voice will be launched on Saturday 17 April. The launch comes after extensive consultation and discussion with hundreds of civic and amenity societies and their members and with over 100 other interested organisations and partners about the future of the civic movement following closure of the Civic Trust in April 2009. This work has been led by the Civic Society Initiative and funded by the National Trust, Esmée Fairbairn Foundation and individual civic societies with support from CPRE, the North of England Civic Trust, English Heritage and the RIBA among others.

What is the civic movement?

The civic movement is based on a network of over a thousand local civic and amenity societies in the warp and weft of local communities across England. The civic movement is one of the largest social movements in the country, with over 250,000 individual members and 20,000 volunteers. The first civic society was set up in the 1840s.

Civic societies provide a focus for voluntary and community action to improve the places where people live, work and relax. They champion the importance of these places to decision makers and opinion formers in business, politics, government, the media, the voluntary sector and elsewhere. They play an essential and voluntary role in helping individuals and communities to understand and take action to improve the quality of their lives and everyday experience through the place where they live. Civic societies promote and celebrate the best of what is inherited from the past and what is developed for the future. They are a fundamental source of civic pride. Their work brings benefits to the whole community and not just to those who are members of civic societies.

Civic societies can be provocative, stubborn, forceful, inspiring and outspoken on behalf of the places they care about. They are fiercely independent and grassroots organisations, often providing the grit in the oyster which stimulates people to think, reconsider and widen their horizons. They will celebrate and encourage positive action and be forthright in resisting damaging change. They are also a store of knowledge and expertise about local places which is an essential starting point in recognising and strengthening their identity. This is often reflected in blue plaque schemes run by civic societies or the development of town trails or management of local archives. Civic societies are the country's most numerous participants in the land use planning system and civic society volunteers frequently act as trusted intermediaries between

local government and local people in planning, transport and other decision making. Many civic societies campaign for better management of local buildings and open space and find solutions to their long term management.

The civic movement's full potential to help the nation discover and listen to its communities and its roots remains untapped. This is at a time of renewed political interest in localism and the benefits from empowering communities. There is much talk of the development of a "*big society*"¹ and it is a Government priority to "*strengthen the role of citizens and civic society*"². From different political perspectives the civic movement is a big contributor to those aspects of society that are not the same as the state³. It also has a major contribution to make to the Prime Minister's belief "*that a strong and flourishing civic society goes hand-in-hand with an active and effective government. When we work together, our communities are stronger*"⁴. The civic movement is also central to supporting and developing the sense of identity and belonging that comes from positive feelings about the place where people live.

What will Civic Voice do?

Civic Voice's priority is to champion and support the civic movement – providing a stronger national voice and increasing the capacity and capability of local volunteers and their community networks. While many individual civic societies flourish they also recognise the value of having a national body to represent their views, provide advice and information and strengthen and extend the whole civic network.

Civic Voice will lead a number of national campaigns, working through local groups. We will launch our Love Local campaign on 17 April to champion what makes people feel proud about where they live. Our ongoing Street Pride campaign (www.streetpride.org.uk) aims to make places more attractive, enjoyable and distinctive by removing unnecessary street clutter. We are also campaigning on a number of other issues ranging from the reform of the land use planning system and proposals for a second High Speed Rail link to the importance of blue plaques and the future of coastal towns.

Our vision

Our vision for 2015 is that everyone lives somewhere they can be proud of. To achieve this we will provide the civic movement with a strong local presence and an influential national voice. We will be active on the national, city and local stage, working in partnership across the UK. Civic societies will perform at the level of the best today and the civic movement will reach more places and benefit more people from all walks of life. Our reputation and authority will make us the first port of call for anyone seeking to develop, conserve or interpret the quality, beauty and character of our towns, cities and villages or to engage people in shaping their future. We will be a source of civic pride and people will know us for our independence of thought, challenging perspective and positive outlook. We will listen, advise, support and act on behalf of communities everywhere. Communities will know they have a voice and a champion for the place where they live.

Who runs Civic Voice?

Civic Voice is being established very differently to the Civic Trust. Its core membership is civic and amenity societies and other local groups. They pay a fee based on the size of their membership. Individuals can also join and we welcome membership from other like minded organisations, town and parish councils, business and public sector bodies. The majority of

¹ David Cameron MP, Hugo Young Lecture, November 10 2009

² *Putting the frontline first: smarter government Cm 7753* December 2009 (which includes 43 references to "civic")

³ "*there is such a thing as society, it's just not the same thing as the state*", David Cameron MP, speech to Conservative Party conference, 8 October 2009

⁴ Prime Minister Gordon Brown MP, Foreword, *Putting the frontline first: smarter government Cm 7753* December 2009

Civic Voice's trustees are elected by civic societies. Our Chair is Paula Ridley and our Director is Tony Burton – short biographies are provided below

Civic Voice seeks to raise its core funds through membership to guarantee its independence. Civic Voice has developed partnerships with Bluefin insurance, NCVO, National Trust and The Co-operative Bank among others.

Biographies

Paula Ridley – Paula Ridley CBE Hon FRIBA is Chair of Civic Voice. Paula is immediate past Chairman of the Victoria and Albert Museum. She has been involved in the civic movement for over 30 years and is Hon. Vice President of Merseyside Civic Society, following many years as Hon. Secretary, where one of her key activities was helping to save the Albert Dock in Liverpool – the largest group of Grade 1 listed buildings in the country - from both dereliction and unsuitable development in the 1980s. Paula was Director of the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation and Chair of the Liverpool Housing Action Trust, a large housing regeneration scheme in Liverpool. Paula has had a long and varied career in both public and private sectors and throughout has always retained a keen interest in civic affairs, regeneration and architecture. Paula is Chair of the Liverpool Biennial of Contemporary Art, the National Student Drama Festival, and is on the board of the National Communities Resource Centre.

Tony Burton – Tony Burton is Director of Civic Voice. Tony left the National Trust as Director of Strategy and External Affairs in 2009 to take up the challenge of building a stronger civic movement. He has over 20 years experience in voluntary conservation and environmental organisations and community campaigning. He was at the National Trust for 8 years and left the Campaign to Protect Rural England after 13 years in 2001 as Deputy Director. Tony has been Chair of Wildlife and Countryside Link and a founder trustee of Heritage Link – the two main voluntary sector liaison bodies – and was a member of Richard Rogers' Urban Task Force. He has a strong track record in national campaigning and lobbying. Tony is a geographer, town planner and an honorary Fellow of the Royal Institute of British Architects.

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