

Civic Voice

Regional Forum

Minutes of the meeting held on 1 September 2015

Present:

Tony Fooks Regional Forum Chairman
Helen Kidman Yorkshire
Howard Vero West Midlands
Peter Lee East of England
Peter Evesden London Forum
Vernon Porter Oxfordshire
Keith Robinson Association of North Thames Amenity Societies (ANTAS)
Colin Webster Torbay Society
John Kershaw North West
Helen Marcus Camden
Freddie Gick Chairman Civic Voice

Apologies: John Walker (Kent Federation of Civic Societies), Mike Jenks Falmouth Society.

Peter Eversden welcomed members on behalf of the London Forum in whose offices the meeting was being held.

The Chairman also welcomed members

1. Minutes of previous meeting

The minutes of the previous meeting were approved subject to slight amendments to items 3 and 4 and the spelling of the name Gick.

2. Trustee Report

Freddie Gick reported that:

- a. Ian Harvey had returned to work in July after a period in which the Chair had assumed the responsibilities of the role of Executive Director.
- b. While project income has maintained a strong cash flow position, new longer term income sources are needed.
- c. Current project work includes DCLG sponsored work on Community Rights, DCMS funded work on war memorials and acting as the lead organization in preparing a substantial HLF bid in relation to surveying Grade II listed buildings in association with Historic England. This work helps to raise the profile of Civic Voice with DCLG, DCMS, Historic England and HLF.

- d. The Board will agree the appointment of members of the Expert Panel at its next meeting and expects that members of the Panel will meet during the Convention in October.
- e. The Chair has spoken to Marcus Jones, the Minister for Local Government and Communities and has asked for a further meeting. A meeting has been arranged with Brandon Lewis, Minister for Planning and Housing.
- f. A meeting of a group of volunteers to discuss public relations and profile raising for Civic Voice has been arranged for 14 September.
- g. It is likely that Historic England will fund a project in which a consultant will be engaged to undertake a three or four month strategic study of Civic Voice to enable the next stage of development to be planned and appropriate funding sources to be identified.
- h. Nominations for the election of Trustees close on 7 September and it is important that a strong field of candidates is put forward as the group elected will form a significant component of the Board for the next three years, particularly after October 2016 when several of the current trustees are scheduled to retire.

3. Regional Reports

John Kershaw reported that several new members had been recruited to NWACTS, its most recent meeting had been held in Chester to mark the success of the Chester nomination in the National Design awards programme, Preston Civic Society had closed and Bolton Council had dropped its proposal to alter the Town Hall

Helen Kidman reported on a recent successful YHACS meeting in Skipton, the YHACS committee has taken over the Market Wheaton Civic Society and she has taken responsibility for planning for YHACS and is convening a meeting of people involved in planning in their societies., partly as a consequence of difficulty encountered in ensuring local authority enforcement of planning decisions.

Howard Vero reported that WestMASA was having difficulty recruiting office holders.

Colin Webster reported that a first informal meeting of a group of 7 societies in Devon will take place on 19 October, to be attended by Freddie Gick and Tony Fooks. He drew attention to difficulties encountered in two developments where Historic England objections in one case were holding up progress and Local Authority actions were preventing another moving ahead. (Freddie Gick agreed to pursue the matter with Historic England.)

Vernon Porter reported that Oxford is in discussion with the Charity Commissioners about broadening its objectives to embrace subjects as diverse as housing and transport etc.

Keith Robinson reported that ANTAS was having difficulty recruiting new office-holders

Peter Eversden reported that the London Forum was looking at extending membership to a wider range of groups, had commissioned a legacy funded study of the areas covered by their member societies, is attempting to become more involved with the rental market and tenant groups, has

developed a more automated website that is now being copied by some member groups and is increasingly concerned about current policies being pursued by the government, particularly in relation to Permitted Development Rights and wishes Civic Voice to take a firm line with Ministers.

Peter Lee reported that he is still new to the role of Regional Chair and that the region is represented on the Regional Historic Forum.

It was noted that in the cases of WestMASA and ANTAS it may be beneficial to consider smaller county based groupings rather than persisting with the current wider groups that seem difficult to sustain.

It is hoped that the next meeting will include representatives from Cornwall and Gloucestershire

4. Civic Voice Activity

Freddie Gick reported on the following activities:

Plans were being made for the formation of a new APPG in November
The war memorial surveying programme is proceeding with some revisions to the programme, including identifying 8 major targets for significant activity in the coming months.

We are working with Locality on the 2015/6 community rights programme and adding to work commissioned by DCLG earlier in the year.

Plans are being made for the preparation of the Annual Review and for running the Convention in Bristol on 23/24 October.

The Design Awards programme was completed very successfully and has resulted in a meeting to be held with the BBC about a possible TV programme involving Griff Rhys Jones

The Sandys Lecture will be given by Simon Thurley in Central Hall Westminster on 12 October

It is being considered whether it might be possible to get sponsorship for a set of three conferences later in the year or early in 2016 on Historic Cathedral Cities, Infrastructure aspects of development planning and Design aspects of Housing developments.

The Minutes of Board meetings should be included on the website as soon as they have been approved.

John Kershaw reported on a Membership sub-committee set up by the Board.

The sub-committee had decided to adopt the following terms of reference:

- a. To make recommendations for the internal management of membership records
- b. To suggest ways of attracting more societies to join Civic Voice
- c. To make proposals for recruiting more members for individual societies
- d. To consider alternatives to the current membership fee system.

It was noted that a previous study had been conducted two years earlier and that it would be appropriate for the papers considered at that time to be included in the current study.

Further reference will be made to this subject on completion of the Board's approval.

5. Discussion on Green Belt and Brown Field development

There was a preliminary discussion of the issues involved, including consideration of the appropriate provision of affordable housing, whether there really is hard evidence of a housing shortage and the particular problems faced by both small rural communities and London and the other larger cities. Mention was made of a study by Tony Travis of LSE.

This subject is to be included as a major item on the agenda for the next meeting.

6. Next Meeting

The next meeting of the Forum will be held on 1 December at 1.00pm in Cowcross Street, London.