

a new national body – what will be the benefits?

An effective national body will make your local civic society and its members stronger:

- You will have a voice lobbying and campaigning on the national policies and issues that you can't change locally.
- You will be able to use the logo of the new national body and get authority and recognition from saying you are a member.
- Your profile will be raised by a higher media profile for the movement.
- You will have access to tailored information bulletins and a lively website.
- You will know more about what other civic societies are doing and have opportunities to meet and debate with them.
- You will have guidance on where to find support on issues like fundraising, finding volunteers and addressing legal questions.
- Your members will be offered a free day access pass to the National Trust (worth up to £14) and if you are already a member this can be given to a friend or relative who isn't.
- Your society will have access to the tailored insurance policy provided by Bluefin.
- Your members will be able to take out personal health insurance and household/motor/pet/travel insurance with Bluefin at good rates and this will financially benefit your local society.
- You will attract new members because you will offer more for your membership.

In all this you will become part of a wider movement championing the importance of the places where we all live.

so what's next?

The details of the new arrangements are being finalised in consultation with civic societies over the next few months. The majority of those governing the new national body will be drawn from civic societies. You will be able to put forward people to serve as trustees of the new body and your society will have a vote on who is appointed.

There will be a final announcement by February 2010 and this is when your society will be asked to join the new national body. The plan is to launch the new body in April at an event to which all civic societies registered with the Civic Society Initiative will be invited.

what should we do now?

- Read *Own The Future* – available as a pdf online at www.civicsocietyinitiative.org.uk (or for a free copy contact the address below).
- Distribute this leaflet to every member of your committee.
- Discuss the new arrangements in your committee.
- Keep your members informed in newsletters, on your website and at meetings.
- Think now about how you can budget for supporting the new national body in 2010.
- Be prepared to make your decision when asked to join in February.

**civic
society
initiative**

Unit 101
82 Wood Street
The Tea Factory
Liverpool L1 4DQ

T 0151 708 9920
E admin@civicsocietyinitiative.org.uk
www.civicsocietyinitiative.org.uk

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time to decide

it's your choice...

“Nowhere should be without its civic society and no-one should be without the voice you can provide.”

HRH The Prince of Wales, October 2009

The next few months are a critical time in the history of the civic society movement. This leaflet explains why.

what has happened?

The Civic Trust closed in April 2009. For 50 years it had supported civic societies and seen a mushrooming in their number and influence. Its loss generated a groundswell of concern for the civic movement from many partners. The Prince of Wales spoke forcefully of the opportunity “to build something even stronger – a powerful community movement which can address the challenges of a fast-changing world and remain a steadfast champion of the fabric and character of our nation’s cities, towns and villages.” With the generous support of other organisations and financial backing from over 130 civic societies the Civic Society Initiative was born in June 2009 to help find a way forward.

why does this matter?

Civic societies’ roots go back to the 1840s and they have a proud history. Yet, in a fast changing world their influence has declined. Local decisions are shaped by external forces which cannot be reached by individual civic societies. While some prosper, many societies lack funds and struggle to find volunteers. Others have closed. Societies want advice and support on a huge range of issues – from influencing planning and transport decisions or setting up websites to finding funds and meeting with other civic societies. In some places new organisations are springing up to address issues previously tackled by civic societies. Yet the potential of the civic society movement is unique. With over 1,000 local organisations and 250,000 members working together it should be a force to be reckoned with.

what is being proposed?

The Civic Society Initiative has worked with over 800 civic societies. It has held 14 public meetings across the country, conducted a major survey and talked to other organisations to find out what people think is needed. Its conclusion are summarised in a special report – *Own The Future*. This shows strong support for a new national body to champion the civic movement in England and support civic societies. The plans are to establish the new body in April 2010. It needs to be small, responsive to civic societies and independently funded.

what’s the urgency?

Funding for the Civic Society Initiative runs out in May 2010. Without this practical support it will be very difficult to set up a new national body, leaving civic societies in England without a collective way of influencing government policy and priorities and lacking a reference point for support and advice. Civic societies have only a few months to decide.

what will it cost?

To provide what civic societies are looking for needs between £300,000 and £400,000 each year. This is the minimum required to provide the full range of services and support being asked for, together with effective lobbying and campaigning. It provides for minimum staffing levels and modest office accommodation. A lower budget would require a trade off between providing support or lobbying and campaigning.

Civic societies want the body to be independent so they will need to provide this core funding. This is a significant change. Civic societies never paid the full cost of the services they received from the Civic Trust.

This meant it became dependent on others for its resources. It is sadly unrealistic to think that other core funding can be found without strings attached, while additional fundraising from government, business, philanthropists and charitable trusts is likely to be limited to supporting one-off projects.

what will it cost my society?

The fairest way to fund the new national body is by a per capita fee based on each society’s membership. This treats large and small civic societies equally. The fee will be in a range of £1 to £3 per individual member. £1 will provide basic information services and limited campaigning. £3 will provide the full range of what civic societies want. Each civic society will decide how to raise the money – through increased membership fees, charges from events, fundraising, corporate support or other methods.

Some societies are already budgeting for these changes and many have offered their support. It is recognised, however, that this will be difficult for some societies in the short term and transition arrangements are being investigated.

we only charge a few pounds – how will we cope?

A number of civic societies charge less than £5 for membership and some are concerned any increase will hit their membership numbers. Yet people join organisations because of what they do and the results they achieve. Low subscriptions can restrict what societies can achieve and, in consequence, their profile within the community. Civic society membership fees are often falling behind those of other organisations which achieve more and see their membership grow. Societies will also be able to promote membership better as a result of joining up because they will offer more to new members.