

## **THE CIVIC SOCIETY INITIATIVE**

### **An update for Civic Trust regional chairs, North of England Civic Trust, Civic Trust for Wales, Scottish Civic Trust**

I am writing to provide you with information about a new Civic Society Initiative – an initiative that will help to secure a positive future for the civic society movement following the decision to put the Civic Trust into administration. It has been a challenging few weeks but, following discussions with a number of organisations and individuals, there is some good news to share. I thought it would be helpful to provide you with an update on where things currently stand.

The loss of the Civic Trust has prompted a groundswell of support for the civic society movement. Messages of support and practical offers of help have been received from a large number of professional bodies, local authorities, voluntary and charitable organisations and others. Over 500 civic societies have already said they want to be kept in touch with the future arrangements for supporting societies and providing a champion for the movement.

It is clear that many share our view that the civic society movement is too important for it to lose its national voice. The role of societies and local community action is as important now as it was when the Civic Trust was set up. This is the sentiment at the heart of the package of measures now being put in place to allow a range of options for the future health of the civic society movement to be explored and assessed.

A full range of options will need to be examined but three things are clear:

- the civic society movement needs an independent champion
- the movement needs to be supported as a network where the voice of individual societies and local groups can be strengthened
- the future needs to be rooted in what the societies want and they need to drive the way forward.

The core package for establishing the Civic Society Initiative which has emerged is as follows:

- one year's funding donated by the National Trust for someone experienced to provide strong leadership for this critical period
- office accommodation and in-kind support donated by CPRE (in London) and the RIBA (in Liverpool)
- a charitable 'home' to receive funds and provide governance through the North of England Civic Trust
- English Heritage will deliver Heritage Open Days in 2009
- a continuation of the Paving the Way initiative, supported by English Heritage
- support from Blackpool City Council for a meeting of the civic society movement in the Winter Gardens on 15/16 October to discuss its future.

There are details to sort out and some things may change but I am particularly pleased to say that Tony Burton is available to take on the leadership role for the Initiative. Tony will be known to many of you and has over 20 years experience in the field. He is currently the National Trust's Director of Strategy and External Affairs and previously worked for 13 years at CPRE, which he left in 2001 as Deputy Director. He was a founder trustee of

Heritage Link and also chaired Wildlife and Countryside Link. National and local campaigning and volunteer action are in his lifeblood and Tony has a land use planning background. I know he is looking forward to talking to you all. You can reach Tony on [tony.burton@nationaltrust.org.uk](mailto:tony.burton@nationaltrust.org.uk) for the time being. Ian Harvey is also keen to be involved and continues to provide invaluable support which we wish to maintain.

As you will appreciate, we need to move quickly to capture the enthusiasm of the local societies, and before the momentum of the 'old' Civic Trust is lost. The Civic Society Initiative is, therefore, being set up as soon as possible and will be announced to the media in around a fortnight. I am pleased to say Griff Rhys Jones has already given his support, as has Duncan Sandys' daughter, Laura Sandys. We will keep you in touch.

There will be a small governance group formally responsible for the Initiative, comprising people from the civic societies, North of England Civic Trust, and the partner organisations (e.g. CPRE). The most important contributors, however, will be the societies and others concerned with community action on behalf of the local environment. A wider sounding board, drawing from the movement as a whole, will be set up to help the process. Some of the former trustees of the Civic Trust, including Philip Kolvin, will help provide continuity and it will include people from some of the other organisations that are helping us now. We are keen to see a wider membership from among the civic societies and are looking at how this might best be achieved.

There will be a letter to the civic societies and other interested organisations from Griff Rhys Jones in the next week or so which will seek their support and ask for donations to a 'fighting fund' appeal. We estimate a need for £50,000 to fund the immediate transition and support match funding from others. I will ensure that you all get a copy of this letter and I hope you might also assist personally in helping us raise this sum. I am also pleased to say that an application for emergency funding to the Esmee Fairbairn Foundation has passed the first stage. As I am sure you will appreciate the viability of any future arrangements will be dependent on the income we can raise and the amount of funding that civic societies are prepared to contribute, whether this comes from the societies themselves or by means of a contribution from their members or some combination of both.

There is also activity to look at the future of the Civic Trust archives and work with the administrators on the Civic Trust programmes among other things.

I am sure you will wish to share my thanks to the organisations backing the movement in this way. I hope you will support the Initiative and make your support known to the societies in your areas. I would welcome your active help in making it happen. Things have moved quickly and continue to do so but I hope this update has helped. If you have any questions or can see any difficulties please let me know as soon as possible.

**Kevin Trickett**  
[kevintrickett@msn.com](mailto:kevintrickett@msn.com)

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