



EECAS NEWSLETTER

East of England Civic & Amenity Societies

Issue: Autumn 2011

Website: <http://www.cambridgeppf.org/eecas/>

Message from the Chairman

Civic Voice AGM

Fellow EECAS committee member Alec Hartley (Norwich Society) and I attended the AGM of Civic Voice on 14 October. Of its 302 member societies (with 75,000 individual members), 29 are in our region, but only Cambridge, Hunstanton, Huntingdon & Godmanchester, Ipswich, King's Lynn, Norwich and Peterborough were represented.

- It was observed that the participants were predominantly white, middle-class and elderly. There is a need to recruit more members, as politicians tend to view us as a group of nimbies.
- Income from subscriptions last year totalled £70k, with a further £156k from other sources, including grants of £80k from DCLG and £20k from English Heritage. Total expenses were £165k, of which £109k was for the two staff, so £84k is carried forward to next year. Grant income is likely steadily to reduce, but the existence of Civic Voice seems assured until at least the end of 2012-13.
- The Civic Voice submission on the NPPF must be seen as only the beginning of campaigning on planning. It was observed that the effect of the NPPF on town centres has had little mention. [http://www.civicvoice.org.uk/uploads/files/NPPF - Civic Voice - key issues - Sep 11.pdf](http://www.civicvoice.org.uk/uploads/files/NPPF_-_Civic_Voice_-_key_issues_-_Sep_11.pdf)
- Civic Voice has secured three changes to the Localism Bill. We have to get involved in Localism, for fear that if we do not, others will. Attention was drawn to free advice from the 'Building Community' programme <http://locality.org.uk/projects/building-community/>
- Civic Day attracted 200 groups to mount 350 events. Next year's Civic Day will be on 23 June.
- Civic Voice has produced a list of '101 Civic Ideas'. See: http://www.civicvoice.org.uk/uploads/files/101_civic_ideas.pdf
- Civic Voice has improved its insurance scheme, offers legal help from the NCVO, and is taking a lead in organising Heritage Open Days
- Only 10,000 people have used the free English Heritage and National Trust passes facility – they need better advertising as they are a good reason for societies to remain members of Civic Voice
- Over 100 groups have participated in the Street Pride campaign. The DfT has just published a traffic signs policy review - please see article below.

For Civic Voice's full trustee report – visit: <http://www.civicvoice.org.uk/accounts2011>

For Civic Voice's Fair Planning Campaign – see

<http://www.civicvoice.org.uk/campaigns/fair-planning/>

For Civic Voice's first Annual Review see –

<http://www.civicvoice.org.uk/news/civic-voice-publishes-first-annual-review/>

Housing needs in the region

A recent email from the East of England Local Government Association mentions a report on homelessness in the region. It says that Following a downward trend in recent years, the number of households accepted as homeless has increased by an average of 16% between 2009-10 and 2010-11, in particular during the latter three quarters. Since quarter 3 of 2010 each quarters' figures have been over 1,100. The main reasons for homelessness are loss of accommodation with friends or relatives, relationship breakdown and the ending of a private sector tenancy.

Many more people are not homeless, but are in unsuitable accommodation and waiting lists for social housing are long. An Anglia-Ruskin University report 8 years ago estimated that more than 20,000 new homes a year are needed in the region just to accommodate the expected increase in population. According to the 4 September Sunday Times, recent re-evaluations conclude that this is actually an under-estimate. So, much as many of us regret the ever increasing development of the region, we must welcome the fact that house building is beginning to pick up again.

The EELGA website is at: <http://www.eelga.gov.uk/>

The report at: <http://www.eelga.gov.uk/news-and-campaigns/263/Homelessness-in-the-East-of-England/>

Keeping the region special

The region's new Local Enterprise Partnerships are committed to increasing the number of jobs. For example, the one covering Cambridgeshire, Peterborough and parts of Norfolk, Suffolk and Hertfordshire, has promised 160,000 over the next decade. This will need a significant number of new business premises, as well as homes. In the context of the proposed Draft National Planning Policy Framework and the Localism Bill, Civic Voice is campaigning to ensure that local communities and their environment are at the heart of planning and, together with the RTPI, to restrict firms' neighbourhood planning powers. Our local knowledge-based economy needs to recruit and retain highly-skilled people, for whom there is global competition. It is therefore very much in the interest of business to keep the region as attractive as possible.

Although I am not a regular reader of *Country Life*, I happened to see in an editorial in its issue of 3 August the statement that the reason people fear development is the dreadful standard of what has been allowed. One might ask why so much development is awful? Is it because developers are interested only in making money? Or is it because those who teach our architects and planners do not do enough to help them learn good design? In any case, we all have different talents, and just because someone decides to become an architect or a planner this does not necessarily mean they have a flair for good design.

The role of our societies

All of this implies that the need for active and vigilant civic and amenity societies is greater than it has ever been.

We must repeatedly lobby planners and councillors. We need to ensure that each planning authority has access to a panel of good architects to give advice on applications, perhaps sharing one with other authorities. And we must scrutinise them ourselves and complain loudly when need be. Local awards schemes can be valuable.

Transport

On 1 July I attended a meeting of the Regional Transport Forum, which is composed mainly of councillors and officers from the region's transport authorities. Curiously, the A14 was not on the agenda. One thing that was mentioned was the East West Rail Consortium, eastwestrail.org.uk, which is seeking to re-establish a rail link from Cambridge to Oxford. The DfT has agreed that the Oxford-Bedford portion should be assessed for inclusion in the next High Level Output Specification for 2014-2019.

Sustainable Communities Act

A couple of years ago I went to meetings organised by the Environmental Law Foundation about the Sustainable Communities Act. I heard no more, until an email on 17 August asked "Have you or your group used or been involved in the Sustainable Communities Act since it became law in 2007? A 2nd round of invitation for the Act has also been issued, and you can now submit proposals anytime you like without the concerns of meeting a deadline. This means that should the Localism Bill not fulfill your community's needs, you can submit a proposal to amend it through the Sustainable Communities Act." My impression is that the Act has not been as valuable as originally was hoped, but in Cambridge it has been used for the following:

- Make it much easier to introduce renewable energy schemes.
- The Government should change current arrangements to allow Cambridge City Council to keep all revenue collected from Council housing rents and all receipts from Right to Buy sales of Council homes.
- Legislate to require high energy efficiency standards for all new buildings before 2016.
- Change taxation to make renewable energy schemes more viable.

See <http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/localgovernment/scainvitation2010>

Energy conservation in our homes

Some 30% of our energy consumption is accounted for by domestic buildings. Although stringent standards are progressively being applied to new dwellings, it has been estimated that existing buildings will constitute 70% of the housing stock in 2050. However, owners of existing buildings are proving reluctant to apply energy-saving measures, even though it would save them money. See <http://www.cambridgeppf.org/vision/2/> for the reasons the government is preparing a scheme called the Green Deal, see: http://www.decc.gov.uk/en/content/cms/tackling/green_deal/green_deal.aspx, a framework to enable private firms to offer consumers energy efficiency improvements to their homes at no upfront cost, and to recoup payments through a charge in installments on the energy bill.



Please feel free to email me about suggestions and issues that concern you.

Peter Landshoff: pvl@damtp.cam.ac.uk
Chairman
East of England Civic & Amenity Societies

Autumn 2011

Urgently Contact your local MP on behalf of Civic Societies



Civic Voice's Director Tony Burton writes:

"I am pleased to let you know that the first meeting of the new All Party Parliamentary Group for civic societies is meeting on 1st November in the Houses of Parliament. This is to ask you to encourage your local MP(s) to attend. The new Group provides an important new platform for civic societies with MPs and Peers and we are looking for a good attendance.

The Group has been set up in response to the growing recognition of the important role played by civic societies and of their relationship with constituency MPs. We are grateful to all those civic societies who have helped generate the support needed to establish the Group by contacting their MP(s) earlier in the year.

The first meeting will begin at **4pm on Tuesday 1st November** in the Wilson Room, Portcullis House. It will include a presentation from me on the civic movement and the work of civic societies and Civic Voice across England. It will also agree the officers of the Group and decide who to invite to its next meeting. This might include a Minister such as Greg Clark, who responsible for the planning reforms. The meeting has been organised by Laura Sandys MP."

Thank you in advance for contacting your MP(s) and do keep Civic Voice in touch with any responses.

Tony Burton - Director of Civic Voice - <http://www.civicvoice.org.uk>
Contact via: info@civicvoice.org.uk

Civic Voice is the national charity for the civic movement. We make places attractive, enjoyable and distinctive and promote civic pride

How to find contact details of your local MP(s) visit: <http://findyourmp.parliament.uk/>

Background reading – Civic Voice's Fair Planning Campaign
<http://www.civicvoice.org.uk/campaigns/fair-planning/>

To access a draft letter as prepared by Civic Voice to contact your local MP – visit
<http://e-activist.com/ea-action/action?ea.client.id=1729&ea.campaign.id=11841>

Draft National Planning Policy Framework a 'material consideration'

The Planning Inspectorate advised Planning Inspectors on 4 August that the draft National Planning Policy Framework is 'capable of being a material consideration'. A guidance note was issued which can be found here:

http://www.planningportal.gov.uk/uploads/pins/advice_for_inspectors/nppf_consult.pdf

The note states that: "The draft NPPF is likely to be referred to by the parties in current appeal and development plan casework. It is a consultation document and, therefore, subject to potential amendment. It is capable of being a material consideration, although the weight to be given to it will be a matter for the decision maker in each particular case."

See also chronological notes and references as continuously updated by the RTPi

<http://www.rtpi.org.uk/item/4741&>



Bridge Street in Cambridge before and after a de-cluttering exercise.

De-cluttering our streets

On 13th October The Department for Transport released '**Signing the way: traffic signs policy review**' which they say "sets out a policy framework for ensuring our traffic system meets the future needs of all road users. It sets out recommendations for improving the information that traffic signs communicate to road users by providing more freedom for decisions about signing at the local level."

The Review will require a major update of the Traffic Signs Regulations and General Directions and the Department is "proceeding with this work as a priority". In the interim, they will deliver changes where possible through the Secretary of State's traffic signs authorisation process.

You can find a summary of the policies and the full document text at:

<http://www.dft.gov.uk/publications/signing-the-way>

Heritage Counts

'Heritage Counts 2011' is the tenth annual survey of the state of England's historic environment. Each year Heritage Counts explores the role of the historic environment in wider social and economic agendas. This year the theme is the historic environment and Big Society.

The
Heritage
Alliance

It is produced on behalf of the Historic Environment Forum and the data and documents can be found at:

<http://www.heritagecounts.org.uk>.

Civic Day – King’s Lynn Saturday 25 June 2011

To mark the day the KL Civic Society highlighted vacant – and derelict - buildings and their effect upon their surroundings and the fact that they could be providing accommodation. KLCS was supported by the Purfleet Trust, a local charity which does much good work among the homeless.

Five large posters were produced which stated: ‘Long term vacant – why?’ and then gave the number of people which KLCS estimated could be living there. Printed in bright red a group of what has become known as ‘*heritage guerillas*’ went out early in the morning of Civic Day and pinned them to five prominent properties, one of which, a house, has been empty for 43 years. Photographs were taken at each location.



A leaflet detailing these and a substantial number of other properties was also produced to hand out to the public.

Two town centre locations were chosen where society members met and talked to passers-by about empty properties and housing needs, drawing pretty universal approval for our actions.

A press release had been distributed earlier in the month and was used for features by the Eastern Daily Press and the Lynn News in advance of Civic Day. The Lynn News carried a two page article which included a piece on the former Post Office – one the buildings featured – giving its history and the society’s attempts to get it listed in 2007.

KLCS chairman Alison Gifford was interviewed on BBC Radio Norfolk on the evening before Civic Day and explained what we were going to do – and why. Both papers took photographs on the day and reported the occasion.

News of our action resulted in enquiries being received from the charity Empty Homes based in London; from New Start/CLS Online magazine in Manchester, and from Channel 4 television, where a researcher was looking into a programme on homeless people and empty properties with the possibility of a news team visiting the town, though sadly nothing further has resulted.

Committee member Ken Hill, whose idea the theme was and who undertook most of the work, did a survey of the High Street, reporting that of the 92 shops, 12 appeared to have flats above them. But it was likely that about fifty more had unused upper storeys which might house around 150 people.

The borough council’s portfolio holder for regeneration has since contacted the society asking for a meeting to discuss what might be done with the empty properties and this will take place in August.

KLCS has a sub-committee specifically set up to lobby and campaign over empty properties and this forms a major part of the society’s remit.

Note: This article was supplied by The King’s Lynn Civic Society. You can read more about their day of action, and the fact that they won the Civic Voice Award for “Innovative Campaigning” on their website here: <http://www.kingslynnonline.com/2011/10/6798>

East of England's Landscape Character Map



Natural England has produced an interactive on-line landscape character map of the country including the Eastern Counties. This can be found at:

<http://www.naturalengland.org.uk/ourwork/landscape/englands/character/areas/eastofengland.aspx>

UK's 'Shoe Box Homes' revealed by RIBA

The Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA) has launched the 'Case for Space' campaign. They say that: "The average new three bedroom home currently being built by the UK's top house builders is around 8% smaller than the basic recommended minimum size, leaving thousands of people across the country short-changed. This squeeze on size is depriving thousands of families the space needed for children to do homework, adults to work from home, guests to stay and for members of the household to relax together."



A 'Future Homes Commission' has now been established which "will engage with people in their front rooms, town centres and online, to build a comprehensive picture about what people want and need from their homes. The Commission will announce an open call for evidence from housebuilders, architects, academics and other professionals and experts in the industry and will draw from specially commissioned research looking at how people live today; the Commission is expected to report in the summer of 2012".

The full RIBA 'Case for Space' report can be downloaded from:
<http://www.behomewise.co.uk>.

Industrial Heritage at Risk



Listed industrial buildings are more at risk than almost any other kind of heritage, according to a major research project carried out by English Heritage. If you would like to find out more about the threats to our industrial heritage, as well as how to get involved in rescuing it, re-using it and caring for it then please access the English Heritage website:

<http://www.english-heritage.org.uk/caring/heritage-at-risk/industrial-heritage-at-risk/our-industrial-heritage/>

CABE Website Archived

The Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment (CABE) was, from 1999-2011, the government's advisor on architecture, urban design and public space. Their website is an excellent resource for architects, housebuilders, planners and Civic Societies which features their publications promoting examples of good practise. It is fortunate that their website seems to have been saved for posterity by the National Archive and can be found at:

<http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20110118095356/http://www.cabe.org.uk/housing>

Living Places



Another very useful 'official' on-line resource for design guidance and planning is the 'Living Places' website:

<http://living-places.org.uk/living-places-advice-and-guidance/resources/design-guidance.html>

Village SOS



Village SOS is an initiative by the Big Lottery Fund and the BBC which was launched during the summer to help communities take a step towards starting their own business.

A nationwide road show is coming to the region to bring the benefits of community enterprise directly to local people.

The East of England event is taking place at the **Burgess Hall, St Ives, Cambridgeshire on Tuesday 15 November from 10am to 4pm.**

They're inviting local people from across the region to come along and hear the experiences of people behind community enterprises like shops and pubs, broadband projects and transport schemes. The event is free and to book as a delegate visit:

<http://www.villagesos.org.uk/uk-event/village-sos-roadshow-burgess-hall-st-ives-cambridgeshire>

From the E-Newsletter Editor:

Please e-mail or call me with news and articles from your area for our next issue to be published early in 2012.

Please send me any contributions by 15th January 2012.



Nigel Bell – Telephone: 01223 - 243830 x 205

I usually work Tuesday and Wednesday –

if unavailable, please leave a message.

E-mail: planning@cambridgeppf.org