

## Report for the November 2016 meeting of the Malvern Civic Society

On Friday 11 November we held the 57th Annual General Meeting, followed by a talk on the civic movement from Dr Freddie Gick. Freddie has been involved in civic societies for many years, including holding roles as Chairman of Birmingham Civic Society and latterly in Civic Voice, the umbrella organisation for civic societies.

President Dudley Brook welcomed everyone to the AGM, especially new members. Chairman Clive Hooper then gave a synopsis of his own report, contained in the Annual Report, thanking everyone who had contributed to running the Civic Society over the past year and listed forthcoming changes in roles. He gave special thanks to Dudley Brook for many years of service to the Society, but who was now stepping down. Grateful thanks were expressed to Denise Preston, particularly for her splendid reports of monthly talks. She was stepping down after eleven years as press officer, but would be continuing to work as part of the editorial committee, as well as being the interface for the website with the webmaster, Kevin Brewer, and as coordinator and town guide for the heritage guided walks. Valerie Gilmer was thanked heartily for her three years as Hon. Secretary but she would continue on the Executive Committee and Louisa Davidson, who was leaving the Executive Committee, was praised for her valuable contribution in heritage work, which she would continue (subject to her own work commitments) with the planning sub committee. Clive was re-elected as Chairman for the fourth year. The new President is Dr John Harcup, currently Chairman of Malvern Spa Association, a former Chairman of the Civic Society and hitherto one of its Vice Presidents. Katharine Barber now also becomes a Vice President. A full list of role changes will be published on the website.

Hon. Treasurer Andrew Huntley summarised his own report. We now have 423 members but the accounts show a deficit of £2,045 for the current year. One reason is that the talks programme does not cover its costs, so the Executive Committee has decided that from January 2017 the admission charge will increase from £1 to £2, but this will now include refreshments. Civic Week also made a loss on account of a drop in sponsorship by £1,000, the cost of advertising and poor support for some of its lectures. He urged those who have not yet paid their membership subscription to do so, payment details of which are included in the Annual Report.

The talk on the civic movement started with an outline of its development, where the first civic society was formed in 1846, right up to the formation of Civic Voice in 2010 after the Civic Trust entered into administration in 2009. It is estimated that there were 1200 civic societies at their peak in the 1970s and that there are about 500 now. About half of the existing ones are members of Civic Voice. The average annual civic society membership costs £10 a head, so Freddie emphasised that there is very little money in the movement. Societies are run by volunteers who are remarkably active people covering work like design awards, street clutter, town trails, tree planting, blue plaques, friends groups and campaigns. The core activity is planning, to do with conservation and heritage, where civic societies influence local planners and councils rather than carry out actual planning. Members generally tend to be people with more than a basic level of social responsibility and believe that there is something special about where they live. The aim is to ensure that new building developments are sympathetic to the existing distinctive features of an environment, and to work with local authorities rather than protesting against everything. Ideally, developers see civic societies as people with whom they wish to engage. Unfortunately there are difficulties experienced by civic societies, namely attracting new members and finding office holders. Other problems are slow adoption of modern communication media and a need to ensure that relationships with planners or developers are collaborative rather than antagonistic.

As volunteering is at the heart of civic societies, Freddie suggested that in order to recruit new members and improve the age profile, they should start activities in the community like Civic Day and then get those who participate to join their local civic society. Civic Day will be held on 17 June 2017, which should be an opportunity to show what people are doing and encourage others to discover more about where they live and to get involved. Freddie discussed the activities of Civic Voice, which include campaigns such as Localism (including local listing of historic buildings); the encouragement of "brown field" developers to engage with civic societies; influencing the House of Commons; conducting national lobbying and giving national design awards. One example of such an award was the new motorway service station near Gloucester, which gave jobs to many and where local produce is sold. For more on Civic Voice, please see: <http://www.civicvoice.org.uk/>.

The next talk will be given by Hannah Thomas on Friday 13 January 2017 on the subject of The Worcestershire Wildlife Trust. There is an admission charge of £2.