

Yorkshire & Humber Association of Civic Societies

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www.yhacs.org.uk

Voice of the Civic Society Movement in the Region

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Coming out of Lockdown

I hope this finds you well and, as we emerge from Lockdown Mark 2, in good spirits, even though members will still, of course, be subject to restrictions on movement – some more than others being relegated to Tier 3 rather than Tier 2 which some parts of our region now find themselves in.

Whichever tier you have been assigned, it's probably too soon just yet to contemplate anything like a return to business as usual. Yes, we now have a vaccine, but it will take several months to get to the point where it has been rolled out right across the country – and only time will tell exactly how efficacious it is.

So, we are left, if not in limbo, then very much in continued period of what might be regarded as 'suspended animation' – but, as I have said before, don't let this period go to waste. There are still things you can do to keep your civic society going and, if you are willing to experiment with other media such as video and podcasts, you can use the next few weeks (and possibly months) to make your presence felt on-line and even reach new audiences. Here at YHACS we have been making use of Zoom and Vimeo to keep in touch with our members while Wakefield Civic Society has used Zoom, Vimeo and social media to not only keep in touch with existing members but also to widen our reach and to attract new members – a strategy that has proved successful in these difficult times.

Civic Voice has been running some webinars on the use of social media. If you missed them when they first went out, don't worry, they are available to watch on the Civic Voice Vimeo account <https://vimeo.com/civicvoice>. Specifically, you might like to watch this webinar on how civic societies can make use of Instagram (it features one of our members, Carolyn Curr of

Whitby Civic Society!): <https://vimeo.com/481777329> - or this one on how civic societies can make use of Twitter: <https://vimeo.com/484491018> (featuring another of our members – Mel Roberts of Leeds Civic Trust!).

Civic Voice Yorkshire & North East Roundtable Discussion

Civic Voice has organised another roundtable discussion for their members in our region and the North East. It will take place via a Zoom meeting on Tuesday, 8th December between 2 and 3pm. The discussion will centre on statutory consultee status, design codes and membership development.

You will need to book a place [via Eventbrite here](#) and a Zoom link will be emailed to you on the day. **Note – Civic Voice members only for this one.**

Civic Society Governance

I sometimes receive requests for advice on matters of governance and the general running of civic societies.

The starting point is always to check what your society's governing document says – this will usually be your constitution or similar.

Sometimes, of course, the constitution doesn't help and you need to turn elsewhere for advice. If your society is a registered charity, then the [Charity Commission](#) is the best place to look for help. As well as publishing advice on-line via the gov.uk website, they also issue regular emails about their work. I find that the emails about investigations that they have conducted to be of particular interest in so much as they highlight how not to run your society.

Many of the investigations are into charities where things have gone seriously awry and concern charities that are handling cash and other resources that far exceed what civic societies have at their disposal. Nonetheless, there are nuggets of information that can be extracted from these investigations that might give you pause for thought if you are a committee member (and therefore a trustee) of a civic society which is also a charity.

Charity Commission investigations can be instigated by complaints made by members of the charity or others. They can also arise when a charity fails to submit its annual return within the deadlines. [One of the recent reports](#) relates to an investigation triggered by a charity which missed the deadline for its annual returns in at least two of the last five years. The investigation then revealed other problems – issues of decision making, payments to trustees and whether the charity had operated according to its governing document. By reading these reports, you can build up some expertise relevant to the running of your own society.

Tomorrow (8th December 2020), NCVO will launch an updated version of the Charity Governance Code and it will be interesting to see what changes have been introduced and whether any of the revisions might affect the smaller charity sector.

While the 'rules' for running a charity apply specifically to charities, some of the principles underpinning the guidelines for charities can also be applied to civic societies which are not registered as such.

Strategically thinking: Does your society have a vision?

When I first became president (and chair) of Wakefield Civic Society back in 2002, it coincided with the rollout of the Yorkshire Forward Urban Renaissance Programme where Wakefield had been selected as one of six towns and cities in the first tranche of the rollout.

Under the auspices of a newly created 'Town Team', council officials, councillors, local business people, individual residents and representatives from community organisations worked together under the auspices of the project facilitated by Yorkshire Forward and external consultants (in our case, Koetter Kim) to identify the sort of city we wanted Wakefield to be in the future.

The resulting 'vision for Wakefield' was then incorporated into the Council's local development framework and elements of the visions still feature in the current Local Plan. As Wakefield Civic Society signed up to the vision, the guiding principles contained in the vision documentation have also informed our own decision making as an organisation and also our responses to planning applications and development proposals.

In the intervening period, life has moved on and a vision developed nearly 20 years ago needs updating to reflect current needs and trends. Wakefield Council has commissioned Farrells to come up with a new master plan for the city centre and a Town Deal Board has been created to discuss how the city centre can be regenerated. I have a place on the Town Deal Board as a representative of Wakefield Civic Society.

The Society's own ideas on what the city should look like have also evolved over time, not just because society at large is changing and we therefore need to reflect those changes but also because the make-up of our committee has also changed – we currently have 18 members on the Society's Executive Committee but I am the only one remaining from 2002 – and new people bring fresh perspectives and new ideas.

We had planned to have an 'Awayday' back in June for the committee to formulate our new vision. As things turned out, of course, we couldn't do that but we have nonetheless managed to take the work forward – first we asked committee members to complete a questionnaire in which we asked for their views about the city and then we discussed the comments received over a

Zoom video conference. We are now in the process of distilling the results into the first draft of a vision paper. This will be circulated to committee members for further comment and refinement.

I'm very fortunate in having a number of committee members whose professional backgrounds are in planning, architecture and design but all our committee members bring a wealth of experience and local knowledge and experience of living and working in the city.

Whatever our professional backgrounds, I think it essential to be well-read on planning and design matters. How can you know what to think until you have read through the evidence, seen what learned opinion makers and influencers have had to say? How do you keep abreast of trends and latest developments in thinking if you're not paying attention to experts in their fields? It's all very well if you are an expert yourself but many of us are really just committed enthusiasts and to show that our own opinions and ideas are well thought through and soundly constructed, I think it important to have read what others have had to say. We may not agree with them, but by reading their articles, we can at least debate them more effectively.

If you agree, there's certainly plenty of material to choose from: one of the 'advantages' of lockdown seems to be the abundance of papers and blogs from people who have been thinking about the challenges facing our town and city centres, the threats to the high street, the implications of climate change, and so on. With perhaps a bit more time on their hands, more people have put their thoughts on paper (or screen) and much of it is freely available – if you know where to find it.

Now, at this point, I'm going to recommend Twitter – no come back – don't walk away! – Twitter is an excellent source of news and information across many fields – you just have to be selective in whom you follow. Many urban planners and architects are on Twitter, as are social commentators and, of course, civic societies. If you are new to Twitter, look up someone you know and trust (coughs discreetly) and see whom they are following. From that list, you will find a selection of people you too could follow. And if others find you before you find them, follow them back (– assuming you like the cut of their jib).

Yes, I know you can sign up to emails and newsletters, but you have to find them first and many of the organisation and bloggers on Twitter do offer newsletters should you wish to sign up for them.

I'm not going to do all the work for you by sharing all the sites, individuals and organisations I follow or subscribe to, but here's a short selection taken more or less at random but which provide food for thought and might even assist you in helping to shape a vision for your own society:

1. [What makes for happy places?](#) – In this film by Create Streets, explores what makes places ‘happy’, places which people enjoy; the sort of places in which people want to live.
2. [A Lesson from Social Distancing: Build Better Balconies](#) - To have a balcony during coronavirus is to enjoy fresh air without anxiety. A lack of private outdoor spaces in many cities is partly by design.
3. [Urban Villages: the best of both worlds?](#) – When Poundbury, the traditionalist suburban development on the edge of Dorchester, was first proposed by the Prince of Wales nearly 30 years ago, it had its detractors but the development has now had time to mature its benefits are being re-evaluated in a more positive light. Could the idea of mixed use urban ‘villages’ of this type (whether or not traditional in their architectural design) provide one answer to how we meet the demand for new housing? By bringing together the mix of housing types with the facilities and amenities that might be found in a typical village, urban villages help to reduce dependency and can lead to the creation of local communities in the process.
4. [Europe’s Cities Are Making Less Room for Cars After Coronavirus](#) - Hard-hit Milan may be leading the way in reimagining how transit and commuting patterns could change as cities emerge from coronavirus shutdowns.
5. [How do cycle lanes really affect towns and cities?](#) – Strictly speaking, this link came from one of my members rather than via Twitter – but Cycling UK is on Twitter!
6. [Home Comforts during the Covid-19 Lockdown](#). This report from The Place Alliance summarises findings of a national survey of 2,500 households (representing 7,200 people) aimed at understanding how well or how poorly the design of our homes and their immediate neighbourhoods supported us during the period of coronavirus lockdown.
7. [Uncontrolled PDRs could damage post-Covid High Street Recovery, warns RTPI](#)
8. [What's Up With That: Building Bigger Roads Actually Makes Traffic Worse](#). Induced demand: I read a quote somewhere on Twitter recently that building new roads, or adding new lanes to existing roads, to tackle the problem of traffic congestion was rather akin to putting letting your belt out a notch to tackle obesity. Making things easier for vehicles to travel quickly to their destinations might seem desirable – and yet, the downside is that it encourages more traffic to use the roads and is, in fact, self-defeating, as this article sets out to explain.
9. [Disney’s Goofy in Motor Mania](#) – Yes, you read that right! Here’s the tale of Mr Walker and Mr Wheeler; some problems are far from new!

There's much, much more where this all came from, but I'll stop there and let you do your own research!

And Finally

– The YHACS Annual General Meeting is coming!

Don't forget that our Annual General Meeting will be held in the afternoon of Saturday, 30th January 2021 by Zoom. As previously advised, we're looking for new YHACS committee members. If you'd like to stand for election at the AGM, do get in touch!

**Kevin Trickett MBE,
Chair, YHACS**

