



YORKSHIRE & HUMBER  
Association of Civic Societies

Member of



# SOCIETY INSIGHT

## THE FUTURE OF CIVIC VOICE

*The Civic Societies national body, Civic Voice, is facing possible closure.*

*The paper reproduced below was circulated in October 2025 by the Board of Civic Voice, and details their understanding of the reasons for this situation and the options facing Civic Voice.*

*There will be discussion of this at the YHACS meeting on 1st November.*

**Editor**

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### A COLLECTIVE REPORT WITH OPTIONS AND A PROVISIONAL RECOMMENDATION

1. The Board of Civic Voice has a legal duty to undertake financial management in a way that supports its charitable objectives whilst protecting third parties. The Board also has a legal duty to inform member societies if, as at present, it believes that Civic Voice lacks financial viability either in the present or the immediate future.

2. This paper is intended to provide the basis for discussions in a consultation period that will end at an Extraordinary General Meeting to be held in January/February 2026. The paper is for discussion on 8 November at the meeting immediately prior to the AGM. For those Societies unable to attend that meeting, there will be an online session on 19 November.

3. The paper starts by outlining the character and causes of the present financial problem. It continues through identifying alternative options for the future. Those options are specified in more detail in an Appendix.

### The current problem

4. On 13 August 2025, the Chief Executive, Rob Hattersley resigned his post, saying that he believed Civic Voice had no viable financial future. Rob had been in post since February 2025 and during that time had resolved a huge number of administrative and financial issues. However, this same exercise served to underline the inherent financial weaknesses of Civic Voice's funding model and in particular an imbalance between the income from membership subscriptions and the cost of running Civic Voice with a full-time Chief Executive and other, albeit limited supporting staff.

5. At about the same time, the external financial examiner also declared that Civic Voice lacks a viable financial base and that she is not minded to sign off Civic Voice as a viable, going concern. Further, on the advice of the independent examiner, the Board consulted, on an informal basis, the view of an insolvency practitioner. The advice was again that Civic Voice lacked a sustainable financial basis. Civic Voice is not yet insolvent, because it has been able to draw on financial reserves. However, it would become insolvent sometime in 2026 or soon afterwards. The Board therefore faces a situation in which the Chief Executive



and two financial advisers have all agreed that Civic Voice has no viable financial future beyond, say 12 or 18 months, depending on levels of expenditure on support staff.

6. The financial problems of Civic Voice stem from the relationship with the wider civic movement. In the past financial year, 130 societies have paid subscription fees at an average of £216.94 for each society, giving a total fee income of about £28,202 (as at 25/09/2025). From the internal records, however, there are a further 196 societies that have paid fees at some point in the recent past, but have not contributed in the past financial year. Attempts to contact these societies failed to generate a subscription, though a small proportion (under 10) might still pay.

7. Membership subscription numbers have declined steadily in recent years. Reversing this decline and attracting new members has not been possible in spite of best efforts. Civic Voice is tasked to represent civic societies in England. Given the number of subscriptions currently received, Civic Voice cannot claim to be truly representative of the civic movement.

8. Moreover, the relatively small number of paid-up members is too little to support a national body with full-time paid staff and given the efforts of the Chief Executive since February 2025. To make Civic Voice viable with a full-time Chief Executive would require a very large increase in the number of subscribing members. Raising subscription charges is also not a realistic option. To support a Chief Executive and other related administrative and staffing costs, fees would probably have to more than double and this would, in turn, lead to a likely reduction in the number of subscribing members.

9. To an extent, the income from membership subscription may be supplemented by consultancy contracts and grants from other bodies. Other than in large charities that have specialised in grants and consultancy and have a good, continuous record of attracting such funds, this is not a substitute for a sound membership basis and income. The search for external income can also divert attention from the core charitable aims. Consultancy contracts and grants tend to be short-term. They require the appointment of additional staff to undertake the work as well as a senior member of staff to undertake supervision. Most are paid in arrears, when work is completed. Once the contract or grant period is finished, staff have to find a new source of income in competition with other charities and sometimes in competition with universities and commercial consultancies. Contracts and grants therefore introduce a new element of risk and uncertainty, and this is a particular issue when core funding is so low.

### **The options**

10. To clarify the future, four possible options have been identified, shown in more detail in the appendix.

**Option 1** involves collaboration and likely merger with another similar national charity, so generating economies of scale that reduce administrative costs and provide a more secure foundation for grant and consultancy bids.

**Option 2**, closure, is the recommendation of the chief executive when in post and of Civic Voice financial advisers.

**Option 3**, 'volunteer-led survival' involves no Chief Executive and minimal administrative support. It has the advantage of keeping the identity of Civic

Voice in the hope that the financial situation improves in the next few years. At present, however, Civic Voice only has five trustees and has been unable to attract new people in spite of efforts to recruit them.

**Option 4, 'clean start'** assumes an influx of new start-up funds and the creation of a new Board with new ideas.

11. Unless there is a significant change in circumstances before the end of the consultation period, the recommendation of the Board is for option 2, orderly closure. The other, remaining options raise too many uncertainties or have other, obvious problems. Option 1 involves delicate, time-consuming negotiation with another organisation, with no guarantee of a successful outcome. Option 3 relies very heavily on volunteering if it is secure the main charitable aim of providing a voice for civic societies. It may not be possible to provide an effective voice without a Chief Executive or similar paid staff. Option 4 awaits the promise of start-up funds. In the absence of start-up funds, Option 4 would be similar to Option 3, relying on volunteers, with a much reduced ability to meet charitable objectives.

**Recommendation From Civic Voice Board**

12. To make a final assessment and decision, the Board needs to hear the views of members. We are particularly interested in offers of assistance or support in respect of Option 3, namely the identification of new Board members and others who would undertake the various tasks involved in volunteer-led survival.

**Without a compelling proposal from the membership that would convince the Trustees that Civic Voice has a sustainable future, we currently see no alternative to an orderly closure.**

Appendix 1: The options diagram

Option 1: Collaboration		
Details	Pros	Cons
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Offer Civic Voice assets to another non-profit organisation with similar aims, subject to the rules of the Charity Commission.</li> <li>The Civic Voice board negotiates with a partner and then is dissolved once a satisfactory outcome is agreed, both with the partner and existing members.</li> <li>The new owners may merge CV into their operations, or operate it separately</li> <li>They may or may not be able to offer support services to civic societies directly or advocate at national level.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Possibility of continued support for societies and a national voice, but hosted elsewhere.</li> <li>A reduction in administrative costs, achieved through sharing staff with another organisation.</li> <li>The provision of a firmer, more varied financial and skills base - so facilitating contract work and consultancy.</li> <li>Possible retention of a Civic Voice identity in a new form?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>An appropriate partner has not been identified. The selection of a partner and the subsequent negotiation will be time consuming.</li> <li>Much depends on the wishes and interests of any proposed partner and their senior personnel. Major uncertainty if negotiation fails.</li> <li>There is no other national charity/ NGO with exactly the same ethos and scope of interest.</li> <li>Civic Voice is in a weak bargaining situation. Collaboration may mean takeover. Identity may be lost.</li> <li>The main asset of Civic Voice is its membership list. Members might affiliate directly with a partner organisation bypassing any remaining Civic Voice elements. They might equally disaffiliate, owing to a loss of control and influence.</li> <li>Loss of separate representation on government panels.</li> </ul>

Option 2: Orderly closure		
Details	Pros	Cons
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Move towards a planned closure, at the end of the financial year (1 April 2026)</li> <li>No membership renewal for the year 2026/ 27.</li> <li>Duties of trustees limited to the implementation of orderly closure.</li> <li>Remaining financial assets to be distributed as agreed with the Charity Commission.</li> <li>Informal networks would remain but not funded centrally. Subject to agreement, there is a possibility that residual</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Avoidance of the financial penalties and costs (up to £10,000) associated with insolvency and administration.</li> <li>Subject to agreement with the Charity Commission, members could choose to use redistributed assets to kick start a new organisation</li> <li>Closure may prompt members to consider new partnerships at local and national levels that might not have been thought of otherwise</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Loss of national body representing and supporting the civic movement.</li> <li>No national NGO to represent 'place' - a loss for public policy and a loss for the quality of villages, towns and cities.</li> </ul>

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<p>functions could be based in one of more local societies or regional groups.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Some non-financial activities would continue, for example political lobbying in the House of Commons and House of Lords on behalf on regional organisations and individual societies.</li> </ul>		
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Option 3: Volunteer-led survival		
Details	Pros	Cons
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>CV continues with no paid staff and reduced member subscription fees.</li> <li>Work is undertaken on a voluntary basis covering - membership, - website, - correspondence, - political lobbying, - expert panel</li> <li>- regional collaboration.</li> <li>New Board members come forward to share the work. Individual societies may also assume one or more functions.</li> <li>Secretarial support may be available for note and minute taking and nothing else.</li> <li>The Board would possess a Chair and Secretary. Treasurer responsibilities would be shared.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Identity of CV remains, awaiting a possible change of fortune in the future.</li> <li>Member societies retain control, subject to financial constraints.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The scale of work is beyond national voice, events and conference, networking systems, mentoring and training, member support</li> <li>A subscription fee would still be necessary. It is not possible to give a figure. Expectations from member societies would be difficult to manage.</li> <li>The failure to replace the Chief Executive may trigger a further loss of members and income.</li> <li>Without paid staff, raising funds from external contracts or consultancy becomes either difficult or impossible.</li> </ul>

Option 4: Fresh start		
Details	Pros	Cons
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>New Board is appointed by April 1, 2026.</li> <li>At the discretion of the new Board, the name of Civic Voice may be retained or a new name invented and</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Gives the opportunity for fresh thinking, for example for - a wider and more diverse civic pride movement, - a more diverse membership - new business strategies.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The set-up costs would be substantial, requiring investment from an external party or parties that have not been identified.</li> </ul>

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<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>registered with the Charity Commission. The choice of name would rest with the new Board.</li> <li>All assets would be transferred to new Board, subject to the rules of the Charity Commission.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Continued representation of civic movement to regional and central government.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>There is no current evidence of commitment or capacity required in the wider civic movement (as currently defined) to support a new organisation</li> <li>The aims and business strategies of any new organisation are currently poorly defined and may lapse back into the practices of the old Civic Voice</li> </ul>
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## VIEW FROM THE CHAIR

**I was shocked and dismayed when earlier this month I received an email and discussion paper entitled *The Future of Civic Voice*, which presented the stark realities facing our national body.**

It offered four options for consultation with members with a board recommendation of orderly closure “unless there is a significant change in circumstances before the end of the consultation period.”

The other options are:

- A collaboration with another not-for-profit national body (if one can be found)
- Continuing on a volunteer-led basis
- A fresh start with a completely new board

I found the news particularly disheartening as Civic Voice appeared to have turned a corner after its difficulties over the previous few years. Its lost finances had been restored, it had new Co-Chairs and a new Chief Executive, Rob Hattersley. Rob took us through his ideas for the future when he addressed our Spring meeting in Hull, which we received enthusiastically.

Rob’s resignation in August was a blow but I had not anticipated what was to follow so quickly. Perhaps I and others were too happy to let Civic Voice manage its own affairs without paying much attention. I must say I was surprised it had only five trustees, which is far too few to bear such a heavy responsibility and workload.

I believe Civic Voice has a vital role to play nationally as an informed and authoritative advocate for the civic movement. It should be seen as a robust campaigner, respected adviser and critical friend to governments of whatever persuasion. It should have a dialogue with MPs of all parties through the APPG and be the go-to organisation for journalists seeking an independent view. This role is especially needed now, when decisions about new towns and big energy and infrastructure projects are being made across geographical boundaries and more planning decisions are being taken out of the hands of elected planning committees.

Last summer Civic Voice did a great job of swiftly pulling together a thorough response to the Government’s National Planning Policy Framework consultation and recently it produced a small-scale study over concerns that public comments were not being published on local authority planning portals.

I know also that many of our societies have participated in various Civic Voice campaigns and the Blue Plaques survey it carried out with Historic England.

I remember the first Civic Voice Convention I attended, in Bristol. I was impressed by the quality of discussions, activities and people I met from all over England. I recall that there was tough competition for places on the board of trustees, with a number of well qualified nominees up for election. I felt as though I was part of something much bigger than my own civic society and learned a lot.



*Representing Goole Civic Society at a Civic Voice event at the House of Commons in 2016. (Picture courtesy of Civic Voice).*

YHACS has supported Civic Voice in recent years - co-hosting two very successful joint conventions in Halifax and Wakefield and taking an active role on the Regional Forum. We will continue to provide support within our capacity but cannot take over Civic Voice's unique role as national champion of the civic movement.

We will be discussing the Future of Civic Voice paper at the YHACS Autumn meeting in York and the executive committee will use your input to inform a YHACS response.

I would invite you to consider:

- What you value about Civic Voice
- How we can help Civic Voice to maintain its core functions
- How you or your society could help – by stepping up to join the trustees, sharing skills and knowledge or offering to perform specific tasks on Civic Voice's behalf
- How Civic Voice should be funded, given that the current per head subscription model does not provide enough income with the current level of membership (membership would need to double to make it work)

I know not all YHACS societies belong to Civic Voice. Some never joined and others are lapsed. Your views will be helpful too. We need to know why societies are not joining and what would persuade them to reconsider.

The bottom line is that if we want a respected voice to speak up for the civic movement on the national stage - making politicians sit up and take notice - we need to help make it happen. It's no use saying "somebody should do something". That somebody needs to be one or more of us.

Civic Voice member societies and individual members are also invited to air their views at a meeting immediately prior to the Civic Voice AGM in Birmingham on Saturday 8<sup>th</sup> November and in an online forum on 19<sup>th</sup> November. A final decision will be made at an extraordinary general meeting in early 2026.

If your society is a Civic Voice member but has not received the report, please email [info@civicvoice.org.uk](mailto:info@civicvoice.org.uk) to request a copy – and make your views known.

**Footnote:** The fate of YHACS does not depend on the future of Civic Voice. Whatever the outcome nationally, we will continue to provide support, training, regular meetings and this newsletter for our member societies.

## THANK YOU ADDINGHAM

As the nights draw in, summer seems like a distant memory but who could forget the warm welcome we received from Addingham Civic Society, who hosted our summer event in their beautiful Wharfedale village.

More than 50 representatives from civic societies all over Yorkshire attended, some of whom also took advantage of the morning walks led by Addingham Civic Society members.



*Dinner at The Fleece on the evening before the Addingham meeting.*

Our two excellent speakers kept the audience engaged on contrasting subjects, showing the range of work civic societies are involved with. Prof Rick Battarbee spoke to us about the environmental partnership work Addingham is doing while Sue Wrathmell from Skipton Civic Society talked about mapping the history of buildings through time. Thank you to both for sharing your experiences with us.

We all appreciated Addingham's fantastic hospitality, enjoying a generous buffet lunch – and even a doggy bag to take home! About 30 of us gathered at The Fleece the previous evening for dinner and lots of great conversation. Once again, thank you to Gill Battarbee and Addingham Civic Society trustees and volunteers, who made us so welcome.

### GET YOUR AWARD ENTRIES IN NOW

*Last year's winners Stephen and Rachel Walker, trustees of Goole Civic Society, being presented with the Peter Spawforth Trophy by our President, Kevin Trickett MBE.*



There are less than three weeks to get your applications in for the YHACS/ Peter Spawforth Award, which recognises the Regional Society of the Year in terms of achievement.

I know societies all across the region have been doing great work this year so don't be shy, let's hear about it.

The winning entry will receive the Peter Spawforth Trophy to hold for one year and a cheque for £200. There are prizes of £100 and £50 for second and third places.

If you wish to submit an entry please complete the form I have already circulated with supporting evidence and return it to [margarethicksclarke@gmail.com](mailto:margarethicksclarke@gmail.com) by email before **17th November 2025**. Awards will be announced at the YHACS AGM in Harrogate on 31st January 2026 (another date for your diary.)

The judging panel will be made up of members of the YHACS Executive Committee and the YHACS Honorary President. The judges' decision will be final.

Due to low take-up in 2024, the Executive Committee has decided to pause the Richard Ward Memorial Prize this year, resuming in 2026. Any projects completed or started in 2025 will also qualify for entry. The prize is focused on engagement with younger people (18-30).

**Margaret Hicks-Clarke**  
YHACS Chair

## THE LEEDS ARCHITECTURE AWARDS 2025



**Leeds Civic Trust co-ordinates the Leeds Architecture Awards in collaboration with the Leeds Society of Architects, Leeds City Council and RIBA.** This is an opportunity to showcase the best of the city's architecture completed in the previous two years. The competition was rebooted as a collaborative effort (it was previously run by Leeds City Council) post-covid, and it has proven to be a very effective way of bringing all parts of the built environment community together to celebrate the best of their work.

Whilst the competition culminates in a ceremony at the Howard Assembly Rooms in November, we are keen that this is seen as a celebration that lasts for several months as the tension builds for the announcement of the winners, rather than a one-off event.



*Corn Exchange Exhibition – The launch night of our exhibition of shortlisted schemes*



*Leonora House – The judges visiting one of the shortlisted entries earlier in the summer. These new apartments are for social rent and are named after Leonora Cohen, a suffragette who is also celebrated through the Trust's Blue Plaques Scheme.*

We have made extensive use of social media not only to communicate information about this year's entries but also to remind people about the outcomes of the competition two years ago. We were also keen to ensure that all entrants gained proper recognition and were not forgotten in the excitement of the prizes being awarded. Leeds Civic Trust co-ordinates Heritage Open Days and it was fortuitous that the theme for this year was "architecture". This gave us the excuse to run an exhibition in Leeds Corn Exchange during HODS week, primarily to announce the shortlisted schemes but also to recognise all entries. We also took the opportunity to thank our sponsors who are essential in allowing the awards to take place in a professional and affordable way.

After a lot of investigation, we found a supplier of display boards who were able to provide an eight-foot four-sided printed panel for only £80! Amazingly, they were manufactured and flown over from Italy! They will be re-used for the ceremony itself, but they looked great in the Corn Exchange and attracted a lot of people who would otherwise not have known about the awards. If you need some professional exhibition boards at a price you can afford I would be more than happy to share details of the supplier!

As well as the usual prizes for new buildings, renovated buildings, landscape and public art we will also be acknowledging schemes that have particularly strong sustainability or accessibility credentials. We have launched a new prize

called the Mark Finch Award in memory of local developer Rushbond PLC's late Executive Director, to celebrate an individual who has made a significant contribution towards the built environment in Leeds. In recognition of our 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary this year, we are also inviting members of the public to nominate their own favourite building constructed since the year of our formation in 1965.

If you would like to attend the awards ceremony on 6<sup>th</sup> November, which takes place at the Howard Assembly Room in Leeds then please use this link to book your ticket. The cost is £17.50 and this includes drinks and canapes (and the entertaining former BBC presenter Andrew Edwards compering) and hopefully a very enjoyable evening to boot! [Leeds Architecture Awards 2025 Awards Ceremony | Leeds Civic Trust](#)

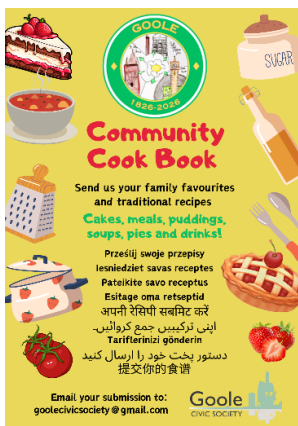
Martin Hamilton



## GOOLE'S 200<sup>TH</sup> BIRTHDAY!

**2026 marks an important milestone in the history of Goole as it celebrates the bicentenary of the opening of the Aire & Calder Navigation's Company town and docks.**

Goole Civic Society is one of the major contributors to the community group 'Goole 2026' which are leading on plans to celebrate this major birthday. The Society has been successful in being awarded several grants to bring together a series of educational, community and heritage projects as part of the wider plans for Goole's celebratory year.



The projects include a public screening of historic Goole films, a children's history book, a community cook, a pop-up exhibition and a public heritage trail. The projects will promote local skills, groups and businesses.

2026 will be a period of collaboration, community involvement and celebration, and will promote Goole's past, present and future.

If you would like to contribute to the Society's projects, please e-mail [goolecivicsociety@gmail.com](mailto:goolecivicsociety@gmail.com) or to see what is being planned please visit the website [www.goole2026.org.uk](http://www.goole2026.org.uk)



Stephen Walker

## YORKSHIRE HERITAGE SUMMIT 2026



We are pleased to announce that the 4th Yorkshire Heritage Summit will take place in South Yorkshire for the very first time...Barnsley, to be precise, on Wednesday 25 March 2026 10:00 am - 4:00 pm at The Civic, a significantly regenerated cultural space right in the heart of the historic market town famed for mining, mills, markets and more.



# BARNLSLEY CIVIC

Whilst the area has a rich industrial past and a state-of-the-art regenerated town centre, it is also surrounded by some beautiful countryside, with several museums, and our chosen venue is just 2 minutes from the rail & bus interchange.

### WATCH THIS SPACE!

We have already had extremely welcoming and positive meetings with Barnsley Civic Trust and Barnsley Council, with more in the pipeline, which will enable us to announce details of a comprehensive programme of speakers and heritage walks, which will be great for exhibitors from across Yorkshire and beyond, together with great footfall on market days.

The event will include the now traditional:

- EXHIBITION
- SYMPOSIUM
- GUIDED TOURS
- AND MORE....

**BARNLSLEY  
YORKSHIRE  
HERITAGE  
SUMMIT  
2026**

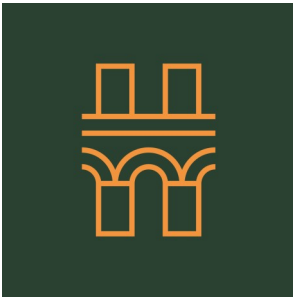
We hope to bring you more exciting news on the programme and prices in November.

Meanwhile, get the date in your diary, and if our negotiations go well, we may even extend this Yorkshire Heritage Summit over 2 days as we did in Hull.

### FURTHER INFORMATION

If you have any questions or require further information, please contact [heritage@theyorkshiresociety.org](mailto:heritage@theyorkshiresociety.org)

**Paul Cartwright**



## HALIFAX CIVIC TRUST EVENTS

### Beatles Blue Plaque in Halifax

In April the Mayor Anne Kingstone unveiled a Halifax Civic Trust Blue plaque at Holdsworth House in Halifax commemorating the night the Beatles stayed there on the opening night of their UK tour in October 1964.



*The Mayor and the blue plaque*

### Halifax Civic Trust thank Gwyneth Crawley... ...and announce a new President



In May **Gwyneth Crawley** (*above, left*) was presented with an Award as an Honorary Advisor to Halifax Civic Trust in recognition of her many years of contribution to the Trust. Alan Goodrum thanked Gwyneth on behalf of Halifax Civic Trust acknowledging her active involvement bringing many new projects to life including the Wakefield Gate, Woolshops and Moot Hall projects. The two films she was involved in making and appearing in have reached over 10,000 views on YouTube. Gwyneth was stepping down from active committee work but would continue in an advisory role.

Halifax Civic Trust were honoured to announce their new President **Jeremy Hall** (*above, right*). Jeremy stated he was very privileged and honoured to take over the Presidents role which was previously held by his late father. He stated that he was looking forward to supporting and carrying on the good work of his father and Halifax Civic Trust.

## Halifax Civic Trust and Calderdale Industrial Museum Unveil Blue Plaque Honouring Laura Annie Willson MBE



In a ceremony attended by local dignitaries, family members and supporters, Halifax Civic Trust, in partnership with Calderdale Industrial Museum Association, unveiled a commemorative blue plaque to **Laura Annie Willson MBE** at Elmwood Street, the place of her birth.

The event was held in the presence of The Mayor of Calderdale, Councillor Steven Leigh MBE, who performed the unveiling. Councillor Leigh shared his personal admiration for Laura Annie Willson's life, saying that prior to the invitation, he had not heard of her—but had since been deeply inspired by her story. *"I spent many hours reading about her humble beginnings and how she achieved so much in her life,"* he said.

Laura Annie Willson was a truly remarkable woman. From her early days as a mill worker and trade union leader to her courageous activism in the suffragette movement, she consistently broke new ground. During the First World War, she mobilised and supported women in engineering, earning her an MBE for her service. She went on to co-found the Women's Engineering Society (WES), serving as its President from 1926 to 1928.

After the war, she turned her attention to the housing crisis, building over 800 affordable and high-quality homes, many of which still stand today. She became the first woman to join the National Federation of Housebuilders, setting new standards in women's leadership and business.

Following the unveiling, guests gathered in the garden of the nearby Big 6 Inn where a series of short tributes celebrated her extraordinary legacy.

**Mark Fennelly**



Hull Civic Society

Promoting the future  
Protecting the past

## HULL CIVIC SOCIETY TALKS... ...AND RADIO PUBLICITY

**Hull Civic Society (HCS) has recently seen the start of a new venture.** This happened due to a series of events which will hopefully be told in the following story.

A number of our members, over the course of a few years, approached our committee and said that they didn't like coming to our evening talks. Their concerns were taken onboard, and a proposal was made at committee to introduce afternoon talks in addition to our evening talks. This was agreed with these to take place at different venues in the city.

Interesting people were then asked if they could talk or give tours about their establishments and/or subject matters. These events were arranged for the third Monday of each month at 2 pm. Our evening talks take place on the second Monday of each month at 7:30 pm at the Holiday Inn Express, Ferensway.

Once all the afternoon and evening talks and visits were finalised they were arranged on a Publisher A5 document, folded to A6, with these details inside with information about how to join on the back and a welcome to HCS on the front. This was then taken to a committee meeting with permission sought to have 500 printed. This was granted and would be ready for Heritage Open Days where they would be offered to folks at talks.

We were invited to the launch of a newly opened and refurbished office building in the centre and programme cards were handed out.

A few days later, our webmaster alerted us to an enquiry received from Sally Groome of Nation Radio, Yorkshire who said that she would like to meet up with us. We agreed and met Sally at the newly opened Daze Cafe, part of Monocle, Ferensway.

Sally introduced herself and described Nation Radio, Yorkshire, formerly KCFM. Sally then went on to tell us what was on offer from the station. For £200 we would get a LIVE Presenter Read talking to potentially 48,000 current listeners about our event in both the Breakfast and Evening Drive Shows for a week, Monday to Friday, for £200. Also, for no charge, we could have our talks and events listed on their website. This would include times and dates of who was going to be talking where and what about.

This has been successfully carried out already for our October talks with Cllr Mike Ross giving us a talk on Monday the 13th at the Holiday Inn Express, Ferensway, and Richard Motley talking on the afternoon of the 20th at St Matthew's Community Enterprise Centre. We will also be presenting him with a Good Mark for the exceptional refurbishment of the building by Giroscope. Both are on the station's website.

This collaboration between Nation Radio, Yorkshire, and HCS has already been an outstanding success, with the future looking bright. Many thanks to Sally Groome and all concerned.

**Ian Pearson**

**nation  
radio**

**Yorkshire**

## A-UP, WHAT'S ALL THIS AI STUFF?

**Along with many people I'm currently trying to get to grips with AI, weighing up the undoubted benefits against the pitfalls (like the one our granddaughter encountered when she tried to take a shortcut in a school essay!)**

I think most of us will be familiar with Chatbots, such as those used for "customer service!" which can be frustrating to say the least. Many of these are rule-based, operating on a fixed set of predefined rules, keywords, and a decision-tree structure.

They can only answer questions that have been explicitly programmed so you end up on a merry-go-round trying to find the correct form of words and screaming "I just want to speak to a human being!"

I've also spent a lot of time shouting at Alexa or Siri trying to get them to play a certain song, tell me the weather forecast, or make the sound of a particular animal (my two-year-old grandson's current favourite.)



*One of the more fun sides to AI. Here I am as 'Superchair' on my way to the YHACS autumn meeting in York! (Thanks Gemini)*

However, there is now a new generation of AI-powered Chatbots, which are much more advanced, using technologies like Natural Language Processing (NLP), Machine Learning (ML), and Large Language Models (LLMs). Without getting bogged down in the science, this means they can understand intent and context from natural human language, generate new dynamic responses (Generative AI) rather than just pulling from a script and, importantly and also quite scarily, learn and improve from past interactions.

There are many Chatbots around with different models and pricing structures but the three most popular are ChatGPT from OpenAI, Google's Gemini and Microsoft's Co-Pilot.

I decided to put Chatbots to the test by finding out what they know about Civic Societies. I used the free versions, which are limited in their scope and the number of questions you can ask in one day.

**Question: Define a civic society or civic trust in England and Wales.**

**ChatGPT said:**

*A civic society or civic trust in England and Wales is typically a voluntary, community-based organisation dedicated to improving and protecting the local environment, heritage, and quality of life in towns, cities, or neighbourhoods. These groups usually operate as independent charities or associations.*

**Key Features:**

- **Community-Focused:** Made up of local residents who take an interest in how their area is planned, developed, and cared for.
- **Heritage and Environment:** They often campaign to preserve historic buildings,

*promote good urban design, protect public spaces, and enhance the visual character of towns and cities.*

- **Planning and Advocacy:** Civic societies commonly review planning applications, advocate for sustainable development, and engage with local councils and developers to influence decisions.
- **Education and Engagement:** They may organise lectures, walks, heritage open days, and publications to raise public awareness of local history and architecture.

**Examples of Activities:**

- Objecting to inappropriate developments
- Promoting conservation areas
- Installing blue plaques or heritage markers
- Organising community clean-up or beautification projects

These organisations are often affiliated with national bodies such as **Civic Voice**, which represents civic societies across England and Wales.

***In essence, a civic society or trust acts as a guardian of local character, heritage, and public interest, giving residents a voice in shaping their surroundings.***

A pretty good description of what we do. I then decided to give the question a regional focus, based on Yorkshire and the Humber.

**Google Gemini** said:

*A civic society or civic trust in Yorkshire and the Humber operates as a local, independent, voluntary organisation dedicated to improving the quality of life and the environment within its specific town or city in the region.*

These local groups are often members of the **Yorkshire and Humber Association of Civic Societies (YHACS)** and the national body, **Civic Voice**.

Their core focus, often described as "place-making," includes:

- **Protecting and celebrating heritage:** They work to conserve historic buildings, landmarks, and the unique character of their locality.
- **Campaigning for high standards:** They scrutinise and comment on local planning applications and proposals for new developments, advocating for good design, quality architecture, and sustainable planning.
- **Improving the public realm:** They initiate projects to enhance public spaces, streets, and the local natural environment.
- **Raising civic pride:** They promote local history and culture through events, talks, guided walks, and schemes like the installation of blue plaques.
- **Acting as a "critical friend":** They provide an independent, non-political voice in discussions with local authorities, developers, and other stakeholders about the future development of their community.

***In essence, a civic society in Yorkshire and the Humber is a community watchdog and champion for the continuous improvement of its townscape and local environment, balancing the preservation of the past with the demands of future development.***

Again pretty thorough, giving a plug for YHACS and stressing the importance of looking forward as well as back.

I tried the same question with **Copilot**, which began promisingly.

*In Yorkshire and the Humber, a civic society is a grassroots volunteer group dedicated to improving and preserving the local environment, heritage, and community life. The regional umbrella organisation is YHACS - the Yorkshire and Humber Association of Civic Societies.*

### **YHACS: The Regional Network**

*The Yorkshire and Humber Association of Civic Societies (YHACS) is a registered charity founded in 1999 to support civic and amenity societies across the region.*

*It:*

- *Acts as a representative body for member societies*
- *Provides resources, networking, and advocacy*
- *Hosts events and publishes newsletters to share best practices*
- *Engages in regional planning discussions and policy matters*

It helpfully provided an additional section:

### **How to Get Involved**

*If you're in Yorkshire and want to contribute to your community's future:*

- *Join a local civic society*
- *Attend YHACS events or subscribe to their newsletter*
- *Volunteer for heritage walks, planning reviews, or community projects*

*You can explore more at [YHACS.org.uk](https://YHACS.org.uk).*

It then asked whether I would like help finding a civic society near a specific town or city in Yorkshire, so I entered my postcode, which is where things went awry.

Instead of directing me to my nearest societies – Scarborough, Bridlington and York – it referred me to YHACS and included an old address and phone number that belonged to former YHACS President, the late Peter Cooper.

I asked where it got the address from and it responded:

*Thanks for catching that - the address I mentioned earlier was mistakenly included and isn't an official location for the Yorkshire & Humber Association of Civic Societies (YHACS). That was an error on my part, and I appreciate you pointing it out.*

It didn't tell me where the rogue information came from but a Google search found it was a listing on the Firmania website, based on the Cylex Business Directory, which Peter must have registered YHACS with at some point. YHACS was no longer on the Cylex Directory but Firmania had not mirrored this.

**A lesson here: Chatbots get their information by “scraping” the internet and are only as good as the information that’s there. As with Wikipedia, you need to check your facts with independent sources.**

I then requested it to find me a Civic Society in Scarborough (where I am a trustee) and it replied: *There doesn't appear to be a dedicated civic society currently active in Scarborough itself.*

So quite a bit of learning required here.

## Some quick wins

I did find all three Chatbots helpful in generating policies for specific organisations (YHACS and Goole Civic Society) based on best practice as defined by the Charity Commission. ChatGPT offered different options – a longer one for funders or a shorter version for the website.

After creating a Finance and Reserves policy, I simply typed in *Change to Equality and Diversity* and the Chatbot produced an Equality and Diversity policy. Both are professionally laid out and, after a review and some minor amendments reflecting our specific needs, were ready to go.

I also created some very professional Project Briefs for our funding application, tailored to YHACS and including specific requirements. If it's not quite right at the first go, you can refine it by adding more information to the dialogue box.

With the free ChatGPT I was allowed five questions in one session, which seemed to be sufficient for the basics, though I may investigate paying for the premium version.

Next I pasted a press release I'd written into Gemini and asked it to produce posts for Facebook, X and LinkedIn. It came back with a number of excellent options. The LinkedIn post even tried to generate some conversation, adding the question:

*What role do you think local civic organizations play in fostering community well-being? Share your thoughts below!*  
*#Goole #CommunityEngagement #CivicSociety #Volunteering #LocalInitiative #EconomicDevelopment*

There's a lot more to explore here to increase our capacity to maintain a visible and regular online presence.

As with everything it's a learning curve – for me as well as the Chatbots – but it is the future and I'd recommend you give it a go.

**Margaret Hicks-Clarke**  
**YHACS Chair**

## HOW EFFECTIVE IS YOUR CIVIC SOCIETY?

**Here's a self-checklist ChatGPT helped me create to assess how effective your society is. Share it with your committee and see how you score.**

### 1. Community Representation

- Do we engage a wide cross-section of local people (age, background, interests)?
- Do we actively invite new members and volunteers?
- Do we gather and reflect community views before speaking on their behalf?

### 2. Planning & Development

- Do we review planning applications regularly and submit comments when appropriate?

- Do we contribute to Local Plans, Neighbourhood Plans, and Statements of Community Involvement?
- Do we monitor national and local planning policy changes that affect our area?

### 3. Design & Place Quality

- Do we promote good design and challenge poor-quality proposals?
- Do we celebrate and reward good architecture, planning, or public space improvements (e.g. awards, publicity)?

### 4. Heritage & Local Identity

- Do we campaign for the protection of conservation areas, listed buildings, and heritage assets?
- Do we run events or projects that celebrate local history and character (walks, plaques, talks, festivals)?

### 5. Campaigning & Advocacy

- Do we campaign on issues that matter locally (e.g. high streets, housing, transport, green spaces)?
- Do we hold local authorities, developers, and institutions accountable for their decisions?
- Do we work with Civic Voice to strengthen our voice at the national level?

### 6. Civic Pride & Volunteering

- Do we organise activities that build community pride (clean-ups, planting, heritage days)?
- Do we encourage schools, youth groups, and residents to take part in civic projects?

### 7. Partnerships & Influence

- Do we maintain constructive relationships with councillors, planning officers, MPs, and local organisations?
- Do we collaborate with other civic and amenity groups to share knowledge and support each other?

### 8. Communication & Visibility

- Do we use newsletters, local press, or social media to share updates and campaigns?
- Do we publicise successes and positive changes we've helped deliver?

### 9. Skills & Knowledge

- Do our members have access to training (planning, heritage, community engagement)?
- Do we provide resources or guidance so volunteers feel confident engaging in planning issues?

### 10. Governance & Sustainability

- Do we have transparent decision-making and democratic processes?
- Do we manage finances responsibly and sustainably?
- Do we have a plan for leadership succession and keeping the group active long-term?

If a society can tick most of these boxes, it is **well-placed to be effective and influential** in shaping its local area.

*Margaret Hicks-Clarke*  
YHACS Chair



## BEVERLEY, GOOLE AND HORNSEA COMBINE FOR 2025 HERITAGE OPEN DAY EVENTS

**Heritage Open Days (HODs) is an annual National celebration of history, heritage and culture.**

The theme changes each year, this year being "architecture". For eleven years Beverley Civic Society has led efforts to organise local events, initially in the Beverley area, but extending across East Riding in 2025. This year we have been fortunate to work with our neighbouring Civic Societies in Goole and Hornsea (Hull produces their own brochure) together with Bridlington Heritage Open Days and Cottingham Local History Society.

In total we had 97 open venues, walks and talks spread across the East Riding to which we had 9850 visits between 12 and 21 September. Five people opened their homes to visitors, including the home of the first feminist Mary Wollstonecraft which was oversubscribed several times. Indeed, visitors were trying to make reservations on the tours within one minute of booking opening.



The success of the festival is down to the owners of the properties and the many volunteers who help to meet and greet the visitors. The attached photograph (left) shows Norwood House, a fine Georgian property, owned by local company Bostonair which has opened their building every year for HODs. Visitors to Barges on the Beck, were entertained by a ukulele band.

Richard Stott, who opened the Old Savings Bank on Lairgate, said *"It was a really great weekend and I loved it! I couldn't have done it without the volunteers and they were all great and really helpful and supportive. I think we had 88 visitors on Saturday and 100 on Sunday."*

Newbegin House also proved very attractive with 477 visitors in two days. To see a video of the event search for "Newbegin House on Youtube". All the walks and talks were fully booked; in fact, some could have been filled many times. The harbour museum in Bridlington welcomed 669 visitors from all over the UK, not just East Yorkshire residents.

This year we produced 8000 copies of a 44-page brochure at a cost of about £0.75 each. They proved very popular and the Beverley Treasure House had distributed all their brochures before the festival started. Brochures were also distributed in Bridlington, Goole, Hornsea, Howden and other outlying towns and villages. I think we could easily have printed another 2000 brochures and still not satisfied demand.

We were fortunate to be granted financial support from Visit East Yorkshire (VEY), Beverley Town Council, Yorkshire Wolds Heritage Trust and the



Georgian Society of East Yorkshire, which together with a contribution from Beverley Civic Society covered our direct costs, including a promotional banner hung over Toll Gavel - Beverley's main pedestrian thoroughfare - for a month (photograph, left).

This event could not happen without the help of many people who give their time freely contributing to the

preparation of venues, text in the brochure and acting as stewards to help visitors during the Festival.

In 2026 the HODs festival will fall between 11<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> September with a theme centred around "working lives".

**Mike Farrimond**

## REBOOT OF WHITBY CIVIC SOCIETY PARTICIPATING IN 2025 HODS



It was a last-minute decision to give it go and while it was a smaller event than when we last participated in 2019, we are already planning bigger and better for next year. The weather on the day was truly a wash out but that didn't dampen the enthusiasm and there was a steady stream of soggy people all day.



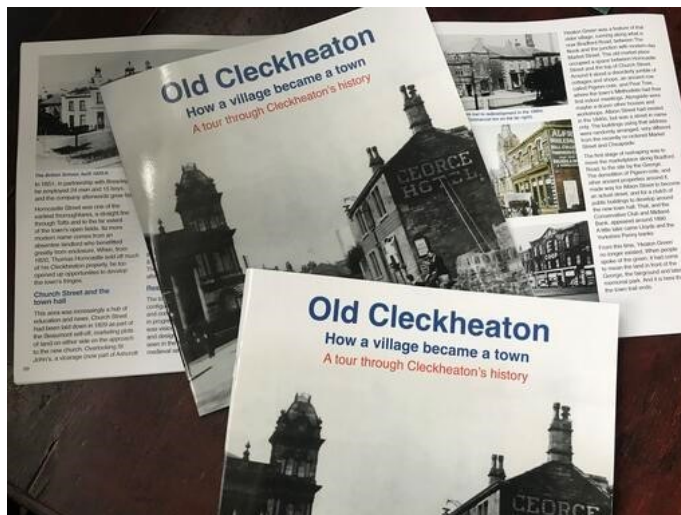
It made all the hard work worth it and all in over 560 people visited the six venues we opened the doors to. We do struggle to recruit active members and can feel despondent at times, but the day really was a boost to morale and while we didn't get everything right, we didn't do a bad job on the day.

**Kat Norrby**



## “OLD CLECKHEATON”

Spenn Valley Civic Society covers an area in the centre of the West Yorkshire conurbation jokingly called “Cleckheckmondsedge” because of the quirky names of its villages and small towns.



One of these is Cleckheaton, close to Junction 26 of the M62. It's now a popular residential area with plenty of trees. But that's not always been the case. Once upon a time Cleckheaton was a mediaeval village with tofts, crofts and strips of field surrounded by common land. About 200 years ago, the last traces of open-field farming were cleared away. Cleckheaton became a smoky Victorian mill town with a railway, grandiose Non-Conformist chapels, enormous spinning mills and sophisticated textile engineering, to the extent that it was the world “capital” of card clothing manufacture. In the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries it's transformed itself again.

On the way, Cleckheaton has lost many interesting, substantial buildings. Like other Civic Societies, we shout about our heritage and architecture, often taken for granted until it disappears.

So, we decided to expand and upgrade a 1990's pamphlet about the town and asked its author for help. Cleckheaton-born historian Dr Gillian Cookson kindly agreed, and the 24-page booklet “Old Cleckheaton” has just been published by Spenn Valley Civic Society. With several maps and numerous photos, it takes you on a tour through Cleckheaton's history. It allows you to walk around the town centre and understand how streets and buildings developed as manufacturing, engineering and the textile industries changed.

It's £4 plus postage to buy, either by contacting Spenn Valley Civic Society via its website [www.spennvalleycivicsociety.org.uk](http://www.spennvalleycivicsociety.org.uk) or by emailing [oldcleck@gmail.com](mailto:oldcleck@gmail.com)

About the Author: Dr Gillian Cookson lives in North Yorkshire and specialises in the history of industrial and technological developments of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. <https://oldbank2.wordpress.com>

Erica Amende

**REMEMBER THIS...  
...IN SPRING 2010?**

This was the front page story of Society Insight in April 2010. Launch of Civic Voice announced.

Interesting contrast with today's front page story!

Editor



Volume 6, Issue 1  
Spring 2010

# SOCIETY INSIGHT

NEW NATIONAL BODY

It's Civic Voice!

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So now we know – the new charity that will represent the civic society movement from April will be called **Civic Voice**.

After nearly a year of consultation and debate, the Civic Society Initiative recently announced details of the new independent national charity that is being created to represent the civic society movement. Operating under the name Civic Voice – a name selected in an on-line vote – the new charity has been set up as a limited company and will be managed by a board of trustee-directors for which applications are now being invited. Board members will be elected by the 922 societies that registered interest in the Civic Society Initiative and results of the ballot will be announced in early April.

Your society can now make an application to join Civic Voice – the fees are related to the number of members in your society and are calculated at £1.50 per member for this year, capped at £500 for larger societies, with discounts for societies joining before the end of May. Societies that join will be able to take out the Civic Society insurance package through Bluefin.

17<sup>th</sup> April 2010 at the Building Design Centre, Store Street, in central London. Places can be booked via the Civic Society Initiative website at a cost of £10 each (one free place is being provided for civic societies joining Civic Voice before the end of March). The launch event will provide an opportunity to meet the new board and also to hear Griff Rhys Jones, who will be attending.

This is an historic moment for the civic society movement. We are seeing the birth of a new organisation that will represent our interests, help raise our profile and act as a source of advice, support, information and inspiration, whatever the size of your society.

We hope that, by joining Civic Voice now, societies will be able to shape and influence the destiny of the new organisation. For more information visit [www.civicsocietyinitiative.org.uk](http://www.civicsocietyinitiative.org.uk)

**Kevin Trickett, YHACS Vice Chairman**



Civic Society Initiative Director, Tony Burton, addressing members of YHACS at its AGM in Harrogate

Photo: Cyril Oliver

Civic Voice will be officially launched on Saturday,

[www.yhacs.org.uk](http://www.yhacs.org.uk) Registered Charity No. 1112290



YORKSHIRE & HUMBER  
Association of Civic Societies

Reg. Charity No. 1112290

[www.yhacs.org.uk](http://www.yhacs.org.uk)

Please send any articles,  
comments, letters or  
questions to the editor:

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The Yorkshire and  
Humber Association of  
Civic Societies (YHACS)  
is the distinct voice of the  
civic society  
movement in the  
Yorkshire and Humber  
region, and our vision is  
to enhance the quality of  
life for all citizens in the  
region by engaging  
citizens not only in the  
protection of local  
heritage but also in the  
promotion of sustainable  
economic development  
and urban renaissance.

## Future Events/Dates In 2025/2026

- Sat 8th November - Civic Voice AGM, Birmingham
- Weds 19th November - Civic Voice online discussion from 2.30pm
- Sat 31st January - YHACS AGM in Harrogate
- Weds 25th March - Yorkshire Heritage Summit at The Civic, Barnsley

## NEXT YHACS MEETING

**SATURDAY 1ST NOVEMBER 2025 1:00 - 4:00 PM**  
**IN MEDICAL SOCIETY ROOMS,**  
**STONEGATE, YORK, YO1 8AW (NEW, CHANGED VENUE)**

**GUEST SPEAKERS :**  
**ANDREW MORRISON - CHIEF EXECUTIVE, YORK CIVIC TRUST**  
**MARTIN HAMILTON & BARRY GOODCHILD - CIVIC VOICE TRUSTEES**  
**ERICA AMENDE - SPEN VALLEY CIVIC SOCIETY**

**CONTACT: [INFO@YHACS.ORG.UK](mailto:info@yhacs.org.uk)**

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