

Dronfield Civic Society – A Case Study

Dronfield Civic Society was founded in 1989. It has an increasing membership of more than 200 people and is supported by local businesses, schools and other Dronfield societies. Annual membership is £8 for individuals and £12 for families. The society also offers life membership, business membership and sponsorship.

Dronfield is a small market town with many other voluntary groups and charitable organisations. It has recently been ranked 9th in the top ten best places to live in the UK, so there is a good deal of civic pride within the town and its environs.

The aim of Dronfield Civic Society is to create opportunities for local people to be involved in shaping the future of their community. The society strives to make Dronfield a better place in which to live, work and visit by being positive and forward looking.

There are three Conservation Areas in Dronfield and a number of listed buildings, so committee members carefully monitor planning applications and engage with local councils. Most recently the collective views of the committee and members were represented in a response to NE Derbyshire's Local Plan Draft which proposes significant housing development on the Green Belt which surrounds the town.

The society has an impressive project portfolio involving and engaging the community in activities like litter picking at problem sites, bulb planting to enhance the environment of Dronfield and the surrounding villages and hamlets, monthly open meetings and an annual photographic competition. They publish a quarterly newsletter and have an active and vibrant website promoting their events and activities.

Significant projects over recent years have included:

- the renovation of two dilapidated and vandalised K6 telephone boxes which significantly improved the local street scene;
- the creation of an environmental and heritage trail with interpretation panels along a disused colliery branch line in conjunction with Derbyshire County Council;
- the refurbishment of a set of historic steps to uncover a stone drainage channel and the renovation of a length of hand rail believed to have been made in the local forge;
- the suggestion and implementation of an interpretation panel to commemorate the industry which occupied the former site of the Aldi supermarket;
- in conjunction with Derbyshire County Council, funded by Veolia, the purchasing and erecting of a replacement foot bridge, the clearance of undergrowth and the establishment of a nature walk to the site of one of Dronfield's major 19th century works, with interpretation panels about its history and the wildlife of the site;
- the planting of native tree species to improve a small area of woodland in conjunction with Derbyshire Wildlife Trust

Some of these projects have been carried out with the help of the Probation Service's Community Payback teams.

Being positive is a key part of the work of Dronfield Civic Society. They reward the good things in the town. Annual awards recognise improvements to the built and historic environment, including the renovation of historic buildings, appropriate shop fronts, areas of attractive planting and through Dronfield in Bloom, the person contributing most horticulturally to the local area.

With a view to encouraging the next generation to take an interest in civic activities, they present awards at Dronfield Henry Fanshawe School, for the Young Achiever and Young Entrepreneur. Younger children take part in making bird boxes from flat pack kits made by a committee member using donated timber which they decorate and site in school grounds and local woodland.

This year the society will be taking part in the **Big Conservation Conversation** and national Civic Day on June 17th to raise awareness of Conservation Areas. They are proposing to work in co-operation with Dronfield Heritage Trust, a partner organisation in the town, to update the Dronfield Conservation Area Character Statement which was published in 2000. This will then be made available to the local planning authority.

Partnership working has involved participating in the national street clutter campaign with Derbyshire County Council Highways Department to identify and remove redundant and unnecessary signage in the Town. Dozens of signs and posts have been removed making a noticeable improvement.

The society also works closely with Dronfield Town Council, Derbyshire County Council, Friends of Dronfield Station, The Lea Brook Valley Project, the PCSOs, Dronfield Schools, and the local MP, Natascha Engel who is a member of the APPG for Civic Societies, to address issues like traffic, pavement parking, pedestrian safety and car parking.

Connecting with other civic societies is important so they invited Ian Harvey, the Chair of Civic Voice, to talk about the experiences of other civic groups. They have presence and attendance at the national Civic Voice AGM and their membership of Civic Voice provides insurance for civic activities and has entitled Dronfield members to a free day access pass to National Trust properties.

Our one piece of advice to other civic societies would be to build your membership and through this increase your visibility around the areas you represent.