

Dronfield Civic Society

Making Dronfield Better—Together

Web: www.dronfieldcivicsociety.org.uk Email: enquiries@dronfieldcivicsociety.org.uk

Litter Pick at Cliffe Park with the Hilltop Cubs

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We are a small team of individuals with interests in planning, heritage, conservation and environmental enhancement with a desire to make the town a more pleasant place to live, work in and visit.

We invite you to help us secure a future for Dronfield Civic Society.

Welcome to the November newsletter

Following a unanimous vote at the Relaunch Meeting in June, we are pleased to inform members, friends and supporters that Dronfield Civic Society will continue 'Making Dronfield Better—Together'. We welcome Ian Ward onto our committee and another member who joins us for monthly meetings.

In this newsletter, we report back on the Relaunch Meeting including the four winners of the all new Civic Awards which were presented by the Mayor Pam Jones.

At the end of April we helped to facilitate a litter pick with the 5th Dronfield Hilltop Cubs in Cliffe Park and whilst there was not too much litter for such a large group of more than 30 pickers, the Cubs were motivated, well-behaved and they had a thoroughly enjoyable evening.

Three members of the Committee represented the Society at a Focus Group meeting held in the courtyard room at Hall Barn at the beginning of July. This was the second meeting relating to the development of the NEDDC Emerging Local Plan, now at Regulation 19 stage which will be examined by a planning Inspector next year and then adopted as the Plan for the district to 2044.

And finally, we extend our thanks to David and Phil for the work done on the K6 Book Exchanges during the sunny days of August and September.

DCS Committee—Chair Martin Hanrahan

Holmesdale and Coal Aston K6 Restoration





Just the Job!
Perhaps a bit too hot at times in the summer of 2026 and where's your hat David?





The K6 Book Exchanges at Holmesdale and Coal Aston, owned by the Civic Society, were beginning to look in poor condition with peeling paint and missing glazing panels. Once again David Hallam stepped up for us and restored them, often in the searing heat of the 2026 summer.
First step was to remove all the books and shelves. Next step involved grinding and sanding to remove the old paint. The glazing panels on the Holmesdale box were too badly affected by UV to clean up so they were removed which made repainting much easier. After repainting, new glazing was installed, the shelves were put back and they were re-stocked with books.
The Coal Aston kiosk was in slightly better condition and the old glazing panels were removed, cleaned up and put back to avoid the quite significant expenditure of a new glazing kit.

When the Civic Society first purchased the former telephone boxes, they were renovated and kept locked to be enjoyed as heritage street furniture and until such time as we agreed their future use. An information panel was fixed inside which detailed the history of the K6 including where each one was made. When we decided to convert the kiosks into Book Exchanges, the information panel was kept behind the shelves in case at some time in the future the kiosks need to revert back to being items of heritage street furniture rather than mini libraries.

We depend on people like David to look after the Book Exchanges and it's not helpful when bags of books are left on the floor or when old suitcases are left inside. We are hoping that people who use and enjoy these local resources might want to help us to keep them in good order.

If you can help, please contact us at the address on the header.

YOUR CIVIC SOCIETY RELIES ON VOLUNTEERS WHO HELP TO KEEP OUR TOWN AN ATTRACTIVE PLACE TO LIVE. HELP US TO KEEP THIS SHARED SPACE BEAUTIFUL FOR FUTURE GENERATIONS. JOIN US!

If you would like to receive our newsletters, please let us have your current email address.

Litter Pick— Cliffe Park

At the end of April we helped to organise a litter pick at Cliffe Park, Callywhite Lane, Mill Lane and along the paths surrounding the park with the 5th Dronfield Hilltop Cubs.

Taking part were around 35 children aged 8 to 11 years who were well-supervised by a team of volunteers. Civic Society member David Hallam distributed the equipment which the Society has built up over the years from previous organised events and he led one group of pickers towards Mill Lane with Robert Hardcastle accompanying. Chair Martin Hanrahan worked with the second group and their volunteers around the park and towards Stonelow.







A Litter Pick was an enthusiastic choice by the Cubs for their 'Community Project'. The activity goes towards helping them achieve their 'World Challenge' and 'Environmental Conservation' badges.

With thanks to Cub Leader Chris Smith who contacted the Society asking for our help to facilitate this important activity for the younger citizens of our town.





The Society has been asked to help the Cubs with future litter picks. We will need to make sure we select an area where there is a bit more litter for the Cubs to spot next time.

The Rodgers' Bequest

We continue to fund improvements in Coal Aston using the generous bequest of Mr & Mrs GM Rodgers. The Coal Aston Village Hall Wildlife Gardeners, who are a small group of volunteers, are facilitating this on our behalf. The new fruit trees in the mini orchard are now well-established and recent funding allowed the purchase of tree guards for the five trees to protect them against damage.

Group co-ordinator Mary Gray commented that the pond and orchard have added so much to the overall plans for the area around the village hall to make it more attractive and increase biodiversity.

Committee also agreed to fund a picnic bench and at a later date a 'sleeper bench' for the orchard area. The picnic bench was on special offer at the end of September with a saving of almost £125. There was the option to include a plaque on the picnic bench in memory of Mr and Mrs Rodgers. The plaque was a requirement of the bequest which the Society continues to administer.

We anticipate being able to co-ordinate with Mary and her team to do some autumn bulb planting around the village hall and in other areas of Coal Aston such as roadside verges.

Next year we will look to replace the triangular planter which is in a poor state of repair in the community garden next to the Methodist Chapel using funding from the bequest.







Society Receives Unanimous Vote to Continue



At a well-attended event in June, a vote was taken to reverse the decision to close the Society. Members, supporters and friends voted unanimously for the Society to continue its work with the expectation to reach the 40th Anniversary in 2029.

Chair Martin Hanrahan gave a visual presentation about the work of the Society and the Mayor Pam Jones handed out our new Civic Awards to the worthy winners.

In no particular order these were the winners:
Chilled Pubs for the sympathetic restoration of the Blue Stoops to secure its modern future in the heart of the town.

A posthumous award to a Special Citizen—Tony Hartigan who made life better for everyone around him.

Deserving of an award were the organisers of a huge town event—the Dronfield 10K and 2K Fun Run.

Life Dronfield received a Civic Award for their plans to create a welcoming, inclusive space for the people of Dronfield to use and enjoy.













Speaking of Winners.....

We are pleased to announce that after a few years of absence, the Civic Society will once again be taking part in the Christmas Tree Festival at the Parish Church.

Over the years we have given awards to many local groups, businesses, individuals and projects, so what better way to remember the recipients than with our 'Tree of Winners'.

The tree will display around thirty winners of the John Robert Clough awards which were named after a former Chair of the Society as well as the all new Civic Awards for this year. The new awards have enabled us to widen the scope for nominations to include not just awards for well-designed built structures, but also individuals and group leaders who we recognise as special citizens because they have done so much for so many within our town.

In the Quest to Speed up Planning…….Are we Losing our Civic Voice?

The work of Dronfield Civic Society has always had a focus on planning. Whether that is to comment on local planning applications or to be involved in Local and Neighbourhood Plan development. But in the quest to speed up the planning process, it appears that civic societies, campaign groups and residents are increasingly being seen as 'blockers' in the system and with a series of incremental changes at national level, we are rapidly losing our civic voice.

Role of local councillors in the planning system expected to shrink further

From 31 October, the way planning applications are decided in England has changed. Now most decisions concerning minor planning applications are determined by planning officers rather than being allowed to be 'called in' by a Ward Councillor for further scrutiny by a planning committee. Local councillors speak for their residents and usually know their areas better than those who make the decisions. Planning committees have been capped at 13 councillors and they will only be used to scrutinise the decisions of officers for larger developments.

More planning power for mayors

A consultation about giving regional mayors powers over large developments, such as schemes for more than 150 homes, closed on 5 October. This would mean large schemes being decided at regional rather than local level. Claire Ward is the regional mayor for Derbyshire in her role as the Mayor of the East Midlands, representing Derbyshire, Nottinghamshire, Derby and Nottingham. This area covers 1,847 square miles and has an approximate population of 2.29 million people. Will she really understand what is best for our town?

What about plans for Local Government Reorganisation?

Many readers will have seen previous newsletter content about Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) which sought to reduce two tier councils like ours (county and district) into one unitary authority of north Derbyshire which would cover a vast geographic area including High Peak in the far north and Amber Valley in the south. LGR was paused and put under review with the aim of testing whether it would be more cost effective than the current two tier system. It has already cost councils millions of pounds to test public opinion and to employ consultants to look at what it might mean and how it might work. On 29 October 2026 ministers said plans to create a north and south council in Derbyshire, which they had previously given the green light to, would be reconsidered. An outcome by the government has been promised by early next year and all options remain under consideration. Whilst the local elections in May will go ahead on existing council boundaries, the future is less certain in this

Housing delivery: the 1.5m target slips further out of reach

The government is now widely expected to miss its target of 1.5 million homes this Parliament by around a third. An estimated 437,900 net additional homes were delivered in England between July 2024 and September 2026: about 29% of the target with 44% of the time gone. The pipeline is weakening too. ONS data reveals 'new-build starts' falling for three months running. Housing Secretary Angela Rayner has conceded the chances of hitting the target are slim. But what might this mean for our district?

When delivery falls behind, the pressure to approve housing development will increase. Developers use the delivery shortfall to their advantage at appeal. However the shortfall is so often related to viability, build costs and market conditions rather than the NIMBYs or those who seek to protect the bats and newts.

We must also question why our local district council has allocated housing sites in places where there are known adverse constraints which will impact delivery. Of the five sites allocated in the R19 stage consultation for Dronfield, 2 sites were allocated in 2018 and have yet to deliver any houses, another site has stalled despite having planning permission and 2 of the five sites are in the housing trajectory to be developed in 2037 and 2041. The DR1 site below Shakespeare Crescent has been reallocated with an extended site area; yet the two fields allocated in 2018 have seen an appeal dismissed in part due to the constraints of the land. So while it is concerning that Dronfield could have an additional 560-595 houses on five sites, they may turn out to be just paper allocations.

What is the impact of the new National Planning Framework (NPPF)?

The rewritten National Planning Policy Framework, published on 17 August 2026, splits plan-making from national decision-making policies, introduces a "default yes" for development near well-connected stations and creates a new "medium development" category of 10 to 49 homes. On 8 October housing minister Matthew Pennycook instructed the Planning Inspectorate to embed the new approach within their decisions. If Local plan policies conflict with national decision-making policies they now carry little weight and it is expected that appeal decisions will lean directly on the NPPF.

Local Plans: Regulation 19 consultations are open now, with a new deadline

Many councils (including NEDDC) are rushing to finish local plans under the old system before it closes. On 23 October housing minister Matthew Pennycook extended the deadline: plans whose final Regulation 19 consultation has concluded by 31 December 2026 can now be submitted for examination by 31 March 2027. Plans that miss this deadline must restart under the new 30-month system. This is why our local district council has a Regulation 19 consultation running up to the 18th November and residents have faced consultation after consultation.

Unfortunately due to an error in the calculations relating to the incorrect affordability ratio used to calculate housing numbers, the consultation on that part of the Plan has had to be extended into early December, increasing the pressure to submit before the deadline. See next page for the detail about the R19 stage of the NEDDC Local Plan.

Local Plan R19 Stage….. where Green Belt turns Grey

At the time of writing, the NED Local Plan has reached what's known as R19 stage with a consultation running to November 18th with a further two weeks for comments on a specific part of the plan where an error was made which affected the number of houses required over the plan period.

In our last newsletter we reported that the council had produced a list of Refined Sites from all those submitted in the 'Call for Sites'. At that stage we were asked to comment on those Refined Sites to provide detailed local information which would be used to refine the sites still further. A number of Society Committee members took part in a lengthy workshop session in the Courtyard Room at Hall Barn on July 1st. At that stage there appeared to be 9 sites in Dronfield which would accommodate 862 dwellings which was purely an estimate based on the acreage of the sites. At a similar time, the council was waiting for their Green Belt Assessment to conclude. The Green Belt Assessment considered many sites under the new concept of Grey Belt. Initially, and in the press, we were led to believe this would be land that was poor quality Green Belt such as previously developed land or derelict areas like former car parks. **The reality is quite different.** Of the original 5 purposes of Green Belts, which are equally weighted and which have been used individually or collectively to define and protect the Green Belt effectively for years, only 3 now carry weight in the quest to find Grey Belt. They are: purpose a) to check the unrestricted sprawl of large built up areas, purpose b) to prevent neighbouring towns (not villages) merging and purpose d) to preserve the setting and special character of historic towns. Purpose c) and e) no longer count.

When applying just those three purposes it would appear that much of our precious Green Belt has now turned Grey.

Whilst this label will not, in itself, establish the principle of development, proposals on Grey Belt will still need to accord with the spatial strategy and other policies of the Local Plan and appropriately address any environmental, landscape, heritage, biodiversity, flood risk or other infrastructure constraints.
What this means is that the Local Plan has given the Grey Belt label to sites, knowing full-well that some have major adverse constraints which may make the allocation undeliverable. This is exactly what happened at the DR1 site below Shakespeare Crescent where the steepness of the land meant costly engineering solutions like cut and fill and retaining walls to essentially re-grade the land leading to an inappropriate design layout. There was an issue with existing housing at a higher level impacting the amenity of the occupants of the new build in respect of overlooking which would be extremely difficult to mitigate and there's proximity to the Wastewater Treatment Works which was there first! The Council has not learnt its lesson that allocating and now extending this site may potentially mean the 235 houses they need to make up the numbers will never be built.

The DR 1 allocation (assessed as Grey Belt) has 10 pre-application requirements including a design code, highest quality design and energy efficient homes, landscape, visual, ecological impact assessments, retention of hedgerows, trees and their root protection zones, conservation of heritage assets, retaining field patterns, incorporating buffers to transition to open countryside, retention and enhancement of the public right of way, traffic modelling and mitigation measures in respect of noise and air quality associated with the wastewater treatment works.

The Civic Society will be challenging the Grey Belt label for both of the above allocated sites because according to the Green Belt Assessment, taking all 5 purposes together, they lie in areas of 'Fundamentally Important Green Belt'.

The R19 Consultation is the last chance we have to shape a Local Plan before it goes to a Planning Inspector who will test its soundness and legal compliance at a public examination. Representations made will go to the Inspector and they secure your right to speak at the hearings should you wish to do so.

It is likely that the examination of the Local Plan will be in April or May of next year, but with so many local authorities attempting to submit their Plans before the March deadline, will there be enough Inspectors or will the north east Derbyshire Local Plan be placed in a queue?

The DR 4 allocation, north of Dronfield Woodhouse (assessed as 'Provisional Grey Belt') for 250 houses has 11 policy requirements similar to DR1 but with additional points such as maintaining ecological connectivity, compensation measures to address impacts on skylarks, sustainable drainage systems and highway safety modelling.

The New Golden Rules

Under the new National Planning Policy Framework, Golden Rules are mandatory requirements that developers must meet when building major housing schemes on grey belt or released Green Belt land.
Affordable Housing: Developers must provide either 50% affordable housing or an increase of 15% above local policy requirements. Viability negotiations to lower these targets are often restricted or disallowed on most grey belt releases.

Infrastructure Improvements: Schemes must fund and deliver local infrastructure improvements. This is typically secured through Section 106 agreements to ensure the scaling of transport, schools and health facilities for the population increase.

Publicly Accessible Green Spaces: Developments must provide new or significantly improved green spaces within a short walk for new residents. They must actively contribute to local landscape settings, support nature recovery and meet local green space standards.

Local Street Scene



We sometimes receive comments from local residents about things they have noticed in and around our town—good and not so good as well as issues relating to footpath safety like overgrown pathways or missing hand rails.

In July a resident wrote to ask our opinion of this wooden structure at the Jolly Farmer.

Whilst the planning application had given full details about the materials to be used, together with the size of the external canopy with an outdoor bar, which was approved, it may have been quite difficult to comprehend how it would actually look once built.

Residents living close to the former Three Tuns public house were probably quite relieved to see a start being made on site to clear vegetation, erect scaffolding and begin work stripping the interior and roof. It would appear that progress has been halted. A local source revealed the reason is to allow the bats to leave the building. Perhaps now that Hallowe'en has passed, the bats have left to find a much cooler place in which to hibernate.

The current planning status of this building which was granted is for its conversion and extension to a restaurant with 3 holiday apartments and alteration to the remaining structures on the site.





A Civic Society member contacted us to raise concerns about the overgrown and unkempt state of the Snape Hill path and steps. The steps are an historic feature of the townscape and as well as the unusual hand rail which is believed to have been made at the Lucas Works opposite, there is a stone-lined drainage channel which runs down one side.

Some years ago, the Society helped to clear the drainage channel and steps and a local company was able to fit a new section of rail where a piece was missing.

We have passed on the concerns about the state of the steps to the local authority as we no longer have the volunteer capacity to tackle the work ourselves.

At the beginning of September we were notified by the planning department of an application within the Conservation Area. The application was seeking planning permission and listed building consent to convert existing office buildings into two dwellings at Manor Farm at the top of the High Street.

The application site includes a farmhouse, stables and part of a yard area associated with the working farm.
The buildings were converted for commercial office use in the 1980s. Current proposals involve the former Victorian farmhouse reverting back to residential use and sympathetic conversion of other buildings into a second dwelling. Parking will be provided in two traditionally built oak framed and slate-roofed garages. An arched gateway with steps and flanking walls will be kept as it is a particularly interesting feature of the streetscape.





Google Street View Images

The application was discussed at a civic society committee meeting where it was decided to support bringing this prominent characterful building back into residential use.

A 57-page Heritage Impact Statement accompanies the application with many details about the early history of this site adjacent to the Manor House, which is now the Public Library.

Your Civic Society Needs You

Over the last 170 years, many thousands of people have volunteered their time and energy to improve where they live. Pride of place has motivated the members of hundreds of Civic Societies across the country to conserve, restore and improve their local environments particularly following the Second World War.

In the early days the work often involved practical projects to improve local amenities and create recreational areas like parks, manage traffic and sometimes to redesign street furniture.

During the 1960s and 1970s there was a need to balance regeneration with conservation which it may be fair to say was not always successful in terms of architectural style.

Care for the historic environment has been at the core of many of the activities of the civic movement. When the Civic Amenities Act of 1967 came about, it allowed areas of special architectural or historic interest to be designated as Conservation Areas. The Act also helped to connect local authorities with the voluntary groups as part of a democratic planning process.

In 2010 the formation of Civic Voice was a major landmark event giving local societies a voice at national level.

Over the course of its history, the civic society movement has demonstrated an enduring presence and a commitment to improving the character of towns and cities by championing local distinctiveness through community involvement.

The extent to which civic societies are able to play this role in the future very much depends on the continued willingness of individuals to participate.

Dronfield Civic Society was founded in 1989 following concerns about traffic management in the town. Over the decades it has widened its scope with projects including bulb planting, litter clearance, tree planting and heritage restoration. Now with a keen focus on planning matters, it is recognised by the local authority as a consultee.

With the recent changes to planning explained in this newsletter, it is all the more important to try to retain a local civic voice for the good of our town. Dronfield Civic Society will celebrate its 40th anniversary in 2029. Can you help us to reach this milestone?



We are looking for people with an interest in the iconic K6 phone boxes, now Book Exchanges, who might be able to keep an eye on them for us. All three K6s are now in good condition on the outside, but occasionally they may need a tidy up to remove books in poor condition and to make sure no books have been left on the floor. If you live near to one of our kiosks, could you volunteer?

We need people who enjoy organising events, finding interesting speakers, or who could help us to run interactive social events.

One suggestion we have received is to re-invent the Annual Dronfield Lecture, perhaps under a different name. We used to organise this in conjunction with the Peel Centre Management Team. It was largely due to the pandemic that this event was shelved rather than a lack of interest.

Could you help us to organise occasional litter picks in problem hotspots? The Society has plenty of litter picking equipment, but we are short of active volunteers.

If you are a local business, would you be willing to provide a donation or sponsorship? We would like to thank Stauff UK for their continued support by annual donation.

Have you considered being a member? Even if you are unable to be an active member, there is still a feel good factor about membership subscriptions which help us to make improvements around the town and keep the Book Exchanges in good order.

If you can help in any way, please contact us.

Membership contact is : dcsmembership@gmail.com
or for any other information
enquiries@dronfieldcivicsociety.org.uk

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