

Dear Sirs,

The work of Hythe Civic Society

Some months ago, through your regular Civic Voice updates, you asked your members to keep you up to date with the work they are involved in locally and their achievements within their town.

As members of Civic Voice, Hythe Civic Society would like to take this opportunity to do just that....

Since 2004, when the Society was invited to join the group working on the South East England Development Agency (SEEDA) Market Town Health Check, we have been involved in a number of projects in Hythe, all of which were conceived in an attempt to improve both amenities and the appearance of the town centre. Funding for the projects has been received from many quarters including Kent County Council (KCC), HytheTown Council (HTC), Shepway District Council (SDC) – now Folkestone and Hythe District Council (FHDC)- S106 funding, SEEDA, The Hythe Institute Fund, the High Street Innovation Fund and several more. Our projects include: **the installation of a number of commemorative benches, litter bins and bus shelters; advising on improvements to signage in the town; providing mosaic benches in the Town Square to celebrate the Queen's Diamond Jubilee; working with the District Council on cycling matters and being involved in setting up the popular Hythe Farmers' Market and running it for ten years.**



Jubilee Bench



Hythe Farmers' Market Apple Fair

Here are some of our other projects in more detail...

In 2004, **Hythe in Bloom** (HIB) was born as a partnership between the Civic Society and the Hythe Chamber of Commerce – now the Hythe Business and Tourism Association.

Sixteen years on, it is still going strong: it now provides all the barrier baskets in Hythe's main through road and a group of keen volunteers plants, waters and maintains all the flower troughs in the High Street. Funding is received from several quarters – including commercial sponsors and the Town Council.

In 2018 our work was rewarded with a Silver Gilt Award in the South and South East in Bloom competition – our first attempt for many years.

In 2011, we began a programme of daffodil bulb planting. In 2016, we supported the Rotary Club 'Purple for Polio' campaign by planting 5,000 purple crocus corms and, in 2017, 5,000 more: they looked lovely in the spring!



In 2017, a number of HIB volunteers joined forces with Saltwood Village Society to form '**The Friends of Sandling Station**' which - with the support of Southeastern Railways – has cleared unattractive and overgrown areas of our local station and re-planted with colourful, robust planting.



Volunteers at work at the station

Our work has continued in **the churchyard of our local church** - St Leonard's. Since it is 'closed', it is the responsibility of the District Council to keep the area in order but over several years, despite their best efforts, it had become heavily overgrown with weeds and brambles and the trees required considerable pruning to bring everything back to a manageable level.

The work was carried out by volunteers from the Society and from St Leonard's Church congregation with support from stone masons, tree surgeons and Veolia – all free of charge.

Over the past six years a regular programme of work has continued both on the churchyard grounds and - thanks to the skills of three volunteer stone masons - many damaged headstones have been restored, damaged walls repaired and new gates installed to the northern entrance. To complete the transformation, the railings have been stripped and repainted by individuals from the Community Payback Scheme with work completed by Society members.



Before



After

Our areas of responsibility, horticulturally, also extend to other parts of the town where we have been instrumental in bringing about improvements to neglected spots. We have ensured that the Hollyhocks growing on one of Hythe's prettiest streets are no longer sprayed by the District Council with weed killer and, working with the Town Council, local schools and other local organisations our volunteers have brought **The Eaton Lands** – a large open space which had been farmed, with parts long-neglected - back into public use, planting trees, a wild flower meadow, daffodils and a community orchard for all to enjoy.

Ever since the decimation of Hythe's tree stock by Dutch Elm Disease in the 1970s – which resulted in the formation of the **Hythe Tree Campaign** - Hythe Civic Society has taken a pro-active interest in the management of Hythe's trees. It has arranged for a number of new trees to be planted, some as memorials, in several areas of the town.

At the request of Hythe Town Council, we have also planted several new hedgerows using our reliable team of volunteers.

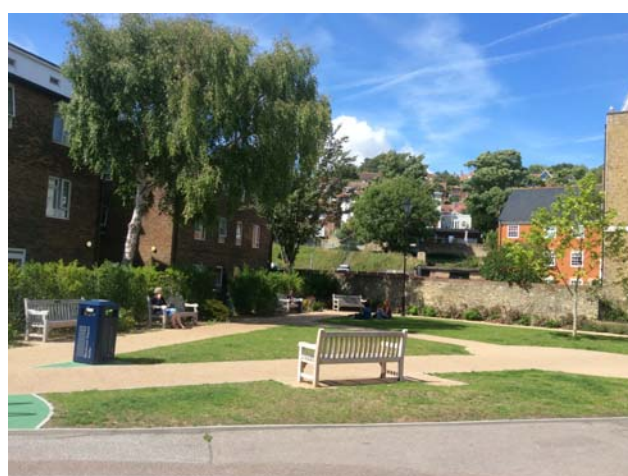
Another important project was the **regeneration of Mackeson Square**, on the site of the now defunct Mackeson Brewery and a gateway to the town. Mooted by the Society in 2010, work began in earnest – and was completed – in 2016.

Over several years, the area had become very overgrown, making it dark and unwelcoming. As a result, it had become a hot spot for anti-social behaviour, which needed to be addressed. The oversized tree in the centre was also creating a serious health and safety issue as the roots were pushing up the paving slabs around the base and creating a tripping hazard.

It was agreed that the Society should work with the District and County Councils to improve the appearance of the square, to provide a lighter, brighter, more welcoming entrance to the town. Funding was secured from S106 monies and, in 2015, the Society organised two days of public consultation to ascertain the views of local residents: the results were positive and the Society's designs were agreed. A local contractor did a superb job and the grassy square is now enjoyed by all.



Before



After

In 2012, work began on installing tourist **Maps in Hythe's car parks**. As a town comprising three areas, some distance apart – the historic centre, the Romney, Hythe and Dymchurch Railway, and the seafront – the Society felt that all three should be brought together on one map to enable visitors to see the town at a glance and plan their day accordingly. The project was completed in 2014/15 and we are delighted that the maps are being so well-used in the nine car parks where they are located. We also arranged for two old and out-of-date maps to be refurbished, bringing the total in use to eleven.



As with everywhere else in the country, our High Street ground to a halt when lockdown was announced in March but, as it began to ease in June, we were keen to give as much support as possible to High Street traders. We therefore took the initiative to publish a list of shops and eateries with their revised trading arrangements- **'Open Hythe'** - which was very well-received by both traders and customers and really helped to get businesses moving again.

As can be seen from the above, Hythe Civic Society members are seldom at a loose end: there are lots of opportunities for them to get involved with projects locally, if they wish.

In addition to ad hoc projects, of course, we also organise guided walks throughout the summer months (although not this year!), offer a programme of talks between October and April, publish books and newsletters, comment on local planning applications, etc, etc.....

We hope that other members of Civic Voice will enjoy reading about our achievements to date and we hope, too, that they will be inspired to be as involved in the life of their town as we are with ours.

For interest, our Society celebrates its 75th Anniversary this year and, with membership now standing in excess of 750, we believe we are one of the largest Civic Societies in the country.

Kind regards,

Yours sincerely,

Sally Chesters
Committee Member
Hythe Civic Society

