Civic Awards:
Wrexham Area Civic Society

Each year Wrexham Area Civic Society presents awards for the best recent architecture, landscape and environmental projects in Wrexham County Borough. The event aims to encourage the promotion of high standards in planning and architecture throughout the Borough, by issuing and publicising awards to the worthy recipients.

The award categories (below right) are the same every year but if there is no suitable entry for a certain category it is not awarded. The Wooden Spoon Award is given only occasionally. The Society would rather place emphasis on the positive aspects of a project.

The awards evening evolved from the Society’s summer social event held in a member’s garden, to an autumn event that puts the focus more on the projects being awarded. In 2013 buildings, country parks and colliery wheels across Wrexham were just some of the landmarks honoured. A wide range of projects was nominated, including a number of ongoing community supported projects.

Lay Main Colliery awarded their commendation for Landscape or Environmental Improvement. Wrexham Area Civic Society Chairman Geoff Foy is in the background.

The award categories are:

• **New build.**
  A recently completed project, of outstanding architectural merit.

• **Restoration or refurbishment of an existing building.**
  This must be a recently completed full restoration or refurbishment, maybe with public funding (not merely redecoration or repointing for example).

• **Landscape or environmental improvement.**
  Examples might include landscaping of derelict land, the creation or restoration of a public open space or playground.

• **The Ruth Howarth Award.**
  An award made for a significant contribution to Wrexham’s environment or quality of life, not necessarily a building or landscape.

• **Award for Sustainability.**
  A recently completed or refurbished building or project which demonstrates environmental sustainability well in advance of statutory requirements. The building / project must be easily accessible for inspection.

• **Wooden Spoon Award**
  An award for conspicuous failure to consider the context of a development, or failure to appreciate that design is an important part of the environment.
Why organise awards?

The Society organises the annual awards as they highlight good architectural and community projects. The Society also believes that holding up examples of good practice in architecture and town planning provides benefits for Wrexham.

Wrexham Area Civic Society believes the awards provide a good advertisement for the Society especially when the local Member of Parliament Ian Lucas and Assembly Member Lesley Griffiths attend as well as interested councillors and community councillors, local architects and developers. The event provides a platform for people to find out what the society does and for friendly discussions.

The event also provides an opportunity to gain new members: guests sign an attendance sheet with contact details and the society writes afterwards inviting them to join.

Organising the awards

The Awards are organised by the Society’s main committee. There are not enough Committee members for a specific sub-committee to arrange Awards. The organisation process starts just after Easter when publicity for the year’s awards begins. The awards ceremony takes place in November.

Entries are invited from Civic Society members, Councillors, Community Councils, Wrexham County Borough Council’s Conservation Officer, local MP and AM, and from the public via the press. Project nominations are sought from local architects, developers and agents. Nominations can be for projects they are working on as well as those they have not been involved in. In recent years the Society has been developing links with the 34 Community Councils in the area, and some of these have become corporate members of the Society. This has resulted in more community projects being nominated for awards.

A standard entry form is completed by entrants (see next page). The Civic Society welcomes submission of photographs of the project to be submitted with the entry form but this doesn’t always happen.

A group from the Civic Society then visits all the nominations (whether or not photographs are submitted with the entry). When available planning/conservation officers from Wrexham County Borough Council also join the judging panel. A member of the society also photographs the entries.

The venue for the awards ceremony has for the last few years been a local Memorial Hall. The Society would prefer to host the awards in something grander but the Memorial Hall is an affordable option.

The chair of the Wrexham County Borough Council Planning Committee (Councillor Michael Morris) always presents the awards. Councillor Morris is very supportive to the Civic Society - and this provides the opportunity to engage with him in a social and friendly environment.

Tickets for the event are free but this is a relatively new thing, with tickets previously being charged for including extras for the award winners. Currently the winners get three tickets each but may request extras.
Publicity for the awards evening is through the press. While the press are invited, they don’t usually attend, and instead a report is sent in just after the event.

The event is paid for at present out of Civic Society funds: It makes money from drinks sales, raffles etc., This allows the event to break even. The event has not previously been sponsored. The society is very fortunate in getting sponsorship from TACP Architects Ltd and Lawray Architects for its regularly produced newsletter ‘In Focus’. Sponsorship for the awards event is a potential conflict of interest, for example architects, developers, companies etc. could be sponsors and award nominees.

Further information/ inspiration

Wrexham Area Civic Society
Awards contact Civic Society Chairman Geoff Foy or Secretary Nick Roe. http://www.wrexhamcivic.co.uk/page15.html

Other Societies that organise awards include:

Conwy Valley Civic Society
http://www.conwy-valley-civic-soc.org/awards-2/

Usk Civic Society
http://www.onmouthshireregnewb.co.uk/UskCivicSociety/index.

Menai Bridge and District Civic Society
http://www.menaibridgecivicsociety.org.uk/

Images to left: 2014 award winners.
Below: The 2014 entry form.