



Minutes of Friends of Pittville Annual General Meeting - 24 October 2007

1. Executive Committee (Excom) Members Present

Chairman – Tony Mason (TM)
Hon Secretary – Ron Pattinson (RP)
Hon Treasurer – Paul Weston (PW)
Ward Councillor - Dave Prince (DP)
Ward Councillor - Diane Hibbert (DH)
Park Watch – Desmond Fitzgerald (DF)
Anne Roberts (AR)
Arran Stibbe (AS)
Colin Eynon (CE)
Fiona Clarke (FC)
Judy Langhorn (JL)
Roger Turner (RT)

Also, from Cheltenham Borough Council (CBC)
Assistant Director of Green Environment – John Crowther (JC)
CBC Communications Team representative – Ruth Darling (RD)

54 Members of the public present

1.1. Apologies

Michael Canning
Maurice and Nora Harbridge
Mr & Mrs Peter Simmons
Graham and Eileen Lockwood
Rosemary Mansbridge (RM) (CBC)
Adam Reynolds (ARY) (CBC)

2. Minutes of the Previous AGM (20 September 2006)

The minutes had been previously circulated to the members of the Friends of Pittville (FoP). A vote was taken on the motion that the minutes represented a true account of the AGM of 16 September 2006.

Proposed – AR, seconded by DP and carried unanimously.

3. Matters Arising

- 3.1 A suggestion from JC at the last AGM that the FoP should pursue alternative grants for projects has been put on hold in order to avoid potential conflicts with the overall Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) application.
- 3.2 Executive committee members have been appointed as liaisons with St Vincent's, Pittville School, Dunalley School, and the University of Gloucestershire. An initial contact meeting with UCAS has also been held.

4. Treasurer's Report

The Hon Treasurer reported a moderate balance of £597.02 held in the FoP account at the end of September 2006.
Proposed by Mr John Clayton, seconded by RT and carried unanimously.

5. Chairman's Report

The Chairman read his annual report as follows:

“Over the last twelve months the FoP has pursued the objectives set out in our Constitution: promoting the public benefit and enjoyment of Pittville Park and estate; supporting Cheltenham Borough Council in involving local

people in protecting, conserving and promoting good husbandry; encouraging more local people to use these areas and take an active interest in their future; and in providing a means of coordination for Park Watch. The focus of all those activities has been the support for the Borough's bid for a grant from the National Heritage Lottery Fund for the enhancement of Pittville Park and Estate.

We have publicised the progress of the Lottery Bid and encouraged public contributions to the process by the creation of a website, by the delivery of four newsletters during the year to each of 3000 households in the area, by frequent items in the local press and radio and by regular email communication with FoP members.

We have established links with local institutions with strong interests in the Park and Estate. These include PARA; Park Watch; Pittville School; Dunalley School; the University; UCAS and St Vincent's Centre.

Our position as a conduit for public opinion has been recognised by the invitation of the Borough Council to contribute to the preparation of the initial Lottery bid and currently to sit on the three Working Groups established by the Council to prepare the submission for the next stage of the bid in September 2008.

We have accumulated and publicised a list of possible enhancements, submitted by the general public, for consideration for inclusion in a Lottery funded programme and the list is always open for additions and discussion.

Members of the Executive Committee have visited other locations and websites of similar Heritage Lottery beneficiaries and other projects, seeking examples of bridges, buildings, gardens, features etc which might contribute to thinking about the enhancement of our own Estate.

Even now, the role of FoP is sometimes misunderstood. We are not a pressure group, nor in any way are we the mouthpiece of the Council or any political party within it. We do not compete, nor could we compete, with the long established PARA with its vigorous expertise in espousing the interests of Pittville residents. We recognise that the Park and its environs are in need of enhancement. The decayed Pittville gates, the vandalised lake bridge, the insalubrious and inadequate underpass beneath Evesham road are only the most obvious examples of the need for substantial funding. Pittville Estate should be a jewel of the Borough. The success of the Heritage Lottery Bid will be heavily influenced by evidence of the widest public support. The Friends of Pittville organisation exists to provide the general public with the widest possible opportunity to debate and contribute."

The Chairman invited questions.

Mr John Oates observed that when considering plans for the Park and Estate, the North Place car parks should be included. JC responded that he was aware of this and an integrated approach is being taken.

CE wished to emphasise the implications of the recent severe flooding at the Leisure Centre and any impact it may have on the HLF bid.

RT disagreed that the FoP is not a "pressure group", as stated by the Chairman. The Chairman and Cllr Prince reiterated that FoP's main purpose was to work in tandem with CBC in order to provide a conduit for the opinions of the local community in order to secure the necessary funds to improve the local environs. Para (C) of the FoP constitution applies. This is one of the differences between FoP and PARA, whose constitution Para 2 states: *"AIMS :-The aims of (PARA) are to be a pressure group to the local council and other statutory bodies.....etc"* This also partly covers the explanation given by the Chairman to a question of how is FoP different to PARA.

6. Amendment to the Constitution

The revisions to paragraphs F and G(2) had been notified to the FoP members as required by paragraphs P(2) and T of the Constitution. The revision to paragraph F was deferred.

The revised para G(2), first paragraph, of the Constitution proposed by the Excom to be adopted was as follows:

"In addition, the Executive Committee may appoint not more than 4 co-opted members, consisting of one representative from Pittville Area Residents Association (PARA), who shall not be one of the three officers of the PARA committee (Chairman, Secretary or Treasurer), one representative of Pittville Park Watch, and two Cheltenham Borough Councillors of the Pittville Ward. In doing so, no more than one third of the members of the Executive Committee shall be co-opted members."

In addition, a new second paragraph be inserted stating:

"The Chairman, Secretary and Treasurer of the Friends of Pittville Executive Committee shall not be committee members of PARA while holding these posts."

The original second paragraph becomes paragraph three.

Proposed by the Hon Secretary and seconded by Roger Turner. Carried with two nays.

Before the vote was taken, Mr Gary Wildin, Chairman of PARA, wished to make three points, which he confirmed later by email, and are quoted here verbatim.

In view of the poor acoustics in the hall, and the frequent interruptions by Mr Wildin while the Chairman was attempting to answer the points, the audience may have missed a lot of what the Chairman was trying to say. His responses are set out below.

Mr Wildin: "PARA has not been adequately consulted on this matter. We would not be able to offer a reciprocal agreement until the item has been formally considered at our next committee meeting in November." *(This latter refers to a request from FoP to PARA to be represented on PARA committee and have access to minutes, as they do ours.)*

Chairman's response: FoP reiterates its desire to work closely and harmoniously with PARA; the Chairman and several members of the FoP committee are themselves long standing members of PARA with a proven track record of active participation in that Association. The proposal to revise the relevant paragraphs of the constitution was published in FoP minutes on 7th August, placed on the FoP website and PARA notified immediately afterwards. No reciprocal agreement on excluding FoP Chairman, Secretary or Treasurer from sitting on the PARA committee has been sought or is necessary.

Mr Wildin: "It is unfortunate that PARA is being treated differently from the other groups with representatives on FoP committee. Is this a form of discrimination?"

Chairman's response: There is no question of PARA being treated "differently" from any other group because no other such group has a "representative" on the FoP Committee. Parkwatch, which was specifically singled out by Mr Wildin, is an informal, voluntary, non membership fee paying organisation without constitution or office bearers. Park Watch is explicitly mentioned in the FoP Constitution.

Mr Wildin: "PARA members could potentially be disadvantaged by the proposed restriction. Members may not feel able to have their point of view raised at FoP meetings by their preferred representative."

Chairman's response: It is difficult to see how PARA members could be disadvantaged by the restriction. The future PARA representative would be accorded the same respect and attention given to the previous PARA representative, who, while not a PARA office holder, made a major and valued contribution to the activities of FOP and cooperation between the two organisations. We look forward to welcoming his replacement.

In addition to these three points, Mr Wildin had a further two questions.

Mr Wildin: "Has the proposal had been checked for legality in the light of the FoP apparent position as lead consultative contact for the Borough Council lottery bid?"

Chairman's response: FoP has no position as "lead consultative contact" for the Borough Council Lottery Bid but has established itself as a conduit for public opinion open to all who wish their voices to be heard. As such, it has been invited to contribute to the planning processes, as indeed was PARA. There is no issue of legality and no reason to seek any external agreement to an internal, constitutional FoP structural matter.

Mr Wildin: "Has the proposed change had been agreed with the Lottery Commission?"

Chairman's response: These matters are not regulated by the Lottery Commission.

7. Heritage Lottery Bid – Status and Planning Structure

Mr John Crowther, Deputy Director Green Environment, Cheltenham Borough Council, briefed the audience on the current status of the bid for Heritage Lottery Funding and explained that the bid was under the HLF Parks for

People initiative, quite different to the award for Montpellier gardens. The 5 principles, which **must** be satisfied for a successful bid are:

1. Increase the range of audiences
2. Conserve and improve heritage value
3. Increase the range of volunteers involved
4. Improve skills and knowledge through training
5. Improve management and maintenance.

JC then elaborated on the points above and made particular mention of the decline in number of dedicated gardening staff from 96 a few years ago to a level of just 16, who are now required to be multi-skilled. In response to a question from RT about what CBC is doing to train more horticultural experts, LC replied that he is hoping to establish an apprentice scheme in the near future. A member of the audience, who deals with work placement for young people, expressed interest in working with JC on this matter.

A member of the audience suggested seeking support from the Racecourse in view of the fact that race goers frequent the Pittville Park and Estate during the race events. The Chairman welcomed the suggestion, which was already in hand.

Another member asked JC why the very popular Picnic in the Park had been discontinued. The underlying reason is one of cost in mounting such an event properly. In light of item 1 above, perhaps this needs to be re-visited.

An observation was made that signposting to Pittville Park from the town centre is non-existent and efforts should be made, as part of the HLF bid, to direct people to the Park from not only the town centre but from the main inbound traffic routes.

The Chairman thanked JC for his presentation and wished to record the Friends of Pittville's appreciation for both the past and ongoing work put in by his team to secure the HLF funding for Pittville Park and Estate.

8. Heritage Lottery Bid – Public Opinion Survey

Ruth Darling, from the CBC Communications Team, briefed the audience on the problems associated with increasing the audience and ensuring the community views are consulted and represented. She advised everyone of the on-line survey just launched on the website for Community First, consultants to the Community Consultation Work Group, at http://www.communityfirstpartnership.co.uk/cheltenhambc/user_survey/user_survey.htm. This survey will shortly appear on the CBC website also and can already be downloaded from the Friends of Pittville website at <http://www.friendsofpittville.org/docs/usersurveyHLF.pdf>. RD brought copies of the survey for distribution to the audience.

RD was asked if the survey form could be translated into Polish for distribution to a local Polish Family Group. A request to GCHQ for help on this would be sent.

The Chairman thanked RD for her presentation and noted the recent greatly improved communications between FoP and CBC.

9. Election of Executive Committee

The incumbent Executive Committee (Excom) members had previously stated their willingness to serve another year and were nominated en bloc. There was one other vacancy on the Excom, for which there was one nomination, Mr David Anderson, who works with Warwickshire District Council and has a great deal of experience in matters relevant to the HLF bid.

Proposed by Mr John Clayton and seconded by Cllr David Prince. Carried unanimously.

10. Any Other Business

In view of the difficulty the audience had hearing the proceedings, it was suggested that the venue be changed or a P.A. system used for the next AGM. Mr John Clayton volunteered to supply a P.A. system.

11. Next Meeting

The date for the next Annual General Meeting was set for October 2008, the precise day to be determined closer to the time in order to de-conflict with school half term holiday..

Meeting closed at 2045