



Minutes of Friends of Pittville Executive Committee Meeting – 10 June 2009

Note abbreviations used in the minutes: FOP = Friends of Pittville; PARA = Pittville Area Residents' Association; CBC = Cheltenham Borough Council

1 Members present

Hon Chairman Dave Prince (DP)
Hon Secretary Fiona Clarke (FC)
Hon Treasurer Paul Weston (PW)
Ward Cllr. Tim Cooper (TC)
Ward Cllr. Diane Hibbert (DH)
Judy Langhorn (JL)
Ron Pattinson (RP)
Anne Roberts (AR)

1.1 Apologies

Colin Eynon (CE)
Park Watch - Desmond Fitzgerald (DF)

1.2 Absent

Daud McDonald (DM) who may be at the PARA meeting being held tonight
PARA representative (not yet nominated by PARA)

1.3 Others present

Cheltenham Borough Council - Rosemary Mansbridge (RM)

2 Minutes of Executive Committee (ExComm) Meeting – 8 January 2009

There was a correction to the minutes: in paragraph 4.1 JL was to approach only schools (and not colleges) about 'What Pittville means to you' for incorporating into the bridge design; also, RP noted that in the agenda Colin Eynon's name was spelled incorrectly.

3 Matters arising

There were none.

4 Feedback from CBC on the HLF bid

- 4.1** RM informed the committee that she could not say very much about the HLF bid. She was here to listen to comments from FOP to feedback to the HLF bid Steering Group. The agenda for the Steering Group meeting is with Cllr Paul Massey and will be circulated to the Group tomorrow, 11 June. Nothing will be decided until after that meeting on 17 June.

DH asked whether it was the case that there was money we could tap into. RM replied that at the HLF bid feedback meeting she had attended, with the CBC solicitor, they had identified a possible source of funding.

DP pointed out that we still did not know why the bid was unsuccessful. He thinks we could have had some explanation by now, especially as the HLF had asked CBC to do more work on the original proposal. Why would they do that if there was no hope of funding? He asked RM to give the ExComm some information.

RM pointed out that she and Rob Bell (RB) were officers of CBC (not decision makers); she regretted the delay; is not able to explain to us why we failed, or tell us what the options are, or what might have been decided.

DP pressed RM by asking who is stopping her from telling the ExComm anything. FOP has put a lot of time and effort into the bid; they might not be so keen to work with CBC in future.

RM said there are no secrets or embarrassment about the bid. The issue is to do with the way CBC works.

DH thanked RM for her comments and recognised that she was in a difficult position. But she wanted it put on record that this group, Friends of Pittville, was extremely disappointed and angry that it has not been able to be kept informed. She will make sure that CBC knows this. Decisions about FOP could have been made at this meeting if the facts were known. It might be that FOP would have disbanded if there is no future funding available.

DP said that there is no political dimension to the matter. He then asked if there were any other questions for RM.

RM invited feedback from the ExComm which she could pass to RB before the HLF bid Steering Group meeting which he is chairing.

AR asked if it was secret, like GCHQ.

PW said he, also, was sorry that RM had been put in this position but he thought the reasons for failure, at least, could have been made known by now.

RM said the HLF debriefing paper would be freely available after the HLF bid Steering Group has met.

RP asked would it be somewhere where we went to read it; would it be sent to the ExComm.?

RM replied that each Friends group will receive a copy, as soon as the meeting is over. That means each group will receive it next week.

FC asked does DP represent the FOP on the HLF bid Steering Group?

RM said it was.

RM left the meeting at this point.

4.2 DP asked if there was anything else ExComm members wished to raise about the HLF bid.

JL commented that whenever FOP does anything for CBC, they never come back, e.g. the school childrens' painting exhibition at the Pump Room. It was to be at Easter; nothing was said about the delay. The first she knew of it was FC's e-mail to FOP members.

FC explained that she was informed about it by RM by e-mail at 1100 on the first of the three day's exhibition, asking her if she could come at 1400 that afternoon to meet Gloucestershire Echo staff. As she was away FC had not read the e-mail until the morning of the second day. She immediately sent an e-mail to the membership, not having had time to see the exhibition. It had been very disappointing to miss the Gloucestershire Echo and an opportunity to promote the FOP. The exhibition itself was extremely disappointing, with no information about the bridge design, Christopher Lisney etc. In themselves the paintings were charming, but many visitors also had been very upset at the lack of information and rather poor display.

AR asked DH and DP if they really didn't know anything.

RP said that the exhibition was a continuation of everything to date; promises made and broken.

AR asked whose fault it was; was it the councillors?

DH pointed out that the poor exhibition was due to poor administration and lack of thought. There must be a good reason for keeping information until CBC is ready to go public. She suspects that there may be good news but it is hard as FOP has worked voluntarily and been pushed to the sidelines. It is not surprising there is bad feeling.

FC said she'd been very surprised at the last ExComm meeting that a designer had been chosen for the bridge without open tender. There was a token mention of inviting others to bid but it seemed pretty cut and dried that Christopher Lisney was to interpret the childrens' work. She also noted DF's feelings about acknowledging – or not - the work by the army engineers in building the wooden bridge which had been burned down.

RP said he thought we were only involved so that CBC could tick all the boxes about community involvement.

5 Proposed amalgamation of Friends of Pittville and PARA

5.1 DP invited each of the ExComm members to speak openly in turn to air their views on this idea. It would be good if the committee could come to a decision this evening. He explained that PARA had been in decline in recent years. There had not been a quorum at the AGM on 13 May 2009 and it had proved difficult to assemble a committee; no-one came forward as Chairman. The former Chairman has asked FOP for support. PARA could fold but that would not be good for the area. But FOP has questions about its future too. PARA has asked if FOP will amalgamate with them. What does the ExComm think?

PW said that the two groups have their respective aims; FOP was wide-ranging, beyond Pittville to Cheltenham and beyond. PARA exists to protect the interests of residents of Pittville. We are a Friends group. Would PARA be interested in what we want to do? We are not so interested in planning decisions.

FC said that we cannot think about possible amalgamation until we agree what FOP is for. Will it stay the same? The Constitution makes no mention of the HLF bid, although the perception is that FOP is tied to it. What does CBC want from a group such as FOP? Whatever it is, is it what FOP thinks is best for Pittville? Arguments for are strength in numbers and PARA's long experience in Pittville. Arguments against are that FOP is wider than a residents' association ; FOP is for anyone with an interest in Pittville, including its historical and cultural importance, PARA is a pressure group; FOP is beginning to establish its own identity as working with CBC, not against (previous item notwithstanding!!) There is also the legacy of past differences within PARA and with them and the setting up of FOP. FOP has also established an excellent web-site with complete documentation on the group, a photo archive, history of the park etc. Issues if there were an amalgamation include agreeing joint aims and objectives, a name for the group, appointment of Chairman and committee, how to forge a new identity for a web site and printed newsletters. If FOP were to remain as it is, would it be better to focus on the park only or, as now, the park and other green spaces including the squares and lawns. One option is to take inspiration from Friends of Naunton Park; FC offered to tell the ExComm about her discussions with their current chairman later in the meeting if time.

JL would prefer to remain separate. PARA was effective at the beginning. She enjoys the focus of FOP at getting the park, squares etc, improved. People can use the internet to check on planning applications and register their thoughts. Planning applications is not what she wants to do. She does not want to feel that we have no say with CBC. Even for the bridge, the HLF bid Steering Group will decide, FOP has no role in deciding what happens. We have no power. Even if FOP is the workers, the ants, it still needs to have a say. She wants more respect paid to FOP.

TC said that when, at first, he saw all the Pittville groups he wondered; and still thinks, at the end of the day, it is a small area and it would be good to amalgamate. Sub-groups could deal with different areas of interest. FOP also needs to include St Paul's. There is strength in numbers.

AR agreed with TC; she feels there are benefits for the two groups to work together. The original PARA did seem more open, did not deal with planning issues, had activities, and seemed more about cultivating friendships. It would be good to have more members; she would like to keep the name PARA and to include all the green spaces in Pittville. She thinks the issues FC and JL raised could be addressed. Basically, she is in favour of amalgamation.

DH said she wasn't sure what amalgamation means. If PARA wants to join FOP, that's good. FOP does not want to be a pressure group; if PARA wants to continue as they have in the last few years, she is not in favour of joining together. She would be in favour of PARA members being encouraged to join FOP.

DH added that the HLF bid Steering Group is the decision maker; FOP is represented on that by DP, our Chairman. FOP's work is important and valued. The HLF bid Master Plan will be used as a basis of future activity. There is an issue with poor communication, but FOP has to remember that CBC is very slow.

RP said that FOP and PARA's aims were not the same. In answer to the question of where FOP is going, we have to assume it is in the same direction. PARA is a pressure group. The big problem has been the comments in their newsletters which may not be shared by the general membership. PARA is folding; members should be encouraged to join FOP. There is no need to change FOP's name; we could say 'Friends of Pittville, incorporating PARA'. There has been some discussion between FOP and PARA – but it is **absorption, not amalgamation**. FOP could offer automatic transfer of membership, paid by PARA, or there could be a transfer of funds in proportion to the number of PARA members joining FOP.

RP added that DF felt the same as he did. The mechanics would have to be discussed. Also FOP could do some of the things that PARA currently does, but this would have to be addressed later. We are not equal partners.

DP agreed there was strength in numbers. PARA needs a new identity; it has lost direction. As AR said, it used to have one like FOP does; one group has to keep its identity; a change of name would not be good.

- 5.2 The ExComm then noted that the recent PARA AGM did not reach a quorum, it had 700 members; it was not the PARA members' fault that things had declined; it was a pity as PARA was well known. Also that FOP needed to be clear about its direction before offering to absorb PARA; FOP constitution was clear about its remit. DH asked the ExComm to think about what FOP would do if there were no HLF or other money at stake? There were plenty of reasons to exist. RP added that if pressure is needed in future, an individual or group of individuals can lead it, as the recent Pond House case showed.

FC then summarised what she had learned on her visit to Naunton Park and from a conversation with the Friends of Naunton Park chairman. There are about 200 friends who pay a nominal sum for two newsletters a year. There is no web-site. The group was formed when CBC threatened the park with closure a few years ago. They became a charitable group with the aid of a solicitor. This status is useful when applying for grants. The group obtained a Living Spaces Fund grant of about £17,000 in 2004. They also have a Green Flag award, achieved with the help of CBC. The Friends tendered for a landscape gardener with input from the local community; CBC gardeners maintain the park, the childrens' play areas and the playing fields. The Friends have raised funds in the past through activities and have paid for some of the play equipment and wood sculptures. Most of the Friends work and it is proving hard now to organise events. They are not a residents' association (there are several groups fulfilling various roles).

Friends of Naunton Park

http://www.cheltenham.gov.uk/site/scripts/documents_info.php?documentID=347&pageNumber=3

History of Naunton Park

http://www.cheltenham.gov.uk/site/scripts/documents_info.php?documentID=347

Living Spaces

<http://www.living-spaces.org.uk/>

Green Flag Award

<http://www.greenflagaward.org.uk/award/>

DP then read out a letter from PARA'S outgoing chairman, inviting FOP to discuss possible amalgamation. DH pointed out the FOP does not **represent** the people of Pittville as PARA does. The PARA committee is meeting this evening and DP will telephone their chairman tomorrow to arrange a meeting; FOP would be represented by its Chairman and Secretary.

DP summarised the offer to PARA – FOP invites members of PARA to join FOP (i.e. they must opt in rather than opt out); funds to cover their membership will be transferred from PARA to FOP over a period still to be agreed; two PARA members will be invited to join FOP committee; the group will be called 'Friends of Pittville, incorporating PARA' ('incorporating PARA' may be for a limited period). Basically, PARA is joining FOP.

6 Any other business

- 6.1** DP informed the ExComm that an ex-gratia payment will be made to Flip Media for creating and maintaining the **FOP web-site and membership database** to date. This is for three year's work and had been agreed in principle at the 23 January 2007 ExComm meeting (refer paragraph 3.2). The invoice is for £1073 but RP has agreed that FOP will pay £500 only. CBC has also agreed to contribute £250 to the £500. This will be a help as a great deal of the web-site and FOP work to date has been in support of the HLF bid. There is only £719 in the FOP kitty. Flip Media will be paid once CBC's contribution is received.

DH asked that in future the ExComm be informed of the estimated cost for the year, in advance, so that it knows what to expect.

The principle that out of pocket expenses such as printer paper and petrol be covered was reiterated.

- 6.2 The bridge** DP and DH are on the HLF bid Steering Group and they will make it clear that FOP wants to be involved. FC asked about the previous bridge's military connections and hoped that DF's concern that it be included in the design would be mentioned at the meeting.

RP noted that there was nothing on the web-site about the bridge because we had not been given the information promised by CBC at the last meeting (refer paragraph 4.1)

7 Date of next meeting

This will be decided once DP and FC have met the PARA Chairman and should be as soon as possible after the HLF bid Steering Group meets on 17 June. The Friends of Pittville will be informed of all developments and asked to comment and raise issues etc.