



Minutes of Friends of Pittville Annual General Meeting 20 October 2009

Abbreviations used: CBC = Cheltenham Borough Council; FOP = Friends of Pittville

1. Executive Committee (ExCom) members present

Hon Chairman Dave Prince (DP)
Hon Treasurer Paul Weston (PW)
Hon Secretary Fiona Clarke (FC)
Judy Langhorn (JL)
Anne Roberts (AR)
Ward Cllr. Tim Cooper (TC)
Ward Cllr. Diane Hibbert (DH)
Park Watch - Desmond Fitzgerald (DF)

Apologies

Colin Eynon (CE) from the Excom, and also Ron Pattinson (RP) for late arrival
John and Pauline Clayton, Joyce Cummings, Eileen Lockwood, Tony Mason, Derek Rue

CBC officers present

Rosemary Mansbridge (RM)

23 FOP members were present and 12 interested members of the public.

2. Minutes of the previous AGM (21 October 2008)

The minutes were made available at the meeting and were unanimously accepted as a true record of the 2008 Annual General Meeting.

3. Matters arising

There were no matters arising.

4. Chairman's report

The Chairman said it had been a slow year, but a fruitful one. The failure of the HLF bid had been a great disappointment, through no fault of CBC or FOP. It had been a very strong bid, the strongest in the south-west region. However, it had been up against bids relating to the 2012 Olympics and, in fact, no money had been awarded to the south-west. FOP had not been disheartened and some money was secured through 2007 flood relief funds.

Within the Excom there had been much discussion about the role of FOP. FOP wants to look after the park and the Pittville Estate, including the Pittville Gates. It wants to explore ideas with CBC

conservation and heritage officers, and to secure external funds for important projects, such as restoring the gates, which would not be cheap.

Another area of concern is the lack of catering at the playground in the east park. During the summer there had been nothing for sale to eat or drink at 'Bands in the Park'. Any catering facility has to fit the environment and serve its purpose. It must not detract from Central Cross Cafe, which is a valued asset. The east park needs two facilities.

Volunteering projects is another idea. It is the little things that matter, and volunteers can make a big difference.

This is probably enough for the coming year, but others ideas are welcome. These can be raised at the end of the meeting.

The Chairman thanked the Executive Committee for their support over the past year; everyone gets on well and is looking to achieve the same thing.

5. Treasurer's report

The Treasurer noted that the accounts were very simple. Costs were £766 and income £460. FOP had leaned on reserves during the year, leaving only £398 in the bank.

£500 was for setting up the web-site; this was only a fraction of the true cost. Income from membership was £210. CBC had contributed £250 toward the web-site; this was most welcome, but was also an acknowledgment of the input of FOP into the HLF bid.

Standing order forms are available at tonight's meeting and members were encouraged to pay for 2010 now. Non-members present were invited to join.

The Chairman noted that this level of deficit was not sustainable. The original bill for the web-site had been £1000; this was negotiated down to £500, and as we'd learned already, CBC had contributed £250 towards that.

FOP hopes to bring in more revenue by holding fund-raising events; these would be advertised in the newsletter and on the web-site.

Action: to produce the newsletter before Christmas 2009 (Excom and FC)

There were no questions and the Treasurer's report was accepted unanimously.

6. Changes to Constitution

The proposed revisions to Section G (2) of the Constitution had been notified to FOP members 21 days prior to the AGM, as required by the Constitution, Sections P (2) and T.

The Chairman said there were three minor changes to Section G (2)) relating to removing references to PARA (Pittville Area Residents' Association) as PARA no longer existed.

The revised section is as follows:

G (2) Co-opted Members

- (a) 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, **and one other as determined by the Executive Committee.** In doing so, not more than one third of the members of the Executive Committee shall be co-opted members.

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

(b) Each appointment of a co-opted member shall be made at the Annual General Meeting, or at a special meeting of the Executive Committee called under clause J (1), and shall take effect from the end of that meeting unless the appointment is to fill a place which has not then been vacated in which case the appointment shall run from the date when the post becomes vacant.

(c) No co-opted member shall be eligible to be Chairman.

The revisions were accepted unanimously.

7. Election of officers and committee

All members of FOP had been notified that anyone wishing to be elected to the Executive Committee should return a signed and endorsed Nomination Form to the Hon. Secretary at least two weeks before the AGM.

Forms had been received from all 2008 Excom members bar one (received from Dave Prince, Paul Weston, Fiona Clarke, Colin Eynon, Judy Langhorn, Ron Pattinson and Anne Roberts).

Election of Chairman: Dave Prince was elected unopposed to serve another year as Chairman.
Proposed: Anne Roberts and Seconded: Terry Langhorn.

Election of Treasurer: Paul Weston was elected unopposed to serve another year as Treasurer.
Proposed: Anne Roberts and Seconded: Tom Clarke.

Election of Secretary: Fiona Clarke was elected unopposed to serve another year as Secretary.
Proposed: Diane Hibbert and Seconded: Dave Prince.

Election of ordinary members of the committee: the Excom members present were asked to stand up; they were elected en bloc.
Proposed: Dave Prince and Seconded: Peter Simmons.

There was one new nomination to the Excom – Mrs Christine Sharpe, from the Board of Governors of Pittville School.
Proposed: Diane Hibbert and Seconded: Paul Weston.

Re-appointment of co-opted members: the three co-opted members (Councillors Diane Hibbert and Tim Cooper, and Pittville Park Watch representative Desmond Fitzgerald) had also submitted forms. They were re-appointed en bloc.

The Chairman said there were a couple of vacancies on the Excom and anyone interested could join during the year, by submitting a Nomination Form to the Hon. Secretary.

8. Future funding for Pittville Park

The Chairman said a lot had been going on recently. FOP had invited Councillor Roger Wyborn to the AGM. He is the cabinet member with responsibility for sustainability and is the accountable officer for the recent report on Pittville Park. Unfortunately he had a long standing former commitment and was unable to attend. He has now been invited to the next Excom meeting on a date in November that is convenient for him.

The Chairman invited Councillor Diane Hibbert (DH) to say a few words, as she had been at the Council meeting on 12 October when the report was to have been presented.

DH reminded the meeting that £300,000 from the Capital Reserve had been earmarked as CBC's £1,000,000 contribution towards the total £4,000,000 HLF Pittville Park bid. Once the bid was unsuccessful, CBC had to decide if this amount was to remain available for Pittville Park. It became apparent that the CBC'S ruling group didn't want that money kept for Pittville Park and, at the last minute, the report was withdrawn from the agenda of the Council meeting on 12 October.

It seems, furthermore, that the CBC's accountants said that the £300,000 had to go back into the central pot, and be available for other services such as the Everyman Theatre and Cheltenham Football Club. It could not even be allocated to other parks in Cheltenham, as recommended in the report.

Because the report was withdrawn, there was no discussion and no vote, so the money is still ring-fenced for Pittville Park.

The ruling group is determined that the £300,000 will be returned to the centre in the annual budget setting programme, which is agreed in February 2010. This process includes a public consultation, and everyone is encouraged to speak up if they want the money to be retained for Pittville Park. The crucial period is November and December 2009.

DH asked everyone present to write to CBC saying why they think the money should be retained for Pittville Park. One important fact is that it will be very difficult for FOP to secure external funding if there is no financial commitment from CBC. We need this money for leveraging more money. In fact, most of the money spent since 2007, or still to be spent this financial year, on Pittville Park, has been with external funds.

We have the HLF bid Master Plan to guide us; a lot of good things have happened in the park, and it is only by working in partnership that the improvements that have been achieved in this period were achieved.

Questions and comments were then invited from the audience.

1 – To clarify, has the £300,000 not been spent yet?

DH responded that it has not, and the controlling group can decide what to do with it. The money was actually to come from the sale of the Midwinter site, which had not eventuated yet.

2 – Will any more be spent on Pittville Park?

DH said there will be routine maintenance.

3 – Is Pittville Park maintenance ring-fenced or itemised separately?

DH thought probably not.

4 – Parks in Cheltenham have always been under-resourced. Pittville Park, in particular, looks shabby. There are many rats (others agreed). There has been no shrub planting since the speaker's childhood, and no exciting plantings of flowers. What about setting up groups to do the work and to get matched funding? Is there any opportunity of getting money from bequests?

The Chairman responded that on-going maintenance costs (for plantings, play areas etc.) have to be kept in mind. Money should be set aside on a regular basis for this, but CBC does not do it.

The Chairman added that he was disappointed that CBC did not go ahead with a second HLF bid; the £300,000 would have resulted in much more. If there is nothing there, we will not get matching funds. Pittville is an important, large and well-used park. The next speaker agreed.

5 – The park is used now more than ever. Having volunteers is one way of overcoming some of the maintenance costs. The National Trust has 20 per cent of its expenditure in kind, through volunteers. Volunteers are active on Leckhampton Hill.

The Chairman responded that views on volunteering differ among members of the Excom.

6 – People need information about who to contact in CBC if they are to register their thoughts on funding; also to know what issues to raise. Not everyone has a computer, so it is crucial to reach people in other ways.

The Chairman said that the next printed newsletter would provide all the required information. (This goes to about 2500 households in Pittville and Fairview, and to the university and small businesses in St Pauls).

Action: to prepare the content for the newsletter and to distribute it in time for November – December consultation period (ExCom and FC).

9. The Community Bridge

Rosemary Mansbridge updated the meeting on what is proposed and urged everyone to make their views known, to her tonight if time but, better, through the CBC's planning web-site.

She had mounted a small display with detailed engineering and sculptural drawings, photographs of the old bridge, and examples of the sculptor's work. She said it is a little difficult to get a real picture of the final product from these. She would leave the display when she left the meeting, so people could look at it more closely at the end of the meeting.

RM went on to say that the public were consulted earlier in the year about 'what makes Pittville important to you?' The hope is that, if the community is involved, it is possible that the vandalism which led to the removal of the previous wooden bridge might be reduced, and people would have more pride in the bridge.

Heritage and conservation staff had been consulted to ensure that the bridge fitted into a grade 2 listed park.

Three structural engineering companies had been invited to tender; the successful one was Clarke Nicholls and Marcel Ltd. They had produced the drawings we see tonight. These days we need to take into account health and safety issues, access for people in wheelchairs etc., environmental issues

and the physical situation, e.g. the two banks are at different heights. The bridge curves in two directions – to the side and over the water, which is aesthetically pleasing.

The most important point is that the bridge is made of metal with a patinated surface; it is as vandal resistant as it can be.

The unique feature is the ‘art work’ which is attached to the railings on both sides. The illustrations are of the west-facing railings. Some of the ideas for these decorative features were from the drawings made by students at Dunalley and Pittville schools.

Examples of the sculptor, Christopher Lisney’s, work are in photos. On the bridge, the decorations are three dimensional; they are the same height as the top of the handrails. At either end of the bridge are two sculpted bulrushes, slightly curving out from the bridge, of different heights.

All the information about the bridge is on the CBC web-site at http://planning.cheltenham.gov.uk/PublicAccess/tdc/DcApplication/application_detailview.aspx?case_no=KQSDSAELOBC00

RM also provided the planning application reference number – 09/01415/FUL.

The bridge will be considered at the next Planning meeting on 19 November 2009.

An application for additional funding for the bridge will be submitted tomorrow, Wednesday 21 October, to the Gloucestershire Environmental Trust.

RM then invited questions and comments.

1 – If planning permission goes ahead, when will it be built?

RM replied that the bridge will be constructed off-site; it will take a week to ten days to assemble, hopefully in late January 2010, weather permitting.

2 – What will happen to the old piers?

RM said that these will be taken out after the bridge is completed.

3 – Why was FOP not consulted earlier?

The Chairman responded that FOP Excom was consulted from the beginning. Not all the committee thinks the bridge is ‘the best thing since sliced bread’ and our individual views have been expressed.

RM added that now is the time to make further comment, as the public consultation period has started.

4 – If the finish is patinated, will people still be able to spray it?

RM said it is an uneven surface, so is more difficult to spray and it is easier to clean off.

5 – When will the bridge be operational?

RM anticipates by Easter 2010.

6 – If the landscape is a grade 2 landscape, how can it look like an average motorway bridge?

RM responded that English Heritage has been consulted and CBC has been led to believe there is no problem. They will be approached formally as part of the planning application process.

7 – What is the surface for the three dimensional sculptures?

RM said they will be dipped metal.

8 – Is the bridge wide enough for motorbikes – which we don't want?

RM said there will be bollards at each end, and this will keep three-wheeled vehicles off. However, it must be possible for wheelchairs, prams and electric buggies to cross.

9 – Will there be lighting?

RM said not immediately as funds don't allow. The fittings will be put in place though. The Chairman added that these are the sorts of things we need more money for, now.

10 – Will there be cameras? Shouldn't these come before lighting?

RM said, no, because lighting is a deterrent and it makes the bridge feel safer.

11 – Is the funding actually in place?

RM replied that CBC has a significant sum, but more is needed. Since the original idea, detailed plans have led to mounting costs. CBC will be seeking external funding, as mentioned earlier.

The Chairman thanked Rosemary Mansbridge for her presentation and she left the meeting at this point.

10. Volunteering in Pittville Park

The Secretary opened by saying that volunteering had already been raised this evening and this was encouraging.

The background to FOP taking volunteering further is that the HLF submission, Section 6 Proposals, referred to FOP's role in the public consultation. To quote ' a major phase of reinvestment in the park may be the time to encourage wider participation, fund raising and activities supported by formal council input and with a direct role participating in the management of the park'. Volunteering fits each of these elements.

There are already many such groups in Cheltenham, such as Friends of Naunton Park (who have achieved a beautiful and well-maintained garden, admittedly much smaller than Pittville Park) and the Friends of Leckhampton Hill and Charlton Kings.

Tonight FOP wants to seek the meeting's views, and get an idea of numbers of who might be interested.

The Secretary had met the CBC Landscape Services Manager, who said there was a lot that volunteers could do. It would be better to start small. He favoured litter picking but FC preferred gardening related work. Park Watch already did litter picking, mostly on an individual basis. She also has been approached by one of the Community Rangers who runs the Pittville Lake Fishing Club; she would like FOP involvement.

More ambitious projects could include clearing the lake of litter; tidying the street leading from Pittville Gates to Central Cross Drive; cleaning the underpass and its approaches on a regular basis and painting the walls; painting the railings, where necessary.

CBC suggests volunteers work once a month for two hours; CBC staff would carry out risk assessments, train and supervise; and CBC would provide tools and equipment and appropriate working clothes.

Insurance was something potential volunteers would be concerned about. If volunteers work under supervision of a council employee with skills and knowledge of the work being completed, they would be deemed staff and be covered by the CBC. If volunteers worked alone, FOP would need to take out public liability insurance. CBC provided information about a policy offered by Zurich through BTCV (formerly British Trust for Conservation Volunteers), the premier umbrella organisation for voluntary groups working on environmental projects. This would be beyond FOP's financial capability at the moment.

The meeting was invited to ask questions and make comments.

Points raised were that much could be achieved to improve the appearance of Pittville Park, as had been done in Hatherley Park; many people already collect litter in their own street or on routes they regularly check; DF, the Park Watch representative, wanted to see police enforce anti-litter laws; litter bins on a Monday morning are overflowing; the bins for dog waste have been removed - these are necessary.

The Chairman responded that we need more assistance from people who live on the park. And FOP, as a group, could ask the police to make more regular patrols and to prosecute when they can. He also said FOP could request more litter bins (later someone suggested the bin lids should have cigarette trays in them).

Action: ExCom and Chairman

It was also noted that community policemen are in Imperial Gardens at key times and manage to keep litter and anti-social behaviour to a minimum. Lynn Aston of Gloucestershire Police said that they are active in Whaddon. Her colleagues make home visits to young people about whom they are concerned. Her colleagues patrol on foot and on bikes between midnight and 2am. But usually it is a matter of displacing rather than providing anything for the young people to do.

The Chairman invited anyone interested in volunteering to fill out the form which was available from the Secretary. (Fourteen people did so).

Action: The Secretary will go back to CBC to discuss the next steps.

11. Park Watch

DF informed the meeting that Park Watch is an informal group of individuals who work alongside the police, ward councillors and CBC officers. Park Watch is also concerned about vandalism. They want to keep the park nice the whole year for those who use the park on a regular basis, e.g. dog walkers,

runners, cyclists, exercise groups. The aim is 'to displace the vandal' and vandalism has gone down demonstrably. If anyone is interested, add their name to the list – there are no duties as such, no fees, just join in and report anything untoward to the key people.

12. Any other business

1 – Has FOP approached the racecourse for funding?

The Chairman responded that FOP has not asked for money directly, although there was a meeting between the former Chairman and the racecourse managing director. The racecourse contributed to the work carried out recently by Gloucestershire Highways on Evesham Road. FOP could possibly approach the racecourse for small projects.

2 – Has FOP met the owner of Hotel on the Park in Evesham Road? He seems keen to improve the area around his hotel and is funding the planting on the roundabout leading into Pittville Circus.

The Chairman said he and DH have met him and he has ambitious plans. FOP will invite him to an Excom meeting to explore his ideas.

Action: ExCom and Chairman

3 – There was a motorbike day recently on the Promenade. It really engaged the young people. Could that be repeated?

Lynn Aston said an event was planned for 31 October on the racecourse car park. There would be a ten week course where young people could learn about how and where they can ride. Everyone is welcome on 31 October.

13. Date of next annual general meeting

This will be in September or October 2010, on a date to be determined.

The Chairman thanked everyone for coming and invited them to have a cup of tea or coffee and a biscuit, look at the bridge designs in detail, and to talk informally with each other and Excom members. The meeting finished at 8.30pm.

Fiona Clarke
Hon. Sec. Friends of Pittville