



Minutes of Friends of Pittville Executive Committee Meeting – 8 January 2010

1. Members present

Hon Secretary Fiona Clarke (FC)
Hon Treasurer Paul Weston (PW)
Colin Eynon (CE)
Judy Langhorn (JL)
Park Watch Desmond Fitzgerald (DF)
Ward Cllr Diane Hibbert (DH)
Ward Cllr Tim Cooper (TC) – till 7.15

1.1 Apologies

Anne Roberts
Christine Sharpe

1.2 Others present

Ward Cllr Roger Whyborn – from 6.25 to 7.15pm

In the absence of a Chairman, Diane Hibbert agreed to chair the meeting, which started earlier than usual, at 6.30pm, because of the weather.

2. Recent resignations

FC had informed the committee, in writing, that both the Chairman, Dave Prince, and committee member Ron Pattinson had submitted their resignations before Christmas. These resignations were not co-ordinated, though both felt that they had made their contribution over the last three years and that the time had come to move on. Ron was willing to continue managing the website and server.

FC explained that there was no provision in the Constitution for replacing the Chairman mid-term, but it would appear that the ExComm could appoint one of its members to be acting chairman. One person could be co-opted to the committee to replace Ron, as set out in the 2009 constitution.

DH said it was a pity, as the ExComm was working well as a team, and there was a real need for such a group as FOP. She asked if anyone would be willing to take on the chair in an acting role, until the next AGM. Judy Langhorn said she was willing and was duly appointed, with effect from the end of the meeting.

CE had suggested to FC said that we should amend the Constitution once again; creating the post of Deputy Chairman, to deal with such a situation should it arise again. This would be put to the members at the next AGM. **Action: FC**

It was agreed that FC and JL would sound out some of the volunteers at the gardening working party on 21 January to see if they'd be interested in joining the committee. They would be invited to the next meeting to see how they felt about it. **Action: FC and JL**

CE suggested that we write to Dave and Ron to thank them for everything they have done, and to thank Ron for his continued assistance with the website and server. We agreed, also, to acknowledge their contribution in the printed newsletter and in an e-mail to members. **Action: FC**

3. CBC 2010/11 financial planning update – Cllr. Roger Whyborn, CBC Cabinet Member for Sustainability

RW had been invited to the ExComm meeting to discuss the decision at the Council meeting on 12 October 2009 to withdraw his report on Pittville Park at the last moment. The original recommendation in that report was to 'allocate the £300,000 capital reserve ring-fenced for the Pittville Park development scheme to the provisional investment schedule 5 detailed in this report'. Basically the £300,000 was to be reallocated to improvements to seven other parks in Cheltenham. This is not happening now.

There was considerable discussion about the fact that the money was from the capital budget, not the revenue budget. There were other demands on the former including Regent's Arcade, Everyman Theatre and IT in the municipal offices.

Questions were invited.

TC said that the provisional investment schedule 5 had proposed splitting the money over several parks; this was now not happening, even though they still needed that investment.

DH noted that money could not be taken from Pittville Park and given to others because it was not in the Business Plan. The full council had agreed to spend £300,000 on Pittville Park. The final budget will be going to a meeting of the full council for approval on 12 February. The public can attend that meeting and the budget could be challenged then. She said that CBC has a duty to take on public responses submitted before 26 January.

CE asked how much of this decision about the £300,000 is due to the Icelandic 'situation'. RW said the short answer was 'none'; it had not influenced the decision to direct the £300,000 capital from Pittville Park to any other project or projects.

PW asked to what extent having the £300,000 would have helped FOP or CBC get more money from other sources; how significant is it that we don't have it? RW said it was 'a blow'.

DH asked why it could not be kept in the reserve; it will earn a little interest and it can be used to leverage more money. RW responded that it had been returned and that one couldn't say that parks were a special case.

TC said that the public does think they are a priority.

DF asked if had the HLF bid been successful, the money would have been kept for Pittville Park. RW replied that the bid had failed, so it was reconsidered.

CE said he clearly remembered asking someone (perhaps it was Rob Bell) if the money was ring-fenced, even if the bid failed, and he'd been told it was.

RW said that he hoped he had an open mind, to which DH said it sounded like a 'done deal'. RW then said that if there was a lot of feedback CBC would have to think about it.

DH said it was almost as if it was the Everyman Theatre versus Pittville Park.

RW replied that the Everyman needed certain repairs that could not wait. However, if there was a clear bias one way or the other he would hope the council would be open to change.

JL asked if it was possible to share the £300,000 (between the two).

TC said we need to start driving the agenda a bit, we need to have specific proposals and priorities; if we don't have specifics, we are not in a strong position.

CE asked if the offer to the Everyman of £250,000 was because they had submitted an HLF bid. It sounded like a sheer grab to bail out the Everyman. RW said there was a subtle difference – the Everyman Theatre building is owned by CBC. While the art gallery and museum had its bid in, CBC could not submit yet another.

DH said it was strange that a cash strapped council should give money to an outside body. RW said he would need to hear this from a wider group than in this room.

DH went on to say that the Pittville HLF Master Plan had identified a massive need, not least from the community it serves. The Everyman goes to schools, but it can generate an income. Pittville Park is Cheltenham's heritage, that's the worry. It's not just another park down the road. It must be better quality and be a better environment.

RW said he agrees, but if he went to all the councillors he'd get a wide variety of viewpoints.

DF asked if the Everyman repairs were required for health and safety. TC replied that yes, to some extent. The boxes are currently closed because they are unstable; the auditorium needs to be refurbished and redecorated; it is an important historic building. He said we need to have some specific proposals for the park and we could go to the racecourse, UCAS and others for some funding.

JL asked if there was another CBC fund for restoring the Pittville Gates. RW said he's seen them and they were tatty. There is a fund, but it's not nearly enough; it needs a fundraising drive.

JL asked if FOP could raise funds, would CBC meet half or part way?

DH said that once the money (the £300,000) is gone, it's gone. That's what galls everyone. There's been a lot of volunteer work to support the HLF bid; it's a kick in the teeth for FOP and others. It could be used to generate income. FOP could apply for funds elsewhere.

RW said he can try to understand our feelings and our tenacity. But CBC has to deal with even more problems, such as with Imperial Garden's drainage. The reality is that CBC does not have lots of money.

DH said the reality was that CBC was giving money to the Everyman; it is choosing to give the money to other things. She hopes that as a result of the consultation that CBC can reconsider; it makes sense to keep some money to allocate to Pittville Park, should it put forward a proposal. RW agreed. CE and TC supported DH; it would not cost any money to keep it, **especially as it is still in the pot**. DH emphasised that RW should be defending the green environment.

PW asked if it was the intention to give the Everyman money before CBC knew of the HLF bid. CE said the request came in after the bid; it is still in the application process; if it fails, we could still have the money.

TC said we have skipped over how it was decided not to make a second HLF bid for Pittville Park. Would we be able to submit a new bid if the art gallery and museum's fails?

RW said there were problems in other parks; if CBC did have the capital for parks, Pittville would not be first on the list. Furthermore, Cheltenham Festivals does not have enough money to make good the damage its audiences cause in Imperial Gardens. DH said they should keep a reserve to put right the damage.

There were no further questions or comments. DH thanked Cllr. Whyborn for coming and giving us further information and his views. It had been helpful. He (and Tim Cooper, who had another engagement) left the meeting.

4. Minutes of Executive Committee (ExComm) meeting – 11 November 2009

There was one correction to the minutes of the previous Committee Meeting, provided by Karen Radford, Heritage and Conservation Manager, CBC, as follows:

"Thank you for the email and the minutes. However I have noticed something in the minutes which I feel I must comment on, which is as follows: *Section 3.1 ".....Severn Trent, which is providing a substantial amount of money, is not involved and does not have a view on the style of the bridge; it was approved by the heritage officer and heritage bodies"*.

However this statement in relation to the heritage officer (i.e. me) and heritage bodies is incorrect. Please note the following

1. The English Heritage Historic Building Inspector considered that the proposed site of the new bridge is so far away from the Pittville Pump Rooms, that the bridge does not affect the setting of the Grade I Listed Pump Rooms, and therefore no comment was necessary. They have not approved the bridge, but simply not commented on it.

2. The English Heritage Historic Garden Inspector only comments when the registered Parks and Garden are either Grade I or grade II*. Pittville Park is grade II. So again they have not approved the bridge, but not simply not commented on it.
3. The Gloucestershire Gardens and Landscape Trust, the Garden History Society and Cheltenham Civic Society have all submitted comments in relation to this planning application.
4. The planning application has yet to be determined. It will be determined by the Borough Planning Committee members. In considering whether to grant planning permission consideration will be given to the planning officer's report and any comments received from consultees, or other interested parties. My initial written comments in relation to this planning application were critical.

Otherwise, the minutes were agreed to be a true record of the meeting.

5. Matters arising

There was not enough time to discuss matters arising, as the building was closing at 7.30 because of the weather. These will be addressed at the next meeting. These include the Community Bridge, the Central Cross Cafe, the Waitrose Charity Scheme and Membership.

6. Any other business

6.1 Cafes in the parks - FC reported that she had received an invitation for FOP to participate in a focus group on outdoor catering facilities in Montpellier Gardens and Pittville Park. It is on 28 January. We can bring another representative, and it was agreed that JL should also attend. DH counselled FC and JL to think hard about what is right for Pittville Park, especially Central Cross Cafe.

6.2 Planning - DF reported that he had researched the six other park groups in Cheltenham and had learned that they were talking to CBC on a daily basis. He asked if we want a permanent dialogue such as this, for example, on planning applications. It was decided that, although we had discussed this before, and most of the ExComm was against it, it should be put on the agenda for the next meeting. **Action: FC**

7. The remaining items on the agenda (Plans for 2010; Pittville Park walkabouts; Park Watch) were all deferred until the next meeting.

8. Date of next meeting

This was agreed for Tuesday 16 February 2010.