

Community News for the Echo, 3rd February 2007

Pittville

The Executive Committee of the Friends of Pittville (FoP) met on January 23rd to consolidate progress made in the last three months to expand awareness and support for the Borough's Heritage Lottery bid to restore and renew the Pittville Estate. Before the next meeting in April, the result of the initial planning grant bid will be known. Already several suggestions had been received for items to be included in the subsequent main bid. The general public is invited to submit their suggestions and comments via the FoP web site, www.friendsofpittville.org or by email to secretary@friendsofpittville.org. At the next meeting of the FoP committee in April, all suggestions will be examined prior to making recommendations to the Borough Lottery Planning Group. If the Lottery bid should not be successful, the recommendations will still go forward to the Council and fund raising by FoP will begin.

A communication vacuum has arisen which is fuelling speculation, rumours and concerns about the future of the Pump Room and environs. FoP had been promised an early meeting with the Borough Council Cabinet to discuss the situation. Meanwhile, in addition to the main Heritage Lottery grant, it was agreed to make bids to subordinate Heritage Lottery funds: to replace the bridge over the west lake in the Park and to support a Junior Ranger Scheme to involve the younger generation constructively in the Park. The minutes of the FoP meeting are accessible on the web site.

On January 24th, the Pittville Area Residents Association (PARA) organised a "back to the future" event in the Pump Room when Cheltenham historian Steven Blake gave a riveting account of the origins of the Pittville Estate. An audience of more than 200 heard Mr Blake draw upon contemporary documents, eye witness accounts, original plans and modern photographs. Sadly, Joseph Pitt's funds had run out before his dream could fully materialise but modern Pittville was still very much his legacy. Intriguingly, Wellington and Clarence Squares were both designated by Pitt as "Pleasure Parks". Had that been generally known in 1825, no doubt rumours and concerns would have matched those of 2007.

PARA chairman Garry Wildin then graphically illustrated "proposals" which are swirling around in the information vacuum about Borough plans for the future of the Pump Room and wider estate. Subsequently, the audience was reminded that incredulous expressions of concern about the future use of the Pump Room were being received from music lovers across the UK and beyond. Garry Wildin exhorted all local residents to make their views known and emphasised the close cooperation and complementary objectives of PARA and FoP. £175 was raised at the meeting for the Holst Museum.

On January 26th an opportunity arose to invite the University of Gloucestershire to participate in the restoration and renewal of Pittville Park. A meeting was organised at the Francis Close campus by the National Higher Education Academy to look for ways in which the University could work in partnership with the local community on projects which contributed to social and environmental sustainability. Professor Tony Mason, chairman of FoP explained the potential value of studies of the origins and social evolution of the Pittville Estate, of the flora and fauna of the Park, of past use of the Park, and for social surveys of current public opinions and aspirations about the Park. There could also be a specific examination of the sustainability factors in all proposals for renewal and restoration. The suggestions were welcomed by the University staff attending the meeting, with agreement that they would be taken forward by the University in cooperation with FoP.

On January 28th, the Cheltenham Bird Club organised, for the first time, a bird watch in the Park to coincide with the Royal Society for the Preservation of Birds annual weekend. Members of the Club

were on hand, together with Park Rangers, to help the general public recognise the species which can be seen here. The event attracted considerable interest from the Sunday morning patrons of the park and was another excellent example of its widespread use by interest groups throughout Cheltenham.

Regular visitors will be relieved to hear that the two remaining cygnets, which suddenly disappeared last week from the lake, were safely moved to other waters where they can acclimatise to a larger flock and continue their evolution to adulthood. Parents Mac and Ha'penny had been demonstrating increasingly forcibly that it was time for the kids to leave home!

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