

Cheltenham Borough Council

Cabinet - 17th October 2006

Community Involvement and the Conservation and Management of Pittville Park and Pittville Estate

Report of the Assistant Director Green Environment

1. Executive Summary and recommendation

1.1 This report provides an update on community involvement and engagement in the conservation and future enhancement of Pittville Park and Pittville estate, in response to a request from Cabinet.

1.2 I therefore recommend that:

1.2.1 Cabinet notes the report.

1.2.2 Cabinet endorses the submission of an application for a Project Planning Grant to the Heritage Lottery Fund's Parks for People programme.

1.3 Summary of implications

1.3.1 **Financial** None at this stage, however any future submission of a bid to the Heritage Lottery Fund's Parks for People programme will require advance planning of capital and S106 contributions in order to attract a maximum potential grant of 75% of any proposed restoration works.

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1.3.2 **Legal** None at this stage

1.3.3 **Human Resources** None at this stage

1.3.4 **Equal opportunities, social justice and anti-poverty** The restoration of the Park and Estate will improve accessibility and cater for a greater variety of needs of the wider community within Cheltenham.

1.3.5 **Environmental** The historic restoration of Pittville Park and Estate can prove to be a catalyst for environmental improvement and form part of the council's civic pride aspirations.

1.4 Links to Business Plan and Corporate Objectives

1.4.1 The conservation and restoration of Pittville Park is in accordance with the council's environmental priority for the protection and improvement of green space.

1.5 Statement on Risk

1.5.1 There is no current capital funding allocation for any future restoration of Pittville Park and there is no guarantee of attracting external funding from the Heritage Lottery Fund as competition for funding becomes increasingly competitive and scarcer as we move closer to the 2012 Olympics.

1.5.2 However without a vision for the future of Pittville Park and the former Pittville Estates, or willingness to explore available options, there is unlikely to be any significant improvement in the near future and the council will continue to be faced with the challenge of maintaining the park with static resources.

1.5.3 Any exploration of the future development of the park will need to address the matter of achieving and maximising value for money from the resources invested in the park and in such a way as to control carefully future capital and revenue costs to the council.

2. Introduction

2.1 Recent audit work and public consultation, undertaken as part of the council's emerging Green Space strategy, provides evidence that Pittville Park is the most popular and widely visited park within Cheltenham. Furthermore its importance as an early example of a public park is recognised by its inclusion within English Heritage's Register of Historic Parks and Gardens. The park and its famous Grade 1 listed Pump Rooms are vital parts of Cheltenham's environmental and cultural heritage.

2.2 The responsible stewardship of these important elements of Cheltenham's heritage is a constant challenge for Cheltenham Borough Council as the capital and revenue demands of managing and maintaining the infrastructure and facilities within the park are high.

2.3 Over the course of the last three years the council has committed significant investment in the park through refurbishing and modernising the toilet facilities, desilting the lakes, providing an updated footpath and cycle path layout with improved lighting, and revitalising the outdoor recreational facilities including Central Cross café and the pitch and put golf course. In the current year the boat house has been refurbished, with boating back on the lakes for the first time in nine years, and the skateboard park has been improved and enhanced in close consultation with the Ramp User Group and young people.

3. Community Engagement

3.1 For some time the council has been developing the network of community volunteers and Friends groups to work in partnership with the council to safeguard and improve the parks and green spaces within the borough. The council has worked closely and successfully with a number of these groups to draw in external funding from a range of sources over the past three years, including the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF)

(£722,000 for Montpellier Gardens), Countryside Agency Doorstep Greens (£70,500 for Clyde Crescent), ODPM Living Spaces (£15,000 for Hatherley Park and £13,200 for Naunton Park) and British Trust for Conservation Volunteers People and Places (£21,000 for Hatherley Park).

3.2 Currently there are Friends groups working with the council at Montpellier Gardens, Naunton Park, Leckhampton Hill, Clyde Crescent, Jenner Gardens and Hesters Way Park. In addition, there are Park Watch schemes in existence at Pittville Park, Naunton Park, Hatherley Park, Benhall and Welch Road. There is also current interest in setting up further Park Watch schemes at Caernarvon Park, Hatherley Park, Hesters Way Park and Chargrove Way.

3.3 The most recent Friends group to become established is the Friends of Pittville who came into existence following their inaugural Annual General Meeting at Pittville School on 20 September 2006. The meeting was well attended with over 40 local residents present and an executive Committee, headed by Air Vice Marshall Tony Mason as Chairman, was elected.

3.4 The establishment of the Friends of Pittville has been endorsed by the Pittville Area Residents Association (PARA), who are represented on the Executive of the Friends group. The adopted constitution of the Friends of Pittville includes the following objectives:

- Recognising the importance of Pittville Park and Pittville Estate, the Friends aim to promote the public benefit and enjoyment of the park and gardens, including the green open spaces of the Lawns, Pittville Gates, the two Pittville Crescent Gardens, and Wellington and Clarence Squares.
- Supporting Cheltenham Borough Council in involving local people in protecting, conserving and promoting enjoyment and good husbandry of the park, gardens, buildings and structures and green open spaces.
- Encouraging more local people to use and enjoy these areas and to take an active interest in their current and future management.
- Providing a means of co-ordination for Pittville Park Watch.

3.5 A key part of the reason for the establishment of the Friends of Pittville has been to establish a framework for local residents to work with the council for the protection, conservation and enhancement of the Park and Pittville estate and to work together to attract funds in order to further these objectives.

4. Conservation and Management Plan

4.1 Undertaking a Conservation and Management plan for the park and estate is one of the actions previously identified within the council's business plan. This is similar to a Conservation Management Plan for buildings and archaeological sites and takes into account the wide ranging cultural, recreational and educational value of public parks and gardens and the need for new ideas, investment and re-vitalised management. It also seeks to promote heritage conservation as an integral part of urban and rural regeneration and open up heritage resources to the widest possible audience.

4.2 The study would seek to identify the current situation of the park and estate, within the correct historic context, including appropriate reference and understanding of the

role of key buildings and facilities such as the Pump Rooms and Leisure@ , and should also take due consideration of adjoining development proposals for the Midwinter site and St. Paul's in order that a holistic and integrated view of the area is achieved.

5. Current Position

- 5.1** In order to take this forward the next step is to submit an application for a Project Planning Grant (PPG) to HLF, with the objective of securing a grant of up to £50,000 to meet the costs of undertaking the Conservation and Management plan. Submitting the application for a PPG will not involve any additional expenditure over existing approved resources, nor does it commit the council to any further capital expenditure at this stage.
- 5.2** The revised guidance from HLF, under Parks for People, is that carrying out a Conservation and Management Plan study is not simply an exercise to be handed over to consultants. HLF want to see evidence that organisations applying for such grant aid have mapped out how they intend to undertake the study, including the preparation of plans covering audience development, conservation management, volunteer/employee training and 10 year management and maintenance plans. Furthermore they want to see clear evidence of ownership, value for money and community engagement within the process.
- 5.3** It is intended to submit the application for a PPG in mid-December with the result of the application being notified to the council by March 2007. The time span for undertaking the work, if the grant application is successful, would be start work in April 2007 and complete in February 2008 with the outcome being reported back to Cabinet in order to consider the findings, future options and recommendations.

Background Papers

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Accountability	Councillor Chris Ryder, Cabinet Deputy for Quality of Life
Scrutiny Function	Overview and Scrutiny (Environment) Committee