



Minutes of Friends of Pittville Annual General Meeting, Monday 16 October 2017, at 6.30pm

Abbreviations used: CBC = Cheltenham Borough Council; FOP = Friends of Pittville; HLF = Heritage Lottery Fund

Trustees present:

Hon Chairman Judie Hodsdon (JH)
Hon Secretary Fiona Clarke (FC)
Hon Treasurer Paul Benfield (PB)
Chris Archibald (CA)
Philippa Howell (PH)
Eileen Lockwood (EL)
David Richards (DR)
Hilary Simpson (HS)
Henry Williams (HW)

1. Welcome

JH welcomed everyone to the 11th Annual General Meeting of the Friends of Pittville and thanked Dunalley Primary School for making the school hall available for the meeting.

2. Apologies

FOP trustee, Sandy Marshall (SM) and non-voting representative of other bodies, Dennis Parsons.

FOP members: Peter and Pat Attwood, Kay Canning, Jillian Herbert, Janina and Gerald Kay, Betty Le Vierge, Jenny and Douglas Ogle, Anita Richards, Rob Rimell, Sally and ARK Thomas, Sue Walker.

62 other FOP members were present.

3. Minutes of the last Annual General Meeting, 18 October 2016

The minutes for last year's AGM had been posted on the website throughout the year and JH hoped that everyone had seen them. There had been no queries in that time, and, as there were no further comments, the minutes were unanimously accepted as a true record of the 2016 Annual General Meeting. Proposed by James Hodsdon and seconded by Tony Mason.

4. Matters arising

There were no matters arising.

5. Treasurer's report

JH introduced Paul Benfield (PB) who had been appointed as a trustee in May and had taken on the treasurer role from June 2017.

PB referred members to the accounts. The highlights are that income for the year was nearly £6,000 more than expenditure (£5,858.04); there was a significant fall in the number of transactions in the current year, and the value, as the play area project has been completed; and there are assets of nearly £10,000 held in the bank account at the end of the year (£9,850.43).

Looking in a little more detail, the income and expenditure statement has been split into three sections: the general activities of the charity, transactions relating to projects, and the transactions relating to the play area.

For the general activities relating to the running of FOP, most of the income is from membership fees (£1,840) and fund-raising activities, such as the duck food dispenser, the East India Café lunch, quiz night, plant sale and the garden party generously hosted by our chairman. This has brought in over £6,000 in the year.

This income was used to pay for the administration of the charity, costs associated with fund raising and, principally, to produce the newsletters for members and local residents. Other expenditure during the year was to support both the green space volunteers and the history group. Overall the income was more than the expenditure on the general activities.

Currently FOP is involved in several projects which are just beginning, one of the most significant is working with CBC on developing the area between the Pump Room and Upper Lake. FOP is contributing to a Master Plan and, to fund this, CBC has allowed FOP to raise money from car parking fees charged during some of the race meetings. This has brought in just over £4,000 through the year. This income will be held to fund the costs associated with the Master Plan and development of the park.

The final section of the income and expenditure is for the new play area in the park. The activity in the year saw the charity recover the gift aid donations from HMRC related to donations to the project. This money has been handed over to CBC.

In summary, the increase in funds available to FOP are due to the small surplus on general activity which was expected in the budget, as well as holding the income from the car parking charging to cover the future costs of the Master Plan for the park, therefore leaving £9,850.43 available at 30 September 2017.

The accounts have been reviewed by Robert Rimell who gave an independent review of the information presented. He has reviewed the books and records held and provided a statement confirming that he was satisfied with the information in the statement of accounts. The accounts will be available on FOP's website.

There were three questions:

Jackie Anderson noted that although subscription income was slightly up (about £200) the printed newsletter was much more expensive (about £700 more). JH explained that two issues were now in colour. These had been well-received and membership was at its highest ever (currently 374).

Gerald Seal asked if FOP was planning to man the Albemarle Gate car park again (income had been about £4000). JH responded that it was, in November and next March.

Annette Berg asked if FOP set the admission charge for the car parking. JH said it was set at the market rate for the area, £10 for the Festival in March and £5 in November.

JH thanked PB for the report, and Rob Rimell who had examined the accounts. It was proposed by Susie Panniker and seconded by Terry Langhorn that the accounts be accepted with all in favour.

6. Chairman's report

JH had prepared the formal annual report, which had been distributed this evening. She did not propose going through it in detail, but picked out a couple of points.

The highlight of the year was the Queen's Award for Voluntary Service. It is recognition of the fact that FOP's success depends almost entirely on the work of volunteers. The group occasionally pays for a professional service, for example, for designing the website and it also relies on the sound and productive relationship established with borough council staff. But most things are down to people's good will.

This can be attributed partly to the aim, to protect and enhance the environment and heritage of this wonderful part of Cheltenham, but also because there are so many different things to do that appeal to volunteers – from landscape gardening, hacking down overgrown greenery, sweeping fallen leaves, planting bulbs and trees, picking up litter, all with a sense of team effort. Also being able to help with events such as the plant sales, baking cakes and serving tea at the garden party, undertaking historical research and even, on occasion, being playwrights and actors, such as for the East India Café lunch, and undertaking the newsletter deliveries.

She thanked everyone who make FOP's activities a success, not forgetting those who support us, less actively, with their subscriptions.

JH expressed her thanks to the trustees for their contributions during the year, especially those who have regular responsibilities: GJ for looking after membership matters and organising the newsletter distribution; SM for producing the newsletter; CA for managing the green space volunteers; HS for looking after Pittville History Works and the website and Facebook updates; PB for looking after the money; and FC for making sure meetings, and so much else, run smoothly.

However, the committee always needs new people and JH encouraged anyone who is having even half a thought about joining to get in touch. It is possible to attend meetings to try it out before making a commitment. She invited anyone interested to speak to her or any committee member. FOP is particularly looking for someone who will act as secretary as FC, after eight years as secretary, would like to bow out gracefully at some point in the next year. In addition, web and Facebook skills will be needed.

Looking ahead – FOP hopes to make progress with the several projects to enhance areas of the park between the lake and the Pump Room and to develop educational information available online for teachers.

There were no questions and Hilary Simpson proposed and Peter Jones seconded that the report be accepted, with all in favour.

7. Election of trustees

JH outlined that, under FOP's constitution, the officers are chosen by the committee and that will be done at the next trustee meeting. Trustees are elected for three years and CA, FC, GJ, DR, HS and she have another year before needing to seek re-election. EL has decided to step down, but can be called on to help with events, for which we are very grateful. PB, PH and HW were appointed during the year, and need to be formally elected by this AGM. JH proposed that they be elected en bloc; seconded by Michael Canning, with all in favour.

8. Any other business

8.1 2018: the Royal Air Force centenary

First FOP chairman and member, Tony Mason, wanted to add to his item in FOP's October newsletter. As noted there, CBC is developing its 'Cheltenham Remembers WW1' programme, which has three themes - how the social and economic life and face of Cheltenham were transformed as a result of the war. The organising team has been overwhelmed by the response to an appeal for memorabilia for an exhibition in April 1918. GCHQ is co-operating with information relating to the Royal Flying Corps. The relevance for

Pittville tonight is that there are only one or two mentions of Pittville in the literature. In the audience someone may have family connections or know of someone who does, who could add to understanding of the effect of WW1 on Pittville. He encouraged everyone to search their attics in case there is material there.

8.2 University of Gloucestershire

Michael Canning asked about FOP's links with the university. FC responded that e-mails from several students asking to join the Green Space Volunteers has never resulted in an appearance although one young woman had come last week and seemed keen (she is studying environmental sciences). Attempts had been made at different times to engage through official channels but again had not borne fruit. Tony Mason reminded the group that in the early days of FOP there had been a university contact at some of the committee meetings. Michael Canning thought that FOP might be able to harness some of the energy of those in the Student Village. It was agreed that FOP would try again once students had settled in. **Action: JH**

8.3 Damage to grass in the park

Annette Berg had been told about badly damaged grass somewhere in Pittville Lawn (the Long Garden). It may have happened during the Festival of Cycling's family activities in the park, or be due to a motorbike. CA said that the owner of the bike had been served a Section 59 notice and FC noted that Festival of Cycling damage would be rectified in due course.

9. Date of next meeting

The date of the next Annual General Meeting will be in the second half of October 2018.

JH concluded the formal meeting and called on John Simpson to talk about some Pittville people. John is the former chief editor of the Oxford English Dictionary; he is now a Friend of Pittville and the leading light behind the success of the Pittville History Works team.

John's talk focussed on the people who lived in Pittville Lawn from 1840s on; most were military or East India Company employees. There were also many women of independent means and, of course, women and some men in service.

Questions:

Q1 Tony Mason asked about the high proportion of unoccupied houses during WW1 might be a reason for the widespread billeting in airmen in Pittville. Steve Blake noted that in 1919 Cheltenham was known as 'Cheltenham – a town to let'; only two houses were built in Pittville between 1888 and 1923. There were too many houses and too much on the market.

Q2 Why is there is no 24 Clarence Square? John Simpson has just been contacted by a lady in Tasmania who is researching the Umbers family; Thomas Umber had bought 22 Clarence Square and his papers are in Stratford upon Avon.

Q3 What was the purpose of the chamber under Pittville Gates? James Hodsdon explained that it was a former electricity sub-station, built when the 1897 overthrow was erected over the central gate; the bricks are Victorian, from a company in Ruabon, in Wales.

JH concluded the evening by thanking John and noting that when some members received training at Gloucestershire Archives with funding from HLF as part of the Pittville Gates restoration, we had no idea that it would take off like it has.

The meeting ended at 7.30 p.m.