



Minutes of the Friends of Pittville Annual General Meeting held on Tuesday 26 October at 6.15pm at Pittville Pump Room

Abbreviations used: FoP = Friends of Pittville; CBC = Cheltenham Borough Council; PHW = Pittville History Works; GSV = Green Space Volunteers; GCC = Gloucestershire County Council

Trustees present:

Hon Chairman Judie Hodsdon (JH)
Hon Treasurer Paul Benfield (PB)
Membership Secretary Janina Kay (JK)
Chris Archibald (CA)
Andy Hopkins (AH)
Philippa Howell (PH)
Sally Thomas (ST)
Henry Williams (HW)

Minutes:

Joc Potter

1 Welcome

JH welcomed everyone to the Annual General Meeting of the Friends of Pittville, and expressed her pleasure at the number of members (46) who were attending. The committee had decided that since the 2020 AGM could not take place in person, it was particularly important to meet this year. She thanked The Cheltenham Trust for the use of the Pump Room, which allowed appropriate distancing.

2 Apologies

Trustees: Sandy Marshall, David Richards, Robert Hyatt Williams

FoP members: Penny and David Hyams, Peter and Gloria Jones, Desmond Marshall, Gareth Swain, John and Janet White

3 Financial report

PB presented an overview of FoP's financial activities for the year ending 30 September 2021, which had already been made available to members digitally; paper copies were also available at the meeting. In summary, expenditure was down due to the lower cost of digital newsletters and income was reduced owing to less fund-raising (both necessitated by the pandemic). GSV expenses included the planting of the bed on the south-west corner of the east side of the park, and the cost (under Miscellaneous) of paving near Pittville Gates was later reimbursed by Severn Trent. Income came mainly from membership fees; other contributions included income from the duck feeder and gift aid reimbursement from HMRC. There was a surplus for the year, resulting in £26,870.44 available for spending, in the projects reserve (for the Green Spaces Masterplan) and the general reserve (for other activities).

Joe Mar — the independent examiner — had signed off the accounts, with JH and PB, as being consistent with FoP's records and giving a full and fair view of the charity's financial activities. The accounts had also been approved by the trustees, and were accepted unanimously at the AGM. PB thanked Joe Mar for his review.

In response to questions, PB and JH replied that:

- the large fall in website hosting costs was the result of moving to a new host (34SP.com, a company which provided a free service for charities), after a consultant had been hired to advise on the best solution; the cost of the domain name was now £7.50 a year;
- car park management and therefore income would not return for the November race meeting, since the racecourse would be charging similar fees, but would (FoP hoped) return in March 2022;
- FoP aimed to have sufficient reserves for normal expenditure, but planned to spend at least the additional project funds on the Masterplan work, due to begin in the next six months, although more fundraising would be required;
- the Masterplan projects were jointly managed by FoP and CBC.

4 Annual report

JH summarised her annual report, which is also available on the FoP website. One change would be made to the text, replacing 'Swan group volunteers' to 'volunteers from Pittville Swans and Friends'. JH noted among the achievements, despite the pandemic:

- little change in GSV hours over the year, since more volunteers compensated for fewer working parties being possible; the tidying and planting of Bed 38, in the southwest corner of the east side of the park; the planting of the western rockery beside the upper lake, and general maintenance;
- little change in the diligence of PHW research (which could be seen on PHW's fascinating website), and the news that they could now look at 1921 census information;
- a plant sale was held, albeit in the autumn, for this year only.

She reminded the meeting of the part of the Masterplan that would reinstate the steps in front of the Pump Room (which disappeared in about 1899) and create much better gateways to the Pump Room to replace ironwork erected in the 1940s. Since it felt inappropriate to fundraise for these during a pandemic, FoP would only now start looking at grants and other means of fundraising. For example, the annual quiz - a very enjoyable social event - which had to be postponed would take place in the Feathered Fish on 8 November; members and non-members were encouraged to book tickets.

A strategy meeting was held, which led to the establishment of three sub-committees: for communication, increasing membership, and future projects. One project would be to plan for the 200th anniversary of the park and (on 4 May 1825) the laying of the Pump Room foundation stone. JH appealed for help from members, as trustees or just to help with a specific area of FoP's work.

Problems at Pittville Gates this year (despite sterling maintenance work by Tom Clarke and Sally Thomas) included:

- Severn Trent's botched replacement of paving and setts (a job eventually done perfectly by Mike Beamish, and - eventually - paid for by a donation from Severn Trent);
- the destruction of plants in the nearby garden by a fibre company (which then paid for replacement plants);
- the parking of e-scooters in inappropriate and random locations around the gates;
- the apparent theft of an irreplaceable blue metal plaque, carefully saved for the restoration, from one of the pillars.

The Chairman's report had already been approved by the trustees, and was accepted unanimously by the meeting.

In response to a question about the application for a telecoms tower next to the Central Cross cafe, JH said that FoP and many individuals had objected and that the application was rejected.

5 Election of trustees

JH noted that the following people would be standing down as trustees:

- David Richards, an invaluable source of advice on plants and plant sale organiser since the early days of FoP, who would continue as an active GSV;
- Chris Archibald, who would be continuing his management of the GSVs and other work for FoP and who would (she hoped) return as a trustee in future;
- Paul Benfield, who had done an excellent job as treasurer but had now moved away from Cheltenham.

JH was standing down as chairman but would remain involved, particularly for fundraising. Sarah de Buriatte was unanimously elected as a new trustee, with a view to taking on the role of treasurer.

JH invited other members to become trustees, telling them that they could attend meetings before committing themselves. She thanked her fellow trustees for their work during the year, all the volunteers (in the park, doing historical research, delivering newsletters etc), and the members who supported FoP and who, she hoped, felt they were contributing to a worthwhile cause.

6 Any other business

In response to a complaint about inadequate lighting in Wellington Square, Clarence Square and (JH noted) Evesham Road, and the suggestion that lights should be turned to illuminate pavements rather than roads, JH agreed that she would contact GCC.

Gifts of appreciation for their service were presented to PB and JH.

7 Date of the next Annual General Meeting

The next AGM will take place on a date to be decided in October 2022.

Following the meeting, Martin Renshaw gave a talk on the newly restored Holst Victorian House and showed a short film dramatising a maid's life in the building.

Trustees then met briefly to elect officers: Sally Thomas was unanimously elected as the new Honorary Chairman and Sarah de Buriatte as the new Honorary Treasurer; Sandy Marshall was unanimously re-elected as the Honorary Secretary.