



ANNUAL REPORT 2021-22

1. The current situation at Pittville Pump Room

- Over the past year Pittville Pump Room Revival's (PPRR) focus has been on safeguarding the unique heritage site that the Pump Room represents. We tried to meet with The Cheltenham Trust (TCT) to express our concern about the 'temporary' Heritage Deco Café which the Trust constructed within the curtilage of the Pump Room in September 2021. Sadly, such a meeting was not granted, but we managed to speak directly to Cheltenham Borough Council (CBC) in a meeting on 28th March this year with CBC officers Darren Knight and Richard Gibson, and Cllr. Max Wilkinson.
- During this meeting we asked about the structure and safety of the building, when the last independent survey had been carried out (it is required to have one every five years), how the Pump Room could be better signposted and open to the public more often in line with the agreement between the landlord and the lessee, and how long it would be before the mineral water would be available again.
- CBC did not have a recent independent survey but said they could do an 'in-house' one. The mineral water would be checked again in July as it was not fit for consumption due to elevated levels of bacteria. We checked in July but were then told that there may be a problem with the well and drilling a new one would be costly. The water still has unacceptable levels of bacteria and CBC says it is seeking advice from other councils, such as Buxton and Bath.
- There were many private events held at the Pump Room, which made it difficult for the public to visit the building. Although the Heritage Trail was offered on several days a month, the 'closed' sign is up frequently but without an online warning to prospective visitors, who are often disappointed. This issue needs further pressure.
- To find solutions to the above problems we tried to see whether PPRR could re-join the Friends of Pittville (FoP), a registered charity, which could have given us better access to grants and facilitated other fundraising efforts. A presentation was made to the Trustees of FoP on July 19th, but the Trustees were not prepared to see our re-joining in the foreseeable future.

2. Planning application – Heritage Deco Café

- As TCT has been operating the Heritage Deco Café under Covid rules, i.e. without specific Planning Permission, it was permitted to leave temporary structures in place until January 2022, subsequently extended to September 2022. However, TCT has now applied for a ‘change of land use’ to allow it to continue to operate the café all year round, albeit it still within the curtilage of a Grade I listed building.
- PPPR mounted a campaign to object to the planning application which, if granted, will allow TCT to continue operating the café for another two years. This included lobbying local councillors, our local MP, and immediate Pump Room neighbours in East and West Approach Drive, as well as seeking and gaining important support from Historic England, which keeps a watching brief over all listed properties.
- As a result of this lobbying, a total of forty-nine public comments were posted on the CBC planning portal, eleven supporting the application and thirty-eight objecting. Additionally, CBC consulted twelve of its own departments and external consultees, resulting in eleven responses including heavyweight objections from Historic England, Cheltenham Civic Society (CCS) and PPPR.
- Following the significant objections, TCT instructed its agent to submit a further document outlining the public benefit of the application being granted and the café being allowed to continue in place. As a result of this new document being submitted, we trust the Planning Officer will now enter a fresh round of consultation, at least with consultees.
- It is clear to PPPR, following its meeting with officers, that CBC is fully supporting TCT in its application, despite the objections formally raised. This had led to a strengthened view that CBC should adopt a Heritage Strategy across all the conservation areas in the town.

3. A Heritage Strategy for Cheltenham

- PPPR organised a meeting with the chairman of CCS to consider how CCS could help TCT (and CBC) design a separate permanent building for the café. However, it was agreed this was not really what we wanted as we would prefer a café inside with an outside area under the colonnade. It was agreed that what was really needed was a heritage strategy for Cheltenham and that CCS should organise a further meeting, inviting many of the ‘Friends of’ groups in Cheltenham to be involved.
- An initial meeting involving PPPR, CCS, Friends of Montpellier Bandstand & Gardens (FOMBAG) and Friends of Imperial Square Heritage & Conservation (FISHAC) was held on 12th September, where it was agreed that all present, as well as Friends of Pittville, Cheltenham Local History Society and the Holst Victorian House would be involved in the drafting of a proposed Heritage

Strategy. A further meeting is planned for 18th October and Historic England has been notified of this development.

4. Conclusion

- The PPPR Committee met monthly throughout the year and communicated with its followers and other individuals and community groups directly and via social media. It reviewed its Action Plan and was forceful in opposing TCT's planning application which it sees as unnecessary and in breach of Heritage England guidelines designed to protect Grade 1 listed buildings such as Pittville Pump Room. It brought Historic England on board to present formal opposition to CBC and TCT ambitions and, very significantly, formally proposed that the time was right to draft a Heritage Strategy to curtail commercial developments which damage Cheltenham's heritage, especially Pittville Pump Room.
- PPPR sees itself as having had a successful year and will continue to fight the heritage cause in the year ahead.

Bettina Carr-Allinson, Fiona Clarke, Chris Archibald