



FRIENDS *of* PITTVILLE

June 2020

The aim of Friends of Pittville is to promote greater community involvement in the enjoyment, protection, future restoration and renewal of Pittville Park and Estate.

From the Chairman

Dear Friends,

Welcome to our lockdown newsletter. We decided that delivering hard copy newsletters was not the right thing to do at this time. So, most of you will have received this issue as an attachment to an email, and those for whom we don't have an email address will have received it through the post.



The emptiness of the first days of lockdown

In these extraordinary times, Friends of Pittville's activities have been affected for the foreseeable future. The Drop-ins have been cancelled, as has the Plant Sale, and even Steven Blake's talk (a joint event with the Holst Museum), scheduled for October, has had to be postponed until next year. The Green Space Volunteer working parties have also been suspended, and Chris Archibald writes about some of the effects of this below.

It may be possible to hold a plant sale in September instead of May. Several of us have perennials already potted up that could be planted out in the autumn and the nurseries may be able to supply perennials and winter bedding, but nearer the time we will have to see if it is sensible to hold it. We had provisionally scheduled a garden party for members and friends for July. We will decide what to do about this when government guidance for July onwards is clearer. Drop-ins may be able to resume, perhaps at an outdoor café to begin with, when such gatherings are permitted. We are still planning to hold our AGM in late October.

One activity that has been able to carry on almost as usual is the Pittville History Works research, and there is plenty of new, interesting content on the website.

It is marvellous to see that the park's green open spaces have been such a boon during lockdown. Although the play area is closed, there is still plenty of space for children to run around in and use up energy. We see a lot of people, family groups, cyclists, runners, making their way to the park along our lane. The lack of traffic has meant the whole roadway is available for people. The other day, I heard lots of loud children's voices which turned out to come from boys in Pittville school uniform pushing bikes on their way home. They were observing social distancing and needed to raise their voices to communicate. It was good to see them doing the right thing.

We held our last committee meeting by email – a very relaxed meeting, but it did take a week to complete! We are holding our next meeting, a strategy discussion, via Zoom. I would welcome thoughts on what you think Friends of Pittville might do differently or indeed stop doing altogether. Are there any new initiatives that we should consider? Email me at the address below. Also, we are always on the lookout for new committee members, so contact me if you would like to know more. Keep safe. Judie Hodsdon

chairman@friendsofpittville.org.uk



Nature has provided some wonderful moments

Green Space Volunteers

The last time the Green Space Volunteers met for a working party was on 5th March and lockdown started the day before the next meeting. We were advised that the volunteer working parties had to stop for the foreseeable future. Since then, like many others, I have been taking exercise in the park and we are very fortunate to have had such lovely weather.

How has the lack of working parties impacted on the park during lockdown? As the GSV coordinator, I walk round noting all the jobs we would have been doing – because, of course, although we have stopped, nature carries on. A positive effect of the lockdown is that there seems to be less litter in the park than usual, although I suspect one or two of our volunteers can't resist taking their litter picker with them when they take their daily exercise! It's a pity to see weeds growing back on the rockery we so carefully prepared and started to plant. There are also shrubs in many places that need pruning after flowering. Most of all, though, I miss meeting up with the other volunteers. I think we all look forward to the time when we can start the working parties again and share the task of helping to keep our park beautiful.

Chris Archibald

The Council view

I spoke to Adam Reynolds, Manager of the Green Space Development Team, who is responsible for all the parks and green open spaces in Cheltenham. I asked him how the Coronavirus situation had affected their work.

His staff, many of whom are working from home, have found some jobs a lot easier to carry out without the public in close proximity, such as repairs to play areas. Other tasks are harder and require more staff than usual. The bedding plants

and hanging baskets in the town centre, for example, took three times as long as usual to plant and involved the use of a cherry picker. In Pittville Park, Adam

has had to tape off the underpass and the Multi Use Games Area several times because people have been removing the tape. More substantial barriers then had to be erected. On the positive side there has been less litter and vandalism in the parks.



He also reported that more people are using the parks in and around the town as so much else is closed. This includes quite a few people who don't usually use parks or have not visited them for years and he has had some very positive feedback. Public parks are a topic in the news every day and this pandemic shows what a valuable asset they are to the community. Hopefully they will be appreciated as much when this is all over.

Chris Archibald

A haven of hope

When lockdown was first imposed, the park was suddenly deserted. Even now, it's hard to recall just how empty it became. The picture on the previous page was taken then. But as the situation developed, people began to appear, and some positive features of the crisis began to become apparent. In the clean air of the park, with nature getting on with what it does best, a real sense of community and compassion flourished: strangers greeted each other; most respected others' personal space; people were really trying to make the best of things, and there was a real sense that we were looking out for each other.

Our park is many things to many people, but in the current crisis, and in the unusually clement weather, it has become a haven of peace in a difficult world. It has provided a magnificent backdrop for daily exercise and offered opportunities for what little contact has been permissible.



The many formal and informal exercise groups that traditionally use the park have been disrupted since early March – no bootcamps, no Parkruns, no Qi Gong, no Buggyfits. Cheltenham Bootcamp continues online, and we hope to see the return, in some form, of other groups in the coming weeks and months.

In the meantime, people are exercising alone, and early battles for space between runners, walkers, cyclists, buggy

pushers and those exercising dogs seemed to resolve into a more amicable sharing of resources.



Slacklining



Is this far enough?



Skipping outside the Pump Room

One trustee reports that dog-walking friends comment on how much cleaner the park is, and how their dogs are much calmer without the smells of picnickers' food that are usually so often a feature of good weather.

The sadness caused by the stillness and eerie silence of the children's play area can't go

unmentioned, and the lack of activity at the leisure centre, Prince of Wales Stadium and the park's cafes has been stark. But the end of May saw some relaxation and there is hope of further easing of restrictions as the summer approaches. In the meantime, let's all be as generous and understanding as possible to other park users.

Andy Hopkins

(contributions from Sally Thomas and Henry Williams)



Tables stacked away at Central Cross Cafe

Policing the park

Pittville Park has seen a massive increase in the number of visitors using it since the lockdown in March. There are many more walkers, including families and dogs, runners and exercisers. One of the long-term runners is Sgt. Julia Martin-Jones, who was brought up in Pittville Lawn, and now heads the Cheltenham Neighbourhood Policing Team. Sgt. Martin-Jones, together with Beat



Sgt. Julia Martin-Jones

Officer Catherine Miller and PCSOs Hazel Chinn and Leonna Mulraney, organises regular patrols in the park, and assesses reported incidents on a monthly basis.

At the end of 2019, there were significant numbers of reports from the public regarding antisocial behaviour (ASB) in the form of illegal use

of mopeds and motor bikes in the park. Operation Endurance was set up, and around forty bikes were seized; many of them proved to have been stolen. The police are dependent on public input in such situations, and the results indicate the value of local cooperation. Due to Covid-19 there have been only twenty-five incidents of ASB reported this year, and only four crimes. The majority of these relate to people not socially distancing. With the arrival of summer and some reduction in the level of lockdown measures, the expectation is that the park will become even busier, and there will be patrols day and night. It's very fortuitous that Sgt. Martin-Jones is uniquely placed to appreciate the issues relating to Pittville. To support her team, it is crucial that residents or visitors who witness antisocial behaviour in the park continue to report it to Gloucester Police by calling 101 or emailing 101@gloucestershire.police.uk

Janina Kay

Strange times for an amateur Big Band

The empty bandstand is a sad sight in this beautiful weather. How are the bands who might have been playing in parks this summer coping? One of our members tells us all about it.

I have been a member of (and run) an amateur Big Band (you know – Glenn Miller, Count Basie and all that) for several years. There are sixteen of us, and we all enjoy getting together once a week to play music. It's fun, and we don't take anything too seriously. However, when Coronavirus came along, all that came to a shuddering halt. As did a couple of performances we were supposed to do, one of which was for a village VE Day commemoration.



Just some of the members of The METZ Big Band

What to do for the duration? Basically, there is very little we can do except practise at home, but it's hard to create a big band sound alone! The current problem is obviously not going to go away in a hurry so it looks as if social distancing is going to be with us for a while.

Talking it over with another band member, we wondered if for rehearsals, because of the two metre rule, we would probably have to hire somewhere like the Town Hall or the Pump Room (any chance of a discount?) to ensure that all players are at least two metres apart. For performances, perhaps we could have the audience queue outside (observing the two metre rule) and then enter the hall two at a time and spend an allotted period listening before filing out and letting the next two in.

Ho hum ... I'm sure that better times are on the horizon but in the meantime, should anyone have any suggestions as to our future – answers on a postcard please!
John Clayton

Pittville History Works

Like so many other groups in the current circumstances, Pittville History Works met via Zoom last month. Visits to libraries and archives are not possible, but research online can still be

done. Members of the group have almost completed the listing of names from directories and electoral registers from the last century. House history research has continued and new images have been uploaded to the History Works website. These include the image library of architectural details of Pittville houses, compiled by Andrea Creedon. Andrea is also looking into the possibility of the repair of the four street lamps on Prestbury Road. Interest in the PHW website is worldwide, with pages viewed by visitors from the US, Germany, Russia, India and Australia.

Sandy Marshall

Stop press ...

The Cheltenham Trust has written to the **Pump Room Revival Group** to say that they look forward to 'welcoming the local community back to enjoy the external space at Pittville Pump Room in a safe way', perhaps after 4 July if the infection rates continue to fall. See PPRG Facebook page for the exact wording.

There is a chance that some **Green Space Volunteer** activity in a safe way may be possible from June. We will keep you updated on the website and FoP Facebook page.

The **skateboard park** and **tennis courts** are now back in use and **Central Cross Café** is serving takeaway drinks!

Editor

Andy Hopkins

Photos

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Why not join us?

One way to recognise the importance of the park to our community is by joining Friends of Pittville and helping keep it the wonderful resource it has proved to be.

Contact: membership@friendsofpittville.org.uk

