

SECTION 4 – STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

4.0 STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

4.1 The Significance of Pittville Park

An understanding of the significance of Pittville Park has been developed through an exploration of its history, land use and character, and the values associated with these elements.

The following section outlines the significance of the Pittville Park as a whole as well as its constituent elements that contribute to its overall value as an urban open space. Part of the significance of Pittville Park lies in the fact that it has evolved as a public park from previous 18th and 19th century private landscapes. But this is not the only aspect of Pittville Park that contributes to its current significance. Other elements of significance include public benefit, ecology and nature conservation, its role in the local community and economy as well as an educational resource. The core features that contribute to the significance of Pittville Park have been summarized below:

4.2 History and Character

Pittville Park is a nationally significant registered landscape given that it is listed Grade II on English Heritage's *Register of Parks and Gardens of Historic Interest*. This includes the park's architectural importance in providing a setting for Grade II* listed Pump Rooms.

The Park is historically significant in that it combines three historic areas into one extensive public park. These three areas constitute: the Marle Hill Estate and Lake; Pittville Gardens and the Agg-Gardner Recreation Ground.

4.3 Public Benefit

Pittville Park provides enormous public benefit within and around Cheltenham in a wide variety of ways, but especially in recreation, education and in the range of interests it incorporates. Pittville Park also holds potential for learning and enquiry in a range of disciplines relating to heritage, recreation, education, natural history, arboriculture, horticulture, public art and architecture. It is significant locally in providing a substantial public open space and its high levels of public access.

4.4 Nature Conservation

Due to its diversity and long-standing presence as a public open space, Pittville Park comprises a locally significant resource for wildlife and nature conservation. This arises from the park's unbroken historic links with the Marle Hill Estate, and before that as open country on the edge of the town. This includes the park's impressive stock of trees, water bodies and open parkland character.

Though comparatively intensively managed, Pittville Park is of local significance for nature conservation value. For example there is a wide variety of trees, both native and exotic, which include fine specimens of native broadleaves and these can provide a range of feeding and nesting opportunities for a range of birds, insects and other animals and plants including mosses, lichens, fungi and climbers which themselves provide opportunities for wildlife.

4.5 Local Communities and Economy

Pittville Park as a whole plays an important role socially and in the economy of the area by providing employment and stimulating local tourism and visitors. Indirect benefits include local pride in having such an expansive and diverse urban park so close to the town centre.

The site of Pittville Park has been linked with the community of Cheltenham for more than a century and during that time the local authority and local residents have taken a keen interest in the park.

Pittville Park provides a significant amount of the 310 hectares of public open space managed by the borough of Cheltenham, and it is known to be one of the most popular parks within the town. Pittville Park is a regionally significant resource whose quiet and restful character provides a much appreciated open space by the great many residents within the area (Household Survey carried out in 2006). Pittville Park is also significant for the way that the wider community can enjoy its facilities. The health and well-being through this expansive resource for daily exercise for all ages as well as peaceful reflection cannot be over-estimated.

The historical connections of the Pump Rooms with the community are preserved through the Council's functions facility. This provides space for hire by the public and the Pump Rooms are used for weddings, conferences and a number of local events, concerts, recitals etc.

4.6 Educational Significance

Pittville Park has been used as a public open space for more than a century. For Cheltenham, it is a remarkable heritage asset that is replete with possibilities for educational interpretation. Pittville provides a unique and regionally significant resource for both formal and informal education across a wide range of subject areas relevant to a wide variety of age groups.

The Pump Rooms provide a significant site for visits by schools and can sow the seeds of interest within children for the benefits of landscape and the environment. Cheltenham Borough Council is fully committed to life-long learning for all of the visitors to Pittville and for providing both formal and informal opportunities for learning. Pittville is significant for the range of informal education available from informing volunteers to school visits.

The Friends of Pittville Park is a significant forum for informal education about Pittville Park, and through membership of this group, local people gain both connection and knowledge of the park.

4.7 Principles and Policies of Management and Development

In considering the approach to the restoration and enhancement of Pittville Park, this report sets out a number of principles which it is recommended that Cheltenham Borough Council should adopt as part of its policy for ongoing management within the Park. Drawing from the information collated and analysed in the site surveys and documentary research, the following objectives for repair, enhancement and management are put forward:

- **To use as a basis of restoration and ongoing management and enhancement a philosophy that respects the development of Pittville Park and recognizes that the historic fabric of the park provides a landscape framework within which recreational uses take place;**
- **To maintain and improve the visual and aesthetic qualities of the Park for the benefit of both historic and recreational values;**
- **To conserve and maintain Pittville Park as a historic landscape and recreational resource in which the vegetation, built features, trees, water bodies, recreational facilities and views and vistas are of particular merit in their own rights, as well as combining to form a superb urban parkland landscape;**
- **To define capital works which are required to enhance and conserve the essential structure and character of Pittville Park;**
- **To recognize that Pittville Park has nature conservation value and that the biodiversity of the park should be maintained and where possible enhanced by appropriate management;**
- **Central to the restoration and enhancement strategy should be the improved integration of the park to either side of the Evesham Road. This element represents one of the main challenges to the future success of Pittville Park as an regionally significant urban open space;**
- **Pittville Park is a locally significant resource for the many aspects of learning and training that relate to its distinctive qualities and characteristics. The opportunities for education and training should be pursued in a subtle but persuasive manner, allowing each person to learn at his/her own pace, preferably through a series of enjoyable visits. Subject matter, via interpretation could be drawn from the production of this report. This will also encourage appreciation, interpretation and access to the park through publications and events;**
- **Because of the dynamic nature of Pittville Park, those involved in its management and maintenance need a broad knowledge and understanding of the local community. Well trained staff are essential for both the short-term appearance and long-term survival of parks and gardens. Pittville Park should continue to play its full part in training professional at all levels and should welcome volunteers for a range of work and training;**
- **To seek to retain and enhance protection of Pittville Park through the planning system and in cooperation with adjacent property owners;**
- **To improve the sense of community ownership and responsibility and reduce anti-social activity in the park;**
- **To improve the economical and environmental sustainability of Pittville Park as a whole, and to establish a secure financial basis for the coherent management of the park;**
- **To involve people of all backgrounds and abilities in the improvements and enjoyment of Pittville Park.**