

Cheltenham Heritage Action Plan

June 2026



Montpellier Caryatids ©Alex Merry, May 2026



Introduction from Councillor Izaac Tailford – Cabinet Member for Economic Development, Culture, Wellbeing and Public Realm



As cabinet member for culture, I want to start by saying thank you to everyone who shared their views through the Cheltenham Heritage Survey and helped shape this Action Plan. The response was fantastic – thoughtful, passionate and full of pride in what makes Cheltenham special.

What came through loud and clear is how much people care about our town’s heritage in all its forms. Not just buildings and landmarks, but parks, festivals, neighbourhoods, creativity and everyday stories. There’s also real enthusiasm for a broader, more inclusive view of heritage that reflects the experiences of communities across Cheltenham, past and present.

That excitement matters. Heritage isn’t just about looking back, it’s about bringing people together, strengthening identity and shaping the future of our town. I hope you will agree this Action Plan captures that energy and turns it into practical action, backed by strong partnerships and community involvement.

I’m genuinely excited about what comes next and look forward to seeing Cheltenham’s heritage celebrated, shared and cared for in new and meaningful ways.

Introduction

This document is one of two parts.

Part 1 – The Making of Cheltenham: Heritage, Place and Identity sets the foundations for the Cheltenham Heritage Action Plan. It explains what we mean by heritage in Cheltenham, why it matters, and the shared direction that partners are working towards. It:

- Defines Cheltenham’s heritage broadly, going beyond famous buildings to include:
 - Historic and natural places
 - Events, traditions and festivals
 - Collections, archives and artefacts
 - People – well known and everyday – who shaped the town
- Sets out Cheltenham’s heritage story, from early settlement and spa development to industrial growth, cultural life and modern identity.
- Explains why heritage matters – not only for conservation, but for:
 - Sense of place and belonging
 - Wellbeing and community pride
 - Learning and skills
 - Economic and cultural vitality
- Establishes the four strategic themes that underpin all heritage work:
 - Discover & Explore
 - Learn Together & Bring Together Communities
 - Celebrate
 - Protect & Enhance
- Clarifies who the Action Plan is for, recognising that heritage is shared and cared for by many partners and communities, not owned by a single organisation.
- Sets out long-term objectives, including increasing access to heritage, improving coordination, supporting skills and volunteering, and using heritage to inspire future development.

Rather than listing actions, Part 1 provides the big picture. It brings together Cheltenham’s story, values and ambitions so there is a common understanding of heritage across organisations, communities and decision-makers.

Part 2 – The Cheltenham Heritage Action Plan translates the ambitions of The Making of Cheltenham into action. It provides a clear, live framework showing what will be done, who is involved, how activities will be resourced, and when progress is expected. It is a working document and will be subject to review and revision.

Developing the Action Plan - Engagement

To help understand priorities for Heritage, in 2025 we undertook a programme of engagement activity. This included:

- An online survey. The survey gathered views from over 100 respondents on what people value about Cheltenham's heritage, what they would like to learn more about, and how heritage should be recognised, shared and celebrated in the future.
- Direct engagement with a wide range of local groups, this included groups such as local history societies, Friends Groups, Cheltenham BID and Cheltenham VCS Forum.

What people value most

Respondents expressed strong pride in Cheltenham's distinctive character, with several themes consistently emerging:

- Regency, Georgian and Victorian architecture was the strongest and most widely shared value. People cited terraces, crescents, villas, landmark buildings (including Pittville Pump Room, Town Hall, the Rotunda and Imperial Square), and Cheltenham's overall low-rise, elegant built form. Many referred to Cheltenham as *"the most complete Regency town in England."*
- Parks, gardens and tree-lined streets were seen as central to the town's identity, wellbeing and sense of place. Pittville Park, Montpellier Gardens, Imperial Gardens and historic green corridors were repeatedly highlighted.
- Cheltenham's identity as a historic spa town remains highly valued, although many respondents felt the spa story is currently under-celebrated.
- Festivals, arts and cultural life – including the Literature, Science, Jazz and Music Festivals, museums, galleries and performance venues – are viewed as a defining part of Cheltenham's heritage, alongside contemporary creativity such as street art.
- Racing and sporting heritage, particularly the Gold Cup and the Racecourse, remains an important cultural reference point.
- Respondents also valued local industries, social history and "hidden histories", including Cheltenham's engineering, aviation and working-class past.

Overall, people value not just individual assets but the "look and feel" of the town: the harmony between architecture, green space and landscape, and the sense of continuity and civic pride.



What people want to know more about

There is a strong appetite to deepen understanding of Cheltenham's heritage, especially areas that feel less visible:

- Early history and archaeology, including Roman, medieval and pre-Regency Cheltenham, and how the town developed from a small settlement into a spa destination.
- Spa town origins, including the original springs, how the waters were used, Regency lifestyles, and why Cheltenham no longer has a working public spa.
- Social and working-class history, focusing on ordinary people, trades, industries, transport systems and neighbourhood life.
- Diverse and multi-cultural histories, including Anglo-Indian connections, migration stories, and the influence of empire and the Atlantic slave trade on the town's growth.
- Buildings and places, particularly who designed them, how uses have changed, how heritage is protected, and what has been lost through redevelopment.
- Cultural and creative history, including music, arts, famous and lesser-known residents, and lost venues.

Respondents also expressed a desire for greater inclusivity and accessibility, so heritage reaches beyond enthusiasts and beyond the town centre.



How people want to engage with heritage

People favoured a mix of ways to learn about heritage, including:

- Walks and trails (guided and self-guided)
- Interpretive boards and signage
- Digital resources and maps
- Exhibitions, talks and events
- Learning through schools, families and community activity
- Informal, place-based storytelling embedded in everyday spaces

People, places and stories to celebrate

Frequently mentioned individuals included Gustav Holst, Edward Wilson, Edward Jenner, Brian Jones, and figures linked to engineering, aviation, science and exploration. Respondents also highlighted the need to recognise women, diverse communities, working people and overlooked local figures.

Key places included spa sites, parks, historic cultural venues, the Lower High Street, and neighbourhoods beyond Montpellier and the town centre. Suggested themes ranged from spa discovery and festivals to industrial heritage, wartime history, migration stories and community activism.

What communities want heritage to include in future

Respondents consistently called for a broader, more inclusive understanding of heritage, one that:

- Goes beyond grand architecture and elite narratives
- Reflects everyday life, neighbourhood identity and lived experience
- Recognises diversity, migration and contemporary cultural heritage
- Tells a full timeline, from prehistory through the spa era to industrial, post-industrial and modern Cheltenham

The survey shows strong public support for Cheltenham's heritage and a clear desire to protect what makes the town distinctive, particularly its architecture, green spaces and cultural life. At the same time, it highlighted a public appetite for more inclusive, people-centred storytelling, deeper exploration of lesser-known histories, and more visible, accessible ways to engage with heritage across the whole town.

The Action Plan brings together the work of a wide range of partners, including Cheltenham Borough Council, the Cheltenham Trust, local history societies, community and civic groups, cultural organisations, archives, educational institutions and volunteers. It reflects the fact that Cheltenham's heritage is broad and multifaceted, encompassing the historic built environment, landscapes and green spaces, collections and archives, traditions and memories, learning and participation, and the lived experiences of local communities.

What this document contains

Using the findings from the survey and wider engagement with local groups, the Action Plan is structured around four overarching themes:

- **Discover and Explore:** research, archives, collections, stories and access to information
- **Learn Together and Bring Together Communities:** education, engagement, participation and skills
- **Celebrate:** events, interpretation, marking anniversaries and promoting Cheltenham's heritage
- **Protect and Enhance:** stewardship of buildings, landscapes, collections and historic environments

For each action, the plan identifies:

- The lead organisation(s) and contributors
- The specific activity or project
- The current status or progress
- Whether funding is required or identified
- An indicative timescale

This enables readers to understand both the scale of ongoing heritage activity across the town, where future effort, collaboration or investment may be needed and more importantly, which organisation to reach out to if they want to become involved.

How the Action Plan will be used

This is a working document, not a fixed programme. It will be:

- Reviewed every six months by the Cheltenham Heritage Steering Group
- Updated as projects progress, new initiatives emerge and circumstances change
- Used to support collaboration, funding bids and partner engagement
- A reference point for those wishing to contribute to or align with heritage activity in Cheltenham

The Action Plan recognises the vital role of volunteers and community-led organisations alongside public bodies, and it seeks to support, connect and amplify that work rather than duplicate it.

Taken together, Parts 1 and 2 of the Cheltenham Heritage Action Plan provide a shared framework for understanding, celebrating, sustaining and passing on Cheltenham's heritage, now and for the future.

Action Plan and Implementation

The following actions will be progressed to realise the aims of the Heritage Project. The table will be regularly updated and amended when more initiatives emerge as the wider Cheltenham community becomes involved. This action plan will be reviewed by the Cheltenham Heritage Steering Group every 6 months.

A DISCOVER AND EXPLORE					
	Contributors	Action	Progress	Funding Needed?	Timing
1	Heritage project steering group	Review other heritage strategies/statements/action plans to establish good practice, and any lessons learnt	Completed	Voluntary effort/officer resource	Completed
2	Local groups in Cheltenham	Local groups carry out research into Cheltenham's past to help inform the Cheltenham story e.g. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> original research carried out for Cheltenham Local History Society Local History afternoons and members' research display mornings Leckhampton Local History Society and Charlton King Local History Society conduct research into local family and house history and Leckhampton Local History Society into local archaeology Cheltenham Local History Society oral history project 	Ongoing Ongoing Currently in abeyance	Voluntary effort Voluntary effort Voluntary effort	Ongoing Annual Under review
3	Cheltenham Trust	Big Museum Project <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Community Highlights exhibition – drawn together by 6 community groups. A curatorial project, telling the Cheltenham stories from a community perspective. 	Underway	In place - National Lottery Heritage Fund Link into UKSPF project	October 2026

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Test space to help discover how visitors want to explore the museum and feedback key stories about Cheltenham <p>Rolling exhibition programmed over 18 months – 2 years</p>	In programme	Cheltenham Trust	2027/2028
4	Cheltenham Trust/ Gloucestershire County Archives	<p>The Gloucestershire Archives (including the former Cheltenham Local Studies library content) and The Wilson archive are easily accessible and promoted</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • all the Local Studies Library material will be accessible at the Archives. • Archives have appointed a full-time assistant to work methodically through the collection. There will be scope for a new volunteer project in due course to support this activity. • Archives are waiting to hear back from the lottery about an expression of interest for a bid to enhance accessibility across the county and if they approve will be submitting a bid after Easter. <p>Cheltenham Trust - facilitating research and study</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reinstatement of The Wolfson Study area • Access to the open archive 	Underway	Gloucestershire County Council and grants	TBC
			In Cheltenham Trust work programme	Cheltenham Trust	2027
5	County History Trust/Institute of Historical Research (University of Leicester)	<p>The VCH 'red book' for Cheltenham (the definitive history) is published. This will be an online resource and printed copy.</p> <p>Cheltenham Trust can support by signposting from The Wilson website.</p>	Research is ongoing. Several sections written	Grants and donations	2028
6	Cheltenham Civic Society	Cheltenham Civic Society awards identify built environment heritage for the future	Underway	Cheltenham Civic Society	2026 and then biennially

7	Cheltenham Borough Council	Consider how veteran/ancient trees can be identified, managed and protected via the emerging Tree Strategy.	Complete. Cabinet decision 24 February 2026	UKSPF	Closed
	Cheltenham Borough Council - Tree Team / Cheltenham Tree Group	Identify Heritage trees		N/A	Ongoing
	Cheltenham Trust	UKSPF Cheltenham Trust commission to include a story on Pittville Trees	In draft	Cheltenham Trust	September 2026
8	Local history groups	Work together to create a research framework to identify subjects needing investigation.	This is an aspirational action. First step is to investigate across the various groups, including University of Gloucestershire	Voluntary effort	Under review
9	University of Gloucestershire with local history groups and wider stakeholders	Assemble an accessible review of the source of wealth (from slave ownership or EIC sources) that built Cheltenham Spa	Liaison with University of Gloucestershire. Local history groups have already compiled some relevant material	Requires funding – future university research funding?	Under Review
B	LEARN TOGETHER AND BRING TOGETHER COMMUNITIES				
1	Heritage project steering group	UKSPF Project – Cheltenham Trust creating ‘the Cheltenham Story’ – 10 key stories and accompanying map of locations UKSPF Project – Cheltenham Trust will make Heritage information easily accessible including a	Cheltenham Trust	UKSPF	By September 2026

		index of links to existing sources via new webpage hosted on The Wilson website			By September 2026
2	Cheltenham Trust	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Wilson schools programme (2025 65 schools worked with Cheltenham Trust) • 200 boxes of historic collections which are used as a resource for outreach learning/experience across wide range of local groups • Learning through play programmes, including annual interactive PLAY exhibition and informal learning programme • New learning resources to be developed and launched to tie in with the reopened galleries • The reopened Wilson Victorian galleries tell the story of Cheltenham 	Ongoing programmes Work in progress	Cheltenham Trust Grants and donations	Ongoing 2026 (and then ongoing)
3	Heritage project steering group	Launch of publicity about the Action Plan and survey of views on what heritage means to people	Completed	Cheltenham Borough Council	Completed - November 2025
4	Heritage project steering group	Commission 'horrible history' style history of Cheltenham. Cheltenham Trust to investigate new learning resources for 'horrible histories' to enhance The Wilson's existing learning programme and the potential for it be used outside of The Wilson	Investigative	Funding required	Under review
5	Charlton Kings Local History Society	To produce book for children about the history of Charlton Kings	Almost complete	Local history society raising funds to cover printing costs	Summer 2026
6	Cheltenham Local History Society	Further development of Cheltenham Local History Society website (including South town pages) Link where appropriate to UKSPF project	Completed	Cheltenham Local History Society	Completed – end 2025
7	Cheltenham Local History Society	Digital vault of donated photographs planned by Cheltenham Local History Society	Ongoing	Cheltenham Local History Society	Ongoing

8	County Library Service/Gloucestershire Archives	Cheltenham Local Studies Library digital images project	The online photographic collection remains accessible at Cheltenham	Gloucestershire County Council	Under Review
9	Cheltenham Local History Society	Cheltenham Local History Society Annual Journal, newsletters and occasional publications	Ongoing	Cheltenham Local History Society	Ongoing
10	Cheltenham Local History Society	Cheltenham Local History Society enquiries service	Ongoing	Cheltenham Local History Society	Ongoing
11	Local history societies/friends and community groups	Reach out to wider audiences e.g. through talks (varied venues and timings), fliers, publications, skills training, volunteering opportunities to increase membership and participation	Ongoing	Subscriptions	Ongoing
12	Cheltenham Local History Society /museums/Cheltenham Civic Society	<p>Work with university, colleges, schools to gain input from students (research, writing, art, photography)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cheltenham Local History Society creation of pack of information and links to support KS2 Cheltenham Local History Society link with University of Leicester on East India Company project 	<p>Ongoing (e.g. 3 students researching article for Cheltenham Local History Society Journal)</p> <p>Completed and in use</p> <p>Early stages</p>	<p>Cheltenham Local History Society/University of Gloucestershire</p> <p>Cheltenham Local History Society</p>	<p>Ongoing</p> <p>Completed – End 2025</p> <p>Under review</p>
13	The Wilson and Holst Victorian House/ and Battlefields Museum	Cheltenham heritage displayed in the 3 museums with active marketing to make this relevant for visitors and residents.	Consultation process relating to The Wilson’s collections is underway	Cheltenham Borough Council grants donations	Ongoing New Wilson exhibition from October 2026
14	Cheltenham Borough Council/Marketing Cheltenham/Cheltenham Trust	Work with Cheltenham Festivals to build in heritage pieces into the relevant festivals where heritage could be explored and celebrated.	Ongoing	Cheltenham Festivals/ sponsorship	Explore from 2026 on future opportunities

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cheltenham Festivals archive including published books, photos, scores, audio archive, historical community heritage outreach projects, full print collection - in the process of being digitised and made accessible. Community Voices project 2025 - recordings of memories of local residents Community Voices network - forward-facing work ensuring that different local heritages are represented on Cheltenham Festival stages 			
15	Civic Society	Creation of a historic map of Cheltenham to be published in the 'Historic Towns' series	Very early stages	Private donation	2028
16	Local societies/groups/Marketing Cheltenham/Cheltenham Civic Society/ Cheltenham Trust/Cheltenham Borough Council	<p>An active schedule of town wide walks/talks in person and online</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Local history societies, friends and community groups talks and guided walks Annual Heritage Open Days programme Information and links on Visit Cheltenham website UKSPF project 	Ongoing – need to test opportunities of providing more structure/linkages	Various Groups	Ongoing
17	Local societies/groups	<p>Work with local groups for relevant refresh of information boards</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Audit of what information boards we have Opportunities for new/additional information board Prepare community infrastructure levy bid 	<p>Cheltenham Borough Council Green Spaces Team and associated Friends of Groups.</p> <p>Cheltenham Local History Society to refurbish Exmouth Bath Road board</p>	Grant funding/ Neighbourhood/ Community Infrastructure levy	Ongoing/under review
18	Heritage Steering Group	Encourage inclusion of Heritage as an output in Honeybourne Public Art Project	Cheltenham Borough Council	Section 106	Commission agreed April 2026

C CELEBRATE					
1	Local societies and groups/Marketing Cheltenham/Cheltenham Trust	Events to commemorate significant anniversaries e.g. visit of George III <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify possibilities e.g 200 years of <i>Pittville</i> pump room Facilitating use of objects within the Wilson collections through aligning exhibition and learning/engagement programmes Marketing Cheltenham investigating options for a Regency Festival to take place in 2027. 	Investigative	Requires a sponsor/ grant <i>funding</i> /Neighbourhood Community Infrastructure Levy	Under review
2	Local societies/groups	Events to celebrate significant people e.g. Holst anniversary - Identify possibilities	Investigative	various	Investigative
3	Cheltenham Civic Society	Commemoration plaques for significant people/events - possibly expand scope to include famous visitors with a different coloured plaque?	Ongoing	Cheltenham Civic Society	ongoing
4	Cheltenham Borough Council	Visit Cheltenham highlights Cheltenham's heritage activities and their value and importance to Cheltenham. working to embed Cheltenham's heritage throughout marketing, events, promotion of plaques, and via visitor attractions.	Ongoing	Cheltenham Borough – Marketing Cheltenham	ongoing
6	Cheltenham Civic Society	Successful Heritage Open Days programmes, involving communities across the town, to celebrate local heritage	Annual	Cheltenham Civic Society	Annual
D PROTECT AND ENHANCE					
1	Gloucestershire Archives	Stewardship of Cheltenham records and other information	Ongoing	Gloucestershire County Council	Ongoing
2	Cheltenham Trust/Cheltenham Borough Council	Stewardship of The Cheltenham Collection (The Wilson) – plan for the changes arising from Local Government Reorganisation	Ongoing	Cheltenham Borough Council/Cheltenham Trust	Ongoing

3	Cheltenham Borough Council/ Cheltenham Civic Society	Review of Index of Buildings of Local Importance	Project group in place and project initiation document agreed. Currently working on programme and agreeing key milestones	Volunteer led in partnership with Civic Society	Project timescales to be reviewed post summer 2026
4	Cheltenham Borough Council	Review Heritage England's 'heritage at risk' buildings	As required	N/A	Annual
5	Cheltenham Borough Council	Conservation area reviews	Consultant in place February 2026. Underway	Government funding secured via digital planning fund	2027
6	Cheltenham Borough Council	Identify Design Codes to steer owners/developers and agents involved in alterations to existing or proposed development within heritage sensitive areas.	Investigative – will need to be steered in light of any changes to the national Planning Policy Framework. Priority is currently design coding via Cheltenham, Gloucester and Tewkesbury strategic and Local Plan pathfinder project	Would need funding to be identified	Under review
7	Cheltenham Borough Council - Climate Change Team/Conservation Team	Develop information pack for developers about the value of heritage, including the implications of Cheltenham net zero	Investigative	Officer resource	Under review
8	Cheltenham Borough Council	Ensure veteran/ancient trees are included within the emerging Tree Strategy and consider the appropriateness of applying Tree preservation orders and management	Completed	N/A	Completed December 2025

9	Guardians of the River Chelt/ Cheltenham Local History Society	Promote the significance of the River Chelt to the town's heritage, consider collaborative project with Guardians	Investigative	Voluntary effort/grants/ sponsorship	Under review
10	Cheltenham Borough Council - Green spaces Team/Friends groups/Gardens Trust (local group)	Maintain the number of parks with Green Flag and Green Heritage status	Annual	Cheltenham Borough Council – green spaces budget	Annual (either in person or mystery shopped)
		Maintain and restore heritage in Cheltenham's green spaces	Ongoing	CBC and voluntary effort	Ongoing
11	Heritage project steering group	Engagement with groups involved in built and green environment heritage conservation/enhancement e.g. Parish councils/Cheltenham Civic Society/Architects panel/friends' groups/Town Centre Forum	Ongoing	Voluntary effort	Ongoing

Website links of the key partners supporting the delivery of the action plan are listed below.

[Cheltenham Borough Council](#)

[Marketing Cheltenham](#)

[Visit Cheltenham](#)

[Cheltenham Trust](#)

[Gloucestershire Archives](#)

[Cheltenham Local History Society](#)

[Cheltenham Civic Society](#)