



## Annual General Meeting Chairman's Report

### Introduction

Cheltenham Civic Society is established for the public benefit of Cheltenham and its environs with the following objectives:

- (a) To promote high standards of planning and architecture;
- (b) To educate the public in the geography, history, natural history, architecture, urban design and planning;
- (c) To secure the preservation, protection, development, improvement and care of features of historic or public interest.

As a practical society, we are bouncing back from the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and helping to shape the town as it does so too. We are benefitting from the many bright ideas and opportunities that have been identified by proactive members, and we continue to cooperate with similar groups across the town and, of course, we remain a helpful but critical friend to the councils.

### Events and Activities

**Heritage Open Days 2021** brought us back out of hiding. Over the 10 days, we put on over 50 events, including walks, talks, open buildings and self-guided walks sheets. There was a huge demand for the walks and talks – 98% of the walks and talks, which had to be pre-booked, filled up well in advance and we had waiting lists of people wanting to attend. Well done to Sarah Harvey and her team in developing an excellent series of events that continue to inspire, enthuse, educate and surprise.

The **Planning Forum** has been considering numerous planning and listed building applications as well as various consultations. Adrian Phillips identified an opportunity to improve an application for Cambray Court and presented an alternative proposal. It was not just about Cambray Court; it was about the neighbouring council-owned car park, opening up the River Chelt, introducing more greenery to improve a heavily tarmacked part of town, as well as demonstrating that we're willing to offer informed, well-considered and imaginative approaches where others prefer just to tick boxes or replace like-for-like. We can do better! Well done to Planning Forum Chair Peter Sayers and his team for their diligence and industry.

The **Successful Streets Group (SSG)** under Hugh Curran continues to fight for the town's public realm. The town centre stubbornly remains the number one concern of the public generally and our members specifically. Cheltenham Borough Council is getting the message that we are here to find solutions. Officers approached us for support to establish a 'Friends' group for the Minster Churchyard. The churchyard is to be refurbished at a cost of three quarters of a million pounds and work starts this month. They also approached us to support plans for 'Clarence Fountain', the less sensitive name for Boots Corner, but we felt we could not endorse a poor compromise for the space when the whole town centre lacks a coherent plan to improve its abysmal appearance. The bottom line is that our town centre is in an appalling mess. We've been waiting for years for Cheltenham Borough Council's Town Centre

Vision (TCV) to provide a masterplan for the town centre. It has not materialised so we will look to help develop one.

On **Communications**, Steve Bryson has delivered a polished new website, reinforced with active social media on Twitter, Instagram and Facebook, and with Hugh Curran, a lively WhatsApp discussion group. *Our Town* has been supplemented with *Making a Difference*, which celebrates our achievements and active projects and campaigns. We are always looking for new articles, captioned photographs and contributors to both so please get snapping and scribbling!

**Membership** grows steadily although in a town as rich in Friends', amenity and special interest groups as Cheltenham, pure membership numbers are less important than in other civic societies, not least as we enjoy strong relationships with all groups and we frequently cooperate on projects of mutual interest. Membership Secretary Hugh Curran has recruited a number of new Corporate Supporters, including Savills and Leckhampton Builders and we are looking to attracting more in the coming year.

Neela Mann has stepped down as our **Plaques** Officer. We are grateful for her efforts but can we find a replacement as knowledgeable on our local history?

The Society's administration is not a particularly 'sexy' affair but our Honorary Secretary, Mike Richardson, and our Honorary Treasurer, Claire Attenborough, have continued to maintain our efficiency and improve our management systems, especially as we change our property interests. I am most grateful for their hard work that is largely unseen but carefully considered.

### **And Finally...**

We're now on the other side of Covid and we are making the very most of our resources. We've transformed ourselves into a visionary, authoritative and proactive group that has a reputation for excellence and sound representation. Cheltenham Civic Society is a force for good that is determined to ensure that the town can be all its capable of being.

I would like to thank our enthusiastic Trustees for their dedication, sound judgment and hard work. They continue to provide wise counsel and leadership not just to the Society's benefit but for the benefit of the whole town. I would also like to thank the numerous volunteers who help to deliver our activities and effects. I am also grateful for Phil Collins' support and hard work and we look forward to welcoming him back to our new home.

*Andrew Booton*  
*Chairman*  
*31 March 2022*