Cheltenham Civic Society

OurTown

The Newsletter of Cheltenham Civic Society

Issue 31 • Summer 2023

YOUR REGULAR UPDATE ON HOW WE ARE WORKING TO KEEP **CHELTENHAM** A GREAT PLACE TO THRIVE



The enthusiastic army of volunteers gathered at Parmoor, where they were briefed and equipped with hi-vis vests and tools.

Clean up for The Strand on Civic Day

Nearly 30 volunteers from Cheltenham Civic Society and Cheltenham BID turned out on the morning of Saturday 17th June to demonstrate the kind of TLC that the run-down Strand and Cambray area really needs.

Armed with brushes, shovels, scrapers, hoes and anti-graffiti cleaning materials, the high-spirited team swarmed all over The Strand for three hours.

While shoppers went on their way, they scraped the weeds out of paving cracks, peeled stickers off street furniture, and cleaned a mass of sprayed-on graffiti off walls, posters, street signs, utility boxes and just about every other surface.

Hundreds of dog-ends – wedged in all manner of small crevices and drains – were carefully prised out and put into the team's collection of black bin bags.

For those who care about our town centre, the results were outstanding. At the end of the clean up, there were no more dead weeds, the graffiti problem was much reduced, and the whole area looked much cleaner, fresher and welcoming. Now, we just need the County Council (GCC) to do something about the awful state of the paving.

In the picture gallery overleaf, you can see how hard the team worked. ●

What's in OurTown this time

Civic Day photo gallery **page 2** ● Parmoor progress **page 3** ● Town centre masterplan – Boots Corner **pages 4-6**
Alternative ideas for the Promenade **pages 7-8** ● Preview of September's Heritage Open Days **pages 9-10**
Other news **page 10** ● Around town – street art **page 11** ● Paucity of EV chargers and Circumspice **page 12**

Civic Day photo gallery



Cheltenham's Mayor, Cllr Matt Babbage (on the left above), helping to clear the weeds from the paving bricks in The Strand.



Civic Day is a national celebration of civic pride – a day when residents can demonstrate their care for the place they live by undertaking a variety of community tasks.

Civic Voice – the national body for civic societies – co-ordinates Civic Day across the UK, while the Civic Society and BID organises the activities in Cheltenham. ●











CCS member, MP and Lord Chancellor, Alex Chalk, put in a shift cleaning this graffiti.



How Parmoor will look with a more conventional square design for the front steps.

Planning for Parmoor inches forward

Our planning application is slowly moving towards a planning decision, which we now hope will be made at the July meeting of the Borough Council's (CBC's) Planning Committee.

In response to a request by officers, we have had to provide an additional report on the (very small) flood risk. We have also modified the design of the front steps from a curved shape to more closely match other Regency properties in the town.

If planning consent is granted in July, we should be ready to start building work soon afterwards.

However, while we have the residual funds available from the sale of Parmoor House, we really need significant additional finance to help us fulfil all of our ambitions – including replacement of the ashlar stonework on the front of the building, and creating an exemplary front garden with planting, railings and curved ramp to the front door to make Parmoor fully accessible. We also wish to restore many of the original Regency features and, of course, fit out the building to an appropriate standard and provide it with everything from conference seating to audio-visual facilities.

So to finance that, we are undertaking a comprehensive fundraising campaign.

We have already submitted an initial 'Expression of Interest' to the National Lottery Heritage Fund – which if successful will allow us to proceed to a full application.

Approaches to other funding bodies will soon follow. Plus we also plan to run a public fundraising campaign and write to all members to see who can help.

We've just set up a 'Just Giving' account and have added a Parmoor page to the website – **https://cheltcivicsoc.org/parmoor** – with a 'Donate Now' button that takes you directly to our 'Just Giving' page.

But this campaign, combined with the management of the building works, is understandably putting some strain on the Society's Trustees – while they are also continuing to run campaigns and organise activities and events such as Civic Day and Heritage Open Days.

Call to action: We need more help from our members!

If you are good at fundraising, can help with anything, or have relevant experience, please do put your name forward to CCS Vice Chair, Peter Sayers, via: **vicechair@cheltcivicsoc.org**

"Our aim is to make Parmoor an exemplar for the restoration of other Regency villas," said Peter Sayers. "We also want to create a heritage hub for the town by making Parmoor a place where many voluntary and 'Friends' groups can meet. In this way, Lord Parmoor's extraordinary gift of our old building to the Society can really be made to blossom by spreading its benefits much wider and generating a long-term resource for the wider community." ●

Cambray Place resurfacing to start this summer

Just over a year after we launched our Town Centre Manifesto, Gloucestershire County Council (GCC) is finally resurfacing Cambray Place.

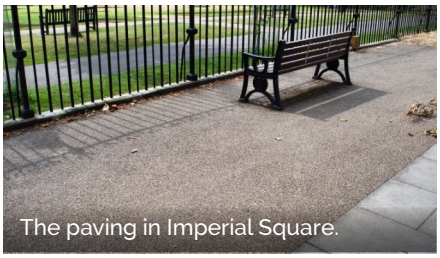


Cambray Place as it was.

Just in case anyone needs a reminder, this bit of the town centre has been ignored for years, with contractors being allowed to get away with tarmac patches even though they have contractual obligations to return the surfaces to their original specification.

This failure to supervise contractors over the years has resulted in Cambray Place becoming a maze of tarmac patches, often with new patches overlaying older ones. And, as any casual observer can see, that habit has been creeping across the whole town centre, even into our prestigious Promenade.

What GCC is proposing to do in Cambray Place is to resurface the central strip using tarmac and then coat it with small pebbles – similar to the Promenade paving along the side of Imperial Square.



The paving in Imperial Square.

The outer paving strips will remain the same but with patches replaced by slabs taken from the central area. Spare slabs from here will also be used to repair other town centre paving.

We think this solution is acceptable for Cambray Place but not in the prime part of the Promenade – see our article on pages 7 & 8. ●

A TOWN CENTRE MASTERPLAN

In the summer 2022 edition of **OurTown** (OT 27), we set out the need for a Town Centre Masterplan and what it should cover. We believe that the masterplan should cover six main areas: Royal Well; the Promenade and Cavendish House; Albion Street; the West End; Boots Corner and the centre; the East End; and the Black & White site.

In this edition, we set out our thoughts on Boots Corner.

Boots Corner and the centre

Cheltenham Borough Council (CBC) might prefer to call Boots Corner 'Clarence Fountain' to avoid reminding everyone of the failure of CBC and Gloucestershire County Council (GCC) to deliver a worthwhile trial closure four years ago. But this important node is critical to the town centre, linking High Street, Clarence Street and the Promenade. This article explores ideas to create some amazing public spaces and to design out a number of problems.



At peak times, hundreds of Cheltenham shoppers wishing to cross Boots Corner have to give way to relatively few car drivers.

Character and Significance

Cheltenham suffers from a sprawling retail centre. The High Street stretches over one km (0.7 miles) from Poole Way in the west to Bath Road in the east. The pedestrianised section is 2/3 km (1/3 mile) long. It lacks coherence and identity, a perception reinforced by at least eight different patterns of street furniture and at least six different types of street surface.

The pedestrianised area is host to only ten listed buildings, which contrasts markedly with other areas such as the Promenade and Montpellier, indicating inconsistent architectural quality. Conversely, it suffers from the presence of inappropriate buildings, such as the Brutalist WH Smith (A*) and the plain ugly Specsavers block (B*).

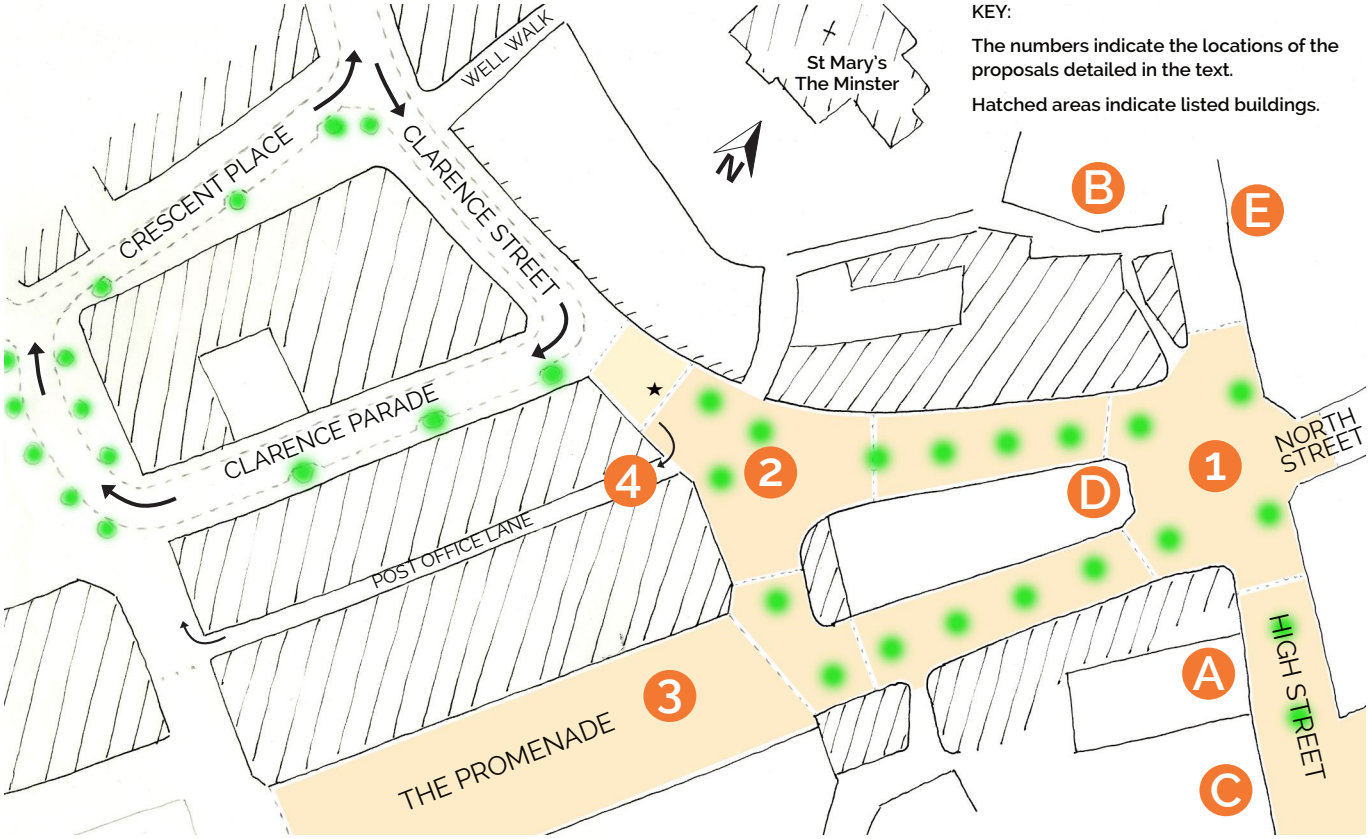
Yet it also has some excellent buildings that deserve local or formal listing, such as the Art Deco Burton building (Monsoon/Accessorize) (C*) and Starbucks (D*), an early C20th classical Marks & Spencer (not shown), and good Victorian examples (Foneworld) (E*).

* See our map on the following page.

Issues

The town centre is not a particularly pleasant or attractive place, especially compared to areas such as Montpellier. This is all the more concerning given Cheltenham's reputation as a 'destination' and as 'The Festival Town', for which tourism and attraction are fundamental elements.

- **Traffic and shared space.** Buses, taxis, through traffic and speeding food delivery scooters 'share space' in the High Street bus corridor. Traffic chicanes cross pedestrianised areas through Boots Corner, Pittville Street/Colonnade/ Imperial Circus, Winchcombe St/ Rodney Rd and Bennington Street. Prioritising vehicles over people adds complexity and danger to the shopping experience. Traffic management in the town centre does nothing to improve perceptions of safety, enjoyment or cleanliness. Walkability is threatened by unsafe surfaces while traffic and speeding cyclists and electric scooters can be intimidating.
- **Dirt and grime.** CBC presides over an ineffective street cleaning regime. In addition, there are at least six different commercial waste carriers serving the centre, ensuring different waste piles sit outside premises every day. Most of this sits on pavements at the front, even when premises have rear access, because the town centre's management focuses on making life easy for service providers instead of attractiveness and safety for town centre users. Bins are often unserviceable. Planters have become additional waste receptacles. Street surfaces are filthy with cigarette ends, ingrained dirt and litter.
- **Vision, design and leadership.** A 'Town Centre Vision' has been promised by CBC for years, yet, as seems so often the case in Cheltenham, nothing has happened. A public realm consultation took place in 2019 but most of its proposals hinged on outcomes from the botched Boots Corner trial. Then Covid struck in 2020 and the £1m funding disappeared. CBC blames GCC yet the Borough has the overall public realm responsibility.



Proposals

1. **Create a Town Square.** The removal of all vehicles from Boots Corner would enable the creation of a wonderful public square (approx. 35m x 31m/115' x 100'). Simple paving and underplanted trees in each corner would create a welcoming space, surrounded by good buildings, that could host festival events and other activities to contribute to town centre vibrancy.
2. **Improve Imperial Circus.** Imperial Circus is another large, potentially beautiful public space (approx. 53m x 23m/175' x 75'). The Grade II listed Clarence Lamp (★) could be relocated to create an open space, edged with street trees and unified with level surfaces and better street furniture.

Continued overleaf ...

Proposals (continued from page 5)

3. **Prioritise the Promenade.** Probably the most underestimated public space in Cheltenham, the Promenade (approx 120 x 28m/395' x 92') needs simple adjustments to make it one of the best. Exclusion of all vehicles (except emergency and street cleaning vehicles) would enable the removal of all clutter, including bollards. Tree pits would reconfigured to the best size and underplanted. Benches and sculptures would be rearranged to make the best of views and open space for events including markets, entertainment and festivals.
4. **Loop traffic.** All vehicles would be removed from Boots Corner, partly by looping traffic from Clarence Street via Clarence Parade and Crescent Place. Properties on the north side of the Promenade and Clarence Parade would still be serviced from Post Office Lane.



Freed from traffic, the High Street's social divide would be eradicated and shoppers would be able to go wherever they like.

General approach

- **Leadership.** Establish a Town Centre Forum (TCF) to lead the town centre's redevelopment and maintain momentum through cleaning, maintenance and event management. This was recommended by the Local Government Association in CBC's Peer Review of the Planning Department. It would inject new ideas and share the burden of the town centre's management and oversight.
- **Prioritise people.** We must overturn the domination of vehicles over people. We need not be anti-vehicle as we should acknowledge the need for deliveries and accessibility but as a matter of principle, vehicles must work around people not the other way round.
- **Public realm design.** We need a new approach to public realm design to replace the inconsistent, piecemeal approach of the past three decades. Surfaces can differ but should be used to zone areas such as the public squares. Trees and planting are essential to soften the area, and improve air quality and the environment. A single design of street furniture will improve coherence and simplify repositioning if required. Then we need a plan to keep it all in the best possible condition in future.
- **Events.** Events should be an integral part of Cheltenham's street scene. But don't allow just anything, such as fast-food stands – expect better! Beware of cheapening the town centre and thus undermining Cheltenham's brand and distinctiveness. Manage the allocation of licences so that street traders don't undermine the stores who are paying top money through rents and rates.
- **Antisocial behaviour.** Take a stronger line on littering, begging and ASB to ensure the town centre feels safe for everyone and is not just the playground of the few.
- **Servicing.** A more rigorous programme of deep as well as routine street cleaning will maintain a higher standard for the public realm. More bins must be provided at obvious locations and prioritised for their attractiveness not, as presently, for their ease of use by refuse operatives. The collection of commercial refuse/recycling must be better coordinated by the TCF, BID, Ubico and the six commercial waste operators to prevent the piles of bags and rubbish in our town centre every day. ●

Two options for Promenade paving

Cheltenham Civic Society has been campaigning for an improvement to the Promenade's paving for at least three years. We finally gained traction by contacting the Gloucestershire County Council (GCC) Cabinet Member for Highways, who tried to set up a meeting between us, GCC and Cheltenham Borough Council (CBC). It then took just shy of six months actually to meet and even then, CBC chose not to be present, despite their public realm responsibilities.

GCC's highways officers refused to accept that poor workmanship and contract supervision were to blame for the evident failures to date. They then set out two options to address the Promenade's poor state, in particular the Cavendish House section. These were:

OPTION A – BOLLARDS

Many of the original bollards were removed from the Promenade for the Tour of Britain Race in 2017, six years ago. These bollards delineated the reinforced section of the Promenade for vehicles to use. Consequently, vehicles have been free to park and manoeuvre anywhere, which is what GCC blames for the broken paving. That almost all the broken paving is on the reinforced section seems to have passed them by. GCC proposes to reinstate the bollards at a cost of about £10,000 and to resurface the reinforced section between them in coated black tarmac at a cost of about £90,000 – a total of about £100,000. The black tarmac will be 'dressed' with small, neutral coloured pebbles, as seen around Imperial Gardens. This is GCC's preferred option.


With gaps in the bollards you get this!

ADVANTAGES

- Removes cracked paving slabs.

DISADVANTAGES

- Visually creates a vehicle-prioritised route from the Colonnade to the lower Promenade, encouraging speeding and increased traffic.
- Maintains importance of vehicles over people.
- Huge cost.
- Relegates the Promenade as an important open space within the town centre.
- Limits space for events such as markets.
- Greater impact on businesses and pedestrians during works.

OPTION B – NO BOLLARDS

The second option is to close the Promenade to all traffic bar emergency and cleansing vehicles, using a Traffic Regulation Order (TRO). This could take two years to be approved but would see bollards removed from the Promenade and re-sited across the top and bottom of the pedestrianised areas to prevent traffic entering. This would enable the stone paving to be reinstated without further risk of damage. All other bollards and street clutter could also be removed from within the restricted area. Costs would be considerably less than option A, since most bollards could be reused, stone is already in stock for reinstatement, and the only new bollards would be for secure access.

ADVANTAGES

- Repairs cracked paving slabs.
- Retains traditional character of the Promenade.
- Prioritises people over vehicles.
- Much lower cost - perhaps £80,000 less.
- Retains space for events.
- Much lower impact on town centre users and businesses.

DISADVANTAGES

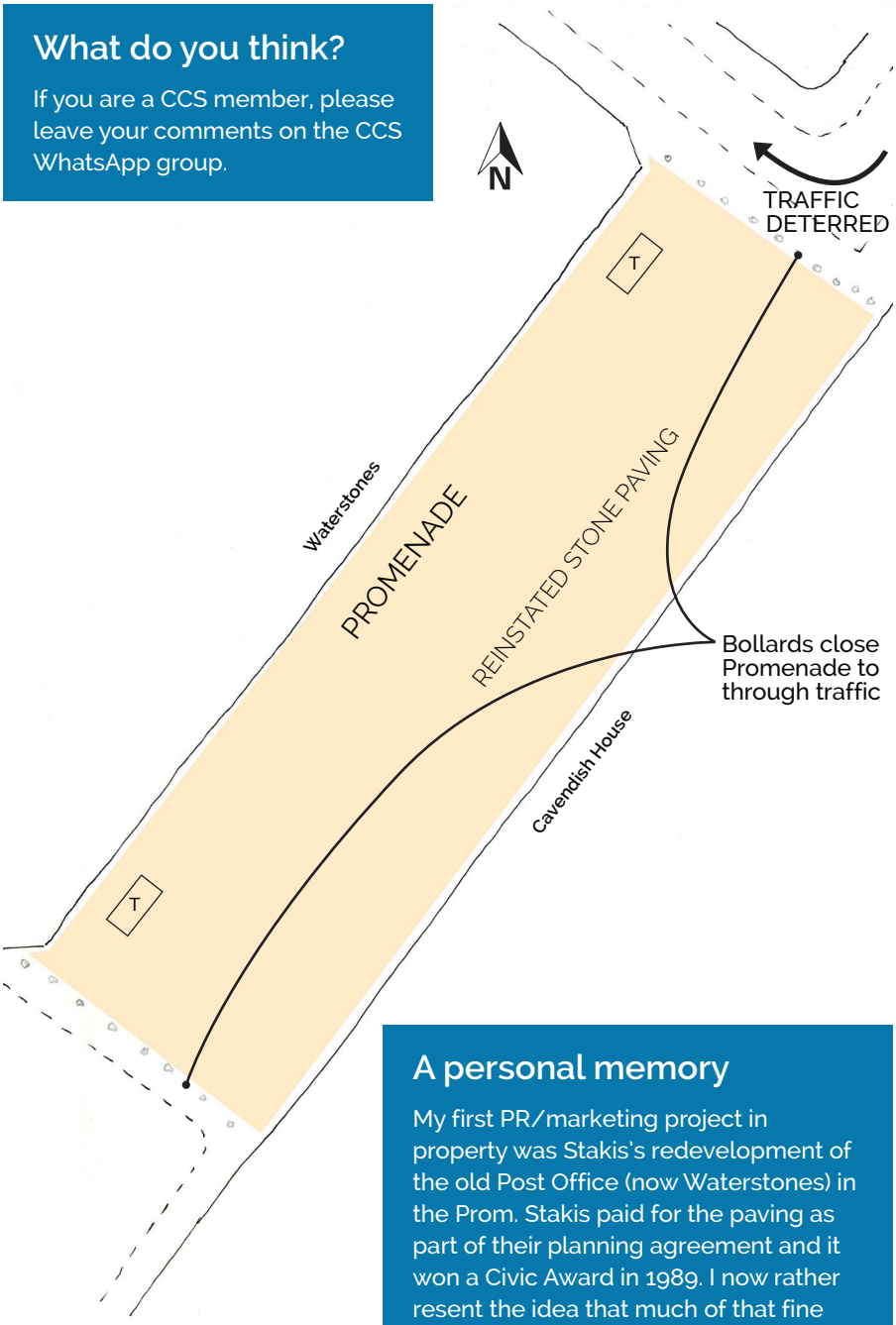
- Access arrangements for emergency and cleansing vehicles would need to be agreed.
- TRO required, with associated costs and consultations.

GCC prefers option A – bizarrely – as it is significantly more costly. But we must remember that local authorities like making things easy for themselves rather than better for the people who pay their bills.

Option B seems much better as it maintains the character of the historic and important Promenade and it is less expensive. It may be more time-consuming to implement through a TRO but given that it takes GCC six months just to convene a site meeting, two years is not so long in reality. ●

What do you think?

If you are a CCS member, please leave your comments on the CCS WhatsApp group.



A personal memory

My first PR/marketing project in property was Stakis's redevelopment of the old Post Office (now Waterstones) in the Prom. Stakis paid for the paving as part of their planning agreement and it won a Civic Award in 1989. I now rather resent the idea that much of that fine stone could soon be ripped up just to suit GCC. **Ed.**

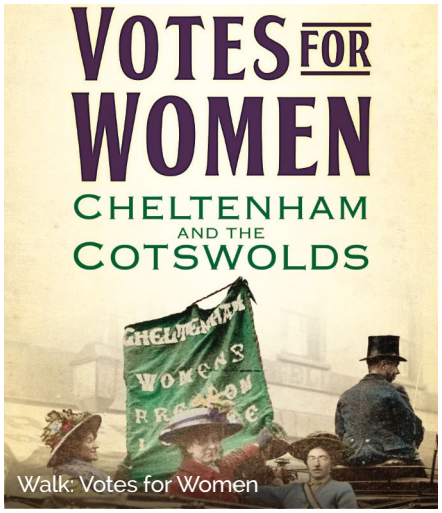


How the Prom and its Yorkshire stone paving looked at the beginning of the 1990s.



Open house: All Saints church

New attractions joining Heritage Open Days this year



Walk: Votes for Women

Coming soon – HODs 8-17 September 2023

With nearly 70 things to choose from, this year's HODs programme is set to feature more than 20 new open buildings, walks, talks and other events. Our full programme will be published on Thursday 20th July, from when it will be downloadable from the HODs page on the Civic Society's website. ●



Steam rail journey: GWSR



Walk: Spas, Spats and Stories



Cheltenham Promenaders: Touring Mummers Performances

HODs preview continued

The theme is 'Creativity Unwrapped', so come along and explore the hidden gems of Cheltenham. Visit our stall in the Farmers' Market in the Prom on Friday 28th July to pick up a programme. Our pre-booking facility – needed for certain events – will open at 10am on Tuesday 1st August. Details will be in the programme. ●



Creativity: Mixed-Media Art Show



Open house: The Lido



Walk: The Prestbury You Didn't Know



Open house: St Christopher's church



Talk and tour: Arts and Crafts



Exhibition: Cheltenham Postcards



A 'wish stone' or just a well-worn gate pier?

Some believe that this old stone on the corner of Clarington Mews in Pittville is a 'wish stone' or 'tingle stone' – where people make a wish while placing a small pebble or stone on it.

However, local historian, Jill Waller, thinks that that's probably a fairly recent 'invention' and that the more likely explanation is that it is just an old worked stone such as a gate pier that may have come from one of the entrances to Dunalley Lodge. ●



Alternative arrangements for CBC

As an update to spring edition of OT (OT30), CBC is no longer looking to find a new Head of Planning. Given the tough recruiting and retention environment, CBC has instead reorganised its Planning Department under two heads of service. One will oversee policy and include conservation officers; the other will oversee 'planning operations' including planning enforcement. Both will report to the Director of Community & Economic Development, Tracey Crews. This looks like a pragmatic option and we will continue to support the Department in its new configuration. ●

Around Town : STREET ART



Orchard Way – off Princess Elizabeth Way

Cheltenham Civic Society

Key contacts

Andrew Booton Chairman **chair@cheltcivicsoc.org**
Hugh Curran Membership Secretary **membership@cheltcivicsoc.org**
Steve Bryson Editor of OurTown **comms@cheltcivicsoc.org**

Enquiries

enquiries@cheltcivicsoc.org
Cheltenham Civic Society
https://cheltcivicsoc.org
Follow us on **Twitter** and **Instagram @cheltcivicsoc**
and on **Facebook.com/cheltenhamcivicsociety**
Registered charity No. 1166580

https://cheltcivicsoc.org

Photo and image credits

PAGE
1-2: Civic Day – Editor
3: Parmoor – Edge; paving – Editor
4-6: Boots Corner – Editor
7: Prom van – Editor
8: Prom – Editor's old project files
9-10: HODs – participants
10: Wish stone – Editor
11: Around Town – Editor
12: EV chargers – Editor;
Circumspice – Mike Rigby

Artwork and layout by the Editor
Printing arranged by Art Works Design



Lansdown Road chargers – recently connected to the grid after an 18 month wait.

So little incentive to go electric!

I first wrote about the paucity of electric vehicle (EV) chargers in OT27 a full year ago. In that article, I pointed out that Cheltenham needs to quickly up its game by installing hundreds of accessible on-street charging points. If we are to stand any chance of saving the planet by ditching our internal combustion engines for greener transport modes, these charging points are needed to serve the huge proportion of the town's homes that have no driveways or off-street parking.

If you live in areas such as Fairview or Tivoli, your only chance of running an EV is to rely on chargers situated in service stations or car parks. In central Cheltenham, that means a choice between the total of 11 chargers spread between the Regent Arcade, the service station on Lansdown Road, Lidl on Swindon Road, and Tesco on Tewkesbury Road. All the others that appear on the EV Zap Map app are either private, for hotel guests only, or simply out of order!

Gloucestershire County Council promised a year or more ago to install 1,000 on-street chargers across Gloucestershire in three years. 12 months later and not a single one has appeared on the Zap Map. I despair! ●

Steve Bryson

Circumspice 10



Move along now! There's nothing to see here! The seasoned urban wanderer will always ask questions about an open space – why, what, when? Absence and presence are both part of our townscape history. What is absent here and what is the (very tenuous) connection to Michaelangelo?

Rig

The answers to this mini quiz* can be found on the Society's website: **cheltcivicsoc.org/category/news**

*Unfortunately there are no prizes!

Cheltenham Civic Society

We are proud to be supported by the following companies and organisations.

BENCE Builders Merchants
Leckhampton BUILDERS
COUNTYTOCOUNTY Property Group
Crowe
EDW
UNIVERSITY OF GLOUCESTERSHIRE
CHELTENHAM LADIES' COLLEGE
evansjones
savills
hcr harrison clark rickerbys solicitors
willans Willans LLP | solicitors
EVERYMAN THEATRE · CHELTENHAM
Cape HOMES LIMITED

CHELTENHAM CIVIC SOCIETY ● CHELTCIVICSOC.ORG