

SECTION 5 – VULNERABILITY AND ISSUES

5.0 VULNERABILITY AND ISSUES

The issues affecting Pittville Park and their vulnerability are varied - some quite major and pressing - some much more noticeable than others - some perhaps not fully appreciated as developing issues at all. Fundamental to all is the use of the park and its ongoing management. Parks without a sustainable use can rapidly become at risk.

One of the central issues at Pittville is the ongoing management and maintenance of the different uses and activities whilst simultaneously ensuring preservation and enhancement of significance. There is also the condition of some of the features and the need to address legislation such as that concerning health and safety as well as access.

A number of issues are discussed in this section relating to specific items concerning the park. Pittville Park comprises an evolving site with a variety of significances and together these hold meaning for a wide range of stakeholders and members of the community. Pittville Park therefore needs to be managed in a dynamic manner and not as a static entity.

The issues and vulnerabilities outlined here have been fully assessed in conjunction with the identified significances and subsequently used to inform the proposals set out in the following chapter.

5.1 Historic Landscape

The historic landscape at Pittville is recognised as being significant and is listed as Grade II on the English Heritage register of Parks and Gardens. The park also provides the landscape setting for the Pittville Pump Rooms, which are regarded as being architecturally significant and are also listed as Grade I.

The historic fabric of Pittville Park, including buildings such as the Pump Rooms and Central Cross Café, bridges, gate piers and mature tree plantings all contribute to the character and setting of the landscape. Changes to the management structure, reductions in budgets and staffing cuts have all contributed to the decline in the historic fabric, resulting in a gradual deterioration in the character and setting of the park. Materials have been replaced with cost effective substitutes rather than period matches. Planting has been reduced, once a colourful display of plants surrounded the upper lake, today a collection of hardy shrubs which are systematically cut back to a uniform shape and size are predominant. Such conflicts continue to exist which are seriously detrimental to the remaining historic fabric.

The management team are sensitive to and aware of the historic significance of the park but are restricted in their approaches by funding cuts and a centralisation of resources. At present they provide the best service possible with the resources they have, however this approach may result in further and rapid deterioration in the historic fabric.

5.2 Landscape Setting

One of the most beneficial aspects to the landscape within Pittville Park is its open nature, with limited belts of dense vegetation to the peripheral areas, alongside residential housing belts and roads which pass through the green space.

This open nature provides an overwhelming sense of safety within the park, especially for visitors who use the park throughout the evening, with good surveillance from those residential areas and dissecting roads.

The landscape setting has remained, for the most part, constant throughout the history of the park, with more recent features now creating a new layer. Some of these newer features, the tennis courts and skateboard park for example, do create a visual intrusion into the landscape setting and whilst they do provide a resource for visitors, they also provide a greater conflict within the historic setting.

The character of the Pittville area, which includes Pittville Park has been studied and recorded within the Cheltenham Borough Council Local Development Framework and the resulting documents will be adopted as supplementary planning guidance to be considered in all new planning applications and in the future management of the area.

5.3 Access and Circulation (inc Pedestrian / vehicle traffic)

Access to Pittville Park from wider setting

Pittville Park lies within easy walking distance from Cheltenham town centre. Access into the park from the wider area is excellent, especially in the west park which has a predominantly open boundary. As the park is dissected by the busy A435 Evesham Road and the smaller Tommy Taylor's Lane, public transport provision is also excellent.

a. Public Transport

There is good access to Pittville Park from public transport, with bus routes passing through the park on Evesham Road and Tommy Taylor's Lane.

b. Car Travel

Access to Pittville Park by car is easy, especially for visitors arriving from destinations beyond Cheltenham. (See Fig 1.1)

The M5 runs north-south to the west of Cheltenham. Major roads converge in Cheltenham, including the A4019 from the north west, A40, Lansdown Road from Gloucester and the south west, A40 London Road from the south east and A46, Bath Road from the south via Leckhampton.

See Section 5.4 for car parking provision around the park.

c. Pedestrian / Cycle entry

The boundaries of Pittville Park are the most permeable for pedestrian and cycle access. The park to the east is enclosed by a series of boundary treatments to the north, whilst to the south, the Lawns have no boundary treatment and therefore enable the park to have access for all.



2007 Pittville Lawn South

Access to the north of Pittville Pump Room Lawns is via two approach drives and gates to the east and west of the Pump Room.

From the south access towards the Pump Room is via an unmarked entrance south of the subway and historic bridge. The hard, bitmac surfaced footpath then leads across the bridge, through green iron railings and gates, towards the pump room.



2007 Bridge at the western end of the Upper Lake.

There is a formal gateway to the north of the bridge, off Evesham Road through high, gothic gate pillars. The iron gates are permanently locked. This formal entrance is in keeping with the character and setting of the park and signifies the historical importance of this entrance. There is no interpretation or signage here other than a dedication to the person for whom the gates were purchased.



2007 Historic entrance to Pittville Pump Room, off Evesham Road

To the east of the lower lake are two further gateways, the most eastern of the two leads off Pittville Lawn, between medium height green iron gates, towards the bridge to the east of the Upper Lake. These gates are locked.



2007 Gates onto Pittville Lawn

There is a small pedestrian entrance to the east of the Pump Room lawns which has an ornamental gate. A narrow alley leads east between the gardens of residential properties and finally emerges onto Albert Road.

It is unclear as to the history of this entrance and the amount of visitors to the park who use it. The ironwork of the gate is different to the site wide style of ironwork which may indicate it was once a private, locked entrance to the park.



2007 Entrance along eastern boundary of Pump Room lawns



2007 Gates to south of Upper Lake

The grand, formal entrance for the carriage drive to Pittville Pump Rooms is found to the south of the Upper Lake, off Pittville Lawn. Two high, stone gate piers with finials define the gateway and a pair of high green iron gates stand open to welcome visitors. A hard, bitmac surfaced, drive leads through the gate piers, looping around the eastern side of the Upper Lake, across the bridge and north towards the Pump Rooms. This grand entrance is an indication of the historic significance of the park. There is no interpretation of this historic significance at this point.

For a short distance beyond the gate piers, continues a low, curved stone wall with green iron railings above. The low wall ends with a further set of smaller piers. To the east a medium height, green iron railing fence defines the park boundary. To the west the park is open. Parked cars to either side of this significant and important gateway detract from its character.



2007 Car parking around gates

To the west, predominantly open boundaries enable pedestrians and cyclists easy access along the majority of the boundary. Hard surfaced footpaths are lacking to the west, with the only routes running west-east along the lakeshores. Gateways along the southern boundary with the St Paul's residential area enable easy access, despite the lack of footpath provision and desire lines within the grass are a clear indication of usage.



2007 Open access into Pittville Park off Tommy Taylor's Lane

The Honeybourne Line cycle and pedestrian route passes to the west of the Park, providing a direct, green corridor link to the town centre. This corridor has been formed on the disused railway tracks of the Honeybourne Line and provides a well maintained, sustainable route between the park and the town centre. Signage towards the Honeybourne Line within the park is limited and visitors from further afield may be unaware of this route.

Whilst there is easy access for cyclists within the park, footpath provision is limited and the only route through the west park is via a relatively narrow footpath, wide enough for pedestrians to pass with ease but too narrow to allow safe passing of pedestrians and cyclists.



2007 Footpath west towards Tommy Taylor's Lane.

Gateways from the south predominantly follow the historic street pattern from the town centre via St Paul's residential area. These gateways are enclosed and formed in gaps between houses. Once within the park boundary there is no formal footpath for three of these gateways.

The gateway to the west adjacent to Agg Gardner Lodge leads from Brunswick Street. There is a brick surfaced footpath between the road and the park, which ends abruptly just beyond the rear garden boundary fences of adjacent houses. A dirt track, formed through volume of foot traffic, leads off east at this point towards the newly renovated Agg Gardner Pavilion.



2007 Agg Gardner Lodge and Brunswick Street beyond.



2007 Gateway entrance into park with dirt track off to the right.

The central gateway from Marle Hill Parade leads into the park between residential houses. This gateway space is narrow and difficult to see both from the park and from the road to the south, and is defined to the north by solid green metal railings with pedestrian access space between.

To the south a single black bollard stands in the centre of the footpath. This gateway has a brick surfaced footpath which is colonised by grass and weeds. Again the path ends abruptly once inside the park. High wooden garden boundary fences stand to each side of this narrow gateway space.

Despite the provision of a rubbish bin, there was, at the time of surveys in the park, a large amount of rubbish surrounding this gateway.



2007 Gateway between park and Marle Hill Parade.

The third gateway to the east of the Agg Gardner recreation ground leads from Wellesly Road and enters the park via a low iron railing fence and gate.

This gateway runs to the east of the residential houses and has a more open aspect. Again, there is no hard surfaced footpath leading into the park from this gateway although clear desire lines within the grass give an indication of foot traffic through this gateway.



2007 Eastern gateway into park from Wellesly Road.

The main St Paul's gateway does have a hard bitmac surfaced footpath leading towards the Lower Lake, through a green metal fence designed to prohibit the entry of traffic into the park. Sadly it also gives the visual appearance of no access from that point and it is only when close by the fence that entry points can be seen. There is a gate which opens into the park, allowing authorised maintenance vehicles entry.



2007 St Paul's gateway looking north (above) and south (below)



This gateway, which leads into the park from the junction between Hudson Street and Hanover Street, is the least appealing of all within the park. Litter and broken grass are strewn in the ground.



2007 St Paul's gateway

A single narrow bitmac surfaced footpath leads from this gateway, adjacent to a high metal security fence towards the Lower Lake.



2007 Footpath.

To the south of the gateway there is an expanse of hard surface. This is paved with both pc slabs and an area is also paved with smaller units to denote the entrance to an electricity sub-station. This variety of paving styles results in an untidy appearance which does not contribute to the character and setting of the park. Bollards have been erected to restrict the parking of unauthorised vehicles, although consultation with local community groups indicated that this is a sensitive area and often covered in parked cars whose occupants cause damage around this gateway and within the park.



2007 South of the gateway.

To the north of the park access is predominantly open from the Albermarle residential area although east of this point, from the Albermarle Road car park to the Pump Room, access is controlled by boundary fences and residential houses.

The gateways adjacent to the Albermarle Road car park is marked by two gaps in the low fencing which surrounds the car park. There is no hard surfaced footpath linking these two entrances beyond the car park, however, as this is the only exit point from the park towards the north, there are clear desire lines in the grass indicating the extent of foot traffic. There is no gateway to the north eastern part of the park and the boundary is marked by a high evergreen hedge along Albermarle Road and higher golf netting along Evesham Road.



2007 Access into park via Albermarle Road car park

Access into the western park off Evesham Road is via a narrow gate off Evesham Road, adjacent to the existing tennis courts. A narrow, hard bitmac surfaced footpath leads through the low, green railing gate to the north of the tennis courts and skateboard park. There is no corresponding gateways to the opposite side of Evesham Road into the eastern park.

Further south along Evesham Road, beyond the subway, is a narrow gateway between the green iron railings. A hard, bitmac surfaced path leads west towards the Lower Lake. This is the main access point into the western park from Evesham Road. There is no signage at this point which announces arrival into the park.



2007 Access into the park off Evesham Road.

Circulation within the Park

a. Internal footpaths

There is a good footpath network surrounding the upper and lower lakes and to the east park where a series of footpaths denote the original walks and rides in the pleasure gardens built between 1825-42.

The drive to the Pump Room enters the park between gothic gate piers at the eastern point of the upper lake.

The drive continues to the front façade of the Pump Room before heading south along the eastern boundary.



2007 Pump Room Drive

This drive continues down and around the upper lake. A small gateway leads out of the park onto Pittville Lawn. A narrow footpath continues west at this point, along the lakeside towards Evesham Road. A series of narrow footpaths cross the lawns at this point, providing good access across the site.



2007 Drive looking south from Pump Room towards Upper Lake

The Pittville Lawns are well served with a footpath hierarchy which link to Pittville Lawn, Central Cross Drive, Evesham Road and Wellington Road.



2007 Footpaths through Pittville Lawns

The footpaths and drives in the eastern park comprising Pittville Pump Room Lawns, Upper Lake and Pittville Lawns are, predominantly of a hard, bitmac surface. These footpaths are in generally poor condition with surface cracks noticeable in some areas of the park. They have been spot patched in places to prevent pot holing in the short term.

The most common disruption of the bitmac surface is caused by tree roots. This disturbance can create a surface which is uplifted and folded which may cause a tripping hazard for park users



2008 Cracked surface on Pump Room Drive

These hard bitmac surfaces are functional and easy to maintain, however their dark rigid appearance does not make a positive contribution to the setting and character of the park.



2008 Path surface disturbance

The narrow path leading around the southern lakeside is surfaced with a compacted gravel and has visible signs of deterioration from foot traffic, further enhanced when the lake floods.



2008 Footpath to the south of the Upper Lake

The footpaths surfaced with compacted gravel which run adjacent to Pittville Lawn and Central Cross Drive also show an amount of surface deterioration, and indicate the amount of foot traffic through this area.



2007 Pittville Lawn North

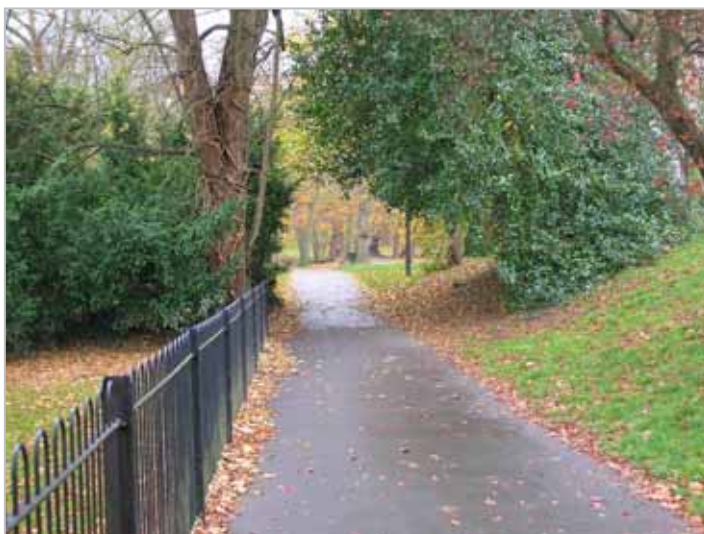
Some paths appear to have no surface treatment, or if they did the surface has disappeared. There are now desire lines which have, through the amount of use, worn a dirt track through the grass. These paths are an indication of the regular routes which people take through the park, especially where there are links to adjacent hard surfaced footpaths.

Such paths look untidy and are not in keeping with the setting or character of the park.



2007 Dirt track adjacent to Central Cross Drive

To the west the park is served by footpaths only around the Lower Lake and towards the St Paul's gateway. These hard, bitmac surfaced footpaths are in good condition and provide good access around the Lower Lake.



2007 Path adjacent to the Boat House

There are well worn desire lines which meet this path, the most prominent being to the east of the Lower Lake adjacent to the boat house and tennis courts.



2007 Desire lines off the footpath around the Lower Lake (above and below)

To the east of the Lower Lake where the footpath extends beyond a large grassed area, desire lines have been formed by people taking a shortcut across the grass, resulting in the grass wearing away and a dirt track established.

In the gateway space to the Lower Lake, this surface deterioration does not add to the character and setting of the park, instead it gives a weary and neglected appearance.



A similar desire line has been worn into the grass towards the children's play area adjacent to the St Paul's residential area. Originally a gravel surfaced path, the edge is just visible although grass has been allowed to encroach and the surface disappeared.



2007 Play area adjacent to the St Paul's residential area

There is no hard surfaced footpath to the north of the west park. Grass runs directly adjacent to Albermarle Road, with the only footpath provision being to the north of this road. On the land once occupied by Marle Hill House, a narrow worn bitmac surfaced path runs around the perimeter of the residential houses. This footpath is outside the boundary of the park but is the only hard surfaced footpath available to park visitors at this northern boundary.



2007 Residential area footpath off Albermarle Gate

There are no hard surfaced footpaths linking the northern boundary with the Lower Lake. There is good footpath provision within both Wellington and Clarence Square. The footpaths follow the same route as was originally laid out in the early days of Pittville Park. Both squares have good access from four gateways, with a hard, bitmac surfaced footpath leading visitors diagonally across Clarence Square and around the perimeter of Wellington Square.



2007 Clarence Square

Footpath provision to the exterior of the boundary hedge is limited, with hard surfaces only provided close to the some of gateways. The hard surfaced footpaths do not extend to four sides of the squares and, where these surfaces end, the footpaths are still visible in the grass, either as a well worn dirt surfaces or as desire lines within the grass. The need for a footpath to the exterior of the boundary hedge is clear and the current worn grass surfaces do contribute a negative affect on the character and setting of these squares.



2007 Wellington Square

There are no hard surfaced footpaths within Pittville Crescent, with gateways leading directly onto the grass within the both crescent gardens. A hard surfaced footpath runs east-west to either side of Central Cross Drive and north-south along Albert Road.



2007 Pittville Crescent

b. Restrictions of access

Pittville Park is freely open for visitors 365 days a year and its predominantly open boundary enables visitors to have access over the entire park.

The limited provision of hard surfaced footpaths can be seen to limit access to the wider grassed setting of the park, with visitors using these areas being predominantly dog walkers or people taking a short cut route north-south through the park. Throughout periods of bad weather the grassed areas of the park have limited access to all users.

The 18 hole, Approach Golf Course occupies the northern grassed area of the west park. Although on the occasions of survey visits this facility was never seen to be used, it remains a popular facility and the possibility of flying golf balls seriously limits access to wider audiences. Gateways to north of the west park are restricted by the location of this golf course.



2007 The Approach Golf Course

The play area adjacent to the St Paul's residential area has restricted access. The fenced play area is an island within the grass, with no hard surfaced footpath leading to and from it. This lack of well maintained footpaths effectively limits access to this play area to dry weather only. At other times access across the grass, especially for tiny feet, will result in wet shoes. Disabled access to this facility would be extremely difficult.



2007 Play area adjacent to the St Paul's residential area

There is an issue with restrictions of access for some local residents. There are a significant number of unauthorised vehicles driven into Pittville Park, predominantly into the west park. Cars and motorbikes cause much damage to the landscape setting, including deep tyre and skid marks within the grass and areas of fire damage where vehicles are burnt out.

This unauthorised vehicle access is also a significant worry to local residents. Fearful of the harm that they or their children may suffer from this unauthorised misuse of the park, this has resulted in many families no longer using the park, or allowing their children to have free access to this wonderful recreational and educational resource on their doorstep.

Access to facilities within the Park

a. Golf Course

The Approach Golf Course is accessible for everyone on a pay and play basis. This eighteen hole golf course is well managed and maintained by Cheltenham Borough Council, and Green fees are payable at the Boat House.

b. Tennis Courts

There are three hard surfaced tennis courts located adjacent to Evesham Road in the west park. The courts have a high perimeter fence and have access gates from the north, off a narrow bitmac surfaced footpath and from the south, directly off the grass.

There is one bench positioned to the north of the courts but no provision inside the courts for sitting between games. The surface of the courts was resurfaced in 2007



2007 Tennis courts (above) and sign (below)

A faded sign attached to the fencing to the south of the courts indicates bookings available between April and September at the golf kiosk, which no longer exists.

The entrance gates and steps, especially to the south, are in a poor state of repair and visually detract from the high quality surrounding landscape.



c. Play equipment / areas

The play facilities within the park are restricted to designated and fenced areas in the east and west park (see Section 3 – Understanding the site) These play facilities are aimed at younger children and have limited provision for older children and teenagers.



2007 Evesham Road play area



2007 Agg Gardner play area

Whilst the equipment is in good working order, it is becoming faded and worn with use, with path surfaces and edging treatments showing a high amount of wear and tear.

Metal self closing gates are installed in the gateways to both play areas. Large areas of dark coloured wet pour give the Evesham Road play area a drab and unappealing appearance. The wet pour surface in the St Paul's play area does have colouring upon it although this is becoming faded and worn.

The range of equipment in both play areas is predominantly aimed at physical play and other play types such as social, creative, fantasy, exploratory and role play are not catered for.



Physical play in both areas is well catered for with a good range of climbing, sliding and rocking equipment.



2007 Equipment in the Evesham Road play area (above and below)



2007 Physical play for older juniors

Some newer pieces of equipment have been installed in the play area adjacent to Evesham Road. The bark safety surface within the Evesham Road play area is in good condition and clean and is in keeping with the character and setting of the park.

Some of the grassed surfaces within the Evesham Road play area have become very worn, despite the provision of grass crete surface. This is an indication of the usage of the play area.



2007 worn grass in Evesham Road play area

On the occasions of the site visits in November 2007, equipment was rocking equipment had been removed from the wet pour surface.



2007 Missing equipment

d. Teenage facilities



2007 Skateboard park looking east

Teenage provision within Pittville Park is specifically provided by a skateboard park. This feature has been built within the perimeter fencing of former tennis courts adjacent to the existing tennis courts adjacent to Evesham Road. There is a good range of equipment provided for both skateboard and BMX bikes.



2007 Skateboard park from south

While surface treatment within the area is structurally sound, it is considered far from useable by user groups. The equipment has a large amount of graffiti which is visible from a distance across the western park and from Evesham Road. This visually detracts from the character and setting of the park.

There are entrances into the skateboard park from the north and south. To the north access is off the narrow bitmac surfaced footpath that runs along the northern boundary of both the tennis courts and the skateboard park. There are no seats provided surrounding this space although there is evidence that one has been recently removed.

Access from the south is across grass from the Lower Lake path. Significant desire lines indicate the preferential route into the skateboard park. The steps and edges to the area are in a poor condition and give the appearance of neglect.



2007 Southern gateway to skateboard park

There are no other specific facilities for teenagers within Pittville Park. Sporting provision is well catered for in Leisure@Cheltenham. However, there are no specific areas for teenagers to meet friends and spend time. During consultation within the park it was clear from comments made by a number of teenagers that the park is well used by this age group although they feel they are often not made to feel welcome, especially if they occupy seats in the play area.

e. Boating Lake

The boat house and boating facilities are found on the Lower Lake although this facility had to close after flooding in the summer of 2007 and remained closed over the winter of 2007-08.

f. 'Birds and Bunnies'

The aviaries which stand adjacent to Evesham Road in the east park contain a selection of birds and small animals including rabbits and chipmunks. This is a popular feature of the park and it well loved by visitors of all ages.

The aviaries themselves are a recent replacement of earlier structures and provide the birds and animals adequate amounts of space.

The paving and planted beds around the aviaries are becoming visually dated, although are in good condition. The only access to this area is from the main Pump Room drive, through self closing gates within the fencing. There is no access off Evesham Road. There is a hard surfaced footpath leading from two of the gates which enables access fro disabled visitors and families with pushchairs.

Interpretation is provided here although the format is visually dated and out of childs eye level. (See 5.5 landscape interpretation and signage)



g. Fishing

A number of fishing platforms have been provided around the Lower Lake and it is understood that there is a dedicated group of fishermen who regularly use these facilities. Tickets are available from the Boat House, although it is unclear where tickets can be obtained when the boat house is closed.

The fishing platforms are in excellent condition and are maintained by members of the parks maintenance team. Whilst they are all located off the hard surfaced footpaths, some are located closer to the hard footpaths making disabled access possible.



2007 Fishing platform, Lower Lake

5.4 Car Parking

Designated car parking provision within and surrounding Pittville Park is in the form of a large area to the north, adjacent to Albermarle Road which will accommodate up to 50 cars and the Pump Room car park which can accommodate up to 150 cars. There is also a trend of parking along Evesham Road, Pitville Lawn and other minor roads in the area.

The Albermarle car park is located to the north of the park and is well hidden from view by mature trees and vegetation. There are no hard surfaced footpaths leading into the park from this point although, as this is the only gateway into the park on this north east boundary, there is a clear indication of foot traffic with the presence of desire lines through the grass.

The Albermarle car park appears to be infrequently used. Whilst site survey visits were carried out, cars were never seen parked here. Consultation with park users indicates the location of the car park and lack of footpaths to the main activity areas in the park may contribute to the unpopularity of this provision. Park users prefer to park along Evesham Road and gain easy access into the park along the footpaths which lead off to the lower and upper lakes.



2007 Car park off Albermarle Road

There is also good provision for car parking to the rear of the Pump Rooms although this facility does appear to be very well used and over subscribed at times, with cars parked randomly in any available space. Parking here is very much dependant upon events in the Pump Room and so this car park should not be classed as one of the main parking provisions for Pitville Park.



2007 Random parking behind the Pump Rooms



2007 Pump Rooms car park

To the west, there is a large car park adjacent to the Prince of Wales Stadium. This car park is always open and despite being under the management of Leisure@Cheltenham, would provide parking. Again, during site survey visits, this car park was not used.



2007 Prince of Wales Stadium car park

A sign on the car park’s boundary fence clearly indicates free parking for Pittville Park users.

Evesham Road appears to be the favoured parking location, providing good access into the park adjacent to the lakes and main activity areas. Parking along here is intensified at weekends and holiday times adding extra pressure to the busy, fast road, making pedestrian crossing extremely difficult.



2007 Prince of Wales Stadium parking sign

Parking around Wellington and Clarence Square and Pittville Crescent is on-road spaces only. Parking restrictions apply here to residents only. There are no designated parking spaces for users of these squares and crescents.

Any increase in the number of visitors to Pitville Park will put strain on the parking arrangements along Evesham Road, although it is not clear if the capacity of the three surrounding designated car parks ever reaches a maximum level.

5.5 Landscape Interpretation and Signage

There is currently no landscape interpretation within Pittville Park, despite its historic significance to the development of the town of Cheltenham and its position within the city conservation area.

The only area where an interpretation panel is provided is adjacent to the aviaries in the eastern park. Here a tall, green, circular information point gives relevant information regarding the animals and birds currently housed within the aviaries.

This information point looks uninviting and is above child's eye level, making information gathering extremely difficult for the younger visitors to whom these facts are primarily aimed. The graphics and text are more appropriate for an older age range and have faded considerably in the sun.



2007 Interpretation board adjacent to the aviaries.

Signage within the park is random in character and style. There is no consistency in the height, materials, graphic style or maintenance of signage, which is predominantly concentrated to the east park.

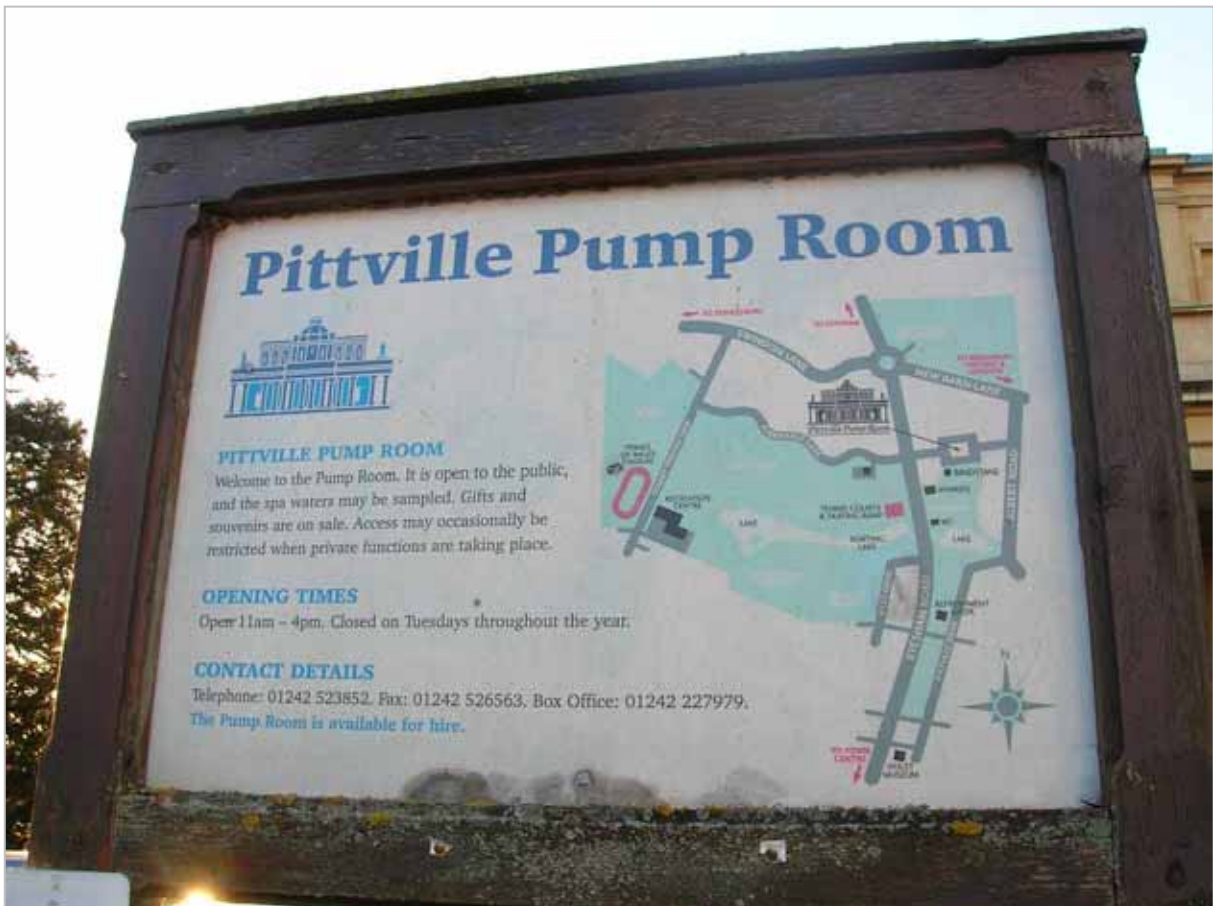
The signs vary in age across the park and are becoming worn and dated. Various stickers have also been randomly attached to signs or bollards, litter bins, fences and gates. The overall effect is a variety of styles, which are inappropriate to the character and setting of this important historic park.

Graffiti is also a consistent feature of most signs within the park.

The following photographs indicate the range of signs within Pittville Park and give an indication of the current condition and level of information provided to park users across the site.



2007 Sign behind Scout Hut on Pittville Lawn (above) Sign adjacent to Pump Rooms (below)





2007 Sign on Litter bin (above) and sign on Boat House (below)





2007 Stickers on bollard (above) and fence (below)





2007 Information sign on Pittville Lawn.



2007 Sign on Boat House for Golf Course users (above) and direction sign on north shore of Lower Lake (below)



2007 Signs at the skateboard park (above and below)





2007 Sign on Tennis Court fence (above) and playground (below)

A sign which welcomes the visitor to the play area in the eastern park advocates safe play, however, portrays a negative message about what the users cannot do. Stickers have also been placed on this sign which gives a cluttered appearance and detracts from other important information.



Interpretation and signage within the squares and crescent at Pittville follow a similar pattern to the park. There is no interpretation of the landscape available within these historic spaces.

Signage is again poor, with the two squares having similar signs which announce they are a public amenity area. In Clarence Square a rectangular metal sign is held in position by two metal tubular supports. The fixing points through onto the tubular supports have been drilled through text and the sign has graffiti upon it. The same sign appears again in Wellington Square.



2007 Clarence Square sign (above) and random signs attached to railings (below)

Small signs and stickers have once again been added to fences, gates and rubbish bins within the square. There is no standard format to these signs and the overall appearance is cluttered.





2007 Wellington Square signs attached to entry gates (above)

There is no formal signage within Pittville Crescent although random smaller information notices have been attached to railings and gates at the three entry points.



To the south of Pitville Crescent South is a small gate leading out onto the roadside verge. Here a sign has been attached to the gate. Once again this sign is of random design, visually intrusive and is attached to characteristic ironwork found within the park.

To the front the sign is clear in its message but to the rear another message is displayed which it out of place within this historic setting.



2007 Pittville Crescent sign front (above) and rear (below)



There are two wall plaques within Pittville Park. The first is positioned at the formal gateway into the east park off Evesham Road and is attached to a gate pier. The plaque signifies the donation of the gates to the park by the Floral Fete Committee in tribute to the work of Alderman WJ Green between 1935 –1951.



The second wall plaque is found close to the aviaries. This plaque indicates that this space, known as the Centenary Gardens, was opened in 2000 to celebrate the Queen Mother's 100th Birthday.

This plaque is attached to one of the raised planters, however, it is quite difficult to read because of its low position.

Both plaques are in good condition.



2007 Plaques in Pittville Park (above and below)

5.6 Landscape Views and Vistas

The historic views and vistas within Pittville Park and out into the wider landscape have been more or less preserved, although maturing vegetation has begun to obscure some classic vistas.

The most important vista within the park is that to the Pump Rooms from the upper lake. Once a clear view through, today, mature trees and vegetation have blocked the view.



c1800



2008

Other significant views include those between Marle Hill and the lower lake, towards Cheltenham, with the spires of several churches visible between the houses and the views out across Cheltenham towards the Cotswold escarpment and south towards Leckhampton Hill.

All internal views and vistas are important to the landscape setting and are at risk from encroaching vegetation or poorly located new facilities which may be considered a valuable resource in the future. Key views and vistas have been highlighted in figures 3.3 and 3.4 and future management and maintenance of Pittville Park should be made with regard to maintaining these sight lines.

5.7 Furniture

a. Seating

The seating opportunities within Pittville Park vary according to location, with the most frequent opportunities offered within the east park, around the upper lake and play area.

Benches are all of a similar style to the east park and are positioned in such a way as to enable the users a good view of the surrounding landscape.



2007 Seating opportunity in the east park

However, to the west park, seating opportunities are limited to the lower lake area with occasional fallen trees and only two simple benches provided on the north shore.

There are no seating opportunities to the north of the lower lake, across Marle Hill, or to the south of the lower lake across the Agg Gardner recreation ground, despite these areas being well used by visitors to the park. A single wooden bench is provided within the play area adjacent to the St Paul's residential area.



2007 Seating opportunities around the lower lake (above and below)

The use of fallen trees as a seating opportunity is to be commended as a sustainable approach to management and maintenance of the park, however if such features are to be used for seating, they must be maintained to a high standard and be offered as an attractive opportunity to sit and rest within the park.



Seating opportunities are also very limited within the squares and crescents, with a single bench provided in each square and none in the crescents. The benches provided within the squares are increasingly covered with graffiti.

Seating opportunities within the park as a whole are poor, with the majority of benches being located within the east park. A lack of facilities such as seating can affect the way visitors use the park and may also restrict the number of visitors who cross Evesham Road and experience the landscape to the west.



2007 Wellington Square

b. Lighting

Lighting within the park is generally well positioned and maintained. The style of lighting unit is generally maintained throughout the park and units are predominantly positioned alongside footpaths and features such as play areas and buildings.



2007 Lighting in the Pump Room car park (above) and litter bin (below)

c. Litter Bins

Litter bins within the park are located in predominant positions, generally alongside footpaths or other built features. They are generally of a standard style, coloured either green or red and the condition of these units varies according to age and usage.

Consultation within the park highlighted the need for improved facilities to dispose of rubbish, especially in those areas used for walking dogs.



d. Signage

Signage within Pittville Park is dealt with in section 5.5

5.8 Built Features

a. Boundary Elements

The condition of boundary elements such as railings and fences has been dealt with in detail in Section 3 and a condition survey of the ironwork in the park is attached at Appendix 3.



2007 Ironwork

The overall condition of the boundary treatments within Pittville Park varies according to style and age. The predominant style of built boundary treatment is green iron park railings. The current railings are replacements for original features which were removed during the 2nd world war and the condition of these features varies across the park. In some areas the paintwork is become damaged and the ironwork beneath exposed, resulting in rust.



2007 Clarence Square

Within the squares and crescents the ironwork has been removed and replaced with alternative styles of fencings, often simple wooden structures which are fit for purpose but not in keeping with the historic character and setting.



2007 Wellington Square

Gates within the park are predominantly located to the east, surrounding the upper lake. Some of these gates are locked, restricting access for the visitor.

b. Buildings

A condition survey of all the buildings within Pittville Park is attached at Appendix 3.

The buildings within Pittville Park are extremely important and significant to the character and setting of this historic green space within Cheltenham.

With the exception of the Scout Hut, all the buildings have a character which adds to the overall setting and have both a place in the history of the park and a current use today which secures their future.



2007 Central Cross Café (above) and Boat House (below)



The Scout Hut dates from 1942 and is now considered to be one of the less attractive features within the park and which significantly blocks north-south views on the Pittville Lawns. Whilst this is a well used building, its structure and character detract from the historic setting of the park and whilst planting has to some extent been used to camouflage the structure, it is still a predominant feature on the Pittville Lawns.



2007 Scout Hut

Throughout 2007 the Agg Gardner pavilion has undergone refurbishment and is now fully open as a changing facility and as a venue for activities organised by the County Youth Services.

5.9 Ecology and Soft Landscape

- 5.9.1 The evaluation of features of interest at the site concentrates on native species, protected species, native wildlife and habitats listed on the UK Biodiversity Action Plan and the Gloucestershire BAP.
- 5.9.2 Although the Pittville Park occupies a large area (approximately 34 hectares) most of the site is covered by mown, amenity grassland which in consideration of the area of the site, does not represent a diverse habitat.
- 5.9.3 The presence of Bulbous Buttercup (a species more characteristic of less improved, species-rich grassland) within the grasslands in all Character Areas is of some interest but it is concluded that this is a remnant of the unimproved grassland, which may have been present prior to the application of more modern grass cutting techniques; other plant species which are typically associated with the Bulbous Buttercup in unimproved meadows such as Common Knapweed, Pignut, and Field Scabious are absent.
- 5.9.4 The main floral diversity is provided by the planted standard trees, although many of the trees are specimen, non-native varieties.
- 5.9.5 The surveys have demonstrated that the focus/concentration of wildlife and biodiversity is associated with the lakes. It is also noted that despite their small size, the Squares and Crescents in Character Area 9 support hedgerows with a diversity of woody species.
- 5.9.6 Despite the limited habitat and structural diversity with the Park, the presence of established habitats including two UK and Gloucestershire BAP habitats (Standing Open Waters and Wood-pasture, Parkland and Veteran trees) is of significant within the urban context of the site and the built up environs. The lakes and adjacent linear trees create a wildlife corridor linking the grasslands and areas of the town.
- 5.9.7 Similarly, although some Character Areas are separated from the main Park the habitat connectivity is considered to be good as the tree lined roads create habitat continuity and connectivity between the squares, crescents, the Park and the residential gardens in the local area.
- 5.9.8 Although the site is managed as parkland and none of the Character Areas are classed as *semi-natural* it is clear that some actions have been taken to conserve the native flora and faunal interests at the site (for example the retention of dead tree stumps for use by roosting bats and birds).
- 5.9.9 It is recognised that there are some significant faunal species supported by the site (including European and UK protected species) and UK BAP Priority Species. The abundance of bat activity over the lakes is of great significance and can be a valuable resource in informing the local community about aspects of the Park which may not be as obvious (as described in section 5.16).
- 5.9.10 Whilst none of the habitats at the site are considered to be extremely fragile, a certain degree of appropriate management (either active management or protection) is required for the future conservation of the features of interest. Section 5.0 of this report outline the identified requirements.

- 5.9.11 It is considered that the amenity or intrinsic value of the site is of significance and, if managed sensitivity, can be exploited to attract visitors and raise awareness of the wildlife associated with the site and the conservation requirements.
- 5.9.12 A list of all recorded features at the site which are regarded to be of significant ecological value (taking into account the Ratcliffe criteria, the NVC and the UK and Gloucestershire BAP's) is presented below (features are not listed in any particular order): -

Feature	Rationale
Historic parkland habitat (Wood-pasture, parkland and veteran trees)	UK BAP and Gloucestershire BAP Habitat
Standing open water	UK BAP and Gloucestershire BAP Habitat
Presence of at least three genus (<i>Nyctalus</i> , <i>Myotis</i> and <i>Pipistrellus</i>) of foraging bats and the likely presence of bat roosts	European Protected species (<i>Habitat Regulations</i>) and UK protected species (WCA 1981) Some species of bat are listed as UK BAP and Gloucestershire BAP species.
Presence of Hedgehog	UK BAP Priority Species
Breeding birds including UK BAP Priority Species	UK BAP and Gloucestershire BAP species
The formation of a wildlife corridor and a refuge for wildlife within an urban context.	-

Habitat Regulations = Conservation (Natural Habitats and c.) Regulations 1994.
WCA 1981 = *Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981*

- 5.9.13 Following the completion of the baseline ecological survey and assessment it is concluded that a number of management practices and/or habitat creation schemes can be simply carried out to significantly improve the ecological value of the habitats and further enhance the biodiversity interests at the site.
- 5.9.14 In accord with the restoration of the site there is an opportunity to implement the relevant actions including the UK Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) and the Gloucestershire BAP.

5.10 Management

Current management and maintenance of Pittville Park is in conflict with the historic fabric and consequently the character and setting of the park within the Pittville area of Cheltenham. Funding and staffing cuts over the years have led to a centralisation of resources and reduction in the quality of service provided to Pittville Park.

The management team are, at a senior level, aware of and passionate about the historic significance of the park and its contribution to the overall green space within Cheltenham. The centralisation of resources has led to a reduction in the horticultural maintenance available within the borough and this in turn has seen a reduction in the style and variety of planting. Once planted with colourful bedding displays, today no planted bedding areas remain. This centralisation of services has also seen a decline in the training for team members and vital skills are being forgotten. It is a sad reality that today, with limited time and budgets, maintenance is done to keep planting in check rather than display individual plants to their full potential. Maintenance appears to have been carried out using any available materials rather than matching to a period pallet and the resulting effect is one of disharmony.

5.11 Implications of July 2007 floods

On 20 July 2007, 122mm rain fell over central and southern England in 34 hours causing widespread flooding throughout Gloucestershire. In Cheltenham, 600 properties were affected and the brook draining Pittville Park was soon overwhelmed and the lower lake burst its banks. The floodwaters quickly found their way into the nearby Leisure Centre, rising at the height of the flood to 1m above ground floor level, causing complete devastation throughout the ground and basement (including plant room) levels.

Although one of the county's highest single claims, the insurers agreed to fund a £4 million refurbishment programme, providing the Borough Council took steps to protect the Centre in future. Halcrow Group Ltd were instructed to investigate and prepare recommendations for a solution to prevent any further flood damage to the refurbished building and prepare a flood risk assessment to support any application for approval of the work by the Environment Agency (see Appendix 3).

The council purchased a temporary flood bund after initial costings suggested that this would be a cost effective way to protect the Leisure Centre and the masterplan reflects this decision. However, discussions continued with the insurers throughout May and June this year when it became clear that the annual insurance premiums associated with a temporary bund, quickly exceeded the capital cost of a permanent solution. Consequently, the Council's preferred solution now incorporates the construction of a permanent earth bund and discussions are continuing with the Environment Agency to finalise permanent, flood defence and mitigation proposals, which take into account the recommendations of the Conservation Management Plan and Masterplan.

This is an ongoing process, the final conclusions of which are not yet determined. On this basis, the Pittville park masterplan does not take account of any finalised flood mitigation / resolution proposals.