

The Making of
Cheltenham
HERITAGE, PLACE AND IDENTITY



Heritage, Place and Identity

The Making of Cheltenham represents the collective effort of a wide range of partners, organisations, community groups, and dedicated individuals who share a commitment to protecting, celebrating and promoting the town's rich and diverse heritage.

I would like to extend our sincere thanks to all partners – formal and informal – who have given their time, insight and energy to this work. From local history societies and volunteer researchers, to cultural institutions, civic groups, educational bodies and public agencies, your support has been invaluable. Your shared knowledge and continued dedication to Cheltenham's story ensure that our heritage is not only preserved but understood, enjoyed and passed on to future generations.



I look forward to continuing this journey together as we discover more, learn together, celebrate widely and protect what makes Cheltenham unique.

Councillor Izaac Tailford

Front cover image: Neptune Fountain



Royal Crescent



Executive Summary

This Heritage Action Plan outlines Cheltenham's commitment to preserving and celebrating its rich heritage. It focuses on four key themes:

1. Discover
2. Learn
3. Celebrate
4. Protect

The plan aims to engage residents, visitors, and stakeholders through accessible resources, coordinated actions, and measurable outcomes. It serves as a strategic guide for heritage development, funding, and community involvement.

Introduction

Heritage helps to create the sense of place and identity of Cheltenham, helping local people develop an attachment to their environment.

This Heritage Action Plan will do just that, promoting our heritage story about the buildings and open spaces, significant individuals and groups of people, important events, memorable objects and experiences. It will include actions which will foster Cheltenham's heritage by discovering more, informing and engaging residents and visitors, celebrating, and, where necessary, setting out ways of protecting Cheltenham's rich heritage.



Scope of the Heritage Action Plan

The Action Plan will articulate the characteristics that make up the heritage of Cheltenham with the objective of promoting engagement and establishing a continuing legacy.

This document is designed to be helpful and accessible for a wide range of stakeholders, helping to celebrate what exists as well as to maximise opportunities to uncover more, to make the sources of heritage information easily available, and to address challenges to the preservation and enhancement of the town's unique heritage offer. It will underline the economic value of heritage in its contribution to our culture and economy. It will also serve as evidence for potential heritage funders that Cheltenham merits investment.

The Action Plan is grounded in partnership working across the many interested organisations and groups. Its aims are intended to be inspirational and visionary, but it will set out practical steps for implementation. Within this it will recognise that Cheltenham's heritage is not just about its famous regency architecture but also encompasses:

- **Places:** the environment throughout the town, designed and natural
- **Events and traditions:** that have shaped the town and its increasingly diverse communities
- **Heritage items:** collections, artefacts and records
- **People:** those who have left their mark on the town, those born in the town who have achieved fame, other intriguing individuals and groups of people important in the development of the town.



The Pump Room was designed by John Forbes and opened in 1830.

Pittville Pump Room



The Poets Conservation Area



Lansdown Parade



Pittville Gates

Our Heritage Story

Cheltenham is located in a landscape rich in prehistoric and Roman archaeology.

It was a Saxon settlement around a minster and developed into a medieval borough and market town which has determined the shape of the High Street to this day. The discovery of mineral waters in the early 18th century led to the rapid emergence of a spa town with splendid buildings for wealthy incomers and artisan areas for those who provided the services. Education, and cultural and leisure facilities were an important attraction for residents and visitors. In the Victorian era and the 20th century it expanded to take in nearby ancient settlements and created many new communities. It became the home to notable craft-based, engineering and service industries. It is now a prosperous town, with a mixed economy with developing cyber, high tech and defence sectors. The spa town legacy provides significant retail, hospitality, cultural and leisure offerings, making it an attractive town for tourists.

But of course, heritage is not just about looking to the past, but also to our more modern heritage and what may define Cheltenham in the future.



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The present church is of 12th century origin, possibly on the site of a Saxon minster.

Cheltenham Minster

What is Meant by Heritage?

Historic England has defined heritage as “all inherited resources which people value for reasons beyond mere utility”.



The historic environment: This includes the location of the town, signs of prehistoric, Roman and Saxon eras from archaeological remains, the medieval Minster, the market cross, road layouts (alleys and burgage plots on the High Street), Regency and Victorian buildings, both large and more modest, churches, civic buildings and leisure facilities, commercial and industrial buildings of note and more modern significant developments towards the periphery, built to house the growing population. The natural or green environment includes the River Chelt that powered the mills supporting the town in its earliest days, and the parks, gardens and trees that have made Cheltenham an attractive place to live in and to visit. The importance of Cheltenham’s built and green heritage is recognised in Historic England’s listings (including 5 Grade 1 buildings), local listings, conservation areas, character areas and recognised open spaces. The Civic Society awards scheme helps recognize new buildings that will become heritage for the future.

Events and traditions: Cheltenham has not featured in many events of national importance, especially in its early years, but it was mentioned in the Domesday Book and acquired weekly market and annual fair charters in the early thirteenth century. The discovery and development of the first spa put it on the map as a health resort leading to the visit of George III and the boom years of the early 19th century. More recent events include events such as the Leckhampton Hill riots, the invention of the jet engine, the arrival of the Government Communications Headquarters (GCHQ), the founding of its many festivals, and the traditions of a more diverse community becoming part of Cheltenham life.

Historic items, artefacts and records: These are held in the three Cheltenham museums (the Wilson - especially from the history of the early spa onwards, the Holst - life in a typical Victorian house through the ages, and the Battlefield Crosses - commemorating the role of Cheltenham soldiers in the First World War). Other items include statues and other significant works of public art, and records and papers held in the Gloucestershire Archives, the Local Studies Library and the Wilson.

People: Those who have shaped the development of the town such as Captain Skillicorne, Joseph Pitt, and notable architects. Others include civic and industrial leaders and inventors, educationalists, military heroes, famous visitors to the town and those who have made their mark on the cultural life of the nation. Also important are daily lives of working people who contributed to the growth of the town and individuals who led interesting lives.



“Pittville was originally a private estate of houses, a lake and gardens, developed by Joseph Pitt.”

Pittville Lawn

Action Plan Objectives

What do we want the Action Plan to achieve?

- **The residents of Cheltenham know more about the town's heritage and are proud of it, and more people visit Cheltenham because of its heritage and can easily discover more about its treasures.**
 - It will achieve this by establishing a clear shared holistic vision for Cheltenham's heritage by producing an easily accessible history of the town and creating a portal for easy access to sources of heritage information, online and through the Tourist Information Centre.
 - It will identify what is significant about Cheltenham's heritage and its contribution and value including to the wider area.
 - It will promote Cheltenham's heritage and its importance in terms of its impact on the economy, on the well-being of all its residents and on visitors to the town.
- **Cheltenham's heritage is celebrated and protected for the future, and it is used as a resource to identify and support future actions and policy developments.**
 - It will achieve this by developing a longer-term view of the management of Cheltenham's heritage for better efficiency, effectiveness and value, including the identification of heritage for the future.
 - It will bring together the efforts of Cheltenham's heritage partners in a coordinated and strategic manner, with the support of the Cheltenham Culture Board, to promote smarter working, partnerships and ongoing informal cooperation.
 - It will develop and sustain the collective and individual skills, knowledge and experience in heritage management.
 - Set the conditions for fundraising to support heritage and to prevent major projects from competing for the same funding streams.
 - Use Cheltenham's rich and diverse history and culture as an inspiration and catalyst for its future development.
 - Further develop the existing partnership working between Cheltenham Borough Council (CBC), Gloucestershire County Council (GCC), Cheltenham Business Improvement District (BID) together with other key public and charitable agencies, the wider heritage community and other community groups.





St Mary's Church, Charlton Kings



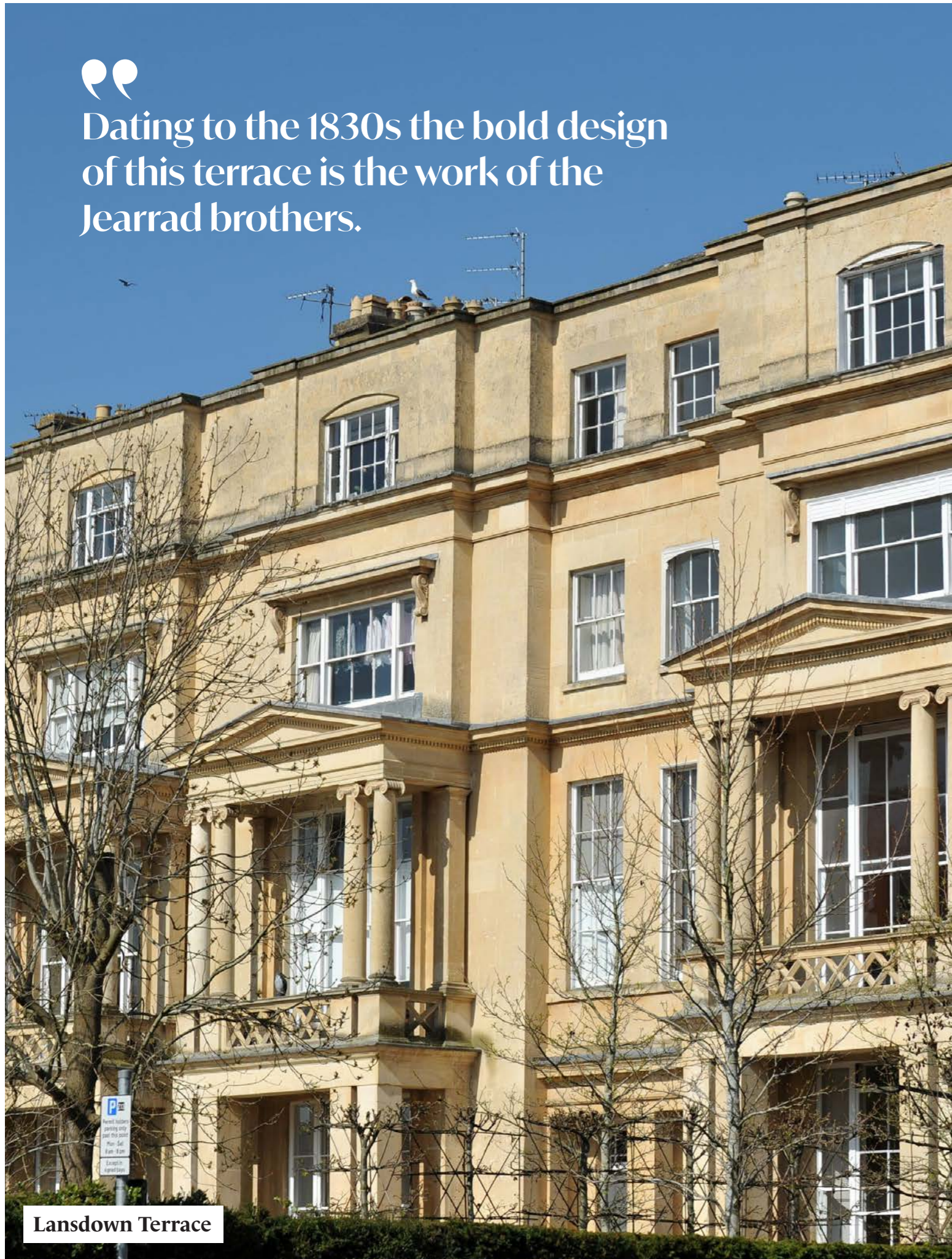
Leckhampton



Hayes Cottages



Dating to the 1830s the bold design of this terrace is the work of the Jearrad brothers.



Lansdown Terrace

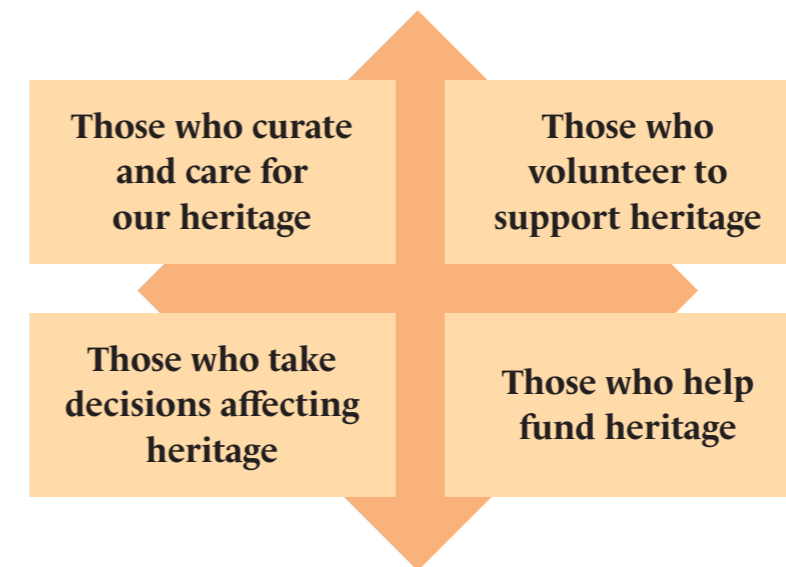
Target Audience

The outcomes of this Action Plan are for everyone who lives in or visits Cheltenham, decision makers, businesses, stakeholders and investors.



Contributors

The contributors to the Cheltenham Heritage Action Plan are numerous, ranging from both formal and informal groups, communities and other stakeholders.





Princess Elizabeth Way



Entrance to Naunton Park



St Philip and St James Church

Strategic Themes

The Action Plan will deliver against:

Discover & explore: find out more about the past and the development of our town. Continue to identify heritage for the future in all our communities

Learn together & bring together communities: make the stories and information about our heritage available and easily accessible to anyone. *Recognise that much of the wealth that funded the development of the spa town came from slave owning and East India Company sources.* Make sure all our communities and young people feel involved in the town's heritage – engagement is a key element and care must be taken to ensure it involves communities across the borough and all socio-economic groups.

Celebrate: make the most of our heritage by commemorating significant Cheltenham people, communities and events, exhibiting objects of significance, running successful festivals that celebrate our heritage of culture, leisure and sport, awarding good practice in heritage preservation.

Protect & enhance: maintain what is best about the built and natural environment and the public realm that make Cheltenham a uniquely attractive place to live in and to visit.

Success Metrics

Increased public engagement with Cheltenham's heritage: measured through number of visits to heritage attractions (museums, heritage sites, festivals) and enquiries via Visit Cheltenham and the Tourist Information Centre.

Broader participation across communities and age groups: demonstrated by involvement of schools, colleges, universities, community groups and volunteers in heritage projects, events and learning activities, including participation from under-represented areas of the borough.

Improved accessibility and awareness of heritage information: evidenced by the active use of a shared heritage information portal, improved signposting and interpretation, and positive user feedback on the ease of discovering Cheltenham's heritage stories and resources.

Stronger partnership working and delivery: measured by the number of joint initiatives delivered by heritage partners, coordinated funding bids, shared projects and skills development activities, alongside regular progress reporting through the Heritage Steering Group.

Effective protection and enhancement of heritage assets: demonstrated by completion of Conservation Area review and sound planning policies delivered via Cheltenham, Gloucester and Tewkesbury Strategic and Local Plan. Progress on successful funding secured for heritage improvements, active surveys and recognition of good heritage practice.



“
The Montpellier
caryatids are
copies of those
on the Acropolis.”

Montpellier

“
The Municipal
Offices were
designed as houses
in the 1820s.



The Long Gardens

Stakeholder Engagement

Stakeholder engagement is central to the success of this plan. Key partners including Cheltenham Borough Council, Gloucestershire County Council, Cheltenham BID, and heritage organisations collaborating to ensure inclusive participation. Public input will be encouraged through consultations, workshops, and digital platforms.

Funding Strategy

To support heritage initiatives, opportunities for wider funding will be developed. This includes identifying potential funding bodies, avoiding competition among major projects, and aligning efforts to maximise investment opportunities.

Governance

The Heritage Steering Group has been established to develop the action plan further, to identify priorities and monitor progress.

It is chaired by the Cabinet Member for Economic Development, Wellbeing and Culture, and includes:

- **Representatives from Cheltenham Borough Council including**

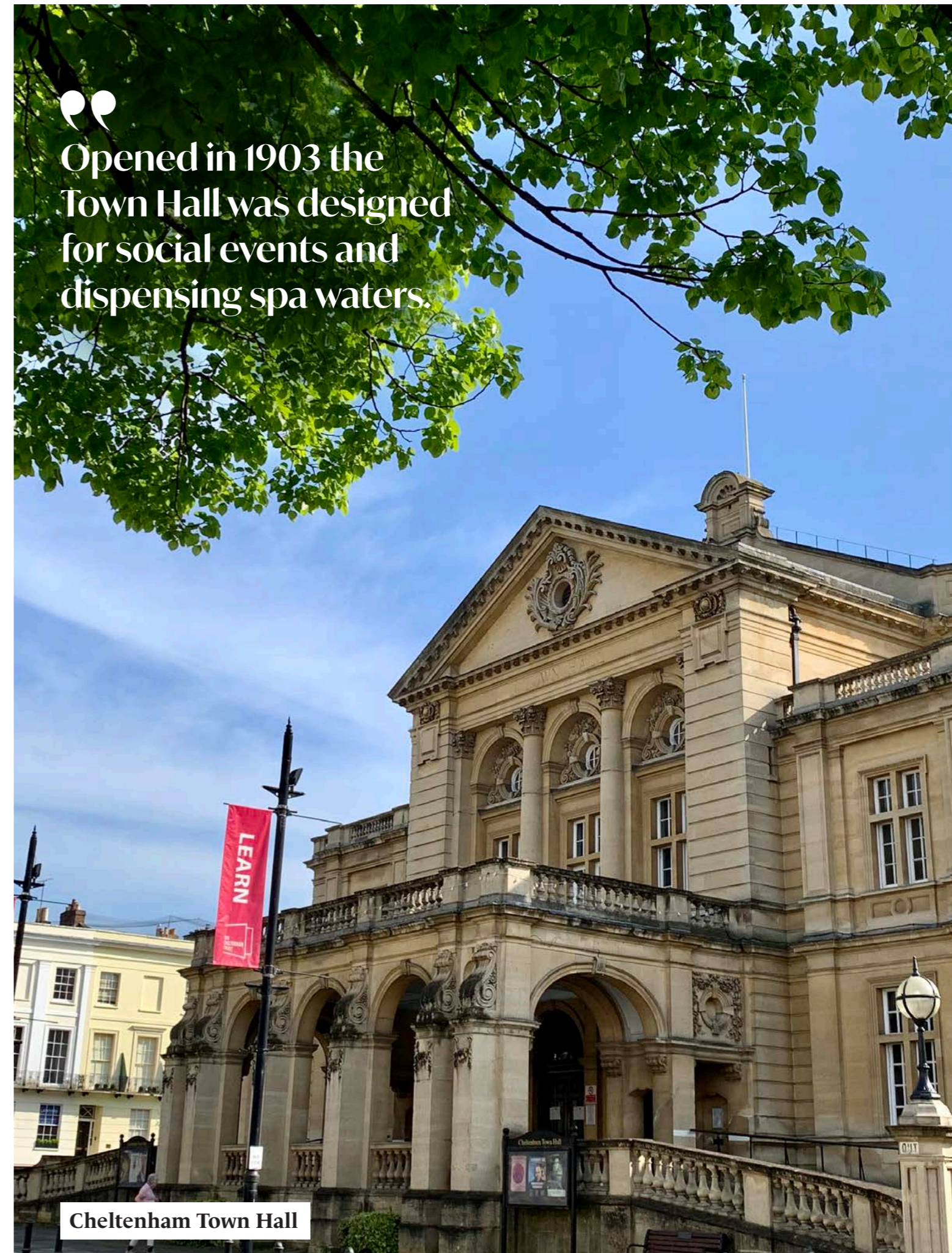
- planning, conservation & heritage
- tourism & economic development
- marketing & communications

- **Representatives from the cultural sector including**

- the Cheltenham Culture Board, museums and collections
- local history societies
- Cheltenham Civic Society

- **Representatives from the community including**

- Cheltenham Voluntary and Community Services
- friends and community groups
- youth and education



Opened in 1903 the Town Hall was designed for social events and dispensing spa waters.

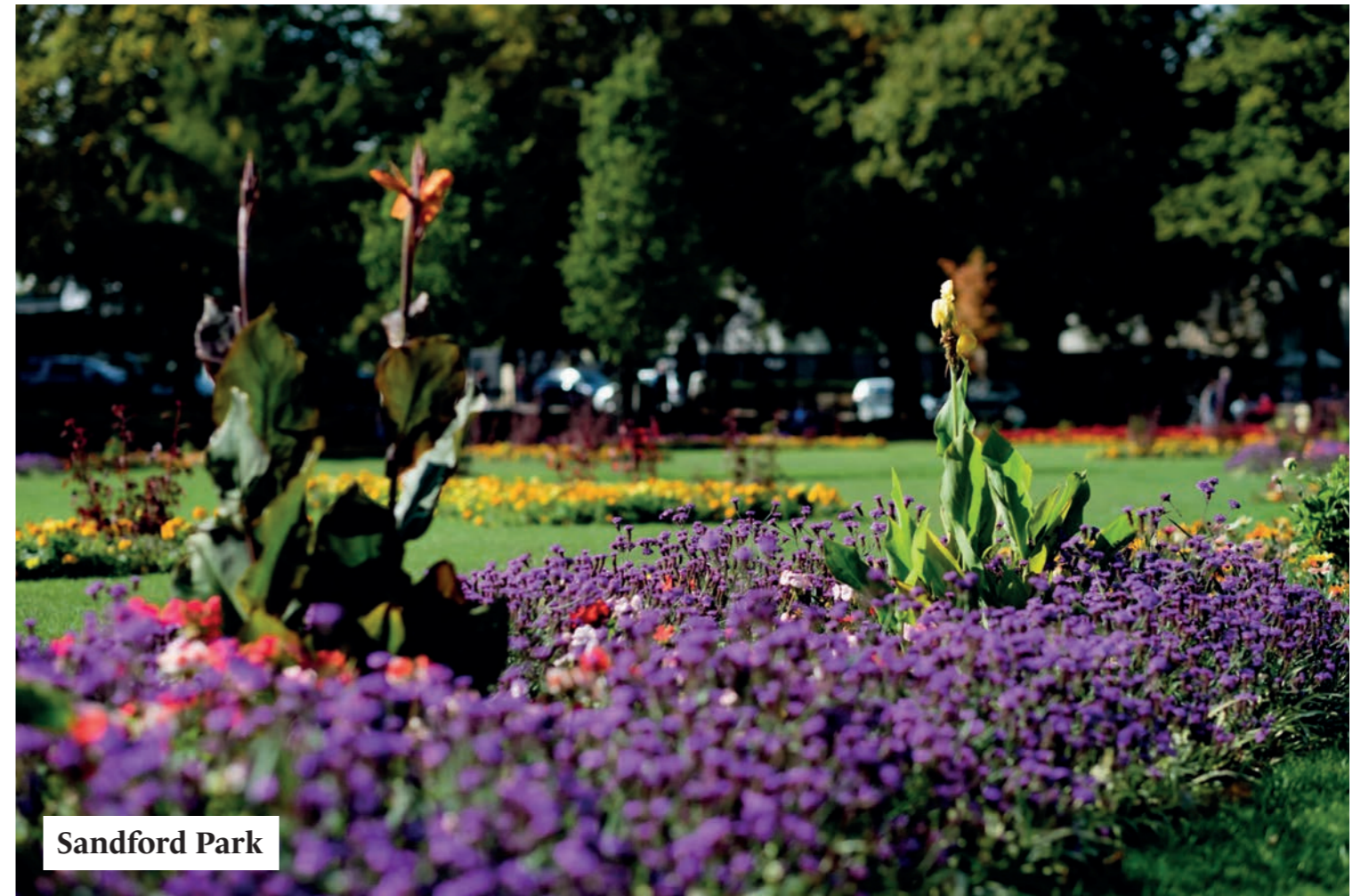
Cheltenham Town Hall



Charlton Kings



Penfold postbox



Sandford Park



Central Cross Café in Pittville Park



Charlton Kings



Cannons from the Crimea outside the Queens Hotel

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