



## Response of Cheltenham Civic Society to the Imperial Gardens Redesign Consultation

### 1. Introduction

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the proposed redesign for Imperial Gardens and the new arrangements for Cheltenham Festivals use of Imperial and Montpellier gardens.

We commend the efforts of Fiona Wild to bring the concerns about Imperial Gardens to the fore through her petition and the positive response of Cheltenham Borough Council and Cheltenham Festivals to this initiative to find a way forward.

Whilst in general we welcome the outcome of this exercise we do have a number of reservations about the re design. We have suggested changes which we believe will more closely meet the desires of residents and visitors without compromising the Festivals use.

### 2. Our Aims

Imperial Gardens and Cheltenham Festivals at the heart of our town are key attractions to both residents and visitors to the town and important to the future economy of the town. Our objectives are to reverse the decline in the quality of the Gardens, in order that they should continue to be enjoyed by all and that the Gardens and the Festivals should be able to bloom and blossom in the centre of Cheltenham in harmony.

### 3. Festival within a Garden

We do welcome the concept of the “Festivals in the Gardens” provided that the Council and the Festivals work closely together to ensure that the “Garden” component is respected as important.

The provision of an attractively paved area in front of the Garden Bar is very welcome and we hope that it will be used during the Festivals. We hope that the passage way between the Town Hall and the Quadrangle to the Gardens will at long last receive the upgrading and tidying up that we have campaigned for. The addition of flowering trees within the gardens will add structure and bring new colour to the Gardens.

### 4. Reservations

#### a. Time of occupation in Imperial Gardens and Montpellier Gardens

We are concerned about the number of days occupied by the Festivals, particularly for the erection and removal of tents and marquees. We welcome the reduction in the number of days over the season and trust that the Festivals will seek ways of reducing this further. As Montpellier Gardens do host other events, we would suggest that the Council need to set a maximum number of days of use



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for each of the 2 gardens and reduce any overlap between the 2 gardens occupation as a reassurance to the residents of Cheltenham that they have places to enjoy and be proud of throughout the year.

**b. Recovery Risk for areas covered by Marquees**

We welcome the proposals to pre-prepare the grass and replant beds covered by the marquees although we do recognise that quick recovery of the Gardens after the Festivals is still a high risk, and particularly that expectations may not be met.

**c. Damage to grass in the event of bad weather**

We are concerned about the possible damage to the grass in the event of wet weather at the time of a festival and suggest that all walkways over grass will need to be protected. (We have noted that tents and marquees cannot always be aligned with the surface paths in the Gardens, resulting in the walkways being a mixture of surfaced path and grass.)

**d. Skillicorne Garden**

The reopening of Skillicorne Garden will be a relatively costly item in the proposal and will only be of benefit to users of the Garden Bar. The lily pool will present a health and safety problem in its current form. We believe that the removal of these gardens is a better alternative which would bring greater benefit.

## 5. Suggested Improvements

**a. Open up the back of the Town Hall by removing Skillicorne Garden**

The removal of Skillicorne Garden could open up the back of the Town Hall to provide a new space, suitably hard landscaped, to form an attractive open seating area for the Garden Bar and in the time of festivals form a base for one of the large marquees. It would also allow the other tents to be aligned with the current surfaced paths. We would also suggest that it would make a more attractive entrance to the Town Hall from the Gardens and an area for temporary use by the Town Hall and thereby increasing the flexibility and income to the Town Hall.

**b. Permanent flower bed in the West, Festivals in the East**

The premise of the proposed arrangements for the Festivals is that the gardens will recover quickly after the Festivals. We suggest that by removing Skillicorne Gardens to provide a new space at the back of the Town Hall, that the same amount of tentage could be achieved in the eastern half of the gardens allowing the western half to remain throughout the year for floral beds and providing colour along the Promenade side to be appreciated by a much larger audience than a restored Skillicorne Garden and truly give the impression of a Festival within a Garden. A possible arrangement for the Festival is attached as an example. (See Appendix 1 below)



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## **c. Remove Round Municipal Flower Bed**

The round municipal bed is no longer planted as it was intended in the 1950s. We suggest that it is removed and the space released.

## **6. A Garden for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century**

### **a. A New Design for the Gardens**

To get the best out of this valuable space at the centre of the town, we feel that it would be extremely worthwhile to involve an independent respected landscape architect in redesigning the gardens to provide an attractive space, to open up the Town Hall to the gardens, to meet the expanding needs of “festivals”, to incorporate future reinstatement of railings, to possibly merge the Promenade into the Gardens and, most importantly, to enable the Gardens to shine again as gardens we are all proud of in this 21<sup>st</sup> Century. To this end, we the Cheltenham Civic Society are prepared to make a financial contribution towards this design exercise.

### **b. A Parks and Gardens Leader**

Gardens are, like people, living entities that need to be nurtured and developed. It is the vision and creativity of people that make the difference. Cheltenham is renowned for its parks and gardens and we would assert that this is part of the attractiveness of Cheltenham to its highly skilled and creative workforce and hence important to the future prosperity of the town. We suggest that serious consideration should be given to how the necessary leadership and vision can be achieved for the future of our parks and gardens, as it has been achieved so successfully for the Festivals.

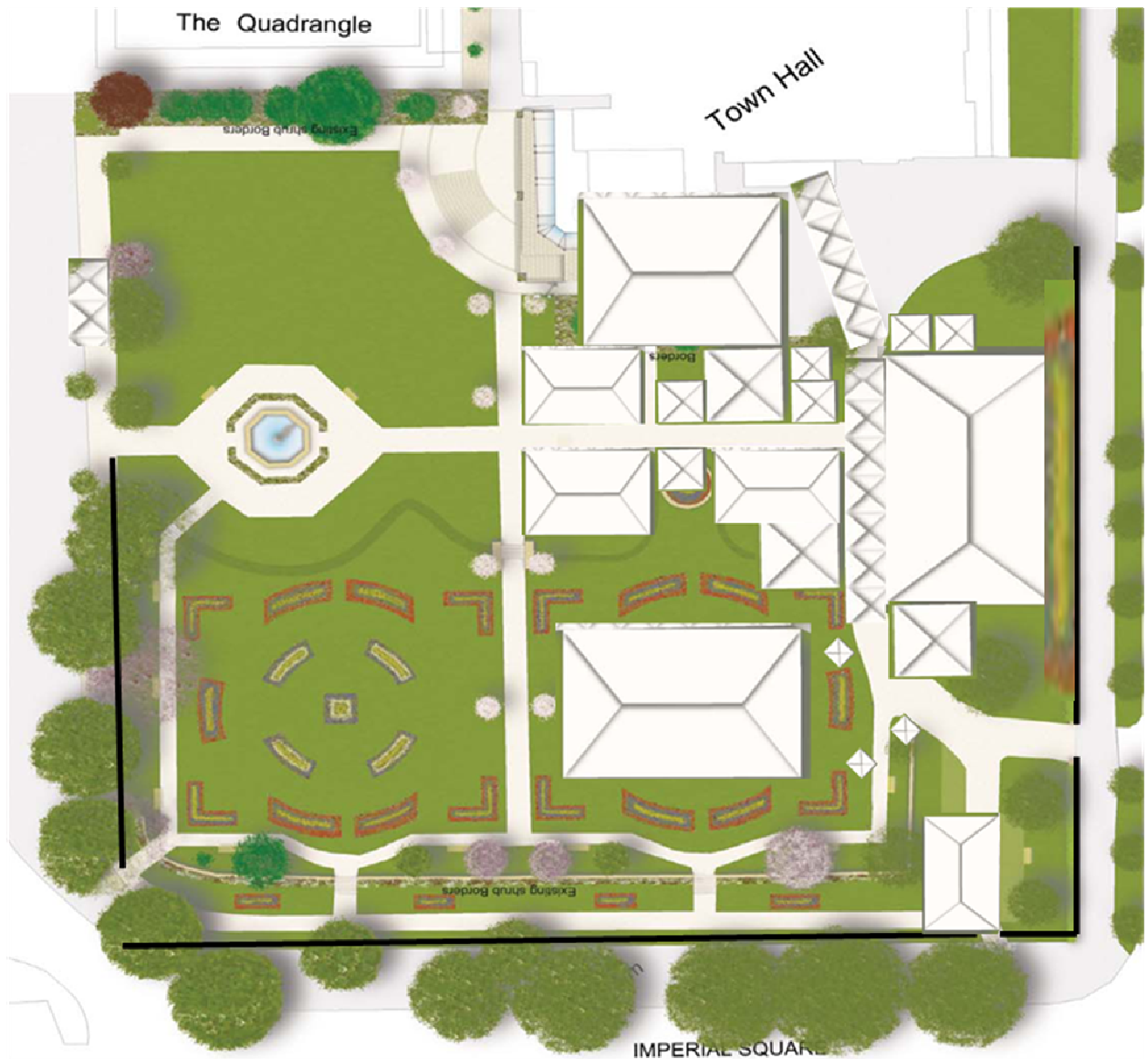
## **7. The Festival Contribution**

We hope that the Festivals will do their bit in the Gardens to reflect this essence of Cheltenham by seeking to improve the appearance of the marquees and tents. As examples, we suggest a “Festivals in Bloom” competition, or sponsorship for floral displays in the Gardens, the involvement of students from the University, or even an architectural pavilion, tented or otherwise, for the Festival season.

Stephen Clarke  
Chairman, Cheltenham Civic Society  
June 2011



## Appendix 1: Example of alternative arrangements for Festivals if Skillicorne Gardens removed.



- Assumes Skillicorne Gardens and round municipal bed removed.
- Rear of Town Hall opened up to the Gardens.
- Permanent floral beds in south west area
- Festival tentage restricted to eastern area of Gardens
- Garden Bar open to Promenade
- Black line marks railings plinths.