

Out of adversity  
comes opportunity  
and imagination...

**Laurie Bell**  
CEO, The Cheltenham Trust



## A bit about me...

- CEO of The Cheltenham Trust – appointed 2 years ago
- Former Director of Communities and Communications at Wiltshire Council
- Lead for all communication and marketing following the nerve agent attacks in Salisbury in 2018
- Responsible for delivery of sustainable community facilities and services; libraries, leisure centres, entertainment venues (c60 venues)
- Rationalisation of properties to deliver £90m investment into new multi-service community campuses
- Previously Deputy CEO and Director of Planning at North Wiltshire DC
- Started career in retail (M & S and Jaeger)

# Facing the ultimate test in 2018

## Crisis and recovery

- Salisbury hit headlines across the world - 5 March
- Public confidence plummeted and the local economy collapsed
- Local community fearful, angry and hungry for information
- Tourists and visitors avoided the city and Stonehenge
- 3 months later, the neighbouring town of Amesbury also impacted
- Strong, consistent and clear leadership and communication essential at local and national level
- Intense pressure, fast moving, highly sensitive political environment
- Unprecedented situation and crisis lasting 10 months +
- Huge challenge for leaders and all involved
- Huge learning...



The Cheltenham Trust  
is an independent  
charity

A lead provider of Cheltenham's culture and leisure offers

Venues:

- The Pittville Pump Room and Heritage Cafe
- The Wilson Art Gallery and Museum
- Cheltenham Town Hall and Garden Bar cafe
- Leisure at centre
- Prince of Wales Stadium

# The impact of the pandemic...

“The secret of getting ahead is getting started”

# Mark Twain



- 5 year business plan approved end 2019 (pre-covid) projected annual growth and surplus
- Focus on financial sustainability outturn and maximising potential of all venues
- 2019/20 final accounts - surplus £46k (target £9k) first surplus in 5 years
- All venues closed March 2020 – income lost £4m+ (£2m Leisure at - £2.1m hires, shows)
- Top priority - remain solvent
- Cash flow impacted – no reserves and limited free cash (more than 50% pre-paid by customers)
- More than 100 staff placed in furlough – small core team retained in business
- Repurposed business model – based on in-house catering
- Launched community campaigns - #let'smeetagain bunting project, Art Trail, virtual exhibitions
- Engaged with the community and customers



# Repurposed to aide recovery



- Developed a remobilisation plan and capital investment plan
- Applied for grants – local and national – secured more than c£1.8m
- Shifted focus to use of outdoor space
- Created two new outdoor cafés at Pittville Pump Room and Garden Bar at Imperial Gardens
- Introduced schedule of free Music in the Park and Marquee events throughout the summer and winter months and Christmas season
- Huge organic growth
- PPR Heritage café - 140,000 visitors in 5 months – became a lifeline for many
- Sold 48,000 cups of coffee, 12,000 cakes, 10,000 hot chocolates, 2,500 homemade pizzas and more than 1,000 sausage rolls
- Lifeline for the community

# New model and focus for 2021/22

Recovery will take time and tenacity

- Recovery to pre-covid income levels (c£5m) will be a challenge
- Aim to achieve in 2021/22
- Our model and profile has changed as a result of the pandemic – café culture more prominent
- The heritage outdoor café will continue as permanent offer
- The Garden Bar will be year round
- Target income for cafes pa pre-covid exceeded in one week (12 April following tables and chairs returning)
- Free community events – music in the park commenced Friday 15 April
- Introduced Handmade by TCT range of products



# Grasping opportunities



- Demand for venue space is high
- No Saturdays available at the Town Hall before July 2022
- Rescheduled shows – high bookings
- Venues reopen inside from 17 May (reduced capacities) – guidance permitting
- Leisure at partially reopened – pools and gym
- Outdoor classes and under 5s soft play sessions in temporary structure from 1 April
- Pop up outdoor café adjacent to classes
- Refurbishing The Wilson to provide new community art gallery and community arts café
- Deliver a more sustainable model for The Wilson through increased footfall, events and activities
- Complement the new business innovation park



# Resilience and growth comes from learning

“Leadership and learning are indispensable to each other”

*John F. Kennedy*



- We've learnt a lot ...
- Adopted an agile, flexible, imaginative approach and response to the pandemic
- Continue to recognise and grasp opportunities
- Embed community confidence and nurture positivity
- Ethos and values matter – how you are seen and what people say matters
- Our social media reach has grown to more than 150k
- We will build on what works – change what doesn't
- We recognise our role as a lead provider of culture and leisure supporting the local community and the economy to rebuild and stabilise
- We blend culture, community and commercial to deliver sustainability
- Achieving remobilisation and recovery needs focus, effective partnership working, and an offer that works...

# Believe in the art of the possible...

- Take measured risks
- Never stop learning
- Redrafting 5 year Business Plan focused on a new business model
- The Trust does not underestimate its role in delivering cultural and leisure services for Cheltenham's residents and visitors
- Recognise our role in supporting the economy and overall wellbeing
- We will continue to seize opportunities, test ideas, develop and grow
- And, you can never provide enough coffee and cake!



Thank you for listening

Being challenged in life is inevitable  
Being defeated is optional...