

Appendix 2: Consultation & Communication Approach, Concerns and Comments of Support provided by members of the Stakeholder Steering Group

1. Consultation & Communication Approach

Full public consultation was undertaken in April 2012 to get residents' views on Valley Gardens as it currently is, and their aspirations for future improvements.

The design team has used this feedback to guide development of the concept scheme, working with a range of stakeholders to ensure local knowledge has continued to feed into the design process.

The positive discussions with stakeholders during the workshops give the project team confidence that the proposal can deliver the aspirations identified in the initial consultation, and that the suggested transport arrangement offers the best way of improving movement for all users through Valley Gardens with minimal negative impact on other users and uses of the area. Using the city's transport model, the suggested traffic arrangement has been tested to ensure it can accommodate existing traffic flows.

In late January / early February, two day long events were held at various locations in the vicinity of Valley Gardens to share details of the proposals with the local community, supported by information on the council's website. Though designed to communicate the proposals and rationale behind them rather than act as a formal consultation, the events again saw majority support for the proposals from the majority of people who attended.

Should the principles of the proposal be agreed at March Committee, it is recommended that full public consultation is undertaken to help inform the next stage of project development.

2. Stakeholder Steering Group Feedback

The following comments in support of the proposal have been provided by members of the Valley Gardens Stakeholder Steering Group.

(Comments were not received from Alan Boldon (University of Brighton) in time for inclusion in this note).

Chris Todd – City Sustainability Partnership and Friends of the Earth

I think that done well with good design and quality materials, these proposals will vastly improve people's experience of what should be an important part of the city. It's not just about joining up a series of dysfunctional green islands but changing the perception of the whole area. This will create a real long term asset.

These proposals will improve local people's living environment, not just within the central green space, but all over, including the pavements around the edges. They will also allow greater use of the area socially and economically, while also giving a better welcome to visitors to the city.

The simplification of the road layout with better crossings will make it safer while the improved bus priority measures should help speed up services and provide a new northbound bus stop serving the Prince Regent swimming pool / Jubilee Library / North Laine area. The changes to the Aquarium roundabout would dramatically improve the setting of both the Palace Pier and the Aquarium as well as neighbouring buildings while vastly improving the visitor experience and connectivity to the seafront.

Any concerns are around there being a can-do mentality, rather than a can-not. For instance, some way of extending the cycle facilities southwards needs to be found around the Pavilion pinch point. Also the elm trees need not only to be protected but giving a good setting, even if that is in the central reservation. And environmental features, particularly around planting and water, and their associated messages and stories, must not be lost.

Andrew Boag – Brighton Area Buswatch

The Valley Gardens plans should improve the environment for everyone, enhancing the impression given to visitors arriving in Brighton by road. Particular benefits for bus users include the possibility of extra bus stops between Church Street and North Road to improve access to the North Laine area. It also provides an opportunity to create a more attractive space around Old Steine. Segregating bus lanes from general traffic should reduce delays to buses, which could encourage more people to use public transport.

Stephen Young – Living Streets

Valley Gardens, potentially a wonderful open space in the heart of our city, has, over the years, turned into a giant traffic engineering scheme. The current proposals could rectify this and create a fitting gateway, transforming Valley Gardens into an accessible and enjoyable space. Pedestrians should enjoy a better walking environment, especially with the reduced number of road crossings required to get from St Peters Church to the seafront.

Chris Kift - Chair of the BHCC City Assembly and Member of the Fed for Independent Living

From my point of view this plan will make my journey to London Rd in my wheelchair a much nicer experience. It has more space with the wider pavements on the West side so less obstructions, for people with limited mobility, more public seating and a quieter and less polluted atmosphere.

Alistair Hill - Consultant in Public Health, NHS Sussex / Brighton and Hove City Council

The plan to improve Valley Gardens has significant potential to improve health and wellbeing (including mental wellbeing) and tackle local health inequalities, by creating a high quality, safe and accessible City centre green space that will:

- Promote physical activity, including walking and cycling
- Provide opportunities for people to enjoy social interaction and play
- Link to existing walking, cycling and public transport networks.

The proposals fit well with the recommendation of the local Joint Strategic Needs Assessment to improve access to green and open spaces, as well as the priorities in the draft Health and Wellbeing Strategy for Brighton and Hove, which include helping people maintain a healthy weight and improving emotional health and wellbeing.

They are also consistent with the National Institute of Health and Clinical Excellence (NICE) guidance on physical activity and the environment, and preventing Type 2 diabetes, and the new national Public Health Outcomes Framework indicator on 'utilisation of green space for exercise and health reasons'.

Roger French – Brighton & Hove Bus and Coach Company

We like the plans as they're developing.

Julie Cattell – Chamber of Commerce

The proposal is very well thought out and takes into consideration all users and their interactions. It will vastly improve this neglected part out the city and create links between areas that are quite isolated from each other. From a business point of view, any project which makes the city more permeable will be beneficial. There will be particular benefits for shops and businesses in North Laine.

3. Concerns

Despite the general support received for the scheme, concern has been raised that the proposal has a negative impact in terms of open space policy, could impact on the types of events that could be accommodated within the area in future and could do more from a biodiversity perspective.

As would be expected, a range of different interests need to be accommodated within Valley Gardens, and different people have different views as to how the available space should best be prioritised. The proposal seeks to balance the needs of all users and uses of the space, and seeks to deliver a proposal best suited to the various needs of the city.

To an extent, the design team feel that the current proposal is flexible enough for some of these concerns raised to be resolved through forthcoming stages of design. The concerns raised relating to Open Spaces, Cultural Projects and Parks are set out below:

Open Spaces

In general the proposals are welcomed. Initiatives that help to make open spaces more accessible and optimise their use are essential when regard is given to the objectively assessed open space needs of the increasing population within this constrained high density city (constrained between the sea and National Park).

However, due to the assessed needs a concern is raised over the proposed reduction in greenspace and its fragmentation especially within Victoria Gardens (there are assessed needs and standards for parks and gardens, natural semi-natural space, amenity greenspace, allotments, children and young people equipped play space and outdoor sport – Valley Gardens currently falls within the parks and gardens typology).

The city is unable to deliver much of the assessed needs for additional open space (eg in excess of an additional 200 hectares by 2030). It is therefore unsustainable to assume a reduction in existing open space can meet the needs of the increasing population. The cumulative impact of incremental loss of open space within the city would be significant if left unchecked.

The main concern relates to the proposed route of the bus/cycle lane in Victoria Gardens. Road layouts rarely alter and dedicated cycle and bus lanes can enable aggressive cycling/driving especially when timetables are to be met.

It is therefore considered the proposed cycle/bus lane will form a barrier within the space and reduce the future flexibility in the use of the space that could be necessary to meet assessed needs and trends. Indeed as the population increases traffic upon this road is likely to increase.

Unless this proposal and the incremental loss in open space accords with and is justified within a wider open space strategy for the city (or similar) it is considered the route for the bus/cycle lane should be reconsidered.

Potentially it could be rerouted to the east of Victoria Gardens, which would improve the connection between the gardens and the city centre, or retained in the position of the existing carriageway - with the provision of appropriate pedestrian crossings.

Based on the current information the merits of the proposed bus/cycle lane within Victoria Gardens are not felt to justify the negative impacts upon the future potential of this open space and its ability to meet assessed needs.

Brief Response: The Valley Gardens Concept Scheme seeks to deliver a range of objectives and best balance the needs of a range of users and uses. At times this can only be achieved by identifying a compromise that offers maximum overall benefit to the city. The proposed bus lane is expected to carry around 250 vehicles an hour (including buses and private vehicles accessing frontages, but excluding taxis – a decision as to whether taxis would use this facility or the eastern general traffic routes will need to be made at a later date).

Whilst rerouting the bus lane to the eastern side of Valley Gardens could be explored at the next stage of design, such an approach would likely increase severance between Victoria Gardens North and South and either:

A: increase severance between the Gardens and the east of the city and retain aspects of the inconsistent transport arrangement that currently contributes significantly to the poor quality (and so use of) Valley Gardens (if bus provision was retained but moved to the east of the Gardens), or

B: reduce traffic capacity and bus provision through this area (if buses shared the proposed general traffic lanes).

There are valid arguments for and against re-routing the carriageway along Marlborough Place, and it is recommended that a decision on this aspect of the scheme is made at the next stage of design, based on a careful assessment of the relative benefits to the city of both approaches.

Arts & Cultural Projects

There is no requirement from the cultural sector to retain the (Victoria Gardens South large event) space as is in order to maintain the exact nature of the current cultural activity. However, it should be noted that outdoor event and cultural activity sites are being lost all over the city and in this context the loss of Victoria Gardens South without a replacement presents a threat to the city's future cultural offer. It is suggested that the development presents a rare opportunity to vastly improve the cultural infrastructure through the creation of a new cultural and civic space for the city in the south-west corner of the Old Steine. The city currently does not have a civic square for larger events, screenings, visiting tourist installations (ice rinks etc) and occasional stage events. There is demand for this from the city's cultural partners and visiting commercial promoters – and the potential to generate significant revenue from commercial hire. Currently the only two suitable larger cultural spaces in the city – Black Rock and the old paddling pool site – are both in demand – and both are due to disappear as the surrounding land is developed.

The unlocking of the corner of Old Steine as an open cultural space would require a rethinking of the bus lane that currently cuts through the space, either to divert it or limit its use and reduce its permanent impact on the landscape (through bus shelters for example)

Brief Response: Opportunities to provide an enhanced cultural activity / event space at the Old Steine should be investigated during the next stage of design, informed by the Cultural Strategy for the area. For sake of clarity it is important to note that where there are competing and incompatible demands on the same space, a decision on the most appropriate use for the area will need to be based on careful assessment of the relative benefits to the city of different approaches.

City Parks

The council's parks department, City Parks plays a strategic role in protecting and enhancing the city's parks and green spaces. On a day to day level City Parks is responsible for the maintenance of Valley Gardens.

Officers have been consulted on the proposals and have provided comments in relation to the impact of the scheme on the open space and biodiversity.

Valley Gardens is a unique open space in the heart of the city where many residents do not have access to private gardens. The city as a whole does not have sufficient parks and gardens to meet the standards defined by the council's planning policy. It

is anticipated that by 2030 a further 200 hectares will be required to meet the needs of increased population numbers.

It is therefore disappointing that the master-plan proposals were not able to identify ways of reducing traffic in this area or ways to extend the green spaces to make a larger recreational park in the centre of the city. However the reasons behind the decision to produce a traffic neutral scheme are understood.

Overall City Parks fully supports the concept landscape design which provides improved wildlife habitats, provides flood amelioration measures and connects to the history of the site with the use of water and flowing paths. Proposals for use of art and other initiatives are welcome.

However, officers consider the loss and fragmentation of green space in the proposed/preferred scheme to be unacceptable given the importance of this resource for people and nature in this city centre location and green network route.

This is the result of two main proposed changes:

- a) Green space has been lost due to the creation a new hard landscape civic space to the west side of South Victoria Gardens and the creation of a bus lane running through the middle of South Victoria Gardens.
- b) The creation of new traffic lanes on the east side of Valley Gardens running on either side of the existing elms which will become isolated from the main green space. These elms are now rare across the UK and are part of the National Elm Collection; it is imperative therefore that they are protected and enhanced.

Officers are concerned that the narrowing and fragmentation of green spaces will make them less attractive for recreational use and their natural value/experience.

If the proposed master-plan is adopted officers recommend that the loss of green space is minimised by losing the proposed hard civic space to the west of South Victoria Gardens and making the proposed bus lane follow the line of the existing road. If possible, there should also be better north-south connectivity for the various green spaces.

Given the estimated 15-20 years for the whole scheme to be implemented in stages as resources allow, there is a risk that the soft landscaping elements will not be fully implemented and/or there is no revenue funding to maintain them properly.

It is therefore requested that any approval to adopt the proposed scheme is given only if sufficient funding can be made available to prepare and implement a fully costed Management & Maintenance plan for the landscaped elements of the site and sufficient revenue funding is made available to manage and maintain the landscaped elements to a sufficiently high standard so to protect the capital investment in this area.

Brief Response: It is not considered desirable to propose a transport scheme in Valley Gardens that would cause significant levels of traffic to be displaced onto

alternative city routes less suited to carrying that traffic, and strategically, there are no wider measures that are likely to significantly reduce levels of traffic in the city centre in the foreseeable future. From a pragmatic perspective, the proposal therefore seeks to be traffic neutral. Whilst it is accepted that there are different views on the principle of whether vehicle numbers should be restricted in the city, such a subject is beyond the scope of the Valley Gardens project.

As stated elsewhere in this note, there are arguments for and against re-routing the Marlborough Place (Victoria Gardens South) carriageway, and it is recommended that a decision on this subject can be made at the next stage of design.

The necessity for a Management & Maintenance plan for the landscaped (and wider) areas of Valley Gardens is reflected in the recommendations of the main report.

