

Appendix 4: Frequently Asked Questions

A vision for Valley Gardens?

Following public consultation and a series of workshops with stakeholders, a masterplan has been drawn up for Valley Gardens.

Valley Gardens is made up of the series of green spaces running from The Level down to the Old Steine and the seafront. Based on responses to the consultation, the masterplan aims to upgrade the public spaces and improve routes for pedestrians, cyclists, drivers and public transport.

The proposals will be going to the council's Transport Committee in March. If they are agreed, the improvements are likely to be delivered in phases over coming years as opportunities arise. Further consultation will take place as the detail of each phase is progressed.

The ideas include creating a tree lined avenue for north and south bound traffic on the east side of Valley Gardens, a 'park road' for buses and cyclists on the west, and simplified crossing points for pedestrians. The changes are designed to make it easier for everyone to move through and across the area.

The plan also includes changing the seafront roundabout to a junction to improve traffic flow and make it easier for pedestrians to get to and from the beach. Traffic modelling has shown that the proposals will be able to accommodate existing levels of traffic in the area with no adverse effect.

While the specific detail of the public spaces within Valley Gardens will be developed at a later stage of design, key principles of the proposals include a flexible mixture of soft and hard-scaped areas based around a natural, sustainable theme. The spaces will have better connections to existing attractions and destinations in and around Valley Gardens, and be managed in a way that maximises community involvement.

To see the outline illustrations of the traffic proposals, view or download our Valley Gardens traffic masterplan map [PDF XXkb].

If you have any comments on the proposals, please:

- e-mail: valleygardens@brighton-hove.gov.uk
- Phone: (01273) 293858
- Post: Valley Gardens feedback, Brighton & Hove City Council, Room 404, Hove Town Hall, Norton Road, Hove, BN3 3LS

The process

Why do we need to improve Valley Gardens?

The area has huge potential as a city amenity space, and plays an important role in connecting various city destinations. However, hardly anyone spends any time in the green spaces, and movement through the area can be difficult whether you are travelling by vehicle or on foot.

Our vision is for Valley Gardens to become a key area of Brighton & Hove that adds to the city's appeal. We would like Valley Gardens to be:

- an attractive, flexible, safe space that enhances the city centre's environment
- a place that will attract residents and visitors at all times of the day and year, with something for everyone to enjoy
- a meeting place, connecting the city efficiently and safely however people travel

In the consultation held last spring, 83% of people said they would like to spend time or more time in Valley Gardens if facilities and / or the environment were improved. Only 1% said they thought Valley Gardens was fine as it is.

Typical comments from people who drive through the area included the desire for a simpler road layout, while cyclists expressed a desire for coherent, joined up cycling facilities. Only 26% of people thought it was pleasant to walk through Valley Gardens, and only 17% felt it was easy to cross the road.

This and other community and stakeholder feedback illustrates the fact that Valley Gardens is currently falling short on its potential as a key public place and as an important route through the city. We want to put this right.

Where is the money coming from and what are the next stages?

In response to the consultation, most people agreed that Valley Gardens doesn't work very well at the moment. Over the years, numerous individual changes have been made in the area. Often these have sought to solve a specific problem for a specific user group in a specific location, perhaps with limited consideration of other users of the space. The result is the confusing, disjointed environment that we see today, which doesn't really work well for anyone.

Our main priority is to develop a practical masterplan for Valley Gardens that can achieve the aspirations of the city. Once we have this agreed, we can ensure that any future changes in the area contribute towards a consistent, high quality environment that works well for everyone.

If the masterplan is agreed, improvements within Valley Gardens are likely to be delivered in phases over coming years as opportunities arise. However, the project is not just a paper exercise. Funding for initial improvements has been secured through a 'Better Bus Areas' bid and this work will start later in 2013. Indicative funding in the Local Transport Plan and funding from various developments in the area also provides opportunities to start improving Valley Gardens in the near future.

How have people been consulted about this proposal?

We carried out a public consultation exercise in April 2012 to get residents' views on Valley Gardens as it currently is, and their aspirations for future improvements. Our design team has used this feedback to guide development of the masterplan. Along the way, we've held regular workshops with a range of stakeholders to ensure local knowledge has continued to feed into the design process.

The workshops have investigated the feasibility of different transport arrangements and discussed ways in which public spaces can be better designed to fulfil their potential.

The positive discussions we have had with stakeholders gives us confidence that our proposal can deliver the aspirations identified in our consultation. We are also confident that our suggested transport arrangement offers the best way of improving

movement for all through Valley Gardens with minimal negative impact on other users and uses of the area. Using the city's transport model, we have tested the suggested traffic arrangement to ensure it can accommodate existing traffic flows.

However, by its nature, the masterplan is still conceptual. We expect that the development will be delivered in phases over time as and when opportunities arise. We will consult on specific details of the improvements as each phase is progressed when it will be most meaningful.

Traffic and transport

Will it take longer to get in and out of the city by car?

No. Our proposal seeks to make it easier for everyone to move through the area, irrespective of how they travel. Simplifying the road layout should allow vehicles to move more freely through the area, while reducing the negative impact transport infrastructure currently has on other potential uses and users of the area. Transport modelling has shown that our simplified transport arrangement will accommodate existing traffic levels.

Will the proposal improve traffic flow in the area?

Many of the busiest transport routes in the city pass through Valley Gardens and, as the current road layout has developed over time, what is there at the moment is inconsistent and often overcomplicated. This creates problems and confusion for drivers and other existing or potential users of Valley Gardens. However, vehicle routes, at least between the Level and the seafront, could be quite simple.

The new proposal seeks simplicity and consistency. As well as being easier to understand, the arrangement results in simplified junctions, which enables freer vehicle flow. Transport modelling indicates that the improvements will reduce traffic in adjacent areas, because people will have less need to 'rat run' to avoid the existing levels of congestion through the gardens. At the same time, overall space given over to vehicles can be reduced by around 25%, meaning more public space, so everyone benefits.

Are you trying to reduce traffic in the area?

In order to be deliverable in the short term, the scheme is designed to accommodate existing levels of traffic through the area. However, we hope the proposals will increase the attractiveness of other travel options, and so could encourage reduced levels of traffic in future.

In an ideal world, most people would like to see reduced levels of traffic. This aspiration was even fed back by people who classed themselves as drivers during the consultation. However, it would be unrealistic to expect traffic to disappear, at least in the foreseeable future, and it would be detrimental to the wider city if we moved significant amounts of traffic from Valley Gardens on to alternative streets that have less capacity to deal with high vehicle numbers.

By accommodating the traffic in a different and simpler way, we are confident that the proposal will make Valley Gardens an easier place to drive through, as well as

significantly reducing the negative impact traffic currently has in the area, even if current traffic levels are maintained.

However, we hope that creating a pleasant walking environment and improving cycle and bus facilities will make people more likely to consider alternative means of travelling through the area in future. And by making Valley Gardens an attractive part of the city rather than just a place to drive through, some people visiting the city by car may choose to park earlier, and continue their journey on foot, further reducing city centre traffic.

What about access for local traffic?

Although the proposal sees private vehicles moved to the east of Valley Gardens, we the important east-west transport links are maintained. Local vehicle access to properties on both sides of the gardens will also be maintained.

Will we be consulting further on specific details of the scheme, such as changes to the Aquarium Roundabout and other junctions?

Yes. Using the city's transport model, we have tested the suggested traffic arrangement to ensure it can accommodate existing traffic flows.

However, the masterplan is conceptual at the moment and none of the individual details included are set in stone. We expect that the masterplan will be delivered in phases over time as and when opportunities arise and specific details of physical improvements will be agreed as each phase is progressed. We feel that this will be the point at which further detailed consultation will be most meaningful.

Will the roads be subject to the 20mph limit?

The proposed city 20mph speed limit would apply in Valley Gardens. However, we feel that through good design, we can improve behaviour and awareness of people moving through the area irrespective of the maximum speed limit, and significantly improve safety. The current road design probably encourages vehicles to drive quickly - partly because the roads look like outer city highways rather than town centre streets, and partly because 'stop-start' conditions encourage drivers to speed up in order to try and beat the next set of traffic lights. At the same time the complex and counter-intuitive road layout can be confusing and frustrating for everyone, increasing the likelihood of collisions.

How do the proposals improve pedestrian and cycle connectivity?

In our April consultation, very few people thought the current arrangements for pedestrians and cyclists in Valley Gardens were adequate. Due to the inconsistent road layout and overly complex junctions it's often unclear which way traffic will come from. Some of the roads are a lot wider than they need to be and there are a lot of guardrails.

Simplifying traffic arrangements enables us to improve access through the gardens for pedestrians and cyclists. A simpler layout of roads and junctions will allow traffic to flow more steadily, and pedestrians will always know which way it is coming from. The design of the roads will remind drivers that they are in a town centre, so they will drive with much greater care.

The proposals include simplified crossings (where pedestrians will never have to cross more than two lanes of traffic in one go), and formal footpaths through the gardens. Reducing the amount of space given over to roads means that footway space between buildings and roads almost doubles.

A dedicated cycle route will be provided along the length of the gardens. Confident cyclists will be able to share the roads with vehicles and recreational cycling will be allowed within the public spaces. We are also planning to add new cycle parking facilities in the gardens, details of which will be agreed at a later stage.

How will buses operate in Valley Gardens?

As with many other things, bus facilities within Valley Gardens are currently very inconsistent. Sometimes there are bus lanes, sometimes there are none. Often, bus stops are located on traffic islands, surrounded by guard-railing, between busy roads.

The proposal sees a simple, consistent bus route running along the western side of Valley Gardens between the Old Steine and the Level. The idea is to have three simple bus interchanges with improved facilities at St Peter's Church, Marlborough Place (a new bus stop many people requested during our April consultation) and the Royal Pavilion.

At the Royal Pavilion, the bus stops would continue to use the listed 1920s deco tram shelters, and there may be new versions added.

The public spaces

Does the proposal result in a net loss of green space?

If the proposals are delivered in full, there will be a slight (7.6%) reduction in the size of the green spaces currently running through the centre of Valley Gardens. However, much of this existing green space has limited benefit from either a biodiversity or recreational perspective, and the idea is to improve the quality, accessibility and biodiversity of the green spaces and increase the amount and flexibility of the general public space.

Overall the proposal significantly increases the amount of space with biodiversity value. Reflecting consultation feedback, the proposal incorporates additional trees, including a legacy planting strategy to ensure the area maintains its important Elm heritage in future decades. Wider planting schemes provide habitats for animals, and the overall landscape design maximises opportunities for grey water harvesting.

The simpler road layout enables space used by vehicles to be reduced by 25%. This creates more public space. In addition, the simplified road layout reduces the perceived and physical barriers between these public spaces and the surrounding city, increasing the attractiveness of these recreational areas.

Won't the changes increase the risk of flooding?

Two of our design objectives – an improved environment for biodiversity and an environment that connects to the city's history – are reflected in our desire to introduce a sustainable water harvesting system to Valley Gardens.

The biodiversity benefits extend into the 'hard-scaped' areas of Valley Gardens, both through highly visible aspects (such as new trees) and less obvious factors, such as permeable carriageways which contribute towards sustainable water management. We will also be investigating introduction of swales and grey water harvesting from surrounding buildings.

As well as bringing environmental benefits, we hope sustainable water management can contribute towards features that enhance the aesthetic appeal of the gardens, and serve as a reminder of the area's historic valley character which traditionally carried the seasonal Wellesbourne river.

How does the proposal create a high quality space to welcome people to the city?

The idea is to create an attractive area where everyone will want to spend time, adding to the city's appeal for residents and visitors. Valley Gardens already has great inherent qualities, including public spaces, buildings such as the Royal Pavilion, the pier and St Peter's Church, and key destinations such as the University. But the current environment stops these elements from fulfilling their potential. When we asked people what words they would use to describe Valley Gardens today, only 8% were positive, and half the positive comments related to Valley Gardens' potential to be something better.

By redressing the oppressive, overly complex vehicle infrastructure that dominates today and providing an environment that people will have reason to spend time in, we believe the proposal enables Valley Gardens to fulfil its inherent potential as a high quality space and welcome.

How does the proposal encourage people to use the green spaces?

Rather than focussing on encouraging people to use the green spaces in Valley Gardens specifically, our objective is to make the whole of Valley Gardens a more pleasant public space, incorporating a mix of hard-scaped and green areas.

As an overall principle, we want to create flexible spaces that can be used at different times of the year for formal and informal activities. These spaces will incorporate aspects that consultation told us people wanted to see – such as better seating, planting, natural spaces and events.

We also want to help existing attractions within the area fulfil their potential as activity generators. For example, we want to help St Peters fulfil its potential as a community hub, work with the university to encourage academic life to spill into the gardens and encourage varied and interesting businesses around the edges of the space.

Doesn't realigning the road on Marlborough Place reduce the recreational space in Victoria Gardens?

The proposal suggests realigning the Marlborough Place road so that it leads directly to the Royal Pavilion entrance, strengthening and formalising the visual and physical connection between this key building and the surrounding gardens. From a practical perspective, this allows us to create a new hard-scaped public area that would be ideally situated for events, perhaps connected with the nearby theatres or taking place at times when the green areas are too wet or muddy to use.

So far we have had different views as to whether the road should be realigned. Those who support it feel that the existing green space has limited value in terms of public use or biodiversity, and that realigning the road would create a hard public space that could host events year round. Those who want to keep the road how it is feel that realigning the road would lead to loss of green space, and a loss of recreational space.

In truth the proposal would work irrespective of whether the road was realigned, and a decision could be made at the relevant stage of project delivery. The recommendation of the design team would be to realign the road, due to the enhanced relationship it creates between the gardens and the Royal Pavilion, and the flexibility the new hard-scaped public area would provide.

Whatever decision is made, it is important to remember that green space and recreational space within Valley Gardens are not one and the same. A combination of green and hard-scaped public areas can boost the flexibility of Valley Gardens, making it able to accommodate a wider range of uses.

Can we do more to connect the central gardens?

The current proposal relies on simplified road design and junctions to provide better north-south links between the gardens. As buses and other vehicles no longer need to switch from one side of the gardens to the other midway along Valley Gardens, intersections will carry less traffic, but we still need to provide some connection with east – west routes such as North Street.

It may be possible to remove the road between St Peter's Church and Victoria Gardens. The proposal includes a road here to provide access to North Laine via Trafalgar Street, but stakeholders suggested Cheapside via St Peter's Place may be a more practical way of accessing North Laine. We've left the road in the proposal at the moment but further consideration will be given to this section at detailed design stage.

How will the proposal provide a better environment for our historic Elms?

Valley Gardens is home to some of the most important trees in the world. Having survived Dutch Elm Disease, the trees are part of the National Collection of Elms and it is important that they are recognised and protected in an improved landscape setting.

Careful construction techniques will be used to ensure any work does not damage the existing Elm trees. Planting proposals for the area include the introduction of new trees to ensure the area's Elm Heritage extends into the future.

Management & Maintenance

Will any improvements be properly maintained?

It is critical that any physical enhancements to the Valley Gardens are supported by the necessary resource to manage and maintain the area. Alongside our proposal for physical improvements we have produced a provisional management and maintenance strategy that would draw on public and private opportunities. The approach is designed to ensure the proposed scheme can be managed and

maintained in a way that brings maximum benefits in terms of partnership working, learning opportunities, community involvement and ownership and cost effectiveness in future.