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| <b>Project:</b>       | Valley Gardens Phase 3                          |                    |              |
| <b>Our reference:</b> | 341760-RR-23                                    |                    |              |
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| <b>Approved by:</b>   | Robin Reed                                      | <b>Checked by:</b> | Steve Jones  |
| <b>Subject:</b>       | Accessibility Workshop Summary – 4 October 2018 |                    |              |

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## 1 Introduction

This note provides a summary of a stakeholder workshop on the Valley Gardens Phase 3 project. The workshop focused on the emerging design for the area which will be subject to a wider public consultation during October and November 2018 (Option 1). Attendees were also presented with the design objectives and provided with an opportunity to comment on their current experiences of the study area.

The workshop was attended by:

- Possability People, an organisation representing the needs of disabled people in Brighton
- Brighton & Hove City Council's (BHCC) Equality Officer
- BHCC's project manager for Valley Gardens Phase 3
- Mott MacDonald

## 2 Summary of Comments

The following observations were made in respect of how disabled people experience the area at present:

- A lot of people currently avoid the city centre in general or struggle to access the seafront because of the existing layout and standard of footways leading to it from the city centre.
- The parks were considered to operate as traffic islands at present and it was difficult for disabled people to access them.
- Tree roots create uneven footways and make footways difficult for mobility impaired people to use.
- It was felt that the current placement of items such as communal bins and A Boards creates barriers for those using already constrained pedestrian routes.

The plans were welcomed in principle and it was felt they would help to address the current issues experienced by disabled people, with particular support for the public spaces and improved access to the seafront. The following specific comments were made which identify areas where the proposals may be improved or suggest items to be considered as part of the design development.

### Pedestrian Facilities

- The realignment of pedestrian crossings to provide more direct routes was supported, including the removal of staggered islands which require a change of direction.
- The width of crossings would need to be sufficient to accommodate the large number of users and ensure that mobility impaired people can be accommodated.

- There was a desire for pedestrian crossing phases at signals to be as long as possible with audio signals provided. Attendees also asked whether pedestrian countdown facilities could be incorporated at pedestrian crossings.
- Crossings should be equipped with aids for disabled users, including rotating cones. The cones should also be maintained, with attendees reporting that they are in poor condition across the city.
- Suitable crossing opportunities should be provided along the proposed bus lane to the south west of the Old Steine and in between stops to avoid the road becoming difficult to cross (for example, like Churchill Square). However, the reduction in carriageway space to reduce the crossing distance was welcomed.
- If not signalised, the proposed pedestrian crossing on Madeira Drive may need to be moved back further from the A259, to allow people to see traffic coming from behind and have the confidence to cross.
- There was considered to be a lack of seating and resting opportunities at present and the scheme provides a chance to address this. The design of seating is also important in ensuring that it is accessible.
- The placement of all street furniture should be considered at the design stage. If not, the retrospective placement of bins or other items could impact on the effectiveness of the overall design.
- Where tree planting is proposed, footways should be wide enough to allow people to pass, with tree pits used to contain the roots and prevent the creation of uneven footways.
- The design needs to be supported by the council's street licensing policies and enforcement to ensure businesses are not permitted to clutter walking routes with A boards and other equipment.

#### Public Space

- The additional public space by the Royal Pavilion was welcomed.
- The new public space at Madeira Drive and the Palace Pier was also considered to be a positive; however, consideration should be given to how pedestrians and cyclists interact in this location. If possible, the route of the cycle lane should be changed to follow the carriageway more closely. This may offer an opportunity to add planters or other means of segregating the cycle lane from the pedestrian space.
- The incorporation of less crowded waiting areas next to bus stops would be desirable, particularly for those with hidden disabilities. Similarly, the creation of quiet sensory spaces within the design would be supported.
- There was a desire for the council to provide improved public toilet facilities generally, including adding 'changing places' facilities. The nearest toilet facilities (Pavilion Gardens) and routes to them should be considered where there is an intention to open the area up for new activities.
- There are pockets of the area which attract anti-social behaviour at present. For example, around the landscaped area to the south of Steine Gardens where improved lighting may be beneficial.

#### Cycling

- There was a strong preference for segregating pedestrians and cyclists and this would preferably include an extension to the segregated cycle lane towards Marlborough Place, rather than this needing to cross over the pedestrian route or require sections shared with pedestrians.
- As noted under public space above, there were similar comments in relation to the seafront cycle lane at Madeira Drive and whether there was an opportunity to better align or segregate this to reduce conflict with pedestrians accessing the pier. This could also reduce what was seen as a redundant area of pedestrian space between the proposed realigned Madeira Drive carriageway and existing cycle lane.
- The preference would be for crossings for cyclists and pedestrians to be separated.

- Consideration should be given to how cyclists can be managed where the cycle lane crosses pedestrian areas. Attendees raised the possibility of cyclists dismount signs or traffic signals for cyclists; however, it was acknowledged solutions needed to be convenient for all users if compliance is to be achieved.
- Some disabled users do not support floating bus stops as these were seen to introduce conflict between pedestrians and cyclists.
- There was a desire for accessible cycle hire to be introduced and cycle facilities should be of a suitable standard to allow use by trikes.
- The positioning of cycle parking should be considered so this does not clutter pedestrian routes, for example where the plans currently indicate this close to pedestrian crossings. There was discussion as to whether this should be located closer to the cycle lane.

#### Car Parking

- Designated disabled parking should be located away from the main dual-carriageways as the latter would make it difficult for mobility impaired people to get in and out of cars (where parallel to the kerb).
- There was a feeling that there is insufficient blue badge parking at present and the proportion would ideally be increased.
- It was suggested that additional disabled car parking could be provided in Palace Place or Madeira Drive.

#### Buses

- Few specific issues were raised in relation to buses, although the need for crossings to be provided at bus stops was noted, particularly where there is a continuous row of bus stops or waiting buses.
- Areas were needed for buses to stop/wait without blocking dropped kerbs.

#### Taxis

- The retention of a drop-off facility or rank would be supported.

## 3 Recommendations

The workshop highlighted a number of positives that the proposals are likely to have on access to the city centre/seafront and the ability of disabled people to enjoy the city. This also applies to other protected characteristics under the Equalities Act 2010, such as age. However, some opportunities for improvements to the initial design were highlighted, as well as issues that should be considered through the subsequent stages of design development.

As part of the next stage to develop the concept designs to preliminary level, Mott MacDonald will seek to respond to the points raised in discussion with BHCC. Whilst many of the suggestions will be possible to incorporate, others may be less feasible. In any case, it is recommended that the issues raised be addressed as part of the Equality Impact Assessment.

It is recommended that BHCC continue to actively engage with groups representing those with protected characteristics throughout the preliminary design stage and public consultation. Some of the points raised will also need consideration as part of the detailed design (for example, the design and placement of street furniture), construction and operational stages. As such, the Equality Impact Assessment for the project should be kept under review and updated as the project progresses.

