



Objection to the planning application by the Brighthelm Church and Community Centre BH2024/00139

Summary of objections

Living Streets Brighton and Hove¹ is the primary voluntary group concerned with the walking environment in Brighton and Hove. We are writing to object to this planning application for the "Replacement of a vehicle access barrier, new railings and gate to top of ramp and steps from North Road. Infill railings with double gates off Queens Road and infill railings with single gate off Church Street." (Planning Application form, page 4).

We are objecting on two main grounds:

- that the proposed changes will limit public access to this much valued and rare open green space in the middle of Brighton, a space which has been used as a public park for decades;
- that the changes will limit the use of the public footpath as a route through the gardens from Church Street to North Road, again used by the public for decades.

Objections to limiting access to the gardens

The Heritage Statement submitted with the planning application makes clear the historic role of the Brighthelm gardens as a public park, since they were laid out as a public garden, the Queen's Road Rest Garden, following the churchyard becoming the responsibility of Brighton Corporation after the 1884 Brighton Improvement Act and then the clearing of the headstones and monuments in 1949 (page 3).

The Heritage Statement (page 4) clarifies the value of the gardens for the public: "The Brighthelm Centre Rest Gardens set within the North Laine conservation area, *it is one of the few open spaces within the predominantly built-up form that characterises the area*" (emphasis added).

The Heritage Asset Statement (page 12) goes on to say that the gardens are "A rare example of a city centre burial ground and surviving green space within the North Laine. Although the gardens have changed over time, indications of their original use as a burial ground survive, *as well as elements of their design as a public park*" (emphasis added).

The gardens have clearly been created and used as a public park for decades, and we object to proposals to limit public access.

¹ Living Streets Brighton and Hove is part of Living Streets, the UK-wide charity for everyday walking. We support the development of safer, cleaner, greener streets and neighbourhoods that create a better walking environment and inspire people to walk more. See our Brighton and Hove local group webpage <https://www.livingstreets.org.uk/get-involved/local-groups/brighton-and-hove>.

Limiting the use of the public footpath through the gardens

The Application Form for the planning application states, in answer to the question as to whether new or altered pedestrian access is proposed to or from the public highway, that there will be this change. However, no detail at all is given about what that change will be.

The Heritage Statement makes clear (page 4) that "All historic OS maps and surviving drawings show the site to be laid out with a single linear route providing access from Church Street to the Chapel." The OS map from 1840 - 1880s shows a path from Church Street to North Road (page 5). The OS map from 1944 - 1972 clearly shows the same footpath from Church Street to North Road (page 78).

The current very ugly temporary fencing is described as follows: "The closing off and screening is to prevent access for undesirables and unauthorised activities within the Brighthelm Church and Community Centre and Rest Gardens."

This temporary fencing has already closed the access from North Road to the gardens, and the access from Church Street is only occasionally open. This suggests that the new railings and gates will also be used to severely limit the use of this footpath, which is much valued by local residents to avoid the traffic on Queens Road and to enjoy the green space of the gardens. There is much evidence to suggest that public access to such open green spaces is vital for public health².

Lack of evidence for the need to limit access to the gardens

According to the Heritage Statement, the justification for the proposed changes to the gardens is that the proposed works "will significantly improve the quality and viability of the current garden, particularly in terms of improved security" (page 14). All the detailed works (page 13) are for a "more secure design" and "for out of hours security", with no detail about what those hours might be. There any evidence of how these changes will actually improve the quality and viability of the gardens.

We would argue that closing the gardens "out of hours" will not tackle problems of anti-social behaviour that is also likely to happen during the day. Indeed, such behaviour is likely to be deterred by the continued use of the gardens by the public.

In addition, the closure of the gardens will not tackle anti-social behaviour by what the application terms "undesirables" or anyone else. It will simply displace it on to neighbouring streets, which is already happening as a result of the temporary closure (North Laine Runner Feb-March 2024).

We note that a previous planning application which included new gates and railings (BH2012/02707) was refused.

We therefore suggest that no case has been made for gates and railings that are closed for "security" and that the value of the gardens as an open public green space and a much valued public footpath providing a through route from North Road to Church Street, should result in the application being refused.

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² Public Health England (2020). *Improving access to greenspace. A new review for 2020*. Public Health England, London.