



RPMT Proposals to fence and restrict access to Pavilion Gardens

Submission from Living Streets Brighton and Hove¹

We welcome the news that RPMT is proposing to raise funds to improve our much-loved and highly valued Pavilion Gardens. This is a vital public green space in the middle of our city, which otherwise severely lacks green infrastructure, and we welcome proposals to help the gardens continue to thrive.

However, we are very concerned that proposals to fence and restrict access to Pavilion Gardens appear to be continuing as part of current funding applications.

Pavilion Gardens is a key thoroughfare for people walking in Brighton, as well as a space to stop and relax and enjoy the natural environment. Many organisations, including Brighton and Hove City Council, have been working for many years to improve the walking environment in the city. This work is based on a recognition that improving the walking environment, and especially including access to shared green spaces, is good for people's mental and physical health and wellbeing, as well as building a strong relationship between people living and visiting the city and the public realm:

“Greener environments are ... associated with better mental health and wellbeing outcomes including reduced levels of depression, anxiety, and fatigue, and enhanced quality of life for both children and adults. Greenspace can help bind communities together, reduce loneliness, and mitigate the negative effects of air pollution, excessive noise, heat and flooding. Disadvantaged groups appear to gain a larger health benefit and have reduced socioeconomic-related inequalities in health when living in greener communities, so greenspace and a greener urban environment can also be used as an important tool in the drive to build a fairer society.” There is also considerable research showing the economic benefits of green spaces: such as the £2.1 billion per year that could be saved in health costs if everyone in England had good access to greenspace (Public Health England 2020²).

All these benefits only apply when there is *good access* and maintaining free and unrestricted access is the crucial issue for us in relation to the proposals for fencing Pavilion Gardens and closing it at certain times.

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>.

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

As a registered charity RPMT will be well aware the charities are required to have and to demonstrate public benefit³.

To quote from RPMT's website: "As a registered charity, RPMT is committed to activities that support the management of the buildings and collections for public enjoyment and benefit." The website also refers to the benefit being to "the local community and visitors". However, we know that the closest community to the gardens, represented by the North Laine Community Association (NLCA) has made strong representations against fencing the gardens, supported by very impressive evidence that fencing will not solve problems of anti-social behaviour or and will not meet other objectives you have for the gardens.

The RPMT website also states that "RPMT is dedicated to preserving its historic buildings and collections, *which will be even more accessible in the future*" (italics added).

It is very hard to see how fencing that limits public access meets your charitable objectives, or the aims to apparently make the facilities "more accessible in the future".

RPMT is a custodian of the gardens for the people of Brighton and Hove, under contract to Brighton and Hove City Council which still owns the land, buildings and the collections on behalf of the people of Brighton and Hove. Continued access for the people of the city is vital.

We would add that fencing and gating the gardens sends a powerful symbolic message to residents and visitors that the gardens are private and not for general public access and enjoyment. This goes against the entire spirit of accessible open public space, of which Pavilion Gardens is currently a unique, beautiful and highly valued example.

More specifically, and in relation to Living Streets B & H's core purpose, Pavilion Gardens is a unique space in the network of walking routes around the city and is vital to the wider walking environment. Fencing and restricting access to Pavilion Gardens at any time reduces the opportunities for people to walk through and benefit from this remarkable space and will much diminish its value to the people of the city and our many visitors.

Given these concerns, we would certainly not be able to support any application for funding from RPMT to the National Lottery Heritage Fund. Indeed, having personally worked closely with NLHF in the past, I would be very surprised if they were to look favourably on funding bids that restrict public and community access in the ways being proposed. The NHLF website clearly states that they welcome place-based heritage projects which are about "thinking beyond an individual project by considering how it relates to your local area and community" among other things⁴. Similarly, it states that they "fund projects of all sizes that connect people and communities to the UK's heritage"⁵. Strong objections from the local community, and stakeholder groups like ourselves, suggest that RPMT has given inadequate considerations to such matters.

I hope you will be able to reassure us that the proposals for fencing and restricting access will no longer be part of any funding bid or future plans for Pavilion Gardens.

Diane Warburton, Convenor, Living Streets Brighton and Hove
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³ <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/public-benefit-rules-for-charities>

⁴ <https://www.heritagefund.org.uk/our-work/thriving-places>

⁵ <https://www.heritagefund.org.uk/>