



Objection to Brighton and Hove Museums' planning applications for 'A Garden Fit for a King': Reawakening Brighton's Royal Estate Phase 2 (BH2023/02835 and BH2023/02836)

Summary of objections

As Living Streets Brighton and Hove¹, we are delighted to see that the original plans for gates to be installed on all entrances to the Gardens have been removed in the latest documents from Brighton and Hove Museums (B&HM) dated June 2024 to support this planning application. This is a vital change to ensure continued easy constant access for pedestrians throughout the gardens.

We also warmly welcome the written statements (page 28 of the Development Stage Design Report) that:

"BHCC and B&HM have committed to maintain 24-hour access to the Gardens and both organisations will work together with several key city centre stakeholders including Sussex Police, local businesses and the Brighton BID to ensure that there are strong regulatory policies and practices in place to secure and protect the Garden as part of the city centre wide campaign."

"The proposals will therefore maintain the existing un-gated pedestrian entrances, which will be widened and improved with new bollards and stone piers to enhance access and improve the sense of arrival."

However, we continue to object strongly to the proposals for very tall perimeter railings around the entire boundary of the Gardens.

The main reasons given by B&HM for the railings are twofold: (i) to increase security and deter anti-social behaviour; and (ii) to create a coherent boundary for the whole Pavilion estate. We would argue that neither of these arguments are convincing for two reasons: (i) now the gates have been removed, the security arguments for the railings no longer hold - the railings themselves will not improve security at all; and (ii) a coherent boundary could be created without the enormous expense of very tall railings which would create a highly damaging visual as well as physical barrier to public perceptions of the gardens as an open public green space, deterring access for residents and visitors to the City.

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>.

In terms of costs, we note that the railings will need to be made by a specialist blacksmith / fabricator (Materials document page 3), and suggest that maintenance will be a continuing problem; many of the existing railings are being renewed precisely because they have not been adequately maintained through lack of funds. The challenge of funding maintenance in the long term is likely to remain.

A much more sensitive low boundary treatment - similar to the height of the MacLaren balustrade - would create a coherent boundary without the damaging visual and physical deterrent effect of tall railings.

Our previous objection letter (6 December 2023) detailed the case for the historical significance of Pavilion Gardens as a public park. Since then, Historic England, in their own evidence in relation to this application (22 March 2024), have stated that they "appreciate the concerns that a new boundary and gates around the Gardens' perimeter could reduce access and public enjoyment. In addition, we think that railings would also intrude in views of the Pavilion from the Old Steine and would affect the appearance of the India Gate".

On balance, HE supported the installation of railings and gates for security purposes. However, their advice was given before the proposed gates were removed from the application. HE refers to a security report they jointly commissioned with B&HM in 2022, but that report clearly "identified the threat level in the garden as generally 'low'" (page 38 of that review) and other research found similarly low levels of concern among the public using the gardens about crime and anti-social behaviour (B&HM Development Stage Report, page 110). Given the expectation that HE would necessarily prioritise protection of physical heritage assets (that is their purpose) over public access and enjoyment, and that the gates have now been removed from the planning application, the justification for high railings has been reduced further.

We have two further concerns:

- It is vital that the now agreed 24-hour public access is guaranteed for 7 days a week, and covenants are enacted to ensure this remains a permanent feature of the Gardens.
- Internal railings should be used only where protection is necessary to separate pathways from flowerbeds and shrubberies. If they are used elsewhere, they are likely to be a trip hazard. We also question the design of the internal railings, which seem inappropriate and, again, focus much more on control than enhancement.

There are many aspects of the proposals for the improvement of Pavilion Gardens which we warmly support, and which we believe will make pedestrian access easier as well as enhance public use and enjoyment of the Gardens, including wider entrances and pathways and improved walking surfaces.

These Gardens belong to the people of Brighton and Hove and it would be an entirely negative outcome if all these much needed improvements were threatened by unpopular, unnecessary and very costly tall railings which will undermine the desired welcome to visitors to the Gardens.

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16 July 2024