

City Case Study

Urban design for wellbeing and mental health: Brighton, UK

Verity Parkin¹ and Alys Daniels-Creasey^{2*}

¹ University of Birmingham

² University of Edinburgh

* Corresponding Author: adaniels@ed.ac.uk

Abstract: Brighton, a vibrant, densely-populated city on the south-east coast of the UK, has worse mental health outcomes than the average for UK cities. Despite this, there have been efforts made to rectify this through promising planning and policy actions and aspirations. Through interviews with councillors, planners, academics, and third sector and design practitioners living and working in the city, and a selection of case studies, we seek to better understand the relationship between urban design and mental health in Brighton. Relating interview data to the 'Mind the GAPS' framework, we conclude the following as vital for mental health promotion through design of public space: safe public and living spaces, enriched social infrastructure, accessible transport options, co-production of design, visual mapping of data and citizen involvement in urban planning.

Implications: This study indicates that urban design measures can benefit wellbeing through: a) the intentional selection of planners, architects, and other collaborators who demonstrate understanding and prioritisation of mental health in their work, b) valuing central areas for green, active spaces, c) the development of rich social infrastructure in conjunction with design, d) the trial of innovative projects to gauge response and impact, and e) the creation of genuine opportunities for community engagement.

Keywords: urban design; wellbeing; mental health; cities

1. Introduction

1.1. City Overview

1.1.1. Brighton and Hove

Brighton is a dynamic and vibrant city located on the south-east coast of England. Surrounded by the South Downs National Park, it is well-known for its cosmopolitan, liberal attitudes and high-levels of political engagement and activism. Brighton has a strong arts and culture scene, hosting more than sixty festivals a year including the largest annual arts festival in England (Brighton and Hove City Council, 2021a). The city is also home to the UK's only Green Party Member of Parliament, and has one of the highest populations of homeworkers and freelancers in the UK, including many artists and creative producers (Brighton and Hove City Council, 2021a).



Figure 1. Aerial view of Brighton (Hagan, 2021).

1.1.2. Development and demographics

Brighton boasts a mixture of iconic Regency and Victorian architecture. Developing from a fishing village into a modern Georgian resort town, it continued to expand along the coast and into the Downs throughout the 19th and 20th centuries. The advancement of transport infrastructure, particularly railways, helped connect the city to London and surrounding areas. Its various urban, coastal, and suburban regions underwent further significant redevelopment during the latter part of the 20th century to accommodate the changing needs of residents and visitors (Brighton and Hove City Council, 2009).



Figure 2. Regency period architecture in Brighton (Visit Brighton, 2021).

Brighton has a high population density, with the number of people living in the city at 290,395 (Brighton and Hove City Council, 2019a). This is expected to increase faster than the country average and get older as it grows. At the time of the 2011 census, the Black and Minority Ethnic population (defined as anyone who is not White UK/British) had increased to 20%, one in six residents was disabled or had a long-term health problem that

limited their day-to-day activities, and Brighton fell into the top third of most deprived authorities in England (Brighton and Hove City Council, 2014).

With two universities located in the city, Brighton holds a vibrant student scene as well as hosting many short-stay foreign language students and generating millions of pounds a year from its thriving tourist industry (Brighton and Hove City Council, 2014). It is renowned for its celebration of the LGBTQ+ community, accommodating the highest number of same-sex civil partnerships in the country, and is regarded as supportive of refugees and asylum seekers. Brighton has more single-person households than the country average and many residents live in flats, rented accommodation and social housing due to a high level of unaffordable housing. The lack of affordable housing arose as a prominent issue throughout this project, referred to as the biggest problem facing Brighton currently in the majority of the interviews.

1.1.3. Planning in Brighton and Hove

Urban planning decisions in the city are led by Brighton and Hove City Council's Urban Planning Department which follows national planning guidelines, as well as a variety of city-specific planning documents. These include those that lay out specific strategies for public realm improvements (such as street furniture, and guidance of increasing socialisation opportunities). The city's coastal geography makes it a '180 degree city', posing challenges for planning in terms of limiting potential for sprawl and restricting opportunities for transport links.

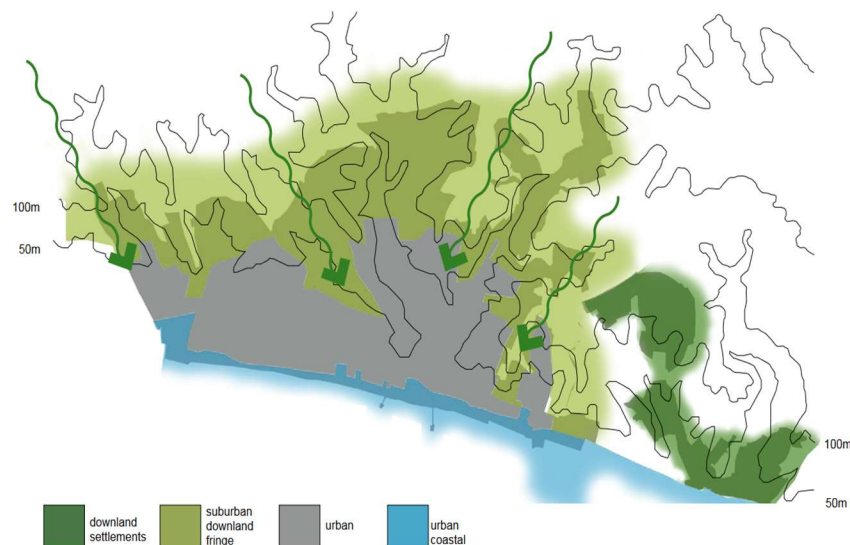


Figure 3. Brighton's landscape character (Brighton and Hove City Council, 2009).

Suffering from high levels of air pollution, Brighton and Hove has made a concerted effort in recent years to move away from a car-oriented design towards a focus on active transport (Brighton and Hove City Council, 2021b). 80% of residents are satisfied with parks and open spaces, however 34% see air pollution as a big problem in the city (Brighton and Hove Connected, 2018). The council also collaborates with external groups including the Grass Roots Suicide Prevention charity to design suicide prevention urban furniture, and has shown a long-standing commitment to human-centred urban design

such as commissioning the 'Public Space, Public Life' study by world-renowned Gehl Architects (Gehl Architects, 2007).

1.2. Mental Health Overview

1.2.1. Brighton's mental health situation

The Brighton and Hove City Tracker Survey (Brighton and Hove Connected, 2018) shares encouraging statistics regarding social interaction and community engagement in Brighton and Hove, with 76% of respondents feeling a sense of belonging, and 94% feeling the city is a place where people from different backgrounds get on well. However, the survey also reveals worrying findings around sense of safety, with levels varying by area of the city (Postcodes 'BN1' and 'BN3' felt safer than 'BN2') and by demographic. Women reported lower sense of safety in the city than men (67% of women felt safe in the day compared with 75% of men, dropping to 26% compared with 46% at night). Safety levels of residents with a disability were also lower than non-disabled residents. Concerningly, the city's mental health outcomes are worse than average for cities across the UK (Brighton and Hove City Council, 2019b), and suicide rates are high at 18 per 100,000, compared with a national average of 10.2 per 100,000 (Brighton and Hove Connected, 2018). Feeding back on mental health provisions in the city, only 45% of residents and 63% of service users are satisfied with mental health services in Brighton and Hove (Brighton and Hove Connected, 2018).

1.2.2. Current policies and future strategies

There are several policies in place in Brighton and Hove that address mental health issues and propose plans to improve wellbeing in the city. Brighton and Hove Connected (2021) presents a 2030 vision to 'connect people and place, business with community, and opportunity with equality' demonstrating the desire to approach wellbeing holistically within city policy. Perhaps the most comprehensive policy is the Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2019-2030 (Brighton and Hove City Council, 2019b) which sets out the council's vision for improving wellbeing and reducing health inequalities, through economic reinvestment and the development of transport, open spaces and leisure and community facilities. The City Plan Part One (Brighton and Hove City Council, 2016), which is due to be replaced by the City Plan Part Two in spring 2022, mentions wellbeing improvement, particularly in terms of inequalities, older people, and active travel. Brighton also has a Suicide Prevention Strategy (Brighton and Hove Connected, 2018) that emphasises the need for collaboration across services.

2. Methods

2.1. Literature review

Using local government websites, a literature review was conducted in 2020 to identify policy documents and strategies related to both urban design and mental health in the city of Brighton and Hove.

2.2. Interviews

Interviewees were identified through snowball sampling. A semi-structured interview approach was used, with questions tailored to interviewees' areas of specialism, in addition to questions focussed on urban design and mental health in the city. All interviews were recorded, allowing for key themes to be extracted, prioritisation of

mental health to be gauged, and principles to be identified. Interviews were conducted between October 2020 and February 2021.

2.2.1. Participants

Participants have been anonymised, and include urban planners, an academic, an urban designer, a trustee of the Royal Town Planning Institute, city councillors and third sector professionals.

Table 1. List of participants involved in the case study.

Participant	Role
Participant A	Academic/Researcher specialising in New Towns and Garden Cities
Participant B	Councillor, Chartered Town Planner, Lecturer in planning
Participant C	Cycling Journalist and member of a local active travel group
Participant D	Third Sector Fundraising and Financing Co-ordinator
Participant E	Councillor involved in various committees relating to sustainability, transport and children
Participant F	Director of Urban Strategy/Urban Designer
Participant G	Councillor involved in several committees including the Environment, Transport and Sustainability Committee
Participant H	Community Safety Manager
Participant I	Senior employee at a suicide prevention charity
Participant J	Councillor and Housing Committee Member
Participant K	Mental Health Navigator for a signposting service
Participant L	Planning Officer

3. Results

3.1. Prioritisation

3.1.1. Policy and strategy

As discussed previously, there are policies and strategies related to planning and wellbeing in Brighton, however these are predominantly in isolation from each other. There are some exceptions to this, including the City Plan Part One (Brighton and Hove City Council, 2016) which linked mental health and urban design through discussing physical and mental wellbeing in association with green space, active travel, and community and cultural facilities. Participant A, an academic, indicated that the upcoming City Plan Part Two may take wellbeing into even further consideration, particularly due to the emphasis on mental health because of the pandemic. However, they also outlined how city design priorities are somewhat constricted by national planning frameworks; Participant B, a chartered town planner, further explained that some of these touch on mental health, such as the new Urban Design Framework (Brighton and Hove City Council, 2021c). Participant A suggested that ‘the thrust of [national] policy is growth’, lending itself to the criticism that councils are not able to deliver their own aspirations. This provides valuable insight into the confines within which Brighton’s planning prioritisation takes place.

3.1.2. Prioritisation of physical health

According to Participant A, mental health is ‘not that high up’ as a priority for planning and urban design in Brighton. A recurring theme throughout the interviews was that physical health was seen as a greater priority. This includes a push towards encouraging

active travel through city design, which primarily aims to address physical health and environmental concerns but, as noted by Participant C, a cycling journalist, also results in a positive knock-on effect for mental health. This suggests that improvements to mental wellbeing are often an unintended byproduct, or consequence, of planning that aims to target other issues -- a conclusion drawn across many of the interviews.

3.1.3. Growing consideration

Despite the greater emphasis on physical health, and an indication that 'cost is always the overlying priority' (Participant D, a third sector funding and financing co-ordinator), Participant E, a councillor, believed that a good mental health team exists within the council to address relevant concerns. Several interviewees (Participant B, a chartered town planner; Participant F, an urban designer; Participant G, a councillor) mentioned the substantial investment in public green spaces in the city and how these are designed specifically with wellbeing in mind. The design team chosen to redevelop Valley Gardens (discussed later in case study two) positions wellbeing as a priority in their process, indicating an openness to considering mental health in planning in Brighton.

Despite this, through discussions with Participant H, a community safety manager, it became apparent that mental health improvements are more likely to be considered in conjunction with social infrastructure design, rather than planning and urban design. This was explained through the context that a rich community sector creates an ecosystem where wellbeing can be supported. For example, interviewees mentioned the importance of supporting collective activities such as food growing, and emphasised the social infrastructure rather than the physical spaces required to achieve this.

Participants noted that the COVID-19 pandemic has amplified wellbeing issues across all sectors. In line with this, it has also helped accelerate the move towards making mental health a greater priority in the city planning of Brighton. Developments such as the temporary pedestrianisation of Madeira Drive, aimed to encourage socially distanced exercise to improve both physical and mental health, were spurred on by the urgent need the pandemic created. For several interviewees, this reveals the direction that planning prioritisation in the city is going in, with mental health rising up the agenda.

3.1.4. Collaboration

In terms of the choices made surrounding urban planning, Participant D, a third sector employee, raised the concern that there is an apparent disconnect between Brighton charities and urban planning decisions. Participant I, another third sector employee, explained that despite evidence of some collaboration, sectors usually operate as distinct entities. The use of urban furniture to prevent suicide is one example offered of a key collaboration point between charities and different departments within the council: 'the main issues that have been discussed at suicide prevention strategy meetings, and connected to planning departments at the council, are around improved fencing/signage along the seafront clifftops to prevent suicide risk, and similar precautions at high-rise carparks' (Participant I).

3.1.5. Mapped data

Finally, Participant B, a councillor and town planner, expressed concern that there is a lack of integrated mapped data around wellbeing issues. For example, there is a lack of geographically mapped data which combines information on wellbeing factors such as employment and housing opportunities, access to green spaces, benefit claims, access to foodbanks, and mental health service usage. This is problematic as it can result in, or exacerbate, the lack of prioritisation of certain issues because there is no data to justify the decisions and funding surrounding potentially beneficial projects. Collaboration between teams is needed for this data collection to occur, which would lead to greater

links between planning and wellbeing in Brighton. However, according to Participant B, 'that kind of integration is very difficult'.

3.2. Design principles for mental health promotion

3.2.1. Principles

We reviewed the data collected through our interviews in order to pool expertise and generate principles that guide thinking around urban design and mental health in Brighton. Our findings support and align with the Mind the GAPS Framework (Centre for Urban Design and Mental Health, 2016). Analysis of the data also suggests the value of two further principles: co-participation in design, and mapping data about urban design and mental health. These are presented below alongside quotations from interviews.

3.2.2. Providing safe, community-minded spaces

Safe public space

- Carefully designed lighting which facilitates passive surveillance to prevent crime such as sexual assault.
- Infrastructure designed with suicide prevention in mind, such as placing bus stops away from cliff edges and installing railings.

Participant I, the Development Manager at a suicide prevention charity, explained that 'improved safety measures and information at high suicide risk areas, like the undercliffs...proper fencing, a Samaritans/suicide prevention helpline information board, or even moving a bus stop away from a high risk area, can all help reduce suicide.'

Safe and stable living spaces which foster community

- The creation of more affordable housing to minimise numbers in temporary, unstable housing which are detrimental to mental health outcomes
- Housing layouts which encourage neighbourly interaction, such as incorporating communal green space.

Participant J, a councillor and housing committee member, said that housing needs to have a design that 'helps people to be more neighbourly' by designing housing areas that are arranged more collectively and closely because 'fun and pleasure is often rooted in community and relationships'.

3.2.3. Creating social interaction and community

Develop existing social infrastructure

- The promotion of social interaction through the design of spaces, drawing momentum from the heightened awareness of the detrimental impact of isolation in the COVID-19 pandemic.
- The careful consideration of accessibility and transport links when designing spaces for social interaction.

Participant H, a community safety manager, explained that existing social infrastructure could be strengthened through the creation of urban spaces designed specifically to support interaction.

Socialising in public areas

- The development of space that is inviting for people to linger and socialise.

Participant F, Director of Urban Strategy on the Valley Gardens project, suggested mental health promotion as best integrated through relaxing elements such as greenery, play spaces, and informal sitting space, and by removing stressful elements such as traffic, noise, and speed.

Promotion of neighbourly interaction

- The creation of open space near to housing to promote interaction between neighbours.

Participant E, a councillor, shared that the 'little conversations we have could be more plentiful if we have more social spaces', for example the inclusion of 'little parklets' into residential areas.

3.2.4. Encouraging active transport

Accessible pavements

- The installation of wider pavements to allow wheelchair access and space for families with pushchairs.
- The placement of benches along walking routes to allow people to stop and rest, and interact.

Move away from car-oriented design to support walking and cycling

- The development of inviting ways to travel around the city, such as bike lanes through green space or with a view onto blue space (such as the sea).

Participant C, a cycling journalist, explained how Brighton has only recently started making concerted efforts to prioritise active transport through infrastructure change: 'It [car domination] is almost like a disease that has crept in since the 1950s...it is only in the last couple of years that Brighton has been made more attractive to people walking and cycling'.

3.2.5. Facilitating co-production in design

Diversifying involvement with urban design

- The use of multifaceted approaches to inclusive engagement such as physical leaflets, online focus groups, and building connections with university students and community interest and activism groups.

Giving agency to citizens

- Striving to go beyond the baseline consultation requirements, embracing citizen agency and empowering them to make a difference to their own public space.
- The encouragement of active engagement through projects such as guerilla gardening, pop-up parklet programmes and community food growing projects.

Participant E, project lead for a low-traffic neighbourhood (LTN), explained how citizen engagement in the design stages of the project has had a positive impact on mental health: 'It is about reclaiming the space, it is about people's mental health I think the being involved ... people who come along to some of our groups, it is a social event for them in the week to come and be in the Zoom [video call software] and talk about how we could make things better... and that galvanises people a bit'.

3.2.6. Mapping data about mental health and urban design

- The compilation of richer data on the impact of urban design decisions on mental health, as this would be beneficial for supporting funding applications for projects with a mental health focus.
- The utilisation of an innovative and collaborative approach between public sector and third sector organisations to create mapped data.

Participant B, a councillor, chartered town planner, and researcher, explained how a lack of integrated data for the city limits the extent to which mental health is explicitly addressed in planning and policy documents: 'we don't have all of these things mapped in one place, it becomes very difficult to manage'. Participant B provided an example scenario whereby data on employment, access to benefits and usage of foodbanks was not geographically mapped in relation to each other. They explained the ramifications of this for driving policy change: 'sometimes you can't make decisions without the necessary data to help you make those decisions'. This lack of integrated city data threatens the holistic approach that is needed if mental health is to be addressed and prioritised through urban design.

3.2.7. Moving forwards

While these principles provide useful insight into how mental health can be promoted through urban design, multiple interviewees expressed frustration at cost being an overlying priority preventing the translation of principles into practice. A focus on innovative mapping of data could therefore be a valuable first step towards justifying allocation of funding to mental health focussed projects.

4. Case studies

4.1. *New Road, Brighton city centre*

Gehl Architects, together with Landscape Projects and Martin Stockly Associates, radically transformed a previously run-down city-centre street, New Road, in 2010. Once prone to antisocial activity, the street was completely altered to create 'England's first shared space street where cars are welcome – but on people's terms' (Gehl Architects, 2021). The project won numerous awards, including the Landscape Institute Award, and was selected for inclusion in the English Partnership's 2013 Urban Design Compendium, as exemplary best practice for making neighbourhoods inviting, active and safe (Gehl Architects, 2021).



Figure 4. New Road as a shared street space (Gehl Architects, 2021).

4.1.1. Green places

- The project capitalised on its parallel proximity to the Pavilion Gardens – a public grade II listed Regency garden, through creating wide, wheelchair accessible entrances to the garden at either end of New Road.



Figure 5: Pavilion gardens as an inviting green space (Gehl Architects, 2021).

4.1.2. Active places

- Through replacing rigid features such as crossings and kerbs with a smooth natural stone surface, pedestrians were invited into the space and given priority over

other users, and the space became more accessible to users with disabilities, those in wheelchairs, and to parents with pushchairs.



Figure 6: New Road as a shared street space (Gehl Architects, 2021).

4.1.3. Pro-social places

- Creating space for social interaction was a central goal of the New Road project, inspiring the key element: a long wooden bench running down almost the full length of the street, creating a 'back' to the street, and a perfect place for resting, socialising and people-watching. The street has become an active hub for buskers, and a favoured location for outdoor street performances in the annual Brighton Fringe Festival.
- Reflecting on the project, Gehl Architects said: 'Local citizens have been quick to embrace the change, generating a new urban culture in what has become one of the most popular places to spend time in the city' (Gehl Architects, 2021). This success is reflected in statistics: traffic levels have dropped by 93%, pedestrian numbers have increased by 62%, and lingering activities have soared by 600% (Gehl Architects, 2021).



Figure 7: New Road as popular performance space during the Brighton Festival and Fringe Festival (Gehl Architects, 2021).

4.1.3. Safe places

- Responding to the multiple theatres and pubs on the street, the project identified New Road as having high potential for active nightlife and paid particular attention to designing lighting that would increase street usage and sense of safety at night.

4.1.4. Community involvement

- 'Creating opportunities to talk' was a key principle of the New Road project (Gehl Architects, 2021), and involving local business owners and residents was key to the design process. Through listening to points of view of different stakeholders, ideas for the project were adapted from the initial plan of total pedestrianisation to the final - and pioneering - shared street design.
- Speaking on the importance of community involvement in the project, Gehl Architects said: 'Facilitating this dialogue through workshops and meetings was also key to our work on New Road: talking to people about their hopes and fears helped us meet the goal of creating a more walkable, relaxed, attractive and accessible street.' (Gehl Architects, 2021).

4.2. Valley Gardens

Principally designed by Urban Movement in collaboration with the council and others, the 2020 redevelopment of Valley Gardens was described as 'a showpiece' by Participant C, a cycling journalist, which was a sentiment shared by the majority of interviewees. Stretching 1.5 kilometres from St. Peter's Church through the centre of the city and down to the Palace Pier, Valley Gardens comprises a chain of green spaces along a major transport route.

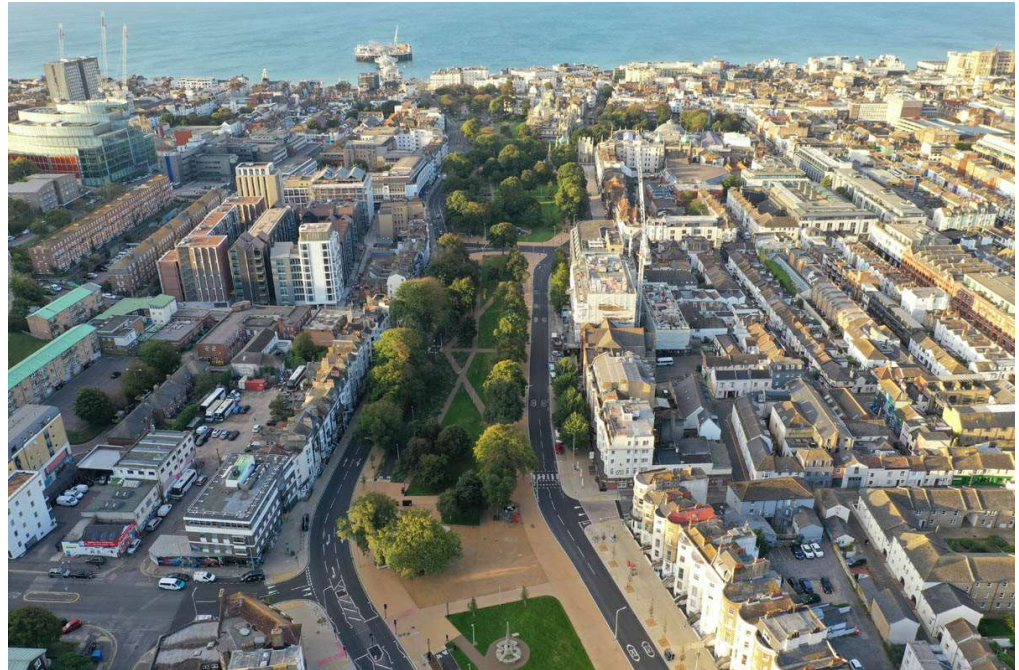


Figure 8: Aerial view of Valley Gardens (Brighton and Hove City Council, 2021d).

The project identified several problems with the area, such as the prioritisation of traffic and the subsequent barrier to active transport, the minimal ecological value of the place, and the failure to capitalise on the opportunity of a large green space. In conversation with the Director of Urban Strategy for Urban Movement (Participant F), they shared that: 'At its heart, [the design] was rooted in improving quality of life and city enjoyment, and a huge part of this is happiness, mental health and physical health improvement'. Bearing this in mind, designers focused on the inclusion of improved lighting, bike lanes separated from the roads, inviting walkways, a range of plants, inclusive seating, and unifying materials (Urban Movement, 2021).

Based on the interviews, the reception to Valley Gardens has been largely positive, with the redevelopment acting as a 'real enhancement to the city experience' (Participant K, a mental health navigator). The biggest pushback has come from some car users, who are not happy with the traffic changes, according to Participant B, a town planner. Participant E, a councillor, noted that 'spaces that were once for cars are now for people'. However, this was framed by Participant C, a cycling journalist, as a potential incentive to get more residents into active travel.

4.2.1. Green places

- Valley Gardens has transformed a previously underused green space of minimal variety into one with greater ecological value, introducing 37,000 new plants to the area (Brighton and Hove City Council, 2021d). Diversity of landscaping throughout the space has created a 'pocket of green' (Participant K, mental health navigator) that '[brings] the countryside into the town' (Participant A, an academic).



Figure 9: Plan drawing of Valley Gardens, highlighting green space (Urban Movement, 2021).

4.2.2. Active places

- With the addition of new bike lanes and walking paths cutting across the space, Valley Gardens has become abuzz with active travel. It is now a pleasant area for commuting, or a 'through-route' (Participant A, an academic).

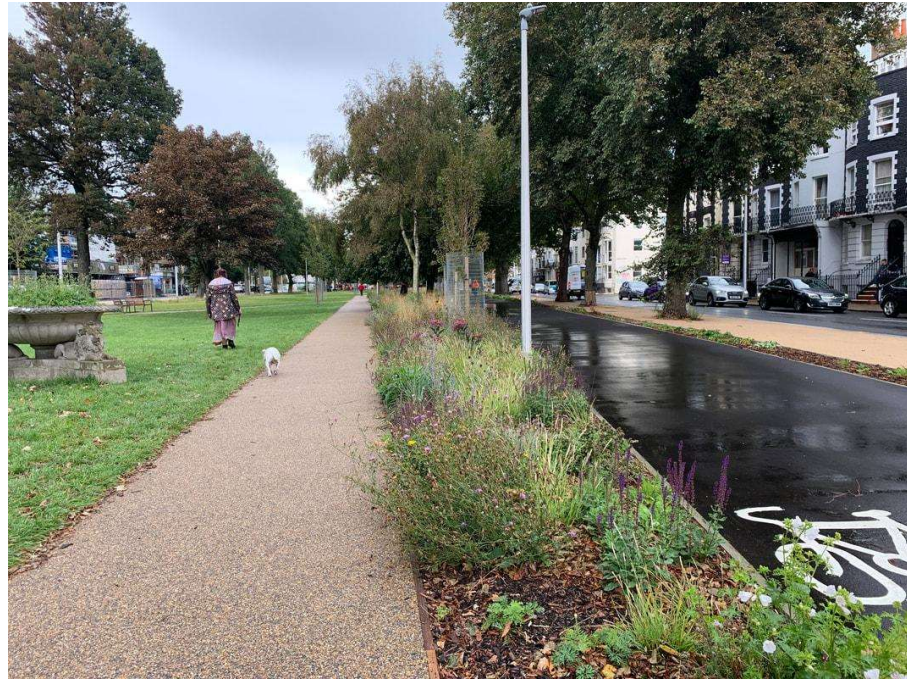


Figure 10: Opportunities for active transport in Valley Gardens (Urban Movement, 2021).

4.2.3. Pro-social places

- The improvements to other aspects of the space, such as diversified greenery and new paths, have provided a space that people not only want to pass through but stop in. Designers of Valley Gardens did not want to prioritise 'movement function over place function', but rather shape an environment that is of 'human scale and speed' to encourage socialising (Participant F, Director of Urban Strategy).

4.2.4. Safe places

- Improved lighting, wider pavements and better upkeep of the area have ensured the space has the right elements for a safer environment for users, however the data for whether this is reflected in practice does not yet exist. It is also expected that the changes will have a positive impact on air quality, road safety and flood risk management (Brighton and Hove Council, 2021e).

4.3. Liveable City

Primarily a project with the environment in mind, the Liveable City plan that is currently under review aims to make the city centre car free by 2023. Referring to Brighton's low car ownership relative to the rest of the UK, Participant L, a planning officer, commented that 'we are a city not inside the car, but cars take up a lot of our city space', suggesting that the city's design needs to be realigned with its priorities. Driven by the Green-led council, zones of various sizes are being explored as potential options, ranging from the 1.5 kilometres north of the seafront to the entirety of the city south of the A27. Preliminary research (Brighton and Hove City Council, 2021f) suggests that the larger the proposed zone, the greater the positive environmental impact and subsequent benefits. However, the potentially challenging social and practical implications are also likely to be

greater. At the time of writing, a concrete decision regarding the extent of the car-free area has not yet been established.



Figure 11: A congested Brighton city centre (Brighton Journal, 2017).

The Liveable City focuses on several issues, particularly the reduction of harmful emissions. Mental wellbeing is not the major focus of the project but it is certainly a huge consideration. Participant G, a councillor heavily involved in campaigning for the implementation of the Liveable City, stated 'I think it is easy to forget how things like transport and local public spaces impact on our mental health'. The public reception to the proposed plans is mixed, with its implementation seen by some as highly controversial and disruptive. However, with an emphasis on collaboration and consultation (Brighton and Hove City Council, 2021f), the Liveable City aims to accommodate the needs of residents, visitors and businesses alike.

4.3.1 Green places

- Increasing green space is central to the Liveable City and has been explicitly linked to wellbeing: Participant G said the proposal '[emphasises] the importance of green and open public space, and how this positively impacts quality of life'.

4.3.2 Active places

- Making the city centre more pedestrian friendly boosts the opportunities for active travel and outdoor exercise.

4.3.3 Pro-social places

- Through reducing traffic, Participant G noted that the Liveable City creates a space in which 'people want to spend more time...socialising, exercising,

shopping, commuting' which 'will help contribute to mental health'. This proposal visualises a city centre alive with interactive pedestrian activity.

4.3.4 Safe places

- The reduction of traffic in the city is predicted to improve air quality, a physical health benefit that would more generally contribute to people's wellbeing, as well as reduce traffic accidents, making the city centre safer.

4.4 Hanover and Turner Liveable Neighbourhood

Hanover and Turner Liveable Neighbourhood is an exciting project currently underway in a residential area of the city. Funded by Brighton and Hove City Council, and taking a co-design approach involving local residents, the project will create a low traffic neighbourhood through restricting car access for non-residents, instilling planters and bollards, and eventually also green "parklets" in place of on street parking spots (Hanover and Turner Liveable Neighbourhood, 2021). Participant E, a councillor involved in the project, explained that while the principle aim of the Liveable Neighbourhood is to reduce traffic and prevent rat-runners, there are hopes that it will also bring great wellbeing benefits to residents:

'having more seating space, having more greenery is actually really good for mental health, and just those little social interactions, those little conversations we have could be more plentiful if we have more social spaces, little parklets and what have you... so I'm really pushing for those.'



Figure 12: Visualising the Liveable Neighbourhood (Hanover and Turner Liveable Neighbourhood, 2021).

4.4.1 Green places

- Although creating green space is not within the initial plans for the project, parklets in place of on-street parking is something Participant E was keen to implement further down the line, and recognised the wellbeing benefits these would provide in terms of social interaction.
- Looking to the future there are plans for parklets which will improve mental health: 'Parklets could reduce the risk of social isolation and of developing mental health problems' (Brighton Green Group, 2020).

4.4.2 Active places

- The creation of wider pavements and addition of benches aims to encourage active travel and exercise for those with pushchairs, and those with mobility difficulties who would benefit from stopping at benches to rest during a walk.

4.4.3 Prosocial places

- The installation of benches, and parklets (further down the line), will aim to create opportunities for social interaction, and reduction in traffic will allow children to play outside houses - something currently impossible due to the narrow roads being congested with cars.

4.4.4 Safe places

- Through dramatically reducing car traffic in the area, particularly that caused by rat-runners, the streets will become a safer space for all.

4.4.5 Community involvement

- With a co-design approach to the project, community involvement has been central from the outset. A pop-up parklet, held in a local car park, invited residents to share ideas for how they would like their public space to look through the Liveable Hanover project, engaging with all age groups:

'Children, they don't inhibit their ideas as much [...] to get them on board and get them used to the idea that their voice matters is really important. You get so tunnel vision about things and you need those fresh perspectives coming in' (Participant E).

- A multi-faceted approach is being taken to involve the community in an accessible way, including a paper newsletter, reaching out to university students in the area, and holding focus groups over Zoom - methods which themselves have the potential for bringing mental health benefits:

'It is about reclaiming the space, it is about people's mental health I think... being involved ... people who come along to some of our groups, it is a social event for them in the week to come and be in the Zoom and talk about how we could make things better... and that galvanises people a bit' (Participant E).



Figure 13: Increasing community engagement with Liveable Neighbourhood project through a pop-up parklet (Brighton Green Group, 2020).

Reception of the project has been mostly positive, and community groups from other areas of the city have even enquired about setting up similar projects. However, leaders of the project are mindful that consultation will be central to ensuring that the project is as beneficial to everyone as possible, for example recognising that limiting car access is restrictive for some people with disabilities, and that seeking out opportunities to engage with disability advocacy groups for advice will be essential.

5. Evaluation and reflection

Reflecting on our analysis, below are the key strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats we identified in relation to urban design and mental health in Brighton.

Table 2. Summary of SWOT analysis for urban design and mental health in Brighton.

<p>Strengths</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rich social infrastructure • High levels of citizen engagement and activism • Strong creative scene • High satisfaction with public parks and open spaces • Council's evidenced willingness to take a human-centred approach to urban design • Easy access to green and blue space due to Brighton's coastal location and proximity to a National Park 	<p>Weaknesses</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of affordable housing • High levels of air pollution due to traffic • High levels of dissatisfaction with mental health services • Higher levels of mental health issues than the UK average
<p>Opportunities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Having the only Green Party MP in the UK (access to green space) 	<p>Threats</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Space for development is limited by Brighton's coastal geography

<p>and active transport is an existing priority)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Current relevant policies and future strategies evidence an increasing focus on mental health • Growth of the active travel movement • COVID-19 pandemic has brought mental health to the fore, accelerating consideration and possibilities of projects across sectors • Two universities with researchers and students engaged with urban design, planning and mental health offers exciting opportunities for collaboration 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of collaboration between council planning department, private companies, and third sector organisations • Council is composed of three different political parties, making decision making slow • Lack of geographically mapped and integrated data connecting mental health and wellbeing with urban design decisions in the city
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6. Conclusions

6.1. Lessons from Brighton

- Intentionally select architects, planners and other collaborators who show a demonstrated understanding of mental health and prioritise it in planning.
- Recognise the value in allocating central city areas for green space and active transport.
- Develop a rich social infrastructure in conjunction with improved urban design - encourage the growth of community groups and events alongside spaces for these to take place.
- Trial innovative projects, such as car-free zones and low-traffic neighbourhoods, to gauge impact and response.
- Create genuine opportunities for active citizen involvement in decision making regarding planning.

6.2. Recommendations

Actively seek out opportunities for collaboration between Brighton and Hove City Council, third sector organisations and private companies, pooling expertise to improve mental health through creative approaches to urban design.

Further promote social interaction through designing and improving urban spaces around Brighton's existing rich social infrastructure, creating spaces which act as hubs of wellbeing.

Specifically refer to 'mental health' (as opposed to simply 'wellbeing' or 'health') in relation to urban planning within future city strategies and policy documents, to make it clearer when mental health is being intentionally considered.

Explicitly recognise the detrimental impact of unstable, temporary housing for residents' mental health in planning and policy documents, and renew an urgent focus on the need to re-evaluate how housing can be made more affordable in the city.

Trial an integrated mapping approach as an innovative way to justify future urban design decisions that support mental health. A wealth of data exists separately on mental health

outcomes and urban planning, but it is predominantly siloed in the public and third sector. To support future projects that focus on urban design and mental health, data regarding mental health outcomes and design decisions could be integrated, overlaid and mapped at a city scale. This would be a valuable tool to identify and visually communicate gaps and opportunities for urban design projects that prioritise mental health; collaboration between university researchers, Brighton and Hove City Council, third sector organisations, and urban planners could help to realise a trial mapping project.

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