

## **Comments on Planning Application BH2017/02583 Victoria Gardens North and South, Grand Parade, St. Peter's Church, York Place (Valley Gardens)**

The application supersedes an earlier proposal to remodel Valley Gardens as part of a new traffic scheme. The current landscape proposals also form part of a wider traffic plan. However, as the traffic plan does not form part of the planning application, the application gives no details. It is therefore difficult to relate the landscape proposals to the wider context.

The application has been prepared on behalf of Brighton and Hove Council by 'Untitled Design', a firm of landscape consultants based in London.

### Comments:

1. The application is difficult to understand – most of the drawings submitted are very diagrammatic and give very little detailed information. Two perspective visualisations provide the only tangible information and they are of very low quality.
2. To summarise: the proposals take the form of a mainly two-dimensional intervention in which a pattern of straight routes, corresponding to supposed desire lines, criss cross the area of land contained between the two north-south highways (i.e. a public transport route to the west and a general route to the east). Two large hard surface areas are defined, one to the immediate south of St. Peter's Church (St. Peter's Square) and one occurring opposite Gloucester Street (Richmond Square)
3. The consultants set out a number of 'aims' in their Design and Access Statement:

*(1) To create a vibrant and attractive new public park.*

We are not sure what this means. We do not believe that this long narrow urban space, locked in between two traffic arteries, could or should be conceived as a public park. It is essentially a space dedicated to movement, both transverse and longitudinal and activity. It is more of a 'Ramblas' than a Place Vendome. However, it is clear that the proposals are neither vibrant nor attractive.

*(3) To create legible and safe links to the surrounding areas.*

There is no evidence in the application to suggest that this has been achieved. The emphasis seems to be on north south routes, whereas the biggest challenge is to cater to important east-west routes. Clear east-west crossing points need to be identified emphasised and other crossing points should be discouraged.

*(4) To enhance the appearance and setting of historic buildings.*

There is no evidence in the application to suggest that this has even been attempted. There is nothing in the geometry, in the choice of materials or in the type of planting which in any way relates to or addresses the historic setting. Nor is any attempt made to use materials or forms that relate to the city's architectural heritage.

*(6) To make provision for high quality outdoor events.*

There is little evidence in the application to suggest that this has been attempted in any serious or deliberate way. No attempt seems to have been made to study the sort of

events that take place already or that potentially could take place in the future. We believe, for instance that Valley Gardens could provide a setting for vibrant street markets and exhibitions at different times of the year – such possibilities are not discussed.

4. The application provides almost no details of proposed street furniture – i.e. lighting (either elevated or at ground level), seating, shelter. Although the D.A.S. contains seductive pictures of mounds, screen walls etc. in other developments, these are totally absent from the design.
5. No attempt has been made to screen the central space from the carriageways to either side – either physically or visually. There is a total absence of shrubbery and shelter planting (both features of the Regency landscape), of mounds, walls or hedges. There is no sense of containment. No attempt to provide some protection against prevailing winds.
6. The proposed choice of planting is totally inappropriate to an urban setting. Meadow grasses and snowdrops have no place in such a location.
7. The proposals appear to be driven by a low budget. The materials employed are basic and utilitarian and no attempt has been made to create patterns, vary finishes etc. However, there is evidence that the space will be expensive to maintain.
8. The design makes absolutely no use of traditional local materials – flint, cobble, bungaroosh etc. The proposals are not in keeping with what is a unique urban space in an important heritage setting at the heart of a major city.
9. The proposals fail to engender any sense of place: there is nothing which expresses the spirit of Brighton.
10. Because of the paucity of information provided we have to rely on the two perspective sketches which have been provided:
  - The view towards The King and Queen Pub shows trapezoidal areas of planting which seem to be made up of straggly meadow grass with random flowers. These are unprotected – there is no upstand to differentiate them from the footpaths. We do not think that this sort of planting is appropriate to an urban location – it will be high maintenance and will collect rubbish. The trees shown are of different heights and do not suggest ‘avenue planting’ that is referred to in the D.A.S. – there is no sense of order or formality.
  - The view of ‘St. Peter’s Square’ reveals the full bankruptcy of the proposals. The square is shown as a sea of bound gravel. The surface is totally plain with no attempt made to create surface pattern or change of material. There is no indication of any lighting or street furniture. The seating that is shown has the appearance of cheap white plastic garden furniture. There are no vertical features (e.g. walls, shrubs, hedges) that might contain the space or mitigate against traffic noise or protect from wind.

In summary we believe that this application should be refused permission on the following grounds:

- a) The submission fails to provide sufficiently detailed or explicit information for what is a development of huge visual, cultural, social and environmental significance to our City.

- b) The design is not fit for purpose – it fails to create an urban landscape of quality appropriate to its location
  - c) The design fails to achieve the stated aims of its authors in terms of place-making, in terms of providing legible and safe links to other parts of the city; it fails to address or enhance the important heritage assets that line the space, or to make provision for a variety of outdoor events.
  - d) The proposals are cheap (though expensive to maintain), boring and totally uninspired.
- Finally, we believe that an urban design of such a scale and of such importance should be properly publicised with a public exhibition. Such an exhibition would contain samples of materials and of street furniture, high quality visualisations and a three dimensional model to an appropriate scale.

DGR  
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