

Brighton & Hove City Council

Cabinet

Agenda Item 56

Subject: Royal Pavilion Gardens restoration project

Date of meeting: Thursday, 15 October 2026

Report of: Cabinet Member for The Economy, Culture, Heritage and Tourism

Lead Officer: Alison McManamon Corporate Director- City Operations

Contact Officer: Nicholas Fishlock, Programme Manager

Email: nick.fishlock@brighton-hove.gov.uk

Ward(s) affected: West Hill & North Laine;

Key Decision: Yes

Reason(s) Key: Expenditure which is, or the making of savings which are, significant having regard to the expenditure of the City Council's budget, namely above £1,000,000.

For general release

1. Purpose of the report and policy context

- 1.1 This report seeks Cabinet approval for a revised total project budget for the Royal Pavilion Gardens restoration project and authority to enter into the main works contract. The council has previously approved £750,000 financial contributions to the project and this report does not seek approval for further direct funding. All other project costs are funded by external sources including the Royal Pavilion and Museums Trust and National Lottery Heritage Fund. The report outlines the project costs and funding in section 3. Context and background information.
- 1.2 The project supports the Council Plan objective of "A city to be proud of" by conserving and enhancing one of the city's most important public heritage spaces, improving accessibility, strengthening community use, supporting visitor economy outcomes and protecting the long-term condition of a nationally significant historic garden.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 Cabinet agrees a budget increase of £1.600m funded by National Lottery Heritage Funding, Historic England Grant and RPMT donations. This takes the total project to £8.038m for the delivery of the restoration project works.

- 2.2 Cabinet delegates authority to the Corporate Director – City Operations, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Economy, Culture, Heritage and Tourism, to enter into a contract to appoint a Main Contractor to carry out the restoration works to the Royal Pavilion Garden within the project cost plan. Subject to receiving approval of additional £0.500m funding from Historic England.

3. Context and background information

- 3.1 The Memorandum of Understanding signed by the council, Royal Pavilion and Museums Trust [RPMT] and Brighton Dome Brighton Festival on 18 August 2014 proposes to redevelop and improve the Royal Pavilion Estate as a world class cultural and heritage site by integrating the Royal Pavilion, Brighton Dome, Brighton Museum & Art Gallery, Corn Exchange and Studio Theatre with their historic setting, improving the world class centre piece of Brighton & Hove's city centre. The capital works will seek not only to improve the Royal Pavilion Estate, but also restore some of the connectivity between Brighton Dome, the Brighton Museum & Art Gallery and the Royal Pavilion, which will enable further co-working in the future on the delivery of cultural events and celebration of the parties' unique heritage.
- 3.2 The improvement programme is being delivered in phases to enhance the visitor experience, conserve the Estate's heritage and improve the long-term sustainability of the council's freehold assets. The first phase, comprising the restoration of Brighton Dome's Corn Exchange and Studio Theatre, was completed in 2023.
- 3.3 The Garden sits within land leased and managed by the Royal Pavillion and Museums Trust. Historic England placed the Garden on its Heritage at Risk Register in 2017 and since this time a programme to protect and maintain the Garden and its infrastructure has been in development. The restoration project has since been developed jointly by the council and RPMT to address the Garden's condition and secure its long-term future.
- 3.4 In November 2017, Policy, Resources & Growth Committee approved the submission of a National Lottery Heritage Fund (NLHF) bid for the Garden and allocated £1.000m of council capital funding, split equally between the Garden and Royal Pavilion.
- 3.5 In October 2019, Policy & Resources Committee reallocated the £0.500m intended for the Royal Pavilion to the urgent replacement of the Brighton Museum & Art Gallery roof. The remaining £0.500m council allocation to the Garden was retained.
- 3.6 In August 2023, Strategy, Finance & City Regeneration Committee approved a further council contribution of up to £0.250m towards new public toilets within the Garden project. It also delegated authority to procure and appoint a main contractor following a successful NLHF bid. The council's approved capital contribution to the Garden project is therefore £0.750m.

- 3.7 NLHF subsequently awarded grant funding jointly to the council and RPMT, reflecting their respective roles as freeholder and leaseholder and their joint responsibility for delivering the project. A Collaboration Agreement sets out each party's responsibilities and the allocation of project risks. The project is overseen by a Project Team comprising council and RPMT officers and the project's professional advisers.
- 3.8 Planning approval was granted in 2024 to restore the regency planting and protection and promotion of local biodiversity; reinstate the historic boundary based on the original 19th century railing designs; provide new visitor and community facilities, more accessible information and increased community engagement opportunities; and to repair, conserve and enhance historic elements, including the garden entrances and pathways.
- 3.9 Project costs have increased during design development due to the cumulative effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, planning delays, construction inflation, higher material costs and additional professional fees.
- 3.10 In August 2023, the estimated total project cost was £6.264m, including capital of £4.241m. By detailed design in December 2025, this had increased to £8.228m including estimated capital works of £5.976m.
- 3.11 In response, the Project Team undertook a detailed review of the design, procurement and delivery approach while protecting the project's essential heritage outcomes and NLHF approved purposes. By February 2026, this reduced the forecast project cost to £7.139m, including estimated capital works of £4.614m.
- 3.12 Under a two-stage competitive flexible tender process, 14 expressions of interest were submitted. Four contractors were shortlisted based on financial standing, technical capability and relevant experience. Two contractors submitted tenders, reflecting prevailing market conditions, contractor capacity and individual tendering decisions, rather than any limitation in the competitiveness or openness of the procurement process. The bids showed significant market testing. Blakedown Landscapes was identified as the preferred contractor as the most economically advantageous tenderer.
- 3.13 Following negotiations and value engineering, the proposed contract sum is £5.174m. Further value engineering opportunities have been identified and will continue to be explored where these do not compromise the project's approved outcomes.
- 3.14 The tender resulted in increased costs of £1.476m above the funding awarded and planned to be secured. NLHF has subsequently awarded an additional £0.976m, substantially reducing the shortfall. An application has also been made to Historic England for a further £0.500m and is to be determined imminently.
- 3.15 After considering all of the work undertaken to date outlined in the paragraphs preceding this the revised total project budget is £8.038m.

Identified funding exceeds this amount, providing some flexibility should elements of anticipated external fundraising not be secured.

Figure 1: Current project budget and funding

	Total Project Cost (£'000)	Funding secured (£,000)	Funding to be secured (£,000)	Funding total (£,000)	Notes
Capital work	6,244				incl. professional fees
Activities	959				
Contingency	835				
BHCC Capital Receipts		310		310	
BHCC Borrowing		440		440	
Other public sector grant		247	585	832	Funding set to be announced early October
National Lottery Heritage Fund grant		5,346		5,346	
Other external contributions (collected by RPMT)		644	466	1,110	RPMT have confirmed on track to achieve
Total	8,038	6,987	1,051	8,038	

- 3.16 The refurbishment of the public toilets, which together with a new concession will be leased to RPMT, is expected to reduce the council's ongoing management costs by approximately £0.024m per year. In 2025, additional maintenance and security costs resulted in total operating costs of £0.091m.
- 3.17 Some external funding remains to be secured. A decision is awaited on the additional £500,000 requested from Historic England. The council has also applied to Arts Council England for £0.085m. RPMT is pursuing the remaining third-party grants, donations and other income through its fundraising programme. The council will not be required to apply for, manage or directly receive those RPMT contributions.
- 3.18 No additional direct council funding is requested through this report. The project includes a contingency allowance to manage delivery risks. Under the Collaboration Agreement, costs exceeding the available contingency would generally be shared between the council and RPMT. This risk is being managed through project contingency, continued value engineering and RPMT's fundraising programme.
- 3.19 Subject to Cabinet approval and completion of the funding and contractual arrangements, the current programme is:

Figure 2: Delivery programme

Milestone	Date
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Additional funding applications submitted	14 September 2026
Funding decisions expected	23 September 2026
Contract execution (on receiving Cabinet approval)	22 October 2026
Estimated work start	09 November 2026
Estimated completion	November 2027

- 3.20 The programme remains achievable but depends on Cabinet approval, completion of construction contract documents and prompt contract execution, and contractor mobilisation. Delays could result in further inflation, additional professional fees, programme disruption and changes to the sequencing of seasonal planting.

4. Analysis and consideration of alternative options

- 4.1 The project has received prior Committee approvals, planning approvals, and has a complete design. On receipt of the required funding, it can proceed.
- 4.2 In case the £1.050m funding yet to be secured is not received and in effect leaving the project not fully funded; the project team have prepared a list of work packages that could be omitted from the project. Each of these elements would reduce the scope of the project, but allows the project costs to be managed within the approved funding envelope without further impacts on the council's financial position. The elements have been chosen to minimise impact on the purposes of the project agreed between the project team and the funders. The NLHF funding is linked to delivering these Agreed Purposes.
- 4.3 The project team have attempted to find a way for the ice rink to return to the Pavilion site over winter 2026/2027. However, work will be happening on the ice rink site throughout the winter period, and it is not possible to delay the start of the project without significant cost and funding implications.

5. Community engagement and consultation

- 5.1 An initial unsuccessful NLHF submission for the whole Estate was informed by a series of consultation and engagement sessions, which included workshops, presentations and surveys undertaken with a variety of stakeholders. In relation to the Garden, several stakeholder workshops, including one solely for young people was held along with public consultation in the Garden and an exhibition in Jubilee Library along with an online survey on the council's consultation portal.
- 5.2 An online survey completed in 2018 informed the NLHF bid for development funds. It was completed by 1,363 Brighton and Hove residents who were regular visitors to the Garden, travelling through it, or to sit and relax. Those who responded were visiting the buildings in it or using the Garden as a place to meet friends and to use the café.
- 5.3 Preparation of the Activity Plan for the NLHF Round 2 application included public consultation in summer 2022 consisting of; on-line surveys; individual

interviews with identified stakeholders; two focus groups with local adult residents; one focus group with young people aged 17 to 24 years old with special educational needs; five focus groups and follow up phone calls with 21 individuals working with young people, low income families and adults supporting people with disabilities or ill health and in community support organisations in Brighton and Hove; and focus groups with primary and secondary school teachers.

- 5.4 The project underwent a statutory consultation informing the planning process and consent.

6. Financial implications

- 6.1 Cabinet is asked to approve a £1.600m budget increase, bringing the total project budget to £8.038m following the project team's review of estimated costs. The council's capital programme currently includes a £6.437m budget, funded by a previously approved council contribution of £0.750m, of which only £0.440 is borrowing. The balance of £5.687m comprises secured external grants and donations received by RPMT.
- 6.2 The £1.600m increase will be funded by £0.550m of secured NLHF grant, a £0.500m Historic England grant application due for determination in early October, and £0.550m of RPMT donations yet to be secured. Council officers continue to meet with RPMT, which has confirmed that fundraising is on track.
- 6.3 As set out in paragraph 4.2, the council's financial exposure if external funding is not secured will be managed by reducing the project scope to within the adjusted budget position while retaining the agreed purposes required to meet NLHF grant conditions.
- 6.4 The £8.038m budget includes contingency allowances of 12.5% for works and 7.5% for other costs, which are considered sufficient at this stage. If an overspend is forecast during delivery, the project team will review the scope to keep costs within the approved budget. If this is not achievable, any remaining overspend will be shared equally between the council and RPMT under the Collaboration Agreement signed in September 2026.
- 6.5 The council's total project contribution is £0.750m, of which £0.440m is funded through borrowing. The associated financing costs are included in the Corporate Financing budget and current MTFS projections. Based on PWLB rates at 2 October 2026, annual borrowing costs are estimated at £0.046m.

Name of finance officer consulted: Craig Garoghan
Date consulted: 02/10/2026

7. Legal implications

- 7.1 The building contract to appoint a Main Contractor to carry out the restoration works to the Royal Pavilion Garden is procured under the

Procurement Act 2023 ('the Act') by the Council and is above the regulatory threshold for works contracts under the Act. The building contract will be in the form of a JCT Intermediate Building Contract (ICD 2024) supported by the bespoke Schedule of Amendments. The Council's Contract Standing Orders (CSOs) will also apply to this procurement exercise.

- 7.2 The legal team will assist with completing the Schedule of Amendments supporting the building contract, forming and executing the agreement.

Name of lawyer consulted: Sabina Cherevichenko

Date consulted: 21/09/2026

8. Risk implications

- 8.1 Project risks have been actively managed and mitigated throughout the development of the scheme. This has included preparation of a detailed design, completion of relevant surveys and a competitive procurement process. These measures have reduced uncertainty in relation to the scope, cost and delivery of the works.
- 8.2 **Final cost of the works exceeds the approved project budget.** This risk has been mitigated through the development of a detailed design, completion of surveys to identify potential issues prior to construction, value engineering, competitive procurement and provision of an appropriate project contingency. Notwithstanding these measures, some financial risk will remain throughout the construction period, particularly where unforeseen site conditions or other unexpected issues arise.
- 8.3 **Construction programme.** Delays could increase project costs and may have implications for meeting the timescales associated with external funding. This risk will be managed through close monitoring of the construction programme, proactive identification and resolution of emerging issues, and effective contract and project management throughout delivery.
- 8.4 **Poor contract or project management** could adversely affect cost, programme and the quality of the completed works. This risk has been reduced by ensuring suitable internal and external project management resource arrangements are in place to oversee delivery.
- 8.5 The design team will remain engaged throughout the construction period, including undertaking a Clerk of Works role and carrying out regular site visits. This will provide ongoing oversight of the quality of construction, help ensure that works are delivered in accordance with the approved design, enable issues to be identified at an early stage and support their timely resolution.

9. Equalities implications

- 9.1 The proposed works to the Royal Pavilion Garden will improve facilities and safety to promote increased access. The application to NLHF includes providing a Changing Places toilet that enables access for people with

disabilities and therefore removes barriers to use of the Garden. Increasing access for vulnerable communities meets both NLHF's funding criteria and importantly provides a much-needed city centre facility. There will be no financial charge for the Changing Places toilet, which will be accessed through the RADAR Key scheme. This Changing Places toilet will complement the network that is currently in development across the city. Providing facilities at this site would contribute to making Brighton & Hove more accessible, aligned with the Accessible City strategy.

- 9.2 The improved educational space and the Activity Plan provided within the project will further increase access for schools and marginalised groups to the Royal Pavilion Estate activities. Plans include creating a Community Forum that will be a local community advisory group working with RPMT to make suggestions about future management and activities. The Forum will have a Terms of Reference and will include representatives of the target audiences for the project.

10. Sustainability implications

- 10.1 The proposed capital works will restore the Regency Garden and secure its sustainable future by delivering against the Conservation Plan and a costed Management and Maintenance Plan. This aims to achieve the principal project outcome of removing the Garden from the At Risk Register. This will promote healthy, safe and secure environments, and protect and enhance local habitats.
- 10.2 The principal risks to the Garden include the continued deterioration of the fabric and quality and the loss of the Garden's listed status. This would contribute to reduced future resilience and impact on the use and enjoyment of the Garden by residents and visitors.

11. Health and Wellbeing Implications:

- 11.1 Protecting the Garden and improving public safety will contribute to better environmental conditions that have a beneficial effect on people's enjoyment of the green space. Providing a Changing Places toilet facility and retaining public access toilets in a city centre location will also contribute to health and wellbeing outcomes (including health life expectancy) and help deliver the aims of our Health and Wellbeing Strategy, including: using green & open spaces to improve wellbeing; being an age friendly city; considering the needs of our ageing population in the design of the physical environment; and reducing social isolation and loneliness.

Other Implications

12. Procurement implications

- 12.1 As described in paragraphs 3.12 and 3.13 of this report, a compliant procurement process has taken place and the construction contract can be executed on approval of the recommendations in this report.

13. Crime & disorder implications:

- 13.1 The Garden experiences considerable levels of antisocial behaviour, particularly during the early hours of the morning. A City Safe Zone initiative, led by BHCC officers, with funding support from NLHF is being developed in response to those challenges.
- 13.2 An innovative, prevention-focused partnership has been developed, bringing together community safety, public health, heritage, culture, local businesses and community organisations. The aim is not simply to respond to incidents after they have happened, but to intervene earlier, reduce harm and create a Garden that feels safer, more welcoming and better cared for.
- 13.3 The proposed programme includes visible safety marshals during higher-risk periods, outreach and support for vulnerable people, work with local venues to improve safety in the night-time economy, and community, cultural and environmental activities that encourage positive use and greater stewardship of the Garden.
- 13.4 This work has attracted support and funding from Public Health which has committed £50k to support the pilot, with match funding worth £35k leveraged from citywide stakeholders. Further investment is being sought to develop the programme and maximise its impact.
- 13.5 The ambition is to develop a model that works not only for the Royal Pavilion Garden and New Road, but which could be evaluated, expanded to other parts of the city and potentially shared nationally.

14. Conclusion

- 14.1 The Royal Pavilion Garden is one of Brighton & Hove's most significant heritage assets and an integral part of the wider Royal Pavilion Estate. The proposed restoration project represents an opportunity to safeguard the long-term future of this nationally important historic landscape, improve accessibility and visitor facilities, enhance biodiversity, strengthen community engagement, and support the city's cultural and visitor economy objectives.
- 14.2 The project has been developed with RPMT over several years through extensive consultation, detailed design, planning approvals, and collaboration with external funders. The scheme directly addresses the issues that led to the Garden being placed on Historic England Heritage at Risk Register and secures its long-term conservation.
- 14.3 The procurement process has been completed through a competitive tender exercise, and significant value engineering has been undertaken to ensure the project remains affordable while maintaining the key heritage, accessibility, environmental and community outcomes required by funders. The project benefits from substantial external investment, including funding from the National Lottery Heritage Fund, reducing the financial burden on

RPMT and the council while enabling delivery of a major improvement to a landmark public space.

- 14.4 Approval of the recommendations will enable the council to proceed with contract award and delivery of the restoration works. Cabinet is therefore recommended to approve the revised project budget and delegate authority to enter into the main works contract for the delivery of the Royal Pavilion Garden restoration project.