

# Inner city walkaround

Summary of ideas for improving green spaces 12<sup>th</sup> March 2026

**Background:** Southampton HDRC has a working group of residents, researchers, council officers and local organisations to generate research questions on green and safe spaces in the inner city. On 12<sup>th</sup> March we walked through the inner city green spaces and surrounding areas, to share ideas for improve their access and use. We were joined by residents and community groups. Despite damp, blustery weather, we had plenty of enthusiasm and suggestions.



## What's strong in the inner city

- active community organisations
- informal improvements
- well-used playgrounds, MUGAs, and sports areas
- strong cultural diversity and heritage
- residents who care about the area



## Small details

During our walk, people said that small details (art, flowering bulbs, seating, lighting) affected how welcoming spaces felt. Some unofficial urban art was much admired. Many residents had planted flowers and decorated with lights and ornaments.



Heritage is everywhere: murals in Holyrood Estate, decorative signs for local areas, Speakers Corner. There is little context on some of these.

There's potential for heritage trails or local history celebrations



*Mural codesigned with locals*



*Golden Grove sign*

Art and beautification (official and unofficial) made areas feel interesting, special and cared for, even when nearby issues such as fly-tipping remain



We found that spaces felt calmer and more pleasant with spring bulbs, wildflowers, mixed hedging, trees, birdlife, and "messier" nature

Suggestions included mass bulb planting, wildflower meadows, nature trails, and QR-based links to help people learn about biodiversity





Hoglands Pavilion



Zoelogic in Holyrood



Holyrood previous veg garden

**Activities:** Organisations and individuals are working hard to improve people’s experience in inner city green spaces. We were impressed by hidden assets, such as SoCo music (in Hoglands pavilion) and Zoelogic (in Holyrood estate). They use spaces which provide safety, belonging, creativity, and recovery support. Many people had no idea these spaces were being used for this.

**Opportunities:** Supporting these organisations, offering better visibility and communication of what already happens in and around green spaces. Potential for training/education links? SoCo do youth outreach as well as drug and alcohol recovery groups, would like to run youth groups

**Challenges:** Difficulty sustaining projects without a key organiser, as with the Holyrood community garden shown above. There are no public toilets in or near the pavilion

**Learning from other areas:** Examples of Incredible Edible and Sufra in Wembley were discussed where a community garden project evolved into a large community wellbeing hub



**Play, sport and physical activity**  
 Playgrounds and MUGAs are well-used, even in poor weather, and play areas across the walk were being updated and maintained well. Informal and organised sports activity (e.g. football, cricket) is happening across Hoglands and surrounding spaces

**Challenges**

Ground conditions (boggy grass, uneven surfaces) can make football tricky  
 Some playgrounds were felt to be more suitable for younger age groups, with less provision for older children and teenagers  
 Lack of public toilets (or drinking fountains) in the area limits extended periods of usage



**Opportunities**

Official cricket matches can’t be played at Hoglands park, however unofficial cricket can happen  
 Potential for making unofficial sports more visible?  
 Cricket nets have been suggested but need funding, there is a big demand for cricket in the area  
 Cage cricket was intended for the MUGA in Hoglands, but the company went bust  
 The new skatepark will link well with SoCo in the pavilion, as the previous skatepark was already well used and a new safer, well designed skatepark will be a great asset



Hoglands new skate park design



### Access to parks from St Mary's and Newtown

We visited a lot of underpasses!  
Some were well kept with attractive tiles and murals and good lighting and sightlines (though this was during the day)



The connected underpass system around Kingsway was less pleasant, with some fly-tipped bags of rubbish and litter blowing around

One bank had been fenced off to protect people as it had been used for dumping needles



### Safety

Feeling safe was linked to: the presence of other people, activity and liveliness, use of green spaces by different groups, music, events and play

Feelings of lack of safety: Dogs off leads, needles and drug dealing activity and underpasses which were littered and 'smelt'

This playground in Holyrood Estate was attractive and well maintained but the shelter behind is used for drug dealing (despite high visibility)



### Accessibility

- Green spaces could be more accessible for people with mobility impairments, older adults, families with small children, and those needing to rest frequently
- Bike parking provision could be improved
- Toilets affect who can spend time in parks and for how long, and their absence actively excludes people



### Socialisation and relaxation for families and older adults

BBQ areas, picnic benches, and public meeting points (e.g. markets) allow social interaction

Suggestions for more accessible and sheltered areas for older adults/families to relax outdoors, and community spaces for groups to use or hire



## Summary of suggestions from walk, community members and community of practice discussions

NB A member of our working group also gathered more suggestions from locals afterwards



### Nature, biodiversity & green infrastructure

- Expand bulb planting (e.g. daffodils) to add colour and seasonal interest
- Protect/signpost areas deliberately left for nature
- Develop nature trails and family walking routes
- Introduce tree trails and nature interpretation using QR codes/digital tools
- Build on existing examples of wildflower meadows and biodiversity projects



### Sports, play & physical activity

- Improve uneven or boggy grass in informal sports areas to make football and cricket safer
- Explore flexible, multi-use sports infrastructure (e.g. cricket nets used for other activities)
- Design playgrounds with older children and teenagers in mind, not only younger children
- Include play equipment that encourages team play and social interaction
- Provide positive, safe spaces for teenagers once they age out of playgrounds
- Create sheltered play areas so children can play in poor weather
- Provide toddler- and family-friendly green activities in inner-city spaces
- Organise accessible, kid-friendly hikes and nature activities



### Amenities, facilities & everyday infrastructure

- Provide public toilets and water fountains near parks and green spaces
- Treat public toilets as essential enabling infrastructure, not optional extras
- Install more seating, including informal seating (steps, edges, varied heights)
- Increase shaded seating for hot weather
- Provide shelters so parks are usable in rain, wind and heat
- Install bike racks near parks and play areas
- Improve cafés or kiosks so they feel more welcoming and accessible
- Explore safe, open, bookable or shared community spaces within parks
- Ensure parks support longer stays, not just short visits



### Perception of safety

- Address fly-tipping and litter accumulation in underpasses and play areas
- Reduce fear around dogs off leads through design, signage, or stewardship
- Encourage regular, diverse use of spaces as a deterrent to antisocial behaviour
- Recognise that safety perception is linked to comfort, care and visibility, not just enforcement



### Art, culture, heritage & sense of place

- Expand and encourage murals, mosaics and underpass public art projects to brighten transitional spaces
- Support co-designed public art involving residents and young people
- Encourage resident-led small-scale, low-cost creative interventions in overlooked spaces
- Celebrate local history and heritage through signage, interpretation and trails
- Develop heritage or cultural trails linked to landmarks, art and local stories
- Encourage culturally diverse music, festivals and events in parks
- Explore creative or decorative lighting (e.g. warm lighting) to support appropriate evening use
- Strengthen links between green spaces and cultural institutions (e.g. galleries, museums)



### **Inclusion & community social spaces**

- Improve accessibility for disabled people, older adults and people with mobility challenges
- Provide places to rest, shelter and stay for longer
- Create multi-faith, quiet or reflective spaces
- Provide safe spaces for breastfeeding and informal community gathering
- Recognise and support green spaces as places for recovery, wellbeing and social connection
- Make community activity in parks more visible so people know what's already happening



### **Community participation**

- Encourage community-led litter picking, including through faith-based groups
- Explore ambassador or steward roles connected to the council
- Value green spaces for the community activity they enable, not just physical features
- Improve signage and communication so hidden assets (e.g. pavilions, community work) are easier to discover



### **Food growing & community gardening**

- Revitalise defunct community growing spaces using collective or supported models
- Avoid reliance on single volunteers to sustain projects
- Link community gardens to schools, training, volunteering and employment opportunities
- Explore horticulture training or supported volunteering programmes



### **Planning, delivery & learning**

- Design projects with long-term support, maintenance and ownership in mind
- Evaluate VCSE and community activity alongside council-led provision
- Ensure learning and engagement continue beyond individual projects

## **Links, resources, and work currently happening in Southampton and elsewhere**

### **Local activity and organisations**

SoCo Music – recovery groups and community music in the pavilion, youth outreach [SoCo Music Project](#)

ZoieLogic Dance Theatre – long-term youth arts work in Holyrood <https://zoielogic.co.uk/hub25/>

### **Nature and green space**

SCC tree map: <https://www.southampton.gov.uk/environment/trees-grass-hedges/council-trees-map/>

Friends of Riverside Park tree trail: [https://friendsofriversidepark.org.uk/?page\\_id=297](https://friendsofriversidepark.org.uk/?page_id=297)

### **Community food and growing**

[Round About Cafe](#) (community hub in Mansbridge, SUFRA NW London: <https://www.sufra-nwlondon.org.uk>)

Incredible Edible: <https://www.incredibleedible.org.uk>

### **Heritage**

[Understanding Pride and Heritage In Your Communities](#) (A place-based creative toolkit for community workers, housing teams, and neighbourhood volunteers)

### **Research, previous engagement and wider thinking**

Girls in parks work: [Report-on-teenage-girls-in-parks-Sept-2024-summary-and-full-report.pdf](#)

Parks, Pride and Place – More in Common:

<https://www.moreincommon.org.uk/our-work/research/parks-pride-and-place/>)