

Benches for everyone

Solitude in public, sociability for free.



A grayscale photograph of a person sitting on a bench in a public space, possibly a transit station. The person is wearing a quilted jacket, jeans, and loafers. Another person is sitting on a bench in the background, also in a public space setting. The image is overlaid with large blue text.

Manifesto for the Good Bench.

- 1.** Benches are valued as **public**, egalitarian and free.
- 2.** Bench-space allows people to loosely **belong** within the flow of city life, to see and be seen.
Solitude and conversation are equally acceptable.
- 3.** Sitting on benches supports **healthy** everyday routines by enabling people to spend longer outside.
These opportunities to rest can be restorative for mental health and support local walking when personal mobility is limited.
- 4.** Benches function as a **social** resource - they are flexible and affordable places to spend time at no cost. This is appreciated by many, and especially vital for people who are largely marginalised from other collective environments such as work, cafés, educational or leisure facilities. They are contrasted positively with crowded, lonely or boring home situations.
- 5.** **Design** of benches and of sittable public space is important. Comfort and accessibility are basic requirements. Clustering of benches and co-location with a range of facilities provides interest and gives legitimacy to hanging out. The ability to gather in larger groups is valued by many.
- 6.** People need to feel **safe**. Frequently used, visible spaces with a choice of where to sit can support this.
A mix of short and long stay bench users supports informal safety in numbers. Quality of materials, attractive planting, and cleanliness of public space seems to increase individual tolerance for the proximity of strangers and diverse ways of enjoying public space.

1.

Benches are valued as public, egalitarian and free.

The humble bench. An unremarkable feature of public life, for some a source of quiet delight, for others a potential magnet for street drinkers. This report goes beyond the generalisations to explore how benches are being used and valued in urban spaces today.

Benches speak to egalitarian ideals, provided as a public good, an open gesture of welcome to any passer-by. They are symbols of what it means for space to be shared, of what we have in common regardless of income or background. The invitation to sit makes no further demands; no price tag, dress code, minimum or maximum length of stay or restriction on the company kept. Classic urban design theorists such as Jacobs¹ and Whyte², repeatedly highlighted the importance of people sitting and watching the world go by as fundamental to the vitality and safety of city places.

This somewhat romanticised view of everyday urban life is under threat, subject to competing agendas regarding the ideal city. Not all forms of sitting in public are equal, and a broad ambition to keep urban precincts clean and safe can mean increased antipathy to human messiness³. Sitting while drinking alcohol, sitting while being noisy, sitting and then sleeping, sitting while looking dishevelled or vaguely intimidating gets conflated with illegal activities such as hate crime, threatening violence and drug dealing. Landscape architects are pressured (both by authorities and by local residents) to remove vegetation and public seating; to vandal, skateboard and sleep-proof the urban landscape into a dull sterile shadow of a pleasurable place⁴.

Concerns regarding personal safety in public spaces can focus attention on micro-localities seen as troublesome

and directly impact on the design and management of public space. Benches are being made deliberately uncomfortable to discourage “extended sitting”⁵ (in Dover, Guardian April 2014), or simply removed. Reasons range from general concern to deter “anti-social behaviour”⁶ (Faversham, Pike, 2015), drug dealing⁷ (In Manchester, Ruki, 2015) or newly arrived refugees⁸. Though founded on specific concerns, these strategies are disproportionate in removing the opportunity for anyone wanting or needing to spend time outdoors (“This has left the town with few places to sit”⁹”, Pike, 2015) and demonises particular groups of people. Anti-bench strategies are closely related to the history of installing hostile architecture in terms of ‘homeless spikes’, and the use of dispersal orders that give police powers to ‘move on’ groups of more than two people¹⁰.

The Bench Project was initiated as an attempt to articulate the values and experiences of bench-users within this increasingly inhospitable context, and to make recommendations that positively integrate different policy areas: public space design, safety, health, wellbeing and inclusion. The research has been funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council Connected Communities Programme, who saw value in the multiple perspective and diverse knowledge bases of our interdisciplinary team: a landscape architect, a director of community engagement, a hate crime activist, a film maker and a migration geographer. The project ran throughout 2015, with on-site fieldwork from April to August. The project undertook an ethnographic approach, focussing on three sites: General Gordon Square, located in Woolwich in south-east London and redesigned in 2011; Winn Common, a nearby expanse of historic common

land, and St Helier Open Space at the edge of Sutton, at the outer edge of south London, a large public open greenspace flanked by a large hospital and low-density social housing. Fieldworkers Diana Coman and Samprada Mukhia spent many hours at these spaces at different times of day and of the week, getting to know both the regulars and short-term users, increasingly collaborating with the filmmaker Esther Johnson. Other team members (Jasber Singh, Ben Rogaly, Clare Rishbeth, Radhika Bynon), also accompanied them from time to time, and co-led workshops with specific groups. The making of a documentary film **'Alone Together, the social life of benches'**¹¹ gave participants the chance to share their stories of using benches in these locations and captures the rhythm and flow of daily life. This report draws on these many conversations as well as interviews with police, parks authorities and landscape architects.

We found that benches are a highly valued resource, particularly for people who may find themselves at the margins of society, and that by removing them from our towns and cities we deny many people access to outdoor space. In the following sections we set out the key findings and propose points for action.



2.

Bench-space allows people to loosely belong within the flow of city life, to see and be seen.

There is an extraordinary richness in people-watching in a busy, highly-diverse setting like General Gordon Square, where it feels as though people from every corner of the world pass by in one afternoon.

Fitz, a teenager, sitting up on the back of the benches with his friends said “if you spent longer than a week in Woolwich, yeah, you would see so much stuff, you’d just see everything”.

By observing difference in this way, people spoke about how they develop an awareness of a broader range of behaviours and activities, helping to engender greater tolerance. This high-density location also plays host to a wide network of ‘loose ties’¹², flexibly accommodating the churn of neighbourhood population change, and allowing participation and a sense

of belonging without making demands. Belonging matters at both an individual and a community level. Having a sense of connection to a neighbourhood can have a positive effect on individual health and wellbeing¹³, and is linked to increased life satisfaction¹⁴. Research has also found broader social benefits, because when people feel they belong, they invest more time and energy into the local community¹⁵. The Bench Project investigated how aspects of belonging played out in public space, and in particular the dynamic of sitting outside. Our findings pointed to the importance of presence, of being visible and of watching others.

While people often sit on benches on outings with family members, or specifically arrange to meet friends in a particular place, the position of benches in the flow of strangers is important. Madge comes to the General Gordon

Square a few times a week with her adult daughter who is profoundly deaf. They bring their own camping chairs as these are more comfortable than the granite benches, and enjoy the bustle and the activity as a change from their garden at home which can feel lonely. She talked about how nice it is to see familiar faces even though she might not talk to many people, and how the multicultural nature of the square gives “hope for the future”. The square is also a key daily meeting place for the elderly Nepali community. They are largely isolated from wider social networks, primarily through a lack of conversational English, but value being among people of all ages and backgrounds. “If we see a thousand faces then it is good for you. My ancestors used to say that.” (*Chali Kumari, General Gordon Square*)

Simply sitting, seeing and being seen in itself can provide sense of belonging.

However, we also found that benches provide good opportunities for ‘casual public interactions’¹⁶. Some regular users of the benches in St Helier Open Space valued the mixture of solitude with mingling, loosely interacting with others. Benches provide opportunities for connection in expansive spaces. Penny regularly sits on the benches for peace and quiet in contrast to a busy working life, but also tells us “I talk to loads of people, if someone sits down here next to me I chat to them. If someone’s walking their dog, I talk to them”.

Colin drinks out here with his friend Phil, not only chatting together but “people will kind of beeline for us. They could be any people in the world, we make them laugh and cheer them up a bit in the day. We sit down and have a laugh.”

“Look around for yourself, how many different cultures you can see here, and I think it’s just brilliant. And the different cultures that come here, you see them actually mix. You see them in their little groups but then you see people walking past and saying hi. It’s a start, you know.” - Madge, General Gordon Square

These connections can bridge social differences. In General Gordon Square Roy, originally from Trinidad and Tobago and settled in Woolwich, greets a group of Nepalese elders by saying ‘Namaste’ with a bow of his head and clasped hands. He then chats briefly to a dishevelled young white woman, whom he knows by name, and her friend with the black eye. Dave, Sam and Patrick, older men wearing leather jackets, meet up at Gordon Square regularly to chat and share a few cans. A young black teenager swears as he walks past, Dave shouts at him, a few moments later the boy returns, apologises and they shake hands. Dave gently tugs at the boy’s tie and jokes “you can’t wear a posh uniform and go around saying things like that.” These everyday exchanges foster belonging, creating a web of loose connections that contribute both to individual happiness and community cohesion.

Public benches are an asset which enable

people to participate in society, using the simplest of communal resources. A well-positioned and well-used bench can help to facilitate interactions and create a sense of belonging and place within the bustle of the urban landscape. A space to meet friends, old and new, builds an authentic, on-going sense of community among people of diverse origins, backgrounds and points of view.



3.

Sitting on benches supports healthy everyday routines by enabling people to spend longer outside.

“Disabled people are only disabled by their environment.”

– Terry, St Helier Open Space

The broader context of this project clearly links into well-established research findings and policy areas that emphasise the importance of spending time outdoors and contact with nature for personal wellbeing¹⁷. By focusing on benches, we examine the specific qualities of this with regard to sitting outside, and whether the use of benches can be shown to support mental and physical health.

For many of our participants, being able to sit down fundamentally allows them to spend longer outside, time that for most of them would otherwise be spent indoors at home. That this time was described as beneficial to their own mental health was the primary unifying factor among site users across both

sites, male and female, of different ages, ethnic and social backgrounds. This was conceptualised both in terms of connection and retreat, reflecting the unusual nature of bench-space as a place where conversation and solitude are equally legitimate. There were many stories told of the value of social connection, and how spending time on a bench mitigates life situations otherwise characterised by loneliness or exclusion.

Both older and younger people in St Helier Open Space and Gordon Square expressed the reflective qualities of sitting on benches: ‘feeling free’, ‘getting fresh air’, ‘it can sort your day out’. Regular use of particular benches gives space for memories, a mulling, an ‘emptying’ of worries. It is a particular form of restoration which combines mental processing with being present in a place of activity and the often welcome

distraction of people watching. Both places were frequently described by the word ‘peaceful’, despite the busy urban environments characterised by nearby traffic, ambulance sirens and chatter. This peacefulness seemed to reflect an inner calming, but was also associated with perceptions of nature. These included the relatively formal planting of trees and flowers in the square and the broad expanse of sky, grass and trees in the open space, both with a supporting cast of pigeons and dogs. A busy mother in St Helier Open Space talked about spending long periods of time sitting on the benches every week as “bringing my senses alive, it’s the only time they come alive really”. This is also important for people who use the benches as a snatched break from hectic work situations. An ambulance worker summed up his twenty minute bench time as “some fresh air, a fag and a catch-up in peace”, and this speedy

quick fix of the outdoors is reflected by the lunchtime flurries of people in General Gordon Square.

The link between using benches and improved physical health, such as reduced probability of obesity or heart disease, is not clearly apparent. Fundamentally bench use is a sedentary activity, with a significant minority also using this time to smoke or drink. However, the presence of benches changes behaviour in other respects. The importance of benches to encourage local walking especially for older people and for people with disabilities has been well documented¹⁸, highlighting the need for sitting points along routes as well as at destinations places. The elderly Nepali group in our project walked every morning in Winn Common to improve their health, and then sat on the nearby benches to have a good chat, demonstrating

“Yeh so you’ve got the best of both worlds, you’ve got the quietness, the peacefulness... just sitting there and watching the kids and drifting off into space. And then you’ve got the hectic-ness behind you.”

- Penny, St Helier Open Space

the integration of physical and the mental aspects of wellbeing. Research with older people in Brighton and Hove¹⁹ found that the availability of seating affected the extent to which older people felt they could participate in the rich array of activities available in the city. This is integral to broader strategies for reducing isolation and loneliness for older people. Both have been increasingly shown to be damaging to both physical and mental health²⁰.

After school at St Helier Open Space, the children perched on, around and moved between a range of structures - the ramps, the youth shelter, the sports cage – bursts of energy after a day of sitting, but facilitated by known points of gathering. One thirteen year-old girl asserted that if she was stuck at home in her bedroom she would “literally rock backwards and forwards”. Owen, a twelve year old living in Sutton talked about how scooting on the ramps made him feel happy “because I’m out with my friends,

I’m not indoors like stuck playing with my X-box or stuff.” Benches in public parks, especially near play facilities, are essential for supporting physical activity in younger children by inviting supervising parents and grandparents to stay outside for longer than might happen with nowhere to sit. We would suggest that there is a counterintuitive argument that seating provision can help to reduce obesity, by changing daily routines and encouraging outdoor activity.



4.

Benches function as a social resource: they are flexible places to spend time at no cost.

Anyone can sit on a bench, there are no financial barriers, and few codes of behaviour. This is appreciated by many, and especially vital for people who are largely marginalised from other collective environments such as work, cafés, educational or leisure facilities. Homes are often too small, too crowded, or too personal a location. We found widespread evidence of the use of benches reducing isolation by supporting a range of important relationships and friendships. Below we explore how benches function as a social resource for three key groups: new migrants, people out of employment and carers. It is important to also note the broader impact of austerity on many residents in our case study areas. People often have time to pass but not much money to spend, a common recipe for loneliness.

The historic connection of Ghurkha soldiers based within the army barracks

has meant a longstanding community of Nepali residents in Woolwich (veterans and wives of veterans) with a significant increase in numbers since the right to settlement in 2009. Groups of Nepali elders, men and women, are a visible presence on the paths and benches of Winn Common and the urban precincts of General Gordon Square. They are significantly isolated from the broader community due to age, language and low income and often speak of their homesickness for Nepal. Meeting up with each other is therefore crucial: gathering in parks and public spaces are their primary source of social interaction. They spend hours at a time at General Gordon Square, notably watching the news of the 2015 earthquake unfold on the 'big telly' there. "We talk to each other, share problems and find out solutions." The square is a practical place to meet as it accommodates their large groups, is clean and safe with toilets nearby. The

older women describe it as a welcome distraction and an escape; it is different from any kind of outdoor place in Nepal, so they can 'live in the moment', rather than be haunted by memories. There is a real sense of regret about not being able to speak to other people – they exchange smiles and nods with others in the park, and long to communicate "we have cried because of the language" (*Till Rana, General Gordon Square*).

A significant number of those who spend longer hours in both General Gordon Square and St Helier Open Space are people who are out of work. Predominantly male, they meet with friends and often have a drink. Colin visits St Helier Open Space most days with his dog Chester and explained how many of the local pubs have now closed down, so the park has become an open-air pub where he does his socialising. A larger group of men in their early

twenties use General Gordon Square as a flexible central point, "This is a meeting point innit... I'm from somewhere else, he lives somewhere else, but when we tell someone to come to Woolwich like, we is here". They enjoy the cut and thrust of people-watching and banter, mocking the programming on the big telly "Always BBC, they should get a remote".

Tom has a chronic health condition which means he is "short of air and energy" and cannot walk for long. The benches in St. Helier Open Space mean that he can continue to enjoy going out and about with his wife, pausing to gather his strength. Carers can find the outdoors a welcome change from being at home. Margaret and her young daughter find spending time at St Helier Open Space gives enjoyment and refreshment to their relationship. "She's got autism, so for us it's really beneficial. She loves it,

“Without benches, everyone would be a bit more lost, they wouldn’t talk as much. It’s face-to-face, good old fashioned face-to-face chat.” - Phil, St Helier Open Space

because of the sense issue, she takes off her shoes, she likes to be on the grass... and she sits on this bench for some time. I think outdoors is better for her, it makes them calm”. For Madge, primary carer for her adult daughter, time at the square is pleasurable, ‘calmer’ and a way of moving towards independence for Charmain who practices shopping in the adjacent shops.

While these examples emphasize the more demanding forms of caring roles, across the country many different parents and guardians use benches to watch their children scooting or playing football; they change nappies on them, check texts and enjoy distracted chat with another local mum, dad or grandparent. For many people, sitting on benches allows for ‘good old face to face’ conversations that are not mediated through a screen, and which are enhanced by the fluidities and encounters of urban life.



5.

Design of benches is important. Comfort and accessibility are basic requirements.

The traditional park bench of the public imagination - wooden slats, metal arms - is strong on comfort but weak on adaptability. In comparison the long benches of General Gordon Square offer generous possibilities for clustered conversations. The benches accommodate both busier and quieter times, and conversations that morph from intimate to gregarious as friends drift in and away again.

Seating design that caters for more people chatting in disparate and fluid groups is important. Our fieldwork highlighted the importance of flexible adaptations of group seating especially for teenagers, extended families, men without secure employment and some migrant communities. Sitting in public spaces can be the primary way these groups meet, with indoor locations being too small, too formal or too costly. Whether these benches are points of

first or last resort depends largely on the quality of design of these areas, but being able to sit together is a priority. The Nepali elders gather daily, in group sizes of up to thirty people, in an area they refer to as 'Khalta' meaning 'the hole'. This spot around a semi-derelict boating lake on Winn Common, is chosen because several benches are clustered together. Groups of young people in St Helier Open Space move restlessly between the ball cage, the youth shelter and the skateboard ramps rather than using the standard benches nearby. There are some good precedents for long benches for positive social interactions in Copenhagen²¹ and Brighton²², both intentionally designed for social inclusion.

Benches, while functional, also need to be comfortable, especially for a significant minority of users who regularly stay in these places for up to

four hours at a time. In General Gordon Square the granite benches were criticised by many for causing "cold bums", and some of the Nepali elders use food packaging gathered from the nearby market or newspapers as temporary cushions to reduce the chill. The recycled plastic benches in St Helier Open Space are less cold to touch, but are located in exposed locations, and half are without backs. Arms on benches was described by many older people as essential simply to enable sitting down and getting up again. Many bench users in Woolwich and St Helier longed for wooden benches, which are often reserved for 'heritage' parks assessed as having a lower risk of vandalism and needing less maintenance. As a result, more comfortable benches tend to be located in more affluent areas. Though the General Gordon Square benches were chilly, they were carefully detailed for comfort in other ways, with slightly

inclined backs, setbacks behind the feet to aid balance when getting up, some arm rests, and extra wide back rests²³. Informal sitting on the back of benches is common here, not just among teenagers. This form of perching allows for better visibility, for being tucked back from the walking flow, and allowing easier conversations between those standing and those seated.

The location of benches is important, both in terms of aspect, and in the broader availability of facilities. Though there were complaints about the unvaried programming of the 'big telly' in General Gordon Square, "Always BBC, they should change it. You know what they should do... big ass remote control" (*Fitz*), the screen does provide another layer of interest to people spending longer periods of time here. Big events are given extra emotional significance when viewed communally;

whether celebratory, such as Andy Murray winning Wimbledon, or the shock of the Nepali Earthquake. Practicalities are important too; benches near or en route to shops are useful for many. The decrease in the provision of public toilets, especially in parks, is a frequent source of complaint, especially for older people. These are second only to the presence of benches in terms of supporting longer stays in outdoor places.



6.

People need to feel safe.

Frequently used, visible spaces with a choice of seating can support this.

Concerns regarding personal safety in public spaces can focus attention on micro-localities seen as troublesome. How can this be addressed, and does the presence of benches increase or decrease perceptions of safety?

In all three of our fieldwork sites benches are used as places for drinking alcohol, for young people to hang out, and have some low level drug dealing – all ‘anti-social behaviour’ flashpoints. However, research participants seldom raised issues of fear or annoyance of others. Women and elderly people on their own used both spaces, one of the classic litmus tests of a perception of safety²⁴.

The Woolwich site is a busy urban square in an area historically stigmatised by high crime rates. The redesign of the square in 2011 has been instrumental in ensuring a more inclusive and safe central area, a bold claim but one

verified by many site users. The square is typical of a centrally located public space in having CCTV surveillance and the near constant presence of town wardens until 6pm in the evening. It is designed for evening use with high levels of lighting.

In many respects the square is an exemplar of the ‘cleaner, greener, safer’ ideal²⁵ promoted by the Labour government. The town wardens seem to have an impact beyond their physical presence, and many saw their presence as crucial. The intensity of use and positive atmosphere of the square demonstrates the potential of high quality socially enabling design. Interventionist, but generally reasonable, management practices deter excesses of problematic behaviour. ‘Responsible drinking’ is allowed, littering carries a seemingly disproportionate fine of £75, and skateboarding is officially forbidden

but tacitly accommodated around the edges²⁶. This level of control is rightly critiqued in some contexts as leading towards a overly sanitised exclusive urban realm²⁷. However, in the specific context of Woolwich we found the approach has supported inclusive uses of this space by a genuinely diverse range of people, where the natural messiness of human relationships provides grit and colour. Consistent across many interviewees in the square was a sense of mutual pride, an adjustment to changing ways of using public space, and an enjoyment of proximity with strangers.

St Helier Open Space is without any overt security presence beyond occasional visits by the neighbourhood police team. It is green but not particularly clean or safe in conventional respects; surveillance and visibility have a different relationship here. An important positive

factor is the high level of visibility across the site, being overlooked by a busy road, the hospital and surrounding houses. However, many people use and value the space especially because of the lack of explicit surveillance. It has looser codes of behaviour and a wider range of acceptable activities than other nearby locations. Skateboarding is welcome, young men hang out in the youth shelter. A Travellers’ camp that set up in the far corner for a week raised barely a comment. Drinking on the benches is common. Colin comes out to St Helier Open Space “to relax and have a can or two” with his friend Phil. He contrasts this space to “Carshalton park [where] you’d hide it, as there are more children and people around and I don’t want to be judged as someone sitting on a bench looking like a tramp”. He is careful to clear away his litter, and chooses a bench at some distance from the teenagers at the ramp.

“There are a lot of people who drink on park benches and I know a hell of a lot of them. They just sit and drink on park benches ’cos they can’t afford pubs and they sit and socialise on benches.” - Colin, *St Helier Open Space*

Benches in both sites offer choices of social proximity. St Helier Open Space has a ball cage, a youth shelter and the ramps, all designed for young people to use and located at a reasonable distance from the houses and hospital entrance. The scattered distribution of benches means that teenagers, hospital workers and day-time drinkers can all share the area without needing to interact or overhear each other. General Gordon Square is more crowded, but even here the long benches allow subtleties of how close people chose to sit to those they don’t know (and may find intimidating) and high levels of visibility allow these micro-decisions to be made easily.

Both sites feel safer due to movement through - some just passing by, some sitting for a while - dog walkers, people heading to bus stops, school children, shoppers. This mix guards against a too entrenched territoriality of any particular spot (a

situation that can lead to bench removal), and supports well developed arguments (Whyte²⁸, Jacobs²⁹) of the vital importance of other people as informal surveillance, ‘eyes on the street’. People sitting on benches like watching people, and this in turn improves the overall safety of an area.





Summary

A project focused on benches runs the risk of sounding whimsical, peripheral to the main concerns of life. Sutton and Woolwich, though very different, typify some of the social and political pressures on London: austerity politics, corporate-led regeneration, the housing crisis, precarious employment and various processes of displacement and inequality. This report makes a strong case for the potential to enjoy public space as one means available that supports resilience and human connections at the local level.

Benches do not exist in isolation; their presence is related to issues of public space for sociability and accessibility. Our research highlights the role of benches in giving the choice to stay longer, with links to wellbeing and inclusion, and

the importance of good landscape design for supporting this. We found broad appreciation across different sectors of the community for interest-rich places with a range of recreational facilities and the restorative qualities of contact with natural elements. Our conclusion is resoundingly pro-bench. In the vast majority of outdoor public places, we recommend comfortable benches, longer benches, and simply more of them.

Making benches better: points for action

- 1.** Benches should be recognised and promoted as a social good, core to supporting mental health and active lifestyle policies. Local strategies should address inequality in quantity and quality of benches in urban locations, and these should reflect the access and wellbeing requirements of different users of benches.
- 2.** Formal and incidental public spaces should be maximised as local social resources by clustering of benches and their co-location with leisure facilities and other services.
- 3.** Design of public spaces should increase the quantity and diversity of non-commercial seating, and introduce natural elements and planting wherever possible. The traditional two-seater bench may have had its day: longer benches and larger seating structures are more adaptable in supporting fluid social networks.
- 4.** Benches need to be comfortable as well as robust. ‘Hostile architecture’ approaches have led to a reduction of bench provision and the specification of deliberately uncomfortable seating in some places. Thermal comfort, height, backs and arms of benches need to be human-friendly. Research and innovation in product design and landscape architecture are needed.
- 5.** Management of public spaces should ensure hanging out is legitimised as a non-criminal activity: balancing safety agendas with a meaningful inclusivity of diverse people and activities. In busy urban places the role of uniformed wardens is largely welcomed in maintaining acceptable communal behaviour as long as this is exercised with a light touch.
- 6.** Management of public spaces should ensure hanging out is legitimised as a non-criminal activity. Some of what is classified as ‘anti-social behaviour’ is better seen as simply differently-social. While violence or hate crime should be actively addressed, this should not be at the expense of bench provision or the quality of public space. People should be encouraged to use benches through integrated planning, design and management. Key aims should be to support high pedestrian movement through open space networks, maintain good visibility, zone quieter and noisier areas, and give options of where to sit.

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Thank you

The Bench Project research participants and contributors who kindly gave of their time and thoughts.

Arts & Humanities Research Council

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The St Helier Safer Neighbourhood Team

Sutton Vision

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Funder

The Bench Project was funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC). The Arts and Humanities Research funds research and postgraduate training in collaboration with a number of partners. The Bench Project was part of 'Connected Communities programme', an AHRC led programme designed to understand the changing nature of communities in their historical and cultural contexts and the role of communities in sustaining and enhancing quality of life. For further information on the AHRC, please go to: www.ahrc.ac.uk



www.the-bench-project.weebly.com

Film: *Alone Together, the social life of benches*
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