

Sound Sparks: Listening together to seaside gentrification

Findings report about co-creating and consulting on Interactive
Listening Walks for research engagement 2023-24

by Bethan Prosser



Contents

1. [Summary](#)
2. [Introduction](#)
3. [Co-creating Interactive Listening Walks](#)
4. [Piloting Interactive Listening Walks](#)
5. [Delivering the public events](#)
6. [Key listening findings](#)
7. [Conclusion](#)
8. [Acknowledgements](#)
9. [Further information](#)

1. Summary

Co-creation

Bethan Prosser (researcher) and Bela Emerson (sonic artist) co-created Interactive Listening Walks about urban seaside gentrification on the Sussex coast. An Interactive Listening Walk (ILW) is a participatory site-responsive group activity to promote active listening, curiosity, and new connections with people, places, and projects. Three ILWs were designed for Brighton Kemptown, East Worthing and Central St Leonards-on-Sea based on PhD findings about the sonic experiences of gentrification. This built on a long-term, mutually beneficial community-university partnership and further developed shared working and creative practices which were crucial for the co-creation process. The ILW format was able to be effectively applied to complex place-based research findings because of its participatory, site, and topic-responsive design components.

Consultation

Through six ILW pilots, 50 people were consulted with. Three groups were recruited: residents, community groups, and policy-related professionals. These groups offered feedback based on distinct combinations of experiences, knowledge, and relationships to both the neighbourhood and the topic. We designed bespoke and agile sessions that supported and responded to the specific motivations, needs, and dynamics of these three groups. This enabled a range of people to be involved in the project, which was further expanded by the delivery of three public ILW events and one academic workshop (83 people and 10 ILWs overall).

Engagement through listening

We found that the ILWs effectively engaged a range of people in listening to urban seaside gentrification across the three Sussex neighbourhoods by:

- sparking curiosity, learning, and new discoveries through listening about each neighbourhood and the processes of urban seaside gentrification
- utilising the distinct qualities of listening to create meaningful connections with the surrounding and changing urban seaside environment
- creating an unusual and playful intervention in everyday experiences of living, working, and visiting the neighbourhoods
- careful and responsive curation of listening, walking, and playing activities
- responding to participants' different motivations and needs to create an accessible and inclusive journey
- facilitating valued time for people to listen together and thereby supporting the conditions for dialogue and debate about policy and planning issues.

2. Introduction

In October 2023, Bethan Prosser (University of Brighton) and Bela Emerson (Brighton & Hove Music for Connection) embarked on co-creating Interactive Listening Walks about ‘Seaside change and the Sussex Coast’. The aim was to design three group walks to engage a range of people in the research findings from Bethan’s PhD project (*Listening to urban seaside gentrification: living with displacement in/justices on the UK south coast 2018-2022*). This report provides the details of the co-design process (between researcher and sonic artist), the consultation pilots, public events, and key learning from these activities.

The PhD research project carried out listening activities in 2020 with residents to investigate their experiences of gentrifying change in three neighbourhoods: Brighton Kemptown, East Worthing, and Central St Leonards-on-Sea. Gentrification is a debated term, but one Worthing resident neatly defined as “the poshing up of a place to the detriment of working folk”. An Interactive Listening Walk (ILW) is a participatory site-responsive group activity to promote active listening, curiosity, and new connections with people, places, and projects. We experimented with how this type of participatory walk could encourage engagement, reflection, and discussion on this topic and specifically the PhD research findings.

ILWs offer a versatile creative engagement tool, developed as part of community-university collaborations by Brighton & Hove Music for Connection (BHMC), the city’s specialist community music organisation. Since 2019, Bethan and Bela have been using this format for sound heritage and nature-based projects, but this was the first time this had been applied to urban streets and complex research findings.

Between March-September 2024, we consulted with residents, community groups, and local policy professional, running focus groups to get feedback on their experience of these ILWs. We then ran three public events in October, called “Sound Sparks 2.0”, delivering the finalised versions with a post-walk indoor discussion.

These activities were funded as part of an ESRC Postdoctoral Research Fellowship, led by Bethan at the University of Brighton (UoB), on the role of participatory listening in enhancing public engagement and consultation. Participatory Listening Research is a methodology developed through the PhD project. It is a way of listening, with others, to the environment to generate new knowledge and discoveries, whilst embracing different listening experiences, practices and positionalities. This postdoctoral project has extended the Participatory Listening Research toolbox by testing out how ILWs can support residents, community groups, artists, researchers, and professionals to learn about research findings.

The project aimed to evaluate how Interactive Listening Walks can be co-created to engage a range of people in the PhD research findings. It was guided by the below research questions, which also help to structure this report.

- i. How can ILWs focused on research findings be co-created?
- ii. How can a range of different people be consulted with, as part of the ILWs co-creation?
- iii. How do ILWs engage people in listening to urban seaside gentrification on the UK south coast sites?

Overall, this knowledge exchange project has achieved the:

- co-creation of 3 Interactive Listening Walk scores for Brighton Kemptown, East Worthing, and Central St Leonards
- co-delivery of 10 interactive listening walks
- consultation through 6 focus groups
- recruitment of 83 participants (5 people attended more than ILW, totalling 88 attendances)
- co-delivery of 2 bespoke sessions with 2 existing community/voluntary sector groups
- involvement of 6 local organisations in delivery (2 cafes, 1 leisure centre, 1 community centre, 1 art gallery, and 1 community garden)

Furthermore, it has contributed to understandings about the sonic experiences of urban and seaside changes as well as how listening can be an effective tool for learning and reflecting on complex place-based policy issues. Descriptions of the different phases and activities undertaken will be first provided before sharing these findings.

3. Co-creating Interactive Listening Walks about seaside gentrification

This section will describe and share reflections on the design phase, focusing on the first research question:

i. How can ILWs focused on research findings be co-created?

Existing community-university partnership

The community-university partnership between UoB and BHMC began in 2019 through a PhD internship that Bethan undertook at BHMC, working closely with Bela. The internship project, *Sounds to Keep*, developed and piloted sound activities in order to raise the profile and awareness of The Keep's (regional archive centre) sound archive (see *digital story for more details*). We developed a shared practice, which we termed Interactive Listening Walks, based on Bela's community music expertise and Bethan's research into sound-based methods. Over five years, we have delivered a series of ILW and listening-based projects for a variety of purposes and outcomes: heritage, community engagement, sustainability, wellbeing, and social inclusion. This collaboration has laid the foundations for both a shared practice and ways of working together. This includes adopting a "defining in the doing" approach, about which we wrote a joint paper (Prosser, et al., 2023). These foundations have been crucial in experimenting with co-creating ILWs focused on research findings and addressing the challenges that have come up during co-design and consultation. Therefore, it's firstly important to recognise the value of having an existing community-university partnership in place as part of the co-creation process.

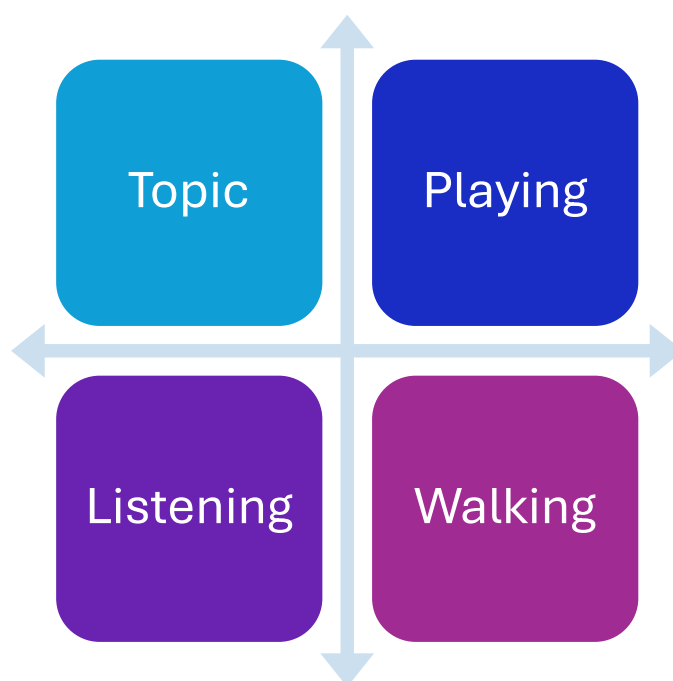
Planning & site visits

As part of a community-university partnership, we built mutual exchange and time for sharing reflections into our planning. In our first meeting, we discussed and recorded our intended outcomes. Bethan aimed to get people to think about listening to change as well as more deeply about gentrification and their own positionings within it. But as an experiment, she also hoped to 'spark something from thinking differently – a ripple effect, what could the actions be that people come away with?' (meeting notes 29/11/2023). Bela wanted to further develop this ILW practice and explore further applications. Previous ILW delivery had been focused mainly

on nature-based projects in the South Downs or urban fringe; this project offered the chance to create ILWs in urban and blue spaces. Additionally, she wanted to map across the languages of academia, community/voluntary sector, and community music, and was strongly interested in the issue of the financialisation of housing.

To start the process, we reviewed our existing ILW toolbox, thinking about how each tool could be directed towards the topic of gentrification or not. We came up with a design matrix that plots out the three core elements: listening, walking, and playing (site and group responsive sonic interactions). We added the topic as a fourth element we needed to balance within the format – see Fig. 1 below.

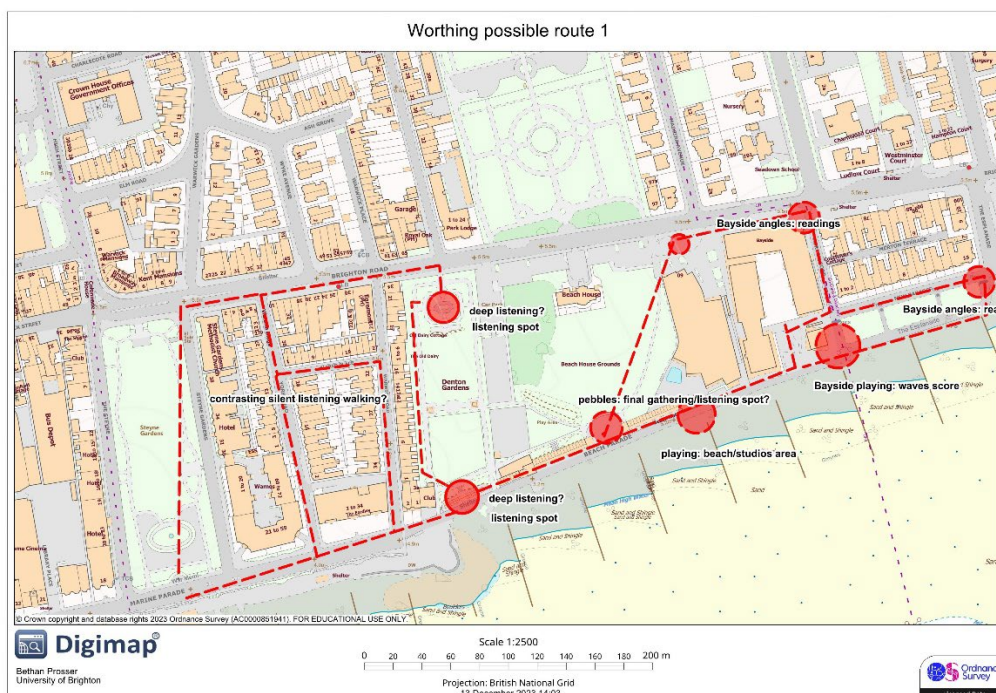
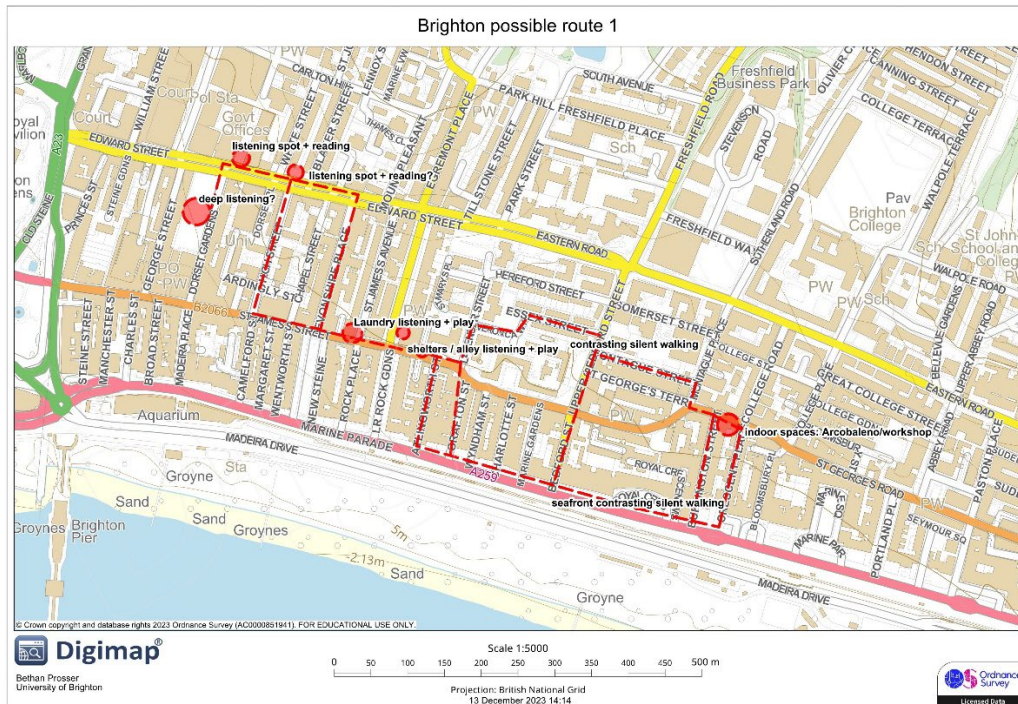
Figure 1: ILW design matrix

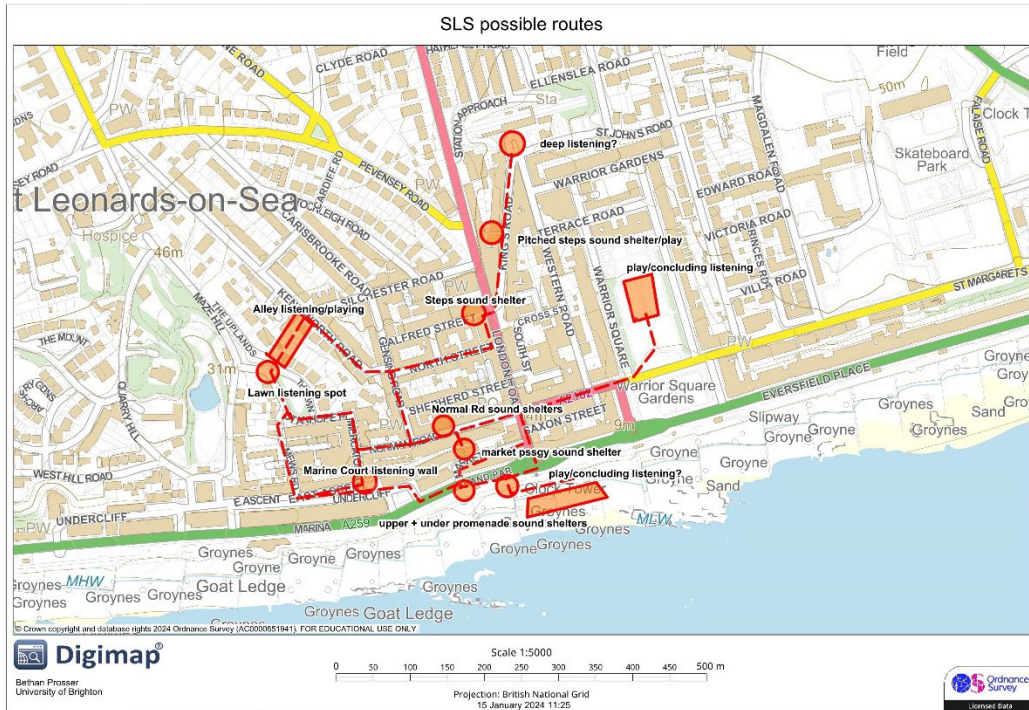


This helped guide the series of site visits in each neighbourhood. We did seven joint visits across the three sites; the majority took place in winter, with stormy weather impacting our experience and highlighting the risks and challenges of doing outdoor activities. For each visit, we started with the routes that the PhD research participants had taken as part of individual listening walks. We plotted key sites that the research participants had captured and been interviewed about in 2020.

Across each site, we grappled with an ongoing question: how much do we want to base the ILWs on the PhD research participants' listening walks and activities? Bethan realised through this process that she was very attached to these existing research listening walks. But Bela's fresh ears listened out for what was useful in "the here and now" for engaging people. Together we shaped what worked for the ILW format. Exploring significant listening spots or places for sonic interactions, we then weaved these into a route that could take people on a listening journey, as seen in the Maps of Possible Routes below.

Fig. 2-4: Maps of Possible Routes





Facilitator reflections

We have reflected together on our learning from this co-design process, which can be grouped into three areas:

- learning together about the sites
- the challenges of urban listening, walking, and playing
- adding to and refining the toolbox

There have been many neighbourhood changes since the PhD research was undertaken in 2020. The PhD research was a snapshot (“earshot”) captured by 22 residents during the Covid-19 crisis and the corresponding distinct acoustic environment (called “lockdown listening” in the PhD findings). The task of designing ILWs created new knowledge about each of the sites. As Brighton residents, we had differing degrees of familiarity with the three neighbourhoods. We both had spent less time in St Leonards and therefore needed an extra site visit there. Bethan brought a particular type of knowledge about each site, having conducted her research remotely due to the pandemic; as seen in her reflective notes after the first site visit:

I've had my head in 3-year-old material from 8 Kemptown residents remotely – what a strange way to know a place. (Reflective notes after 1st site visit 30/11/2023)

Through constructing a route and creating different listening and sound-interactive activities, we became very aware of the differences between each neighbourhood.

In East Worthing, we designed a shorter route around the Active Beach zone area, which offered opportunities for comfortable and safe playful interactions. We focused on “sounding out” the controversial new-build redevelopment, Bayside Luxury apartments, which identified in the

PhD as a landmark of neighbourhood gentrification. There were more spaces to play, with the flatter topography, easy access to the beach, and family-oriented public space.

In contrast, Brighton Kemptown, offered less space for interactions and playing. The neighbourhood is more typical of urban streets. It felt like a more controlled environment, therefore, inviting participants to interact and play needed more thought and consideration. Similarly, in St Leonards, there was more of a focus on listening than interacting with the environment. As a denser built environment, there was a lot to take in visually and it bustled with urban activities. We felt the need to concentrate on activities that supported bringing people back to listening and find safe and less intense places to listen. Bela aptly named these types of listening spots: “sound shelters”.

Consequently, the three ILWs had different themes, rhythms, and tones in response to the distinct resonances of each neighbourhood. This was all part of the challenge of urban listening, walking, and interacting. It was a constant challenge (especially in Brighton Kemptown and St Leonards) to find safe places for a group to stop, listen, and share. As already discussed, we needed to make sure there was a mix of contrasting listening spots to reduce the intensity of listening to traffic and the dense layers of urban activities.

In terms of walking, we wanted to make sure the walks were accessible to people using mobility aids, such as a mobility scooter. We soon realised how much this challenged our ableist assumptions. In St Leonards, we kept wanting to make use of the cut through passages (twittens in Sussex dialect) as obvious “sound shelters”, but the majority included steps. Across all the sites, we started to notice how few dropped curbs there are for crossing between pavements. Access to parks and community gardens also often involved narrow paths and unkept paved ramps that had become hazardous. Recognising our lack of expertise and ableist assumptions, we turned to others to give advice and feedback on the routes. In Brighton, we consulted with one of the community group staff leads. In St Leonards, one of the previous PhD participants, who uses a mobility scooter, kindly gave their time to check the route and share their everyday experiences of navigating the neighbourhood.

The lack of places where we could play and interact was also stark, requiring creative imagination and resourcefulness. In nature-based walks, we make use of “sound foraging” and invite participants to find objects (e.g. sticks, fallen leaves) that can make sounds and use these to create music and rhythms together. In the urban environment, this was challenging to do, both in terms of finding safe and interesting objects and places that people would feel comfortable jamming together. We reflected throughout on how the ability to move, stop, listen, or play in these three neighbourhoods connected to the topic of urban change and gentrification. Gentrification processes encompass issues of private and public ownership, how public space is used, and who or what gets excluded.

All of these dynamics resulted in us adding tools to our ILW practice as well as adapting and refining existing ones. We constantly needed to balance the topic/research findings against the interactive responsiveness of this participatory walking format. We agreed early on that our preference was to preserve these participatory elements. We kept the listening exercises open to what different participants brought on the day and used the recruitment process and welcome/introduction for framing the topic. It was crucial to allow a degree of co-creation in the live delivery with residents, community groups, and others with experiences of each neighbourhood. Bela observed early on how we needed to be guided by residents, especially for

sites that we held less knowledge about. This chimed with the PhD approach and findings about “listening-with” residents to gentrification.

The tools we added include identifying “sound shelters” as a specific type of listening spot, creating individual listening quests that offered different options for people explore a street, and bringing sounding objects (rather than foraging) that could be used for creating rhythms, music, and site-specific sonic interactions. We adapted our delivery of the deep listening exercise that we start each walk with (based on the work of Pauline Oliveros) to make participants feel safer. We also made more use of readings to create prompts and bring in different voices about gentrification e.g. reading out excerpts from the PhD participants’ material that they captured in the same site 4 years prior.

Co-creation findings

This section has looked at the question of how ILWs focused on research findings can be co-created. There are two main findings about research practice and design:

An existing community-university partnership is a key enabling factor, laying the foundations of shared mutually beneficial working and creative practices.

The challenges of co-designing urban ILWs about complex research findings were able to be addressed due to these foundations. These foundations include a way of working together, the “defining in the doing” approach, as well as a shared creative practice, the ILW format. Bela and Bethan had already developed this format over 5 years, which included a built-in design process of site visits and shared reflections. Mutual exchange is an importance component of this, combining researcher knowledge on the topic and sites with practitioner knowledge on how to engage people in sonic interactions.

The participatory, site, and topic-responsiveness of this format allowed ILWs to be applied effectively to findings on a complex place-based issue.

The co-design stage supported us to review and further define the format, such as through the design matrix. We were able to adapt and change existing activities as well as add new ones into the toolbox. At the heart is a participatory ethos (in research terms) and community music approach (in practice terms), which centres openness and responsiveness to the group live experience. This both supports people bring their own experiences and perspectives to the topic, as well as allow interactions in the moment to the specific neighbourhoods and their ever-changing acoustic environments.

4. Piloting the Interactive Listening Walks in Worthing, Brighton & St Leonards-on-Sea

This fourth section details the consultation undertaken with residents, community groups, and policy-related professionals, focusing on the second research question:

ii. How can a range of different people be consulted with, as part of the ILWs co-creation?

To better understand how the ILWs could engage a range of people in the findings we consulted with three differently impacted groups of stakeholders: residents, community group members, and local policy-related professionals. The six pilots captured feedback through individual written forms and a semi-structured focus group immediately following the walk. This design offered learning about different ways of consulting and the significance of bringing more perspectives into engagement activities.

We recruited 50 participants (21 residents, 15 community group members, and 14 professionals) to take part in six pilot ILWs with focus groups to capture their experiences (see *appendix A for more details*). We delivered three public events with 25 additional participants, discussed in the next section. In addition, we led a Brighton ILW for academics and practitioners as part of a conference, Sonic Rebellions (8 participants).

Overall, the project worked with 83 people and generated a wealth of material, which includes: practitioner and researcher reflective notes, site visit audio recordings, planning materials, focus group transcripts, and participant feedback forms. Creative listening analysis techniques were applied from the PhD methodology: sound-collaging, creative reflection, listening-back, thematic coding (using Nvivo software), and layered soundmapping technique (Prosser, 2022).

In addition to the participants, we also worked with several venues across the three sites. It was challenging to find suitable venues that were located near the end of the walking route that could host the focus groups. We required a quiet separate room as well as refreshment facilities. We ended up holding the focus groups in three different types of venues: leisure centre, community centre, and seafront café.

Resident pilots: Worthing & St Leonards

For the resident pilots, we directly recruited people living in the Worthing and St Leonards neighbourhoods. This built directly on the PhD focus on residents' experiences of urban seaside gentrification. It was important to get feedback from people with lived, everyday experiences and knowledge of each neighbourhood. The original study took place during the Covid-19 fluctuating lockdowns in 2020. There have been ongoing changes and developments in the four years since, therefore we wanted to make sure the ILW content was up to date and relevant.

Recruitment

For recruitment, Bethan firstly approached all the original research participants. There was ongoing interest in the project from 10 previous participants and out of this two managed to take part in the resident pilots – one in St Leonards and one in Worthing. We then advertised the pilots through digital and physical flyers, social media videos, local newspaper articles, and BHMC's networks. We offered £15 vouchers as acknowledgement of people's time to all

participants. Recruitment was time-intensive and required constant promotion on numerous channels. Despite the challenges, it was an importance part of the engagement process. Feedback from community organisations and local news outlets helped us refine how we described ILWs and the topic. It also demonstrated how engagement is not just a single event but includes all the pre- and post- event activities.

We found that ILWs offered appeal through their novelty. In the feedback forms, almost all of the participants stated motivations around ‘doing something new’ or being curious about this ‘intriguing methodology’ in relation to listening. Sensory and sound studies tell us that Western societies are visually dominant (Howes, 2005; Bull, 2009). The PhD study used listening as a “defamiliarisation tool” for helping residents explore their familiar neighbourhood afresh. For this post-doctoral study, the neglect of listening had positive effects for recruitment and more generally added to the ILWs as an effective engagement tool.

Re-engagement

The “re-engagement” of previous residents was invaluable and adds another dimension to learning about participatory listening’s potential for engagement in research findings. Each “returning” participant offered in-depth insight into thinking about listening to changing neighbourhoods, from their 2020 individual explorations to the 2024 group experience. We had chosen readings taken from both participants. They both fed-back they were happy for this material to be included, and equally important, that they had valued being part of the research longitudinally.

The experience of re-listening to their own words from 4 years ago in the same site was particularly striking for one participant. The site was a controversial redevelopment luxury build, which in 2020 was still being built. The resident had welcomed it as hopeful positive regeneration. However, he explained how he had since changed his perspective on this site, which formed part of his motivations for taking part again:

Because actually it was quite exciting when it happened. It was quite industrious. It was a period where not much was happening in the world. I wanted to know how I felt about how the area changed, but also how I had changed as part of that process. (Rafael, residents’ group)

He described the reading as ‘authentically my experience at the time’. However, during the ILW, listening around the site, he became increasingly ‘disconsolate’:

I think the more we circled the building, the less positive I felt about it because it just looks so empty. It looks like an investment rather than what I hoped. What I think my quote was, “But any, any form of housing grows the area because more people are moving”. But they just look like they’re sitting there empty, which feels insulting to people who’ve lived here for 20-30-40 years. (Rafael, residents’ group)

Yet he described the overall experience as very rewarding, stating that ‘experiencing the negative sides of something has improved my positive experience in my community’.

The other “returning” participant in St Leonards similarly fed-back how beneficial it was to take part in the research over the long-term. He took an active part in the consultation (as described in checking the accessibility of the route in the previous section) and attended the public event. However, in contrast, he ‘found it more rewarding doing the original research – thinking about what to record’. An interesting suggestion came out of this about whether “real-time” archiving

could be included into the ILWs, incorporating technology and the opportunity to record sounds. This speaks to the potential enhancements that a digital media walk mediated by mobile technology could offer as a different participatory listening walk format.

Evaluative feedback

Many others in the residents' pilot discussed how the ILW offered a multi-dimensional experience. Across these two pilots, there was very positive feedback with few changes suggested in the individual written forms or focus group discussion. Many stated the ILWs offered wellbeing benefits. For example, one participant said they had felt anxious about attending but this changed through the walk:

It's been really enjoyable and meeting new people. It was a challenge to start off. But I'm absolutely glad I've done it now. (Resident feedback form)

One feedback answer stated, 'I noticed that everyone appeared to be engaged from start to finish', which chimed with our observations as facilitators.

From the written feedback, there were some suggestions for changes:

- reducing from 90 minutes to 60 minutes
- running on different days and times
- using technology to add sound sampling
- stopping in quieter places where you can each other respond more easily

The last suggestion was made by two St Leonards participants and resonates with our co-design experiences discussed in the previous section about the challenges of urban listening and the need to find "sound shelters".

The "playing" components received the most mixed responses. It was noted on two Worthing feedback forms that the playing with pebbles (on the beach and in the beachside public space of the luxury apartments) made the person feel uncomfortable. For one person this was due to finding the sounds uncomfortable in their hearing aids and not wanting to raise this at the time as it would have taken away from the enjoyment of the rest of group. For the other person, this was due to feeling self-conscious, which was also brought up by some people in the focus group discussion. In contrast, some participants discussed the chance to play being the most rewarding part of the experience and wanting more opportunities for this as an adult. In this Worthing focus group, play therefore brought up interesting discussion about what is acceptable or not as a group of adults in public space as well as the pressures of not wasting time.

Across both groups, the most significant learning was around listening. This includes new discoveries about participants' own relationships to different sounds as well as what they could learn about the neighbourhood through sound. The Deep Listening exercise (adapted from Pauline Oliveros, 2005) was particularly striking for people. In the Worthing focus group, one person described how he has previously done mindful walks on their own, but the group experience supported him to listen more profoundly. When asked about this further, most agreed that closing of eyes during this exercise was important but that the ability to tune into sounds did start to fade during the walk.

Talking about sounds allowed the groups to share their different listening experiences as well as how they normally navigate the neighbourhood. For example, one participant shared:

I was going to relate this to my own experience, because I travel round on my mobility scooter all the time. So I have to constantly listen to what's around me just to keep myself safe. But doing the walks around with other people meant that I wasn't concentrating just on dangers. I was actually opening up my hearing. For other things that were happening all around me. And for me, it's a less frightening experience going around. (Geoff, residents' group)

Alongside gaining understanding about each other's different neighbourhood experiences, several participants felt that the focus on listening created a "levelling" effect. Many participants explained how they use aids to avoid being overwhelmed e.g. listening to music or adjusting their hearing aids. Without aids, one participant described everyday listening as having 'a pair of blinkers on' (Trevor, residents' group 3). This was associated with the need to be productive, such as getting from A to B, as well as the overwhelm of traffic.

The focus group conversations showed that the ILWs stimulated thinking about neighbourhood change and the topic of gentrification. Participants were struck by the way the built environment is designed acoustically, or not. This was especially in Worthing where we "sounded out Bayside" – the luxury new-build on the seafront identified as a significant contested site in the PhD research (Prosser, 2022). This involved silently walking around the building, stopping to listen at contrasting points, and reading out different perspectives from the architectural award judges and previous research participants. Worthing participants were struck by the contrast of the acoustic segregation: the social housing located on the roadside with noisy traffic in contrast to the expensive private flats taking in the sound of waves on the beach side. There were mixed opinions in the focus group discussion about the site, with some believing it was better than the derelict car park that had been left there for years before redevelopment.

The focus group discussions across both resident pilots therefore showed that in-depth reflections and meaningful exchanges about the PhD findings were sparked by the ILWs. The collective acoustic experience mostly created a common ground for people to discuss their different perspectives. There was a notable incident of disagreement in one of the focus groups. This stemmed from a participant's comments about being unhappy with the increasing amount of foreign languages heard in the neighbourhood. Others in the group gently challenged this opinion with one person trying to steer the conversation towards accents more generally and Sussex dialects. This discussion topic raised discomfort for us as facilitators, and has led to post-delivery discussion about our role in these kinds of challenging or contested discussions. As the researcher, Bethan felt a responsibility to question this viewpoint further as well as challenge this person's view that people should be speaking English in the neighbourhood. Gentrification is a sensitive topic that brings up issues of belonging and im/mobilities i.e. people moving in and out and who belongs or has the right to stay. This incident is an important area of learning about what can come up in engagement around complex research findings.

Overall, however, feedback showed that people valued this opportunity to share with others. A key suggestion was to include a post-walk discussion in subsequent ILWs. This had not been originally planned for the public events as the indoor facilitated discussion was for the purpose of capturing research data. But both groups suggested the need to have some debrief time, in addition to the structured discussion built into the ILW scores. There was also the suggestion to create mixed groups of residents and local policymakers, rather than keeping these separate, in the way we had designed the consultation groups:

I think it's very interesting because the whole process apart from anything else brings everyone to the same level to some extent. So I think it'd be really good to get a few policy makers...you know, a mixture...I think that people would be more able to kind of communicate with each other. (Vivian, residents' group)

Community group pilots: Brighton

In Brighton, we advertised for two existing Brighton groups to work with us to create two bespoke sessions. One of the limitations of the PhD study was involving a range of different residential experiences, mainly due to the challenges of recruiting during the pandemic. More homeowners took part in the research and there were less people experiencing the most damaging direct impacts of gentrification, such as people experiencing homelessness or living in insecure and increasingly expensive rental housing. Therefore, in this project we wanted to make sure there was a range of perspectives included in the consultation. Working with an existing support group offered a way to include different experiences from the residential groups, but in a way that could be safe and supportive.

We had eight responses to our call out, done through BHMC's networks in the community/voluntary sector. The positive response demonstrates the importance of working in partnership with an organisation with a trusted track record in the local sector. The first group we worked with was for young people with additional needs, including autism, ADHD, learning disabilities, sensory impairments, and physical disabilities. The second was a peer support and befriending group for people experiencing homelessness, specifically people living in temporary or emergency accommodation. Working with community practitioners was critical in the design of these pilots, requiring professional expertise to tailor the sessions to the specific needs of the participants.

Community group 1

The youth group lead responded to the call because they were looking for interesting activities that could help with the group's wellbeing aims. Bethan met a couple of times with the youth worker to discuss how to best advertise the ILW out to their members and deliver the session in an accessible way. The main changes we made were around the language and terminology, shortening the walk, and having options for adapting exercises depending on how participants found them on the day. The main concerns were about sensory overwhelm and whether the young people would connect with the topic. We had 9 young people aged 18-25 years old sign up which included 3 peer volunteers. On the day 8 attended (3 males and 5 females) plus the youth worker.

The majority of feedback was positive from the group, with most finding it an interesting and enjoyable activity. We found that the young people mainly engaged in the findings about what we can learn through listening, rather than the gentrification issues. There were quite a few "sound surprises" that people fed-back in the forms and discussion, including an unexpected encounter with a driveable lawnmower that passed us as we were crossing the road that the group found sonically fascinating. Several participants talked about expecting to find the urban sounds uncomfortable but instead found it more manageable through the structured activities. As seen in one answer on the feedback form when asked what was most significant during the walk:

The lawnmower, how noisy traffic and the bustle of the city is. I don't traditionally listen to traffic because I can't really hear my thoughts if the noise is too loud but being confronted with it and not being able to shut it out was a significant experience for me. (Feedback form answer)

Other discoveries were the White Street community garden, which participants had not visited before but enjoyed exploring sensorially.

We found there were some challenges during the walk as facilitators. Compared to the resident pilot groups, this group knew each other well and the session was a social opportunity. We had to spend more time encouraging people to be quiet and focus on listening, as well as moving the group to keep to time. For example, one participant decided to lie down during the Deep Listening exercise in the park, and it took some persuasion from the youth worker and volunteers to get them to eventually get up and join the walk. One participant was less engaged and mostly interested in the chance to catch up with the group, which at certain points disrupted the activities. However, through all of this, we gained insight into how the ILW format can be made adaptable for people with additional needs and varying motivations. This was especially the case for consulting around hearing and sensory heightened sensitivities. The PhD approach incorporated the idea of “plural listening” and the importance of embracing the different ways people listen, drawing on the field of aural diversity (Drever & Hugill, 2022). It was therefore important to test out these dimensions of the ILW.

In terms of the gentrification topic, the group engaged with how we can learn about a place through listening e.g. thinking about the relationship between different “nature” and “urban” sounds. Many visited places for the first time and the peer volunteers in the group in particular were interested in learning about the sites we listened in:

I think it was quite interesting when you gave context to the places that we stopped. So I think like, more of that could be really interesting because like, I don't like think that people walk and really think about where we're walking and like whether it has much meaning behind it. (Lily, community group 1)

The “sound surprises”, surrounding how participants found the group listening experience compared to their normal navigations, also generated some discussion about public space, how we use it, and exclusions. For example, one of the peer volunteers discussed the difficulties of finding places and facilities where you do not have to pay money or consume:

It's interesting with community spaces. There's not a lot of places anymore where you can just go in without being expected to buy something or stay for something like. (Albie, community group 1)

This links to displacement pressures caused by gentrifying processes identified in the PhD research findings such as the privatisation of public space and lack of community facilities.

However, the majority of the group were not directly impacted by gentrification changes nor familiar with the neighbourhood. Many either lived with family or in supported accommodation in other parts of the city and not actively engaged in housing issues. We set out to consult with groups facing increased societal marginalisation through this form of consultation. We left the criteria open to see which groups would respond and might find this activity of interest, which was in part driven by prioritising mutual benefit. Bethan met with the youth worker after the session to debrief and organise the logistics of participants’ vouchers and their feedback

confirmed this was a mutually beneficial research activity. However, it was interesting to see how a group less directly impacted by the topic was attracted by the format of the engagement activity rather than the place-based issues.

Community group 2

In contrast, gentrification was a highly sensitive topic for the second group, who were the pilot group most directly impacted by the research. In preparation for the session, Bethan met with two workers from the homelessness charity to discuss the potential ethical and safeguarding issues due to the topic and needs of the group participants. It was decided that the befriending scheme was a good way to provide sufficient and trusted support. This meant that if any issues arose from the session, participants could discuss this afterwards and get support from their befriender. Pairs of volunteers and group members were encouraged to sign up together: 8 pairs signed up and 3 came on the day. One staff member filled in for one of the befriending volunteers and we also enlisted the support of a BHMC volunteer.

As facilitators, we became aware at the beginning of the session that participants were apprehensive about the walk and its purpose. We gave more time to the introductory section of the walk, answering questions and providing information. However, as the walk progressed, we found participants became very engaged and rich discussions were generated in the group sharing activities and focus group discussion. For example, in the focus group, one participant shared their personal story of homelessness that involved being evicted from a rental property in the neighbourhood we were exploring. She expressed wariness at the beginning, but after the walk shared how rewarding the experience had been:

I do feel myself personally, you know, quite, irritable for my own issues, you know?...But because this was more structured, and it was telling you something new to do, you know, that annoyance starts to go...You kind of become more accepting of the environment. (Narima, community group 2)

It was striking how the ILW format allowed this participant to experience the neighbourhood in a new and valuable way, despite it being a place that held previous traumas and exclusions. Narima explained that it was through being supported to listen that she was able to 'get out of yourself, you know, and not think that you already know what it is'. Narima found doing something new 'refreshing' in a place she assumed she knew, as well as aiding reflections about her housing journey.

Many of the other participants also made new discoveries. One participant was very expressive in their responses and, when asked what was most significant for them, they read out one of their feedback form answers:

Explosion of vibrancy engaging the human nature of himself, incorporating the harmony of industrial, environmentally friendly machinery, harmonising the uncertainty and precariousness of the human condition in an enclosed, urbanised, idyllic setting. (Crazy Pie, community group 2)

There was more interest and discussion in this group about the relationship or contrast between listening stops than the youth group. Early in the walk, we stop, listen and do a reading in two very different sites that are both off the same main road: a street that has been reinstated as part of a new-build redevelopment and a small community garden located on the main road. The group were struck by these contrasting sites, as stated in one person's feedback form answer:

The juxtaposition between listening landscapes and the visual e.g. community garden next to a main road; the readings of the developer's intentions within the actual environmental soundscape.

The acoustics of these sites are very different, but participants' perception and responses to these was interesting:

When I saw the building in Miguel one [new street], it's hard for me to hear like the sound of the bird or like it's hard for me to hear like the chatter because the building are like very monotonous. So, it feels like traffic, traffic, you know, scaffolding and stuff. But when I am in the garden, it's, I can hear more of that birds and stuff. (Tohru, community group 2).

The group discussed how they were surprised how much they could enjoy the sounds of nature and relax in the community garden, despite the sounds of traffic being more intense with its location right next to the road. In the new-build site, participants found it 'a Legoland, monolith, sort of brutalist' which impacted on their listening and overall sensory experience of the space. These sensory experiences and contrasts therefore generated ideas and reflections about the acoustic design of the built environment as well as issues surrounding private vs. community ownership.

Similar to the Worthing residents' pilot group, play and site interactions had the most mixed reactions. We used beaters to play the sculpture in the new street, which some enjoyed but others questioned the purpose of. In the focus group discussion, this allowed Bela to share what play and sound-making can offer. However we did find that one of the sites we intended to play did not work so well. One of our listening spots was inside a launderette, and whilst there we hoped to play with coins if there were not too many customers. We got a positive response that this was an unusual and almost 'meditative' place to listen, resonating as a "sound shelter". However when we were not able to play there, we offered the coins at an outdoor spot next to the road with layered sounds of traffic and pigeons cooing. Many participants engaged in this, but one person fed-back that they found this un-hygienic and did not make much sense as a place to play with coins. We tried this out in other pilots, getting the chance to play with coins on two occasions. But we changed the score to not include this second optional site due to this feedback in the final public event.

This pilot session was one of the richest for feedback on the ILW format as well as depth of discussion about gentrifying change. It was rewarding as facilitators to learn how we could safely support people most impacted by the topic to have a positive experience through this creative format. The support of staff and volunteer befrienders were vital in enabling engagement in issues that directly connected with personal traumas experienced by participants. We met with the two staff members to debrief after the session and organise the logistics of participants' vouchers for recognition of giving their time. These pilots required more resources to create safe consultation with people experiencing intersecting societal marginalisation. In exchange, we offered a new restorative activity for the group to do together, which the staff and participants fed-back was beneficial and contributed to the wellbeing aims of the group.

Professional pilots: Worthing & Brighton

Gentrification is an issue of social policy connecting to a range of areas including housing, planning, public health, and infrastructure. Therefore, by creatively engaging people in the

research findings, the ILWs also offer a potential policy engagement tool. Having consulted with residents and community group members, we wanted to gain feedback from “local policymaker” i.e. professionals involved in local policy planning and implementation. We were interested in consulting with a group of people who had a different relationship to and experience of the neighbourhood as well as understanding if this ILW practice would be of interest to policy-related professionals.

Recruitment

Recruiting professionals was the most challenging out of the pilots, both in terms of locating relevant people and organising attendance. As gentrification connects to many policy areas, we promoted the pilots to a broad range of elected councillors, council officers, and voluntary sector leaders. We used our existing professional networks but mostly had to “cold call” by sending direct email invites with a 2-page proposal. Across both locations, Bethan emailed 65 professionals targeted at:

- ward councillors council officers with responsibilities for the neighbourhood
- councillors and council officers with responsibilities related to planning, housing, or communities i.e. committee members
- key voluntary sector leaders responsible for infrastructure with working relationships with the council.

Over half replied, often after a follow up email, and 23 were interested in taking part. There was generally a good response to the activities with the majority of replies expressing support for the project. One councillor raised concerns about impartiality in their role of chairing a committee related to the issues and therefore declined. In total, 20 professionals booked onto the two pilots and 14 attended on the day.

This was time intensive in a different way to the community group consultation, requiring persistent email correspondence and testing out different ways of explaining the project. The council structures were not easy to navigate with the two councils having different arrangements in how they divided up policy areas and responsibilities. This left little time to engage with other relevant professional areas and therefore we did not involve the health sector. Even when participants had booked, another more pressing work task could be prioritised, leading to less attendance on the day. This included three councillors unable to take part in the whole session and leaving after the walk, providing feedback via email.

Through this type of consultation we were able to learn about the dynamics of engaging with local policymakers. We wanted to understand how professionals could benefit from taking part in this kind of creative engagement. At this experimentation stage, we were still developing what a “clear ask” could be for professionals, which was necessary against competing workloads and pressures. Overall, it was easier to locate councillors, from whom we got a more positive response. For council officers, it was important that their role had a close synergy with the topic or the approach, which we mainly promoted as concerned with public consultation in neighbourhood change. Most of the positive responses surrounded the novelty of the listening approach as something different to take part in and holding potential for community engagement. The feedback forms showed the following motivations for those who took part:

- the methodology/listening approach (35%)
- the topic/place issues (35%)
- involvement in research (under 30%)

There were also differences between Brighton and Worthing, with the latter borough town council structure being easier to navigate than that of the city authority. We had a quicker uptake in Worthing, which in many ways speaks to the amount of creative and place-based initiatives already taking place in Brighton.

Engaging with professionals

Engaging with professionals brought different insights but also another set of challenges and sensitivities to navigate. Ethical issues around anonymity, confidentiality, and trust were centred on participants' job roles and responsibilities, rather than personal needs or vulnerabilities. This includes both the risks that professionals take in participating and the increased identifiability of participants. Bethan made clear the ethical procedures in place and explained the onus on her researcher integrity to ensure participants' anonymity was considered in the write up of findings. There were additional considerations that came up during the walk including the group dynamics, the reputational risk of taking part, and the content of the walks.

The make-up of each group created different dynamics. In one group, participants were predominantly councillors from one political party who knew each other well plus one VCSE sector leader. As with the first community group, this presented challenges for facilitation to ensure the session did not solely become a team-building day. For example, one participant joined last minute to the session and when asked why they took part, replied: 'To be honest, I knew some of the other participants and I saw it as an opportunity to catch up'. We were able to manage this by setting up the clear purposes of the research pilot. The presence of the VCSE professional also kept the focus on the topic. These dynamics created more consensus within the group from the start and supported open detailed discussion in the focus group. However, it also increased the visibility and potential reputational concerns as a group of councillors who could be recognised in the neighbourhood. In the focus group, one participant raised the risk of being photographed by a local journalist whilst involved in the playing activities:

You could get a group of us out there today and probably a bit of most of our minds are going, 'I'm a representative of this town out in public, and I might feel a bit reserved as to start smashing some rocks against the post or...'. (Diamond, professionals' group 1)

This generated group reflections about the unique but challenging positionality of being a councillor, balancing different expectations of what the role entails.

In the other group, there was a mix of councillors from different political parties, council officers, and a VCSE voluntary leader. Concerns about visibility during the walk were not raised. However more group-building facilitation was required as there were differing relationships between the group members. Some knew each other well in a working capacity, others were aware of each other or their role only. Rather than a social or team-building opportunity, the session presented participants with the possibility to network with other professionals. The varying professional agendas brought by participants presented a very different dynamic to the other pilots. As facilitators, we observed that the council officers in the group regularly contributed information to explain why a decision had been made or provide additional context to a site. From our perspective, we were more aware of the issues of professional integrity that each person brought as well as the desire for the perspective of the council to be voiced.

Running this type of policy consultation alongside resident and community groups allowed us to identify how these sensitivities and group relations affect ILW engagement and responses.

For the residents and community groups, we found participants were generally quite open to the experience and there was a range of different ideas and discussion generated by the sound-based stimuli. In the professionals' groups, there was more interrogation of the purpose of the activity, but, in addition, more detailed focus on the topic. Most of the feedback answers were concerned with how the topic could be explored through sound or learning about the neighbourhood change through listening. In the focus groups, the participants more immediately and directly brought up the topic of gentrification, neighbourhood change, and what this tool could offer for consultation.

Policy perspective

The professional expertise offered by these groups was invaluable for us to test out the potential of the ILW format for policy engagement. There were similar responses to the other pilots during the walk at each listening spot or activity as well as a mixed response to the play/site interactions. For example, there were many discoveries about the acoustic design of the built environment. One participant neatly described the inequalities of access to different levels of noise as "sound privilege", which echoes many of the discussions in the resident and community groups. However, it is interesting in this section to pull out some key differences as well as the responses most related to policy engagement.

Most striking was the responses to the new-build redevelopment sites that are part of both walks – listening to the acoustic environment as well as the readings from previous PhD participants and the developers' website. In one site the readings included critique of private-led development and the role of the council; in another site the developer's promises of a vibrant quarter stood in juxtaposition to a relatively quiet soundscape, lacking the sounds of human activities. As facilitators, we reflected that during the walk we felt more conscious of this tension when reading out the excerpts, with the prospect that some members of the group could feel under attack. There were different reactions across the groups in these sites and the focus groups allowed us to discuss this in more detail. The councillors on the whole were open to the critique and able to distance themselves from the specific decisions surrounding these sites. They cited that they were not involved in these processes, either because they were newly elected or the decisions were made by a different political party. However, the council officers' responses differed. As facilitators we observed that the council officers in response to the readings provided additional information about the process and explained the complexities of the contested sites.

For the most part, the ILW format and the framing of the session as a pilot allowed the councillors and council officers to engage productively in discussing the complexity of these contested sites and planning process. For example, one participant expressed how the reading of a resident describing the sounds of construction had been amplified by the sounds of a drill on the day of the walk:

...the actual process of the, the noise of building work in the development. So I think some of the residents feedback that you'd had about how long it was taking to build that whole development and the noise. About the buzz of one of the machinery or the plant, or that a couple of different people had mentioned that and us doing the walk, hearing that drill, which seemed to dominate, just appreciating that comes with development in that way, but how that dominates and you could feel, I could almost feel that drill like vibrating inside me. (Mrs Wheeler, professionals group 1)

Many fed-back how significant it was to be able to spend time in these places with the simple ask of listening. This chimes with the resident groups' discussion about pace and valuing the slowness of the ILW format. For the professionals, this discussion was concerned with the fast pace of professional efficiencies and productivity rather than navigating the neighbourhood as a resident. But both speak to the need for speed and blocking out our surrounding due to feelings of overwhelm. As expressed by one participant:

But I think the significance was me being put in that space and having the time to look at. So often we go and do things, and we look at things and I try desperately as hard as I can be not to predetermine what I think or feel about things. Obviously, I'll come with my own stuff, and it was just nice being in a space that is probably not my world, or my sphere and, and not thinking like 'Oh, so what, what impact is this sort of development going to have on people?'. But just to look at it, to think about, to hear it, to hear the differences. (Diamond, professional's group 1)

This also resonates with the St Leonards' residents group discussion about how the ILW acted as a "leveller".

Crucially, there was detailed discussion of how listening and sound can be used as a tool for community engagement and reflections on the planning process. One feedback response offered:

Sound is not reflected in planning policy enough and is too narrowly focused in policy terms e.g. agent of change principle. Should we be evaluating the choice of materials in construction and their acoustic qualities (happening in road design). (Feedback form)

The discoveries and ideas sparked by the group allowed the professionals to experience how listening can be a creative and valuable tool in their area of work. For example, in discussing different responses to play, one participant described it as a "disarming tool" and advocated for the value of creative explorations:

And it's such a great tool, isn't it, to make us focus whatever sense you use, whether it's sound or touch or whatever. To take away that desire. To judge it, fix it. And apply it to other ways that didn't work and stuff. To just be in that moment and think 'how interesting, this is just what this is right now'. (Katrin, professionals' group 1)

In the mixed group, there was nuanced debates over the planning process stimulated by the ILW experience. This included discussion of approaches in other countries and the flaws of our current system. There was a strong interest in more collaborative planning, as described by one participant:

I think that my experience with, you know, is that planning could be a lot more collaborative. You know, but the position is, it's an antagonistic one between the developer and the community. There's always this kind of clash already. If there was room and the planning system is not one that kind of enables this kind of conversation a bit more, if it was more of a collaborative thing of kind of saying, 'Okay? You could do something here and, but you give us a place.' That's the placement kind of thing. (Lily, professionals' group 2)

Both groups expressed the interest and appetite for bringing in more perspectives from the wider community into planning, especially those who usually are not represented in consultations. The challenges of doing this were also discussed. This includes the silos that

divide each department and sectors and the tensions between national and local governance and powers. The main barrier raised was resources and the impact of long-term and ongoing cuts to public spending.

However, despite these challenges, the ILW and listening approach was welcomed and valued by all the professionals. Several professionals stated they were thinking about how to do things differently as a result of the experience. For example, one councillor stated:

I think listening to those stories, it's sort of a learning process. So I I could sort of say now, if I was involved in the planning process, and you've got something like that, I would say 'Let's listen to what everyone else said about [the redevelopment] and so forth, and take that into account'. (Gromit, professionals' group 1)

Two participants discussed how they might use Deep Listening exercises in upcoming consultations they were facilitating. Several discussed how they would be more aware of sounds and try out listening by themselves again. Overall, the professional consultations therefore indicated that ILWs and listening-based tools hold simultaneous potential for both engaging policymakers and as a consultation tool for engaging the wider community in place-based issues.

Consultation findings

This section has shared the details of the pilots and drawn out learning about how a range of different people can be consulted with, as part of co-creating the ILWs. There are two key findings about consultations design:

Recruiting different groups of people based on distinct combinations of experiences, knowledge, and relationships to the neighbourhood and the topic is an effective way of gaining valuable feedback from a range of feedback.

There was diverse experiences within each group, but structuring consultation across these three groupings proved to be insightful:

- residential: everyday lived experience and knowledge of neighbourhood + differing relationship to the topic
- community group members: everyday lived experience of the topic + differing relationships to the neighbourhood
- policy-related professionals: professional knowledge of the topic + differing experiences of the neighbourhood

Although these categories were a useful structure, many participants expressed interest in experiencing the ILWs with a wider mix of people. This was promising feedback for delivering the public sessions, which will be discussed in the next section. These pilots also indicated that people who had deeper experience of the neighbourhood or the topic were more engaged and found the ILW more rewarding.

Creating bespoke and agile sessions for different groups is important for supporting and being able to respond to the specific motivations, needs, and dynamics of each consultation group.

Through working with these different groups, we learnt how a range of different motivations and needs can be included and responded to within the ILW design. For example, it was vital to work with the practitioners supporting the community groups to ensure we could consult safely and ethically. Responding to different motivations allowed us to create mutual benefit for those

taking part. The pilots were overwhelmingly positive and only minor changes were suggested, which is testament to the co-design and shared practice between Bela and Bethan. Every participant fed-back that they had gained something from taking part, which can mainly be grouped as the following:

- listening: discoveries about listening and their own relationship to sounds
- place: learning about new places and exploring the neighbourhood in a new way
- group: meaningful and creative exchanges with others
- topic: ideas and reflections about changing seaside neighbourhoods and the issues of gentrification

Pilot participants valued the opportunity to discuss the whole experience and topics sparked through the focus group and suggested the need for a debrief discussion as part of the whole ILW event. This was the main significant change we made through the consultation process to the final public events, which are discussed in the next section.

5. Delivering the public events: Sound Sparks 2.0

Following the consultation period, we planned to run the three ILWs in each location as public events open to anyone. There were a couple of developments during the pilots that led us to collect feedback and include these events within the research data collection. Firstly, due to the consultation feedback, we extended the ILWs to include a post-walk indoor discussion. This amendment allowed us to gain additional feedback about how a mixed group of participants (e.g. residents, artists, students, councillors, council officers, academics, and visitors) experienced the ILWs, as opposed to the separated pilot groups. Secondly, we were struck in the pilots how the ILWs appeared to support dialogue and exchange in the focus groups. This opened up a new research area that we wanted to explore further: how participatory listening tools (listening to the environment together) can enable and support dialogue (listening to each other).

The PhD research had coined the term “sound sparks” as an idea or reflection stimulated by listening to a specific sound or collection of sounds. Given the myriad ideas sparked by the ILWs, we decided to call the events Sound Sparks 2.0. The “2.0 version” number indicated that the ILWs had been refined through consultation but that they will keep changing. Having experimented with different ways of explaining the project, the publicity material was easier at this stage to compile into a flyer. Many of the pilot participants expressed an interest in attending the public events to experience either the same walk or one of the other locations. This was testament to the positive engagement in the pilots and part of the dynamic of “re-engagement”, discussed earlier. Six pilot participants booked onto the public events (four attended on the day). We had also garnered interest from a range of people in the project who wanted to take part in the pilots but were unable to attend (due to consultation criteria or timing). Bethan therefore sent out invites to this growing list (170 direct email invitations) as well as promoting more widely through social media, university, and BHMC networks.

We kept the feedback light touch and tested out how a post-walk discussion could be included as part of an ILW score. We designed a shorter indoor post-walk section (30 mins compared to 45-60 mins in the focus groups) and did not ask people to fill out a feedback form. Instead, we asked people to write some quick answers onto post-it notes to the following questions:

- What was sparked? What was most significant?
- Any suggested changes/other comments?

This allowed participants to have some individual reflection time, before we discussed these questions as a group.

Across the events, the feedback was positive and there was an encouraging level of engagement and meaningful exchange in these mixed public groups. There were some variations in what was noted on the post-its, both in terms of what was most significant for people across the three locations as well as suggested changes. This is depicted in Charts 1 & 2 through grouping these into four areas. As facilitators, we observed quite different dynamics across the three groups, which is briefly detailed below.

Chart 1: Q1 Feedback answers collated by site

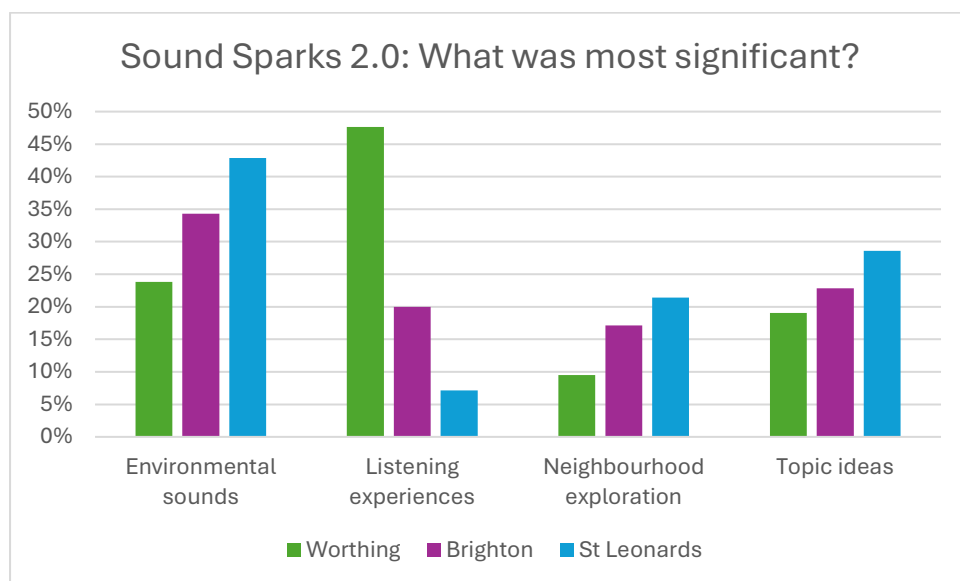
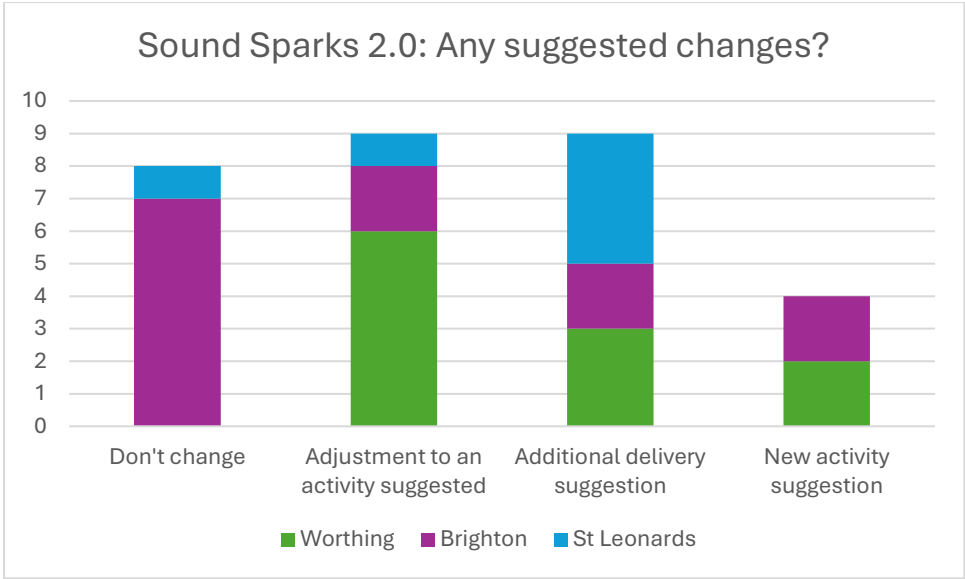


Chart 2: Q1 Feedback answers collated by site



Worthing Sound Sparks 2.0

The Worthing event was the most popular with 15 people booking on early on in the promotion of the event. Despite only 8 attending on the day, there was a mix in the group: one previous resident pilot participant, two council officers, one councillor, one creative practitioner, and one academic. Out of this, four were visitors to the town with limited experience of the neighbourhood. There were many similarities between the public and pilot groups’ responses to the ILW activities. The deep listening exercise was striking for many, as a way of slowing down and tuning into sounds that usually get filtered out. For those that knew the area well, in particular the professionals, the chance to explore at a slower pace through listening enabled some new discoveries as well as prompted reflections about neighbourhood change.

The range of experiences and relationships to the neighbourhood enabled different perspectives to be shared in the post-walk discussion. The previous pilot participant was unable to join the discussion section, however, she shared at the end of the walk that she had kept attentively listening since the pilot. Another pilot participant was unable to attend on the day but also shared via email how struck he had been by the ILW experience, continuing to reflect on the issues and discuss with others. This “re-engagement” allowed us to hear how the ILW experience was still continuing to have positive impacts 6 months after the session for some participants. This indicates that having a form of follow-up feedback and data collection could be considered in future projects.

The varying reactions and perspectives sparked by the ILW did not clearly align with participants’ previous experience or knowledge of the neighbourhood. Two participants who have a close relationship to the place (through residential everyday experience and professional responsibilities) expressed differing views on the redevelopment new-build site. The first of these participants was very struck by the negative impacts of the site due to the segregated experiences between the more affluent apartments and the social housing:

The gentrification thing. Either side of Bayside was fascinating. It never, I've walked past there 100 times, both sides and never noticed it until you actually mindfully notice what's actually happening. It feels like you, doesn't feel like you're in the, either two

sides of a building. You feel like you're in a different town, you know, in terms of the actual noises, which I thought was fascinating. (Lewis, Worthing Sound Sparks)

However, the second participant countered this critique of the site and instead drew on one of the readings that posited a different perspective about the value of embracing change. The participant offered the view that 'income, money, wealth needs to come in our town for it to not to die'. The reading and "sounding out" of the site effectively allowed these differing perspectives to be explored in the post-walk discussion.

There was also differing responses from participants that were visitors to the area. For one participant who was unfamiliar with the town, listening to the contested site sparked a strong emotional reaction:

I was really struck and saddened by the disruption, distortion, claiming of sound and soundscape through the processes of development and slash gentrification. Like I, I'm kind of speechless - cannot believe, as someone who's always lived in urban areas, I think of myself as someone who exists in these sort of landscapes and is familiar with them and thinks I know them and then you are there. I don't know this landscape, but I've grown up in cities and yeah, just. It's fucked up. It's been claimed it's literally being thieved like. I just think that's awful. (Billie, Worthing Sound Sparks)

In contrast, the other visitors fed-back that they found it harder to connect with the topic and felt this was due to not being from the town:

I think if I was from here and I understood the history of these spaces. Maybe I've just come here in this particular space today, but I found it hard to connect to the, you know, the people, kind of, I haven't seen this place before. I've got no connection to them. But perhaps if it had been like where I grew up or something, it would have had so much more resonance to me. (Pearl, Worthing Sound Sparks)

Pearl suggested that being able to hear the voices of residents might bring this activity more alive, rather than the excerpts being read by facilitators. Another participant who was less familiar with Worthing also suggested the use of technology to bring in oral histories, which chimes with suggestions from pilot participants about incorporating sound heritage.

The relationship between engagement with the gentrification topic and previous experiences or knowledge of the place is an interesting dynamic that requires further exploration. However, it was evident that participants valued the opportunity to discuss these different experiences and perspectives after sharing the ILW activities. All participants discussed making new discoveries from the different listening activities. Those less engaged in the topic made many discoveries about their relationship to sounds, as shared by one participant:

I think for me it was about when you go into that deep listening, it created this new spectrum in my head. There's this visual spectrum of like sounds, as I was inside of myself listening to the sort of these layers of sound. (Lucy, Worthing Sound Sparks)

These differing responses may also speak to the different motivations and interests of the participants. Billie, who was struck by the injustices of the redevelopment acoustic design is a geography academic; the other visitors who focused on listening discoveries are practitioners working in the creative sector. This resonates with the PhD findings that interrogated the "plural listening positionalities" of residents: how previous experiences including professional roles

can influence and interact with the way people listen and pay attention to specific aspects of their acoustic environment.

This mix of professional roles was a distinct group dynamic that differed from the other public events. For example, the policy-related professionals had originally engaged with the project through invitation to the pilot. One participant reflected on how the play activities raised some discomfort mainly because they were attending in their professional capacity. The playing sections, such as with pebbles on the beach, raised worries about whether this was a productive way to spend their time. This chimes with the residents' pilot discussion about play being an unusual activity for adults due to the pressure of not wasting time. The Worthing ILW route allowed for substantial time on beach (in contrast to the other sites) due to the flat topography and accessibility of the promenade. The beach would traditionally be viewed as a place of leisure and play. Yet across the Worthing delivery, playing on the beach was disarming for many of the participants and viewed as out of the norm for a group of adults, regardless of being residents or professionals. Although the focus of this PhD and post-doctoral research has been on listening, the component of play is another area that warrants further exploration, especially as a way of listening with others.

Brighton Sound Sparks 2.0

The Brighton event required more promotion to secure bookings, with double the amount of email invites sent out compared to the other sites. This recruitment drive led to 14 people booking on and good attendance (12) on the day. Three participants knew the neighbourhood but did not live in Brighton. There was a mix of overlapping identities: six primarily attended as interested Brighton residents living in other neighbourhoods, four academics/post-graduates, and two creative practitioners. This large group was the most positive in their feedback and engaged in detailed discussion and debates of the PhD findings in the post-walk section. Interestingly, the Brighton ILW was the one we were most familiar and practiced with as facilitators, which may have allowed the event to run more smoothly.

There was in-depth engagement with listening as a way into the topic and reflective exploration of the issues. As expressed by one participant:

Our ears are open to the brilliant sounds, and then it's really difficult because there's this friction where there's the sounds that some of us probably don't want to hear. Feel like they're intruding. (Corky, Brighton Sound Spark)

Rather than sharing differing viewpoints on neighbourhood change, the main exchange of differences centred around individual experiences of listening and navigating neighbourhoods. There was rich discussion about hearing impairments, neurodiversity, and the use of technological aids. As explained by one participant:

I also put in, like my airpods because I've been using them as hearing aids, because I'm on the NHS waiting list, for actual hearing aids because I'm hard of hearing. And I was actually wanting to pay attention to this a little bit more, because already being hard of hearing I close things off so much because I can't hear things anyway. But then being at the White Street Garden has been mentioned. You know, the birds were just like almost overwhelming. Like with the hearing aid support and with the contrast of just this almost weird absence sound that was happening at the development. And then suddenly this like full, layered sound experience. (Molly, Brighton Sound Sparks)

Another participant responded by sharing their own experience with urban listening and the positive experience during the ILW:

I just think for me was, what really stuck out for me, was sort of feeling less overwhelmed than I thought I would with like the urban sounds. Cos I'm like neurodivergent, so I wear like loops to sort of cut out, cos I find that quite sensory overwhelming and that kind of yeah, just really enjoyed that space of just transitioning through the things, didn't feel as overwhelmed as I thought I would be, which is kind of quite nice. (Rob, Brighton Sound Sparks)

However, another participant shared that they had the 'opposite' experience due to their neurodivergency, finding it difficult to separate out the sounds in the Deep Listening exercise. They had hoped that the redevelopment listening spot would create a kind of "sound shelter" as a residential area, 'but the noise coming from the street was kind of like tunnelling through the corridor of the street'.

There was generally more consensus about the topic, both about the causes and negative impacts of gentrification in Brighton. This supports the PhD findings that identified varying stages of gentrification across the three sites, and explored residents' ways of making sense of these, called "seaside gentrification narratives". Brighton is viewed in a stage of mature gentrification, which was borne out in the public group's consensus over the gentrifying causes and impacts. In contrast, in Worthing there is debate over the extent of gentrification, evident both in the 2020 research activities and the public event discussion in 2024. This indicates that despite the PhD research being conducted four years prior, the findings still hold enduring relevance. The acceptance of mature gentrification in Brighton led the group to consider future changes as well as what could be done about these issues. For example, many of the participants enjoyed listening in the launderette, yet one participant wondered 'whether with gentrification, will those oases, even the laundrette continue to exist?' Many shared both frustration over housing inequalities and the disenfranchisement of communities from planning processes and consultations. As expressed by one participant:

It's just to get the quotes and to tick the boxes and like sort of, yeah, make people feel like they have any decision power. But it doesn't. At least you won't have this power as participants in that mechanism. But if you create your own like, you know, you still have power to change things. And that's what I believe and that's why I think it's really important to have this kind of approach to it as well. Because you can, like architects and developers they don't do soundwalks. They don't like feel the city. They just like, fill it with new shiny buildings. But if they did soundwalks maybe they'd have an actual first-hand experience that would inform the design, unlike all this sad green space we've seen. (Beatrice, Brighton Sound Sparks)

Many appreciated the ILW as an intervention in public spaces, not just an engagement tool. For example, most participants had enthusiastically engaged with playing the sculpture in the redevelopment site with soft beaters. In the post-walk discussion, one participant suggested regular sonic performances to bring the life and vibrancy originally promised by the developers. Reflecting back to Bethan's original intentions, she had wanted to get people to think about their own positionings in gentrification and potential actions, which this public event worked towards.

However, as a researcher, Bethan felt tensions over the purpose of this post-walk discussion, which was not completely clear, having emerged out of the co-creation process. This new addition allowed participants to share their thoughts and hear others' perspectives. But there was no clear ask or set of solutions being offered to the issues. Bethan reflected afterwards in the facilitators' debrief, that the Brighton session took the shape of a seminar, with the ILW being the "reading material" that allowed detailed critique and analysis to take place. One of the suggestions for changes in other groups was to include more information and context about gentrification, but this was not raised in this Brighton mixed group. It was interesting to see how the group instead shared their own knowledge of gentrification rather than looking to the facilitators to provide this. However, despite not asking for more information as a change to the event, the search for solutions and possible actions could indicate the need for further information resources that could be shared about housing policy options and campaigns.

St Leonards Sound Sparks 2.0

The St Leonards event took longer to get booked up, but we managed to secure 12 bookings and 10 people attended on the day. As mentioned earlier, we had less connections to the neighbourhood and only carried out one pilot, which influenced the level of pre-event engagement. Nevertheless, three pilot participants joined us for this public event. Two of the participants had taken part in the PhD research in 2020 and one person had been part of the Brighton public event. This event, which was the last in the project, therefore had the highest level of "re-engagement" out of all the ILWs. Bethan promoted the event to a range of people, including invites to local councillors and council officers. However, it was predominantly made up of residents and visitors - four neighbourhood residents and six Brighton residents, including one academic and one creative practitioner.

From the facilitators' perspective, it was the most challenging of all the delivery. It was a surprisingly sunny and warm Friday afternoon in October, which made the neighbourhood much busier, louder, and livelier than the pilot. In contrast, the pilot had taken place on a colder summer Monday afternoon, when many of the "tourist-oriented" shops were closed. We met outside the station with a constant flow of people coming and going. This added to the variety of sounds but also the intensity of urban listening, which spoke to the need for the "sound shelters" within the design. There was heavy traffic to negotiate both acoustically and to keep the group safe and together. Several participants in the pilot had suggested doing the walk at different times and seasons to see the changes, which was clearly evidenced in this contrast between the pilot and the public event. This sparked discussion about the seasonality of the seaside neighbourhood and also the presence of visitors or second homeowners during the weekend, with particular amenities opening up and different uses of the streets. This had been part of the PhD material, so it was interesting to see how this played out in the engagement activities.

The lack of public amenities and suitable accessible venues to hold the indoor post-walk discussion created some logistical challenges. During the pilot we had found the seafront café unsuitable due to loud music and interruptions that made listening to each other difficult. One of the participants kindly offered to host this end section of the event at a community art gallery which they are part of, located next to the station meeting point. The St Leonards ILW score is linear and ends at the seafront, so this required us walking back up to our beginning spot. Although useful for some participants to return to the station, it meant three participants

decided not to join us for this section and left the event at the seafront. These participants provided feedback over email to the feedback form questions.

In addition, these logistical challenges led to an incident at the beginning of the walk. The only public toilets on the walk were available on the seafront and are not well maintained. The gallery has special access to the station disabled toilet, usually locked to non-disabled customers. Many of the participants decided to make use before we started the walk, but this activity got attention from a member of the public who also wanted to use the toilet. This person became increasingly agitated when he was denied access and approached the whole group with verbal abuse. We had considered the possibility of challenging encounters with the public in our planning, but its occurrence on the tenth event took us by surprise. The incident was brief and we checked in with the group members after the person had left the area. Participants mostly shrugged this off in the moment, but it created an unfavourable atmosphere to ask people to close their eyes and take part in a Deep Listening exercise. No-one specifically brought up this incident in the feedback. Bethan checked in after the event with the hosting gallery member, who minimised the event as something he was accustomed to and not unusual in the neighbourhood. But this uncomfortable beginning was an important reminder of the challenges and risks of doing events outdoors in public spaces.

Due to the timings of walking back up the hill to the discussion venue, we had less time for the post-walk discussion. The written feedback (post-it notes and the emailed feedback) showed that the most significant aspect of the experience was around environmental sounds. Many of the participants made note of the types of sounds that they had observed, including the specific loudness of certain streets. This led to some reflections about listening practices, for example:

The richness of the sounds coupled with the feeling of overwhelm. This made me think about how I haven't noticed this before or I've just been irritated by a particularly obtrusive noise. It made me question if there has been a change in noise volume over time as St Leonards used to be a quieter place – at least that's my sense of how it used to be but I'm already questioning if that's a false memory. Certainly, there was more anti-social noise from people in the street (e.g., street drinkers) but perhaps less car traffic noise and general sounds of people at work and play, delivery vans, people parking etc. (written feedback)

The term “overwhelm” was used by others, which reflects our experiences as facilitators on the day trying to manage the density of activities ongoing in the area.

There was less discussion about the issues of gentrification, compared to the other public groups. Instead, the discussion focused on whether you can connect sound and gentrification; as noted by one person: ‘what auditory signals might you associate with gentrification?’ The participants who found it more challenging to connect to the topic of neighbourhood change were visitors. As one person observed:

...the whole experience of thinking about sounds and so on, and their relation to gentrification is still a bit, the relation is tenuous. Maybe I need to go and think about it, or maybe we need to kind of, like have, at the outset, a chat about the relation between gentrification and sound. Because I feel it's very subjective, you know. So I kind of, you know, I'm listening to the sounds, but maybe, you know, also trying to think how does that relate to gentrification? (Theodora, St Leonards Sound Sparks)

A couple who attended as visitors to the area also wrote in their feedback email:

Both of us were aware that we were hearing nothing new, as we live in another seaside town, and are used to the diversity of sounds that we experienced. (written feedback)

This difficulty in engaging in the topic for those with little or no experience of the neighbourhood indicates again the need for further exploration on this dynamic.

The post-walk discussion allowed others to respond to this relationship between gentrification and sound. One previous pilot participant explained how it was nuanced and subtle, which he had been able to further reflect on since the pilot. He maintained that sound was a significant way of thinking about the issues. For example, he explained the change in gulls due to Airbnb's and short-term visitors not managing their bins properly. Interestingly, Theodora went on to reflect that she had started to think about the sounds of dogs as a sign of gentrification. This sparked some beginning discussion about the association between loud/quiet preferences or behaviours with class and race. With more time, there might have been further engagement with the topic. The feedback also included the need for more information, especially before the event about the topic. This suggestion appears to be most prescient for mixed groups that includes people not familiar with the neighbourhood.

There were varying reactions to the play dimension, with a couple of people feeding back that they were uncertain about its purpose. The walk ends at the beach area, allowing for some exploration of pebbles and the acoustics of the Bottle Alley covered walkway. In the post-walk discussion, it sparked discussion over the changing soundscape of the beachfront. One participant noted that 'you've always heard music' there, but that 'the sources are different'. He explained that there has often been people playing instruments or music from speakers, but now it's 'funky bars opening up because people around here now have money to spend in funky bars'. The importance of music in the neighbourhood was noted by one resident, with another suggesting that this could be an interesting theme for another ILW. One visitor pondered whether 'the process of gentrification will lead to everyone just shutting up and being, you know, very prim and proper and no music and no other sound'. Although play garners differing reactions, it appears to prompt interesting reflections about public space. Similar to the Worthing site of play near Bayside, playing in this area in St Leonards tapped into discussions about acceptable/unacceptable behaviours and changes that bring about exclusions such as the need to spend money.

6. Key listening findings

This final section looks across the co-creation process, consultation, and public events to respond to this third research question:

How do ILWs engage people in listening to urban seaside gentrification on the UK south coast sites?

There was a wealth of material generated about how listening-based activities engaged the participants in the research findings. Six main dimensions have been identified through analysis, which are discussed below.

Sparkling curiosity, learning and new discoveries

All of the ILWs sparked curiosity, learning, and new discoveries for each participant. These can be grouped into three main areas of learning:

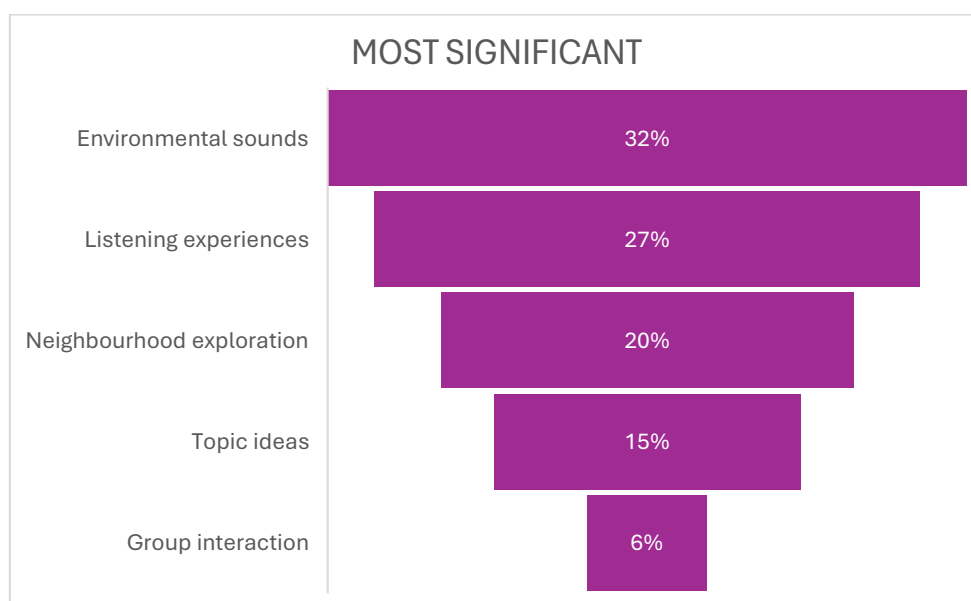
- listening practices
- the Sussex neighbourhoods
- processes of urban seaside gentrification

This dimension chimes with good practice around research engagement, which upholds inspiring learning and stimulating curiosity as key components (Duncan & Spicer, 2010). The ILWs were regarded as a novelty and this offered appeal for recruitment, sparking curiosity before the ILW took place. In the feedback forms, over half of the pilot participants stated motivations around ‘doing something new’ or being curious about this ‘intriguing methodology’. This therefore initiated curiosity about how we listen and indicates participants’ openness to learn, as expressed in one pilot:

Because we just take it for granted don’t we? And you know, visually, that's what I feel is my primary...I think you said at the beginning, you know, you were talking about how we spend most of our time shutting out noise, not embracing it and I think this has reminded me actually how important my hearing is and, and what it tells me. (Annie, professionals’ group 1)

Consequently, across the ILWs the most common learning was around participants’ relationship and responses to different types of sounds and the acoustic environment. One question was asked to all groups (pilots and the public events): *During the ILW, what was most significant for you?* The chart below shows that environmental sounds and the listening experiences account for over half of the answers to this question:

Chart 3: Feedback answers collated across all ILWs



Within the PhD research, the different ways that sound stimulates responses had been grouped into a “sound stimuli typology”. These played out in the ILWs and can be clearly identified in the

feedback forms and post-walk discussions. A few examples of these are included below from the focus groups:

<p>Sound layers: sound that the listener describes as having a notable quality</p>	<p>I found myself thinking about the layers of sound. How some noises were constant or repeating, others came in, swept by or were lost. Sometimes a peep or a screech. Again found myself thinking about music, the different lines, fitting together.</p> <p>...being in the park and really being able to hear that bird song, but still, it was still competing against the building works that were going on and I'm a kind of city person really, but I love the countryside as well, and I kind of like that little mad mishmash of town and country.</p> <p>I felt more relaxed as I was sort of trying to engage with the environment, rather than sort of edgy sounds or something like that, like industrial noises as well. I suppose that can, you know, that's of course harmonising into the environment that we're walking into. It's still industrial, it's always industrial noises. But then nature always finds a way, doesn't it?</p>
<p>Sound surprises: sound that is unexpected by the listener</p>	<p>I was surprised of how much I could listen and the different layers of sound (i.e. close by, away, up and inside my body).</p> <p>I guess I was thinking, "Oh God, going into Laundrette, it's like, where are you going to do your work that you want to do? It's hot, smelly, it's noisy, clunking, and I don't know, just the sound of the machine going round, it was going to be hectic", and it's the complete opposite of that.</p> <p>It helped me tune into what I value and what I want to have and what I choose to put aside and what I don't and kind of what I feel. And I think that was, that surprised me through sound.</p> <p>I just think for me was, what really stuck out for me, was sort of feeling less overwhelmed than I thought I would with like the urban sounds.</p>
<p>Sound sparks: sound that triggers the listener to discuss and share their thoughts about a particular topic</p>	<p>I guess it made me just think a bit more about gentrification.</p> <p>Hearing that drill, which seemed to dominate, just appreciating that comes with development in that way, but how that dominates and you could feel, I could almost feel that drill like vibrating inside me. But in that in that way, that actually as soon as that is switched off then you, you it's much more calm and peaceful. But if you're living next door to a development like that and something's going on for three years, that is going to have a really detrimental effect on your, your own space in your own, you know, your own peaceful, you know, peaceful haven, I suppose.</p> <p>I like that, the idea of like, cause it sounds, you know, that idea of like gain and loss and who gains and who loses, and then by using sound as a way of focusing on that, loss or that choice of what you want to have or what you don't want to have kind of helps you.</p>

<p>Sound stories: sound that stimulates the listener to share a personal story or memory</p>	<p>And there are, you know, buildings, that are things that I was sort of reminiscing of little bits as well, especially in the American Express area, that area. I remember it as it was.</p> <p>I've just done the town's book festival, which was about the two, um, tunnels, of St Leonards Warrior Square. And looking back at the old pictures I did for, pictures to get together, I'm just sitting there thinking, I wonder what sounds would have been like.</p> <p>Because all I could see was horse and carts. Lots of individual shops on King's Road. So I'm wondering if it would have been more verbal.</p> <p>I don't really think about sound provoking memories or invoking memories, but when you are, what I found myself doing was taken back to a memory I hadn't ever remember before, which was paddle boarding with my daughter during lockdown. And it happened, it was the combination of being there and listening to the waves outside of the place where we got the boards, that made me think about, that made me think about that memory which hadn't I might not have come back to me without that.</p>
---	--

This typology is a helpful framing for understanding how curiosity, learning, and new discoveries are stimulated in the ILWs. We also incorporated these into the ILWs by setting these as questions for framing pair discussions during the walk.

The curiosity sparked by the ILWs is also demonstrated by the amount of participants who stated they would like or intend to do more listening-based activities. This is another part of the “re-engagement” discussed earlier in the report. Many pilot participants were interested in doing the ILW again and several attended the public events. Four professionals stated interest in using the listening tools in their practice. There was mainly an appetite for the Deep Listening exercise, with ideas of how to use this with groups as part of consultation or community development activities. Post-walk communication with participants also shows that several participants have tried out listening again and/or kept discussing the issues. For example, one participant who took part in the PhD research and residents’ pilot, explained that they had purposively changed how they walk around their neighbourhood because of the experience. Another pilot participant who took part in the public event also explained that they have kept on attentively listening in the seafront area since the ILW experiences. This level of post-event engagement is testament to the level of curiosity and new discoveries that the ILWs sparked for participants.

Making use of the distinct qualities of listening

The ILW design approach allowed us to make use of the distinct qualities of listening to create meaningful connections with the surrounding environment, other people, and place-based issues. This builds on the first dimension by purposively utilising the ways that sounds stimulate curiosity to engage participants with the specific issues of urban seaside gentrification. The exercises were designed to prompt ideas and further questions, rather than leave participants to listen unguided or unsupported. Most participants were not accustomed to attentive environmental listening and participants valued being supported to listen through the ILW format. Each walk began with a Deep Listening exercise (Oliveros, 2005) which was striking for many as a way of tuning into the surrounding sounds. Through this tuning in, many

became surprised by how their listening experience did not match their expectations of specific sites. This mismatch allowed discussion and reflection about the specific dynamics of each site and people's relationships to these changes. A good example of this was the "sounding out" of Bayside new build apartments in Worthing, as already discussed in the report. Attentive listening and moving around the building allowed participants to notice the changing soundscape and its acoustic design, which in turn prompted questions about "sound privilege" and redevelopment.

A "plural listening" approach was important in supporting this dimension. This was identified in the PhD research and is a significant part of community music approach. It is about valuing and embracing the different ways that people listen, rather than assuming a universal listening experience. We incorporated different listening tools and gave options for participants to support this. This also led to participants sharing their different experiences, as discussed previously.

We also developed new tools that could further support how listening could be a way into the topic. For example, in the St Leonards ILW we invited participants to embark on their own individual listening quest along a street, with the option to go into shops. This allowed us to support a group to explore the changing retail spaces of the street, which had been highlighted as significant in the PhD research. We would not have been able to take large groups into the shops, but this exercise offered a site-appropriate approach whilst also allowing choice for participants.

A particularly striking quality of sound and listening is around time. As identified in the previous dimension, sound stories show how sounds can transport people to different times through memories or personal stories. It can also prompt thinking about how a place sounded in the past or may sound like in the future. This aspect generated rich discussions in the focus groups that opened up discussion about gentrifying change. Thus the ILWs design allowed us to employ the distinct qualities of sound and listening to engage people in thinking about the topic.

However it is important to note that connecting to the topic through listening did not always work for every participant. As discussed in the public events, some queried the purpose of the ILW or shared that they found it hard to connect with the issues of gentrification in the neighbourhood. This was mostly for participants who did not know the neighbourhood well, which is a dynamic that requires further exploration.

An unusual intervention in everyday experiences

We discovered that the ILWs could be considered an intervention in the everyday experiences of living, working and moving through the neighbourhoods. This was noted across the post-walk discussions and was a significant part of how the ILWs creatively engaged participants in the neighbourhood and topic.

Slowing down was frequently discussed as a significant part of the experience, connected to being given permission to listen and explore the neighbourhoods differently from everyday practices, which chimes with soundwalk methods (Smolicki, 2023). Pace was discussed in each of the focus groups:

There's various sorts of social pressures and pace pressures of time to get somewhere being the most important thing and the bit in between is kind of wasted...so this

soundwalk, I think it was really nice to be able to slow down and to appreciate the time spent on the journey. (Discobunny, professionals' group 2)

This speaks to the challenges of urban listening, encountered by Bela and I during the design, that requires filtering out sounds to navigate everyday life. Many participants explained how they use aids to avoid being overwhelmed, especially those experiencing aural diversity through neurodivergency or hearing impairments (Drever & Hugill, 2022). The intensity and plurality of listening required a mixture of activities for accessibility and inclusivity. Without aids, one participant described everyday listening as having 'a pair of blinkers on' (Trevor, residents' group 3). This was associated with the need to be productive, such as getting from A to B as a resident or being on tight professional timescales.

This intervention enabled new explorations of public space, which connects to processes of gentrification. Participants frequently compared the ILW experience with how they normally navigate the neighbourhood. For example, finding it unusual to stop in specific places or not feeling comfortable to. This prompted discussion about where we might feel comfortable or not comfortable to spend time or listen, which in turn prompted thoughts about exclusions and inclusions from public space. This included discussion about increasingly expensive facilities, not feeling welcome, or it not being clear whether a place is for the general public or not. Green spaces were commonly valued across the groups, especially community gardens in the Brighton ILW, as places where it was acceptable to spend time and not spend money.

Participants themselves often identified these listening tools as an intervention. As mentioned previously, many stated they would use the deep listening practice again. In the focus groups, these tools were discussed as "free" and as a radical way to spend time somewhere without spending money or being on a mobile phone consuming social media. Therefore the ILW acted as an intervention during the event but also offered future intervening tools for how participants spend time in the neighbourhoods.

Careful and responsive curation of listening, walking and playing

The ILW format can effectively engage a range of people in listening to urban seaside gentrification through careful and responsive curation of listening, walking, and playing activities. The first two dimensions are only made possible because of this ILW design approach. A mixture of different types of activities was necessary for a number of reasons. Firstly, it supported participants' different listening practice and positionalities, as part of embracing "plural listening". Secondly, the intensity and challenges of urban listening and the variations between each site required different types of activities. This curation helped cut through the sensory "overwhelm" that many participants identified in everyday navigations of the neighbourhoods.

Deep Listening was valued by the majority of participants as a way of facilitating attentive and heightened listening. Combined with silent walking and silent stops, participants were able to notice and explore a range of complex "sound layers". As described by one participants, these different listening exercises helped participants open up their usual "blinkers". Where we chose to walk and listen was also important, with many valuing the route and contrasting or unusual places incorporated into the route. There was the need to find contrasting places to listen to, including "sound shelters" or "oases" as several participants referred to them as. The role of readings was significant as another stimulus within the listening spots. These brought in contrasting perspectives and provided information and context. This enabled learning but also

different viewpoints to be heard from the PhD research, and was the most directive of the activities towards the topic. The interactive activities were also an important component. The contested role of play has been discussed throughout the report. On the whole, the music-making activities provided another dimension to exploring the neighbourhood, allowing the participants to embrace being active sound-makers. It was also disarming for many and this discomfort allowed for insightful discussions related to the topic to emerge. However play as listening practice need to be further explored, an area we are learning about as ILW practitioners. Finally, it was important to create structured time for participants to talk with each other, through whole group discussion and in pairs. Many shared how much they valued learning from others and the group dynamic.

Accessible and inclusive engagement journey

The ILWs were able to create an accessible and inclusive engagement journey for the majority of participants. This was as a result of responding to the range of different motivations and needs. This stems from both the participatory research and community music practices that we drew from in guiding the design decisions and delivery approach. As well as being responsive to each site, we were person-centred and group-responsive. This is most evident in the community group pilots where we created bespoke sessions in collaboration with the groups' support workers. But we also ensured there was open and active communication with all participants. For example, we used Participant Information Sheets and Consent Forms to make clear to each participant what they were taking part in and to cover ethical issues. Bethan checked with each participant if there was anything we should be aware of about listening or walking before the events. Although this was time-intensive, it ensured smoother running on the day and helped to manage the expectations of participants.

As part of the consultation design, we had identified the different combinations of experiences and relationships to the topic and neighbourhoods. This also helped us respond to differing motivations. Although these pilots were experiments and we were continually learning why participants wanted to take part and what appealed about the ILWs. This is particularly the case for participants in the public events who were visitors to the neighbourhoods and did not necessarily bring any priori experience or knowledge of the sites. As discussed in the report, it appears that this created some distance for participants in being able to connect to the issues, which is an interesting area to explore further.

Through the 10 ILWs we were able to test out how accessible the format is across a variety of support needs. This includes neurodiversity, different age groups, learning disabilities, physical disabilities, mental health as well as support needs in relation to homelessness. These pilots were a good indication of accessibility, however there are many other groups that are missing from these pilots which further work would need to consult with to ensure inclusivity.

Listening together and conditions for dialogue

The final dimension is one we had not expected. We found that ILWs facilitated valued time for people to listen together and this appears to have created generative conditions for dialogue and debate about complex place-based policy issues. The group dynamic of listening together was significant in multiple ways for participants. Many discussed how it is unusual to be silent with others, especially with strangers as part of a group activity. Some reported struggling with this whilst others embraced it, and this exchange enabled participants to share plural listening

experiences. Alongside gaining understanding about each other's different neighbourhood experiences, several participants felt that the focus on listening created a "levelling" effect. There was structured time for discussion during the walk, as a whole group and in pairs, which we designed for varied opportunities to talk. We found that it also created positive conditions for dialogue. This was an unanticipated benefit of the tool, part of the "serendipity" of impact (Pain et al. 2015). As described by one participant:

It's really good to spend that amount of time, and to kind of come together, and I really liked the way that we did it with silent listening and then coming together and having little conversations. I thought it was a really nice mixture of communal conversation about our experience and just listening. (Blossom, community group 2)

Initial analysis shows that structured listening and talking combined with practicing different ways of listening supported people to be able to listen to each other. Listening to the environment enabled 'shared attunement and capacities for understanding or care' (LaBelle, 2021, p.4). It also allowed people to take turns with listening and speaking and these dynamics were appreciated by many participants.

For some it was an antidote to everyday practices:

Because the art of conversation has definitely got going. I'm not going to say it's definitely gone. We can come here. It's like everyone's trying to be silenced. Or here people walk past with their iPods on or something like that. No one wants to engage with the environment around them. That's what we've tried to do today. (Crazy Pie, community group 2)

Others identified the tool as offering wider potential for community consultation and democratic processes:

I think the whole process of just doing an hour and a half of listening, with a varied group of people, finding out the experiences they have on it, is a tool that could be so crucial to helping shape and build sort of not just structures, but better communities as well. (Diamond, professionals' group 1)

This was especially the case for the professionals' group who discussed the perpetual challenges of meaningfully involving a range of people in planning processes within the restricted resources of local council cuts.

There were moments of disagreement during the walks and in the focus group discussions. But overall, participants agreed on the collective acoustic experience of the walk, and this created common ground from which to debate the reasons behind and consequences of these complex issues. Although the main project design was to consult with different stakeholders separately, the mixed groups allowed us to begin to explore this ILW tool for dialogue across different groups. This created a hopeful end to this research engagement project and raises ideas for future research into how listening to the environment together can help people listen to each other. As expressed by one participant:

I think it's very interesting because the whole process apart from anything else brings everyone to the same level to some extent. So I think it'd be really good to get a few policy makers...you know, a mixture...I think that people would be more able to kind of communicate with each other. (Vivian, residents' group 3)

There are different groups patterns that we identified as facilitators that would be interesting to explore further within this. There is the dynamic of existing group vs strangers, which created different facilitation challenges, as discussed earlier. There is the importance of being familiar or new to neighbourhood, with indications that “out of towners” find it harder to connect to the topic compared to residents. Furthermore, this leads to questions about different relationship to the neighbourhoods, degrees of a sense of responsibility and investment, and differing place positionalities.

This dimension in particular demonstrates the potential for ILWs, and more generally listening-based activities, to be used as creative effective tools for policy consultations and engagement. Within the policy-related professionals groups, there was an interest in such creative tools to help with the challenges of widening consultations to people who do not usually take part. From the residential groups, there was also some appetite in having more of a say in neighbourhood changes and different ways to take part in local democracy. ILWs could present a unique way forwards for policy engagement.

7. Conclusion

This post-doctoral project has enabled three ILWs about complex place-based findings to be co-created and consulted on. A range of people have been involved in this process and their generous feedback has generated insightful findings about how we can listening together to urban seaside gentrification.

Summary of findings

- i. **How can Interactive Listening Walks focused on research findings be co-created?**
 - By applying the participatory, site, and topic-responsive components of the ILW design approach and adding new techniques to its toolbox
 - Through the shared working and creative practices developed between a researcher and creative practitioner
 - Owing to the foundations built from a long-term mutually beneficial community-university partnership that accompanied the research
- ii. **How can a range of people be consulted with, as part of the ILWs co-creation?**
 - By recruiting three specific groups to pilot the ILWs and participate in focus groups: residents, community groups & policy-related professionals
 - Using a criteria based on distinct combinations of experiences, knowledge, and relationships to the neighbourhood and the topic

- As a result of designing bespoke and agile sessions that support and respond to the specific motivations, needs, and dynamics of these three groups

iii. How do ILWs engage people in listening to urban seaside gentrification in the three Sussex neighbourhoods?

- By sparking curiosity, learning and new discoveries across three key areas: listening practices, the Sussex neighbourhoods, and processes of urban seaside gentrification
- Through making use of the distinct qualities of listening that can create meaningful connections with the surrounding environment, other people, and place-based issues
- As an unusual intervention in the everyday experiences of living, working, and moving through the neighbourhoods
- Through careful and responsive curation of listening, walking and playing activities as part of the ILW design approach
- By responding to a range of different motivations and needs to create an accessible and inclusive engagement journey
- By facilitating valued time to listen together and thereby support conditions for dialogue and debate about complex place-based policy issues

Why is this important?

This project has generated findings and new ideas for future research, had a positive impact on its participants, sustained a community-university partnership, and developed new networks and relationships. Crucially, it has:

- created a novel and innovated tool for research dissemination and engagement
- evaluated how participatory listening activities can engage a range of people in complex place-based issues
- demonstrated the potential of Interactive Listening Walks, and participatory listening more generally, as a tool for consultation and engagement in policy and planning
- contributed to understandings about gentrification as a sonic experience
- identified new areas of research, namely the relationship between environmental and political listening: how does listening together to the environment enable and support listening to each other?

It is hoped that many of the participants will keep on listening to their neighbourhoods and surrounding environments. Bela and Bethan plan to continue collaborating and developing new ILW and listening-based projects, both as community-based projects and through research funding.

8. Acknowledgements

We would like to thank:

- All the participants who took part in the ILW event for giving their time, being open to the journey and generous with their feedback.
- Brighton & Hove Music for Connection's team for delivery and support: Sally Godwin for administrative support; Hannah for social media volunteer support; Matt Smith, Harriet Parry and Rachel Wilson for pilot ILW volunteer support
- The community groups who supported the project: Community Works, Just Life & Amaze
- Venues and those providing vital refreshments: Splash point Leisure Centre, Coast Café, Fitzherbert's Community Hub, Real Junk Food Project, Goat Ledge café & Zoom Arts Gallery
- Supportive listening spot hosts: White Street Community Garden & St James Street Launderette
- University of Brighton Academic mentor for guidance and support: Mary Darking
- Publicity design support: Paul Stapleton

This project would not have been possible without funding from: Economic & Social Research Council, South Coast Doctoral Training Partnership, Post-doctoral Fellowship Award no. ES/Y010388/1

9. Further information

Brighton & Hove Music for Connection: <https://musicforconnection.co.uk/>

Brighton Kemptown recruitment video: <https://vimeo.com/922488985>

Hastings Online Times article, Wednesday, Apr 10, 2024:

<https://hastingsonlinetimes.co.uk/hastings-life/society/listen-for-gentrification-in-st-leonards>

LaBelle, B. (2020) *Acoustic Justice: Listening, Performativity & the Work of Reorientations*. USA: Bloomsbury Publishing.

Prosser, B.M. (2022) *Listening to urban seaside gentrification: living with displacement in/justices on the UK south coast*. PhD Thesis. Available at:

<https://research.brighton.ac.uk/en/studentTheses/listening-to-urban-seaside-gentrification>

Prosser, B.M., Emerson, B. and Gill, E., 2023. Defining in the doing: listening and reflecting in a community–university collaboration. *Research for All*, 7(1), pp.1-8.

St Leonards recruitment video: <https://vimeo.com/935362103>

Worthing recruitment video: <https://vimeo.com/917998113>



University of Brighton

SC.DTP.

**South Coast
Doctoral Training
Partnership**



**Economic
and Social
Research Council**

