

KLP DESIGN SOLUTIONS

KIT POWELL · UX & BEHAVIOURAL PSYCHOLOGY CONSULTANT

DOCUMENT 2 OF 2 · LEADERSHIP

Executive Summary

A review of the motivational, cognitive and trust mechanics of the Harbourly booking application, prepared for the leadership team.

CLIENT

Harbourly Ltd

PROJECT

Harbourly Mobile & Web Redesign

DISCIPLINES COVERED

· **Behavioural psychology**

DATE OF ISSUE

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PREPARED BY

Kit Powell

VERSION

1.0 — Final

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This document is designed to be read on its own. Full detail sits in the Behavioural Psychology Audit Report.

Sample report. "Harbourly" is a fictional product created to illustrate the format, structure and depth of a KLP Design Solutions audit. All findings are invented and client screenshots are omitted.

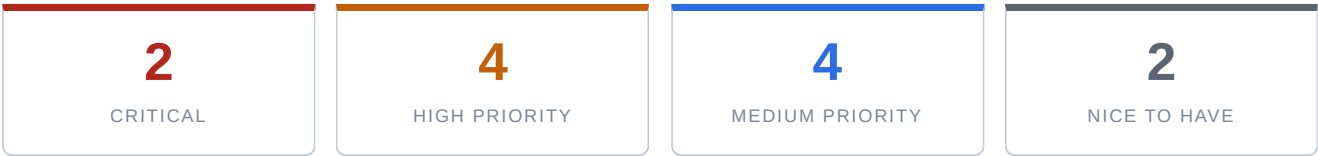
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The position in one page

Harbourly's psychological problem is not that it manipulates guests; it is that it spends its trust before it has earned any. The product presents well and makes people feel capable while they are browsing, then withdraws confidence at every moment that involves money — which are precisely the moments guests remember when deciding whether to book again.

Two coercive patterns do most of the damage. Urgency messaging is displayed regardless of real activity, and cancelling takes five screens where booking takes three taps. Both work in the short term. Both fail badly on discovery, and both now carry regulatory exposure under strengthened UK consumer protection powers.

Meanwhile the genuine sources of motivation in this category — anticipation, planning, the pleasure of imagining a trip — are almost entirely unused. The product treats booking as a transaction to close rather than a decision to support, and that framing costs it both conversion and repeat custom. Of the twelve findings in this report, the two most serious are deletions rather than builds.



WHAT THIS REVIEW COVERED

This engagement was a behavioural psychology audit: motivation, cognitive load, trust and the mechanics that determine whether people commit and return. Visual design quality and general usability were not systematically assessed, and nothing in this document should be read as a judgement on them.

Behavioural health check

A high-level measure of the product's psychological posture before the detailed findings: whether people engage because they want to, what the product costs them mentally, and whether it earns trust before spending it.

Motivational health

Scored against self-determination theory — the standard model of what makes engagement voluntary rather than pressured.

NEED	HOW WELL IT IS SERVED	WHAT DRIVES THE SCORE
Autonomy Feeling in control of one's choices	2/5	Manufactured urgency, forced registration, pre-ticked consent and an unpausable countdown. The product narrows choice rather than supporting it.
Competence Feeling capable and effective	3/5	Search and filtering make people feel effective; error handling makes failures feel like their fault.
Relatedness Feeling connected to other people	2/5	Hosts are almost invisible and reviews are reduced to a number. The strongest relational asset in the category is unused.

Coercive mechanics present

PATTERN	PRESENT	WHERE
Manufactured urgency	YES	Every property page.
Drip pricing	YES	Fees revealed at step 6 of 7.
Roach motel	YES	Three taps to book, five screens to cancel.
False scarcity	PARTIAL	"Only 2 left at this price" where price is not tiered.
Confirmshaming	PARTIAL	Notification opt-out wording.
Preselection	PARTIAL	Marketing consent pre-ticked.
Forced continuity	NO	No subscription mechanics.
Disguised advertising	NO	Promoted listings clearly labelled.

Trust across the journey

MOMENT	NET EFFECT	WHAT THE GUEST IS ASKING, AND WHAT THEY GET
First impression	BUILDS	"Is this a real company?" — answered well.
Property page	MIXED	"Is this listing honest?" — undermined by fabricated urgency.
Account creation	ERODES	"Why do you need all this?" — unanswered.
Price reveal	ERODES	"Were you straight with me?" — an 18% rise answers no.
Payment entry	MIXED	"Is my card safe?" — no reassurance offered.
Payment error	ERODES	"Have you taken my money?" — left unanswered.
Confirmation	MIXED	"Is this definitely happening?" — confirmed, but coldly.
Cancellation	ERODES	"Can I get out of this?" — hidden, refund unstated.

WHAT THIS SAYS

Trust is built early and spent late. The product presents well, then erodes confidence at every moment involving money — and those are the moments guests remember when deciding whether to book again. Engagement meanwhile runs almost entirely on pressure rather than on the anticipation that makes holiday planning enjoyable, which keeps acquisition cost permanent rather than amortising it across repeat custom.

02

What works well

Strengths of the product's current psychological posture. These are assets to protect during any redesign.

✓ **No subscription traps or disguised advertising**

Promoted listings are labelled and there are no forced-continuity mechanics. The commercial posture is more honest than the urgency messaging suggests.

✓ **Search makes people feel capable**

The filter taxonomy matches how guests actually narrow a choice and results return quickly. Competence is the one psychological need the product serves well, and it is served in the place that matters most for discovery.

✓ **The product does not nag**

Prompts are not repeated after dismissal. A refusal is respected, which is more restraint than most consumer products show.

✓ **Language is plain and free of manipulation**

Outside the urgency messaging, the copy does not use trick wording, double negatives or misleading framing. The problems are of what the copy fails to say, not of deception.

✓ **Reviews carry genuine weight**

Review volume is real and visible, and it does substantial work in building confidence during evaluation. The opportunity is to make it feel like people rather than a number.

✓ **Progress through checkout is disclosed honestly**

"Step 3 of 7" tells guests the truth about how much is left, where many competitors deliberately obscure it. That honesty is worth protecting even while improving how it is framed.

03

Biggest psychological misalignments

The most consequential findings from the Behavioural Psychology Audit Report.

ID	MISALIGNMENT AND CONSEQUENCE	PRIORITY
BP-01	Urgency messaging is manufactured rather than real. "3 people are looking at this right now" appears regardless of actual activity. It works until a guest notices, at which point they revise their view not of the message but of the company. There is also live regulatory exposure — the CMA has taken enforcement action against this practice in online booking.	● CRITICAL
BP-02	Three taps to book, five screens to cancel. Difficult cancellation does not prevent cancellation; it converts it into a support call and a grievance, at the last interaction before the next booking decision.	● CRITICAL
BP-07	A late price rise forces the whole decision to be re-made under a countdown. Drip pricing creates the loss and the timer removes the ability to process it calmly. This is the highest-abandonment-risk moment in the product.	● HIGH PRIORITY
BP-08	Payment failures leave guests unsure whether they have been charged. "Error 4021" at the moment a guest most needs certainty. The most trust-destructive screen in the product, resolved by writing better sentences.	● HIGH PRIORITY
BP-05	The emotional peak of the journey is met with "Transaction complete". Confirmation is both the peak and the ending, which is what guests remember and describe. Spending nothing there is spending nothing at the only moment they are fully receptive.	● HIGH PRIORITY

04

Highest impact changes before launch

Drawn from all three documents and ordered by impact for effort. This is the list to work from.

01

Remove fabricated urgency; use real scarcity — BP-01
A deletion. Removes the largest trust liability and the clearest regulatory risk. Real demand data in this category is genuinely persuasive and survives scrutiny.

Low effort
Critical

02

Rebuild the confirmation screen around the stay — BP-05
Property, dates, host and countdown instead of a reference number. Changes what guests remember and repeat.

Low effort
High

03

Design dark mode properly rather than inverting it — UI-03
A five-step elevation ramp and desaturated brand colours for the dark theme. Token-level work with no layout change, affecting roughly a third of mobile users on the theme they use every evening.

Medium effort
Critical

04

Consolidate the design tokens — UI-08
Replace hard-coded values with token references and add a lint rule rejecting literals. Enabling work: it makes every other fix in this report substantially cheaper.

High effort
High

05

Standardise on one primary button treatment — UI-07
Retire the gradient and shadow variants and enforce one primary per screen in the component library. Restores the product's most valuable piece of visual vocabulary.

Medium effort
High

06

Reduce corner radii, shadows and loading indicators to one set each — UI-10, UI-13, UI-14
Immediately visible as an overall lift in polish, with no functional risk attached.

Low effort
Medium

07

Make cancellation visible and state the refund — BP-02
One link on the confirmation screen and in the email, plus the exact refund figure before the confirm step. Removes the asymmetry between how easy it is to commit and how hard it is to leave.

Low effort
Critical

08

Rewrite payment failure messages — BP-08
State the money position first — "no payment has been taken" — then the cause, then the next step. Copy only, and it resolves the most trust-destructive screen in the product.

Low effort
High

09

Show the all-in price before the point of commitment — BP-07

Removes the late loss that forces guests to re-make the entire decision under a countdown, and defuses the highest-abandonment-risk moment in the journey.

Medium effort

High

10

Add reassurance at the point of payment — BP-09

A security statement, card scheme marks and a one-line restatement of the cancellation policy above the pay button. Their absence is itself a signal, and guests read it.

Low effort

Medium

11

Neutralise the notification prompt and untick marketing consent — BP-03, BP-10

Equal-weight buttons, a concrete reason to accept, and consent unticked by default. Removes a reactance cost and a GDPR exposure in the same change.

Low effort

Medium

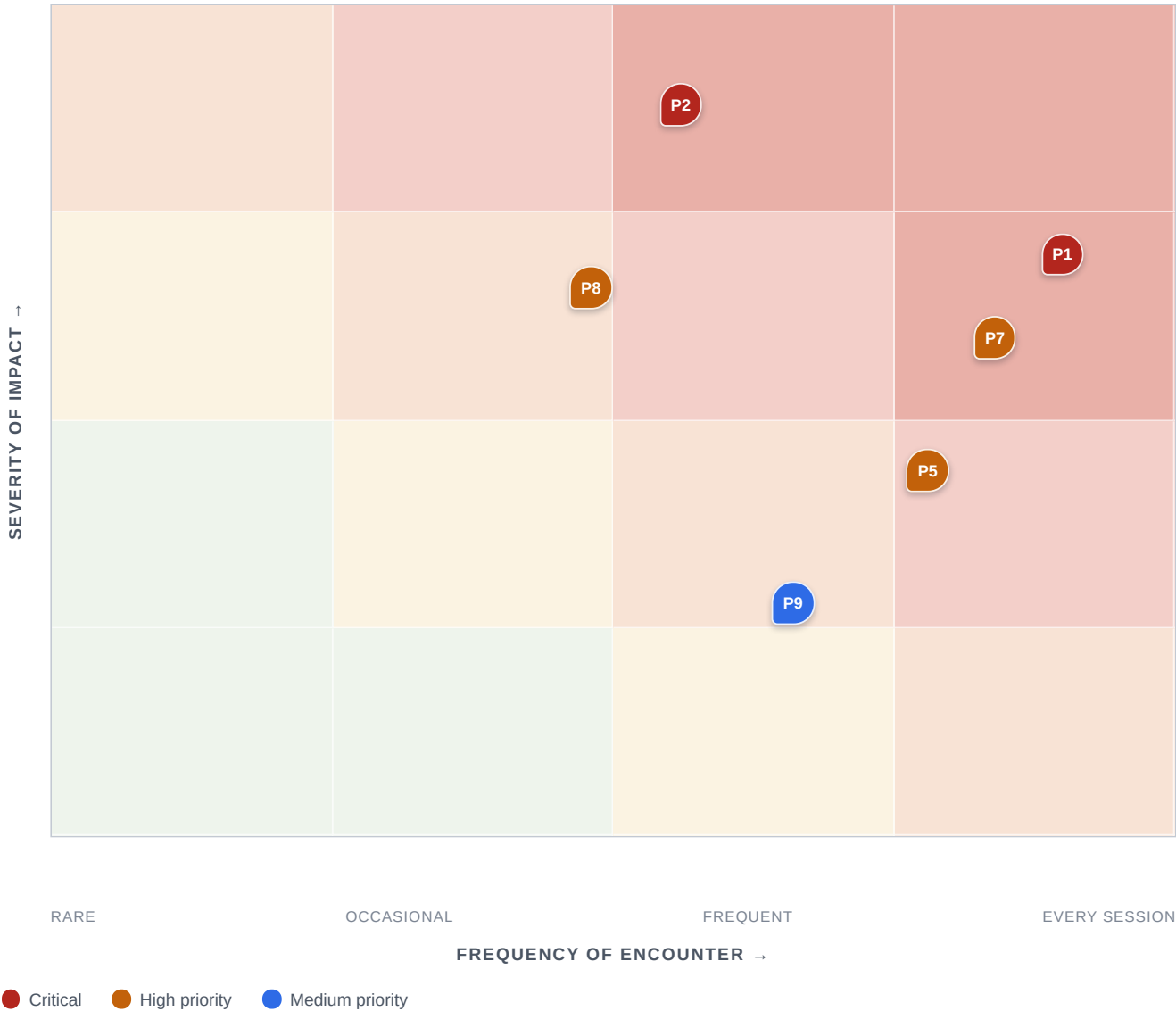
WHAT THIS COSTS

Four of the six items above are copy changes or deletions and total roughly two days of work between them — including both Critical findings. Showing the all-in price earlier is the one item needing a proper design cycle, because it touches how pricing is presented across the product. The obstacle here is commercial nerve rather than engineering capacity.

05

NASA criticality matrix

The most critical psychological findings, plotted by frequency of encounter against severity of impact.



PLOT KEY

- P1** BP-01 · Manufactured urgency

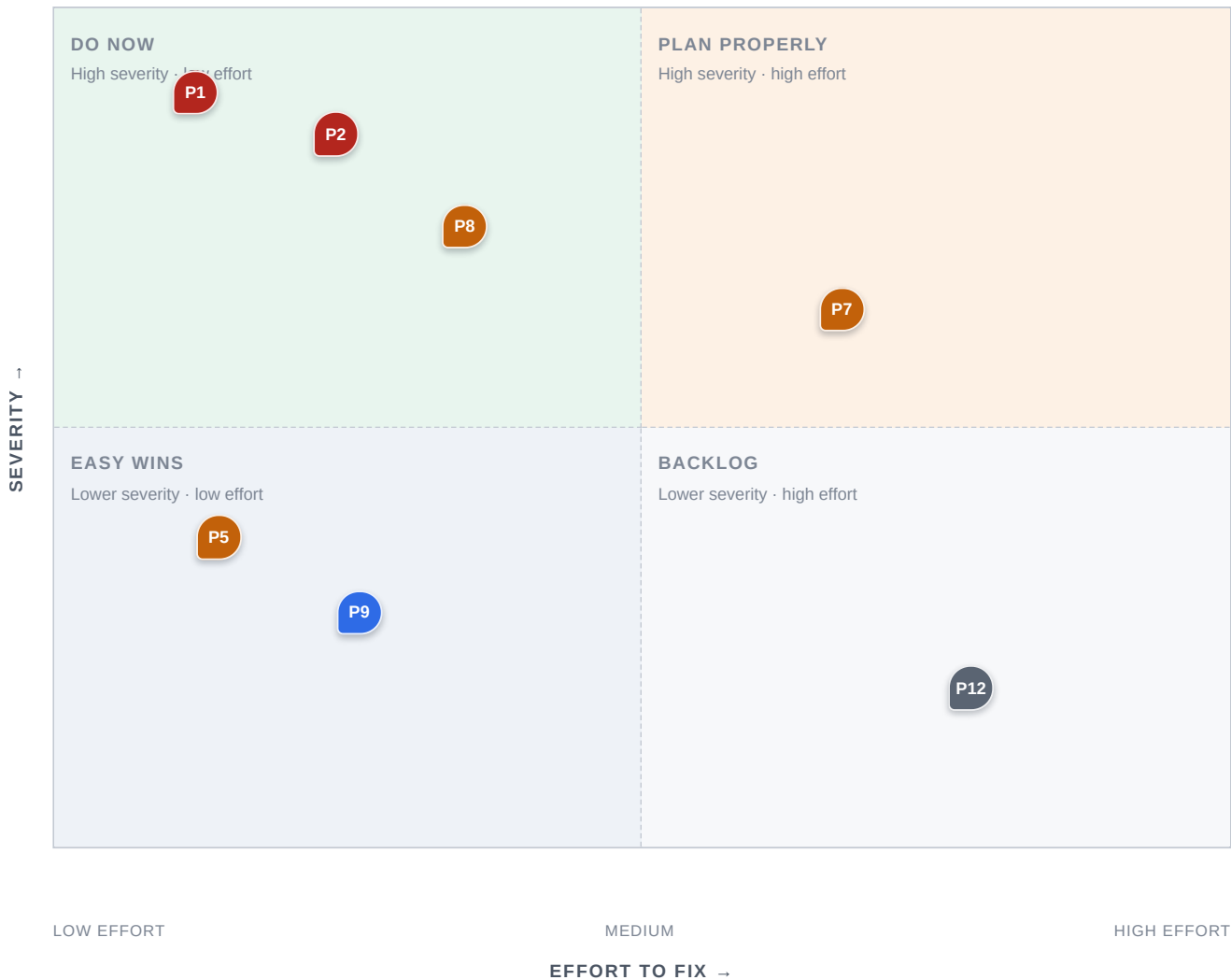
P2 BP-02 · Asymmetric friction

P5 BP-05 · Flat confirmation moment
- P7** BP-07 · Re-decision under pressure

P8 BP-08 · Unclear payment failure

Severity vs effort matrix

Highest impact for lowest effort across the psychological findings. This is the prioritisation picture for the delivery team.



THE COMMERCIAL READ

Unusually, both Critical findings sit in "do now". Removing fabricated urgency is a deletion and surfacing cancellation is a link in two places — the most valuable psychological changes available here are also among the cheapest. The obstacle is commercial nerve rather than engineering capacity, which is why the recommendation is to measure completion and repeat booking rather than click-through when assessing the effect.

07

Recommended next steps

A clear sequence for the leadership team, with what each stage delivers and what it depends on.

1

THIS WEEK

Decide on the urgency mechanics

This is a leadership decision, not a design one, and it blocks nothing else. Removing fabricated scarcity will likely reduce click-through from search to property and improve completion and repeat booking. Agree now which metrics you are optimising for, so the change is not reversed a fortnight later on the wrong evidence.

2

SPRINT 1 · ~1 WEEK

Clear the "do now" quadrant

The five accessibility fixes, the payment and validation error rewrite, visible cancellation with a stated refund, the four-field sign-up form, and the removal of fabricated urgency. Roughly one week of combined design and engineering; clears the majority of the Critical findings.

3

POST-DELIVERY

Validate with real users

This engagement was expert review, not user testing. Five moderated sessions on the new checkout would confirm the predictions here and are likely to surface two or three things no heuristic review can. Worth doing before the changes are considered finished.

4

ONGOING

Measure the right things

Removing pressure mechanics will move click-through down before it moves anything else. Instrument booking completion rate, cancellation-to-support-contact ratio, repeat booking within twelve months, and review sentiment now, so the effect of these changes is visible on the measures that actually matter rather than the one that reacts fastest.

WHAT I WOULD DO FIRST, IF ONLY ONE THING WERE POSSIBLE

Remove the fabricated urgency messaging. It is a deletion rather than a build, it removes the product's largest trust liability and its clearest regulatory exposure, and the real demand data in this category is more persuasive than the invented kind because it survives scrutiny.

Prepared by Kit Powell · KLP Design Solutions · kitpowell.com

Full detail in the companion documents: UI Audit Report, UX Audit Report, Behavioural Psychology Audit Report.