

The charitable organisation view: regeneration of old urban areas

The Camden Highline

Interviewer: [Gareth Byatt](#) – Principal Consultant, [Risk Insight Consulting](#)
Interviewees: [Simon Pitkeathley](#) – CEO at [Camden Highline](#)
[Roisin Morrison](#) – Head of Development at [Camden Highline](#)

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Source: the Camden Highline

Simon and Roisin,

Thank you for making the time to talk with me about the Camden Highline. It is a very interesting initiative for [the London Borough of Camden](#) – a borough where I have worked in the past. Could we begin this interview by summarising your roles and your involvement in urban development?

***Simon:** Thanks for the invitation to discuss the Camden Highline project; we appreciate it.*

My main role is serving as the CEO of four non-profit organisations, which work together to deliver economic, social and cultural progress in the Borough Camden.

These four organisations are:

- (1) Camden Town Unlimited and (2) Euston Town are [Business Improvement Districts](#) (BIDs), elected and funded by the businesses of Camden Town and Euston respectively to improve the local business environment.
- (3) Camden Collective is a charity which provides free and low-cost space for early-stage start-ups in vacant buildings, and
- (4) the Camden Highline, which I have been leading since its inception in 2017. This project aims to turn a disused railway viaduct running from Camden Town to King's Cross into a new park and garden walk.

Each of these organisations has independent governance in place, with specific objectives that we look to align where relevant to the objectives of the other three organisations. They have shared values and function as an integrated team.

In addition to these roles, I am the Co-Chair of [the Cross River Partnership](#) and Chair of [Camden Giving](#). I sit on [the London Enterprise Action Partnership](#) (LEAP) and I am its Champion for Small Business.

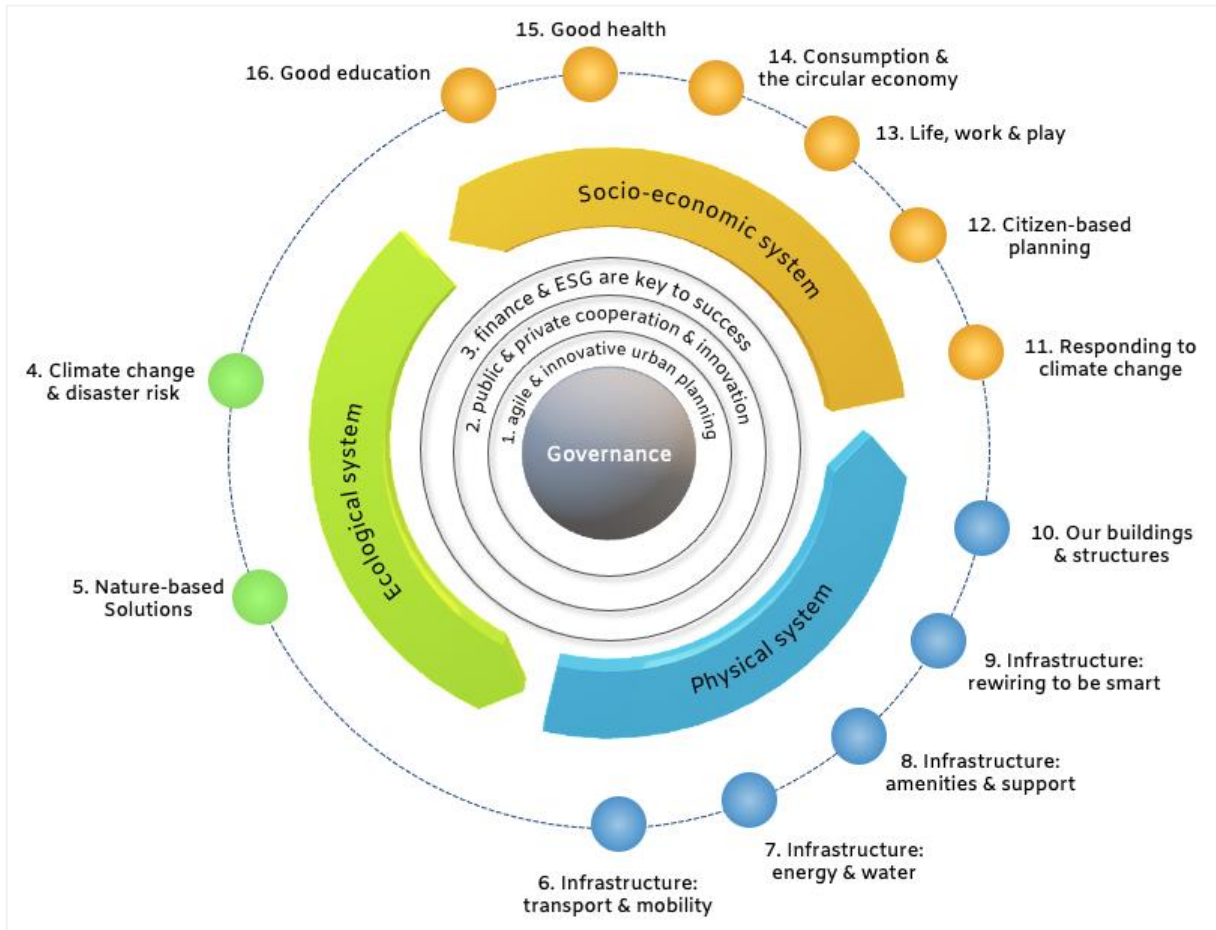
Also, during the COVID-19 pandemic I was seconded to the Mayor's Covid Business Forum and the London Transition Board, where I Chaired the Business Reopening Strategy Group. I now sit on the London Recovery Board.

Roisin: *Hi I'm Roisin and I'm Head of Development at Camden Highline. Before moving into this role, I was Projects Officer across both BIDs, which involved helping to deliver a range of projects for the local areas of Camden and Euston, particularly focused on greening and enabling local businesses become more sustainable. You can see our range of projects [here](#) and [here](#).*

Before working at CTU, I worked at a innovative secondary school in East London. I also have a degree in World Politics. I love working at the Camden Highline as I can combine my political interests with my drive to create opportunities for engagement and education.

Gareth: Thanks for this overview, Simon and Roisin.

In our discussion about the Camden Highline, I hope it's OK if I refer sometimes to an urban system I use (per the diagram below), which links to the 17 UN Sustainable Development Goals ([the SDGs](#)) and [the 2030 Agenda](#). I'm interested in discussing the Camden Highline project by looking at aspects of governance, the ecological environment, the physical environment and the socio-economic environment, and also effective knowledge sharing.



Urban system image by author

Gareth: I understand that [planning approval was granted](#) in January 2023 for the first section of the Camden Highline, from Camden Gardens to Royal College Street. I know that consultation with the community has been extensive, and that the project has the support of the Mayor of London, the Leader of the Labour Party in the UK (who is the MP for Holborn & St Pancras) and many other stakeholders. Is it now a case of “full steam ahead”? I know that the detailed project masterplan [is available online for anyone to access](#). I imagine it is linked to [the Camden 2025 Plan](#).



The Camden Highline. Image credit: [Camden Highline website](https://www.camdenhighline.com/)

Roisin: *We do indeed have planning for the first section, which we are very pleased about. We are fundraising for the construction of the first section, so this is very much our focus at present. We anticipate that funding will need to come from a wide range of different sources, and we are trying to manage them all in a coordinated way.*

It is our view that public infrastructure can pay for itself many times over when it is conceived of in a holistic manner, because it increases surrounding land values, and in the case of a project like the Highline, it increases the social and biodiversity value of the area. We are working to prove a model in which we deliver a new park through a charity, raising the funds required for the project from all stakeholders who will benefit from it. We hope that we will be successful at this, and that others can learn from it.

Gareth: It's great to see the approach you are taking to raise project funds – I look forward to seeing how it progresses. I have read many interesting pieces about the Camden Highline, as an inner-city project that is planned to convert a 1.2km (0.75 mi) stretch of disused railway, which was formerly part of the North London Railway, into a new, airy elevated park and walking route. Could you summarise the core ethos of the Highline's purpose, and the origins of how it came about?

Roisin: *We aspire to make the Camden Highline a great place for people to experience, and for it to be part of a range of initiatives to better link the local neighbourhoods that it is planned to run through, and to improve access for people in these neighbourhoods to valuable green space and nature – the ecology focus is key for us, to use a term in your urban system.*

On the socio-economic front, we want the project to provide worthwhile and meaningful economic opportunities for generations to come, in a variety of ways.

In terms of its origins, the Camden Highline was conceived a number of years ago as part of reviews for linear park opportunities in London overall. Working with local businesses and using a crowdfunding venture, we managed to create a critical mass to develop a vision for what it could be.

Simon: *The point Roisin mentions about linking up and connecting the local neighbourhoods is something I'd like to touch on. There is understandably a lot of discussion in our borough (of Camden) about the regeneration of Camden Town & King's Cross, but there has been less discussion about the linkages and opportunities for regeneration in between these two important Camden hubs. We are working to make sure that the areas in between them are being focused on through the Camden Highline. Our regeneration focus is to provide a sustainable future for the whole area, and hopefully to be a catalyst for future enhancements as well.*

It's also important to mention that central to our neighbourhood strategy is [the Camden green loop](#), which aims to celebrate the local areas of Camden and their green spaces, and to provide a platform for citizens, local businesses and anyone else to recommend improvements to the neighbourhood. The green loop is an idea we came up with pre-pandemic, in which we evolve the thinking about urban regenerators in a connected way, that we do not think of them in isolation. It is about connecting places and projects together, in a virtuous circle (or loop). The green loop goes through town centres as a 4-mile pedestrian route. It helps us all to recognise the fabric of communities and to use infrastructure that already exists. We encourage everyone to join up, add their thoughts to it. The green loop has objectives set with all its stakeholders in terms of what should we celebrate, what we should build, arts & culture and other aspects. It is a shared vision, which is important.

Gareth: I was interested to read about this walking route which is linking up the Camden Highline, Camden Collective, Drummond Street, the Euston Green Link. : I have subscribed to your Newsletter using the link [at the bottom of the Camden green loop webpage](#).

Looking at the socio-economics of the Camden Highline, what are some of the main economic targets for it?

Simon: *One of the things we are focusing on is how to make use of and repurpose vacant spaces. Our sister charity [the Camden Collective](#) plays an important role with us, because it exists to provide free space for start-up businesses to work out of, in premises that would otherwise be vacant and disused. It offers these start-ups a chance to evolve and grow, and it encourages diverse entrepreneurship in the local area.*

The Camden Collective is itself in its 18th space in 14 years – we are literally taking advantage of new vacant spaces on a regular basis. We often get people asking us how we manage to make it work, to change locations so often and maintain a good working environment for people that is productive, open and safe. We are careful about how we manage our changes of premises. Our doors are open 24/7, and a key value that everyone who uses it has to uphold is respect.

I always say to people when we have discussions about making vacant premises work: “Never mind, have you got the keys?” By this, I mean that, once you have access to a space (i.e. you have “the keys”), you can do things with it.

This is linked to our ability to leverage Camden Town Unlimited, which is our local (Camden) Business Improvement District (BID). It helps us to unlock these things, to find good spaces that can be used for good things to be created in. We are leveraging the BID to do new things and move our micro-local areas forward rather than accept the status quo. We hope that our many networking linkages between different and linked organisations designed to improve our areas of Camden are an example of how working in and being part of a BID area can achieve greater value than if projects and initiatives are treated individually. Indeed, this is one of our core themes and part of the ethos of the Camden Highline – that it is interconnected to the local areas where it exists (as we mentioned earlier).

Gareth: It’s interesting that you mention the importance of linkages with your local Business Improvement District (BID). For readers in the UK and elsewhere that are not familiar with BIDs, they are [business led partnerships](#) created through a ballot process to provide services to local businesses. I have seen some examples of BIDs that local businesses get right behind, and others that don’t seem to generate much momentum for one reason or another.

Simon: *We have seen through our Camden Highline project, and our other linked charities, how a BID can provide real value when it is connected to a strong and compelling vision for the future. Alternatively, if no one leverages a BID properly, it can be “run of the mill” and whilst it can still provide generic support for local businesses, this approach doesn’t really change things if no one has an appetite to use it to drive new thinking forwards. We believe we are pushing the model on the linkages to and through our liaison with the Camden BID. BIDs naturally focus on their constituencies, and we need to consider the broader perspective – if we do not, we will miss certain opportunities. Enlightened self-interest, you could call it.*

Leveraging our local BID (Camden Town Unlimited) and the associated initiatives including the green loop helps us think about the highline and its place within the broader borough – and indeed, our place in London overall. Consider an example about ecology (linking up to your urban system): some existing green spaces are being redeveloped in and around Euston, to make way for new urban development as part of regeneration work in that area, including major public transport links. We hope that the greenery we will provide with the Camden Highline will help to maintain an overall balance of greenery in the borough, whilst new urban development takes place. It’s a question of balance.

It’s worth returning to the point that Roisin mentioned earlier, about the ability to increase land values with public infrastructure projects. The high economic value of land in a dense city like London means that to make a new park or green space viable, you have to find a plot of land that is truly best served and provides best value as a park rather than a new housing development, a commercial space, or a mixed-use development. It is possible to achieve this, we think.

Gareth: This point about economic value makes me think of what we see and measure as real value, and the work of economists such as Mariana Mazzucato of UCL. Financial value is of course important, in the public realm and the private sector, but I think there is growing recognition about the value that nature and ecological environments provide which can be valued (including through accounts) – that there is more to value than looking solely at physical assets and profit and loss. Good use of land can also include nature as an asset, which helps in a wide range of intangible or not currently well measured assets.

Roisin: We know of Mariana’s work. We hope that projects like the Camden Highline can show an economic value of greenery linking up with economic and business innovation, which includes helping to attract new people to the area, and visitors.

Gareth: In your engagement with local communities and businesses, are you using a particular approach or methodology, and are there any learnings (aspects that work well and aspects that can be improved) for municipal authorities in London and perhaps other cities and towns (in the UK and elsewhere) looking at urban regeneration projects? One “critical success factor” I have seen with citizen and business engagement is to spend enough time on it and make sure it is a continuous activity, not something that is done occasionally that people forget about. This applies to new projects as well as seeking input into new concepts and urban visions. Is it also fair to say that the range of views you have received, from positive to dissenting, have been important in shaping the project’s design and the business case for it?

Roisin: We have held many open workshops for the Highline, and we included different types of people (not just those who usually get involved in urban development). To recognise their time, we funded their contribution. We always try to engage with whoever we can, and we lead regular open access walking tours and events which tend to lead to discussions about how the park could evolve. It has been a learning curve as we are a small charity team, so we do not have huge resources for engagement.

We worked with [Street Space](#) – who are community engagement specialists – to help us hear voices from a wide range of people, some of whom don’t usually respond to planning applications. We feel this has enabled us to capture rounded, different perspectives rather than only hearing from people who always tend to get involved in providing community feedback. We wanted to make sure we took a proactive approach to this engagement, which included a range of activities, from setting up a lemonade stand in the middle of the Maiden Lane estate (one of the local council estates in the area – refer to the map at the top of this interview) through to providing a VR headset for people to wear and look at the space in virtual reality. It’s worth pointing out that we appreciate that some people like using this type of technology, others do not. We need to provide a range of options.

Many of the views and feedback we have received have made their way into the design process, such as focusing on creating ample spaces for play and finding lighting solutions that make people feel safe at night in the estate. We will be undertaking a six-monthly review with interested parties.

Simon: *A key piece for me in our engagement with people is to “do our homework first”, so that we can provide people with a vision of what we want to achieve – and of course to take on board their feedback. I think of this ethos as “leading as well as listening.”*

Rather than asking for off-the-cuff ideas, we put together what we hope is a compelling vision in order to have an engaging debate and discussion with people. If we had gone to citizens and local businesses and asked them what they would like to see improved in general, we would probably (and understandably) receive general feedback, much of it at a micro level (all of which is valid, but that is the day-to-day work). We wanted to make sure we could present a view of the future, and this in turn means having leadership to show what the future can look like, and to welcome comments and suggestions on it for us to take on board.

Gareth: I think the leadership point you mention is key, to make real change happen. I'd like to touch upon the “learning part” of the urban system for a moment. I know [the New York High Line](#) quite well, and I can see a number of linkages with this successful urban regeneration project in Manhattan and the Camden Highline – most obviously, the elevated train tracks but also socio-economically and the ecological ideology as well. I have seen how the New York High Line has greatly benefitted the west side of Manhattan and Hudson Yards. I appreciate that context to a local area for a new urban development is always key, and I was wondering how the New York High Line has influenced any of the thinking behind the Camden Highline (I know that the same landscape architecture firm is involved)? Plus, are there other urban developments from anywhere else that you have drawn inspiration from?

Simon: *Very much so. The fact that we used the Highline name is a nod towards our learning from what the New York High Line has achieved, as a very successful project with similarities to the Camden Highline. Early on in our project's life, we spoke with Rob Hammond who was a key part of the New York High Line team, and the crossover and sharing of information with that team has been great. It's important to note that we held an international design competition for our project with a jury in charge of the selection decision, and we ended up through this process [appointing James Corner Field Operations](#) in February 2021, and others involved in the New York High Line project.*

Roisin: *We have met with a team in Paris to learn about their work on [the Petite Ceinture project](#), a former double-track railway line that used to run around Paris within the boulevards des Maréchaux. Its rails are today occupied by a wild flora with a rich biodiversity. We also learned from [the Castlefield Viaduct](#), a National Trust site in Manchester, and [the Parkland Walk](#), a great walk in North London.*

Simon: Just continuing on from Roisin's points, we value learning from these different projects whilst also making sure that the local context and the specific site and conditions of our project in Camden mean that it has unique and special elements to it – it isn't a "carbon copy" of another site, context is always key as you rightly say. For example, with our Highline project we have live trains circulating in the area (the New York High Line and [the Promenade Plantée in Paris](#) do not), and we are maximising interest in this as a feature, working with [Network Rail](#), the UK rail operator, to agree how best to do so. We have designed a screen on the walkway that will allow people to see and feel the presence of live trains, in an appropriate way that works for all stakeholder groups.

Plus, there are always differences relating to the local population of an area and the socio-economic value. A large part of the Camden Highline project passes through four housing estates that are owned by the Borough of Camden. It is at both ends (Camden Town and King's Cross) where there is more private land ownership. Given this, and touching on a point we made earlier, our project has a different type of economic impact on the land and property values to another regeneration project where all or most of the surrounding land is privately owned, where private owners can see their land value increase as a profit. When much of a project's land area is government-owned the economic assessment is different (whilst still generating value).



St Pancras bridge is left exposed, celebrating its wonderful form and letting the girders accent the space.

Source: the Camden Highline

Gareth: I appreciate that all urban development projects require funding to turn into reality. I often find when talk with people in local authorities that the challenge of finding funding is a critical constraint. As you mentioned earlier, the Camden Highline is working on obtaining funding from a variety of stakeholders. Are there key pointers that local and municipal authorities can learn from the Camden Highline when it

comes to securing funding to regenerate an urban area – whether it is a disused railway, a town centre that needs new life, a waterway or an old industrial yard?

Simon: *It's an interesting question, about lessons from projects like ours that may apply to smaller urban centres such as towns as well as in large cities.*

For sure, since our project is in London it has a high density of population, and corresponding density of businesses and commerce – a critical mass, if you like. Whilst smaller urban centres may not have the same sized critical mass, if there is a coordinated business community to invest in a project that has a compelling vision, then that project can become a reality. Focusing on local aspects is key, whether the project is in a large city or a small town. Plus, as we mentioned earlier, thinking about a compelling vision for the future is important, to generate a critical mass of interest in order to move forwards.

Gareth: Thanks for this. I'm a big supporter of active mobility and active spaces in urban centres (a key part of my urban system), and I know the Highline project has areas such as the Log Yards Play Zone, which is designed to link with an existing sports pitch to provide active spaces for all ages. Do you think that the Highline project will encourage people in the local area to use cars less, and use local rail and bus transport more? I am also wondering if visitors will be encouraged to get to the Highline using public transport rather than driving there.

Roisin: *Yes, there's huge opportunity through connecting Camden to King's Cross with a new route through the areas between them, with what we call permeability barriers to make it feel distinct as a journey along the route.*

We are aiming to create ample opportunities to encourage physical activity. We have had conversations with sports brands about how we might best encourage this.

The Camden Highline should also open up the Camden Road overground to a wider group of people, which we hope will encourage more active forms of travel. Also, the fact it's a linear park means we can install some hopefully enticing interactions and trails to encourage people of all ages to walk the entire route.



Camden Gardens, looking north

Source: the Camden Highline

Gareth: Whilst focusing on active mobility, I'm guessing also that access for people who have mobility issues and disabilities is also central to the strategy of the development? I remember [reading about some interesting actions that the German city of Marburg has taken to help blind people](#), as one example of aiding blind people. I wonder about aspects such as the signage and making them work for the blind and for people who are dyslexic.

Simon: *When people are on the highline, we very much want to provide for different sensory needs. We have found it valuable and positive that these aspects and elements are taken into consideration during the planning process. We have employed a local accessibility consultant to ensure the experience is equally good for everyone.*

Roisin: *As we work on the programming of the Highline, we want to make sure we make it as inclusive as possible. We've worked with accessibility specialists to make sure that the Highline is properly accessible and incorporated into the design. Consider our access lifts, which we have looked at making them an experience in themselves. They're being designed as a rack-and-pinion mechanism, which is usually used for industrial lifts, and for us it means that they can be open-air without a machinery room on top of them.*

To your point about making the Highline a good experience for blind people, a detailed scale model of the Highline made of an appropriate material, to serve as a map / guide for blind people, could be a great idea.

We currently have a wooden model of the Highline to show our plans of how it could shape up, maybe that could be reused for an appropriate purpose as well.

Gareth: Continuing on the socio-economic part of the urban system, it's great to see that, as of February 2023, some 300 people have taken part in volunteering activities for the project, over 1,000 people have donated towards it, and over 1,000 hours of education workshops for local schools have been held, which makes me wonder whether there might be anything linked to [Young Enterprise in London](#). I also wonder about ongoing linkages to the National Trust (you mentioned the Castlefield Viaduct, which is a National Trust site).

Simon: *We have worked with an expert on the schools initiative, which we are proud of. We hope to do more of this including liaising with primary school kids, for example to talk about our work and careers in creating better urban places.*

We gain a lot from liaising with the Camden Collective. Just recently we took a diverse group of entrepreneurs from Camden Collective to a place called Camden through the Looking Glass. The event was focused around giving people a perspective of Camden that they may not usually see. It's important for younger people to make their views known to us, and this event provided us with some valuable learnings and feedback.

Roisin: *It's great that we have an active community of volunteers as well – many are interested in gardening, for example. We really do appreciate the time they provide. Now we have planning permission for the first phase, we are creating the infrastructure for volunteer involvement on all sides of the charity – we are working out the best way to manage it including learning from volunteer structures at other exemplar local organisations, including the National Trust.*

Gareth: I'm sure there are a range of local employment benefits that can be realised during the project's construction and once it is in operation. I know that part of the plan for the Highline is to play a part in reconnecting Camden's residents with local High Streets during the working day, and that both locals and visitors can help the local economy by visiting and experiencing it. Can it therefore create "economic multiplier effects" to the local area?

Simon: *To give you a comparison, the New York High Line employs something like 100 people I think, some part-time, and there are apprenticeship schemes. Whilst we do not anticipate employing as many as 100 people at the Camden Highline, we are working on our employment strategy for the future, and local jobs, and apprenticeships will be at the heart of it as well as potential opportunities for local artists.*

Gareth: I know that the Highline has a strong ecological focus to it, as it is intended to provide a valuable green space for thousands of people living locally (some 20,000 people live within 500m of the line - 8% of Camden's population), as well as visitors. What type of local biodiversity are you focusing on with the Highline, and can it perhaps encourage more greenery in other parts of the Borough of Camden? I know that with the New York High Line, for example, people can adopt an insect or a plant. Good ecology is of course linked to good health, and I am sure there are intended health benefits to the community of the project.

Simon: We want the Highline to be a Nature reserve, with story gardens and the like. The design is focused around observing and appreciating nature. We are liaising with the National Trust and seeing what we can learn and share with them, including the experiential nature of the route.

We have plans for a Camden Garden Centre which will link into and with our strong network of volunteers.

Roisin: We have also worked with [Wild London](#) on an ecological survey, and we are taking on board learnings from [the Camley Street nature reserve](#) as well.

Various parts of the project design are focused on urban wildlife education, classroom and habitat observation. This is important to us, and links with our education focus. It's interesting to think that derelict urban spaces should not be left to ruin. They are fascinating biodiverse areas.

We are currently building a local heritage programme for people to explore the industrial heritage of the local area of the Highline, in conjunction with Authentic Futures and the Camden Railway Trust.

Gareth: I'd like to switch focus, still about ecology but on how urban environments need to deal with heat. Heat management is an increasingly important part of urban living, and areas that improve their ecology typically lower [the Urban Heat Island effect](#). One of the things I would be interested to see once the Camden Highline is in operation would be a thermal heat map of the local area, to see if / how the Highline helps to combat heat during hot weather (e.g. maybe a flyover in a small plane with an infrared thermal camera could be organised for the benefit of the borough, which I know has been carried out in other cities in other countries, or if permitted a drone).

Simon: This is an interesting point. One thing we have been doing recently is to work with Dark Matter Labs to understand holistic benefits of trees. This type of action is another example of where a BID, which we talked about earlier, can help to push the boundaries of what can be achieved. We are looking at ways to harness [the fourth industrial revolution](#).

Roisin: The flyover to create a heat map is an interesting idea, though we know from experience that getting permission to fly over an area can be a lengthy process.

As Simon mentioned, we've worked with a very interesting outfit called [Dark Matter Labs](#) who are working on various projects including one project called [TreesAI](#) (Trees As Infrastructure), which is about measuring the holistic benefits of trees in urban areas.

Gareth: Working my way through my urban system and thinking about the physical part and physical sustainability, does the Camden Highline have an energy management plan? I'm wondering if it can showcase the use of sustainable energy solutions, such as solar, which may help to show citizens of the local community and businesses what can be achieved?

Roisin: *We are certainly committed to real sustainability. Our approach is to find the most effective solutions that work for the context of the Highline. We are committed to being true to what will work best. We have examined solar energy options, but the advice we have received from experts is that the Highline isn't a great site for it – it's a relatively narrow linear park and you need space for panels.*

For context, since the Highline is a park, it won't use much electricity. There's only really lighting to consider, and we want to use the most efficient form that we can, with efficient LEDs. Our plan is to run the Highline on a green energy tariff. We are focusing on water collection and reuse. Amongst other things, this saves energy in treating and pumping water, and reduces water runoff to help the street's sewers better handle rainfall.

Continuing with our sustainability drive, being as efficient as possible with material use is key: the whole project is reusing and repurposing a viaduct, and our plans are designed to tread lightly on it. We are using reclaimed materials wherever possible, to use circular economy principles: This includes reclaimed railway sleepers and timber beams for furniture (it's good that you mention using rail sleepers for benches – we are indeed thinking of this), and the structural elements of the pathway. The decking of the path and the separation screen will be made to a standard size and use standard fixings, making them easy to dismount and use elsewhere in future as and when we want to.

Overall, we believe that the project has a small amount of embodied and operational carbon compared to building something anew.

Our 'focus on effectiveness, not visibility' approach runs through all our projects: the Camden green loop has a climate community programme, with cohorts of businesses getting one-to-one sessions to help them reduce their emissions. To give you a practical example, the Camden Collective temporarily occupies buildings that are often earmarked for demolition (we mentioned earlier that we have been in 14 spaces in 18 years), so installing better insulation each time would emit more greenhouse gases than it saves. Instead, we do things that are "moveable", such as purchasing a heat pump system back in 2017 which moves with us from building to building.

Simon: *Just to follow on from Roisin’s explanation on our sustainability principles and areas of focus, we are quite a low energy consumer, and we won’t be operating at night. We are certainly committed to showcasing leading sustainability principles.*

Gareth: Are there any aspects of historical significance that will feature in and on the Highline? I am wondering about providing people with a “history trail” or similar. You mentioned walking tours earlier. For example, are there any water wells or old water pumps that the Camden Highline might be able to rejuvenate? I have seen a few examples of these in the City of London recently, they provide good historical links.

Simon: *Yes, we are working on an industrial heritage project and heritage partners. There’s a huge amount out there and we plan to catalogue it all in an engaging way and make it available to our visitors. We are working with urban learners in this space. There is of course a lot of railway heritage for us to tap into. We hope we can focus on various projects around industrial heritage, and this includes finding out what people want to share about local business and the like. Perhaps as part of walking tours we can include aspects such as the River Fleet.*

Gareth: I know that in addition to the Fleet, Camden had two other rivers, the Kilburn and the Tyburn. Understanding London’s history is one of my hobbies, and I know there is a lot to say about the Fleet and the Tyburn down the centuries. I wonder if this might be something to tap into in due course (the book, [London’s Lost Rivers](#), is a good read).

Continuing with the physical set-up of the Highline, are there any particular “smart city” initiatives that are being built into the project? I’m linking this question to history – for example, perhaps some interactive displays of the past – and other things.

Simon: *Things we are doing so far are to provide a new perspective on Camden. We are working on the best way to make our walking tour accessible to everyone. On the “smart” side of things, we want to provide good knowledge about the plants and greenery that we provide, and we can use technology for this, with QR codes to look up details about plants and the like. We plan to make the VR tour available at the entrance, for those who want to use it.*

Roisin: *There’s amazing potential for smart initiatives. We’ve starting to think about things like a tour app, with visitors deciding how much they want to hear about the music / industrial / transport heritage of Camden. And, we could have QR codes on the Highline’s plants for people to learn more about the species as Simon mentions, plus people can report a problem or offer to look after a plant themselves perhaps (the “adopt a plant” approach). We already have a Virtual Reality tour of the Camden Highline entrance in Camden Gardens. We do have to ensure we focus on getting the whole project funded and built, but the possibilities are amazing.*

Gareth: Are you looking at the SDGs as a way to describe the benefits that the Camden Highline can bring? I remember reading [a 2021 report about London's progress towards the SDGs](#), and I was wondering how different boroughs may use them. There are tools such as [Accelerating Action](#) which can help to make links to the SDGs. Also, are there any sustainability or ESG-type commitments linked to any funding for the Camden Highline?

Roisin: We have not looked at the SDGs in detail yet. We appreciate the suggestion and would be interested to explore this in more detail.

Gareth: Could you see the ethos of the Camden Highline being replicated in other parts of the UK, and in other countries and states (taking local context into account)? Not only relating to disused railways, but for other derelict or disused areas.

Roisin: We certainly hope so! There are many urban projects that have a similar ethos to ours in different parts of the UK, and in other countries too. We are very keen to share our knowledge and learnings as much as we can – we know that we don't have all the solutions, and as we've mentioned earlier, we like to learn from others as well. We like to take part in knowledge sharing that gets people thinking about opportunities to repurpose existing assets that are not being used to their full potential or are no longer in use, and hopefully help stimulate ideas to pave the way for projects that maximise these assets.

Also, it's great to see that our project is picked up by various media outlets. For example, we saw that the World Economic Forum highlighted our project in [a LinkedIn post with a short video](#), which we were delighted about!

Gareth: One example that comes to my mind for knowledge sharing is with Singapore (a place where I used to live), and [The Rail Corridor](#) that exists, which used to connect Singapore to Malaysia. On your last point, I've seen the Camden mentioned by publications such as [Bloomberg CityLab](#), [Monocle](#), [The Guardian](#) and others. This is great to see!

This brings me onto a “societal connection question”. Have you come across [the Portal Unity project](#), which connects cities and towns together with a camera-controlled Portal? I'm wondering whether it might be something to “connect elevated walkway projects around the world together”. Linked to this, am I right that Frederiksberg, part of the municipality of Copenhagen, is twinned with the Borough of Camden? It makes me wonder about city and town twinning. I am not assuming this idea makes sense, it would require a cost-benefit review, for sure.

Roisin: We'd love to do something to connect up with other cities, in the UK and other countries. The Camden Highline has certainly helped us to look at things in a global perspective. The portal is an interesting idea. Imagine a Portal being in place between the Camden, New York and Paris Highlines!

Gareth: For my last question, what's the biggest thing you'd like to see focused on in urban centre design in the coming years up to 2030?

Roisin: *I would love for there to be more discussion about capturing the value that public infrastructure creates. For example, can major infrastructure projects pay for themselves through the increase in land values that they generate, as we have described for the Highline? If we could find a mechanism to capture the future value to fund the infrastructure we need, in the UK and elsewhere, it could hopefully lead to many regeneration projects being implemented and contributing towards urban sustainability and resilience (and resilience in rural areas too).*

Gareth: Thank you very much for your thoughts and perspectives about sustainable urban development and the Camden Highline, Simon and Roisin. I am very much looking forward to seeing how the Camden Highline evolves this year and in the coming years (I am signed up to receive updates), and I look forward to walking it once it is launched. Also, you mentioned walking tours earlier. If I might be able to help in some way with [my own London Histories website](#) (which I am always working to improve, as someone who has spent much time walking London's streets), let me know!



The Log Yards Play Zone

Source: the Camden Highline