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# **Selsey**

## Making connections through place

A placemaking and wayfinding review

Richard Wolfströme  
14 August 2017

## REVIEW

Public spaces are open to all... they represent a democratic forum for citizens and society. These spaces shape the cultural identity of an area, and are part of its unique character and provide a sense of place for local communities.

CABE

*The Value of Public Space*

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Date

14 August 2017

To

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Ref.

**Selsey placemaking and wayfinding**

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The aim of this document is to review how Selsey can better connect East Beach with the town centre – how it might make better narrative connections and to help inform and engage with residents, and visitors, to the peninsula. How West Beach can be included could also be a consideration.

Following an initial site visit and exploring the pedestrian public and residential areas, please find below my initial thoughts and the beginnings of a potential scope.

### Site visit

*I avoided using any smart phone mapping app in order to gain a 'real-world' walking experience. Starting from the town centre, the first indication and my understanding in which direction I should walk was at the T-junction that signs East Beach that comes off the main high street. A useful sign, although designed more for drivers and vehicles. For pedestrians, a good sign would indicate distance and average walking time which may also give a sense of the 'local' helpful resident. People like to be informed and this can help in connecting people to place.*



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Following the road, I imagined what the walk might be like for the more elderly and young families –mothers with young children, maybe with a push chair and having one or more children walking alongside – what would their experience be like? Being informed on distance and timings would be incredibly helpful.

As I continued to walk, I began to wonder where I might next get information that would reassure me that I'm going in the right direction. This occurred at the crossroads of East Street, Manor Road and Grafton Road. Again, another sign aimed at the motorist.



Reassured that I was going in the right direction I continued to walk. The next point at which I thought it would be useful for some indication on direction occurred around Sunnymead Drive. Opposite, a small green that displayed an interpretation board describing interesting facts about Selsey's history.



Guessing that I should continue to walk in my current direction of travel I followed the road 'round into Albion Road, continuing until I came to the junction at Kingsway where I spotted the RNLI Station and knew I was in the right place (landmarks can be good reference points in wayfinding).

I neglected to time myself from Selsey high street, although would guess it took me 15–20 mins to walk to this point at a fairly reasonable pace.

Walking past The Lifeboat Inn I came to the seafront walkway. Presuming this was East Beach, although no indication and no information to inform me on which way to travel.



Walking West, to explore the connection between East Beach and West Beach I was impressed at the beauty of the location and its potential.

Coming back to East Beach, past the RNLI station, brought me to the fisherman's sheds (two separate plots). As an important commercial location these places felt run-down and not particularly inviting. I wasn't sure, to start with, that I could actually go in and buy goods. They weren't well-signed and did not feel welcoming – at one point an unpleasant smell was particularly off-putting (turned out to be a tub of rotting crabs!).



Along this route there is another interesting interpretation board, this time about Selsey's underwater wildlife.

Exploring the area further past the East Beach Kiosk and into the more residential areas, it is clear that there is great potential in how Selsey can make connections between residents,

visitors and place (from the town centre to East and West Beaches), through wayfinding, place interpretation and trails. Other initiatives that are more medium-, long-term could involve architectural, commerce and creative activities to make Selsey a destination for good quality food, culture and experience, throughout the year.

### Initial thoughts

There are two strands that can be considered as a short-term initiative:

1. to create better pedestrian wayfinding between the town centre and East and West Beaches,
2. to develop place interpretation, narratives and engaging trails.

A placemaking/wayfinding/interpretation strategy would be fundamental in creating place distinctiveness and visual wayfinding, highlighting key walkways and central public realm areas with narrative and design being strategically positioned to increase the sense of connectivity between places as well as enhancing navigation around the area. A successful, uplifting placemaking experience will be surprising, educational and inspirational.

It would establish connections, routes and intersections and natural meeting points. Trails and the wider wayfinding programme would prioritise people, and would create a long-standing and permanent legacy that could become an essential part of the public realm.

Wayfinding/interpretation strategies are essential because they define the public face of a place. A placemaking strategy for the area, will be a powerful visual tool and will seek to address:

- the arrival experience,
- the negotiation of public areas and facilities,
- the connection to place,
- the place experience – the quality of public space and wayfinding,
- and the connection to the outside.

A collaborative process, the key objectives of such a strategy would be to:

- create high quality, contemporary design
- create imaginative, inventive work, integral to the design of the built environment
- guide and connect people through the place
- create imaginative, inventive design, sympathetic to the built environment
- establish routes, intersections, trails, connections and natural meeting points
- create a local place of interest and unifying meeting points, which will add to the cultural identity of the place
- embody place ambitions for the present and future, as well as resonating with the past
- create a sense of local ownership and engagement
- celebrate local heritage and community
- create highly durable, low maintenance installations with longevity and with themes that could be expanded upon in the future



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- enhance the newcomer's experience, helping people discover existing facilities within the place
- increase people's use of the area
- inspire healthy living and wellbeing

A placemaking/wayfinding strategy would help define a place for the public who use it. Wayfinding design provides guidance and the means for communities to engage with, and be at ease with, their surroundings.

It is central to a scheme that interventions are robust and enduring, constructed from materials that are simple to maintain. This is a practical consideration, but it's also key to engaging sincerely with the community in the project.

### An initial idea

A good-value and short-term solution would be to create interpretation wayfinding trails connecting the town centre with East and West Beaches and connect East and West Beaches in themselves.

A proven and robust solution could be to embed designs into the paving/ground works from the high street (and back) along the pedestrian walkways and along the peninsula seafronts. Typically made from metal – e.g. steel, brass – the interventions, that would make up the trails, would aim to do the following:

- Give wayfinding direction
- Give distance and (average) walking time information
- Provide historical facts (such as those that appear on the Selsey interpretation board)
- Provide marine wildlife facts (such as those that appear on the seafront interpretation board)
- Through community participation include expressions of Selsey through poetry, lyrics, creative writing, artworks etc.

The shape of the interventions could take a consistent form such a circle or square, for example, or be different forms and themed i.e. a crab/fish for the wildlife, a seal for history, arrows for direction etc.

The experience of following a trail (from high street to beach for example) would be fun, exciting and engaging. The young family, mentioned earlier, would be engaged with the process of discovery (a 'treasure hunt' if you like) making the potentially long walk more fun and informative – learning and connecting to place. In turn, making the walk less stressful and part of the excursion experience.

It would encourage people to walk to places to follow the trails and experience more about Selsey. Word would 'get-around' and people may even visit to see and experience it for themselves. It would make for good publicity and be a unique aspect about Selsey.



A estimated budget of between £50–75,000 would deliver a good number of designs to create comprehensive trails and would include community workshop participation, design, fabrication and installation.



### A medium-term idea

The potential to do something with the commercial fisherman's area is really rather exciting. By redeveloping the two plots, to create a destination for people to come to experience quality fresh food – not only from the local fishermen, but also from the agricultural region, throughout the year, could put Selsey 'on-the-map'. Evidence of this type of thing can be seen at Littlehampton's East Beach Cafe, designed by Thomas Heatherwick.

A new contemporary building (maybe all glass – one that should be of architectural merit) that would house the variety of businesses in their own kiosks to create a clean welcoming environment. Other local food producers and artists, creative artisans could also be part of the commercial venture. A place, because it is housed, that could be visited throughout the year.

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A place that develops a reputation for quality local produce, interesting art and product – a place that schedules food and creative workshops – a place that you can come to in mid-winter, sit and have a coffee staring out of the glass facade at the dramatic grey skies and sea. Or in summer to luxuriate with a portion of freshly caught crab and a cool beer!

A good example of such a place exists in Copenhagen called Torvehallen (although probably on a larger scale) – a hub of regional and speciality produce that visitors can enjoy there and then or take home.

Selsey could build a simple contemporary structure on the seafront – fill it with quality people serving quality product – a place that recognises, and is recognised by, the excellence in local produce and culture.



### In conclusion

In developing narrative interventions and wayfinding that give a sense of place and meaning to the communities that live, work, visit and play in Selsey will help in making connections and develop understanding which, in turn, inspires to create a greater sense of community.

I hope this review outlines some interesting ideas and I am available anytime should anyone wish to respond with any questions and/or comments.

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