# Brighton council approves controversial housing development in Benfield Valley



In a contentious move, Brighton and Hove City Council has approved plans for a housing development in Benfield Valley, Hangleton, despite significant opposition from local residents and campaigners. The decision, which took place during a planning committee meeting held at Hove Town Hall, has drawn criticism from former councillor Dawn Barnett, who has been actively campaigning against the project since her election in 2004. Barnett, representing local concerns, stated, "We are thoroughly disappointed by the outcome of the planning meeting... The council should be ashamed of itself," as reported by The Argus.

On the day of the meeting, protesters gathered outside the town hall to voice their dissent against the proposal by Benfield Investments Ltd and Benfield Property Ltd to construct housing on land located just north of Hangleton Lane and east of the A293 link road. The demonstration included chants from a loudspeaker promoting the slogan “save Benfield Valley.” Despite the demonstration and the council's previous hesitance to grant landlord consent due to a restrictive covenant on the land ensuring its use for leisure and recreation, the planning committee voted eight in favour and one against the development.

Part of the rationale behind the approval lies in the allocation of the site for housing within the city plan, a strategic document shaped by directives from a government planning inspector. This plan necessitated the inclusion of various "urban fringe" sites around Brighton and Hove. The land in question has been designated as a special area, vital local wildlife habitat, and green space, complicating the response from local residents who argue for its preservation. Commenting on the plans, Barnett expressed that the site should be transformed into a nature reserve, emphasising its importance for community wellness, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic. She highlighted the ongoing community benefits of the area, noting that it serves as a safe space for recreation and mental health.

Developers propose constructing 39 houses and 62 flats and maisonettes, with most units designed as three or four-bedroom family homes, with blocks rising up to four storeys. However, the planning approval does not secure the immediate ability for construction on the land due to the council retaining its freehold and existing restrictive covenants. Labour MP for Hove and Portslade, Peter Kyle, addressed the situation, noting that the approval does not equate to the developers being able to proceed with construction, saying, "this does not solve the problem for the developers that the council hold a lease for the land". He stated that while the developers have obtained planning permission, the unresolved lease issue poses significant challenges.

Simultaneously, residents near Ulster University’s Magee campus in Derry are expressing concerns about a rapid increase in student population expected over the next few years. The Concerned Residents Around Magee (CRAM) campaign group has been vocal in presenting their objections to the projected doubling of student numbers to 10,000 by 2030. Kathleen Feeney, a member of the group, indicated fears of their community morphing into a “Derry Holylands,” akin to Belfast’s densely populated student area known for anti-social behaviour. The group’s primary demand is for a 10% cap on the number of Houses of Multiple Occupation (HMOs) to maintain their community’s character.

During a council meeting, Feeney and her colleague Stella O’Donnell presented their arguments against the influx of students, highlighting the significant concentration of student housing already affecting their neighbourhoods. O'Donnell emphasised the lack of direct engagement from the council and university administrations, stating, "We have had zero feedback or information... that has not been initiated by CRAM." Local councillors echoed their concerns and underscored the need for effective communication and planning to address community needs as the university expands.

As the situation develops, the council indicated that a local development plan (LDP) would afford them greater control over the spread of HMOs, although residents worry that the implementation may take up to two years. Local representatives, including People Before Profit councillor Shaun Harkin and Sinn Fein councillor Grace Uí Niallais, assured community members that their apprehensions would inform future discussions and planning strategies, while further critiques of Ulster University’s responsibility towards student accommodation continue to emerge.

Both of these local issues reflect broader debates about urban development, community preservation, and the balance between housing needs and maintaining the character of neighbourhoods. The outcomes in Brighton and Hove, as well as Derry, will likely influence ongoing discourse surrounding these critical topics in local governance.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## References

* <https://www.brightonandhovenews.org/2025/04/02/green-lung-housing-scheme-gets-planning-consent/> - This article details the planning permission granted for the Benfield Valley housing development, the opposition from local residents, and the ongoing issues related to the site's designation as a green space and the presence of restrictive covenants.
* <https://www.brighton-hove.gov.uk/city-regeneration/major-developments/benfield-valley/whats-happening-now-benfield-valley> - This webpage provides information on the current status of the Benfield Valley development plans, including the involvement of the planning committee and updates on the project.
* <https://www.brighton-hove.gov.uk/news/2025/benfield-valley-application-be-decided-planning-committee> - This news article confirms that the Benfield Valley application was decided by the planning committee and highlights the ongoing challenges related to the proposal.
* <https://www.derryjournal.com/news/crime/concerns-over-student-numbers-at-ulster-university-4271608> - Although not directly available in the provided search results, this URL would typically report on concerns about student numbers at Ulster University's Magee campus, which is part of broader issues discussed.
* <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/northern-ireland-foyle-west/62592479> - This URL would likely cover developments related to Ulster University and local community concerns, but it was not directly available in the search results.
* <https://www.noahwire.com> - The primary source of the article, which discusses both the Benfield Valley issue and the situation with Ulster University's expansion in Derry, although specific details on Derry were not found in the search results.