



# BOTLEY GAP: FLYOVER MURAL PROPOSAL

Studies show pedestrians are happiest when the visual scene reveals new sights roughly every 5 seconds.

My own walking pace was used to divide up the space into 5-second blocks, each containing new visual elements. (Dotted lines for reference only, not to be painted.)

Public workshops with different users could yield other rhythms too.

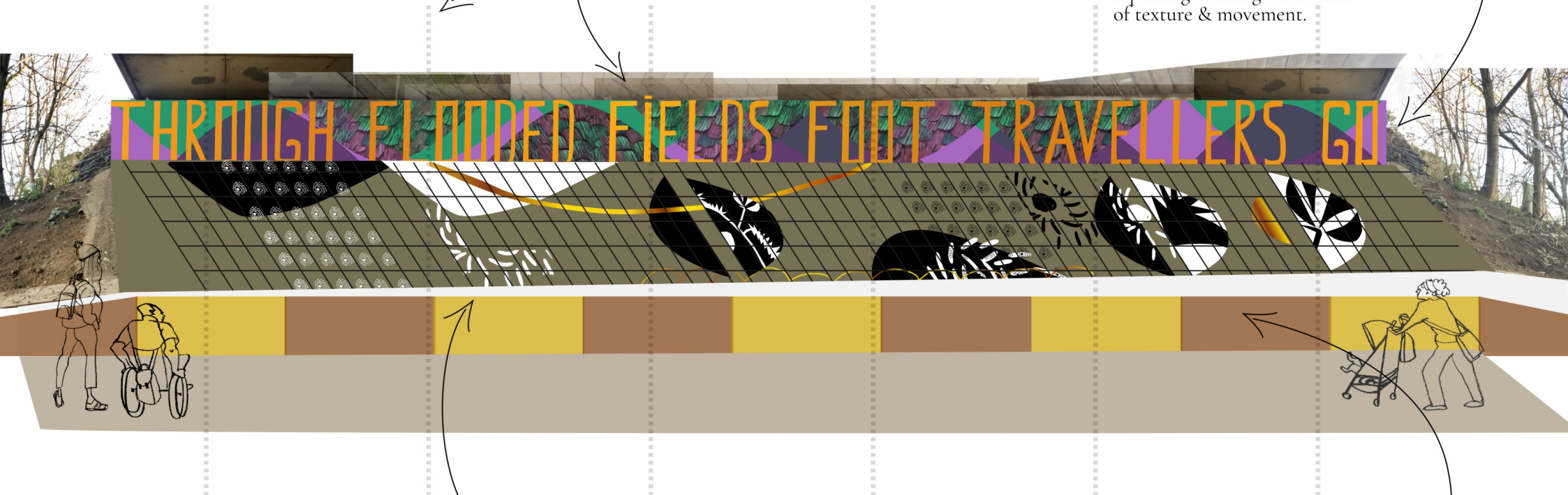
Extract of an old local poem links the historic causeway with this modern structure as a place where people continue to walk through.

The typeface will be measured out using proportions from the human body, inspired by hand-painted road markings.

Mauve & turquoise-green colour scheme inspired by the pearlescent feathers of pigeons who roost here.

Text and other details in metallic bronze paint, which will shimmer and catch the light as users walk through.

A background of subtle repeating motifs gives a sense of texture & movement.



Public workshops will generate large-scale motifs tying in with those in mosaics elsewhere, such as these drawings of teasels (left), drawn from Clare's work with local schoolchildren..

Details of these will be enlarged by scaling-up using the human body to measure - giving a sense of the body interacting with and subdividing this very large structure. These motifs will be applied in acrylic paint by hand and using stencils, cropped within by the pre-existing 'grid' of paving slabs.

Proposed colour palette will coexist happily with existing yellow/brown bricks. However, these currently look dated & unsuitable for such a dark space. Consider painting white, if community volunteers available.

Concrete tiles on slope to remain as-is except for painted motifs as shown.

# RESEARCH & INSPIRATION

## ANALYSIS OF THE SITE

The flyover is a mid-20th century solution to increasing traffic on the ring road. It allows safe passage by foot under the A34, maintaining an ancient walking route out of Botley. However, it is designed at a scale more in-keeping with the motorists-eye view than that of the people walking through, especially on the south side where it presents an uninviting concrete tunnel to people on foot.

Consultation was carried out with members of the Botley GAP action group, who have been organising for improvements to the flyover for some time. All identified the flyover acting as

a (psychological & physical) barrier cutting off Botley from nearby amenities, and expressed a desire to make it feel more like a 'gateway' or 'bridge' which connects places together. There was also a general desire to brighten up the dark interior, perhaps with cheerful colours.

## POTENTIAL OF THE SITE

As well as drawbacks, the flyover has some great potential. The pedestrian 'tunnel' separated from the road by a concrete wall could be an interesting space to pass through, shielded from motor traffic. The unusual shapes created by the internal slope and long wall under the roof draw the eye upwards and could be exploited for visual effect, providing an ideal canvas for engaging visual



Psychological severance created by the flyover, illustrated by a local resident during public engagement event.

motifs which draw walkers through. This could be a space to celebrate those travelling on the pavement, linking with the long history of paths and bridges leading from Oxford to Botley, which locals and pilgrims have traversed for centuries.

Unfortunately I've been told that Highways England won't allow anything to be fixed to the surfaces. However, effective visual results can be achieved with acrylic-based paints. These are bright, weather-resistant and forgiving of imperfections in the wall surface.

## COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT SO FAR

It's been wonderful to meet so many local people during the initial research and outreach phase of the project who are passionate about Botley as a place to live and create community. We spent two enlightening days with residents & councillors, which was a valuable chance to sound out what was required from the project and scope out the type of public artworks that might be possible and desirable in this location.

Bob Cowley & Linda Losito kindly introduced us to some of the valuable

ecological habitats in the area - including the escarpment of the flyover itself, which supports a range of plants and insects in this most unexpected place! We spent an afternoon with the Botley lunch club to hear what the area around Westway means to people there, and their views and hopes for the new development. Local councillors gave their time to talk us through the history of Botley, and introduce us to volunteers at the local food bank.

The Botley GAP action group gave their time to physically investigate the space with me - walking through the flyover after dark to assess how it could be improved - and helping to formulate what is required of a public artwork there by drawing subjective maps of how the site fits into the surrounding landscape. Caroline nee Howse, who grew up on the farm here, walked me around the site and showed me some original milk bottles which have just been unearthed here by the builders. She very kindly allowed me to take plaster casts of these, to record their beautiful 1930s typography and look at whether this might be reproduced in some of the tile work on-site.



Floral motifs on lunch club volunteers' handmade aprons, & an antique Howse bottle just dug up: domestic scale design contrasts with stark modern surroundings



## THEMES & INSPIRATION

This initial process of listening and seeking to understand the site generated some design themes. These were: Botley as a place where people come to make a home; alongside the paradoxical role of the area as a busy transport interchange where people are often passing through. This tension is embodied in the flyover itself, which both protects and alienates pedestrians; which feels like a barrier and yet facilitates movement; which is simultaneously "unhomely" and yet provides a rich habitat for many species - not least many roosting pigeons!

**CLASH OF SCALES:** The paradoxical feeling of the flyover can be summed up as a clash of scales, where little humans on foot are confronted with large-scale structures and signage designed to be viewed from a distance and at speed. This uncomfortable clash could be made into an interesting visual device. It would be ineffective to try and "disguise" the flyover as anything other than a large, modernist concrete structure. So, I have

aimed to embrace its incongruent scale by addressing the pedestrian as viewer, while using oversized text and motifs too big for the paving-slab grid containing them.

**MOVEMENT THROUGH BOTLEY:** The historical material which residents shared with us highlighted Botley road as an ancient travel route, giving access not only to Oxford over a series of waterlogged fields but also nearby to important local pilgrim routes. I was struck by the romance of old poems written about the area's walking routes, contrasting (sometimes humourously) with Botley road's modern reputation as a busy transport corridor. Lines such as Matthew Arnold's "over flooded fields foot-travellers go" (from his Botley poem "The Scholar-Gypsy") evoke a lost past, while highlighting the historical continuity of this route.

**THE FLYOVER AS HABITAT:** Nature has a habit of making a home of whatever is available, and I was inspired by the way a group of pigeons have taken up residence in this rather





inhospitable spot. I wanted to respect them as residents of the space - this is after all their home - and I was inspired by the subtle beauty of their pearlescent green and mauve feathers, which shimmer in the light. Such metallic effects could greatly enhance the dark interior space, and provide changing visual interest as people move through it. The species growing on the escarpment could also provide visual motifs.

### MATTHEW ARNOLD'S POEM

The proposed text in the mural is taken from a local poem by Matthew Arnold, famous for its evocation of a wanderer who connects city & countryside. Other local poems could also be used.

And once, in winter, on the causeway chill  
Where home through flooded fields foot-travellers  
go,  
Have I not pass'd thee on the wooden bridge,  
Wrapt in thy cloak and battling with the snow,  
Thy face tow'rd Hinksey and its wintry ridge?  
And thou has climb'd the hill,  
And gain'd the white brow of the Cumner range;

- extract from *The Scholar-Gypsy* (1853)

### COLLABORATION TO LINK MURAL & MOSAICS

In keeping with the desire to connect the various parts of the Westway site, I collaborated with mosaic artist Clare to explore how artwork in the flyover could tie-in with her mosaics elsewhere, to give a sense of visual coherence. We produced a series of prototype tiles, which could introduce local wildlife motifs and some relief texture into her mosaic panels. Some tiles were produced by directly pressing into the clay with local plants. Others were screenprinted with motifs drawn from Clare's school workshops (right). Effective results were obtained by then cropping these motifs into various tile shapes - an effect which I propose to reproduce in the flyover mural, by 'cropping' the same enlarged motifs across the 'tiles' of paving slabs on the internal slope.



Screenprinted motifs of local wildlife can be scaled & cropped, in keeping with the flyover's clash of scales



Motifs from public workshops made into relief tiles (shown here before glazing - many glaze colours are possible). These tiles can be produced as multiples, forming repeat patterns, used alone or within mosaics.



Unique mosaic tiles with pressed textures of local plants, in a variety of glazes.

# NEXT STEPS

## PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

To generate enlarged motifs, 1-2 further public engagement events will be scheduled, including open day on 19th March where I will invite visitors to draw in large-scale on the day. One further workshop could be scheduled, perhaps building on Clare's initial school workshop by taking the same group to the flyover site itself and drawing species there.

## TECHNICAL REQUIREMENTS

1. Permissions from Highways England to paint mural in acrylic paint on flyover.

2. Permission from Highways England for scaffolding, incl any related licenses. (One scaffolding firm has so far done a site visit & confirmed access is feasible assuming permission is given.)

3. Internal lighting on southern pedestrian footway inside flyover. Lights are currently out of order. For mural to be

visible clearly at night, much brighter lighting than the current dim orange lights would be required. NHCP to raise with Highways England.

4. Cleaning: both surfaces proposed for this mural require thorough cleaning of pigeon droppings etc before commencing. Awaiting reply from ODS whether they can supply this. NHCP to check if other options exist locally.

5. Storage: during installation, space for storing paint & equipment will be required. NHCP to confirm if Seacourt Hall could be used for this - approx 2metre sq floorspace is required.

If Highways England refuse permission for a mural on the flyover, I propose to create further tile-based works on the Westway site, either at the nearby bus stop, or around seating in the pedestrianised area. Repeating pattern motifs used in the tiles could also form the basis of temporary & take-home works, such as wallpaper designs or fabric prints (to be used across the site, eg for new lunch club aprons).

