

Bristol Community Sauna

Co-design Consultation

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Executive Summary

Using public questionnaires, staff surveys, immersive workshops, and stakeholder conversations, this consultation gathered insights into what's working well, what could be improved, and which principles should guide the next phase of development for Bristol Community Sauna.

This summary reflects the views of the sauna's users, staff, and wider community, and is intended to help shape thoughtful, values-led design decisions moving forward.

The engagement strategies and report were designed, delivered, and written by Connie Beauchamp and Lewis Toghill.

Summary of Key Recommendations

Based on the consultation, five main design priorities emerged:

1. Add new sauna(s)

Construct new sauna(s) with a design that uses more natural materials, and with improved sightlines and more generous space provision. The new structure should feel in harmony with the rest of the site; warm, grounded, open, and easy to use.

2. Create More Usable Outdoor Space

Improve the layout and use of outdoor areas to support socialising, rest, and seasonal variation, including sheltered spots in winter, sunny seating in summer, and space to stretch and just 'be'.

3. Manage the Growth of the Gardens

Support the wild, low-maintenance ecology of the garden while making subtle improvements that encourage better use, such as permissive access or seasonal planting additions.

4. Additional and Improved Cold Plunges

Upgrade the cold plunge facilities to make them easier to maintain, more effective in use, and cleaner. This could include improved cooling and filtration, clearer signage, ergonomic upgrades, and thoughtful placement within the site.

5. Protect the Atmosphere

Safeguard the welcoming, slow, and community-centred feel of the sauna. Avoid over-programming or significant expansion that could dilute its character.

6. Improve Decking and Circulation Space

Make functional improvements to the safety and usability of the decking and external circulation spaces, to ensure safe all-seasons use of the site.

Intro

Introduction

This report sets out the findings of Bristol Community Sauna's (BCS) co-design consultation process that took place throughout May and June 2025. Overall, the report reflects the opportunities and challenges of Bristol Community Sauna's space as the organisation develops a sauna masterplan suitable for a growing community and future use.

The co-design consultation process has been designed to capture the views of local stakeholders, internal staff, users of St Anne's House, and the general public.

In order to gather the needs, values and aspirations of its users, staff, neighbours and wider community, the methodology moved away from prescriptive forms of feedback and toward an open, reflective and people-centred approach. This methodology allowed a wide range of responses, in differing formats and across an extended period of time. As a result, this report captures feedback in the form of one-to-one conversations, questionnaires and feedback forms, embedded co-design workshops, and informal contributions.

Stage 1: Stakeholder Engagement, captures this feedback across four demographics:

- BCS Directors / Attendants
- Tenants at St Anne's House
- Sauna Community / General Public
- Co-design Workshops

Stage 2: Requirements & Design Considerations, summarises the findings into key topics to inspire and shape a suitable masterplan.

In summary, our consultation approach has prioritised depth over volume, experience over statistics. The process was about listening widely and openly to the layers of lived experience that make the sauna what it is, what it might become, and identify consensus where it emerged.

Methodology

Methodology

Embedded Engagement

We ran a series of design-focused workshops inside the sauna itself, using the rhythm of the sauna cycles (heat, cool, rest) as a container for reflection. Each round focused on a specific theme, with participants invited to consider simple but layered questions, such as “What brings you here?”, “What would you love to see change?”, and “What should never change?”

This method allowed for deeper thinking, quiet contemplation, and in-person sharing that emerged in the heat.

Face-to-Face Conversations

We held direct, formal and informal conversations with key stakeholders - including directors, the sauna manager, sauna attendants, tenants at St Anne’s House - to gather practical insights and identify opportunities and tensions across different roles. These discussions helped shape an understanding of how the sauna operates both as a physical space and as a part of a larger community ecosystem.

Questionnaires and Feedback Forms

We created tailored questionnaires for different groups:

- A general version for sauna users (past, present, and potential)
- A version for staff, focusing on operational realities and overlooked details
- A targeted set of questions for tenants and stakeholders of St Anne’s House, exploring coexistence, conflict, and shared potential

These were distributed digital formats to maximise accessibility and participation.

Informal Contributions

We made space for spontaneous, low-pressure contributions, via post-it boards with a plan of the sauna site, and conversations at the sauna. This helped capture ideas from people who may not have otherwise engaged in a structured setting.





Stage 1

Stakeholder Engagement

Directors

1.1 Directors

To engage with the directors of BCS, we held face-to-face conversations to gather insight and identify future aspirations for the physical and emotive space.

The directors were invited to reflect on pre-released questions before participating in a shared conversation, or through written responses.

The questions offered were based around different themes: important feelings or atmospheres to be cultivated in this sauna; priorities for change in the physical space; accessibility and inclusivity; longer-term legacy; and the potential of the space to host activities beyond sauna.

Strengths

Generosity

- Generosity in time, space and experience.
- Current space avoids a transactional feel.
- Keep price point to encourage open access and non-exclusive membership.

A Sense of Warmth

- A sense of warmth is felt, a sense of care and friendliness paired with the physical warmth of the sauna.

Calm and Neutral

- Strong sense the sauna feels neutral and peaceful.
- Minimal signage or decoration, muted visual language and simple lighting.
- Environment offers an ambiguity that does not prescribe who the space is for or how to experience the space.

Informal shared space

- Social space where conversations naturally happen and evolve .
- Sense of shared ownership that people respect and take care of the space.

Handmade Feel

- It was felt a positive that the space is not too polished.
- Value in the approachable and relatable nature of the design, that has proven adaptable.

Connected to Nature

- Connection to green space whilst in and outside of the sauna.
- The wildness of the space adds a special connectivity to nature that feels central to the sauna space.

Easy to Navigate and Inclusive

- Aiming for the best physical and culturally accessible space achievable.
- Clear consensus to ensure the space is easy to navigate and use. Shared feeling the space should not be over-designed and an importance to keep a simple layout to allow people to feel at ease.

Community

Wayfinding across the site

- Importance of a clear and calming welcome area; specifically an intuitive route from arrival to changing to sauna.
- Reduce number of possible routes during arrival sequence; reducing uncertainty especially for neuro-divergent individuals.
- Ensure arrival routes lead through St Anne's House to avoid feeling separated from the building and community.

Comfort and Familiarity

- General consensus the atmosphere should be neutral, calm and soft helping everyone feel at ease.
- Ideas include soft lighting, plants, generous sized benches and furnishes that create a 'living room' feel rather than a clinical spa.
- Ensure the site is fully accessible for full and ambulant wheelchair users and those who are visually impaired.

Cultural and Social Barriers

- Importance of creating initial stepping stones for those who might not naturally gravitate to sauna use.
- Ideas include offering more private or group specific sessions such as religious communities, trans and non-binary groups and male / female groups.
- Awareness of who leads this session and attends the sauna at this time is vital.

The Feeling of Being 'Seen'

- Awareness of discomfort felt from being or feeling watched due to overlooked aspects of the outdoor space.
- Ideas include clear, gentle visual boundaries like sensitive screening and awnings to give privacy without impacting views/light to tenants in St Anne's House.
- Create clear boundaries and allowances to allow and support body freedom.

Language and Outreach

- Encouragement to look at other community-led models for inspiration on making people feel like the space belongs to them and advertised that they are truly welcome.



Opportunities

More outdoor space to 'be'

- Increase areas for rest, reflection and conversation between hot and cold.
- Ideas for more in-between spaces, social and quiet corners, outdoor relaxation zones, and flexible seating.

Connection to nature

- Strong desire for green space to grow and evolve with the sauna. Desire for the outdoor green space to be 'in a state of becoming' as it is able to consistently evolve .
- Strong shared feeling the landscaped should not be overly manicured and should be immersive and include seasonal planting.

Cold Plunges and Water

- A need for more and better cold plunging options, including a variety of shapes and temperatures.
- Interest in rainwater harvesting to be integrated into the site.
- Desire for warm showers for the end of sessions and cleanliness.

Accessibility

- Ensure the site and any improvements to the area meets or exceeds compliance with the Disability Act.
- Access to the new sauna should be step free and improvements are needed to the changing facilitates.
- Movement around the site should be accessible and comfortable for a diverse bodies and needs.

Safety and Security

- Improve functionality of the fire exits and pathways to ensure the layout flows well.
- Improve functionality of the decking and assess safest option.
- Idea to improve enclosure to support atmosphere and privacy.

Material Palette

- Conclusive feeling the materials should have a clear, warm and consistent appearance across the site.
- Timber and natural materials are preferred.

A regular part of the week

- Everyone that wants a sauna in their week can have one.
- It should feel like an open and friendly space to use. A space for you to come alone, to meet others or use with a friend.
- Natural and normal environment to gather.

Flexible and Seasonal Use

- An interest in making the space more adaptable and allowing people to spend more time in the green space to simply hang-out and relax. Avoiding an overly scheduled ethos.

Keep it simple

- A consensus towards keeping the essence of what makes the sauna special; its simplicity, DIY feel without being overly polished.

Sustainable

- Clear interest in making the sauna more environmentally sustainable with rain water harvesting and low-impact materials.

Open to Change / British Sauna Culture

- A need for more and better cold plunging options, including a variety of shapes and temperatures.

Connected to St Anne's House

- Strong consensus to stay connected to St Anne's House, linking the sauna with the cafe, pottery studio. local community and other tenants.

Wide Range of Uses

- Ensure the sauna is able to adapt and remain flexible as it evolves over time.
- Allow a community-led British sauna culture to emerge and embrace the responsibility to explore new practices and sauna rituals.
- Caution was felt around introducing a range of wider offerings. Importance in maintaining focus on the sauna aspect and integrating workshops / music / movement slowly.

Attendants

1.2 Attendants

To engage with the attendants of BCS, a tailored questionnaire was shared with all staff members. The form was fully anonymous and a total of 7 responses were received from the team. The attendants were invited to reflect on the questionnaire, and informal contributions were also incorporated throughout the consultation period.

Strengths

A Space for Recovery and Balance

- An opportunity to step away from more stressful work environments.
- Slower rhythm of the space has helped staff find balance in working life.
- Often described as a grounding space during periods of personal or professional transition.

Connection to Nature

- Many attendants described being in the garden, observing the seasonal changes and being outdoors as meaningful and a grounding part of their regular shifts.
- Attendants describe a deep appreciation for how the natural world integrates with the sauna space; semi-wild garden, birdsong.

Community and Belonging

- The sauna was described as a source of local pride, something attendants are proud to share with others, a space that holds a strong sense of community.
- Attendants praise the space for allowing low-pressure and informal social connections.
- Many describe the respectful and enjoyable company of other attendants and visitors.

Meaningful Work

- Several attendants highlighted that working at the sauna offers a satisfying type of work in contrast to more conventional roles.
- The role allows attendants to facilitate experiences that bring joy and relaxation which feels purposeful and appreciated.
- Attendants noted the collective ownership and sense of pride for the space, a broader culture of care and tending to the area.

Light, Colour and Material Warmth

- Visual atmosphere emerged as a powerful contribute to well-being. Large windows, warmth of materials and natural textures create a welcoming and grounded space.

Comfort and Practical Ease

- Practical elements of the space have improved recently, noting better tidiness and ease in the changing area and layout that allows people to arrive more easily.

Community

Staff reflected with care on the moments when they feel most at home in the sauna. Comfort often came through a mix of practical readiness (cleanliness, safety) and emotional aspects: meaningful connections, warm feedback, shared rituals, and a sense of belonging. Pride was frequently tied to how visitors respond to the space; moments of recognition, and gratitude.

Shared Achievement

- Many staff said they feel proud when visitors are visibly moved or delighted by the space, especially first-time guests expressing surprise or joy at discovering it.
- Attendants feel pride when others acknowledge the atmosphere they helped to cultivate such as personality and ambience.

Connection and Recognition

- Strong relationships with regular users came through as a key source of pride. Attendants enjoy getting to know regulars, sharing small life updates and marking milestones together. These relationships create a feeling that the space is not a transactional service but space that is co-held and inhabited.

Safe and Functional Space

- Attendants noted that when the space is clean, calm and in good working order, it helps create conditions for everything else to unfold; safe and functional space.
- The circulation through the sauna site from reception to decking, sauna to cold shower, was widely seen as functional and safe.

Maintaining the Atmosphere

- Attendants describe their role as being a caretaker of the saunas culture. Attendants reflected on the balance of friendliness and respect, the effort and awareness it takes to hold a space and the challenge of sustaining community through change and growth.

Opportunities

Sensory and Ritual Additions

- Staff were enthusiastic about the idea of aromatherapy, sauna rituals and a more conscious curation of scent, sound and atmosphere.
- Attendants feel mindful touches that feel true to the sauna's informal culture could deepen and improve the experience.
- Attendants are cautious of how these extra services would be facilitated and if within the role they have enough capacity.

Community Driven Programming

- Several responses leaned into the possibility that, beyond logistics and day-to-day fixes, there might be a richer calendar of events and partnerships.
- Attendants proposed that the team be supported to run specialist sessions. These might include from LGBTQ+ or BIPOC focused events, ritual sessions, full-moon saunas, women's / men's circles, and collaborations with local cafés or artists.
- A community not a venue, many expressed fears over growth or commercial popularity would threaten the existing community. A sense not to lose any more regulars and to preserve the environment.

Upgraded Garden and Social Space

- There was a clear desire to enhance the garden space, especially around the pond and decking.
- Suggestions included more comfortable and flexible seating, safer flow around the site, and creating areas for relaxation that feel both welcoming and visually appealing.

Seasonal Programme and Infrastructure

- Staff called for a more responsive design approach to summer and winter conditions.
- In summer, this might mean expanding areas to hang out and adding tubs to accommodate higher demand for cold use.
- In winter, safer decking, better shelter, auxiliary heating (potentially via fire pits), and better lighting would all help maintain comfort and safety.



Opportunities

Overall, attendants feel the ideal session balances functional ease with a nourishing, welcoming atmosphere, where everyone is respected and the space feels manageable and in working order.

Intuitive Flow and Layout

- Attendants appreciated that the layout feels natural and private while offering line of sight to keep an eye on guest.
- The relationship between interior and exterior spaces was generally seen as coherent and user-friendly.

Use and Maintenance

- The space was generally described as easy to manage during shift set-up and close down; surfaces and structures are practical to maintain and straightforward.
- The decking was highlighted as the biggest concern. Improvements need to be made to the safety of the decking, attendants regularly describe their concern over the dangerous surface and injuries that have occurred as a result of slipping on the decking. Specifically during the winter when the sauna is its most busy and the decking at its most slippery.
- Shared top spot are the improvements needed to the functionality of the cold plunges. Attendants describe them as difficult to maintain, and often when not functioning correctly the space risks losing a key element and visitors feel disappointed.
- When these things break-down attendants noted the negative knock-on effect on the whole experience for both guests and attendants.
- The electric sauna was praised for its ease and reliability to use and adjust.

Seasonal Infrastructure

- Staff feel the colder months bring the most challenges, when pressure on staff is at its highest and the space is most in demand. Attendants feel more sheltered seating, heating and all-weather infrastructure could support the winter-peak season.
- The decking was highlighted again as being a concern for attendants during the winter.

Safer Conditions for Staff

- Lone working in winter was described as feeling 'a bit dangerous' due to the darkness across the site, specifically the lack of general security felt at St Anne's House, slippery deck and risk of falling.
- The desk space has been highlighted as a particularly unpleasant space to work in during the winter due to extremely cold conditions for the attendant.
- Attendants suggested looking at better infrastructure during winter months such as heating in the changing space, safer flooring and improved lighting across the site.

Lighting

- Attendants noted the outdoor lighting helps to maintain a soft and safe feel to the space.
- Staff note that adjustable lighting inside the sauna would be helpful for cleaning and maintaining a consistent atmosphere e.g. in the winter the sauna becomes very dark which shifts the vibe within the sauna.

Support

- Attendants noted the support from the Sauna Manager and WhatsApp group which has encouraged a communicative and more connected work environment.

Additional Amenities

- More privacy could be added to the changing room curtains and flooring could be improved.
- Attendants feel the toilets could work better and there is some discomfort with cafe and sauna visitors using the same facilities. Staff feel an on-site gender-neutral toilet would add to the wider experience.
- Attendants feel a hot shower with soap would widely support the winter months

On-Site Communication

- Suggestion that low-key signage to gently communicate expectations would be helpful such as "Shower before entering the sauna", "Silence, its a silent session", and "No phones beyond this point".
- Suggestion are these signs could be subtle without being prescriptive or directive.

Co-design Workshops

1.3 Workshops

To engage with regular sauna users and sauna-curious people, we designed and facilitated a series of design-focused workshops inside the sauna itself, using the rhythm of the sauna cycles (heat, cool, rest) as a container for reflection. Each round focused on a specific theme, with participants invited to consider simple but layered questions. Information was gathered through verbal contributions transcribed by the workshop facilitators, sticky-notes, and written responses. The attendees were invited to reflect on the workshop process and informal contributions were incorporated during the event.

Over 200 feedback notes were collected on the co-design boards during the workshops.

25 people registered to attend these on-site workshops. Of these attendees there was a wide variety of visitors. Some were sauna-regulars, many use the sauna on an ad-hoc basis and some attendees were visiting for the first time.

Strengths

Community Environment

- Strong celebrations for the sauna being body-positive and non-judgemental environment.
- Celebration of the inclusive price point.
- Emphasis the space is a LGBTQ+ neurodivergent friendly environment.
- Strong praise for staff and seen as a key to maintaining the calm and safe environment
- Community is emotionally invested in the ethos of the sauna and well supported.
- Users feel strongly connected to the site and natural integration with St Anne's House.

Natural Integration & Site Character

- Strong emotional connection to the urban wildness and rewilded setting.
- Love for the greenery, pond, and raw, simple architecture.
- Positive response to the site's integration with St Anne's House and the broader community.

Sauna Experience

- Having two saunas allows flexibility in use.
- Loved features include essential oils, quality of sauna, high heat of sauna, quiet sessions and natural materials across the site.
- Clear value placed on the ritualistic and sensory aspects (e.g. sounds and scents).
- Well-loved length of sauna session at 75 minutes and strong feedback to maintain it.

Spirit

- Sauna seen as a neutral space that fosters connection, belonging, and recovery.
- Users appreciate the ability to be both introverted and extroverted.
- Comments show that it has contributed to mental health, body confidence, and emotional well-being.

Opportunities

Cold Plunges & Water Experience

- The most frequently mentioned topic was requests for more cold plunges, different shapes (barrel plunges, shared baths) and temperatures (ambient, cold and ice cold).
- Suggestions for communal options, female physiology-friendly plunges.
- Concerns around cleanliness and clarity; suggested sign "shower then plunge"
- Improvement ideas for cold plunges: cold bucket, timers, and water bottle racks.

Atmosphere: Quiet vs Social Sessions

- Very frequently discussed topic
- High demand for more silent sessions and a designated quiet sauna.
- Concerns with, but also praise for, unpredictable 'roulette wheel' between social or quiet atmosphere and finding it very changeable.
- Many suggestions to keep low capacity sessions and increase sessions in timetable.
- Risk that lack of clarity in session types could alienate regulars due to business of site.

Inclusivity and Accessibility

- Requests for more accessible features such as fewer steps to get into the sauna, better ergonomic seating outside and more hand rails to accommodate for slippery surfaces.
- Suggestions to create a pay-it-forward membership or low-cost sessions. If pricing or access changes, it may exclude the current diverse user base.
- Importance to work with local community and keep this group of people involved.
- Overbooking and overcrowding can affect the safe, welcoming feel.
- Lack of accessible features (e.g. steps, seating, signage) could limit participation.

Natural Integration and Green Space

- Rewilded, green space is well loved and seen as essential to the identity of the space.
- Increase wild flowers, pollinator plants, and landscaping planting around the site to support natural landscapes.
- Improve pond health and address eutrophication as can appear unpleasant.
- More seating spaces within nature for immersed relaxation options.

Sensory and Ritual Enhancements

- Some enthusiasm for sensory layers to deepen the sauna experience, specifically offerings such as aromatherapy, relaxing music, incense and tea offerings.
- Introduce ritual based programmes for meditations and movement / creative workshops / discussion to take place.

Facilities and Practical Comfort

- Add more hooks, hair dryers, seating and storage for belongings during the session.
- Improve the decking for slip resistance as concerns over danger of surface in winter.
- Enhance shower facilities introducing a hot shower for after sessions to wash.

Social Connection

- Requests to host social events such as BBQ's, music events and more group bookings, forest bathing and yoga classes, talks and conversations.
- Highly requested was a space to sit after the session to enjoy the community environment and socialise or rest after a sauna session.
- A fire pit was requested multiple times.
- More areas to socialise with either physical seating or spaces to lie and rest.

Design Identity

- Many workshop individuals highlighted the fear of over development and avoiding commercialisation.
- Groups highlighted the desire to use natural materials and keep the design simple.
- Preference to let the space continue to evolve and resist over-flashy designs.
- Desire for the sauna to be spacious, generous benches, good sight lines and a double door to reduce heat loss.
- Lessons from Bluebell sauna include poor visibility into the sauna and poor access due to steps and small bench design.
- First sauna generally preferred and positive feedback over large glass window, material palette, sauna size and L-shaped layout.
- Preference for more shelter in winter months.
- Fear of the space becoming too "boujee," sterile, or commercial.
- Concern that design identity may be lost if too many changes are made, don't over-design it.



St. Anne's House Tenants/Staff

1.4 Tenants & Staff

To engage with the current staff and tenants of St. Anne's House, a tailored questionnaire was shared within the building, including St Anne's House staff. The format of response was fully anonymous, and while the number of responses were limited, it's possible to begin to see a picture emerge around how the Sauna sits in the context of St. Anne's House.

Tenants were invited to reflect on the relationship between Bristol Community Sauna and St. Anne's House. Respondents were asked questions such as "How do you feel the sauna currently sits within the wider culture and activity of St Anne's House?", "Where can you see challenges that might emerge if the sauna evolves?", and "Looking ahead, what are your hopes on how the sauna space could evolve?".

The questionnaire as well as informal contributions were used to compose this section of the report.

It should be noted that, due to the relatively low response rate in the context of the number of tenants based at St Anne's House (4 out of 70+), the responses received may not be an accurate representation of everyone's thoughts and feelings.

Perceptions of the Sauna Within the Culture of St. Anne's House

Positive Contribution to the Site's Atmosphere

Respondents overwhelmingly viewed the sauna as a valuable addition to St Anne's House. It was seen as contributing positively to the building's culture, encouraging more footfall and making the space feel livelier and more public-facing. One respondent highlighted that it brings in people who "wouldn't otherwise come," supporting a sense of openness and accessibility.

Alignment with Community Ethos

Several comments suggested that the sauna fits well within the broader community character of the site. Terms like "lovely addition" and "fits well" reinforced a general sense of cultural alignment and mutual benefit.

What's Working - and What Could Become Challenging - About the Sauna's Presence

Appreciated Privacy and Adaptation

Several respondents acknowledged thoughtful design choices that help integrate the sauna better. Privacy screens separating the sauna from adjacent spaces like the pottery studio were praised for helping both spaces coexist more comfortably, although visibility is still an issue from the higher floors in some parts of the building. The addition of coloured window film was also noted as improving the sense of privacy.

Pressure on Shared Facilities

Multiple respondents highlighted the limited toilet provision as an issue, with only one accessible bathroom shared between the café, sauna guests, and ground-floor events.

Cautiousness Around Future Expansion

A few respondents expressed concern that further physical expansion of the sauna might be too much for the site. While its presence is currently seen as positive, there was a sense that growth should be carefully considered in relation to other tenants' needs and the overall atmosphere of St Anne's House.

Hopes for the Future of the Sauna

Keep It Simple and Welcoming

Respondents praised the sauna's current visual character - simple, natural, and inviting - and hoped this approach would continue. There was some concern that future additions might block light into neighbouring spaces.

Support the Broader Site and Community

There was interest in seeing the sauna's success ripple across St. Anne's House and beyond. It was noted that if the sauna generates a financial surplus, it could help improve shared infrastructure across St Anne's House. Others saw potential in the sauna supporting the creation of similar community-led sauna projects elsewhere.

Shared Use of the Garden Space

A common theme in responses was the desire to see the outdoor areas around the sauna used more flexibly. While the sauna's presence in the garden was appreciated, some respondents flagged that it occupies a significant part of what had previously been a peaceful shared space. There was particular interest from the Community Pottery in being able to use the area for outdoor firings and other tenant-led activities, suggesting an opportunity for more diverse use of outdoor space.

Encourage Collaboration

There was also enthusiasm for deeper collaboration between the sauna and the other tenants at St Anne's House. Ideas included outdoor cafe seating, co-hosted creative events, and activity crossovers, like sauna-and-craft sessions. These ideas point to a desire for the sauna to remain part of the wider culture of the site, rather than a separate or standalone use.

Sauna Community

1.5 Sauna Community and General Public

To engage with the general public and sauna community at BCS a digital questionnaire was made publicly accessible and advertised within BCS sauna area, St Anne's House, BCS website and on social media platforms. Beyond this informal contributions were captured via post-it boards with a plan of the sauna site to capture spontaneous low-pressure engagement and conversations with attendants.

A total of 118 online surveys were completed.

The survey contained 10 questions.

Summary of Sessions Attended

There is a broad interest in different session styles, with a preference for classic sauna and cold plunge sessions, but also a much stronger desire for quieter, lower-capacity sessions than is supported by the current schedule.

Many respondents shared that their preference changes depending on who they're with or how they're feeling..

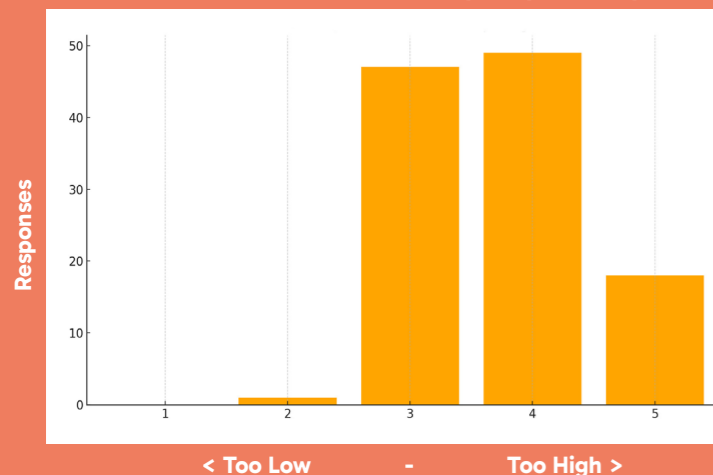
- Sauna & Cold Plunge was selected by **73** people
- Silent Sauna & Cold Plunge by **55** people
- Lower-Capacity Sauna & Cold Plunge by **51** people
- Silent Lower-Capacity Sauna & Cold Plunge by **21** people
- **15** respondents gave free-text answers, often expressing that their preference depends on mood, company, or time of day.

Attendance and Membership

As of July 2025 BCS has 326 active memberships. The most popular sessions remain the weekends, with Sunday and Saturday sessions having an average of 17-19 attendees.

Beyond the weekends, Wednesdays and Fridays are the most popular days to attend weekday sauna sessions. Lower-capacity sessions and silent sessions remain regulars favourites with a high demand for both sessions throughout the week.

How does the current session capacity feel to you?



“Great to have a mix – please keep low-capacity sessions.”

“Smaller groups are more relaxing and feel safer.”

“I love the lower-capacity sessions – more space to breathe.”

“It can feel too busy.”

Thinking about Bristol Community Sauna, what do you enjoy most?

Respondents were asked to reflect on what they already value about the sauna, with many highlighting its atmosphere, natural setting, and restorative quality.

It was frequently described it as a space where they feel safe and connected, whether to others, to their bodies, or to the green space. The responses show that the existing design has cultivated something that feels both special and grounded.

Atmosphere and Safety

- The most commonly mentioned quality was the calm, supportive atmosphere. Respondents frequently described the space as gentle, kind, or “held.”

Natural Setting

- People highlighted the surrounding trees, sky, and pond as key parts of what makes the space feel peaceful and connected to nature.

Quiet and Restfulness

- Silence and stillness are deeply appreciated. Many respondents value the opportunity to fully switch off.

Community and Inclusivity

- The space is seen as friendly and welcoming with a strong emphasis on non-judgement and ease.

Rituals

- The established routine of sauna, cold plunge, rest, and repeat is something respondents see as a key part of their experience.

How would you describe your ideal sauna experience?

Most people described an ideal experience that felt calm, unhurried, and immersive, with an emphasis on low lighting, calm energy, spaciousness, and sensory richness. There is a commonality in that the ideal sauna is not just a facility, but an embodied experience.

Atmosphere

- Silence or gentle energy was a top priority. Many people spoke about the sauna as a place of refuge or deep rest.

Spaciousness and Low Capacity

- Having room to breathe, lie down, and move freely was often mentioned. People are clearly affected by crowding.

Natural Materials and Green Space

- Respondents described the green space, wood, plants and earthy textures as important to their ideal version of a sauna experience.

Lighting and Sensory Ambience

- Low light, warmth, and minimal artificial elements are key. The sensory field is considered carefully.

Flow and Layout

- Good flow between spaces was raised by a smaller group but often in detail; a feeling of intuitive, unhurried movement between zones was seen as important

“Its CIC status should remain. It should be organised by and for the community.”

“The format works beautifully, no need to reinvent it. No clocks or timers”

“The rhythm, hot, cold, rest. Please keep that core.”

“Harsh lighting, bright colours, metallic finishes.”

“Too much ‘design’ — keep it simple.”

“Avoid over-commercial or try-hard aesthetics.”

“Don’t add speakers – let the space be quiet.”

“Avoid sharp edges, slick flooring.”

“It can be quite slippy and dangerous.”

“Plastic furniture or brightly coloured coatings would ruin the feel.”

“I really value the natural materials – please don’t make it feel sterile.”

“Please don’t let it go commercial.”

“Anything too bright, too sterile, or strip-lit.”

“Keep it low-key and gentle – not overbranded.”

What should not change about Bristol Community Sauna? What should be protected or preserved?

This question was included to try and ascertain what the core identity of the sauna is. Participants expressed a strong desire to preserve its calm atmosphere, community values, natural aesthetics, and accessible ethos. Many emphasised the importance of remaining not-for-profit.

Atmosphere & Energy

- The gentle, respectful, and relaxed vibe was repeatedly described as fundamental to the sauna’s appeal.

Natural Setting & Materials

- Respondents want to protect the connection to nature, views through the outside space from the original sauna, especially the pond, natural greenery, open skies, and use of wood and other organic materials.

Inclusivity & Accessibility

- Several people emphasised the importance of preserving the welcoming, non-judgemental culture.

Ritual and Simplicity

- The structure of sauna, plunge, rest, and repeat was identified as a central and comforting rhythm.

Community Ownership / Non-profit Ethos

- Participants made explicit reference to the sauna’s community-led model and social purpose.

Are there designs, features or materials you feel should be avoided in the saunas themselves or the outdoor space?

While many respondents skipped this question, those who answered offered clear, consistent views on what should be avoided. Their main concern was preserving the sauna’s natural, calming feel. Bright lighting, synthetic materials, loud sounds, and anything that might feel commercial or clinical were all raised as things that could disrupt the sense of peace and connection in the space.

Harsh Lighting and Bright Colours

- Overhead lighting and intense colours were seen as disruptive to the space’s calm ambience.

Slippery Surfaces and Safety Concerns

- Safety came up in relation to surface materials and layout, specifically the decking and slippery surface when wet.

Over complication / losing the Simplicity

- A small number of comments warned against adding too many features or straying too far from the sauna’s current character.

Plastics and Synthetic Materials

- Respondents strongly favoured natural materials and warned against using plastic or overly processed surfaces.

Loud Sounds / Music

- Many people want to preserve the quiet nature of the space by avoiding amplified music or noisy features.

“Events with food, fire and community – simple and nourishing.”

“Sliding scale tickets or more free community sessions.”

“Yoga, dance, and movement practices would be amazing.”

“I’m happy with it just being a sauna but would be open to other offerings if they suit the space.”

“A lower rate for those on lower incomes would help. It’s not always affordable.”

“The steps and floor can be tricky when wet.”

“As a British South Asian man, I feel very comfortable and welcome here.”

“Great to have a mix – please keep low-capacity sessions.”

“It can feel too busy.”

“Smaller groups are more relaxing and feel safer.”

“I’d prefer slightly fewer people so I can lie down or stretch.”

“I appreciate how values-led and non-commercial it feels.”

“Depends how I’m feeling. Sometimes I want quiet and space, sometimes I want social.”

“Sometimes I feel that single sex options could be nice. It can be a bit intense being exposed with men if I don’t know them.”

“I love the lower-capacity sessions – more space to breathe.”

“Please keep it grassroots, community-run.”

“It’s a really beautiful community resource.”

Do you feel welcome and comfortable in the current space? What could we do to make it more welcoming and comfortable?

Most respondents said they feel welcome and comfortable in the current space, often describing it as inclusive, friendly, and safe. However, a number of thoughtful suggestions emerged about how the sauna could go further in supporting access and inclusivity, particularly around cultural representation, gender identity, and affordability.

General Welcoming Atmosphere

- A clear majority of responses were positive, highlighting the current environment as supportive and inclusive.

Cultural and Religious Inclusion

- A few respondents emphasised the value of holding specific sessions or practices that acknowledge and centre different cultural experiences.

Gender Inclusivity and Comfort

- A handful of people raised the desire for more options around gendered or non-gendered space, and how nudity feels depending on who else is present.

Economic Access

- Some responses noted that ticket price or the lack of flexible pricing can be a barrier for some potential users and suggested more free community sessions or pay it forward schemes.

Physical Accessibility and Comfort

- Feedback included safety, ease of movement, and practical improvements for physical comfort, often focusing on the proportions of the space.
- Desire for fewer people. Most respondents would prefer slightly fewer people per session, mentioning crowding and the need for quiet.
- Many respondents appreciate both quiet, low capacity sessions and social sessions. However, many highlighted the need for better flexibility in the schedule.

Would you like our sauna space to be able to offer events and experiences beyond just sauna? Any final thoughts and reflections?

Responses to this question were split. Many participants were excited by the idea of gentle, aligned events such as meditation, breathwork, sound baths, yoga. However, a significant number also expressed caution or disinterest, preferring the sauna to stay focused on rest, recuperation, and simplicity.

The overall sentiment is that any additions should be optional, low-key, and clearly in harmony with the current atmosphere.

Support for Extra Events (if aligned)

- Some people were positive about the idea of events, especially if they build on the restful or communal spirit of the space.

Preference to keep it simple

- A sizeable number of people responded with variations on “no” — emphasising the importance of protecting the sauna’s core simplicity.

Ideas for Events and Activities

- Those in favour shared a wide range of ideas for future programming, mostly small-scale and reflective. Some people would like the opportunity to socialise over a drink after a session in the evening.

Gratitude and Appreciation

- Many used this space to express how meaningful the sauna is to them.

Support for the Community Ethos

- People valued the not-for-profit model and community care.

Encouragement and Hope for the Future

- There was a tone of support and trust throughout - people want the project to thrive.

“Some seating with back support would be helpful - also the benches in the saunas can feel cramped.”

“A more covered warm rest space.”

“Somewhere to lie down and stretch between rounds.”

“Another cold plunge.”

“Thermometers and egg timers to help guide your time in there.”

“Colder and more plunge pools’

“Warmer, dimmer lighting.”

Soft, glowy lighting indoors and out.”

”Places to be able to lay down and stretch that aren’t the floor”

“More signage or communication around it being a queer and body-positive space could help.”

“Colder plunge pool, and maybe more than one.”

“Make the sauna slightly bigger.”

“Coherent layout where nothing feels cramped or chaotic.”

“Herbal infusions or essential oils — like eucalyptus or birch.”

Are there any designs, features or materials you’d love to see more of in the saunas themselves or the outdoor space?

Cold Plunge Options

- The most commonly requested change was additional plunge pools or cold water features, particularly different temperature and sizes / shape of cold plunge.
- Many want reduced waiting times after exiting the sauna.

Bigger Sauna

- Respondents asked for more space in an additional sauna. Details such as bigger benches, more generous sizes inside the sauna, including head height and generous window sizes.

Lighting & Atmosphere

- Many asked for warm lighting and cautioned against anything too bright or artificial.

Scents, Steam and Sensory Enhancements

- Smells and sensory stimulation were popular, especially using natural inputs like essential oils or herbs.

Natural Materials and Aesthetics

- Respondents want to maintain and expand the use of organic, non-plastic materials and earthy tones.

Social and Resting Zones

- A number of people asked for more spaces to pause, reflect, or connect - such as benches, loungers, platforms to stretch on, or fire pits.
- People asked for places to relax in between rounds; ideally warm, soft, and sheltered.

Additional Amenities / Storage

- Practical requests included warm showers, shelves for water bottles, space for footwear, and storage solutions.
- Respondents asked for a better changing area that is more sheltered, some feel the changing curtain is not private and the buzzer system isn’t conducive to a calm environment.

If you could make only one change to our space, what would it be?

This question prompted a wide range of responses; from small, practical suggestions to broader desires for increased capacity or new zones. Some ideas aligned closely with earlier feedback, such as improving cold plunge facilities or adding more sheltered rest areas. While some responses were unique or personal, several common themes stood out clearly.

More Cold Plunge Options

- A frequent request for many. Many respondents find the waiting times for cold plunges too long and the hot-and-miss cold temperatures an issue.
- Respondents also raised concerns over the cleanliness of the cold plunges.
- Many respondents also requested different size, shapes and temperature cold plunges, once again highlighting the need for more cold plunges.

Bigger / Additional Sauna

- Respondents requested an additional sauna or larger second sauna to accommodate a more spacious, roomy sauna experience.
- Requests for a sauna with more internal space and larger benches would be ideal.

Lighting Improvements

- Suggestions to keep lighting gentle and consistent and improve the lighting within the existing sauna.

Changing Area / Storage Upgrades

- Ideas included better towel hanging facilities in the changing room and outside the saunas and improved water bottle storage.
- weather protection.

Don’t Change Anything

- A small group of respondents stressed they didn’t want any changes at all.
- Suggesting changes are minimal and to be wary of over commercialisation.

“The steps can be tricky when wet.”

“As long as it doesn’t interfere with the peaceful vibe.”

“Events with food, fire and community – simple and nourishing.”

“More signage or communication around it being a queer and body-positive space could help.”

“Colder and more plunge pools’

“Another cold plunge.”

“Sliding scale tickets or more free community sessions.”

“Yoga, dance, and movement practices would be amazing.”

“Sometimes I feel that single sex options could be nice. It can be a bit intense being exposed with men if I don’t know them.”

“The London saunas organise BIPOC-exclusive sauna nights. That might be worth considering.”

“As a British South Asian man, I feel very comfortable and welcome here.”

“Somewhere to lie down and stretch between rounds.”

“Herbal infusions or essential oils — like eucalyptus or birch.”

“Make the sauna slightly bigger.”

“Dim lighting, warm tones, natural smells.”

“More space to rest and socialise, with hammocks or benches.”

“A changing area that’s more sheltered. Also the buzzer is annoying”

“Dim lighting, quiet sounds, earthy textures.”

“Another sauna, maybe one is more social, the other silent.”

“I’m happy with it just being a sauna but would be open to other offerings if they suit the space.”

“It’s a really beautiful community resource.”

“I love it here, it’s my sanctuary.”

“I appreciate how values-led and non-commercial it feels.”

“Its CIC status should remain. It should be organised by and for the community.”

“Please don’t let it go commercial.”

“The format works beautifully, no need to reinvent it. No clocks or timers”

“Avoid sharp edges, slick flooring.”

“Avoid over-commercial or try-hard aesthetics.”

“Don’t add speakers – let the space be quiet.”

“It can be quite slippy and dangerous.”

“A warm shower as well as cold ones!”

“Anything too bright, too sterile, or strip-lit.”

“Harsh lighting, bright colours, metallic finishes.”

“Too much ‘design’ — keep it simple.”

“Keep it low-key and gentle – not overbranded.”

“I really value the natural materials – please don’t make it feel sterile.”

“Please keep it grassroots, community-run.”

“I’d prefer slightly fewer people so I can lie down or stretch.”

“The rhythm, hot, cold, rest. Please keep that core.”

Stage 2

Key Findings & Design Requirements

Key Findings

The Sauna Has Deep Personal and Community Value

The sauna plays a meaningful role in many people's lives as a space to unwind, reset, be in green space, and connect with people. Several respondents spoke of its role in supporting recovery from burnout or other health conditions, reducing isolation, and offering a dependable rhythm in their week.

For staff, it is both a valued workplace and a source of community connection.

The Atmosphere Works - and Should Be Protected

Users and staff consistently praised the site's welcoming, unpolished, and unpretentious character. The calm tone, informal and unregimented sessions, natural urban setting, and raw, grassroots feel help distinguish it from more commercial wellness venues.

There is a strong desire to maintain these qualities and avoid over-formalising or upscaling the space. Several respondents expressed concern that expansion, if not implemented carefully, could compromise the qualities that make the sauna feel special.

There Are Barriers to Inclusion

While many respondents feel the space is inclusive, several noted areas for improvement, including cultural access, privacy in changing areas, accessibility for marginalised groups, and communication. Dedicated sessions, clearer signage, and more generous space provision were suggested to help more people feel comfortable.

Staff Experience

Staff generally feel positive about the space and its operations, but flagged recurring issues:

- Slippery decking and awkward movement around back-of-house areas of the site
- Equipment not functioning optimally (especially cold plunge system)
- Lone working at night or feeling unsafe
- Maintenance tasks not yet being optimised

Staff also emphasised the importance of informal connection and communication between team members and sauna users, and the value of having a clear, supportive manager.

St Anne's House Staff & Tenants

Overall St Anne's House Staff and Tenants see the sauna as a positive and culturally aligned addition to St Anne's House, enhancing the atmosphere and increasing public engagement. While its simple, natural design and privacy adaptations were appreciated, concerns were raised about pressure on shared facilities and the potential impact of future expansion.

Looking ahead, there is enthusiasm for deeper collaboration, shared use of garden space, and the sauna supporting broader community benefit across the site.

Design Requirements



1. Design and Construct New Sauna(s)

- Provide bigger benches and more generous seating throughout.
- Increase site capacity while ensuring enhanced spaciousness and comfort, exploring the possibility of private zoning.
- Incorporate large areas of glazing to connect with the outdoors.
- Include generous ceiling height and clear space between bench levels.
- Design thermal layout to avoid direct heat exposure on seats.
- Ensure level, step-free, and safe access for all users.
- Use durable, natural materials that age well.
- Select surfaces that are easy to clean and quick to dry.
- Include appropriate floor drainage throughout the space.
- Use timber flooring for warmth and visual consistency.
- Add a glazed panel within the sauna door for visibility.
- Integrate soft, warm lighting into the sauna design.
- Align visual and material language with the existing sauna for coherence.
- Choose robust hardware and finishes for long-term use.

2. Create More Usable Outdoor Space

- Create comfortable, sociable spaces for rest within the landscape.
- Improve safety and usability of decking areas
- Provide weather protection and shade for all seasons with canopies or shelters.
- Offer multiple seating areas for flexibility and privacy.
- Include platforms or decks for stretching and sitting within garden areas.
- Install warm shower facilities on-site, especially for winter comfort.
- Upgrade screening materials for privacy with more durable solutions.
- Include ergonomic seating designed to meet varied access needs.

3. Manage the Growth of the Gardens

- Maintain a balance between wildness and intentional planting.
- Manage existing plant life to preserve the garden's organic feel.
- Introduce subtle landscape cues and

- permissive routes to encourage exploration.
- Use low-maintenance, self-sustaining, heritage or native, pollinator-friendly, herbal, and fragrant plants throughout.
- Improve pond health by addressing eutrophication and potentially expanding size.
- Preserve moss as a key component of garden biodiversity.

4. Additional and Improved Cold Plunges

- Design the plunge zone to encourage showering before use.
- Ensure logical, fluid movement between shower and plunge areas.
- Position plunges in shaded, cool parts of the site.
- Insulate plumbing to help maintain cold temperatures.
- Offer varied plunge shapes, including barrel forms for deeper cooling.
- Provide communal plunge options for shared use.
- Install a reliable and easily maintainable plunge system.

5. Protect the Atmosphere

- Maintain the welcoming, raw and unpolished identity of the site.
- Preserve the calm, grounded feel within its urban natural setting.
- Avoid over-designing or formalising the space unnecessarily.
- Minimise disruption by implementing phased works.
- Improve site signage to gently communicate suggested norms and behaviours.
- Include reminders to shower before plunging and to keep silent during quiet sessions.

6. General Improvements to Changing Areas

- Enhance privacy with better curtain coverage or partitions.
- Add towel hooks and storage facilities across the site, in and outside of the sauna.
- Provide ergonomic seating that is comfortable and supportive.
- Include hair drying amenities, especially for winter months.
- Install hot shower facilities to improve hygiene and comfort.
- Provide accessible, on-site toilet facilities dedicated to sauna users.

**“So excited to see
how this evolves.”**

**“Thank you for holding
such a nourishing,
beautiful space.”**

**“Thanks for including
us in the process.”**

CLIMBING
PLANT

Seconding
of cold plunge
bucket.

DJ / MUSIC
SESSIONS
😊 x

More
PLUNGE
pls ;)

Lovely sauna, lots of
space, lovely staff.
I like when there is
essential oils available.
Something to improve:
- another ice/cold plunge
- changing room curtains
closed properly Thank

Yoga
& sauna
event!

Art Gallery/
Sculpture-
Exhibition
Area

COLD
BUCKET!
ice bucket
please

More
Cold
plunges ;)

Wild flowers
to encourage
nature!

More
cold
plunges!

more wild
to look at
while in
sauna

More
Grippy
on floors
⚠️

SHIPPING
SLIPPING!
SLIPPING

DO something
about the
ennutification
of this pool?

some more
planters/
growing
space
(e.g. Community
veg growing)

yes!
← pls

Two saunas
is great
it's easy to
if want
for any
reason.

PRIVATE SHOWER
LOWER CAPACITY
WITH BOTH OPEN



SHOWER FIRST
THEN
COLD PLUNGE

easy sightline
know what you
walking into

SHELTER
OPTIONS

Aroma-
therapy
sessions
♥️

yes
please

herb
garden
(nicely
small)

↑
Seconded

SWIMMING
POND!

slippy
slippy

Different temp
to cold plunge:
- Ambient
- Cold
- Ice cold

i'd love something
like a workshop
for aromatherapy/
essential oils
stuff
x

Don't charge
too much -
it's great as it is.
Simple works
😊 x

↑
Sign
please!

NEW
SAUNA
(2ND)

Resources & Data Content

Questionnaires:

All Google Forms responses for each questionnaire can be accessed via the ideas@bristolcommunitysauna.org account.