

Growth and Infrastructure Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Monday 22 January 2024

PRESENT:

Councillor Tuffin, in the Chair.

Councillor Salmon, Vice Chair.

Councillors Carlyle, Gilmour, Goslin, Luggier, McLay, Noble, Partridge, Patel, Raynsford, Sproston, Stevens and Tuffin

Apologies for absence: Councillors Bingley and Stoneman.

Also in attendance: Councillors Evans OBE (via Teams), Briars-Delve, Coker and Laing, Richard Bara (Urban Designer), Paul Barnard (Service Director for Strategic Planning and Infrastructure), Nick Carter (Head of Housing and Regeneration), Liz Cole (Natural Infrastructure Officer), Alison Critchfield (Monitoring Officer), Ellie Firth (Head of Public and Partner Relations), Martin Ivatt (Regeneration and Placemaking Manager), Ross Jago (Head of Governance, Performance and Risk), Julie Parkin (Senior Lawyer), Anthony Payne (Strategic Director for Place), Helen Trenerry (Project Delivery Officer), Elliot Wearne-Gould (Democratic Advisor), Hannah Whiting (Democratic Advisor), Louise Bradley (Director, ECF), Will Hudson (Principal Engineer, Jubb), Lee Ferris (Director and Architect, Agora Architects) and Adam King (Managing Director, YGS Environmental Consultants).

The meeting started at 2.00 pm and finished at 4.33 pm.

Note: At a future meeting, the Panel will consider the accuracy of these draft minutes, so they may be subject to change. Please check the minutes of that meeting to confirm whether these minutes have been amended.

27. **Declarations of Interest**

No declarations of interest were made.

28. **Chair's Urgent Business**

There were no items of Chair's urgent business.

29. **Better Places Programme: Armada Way**

The following public representations were made:

The following representation was made by Mr Kilroy:
If no detailed SuDs designs and calculations have been done, how can we be sure that the scheme will have sufficient capacity to handle the roof run-off of any future development in the area?

The following representation was made by Ms Tarrant:
Why was no cost/benefit analysis done regarding the translocation of the 6 (now 4) trees, factoring in the chance of survival, which was considered poor by organisations such as Plymouth Tree People and the Woodland Trust, as well as the council's own Natural Infrastructure Officers?
The following representation was made by Mrs Steer:
If the plans can change to accommodate two trees, can be changed to accommodate all six trees?
The following representation was made by Mr Godefroy:
The Plymouth City Centre Company, representing the interests of all city centre businesses, recognises the value, importance and urgency of the significant investment planned for Armada Way. We would like to ask the Scrutiny Committee if it could give the scheme its full support for the sake of existing businesses, which have suffered financial losses due to the delays, and for future investment which will be vital for the regeneration of the city centre.
The following representation was made by Mr Thomas, although he was not present at the meeting:
The consultation material stated that "if we do not translocate the six trees then this proposed scheme is not possible" but this claim was not made about any other element of the design. How can you be sure that this statement did not influence people's responses?

The Leader of the Council introduced the item and highlighted the following:

- a) Thanks to the Committee for this consideration of the material and their important role in the decision-making process;
- b) Cabinet wanted to have an open and transparent process for Armada Way and so experienced and independent experts were commissioned to undertake the most recent consultation and engagement exercise;
- c) The consultation reflected the values of being democratic, taking responsibility, acting with fairness, and being cooperative, in the Corporate Plan;
- d) He advocated for pre-decision scrutiny on key decisions;
- e) The consultation exercise was not a vote or a referendum, and the project was not starting from nothing, and he was grateful for the generally positive responses received from local people and businesses on the scheme;
- f) The consultation and engagement had launched on 17 October 2023;
- g) They wanted the new scheme to:

- i. Recapture the scale and grandeur of Armada Way;
 - ii. Include more trees and greenery;
 - iii. Include a huge and exciting new destination play village for families;
 - iv. Help wildlife and nature;
 - v. Be water smart;
 - vi. Improve safety for all, especially women and young girls;
 - vii. Have more places to sit, relax and eat;
 - viii. Include a new cycling path for people of all abilities;
 - ix. Have plenty of pop-up spaces for retail, arts, culture, and entertainment;
- h) They had had to balance some polarising views on certain issues such as trees and cycling;
 - i) They had carefully considered all views submitted via the consultation and engagement and had made changes to make the proposal even stronger;
 - j) The overriding message from both residents and businesses had been alike and clear: “Just get on with it!”;
 - k) The revised proposals would play a pivotal role in supporting new investment and development opportunities;
 - l) Plymouth’s unique city centre deserved the best, for the people who lived and worked in Plymouth, and for future generations;
 - m) The costs were still to be finalised and negotiated as part of the final construction contract and he would ensure that they got value for money.

Councillor Laing (Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Children’s Social Care, Culture, Events and Communications) added:

- n) Feedback from previous engagement exercises had been considered;
- o) They wanted to create a revised scheme that incorporated more trees and greenery, more recreational space, a large play area, improved pathways for walking and cycling, with a sustainable lifespan;
- p) Through the consultation they wanted to:

- i. Gain a deeper understanding of the aspirations of residents, businesses, and other stakeholders regarding Armada Way;
 - ii. Ensure a scheme was delivered that meets the long terms needs of people who work, live, shop, eat, play, and travel through it;
 - iii. To engage on what had been revised and offer 'true scope for influence';
 - iv. To balance and weight views, so no one group or individual had disproportionate influence;
 - v. Engage with a wider set of stakeholders, reaching those not previously engaged;
- q) The fact that Armada Way was being regenerated was not up for debate;
- r) The approach was legally robust and considered:
- i. Gunning principles;
 - ii. Localism Act 2011;
 - iii. Equalities Act;
 - iv. Plymouth's own Statement of Community Involvement;
- s) It was decided that Plymouth City Council would work with an independent consultation and engagement specialist (ECF), who had vast experience in the field, to offer public reassurance that the process would be different to what had happened before;
- t) The proposals and information were shared, and feedback was gathered through:
- i. A dedicated project website, email and phone number, and the website had 24,000 visitors and 1,568 subscribers;
 - ii. A survey hosted online, in hard copy and EasyRead format;
 - iii. 1-2-1 interviews with stakeholders;
 - iv. Four workshops with under-represented groups – including older people, parents and families, those with disabilities and young people;
 - v. The submission of formal written responses from groups and organisations;
 - vi. Those without access to the internet could also provide feedback through a dedicated phone number, as well as through hard copy

survey;

- u) To ensure that as many people as possible knew about the consultation and how to have their say, a robust publicity plan was developed – which included:
 - i. Social media posts by PCC and through digital advertising – and as the ECF report highlights, there were significant views – including over 2.2m impressions in the paid for advertising campaign;
 - ii. Emails to over 250 stakeholder contacts – made up of key businesses and organisations – including environmental groups – encouraging them to publicise via their networks and on their channels;
 - iii. Briefings with stakeholders, the local MP and councillors;
 - iv. Vinyls on hoardings along Armada Way;
 - v. Press releases and video sharing – including weekly updates and videos focusing on different areas in the proposals – including a SUDS (Sustainable Urban Drainage System) scheme explainer, the history of Armada Way, the cultural value of regenerating Armada Way;
 - vi. Hard copy materials in central library, indoor market and the Theatre Royal;
 - vii. Over 15,000 postcards distributed to businesses, schools, wellbeing centres, residential areas, shopping centres and to people along Armada Way;
- v) Cabinet Members and Council officers worked closely with ECF to help answer questions and provide clarifications and additional information for FAQ's;
- w) Over 1,500 people completed the survey.

Louise Bradley (Director, ECF) gave a [presentation](#) and highlighted the following points:

- x) There were 1503 survey respondents, 5 completed EasyRead surveys, 9 stakeholder interviews, 16 written responses from organisations and groups, 50 respondents who provided feedback via email/phone and 4 workshops conducted with older persons, younger persons, and people with disabilities;
- y) 96.4% of respondents were from PL postcodes;
- z) 40% of respondents were people aged between 55-74, 12% were aged 25-34;

- aa) 53% of respondents were female, and 96.5% of respondents had the same gender identity as the sex they were assigned at birth;
- bb) 71% of respondents did not have a health problem or disability that affected their day-to-day activities;
- cc) 87.6% of respondents identified as White and 2.6% of respondents identified as mixed or multiple ethnic groups, Asian or Black;
- dd) Design of the survey;
- ee) Approach to workshops, interviews and formal responses;
- ff) 871 respondents felt that the most important thing when making Armada Way a greener and more sustainable urban environment was that Armada Way would be a green space with trees, shrubs and wildflowers;
- gg) Findings relating to translocation were thematic and so could not be quantified, but some people felt that the cycle path could be moved to incorporate remaining trees and there was not sufficient evidence that the trees had to move to enable SUDS, some were concerned about the success rate of translocation and that it could be a waste of money, and if trees had to be moved, it needed to be done carefully in conjunction with experts and a maintenance plan;
- hh) Other feedback included:
 - i. SUDS being essential to manage the city's rainwater;
 - ii. Tree canopy was needed in the urban environment;
 - iii. Inclusion of plants for pollinators and edible plants for wildlife;
 - iv. Some species might have been unsuitable, and others suggested;
 - v. Reduce the amount of hard/grey space;
 - vi. Under planting to increase biodiversity;
 - vii. Requests for detail regarding long-term maintenance plan and funding;
- ii) With regards to the Play Village feedback included:
 - i. Those who were not interested in it were mainly older people and/or people who did not have young children;
 - ii. Parents and grandparents of young children, and the business community, were supportive, and many felt it would encourage them to use the city centre more as it would increase dwell time;

- iii. Important that there was plenty of seating and clear visibility to parents could see children, and that equipment catered for a diverse range of abilities;
- iv. Important to consider ways of deterring antisocial behaviour, especially in sheltered places;

jj) Feedback relating to pop-up spaces included:

- i. Desire for live music, creative performances, pop-up stalls and food outlets;
- ii. Encouragement for high quality traders, whilst making provision for regular local favourites;
- iii. Suggestion of street art installations;
- iv. Consideration was needed for the impact on walls, seating etc from skateboarding and parkour;

kk) Feedback relating to solar canopies, flexible spaces and seating spaces included:

- i. Solar canopies could be used for sheltered seating, bike racks and pop-up stalls;
- ii. Flexible spaces to sit, eat and relax;
- iii. Regular and varied seating types;
- iv. Request to keep 'flag blocks' as seats around the Sundial;

ll) In relation to the cycle path and mobility hub, the following was fed back;

- i. Concerns over width of the paths for passing spaces, crossing places, misuse by e-bike riders, unclear sightlines;
- ii. Desire for bike storage throughout to be made from durable materials;
- iii. Need for clear way marking of cycle path and education of its use;

mm) Lighting and CCTV feedback included:

- i. Concerns over light pollution for residents and wildlife;
- ii. Maintenance was essential;

- iii. CCTV would help address anti-social behaviour, monitor sheltered spaces and deter loitering;
 - iv. Could improve night-time economy and make people feel less vulnerable;
- nn) Suggestions were made in relation to supporting those with disabilities that included:
- i. Appropriate surfacing for people in wheelchairs, with mobility and/or vision issues;
 - ii. Inclusion of appropriate lighting for people who were sensitive to hard lights;
 - iii. Disability toilets and change facilities;
 - iv. Separation of the cycle path and pedestrian walkway to improve safety for people with disabilities;
 - v. Inclusion of seating and tables that catered for people in wheelchairs;
- oo) When given a list of statements to agree with regarding the scheme, the most popular were: it will make the city centre more welcoming; it will be a greener space; it will help businesses attract more customers;
- pp) Many felt it was important that there was a long-term maintenance plan with a ring-fenced budget;
- qq) Concerns around construction timelines and phasing.

Councillor Coker (Cabinet Member for Transport) added:

- rr) Plymouth City Council had been awarded a total of £58.8 million grant funding for the Plymouth Transforming Cities Fund programme in 2020 which totalled 31 projects, amounting to £117.1 million of investment in Plymouth;
- ss) The projects were originally due to be completed by March 2023;
- tt) The primary outcomes that the Council were aiming to deliver across the projects were:
 - i. A step change in local public and sustainable transport connectivity;
 - ii. Improved access to jobs;
 - iii. To reduce congestion;
 - iv. To improve air quality;

- v. To deliver housing;
- uu) Armada Way was one of the 14, Tranche 2 projects that made up the Plymouth TCF programme, the benefits of which would include:
 - i. A new cycle path to cater for cyclists of all abilities to a standard that delivered a step change in sustainable connectivity;
 - ii. Quality infrastructure that encouraged more people to walk, cycle, and shop locally, which would reduce congestion, reduce carbon footprints, and improve air quality;
- vv) Investment in the public realm, directly supported the ambition to bring substantial amounts of new residential development, and therefore more footfall, into the city;
- ww) Just over £4 million in grant money from the Transforming Cities Fund was being put into the Armada Way project;
- xx) Following a review of all TCF projects across the country, by Government, alongside a new national assurance process, the Department for Transport have advised that TCF funding must be spent by March 2025;
- yy) Funding had been received to install a cycle path in the city centre and to meet requirements, the cycle path had to meet the detailed guidance set out in the TCF LTN 120, and this scheme did this, which had been independently verified by AECOM and Active Travel England;
- zz) Throughout the length of the project, the Council had sought feedback from a wide range of stakeholders and industry experts;
- aaa) Four specific changes had been made to the cycle route to reflect comments from the consultation.

Councillor Briars-Delve (Cabinet Member for Environment and Climate Change) added:

- bbb) The scheme published in October 2023 was substantially different to previous proposals;
- ccc) A balanced compromise had been reached with regards to the remaining trees to help meet all of the schemes objectives;
- ddd) 153 trees had existed before, and this would increase to over 200 at the completion of the scheme;
- eee) The new trees would all be between 3.5-8 metres tall at the time of planting;

- fff) 39 of the remaining trees would be retained in the scheme, with only 4 trees needing to be translocated in order to implement the SUDS system;
- ggg) Nature was at the heart of the scheme with plants under the trees, reed beds in the stream, and large new areas of wildflowers as well as bird boxes, bat boxes and insect totems, that would be created from the previously felled trees;
- hhh) The aim was to achieve a biodiversity net gain of approximately 20%;
- iii) 10 changes had been made to the scheme following the consultation.

In response to questions it was explained:

- jjj) The correct decision process was for Cabinet to sign off the final decision on the scheme;
- kkk) Various disabilities had been considered within different aspects of the scheme;
- lll) The play village would include different equipment that was accessible for children of varying abilities, with a specific sensory area;
- mmm) Sensory needs and benefits had also been considered in relation to planting across the scheme;
- nnn) SUDS would help tackle issues such as sewer discharge into Plymouth Sound and flooding and had been designed to take on a large amount of rainfall and cope with expected increases in rainfall in the future due to the ongoing climate emergency;
- ooo) Some of the water from the SUDS would be used to irrigate the trees and rain gardens would help to filter the water and improve water quality;
- ppp) There would be an increase across the scheme in permeable and soft landscaping;
- qqq) Over the past 12 months, construction inflation costs had been running at 15-20% across the UK, and some elements were going above 20% because of world affairs such as the Israel-Hamas war in Gaza, war in Ukraine, the aftermath of Brexit and more having an impact on supply chains, and the Armada Way project inflation element had been estimated at £3-3.5 million;
- rrr) There had been a cost increase due to an increase in the scope of the project, estimated at £4.7 million;
- sss) Significant underground elements, not previously known about, had been uncovered in nearby streets of Old Town Street and New George Street;

- ttt) Legal costs for the scheme had increased;
- uuu) Once the scheme had been finalised and contract negotiations could be entered into, costs would be reduced wherever possible;
- vvv) Plymouth City Council's investment in the city centre was encouraging to private investors for future schemes, and improvements to the public realm, would hopefully lead to an increased footfall, benefitting multiple sectors;
- www) Destination Plymouth, Homes England and the Plymouth City Centre Company have all agreed that investment should increase footfall, including from the tourism sector;
- xxx) The £14 million for the previous scheme was a budget figure, not a tendered cost figure;
- yyy) Additional funding was to come from the existing capital programme, but other sources of income would be looked at for the project;
- zzz) A long term maintenance plan was being drawn up which would outline the funding and maintenance for 5 years, and the SUDS had been considered as part of that;
- aaaa) The new scheme and water features were as low maintenance as possible and Plymouth City Council were working with a water feature specialist and would inform the maintenance plan;
- bbbb) Renewable energy was important in the scheme to power the SUDS, but also to set an example for local people and businesses to be more sustainable;
- cccc) Other projects across the city would still be funded by the Climate Investment Fund;
- dddd) Significant amounts of risk were being costed into contracts across the capital programme;
- eeee) No guarantee could be given with regards to the final cost of the scheme as the costs had not been finalised and agreed and that the £36.8 million was an estimated maximum and it was hoped that the figure could be reduced;
- ffff) Trial pits would be carried out relatively quickly;
- gggg) The figure of £36.8 million was not out of keeping with other, similar, public realm schemes in other areas of the country;
- hhhh) The consultation that had taken place in February 2023 had been on the previous scheme;
- iiii) If the ongoing legal issues relating to the previous scheme caused an issue in spending the funding from the Transforming Cities Fund, the Council could

approach the Department of Transport to discuss other options to spend the funding;

- jjjj) The Climate Impact Assessment assessed the scheme against 8 different categories and included information on materials and waste for the project;
- kkkk) Materials would be recycled and reused wherever possible and new materials would need to be imported in some cases, but local materials would be considered where possible as well;
- llll) The city centre would play a key role in the future of social and affordable housing in Plymouth, and would bring significant footfall to the area;
- mmmm) The Plymouth Pear Tree was not included in the plans, although it had been looked into, but there were complications, including the need for a license to plant it, but it was deemed not suitable for the scheme, but other fruit bearing trees had been chosen for the scheme and would provide food for wildlife;
- nnnn) 'Lollipop' Trees had been selected because they provided clear lines of sight, but there would be a wide range of different tree species planted;
- oooo) The starting point for the new scheme was to try and retain all the remaining trees but it had not been deemed possible, so translocation had been considered a viable option;
- pppp) The cost translocation of trees was expected to be around £100,000;
- qqqq) Considerations had been made for the safety of both pedestrians and cyclists in the scheme;
- rrrr) Once the scheme had been implemented, there would be a review of how the space was working for both pedestrians and cyclists;
- ssss) Plaques relating to the trees would be kept clear of surrounding vegetation and adding braille to them to make them more accessible would be considered.

The meeting was adjourned from 4.05 pm to 4.17pm.

In response to further questions, it was explained:

- tttt) Key stakeholders were reached out to, but some felt that they could express their views via the survey, or a written response, rather than through an interview;
- uuuu) Numbers of people who did not complete the survey were low, but people could have skipped questions if they had wanted to, and incompletes were accepted;

- vvv) Some of the recommendations for improvement in relation to a review of the planned cycle routes had already been implemented into the new scheme;
- www) Walking and cycling improvements and connectivity of routes across the city, were a priority for the administration;
- xxx) With regards to the Climate Impact Assessment, equal weighting was given to each of the categories;
- yyy) The refurbishment of the interior of the public toilets on Armada Way, would be looked at as a separate project, to be developed in the future;
- zzz) Plymouth as a city was beginning to get noticed, for example in hidden gem articles in national newspapers, cruise ships visits were expected to increase, and other regeneration projects had taken place across the city; Plymouth deserved a first class regeneration that matched its ambition.

The Committee resolved to fully support the new scheme ahead of the scheduled Cabinet decision.

The Committee also resolved to thank the Cabinet Members, Officers and Members of the Public for their thorough report and contributions.

In addition, the Committee agreed to recommend to Cabinet that -

1. The City Centre Public Realm Board included cross-party membership;
2. The provision of waste bins should be of the combined litter and recycling type;
3. Further consideration should be given to the provision of outdoor gym equipment in the play area;
4. Further consideration should be given to how to improve community engagement in the project (e.g. community painting event for bird boxes);
5. The Cabinet would use best endeavours to ensure that the project was completed on time and within budget;
6. Cabinet should give consideration on how to assess overall economic impact of the project and to report back to an appropriate meeting of the Growth and Infrastructure Scrutiny Committee;
7. Further consideration should be given to improving the 1:1 replacement ratios for failed translocated trees;
8. Consideration of inclusion of braille on the plaques placed under trees.

For (12)

Councillors Carlyle, Gilmour, Goslin, Lugger, Noble, Partridge, Patel, Raynsford, Salmon, Sproston, Stevens and Tuffin.

Abstain (1)

Councillor McLay.

Against (0)

Absent/Did Not Vote (0)