

Cabinet

Monday 19 February 2024

PRESENT:

Councillor Evans OBE, in the Chair.

Councillor Laing, Vice Chair.

Councillors Aspinall, Briars-Delve, Coker, Cresswell, Dann, Haydon, Lowry and Penberthy.

Also in Attendance: Councillor Ian Tuffin, Paul Barnard (Service Director for Strategic Planning and Infrastructure), Alison Critchfield (Senior Lawyer), David Haley (Director of Children's Services), Ruth Harrell (Director of Public Health), Martin Ivatt (Regeneration and Place-making Manager), Tracey Lee (Chief Executive), David Northey (Service Director for Finance), Anthony Payne (Strategic Director for Place), Giles Perritt (Assistant Chief Executive), Jamie Sheldon (Senior Governance Advisor), and Gary Walbridge (Strategic Director for People).

The meeting started at 2.00pm and finished at 2.52pm.

Note: The full discussion can be viewed on the webcast of the City Council meeting at www.plymouth.gov.uk. At a future meeting, the Council 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.

113. **Declarations of Interest**

No declarations of interest were made.

114. **Minutes**

The minutes held on 05 February 2024 were agreed as a correct record.

115. **Questions from the Public**

There were no questions from the public.

116. **Chair's Urgent Business**

There were no items of Chair's urgent business.

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

Councillor Evans OBE (Leader of the Council) introduced the item and highlighted the following points:

- a) The vision for the city centre was for a vibrant, modern shopping area;
- b) The ambition was to reimagine the city centre, collaborating with national parties including Homes England, Historic England, the Environment Agency and others

to bring forward one of the most ambitious regeneration programmes since the War to transform the city centre into a modern, vibrant and mixed use destination with a new community living at its heart;

- c) The Council had been well versed in developing long term strategic investment frameworks with funders over a decade.
- d) The Council had pioneered nationally significant work with the Local Enterprise Partnership, Arts Council England, National Lottery and the Transforming Cities Fund;
- e) The revival of the city centre had already begun and £1.1 billion of investment potential was in the pipeline with significant investments already been made;
- f) Plymouth City Council had invested millions of pounds to upgrade the outdated and tired public realm. This would encourage others to invest when the quality of plans had been seen;
- g) A consultation was published 17 October 2023;
- h) The new scheme would recapture the scale and grandeur of Armada Way, it would include more trees, greenery and a play village for families, it would help wildlife and nature, and it would be water smart and improve safety for all, especially women and girls. There would be more places to sit, to relax and eat. There would be more cycle paths and have plenty of pop-up spaces for retail, arts, culture and entertainment;
- i) The changes arising from the consultation and Scrutiny had made proposals stronger;
- j) City centres across the country were struggling and a credible response was required for Plymouth residents now and into the future;
- k) A suggestion from the local MP would be to have a time capsule and include what life was like in 2024 and the story of Armada Way.

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

- l) Various forms of engagement and the robust publicity plan which was developed had been set out in the Cabinet meeting of 5 February 2024 and ensured that as many people as possible were aware of the proposals and had an opportunity to have their say;
- m) The administration had endeavoured to ensure the Armada Way proposals had been consulted on in a thorough and transparent way using specialist external consultation and experts to do so;

- n) The administration looked at the feedback that was given in previous engagement exercises and whilst this was not a vote or referendum the administration wanted to present a bold new plan to revitalise Armada Way;
- o) Excited by the new scheme, it not only represented the administrations aspirations for enhancing the quality of the public realm in the city but to also have a truly transformed modern city centre;
- p) The play village would be seen as an innovative design which families and young people could enjoy and one which would bring footfall into the city centre and add to the vibrancy of the area;
- q) The plans would incorporate more trees and greenery, more recreational space, and improved pathways for walking and cycling;
- r) The Chair for Growth and Infrastructure Overview and Scrutiny Committee described the pre-decision scrutiny as an example of best practice;
- s) Specialist external consultation and engagement experts had been used to ensure the Armada Way proposals were thorough and transparent;
- t) The scheme represented the aspirations for the public realm in Plymouth and the wider vision for creating a truly transformed, modern and thriving city centre;
- u) One of the key messages from the consultation was 'get on with it'.

Councillor Coker (Cabinet Member for Strategic Planning and Transport) added:

- v) Armada Way was about sustainable transport and improving cycling and walking infrastructure as well as reducing the cities carbon emissions;
- w) A new cycle path would be provided which would cater to cyclists for all abilities and standards which would deliver a one-step change for sustainable connectivity;
- x) The cycle path was a contested area at Let's Talk Armada Way Consultation and it was agreed to have further changes to the design in response to the concerns of points four, five, six and seven;
- y) The design met the latest Department for Transport design standards known as LTNI20 and had the support of Active Travel England and the national sustainable transport charity, Sustrans;
- z) Over £4 million of the Transforming Cities Fund Grant would be put into the Armada Way project to achieve sustainable transport outcomes;
- aa) These sustainable transport measures would help the Council to achieve its existing commitments in strategic objective three of the Joint Local Plan, concerning the delivery growth in the city centre;

- bb) The provision of improvements to the city centre in Policy PLY6 would enable a foundation to be laid for the expansion of city centre living. With more people living and working in the city centre, footfall for businesses would increase, with vacant and historic buildings repurposed and would reinforce the city centre as a commercial centre and also transform it into cultural, tourist and residential destination.

Councillor Haydon (Cabinet Member for Community Safety, Libraries, Cemeteries and Crematoria) added:

- cc) There had been incidents in previous years there had been serious incidents in the city centre including serious sexual offences against women and girls which had been due to large tree canopies blocking the CCTV
- dd) Enhanced lighting and CCTV was supported and would improve the night-time economy and help people feel safe.

Councillor Cresswell (Cabinet Member for Education, Skills and Apprenticeships) also added:

- ee) The play village would be full of spaces and opportunities to run, splash, balance, swing, climb and relax for children of all ages and their parents and carers to enjoy;
- ff) Having a place for children to visit would attract families into the city centre, therefore benefitting businesses;
- gg) The charity, Make Space for Girls had been approached to provide an input into the detailed design of play equipment to ensure it would be an inclusive space.
- hh) Extensive efforts had been made during the consultation phase to engage with young people to ensure that their voices were heard.

Councillor Dann (Cabinet Member for Customer Services, Sport, Leisure & HR, and OD) added:

- ii) City centre yoga classes would take place in the flexible spaces;
- jj) Residents in Plymouth were being given a space that would be vibrant and where various pop up events could take place.

Councillor Penberthy (Cabinet Member for Housing, Cooperative Development and Communities) added:

- kk) The scheme would provide a local play space for children;
- ll) The scheme would be important for residents that already live in the city centre and would provide solutions in relation to transport and feeling safe and local play spaces;

- mm) Housing was a top priority for the administration and the city and the Council needed to build the right homes in the places and at the right time and place. The City should not look to build on more green spaces and there were limited brownfield spaces;
- nn) Strategic Infrastructure investment would be needed to enable the creation of a new town in the city centre;
- oo) The administration had delivered 7,581 new homes with 1,980 being affordable;
- pp) The Council needed to be more innovative and radical with the next phase of Plans for Homes to meet the housing solutions the city faced at present;
- qq) New housing choices were part for the regeneration of the city centre. The Council needed to create the market for city centre living in a way that hadn't been achieved for 80 years. A hardship from the city centre plan was that it stripped residents from the city centre and this plan would start to put them back in;
- rr) There would be a mix of housing tenures and prices to create a new community of all ages
- ss) The Council met with Homes for England and Department for Levelling up Homes and Communities and had developed strong relationships which would unlock stalled sites and create investments from many partners;
- tt) This agenda would see many homes provided and the people living in those homes would see sustainable transport provision, provisions provided by the play village and the broader facilities and amenities to those residents.

Councillor Aspinall (Cabinet Member for Health and Adult Social Care) added:

- uu) The Armada Way design team had engaged extensively with PADAN and other groups over a considerable period of time to ensure that the spaces created were accessible to people in a way that the current Armada scheme was not delivering. Parts of Armada Way had been inaccessible for people with physical and visual impairments and it was imperative for the space to be modernised;
- vv) Provision was made for inclusive and sensory play and thorough consideration had been given to children with disabilities in the play village;
- ww) Issues such as appropriate surfacing for people in wheelchairs and other disability matters had been raised during the consultation and had been addressed.
- xx) The recommendation from scrutiny in relation to braille on plaques was welcome.

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

- yy) The Council withdrew the previous decision in relation to Armada Way and set to work on a reinvigorated Armada Way vision which would look to incorporate the remaining trees and considered wider environmental factors raised by the public;
- zz) Nature, renewable energy and climate resilience were key priorities in the new design that was published in October 2023;
- aaa) The new design proposed 202 trees, as opposed to the previous 153 that existed in Armada Way. The trees were carefully selected by experts to be the right tree in the right place;
- bbb) The additional trees would be planted between the heights of 3.5m to 8m to provide immediate canopy cover and environmental benefits;
- ccc) The plans enhanced provision for wildlife through shrubs, wildflowers, reed beds, bee hotels and birdboxes;
- ddd) The sustainable urban drainage system would be implemented and was essential to the city centres adaptations to the realities of climate change;
- eee) Solar panel canopies would be added and power the schemes clever irrigation of the trees;
- fff) There were 871 respondents to the 'Lets talk Armada Way' consultation that said the proposals would make the city centre a greener place;
- ggg) Thanked local community groups such as Plymouth Tree people and Food Plymouth who responded to the scheme in detail in areas such as tree selection, under planting and greening the grey and several of their ideas had been implemented into the post consultation plan. This included the increasing the diversity of tree species and the area of accessible green space;
- hhh) A water bottle refill station had been recommended at the consultation;
- iii) The translocation within the consultation provided divisive some were against any trees being translocated but others understood the rationale. The reality was that it would've been difficult to please everyone with these contrasting perspectives and the Council strived to make a balanced compromise. Since the consultation, the Council kept two more trees in situ without compromising other objectives;
- jjj) 39 original trees were remaining in Armada Way with 20 having been earmarked for felling before the injunction was placed. This felling had been stopped, with 15 being incorporated in the design and reduced the number to be translocated locally from six to four. Any of those trees that fail would be replaced on a 1:5 ratio;
- kkk) The scheme had been through an environmental impact screening report and had been evaluated under the Council's new climate impact assessment to explore how it aligned with the eight nature and decarbonisation priorities.

lll) There had been an arboriculture impact assessment, habitat regulation assessment, preliminary ecological assessment, a biodiversity net gain assessment and an LTN120 assessment. Read alongside the Cabinet report it showed a wide ranging biodiversity benefit for the city centre.

mmm) The Council listened to the feedback to the consultation of the final design and now was the time to deliver the significant investment.

Councillor Lowry (Cabinet Member for Finance) added:

nnn) Work was being done to make sure costs were kept as low as possible and the final construction costs would be brought back to the Growth and Infrastructure Overview and Scrutiny Committee;

ooo) The City Centre Company Board supported the scheme and were keen for the scheme to be brought to fruition as there had already been a considerable delay and disruption for businesses in the city centre.

Paul Barnard (Service Director for Strategic Planning and Infrastructure) added:

ppp) The Impact Assessment Report was available on Plymouth City Council's website for the public to view.

Councillor Tuffin (Vice-Chair of the Growth and Infrastructure Overview and Scrutiny Committee) added:

qqq) There had been a lot of patience from the retail sector, residents across the city including those that live and work in the city centre and it was time to move forward.

Cabinet:

1. Noted the outcome of the "Let's Talk Armada Way" October/November 2023 Consultation and Engagement Exercise as considered and set out in the report.

2. Agreed to The proposed changes to the Armada Way scheme in response to the "Let's Talk Armada Way" Consultation and Engagement Exercise as set out in paragraph 10.1 of the report.

3. Agreed the response, set out in Section 12 of the report, to the recommendations arising from the Growth and Infrastructure Overview and Scrutiny Committee regarding the Armada Way Scheme.

4. Approved the Armada Way final scheme design as summarised in paragraph 1.4 of the report and Appendix L.

5. Directed the Strategic Director for Place to take all necessary steps to confirm a final construction cost for the approved Armada Way design and to report back to a subsequent meeting of the Cabinet for approval.

6. Directed the Strategic Director for Place to establish a City Centre Public Realm Board, with representatives from relevant City Council departments and the City Centre Company, to coordinate and monitor all existing public realm revenue maintenance budgets and oversee new income-generating initiatives.

Councillor Tudor Evans OBE (Leader) proposed an additional recommendation to direct the Strategic Director for Place to make provision within the final capital cost of the Armada Way scheme for a time capsule to be placed in the scheme. This was agreed by the Cabinet.