

# Natural Infrastructure and Growth Scrutiny Panel

**Wednesday 9 July 2025**

## **PRESENT:**

Councillor Ricketts, in the Chair.

Councillor Holloway, Vice Chair.

Councillors Bannerman, Goslin, McCarty, McLay, Raynsford, M.Smith, Sproston and Stevens (substitute for Councillor Allen).

Apologies for absence: Councillors Allen and Darcy.

Also in attendance: Councillor Evans OBE, Councillor Penberthy, Paul Barnard (Service Director for Strategic Planning and Infrastructure), Julia Blaschke (Economic Development Manager - Partners), Nick Carter (Head of Housing & Regeneration), Hannah Chandler-Whiting (Democratic Advisor), Ian Cooper (Operations Director, PASD Freeport), Richard Davies (Vice Chancellor, University of Plymouth), David Draffan (Service Director, Economic Development), Matt Garrett (Service Director for Community Connections), John Green (Net Zero Delivery Manager), Neil Mawson (Housing Delivery Manager), Lauren Paton (Economic Development Officer), Nina Sarlaka (Inward Investment and Enterprise Manager, Economic Development) and Jan Ward CBE (Chair of the PASD Freeport Board).

The meeting started at 2.00 pm and finished at 5.06 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.*

## 1. **Declarations of Interest**

| <b>Name</b>          | <b>Item</b> | <b>Reason</b>                          | <b>Interest</b> |
|----------------------|-------------|----------------------------------------|-----------------|
| Councillor Raynsford | 4           | Husband sat on the New Towns Taskforce | Private         |
| Councillor Goslin    | 6           | Employed by University of Plymouth.    | Private         |

## 2. **Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting held on 02 April 2025 were agreed as an accurate record.

During this item Councillor Ricketts expressed his thanks to Councillor Darcy for Chairing the Panel throughout 2025/26.

3. **Chair's Urgent Business**

There were no items of Chair's urgent business.

4. **Plan for Homes 4: Year 1 Progress Report**

Councillor Chris Penberthy (Cabinet Member for Housing, Co-operative Development and Communities) introduced the report and highlighted:

- a) Since its launch in November 2013, more than 1,100 new homes had been built on Council-owned sites, under Plan for Homes;
- b) Over 64% of the 1,100 new homes had been affordable;
- c) The ambition was to deliver a minimum of 5,000 new homes in Plymouth over 5 years;
- d) Increased housing supply, with a focus on both social and affordable home ownership;
- e) Improved the private rented sector to ensure homes were decent, safe, and secure;
- f) Brought empty homes back into use to maximise existing stock;
- g) Enhanced the condition and energy efficiency of homes across all tenures, retrofitting and delivering low-carbon new homes;
- h) Supported estate regeneration and renewal to replace obsolete housing;
- i) Reduced homelessness and reliance on temporary accommodation and expanded supported and specialist housing options;
- j) Maximised inward investment through partnership working, including with Homes England;
- k) Maintained flexibility and innovation in response to emerging housing challenges such as people being priced out of the market and housing demands resulting from Section 21 evictions, VAWG (Violence against women and girls) and household break ups;
- l) There were more than 8,000 households in Plymouth awaiting homes for rent at an affordable price;
- m) Having a place to call home had a positive effect on people's health and wellbeing;
- n) Plan for Homes 4 had:

- i. Developed a pipeline of future housing sites and a new market recovery plan;
  - ii. Worked with investors and developers to establish a build-to-rent offer in Plymouth, that would capitalise the long-term investment in the dockyard and for people coming into Plymouth for dockyard employment;
  - iii. Prepared for the Renters' Rights Bill;
- o) The action plan reported across all 10 of the Plan for Homes 4 initiatives and was RAG-rated with commentary;
- p) The Housing Taskforce would continue to meet quarterly;
- q) Plan for Homes 4 was presented as a live, evolving strategy responsive to challenges.

In response to questions, supported by Paul Barnard (Service Director for Strategic Planning and Infrastructure), Nick Carter (Head of Housing & Regeneration), Neil Mawson (Housing Delivery Manager), John Green (Net Zero Delivery Manager) and Matt Garrett (Service Director for Community Connections), the following was discussed:

- r) Continued lobbying of government for the resources and powers to tackle the housing crisis in the city;
- s) Worked with PEC (Plymouth Energy Community) to support insulating homes;
- t) The Council was supporting not just homeowners to retrofit homes, but also landlords, which targeted fuel poverty and damp housing conditions;
  - i. £3 million had been secured from Government to retrofit approximately 206 homes in Plymouth;
  - ii. PCC (Plymouth City Council) had been very successful in previous retrofitting programmes and was in a good position to secure more funding if it became available;
- u) Estate regeneration included projects at North Prospect and Savage Road;
- v) Registered providers were encouraged to invest in existing housing stock as well as provision of supported and specialist housing;
- w) City centre housing plans considered infrastructure, service and amenity needs through a infrastructure needs assessment as well as strategic liaison meetings;

- x) Master planning was prioritised to ensure sustainable development and ensure that transport and community space needs were integrated into housing plans;
- y) The Renter's Rights Bill would require licenses for all rented properties;
- z) Whilst the Renter's Rights Bill would give the Council more powers, there were concerns about funding, which was yet to be confirmed, as there would be new burdens on the service;
- aa) All of the previous Plans for Homes had been completed ahead of schedule, and each consequential plan had been more ambitious;
- bb) Plymouth had some population increase, but this was not significant, and not all factors contributing to this were mentioned/analysed in Plan for Homes 4;
- cc) Asylum seekers were not on the housing waiting list, and the list was growing because there was not enough housing for the number of people in Plymouth;
- dd) The number of properties in the city for asylum seekers had been fixed for some time, and there had been no requests from Government to change this, so therefore it was not a pressure and was not included in Plan for Homes 4;
- ee) Rough sleeping numbers fluctuated throughout the year due to weather conditions, creating a peak in Plymouth in the summer months;
- ff) Planning permissions were granted for over 5000 dwellings but private sector delivery lagged;
- gg) In 2023/24, 282 additional homes were built in the city of which 189 were affordable;
- hh) Between 2014-2024, 6,798 dwellings had been built;
- ii) Efforts had been made to incentivise private sector investment and the aim was still to build 5,000 homes in the next 5 years;
- jj) The railway station project had stalled due to issues with network rail;
- kk) The Homeless Prevention Grant would be spent building on the expertise and skills already present in the city;

- ll) An update would be presented in 2026/27 on whether rents could be expected to increase or decrease as a result of the plan being delivered;
- mm) A consultation on Council's being able to use CPO (Compulsory Purchase Order) powers to reclaim land from developers, who were not developing, had closed that week and the team were curious to see the outcomes;
- nn) Emergency accommodation differed due to a variety of factors including the number of people in the family unit, availability, and more;
- oo) The team was working to get people away from nightly paid accommodation;
- pp) The Housing and Community Services Scrutiny Panel received updates on homelessness throughout the year;
- qq) The supported and specialist housing needs assessment was being reviewed;
- rr) Building regulations determined the number of properties within housing schemes that needed to be accessible;
- ss) PCC did sometimes subsidise affordable homes;
- tt) Neurodiversity was being developed to be included within specialist housing needs assessments.

The Panel agreed to:

- 1. Note the report;
- 2. Endorse the team maximizing the impact of the South West Housing and Construction Conference, to promote development opportunities, overcome challenges to delivery and secure inward investment.

## 5. **Economic Insight and Intelligence**

David Draffan (Service Director for Economic Development) and Lauren Paton (Economic Development Officer) gave a presentation and highlighted the following points:

- a) The labour market in Plymouth was tight with high job vacancies and moderate wage increases;
- b) The UK Modern Industrial Strategy had recently been published and had included Plymouth as a case study, highlighting the city's defence sector and

it's investment potential;

- c) Plymouth had been designated the UK's National Centre for Marine Autonomy;
- d) Economic activity stood at 77.5% with a claimant count of 3.5%, indicating near full employment;
- e) Job postings had increased to approximately 4,500 in May 2025;
- f) A projected gap between job demand and workforce availability was identified;
- g) Median weekly pay was below national and regional averages but had risen by 35% over ten years to approximately £570;
- h) Lower earners saw a 28.1% increase in wages compared to 1.8% for higher earners;
- i) Productivity in Plymouth was 81.1% of the UK average;
- j) Growth in productivity lagged behind national trends despite nominal increases due to labour constraints and a lack of skills;
- k) Key sectors identified included defence, clean tech, and advanced manufacturing and marine autonomy was highlighted as a strategic growth area;
  - i. Increasing employment numbers in these highly productive areas, presented an opportunity to increase productivity across the city and lower the gap with relative growth;
- l) Efforts were made to align the local economic strategy with national priorities;
- m) Workforce projections emphasised the need for intervention to meet future job demands.

The Panel agreed:

- l. To note the report.

6. **Productive Growth and High Value Jobs Update (Economic Strategy Pillar 1)**

Councillor Evans OBE (Leader of the Council) introduce the report, supported by Julia Blaschke (Economic Development Manager - Partners), Richard Davies (Vice Chancellor, University of Plymouth), David Draffan (Service Director, Economic Development), Lauren Paton (Economic Development Officer) and Nina Sarlaka (Inward Investment and Enterprise Manager, Economic Development):

- a) The intention was to bring each of the five pillars of the economic strategy, one to each meeting of the Panel in 2025/26;
- b) This pillar focused on increasing productivity and wages to enhance prosperity;
- c) Plymouth was well positioned as a national opportunity with significant investment potential;
- d) £4.4 billion investment in the dockyard was expected to create 5,500 jobs;
- e) £3 billion investment in Derriford Hospital;
- f) The city centre had a £1 billion pipeline of regeneration projects;
- g) A Growth Alliance had been formed between the Council, Royal Navy, and Babcock which aimed to support innovation, creation of high value jobs, skills, and housing development;
- h) Plymouth had been designated the UK's National Centre for Marine Autonomy which showed the excellence of the companies who had already been attracted into in Plymouth, but opened up even more opportunity for the future;
- i) Homes England had partnered with the Council to build 10,000 homes, mostly in the city centre to create an exemplar of urban living;
- j) The industrial strategy had recognised Plymouth's marine and defence capabilities;
- k) Babcock had announced a defence dividend for Plymouth which planned to relocate 2,000 workers to the city centre, an integrated logistics and manufacturing facility was proposed in the Freeport, and a new centre for engineering nuclear skills;

- l) The city had a £10 billion investment pipeline, a strong business community, three universities, a highly skilled workforce, a Freeport and a science park;
- m) Universities played a key role in innovation and workforce development;
- n) The University of Plymouth (UoP) had held meetings with various representatives of governments from around the world due to interest in Plymouth's marine and defence sectors;
- o) UoP had led initiatives in cybersecurity and marine technology;
- p) Medical research and business incubation were supported by UoP facilities;
- q) Knowledge partnerships placed students in businesses to foster innovation;
- r) Skills development targeted both young and mature learners;
- s) An innovation task force had been established to coordinate efforts;
- t) 16 strategic projects were identified across investible themes: Defence sector and Devonport, the waterfront and maritime, the north of the city and the city centre;
  - i. These projects were not necessarily owned, funded or held by the Council;
  - ii. They would all significantly impact on high value jobs and productive growth;
  - iii. Projects included building Oceansgate Innovative Barns, Growing Smart Sound Plymouth and strengthening supply chains for University Hospitals Plymouth NHS Trust;
- u) Scrutiny Panel members were encouraged to visit [www.investplymouth.co.uk](http://www.investplymouth.co.uk) to learn more.

In response to questions, the following was discussed:

- v) £50 million was needed to reopen a railway line to Tavistock and open a train station in Plympton, which The Leader was lobbying for in connection with the defence investment in Plymouth;
- w) Electric buses had recently launched in the city;

- x) There was consultation and discussions ongoing about improvements at Manadon interchange, and other congestion-busting road network areas;
- y) The Council were working with Babcock on green staff travel plans;
- z) There were plans to expand The George Park and Ride;
- aa) Approximately 30,000 people were of working age but were not working and part of the strategy was to get 6,000-10,000 of those people reskilled and into the workforce;
- bb) There was a need to encourage more graduates to remain in the city;
- cc) Another part of the strategy was to increase the aspirations of Plymouth's population going through the education system;
- dd) Marketing Plymouth was important to get people to relocate to the city;
- ee) The pace of the change in vacancies within specialist areas, increase in number of apprenticeships in the dockyard;
- ff) It could be argued that people had not previously seen the ability to build a long-term career, across multiple large employers in Plymouth before, but recent and future investment was changing this;
- gg) There were barriers for diversity in some industries, particularly for women, and it was important to create role models, work which was being done through the university;
- hh) UoP offered hands-on experiences different to other universities across the country in a variety of courses;
- ii) There was a need to engage with young people in Plymouth and use mentor and ambassador schemes to do so;
- jj) Leaders within the city were aligned on the vision for the future;
- kk) UoP wanted to be a strong civic contributor and recognised that partnership working led to more positive impact and better solutions.

The Panel agreed to:

- I. Note the report and the continued focus on Productive Growth and High Value Jobs, as a key element of the Plymouth Economic Strategy.

## 7. **Freeport Annual Update**

Councillor Evans OBE (Leader of the Council) introduce the report, David Draffan (Service Director, Economic Development), Ian Cooper (Operations Director, PASD Freeport) and Jan Ward CBE (Chair of the PASD Freeport Board), and highlighted:

- a) Freeports would transition into a industrial strategy zones under new government plans;
- b) The Plymouth and South Devon Freeport (PASDF) had contributed £1.3 million seed funding into the Council's £23 million investment partnership with Associated British Ports (ABP) to transform Millbay docks, providing new facilities to support export growth;
- c) PASDF had also supported the widening of Cattewater Harbour to attract larger, and greener, vessels;
- d) Planning permission had been secured for Oceansgate Innovation Barns and work on site was due to begin shortly;
- e) PASDF had provided funding to enable Princess Yachts to expand their South Yard operation;
- f) Direct development of Freeport in Beaumont Way was nearing completion;
- g) Sherford employment land had been secured by PASDF funding;
- h) Recent announcements on investment in defence in Plymouth, could lead to more opportunities for PASDF;
- i) The industrial strategy had identified eight key growth sectors which aligned with Freeport gateway sectors of defence, clean tech, advanced manufacturing, marine and space;
- j) PASDF worked with GAP partners, led by PCC, on the Government ask for a 10-year investment programme to develop new technologies and capabilities focused on marine autonomy;
- k) PASDF had also commissioned a marine autonomy research project in collaboration with PCC following the Government's designation of Plymouth as the UK's National Centre for Marine Autonomy;

- l) This supportive, mission-led approach was geographically focused on the three tax sites established at South Yard, Langage, and Sherford, plus the ports of Plymouth;
- m) £25 million in seed funding was matched by £47 million locally;
- n) Twelve seed capital projects were all initiated, with three completed and two nearing completion;
- o) Langage developments included spine roads to unlock employment land;
- p) PCC's direct development at Beaumont Way construction had made swift progress;
- q) Social value and engagement targets had been met and in some cases exceeded;
- r) Carlton Power had signed a contract for green hydrogen production at Langage;
- s) A demand study had identified the fast-moving consumer goods sector as the likely early adopter of green hydrogen, but also forecast demand from the marine and defence sectors from the mid 2030's;
- t) Sherford land had been secured for defence use with infrastructure improvements planned;
- u) Babcock had announced intentions to invest further in PASDF by establishing an integrated logistics hub and advanced manufacturing facility;
- v) Floating offshore wind opportunities were being explored in alignment with clean tech goals;
- w) In driving local growth, PASDF would provide advice and support, and had already supported talks between Freeport land owners to agree a joint venture that would create a development structure for Langage;
- x) PASDF was fairly unique in that its gateways aligned so well with Government priorities;
- y) Growth Alliance Plymouth (GAP) was important to ensure work was focused and didn't duplicate.

In response to questions, the following was discussed:

- z) PASDF supported SMEs through partnerships and skills programmes and more information would be circulated by officers following the meeting  
**ACTION;**

- aa) Pre-letting of units indicated strong demand for industrial space;
- bb) Concerns about governance changes and the local government review were noted;
- cc) PASDF remained embedded in the city's growth agenda;
- dd) Future funding opportunities were anticipated through government strategies.

The Panel agreed to:

- I. Note the Freeport Annual Report.

## 8. **Work Programme**

The Panel discussed its work programme highlighting the following:

- a) Site visits were confirmed with logistical details to follow;
- b) Concerns over having time to effectively scrutinise each item on the agenda;
- c) It would be suggested that in future the papers were taken as read and time was used for questions.

The Panel noted the work programme.

## 9. **Action Log**

Hannah Chandler-Whiting (Democratic Advisor) advised that since publication:

- a) Three recommendations from an earlier meeting had been completed and had gone to a recent Cabinet meeting and received an official response which was available online, but would be shared with Panel members.

The Panel noted the action log.

