

CITY CENTRE REGENERATION LEADERSHIP



I. INTRODUCTION AND CONTEXT

- 1.1. The city centre remains the major strategic priority for Plymouth in terms of Regeneration and Growth. The proposals in this report will help to deliver the aspirations for Plymouth's City Centre and Waterfront area as set out in the Plymouth and South West Devon Joint Local Plan Strategic Objective 3 'Delivering growth in Plymouth's City Centre and Waterfront Growth Area: To realise the potential of the City Centre and Waterfront Growth Area as a regionally significant growth hub' and the City Centre Policy PLY6 'Improving Plymouth's city centre'.
- 1.2. On many measures the city centre is a significant challenge but also a major opportunity. Many of the challenges stem from its post war re-construction as primarily a retail-anchored centre with few other primary uses. These are exacerbated by the current challenges that are being faced, as evidenced by continuing increases in interest rates, cost of living and overall financial pressures. The proposals put forward here are designed to support city centre regeneration and demonstrate how working with partners, the city council can help address in regenerating challenging spaces such as our city centre.
- 1.3. The physical space it occupies is of a significant scale and provides more opportunity and challenge than the vast majority of cities of its size and indeed many larger metropolitan cities. The scale of the opportunity is immense. Plymouth's City Centre is of a similar acreage to Manchester, Liverpool and Southampton city centres. And if unlocked, could support a similar number of residents, businesses and GVA. That said, our city centre plays a significant role in supporting approximately 18,000 jobs and provides an estimated £700m GVA to the city's economy. Maximising that still further is a key priority.
- 1.4. City centres and in particular their retail offer have struggled to compete with the growth of on-line shopping and increased levels of remote and hybrid working. Having said that, the retail offer provided in the city centre both in terms of the high street offer anchored in the eastern side of the city and primarily by Drake Circus and the independent offer in the city's West End remain extremely important to ensuring the future success of the city centre.
- 1.5. The residential offer in the city centre is extremely limited. The density of residents is much lower than most regional cities of similar size. Today Plymouth City Centre has approximately 1,000 residential units. City centres of comparative spatial size have around 8,000 residences. The potential for 5,000 residential units in the immediate city centre and nearby locations provides the opportunity to address this.
- 1.6. It should not be forgotten, that over the past decade there has been significant investment, diversification and activity to support the city centre's regeneration. This has attempted to address the need for a greater diversification of uses across the city centre and neighbouring areas. Our city centre is a space for residents and visitors to enjoy and take advantage of. The civic pride engendered in the city centre influences the overall impression of the city as a whole. Some of the prominent investments and changes that have taken place have included:
 - The £50m cultural investment in the Box museum, gallery and archive
 - The delivery of the Barcode to bring in a significant leisure offer for the city centre
 - Investments on the campuses of the University of Plymouth and Arts University Plymouth
 - A proposed and on-going programme of public realm investments worth around £26m

- Re-purposing of the former BHS retail unit
- Development of the form Co-Operative / Derry's store to a 110-bed Premier Inn and 500-bed student accommodation block
- The 95-bed OYO hotel in the former Woolworth store
- Investment and diversification of the covered Plymouth market
- Acquisitions and site clearance for the re-development of Colin Campbell Court
- Phase I of the regeneration of the Railway station gateway, including a new Gateline, public realm improvements and the refurbishment of Intercity Place to provide new teaching facilities for allied health professionals.

1.7. The overall value of investment into Plymouth city centre over the past five years has been in the order of £300 million.

1.8. None of the above would have been delivered without partnership working between the city council, landlords, other public sector partners, the private sector, educational establishments, central government and a variety of funders.

2. WHAT NEXT

2.1. Despite all of the above, there is still significant challenge and opportunity that needs to be addressed and exploited. Following a recently completed Place Commission assessment by Homes England of the challenges that need to be addressed, there are two headlines which jump out. These are:

- 1) Project Viability – i.e. the difference in costs of delivering a project and the return on investment.
- 2) The limited levels of capital funding available to bridge viability gaps - the paucity of funding to address gaps and provide the capital required to acquire assets and to deliver projects.

2.2. The above also needs to be seen within the context of a changing approach from government and new strategic plans from key national regeneration agencies.

2.3. The government is proposing that funds associated with Levelling Up Regeneration will now be devolved directly to local government. Homes England have recently launched their Strategic Plan 2023-28 and now refer to themselves as “The Housing and Regeneration Agency”. A new approach of working with places of opportunity with potential new funding streams and devolution is being taken forward for Devon, Plymouth and Torbay (DPT) through the emerging DPT Devolution deal.

2.4. Given all of the above, it is proposed to recast existing structures that are in place to support and prioritise regeneration opportunities in the city centre. The current Plymouth Strategic Regeneration (and Levelling Up) Board has served its purpose in light of the funds being passed directly to local government. Existing city centre regeneration groups will therefore be refocused and we will pivot in a new direction working with key partners to support the next stages of city centre regeneration and growth.

3. PROPOSALS

3.1. The work to deliver against priorities for the regeneration and growth of the city will be taken forward through the creation of:

- a. A Strategic Investment and Regeneration Board (made up of senior council officials, chaired by the Chief Executive and senior government and agency officials) – meets quarterly.
 - b. A City Centre projects oversight and delivery board of key city partners tasked with the delivery of existing in-train city centre projects (Chaired by City Centre portfolio holder) – meets quarterly.
 - c. A City Centre (officers) working group/Programme board focused on addressing detailed regeneration project delivery working with delivery partners, reporting to the Operations Board – meets monthly (Chaired by the Service Director for Economic Development).
- 3.2. These structures should be seen as organic in their nature. They will evolve over time as opportunity and purpose for the city centre develops and are taken advantage of. The terms of reference will be developed to include funders and delivery partners as appropriate.
- 3.3. The **Strategic Investment and Regeneration Board** will provide an oversight of opportunities in the city centre and co-ordination of key government and relevant agency stakeholders providing an interface with those tasked with supporting the regeneration of cities.
- 3.4. The **City Centre Oversight and Delivery Board** will focus on the completion and delivery of major city centre regeneration projects (e.g. Railway station, Civic, Community Diagnostic Centre) and identify the pipeline of priority projects for recommendation to the Strategic Board for consideration and potential funding.
- 3.5. This will be created out of the existing city centre regeneration board and be sharpened up to concentrate on delivery of existing major city centre regeneration projects. It will task all city partners that have live regeneration projects to deliver projects, to identify areas of challenge and to define solutions for delivery. It will provide a programme management function for city centre regeneration and growth projects.
- 3.6. The **City Centre Programme Board** will focus on the daily delivery of live regeneration projects. It will include the city council, project deliverers and funders. The delivery board will be supported by an Operations structure which will focus on individual projects and report to the delivery board on their progress. Issues will be raised to the Operations Board as and when required.
- 3.7. A city centre team will be created, anchored within the economic development department working through a matrix team from across the Place directorate and with a range of external public and private sector partners.

4. CONCLUSION

- 4.1. This new structured approach will create the conditions to take forward the further development and regeneration of the city centre. It will hold all delivery partners to account, ensure that the existing projects are delivered and that funding opportunities are focused on the city centre's most important, strategic priorities, which are identified through the recent Place Commission worked that Homes England have completed.
- 4.2. The structures proposed will provide space for funders to be confident that their investment is being used for the greater good of the city, unblocking and delivering homes, jobs and wider regeneration benefits for the city centre and the wider Plymouth population.
- 4.3. Plymouth City Centre is a priority for the city council and the city as a whole. The putting in place of these new structures to support interventions will help deliver that priority.