

Natural Infrastructure and Growth Scrutiny Panel

Wednesday 17 July 2024

PRESENT:

Councillor Darcy, in the Chair.
Councillor Holloway, Vice Chair.
Councillors Bannerman, Freeman, McCarty, McLay, Moore, Noble, Raynsford, Ricketts and Sproston.

Also in attendance: Councillor Evans OBE (Leader of the Council), Jemima Laing (Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Children’s Social Care, Culture and Communications), Hannah Chandler-Whiting (Democratic Advisor), David Draffan (Service Director for Economic Development), Kate Farmery (Head of Business at The Box), Toby Hall (Project Manager, Economic Development), Patrick Knight (Manager, Economy/Partnerships/Regeneration), Anthony Payne (Strategic Director for Place), Victoria Pomery (CEO of the Box), Amanda Ratsey (Head of Economy and Investment), Nigel Godefroy (Chair, City Centre Company) and Steve Hughes (Chief Executive, City Centre Company).

The meeting started at 2.03 pm and finished at 4.40 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. **To note the appointment of Chair and Vice Chair for the Municipal Year 2024/25**

The Panel agreed to note the appointment of Councillor Ian Darcy as Chair, and Councillor Charlotte Holloway as Vice Chair, of the Natural Infrastructure and Growth Scrutiny Panel for the municipal year 2024/25.

2. **Declarations of Interest**

Name	Minute Number	Reason	Interest
Councillor Josh McCarty	7	Member of the Plymouth Waterfront Partnership Board.	Personal.
Councillor Lauren McLay	8	Worked for the Eden Project.	Personal.

3. **Scrutiny Panel Responsibilities**

The Panel agreed to note its responsibilities.

4. **Minutes**

Councillor Raynsford asked if the following items' responses, mentioned in the minutes of the meeting held on 14 February 2024, could be recirculated to panel members:

- a) The response to the letter sent to national Government regarding increasing utility costs for organisations in the cultural sector;
- b) A half page report with more detail on why there had been a continual decline in productivity from 2017 onwards.

The Panel agreed the minutes of the meeting held on 14 February 2024, and those of the Water Quality Select Committee Review held on 22 February 2024, as accurate records.

5. **Chair's Urgent Business**

There were no items of Chair's urgent business.

6. **Economic Intelligence and Insight**

David Draffan (Service Director for Economic Development) and Toby Hall (Project Manager) introduced the item and highlighted:

- a) This standing item had been introduced by the Chair for 2023/24, and it would remain a standing item, but reducing to every other meeting due to a lag in data;
- b) 8,000 jobs had been created in Plymouth from 2018-2022, most of which were full-time;
- c) Wages had increased in both high-paying and lower-paying jobs in Plymouth, since the COVID19 pandemic;
- d) The gaps between the highest and lowest paid jobs in Plymouth, compared to the UK averages, had been closing significantly since 2021;
- e) Wages for full time jobs had increased more than those for part-time work;
- f) In 2022, Plymouth had 25% more business start-ups than in 2017 (higher than the national trend), with more of them surviving longer than 5 years than before (higher than the South West average);
- g) The creative industry had had a 10% increase in jobs from 2019-2022 and this trend was expected to continue;
- h) A creative industries plan had been commissioned to better understand the opportunities and strengths Plymouth had in creative industries;

In response to questions, with support from Amanda Ratsey (Head of Economy and Investment), it was further explained:

- i) Business start-ups that networked and took advantage of informational advice and guidance at the outset were more likely to survive long-term;
- j) Data was not available to show which sectors these new businesses were in;
- k) Self-employment and part-time work would be looked at through a future update.

The Panel agreed to note the update report.

7. **Plymouth City Centre Company BID (2025-30)**

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

- a) Plymouth was one of the few cities in the country to renew their bids and vision;
- b) Plymouth had been the second city in the UK to adopt a business improvement district when they had first been introduced in 2001;
- c) Importance of diversification of the city centre;
- d) The city had had a remarkable recovery from the COVID19 pandemic;
- e) The success of The Barcode and Theatre Royal Plymouth in driving footfall in the city centre;
- f) The health hub at Colin Campbell Court was expected to bring in 990,000 people annually, some of whom would shop in the city centre;
- g) Plymouth University drove forward diversity, food business and ancillary and support services in the heart of the city, and had invested significantly in the Brunel Plaza development;
- h) Investment in the Civic Centre was investment in blue and green skills, but would also increase footfall in the city centre;
- i) Investment in the Guildhall as a new music and entertainment venue in the city centre;
- j) Investment in the public realm, including the Civic Square;
- k) Investment in Plymouth Market and its diverse cooked food offering;

- l) Several department store buildings which had been left empty were now, retail, residential and hotels;
- m) 5,500 homes were to be provided in and around the city centre in partnership with Homes England;
- n) A 30% increase in visitor spend, and a 20% increase in number of visitors, was ambitious but achievable.

Nigel Godefroy (Chair, City Centre Company) and Steve Hughes (Chief Executive, City Centre Company) added:

- o) The partnership between the Plymouth City Centre Company and Plymouth City Council had been formed 20 years ago;
- p) The City Centre Company represented over 500 companies, and worked to provide a secure, safe and clean city centre and to ensure the ongoing viability of individual businesses and the City Centre as a whole;
- q) Diversification of Plymouth City Centre;
- r) A successful city centre was a sign of the confidence and success of a city;
- s) Congratulated and thanked Plymouth City Council for its ongoing commitment to the city centre;
- t) Lots of new businesses were opening up in the city centre;
- u) Ambition to deliver a different kind of city centre that was vibrant and alive, during the day and night, and all year round;
- v) Partnership working was successful and key to the future of the city centre;
- w) Important to change perceptions, increase visitor and local spend, and create an experience for visitors to the area;
- x) The plan was in a consultation phase and any feedback from the panel was welcome;
- y) Main aim was to position Plymouth city centre as the major retail, visitor and leisure destination on the South West Peninsula and as a great place to live, work and study;
- z) The new plan would be bold and ambitious and reflect the ambitions of the Council;
- aa) Flavour Fest had been run slightly differently for 2024 and had attracted over 100,000 visitors to the city centre.

In response to questions, it was further explained:

- bb) Housing on Bath Street and the Moxy Hotel would improve the connection between the waterfront and the city centre, as well as events in the city such as Flavour Fest and Pirates Weekend;
- cc) New businesses were encouraged to get in touch with the City Centre Company when they opened to help with any issues they experienced;
- dd) They ran a Shop Improvement Grant Scheme which had been very well received in helping businesses become more visible, and were also providing mentoring and courses to help businesses develop their social media presence, and could connect them to the Council, Chamber of Commerce, and other organisations that might be able to support them;
- ee) A large amount of business was done through deliveries such as Just Eat and Deliveroo;
- ff) PARC (Plymouth Against Retail Crime) had been a major success of the previous five years dealing with the rise in shoplifting and anti-social behaviour;
- gg) The Cost of Living crisis and the COVID19 pandemic had been tough on businesses, but the City Centre Company had supported wherever possible;
- hh) Old Town Street and New George Street had been more problematic and had taken longer than expected, along with delays with Armada Way, something else business had had to contend with;
- ii) Several recent developments in the city centre wouldn't have been possible without the partnership between the City Centre Company and Plymouth City Council, such as The Barcode and The Box;
- jj) The ballot would be run through the Chief Executive of the City Centre Company;
- kk) Businesses whose rateable value increased would not be asked to pay the BID levy during a BID period, but might at the beginning of the next;
- ll) Work on Armada Way would be carried out by Plymouth City Council and not the BID;
- mm) Feedback from events helped them improve accessibility, for example 2024 Christmas Light Switch On would include a sign language interpreter, and they were happy to listen to further feedback on how the city centre could be more inclusive;
- nn) Although footfall was down on levels in 2019, it was 20% higher than this time in 2023 and optimism that it would continue to rise;

- oo) Plymouth was becoming more of a city break destination, rather than just a day visit destination;
- pp) Investment in a tourism data hub;
- qq) It was important to improve the public realm to make it a place that people wanted to live and re-introduce that use into the city centre;
- rr) City Centre Company was working with Connect Plymouth to promote Beryl Bikes and Co Cars and with Plymouth City Council to promote cycling and walking;
- ss) Concerns from businesses had included business costs, which the BID had no control over, and wanting more focus on street cleaning and planting, but the mood had generally improved in recent months;
- tt) The BID levy's were relative to the size of the businesses, with some of the smaller businesses paying less than £200 a year, and there hadn't been very many complaints about the cost/value of this;
- uu) The business plan was due to be completed by October 2024, and it would go to ballot before March 2025.

The Panel agreed unanimously to:

- I. Support the principles and overall approach of the Plymouth City Centre Company BID and its draft Business Plan for 2025 to 2030.

8. **The Box Annual Performance Review**

Jemima Laing (Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Children' Social Care, Culture and Communications) introduced the item and highlighted:

- a) Importance of demonstrating the positive impact and return on investment of the cultural sector;
- b) In 2023, The Box welcomed 272,000 visitors, which was a 10% increase on the previous year, and three times the number that had visited the former Plymouth Museum and Art Gallery;
- c) The Box was developing a national and international reputation by working with some of the very best artists and institutions in the UK and beyond;
- d) Exhibitions such as planet ocean attracted school visits and there was a family programme with over 50 free family events for 2024, and The Box Café was a firmly established community hub;
- e) The Box had been successful in generating over £2m in earned and grant income in 2023/24;

- f) 78% of Plymouth schools had formally visited The Box, with 27,000 family visits and 87,000 community participants;
- g) Positive Google and Trip Advisor reviews.

Kate Farmery (Head of Business at The Box) and Victoria Pomery (CEO of the Box) added:

- h) The Box had opened in September 2020 amidst the COVID19 pandemic, and expected to welcome it's 1 millionth visitor in 2025;
- i) The Box had had a positive £13 million tourism impact on Plymouth and a more comprehensive social and economic impact was being embarked upon;
- j) In 2023/24 56% of The Box's budget was generated from sources other than the Council;
- k) In reviews people had spoken of real joy at having real life issues contextualised at The Box and it being world class as a result;
- l) The Box contributed to the city's national and international profiles and reputation and had been featured in iNews, ITV News and Artists and Illustrators Magazine;
- m) The Box had a dynamic and connected programme, the likes of which would be hard to find in any other British venue;
- n) The number of visits was increasing year on year, and a third of visits were first-time visits, and 8% of visits were from people who had never been to any kind of cultural venue before;
- o) Unusually high number of under 25s for a cultural venue;
- p) Visitors mostly gave their reasons for visiting as wanting to spend time with family and friends, and being keen to learn;
- q) 78% of Plymouth schools had visited The Box and the team were always striving to engage with those who had not yet visited;
- r) 42% of school visits were from schools outside of the city boundary;
- s) 27,000 family visits in 2023/24;
- t) 87,000 community participants;
- u) Important to interpret the city's amazing collections in new ways that were appropriate and current, and introducing visitors to a world view;
- v) The monthly Saturday market on Tavistock Place was very popular and worked with diverse businesses to celebrate some of Plymouth's fantastic

artists, musicians and food producers;

- w) The Box had received a TripAdvisor Traveller's Choice Award for 2024;
- x) They were developing a new marketing and audience strategy for the next three years;
- y) The team had been working collaboratively with local, regional, national and international organisations;
- z) It was important to The Box that it worked to enhance the city's green credentials, including working on improving biodiversity on Tavistock Place;
- aa) Important for The Box to have a clear vision of its future and important to be able to demonstrate the impact for future funding opportunities;
- bb) Keen to expand revenue and diversify income, included the recent taking of catering in-house;
- cc) 2025 would mark 5 years of The Box opening and celebrations were being planned.

In response to questions, it was further explained:

- dd) The new marketing and audience strategy would aim to gain understanding about the barriers that stopped people from visiting The Box, and would work on ways to get them to visit, such as taster sessions, which had already been trialled;
- ee) Increased advertising of the most recent exhibition on Tavistock Place had increased visitor numbers;
- ff) Funding from Plymouth City Council and Arts Council allowed them to leverage funds from other places such as foundations, because they want to fund projects that are proven to be viable;
- gg) The core budget from the Council was the same as the previous Plymouth Museum, but it was now three times as big;
- hh) Taking catering in-house allowed them to have more control over being able to work with local suppliers; and they were excited about the long-term opportunities;
- ii) The Box would ask suppliers to not use single use plastic, and if they couldn't change the product, they would change supplier in the shop;
- jj) Volunteers were vital for The Box and gave every visitor a warm welcome;
- kk) To encourage engagement, opportunities such as competitions for children with their entries shown at The Box, would be developed to further

engagement with children, young people and families;

ll) Request for statistics on the number of archive requests at The Box;

mm) There had been a soft relaunch of the membership scheme for The Box, but the team admitted it needed more attention, and it would be considered in the new marketing and audience strategy;

nn) Important that Councillors supported The Box by championing it in their wards.

The Panel agreed to note the report.

(Councillor Ricketts left the meeting during this item at 4:40pm)

9. **Tracking Decisions**

Hannah Chandler-Whiting (Democratic Advisor) explained:

- a) The actions from the Water Quality Select Committee Review were being tracked via this Panel's tracking decisions, as it fitted within its remit;
 - i. Several of the Water Quality Select Committee Review actions had involved writing letters to Government Ministers, but a general election had been called in July causing a delay, and so the letters would be written in the coming weeks to be sent to the new relevant Government Ministers.

During discussion the following was raised:

- b) The Plymouth City Council's Public Health team would be asked if they could pick up winter pilots in Plymouth's three bathing areas as the Environment Agency did not have the directive or remit to do so;
- c) There had been a delay in the actions from the Water Quality Select Committee Review that needed to be actioned by Environmental Protection, because they had not been identified initially as the correct department;
- d) More information was requested on the improvements that had been made ahead of the 2024 bathing season;
- e) A full report regarding for the aborted start to the Old Town Street and New George Street project would be able to be provided once the projects had completed, this was expected to be October 2024.

10. **Work Programme**

Hannah Chandler-Whiting (Democratic Advisor) explained:

- a) Working with the Chair, the items that had not been looked at the year before, as well as the items already identified for consideration for 2024/25 and had populated the work programme.

Following a short discussion:

- b) Sustainable transport was added to the work programme;
- c) The possibility of an additional meeting in March/April 2025 was discussed as there wouldn't be a pre-election period.