



Armada Way Independent Learning Review

Report

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Armada Way Independent Learning Review Report

I. Introduction

I.1 Plymouth is the biggest urban area and major regional economic hub in the south-west peninsula. With a resident population of 262,800, it is the 15th largest city in the country and within the 20% most deprived local authority districts in England.

I.2 In 2021, Plymouth City Council (PCC) was recognised by its peers through the Municipal Journal as the 'Council of the Year'. This is the highest accolade a council can receive. In February 2022, the Local Government Association (LGA) undertook a [Corporate Peer Challenge](#) which concluded that the council was:

'...a council with ambitious plans for the future, illustrated by a clear strategic approach and underpinned by a set of realistic delivery plans. . .a council which displays strong leadership across their city, with a deserved reputation for delivering successful regeneration and growth.'

I.3 The Peer Challenge team which undertook the review 'found a dedicated and passionate workforce, led by a well-regarded chief executive and equally driven and respected senior leadership team'. However, like other councils around the country, PCC had faced significant cuts in Government funding over a sustained period (reduced by circa £45m p.a. from 2014-2023) and the peer team made a series of recommendations intended to assist the council to adjust to the impact of austerity cuts and the post-pandemic environment. These are set out in the Peer Challenge Executive Summary (LGA 2022) which included that the council:

- i. '...take time to pause and reflect after a period of unprecedented activity and demand, and ensure the approach to consultation, engagement and customer experience is consistently positive.
- ii. Review key plans and strategies to reflect the post-pandemic 'new normal' . . .taking the opportunity to review ambition to ensure it aligns with capacity and resources.'

I.4 During the period covered by this Learning Review into the events relating to the tree felling on Armada Way, the council was operating a Capital Programme of £395.8m with approximately 140 schemes on its books, including in the city centre alone:

- The Rail Station
- The Box
- The Guildhall
- Health Hub
- Civic Square
- Old Town Street
- New George Street
- Armada Way

1.5 The city centre needed revitalisation and public realm was in a poor state of repair, but this was a massive task for any city council. On 14 March 2023, Plymouth City Council started work on a significant city centre re-landscaping, drainage and transport programme along Armada Way – the principle pedestrianised route running through the centre of the city from the Railway Station to the Hoe.

1.6 The project objective was to improve cycle and pedestrian routes, drainage, and to recreate the regimented tree-lined avenue, the centrepiece of the post-war vision for Plymouth of Patrick Abercrombie. This objective had been emerging for over 20 years and both local politicians and council officers were keen to see it happen.

1.7 This long held vision required the removal of most of the shrubs and trees that had been planted along Armada Way in the 1980s. The trees were now semi mature although some were species not necessarily appropriate for their location, struggling to thrive in challenging soil conditions or growing too close to existing buildings, but they created a landscaped canopy that had an amenity value and was familiar.

1.8 Late in 2022, when residents understood that the trees were to be replaced, a campaign to save them emerged. This was far-reaching and well organised.

1.9 On the night of 14 March, most of the trees (110) were felled, following an urgent decision taken that afternoon by the then Leader, which meant that there was no opportunity for scrutiny, public debate or challenge at that time. Felling began 2 hours after the decision was published. The works were halted 5 hours later when an injunction sought by the protestors ([STRAW](#) - Save the TRees of Armada Way) was served on the council. Further legal action followed over the next 18 months.

1.10 The lack of meaningful engagement and transparent decision-making by Plymouth City Council as perceived by the objectors led to significant media attention, litigation and reputational damage. It turned out to be a damaging project for the council and took considerable money and time to address. Now, 2 years later, the Armada Way re-landscaping is under construction surrounded by hoardings and the projected budget has risen from £12.7m to circa £30m.

1.11 Plymouth City Council wanted to learn from what went wrong and implement that learning for their future ambitious regeneration programme across the City. We have been asked, as a Panel of independent experts, to look in detail at what happened, talk to many of those involved at the time, and make a series of recommendations based on the evidence we have

found and our understanding of the circumstances. The Terms of Reference are attached in Annexe 1.

- 1.12 The report follows the 7 questions posed by Plymouth City Council (para 3.4), but we have included a further consideration regarding Wellbeing because this was cited as a key issue by many of the people we spoke to.
- 1.13 It is hoped that this process and our recommendations will help the council, residents and partners move forward for the benefit of the future of the City of Plymouth, its residents, businesses and visitors.

2. Acknowledgements

- 2.1 The Panel appointed to undertake the Armada Way Independent Learning Review (AWILR) were commissioned through SOLACE and comprised three former local government officers with extensive experience at a senior level: a former local government chief executive, a former strategic director of regeneration and a former monitoring officer. A brief resume of the Panel is attached at Annexe 2.
- 2.2 To undertake the Review, the Panel were asked to review all relevant documentation, to organise private discussions with relevant officers and Councillors, and to provide opportunity for members of the public and interested parties to make written submissions based on the objectives of the review.
- 2.3 The Panel widened the scope of private discussions to include the Complainant in the court proceedings and her KC, the Chair and Chief Executive of the City Centre Company, the MP for Plymouth Sutton and Devonport, and Chief Executive of Destination Plymouth. The interviews included three former council officers and five former City Councillors. The Panel visited the site, interviewed 35 individuals (8 current and former Councillors, 21 current and former council officers and 6 individuals external to the council) and received 110 submissions from members of the public and interested parties. The invitation to the public to engage and the submissions received are set out at Annexe 4. A bibliography at Annexe 5 lists all the documents reviewed by the Panel.
- 2.4 The Panel would like to thank those members of the public who submitted responses to inform the Review, and all of those who agreed to be interviewed for their candid recollections and reflections. The interviews were conducted in confidence, with agreement from the participants to use short extracts in an anonymised manner to help convey flavour and authenticity. These extracts (italicised) are opinions expressed to the Panel. Although the Panel has endeavoured to check their veracity, their significance is in giving voice to the feelings and conveying that sense. The extracts have been identified as either from individuals 'external' to the council, or to 'PCC' which includes both Councillors and officers of the council.

- 2.5 The Panel extends a special thanks to the officers who provided support in researching documents, organising interviews and generally assisting the Panel in navigating a complex organisational web.

3. Scope of the Learning Review

3.1 This Review has been conducted to identify learning points for the council arising from the decision (the [Original Decision](#)) to implement the final design for Armada Way scheme in the centre of Plymouth (Annexe 3). The Original Decision was taken by the then Leader of the Council at 17:05 hours on 14 March 2023 and published on the council website at 17:55. Site preparation works started at approximately 18:00 and tree felling commenced at approximately 20:00. By 01:00 the following morning, 110 trees had been felled by the council's contractors. Felling stopped at 01:03 because an Injunction had been secured by the objectors and served on the council.

3.2 On 22 March, the Council Leader announced his intention to resign. On the same day, at a meeting of Full Council, it was decided to recommend to the Council's Cabinet (then Conservative) to establish an independent review into the decision-making process relating to the Armada Way scheme. Following the local elections in May 2023, the new Leader (Labour) withdrew the Original Decision, confirmed that the Original scheme would be progressed no further, and committed to establishing this Independent Learning Review. The undertaking of the Learning Review was formalised as part of the Court Order arising from the Judicial Review of the Original Decision.

3.3 The principles and purpose of the Armada Way Independent Learning Review are set out in the Terms of Reference for the Independent Panel (Annexe 1). They are:

- To provide an opportunity for PCC to receive feedback from interested stakeholders to enable it to objectively analyse areas of good practice and areas of improvement for the organisation moving forward.
- To obtain an independent, fair and objective appraisal of all relevant facts and factors pertaining to the Original Decision and the implementation of the Original Scheme.
- To provide PCC with learning outcomes from which it can identify improvements to its procedures and processes, particularly in relation to governance, decision making and the management of the Original Scheme as a major project.

3.4 The Issues for Consideration identified in the Terms of Reference are:

3.4.1 The approach taken by the council in preparing the Original Decision and associated documentation, to include issues around the wording, accuracy and focus of the Original Decision.

3.4.2 Details of the decision-making processes from a governance and legal perspective, to include:

- i. The use of “urgent” decision making procedures
- ii. The lack of opportunity to “call-in” the decision
- iii. The reasoning for urgency, including pre-election period and bird nesting.

3.4.3 Whether a sufficient consultation process was undertaken to include how well the council engaged with stakeholders throughout the process and the extent to which feedback was incorporated into the plans of the Original Scheme.

3.4.4 The eventual implementation of the original decision and events surrounding it, including stakeholder response and documentation submitted to the injunction hearing by both sides.

3.4.5 Recording of officer decision making processes and actions, in particular in relation to the implementation and project management of the Original Scheme.

3.4.6 The impact of the original scheme on the local environment, to include reasons why an EIA was not undertaken prior to the Original Decision.

3.4.7 The financial implications of the events and circumstances arising from the original decision and the implementation of the Original Scheme including costs directly to the council.

4. Learning Recommendations

In setting out these recommendations, the Panel acknowledges that PCC has already instigated a number of changes since the Original Decision and its aftermath. For example, changes have been made to the management of the capital programme and the ‘Golden Triangle’¹ now has scheduled governance meetings. For completeness, the recommendations below relate to the Panel’s findings in addressing the Review Brief and period. This report leaves it with the council to set out where it has already instigated change, perhaps in an action plan to respond to the recommendations. The references relate to the relevant sections of the report where the rationale for the recommendations will be found.

- 1. Review the Constitution, including Urgency provisions (6.2)**
- 2. Review the council’s approach to Scrutiny and Cabinet (6.2)**
- 3. Enhance the role of the Statutory Officers¹ by ensuring they meet regularly and take shared responsibility to address key governance issues (6.2)**
- 4. Extend the rolling Forward Plan for council decision making (6.2)**
- 5. Review the approach to the Pre-Election period (6.2)**

¹ The ‘Golden Triangle’ of Statutory Officers (Head of Paid Service/CEO, S151 Officer/Chief Financial Officer and Monitoring Officer)

- 6. Refresh Good Governance training (6.2)**
- 7. Create a compelling and collaborative narrative for the city's vision (6.3)**
- 8. Elevate the importance of engagement and consultation and build in capacity for engagement and consultation professionals with earlier involvement of in-house communications experts (6.3)**
- 9. Enhance risk awareness involving works to public places and ensure the risk assessment methodology, timing and approach is the most appropriate for the location and community (6.4)**
- 10. Ensure greater rigour of decision-making reports so they are accurate, fair, accessible, based on sound evidence (6.5)**
- 11. Enhance the recording of advice and decisions (6.5)**
- 12. Ensure that internal advisory and decision-making Boards have Terms of Reference (6.5)**
- 13. Embrace and resource a corporate approach to Project Management, including oversight (6.5)**
- 14. Heighten expertise and awareness of Environmental regulation and practice (6.6)**
- 15. With other local authorities, press the case with Government for more realistic funding models (6.7)**
- 16. Review the corporate provision of wellbeing and healing support (7)**
- 17. Ensure that the political and officer leadership work together to maintain a common understanding and collective grip over the application of good governance across the council (8)**
- 18. Ensure that Officers take responsibility for the advice that they give, and Members take responsibility for the decisions that they make (8)**

5. Key Events (a full Timeline is at Annexe 6)

The following table sets out what the Panel considered to be the key events which significantly shaped the outcome:

Date	Event	Panel's view of Significance
1943	Abercrombie's original design for Plymouth	The "Beaux-Arts" plan for rebuilding Plymouth city centre following the Blitz. The landscaping for Armada Way was proposed as formal and geometrical and implemented in the post war period.
2003	David MacKay Vision for Plymouth	Commissioned by PCC, the plan proposed that the Abercrombie vision for Armada Way – a grand vista linking the Railway Station to the Hoe - was recovered, reintroducing regular lines of trees and simplified design. This vision was built on and reinforced over the next 20 years.
2017	LDA City Centre Strategic Masterplan	A further masterplan for Plymouth city centre. It also proposed the reinstatement of the Abercrombie Plan form for Armada Way.
2017	Long term aspiration gains cross-party support and officer focused delivery through Better Places Programme	Degree of assumed consensus for the removal of the trees was subsequently not adequately explained to the public.
15 Mar – 26 Apr 2018	Consultation "Better Places Plymouth"	The consultation set out emerging design ideas for Armada Way – concept ideas only of a "great vista".
2020	Transforming Cities Fund (TCF) Programme agreed with Dept. of Transport	The Better Places Programme was part-funded by TCF and was monitored through the TCF governance arrangements.
2018-2022	4-year gap in consultation	A long time in the life cycle of dialogue and engagement. Period of big societal changes and challenges for town centres across the UK – Brexit, Covid, online retail, recession. There was a national need for re-imagining town centres with Government incentives, regulatory flexibilities and funding.
2022	PCC re-emerged with principally the same design rationale, political imperative to deliver a bold and comprehensive scheme and officer endorsement of the original Abercrombie vision as set out in the Better Places concept.	The project team anticipated a start on site in January 2023 but emerging protest and limited project management oversight led to series of issues about relevant permissions, contractual arrangements and programme delay.
29 Sept 2022	Consultation became a 6-hour single information event for Armada Way at Drake Circus	Autumn 2022 – first recognition of the extent of the tree removal with emerging opposition.

Date	Event	Panel's view of Significance
10 Oct 2022	Report & presentation to Growth and Infrastructure Overview and Scrutiny Committee on Armada Way	Neither the report nor presentation referenced the information event of 29 September. The debate focused on amendments to the proposed cycle way (for which a technical note was requested) and confirmed a start on site of January 2023.
Nov 2022	Full Council resolved to pause the project to enable officers to review the proposal and assess whether any further trees could be retained	This resolution reflected the growing public opposition to the scheme. This appears to be a sensible decision in the emerging circumstances and also gave officers the opportunity to work on the outstanding delivery issues.
30 Jan 2023	Full Council received a petition against the loss of trees and instructed officers to undertake 'meaningful engagement' in February and then to implement the final design as quickly as possible	A well-meaning but relatively hollow gesture – commitment to implement and insufficient time given.
Feb 2023	'Meaningful Engagement' event in Guildhall over 6 days	Further engagement too late and too short to be meaningful.
27 Feb 2023	Chair of Scrutiny agrees to the principle of an Urgent decision	What the Chair confirmed agreement to (waive call-in) and what was required (justification for urgency) were different. Lack of clarity. (para. 6.2.2)
17:45 14 Mar 2023	Leader makes delegated decision using Urgency Powers	Decision to take an Urgent Decision ahead of the pre-election period removed opportunity for call-in or wider debate.
18:00 14 Mar 2023	Work commences to fell trees.	Implementation the night of the Urgent Decision compounded the issues of trust and respect on behalf of the protesters leading to them seeking an injunction and subsequent Judicial Review.
01:02 15 Mar 2023	Injunction served	Works stopped.
24 Mar 2023	First High Court hearing	PCC and the protestors tied into court proceedings with significant resource and welfare issues for all directly involved, and Armada Way a mess.
Between 24 Mar 2023 and 13 Nov 2024 the council and the complainant were involved in five Court Orders and three further High Court Hearings (Annexe 6) related to the Injunction, Judicial Review and Contempt of Court. This took up extensive PCC time and resources (section 6.7).		

6. Issues for examination as identified in the Terms of Reference

In reporting our findings, we adhere to the structure given by the Brief by separating out the areas the AWILR will examine 1-7 in turn. Inevitably, they overlap and are interdependent so cross-referencing and some repetition is necessary.

6.1 The approach taken by the Council in preparing the Original Decision and associated documentation, to include issues around the wording, accuracy and focus of the Original Decision.

- 6.1.1 The first record of the deliberations about the decision-making process for the Original Decision was a meeting on 14 February 2023 between the Monitoring Officer (MO) and the Armada Way project team and a further meeting the same day with the Chief Executive Officer, Strategic Director (for Place), SRO (Senior Responsible Officer) and Assistant Chief Executive Officer (ACEO). These meetings discussed the contingent need for a decision under the Urgency procedures. There was clearly much discussion over the following month about how and when this decision should be taken, with differing views amongst the officers concerned.
- 6.1.2 The MO advised senior officers that the Transforming Cities Fund (TCF) Programme Board was not an appropriate body to take the decision to proceed with the project and that the decision should be escalated upwards. The reasoning (as set out in the MO's JR witness statement) was that a TCF decision would not be a public facing meeting; would not demonstrate how the engagement event responses had been considered and would not provide transparent and full reasoning for the decision being made .
- 6.1.3 On 17 February, the Leader confirmed that he would take the decision rather than the decision being presented to Cabinet. This was an important decision, but no written record exists (section 6.5 below).
- 6.1.4 The Panel were informed that the Opposition (other elected political groups) were briefed on several occasions including on 23 February 2023. This included discussing the (then) intended decision-making route and timescales designed to avoid a contentious decision being taken during the Pre-Election Period (also known as Purdah).
- 6.1.5 At this time, there appears to be no suggestion that the decision would need to be taken using the Urgency procedures, even though the deadline to meet a pre-election decision using normal processes was 7 March. We were informed by officers that the intention was always to present the report within a timescale that could enable open publication of the agenda and report and include the opportunity for 'call-in' (section 6.2.34).

"It wasn't planned to be an urgent decision" (PCC - indicates source a PCC employee or Councillor)

"Ultimately we were up against a fixed funding deadline" (PCC)

- 6.1.6 The Panel understands from the MO Witness Statement that a meeting on 3 March between the Chief Executive Officer, Assistant CEO, Monitoring Officer and the SRO

identified that the timescales towards decision making had got increasingly difficult to adhere to, partly because confirmation on important regulatory requirements was still outstanding (sections 6.5, 6.6), and the council ran out of time to comply with the deadlines to take the report through the 'normal procedures'.

"There were so many problems that had not been addressed that getting to the decision wasn't immediately possible" (PCC)

"It turned out that because of the timescales we weren't going to be able to go through normal procedure" (PCC)

6.1.7 Eventually, the Original Decision was taken in private under the Urgency procedure by Cllr Bingley as Leader of the Council and published online at 17:55hrs on 14 March 2023.

6.1.8 On 14 March the Leader of the Council approved:

1. To note the outcome of the Engagement exercise as set out at Appendix C
2. To consider and agree the proposed amended design for Armada Way, to include additional tree planting within Armada Way and a revised planting schedule, together with the investigation of the wider tree planting within the City Centre and set out at B in the report.
3. To agree with the implementation of the final design and the redevelopment of Armada Way to recommence without further delay.

(Executive Decision made by a Cabinet Member, Reference Number- L34 22/23)

6.1.9 This was a pivotal event in the Armada Way project and a key point of contention through the ensuing court proceedings. In this section we focus on the circumstances leading up to the decision to use the Urgency procedure and the veracity of the material that was presented to the decision maker to support the decision. The constitutional issues related to the choice and application of the Urgency procedure are discussed in more detail under 6.2 below.

6.1.10 The officer report recommending the Original Decision presented six reasons why a decision under Urgency provisions was justified, summarised as follows:

- i. 'Reduces disruption of city centre events;
- ii. Reduces delays due to nesting birds;
- iii. Reduces the impact of construction (upon) city centre business;
- iv. Reduces city centre anti-social behaviour;
- v. Reduces impact of cost increases over time;
- vi. Reduces the impact of inflation'

These are discussed in more detail in section 6.2 (c) below.

6.1.11 The summary rationale (Original Decision report p1) for the Leader's decision, makes no reference to the Pre-Election Period although it is cited within Appendix A, p9. The report also stated that it was not a 'Key Decision' and did not need to be considered by Cabinet. This is discussed at section 6.2.4 below.

- 6.1.12 The Original Decision report was checked and cleared by a series of internal officers, as would be expected for a significant Executive Decision report. It does not appear that the final draft of the report was considered in detail by Counsel even though the Monitoring Officer had identified a high risk of legal challenge and had sought Counsel's advice just prior to the Original Decision report being finalised. The advice requested on 6 March 2023 related to the Council as developer and sought advice on matters such as the Tree Preservation Order (TPO) application determination, Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) screening opinion and the Habitat Regulations. Counsel's advice suggested that it would be very likely that STRAW will challenge any decision and that the draft Executive report to support the Executive Decision had not been checked in detail or with a view on analysing any legal or other risks arising from the report. (*Estelle Dehon KC, 7 March 2023*)
- 6.1.13 The Decision report was long and detailed (105 pages including appendices). It set out well the rationale for the proposed design, benefits it would bring and the policy context that led to the final design concept. It also set out the consultation and engagement that had taken place over the years. What was not easy to track, however, was the extent to which the views of consultees were considered or had resulted in any change to the design. The report relied on informal pre-application advice to justify that the scheme complied with statutory requirements.
- 6.1.14 This was flawed, particularly in respect of the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) Regulations 2017, and consequently the use of permitted development rights (Article 3 (10)(a) of the General Permitted Development Order 2015). The result was that the works undertaken on the night of 14 March were without the benefit of all permissions necessary.
- 6.1.15 The withdrawal of the Original Decision on 19 May 2023 gave the council opportunity to recover the position. However, it took significant court time and additional witness statements to work through what had and had not been in place for the Original Decision. The matter of the EIA is discussed in further detail in section 6.6 below.
- 6.1.16 Whilst there was a section in the main report about Green Infrastructure which set out the number of new trees to be planted and the number of existing trees to be retained, there is no mention or analysis of the number of existing trees to be removed. Information could only be found under the section headed Tree Surveys where the condition of the existing trees was set out (8.6-8.9). The report quotes the Arboricultural Impact Assessment (YGS 2021) which states that the "removal of 129 tree features is anticipated to have a significant negative effect on site amenity and local landscape character in the short-term. However, in the long-term a significant increase in amenity is anticipated through provision of a significant new tree planting scheme". Unfortunately the report does not at this stage, or any other (including no reference to tree felling in the recommendations), suggest that the YGS analysis is the approach to be taken and the 129 trees are indeed the number to be felled. It is only within the summary page at Section 10 (Environmental Implications of the decision) where the number of trees to be

felled is mentioned and again in the 'Alternative options considered and rejected' section of the summary page of the report there is reference to the objectors' wish to:

'...accommodate all or most of the 129 trees'

[Executive Decision ref L34 22/23, 14 March 2023](#)

- 6.1.17 This is of concern to the Panel; it appears rather dismissive to what had become the key issue of contention with the scheme as reflected in the consultation responses and petition. Utilising the terminology "wrong tree, wrong place" as referenced in the Original Decision report in relation to the YGS report and reiterated in interviews to the Panel, adds to the impression that trees are dispensable where they do not sit well with the proposed design scheme.
- 6.1.18 An explicit reference to the number of trees retained, those to be felled and new trees to be planted, and describing change over time since the first iteration of the scheme in 2018 would have been a valuable addition to the report. This would bring clarity to what was being proposed and recognition of those changes made.
- 6.1.19 Another element of the report that would have benefitted from greater scrutiny and managerial oversight was the approach to the Armada Way engagement programme report. This provided the Leader with feedback from the 'Meaningful Engagement' held between 6-11 February 2023 as requested by Full Council in January 2023.
- 6.1.20 The engagement event included the opportunity for the public to fill in and return a survey form. The results of this survey were analysed by officers and provided as an appendix to the decision report. The survey responses clearly showed significant opposition to the scheme with many responders replying negatively to all aspects of the proposals. However, in reporting the results the Council officers sought to redress what they perceived to be unfair practice and misrepresentation on the part of the objectors. The consequence was a skewed presentation of the results designed to eliminate duplicate or 'pro forma' comments. This looked partisan and exacerbated the growing view of STRAW and its supporters that the Council was underhand and untrustworthy. It may have been preferable to simply set out the survey results as received and provide commentary about what this demonstrates rather than seeking to exclude responses based on location or commentary and present different outcomes based on which responses were excluded. This is a good illustration of where taking the advice of engagement and consultation professionals would have been beneficial. For elements of the scheme other than tree loss, the Original Decision report set out ideas received as part of the event and how these issues could be incorporated into the final scheme. These are wide ranging from improved lighting, more seating, amendments to the cycle lane, introducing more colour, improved CCTV coverage and more habitat for wildlife. This suggests that the Council was listening on issues that would be seen to enhance the design where they could be included within the adopted design philosophy, even at this very late stage, but appeared to play down the voices seeking further tree retention.

- 6.1.21 The officer report needed to be cleared and sent to the Leader by 14 March. That was the date identified for the start of works (Annexe 6). Any delay would have incurred significant costs. From the evidence, it appears the report just made that deadline. The final report was sent to Democratic Services at 13:31hrs (GMT) and sent on to Cllr Bingley at 15:31 (GMT) on 14 March. This was received by him at 16:41 (GMT+1) (he was out of the country). He responded at 17:02 (GMT+1) the same day, agreeing the decision.
- 6.1.22 The decision-making route for the Armada Way scheme to start on site changed as the report preparation slipped and the timescale for a start on site began to be firmed-up. Some of the decisions about the route it was to take, the extent of legal oversight it would receive, and the shortness of time allowed to the Leader to agree the report, all became issues of challenge in the subsequent legal proceedings (see Recommendation 8). As remarked by David Elvin KC in his Judgement on the Judicial Review, “...the Leader had significantly less than half an hour to read and digest the 30-page [plus appendices, 105 pages in total] Executive Report, which period of time also included a telephone discussion with the Assistant Chief Executive, before he communicated his decision at 4.02pm. . .” (quoted by Mr Justice Sheldon in the Contempt Final Judgement at para 7).
- 6.1.23 Senior Conservative politicians at the time have been adamant that they had a cross-party political mandate over many years to progress the scheme, including a *‘Full Council motion saying go ahead pending an extra consultation’* and that the professional advisors had given the decision and the process the ‘all clear’. It was felt that it was *‘now or never, because we might lose the funding’*. (PCC)
- 6.1.24 The Panel concludes that the Original Decision, taken by the Leader, was based on an officer report which appears not to have included all relevant information and was incorrect in some significant areas (see 6.1.13-15; 6.1.20; 6.4; 6.6)) This was partly because it was rushed to meet a deadline (established by the planned date for felling) the project management was not adequately resourced (see 6.4), and the project was not ready for decision at the time the decision was made. This was caused by the desire to avoid the pre-election period as well as other potential impacts of delaying the scheme, particularly the risk to funding (6.2.43). There was also an intention to manage protest during the implementation for Health and Safety reasons and to minimise the gap between the time of the decision and the felling of the trees (see 6.4.14 below).
- 6.2 Details of the decision-making processes from a governance and legal perspective, to include:**
- (a) **The use of “urgent” decision making procedures**
 - (b) **The lack of opportunity to “call-in” the decision**
 - (c) **The reasoning for urgency, including pre-election period and bird nesting.**

- 6.2.1 In examining this element, three points need to be made at the outset. Firstly, the decision to adopt an ‘urgent’ decision-making approach was given consideration at a senior level with both Councillors and officers (opinions may differ whether it was the most appropriate approach).
- 6.2.2 Secondly, it is not within the remit of this review to make judgements on points of law or the lawfulness of actions of any individuals or agencies. Many of the issues raised have been rehearsed in court, both Judicial Review and Contempt of Court proceedings. On some of these points, the Court decided that the points had become ‘academic’ because of the new Leader’s decision to revoke the Original Decision. Whilst this might be unfortunate (for some), this Panel is not a surrogate adjudicator. This review is to identify learning points to help the council in the future.
- 6.2.3 The third point is that the provisions in the Constitution and guidance about the use of the Urgency procedure and the treatment of the pre-election period are two separate pieces of governance; their expression at Plymouth City Council does not appear to anticipate their inter-play. In this case they appear to have become coaxial. In drawing out learning points about the practical operation of the governance function it is necessary to explore these two elements separately and in conjunction, including their purpose and justification.

6.2 (a) The use of “urgent” decision making procedures

- 6.2.4 The relationship between an Urgent Decision and a Key Decision² is important. An Urgent Decision is the only form of Member decision-making for which call-in (6.2.34) does not apply. The Monitoring Officer makes the ultimate decision as to whether a report should be a Key Decision or not and the Constitution sets out the criteria for Key Decisions. The Panel note that Key Decisions can be taken by the Leader, Cabinet or officers and that Key Decisions may also be Urgent Decisions if a decision is considered ‘urgent’ where the interests of the Council or the public require immediate action.
- 6.2.5 The grounds for a Key Decision are two-fold and are set out within the Council’s Constitution. If either one is met, then it is a Key Decision. The first relates to the local authority incurring expenditure or making savings which are significant; this did not apply in March 2023, as the funding commitment had been previously agreed. The second is that the decision:
- ‘Is significant in terms of its effect on communities living or working in an area comprising two or more wards in the area of the local authority’.
- 6.2.6 Whilst a matter of judgement for the MO, the Panel considered this criterion did appear to apply to the Armada Way decision. The Council had previously expressed the importance of the scheme to the future of the city and referenced Armada Way as:

² The Key Decision derives from the Local Authorities (Executive Arrangements) (Meetings and Access to Information) (England) Regulations 2012.

'a kilometre long processional, regimented tree planted route for the people of Plymouth' that was 'at the heart of the City Centre, designed to inspire a spirit of rebirth in the post-war period'. (Original Decision Report – summary introduction)

- 6.2.7 This would have a significant effect across two or more Wards. Added to this, the Council was aware of the growing public concern about tree felling, following the petition. The fact that Armada Way had been recently considered by Council (30 January 2023) did not reduce the significance of the decision to proceed with the scheme.
- 6.2.8 It is the Panel's view that a Key Decision would have been the preferable route for the Armada Way Decision. Had the decision route been planned and included within a Project Plan, there would have been ample time for a Key Decision to have been made by Cabinet, which the MO thought would have been a more appropriate forum, given the profile of the decision. The Panel share this view; in the circumstances, a Key Decision taken within the pre-election period would have been preferable in terms of transparency rather than under the Urgency procedure; both would have occurred within the nesting season.
- 6.2.9 The Panel note that a Key Decision with regards the entire Transforming Cities Fund, £54m, which included the Armada Way project and other projects, was made by the Leader in 2020. However, the Panel is of the view that this did not negate the need for further and specific Key Decisions concerning the Armada Way project. The Panel considers this an important learning point as a project or programme could have multiple Key Decisions during its implementation and a single 'catch-all' is not in accordance with the Regulations.
- 6.2.10 Key Decisions should be published on the PCC web site at least 28 days in advance of the proposed decision. This gives notice to the public and other Councillors and would give an opportunity for such a Key Decision (due to the heightened public interest) to be debated and decided in public. The public, partners and other interested parties would have had the opportunity to make written or verbal deputations, in advance of any decision. There would also have been opportunity for (three or more) Councillors to 'call in' the decision for review (6.2.34). Regardless of whether call-in is exercised, the implementation of a Key Decision would be paused for 5 days (to enable call-in). The determination that it was not a Key Decision lessened the governance profile and publicity of the decision.
- 6.2.11 The Panel were advised that the potential need for an Urgent Decision was first discussed on 14 February 2023. This would have given sufficient time for the Statutory Notice of an impending decision to have been published on the Council's website, 28 days in advance of the meeting and in advance of the Pre-Election Period.
- 6.2.12 Where the decision maker regards the decision as so urgent as to warrant not following normal procedures then the agreement of the chair of the relevant Overview and Scrutiny

Committee (O&S) is required that the decision is urgent prior to the implementation of the decision. Where an urgent decision is taken and agreed by the chair of the relevant O&S it shall be immediately implemented and the call-in procedures in Part C will not apply. The urgent decision must still be recorded, published and reported to the relevant O&S.

- 6.2.13 The reason why both the Chair of Overview & Scrutiny and the Monitoring Officer must be satisfied that the degree of urgency is sufficient to warrant an exception to the usual decision-making processes, is because a decision using the Urgency procedure results in less transparency, less accountability and no opportunity for call-in of the decision. The judgement should be made on the urgency of the issue, regardless of what the decision on the issue may be i.e. the ultimate decision-maker may yet approve, reject, defer or modify the approvals sought.
- 6.2.14 In reviewing the process leading up to taking a decision under Urgency procedures, there are three clear considerations:
- i) Is there sufficient urgency to warrant an exceptional route to decision taking? This is the decision of the Monitoring Officer and the Chair of Overview & Scrutiny.
 - ii) If there is sufficient urgency, there is then a choice about whether deploying the urgency powers is the best way to proceed in the circumstances. This would normally be a deliberation between the Monitoring Officer, the Chief Executive and the Leader. At PCC at the time, the Assistant CEO had responsibility for the Democratic Services functions of the council, so would also be expected to be part of that deliberation.
 - iii) Based on this, there is then a choice about who will make the decision and in what forum. This would also normally be a deliberation between the Monitoring Officer, the Chief Executive/Assistant Chief Executive and the Leader.
- 6.2.15 The Panel were informed during interviews that there were differences of opinion as to the most appropriate decision making forum, ranging from the view that it could have been an officer decision; that it probably shouldn't have been a political decision at all as adequate delegations were in place in the TCF (Transforming Cities Fund) Board; that it should have been addressed under 'normal procedures' with prior publication of a report and opportunity for scrutiny and public access. The important point is that just because there is sufficient urgency, the decision need not be taken under those procedures and could still be made in several ways. This is a matter of judgement, including how transparent that decision-making is to other Councillors and the public. It could, for example, be taken following circulation of a report and after deputations, or it could be in private; the critical issue from a decision-making perspective is that there would be no recourse to 'call-in' and the decision could be implemented immediately. Finally, there is a judgement about whether, in the circumstances, the diminution of the democratic process to secure greater urgency is the best choice.

6.2.16 The table below sets out the alternatives available to the Council in exercising an urgent decision, as it appears to the Panel (no written record of the Council's deliberations exists).

Alternative 'urgent' decision makers			
Decision method	Evidence of consideration	Reason for rejection	Learning points
Transforming Cities Board	Y	Too significant	Had delegated decision making powers but decided to escalate.
Council	N		(Part B, 11.3 & 11.4))
Cabinet	N	Deemed not a Key Decision - officer report to Leader. Urgency Decision taken	Met the requirements of a Key Decision (i) affected at least 2 Wards (Part B, 11.5) Was first discussed with adequate time for a Key Decision and before Pre-election period.
Officer	N (but see para 6.5.34)	Too contentious/significant?	(Part B, 10.4)
Council Leader	Y – no written record	Chosen	Minimised gap between decision and implementation; likely to appear contrived and 'secret'.

6.2.17 The Monitoring Officer was satisfied that there was sufficient urgency, even though she informed the Panel that her preference was to take the decision in Cabinet through normal procedures during the pre-election period which would have been open to the call-in procedure and democratic challenge.

6.2.18 However, the 'Original' report stated: 'The issue with this [taking the report through normal procedures] is that it allows insufficient time for the process of call-in before the pre-election period given that reports were not able to be ready for 7 March (the final day that it would have been possible to take a decision pre-election and allow time for call in)' ([Original Report page 7](#)).

6.2.19 The Panel were advised that the decision to request the use of urgency powers was discussed with the Chief Executive on 3 March (Monitoring Officer's witness statement JR) and subsequently:

"following a meeting on 6 March 2023 it was agreed by the Chief Executive and the Monitoring Officer that given the decision report would not be completed by 7 March that a request for use of the Urgency procedure would be made" (Assistant Chief Executive para 8 contempt witness statement)

6.2.20 The Monitoring Officer had a telephone briefing with the Chair of Scrutiny on 3 March concerning waiving the call-in procedure. This was followed by an email from the Monitoring Officer to the Chair of Scrutiny on 8 March:

“Withdrawal of Call-In – Armada Way

Dear [Chair of O&S],

As discussed last week there is a need to seek your agreement to take an urgent decision and remove call in. The decision is to agree how to move forward in relation to the Armada Way scheme, following on from the resolution of Full Council and the requested engagement exercise. This needs the agreement of the relevant OSC Chair, which will be you”.

6.2.21 The email included three attachments (Annexe 9) as follows:

- The six reasons for urgency (para 6.2.39)
- The front sheet of The Armada Way Executive Report
- Report to the Leader for Executive Decision on Armada Way

The Report stated that the report did not meet either of the Key Decision criterion. The Chair of Overview & Scrutiny confirmed he was content to waive call-in powers by email at 11:01hrs on 14 March:

“Thank you for your email, I can confirm that I have considered this matter and I agree to the waiver of call-in on this item.”

The Chair of O&S appeared to understand that he was being asked to waive the call-in procedure rather than assess the urgency.

6.2.22 The Leader of the Council then made the Urgent Decision on the 14 March 2023. The adoption of an ‘urgent’ decision by the Leader removed the requirement for prior publication of the decision and report on an agenda as well as the opportunity for other Councillors to call-in the decision or to express their views in a public meeting. It also removed the opportunity for the public to make representations and to observe the decision being made.

6.2.23 This means that the public would not have been aware of the Urgent Decision until *after* it had been made and, potentially, after it had been implemented. This is a serious diminution of the democratic process and should be used as a last resort.

6.2.24 The Mr Justice Sheldon (Contempt of Court Judgement) refers to the Urgent Decision as follows:

‘48. ...The Council has advanced a reason for the use of the Urgency procedure – the necessity to take a decision before the election period in which ordinary local authority decisions cannot be made – which seems plausible. [³]

³ elsewhere in the court proceedings it is recognised that ‘Business as Usual’ or Ordinary Decisions can be made during the Pre-Election Period, as can ‘contentious’ decisions ([R. \(on the application of Lewis\) v Persimmon Homes Teesside Ltd \(2008\)](#))

49. Furthermore, the overwhelming evidence is that the Council’s conduct was mainly designed to avoid protest, rather than legal action. The evidence before the Court demonstrates that there was a real concern that there would be “direct action” taken against the plan to fell the trees...’

- 6.2.25 Annexe 7, The Route to Urgency, sets out the choices along the pathway to adopting the Urgency procedure – this includes the decision that the matter should not be considered as a Key Decision but rather an Urgent Decision as this was an enabling consideration. Whilst it was good that the council was planning ahead in considering the potential need for urgency, it was unfortunate that what was thought to be urgent took a long time to be implemented; the decision was not taken until 14 March, the day the contractors had been arranged to commence the felling (See 6.2.31).
- 6.2.26 On 14 March at 17:45, the Original Decision by the Leader, taken under Urgency procedures, agreed the implementation of the final design and for the redevelopment of Armada Way to recommence without further delay. This included the felling of 129 mature trees and the planting of 169 new semi mature trees. However, due to the evidence of nesting in 3 trees (Bird nesting survey 12 March 2023) the number to be felled initially was 126.
- 6.2.27 Where a matter is so urgent as to warrant the urgency procedure and the consequent diminution of the democratic process, it would seem sensible that the decision is immediately implemented, as set out in the Constitution. In the Judicial Review proceedings, the Complainant’s KC queried whether it was this way around at all, or had the council decided that to avoid public outcry the implementation needed to be immediate and therefore the decision had to be ‘urgent’ to avoid prior notice, call-in and public scrutiny?

“To publish a decision as your vehicles are rolling into the city centre to do it, which is what happened, can only be done if the urgency procedure is being used” (Richard Harwood KC)

- 6.2.28 Ranjit Bhose KC, representing PCC (Defendant’s Skeleton Argument 4 March 2024) in setting out the position that the Council reached concerning the use of the Urgent decision acknowledged the consequences of that route:

‘59. The March 2023 Decision was an executive decision. All executive decisions of the Leader (or Cabinet) are subject to call-in under the ‘Call-In Procedure Rules’ unless they are ‘Urgent Decisions’ as defined. Where a decision is called-in it does not come into force until that procedure is completed.

‘63. It is submitted that the published reasons ...were not based on any error of law. The Defendant was not harbouring under a (most basic) misapprehension that the call-in process could not be completed- as a matter of law in the pre-election period. Rather, the informed reader would have understood:

- (1) That because of the proposal to replace a large number of trees, any decision to go ahead with the scheme would be controversial, whenever it was made;
- (2) From the reference in the first sentence of Appendix A to the “approaching pre-election period”, that the concern lay with the taking of a controversial decision within the pre-election period; and
- (3) From the constitutional requirements, the completion of the call-in process would have resulted in, a further decision of the Leader, to be taken within that pre-election period (noting the possibility of a referral to full Council and further elongation of time).’

6.2.29 At the earlier Interim Injunction hearing, Sir Ross Cranston (Presiding High Court Judge) took a different view to that of Rhanjit Bhose KC regarding the pre-election period:

“The Council contended that it had a policy that avoided controversial decisions being taken during the purdah period. That was not the reason given at the time. Moreover, it is a policy which does not reflect statutory or LGA guidance”
(Injunction Hearing 24 March 2023)

6.2.30 The Original Decision was undoubtedly a controversial one even though Armada Way was a well-established council priority. This is mainly because it led to the immediate commencement of felling against which there was heated opposition. The use of the Urgency Procedure was adopted to avoid a controversial decision being taken during the Pre-Election Period. However, the use of the procedure removed important procedural safeguards from a controversial decision with significant implications. As a matter of Case Law, the decision could have been taken (or the call-in process completed) during the Pre-Election Period by normal routes. Accordingly, it was a choice by the council applying its own rules and guidance.

6.2.31 In the Panel’s view, the choice to use the Urgency Procedure in these circumstances had the effect of making the decision even more controversial. The lawfulness of this was never judged upon as the proceedings were deemed by the Judge to have become ‘academic’ as the trees were down and the Original Decision effectively rescinded. However, in the Contempt Proceedings Judgement, Mr Justice Sheldon, at paragraph 28, summarises the Council’s position as being;

‘On the facts, there was a legitimate reason for using the urgency procedure: an election was coming up, and the urgent procedure enabled a decision to be taken before the period in which **ordinary local authority decisions could not be taken**. There were good reasons for implementing the decision immediately: **public safety** meant that the felling needed to be done safely and away from the public, and there was a risk of “direct action” by protesters’. [Panel’s emboldening]

- 6.2.32 To Mr Justice Shelton ‘this seemed plausible’ (paragraph 48 at 6.2.24 above), however, this is a different rationale to either that which the Panel heard from interviewees, or to that which was set out the report to the Leader of the Council (6.2.39; 6.2.41).
- 6.2.33 Having interviewed the former Leader, former Chair of Scrutiny, former Monitoring Officer and several other senior Councillors and officers, the Panel were satisfied that there was a Plymouth City Council view that the matter was urgent, albeit for differing reasons. However, just because it had become urgent did not necessarily mean that the use of the Urgency procedure was the most appropriate course of action – it just means that it was an option that might be considered. Best practice would have been for more rigorous project management, with greater oversight of steps along the critical path that would need to be completed, thus avoiding the need for an Urgent Decision. This in turn, would be likely to lead to greater transparency and trust. But having reached this unfortunate position, there were still other options available to the Council e.g. take the decision during Pre-Election Period and risk call-in; undertake pre-scrutiny, as set out in section 6.2 (a) above.

6.2 (b) The lack of opportunity to “call-in” the decision

What is Call-In?

- 6.2.34 [The Local Government Act 2000](#) requires councils to establish a mechanism which (in accordance with Sections 9F(2)(a) and 9F(4)) allows for executive decisions made but not yet implemented to be ‘called in’ for consideration by Scrutiny. This includes decisions taken by Cabinet (collective or individual) or decisions delegated to Chief Officers.
- 6.2.35 The Act also includes the power for an overview and scrutiny committee to refer the issue to the Full Council for them to consider it substantively.
- 6.2.36 Part C Section 4 of PCC’s Constitution – Call-in Procedure Rules, sets out:
- ‘Call-in is a process where an Overview and Scrutiny Committee can recommend that an executive decision which has not yet been carried out, is reconsidered by the decision maker’.
- 6.2.37 Plymouth City Council’s call-in procedure requires three Councillors to complete and sign the Request for Call-In Form, setting out the reasons why the decision should be reconsidered. If the reasons are accepted the decision will be reviewed and reconsidered. Both Key and Non-Key Decisions are subject to call-In; only Urgent Decisions are exempt from call-in.
- 6.2.38 A successful call-in would mean that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee will review the executive decision before it is implemented and potentially will refer the matter back to the Executive for reconsideration by the decision maker(s) or determination by Full Council.

6.2 (c) The reasoning for urgency, including pre-election period and bird nesting.

6.2.39 Six reasons to justify ‘urgency’ were set out in the Original Decision report and considered by the Leader of the Council, as follows:

	Reason cited
i	Reduces disruption of city centre events
ii	Reduces delays due to nesting birds
iii	Reduces the impact of construction (to the) city centre business
iv	Reduces city centre anti-social behaviour
v	Reduces the impact of cost increases over time
vi	Reduces the impact of inflation

6.2.40 Whilst it appears to the Panel that these reasons were neither compelling or well evidenced in [Appendix A](#) to the report, from a learning perspective, the important element is not the Panel’s view of the reasons cited but how the council weighted the pros and cons of different approaches, how the route to decisions were poorly recorded and how the council lived up to its values (see 6.3.19).

6.2.41 With one exception, these six reasons differed from those most frequently cited by officers and Councillors during the interviews, which, in order of frequency, were:

- i) Loss of Government funding if the matter were to be delayed
- ii) The bird-nesting period
- iii) The Pre-Election Period

6.2.42 The AWILR Brief (6.2 (c) above), notably and explicitly asks the Panel to examine two of these reasons, the pre-election period and bird nesting. Below, we examine all three.

Loss of Government Funding

6.2.43 The most frequent reason given by interviewees in respect of the need for an Urgent Decision was the potential loss of Government funding.

“The money was going to be taken away, we had a plan and I wanted that money to be spent in Plymouth” (PCC)

“to the best of my personal recollection the potential loss of funding was the most critical issue” (Monitoring Officer Contempt statement para 7)

6.2.44 Over the lifetime of the Armada Way project, the identified sources of funding changed. This is not unusual for a grant funded project with multiple sources of finance (see spreadsheet at Annexe 8). The Government funding was the Transforming Cities Fund from the Department for Transport, who were represented on the Transforming Cities Programme Board overseeing the TCF grant and whose officers met regularly with Plymouth City Council’s officers. The chair of the Programme Board was Cabinet Member for Transport, and the Service Director Strategic Planning and Infrastructure was the

Chair of the Project Board. The TCF budget allocation for PCC was £58m which combined with other funding pots to give a total capital budget for the programme of over £150m. For Armada Way the TCF allocation was £2.7m with a total budget in 2022/3 of £12.7m.

- 6.2.45 It was reported to the Panel by the Chair of Scrutiny, the former Leader of the Council, and senior officers, that the Council was advised that delays to the project would mean that Government funding was in danger of being withdrawn. This was a legitimate concern. The funding was profiled to complete in March 2023. The Department for Transport wrote to the Leader on 20 December 2022, confirming there were no guarantees of funding available for 2023/24. This was re-confirmed in a follow-up letter in January. It wasn't until 2 weeks into the new financial year (18 April 2023) that the Minister wrote to Plymouth to confirm the funding was secure to spend in 2023/24. However, the loss of funding was not cited as one of the six reasons for urgency within the report to the Leader on the 14 March 2023.

The Bird Nesting Period

- 6.2.46 The Bird Nesting Period was a central plank within the Council's formal justification for resorting to the Urgency procedure. The Wildlife and Countryside Act, 1981 prohibits intentional damage, or destruction of a wild bird's nest whilst it is being used or built. According to Natural England, the bird nesting season covers March to August, although it is not a legally defined period and will vary with climate, species and other factors. Pigeons, for example, may nest all year around.
- 6.2.47 The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) refers to the need to obtain a licence to remove or disturb bird nests. The guidance from Defra states that tree pruning and felling during bird nesting periods should be minimised. However, Defra acknowledge that there are times when such work is necessary, usually due to Health and Safety reasons. There are recognised approaches to minimise risk to birds and other wildlife, such as visual surveys and when appropriate, advice from specialist ecologists.
- 6.2.48 PCC commissioned visual surveys by specialist ecologists, prior to the implementation of the Urgent Decision and the felling of the trees. Annexe 9 refers to the Bird Nesting Period and other attachments in an email from the Monitoring Officer to the Chair of Overview and Scrutiny Committee and is an extract from a briefing note (considered by 3 senior officers and emailed to them by the Monitoring Officer on 6 March at 23:04).
- 6.2.49 Clearly, there are degrees of urgency. Regarding the bird nesting, for example, the season had already commenced and there are provisions available, which the council adopted, to safeguard nesting birds from tree felling. It is the Panel's reflection that the bird nesting issue may have been afforded too much weight as a justification for adopting the Urgency procedure to avoid the pre-election period. However, it was an aspect upon which the

council was facing increasing pressure by the protesters. Greater clarity at a national level might assist public bodies evaluate whether and how to undertake significant works to trees in urban environments throughout the bird nesting season.

The Pre-Election Period

6.2.50 The Panel understands that whilst differences of opinion clearly existed, significant weight was given by the officers to avoid making a contentious decision during the Pre-Election Period. This was re-enforced in many of the interviews conducted.

“It was my view that the Armada Way decision hit the bullseye for contentiousness if taken in the pre-election period” (PCC)

“I think we’re a bit risk adverse when it comes to making decisions during the Pre-Election Period”. (PCC)

6.2.51 The pre-election period of heightened sensitivity is the period which occurs in the immediate run up to local elections, general elections, and referendums. During this period, certain restrictions apply to various public bodies and individuals, including MPs, civil servants, and local authorities.

6.2.52 The rules on pre-election sensitivity originate from convention rather than legislation. The restrictions are intended to allow elections to be carried out without undue interference and avoid political parties using their power from being in office to gain an unfair advantage.

6.2.53 The Local Government Association issues general guidance each year but most guidance concerns the use of Council resources and facilities to ensure that existing Councillors standing for re-election do not obtain unfair advantage.

6.2.54 Caution should be exercised when making certain decisions which would be politically contentious, especially in the following areas:

- use of facilities
- use of resources
- starting consultations
- development of new policies and
- holding meetings or other events which feature elected officials.

6.2.55 Councils also have a duty under section 2 of the Local Government Act 1986 (‘the Act’) to “not publish, or arrange for the publication of, any material which, in whole or in part, appears to be designed to affect public support for a political party”. Using the power in section 4 of the Act, the government published the ‘Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity’ (the ‘Code’), which local authorities must consider when coming to any decision on publicity.

6.2.56 The restriction in section 2 of the Act always applies, not just during the pre-election period. During the pre-election period local authorities should pay 'particular regard' to their legal duties in the following ways:

- i) consider suspending the hosting of material by third parties
- ii) consider closing public forums
- iii) do not publish material on controversial issues or report views or proposals in a way which identifies them with any individual members or groups of members
- iv) do not publish material relating to individuals involved directly in the election (unless this is clearly allowed by statute) and
- v) do not issue any publicity which seeks to influence voters (subject to legislation).

6.2.57 The Panel has focused upon decision making during the Pre-Election Period. It is recognised that if decisions made during the Pre-Election Period are done based on party politics rather than their individual merits, they may be open to challenge.

6.2.58 However, in the Court of Appeal case of R. (on the application of Lewis) v Persimmon Homes Teesside Ltd (2008) the claimant argued that a grant of planning permission was invalid as it was made during the pre-election period for an electoral advantage. The court rejected the claim, finding that any decision made during the pre-election period does not become unlawful merely because of its timing. All elected officials have a political pre-disposition, and without further evidence, nothing suggests this would cause a 'closing of minds' any more than it would outside of the pre-election period.

6.2.59 Monitoring Officers issue local Pre-Election Guidance, and this may vary slightly between Local Authorities. However, it is clear that 'business as usual' can continue for a local authority during the Pre-Election Period. What is judged to constitute 'business as usual' and what might be perceived to be unduly favouring a particular candidate or political party is a judgement from the MO and would normally be discussed with the other Statutory Officers. In this case, PCC appears to have based its decision on the perceived 'contentiousness' rather than political favour.

6.2.60 In 2023, Plymouth City Council published internal Pre-Election guidance for the period up to and including 27 March - 4 May 2023 (Annexe 10). This guidance was drafted by the Monitoring Officer and was publicised on 6 February 2023 within the staff newsletter and on the front of the council's intranet. The Panel were advised that it is likely that the guidance would have been forwarded to Councillors at the same time.

6.2.61 The former Monitoring Officer's guidance states that decisions should not be artificially delayed:

"Council business continues; however controversial issues should be avoided during this period.

Decisions should be made at the appropriate time and not be artificially delayed until immediately before the pre-election period”

6.2.62 This suggests the Monitoring Officer’s sensitivity was to the period ‘immediately’ before the pre-election period as well as the period itself. There is considerable ambiguity and misunderstanding about what can and cannot be done during the Pre-Election Period. Getting this right is particularly important for councils like Plymouth which elect by thirds, as they have a higher proportion of their time spent in the pre- and immediate post-election period. Perversely, this can create a significant amount of democratic ‘down-time’.

6.2.63 The PCC guidelines on considering what is ‘controversial’ in respect of the pre-election period include four points. The guidance says that decisions should probably be avoided if they did not meet the criteria. In the Panel’s opinion, the Armada Way decision met each of the criteria – was it:

- i. pre-planned (Yes)
- ii. in line with policy (Yes)
- iii. one-off (Yes)
- iv. of broad impact rather than of relevance to only one Ward (Yes)

(Annexe 10 PCC Pre-election guidance and Panel’s commentary)

6.2.64 The Pre-Election period was the third most frequently referenced reason why the Urgency procedure was necessary by Councillors and officers; but it was not cited as one of the six reasons for the need for the Urgent Decision within the ‘Original Report’. Rather, in the Panel’s view, it appeared to be the trigger for a sequence that led to other reasons being cited.

“Before we’d got anywhere with the decision, they wanted to look to chop down the trees. It was going to be at night. I remember discussions before we were anywhere near the process for the actual decision [and] how it might be taken. . .I’ve a feeling that we were looking at cutting down the trees before Christmas. . .We started looking at the trees and that became the catalyst for how they took the decision.” (PCC)

“It was a contentious decision that shouldn’t be made in the pre-election period and it’s one of our reasons for urgency” (PCC)

“It was better to take it using urgency powers than take a decision that would stray into the pre-election period” (PCC)

“The election was on a known date and we had a project to deliver by March 2023. If we were going to hit that [date] we had to clear the trees before the bird nesting season” (PCC)

6.2.65 In the PCC Pre-Election Guidance: ‘Decision Making, Council Business and Publicity’, the assumption is that ‘business as usual’ can continue for a local authority during the Pre-

Election Period. Some may argue that the Armada Way Project constituted 'business as usual', particularly as it was first discussed by Councillors during 2018 and spanned Labour and Conservative administrations.

6.2.66 However, given the sensitivity to the tree felling it was clearly contentious. Even so, there was a judgement to be made - which was the worst of two evils – taking the decision under normal procedures within the pre-election period or curtailing the democratic process but getting the decision made (just) ahead of the pre-election period. The council adopted the latter. The Panel, trying to avoid hindsight bias, believes the former would have been more open and in line with the council's values (6.3.19). However, it was a valid judgement for the council to make.

6.2.67 In summary, the decision to proceed with the implementation of Armada Way was judged by PCC to be:

- too significant and contentious to be taken during the pre-election period
- transformational for the city but not significant enough to be a Key Decision
- urgent because of bird nesting, although the decision was taken after the commencement of the nesting season
- an insignificant next step following the approval of the Transforming Cities programme and the earlier decision of Full Council, but too significant to be 'business as usual'.

6.2.68 Given the optics of this and the anticipated legal challenge, it is unfortunate that the advice and deliberation of this series of judgements were not adequately recorded. This is addressed more fully in section 6.5.

6.2.69 Of course, with hindsight, had Armada Way been more carefully planned with clear timelines and milestones, including Key Decision points, this would have enabled the council to make decisions in public and in turn, would have provided opportunity to challenge within the democratic process and in good time before the commencement of the Pre-Election Period.

Learning Recommendations

1. Review Constitution, including Urgency provisions

PCC should consider a review of its Constitution to ensure that it serves the needs of the local authority and the people of Plymouth. This should include reviewing the clarity of delegated decision-making, the status and obligations of key Boards and clarification of the Urgent Decision-making process and the rationale for it in light of the council's values.

2. Review the council's approach to Scrutiny and Cabinet

Effective scrutiny can occur before or after an executive decision is made. Scrutiny may also be commissioned by Cabinet to undertake reviews in order to consider the Scrutiny Committee's

recommendations before making decisions. Scrutiny seeks improvement and helps decisions to be more robust and open.

It is recommended that PCC review

- i. the flexibility of the Scrutiny function to ensure they can undertake their role effectively and demonstrate this to the wider community.
- ii. the role of Cabinet so that there is clarity between the purpose and responsibilities of Scrutiny and those of the Executive in monitoring and managing capital projects.

3. Enhance the role of the Statutory Officers by ensuring they meet regularly and take shared responsibility to address key governance issues

The Panel was advised that the core Statutory Officers (Chief Executive, Monitoring Officer and Chief Financial Officer) did not have regular, scheduled meetings as a triumvirate to consider the health of corporate governance during the period under review. These three statutory postholders are known as 'the Golden Triangle'. They each have specific statutory roles and powers vested in them to uphold good governance and they can, together, ensure that good governance is embedded across the whole council. 'The Code of Practice on Good Governance for Statutory Officers' (LLG, CIPFA, SOLACE 2024) was introduced to support the role of the three statutory officers working together to help achieve high standards of corporate governance (Annexe I I). Whilst bi-lateral meetings took place, structured meetings of the Statutory Officers during 2022 and 2023 may have given the Council better oversight of the risks associated with the Armada Way project and clearer corporate leadership and more timely and effective intervention.

4. Extend the Rolling Forward Plan for Councillor Decision making

The Forward Plan sets out key decisions, when they will be taken and by whom. An extended Forward Plan will offer a longer lead-in time for reports and should help staff to map out decision-making timelines, associated processes such as statutory requirements, permissions and key milestones. This should enhance programme and project management as staff work back from key decision milestones.

This process should, in turn, give residents and others an opportunity to see what decisions are planned to be taken in advance of meetings and should aid good governance, transparency, improved planning and timeliness of decisions. The Panel was advised that there was an agreement for a 3-month Forward Plan, but that the statutory minimum of 28 days was the council's approach⁴ in practice⁵.

⁴ The Local Authorities (Executive Arrangements) (Access to Information) (England) Regulations 2000, Part iii, Regulation 12 refers to the requirement for local authorities to have a four-month Forward Plan.

⁵ It is regarded as best practice for councils to have an even longer rolling Forward Plan.

Some examples of other Councils which have adopted the 12-month rolling Forward Plan approach are: Wandsworth Borough Council; New Forest District Council and Greater Manchester Combined Authority.

5. Review the approach to the Pre-Election Period

Councils such as Plymouth that elect by thirds spend a lot of time in pre-election and post-election hiatus. The use of urgency powers was in part initiated to avoid making a controversial decision within the pre-election period. Taking the urgency route, perhaps with laudable intentions, caused the decision to become even more controversial. It removed transparency, opportunity for public and Councillor scrutiny, and crucially curtailed the opportunity for the council to explain what it was doing, when and why. There is nothing in law to prohibit a council from taking a contentious decision in the pre-election period (see the planning appeal matter: *R. (on the application of Lewis) v Persimmon Homes Teesside Ltd (2008)*). The PCC protocol for staff and Councillors took an overly cautious approach to the pre-election period with little flexibility.

It is recommended that further consideration and clarity on procedures for pre-election periods would be helpful, including giving greater emphasis to delivering 'business as usual' and examining the interplay between the council's provisions for 'urgency' and those for the pre-election period.

6. Refresh Good Governance training

It is important that both Councillors and Officers understand one another's respective roles and the purpose as well as the application of the Regulations, guidance and Standing Orders they operate by. Some of the aspects highlighted by this experience are nuanced and there were important and difficult judgements to be exercised. Showing how these relate to the principles of good governance should form part of the recording of such decisions and why certain choices were made.

6.3 Whether a sufficient consultation process was undertaken to include how well the Council engaged with stakeholders throughout the process and the extent to which feedback was incorporated into the plans of the Original Scheme.

6.3.1 To understand the appropriacy of the consultation that PCC undertook between 2018 and 2023 and the extent feedback was incorporated into the plans, it is important to look back to the origins of the Armada Way scheme's design.

The Design Rationale for the Original Decision

6.3.2 The design thread traces right back to the early post-war visioning for Plymouth City Centre (A Plan for Plymouth, Abercrombie and Watson 1947). This is relevant to what emerged for consultation and the issues that occurred thereafter.

This approach enables early publication of proposed decision and helps officers to map out decision making timelines. Items do not necessarily need to be completely worked through or polished. Matters can be removed or added to the Forward Plan.

6.3.3 The [Original Decision](#) report starts with a summary that sets out the importance of Armada Way as a critical element of the Abercrombie city vision:

“a wide ceremonial and direct boulevard connecting the Hoe to the Station, designed to inspire a spirit of rebirth in the post-war period”.

6.3.4 Armada Way was to be a kilometre long processional, regimented tree planted route for the people of Plymouth and although some other elements of the wider post war vision did not emerge, Armada Way did. Its national status as an important and unique contributor to post war city planning of civic spaces is well recognised.

6.3.5 Incremental change to Armada Way followed, with the current public realm scheme being set out in the 1980s. The north-south route became pedestrianised, with an organic meandering scheme of trees, planting and water features. This is the form of public realm that most age groups will associate with the city centre.

6.3.6 We have been informed by many of those interviewed that the route had fallen into disrepair and disrepute through lack of maintenance, inappropriate species, poor planting into post-war rubble, growing issues with anti-social behaviour and low levels of footfall.

6.3.7 There were others who, whilst recognising the lack of maintenance, valued the earlier landscaping within the city centre:

“Armada Way had a wiggly path all the way down the middle, it was lovely ... we would always walk down the winding path” (External source)

“We lost the wooden animals ... I played on them as a child” (External)

6.3.8 A series of vision statements have been commissioned by PCC over the past 20 years to provide a framework for the future master planning of the City Centre. They have all retained an intention to pay homage to the original Abercrombie design. This was explicitly noted by some responders (internal and external).

6.3.9 It is not clear to what extent this was a desire shared by the people of Plymouth, but it was a design objective adopted and promoted by successive design and planning professionals. It is also apparent that the determination to revert to the regimented tree-lines of the Abercrombie scheme had significant consequences for the options presented for consultation and engagement and the degree of responsiveness and flexibility shown to feedback.

6.3.10 In 2003, David MacKay was commissioned to produce a City Centre Strategic Masterplan (A Vision for Plymouth). His narrative and images for Armada Way pick up on the Abercrombie vision. MacKay recommended that existing obstructions should be removed and “regular lines of trees should be introduced to mark the formality and scale of the

axis” (MacKay 2003). This vision was subsequently embedded in the ‘Asset Heritage Audit Statement of Significance’ in 2014 and again in the City Centre Strategic Masterplan led by LDA Design (2017).

6.3.11 The LDA Design masterplan (2017) formed the basis for the 2018 Better Places Programme Consultation which proved to be the seminal consultation event undertaken on the Armada Way scheme prior to the Original Decision. The LDA masterplan was similar in intent to the earlier commissions. It set out a vision for Armada Way as the stunning centrepiece:

“a powerful axial route and urban park of more than a kilometre long, lined on either side by a simple, single-species avenue of trees. The central line of the axis will be free of clutter and obstacles both to preserve the spectacular views in either direction and to create a simple and unequivocal connection of city to waterfront, Rail Station to the Hoe”.

6.3.12 The LDA vision made an exception to the regimentation to accommodate the Listed gardens in front of the Civic Centre where a more organic arrangement of trees and landscaping was to be retained and refurbished.

6.3.13 Ultimately, this re-imagined Abercrombie vision included a mixed-use city centre environment with additional development opportunities, interspersed with newly defined high quality public spaces. This was embedded in the ‘Plymouth Plan’ (2021) and statutory planning documents including the Plymouth & SW Devon Joint Local Plan (JLP, adopted 2019) and the City Centre Conservation Area Appraisal (2022). Policy PLY6 (JLP 2019) recognises the importance of reinforcing the primacy of Armada Way as the principal thoroughfare from the station to the Hoe.

6.3.14 The Panel was informed that this 20-year period of visioning for the city centre was a cross-party political aspiration and remained so as the scheme emerges into final delivery.

“it's cross party and for the whole city, everybody wanted Armada Way to be smartened up”. (PCC)

This became a key factor determining that the scheme should and would proceed.

Was sufficient consultation and engagement undertaken - the requirements on public bodies to consult

6.3.15 The way in which Local Authorities engage with their citizens, partners and stakeholders varies enormously and needs to reflect the form and context in which it takes place.

6.3.16 Much of the consultation undertaken by local government is set out in statute and this duty is governed by clear protocols, regulation and case law. This enables interested parties to understand how they can be involved, how their views can be heard and whether the local authority has complied with the required consultation methodology.

- 6.3.17 In the case of the Armada Way scheme, the project team appears to have considered that consultation was not required by statute. This was because the works required were deemed to be ‘permitted development’ not requiring formal consultation. Instead, the proposals fell under the wider common law duty on public authorities to consult (where deemed appropriate) which is an aspect of the duty to act fairly.
- 6.3.18 In 2021 the Council agreed a ‘Community Empowerment Programme: Working together for a Fairer, Greener, Healthier Plymouth’. This renewed approach to engagement sought to enable communities to increase control over their lives. It stated that Plymouth City Council is committed to supporting local communities to do things for themselves, and to make their voices heard in shaping the services they use and the places they live. The report set out a series of principles to guide engagement.
- 6.3.19 This approach to engagement together with the four principles were re-iterated in 2023 through “Our Plan: Build A Better Plymouth - Britain’s Ocean City”:
- i. Democracy: Because we listen and hear what people want
 - ii. Responsibility: Because we care about the impact of our decisions and actions
 - iii. Fairness: Because we want to address inequality and inequity in our city
 - iv. Co-operation: Because we achieve more together than we would alone
- 6.3.20 For this scheme, as part of the Better Places Programme, it was decided to consult in 2018. This aligns with the commitment of Plymouth City Council to engage and be informed by what people want (Plymouth Plan).

“Anything of significance, of course we do consult, it is our second nature” (PCC)

Devolved approach to consultation

- 6.3.21 The Panel was informed that there was no Plymouth City Council overarching policy on how community engagement and consultation is undertaken. The arrangements to determine how the Our Plan: Build a Better Plymouth commitment to ‘hear what people want’ was devolved throughout the organisation. We heard that the decisions about who determines what non-statutory consultation should take place, what form it takes and what weight it has, sits within each Directorate.
- 6.3.22 Given that there was no standardised approach to consultation or engagement, the devolved model appeared to be managed in different ways across the council. The statutory consultation requirements such as the Statement for Community Involvement were in place, but for non-statutory consultation or engagement, this was determined by the team. In the case of Armada Way, it was the responsibility of the Project Manager (a mid-tier manager) and his team. That meant that those responsible for planning, undertaking and analysing consultation, one of the key elements of regeneration projects, did not have a corporate framework to guide them or specialist advisors to help them shape their engagement strategy.

“What happened with Comms was it started off as “Go away and leave us [Place Directorate] alone, this is none of your [Corporate Communications] business”. . .to stuff happening and [Place] asking “what are we going to do now?”, and becoming very reliant on the guidance of Communications colleagues. That transition was fascinating.” (PCC)

- 6.3.23 PCC has a small in-house communications team with resources and expertise in communications and media. There is currently some support available for questionnaires and design and content of surveys, but no core funding allocated for an engagement or consultation resource. Without an officer or team with the skills and experience in consultation, the Panel were informed that there was no opportunity to provide guidance to teams across the council. Despite this, a communications officer has supported the Directorate on the Better Places Programme throughout, funded by the core communications team revenue budget, potentially reflecting the importance of the programme corporately.
- 6.3.24 It is unclear whether any communication and consultation costs associated with the Armada Way capital projects were built into the total costs upfront. Had they been, it would have enabled ongoing expertise to be embedded in the project team whether from an in-house source or brought-in, benefitting the project and supplementing the internal communication team offer. Involving communication expertise right at the start of a project's development is beneficial and recommended. For National Lottery funded programmes, 10% of project costs should be identified for consultation and engagement. This sets an expectation that consultation will play a key role in shaping projects and involve communities in their development.
- 6.3.25 The Panel were informed that the more recent consultation that took place for the revised 2023 scheme (September 2023), was outsourced bringing in expertise and capacity to undertake a more extensive engagement piece. The Council regarded this consultation for Armada Way as one of the biggest listening exercises they had ever carried out (All Councillor briefing 14 January 2024). 1503 survey responses and 96% respondents living in Plymouth. Independent consultation experts ECF undertook the analysis and identified the key themes. The Panel heard that this consultation exercise was expensive but “we had to be seen to take the issue of consultation seriously and we did” (PCC). This is another example of where PCC has already taken learning from the ‘original decision’ consultation and commissioned expertise to lead a much more comprehensive and inclusive consultation exercise.

Armada Way Consultation March- April 2018

- 6.3.26 The consultation for the Armada Way scheme took place for 6 weeks from 15 March to 26 April 2018. It was seen as an “extensive consultation event” consisting of an exhibition in various locations around the city for members of the public to attend, with a series of

staffed events where residents, visitors, stakeholders and interested parties could be provided with more information about the Better Places Programme. The consultation event included a feedback questionnaire.

6.3.27 The events were led by the in-house project team, a team considered by its managers as having a

“pretty good track record” on engagement ... and being an [award-winning team](#) for consultation on statutory documents” (PCC)

“The consultation on the joint local plan was exemplary. They took a sofa around the city and people sat in the sofa and had a chat. Really good and really innovative” (PCC)

“We won the Jubilee Cup twice, which is the planning cup for superheroes in planning, given out by the RTPI” (PCC)

6.3.28 For the consultation in 2018 they had external support from the master planning consultants LDA, WSP, and DCA a communication consultancy. The material produced to aid the consultation included an overall framework for the city centre and individual elements including more detail and explanation. Armada Way North, “from Royal Parade to North Cross (and the west end) are presented as early ideas for change. The details and phasing of these projects will be worked up in tandem with emerging development opportunities.” (LDA consultation material)

6.3.29 For Armada Way South (from Royal Parade to the Hoe) the proposal was suggested as an earlier phase, that could be planned and delivered to support the renovation of the Civic Centre.

6.3.30 The imagery for Armada Way North set out a new arrangement for tree planting, reflecting the wider master planning concept of reinstating Abercrombie’s initial vision. However, the text made no mention of the existing trees or their removal and without explanation in person, this crucial element could well have been missed or misinterpreted by those attending. Those involved in the design acknowledged to the Panel that it was not explicit that the trees would have to go:

“No [it was not explicit], but I did point it out when I was there to the public” (PCC)

6.3.31 The consultation event appeared in line with LGA guidance for an initial event at a formative stage of engagement. It was reported as being well attended with 178 formal responses. The overall support for the Armada Way element of the scheme was reported as 82% (being mindful this was in total 92 individual responses). From this level of support the design team assumed the ‘endorsement of concept’ that they needed to continue to refine the plans and work up the design detail.

“With the benefit of hindsight, I think we could have engaged more and earlier, but do I think it would have made a blind bit of difference? No, I don’t.” (PCC)

The Gunning Principles

6.3.32 Given that consultation was undertaken, the need to comply with the basic requirement of “fairness” prevails. [The Gunning Principles](#) set out 4 steps that need to be complied with, being: to consult when proposals are at a formative stage; provide sufficient and understandable information about proposals; adequate time for a response; and the outcomes of the consultation to be conscientiously taken into account in finalising the proposals.

6.3.33 The initial consultation in 2018 provided proposals at an early stage in the design process but even then, the scheme embedded the clear desire by PCC to re-instate the Abercrombie vision. Whilst some officers considered that they were implementing the intent set out in planning policy adopted in 2019, a sense of pre-determination was fed back by many of those who provided written responses to the Independent Learning Review:

“First of all, offer alternative ideas for people to consider” (External)

“As was demonstrated, the Council had a direction of travel that they did not want to deviate from” (External)

“Actually listen to what people want and be prepared to change rather than ploughing on regardless with a fixed agenda” (External)

6.3.34 This view was also reflected by some of those within PCC at the time:

“This was a very different time but [Abercrombie’s] vision was held on to. It felt inherited; whose plan is it, our plan rather than the city’s plan?” (PCC)

A Four Year pause and an alternative ‘sequential’ approach

6.3.35 Following the 2018 consultation there was a four-year pause. Many external and internal circumstances impact on the delivery of urban renewal programmes but these were particularly impactful times for city centres. The post-pandemic, post Brexit environment; the ongoing shift to online shopping; cost of living crisis; an increased awareness of climate change and its implications, all suggested that simply picking up and carrying forward the initial concept plans of 2018 may be unwise.

6.3.36 Whilst the Abercrombie vision was retained, there was recognition by officers during the pause that a sequential approach, with phased removal and re-instatement of trees, may

be preferable in terms of public acceptance. This alternative approach to implementation had been well thought through and worthy of consideration. It was presented to the political leadership at the time, but they were committed to a single bold vision and wished to see implementation progress and the sequential approach was rejected. This was a legitimate political choice driven by the length of time Armada Way had been ‘on the books’, the apparent political consensus and the delays already incurred. Even with the benefit of hindsight, it was considered by some senior officers and Councillors that the sequential approach would have been ‘*an absolute disaster*’.

The subsequent “Information Exchange” Drake Circus, 2022

6.3.37 For the design team, the single day “Information Exchange” in September 2022 (Drake Circus Event) was the culmination of many years of strategic visioning. The team held their memory of the waves of engagement that had been carried out over the last decade or more and the political ‘imperative’ to see implementation. They also felt an anxiety that the proposals had not been ‘exhibited’ for some considerable time.

“We could have done more [to remind people]. It was very much in the hands of politicians at that time...although we were trying to advise them.” (PCC)

“We did the Drake Circus as a reminder, it was more of an information type event.” (PCC)

“Primarily the politicians supported it, we just needed to have an information event to get the revised plan out there for Armada Way.” (PCC)

6.3.38 This anxiety appeared borne of a wish to have the ‘mandate’ endorsed rather than a nervousness that the design solution may not have been right. For many residents conversely, it was the first clear expression that the majority of the existing trees on Armada Way northwards from Royal Parade were to be removed and replaced.

6.3.39 The scheme displayed at Drake Circus was in essence a more worked up version of the 2018 proposals. It had changed in detail but maintained the key principles from 2018. The exhibition board titled ‘Re-inventing Post War Plymouth’ reinforced the design rationale of the 2018 consultation.

6.3.40 It was reported that there were 17 formal responses with 75% of comments supportive of the scheme. The presentation material did not include “You said: we did” so it was not possible to see whether any of the changes were a result of the consultation in 2018.

6.3.41 The exhibition boards did not ask questions or offer alternatives for comment. The information indicated that 164 trees would form part of the scheme. In smaller text below it noted that 17 trees would be retained and 77 existing trees removed. This appeared to be the first time that the potential wholesale removal of trees along Armada Way was set

out explicitly for the public to consider, although this key element of the proposal could have been missed by those attending the event. Feedback to the AWILR from the public, Councillors and officers included:

“Don't present misleading images – be honest” (External)

“It was so hard finding out. Officers would give a % of trees they were keeping but what does that equate to in trees, or how many there are to begin with. You felt like you were banging your heads against a brick wall trying to figure it out. Maybe they didn't want to tell how many trees they were going to cut down, because it didn't sound good in the end.” (External)

“Consultation wasn't good enough, Council hell bent on delivering it. People felt they weren't heard.” (External)

“Should have given it [consultation] a bit more substance in 2022 but driven by funding guidelines.” (PCC)

“Consultation on a project that was going to change a 70-year-old green artery in the middle of the city centre - 6-hour event only!” (PCC)

- 6.3.42 There was widespread recognition amongst those interviewed that in retrospect this single, six-hour event was not extensive enough to be meaningful engagement. There were no options or alternatives. It was presented as a finalised plan on route for imminent implementation. It included many features that delivered sustainable benefits such as a sustainable drainage system (SuDS) scheme and enhanced walking and cycling route and new linear green park, but this became lost in the emergence of a public focus on the loss of trees.

How did Armada Way fit into the wider vision for the City

- 6.3.43 Councils are responsible for the long-term strategic planning of their areas as well as the detailed implementation of public realm schemes. The two should go hand in hand, complementing one-another. PCC understood that link. In short, for the city to thrive it needed economic vibrancy in the city centre where it had an unusually low density of development, too much retail floorspace and a proportionately low number of residences. To attract people to live in the centre and revitalise the commercial life, it needed high quality public realm and better travel arrangements. Armada Way was undoubtedly a key part of this jigsaw. However, one of the challenges we heard from interviewees was that the engagement material did not sufficiently demonstrate the link between the wider narrative for the city and the 'stand alone' plan for Armada Way. The wider strategic narrative for Plymouth did exist but was contained in statutory plans that were not easily referenced by the public.

“No single narrative...seen as individual projects – need a common narrative...” (PCC)

“Bigger picture very difficult to get across. Not explained at all. Catalyst for major change. City centre was in decline.” (PCC)

“We were remiss – could have painted a far broader picture.” (PCC)

- 6.3.44 The involvement of the communications team at an earlier stage in the project development, with the right consultation and engagement expertise and policy framework, may have ensured the project was framed by a wider city narrative. A simpler, compelling storyboard would have helped convey the long-term vision for the City and how individual project such as Armada Way contributed (whilst simple in their presentation, they are difficult to get right but worth their weight in gold).

Alternative routes to understand the views and aspirations of residents

- 6.3.45 Apart from the project specific consultation, it would have been helpful if the design team had used other sources to help understand wider resident views and opinions. A residents' survey was undertaken by Marketing Means for PCC in 2020 (published July 2020) and then again in 2022. The 2022 survey was carried out between 19 September and 4 November 2022 with 1877 valid survey responses. The results were published in May 2023, after the Original Decision had been determined and therefore the analysis was not available to the project team. The survey confirmed the importance of nature to residents (60% agreed they take time to notice and engage with nature with only 15% disagreeing). It also confirmed the need to improve the city centre (51% felt it was not improving with only 29% feeling it was). There have been no residents' surveys published since 2023 and therefore the resident perception of the recent public realm changes in the city centre through a further residents survey have yet to be picked up. There were no active Citizens' Panel or tradition of Citizen Assemblies during the period of the AWILR which could have also provided insights regarding Armada Way from the diversity of Plymouth's population.

“Comms and consultation are usually some of the first things to go in terms of budgetary decisions.” (PCC)

“The citizen assembly model of consulting and deciding would be a more open, democratic and un-contentious way of dealing with potentially divisive schemes such as this.” (External).

The emergence of dissenting voices

- 6.3.46 The key outcome of the September 2022 Drake Circus event was that it publicised the implications of the scheme in terms of tree loss and captured the attention of some residents. These residents proved fundamental to what came next. Alarmed by the potential impact on the existing trees they formed themselves into an un-constituted group ([STRAW](#)) focussed on a single aspect of the proposal, the removal and replacement of the trees:

“Our campaign was started to try and get PCC to incorporate more of the healthy, mature and much-loved trees on Armada Way into the new design.” (STRAW)

6.3.47 The emergence of groups of residents or organisations coming together to raise their concerns about urban renewal projects is nothing unusual, it is one route to challenging the public sector and holding it to account. If dialogue is made possible, it can enable debate and potential change to a developing scheme but invariably leads to the need to re-assess timescales to delivery. In some cases, it can result in the curtailment or re-design of schemes, some of which do not re-emerge for decades, if at all.

6.3.48 In this case what had been seen by officers and politicians as a well-supported long-term, cross-party vision for the City Centre, with little or no dissent, was almost overnight turned on its head:

“We didn’t see it coming” (PCC)

6.3.49 In part this was because, in the council’s view, it had implemented other schemes in and around the city which involved significant tree felling without experiencing such outcry. It was also because the sensitivity of the city centre was under-estimated as it was not an area with a large resident population. A learning point here is that the psychological impact of proposed works, especially tree felling, is difficult to judge but may be seen to be more necessary and justifiable for major highway re-alignment than for apparently more ‘cosmetic’ schemes; the significance of the SuDS and the cycleway was not seen by the public as the focal point of the scheme. Secondly, whilst city centres (and especially Plymouth) may have a small resident population, they are used and valued by huge numbers of people from all around.

6.3.50 In the Panel’s view, it was also in part because it was a scheme borne idealistically, considered by its proponents to be largely unobjectionable, and its implications had not been sufficiently explained to the public. It was also a scheme that was part funded by Government grant and was anticipated as being on site in 3 months’ time.

6.3.51 A well-orchestrated and focussed campaign against the tree removal element of the project grew in momentum from October 2022. This campaign focussed the debate and media attention on an important but single element of the scheme. We heard from officers and politicians that articulating the wider benefits became even more difficult for PCC.

“The use of social media, a petition, and the sheer volume of activity was completely unexpected and unforeseen.” (PCC)

“It was a bolt out of the blue.” (PCC)

“A petition for the Place Directorate was completely abnormal.” (PCC)

6.3.52 Meetings between PCC and STRAW did take place both at political and officer level but we were informed that any meeting of minds seemed unachievable. It appears that “lots of doors shut” as the opposing positions became more evident. The prevailing council view by this stage was that the opposition was entrenched, exhibited unacceptable behaviour and contained ulterior political motives (the Panel did not gain a consistent picture of what these ‘ulterior political motives’ were). From the protesters’ perspective, the council had been insincere in its engagement and was unreceptive to suggestions or compromise.

“All the way through we just wanted a bit of a dialogue... and some compromise. We were not saying scrap the whole scheme ... surely it was possible to keep some of the trees.” (External)

“Really it was a presentation. I don’t think they asked us a single question. They just told us what they were going to do... after that it just felt we were at arms’ length the whole time.” (External)

6.3.53 Whether there had been the opportunity for compromise and dialogue with STRAW following the 2022 Drake Circus event, that did not happen. The Panel were informed that “like wildfire, the campaign took off” and both sides were stereotyping the other, trust was lost and dialogue was strained at best.

6.3.54 The quantum of Freedom of Information requests, email enquiries and formal complaints coming into the Council from the protestors regarding Armada Way added to the project team's workload very significantly and potentially limited their capacity or intent to find time for a more constructive dialogue and progress the project in a timely way (up to March 2023, 93 separate requests/complaints/FOIs received regarding the AW scheme). The pressure on officers and councillors was exacerbated by the actions of some of the objectors (see Section 7).

6.3.55 Some politicians and officers clearly wanted to engage more fully to see if common ground could be found but for others a bunker mentality had kicked in.

“I don't think it [mediation] would have helped. In terms of sort of de-escalation, I’m not sure there was anything that we could have ever done in terms of the design of the Armada Way scheme that would have actually satisfied STRAW.” (PCC)

6.3.56 Whilst things had reached the ‘you wouldn’t start from here’ stage, there was opportunity for properly structured and facilitated mediation. Local Councillors can be very effective mediators but unfortunately at this time two of the Ward Councillors were unwell. The attempts that did take place on 3 November 2022 as well as three independently facilitated discussion forums in early 2023 were well-meaning but proved unproductive and too late to materially alter the project objectives. The council may wish to consider the use of mediation again in the future, The deployment of professional, structured,

facilitated conversations can help build trust with the communities with whom trust has been damaged.

Consideration of the proposal at Full Council

6.3.57 Full Council considered the matter in November 2022 and again in January 2023, first to pause the project for further consideration regarding tree loss, and subsequently to respond to the petition received from STRAW. This political debate triggered the retention of 7 further existing trees and 3 new ones (129 trees to be felled and 150 new trees to be planted) and resolved to undertake

”a meaningful engagement process in February, which considers the natural environment and climate resilience before finalising the designs for Armada Way.”
(Full Council decision)

6.3.58 This was set up at very short notice and ran from 6 to 11 February. It was consciously called ‘Meaningful Engagement’ rather than a ‘consultation’ by the council, apparently a reference to the comment by STRAW in the Petition debate that no meaningful community engagement had occurred thus far.

6.3.59 A further debate at Full Council took place on 27 March 2023 after the trees had been felled, regarding the establishment of a Tree Panel. Full Council unanimously recommended that Cabinet consider whether a ‘tree panel’ be set up to bring together politicians, officers and interest groups to seek a shared understanding of the challenges of delivering public realm schemes. This was considered by the Cabinet Member on 10 August 2023 who decided that the existing Tree Steering Group already fulfilled this role and that the proposed Tree Panel was not required. The Panel is unaware whether the Tree Steering Group considered the Armada Way proposals.

Meaningful Engagement Event February 2023

6.3.60 The ‘meaningful engagement’ event held at the Guildhall resulted in nearly 600 visitors and 2314 responses. There are varied reports about the spreading of misinformation and interference with those seeking to attend the event by those campaigning to retain the trees. To what extent this influenced or inhibited the engagement is unclear but there is certainly evidence that the focus on the tree loss made it harder for the weight of the other elements of the scheme to be debated. The plans used for the event had been released in January 2023 and showed the retention of 7 more of the existing trees compared to that in September 2022.

6.3.61 What appeared obvious to many of those we spoke to was that this final engagement was too late in the process to have any meaningful outcome on the proposed tree removal.

“It didn’t save a single tree.” (External)

“Those [voices] who were in support were getting lost.” (PCC)

“I’m pretty confident that every single one of those businesses and the landlords who own the buildings would have preferred it if those trees had come down... So, the views of the businesses were very much for the scheme, and I think the protesters got very mischievous and they started comparing Plymouth with Sheffield . . . Plymouth’s 120 trees, I think Sheffield was 10,000. But also, this isn’t a residential street. They’re not outside people’s homes”. (External)

*“Adapting the design further to accommodate more existing trees will also prevent the design from achieving **the image of the city centre which the Council wants to deliver...**the resultant benefits from piecemeal scheme would be less in terms of the expected increase in visitors, new businesses and economic growth” (Original Decision report 11.9, Panel emboldening)*

6.3.62 The survey results from this final engagement process were analysed and presented as part of the Original Decision. By this stage STRAW’s communication on social media encouraged its supporters to reject all elements of the scheme - *“Say NO and MEAN NO to this destructive Plan”*. The outcome was 2274 responses. The results clearly reflected the view of STRAW and those who wanted to see the retention of the existing trees.

6.3.63 From the evidence we have received, it seems unlikely that any magnitude of engagement response would have had an impact on the overarching design objective to reinstate the Abercrombie plan form. It would have needed a complete re-think of the past 20-year cross party visioning or a complete full stop to the scheme to embrace those views.

6.3.64 Consultation and engagement with residents are complex and require a skillset that is not just acquired but requires training. For it to really add value, it needs to move beyond the ‘statutory requirement’ and formula. This is particularly the case in a digital age, with social media needing specific skills in disseminating and gathering, engaging and in responding.

“with social media, people can put their views out an awful lot quicker and wider and without the degree of filter or effective control of local media. That does change the dynamics and does mean that from the perspectives of councils and Councillors they probably feel under more pressure to respond.” (External)

6.3.65 This requires investment and greater reliance on the communications and engagement professionals within the organisation and those they may commission, developing corporate policies and core standards for the departments to adhere to above and beyond statutory minima. This might usefully include communications and engagement professionals being seen as integral participants on project boards.

6.3.66 Consultation and information sharing with residents, businesses and other stakeholders does not end at the decision stage but needs to follow through the entire implementation . Given the city centre location, how the site is presented during construction can make a

real difference. It can promote positive messages about what is coming. The hoardings at Armada Way at the time of writing look stark. They could celebrate the future vision, for example, with exciting visuals and messages as part of a wider engagement programme with local schools and colleges.

- 6.3.67 PCC has a massively ambitious and dynamic vision for the city which is built on sound analysis and past success. It finds expression in formal plans such as the local plan, but it is difficult to identify an easily digestible narrative of ‘the Plymouth story’ which should include social, educational and health goals as well as economic and environmental outcomes.
- 6.3.68 Co-designing the future strategic vision with the community is recommended. PCC has a strategic forum (City Centre Regeneration Forum) to help steer this vision. The forum needs to have weight, inform and steer regeneration principles and outcomes.
- 6.3.69 We were informed that the project team had built strong relationships with the city centre business community:
“As business owners, we are in regular dialogue with the Council ... I think the Council did as best as they could [on Armada Way] they certainly liaised very closely with us”
 (External).
- 6.3.70 Taking time to build wider relationships would provide the opportunity for residents and stakeholders to have a long-term role in shaping the strategic vision at the local level, rather than relying on periodic, statutory and non-statutory engagement events.

Learning Recommendations

7 Create a compelling and collaborative narrative for the City’s vision

Developing an easily digestible narrative of ‘the Plymouth story’, co-designed with the community is recommended. PCC has a strategic forum to help steer this. The forum needs to have weight, inform and steer regeneration principles and outcomes. This would provide the opportunity for residents and stakeholders to have a long-term role in shaping the strategic vision, rather than relying on periodic, statutory engagement events.

8 Elevate the importance of engagement and consultation and build in capacity for engagement and consultation professionals with earlier involvement of in-house communications experts

Inadequate and ill-considered communication and engagement was one of the core reasons why the Armada Way project took the unfortunate course it did. Much of the design was ‘fixed’ before the initial consultation in 2018. The consequences of this as a constraint on what might be changed appears to have been under-appreciated. Greater openness was needed about what the consultation and engagement in 2018 and 2022/3 was for, how many trees would be removed,

and how much public response could realistically influence the scheme. It is recommended that PCC:

- i) Promote the capacity and influence the in-house Communications Team to advise and oversee other professions on engagement and consultation.
- ii) Introduce corporate standards for consultation and engagement that set out how engaging with and listening to residents will be put into practice, such as “You said: We Did” to enabling residents and stakeholders to see what changes their input has made.
- iii) Ensure that capital programmes and projects allocate at enough (c10% is recommended by National Lottery for projects they fund) from the overall budget to consultation and engagement.
- iv) Introduce a protocol for officers and members, with associated training, regarding the use of social media.

6.4 The eventual implementation of the original decision and events surrounding it, including stakeholder response and documentation submitted to the injunction hearing by both sides

6.4.1 To implement the scheme within hours of the decision having been taken and published, significant pre-planning had been necessary by both the Council and their contractors.

“The Intention was to implement the same day, but everybody was very clear that we did not know whether the decision would be taken that day and they were mobilising to implement at absolute risk.” (PCC).

6.4.2 The project mobilisation had been planned well in advance for the night of 14 March anticipating the Original Decision would be signed beforehand and the necessary permissions for implementation would be in place. This approach held risks for the Council with the potential for significant abortive costs. As it transpired, the Highway Notices to enable Heras fencing to be erected around the site (Section 171 Notice for Hoardings and Fencing) came through at 16:26 on 14 March and the original decision published within minutes (17:58) of the removal of tree works commencing. This inhibited communication with the public about the timing and consequences of the decision and the rationale for implementation.

6.4.3 We have been informed that the intention was always to fell the trees at night. This was on the health and safety advice of the contractors undertaking the work. Large, dangerous equipment was needed to fell this number of trees in a single phase and given its location, the contractor’s risk assessment and experience indicated this would be the required methodology. Protecting the public from harm was the key imperative, but night work was also less disruptive to the City Centre businesses.

- 6.4.4 PCC had set up a Tactical Group (TG) to oversee and co-ordinate the implementation phase of the tree felling. This approach served as an implementation project group tracking all necessary actions to ensure a start on site once the Original Decision had been published and work could commence. The group was also tasked with monitoring public order and safety.

“The whole thing appears to have been planned like a military operation as if the residents of Plymouth were the enemy.” (External)

- 6.4.5 From the action log and transcripts, the planning was detailed. For the night of 14 March, the team involved officers on the ground and senior officers on call, including the Acting Chief Executive and the Monitoring Officer. This enabled swift decision making throughout. The Council was perhaps naive in its eagerness to comply with the request of the police for background information on objectors. Statements were wrongly attributed to an individual because it was their laptop that was used for a multi-agency Teams meeting.
- 6.4.6 The action log anticipated the potential for an Injunction to be served on the Council and arrangements had been put in place in preparation for such an event. This included what to do if an Injunction was served but did not appear to extend beyond cessation of felling. The final TG was on the day after the tree felling (15 March).
- 6.4.7 What is not evident is any such detailed pre-planning was to manage the aftermath of the tree felling or the serving of an Injunction, including overwhelming demand for media management and the impact of the debris on the ground. The TG delivered in part against its objective to ensure safe tree removal and therefore disbanded when their task was aborted by the Injunction. This left a physical and psychological mess.
- 6.4.8 A ‘recovery’ arrangement did emerge, put in place initially to manage the subsequent impact of the tree felling and the media interest that occurred and then to oversee the legal proceedings and the [revised scheme](#). The Panel understand these commenced on 28 March, chaired by the Chief Executive, and continued weekly handed over to the Strategic Director for Place to manage.
- 6.4.9 The transcripts of the Tactical Group through the evening and night of 14 March, demonstrate that when the Injunction was served it was given the importance it required. The instruction by the Monitoring Officer and Acting Chief Executive was unequivocal – work had to stop immediately.
- 6.4.10 The subsequent Judicial Review Hearing explored the timing and response of the Council to the Injunction. Clarification of the timings and actions were set out in supplementary witness statements as more detail was identified and disclosed. For those objecting to the tree felling, time was of the essence. The time elapsed from the conclusion of the

injunction hearing (00:29hrs), the serving of the injunction (00:57hrs), and the instruction to stop work was 34 minutes (01:03hrs).

- 6.4.11 The perceived secrecy and the speed of the commencement of the works less than an hour after the publication of the 'Original Decision' gave no opportunity for the Council to set out its rationale for why the works would need to take place immediately or at night, nor the benefits the scheme would bring to the city centre once completed. There was no time to inform those who had commented on the scheme – whether positively or negatively – of the decision and the next steps towards delivery.

“One of its consequences [using the urgency decision making route] was a lack of transparency as it was conducted (the implementation) without any notice at all to objectors as to the decision which was taken or the Executive report on which it relied until a very short period of time indeed before the works began to fell the trees.” JR Judgement

- 6.4.12 The extent to which the Council kept the impending original decision and subsequent mobilisation out of the public domain appears in conflict with the Nolan Principles. Two examples of this are as follows.

- 6.4.13 A meeting with key City Partners the day before (City Centre Regeneration Board – agenda and minutes 13 March) provided an update on Armada Way. It made no mention of an imminent Executive Report – instead, “a report on this process is currently being compiled”.

- 6.4.14 Of greater concern (EJ 2nd witness statement) was an email sent to STRAW’s solicitor at 17:55 on 14 March by the Council’s Monitoring Officer. At 14:13 on 14 March, the claimant’s solicitor had expressly asked for a response to their earlier correspondence (23 February) before any decision was made. The response from the Monitoring Officer at 17:55 on 14 March did not mention that the Original Decision had been taken or of its publication (it was agreed for publication at 17:53). The Monitoring Officer’s response was:

“Finally we can see no reason set out in this or your previous letter to require us to confirm that no further action will be taken by the Council at this stage...

All issues raised will be set out in a detailed Executive Report and briefing papers which will be in the public domain.”

(Email to HGR solicitors from the Council’s Monitoring Officer, 14 March 2023)

- 6.4.15 During the Contempt Proceedings, Mr Justice Sheldon accepted as plausible the Monitoring Officer’s explanation that ‘she had “limited peripheral knowledge as to what was occurring beyond the matters that I was focusing on that day” and ‘it was not unusual that she would not be involved in the progress of a decision report following legal sign off.... she was aware that there was a possibility that the decision would be taken on 14

March, but she was not certain it would be.’ (Mr Justice Sheldon, Approved Judgement para 52). This reflects poor communication between key council officers at the centre of the management of the decision-making at a crucial moment. It is also indicative of the loss of respect between the council and the objectors that the timing of the decision was not communicated.

6.4.16 It is worthy of note that in the PCC draft communications plan for the 14 March the advice was that ‘NB If asked when it starts by media will have to say when as it is happening that evening’. This is a quite different position to that adopted with the complainants.

6.4.17 Given the background, it was no surprise that the public perception of the night-time work was likely to have led to an assumption that the Council were trying to fell the trees by stealth. The media interest was extensive, both local and national, and the images of the felled trees were stark.

“In retrospect this looked furtive.” (PCC)

“The whole thing smacked of cloak and daggers.” (External) - submission

“Chopping the trees down in the middle of the night – if you’re going to do it on safety grounds... you have to say it again and again and brief ahead of time. It looked appalling in terms of the public perception.” (External)

6.4.18 From the evidence it is not easy to ascertain whether the optics of the tree felling at night was fully considered or recorded. From a safety perspective it was deemed the only way to deliver, but whether it was recognised that it would look “appalling” to those witnessing it is unclear.

6.4.19 The consequence of the injunction left a small number of trees standing. 110 of the intended 126 trees were felled before the Injunction was served, leaving 16 remaining plus 3 identified with bird nests. Those that were felled remained in situ for six months and created a poor impression:

“...had two years of the town centre looking dreadful.” (PCC)

“Trees lying there for a year massively damaging.” (External)

6.4.20 We were informed that the council’s response to the media attention was challenging both for individual politicians and officers as well as for the council as a whole. The Conservative administration decided it was safest not to respond to the extensive media enquiries and, in the absence of the Chief Executive, it was left to the Assistant Chief Executive to front it out. This left the officers of the council in the firing-line and, most unfortunately, gave the impression that the political decision-makers were not standing up

behind the decision they had made. This undermines trust and confidence, not just within the council but with partners and the public.

6.4.21 There was evidence from the transcripts of the TG (15 March) that by the next morning, particularly in respect of the portfolio holder, there was extensive and threatening comment, both on social media and via email. The importance of a duty of care was flagged at the TG meeting, with acknowledgement of the need to support politicians receiving abusive comments on email and social media (section 7).

6.4.22 In the lead up to the original decision and implementation date, the council's legal advice suggested that the decision to implement was likely to be challenged. In addition, the groundswell of public opinion and media attention was unlikely to abate in the run up to the implementation or following tree removal. The approach adopted to both the decision-making and the tree removal could only have been expected to exacerbate this. The completion of the scheme was compromised as a result, as was the council's reputation, with the impact on the city centre very visible for all to see.

"The Council failed to understand the consequence." (External)

"..everyone anticipated there would be a reaction when the trees came down ... but not the extent that it was - should have seen it coming more." (PCC)

"With hindsight removal [and replacement] of trees gradually over a number of years may have made a difference." (External)

6.4.23 We heard from many sources that the delivery at this time was a political imperative. We did not find evidence to suggest that the risk the tree felling could pose in terms of a complete full stop to delivery had been fully evaluated, endorsed and owned at senior level or that alternative scenarios had been considered – even at this late stage. The Chief Executive advised the Panel that the managerial model at the time was dependent on escalation from the Departmental Management Teams (DMT) to the Corporate Management Team (CMT, comprising the Chief Executive, the Assistant Chief Executive and the Strategic Directors as the most senior management board) with the DMTs meeting weekly. There was no record that either the Place DMT or the CMT had discussed Armada Way before 14 March 2023, but the timeline (Annexe 6) does indicate that the Chief Executive was involved in the decision to use the Urgency procedures and chaired the first of a series of senior officer meetings.

6.4.24 The outcome of the tree felling resulted in significant reputational damage to Plymouth which still remains today, albeit fading with time.

"I had people from Australia phoning me asking what on earth Plymouth was doing cutting down all its trees in the middle of an environmental, health and cost of living crisis." (External)

6.4.25 The resignation of the Leader followed almost immediately, and the Conservative administration lost power in May 2023. We heard that managing this political turbulence following the tree felling was difficult. The long period of inactivity within the city centre was a visible sign of what had been seen by some as a 'brave decision' to carry on, by others as

"this was moving into something significant beyond what any of us have been involved in"
(PCC)

"I think there's a bit of the business community who feel . . .done to. They had genuine issues with trees and safety... they've had brand contamination... they've had months and months and months of hoardings up and detritus left everywhere due to legal action."
(External)

Learning Recommendation

9 Enhance risk awareness involving works to public places and ensure the risk assessment methodology, timing and approach is the most appropriate for the location and community.

Each public realm scheme is different and its success is not only determined by how well the final scheme functions and is maintained but how it came about and was implemented. The command and control methodology of the council, working under pressure to deliver was well demonstrated on the night of 14 March but the consequences of the injunction that should have been anticipated was not well thought through or planned for and the consequences for the city centre, the business community, visitors and community had to live with the impact.

Re-evaluating the methodology for the implementation of city centre public realm projects may be valuable given there is high footfall and a business community that needs to continue to be able to trade. In 2021-2 there was a suggestion that a sequential approach to the work may be better, undertaking the work in phases. As a smaller initial demonstration project, it could have reduced delivery risk and enabled feedback from residents, businesses and visitors before moving forward with further stages.

6.5 Recording of officer decision making processes and actions, in relation to the implementation and project management of the Original Scheme

6.5.1 Plymouth City Council has a long history of enabling and in some cases delivering themselves, major urban growth programmes. They have been good at capturing significant match funding. The five-year capital programme (2023/28) anticipates spend of £398m of which £325m is to be delivered through the Place Directorate. Grant funding is

identified as £130m of that total budget (Full Council Revenue and Capital Budget report 08/03/24). With significant grant allocations, there is opportunity to deliver this visionary and transformational agenda and work in partnership to create the “prime city for accelerated growth in the far Southwest”.

6.5.2 The strategic growth priorities and the capital programme that delivered the physical regeneration projects for this strategy would be captured annually in the Financial Budget report to Cabinet and Full Council. The Panel was informed that the governance arrangements for the capital projects themselves were captured primarily through the O&S Committee, City Council Investment Board, TCF Project Board and bespoke departmental arrangements.

6.5.3 One element of this growth agenda has focused on public spaces. It has sought to deliver enhancements that will transform the open spaces and pedestrian areas of the City Centre. Armada Way is part of this wider Better Places Programme.

“Better Places Plymouth is a long-term programme of investment to transform the City Centre’s streets and spaces to: support and enable inward investment and provide for a diversification of uses in the centre including new employment; connect the City’s best assets; de-clutter and enhance pedestrian and cycle movement for all; and resolve conflicts between different modes (pedestrians/Cyclists/Vehicles)” TCF Business case/Cabinet report 2020

6.5.4 The internal arrangements to manage the Armada Way project from inception to delivery were primarily held within the Place Directorate, with a looser corporate and political oversight, including by the Chief Financial Officer. The Council was the client for the project, procuring contractors to deliver the scheme.

Place Directorate arrangements

6.5.5 The Place Directorate brought together the range of expertise and professional skills to lead, manage and deliver the growth agenda for the city with a Strategic Director and 3 direct reports. Two of the direct reports managed capital projects associated with the strategic growth vision as part of their respective portfolios of responsibilities. We were informed that the Service Director for Economic Development held a portfolio of major strategic projects. The Service Director for Strategic Planning and Infrastructure took responsibility for a larger group of small capital projects as well as the large Transforming Cities infrastructure programme.

6.5.6 The Place Directorate had a strong track record in delivering major capital projects. Many of the senior team members had been in post for a considerable period and expressed confidence in their own arrangements. We were told of the [awards](#) that the Directorate had won.

“Place Directorate - we have got this. Very strong reputation – considered very competent.” (PCC)

“Exceptional delivery in... team – on budget and did not fail” (PCC)

- 6.5.7 We also heard that the Place Directorate had an internal reputation for knowing best and doing things their way:

"I was concerned that the people involved on the day-to-day basis were precious about their project and running it in the way that they felt it should be run. There wasn't objective oversight of it in terms of decision making or guidance in terms of governance and process."(PCC)

Whilst the Directorate clearly had a strong reputation internally and with professional bodies, this is not a substitute for adequate capacity and oversight.

- 6.5.8 The decision to place the Better Places programme under the Service Director for Strategic Planning and Infrastructure appears to have been one of capacity. The Service Director for Economic Development did not consider he had the capacity to add the Better Places projects to his portfolio at that time. We were advised that he rigorously followed the Prince 2 methodology, had a team of project managers and would escalate any issues or risks upwards to ensure more senior oversight and risk awareness was in place.

"I am not sure anyone wanted to take ownership of it [Armada Way project]. . .shying away from it." (PCC)

'Somebody needed to make a decision. . .I don't think anyone above our level was wanting to take any ownership or give us any direction.'" (PCC)

"I would say, Armada Way was a project in search of a Project Manager." (PCC)

We also heard that

"The absence of project management is kind of endemic across the council. We have peaks of greatness but then we have some desperate troughs where we get into trouble." (PCC)

- 6.5.9 The Armada Way project was placed with a new mid-tier manager (as Client), skilled in his field, but not a qualified project manager and with little or no experience of managing a project of this complexity or visibility. This was alongside other projects which were already underway and suffering major setbacks, including New George Street and Old Town Street. He had a small delivery team and reported to the Service Director for Strategic Planning and Infrastructure as SRO. At this time Armada Way was seen by the council as a relatively 'low budget and low risk project' compared to others within the capital programme at the time. Armada Way was not on the corporate risk register or tracked regularly by CMT.

- 6.5.10 It was evident that the individuals and the team were passionate about improving the city and committed to delivering the project.

"It's what keeps us going, we've got our minds set on this being finished and it just being awesome for the city" (PCC)

6.5.11 However, this was not blind commitment. It was from within this small team that both the suggestion to explore a sequential approach to tree replacement (6.3.36) and the need to re-connect with the public (Drake Circus information exchange event) came from.

6.5.12 We also heard that it had been conveyed unequivocally to the team by their senior managers that there was a ‘political imperative’ to commence the scheme and that under the so-called ‘Strong Leader’ model, that was to happen. The Panel did not ever get the impression that the delivery driver was commencement before the forthcoming election for electoral gain, but rather that the election loomed large, a change of controlling party was expected, and it was believed that both may have increased the risk of delay and the risk to funding.

6.5.13 We heard from a number of politicians and senior officers that there was long-standing cross-party political support for the rejuvenation of Armada Way, including the creation of the treed boulevard.

“I have to say every administration, every Leader, had been involved . . . the plan that came to me we didn’t really change because it was widely accepted that everybody liked it... It wasn’t a political project, it was a team project, across the city.” (PCC)

“Because you’ve got changing Administrations all the time, all of us have got our prints on the plan.” (PCC)

6.5.14 The project team had strong urban and landscape design skills and experience. It was explained to the Panel that the capital team under the Service Director for Strategic Planning and Infrastructure had been reduced 6 years earlier due to budget constraints leading to reduced project management capacity. Whilst part of the same Directorate, this service area did not follow Prince 2 methodology with the same rigor, and had limited project management capacity in the team during this period.

6.5.15 The governance for the Better Places Programme was set up within the Transforming Cities Fund arrangements. This was a very large Department for Transport grant-enabled Programme to deliver new sustainable infrastructure projects across the city. It included 31 separate infrastructure projects with a budget of £117m. The Armada Way grant element was relatively small (£2.7m).

6.5.16 The Transforming Cities Programme and Project Boards oversaw the entire TCF Programme, including the Better Places Programme, of which Armada Way formed part. The Board comprised Councillors, Department for Transport representatives and the Place Service Directors (SRO for both programmes including Armada Way) and a representative of the PCC Director of Finance.

6.5.17 The Panel was advised that the governance was robust and conformed to government requirements with individual projects reporting monthly on risk, finance, programme and key decisions. The TCF Project Board agendas and minutes demonstrate regular reporting of the Armada Way project to the Board using a standardised reporting template. This

should have provided a structured mechanism for the Board to track progress and seek to resolve or escalate any slippage or heightened risks.

- 6.5.18 The Project Board papers, however, demonstrate that there was an over-positive interpretation of anticipated delivery and risk profile set out in the reporting. The submission for Armada Way that went to the Project Board on 14 February 2023 gave a RAG (risk) rating of Green/Amber for the overall project delivery. The heading ‘Securing political and public support’ was rated Green. The return on 7 March 2023 had only shifted to Amber/Green for overall project delivery and ‘Securing political and public support’ remaining Green. The reporting did not seem to accurately reflect the problems that were mounting up for the project and the evident risks of legal challenge.
- 6.5.19 ARUP was commissioned by the Department for Transport to undertake an Independent Assurance of the entire national TCF programme in January 2023. Their findings for Plymouth indicated that there was good management and levels of control overall. However, they did note that optimism bias delayed recognition of programme slippage. They also identified little or no warning to significant delays in some cases and a lack of project management resources for several schemes.
- 6.5.20 The pre-commencement programme was outsourced to the contractor (Morgan Sindall) and project managers (Curry & Brown) to populate and track. This set a detailed delivery plan and actions for the construction phase (evidenced by Gantt charts). However, the Panel have not seen a programme timeline that includes the necessary internal actions which identified the critical path to achieve a start on site within the timescales being reported to the O&S Committee, portfolio holder and TCF Project Board.
- 6.5.21 We were informed that there was no operational project board specifically in place for the Better Places Programme. Outside of the TCF Boards, the programme was tracked informally through regular Project Team meetings and an occasional escalation to their line manager.

Governance Arrangements

- 6.5.22 From our interviews the governance arrangements in place left the project team exposed. It was hugely optimistic of senior managers to think that a scheme of this profile and complexity would not hit serious challenges, technical, financial and political. The project management approach may have been determined by their lack of capacity, but it resulted in:

“Armada Way was heavily reliant on [one person] to deliver the project alone.” (PCC)

- 6.5.23 This was a complex project to deliver, and it appears from the evidence presented that the governance in place did not ensure the necessary oversight and support to adequately control, review and monitor the scheme. There were no obvious mechanisms to demonstrate to the Leader, Cabinet or senior officers that the scheme was on time and on budget or that it was behind schedule and was experiencing significant challenges and risks.

- 6.5.24 The arrangements appear to have relied on the mid-tier manager, against the ‘political imperative’ to deliver, having the expertise, experience and the confidence to escalate the project as the risk profile worsened.

“This left people exposed.” (PCC)

- 6.5.25 Whilst trying hard to avoid hindsight bias, the Panel were surprised that Armada Way was considered low risk until it was too late – even in February and March 2023 the TCF Programme Board returns showed the risk of securing political and public support were both Green. This was after CMT (officer Corporate Management Board - January 23 Horizon scanning) had been verbally advised that:

“Armada Way was going to either break us or we’ll get it over the line, but it is going to be horrible. From what has been going on in the last quarter (October-December 2022) I can tell how much time this is going to suck out of the organisation.” (PCC)

City Council Investment Board

- 6.5.26 We were advised by the Transforming Cities SRO and other senior officers that a Councillor-led City Council Investment Board (CCIB) was set out in the Constitution although the Panel could not be given any reference to this and nor was there a capital officer board that paralleled this governance arrangement (Terms of Reference for this Board were not available).
- 6.5.27 We were informed that the purpose of the CCIB was to consider capital projects at their inception. They assessed capital project business cases and advised the Leader of their acceptability and, if so, whether it should be approved by the Leader or be considered by Cabinet. They also had a remit to consider which projects were funded. The Board did not monitor capital projects’ performance. There was no requirement for gateway reports and no standardised methodology across the council.
- 6.5.28 There was no officer-only Capital Board either at that time. Without this, there was no place corporately for capital programmes to be routinely scrutinised by senior officers. The S151 officer could still sign off projects to the value of £200k, but again this would only require a Business Case, there was no requirement for subsequent gateway reports. We have been informed that by 2022, although the CCIB existed on paper, it met infrequently; *“It had withered on the vine”.* (PCC)

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

- 6.5.29 We have been informed that the political oversight for monitoring capital programmes sat with the relevant Overview & Scrutiny Committee (O&S) and that the applied practice was for O&S to challenge and inform the departmental work programme.
- 6.5.30 The Growth and Infrastructure O&S Committee meeting that took place on 10 October 2022 received a presentation of the Better Places Programme, and particularly the

Armada Way scheme. The presentation was in the form of a written report and verbal update. The timescale for implementation was confirmed at the meeting as December 2022 for Armada Way to start on site. This timescale was at odds with the project plan (Gantt chart dated 1 Nov 2022) that predicted a start on site of 6 March for pre-commencement works based on the necessary construction related tasks that were needed.

- 6.5.31 The update made no reference that the programme was at risk or could be delayed and there was no verbal update regarding the ‘information exchange day’ at Drake Circus that had taken place in September 2022. Despite confirmation the programme was on track, it appeared the final design had not yet been confirmed. A revised scheme for the TCF funded sustainable transport element of the Armada Way scheme was proposed at the meeting for which further information was requested by the Committee (Minutes O&S meeting, 10 October 2022).
- 6.5.32 From the submitted written report, presentation and the verbal update report, it is questionable whether the O&S Committee had enough information to properly carry out their scrutiny role.

Officer & Member Portfolio Holder Meetings

- 6.5.33 In addition to the scrutiny of the AW programme through the O&S Committees, there were regular officer meetings with Cabinet members. This enabled officers to discuss project progress and steer future activity and actions with politicians. The Panel was provided with the agendas and minutes for the meetings with the Portfolio holder for Transport and the Deputy Leader relating to the AW programme, between September 2022 and March 2023. There was no evidence of written reports at these meetings, but they did have detailed minutes to track agreed actions.
- 6.5.34 The meeting notes confirm the project timeline presented to O&S and TCF. On 24/10/22 it was still anticipated that the entire AW scheme would be completed by March 2024 within the budget as set (£12.7m). On 10/11/22 it was agreed that the tree removal should “continue and be completed in one go as quickly as possible” with the project team making necessary arrangements with the contractors for this to happen. This date (for felling) was confirmed (6/12/22), as the first week in the New Year and was then pushed back to 9 January on 14/12/22. The amended timeline was to give time to address a myriad of outstanding issues including a series of environmental requirements and the need to remove the Ferris wheel and festive lights from the trees. This is the only evidence that the Panel has found to suggest that at this stage, the decision may have been anticipated as an officer decision agreed by the Strategic Director Place and the SRO for the TCF programme. It seems unlikely that for the timescale anticipated any other decision-making route would have been possible.

6.5.35 By early January, the STRAW petition had been confirmed for debate at Full Council on 30 January 2023 and the minutes of 10 January confirm the tree removal date was pushed back beyond that Council meeting. The meetings in 2023 mirror the discussions and timeline for decision making recorded elsewhere in this report. There is only one other action to note which has not been evidenced elsewhere. At the 19 Jan 2023 meeting, the AW budget was increased to £14m.

Senior officer meetings (Departmental Management Team and Corporate Management Team)

6.5.36 Regular management team meetings at Directorate and Corporate level is a standard governance arrangement in local government to set overall strategy, monitor performance and budget and debate and steer relevant and challenging issues. This was the arrangement the Panel was informed was in place at PCC in 2022/23.

6.5.37 Interestingly, and somewhat surprisingly, none of those we interviewed mentioned DMT as playing a role in the monitoring of the project delivery or debating how to address the increasingly challenging issues that emerged because of the protests and petitions.

6.5.38 There have been no minutes, action notes or reports provided to the Panel for the DMT meetings between September 2022 and March 2023 so assessing its effectiveness has been difficult. The only reference to Armada Way was set out in the DMT agenda for the day after the trees were felled (15 March 2023).

6.5.39 From the interviews with officers, there was reference to CMT. The Panel was informed that CMT involvement in capital programmes was primarily focused on their budget monitoring role and that financial risk was the primary consideration and trigger for CMT interest. We were advised that they had the option to request a project for consideration if they became aware of a risk but this was not a structured arrangement. The Armada Way scheme was not on the corporate risk register, nor did it feature on the monthly performance scorecard.

6.5.40 This suggests that officers would need to proactively escalate issues up to CMT rather than being held to account on a regular basis by CMT, keeping the risk with the project team rather than at a more strategic team level.

“No-one [on CMT] sighted on projects.” (PCC)

“[CMT] did not discuss it proactively.” (PCC)

6.5.41 Overall, there was evidence from the documentation and interviews that the delivery of the Armada Way project suffered from a lack of capacity and strategic oversight. Much of the project activity and subsequent actions and decisions were verbal in nature. This left the organisation exposed and vulnerable throughout the court proceedings. A robust audit trail is essential for any capital programme with a document retrieval system that is robust. The evidence of multiple witness statements in part stemmed from this lack of discipline. We also heard that in some instances social media and email communications

“used an informality in language that perhaps we sometimes shouldn’t, we all forget it, there are lessons to be learnt” (PCC).

6.5.42 Several critical requirements to enable implementation were identified at a late stage. For example, the failure to identify the public outcry sooner; EIA considerations; ensuring the Highway Licence was in place. This, in turn, led to time running out to take the decision under normal processes ahead of the pre-election period.

6.5.43 It is usual and good governance practice for the Monitoring Officer to review Urgent Decision and Key Decision Reports so that legal implications may be considered, commented upon, be given legal sign-off and for the Monitoring Officer to continue to advise up until and beyond implementation of the decision. It is concerning that the Monitoring Officer appeared to be unaware that the Urgent Decision had been taken on the 14 March 2023 and stated that she had ‘...limited peripheral knowledge’. It is also usual and good governance for the S151 Officer to consider, comment upon, provide financial sign-off and continue to advise on the financial implications of such reports up until and beyond implementation of the decision.

Learning Recommendations

10 Ensure greater rigour of decision-making reports so they are accurate, fair, accessible, based on sound evidence

At the point at which the Urgent Decision was being drafted for Armada Way, it was apparent to officers that there was a risk of legal challenge. The accuracy of the ‘Original’ report was paramount, not only so that the Leader could make an informed decision but to ensure that those who objected to the scheme could read it as unbiased and based on sound evidence. There were clear shortcomings in the accuracy, completeness and even-handedness of the report. In part this was a product of poor project management disciplines and poor practice in handling and reporting public responses. Some of these errors and omissions were later to become grounds for Judicial Review and Contempt challenges and lead to significant and unifying amendments to witness statements.

It is recommended that further oversight of reports raising contentious issues occurs prior to publication, ensuring they are transparent and without bias and that Urgency Decisions are based upon a report setting out clear reasoning for the decision.

11 Enhance the recording of advice and decisions

Record keeping of key meetings and decisions was patchy at best. This occurred even when litigation was anticipated. This led to considerable inaccuracy and error which was exposed through the Court proceedings. Some of this stemmed from inadequate rigor in project

management processes. However, it is also a cultural issue, arising through informality and familiarity at the senior staff/Councillor interface.

It is recommended that a review takes place to determine how internal dialogue, delegated decisions and actions during the life of a capital project and other delegated decisions shall be recorded.

12 Ensure that internal advisory and decision-making Capital Project Boards have Terms of Reference

It is recommended that the Terms of Reference of capital project boards are based upon a corporate checklist and template which sets out the membership, Chair, frequency of meetings and defines the authority each Board has, where decision-making takes place, and to whom the Board reports.

13 Embrace and resource a corporate approach to Project Management, including oversight

Whilst there are clearly many examples of good project management practice, this is not consistent. Much of what happened regarding the Armada Way project stemmed from insufficient capacity, oversight, risk analysis (not just financial) and project management disciplines. This was not the responsibility of one or two people but was a corporate weakness. The adoption of a corporate approach, such as Prince 2, would help raise standards, add rigor, make it easier to evaluate the relative progress of projects and enable a body of project managers to operate consistently across the council and support and cover for one another. This will require training and resourcing.

Providing clarity on which schemes are prioritised (based not only on budget but also on wider outcomes and risks) would bring certainty and focus. The prioritised projects should be actively tracked by the Departmental Management Team and Corporate Management Team to ensure appropriate strategic oversight and risk awareness.

6.6 The impact of the original scheme on the local environment, to include reasons why an EIA was not undertaken prior to the Original Decision.

- 6.6.1 The Armada Way scheme clearly aimed to improve the public realm. It involved the removal and replacement of green infrastructure, ground remodeling, sustainable transport features, sustainable urban drainage and environmental improvements.
- 6.6.2 The Original Decision report set out the environmental benefits of the proposed scheme and mitigation measures to address the loss of existing vegetation and tree cover.

- 6.6.3 The intention was to rely on ‘permitted development rights’ to build out the project, given that the developer was the council. This meant that planning permission was not required. This did not, however, exempt the local authority from complying with the swathe of regulations pertaining to the potential environmental impact of a proposed scheme.
- 6.6.4 The site was partly located in the City Centre Conservation Area and had ground level vegetation and tree cover. Due to the drainage, the project also had the potential to impact on the Sound and Estuaries Protected European site (PS&E). Both attributes meant that the council had regulatory obligations to discharge, regardless of whether the works were ‘permitted development’.
- 6.6.5 On 3 March 2021 the project team contacted the Local Planning Authority (LPA) to see if planning permission was required and whether there was a need for an EIA screening. Discussions were ongoing during 2021. The verbal advice from the LPA was to submit a request for pre-application advice. From the evidence presented, it also appears that a verbal discussion between the project team and the LPA suggested that, in terms of the EIA matter, the scheme would “categorically not be considered EIA development” (SRO witness statement).
- 6.6.6 On 13 September 2022, the Project team sought pre-application advice regarding the scheme from the LPA. This was received from the LPA on 25 October 2022, just two months before the proposed start on site was advised to the O&S Committee by the Project Team. This was after contracts had been awarded to Morgan Sindall for the pre-commencement works for Armada Way comprising:
- provision of pre-construction design services (Executive Decision 17 August 2022)
 - Establishment of site welfare establishment and works for the project (Executive Decision 21 October 2022)
- 6.6.7 The advice from the LPA was informal. It set out what consents were required, commentary on environmental assessment, trees and whether the works could be implemented under permitted development rights. The advice did not cover Habitat Regulations Assessments (HRA).
- 6.6.8 The informal advice concluded that planning permission was not required. It also confirmed that the project was not EIA development. The project team relied on this advice and progressed with the preparations for implementation.
- 6.6.9 The increased focus on the scheme arising from the engagement event in September 2022, and the recognition by members of the public that a significant number of trees may be felled, challenged the robustness of the advice that the project team had been relying on.
- 6.6.10 The project was paused by Full Council for further engagement to take place, but this also enabled the project team to obtain further advice and expert opinion on planning matters, including importantly, whether further advice was required regarding an EIA.

Environmental Impact Assessment

- 6.6.11 The EIA Regs (Town and Country Planning (Environmental Impact Assessment) Regulations 2017) are in place to protect the environment by ensuring that proper consideration takes place.
- 6.6.12 The council relied on the informal pre-application advice provided by the LPA for the Original Decision report. This stated that the “proposed development did not fall within Schedule 2 (of the EIA Regulations) and (therefore) fell outside the requirements of the Act”.
- 6.6.13 The council subsequently undertook a full EIA screening opinion from WSP Planning (SRO 4th witness statement JR Proceedings 31/8/23). This was commissioned in February 2023 (prior to the Original Decision). WSP issued the result of this assessment on 16 May 2023 (after the Original Decision). The report advised that the scheme was of a form that would require a screening opinion to be undertaken as it fell within the definition of an Urban Development Project. The screening opinion itself concluded that the proposed works would not likely create significant adverse effects and for that reason it was not an EIA development. The route to finally request and receive the EIA screening opinion was not timely.
- 6.6.14 The Original Report was correct in the fact that only informal advice had been received. The summation of that informal advice was that an EIA screening opinion was not required. This turned out to be contrary to the advice provided later by WSP (16 May 2023).
- 6.6.15 An additional inconsistency emerged in March 2023. As a result of legal proceedings now underway, a document was identified that had been received by the project team on 3 March 2021 from the LPA. The project team and SRO took this to be a formal EIA screening for Armada Way. Further inquiries indicated it was not a formal screening opinion but a suggested template for submitting one, based on other development proposals in the city. This was a mistake by Council officers and was corrected in an additional witness statement as part of the JR hearing.
- 6.6.16 This EIA saga illustrates how important it is to follow and record due process. The importance of diligent project management, where statutory requirements can be ticked off as they are confirmed, ensures the project is not only lower risk but compliant with regulation when work eventually takes place.
- 6.6.17 The project team was also required to demonstrate compliance with the Habitat Regulations (2017) and undertake a Habitat Risk Assessment to test if the project could significantly harm features of a European Site. This action was left very late to address, with internal legal advice and counsel’s advice not being sought until January 2023. The planning advice to the project team (pre-application advice) had failed to identify the need to comply with the HRA regulations, although it had been identified by the Preliminary Ecological Assessment in 2017.

- 6.6.18 Until this assessment had been completed and the response from Natural England received to establish that there was no likely significant effect on the PS&E protected area, it would have been unlawful to progress with the scheme. The Original Decision sets out that this task was in fact completed within the timescale and a response from Natural England received (8 March 2023) to confirm there was no likely significant effect.
- 6.6.19 As set out in 6.2.41 above, one of the six reasons for the Urgency Decision was the start of the Bird Nesting Season. Any delay in the decision making increased the risk that the felling of the trees may need to be postponed. This reason was considered by the programme SRO as the most important:
- “If we were going to hit that [in contract by March 2023] we had to clear the trees before the bird nesting season and that led to the Monitoring Officer agreeing the reasons for urgency set out in the decision report.” (PCC)*
- 6.6.20 By the time the Original Decision was published, and work could commence, the Nesting Period had commenced. From our interviews it was apparent that the project team and their contractors were aware that birds may start nesting in the trees, and they commissioned on-site surveys that were considered reasonable to rely on. The final survey undertaken two days before the felling identified a number of potential nesting sites and 3 trees were not felled on the night of 14 March for that reason.
- 6.6.21 A further matter the project team had to have regard to was an application made to the council for a Tree Preservation Order (TPO) covering all the existing trees in Armada Way (to the north of sundial). The application was made on 26 November 2022. The TPO request was made in response to pre-commencement works that had already started on site and had the potential to harm the existing trees although this work was subsequently halted for a period to enable the meaningful engagement to be undertaken.
- 6.6.22 Local Planning Authorities have the discretionary power to make a TPO for an individual tree or a group of trees if they consider they have an amenity value that requires preservation⁶. A TPO does not itself prevent a tree from being felled, but the project team could not have relied on using the permitted development route for the intended works had a TPO been in place. Planning permission would have been required.
- 6.6.23 PCC indicated it is “not common practice for a Local Authority to make a TPO on trees on land that it owns and manages” but it was required to assess the application in line with the legislation and guidance based on the amenity value of the then existing trees.
- 6.6.24 The process to assess the expediency of the TPO took time (just over 3 months) and resulted in a formal complaint to the council and then to the Information Commissioner (ICO) by the applicant. It wasn’t until 30 January 2023 that the Monitoring Officer

⁶ The process and procedures for TPOs are set out in the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 Part VIII, Town and Country Planning (Tree Preservation) (England) Regulations 2012 and Government Guidance – Tree Preservation Orders and Trees in Conservation Areas.

confirmed that the council was seeking peer advice from another Local Authority and commissioning an independent expert to assess the merit of a group TPO.

- 6.6.25 On 27 February 2023 the council concluded that the trees did not merit statutory protection by TPO.
- 6.6.26 The environmental considerations raised by the Armada Way scheme were a significant risk for the project. In January 2023, the project team received legal advice on the three key environmental matters (EIA, Habitat Regs, TPO). The simple remedy to de-risk the project and enable statutory consultation and decision making in public, would have been to seek planning permission for the scheme, thereby addressing the environmental issues as part of that statutory process. Planning permission had always been part of the timeline anticipated by Morgan Sindall in their Gantt chart but by January 2023 time was of the essence and the project team chose to rely on the advice from the Local Planning Authority that they did not need planning permission. Legal advice to the project team in January 2023 advised that:
- “It will be a matter for the project team, which has a more detailed understanding of both the financial risk and the vociferousness of the local opposition to decide whether the commercial risk of a potential loss of funding is so significant that it outweighs the legal and reputational risks [for the council]” (Estelle Dehon KC, 26 Jan 2023)
- 6.6.27 The project team chose to press ahead and attempt to avoid the potential loss of funding and be able to start work before the bird nesting season.

Learning Recommendation

I4 Heighten expertise and awareness of Environmental regulation and practice

Informality and a lack of grip regarding environmental regulation especially in relation to the EIA process is a learning point. It is recommended that PCC puts in place mechanisms to ensure it can comply with current environmental regulations. Introducing environmental planning expertise in-house (in a similar form to Heritage, Urban Design and Arboricultural advisors) who can advise staff and Councillors, as well as provide an interface with the community, may be cost effective and worthy of consideration.

Trees in public spaces are an important and precious element of our urban landscapes. With the impact of climate change, existing trees will need help to continue to thrive and new trees will need careful planning to ensure adaptability and resilience. An enhanced focus on the value of our urban trees is recommended ensuring they can continue to provide visual amenity, support biodiversity and facilitate wellbeing. This will require ongoing recognition and respect by public bodies, developers and communities, as well as the resources to enable this to happen.

PCC has a Climate Emergency Action Plan that has ensured the planting of many thousands of trees already. It also has a Tree Steering Group to help advise on the future of the city's urban trees. Through the Action Plan emerging from this review, there is the opportunity to set out further actions to protect and enhance the tree canopy across the city. In particular, it is

recommended that where new public realm schemes are being brought forward, the impact on any existing trees or proposed new planting is set out at project inception with a clear rationale that can be shared and discussed in the community. Tracking any changes to proposals should be clearly articulated with a sound rationale and be easy to understand.

With respect to birds nesting within urban tree canopies, greater clarity at a national level may be helpful to assist public bodies evaluate when and how to undertake significant works to trees in urban environments during the bird nesting period.

The environmental expertise garnered by the community because of the Armada Way project was considerable and finding opportunities to embrace that knowledge on future schemes may also be worth exploring.

6.7 The financial implications of the events and circumstances arising from the original decision and the implementation of the Original Scheme including costs directly to the Council.

- 6.7.1 The full financial implications of the events and circumstances arising from the original decision and the implementation of the original scheme are extremely difficult if not impossible to quantify. The PCC Chief Financial Officer was asked by the Panel to provide his calculation of those costs. The table below sets out the 'additional costs to the project recognised as being incurred due to the interruption to the project'.

Armada Way – Additional Costs	
Legal Costs	£484,648
WSP (Ecology Checks/EIA)	£59,582
Staff Time (March 2023 to February 2024)	£167,267
Morgan Sindall Costs (Contractor)	£1,077,994
Inflationary cost to project due to delay	£1,362,736
Additional Communication Times	£40,524
Learning Review Costs	£130,500
TOTAL	£3,323,251

- 6.7.2 The EIA costs are included as they were additional costs arising from reversing the Original Decision.

- 6.7.3 The Staff Time relates to the need to draw in additional staff to help cope with the influx of complaints and Freedom of Information requests received by the council (507

FO/complaints/email requests up to August 2024). It does not include the additional time spent by those, including senior managers, who had previously been involved in the issue but were now having to dedicate significantly more time to it:

“It turned into a tsunami after the trees were felled.” (PCC)

“Between November ‘22 and September ‘24, the time taken up by Armada Way was disproportionate to any project I have ever been involved with in my professional life.” (PCC)

- 6.7.4 Understandably, no quantification has been made of the cost to the City Council of reputational damage or the cost of re-building trust. These elements have the potential to add costs to future council projects and endeavours. There will also have been significant costs to other parties, including the objectors who, by any reasonable assessment, had right and reason to pursue their complaints during the period of this review. More significantly, no assessment has been made of the costs to business and the lost revenue to the local economy from having the key artery of the city centre so impacted.
- 6.7.5 In this respect, £3.3million is the lower end of the likely cost and demonstrates the value in making sure in the future that projects such as this are adequately resourced, risk assessed, engaged upon and communicated, and receive thorough political and senior officer oversight.
- 6.7.6 There are further financial aspects of the management of this project that are worthy of comment and reflection, especially as Armada Way started as a circa £12.7m project and is now projected at circa £30m.
- 6.7.7 Particularly in areas of heavy usage and high visibility, it is important that the ‘whole life costs’ are estimated and addressed from the outset, including maintenance and repair of surfaces, replacement of landscaping etc. This did not appear to happen with Armada Way and there were on-going discussions between the project team and the highways maintenance team about future costs. This does not necessarily mean that the Armada Way project should bear all the costs, but that in deciding whether to pursue the project, these costs should be evaluated. There are HM Treasury ‘green book’ models for how to do this, particularly for schemes designed to enhance commerce or that may bring benefits to infrastructure such as drainage and transport.
- 6.7.8 There is a big difference between ‘budget’ and cost – they are two different things. Both should be rigorously managed. Armada Way had an identified budget of £12.7m which was set out in the business case at the initiation of the project. The actual costs only became apparent as a series of contractual arrangements were put in place, and as the project was refined throughout 2023 this “cost” became significantly greater than the original budget identified. Managing the risk and minimising the price differential between predicted budget and actual cost is a complex but essential part of in-house capital programme delivery.

“knowing what the actual cost is going to be rather than the business case based on what we think, is a difficult one because until you’ve got a mandate to go forward, you can’t talk to a contractor to see what the price is for this piece of work.” (PCC)

- 6.7.9 The Better Places programme was delivered using a series of separate contractual arrangements. We were informed that some of these were problematic and delayed work on site. For Armada Way the pre-commencement contract was procured ahead of the decision to enable the work to proceed. This was a judgement regarding cost, risk and deliverability. The project team were advised by internal procurement officers who appeared fairly arm’s length to the capital programme. Sharing information about individual projects with them earlier and outcomes when delivered may enhance the advice and support they can provide.
- 6.7.10 Consultation is so fundamentally important to the successful design and implementation of public realm schemes that it should be explicitly assessed and included as part of the budget.

Learning Recommendation

15 With other local authorities, press the case with Government for more realistic funding models

Financing for city wide regeneration comes from many sources and is complex and fluid. The longevity and complexity of bringing forward regeneration projects means they are often compromised by the limited timescale for public sector grant and uncertainty about their renewal. For Armada Way, the Transforming Cities Fund (Department of Transport) had relatively short time limits, made even more impractical by the consequences of the pandemic, Brexit and the Ukraine war. The uncertainty and late confirmation of extension of this grant was a key driver influencing the decision to use ‘Urgency’ measures in decision-making. Whilst time-limits help focus delivery, this can lead to uncertainty for individual projects. More timely notice of carry-forward arrangements would be beneficial. It is recommended that PCC works with local authority groups such as LGA, Key Cities Group and SIGOMA to press central government for a more enlightened approach.

Robust Business Planning for capital projects with appropriate oversight and guidance can help ensure initial budget estimates more closely align with actual costs including post implementation management and maintenance regimes (whole life costing). Ensuring relevant expertise, including the involvement of procurement advice from the earliest gateway stage of a project’s inception, can also ensure project objectives and resources are more accurately reflected reducing project risk and abortive costs. The panel is aware that a review of PCC capital programmes and its governance has been undertaken by Grant Thornton and CIPFA and anticipate that this should provide the opportunity to enhance the delivery of capital programmes within the council.

7. Wellbeing and the Healing Process

- 7.1 From an early stage in the Review, the Panel were alerted to wellbeing concerns from residents, business partners, officers, and Councillors. Whilst not an explicit part of the AWILR brief, given the frequency and sincerity of these concerns the Panel considers this to be an important area for learning, both for PCC and local government in general.
- 7.2 Representatives from the above-mentioned groups, including objectors, were noticeably bruised by the Armada Way experience and most referred to a feeling of anxiety and unease when coming into the City Centre. Several officers, Councillors and business representatives referred to feeling that they had been targeted by campaigners. Examples given included intimidation, graffiti about named officers and councillors on hoardings and outside the Council House, STRAW members wearing masks of officer's faces. The negative impact that the process has had on some of those seeking to legitimately challenge the actions of the public body should also be recognised.
- 7.3 There was significant social media activity, a phenomenon which affects the whole of Local Government and society at large. The Panel recommends that Plymouth continues to work with Local Government partners such as the LGA, to consider how best to respond to the challenges and opportunities this presents corporately and to individual staff and Councillors. It is strongly advised that individual officers refrain from responding to social media comments directly and leave such matters to the council's Corporate Communications specialists.
- 7.4 For the purposes of this review, we will focus on the council's response, but public bodies do need to have an awareness that stresses are likely to occur on both sides of an issue and avoiding polarisation and 'group think' should be a conscious part of the public body's approach to addressing areas of heightened contention, however difficult.
- 7.5 AWILR was informed that:
- details of home addresses appeared in the media
 - an anonymous approach was made to the daughter's employer of one officer, criticising her parent's conduct in respect of the trees
 - At the High Court, individual members of staff were confronted and verbally abused in a most hateful manner
- 7.6 There is no doubt about the seriousness and the impact on those concerned, their colleagues and their families. The social media campaign was highly effective and gained local, national, and international attention. One interviewee stated:
- "...Social media is a difficult thing, I've got quite a lot of experience in there. In the early days because we supported the scheme, I would occasionally go back and I would say, well, that isn't true, is it? That's not right, is it? Or you did this, didn't you? But after a while, it became clear it was just getting too volatile, too nasty, too personal, so we backed off then." (External)*

- 7.7 Local Government generally does not appear to be sufficiently prepared or equipped to deal with the power and instantaneous nature of social media nor the change in societal norms that has arisen. Two MPs and one Advisor have been tragically murdered since 2000 whilst conducting their surgeries⁷.
- 7.8 However, there do not appear to be formal processes in place to support officers or Councillors when facing wellbeing and safety issues. In this case, staff and Councillors reported to the Panel that they felt there was insufficient corporate support and rebuttal.
- “It is extremely difficult to talk about pressure with your manager when you know that they are under a lot of pressure.” (PCC)*
- 7.9 In April 2024, the council sought advice from counsel on what it could say or do to protect its employees, Councillors and reputation from inaccuracies, misrepresentation and abuse. By that time, the ruling Administration had chosen not to defend their decision. The council was strongly advised of how hard defamation was to prove, and that a public body cannot take action on behalf of individuals. Rightly or wrongly, the council’s decision not to ‘fan the flames’ or rebut erroneous messaging or challenge unacceptable behaviour has left some distrust between the corporate entity of the council and some of the individuals who comprise it. It is often the case that managers feel that they are giving appropriate support, but staff feel it is inadequate or too late. In this instance, the reflection was almost unanimous that the managerial response was both too little and too late. This is an important leadership issue.
- 7.10 Understandably, in the heat of the events, some individuals found it difficult to articulate what assistance would help them or sought legal redress that would have been difficult to secure. For others, however, it was:

“Resourcing, thank yous, really easy stuff like that. General understanding. What we got internally is ‘this is wrong, you haven’t done this’. . . none of it is ‘we know you are under constant pressure’.” (PCC)

- 7.11 Many months later, with the opportunity to reflect, it was still difficult for people to process what they had been through and how it could have been better handled. We heard, for example:

“I myself went to the STRAW stand. . . I heard a pack of lies from them. . . I have to say . . . this is for Plymouth City Council, a miscarriage of justice.” (PCC)

“It’s just a very regrettable situation generally for most people, and I think the impact it’s had on staff and us and the reputation of Plymouth. It is a huge shame, it was such a huge opportunity.” (External)

⁷ The murder Andrew Pennington in Cheltenham as he tried to protect Liberal Democrat MP , Nigel Jones (now a peer) in his constituency office in January 2000; the murder of Jo Cox, Labour MP on the 16 June 2016 and Sir David Amess, Conservative MP on the 15 October 2021, whilst they were conducting their public surgeries, raised wellbeing and safety concerns in respect of MPs.

- 7.12 Councillors may talk to their Group Leaders and officers may talk to their line-managers and colleagues but the Panel would suggest that a stronger policy framework is developed, with staff and their representatives, and with Councillors about what is and is not going to be tolerated, what evidential requirements may be needed, and what corporate response can be expected⁸. It would also be helpful to refresh the package of training in conflict management, stress management and managerial and peer support. There may well be scope to engage through the LGA, SOLACE and other Associations as it is an issue which potentially affects all councils and as such the Panel recommend that Government and the LGA develop national guidance.
- 7.13 It is noted that there is no national approach for supporting Councillors when they lose their positions following an election. For many Councillors, their work will have taken up many hours and have been a way of life. The Panel suggests that there should be a national approach agreed, for example including an exit strategy or process for Councillors.
- 7.14 It is recognised that future projects may well not have full support from all parts of the community. It is recommended that arrangements for bringing forward controversial schemes comply with the Seven Principles of Public Life and have the appropriate procedures and oversight wrapped around them to anticipate and manage the process, including enhanced arrangements to support junior officers.

Learning Recommendation

16 Review the corporate provision of wellbeing and healing support

The experience of the Armada Way tree felling has been painful and difficult for many people, including Councillors, staff, campaigners and businesses. It is important to recognise and respond to the extent of this. It is recommended that:

- i) The council reflects and acknowledges that there were weaknesses in the council's approach to bringing forward this project, many of which had underlying causes. This had detrimental impacts on the organisation and the city as a whole.
- ii) A review is conducted of the well-being and health and safety arrangements which support officers and Councillors as they undertake difficult and challenging work.
- iii) An explicit statement by PCC that aggressive and abusive behaviour towards Councillors and officers will not be tolerated.
- iv) A review is undertaken of the support given to elected members whilst in post and as and when they are voted out of office or resign. This is a national issue and may warrant a broader review by the LGA.

⁸ For example, 'Parliament takes the safety and wellbeing of its Members very seriously. Any contact which is threatening or offensive may be passed to the police for action.'

8. Conclusions

“Cities have the capability of providing something for everybody, only because, and only when, they are created by everybody” Jane Jacobs, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (Quoted by LDA Design - Plymouth City Centre Masterplan, 2017)

- 8.1 The commissioning of this Independent Learning Review in the aftermath of a traumatic episode in PCC’s governance was a brave decision and demonstrates an intent to put things right for the future.
- 8.2 There has been a palpable corporate shock to the organisation, which still reverberates today. There remain significant tensions within the council and between the groups and individuals involved. It is apparent that there are wounds still to be healed for those individuals most directly impacted. There are pockets of regret, remorse, guilt, blame and defiance. It is important that the council finds a means to rebuild trust, internally and externally, if it is going to maximise the benefit to its citizens that its strong regeneration programme should bring to the city.
- 8.3 We have heard ambitious messages about a forward-looking vision for Plymouth from very committed Councillors, officers and partners, including members of the public. PCC has an enviable record of attracting significant Government grants and consequently it has a big capital programme. Bringing this forward through collaboration and endorsement with partners, stakeholders and the wider community may help to give more attention to how to share this long-term strategy across the entire city with residents as well as the business sector. It will need to be articulated simply, and emotionally - beyond the land-use language and boundaries of the local plan - so that it is accessible to all, with aspirations that can be measured to show progress.
- 8.4 One of our interviewees, citing Bloomberg, said that ‘context is everything’. The circumstances culminating in the Original Decision had a significant impact on how this unfolded, and we have tried to illustrate this.
 - Due to over a decade of ‘austerity’ cuts, the council was already over-stretched in its capacity when it embarked on the project
 - The pandemic caused major delay which meant that the public engagement on the project had lost currency
 - The scheme was borne of a vision from another age. This is not to say it was wrong for 21st century Plymouth but there was a lack of appreciation of the implications of adherence to the regimented design that was not adequately explained to the public
 - The austerity cuts and pandemic had ramifications in backlog and delay, and this was compounded by high inflation in construction costs, all heaping pressure on those projects underway as well as the emergence of Armada Way
 - The pandemic and resultant ‘lockdowns’ and working from home changed people’s perspectives of their precious green spaces

- The council was running an ambitious regeneration programme without sufficient staff capacity or the senior management oversight necessary
- Armada Way was categorised as low risk because of its budget. This was clearly a misjudgement given its location
- The public psyche doesn't equate the loss of an existing tree with the planting of replacements unless the rationale has been very well explained.

- 8.5 The Panel heard from several sources that there was an established consensus across the two major political parties on the council that the Armada Way scheme should go ahead (officers, Councillors and members of the community). The Panel did not hear it inferred that taking the decision either immediately before the Pre-Election Period or during was for electoral gain.
- 8.6 The Review has looked at the technical side of governance in section 6.2, including the interpretation and application of the council's constitution and guidance. In the latter sections, it looks at more behavioral aspects, including political and officer involvement in design, compliance and implementation, and the interface between the council and the public. Learning points have been identified on all these aspects and recommendations offered.
- 8.7 Whilst it is unusual to introduce new recommendations in the conclusions, there are additional learning points from the interplay of these two areas regarding the importance of sustained managerial grip by senior politicians and officers. Sadly, this was lacking at crucial points. Insufficient grip was shown at early stages in the capacity allocated to the project and its oversight, including through the political machinery and the DMT and CMT. The pressures exerted on the council by the difficult economic circumstances, the scale of its own ambitions, and the persistent attention of objectors, led to some clarity and objectivity being lost. Clarity and recording of key decisions and judgements was lacking. When issues came to a head, senior politicians ducked and senior officers failed to anticipate the media frenzy and the impact of (anticipated) legal action. The court proceedings exposed the frailties in rigour and discipline, leading to David Elvin KC, in his JR Judgement to comment that the council's conduct was "highly unsatisfactory" and revealed "the lack of transparency in its procedures, in its inadequate compliance with its duty of candour to the court and raised issues about the credibility of some of its witnesses".
- 8.8 A significant number of interviewees explicitly referred to the 'Strong Leader model' operating at PCC and explained how many decisions were made by the Leader. The Panel found that officer interviewees suggested that '*the Leader wants this to happen and so we had better make it happen*'. Whilst politicians should be prioritising and giving direction, conflating this with the Strong Leader model in this way is unusual in the Panel's experience.

- 8.9 The Panel recognises that the political interface, especially in robust and contested city politics, can be challenging territory for senior officers. However, the ‘mythology’ surrounding the ‘strong leader’ does not help this. It is here that a strong ‘Golden Triangle’ and a broadly engaged CMT is most helpful in supporting the Chief Executive reinforce the principles of good governance, instill the council’s values, and maintain objectivity. It is important to see that this is one of the areas that is being addressed.

Learning Recommendation

17 Ensure that the political and officer leadership work together to maintain a common understanding and collective grip over the application of good governance across the council.

18 Ensure that Officers take responsibility for the advice that they give, and Councillors take responsibility for the decisions that they make

- 8.10 There will be good reasons why some existing trees may need to be felled in Plymouth in future as part of the wider strategic city vision. There is ongoing commitment to continue to plant many thousands of new trees as part of the Climate Emergency action plan. Getting the explanation, engagement and collaboration right for future schemes could help build trust and encourage healing. Giving an ongoing voice, which has weight, to interest groups and individuals on public space proposals may be one way to help bring forward dialogue.
- 8.11 Knowing when consultation on a proposed scheme has run its course and it is time to take a decision and move forward is important. In this case, there was commitment and determination to progress with the (already delayed) scheme by senior officers and politicians. The commitment to the long-term future vision of the city centre was a political imperative and led to the scheme being implemented despite the checks and balances being incomplete.
- 8.12 In contrast to the lack of grip and oversight exhibited by senior managers in the earlier stages of the project, a command-and-control approach was demonstrated in the immediate leadup and on the night of 14 March, with actions worked through and resolved to ensure the tree felling could commence safely in-line with the urgent decision. The threat that an Injunction or public disorder could stop the works was anticipated but planning for the aftermath was less well developed, although ‘recovery’ meetings were swiftly instigated and led by the CEO.
- 8.13 The subsequent legal challenges exposed inaccuracy and poor record keeping, both in the mainstream management of the project and, even more seriously, at the senior staff/Councillor interface. Good record keeping is always important to justify and validate

decision making when spending public money and impacting people's livelihoods. This is even more important for a public body which has a duty to transparency and accountability. Anticipating legal challenge should simply reinforce this need, but this didn't happen.

- 8.14 Deciding what decisions and guidance should be formally recorded is always easier with hindsight. However, the Panel felt that there were several very significant decisions, particularly in the giving and receiving of advice between staff and Councillors, that should have been better recorded so that the advice given, and the basis of the decision, were clear both to the decision-makers and the public. The discipline of setting out reasons can itself focus the mind and aid decision-making. It can also crystalise the points at which the 'truth to power' nettle needs to be grasped.
- 8.15 The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF 2024) reinforces the importance of achieving sustainable development. One of the three overarching objectives is an environmental one – to protect and enhance our natural, built and historic environment. Demonstrating that this has been addressed, prior to any development commencing, requires a diligent approach to the array of regulation and statutory consultation.
- 8.16 Given the importance of assessing the environmental consequences of the council's own development as well as enabling a transparent, open engagement with the community, it is very important to demonstrate due process has been carried out.
- 8.17 There emerged a pattern of lateness securing advice on key environmental issues (including the TPO application 6.6.21). It was also noted that some of the advice received by the project team from the Local Planning Authority lacked clarity (EIA screening opinion) or was incomplete (HRA requirements). There is significant complexity to the environmental requirements and ensuring the right expertise (either in-house or commissioned) to advise with confidence is important. Formalising advice and seeking screening opinions where any doubt exists, should be the default position taken.
- 8.18 Finally, Plymouth City Council has a tremendous story to tell and has an enviable track record of obtaining external and matched funding but the Council must carry people with them on this journey. The staff are the council's key resource and they showed commitment and determination to deliver what they and the politicians considered best for the city. However, they deserved better support and a more accurate alignment between the scale of the ambitions of senior officers and politicians and the skills and resources to enable them to deliver. This balance was missing and the individuals concerned, and the city as a whole suffered as a result.
- 8.19 We appreciate that there are some difficult messages in this report, all the more so for a talented workforce that has done so much good, is clearly very hard working, and is truly dedicated to improving the city it serves. Whilst the Panel has not been asked to comment on the over-arching strategy of investing in the public realm and seeking to increase residential levels in the city centre, we applaud this and wish it every success. We

hope that the learning points and recommendations arising from this Review will assist the council and the city regain its momentum and realise its ambitions.

Armada Way Independent Learning Review Report

Annexe I

Terms of Reference

Background

The original Armada Way executive decision was published on 14 March 2023 signed by the then Leader of Plymouth City Council (the Original Decision). The decision was to proceed with a redevelopment scheme for Armada Way, the final design for which included the felling of 129 mature trees, the retention of 20 existing trees and the planting of 169 new, sustainable semi-mature trees (“the Original Scheme”). Following the local elections in May 2023, Plymouth City Council’s (PCC) Leader and Cabinet were replaced. The new Leader withdrew the Original Decision and confirmed that the Original Scheme would be progressed no further. Furthermore, the Leader also announced at a Cabinet meeting of 10 July 2023 his commitment to establish an Independent Learning Review into the Original Decision (“the ILR”). That commitment included an outline indication of the format and scope the of ILR and these elements have now been formalised as part of a Court Order arising from Judicial Review proceedings into the Original Decision.

Purpose and Methodology

The principles and purpose of the ILR are:

- a. To provide an opportunity for PCC to receive feedback from interested stakeholders to enable it to objectively analyse areas of good practice and areas of improvement for the organisation moving forward.
- b. To obtain an independent, fair and objective appraisal of all relevant facts and factors pertaining to Original Decision and the implementation of the Original Scheme; and
- c. To provide PCC with learning outcomes from which it can identify improvements to its procedures and processes, particularly in relation to governance, decision making and the management of the Original Scheme as a major project.

In convening the ILR the Council is committed to organisational change through learning and improvement. It is not intended that the ILR will seek to allocate blame or culpability to any of the parties involved for previous actions or events and the process will be a non-adversarial one. The ILR will be conducted in the spirit of openness and fairness that avoids hindsight bias and any bias towards any of those involved. Instead, the focus will be aimed at implementing improvement in processes and procedures moving forward. The ILR will be guided by that focus.

In order to achieve its goals, the ILR will examine what happened and why it happened. It will consider the facts relating to the development and approval of the Original Scheme, alongside any written submissions received under these ToR. This will help to provide a clear picture of what happened and whether there are improvements that could be made to the Council's approach to governance as well as processes and procedures to be implemented in similar circumstances. The ILR will review all

relevant documentation and other forms of information to include a review of Freedom of Information requests (accepted and rejected), issues around disclosure and transparency and recordings of meetings. Commercially sensitive and legally privileged documents will be reviewed on a case-by-case basis to establish whether they can be released to the ILR following legal advice provided to the Council as stakeholder. Redaction may need to be undertaken by an independent party to protect data and any other sensitive or privileged material. The Council has agreed to provide the ILR with all information it holds which the ILR may consider relevant subject to the foregoing considerations.

The ILR will organise private discussions with relevant Council officers and members identified following a review of the documentation. It will provide the opportunity for members of the public and interested parties to make written submissions to the ILR based on the objectives of the review. Any submissions that do not address the purposes and issues for consideration set out in the ToR will not be considered.

The ILR will publish a report at its conclusion, which will be considered at a meeting of the full Council.

Issues for consideration:

The ILR will examine:

- The approach taken by the Council in preparing the Original Decision and associated documentation, to include issues around the wording, accuracy and focus of the Original Decision;
- Details of the decision-making processes from a governance and legal perspective, to include:
 - the use of “urgent” decision-making procedures including
 - the lack of opportunity to “call-in” the decision;
 - the reasoning for urgency, including pre-election period and bird nesting;
- Whether a sufficient consultation process was undertaken to include how well the Council engaged with stakeholders throughout the process and the extent to which feedback was incorporated into the plans for the Original Scheme;
- The eventual implementation of the Original Decision and the events surrounding it, including the stakeholder response and documentation submitted to the injunction hearing by both sides;
- Recording of officer decision making processes and actions, in particular in relation to the implementation and project management of the Original Scheme;
- The impact of the Original Scheme on the local environment, to include reasons why an environmental impact assessment was not undertaken prior to the Original Decision;
- The financial implications of the events and circumstances arising from the Original Decision and the implementation of the Original Scheme, including the costs directly to the Council.

In making any findings in relation to the legality of the decision-making process as set out above, this is expected to be in the context of providing advisory conclusions for best practice in future under similar circumstances where a Local Authority finds itself faced

with decision-making options in unusual circumstances. Only a court of law can conclude whether the way in which a decision was taken was lawful or unlawful.

Conduct of the ILR

The ILR will not commence until the conclusion of all extant legal proceedings, in accordance with the Court Order.

The ILR will be independent of all stakeholders and will consist of a panel made up of an Independent Chair with local government governance expertise, along with two further advisors possessing suitable governance/legal and environmental/regeneration/planning expertise in a local government context. The ILR members will be remunerated for conducting the ILR.

It will adopt a constructive and inquiring approach; that is to say, it will pose questions and seek information in order to help the Council and others understand what happened and how improvements can be made to the Council's processes and procedures as a result.

The ILR will comply with Freedom of Information, data sharing and confidentiality requirements as set out in the contract between the ILR members and the Council.

The ILR members will be supported by an administrative officer and advisors who have had no prior involvement with the Original Decision or Original Scheme.

The ILR members will be mindful of the need to keep the cost and duration of the ILR within reasonable limits. This will include complying with the requirement of the Court Order to complete the review within 3 months of commencement, as well issues surrounding proportionate use of time and resources.

The Council will publish the details of the ILR on its website and will also provide details of the way in which the members of the public can provide submissions to the ILR at the relevant time.

The ILR will, on the conclusion of its review, produce a draft report. Prior to finalisation of the ILR report, those who have been interviewed will have the opportunity to review the transcript of their interview to ensure accuracy and factual correctness. The draft ILR report will remain confidential until such time as it has been finalised. Upon finalisation of the ILR report, a copy will be made available to all stakeholders, including Plymouth City Council for presentation to its full Council. It will also be published on the Council's website.

Armada Way Independent Learning Review Report

Annexe 2

The Independent Panel

The following Panel members were appointed through SOLACE to undertake the ILR:

Sue Foster OBE MPhil RTPI

Experienced local government officer, a Town Planner by profession and Executive/Strategic Director in a series of London Boroughs for over 20 years. Areas of expertise includes strategic leadership, bringing forward major regeneration programmes, professional responsibility for housing services, environment and transport, planning, employment and investment, property services and capital programme delivery. Experienced at building and fostering relationships at national, regional and local level with the public and private sector, voluntary and community organisations and local residents to develop and deliver shared outcomes.

Jeanette McGarry

Experienced Monitoring Officer and local government chief executive and director, with private sector and third sector experience. Senior roles within local government for over for over 27 years within London Boroughs, other Unitaries, County Councils and District and Borough Councils. Helped to establish new authorities and supported post inception. Supporting Mayoral, Committee and Cabinet models of democracy. Transformed and lead key services such as the Fire Service, Housing, Social Care, Legal Services, Democratic and Electoral Services, the Coroner's Service-introduced online Inquests during the COVID Pandemic, Libraries and Arts, Museums and Archives, Trading Standards and Environmental Health, Place: Planning, Highways, Regeneration, Environment, Waste and Recycling. Worked in partnership with the Retired British Racing Drivers' Association and the Leadership of the Football Association. Recently lead an Investigation for Guildford Borough Council concerning alleged housing fraud and advised a private sector company following a Cyber-attack.

Areas of expertise include advising on and delivering training in Good Governance - compliance, behaviours and culture, decision-making, reviewing the role of Scrutiny and Cabinet, Code of Conduct Complaints, investigating Whistleblowing matters, conflict resolution, organisational transformation, coaching and empowering staff and Elected Members, and partnership working. Whilst always ensuring that partnership working, communities, residents and customers are at the heart of everything.

David Williams (Panel Chair)

Experienced local government chief executive for over 22 years at Guildford, Gosport, and Portsmouth City Council. Previously Policy Director at Poole responsible for a wide range of services including Finance, Transport, Democratic Services and Communications. Before that, Head of Planning and Deputy Director of Environmental Services at Telford. A town planner by background, with various roles in environmental services and town planning at county, New Town and district councils. The lead Chief Executive for Partnership for Urban South Hampshire (PUSH) for many years. Has been SRO for several major capital projects including the Southsea [Coastal Scheme](#), Portsmouth.

Armada Way Independent Learning Review Report

Annexe 3

Scheme Location





Fig 1. Armada Way masterplan



Fig 2. Armada Way Corridor South



Fig 3. Drake's Leat



Fig 4. Auditorium and Rill North Facing



Fig 5. Parterre and Table Tennis North Facing

Armada Way Independent Learning Review Report

Annexe 4

Invitation to the public to engage and the submissions received

Public feedback welcomed for Armada Way independent learning review

To help inform the Armada Way independent learning review, members of the public, local groups, businesses and interested organisations are now invited to submit their representations.

Following the scrapping of the original decision to redevelop Armada Way, announcing an independent learning review was one of the first decisions that Council Leader, Tudor Evans, made when he first took office in May 2023.

Now that all the legal action has concluded, the Learning Review has started and is expected to conclude within three months. [Three independent experts](#) have been commissioned to lead the review.

Over the next three months, they will examine what happened in the lead up to the felling of the trees, and why it happened. They will consider the facts relating to the development and approval of the original scheme (that was subsequently scrapped).

The panel are reviewing all the documentation relating to the scheme and will be speaking to those involved in the decision making and implementation. The Council is also keen to give relevant key stakeholders who have an interest in the city centre scheme, including members of the public and local businesses, the opportunity to feed their views to the panel.

One of the key areas that the panel are considering is the role of consultation and engagement in the lead up to the decision being made – specifically were there adequate opportunities and information available for people to give their views.

If you would like to give your representations, please complete the online form by the 6 January 2025. A report which will include the findings from the review and recommendations for the future, will be published in the Spring.

Councillor Tudor Evans, Leader of Plymouth City Council, said: “I have made it clear that we want to learn from the past and if there are any areas that we could improve on for future large-scale developments, such as Armada Way, we want to make sure we do.

“The role of the public in the lead up to the decision being made by the previous administration was through consultation and engagement, to help shape the scheme. If anyone would like to give their views, I would encourage them to have their say.”

David Williams, Chair of the Review Panel, said: “Over the next few months we have a lot of material to consider. We want to understand the process that the Council went through

in preparing the original decision, the governance around it, the previous consultations, the implementation stage and indeed the financial implications.

“Whilst much of this information has already been collated for the various legal stages, if members of the public, or other external stakeholders want to give their views, we will of course consider their feedback

“It is important to remember that the purpose of this review is to identify improvements for the future. To make sure that any areas that could be strengthened or bolstered in future regeneration projects are taken on board.

“If you have a constructive view that you would like to be considered, please complete the form so that my colleagues and I can take it into account.”

For more information, or to submit your views, go to: [Armada Way Independent Learning Review](#). Please note that the deadline for submissions is 6 January 2025.

Questions

First name (text box)

Surname (text box)

Who are you responding on behalf of? (Tick only one)

- a. Myself, as an individual
- b. On behalf of a group, business or organisation. Please provide the name, if you are responding on behalf of a group, business or organisation (only one reply per organisation will be accepted).

Email address (text box)

How are you connected to the Armada Way area? (Tick all that apply)

- a. I live near to Armada Way
- b. I don't live near to Armada Way, but live in Plymouth
- c. I own/manage a business on Armada Way
- d. I am a street trader that works from Armada Way
- e. I work near or on Armada Way
- f. I frequently shop at or visit Armada Way
- g. I am a staff member at a school near Armada Way
- h. I represent a local group or organisation interested in Armada Way
- i. I deliver food/goods from Armada Way
- j. I am a student that sometimes lives near Armada Way
- k. I am a visitor and do not live in Plymouth
- l. Other [please state]

The Armada Way Independent Learning Review Panel are specifically examining what happened in the lead up to the felling of the trees in March 2023, and why it happened. They

will consider the facts relating to the development and approval of the original scheme (that was subsequently scrapped).

If you would like to make representations, please complete the below sections.

A The Council carried out three consultations on the future of Armada Way.

These were in March 2018, September 2022 and February 2023.

Do you think there was adequate consultation and were you clear on the results of the consultation and how feedback impacted the proposed designs?

Text box for people to complete maximum of 400 words

B How do you think the Council can improve the way it consults on major schemes e.g. similar to Armada Way, in the future?

Text box for people to complete maximum of 400 words

C In the lead up to the March 2023 decision, how well do you think the Council engaged with relevant stakeholders regarding the plans e.g. the public / community groups, businesses etc. How do you think stakeholder engagement could be improved in the future?

Text box for people to complete maximum of 400 words

D Considering the scope of this learning review, how do you think the Council could have improved the way it handled the original Armada Way scheme?

What lessons do you think they should learn for the future?

Text box for people to complete maximum of 400 words

Thank you for submitting your feedback. Your comments will be passed on to the Armada Way Independent Review Panel. Please note that the information you provide will be used appropriately and stored securely in accordance with General Data Protection Regulations. Any published information will be anonymous unless otherwise stated. Information will not be used for any other purposes, other than those stated and no information will be pass to third parties.

Public Responses January 2025 (anonymised)	
A	I heard that the centre was tried and needed a revamp but it was not looked after and with the new stuff they have put down looks good now but how long will it be before it is not managed
B	An open vote by all the people in Plymouth they could have done better yes the council could learn from the mistakes they made we have to wait to see if they have over a long term
C	
D	
A	Armada Way did not need a "major scheme " . The existing scheme needed maintenance and the original stream way (only worked briefly) made to work. This would have saved a considerable amount of money, that could have been spent elsewhere in the city centre. The Royal Parade underpass needs to be reinstated. Our trees could have been maintained and been replaced as part of an ongoing programme of maintenance where required. The area outside the House of Fraser trees are still not being cared for properly. This area is fairly new. Is the new scheme going to be maintained? On past performance I think not. What is the overall plan ? No more shops, and additional student accommodation? Why? We need independent shops and affordable housing for local people. New George Street is bland. Computer generated views are not what we end up with (see Ferry area).
B	
C	Perhaps engage the local community- like the Hoe scheme.
D	They need to finish schemes before starting new ones.
A	No. At no time at any stage was it adequate. First time, nobody knew and they lied about tree removal. 2nd time, overwhelming rejection yet they ignored it. They used misleading glossy images. Third time, even less adequate. Nobody to actually talk to, view plans etc. I went to the library and next to no info there...plus the staff were telling anyone who picked up a paper form how fantastic it was! Very inappropriate from PCC staff. A few behind scenes meetings were held with select groups, but not open to all. Many people not on Facebook didn't even know there was a 2nd consultation. The 'purple people' were nowhere to be seen and the few people who did spot these unicorns said they were clueless! All through this council staff used Facebook to manipulate public views...Steve Hughes was one. Martin Ivatt the other who was posting publicly and in a very nasty group using several aliases (Steohen Mertin, being obe). When he was called out for this he'd change the name he used before eventstopping after a complaint to PCC. All through this, STRAW were named and abused BY PCC...Cllrs joined in. Straw have all of this evidenced in screenshots if you care to follow up on it. Dept chief exec lied onTV saying all organisations/ consultees supported it...they did not. Barnard...treated Straw with contempt and refused to sit down like an adult and talk/compromise. Pcc then blamed Straw for repeatedly racking up legal bills in their futile attempts to prevent the truth coming out. Further lies...'can't change the scheme'...yet they did, although pretty meaningless changes.
B	Do so following established planning consultation methods. Be honest, don't present misleading images, have people available to talk to but not people who just lie. Prevent staff from pusting on Facebook and doing so using aliases. Actually listen and make changes ...not just ignore it and do whatever. Sadly they've not learnt from this

	as they've this week now ignored the 57% vote to change the election system. Why consult if you ignore the result!
C	Very badly. Refer to previous comments. One group, Straw, were subject to harassment, slander and libel, which has even continued in a public meeting this week with Tudor Evans talking about Ali White...total breach of Nolan Principles and Councillor codes of conduct.
D	As above. Be honest from day 1...it was hidden at first that all the trees were to go. None of us have any faith in this review based on its very limited scope and that PCC continue to date to slander and blame Steaw publicly and ignore the result of the public consultation into the election system. Above all, say SORRY! Not once has PCC recognised its actions were wrong and the whole sorry mess was avoidable. Not use it, as Evans did, as a political football. He and Pollard and others, knew in advance the felling was booked but they denied this and Pollard has lied repeatedly on his Facebook page. They kept quiet to blame the Tories. They had chance to stop it before it happened and take control of the council, but they didn't. Lesson...actually listen and act on views. They jist ignored the majority rejected the plans.
A	Seemed adequate but not taken into account
B	Uses the knowledge of people who know and understand the environment, climate change and the demographic of the city
C	Not at all well
D	Should have had people involved who knew what they were doing. Involve the university and take into account the need for clean air (which trees) provide, an awareness of reflective heat from large expanses of paving. Provide shade with native species trees
A	My wife and I visited the week long presentation and viewing of plans at Plymouth Guildhall. This was a well organised introduction to the detailed plans for Armada Way redevelopment with Council Planning officials available to answer questions and take us though the plans. We also looked at the plans online and in the local press.
B	They did all they could to present the plans.
C	I will give them 10 out of 10
D	10 out of 10 again
A	Yes. I went to the consultations. Just press on. Cutting the trees down was a brave move and the final result will be so much BETTER. Fact. DON'T listen to those that do not like or understand change.
B	You consulted well. Those that LOST did not think you did
C	The council SHOULD NOT have consulted then. Can you imagine all the barricades and trouble making from the tree people? Its none of their business anyway - he city council sensibly voted on the new Armada Way scheme.
D	Tell them LESS.
A	Yes and I attended all three the first of which received an 85% approval rating and then we had two further consultations the latter at the hub and in the Guildhall where you could ask questions about the scheme. Those that opposed the scheme came late in the process and those in favour don't always feel they have to say so.

B	To be honest if your consulting three times then I don't see how they could improve that process and you get to a point where a decision has to be made by elected Councillors and in this case Government money was pending.
C	Fairly well but like everything at that point a decision had to be made.
D	If anything they were too slow in implementing the scheme because people had been crying out for regeneration for years. It fits in with Abercrombies original design for a tree lined boulevard from the station to the Hoe. A large part of the opposition to the scheme was based on not studying the plans and not believing what would be delivered. Surely elected Councils must be allowed to make a final decision and now people can see the change that is happening are happy.
A	The consultations weren't particularly well or widely published and the results of the feedback wasn't effective.
B	Be honest and where the public majority has a negative response to the Council's intentions these should be recognised and the council's plans amended accordingly.
C	They didn't...it was a sham. There needs to be stakeholder engagement at stakeholder level and provide adequate time to prepare cases.
D	As was demonstrated, the council had a direction of travel that they didn't want to deviate from. Spend time listening to people and not steam roller over the stakeholders and interested public must be a high priority of learning. They need to be honest and not mislead people with false rhetoric!!!
A	Not at all. I had absolutely no idea these consultations had taken place until the widespread press coverage around the atrocious decision to fell the existing trees on Armada Way in the middle of the night.
B	Use the new WhatsApp group to communicate with younger people + ensure that consultations such as these are included on the weekly email newsletters.
C	As above.
D	Remember who pays your wages. It is abhorrent that public servants took it upon themselves to order the destruction of the original trees in the dark of night, knowing there would be less resistance. I appreciate this was under the Conservative council leadership, but Labour are no better. Take the sculpture up on the Hoe that an inordinate amount of money was spent on - and all during COVID when swathes of people were struggling and out of work. Read the room, the public have had enough.
A	There was adequate consultation but the depth of feeling relating to the trees was not properly reflected in the feedback. It is a good question as to who is responsible for this. I don't think the public were vociferous enough and the concerns about the trees were diminished because new trees were going to be planted.
B	Actually, I think the Council did a good job with consulting on Amada Way. However, potentially contentious issues need to be spotted and highlighted as part of the consultation. It was pretty clear that the trees of Amada Way were going to be an issue but that was not given adequate prominence. Maybe the Council were rather too arrogant over the matter.
C	I believe there was a breakdown of proper, useful dialogue. Time pressures on the budget encouraged the Council to become focused on achieving their objective. By Mar 2023 it was probably too late to rescue the situation.
D	The Council needed to be open and honest about moving forward with the scheme. That would have given the vocal dissenters the impetus to challenge the situation or back down.
A	

B	
C	make plymouth nice city
D	plants flowers and garden seat area .
A	<p>It's not necessarily about the number of consultations but who is consulted. I started work full time in Plymouth city centre in January 2023, only to discover that the trees were going to be felled as part of the redevelopment. I've lived in the Plymouth and Plymouth catchment area (still a Plymouth address but officially in South Hams PL6) for 22 years. My children were born and raised in Plymouth. My son still studies and works in the city centre. My husband contributed so much to the health infrastructure of the city.</p> <p>Plymouth is our city centre, but in so many ways we were shut out of the consultation process. I signed a petition to try to save the trees but we were told we weren't from Plymouth so our views didn't count. I did the survey in February 2023, but our views were dismissed as being from outside Plymouth. Plymouth and Armada Way are vital centres for commerce, employment, services and culture for the whole region. For so many not to be consulted – including some councillors – was disappointing.</p> <p>Staff at the February 2023 consultation could not answer the public's questions. The public who visited the Guildhall for the survey had numerous concerns about the cycle paths, the water features, the drainage systems, the height of replacement trees, shade and canopy coverage. It was not just about the trees being felled. The bat survey on the table stated that they had been asked to survey the bats at the wrong time of year. The tree survey left me with a lot of unanswered questions too. We were told at the time that the cost would be approximately £12 million, and have received no explanation for the rise in cost to £34 million. (A similar plan in Tameside will cost approximately £1.5 million.) I would have liked to have seen the developers explain the plans to the public.</p> <p>I understood that the survey of February 2023 indicated that the majority of those responding wanted to save the trees. However a large proportion of those responding were dismissed because they did not have a postcode within the Plymouth City Council boundary. That was impressed upon us repeatedly, that our opinions were not relevant. This was proved when the trees were felled in March 2023 with no warning.</p> <p>Even now, I feel as though the numerous concerns at the consultation process of February 2023 have never been resolved. There have been some changes since I first saw the plans, but they are small accommodations frankly. I have no idea why the cost suddenly rose to £34 million and why the trees had to be felled in March 2023.</p>

B	<p>Professional project management by the developers should include being the ‘face’ of the communications and consultations process. I want to hear from the person who designed the scheme. For £34 million, their silence was deafening. They were also an outside company with no previous links to Plymouth, and a landing page absent of Plymouth landmarks. Plymouth people want to discuss Plymouth, not previous jobs elsewhere.</p> <p>Don’t publicly dismiss the views of Plymouth residents, and don’t make it personal. I was horrified to see individual residents criticised by name in the newspapers and online. Online newsletters from Plymouth City Centre company were a vendetta against the residents on behalf of “Plymouth traders”. I had to unsubscribe.</p> <p>If funding bodies are rushing the plans, re-negotiate the project deadlines. A project costing £34 million involving multiple stakeholders with high reputational risk must be thought through with an effective timeline.</p> <p>Environmental legislation is no excuse to rush a project. I have the impression we had to rush to cut down all the trees because the birds were nesting. (With climate change, birds will be nesting earlier each year.) Did no-one consider that issue when the plans were signed off in 2020?</p> <p>Be aware of communications eg how does it look. I had people from Australia phoning me asking what on earth Plymouth was doing cutting down all its trees in the middle of an environmental, health and cost of living crisis. Also, communicate how the money is being spent and where the money is coming from.</p> <p>Warn Plymouth traders about major changes. We had an Environmental Exhibition on the piazza the day after the trees were felled, with green businesses showcasing their innovative products. You can imagine how that went. Two of the businesses we worked with no longer operate in Plymouth.</p> <p>Timing of multiple projects. With the Old Town Street development delayed, we ended up with hoardings everywhere in the city centre. It was really unpleasant. Can Plymouth find other images to put on the hoardings please? We saw a lot of images of Plymouth bombed in the Second World War – there’s still a 10 foot square bombsite image outside the old Debenhams, another even bigger on Armada Way itself. Comments from shoppers included: “Is that 1943 or 2023?” The images did little to help the mood.</p> <p>When something goes wrong, send trained staff to talk to the public. The morning after the trees were felled, I was in work, meeting people on Armada Way, and I’m afraid I cannot praise the Council staff who were forced to stand by the debris. It was not a pleasant interaction. Library staff however were wonderful despite bursting into tears.</p> <p>Make sure the information being circulated is correct, with an environmental impact report. People associated with the Council told me “Don’t worry, the new trees will absorb more CO2” which is not scientifically accurate.</p>
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C	<p>Meetings: I presume there was no 'Town Hall' style meeting to listen to residents and businesses. I never saw one advertised.</p> <p>Project Manager: who engages with all the relevant stakeholders would have helped - Someone who wasn't a councillor, and certainly not the head of the Council. I found the Council defensive, bullish and sometimes antagonistic towards concerned residents. It just made the Council appear to be out of touch.</p> <p>Better debate: The Council meeting of February 2023 could have had less political point-scoring and more discussion of the plans. I attended the meeting as part of my job and sat in a packed gallery. I was interested in how the plans for Armada Way would impact the businesses I'd been asked to work with, and how the Council would handle residents' concerns. But the debate was mainly councillors personally attacking each other.</p> <p>Engage positively: I did not take part in any of the protests but I was working in the city centre throughout February and March 2023. So I saw the posters and craft displayed on the trees. The attitude of the Council and Council staff was negative towards the protests.</p> <p>Better communication of views: We were repeatedly told that all the businesses approved the plans, including felling the trees, but I never had a business owner say that to me directly. Very few would comment publicly about it. Many I worked with received funding from Plymouth City Council so were afraid to criticise the plans. It all became very divisive.</p> <p>Consultation should include key individuals: The councillor for the Armada Way area informed us that he was never consulted on the plans. This was after the trees were felled, so I don't know if he was just trying to distance himself from the situation. I remember the MPs denying knowledge as well. Library staff were very upset.</p> <p>Define the consultation area: In the surveys and petitions, views from the Plymouth catchment area were discarded apparently. Though we use Plymouth services, education, health services, and work in the city, we were not seen as stakeholders. Our opinion was deemed irrelevant. This might seem churlish, but Plymouth City Centre impacts the whole of the South West.</p>
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D	<p>My suggestions are included above, so I'd like to focus on the positive lessons here:</p> <p>Plymouth City Council runs a global city. Act like a global city. Infrastructure projects have a big impact, locally, regionally, nationally, internationally. They should be resourced and planned accordingly. Communications must have a professional tone. Consultations should be objective, on the right timescale and with all the right people. 'Town Hall' consultations are hard but they achieve a lot and clear the air if handled well. Don't get petty. Don't get personal. Don't be vindictive. When mistakes happen, or things change, we don't need defensive, antagonistic responses and the 'blame game'. Get the facts straight. Apologise if necessary, and get the community and stakeholders to help address the problem. Think how the city looks to the pedestrian on the street, walking past the building site. Explain budget or timescale changes, and be prepared to renegotiate the project. Get the right impact assessments. Get the right advice, and get the designers and developers to do their jobs.</p> <p>Plymouth is a unique and amazing city. We all want to see Plymouth succeed but we can't do that with people who want us to be like other places, who lack the imagination to see the potential that is Plymouth. So please work with the right people who want to engage with the people of Plymouth and help us be amazing.</p> <p>Thank you for this opportunity to give some feedback. Good luck with the review.</p>
A	At the time, we were busy with other things!
B	We proposed a project yesterday—11 pages and a 10-point strategy! It was point number 9 where we emphasized having feedback mechanisms in place. It should be fast! More importantly, for the strategy we've shared, we are looking for 50% of the profits!
C	You know that proposing a well-thought-out strategy can take 8 hours, or possibly, depending on the details needed, it can take 20 hours! With that in mind, you are asking for consultation. What would you like to offer to people who will support initiatives and take valuable time out of their day to break down complex issues and make them easy to understand? More importantly, after feedback is sent, how will you respond and how quickly?
D	If we step into a different issue, for example, how the government would handle a critical mineral strategy, it would find 5 different areas of professionals and ask them to present a 90-page plan on the best way forward in 9 months!
A	The first time I became aware of consultation was learning that there had been one, it had been roundly rejected by the respondents but that feedback was to be ignored. I pass through the area daily and would have expected something more visible to indicate a consultation. The designs I saw that were initially accepted were strikingly poor quality
B	The request for consultation could be more clearly marked in multiple places throughout and feedback could be respected
C	It's evident the council didn't fully engage with the public, both in request for consultation or reacting to feedback

D	<p>Fundamentally you're developing a public space, in that aim the thoughts of the people who will use that space are all that matters. You take a guess at a design, it doesn't work, no problem that's part of the process! We try again incorporating the notes from the feedback. This city has tremendous, world class talent that given the right interface will contribute voluntarily – make use of this!</p> <p>If the consultation process to achieve a well liked design is too slow, then the first aim is to speed this up. It makes no sense to break ground on a design that isn't supported by a majority</p>
A	Can't remember. Remember seeing a plan.
B	Better inclusion of all involved via advertising
C	No idea
D	To involve and listen to residents and all those who will impacted on plan
A	i do not believe there was any consultation or feedback taken into account. I believe that the councillors do whatever they want and see no issues with what they do
B	they could actually listen to the people, rather than bits that they want to listen to. Their minds are already made up and are going ahead with all plans even after a consultation
C	I personally don't think the council engages with anyone who disagrees with them
D	all the councillors involved within this should resign, they have brought disgrace to the city and has steam rolled through plans that not many people of Plymouth wanted
A	<p>That's outrageous. There was no consultation in 2022 . I attended the event in the mall thinking it was a consultation. I was specifically told it wasn't. It was made very clear it was for information only. I asked where I could voice my objections and had the lessons back turn on me. Another lady had the same happen to her.</p> <p>Here is the actual advert for this event. It's clearly NOT a consultation. https://www.plymouth.gov.uk/news/learn-about-armada-way-regeneration-plans</p> <p>I take a great interest in what plans PCC have and I am sure there wasn't a consultation open to the general public March 2018. The 2023 was a farce. Most of the survey was leading and misinformation.</p>
B	Actually hood a public consultation where the public can see the plans, leave feedback and say whether they are behind the plan or not. Have objections and support counted and registered.
C	
D	So much that words cannot suffice in this small space. They didn't care what the public thought. They ignored the protest and the petition. They kept their decision behind closed doors. And started the work in the mist underhand of ways. It was insidious. Ego despots hell bent on getting their way.
A	<p>No I was not clear on any of the above! There did not seem to be adequate consultation with regards to the felling of the trees until it happened. I can appreciate that the trees were felled in the dead of night, I suppose that was to minimise accidents to the public, if the felling had been executed during daylight hours.</p> <p>I did not see any proposed plans at the time, but have viewed them since. I think that the original plans would have been in keeping with the general environment of Armada Way.</p>

B	There could be models placed in prominent places, such as empty shop windows, (there are plenty of those) where passing residents and visitors could view, and better advertising if models are presented in the Guildhall, and there could be far more dialogue with the residents of Plymouth
C	No comment
D	<p>1. Much much more dialogue with all residents in Plymouth, both retailers large and small, and citizens, of all ages and genders.</p> <p>2. Listen to the people of Plymouth and take into consideration their views, and incorporate those views into the planning and execution of any future projects, whether large or small.</p> <p>3. Having viewed on line the proposed project models of 2018, 2022 I can see no difference, and very little difference in the 2023 model. There is so little in the way of greenery, that it is likely to be missed.</p> <p>4. The result in the upgrade is very sparse, bland and disappointing.</p> <p>We have a beautiful city with so much to offer to visitors, which is not tapped into on any social media outlets. I have been a resident of Plymouth since 2002 and I still feel like a foreigner. I find it very hard to access Whats' on in Plymouth at any time.</p>
A	Not adequate as alternative views for the development had no place for inclusion. The large response of public that showed they were not in favour of the plan were completely ignored and tree cutting took place just hours after the results were announced. No Business Plan showing Public "value for money" was ever produced and the plan should have gone to full Council!
B	First of all offer alternative ideas for people to consider and vote on. Include Community Groups in forming those ideas. Put a business case together to show "value for money" of any proposed scheme. Ensure all schemes with a value over say £3 million are always discussed in Full Council.
C	The cutting of trees hours after the final consultation that recommended that the scheme was not popular in the form offered speaks for itself as to the blind indifference of the Council to Public thoughts! Any future schemes must start with community involvement to see what the Public want from a space then the Council can formulate plans based on this feedback. Too much emphasis placed on "business interests" in the City Center.
D	Community involvement from day 1 as to what was wanted from a City Center revamp, who was to pay and the benefits that would come to the community. The City Center is a Business location and much of the revamp was to accommodate conversion of buildings to residential use whereas it appears Public Money was spent for developers benefit and ignore community use and continued involvement in the areas. The retail business users had too much influence through just 1 spokesman. The Council have developed open paved areas with the idea to commercially rent these for pop up businesses. No place for Community gardens for meeting and spending time together, local farmers market or community group use for cooking and feeding information, citizens advice etc.. Result is endless barren area of paving!!
A	The consultations were widely publicised and communicated to interested parties, including business owners and landlords in Armada Way and nearby streets. The regeneration of Armada Way had been talked about for years. I think there was adequate consultation for the most affected people. We were consulted and were kept informed of developments and communicated the consultation and developments via our newsletters to more than 500 city centre businesses.

B	As an organisation representing city centre business owners, we are in regular dialogue with the council and were happy with the way the council consulted on the Armada Way scheme. Hardly anyone lives in Armada Way, it's all businesses and landlords. They were fully aware of the scheme and its implications and, according to our research, was widely supported. Perhaps more social media coverage might have reached more people.
C	The council engaged very well with the principal stakeholders, including us.
D	The council was ambushed by a small hard-line group of politically motivated agitators who did everything they could to mislead the public about the scheme and make it look as if thousands of residents in Plymouth were upset about the loss of trees. They whipped up a national campaign, comparing Plymouth' loss of about 100 trees to Sheffield where 10,000 trees were chopped down in residential street. Armada Way is not a residential street, the council had permitted development rights and none of the trees were protected. The council grew increasingly nervous about the actions of the protestors and what they might do and became defensive. The leader at the time chose not to be the figurehead of the scheme and so they handed the PR space to the protestors. In our opinion the council did nothing wrong as borne out by future legal action. But, perhaps, they could have improved their communication of the merits of the scheme.
A	Yes there was enough consultation, and it was repeated in the local news/ media. Its people who DIDN'T go or didn't read the local news reports that thought there was not enough - and then complained without any understanding or knowledge of the plans or work.
B	Just do the same or even less. 2 consultations is plenty - and it was passed by the council. You do not have to pander to the social media people that are just negative about most things or listen to false information.
C	It was well publicised. As for tree felling 'At night' that is the time to do it. You should not pander to protest groups or they will disrupt the whole process and prevent vehicles and machinery from doing their job. It is NOT their property anyway.
D	Not to provide so much information as the protesters only use it against you and then you get the social media keyboard warriors who are not aware of the plans putting their piece in. Just provide the bare basic necessary information.
A	I was not around for 2018 but the other two I found to be very informative, up front and the knowledge hub was useful. It was always clear to me the results and the publishing of changes made after we're unambiguous.
B	I personally think that inviting a group that are publicly against anything council related is costly and time consuming, and whilst involvement of business, key local groups is valuable, that you should not entertain protest groups who clearly show one way of thinking and are not openly minded.
C	Given that I'm not generally aware of other council decisions around felling, the fact I knew of this in detail shows how well it was communicated and how the council engaged. I don't feel that it needed more than the event in the guildhall which had literally all of the detail and experts to read or ask. You literally had the plans, planting and everything needed to be fully informed, and those that don't like something shouldn't be flattered by considering otherwise.
D	My personal view is a stronger stand publicly for what they're doing. Showing belief in the scheme and councillors standing up publicly. The politicians were switching and engaging with protectors at a time to gain votes rather than standing up for Armada Way project as the sensible and only real solution to fix Plymouth.

A	Absolutely not. I keep abreast of all opportunities to make my views known on council consultations and was not aware of any opportunities to comment on plans prior to the Armada Way area being blocked off in preparation for work there. I also believe that too much emphasis was given to views from organisations, many national organisations, who often have an ulterior motive not in line with residents who live in or visit the area regularly.
B	Much more publicity about giving views initially and to ask the residents first to get a general understanding of what the people the council should be serving think about plans before then going to outside bodies.
C	Very poorly with the general public and individual businesses, far too much consideration given to views of organisations. Improve publicity around consultation by doing a leaflet drop to all properties, both domestic and business, in the Plymouth area and providing plenty of drop-in events for people to attend to get a better understanding of what is planned and how those plans may affect them.
D	Greatly increase the information available and the publicity of that information to the general public during the planning stage, prior to any formalisation of plans and certainly prior to any work taking place. Place greater emphasis and weight on the public opinion, rather than appearing to ignore the overwhelmingly negative feedback from the public. I also believe that the way the council went about starting the work was seen by the public to be underhand and secretive and by employing security and engaging the police in patrolling the start of the work, at night, suggested that the council expected opposition to the work. If they had carried out proper consultation and raised awareness of their plans, and listened to the public's views, any such opposition would have been kept to a minimum prior to the work starting.
A	It wasn't a public one 2018. It was for a limited few. 2022. Is a falsity. It was information and the staff were rude to anyone who wanted to leave feedback. 2023. PCC didn't listen to the public. They merely cleverly tweaked the design to include a play park to get the court case against them overturned and pretend this was what the public had asked for. When in fact they had a loaded question in their survey.
B	If my neighbour is doing alterations to their property, I get to look at the full planning application all the details drawings and it would certainly be mentioned if they had to cut down s tree. I can then voice my objections and they get counted Yet for this Armada way scheme we had nothing like that despite it affecting the public massively. There was never any mention of a single tree being cut down in the first consultation or the information event. This was what the public were most outraged by. If you did a survey right now asking the folk of Plymouth if they feel listened to. The majority would say not. That is so wrong at every level in a democracy. The people should have been presented with an option and cost to fully repair to its original previous water feature design retaining the trees. Councillor Kelly told me personally that the estimate to repair was 1 million .this new one which is a prototype costs 13 .5 million .With the same free maintenance for 2 years are we to expect it to fall into disrepair at that point ,as did the previous one. Since the council have a very poor maintenance record, This review should recommend that the maintenance plan beyond 2 years is also made public.
C	N/A

D	For the massive impact on the city this plan entailed they should have had been transparent in every aspect. Put to public vote. This is now a simple thing to have online. It should be a simple matter of for or against. They reserve this system for themselves at council meetings and it's easily extended to the general public. PCC treat the public with disdain and at root level think us incapable of making informed decisions. The public should be welcomed into the gallery at meetings not treated with annoyance. It's a culture of scheming and back scratching. A public debate is essential for many of their schemes. But instead they use insidious means to get their own way.
A	No
B	Answer queries personally at public meetings. Make it easier to ask questions at council meetings Publicise these meetings well in advance and everywhere in Plymouth
C	They did not make it clear to the vast majority of people who visit Armada Way that many many loved trees and greenery were going to be sacrificed for reasons which include unimpeded access to hightech posts and communications within them, and the apparent anti-social behaviour which occurs under and around trees which nevertheless have generous canopies for nesting birds and carbon capture and bring shade and pleasure to visitors.
D	To listen more, respond to requests for specific info eg an accurate description of the state of each condemned tree from an independent tree surgeon, honesty about the real reasons for the need to fell so many mature trees, but above all accurate info and the ability to adapt plans to save as many trees as possible. obviously not done in this case.
A	Yes I do think there was adequate discussion
B	There seemed to be a lack of communication with the public and media on a few issues such as the necessity in cutting down the trees at night. We were informed beforehand of the reasons i.e. health and safety etc but the public perception was otherwise.
C	We were given regular updates of the work and we were consulted when we raised concerns over the loss of parking spaces.
D	It should have listened to the majority of residents and shopkeepers who supported the plans rather than a small vociferous gang of political activists who threatened, harassed, intimidated and tried to blackmail myself and members of my staff. I feel more support could have been offered to myself and others who were being harassed and intimidated by straw.
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A	No, the plans did not come to my attention, certainly not as early as March 2018.
B	It needs to have a much larger voice informing the public. Especially in the free papers etching most households. Though often too late for some events.
C	Reading about Alison White's struggles and my own attempts I thought it was a mess and avoidance game to communicate with the public.
D	Not to dismiss the public's views and belittle them as being purely factional. The finish of the work south of the shopping centre is a stone desert. Generally the scheme has left our city centre devoid of greenery and shade. It feels alienating. Not a place to hang out. Utilitarian.
A	No. Very little information was provided. Subsequent 'redesigns' completely ignored comments made by consultees. Designs were presented as finished with people asked for a black and white yes/no response with no opportunity to change designs. The council completely refused to engage despite repeated opportunities to do so.
B	Actually listen to what people want and be prepared to change rather than plowing on regardless with a fixed agenda. Consult BEFORE designs have been fixed. More transparency is needed - we still know almost nothing about the process. This was a textbook example of how not to handle a public consultation.
C	There was no engagement. Utterly shameful.
D	More transparency. The whole thing smacked of cloaks and daggers with the council refusing to engage, or even acknowledge public feeling. It was utterly undemocratic with decisions taken by unaccountable civil servants. The council need to make more information available at the start of the process or any consultation is meaningless. The council were and are arrogant, self-serving bullies who feel they push through whatever they want without any sort of public engagement.
A	None of the consultations were adequately advertised The results were not publicised Feedback was to a large extent ignored
B	The Council needs to be much more open The public must be given every opportunity to air their views and not left feeling ignored
C	The public opinion was ignoredThis Council needs to listen
D	The initial plans should have been much more open Plymothians were kept in the dark Never again should we be treated with such contempt
A	Totally inadequate consultation. I am engaged with local politics but saw nothing until the "last moment" attempt at consultation There has been little transparency on public feedback. Some of the phraseology of questions was very skewed towards "favouring" the plans so weren't helpful to begin with. I also witnessed a planner for the scheme telling members of the public that "it WILL happen" which suggested the consultation was a sham I have no idea how feedback impacted the plans - if they did at all
B	Longer run ups to information/consultation schemes. Give busy people a chance to note scheme details in plenty of time & over a variety of media.

	If the council believes in a scheme it should persuade the public- not ride roughshod, regardless. We still like to believe our views matter
C	<p>The Council failed to engage with the public until a growing unease forced its hand. The initial attempt at consultation in what looked like a portaloo was only moved to the Guildhall & “professionalised” after public complaints. The Council has been defensive & secretive</p> <p>Publicise major schemes better & use ward councillors to actively seek out opinions</p>
D	<p>Don’t make megalomaniacs Council leaders.</p> <p>Mr Bingley showed an utter contempt for process, democracy & residents. The rest of the Council failed to proactively interrogate these failures.</p> <p>Democracy still matters</p>
A	No, there wasn't. I don't have the Herald and I don't 'live' on the internet, following every bit of news. I knew very little about the redevelopment of Armada Way until the furore about some of the plans. I went to the final 'consultation', the results of which were COMPLETELY ignored!
B	Every residential property should have notification of major developments, by letter, email, in the news, etc. And the results need to be collated by a totally IMPARTIAL body, who don't have a vested interest in the outcome.
C	I feel it was a total whitewash of previous (& some present!) council members. The public aired their views, and they have been ignored (as usual).
D	They need to LISTEN & act on what WE, their wage payers, wish for our City, instead of going off on high falutin vanity projects that have no onward maintenance costs factored in. Instead of passing the buck & lying about results, listen & work WITH the interested people.
A	No. The consultation periods were short and poorly publicised, and most importantly the majority of the objections and suggestions made were not acted upon, most importantly the suggestion that the trees should not be chopped down and were manageable. The points made about climate change, most centrally the need for shaded areas provided by the trees, and the scientific issues of trees as carbon sinks (a tree not storing CO2 for its first 25+ years) were dismissed by the decision to chop them, despite consultations highlighting the issue. The fact that the council hired expensive special industrial plant to take out all the trees over one night proves that Plymouth City Council officers knew they were acting against the majority of people’s views on the consultation. This represents corruption of the consultation process.
B	<p>This is primarily a political democratic question. For so long as the culture of the Council is combative, the ruling party in competition with those elected from other political Parties and working to a Whip block vote for decision-making, the engagement of the electorate will remain secondary or irrelevant, effectively undermining all and any public consultation.</p> <p>At the same time, putting out a call for the public’s voice relies wholly upon those with the time and inclination to respond. The only answer to this conundrum, now being rolled-out by a growing number of councils and States, is the “citizens assemblies” based upon an identified and temporary cross-section of the population brought together and fully informed of the issues by specialists with the relevant knowledge. It works only if the ruling Party is prepared to be advised by the the</p>

	decisions of the CA, even where the conclusions conflict with the Party's ideology/programme.
C	<p>Stop using corporate speak. This question is absurd because, as usual, the question doesn't define and explain itself and assumes the respondent understands the concept and role of "stakeholders". Typical top-down internalist if not elitist language. Democratise your language.</p> <p>As far as stakeholders go, it is more than apparent that business owners have a much louder voice and are taken into account far more than residents, despite the fact that many businesses are transient, show a lack of care for the long-term stability and infrastructure in pursuit of immediate short term profit and domination over competitors. A political understating of the interests of various groups of stakeholders, with a transparent weighting attached to the purpose/aims/philosophy of the scheme and therefore the value of the consultation is vital - the decisions over Armada Way were probably based more on meeting the needs of the shop-owners than the shoppers/promenaders. The dominant construct was also about footfall rather than a sustainable environment acknowledging how climate change will produce more extreme weather and require both shelter for people and carbon-sinks with homes for insect and wildlife - much of which will not of itself encourage the footfall of consumerism.</p>
D	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. End the legalistic authoritarian culture. 2. Be honest about the threat of climate change and need for planned adaptation ahead of crisis, across all departments as the priority criteria. 3. Be vigorous in the quest for transparent and accountable decision-making observable to the entire electorate at all times. 4. Reject the demand for further centralisation of decision-making, especially the powers encompassed by an elected Mayor.
A	No. The consultations were not adequate. Some people on the council had decided the outcome in advance. The damage had already been done.
B	Get recommendations from outside conservation/ecological bodies with an emphasis on environmental protection that puts nature at the heart of a scheme. This benefits people.
C	I would like to see the council keep an open view that can adapt to the community engagement and follow up consultations.
D	To learn that going ahead with their plan in an underhand and aggressive way is NOT the way to improve this city. Be prepared to think again and not ride roughshod over the public concerns.
A	No. The first consultation didn't have enough information about the trees. The other 2 consultations had questions that were badly designed.
B	Be open and transparent. Listen to the public. Use genuine experts to give advice. More positive engagement. Training needed in how to be a professional public servant and not engage in demonising people who oppose their poor decision making.
C	More transparency, more professionalism. Training needed.
D	Consult the public with open and honest information. Take advice from experts.
A	None at all. Any feedback was ignored. A PR plan was in place and nothing anyone said against it was ignored.

B	<p>Involve the residents in every way. Let them know that their voice matters. Stop Carrer Politicians and the Free Masons influence on local Politics. An Environmental Programme is Important.</p> <p>We need to be a Part Of The Solution Instead Of A Part Of The Problem.</p>
C	<p>I didn't hear anything about it until it happened. They acted like we didn't matter. I wasn't made aware of their intentions or their subterfuge or power.</p>
D	<p>They ignored completely the residents who did not wish this Criminal action to go ahead. The Town Centre has been a Building Site for years now.</p> <p>I've spoken to people visiting from Cruise Ships and they are very disappointed with what Plymouth has to offer.</p>
A	<p>I was not aware of the March 2018 consultation. I was not aware of the results of this either.</p> <p>I was not aware of the September 2022 consultation and was not aware of any of the results of this until I got involved in the campaign to save the trees of Armada Way, which I became aware of in early November 2022.</p> <p>It seems that the results of this did not impact the council's determined plan to fell the trees.</p> <p>I was aware of the consultation in February 2023 and attended it. I believe that the council ignored the results of this consultation.</p> <p>They continued with their plan to fell the trees regardless, unlawfully I believe, and with a determination and zest that was totally out of proportion with the task, over-night, and with little regard for the views and feelings of Plymouth residents and visitors.</p>
B	<p>This is a question that has tried to be answered many many times with the feedback from the campaign, residents, local councillors, local groups and organisations and the mainstream press in comments from farther afield. The council failed miserably to listen to anyone but their own vested interests and individuals within the council, and local MP's that were already 'onside' with their plan to fell the trees. They have blatantly disregarded the views of their own people. They have failed to address the very real issues that the City faces with a supportive and sensitive mindset and approach. They have failed to uphold their own standards and the protocol that they are supposed to follow. They have failed to address and answer questions posed to them through meetings, emails, letters, FOI requests and from interested parties that offered their expertise. They have put economic interests above everything else, and in addition those economic interests are not necessarily those shared by local business owners. The city now is full of huge fast food chains that do nothing to support the local economy past the minimum wages that they pay their staff. They also cause environmental degradation, littering and plastic pollution. The resources these types of businesses suck from the earth is parasitical and ongoing, in the midst of a 6th Mass extinction, a biodiversity crisis and rising temperatures across the globe, and is such a short sighted way to artificially inflate the local economy with no regard for the long term. All these issues have been failed over and over again, and the residents that voiced their concerns ignored.</p>

C	<p>This has echoes of the last question.</p> <p>I do not believe that the council took any notice of anyone who did not agree with their view and their plan.</p> <p>They drove on regardless of anyone else's opinions and expert knowledge.</p> <p>They did not take on board the real concerns about wildlife, biodiversity, the bird life, the amenity to shoppers in the way of natural vistas and shade, and the absolute value of the trees as living beings.</p> <p>They shamed those that dared to speak up or against or protested or opposed their plans.</p> <p>This was clearly shown in the actions that unfolded in those early months of 2023.</p> <p>They 'ramped up' the risk that the people in the campaign posed, thus vilifying and demonising those of varying opinions not shared by the mindset of the council at that time.</p> <p>They took the decision under 'emergency measures' thus bypassing the normal checks and balances because they were obviously hell bent on 'doing the job' at ALL costs.</p> <p>Their actions were shameful and disrespecting in the very least.</p> <p>Plymouth city council are beholden to the residents of the City, and need to be much more humble in their dealings in the future.</p>
D	<p>I believe that I have answered this question in the last two answers.</p> <p>I believe that the Council needs a complete 'overhaul' to root out systemic and institutional cronyism and the belief that 'might makes right'.</p>
A	<p>No. The consultations were not advertised properly resulting low turnover.</p> <p>Removing all trees was not decided by public but but PCC only.</p>
B	<p>Proper public consultation preceded by letters sent to residence or advertised in local media.</p>
C	<p>I asked local stakeholders if they knew about planned trees felling and they all said none of them knew about it. Improvement is necessary so improvements are not deterioration.</p>
D	<p>Meaningful public consultations are crucial. The competition should be carried so various proposals could be presented to the public. One person vision is something that characterise totalitarian systems, not democracy.</p>
A	<p>The consultation exercise was poorly advertised and as a result public feedback was minimised. This was a deliberate tactic in order that tree-felling could be railroaded through with minimum opposition. Timelines were deliberately kept secret in order to obstruct STRAW.</p>
B	<p>They could have used the extensive hoardings that surrounded the tree-felling site to advertise in detail the actions that were due to take place. They probably chose not to to limit opposition so that they could initiate tree-felling action by subterfuge.</p>
C	<p>The Council's consultation process was shameful particularly in respect of the legitimate concerns of STRAW. Similarly, the absence of any proper scrutiny as a result of the decision to go ahead with the tree-felling operation was equally shameful.</p>
D	<p>The lack of leadership throughout this depressing saga was shocking. The buck stops with the Chief Executive and her abysmally low profile throughout the operation and complete lack of grip facilitated national press attention and ridicule. Why was a major incident not declared and damage limitation procedures invoked. It appears that the CE delegated all responsibility for the tree-felling to the Director of Planning and that he was allowed to use whatever disreputable tactics that were needed. A letter written by me to the Plymouth Herald some months ago on the subject was published in full.</p>

A	I attended the consultation in Mar 2018 and the one in Sept 2022. I would especially like to comment on the Sept 2022 consultation as the questionnaire was heavily biased to get the answers PCC wanted. When I challenged the staff at the event about certain aspects, e.g. the hazardous cycleway, they did not listen but just wanted me to say that the overall project was better than nothing. The PCC staff made it clear, by their answers, that the exercise was a tick in the box event to justify the existing design.
B	Hold the consultations when at the sketch design, i.e. not when the design has been agreed and priced leaving little or no interest from PCC for anything but the most simple changes. Rather than just hold mass drop in sessions, go to the people via smaller local events or by attending resident associations meetings.
C	Very poorly, see answer to question 7.
D	See answer to question 7.
A	I think that the Council gave adequate consultation and I was clear on the results of the consultation and how feedback impacted the proposed designs.
B	I think that there is always room for improvement however I think that the Council's consultation with regard to this scheme was satisfactory.
C	I think the Council engaged with the relevant stakeholders regarding the plans in a satisfactory way.
D	I think the Council should consider appropriate methods & strategies required to complete schemes that groups or individuals strongly disagree with when the schemes have completed the required consultation process.
A	No I do not. I think this was kept very quiet as none of my friends and family were aware of it having taken place at all until after the event. We were busy enjoying the wildlife in the mature urban woodland that had developed at the top of Armada way (now removed).
B	Be honest. I have found council members to be less than honest either when they are ignorant of certain subjects like ecological surveys, biodiversity and ecology or even physical geography. I have also found members to be very dismissive of public concerns, as if we were the ignorant people even if this is our field of expertise. Communication is key. This is a weak area for the council where departments do not communicate or we are told that they do not, whichever is the real truth of the matter. I have been gaslighted by members of the council with no apology. Council members could learn from the expertise of citizens who have more experience in certain fields instead I have found arrogance and dismissal or not responding at all to be the typical way. The council itself is not entirely transparent about the line management making it very difficult to target the right staff member. The chart is not detailed or accurate enough to be useful for citizens.
C	Again, communication to all stakeholders and opportunities to be heard. Council members often do not listen to important and valid points raised by the public and consequently they are left feeling disempowered and dismissed. The biodiversity net gain figures trotted out show a complete misunderstanding of ecological diversity and mature ecosystems as these are adaptable living systems. We have been gaslighted about this frequently. It has become a mantra based on ignorance and designed to shut down conversation and learning about it.

D	<p>As above:</p> <p>Council need to:</p> <p>Listen to the public, citizens, stakeholders, businesses, University staff and students and research experts.</p> <p>Communicate better for collective learning on these projects that affect almost all residents of Plymouth and beyond.</p> <p>Be more honest and transparent.</p> <p>The council has much work to do on becoming more honest and transparent and mature in its responses and communication. It lacks vision and sophistication in working alone or for large multinationals that export profits out of the area.</p> <p>Admit failure and bad decisions when they are made instead of sliding the blame onto others in an immature fashion which irks everybody. Be ready to apologise and offer a better vision and mission. Give credit to good input where credit is due rather than taking credit for good things after other communities have done the hard labour for you that has been ignored or dismissed.</p> <p>You have created a split and hierarchy from ground level to top and fail to bring the community together cohesively due to immature behaviours and attitudes.</p> <p>The contempt for STRAW was painful to watch and clearly showed complete ignorance on many levels.</p> <p>I do not see hope for change with this council following my experiences over the last few years.</p>
A	No
B	More public awareness through both media outlets and general post
C	Not very well
D	More openness and transparency instead of carrying out the process as hidden from the general public as possible. Longer consultation times are required along with more comprehensive notifications to the public
A	No I don't think adequate consultations on the planned redevelopment of Armada was given .Also the impact of the loss of so many healthy trees being lost to the Plymouth shoppers and visitors.
B	By being open reference to the benefits and none benefits of proceeding with such a major scheme.
C	There should have been more options given for everyone to discuss and mill through alternatives options Given more time was needed.
D	Listen to what people want and not be driven by time restrictions. Take time to look at what can be saved of what we already have. Logically think environment first every time.
A	No response
B	They are elected to make decisions.
C	No idea
D	No comment
A	No. No. And no. 2018 was poorly advertised and therefore only had a small response. It is clear from the results of the 2022/23 consultations that the wishes or suggestions of the public were largely ignored as the proposals barely changed.
B	Yes. Accept criticism of bad ideas instead of ignoring public views. Incorporate sensible ideas instead of dismissing them. Adjust designs instead of retaining them and increasing the budget.

C	Badly. Council was playing party politics instead of joining forces for the good of Plymouth and talking to stakeholders in advance of actions. In future, stakeholder engagement needs to happen much further in advance and then not ignored if Council doesn't like what it hears.
D	It was a bad scheme and should have had a full public and stakeholder consultation before a revised plan went ahead. Council's actions brought devastation to the City centre and Plymouth into disrepute. This was avoidable. The Council carried out an act of vandalism which has earned it a bad reputation and long-term distrust. Regarding lessons for the future; as the Council didn't listen before I doubt if anything I put here will have any effect.
A	No. I was only aware of the changes when works began and news coverage started. So I would say that their was wholly inadequate consultation.
B	Yes. The consultation needs to be dynamic and wholesale. T
C	I felt that the only stakeholders who were encouraged to engage were those from the BID. That as a resident my views were not sought out or given any weight
D	
A	I wasn't even aware of such consultations. Even though the council has my contact details, I don't recall receiving any communications from them.
B	Firstly, they need to push information about such projects to interested parties. In most cases, this could be an email. Secondly, the 'tone of voice' of such communications must be neutral. Whilst it will need to explain the reasons why a major scheme is being considered, it needs to tread a fine line of avoiding using marketing language to push features and dress them up as benefits.
C	It seemed to engage with stakeholders but my sense was it was a case of ticking boxes on decisions that had actually already been taken. It felt dishonest and corrupt. I appreciate that not everything comes down to being a matter of opinion but if the council are going to engage with stakeholders, the process must be honest and sincere.
D	I don't think cutting down mature trees should have ever been on the table. It really is environmental vandalism and completely undermined any notion that the the council is sincere about its 'green' priorities. It ended up being extremely bad national PR for Plymouth and it was shocking to see the deceit the council leader embarked upon when sending in the chainsaws late into the night. It was shameful.
A	The consultation was poor in all respects, it wasn't clear why it needed to happen. One thing a lot of people didn't want to see was the loss of so many trees...but they were still chopped down. I think feedback regarding to the loss of trees was largely ignored.
B	Dramatically increase recourses to the planning department. Follow the guidelines to the Climate Change agreement and think hard about what that means...not cut down 120 trees and replace it with water features and hard surfaces.
C	Post out the proposals to residents within one mile of a large project. Build a large 3D model of what is being proposed and move it around the city for all to see e.g. schools, libraries, community centres etc. Have senior members of the planning committee present at any public meetings/discussion groups etc.

D	It shouldn't have gone ahead, the CEO of PCC should have stopped it in it's tracks.
A	Yes. There was plenty of consolidation but it felt like if you had an alternative view to the then council it was not welcome.
B	The new council have already improved on the previous council. They have been open with the public and willing to listen to the feedback given.
C	They didn't. The fact that the tree cutting down was started under the cover of darkness says everything about the project.
D	More involvement with the local community. Get their ideas. Learn from other areas. Embrace the unique landscape that Plymouth has.
A	Yes. And my choice to take PCC to court was misguided.
B	Perfection.
C	If I hadn't stuck my nose in and caused massive delays the project would probably be done now.
D	That groups such as mine should learn to work with businesses, PCC leaders and the public before starting something they can't finish.
A	Yes there was adequate consultation, and results were made clear.
B	I believe early consultation attempts by the Council were negatively impacted by what I view as intimidation by campaign group STRAW, who placed members at entrances to physical consultations and launched social media campaigns. It was clear on speaking to them that STRAW members were mainly not local, were not impacted by the regeneration in the same way as locals, and were a single issue campaign group. The Council could have done more to make clear the multilayered benefits of the regeneration, and could have acted more positively to prevent intimidation.
C	There was wide engagement and plenty of opportunities to view proposals. As someone who uses the area almost daily, often pushing a wheelchair or pram, I had strong views about surfaces. Old surface were completely inadequate, bumpy, marred by tree roots that raised surfaces, marred by low lighting, and almost impossible to push a wheelchair over. I do not believe this aspect was highlighted enough in engagement or feedback. I blame this on the campaign group STRAW who unfortunately made the agenda all about old trees. In future there needs to be more clarity about different agendas and benefits.
D	Do not be distracted by single issue campaigns, like STRAW/old trees. Allow all agendas to surface. Prevent intimidation/leafleting by single issue campaigners, or at least be clear there are other issues.
A	Yes. The council is elected to represent the city through a democratic process. I believe it was quite clear what was intended and members of the public had the opportunity to comment via the consultation processes or could have contacted their council representatives. It is unfortunate that whilst people have the right to object and protest, the huge cost to the city of defending it's position as a result could have been put to the regeneration costs. Leaving Armada Way in such an appalling state as a result of the court actions did not ultimately help anyone - least of all the traders.

B	<p>The council often uses consultation to justify highway schemes etc. what it does not do well is publish how many responded to it and the percentages for / against. As an example local people were in favour of the Laira traffic scheme and yet I know people who live there who are set against it with 120,000 fines issued so the scheme must be a failure because people were caught speeding.</p> <p>They at least publicly consulted on the stoke to union street scheme but it took the Herald to advertise this to the whole city as it impacts everyone who uses the area not just those who live there.</p> <p>It's easy to use throw away comments that people were in favour or against but the council must publish results if it's to be credible - and remember it is representing collectively +250,000 people - not just a few who respond either way.</p> <p>That at least would give some credibility to the consultation.</p>
C	<p>There is only one way in my view to consult people and that's one to one! The public had the opportunity to comment on the Armada way scheme and I'm sure in percentage terms, very free did. Who appoints community groups and gives them authority to represent the community? Many only have a small percentage of members who actively support them. I can't remember ever having a ballot paper to elect members to these groups? That doesn't mean they should not have a voice as a combined group of members of the public - but neither should they be able to unduly influence schemes as stakeholders etc! Again in open democracy it should be published in responses who they are - where they represent and for what- how many active members they have / what percentage were for / against - how many people live in the area they believe they represent. The only true representation are the democratically elected local councillors for the area and the MP as they are there to take a balanced view and represent their electorate first balanced with the wider interests of the city overall. At least if we don't approve of what they do on your behalf you have a vote that you can use!</p>
D	<p>Greater publicity and more openness around consultation outcomes using for example the Evening Herald / Plymouth live / its own website.</p> <p>The decision to cut the trees at night actually made sense in terms of safety. Given the subsequent protests it is difficult to see what alternative the council had to enact its democratically taken decision. It would not be unreasonable to assume protesters would have done everything in their power to stop this. Meanwhile the redevelopment of a key area of the city which has a city wide benefit with visitors and the economy of Plymouth would have been disrupted. With hindsight it was probably more costly to the council due to the court actions and terrible state it had to be left in.</p> <p>If anything can be learnt, it will need a detailed cross party review by the council to see how it take future plans forward. Otherwise we will be left with out of date eyesores and no effective way to modernise / improve or grow our city.</p> <p>I know this is part of this and the conundrum is when should voices of protest influence decisions especially that impact the city 20mph on Wilton Street is a classic example where the council are using consultation to justify this but they at least went to the public and hopefully they will issue the results of this.</p> <p>I would add I'm glad I'm not one of the councillors having to wrestle with these types of decisions. Right or wrong is a personal public view whereas elected democracy must always prevail - even if it's not what you particularly want and it should never be abdicated to pressure groups or anyone else for that matter.</p>
A	No

B	Use a variety of community consultation methods to gather data, including in-person creative workshops with small groups, businesses and public drop-in sessions so a diverse range of people can contribute imaginatively to a collective decision-making process.
C	PCC's engagement was poor. See Q7 response
D	See Q7 response
A	I went to three consultations and visited the hub. I took an interest because I was glad the old cluttered low grade landscaping was going to go and had my full support. I wrote to the council many years ago and said it needs a re-plan/ sorting out. And it does, make no mistake.
B	It is not really up to the general population to decide or interfere when a good professional plan is decided upon. Most of the vociferous ones do not like or understand change for the better. 90% of the population do not engage anyway.
C	It was good what they did. Could you imagine if you notified all the protesters and green people in advance. They would have blockaded the site. Please do not give these air time.
D	Once a decision has been decided democratically then the council should press on. The most vociferous councilors who supported the Save Armada Way trees group lost their seats at the local elections anyway.
A	No. The consultations were low keyed and poorly promoted, almost low-budget in tone and application. Any "promotion" or information given was ambiguous and very general and always the onus was on improving the business environment through such topics like improving CCTV coverage or a better shopping experience.
B	No consultation is ever going to please everyone but it's so tiresome to keep on meeting the same bland and generic pseudo-management speak. Try using English, plain and straight-forward English. The way these consultations were presented it was so obvious that the answer had been decided and the questions were framed to suit.
C	Honestly???? Engage???? Stakeholders???? I'm losing the will to live already. But I will try to work with it. There was no engagement with the public, just a well planned political blame and shame exercise by well practised politicians who could have prevented the whole debacle if they had been even slightly interested in the people they are supposed to represent at several points of the process. And let's not forget that several of these decisions were at the instigation of senior Council officials who have never had to face the public and been held to account.
D	I will be very surprised if anything does change. The self-denial and petty-minded blame culture of the current administration and the senior officers does not hold much hope. Learn? You need intelligence and understanding to learn and admitting to mistakes and learning from them is never going to happen.
A	There was not enough publicity about the consultations, the "consultations" came before the public could adequately scrutinize the proposals, and then they were asked to turn up at the Guildhall over a limited period of time to fill out a form. The proposals themselves did not delve enough into the reasons for the scheme in general, or for the cutting down of the trees. In fact, the proposals did not give the impression that so many wonderful trees would be cut down and we would be left with a soulless amount of concrete and nowhere quiet and comfortable to rest and

	relax in, in the presence of nature, while shopping. I wasn't even aware of the 2018 consultations either.
B	<p>1. All councillors should publicize when they will have special surgeries to discuss major schemes with their constituents. They receive a salary to represent us, not the unelected civil servants in the Council, and not their political parties either. (Quoting party policy for the proposals is no excuse. Councillors have a duty to represent their constituents.)</p> <p>2. All residents should be sent information in the physical post about the scheme, and residents should be sent totally objective questionnaires to fill out in a reasonable amount of time. We got posted surveys about "Plymotion", but not about this much more important matter.</p> <p>3. The questionnaire should not have leading questions. The one we had to fill out had shockingly leading, multiple choice questions in it that really didn't give you the chance to say you didn't want the scheme at all. It was more along the lines of "which part of this proposal do you like the best? Tick one" etc.</p> <p>4. There are plenty of residents who do not use the Internet or have computers. Make consultations available in paper form and in person. Internet questionnaires should only be one option. I personally do not have my own Internet connection and am using someone else's laptop, to fill this form out. (I find being around wifi or strong EMF fields give me headaches, tinnitus, and other symptoms. This is a form of disability that should be accommodated.)</p>
C	See above, but terribly. And I do not think they gave adequate reasons to us for wasting so much money to change Armada Way. I think there are other reasons that they did not tell us - to do, among other things, with installing unwanted wifi cables under the concrete. They should TELL US how this scheme has changed the infrastructure underground - and they should have given us the chance to comment on that, as well as the removing of the trees and pleasant surroundings we had.
D	<p>See above. But obviously the Council knew well in advance, that the public would disapprove of the cutting down of all the trees, otherwise why do it so surreptitiously in the middle of the night?</p> <p>I myself happened to be walking through the City Centre on the very night the massacre of trees took place - at about 7:00 PM after seeing a film in town. I saw no sign of what was about to take place. Then when I walked into town the next day...well, the whole thing appears to have been planned like a military operation, as if the residents of Plymouth were the enemy! They should not treat us like that.</p>
A	Consultation was inadequate, continual mixed messages came from elected officials.
B	Far more transparency and less political shenanigans. At no point did I feel the consultation was a genuine exercise.
C	<p>Engagement was very poor and lacked openness.</p> <p>Learn the lessons from the Sheffield inquiry.</p>
D	Learn from the mistakes made in Sheffield.
A	I personally think that straw Has cost the council a lot of money I think if they're only listened to what the council said that we're planning to do was the plant more trees than ever which is a good thing with the money that would've been saved, if she didn't have taken them to court, we were we would've had a better Centre to to attract locals and visitors

B	More consultation
C	As above
D	More consultation
A	<p>It was not initially clear to people the extent of the number of trees to be felled. This should have been clearer from outset.</p> <p>When a large petition was presented to PCC opposing the plans and seeking to save more trees in the planned design, proper and meaningful meetings and dialogue should have taken place. A motion was presented at Full Council, requesting an amended plan to retain more nature trees as a direct result from public feedback. This was ignored.</p> <p>The results from PCC final consultation were also ignored. Poor judgement and a distinct lack of listening and respect for democracy.</p>
B	<p>Be fully open and transparent in all decisions and the results of the feedback. No lessons learnt as PCC under Labour, not the Conservatives as with Armada Way, voted against 57% who wanted all out elections every four years following consultation. This was once again ignored, even after the debacle of Armada Way. Public faith and trust in PCC has been lost. It will only be restored if certain individuals are sacked or forced to resign, there needs to be consequences, not a cover up and the same old lines, lessons will be learnt. As time and time again, this is a lie, and the same thing happens, the public are ignored!</p>
C	<p>Clearly not very well in the end. A huge petition was ignored and rubbished, appalling behaviour. The information PCC put forward was also flawed and biased. A lack of transparency and trust was very evident. PCC avoid answering direct questions and concerns. Cloth eared and arrogant in their approach. Wasted millions. Accountability is distinctly missing.</p>
D	<p>See above. Nothing learned as already highlighted. We live in a democracy, not a dictatorship! Terrible leadership under both Bingley and Evans.</p> <p>Bingley needs to be punished for his actions against the public, ignoring the consultation results and ploughing on regardless under cover of night. The contractors and plans were already approved, irrespective of the consultation results. A total waste of money.</p>

A	<p>I do not feel consultation was adequate, in large part due to the processes being limited to commenting on a pre-defined proposal. A stage may be reached where this is appropriate, but major projects can be commenced with open opportunities for comment and suggestion.</p> <p>The 14th March 2023 report on the 'engagement' includes comments that concern me, having been involved in academic social research for more than forty years. This suggests responses may be, "impacted in term of a campaign by STRAW to result in 'standard' responses with limited value in terms of qualitative feedback on the scheme." (7.1). "There is evidence from the analysis that the campaign by STRAW has had a significant impact upon the responses to the engagement process. . . . there is a degree of caution in considering those responses which appear to not offer meaningful responses in terms of qualitative data compared to those which do" (6.5 Engagement Report).</p> <p>Participants were not informed this is how responses would be handled, and it contrasts with other exercises. For example, a more recent report on consultation on the electoral cycle explains, "Due to the significant number of comments received in response to only one question . . . 20 per cent of them would be randomly selected for analysis." (Electoral Cycle Consultation Report, October 2024: para 6.3). Participants have no way of knowing if failure to provide qualitative comments will reduce the weighting given to their quantitative responses, or if they offer comments whether or not these will be read and considered. In addition to lacking openness with participants about the data analysis, the approach to "standard" responses" is one-sided. In response to FOI requests, I received information from several public authorities who were asked to submit comments by the council. One example is an email sent to South West Water on 20th December 2022 requesting: "If you could write a letter of support that could assist us at this moment that would be great especially if it comes from you and your director, and if it could focus on the principle benefits to the environment that would help. The letter should go to the Leader copied to our portfolio holder and Director . . .". I can provide further details if required. It may be reasonable for the council to lobby others to gain support in this way but it seems manifestly unfair to discount other responses presumed to be influenced by a campaign organised by local citizens.</p> <p>I appreciate that consultations of this kind are not expected to meet the ethical standards and rigour required for academic research, but the processes lacked adequate objectivity and independence, and in my view contributed to scepticism about the council's intentions which has had lasting consequences.</p>
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B	<p>Processes need to begin at a sufficiently early stage to enable the shape of a proposed scheme to be developed collaboratively. Currently the council is widely seen as simply permitting relatively marginal comments on its proposals. A change in approach would require a wider consideration of governance and decision-making by the council.</p> <p>An impression is given that many schemes develop because capital funding is available through external grant opportunities matched with local borrowing. The council has considerable expertise in this, but it can undermine a more strategic approach that could be embedded in greater public participation.</p> <p>A fundamental element of this will need to be greater transparency. This may have implications for the current 'Strong Leader and Cabinet' model which enabled the 'urgent decision' to be taken in the manner it was on 14th March 2023. The council previously received criticism from its external auditor for its handling of the pension dept transaction and the interest rate swap, and while Grant Thornton was subsequently satisfied that procedures were improved, this did not address associated features of organisational culture.</p> <p>Potential risks of loss of transparency associated with the Strong Leader model are widely understood, and attention must be given to developing more effective scrutiny. When Cllr Riley (Chair of the Scrutiny Panel) was asked to endorse the 'urgent decision' process he sought advice from Cllr Lowry who suggested he consult with Cllr Penberthy, which he did prior to giving approval. In the judicial review hearing Counsel for the council pointed out both Cllrs Lowry and Penberthy are Labour members. While this contributed to achieving cross-party engagement in the process, none of this was done openly. In response to a FOI request for details of the communications between Cllr Riley and Cllr Penberthy I was advised this information was not held.</p> <p>A statement submitted by the former Monitoring Officer for the judicial review explains that meetings with portfolio holders are not minuted. A reliance on a verbal culture can undermine accountability making it difficult for the public to understand how decisions are made and by whom.</p> <p>While these points go beyond consultation processes, these need to be part of a wider change in culture that accepts a need for greater openness and transparency. Alternative viewpoints should generate reflection and discussion rather than dismissal and criticism.</p>
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C	<p>It strikes me there was a strong contrast in how the council interacted with different groups. FOI requests I submitted to public authorities who submitted comments to the council disclosed examples of communication (written or verbal) from the council seeking to guide their responses. It was evident from the disclosures that these formed part of an ongoing process of discussion around the project. Council officers were evidently keen to ensure the Leader and portfolio holder were contacted by these organisations.</p> <p>The attitude towards members of the public expressing opposition to the plans could not have been more different. I attended the judicial review hearing in London in March 2024 and was shocked by what I heard and statements and transcripts I read. Council officers appear to have regarded themselves as organising an almost military style operation to ensure the trees could be felled before the public became aware the decision had been taken.</p> <p>The judicial review did not proceed as it was ruled 'academic' following the rescinding of the 'urgent decision'. But this should not be interpreted as a "win" for the council, as some appear to believe. Members of the public concerned about the environment should not be treated as an "enemy", and attention must be given to how the council culture contributed to officers believing this conduct to be acceptable.</p> <p>Following the tree felling the BBC published a statement from the council claiming: "Our decision to transform Armada Way was a mandated, democratic decision, agreed by Plymouth City Council's elected members" (Plymouth tree felling 'really good' for city, council official says, BBC 25th March 2023). Attending the judicial review, I learned the reality was very different, and this must be acknowledged and reflected upon.</p> <p>The council should consider whether training and support for officers is required to encourage the adoption of a different approach. It should not be acceptable to consult and engage with those in positions of organisational authority and then disparage local people who happen to hold a different view to that of the council. Mechanisms could be developed to support this, but a change in culture and attitudes are needed first.</p>
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D	<p>My previous comments address some of this, but one key issue to address is whether the ‘Strong Leader & Cabinet’ model is fit for purpose in the very difficult environment in which local government now operates. To my knowledge this was last considered by the council in 2017, when comments from officers discouraging an alternative model included the statement: “The requirement to make complex decisions at pace combined with the ability to keep commercially sensitive information in confidence could adversely impact the business of the council damaging the confidence of both commissioned providers and other commercial organisations when trading with the council.” (Report to full council, 30th January 2017). Sometimes it may be better not to make “complex decisions at pace”, and existing provisions (public exclusion under the Local Government Act and exemptions under the Freedom of Information Act) provide protection for commercially sensitive information.</p> <p>Scrutiny needs improvement beyond the procedural changes introduced following the Grant Thornton governance review. An illustration of why I believe this is a cultural rather than merely a procedural matter is provided in the minutes of PCC’s Audit & Governance Committee, held on 11th October 2021, with this summary of comments by councillors in response to the review:</p> <p>“there was concern that this was a solution in search of a problem”, . . . “It could be judged as clipping the wings of the Leader of the Council; Councillors raised concerns that the guidance appeared to work against the strong Leader and Cabinet model” . . . “The committee collectively requested that its present content be reviewed/amended . . . the amendment should emphasise, underline and strengthen the Executive Leader and Cabinet model.”</p> <p>I have explained some of my concerns further in correspondence shared with David Williams, Chair of the ILR (my letter to Cllr Evans of 4th June 2024 and his reply of 20th August 2024) and my letters to Stoke Branch Labour Party and Cllrs Cresswell, Laing and Briars-Delve (13th November 2022) and Cllr Penberthy (21st March 2023). Councillors and offices should regard members of the public – including those holding different views – as part of a community that can co-operate in making the city better. There needs to be respect for environment campaigners as well as for local business leaders. Diversity is not only about ‘protected characteristics’ but also involves differences of opinion, values and feelings about what matters. Plymouth’s politics has been quite tribal, and perhaps not well suited to a more participative style. But without genuine change in the political culture and that of the council it is difficult to see how real progress will be made in the future.</p>
A	<p>No.</p> <p>The council ONLY consults in the manner the council WANTS to consult - so tokenistically - it's incapable of anything else.</p> <p>And how destructive this has been continues to be demonstrated by the victim-blaming/victimising culture that the council continue to harness to evoke ill-deserved sympathy for some that a good deal of people in the UK, unlike the council, recognise as an appalling, an form of an abuse of power.</p> <p>Comments emanating from the leader of the council only confirming this.</p>
B	<p>Sack those responsible for prioritising the victim-blaming/victimising toxicity that the council is so fond of weaponising as they continue to be a blight on the city, and continue to poison the city as they put their pursuit of pathetic not-recognised-outside-of-Plymouth pursuit of power before doing what they should be - providing fair and equitably delivered services to ALL Plymothians, not just themselves and their rotten cronies.</p>

C	<p>They didn't.</p> <p>They were tokenistic, so deceitful in their engagement. It was obvious that they were pursuing an ulterior motive - tick-boxing so they could create something in their pathetic image.</p> <p>All they have achieved is notoriety and shame - neither of which they will ever acknowledge - unless they are able to play-the-victim so evoke undeserved sympathy for their toxic selves.</p>
D	<p>Terribly - see above.</p> <p>As the council ALWAYS does, because it is so toxic, it will learn NOTHING as it chooses not to - unless it and its cronies capitalises somehow.</p> <p>It's why Plymouth is seen, increasingly, as the sh*thole-of-the-South-West and one that is only interested in serving itself and its rotten cronies, NEVER those it should be serving - ALL Plymothians' interests.</p>
A	<p>Little publicity, little clarity and no sense of the consultation having heeded public opinion. It felt as though they were just going through the motions and had already made their decision.</p> <p>Rushed into action within hours of the consultation closing.</p>
B	<p>Openness and wide publicity.</p> <p>Organise more meetings.</p> <p>Open process to widespread bidding and discussions.</p>
C	<p>It was appalling.</p> <p>All Plymouth needs to be involved.</p> <p>We are all stakeholders.</p>
D	<p>Openness.</p> <p>Honesty.</p> <p>Democracy.</p>
A	No.
B	Make knowledge that there would be a consultation more public.
C	Not well.
D	
A	Consultations were invisible, biased, and impossible for someone that works to take part.
B	Better communication, and just send people a presentation of the project and feedback form at home. That is the easiest way for Plymouth city council to ensure they care about their taxpayers input.
C	<p>Again, there was no good communication on consultations, very little slots for taking part in person. I had to review online.</p> <p>I heard that the people present did not know enough about the project to answer questions.</p>
D	Be more imaginative in the project as it could have creatively worked around keeping existing trees!
A	The consultation was not adequate and most of Plymouth was not aware of it. I was shocked by the lack of attention to the feedback.to the proposed designs.
B	By paying attention to feedback instead of ignoring and alienating any comment.

C	Not well at all in engagement. I heard a labour councillor say, in private, that they were told to ignore emails and forward them to the person in charge [to disregard]. Perhaps in future, to listen with proper intent and be open to consider genuine views and concerns.
D	It could have vastly improved by actually considering what their voters were saying. The embarrassment of being a council paraded through the country for their bullying and uncompromising attitudes! Listen properly. think and consider and care. This exact same behaviour by the council has been exhibited before in the engagements with the incinerator and closing the local libraries. Listening with pretence and no intention of change, and in doing so not representing their public.
A	It's hard to remember exactly now, but as I recall it the public was consulted. The majority said no but the Council ignored that and went ahead with cutting the trees down anyway. And it was done sneakily during the night. Disgraceful. It made Plymouth a complete laughing stock.
B	Online forms. PAPER forms in libraries and other public places. Send letters or emails to everyone on the voting register. Contact all local businesses. Potentially EVERYONE in this city is affected by what is planned for it so try a little harder to contact us all - and then LISTEN to the responses. Not everyone will be happy with the result but you have to prove to us that our views and needs are important.
C	On the face of it people, groups, businesses were consulted but what the Council had planned was always going to happen anyway. It was someone's pet project, I believe. The site could have been successfully updated without so much unnecessary destruction. And it would have cost less, I believe.
D	They should have come up with a plan that INCORPORATED the existing, mature, beautiful trees not cut then down for a vanity scheme. Recycle. Reuse. Reduce - etc. this is not a rich city. Best that in mind
A	I don't think there was enough consultation with the public over the proposals.
B	I think the Council needs to find a better way to interact with the people of Plymouth so that we have more of a say in what is going on.
C	I don't think the Council allowed the public enough time to react to what was proposed.
D	I think the Council should have been more open about what it was proposing for Plymouth city centre and tried to include the existing trees in the new design. Trees take a long time to reach maturity and they are important for bird life. I hope the new trees which are being planted will be left to mature.
A	The consultation produced a result of approximately 2:1 against the tree felling. The result was ignored by the Council. The Council spent public money on the organisation (in advance of the consultation result) of the tree felling knowing that they would still cut down the trees. They also spent money on the organisation of the Public Consultation. Therefore this money was illegally spent since the Council cut down the trees on the same day that the consultation result was announced. Despite the result at the High Court it is clear that the Council broke the law by misappropriation of public funds.
B	They should listen to the public that they represent. They should advertise public consultations in a better way (not just by fixing notices to lamp posts). In the Armada Way case almost all the Conservative councilors were voted out at the next opportunity (as expected). The Council leader resigned.
C	These stakeholders were ignored. A petition was organised and a verbal presentation was made to the whole Council. This was ignored.

D	They should not have cut down the trees. These trees provided weather protection in an otherwise open urban landscape. They provided nesting locations for birds (eg Tree Sparrows), contributed to the 'green' City and gave Armada Way a feel of character. Plymouth City Centre desperately needs protection from the rain and wind. We get twice the annual rainfall of London. When will the City Councillors understand this?
A	I lived in Plymouth for the last two dates only, but do not recall any consultation received.
B	Online forms on social media platforms. Advertising at the site, on bus stops in shops and post offices. Publicity on local tv and radio.
C	I didn't know anything about it.
D	Don't blunder ahead without first ensuring the public understand and are behind you.
A	<p>No. According to FOI request FS-Case-480351647, only March 2018 was classed as a 'consultation' while September 2022 and February 2023 were classed as 'information events'. The difference in wording is crucial (see Note below). Plymouth Civic Society (PCS) is a properly constituted community group along with other similar groups who promote civic pride in the City. PCS participated in the March 2018 consultation and attended the 2022/2023 information events. In 2018, Armada Way formed part of the wider Better Places consultation from North Cross to the Hoe. PCS provided detailed feedback on the plans which we regarded as generally favourable except for Armada Way, where we objected to the proposed removal of trees. There was no acknowledgement of PCS feedback from the Council and later plans for Armada Way showed our feedback had been ignored. PCS attended the Armada Way information events of September 2022 and February 2023 and participated in the Armada Way survey of November 2023. PCS notes that the Council uses the blanket term 'consultation' to cover public 'information events', 'commenting on' and 'surveys' as all one and the same. In addition, the Council classes Armada Way as a permitted development thus avoiding the need for a planning application and a Statement of Community Involvement (SCI). The Council therefore presents the illogical situation of having consultations without the need to follow SCI consultation guidelines. For the purpose of providing the ILR team with feedback, PCS will allow the fiction that the 2018 consultation and the 2022/23 information events may all be classed as 'consultations' as the Council so wishes. However, PCS maintains that these consultations should all follow SCI guidelines. The ILR team can judge how well the Council manages this. Note: The accepted meaning of a 'consultation' allows plans to be examined early on in the project development stage by involved organisations as well as statutory consultees allowing for the incorporation of feedback into the development process prior to plans being matured. The consultation process should follow guidelines such as those laid down in the Council's Statement of Community Involvement (SCI) for planning applications. An 'information event' means major decisions have already been taken with plans in place close to finalisation but allowing for minor modifications. The Council characterises an 'information event' by using display boards in a public venue with Council officers on hand to answer questions and with survey forms available for the public to give feedback. It forms a subset of an SCI.</p>

B	<p>The Council can improve the way it consults by implementing its own SCI consultation guidelines for major projects whether permitted developments or not. The SCI sets out the minimum requirements for consultation and involvement that must be followed when preparing planning documents or consulting on planning applications.</p> <p>The SCI draws heavily on publications such as (1) Government Consultation Principles 2018, (2) The Seven Consultation Criteria of the Government Code of Practice on Consultation and (3) The Royal Town Planning Institute (RTPI) Consultation Charter which provides for seven principles.</p> <p>Adherence to these principles can act as an indicator of best practice.</p> <p>I summarise the main recommendations from the above which is somewhat easier to understand than the Council's own SCI.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Formal consultation should take place at a stage when there is scope to influence the policy outcome. • Ensuring the consultation has an honest intent - a formal consultation should not be undertaken if the decision has already been taken. • Ensuring the consultation is properly scoped to provide clear indication of those matters where the Council has discretion and is open to be influenced by the submissions and contributions made by those who respond. • The Council should emphasize their commitment to integrity in its Statements of Community Involvement (SCIs). • Avoiding spurious consultation exercises where there is no scope to act upon consultee responses. • Developing strong relationships with stakeholder organisations. • Demonstrating how public and stakeholder views have been taken into account in previous engagement exercises. • Using pre-consultation dialogues to discuss fully with potential consultees how forthcoming involvement can be best used. • Ensuring that consultation is an on-going process and not a one-off. <p>I leave it to the ILR team to prioritise its recommendations.</p>
C	<p>PCS understands that the Council engaged directly with businesses through its representation by the Plymouth City Centre Company (PCCC) at its monthly meetings. PCCC was kept informed from a business perspective at all stages of project development.</p> <p>However, no minutes were made public of these meetings so the public / community groups were unaware if questions were asked on the design philosophy in the current climate of environmental concerns or was this simply a carryover from the March 2018 consultation. The expectation from past experience is that the concerns of the public / community groups previously expressed were ignored.</p> <p>Only Statutory Consultees were approached. Properly constituted community groups such as Plymouth Civic Society, Hoe Neighbourhood Forum, Plymouth Tree People, Plymouth Architectural Trust, 20th Century Society and Environment Plymouth are key stakeholders and were not invited to the table despite representations for early engagement.</p> <p>The Council has rejected Plymouth Civic Society's suggestion of a Civic Forum for major public realm projects to represent the interests of community stakeholder groups.</p> <p>Failing the above, stakeholder engagement could be improved in the future through a proper and active implementation of the Council's Statement of Community</p>

	Involvement (SCI) including a relaxation of its ban on stakeholder consultation through an SCI for permitted developments.
D	<p>More honesty, integrity and transparency would have been welcome. Local councillors should to have more independent knowledge of their brief and therefore better represent the interests of their constituents not just those of the Council officers.</p> <p>For the future, the Council should try working with stakeholder groups, not against them; making use of their expertise, knowledge and insights and giving them credit as contributors, not denigrators.</p> <p>Welcome early engagement for meaningful consultations. Take note and act on their observations. If the Council had done so, the Armada Way fiasco would never have happened.</p>
A	No I was not aware of the consultations - I do not recall receiving emails or a flyer about them. I was therefore unaware of the results of the consultation.
B	It should use better methods for communicating with people i.e. as stated above emails or flyers. I did not see the consultations reported/signposted in any local media. There were no posters in shop windows. It seems like these consultations were deliberately extremely low key to avoid receiving opinions they did not want to hear or accommodate.
C	Appalling - the reasons for the culling of the trees were not logical i.e. to cleanse the neighborhood of undesirables/homeless. This was ridiculous and a completely ineffective way of tackling the problem which is substance abuse, trauma and homelessness. Addressing these rather than felling trees would have greater effect.
D	They should learn about what meaningful consultation is and seek proactively to ensure that greater numbers are engaged. I cannot help thinking that the secrecy and lack of publicity was aimed to ensure that this deeply unpopular policy could be delivered secretly and without consent of the public. Felling the trees at midnight seemed to support this.
A	<p>I participated in the 2018 consultation, in which the information provided to us did not state that any trees would be destroyed (let alone the massed felling that was actually planned and executed) This fundamental omission, in my view, invalidates the consultation. PCC only released this significant information at the 2022 event in Drakes Circus, at which there was no opportunity to submit our concerns other than verbally. I spoke to hundreds of Armada Way shoppers following this event, almost none of them knew that the trees were going to be felled- the reach of this public information event, was inadequate, not accessible to all, was not looking to collect feedback on which to amend plans. The plan was already decided, PCC was forced to appear to be listening to horrified members of the public following the STRAW campaign. This campaign successfully raised awareness of the design which threatened most of the 150 trees- with 16,000 petition signatures against it. It was at this point that PCC's Meaningful Public Engagement event was set up. I attended it and witnessed outright lying from the lead Designer Lee Ferris about the proposals and misrepresentation of the Tree Survey Data. He got angry with me when challenged. I have witnesses. Even with these attempts to continue to mislead the public, the outcome of this consultation showed the overwhelming majority of people rejected the proposals. This was acknowledged by PCC just before the trees were felled. This feedback obtained had no impact whatsoever on PCC's decision to crack on with their plan. It was a meaningless exercise and another deception.</p>

	Following public outrage, PCC provided an amended plan reducing the number of trees to be destroyed by about 6. They called it a new plan, which was not put to any consultation at all, even an invalid or disregarded consultation. 110 trees were ripped down in March 2023, just a few hours after the results of the February Consultation were announced which said people didn't want the trees destroyed. It's outrageous.
B	The Council must be honest and transparent about what they want to do, from the outset. There needs to be an overseeing body to ensure this happens. I know that the public was misled, deliberately- contentious plans were not made clear in consultations, making them worthless. PCC's officers repeatedly misrepresented Tree Survey results in order to justify their plans to destroy the Trees of Armada Way. They not only failed to inform, but have been dishonest with data, claiming they had legitimate reasons to take down massive numbers of healthy, valuable trees. Trust can only be restored by holding those responsible to account. Contempt of Court proceedings brought against PCC only failed because they withheld CCTV evidence.
C	PCC did not engage with any integrity at all. Plymouth City Centre Company ensured that local traders and members of BID were as misinformed and misled as the public were. Local environmental groups, scientists, cycling groups, disability groups etc made their objections clear but they were ignored. The public made their objections crystal clear, but were ignored. What more can I say. I wish I had faith in this exercise, but I honestly don't. Plymouth people have been betrayed and our Council is a national disgrace.
D	Honesty from the start. A Willingness to actually listen and humility to acknowledge mistakes, apologise and learn. The Sheffield Tree disaster and subsequent Council public apology came in good time for PCC to heed the likelihood that without changing tack, they would be in the same mess. Senior officials should lose their jobs- it's not about Labour or Conservative- those at the top should be held to account. Plymouth is stuck with this toxic legacy if nothing radically different doesn't come out of this tragedy.
A	I personally wrote to the Council on several occasions regarding the restoration of the water course that ran at the top of Armada Way, and also expressed my objection to another proposal to fill in all the watercourse with 'wild flowers'. At no stage did anyone alert me to the 2018 consultation. The 2018 consultation did not reach my ears despite me being involved in several environmental organisations. The feeling the public got was that we were wrong for expecting to have a proper say and that the whole scheme was being rushed through. Which raised the question of Why?
B	Of course. There is no excuse for not allowing any major scheme to run through a proper public consultation period. And that should run for months not crammed into one week. There is no reason why such information is not made available no many of the media outlets, not just on the Planning website.

C	<p>Combative! Members of the public took the Council to task and instead of reviewing the whole situation and interacting with groups it felt like the hand in the face and a race by the Council to push the scheme through and cut the trees down before they could be stopped. I cant remember the statistic I worked out regarding the size of the objection based on the petition. I requested the figure from thhe Electoral Office of how many people in the city were entitled to vote. I was given several answers from : you cannot have that information; we dont know; eventually, that I had to obtain a Freedom of Information Request. What absolute nonsense. We know the approx population of the city and the Council know how many people are of voting age and how many are registered. Someone [in the Coucil?] said that the petition was not representative. Actually, based on the figure I finally got and that at any local election where I have been a Poll Clerk, the voting turn out has been about 25%, which made the number on the petition on a par I believe, with a local election. [sorry, I cant find the detail just now]</p>
D	<p>Remember that the Council is voted in by the electorate and only for a limited period and they are there to represent the people not alienate them. All this could have been avoided but the council kept saying that there was a £12m grant which would expire by a certain date. So re-negotiate it. [The public are still reeling that the £12m tag has risen to £36m] . The new scheme is unimaginative and seems not to be aware of climate change sporting open spaces with no tree cover [as there was in the original design] and seems to feature several children play areas... what use these will get is to be seen as parents do not let their children go to parks alone anymore]. As well as not interacting with the public and particularly the action group, the resulting publicity has put Plymouth on the map for the wrong reasons. I was on holiday in Croata and the guide had heard about the fiasco. The Council could not do worse than read through the dossier of letters and posting that STRAW has made to see why the public trust needs to be rebuilt by the Council.</p>
A	<p>I knew there was a consultation, not three, but like most people don't normally engage as I feel there is little point.</p>
B	<p>Engage more effectively a, for examples: Home games at Albion and Argyle Other major events that occur in Plymouth Better leafleting of Plymouth residents Regular information in The Herald, on Plymouth Live etc. Some of the above will have a cost element, but nothing compared to the costs that have arisen from not doing so. Engage with the sports clubs for free space - of the city for the city A stall in the city centre Free use of an empty shop premises Plus many more</p>
C	<p>Poorly Specifically the felling of the trees, and especially the lack of information surrounding the reasoning why and benefits of doing so</p>

D	<p>Better Dissemination of Information - don't allow the 'No you can't do anything we don't agree with' brigade determine the Council's narrative, take ownership of it and communicate the reasoning better - local TV and other media;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Inform -Communicate -Explain -Reason -Debate <p>Cutting down of a tree in of itself is not an environmental disaster, there are other factors to be taken into consideration</p> <p>Many of these trees were poorly planted originally, and therefore not likely to be viable to safely grow to full maturity - this information was not effectively communicated to the general public.</p> <p>Trying to fell the trees under the cover of darkness was both seen and portrayed as a complete admission of guilt and wrongdoing. Very poor PR.</p> <p>Learn from others mistakes! The Council learnt nothing from the Sheffield debacle of 2014 - 2018, albeit on a different scale.</p>
A	I don't think the council took any feedback from the consultations which took place.
B	Really analyse the information provided by the public, and not just go ahead with an idea, regardless of the opinions presented in the consultation.
C	<p>I do not think the council regarded any outside opinions otherwise there would not have been such an outcry about the felling of trees.</p> <p>The council MUST take into account public feeling rather than just go ahead and implement an idea that has been signed off by council members who do not even live in Plymouth or who have not been living in Plymouth for a long time. These individuals have no idea what that public are asking for. So these council members must seek the knowledge on the ground and give up their egotistical plans, by LISTENING to local concerns and implementing the ideas of Plymouth residents. If this does not happen then it is another form of imperialism.</p>
D	<p>I think cutting trees down under cover of darkness, with total disregard for public views shows that the cabinet members have not a concern for the community that they deem to represent.</p> <p>So with this in mind, council members should not be able to go ahead with a plan if there is public outcry. The council should have taken on board professional expert advice, not necessarily with an invested interest in supporting the cabinet decision. By welcoming challenge and adopting expert arborist advice that is external to the council but has a deep connection to community the council could have incorporated a plan that didn't end up on national media as a negative way of city regeneration.</p> <p>The council needs to learn that expert advice doesn't only come from contracted individuals but that the city has a wealth of experts that reside here. That the advice of these residents can be extremely beneficial as they have local knowledge.</p> <p>Local knowledge is undoubtedly the best information that MUST be incorporated into any future plans.</p>
A	No. I had no knowledge of the proposed development of opportunity to engage or provide feedback
B	Contact residents to inform on schemes, using existing contact opportunities, council tax billing or engage more widely.
C	Engagement not targeted effectively. It was apparent in the aftermath that many residents were unaware of the proposal.

D	It was clearly undertaken without adequate engagement resulting in backlash against an unpopular scheme. In future, council should recognise residents and taxpayers as stakeholders in the town centre and offer opportunities for genuine feedback into design and proposals at an earlier stage and control costings. Assets are being sold off to fund scheme and this should have been communicated originally. Engagement with a range of stakeholders and viewpoints to ensure designs meet the needs of different groups. As a mother, for example, I don't want water features or playground elements that are going to distract my child and endlessly delay shopping trips. I do value other ecosystem services provided by the previous setting such as the shade provided by the old trees by the library, the aesthetics of trees, daffodils etc and the sense of a little wilderness. I see no evidence that views such as these have been incorporated into the planning. Without capturing resident viewpoints in a structured and formal way across groups the design is inadequate, performs poorly for key groups and cost benefit analyses miss key indicators. The council then appear reckless and high handed.
A	Yes. There was plenty of opportunity to make your views known.
B	Social media is the way forward
C	This is basically a rehash of questions 6 & 7. There was plenty of opportunity to make your views known. Social media is the way forward.
D	No, it was well handled from the outset and this review is a knee jerk reaction to that certain group who caused all the trouble and put the city back years!
A	Probably appropriate as they need to work within the law.
B	Appreciate plans communicated via appropriate leases from the council, identified in the press & consultations held & displayed in public libraries.
C	It had been on the cards for a while & the area is in need of regeneration. If the council had done the above they had probably discharged their duty of care in informing the community they serve.
D	If the trees were in the original proposal to be removed as many have broken the paving slabs around the roots & were a trip hazard etc plus they did not fit the plans, then they had done their duty, if not then questions need to be asked. I am no tree expert but they looked like they had reached their maturity & unfortunately were a hazard around the base due to tripping over the protruding roots & falling branches. In the plans trees are to be planted to replace them & I believe these trees will be suitable for an urban environment. The cost has increased significantly because of the tree removal issue and the City Centre has looked appalling for 2/3 years & this is to continue with the delay to this scheme. Immature trees have been removed at Woolwell for road improvements, but I haven't seen people protesting about this issue?
A	No I don't think it widely enough publicised. I watch the local new, and don't think the proposal was discussed enough.
B	Perhaps discussing the subject with as wide an audience as possible. Perhaps getting out on the streets would help.
C	Not well at all, and the sneaky way they felled the trees was shameful. Full disclosure of plans to be discussed with as wide an audience as possible.
D	Well let's be honest, it was shamefully deceitful, the way it was carried out. And in future it would be good to see our council, approaching it's residents and businesses, to discuss plans with complete clarity.

A	The first consultation was not advertised sufficiently, was not fully honest, was on a weekday afternoon so not accessible to most even if they were aware of it. The other two were not listened to and concerns raised about the tree felling was dismissed by PCC. Was also worded in a leading way and not entirely transparent about the tree felling.
B	Listen to the responses and do not commit ecocide.
C	Not well..especially the straw campaign who brought what was happening to people's attention but PCC dismissed as outsiders.
D	Listen to popular opinion and campaign groups who did not want the trees to go.
A	I do not feel that any of these consultations were adequate enough and that they have wasted more time than they should have.
B	Listen to the people of Plymouth, not council members who are unable to think beyond themselves.
C	Be open and honest about what the Council are planning. Email, petition, Plymouth Live, leaflets, anything to allow Plymothians to understand and have a proper say in what is happening in our city.
D	Be open and honest and do not prevaricate!
A	I did not hear anything about any consultations. I'm not aware that any were published.
B	
C	
D	Too many trees were cut down at the same time
A	<p>The council did not carry out 3 consultations. The 2018 event was an information event, very badly publicised. It apparently was discussing New George Street and very briefly mentioned Armada way. I believe there were only 178 responses.</p> <p>The 2022 event was also not a consultation, they called it a Meaningful Public Engagement event. I never felt clear on the results, because I knew that what PCC were telling the public was not an honest description of what we were going to get, historically, it rarely is. It felt like a massive waste of time and money to be honest the way it was done, as when campaigning on Armada Way we were constantly told by members of the public 'Its PCC, they always just do what they want'. It appeared PCC had already made up their mind and were completely uninterested in Public opinion. They just needed to appear to listen, then carry on regardless, they made very superficial changes to the design and saved no more trees. They were not even willing to sacrifice a ping pong table to save some trees.</p> <p>2022 MPE was all just loaded questions, if you didn't like their suggestion it was interpreted as you did not support development of city centre, if you answered yes in support to questions, it was taken as agreement to fell trees. After the Meaningful Public Engagement event, the public were informed it was going to cost 3 times more. The only meaningful element of that event, was how to fool the public it seems. Every time there was a valid response to their reasoning for felling, they created a different explanation as to why the trees had to come down. So how can the public trust any reasons the council now give for controversial decisions?</p>

B	<p>Be honest. Act respectfully and professionally. Be realistic. But mostly, just LISTEN more rather than acting defensively continuously.</p> <p>Involve the public fully and honestly at the start of the process.</p> <p>Don't mislead the public to make your job easier, for example don't present artists impressions of what you think will convince the public on your plan, create honest, realistic artist impressions of how it will look, as for people without the time or energy to investigate further, these first impressions may be all they go on. It is the councils responsibility to ensure that the designers are being honest and realistic with how the designs look.</p> <p>Engage positively with the public, rather than treating the public with different views, as opposition, terrorists, conspiracy theorists, the enemy getting in your way etc.</p> <p>Cross party working together, Independent Panels, public assemblies.</p> <p>consider and be upfront and realistic about cost and future maintenance costs of any plans. Make these clear to the public.</p>
C	<p>At the 2022 MPE event, I asked Chief Executive of City Centre Company Steven Hughes how these trees were helping CCTV coverage (he told me the trees needed to come down as there had many lots of sexual assaults on Armada Way) as they looked the same size as trees we already had, he admitted to me the artists impressions were not correct, the trees would not be that big. So PCC were clearly comfortable with people such as this representing the plan and being present at the event, being dishonest to the public about what the plan actually was, in comparison to what they were presenting.</p> <p>PCC only appeared to engage with groups or businesses in agreement with the plan. Which I assume were not very many, as they often quoted and focused on just a couple of businesses and appeared to have no real support from the majority, which of course, they ignored.</p> <p>Start the consultation at beginning of process not the end. Do consultations before you have decided what you are doing. Utilising qualified, independent experts.</p> <p>Reviewing and broadening consultees and stakeholders. Insure 3rd sector involved in consultations.</p> <p>Properly publicise ACCESSIBLE consultations for genuine engagement. (Review the process)</p> <p>Educate the public on how to engage on consultations. Straw heard lots of complaints from elderly or disabled public who could not access the Meaningful Public engagement event or use the online survey. It was certainly not accessible.</p>

D	<p>It felt like PCC and Plymouth City Centre company almost encouraged trolling on social media against STRAW campaigners. They also pretended to be campaign supporters, to infiltrate our Whatsapp chat, cheered on by council officers. I think this is absolutely deplorable behaviour from people in respected positions or any position. They acted with no shame towards members of the public. They (including the council leader Tudor Evans) were insulting towards campaigners in public meetings. They used the tree campaign for political point scoring rather than actually engaging with the public's views, including radio interviews lying that Labour would not cut down any more trees if they won the election. How can our council leader just be allowed to blatantly just make stuff up to shut people up? Their response to our petitioning and representing the public's views was changing rules on what petitions they will accept. What a shocking lack of democracy this Labour council displayed in response to the public's disapproval of their actions.</p> <p>Other lessons they need to learn, they are not GOD, they need to remember they work for us and are supposed to be representing the public's views, not their own. They should not be acting against us. The arrogance of PCC is unbelievable. Failing to provide evidence requested by a High court Judge and changing witness statements 7 or 8 times, every time their statement was scrutinised, does not give the public great confidence in the honesty of our council. Tudor's smug, misguided public statement following the rejection of the Contempt of court hearing was just another fine example of how PCC will miss out very important facts to create propaganda to attempt to fob off the public and try and appear unaccountable and justifies in their actions. They may feel this benefitted them in the short term, but this whole episode has resulted in a massive loss of public trust in our council, whatever the party. They need to wind their necks in a bit and start acting with a little humility and a lot more honesty, or they will never regain the trust needed to get the support from the public and get this city on its feet properly.</p>
A	<p>I wasn't aware of the consultations until people from STRAW started leafleting on armada way. I then submitted an email to the council about the quality of the arb report, which didn't seem up to a professional standard, or in line with the British standard guidance. I am an arboriculturist and have carried out these surveys myself. In addition as a landscape architect I am aware of the options to retain and work with mature trees in a design. Something that didn't even seem to have been considered. I did receive a response to my email, but it was along the lines of, 'we know best and we have already made a decision '.</p>
B	<p>Consultation needs to start earlier, rather than presenting a completed design and asking people to comment on it. It also needs to be more visible, in more locations, which the consultation over the latest design seems to have been.</p>
C	<p>The Council seemed unwilling to discuss with anyone. They sometimes acknowledged concerns that were raised, but took no action to address them. They became increasingly defensive. It would have made a big difference if relevant decision makers and the designers had offered to sit around a table with people to discuss the issues, and been willing to think about alternatives.</p>
D	<p>They should act more like citizens, not some superior management class.</p>

A	<p>They did not carry out three consultations. The 2018 event was an information event, very badly publicised. When people I know managed to get the people on the stand to admit that it covered Armada Way as well as New George Street, and when they tried to find out if the trees there and were going to be safe, they couldn't get a straight answer - and whey they tried to respond in such a way to object to any possible danger to the trees they were told it wasn't a consultation but an information event. Shocking bad behaviour, the people involved should be ashamed. The people in charge of the scheme should be ashamedThe 2022 'consulation' was also very poor and in my view was an exercise in expectation management, stretching of the truth and some blatant lying - it was very hard to get a word in edgeways with the constant hard sell of 'There Is No Alternative'. This charade of a 'consulation' was even worse than the 2018 exercise and took place in the misnamed 'The Information Centre' (in reality there was very little truth or light there)The 2023 'consulation' plumbed new depths - how can PCC make such a bad fist of doing consultations? Its almost as if they don't care about the public and treat the process as one of educating or training the public - that's it, they wanted to 'train us' so that we would accept their designs - again, shameful. These exercises should become textbook examples of poor practice and should never be repeated</p>
B	<p>First of all please see my answer to the previous question. First of all they should embed consultation into the planning process instead of designing the project first and then trying to 'sell' it to us (and refusing to make any meaningful alterations in the face of people's responses).</p> <p>Secondly the people involved and actually the whole organisation should take a good long hard look in the mirror. What PCC has become is a toxic local authority organisation and the people of Plymouth don't want them anymore. We want to have a benign, fair and professionally run local council instead of the twisted thing we have at the moment that appears to hold the people of Plymouth in contempt. Wake up and make amends!</p> <p>Thirdly, PCC should get some outside help in the form of truly impartial outside people to conduct a wide-ranging review of the culture inside the institution that led to such a shocking situation - this review should be held in public and should publish a publicly available report within 12 months of it's founding</p>
C	<p>I believe in the lead up to that decision that the council did all it could to obfuscate it's intentions, and this includes the Meaningful Public Engagement which was an exercise in persuasion, and pretend listening - it used half-truths and some outright lies. It also used sneaky design of the form that made it confusing and actually difficult to answer in any way that did not end up endorsing their argument to cut the trees. And finally it used underhand tricks to disqualify large numbers of responses, for example by ruling out any questions that answered in a way they didn't like if the answer didn't contain any comments</p> <p>Shameful, bad practice, bad faith - how can the people involved hold their heads up high never mind looking the mirror?</p> <p>I'll end with this - the people of Plymouth are stakeholders in what happens in Plymouth, we are not the creatures of PCC to be deceived, tricked and ignored</p>

D	<p>Yes the scheme could obviously have been much improved, if instead of trying to ram a project generated to raise grant income down the throats of local people in the teeth of huge opposition - if instead of this they had engaged with local stakeholders in a positive manner to jointly create an improved plan that would have had buy-in from the public and local groups such as Plymouth Tree People, never mind national organisations, never mind the national press and and national media who broke the story to a disapproving and enraged national public opinion</p> <p>Please also see my answer to question 8.</p> <p>In the end it needs PCC to face up to what it has done so that it can start to put things right. A bit like the MET, first of all admit fault (institutional Racism exists) and then work from there.</p> <p>The first step in this journey is to TELL THE TRUTH and own up to previous lies and half lies. Then it should apologise. We'll take it from there</p>
A	I was unaware of any 'consultations' having taken place.
B	The Council needs to 'listen' to and respect the views of people, even if those views are contrary to their own plans regarding development. Furthermore, it is unacceptable for a Council to plough ahead with an action regardless, in the knowledge that an injunction halting that action is in the pipeline.
C	To my knowledge, the Council's engagement was either insufficient or incomplete regarding the facts and their implications.
D	<p>The overriding issue is that any proposed new development needs to have the full backing of 'stakeholders' and that in order for that to occur, they need to understand the full implications (i.e. what would be 'lost' as well as 'gained'), which essentially means good communications. It also means that no council should ride roughshod over the views of local people; in this instance, once the trees were lost, they were lost forever. No commitment, clearly as a 'sop', to plant new 'replacement' trees can mitigate the destruction of healthy mature ones. Overall, a council should never be in the business of implementing a plan and ignoring the wishes of others to suit its own narrative.</p>

A	<p>I am a Plymouth resident and Dr who has undertaken, taught and published on community engagement. I believe some basic principles of meaningful consultation were not followed which I detail below</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Start each consultation early before time and money has been spent on developing plans {1}. Let local people participate in the development of options and proposals, rather than simply commenting on Council generated ideas. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The 2018 information event could not be called a “consultation” as the Armada Way plan and tree felling were hardly, or not at all mentioned. By the time of the “meaningful public engagement” in 2022, plans for Armada Way were already in place and no alternative options were offered 2. PCC must want to hear what people think and be prepared to make changes in response. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The "consultation" process has felt like a tick box exercise, rather than an attempt to understand and incorporate public opinion. Criticism of existing plans, particularly related to tree felling, seemed to be discounted or belittled. 3. PCC should only ask about specific things they are able and willing to change <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If the Council were not prepared to change e.g. water tank design, felling of the majority of trees, this should have been made clear, with explanations why, in all communications, to avoid raising expectations. Better. of course, would have been a good quality consultation before the design was in place, exploring the public’s ideas and responses to a much wider range of options. 4. Provide high quality, evidence-based information to facilitate high quality feedback <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Information provided was often misleading, not evidence-based or disputed e.g. figures for lifespan, health and type of existing trees, girth/height of planned new trees, statements that trees increase crime [2], that mature trees would survive relocation and that the 2018 consultation was “large scale” [3]. Artists’ impressions were also misleading. 5. Questionnaires should be designed so people can express their views clearly <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The “meaningful consultation” survey was rightly criticised for using leading questions which could then be used to promote PCC's plans e.g. people were asked about the “plan for retaining 24 existing trees and providing 150 new trees?” but not given the option "retain many more trees". 6. Respect feedback and share it honestly <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I do not feel this happened. For example the 10,000 response petition (very large by Plymouth standards), was dismissed by the Deputy Leader of PCC saying that as only 2% signed the petition, 98% of Plymothians either supported the scheme, did not object or "had no avenue to express themselves". He gave no evidence to support this, with the latter suggestion raising questions about PCC's inclusion processes. The survey showed an overwhelming majority of Plymouth respondents opposed the scheme, yet I understand the council removed these responses people if people did not give a reason why (not a required field).
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B	<p>So many ways (see list of principles above). In addition, information e.g. about the whole process e.g. how local people's views would be used, or the meaning of "a short pause" were not, and should always be, transparent.</p> <p>My experience was that you only had to talk to people using Armada Way (and in my case, my patients) to appreciate the overwhelming strength of feeling against the tree felling. Had the Council done this I am sure they would have heard the same.</p> <p>In the future, when PCC should consult on changes, particularly those as big as Armada Way, they should consult early and promote 2-way dialogue. They should provide transparent well-researched information. If there are conflicting facts (e.g. in this case, the health and likely lifespan of the existing trees) they should acknowledge this.</p> <p>I suggest PCC follow other councils in being guided by Arnstein's Ladder of Citizen Participation, (promoted by e.g. GoVocal and used by some councils [4,5] or Wilcox's adaptation of this [6]. PCC could include this in their consultation policy and train their teams and councillors in its underlying principles and application. This could then guide their approach to future consultations, by deciding and communicating the level at which they plan to consult</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If used to evaluate the Armada Way consultation I think it would be clear that PCC only began to reach the very bottom rungs: (Level 1: "provides transparent, relevant and up to date information" and Level 2: "asks community for non-binding feedback about specific decisions and policies, while maintaining decision making powers") and even at these levels there were major omissions (detailed above). I believe there was no evidence they had achieved level 3: ("actively involving the community") or level 4 ("collaborating with local people as equals"), which is not surprising as these levels require level 1 and 2 to have been reached. • Most importantly PCC need to trust, value and respect people's feedback, even if it is not what they want to hear. They need to recognise that most individuals and groups who respond do so, not to be difficult, but because they really care about their city. They often bring valuable ideas and energy and are usually willing to compromise if the Council are too. Respondents need to feel valued, heard and involved in dialogue. PCC should seek to understand and incorporate their views where possible, or give clear explanations as to why some suggestions are not possible. They should not belittle and undermine them. They should be sensitive to power differences (e.g. views of large organisations v. local people)
C	<p>As a local GP and want to particularly question how health was represented in the Armada Way consultation and decisions. Plymouth City holds responsibility for Public Health and states that it "puts health and wellbeing at the heart of everything we do", helping "people in Plymouth to live healthier and happier lives." I work in Stonehouse, the most deprived part of Plymouth, with limited green spaces. For many of my patients, who often have limited mobility or difficulty travelling, Armada Way is their garden. There is considerable evidence for green spaces improving health e.g. for people with mental ill-health, diabetes, heart disease and women who are pregnant. In addition trees reduce heat and air pollution which kills tens of thousands in UK every year. I am unclear how health-related evidence and the views of public health, local health organisations and the health-related views of local people were taken into account. I did not hear public health mentioned in any of PCC's statements. I would like to see this happen in future consultations.</p>

D	<p>As explained above, there is lots to improve. I would like to them really think through and then apply their principles of effective consultation</p> <p>PCC's current Statement of Community Involvement emphasises inclusion which is, of course, very important. But this is not enough. They also need to focus on the purpose and process of future consultations. Increasing inclusion in a bad process just causes more dissatisfaction and frustration, likely affecting vulnerable groups. Failure to consult well can take up time for local people and raise expectations. If feedback is ignored (or worse, resented or manipulated) this can be disempowering and frustrating for people who thought they would be heard - and can impact their future participation in democratic processes [1].</p> <p>PCC have a lot of work to do to regain people's trust. An apology would be a great start.</p> <p>They need to recognise that there are so many benefits to effective public consultation:</p> <p>"High quality public engagement benefits all those involved. These benefits might include developing new skills, gaining new insights or ideas, developing better research, improving how things are done in the world, building stronger networks between people, raising aspiration, and inspiring learning". [8]</p> <p>References to all sections</p> <p>[1] Public engagement in policy-making https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201213/cmselect/cmpubadm/writev/publicpolicy/m07.htm</p> <p>[2] Meyer & Gilstad-Hayden. Trees, a new partner in the fight against urban crime https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/usappblog/2015/11/20/trees-a-new-partner-in-the-fight-against-urban-crime/#Author</p> <p>[3] Statement from leader of the Council regarding Armada Way https://www.plymouth.gov.uk/news/statement-leader-council-regarding-armada-way</p> <p>[4] GoVocal The ladder of citizen participation and community engagement https://www.govocal.com/en-uk/blog/ladder-citizen-participation</p> <p>[5] Worcestershire City Council. The ladder of participation: be clear about what you are doing. https://democracy.leics.gov.uk/documents/s37036/C - Appendix 3 - The Ladder of Participation.pdf</p> <p>[6] Improvement and Development Agency. Engaging citizens. https://www.local.gov.uk/sites/default/files/documents/engaging-citizens-pdf-13--08e.pdf</p> <p>[7] World Health Organization. Regional Office for Europe. (2016). Urban green spaces and health https://iris.who.int/handle/10665/345751</p> <p>[8] National Co-ordinating Centre for Public Engagement https://www.publicengagement.ac.uk/sites/default/files/2023-08/nccpe_manifesto_for_public_engagement_2019_01.pdf</p>
A	<p>PCC insisted on using Parks to oversee this project of enormous cost and upheaval! The arrogance of thinking one Cabinet member should sign this project off was disastrous for the environment, the city's reputation and for that single cabinet signee! It should have been in Planning so the public could see clearly what was intended, the Planning Inspectorate would have had jurisdiction over any repercussions to legal objections. It was impossible to be clear about which stage the Plymouth council was in at any part of the consultation periods as one merged into another!. You did not change the names of each successive consultation or even number them, how did you think the average person would know which was which?</p> <p>Also having a cabinet does not mean that you've got a full range of experience and</p>

	<p>knowledge assessing Enormous expenditure and environmentally potentially devastating strategies PCC often engages and consults and then takes little or no notice of what they are advised! This has happened with the Bus Station and other major projects. So what is the point of asking users for their experiences and needs if a Cabinet of a few people, possibly with no professional knowledge, then ignores what has been given in good faith? There should be more public meetings and a Citizens Assembly to give an overview on major expenditure projects, that avoids councillors being blamed for ignoring public opinions and needs.</p>
B	<p>Use Experts, not In House Officers! Parks were hardly competent, this was so costly and disruptive over such a long period it was obviously a Planning Inspectorate project which would have covered all the questions you are now asking us! The ensuing legal actions and challenges should have been Risk Assessed as highly probable - your Communications were not even using the local media until PCC was challenged by a JP Injunction. Consultations visually would have been useful in the centre by having hoardings around with clear photos and people answering questions from passers by! You confused the public and put many off engaging! That high level of expenditure and construction in a major city area must always come back into Full Council! PCC wasted taxpayers money trying to challenge legal actions when it was obvious that a Judge would never rule another Judge to be 'unnecessary' but now more fees are being spent by the Council on its own officers and legal advice? Planning Inspectorate would have avoided that & ensuing FOI or Judicial Reviews as to monetary wastage and inadequate consultation within the council itself.</p>
C	<p>PCC take too much notice of Plymouth City Centre Company and communication with the public was utterly inadequate; could have used Election methods but visuals were also needed, Public Meetings were not being advertised around the community groups and local councillors were not engaging their electorate. Guildhall exhibition was NOT disabled access friendly, no notices outside it was happening, inside there was no notice it was upstairs or where the LIFT was! simple signage on the hoardings of what the trees would have looked like, the wonderful difference of the seasons, NOTHING was visible outside and when asked for it to be on the MS hoardings it never was! whoever used CAD green lollipop trees should be sacked! If you engage, you must keep current changes easily findable and with full explanations.</p>
D	<p>LISTENING& LEARNING The quality of paving work Street furniture and gardening is very poor Looks like a skatepark and cycles mixing at speed are lethal! Your officers told you cycles should be banned but you do not consider Disabled Access which is poor, concrete block benches with few armrests to aid access and what looked like unstained unvarnished pallets on the top which are already cracking!</p> <p>PCC had been told before not to have seating and pavement the same colour - PCC have done precisely that so somebody with poor vision can now walk along grey pavement collide with a grey solid stone bench !</p> <p>Trees are too small poor leaf coverage and we cant wait years before any new ones create enough shade to sit under! Look at other cities who have succeeded, no need to reinvent the wheel!</p>
A	<p>I was not aware of the 2018 consultation until long after the event. The results of the two subsequent consultations were not clear and the February 2023 consultation felt very much weighted towards an assumption that the proposal for Armada Way would be approved.</p>

B	By being more open to receiving and accepting dissenting opinions and giving them proper consideration. By respecting rather than dismissing opposing viewpoints, particularly when these are being expressed by significantly large numbers of people.
C	Not very well at all. Stakeholder engagement could be improved by public meetings and meaningful opportunities for concerned members of the community to express their views directly to decision makers within the council.
D	By being far more open and honest about its intentions and certainly by avoiding any future repetition of the underhand, clandestine and frankly brutal felling operation in March 2023. This ranks as one of the most distressing and traumatising events I have ever witnessed.
A	Starting from the design itself, it was presented as fait accompli. Was there a competition or opportunity for imaginative designs to be considered? If not, then feedback on the design presented was somewhat pointless, as there was no real prospect of it being radically changed. Although I responded to the council's request for feedback, I was not invited to participate in any subsequent discussion or consideration of the outcome.
B	The main thing is to take the heat of politics out of these schemes. It is also important to identify vested interests (i.e., preferred architects, contractors etc.) and to make clear to the citizens where the funds are coming from and why they are being allocated. Armed with this information, citizens would be able to make informed decisions.
C	It seems to me that the executive had an agenda that was influenced by several factors. First, sticking to the design and the contractors chosen to carry it out appear to have been the main priority. Although 11,000 people signed a petition to keep the trees standing, this voice was sidelined and a few token trees were spared. In future, the council ought to offer more transparency of its motives and engage more meaningfully with those of its citizens who are prepared to step forward. On issues such as this, which have the potential to be contentious, a "citizen assembly" model of forum would be a more open way of deciding outcomes. The collection of views on paper is all very well but that data then goes down the hole of council politicking and is lost from public view.
D	The citizen assembly model of consulting and deciding would be a more open, democratic and un-contentious way of dealing with potentially divisive schemes such as this.
A	They were inadequate. I only became aware of them because I am environmentally pro-active and was correct in having little faith that said consultations would be publicized and marketed to the Plymouth Public at large. They were not. It is a legal requirement, in consultations relating to the development of environmental policy, that environmental impact assessments are carried out, to determine potential effects on the natural environment. Had this been done correctly and the results fed back correctly (seriously, what feedback?), there is no way we, the Plymouth public would have agreed to the strong armed, forceful felling of all those beautiful trees and the work that has been carried out so far in the Centre? Boring, dull, lacks colour and nature and already looking stained and tired. Our voices were not listened too, in fact they were ignored.

B	<p>They should consider the Equality Act and carry out an equality analysis. If they have done this, it is not at all apparent. They are spending public funds, that means each one of us is a stakeholder and should be able and allowed to have a say in the final outcome of that spending. The Council should consider their reputation, the image they portray and have a desire for the local majority to trust that they will always work in our best interests. Because consultation is a legal requirement, the poor and bias led consultations that have occurred felt like tokenism to me. Please reach out to your public in future consultations, have a much wider remit, don't take a position beforehand, this is the cause of polarization. Be prepared to consider views opposite to your own. You can't and won't always please everyone but at least make a better effort to please the majority. All of this would encourage the public to learn to trust you again.</p>
C	<p>This is a difficult question to expect a member of the public that has no access to your internal workings, to answer. I can only answer from what I have witnessed, best value duty was not applied, certainly when it came to the awful way the council did not engage with STRAW and security guards? Police? Police Dogs? Felling trees at night? Regardless of the trees themselves, that is disgusting and despotic behaviour and whilst the council may believe, it was just a few people in a large population, the entire population of Plymouth looked on. What message do you think that gives? One of Hope, that local voices will be heard? I don't think so. That behaviour leaves a legacy of distrust and lack of motivation and hope that things can be different and better. Stakeholder engagement can so easily be improved firstly through transparency and multi-agency including perhaps a 'user group' of local people. I would also suggest considering the history of the city (via the archives perhaps), when planning any future projects.</p>
D	<p>As I said above, the council might consider being more flexible and not taking and sticking firmly to a position that encourages polarization. If they can be more flexible, that in turn might lead to different ways of delivering a bit of what everyone wants. Learn to be excited at the possibility that initial ideas are a beginning, a seed, but don't try to railroad the public into believing they have a say in where those seeds are to be planted when that decision has already been made. Have a wider reach, schools, colleges, University, advertise and market your consultations so the public truly believe that you are a council that does want to hear what we have to say.</p>

A	<p>No I do not think there was adequate consultation and I was not clear on the results of the consultation and I do not believe that feedback was listened to nor influenced the proposed designs.</p> <p>"Consultations give you a chance to have your say and influence decisions before we agree them" - this is what is on the PCC website.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -I do not believe that the people of Plymouth and those that use and visit Plymouth were consulted properly. The initial proposal - which wasn't detailed only had 178 replies - this doesn't represent those that have an interest in Armada way. - 6 hour slot in Drake's circus is not proper consultation. -I did not hear about the proposed designs from PCC but through friends. -The 'pause' in November was welcomed but then nothing was heard. -Why were the trees cut down in the dark - why as there so little warning. -Those that objected to the design were/are non violent and have a right to peaceful protest. What we saw on the night of the felling was harassment by the authorities and their security contractors and then endangering of citizens exercising their right to protest. Alongside that the refusal to accept the court's injunction. -Communications from PCC to the public were dreadful and harmful obviously to the trees but to the city's reputation overall. -Consultations on the PCC website were/are hard to find and the questionnaire wasn't quite ambiguous - I suggest it was not fit for purpose. -More than 11,000 people signed a petition against the cutting down of the trees - they weren't listened to nor given a reply to alternative proposals. -The PCC did not listen to or take into consideration the science of the situation. -At no time did all the interested parties get together to discuss the proposed designs or look at an alternative. - Yes, many people wanted Armada Way to be regenerated but not at the expense of the trees - it wasn't a matter of doing nothing but there were ways that many of the trees could have been kept. - PCC have a reputation of cutting down trees unnecessarily without consultation before the Armada way disaster and are now known world wide as a Council that cuts down trees needlessly.
B	<p>They need:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - take the politics out of it - explore and use different approaches to consultation - not just give information but LISTEN and be prepared to change - reach a larger audience - don't rely solely on questionnaires and/or limited drop in sessions - to be more accessible - consultations similar to this one on the PCC website are difficult to find and I find confusing and difficult to use - to think about ALL Plymouth people (people without access to tech/those with disabilities/education needs etc) and now to engage with them - get all interested parties together to discuss - reply to alternative proposals - use peoples assemblies to provide all the information and give people proper time to discuss and make proposals for and against schemes

C	<p>Very poorly.</p> <p>They appeared set in their decision and were not prepared to listen.</p> <p>Sending out a questionnaire or giving a 6 hour window for engagement in the city centre is not proper engagement.</p> <p>The PCC communications were poor regarding both engagement and publicity - the use, for example, of an analogy of doing up one's house was both demeaning and inaccurate.</p>
D	<p>The PCC must remember that they are working for the people not the other way around.</p> <p>And COMMUNICATE and LISTEN.</p>
A	<p>I still am not sure of why the council deemed Armada way area not fit for purpose in the first place and requiring a redesign. When at the university I often sat in Armada way. Improved seating and getting the "river" flowing - all that was needed.</p> <p>I cannot recall being asked to comment on any development of Armada Way. Any consultation requests were obviously not disseminated adequately plus the timescale of the consultations were over a period of 5 years which would lead to discrepancies on costings, public demographics and environmental concerns. Also interrupted by the covid pandemic.</p> <p>I do not know what feedback was received nor the way in which the design plan was amended to reflect it. Nor even how to find this data.</p>
B	<p>Details in lay mans terms - using clear simple language explaining scheme -</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Current situation what is and is not satisfactory -Why need for change - proposed change - what action is required for the change - The cost of the change - financial, disruption, environmental etc - realistic timescale - benefits to stakeholders once scheme completed. <p>Hold face to face meetings with public, businesses etc</p> <p>Have a dedicated spot on local tv and radio news.</p> <p>Have a pop up space at the affected area to encourage conversation and interaction, to highlight and disseminate the proposal.</p> <p>Facebook page for information and comments.</p> <p>Distribute proposal details with annual council tax letters</p>
C	<p>Engaged? I don't think so! Suggestions as per previous reply - Hold face to face meetings with public, businesses etc Have a dedicated spot on local tv and radio news. Have a pop up space at the affected area to encourage conversation and interaction, to highlight and disseminate the proposal. Facebook page for information and comments. Distribute proposal details with annual council tax letters</p>
D	<p>My opinion on improvements are detailed above.</p> <p>The night time operation to cut down our trees in itself sums up what I think of the whole scheme - secretive, on a need to know basis and not democratic.</p>
A	<p>I wasn't aware of consultations or results - sad but true! I am a regular watcher of Spotlight SW & a subscriber to the Herald & am usually aware of 'things' around me but this passed me by</p>

B	As a council tax payer I receive regular info' about waste bins & garden waste renewal so, why not add proposals to your list of email addresses for council tax payers
C	Clearly not well
D	As a Plymothian who lived in France for a number of years, the French know how to present their towns & cities. For example by choosing the appropriate tree species & pruning rather than wholesale demolition, it seems to me that bringing French advisers in using the very convenient Brittany Ferries might be a great idea
A	<p>No adequate consultation. In particular the reps at the guildhall did not seem to be at all informed and could not answer more than a few of my questions.</p> <p>The way the form was worded was ambiguous - it only allowed for black or white answers ie, a "yes" or "no" response would indicate complete agreement or disagreement with the Council's decisions: therefore the Council could interpret the survey to its advantage.</p> <p>The girls in Purple taking a survey didn't have a clue as to what was going on.</p>
B	<p>Listen to the public and not treat them as the enemy. The people of Plymouth only want the best for the city.</p> <p>The several thousand names on the petition to keep the old waterway was never followed up on. Many people in Plymouth wanted to see it resurrected and renovated as it was charming and particular to the city as opposed to a cookie cutter modern plan.</p> <p>Be honest with facts ie, the number of trees that were labeled unhealthy was completely inaccurate.</p>
C	<p>Very poorly! Indeed, the cutting down of the trees under cover of darkness was despicable, cowardly and totally dishonest, leading to total distrust of the Council.</p> <p>Have people who are genuinely informed answering questions at the consultations.</p> <p>And, as above, the Council ignored the petition to keep the old waterway.</p>
D	<p>Pay attention to the public and respect the differing opinions.</p> <p>Be more honest and transparent and not so confrontational</p>
A	I did not receive any notice regarding any of the consultations. I was only able to add my voice to the 2023 consultation due to community groups highlighting the issues.
B	<p>The council in my opinion clearly disrespects the public. A full and transparent policy overhaul with accessibility and equality issues resolved is required. In addition I object to the use of stakeholders over voters as though there are 2 kinds of voters. The highly manipulative form of questionnaires used by the council are a classic example of bad practices lacking in good faith. I would like to see the formation of citizens assemblies as used in the Republic of Ireland for all major developments and decisions. In short the council is extremely unpopular and lacking in humility. It would be good to see full council elections and replacement of the current head of the planning department who has failed the public in numerous ways.</p>
C	<p>Every voter is a stakeholder. We were not consulted and we lack awareness of the offers made to those businesses within the business zone. There is too much sly privatisation of the public sphere actively going on out of sight of the public view. All transactions should be made in plain sight. Freedom of information requests should be unnecessary.</p>

D	<p>The council needs to develop a culture of learning from mistakes and accepting responsibility. This needs radical reform. The council needs to reflect on the harm it has done to the city and its own citizens. The council needs to recognise it was wrong and is still setting a low standard in engagement and following the wishes of the population. The city centre continues to suffer from poor decision making particularly in the provision of shared public spaces , protecting the natural world and biodiversity. The council needs to see itself as we do, which is a group dominated by small minded, stale and institutional forms of thinking. Bringing more women, young people and non business people such as citizen scientists and other bodies on board without fear. They lack new ideas and are reforming Plymouth into a drive through pit stop for dying industries. It is so depressing to hear their self serving rhetoric. Even exceptionally rude behaviour on camera by Tudor Evans illicit no reaction. If our council won't learn, we really must get rid of them.</p>
A	<p>Self evidently any consultation was inadequate. Had PCC not been obsessed with retaining power to itself, at the very outset it could have created a really exciting and creative process that allowed everyone to consider the fundamental question of whether they wanted the development to keep and work around the trees or to fell them all and start from scratch. By the stage that the inadequate 'consultations' were carried out, PCC had invested too much time and money and was not going to make any fundamental changes. At every stage the information given to the public and the way 'questionnaires' etc were worded and structured were obviously designed to give the decision makers in PCC the answers they wanted and to put people off even completing them. They were model examples of how not to do it. PCC had made up their minds what they wanted Armada Way to look like and nothing the public could say or do was going to change that. It was obvious that the first exercise should have highlighted and made crystal clear the fact that the trees would have to be felled. The public were misled about what effect their views would have – not surprising as the staff themselves don't seem to have understood the different types of consultation and the legal effects. The whole way the supposed public involvement exercises were carried out has had a serious adverse effect on the public's trust of local government and people's involvement in such exercises in the future. That is hugely damaging to local democracy and the feeling of huge numbers of Plymouth residents is that "the Council just does what it wants"</p>

B	<p>A major cultural change is needed within the Council – both staff and Councillors. Instead of using the trees as political footballs, all proposed developments should start with the assumption that semi-mature and mature trees are to be retained. With imagination and the will to do so, there is invariably a way to work around and keep existing trees.</p> <p>Staff and Councillors both need more education about environmental issues generally and specifically about biodiversity and the crucial part that urban trees play in mitigation of climate chaos so that they see trees not as things that are in the way but rather as valuable societal and nature assets. Every felled tree did of course have a huge and quantifiable financial value yet the Council did not publicise this fact when giving people information about the Scheme.</p> <p>Signs should be attached to every tree that is at risk under Schemes so that the largest number of residents are made fully aware at the earliest possible stage that the tree will be felled if a development goes ahead.</p> <p>Respect and give a much greater say to knowledgeable community bodies in decisions involving felling of trees - in PCC's case The Plymouth Tree People are a well established, respected and knowledgeable group.</p> <p>Consult at a much more earlier stage and well before any plans (especially visual representations of a completed development) are formulated.</p> <p>Involve local schools to give local children a say in planning the city they will have to live in – harness children's creativity and ideas.</p> <p>A complete change of attitude is needed in how PCC deals with FOI and ERI requests. Having been a Civil Service lawyer dealing with the public's FOI requests and then having been involved for many months in trying on behalf of Straw to obtain information under FOI and ERI I found the way that PCC handled Straw's requests deeply shocking. I reluctantly came to the conclusion that contrary to the spirit and purpose of the Acts, PCC was doing everything possible to withhold relevant information – requests weren't answered within the time limits or only on the very last possible day, answers were worded evasively and sometimes failed to deal with the question at all so that follow up questions were needed. It seemed to me that PCC also failed to make use of the obligation to publish environmental information proactively. Much of the information I and others sought for many months to obtain should have been readily available on line without the need for FOI and EIR requests.</p> <p>Both the PCC Constitution and PCC's website is a major hindrance to greater public participation and it feels as though PCC almost uses the site's clunkiness and poor search facilities to keep the public at arm's length and put them off engaging.</p> <p>PCC needs to find imaginative ways to consult and to go beyond the bare legal minimum so that it can harness the huge knowledge, technical expertise, creativity and energy in the city.</p>
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C	<p>In a word - appallingly. I've tried to deal with this and the second question elsewhere in this response. There was an over reliance on slick visuals showing the scheme at some undefined time in the future which were used to dazzle the public to concentrate on the shiny new look whereas the critical fact that it depended on the loss of the trees was dressed up in weasel words. It was a slight of hand and obfuscation by PCC that cannot have been accidental. PCC should not have exploited their imbalance of power by using local and social media in the way it did to demonise individuals and Straw as a group. These were people who gave up hundred of hours of their time at considerable personal cost to their health to try to help PCC avoid this disaster. Their input should have been valued and PCC should have positively engaged with Straw. I also have some comments about this Learning Review. 1. I am very concerned whether all relevant emails, attendance notes of all discussions, minutes of meetings (informal and formal) will have been disclosed. As the Review has only contacted a few individuals outside the Council, important information may not come to light and neither the public nor those carrying out the Review will know whether the full picture has been disclosed by staff and Councillors. The fact that the provision of evidence is heavily weighted in favour of the Council cannot fail to affect the outcome of this Review. Sadly I have no faith that it will get to the bottom of the tangled web of factors that led to this embarrassing tragedy for the city or that even if it did anything will change for the better. My whole interaction with PCC in relation to Armada Way has been a deeply demoralizing experience which has made be very cynical about the whole of local politics and government. If people like me, who want to help improve things and who care enough to give up time and energy, stop being involved because of cynicism that is a very bad thing. 2. It is extraordinary that yet again any public engagement with this Learning Review is restricted to an online response (the website doesn't invite people to submit their views in any other way) that limits their submission to four narrow and slightly repetitive questions, contains no "any other comments" box and limits the length of the response. The whole episode went on for months and I have a large number of documents and emails that I consider are relevant to the Inquiry but have no means of submitting because of the way public responses have been restricted. 3. Further it feels that yet again a large proportion of the residents of Plymouth will not be able to feed into this Learning Review – those who don't have access to a computer and all the other under represented groups including refugees, children, etc. Indeed anyone who didn't closely follow the detail of what went on would struggle to say anything meaningful in response to the Review's four questions.</p>
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D	<p>As a supporter of Straw and former lawyer I was involved for many months in trying to help them oppose this scheme. I still doubt whether parts of Armada Way could even be legally classified as ‘highway’ – an issue which is highly relevant to the powers under which PCC pushed through the Scheme.</p> <p>Staff/Councillors need proper training in the Nolan Principles which were clearly not followed. The fundamental problem was that staff and Councillors involved in the scheme thought their views mattered more than anyone else’s and they seem to have forgotten they are merely public servants.</p> <p>LGA and other Council’s best practice about effective and meaningful consultations should be followed when consulting on schemes. PCC did not do this.</p> <p>The PCC’s conduct on the night of the felling and the involvement of the Police and the creation of inaccurate dossiers on Straw members was deeply shocking and underhand. The failure to halt the felling immediately on being informed that an injunction was being sought was particularly outrageous.</p> <p>PCC were overly fixated on an outdated view of what cites should look like (vast open areas of paving creating a huge wind tunnel, minimal greenery etc) which took little account of climate chaos. They missed a golden opportunity to be radically creative in greening the city as other cities like Singapore have done.</p> <p>The PCC press releases that were published often contained material errors that misrepresented the facts.</p> <p>PCC’s complaints procedure and the Scrutiny Committee process are not fit for purpose. It was clear early on that something had gone very badly wrong in the process yet there was no effective way for the public to challenge it. Councillors didn’t seem to understand or be familiar with their own constitution particularly relating to the right to have a public petition considered. Since the debacle the constitution seems to have be changed to make it even harder for the public to challenge the Council.</p> <p>Staff and Councillors need to be more ready to accept that they have made mistakes and apologise for them at an earlier stage. It was evident early on that people didn’t appreciate that the plan was to fell all the trees. Given the obvious strength of feeling PCC should have completely fundamentally reappraised their plans to find a way to keep the trees.</p> <p>When people have been too long in one job they become overly powerful with their own fiefdom and it makes it difficult for colleagues to effectively challenge.</p> <p>From memory I believe that although the MO was giving advice to staff her advice was not always followed. I gained the impression that the MO’s role was not fully understood and was not taken seriously.</p> <p>The role of the Natural Infrastructure staff in the Council need to be boosted and they need a greater say in all projects at a very early stage to encourage a presumption to retain all trees.</p>
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A	<p>The consultation in 2018 did not make it clear how many trees would be felled - this was implied not explicit, in what was a very early-stage schematic proposal. The consultation was held 4.5 years earlier than the 2022 scheme proposal. Several of the groups who responded expressed concerns about the potential loss of trees, but these concerns did not inform the subsequent detailed project brief or emerging design. For these reasons the 2018 consultation was not adequate.</p> <p>The 2022 consultation was poorly publicised and difficult to access. For these reasons it can be judged to be inadequate. I think it is safe to say that the public only became aware of the potential impact of the design on trees thanks to the efforts of campaign group STRAW.</p> <p>When the public did become aware that the Armada Way proposal would result in the felling of over 100 mature trees, it was clear that the scale of tree loss was the key issue of concern. A petition, supported in exceptionally high numbers, was indisputable evidence of a strong public desire to see as many existing trees as possible incorporated into the Armada Way proposal.</p> <p>Despite this clear indication of a widely-held public view, only minor adjustments to the design were made – a handful of trees retained and still over 100 to be felled. Citizens continued to voice their concerns because design adjustments did not address the key issue of significant tree loss.</p> <p>This led to a final consultation in February 2023 which was well publicised and well-resourced. However, despite its claim to be a 'meaningful engagement' it is evident from the timetable of the subsequent felling that the consultation exercise was never intended to inform significant design adjustments to address the principal public concern about loss of trees in large numbers.</p> <p>The trees were felled on 14 March 2023, (the same day that the 'meaningful engagement' results were published), in an operation whose scale and logistical complexity points to a planning period of at least 3-4 weeks. The felling operation involved scores of Police, private security contractors, fencing contractors, tree surgeons and chipping contractors, many of them from outside the area. It was not an operation that could be planned and executed in an afternoon, and must have been in the making for many weeks.</p> <p>It is safe to speculate that PCC were organising the felling either during or shortly after the close of the February 2023 consultation. This circumstance alone indicates that the exercise was a sham and a foregone conclusion, as well as being a disgraceful waste of public money. But the indisputable fact that the consultation feedback demonstrated an 'overwhelming majority' of respondents were against the Armada Way scheme – yet the felling still went ahead within hours of this being made public, underlines how completely meaningless the February consultation was.</p>
B	<p>Enter consultation in good faith with the intention of assimilating public feedback into the scheme design, and in good time so that it is practically possible to do so. If it is impossible to meet these conditions of good faith and good time then don't bother to consult and be honest about why. Tell the truth and treat citizens with respect.</p>

C	<p>The Council's engagement with the public, specifically STRAW - who represented large numbers of Plymouth citizens - was disgracefully politicised, and by March 2023 had reached shameful levels of hysteria. By this I mean that the attitude adopted towards STRAW by PCC Officers and elected members was adversarial, combative, contrary and intransigent, as if STRAW represented a professionalised political opposition, rather than a voluntary assembly of concerned citizens. This antagonistic stance was evident in anti-STRAW media briefings from PCC including official press releases as well as press quotes and social posts from members and Officers. But the combative culture also infected face-to-face engagement at stakeholder meetings and during the February consultation, and it culminated in the sharing of 'intelligence' on named members of the group with the Police, in a move that suggests PCC had placed the whole affair on a war footing.</p> <p>Whilst it is acknowledged that there is context to be taken into account – a wider culture of social media trolling that has normalised polarised 'debate' - I am profoundly disappointed in PCC officials for choosing to lean into this toxic culture, rather than rise above it. It is incumbent on public officials, whether elected or appointed, to model the highest standards of behaviour and impartiality, and this was not the case during the Armada Way debacle.</p> <p>As part of the learning review I urge you to revisit PCC communications from the period including press releases, tweets and Facebook posts. You will find that the Council took an extremely partisan position and was an active agent in polarising the issue in its communications to the public. This stance negated the conditions of a meaningful consultation by showing that PCC's position was pre-determined, and worse still, it revealed a culture within the council not only of ignoring public concerns, but of proactively briefing against citizens.</p> <p>A low point in this toxic and polarised attitude was revealed in the 'intelligence' on named individual citizens that PCC Officials shared with the Police prior to the felling action. It is appalling that feelings within PCC should have reached such a state of hysteria that concerned law-abiding citizens were cast as potential terrorists and their personal details shared with Police so that the council could use law-enforcement to defend an action that was not supported by the overwhelming majority of respondents to their own consultation!</p> <p>It is essential that council leaders urgently and whole-heartedly commit to dismantling this toxic and polarising culture. Officers and elected members must lead by example, rise above the social media maelstrom, treat the public as citizens and not as a form of political opposition, maintain impartiality, listen to legitimate concerns and be prepared to assimilate and respond to these, rather than hunkering down to defend at all costs a pre-determined position.</p>
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D	<p>Armada Way is a classic example of what goes wrong when consultation is left too late and a scheme is too far advanced for any meaningful changes to be made. Despite claims to have consulted at key stages since 2018, in fact what happened was an early schematic was published, stakeholder comments invited but their detail not acted on, and a broad assumption of positive feedback was taken by PCC as license to push ahead with a project brief that was too radical, and that would never have won public support if properly communicated in 2018. By the time a developed concept was published and consulted on in 2022, PCC was already locked into a contract with Morgan Sindall and (one assumes) locked into other time-bound deadlines associated with the central government funds that are (partly) paying for the project. The council's resistance to significantly revisiting the project brief after 2022 meant that any consultation was bound to be a tick-box exercise, intended simply to endorse the course of action they had already set in motion. The resulting costly fall-out could all have been avoided if the 2018 consultation was properly followed up with periodic stakeholder engagement at points when public feedback could have shaped the project brief and emerging concept development. Good consultation isn't rocket science - a simple Google search will supply many examples of robust best practice guidance. Consultation must be able to affect the outcome of a scheme for it to be meaningful. It should be done at the earliest possible opportunity and revisited as a project brief evolves and develops. The council should expect and welcome challenge from the public and be prepared to make changes to a scheme or brief. If unavoidable circumstances mean that consultation is left to the last minute and the outcome can only be changed slightly or not at all then the council should be honest about this and the reasons why. However, to suggest that this is simply about learning 'how to do consultation better' is to miss the more serious and more challenging aspects of council culture that the debacle has revealed. The toxic reaction of Council Officers and members to widespread public concern about the Armada Way proposals cannot be ascribed to 'poor consultation practice', and it cannot be addressed by simply improving how consultation on future schemes is handled. It requires culture-change led from the top, to model impartiality and listening, and to root-out and eliminate defensiveness and politicking, particularly when this manifests as bullying, gaslighting and besmirching concerned citizens. The fact that this leadership was lacking during the entire Armada Way affair is a sad reflection on the quality of our city council directors and members, and unfortunately points towards scant hope for reform until there is a substantial change in personnel.</p>
A	<p>I was not aware of any consultation until the February 2023 one. I believe only 178 people responded to the consultation in 2018 because no-one knew about it & it didn't even mention removing all (136) but 1 tree. A consultation appeared on the council's website https://plymouth-consult.objective.co.uk/kse/event/35559 which no-one knew about from 21st Nov - 21 Dec 2022 which then expired & had the details removed (it's not a consultation if its hidden from sight), it was not mentioned in the council meeting on 21st Nov 2022 when the project was discussed, I emailed andrew.thomson@plymouth.gov.uk as that was the email address given on 10th January & received no response whatsoever. In the Feb 2023 consultation, I felt the questions asked were incredibly biased & I believe the results showed that the overwhelming majority of responses were opposed to the scheme, yet the council decided to go ahead regardless, so no I don't believe there was any meaningful consultation at all.</p>

B	Meaningful consultation with the public & organizations such as Plymouth Tree People & other arborists who don't have a vested interest to establish what the public really want & what is best for the future of Plymouth, it was also greenwashed, the council advised there was a Biodiversity Net Gain which turned out to be untrue, it was actually a loss
C	The council didn't engage, they had a plan & were going to push it through whatever way they could, they knew their decision was unpopular which is why Bingley & the other officers conspired to make the decision almost impossible to challenge, the high court judge confirmed this. I'd like to see the council being open, honest & to have a proper democratic process where the public / community groups & businesses can air their views, have them considered and the majority listened to.
D	By having meaningful consultation that the public are aware of & listening to public / stakeholder views. The public have now become aware more than ever of the council's undemocratic approach to the Armada Way Scheme which has left lots of the public untrusting of them.
A	No, not at all. Feedback clearly did not impact the proposal at all as the final consultation, or 'meaningful community engagement' showed that the majority of those consulted were against the removal/felling of the trees on Armada Way. The results of this consultation were actually published on the council's website the day after the felling operation.
B	Consult with community and environmental groups. Publish the results of the consultation including the comments made in full. Consulting means asking for views on the entire proposal. not trying to narrow the potential responses by asking leading and narrow questions. Publicize potential proposals more effectively.
C	See above. The whole scheme was unnecessary and the most massive waste of money. There is literally nothing which has been improved in spite of the vast amounts of money spent on the project. It has damaged the centre, led to loss of trade for the local businesses and people stating that they did not want to go into the centre because of how it looked after the felling.
D	Yes, considering the scope of the review, there are a lot of lessons to be learnt about how the scheme was handled. The handling of the felling operation was shameful, taking place at night in an entirely unnecessary way, in an attempt to shut down lawful and legitimate protest. The police presence was a waste of police resources and council tax-payer funds. The council continued to fell trees, even after a high court injunction was made and the terms of that injunction relayed to the council. It is astounding that a local authority considers itself above the law. The fact is that the original decision and the use of the emergency procedure by PCC which was clearly unlawful, was not examined at the final JR hearing. It is also a fact that the CCTV footage of that night, although requested, was never disclosed by PCC. This should be examined. If PCC decline to provide documents/ information to the ILR then this should be fully disclosed in the final report, details of what information was requested and declined should be made transparent. In terms of how it handled the following judicial review proceeding, the council could have conceded and accepted that they erred in law. Instead they chose to litigate in an expensive and wasteful fashion. Two repeat interim applications, both rejected by the court, were criticised as unnecessary by the judges who dealt with them. PCC

	<p>were also criticised by the court for failing to hand over documents which they were legally obliged to do and they failed to comply with their duty of candour in those proceedings. They had a partial costs order made against them, which demonstrates that their conduct fell way short of what is expected.</p> <p>This is not academic stuff. This is huge amounts of council tax-payers money being wasted, not only on the project but in the way in which the council handled the ensuing litigation. In addition to the conduct of the litigation, PCC used its powers to request the police to compile 'intel packages' on lawful peaceful protester, a totally disproportionate action, breaching the rights including that of privacy, of those involved.</p> <p>For all of these failings, there has been zero accountability.</p>
A	<p>Yes, I think there was adequate consultation. I was clear about the results and excited about the 'grand plan' for Plymouth that was being proposed.</p> <p>It could be looked at on the internet (also on my employer's website, the University of Plymouth) and was discussed in the local newspaper (the Plymouth Herald). It was detailed and comprehensive, with copious diagrams and explanatory text. It was also presented in different local areas around the city and in the city centre itself. There may well have been other ways of disseminating the information, but these are the means of dissemination that I know about. I'd taken time to examine the plan on-line and thought it carefully considered. Frankly, I couldn't wait for its implementation. Plymouth has great potential and badly needed what was proposed.</p>
B	<p>Perhaps, the Council should have sent outlines of the plan in the post to every household, or done more on social media, although I am no judge about the latter as I use it as little as possible, myself.</p> <p>Despite all the breast-beating about how it could have been better handled, I think the consultation was pretty well carried out. Competent professional people with expertise in relevant fields were consulted: civil engineers, town planners, parks and recreation staff, and so on. As well as Plymouth residents, local businesses, shops and restaurants were also consulted, I understand.</p> <p>If my memory is correct, the plan was revealed about five years before STRAW interfered and upset the whole process. When the trees had been felled (and there was outrage and fuss), I was surprised at how several friends of mine hadn't paid much attention to the plan or were completely unaware that there was one.</p>
C	<p>How much more consultation and providing/force-feeding of information does a council have to do? There has to be a balance between what is needed and feasible, and what the people of the town wish to see. If indeed, the Council's consultation exercises have been deemed inadequate, I can't help asking (if you will please excuse the sarcastic tone), why bother going to all the trouble and expense of consulting with experts and stakeholders? In fact, why have a council at all?</p> <p>In our democracy we pay people to work for the Council and expect them to get on with the job for us. I would not like to see something like a people's assembly for decision-making and be like Switzerland, so that few decisions are ever taken at all. The Council is elected and paid for by us to do this work.</p> <p>As an ordinary citizen, I was deeply disappointed (actually, devastated) at STRAW's legal action. After four or five years of waiting, all the preparation and work that went into implementing the plan has been thwarted by people who didn't know about the plan or the thinking that went into it, and didn't care.</p>

D	<p>You need to ask them this question. They are better placed to answer, with a good deal of hind-sight to dwell on. I feel sorry that Council members and officers must have suffered feelings of humiliation and, no doubt, frustration, ever since STRAW's action.</p> <p>The worst thing about this debacle is how they, the Council, have been portrayed as having malign intent. Stories in the national and local press and other media have painted them as dishonest and sly incompetents, not acting in Plymouth's best interests. Having spoken to many Council people over the years (of all political stripes), I know the opposite is true. Many are Plymouth born and bred and love the city with a passion.</p>
A	No. Never heard of any consultations, poorly communicated with the whole of Plymouth
B	Needs to be on all media platforms and highlighted for days on end even in the local news
C	Poorly.
D	Need to listen to the public who live here. High street is dire straights anyway with lack of chains etc taking over stores. Changing the exterior like you have is not going to change this
A	<p>None of these consultations were adequate. March 2018 - a single table on the 6th level of Drake Circus shopping center was where shoppers were 'informed' or their views gathered - all 178. Pretty low for a city & the development of the center. George Street was mostly focussed on, very little information about Armada Way was included. Trees weren't even mentioned, let alone cutting down trees. Sept 2022 - I didn't know about this consultation. PCC buries planning applications and consultations in opacity on their website. Feb 2023 - the Meaningful Community Engagement was deliberately not called a consultation by PCC, so how it can be included in this question about consultation is evidence of the sort of mixed messaging the public endured throughout the process which amounts to gaslighting (continuous gaslighting) of the public. Examples of gaslighting - plan can't be changed to save trees but it can be changed to create an enormous children play park. Trees stop fire engines from accessing buildings - not true. Trees are dying and diseased - not true. Where do I start about the MCE? The way the questions were worded was utterly biased, absolutely no objectivity. It was to the point that questions implied I would only want to provide a 'yes' answer. I couldn't answer 'no' to most questions because this option was denied. There was never the option on tick boxes to articulate/express my view 'I do not want the mature trees removed' or "save ALL the mature trees", but I made my views known through additional comments. The MCE was PCC's response to the successful STRAW petition and not what was asked for by STRAW which was for the trees to be saved. The MCE was about PCC appearing to be 'listening' whilst staging a publicity exercise. The questions were very long, incomprehensible, and very, very poorly worded. The average reading age of people in Plymouth is 11 yrs old. If, someone went to the website to search for the MCE, they had to be digitally literate to go online, and also actually highly literate to answer the questions. The paper version was not disseminated by representatives had PCC promised would be walking around Armada Way in purple t-shirts, to direct/guide people to the Guildhall for further information. The most CRIMINAL outcome of this MCE was if responders used the tick boxes to share an approximate view but they didn't leave an additional comment to back up their choice, there responses were invalid. NOWHERE did it state on the guidance that a response</p>

	<p>without a follow-up comment would be discounted. This is blatant disregarding of peoples' responses, their views, their voice and their engagement in a (so-called) democratic process. It was a sham, and contemptible behaviour by the questionnaire designers, and ultimately PCC. The MCE was one of the lows of the whole process because before it was published it was promising hope, but it was a clear example of PCC paying lip service to 'listening' to people.</p>
B	<p>Have the plan available for locals to view it intentionally and incidentally E.g. in community 'bumping spaces' (Stonehouse's Nudge Community at 'The Plot', Whitleigh's 4 Green Community Trust, Devonport's Library, Efford's High View Community School, Southway's Community Centre, The Stoke Village Hub, Woseley Trust in Keyham, The Beacon etc).</p> <p>It wasn't even mentioned in PCC's own Facebook pages. FB's Plymouth bulletin boards and dozens of other social media pages need to be employed to get the word out.</p> <p>The various petitions that were created, because public's views weren't being properly gathered, were ignored, dismissed (and lies peddled about the validity of the number of petitioner). No single extra tree was saved, despite the STRAW petition being evidence that saving mature trees was what public wanted. Later the rules about petitions were changed by PCC to blatantly hinder valid channels of our democratic process to have opposing and alternative views logged on the plan.</p> <p>Where was PCC's leadership in modelling communicative and productive 'grown-up' dialogue between city planners and Armada Way designers, independent arborists and ecologists, construction firms (YGS!) Commerce reps, young people (lots of yp skate and shop in Plymouth, and inherit the AW legacy), cycling groups, twitchers (peregrine falcons live on the civic building!) - Tudor Evans needs to be removed from office for his contemptuous views, often made public, of the city residents who he serves as a public servant. To hear Tudor publicly describe STRAW as unable to understand words of more than one syllable in a Council meeting (and by clapped by his colleagues) is not role modelling leadership, or making any attempt at finding solutions with people together. And neither is it true, so Tudor looks very silly (yet again).</p>

C	<p>Public are and should always be considered as “stake holders”. The public's overall trust in PCC has not been a strong point of PCC for decades, whoever the political party in leadership. A mistrust in the contract between civil servant and people was borne out by so many people saying "PCC will do what it wants whatever we say" when in conversation re: Armada Way. As a Plymouth resident of only 10 years, but having lived nearby for 48, hearing this mantra of resignation was disheartening. PCC's flagrant breaking of rules around the Biodiversity Net Gains of the plan only served to push PCC's non-trustworthiness home. Why wasn't the independent arboricultural impact assessment (AIA) made available to the public? Why was YGS allowed to tender the contract to conduct the ecological survey (in which they decreased the numbers of wildlife species present on Armada Way) and assess the trees ("diseased", when they weren't, and it was plain to see once the stumps and boughs lay about for everyone to see), whilst also tasked with removing the trees? Conflicts of interests & cronyism proliferated under this scheme, always opaque & often no procurement process followed for contracts. In part it explains the endemic of disenfranchised local residents not trusting or engaging with PCC & any of its schemes/initiatives.</p> <p>It appeared that the only stakeholders' views that were highly important to PCC were those that had clearly had a blanket gagging order placed them. E.g. University of Plymouth staff and staff/employees of Plymouth City Council (ie The Box). Between just these two organisations alone, it amounts to 1000's of people working and/or living in Plymouth, who'd have had very productive input on the plan & informing its designers to find a win-win.</p> <p>Any grassroots organisation who are dependent on funding from PCC, & in close working relationships were unable to publicly oppose the scheme, for fear of the repercussions. The Community Builders in Nov 2022 (weren't employed by PCC but PCC were partnered with their social enterprise employer), were in prime positions to convene community groups to engage, dialogue and inform. In meetings I attended, Ward Councillors bullied community leaders, not over Armada Way related issues, but on any issues raised between Dec 2022 and after the trees were destroyed. This amounted to 'firing shots over the bows' at all times to show who was in charge, who has power and who doesn't. It proliferated the existing culture of PCC which is top-down, fear-based bullying, extremely controlling and threatened by people with agency, education & creativity.</p> <p>Stakeholder engagement could be improved in the future by being conducted by an entirely independent (to PCC) group of experienced individuals, with a track record of being able to listen; with specialisms eg Appreciative Enquiry, People's Assembly, Biodiversity metrics, & co-creative approaches.</p>
D	<p>LISTEN! Greater deployment of independent moderators and mediators. Greater transparency, increased communication opportunities, greater humility; stringent checks and oversight (by independent experts) on the proposed plan to ensure it meets ALL the required environmental and ecological criteria. When the Woodland Trust publicly denounces the decision to fell 110 trees in a city it means something is wrong with the decision-making process.</p> <p>PCC needs to stop its double-speak - telling Plymouth how great the city will become (with yet another major city center upgrade, may be its 3rd since WW2), when the Armada Way plan in all its chapters of development excluded so many of the local population. Whose Plymouth is it? Plymouth isn't just for a few, mainly older, white, middle class, males who are obsessed with power and an out-of-date vision which is</p>

	so out-of-date it has no validity for existing NOW, based on being actively harmful to our attempts at becoming climate-resilient.
A	<p>I don't believe the way that the results of chopping down so many older trees that looked so healthy and were a part of Plymouth's history, with few remaining and relocated, was thought about in an environmentally friendly way.</p> <p>It looked like an eyesore when it was done, and now the site is getting better, but it is tragic that the trees and the Armada Way area were changed so drastically.</p>
B	I think we should learn about why places like Armada Way were built before we drastically change them, even for the better. After all, this city's history is a part of its future.
C	I'm not sure.
D	<p>To consult with people of many ages and backgrounds who would be using spaces like Armada Way, not just shareholders or people who would benefit from such drastic actions like the tree felling.</p> <p>Those were more than just some old trees to people, and I'm sure other parts of Plymouth are being looked at for rejuvenation of the city, which have significant meanings to the people of Plymouth.</p>
A	I was not aware of any of these consultations or their results!
B	I think more posts in social media plus (if finances allow) door to door leafletting
C	<p>Not brilliantly well.</p> <p>More posts on social media.</p>
D	<p>The original review by Conservative council seemed to have been a small review aimed at lining the pockets of Conservative cronies.</p> <p>In future I would hope Environmental groups and Sustainability initiatives would be consulted. I found the felling of the trees in middle of night morally unacceptable and illegal. I love Plymouth and hate it when Plymouth is famous for a negative/humiliating reason (as it was when trees felled in middle of night).</p>
A	To be honest I wasn't aware of any consultation about the redevelopment and certainly not of the destruction of so many living trees and indeed bushes and other foliage.
B	Much more transparent publicity and more visibility of council members at times other than elections
C	I'm not really aware of how these processes were or were not conducted
D	<p>The most annoying thing was the covert nature of an overnight operation of total and wanton destruction.</p> <p>The council should learn that they are not free to do what they like and when they like and that no leader is above legal processes in relation to any decision.</p> <p>They should also be more aware that actions have consequences- legal and financial and such outrageous actions may well prove very costly for the city.</p> <p>At the end of the day they are public servants and not freelance operatives.</p>
A	Please see Q 7, which encompasses this, and is how I feel I can best respond.

B	<p>Improvement could be made by PCC adopting a brief set of minimum standards and good practice, distinguishing between statutory consultations and explaining when and why the council might consult in non-statutory circumstances. A number of local authorities already have in place publicly available guidance on what to expect from their consultations, based on the Compact and other useful, readily available documents. As these are available online it would be a simple, very low cost desktop exercise for PCC to task an officer to use them as the basis for compiling a brief draft code. If monitoring is built in, this should improve consistency and clearer understanding by members of the public concerning how their contributions will be used, limitations etc. It would also provide council officers with guidance on how these exercises should be constructed and interpreted. In a job role in the voluntary sector during several years prior to 2022, I frequently gave support to council consultations and, working with others in similar roles, tried to have minimum standards adopted. This included providing a brief draft code and links to toolkits. Despite submitting feedback from a number of communities that this would improve their relations with the council, improve quality of responses and increase numbers taking part, this was unsuccessful. I do not believe listening to the public became part of PCC's culture, being seen as a requirement to gain funding rather than a means for better planning and more effective services. I have since participated as a citizen in a number of PCC's consultations, pre and post 2022, and feel the standard and clarity has declined further. As just one brief example, discovering after submission that in some consultations less weight was given to responses where no additional comments are included, while in other consultations only a sample of the comments submitted were read and summarised. Nothing in the guidance to the public indicated any of these inconsistencies in advance.</p>
C	See my response to Q 7 which encompasses this.
D	See my response to Q 7 which encompasses this, but I believe officer engagement with the public during the Armada Way scheme has been unprofessional. PCC leadership needs to change their culture for meaningful engagement and improvement.
A	<p>I do not think there was adequate consultation on the plans/future of Armada Way. The first consultation in 2018 was not well publicised and many people didn't know there had been a consultation until the campaign to save the trees was underway. The second and third 'consultations' were only carried out in response to the intensity of the campaign to save the trees. If there'd been no campaign, it seems likely there would've been no public engagement at all beyond the initial consultation in 2018. Given that the volume of response to the 2022 consultation (which was held as a result of the campaign, and at that point the issue was very high profile in the city), far exceeded that of the 2018 consultation, and response was overwhelmingly in favour of saving the trees, it seems clear that the 2018 consultation was flawed. I think at the time of the 2022 consultation, much concern about the proposal, and evidence pointing to flaws in it had already been raised, concern that was not taken into account nor clearly addressed in the consultation/feedback. Two points specifically: 1. The use of an outdated Biodiversity Net Gain metric to determine viability of the existing trees and projected gain with the new proposal, as well as applying the BNG metric from a baseline of no trees, rather than a baseline that accounted for the existing trees gave a result artificially weighted toward removal. 2. The Suds drainage system was presented as a set of 'products' or 'tools that had to be installed a particular way, rather than a flexible design concept that could potentially be adapted</p>

	<p>to suit new conditions, ie: the retention of mature trees. At the 2022 consultation, the council and architects were dismissive of concerns like the above, and at times openly hostile to the idea that the proposal might have issues. The campaign and results of the survey handed out at the 2022 consultation showed an overwhelming desire on the part of the public for retention of the mature urban forest along Armada Way (along with bringing to light a number of issues, including long term maintenance of the new scheme & associated costs, accessibility for disabled people, bicycle/pedestrian safety). I think the language of the questions in that survey was crafted to illicit a response favourable to the council/proposal, and I think the 2022 & 2023 consultations were largely PR exercises taken under public pressure, but with little or no intention of taken seriously the concerns raised.</p>
B	<p>A project of this size, scope and cost shouldn't be undertaken without robust and transparent consultation with the public at all times along the way. The first consultation should have been much more comprehensive and high-profile, and in order to encourage public participation, a leaflet campaign describing the project and how to engage with it, could have been done throughout the city centre, and even to the homes of residents in the ward directly affected by the proposal, if not citywide. This could have been done in addition to any online engagement paractices through the council website and social media. The point is that if this is a large, costly townscape development project that the city/council is excited about and wants to present as a positive improvement to the cultural and actual landscape of the city centre, that excitement should be reflected in the way the proposal is presented to the public. That presentation should be comprehensive and ongoing, with multiple opportunities for public and stakeholder engagement. As I recall, the council presented that there wasn't a lot of engagement with the 2018 consultation. Given the level of involvement with the 2022 consultation, after a sustained public campaign to save the trees, I'd suggest that the lack of engagement in 2018 was less due to indifference on the part of the public than it was lack of publicity on the part of the council. There could even have been fun projects - postcards showing the new development, an art exhibition for kids to draw their ideal city centre park. Such things enliven a project and build public support & sentiment, and they help give people a sense of ownership in the project. Because of a technicality that Armada Way is classed as 'a road', the need for planning consent was circumvented, and thus another avenue for scrutiny and comment was shut down. Again, a project of this size and cost should be subject to planning consent irrespective of any technicalities that might exist. Whilst Armada Way might be a road on paper, it is clearly not a road/highway in the sense of being a thoroughfare for vehicular traffic, it is much more like a park. As such, it should have been proposed not as a way of creating a park out of a road, but as a way of improving an already existing park. Most importantly, if serious concerns are raised about the viability of the project early on, those concerns can be taken seriously, and good faith attempts made to mitigate them. The potential necessity of rethink/redesign can be built-in from the beginning, rather than as a panicky, last-minute response to massive public pressure when it was virtually too late to make any real changes.</p>

C	I don't think engagement with relevant stakeholders was done evenly or equitably. I think the local business community, as represented by the city centre corporation, was presented to the public in a much more prominent and flattering way than any other stakeholders, including Straw & other environmental groups, bicycle groups and disability groups, among others. Further, I think the business community was portrayed as being universally in favour of the scheme, and this was presented as being one of the dominant factors driving the project. So I think that served to pit the business community against other stakeholders and public groups with concerns about the project, and this division was not healthy for moving the project forward. I also think concerns raised by members of the public were routinely dismissed, and those opposed to any aspects of the project were seen and portrayed as agitators & troublemakers. It was made clear from the start of the Straw campaign that there was not broad objection to the project as a whole, just to some parts of it (the removal of a mature urban forest), and the way they were being carried out. As in my answer to question 7, I think a more sustained and comprehensive engagement - council officers, architects, ward councillors showing up at regularly scheduled meetings of various groups to update them with progress - would have helped cement broader support.
D	The council could have involved the public much more comprehensively from the start on a project that effectively impacts everyone in the city. They could have done more to raise awareness about the project in all aspects, and been more transparent about the costs - financial, but also environmental & emotional/sentimental. They could have submitted the project to planning for further scrutiny. There needs to be more oversight about how feasibility is done - the flawed BNG results caused by improperly using an out-of-date metric is an example of how bad data can impact a project. The executive order to remove the trees in the dark of night was a disastrous failure - they should create safeguards at the policy level that prevent such decisions being made on the say so of one person.
A	The three consultations were inadequate in making the population of Plymouth aware of the impact to the city, the environment or the cost.
B	The council have the email addresses of most (if not all) residents paying Council Tax. They could easily and very cost efficiently make everyone aware of major plans which will impact the city we live in and call home
C	They have no interest in engaging with stakeholders - if they did they would not have contractors working through the night to complete the removal of trees
D	Take in the feedback from all stakeholders in the city and have very open communication.

A	<p>The fact that this question states that there were three ‘consultations’ does not give me much faith in the independence of the ILR. Can any of these be called consultations? The 2018 ‘information event’ was not really about Armada Way – it was about New George Street developments. There were so few responses which indicates it was not well advertised. I wasn’t aware of it until much later.</p> <p>The 2022 event was not a consultation. An FOI request for the results of this ‘consultation’ stated that this was ‘not a consultation’. It was held at the very top of Drake’s Circus and was on for one weekday afternoon. I did not know about it until much later.</p> <p>PCC did not even call the 2023 event a consultation. The questions were quite shocking in that they were all leading questions and didn’t mention the main thing that many people were concerned about – the loss of trees. I hope the ILR will take a close look at the questionnaire. It wasn’t possible to answer yes to parts of the scheme that looked appealing because (although it was not mentioned) it was by now obvious that this meant losing nearly all of the trees. This questionnaire seemed deliberately designed to restrict any comments about the trees and just garner support for the scheme.</p> <p>There was no information on how feedback would impact the plans, and PCC’s own summary that ‘the overwhelming majority were against the scheme in any way’, shortly before implementing the mass felling shows this was just a ‘tick-box’ exercise and would not influence the scheme at all.</p> <p>It was difficult to obtain any meaningful information from the staff at the event. It seemed as if the event was just intended as a ‘hard sell’ for the scheme. I was unable to get hold of the biodiversity net gain assessment and later found out the scheme would actually result in a significant biodiversity net loss. The images of new trees were very misleading. This exercise felt quite insulting to the public.</p>
B	<p>It can improve by being honest. There were many untruths told to justify the clearance of Armada Way’s green infrastructure, including that trees were damaging the built environment when the tree survey report clearly showed they weren’t. If they could have publicised what they were planning early on and via channels that were accessible to people, people may have had the chance to express their concerns about loss of the mature trees early on. There may then have been an opportunity to consider alternative solutions that allowed for the updating of the public realm whilst retaining some or more of the important green infrastructure. It may have been necessary to lose some trees but mass tree clearance might have been discarded as the starting point for the scheme. It seems clear however that PCC officers thought the scheme would be unpopular and therefore deliberately kept it quiet (notably the proposed felling of so many trees). It could be argued that this is evidenced by the avoidance of the planning system where the public would have been able to raise objections. Has there been any other public realm development scheme on this scale that was put through under permitted development rights?</p>

C	<p>Surely it is very clear that the Council did not engage with stakeholders or the public in the lead up to the March 2023 decision and that the Council, in fact, made every effort to ensure that no-one would be aware of what they were about to do.</p> <p>My ward Councillor, Chris Penberthy, despite never having responded to my emails expressing concerns about the proposed mass tree felling in his ward, sent a generic email to his constituents on March 9th 2023 about Armada Way. When I received this email, I had a feeling that something was about to happen. It later emerged that on this very day he had been consulted by the Conservatives on the urgent procedure and therefore was very aware of the plan and did not object to the process. It also emerged that he had sent my personal details to council officer Martin Ivatt, for use in a dossier that was sent to the Police, seemingly in an attempt to justify significant police presence for the night of the felling.</p> <p>Elaborate plans were put in place to ensure the public were excluded and kept in the dark and prevented from access to justice (i.e. obtaining an injunction) as is evidenced by transcripts of meetings and internal emails within the court case documents. To announce the felling (only on the council website) at the same time as the tree-felling plant and equipment was arriving on site in the early evening must have been deliberately planned to ensure a lack of public awareness.</p> <p>As far as I can see, the contempt of Council senior officers and some Councillors for the public they serve, is unlikely to change. Councillors are elected but senior officers are not and seem to be able to act with impunity and complete disregard for communities.</p> <p>I think stakeholder engagement will only improve with a new planning and infrastructure team in place, especially a new senior lead. I do not believe the current team will wish to improve their stakeholder engagement – more likely they will find even more creative ways to avoid this in future.</p> <p>Evidence from the later ‘Let’s Talk Armada Way’ consultation could be referred to, to demonstrate that keeping the public in the dark continued after the felling. This consultation also featured a questionnaire with very leading questions. It talked about biodiversity gain when there was to be a loss. It mentioned, bizarrely a Myawaki forest which there were seemingly no intentions to plant and which was not part of the scheme. It also omitted the important information that the scheme had recently tripled in cost. The Council were obviously aware of this at the time but failed to mention this very important aspect. It is difficult to imagine there will be any improvement in transparency in the future with the current Council leader and Senior Officers (who have worked together over decades on many schemes) likely to carry on with business as usual.</p>
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D	<p>This learning review includes the aim to examine the impact of the scheme on the local environment. I hope it will consider the biodiversity net loss of the current proposal and the requirement to plant hundreds more trees to achieve the 10% biodiversity net gain that is required by legislation. It should consider the fact that the Council ignored their own ecologist's advice and felled trees (in bird nesting season) adjacent to trees that had to be retained due to active nests being present. In future the Council should be transparent about impacts to green infrastructure and nature, and the public should be able to have faith that BNG assessments are undertaken correctly and should be able to trust that their Council will value nature and urban trees.</p> <p>For the future, the Council should engage (early on) with community organisations such as Plymouth Tree People and Environment Plymouth – groups that have professional expertise on natural infrastructure and represent Plymouth communities. They should be willing to be open to suggestions / and willing to listen to the views of these groups and allow them, where appropriate to have some influence on decision making.</p> <p>This learning review also includes the aim to examine financial implications. The significant spending of public funds and borrowing of vast amounts of money by the Council should be examined. The CAVAT (Capital Asset Value for Amenity Trees) value of the trees should be examined as part of this review to reveal the value lost. Significant spending should be transparent in future. In times that require austerity, public opinion is likely to favour improvements to public services, rather than mass wastage of funds on what appear to be vanity projects. If the public had been aware of the plans and had had a chance to influence them, it is possible that a much cheaper scheme to update and improve Armada Way could have been found and that important green infrastructure could have been retained. It will take a lot to regain public trust and I believe this will not be achieved with the current planning and infrastructure senior officers in place.</p>
A	Regarding the 2018, this wasn't widely advertised. I didn't even know it happened until the 2022 one. The questions were elaborated in a confusing manner and results were ignored. When the outcome wasn't what the council wanted, huge amount of resources were diverted and the result was ignored again
B	Widely announced consultation and follow the results
C	There was no engagement. When it happened, Council behaved in a bullying way, it was more of "listen what I want to say" rather than listening to the views of the stakeholders
D	Council should be bond to follow the will of the people they represent. They lost their credibility by behaving so patronisingly in a way "I did try to explain what I wanted. You don't want it? I do my will anyways"
A	No
B	Engagement, provide concise and concrete information, ensure non biased expert information is included.
C	I think it improved drastically, but this was in reaction to widespread protests and doesnt relate to BAU
D	Much wider engagement, no biased detailed information, deeper relevant community and a vision for future for people and place
A	The 2018 and 2022 events were not consultations. The 2023 consultation was a sham consultation that was an insult to Plymouth's residents. It was only implemented

	because of widespread public concern over the plan to clear Armada Way of its trees, and yet didn't include information on this in the questionnaire.
B	It needs to be transparent; open; honest; engage before the scheme is finalised and indicate if or how any consultation results will influence the scheme. Information on any consultation should be obvious and accessible to the public. Major schemes should be open to public scrutiny and not forced through if the public and community groups are clearly against them.
C	The Council obviously didn't engage - rather secretly planned the operation and implemented it with no notice.
D	It should have accepted, once it received one of the largest petitions ever submitted, that the people of Plymouth valued their urban trees and didn't want them to be recklessly destroyed. The Council should then have revised the scheme significantly so that as many trees as possible could be incorporated. Instead of accepting the petition (and this shows the Council's true colours) the Council moved to ban all online petitions in future, so that the public could not interfere in schemes in the future. Now the Council will only accept paper petitions which seems a very retrograde step and one deliberately designed to put a barrier in the way of the public being able to express concerns. This in itself shows that the public cannot have trust the Council. I'm not sure if trust can be regained as these Council behaviours are ingrained.
A	No. The consultations were about the proposed end result with little explanation of why it was needed, who had asked for it, how much it would cost and what other options existed. The basic choice was between agreeing or disagreeing with the presented design or suggesting minor changes. The consultation events were more promotional than consultative in their nature. Plymouth Tree People submitted detailed responses to all three consultations but none of them was acknowledged. Stakeholders might reasonably have expected to receive a summary of the main comments with the reasons why they could or could not be incorporated, but no such report was provided.
B	By being transparent with the information provided, particularly to explain what other options had been considered and why they were discounted. It was only after the release of the Better Places Programme Armada Way Cabinet Report in February 2024 that most of the detail came to light, although this still did not satisfactorily explain why the outer two tree avenues could not have been incorporated into the scheme's design for a "gateway to the city centre".
C	Not at all well. Design should be a process, yet stakeholders were only permitted to comment on the end result. Information that Plymouth Tree People had asked to see, which could have been released without causing commercial or protocol issues, was refused or only provided after a long delay. There is evidently a need for Plymouth City Council to give more weight to informed comments from individuals and organisations. Improvements for future projects must depend on information being made available to them in a timely fashion, as well as appreciating their competence to comment or otherwise. We believed that Plymouth Tree People's credentials were already established, not only by drawing from the resources of its own members but also by consulting with other tree-based organisations. There have been occasional references to a Public Realm Panel but its composition and terms of reference do not appear to be available. It is contended that, appropriately constituted, such a panel could assist project delivery by testing and

	refining user requirements, ensuring options are fully explored and communicating the reasons for the chosen solution.
D	<p>The social fabric of a city is probably more important than its bricks and mortar, which is why people should be made to feel part of a project rather than having it done to them. Communications should invite responses and not simply announce what is planned.</p> <p>Glasshouse Design (https://theglasshouse.org.uk/) is a charity that advocates the use of community-based design processes and it is suggested that a presentation by them to Councillors and Growth Directorate staff would help to explore its usefulness for public-realm projects such as Armada Way.</p>
A	<p>No, the consultations were very deficient. The questions were leading, as though the Council was only looking for comments in support of their scheme, and the results reflected this impression. Negative feedback – which was substantial as evidenced by the petition and protests – was roundly dismissed and even ridiculed by the council. Questions put to the Council were not given adequate consideration and some were even ignored. The whole process was a disgrace and has led me to disengage with the Council because they have proven – whether under Tory or Labour leadership – that they will not listen to the wishes of the public, only push through their poorly conceived plans, and refuse to be held accountable. The designs barely changed from consultation to consultation, yet the Council invested in marketing promotion that would have the public think they had completely revamped the entire project. This tactic is generally called gaslighting. The entire process was deeply flawed, misleading and disrespectful of the public.</p>
B	<p>There are so many examples of stunning urban design. Why couldn't PCC have held an open competition and allowed the public to weigh in on proposals? The Council would do well to accept criticism as part of public engagement. Many people I know whose work is funded by the council were afraid to express their opinions openly. This a shameful, undemocratic way to run a city council. If the Council honestly welcomed feedback, we could have a mature discussion about the values Plymothians share and how we want to live. If PCC took feedback seriously, it would be an opportunity to bring people together in thoughtful discuss and creative exchange of ideas about the challenges the city faces. Instead they bully everyone into silence.</p>
C	<p>My impression is that the Council in March 2023 was determined to see through its plan no matter what the consequences, no matter how many businesses were destroyed or nature demolished. They have no regard – again neither under Tory nor Labour leadership – for the public's wishes. This is a profound loss for a city that struggles to fill its shops, attract tourists and investors. Stakeholder engagement can be improved by asking stakeholders about their needs, acknowledging their responses (in a transparent report) and incorporating their responses.</p>
D	<p>The Council could have improved their original scheme for Armada Way by engaging the public before contracts were signed and taking our views seriously. Instead of seizing this opportunity for urban renewal to give the Southwest a stunning urban landscape, they boxed though their dull plan that excited no one and has only wasted vast amounts of money and angered people. The felling of the trees was an irreversible crime against Plymouth's natural environment. Had the Council sought out environmental impact reports from several independent analysts and incorporated their insights, they would have won the respect of Plymothians.</p>

	The foremost lesson each council member and council officer must learn is that their role is to serve the people of Plymouth, not their own egos or imagined legacy.
A	No. Too hard to find and no clear feedback or engagement from the council.
B	Send letters (in same way as electoral roll info) with s. a. e. and track responses. One way to bring info to all residents. There are others.
C	There was NO return engagement from the council. I spoke to my OWN councillor in the week's before the brutal felling took place, FACE to face, who would only give evasive non answers on progress of the decision, did not state his own position on it, and when I asked if a vote of full council should happen (where Conservatives were literally in minority, to stop the destruction, I was blandly told " There is NO APPETITE FOR COALITION. The decision was then taken in arrogance and disdain for public opinion
D	LISTEN to the public, and FOLLOW the results of consultation (in which 80% responses were opposed to FELLING our beautiful trees) and stop the arrogant dismissal of the public voice (15,000 petition). And in personal conversation.
A	no, I am unclear how the consultations were organised, advertised and community engagement sought. The exception being the last consultation that was held in the guidhall, but that felt more like a sales pitch for already well development ideas, where little could be changed.
B	with something as significant as a major revamping of the city centre landscaping, I would expect much more effort to be made in terms of seeking out input from residents and communities. I have been reflecting on the differences between this community consultations that I have been involved in in the past. It is disappointing, and in my view inexcusable that there was such a reaction as people were clearly unaware of the impact of the redesigned centre on the existing landscaping and the trees in particular. I was a Plymouth City Councillor for 9 years in the 1990s, and chair of planning for about 6 years. In that role, I was particularly keen to maximise community participation in the local plan process, as i wanted to empower communities about development in their neighbourhood prior to the stage of objecting to specific applications. In conjunction with officers a comprehensive consultation exercise was undertaken, that involved businesses, community and voluntary groups, and ad hoc opportunities , such as stalls at church meetings, and park fun days. The exercise was gained national recognition as exemplary practice. In looking to draw lessons for the future, it may be useful to draw on the experiences of consultations that have been much more effectively conducted in the past.
C	At this stage it was too late to make significant changes. The consultation needs to be more engaging, meaningful and genuine at an earlier stage. For example, as a reaction to the resistance to the removal of mature trees, the scheme was amended to include more tree planting, but this then included a community forest located by the crown plaza hotel. No one I have spoken to sees that as a workable idea. It looks like a panic bolt on.
D	see above,. It is hard to avoid the impression that the Council is designing projects to bid for monies available, and to fit the bidding criteria, rather than see a need ,design a scheme and then look at available funding.

A	Consultation needs to be conducted by reputable outfits. Plymouth City Council has a long history of poor environmental standards and a predilection for appointing poor quality principal officers in its planning, chief executive's and legal departments. Incompetent, struggling, over-promoted and overpaid officers lacking probity and integrity are likely to be predisposed to appointing misfits and tenth-rate consultants. Lacking in integrity and probity could be a fitting description if applied to the city's coat of arms!
B	The council needs to purge itself of poor quality officers in key areas - planning, legal and chief executive's (formerly Town Clerk's department). Any intelligent member of the public attending a typical PCC planning meeting could be forgiven for thinking they are witnessing a freak show encompassing ill-prepared semi-literate senior and subordinate officers scarcely able to string a few sentences together. So-called democracy officers appear to be a waste of space. Although thickism is rife and endemic within the population of the city, there is a significant proportion of the population that is environmentally literate and deserving good quality staff. Council members are elected and it's something of a lottery what turns up, but there ought to be a way of improving the quality and professional standards of the appointed officers. A preponderance of poorly educated within the population of a city like Plymouth leads to the election a Tudor Evans bumkin-like interloper with straw sprouting from his ears and some sort of ersatz qualification in environmental science that equips him for nothing in the way of useful field or bench work. However as leader of the council this clown has a significant influence on MPs, cabinet ministers and the quality of council officers appointed to posts and in turn, the standard of consultants brought in. I suggest the likes of Cllr Richard Bingley the environmentally thick Tory councillor and former leader of PCC who signed the tree destruction order successfully progressed up the ladder of PCC because of the high proportion of thickism in the city - a notion confirmed sitting near a dopey woman in a bus with a hat like an inverted po whose approval of seeing a green area covered with concrete was her exclamation of - "it's about time they did something here". This is the sort of Plymothian you come across all too often - clear minds unimppded by excessive education. And this is why, apart from a small proportion of decent coucil members we end up with so many crummy over-promoted and overpaid officers in the planning and chief executive's departments.
C	In the lead up to the March 2023 decision I suggest council engagement with stakeholders was, as usual, hopelessly inadequate. In any profession, some practitioners are better than others, but my experience of the council's planning and CEO's departments is that Plymouth is badly served and standards of professional conduct need drastic improvement if "the bond of trust between Council's and their local people" is to be achieved. Probity in Planning Code of Practice can easily be circumvented by Plymouth's poor calibre planning officers. Also, there are too few Planning Committee Members with experience and intellectual capacity to follow any but the simplest arguments. Such weak intellects are particularly prone to the views of planning officers eager to facilitate the narrow, selfish, rapacious interests of outfits such as the Plymouth Area Business Council (PABC).
D	To think that PCC is likely to learn environmentally beneficial lessons for the future is delusional. Unfortunately supine decisions by a naive High Court Judge have set a precedent for councils and other public bodies to make unlawful decisions, carry out wantonly destructive action and then be immune from legal challenge through judicial

	review. Basically what PCC's thuggish officers have achieved is a blueprint for irreversible, unlawful damage with limited legal consequences.
A	I asked questions at these reviews but all I got was blindsided platitudes about taking my views into consideration.
B	By actually showing how they incorporated the publics views into their changes instead of just restating their original plans as if there was no other options but theirs on the table.
C	They just kept pushing their views and we're deaf to everyone's views but their own
D	Pushing ahead against peoples views whilst all the time claiming that they had consulted the public was not an acceptable response.

Armada Way Independent Learning Review Report

Annexe 5

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Annexe 6

Timeline of Events – Armada Way

Date/time	Event	Key person/s or Organisation	Comment
1943	A Plan for Plymouth - The original “Beaux-Arts” plan for rebuilding the city centre following the blitz. Formal and geometrical approach to the proposed landscaping of Armada Way.	Abercrombie and Watson	“We have permitted ourselves the one monumental feature of the whole of Plymouth rebuilding” Armada way presented a wide, ceremonial and direct boulevard connecting the Hoe to the Station
1980s	City Centre pedestrianisation scheme	PCC	The landscaping for the city centre pedestrianisation was based around a winding stream and curved landscaping with ornamental tree planting.
Nov 2003	David Mackay Vision for Plymouth and the City Centre Strategic Masterplan	PCC David Mackay	The vision proposed that the original purpose of Armada Way - a grand vista linking the train station to the Hoe – is recovered through a simplified landscape design with movement enhanced by a public transport link. Regular lines of trees should be introduced to mark the formality and scale of the axis – the central area be kept clear of all obstructions to allow

Date/time	Event	Key person/s or Organisation	Comment
			for events, processions, markets.
26 April 2010	City Centre and University Area Action Plan	PCC	Planning policy document providing a framework for key growth areas. The vision for the city centre was to create a lively and vibrant mixed use regional centre. AW identified for high quality public realm improvements
2014	Asset Heritage Audit statement of significance	PCC	Advocated a return to the Beaux Arts design concept with formal tree planting and reinstatement of the vista. The existing tree planting in the northern section considered heavy.
2017	City Centre Strategic Masterplan	PCC LDA Design Bilfinger GVA WSP Robery Bevan	“a single, simple overarching public realm plan for the route is deemed essential” “Piecemeal changes have domesticated the scale of the route and introduced elements which interfere with long range views”
2017	Preliminary Ecological Assessment and Full Arboricultural Survey undertaken	TOR Ecology	Commissioned to understand the health of the trees in the city centre environment
2017	Tree survey for entire City Centre Area	WSP	
2017	Better Places Programme initiated	PCC LDA Design	Armada Way was the largest single project within the BPP (£12.7m)

Date/time	Event	Key person/s or Organisation	Comment
			<p>The programme transcended numerous political administrations from concept to delivery</p> <p>LDA commissioned as Design Consultants for the BPP programme</p>
15 Mar 2018 – 26 April 2018	Better Places Programme Consultation	PCC LDA Design	<p>Series of engagement events for the community to help shape the BPP.</p> <p>178 formal responses. Q12 of the response form related to Armada Way. 86% (92 responses) supported the proposals. Some concern about the loss of mature trees</p>
Mar 2019	Plymouth and SW Devon Joint Local Plan adopted	PCC/West Devon LPA	<p>Policy PLY6 (re-imagining city centre)</p> <p>Policy DEV28 importance of trees</p>
18 Mar 2019	Plymouth Climate Emergency Action Plan	PCC	<p>CLlrs voted unanimously to declare a climate emergency.</p> <p>*Tree planting 2020/23 – 16,000 trees planted in the city</p>
July 2020 (updated June 2022)	Assurance Framework for the Transforming Cities Fund Programme agreed with Department for Transport	PCC Department for Transport (DfT)	<p>TCF Programme Board established to oversee the programme delivery. Political/officer and DfT reps.</p>
3 July 2020	Transforming Cities Fund (Tranche 2) Key Decision Report	PCC Leader Decision	<p>Report approved allocation of £52m funding; Business case; governance arrangements; procurement process</p>

Date/time	Event	Key person/s or Organisation	Comment
			& award of contract delegated to SRO.
2021	Further Tree Survey undertaken	YGS	Condition and future longevity of the existing trees in the corridor. This survey provided the basis on which the designs for Armada Way were then developed
3 Mar 2021	Assessment was undertaken by the LPA on the need for an EIA screening	LPA (Local Planning Authority) PCC	This process was undertaken prior to formal pre-application advice on the proposed scheme. Amendment (Paul Barnard witness statement) – no assessment by the LPA occurred at this time as no formal request from the project team was submitted
Jun 2021	Project Team for AW undertook a review of the EIA Regulations	Project Team PCC (Developer)	The team determined that the likely design for public realm improvements would not fall in Schedule 1 and very unlikely to fall in Schedule 2 of the 2017 regulations
2022	Decision taken to reduce the scope of the scheme	PCC	Due to financial pressures – scheme reduced from North Cross to the Hoe to North Cross and Royal Parade only
Early 2022	Officers recommended to Leader and Cabinet member for Transport that the 2018 scheme (as revised should be progressed)	PCC	

Date/time	Event	Key person/s or Organisation	Comment
9 Feb 2022	City Centre Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Plan	PCC	Much of the City Centre was initially adopted as a conservation area in 2019. The CAAMP reiterates that the views within and from outside the CA are compromised by the original planting scheme reaching maturity.
13 Sept 2022	Project team requests pre-application advice on the proposed scheme	Project team PCC LPA PCC	
Sept 2022	2018 scheme published for consultation	PCC	
12:00 – 18:00 29 Sept 2022 Consultation boards at central library for a further 2 weeks	Public Information event in Drake Circus on the proposed Armada Way scheme	PCC	Updated design scheme. 200 people attended. 17 formal responses received (75%) supportive. One comment referred to the loss of the trees. Members of the public were informed the project was permitted development and did not require an EIA screening opinion.
Sept/Oct 2022	STRAW established	STRAW	Campaign Group established – concern for the loss of existing trees on AW
10 Oct 2022	Growth and Infrastructure OSC	OSC PCC	Armada Way Scheme considered as part of the city centre improvement item – discussion regarding cycle way, timeline, funding. Technical note requested on cycle

Date/time	Event	Key person/s or Organisation	Comment
			way – to 29.11.22 OS Committee.
25 Oct 2022	Pre-application advice received from the LPA regarding the proposed scheme	LPA	<p>Informal advice and clarification on a series of points –</p> <p>No listed buildings within red line</p> <p>Demolition works were not relevant so not triggering planning consent.</p> <p>Construction was permitted development</p> <p>No TPOs but any works to trees south of the sundial requires 211 notice (6 weeks' notice)</p> <p>The works did not fall within Schedule 2 of EIA Regs 2017 and fell outside of the Regulations</p> <p>*The entirety of the land in Armada way is in council ownership and therefore Highway Maintainable at Public Expense (HMPE)</p>
31 Oct 2022	Correspondence to STRAW from project team informing that no EIA screening opinion required	PCC Project Team STRAW	
3 Nov 2022	Meeting with Project team and STRAW	STRAW Project Team LDA Design Morgan Sindall contractor YGS Cllr Mark Shayer	Meeting with STRAW to discuss the design rationale for the scheme and explain why the existing trees could not be retained

Date/time	Event	Key person/s or Organisation	Comment
21 Nov 2022	COUNCIL MEETING - Cabinet member for Transport announced a pause to the project at the City Council meeting	Cllr Dreen	Item 29 on agenda and Cllr questions 5&8. As a result of the debate a pause announced because of members of the public raising concerns about the potential loss of the trees and requested a review to establish if more of the 136 trees could be retained STRAW protest (50-60 people)
Nov/Dec 2022	Design review undertaken internally	PCC LDA Design	
8 Dec 2022	Updated Preliminary Ecological Assessment	Simon Geary Ecology Services	Update to the 2017 report between North Cross and Royal Parade. Concluded that most of the habitats are of negligible ecological importance and unlikely to support protected species – although 15 trees may contain bat roosts. 1 bird nest recorded.
4 Jan 2023	Endoscopic Bat survey assessment undertaken	YGS/EC	
19 Jan 2023	Modified Design Plan published on Council website	PCC	The review resulted in 7 additional existing trees to be retained, and 3 new trees planted. This resulted in 129 trees to be felled and 150 new trees to be planted.
30 Jan 2023	Full Council Meeting	PCC	Petition response from Full Council. STRAW protest (80-100 people) The Council supported

Date/time	Event	Key person/s or Organisation	Comment
			'a meaningful engagement process in February, which considers the natural environment and climate resilience before finalising the designs for Armada Way' and requested that the Cabinet member implements that final design quickly to avoid ongoing disruption to city centre businesses from the construction works.
31 Jan 2023	Meeting between STRAW and MO	PCC STRAW	
6 – 11 Feb 2023	Meaningful Engagement in the Guildhall and other locations. Included exhibition and workshops. Response form for feedback online and hard copy	Project Team LDA	2314 responses 592 visitors STRAW – small protests and targeted activity)
14 Feb 2023	Internal meeting with MO and project team	MO Project Team	Advice that the TCF Programme Board should not take the decision to proceed with the project but that the decision route should be escalated upwards.
14 Feb 2023	Internal Senior Officer Meeting	CEO, ACEO, MO, Strategic Director, SRO	Discussion on decision making options
17 Feb 2023	Cllr Bingley informs officers he would take the decision rather than the decision going to Cabinet under his scheme of delegation	Cllr Bingley SRO Strategic Director Place	Verbal meeting to confirm decision making route would be Leader decision under his delegated powers

Date/time	Event	Key person/s or Organisation	Comment
22 Feb 2023	OSC meeting (Performance, Finance and Customer Service)		Appeal by STRAW against the resolution of Full Council (30 Jan) considered. The OSC supported the resolution of Full Council with one additional recommendation: Cabinet member for Transport write to the Minister for Transport requesting an extension to funding for the Armada Way Scheme.
23 Feb 2023	Alison White's solicitor wrote to PCC raising a number of concerns, including compliance with environmental impact assessment (EIA) requirements, whether planning permission was required and the adequacy of the consultation carried out [7/490]. The letter asked for a substantive response before any final decision.	STRAW PCC	The Council replied on 10 Mar 2023 STRAW considered no substantive response to the points raised was given
08:15 23 Feb 2023	Briefing by Cllr Bingley to opposition Leader and Cabinet portfolio holder regarding the decision-making route. Proposed decision by Leader to be published and subject to call in	Cllr Bingley SRO Strategic Director. Cllr Mark Coker *Cllr Tudor Evans invited but not in attendance	Verbal meeting
17:00 23 Feb 2023	Internal officer meeting to discuss decision making route. Agreed to pursue member executive decision making route	MO CEO ACEO SRO	Meeting to discuss the decision-making route and timescales. 7.03.23 was the latest date the decision by Leader could be taken to

Date/time	Event	Key person/s or Organisation	Comment
	subject to agreement with Cllr Riley		ensure process could be completed prior to pre-election period.
27 Feb 2023	Full Council Meeting	Cllr Bingley CEO MO	In the 2 weeks prior to Full Council, meetings were held with the Leader and officers that any publication of the information from the Engagement Event or the decision must be done prior to this Full Council meeting. This was not achieved. Council also unanimously agreed to recommend to Cabinet that a Tree Panel be established (see 6.3.58)
1 Mar 2023	Initial draft of "original decision" circulated by SRO at 21.51	SRO	Report circulated to senior officers including to CEO and Monitoring Officer
2 Mar 2023	Initial draft of Engagement Report	SRO	Report circulated including to CEO and M O
12:30 3 Mar 2023	Internal officer meeting	SRO Strategic Director MO	Confirmation that the deadline of 7 Mar will not be achieved. Agreed to pursue an Urgency route and discuss with the Leader and OSC - Cllr Riley
14:00 3 Mar 2023	Internal Officer meeting to agree to pursue Urgency route	CEO SRO MO Strategic Director	Exploring reasons for Urgency
3 and 12 Mar 2023	Pre-felling assessment for nesting birds undertaken	YGS/EC	Assessment undertaken as a result of SGES Ecological Assessment (Dec 2022) Requested by

Date/time	Event	Key person/s or Organisation	Comment
			Morgan Sindall prior to any tree felling.
10:15 and 17:00 6 Mar 2023	Internal officer meetings to brief and agree with Leader the decision-making route	Cllr Bingley MO CEO SRO Strategic Director	The opportunity for call in – no longer available if decision was to be taken prior to pre-election period. Meetings to agree actions for an urgency report under leaders delegated powers and agreement to this route from Cllr Riley
Week of 6 Mar 2023	Internal discussions regarding project implementation	Giles Perritt Emma Jackman Anthony Payne	Discussions regarding project mobilization on 14 Mar
10:00 9 Mar 2023	Tactical coordination group meeting	PCC Police	Initial meeting to discuss potential mobilisation
12:30 10 Mar 2023	Tactical coordination group meeting with Police	ACEO Council Civil Protection group (plus additional officers) Contractors Project Team Police	2 nd meeting to discuss potential mobilisation
14 Mar 2023			
11:30	Tactical coordination group meeting	PCC Contractors Police	3 rd Meeting to discuss mobilisation
11:01	Cllr Riley, Chair of Scrutiny, confirmed in writing he was content to remove call-in powers	Cllr Riley MO	
13:31	Final “original decision” report sent to Democratic Services	Project Team	
14:13	HGR solicitors (acting on behalf of STRAW) wrote to the Council (MO),	HGR solicitors MO	Letter noted the lack of a substantive response to letter dated 23 Feb and asking for a response

Date/time	Event	Key person/s or Organisation	Comment
			before any final decision was made. MO responded at 17.40. STRAW considered the letter implied that a decision to proceed was not imminent or that the decision had been made. “Finally, we can see no reason set out in this or your previous letter to require us to confirm that no further action will be taken by the Council at this stage.”
15:00	Internal officer meeting with Deputy CEO	ACEO MO Project Officers	ACEO confirmed he had not sent the report to the Leader. The s171 Highway license was not yet in place
15:28	Final “original decision” report sent to Leader for signing	Cllr Bingley	Received by Cllr Bingley at 16.31 (GMT +1)
17:21	Signed Original Decision Urgent Decision: Better Places Programme Armada Way Reason for urgency decision: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduces disruption of city centre events • Reduces delays due to nesting birds • Reduces impact of construction on businesses • Reduces city centre anti-social behaviour • Reduces impact of cost increases over time • Reduces impact of inflation 	Cllr Bingley	Decision taken under Urgency powers and sent from Leader’s office to Democratic Services to publish. The TCF Programme Board had delegated powers under the approved TCF assurance Framework agreed with the Department for Transport to provide necessary approvals from one delivery stage to the next. The TCF programme board can, however, where

Date/time	Event	Key person/s or Organisation	Comment
	The decision was not considered to be a key decision		there is a significant political impact that cannot be managed by the TCF Board, refer matters to Cabinet. The Leader can delegate or take back matters as he/she sees fit.
17:54 to 17:58	Original Decision published on Council web site	PCC	
18:00	Project Implementation begins	Morgan Sindall	Hoardings erected
20:00	Tree felling commences		
15 Mar 2023			
00:29	Interim injunction to stop the trees from being felled concluded	STRAW Mr Justice Freedman	–
00:35	STRAW contacts Morgan Sindall indicating interim injunction received	STRAW Morgan Sindall	
00:57	Email received from STRAW with digital copy of interim injunction.	STRAW PCC	
01:00	MO sent email to officers indicating an interim injunction had been received and all works must stop immediately	STRAW MO SRO	
01:01	Planned tactical meeting commences	PCC	
01:02	Project Team instructs all tree works to cease immediately	Project Team Contractors	
01:07	Interim Injunction served in hard copy to SRO	STRAW SRO	Of the 129 trees due to be felled 110 were felled before the interim injunction ceased work.
17 Mar 2023	CPR Part 18 request	MO STRAW	Request for further information under the Civil Procedure Rules in respect of the ongoing legal proceedings
22 Mar 2023	Cllr Bingley announced intention to resign	Cllr Bingley	

Date/time	Event	Key person/s or Organisation	Comment
24 Mar 2023	Interim Injunction confirmed	Sir Ross Cranston STRAW	
27 Mar 2023	Pre-election period starts	MO	Pre-election guidance published internally to officers on 6 Feb – Controversial decisions should be avoided unless they are required to comply with the Councils statutory duties and cannot wait until after the election
27 Mar 2023	Full Council meeting	Cllr Bingley/Cllr Shayer	Cllr Shayer becomes acting Leader. Motion of notice Armada Way – full independent review of Armada Way project and establishment of a Tree Panel agreed
4 May 2023	Local Elections take place		Labour gained 7 seats and hold an overall majority
19 May 2023	Full Council AGM		Tudor Evans elected Leader of the Council
19 May 2023	Armada Way – withdrawal of decision	Tudor Evans	Executive decision – not to implement “Original decision” and for officers to review options for Armada Way
22 May 2023	Permission to apply for JR	Ms Justice Lang STRAW	
27 May 2023	Full Council motion unanimously agreed	PCC	Motion resolved to establish an Independent review of the Armada Way Project
10 Jul 2023	Cabinet meeting – report Armada Way	PCC	Report to agree Full Council motion

Armada Way Independent Learning Review Report

Annexe 7

The Route to Urgency

(sources: witness statements/TOG timeline/interviews/original decision report)

Date	Activity	Consideration
12:00 14 Feb 2023	Internal meeting between MO and SRO (verbal) No written record. Source: MO Witness statement/Tactical Command timeline/Interviews	MO advised officers on the ramifications of the proposed decision if taken by the TCF Programme Board – given it would not be a public facing decision and may not allow the Council to demonstrate how the engagement event responses had been considered or provide transparent and full reasoning for the decision being made. As a result, it was considered that the proposed decision should be escalated upwards to the Council Leader. It was also advised by the MO that political groups should be briefed that any resulting decisions would come as a Leader's Decision.
14 Feb 2023	Internal meeting with CEO, ACEO, MO, Strategic Director, SRO Source: Tactical Command Timeline/MO witness statement/CEO meeting minutes	Discussion on Decision Making Options
09:00 17 Feb 2023	Leader, SRO Strategic Director (verbal) No written record. Source – interviews/MO witness statement	Update on Armada Way legal issues and decision-making options. Cllr Bingley confirmed to officers that he would be taking the decision in place of the matter going to Cabinet as he was entitled to under his scheme of delegation.
08:15 23 Feb 2023	Leader; Cllr Coker (Cllr Evans not in attendance) SRO Strategic Director No written record identified.	Discussion on proposed decision-making route. The meeting was for Leader and officers to brief the opposition party. Timelines were discussed with a view to ensuring the proposed decision could be taken with time permitted to allow for call-in and for the call-in to take place before

Date	Activity	Consideration
		the pre-election period. The decision to be taken on 6 March or no later than 7 March.
17:00 23 Feb 2023	CEO ACEO Strategic Director MO SRO Written record identified	Agreement to pursue urgent member executive decision route (subject to agreement with Cllr John Riley) Allow for Call-in
18:00 23 Feb 2023	SRO Project Team	SRO and Project Team to prepare member Executive Decision report
25 Feb 2023	Project Team email to MO	Project Team emailed MO to ask if there was any basis to consider removal of call-in. MO did not respond to the email
1 Mar 2023	Project Team phone call to MO	Project Team concerned about timescale and asked whether there were any reasons such as cost delays/impact on city centre that would be relevant, MO outlined Urgency procedure and indicated it could be considered but MO needed more information.
21:51 1 Mar 2023	SRO Project Team	Very first early draft circulated including to CEO and MO
15:38 2 Mar 2023	SRO Project Team	Draft of the AW Engagement Report circulated including to CEO and MO
12:30 3 Mar 2023	MO SRO Strategic Director (no written record identified)	MO recognised the report would not be completed, reviewed and signed off by 7 March. Discussion regarding timing difficulties if the Leader was to take the decision before the Election in the light of the pre-election period and the approach taken by the Council to controversial decisions. It was agreed to use urgency procedure. SRO to approach Leader. MO to contact Cllr Riley
14:00 3 Mar 2023	MO SRO Strategic Director CEO ACEO (verbal)	MO updated that Cllr Riley willing to consider the request for no call-in. MO agreed it was in the interests of the Council that a decision was taken before the pre-election period and therefore immediately (subject to Leader agreeing) using the Urgency procedures.
3 Mar 2023	SRO email to CEO Strategic Director MO	SRO emailed possible reasons for urgency
4 Mar 2023	Project Team email report to SRO and Hof Hs & Regen.	First full completed draft of report

Date	Activity	Consideration
10:15 6 Mar 2023	SRO Cllr Bingley	Cllr Bingley confirmed that he did not want to take the decision or consider O&S Committee recommendations in the pre-election period. He did not want to delay the decision until after the Election due to the bird nesting season.
17:00 6 Mar 2023 Meeting notes CEO	MO CEO SRO Strategic Director	There was no prospect of the draft decision report being completed and signed off by the following day. It was agreed that the Council would move from exploring call-in, to taking steps to prepare to request that it be removed in accordance with the Constitution.
23:06 6 Mar 2023	MO SRO project Team EJ PB MI	Proposed wording to be used in a request by the MO to Cllr Riley, Chair of Scrutiny
Week of 6 Mar 2023	Officers; Contractors & Police	Discussions regarding mobilisation of AW project on 14 March
10:22 8 Mar 2023		Latest draft report sent to CEO and Strategic Director. Reasons for Urgency added to the report
8 Mar 2023	MO	MO's email to Cllr Riley, Chair of Scrutiny seeking the removal of Call-In and the use of Urgency Powers
18:44 13 Mar 2023	SRO	Final Executive Decision report sent to MO, Sen. Lawyer, ACEO for clearance and approval
11:01 14 Mar 2023	Cllr Riley EJ	Cllr Riley confirmed in writing he was content to remove call-in powers
13:31 14 Mar 2023	Project Team	Final "Original Decision" sent to Democratic Services
15:00 14 Mar 2023	ACEO	Report held by the ACEO because the s171 Highway License was not yet in place for the site hoardings.
15:31 14 Mar 2023	Democratic Services	Final "Original Decision" sent to Cllr Bingley for clearance and signing (received 16.31)
17:21 14 Mar 2023	Leader's Office	Decision taken under Urgency procedures. Signed report received by Leader's office from Cllr Bingley at 17.02 and sent on to Democratic Services at 17.21
17:53 14 Mar 2023	ACEO	ACEO agreed to publish decision
17:58 14 Mar 2023	Democratic Services	Report re-published to ensure report document and appendices were legible
18:00 14 Mar 2023	Project Team Tactical Command Group Morgan Sindall and sub-contractors	Work starts on site to set up to implement the decision (Hoardings erected).
20:00 14 Mar 2023	Morgan Sindall and sub-contractors	Work to fell trees begins

Armada Way Independent Learning Review Report

Annexe 8

Armada Way – Sources of funding

Armada Way Capital Budget									
	TCF Grant	FHSF Grant	DRIP Grant	Capital Receipts	Corporate Borrowing	S106/CIL	LTP	CIEF (Corporate Borrowing)	Total Funding
Dec-20	£9,949,933.65	Virement from overall City Centre Public Realm programme			£9,293,695.81	£656,237.84			£9,949,933.65
Mar-21	£174,421.82	Virement from overall City Centre Public Realm programme			-£55,295.00		£78,442.14		£174,421.82
Dec-22	£2,577,103.00	TCF Funding transferred into Project from TCF Holding Line							£2,577,103.00
Mar-24	£1,300,000.00	TCF Funding transferred into Project from Crownhill Road							£1,300,000.00
Jun-24	£35,000.00	Devon CC DRIP funding	£35,000.00						£35,000.00
Jun-24	£5,000,000.00	TCF Funding transferred into Project from Western Corridor							£5,000,000.00
Sep-24	£10,754,350.00	Cabinet Paper		£8,716,449.00				£2,037,901.00	£10,754,350.00
Sep-24	£4,700,000.00	FHSF transferred into Project from Civic Centre							£4,700,000.00
	£34,490,808.47								
Armada Way Projects (Phases)									
	TCF Grant	FHSF Grant	DRIP Grant	Capital Receipts	Corporate Borrowing	S106/CIL	LTP	CIEF (Corporate Borrowing)	Total Funding
Delivery Phase	£4,823,075.96	£4,700,000.00		£8,716,449.00	£9,238,401.00	£376,838.05		£2,037,901.00	£29,892,665.01
Development Phase	£4,205,301.90		£35,000.00			£279,399.95	£78,442.00		£4,598,143.85
TOTAL	£9,028,377.86	£4,700,000.00	£35,000.00	£8,716,449.00	£9,238,401.00	£656,238.00	£78,442.00	£2,037,901.00	£34,490,808.86

Armada Way Independent Learning Review Report

Annexe 9

Attachments to email to Chair of OSC, 8 March 2023

Attachment 1 '230307 Reasons for urgencyFINAL'

Reasons for urgency (decision to be taken pre-election):

1. Timescales for scheme delivery & summer events

There are 12 weeks of work remaining for the piazza area, from the point works restart. Flavour Fest, one of the largest city centre events, is booked on 26th-28th May 2023.

To be ready to open the piazza up to allow Flavour Fest to take place the works required for this section of Armada Way would take six weeks, assuming there are no further delays. They need to be completed and the piazza cleared a minimum of 2 weeks before Flavour Fest in order to allow for time to set up.

If the decision was taken and works commenced the week before the start of the pre-election week works would take until at least the 8th May 2023. This would leave a little over two weeks to clear the site and allow the set up before Flavour Fest.

The only other suitable location for the Flavour Fest event is the Hoe. This will not have the same benefits for the city centre and there is no guarantee at this moment it could be hosted there.

If the project cannot recommence before the pre-election period, the works will remain on hold and Flavour Fest will not be able to go ahead in the city centre. There will be a knock-on affect for all other events over the course of the summer as, if it needs to wait until post-election, it would be significantly in to the summer before works can be completed.

Following Flavour Fest work would then need to recommence for the final 6 weeks, therefore continuing well in to the summer season, and therefore having a potentially significant impact on tourism for the city.

The Events team have advised that there are a number of large events which around which construction cannot take place, in June 2023, including Army recruitment over several weekends, Ford Electric promotions, Halloween and Half-term. Thereafter there will be severe limitations running up to the Christmas period from 17th November to early January 2024. If a decision is not taken pre-election the knock-on effect will be to events in the autumn and the Christmas period which are likely to cause issues with the delivery of the project within any revised date agreed with the Department of Transport for the completion of the project under the Transforming Cities Assurance Review process.

To ensure that the impact on events is minimised, and that the piazza is available, substantial works can be undertaken leading up to Flavour Fest, with the remaining slab replacement works undertaken following the event, working around retail concessions planned for the space. The contractor will be able to undertake the substantial works for the bases of the lighting columns, including setting the concrete foundations, with the lighting columns added in between events in the piazza.

2. Bird nesting

We have now within the bird nesting season. Once a bird is nesting in a tree it is a criminal offence to interfere with the nest.

Whilst works to trees can be undertaken in bird nesting season, it needs advanced confirmation from an ecologist to assess and certify that the tree does not contain a nesting bird.

The likelihood of birds nesting increases as trees grow more leaves and become denser in their cover. As Spring approaches this risk is increasing daily.

Even if a small number of trees are required to be protected due to nesting birds, this has a very real risk of resulting in a significant impact on the deliverability and costs of the project. Depending on which trees are used by nesting birds, it could mean that a bird nesting in a location could prevent the Council from undertaking any of the following key works, and therefore progressing the project:

- works to the underground sustainable drainage system
- utilities works
- the water rill or any of the essential re-grading works
- the provision of the cycleway

The project, and therefore delivery, is split in to three zones. Even one tree with a nesting bird in each zone could have a significant impact on the delivery of the scheme as there is a risk that the contractor would not only be unable to undertake works to the tree in question, but also adjacent tree to avoid disrupting the nesting birds around it.

As such, as the risk of nesting increases, so does the pressure to the project in terms of delay (potentially until end of September 2023). It will also lead to additional costs due to the need for re-phasing and re-scheduling planned works because of the nesting birds. The budget for the scheme cannot accommodate this and the other inflationary pressures already impacting on the scheme. The cost of pausing the work for several months to date will be unsustainable and will prejudice the delivery of the entire project.

3. Impact on city centre businesses

With the support of the City Centre Company the inevitable impact and disruption of the Armada Way works have to date been largely mitigated. However as was acknowledged by full Council in its resolution on 30th January 2023, that any final scheme needed to be implemented speedily, the resulting delays with the construction works are unduly impacting on a number of city centre. There have been a few concerns recently raised regarding further delays to the project which is now having a cumulative impact on the city centre businesses who are worried by the loss of trade into the summer. The summer is the best trading period for the city centre due to the increase in footfall through tourism and city centre events and therefore there is an urgency to minimise the disruption of the construction works by allowing the phased opening of sections of the completed works in Armada Way.

There is the risk that the City Council will see claims submitted to it for loss of income. With the summer approaching, any delay until post-election for the decision (and therefore delay in completing works and opening the city centre) could be more significant for affected businesses.

4. Impact on crime and anti-social behaviour in the City Centre

There have recently been concerns raised from Devon and Cornwall Police regarding the construction site hoardings and these impeding CCTV sight lines. Following a serious incident in the city centre in recent weeks, where due to the hoardings CCTV cameras could not capture the assault, the police have raised a concern about how long these will remain in place. It has already been identified that the hoardings do not contribute towards safety in the city centre and if the decision is delayed until post-election, the hoardings will remain up for considerably longer period of time.

5. Additional project costs

The current estimated weekly costs incurred by the Council for delays (provided by the contractor) are as follows:

<i>Prelims - Time Related Costs</i>	£	25,371.00
<i>SDA Prelims (Site Set Up) Time Related Costs</i>	£	2,140.63
<i>OH&P (2.2%)</i>	£	605.26
Weekly Cost for Delays (MS Direct)	£	28,116.89
<i>Subcontract Prelims</i>	£	10,066.55
<i>Subcontract Standing Time (assume 2 Gangs)</i>	£	63,340.50
<i>OH&P (2.2%)</i>	£	1,614.96
Subcontract Weekly Costs (assumed Groundworks Only)	£	75,022.01
Potential Weekly Costs	£	103,138.89

These are high level costs and estimates, with actual costs depending on the delays and impacts in question. The figures above accounts for the Groundworks Team and plant only. If there were further delays affecting the Pavers and Landscapers, there would be additional costs above those shown which cannot be quantified at this stage.

With this in mind, there is a real risk of a significant cost being incurred by the Council where the project is delayed until post-election. Using these high-level estimates, in a worst-case scenario this could be as much as £928,000. As the project is fully funded, and given the wider financial position of the Council, such an increase in cost could impact the ability to deliver the project at all.

6. Indexation / inflation – cost increases

At present inflation is still projected to remain high / increase in 2023 until at least the middle of the year as stated by the [Bank of England in February 2023](#).

As of November 2022 the [Building Cost Information Service \(BCIS\) projected](#) that in 2023 the indices relating to construction costs will continue to rise, and that building costs will increase by 2.5% despite the fall in inflation that it projects.

As such any further delay in the project could lead to a substantial increase in build costs for the project. As the project is fully funded and given the wider financial position of the Council, such an increase in cost could also impact the ability to deliver the project at all.

EXECUTIVE DECISION

made by a Cabinet Member



REPORT OF ACTION TAKEN UNDER DELEGATED AUTHORITY BY AN INDIVIDUAL CABINET MEMBER

Executive Decision Reference Number – [democratic support to complete on submission]

Decision	
1	Title of decision: Better Places Programme: Armada Way Scheme
2	Decision maker (Cabinet member name and portfolio title): Councillor Richard Bingley, Leader
3	Report author and contact details: Paul Barnard, Service Director for Strategic Planning & Infrastructure Contact: paul.barnard@plymouth.gov.uk
4	Decision to be taken: To proceed with the final design for the Armada Way with further amendments to include additional tree planting within Armada Way and a revised tree planting schedule, together with the investigation of wider tree planting within the City Centre.
5	Reasons for decision: To enable the final design for the Armada Way project to progress to implementation as quickly as possible in accordance with the resolution of the City Council on 30 th January 2023 which stated that 'the Council supports and requests that the Cabinet Member implements that final design quickly to avoid on-going disruption to city centre businesses from the construction works'.
6	<p>Alternative options considered and rejected:</p> <p>Option 1 – Abort the Armada Way project completely: this was rejected as this would not be in accordance with the commitments set out in either Policy PLY6 of the adopted Plymouth and South West Devon Joint Local Plan, or the award of funding from the Department for Transport following the submission and approval of the Strategic Outline Business Case for the Transforming Cities Fund Tranche 2 of which Armada Way was a part.</p> <p>Option 2 – Abandon the current scheme and re-design the whole project to accommodate all or most of the existing 129 trees: this was rejected as both the results of the pause announced by the Cabinet Member for Transport in November 2022 leading to the publication of a modified design and the consideration of further design options as part of the Armada Way Engagement Programme 2023 have clearly demonstrated that the retention of all or most of the existing trees are incompatible with the other design objectives and outcomes for the project and starting the whole design process again is likely to result in challenges from the department of transport regarding the delivery of the scheme whilst the Assurance Review process for the Transforming Cities Fund programme is underway.</p> <p>Option 3 – Revise the modified design for Armada Way to accommodate all or most of the existing 129 trees: this was rejected as both the results of the pause announced by the Cabinet Member for Transport in November 2022 leading to the publication of a modified design and the consideration of further design options as part of the Armada Way Engagement Programme 2023 have clearly demonstrated that the retention of all or most of the existing trees are incompatible with the other design objectives and outcomes for the project and starting the whole design process again is</p>

	likely to result in challenges from the department of transport regarding the delivery of the scheme whilst the Assurance Review process for the Transforming Cities Fund programme is underway.		
7	Financial implications and risks: There is a risk that the funding from the Transforming Cities Fund could be lost if the project is not implemented quickly.		
8	Is the decision a Key Decision? (please contact Democratic Support for further advice)		No
			Per the Constitution, a key decision is one which:
		No	in the case of capital projects and contract awards, results in a new commitment to spend and/or save in excess of £3million in total
		No	in the case of revenue projects when the decision involves entering into new commitments and/or making new savings in excess of £1 million
		No	is significant in terms of its effect on communities living or working in an area comprising two or more wards in the area of the local authority.
	If yes, date of publication of the notice in the Forward Plan of Key Decisions	N/A	
9	Please specify how this decision is linked to the Council's corporate plan/Plymouth Plan and/or the policy framework and/or the revenue/capital budget:	The delivery of the Armada Way scheme is consistent with several policies in the Plymouth Plan and the Plymouth and South West Devon Joint Local Plan.	
10	Please specify any direct environmental implications of the decision (carbon impact)	The final Armada Way final design results in the loss of 129 existing trees of, in most cases, limited longevity and health. In addition the wider climate and sustainability benefits include the provision of sustainable walking and cycling improvements; the provision of a sustainable urban drainage system; an ornamental watercourse linked to the SUDs system predominately gravity powered and supplemented with solar powered electrical pumping and naturally filtered by reed beds to contribute to the biodiversity enhancements and new habitat creation; The provision of new high mast low energy street lighting using LED lanterns to replace the aging building mounted lighting infrastructure; futureproofing for the continuation of a District Heating Network; upgrading existing and provision of new and more efficient power and water services for public events use; a high quality planting scheme using 164 semi-mature trees of >8m height with floriferous under planting, to promote city centre biodiversity net gain in the region of 25% and contributing to greening the city centre; and reusing	

		substantial amounts of the existing materials.		
Urgent decisions				
11	Is the decision urgent and to be implemented immediately in the interests of the Council or the public?	Yes		(If yes, please contact Democratic Support (democraticsupport@plymouth.gov.uk) for advice)
		No		(If no, go to section 13a)
12a	Reason for urgency: N/A			
12b	Scrutiny Chair Signature:		Date	
	Scrutiny Committee name:			
	Print Name:			
Consultation				
13a	Are any other Cabinet members' portfolios affected by the decision?	Yes	√	
		No		(If no go to section 14)
13b	Which other Cabinet member's portfolio is affected by the decision?	Councillor Mark Shayer, Deputy Leader, Finance and the Economy Councillor Jonathan Drean, Cabinet Member for Transport Councillor James Stoneman, Cabinet Member for Climate Change and Governance Councillor Bill Wakeham, Environment and Street Scene		
13c	Date Cabinet member consulted	23 February 2023		
14	Has any Cabinet member declared a conflict of interest in relation to the decision?	Yes		If yes, please discuss with the Monitoring Officer
		No	√	
15	Which Corporate Management Team member has been consulted?	Name	Anthony Payne	
		Job title	Strategic Director for Place	
		Date consulted	01 March 2023	
Sign-off				
16	Sign off codes from the relevant departments consulted:	Democratic Support (mandatory)		

		Finance (mandatory)							
		Legal (mandatory)							
		Human Resources (if applicable)	N/A						
		Corporate property (if applicable)	N/A						
		Procurement (if applicable)	N/A						
Appendices									
17	Ref.	Title of appendix							
	A	Armada Way Executive Decision Briefing Note							
Confidential/exempt information									
18a	Do you need to include any confidential/exempt information?	Yes							
		No	√						
		If yes, prepare a second, confidential ('Part II') briefing report and indicate why it is not for publication by virtue of Part I of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 by ticking the relevant box in 18b below. (Keep as much information as possible in the briefing report that will be in the public domain)							
		Exemption Paragraph Number							
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
18b	Confidential/exempt briefing report title:								
Background Papers									
19	Please list all unpublished, background papers relevant to the decision in the table below. Background papers are <u>unpublished</u> works, relied on to a material extent in preparing the report, which disclose facts or matters on which the report or an important part of the work is based. If some/all of the information is confidential, you must indicate why it is not for publication by virtue of Part I of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 by ticking the relevant box.								
Title of background paper(s)			Exemption Paragraph Number						
			1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Cabinet Member Signature							
20	I agree the decision and confirm that it is not contrary to the Council's policy and budget framework, Corporate Plan or Budget. In taking this decision I have given due regard to the Council's duty to promote equality of opportunity, eliminate unlawful discrimination and promote good relations between people who share protected characteristics under the Equalities Act and those who do not. For further details please see the EIA attached.						
Signature			Date of decision		06 March 2023		
Print Name							

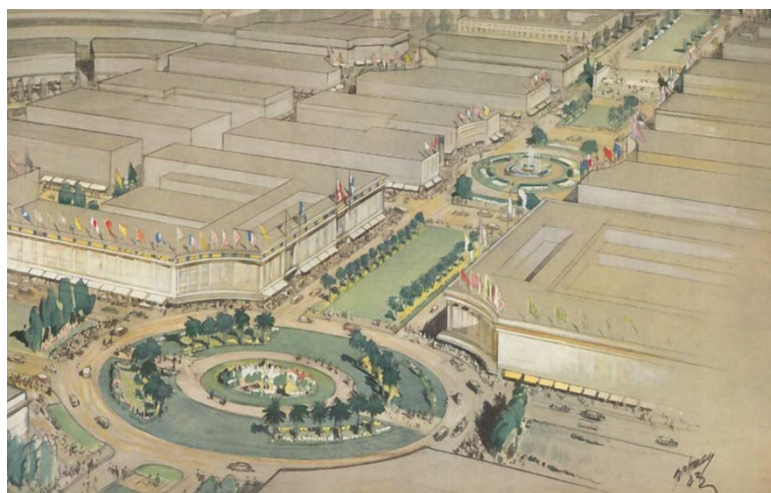
ARMADA WAY

Executive Decision Report



This Executive Decision report is associated with Executive Decision XXX/XXX and is provided to form the basis of a decision on the recommendation to proceed with the further modified Armada Way regeneration scheme.

HISTORY OF ARMADA WAY



“We have permitted ourselves the one monumental feature of the whole of Plymouth rebuilding – a great view seen from the forecourt entrance, across the shopping and civic centre to the Naval War Memorial on the Hoe”.. “the vista will be the visitors guide”..

(A Plan For Plymouth, Abercrombie & Watson 1943” page 67)

A critical element of the 1943 Plan for Plymouth, Armada Way was to present a wide, ceremonial and direct boulevard connecting the Hoe to the Station, designed to inspire a spirit of rebirth in the post-war period, and inspire confidence for the future of the city. Taking into account the topography of the land, with the city centre effectively lying within a basin, the overriding aim was to achieve a grand vista toward the Naval War Memorial. The idea was that visitors arriving by rail would have a clear route into the city centre along this key axis, with the view to the Hoe and memorial as a constantly visible landmark, central to Abercrombie’s vision. Armada Way formed the backbone of the original Beaux-Art plan, with the ‘*Heritage Audit & Statement of Significance for Plymouth City Centre*’ (2014) stating that Armada Way is “*probably the best realised element (of the plan), making it a heritage asset of **high significance***”. Armada Way was to be a kilometre long processional, tree lined route for the people of Plymouth, running directly through the commercial centre, bisected by the smaller streets of the grid, whilst maintaining superiority and prominence over them.

THE CASE FOR CHANGE

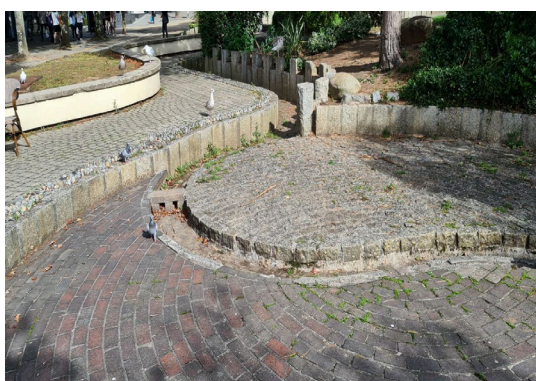
Armada Way has long been identified as a priority area for public realm led regeneration, which will act as a catalyst to the wider regeneration of the city centre. The rationale for the project is multifaceted and is of strategic importance for the future economic and environmental prosperity of the city centre.

Changing City Centre

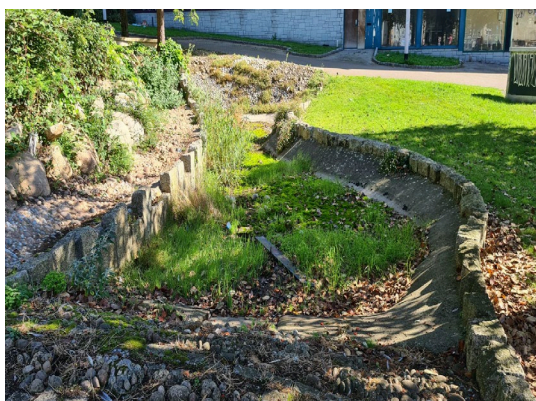
Plymouth’s city centre, along with most city centres, needs to change to adapt to changing shopping habits and changes to how people use their public spaces. Plymouth has an exceptionally large city centre, around twice the size required and larger than other cities in the country with two or three times the population as well as a vast area of public realm, significantly more than comparable cities.

Plymouth city centre was designed first and foremost around the car, with wide streets and a zonal approach to land uses which resulted in a large retail footprint. With bricks and mortar retail in serious decline, the city centre needs to adapt quickly to ensure it is relevant and fit for the future as the regional centre. Our ambition is to bring a large amount of residential development into the centre, giving new leases of life to tired, vacant buildings, with some extending upwards, encouraging more people to dwell in and use the city centre both day at night. We know there is pent up demand for city centre living in Plymouth, however the current environment does not encourage investment nor inspire confidence to developers, and this is clear from the lack of change to date. The ambition for Armada Way is to create a new urban linear park, providing a wealth of activities and new uses which will form an attractive 'front garden' for new residential development along the boulevard. Our approach to the redevelopment of Armada Way is supported by Homes England, as well as the City Centre Company, Plymouth and Devon Chamber of Commerce, and a retail expert from the government's High Street Task Force, with their correspondence appended to this report.

A tired, dated landscape



The existing public realm features within Armada Way were constructed in the 1980s when the majority of the city centre streets were pedestrianised and, with the exception of the Piazza area, have not been updated since. This landscaping was based around winding stream and a series of curved landscapes, very much removed from the more formal and geometrical design intent in the original plans for Armada Way as acknowledged in the City Centre Heritage Audit which states that "The curved ornamental paving and artificial streams are at odds with the rectilinear geometry of the space and feel out of character with Abercrombie's strongly-planned Beaux-Arts axis"



Over the last 35 years or so, the hard landscaping has gradually become tired, damaged, broken and in some places dangerous to use by the public. The stream was switched off around 15 years ago due to the heavy cost of maintenance and difficulty in replacing the parts needed to keep it running. This, combined with the general sense of dilapidation in the public realm hard landscape features, areas concealment and large swathes entirely unused, gives the impression of an unloved city centre space, not the vibrant, exciting, busy and modern city centre which the Council is striving to achieve.

Night time economy

It is recognised that a successful city centre requires a high level of activation and footfall across the day and into the evening in order to thrive. At present Armada Way, as with much of the city centre, is desolate after retail closing hours. We must invest into creating a modern public realm which encourages use of the space into the evening, and which will subsequently encourage businesses to remain open later into the evening, or for new evening uses to open up along Armada Way. Redevelopment to provide residential uses along Armada Way will also bring more footfall into the space during hours of darkness, and facilitating this redevelopment is a core objective of the project.

Safety, including Women & Girls



Armada Way currently does not offer an attractive environment into the evening. The space is dark, primarily due to building mounted lighting being some distance from many parts of the space, a layout which creates a large number of areas of concealment, and over-developed planting which block long views within the corridor. CCTV coverage along Armada Way is patchy, with large areas under no surveillance, and this is further exacerbated when the existing trees are in full leaf when views along the space are almost entirely concealed. This is a matter raised by Devon & Cornwall Police, as well as Plymouth Against Retail Crime (PARC) officers and our own CCTV operatives. These poor levels of lighting, considerable areas of concealment, combined with lack of visibility to surveillance are very real concerns, particularly given the Council’s commitment not only to improving the safety of women and girls, but all residents and visitors to the city. There are also considerable issues of antisocial behaviour, including street drinking and drug

use which is primarily focused on the heavily concealed area north of Mayflower Street. Over 200 incidents of ASB were recorded by PARC during a ten month period to October 2022 (letter of support appended to this report). This is a matter which has been raised by businesses which front onto this space and from the City Centre Company.

Usable and inaccessible spaces



The 1980s’s landscaping arrangement and stream bisecting the space, whilst being considered appropriate at the time, has resulted in large areas of the public realm being inaccessible or unusable. This is particularly acute to persons with limited mobility who are unable to safely access and use swathes of the public realm due to considerable level changes, uneven surfaces and breaks within areas of footway. The arrangement of levels within the space also results in large areas essentially inaccessible to anyone. A study undertaken of the public realm showed that 68.6% of the space was pedestrian circulation hard space (not all of this being accessible) with the remaining area being 27.3% inaccessible green space, and only 4.1% of space classified as usable green space. This area includes the grass strips outside of Mayflower House, areas either side of Braille Garden. This is not an acceptable situation for the city centre’s showpiece boulevard which

should provide a range of spaces accessible to all, and therefore considerable re-grading of land to create dynamic and usable spaces is required to make the city centre a space welcoming for all. Creating accessible and safe to use spaces along Armada Way is supported by PADAN – whose letter of support for the scheme is appended to this report.

Encouraging safe, active and green travel

Armada Way as the primary city centre public space needs to promote and encourage travelling by active and sustainable travel methods. At present there is no defined route for cyclists north-south along the boulevard, resulting in cyclists travelling at speed traversing, sometimes erratically, with large volumes of pedestrians including vulnerable groups. Given its importance as the only direct north-south route through the city centre, connecting the station to the waterfront and all the associated amenities, it is imperative that a legible, safe cycle way is provided which meets necessary standards of design. The cycle way needs to be woven into the fabric of the public realm, not added as an afterthought which will risk conflict with existing infrastructure and result in a substandard design. Creating a wide, level and safe to use pedestrian space is also of primary importance. At present the space is disjointed, with broken footways, changes in level and a mis-match of materials – a space of such importance as Armada Way deserves a holistic and cohesive design with high quality materials to encourage use by pedestrians.

Long term resilience and sustainability



Armada Way has extensive mature and overdeveloped planting which is largely a result of the 1980s planting regime following the redesign as a result of pedestrianisation. Our knowledge of trees has developed considerably in the period since these trees were planted, and we would now not consider planting these types of trees in the conditions they are existing within. Due to the underground conditions of post-war rubble and highways, along with the 1980s hard landscaping, the trees are not able to reach their full potential, and many are not thriving in the conditions they have been given. The trees have generally already reached their optimum, having exhausted their conditions, and are now considered to be in decline. Many of the trees are also not appropriate for the space and should not have been planted in their locations – this includes the horse chestnuts along the flanks which have been successively pollarded and crowns reduced to avoid hitting the buildings or impacting on pedestrians and the blue light routes. These are not trees which have been able to flourish and grow to their natural size and form, but have been subject to cyclical hard pruning works which have wounded the trees over time, leaving them susceptible to disease.

A major part of the plan for a new Armada Way should be ‘right tree, right place’ which will allow for a natural environment with long term resilience to changing climate and environmental conditions. The current trees will not withstand these changes, and it is therefore important that new planting allows for species

which will thrive in a harsh, city centre environment and last for the next 100 + years alongside considerable biodiversity gains.

Enhance heritage, identity and purpose



The People's Way was one suggestion, Armada Way it became, but to be truly worthy of The People it needs to be the clear walkway, worthy of those seafarers who gave their lives and who are commemorated on the Hoe Naval War Memorial. At present there too many wrong trees unnecessarily in the wrong places. This shouldn't be about saving them, it should be about planting more trees in more appropriate places and creating the pedestrian boulevard that was planned during the war, leading people straight to that memorial as a bold statement that had real integrity. It is long overdue and will at last recognise the significance of the principal post war axis of Royal Parade and Armada Way that will put this once war torn city well and truly on the map.



Armada Way is the showpiece of the Abercrombie 'Plan for Plymouth' and fundamental to the composition of the Beaux-Arts plan which is of international significance. The entire purpose of the boulevard was to connect the Hoe with the station, with the Naval Memorial being the constantly visible way-marker to guide people towards the waterfront. As outlined in the Heritage Audit, the modern planting along the centre of Armada Way "closes off the green, open space he envisaged" and the "curved paving, artificial streams, and heavy planting themselves do

not reconcile well with the open spaces and geometric forms expressed in the 1943 plan. Notably, the planting, although pleasant, blocks much of the intended view down towards the Hoe." It is also stated that "the vista along Armada Way is of high significance but it could be improved at its northern end" (north of the sundial).

Further on the point of the vista, it is recognised in the audit that a "Traditional Beaux-Arts street planning uses formal planting in order to create vistas and promote certain views and this is certainly what was intended by Abercrombie. Such a layout creates a clear sense of legibility but allows public use of the space for movement, recreation, street markets etc. This has been diminished in Plymouth through the implementation of more ornamental planting in the early 1980s. A return to the formal, rectilinear planting of Abercrombie's Beaux-Arts scheme would benefit the legibility of Abercrombie's grid as well as the setting of the buildings which inhabit it." It is also stated that the "the planting on Armada Way – North is too developed for the space. Notably, this diminishes the vista along Armada Way towards the Hoe."

Further support for the plans to open up the vista is included above in a segment from esteemed local historian Chris Robinson. It is clear that the importance of opening up this clear vista is of enormous significance to Plymouth, its identity as Britain's Ocean City, and this once in a generation opportunity to restore this glorious boulevard to its original scale and ambition through clearing the central area and releasing the powerful vista should be realised.

Maintaining a high quality space



The current layout of Armada Way is a significant maintenance liability, and this has been proven through the obvious degradation of both the hard and soft landscaping along the corridor. The hard landscaping is disjointed, hard to clean and repair, formed of many different materials and across multiple levels which is difficult to maintain effectively and cheaply, for example having to lift

mowing equipment manually to mow ad-hoc strips of grass amongst cobble and rocks every few weeks.

Trees which have grown out of their constrained underground planting pockets as a result of planting within post-war rubble are now presenting hazards to the condition of the footway and impacting on buildings in some instances. This maintenance regime to keep an aging landscape looking tidy is resource intensive for minimal return and not sustainable in the long term. Armada Way, in common with most of the city centre, is littered with a wealth of both live, dead and undefined utilities, many of which are unrecorded, which makes undertaking works and repairs a considerable process. There are also numerous points where drainage systems, including the post-war combined sewer system, have failed resulting in leaking into the ground. It is essential that these issues are dealt with in order to futureproof the city centre and create a long term, sustainable and adaptable environment.

ARMADA WAY IN POLICY & GUIDANCE

The proposed scheme for Armada Way has been shaped by the MacKay Vision for Plymouth and the City Centre Strategic Masterplan, whilst responding directly to and adhering with Strategic Objectives and Policy within the Plymouth and South West Devon Joint Local Plan and the requirements outlined within the City Centre Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Plan (CAAMP).

MacKay Vision for Plymouth (2003)



A 'Vision for Plymouth' was launched in November 2003 and sets out a clear vision for the city, showing exactly how it is going to become a reality. The vision focuses on the city centre as one of the key areas for large scale intervention proposing that a greater intensification and density of mixed use development be introduced to include new residential, leisure and cultural evening uses. Improvements to the quality of the built environment and the public realm with improved links to the waterfront:

- Taller buildings
- Shared attractive spaces
- Quality landmark buildings
- Improved public transport interchanges

The Vision sets out that *“the original purpose of Armada Way – a grand vista linking the train station to the Hoe – is recovered through a simplified landscape design, with movement enhanced by the introduction of a public transport link”* and that *“as a structuring*

element of the city, Armada Way is responsible for the connection and movement from the station to the waterfront, and indeed beyond the station to the north into Central Park.”

MacKay also states that *“We feel it is important to retain the route as predominantly pedestrian, and propose that a new cohesive landscape strategy is developed, with an emphasis on clarity and flow, as opposed to the current obstructions. Regular lines of trees should be introduced to mark the formality and scale of the axis, with the ability to provide other items of street furniture as required to define and animate individual areas. We propose that the central area is kept clear of all obstructions, to allow for events, processions, markets etc., and advocate the preservation of a 6m lane on the eastern side for a future transport system. Where more carefully considered existing landscaping is found, such as between Royal Parade and Notte Street, this must be essentially retained within any new proposals.”*

City Centre Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Plan (CAAMP) (2022)



A large part of Plymouth city centre's post-war plan was adopted as a Conservation Area in 2019, and represents the UK's first post-war city centre conservation area. Understanding the character and significance of conservation areas is essential for managing change within them. Councils are therefore required to "formulate and publish proposals for the preservation and enhancement" of conservation areas within their jurisdiction. These proposals are normally presented in the form of a Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Plan (CAAMP), which defines and records the special interest of a conservation area, analyses the characteristics that

make it special, as well as setting out a plan for managing change to ensure its on-going protection and enhancement. The CAAMP has been prepared in line with current best practice guidance published by Historic England, the public body who manage the care and protection of the historic environment and also aligns with local planning policy namely the Plymouth and South West Devon Joint Local Plan 2014-2034 and its accompanying Supplementary Planning Document (SPD).

The CAAMP makes reference to the importance of Armada Way in numerous areas, including:

- 5.1 *"Forming a central spine is Armada Way, extending north to south from North Cross all the way to the Hoe. The route was designed to be a grand vista for public enjoyment, taking advantage of the topography to gain long views through the redeveloped city centre to the Naval Memorial and Smeaton's Tower on the Hoe."*
- 5.4 *"Armada Way, the north to south axis through the redeveloped city centre, running all the way from the railway station to the Hoe, is perhaps the most important public street in the city centre. Although only the southern part lies within the Conservation Area boundary, its whole length is a set piece of Beaux-Arts urban design, which was the driving discipline of the Plan for Plymouth."*
- 6.1 *"Views along Armada Way and Royal Parade, the two most important streets in the Conservation Area, are of particular importance, both containing many landmark buildings including Dingles, Pearl Assurance and the Civic Centre"*

At page 43, the CAAMP states that *"Armada Way forms the backbone of the Conservation Area and was, from its earliest conception, designed to hold the Plan for Plymouth together, providing a broad boulevard from the mainline railway station to the Hoe. Its conception therefore was as a thoroughfare that both literally and figuratively tied the city together and to the rest of the country. It was originally an open vista, sloping down from its highest point at North Cross, down to the Civic Square, where it begins to rise again up to the Hoe. Views along Armada Way both from within the Conservation Area and its setting, therefore make a significant contribution to its special interest, however these have begun to be compromised by the original planting schemes reaching maturity and subsequent additional tree planting."*

It continues to state that *"Following its pedestrianisation in the 1980s, curved raised beds lined in composite stone and decorative planting characterised the boulevard north of the Conservation Area. Trees both in the central planted area and the pedestrian avenues on either side have matured and now unfortunately screen the best views down to the Civic Centre, the Guildhall tower from the upper stretches of Armada Way, although there is more visibility in the winter months."*

Within Theme I: Streets and Spaces, the CAAMP mentions the negative impact which more recent planting has had on the overall impression and purpose of Armada Way:

"Trees and green landscaping have always been a part of the city centre's public realm. However, the shrubs in the Civic Square have grown considerably since they were planted more than half a century ago and these now frequently obscure important views north and south from the square. This is similarly

the case towards the north end of Armada Way (outside the Conservation Area boundary) where trees screen views down Armada Way into the Conservation Area and beyond.”

Opportunities for improvement are also referenced in the CAAMP, including at ‘4. Public realm improvements’ which states

“...consider appropriate opportunities to restore the long vistas both within and across the Conservation Area, for example down Armada Way” and more specifically:

“Armada Way was designed as ‘garden vista’ and ‘parkway’, with spaces along its length defined by the building line. It has seen considerable alteration since originally laid out, now being fully pedestrianised. To ensure that this characteristic of the historic environment is maintained and enhanced, there is a need for sensitive management and design of the natural landscaping along Armada Way.”

Plymouth and SW Devon Joint Local Plan (2013-2034)



The Plymouth and South West Devon Joint Local Plan was adopted in 2019. The Plan looks at every aspect of how we want our cities, town and villages to look at feel over the next 20 years and includes a series of Plymouth specific policies, as well as Strategic Objectives. Of significance to Armada Way are Strategic Objective SO3, Policy PLY6 and Policy PLY37, all of which are detailed below. Specific sub-sections relevant to Armada Way public realm scheme have been italicised.

SO3 - 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 through:

1. *Establishing and reinforcing the City Centre's role as a regional centre for shopping, employment, leisure, a university centre, a strategic transport hub and a sustainable community in its own right.*
2. *Utilising the City Centre and waterfront's economic assets, including its waterfront infrastructure, to drive economic growth in the area.*
3. *Improving sustainable transport facilities and connections throughout the area, and particularly between the City Centre and the waterfront at Millbay, The Hoe and Sutton Harbour.*
4. *Protecting and making best use of the unique historic environment and landscape of the City Centre and waterfront, in particular Devonport waterfront, Royal William Yard and Devil's Point, The Hoe and The Barbican.*
5. *Capitalising on the potential of the City Centre and waterfront to deliver a world class cultural and visitor offer, with well connected destinations, high quality visitor accommodation, facilities to deliver major events and improved public realm and waterfront access.*
6. *Delivering new residential-led mixed-use developments that integrate successfully with existing communities and enhance community cohesion.*

7. *Improving city gateways, arrival points and key transport routes and delivering high quality architecture and urban design.*
8. *Delivering improved public access to and along the waterfront as well as enhancements to key public spaces and heritage assets.*
9. *Delivering water transport improvements and integration with other transport modes that will improve access to key locations including The Barbican Mount Batten, Sutton Harbour, Millbay, Royal William Yard, Devonport and Mount Edgcumbe.*
10. *Safeguarding and enhancing the environmental status of the Plymouth Sound and estuaries, including the European Marine Sites, and making the City Centre and waterfront communities more resilient to the effects of climate change.*

PLY6: Improving Plymouth's city centre

Plymouth City Centre will be renewed and enhanced through a combination of major new developments, proactive management of change and support for community and trader led initiatives. This will deliver a modern, high quality, vibrant, accessible and adaptable centre that reflects its status alongside the waterfront as the showcase of Plymouth. This will be achieved through making sure that development and change:

1. *Capitalises on and strengthens the City Centre's role as a regional centre.*
2. *Respects and celebrates the centre's mid-twentieth century built heritage, including the Beaux Arts grid of the 1943 Abercrombie Plan and the highest and good quality non-designated assets identified in the City Centre Masterplan.*
3. *Recognises the importance of reinforcing the primacy of Armada Way as the principal thoroughfare from the station to the Hoe. This will be achieved by focusing larger development - building heights of six to eight storeys - on the Armada Way frontage to provide enclosure to the space and to maintain a degree of consistency to these increased building heights to respect the Abercrombie Plan's form and historic context.*
4. *Supports the intensification and diversification of uses through redevelopment of City Centre blocks, with specific sites identified where tall buildings will be acceptable in principle.*
5. *Addresses the size and need for a clearer focus of the retail area, through prioritising the prime retail role to the east of Armada Way and through diversification of uses for the centre as a whole.*
6. *Strengthens the role of the West End as an Independent Quarter, anchored by the City Market, which supports independent traders, niche retail and food shopping to serve the nearby residential communities, and provides for the introduction of alternative higher value business uses, cultural uses, community uses and creative business clusters.*
7. *Delivers a vibrant mix of uses to diversify the centre including, in addition to retail:*

- *Regionally significant office uses and the coordination of public sector investment as a catalyst for transformational change.*
 - *A vibrant destination, with leisure, culture, visitor accommodation and food and drink uses, especially making best use of key assets such as the Armada Way boulevard and piazza, and creating greater synergy with the cultural hubs at Royal Parade, The Hoe and historic waterfront, and North Hill / Tavistock Place.*
 - *A new residential community, through development and environmental changes which provide high quality urban living environments.*
 - *Education and community uses, optimising the benefits from the proximity of Plymouth University and Plymouth College of Art, and the potential for a more vibrant mix of uses especially along Armada Way and to its west.*
 - *Student accommodation, but only where it is targeted to support prioritised regeneration opportunities, and delivers new housing and/or office accommodation and ground floor active uses as part of mixed use development.*
8. *Supports a diverse and active evening and night time economy catering for a wide cross section of the public.*
 9. *Delivers high quality public car parks in strategic locations around the edge of the centre with excellent pedestrian connections to key attractions.*
 10. *Facilitates easier movement in and around the City Centre for all modes of transport, including reconnecting the City Centre with its neighbouring areas - which include Millbay, Sutton Harbour and the Hoe – by high quality walking and cycling links.*
 11. *Supports the delivery of a coordinated programme of investment in the public realm, and delivers structured environmental improvements, creating a safe accessible and attractive environment for the community and visitors alike, and exploring opportunities for weather protected spaces.*
 12. *Delivers proposals that are resilient and respond to the challenges of climate change and protect the Plymouth Sound and Estuaries European Marine Site from pollution, providing where appropriate improvements to flood management infrastructure, surface water drainage systems, and future connection to critical drainage infrastructure and district heat networks relevant to the site.*

Policy PLY37: Strategic infrastructure measures for the City Centre and Waterfront Growth Area

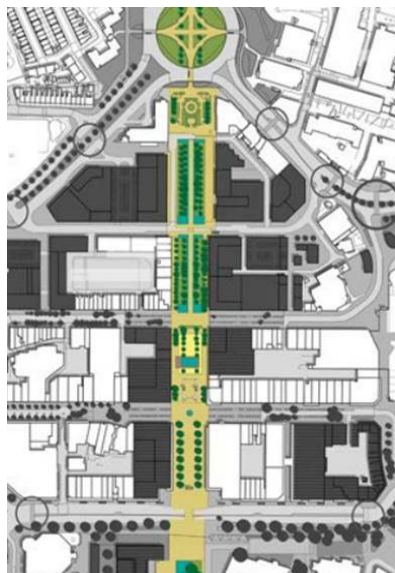
The following key strategic infrastructure measures will be provided during the plan period, in addition to proposals identified in other policies of this plan, in order to support the delivery of the strategy for the City Centre and Waterfront Growth Area:

The following key strategic infrastructure measures will be provided during the plan period, in addition to proposals identified in other policies of this plan, in order to support the delivery of the strategy for the City Centre and Waterfront Growth Area:

1. *City Centre public realm and transport improvements to improve circulation and encourage investment, including:*

- I. Capacity increases, including bus priority improvements, to the A374, A379 (Exeter Street) and the A386 including North Cross roundabout, Charles Cross, Western Approach, Union Street, St Andrews Cross and Derrys Cross and Drake Circus junction improvements.
- II. *Armada Way public realm; incorporating City Centre Strategic Cycle Network and walking improvements*
- III. *Improvements to Royal Parade to ensure a positive sense of arrival and sufficient capacity for buses.*
 2. Millbay Boulevard and related public realm and transport improvements to enhance the link between the City Centre and waterfront.
 3. Improvements to international ferry facilities and a new cruise liner terminal, and associated local road network improvements.
 4. Other City Centre and waterfront public realm and transport improvements to support Mayflower 400.
 5. New coach station at Mayflower Street.
 6. New and improved public car parking in the City Centre.
 7. *Strategic drainage improvements.*
 8. *City Centre / Waterfront Strategic Cycling and Walking network improvements.*
 9. Upgrading of flood defences, maritime and harbourside infrastructure including:
 - I.Replacement of Sutton Harbour Lock Gate and Bridge.
 - II.Improvements to West Pier.
 - III.Completion of flood defences around Millbay.
 - IV.Monitoring the condition of the breakwaters and other structures within Plymouth Sound and, in case of deterioration, identifying strategies to ensure the current benefits provided at the coast during coastal storms are retained.
10. New primary school in the City Centre area (site still to be identified).

Plymouth City Centre Strategic Masterplan (2017)



The City Centre Strategic Masterplan describes Armada Way as the stunning centrepiece of the City Centre Grid, which deserves recognition as one of the greatest civic spaces of any city in Europe and indeed has a vista of scale and ambition capable of standing on an international stage. A single, simple overarching public realm plan for the route was deemed essential; with the plan to be implemented in sections as opportunities arise but each stage must be part of a clear vision for the future of the whole route. It defines Armada Way's identity as a "singular and spectacular processional route" which has been gradually eroded over 70 years by piecemeal changes which have "domesticated the scale of the route and introduced elements which interfere with long range views".

The plan states that Armada Way should be planned as the pre-eminent route in the City Centre and be read as a single continuous linear urban park connecting multiple neighbourhoods across the City Centre from

the train station to the waterfront. The aim is to develop an overarching plan and design principles which can be implemented over time to open up views and provide the opportunity to walk and cycle down the centre of Armada Way to allow an appreciation of the scale of the route and help realise its potential. The key objectives of the design for Armada Way are to:

- Recapture scale and grandeur of the route by opening up views, allowing movement through the centre of the space allowing the route to be appreciated as one single linear space.
 - Give the route primacy over other City Centre streets by introducing greater continuity in design language and giving the sense that Armada Way is continuous and other routes are crossing it.
 - Ensure that the continuity of the route extends from the Train Station to The Hoe with improved crossings, improved visibility and more consistency in materials.
 - Allow local variations in character to reflect different parts of the City Centre.
 - Tree planting and replacement should primarily be contained within avenues using species which maintain a compact form to allow visibility along the length of the route with the exception of the listed gardens in front of the Civic Centre. Use strong avenue tree planting to emphasise the scale and linearity of the space.
 - Incorporate opportunities for sustainable urban drainage.
 - Declutter and rationalise planting and materials to achieve a simple, elegant design which infers manageable ongoing maintenance.
 - Use Armada Way to increase the presence of the Waterfront in the City Centre, not just through improved connections but through introduction of bold water features, installations and public art which reference the Waterfront.
 - Incorporate clearly defined provision for cyclists along the centre of the route to take advantage of funding secured to deliver walking and cycling improvements in the city centre.
- Introduce a soft public space such as lawn to the north of the public toilets to allow a greater range of activities to take place within the City Centre including play

BETTER PLACES & CONSULTATION

Armada Way is the singular largest and most transformational project within the Better Places programme. The object of the Better Places initiative is to address the years of underinvestment in city centre streets and spaces, and will dramatically turn around the look and feel of the city centre. This initiative falls within the Transforming Cities Fund programme of works **(MI TO COMPLETE – PB should we include the £1.4m from Civic?)** Other overarching aims including to support and lever in further future inward investment in retail, leisure, employment and housing; to bolster local pride in the city centre; and to enhance the overall experience and perceptions of the city centre. Work is already underway at Old Town Street and New George Street, with the finished scheme planned to reopen in phases from June 2023. Work at the Civic Square has also recently begun which is due to restore they key historic assets of the space and introduce a new cycle connection.

The City Council recognises that enhancing public realm is just one, albeit important, part of place making and that's why we are working closely with our partners, land owners and retailers to ensure that this investment in public realm works hand-in-hand with investment in the city centre offer, development promotion and land use change. Better Places incorporates the following key design principles and objectives, which were formulated within its masterplan, its consultation in 2018 and discussions since that time on the Climate Emergency which this Council has signed up to together with discussions with our partners. The key principles are:

1. Raise the bar in quality to support and enhance the retail, leisure and cultural offer and experience of the city centre;

2. Provide for a diversification of uses to attract and support new residential, office and evening economy uses into the city centre – providing high quality environments, addresses to be proud of, outdoor amenity and children's play space;
3. Connect and show off the city's best assets;
4. Be built to last, reduce maintenance costs and generate revenue;
5. Create environmental gains, deliver sustainable urban drainage and provide new trees and planting;
6. De-clutter and enhance pedestrian and cycle movement for all, tackle barriers to people with disabilities and resolve potential conflicts between modes.

The Better Places programme dates back to 2017 and has transcended numerous political administrations since that period. LDA were commissioned as designers for the programme, and extensive engagement was undertaken with Councillors and relevant stakeholders on the lead up to, and during the Better Places consultation in 2018.

Better Places Consultation: 2018



An extensive consultation event was held between 15th March 2018 – 26th April 2018 where the public, visitors, stakeholders and interested parties could attend a series of events providing more information on our Better Places proposals.

Recognising the desire of the public to shape the future of their city centre, the team organised a total of 19 days of public consultation events. The events were held at the following locations and during the periods indicated:

- City Centre - 3 days - 35 New George Street East - 15th to 17th March inclusive
- B&Q Crownhill - 2 days - 28th & 29th March
- Co-op Plympton Ridgeway - 2 days - 4th & 5th April
- Drakes Circus Mall - 2 days - 6th & 7th April
- Plymouth City Market - 2 days - 9th & 10th April
- ASDA Estover - 1 day - 13th April - 10am to 5pm
- Plymouth Rail Station - 2 days - 16th & 17th April
- Sainsbury's Marsh Mills - 2 days - 19th & 20th April
- Plymouth University, Roland Levinsky Building - 1 day - 23rd April
- Plymstock Library - 2 days - 25th & 26th April

The events were advertised across all social media channels, our website, and the local press encouraging people to come along and provide their feedback to our plans. A number of stakeholder workshops were also undertaken, including Historic Environment Workshop, Health & Accessibility Workshop, Access, Events Infrastructure and Emergency Planning workshops. Representatives from the following organisations (not exclusive) attended the workshops:



PCC @plymouthcc · Mar 15

Want to see our plans to make #BetterPlacesPlymouth in the heart of the city centre? Come to our exhibition over the next three days. Read on for more detail ow.ly/bRla30iWNp6



- PADAN
- Environment Plymouth
- Plymouth Environment Group
- Access Plymouth
- Plymotion
- Plymouth Cycling Campaign
- Living Streets
- Sustrans
- Historic England
- Devon Gardens Trust
- 20th Century Society
- Plymouth Architectural Trust
- Hoe Neighbourhood Forum
- Plymouth Tree Partnership
- Plymouth City Centre Company
- Youth groups and schools
- Local media
- Ward councillors and MP's in seat
- Funding partners
- Statutory Consultees

The events were very well attended across the numerous venues in the city. A total of 178 formal responses were received, breaking down as:

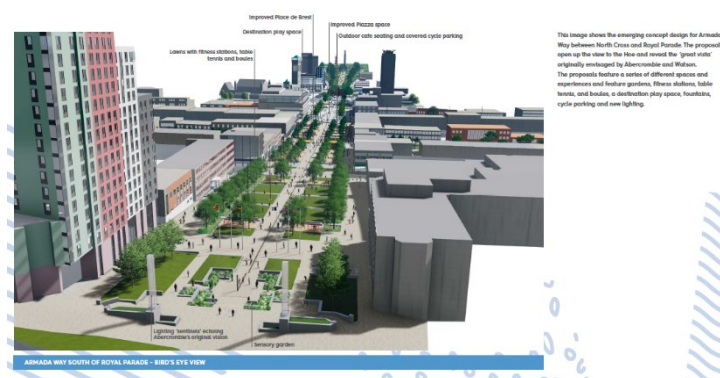
- 86% (154) live in Plymouth
- 7% (13) visiting the city

Specifically relating to Armada Way, Question 12 of the Consultation form asked to give views on the ideas proposed. Of those respondents that indicated a preference of an option (109) 92 people (84%) indicated their support for the proposals, of which 12 respondents had some reservations about specific elements of the scheme, and 16% (17) weren't supportive of the proposals.

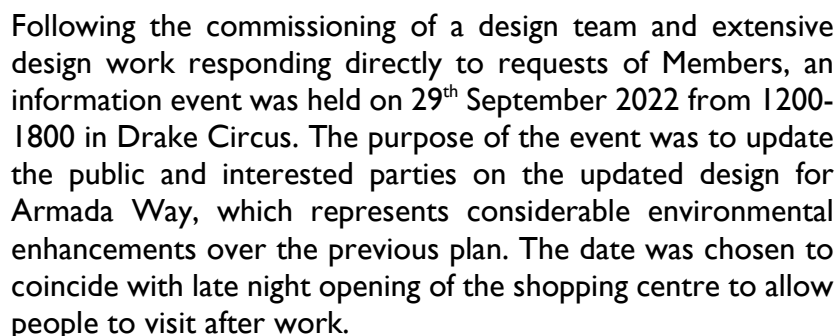
There was support for opening up vista and the sweeping route south to the Hoe. Issues raised again included shelter and more seating. There were some concerns about loss of mature trees, with representatives also stating that they would wish to see a mixed variety of species in the tree lined boulevard as opposed to single species. There was also comment that the Oak on Citadel Road could be felled, with subsequent planting elsewhere to mitigate, to release the view to the Naval Memorial more fully. It was recognised in the comments that cycle lanes were needed to avoid pedestrian conflict.

Officers of the Council, including those involved directly with the scheme, and relevant design experts, were on hand at all times during each event to run through the proposals with the attendees.

The images provided overleaf were displayed during the exhibition and include a number of bird's eye view/axonometric plans with associated labels, alongside a series of visuals showing the proposals for Armada Way at pedestrian level at various locations.



Armada Way Public Information Event 29th September



A display setting out the nature of change with 3D CGI images and explanatory boards focusing on issues such as tree removal and replanting, the proposed sustainable drainage system and the new general arrangement plan were presented.

The information event was attended by approximately 200 members of the public and business owners, who had the the scheme designers and council officers. 17 formal comments

The £12.7 million investment project, aiming for completion in Spring next year is funded through the Government's Transforming Cities Fund and matched by Plymouth City Council.

were received, with 75% of comments being supportive of the scheme. One comment referred to the loss of mature trees.



From the 30th September 2022 the information boards displayed at the information event were retained and displayed at the Central Library for a period of over 2 weeks.

In the intervening period, the Council were made aware of a petition which was started by the campaign group 'STRAW'. Following a discussion with the former operators of the Climate Hub, who offered as mediators, the project team agreed to meet with representatives of 'STRAW' on the 3rd of November 2022.

The meeting was attended by numerous members of 'STRAW' alongside members of the project team including the Arboricultural expert from YGS, Morgan Sindall project manager, PCC project manager, and the Deputy Leader Cllr Mark Shayer. Members of the design team ran through the history and design ethos behind the scheme and answered any questions or queries 'STRAW' representatives wanted to make. Clarification was given for why more existing trees could not be retained into the scheme from a technical and/or arboricultural perspective due to all of the competing demands and requirements to be met within the design for the space.

Growth & Infrastructure Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Armada Way was brought to the Growth & Infrastructure Overview and Scrutiny Committee the 10th October 2022 for a discussion with Members around the detail of the Armada Way scheme as part of the City Centre improvement item. Robust discussion was had on matters relating to the cycle way, project timeline and funding. The committee requested a technical note of the cycle way design ethos and how it is anticipated to operate was to be provided, which was sent to Members of the Committee on 29th November 2022.

21st November 2022 City Council

Recognising the concerns raised by some members of the public relating to the original plan to fell 136 trees, the Cabinet Member for Transport agreed to undertake a pause to consider whether any additional trees could be integrated into the design. This resulted in the modified scheme, where an additional 7 existing trees were planned to be retained, and a further 3 new trees added. This brought the total number of trees planned to be felled to 129, with 150 new trees proposed.

Petition

The campaign group 'STRAW' set up a petition following the presentation of the scheme on 29th September 2022. As per the constitution, once a petition has reached over 5000 signatures it will automatically trigger a debate on the issue at the next ordinary Full Council.

Debate and Full Council Resolution

On the 30th of January 2023 Full Council debated the petition presented by STRAW. The petition called for the following:

“Plymouth City Council is regenerating Armada Way and in doing so will be chopping down virtually all the beautiful and well-established trees which make the city such a nice place to be. If you would rather they change their plans to incorporate a bit more of what we already have rather than bulldozing it flat then get behind our campaign to save the trees! They are more important than a glimpse of a view of the war memorial on the Hoe.

The council say they want more trees, so why not just plant more trees?”

Following a debate, Council resolved the following:

“Plymouth City Council firmly believes that the residents and businesses of Plymouth deserve a thriving and prosperous city centre to deliver high quality jobs and places to live.

We recognise that the strategic policies set out in the Plymouth and South West Devon Joint Local Plan adopted in March 2019 commits us to delivering a vibrant mixed-use regional shopping centre and attractive visitor destination. We remain committed to delivering Policy PLY6 of the adopted Joint Local Plan (‘Improving Plymouth’s City Centre’) which, amongst other things, specifically supports respecting and celebrating the centre’s mid-twentieth built heritage, a coordinated programme of investment in public realm, and improvements to surface water drainage systems.

We note the substantial support that has been expressed for the Armada Way scheme by local residents, many city centre businesses, the City Centre Company, the Environment Agency, South West Water, Homes England, Historic England, the Twentieth Century Society and others.

We recognise the concerns that have been expressed regarding the engagement arrangements for the scheme, the tight funding deadlines for the project to be delivered, and the potential for funding to be lost if the scheme is not implemented. We therefore call on the Cabinet Member for Transport to undertake a comprehensive review of the engagement arrangements for the scheme and commit to publishing the results of this review to inform this and delivery of future city centre schemes. We also call on the Cabinet Member for Transport to publish a detailed statement regarding the maintenance costs of the Better Places Programme projects.

Plymouth City Council recognises the concerns expressed in the petition regarding the loss of existing trees but agrees that a balance has to be struck with the achievement of other regeneration and environmental objectives for the city centre, including the city’s climate change commitments. We note that the scheme has many environmental benefits, for example the creation of new walking and cycling infrastructure, a sustainable urban drainage scheme, and provision for future district heating initiatives. We call on the Cabinet Member for Transport to set these out in detail for the benefit of local businesses and the public.

Plymouth City Council welcomes the pause to the Armada Way scheme announced by the Cabinet Member for Transport on 21st November 2022. We note that the modified scheme that has been published seeks to directly respond to the request in the petition to ‘incorporate a bit more of what we already have’.

Plymouth City Council calls upon the Cabinet Member for Transport to note its dissatisfaction with the lack of public engagement and suspend tree felling whilst undertaking a meaningful community engagement process in February, which considers the natural environmental and climate resilience before finalising the designs for Armada Way. The Council further acts that no work be carried out that could prejudice the survival of the existing trees until the design is finalised. Having undertaken this process and published the results, the Council supports and requests that the Cabinet Member implements that final design quickly to avoid on-going disruption to city centre businesses from the construction works.”

Meaningful Community Engagement Event



Following a full council resolution to “undertake a meaningful community engagement process in February” a 6 day short sharp engagement programme was agreed with the Portfolio Holder, opposition groups and ward members which ran from Monday 6th until Saturday 11th February at the following times:

- Monday 6 February, 12 noon to 5pm
- Tuesday 7 February, 10am to 4pm
- Wednesday 8 February, 10am to 4pm
- Thursday 9 February, 10am to 7pm
- Friday 10 February, 10am to 7pm
- Saturday 11 February, 10am to 4pm

The exhibition was held at the Guildhall with all materials also available to view on the PCC website and online portal.

A response form which asked 9 questions was used to collect views. Respondents were asked to provide name and postcode for responses to be considered and were asked to indicate ‘Yes’, ‘No’, or ‘Yes with changes’ to each of the questions. Respondents also had the opportunity to set out what changes they felt needed to be made to enable them to support the different parts of the scheme as well as chance to provide any other feedback.

In terms of promoting the event, it was on the front of website (from 3 February) and lead article on the news page. A [press release](#) (with an update issued) led to coverage in the media, including Plymouth Live: [Plymouth City Council starts 'short sharp engagement' on future of Armada Way trees - Plymouth Live \(plymouthherald.co.uk\)](#) and [Armada Way protesters call council's 'meaningful engagement' an 'insult' to Plymouth - Plymouth Live \(plymouthherald.co.uk\)](#)

Information was included in our resident’s newsletter to 26,252 people on 3 and 10 February and social media advertising started from 4 February reaching 38,000 Plymouth residents, resulting in 1,500 clicks to the press release (and 159 comments on social media). Social media posts on our corporate Facebook, Twitter and Instagram accounts resulting in over 7,000 clicks on Facebook with an average reach of 17,362 and average engagement of 70.

There was considerable attempt from ‘STRAW’ to influence people through the following activities:

- By intercepting people attending the exhibition before they could see the scheme display boards and engage with officers and the design team on the project.
- Mobilisation of an on-line campaign to direct respondents to ‘answer no to every question’ and ‘beware of the yes with changes option’.
- Producing ‘model’ ‘no’ answers to the questionnaire questions.
- Spending considerable time at the exhibition across many days and taking an intimidatory approach to discussions with the officers and the design team.
- Approaching members of the public in city centre to complete the questionnaire and submitting these in bundles.
- Standing outside of the Guildhall with placards and banners against the scheme
- Posting a number of misleading statements on Facebook about the exhibition and the project.

A detailed breakdown of all information submitted online and in-person at the event and the results has been included at the Meaningful Engagement Report appended to this document.

Discussion Forums

Three invite only Discussion Forums were held on Friday 10th February with 'STRAW', Plymouth Tree Partnership (PTP) and Local ward councillors. These involved the PCC Project Team and the Design Team and were independently facilitated by a tree advisory specialist, Luke Fay, Managing Director and Senior Arboricultural Consultant from Treework Environmental Practice. The purpose was to outline the process of how we arrived at the modified design and provide an opportunity for those invited to ask questions of the design team. Minutes of these meetings were circulated to attendees of the discussion forums.

Meeting with STRAW/PTP

A further meeting was held (at the request of 'STRAW' and the Plymouth Tree Partnership during the discussion forums) on the 23rd of February 2023 which was attended by project team officers, the Cabinet Member for Transport, and representatives of both organisations.

Performance, Finance and Customer Focus Scrutiny Committee

An appeal against the resolution of Full Council was launched by 'STRAW', resulting in a debate at the Performance, Finance and Customer Focus Scrutiny Committee on 22nd February 2023. The petition was rejected by the Committee, however the Committee agreed the following:

- *"That the Cabinet Member for Transport write to the Parliamentary Minister for Transport requesting an extension to the programme of works/ funding for the Armada Way Development Scheme"*

FEEDBACK AND CONSIDERATION TO ISSUES RAISED

A diverse range of both positive, neutral and negative comments were received during the engagement event.

Comments in favour of the scheme primarily echo support for the regeneration of the city centre with a well thought through and innovative design. Specific comments include support for features such as new wildlife benefits and a range of spaces to enjoy, opening the view and appreciation of the Abercrombie plan. There was support for making the city centre safer and more usable across the day and night, including more space for events, as well as for upgrading the footway areas to reduce trip hazards, and improving seating. Other comments included the introduction of new areas of play space and range of interactive water features.

Comments against the scheme primarily focus around designing a scheme that incorporates the existing trees. There were also comments in favour of keeping existing trees and planting more. Other comments not in favour of the scheme include concerns about the cost of the scheme and how money could be better spent on other things; the time it will take to achieve the biodiversity net gain; maintenance both in terms of regime and cost; and concerns about the cycle lane, particularly the desirability of the route, speed of cyclists, conflict with pedestrians and safety around the water jets. There are also comments about the wind tunnel effect, lack of interest in the design and a preference for restoration of the existing water feature rather than installing a new one. There were a number of comments questioning the interplay between the ornamental water feature, the irrigation and the SUDS.

Suggestions

There were a range of suggestions made in feedback received during the engagement event, some very detailed and specific. However there are some common themes which have been outlined below with a response provided:

1. Enhanced lighting;

A primary objective of the scheme is to improve the lighting along Armada Way which at present are poor, resulting in large areas of darkness. Lighting plot plans have been concluded by lighting engineers and experts which show complete and compliant lighting lux levels across Armada Way. We are also introducing GOBOs in various locations which will project patterns and animation onto the hard surfaces to add some vibrancy in the evenings and during special events.

2. Sufficient supportive seating (including covered seating)

We are proposing a range of seating types along Armada Way, some with back support, for example along the edges of the raised parterre areas, and others without backs acting as benches. We will review the plans for seating to ensure that as many provide sufficient supportive seating as possible and increase the ratio if necessary.

3. Improved CCTV coverage

Improving safety and the perception of safety along Armada Way is a primary objective of the scheme. At present the trees are too large and when in leaf, considerable block CCTV coverage around Armada Way and in particular, long views. The new scheme will add more CCTV cameras and allow for better lines of sight across the public realm in all areas.

4. More colour in the design rather than being excessively grey

We recognise that some earlier public realm works in the city centre have been considered too grey in tone, and we are proposing to bring different tones of granite into the design for Armada Way. Originally this was at key junctures in the design, however we are now reviewing the tonal make-up of other areas of significant new paving to bring more colour and warmth into the design.

5. Adaptations to the cycle lane and cycle provision

The design team have met with Plymouth Cycling Campaign who made some relevant comments regarding the cycle lane design, such as ensuring that the corners are not 45 degrees and instead are more curved. We have also discussed the plan with Sustrans, who are fully supportive of the cycle proposals, and the cycle scheme has passed its independent assessment for checked for compliance with LTN 1/20.

6. More habitats for wildlife

The scheme provides for a much greater range of habitat creation than currently exists in Armada Way. We are targeted at achieving over 20% biodiversity net gain for the scheme, which is above the 10% prescribed by the Council for developers. This figure is a real achievement when considering all of the other aims of the project which need to be addressed, and shows that nature and wildlife has been put at the heart of the proposals, with new habitats ranging from wildflower meadows to reed beds, created where ever possible.

7. Variety of suggestions considering different sorts of play and active features

We are proposing a number of new play areas, including green, tactile and natural play spaces for children. We anticipate the tactile play space to be a flagship space for the city centre, which currently has no children's play areas. We are also introducing dancing water jets and boulders with hand pumps and rills for children to interact with, taking best practice examples from other major cities where they have transformed use of public spaces.

TECHNICAL MATTERS

Planning Advice

Pre-application advice was sought from the Local Planning Authority (LPA) to provide clarity on a number of points relevant to the works at Armada Way. A response (22/01549/MOR Armada Way Public Realm Enhancement Works) was received from the Local Planning Authority on 25th October 2022 and is appended to this document. Key matters are included below:

Need for Listed Building Consent:

The Local Planning Authority confirmed that there are no listed buildings within the red line on the plan submitted with your application depicting the proposed Armada Way Public Realm works and therefore listed building consent would not be required for the works proposed.

Planning Permission

The Local Planning Authority considered that based on the plan submitted with on conversation with the project team, they do not believe the works proposed include works which would fall under 'relevant demolition' as defined above and therefore would not trigger as currently presented the need for planning consent for demolition works. In terms of actual building works, the Local Planning Authority stated that consideration needs to be given to the Permitted Development Order which is set out in the GPDO in Schedule 2 and whether the works would fall within the permitted development allowances or whether they would trigger the need for planning permission due to falling outside the remit of permitted development.

The advice stated that with the project team acting as both the Local Authority and Local Highway Authority, the permitted development rights set out in Schedule 2, Part 9, Class A (a) and Part 12 are available to use for the scheme (provided that the works do not include 'Relevant Demolition'). This is on the understanding that the works are located entirely on Highway Maintainable Public Expense (HMPE) land and Highway Land based on the red line submitted with the plan provided with this enquiry.

Following a review of the submitted information, the Local Planning Authority concluded that the works proposed can be undertaken as Permitted Development through a combination of Schedule 2, Part 9, Class A (a) and Schedule 2, Part 12 of the GPDO.

Works to Trees and need for Consent

The Local Planning Authority confirmed that having spoken with the Natural Infrastructure Team, that none of the trees within the red line boundary are subject to a Tree Preservation Order (TPO). The Local Planning Authority advised that any works to trees within the Conservation Area (note: limited to area south of the Sundial) including pruning works or removal of trees would require prior to works taking place the serving of a section 211 notice to the Local Planning Authority, this must be submitted

6 weeks before carrying out works and there is a requirement on the project team to advise of the works they intend to do.

EIA Development

The Local Planning Authority advised that, having considered the EIA regulations and the table in Schedule 2 of these regulations, it was concluded that the works would not fit within 10 (b) urban development projects and the Local Planning Authority does not consider that the works would fall within any of the other categories contained in the table in schedule 2. It was therefore concluded that the works would not be concluded to be EIA development and that this would therefore not preclude the works being undertaken under permitted development.

This concluded advice provided from the Local Planning Authority.

Highway Maintainable at Public Expense (HMPE)

It is important to note that Armada Way, in the vast majority, is designated as highways. The central grassed areas are not classified as Highways Maintainable at Public Expense (HMPE) and are instead Corporate Property. The areas that are HMPE are the footpaths and pedestrianised areas that run the length of Armada Way on its eastern and western flanks, as well as some other paths which are un-adopted highway.

Following redevelopment of the city post-war, all highways were under the control of Devon County Council, until Plymouth became a unitary authority in 1998 and the responsibility then transferred. This was when Devon County Council was Highways Authority. Plymouth became a unitary authority in 1998 and the responsibility for highways transferred from Devon County Council to Plymouth and the highways register as was came to the Council with the HMPE status of the roads in the area. It is understood that these records were used to create the current digital register.

The ownership of the land has been reviewed by the Legal department at the Council. It is confirmed that the entirety of Armada Way is within the ownership of the Council, including the central grassed areas, and that works undertaken since the 1950's would have been done so by the relevant local highway authority. The roads/highways at the top end of Armada Way have been used by the public since the 1950's/1960's so where there is an absence of evidence of actual express dedication or adoption of a road or way as a highway the common law can imply dedication from long usage by the public. It has been confirmed that in this situation there will be no formal adoption order, however, the record of the historic adoption due to the length of time of use by the public will be recorded on the highway register, as it is in this case.

Tree Surveys

A tree survey of the entire city centre area was completed by WSP in 2017 as a basis of forming baseline information relating to the development of the Better Places projects in their entirety. The report concluded at the time that all trees in the Armada Way corridor (as per the modified scheme extents) were Category C (trees of low quality) with only a single tree identified as Category B (trees of moderate quality).

Due to the expanse of time between the consultation event and the implementation of the updated design, a further tree survey was undertaken in 2021 by YGS. The objective of this survey was to go

above and beyond the BS5837 tree survey standard, and provide as much additional information on the condition, impacts from, and future proposed longevity of the existing trees in the corridor. This report has been the basis on which the designs for Armada Way have been developed.

The tree survey showed that trees in Armada Way specifically are of varying condition ranging from dead/dying to 20+ years expected life, with one having 40+ years expected life remaining. Many trees are reported to be causing impacts on footways and buildings, have restricted growth or unable to reach their expected natural form, or have been pruned and pollarded severely. This is primarily due many of the trees in the corridor being considered 'wrong tree, wrong place' and planted in appropriate underground conditions or in proximity to buildings. The tree survey also showed a over-provision of particular species beyond what would be considered good practice. More information on the breakdown of trees by Category specifically for Armada Way are included below.

Arboricultural Impact Assessment

An Arboricultural Impact Assessment was undertaken by YGS for the original proposed design, and revised for the further modified plan which now included the retention of the single Category A tree and the increased number, and amendments to the specification of, new trees. The table below outlines the tree removals by category.

Tree category	A High quality	B Moderate	C Low quality	U - Unsuitable for retention- dead or dying
Removal	0	73	43 plus two tree groups	11

The document concludes with a feasibility conclusion, which states that:

The Proposed Development has been designed to create a resilient, sustainable and socially valuable commercial area within Plymouth City Centre.

- In total, 24 tree features within the Site boundary are to be retained. 129 tree features are required for removal to facilitate the Proposed Development, formed of 127 individual trees and two minor tree groups.
- The removal of 129 tree features is anticipated to have a significant negative affect on Site amenity and local landscape character in the short-term. However, in the long-term, a significant increase in amenity is anticipated through provision of a significant new tree planting scheme facilitating: seasonal variation, flowering, fruiting, bark interest, autumnal colour, leaf shape and colour differences, and a diverse mosaic spatial arrangement of tree heights, forms and overall sizes. The tree removals therefore represent a significant investment in the long-term amenity of 'The Greenery' within Armada Way, most notably in relation to increasing resilience.

Preliminary Ecological Assessment

A preliminary ecological assessment (PEA) was undertaken by TOR Ecology in 2017. At this point, the Armada Way scheme was proposed to run in continuity from North Cross to the Hoe, however as a result of financial pressures the decision was taken in 2022 to reduce the scope of the scheme to the primary core of the city centre between North Cross and Royal Parade only.

The 2017 PEA stated that there was 'low potential only' for bats (roosting) and that species are unlikely to be present or assumed present at the site. It also stated that a detailed survey was not needed to clarify impacts and mitigation measures. The survey identified that there was potential suitable habitat for breeding birds, and House sparrow, Herring Gull were present, but that further detailed study was not necessary in either instance. The study also confirmed that there was no potential impact from the proposals on any non-statutory wildlife designations or non-statutory geological designations. The report confirmed that there would be no potential impact on any statutory designations, with the exception of Plymouth Sound and Estuary's SAC which was to be confirmed via the HRA screening process.

The report made the summary of recommendations which should be undertaken which included

- Undertake HRA screening once plans are finalised
- Any required removal of vegetation suitable for nesting birds outside of bird breeding season, or preceded by a nesting check by ecologists
- If trees identified within the report as having Low bat roosting potential proposed for removal, these should be soft felled
- Installation of biodiversity enhancements

The report also made recommendations of guidance in relation to lighting design to limit the negative impacts of lighting on nocturnal wildlife such as bats and birds.

The report indicated two 'target notes' (TN1, TN2) which had potential as features for bats. Both of these features are located on trees outside of the modified Armada Way design extents, being as they are both south of Royal Parade. Therefore no further investigation was required at the time.

An updated PEA was undertaken by Simon Geary Ecology Services in December 2022 following extensive design development and refinement. The survey was undertaken not only as a new report, but to provide an update to the findings of the 2017 report. The study was an extended Phase I Habitat Survey and included a bat tree roost assessment. This report was solely focused on the area between North Cross and Royal Parade as per the updated scheme extents.

The report summarised that most of the habitats on the proposed development site are of negligible ecological importance per se and unlikely to support protected species (ie. dwelling or resting space) on a permanent or long term basis. The report states that whilst trees and shrubs have higher ecological importance per se and provided habitat for flora and fauna, the city centre is subject to intensive management and high levels of human disturbance reducing the functionality for wildlife.

The report states that some 15 trees planned to be felled contain potential for bat roost features and further survey is required to evaluate these trees prior to felling. At least one bird nest (presumed disused due to time of year) was recorded. Assessment of these trees formed the basis of the bat report outlined in more detail below.

The recommendations of the report were as follows:

- Further survey and assessment of 15 trees identified for bat roost potential prior to felling and follow up mitigation measures depending on the survey results
- Pre-felling inspection for nesting birds
- Ecological watching brief during felling of identified trees depending on the results of the pre-felling surveys

The report also states that 'the redesign will include significant areas of new planting as part of compensation and biodiversity net gain measures'

Bat Report

As outlined above, the originally commissioned PEA undertaken by TOR Ecology in 2017 assessed Armada Way as having low habitat potential for bats. The new PEA was undertaken by Simon Geary Ecology Services in December 2022 which again identified low potential, but recommended a further bat roost assessment.

We then commissioned a further assessment of the potential bat features identified in the PEA, completed in January 2023, which included a detailed endoscopic inspection of trees to check for direct or indirect evidence of bats. The survey was delayed by bad weather, however the final report confirms from the independently-commissioned ecologist that there are no signs of bats or bat roost constraints in the trees on Armada Way.

The bat roost assessment outlines that, following no evidence of bats, there are no further ecological constraints to tree felling including important habitats or other protected species.

Biodiversity Net Gain Assessment

Plymouth City Council has set a desired target of at least 20% net gain for the project, which exceeds the Council's BNG policy requiring development to achieve at least 10% net gain. Following completion of the further modified design, The Environment Partnership (TEP) undertook an update within the set period used for the calculations, and that no further offsetting is required as part of the scheme. to the Biodiversity Net Gain Assessment report. The TWP report (67CA09-YGS-ZZ-XX-RP-J-009 BNG Design Stage Report) states that there will be a **+23.07%** for area based habitats, and a net gain of **+768.5%** for linear habitats.

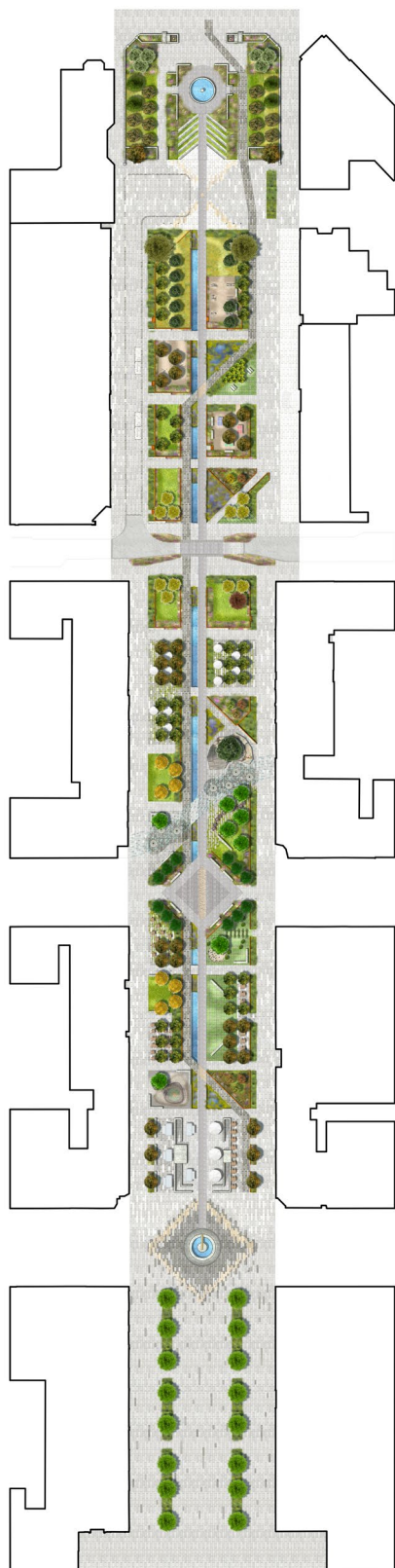
Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA)

An application under Regulation 77 of the Habitat Regulations was submitted together with associated information pertaining to Environmental Management Plan and Construction Methodology. This application requires the local planning authority to undertake an appropriate assessment which is submitted to Natural England to understand the impact of the construction works on the Plymouth Sound and Estuary's protected area. Confirmation has been received from Natural England confirming that there is no likely significant effect on the special protected area from the construction works.

Forestry Commission

Officers contacted the Forestry Commission to clarify whether a permit for felling of the trees was required. It was confirmed by email on 15th December 2022 that following confirmation that the scheme is classified as Permitted Development, the opinion of the Forestry Commission was that tree removal would not require a felling license, if the works are conducted as outlined in the pre-application enquiry to the LPA (Local Planning Authority).

THE PROPOSED PLAN



The ambition for Armada Way is for a completely transformed stunning urban park where people will play, eat, enjoy as well as come to the city centre to shop. The plan has been through a series of revisions, from the original plan released in September 2022, the modified plan released in January 19th 2022, and the further modified plan which was a result of some further design refinement after the engagement event in February 2023. This section refers wholly to the further modified plan.

The plan allows for a complete redevelopment of the public realm on Armada Way to restore the original design intent of the grand boulevard, whilst also being contemporary, future proofed and catering for all users in a safe and accessible environment. The plan will bring dramatic enhancements for the business community, visitors to the city centre, as well as the anticipated future residential community which will front directly onto it. The design is based around being environmentally sustainable for the future, creating a significant increase in the level of green space amenity for future generations to come, whilst addressing long-standing issues of maintenance and contributing substantially to making the city centre more resilient to the impacts of climate change.

Cycling: Armada Way is a well-used route for cyclists, and of primary importance to the scheme is the provision of a new cycle and pedestrian route through the centre. The cycleway will start at North Cross and meander around the enhanced Braille Garden and amphitheatre space, before re-joining the central alignment towards the sundial. The cycle way has been designed to be compliant with LTN 1/20, which recommends a 'soft segregation' approach to cycle paths in town and city centres. It will run adjacent to the rill on one side, with the raised parterres and green space on the other for large sections of the route. It will also connect with a new mobility hub at Mayflower Street. Given the width of the space and volume of pedestrians, the route will become shared with in-ground markers from the sundial, through the piazza to Royal Parade. The design ethos and proposal has been endorsed by Sustrans, the preeminent voice on matters of walking and cycling in Britain.

Sustainable Urban Drainage System

The city centre is a critical drainage area, and therefore providing a purely ornamental water feature recycling treated water would not have sufficed. The proposed SUDs system for Armada Way combines an ornamental rill, providing the noise and movement of running water, with a comprehensive sustainable drainage system which uses and reuses water smartly and responsibly. In this new system, rainwater which lands on the hard surfacing of Armada Way

will be channelled either into the green spaces, or the rill. It will then permeate down and feed into underground storage tanks which are being retrofitted from the original 1980s system. At night, the water stored in the tanks will re-circulate to water the trees, with excess water again permeating down and being reused. Water will also be filtered through the natural reed beds as opposed to relying entirely on mechanical filtration. The scheme has been designed to accommodate 1 in 100 year + 20 year flooding events, not only reducing the amount of water ending up in the combined sewer system, leading

to discharge events into Plymouth Sound marine park, but also allowing capacity within the system for future redevelopment along the corridor. Both the Environment Agency and South West Water fully support the plans and conclude that this scheme is an exemplar of how to fully integrate sustainable drainage networks into an urban public realm.



Green Infrastructure

The proposal will create a new urban linear park with green space at its heart. Whilst opening up the central vista at a minimum of 12m in width, the plan includes for a great variety of new usable green spaces, as well as wildflower meadows, reed beds and hedgerows. The further modified plan includes for 169 new trees, as well as the retention of 24 existing trees. The new trees will be more appropriate to a harsh city centre environment and will be more fastigate in form than the existing, so as to not cause impact to buildings.

The design has been modified to include the single Category A tree which is located on the south side of Mayflower Street, and following discussions with Plymouth Tree Partnership, the planting plan has been amended to include more evergreen trees, including pines, and some larger specimens with wider spreading canopies in place of clusters of fastigate trees. The trees will be supplemented by dense under-planting of shrubbery for ornamental and pollinator benefit, with rain gardens and swales along the flank walkways to soften the edges and provide new habitats which currently do not exist in Armada Way. We will be retaining the piazza trees, improving their planting conditions through removing the concrete rings they're planting in and creating 3m wide rain gardens around their bases.

All of this combined provides a significant betterment over the existing situation and a substantial increase in biodiversity at 23.07% net gain, whilst creating an urban green space which will be more resilient to climate change and impacts of changing weather patterns and temperatures.



Play and activities:

A key objective of the new scheme is to provide a range of accessible and usable play and mixed use games areas for all ages, something which the current arrangement of Armada Way does not offer.

The scheme includes for a range of tactical, green and natural play spaces, with a focus on the area around the alignment of Drakes Leat for water-based play space. This will include dancing fountain jets, boulders with hand-pumps and rills for children to play with.

The 1950's Braille Garden will be enhanced and brought back to life with the integration of a new stepped amphitheatre space for smaller scale performance by local groups and theatres. The Phoenix fountain at the northern end of Armada Way will also be enhanced with a new feature piece of artwork at its centre to signify the rebirth of Armada Way, in association with one of the local universities.

The current topographical and level issues will be dealt with through regrading of the space, allowing for the creation of a series of accessible 'parterres' which will be level on their northern edge, raising to around 1m on the southern edges. These spaces will include a range of activities including outdoor gym equipment for visitors and residents of Armada Way to use, boules pitches and table tennis tables.

A new flagship children's play space will be provided close to the sundial area, attracting families to linger and dwell in the space across the day. Green play will be integrated across the corridor allowing children to interact with nature and learn more about their new green space.



Improvements for Business:

A fundamental objective of the scheme is to enhance the attractiveness of Armada Way for existing and new businesses. The scheme will provide an entirely new, high quality public realm to replace the tired and outdated landscaping which is failing to add vibrancy and any sense of confidence in the future ambition of the city centre.

The plan includes for new wide footways, with a good sized offset to the green space and new trees to allow for pedestrians to move about the flank

walkways without obstruction and for the frontages of the buildings to be more visible both in long and cross views over Armada Way. The plan provides multiple areas of improved outdoor seating spaces for businesses along Armada Way to use adjacent to the footway, but within the central 'green corridor'. It will provide a range of spaces for people to stop and rest for all users of the city centre, including large areas of new seating with the aim of allowing people to sit and enjoy the space for a longer periods of time. The new play spaces, as outlined above, will attract more people to come to and engage with the public realm, creating additional footfall along Armada Way – crucially at the northern end where footfall is currently low. Broken footways will be replaced, and the sundial and external elements of the subterranean toilets enhanced to create a more welcoming and environment and the confirmation that the city centre is well cared for and appreciated space.

We know that there is strong demand for the scheme from the existing business community and investors looking at Plymouth. This scheme cements the Council's commitment to the city centre and will be a significant sign of economic confidence for the future. Letters appended to this document from the Plymouth & Devon Chamber and the City Centre Company confirm the transformational effects that this scheme will have for the city centre.



Safety and Security:

We will be addressing the safety and security issues of the current Armada Way layout through improving lighting and CCTV coverage across the corridor. We will also be redesigning the space to remove the heavily concealed areas as a result of the 1980s landscaping and over-developed planting. The new lighting will be mast mounted as opposed to building mounted and will provide the appropriate level of lux levels across all of the space. Some masts will, in time, be mounted with GOBOs to provide projections onto the hard

surfacing to create some animation into the evening. The removal of the trees and planting of more appropriately located specimens will allow for long-range CCTV views to be enabled along Armada Way, something which particularly when trees are in leaf, is very difficult for large parts. The new scheme will bring more people into Armada Way than current, and act as a catalyst for new businesses to move in, bringing more surveillance and footfall well into the evening. This, along with new open spaces and good cross-views through the spaces, will enhance the perception of safety for all users of the space.

Maintenance

The scheme has been designed to be as low maintenance as possible while providing the best scheme possible for the city centre for the long term. We are currently working with experts on regime and budget requirements for a 30-year maintenance period and have been working with Street Services & Waste and Facilities Management on refining the maintenance regime within the existing budgets.

We have provided for enhanced maintenance for two years for all the new soft landscaping, including replacement and replanting, within the scheme budget, and our Street Services teams will be working alongside the maintenance team to ensure that it is clearly understood what the on-going requirements are. A key factor of reducing our maintenance liabilities is the replacement of the current surfacing with hard wearing robust surfaces which can better accommodate plant and machinery, including our new cold wash machine being brought in shortly and the scheme is being designed to accommodate. It is important to note that, over the past 9 years, £410,000 has been paid in damages for trips and falls in the City Centre. This scheme, through totally repaving the majority of Armada Way, will result in less risk of claims from these types of incidents.

We also collectively looking at other future maintenance options and opportunities, including possible section 106 funding agreements and other funding mechanisms with future city centre developers, particularly properties fronting onto Armada Way.

SUPPORTERS OF THE SCHEME

A range of local, regional and national organisations have written to the Council to lend their support to the Armada Way scheme. These letters and emails of support are appended to the document and include:

- Environment Agency
- South West Water
- Sustrans
- Homes England
- Historic England
- Plymouth City Centre Company (BID)
- PCCC Board Directors and Undersigned Businesses/Organisations
- Plymouth Area Disability Action Network (PADAN)
- Devon & Plymouth Chamber
- Devon Gardens Trust
- Twentieth Century Society
- Plymouth Against Retail Crime
- Destination Plymouth
- Visit Plymouth
- Retail expert – High Streets Task Force

As well as concerns raised largely associated with the tree felling, the Council and Members have received a large number emails in support of the scheme from both businesses and members of the public. The Business Liaison officer from Morgan Sindall undertook, and will continue to undertake, weekly visits to businesses on Armada Way. The comments received so far from businesses include:

- *Happy for a nice, clean look outside of the business”*

- *“Georgia has explained the bigger picture, we think the project is exciting and will improve the city”*
- *“Original concern regarding the trees, however Georgia explained in more detail and now I feel more confident and happy about the project”*
- *“Customer feedback has been mainly positive especially around the open space and improvements. Only minor negative has been about the trees but overall the project is well handled and exciting”*
- *“No real concern at the moment, happy with the advice given to us – is a counter petition possible?”*
- *“Upon seeing the plans, we can’t wait to see the improvements. The city is dull now. I’m sold on the design!”*
- *“Will visit the Knowledge Centre soon. Looks / sounds good”*
- *“Not affected business. Thankful for security. Support the improvements”*
- *“Happy for regeneration, hoping for more trade. No business effects yet”*
- *“Want project to go ahead. Regeneration is needed as a city is dull. Trees cause problems including rats. Support overall scheme”*
- *“Slight concern with the footfall due to hoarding. The regeneration is promising”*
- *“Hoarding has reduced footfall; hoping work goes ahead soon”*
- *“Support project – happy for works”*
- *“Supports scheme, welcome the ideas”*
- *“No concerns and are happy with the works proceed”*

ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

The original ask of the design team was to consider how to retain as many trees as possible whilst achieving the overarching aims of the scheme which include:

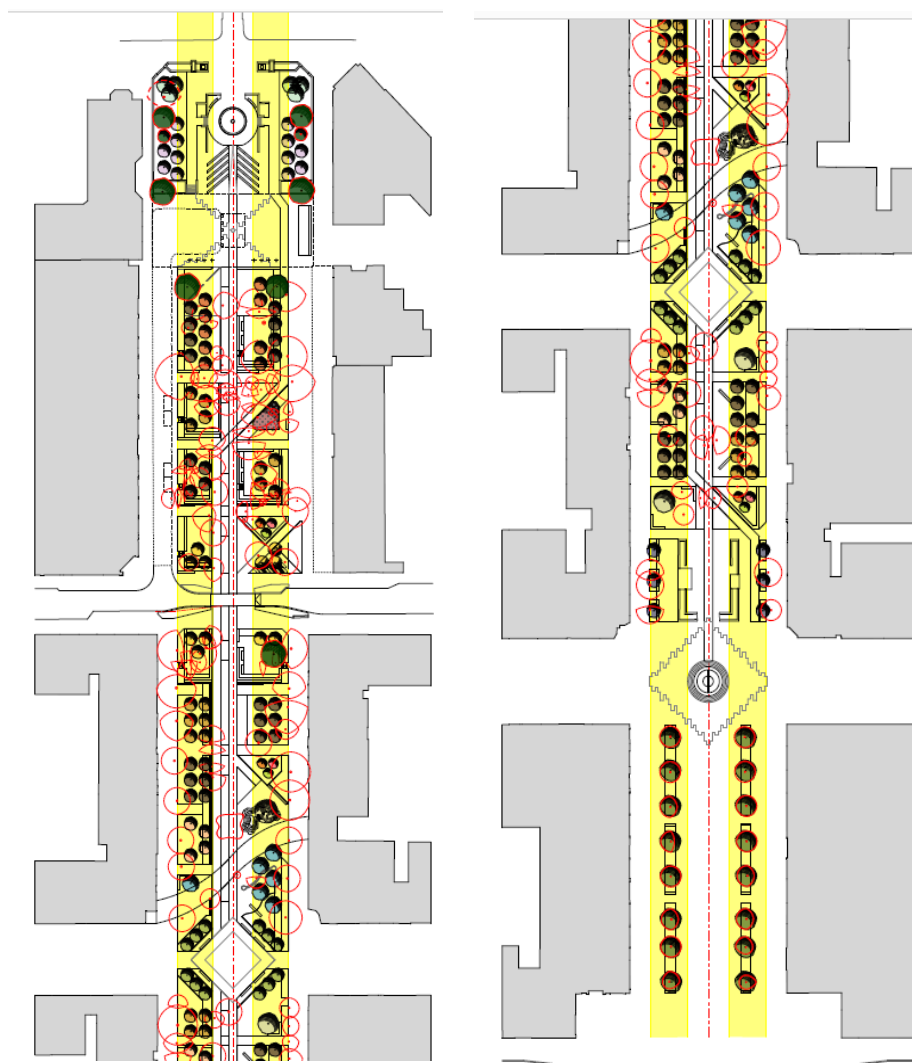
- Responding to the Abercrombie vision in contemporary idiom;
- LTN 1/20 compliant north-south direct cycle and pedestrian route;
- Comprehensive sustainable drainage system network;
- Creating usable and accessible spaces;
- New lighting and CCTV coverage;
- Reduced long term maintenance liability;
- Restoration of the vista to the Hoe;
- Minimum 20% biodiversity net gain and new tree planting;
- Running water feature the length of Armada Way;
- Dancing jets and water play equipment;
- New outdoor seating spaces for businesses;
- A range of children’s play spaces;
- Facilitating development along Armada Way;
- Allowing for a new District Heating System connection;
- Work in conjunction with other planned public realm improvements
- Allow for new event spaces including the northern end of Armada Way;
- Integrating a mobility hub at Mayflower Street;
- Plus many more as the design process continued

Enabling and delivering such a hugely complex public realm scheme of this scale to be effective and support the range of requirements put upon it not only by users of the city centre, but from operationally by teams within the Council responsible for maintaining it, requires an entirely holistic design solution. This solution needed to capture all of above points, and more, into a single cohesive plan which could be delivered in one tranche of works. Part of this process was understanding the condition and health of the trees, their expected longevity, whether they are ‘right tree, right place’ and on balance, what was the best route forward for the future of the city centre not just for now, but for

generations to come. Arboricultural advice was also that you could not simply raise land, or reduce land levels, surrounding trees as this will cause impact on the root network and ultimately kill the tree, and this allows for little degree of compromise when working around the existing tree features.

The design of the scheme was subject to bi-weekly design team meetings where the thought process and interventions were challenged, debated and in some cases compromises or resolutions were made to ensure that the scheme presented covered as many of the demands as possible in the best way.

Specifically pertaining to the trees, it was argued on numerous occasions whether or not additional existing trees along the corridor could be retained, whilst achieving the best design and maintaining the overall scheme integrity. The design team concluded that, with the overall objectives listed, and their relative youth, the piazza trees could be easily integrated into the design, whilst also undertaking further works around the bases and underground planting conditions to allow them to thrive more fully.



A key driver for the scheme was the setting out of planting into distinct corridors or zones along Armada Way, which allowed for a regular, ordered approach to planting whilst still allowing for considerable variation in the layout of planting within the zones. The zones are crucially linked to the re-grading of the levels along Armada Way to make it accessible and usable, an issue which the current arrangement does not necessitate. The zones are also important for maintaining the 12m wide grand vista towards the Hoe and Naval Memorial, which as outlined earlier, is the entire purpose of Armada Way's existence as a piece of urban planning. The zones also allow for the wide, unrestricted and uncluttered flank footways on either side of Armada Way which have been provided at an appropriate width for blue

light services and to provide a substantial offset from the new tree line and canopies to the building. A plan showing the planting zones is included adjacent split into two sections (North Cross – Place de Brest and Place de Brest to Royal Parade)

It was concluded that in order to provide a holistic, entirely interwoven design between the large number of factors and requirements, that it would be incorrect to design around trees which are the wrong trees in the wrong place, with limited longevity and have already reached and surpassed their optimum health and growth. This scheme is to support the future prosperity of the city centre, and represents a significant investment in both the long term environmental and economic sustainability of the city centre and is a key part of our ambitions for enhancing walking and cycling and dealing with

drainage in the critical drainage area. These overarching benefits would be considerably watered down, and in some cases not possible entirely, if even a handful of existing trees were to be further retained. It would not only have an impact on the integrity of the scheme, but would lead to continued issued of failing tree stock, inability to fund to dig up and replace when they do fail, and a public realm scheme delivered in disparate parts with an overall lack of consistency. We already had a diminishing tree stock in Armada Way which has resulted in felling the tree and leaving stumps behind – including instances of hard landscaping designed specifically around a tree which has now been felled. This would have a subsequent significant impact on increased future costs for the life of the design as a result of large scale work required in the not too distant future (eg. 10+ years as trees fail).

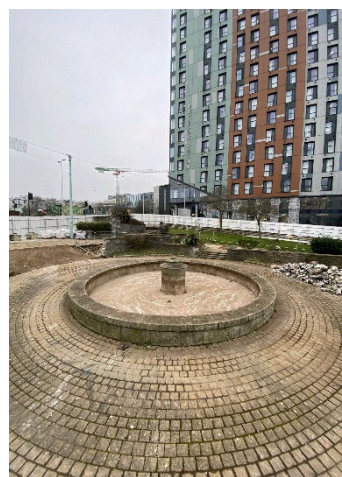
There is no budget certainty that these issues could be dealt with, and nor is there any certainty that future capital funding will become available to deliver Armada Way in a piecemeal fashion. This will also not present the image of the city centre which the Council wants to achieve from this strategic public realm intervention, and the resultant benefits from a piecemeal scheme would be less in terms of the expected increase in visitors, new businesses and economic growth. The issue of maintenance above the already reactive maintenance pruning and pollarding, will only become worse as the trees continue to decline and the landscape becomes even further more tired and degraded. The Council has also been required to pay our considerable sums of money due to trips and falls as a result of the surface conditions and other hazards along Armada Way over the past few years. The Council is not in a position to continue to allocate resource to maintain a declining landscape, and the opportunity of this capital project should be to ensure that the new trees are planted correctly, in the right underground conditions, from the outset so as to not result in significant maintenance liability in future, as per the existing arrangement.

PROGRESS SO FAR



Since the approval of the Executive Decision for undertaking the short-form delivery agreement, Morgan Sindall, the principle contractors for all Better Places schemes, have established the compound which includes a Knowledge Centre for businesses and members of the public to attend. The centre opened back in December and has seen a steady flow of visitors who have been in to speak with the customer liaison officer.

Site works have involved hoarding off the majority of Armada Way, clearance of some shrubbery and removal and cleaning of boulders, granite kerbs and



setts. The Phoenix fountain at the top of Armada Way has also been emptied of soil and cleaned in preparation of its re-imagining under the proposed scheme. Works are imminently due to start on the piazza to bring in new lighting, rain gardens,

seating, improved surfacing to replace the broken slabs and new cycle way-markers.

CLIMATE AND ENVIRONMENTAL RESILIENCE

The Armada Way proposal is more than just felling 129 trees, which has raised the most concern, and as with all of the Council's public realm schemes, it is entirely about embedded holistic benefits for the people of Plymouth. The Council cannot afford not to deliver these benefits in the context of our Climate Emergency Action Plan, and this necessitates using resources such as space above and below ground wisely as well as other important aspects.

Alongside the commitment to 'right tree, right place', one of the key reasons for many of the existing trees being removed is that it is not possible to successfully deliver these multiple critical benefits which are embedded in a layout that is ordered and forms a central clean avenue of sight, accommodating ordered infrastructure below and above ground. To ensure climate and environment resilience, we are also planning for and delivering the following:

- Sustainable Walking and Cycling Improvements: a central walking and cycling link through the middle of the city centre joining with other similar cycling initiatives and connecting routes to and from the city centre. The new cycle route will join in with the National Cycle Network and other cycling projects the Council is delivering through the "Transforming Cities Fund programme. Enabling and encouraging high quality cycling and walking routes will help facilitate low to zero car ownership residential development in the city centre, and promote access to and around the city centre by sustainable modes of transport for the wider population and visitors;
- A unique, large scale Sustainable Urban Drainage System (SUDs): The city centre is a Critical Drainage Area, meaning it is at capacity, and therefore we are required to "use water wisely", by removing surface water from our combined sewer system into a new surface water drainage system allowing capacity for city centre growth in the form of residential development. The rainfall that lands on Armada Way will be stored in underground tanks and within surface SUDs infrastructure such as rain gardens, which will act as surface exceedance routes. This water will be reused for irrigation of our new green spaces and trees, resulting in less water entering the combined sewer and in heavy rainfall events discharging into Plymouth Sound;
- An Ornamental Watercourse linked to the SUDs system; predominately gravity powered and supplemented with solar powered electrical pumping, water storage with a smart controlled system. The system will power the children's play used for civic effect in fountains and is naturally filtered by reed beds and UV light to be as sustainable as it's possible. The natural filtration for the water will provide further green elements to add interest to the scheme and contribute to the biodiversity enhancements and new habitat creation;
- The provision of new high mast low energy street lighting using LED lanterns to replace the aging building mounted lighting infrastructure;
- Futureproofing for the continuation of a District Heating Network to connect in with new residential and mixed use development along Armada Way;
- Upgrading existing and provision of new and more efficient power and water services for public events use;
- A high quality planting scheme using 164 semi-mature trees of >8m height with floriferous under planting, to promote city centre biodiversity net gain in the region of 25% and contributing to

greening the city centre. The trees will be more appropriate to their setting, planted in large tree pits with rooting infrastructure allowing for healthy, long term growth and survival in a harsh environment where issues of climate change in the longer term will be particularly pertinent;

- Reusing much of the existing robust hard landscaping material into the new design to reduce the inbuilt carbon cost of the scheme. This includes reusing the hundreds of granite kerbs, setts, blocks and boulders.

Technically our scheme for Armada Way is delivering reductions in greenhouse gasses in the following ways:

On 8 March 2019 the Council declared a Climate Emergency and produced a number of key actions to make Plymouth carbon neutral by 2030. The Corporate Carbon Reduction Plan (2019- 21) set out the ambitions to:

- Reduce the corporate CO2 emissions and to “deliver the Council’s Carbon Management Plan”
- To become a green, sustainable city that cares about the environment.

Plymouth’s Climate Emergency Action Plan (2019)

On 18 March 2019 the City of Plymouth councillors voted unanimously to declare a climate emergency, committing to meet the most significant challenge facing the city and our planet through achieving carbon neutrality by 2030. The latest report by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change is very clear that limiting global warming to 1.5°C by 2030 is necessary to prevent significant global worsening of floods, droughts and extreme heat. Plymouth recognises the opportunity we have to lead on the de-carbonisation agenda, providing local vision and delivery.

Plymouth city centre is a dense urban environment, and the largest expanse of hard surfacing in the city overall, which is affected by many emissions into the urban atmosphere, these come from our buildings and the heat plants used to keep them warm and cool, from the extensive road network that encircles the city centre, and the many cars buses and vehicles that use them, and the mix of uses including light industry.

The change proposed within Armada Way for the removal of 129 trees will see a complete reimagining of green infrastructure in the city centre for the future. The new trees, as well as having best practice in-ground rooting environments within which they can grow, will benefit from an advanced irrigation system to ensure they have sufficient water directly fed from the planned SUDs system so the chances of them establishing and thriving is very good.

Plymouth City Council has an excellent track record of establishing semi-mature trees in our city centre such that over the past 6 years we have established and nurtured 60 semi-mature trees of similar scale to those proposed in Armada Way, such as the New Coach Station, Market Way, and Millbay Boulevard and in that time has lost only one. The scheme is covered by a 2-year maintenance period by YGS Landscapes where any trees that do happen to fail will be replaced and replanted during this critical establishment period.

The additional 164 new semi-mature trees coupled with the existing 24 retained specimens will contribute to capturing carbon from our urban atmosphere typically locking between 3.8 and 6.2 metric tonnes of CO2 per year. These trees will also moderate the urban microclimate for the long-term by

reducing localised temperature, offer usable shade, and take up and store rainwater in the extensive fastigate canopy, helping to moderate high rainfall events.

Annually, transport accounts for 35% of the carbon emissions in the city, according to the city's decarbonisation report undertaken by Regen SW in November 2022. For Plymouth to achieve our reduction target by 2030 we need to act three times faster than envisaged by the current government policies. Whilst the Council is committing additional resources to tackle the climate emergency, we also recognise the need to maximise the funding from other sources such as developers and central government. Armada Way is contributing to this by promoting safe walking and cycling routes to encourage higher take up of these modes, whilst utilising funding in respect of the Transforming cities Fund Tranche 2.

Met Office data shows that the South West of England is experiencing almost 10% more rainfall across the year now than it did in 1961. Seasonal rainfall is highly variable, but since 1961 it has decreased by 9% in summer and increased in autumn by 28% and in winter by 16%.

Our winters are also milder – on average per year, South West England has almost 21 fewer days of air frost than it did in 1961. The proposals for Armada Way with its Sustainable Urban Drainage System, will have many benefits, principally it creates an entirely new storm water drainage system that removes rainwater from the existing dated combined sewer system then uses that water wisely for the new environment. It uses that rainwater to feed the proposed ornamental watercourse planned to run down the new layout, it uses that water to irrigate the new green infrastructure at times of drought and at times of exceedance captures volumes and stores it for reuse and release when the event is over. All this has the effect of protecting the rainwater catchment from flooding and uses water wisely at the point it falls from the sky and reduces the amount which discharges into Plymouth Sound, a protected marine site and National Marine Park.

Two key partners, the Environment Agency (EA) and South West Water (SWW) are supportive of the scheme for its environmental credentials. SWW reports that Armada Way will:

- Reduce sewer flood risk due to lowering of peak flows,
- Creation of headroom at downstream treatment facilities due to lower flows arriving at treatment works,
- Lower energy and carbon implications due to less flow, less energy requirement for pumping, and reduced chemical use at the treatment plant,
- Opportunity for runoff to be used as a resource rather than a problem,
- Contribute to protection of bathing water quality in Plymouth Sound due to reduced storm overflow discharges.

They said:

“The redevelopment of Armada Way represents a once in a generation opportunity for storm runoff from impermeable areas historically connected directly to the combined sewer network to be separated out and be dealt with in a sustainable way. The city centre area is the largest single area of paved area connected to the combined sewer in the Plymouth Central catchment and the removal of this flow from combined sewerage through the sustainable drainage elements of the public realm project will have a significant benefit across all of the above measures.”

“We therefore fully support the proposals for Armada Way and the many benefits that this project will generate through better storm water runoff management. In our view this urban redevelopment is exemplar in the way surface water management has been incorporated into the design as a core principle. The benefits go far wider than simply creating a more inviting urban environment.”

The Area Director for the Environment Agency, Devon & Cornwall & the Isles of Scilly reported:

“The scale of the redevelopment plan for Armada Way is welcomed and this helps to support the aims of the Government’s National Flood and Coastal Erosion Risk Management Strategy for England, by increasing the resilience to climate change by utilising sustainable drainage solutions. This project will provide a key part of the new surface water drainage system that will link to other parts of the city centre, such as the current works on New George Street and the future works for the Derry’s Cross area. The proposed Sustainable Urban Drainage Systems (SUDS) incorporated into the overall landscaping plan will support the better management of water quality by filtering surface water and storing it during heavy rainfall, which is forecast to increase with climate change. Your proposals will also help support the nature of the local area and allow for better management of periods of drought.”

“These outcomes support the city with its marine park status and the development of a high-quality public realm, that responses to our environmental challenges will enhance the growth of Plymouth as the ocean city.”

The decarbonisation report on Plymouth’s heat (including cooling) challenge undertaken by Regen SW (2022) reports that this represents 38% of Plymouths carbon emissions in line with the Country’s total. Measures to deliver a district heating system and contributions to making this operational are extremely valuable and the Armada Way works will be playing a critical role by proving ducting for this future scheme over active road crossings and soft dig areas. This will allow for the future network to be ‘plugged into’ as and when new development comes forward along the corridor, thereby significantly reducing future carbon emissions.

Council’s Plan for Trees

The Plan for Trees is about tree management and making sure the right tree is in the right place, with the right infrastructure and right aftercare to establish and grow well – “Right tree, Right place, Right care” The current trees have no infrastructure underground to support healthy, long term growth and longevity.

The new trees will have large areas to grow into and be watered through our Sustainable Urban Drainage System and able to gain the nutrients they need to thrive, not struggle growing in cement, brick and post war rubble. One tree where the hub is now was planted in just 30 cm of poor soil, another was planted near a manhole and its roots had grown all over it. We’ve had to remove numerous trees, as you can see on Armada Way where there are stumps, because they have failed.

There is nothing fundamentally at odds with the plans for Armada Way with respect the tree management principles or its delivery programme in the Plan for Trees.

In the last two years the Council’s Tree Planting Programme has resulted in 10,644 trees being planted in the city. This year (2022/2023) the Council will be delivering 30 tree planting schemes. These are funded predominantly through the Trees for Climate Fund. We expected to plant a further 5,763 trees across these various schemes in the coming months. The Council’s Climate Emergency Action Plan supports tree planting and other decarbonisation initiatives which over time, as these and the new semi-mature trees in Armada Way mature, increase tree canopy cover in the city.

RESPONSE TO RESOLUTION OF FULL COUNCIL

As outlined in the Engagement section of this report, on the 30th of January 2023 Full Council debated the petition presented by STRAW. The resolution concludes by calling for the *“Cabinet Member for Transport to note the Council’s dissatisfaction with the lack of public engagement and suspend tree felling whilst undertaking a meaningful community engagement process in February, which considered the natural*

environment and climate resilience before finalising the designs for Armada Way.” The resolution continues to recommend that the “Council further acts that no work be carried out that could prejudice the survival of the existing trees until the design is finalised. Having undertaken this process and published the results, the Council supports and requests that the Cabinet Member implements that final design quickly to avoid on-going disruption to city centre businesses from the construction works.”

This report outlines the process which the Council project team undertook following the resolution of Full Council. This included a well-publicised and well-attended Meaningful Engagement Event, the results of which have been appended to this document. The project team have also abided by the resolution and has not undertaken any further work which would prejudice the survival or health of the existing trees. Outlined within this document, and appended as a full plan, is the further modified layout plan for the scheme. This is the finalised design which has taken on board comments from the public where possible, and those who attended the discussion forums and made representations. The new proposal also seeks to go above and beyond the resolution, and will commit to the planting of a further 142 trees across the St Peters and the Waterfront Ward, doubling the total number of trees that currently exist in Armada Way. To accord with the resolution, to implement the final design quickly to avoid on-going disruption to the city centre businesses, it is recommended that the Executive Decision to proceed with the further modified plan is agreed.

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Annexe 10

PCC Pre-election guidance and Panel's commentary

(Panel's emboldening and addition of comment column):

6. DECISION MAKING, COUNCIL BUSINESS AND PUBLICITY	ILR Comment
<p>1. Generally, when considering whether to carry on business, or produce publicity, the Council should ask “<i>Could a reasonable person conclude that the Council is spending money to influence the outcome of an election?</i>” In the event it could the business should be paused.</p>	<p>The Panel heard from officers, Councillors and members of the community of consensus across the major political parties that the Armada Way scheme should go ahead; and that taking the decision would not have assisted the former Leader or the Conservative Group.</p>
<p>2. Council business continues in accordance with existing policy. Controversial decisions should be avoided unless they are required to comply with the Council's statutory duties and cannot wait until after the election. For example, where the statutory time limits to take planning or licensing decisions expire prior to the Annual General Meeting.</p>	<p>Armada Way was part of the existing policy, and it was an approved part of the capital programme. It was designed to help address statutory duties including drainage and transport. By accepting ‘urgency’ the council confirmed it couldn’t wait until after the election.</p>
<p>3. Context is important when considering this, as decisions with only a local impact might be seen as trying to influence the outcome of an election in that ward, in the weeks immediately preceding a local election. When considering what is controversial it is helpful to consider:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • whether the decision being taken is part of a pre-planned work programme, • whether it will change Council policy, • whether it is a one-off decision and • whether it is associated with one particular Councillor or political group. 	<p>This was not a decision of only local interest and it effected more than one Ward – it was for the whole of the city and beyond.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It was part of a pre-planned work programme • It did not change council policy • It was a one-off decision • It was not associated with one particular Councillor or political group (but became so by using the urgency procedure)
<p>4. The Leader and Cabinet decisions should be avoided, where possible, in the pre-election period, as there is a risk of legal challenge on the</p>	<p>The risk of legal challenge had been identified regardless of the pre-election period – it was not</p>

<p>basis that the Council is spending money to try to influence the outcome of the election. (Any legal challenge would result in delays before a decision is able to be implemented and is likely to incur costs that would not be recoverable).</p>	<p>heightened by that - arguably the use of Urgency led to legal costs and delays).</p>
<p>5. Given other constraints on Councillors' time during the pre-election period, scrutiny meetings will not usually be arranged in the pre-election period unless there is business that needs to be progressed before the election takes place.</p>	<p>The arguments used to justify 'urgency' would have equally justified a scrutiny meeting in the pre-election period.</p>
<p>6. Where Cabinet and committee meetings are arranged the agenda and business of the meeting must be managed carefully to avoid creating publicity in favour of a particular candidate or party. This is particularly so when the meeting will be webcast, as the definition of publicity in the legislation includes webcasts published by the Council. This means that the agenda of most meetings will consist of routine business that needs to take place prior to the election and controversial matters should be avoided unless there is a need for an urgent decision.</p>	<p>It was not considered to favour a particular candidate or party. Urgency had been justified.</p>
<p>6. All media releases must comply with the Code and the Council's Communications Protocol and the Publicity Quick Guide (see Appendix A for further information). Only those that comply can be issued in relation to Council business.</p>	<p>N/A</p>
<p>7. No Council publicity can be issued that in any way might be seen to be helping to promote a candidate or political party.</p>	<p>N/A</p>

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Annexe II

The Code of Practice on Good Governance for Local Authority Statutory Officers (LLG, CIPFA, SOLACE: drafted by Bevan Brittan 2024)

The Governance Golden Triangle – Chief Executive, Monitoring Officer, Chief Financial Officer

A code of practice to support better governance and decision-making published by Lawyers in Local Government, the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountability, and SOLACE encourages the three statutory officers to work together to achieve high standards of corporate governance. The seven standards set out in the Code can be broadly summarised as:

- (i) Understand Governance: officers should understand their roles and what is required to perform them.
- (ii) Act Wisely: officers should collaborate when decisions are being made and ensure decisions are informed by all relevant advice.
- (iii) Lead Ethically: officers should adhere to the Seven Principles of Public Life
- (iv) Act Effectively: officers should meet regularly to review current likely future issues and be able to attend other key meetings where financial, procedural, vires or other constitutional issues are expected to arise.
- (v) Resource the Roles: officers should ensure they have the staff, accommodation and other resources necessary to perform their duties.
- (vi) Build Resilience: good governance should be embedded within each authority and officers should ensure robust arrangements are in place across the authority to ensure a sustainable approach.
- (vii) Deliver sound decision-making: officers should ensure decisions are understandable, lawful and implementable.

The code of practice does not impose legal obligations on statutory officers but is designed to help them know their roles and responsibilities better, encourage collaborative-working and better decision-making with a view to improving corporate governance.