

Plymouth Economic Strategy – Civic Pride and Regeneration

Introduction

The Plymouth Economic Strategy (PES), adopted in March 2024, includes Civic Pride and Regeneration as one of 4 Pillars for driving the city's growth.



Figure 1: Illustration of Plymouth Economic Strategy structure.

Each Pillar has a dedicated leadership and support structure. Civic Pride and Regeneration have:

Leads

- **Cabinet** Cllr. Jemima Laing
- **PGB** James Mackenzie-Blackman
- **PCC** Emma Wilson

Support

- **PGB** Paul Fieldsend-Danks and David Bayliss
- **PCC** Victoria Pomery and Emma Hewitt

A Plan for Action

At the heart of this Pillar is a clear focus on the city centre, recognising it as the primary driver of Plymouth's economic, social and cultural regeneration. The city centre leads the regeneration narrative, with culture and the visitor economy acting as strategic levers to strengthen place, support investment and create the conditions for new homes, mixed-use development and placemaking to sustain long-term urban living.

This aligns with our work across Plymouth Sound National Marine Park (PSNMP), the city's ports and the continued development of Plymouth's image and brand. These elements support the transformation of the city centre.

At the heart of this Pillar is a particular focus on:

- An attractive and vibrant city centre
- Culture Place making

This aligns to our work in Plymouth Sound National Marine Park (PSNMP) as well as our ports and the development and improvement of the city's image and brand.

Summary

This report will provide a detailed update on progress with the city centre, while also reflecting on the important role that culture plays in regeneration.

Since the PES was adopted, major progress has been made through our strategic investment partnership with Homes England, the New Towns proposal, commencement of the City Living Framework, and investment in the Civic Centre. These now form a single, coherent programme for transforming Plymouth.

At the centre of this work is the city centre, which remains fundamental to Plymouth's economic, cultural and social future. While recent investment has strengthened leisure, culture and health provision, the missing element has been city centre living. The City Living Framework will provide the approach to deliver this, bringing planning, culture, transport, placemaking and community engagement together.

The Civic Centre will be the first major proof of concept for urban living, delivering 144 new homes and demonstrating investor confidence. Alongside the New Towns proposal and strategic partnership with Homes England, this creates a clear pathway for long-term regeneration and a more vibrant, sustainable city centre.

Purpose of the Pillar

The purpose of this pillar is to strengthen how Plymouth is perceived by residents, businesses, visitors and the media, creating a compelling story that attracts investment, talent and growth. Central to this is the transformation of the city centre into a place where people can live, work, play, socialise and shop. Cultural place making is at the fundamental to regeneration, city living and a thriving nighttime economy.

Working with the leadership group, we will ensure it fully addresses the future of the city centre, recognising it as the primary driver of Plymouth's economic, social and cultural success. While the PES builds on the work of Destination Plymouth and Plymouth Culture through the Visitor Plan, Culture Plan and city branding, these are now positioned as key enablers rather than standalone outcomes. Their role is to support a stronger, more vibrant and better-connected city centre.

As we develop this reframed approach, it will be directly linked to the City Living Framework, which provides the mechanism for delivering high-quality homes, mixed-use development, public realm improvements and a stronger urban community. Culture, visitor activity and placemaking work all act as catalysts within this model—helping to animate the city centre, drive footfall, and support the long-term regeneration programme.

City Centre

Over the past decade we have delivered major improvements in leisure, culture and health, for example the Barcode (2019), The Box (2000) and the first Community Diagnostics Centre due to complete in April 2026. The critical missing link has been housing. Creating a thriving, sustainable urban community requires more people living in the heart of the city.

Plymouth City Council has previously been constrained on delivering regeneration resulting in a piecemeal approach taking opportunities where they existed. A comprehensive approach was beyond resources available. This has since evolved into a far more ambitious and coordinated programme. The Memorandum of Understanding with Homes England, the investment in the Civic Centre, and now the New Towns proposal represent a step-change in scale, capacity and ambition. These are not isolated projects—they form a coherent long-term programme of change.

New Towns Proposal

The proposed 'Town in the City' New Towns programme will provide 10,000 new, well-designed, well-connected homes, with a target of 40% to be affordable, in a vibrant and attractive city. Quality homes will support the retention and attraction of skilled employees to take advantage of the employment growth as an outcome of the £4.4bn government investment in Plymouth's dockyard.

We know that the City is facing a median jobs gap of 25,000 in 2035 between the required workforce and working age population. We will need over 21,000 homes by 2050 and 100,000m² new employment space. Babcock have a requirement for 5,500 jobs and we have growth of 12,000 jobs already baked in by previous investments and announcements.

The starting point to deliver upon this plan is the commissioning of the City Living Framework. This approach is more than just a masterplan but a framework for how we will bring the New Town forward and the sort of place that we are going to create. It will include our cultural aspirations, our future retail offer, our ambition for the evening and nighttime economy and many other important issues

The City Living Framework

Plymouth is embarking on one of the most ambitious urban transformations in its history. The City Living Framework is a bold commission led by Plymouth City Council, Homes England, and the UK Government. This nationally significant project - will deliver 10,000 new homes, vibrant public spaces, and a thriving economy at the heart of Britain's Ocean City. This is about more than bricks and mortar. It's about creating a city that attracts talent, fosters innovation, and celebrates community life. By reimagining how we live, work, and connect, Plymouth will become one of the most desirable urban destinations in the UK. The City Living Framework integrates planning, culture, placemaking, transport and design into a single approach, underpinned by our commitment to meaningful and ongoing community engagement.

WSP in partnership with other nationally recognised experts were recently appointed (December 2025) to deliver the Framework with Professor Jim Coleman their Chief Economist leading the commission. He has extensive experience shaping economic strategies for major urban transformations in the UK and internationally. Joining Jim in the leadership team is Glenn Howells of Howells as Chief Placemaking Advocate and Framework lead. He is an award-winning architect and urban designer, renowned for city-scale regeneration projects including Birmingham's Future City Plan. He will lead the preparation of the city living framework. Alex Ely of Mae Architects is the City Placemaking Advocate and Masterplan Lead. Former Mayor's Design Advocate for London and RIBA Stirling Prize winner, Alex brings national authority on housing quality and design standards and will lead a team of designers on the city centre core masterplan.

The leadership team is complemented by Gayatri Suryawanshi (WSP) as lead urban designer and development planner. She is an experienced urbanist and architect who will guide urban design and development planning to create inclusive, high-quality spaces. Jason Langley (WSP) as Infrastructure Delivery Lead, is a Chartered Civil Engineer and will lead infrastructure delivery, ensuring robust transport and utilities solutions for the masterplan. Dominic Masters (WSP) is the property market and delivery strategy lead. He is a real estate advisory specialist. He will review the property market and delivery strategy to unlock investment and to ensure deliverability. Daniel Fryd (WSP) is the Engagement and Communications Lead. He is a senior communications specialist with deep expertise in co-design and stakeholder engagement for complex regeneration projects. Maxine Kennedy (WSP) is the Social Value Lead. She authored Homes England's Social Value guidance and will embed locally relevant social value outcomes throughout the programme. Dan Jenkins (WSP) is the Infrastructure and Transport Lead. He leads technical delivery for infrastructure and transport, ensuring sustainable mobility and integrated design solutions.

Gareth Oakley (WSP) is the Sustainability and Net Zero Lead he brings two decades of experience in sustainable master planning and energy strategy. Nick Corbett (WSP) is the Heritage and Placemaking Lead. He is a nationally respected heritage specialist and author of Transforming Cities: Revival in the Square. Michelle Oldfield (WSP) is the Digital and Geospatial Lead. She leads digital innovation and GIS integration, enabling data-driven decision-making and advanced modelling. Simon Yewdall (DNCO) is well known to Plymouth as Brand Strategy Director. He led Plymouth's refreshed city brand and will define the narrative for "City Living" to attract talent and investment. In addition, locally based partners – LHC Design, Gillespie Yunnis, Lavigne Lonsdale, and Makower Architects

bring invaluable local knowledge and design expertise, ensuring proposals are grounded in the city's identity and aspirations.

Programme & Methodology

Phase 1 – Discover (January to March 2026)

The team will start by building a clear picture of Plymouth today and its potential for the future. This includes gathering data, testing ideas, and shaping an early vision for the city centre. Community involvement begins here, and residents, businesses, and local groups will be invited to share their views through surveys, pop-up events, and co-design workshops. These conversations will help define priorities and ensure the vision reflects what matters most to Plymouth people.

Phase 2 – Define (April-July 2026)

Using feedback from the first phase, the team will refine options for the City Living Framework, the City Centre Masterplan, and the Infrastructure Strategy. This stage will include design reviews and scenario testing to make sure proposals are practical, sustainable, and deliverable. Public engagement continues, and people will be able to comment on draft ideas online and at in-person events, helping shape the final plans.

Phase 3 – Deliver (August-October 2026)

The final phase focuses on producing detailed reports, 3D models, sustainability appraisals, and engagement summaries. These will guide delivery on the ground and support Plymouth's case for investment and New Town designation. Residents will see how their input has influenced the plans, with clear "You Said, We Did" updates and opportunities to review the final proposals before adoption and implementation November-December 2026.

The Civic Centre- Market making £36m grant package

PCC have secured circa £18.4m of investment from our government partner Homes England (November 2025) to deliver the redevelopment of the grade I listed Civic Centre. The redevelopment will deliver 144 build-to-rent homes—a product currently absent in Plymouth, yet strongly supported by investor appetite, proving the market for city centre living and driving investor confidence. The basement and podium of the building will deliver a new blue/green skills hub for City College Plymouth, bringing education and skills into the heart of the city centre. In turn supporting the skills investment needed for the Dockyard.

Since the Council took back control of the Civic Centre phase 0 of the works have been completed with internal strip out and the removal of asbestos to make the building safe for construction activity. Currently phase 1 of works are underway with the carrying out of structural investigations to inform repair works required. Alongside this work, over 30 surveys have been or will be carried out to get a detailed picture of what's in and around the building, including where utilities and drainage infrastructure are, both within the Civic and its immediate grounds.

Morgan Sindall have been appointed to carry out pre-development services to enable the redevelopment of the civic centre. We are working closely with them to ensure that the

redevelopment is more than bricks and mortar driving social value for the Plymouth community.

The submission of the revised planning application will be the next significant milestone in moving this unique opportunity for Plymouth forward.

The Importance of Culture

Culture makes places and this has been the reason we have prioritised cultural investments such as the Box over the past decade.

Plymouth has a diverse range of cultural organisations working within and across communities. Plymouth Culture is leading the way in enhancing the city's rich culture and creative sector to deliver growth and enhance wellbeing. Our major cultural assets are leading the way.

Theatre Royal Plymouth (TRP) TRP delivers major boost to Southwest economy | Theatre Royal Plymouth

In January of this year, TRP announced that it has delivered an estimated £53.3 million economic impact in the city of Plymouth and the wider Southwest region during the financial year 2024/2025, up from £45.9m the previous year and marking the most successful period in the theatre's history.

This significant contribution reflects a year when major West End and world-renowned productions chose TRP as their key touring destination for the Southwest region. A defining moment was the internationally acclaimed musical *Hamilton*, which played a six-week summer run and attracted audiences from across the UK and around the world. Other renowned shows to take to TRP's Lyric stage include Disney's *Mary Poppins*, *Joseph and the Amazing Technicolour Dreamcoat*, *Fawlty Towers* and *Chitty Chitty Bang Bang*.

Hamilton sold 53,000 tickets across its 46 performances from as far away as Malaysia, Australia and the USA, and this influx of visitors delivered a substantial boost to local hotels, restaurants, transport providers, retail businesses and cultural attractions throughout Plymouth and neighbouring areas.

In total, throughout 2025, the theatre sold 373,133 tickets across more than 651 performances, for 100 different productions. Of these, 37 productions and 253 performances took place in The Drum, TRP's studio theatre, selling a total of 22,150 tickets.

The Box Five Years On: The Box celebrates its fifth anniversary and outlines its impact | The Box Plymouth

In September 2025, The Box released an independent assessment to mark its fifth anniversary. This assessment highlighted how it has emerged as a significant force in the UK's cultural landscape, generating a £244 million economic footprint while forging partnerships with premier national institutions including the National Gallery, National Portrait Gallery, and the V&A since opening in autumn 2020. In the first five years The Box has witnessed:

- Over 1.1 million visits
- 56% of visitors are Plymouth residents
- 72,000 visits by international visitors
- Over 100,000 hours of volunteering
- Visits from 89% of all the schools in Plymouth
- Over 2 million objects in the collections
- £28m contribution to the Plymouth economy by visitors to The Box
- £11.3m - the economic impact by The Box in 2024 / 2025

Pillar Projects

Through the development of the Delivery Plan for the PES, 13 of the projects were judged to align primarily with Civic Pride and Regeneration. These projects are currently:

Project Area	Project Name	Lead Organisation
Devonport Place-making	<p>Establishing Devonport as a 'Creative Cluster'</p> <p>Update</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We have adopted the city's first creative industries plan. • We have received £20m pride in place funding • We have a social value work stream in Team Plymuth 	Real Ideas
Plymouth Sound National Marine Park	<p>Completing the delivery of the major capital investments</p> <p>Update</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We have completed the investment of tin side • We are on site at Mountbatten • We plan to start at Mount Edgcumbe this year 	Plymouth City Council
	Delivering the 'Sea in our School' programme	Plymouth City Council
	<p>Developing and delivering a creative digital PSNMP programme</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We have launched the Place Partnership and Sea in the City digital engagement programme 	Plymouth Culture
Town within the City Centre	Developing the City Centre masterplan through the City Centre Living Framework	Plymouth City Council

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We have appointed WSP <p>Investing in our priority sites</p>	Plymouth City Council
	Regenerating the West End- delivery of the Community Diagonistics Centre/s	Plymouth City Council
	Developing a Joint Vehicle- enabling delivery through the new towns proposition	Plymouth City Council
Cultural and Community Place-making	<p>Improving our public realm</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Armada Way public realm project is underway <p>Creating Culture and Creative Clusters</p>	Plymouth City Council
	Establishing a Creative / Cultural Business Support and Investment programme	Plymouth Culture
	<p>Growing the night-time economy</p> <p>We have appointed a Night Time Economy champion and associated governance</p>	Plymouth Culture
City Image and Brand	<p>Repositioning the city's image and brand</p> <p>We have relaunched the city's BOC brand</p>	Destination Plymouth

Project Updates

Trial project monitoring reporting was conducted by the PES team in October. Whilst full monitoring has not yet rolled-out, initial data shows that progress is being made with the 13 projects. Following the November trial monitoring reporting, we received 11 reports; this is an 85% response rate. 8 of the projects are listed as 'in progress', meaning they are in active delivery.

As a result of trial monitoring, we are splitting 2 of the projects as they have distinct elements and are overseen by different people. These are:

- Investing in our priority sites – this will now focus on the Civic Centre and Armada North separately
- Improving our public realm – this will now focus on Armada Way and Brunel Plaza separately

As a result of this, there are now 15 projects listed under Civic Pride and Regeneration moving forward in the monitoring reporting.

As part of the reframing that we will undertake with the leadership group, we will review and update the projects listed above to ensure that they address current, not past need.

Next Steps

Through the leadership group, we are:

- Meeting on a quarterly basis
- Scheduling regular monitoring in 2026
- Reviewing individual project progress