

# PLYMOUTH LOCAL PLAN BACKGROUND REPORT

Cabinet - 09 March 2026



## I. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1. The Plymouth and South West Devon Joint Local Plan (JLP) is the current statutory development plan for the city. It was adopted by Plymouth City Council on 26 March 2019 and by South Hams District Council on 21 March 2019, and by West Devon Borough Council on 26 March 2019.
- 1.2. On 16 January 2025, the JLP Partnership Board agreed a public statement setting out the intentions of the three councils in relation to the next iteration of plan making in the area. This included the statement that: *'That the next iteration of local plan making for the JLP area will not be as a joint local plan covering Plymouth, South Hams and West Devon. Instead, Plymouth City Council will work on a new local plan based on the city's administrative boundaries'*.
- 1.3. On 3 December 2025, the Natural Infrastructure and Growth Scrutiny Panel received and noted a report on potential scope and timetable of the Plymouth Local Plan.

## 2. HISTORICAL CONTEXT

- 2.1. Plymouth has a long and proud history of preparing visionary local plans that have played a crucial role in guiding the future development and regeneration of the city for over 80 years.
- 2.2. The inspirational 1943 Plan for Plymouth, produced by Sir Patrick Abercrombie and Paton Watson, provided a positive vision and transformational plan not only for the city but its wider rural hinterland which drove the post war regeneration of the city. A Town Map was approved in 1956 which covered the city as it existed then. This was followed by three Comprehensive Development Area Maps also approved in 1956 for the central areas of the city, Prince Rock and Devonport. A Town Map Amendment was approved in 1960 covering the development of the Eastover industrial estate. Then in 1970, a Town Map Review covering the Plympton and Plymstock areas was prepared following those areas being included within the administrative area of Plymouth after a boundary review in 1967.
- 2.3. The City of Plymouth Local Plan covering the period 1982-1991 was adopted in 1987 and was unique at the time as planning for the whole of the city when the prevailing government opinion was to plan for only parts a local authority area.
- 2.4. In 1996, the City of Plymouth Local Plan First Alteration was adopted and was unique in providing for over 1,000 homes more than the then Devon Structure Plan required from the city: effectively commencing the growth agenda for the city.
- 2.5. In 2001, the City Council published the City of Plymouth Local Plan First Deposit which extended the ambition for a growth-led agenda for the city promoting radical and innovative approaches to the planning of the city building upon the innovative Community Planning Studies published for all parts of the city in 2000, delivering more employment and housing land than the Devon Structure Plan required.
- 2.6. However, with the advent of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004, once again the City Council made a bold and brave decision to adopt the new Local Development Framework approach to plan-making to further drive growth and regeneration, building upon the challenges set out in the 2003 Vision for Plymouth produced by David Mackay. This eventually led to the adoption of the first and fastest Core Strategy for a major city in the country in 2007, which embedded the aspirations of the "Mackay vision" for Plymouth. This

was followed by the adoption of six delivery-focussed Area Action Plans for Central Park, City Centre/University, Devonport, Millbay/Stonehouse, North Plymstock and Sutton Harbour by 2010.

- 2.7. Then in 2019, the Plymouth and South West Devon Joint Local Plan was adopted, one of very few such plans in the country, having been produced in around 15 months, and which unlike most plans of its era, fully met the employment, retail and housing needs of the whole area.
- 2.8. Over the years, Plymouth City Council has been recognised for its innovation and creativity on plan-making winning many international, national, and regional awards, including still being the only authority to have won the prestigious Royal Town Planning Silver Jubilee Cup on three occasions.
- 2.9. What has been particularly notable in the City Council's historical approach to local plans is not only the setting of an ambitious vision for Plymouth, but the strong delivery focus of the plans. Many of the large scale expansions of new housing and industrial estates to the north and east of the city, and transport and community infrastructure projects that we see throughout the city, exist today because they were first conceived or promoted through past local plans. These plans have been successful in safeguarding the regional role of the city centre against out of centre retail and office developments, provided new parks and local community facilities, opened up new access to expanded port facilities and provided protection to important green spaces in the city.
- 2.10. More recent examples include a number of city centre regeneration projects, including Drakes Circus and the Barcode, as well as support for the regeneration programmes of the Barbican, Sutton Harbour, Devonport, Millbay, Stonehouse, Royal William Yard, North Prospect, and Barne Barton. Local Plans have helped to secure millions of pounds of grants and other funding to deliver the Derriford district centre, the Derriford Community Park; the Forder Valley link road (Platinum Way) and Forder Valley Interchange, the Derriford transport scheme, the Saltram countryside park and for Central Park. Much needed land for new housing has been allocated in local plans including at Manadon, Sherford, Morley Park, Seaton, and Woolwell; with existing employment land being protected alongside new land brought forward in Estover, Darklake View, Southway, Belliver, Coxside and Marsh Mills.
- 2.11. The preparation of a new local plan, looking ahead to future decades, presents the opportunity to plan for an exciting new chapter in Plymouth's transformation, which will bring a new wave of development projects, environmental improvements and infrastructure.

### **3. NATIONAL CONTEXT**

- 3.1. The previous government launched a process on national planning reform, which included amongst other things the Levelling-up and Regeneration Act 2023 as well as proposals to introduce National Development Management Policies (NDMPs) and set in place a new system for preparing local plans.
- 3.2. The current government has continued the process of planning reform, most particularly through major revisions to the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), the standard method for calculating local housing need, and the total reform of the strategic and local planning system.
- 3.3. In November and December 2025, the government published a raft of documents and statements that are of fundamental importance to development planning within the city. These include:

*Written Ministerial Statement (WMS) of the Minister of State for Housing and Planning – 'Reforming Local Plan-Making', 27 November 2025*

- Local planning authorities (LPAs) are encouraged to bring plans forward as soon as possible following the commencement of the new local plan regulations early in the New Year.
- 3.4. Regulations will set out final ‘backstop’ dates for when plan-making must legally have commenced, with those that have a plan that is already over five years old being required commence by 30 April 2027
- 3.5. A minimum of £14 million of funding will be made available this financial year to support local plan-making. Since the WMS, this grant funding opportunity has been announced for LPAs that commit to serve notice of commencement by 30 June 2026 and complete Gateway 1 which triggers the formal start of the plan by 31 October 2026. Up to £120,000 is available per LPA.
- The government is committed to taking tough action to ensure local authorities have up-to-date local plans in place, and it is prepared to make full use of available intervention powers – including taking over a local authority’s plan making directly – if local plans are not progressed as required.
  - The new system will rely on revised national policy and the new tier of strategic planning to ensure effective co-operation between plan-making authorities rather than a Duty to Cooperate. LPAs should continue to collaborate across their boundaries.

MHCLG Guidance: Plan-making regulations explainer. 27 November 2025

- Published to help LPAs advance their local plan processes ahead of the publication of the new Local Plan Regulations in the New Year.
- 3.6. The purpose of the explainer document is to describe what the government intend to set out in the regulations.

MHCLG Guidance: 30-month local plan process: an overview. 27 November 2025

- Requires LPAs to prepare a single local plan and adopt it within 30 months.
- Sets out a proposed plan-making sequencing.

National Planning Policy Framework, Draft. 16 December 2025

- 3.7. Delivers fundamental changes to how national planning policy is structured, by having clearly structured policies for both plan-making and decision-making.
- 3.8. The plan-making policies cover the full spectrum of plan-making from spatial development strategies (sub-regional focus), to local plans (local focus), to neighbourhood plans (led by local communities), to supplementary plans (enabling greater focus on sites or areas).
- 3.9. The provisions significantly change the nature, content and process of local plan-making, with greater focus on vision, strategy and sites. The development management policies that local plans have traditionally prepared will now substantially be covered by the decision-making policies included in the NPPF.
- 3.10. The changes made to the NPPF in effect replace the commitment made by the previous government to produce NDMPs.

Other plan-making guidance

- Multiple other guidance documents were published covering every aspect of the plan-making process, including for example: the core elements of a local plan timetable and the required 30 month period from Gateway 1 to adoption; prescriptive guidance on putting together a local plan vision; guidance on collecting and reporting on baseline evidence; identifying, assessing and selecting sites; preparing Minerals and Waste Plans.

- 3.11. Some key points to note from the published statements and guidance are as follows:
- 3.12. Substantial emphasis is being given to the preparation of local plans as a crucial element of the government's commitment to economic growth and addressing the housing crisis. Funding is being made to enable the earliest possible start and there is a stated commitment to enforce the back-stop dates.
- 3.13. The timescale for completing the plan-making process will be 30 months plus a 4 month (minimum) scoping period at the outset.
- 3.14. The new plan-making process is much more prescriptive than previously, which will ensure a high level of consistency nationally and should help keep LPAs on track.
- 3.15. The content of the new style plans will be quite different to previous local plans. There will be much more focus on vision and outcomes, and policies will be primary site and area-specific rather than thematic and about development management.
- 3.16. Spatial development strategies, when in place, will be key to identifying how the housing requirement will be distributed over a wider spatial area, but the absence of SDSs should not delay an LPA working on its local plan now. Neither should the fact that an area is currently undergoing local government reorganisation.

#### 4. THE PLYMOUTH LOCAL PLAN

- 4.1. Plymouth's new Local Plan will, when adopted, be the primary development plan document for the city. It will cover the administrative area of Plymouth and set a clear vision and planning strategy for the city moving forward. This is all the more crucial at a time when there is a generational opportunity for the city, with major strategic partnerships relating to defence-related investment and growth, Plymouth's designation as a National Centre for Marine Autonomy, housing delivery and the transformation of the City Centre. Local plans are always critical documents to ensure that the development needs of an area are met and that this is done so in the most sustainable way. However, as Plymouth is recognised not just for its strategic role in the region but also for its national security role, there is something particularly vital about this next Local Plan for Plymouth. Put simply, the plan must ensure that sufficient land is made available in the right locations so the city is able to fully meet these needs.
- 4.2. To meet the requirements of national policy and guidance, the following timetable is proposed:

<b>Stage of process</b>	<b>Dates</b>
Give notice of plan making	June 2026
Run scoping consultation	July - October 2026
Gateway 1	October 2026
Publish summary of scoping consultation	October 2026

Plan visioning, strategy development and evidence gathering	November 2026 – May 2027
Run consultation on proposed plan content and evidence and publish summary	June – August 2027
Gateway 2	September / October 2027
Evidence gathering and drafting the plan	November 2027 – May 2028
Run consultation on proposed local plan and publish summary	June to August 2028
Gateway 3	August / September 2028
Examination	October 2028 – March 2029
Adoption	April 2029
Finalisation and adoption of digital plan	April 2029

## 5. RELATIONSHIP TO THE PLYMOUTH PLAN

- 5.1. The Plymouth Plan is the city's overarching strategic plan that sets out the long-term direction of travel. It is owned not just by the Council but by partners and stakeholders in the city. It is an holistic plan that covers all the major social, economic and environmental themes. This plan is currently undergoing review.
- 5.2. The Plymouth Local Plan is legally the responsibility of the City Council as local planning authority. It is concerned with development and growth, and is a spatial plan. The Local Plan will in essence provide spatial representation to the direction of travel set within the Plymouth Plan.
- 5.3. Although these two plans are different, they are strongly related and it will be important that the review of the Plymouth Plan – in particular, the refreshing on the vision for the city included in the plan and the identification of strategic objectives – are followed through to the Local Plan. Otherwise, there would be a danger of there being two separate visions.
- 5.4. To ensure that this relationship is achieved, it is therefore proposed to twin track the early stages of the Local Plan timetable with the Plymouth Plan review timetable.

## 6. CANCELLATION OF THE PLYMOUTH AND SOUTH WEST DEVON STATEMENT OF COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

- 6.1. With the transition to the new plan-making system and a Plymouth (rather than Joint) Local Plan, the framework for local plan engagement will be the Council's Engagement and Consultation Framework and the requirements of the new local plan regulations. No provision is made for Statements of Community Involvement in the new system and therefore this document should be formally cancelled for the purposes of planning engagement.

## 7. MINERALS AND WASTE PLANS

- 7.1. In addition to Local Plans, minerals and waste planning authorities such as Plymouth are required to prepare Minerals and Waste Plans. By their very nature they function best at a more strategic level. It is therefore proposed to explore with Devon County Council the opportunity for a Joint Minerals and Waste Plan.

- 7.2. In the event that joint planning is not pursued, then the City Council will either need to prepare a separate Minerals and Waste Plan or seek to integrate it into the Local Plan. It should be noted that the same timetable requirements and back stop dates that the government has put in place for Local Plans also apply to Minerals and Waste Plans.
- 7.3. Should a decision be sought to undertake a joint plan or a separate Minerals and Waste Plan, a further report will be brought to Cabinet before the end of 2026. If however, minerals and waste policies become integrated into the Local Plan, then this will be picked up in future reports to Cabinet on the draft plan content and evidence, and on the draft plan itself.

## **8. NEXT STEPS**

8.1. Subject to approval of the Cabinet, the next steps ahead of the publication of the formal 'Notice of Intention to Commence' in June 2026 are:

- Publish the Local Plan timetable
- Establish project management arrangements
- Put in place a strategy for engaging the community and other key stakeholders in the preparation of the plan, set within the context of the Council's Engagement and Consultation Framework
- Initiate implementation of requirement for baseline evidence
- Prepare consultation papers and processes for the Local Plan scoping stage