

Draft Interim Planning Statement

A Vision for Plymouth

MBM Arquitectes with AZ Urban Studio

23rd October 2003

The Mackay Vision



Interim Planning Statements

The City of Plymouth Local Plan first Deposit (1995-2011) was published in December 2001. Following consideration of all of the representations received the City Council had intended to publish the 'Second Deposit' version in the autumn of 2003. However, Central Government announced proposed changes to the development planning system nationally and as such the City Council decided to move towards the production of a new 'Local Development Framework'. It is expected that the Local Development Framework will be published towards the end of the year and will be placed on formal deposit as soon as possible afterwards.

'Interim Planning Statements' (IPSs) have been devised by the City Council as a means of dealing with matters on which guidance or decisions are urgently required, in the period between First Deposit of the Local Plan, and the publication of the new Local Development Framework.

Any comments on this document should be sent to: Design Team, Transport and Planning Service, Plymouth City Council, Civic Centre, Plymouth, PL1 2EW

Or a comments form is available on the website: www.plymouth.gov.uk

Please send these comments by 5th May.

Next steps

Following public consultation, any observations will be put before the Cabinet on 27th April 2004. Following consideration and possible amendment the general aims objectives and principles will be adopted as supplementary planning guidance and as an Interim Planning Statement to be used by the Local Planning Authority in the determination of planning applications.

The aims, objectives and general principles of the Vision will be included within an 'Issues report' for the Local Development Framework, which is likely to be produced in July of this year. This will be the subject of further public consultation.

The more detailed proposals contained within the Vision will be considered through the Local Development Framework process later this year and early 2005, which will involve detailed public consultation.

Introduction

This document outlines a vision for the future of Plymouth, developed by MBM Arquitectes and AZ Urban Studio over seven months of close involvement with the city and many of its citizens. It has benefited from a close relationship with officers of the City Council, ensuring a considered balance between visionary aspirations and deliverability.

The vision is not a fixed blueprint for the exact future of the city but rather a review of strengths and weaknesses, an assessment of direction, a pointer to opportunity, and an invitation to aspire. However, to ensure its deliverability as far as possible, the proposals have gone one stage further in expressing the vision with precision as it embraces the essential instrument of defining the form of these fragments of the city under study.

The vision is launched for discussion and consideration by all parties. It will be tested and analysed by the relevant authorities, and offered for consultation to the people of Plymouth in the future.



Why does Plymouth need a Vision ?

This study has emerged from a widely held view across the community of institutions and businesses in Plymouth that a sea change in thinking about the city should be explored to promote an overall development strategy that fully recognizes the potential of the city and its urban area.

This has been funded in the main by donations from local businesses and institutions, following concern among key stakeholders about the poor quality of the urban environment in and around the City Centre, and the lack of a clearly expressed strategic vision for the future.

The vision for Plymouth proposed here takes forward this challenge and proposes a future for the city that delivers the highest possible quality buildings and public spaces to attract and sustain the highest quality business, education, living, and recreation opportunities for citizens, investors, and visitors alike – matching Plymouth 2020's Vision and Goals statement.

The process of developing a vision involves capturing the essence of the city and using it to inform and shape the future.

- It is about discovering what works for Plymouth, and what is holding it back
- It is an opportunity to challenge perceptions and raise ambitions
- It invites citizens to engage and demand
- It elicits new routes to delivery and achievement
- It provides a direction and driver for future change
- It informs the ongoing development and revision of statutory plans

The vision presented here examines both the wider context of the city, as well as the local conditions, and proposes a development and public space strategy for repairing the very heart of the city centre, as a driver for the regeneration of Plymouth.

This report is broadly structured in five chapters. The first explores the principles that underpin the approach we have taken to the city, providing examples of how they have been successfully employed in other cities. Chapter two focuses in on the particularity of Plymouth, and presents a summarised analysis of the development opportunities and constraints that our vision both responds to, and emerges from. The third chapter describes the essence of our strategic vision for Plymouth, explored and explained in greater detail as elements of the plan in chapter four. Concluding, chapter five recalls the recommendations for each area and presents possible routes to realising the vision.

We believe that with support at all levels of public and private leadership, this vision is within reach of Plymouth over the next twenty years.

Principles of the Vision

Recovering a lost tradition

In his nine penny book "Town Planning" published in 1940, Thomas Sharp begins by quoting D.H. Lawrence who described English towns as "a great scrabble of ugly pettiness over the face of land" and went on to write "The English are town birds through and through. Yet they don't know how to build a city, how to think of one, or how to live in one. They are all suburban, pseudo-cottages, and not one of them knows how to be truly urban. The English may be mentally and spiritually developed; but as citizens of splendid cities they are more ignominious than rabbits".

Thomas Sharp, born in 1901, once senior research officer at the Ministry of Town and Country Planning, a Town Planner and author of many seminal books on Planning, writes that D.H. Lawrence was like many English people, mistaken. Thomas Sharp goes on to write that the English "once built towns which according to the standards of their times, were excellent instruments for the living of a good social life; which were altogether admirable essays in large-scale architectural composition."

The last phrase had been underlined because it sharply differs from the current practice of reliance on fragmentary proposals.

Written in 1939, Thomas Sharp goes on to lament this loss of confidence in current town planning, and although it is a long quotation of what was observed sixty-five years ago it remains the base of the principles that have guided this vision for Plymouth in 2003.

"Right up till a hundred years ago there was a remarkably strong and virile town tradition in England. That tradition was very different from the continental tradition. It was none the worse for that. But it is a curious thing that today not only the ordinary citizen, not only writers like Lawrence, but our professional men whose job it is to study and build towns, our architects and town-planners, are mostly unaware that such a tradition ever existed, and are content to belaud foreign towns and sign plaintively because we have never built in precisely the same way in England.

Towns have sometimes been described as the physical expression of a nation's civilization. The physical form of a town does in many ways reflect fairly accurately the social condition of the people who live in it, their mode of life, their cultural achievement, their economic status, the kind of government they possess. The town reflects those characteristics because it arises out of them. And it is, of course, precisely because of this that the English town tradition developed on its own individual lines.

Our fall from grace has been very deep during the last century. We are not very sensible, however, because of that, to forget that we once did, in fact, live and build in grace. It is, indeed, all the more necessary for us to remember. The English contribution to the art of

building towns was once an original and a valuable one. It is important that this should be realised, for if we are ever again to build good towns we shall need to restore our lost confidence, and perhaps to re-establish something of the old traditions.”

If the English town was, and is, characterised by being less dense than its continental counterpart, for its towns needed no defensive walls, then there was no traditional restraint in expanding into the countryside, first with the industrial revolution then with the social demand after the Great War. This expansion led to the loss of skills when, as a counter-action, density became an economic demand on the English town after the Second World War.

Sixty years ago, when James Paton Watson, the city engineer, and Patrick Abercrombie, the eminent town planner, came together to produce a ‘Plan for Plymouth’, they worked in heroic times. The blitz had destroyed both Devonport and the heart of the city itself. It was a brave gesture during the early days of the war to pave the way for the future. It was also during the heroic early days of town planning, a time for radical solutions to cure the ills of the nineteenth century with idealism of a healthy functional city. Each area to have its specific function: a place to dwell and sleep, a place for exercise and sport, a place for work, a place for culture, a place for the public administration and a place for commerce and shopping. Having separated these functions, or uses, the task was to provide transport between them and what better than the motorcar. However, the police, alarmed by accidents, wished to separate pedestrians from traffic. Traffic engineers calculated for fast traffic in towns with wider roads, generous curves, hundreds of oddly shaped “traffic islands” and eventually dealing with the unrepentant pedestrian, installed fences and railings along the edges of the road. The street, as a meeting place, was forgotten.

Today attitudes to urban life has changed, there is more respect for the past, there is more concern for mixed use, and, in spite of the demand, more effort to discourage the expansion of the city into the countryside and protect the existing villages and towns from expansion as well. This implies searching, and finding empty pockets of land within the city and a reasonable increase in density. This shift in values towards avoiding social exclusion implies better connections and places where people can meet, even accidentally. As a consequence we need to find the right instruments to repair our urban environments and these are now being found in looking again at the quality of our public space.

The past of Plymouth gives us the key to the future, but it is a past that must be given an interpretation from our own times. The juxtaposition of different styles from different epochs is one of the delights of the village and town churches around the countryside, just as it is in almost any High Street. We must give our own culture today a chance. That culture is based on modernity, in other words the ability to question everything constructively and not accept things just because they are there; it is a question of attitudes not style.

The Form of the Public Realm

The street is the backbone of our society. For a society is not solely about individual freedom, it is about the freedom to associate with others and to enjoy the unexpected encounter. Such social encounters, planned or unplanned, allow an exchange of information that not only enriches our experience and knowledge, but provides a market place for cultural and commercial transactions. The street gives a recognisable form to public space where people can seek out their markets and, in the course of their search, acquire unexpected information -- be it a new product in a shop window or a chance meeting with a friend. This is obviously true in a small town and should be true in our larger towns and cities. Creating the spaces for people and for these encounters is what this Vision is all about.

Anthropological research has disclosed and reinforced the deep-rooted importance of the street to societies which is informative in considering the current crisis of this relationship. In the earliest settlements of Mesopotamia, the first streets connected individual patio dwellings, bounded by closely packed mud walls and provided a link to the cultivated land beyond. Thus the street was given a built form. Later, Greek and Roman cities with more stratified societies and prosperous merchant and administrative classes, the appearance of building façades became socially important as an expression of influence and wealth with consequences for the form of the street. In medieval times, the village street responded to the economy of agricultural labour by allowing each family a small plot of land for its own use, with the wider land beyond reserved for the feudal landlord. These needs created streets formed either by a connected row of houses with a kitchen garden behind and clearly expressed in the form of the Scottish Burgh or by a string of individual houses with strips of land beyond, as in the croft of Scotland or the Hufendorf of the German woodlands. The most civilized early street system was established in Alexandria (BC to 100AD) by the architect Dinocrates where an orthogonal grid provided the form to accommodate the cooperative and cosmopolitan ideas of Alexander himself.

The street is of great consequence; it is important to us and must be treated with respect. The way we look after our streets clearly demonstrates our level of commitment to civilized society.

In recent decades, a key reason for the decay in the quality of the public space and the street is a desire to extinguish conflict. Herein lies one of the great misunderstandings about the configuration of urban settlements. The street of the town and the city is alive if it involves conflict. It provides the moments of opportunity; it is the basis of tolerance, the major instrument of civilization. To remove conflict, and its opportunity for tolerance, is to strike a death blow to the vitality of the street.

Behind this idea of removing the inner conflict within the nature of our cities and our streets, lie two influential socio-urban theories. The first developed in the last century and its nefarious influence lingers with us today. It is founded on the belief that the city is evil and the country pure and good. It gave birth to the garden-city movement which tried honestly to cure the social ills of an exploited working-class by introducing the country into the city. On the one hand, the movement has left a

legacy of urban countryside in the form of parks and botanical gardens, but on the other, we have a suburban city form with streets that go nowhere, a regression from the vision of Patrick Abercrombie, who understood that one of the principal functions of the street is to connect. The loss of this connecting function has been extinguished to such an extent, that in the name of so-called traffic calming, our cities and neighbourhoods are become illegible. The resultant social disaster is as extreme as it is exclusive.

The second theory emerged during the summer of 1933 when several architects isolated themselves from the realities of everyday life by spending the long lazy August days on board the motor-yacht "Patris" somewhere between Marseilles and Athens.

From this voyage of contemplation emerged a document, forged into existence by Le Corbusier, known as the "Athens Charter". The articles which made an enormous impact on City Planning were those that defined its functions: articles 77 and 78. The first stated that "the keys to town planning are to be found in the four functions: housing, work, recreation (during leisure) and traffic". The second stated that "planning will determine the structure of each of the sectors assigned to the four key functions and will fix their respective locations within the whole". Thus was born the abstract concept of the functional city. Concept was transferred into legislation in the brave new world of reconstruction in Europe after the havoc of war.

The pernicious influence of the Athens Charter is that it slipped conveniently into the pockets of easy investment -- both public and private. The single-purpose building could be built and isolated from the difficulties of adjusting to the street or next-door neighbour, making design easy for the architect and engineer, construction easy for the builder and investment simpler for the financier. The functional city, constructed in a ring around the historic core of every European city needed a separate functional solution for traffic. Streets were forgotten and replaced with a classification of traffic routes under the exclusive control of specialised engineers responding to the new consumer society that became obsessed with the progressive icon of Western society -- the individual car. When not in use, cars need storage and so the car park made its appearance in the city. What an aberration -- a park full of cars! The Americanism, "the parking lot" is uglier, but much more accurate. It is time to change traffic routes back into streets and car parks back into public spaces.

It is now generally accepted that the functional city is a fallacy, yet highly infectious intellectual viruses remain to destroy the fabric of the street. The most virulent is the virus of segregation which classifies streets into grades of traffic resulting in the most absurd junctions and guard rails in the city to control speed. Alternatively streets are designated as pedestrian zones with no vehicles at all. The city responds to these stresses by mutation in much the same way as a living organism. Segregated pedestrian only streets mutate into deserted and unfriendly pedestrian precincts with closed and shuttered shops at night and empty properties above. Conversely, the restaurants and pubs along the streets that permit cars, buses and taxis, gather life. Such scenes of schizophrenia can be found across Europe from Cardiff to Cologne.

People must be given priority in the city and there is a time and a place for the pedestrians to take over, provided two conditions are observed. The first is that pedestrian-only space should not be over extensive, as in the historical centre of Krakow in Poland. Instead it should act as an urban oasis like Cathedral Square in Barcelona – thronged with people at the intersection of intensively used buildings and streets. Secondly, a street with traffic should always be within sight, thereby giving comfort and safety.

The Scale of Enclosure

The streets that we know and recognise are not just two dimensional plans, they are also the buildings that define the space and create the place. Every building forms part of the city to which it belongs. There are those buildings which together form a context, which belong to the majority, but there are also buildings that contrast to the context, like punctuation in a text, that allows one to pause and adjust one's perception of the city in a different scale – a public building, a school, a hospital, or just a different style according to the cultural values of the period when it was built. The character of the street is also determined by its topography, if it is straight or curved, also its width and the relation of the buildings to the street, some with front gardens some without.

The more central urban streets are rich in their morphology, or complexity of form. In Paris, or Oslo, there are the small courtyards that lead off the street that give more depth to the building line and increase the business or living activities. In London and Edinburgh we have the Mews that now allow the essential backyard activities that serve the major businesses and residential population. Then there are the larger central courts, like the Hofes in Vienna, which contain community parks with even schools placed there – a feature found also in the Dutch cities.

However, the corridor street is the more usual configuration of the urban character. Commerce is usually clustered where the medieval trade routes merge to form a market place, or where a deliberately designed square has been created, or where two streets run close to each other, like say Southside Street and the Quay Road in the Barbican, where the stimulus of a short step to find alternative offers creates a dynamic relation.

The advent of the lift now allows us to increase the activity (and economy) of the street with tall buildings. If these are related together they contribute to the scale of the enclosure provided they are linked to the corridor street nearer the ground. They need not to be oppressive since they can create another kind of beauty, as in New York or Sydney; they give a welcome metropolitan scale to the city. This is essentially different to the isolated towers of the 50's and 60's or to the free-for-all claustrophobic constructions in the City of London where the streets have lost their social role.

Therefore a fundamental objective in creating new urban structures and in renovating and improving old ones is to combine a discreet evolution of traditional elements with radically new architectural



models. This objective is easily understood but difficult to bring about and nowadays the theory and practice of the most demanding kind of urban development revolves around this difficulty.

Movement through the Public Realm

One of the essential functions of the street is to provide a way of going from one place to another. For this reason places of destination are usually gathered alongside or related to the street system. The street therefore also becomes a place to be in and in many ways the identity of the street is determined by the people who belong there. It is a shared space. Shared between the people who belong there with those who pass through, on their way to somewhere else. This sharing obviously creates conflictive interests which have to be accommodated in the design and use of this space. The social balance that the street demands can easily breakdown when one function dominates excessively the other functions. Too often, with the increase of the use of cars, traffic considerations have upset this balance by being too radical in either subjecting the pedestrian to vehicles or subjecting vehicles to the pedestrian. The fear, and reality, of road accidents, has too often led to drastic precautions that have destroyed the original functions of the street. Cities have been plagued by urban motorways, pedestrian over and under passes, on one hand, and a maze of streets that lead nowhere or full of strange forms to ensure slow driving, on the other hand. The public realm of the street system of our neighbourhoods and districts has become a place of stress for citizens whether they be on foot or are driving a vehicle. This is because each is demanding the same territory. The curious thing is that the pedestrian and the driver is usually the same person assuming a different role.

The answer is to accept that the city is conflictive by the reason of it being alive to the opportunities it offers. Both competing and alternative demands makes the urban life the powerhouse of our civilizations. It provides not only the information that is sought but also the casual encounter of information that is not expected: the delight of discovery.

To enable all these activities to function a recognisable structure of the street system is fundamental. The perception of where one is and how to reach another part of the city needs the use of an understandable punctuation at convenient intervals. A pedestrian needs this within a maximum of 500 m, and a vehicle roughly every 1,500 m.

Kevin Lynch in his book "The image of the city" (1960) makes a strong case for the careful design (deliberate or accidental) to orientate movement through the city:

"A street is perceived, in fact as a thing that goes towards something. The path should support this perceptually by strong termini, and by a gradient or a directorial differentiation, so that it is given a sense of progression, and the opposite directions are unlike. A common gradient is that of ground slope, and one is regularly instructed to go "up" or "down" the street, but there are many others... Perhaps one can proceed by "keeping the park on the left", or by moving "toward the golden dome".

Seventy years before Lynch, Camillo Sitte understood the city as a series of perspectives, preferably enclosed spaces linked together. "For him the character of a town or a city lay in the public spaces that it could provide for its citizens, and its beauty lay in their rhythmic interrelationships." (George Collins).

This Vision which we have prepared for Plymouth is not just three-dimensional but bears in mind the fourth dimension of moving through a sequence of spaces, each contained by the form of its surrounding buildings, both those that are already there and those that will be designed (hopefully with the care and knowledge that they form part of the city) by other hands. Even so, the city will have to live with its past, present and future errors, but then that is part of human nature.

Memory of Place

There is a fifth dimension to every city: the collective memory of place. This is poignantly evident in Penelope Lively's novel "City of the Mind" when the novel's hero drives down a London street and seeing a blackened brick wall vividly imagines the blazing houses under incandescent clouds in the blitz and the fire warden exhausted, hydrants running dry in the street. Now rebuilt and occupied by later generations the footsteps of his childhood remind him how short our lives are compared to that of the city and its streets.

Memory of place does not mean rebuilding the past, but drawing on its memory to rediscover the paths and footsteps of past generations, guided by topography and the weather which traced the early structure of the city. It also means that in renewing the city for the present and the future we must create places that will strike new memories for the next generations.

In order to do this we should understand the words of Aristotle, who summarizes all rules of city planning in observing that a city must be so designed as to make its people at once secure and happy. This quotation by Camillo Sitte allows him to dwell on the city as a work of art.

"In order to realize this, city planning should not be merely a technical matter, but should in the truest and most elevated sense be an artistic enterprise... It is only in our mathematical century (he was writing in Vienna 1889) that the process of enlarging and laying out cities has become an almost purely technical concern. Therefore it seems important to remind ourselves once again that this attitude solves only one aspect of the problem, and that the other, the artistic aspect, is of at least equal importance."



One could dismiss Sitte as a romantic and worse being picturesque, but his plea for considering the city as a work of art is repeated by critics and commentators every now and again. Kevin Lynch writing from Massachusetts in 1959 writes “A good environmental image gives its possessor an important sense of emotional security. He can establish an harmonious relationship between himself and the outside world. This is the obverse of the fear that comes with disorientation; it means that the sweet sense of home is strongest when home is not only familiar but distinctive as well.”

Our Vision for Plymouth is also based on the belief that the city is a work of art of generations with each one handing the baton onto the next. It is also an essay in large-scale composition.



Development Approach

Plymouth at the turn of the 21st Century - the context to which the vision responds

The conditions

'After all, there's the sea, and green hillsides, and shops, and amusements; but there could've been so much more'

Ian Nairn, 1967

Urban history / form

When Plymouth was settled by fishermen in the 11th Century, they inhabited the area now known as the Barbican for its sheltered position – a small natural inlet tucked away from prevailing westerly winds by the raised land of the Hoe. This physical asset of location – the deep, sheltered Sound, and the accompanying rivermouths of the Tamar and Plym – provided the opportunity for the maritime and military-led growth through the following centuries.

The significance of the waterfront in the process of urbanisation fuelled pockets of growth at the points where access to deep water was favourable for ships, slipping and shipbuilding and repairing in adjacent berths, resulting in the tripartite development of Devonport, Stonehouse, and Plymouth. Whilst the three towns were largely independent, and contained their own living, working, and retail areas, the rapid pace of economic growth in the eighteenth century drove expansion inland at such pace that by 1914 the towns were officially agglomerated into one urban area – Plymouth. This unusual process of inward growth and development produced an urban form that physically linked the new heart of the city back to its waterfront origins. Both the connection of the urban form and the localised sustainability of centres are clear in plans showing the pre-war city.

Following widespread destruction of the central core of Plymouth during the war, the Beaux Arts plan on which the reconstruction of the city was based reversed much of this historical relationship, focusing on the two new axes of Royal Parade and Armada Way, and the system of vehicle circulation around the core. The mono-functional use of the reconstruction and the subsequent resistance for change endemic in the institutional investment realities of commercial landlords contributes another level to the physical isolation, ensuring that the activity of the city centre is focussed on the realm of retail to the detriment of any other uses or activity.

Plymouth has turned its back on history, it could be said that in the process it has lost the human scale of connection between its heart and limbs. Our vision seeks to correct this fundamental constraint.



Population

The City of Plymouth currently has a population of 240,000 (Census, 2001), 10,500 less than recorded in 1991. Remarkably, the population has grown relatively little since the beginning of the twentieth century, when the figure was 211,000.

It is fair to report that the income levels of the population are poorer than neighbouring Exeter, this is due to both the time distance from London (3hours by train rather than 2hrs for Exeter) and the historical reliance on the shipbuilding and repairs industry dominated by the military client base. Exeter has benefited from a more diverse economy built upon the service sector.

As a regional centre Plymouth also supports a wider travel to work area, bringing the total to approximately 350,000. From a retail perspective the catchment area is reported as almost 500,000. Movement in from rural areas also drives the move of businesses to out of town locations, seen as more accessible by car than entering the city centre.

Within the city, the distribution of the population across the wards of the city varies greatly, with one of the lowest population densities (27 p/ha) found in Sutton ward, covering much of the city centre. In the areas immediately surrounding the city centre, much higher densities of up to 70 p/ha can be seen in the wards of Mount Gould, Drake, and Stoke.

Over the past decade, the South West region has experienced significant in-migration of economically active people looking for greater quality of life, as well as those of retirement age. Conversely, the region is a net exporter of 16-24 year olds, losing much of its youth investment to other parts of the country. This process has been particularly marked in Plymouth, where 20-24 and 25-29 year old categories have declined 31% and 35% respectively between 1991 and 2001. The decline of the youth population highlights wider concerns that Plymouth is not performing the role of an economically sustainable city.

In essence it seems to fall way short of its potential offer for lifestyle, workplace and urban attractor that this uniquely positioned and naturally endowed waterside City should be able to provide to a waiting population. In an age of electronic communication changes in work patterns have reduced the need for every day commuting. This permits new migrants to the City to retain a work connection with London and South East. The quality of life and natural environment that the City offers provides the opportunity for new waves of population migration increasing substantially its urban population over the next twenty years. The pressure for space and the cost of living is such in the South East that estimates of 100,000 additional population over the next 20 years do not seem to be unreasonable.

Creating a City with a population of 300 – 350,000 is an aspiration of our vision.

Transport

The city is located on the border of the Devon and Cornwall peninsular, it is served by the dual carriageway A38 connecting to the M5 at Exeter and onwards to, Bristol, Birmingham, South Wales and London. Despite the distance the city is clearly connected both to the north, the south east and the south west. These strategic routes set journey time connections to Bristol of 1.5 - 2 hours, London 3 – 4 hours.

The airport at Plymouth provides hub connection to London but limited service to Europe. The existing airport located within the city is constrained by the length of the runway.

Through the duration of this study we have in public meetings reinforced the importance of an airport connection into Europe to enable the city to take its place in the hierarchy of European cities that we consider to be the macro-urban structure around which the economic framework of Europe will increasingly function.

The centre of the city is the magnet for bus and coach services that serve both outlying suburbs of the city and towns throughout Devon and Cornwall. This service reinforces the importance of the city as a centre for health, education, retailing and leisure. The tradition of public transport with the existing population of the city provides a relatively high ridership. Proposals included within the plan have incorporated fixed link public transport routes from the station down to the Hoe on a north-south shuttle and east west from the East End through the City Centre to Devonport should be further developed into a strategic fixed link system.

To support the strategy of reducing car dependence within the centre of the city the development of quality bus services leading to introduction of a framework of fixed link tram / light rail is an essential infrastructure investment. This supports the vision objectives of reinforcement of the city centre and development of its capacity for both residential and business accommodation, and the infrastructure will permit the new areas of development at Millbay, Devonport and Royal William Yard to flourish. Without such investment the city will continue to rely on the private car, and bear the associated impacts on quality of life, public space, and poor pedestrian movement.

Property

In line with national trends, the residential property market in Plymouth has consistently surged in recent years. Significantly, recent developments in the waterfront areas of the city have reached record values for Plymouth, and demonstrate the appetite at the higher end of the market for quality and contemporary urban living. The development of Royal William Yard by Urban Splash epitomises such opportunity and providing this nature of accommodation is essential to the process of attracting business investment.

Conversely, the nature of the post-war reconstruction of the city centre as a predominantly retail estate has largely precluded opportunities for living within the very heart. The impact of this historic

zoning is clearly evident in the empty and quiet city streets outside of shopping hours, devoid of any leisure or service functions. The proximity of the University has influenced the residential conversion of a small number of buildings within the Abercrombie footprint, but there is still much capacity unused within the upper floors of many retail units. The Draft Local Plan addresses this issue with provision for mixed use development on three major sites, but the key task is to find a typology of development and public space that generates quality and desirable living space sufficient to challenge perceptions and meet demand.

It is unfortunate that the mindset of both developers and City has tended to permit development to take place to the lowest common denominator of quality. This has perpetuated a run down feel to the city centre and reinforced the view that this secondary accommodation for students or for budget hotels is the only option for the estate. The point is further exacerbated by the development of awarding winning buildings in fringe locations.

Retail

Within the post-war city centre Plymouth contains around 1.4 million sq ft of retail floorspace much of which is within pedestrianised areas. This volume of retail space secures Plymouth's position as a sub-regional shopping centre, and many major stores are represented including Dingles (House of Fraser), Derrys, Marks & Spencer and Debenhams. The prime retail area is centred around New George Street, although quality decreases notably moving north. Although vacancy rates are reasonably low, it is clearly evident that space within the retail core of the city is under utilised, and this is confirmed in the Urban Capacity Study.

One of the key impacts of the volume of retail floorspace has been large scale provision of car parking in the city centre. The perceived isolation of the city centre from the surrounding areas of the city appears to fuel the reliance on private vehicles.

Office

Plymouth provides a major role as a service centre for the far South West region, with more than 70% of employment in the service sector (Census of Employment, 2001) – financial services, health, public admin, and education are the largest sub-sectors. Recent strengths in the bio-medical and research and development markets have been attributed to Plymouth's quality of life offer, and will be crucial to sustaining future growth.

Office provision is largely in the area immediately surrounding the city centre shopping precinct, although recent commercial development has focused on the out of town business park locations. In town, rental levels have increased over the last 18 months from £8 ft² to £10 ft², whilst out of town rents are higher at around £12 ft². Providing the right conditions and opportunities for occupiers to choose the city centre rather than out of town locations will be a key hurdle to overcome in the process of regenerating the heart of the city. Ongoing discussions with major employers such as the Department for Work and Pensions looking to occupy 80,000 ft² adjacent to the Civic Centre are

positive in this regard, although attention should also be given to attracting smaller businesses to occupy components of mixed use developments.

Leisure – tourism

Plymouth currently acts as a destination for mostly short-stay tourists, often attracted to the city as an excursion from longer stay trips in the region. The tourist offer in Plymouth is based on heritage and history, shopping, leisure attractions such as the National Marine Aquarium, and opportunities to visit peripheral sites such as Mount Edgecumbe Country Park. The National Marine Aquarium attracts the largest visitor numbers in the city, with 425,000 visitors in 2002.

Current trends in the tourism industry towards greater demands for quality short-term breaks with increasing emphasis on the natural environment place Plymouth in a strong position to improve and market its credentials as an outstandingly well situated city. Realising this opportunity through the development of the waterfront is placed at the heart of the MBM strategy.

The opportunity

In our opinion there is a direct correlation between the possibilities that the historic form of the City Centre has created and a programme of intensification. This intensification will incorporate the wider range of uses to include residential uses within the City Centre.

The redevelopment in the 50's and 60's from the 1943 plan of reconstruction was carried out following the traditional leasing structure for town centres. This structure retained the City Council as freeholder who granted building leases to developers who in turn constructed and let the accommodation on rack rents. These investments were subsequently sold to institutions. These passive investing institutions remain as investors in receipt of the rental income. From the CB Hillier Parker review of the City Centre in 2000 these head lessors number approx 13.

The single City Council retained ownership of this 90 acre, (36 hectare) site at the heart of the City has the key component to permit its transformation.

We have identified this heartland site of 36 hectares at the centre of the City, laid out on an exemplary grid, with buildings 50 years old, occupied predominantly for shopping / retail with a handful of investors controlling its future as a 'strength for the city' and a key opportunity for renewal.

Plymouth has the huge advantages of its waterfront location, which other cities, Liverpool, Newcastle, Barcelona, Genoa and London Docklands have all exploited by supporting inward investment and taking advantage of their unique environments generated by their respective waterfronts. Plymouth has proved this to an extent with the waterfront developments at Sutton Harbour, the Royal William Yard development and other developments on the Hoe.

The catchment area to the east back into Devon and to the west into Cornwall consists of small settlements where demand for housing far outstrips supply, which has pushed up prices. The

environmental constraints and limited capacities of these small settlements ensures that supply is constrained and prices continue to escalate.

The demand in these areas with expanding population of locals, weekenders, and retired folk all point to the potential for the urban City Centre to grow. It needs to be developed with a style and imagination that is missing from the current approach. Plymouth, as a principal urban area of the region, must positively capture this demand and thrive upon it.

Our vision looks forward 20 years and the development assumptions follow that timeframe.

We see the City Centre as a parallel with the regeneration that has taken place in northern cities such as, Glasgow, Manchester, Liverpool, Newcastle and Leeds where 20 years ago the city centres were deserted with large derelict warehouses awaiting refurbishment - now these areas have been rejuvenated with mixed use schemes of inner city loft living, bars, studios and galleries. They have remarkably rekindled an excitement of living at their hearts

With the City of Plymouth a similar opportunity exists, but in this case the requirement is more for redevelopment at densities that support the urban context. This calls for imagination and a quality of architecture and place making that can capture the imagination of the population migrating inwards to live in the city centre.

We see an opportunity for dense development of mid rise and occasional towers positioned within the Abercrombie grid. It is an opportunity unique to the UK's historic cities for high rise living, looking out across the city to the waterfront, taking the benefit of the topography over the natural valleys that lead down to the Barbican and out through to Millbay. We see this as an opportunity to create a 'Mini Manhattan' of the south West consisting of residential towers, mixed use, retail, restaurants and bars, and offices.

Lifting spirits, raising expectation and demanding the best of architecture, design and development, ensuring that imagination and vision respect and respond to the opportunity and potential that is offered by this unique waterside city will ensure that within the term of the 20 year vision it fulfils its place within the European cities of equal size.



The MBM Vision

Plymouth is an outstanding waterfront city

One could say without doubt that Plymouth has one of most enviable locations of any city in the world. The views across the waters of the Sound and the rolling green hills to both the east and west of the city provide a setting of outstanding natural beauty. Rarely does a city and its citizens have the opportunity to establish a close and intimate relationship with the surrounding high quality landscape.

The waterfront has long been the leading element of this landscape – it could be described as the frontage to the landscape and façade to the City. It has provided for the industrial and military economy that fuelled the growth of the city, and has more recently transformed much of this heritage into a major tourist offer. Demand for leisure facilities continues to grow as the reliance of industry on the water wanes – the busy calendar of water-based events and demand for moorings in the city's marinas exemplifies this. In marketing terms, the waterfront is Plymouth's 'USP' – it's unique selling point. The evidence of high value, premium residential sales within the urban area has to date concentrated on the waterfront. It also plays a significant role in the economy of the sub-region, maintaining activities from operational ports to marine science research.

The city waterfront is currently defined by a number of attractions – buildings, events, spaces that each draw and recreate their own activity. In areas where such attractions cluster, as at Sutton Harbour, the product is a lively and dynamic mixed use 'quarter', which becomes a recognisable and self-sustainable piece of the city. Other 'pieces' of the waterfront present their own story – the recent development of Royal William Yard, the refurbishment of Tinside Pool, the Mount Batten Centre, the Theatre Royal Workshops – yet the picture is somehow not complete, and there is no one element that holds the waterfront together. The challenge at the city scale, and therefore the challenge for this vision, is to look beyond the 'quarter' and propose a spatial strategy through which the existing fragments and the future opportunities of the whole waterfront can achieve a critical mass that both defines and drives the vitality of the city centre.

We envisage the waterfront of Plymouth as an 'arc' – a curved spine of activity loosely flowing east-west and drawing the influence of the water back into the city. As the leading structural element of the city, it is on this that we can base our repair of the city form. Our vision for this form is guided by three underlying principles – movement, attraction and relationship.

Movement – a waterfront of motion

The waterfront is historically a place of movement and transport - from the departure of the Mayflower in 1620, to the current ferry operations serving mainland Europe, Plymouth embodies the atmosphere of both embarking on adventure and of destination and arrival. For many European visitors, Plymouth's waterfront may be the first and last piece of Great Britain that they see.

This strategic gateway function of the waterfront must be enhanced through the provision of improved port infrastructure as part of the development process at Millbay. Providing the facilities to support cruise ships and the vital input they can bring to the local economy needs to be balanced with the meeting the demand of high-value residential properties on the waterside. Locating such facilities at Millbay could provide a vital energy to the area, and help balance activity with the established and successful Sutton Harbour.

But movement is not simply about arriving and departing on long journeys – it is more often a journey from home to work, from work to shop and eat or drink, or a trip for recreational or social arrangements. Many such trips could be accommodated by an improved water transport service, and would not only potentially reduce road-based movement, but would also provide a vital passenger base to a water service also targeting tourist requirements. We have taken recommendations from the Marine Transport Study and developed them into potential landing points for a new and improved water transport service.

The waterfront should also be a promenade for pleasure and delight where people can simply walk or cycle between events and attractions, and this requires commitment to the public realm. From the strategic South West Coast Path to local connections such as from the Hoe to Millbay, the form of development and the definition of the public space are crucial to enabling and encouraging people to enjoy the city on foot.



Attraction – a waterfront where all citizens can find their place

If Plymouth is to succeed in drawing its own citizens and others from further afield to experience and enjoy the waterfront, then there must be sufficient activities and attractions to satisfy the urban explorer.

Many successful attractions exist on the waterfront – the National Marine Aquarium is Plymouth's top attraction, with nearly half a million visitors in 2002. Our vision is to develop this tourist offer – we propose two major opportunities – but also to consider with equal importance the smaller scale attractions – events, spaces, viewing points, moments, which define the unique character of Plymouth.

We see much of the opportunity for an improved tourist offer between Millbay and Sutton Harbour, and for this reason we have made recommendations for the Hoe Foreshore. The process of regenerating Millbay will not only create a series of vibrant places, but crucially for the city will provide a new dynamic between the two harbours, placing new emphasis and demand on the area between them, and completing the urban 'circuit'.

For those who wish to venture further afield to Royal William Yard, Devonport, or Mount Edgecumbe the water transport system in itself should prove an attraction.



Relationship – a waterfront that respects the city beyond

As the premium location in the city, the waterfront has a responsibility to take the lead in the process of change. Attracting new residents, businesses, and tourists requires the supply of quality buildings and spaces.

But the waterfront, and the premium for living, working, and playing that it holds belongs to the civic realm, not the private. For the waterfront to feed a positive impact back into the city requires attention to the form of the streets and buildings, and the nature of the uses contained within them. In historic locations such as Plymouth, this relationship or inclusion can often be found in the urban forms that were generated from a different set of cultural, social, and economic values, and it is to these lost forms that we can look for guidance.

In summary the City of Plymouth benefits from an extraordinary waterside setting that competes with other waterside cities throughout the UK and Europe. These competing Cities have used their setting and their architecture to establish their credibility on a world stage – Genoa the European City of Culture 2004 – Liverpool the European City of Culture 2008 – it is for Plymouth to build upon the MBM vision to establish itself rightly within the same firmament.

Invigorating the Abercrombie Plan

Many people may find it strange that others think that the city centre lacks an urban atmosphere. On most afternoons, and especially a Thursday or a Saturday on a fine day, it presents a lively crowd of shoppers strolling from side to side and street to street. In some places so full that one can hardly move. So what does it mean “an urban atmosphere” and why is it wanted?

The answer is simple. The plan by Watson and Abercrombie was not carried through as planned with multi-storey buildings giving an appropriate enclosure to the wide streets (they now appear very suburban) which would help to give proper weather protection and provide upper floors for other uses. The blocks of buildings are too long; Watson and Abercrombie planned more frequent North South links to make it easier to go from one street to another. The interior of the blocks were for service access to the shops but with gardens. In other words an urban atmosphere means variety. That classic popular song of the 60s “Downtown” sung by Petula Clark celebrates the many opportunities to meet people and discover things by going downtown. A city the size of Plymouth deserves a downtown for everyone, not just one age group. And that is what this vision is about for the city centre – to make it a real downtown, and not just a successful open air shopping centre. It needs a 24 hour life (with residents) for restaurants, pubs, specialised shops, choice of entertainment and culture and places for quietness but enough activity – with buses, taxis, cars, etc – to make it feel safe.

Watson and Abercrombie’s plan for the city centre is, to use a rather hackneyed phrase, the “jewel of the crown” of modern English town planning. It must be conserved, not as a fossil but rather alive to the present circumstances and shift in cultural values. In other words, we must identify its soft or weak parts, where we can act, and re-adjust to balance the poles of attraction where people will want to go.

The significance of this opportunity should not be constrained by protectionist policies – it is the nature of the grid structure that must be respected and responded to through the densification of the plots, and the recovery of permeability.

The Vision – Downtown

A released city centre - Plymouth city centre is freed from its triangular traffic collar, allowing the economic, social and cultural energies to circulate through the body of the city. Western Approach, Cobourg Street, Charles Street, and Royal Parade become 'Avenues' with central pedestrian or green strips, and pedestrian crossings at surface level. Car parking facilities are removed from the centre of the city blocks, and re-focused on the edges, where existing facilities are underused.

A connected city centre – Redevelopment of large sites around the edge of the city centre allows new buildings and spaces to recover lost relationships with surrounding neighbourhoods. Movement across the city centre is improved, with cars and pedestrians sharing the horizontal streets at all but the busiest shopping hours. 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.

A diversified city centre - Comprehensive redevelopment of the blocks either side of Cornwall Street provides a new focus – a 'living street' of intensity defined by a series of tall buildings, with lanes of living, working, leisure and retail space to the north and south. The finer grain of building provides increased retail frontage on a human scale, with flexibility for office and residential accommodation above.

A defined city centre – Above all, the city centre is no longer defined by its isolation and retail use – it is defined by its varied architecture that exploits the rigidity of the grid – its tall buildings with upper floors providing stunning views of the city and water – its grand gateways from both water and land – its weekend tourists who come to enjoy the waterfront walks and the rich history and culture.

