

Central Park Area Action Plan Sustainability  
Appraisal Non Technical Summary

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## 1 Introduction

### Sustainability Appraisal Process

- 1.1 Planning Authorities are required to produce a Sustainability Appraisal (SA), alongside plans that form part of a Local Development Framework (LDF). The Central Park Area Action Plan (AAP) is such a plan.
- 1.2 Sustainability Appraisal uses a range of sustainability objectives and indicators to test whether the plans, policies and proposals are the best possible ones for delivering sustainable development. SA can be viewed as a yardstick against which the social, environmental and economic effects of the plan can be tested.
- 1.3 There were 3 key stages to the preparation of the Central Park AAP, and these comply with Government guidance contained within Planning Policy Statement 12:
  - Issues and Options (published March 2005)
  - Preferred Options (published November 2006)
  - Submission (due to be published January 2008)
- 1.4 Each of these stages has been subject to a Sustainability Appraisal. All of these appraisals have been undertaken using an appraisal framework developed and set out in the SEA/SA Context and Baseline report, which was developed during 2005 and published in July of that year. The appraisals were undertaken prior to publication at each stage, to enable any recommendations to be incorporated in the published versions. This non-technical Summary outlines the key sustainability findings associated with each of these stages and demonstrates how the Appraisal contributed to the development of the plan.

### Central Park - The Context

- 1.5 Central Park is a strategically important park within Plymouth and is an outstanding and enviable environmental asset. It covers 94 hectares (232 acres) of dramatic landscape from high hilltop to deep valley offering rare panoramic views of the city and Plymouth Sound.
- 1.6 As the name suggests, Central Park sits centrally within Plymouth and is surrounded by many residential neighbourhoods, these include Beacon Park and Pennycross, Peverell, Mutley and Stoke. For many local residents the park is on their doorstep and it has a particular importance in their lives. The park also has a citywide profile as the venue for the city's sporting activities. It is home to Plymouth Argyle Football Club and is a host for the many amateur competitions held on the outdoor sports pitches and facilities. It is also a place for informal recreation and children's play and is a landscape rich in wildlife.
- 1.7 The park has six distinct elements:

- Centrally and to the west lies the built core of the park incorporating the city's football club, (Plymouth Argyle), a large swimming pool (Central Park Pools), recreation centre (the Mayflower Centre), an events field, Milehouse Park and Ride car park, a skatepark and a large equipped children's playground
- Centrally and to the south is a large open hill top sports park
- To the north, the formal gardens and parkland associated with Pounds House
- To the east is a deeply wooded valley
- Centrally to the east is a patchwork of informal sloping meadows
- To the south and west is an extensive series of allotment gardens.

### Objectives of the Area Action Plan

**1.8** The vision for the Central Park AAP is:

***To create an outstanding venue of regional and national significance for active recreation, health, art, education, culture and the environment, which will provide state of the art facilities for the people of Plymouth and the sub-region of Devon and Cornwall.***

**1.9** Central Park will continue to be a unique environmental asset for the city and will be a destination that has successfully enhanced its landscape and wildlife qualities to create a quality and distinctive parkland for the people of Plymouth and their future generations to enjoy.

**1.10** The proposals to deliver this vision are based on the following objectives:

- **Objective 1.** To create a landmark regional Life Centre complex of high quality design and innovative technology.
- **Objective 2.** To create a park with desirable, high quality, vibrant spaces that can be used by the whole Plymouth community whilst also safeguarding its value as an important wildlife corridor.
- **Objective 3.** To create a safe and well-connected park with its surrounding neighbourhoods and the City Centre.
- **Objective 4.** To provide high quality public and sustainable transport facilities serving the park and new facilities.
- **Objective 5.** To improve and strengthen the relationship between the park and surrounding city in a sustainable manner.
- **Objective 6.** To improve the range and quality of public facilities available to park users.

**1.11** The plan contains proposals that provide for the following quantum of development:

- Housing - in the region of 166 units
- Affordable Housing - in the region of 36 units
- Lifetime Homes - in the region of 27 units

- Employment - in the region of 5,380 sq m.
- Retail - in the region of 700 sq m.

## 2 Summary of Sustainability Appraisal at Issues and Options

- 2.1 A preliminary SA was undertaken for the Issues and Options document. This concluded that the proposals appeared broadly sustainable, although inevitably some conflict of interest may arise.
- 2.2 The Issues and Options paper '*suggests a move away from the incremental planning of fragmented spaces and uses towards a bold and exciting vision of "Destination Central Park" that re-interprets the historic Mawson Plan for the Park in a contemporary way*'. The SEA/SA appraisal strongly supports the suggestion of an integrated approach to design but notes that there could be significant tensions between the concept of a regional centre of sporting and leisure excellence and the Park's role as a much needed local resource. Concerns are raised, in particular, by:
- The potential for substantial growth in car borne visitors and increased demand for parking (contrary to aims for the promotion of public transport) arising from the Life Centre concept with its plans for a stadium, swimming pool, ice rink, multi-sports hall and hotel/conference/exhibition facilities
  - Uncertainty over the level of support likely to be forthcoming for the development of really effective public transport links from the rest of the city
  - Issues of public safety arising from increased levels of use (although the corollary also applies in that increased levels of activity can sometimes reduce crime levels)
  - Prospects for securing the required level of investment in the basic infrastructural improvements to the park, as listed under the options, since large scale projects like the Life Centre often absorb most of the available funds, leaving essential repairs and maintenance unattended
  - The proposals to safeguard and enhance allotments are strongly in line with the overall commitment to sustainable development and should be given high priority. However, this should not be seen as compensation for 'any losses resulting from other park enhancement measures' but as a legitimate goal in its own right
  - The concepts outlined in this leaflet are at too general a level to allow a full appraisal to take place and it is strongly recommended that the sketch design for the new vision of the park should be completed and published before the detailed consultation planned in September/October 2005.

### 3 Summary of Sustainability Appraisal at Preferred Options

3.1 The results of the SA indicated that whilst the AAP was generally positive there were some general issues and recommendations. These were as follows:

- Like other Area Action Plans, Central Park will be reliant on future investment. Care needs to be taken to ensure adequate facilities and services are available to meet the needs of an increasing number of households, and that retail units, appropriate employment provision and a mix of housing tenures are always considered
- When considering reducing car parking, the proposal is reliant on encouraging people to make a modal shift. Development proposals are reliant on the success of the new (or improved) public transport system and services must be frequent enough and widely available to encourage a modal shift. This may not occur, at least immediately, and if not measures need to be in place to respond to rising levels of traffic and congestion. It is imperative in encouraging a modal switch that car parking provision is minimised but also that dual use is explored, with some provision made for residents
- Potential negative issues which are highlighted relate to the impact of the options wildlife and nature, hence biodiversity, with potential adverse effects on the sites role as a wildlife corridor. It is important to ensure that with an increase in population and visitor numbers, impacts are investigated and minimised or mitigated
- Development proposals that will result in a significant increase in impermeable surface area need to take account of any potential increase in flood risk either on site, or on surrounding sites
- The structure of existing communities and potential changes need to be carefully considered. The proposals raise a number of basic questions:
  - Will new residential development result in migration?
  - Will targets for affordable housing be achieved?
  - Will people living in the new development areas actually work there, or will there be working elsewhere in the City?
- It is not clear whether design of houses and construction of buildings seek to reduce energy consumption, water consumption, and also source materials locally and use where possible secondary materials
- An increasing number of households, and increased levels of activity and provision of catering on and around the Park site, will inevitable result in an increase in waste production. This will need to be considered in plans and addressed
- The Preferred Options for Central Park appear to be in line with the sustainability criteria and consideration of the minor points above would ensure proposals are further still inline with sustainability objectives.

## 4 Summary of Sustainability Appraisal at Submission

- 4.1 There were a number of changes to the Central Park AAP between the publication of the Preferred Options document and the submission version. The report found that these changes do not significantly alter the sustainability of the plan as a whole, and where there are alterations, these generate positive outcomes against the sustainability objectives. The main focus of the sustainability appraisal commentary was on the maximisation of beneficial effects arising from the proposals.
- 4.2 The report made a number of key recommendations in relation to how the plan should respond to the following areas:
- **The need for local exemplars in sustainable construction** - The prominence of the Life Centre & Home Park proposals in the physical, social & cultural infrastructure of the city means that it is a prime opportunity to create a local exemplar not only for sustainable lifestyles, but also sustainable construction. There is a sub regional shortage of examples successful of renewable energy and sustainable construction, and this can act as a barrier to encouraging uptake on other sites in the locality. The SA therefore recommends that these elements of the proposal are reinforced through specific reference to sustainable construction benchmarks such as BREEAM Excellent. Using these bench marks within the proposal would address the current uncertainty as to how the Life Centre will respond to the sustainability objectives for waste and pollution, and will improve its performance in relation to objectives for climate change, energy and resources. The Council's Adopted LDF Core Strategy and draft Design SPD provide some security that these issues will now be addressed as part of all major applications, but the need for local and iconic exemplars of how high standards of sustainable construction can be delivered justifies specific inclusion on these proposals.
  - **Local economic benefit** - The AAP sets out a framework for significant investment and regeneration of leisure facilities around the Life Centre and Home Park. This report recommends the inclusion of measures such as Local Employment Agreements to ensure that this inward investment addresses local employment needs and has the maximum potential effect on local economic multipliers.
  - **Comprehensive measures to encourage a modal shift** - The inclusion of new public transport infrastructure is recognised as positive in relation to the sustainability objectives for pollution, climate change and transport, but the report recommends that proposal include demand management measures to ensure that the required modal shift is delivered.
  - **Biodiversity enhancement** - To ensure that proposals for managing the parkland respond to local /regional /national Biodiversity Action Plan targets the plan could be improved for the quantity and quality of habitats to be restored as part of the management of the wider parkland, ie recreate 4 ha of Flower Rich Meadow, restore 500m of Species Rich Hedgerow. To reflect Central Park as a beacon of local sustainability , and to reflect the greenfield setting the report encourages the inclusion of requirements for green or brown roofs on the parks proposed facilities.

## 5 Conclusions

**5.1** Over the course of the preparation of the Central Park AAP, the Sustainability Appraisal process has helped to identify:

- Any potential negative impacts of development in Central Park
- The value of considering renewable energy options, such as Combined Heat & Power, as an integrated part of the Life Centre and Home Park developments
- Biodiversity issues that need to be appropriately integrated, for example through reference to Biodiversity Action Plan targets for delivery of habitat enhancements
- The need for Central Park / Life Centre to act as a local exemplar of sustainable development
- The need for a more rounded consideration of the measures required to generate the modal shift required to deliver sustainable transport objectives.
- The need for measures within proposals that will help ensure that the inward investment has the maximum potential effect on local economic multipliers.