

Chapter 2 Devonport's regeneration in context: Issues and Opportunities

2.1 Devonport today

Devonport has about 7,000 people in 2605 homes. Comprehensive work has been undertaken by the DRC and its partners in establishing the baseline issues that most affect the lives of those living and working in the area. Some of the main points are highlighted in Table 2.1. The DRC Delivery Plan has been focussed to address these root issues and its target outcomes defined accordingly, as described in Chapter 3.

Devonport has a disproportionately high number of young people, with about 30% of the population below the age 16 (2000), compared to an English average of 20.5%. However, figures suggest there is a significant problem in keeping school leavers, and in attracting people of working age. Only about 32% of the population is aged 30-64, compared to Plymouth's average of 42%. Some of the more worrying concerns relate to the mortality of Devonport residents, the rate of joblessness and educational achievement amongst children.

A very significant proportion of the community is transitory - staying in Devonport for a relatively short while, before moving on. Whilst many feel they have a strong association with the area as a whole, with individual neighbourhoods or streets, for others it is not a place of choice.

The quality of the physical environment has a big part to play in this. In many parts of the area buildings, streets and spaces are in poor condition. Most particularly, the public housing stock is not in a good general state of repair, which is of particular concern because of the heavy reliance upon rented accommodation in the area. Some 75% of the community live in social housing.

If the DRC objective of creating more sustainable neighbourhoods is to be delivered, then major changes are needed to establish a more sustainable urban structure and socio-economic community profile. The Development Framework provides the physical setting for the necessary environmental, community and economic actions to be realised.

The future for Devonport is of course difficult to predict - and yet alongside the causes for concern, it is possible to strike some cautious notes of optimism. Devonport is blessed with a tremendous waterfront location, fascinating topography and parkland. This enviable natural geography is further strengthened by the area's rich heritage has left a legacy of historic buildings and naval associations of which many are justly proud.

Devonport is also blessed with excellent access to resources of many different kinds- and so it has real potential for growth. If more of Devonport's high numbers of young people could be persuaded to stay, the area's regeneration might have a head start. In addition, some economic sectors in the area are seeing increases in the number of people employed, and there has been faster improvement in the rates of long-term unemployment in the area than in the rest of Plymouth and England generally. Market demand in certain property sectors, residential in particular, is predicted to increase. What is more, the partner organisations are committed to work closely with local people to deliver lasting change.

The challenge is therefore to implement the Development Framework in a way that addresses and integrates each of these considerations - creating a range of employment and training opportunities, choice of high quality housing, a structure that builds-in crime prevention, together with major improvements to education, health and other community facilities - and to do this by involving the community every step of the way.



2.2 A changing planning policy context

The Devonport Development Framework has been prepared within the context of existing planning policies and guidance operating at national, regional, county and city-wide levels. The most relevant documents are summarised in Appendix A.

It is intended that once finalised, the DDF will be formally adopted by the City Council as an 'Interim Planning Statement' to help underline its status as an important reference point for planning policy, investment and development control decisions. This will support Plymouth's Neighbourhood Renewal Strategy (2002 - 2007) which has been prepared to guide the Plymouth 2020 Local Strategic Partnership in addressing deprivation and social exclusion.

The planning policy context is currently subject to significant reform at all levels and the process of change was given added impetus earlier this year by the Government's '*Sustainable Communities: building for the future*' report (ODPM, 2003) and Draft Planning Policy Statement 12, which reaffirm the Government's commitment to reform of the planning system and to neighbourhood renewal. Also of relevance to Devonport is a new regional approach to housing policy that sees English Partnerships and the Housing Corporation working together to deliver community regeneration and the Government target to bring all Council homes up to a 'decent standard' by 2010.

Under the new planning system the Council will be required to prepare 'Action Plans' at the neighbourhood level, which will be adopted as supplementary planning guidance. It is hoped that the DDF can form the basis of the Action Plan for Devonport in due course.



Figure 2 Devonport from the air

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Table 2.1 Audit and Analysis Summary

Strengths

- Strong community identity
- Rich in character, with heritage and recreation assets and attractive waterfront sites
- Property market is generally buoyant in Plymouth
- Management and delivery mechanism in place
- Levels of crime have been falling
- Frequent bus service, including reasonably good links to city centre
- Within close proximity to the city centre, via largely uncongested roads and direct pathways
- Torpoint ferry close at hand, with links to Cornwall
- Availability of local workforce

Weaknesses

- Difficulties in keeping school leavers and not attracting people of working age
- Limited employment opportunities, high unemployment, low income levels and correspondingly high levels of poverty
- Poor housing conditions, particularly in public stock
- Disproportionately high levels of social rented accommodation, little private housing and intermediate tenures - with a correspondingly unbalanced socio-economic profile
- Crime levels remain high
- Schools with high levels of social deprivation, pupil mobility and SEN - resulting in low pupil attainment
- Acute health concerns and inadequate facilities
- Poor quality public spaces and inadequate community facilities
- MoD land contamination
- Severance effect of the A374
- Poor accessibility to railway stations
- Poor strategic pedestrian links - to the waterfront and Pottery Quay for example
- Historic severance of the community by the Dockyard
- Lack of facilities for cyclists throughout area
- Low car ownership levels limits many residents in terms of access to facilities and services outside Devonport
- Speeding traffic and child accidents an issue in certain residential neighbourhoods
- Devonport is generally seen as a weak market - with poor perceptions relating to deprivation and poor quality of environment

Opportunities

- A nationally acclaimed best practice example of community-led sustainable regeneration
- Major regeneration funding backed by political commitment and amongst lead agencies
- Large development sites potentially attracting significant long term inward investment
- Potential to redress current housing imbalance - by providing different dwelling types and a choice of tenures
- Retain and attract 20 to 29 age group by providing suitable family housing, education and employment opportunities and improved facilities
- Opportunity to capitalize on Health Action Zone status
- Significant areas of public open space - hidden assets that can be brought into major public use
- Vacant and under-used heritage buildings are brought to life
- Library redevelopment
- A 'Green Arc' of recreational facilities, linked by pedestrian and cycle routes connecting to the waterfront
- Release of MOD land enables strategic transport linkages, including better bus penetration within residential areas
- Potential designation as a 20mph on Home Zone principles
- Improved local facilities reduce the need to travel
- Home zone principals could be applied - improvement of street environment for walking and cycling, safe routes to school
- Local community based transport initiatives eg car pooling, dial-a-ride buses

Threats

- Insufficient delivery capacity, investment or overly long delays on key decisions constrains progress
- Vacancy, dereliction and under-use accelerates without radical action
- Uncoordinated decisions amongst public sector service providers constrain innovative solutions
- Low quality thresholds fail to lift Devonport's overall environmental quality
- An integrated approach to transport provision in Devonport is not realised

2.3 Plymouth Area Regeneration Initiatives

It is important to recognise the wider geographical context, shown in Figure 4. This summarises the City's principal Area Regeneration Initiatives. Devonport sits within the existing Single Regeneration Budget area, which is in the process of winding down, but at the heart of the inner city and waterfront areas of Plymouth which continue to exhibit the worst symptoms of multiple deprivation, including worklessness, low incomes, poor housing and poor environment.

More relevantly, there are three other Neighbourhood Regeneration Areas - at Barne Barton, Cattedown / Coxside and in the City Centre - identified, together with a series of more localised regeneration strategies and initiatives that are being implemented in parallel with the Devonport Development Framework. Perhaps most significantly, a major regeneration and development initiative is now under way for Millbay, which provides a critical link between the City Centre and Devonport, where SWRDA, English Partnerships and the City Council are currently preparing an Action Plan and will be a source of major public investment in forthcoming years. The City's approach to regeneration also highlights the variety of employment or community economic development initiatives - such as the Millfields Trust and Wolseley Community Economic Development Trust - which can be regarded as successful example of stimulating local enterprise. It is important that Devonport's development strategy is framed to be complementary to these other initiatives, picks up from best practice where this is available and that it establishes a robust framework that withstands competition in the local property market from projects elsewhere.

Of particular importance is the work of the Plymouth 2020 Partnership in embarking on a process of stimulating radical change for the City Centre. This has recently been given added impetus by the launch of 'A Vision for Plymouth' - an ambitious plan prepared by MBM architects and released in draft form in October 2003 for public consultation. This report recommends that in order for the City Centre to fulfil its full potential and meet rising demand, significant intensification of residential development within the City Centre is required as part of a mixed-use development strategy, underpinned by major public infrastructure investment in infrastructure. This vision of intensification, leading to a City of greater regional stature, advocates that development strategies should be put in place so that Plymouth's population grows to 300 -



Figure 3 Looking down on Devonport

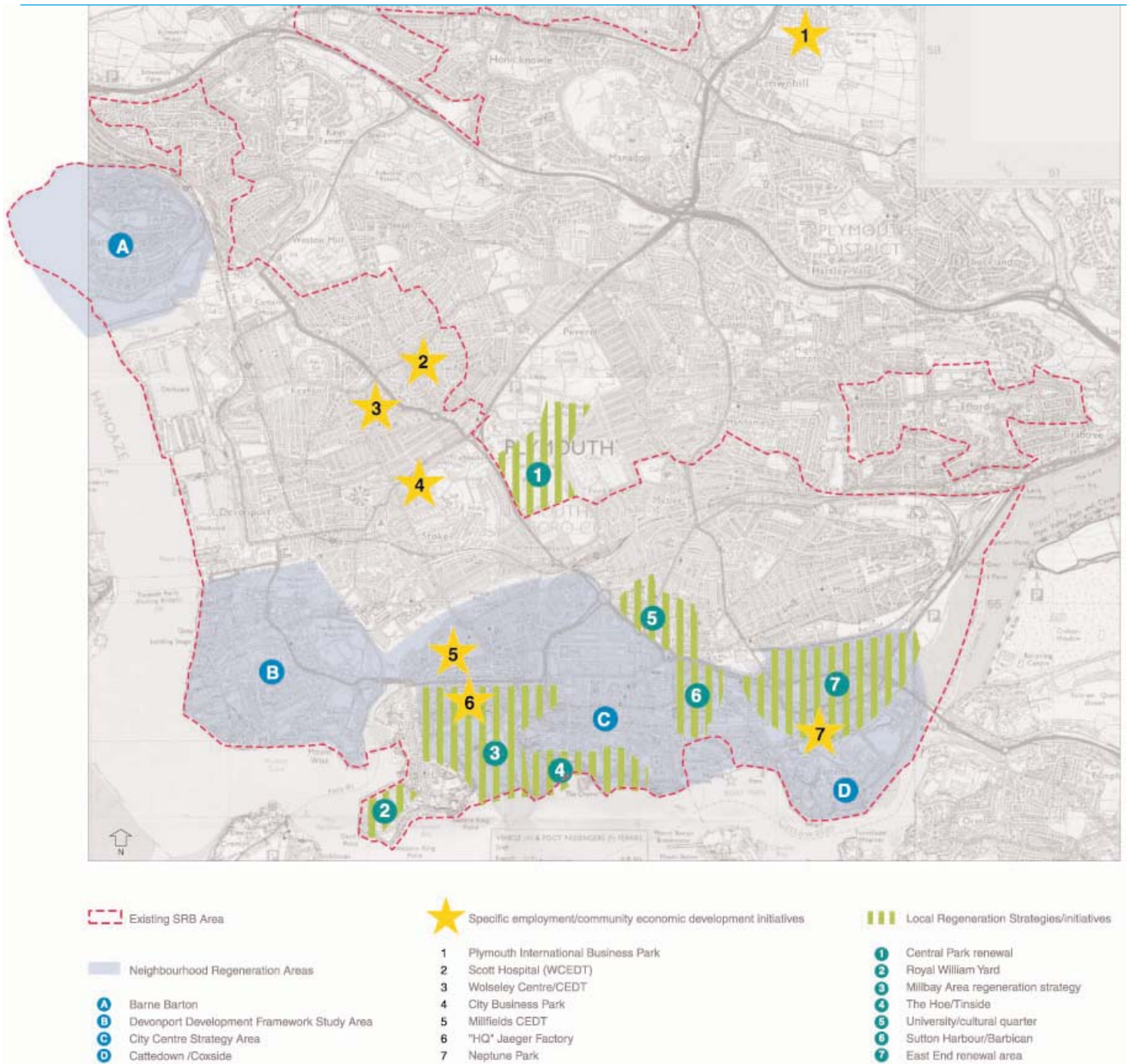


Figure 4 Plymouth area regeneration initiatives

350,000 over the next twenty years.

The development strategy for Devonport needs to be seen in this wider context, which relates to:

- the scale and profile of population needed for Devonport to evolve into a sustainable community able to support a wide-range of services and amenities;
- the need to specify the proposed type of new facilities required in relation to a catchment area that looks beyond the DRC area and are achievable in relation to the scale of public investment that can be expected;

- the need in operational terms for the regeneration partners to define delivery mechanisms that connect with those existing or planned in other regeneration areas elsewhere in the City.