

Tests of Soundness applied to the Central Park Action Plan.

# CP SWATRIDGE FWR (540)

3, Sustainability appraisal

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Looking at economic, environmental and social effects... to...  
create a sustainable Plymouth.

### a) Economic.

For any of the developments, envisaged by the Central Park Area Action Plan (CPAAP), to take place there seems a dependency on public realm agreements. In effect these hand over land and developments long-term to commercial interests, whether by outright sale or long, long leases, which does not protect public interests (such as rights of way, change of use or increasing charges). Argyle the Business has recently acquired title to assets, from Plymouth City, that it can 'realise' at any time. The Life Centre, Peverell Corner and Pennycomequick developments are to be similarly treated. There are no real or long-lasting safeguards.

A telling item offered, CPAAP p48 a report summarises the Peverell Corner proposal "is financially viable GIVEN VALUATIONS" (my capitals). This acknowledges that Peverell Corner is being used solely to realise extra finance as its footprint has a high rateable value for developers rather than its value as a local retail service centre, even with more appropriate residential accommodation included. The whole Central Park area is potentially extremely valuable land if developed. This development will 'release' some 18.6% of the total greenspace for a start, actually a large loss.

Few other sources of funding seem to have been procured. Lottery funding for the Life Centre has been twice refused already (that would have allowed the feasibility of the Life Centre as a 'stand alone' project). The CPAAP (and Plymouth Council, the Local Conservative manifesto, etc) plays down the absolutely integral requisite for commercial development to try and offset costs that will be ongoing, even if the 'top of the market' housing schemes contributed adequately to the 'build' of the Life Centre. It clutches at including office space, small retail outlets (including turning the Parks department/nursery into a Garden Centre), private service businesses and 'related' activities. Maintenance and running costs will be 'outsourced' so largely out of the Council's control. The few possibly profitable areas are likely to be in competition with Argyle, whose activities, services and facilities are exclusive of the general public, yet the new development hands over even more benefits and advantages. Pounds House is already being 'emptied' presumably prior to sale or lease to some commercial enterprise, affecting access, and more.

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CPAAPP FOR SWIMMING POOL

These arrangements do not protect let alone enhance the financial future of Plymouth. Subsidies will be needed to keep some activities 'people affordable'. Plymouth City Council no doubt know how much the present swimming pools cost to run. Sunderland has recently built a 50m. pool, with best policy energy-saving, etc., but is budgetting \$250-300,000 p.a. to keep 'at the door' prices accessible to all. (A full-size ice-rink must be costlier still to run - note Argyll has not offered these facilities!) Plus, like Plymouth, 2 or 3 other local pools have to close.

The scale of development seems out of proportion to need. The CPAAPP purports to start from the need to improve the Park (which could cost next-to-nothing involving conservationists and volunteers, and which 'green' solution is incidentally what that large majority (78% response) of local people and Park users want). The Life Centre is deemed to enable, and somehow enhance, this. Then it takes over and from being seen primarily as a local health and leisure facility (though the sole Swimming Pool provider, now, bar Plymstock) it progresses to supplying all Plymouthians, next the Region, through "one of the best in the country" to an "international" destination. This over-blown idea is not realistic for a sustainable city. 'Economy of scale' and the centralisation of facilities have to be appropriate in order to work. Our 'geography' has to be accepted - socially, economically, topographically and locationally. Plymouth needs to be 'fit for purpose' itself and not crippled by near-bankruptcy in the future!

These Plans seem to have a dearth of information about funding, and a lot of 'maybe's, which contributes even further to questioning their sustainability and economic soundness.

In conclusion I <sup>challenge</sup> ~~question~~ the presumption that this course is the economic solution to Central Park's rejuvenation, to Plymouth's need to address the health of its people, or its sports and leisure provision. (Plus there are great contra-indications to going on to bring art, culture, education, etc. to this site, ie away from the City Centre, and Barbican).

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## b) Environmental

'Natural' greenspace areas and corridors are essential for people as well as wild-life. They produce well-being and promote interests, responsibility and relaxed social interaction. Greenspace activity is actually more widely effective for overall health than gym-work, as it benefits mental health, too. (The Park allows the further asset of keeping a dog as a pet!) Walking, running, cycling, gardening, kite-flying, a shared picnic or quiet 'read' can all 'happen' in our Park. Children especially need the opportunity to freely explore and develop their curiosity and skills informally as well as participate in organised games (where a wider variety should be reintroduced) for all ages. As well as 'pitches' this Park could enable routes for small running groups and even 'cross-country' for the younger and fitter.

For these activities the total area needs to be preserved in order to achieve full stamina-type health benefits. A 'good walk' or run is still an option, as well as smaller circuits, through varied habitats a bonus. In turn these eco-systems need space to be self-sustaining, with a priority for the preservation, and increase, of 'corridor' trees and hedges for cohesion, especially for native wild-life 'feeding' vegetation. (Good also for eco-education of humans, and 'foraging' instincts!) People do not want this valuable Park to be a bare tree or manicured grass set with gaudy annual patches, or even 'foreign' perennial shrubs that restrict bio-diversity. The views they want are smaller scale here, of nature not 'man'.

Apart from a brief referral to my concerns about drainage and water run-off problems (damaged by the making of the Argyle practice pitches, and that to the east below them) there seems to have been no thought about the present and future benefits of this sizeable greenspace as a 'green lung', water-holding / water-table regulator, shelter-belt, air-flow effector, etc, which could be increasingly important. It should not therefore be 'paved' over or covered with high build or density development. Few cities have this gift. But once lost is lost forever. (This Plan loses 18.6% of the total area.)

All Plymouth's reported Plans, Policies, Strategies and political pledges repeat that they are "to safeguard and enhance Plymouth's green spaces" and that "the protection of the environment is a fundamental requirement." The CPAAP does not fulfil this function and should therefore be regarded as unsound.

## c) Social

Social health requires individuals to maximise their own physical and mental health and sense of well-being so that social interaction is a positive experience. The Park environment contributes hugely, as discussed in my previous dem for example. Furthermore the informal, relaxed atmosphere allows 'space' around each individual, or small group, so that congenial interactions can take place (even on the football pitches!) In our Park there is no pressure to do this or that, or go there (or not - the only 'no-go' areas are those that Argyle now command). Even participation in an organised pursuit is enhanced by the opportunity to breathe in some fresh air or the accompaniment of a stroll or chat (nor does this latter require a 'landmark' mall either!).

There is a dire need to replace the lost small, local play apparatus; some sites had happily existed for at least 60 yrs. Indeed there should be an increase in these small, individual venues right around the Park periphery. Mothers with small children, or even older siblings, need destinations within distances accommodating small legs and investigative minds. These promote of sense of belonging, of a secure base from which to explore the next or mix with others and a participation in responsibility for the facility, and the wider environs.

Whilst the present fabric of the Park does contribute hugely to its users health, and casual social life contacts; for example, perhaps there are lower rates of obesity to be seen, and fewer incidents of rage, the ~~RPAAP~~ will throw in some adverse effects.

Busy or not-yet-fit adults also need local areas where they can engage in activities Together. To attain the vaunted goal of a minimum of 30 mins. exercise at least 3 times a week it is not conducive to have to travel an hour each way, whether by motor or self-propulsion. There are ground-level consequences to having a single, massive, multi-strand Centre also as local schemes are disregarded, neglected or deliberately closed. The local facilities and projects affected are not just swimming pools (it seems common for 2 or 3 smaller pools to close for each 50m. one opened). Facilities and facilitators vary, but people are adaptable, taking advantage of changing opportunities and activities. Skills can be transferred, both physical and social, and high standards can be encouraged and obtained from these roots. It is worth-noting that most Olympic swimmers train(ed) locally in 25m. pools (which improves their turns, and ability to count!) Most beginners would be scared and less safe in a 10+ lane 50m 'international' venue. Nor does the ordinary learner of any sport or fitness activity want to be 'onview' either, even in a 'interactive' landmark building.

Sustainability of social benefit depends on participation, and sport process development still largely on local enthusiastic amateur coaches (a diminishing asset) and small groups - commercial interests may not facilitate either. Subsidies will be needed if the City wants to fulfil its pledge to be 'inclusive' for all its citizens, who face the travel costs as well as 'at the door' and other expenses, such as equipment and 'instruction'. Anyway, above all people see the present Park environment a social asset.

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## 4, a) Spatial plan relevance.

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taking into account economic, social, environmental and physical change issues relating to the area and/or those adjoining.

This concept as presented in the CPAAP seems like vague waffle to us laypeople. Justified with much 'social speak' it appears to mainly concern perceived 'relationships' with the Park, or supposed lack of them. To locals many of the views, attributed by inference to them, are of dubious origin (or an extension of what we are all supposed to 'fear' nowadays without any real foundation, especially if following usual sensible behaviour). Local people and users of the Park from further afield cherish the informality, and nature and countryside feel, of the Park. They do not find it inaccessible, nor the trees or walled lanes frightening. They do not see the need for tall buildings to 'frame' an entrance or to overlook where they're walking or playing. Please note that the concerns expressed by that overwhelming 78% response were for the loss of habitat through development. The people of Plymouth believe that Central Park was gifted to them as a natural greenspace in perpetuity. They are not happy with allowing this valuable land to be lost, even whilst accepting that improved sports facilities are probably due. They are sceptical about the benefits to the people in relation to the excessive size and cost to the city of this project.

How does the CPAAP actually solve any of the issues it perceives? How is more housing at Pennycomequick or the Peverell Corner mixed development part of the enabling development of the Park, even if they do 'face into it'? (The real reason, of course, being solely financial.) Does building several stories (gatehouses? lodges?) around entrances 'open up' the view? What is meant by the Park routes not being 'understandable'? Massive redevelopment is not necessary for such aspects. Nor have we ever heard anyone complain about lack of access. People actually still value the Park for what it is now, though see it as not so robust as it could be, largely due to past mismanagement and 'schemes'. 'Posh' housing (even the 'affordable' quota being abandoned in the interests of 'priority') does not increase the Park's accessibility to ordinary Plymothians anywhere.

People accept the Park's geographical position - it is not unusual that an area is bounded by roads - why should building constitute a more distinctive or desirable perimeter to an extensive public space? These days every community has to cope somehow with main roads. (Luckily, the present CPAAP has abandoned earlier schemes that would have been absolutely chaotic and probably dangerous.)

## 4, a) Spatial Plan relevance.

The less affluent areas to the west come into the Devonport catchment area which has its own developmental agenda, including many small-scale initiatives (including varied opportunity at the Brickfields and tennis at Devonport Park). These utilize open spaces and social and health projects as well as sports activities.

The higher-rateable residential areas to the north and east are now quite high-density residential areas and the 'open space' aspect is most dear to the inhabitants (as it is to the permanent residents of the S.E. corner). The recent loss of all the sports and social facilities at the Civil Service ground is much lamented.

City-side, the geography of the valley with the present 'only possible' road and rail infrastructure obviates the planners' vision of the Park being an extension of the Armada Way corridor (or even <sup>into</sup> the fabled Millbay Boulevard cul-de-sac ~~extension~~). A fanciful but horrific 'bridge' structure between has hopefully been eliminated from their minds. (Pedestrians and cyclists find a longer loop via the University and Ford Park entrance is less polluted.) However, that had been indicative of the unsoundness of thought regarding the Park's place and the Life Centre's size, nature and relationship to the City Centre. The Life Centre's 'maybe' as an art, cultural and educational focus would also draw attention away from Plymouth's other 'heritage' assets in the City Centre and Barbican. Improving the greenspace in the south-east corner would provide a quiet corner to refresh the students in the blocks of flats, if allowed to remain small-scale and nature-encouraging (not an outdoor drinking point).

The Open Spaces framework shows sheltered sites for Argyle-only land and pitches, etc. but public ones largely in a vast exposed area. Argyle will be given more parkland despite all the areas already owned or leased. I suggest that the intervening Parks Nurseries area will be at risk of future acquisition, too. Incidentally, Argyle can as yet hardly be seen as environmentally or socially friendly, or interested in enhancing the Park, with their enclosing high fences and Leylandii, or the dumping of debris from the stadium improvements, nor their careless treatment of the lane walls. The CPAAP's promotion of Argyle the Business' commercial plans is insensitive: it could also limit some of the Life Centre's options. Furthermore, moving and extending the so-called Events Field to the south of the main development buildings (with extension of road access, which will also serve Argyle's new developments) puts the old lane and thus, at present, untouched field at risk of being furthered 'seconded', thus becoming 'brownfield' and available.

The Spatial Plan does not go far enough in the provision of small localised play areas within easy reach of families' homes. Strategically-placed toilets do not make a play area unsafe - but are beneficial to parents! The CPAAP solves its perceived problem of the one at Peverell Corner by ignoring any replacement. NB Loos are also useful to the elderly and to pregnant mothers. The sub-station (new) next to it is also not mentioned.

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## H, a) Spatial plan relevance

Although the CPAAP does fulfil the duty to replace amenities lost through development with regard to the allocation of 'new' allotments by extending the Swarthmore site into the greenspace down in the S.E. corner this is displacement by miles. The present mature plots are well-served, have easy and level access and are close-to-home, adjacent to public-transport, etc. The ones at Pennycomequick necessitate a steep climb, a long walk with no public transport to an exposed 'virgin' site, which when my family could procure no other spot, was overrun with brambles and rabbits. Incidentally, it will be difficult to make a route around that perimeter as there is such a steep slope throughout, and a sub-station in the way. A new public access path will also cut 'straight' through the site (causing disruption there) and I doubt that the new inward-looking housing to the west will in any way protect these plots. Plymouth is not doing enough for allotment-holders - the 'ideal' is returning and they are valuable not just to the elderly but also to families and people who want to live as healthily as possible.

The areas around the Park probably have a large proportion of more mature persons to whom the loss of other amenities is a sadness, and a burden if it limits their independence. The Post Office, general store, or local Co-op, and local businesses will be put at even more risk by the development. (The S.E. Dale Road area has already lost their services to students' off-licences.) The scale and expense of the Peverell Corner set-up will change its nature and is unlikely to be beneficial to locals. Many can walk to the corner (but not as far as Morrisons), and take a short stroll in Pounds House park. Pounds House has now been 'emptied' of services for the disabled and needy, and has not been used as a venue for private functions as in the past. Its fabric might be saved as it is listed but is likely to be handed over for commercial use (with parking issues likely).

The Spatial Plan seems to place Peverell Corner as an important site, wanting again to turn it into a 'landmark'. The development will not resolve the economics of the 'corner shop' or local service centre. Nor the perceived parking problems, ie that increased parking activity will prevent congestion, and that increased retail transport will cause less disruption. At present the corner is used mainly by pedestrians - it is not a place for 'passing trade'. The Coop retail supply is timed to be off-peak. A few temporary parking spaces are available and although the crossings may be improved slightly, the present four cars through (right and left) at a time seems to prevent too many problems. The new cul-de-sac will clutter and block the Peverell Park Road flow, and back up behind the bus-stop to affect west-bound Outland Road movement, and eastbound cars turning into Peverell. The 'jumble' of vehicles and indicators could cause an accident-prone spot. Again the geography of the site should be a cautionary sign against such grand-scale development, even if on such high-value land.