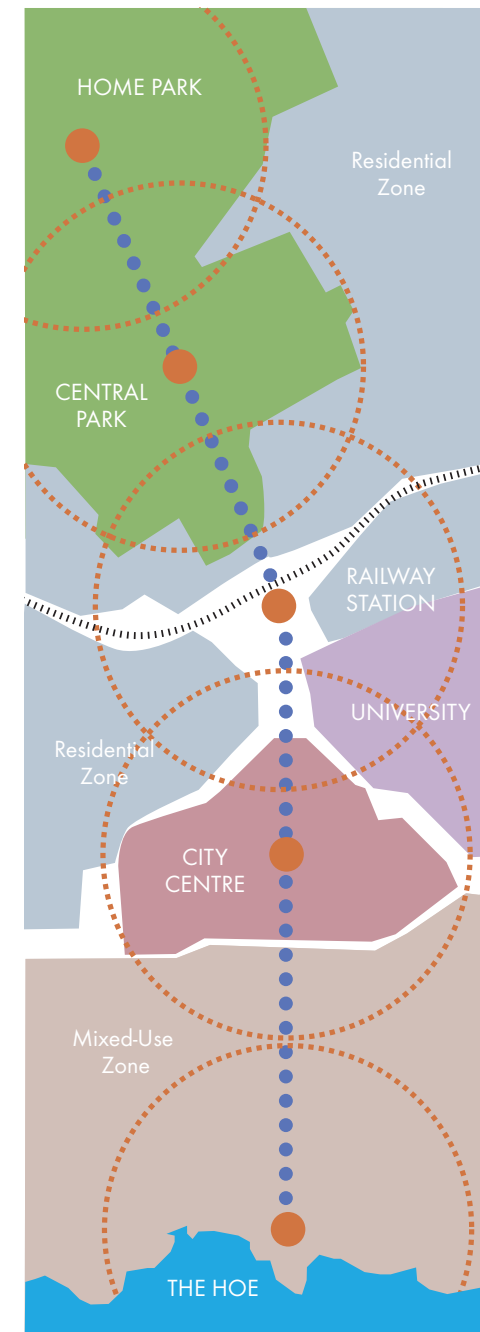


5.0 Conceptual Framework





Canary Wharf, London



5.1 Vision Statement

This section of the framework focuses on the concepts and design proposals for the site within its immediate context. It considers the challenges and the opportunities to improve its potential as a new district and point of entry into the City.

The vision is to transform North Cross into a new mixed-use central business district that maximises its pivotal location and strengthens the urban structure of this part of the City.

The original brief stipulated that options be explored to assess the impact of building over the railway lines to maximise the development footprint. This has been examined and discounted, as the experience of Network Rail elsewhere indicates that the operational constraints and associated costs are likely to be prohibitive. Network Rail requested an option should be explored that retained Caprera Terrace. However through extensive consultation with Plymouth Design Panel, an option to remove Caprera Terrace has also been investigated and the resulting urban form is considered to offer greater benefits.

The concept is to protect the long-term possibility for the site to act as a node between the powerful axis of Armada Way, and a possible future route through to Home Park. The intention is to stimulate a series of urban opportunities along this route, and breath life into the idea of a high quality public transit system between the congregational destinations of The Hoe and Home Park, with an interchange at its centre. The urban form must reflect the importance of this interchange and be of landmark quality. The quality and cohesion of the street pattern should take precedence over the notion of a series of "grands projets." Plymouth does not yet possess a critical mass of population, or economic strength, to make some of the aspirational ideas of larger cities deliverable. It is a provincial city

that should endeavour to regain its place as a regional hub and raise its cultural standing in order to attract inward investment and employment opportunities.

5.2 Urban Design Principles

The planning layout for the site addresses some key principles:-

- Legible movement framework.
- A well-connected and robust movement strategy.
- An urban form that maximises its pivotal location in the city.
- Clear spatial definition for public realm spaces.
- Building form that responds to the topography and Beaux Arts grid.
- The railway station reinvented as a primary gateway into the city.
- Maintain potential for HQPT linking Home Park and The Hoe.
- Active streets and mix of uses.



5.3 The Concept

This document sets out a vision for a new urban quarter. This cannot be driven purely by design aspiration. The proposal must be viable and capable of enhancing economic activity and job creation. The Framework must be flexible and adaptable if the long-term vision is to be seriously pursued. The movement framework and infrastructure must support an urban form that responds to a range of uses at an appropriate urban density. The objective is to reinforce and extend the “City Spine” geared to the pedestrian but capable of accepting a light transit system, if and when demand can sustain it. The centres of activity along this spine need to be developed to ensure its sustainability and desire lines need to be nurtured and reinforced.

The powerful idea that has emerged from this study is to create a new commercial heart for the city; a vibrant business district that allows Plymouth to diversify its economic base. The site connection to arterial transport routes is a major advantage but its proximity to supporting facilities and its ability to accept high-density development makes it a realistic proposition.

The preferred option illustrates how this might be ordered. Armada Way has been extended to terminate at a new square at the heart of the proposal. This will provide the most direct and legible route but mixes traffic and pedestrians in a novel way for Plymouth. The edges of the site are contained where appropriate to give enclosure and are blended into the University campus and existing residential hinterland. The concept is to group buildings around a series of three public realm spaces within a street plan that creates intimacy and shelter and allows sunlight to penetrate as much as possible.

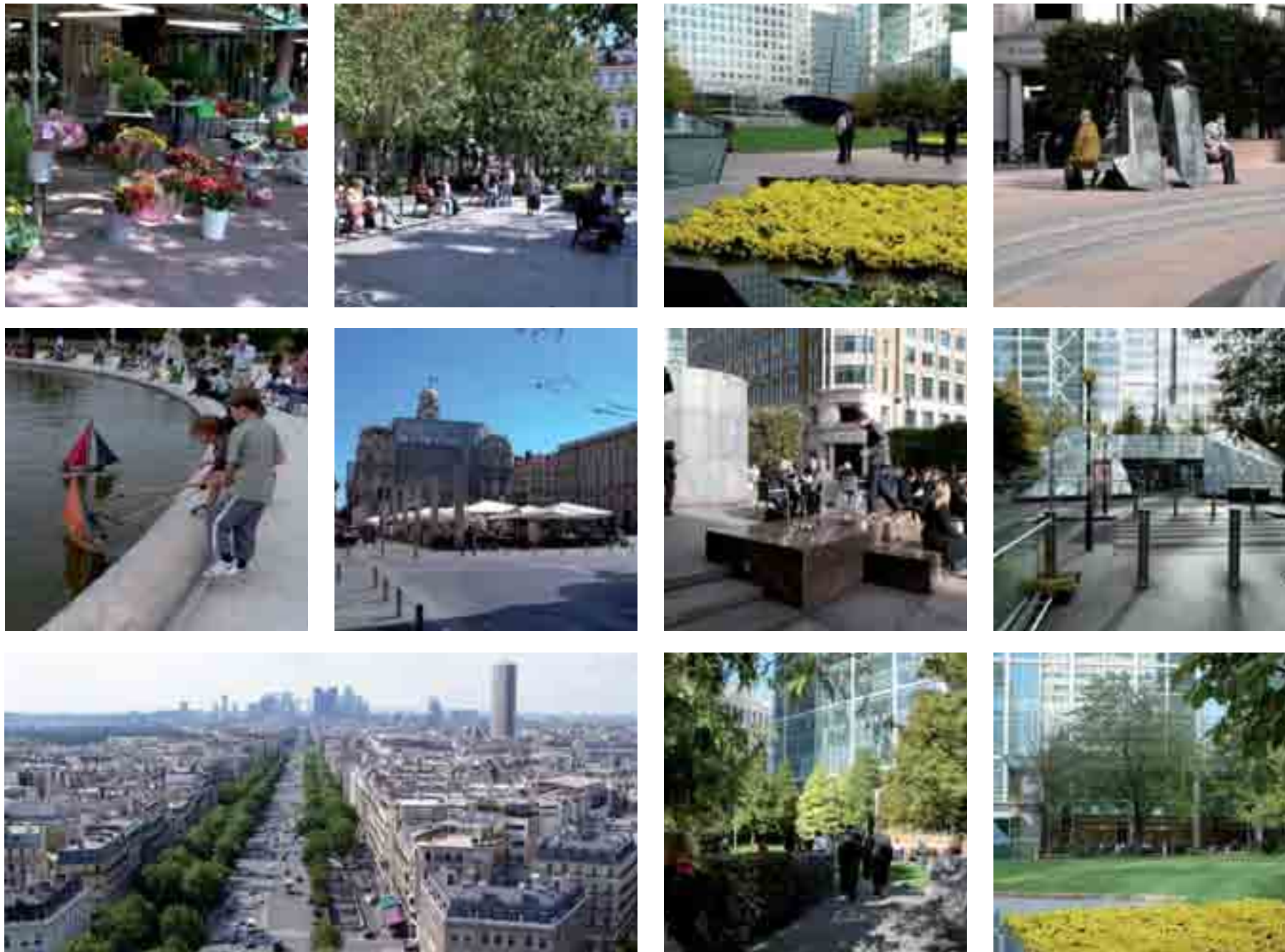


5.4 The Urban Form

The relationship has been considered between the new urban blocks, movement corridors and public realm spaces as well as how the buildings might be knitted into the surrounding neighbourhoods on the eastern boundary. The development terminates Armada Way, which should be considered as a true boulevard. North Cross can then be both a destination and a transition between civic, academic and commercial functions and residential hinterland where the smaller scale domestic streets have a finer grain.

Tall buildings need space around them and an appropriate setting if they are to be successful. The issue of maintaining or removing Caprera Terrace has been carefully balanced. In conclusion we propose its removal, as there are significant advantages to the way in which the urban form can then be structured. The block diagram indicates how this form and scale might be composed to create the new district. The central square allows a taller building to be sensibly sited on its northern boundary, reducing overshadowing. Urban blocks are then placed within a series of streets and squares including a plaza fronting the station concourse to elevate the sense of arrival.

The relationship to the University is crucial. Thought has been given to a gateway into the campus to facilitate a more immediate access for the student population onto the civic spine adding to its vitality. The nature of the space and means of dealing with level changes will require further detailed consideration and this is beyond the scope of this report.



5.5 Public Space

We suggest a hierarchical series of public spaces along the extended spine of Armada Way, set within a street pattern that improves east-west links. A significant civic square at the heart of the preferred option for North Cross provides a gathering and circulation space that is active and vibrant. It links directly to the station plaza to the north and a threshold space to the south, thus energising the main route from the city centre to the station concourse.

The quality of the public realm is paramount in achieving a desirable and sophisticated urban environment. Urban trees can be incorporated in a number of ways; to define routes, provide shelter, visual softening and delight, positively contributing to the ambience of the place. They are an indispensable element of the design and an essential part of the landscape strategy. Measures to create shelter such as canopies and colonnades adjacent to principal pedestrian routes will also help the streets to work well.

Lighting should equally be integrated and provide an ambient backdrop with the use of imposing lamp standards minimised. Accent lighting, public art, seating and signage should be conceived holistically to reinforce identity and cohesion. Visual clutter must be avoided in the street scene at all costs allowing the quality of the place to be appreciated.



5.6 Buildings

The confluence of the various corridors of Armada Way, Western Approach, and Cobourg Street marks the site out as a focal point in the city and influences the manner in which the 'place' is conceived. The scale and form of the urban blocks proposed are intended to define, contain and blend the edges of the site where appropriate, and create active frontages to make the streets and public spaces inviting and secure. The site analysis sets out where landmark buildings could be sited to articulate the townscape and define the spatial hierarchy.

There should be eloquence to the architectural language that deals with the challenges of the topography, orientation, and material language of the development. Relationship to the wider context has been a key consideration and the site analysis indicates where it might be possible to introduce height and alternatively where it is essential to respect a more domestic scale. Three locations have been identified where tall buildings might help signify important functions. Their juxtaposition to existing buildings will be determined by the eventual decision to retain or demolish Caprera Terrace and City House.

The preferred solution is to place a tall structure to the north of the central square at the highest point on the site. We suggest a series of perimeter blocks that can flexibly accommodate a range of uses. These can be mixed vertically as well as horizontally to add vibrancy and include shops, workspaces, residential development as well as commercial and educational facilities.

A strong architectural language is important and a rigorous and contemporary architecture should be a counterpoint to the solid Portland Stone elevations of Plymouth's city centre. We have illustrated an indicative





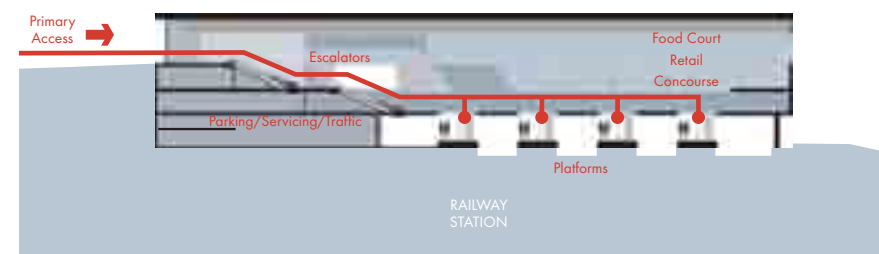
Canary Wharf Underground Station



Canary Wharf Underground Station



Almeida Station, Valencia



Station Schematic

- Provide additional parking beneath podium level and servicing access where appropriate.

In a national "Weakest Link" survey, Transport 2000 highlighted Plymouth as one of 7% of stations that are poorly connected to other modes of transport. This proposal relies on a visionary approach to inner city movement with a reduction of car movements in favour of the pedestrian, cyclist and public transport. The ability to provide an interchange between these modes and the train should be a key objective for a sustainable transport system for Plymouth if it is to reinforce activity at its core.

5.8 The Railway Station

Plymouth Station is a through-station not a terminus. The main booking hall and concourse are part of City House, with the platforms accessed through a subway. The all-important first impression for visitors is currently of a place that is tired and in need of refreshing. Attempts have been made to brighten the foyer but the adjacent car park visually dominates and is rather brutal. We understand the station has a defined life of fifteen years. As part of any redevelopment, the profile of the station should be raised within the townscape to reinforce its strategic importance.

David Mackay's aspiration is to access the platforms via an elevated concourse, rather than by subway. This has the following effects:-

- Natural daylight encourages clearer orientation for users (research shows that natural lighting greatly improves the ability to orient oneself.)



- The experience is an improved environment in terms of fresh air, less noise pollution and more natural light.
- Clearer relationships between ticket office, concourse, waiting areas and platforms.
- The concourse can benefit from adjacent functions such as retail and food outlets, increasing both the commercial return and amenity for train users.
- The improved station environment can increase the attractiveness of rail travel and improve passenger experience.
- The complex topography of the site means that station access at high-level provides an immediately legible relationship to Armada Way.
- Central Park is clearly visible from the station and provides a pleasant green backdrop.

The form is generated from the natural flow of passengers into the most efficient system of organisation (the linear arrangement of the concourse). Large escalators at the principal end of the station become an innate diagram for passenger movement. All subsidiary activities augment the lineation of movement; retail and food courts create 'stationary' zones surrounding the dynamic central zone.

The proposals reference other major European station redevelopments:

- Canary Wharf in London Docklands operates in a similar way to the proposed solution, with circulation working as the coherent ordering structure.



- Valencia's Alameda Station in Spain is generated by a linking bridge between two districts, with daylight drawn deep into the station arranged along the course of people using the bridge link.

It is proposed to create a plaza adjacent to the station concourse. This will allow arriving passengers to immediately orient themselves towards the City Centre and give a clear and attractive route to the retail centre as well as a direct entry to the University campus. Car parking is placed underground using the level changes to good effect. The concourse can be an iconic space, moving people from plaza to platform with a degree of drama and excitement. It must make the experience of movement as pleasant and direct as possible.

The proposals can be phased and allow the existing station to operate whilst building a new one. The new concourse is more centrally located to the platforms providing a direct link via escalators to the ticket office and the entry plaza.

6.0 Next Steps





This study is intended only to investigate the spatial potential of North Cross. It is not intended to examine the commercial or financial viability although we think there is a realistic potential for delivery. Phasing will inevitably mean that early gap funding will be required to deal with the highway alterations, proposed HQPT and infrastructure. This development can then be considered in two parts, south and north of the civic square.

Traffic modelling and the potential for a public transit system along the spine will determine the longer-term approach to a sustainable transport solution along with the car parking strategy. Further consideration to address this vital issue is necessary.

The potential to reconfigure the railway station, placing it more centrally along the platforms and transforming it into a hub for urban activity, building on the increase in rail travel also needs further work. We have made a suggestion that allows building a new station whilst keeping the existing in operation. A review of the proposals with Network Rail will in due course determine the way forward and the eventual outcome for City House.

A financial appraisal to test the commercial and funding issues is also a next logical step to ensuring the proposals are feasible and identify how they can be developed during the next iteration of the scheme.

7.0 Conclusions



Plymouth Hoe

North Cross

Central Park



The challenge for this generation is to develop a singular vision about the way we wish Plymouth to develop as the City Fathers did with Abercrombie. Mackay gave us a good start but it is the responsibility of the current citizenship to equip the City for the competitive step change that is much talked about in the strategy for growth.

This document represents the views of Plymouth Chamber of Commerce and various stakeholders. It is a contribution to the thinking as to how Plymouth might regain the status as the economic driver for the sub-region. What has been created out of a wish to improve the station, is a new way of reinforcing city centre employment and economic diversification, building on the strengths of the North Cross site and its relationship with the retail centre and the University of Plymouth. As a priority we must improve patterns of movement and embrace the notion of a high quality public transport system. Even if this is modest to begin with, it will have a huge effect on the way the City works.

This proposal does involve demolition of Caprera Terrace but the subsequent gains could be enormous and not only promote an evolution of the distinctive Abercrombie principles, but repair and reconnect very important parts of the City. It could offer Plymouth a means to re-establish its regional significance and be a major contribution to turning the City into a green compact exemplar, as set out in the Governments Urban Task Force report "Towards an Urban Renaissance".

The proposals are not designed to be rigid but rather to offer a flexible framework that can accommodate a variety of uses and changing circumstances as individual projects come forward. This report is intended to support the aims and objectives of the City Centre Area Action Plan through the consultation process and beyond in the endeavour to create a dynamic, economically sustainable and socially inclusive city.

