

theme 3

Centres

This theme area addresses the following critical success factor for Plymouth:

Key centres

- A range of well connected centres and nodes that drive complementary and mutually reinforcing components of the economy.

INTRODUCTION & RATIONALE

Competitive cities across the world are usually characterised as having high quality connectivity and infrastructure assets. Ease of access to major urban centres, especially national capitals and central government hubs, as well as effective international linkages, are increasingly important in promoting economic dynamism. In addition, ICT and digital connectivity is also increasingly seen as a key mechanism for diversifying the economic base of a location and increasing opportunities for developing high value added economic activity.

Plymouth's perceived physical peripherality, especially in the context of travel time to and from London, has emerged as a constant discussion theme amongst stakeholder consultees. Although, on balance, consultees view Plymouth's distance from London as having a negative impact on current economic performance, there remains a diversity of opinion regarding the actual scale of this negative impact. In particular, there are many who see the City's obvious environmental strengths as being something of an effective counterweight to any actual, physical connectivity weaknesses.

An emerging view from consultees is that Plymouth must strive to become a strong regional centre in its own right whilst also maximising its physical and digital connectivity networks. There is a clear need to maximise the role of Plymouth as a **City Region**, ensuring effective connectivity with neighbouring local authority areas; the City must create and embed significant levels of economic value from these relationships. This requires a full complement of factors to be present within the city including physical and digital infrastructure and other assets such as skills, educational infrastructures and quality of life factors (including property and housing). In addition, it is vital that ease of movement within and around the City is maximised, in order to facilitate the indigenous creation of economic value. Enhancement of existing public transport services and networks is an important factor here.

There is much debate around the role that Plymouth Airport plays in driving the economy of the City. According to a recent report by York Aviation, Plymouth City Airport could grow to be handling just over 1 million passengers a year by 2030, based on meeting the needs of the local market. The key issue for the airport is the length of its runway. Whilst the existing runway length is adequate for current operations and would accommodate some growth of the route network within the UK and near Europe using current aircraft types, these aircraft are gradually being replaced by larger aircraft which require a longer runway¹.

Connected Centres

A key priority for the City's economy is to ensure complementary growth and development of the main economic nodes across the City. As well as appropriate connectivity between centres, it is also vital that each key centre individually has a number of components which can lead to improved economic performance. These components include high quality, flexible business space, appropriate industrial and employment land, a high quality and diverse housing offer, as well as other service and amenity requirements.

¹ York Aviation (2005), *Plymouth Airport Study*

There are a number of key challenges and priorities with regard to Plymouth's main economic centres:

- The creation of a **bi-polar city economy**, comprising the City Centre and Derriford, must be fully enabled to maximise the economic potential of the City. This will require a number of key elements including:
 - Effective **transport access and linkage** between the key economic nodes, especially rapid and regular public transport infrastructure. The A38 eastern access corridor into and out of Plymouth should be given particular attention. It is imperative that the main growth areas of the City – in both employment and residential terms – have the requisite transport and connectivity structures to ensure long term sustainability and maximum economic impact;
 - Guaranteeing that the two key nodes are fully connected to the other main employment and residential locations of the City is vital, thus maximising ease of access for all communities to business and employment sites.
- In the longer term the development of further nodes of development to complement the bi-polar economy at Langage/Sherford and elsewhere in the city.
- Ensuring that new **knowledge based employment** growth is not restricted to only outlying locations and that infrastructure is available within the City Centre and waterfront areas, especially, to enable a complementary growth of certain knowledge based activities (especially business services); **retaining waterside employment sites** will be critical to achieving these aims.
- The proposals outlined within the **MBM Vision** for the Plymouth produced by architect David Mackay saw major opportunities for the City Centre and areas linked to it. It is imperative to the future of the City, economically, that the Vision for Plymouth is realised, especially in the context of diversifying physical uses within the City Centre. The establishment of a multi-functioning city centre is an important prerequisite to Plymouth reaching its full potential as a key economic location within the UK with significant complementary development at Derriford.
- The City needs to develop a meaningful **office accommodation offer**. The current lack of modern offices acts as a considerable disincentive to possible inward investment, especially in high value added business services. It is likely that potential investors are completely bypassing Plymouth and moving onto other areas that are able to provide accommodation that comes closer to meeting their needs.
- Stakeholders across the City must continue to lobby for **improved connectivity** between Plymouth and other key national and international centres. Whilst economic growth can be engendered in part through embedding the benefits of locally driven endogenous growth, this must not occur in isolation of any possible improvements to connectivity that might be sought and achieved;
- The ability of Plymouth to function as a self-contained economic entity requires considerable investment in **digital infrastructure**. Stakeholders must ensure that businesses operating in the City are able to take advantage of the most advanced ICT and related networks and that lack of this type of infrastructure does not impede business growth and diversification.

As part of the development of effective digital infrastructure, it is also vital that businesses across the City are supported in being able to **take up** and **utilise** this type of infrastructure. Awareness raising and training for business operators, managers and the workforce more generally is an important component in ensuring that digital connectivity works to the best advantage of the City.
- In addition, the development of knowledge based economic activity will necessitate an infrastructure conducive to the **incubation, development and growth** of this type of activity. In particular, the development of office and other premises (e.g. laboratory or studio spaces) that are flexible and affordable, is vital to this process.
- The City's public and private stakeholders must do more to improve the **housing** offer available. The future of the City as a diverse, knowledge based economic entity with a much larger population, depends on being able to draw in significant numbers of highly skilled individuals.

Although the City clearly has an outstanding environmental ‘offer’ that this group may require, it needs to develop a better mix of high quality housing. There are a number of recent new developments of high quality residential apartments and flats across Plymouth, but there is a lack of new high quality family sized housing in central areas of the city. In addition, diversity within the residential property offer must encompass increased provision of affordable housing in appropriate locations, in order to maximise the availability of skills and access to employment opportunities.

- In terms of **employment land** located in Plymouth, it is considered that current provision of employment land, as set out in the Structure Plan, is higher than that necessary to accommodate future employment growth². The key issue here is to ensure that the appropriate amount of employment land and floorspace is provided in the right locations to meet future employment need. In particular, there is a need to manage the large quantity of employment land allocated in outlying areas around the edges of the City, versus a lack of employment land provision currently in the City Centre and waterfront areas that is more likely to attract investors in target growth sectors. Some consideration should be given to release of sites considered unsuitable for future employment to facilitate wider regeneration objectives. The Baker Associates Employment Land Review suggests land at St Budeaux bypass, Wakeham’s Quarry and Honicknowle are unlikely to attract employment development due to site constraints.
- The economic and physical development of Plymouth must be undertaken in a manner that does not compromise the **environmental quality** of the City and its environs. Indeed, the environmental amenities of the City must, as far as possible, be enhanced through economic development activities in order to ensure a sustainable outcome. As such, careful consideration must be given to efficient use of energy and wherever possible investigation of green energy sources, as well as a sustainable approaches to waste disposal. Issues of flood risk must also feature in economic development plans, especially around any planned developments for the Millbay area.

Infrastructure & Access

COMPONENTS

The key objectives falling within this theme area are:

- Continue implementation of the **Vision for Plymouth**;
- Ensure complementary and mutually reinforcing economic development between and across all key centres where appropriate, especially the **City Centre** and **Derriford**;
- Develop plans for further nodal employment centres especially at Langage and Sherford;
- Develop early on the physical infrastructure required to attract investment in key target sectors, in particular, high-spec **office accommodation** and appropriately located **employment land**;
- **Protect and retain key waterside employment sites** to facilitate mixed use development and help to create the infrastructure for business development & growth;
- Enhance the quality and diversity of the Plymouth **housing** and accommodation offer;
- Improve **connectivity** between Plymouth and other key centres while maximised ease of access within the City itself.

² Baker Associates, *Plymouth City Council Employment Land Review*, November 2005