

# Plymouth City Centre Development Study

## Executive Summary

### Introduction

GVA, working with NEW Masterplanning and Asset Heritage Consulting, have been commissioned by Plymouth City Council to prepare a study for Plymouth city centre. This study will be used to inform the preparation of the Plymouth Plan and incorporates an assessment of the:

- o health of the city centre;
- o urban design and heritage assets of the centre, including its development since the publication of the post-war plan for reconstruction;
- o the current and future demand for land uses in and around the city centre; and
- o the opportunities for the future development of the city centre.

This is an executive summary of the findings of the study, concentrating upon the key characteristics of the city centre and the opportunities which exist for the future.

### Plymouth City Centre

The character and appearance of the Plymouth city centre is dominated by the post-war reconstruction plan prepared by Sir Patrick Abercrombie. The broad layout of the plan was implemented and has been retained to this day, although there are certain elements of the plan which were never realised. The city centre is one of the largest and most popular shopping destinations in the South West of England and has, like most centres across the country, suffered as a result of the recent economic downturn. However, the city centre has benefitted from the introduction of the Drake Circus shopping centre and provides a good range of shops and services. This study has found that the city centre has many challenges and opportunities for the future. These are:

- o Land uses:
  - Retail uses. Building upon the success of Drake Circus there remains an opportunity to attract new retailers to the city centre. In some cases, this may be over the medium to longer term and the core retail area in the centre will concentrate itself to the east of Armada Way, leading to a rationalisation of space to the west.
  - Leisure uses. The city centre has historically had comparatively low levels of leisure uses, although there is clear and growing demand for new uses such



as a cinema and further food and drink uses. The ability to capture this interest will be of key importance to the future of the city centre.

- Residential. Increasing the amount of residential uses in the city centre has the potential to increase the vibrancy and vitality of the city centre. At present, limited residential accommodation is available and there is an opportunity to create a new community within the city centre.
- Office uses. The city centre remains a very important location for office uses in Plymouth and should continue to be promoted as such. A key opportunity will be for the City Council to return part of its office function to the city centre following a temporary relocation elsewhere.
- Educational uses. The University and the College of Art & Design continue to make a significant contribution to the health of the city centre, through the job opportunities that they create and their contribution to vitality levels across the centre. There remains the potential for these institutions to grow in the future and the city centre should try and capture this investment. There is also the potential for student accommodation to form part of an expanded mix of uses across the city centre.

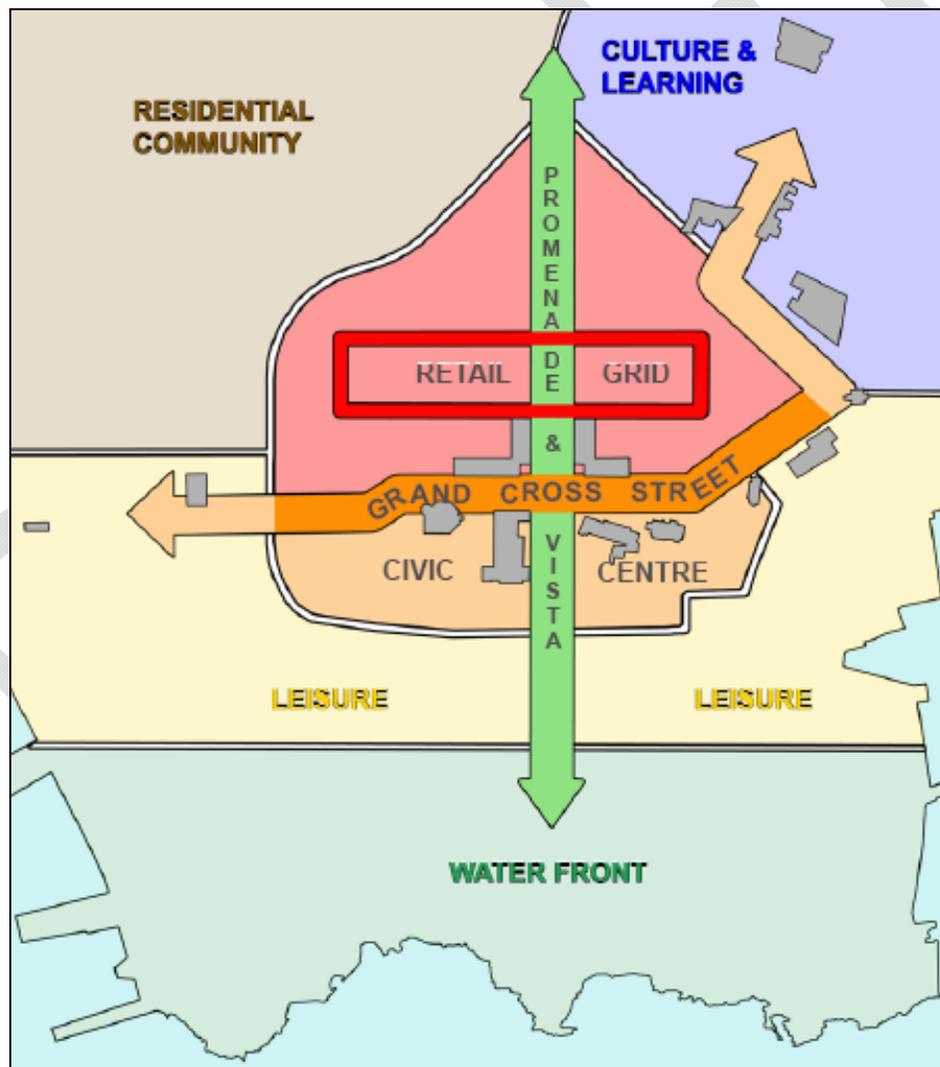
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## Future Opportunities for the City Centre

### *Plymouth's heritage and the Abercrombie central precinct*

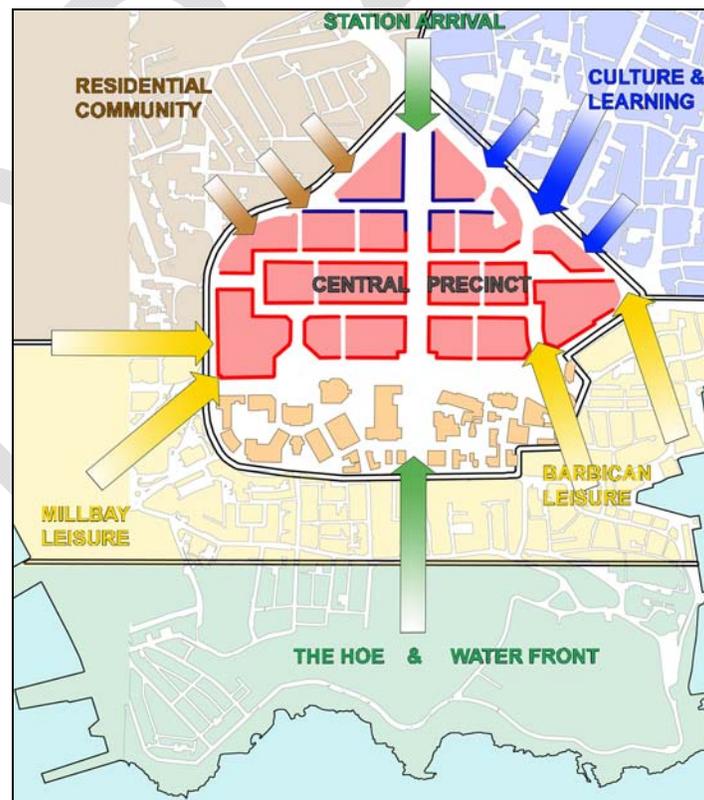
A unique characteristic of Plymouth city centre is its history, including the post-war precinct planned by Abercrombie and Watson. This uniqueness should be celebrated, maintained and enhanced, including retention of the core principles of the post-war plans alongside opportunities for improvement. This is shown in the Strategic Vision diagram below, which explains the key land use areas in the context of the iconic north-south route of Armada Way and the opportunity to provide a new civic and cultural route through the centre.



## Character Areas

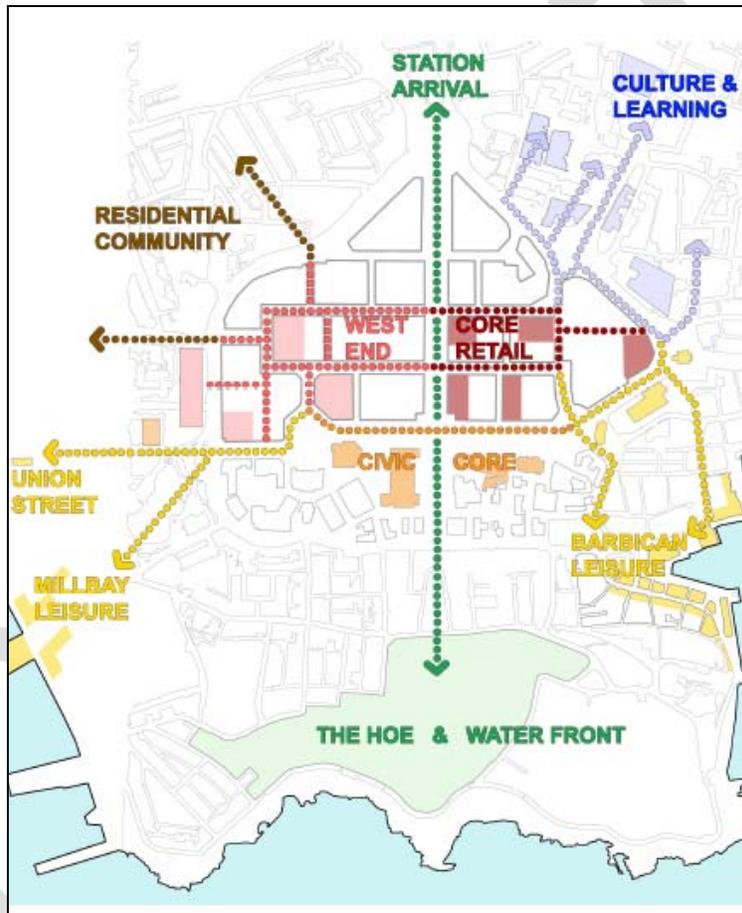
Within this Strategic Vision, the study recommends a number of key character areas for the city centre. These both respect the post-war vision for the city centre and show how the centre (and surrounding area) must evolve to respond to trends in the property market. This is shown in the Character Area diagram below which shows how land uses will fit in with the Strategic Vision and the block structure of the centre:

- The core **retail** area in the city centre will be concentrated to the east of Armada Way, focused around the eastern parts of Royal Parade, New George Street and Cornwall Street. To the west of Armada Way, the retail function will change to more of the local retail character with more local independent provision mixed with other land uses.
- The influence of **education and learning**, via the University and College of Art, will continue to grow on the eastern edge of the city centre. The contribution of this area will grow with new development and better linkages with the adjacent core retail area.
- There is considerable potential for the city centre as a **leisure destination**. This will be through the encouragement of new leisure uses within and adjacent to the city centre and also through better linkages with Millbay and the Barbican.



## ovement and Linkages

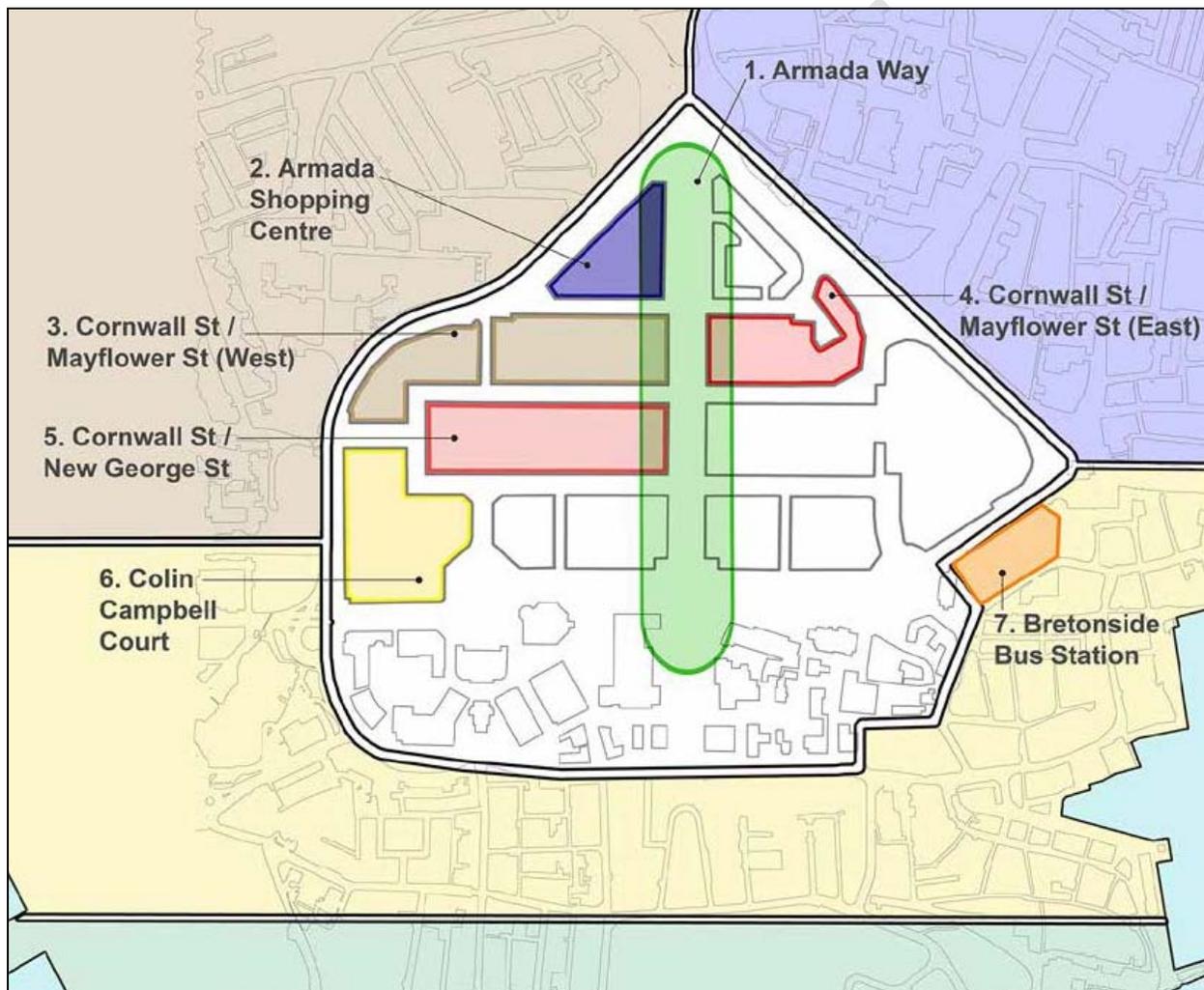
In order to make the city centre a more successful and accessible place to live, work and visit, opportunities exist to improve movement and linkages. The Destination and Routes diagram below shows the key routes associated with each of the key land use destinations in and around the city centre, set in the context of the iconic north to south Armada Way boulevard.



The key areas of enhancement include: Armada Way, which remains the central spine of the city centre; more north-south routes through the blocks separating New George Street, Cornwall Street and Mayflower Street; better links to Millbay and the Barbican; and, to the University and College of Art.

## Key Opportunity Areas

Whilst there is the need to conserve and enhance the post-war grid layout and the important buildings along part of Royal Parade and Armada Way, the city centre study has identified the following key opportunity areas shown in the diagram below.



1. **Armada Way.** An iconic feature of the city centre, although the ambition of the post-war plan has not been realised and has been affected through interventions over time. Opportunities exist for an improved sense of enclosure, enhanced public realm and better views along the street.
2. **Armada Centre.** The Armada Centre now lies at the periphery of the retail area and, as a consequence, has the potential for change in the future. This potential

is reinforced by the poor quality of the existing building. It is recommended that planning policy recognises this potential and works towards a framework for redevelopment should the retail use of this site start to diminish in the future.

3. **Cornwall Street / Mayflower Street (west) – The West End.** These blocks, along with Cornwall Street / New George Street (west), offers significant opportunity for change and this change will take advantage of the declining retail role of this area. Whilst retail will continue to play an important role, there is scope to introduce new uses such as leisure, food & drink, residential and student accommodation uses. The actual scope to introduce new uses will be dependent on the need to use this area for a relocated coach station and for large-scale car parking provision. Given the scale of this block, opportunities for north-south connections should be taken, along with an improvement to views along these streets which form a central part of the Abercrombie grid and linkages to the surrounding leisure and residential areas.
4. **Cornwall Street / Mayflower Street (east) – The Core Retail Area.** This area remains the core retail area and the focus for new retail development in the city centre. Land should be safeguarded for redevelopment which provides new high quality retail units. However, due to the opportunities offered by an increase in height, in order to improve enclosure to the street, new uses can be included on the upper floors and these will include leisure, food & drink and residential uses (including student accommodation). These uses can take advantage of better permeability through this area via the introduction of north-south connections, whilst there should be an improvement to views along the streets which form a central part of the post-war grid. However, the ultimate scale of development in this area will be influenced by the need to retain car parking provision in this block and therefore further masterplanning should take place alongside a parking strategy. Linkages between this area and the learning district and the Barbican/Sutton Harbour will be improved.
5. **Cornwall Street / New George Street (west).** Whilst retail will continue to play an important role, there is scope to introduce new uses such as leisure, food & drink, residential and student accommodation uses. This scope is reinforced by the opportunity for an increase in building heights throughout this area, whilst respecting the setting of the Pannier Market. Given the scale of this block, opportunities for north-south connections should be taken, along with an improvement to views along these streets which form a central part of the Abercrombie grid and linkages to the surrounding leisure and residential areas.
6. **Colin Campbell Court.** This area, which is part of the wider west end area, remains a priority area for change and offers the opportunity to provide a better linkage between the city centre and Millbay. This area is suitable for a range of uses (residential, hotel, leisure, student accommodation, workspace), although it



is unlikely to be able to provide large scale high street-style retailing. Instead, amongst this mix of uses, there is an opportunity for a supermarket in this location of the city centre. This opportunity should be fully investigated as it may be the only opportunity to provide a supermarket in the city centre beyond the existing store in the Armada Centre. The key design principles for this area are: the opportunity to increase building heights and the sense of enclosure along Union Street, Western Approach and Royal Parade, along with the need to enhance the setting of the Pannier Market.

7. **Bretonside Bus Station.** The short to medium term redevelopment of this site is now a real possibility, with the potential for this site to add to the attractiveness of the city centre and provide better linkages to the Barbican.

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