CONTENTS

1. Introduction .......................................................................................................................... 2

2. Historic Development of Plymouth: Key Themes and Character Areas ......................... 3
   Introduction ......................................................................................................................... 3
   Theme 1: Geology and Topography .................................................................................... 3
   Theme 2: Historic Movement Routes ................................................................................. 7
   Theme 3: Historic Growth ................................................................................................. 10
   Theme 4: Plymouth and the Sea ....................................................................................... 10
   Theme 5: The Influence of the Navy and the Military ....................................................... 14
   Theme 6: Abercrombie’s Plan for Plymouth ...................................................................... 18
   Historic Character Areas ................................................................................................. 23

3. Planning and Regeneration Context .................................................................................. 27
   The Planning Context ....................................................................................................... 27
   The Regeneration Context ............................................................................................... 29

4. Development Opportunities and Issues ........................................................................... 31
   Heritage and the New Planning Framework .................................................................... 31
   Improving the Heritage Knowledge Base ....................................................................... 31
   Geology and Topography ............................................................................................... 31
   Movement Routes ........................................................................................................... 31
   Historic Growth .............................................................................................................. 31
   Plymouth and the Sea ...................................................................................................... 32
   The Influence of the Navy and Military ........................................................................... 32
   Abercrombie’s Post-war Replanning of Plymouth ............................................................ 33

5. Next steps .......................................................................................................................... 34
   Embedding Plymouth’s Heritage in the Planning Framework ........................................... 34
   Improving the Heritage Knowledge Base ....................................................................... 34
   Reviewing Existing Designations .................................................................................... 35

7. Conclusion .......................................................................................................................... 36

8. Sources .............................................................................................................................. 37
   Maps ................................................................................................................................. 37
   Historic Maps .................................................................................................................. 37
   Historical Sources ......................................................................................................... 37
   Planning and Regeneration Sources .............................................................................. 38
1. INTRODUCTION

In August 2004 Alan Baxter & Associates was commissioned by English Heritage South West Region to undertake a Rapid Urban Character Study of Plymouth. The Study comes at an important time for the city and its heritage. The City Council is in the process of drawing up its first Local Development Framework, which will replace the current Local Plan, and is considering which parts of the city are likely to require Area Action Plans. Concurrently, urban regeneration is high on the agenda, with a reduction in size of the Naval Dockyard and considerable resources earmarked for a number of major projects.

The aim of this Rapid Urban Study is to demonstrate how an understanding of the city’s heritage can make a positive contribution to future development and regeneration. ‘Heritage’ is here meant in its widest sense: not just the city’s contribution to future development and regeneration. Knowledge of the city’s heritage can make a positive contribution to future development and regeneration. Understanding how the past has shaped the form of the city today allows the definition of its historic character, as well as the identification of historic strengths and weaknesses, which regeneration should either build upon or redress. Seeing the individual surviving sites and buildings within this wider context allows the identification of those which epitomise the city’s unique historic character and which should be used to strengthen its future. The Study sees the historic environment not as self-contained and backward-looking but as an integral part of a regenerated Plymouth.

The Rapid Urban Character Study will inform the emerging City Design Strategy. This strategy will provide a set of citywide design principles and policies to guide development in the city. This is to promote investment and ensure that all development is of the highest quality and contributes towards the achievement of the city’s vision. The design principles will in turn inform the aims, objectives and policies of the core strategy of the Local Development Framework, the main delivery mechanism for the city’s vision. The design principles will in turn inform the aims, objectives and policies of the core strategy of the Local Development Framework, the main delivery mechanism for the city’s vision.

The methodology of the Study follows, in broad terms, those pioneered in the Cornwall and Scilly Urban Survey and Alan Baxter & Associates’ Rapid Characterisation and Scoping Report on Gloucester, but has been tailored to meet the particular circumstances of Plymouth and the available resources and timescale. It does not attempt to retell the history of Plymouth, but rather to identify certain key themes where the city’s character has been particularly influenced (for good or bad) by its past and where, therefore, it should be addressed in plans for the future. These themes are:

- Geology and topography
- Movement routes
- Historic growth
- Plymouth and the sea
- The influence of the Navy and Military
- Abercrombie’s post-war replanning of Plymouth (particularly its suburbs)

Analysis of these themes leads to a first definition of the different historic character areas which make up today’s city, ranging from the medieval core around Sutton Harbour to the post-war suburbs. Archaeology has not had a major influence on the development of these character areas and so has not been analysed in detail.

Having identified these character areas, Section 3 of the report sets out the planning and regeneration context. It is essential that the opportunity, offered by the new Local Development Framework, Area Action Plans and regeneration initiatives, is taken to ensure that Plymouth’s heritage realises its full potential in the city’s future. Section 4 analyses the opportunities and issues which the city’s historic character presents to those planning its future. Section 5 outlines what we believe to be the steps necessary to allow them to be successfully incorporated. These range from the further analysis of specific areas of the city to recommendations on the role of the historic environment in the Local Development Framework and Area Action Plans to deeper studies of specific areas or themes.

The boundary of the Study Area follows the line of the Palmerston Forts, which ring Plymouth, from Staddon Heights to the east, passing around the north of the city, to end on the Torpoint peninsula. As Fig.1 shows, this is by no means the same as the boundary of today’s city, which has not only expanded to the north but has also taken in historic settlements of Plymstock and Plympton. As argued later, there are strong arguments for extending the current study to cover this larger area. It is also worth noting at the outset that the post-war city centre has not been considered in detail in this report. It has recently been the subject of a number of studies, notably that by Jeremy Gould. The aim of this report is to understand the wider context of Plymouth’s historical development.

Fig.1: Map showing study area within the city boundary
2. HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT OF PLYMOUTH: KEY THEMES AND CHARACTER AREAS

Introduction
The history of Plymouth is well studied and widely available. There is no point in simply repeating it here. The purpose of this Study is to understand the city's historic character and to show how it has affected the way in which Plymouth works (or does not work) today. To do this, we have first sought to identify certain key themes and these are described in the following sections. Analysis of these themes, and of their impact on the development of Plymouth, leads in turn to a preliminary identification of different areas of historic character, which continue to influence the city today. In the time available for this Study, it has not been possible to investigate these themes and character areas exhaustively, so many of the recommendations in Section 5 concern their further exploration and analysis.

Theme 1: Geology and Topography
The underlying geology of Plymouth is largely a series of layers of sedimentary rock dating from the Devonian period (Fig.5). There are numerous faults in the rock which form a criss-cross pattern, with fault lines running roughly from east to west and from the north-west to the south-east. These faults are the path of least resistance for water flowing across the rock, and have been by exploited rivers, such as the Rivers Plym and Tamar, which have eroded the rock to create valleys. Elsewhere, lesser streams have cut less deep, but still topographically significant channels. The result is a landscape that could be compared to a bar of chocolate, with valleys dividing the area of the city into a series of roughly rectangular, steep sided plateaux (Fig.6).

Igneous rock also underlies parts of Plymouth; this rock is harder and more resistant to erosion, so now forms the higher ground in the north of the city and Drake’s Island (which is a volcanic plug).

At the end of the Ice Age the River Plym, River Tamar and other rivers and streams carried large quantities of glacial melt-water, which the carved steep-sided valleys and created the dramatic, hilly topography that now characterises Plymouth. Natural harbours were created where these rivers and streams joined the sea (at Sutton Harbour, Millbay and Stonehouse). The sea-level rose after the Ice Age, flooding the Plym and Tamar valleys to create a drowned valley system (or ria). These drowned valleys mean that, although the harbour appears wide, the approach channel is relatively narrow and winding, passing between Drake’s Island and the mainland (Fig.4). As a result it is easy to defend these harbours from attack and this has made Plymouth an obvious place to locate a defensive port.

If the area’s topography created a fine natural harbour and a dramatic landscape inland, it has also been a constraint on the city’s northward expansion. The early settlements clustered on the lower-lying land around the natural harbours and it is very notable that, until the city’s post-war expansion, there were no historic settlements of any size to the north (Fig.14). The hilly topography has also profoundly affected movement patterns (Fig.7).

The extent to which the city’s later expansion took advantage of the topography is variable. The Georgian and Victorian middle class villas and Abercrombie’s suburban settlements are carefully laid out to follow contours and exploit views, but the Victorian and Edwardian terraces and the later post-war council housing completely ignore them.
2. HISTORIC CHARACTER

Fig: 5

GEOLOGY

- Largely sedimentary rock dating from the Devonian period.
- Hard igneous rock forms outcrops to the north of the city and at Drake’s Island (a volcanic plug).
- Faults form a criss-cross pattern which has moulded the topography (see next page).
2. HISTORIC CHARACTER

- Geological fault lines (see previous page) exploited by water courses to create the dramatic topography with roughly rectangular, steep sided plateaux.

- Natural harbours created where the River Plym and Tamar meet the sea.

- The Plym and Tamar valleys are rias (a drowned river system) created when sea-level rose after the Ice Age.
2. HISTORIC CHARACTER

• The dramatic topography restricts movement.

• Roads have been built along the valley floors and hill-top ridges.

• The movement pattern reflects faults in the underlying geology which run east-west and north-south; movement in other directions is difficult.

The hilly relief impedes movement.
Theme 2: Historic Movement Routes

Historically the boat was the most important mode of transport in Plymouth, putting the city within easy reach of London, the rest of Europe and most significantly the Atlantic and the Americas. Plymouth was the first major port when sailing to or from the American colonies (Fig. 8) and as such became a significant city. However, as the importance of sea-transport has declined, Plymouth now finds itself in an isolated position in the UK and Europe (Fig. 10). Having been at the centre of a waterborne movement network, it is now on the fringe of today’s car, lorry and aeroplane based movement networks.

The city’s local movement pattern has been heavily influenced by the topography, which has in general dictated the location of roads. These were generally laid out either along the valley floors or along the ridges of higher ground. The result is a movement pattern which, reflecting the underlying geology, skirts around the natural plateaux and runs generally north-south or east-west. Movement in any other direction is not easy.

Most of the main roads which link Plymouth to its neighbours (Exeter, Tavistock and Penzance) follow historic lines and were completely established by the time of the earliest maps. The major twentieth-century change has been the construction of the A38 (recommended by Abercrombie) which meant that people travelling from Exeter no longer need to enter the city centre on their way to Cornwall (Fig. 11). Given the weight of traffic carried by this road, bypassing of the city was inevitable, but it further emphasises that, with the decline of seaborne movement, Plymouth is not on a natural route to anywhere. It has become a destination (Fig. 9).

**Fig. 8: Movement Routes: Global historic movement routes**

**Fig. 9: Movement Routes: Concept of through-routes applied to Plymouth**

---

**Key**

- Navigational routes
  - Plymouth’s location in the UK meant that it was a significant city while water-borne transport prevailed.
  - Plymouth is the first major port on the western approaches to the UK when sailing across the Atlantic from the Americas.
  - Sea transport also historically linked Plymouth with the Continent, the Mediterranean, Africa and beyond.

**Abercrombie suburbs**

The Abercrombie suburbs were positioned off the main movement routes and were not stopping-off routes into the centre.

---

**Fig. 11: Movement Routes: Through-routes applied to Plymouth**

Plymouth is no longer on a significant through-route, but is at the end of a road. It has become a destination in itself.
- As the significance of sea-transport declined Plymouth has become more isolated in the UK.
- A-roads and not motorways connect Plymouth with the rest of the country.
- There are flights from Plymouth airport to London (Gatwick), Manchester, Leeds and Jersey.
The majority of main roads were laid out by the 19th-century.

Historic reliance on water-borne transport means that there was poor interconnection between roads.

Today people travelling from the rest of the UK to Cornwall bypass the city, whereas historically they would have entered the city centre.
Theme 3: Historic Growth
Originally Plymouth was three separate towns (Fig. 14):

Sutton Harbour is probably the oldest settlement of the three, with evidence of Bronze Age habitation. Sutton Harbour eclipsed Plympton as the first port on the River Plym in the early medieval period. The River Plym became silted up as a result of ‘tin-streaming’ (due to tin-production upriver) and Plympton was no longer a viable port. As a result Sutton Harbour experienced an economic surge; in 1211 the name ‘Plymouth’ was first recorded, meaning mouth of the River Plym. Sutton Harbour has retained its original character as a historic port.

Stonehouse dates from the Anglo-Saxon period, but its name may derive from a Roman ‘stone house’ which stood nearby. The history of Stonehouse is not well-documented; it was the lesser of the three towns. The area historically has naval associations; the Royal William Victualling Yard provisioned warships from Stonehouse and the Royal Marines Barracks are still situated in the area.

Devonport has always been a naval base, and was established in 1691-6 in response to the new French dock at Brest. ‘Plymouth Dock’, as it was originally known, grew considerably over the next 250 years and a town was established to house the workers. In 1836 ‘Devonport’ was granted its own town charter. The prevailing character of Devonport today remains as a naval dockyard, with some good eighteenth- and nineteenth-century buildings, cut off from its associated settlement by a high and largely impenetrable wall.

In 1815 Union Street was built joining the three towns by road (Fig. 14a). Development spread along and northwards from Union Street and by the twentieth-century the three towns had coalesced into a single place (Fig. 15). The construction of the railways also contributed to this cohesion and there was no views of the sea from the present centre. This lack of visibility was also reinforced by the tall walls which shut off the naval dockyards up the Tamar. The only place where there was a direct link was at the Hoe, though this has its origins not in the citizens’ wish to gaze upon the sea but in the Barbican’s need for an open field of fire.

This pattern of segregation between the city and sea is now reversing. The decline of the docks (commercial and naval) is releasing areas of land on the waterfront. At the same time, the sea is now seen not as highway but as an amenity and (for yachtsmen) a source of leisure. As the rapid sale of the Royal William Yard luxury apartments has shown, people now want to have a sea view and are prepared to pay for it. This represents a fundamental change in attitude, with potentially profound consequences for the city.

Theme 4: Plymouth and the Sea
As discussed above, the sea is Plymouth’s raison d’être, its principal historic movement route and the prime source of wealth and work for its inhabitants. As such, it was never seen as an amenity or a place of beauty. It was the equivalent of today’s main road, busy, noisy and dirty, but essential. The shore was therefore lined with the naval and commercial docks, while the city behind looked away from these industrial areas and the sea. The 18th and 19th middle class housing was generally situated on the landward fringe of the city, on the higher ground to the north (for example at Stoke and Manamead). The lack of connection between the city and the sea was reinforced by the topography, particularly by the ridge of high ground which forms the Hoe, and as a result there are no views of the sea from the present centre. This lack of visibility was also reinforced by the tall walls which shut off the naval dockyards up the Tamar. The only place where there was a direct link was at the Hoe, though this has its origins not in the citizens’ wish to gaze upon the sea but in the Barbican’s need for an open field of fire.

Beyond the city lay a series of small hamlets (Egg Buckland and Honicknowl), small estates (Manadon and Ham) and scattered farms, reflecting the fundamental barrier of the topography to human settlement.
2. HISTORIC CHARACTER

1643

- Sutton Harbour is the oldest of the original three towns and was originally walled.
- Sutton Harbour eclipsed Plympton in the medieval period when the River Plym silted up. It retains the character of a historic port.
- Stonehouse dates from the Anglo-Saxon period.
- A castle predated the Citadel which was built on the same site in 1666.
- Villages such as Ham, Eggbuckland and Compton have medieval origins although little evidence remains of this today.

1820

- Devonport was established in 1691-6 in response to the French naval dock at Brest.
- Plymouth was at this time three separate towns based around natural harbours: Sutton Harbour, Stonehouse and Devonport.
- Union Street was built in 1815 and precipitated the gradual amalgamation of the three towns.

PLYMOUTH CHARACTERISATION STUDY

HISTORIC GROWTH: 1643 AND 1820
2. HISTORIC CHARACTER

HISTORIC GROWTH: 1881 AND 1933

- The railways further contributed to the amalgamation of the three towns.
- Middle class suburbs were built on the outskirts of the towns at Mannamead, Mutley and Ford.
- In 1881 there were no sizable villages beyond the city - just hamlets and farms - which reflects the difficult topography.
- Palmerston built a series of defensive forts along the coast and surrounding Plymouth between the 1860s and 1880s.

1881

- The railways also led to ribbon development to the east and west of the city.
- In 1914 a referendum found in favour of the official amalgamation of the three towns.
- In 1928 Plymouth was granted city status.
2. HISTORIC CHARACTER

Bomb damage and reconstruction

- Plymouth was severely bombed during the Second World War because of the naval base.
- Abercrombie’s reconstruction of the city centre and parts of Devonport created a new street pattern.
- Elsewhere the city was reconstructed using the historic street pattern.
- Abercrombie was also responsible for a number of new settlements to the north of the city which were built to accommodate people rendered homeless by the bombing.

2004

- The city has now engulfed the Abercrombie settlements as well as older hamlets and farms, which were not sufficiently large to lend character to new settlements.
- Fig. 36 illustrates the age of different parts of Plymouth, and uses this to define the character areas which make up the city (fig.35).
Theme 5: The Influence of the Navy and the Military

The topography of the area and proximity to the Atlantic and America made Plymouth a natural place to create a naval base. As described in the section on Theme 1, the flooded valley system (or ria) created a series of natural harbours with an inflexible navigational approach (Fig.4). The approach is surrounded by steep-sided hills or cliffs which provided an ideal position for guns to defend the city from any enemy ships audacious enough to attempt to sail into the harbour. As the major western port in Britain, Plymouth occupied an important defensive position, which controlled the Atlantic approaches to the UK and northern Europe. The fact that the Spanish Armada had to sail within sight of Plymouth and, later, that Devonport was founded specifically in response to the new French dock at Brest, exemplifies the significance of the city for the UK’s naval defence.

The naval port at Plymouth required protection from its landward side; the fear was that enemy ships would land further along the coast and attack the dockyard from the rear. In the medieval period, Sutton Harbour was protected by a city wall. This wall was still in evidence in maps dating from the seventeenth-century; however, there were also further Civil War fortifications in a ring around the harbour at Mount Batten, Stonehouse, at Pennycomequick, at (what is now) Mutley and at Lipson. In the 1860s Palmerston (the British Prime Minister) ordered that a further series of fortifications be built to protect Plymouth from France; these forts were built even further to the north of the city (Fig.18). This pattern, where fortifications were moved progressively farther from the city, was partly due to the expansion of Plymouth and improvements in the firing range of the artillery. It is also due to the topography: the general east-west alignment of the high ground north of the city helped the establishment of a strong defensive line, and it is no accident that the Palmerston forts are positioned on the ridge of high ground which forms a natural boundary to the north of the city.

Fig.17: 1643 map of Plymouth showing civil war fortifications
2. Historic Character

Key
- Medieval and C16th fortifications
- Civil War fortifications (1643)
- Palmerston Forts (based on 1868 map)

0-30m
30-50m
50-75m
75-100m
100-130m
130m+

- Natural harbours and an easily defendable navigational approach meant Plymouth was a natural place to locate a naval base.

- Fortifications form a ring around the harbour to defend it from the landward side.

- Fortifications moved progressively far from the city taking advantage of the topography.
2. HISTORIC CHARACTER

- Naval properties occupy a significant amount of land in the city.
- The security of these properties is protected with high walls, which have affected the character of the city—so reminiscent of impenetrable colleges in Oxford and Cambridge.
- Navy kept land around bases clear.
- Navy discouraged development as commercial port.
- Navy historically largest employer, which has influenced social mix and housing stock (which was predominantly working-class).
The purpose of Palmerston’s forts was to protect the naval dockyard. The effect of the navy on almost every aspect of the historic character of central Plymouth has been profound:

- The dockyard itself takes up a significant area of the city, cutting it off from much of the waterfront (see Theme 4). In addition, many other naval institutions (the Royal William Victualling Yard, the Royal Marine Barracks and Royal Naval Hospital, to name but some) occupy substantial plots. What they all have in common is a need for security which results in them being hemmed in by high walls. The effect of this has been to create a city of impenetrable enclosures, which paradoxically is reminiscent of Oxford or Cambridge with its college walls and cloistered communities.

- As a defensive measure, the navy kept ground close to its bases clear from development. The Hoe was traditionally kept clear to maintain the security of the Citadel, and a ‘killing area’ to the east of Devonport was kept bare and is visible on historic maps dating from (at least) 1830 to 1930. A significant number of the city’s open spaces have their origin in this defensive requirement.

- The Admiralty has influenced the overall development of Plymouth. It discouraged its development as a commercial port; for example, in 1897 it quashed a bill to deepen the Cattewater and to create a new commercial dock complex. In the immediately post-war period, its plans (never executed) to extend the Dockyard over the commercial centre of Devonport was one factor in persuading Abercrombie to concentrate the commercial activity of the new city in one single location.

- Most significantly, the presence of the navy has had a profound impact on the socio-economic character of Plymouth. The naval docks have always been the largest employer, and hence Plymouth has traditionally been a working-class city, with a relative small middle-class. This is reflected in the current housing stock, which is predominantly either small scale Victorian terraces or council estates, with only small pockets of grander, middle-class housing, for example in Stoke and Mannnamead.

- The effect of the decline in the dockyard and a possible withdrawal of military presence is likely to have a significant impact on the future development (or decline) of the city.
Theme 6: Abercrombie’s Plan for Plymouth

Background – World War Two

Pre-war Plymouth was a city notorious for its overcrowded and insanitary housing (said to be worse than the East End of London) and for having the worst traffic congestion in the UK. During the decade before the Second World War, the City Council had started to take steps to improve conditions, notably with the construction of some model housing estates, including one on Garden City principles, at Mount Gould to the east of the city.

Plymouth’s pre-eminence as a naval base inevitably made the city a target for Luftwaffe bombs in the Second World War. Plymouth was bombed fifty-nine times during the course of the war; 1,172 people were killed; the city centre was decimated: two shopping centres, two guildhalls, a theatre, six hotels and eight cinemas were destroyed. Across the city 26 schools, 41 churches, 100 pubs and 3,754 houses were destroyed. A further 18,000 buildings were left in need of major repair. Plymouth was one of the most severely bomb-ravaged city in the country.

Patrick Abercrombie was already planning the reconstruction of London and was an obvious choice when the decision was made to rebuild Plymouth. The Plan for Plymouth (The Plan) was written during the War (published in 1943), at the same time as the County of London Plan, and is testament to the wartime spirit of defiance. It is also a remarkable and thoughtful work, based on a careful analysis of the city and its hinterland. The Plan also addressed the city’s pre-war problems, such as traffic congestion, lack of public space and overcrowded, insanitary housing.
To address the pre-war problem of overcrowding, Abercrombie proposed spreading the population out over a larger area.

The density would decrease in bands with distance from the centre.

Abercrombie proposed that a series of local centres be created, each to serve a population of 6,000 to 10,000 within 10 to 15 minutes walking distance. This is similar to the Urban Task Force recommendations that each neighbourhood should have a community centre, shops, post office, pub, school and doctor within 600m of each home (approximately 7½ minutes walking distance) to serve a population of 7,500 to 10,000. Similar neighbourhoods are also defined in the development of new towns.

The local centres would ideally include a school, church, library, swimming pool, cinema, restaurant or hotel and some shops.

The settlements would take their character from existing villages.

The suburban settlements were to be located away from the main movement routes and divided from each other by green belt.
The Plan
Abercrombie’s Plan for Plymouth covered all parts of the city, as well as its agricultural hinterland, but its impact has been most profound in two areas: the city centre and the suburbs. In the centre, where bomb damage was most intense, he decided to concentrate all commercial, retail, administrative and cultural activities in a single new centre, with an entirely new street grid. These proposals for the new city centre have been much studied, most recently by Jeremy Gould. This analysis therefore focuses on the lesser known, but equally radical proposals for the suburbs. Abercrombie proposed a redistribution of the population over a wider area, in bands of decreasing density. The aim of this was to address the pre-war problem of overcrowding (Fig.27). He proposed to create a series of local centres which would serve this suburban area (Fig.27). Each local centre would provide amenities for a population of 6,000 to 10,000 people living within 10 to 15 minutes walking distance. The recommended catchment size for a primary school was 6,000 people, and Abercrombie recommended that ideally these self-contained settlements would include not only a school, but also a church, a library, they would take their character from existing villages. They were also located away from main movement routes, as Abercrombie was keen to separate vehicle movement from areas of human settlement.

The Implementation – did it work?
The initial efforts necessarily focused on the decimated city centre. The 1944 Town and Country Planning Act allowed for the compulsory purchase of bomb-damaged land, and central Plymouth was the first Declaratory Order Area. The city centre was rebuilt largely following Abercrombie’s Plan, with broad, symmetrical beaux-arts boulevards and zoned land use dividing the area up into cultural, administrative and retail quarters.

Some suburban settlements were also built following Abercrombie’s Plan, including Ham, Pennycross, King’s Tamerton, Efford and Ernesettle (Fig.32). These settlements are distinguishable from the surrounding post-war sprawl by their carefully planned form and by the distinctive appearance of the buildings. They often make use of the topography of the area; for example Ernesettle, King’s Tamerton and Pennycross are all situated on the top of hills. Often the houses have been built in a series of concentric circles or rows, following the natural contours of the land, around a school, library or church. The settlements usually contain a central green space and following Abercrombie’s scheme are still separated by greenbelt and inhibit further development of urban sprawl (Fig.32).
2. Historic Character

Abercrombie Settlements and Surviving “Greenbelt”

• City centre rebuilt following Abercrombie’s Plan with broad, symmetrical beaux-arts boulevards and zoned land use.

• Some suburban settlements were also built to Abercrombie’s Plan – Ernesettle, Kings’ Tamerton, Ham, Pennycross and Efford.

• These settlements are divided from the rest of the city by green-belt. The A38 runs through this green-belt, akin to a “road through a park.”

• Ernesettle has been carefully planned to make use of the topography – it is situated on the top of a hill and the roads follow the natural contours of the land.

• There is a school, library and green open space in the middle of the Ernesettle.

• Green-belt divides Ernesettle from the rest of the city.

The drawing incorporates information from the Ordnance Survey which is © Crown Copyright. ABA Licence: AL1000 17547
Explaination – why the Plan failed

In part the Plan was not properly implemented. The Council needed to build houses very quickly to provide homes for the population displaced from bomb-damaged houses and cleared slums (1,500 ‘slum’ houses were cleared by the Council between 1952 and 1962). Planning new estates along Abercrombie’s lines would have taken longer, and in their haste to house people the Council may have thought that it was not a necessity. It is also possible that in the post-war years of austerity, there were financial constraints which limited the planning of new settlements. It is also likely that with the passing of the years, by the 1960s and 1970s the planners had simply forgotten about the 1943 Plan.

Yet, it is probable that even if Abercrombie’s Plan had been properly implemented, the suburbs of Plymouth would be encountering similar problems. The fact that some of the community centres which were properly created following Abercrombie’s guidelines have fallen into disuse and are now derelict is evidence of this. The explanation for this, with the benefit of hindsight, is that a number of Abercrombie’s assumptions were flawed.

Abercrombie misjudged the population densities required to support local services. Today a minimum of 30 houses/hectare is taken as the norm; Abercrombie’s planned for a maximum of 18 houses/hectare. In Abercrombie’s day overcrowding was seen as a significant cause of poor health and poverty, hence his wish to spread houses out to give occupants a maximum of light and space. Nowadays it is low population densities that are seen as problematic and certainly in Plymouth’s suburbs low density has contributed to the decline of local services and communities.

This has been exacerbated by the fact that Abercrombie also misjudged walking distances. Now planners assume that on average people will be prepared to walk for a maximum of 10 minutes to reach a local shop or centre; whereas Abercrombie’s calculations were based on 10-15 minute walking distances. As a result the areas and population served by each local centre was even smaller than he had envisaged.

A further source of current weakness was the decision to locate settlements off main movement routes and far from the city and other urban routes. As already discussed, Plymouth’s topography makes movement difficult at best and there is no doubt that many of the post-war suburbs suffer from their remoteness. They are microcosms of the city as a whole: they are not on a route to anywhere else. It is no accident that the most successful centres (Mutley and the rapidly developing Derriford) lie on routes into the city.

Related to this is Abercrombie’s underestimate of the levels of car ownership and use. He did not think that car ownership would ever reach 16% per person (as it was then in the United States), whereas now 70% of households in Plymouth own a car or van, and 22% own two or more. The increased use of cars means that people do not need to use the local centres, and may not want to, particularly if the walking distance is greater than 10 minutes.

Finally, Abercrombie had intended to use existing places to give individual character to his new neighbourhoods. However, the lack of significant historic settlements on the periphery of Plymouth meant that there were few existing structures from which the new post-war settlements could develop distinctive character. The fact that all the housing was council built and intended for working class occupation further degraded any individuality which the settlements might have had.

In short, there was always a danger that the post-war expansion of Plymouth would fail to establish viable centres of distinctive character. An already flawed situation was only made worse by the continued programme of low density house building, which has produced the monotonous suburban sprawl which gives such a dreary character to much of the city’s northern fringe.
Historic Character Areas

The historical development of Plymouth explains its current urban form:

- The oldest (and frequently the listed) buildings are situated on the low-lying ground around the natural harbours.
- In the nineteenth- and early twentieth-centuries terraces of houses filled the gaps between the old ‘three towns’ (Sutton Harbour, Stonehouse and Devonport) and spread out along the railways. These included important inter-war social housing estates which were concentrated in eastern Plymouth and were built to deal with the pre-war problem of overcrowding.
- Some middle class housing was built on what were then the outskirts, for example at Mannamead.
- Although the navy has provided the city with employment in the dockyards and a fine stock of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century buildings in Stonehouse and Devonport, it has hindered development to an extent and has created an impenetrable townscape or high walls and closed quarters.
- The city was badly bombed in the Second World War; this and Abercrombie’s resulting Plan redefined the city centre.
- Some suburban settlements were also built according to Abercrombie’s Plan, but now form islands of better-planned development in a mass of sprawling, amorphous council estates.
- A ring of nineteenth military forts follow the ridge which forms a natural boundary (along the B3143) to the north of the city.

Fig. 36 maps the different influences which have shaped the appearance of today’s city. As discussed in section 5 (below), further work is required both to extend coverage to the present city boundaries and to refine understanding of the individual character areas, to enable them to be used as an effective tool in planning future development and regeneration.

Fig. 35 maps the character areas which have been formed by the different phases and types of development. These character areas are described below, starting with areas in the north-west of the city, working east and southwards (so that the map is read from top left to bottom right). Character areas marked with an asterisk are priorities for further study, to support Action Area Plans.

Ernesettle*
Abercrombie planned suburban settlement dating from the 1940s or 1950s. Uses its natural setting (next to the Tamerton Lake) and the contours of the land, to set out local authority housing around a community centre which includes a school and library. Still separated from the city by ‘green belt’.

Forts and interconnecting road*
Palmerston commissioned the forts as a defensive measure to protect Plymouth from landward attack and they were constructed in the 1860s. The forts were originally north of the city but have been encompassed by the growth of the city. The road built to link the forts has become a major east-west route, and contributed to ribbon development from the nineteenth-century, although it runs through a band of undeveloped land, often fields or woodland, and has been dubbed ‘the road through a park’. Many of the forts are now derelict and dislocated from the surrounding residential development.

West Park
A late Victorian or Edwardian housing development associated with the main road built to link the Palmerston forts.

Crownhill
Late Victorian or Edwardian ribbon development associated with the junction of two main roads (the main route into the city and the fort road) and possibly the Crownhill fort.

Barne Barton
Post-war infill, predominantly low-density, semi-detached housing built by the navy as family accommodation. The roads follow the natural contours of the land and the settlement includes a school, suggesting a greater adherence to the Abercrombie model than in other post-war settlements.

St Budeaux
A late Victorian or Edwardian settlement, associated with the railway, main road and Tamar Bridge; originally detached from the city, but has been encompassed since.

King’s Tamerton*
Abercrombie planned suburban settlement dating from the 1940s or 1950s. Local authority housing laid out, following the natural contours of the land, around a community centre which includes a school and college. Still separated from the northern suburbs by ‘green belt’.

Egguckland, Hartley Vale, Manadon, Honicknowle and Weston Mill
Post-war suburban expansion, predominantly low-density, semi-detached local authority housing. The roads are less sinuous and have less regard for the natural topography.
Ham and Pennycross*
Abercrombie planned suburban settlements dating from the 1940s or 1950s. Local authority housing laid out, following the natural contours of the land, around a primary school and shop. Settlements still largely separated from each other and the northern suburbs by ‘green belt’.

Devonport Dockyard*
The naval dockyard was established in the late seventeenth-century and has grown northwards in stages. Contains important early nineteenth-century buildings by Foulston. The dock was originally a walled town and to the east the Brickfields was kept clear for defensive purposes, and is now a park.

Keyham, North Prospect, Swilly and Milehouse
Late Victorian and Edwardian expansion, largely high-density terraced housing, which has swallowed an earlier settlement at Ford.

Ford
A Victorian middle-class housing development, originally detached from the city, but has since been encompassed by later development.

Central Park
Central Park was designed by the famous landscape architect, Thomas Lawson, and was laid out as the city grew around it in the 1930s.

Hartley and Peverell
Late Victorian and Edwardian expansion, largely high-density terraced housing.

Higher Compton
Ribbon housing development associated with the main road dating largely from c1880-1933, but with some pockets dating from before 1880.

Lower Compton
Ribbon housing development associated with the railway dating from c1880-1933.

Efford*
Abercrombie planned suburban settlement dating from the 1940s or 1950s. Local authority housing laid out, following the natural contours of the land, around a community centre which includes a school and library. Still largely separated from the northern suburbs by ‘green belt’.

Devonport Station
Originally eighteenth- and nineteenth century development, but severely bomb damaged; redevelopment has been within the historic street pattern, and the area now contains buildings of various ages.

Stoke
Victorian middle-class housing development associated with the railway; contains Victoria Park.

Outer City Centre
Originally eighteenth- and nineteenth century development, however the area suffered from severe bomb damage; redevelopment has been within the historic street pattern, and the area now contains buildings of various ages. Contains University campus.

Mannnamead and Mutley
Victorian middle-class suburban housing, which developed along the main route into the city, and has since been encompassed by the growth of the city.

Prince Rock, Mount Gould and Lipson*
Late-Victorian and Edwardian terraces with some early social housing and an experimental medium-density development at Mount Gould.

Laira
Post-war infill in an area dominated by railway tracks.

Stonehouse*
Eighteenth-century street pattern, with some important early nineteenth-century military buildings, such as the Naval Hospital and Royal William Yard.

Millbay and West Hoe*
Principally developed between 1830 and 1880; Millbay as a commercial port and the West Hoe for housing.

The Hoe and the Citadel
The Citadel is a military fort built in 1666 on the site of an earlier castle. The Hoe, now a park, was originally kept clear as a defensive measure.

Inner City Centre
Originally developed in the eighteenth-century, but severely bombed during the Second World War. The site was largely cleared and Abercrombie redeveloped the centre with a new street pattern and zoned land use.

Sutton Harbour and the Barbican
Medieval port, which retains original street pattern and some medieval buildings.

St Jude’s
Victorian housing development associated with the construction of the railway; originally detached from the city but has been encompassed since.

Cattedown
Industrial area with some development dating from the nineteenth-century, but principally post-war.
2. HISTORIC CHARACTER

CHARACTER AREAS

Priorities: Devonport, East Plymouth, Abercrombie Settlements and outer forts
2. HISTORIC CHARACTER

Key

- Medieval core around Sutton Harbour with surviving street pattern and buildings of all periods
- 18th century expansion (to c1820) and beginning of the amalgamation of the ‘Three Towns’. Surviving street pattern and some major monuments (Royal William Yard, Foulston’s work in Devonport), but most buildings are later
- 19th century expansion (to c1880). Mainly high density small scale terrace housing, with occasional areas of villas (e.g. Mannamead) on edges. New centre develops at Mutley
- Palmerston’s northern defensive forts define a ridge of high ground
- Late 19th and early 20th century expansion and ribbon development along major routes into the city (to c1939). Mainly high density terraced housing with some experimental medium density developments (e.g. Mount Gould). First significant expansion onto high ground north of historic settlement areas
- Areas of bomb damage rebuilt to existing street grid or cleared and rebuilt by Abercrombie to a new grid. Some survivals of earlier buildings, but generally later 20th century. City centre zoned for retail, commercial, administration, arts, etc.
- Abercrombie planned suburbs: low density 1940s/50s semi-detached local authority housing around local centres. Sinuous road layouts, following contours
- Post-war suburban expansion, predominantly low density, semi-detached local authority housing. Less sinuous road layouts, and less regard for natural topography
- Dockyard and other major military/naval establishments. Underlying colours reflect date of establishment and the increase in scale of the later docks, buildings and other structures
- Parks: Central Park and Victoria Park are the only ones which do not have a military origin
- Industrial and commercial expansion related to the docks, with some working class housing mixed in or adjacent (e.g. Prince Rock)
This section summarises the relevant planning policies and regeneration projects affecting the city and explains how this Study should contribute to the new Local Development Framework and Area Action Plans. Fig.38 maps the heritage designations which affect the planning and regeneration context in Plymouth.

The Planning Context

Regional Planning Guidance (RPG) for the South West (2001)
The RPG identifies Plymouth as major commercial centre which serves the surrounding area, and recommends that this role should be strengthened by improving transport links (including the proposed Rail Network Improvement) and by encouraging investment. The RPG highlights Plymouth’s reliance on the naval dockyards as a source of employment and the resulting urban deprivation when job losses have occurred in this sector; it recommends that the city’s economic base is diversified to address this issue. Plymouth is an ‘assisted area’ of ‘special need’ which means that the restructuring and regeneration of the city should be a priority for local authorities, investment agencies and partnership bodies in the area. The RPG also highlights the city’s scenic and historical advantages, and its location as a regional gateway to Cornwall. The RPG recommends the conversion of existing buildings and the development of brownfield sites within the city boundary, and only where this is not possible to plan new urban extensions.

Devon Structure Plan (2001)
The Devon Plan defines Plymouth as a Principal Urban Area which should be the focus of strategic development and regeneration. Like the RPG, the Structure Plan also characterises Plymouth as a major commercial centre providing services to the region. The Structure Plan espouses similar policies to the RPG: it also recommends that Plymouth should diversify its economic base, that investment opportunities should be developed and transport links improved. The Structure Plan suggests that regeneration projects should focus on areas which particularly suffer from social exclusion and economic deprivation.

The Structure Plan offers slightly different recommendations in terms of housing: it is proposed that between 2001 and 2016, 14,500 dwellings and 160ha of employment land will be created in Plymouth; 4,000 houses will be built for a new community in Sherford and 40ha of land will be assigned to the Plymouth International Business Park. The Structure Plan also contains policies for the conservation of the character of historic buildings and areas in Devon, these reinforce statutory legislation to protect listed buildings and local policies to safeguard conservation areas.

Plymouth City Local Plan (2001)
The City of Plymouth Local Plan (1995-2011) First Deposit sets the framework for current development control in the city. It is a visionary document, which sets out the city’s agenda ‘to commence in earnest the urban renaissance of Plymouth [...] It is the foundation for stimulating new ideas and creativity and the means by which these can be brought to fruition.’

On one level, the role of Plymouth’s heritage in contributing to the achievement of these goals is acknowledged. Thus:

- Plymouth’s 2020 Vision states that will ‘maximise and nurture its natural and built environment’;
- The Local Plan’s Aim 3 commits the city to ‘manage in a positive, innovative and sustainable way changes to Plymouth’s built and natural environment, safeguarding the best and raising the quality of the rest’;
- The Objectives (which develop the Aims in detail) include many which acknowledge the importance of the city’s heritage in contributing to wider strategies for:
  - 1: Regional identity, facilities and services: to develop Plymouth as an outstanding Regional Centre for the far South West and as an international centre for knowledge and learning, tourism and culture;
  - 2: Image of city: to optimise the economic benefits Plymouth derives from its exceptional location, environmental quality and heritage;
  - 11: Urban environment: to improve the urban environment and raise the quality of design in the city;
  - 13: Green Space, water space and wildlife: to provide effective stewardship of Plymouth’s greenspace and wildlife [...]
This is an indicative map giving a general impression of the distribution of heritage designations in Plymouth and the Torpoint Peninsula.

- Listed buildings and Conservation Areas are clustered around the historic ports and along historic roads into the city, such as at Mannamead.
- There is a particular concentration of Conservation Areas around Stoke, in the 19th century infill between Devonport and Stonehouse.
- Scheduled Monuments form a ring which once surrounded the city; this is because they are mostly historic fortifications, including the Citadel and the Palmerstonian forts.
However, although the aspirations for using the heritage to create a better city for the future are there, the opportunity to translate them into practical policies has not been taken:

- The detailed Local Plan Policies (73-76) on the Historic Environment concentrate overwhelmingly on the preservation of the individual site or buildings. They do not draw attention to the contribution that they can make to their wider surroundings. It is significant that, despite the number of Objectives which refer to the importance of harnessing Plymouth’s heritage, the majority of cross-references in the Policies are to Objective 12 (Historic Environment), with only two to Objective 11 (Urban Environment) and none to Objectives 1, 2 or 13.
- The first Target by which the success of Objective 12 will be measured is the designation of two new conservation areas between 2001 and 2011. Given the many areas in which the Objectives suggest that Plymouth’s heritage should contribute to the city’s regeneration, this is sadly unambitious.
- City Urban Design Objectives 2 (Communities) and 8 (A legible city) make no mention of the heritage, yet in both cases there is a clear potential for historic buildings to act as focuses.
- Despite Objective 12’s aspiration to ‘implement conservation-based regeneration programmes’, the Area Visions do not exploit the existing heritage as much as they could:
  - The Millbay and Stonehouse Vision Statement contains nothing about the heritage as a key consideration in regeneration;
  - The Devonport Vision Statement concentrates on the need to find new uses for historic buildings, but says nothing about the wider potential of these buildings to act as keystones for the regeneration of blighted areas.
- There is nothing on the heritage of Abercrombie in the outer suburbs, yet an understanding of what he was trying to achieve, where he succeeded and why he failed, is fundamental to any solutions for their future regeneration.

There is, in summary, a need for the Local Plan’s high aspirations for the role of the city’s heritage to be translated into the practical applications both of general policies and specific area recommendations. The drafting of the new Local Development Framework provides this opportunity.

**Local Development Framework**

The government is reforming the planning system with a series of new Planning Policy Statements (which are currently in consultation). In the reformed system Local Development Frameworks (LDF) will replace the existing Local Plans and will consist of a series of documents (rather than a single one).

The aim of the LDF is to deliver sustainable development through ‘economic development; social inclusion; environmental protection; and prudent use of resources’ and it will be produced using community involvement. Plymouth City Council are currently reassessing the first deposit Local Plan to inform the LDF process.

The LDF will include Area Action Plans (AAPs), which are particularly relevant to this study. AAPs will be used to guide development in specific areas; they will be used in a number of different circumstances, such as:

- where an area is growing rapidly;
- for areas that have been targeted for regeneration;
- for places with a wealth of natural or built heritage areas which are sensitive to change;
- an area defined by multiple ownership and experiencing development pressure;
- to manage the impact of mineral extraction or waste disposal on the environment.

There is the opportunity that a more in-depth characterisation of the areas targeted for AAPs would help inform and add another layer of knowledge and understanding to guide the regeneration of these areas (Section 6 considers this in greater detail).

This Rapid Urban Study is intended to provide guidance on the areas in Plymouth which should be targeted with AAPs, and in particular, how the city’s built heritage can be utilised in regeneration projects. There is also an opportunity to address issues with the existing Local Plan (highlighted above) in the new LDF; these recommendations are further developed in Section 6 of the report.

**The Regeneration Context**

Regeneration has been taking place in Plymouth for the last 10 or 15 years, with a particular focus on transforming the waterfront, which was previously either in active port use or had become areas of deprivation and derelict land. Throughout this time, the Ministry of Defence has been gradually releasing land and this has provided an opportunity to rethink the city’s link with the sea.

**Plymouth Development Corporation**

The Plymouth Development Corporation was the first regeneration agency in Plymouth; it was operational from 1989 to 1996. The Corporation owned and have organised projects to regenerate the Mount Wise and Mount Batten areas of the city. It also owned Royal William Yard, but initial efforts were less successful there. The Yard then passed into English Partnerships hands, and later to the South West Regional Development Agency, which is effectively redeveloping the buildings as exclusive apartments and for other mixed uses.

![Fig.39: Royal William Yard is being transformed into a high-end mixed-use complex by Urban Splash and SWRDA](image)
Sutton Harbour Company
In the last five years the Sutton Harbour Company has transformed the area around the harbour into a new quarter for the city, funded by the Department of the Environment and English Partnerships. A new lock-gate to the harbour, built as a flood-prevention measure, has allowed the harbour to be used as a marina for sailing yachts. The fish market was restored and historic buildings in Barbican converted for use as retail and housing.

Millbay
The South West Regional Development Agency has recently bought land around the Millbay dock from the Port and with English Partnerships has commissioned a Masterplan which is to be made public shortly.

Devonport
The Ministry of Defence will be releasing the South Yard enclave for redevelopment in 2005. Devonport has been awarded £50m over the next 10 years as part of the ‘New Deal for Communities’ central government programme. A masterplan for the area, including the additional twelve acres to be released by the MoD, has been commissioned.

The Mackay Plan
A vision for Plymouth in the twenty-first century has been developed by the Plymouth 2020 Partnership (Plymouth’s local strategic partnership of major stakeholders) and refined through the work of the award-winning architect and urban planner, David Mackay, of MBM Arquitectes, along with AZ Urban Studio. A Vision for Plymouth promotes a significant change in the quality, pace and intensity of the city’s development and “sets out a future for Plymouth that is built upon its waterfront setting, [and] its heritage”. The City Council is committed to the delivery of this vision through the emerging Local Development Framework (LDF). The LDF will aim to “provide a strong strategic framework to promote investment, guide development and safeguard the built and natural environment”.

In summary, Plymouth has a long history of successful regeneration initiatives centred around historic areas (Sutton Harbour) and sites (the Royal William Yard). These have demonstrated the benefits of heritage-led regeneration. Current projects are of a much larger scale, but have at least an equivalent potential to harness their heritage to create better places.
4. DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES AND ISSUES

This section analyses the development opportunities which arise from the historic character of Plymouth and which need to be addressed by the Local Development Framework (LDF), Area Action Plans (AAPs) and the overall regeneration programme.

Heritage and the New Planning Framework
The most significant opportunity is the chance to ensure that the new LDF proactively capitalises upon the city's built heritage. As noted in the previous section, despite the high aspirations of the current Local Plan, and the success of Sutton Harbour and the Royal William Yard in harnessing their historic character to achieve successful regeneration, the role of the city's heritage is not fully integrated into the planning policy and regeneration agenda. Given the pace at which the regeneration agenda is moving, there is a real danger that the opportunity provided by the preparation of the LDF will be lost.

Improving the Heritage Knowledge Base
In parallel with ensuring that Plymouth's built heritage is placed right at the heart of the new planning framework, is the need to build up a better understanding of the city's wider heritage, to identify those areas where it can play a significant role in regeneration. The historic character areas identified in Fig.35 are the basis for this approach, but they need to be developed and tested in two ways.

The first is to expand this study's coverage to the current city boundary. One of the unexpected outcomes of this study was the understanding of the Abercrombie suburbs. There is no doubt that similar benefits would come, for example, from an understanding of the relationship between the expanding Plymstock and Plympton. This could be combined with, or form part of, an urban design analysis of the city.

The second is to analyse more carefully the character areas already identified within the historic core of Plymouth. Of these, the following stand out, either because of their intrinsic historic importance, lack of previous study or the need to capitalise on forthcoming regeneration opportunities:

- Devonport: a fascinating mixture of dockyard, Georgian development and failed postwar reconstruction. Now the focus of major regeneration;
- East Plymouth: one of the densest and most deprived areas of 19th century expansion, and the focus of the City Council and other's pre-war attempts at housing reform (as at Mount Gould);
- The Abercrombie suburbs: along with the city centre, the crucial element of the post-war replanning of the Plymouth. Unlike the city centre, which is well studied and lies at the heart of the Mackay Vision, the outer suburbs are barely understood, yet are vital to the future of the northern suburbs;
- Palmerston's northern forts: with the exception of Crownhill, these major examples of Victorian military thinking are mostly derelict and present a major conservation problem. At the same time, they are an underused resource in their neighbourhoods.

The other opportunities and issues which this study has highlighted can best be divided into the six themes of Geology and Topography, Movement routes, Historic growth, Plymouth and the sea, the influence of the Navy and Military and Abercrombie's post-war replanning of Plymouth.

Geology and Topography
- The topography of Plymouth offers opportunities of dramatic locations and views, which have not always been exploited. The Victorian and Edwardian terracing and the majority of the post-war council housing pay no regard to it, and as a result produces places which feel unnatural.
- On the other hand, the topography, especially in its outer areas away from the waterfront, is not easy. The lack of historic settlement testifies to the fact that it is not a natural place for human occupation, while the topography of hills and valleys makes movement difficult and often indirect.
- New development needs to recognise the constraints but also to grasp the opportunities offered by the topography.

Movement Routes
- When Plymouth was a major port and before it was bypassed by the A38, it was a stopping/transfer point on a through route. Now it has become a destination in its own right. The potential of the city's historic buildings and wider heritage to attract visitors needs to be fully exploited.
- Abercrombie's failure to appreciate the future of the car has led to serious problems, both in the centre and in his suburban expansion. The purposeful location of the new settlements off main movement routes has made them microcosms of Plymouth. Unlike the relatively thriving areas of Mutley and (most recently) Derriford, they are not on a route to anywhere. In planning for a sustainable future for the suburbs, there are important lessons to be learned from the past.

Historic Growth
Many of the issues relating to the city's historic growth are dealt with under the next two themes.

- Regeneration, especially in Devonport and Stonehouse, gives the opportunity to reverse the erosion of the three distinct historic settlements of Plymouth, Stonehouse and Devonport, and to restore to each a distinctive character.
- The lack of character of much of the post-war city was caused in part by the construction of huge areas of uniform low density, low value council housing, which mostly fails to take advantage of the natural topography or existing historic buildings to create a distinctive identity.
- On account of its history (and relationship with the Navy; see below) the city has only small and isolated pockets of middle class housing, which are now entirely surrounded by lower value housing. In a city seeking to diversify its social profile, this lack of large areas of better quality historic housing is a significant issue, which character-based generation has the power to redress.
4. DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES

- There are significant opportunities, particularly in the city’s legacy of very fine historic buildings, which managed to avoid the bombing. These are overwhelmingly concentrated in the seaward part of the city but have mostly been ill-served by post war reconstruction which has left them divorced from, and out of scale with, their new surroundings. These buildings offer great opportunities to give character to otherwise anonymous areas and to form the focus for imaginative urban design. The current regeneration proposals, both for the city centre and for Devonport, offer the chance to allow these buildings to realise their full potential. To do this, however, they must be seen as more than just buildings to be preserved; they are the visible elements of the city’s wider historic fabric.

In addition to the individual listed buildings and Scheduled Ancient Monuments are the Conservation Areas. The majority are concentrated in the historic cores of Sutton Harbour, Stonehouse and Devonport, where they provide an obvious framework both for the retention of existing historic character and for positive enhancement as part of heritage led regeneration. There is an opportunity to extend this role more widely throughout the city, by the designation of further Conservation Areas, particularly in the eastern and northern parts of the city. Designation can, of course, give access to specific sources of regeneration funding, from the HLF and English Heritage.

- **Plymouth and the Sea**
  - The natural topography of the area has created in Plymouth harbour an area of remarkable beauty.
  - Historically, however, the city has never appreciated this.
  - The change in the role of the harbour, from workplace and main movement route to sought after amenity, has altered this historical relationship and offers a great opportunity, which the city is determined to grasp.
  - The high value housing development of the Royal William Yard has shown the potential of the waterfront in general to attract the highest quality of development. There is, however, a potential issue if this development were to create another high value ghetto which does not address the need for wider links between the city and the waterfront and for a greater choice of housing types and values throughout the city.

- **The Influence of the Navy and Military**
  - The overall character of Plymouth and its housing stock has been created by the city’s long-term relationship with the Dockyard. With the navy now reducing its presence and releasing land for redevelopment, the city is presented with both opportunities and issues. Among the latter are the inevitable issues of unemployment and economic deprivation, with the consequent implications for the condition of the housing stock. But there are also significant opportunities for regeneration using the newly available land, and building on the dockyard’s historic buildings. The incoming of new employers also gives the opportunity to widen the city’s social mix (provided that suitable housing exists).
  - On the northern fringe of the city, the current underuse and poor condition of many of the Palmerston forts is a significant issue, not least as they are a nationally important survival of a largely intact 19th century defensive line. For the city, they represent considerable potential for imaginative reuse, and the possibility of contributing, whether as a tourist attraction, local centre or landmark, to the wider urban fabric of their vicinity.
  - In the centre, the historic impermeability of the dockyard and other large naval institutions has created fragmented townscape in many areas. On the one hand, this is part of the historic character of these areas; on the other, better permeability could well contribute to a better connected city.
**Abercrombie’s Post-war Replanning of Plymouth**

As section 2 made clear, Abercrombie’s influence over the development of the northern suburbs of Plymouth was both profound and little recognised. On the one hand, his basic aim was, in contemporary urban design terms, good:

- He sought to create new communities, based on centres with facilities and with a distinct character;
- He used the topography to create natural-feeling places which exploited the area’s natural advantages.

On the other hand (and with the benefit of hindsight), his ideas were flawed:

- His maximum development density of 18 houses per hectare was too low to create sustainable communities and centres. It compares with the minimum of 30 houses per hectare which is today’s standard.
- The location of settlements away from main movement routes has left them isolated and unable to benefit from passing trade.
- Despite Abercrombie’s hopes, the pre-existing settlements were simply too small to be able to give an individual character to the new places. As a result, the northern suburbs have developed as a monotonous sprawl.
- He failed to predict the growth of car use and hence the relationship between the local centres and the city centre.
- The development of virtually the entire area as council housing met the immediate post war need but has resulted in low property values over large areas of the city. There is a lack of the sort of housing to attract the wider social mix that the city needs.
- These inherent problems of Abercrombie’s plans were made worse by the later building out of his overall plans for low density council housing, without understanding his underlying aims.

As a result of all these factors, there are significant social and urban design issues in these outer suburbs, which the Local Development Framework and Area Action Plans can start to address. The issue for the City Council is to decide whether these areas are fundamentally sound, and can be made to work (for example by increasing the density to sustain a local centre and giving a distinct character). Or are the flaws (such as the remoteness from movement routes) too deep? Would it in fact be better to start again, as has happened, for example, at Derriford, though this would condemn large areas of the post-war city to long term decline. Also how far can an understanding of the successes and failures of Abercrombie’s Plan for the suburbs be applied to new developments, such as the urban expansion at Sherford? The answer to these questions is of crucial importance to the future of the city as a whole.
This rapid character study was always intended as a first step, to test Plymouth’s potential for this type of historical analysis and to identify areas where further work could provide clear benefits to the city’s regeneration agenda. As the previous section has made clear, there are two immediate priorities for further work.

**Embedding Plymouth’s Heritage in the Planning Framework**

The first priority is to review the effectiveness of current Local Plan policies on the built heritage, and to make recommendations for the emerging LDF. The overall aim is to ensure that, in the LDF:

- The city’s heritage (in its widest definition) plays a full and positive part both in the overall Vision for the future and in the LDF’s various subsidiary documents (such as the Design Strategy and Area Action Plans). Analysis of the existing Local Plan indicates that, *inter alia*, the potential role of the heritage in creating distinctive communities and in aiding legibility needs to be stressed.
- Policies are worded to allow the wider aspirations of the Vision to be fully supported. The existing Local Plan policies are often too narrowly drawn to give the City Council the lever that it needs to ensure that the heritage does play its full role in the formulation both of wider regeneration strategies and in individual development proposals.
- Targets are set which set the heritage firmly in the wider regeneration and planning agendas. They need to be more ambitious and outward looking than the current Local Plan target of designating two conservation areas.

**Improving the Heritage Knowledge Base**

The second priority is to refine the definition of historic character areas in advance of, or as part of the Area Action Plan (AAP) process. This is essential if the city’s wider heritage is to realise its full potential in creating sustainable communities. This means, in the first place, expanding this overview to cover the entire area of today’s city. It also means developing a deeper understanding of individual character areas.

Plymouth City Council has identified the following Action Area Plans, which are, in order of priority:

- Devonport
- Stonehouse/ Millbay
- Central Park
- North Plymstock
- Northern Plymouth (Derriford/ Seaton/ Southway)
- City Centre/ University
- East End
- Sutton Harbour/ Barbican
- The Hoe

The extent to which these areas have been studied varies. Character studies have already been completed on the Royal William Yard (in Stonehouse), Central Park and the Hoe. However, in order to maximise the potential of these Action Area Plans, and to ensure that they are based on a sound understanding of the areas they address, further work is required:

- **Devonport**: A further characterisation study of Devonport is a particular priority because of the advanced stage of the regeneration programme. The study should:
  - Understand the area’s particular historic character (with particular reference to how this was affected by the post-war replanning and subsequent developments);
  - Assess the significance of the individual historic buildings, Scheduled Ancient Monuments, other archaeological sites and historic open spaces, and measure their contribution to the area’s historic character;
  - Address the specific issues of:
    - The vulnerability of the historic asset (in the context of potentially major redevelopment for the area);
    - The need to find sustainable new uses for the historic buildings;
    - The potential of the historic character of individual buildings, sites or spaces to contribute positively to regeneration, by providing urban focuses, community identity or tourist destinations;
    - The long-term conservation of the historic Dockyard (both that part soon to be released and that which remains in active naval use).

- **Stonehouse/Millbay**: A further characterisation study of Stonehouse/Millbay is a priority given the advanced stage of the regeneration programme in the area, with the conversion of Royal William Yard into exclusive flats and the Masterplan under development for Millbay. The study should address similar issues to the Devonport study, as outlined above.

- **Northern Plymouth**: More detailed studies on the Abercrombie Suburbs and the Palmerston Forts should contribute to the Action Area Plan for Derriford, Seaton and Southway.
5. NEXT STEPS

• **The Abercrombie Suburbs:** The identification of a strategy for the northern suburbs was identified above as being very important for the future of the city as a whole. A first stage in this is a further character study to:
  - Understand in greater detail the history of their post-war development, in particular the relationship between the early, Abercrombie-influenced, and later developments, and the extent to which the proposed local centres ever actually worked;
  - Carry out a more detailed urban design analysis of individual areas;
  - Summarise the issues facing the suburbs as a result of their history, density and location as a way of proposing sustainable solutions to their present problems. It would also be entirely appropriate to identify one (or more) of the most complete and best preserved Abercrombie suburbs for Conservation Area designation (in line with the current Local Plan target). This could in turn give access to specific heritage-led regeneration funding.

• **The Palmerston Forts:** The study would build on existing English Heritage studies. It would:
  - Survey the current condition and uses of the forts;
  - Provide recommendations for their conservation and statutory protection;
  - Assess their potential to contribute to local regeneration initiatives, as local centres, sources of identity, landmarks and/or tourist attractions.

• **East End:** East Plymouth contains a mixture of Victorian and Edwardian terraces and some interesting examples of the City Council’s pre-war efforts to alleviate its housing problems. Like Abercrombie’s post-war suburbs, they are little understood and the proposed further study would thus have similar aims to the previous study and would serve to underpin the area’s AAP:
  - To trace and understand the area’s historic development. Was it ever successful?
  - To summarise current issues as a way to proposing sustainable solutions;
  - To identify areas for possible Conservation Area designation (in line with the current Local Plan target).

• **Reviewing Existing Designations**

At the same time as extending understanding of Plymouth’s historic character, the preparation of the LDF provides the opportunity to review the effectiveness of existing conservation designations:
  - Have Conservation Area appraisals been prepared and, if so, do they need revising?
  - Are the Conservation Area boundaries correctly drawn?
  - How effective has designation been in enabling the preservation or enhancement of their character and appearance?
  - Has designation had any impact on regeneration? Has it helped to unlock funding or to ensure that regeneration is ‘heritage led’?
  - Has designation affected house prices or the perception of the area as a desirable place to live?

In addition, the study should consider the overall balance of Conservation Areas across the city and recommend (in parallel with the other studies of the Palmerstonian Forts, northern and eastern suburbs) the designation of additional areas. Finally, it should recommend appropriate LDF targets to monitor the city’s achievement of its conservation area aims.

- **Designation of buildings and areas of local interest:** There is an opportunity to develop a list of locally significant buildings and areas of local distinctiveness, which make a positive contribution to the character of their immediate areas, but which do not warrant statutory protection or conservation area designation.
7. CONCLUSION

As the largest city in the far South-West, Plymouth is one of the principal cities of the United Kingdom. It has had a unique history and, as a result, a unique character based on its long-time reliance on its links with the sea in general, and the Royal Navy in particular. The nature of this link has been changing over the past 50 years, with profound implications for the whole city. The change offers the opportunity to address deep-set problems, many of which, as this study has shown, originate in the city’s underlying character, whether determined by its basic geology and topography, its naval past or by its post-war replanning. The study has also shown that the past is also a source of great strengths, epitomized by the city’s range of listed buildings, Scheduled Ancient Monuments, Conservation Areas and historic open spaces (fig.38). When seen in the context of a deeper understanding of the city’s historic fabric, these assets have the potential to make a huge contribution to the regeneration of the whole city. The Local Development Framework, currently in preparation, offers an opportunity to put Plymouth’s past where it belongs, not in a ‘heritage box’, but at the heart of the city’s future. It is essential that the opportunity offered by the LDF is taken.
8. SOURCES

Maps

Ordnance Survey, Explorer 108 (1:25,000), 2003
Ordnance Survey, Pathfinder 1356 (1:25,000), 1993
British Geological Survey, England and Wales Sheet 348 (1:50,000), 1998
Geological Survey of Great Britain (England and Wales), Drift, Sheet 349 (1:50,000), 1974
International Chart Series, Plymouth Sound and Approaches (1:12,500), 2003

In addition information on:
- topography, listed buildings, Conservation Areas and Scheduled Ancient Monuments in Plymouth City provided as GIS layers by Plymouth City Council;
- listed buildings on the Torpoint peninsula provided by Caradon District Council;
- Conservation Areas and Scheduled Ancient Monuments on the Torpoint peninsula provided by Cornwall County Council.

Historic Maps

A True Mapp and Description of the Towne of Plymouth and the Fortification thereof, with the works and approaches of the Enemy, at the last Seige, 1643

A Plan of the Town and Citadel of Plymouth, 1765

S. Elliott, Plan of the Towns and Harbour of Plymouth, Stonehouse, Dock, Morice-Town, Stoke and the Environes in the County of Devon, 1820

John Cooke, Borough of Plymouth, 1820

John Cooke, Cooke's Stranger's Guide or Pocket Plan of the three Towns of Plymouth, Devonport and Stonehouse, 1827
FP Becker, The Three Towns of Plymouth, Stonehouse and Devonport, 1830
J Rapkin, Plymouth, Devonport and Stonehouse, 1860
William Wood, Plymouth, Devonport and Stonehouse with the Recent Improvements, 1865
William Wood, The Environes of Plymouth, Stonehouse and Devonport Shewing the New Forts, 1868
WH Maddock, Map of Plymouth, Devonport, Stonehouse, Stoke, Morice Town and Ford, 1881
Ordnance Survey, 1:10,560, 1st edition, 1868-1895
Ordnance Survey, 1:2,500, 1st edition, 1868-1895
Ordnance Survey, 1:10,560, 2nd edition, 1896-7
Ordnance Survey, 1:2,500, 2nd edition 1906-7
Ordnance Survey, 1:10,560, 3rd edition 1913-14
Ordnance Survey, 1:2,500, 3rd edition 1913-14
Ordnance Survey, 1:10,560, 4th edition 1933
Ordnance Survey, 1:2,500, 4th edition 1933
Ordnance Survey, Sheet 187, 1:63360, 1946
Ordnance Survey, Sheet 187, 1:63360, 1961

Historical Sources

Owen A. Baker [compiled by], 1976, Plymouth old and new.
Mark Brayshay, c1983, Post-war Plymouth. Planning and reconstruction. Essays marking the fortieth anniversary of the 1943 plan for Plymouth.
Nigel J Clarke, 1995, Adolf Hitler's Holiday Snaps (Lyme Regis)
John Gerrard, 1982, The Book of Plymouth (Buckingham)
Crispin Gill, 1979, Plymouth. A new history. Vol 1 and 2 (Exeter)
Martin Langley and Edwina Small, 1988, Merchant Shipping (Exeter)
J. Paton Watson and P. Abercrombie, 1943, A Plan for Plymouth (Plymouth)
Andrew Pye and Freddy Woodward, 1996, Historic Defences of Plymouth (Cornwall)
Planning and Regeneration Sources

Civic Trust Regeneration Unit, 1991, Plymouth’s Barbican and Sutton Harbour Action Plan

Devon County Council, Adopted Devon Structure Plan 1995 to 2011

Devon County Council, Proposed Devon Structure Plan 2001 to 2016

English Partnerships, 2000, Urban Design Compendium


Lacey Hickie Caley, Millbay Area Regeneration Strategy, February 2003

Land Use Consultants, 2000, Greenscape Assessment for the City of Plymouth

Llewelyn-Davies in association with King Sturge and Sandover Associates, Plymouth Urban Capacity Study

MBM Arquitectes (Mackay) with AZ Urban Studio, 2003, A Vision for Plymouth

Plymouth City Council, Central Park Action Plan, November 2001

Plymouth City Council, City Centre Precinct Urban Design Framework, March 2002

Plymouth City Council, City of Plymouth Local Plan (1995-2011) First Deposit, December 2001

Urban Practitioners, Barne Barton Neighbourhood Regeneration Strategy, 2003

Urban Task Force, 2001, Towards an Urban Renaissance