

PLYMOUTH CITY COUNCIL

SUBMISSION FOR STRATEGIC PLANNING: THE PLYMOUTH PLAN

THE 11TH EUROPEAN URBAN AND REGIONAL PLANNING AWARDS

INTRODUCTION

Ever since Sir Patrick Abercrombie prepared the 1943 'Plan for Plymouth' to guide the post-war reconstruction of the city, Plymouth has had a proud tradition of preparing innovative and effective strategic spatial plans. In 1987 we became one of the first cities in the United Kingdom to have a local plan covering its entire land area; in 1991 we put in place a highly regarded and radical plan for growth; in 2007 we became the first city in England to adopt a new style 'Core Strategy (winning the Royal Town Planning Institute's coveted Silver Jubilee Cup); in September 2015 we put in place Part One of a truly pioneering new style of strategic spatial plan, called '**The Plymouth Plan**'. Our Plymouth Plan project was inspired by looking at good practice examples from overseas, especially the Portland Plan from the USA.

What makes the Plymouth Plan stand out in the context of the UK's planning history is:

- Its truly **holistic and comprehensive** scope.
- Its use of **creative and fun approaches** to engaging citizens, businesses, the community and voluntary sections and stakeholders.
- The way in which the **role of planners has become so core** to city governance and strategy.

THE PLAN'S HOLISTIC AND COMPREHENSIVE SCOPE

The Plymouth Plan brings together into a single plan **every strategic plan** that the City Council and its partners are responsible for creating. All of our key partners own and work to deliver this plan - the health authorities, the police and statutory agencies, our universities and research organisations, our housing providers, our transport providers, even our community and voluntary sector organisations and the business community.

The plan has replaced over **100 strategic plans and strategies**, each which had their own version of the truth, and gives the city a unified voice. The Plymouth Plan becomes the development plan, the local transport plan, the health and wellbeing strategy, the community safety strategy, the child poverty strategy, the cultural strategy, the local economic strategy, the housing strategy, the green space strategy, the children and young people's plan, the municipal waste strategy, and more besides.

The Plymouth Plan has a completely different feel from most other strategies. Instead of dry plans, it **paints an image** of what the city could look like in 2031, and sets out a course to move Plymouth closer towards that vision. Furthermore, it focuses on strategic outcomes around creating a regional city, a healthy city, a growing city and an international city which will address the things that really matter to local people. For example, how we support our children and young people to aspire and fulfil their potential, how we respond to the challenges of an aging population in an era of austerity, how we grow the economy so that everyone has access to jobs that meet their aspirations, how we create a culturally diverse city of opportunity, and how we make sure everyone lives in a quality home and neighbourhood that meets their needs.

THE PLAN'S APPROACH TO CITIZEN ENGAGEMENT

The plan-preparation process was structured around several key stages of engagement. We called these:

- '**Plymouth Plan Conversation**' - a season of open-ended discussions with communities and stakeholders about what the issues are and what kind of city they wanted in the future.
- '**Plymouth Plan Connections**' - a season of more focussed conversations with communities and stakeholders about the options for change in the city, and what the evidence base told us about these options.
- '**Plymouth Plan Check-Up**' - a season of very targeted consultation around a first draft of the Plymouth Plan, to ensure that we had captured effectively the issues and ideas received in the earlier stages.

At each stage of engagement we used a full range of techniques to get maximum impact. These included:

- The creation at the outset of compelling **graphics and images that help identify the Plymouth Plan** to the city. These have been used on all the plan's documents as well as on hoardings around building sites and through social media. They are now widely understood as a brand for the plan.

- The use of **Plymouth Plan sofa** which moved around the city to over forty venues and was hugely successful. As well as introducing the concept of the Plymouth Plan to the public, it also introduced the key themes of the plan, such as local community, health and wellbeing and living and housing. The aim of the sofa was to speak to as many people as possible living their day-day life in Plymouth and to reach residents who may not choose to go to a consultation meeting. The sofa was a very popular way of engaging with people. Highlights included a day of knitting ideas together whilst literally knitting, hosting the consultation for the City of Culture bid, and taking the sofa to the beach. People felt comfortable talking in a relaxed environment and enjoyed the experience. The sofa has been in great demand ever since!
- The setting up of a **'What's the Future' pop-up shop** in the heart of the City Centre to act as a focal point for our Plymouth Plan Conversation. This opened during the height of summer for 3 weeks. It was so successful that the council later decided to move its customer services team into the building. The shop was open to the general public for 4 days a week and for specific groups and meetings 2 days per week, resulting in visits from over 1,400 people. Besides its use to promote the Plymouth Plan, it also played host to over 25 organisations and groups, helping to support and engage people in various activities, from having blood pressure taken to constructing a Lego building. Plymouth Community Radio made use of the space, broadcasting live from the venue. A Photography Exhibition used the shop to explore empty spaces in the city. The shop was used to host a variety of meetings, including the Local Economic Partnership and the City Centre Business Improvement District meeting, encouraging senior decision makers and investors to visit the shop. Comments were collected in a range of ways, including weekly twitter questions, newspapers that people filled with ideas and comments, a photo booth that filmed people's ideas, and through a game to prioritise ideas using play money.
- **Fringe events** led by other organisations and groups also contributed to the Plymouth Plan Conversation, ensuring that a wider range of voices were heard. These included a theatre performance about Plymouth's voice and a campaign for art and culture in communities.
- A **new experimental way of working with local communities** and groups was developed to tap into existing networks within the Voluntary and Community Sector, and to involve hard-to-reach groups in the consultation process. Independent training sessions were run for community groups and citizens to use 'Plymouth Plan Packs'. Groups were rewarded financially if they hosted their own event to discuss the Plymouth Plan. 45 community groups received training and support to run their own Plymouth Plan events across the city, reaching more communities that wouldn't normally attend a consultation event.
- Working with local community representatives who **developed the values** that sit at the heart of the plan; their work is now continuing in a new **community-led Think Tank** to provide strategic input into how the plan is delivered and monitored.
- The use of vibrant and engaging activity in **social media**, which has now resulted in an **interactive version of the plan** – ensuring communities can find relevant parts of the plan and see how it is delivered. The interactive plan enables the user to view the plan in the way that best meets their needs.
- A **unique 'plan on two pages'** has been developed to show the range of elements within the plan, to act as a front cover, and to present a clear and concise summary of the plan.
- We have used visually compelling **neighbourhood toolkits** that help local communities engage effectively with the site and area-specific issues in their localities and how they want their neighbourhoods to change. This includes identifying the local greenspaces they want to protect through the plan and sites they want to see developed.
- We have also just launched a **monthly podcast** to create another medium for people to engage with the plan.

THE KEY ROLE OF PLANNERS IN CITY GOVERNANCE STRATEGY

The **role of planners has been absolutely central** to this ambitious project. Planners were the initial pioneers of the concept, and have led the process throughout, with the strong support of the City Council's Chief Executive's department. But it would not have been possible to achieve without the trust of key city leaders (both within and outside of the City Council) and their willingness to champion the project.

A key skill that planners brought to the task was to **gather and integrate the views and opinions** of professionals from other disciplines and services. Having key abilities to mediate and negotiate, these were important skills when finding ways to understand and respond to the needs of services such as public health, or adult social care, whose needs and timeframes are often very different to those of Local Plans.

Planners were able to **accept the challenges** to the plan concept and process from these professionals, and used the process to create a stronger mix of policies and a better understanding of the connections between different services and policy areas. The result was a better and more effective set of policies.

The **Plymouth Plan is now at the heart of the City Council's** business, helping it make key decisions about its budget and its shape for the future, and also has the commitment and support of partner organisations, business and communities in delivering change across the city.

HOW THE PLAN DELIVERS SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Sustainable development is written into the heart of the plan, especially through three strategic themes or golden-threads that are weaved throughout all the policies of the plan:

- **Delivering a welcoming city** (reflecting the plan's focus on the well being of people)
- **Delivering a city of sustainable linked neighbourhoods** (reflecting the importance of sustainability at a local and neighbourhood level as the building blocks of a sustainable city)
- **Delivering a green city** (committing the plan to aspire to challenging environmental outcomes).

The plan is also has **clear philosophy and values**, developed by local people, to guide all of its strategic objectives and policies.

HOW THE PLAN DELIVERS TRANSFERABLE OUTCOMES

The Plymouth Plan shows a different model and approach to the creation of strategic spatial plans. It shows how they can:

- Be truly **integrated and holistic plans**
- Radically simplify the complex architecture of strategies and plans that many areas suffer from, bringing significant efficiencies in plan making and giving areas **a single and stronger voice**
- Achieve **wide ownership** across local communities and amongst stakeholders
- Make plan making **engaging and fun**.

THREE KEY LEARNING POINTS

Preparing a plan like the Plymouth Plan has been an extremely demanding but an immensely worthwhile undertaking. A single strategic plan of this nature is not something that has been done in the UK before. To overcome the challenges we have had **to be resilient** and stay committed to the vision. Three valuable lessons have helped us along the way:

1. **Not to allow anything to limit the vision** you have for the kind of plan you want to create. Decide what is going to work for you, and then have the determination to achieve this, finding creative solutions when the inevitable obstacles arise.
2. Spend sufficient time at the outset securing political and partner buy-in and engagement, and be prepared to keep working at this all the way through the process. **Always follow up with feedback and nurture relationships.**
3. **Listen, build trust and have fun** – develop on-going creative ways to work with and listen to communities, allow officers to innovate, support and trust communities to make meaningful and useful contributions.

