

Response to City Centre Action Plan from Plymouth Labour Group
12th December 2008

P.22 Have we correctly understood all the issues which the AAP should address?

Has there been any consideration of reducing the retail footprint of the City Centre? Recent proposals for Bretonside and Civic Centre sites imply an expansion of the retail footprint. Is this supported by the Cushman and Wakefield study? Concern remains as to the commitment of the Council to a strong North-South pedestrian access as envisaged by the MacKay plan.

P.27 Have we correctly identified the main drivers for a City Centre Strategy? What other options could we use to develop the Strategy?

Although much discussion has occurred in and around the council in recent years about the diversity of housing provision in the City Centre, these key issues are not addressed in the AAP. Does the Council wish to see more families living in the City Centre, in which case what facilities would be needed to attract and retain them? Or is the Council content for a market-led speculative approach of smaller one or two person units. A family friendly strategy could transform the fortunes and sustainability of the City Centre.

P.29 Should we develop a quarters plan for the City Centre and if so have we identified the right quarters. Are there any other distinctive quarters we could set out in the AAP?

A quarters plan is good for marketing but having six quarters makes us look innumerate. On a more serious point could allocating specific types of development to quarters restrict further development in another quarter? Plymouth has been here before with the Abercrombie Plan. At Derry's Cross the Cultural Quarter only has two buildings in cultural use; the rest could hardly be described as cultural. Given that the university has a cultural quarter and the City Centre could become a leisure quarter might this not reinforce the 'Town and Gown' divide?

P.30 Have we put the right emphasis on a development led regeneration strategy? Do you support the principle of major redevelopment in the City Centre?

Setting aside for one moment any regeneration strategy is doomed unless it is people-oriented, we would support a major regeneration of the City Centre but this needs to be to the West of Armada way to balance the influence of Drake Circus.

P.30 Do you think there are historically important parts of the city Centre? Should we try and conserve these areas and if so will the strategy do enough?

We think there are historic parts of the City Centre including some twentieth century features. We need to strike a balance between conservation and development. These historically important areas need to be defined with care. The strategy needs to be robust enough to enable perverse decisions by organisations such as English Heritage to be successfully challenged and overturned.

P.31 How do you think people will travel to the City Centre in the future? Is the Strategy identifying the right measures to enable people to get into the City Centre easily?

From recent Council Scrutiny panels, it is increasingly apparent that there is insufficient connectivity between the Council's Transport Plans and this AAP. It is clear that the current

administration is unable to take difficult decisions on demand management which would need to underpin sustainable growth in the city centre.

P.32 How could the image and appearance of buildings in the City Centre be improved? What public spaces in the City Centre are in the most need of improvement? How could the public realm in the City Centre be improved?

It is important to recognise that some buildings in the City Centre give a negative image of the city Centre. E.g. Stapes. There needs to be coherence to development and areas so that there is vibrancy, historical authenticity and sustainable neighbourhoods. Greening of the City Centre will aid Air Quality and this is where we would look to the AAP to provide linkages with Green Open Spaces, e.g. bridge. More attention needs to be given to neglected buildings and sites and this should be in the AAP. Children's play areas need to be upgraded and improved, e.g. George Street as part of each quarter and in residential neighbourhoods in the City Centre.

P.32 How do think West End will fit with the City Centre Strategy? Do you think the West End can develop a successful distinctive identity? What ideas do you have that could improve the image of the West End?

We are supportive of the general principles of the '20 projects in 20 years proposals' (actually 17 years!) The West End is part of more than the City Centre AAP as it forms part of the gateway to Millbay. It could be an attractive residential neighbourhood combined with the Independent Quarter. To improve it requires substantial upgrade.

P.34 Do you agree that these points should be main principles used to identify community benefits in the City Centre and university Area? Are there any other priorities/principles which we should include?

We do not think the Council should relax any affordable housing requirements in the City Centre. We consider that family housing is appropriate in the City Centre and that the City Centre should accommodate and welcome the creation of small neighbourhoods with diverse family communities. The Council should place a very high priority of measures to improve the public realm, new green spaces and public art in the above context.

Other supporting evidence

Our submission also includes a 700 signature petition (collected during 2 x 1.5 hrs sessions) opposing any reduction in affordable housing contributions. Although this petition does relate to any specific provision within this AAP, we believe that it represents the genuine concern of the local community that there should be no relaxation in the provision of an adequate supply of affordable housing.