PLYMOUTH White Papers

Issue 1: Ambition
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#PlymouthWhitePapers

An initiative by Luke Pollard MP

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Thoughtful pieces designed to confront and challenge

2 PROVOKE
Views from people in Plymouth to make you think differently

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Ideas to inspire and create political change through discussion
PLYMOUTH’S REGENERATION
GENERATION

JOSH PULESTON, COMMUNITY ACTIVIST

Times 2 magazine ranked Plymouth at number 20 in the UK’s Top 20 Coolest Places to Live. The city’s location, with Cornwall to the East and Dartmoor to the North, is a unique and visually stunning part of the world, but we need the rest of the country to realise that Britain’s San Francisco is indeed right here, without the eight-hour flight and jet lag.

Plymouth is a Social Enterprise city. With the first university in the UK to adopt this structure, we have the history and the credentials to set out an exciting and ambitious programme to put business and social purpose, at the top of the agenda, setting the tone for a movement amongst communities nationally.

Plymouth has also shown a remarkable capacity for change and regeneration. As the new Drake Circus Shopping Centre opened its doors in 2006, traditional shopping areas in the city were forced to adapt. Over a decade on, Plymouth has seen the emergence, or revival, of several other shopping districts, all offering something to the city and its residents that has not been offered before, and it is these exciting destinations that will put Plymouth firmly on the map.

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Ebrington Street

Ebrington Street is one of Plymouth’s great gems. Though understated, it contains the finest independent coffee shops, retailers, pubs, and more. The Bread and Roses was the city’s first social enterprise pub, with a vision to offer the surrounding community with an arts hub, supported by its trade. Fine beer and food, with a mark-up that allows the space to book emerging and established musical talent, as well as hosting regular meets for writers, language clubs, and the autistic community of Plymouth, the space is a melting pot of cultural and educational experiences.

With the Plymouth Social Enterprise Network operating for over five years, led by industry experts behind exciting ventures like Iridescent Ideas, Plymouth Energy Community, and Real Ideas Organisation (RIO), we can expect communities throughout Plymouth to take control of their own economic and environmental destinies - offering genuine people-powered solutions to society’s most complex problems.

Ebrington Street also offers incredible support for the city’s Asian community. The owner of the popular and fairly-priced Asian foods store is tasked with making sure Asian students have adequate housing - with the help of Land Power estate agents just across the street - as well as offering support to students - showing the value of cooperation and partnership between organisations. Such cooperation is not always formal and contractual, but rather built by personal connections and shared interests. This is the very essence of collaborative regeneration, and its what Plymouth is good at.

We are also tasked with encouraging these students - along with the rest of the university alumni - to stay in Plymouth once they have completed their studies. Upgrad, another not-for-profit social enterprise, has graduate retention at its core, offering engagement opportunities for young people, graduates, and businesses by designing and executing outreach programmes that highlight what’s on offer in our city. In turn, ventures like this will continuously identify what our city is missing, as well as highlighting opportunity for innovation in traditional and emerging markets.

This is the model that we will replicate through the city through the introduction of other static and roving community hubs, supported by community economic development trusts (CEDT). This will ensure that all communities receive the support and guidance they need to enjoy an enriching and fulfilling life in Britain’s Ocean City.

In 2020, the Mayflower 400 celebrations will put all eyes on Plymouth. Work is already underway to galvanise Plymouth’s communities to create artwork and develop collaborative working relationships with Plymouth, Massachusetts. Ebrington Street will be a shining example to tourists from the US and elsewhere, being dubbed the ‘cultural quarter’ alongside Plymouth College of Art, and the Box - showcasing Plymouth’s history through educational exhibitions and installations. It’s an opportunity we need to seize as a city.
Union Street

Like most shops in the city centre left empty after the introduction of newer developments, Union Street has beautiful buildings, many of which lack purpose. But this famous shopping and former nightclub district which unites the three original towns together, has potential to be the home for the region's most ground-breaking and inspirational ventures.

One exciting local initiative, Nudge Community Builders, is a community benefit society set up by local residents to bring unused buildings and spaces back into use. It currently has its first building in the form of an old pub named The Clipper - and expects to have it offering start-up market space for those too small for the Plymouth Pannier Market. On top of that, upstairs, the street will have the nation’s smallest housing association offering housing to single fathers. The street is home to the Millfields Trust, another of the city’s community economic development trusts. Not only will Millfields bolster business in the surrounding community in the years to come, we will also see greater collaboration between institutions like this Trust and grassroots community initiatives - more often in touch and more closely aligned with local opinion and need.

The central part of our great city, Union Street’s central hub for social and economic activity, in Millfields, will model what will be replicated through the city’s three constituencies. A comprehensive and forward-thinking programme will be instilled throughout all of Plymouth’s CEDT’s, and with this, we will have communities taking back control of their areas, being supplied with skills and knowledge from those local, and those professional - all minds coming together for the best solutions to a more prosperous society. It will be the joined up thinking of the city’s locals and professionals that will inform neighbourhood plans for each community.

Comprehensive neighbourhood planning for communities surrounding Union Street, and streets like it, will be imperative in ensuring that social displacement is a thing of the past. With a neighbourhood plan in place, and thus a neighbourhood forum of an apolitical nature, communities will be consulted with any development that requires planning permission. This means that residents will more easily prioritise issues and projects that matter to them, that are often too costly to be dealt with, perhaps unable to rely solely on volunteers - anti-social behaviour, street drinking, amongst other issues, will garner community led solutions with the right amount of funding, and the right leadership. That being said, volunteers will continue to be the backbone of our communities, and more will be done going forward to show appreciation and gratitude for the city’s unsung heroes.

Union Street is home to perhaps, one of Plymouth’s most famous buildings - The Palace Theatre. Attracting the likes of the famous comedy duo Laurel & Hardy in its days as The New Palace Theatre of Varieties, and BBC 6 Music’s Gilles Peterson in the buildings spell as The Dance Academy in more recent years. This building of architectural triumph currently stands in a state of disrepair. Officially classified as ‘at risk’, the future of the building, like many others along this historic street, lay in the hands of current owners and prospective buyers/lease holders. As a city, our ambition must include repurposing the fallen icons of yesteryear and there’s no better...
example of that than the Palace Theatre.

With the vision of Nudge Community Builders to breathe new life into such buildings in a way that involves local communities throughout the process and meets local need, there is an opportunity to ensure the current community benefits from improvements as much as new residents. Nudge grew from local residents running Stonehouse Action first establishing an annual street party to celebrate the local community. They then brought a building back in to use after 25 years in the shape of Union Corner – a space and garden for local people to test out ideas, hold events and come together.

Whether buildings offer something that once was, or something that the surrounding community desperately needs, we can be sure that the ventures will have purpose in keeping with local viewpoints. The Palace Theatre has played host to a volunteer led group called Help The Homeless In Plymouth, providing a safe space over the Christmas and New Year period for those without a home, where they could also access clean clothes, essential toiletries, and warm food and drink. This is where awareness is raised of our troubling housing issues, but is the starting point of creating a lasting solution.

As the years progress, and pilots being rolled out in Manchester, Liverpool, and the West Midlands become the standard across the UK, we can expect to see the eradication of homelessness by 2027, according to current government targets. This will be a year prior to centenary of Union, Marlborough, and Ebrington Street coming together under the city as we know it, and what a celebration it would be to have the streets of the shopping districts aforementioned no longer used as just the homes of Plymouth’s most vulnerable.

**Marlborough Street**

In researching this essay, I asked Devonport locals and fellow community activists what they knew of the high street. With a recent investment in the area through the New Deal for Communities regeneration programme, and Marlborough, alongside Cumberland Street, being the focal shopping points of the area, it would seem that the changes seen thus far have been mostly external for this area in particular. Not to ignore the incredible work that has been achieved over the past decade in Devonport - George Street is home to incredible community development ventures, such as Devonport Live, and rejuvenating an already established shopping district will require inspiration from such initiatives.

In 2006, an All Party Parliamentary Small Shop Group was established to future proof our high streets, and help protect against so-called clone towns - the idea of big high-street names being given prime space in new retail and leisure developments at the expense of small and medium enterprises in the current or nearby communities. The report titled High Street Britain 2015 warned:

“The demise of the small shop would mean that people will not just be disadvantaged in their role as consumers but also as members of communities – the erosion of small shops is viewed as the erosion of the ‘social glue’ that binds communities together, entrenching social exclusion
in the UK."

But Plymouth has the answers. We can redefine what has come to be expected of small shopping districts in Plymouth, and set the precedent nationally for thriving and caring local economies. A return to basics, some might say, with businesses driving and being influenced by community led solutions. Not only can Plymouth continue to be one of coolest places to live - it will also be a leader in ground-breaking social economy.

*Starting community development work as a grassroots volunteer in 2013, and currently working for local government in housing and neighbourhood regeneration, Josh is passionate about ensuring that all organisations from all areas of society work collaboratively, to achieve what is best for the citizens they serve.*
PLYMOUTH
White Papers

The Plymouth White Paper are an initiative by Luke Pollard MP. They are designed to provoke, inspire and challenge. The hope is that each set of white papers will contribute to the energy, direction and passion around Plymouth, our economy and campaigning.

These white paper submissions have been written by people across Plymouth. They have been free to voice their own opinions and these are their own words. The white papers are designed to be political and challenge established thinking but they’re not designed to be party political.

Want to get involved with a future white paper? Get in touch:

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