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Reconstruction planning of Plymouth
during the Second World War

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Introduction

Almost 70 years have passed since the German air-raids destroyed the city centre of many British cities. Destruction was thought to have provided an opportunity for comprehensive redevelopment, which, in turn, would be a symbolic feature of post-war reconstruction of the country. However, until recently, the blitz reconstruction was regarded as 'rather under-researched history of British town planning'.¹

In the last two decades, the topic has been explored considerably, bringing forward a comprehensive overview of plans and government policies and detailed case studies of individual cities with particular reference to political and social aspects of blitz reconstruction.² Among the blitzed cities, Plymouth has attracted particular attention ever since the 1950s, as a bold plan scraping the existing layout of the city centre, made during the war by an eminent planner of the day, Patrick Abercrombie, and the city's engineer, Paton Watson, was later materialised.³ In plain English, the

¹ P. Thane, 'Series editor's introduction', in J. Hasegawa, *Replanning the blitzed city centre*, Open University Press (1992).

² See, e.g., P. Larkham and K. Lilley, *Planning the 'City of Tomorrow'. British reconstruction planning, 1939-1952: an annotated bibliography*, Inch's Books (2001); N. Tiratsoo, *Reconstruction, Affluence and Labour Politics: Coventry 1945-60*, Routledge (1990); N. Tiratsoo, 'Labour and the reconstruction of Hull, 1945-51', in his (ed.), *The Attlee Years*, Pinter Publishers (1991); N. Tiratsoo, 'The Reconstruction of Blitzed British Cities, 1945-55: Myths and Realities', *Contemporary British History* (2000), vol.14, no.1; N. Tiratsoo, T. Matsumura, T. Mason, and J. Hasegawa, *Urban Reconstruction in Britain and Japan, 1945-1955: Dreams, Plans and Realities*, University of Luton Press (2002); J. Hasegawa, *Replanning the blitzed city centre*, op. cit., in note 1; J. Hasegawa, 'Governments, consultants and expert bodies in the physical reconstruction of the City of London in the 1940s', *Planning Perspectives* (1999), vol.14, no.2; J. Hasegawa, 'The Rise and Fall of Radical Reconstruction in 1940s Britain', *Twentieth Century British History* (1999), vol.10, no.2.

³ See, e.g., D. Rigby Childs and D.A.C.A. Boyne, 'Plymouth', *The Architects' Journal*, 12 June 1952; H. Swaff, 'In a city of the blitz I saw A Splendid Vision of Tomorrow', *Daily Herald*, 13 July 1955; B. Chalkley, 'The plan for the city centre', in M. Brayshay (ed.), *Post-war Plymouth: Planning and Reconstruction*, South West Papers in Geography no. 8, Plymouth Polytechnic (1983); B. Chalkley, 'Living with the legacy of post-war reconstruction: a case study of Plymouth', in M. Blacksell, J. Matthews, and P. Sims (eds), *Environmental Management and Change in Plymouth and the South West*, University of Plymouth (1998); B. Chalkley and J. Goodridge, 'The 1943 plan for Plymouth: war-time vision and post-war realities', in B. Chalkley, D. Dunkerley and P. Grippaios (eds), *Plymouth: Maritime City in Transition*, David and Charles (1991); M. Brayshay and S. Essex, 'Town versus country in the 1940s: Planning the contested space of a city region in the aftermath of the Second World War', *Town Planning*

`Abercrombie plan was one of the very few indisputable successes of modern town planning.’⁴

What is lacking in the studies on Plymouth is the close examination of the relationship between the government and the blitzed local authority, which was vital to determine what happened to the reconstruction plan. Pressure from the government on the blitzed local authorities forced them to curtail the scope of bold planning, to varying degrees. Many had to abandon the initial ideals altogether but a few, like Coventry, managed to materialise early bold ideas because of the determination of the local authority to stick to the original plan.⁵

As for Plymouth, little has been revealed about what the government thought of the plan in general and of the proposed city centre in particular and how it approached the local authority, except that a few studies pointed out briefly that the government after the war was very mindful of the popularity of the plan for Plymouth, which had been looked on as a ‘local magna charta’.⁶ In fact, materials at the National Archives show that the responsible ministries were by no means happy about the attitude of the local authority from the days immediately after the blitz and tried hard to make change the city’s mind with little avail and thus helping the plan to survive, a process on which this paper focus its attention.

Relationship between the Government and Plymouth during the early days of the war

In April 1941 Colin Campbell, the town clerk of Plymouth, wrote to the Ministry of Health, the then responsible ministry for town planning, stating that ‘the traders concerned’ were ‘pressing for permission to develop the sites of their destroyed premises by erecting temporary buildings’. The city was ‘disposed to be sympathetic towards the traders, but’ it was ‘anxious to deal with [traders’] applications in such a

Review (2005), vol. 76, no.3; M. Brayshay and S. Essex, ‘Vision, vested interest and pragmatism: who re-made Britain’s blitzed cities’, *Planning Perspectives* (2007), vo. 22, no.4; J. and C. Gould, *Plymouth Planned: The Architecture of the Plan for Plymouth 1943-1962*, (2000)

⁴ ‘The raping of Plymouth’, *The Guardian*, 20 October 1987. The article was about the change of policy in regard of pedestrianisation of the city centre. In this connection, also see, ‘The peril in Plymouth’, *The Guardian*, 28 March 1988, and ‘After Abercrombie, the pride and prosperity pedestrianisation has brought to Plymouth’, letters to *The Guardian*, 9 April 1988.

⁵ See works by Tiratsoo and Hasegawa, op. cit., in notes 1 and 2.

⁶ Hasegawa, ‘The Rise and Fall of Radical Reconstruction in 1940s Britain’, op. cit., in note 2, p.159. The quotation is to be found in National Archives [hereafter, NA], HLG 71/11, H. W. J. Heck, ‘Technical Group On Reconstruction. Meeting At Headquarters – 20th March 1946. City Of Plymouth Area No. 1.’, 18 March 1946, p.1.

manner as to avoid prejudicing the final development of the area under a Town Planning Scheme'.⁷ When Lord Reith, the newly appointed Minister of Works and Buildings responsible for physical reconstruction, visited Plymouth in early July, he told the representatives of the city to 'go ahead, planning boldly and comprehensively.'

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Following Reith's visit, G. L. Pepler, a veteran civil servant on town planning, took the initiative in sending down a 'Planning Inspector' to Plymouth⁹ 'with a view to gleaning some of the facts concerning the bombing and a first hand knowledge of the problems involved.' As the inspector told Campbell on his visit, 'the Department was anxious to obtain this knowledge in view of the consideration which was being given to the questions of post-war reconstruction, to town planning generally and to possible new legislation.' In the course of discussion with the inspector, Campbell informed him of the recommendation of the city's Emergency Committee to employ a consultant to prepare a reconstruction plan and of its 'hope that neighbouring authorities would collaborate' in the preparation of a plan. For this it would be useful the neighbouring authorities 'employing the same consultant as the City', although the inspector was told in the subsequent conference with them that it was financially 'impractical'.¹⁰

Paton Watson, the city engineer of Plymouth, raised a few points in the discussion with the inspector. He complained repeatedly about the shortage of staff in his department, which was 'proving a most serious obstacle' in proceeding with replanning of the city. He also told the inspector that 'as it was unlikely that the devastated business areas would be recreated on anything like their former lay-out it would seem essential that all cleared land and property required in the re-development scheme should be acquired by the State or the Local Authority.' While the 'immediate problem of controlling temporary building and the use of buildings in residential areas contrary to the present zoning has been in mind of the City Engineer', neither he nor the town clerk considered any permanent redevelopment during the war necessary in the public interest. As the inspector's report pointed out:

'It was thought that Local Authorities would, at an early date, require to have some definite assurance that the State are to subscribe to the work of re-planning and

⁷ NA, HLG 79/990, Letter from Colin Campbell, Town Clerk to Plymouth, to Secretary of the Ministry of Health, 21 April 1941.

⁸ NA, HLG 79/990, 'City of Plymouth. Special Works Committee. Special Meeting. 4 July 1941.'

⁹ NA, HLG 79/990, Letter from G. L. Pepler to H. G. Vincent, 10 July 1941 and Letter from Vincent to Pepler, 17 July 1941.

¹⁰ NA, HLG 79/990, 'Bombed Areas. Redevelopment. Plymouth. Preliminary Report, by R. A. Hudson, M. T. P. I.', 4 September 1941, p.1.

reconstruction and that, subject to State approval, the larger Authorities and their officers were quite competent to undertake the work. The City Engineer thought that early indication [should] be given by the Government of the extent to which they are prepared to aid Local Authorities in this work.’¹¹

In fact, the question of employing a consultant caused serious concern among the surrounding local authorities. Campbell approached the Plympton Rural District Council and the South East Cornwall Joint Town Planning Committee to which the local authorities in the region belonged with a view to preparing a planning scheme for the region. As he put it in a letter to Pepler, his move was based on Lord Reith’s suggestion who, emphasising ‘the desirability of the re-planning of Plymouth being associated with the planning of the areas of the Counties of Devon and Cornwall immediately adjoining the City’, told the city that ‘the same consultant should be employed by all the authorities concerned.’ However, the proposal was ‘now interpreted by our neighbours as an attempt to superimpose Plymouth’s wishes on them for some sinister motive, whereas in fact, as you know, the suggestion emanated from your Department.’ Accordingly, the mayor, Lord Astor, and the city’s Emergency Committee instructed Campbell to write to Pepler so that he should ‘put the matter in proper perspective to the adjoining authorities.’¹² Lord Astor himself wrote to Pepler, in which he pointed out the ‘Parish Pump’ of the other local authorities, and said that ‘you and Reith [were] the people to act but I [would] do anything I [could] to assist’ him ‘in getting the Cornishmen to co-operate with the “foreigners” of Plymouth.’¹³

Meanwhile, the question of interim development came to the fore. In November 1942, Lord Astor wrote to Lord Portal, Minister of Works and Planning who had replaced Reith. His letter was accompanied by a letter from Campbell on applications put forward to the city’s Special Works Committee by owners of land for permission to erect buildings on the air-raided sites. One application instanced in the letter was from an Alderman on the city’s council. He was doing his business on a rented site. His lease of property was about to terminate and ‘he was being asked what he regarded as an extortionate rent for its renewal.’ He therefore wanted to use his own site for his business. The town clerk and the city engineer thought that the erection of such temporary buildings would ‘obviously retard permanent development’ owing to ‘the unwillingness of a Local Authority to inflict what [would] be represented to be a hardship on an individual’ who had to remove the building at the expiration of notice of certain period. It would also ‘raise the financial complication of probable claims for disturbance when the owners [were] required to vacate the site.’ It was ‘therefore,

¹¹ Ibid., pp. 2 and 5-6.

¹² NA, HLG 79/990, Letter from Colin Campbell to G. L. Pepler, 22 January 1942.

¹³ NA, HLG 79/990, Letter from Lord Astor to G. L. Pepler, 21 January 1942.

increasingly necessary' that legislation dealing with interim development should be made immediately. As Campbell went on to say:

If the owners realise that their sites are going to be purchased outright, I think that their demands for their use will be less vociferous, and if legislation is forthcoming giving power to a Local Authority to refuse to permit even temporary development which is or is likely to be detrimental to permanent development.... the public interest will be served.¹⁴

Thus, Lord Astor warned Lord Portal that 'unless you [could] produce a stand-still order on building, or enable us to acquire the freeholds, our task of planning [was] going to be prejudiced.'¹⁵

A Bill on interim development was under consideration but yet to be made public. E. S. Hill, an official of the Ministry of Works and Planning, drafted a reply to Astor for Portal 'on the assumption that the Minister would not wish at this stage to enter into detailed discussions on the points Lord Astor raise[d].' Hill pointed out that the town clerk's suggestion would 'go far beyond anything' the Ministry had 'hitherto contemplated in the way of a "stand-still" provision', amounting to that 'however necessary the [interim] development, it should be held up until the planning authority [had] settled their plans.' He did 'doubt whether we should get such a provision through Parliament', and he was 'quite sure that public opinion would not, in any event, tolerate its application.' He was 'rather astonished that the suggestion should be made.' As he also emphasised:

We should not agree that the erection of the temporary buildings must obviously retard permanent development, nor give rise to claims for compensation for disturbance when the owners are required to vacate the site. Our proposed Clause is drafted so that no claim for compensation could be sustained. I am at a loss to follow the argument that the local authority should inflict immediate loss on an applicant by refusing to allow him to put up a temporary building, because of a tender conscience at turning him out of a temporary building at a later date.¹⁶

Finally, Hill dismissed the town clerk's argument for the outright acquisition of land by the local authorities for redevelopment, for 'the difficulties of a complete "stand-still" order would not be met merely by the purchase of the site for the redevelopment of

¹⁴ NA, HLG 79/990, Letter from Colin Campbell to Lord Astor, 18 November 1942.

¹⁵ NA, HLG 79/990, Letter from Lord Astor to Lord Portal, 19 November 1942.

¹⁶ NA, HLG 79/990, Letter from E. S. Hill to Parliamentary Secretary of the Ministry of Works and Planning, 28 November 1942.

which permission [was] refused.' There might be cases in which the applicant was unable to obtain an alternative site, and not only would this be 'a loss to him as an individual, but the public [might] suffer through the absence of necessary facilities, particularly in the case of shops.'¹⁷ Accordingly, a non-committal letter was sent from Portal to Astor, only saying that they would, 'in considering the proposals for legislation, give the most careful consideration to the points you [had] raised'.¹⁸

However, Plymouth kept clamouring. In January 1943 Astor sent W. S. Morrison, new Minister of Town and Country Planning, copies of material he forwarded to Portal last November, and complained about the 'increasing pressure....brought to bear upon the Corporation in Plymouth to grant temporary facilities for building.' Astor, pointing out that 'these so called temporary facilities, in effect, create[d] political vested interests', told Morrison:

Reith visited Plymouth after the blitz. Since then all our leading municipal people have been convinced that the right thing is that a public body should acquire the freehold in Plymouth. Subsequent Ministers have promised early legislation to give effect to this. Without it proper replanning would be impossible.¹⁹

While a non-committal letter was hurriedly sent from Morrison to Astor,²⁰ the matter was considered within the Ministry of Town and Country Planning [hereafter, MOTCP] to decide whether Morrison should take any further action. Its conclusion turned out to be that there was 'something wrong with the handling by the Corporation of the whole matter'²¹ and yet to doubt 'whether the Minister could, in a letter to Viscount Astor, usefully add anything to what [had] already been said by Lord Portal.'²² A sense of uneasiness that the 'position in Plymouth' was 'rather seriously unsatisfactory' was creeping over the MOTCP.²³

In March 1943 the ministry officials visited Exeter and Plymouth to see officers of the two Borough Councils and officers and representatives of the Devonshire County Council. The meeting with the town clerk and the city engineer of Plymouth highlighted various problems related to the city's replanning. The planning report by Abercrombie and the city engineer 'originally expected by Easter' was 'not now expected to be ready before the end of the Summer'. The 'future of the Admiralty's

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ NA, HLG 79/990, Letter from Lord Portal to Lord Astor, 1 December 1942.

¹⁹ NA, HLG 79/990, Letter from Lord Astor to W. S. Morrison, 14 January 1943.

²⁰ NA, HLG 79/990, Letter from Morrison to Astor, 18 January 1943.

²¹ NA, HLG 79/990, Letter from E. S. Hill to Phillips, 13 February 1943.

²² NA, HLG 79/990, Letter from K. S. Dodd to E. S. Hill, 9 February 1943.

interest' was described as the 'great problem', especially in that possible extension of the Devonport dockyard would involve the rehousing of some 15,500 people and the re-siting of Fore Street, Devonport's principal shopping area. The relationship with Cornwall County Council was 'said to be very suspicious'.²⁴

At the meeting it was also felt that the question of temporary shops was still lingering on. The town clerk 'feared the creation of goodwill on particular sites which might later be required for other purposes.' A ministry official dismissed the argument as being 'practically without foundation', for 'the goodwill of a firm' was 'not its exact location but on its reputation.' In Plymouth a temporary open air market had been built. 'At first the local shop-keepers would not look at it, but the multiple stores took up stalls' and were 'doing more trade than ever.' Subsequently other firms had 'followed suit, but it would be ridiculous to suggest that they [were] building up a goodwill which [would] later be destroyed by their transfer to permanent premises on another site.'²⁵

Perhaps more disturbingly, this ministry official noted that in both Exeter and Plymouth there was 'evidence of apathy'. As he went on:

As would be expected, the conditions created by war damage have produced an entirely different reaction from that in towns further east and north where life normally runs to a more active tempo and where change is perhaps more common.....

In Plymouth, it is true that the Council have appointed Professor Abercrombie to prepare a plan, but we were told that on the whole public interest was lacking and that local bodies, although invited to meet the Consultant and put forward any suggestions, had made a poor response. There is a long tradition of property speculation in the City which may have created an antipathy to anything which is likely to interfere with the status quo and the City is, of course, dominated by its one and particularly only industry – the dockyard. There is a certain amount of tourist traffic but this is comparatively a minor interest.'²⁶

The MOTPC decided that W. S. Morrison, the minister, should visit Plymouth for informal talks.²⁷ Brief notes made by the ministry officials on the visit made in September demonstrate that Morrison did his best to encourage the city. He promised to assist Plymouth in securing the publication of the planning report by dealing with

²³ NA, HLG 79/990, Letter from E. S. Hill to Parliamentary Secretary, 4 January 1943.

²⁴ NA, HLG 79/990, S. L. G. Beaufoy, 'Visit to Ex[e]ter and Plymouth. 10th and 11th March 1943.', 12 March 1943, p.3.

²⁵ Ibid., pp.3-4

²⁶ Ibid., p.4.

²⁷ NA, HLG 79/990, Letter from S. W. C. Phillips to H. Sloan, 12 August 1943.

obstacles related to paper control so that the printed version would be presented to the Council meeting in early October. In reply to the town clerk's argument that areas demarcated for reconstruction should be in public ownership, Morrison 'agreed that this was likely to be', adding that the value of the land as of March 1939 should be set as a ceiling on purchase by the blitzed local authorities, and that the local authorities 'could expect a fair deal' in financial assistance from the government.²⁸

Then representatives of the surrounding authorities were invited to discussion, in which it was made 'clear that the surrounding districts were apprehensive of Plymouth desiring to extend its boundaries.' It had been contemplated to set up a new joint planning committee of Plymouth and surrounding authorities, but the chairman of the existing East Cornwall Joint Planning Committee said flatly at the meeting that he 'did not wish his Committee to be disrupted by the formation' of the proposed committee. Against this, the 'Minister urged cooperation and suggested that there might be a sub committee for Plymouth.'²⁹

The consideration of the plan by the Advisory Panel on the Redevelopment of City Centres, Ministry of Town and Country Planning

Following the minister's visit, the MOTCP started to examine Plymouth's proposals which were expected to be soon published as a report in a booklet form.³⁰ Although the publication was put off, the MOTCP was still keen on the examination. 'In view of the expert advice which the Corporation ha[d] had at their disposal', it was regarded 'more advisable' that they should 'discuss the application of the proposals', namely 'the financial implications, the programming of the reconstruction, the problems of labour and material', and so on, 'rather than devote valuable time to "testing" the proposals.'³¹

The MOTCP's Advisory Panel on the Redevelopment of City Centres [hereafter, Advisory Panel] took an active part in this examination. It was set up in 1943 to consider problems involved in the replanning and redevelopment of blitzed city centres, with a view to formulating necessary legislation. It consisted of four high-rank officials of the MOTCP and three outside experts such as H. J. Manzoni, City Engineer and Surveyor of Birmingham, and selected seven heavily air-raided cities, Bristol, Coventry, Hull, Plymouth, Portsmouth, Southampton, and Swansea, as test cases of war-damage

²⁸ NA, HLG 79/990, Letter from H. W. J. Heck to G. L. Pepler, 3 September 1943.

²⁹ NA, HLG 79/990, G. L. Pepler, 'Plymouth', 9 September 1943.

³⁰ NA, HLG 79/990, Letter from H. W. Wells to J. Paton Watson, 23 September 1943.

³¹ NA, HLG 79/990, Letter from H. W. Wells to L. Neal, 15 October 1943.

reconstruction.³²

The Advisory Panel, accompanied by the MOTCP's Regional Planning Officer [hereafter, RPO], visited Plymouth early 1944 and discussed various matters with the representatives and officers of the city including the Deputy Lord Mayor, the Deputy Chairman of the Planning Committee, the town clerk, the city engineer and the city treasurer. Before the visit the Advisory Panel already undertook thoroughgoing study into the city's economic and social background ³³ as well as cross-examination of a dummy proof of the planning report by Abercrombie and the city engineer.³⁴

While the redevelopment of city centre was the prime concern of the Advisory Panel, it paid due attention to such related matters as housing and industry of the city as a whole. As noted in its survey report preliminary to the visit to Plymouth, in regard of housing there was need to tackle 'serious overcrowding' in certain wards of the city which was 'worse than in the East End of London'. Plymouth had 'long been a region of small families' with 'a much greater number of one-person families than [was] found generally.' As for industry, Plymouth was 'handicapped with respect to future industrial development' as it had 'a limited hinterland and the import of fuel and raw materials [was] a necessity'. As the Advisory Panel's survey also commented, Plymouth's industries were 'few....chiefly connected with supplying the needs of Plymouth's workers to some degree.....No new industries ha[d] been started during the war'; whereas the number of registered workers in such industries as hotels and laundries, paper and printing, clothing, and food, drink and tobacco decreased heavily owing to enemy action.³⁵

Yet another concern was that there was still little sign of relationship between Plymouth and the surrounding authorities improving, and further information was supplied to the Advisory Panel just before the visit to Plymouth that some surrounding authorities were not to accept invitation from the city to join with it in an Executive Joint Planning Committee for the area covered by the Plan. No less importantly, it was 'felt that the following features of the Plan had in them elements of doubt sufficient to call for close scrutiny'. First, concern was expressed whether the abolition of Fore

³² For Advisory Panel, see Hasegawa, *Replanning the blitzed city centre*, op. cit., in note 1, esp., ch.2.

³³ NA, HLG 88/9, Ministry of Town and Country Planning [hereafter, MOTCP], Advisory Panel on Redevelopment of City Centres [hereafter, Advisory Panel], 'Notes Preliminary to a Visit to Plymouth'.

³⁴ NA, HLG 88/9, MOTCP, Advisory Panel, 'Notes from the Plymouth Reconstruction Report', 10 December 1943.

³⁵ NA, HLG 88/9, MOTCP, Advisory Panel, 'Notes Preliminary to a Visit to Plymouth', pp. 6, 7, 9-10.

Street, the main shopping street in Devonport, expected to be absorbed as part of Dockyard extension, would be accepted to local shoppers who might not be willing to go to the city centre of Plymouth for shopping. Secondly, the Advisory Panel regarded the belief expressed in the Plan, on which the amount of shopping space to be provided was based, that Plymouth served a shopping public of three-quarters million as 'a doubtful assumption.' The city might 'draw on so wide a public for few commodities such as furniture', but, as the Advisory Panel noted, it would 'not meet the everyday or even the weekly or monthly needs of anything like this number.' Thirdly, it was suspected that the proposed layout of the shopping centre did 'lack a focal point' and that proposed five-storey shops there might not be popular. Fourthly, a big question mark was cast on the industrial proposals. There was 'perhaps too large a provision for industry', and it was doubted if Plymouth could, 'being so far from markets, hope for anything more than such light industries as [would] cater for local needs'. Similarly, 'the hopes of establishing a pottery industry and reviving local fishing' were regarded as 'illusory', while it was thought 'unlikely' for Plymouth 'to attract the ordinary seaside holiday makers to any great extent.' In any case, it was suspected that 'the "Plymouth speed of working" [would] cause industrialists to hesitate about establishing concerns there'. Fifthly, in view of the degree of pre-war overcrowding, the figure of 1000 houses to cover pre-war shortage was thought to be 'absurdly low', and the proposed ten-year programme of 32705 houses 'would not bring Plymouth up to an adequate standard.'³⁶

The Advisory Panel visited Plymouth on 4 January 1944. At the meeting between the Advisory Panel and Plymouth, the city engineer agreed with Manzoni that, theoretically, the city would need 70000 dwellings. The reasons why the proposals in the Plan did not allow for so many as this were partly because the suggested programme of 32705 dwellings should 'keep them busy for quite a long time' and partly because 'the sharing of houses between families' was 'a local custom in Plymouth.' The following factors accounted for this custom. First, in a city of seafarers, there were many households where the male members were away for long periods. Secondly, many people were 'compelled to share houses or take in lodgers' as local property values were 'unusually high' while wages tended to be 'rather low.' High property values were in part due to the contours making building difficult and therefore expensive and in part to the water bounding Plymouth on three sides, checking the outward spread of development and thus fostering scarcity value. In fact, because of these factors, there were only 1000 applications for dwellings outstanding at the break of the war.³⁷

³⁶ NA, HLG 88/9, MOTCP, Advisory Panel, 'Minutes No. 13', the meeting held 15 December 1943, pp. 4-5.

³⁷ NA, HLG 88/9, MOTCP, Advisory Panel, 'Minutes No. 14', the meeting held 4

As for the proposed transfer of the main shopping area of Devonport to the city centre of Plymouth, the town clerk told the Advisory Panel that he was 'confident' that 'the abolition of Fore Street would cause no substantial inconvenience to shoppers.' Fore Street served a population of 80000 before the war, 70000 of which were not very much further from the city centre of Plymouth than from it. 'Moreover, although there had not yet been any comprehensive discussion with traders, he knew that the principal trader in Devonport was willing to move to the centre' of Plymouth. For, during the past ten years, 'there had been a gradual diminution in the importance of Devonport as a shopping centre', as against a gradual increase in the importance of Union Street and George Street of central Plymouth. However, it was soon revealed that his remarks were little more than conjecture. Questioned by Lawrence Neal, a member of the Advisory Panel and the Deputy Secretary of the MOTCP, on his statement as to the diminishing importance of Fore Street, the town clerk admitted that it was 'successful right up to the time of its destruction', adding that 'the Co-operative Society had spent a lot of money on a big new store there just before the war.' He was followed by the city engineer who said that 'the whole question of joining the shopping centres had still to be discussed with local interests'.³⁸

As for the industrial proposals, the city engineer told the Advisory Panel that he 'did not rate the industrial prospects very highly.' The proposed industrial sites at Stonehouse, consisting of derelict land with basements, 'would not be so attractive to industrialists as undeveloped land would be.' The minutes of the Advisory Panel continues to note hardly promising views:

Moreover the high price of coal locally is a deterrent to industry. (That alone would spoil the prospects of establishing a local pottery industry). They could not expect industries beyond those that would serve the local population.³⁹

It was also admitted that there were not many avenues for female employment and that the local wages of the distributive trades which formed the principal opening for women tended to be low. However, the city seemed to be content with that 'a good many women, who [were] not insured workers, [did] take in lodgers.' All told, their basic view of industrial future of the city was summarised in the town clerk's remark that, 'provided the Dockyard was fully maintained, they were not sure that they wanted to attract industry to any great extent.'⁴⁰

January 1944, p.1.

³⁸ Ibid, p.2.

³⁹ Ibid., p.2

⁴⁰ Ibid, p.2. Underlined in the original material.

The discussion then turned to the question of how to proceed with actual reconstruction. It was made clear that the city engineer was not versed in the subject. He was 'troubled about the likelihood of very high post-war building costs' and 'feared that, if costs were high, building would inevitably have to be postponed.' Against this, Neal, Deputy Secretary of the MOTCP, pointed out that 'traders.... would not dare to postpone rebuilding, despite high costs, because they would fear the loss of their custom.' The Deputy Lord Mayor 'was inclined to agree with this', adding that 'some of the stores feared that Mail Order Departments would capture their trade.' At that time many traders continued their business in temporary shops at Mutley Plain, in the suburbs of the city along the trunk road. Further asked by Neal whether high cost of rebuilding might cause traders to postpone their plans and temporarily remain there, the town clerk said that the traders there 'would be anxious to get back because Mutley Plain [was] much too far out for convenience', where they had to pay 'about three times the normal rents.' In any case, the Corporation regarded the use of Mutley Plain, which was situated on the principal road into the city, as 'most unsatisfactory from a planning point of view.'⁴¹

Acquisition by the local authority of land for redevelopment purposes was also discussed. Procedure being contemplated in the Town and Country Planning Bill (which was to become the Town and Country Planning Act, 1944) was that the local authority would declare Reconstruction Areas, apply to the Minister of Town and Country Planning for approval of acquisition (compulsory if necessary) of these areas, and purchase them after Minister's approval at the price of the end of March 1939. The city engineer, asked whether he contemplated that some areas might be declared as Reconstruction Areas in 1945 but not purchased until 1955, said that it could be the case. The town clerk, on a query from one Advisory Panel member as to how applications from individual owners for permission to develop would be dealt with during the intervening ten years, stated rightly that owners could require the Corporation to purchase their land in Reconstruction Areas immediately if they so wished in such circumstances. But then the city engineer 'remarked, flippantly, that, if the Corporation were allowed to purchase land at 1939 values and then to let it, they wouldn't need to levy any rates'. Immediate reaction to these extraordinary remarks was the rekindled suspicion, as expressed by Manzoni, that the Corporation was 'expecting to purchase at 1939 values in 1955.' Moreover, in the course of discussion, the city engineer stated that assuming that an area of 24.5 acres of main shopping sites could be let at £ 3 a square foot, £ 1. 10. 0 a square foot for office and bank sites and 15/- a square foot for the sites of civic and other buildings, he thought that the

⁴¹ Ibid, pp. 3-4.

account for the contemplated Reconstruction Area No. 1 covering the city centre could be balanced. This caused 'considerable discussion', for the figure for shopping sites was regarded extremely expensive. The arguments against the city engineer's assumption included:

That the proposals [in the Plan] involve stepping up the amount of first-class shopping sites by more than 50%; that traders can afford to pay only "what the traffic will bear"; that, therefore, unless the purchasing power of the Plymouth shoppers increases, the traders cannot pay increased ground rents; that there is no evidence that this purchasing power will increase....indeed the evidence is all the other way (because of decanting of population and dependence on dockyard wages); and that shopkeepers....will already have the burden of having to build at high post-war building costs.⁴²

If the city engineer seemed to aim at financing the reconstruction by taking from traders as much as possible, the city treasurer wanted explicitly to be dependent on the government. He demonstrated 'his own idea of how reconstruction finance would be arranged'. It read 'that the Government would examine the city's scheme, would decide how much of the cost the city ought to bear, would require the rates to be put up accordingly, and would then stand behind the city for the rest.' Manzoni pointed out 'that if the Government were to undertake an unlimited liability, they would probably require at least a share in any possible profits as a quid pro quo and would also be likely to keep very close control over the administration of the scheme throughout its term. Would not Plymouth perhaps prefer to run some risk of loss, so as to maintain their independence and a possibility of profit?' The city treasurer, 'while seeing the force of this', replied that he 'was troubled at the prospect of undertaking responsibility for losses whose extent could not be foreseen', and added 'that Plymouth would in any event be losing rateable value because the Plan provided for decanting population outside her boundaries.'⁴³

At the meeting of the Advisory Panel following the visit to Plymouth, doubts were still expressed as to the lack of a focal point in the proposed layout of the shopping centre, considerable number of 5-storey shops, and 'apparent inertia about the employment of women'. At the same time, as to one important question, the fusion of Plymouth and Devonport shopping centres, the 'general feeling was favourable towards this'. Moreover, the RPO, who had seen Plymouth officials immediately after the visit, reported that the city 'had been favourably impressed....by the Panel's visit as a whole.

⁴² Ibid, pp. 4-5.

⁴³ Ibid, p. 5.

Both the Aldermen who were present had thought well of the discussions.'⁴⁴

Difficulties that mounted up during the rest of the war and a ray of hope the MOTCP found

Despite a spate of critical observations at the visit of the Advisory Panel, it seemed that there now emerged hopes of progress. In April 1944 the RPO of the MOTCP reported his superior, the Chief Regional Planning Officer at the headquarters, that he attended a gathering of interested ministries and local authorities at the opening of the exhibition organised by the city to hear an exposition by Abercrombie and Paton Watson of proposals in their report which was eventually published. Expectations were thus high that there should be rapid progress with the reconstruction of Plymouth, particularly with the formalisation of the report.⁴⁵ In reply the Chief Regional Planning Officer said that the 'next step would be for you to consider this outline plan in consultation with the other Government representatives in your Region, with a view to sending to the Local Authority a joint provisional approval – probably a conditional approval.'⁴⁶

However, expected progress was hard to achieve. In February 1944, H. W. Wells of the MOTCP sent the city engineer questionnaire to attain estimates of the labour and materials to be required for actual reconstruction. What ensued was an exchange of correspondence, Wells urging Paton Watson to supply information as quickly as possible, whereas the latter pointing out staff shortage as an excuse for not being able to do it.⁴⁷

The RPO of the MOTCP, who had contacts with the Corporation most frequently, also found difficulties in discussing with the city engineer how to further the work leading up to the application for the acquisition of the Reconstruction Areas. True, the Corporation had not yet agreed to the city engineer's proposals to increase his staff, which the MOTCP also thought necessary. At the same time, because of the question of staff shortage, 'any request for the information involving a considerable amount of work [was] likely to be met with a retort that there [was] not the staff available.' The RPO 'should not necessarily agree with' this argument, and went so far as to say that 'I must record for your private information an impression that there [was] a certain

⁴⁴ NA, HLG 88/9, MOTCP, Advisory Panel, 'Minutes No. 15', the meeting held 19 January 1944, pp.1-2.

⁴⁵ NA, HLG 79/990, Letter from H. W. J. Heck to K. S. Dodd, 27 April 1944.

⁴⁶ NA, HLG 79/990, Letter from K. S. Dodd to H. W. J. Heck, 18 May 1944.

⁴⁷ NA, HLG 79/990, Letters from H. W. Wells to J. Paton Watson, 29 February and 31 March 1944, Watson from Wells, 10 March and 3 April 1944.

amount of difficulty building up at Plymouth, to some extent due to the City Engineer's own peculiar temperament'⁴⁸.

The MOTCP officials were now determined to make progress and decided to interview appropriate Council members as well as the officials. Its objects were threefold. First, it was thought necessary to discuss 'the minima of information' in order to enable the ministry's RPO and its counterpart at the Ministry of Transport, the Divisional Road Engineer [hereafter, DRE], to consider the technical merits of the Plan. Secondly, it was expected that through such an interview the MOTCP 'could influence the Council members who would be present in the right direction in regard to such matters as extra staff for Paton Watson.' Thirdly, the problems of organising and financing reconstruction had to be 'faced up', not the least because the passing of the Town and Country Planning Bill 'as some sort of signpost' was now in the offing.⁴⁹

In September 1944, the RPO reported that the Town Planning Committee of the city had accepted the Plan 'as a basic principle for discussion', which the MOTCP regarded as 'a step in the right direction.' It was also reported that the layout of the shopping area was likely to be amended through consultation with commercial interests. However, there were also the seeds of concern. Difficulties were felt in formulating concerted action between the government officials concerned. The RPO pointed out 'unsatisfactory co-operation' with the DRE.⁵⁰ He also implied his complaint about the two-way communication, namely, between Plymouth and the MOTCP headquarters on the one hand and between Plymouth and himself on the other, in the consideration of matters with regard to the reconstruction of the city. As he wrote to a senior civil servant at the headquarters:

I am sure you will agree that there is a very great need for a clear line of action to be formulated as to the method of considering these matters, and for liaison between those who are, on behalf of the Ministry, concerned therewith.⁵¹

Meanwhile, Plymouth became highly critical of financial assistance to blitzed cities from the government, and Lord Astor went so far as to argue in the House of Commons for boundary extension on financial grounds.⁵² This statement certainly deteriorated the city's relationship with the surrounding authorities. A joint planning committee for

⁴⁸ NA, HLG 79/990, Letter from H. W. J. Heck to K. S. Dodd, 24 August 1944.

⁴⁹ NA, HLG 79/990, Letter from H. W. Wells to K. S. Dodd and Heady, 29 August 1944.

⁵⁰ NA, HLG 79/990, 'Notes of a meeting held on the 6th September 1944 in the Conference Room, Cleveland House, St. James Square'.

⁵¹ NA, HLG 79/990, Letter from H. W. J. Heck to H. W. Wells, 30 August 1944.

⁵² NA, HLG 79/990, H. W. Wells, 'City of Plymouth. Note on Memorandum (dated 12th

the region had been contemplated, and the authorities concerned managed to hold its first meeting in June 1944. Since that time Plymouth had forwarded two conditions on which it would come into the joint committee. First, their representation should be increased from two to four. Secondly, Paton Watson, the city engineer should be planning officer to the joint committee. The latter condition in particular was 'strongly resisted' by other constituent authorities. As one MOTCP official, who attended a second meeting of the joint committee held in October 1944, noted:

It was inevitable that Lord Astor's statement in the House on the Committee stage of the Bill regarding the necessity for boundary extension should have a profound effect on the feelings of the other constituent authorities who regard Plymouth with the utmost suspicion and feel that these recent statements have confirmed all that they have previously thought.⁵³

On the morning the October meeting of the joint planning committee was held, the authorities excluding Plymouth had a meeting and decided that the Chairman of the Devon County Council should be spokesman to the joint committee and that the committee should have its own technical staff. At the meeting held in the afternoon, Sir Clifford Tozer, principal member of the Reconstruction Committee of Plymouth Council, said that 'he regretted the secret morning meeting and that Plymouth were not first given an opportunity of expressing their views.' He suggested that the request for increased representation could be dropped should the other authorities so wish. As for the suggestion that Paton Watson should be the planning officer of the joint committee, he emphasised the hope that they would be able to come to terms, but his plea was only greeted by the reply by the chairman of the Devon County Council that 'it was asking too much that they should accept the City Engineer, who could not be independent.' After the meeting the MOTCP officer urged Sir Clifford Tozer to persuade his Council to agree to the conclusions reached in the afternoon.⁵⁴

Nevertheless, there emerged signs of progress. The new Lord Mayor with the town clerk and the city engineer came to see the Deputy Secretary of the MOTCP 'quite informally' in November 1944, enquiring 'as to the best action they could take in order to make further headway with their reconstruction proposals.'⁵⁵ In February 1945, following the conclusion reached at the meeting between Plymouth and the MOTCP, the RPO and the city engineer were instructed to work on the boundary line of the

September, 1944) by City Treasurer of Plymouth', 18 September 1944.

⁵³ NA, HLG 79/990, S. L. G. Beaufoy, 'Plymouth and District Joint Committee', 12 October 1944.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ NA, HLG 79/990, Letter from L. Neal to G. L. Pepler, 21 November 1944.

Reconstruction Area No.1 covering the city centre.⁵⁶

Within a week, the Reconstruction Committee of the Council approved the boundary line of the Reconstruction Area No.1 agreed by the RPO and the city engineer. It also received a deputation from the Retailer's Advisory Committee which represented the commercial interests of the city. The deputation suggested such modifications to the city's planning proposals that the width of all roads in the area should be reduced by at least 23 per cent of the proposed layout; that the open spaces in the area should be reduced proportionately; and that public and private vehicular traffic should be allowed on all roads in the area where practicable.⁵⁷

The following month the RPO, the DRE and his assistants of the Ministry of Transport, and the city engineer discussed the road layout for the central area. The Ministry of Transport representatives, in the light of instructions from their headquarters, outlined certain suggestions. Most importantly, they argued that the east-to-west axis of the central area, one of the main bus routes proposed to be provided (and later to become Royal Parade), should be submerged below ground level to allow of the principal north to south pedestrian access to cross over this route, instead of joining with it on the level as planned. The Ministry of Transport did 'evidently feel that it [would] present some danger if the suggestion they [had] put forward [was] not adopted.' However, the real concern felt at the meeting was, as the RPO reported his headquarters, the attitude of the city engineer, who, reacting to various suggestions for further consideration of the proposals, gave the 'constant reminder....that they [had] not the staff to do the work.' As the RPO went on:

At this meeting with the Transport representatives it was clear that really for Watson to be able to assess the merits of their suggestions, he should take levels and have a good deal of work done on the drawing board.⁵⁸

Meanwhile, the MOTCP tried to make the city accept certain modifications in regard of the plan, such as the reduction of width of the north-to-south axis of the central area 'to meet the shopping interests' wishes'.⁵⁹ However, the town clerk kept complaining about staff shortage and maintained that they would not make a formal application for the purchase of war-damaged land for reconstruction purposes under the Town and Country Planning Act, 1944, for 12-18 months.⁶⁰

⁵⁶ NA, HLG 79/532, Letter from H. W. J. Heck to F. G. Downing, 6 February 1945.

⁵⁷ NA, HLG 79/532, Letter from H. W. J. Heck to F. G. Downing, 12 February 1945.

⁵⁸ NA, HLG 79/532, Letter from H. W. J. Heck to F. G. Downing, 20 March 1945.

⁵⁹ NA, HLG 79/532, Letter from H. W. J. Heck to K. S. Dodd, 20 March 1945.

⁶⁰ NA, HLG 79/532, Letters from A. B. Valentine to Colin Campbell, 29 May and from

In the end, the MOTCP arranged to make 15 technical assistants available for the city in June 1945. As one official of the MOTCP put it:

My feeling is that with this addition of staff we should be justified in pressing Plymouth very strongly to make more rapid headway than they at present have in mind, and if they do not do so I think we might have to make some detailed investigation as to how their work is organised.⁶¹

Developments after the war

As the city eventually submitted in February 1946 a formal application for a Declaratory Order, namely, an order to show land to be purchased by the blitzed local authority for reconstruction under the Town and Country Planning Act, 1944, the MOTCP regarded that the things were now 'moving forward fairly speedily'.⁶² At the same time, the MOTCP was convinced that the Plymouth plan had to be amended substantially. While recognising that the support for the plan was 'immense and enthusiastic' and that to 'alter for the alteration's sake [would] be unwise', it was also emphasised that the ministry should 'not oblivious of the fact that finance from the National as well as the local Exchequer [would] be contributed to the carrying out of the scheme and, it [was] this Ministry's responsibility to ensure that the plan [was] economically possible as well as a model of well planned development.'⁶³

In fact, as it was observed in April 1946, the MOTCP regarded the plan as 'radically defective'.⁶⁴ It was pointed out, for instance, that the proposed road pattern was too costly and rigid, scrapping all the existing roads many of which were in good condition and on good lines; the extent of shopping area was too large and its layout would make it isolated from other parts of the central area.⁶⁵

Campbell to Valentine, 30 May 1945.

⁶¹ NA, HLG 79/532, Letter from E. S. Hill to A. B. Valentine, 9 June 1945.

⁶² NA, HLG 79/597, 'City of Plymouth – Reconstruction. Brief for the Minister's conference – February 20th, 1946. in Conference Room, St. James's Square, at 2.30.'

⁶³ NA, HLG 71/11, H. W. J. Heck, 'Technical Group on Reconstruction....', 18 March 1946, op. cit., in note 6, p.1.

⁶⁴ NA, HLG 71/11, G. Stephenson, 'Plymouth. Reconstruction Area No.1', sent to E. S. Hill, 17 April 1946.

⁶⁵ NA, HLG 71/11, 'Technical Department. Report by Reconstruction Areas Committee on City Of Plymouth Reconstruction Area NO. 1 Application for Declaratory Order', April 1946. Also see, NA, HLG 71/11, H. W. J. Heck 'Ministry Of Town And Country Planning. South Western Region. City Of Plymouth Reconstruction Area NO.1 – Shopping Precinct.', 2 November 1945.

Accordingly, the MOTCP, collaborating with the Ministry of Transport, held a meeting with the city officials and council members in December 1946 in which the ministries forwarded various criticisms of the plan. For instance, the Ministry of Transport told the city that the width of east-west axis, 175 feet as proposed in the plan, should not exceed 110 feet. Against this, the city maintained 'emphatically that any less width than 175 feet' for that road 'would destroy the most important feature of their plan, and one with which the Council were determined to proceed.' However, D. P. Walsh, the official of the MOTCP who chaired the meeting, was of opinion that he 'found it difficult to accept the necessity for a feature of this size in a town the size of Plymouth and stressed the danger of grandiose planning and the consequent financial loss.'⁶⁶ As the MOTCP recorded, the city was 'somewhat aggrieved at our belated and unexpected observations.' Against this, Walsh stated that 'we were all learning by experience.'⁶⁷

The MOTCP and the Ministry of Transport kept putting pressure on Plymouth. For instance, at the meeting with the city engineer in March 1947, the ministries urged the need to make alterations in regard of alignments or width of principal roads.⁶⁸ Local traders, at the meeting in July 1947 held by the Board of Trade on the allocation of sites in the city centre, 'even suggested that but for a few misguided enthusiasts the "Plan for Plymouth" had few backers.'⁶⁹ The RPO of the MOTCP also attended this meeting and reported the headquarters:

You will see from the minutes that doubts exist in the Traders mind of the suitability of the deign and size of the Shopping Precinct upon which the Department also has had doubt for some considerable time. It may be well to have this point made clear to Plymouth, and that it is for them to satisfy us that their requirements in the light of those of the various local interests are sound, and at the same time flexible enough to be adjusted in the light of experience over the next few years.⁷⁰

Soon a letter was sent from the MOTCP to the city, which, on the instruction of the Minister of Town and Country Planning, transmitted the observations of the ministry

⁶⁶ NA, HLG 79/536 (also to be found in NA, HLG 71/11), 'Plymouth Central Area. Notes of a meeting with representatives of Plymouth City Council 5th December, 1946.', p.1.

⁶⁷ NA, HLG 71/11, 'Plymouth Central Area Case History. From Tech. Div. File No. 10135/10/3, - Tech. Exam. Ctee Reports.'

⁶⁸ NA, HLG 79/536, 'Notes of meeting held at Plymouth on March 6th, 1947, to discuss modifications to East-West Axis and road layout generally in the central area of the city.'

⁶⁹ NA, HLG 79/536, H. W. J. Heck, 'Meeting At Board Of Trade Offices, Plymouth, 3.7.1947. To Discuss The Re-Establishment Of Trading Facilities In The Plymouth Shopping Precinct', 10 July 1947, p.1.

⁷⁰ NA, HLG 79/536, Letter from H. W. J. Heck to D. P. Walsh, 10 July 1947.

on the plan. Stating that the plan had 'given rise to some concern', it doubted the appropriateness of 'the virtual abandonment of the existing street framework', emphasised the need to 'keep in touch with the interested parties, such as the traders', and referred to the agreed and possible further modifications in regard of the road and land use proposals. As the letter put it:

The Minister hopes that your Council will not consider themselves as precluded from making such further modifications as experience may show to be necessary during the actual process of redevelopment. He feels sure that they will realise the importance of retaining sufficient flexibility in their plan to enable them to meet such essential readjustments as may be called for by circumstances.⁷¹

At the same time, the letter ended by saying this:

Subject to these conditions, the Minister is prepared to agree that the proposals for the redevelopment of the Central Area as laid before him can be accepted as a target plan.⁷²

In such an abrupt way, the MOTCP's approval of the basic ideas of city centre reconstruction in the plan was eventually given.

Conclusions

Considering the aforesaid critical opinions held by Whitehall, one may wonder why the MOTCP gave its approval of the plan out of blue. There are several reasons which account for this. First, the city engineer remained to be a very tough negotiator, to say the least. As one MOTCP official put it in March 1947:

I do not think we can make any progress in any further discussions if Mr Paton Watson alone represents Plymouth. His mind is not open to reason. I came away with the feeling that he is not going to give an inch on the plan and yet think he is clever enough to shift responsibility on us, Transport and other officers in the City Government.⁷³

⁷¹ NA, HLG 79/536, Letter from D. P. Walsh to Colin Campbell, 26 July 1947.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ NA, HLG 71/11, Letter from G. Stephenson to D. P. Walsh, 10 March 1947. Around that time, the RPO also pointed out in a letter to Walsh 'the bias' which was 'unfortunately....engendered from time to time by the City Engineer', and told him that it would be 'worthwhile that a competent observer from the Department should have a firsthand impression of the Traders grievances and requirements.' NA, HLG 79/536, Letter from H. W. J. Heck to D. P. Walsh, 10 July 1947, op. cit., in note 70.

Perhaps more fundamentally, although Abercrombie was around that time, as Watson informed the MOTCP, 'out of the picture',⁷⁴ there was always a feeling of awe, on the part of the MOTCP, of the plan by Abercrombie. The Ministry's first examination of the plan made at the end the war started with saying:

To make observation on the proposals for a new city centre contained in the report entitled A PLAN FOR PLYMOUTH is a very embarrassing task.... There must be admiration for the high aim and gratitude for its success; the imperfections are mostly those resulting from much perfection, the lavishness inseparable from the swift capture of a vision. The ideal city of the future must be a gracious place, for which the first elements are sunlit spaces and streets of beautiful architecture, freshened with trees and gardens. All these are promised, and if some of the more workaday considerations do not appear to have been allowed full weight it is a matter capable of remedy. It is to be hoped that in the process of adjustment too much of the enchantment will not be lost.⁷⁵

At the same time, the MOTCP suffered from the lack of a formula in considering reconstruction proposals, and consequently tended to hesitate to forward criticisms of the proposals to the blitzed cities. As the RPO in charge of Plymouth put it, 'in the earlier days, immediately after the publication of the Plymouth Plan, I was having to proceed without any instructions or drill laid down in the matter.'⁷⁶

In fact, the MOTCP did not make the most of an opportunity to have a tripartite discussion about reconstruction with the city and the traders, the interests to be affected most directly by redevelopment of the city centre. Between early 1946 and early 1947, traders' associations in Plymouth such as the Chamber of Commerce and Plymouth Incorporated Mercantile Association, which were anxious to know the conditions in regard of re-siting themselves in the city centre such as rents, the time schedule of redevelopment, the terms of lease and the procedure for the allocation of sites, kept asking the MOTCP to hold a conference among a particular organisation of the trading interests, the city, and the Minister of Town and Country Planning. The officials of the MOTCP were afraid that a conference with one interest might lead to similar requests or, even worse, complaints from other interests. Accordingly, the MOTCP kept replying to the effect that the questions raised by traders were

⁷⁴ NA, HLG 71/11, Letter from G. Stephenson to D. P. Walsh, 10 March 1947, op. cit., in note 73.

⁷⁵ NA, HLG 79/532, A. G. Shoesmith, 'City of Plymouth', 20 March 1945, p.1.

⁷⁶ NA, HLG 79/536, H. W. J. Heck, 'Meeting At The Regional Planning Office, Woodland Road, Bristol. 22.5.46. With Mr. J. G. Pidgeon, Divisional Road Engineer.', 23 May 1946, p.p.1-2.

essentially matters which should be discussed in the first instance either between the traders and the local authority or between the local authority and the MOTCP.⁷⁷

As time went by this way, an opportunity to make the city reconsider their plan was thought to be lost. Thus, just before the aforesaid meeting in December 1946 in which the criticisms were eventually forwarded to the city, Walsh of the MOTCP, at the meeting with the Ministry of Transport:

pointed out that in view of the considerable period which had elapsed since the general proposals set out in “A Plan for Plymouth” became known it would now be difficult to lay before the City Council fundamental alterations in the plan and he considered that the point to which we should now address ourselves was what minimum amendments we would regard as necessary in order to secure a reasonably acceptable plan.⁷⁸

Even such minimum amendments were not necessarily materialised. In April 1950, as for an alteration in regard of a principal road originally agreed by the city and the ministries concerned at the time of discussion on the city’s application for Declaratory Order made in early 1946, the ministries were told ‘that Plymouth’s road construction and disposals had now made it too late to effect this alteration’. The ministries ‘therefore accepted it as a “fait accompli”’.⁷⁹

To repeat, the Plymouth plan has been regarded as ‘one of the very few indisputable successes of modern town planning’.⁸⁰ As demonstrated in this paper, the success was certainly made in spite of the pressure from Whitehall, notably the MOTCP and the Ministry of Transport, but mostly due to the fact that the ministries failed in largely a self-induced way to extend the pressure to the city to the full. In this sense, the success might be regarded as a discounted one.

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⁷⁷ See materials in NA, HLG 79/559.

⁷⁸ NA, HLG 71/11, ‘Plymouth Central Area. Notes of meeting with Ministry of Transport on the 13th November’, p.1.’

⁷⁹ NA, HLG 79/536, N. Lichfield, ‘Note of a Meeting held on the 14th April, 1950, at Berkeley Square House’, April 1950.

⁸⁰ Op. cit., in note 4.

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