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Dear Exeter City Living

### **Consultation for the Proposed Development 61 – 63 Haven Road.**

We are grateful for your recent consultation, and briefing to interest groups.

After careful consideration ECS concludes that the development scheme as it stands needs significant revision because there are problematic issues within the suggested development, and it does not respect the historical context of the area, particularly in the wider context of the canal and canal basin being a Heritage Harbour.

#### **Height and impact of the buildings.**

The Basin was never built up with warehouses on both sides, as industrial history for Exeter went a different way after the arrival of the railways. To use old plans which were never realised to make the argument for a significant rise in density and height of the existing eclectic patchwork of buildings on the western side of the Basin is a desperate pseudo-historical claim that has no credence. History has left Exeter with a Canal Basin with less of a canyon effect – something northern cities with fully built-up warehouse structures are desperate to achieve these days, with the aim to bring more light into the canals and basins and to improve the open feel for visitors. As functions have changed, we think Exeter needs to take advantage of how the area has been kept underdeveloped. In part 3 of the presentation you state *Its popularity is dependent on the large open spaces created by the river, and the fact that the open space is water adds immeasurably to its attraction.* We agree, and consider that any development on this site must help maintain that perspective.

By taking the highest points of buildings in the neighbourhood (highest building on the east side of the Basin, top of the building on the corner of Haven Road / Michael Browning Way, as confirmed by Robin Thorne at the exhibition) to define the roof-line height of the new buildings, the proposed buildings will be the highest around the Basin and as such have a

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negative/adverse visual impact on the landscape and the locality. We would expect buildings to step down towards significant heritage assets, not step up.

In describing the Landscape Setting your presentation states:

*Because the development of the Basin was stopped by the coming of the railways in 1844, the buildings and boundary walls of 1830–40 remain as an attractive group of industrial buildings. The materials, the presence of boats and the historic quayside furniture all contribute to creating a place with a special and unique character. Our designs will take this on board, enhancing the existing important features...* We cannot see that any of your proposals will contribute towards the unique character of the area. The local listed buildings are attractive and a good example of the former function of the canal basin, but covering the vast majority of the site with buildings will lose any historical context. However, we accept, as the Canal Basin Masterplan states, that the buildings on the site are of poor quality.

The houses on the west side of Haven Road are built upside down and back to front (a fact the architect team did not seem to be aware of at the exhibition), to maximise the views, but they will become dark and shaded by this proposal. To understand the full shading effect, modelling sunlight diagrams for different times of the year have to be provided by the developer; according to what was said at the exhibition this has not been done yet. The canyon effect that will result from high buildings on both sides of Haven Road will also amplify noise levels.

When questioned at the presentation meeting about the height of the proposals, the design team advised that it is necessary to build higher to make the development viable. For this sensitive site we consider this is the wrong approach. If the proposals are not viable ECL should reconsider what can be achieved and obtain a different brief from the client (Exeter City Council). If the homes are intended for the rental market the costs should be reflected in the rents.

### **Design and Masterplan.**

It is stated that it is intended to follow the 'Exeter Canal Basin Masterplan' as it is a key planning document. However, the masterplan was adopted in July 2004 and has not been updated to reflect the changed ambitions as a result of the canal and basin being granted Heritage Harbour status. ECS in its publication from 2015 advised that it was 'time to review or replace the current Canal Basin Masterplan as part of any built environment strategy' ("A future for Exeter's River, Canal and Quayside", p.7

<https://exetercivicsociety.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2014/04/ECS-RCQ-report.pdf> ).

Since then the water sports use has further diversified, its social dimension has become much more inclusive, the area has become the second most visited in Exeter with both a local and a visitor footfall for recreational and sporting purposes, The granting of 'Heritage Harbour' status opens possibilities and responsibilities to revive maritime functions of the basin as the destiny and departure point for both people and goods transport, as suggested in the various studies by the 'Friends of the Exeter Shipping Canal'.

The Canal Basin Masterplan's proposal for this location, site C, outlines 'residential scale buildings' of varying height ('two storey' residential 'adjacent to 60 Haven Road and the Watersport Centre' with '3.5 storey residential buildings [...] in-between' (p. 5). The current plans propose buildings much greater in height which we object to. The sketches in the Masterplan from 2004 indicate that where 3.5 storey high buildings were scheduled these would have remained lower than what is currently suggested (pp. 11-14), as their storey height would have been more traditional and not measuring 3.5m per storey – a requirement supposedly for ventilation demands of passive house architecture.

It is also worth noting that the 2004 masterplan speaks of: 'A pedestrian footway at a minimum width of 3m will be provided adjacent to the basin', 'that no building will be closer to the quay edge than 3m, features on the quay and its wall to be retained, and 'buildings will be designed to avoid overlooking on to the existing residential accommodation on Haven Road' (p. 5), and there should be a minimum space between buildings of 3m to afford views and access to the basin (current proposals restrict views with the provision of lift shafts and stairs).

We are disappointed that a widened pavement is not proposed, and shocked that access doors are shown opening across the pavement – we will be surprised if this is accepted by the highway authority. Whilst the existing protected/listed limestone canal wall will be retained, the Southwest Elevation drawing shows the design of the new building facing Haven Road will have segments of the wall removed with a series of doors, roller shutters and windows at ground level. However, this will not result in the active frontages purported.

The ground floor access for boats from Haven Road may cause additional problems, as Haven Road is already too narrow and very busy with traffic. We wonder whether the DCC highway team will support an access arrangement that will result in people standing in the middle of a busy highway to load boats. The narrowness of the road layout in this section also means that private gardens and parking bays of the houses opposite might have to be used to bring boats into position for being taken into storage. With the expected loss of car parking as a result of the Haven Banks Retail site proposals, additional traffic can be expected to use the Michael Browning Way car park.

ECS does not see any necessity for a commercial unit (with enlarged flood risk on the non-elevated ground floor) as part of the new buildings; watersport activities must be the priority. We think Piazza Terricina has plenty of commercial units and the current proposals for the Haven Banks Retail centre proposes several commercial units which will support the desired social interaction for the community.

We accept the ambition for a no car development, but access to this development for water sports users and residents is poor if they are required to walk or cycle. No attempt has been made to provide a safe cycle route to the nearest cycle path on Haven Banks or elsewhere.

### **Function of the buildings.**

This leads us to reflect on what the function of the new buildings should be. Since 2004 the use and status of the canal area has shifted considerably and ECS thinks this needs to be taken into consideration. This is acknowledged in the recent plans for this development: no further planning for undercroft parking, and a much enlarged area for the different branches of the Watersports Association.

The Basin has become a socially and financially interesting asset of Exeter City. With a lot of residential flats planned for various sites nearby (Haven Banks and Water Lane), we do not think the relatively small number of flats – however environmentally friendly designed – is the best use of this asset in the possession of Exeter City.

Building a smaller and lower 1-2 storey building on the west side of the Basin (as the masterplan recommends) will reduce the building costs. As the site is in ECC ownership any development must be seen in the context of enhancement, not for a few residents, but the majority of Exeter citizens. This site offers the potential to invest in the future attraction of the whole area, which will enhance the benefit of new residents expected in the planned low-traffic new housing on the Haven Banks and Water Lane sites. This lack of overall insight is a result of a lack of Master Planning by the City Council. Homes will be much better located on ECC owned land at Michael Browning Way.

The provision of metal balconies, large windows and terraces, as proposed, does not reflect the existing buildings around the basin, or the quay, including the sympathetically designed Haven Banks Centre. These buildings have solid exteriors with punctuated walls. If housing must be provided, elevational treatment that reflects an industrial use, rather than residential use should be considered.

In its current state, the proposal results in less mooring and boat storage area. The furthest southern pontoon built into the basin looks as if it will negatively impacts the turning point

in the basin. The currently widely dysfunctional slipway south of the plot does not seem to be reflected upon as a necessary improvement at all.

We support the provision of new sport facilities for the Water Sports Associations, and were pleased to see their own proposals some years ago. That proposal made good use of the site by placing much of their support accommodation at first floor level, and resulted in the open land near the slipway being kept open for trailer parking, and loading and unloading boats. That proposal would result in the area being kept more open, and in-keeping with the historical status of the area. However, we are also aware that the water sports clubs could not raise sufficient funds to proceed.

### **In Conclusion.**

We wish to see an increased harbour function. The site can provide a terminal and landing zone for passengers and goods. Visiting boats/ships will need improved berthing facilities, and some kind of a functioning marina: toilets, showers, washing facilities, recharging of batteries, freshwater supply, etc.

By filling this side of the Basin with a relatively low number of flats this potential will be gone for decades to come. It does not seem wise to rush into building it up before the wider concept for the use of the Heritage Harbour is decided and the results of this for the westside of the Basin can be fully understood.

As pointed out on other occasions, this limited assessment of the functionality and potential is a negative effect of ECC not undertaking a master plan exercise for the whole Wider Water Lane area. Only then should this site be considered in the context of what may be built elsewhere. The ECC-owned land at Michael Browning Way offers a much better opportunity for any much needed housing to the highest environmental standards.

Diversification of use across the whole area will help the Basin area maintain its openness and harbour functionality, its key aspects.

ECS therefore asks for a moratorium containing the following points:

- 1) Wait for and support bringing forward the Heritage Harbour revival strategy (currently being negotiated)
- 2) Reflect functionally upon the outcomes from this for the west side of the Basin
- 3) Draw-up new functionally wider plans for the site, either without housing, or fewer homes.
- 4) Consult the local community on what is best suited for this site.

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Exeter   
Civic Society

Yours faithfully

*K Lewis*

Keith Lewis. Chairman

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