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Estate

By email.
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Proposals for purpose-built student accommodation at Clarendon House, Exeter

Exeter Civic Society is grateful for the opportunity to attend the stakeholder presentation, and for our members and the public to visit your exhibition and to be able to provide feedback. We look forward to your second round of consultation in 2024.

In developing our response we have taken the titles from your response form to help structure it in a similar way.

What do you think about this site being redeveloped for purpose-built student accommodation?

The Society's members have many concerns about the proliferation of student accommodation in the centre of Exeter and the lack of developments for affordable homes. The area close to Paris Street roundabout has seen many student blocks being built, including The Printworks, Kingfisher House, The Barn, The Depot and Centre Living. In addition, there are proposals at the former Police Station site, and the former King Billy Pub. All of this has/will transform the area.

Our members would like to see city centre sites developed for family homes to help address the shortage of such accommodation across the city, especially accommodation that is affordable. We recognise that this site is affected with noise from traffic on Paris Street roundabout, but we consider that this could be managed, and amenity and social space could be provided facing towards Bailey Street.

What do you think about the overall design approach?

We believe your argument for a 16 storey building here 'is justified because it will not be higher than the John Lewis building' is extremely flawed. We believe that any building on this site should relate to the buildings in the immediate area, including the Leonardo Hotel, Vue Cinema, St Sidwells Point, and the Centre Living student accommodation. A new building on the Clarendon House site just 1-2 floors higher than the existing buildings may be acceptable if well designed.

In considering the redevelopment of the whole of the Eastgate area, we would like to see a Design Code developed for the area which will consider the needs and design of the whole area, including existing residents in neighbouring areas, before any major development proposals are brought

forward. It is our expectation that future development will require traffic currently using Paris Street to be diverted away from the city centre (as the Crown Estates development proposed for the former bus station), which will significantly impact the flow of traffic on Paris Street roundabout. Should this roundabout be significantly redesigned to provide a traffic light controlled junction, and the roundabout area re-purposed as a community space?

We support the site layout with pedestrian routes between the proposal and Leonardo Hotel, and between the proposal and the terrace houses on Heavitree Road. However, there is already a well-used pedestrian crossing on Western Way linking the car park to the city centre, which also serves the Newtown community. A crossing point south of the Hotel may not be the best location for the existing community, although it may have some benefits for users of this site and the car park. But will the car park be developed by the City Council for housing as part of the Eastgate development area, and if so, will car parking be retained, and should the needs of the Bailey Street area be considered as a whole before this development comes forward as a planning application?

We support pedestrian priority across the city centre but we are also minded that Western Way is a primary route for commuters across the city. The applicant must demonstrate that a crossing point across Western Way to the Vue Cinema will not significantly obstruct the flow of traffic, particularly at peak times, or be less convenient for Newtown residents if it is intended to remove the crossing further east. We have observed that pedestrians are able to cross at this point with the benefit of dropped kerbs so we wonder if this arrangement can be improved upon. Any proposal to introduce traffic lights at this location must be supported with a calculated analysis of the impact on traffic flows.

Whilst your support information suggests that the availability of public transport will reduce any increase on the transport network, this is of course a misnomer because students are highly unlikely to own a car. On the other hand, statements on your consultation website say there is good cycle access to Streatham campus. We strongly disagree with this – there are no safe cycle routes to the main university campus, and the roads that lead to the university are narrow and busy, and not suitable for safe cycling. Furthermore, the ground floor plan does not indicate any cycle storage, and for a 350 room development, a space for 200-350 cycles needs to be provided, or the developer needs to establish a cycle hire hub.

Do you have any comments regarding the design approach?

We wish to reiterate that your argument for a 16 storey building here is extremely flawed. We believe that any building on this site should relate to the buildings in the immediate area, including the Leonardo Hotel, Vue Cinema, St Sidwells Point, and the Centre Living student accommodation.

We do not consider that a landmark or gateway building in this location is necessary – St Sidwells Point is that building. The proposed high rise building as currently designed will not present any kind of architectural statement at all, on the contrary it looks dull & boring in contrast to the St Sidwells Point, although we appreciate that there are mixed views about its design. We would like

to see a building that is well designed and meets the concept of the governments 'beautiful buildings' approach with a pallet of colours that reflects the diverse building exteriors locally, and respects the terrace houses on Heavitree Road. A lighter colour may lower the impact of height and relate with St Sidwells Point.

The provision of pedestrian routes between the proposal and Leonardo Hotel, and between the proposal and the terrace houses on Heavitree Road is welcomed. Creating a distance between the Heavitree Road listed terraced houses is essential, but we have some concerns about the height of the block adjacent to these houses because they will be dwarfed by this proposal – it should be stepped down to ridge level.

We support the widening of the pavement between the proposed building and Western Way, and hope that the additional space will be a combination of planting and paving, as provided around the Depot student block. This is an essential design concept to offset proposals for a higher building here - as the 7-8 floors Depot development has achieved.

What do you think about our proposals for the publicly accessible outdoor spaces?

Any additional green space is welcomed in the city, but will local people really wish to sit or play in a shaded space between two tall buildings and close to a busy main road? Whilst students may wish to use this space, we think you should review its purpose. It would be a good idea to allow the local community and interest groups to determine the use of the space. If the developer or site management company is to manage this space we appreciate that its future use must be manageable.

What do you think about our proposals for community / incubator space on the ground floor?

We support the idea of a community work space on the ground floor.

Do you have any other suggestions/ideas about how the ground floor space could be utilised?

No

Do you have any additional suggestions to help us realise our sustainability ambitions?

You have suggested a range of proposals which should all contribute towards a low carbon building. We hope you can utilise as many energy generation options, which will know should be self-financing with a long term reduction in purchased energy. With such a large building under one management, we hope that you will be able to recycle brown water to be used in the shared spaces.

From your local knowledge of the area, are you aware of any other constraints, issues or opportunities that might influence the proposals going forward?

We expect that you will have had discussions with Exeter City Council's Forward Planning Team about the council's ambitions for the development of the Eastgate area, extending from Sidwell

Street to Gladstone Road. We hope that S106 funds will be made for improved pedestrian and cycle access across the wider area to support future development, and to improve any existing deficiencies. Upgrading the Summerland Street/ Western Way junction to one similar to the Bedford Street / Western Way junction with a cycle phase to traffic lights would be welcome, as well as contributions towards greening the lower part of Paris Street.

As mentioned above, It is our expectation that future development will require traffic currently using Paris Street to be diverted away from the city centre (as the Crown Estates development proposed for the former bus station), which will significantly impact the flow of traffic on Paris Street roundabout. Should this roundabout be significantly redesigned to provide a traffic light controlled junction, and the roundabout area re-purposed as a community space?

Notwithstanding the above comments, In developing your proposals, we would point out that crossing Paris Street at the roundabout is difficult because there is no pedestrian island there, and although there is an island on Cheeke Street, this could be upgraded to give pedestrian priority on what is now a fairly quiet road. These improvements will make a big difference to all who migrate through the area, not just from the proposed development.

We are also aware that the former Pyramids swimming pool is likely to be developed as an extension of the adjacent residential accommodation, which may also result in a taller building. We hope that through ECC you can discuss with the Housing Association to help co-ordinate local travel needs, and to be aware of the impact of massing there. Furthermore, we expect the planning appeal for the former police station site will be announced in February, and whilst that is not adjacent to this site, the massing of that building will impact on views towards the city centre for those travelling down Heavitree Road, and those living in the vicinity.

About you.

Exeter Civic Society is the pre-eminent organisation in the city concerned with development across the city, as well as its history, and how increasing traffic congestion is having a negative impact on travel across the city. We aim to respond to all major consultations and planning applications, and give our opinion which is focused on what is best for the city in the long term. You can find out more about us on our website <https://exetercivicsociety.org.uk/>.

You have contacted us through the Avril Baker Consultancy by email, and we would like to be informed about any future proposals, developments and consultations for this site.

Yours faithfully

K Lewis

Keith Lewis. Chairman