

PRESS RELEASE

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Exeter Civic Society is concerned about the disposal of public open space for an Energy Centre in the Riverside Valley Park.

Exeter Civic Society is appalled that Exeter City Council has agreed to dispose of land within the city's Riverside Valley Park for the building of a Green Energy Plant at a recent Executive meeting, even though they have a planning policy to prevent such development in any of the six valley parks, unless a building enhances their use.

Chairman of Exeter Civic Society, Keith Lewis says, *"This proposal is completely against the City Council's Local Plan policy CP16 which states that no development will be permitted in any valley park unless it enhances their use, and this proposal clearly does not. When the council considered this disposal the committee paper acknowledged that the site is within the valley park, it failed to reveal that the council's own planning policies prevent developments such as this in a valley park, leaving councillors not fully briefed.*

*Once green space is built on it can never be replaced within the city boundary – we are slowly building over what is left, which means the valley parks are essential. In the council's own master plan for Grace Road Fields possible uses of the site include picnic and BBQs sites, camping, festivals, and a new canal basin; and in the recently approved Water Lane supplementary planning document it suggests that between the new station and the canal, land use should be a new **regional recreation area**, water based activity, and the suggestions in the riverside master plan followed through, but they did sneak in the possibility of energy generation. However, the supplementary planning document also says that the council will, with stakeholders, ensure there is a comprehensive strategy for the use of the site – surely this must be considered first through public consultation. Furthermore, Clapperbrook Lane is a gateway access to the valley park, including from the new Marsh Barton station, but first views will now be dominated by the energy centre if the proposal goes through.*

The Society is supportive of a new low carbon energy centre and a district heating system but it needs to be in the right place, and the city council needs to also consider the long term need for the valley park for existing and future residents for the development sites they have identified at Marsh Barton and Water Lane for up to 7,500 homes with an appropriate level of green space."

On Tuesday 9 July the city council's Executive committee considered a committee paper entitled 'Disposal of land at Grace Road Fields for the facilitation of the Low Carbon Exeter District Heat Network', but they discussed this in part two of the meeting where the public

and press are excluded, so it was not certain how councillors were briefed. Councillors agreed to sell a third of the playing fields to Exeter Energy Network for an energy plant that will extract heat from the river Exe, use excess heat from the nearby incinerator, as well as from a proposed Data Centre, to provide a low carbon district heating system for commercial and domestic premises alongside the river, including the RD&E and County Hall. Opposition leader Cllr Moore expressed concern about development in the valley park.

Further Information:



Grace Road Playing Field with the proposed energy plant dominating the west end, leaving the other two thirds isolated and surrounded by trees.

Shortly after the committee meeting Exeter Energy Network consulted on their proposals for the energy plant which shows their proposals adjacent to Clapperbrook Lane for a large industrial building, a large substation, tall water storage tanks, and the data centre. They expect to submit a planning application later this year.

Grace Road Fields sits between the canal and the main railway line next to the new Marsh Barton railway station, is part of the Riverside Valley Park, and identified as important green infrastructure land to allow people to enjoy nature. And, along with the rest of the green space within the riverside valley park, the land is intended to provide open space to support 1,800 new homes planned for the Water Lane area, and 5,000 homes at Marsh Barton. Both sites are of course industrial areas which will be expensive to develop with little or no green space of their own, so the valley park, which is just a stone's throw from these areas, is essential if future residents are going to have somewhere to exercise and to relax.

Exeter Civic Society, founded in 1961, seeks to maintain Exeter's local distinctiveness and pride of place. It is an influential and respected local voice for commenting on new developments in and around Exeter, promoting high standards of planning and architecture in the city, and celebrating its history through its blue plaque scheme. Further details are at www.exetercivicsociety.org.uk

Further information and contact details.

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