



Zinc Real Estate
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By email
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10 January 2025

Dear Zinc Real Estate,

Consultation for Revised proposals for purpose-built student accommodation at Clarendon House, Exeter.

We are pleased that you have provided the public with an additional opportunity to consult upon these proposals between 16 December 2024 and 10 January 2025, and have pleasure in providing our response below. We hope that you will take account to any critical feedback from those who respond to this latest consultation before submitting any planning application.

We have also provided a response to Exeter City Council regarding your 2024 pre-application which I expect you will have access to, and will hopefully support feedback to you from them in the near future.

We are using your consultation response form as a template to arrange our response to this latest consultation.

1. Response to feedback.

*How satisfied are you that the latest proposals respond to concerns raised in the previous round of engagement? **We are not satisfied.***

In this consultation you advised that there were 12 aspects of the proposals that the public had commented upon which translated into the following statements.

- **Height:** *The height of the development has been reduced. The previous design ranged in height between 16 and 6 storeys. The revised design provides accommodation in blocks ranging between 10 and 6 storeys, resulting in a reduction in the number of student beds from 350 to 300.*
- **Design:** *Enhancements have been made to the architectural treatment and façade design, with classical proportions being emphasised and brick now proposed as the main cladding material.*

- **Landscaping:** *The new Garden Lane through route linking Russell Street to Western Way has been strengthened by reviewing the layout of the seating and planting and also by extending the green tree canopy. This maintains a luscious, leafy, and playful transition between the civic side of the site and the neighbourhood behind. Other improvements include green edge planting and street trees which will create attractive walking routes, improve air quality, provide shade and shelter, improve the micro-climate, and allow rainwater to be collected and conveyed in a sustainable way.*
- **Connectivity:** *An enhanced pedestrian crossing improves connections to the city, the proposed new cycle links, and the Heavitree neighbourhood.*

Height: A reduction in height is welcome, but 10 storeys still seems unacceptable. A well-designed building which knits with and respects adjacent buildings is a more important factor for the skyline.

Design: We consider the current proposals are wholly unacceptable and a backward step in the developing this site. Detailed feedback is provided below.

Landscaping: There are limited opportunities on this urban site for landscaping but we think more can be achieved to 'green' this side of the roundabout. Detailed feedback is provided below.

Connectivity: We do not consider that these proposals adequately address the connectivity required for the wider area, for local people, or students who will reside at this new building. Detailed feedback is provided below.

Questions 2 & 3 **Scale & Massing & Design Response.**

Do you consider that the revised height/scale/massing is more appropriate to the location and surrounding buildings? Do you have any comments or suggestions about the design of the buildings in terms of the external appearance and/or choice of materials?

We do not consider the revised height/scale/massing is more appropriate.

Whilst you believe reducing height and the number of rooms an improvement, this has done nothing to improve the quality of the architecture - it still seems like a proposal for stacking accommodation to maximise the number of student rooms rather than designing an attractive building. The facade treatment shows one of the tall blocks with single windows, and the other with double-joined windows. There is an ad-hoc arrangement of windows and limited continuity in the language of the hierarchy of the windows and structure. For exemplary design you would expect a more coherent fenestration. The asymmetry of the two blocks seems particularly incongruous.

The new neo-classical design seems a backward step in developing a building that is acceptable on this prominent corner and a busy traffic junction in the centre of Exeter. Paris Street roundabout has an ensemble of different contemporary styles, true to the time they were built. To continue with this theme, a well-designed 21st century building should be

proposed, not a neo-classical one. Your statement is about making the architecture 'more creative' and having moved away from a homogeneous material approach' (panel 4), exaggerates the change as there has been only very subtle differentiations from the previous design. Adding the odd arch does not define 'more variety of materials, colours and architectural details' (panel 4). Something bolder is needed to make this building interesting in the ensemble of the other buildings. Some of the more contemporary designs you show on panel 4 may be more appropriate.

Is red and dark brick the solution for this site? Whilst you state that red and dark brick will merge into the existing building scape, St Sidwell Point is a paler colour, the nearby Depot block is also a pale colour, and the terrace houses in Heavitree Road and the nearby Civic Centre are white. A blend of brick colours may help the building look less dominant with colourful panelling perhaps to provide extra interest?

The Massing Concept drawings (panel 3) are a contrived justification for this poorly designed building. Marking the end of Heavitree Rd with a tall block is not a benefit and is unnecessary. There is no need for a 'landmark' building at the bottom of Heavitree Road, particularly if it is defined by height and bulk rather than interesting architecture. The building does not adequately step down to the Heavitree terrace and is still far too tall, and the step-back from the listed building with the cut-through alleyway does little to mediate the difference in scale and massing; this junction needs to be better considered. We do not think a step down for the 10 storey element to Newtown will achieve anything - it would be better locating more rooms in this part of the site and making it architecturally more interesting (e.g. wall greening), because Newtown views will be dominated by this block anyway if it remains at 10 storeys. The suggestion that the gap between the towers will 'articulating form and silhouette' is a poor argument for the second tower element – it would be better to have the Heavitree Rd side much lower to provide freer views from Newtown.

We believe that some of the views from neighbouring streets (panels 2 & 3) seem to underplay the true height of the proposals. A 10 storey block will be much more dominant than the views suggest.

The rear of the building needs to have a high quality design because that will be seen by Newtown residents and those who will live in new homes proposed on the triangle car park. Whilst the central amenity space will be beneficial for residents of the block it is small at just 30 meters square, and may have little sunlight. It may be better to have a solid, but lower elevation facing the current car park to continue the style of fenestration at the rear of the hotel, which will also better align with the rear of the Heavitree terrace. When a final planning submission is made detailed views from the Newtown area, extending to Posloe Road must be submitted. A view from Gladstone Road down Heavitree Road will also be essential as no attention has been paid to this aspect but it is one many people will see as they enter the city. Currently the trees on the edge of the car park function like a screen, but it cannot be certain that they will be maintained in any future concept for redeveloping this car park.

4 & 5 Connectivity

How satisfied are you that the new pedestrian crossing will help to improve connections?

5. Do you have any comments regarding the proposed crossing?

We are not satisfied with the proposed pedestrian crossing.

We do not think that an additional crossing over Western Way within 50m of the existing crossing will function well. Instead, we suggest relocating the existing crossing further towards Paris Street roundabout. In our experience most people using the existing crossing then walk towards Cheeke Street and presumably the city centre. We attach a suggestion for how a relocated crossing could be positioned which will serve both pedestrian routes from Russell Street.

With this block intended for student use we are disappointed that except from pointing towards the bus link to Streatham Campus, no routes to the university campuses have been shown, including pedestrian crossing points – there may be several possible routes to the Streatham campus.

There is no mention of cycle connectivity to the university campuses from the site despite proposing 170 cycle spaces for students. This must be included in any travel assessment submitted to support any planning application. We would like to see a pedestrian and cycle crossing at the junction of Summerland Street and Western Way similar to that at the junction of Barnfield Road and Western Way, and that this development should contribute towards it.

Plans recently submitted to the city council for pre-application advice stated that deliveries to the site will be predominantly from the rear of the building, but with current proposal to pedestrianise the short length of Russell Street from Heavitree Road; this will become more difficult, requiring vehicles to make a three point turn to exit the proposed loading/drop-off area. We wonder if a layby may be possible on Heavitree Road if the pavement is realigned- this will also result in a wider pavement in part for pedestrian use or landscaping.

All of these issues must be included in a Travel Plan.

6 & 7 Public Realm

What do you think about the landscaping improvements to the proposed Garden Lane connecting the Triangle car park with Western Way? Do you have any further ideas or suggestions for the landscaped spaces around the site?

We broadly support the connection between Russell Street and Western Way.

The establishment of a new pedestrian route from Russell Street is welcome, and the landscaping proposals are reasonable, but we are concerned that as the route will be a north facing area between two tall buildings that will receive limited direct sunlight careful thought needs to be given to planting, including the type and number of trees. But as a 'place for wildlife' it is questionable. On a busy inner city roundabout - is the wildlife really expected to traverse the garden and then the 5-storey building roof edge. How is the debatably 'high quality public realm' to be protected - e.g. will there fixed sums and principal

agreements for planting maintenance so that these areas do not suffer from last-minute budget cuts or lack of future care? Hopefully the maintenance of the area will be set out in a draft S106 Agreement.

More detail is required of the proposed planting to the edge of the building extending into Heavitree Road, and we recognise that some of the land may be controlled by the highway authority. The society would be pleased to work with Zinc and Newtown residents to develop a suitable landscaping proposal.

8. Ground floor uses

Please comment on the types of spaces included on the ground floor, and suggest where you think they should be located.

The provision of the Incubator or community start-up space is welcome as it may be a unique space in the city centre if managed well. We think this will lend itself to postgraduate students who may wish to develop ideas in a safe and shared space.

It would be good to further explain the difference between 'Ground Floor Active Uses' and the 'Community Start-Up Space'. The sketch on panel 7 indicates the 'Active Uses' space considerably larger than the 'Start-Up' space. The ground floor needs to be a lofty double-height space - as shown in the internal reference image. What is shown in elevations of the ground floor height appears squashed by the building above and doesn't proportionally reflect the precedent images. The green colouring inside the building for part of the latter does not make much sense and needs to be explained further if there is a reason behind it.

Elsewhere on the ground floor, the provision of social accommodation and perhaps a student café should provide active use which will provide a sense of activity for passers-by. But we wonder whether larger windows will enhance the feel of the area as provided in adjacent buildings such as the hotel and The Depot. The Master Plan brief for the bus station area is to have active frontages.

9. What is your overall feeling about these proposals? We Don't support these latest proposals for the reasons set out in this response.

We appreciate that having initially proposed a 16 storey building, which would have dominated this corner site, that your latest consultation is intended to present an improved proposal that the public and councillors should accept. But we do not consider that it should be accepted either by the public or councillors. The proposals are far from acceptable and need more development to make them acceptable

10. Do you have any final comments or suggestions about the revised proposals that you've not already shared?

We are far from convinced that the current proposals represent a 'designed building' because it lacks any high quality contemporary architecture. We wonder if a more interesting and harmonious design would result if the building sloped or stepped up from 4

floors next to Heavitree Road terrace to a higher storey adjacent to the hotel - perhaps a spiral. This would provide a building which could complement all the surrounding buildings and help provide a coherent entrance/exit to the city.

In respect of the proposed student occupation, we wonder whether a focus on postgraduate occupation would be beneficial. In the presentation the question of whether more student accommodation is needed was one of the public's concerns (panel 2); the current proposal does nothing to address this concern. With the inclusion of the incubator space on the ground floor, this development would benefit from planning as postgraduate student living space as they would be the ones reaching out into business life and benefitting from community and start-up-space. A designation to PGs in the layout not just on the ground floor spaces, would make the building stand out in Exeter and this could become one of its unique selling points. The distance from both campuses and the embedding in city centre life would benefit PG use of the site as they are less likely to go in for lectures and seminars and either spend more time in their own space or work in labs and other dedicated university work spaces. The PG community will be around for more than 40 weeks a year so they will positively contribute to the city life outside term times as well.

The central energy network the scheme is proposed to connect to is not yet agreed in planning, so not guaranteed, although we appreciate that the Local Plan requires buildings to be made ready. What are the green energy options for the scheme if this doesn't come to fruition?

Modern buildings are designed to BREAM standards for insulation and functionality, but it also require designers to consider future uses. This need could result from a need for future carbon reduction re-use approaches but also, given the financial trajectory of universities in the UK, the impact of a possible reduction in student numbers. In submitting a future planning application we would like to see included how the building can be adapted for future for other housing typologies/uses.

12. Did you take part or submit comments in our first public consultation in December 2023? We did provide a response to your previous consultation.

14. If you would like to be kept informed about this project, please provide your email address or full postal address.

We would like to be kept informed about any further progress with your proposals via the civic society email exetercivicsociety@gmail.com

Yours faithfully

K Lewis

Keith Lewis. Chairman