

Councillors and Civic Society criticise plan to sell field for an energy centre

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Y has been sparked over Exeter City Council's plans to sell a green field within the Valley Park to make way for an energy centre.

Authority is proposing to sell a playing fields at Grace Road amounting to 1.8 hectares, to Exeter Energy Network for an energy centre that will extract heat from the river and use excess heat from the nearby incinerator as well as a proposed data centre.

The centre will provide heating for commercial and domestic premises along the river as well as the Devon & Exeter Hospital and Exeter City Hall, headquarters of Devon & Exeter Council.

The site is located between Marsh Barton railway station and the Exeter City Hall. Part of the site was used as a playing area when the railway station was being constructed.

Council shared details of the consultation on the news on its website on December 17, but people only until December 17.

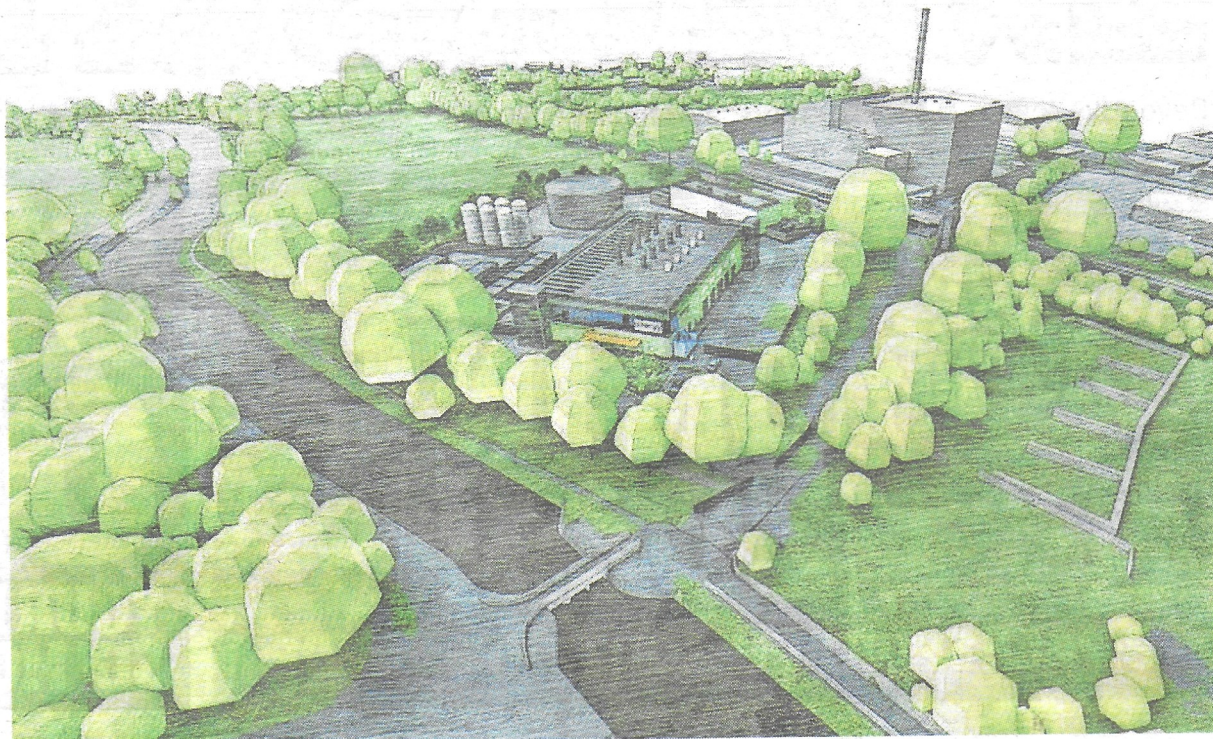
Party councillors called for the consultation to be halted, claiming more key information was not provided for people to make informed responses.

It follows criticism from Exeter Civic Society about the proposals, saying it goes against council policy to protect the valley parks and add more green space is built on it rather than be replaced within the city area.

Councillor Andy Ketchin said: "The loss of precious and diminishing green space requires a cast of eye to be made and the council has failed to do so."

The sale of this field for an industrial complex goes against the council's policies to protect the city's parks.

Furthermore, the information provided to the public is misleading and inadequate. It fails to mention the site is within the protected River Valley Park and gives the



➤ A proposed energy centre at Grace Road Fields, Exeter

Exeter Energy Network

impression that this is a brownfield site rather than a green space.

"Neither has there been any environmental impact assessment. This field is a valuable site for nature, and a flood-sensitive area.

"Exeter City Council has a legal duty to establish the impacts on nature and the environment that will result from this industrial complex before it flogs off the site.

"Finally, the council has not checked the developer's claims that this is the only possible site for the energy plant. I have asked to see details of all 13 alternative potential sites looked at, but the developer has not shared that information.

"The public needs full and accurate information on this proposal so that responses to the consultation are well informed."

Cllr Ketchin is calling on the council to delay the proposed sale of the Grace Road Fields site until the case has been made to the public that the company has proved there is no alternative brownfield site that could be used.

The council previously stated that an assessment of 14 potential sites

across the city for the energy centre was carried out, with the proposed location found to be the most suitable.

Exeter Energy Network explained why it has chosen the site in documents provided as part of the consultation.

It states: "An assessment of 14 potential energy centre sites across the city was carried out, with the proposed location found to be the most suitable for several reasons. The most important of these is the proximity of the site to a number of potential sources of low-carbon energy: an energy-from-waste facility which currently produces significant amounts of waste heat; a council-owned solar farm; and the River Exe - latent heat from the river could be used as a source of renewable energy for the project.

"Connecting to at least one of these sources of low-carbon energy will reduce the emissions associated with the Exeter Energy Network, while at the same time reducing the cost of heat for our customers."

The Civic Society has formally objected to the proposal. In a letter

signed by chairman Keith Lewis, it stated: "The council has failed to publicly consider the needs of future residents from development at Water Lane and Marsh Barton for green infrastructure, even though it is expected that these homes will be mainly flats with little or no outside space.

"Many of the new flats to be built locally will be family homes, perhaps with three bedrooms, and many will be social homes."

It continued: "The council has failed to express any public opinion about this proposal, having considered the disposal of the site in part two of the executive meeting in July, and then failed to discuss the disposal publicly at the October executive meeting as previously advised in media responses in September."

A council spokesperson said: "Councillors discussed a report relating to this issue at executive last July and at council last October.

"The public was invited to comment on the Public Open Space disposal notice, and the completion of sale is subject to the granting of planning consent."

Work to replace part of sewer pipe completed early