

Old St Leonard's Hall – House,
Roberts Road
Exeter EX2 4HD

By email
pierchinellato@gmail.com

3 October 2025

Ref.: 25/1082/FUL | Demolition of existing commercial building and redevelopment of the site comprising student accommodation with associated amenity space (Sui Generis), flexible commercial floorspace (Use Class E) and/or community floorspace (Use Class F1/F2), public realm and landscaping works, cycle parking, refuse storage, access and servicing, and other associated works

Dear Mr Douglass,

The Civic Society wishes to object to this application. While we are broadly supportive of the principle of redeveloping this site, as identified within the emerging Exeter Plan, we are disappointed that family accommodation cannot be developed in this sustainable location, and we continue to have significant reservations regarding the current proposal as student accommodation.

The proposed scheme does not demonstrate an appropriate or sensitive response to the surrounding built environment, particularly in relation to scale, massing, and its relationship with adjacent buildings, streetscapes, and public spaces. Given the strategic importance of this site, a more rigorous contextual approach is required to ensure that the development contributes positively to the townscape character and respects the established urban form.

We acknowledge the inclusion of the proposed Garden Lane and recognise the potential improvements to pedestrian permeability and place-making that this element could deliver. However, the application fails to address wider connectivity considerations, particularly the integration and coordination with the adjacent Triangle Car Park site and the broader public realm network. This omission represents a missed opportunity to enhance pedestrian movement patterns and deliver a more cohesive and legible urban structure.

For these reasons, the Civic Society cannot support the proposal in its current form. We strongly urge the applicant to revisit the design to ensure a more contextually responsive, visually coherent, and spatially integrated scheme that aligns with the aspirations and policy objectives of the emerging Exeter Plan and established principles of good urban design.

MASSING

The scheme has developed through several iterations, with reductions in scale and impact compared to earlier versions. Nevertheless, the current submission does not fully demonstrate that the massing is appropriate or justified within the curtilage of the lower-lying areas characteristic of Newtown and St. Leonard's.

The proposed tall block at the end of Heavitree Road is unnecessary. A landmark or gateway building at this location is not required, and the current design raises concerns. The 9-storey block facing Heavitree Road appears excessively tall and fails to relate sensitively to the adjacent Grade II listed terrace. The proposed step-down does not sufficiently bridge the difference in scale, leaving the building overly dominant. This junction requires further consideration to ensure the development integrates more appropriately with its urban context.

DESIGN AND APPEARANCE

Improvements are evident in the revised colour palette and fenestration arrangements, with the lighter upper sections contributing positively to the articulation of the façade. The darker treatment of the lower floors provides some grounding, though the impact could be enhanced through deeper window reveals to strengthen the architectural rhythm.

The upper middle section, shown in lighter tones in the study views, provides adequate texture and detailing, contributing positively to the building's character. Conversely, the extended roof-level piers, intended to "meet the sky," appear less successful and risk obstructing proposed solar panels, potentially undermining their performance. The extended roof piers exaggerate the building's height, making an already tall structure feel even more imposing and overbearing.

The ground floor elevation to Russell Street remains a concern. This presents as a largely blank façade punctuated by loading bay entrances, giving the appearance of a secondary "rear" frontage. This approach risks replicating existing poor-quality conditions and does not contribute positively to the surrounding public realm.

EXTERNAL AMENITY SPACES

The proposed pedestrian link (Garden Lane) between Russell Street and Western Way is a positive aspect of the scheme. However, the success of these spaces will depend on a carefully considered landscape strategy and long-term maintenance arrangements, which should be secured via an appropriate legal agreement.

It is proposed that the existing pedestrian crossing, which is currently situated to the north of the hotel, be relocated further south—closer to the roundabout—so that it aligns more directly with the proposed Green Lane connection. This repositioning is intended to enhance pedestrian connectivity by establishing a more coherent and accessible route between the Bus Station, the new development, and the Triangle

Car Park. Such an adjustment would strengthen the overall permeability of the site and encourage more efficient pedestrian movement through the area.

However, it should be noted that the approved plans for amendments to the Triangle Car Park still retain a pedestrian route along its northern boundary, in line with the original crossing location. This creates a discrepancy between the current pedestrian infrastructure shown in the car park design and the proposed changes to the crossing location.

This inconsistency must be addressed through clarification and coordination between the relevant plans and proposals. Resolving this issue is essential and must occur prior to any final determination or approval of the wider development scheme, to ensure a cohesive and practical pedestrian network is delivered.

Further details are required regarding the planting along Heavitree Road, particularly where land ownership falls under the highway authority. The current roundabout, enclosed by railings, creates a poor separation between vehicular and pedestrian areas; a more positive alternative arrangement could be to move the proposed green buffer to a position along the pavement edge with the roundabout, with opportunities for larger/taller planting or trees, consistent with the alluded submitted landscape concept sketches.

The proposed enhancement of the stairway from Heavitree Road to the Triangle Car Park is noted, though the design currently relies on a small planting area. A more ambitious intervention could create a stronger and more inviting connection with the proposed Innovation Hub at grade and allow for a clear pedestrian/wheelchair friendly route alongside a redesigned stair.

The amenity spaces along the pedestrian route facing the Triangle Car Park are less resolved. They appear to be treated as the rear of the building, reinforced by the blank façade treatment and the presence of an “unrestricted service zone” encroaching into Russell Street. This creates potential conflict with pedestrians and cyclists. The issue requires resolution through the provision of dedicated loading bays and a reconfiguration of pedestrian and cycle routes, consistent with the aspirations of the Newtown Plans for the Triangle Car Park.

INTERNAL LAYOUTS

Ground Floor

The ground floor accommodates a useful mix of functions that support the residential use above. However, a large proportion of the Garden Lane block is allocated to plant space, including the substation, switch room, and generator room. This represents a missed opportunity to create more active uses that would enhance the pedestrian route from the Triangle Car Park. Reconfiguring the basement could allow these plant functions to be relocated, freeing up space for a more engaging, active ground-level frontage while improving the external amenity area.

Upper Floors

The mix of studio and cluster bedrooms is positive, offering variety. The cluster communal areas are well-positioned at corners and expressed externally through larger windows. However, no layouts have been provided for these communal spaces, leaving uncertainty as to whether they can adequately accommodate kitchens and lounges. Detailed plans should be included to clarify their scale and functionality.

Adaptability

While the layout study indicates some adaptability for future changes, this analysis is limited to a small section of the building and may not translate across the wider scheme. For example, the current co-living layouts include internal communal areas with no access to natural light, while the one- and two-bedroom apartments appear undersized. A typical floor plan should be provided to demonstrate how the arrangement of spaces contributes to a functional and adaptable overall scheme.

SUSTAINABILITY

The commitment to achieving a BREEAM “Excellent” rating is welcomed. The proposed use of district heating with local VRF units for communal areas is also a positive step. However, their precise locations have not been identified on the plans. This information is essential, as screening of roof-level plant could have a significant impact on the building’s external appearance.

The inclusion of roof-mounted solar panels is supported, though the extended roof elevation may reduce their efficiency. This issue requires further testing and resolution to ensure renewable energy performance is not compromised.

TRANSPORT

The submitted Transport Assessment and Travel Plan currently lack sufficient clarity and detail. These documents will need to be updated and adapted following the approval of the amendments to the Triangle car park. A coordinated and structured approach, incorporating the proposed layout of the Triangle car park, must be completed prior to any approval of the development in order to ensure a successful and integrated design.

The proposed delivery and loading strategy, which relies on loading bays along Russell Street, requires reconsideration. Russell Street is too narrow to accommodate such bays, and they are not currently indicated on the submitted drawings. This omission creates a direct conflict with the servicing vehicle tracking shown in the Transport Assessment, and once the agreed amendments to the Triangle car park are implemented, Russell Street will continue to function as a two-way road, making it inappropriate to locate a loading bay across the bend.

More consideration should be given to the needs of disabled students in the Travel Plan, and the proposed strategy for disabled parking remains unresolved. Positioning disabled bays along Russell Street is unacceptable, as they would be

accessible to the general public. It must be clarified how disabled students would manage if these spaces were already occupied by other Blue Badge holders. These bays should be located within the development site itself to ensure accessibility and compliance with best practice standards.

The proposal for bicycle storage at lower ground level, with access from Garden Lane, is acceptable, as is the provision of publicly accessible hoops along Garden Lane. However, the submission does not demonstrate how the proposed cycle access and routes integrate with the wider rerouting and planned cycle lanes. This must be addressed to avoid unnecessary conflict and crossover with pedestrian movements. In particular, it is important to understand how the cycle provisions connect to the proposed cycling routes and avoid crossover with the pedestrian areas around and across the car park.

CONCLUSIONS

The Civic Society supports the principle of redeveloping this site however the current proposal does not meet the standards expected for a development on such a strategically significant site.

Key areas of concern include:

- **Context and character:** The scheme fails to respond appropriately to the local townscape, including issues of scale, massing, and its relationship with surrounding buildings and public spaces.
- **Urban integration:** The development does not adequately address wider connectivity, particularly with the Triangle Car Park and public realm network.
- **Public realm and amenity:** External spaces are underdeveloped, with missed opportunities for pedestrian-friendly environments.
- **Transport and servicing:** The Transport Assessment lacks detail, and current proposals for servicing, loading, parking, and cycle provision are insufficient and potentially conflict with future road layouts.

We request that this planning application be Refused, as significant revisions are needed to foster a positive and lasting contribution to Exeter's built environment.

Yours faithfully

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Pierluigi Chinellato', with a stylized circular flourish at the end.

Pierluigi Chinellato

Member of ECS Planning Sub-Committee