

Chairman's and Planning Reports. ECS meeting 27 August 2025.

Chairman's Report.

Since the last meeting mid-July I have overseen one planning group meeting and responses relating to that, prepared a response to the Grace Road Fields Energy Plant for the ECC planning committee on 4 August, met with ECC and DCC officers regarding North Street improvements and then worked with Gert to arrange the workshop, investigated the Mary Arches planning application for a co-living block and submitted the response from the society, communicated with DCC officers and councillors regarding commercial bins blocking pavements, investigated the possibility of a city centre tourist office, and Gert and I met with the leader of Exeter Community Alliance. I have emailed the new Princesshay Manager asking for a meeting in late October to discuss empty shop units and Fraser Group plans for Paris Street and North Street. I will also discuss maintaining the various statues in the shopping area and the missing East gate bronze plaque.

In respect of the community alliance, they have been offered a shop unit next to the Exeter ticket office in Fore Street (former Spanish restaurant) and hope to occupy this at the end of August. One of the reasons Gert and I are keen to join the Alliance is to be able to work with the many organisations they represent both in collaboration and to spread the word about our work and perhaps to recruit active members. We hope to follow this up once they are operating at the shop, but will not pledge any formal association with them without committee approval.

In respect of a city centre tourist office, this is something that came out of discussions with InExeter – a desire from the business community for a city centre tourist office to promote tourism. The only tourist office in the city is in the customs house on the quay, open 7 days a week 10-5 in the summer months and Thursday to Sunday November to March 11-4. But this is remote, so I visited the underground passages visitor centre in Paris Street to see if this could double up as a tourist office; It is open Thursday to Sunday from 11 to 4. The lower ground access to the passages has very good displays about Exeter in general as well as the passages, and at street level there is a small reception area which could double as a tourist information centre. I have submitted a FOI request about the number of visitors and staffing levels to ascertain how busy it is, but I think this could easily be a tourist office with a little more staffing.

Speakers and events.

Gert will brief us about walks and visits.

Saturday 20 September. I have invited Fiona Carden of Co-Lab to talk about their work.

Saturday 18 October. Ben Clapp, The Restoration and Restorers of St Nicholas Priory.

Saturday 15 November. AGM and city development issues.

10 December. KL will give a talk to the Heavitree Society entitled Exeter Civic Society and our work in Heavitree.

Saturday 13 December. Nicola Wheeler, CEO of InExeter will talk to us about their work.

January 17 2026. John Davidson will talk about a selection of Exeter Buildings and stories associated with them - including Franklin Cinema, Cavern Club, Theatre Royal, Southernhay House, Devon and Exeter Hospital (Southernhay). This is a more light-hearted talk with some musical extracts.

Saturday 21 February. ECS presentation about developments and issues across the city.

6 March. KL will talk to the St Thomas History Society about the civic society and the new West of the Exe Discovering Exeter book.

Saturday 21 March. Julia Neville will talk about the foundations of the University of Exeter.

Do we want another social event away from the Mint in April, May or June?

Planning applications.

There has been one planning group meeting on 29 July since the last meeting. A second was planned for 19 August but this was deferred to 28 due to the unavailability of a core of 3 members.

A new member of the society joined us – Pier Chinellato – an architect and husband of Katherine Leat who is a member of the SP&H group – they have their own architectural practice Fabrica Architecture. Whilst he may favour larger planning applications I am hopeful he will stick with the group for a while.

As reported in the recent bulletin, there were no applications of great significance as you will see from the attached minutes.

Of the recent applications since the last planning group meeting, on the list of 31 July there was an application for the demolition of footbridge between Guildhall Shopping Centre and Mary Arches Street car park.

The list of 7 August included an application for The Exebridge Centre, Cowick Street, to remove condition 11 (quantum of food sales) of planning permission dated 18th October 1999. There are no obvious immediate ramifications but maybe we should expect more food sales space if the application is approved. There are also a lot of applications to either create HMOs or to enlarge existing HMOs.

The list of 14 August includes the erection of a three-storey building for retirement living apartments on former school playing field, Homefield Road, Heavitree; an outline application for land at Barley Lane for the phased development of up to 65 residential dwellings – this site is close to the ridgeline and at the time of writing this, 22 neighbours have already objected; and Exeter College has applied for the construction of a 3 storey SEND classroom building at their Queen Street site.

I will update the meeting if there are any significant applications published on 21 August.