

Strategic Planning & Highways Group

Chair's Report 15 July 2025

SP&H communicated via emails and telephone calls since our SP&H meeting on 6 March 2025.

Responses by SP&H Group to Consultations

1. Exeter Energy and Riverside Valley Park

ECS sent a second response to the Planning Application 24/1536/OUT 'Land Adjacent Marsh Barton Train Station, Clapperbrook Lane East'. We still object to placing this plant in the Riverside Valley Park, but felt that the new data submitted by the developer in April/May 2025 needed an additional response in case ECC would support the application in its current state. After several cancelled meetings, the decision at ECC's Planning Committee now is expected for 8 Sep 2025.

1. We object to the plant being in the River Valley Park for the reasons given in our earlier letter and that the Sequential Test is flawed in light of the new information provided.
2. If the Council is minded to grant permission for an energy centre in the Valley Park, the plant should be re-sited nearer to the railway line and a revised application sought on that basis.
3. A time limit should be placed on the use of gas boilers.

For our detailed response see our letter to ECC under:

<https://exetercivicsociety.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2025/07/ECS-letter-of-objection-for-Energy-Plant-Grace-Road-Fields-24-June-2025-final-V2.pdf>

2. Mary Archer Car Park Redevelopment

We engaged with the developer in its pre-application consultation. ECC conditioned that this site is not for student homes. The developer Eutopia considers co-living for the site. We think small flats would be much better to provide places for families in the city centre. We welcome the redevelopment of this car park site, expect a high quality design, and are not sure that the design presented has achieved that at this stage.

We would like to see mixed use commercial/housing on the site that reflects the council's Local Housing Needs Assessment, as set out in the emerging Exeter Plan at Policy H15. Whilst the presentation stated that there is a need for co-living nationally, and whilst we do not deny that this new style of living has a place in Exeter, the city has seen many planning applications approved for co-living developments in recent years, some in the very same area.

We also think that the whole area needs to improve while being redeveloped, as it is one of the poorest looking major streets in the city centre. We discussed this with InExeter CEO Nicola Wheeler who agreed and taking this further at a meeting with ECC Chief Officer for Urban Design, Mark Pearson, and Ben Southerland from DCC on 22 July.

For our full response to the pre-application consultation please read here:

<https://exetercivicsociety.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2025/05/ECS-response-to-Mary-Arches-Street-Redevelopment-May25.pdf>

We are surprised to see a Full Planning Application handed in so quickly after the pre-consultation and are currently formulating our response: 25/0781/FUL,

<https://publicaccess.exeter.gov.uk/online-applications/applicationDetails.do?activeTab=summary&keyVal=SY2522HBH2F00> .

3 Redevelopment of the Former Police Station and Magistrate's Court Site

We are currently formulating a response to the recent Full Planning Application

(25/0676/FUL; <https://publicaccess.exeter.gov.uk/online-applications/applicationDetails.do?activeTab=summary&keyVal=SX2Y6MHBGLL00>)

by comparing the new application to our response to the 2nd round of consultations by the developer in Oct 2024 (see: <https://exetercivicsociety.org.uk/former-police-station-and-magistrate-court-ecs-response-to-second-proposal/>).

Further Activities

1a Keith and Gert met Fiona Carden, CEO Co-Lab and co-chair of Exeter Partnership on 4 July to discuss our work and potential collaboration.

Co-Lab is a multi-agency wellbeing hub to support people in the city to access services through 30+ projects. Fiona sees an increase in interest in 'neighbourhood' framed initiatives of the new national government into which initiatives will have to tap in.

The Exeter Partnership was set up IN 2024 on the basis of a strategic review (from June 2023) of the 'Liveable Exeter Place Board'. Its mission statement lists 4 areas the renewed organisation would respond to: 1. The demand for sustainable urban and social development; 2. The complexity of cross-sector challenges; 3. A shift toward collaborative guidance/leadership; 4. The emphasis on community engagement. The two chairs provided their leadership under the condition that within 1-2 years distinct changes to meet these priorities will have be made. Change is according to Fiona slow so far. A major public event is now re-scheduled for 27 March 2025.

1b Keith and Gert had a similar discussion with Nicole Wheeler, CEO of InExeter on 7 July. InExeter is the local Business Improvement District (BID) which supports city centre initiatives to 'Make Exeter Better Together'.

These meetings are part of an initiative agreed at the 6 March meeting of the SP&H Group to find ways to enhance our impact. In a fragmenting and polarising political landscape and with local administration facing a difficult time in the restructuring process, we want to contribute to stabilising the development of the city and keep a factual base available. We are particularly interested to see how different organisations react to 'The Historic Places Panel Review' based on **Historic England's** visit to Exeter in September 2024 which we reported in the bulletin. You can find the review online under: <https://exeter.gov.uk/media/j2pfhump/hppr-exeter-2024-final-publication-dec-2024.pdf>

We were pleased to see agreement in major points at both meetings, left our ideas for engagement and are expecting to have further meetings with both.

Possible areas of collaboration:

- a) CoLab: inform Community Builders about ECS and see how local neighbourhood groups could engage with our local membership.
- b) Exeter Partnership: of interest for us would be 2 of the 5 theme groups set-up at the 17 Dec 2024 meeting: on 'Housing/Infrastructure' and on 'City Centre' (refocussed at the 7 May 2025 meeting as 'Business, Economy and Growth'). Both groups run the agenda to engage better with the public.
- c) InExeter: their focus for development will be Musgrave Row and Fore Street, for both LDA has done early-stage studies, which we were sent after the meeting. We also found interest for a public realm improvement of North Street, which needs to be prioritized as we need to use the small window before Mary Archer car park will be agreed upon.

2 Heritage Harbour Festival, 8 June 2025

Gert and David Solman represented us at this year's harbour festival, where we were granted to share the stall with the 'Friends of the Exeter Shipping Canal'. We were located in front of the Customs House, which is not ideal to attract larger amounts of by-passers. We used our adapted flyer about what active engagement we are looking for alongside our other promotion material and our booklets. Despite having had some detailed discussions and what looked like interest for practical and active support, we don't think we have recruited here.

3 Magdalene Road Creative Fair, 21 June 2025

Our stall was hosted by Mr Smith's wine shop. Andy, Hilary and Susan were able to tell lots of the people we talked to about what the Society does, and sold a good number of our newly revised guide to 'St Leonard's and The Quay'.

Tree Preservation Taskforce

David Solman organised a **meeting on 29 May** at St. Martin's Church. David reported on the objectives of the 'ECC Tree and Woodland Strategy 2023-2033'. Ed Dolphin's work on an online map of the Cathedral Green trees was discussed. The group decided to look into producing some kind of print leaflet about trees in Exeter, suggestions to be discussed at the next meeting. We also tried to understand **ECC's TPO map as interactive tool** (made publically available again in early March 2025): [Trees & Hedges: TPOs and Conservation Areas - Map of Tree Preservation Orders - Exeter City Council](#) At the next meeting we will look into specific sites which needs following up with ECC. The next meeting is scheduled for 21 Aug, 10:30, St. Martin's, Cathedral Green.

Gert Vonhoff, 9 July 2025