

Strategic Planning & Highways Group

Chair's Report 18 Feb 2025

SP&H communicated via emails, telephone calls and working party meetings since our meeting on 12 Dec 2024.

Group's meeting 12 Dec 2024

Gavin Hall, Kirby James and Katherine Leat were invited to the meeting as guests to see whether they would like to join the SP&H Group. All three responded positively. We have seen further engagement with our work from Kirby (Water Lane) and Katherine (Exeter Plan) since then.

At the last meeting of SP&H we discussed:

1. Proposed guidelines for assessing active travel and active streets measures
 - Peter Cleasby's 1st version of a paper, securing our discussions on these topics, was discussed; Peter will present a modified version at a later stage
2. Proposals for projects from AGM presentation
 - The group agreed that we can only go ahead with addition projects once we have secured active members who can lead them
3. Clarendon House
 - Keith Lewis led in both our responses to the developer (deadline 20 Dec) and to ECC (deadline 10 Jan). Support from the group, Gert to help with versions' comments
4. Exeter Plan
 - A small working group was established to work on ECS's response: Paul Barkley, Peter Cleasby (in person once and then in written form), Katherine Leat and Gert Vonhoff met four times and exchanged emails to get the response ready by the deadline 6 Feb

Responses by SP&H Group to Consultations

1. Exeter Plan (Regulation 19 version)

- We submitted our representations by the deadline on 6 Feb 2025. It is pleasing to see that many of our previous concerns have been acted upon and the result is a better plan. Our detailed work found 2 cases where we commented on the legally compliance of policies and 55 cases where we enquired the soundness of a policy or the explaining texts. Our representations now will go the Inspector and we might be invited in time to speak to some of them at a later meeting. To read more about our response, visit <https://exetercivicsociety.org.uk/ecs-submitted-representations-to-exeter-publication-plan/> .

2. Clarendon House

- We think the plans did not progress well, as what is currently on the table still does not convince in terms of architecture. 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. Height: A reduction in height is welcome, but 10 storeys still seem unacceptable. A well-designed building which knits with and respects adjacent buildings is a more important factor for the skyline.

- i. Design: 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.
 - ii. 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.
 - iii. 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. 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.
- Our report can be read under: <https://exetercivicsociety.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/ECS-response-to-Clarendon-House-consultation-2025.pdf>
 - Following our critical response, the developers' architects asked for a meeting with the Society as they wished to review some of our concerns. Keith and Gert met with them online on 29 Jan for 90 mins. Many of the issues and concerns we had expressed were defended because the city council, Design West and English Heritage have guided them towards the scheme that they consulted upon, but they did agree to review some of the concerns we have about the overall appearance of the building. We hope that any subsequent planning application will include changes that will result in an appropriate building on the Paris Street roundabout.

3. Water Lane South Development

- Outline Planning Permission has been granted for the first stage of the Water Lane development at the Planning Committee meeting on 27 Jan.
- At a 3.5 hours long meeting, ECC Planning Committee voted unanimously to approve the Outline Planning Application the developer WL DMC had handed in, after one amendment was made to safeguard the operation of Gabriel's Wharf during the construction process. ECC's Director of Place, Ian Collinson, sees this as a crucial step in bringing this key site in Exeter close to being developed. At the meeting, the local councillors and ECS made the point that the Officer's Report recommends to go ahead with no

affordable housing and social rent guaranteed secured at this Outline stage, thereby potentially not meeting ECC's statutory duty to provide affordable homes. Ian Collinson as well as the officers pointed out the review mechanism being put in place by the conditions would be sufficient to do both, prove ECC's commitment to affordable homes and over time deliver these on site. The developer's spoke person highlighted that this reviewing of affordable housing at each Reserved Matters application has been successful on other brownfield sites. Richard Clark in several media appearances said his company was in contact with Homes England and Cornerstone to investigate potential solutions. Exeter Civic Society voiced some doubts in a written joint representation (together with the Haven Banks Residents' Group and the Friends of the Exeter Ship Canal) to ECC on 24 January, which was sent directly to all members of the ECC Planning Committee. The representation can be found under: <https://exetercivicsociety.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/ECC-Planning-Committee-Representation-27-Jan-2025-final.pdf>

Commented [GV1]:

- Gert Vonhoff, representing Exeter Civic Society and the two other organisations as 'Objector' at the Planning Committee meeting, raised some doubts in the validity of this argument. He thinks the Financial Viability Assessment does not prove without doubt that the development is only viable without any affordable homes' obligation.

4. Harlequins Centre Redevelopment

- Like many people and organisations we were disappointed that Exeter City Council accepted the developer's view that including the proposed affordable housing in the development would make it unviable. The £7 million to be paid by the developers to the Council will enable it to build some affordable housing is some compensation. However, the money must be spent within seven years or else returned to the development. Seven years may seem a long time but the Council now has to identify a site or development and procure accommodation or homes, and we doubt that this will result in the 72 'affordable co-living' rooms that the developer was required under the previous planning condition, targeted at essential workers such as nurses.

5. Exeter Energy and the Riverside Valley Park

- The developer submitted a planning application in January for a Heat from Energy plant on land at Grace Road Fields, adjacent to the new Marsh Barton train station. Keith is preparing a response together with the Planning Group. This is a complex application which we expect to object to because the site is in the valley park which should be protected from inappropriate development; as the plant will no longer use river water for heat exchange, this location is even put further into question.

Tree Preservation Taskforce

- David Solman is going to call a meeting in Feb.
- Two new street trees in South Street are very welcome.

Gert Vonhoff, 13 Feb 2025