

Strategic Planning & Highways Group
Chair's Report 23 Apr 2025

SP&H communicated via emails and telephone calls since our meeting on 18 Feb 2025.

Group's meeting 3 Mar 2025

1. Update on Energy Centre on Grace Road Playing Fields

- a. KL is preparing the official response from ECS to consultation. This was handed in end of March. For details see bullet point further down.
- b. Consider engaging local ECC Cllrs who seem to be Labour
- c. Consider contacting Central Government with question whether this would be the best use of their money: could there be alternative use for two smaller plants near the hospital and the university as main customers, which would reduce pipework and heat loss due to transportation; obviously a solution like this would not allow potential future sourcing heat from the river
- d. Do the rejected sites need to be looked at again, now that the river as heat source is not followed through?
- e. As the River Valley Park master plan will end in 2026, we discussed what might be done afterwards: continuation with changed circumstances, replacement by docs like WL-SPD

2. Supporting documents of the Exeter Plan

- a. Discussion whether these documents should be made available in the member's section of our website, with a short commentary each – reservations, as the status of these documents is only to inform the Exeter Plan, so they will be short lived
- b. GV to produce a trial with the 2024 'Views, density and heights study' for the next SP&H group meeting

3. Historic Places Panel Review

- a. Some aspects of this review are looking lofty (inner bypass adjustments 5.42-5.45; creation of an 'Urban Room', 5.10) or potentially not in our interest (Strategic Regeneration Framework, as defined under 5.12; which most likely will not draw in Exeter institutions)
- b. Welcome aspects to follow up with:
 - Encourage greater public participation and meaningful consultations (effective and continuous community engagement) to shift dialogue from units and sites to home and communities (5.9, 5.10)
 - Enrichment of the city's relationship with its community groups (5.33)
 - Organisational audit to support restructuring for a more dynamic working environment across planning, culture and the environment; are there sufficient resources to deliver the ambitious visions for Exeter (5.5)
 - Sidwell Street redevelopment: parts taken out of Westgate Site

- in Exeter Plan; but remaining parts and Paris Street are in the hand of the new owner
- Expand and enhance Farmers' Market (better site, possibly weekend market, 5.32)
- c. GV and KL to write to ECC Chief Executive in form of a critical enquiry how these recommendations are followed on, ongoing
- d. GV and KL to consider making the document and its recommendations better known in the public: online media, press: not yet done

4. Strategy for improved dealing with multiple bodies discussed

- a. ECC Planning, Director of Space Ian Collinson, Chair Exeter Planning Committee (and members):
 - route via Director of Space does not work;
 - exchange with Planning Officers intensified due to better comms between Planning Committee and them, but limited success for more strategic issues (limited resources)
 - engagement with local Cllrs to be intensified, especially where they represent the majority on Planning Committee
 - Chair of Planning Committee seems to act very much in line with officer recommendations and was perceived acting in a more technical way at the Committee meetings
- b. DCC HATOC, Highways officer
 - Not clear how improve our engagement; Chair of HATOC seems to be friendly towards us, but very busy
- c. 'The Exeter Partnership' (former 'Liveable Exeter Place Board') and its Co-leader Fiona Carden, CEO of CoLab.
 - SP&H to find out more about potential changes here: website, liaison, agendas and minutes
 - CoLab and ECC Community Builders: dependencies from ECC and collaboration of CoLab and ECC CB – more research needed
 - Discussion and findings to be carried forward to next SP&H meeting

Responses by SP&H Group to Consultations

1. Exeter Energy and Riverside Valley Park

We submitted our objections to the proposed energy plant on the Grace Road Playing Fields at the end of March. Whilst we accept that an energy plant that uses low carbon sources is desirable, we are concerned that building such a facility within the Riverside Valley Park will result in the loss of a significant area of Green Infrastructure which we consider is essential to support future residents of brownfield development sites at Water Lane and Marsh Barton. We also consider that the applicant had not demonstrated sufficiently that this is the only site available and has not adequately investigated other sites and options. For these two reasons Exeter Civic Society objected to this application. Our full response: <https://exetercivicsociety.org.uk/exeter-civic-society-objects-planning-application-for-energy-centre-at-grace-road-fields/>

2. East Devon District Council Plan

AMcK responded to the 'Section 19' draft of East Devon District Council's Local Plan. The plan proposes a new town of 8000 homes (10000 over the very long term) just south of the airport, a further 600 homes North of Topsham (essentially along Clyst Road) and another 2000 in Exmouth. This is all in addition to the continued expansion of Cranbrook. We have objected to the proposed developments on the grounds that their implications for the road network and traffic into Exeter have been inadequately considered. The A376 from Exmouth is already congested, many of the key junctions are at or over capacity and there is little scope for or confidence in proposed mitigating measures such as bus lanes. Our full response:

<https://exetercivicsociety.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2025/04/ECS-Response-to-EDDC-19-Plan-Final.pdf>

Further Activities

1. Contradictory traffic measures in Barnfield Road and Southernhay East.

Devon County Council as the Highway Authority consulted local businesses in the autumn about making Barnfield Road one-way from Western Way to support the introduction of improved cycle routes to and from the city centre and widen pavements; both of which are needed. We have heard that many businesses were concerned by the loss of access to Western Way from the Southernhay area, and that they were told further consultation would follow. KL then read that the county council had published traffic orders to revert traffic access to the three Princesshay Car Parks (Broadwalk House, Shopping Centre, and Dix's Field) to what they were before St Sidwell's Point and the bus station were under construction. This will result in access and egress to this area from Paris Street only, with access from Southernhay East being closed off.

If both changes are implemented this will result in the only egress from the area being via Southernhay East onto Magdalen Street at the Southgate Hotel. We are concerned that this could lead to congestion in Southernhay East.

Upon making inquiries it seems that the county council will not consult again on the Barnfield Road changes until the autumn when the impact of the Southernhay East closure can be fully assessed.

2. Closure of cycle path and footpath at Belle Isle Drive/Trew's Weir. The temporary closure of the cycle and foot paths seems to be particularly badly signed and arranged and may be unnecessary in parts. We will be taking this up with Devon County Council.

3. Exeter Voluntary Fair, 3 April. Gert Vonhoff, Jennifer Woodman and David Solman ran a stall at the Exeter Volunteer Fair on 3 April in the Cathedral. We

informed attendees about where we could do with some help – with the aim to add to our activity portfolio. We had a good amount of interest, but no follow-ups so far.

The sheet for where we would need further help is attached to the meetings' info pack. How can we best make further use of this?

Tree Preservation Taskforce

1. David Solman bought a **Lucombe Oak** from a local nursery which was selling its stocks. It needs to continue growing in a pot to establish roots for another year or two before planting it out somewhere in Exeter, potentially Dunsford Gardens.
2. David Solman has called a **meeting for 29 May**, 10:30 at St. Martin's Church.
3. As of 3 March **ECC's TPO map as interactive tool** has gone public again (after almost 2 years): This will make checking whether a specific tree has a TPO much easier again: [Trees & Hedges: TPOs and Conservation Areas - Map of Tree Preservation Orders - Exeter City Council](#)

Gert Vonhoff, 16 Apr 2025