

Strategic Planning & Highways Group

Chair's Report 28 Oct 2025

SP&H communicated via emails and telephone calls since its SP&H meeting on 31 July 2025. It has been an incredibly busy summer and autumn and we only got the workload covered because of input from new members: Katherine Leat helped out with the North Street Project; Pierluigi Chinellato helped with Mary Arches Redevelopment and Clarendon; Chris Pope helped firefighting wherever possible, he collected data, helped running the North Street workshops and wrote our Unit 1 pre-application response.

The October meeting of the ECC Planning Committee has been cancelled but 3 more meeting are put in place for 10 Nov, 1 and 8 Dec – so a lot of decision taking on major projects is to be expected before the end of the year.

Responses by SP&H Group to Consultations

1a North Street / Mary Arches Carparks: Keith and Gert, in collaboration with Fabrica Architecture, and other members facilitated 2 workshops on 26 Aug and 23 Sep bringing local businesses, residents and councillors together to discuss improvements in North Street. The initiative is supported by InExeter with distributing information to businesses. There was agreement that this street is currently not a pleasant one to walk up or down, despite it being one of the oldest central streets in Exeter, with a rich history dating back to Roman times. Removing car parking, reducing loading bays, widening pavements, and adding trees will make it much more attractive. Results have been summarized in a 'North Street Vision' document and sent in to ECC Planning as additional response to the Mary Arches Car-park Redevelopment planning application. We also sent this document to all participants of the workshops. Cllrs and officers included. The Department for Transport opened an 'Active Travel Innovation Fund' (£1 Mio, application deadline 14 Nov) for businesses and charities to hand in innovative projects. InExeter has given us their endorsement to apply, but does not want to be the lead applicant for this. GV is currently in contact with Cllr Andy Ketchin who is negotiating conditions on Mary Arches Redevelopment with DCC officers; he is trying to get DCC's endorsement and full support for an application we might hand in.

- Active Travel Innovation Fund to award grants of up to £100,000 for successful bids
- Fund will help start or scale engagement projects that will have a positive impact on walking, wheeling and cycling
- Fund comes as part of government's Plan for Change by backing bold ideas to boost the economy, improve health and make travel safer

Details for the funding call: <https://activetravelengland.gov.uk/news/government-launches-ps1-million-competition-take-active-travel-innovation-next-level>. The deadline is very tight and our project is probably at a too early stage to be successful, but we have to decide whether we want to have a go or not: **Can we please ask the Committee for their views.**

More details on our website under 'Current Concerns', "[North Street Area Improvements](#)".

1b In late Sep the developer for the **Mary Arches site** has submitted a whole batch of improved documents, not really taking our major concerns from our 5 Aug response on board. But there is some movement on the following points:

1. The corner block on North Street / Bartholomew Street East has been modified to make this corner less prominent and more interesting.
2. The metal panels on street level in North Street and Bartholomew Street East have been replaced by full height glazing, with the slab edge set back to introduce a display area. This will help to create a more active front to the building in both streets.
3. The roof line has been set back in part of the building, and a mansard treatment been introduced to create a more diverse shape that is more in line with the existing houses in North Street. It also helps to mask the dominance of the building.
4. The southern end of the building on North Street has been extended to create a new element over the passageway off North Street, thus aligning the façade to respect the existing building line and thus develop an improved cohesion between old and new.
5. The entrance to the building in North Street has been reconfigured and set back, with the aim to create a flat section that will hold the level transition. The document also says 'landscaping features have been introduced to assist with integrating the sloped and flat sections' (p.8), but these are not currently shown in any of the illustrations or plans.

KL and Pier are currently working on a reply to these suggested changes. The ECC website response mechanism closed on 19 Oct, but via consultations@exeter.gov.uk email responses will be possible till the Planning Committee Meeting, expected to be on 10 Nov.

2 Redevelopment of the Former Police Station and Magistrate Court Site:

Gert handed in our response on 29 Sep. When the previous application had been refused by the council and this was upheld in legal proceedings, the developer came up with new layouts and ideas and we commented on them after a pre-application exhibition and consultation earlier this year. We see the current proposals as an improvement, but think further amendments and more information is required before we can remove our objections. More details under:

<https://exetercivicsociety.org.uk/ecs-responds-to-full-application-for-former-police-station-and-magistrate-courts-site/> In the meantime (8 Oct) the developer has responded to the consultation in a 20 pages document, which has 2 pages defending their positions against our points. KL is currently checking whether it will be worth replying to this, deadline 9 Nov.

3 Redevelopment of former Unit 1 nightclub site in Summerland Street:

Our new member Chris Pope responded to this pre-application consultation by Spinnaker Estates. The plan is for more purpose-built student accommodation (PBSA) in this area. We made clear that we are not in favour of this and would rather see 2 and 3 bedroom flats being built instead, as we cannot see the valid market analysis for more student accommodation in an area which urgently needs more diverse housing. Other points we raised include: building would profit from being set back from Summerland Street and Verney Street; inconsistency of exterior imagery; brick treatment and its local context; roof design lacks architectural interest; amenity space on 5th floor better placed at ground level; concerns about the size of PBSA

rooms; low number of accessible studios per floor; improvements of walking and cycling routes in the vicinity. Our full response can be found under:

<https://exetercivicsociety.org.uk/ecs-responds-to-unit-1-redevelopment-in-summerland-street/>

We see that the neighbouring site is currently being demolished, so work on those student accommodation units will start soon.

4 Redevelopment of Clarendon House Site:

On 3 October Pier handed in our response to the full planning application for this site, next to the major roundabout at the bottom of Heavitree Road. We objected to the proposal in its current form of a block with 10 storeys adjacent to the Leonardo Hotel in Western Way and 6 stories adjacent to the terrace of listed buildings in Heavitree Road. We strongly urged 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. Full details can be found under:

<https://exetercivicsociety.org.uk/ecs-responds-to-full-planning-application-for-clarendon-house-site/>

5. Disposal of Land in the Riverside Valley Park Linked to the New Energy Plant:

After the decision to build the energy plant was taken at the Planning Committee meeting on 4 August, the size of the land to be disposed for this project has more than tripled to 8.5ha, which triggered a new public consultation on the land disposal which again was flawed (see [Exeter Observer article from 4 October](#) for a detailed account). The disposal now includes right to lay underground distribution pipework across the River Exe floodplain and alongside the Exeter Ship Canal. KL is currently looking together with Chris Pope whether we want to and can react to it.

Despite being alerted to this move by Cllr Lynn Wetenhall (Green Party), she in an email to us made it clear that they do not have the capacity to oppose against it. She wrote: 'Andy Ketchin thinks that ECC have failed to show how the sequential test has been met, but to raise a challenge on this is a big piece of work which none of us councillors have the time, nor the detailed knowledge of planning and flood stuff to pick up.'

Further Activities

Royal Clarence Hotel Redevelopment. An amended application was submitted by local developer Nooko for 25 apartments, two more than previously approved, although contained within the same building area. The exterior of the building will be similar to the original building but with a metal clad mansard roof to create an extra level, although that is the same as the previously approved application. On the ground floor the space that was the Well house pub will be much larger, and the café/restaurant on the corner of St Martins' Lane will be re-established. In our response to this application we are likely to support the principal of redevelopment and only likely to comment on the finer details. GV and others will attend a

presentation about the fire and the future of the building by Todd Gray and Max Sayers (Nooko) on 27 Oct.

Barnfield Road Gateway, Public Consultation:

Devon County Council informed us about a consultation about plans to enhance Barnfield Road, between Western Way and Princesshay in Exeter. The idea is to make Barnfield Road one-directional, increase pavements there and improve the cycle provision. The proposals are designed alongside another scheme being promoted by Exeter City Council, which is returning the access to Princesshay car parks to its original layout: reverting it to the original access on Paris Street means that the entrance at Southernhay is stopped up, and the one-way system along Southernhay East will be reinstated. These works are expecting to be undertaken in Autumn 2025. Full plans on DCC's website: devon.cc/barnfield. The online questionnaire is available till 31 Oct 2025. KL is writing our response to this, demanding some proper traffic counts to be taken after the link to Paris Street will be closed off again; our concern is that the plan to make Barnfield Road one-directional will lead to a bottle neck for traffic leaving Southernhay.

Exeter History Book Festival 2026:

We have been invited to the book festival on 5 Feb. We attended the event this year to promote our new 'Discovering Exeter' booklet. The costs for a table will be £30 (including one attendant). We do not think we will commit ourselves in 2026, as we do not have any new publications out by then.

Tree Preservation Taskforce

At its last meeting on 21 August, the group led by David decided to go ahead with two projects to raise awareness of and gather public support for our city trees. Supported by Ed Dolphin from Sidmouth Arboretum a tree map for Bull Meadow Park could be unveiled at the tree walk on 10 September. You can access [this map within Google Maps](#).

At a workshop on 6 Dec, several members learnt how to create these tree maps. Ed Dolphin provided us with advice on how best to collate material.

We are currently collecting photos and information for more sites, one focussing on street trees in Prospect Park, one of the leafiest streets in Exeter, located in Pennsylvania. We established contact with a local resident association, a first version with the trees on public ground and some history background has been created, but not made public yet.

Other sites will be Heavitree Park and Polsloe Park, where we have established contact with local organisations and associations.

The next meeting of the group is scheduled for 29 Oct.

For more information about the project, see the autumn 2025 entry in [the tree preservation section of our website](#).

Gert Vonhoff, 27 Oct 2025