

Strategic Planning & Highways Group

Chair's Report 8 Oct 2024

SP&H communicated via emails and telephone calls since its last meeting on 22 July 2024. The next meeting will be on 9 Oct 2024.

Responses by SP&H Group to Consultations:

1. Historic England Places Panel visited Exeter

- On 12 and 13 September 2024, members of Historic England's Historic Places Panel and senior staff was visiting Exeter to consider a range of issues, including the regeneration of key sites within the city centre, and the strategic roles that housing, connectivity, education & culture have in the city's future, as well as Net Zero and sustainable growth in the context of the Liveable Exeter Vision. The visit followed an invitation by Exeter City Council, which is interested in the Panel's views as a supportive document to its new 'Exeter Plan'. Exeter Civic Society was invited to a dinner and some of the talks/presentations. (see paper attached)

2. Teignbridge District Council Local Plan Examination (Andy McKeon)

- Andy prepared a written statement and applied to speak at hearings in November (site allocations bordering Exeter). One of our concerns is the visual impact of the Markham Village and Attwell's Farm sites. Our other major concern is the impact of increased traffic not only on the Ide roundabout but on the roads into Exeter. which we see from the Statement of Common Ground the city council shares. Teignbridge's Infrastructure Plan includes dualling the Alphington Road for a very short distance around the junction with Cowick Lane and Church Road. This may help but does not seem to us sufficient given the further much longer stretch into the city.
- Andy is now preparing for the Teignbridge Local Plan hearing in November about the site allocations of Markham Village, Attwell's Farm and Peamore. ECC is opposed to the Markham and Atwell's Farm developments. We will be largely on our own in questioning the Peamore development - Exeter has no objections on siting or traffic grounds and DCC thinks the traffic is not a significant problem. Historic England have raised some objections

Updates

- **Energy Centre, Grace Road Playing Fields**
 - KL had an online meeting with representatives of the private company 'Exeter Energy Network and worked together with Cllr Diana Moore. He launched a press release on 18 Sep (<https://exetercivicsociety.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/09/Press-release-Energy-Centre-Sep-2024.pdf>), which lead to an half-page article in the 'Express and Echo' on 26 Sep 2024, p. 5.
- **Larkbeare House and Grounds**
 - National recognition of the grounds: The Secretary of State for Culture Media and Sport, Lisa Nandy MP, decided to include the grounds of Larkbeare House on Historic England's national Register of Parks and Gardens of Special Historic Interest at Grade II. National registration will give these historic grounds a better measure of protection, requiring special consideration if changes or proposals for development are being contemplated. For details see: <https://exetercivicsociety.org.uk/national-recognition-for-the-grounds-of-larkbeare-house/>

Tree Preservation Taskforce

- Still no reply to Steve Mariner's efforts to contact Bob Stevenson, DCC, about

street trees; Steve tried to get hold of him via phone, with no results.

- It seems ECC has a second officer with tree officer function: Ben Corke, as Technical Officer Trees, a professional tree inspector; to be contacted.
- Our members David Solman and David Gendle (gardener running its own business, member of Pines Gardens Society) will discuss whether they find a solution for the lead in the Taskforce.

Gert Vonhoff, 2 Oct 2024

Meetings with Historic England Places Panel, 12 & 13 Sep 2024

On 12 and 13 September 2024, members of Historic England's Historic Places Panel and senior staff was visiting Exeter to consider a range of issues, including the regeneration of key sites within the city centre, and the strategic roles that housing, connectivity, education & culture have in the city's future, as well as Net Zero and sustainable growth in the context of the Liveable Exeter Vision. The visit followed an invitation by Exeter City Council, which is interested in the Panel's views as a supportive document to its new 'Exeter Plan'. Exeter Civic Society was invited to a dinner and some of the talks/presentations.

Gert Vonhoff represented ECS at a dinner at the City Gate hotel on 12 Sep. Points discussed include:

- whether we found the Exeter Plan was ambitious enough; we said we agreed on the focus on brownfield site as major development opportunity for the next decades, but that this would bring about issues with the height and density of building as costs for development are normally higher for these sites. It would be important to do this with the input and as far as possible the consent of established neighbourhoods in the vicinity of the sites. We also pointed out that we saw the Exeter Plan as special in its comprehensive approach, but that we needed to see what had been taken up from our comments to come to a final view, especially as so many aspects were quite vague in the various versions the public had seen so far.
- we agreed on potential shortcomings of online consultations, where the sheer number of replies is no indicator for proper engagement.
- we talked about the importance of master planning and that late Design Codes are not a replacement, especially when developers by then have already been working on their applications.
- we received the advice if ECC leads and directors do not respond adequately to our concerns to raise our points with the ECC councillors to take them to the committees via this route, rather than just to improve our communications with lower ranking officers.
- the panel was astonished that we were not on the 'Liveable Exeter Place Board'; GV explained how this board functions, its secretive nature and lack of open communications. Several panel members pointed out that they would reflect in their report on issues with not including volunteer societies like ours enough in early decision making by ECC. The new Place Partnership, the panel was made aware of a lot, seems just the old Liveable Exeter Place Board in terms of formal membership, but there could be signs that under new chairs it might progress in a more inclusive direction. The 10 June meeting seems to signal that: <https://www.liveableexeter.co.uk/news/liveable-exeter-place-board-june-and-september-2023-meetings/> , but for the planned follow-up meeting on 9 Sep there are no records available, adding to the very patchy documentation.
- we spoke about the state of the Roman Wall and the Panel wanted to know what importance the wall had for people in Exeter.
- the Panel was surprised by the high number of commuters coming into Exeter on a daily basis for work – we discussed how this impacts road traffic and what mitigating measures need to be put into place.
- to some length we talked about the cultural life in Exeter and how it had become more cosmopolitan over the last twenty years, not least because of the MET Office coming to Exeter and the substantial growth of the university. But GV pointed out that we still had no theatre and music hall with 1,000 seats in the city centre, and were left with a big white

elephant in the city centre in form of the empty former Debenham's building and other vacant premises in Bedford Street.

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For their final session, after a walk down Sidwell Street – whose vibrancy had impressed them – the Panel met members of the Exeter Place Partnership (formerly Liveable Exeter Place Board) and representatives of other organizations like the Civic Society and Inclusive Exeter. **Julia Neville** represented our Society at this meeting. Her report from the meeting reads:

- The focus was intended to be on how to use heritage to promote tourism and thus benefit the city's economy. The Portfolio holder for Arts, Culture and Tourism and the Deputy Leader from Exeter City Council were both present.
- Two presentations were made on behalf of the Exeter Place Partnership by its newly elected co-chairs. The first by the Earl of Devon focused on Exeter's heritage which, he suggested, was a heritage of innovation and radicalism and portrayed the EPP as a forum whose members were ready on a voluntary basis to use their influence and resources to help attract inward investment. The second, by Fiona Corden, the Chief Executive Officer of Exeter's Co-Lab focused on a bottom-up approach, suggesting that it was crucial to support individuals and local communities in becoming confident in the city to achieve a true sense of well-being.
- The Panel asked questions about how engagement could be broadened and strengthened, and listened to suggestions about, for example, a greater emphasis on supporting creativity.
- This event was not well planned. It was only an hour. There were more than fifty people in the room and we had no list of those attending to help us identify anyone. Only the Panel members wore name tags and as we were café-style at little round tables very close to one another it was impossible to see who was there let alone read name tags. Over half the allotted time was taken up by two presentations by the co-chairs of Exeter Place Partnership. This left little time for questions (which were taken after each presentation) and the chair of the HE Panel gave panel members the chance to ask their questions first. So local voices were few. We got to the end of our allotted time before every question had been answered, and although people tried to network a bit afterwards we were shooed out of the room so that they could lay it for lunch.
- I think most of the local people I managed to catch were themselves members of the Exeter Place Partnership, e.g. Dom Jinks from the University's Drama Department, Glenn Woodcock from Oxygen House, Dinah Cox from Devon Community Foundation. Whilst Bob Foale confined himself to the 'how can we boost tourism by using our heritage?' side of the question, Laura Wright was more engaged by the questions about working from the bottom up and she did acknowledge that the council did not spend enough time on reports, even ones they had commissioned. One by Charles Landry on 'An Opportunity in the Making: Exeter and its Creative Place-making' was particularly referenced as having been ignored.
- There was a strong push to put the creative industries at the heart of policy development and the Exeter City of Literature initiative. Ian Harvey from Civic Voice, whom I did not manage to catch, asked the key question for the Exeter Places Partnership – which was how do people get involved with what you're doing? Charles had no real answer except to say that all members of the group had their own networks. When I spoke about this to Dinah Cox as we were going out she reinforced what she had said in the meeting, that as many people as possible should be engaged.

We shall be most interested to read their report!

Gert Vonhoff & Julia Neville, 16 Sep 2024