Exeter Purpose-Built Student Accommodation (PBSA) and Co-Living: Development Overview and Capacity Analysis

1. Introduction

This report summarises the current and emerging supply of Purpose-Built Student Accommodation (PBSA) and Co-Living developments in Exeter. The data has been compiled from planning application documents submitted to Exeter City Council and reflects the position as of early 2026.

The aim is to provide a clear, factual overview of:

- PBSA already built and occupied
- PBSA approved but not yet built or occupied
- PBSA currently in planning or consultation
- Co-Living schemes built, approved, or proposed
- The combined impact on total bedspaces
- How this compares with student demand (HESA 2023/24)

This information supports public understanding of Exeter’s rapidly changing housing landscape and the implications for local communities, infrastructure, and planning policy.

The statistics may not include all smaller schemes. Corrections and additional data welcomed.

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2. PBSA Supply Overview

2.1 PBSA Approved but Not Yet Built or Occupied

These schemes have planning approval but are not yet operational.

Development	Status	Beds
West Park (net figure after 559 removed)	Commenced	1,290
King Billy, Longbrook Street	Approved	108
Cowley Bridge Laundry Site	Approved	354
Martins Gate, High Street	Advertised for Sept 2026	24
68–72 Howell Road	Approved	26
35–37 Sidwell Street	Approved	28
Beaufort House, New North Road	Advertised for Sept 2026	23
Beaufort House – additional cluster flat	Approved	6
Heavitree Road Police Station	Approved	399
Clarendon House	Approved	297

Total PBSA approved but not yet built: 2,555 beds

2.2 PBSA In Planning or Consultation

These schemes are not yet approved but are progressing through the planning system.

Development	Status	Beds
Summerland Street, Unit 1	Submitted	180
Water Lane South	Outline	320

Total PBSA in planning: 500 beds

2.3 Combined PBSA Not Yet Built or Occupied

Total: 3,055 beds

This represents the pipeline of new student accommodation that may come forward in the next 2–4 years, depending on build-out rates and planning outcomes.

2.4 PBSA Already Built and Occupied

Category	Beds
University-operated	6,976
Part-nominated schemes	366
Commercial PBSA	4,947

Total PBSA built and occupied: 12,289 beds

2.5 Total PBSA (Built + Pipeline)

Total PBSA capacity: 15,344 beds

This figure combines existing stock with all approved and proposed developments.

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3. Student Housing in the Wider Private Rented Sector

3.1 Licensed HMOs

- **Licensed HMOs (2025):** 1,485
- **Average occupancy:** 6 students
- **Estimated total students in licensed HMOs: 8,851**

Note:

- A licence is required for properties with **5 or more** occupants.
- Properties with **3 or more** unrelated occupants require planning permission as HMOs.
- Therefore, the true number of students in HMOs is likely higher than the licensed figure.

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4. Student Demand: HESA 2023/24 Data

Accommodation Type	Students	%
University-provided	6,375	23%
Private sector	3,765	13%
Parent/guardian home	1,145	4%
Own residence	2,220	8%
Other rented (e.g., house share)	13,745	49%
Other	785	3%
Not available	15	0%

Total students: 28,050

This dataset highlights that nearly half of all students live in "other rented" accommodation—typically HMOs—placing significant pressure on Exeter's private rented sector.

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5. Co-Living Developments

Co-Living schemes are increasingly being proposed as quasi-residential models aimed at young professionals but often overlap with student demand due to unit size, tenure, and pricing. Co-Living planning permission may restrict the percentage of student occupation.

5.1 Co-Living Built

Development	Beds
The Gorge	134

Total built: 134 beds

5.2 Co-Living Approved but Not Yet Built

Development	Beds
Exland House, Tudor Street	34
Summerland St / Red Lion Lane	145
Harlequins	383
Haven Banks / Water Lane (outline)	184
Heavitree Road Police Station	414

Total approved but not built: 1,160 beds

5.3 Co-Living in Planning or Consultation

Development	Beds
Mary Arches	297

Total in planning: 297 beds

5.4 Total Co-Living

- **Built:** 134
- **Not yet built:** 1,457
- **Total: 1,591 beds**

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6. Combined PBSA and Co-Living Capacity

Grand total (PBSA + Co-Living): 16,935 beds

This combined figure illustrates the scale of student-oriented and quasi-student accommodation shaping Exeter's housing market.

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7. Key Observations

1. Rapid expansion of PBSA

With **3,055 beds** in the pipeline, Exeter is experiencing one of the fastest PBSA growth phases in the South West.

2. Co-Living is emerging as a parallel student market

Although marketed for young professionals, Co-Living schemes often function as de facto student accommodation due to:

- small unit sizes
- high density
- limited parking
- proximity to campus
- rental price points

Planning consents may restrict the number of apartments rented to students.

3. HMO reliance remains extremely high

Even with substantial PBSA growth:

- **8,851+ students** are estimated to live in licensed HMOs
- Many more live in unlicensed smaller HMOs
- HESA data shows **49%** of students live in "other rented" accommodation

4. Total student numbers exceed dedicated accommodation

PBSA + Co-Living capacity (16,935) remains significantly below the student population of 27,144 – source Exeter University data for 25/26, meaning:

- HMOs will continue to play a major role
- Pressure on residential neighbourhoods is unlikely to ease
- Planning decisions must consider cumulative impact, not individual schemes

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8. Contribution to Exeter's 5-Year Housing Supply

National planning guidance allows certain forms of communal or quasi-residential accommodation to contribute to a local authority's 5-year housing land supply. However, these developments do **not** always count on a one-for-one basis. Instead, they are converted into "housing-equivalent units" using nationally recognised ratios that reflect the level of self-containment.

Exeter's PBSA and Co-Living pipeline therefore contributes to the housing supply in proportion to the type of accommodation provided.

8.1 How the Ratios Work

Accommodation Type	Description	Ratio Used for Housing Supply
Self-contained PBSA	Includes private studios with their own kitchen and bathroom	**1 bed = 1 housing unit**
Cluster PBSA	Bedrooms grouped around shared kitchens/dining rooms	**2.4 beds = 1 housing unit**
Co-Living	Small self-contained units with extensive shared facilities	**1.9 beds = 1 housing unit**

These ratios reflect the fact that communal living does not equate to a standard dwelling and therefore cannot be counted as such.

8.2 Key Implications

1. PBSA and Co-Living do not replace conventional housing

Even large schemes translate into fewer numbers of housing-equivalent units.

2. The 5-year supply can appear healthier than the real housing situation

Because PBSA and Co-Living inflate the supply figures without delivering family homes or general-market dwellings.

3. Heavy reliance on PBSA/Co-Living can mask shortfalls

The Council risks under-delivering:

- affordable housing
- accessible homes
- family-sized dwellings
- mixed-tenure neighbourhoods

4. The cumulative impact on communities remains significant

Even though PBSA/Co-Living may count as fewer "units", the physical scale, density, and population impact are far greater than the housing-equivalent figure suggests.

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9. Conclusion

Exeter’s accommodation landscape is undergoing substantial transformation. While PBSA and Co-Living developments add significant capacity, they do not eliminate the city’s reliance on HMOs, nor do they fully meet student demand. Understanding the balance between these sectors is essential for shaping planning policy, protecting community cohesion, and ensuring sustainable growth.

This report provides a baseline for public discussion and future Civic Society engagement with planning proposals.