

Report to: **Strategic Planning Committee**



Date of Meeting: 9 January 2024

Document classification: Part A Public Document

Exemption applied: None

Review date for release N/A

Exeter City Council local plan – Draft local plan (Regulation 18) consultation and Water Lane SPD consultation

Report summary:

Exeter City Council are undertaking consultation on a full draft local plan. This is the equivalent stage of plan making consultation that was undertaken by East Devon District Council a year ago. The draft local plan for the City sets out a full suite of proposed planning policies, specifically for use in determining planning applications. Consultation feedback on the plan will assist the city council in refining and amending plan content before moving on to subsequent stages of plan making. This committee report sets out a proposed response by this council to the consultation.

One of the sites promoted for development in the Exeter local plan is land at Water Lane. This committee report also includes a proposed response to a Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) for this land that the city council are also consulting on. The response to the SPD majors on employment land considerations and can be usefully seen and read as an expansion on more general proposed local plan feedback comments.

Is the proposed decision in accordance with:

Budget Yes No

Policy Framework Yes No

Recommendation:

1. That committee endorse the proposed response to the Exeter local plan consultation and approves its submission to the City Council.
2. That committee endorse the proposed response to the Exeter Water Lane SPD consultation and approves its submission to the City Council.

Reason for recommendation:

To provide feedback to Exeter City Council in respect of planning policy for the City.

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Portfolio(s) (check which apply):

- Climate Action and Emergency Response
- Coast, Country and Environment

- Council and Corporate Co-ordination
- Democracy, Transparency and Communications
- Economy and Assets
- Finance
- Strategic Planning
- Sustainable Homes and Communities
- Tourism, Sports, Leisure and Culture

Equalities impact Low Impact

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Climate change Low Impact

Risk: Low Risk;

Links to background information

The text of consultation draft of the Exeter local plan, in pdf format, can be viewed at:

[The Exeter Plan Full draft Oct 23 \(cloudinary.com\)](#)

and the policies map (the map that shows spatially where policies apply) can be viewed at:
[gmpjai6levteep9cuxgd.pdf \(cloudinary.com\)](#)

The Water Lane SPD can be viewed at:

[Liveable Water Lane Supplementary Planning Document \(cloudinary.com\)](#)

Links to other background documents, if identified, are contained in the body of this report.

Link to Council Plan

Priorities (check which apply)

- Better homes and communities for all
- A greener East Devon
- A resilient economy

1. Introduction to the Exeter local plan

1.1 The draft Exeter local plan, formally titled - 'The Exeter Plan This is our city • This is our future', sets out, by way of introduction, that

"1.1 The Exeter Plan will shape the future of Exeter for the next twenty years and will be the basis for how the city continues to evolve and meet the needs of the community.

1.2 The Exeter Plan is the new name for the Local Plan. It will be the main planning policy document for Exeter, setting out where development should take place and providing the policies which will be used in making decisions on planning applications. Once adopted, it will replace the current planning policies in the Core Strategy and the Local Plan First Review."

- 1.2 The plan is at the Regulation 18 stage of plan making. As a consultation draft document feedback received will help the City Council in its work of refining and amending the plan as it moves forward to subsequent stages of plan making. This will include through to submission of the plan for examination by a planning inspector and after that onto plan adoption.
- 1.3 For the East Devon Local Plan members of committee will be aware of ongoing discussions around a vision for our local plan. There might be interest in noting the overarching Exeter plan vision, at paragraph 2.1 (though there are also chapter-based vision statements):

'By the time they are an adult, a child born in Exeter today will live in a city that is inclusive, healthy and sustainable - a city where the opportunities and benefits of prosperity are shared and all citizens are able to participate fully in the city's economic, social, cultural and civic life.'

2. The form, format and broad policy approach of the Exeter plan

- 2.1 The draft Exeter plan sets out, in structure and broad content, what we might expect to see in their final plan. In form and format terms it is quite conventional (as is the East Devon plan) being based around subject based chapters that contain proposed policies for use in determining planning applications. The plan also allocates land for development in the city.
- 2.2 The Exeter plan is subject to consultation from 23 October 2023 to 15 January 2024 and as with the East Devon local plan the intent is that the city council will consult on a Publication (Regulation 19) plan in 2024. The city council indicate possible adoption of the plan in 2025, though we would suggest that this is quite ambitious timetabling.
- 2.3 The Exeter plan places a considerable amount of emphasis on development of previously developed (Brownfield) land in the city and in so doing allocates a number of sites that are currently unused or seen as under-used for redevelopment. These sites, coming from the Liveable Exeter programme, are allocated for mixed uses but with an emphasis on residential development to include flat and apartment developments at higher densities.
- 2.4 This spatial approach in part reflects a long-standing approach of the City Council to resist development on elevated rural areas, within the city boundaries, of land lying to the north and west of the city. The plan highlights a stated need to *"protect the city's landscape setting and retain Exeter's environmental quality."* See paragraph 3.5 of their plan. This same paragraph also advises that *"This strategy will also help to achieve the City Council's net zero 2030 target, enable nature recovery, continue Exeter's economic success and support a healthy and inclusive city. This transformational approach is closely aligned with the Government's Levelling Up policy which aims to reduce inequalities and promote opportunities for all."*

2.5 As with the emerging East Devon plan (and to accord with Government policy) the Exeter plan contains a series of strategic policies and a range of non-strategic policies. The Exeter plan sets out how the City Council, within city administrative boundaries, will accommodate the development needs for and of the city. The Exeter plan does not, therefore, reference seeking to accommodate any city development needs beyond their boundaries. This responsible and positive approach of the City Council would be very much welcomed; however we would query whether the plan does really accommodate all development needs, especially so for job generating and employment uses. This is the main theme addressed in proposed feedback.

3. The proposed local plan response to the consultation by East Devon District Council

3.1 In the shaded text below we set out a proposed response to the Exeter local plan consultation by East Devon District Council. In responding to the plan we concentrate on more significant considerations, rather than specific policy detail, and on matters that have a clear cross-boundary relevance.

3.2 Subject to Strategic Planning Committee approval we will submit this response to the City Council.

East Devon District Council welcomes the draft local plan that Exeter City Council are consulting on. We consider the draft plan to be positive, coherent and well-constructed and that it sets out a positive agenda for future development in the city.

We are especially keen to ensure coordinated working and actions between the City Council and East Devon District Council and to this end the timing of production of the Exeter plan, and for your workloads ahead, neatly align with our own East Devon work and work programmes.

We welcome the commitment to swiftly moving to a position of net zero carbon set out in the plan. This is clearly a challenging goal to arrive at but one which we see that you are positively embracing.

In the housing chapter of your plan we note and welcome the fact that you are providing for a broad range of accommodation needs and are positively making provision to address standard method housing numbers, including having a healthy headroom level of provision should there be any possible element of non-implementation. We note that you propose to address Gypsy needs through a windfall policy and that jointly commissioned work is ongoing to assess the need for a transit site; we would support the allocation of such a site within the City.

We note and welcome the fact that Policy EJ6 allocates 17 hectares of land for employment purposes. However, we do consider that the plan should be more explicit in respect of quantifying overall levels of employment land needed. We note, for example, that the Greater Exeter Economic Development Needs Assessment, in paragraph 10.2.6

(as on your web site and as referenced in your local plan – paragraph 15.10), reports a *“requirement of 43 – 57 ha of industrial land over the Plan period”* in the city. We also note the requirement for *“8-30 ha of office space”*.

From our review of your local plan it is not clear, however, how or where these or other appropriately quantified and justified levels of employment land will be accommodated within the city and therefore how levels of net new job generation will be provided for in Exeter. This should specifically include jobs (new and existing) in not just transformational sectors but also in essential traditional, long-established and mainstream work sectors that underpin the economy.

We note that allocation policies in the plan, including the Liveable Exeter sites, provide limited detail, specifically quantified levels/information on employment uses that will be accommodated, and no clarity or guidance on what will happen to existing employment uses that will be displaced through the development and redevelopment of land areas.

We consider that the Exeter plan should clearly and explicitly set out all sources of supply and allocations to meet fully quantified employment need of the city. We assume that full needs will be addressed through mixed use allocations and redevelopment schemes as well as intensification of existing business sites, infill development and smaller windfall proposals coming forward in the city. However, this should be clearly and explicitly stated and quantified in future refinement and redrafting of the plan. In this context the plan should also set out quantified levels of displaced employment uses resulting from redevelopment proposals and how and where displaced employment uses will be accommodated. If the city council are of the view that existing business sectors and business premises, that will be ‘lost’ through redevelopment, will no longer exist or be needed in the future then this conclusion should be fully justified through corroborating evidence.

We recognise that Exeter is and will remain a focal point for many facilities serving an area that extends beyond the city boundaries. There will, therefore, need to be coordinated and cooperative working, between ourselves and other partners, on a range of subject matters, specifically to include transport and communication considerations. To this end we welcome inclusion of chapter 8 in the plan and specifically note the positive messages around joint working set out in paragraph 8.2 of the plan.

As you will be aware the emerging East Devon local plan places a considerable amount of development on the western side of our District, including provision of a second new community, a strategic mixed-use development north of Topsham (east of the M5) and several major employment sites. This development will add to existing development commitments in this broad area and there will be a need to ensure coordinated work to ensure timely and efficient delivery of proposals.

We note that policy STC8 provides for redevelopment of the existing Moor Lane motorway service station should an appropriate replacement come forward. Although we welcome the removal of the previously proposed allocation of this site we have concerns regarding this policy. We recognise highway benefits that such redevelopment might perhaps generate (though we note these are as yet untested) but would question the soundness of

this policy. We are aware of a site for a new service station being promoted by a landowner in East Devon, around 3km north of Junction 29 of the M5. However, we would stress that no policy provision for such a development features in the emerging East Devon local plan, nor as we understand are similar proposals included in any other planning authority local plan in the area. We would suggest that in the absence of specific agreed proposals for a new service station, which would be very expensive and hugely challenging to deliver, the inclusion of this policy and supporting text is inappropriate and misleading given great uncertainty over possible implementation in practice.

We recognise the relevance of the landscape setting of Exeter, however, would question the appropriateness of Policy NE1, if its application would prejudice the ability of the city to accommodate development to meet all of its needs. The importance of the landscape setting of Exeter needs to be seen within the context of the landscape quality across a much broader cross-boundary area that includes Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty and Dartmoor National Park. Whilst the hills around Exeter are attractive, they do not form a national designation and they are in very close proximity to city facilities. Should there be concerns around meeting full city development needs then it would be appropriate to review this policy, and its spatial definition, to ensure that fully quantified and appropriate and relevant development can come forward.

We welcome the positive approach to green infrastructure promoted through the plan, for example through policy reference to the Valley Parks. We would be keen, however, to see greater reference to green infrastructure beyond but close to the city. In this respect the Clyst Valley Regional Park is especially important providing an asset that is and will be used by residents of East Devon, the city and a wider area. The plan should refer more fully to links into the Clyst Valley Regional Park noting that the park and adjoining areas offer significant scope for wider environmental benefits to include nature recovery and biodiversity net gain. The Exeter plan could usefully reference the scope for city development to actively contribute to such delivery.

We consider that the plan could say more about recreational impacts on the highest tier of wildlife sites, specifically the Exe Estuary the Pebblebed Heaths and (in Teignbridge) Dawlish Warren. We trust that a new joint mitigation strategy, for East Devon, Exeter and Teignbridge, will be completed next year and this should ensure an agreed collective approach to the delivery of mitigation can be secured. The Exeter Plan should reference this strategy and provide commitment to delivery.

3.3 In considering the above members may wish to review what Exeter City Council said in response to our draft local plan consultation - [Please ask for: \(eastdevon.gov.uk\)](http://eastdevon.gov.uk)

4. The Liveable Water Lane Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) consultation

4.1 One of the sites promoted for development in the Exeter local plan is land at Water Lane. This land lies to the south of the city centre and it includes a large area of

Brownfield land, understood to previously have been in industrial use. The Water Lane area also currently supports an active mixed range of business uses as well as other commercial activities, some open spaces and residential dwellings.

- 4.2 Exeter local plan policy sets the overarching policy guidance for the Water Lane SPD. The SPD itself is comprehensive and it is clear that a lot of thought, attention and effort has gone into its production. There is much detail in the document that can be commended. However, noting overarching concerns in the proposed local plan consultation response around employment land supply matters, we would regard it as appropriate to highlight employment land considerations in this SPD consultation response.
- 4.3 We note that the SPD consultation had a closing date of 4 December 2023. We have advised Exeter City Council, however, of our desire to take officer concerns on the document to the first available committee meeting, that is this one in January 2024.
- 4.4 The proposed response to the Water Lane consultation is set out in highlighted text below. Subject to Strategic Planning Committee approval we will submit this response to the City Council.

Responding on behalf of East Devon District Council we welcome the opportunity to comment on the Water Lane SPD and Design Code. Clearly lots of effort has gone into production of an attractive document that sets out proposals for significant changes to this part of the city.

We would not want to comment on many matters of detail in your proposals. However, we do wish to express concerns around the way in which you have failed to address, from our review, the need for employment and job provision. On the 9 January 2024 the Strategic Planning Committee of East Devon District Council received a report in respect of the Exeter City local plan – Draft Plan (Regulation 18) consultation. East Devon District Council raised significant concerns around the potential failure of your local plan to address and accommodate full city-wide quantified levels of employment generating uses in the city over the life span of your local plan.

We note that the Greater Exeter Economic Development Needs Assessment, in paragraph 10.2.6, (as on your web site and as referenced in your local plan – paragraph 15.10), reports a “requirement of 43 – 57 ha of industrial land over the Plan period” in the city. We also note the requirement for “8-30 ha of office space”. From our review of your local plan it is not clear, however, how or where these or other appropriately quantified and justified levels of employment land will be accommodated within the city and therefore how levels of net new job generation will be provided for in Exeter. This should specifically include jobs (new and existing) in not just transformational sectors but also in essential traditional, long-established and mainstream work sectors that underpin the economy.

We raise these concerns in the context of the SPD as Water Lane is a long-established employment area in the city that has in the past and continues to support considerable levels of essential employment uses. Many of the jobs accommodated in the Water Lane area are needed to support the public and their needs as well as the economy more widely

– however, many are for uses and in sectors that may not be good neighbours to residential uses and new residential developments.

In your local plan policy for Water Lane - Reference 15 (Strategic policy) – you advise of *“the retention of existing levels of employment floor-space in phases up to 2040”*, however, it is unclear how or if this can be achieved or secured in practice and we note that you reference floor space levels rather than job numbers and also you fail to reference the type of employment sectors that will be accommodated. In the SPD you advise, however, of the Water Lane area accommodating *“more environmentally acceptable”* employment uses and under - W01 - General land use and activity – you advise of accommodating *“employment uses compatible with residential”*.

As you do not quantify overall employment land/job needs (including for all sectors and job types) in your draft local plan (or cross-reference to relevant evidence) we have significant concerns that your proposals for Water Lane will exacerbate potential problems of job retention and provision in the City of Exeter and we are unaware of how or where in the city any jobs displaced from Water Lane will be accommodated.

You show on page 52 of the SPD (W02 - Land use plan) a small area that is shaded and referenced as *“Employment opportunity area (W07)”*. But we cannot see any quantified references in the document to what this means in practice, nor indeed to amounts or levels of employment uses that may be accommodated elsewhere in the Water Lane area. Nor can we see information on the numbers of jobs or make up of existing jobs or the physical extent of land currently in employment uses. We would emphasise the apparent smallness of this employment opportunity area and unless (perhaps) you envisage very high-density job uses (high staff to floorspace ratios such as may be achieved for some multi-story office-based activities) then we would suggest a potential significant under-provision of employment use is set out in proposals and also a lack of provision for a full range of job types.

We would suggest that a thorough review of the SPD (specifically in the context of local plan considerations around job provision and any review the local plan may require) is undertaken before proposals are progressed. Based on past and current uses of the Water Lane area for job generating activities we would see this as a very good area for employment activity to serve the city and a wider surrounding area. That is not to say that it might not be a good location for other and altogether different uses and activities (which we believe you are promoting). But if you are to actively promote these alternatives then it should be undertaken within the context of demonstrating how you will ensure you will meet and deliver full Exeter city employment needs, for all job types, within the city boundary. This should include net new jobs that may be created in the future and any displacement resulting from redevelopment at Water Lane or anywhere else.

Financial implications:

There are no direct financial implication resulting from the report.

Legal implications:

There are no substantive legal issues to be added to this report.

