

## REPORT TO STRATEGIC SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Date of Meeting: 19 January 2023

### PORTFOLIO HOLDER'S REPORT TO SCRUTINY COMMITTEES

#### **COUNCILLOR EMMA MORSE- PORTFOLIO HOLDER FOR CITY DEVELOPMENT AND PLANNING**

<b>1. Issues relating to achieving the Council's published priorities</b>
<b>Number of major planning applications determined</b> – the City Council decided on 40 major planning applications in 2022. Of these, five were refused.
<b>Appeals won/lost</b> – In 2022, 6 appeals were dismissed, and eight were allowed. There are currently 11 appeals in progress.
<b>Exeter Design Quality Partnership</b> - the City Council expects all new development to be of the highest quality, and we are committed to raising the standard of design. We have set up the Exeter Design Quality Partnership (EDQP): an independent body comprising architects, urban designers, landscape architects, engineers, transport planners, heritage experts and other design-related professionals with a local interest and recognised expertise in their field. EDQP will assess development proposals and provide design support. The service applies to all pre-application submissions for major schemes in the city and other proposals where the development is considered sensitive in its setting.
<b>CIL/S106 monies</b> - since the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) introduction in 2013, CIL collection has amounted to £24.15m. In 2021/22 alone, the City received £3.79m in CIL receipts. In the same period, the Council was able to spend nearly £1.2m secured through the Section 106 process on affordable housing, outdoor sport and play, and other projects benefitting people who live, work and visit the City.

<b>2. Update or commentary on any major ongoing programmes of work</b>
<b>Exeter Plan</b> – the Outline Draft Exeter Plan was published for consultation between September and December 2022. The City Development team held 15 exhibitions and undertook multiple other events to promote the consultation. Personally I spoke at three events and attended many consultations, it was a pleasure to have this level of contact with the public on such important issues.
Feedback on the consultation is due to be reported to Planning Member Working Group (Feb), Strategic Scrutiny (March) and Executive (April)
Headline figures for input during the consultation are:
1331 respondents
3407 contributions

Work is ongoing and as such the figures may vary due to duplications, and up loading of some replies.

**Article 4 Direction** – the Article 4 Direction restricting the conversion of dwellings to Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMOs) in specific city areas has been reviewed. A range of options will be reported to Planning Member Working Group this month, with a February Executive report recommending a preferred option to amend the current HMO Article 4 Direction and associated Supplementary Planning Document, and public consultation on that preferred option.

**CIL Review** – in December 2022, a consultation on a revised Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) charging schedule was launched. This will run until 25 January 2023. The process aims to update the CIL rates implemented in 2013. The rates need to be revised to take into account planning and development changes in the city. The critical revisions proposed are:

- Increases in rates for Purpose Built Student Accommodation
- Introducing a specific rate for Co-living (currently, it doesn't pay CIL)
- Introducing a specific rate for build-to-rent, which is lower than standard residential
- Introducing a zero rate for flats

Residential and out-of-city-centre retail CIL rates would stay the same.

**Joint Strategy** – discussions are ongoing between officers representing the five Councils in the Greater Exeter area about a Joint Strategy for planning in the area. Details will be reported to the Executive in February.

### **3. Issues that may impact: services delivery/financial performance/future budget requirements**

**Recruitment** – There are 41 establishment posts in City Development. Currently, there are six vacancies.

**Economic impact** – Building Control and Land Charges are reporting a recent reduction in case work, but there currently is no cause for concern about fee income. Planning application submissions are not showing any signs of slowing down. Householder applications, in particular, are being received at a level comparable to previous years. The Service is reliant on the fees submitted for major applications. To match the fee profile of prior years, several larger applications need to be received this year.

**Brownfield land challenges** – the key focus of the Exeter Plan is the delivery of housing and other new development on brownfield land. Brownfield sites are strategically valuable but can be constrained by land treatment costs, the fragmentation of available plots, complex landownership and declining property values. Development can be complicated and more costly than on greenfield land. The City Council will need to work carefully and closely with developers to unlock the potential of brownfield land.

**Planning reform** – the government proposes changes to the National Planning Policy Framework and supporting guidance. They include:

- making clear how housing figures should be derived and applied so that communities can respond to local circumstances;
- addressing issues in the operation of the housing delivery and land supply tests;
- tackling problems of slow build-out;

- setting more precise expectations around planning for older peoples' housing; and,
- promoting more beautiful homes.

City Development officers are considering how to respond to a current consultation from the government on these changes. If appropriate, a report will be made to the Executive in February.

#### **4. Potential changes to services/provisions being considered**

**Charging for pre-application enquiries** – unlike most local planning authorities, the City Council does not charge developers for pre-application advice. Recent research commissioned by City Development indicates that applicants are generally (nationally and locally) not put off by paying a fee if it leads to delivering a service that is beneficial to them. There is scope to secure income by introducing a charge for providing advice on major development proposals. This income could be used to ensure that the Service can provide high-quality advice. As we move forward with this details will be shared with Planning Member Working Group.

**Liveable Exeter Placemaking Charter** – Exeter has a vision to be healthy, inclusive and sustainable, and officers are working on a Charter setting out how an efficient and effective planning system is vital in delivering that. It aims to secure high-quality development and protect the things that make Exeter uniquely beautiful, including the green hills and historic setting. It will support other Council strategies to help achieve Exeter's Net Zero 2030 ambition, tackle the climate emergency, enable nature recovery, and enhance the city's cultural offer. This will be best achieved by working collaboratively with people who want to invest in our city and with communities affected by development. The Charter will set out how we want to engage with businesses to manage major planning proposals in Exeter and provide clarity and certainty in the planning process. It will bring together the work on design review and pre-application advice referred to elsewhere in this report. Officers will consult Planning Member Working Group in February or March about the content of the proposed Charter.