

PLANNING COMMITTEE

Monday 8 September 2025

Present:-

Councillor Knott (Chair)

Councillors Rolstone, Asvachin, Atkinson, Banyard, Harding, Hughes, Hussain, Ketchin, Mitchell, M and Williams, M

Apologies

Councillors Bennett and Pole

Councillors in attendance under Standing Order No. 44

Councillor Palmer speaking on item 5 (Minute No. 31 below)

Also Present

Strategic Director for Place, Planning Solicitor, Principal Project Manager, City Development and Democratic Services Manager

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MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 4 August 2025 were taken as read, approved and signed by the Chair as correct, subject to the following amendments:-

Minute No. 26: - Councillor Ketchin –

- Bullet point 4 - he had not heard a compelling reason to choose this site **and that the public had not been consulted;**
- Bullet point 5 - **some parts of** Marsh Barton could be amenable for a harvesting waste stream **and not all options for the site of the energy hub in Marsh Barton had been explored;** and
- Bullet point 8 - biodiversity was **NOT** a material consideration for this site, it would easily be done but building an industrial site in the middle of the area would hinder this.

Additional Bullet points to read as:-

- the original plan for the hub was 2.5 acres and the new site has expanded over threefold; and
- the remainder of the Grace Roads playing fields being outside of the red line boundary, should have been clarified as neither a material consideration and not consulted on with the public.

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DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of interest were made by Members.

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PLANNING APPLICATION NO. 25/0318/FUL - FORMER SITE OF 26-28 LONGBROOK STREET

The Chair invited Councillor Palmer to speak under Standing Order No. 44, who made reference to:

- objected to the new application for student accommodation based on community balance issues;
- this was a new application rather than a simple amendment to the previous consented planning application and much had changed in terms of the student accommodation since that original planning permission was granted;
- Purpose-Built Student Accommodation (PBSA) was dominating much of the city centre with even more planned;
- the National Planning Policy Framework promoted inclusive, well-designed places with accessible services and vibrant communities, in which this development did not achieve this;
- the St James Neighbourhood Plan highlighted the area as being unique, with and predominantly residential, acting as a gateway to the city centre;
- more than 50 percent of residents in the St. James area were students, who were welcomed but was already the highest proportion in the city;
- there has been no evidence provided that PBSAs had led to HMOs returning to residential use;
- currently there were 17 HMOs for sale in St James, all marketed as HMO investments and due to costs involved were unlikely to be returned to use as a residential or rental property;
- there was almost no rental properties in the St James area, which were not student HMOs;
- an appeals inspector in St James ward, last year noted that, there was an over-concentration of student accommodation which harmed the objective of creating a balanced community;
- the appeals inspector further noted that the Council was not achieving its target of at least 75% increase in student numbers accommodated by PBSA;
- though additional PBSA's were expected, it needed to be weighed against other plan policies including plan C3 of the St James Neighbourhood Plan to avoid an over-concentration of student accommodation and harming community balance;
- there were 12,500 PBSA beds in Exeter, the majority, of which were in the St James area or its fringes, which were in addition to the hundreds of student HMOs;
- the site needed to be developed for permanent residential homes as a key site in the city centre, not for further student accommodation; and
- the site was currently a mess and as a key gateway into the city should be developed for permanent residential homes for residents.

In response to questions from Members, Councillor Palmer made the following further comments:

- there was no clear evidence of under-occupancy or over-occupancy of the 12,500 student beds;
- data was lacking due to private ownership and no central data source, but not all PBSAs were fully occupied;
- many international students tended to stay in PBSA for three years;
- first-year students preferred PBSA for safety and security, but they moved to HMO housing after the first year for lower cost and social reasons;
- residential accommodation for young professionals in the city centre would be more viable and sustainable than PBSA, but only flats were feasible on this site; and
- young professionals would benefit from city centre living and there would be longer term demand for residential accommodation.

The Chair invited Mrs Robyn Connett, to speak for five minutes, to speak against the application, who made the following points:

- expressed support for Councillor Palmers views on the proposed PBSA (Purpose-Built Student Accommodation) use;
- the proposed design was not good enough for the community, student occupants, city centre, or the Longbrook conservation area;
- the site was high-profile and required sensitive, high-quality development;
- the specific site location was: 26–28 and 30–32 Longbrook Street and was a high-profile area acting as a gateway to the Longbrook conservation area;
- the site was also adjacent to John Lewis and commercial properties;
- the eastern elevation was highly visible from King William Street car park and Bailey Street and the area was badly neglected;
- the application had originally gone to Planning Committee in October 2017 and the design had undergone least seven further revisions, resulting in a wholesale redesign; and
- the height of the proposal was a mistake, due to the original approved scheme being lower than the current proposal.

Mrs Connett responded to questions from Members as follows:

- the St. James Forum was actively involved in the 2015 application process, which included genuine consultation and design improvements through a review panel;
- the design panel had issued 19 recommendations, but the applicant had not fully addressed them;
- the applicant had only consulted the design panel once, shortly before submission;
- the St. James Forum's concerns regarding around design quality and community impact had remained consistent across both applications;
- the St. James Forum managed the Queen's Crescent Garden, but there had been no response from the Council to a request for a financial contribution from this application to help support this site;
- the location of the commercial ground floor was a concern and would not be an active welcoming presence;
- an ideal frontage would allow public access to shops or restaurants, as well as visibility into the space;
- the space was entirely devoted to student accommodation, with doors to plant rooms, bike storage and student reception;
- the student communal space was minimal, and likely to be screened or dark, and not be engaging for passersby;
- students were using Queen's Crescent Garden regularly; and
- there was a desire for financial contributions for the development to be directed towards Queen's Crescent Garden and the forum would welcome discussions on raising money for the regeneration of the strategy.

The Principal Project Manager, City Development presented the application at the former site of 26 - 28 Longbrook Street, Exeter, for a new 9-storey Purpose-Built Student Accommodation (PBSA) in Exeter city centre, replacing the former King Billy pub and coach garage

Members received a presentation which included:

- a precedent had been set for PBSA at the site, following two previous PBSA approvals in 2017 and in 2020 on this site;
- the 2020 approval remained valid but could not be built in its current form, due to new building safety requirements;
- the current scheme was a new scheme, which needed to be considered on its

own merits, with a with the precedent of acceptability from the previous approvals;

- the new scheme had been through pre-application with the Council and the design had also been considered by a review panel, with additional revisions made during the applicant process;
- the applicant had worked closely with the Council during the pre-application stages to improve the scheme based on recommendations made to them;
- the design included a café on the southern ground floor, creating a welcoming and active frontage. The remainder of the ground floor would include a student reception, bike store, bin and plant rooms;
- all deliveries and collections would made from the rear service yard;
- the second to seventh floors would include student studio rooms, with an accessible unit on each floor;
- the eight floor would include student rooms and a second shared amenity space;
- all student rooms would be smaller than standard PBSA developments, but would be mitigated by access to university facilities;
- due to the constraints of the location, there would be no outdoor amenity space, but the applicant had agreed to improve the public area to the south of the site with a seated planter as a condition of the application;
- the medieval wall to the rear of the site, despite not being listed nationally or locally, was of historic significance and had been partially damaged during the demolition of the King Billy, which had been considered by the Council's Historic Environment Officer;
- a pre-commencement condition was for a heritage management plan to secure details of conservation and recording of the wall, alongside an archaeological monitoring of vibration impacts on the Underground Passages to the south of the site;
- the new application proposal was the same maximum height as the previous approval, with an increase in massing on the upper floors;
- issues relating to community imbalance in the area, was set out in the report, and the city centre was identified in the policy as a preferred location for PBSA alongside a requirement to provide PBSA to meet demand;
- Exeter University had continued to expand, which required further PBSA accommodation and calculations indicated that 103% of additional student numbers had been provided since 2006/2007, but was likely to drop to 92% in 2028/2029, based on projected student growth and current PBSA accommodation;
- the adopted development plan did not define imbalance or overconcentration, and therefore, had no clear measurement of what should be considered;
- a recent appeal at Howell Road for a PBSA block had been allowed, with the inspector noting that 4 PBSA blocks within 250 metres of the site would not create an imbalance;
- there were seven PBSA blocks within 250 metres of the site, five of which were within 150 metres. The surrounding area also contained a range of other housing types and uses, including flats, terraced dwellings and commercial units;
- the city centre was identified in policy as a suitable location for PBSA and in this instance was considered that the level of PBSA was acceptable for this location and would not result in overconcentration or imbalance;
- PBSA now counted towards the Council's housing land supply and it could not currently demonstrate a 5-year supply; and
- the application was recommended for approval, subject to the conditions set out in the report and signing of the S106 Agreement requiring contributions towards GP surgeries, implantation of a local energy network, cycle infrastructure improvements and a management plan.

The Principal Project Manager, City Development responded to Member questions and clarification points as follows:-

- access to the service yard for deliveries and waste collection would be maintained, but the access agreement was outside of planning's remit and dependant on agreement between John Lewis and Exeter City Council;
- there was no significant infringement or impact expected on John Lewis windows, as the 22-meter standard gap applied to residential buildings, rather than commercial, buildings;
- a contribution had been requested by the Council's Public and Green Space officer for improvements to Northernhay Gardens;
- other co-living schemes had contributed towards public and green space in the city, but a precedent had been set, that student blocks did not contribute to public/green space as students use university facilities;
- a car free policy would be enforced at the site, with a minimal impact expected on the surrounding parking area. A management plan was also required by Section 106, which would enforce a car-free policy and address exemptions for accessible rooms;
- there was no over-concentration of PBSA in the area;
- the previous permission granted for the demolition of the King Billy was existing, however, the new building could not be built as previously approved, due to new building safety requirements, and as such was a live permission;
- moving in and out logistics would be addressed in the management plan, to ensure suitable drop-off locations and that on-street parking was limited to short periods. All those arrangements would be determined at the proper time;
- construction traffic routes would be specified in the management plan, with main roads preferred over residential streets;
- £30,000 was earmarked for heat network infrastructure, which would be managed by a relevant energy organisation as part of a city centre scheme involving the Council;
- four bat boxes and twelve swift boxes would be installed as part of the ecology officer and RSPB board recommendation;
- the landscape design would be finalised in consultation with the urban designer and ecologist, to approve the final landscape plan with a strong preference for a street tree for the area;
- biodiversity net gain would be delivered through off-site credits, however, the Council had no control over exact location of credit delivery;
- cycle storage provision was below the SPD recommended levels but it had been accepted by DCC highways based on evidence provided;
- a travel plan condition would promote cycling and allow for future increase if needed and the DCC submission had suggested 48 spaces as a condition but would be followed up;
- the current application differed from the previous application due to new building safety requirements and following a design review; and
- there was no precedent set for planning contributions to public spaces for PBSA developments due to existing university facilities being available.

The meeting was paused briefly at 18:34 and reconvened at 18:39 to facilitate a comfort break for Members.

During the debate, Members made the following points:-

- each application needed to be considered on its own merit;
- the location was suitable for PBSA development and appeared to be lower than the John Lewis building;

- environmental health had not raised objections to the application;
- the management plan would need to be robust, and include detail on protecting the medieval wall;
- the current application was considered to be a new application, based on current policy and context, despite previous planning permission granted in 2015 and 2020;
- the 2011 Local Plan supported PBSA, particularly near the University campus and city centre and a number had been developed near St. Sidwell's point. However, there had been no significant reduction in HMO use for students;
- the University had not formally indicated any need for further private PBSA development on this site and there needed to be some demonstrable need for additional PBSA in Exeter, as well as assessment specific for PBSA use at this location;
- the proposal's impact on community balance needed to be addressed, particularly as defined within the St. James Neighbourhood Plan;
- architectural impact needed to be considered on whether the development enhanced or diminished existing design balance;
- an additional 1,600 student bed spaces had already been approved in the Duryard and St. James ward;
- since 2015, several nearby commercial buildings had been converted to PBSA without external changes;
- one of the original aims of city centre PBSA development was to ease pressure on the Duryard and St. James ward, which would be undermined;
- the Council's Article 4 Direction and Local Plan aimed to retain community balance, using a threshold of 20% HMOs in defined areas;
- more than 50% of properties in Duryard and St. James ward currently had student Council Tax exemptions, creating an imbalance;
- a previous appeal upheld for refusal was on the grounds of community balance, had referenced the St James Neighbourhood Plan;
- the scale and massing of the proposed development would overpower the surrounding area and detract the prominence of the nearby John Lewis building;
- there would be an increase in pedestrian and vehicular movement at an already busy junction with students likely to bring in additional vehicles;
- there was insufficient amenity space for residents;
- Exeter was a powerhouse is due to the university, and students needed places to live during term time and its city-centre location was next to retail and nightlife was suitable for students, whilst encouraging economic activity;
- PBSA developments were built on commercial land and do not harm the community;
- similar schemes had been approved twice before, and planning law supported this application;
- comparing it to HMO regulations was incorrect, as HMOs operated under a different regime and Article 4 directions;
- Devon County Council had not objected on highway or pedestrian grounds, and any student bringing cars would use city council car parks, generating revenue;
- previous approvals for similar schemes on the site set a precedent, making it difficult to refuse the application;
- PBSAs were needed to reduce pressure on the residential housing stock, as HMOs are largely still in use;
- the design was acceptable as it was stepped and lower than the John Lewis building;
- the report also noted that the building could be changed to other accommodation use, if student numbers fell;
- the site was suitable and previous planning permissions would have

- accounted for student numbers;
- the impact of student pedestrians was likely minimal, and the new design was a significant improvement;
- planning permission for a PBSA already existed on this site, which would have considered overpopulation issues;
- an increase in students was unlikely to impact the junction which already had good crossing points;
- the developers should morally consider a contribution to Queen's Crescent Gardens, even if not legally required, to support the local community;
- the development was on the margins of the area covered by the St James neighbourhood plan and was in keeping with the surroundings and city centre development;
- consideration of the street scene and planting needed to be considered;
- revisiting the height of the cycle storage needed to be revised, given, DCC had suggested it should be higher;
- there was a missed opportunity for securing financial contributions for local amenity spaces for PBSA developments. Campuses were students' workplaces and the PBSA was their home, making local amenities crucial;
- the site was a key city centre location and needed to be developed;
- students were welcome and were a positive for the city;
- including a tree bench idea outside John Lewis was welcomed;
- more than 50% of properties in the area were already student-occupied, impacting community balance; and
- a previous inspector's ruling on an HMO case found the area to be unbalanced, which could set a precedent to challenge this PBSA development.

The Chair in concluding the debate made the following points:

- agreed with a PBSA being developed on the site;
- the building's massing should be more stepped down Longbrook Street, despite the existing application showing a similar height;
- the internal rooms appeared to be small, but the massing was influenced by fire regulations, which required a wheelchair-accessible studio on every floor; and
- the developer was present at the meeting but had not registered to speak.

The Planning Solicitor, at the invitation of the Chair advised Members of the following:

- planning obligations must be necessary to make a development acceptable in planning terms, be related to the development, and be fairly and reasonably related in scale and kind, as set out in Regulation 122;
- officers had identified that there was no planning harm to mitigate, as students could access community spaces like the campus.
- there was also no information regarding specific monies needed or requested by any third-party organisation, nor how such funds would be spent; and
- insisting on such an obligation could lead to an appeal by the developer for non-determination.

The Strategic Director for Place made the following concluding points:

- the location and design was acceptable;
- there was evidence of unmet demand for student accommodation in Exeter;
- the university's £260 million investment in the West Park scheme, housing first-year students on campus, indicated a clear need for student accommodation;

- students contributed hugely to Exeter's economy and the vitality of the city centre;
- the city centre was the council's preferred location for student accommodation due to its sustainability, allowing students access to facilities by walking or cycling without needing cars;
- the concerns raised about over-concentration and imbalance were legitimate but difficult to define and the issue was often about community cohesion and the feeling of neighbourhood change;
- like other PBSAs, the development would be professionally managed with clear rules, and officers were experienced in securing and monitoring measures to mitigate any impact on community cohesion; and
- the site needed to be of a high quality and the new design was a significant improvement, negotiated by officers after building regulations necessitated a revisit of the 2015 design, which was in keeping with a city centre location.

The Chair moved, and Councillor Rolstone seconded the recommendation, which was voted upon and CARRIED.

RESOLVED to delegate to the Head of Service (City Development) to GRANT permission subject to completion of a legal agreement under section 106 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended) to secure the following:

- £600 per student room to Devon County Council for improvements to local cycle networks;
- £5,000 to Devon County Council for costs relating to Traffic Regulation Orders required as part of the development;
- £27,667 for expansions of GP surgeries;
- £19,564 to Exeter City Council for implementation of a Local Energy Network;
- Management Plan agreed with Exeter City Council; and
- the conditions set out on the Planning Committee Report.

RESOLVED to delegate to the Head of Service (City Development) to REFUSE permission in the event the S106 Agreement is not completed by 8 March 2026 or such extended time as agree in writing by the Head of Service (City Development)

LIST OF DECISIONS MADE AND WITHDRAWN APPLICATIONS

The Strategic Director for Place, the Principal Project Manager, City Development and the Chair responded to Member questions as follows:

- increasing occupants in an HMO, would require either a new HMO license, which was a separate from planning, or, if the number exceeded six, a new planning permission for a 'sui generis' HMO;
- a change in occupants between three and six was under class C4 and did not need a new planning permission;
- the reason for turning down the application for 2 Woodville Road, would be provided outside of the meeting;
- details of the location of the application for the Alphington Cross Store, would be provided outside of the meeting;
- Exwick Ward did not appear, due to there being no applications for this ward;
- the term split decision was rare and was an unusual type of decision where some aspects of a planning application were approved and others refused; and
- the DCC application at County Hall fell under the Town and Country Planning General Regulations 1992 - Regulation 3, which allowed planning applications by a planning authority to develop any land of that authority, or by an

interested planning authority. In this instance DCC was the planning authority and the application site was their land, so they could apply for planning permission to be determined by itself.

The report of the Strategic Director for Place was noted.

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APPEALS REPORT

The Strategic Director for Place in responding to a Member's enquiry confirmed that the officer's summary in the appeals report had not been permanently removed. Its absence in the report was an exception because all the appeals were for household applications, and summaries were usually provided for other types of appeals.

The report of the Strategic Director for Place was noted.

(The meeting commenced at 5.30 pm and closed at 7.38 pm)

Chair