

## **COUNCIL**

Tuesday 10 June 2025

### **Present:-**

The Right Worshipful the Lord Mayor Councillor Anne Jobson (Lord Mayor)

Councillors Asvachin, Banyard, Begley, Bialyk, Cookson, Darling, Fullam, Haigh, Harding, Holland, Hughes, Hussain, Ketchin, Knott, Miller-Boam, Mitchell, K, Mitchell, M, Moore, Palmer, Parkhouse, Patrick, Payne, Pole, Read, Rees, Rolstone, Sheridan, Snow, Vizard, Wardle, Wetenhall, Williams, M, Williams, R, Wood and Wright

### **Also Present**

Chief Executive, Strategic Director for Corporate Resources, Head of Legal and Democratic Services & Monitoring Officer, Strategic Director for Place, Democratic Services Manager and Democratic Services Officer

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## **MINUTES**

The minutes of the Ordinary meeting of the Council held on 15 April 2025 were moved by the Lord Mayor, taken as read, approved and signed as correct.

The minutes of the Annual meeting of the Council held 13 May 2025 were moved by the Lord Mayor, taken as read, approved and signed as correct.

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## **OFFICIAL COMMUNICATIONS**

The Lord Mayor advised that she had attended 12 events since being elected as Lord Mayor including:

- Exeter College's under-18s women's rugby training session;
- Ukrainian Vyshyvanka Day;
- Hong Kongers Dragon Boat Festival;
- The openings of both the LHC office, and the McDonalds in Digby;
- Exeter Comedy Festival;
- Devon County Show;
- Respect Festival;
- Women's Rugby World Cup Trophy;
- Bow Lines Maritime Literary Festival; and
- Choral Evensong at the Cathedral following the introduction of the new Bishop of Crediton designate.

The Deputy Lord Mayor advised that she had attended two events since being elected.

The Lord Mayor also reminded Members of Armed Forces Day on 20<sup>th</sup> June, and the Freedom of the City parade by the Royal Marines of Lympstone Marine Camp, and that she hoped to see many Members there.

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## **PUBLIC QUESTIONS**

The Lord Mayor reported the receipt of nine questions from members of the public and advised that supplementary questions should be short and directly related. Any

questions that cannot be addressed during this Item will be answered in the minutes.

**Question from James Diamond to Councillor Wood**

**“The December ECC motion called on DCC to increase the number of School Street what contribution could this make to the delivery of the 2040 Vision ‘By the time they are an adult, a child born in Exeter today will live in a city that is inclusive, healthy and sustainable?’”**

**Response from Councillor Wood**

“School Streets have the potential to increase the amount of walking and cycling achieved by children, young people and families. This would support improved physical and mental wellbeing and enable children and young people to be healthy and active through daily walking and cycling. Children who walk and cycle to school will be more likely to continue with sustainable travel behaviour as they get older, therefore contributing to the 2040 vision and the council net zero ambitions.”

In a supplementary question the member of the public asked the Portfolio Holder if he would commit to meet the new Leader of Devon County Council (DCC) and the new Portfolio Holder for transport to make most of the motion. The Portfolio Holder deferred to the Leader as there was more than one relevant Portfolio, and the Leader advised that there had been meetings scheduled at respective levels.

**Question from Harriet Sharp to Councillor Vizzard**

**“In December 2024, ECC passed a motion calling on DCC to increase the number of School Streets in Exeter and to provide a progress report on this activity to the ECC Transport Member Working Group in six months’ time. Can you please provide a copy of this six-monthly report?”**

**Response from Councillor Vizzard**

“Officers from the Council’s Live and Move team are engaged with Devon County Council sustainable transport team regarding active travel and school streets in particular. DCC maintains an active school streets application process that is open to all schools and we are aware that DCC have recently commissioned a project to support a number of Exeter Schools with Travel Plan measures. A progress report will be taken to the next Exeter Transport member Working Group on 18 September 2025”

In a supplementary question the member of the public asked if there had been any meetings between DCC officers and ECC officers since the motion. Councillor Vizzard advised he was not aware and asked officers to report back.

**Question from Mark Hackett to Councillor Bialyk, Leader**

**“When the Council Tax officer ignores emails sent to the correct address about problems with the council tax what can a citizen do when ignored at Exeter City Council level?”**

**Response to Councillor Bialyk, Leader**

“Citizens can refer to the Council’s corporate complaints policy and can make a formal complaint if they think we have:

- not resolved an issue or problem at the first point of contact;
- done something wrong;
- behaved unfairly or impolitely;
- not carried out a service to an agreed standard or in line with our policy; and
- not responded to your request for a service within our stated timescale.

Our complaints process is for an on-going service failure that you believe is our fault.”

In a supplementary question the member of the public asked if the URL for the form would be available in the minutes and was advised by the Leader that he would talk to Directors and he should await direct contact.

**Question from Colleen Natola to Councillor Wood**

**“I have bowel disease and spinal injuries. Health professionals tell me to swim. I can’t wait at a bus stop, walk to SSP or afford to pay to park. My e-bike was recently stolen from SSP. Please explain, how can I live better, follow doctor’s advice once Northbrook is closed?”**

**Response from Councillor Wood**

“The Council acknowledges the importance of accessible leisure facilities. Alternative transport options and support schemes are being reviewed to assist residents with mobility or financial challenges.”

In a supplementary question, the member of the public asked what accountability mechanisms exist when decisions with inaccuracies are made. It was advised by Councillor Wood that there would be a written response that will appear in the minutes.

**Question from Alison Lacey to Councillor Bialyk, Leader**

**“Where will special needs children and schools swim when Northbrook pool is closed. Please explain how SSPs profitability will be affected when it has to close admittance to the public to continue with the education of Exter’s children and how does your decisions follow the localism act of 2011.”**

**Response from Councillor Bialyk, Leader**

“Provision for school swimming will be maintained through scheduling at other facilities. The council continues to assess the impact on public access.”

In a supplementary question the member of the public asked if schools would be able to continue using their own teacher at SSP, as they provide their own instructors. The Leader advised that this would be dealt with by staff in conjunction with the schools.

**Question from Sarah Hornsby to Councillor Wood-**

“Concerning the Exeter Vision 2040, in ECC’s current Corporate Plan, what is your strategy for achieving the aim of having a ‘year on year increase in residents using leisure centres’ when St Sidwell’s Place is running at nearly full capacity and you propose to close Northbrook Swimming Pool?”

**Response from Councillor Wood**

“While swimming pools occasionally reach capacity during peak periods, particularly school holidays, our leisure centres as a whole are not operating at full capacity. Our broader objective will allow for increased participation by ensuring efficient use of facilities, expanding programme offerings, and maintaining accessibility across all sites.”

In a supplementary question, the member of public asked if SSP was full, would they have to go to Riverside instead.

Councillor Wood advised that SSP is not full, and there was capacity.

**Question from Richard Isley to Councillor Bialyk, Leader**

**“ECC have an annual budget of £23 million. The remedial work to keep Northbrook, an essential community facility, operational is less than 0.5% of that total. Given the physical and mental health benefits to both the young and elderly city wide, surely this should be taken into account when considering spending priorities.”**

**Response from Councillor Bialyk, Leader-**

“All expenditure must be considered in the context of long-term financial sustainability, operational efficiency, and strategic priorities.”

In a supplementary question, the member of the public asked if the Council was able to see how waste reduction linked with productivity would provide funds to support Northbrook.

This was not answered as was not a supplementary question related to the answer given.

**Question from Tracey Preece to Councillor Wood-**

**“SSP is overwhelming, intimidating, loud, impossible to swim in when you have mental health issues. Many will be overwhelmed, unable to manage the complexity of the building. It does not offer the intimate relaxed friendly and supportive environment needed. Where can I swim if I have challenges such as Autism?”**

**Response from Councillor Wood-**

“The council recognises the need for inclusive environments. Efforts are underway to improve accessibility and sensory-friendly options at existing facilities.”

A supplementary question was asked regarding how Council could justify the closure, when the Equality Act 2010 aims to promote equality for all. Councillor Wood advised that the Equality Act 2010 was taken into consideration against all relevant decisions of the Council. He also clarified that there had been no decision to close Northbrook pool yet, only a proposal. An Equality Impact Assessment would also be carried out to ensure citizens needs were supported.

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**PETITION- SAVE NORTHBROOK POOL**

The Lord Mayor invited Angela Martin to speak on behalf of the petition organiser, who presented and spoke on the following petition, entitled “Save Northbrook Pool” which had gained 2231 signatures.

“Lord Mayor, Councillors, no decision can justly be made about closing Northbrook Swimming Pool without data verified as accurate. Leisure services are looking for a £586,000 cut in budget. We have worked out ways to cover this. We are told the three swimming pools have 12,000 members. If only half of them paid a membership fee equal to that charged by other Devon towns the resulting income would be in the region of £590,000. Cuts covered. In addition, the lease with Northbrook Trust left is much longer than the 15 years needed for ECC to make a commitment to Northbrook swimming pool to receive a grant from Sport England and Swim England. This grant has been approved before but someone in ECC believed the lease was left only 9 years and not the 70-odd our information tells us and so turned it down. This could be re-applied for.

The Willow Grange development increasing the population close to Northbrook swimming pool will yield a CIL of £818,772 this could also be used, even in part for maintenance and upgrading the building which has been sorely neglected. Then there is the matter of managing the income of the pools. £60,000 of club fees were not included in the figures presented in February. The Leader of WEFTE was left holding £7,000 worth of fees because no one knew how to process it. It is too easy to walk into Northbrook for a pay as you go swim with no one on the desk to take

the money. So, we have no idea the total losses made in this way, and it does mean that Exeter City Council has no idea how many people are using the pool because it is not recorded.

Membership is across the three pools, so this is no indicator either of the number of members who use Northbrook. Nor do we know the savings in the long run for the NHS or the care services because people are using Northbrook to help their physical and mental wellbeing often on doctor's orders.

It is an important facility for the local schools who are bound by the national curriculum to ensure their pupils can swim. Its small size, quietness, calm and closed environment and friendly atmosphere is where the school can provide its own 1:1 supervision. Makes it a safe place for the students of Ellen Tinkham School who are autistic and have sensory disorders. Why seek an alternative when we already have one here.

Because the prescribed characteristics of the majority of the clientele using Northbrook, ECC would need to be very careful it does not fall foul of the 2010 Equality Act. If you want to keep it, you should use it – well it's difficult if you don't finish work before three o'clock which is when the pool closes. It closes at 12 noon on a Saturday and doesn't open at all on the Sunday. When can people who go to school or go to work swim?

The large function room is unused and unprofitable whereas before it was used for birthdays and other celebrations. We wonder what was meant in you February meeting when it was declared that extensive efforts to drive income and footfall have been made. If something as simple as the extension of opening hours was not tried. As it is out of hours casual swims and evening clubs' income is still lost. Despite this erosion of income Northbrook had the lowest subsidy of the three pools in 2023/24. This facility is such incredible value for money. It provides a calm, welcoming, uncompetitive environment that is so good for our people who have enough to cope with without the rigours of travelling into the city centre by public transport for a swim.

So, we need the council to obtain completely accurate accounts and attendance records for Northbrook, so the true situation is totally clear.

And apart from all that you have heard we need an impact assessment please. It's a vital facility for the city, for the vulnerable and of course when there is a price to be paid it's always those who have to pay the price."

During discussion, Members made the following comments in support of the petition:

Councillor Pole: -

- was pleased to have secured repairs to the women's showers at Northbrook pool after contact from a Mincinglake and Whipton resident; and
- had been contacted by several residents who had swum at Northbrook pool and advised that she was committed to providing a relaxed atmosphere for residents.

Councillor Haigh: -

- on behalf of the Independent Equity Group, thanked the residents for working hard on both the petition and the campaign;
- highlighted that Northbrook Pool was a unique small space, which enabled those with Protected Characteristics to swim comfortably;
- highlighted concerns regarding the long-term intentions of the Northbrook Trust, from whom Exeter City Council leased the pool; and
- made suggestions as next steps for the Council;
  1. invite Northbrook Trust to a public meeting;
  2. an Equality Impact Assessment and consultation be published; and

3. that no decision be made until councillors have seen full facts and understand ECC financial position.

Councillor Holland: -

- stated that the benefits of swimming, leisure and health were well documented, and that it was the ideal pastime for people of all ages and ability, to exercise;
- felt that Exeter City Council had to make unenviable choices when setting a balanced budget;
- Exeter City Council were committed to maintaining and improving the statutory services and that was an overarching requirement when making decisions on spending; and
- he was glad that this had been referred for further discussion, and he supported it fully.

Councillor Knott: -

- commended those who had brought the petition to Council; and
- believed that Members had a duty of care for the money for which they were responsible, and decisions were made having received as much information as possible and welcomed the opportunity to hear all the information at a Scrutiny Committee.

Councillor Cookson: -

- was happy to receive this petition and was very keen to hear from users of Exeter City Council services.

Councillor Miller-Boam: -

- gave thanks to those who had presented the petition to Council;
- gave thanks to officers who had made sure residents and users could share their thoughts throughout the consultation process;
- there were no good solutions, but the impact of the decision must be balanced against the consequences on keeping it open; and
- the information shared this evening, alongside the consultation and the equality impact assessment would be considered in detail before any decisions were made.

Councillor Parkhouse: -

- stressed the importance of petitions in democracy;
- thanked council officers who had heard these petitions as one; and
- reiterated that engagement in petitions strengthened democracy.

Councillor Moore: -

Councillor Moore moved and was seconded by Councillor M Mitchell a Notice of Motion in the following terms: -

“That the Council refers the petition to Customer Focus Scrutiny Committee prior to Executive determining the matter. Petitions, Officers, and Northbrook Trust are invited to present evidence to the Scrutiny Committee.”

In presenting her motion Councillor Moore made the following points: -

- she felt it sad that the potential closure of Northbrook Pool had not been highlighted before the budget was discussed in February;
- a business case would help the Executive to make a decision; and
- the work of Exeter Live and Move had highlighted Beacon Heath as a priority area, particularly regarding health inequalities.

Councillor M Mitchell made these comments in support of the motion:

- there had been a failure to have meaningful public engagement; and
- the issue should be discussed in an all-party forum.

Councillor M Mitchell called for a roll call vote on the motion, a named vote on the amendment, was recorded as follows: -

Voting for: -

Councillors Asvachin, Banyard, Begley, Bialyk, Cookson, Darling, Fulham, Haigh, Harding, Holland. Hughes. Hussain, Ketchin, Knott, Miller-Boam, K Mitchell, M Mitchell, Moore, Palmer, Parkhouse, Patrick, Payne, Pole, Read, Rees, Rolstone, Sheridan, Snow, Vizzard, Wardle, Wetenhall, M Williams, R Williams, Wood, Wright.  
(35 Members)

Voting Against: - (none)

Abstentions: -

The Lord Mayor.  
(1 Members)

Absent: -

Councillors Atkinson, Bennett, Foale.  
(3 Members)

Following a vote the motion was CARRIED.

**RESOLVED** that the Council refer the petition “Save Northbrook Pool” to the Customer Focus Scrutiny Committee prior to the Executive Committee determining the matter. Petitioners, Officers, and the Northbrook Trust be invited to present evidence to the Scrutiny Committee.

41 The meeting was paused at 18:51 and reconvened at 18:53  
PLANNING COMMITTEE - 28 APRIL 2025

The minutes of the Planning Committee of 28 April 2025 were presented by the Chair, Councillor Knott, and taken as read.

**RESOLVED** that the minutes of the Planning Committee held on 28 April 2025 be received.

**AUDIT AND GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE - 17 APRIL 2025**

The minutes of the Audit and Governance Committee of 17 April 2025 were presented by the Chair, Councillor Wardle.

In respect of **Minute No. 62 Constitutional Changes- City Development Functions and Responsibilities**, Councillor Wardle moved and Councillor Knott seconded the recommendation which following a unanimous vote was **CARRIED**.

**RESOLVED** that the minutes of the Audit and Governance Committee of 17 April 2025 be received.

43 **CUSTOMER FOCUS SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - 27 MARCH 2025**

Councillor Rees, current Chair, deferred to Councillor Parkhouse as Chair at the time of the meeting. The minutes of the Customer Focus Scrutiny Committee of 27 March 2025 were presented by Councillor Parkhouse and taken as read.

**RESOLVED** that the minutes of the Customer Focus Committee of 27 March 2025 be received.

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### **STRATEGIC SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - 3 APRIL 2025**

The minutes of the Strategic Scrutiny Committee of 3 April 2025 were presented by the Chair, Councillor Pole.

In respect of **Minute No. 65 Portfolio Holder report – Portfolio Holder for Leisure Services and Healthy Living**, Councillor Moore stated that she had asked a question regarding the governance models for the Wonford Community Hub, how that decision would be made and whether the answer would be put on the website to enable the community to understand. In response the Portfolio Holder, Councillor Wood stated that a response would be forthcoming and could be placed in the website.

**RESOLVED** that the minutes of the Strategic Scrutiny Committee of 3 April 2025 be received.

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### **EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE - 20 MAY 2025**

The minutes of the Executive of 20 May 2025 were presented by the Leader, Councillor Bialyk.

In respect of **Minute 42 (Review of Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy)**, Councillor Parkhouse spoke of the importance of the revision of policies. The Leader moved, and Councillor Wright seconded the recommendation **that the Council approve the adoption of the revised Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy** and following a vote was CARRIED.

In respect of **Minute 43 (Disposal Report Seeking Authority to Dispose of the Former Clifton Hill Leisure Centre)**, Councillor Harding felt it important that it would be 100 percent affordable and not designated for student housing. Councillor Harding also raised the point of community engagement and asked how that would be delivered.

Councillor Ketchin raised that the Leader was open to an access strip for the Portland residents that had been promised previously, as a condition of the site sale.

Councillor Patrick delighted to see this site developed and provide much needed housing for older residents. Asked for reassurance from the Leader, that once the site is sold, it cannot be used for other types of housing.

The Leader responded to members comments in the following terms:

- public engagement would be carried out through the planning process;
- the development would be exclusively for over 55s; and
- he was confident that the Council would make sure it was not used for anything other than 72, over 55s affordable homes.

The Leader moved, and Councillor Wright seconded that the Council approve a budget for £50,000 funded by anticipated capital receipts to cover disposal costs, including external agency and legal fees, associated with this sale which following a unanimous vote was CARRIED.

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### **OVERVIEW OF GENERAL FUND REVENUE BUDGET 2024/25 - QUARTER 4**

The Leader, Councillor Bialyk, presented the report.

Councillor Moore questioned the significant underspend in some areas of the Council budget and asked how the Executive planned to build capacity to deliver against the budget.



Councillor Banyard raised a question regarding the £200,000 put aside to look after leisure buildings and queried whether this could be used to create a proper business plan for Northbrook Pool.

Councillor Wetenhall questioned whether the search for alternative council premises was still underway and whether a move would happen before any development with the potential unitary changes.

The Leader and the Section 151 Officer responded in the following terms:

- the Executive were meeting frequently to keep an eye on this;
- the £200,000 had already been spent by leisure;
- there would be a feasibility study presented to Council regarding any move, and should a further budget be required all necessary information would be provided at that time; and
- regardless of the future of the authority, it was anticipated that a place in Exeter would always be necessary.

The Leader moved and Councillor Wright seconded the recommendations which following a vote were CARRIED.

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**2024/25 GENERAL FUND CAPITAL MONITORING 2024/25 AND REVISED  
CAPITAL PROGRAMME FOR 2025/26 AND FUTURE YEARS**

The Leader, Councillor Bialyk, presented the report.

During debate Councillor Moore commented on the Mallinson Bridge, and asked what Exeter City Council (ECC) were doing to request that Devon County Council report to ECC and explain why these delays had been allowed to happen, and whether Mallinson Bridge must be used for walking and cycling.

During debate Councillor Rees asked for updates regarding the schedule of consultation for refurbishment of the pools and play equipment in Heavitree Park.

During debate Councillor Read asked for confirmation on the budget that would be spent in the coming year for the works to the city wall.

Responding to questions from Members, the Leader made the following points:

- Devon County Council had now been in contact with Exeter City Council regarding the funding of the bridge and the Leader would be discussing this with the Directors in order to feedback to Members. DCC owned this project, and the Leader would discuss with the Leader of DCC when the opportunity arose. It was important that Mallinson Bridge was separated and for pedestrians and cyclists;
- the splash pools in Heavitree and St Thomas would be open; the consultation was regarding the play equipment. They were separated to ensure that the splash pools were able to be opened as soon as possible. The Station Road park in Exwick cost £70,000 to refurbish, but it was important that children's play equipment was long-lasting, and that the appropriate assessments had been undertaken; and
- the budget used for the works on the Roman wall was an operational matter, and he would talk to Directors regarding this and works undertaken during the year.

The Leader moved and Councillor Wright seconded the recommendations and following a unanimous vote, were CARRIED.

**2024/25 HRA BUDGET MONITORING REPORT – OUTTURN**

The Leader, Councillor Bialyk, presented the report.

Councillor Moore speaking as opposition co-leader, welcomed some of the items in this budget, particularly the issues surrounding long-term leases to secure temporary accommodation.

The Leader moved and Councillor Wright seconded the recommendations and following a unanimous vote were CARRIED.

**TREASURY MANAGEMENT 2024/25**

The Leader presented the report and moved the recommendations which Councillor Wright seconded and following a unanimous vote, the recommendation was CARRIED.

**UPDATE OF EXETER CITY COUNCIL'S COMPANIES, ALTERNATIVE DELIVERY MODELS AND CHARITIES.**

The Leader presented the report.

During debate Councillor Read asked for clarity regarding the ear-marked reserve for ECL, and the report for ECL and what that would be used for. She asked for comment on Exeter Science Park financial viability, and their capacity to plan for future development as stated in the report.

The Strategic Director for Corporate Resources responded making the following points:

- the ear-marked reserve was ECL property support and supported the ECC funding of sales of land to ECL. ECL had been wound down but sales of land had continued and the ear-marked reserve was now being used for its intended purpose; and
- ESVL loss still required high level occupation to break even, and it was just below that at the moment which resulted in loss. The onus was on shareholders to work with the company to enable propositions to come forward.

The Leader moved the recommendation, seconded by Councillor Wright and following a unanimous vote was CARRIED.

**GENERATING INCOME TO FUND NET ZERO ACTIVITY**

The Leader, Councillor Bialyk, presented the report.

During debate Councillor Wetenhall stated felt there had been a failure to consider alternatives to using the bus station as a car park. The space provided opportunity for a range of uses, and no discussion had been had with an interested party. Would like to note the failure to consider funding for the climate change team outside of building a car park.

Councillor Vizard agreed that this was the only idea that had been brought forward and came forward as part of budget discussions. The Net Zero Team were carrying out great work across a huge number of different areas. The report stated that there would be a loss of 500 parking spaces following the sale of the Mary Arches carpark, and this proposal would add 50 spaces. We do need to provide for

business and make sure the city centre is accessible. He would like to see an alternative but at present it was lying empty.

Councillor Hughes welcomed the potential for accessible parking near St Sidwell's Point as they had heard from the petitioners for Northbrook Pool that parking at SSP was an issue for them. It would be great if there were some disabled parking spaces;

Councillor Patrick considered this a pragmatic use of the space. Transitional processes were required whilst the public moved to active travel and public transport. This was a short term, temporary use and low cost to implement and did not prohibit other ideas for the future.

Councillor Moore raised that there was already a car park near the site and stated that in December 2024 the Executive agreed that in early 2025 a proposal would be brought forward for the development of this site. General Fund Report highlighted costs associated with the demolition of the bus station, roughly £46,000 spare. There was money available to turn it into a meanwhile use car park and meanwhile use gives up opportunity to explore other things on the site.

Councillor Ketchin asked if there was potential for different uses at weekends to week-day use.

Councillor Wright reiterated that she was an advocate for people and businesses in the city, who have concerns about the amount of parking in the city. Losing 500 parking spaces would have a knock-on effect on businesses in the city. She was not comfortable with the route taken by an interested party in raising their business plan.

Councillor Read raised her concern about using a car park to fund net zero. There was a car park nearby that wasn't always full, and officer assessment said it was under capacity. There was no demonstrable need for another car park. Other councils such as Frome, and Barnstaple, have covered markets and she wondered why Exeter did not have one. Once the car park was established, there would be no way of guaranteeing that it would be a meanwhile use. If disabled spaces were needed, these should have been provided when SSP was built. She felt that there had not been enough scrutiny of this decision.

Councillor Holland stated his belief that there was an unmet demand for parking spaces in the centre and he hoped that this car park would be ready for use in time for the Christmas period. This was a golden opportunity to provide parking for those with disabilities to be able to use SSP.

Councillor Palmer spoke against the establishment of a car park at the former bus station. She stated that the ECC does brilliant work for the environment but this proposal would undo all the good work. People living in deprived areas had poor quality air, more pollution, and less access to green spaces and by building a car park at the former bus station this would be worsened. She stated that personally, if car parking spaces were such a concern perhaps Mary Arches car park should not have been sold.

Councillor Knott spoke in favour stating that the Council's Estates Team did an excellent job at drawing-in additional revenue from spaces, and he referred to Matford, where the space was being used 7 days a week. He stated his belief that it was very much a meanwhile use and temporary. It would provide a safe space and allow the area to be developed properly in the long term.

Councillor Parkhouse spoke in support of the proposal but noted a contradiction regarding car parking but Net Zero was important to the council and this proposal put action on the table to fund this. It was also of note that the Council was heavily reliant on car parking revenue, and this would support the aims of the council.

In response the Leader made the following points:

- the site had been in its current state for over a year now;
- the £200,000 needed for the Net Zero team was identified by the Section 151 officer, no alternatives had been brought forward;
- Councillor Ketchin made a good suggestion regarding the multi-purpose use of the space;
- ECC was one of the few councils in Devon who did not charge blue badge holders for parking;
- there were major challenges in the city, but ECC were trying their best;
- all information regarding Northbrook would go to the Scrutiny meeting on 23 June, and all Portfolio Holders would be asked to attend;
- 35 spaces would be lost in Newtown to bring forward the Live and Move programme;
- the council wanted to encourage people into St Sidwell's Point.

The Leader moved, seconded by Councillor Wright the recommendations and following a vote were CARRIED.

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**The meeting was paused at 19:54 and reconvened at 20:08**  
**EXTENSION OF THE PUBLIC SPACES PROTECTION ORDER**

The Leader, Councillor Bialyk presented the report.

During debate Members made the following points:

- there were issues surrounding the lack of police enforcement of the current PSPO;
- could it be ensured that the Police used the powers, we have afforded them, as it did not always appear that they did, this could be raised at the next Councillor and Police meeting;
- this was an important package of measures in the City centre to address antisocial behaviour. If it was not extended residents would be wondering why.
- It was important to address the reasons why crime and antisocial behaviour took place, as well as provide support for people with vulnerabilities;
- it was not a crime to street drink in the areas covered under the PSPO, it was enforceable if the police made a judgement regarding criminality to request surrender of alcohol due to behaviour displayed;
- the PSPO formed part of the bigger picture of tackling ASB, and a subgroup of the CSP were looking at how best to make improvements; and
- a Member had been told by police that the PSPO was one necessary tool, but it must be seen as one part of a bigger picture. Some individuals were not just creating a nuisance but were deeply vulnerable and he asked the Leader if some money from Fixed Penalty Notices might be used in tackling these issues.

Councillor Moore, as co-Leader of the Progressive Group, stated that when she joined as a councillor she was concerned about how this would affect people, especially those who were street-attached. The data provided was very helpful, and the new community safety team had been learning how to take action under the

PSPO. There had been positive feedback from businesses and it would take the whole community to deal with this and provide support.

The Leader responded to Members comments making the following points:

- these measures were introduced 6 or 7 years ago and were amended considerably due to concerns from Members;
- public attitude towards ASB had changed since the PSPO was first introduced;
- there was now more intolerance towards ASB;
- nothing was changing but there would be a review in a few years' time; and
- he would find out how many people were charged but believed that was not the first step taken.

The Leader moved the recommendation and was seconded by Councillor Wright and following a unanimous vote, were CARRIED.

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#### **NOTICE OF MOTION BY COUNCILLOR MOORE UNDER STANDING ORDER NO. 6**

Councillor Moore moved and was seconded by Councillor Banyard, a Notice of Motion in the following terms:

"Local Housing Allowance (LHA) rates are used to calculate Housing Benefit or universal Credit for tenants renting from private landlords.

Exeter, like other areas, is experiencing a housing crisis and suffered unsustainable rent increases across the private rented sector and loss of homes to Air B&B and HMOs. This situation is recognised in the Devon Housing Commission Report 2024. Average rents in Exeter are, in March 2025, as high as those in the South East of England.

The LHA rates are based on the 30th percentile figures from twelve months' letting information in the Broad Market Rental Area but are insufficient to cover even the cheapest rooms or homes in Exeter. LH Rates have been subject to a freeze since 2020 and the Labour Government has confirmed the rates will be frozen at current levels until 2026.

When a local authority places a household in temporary accommodation (TA) it can claim back the incurred costs associated with the provision of the TA from the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP). Apart from households placed in council-owned stock outside the Housing Revenue Account (HRA), for which a local authority can reclaim up to the current Local Housing Allowance (LHA) rates, the local authority can generally reclaim up to 90 per cent of the January 2011 LHA rates, which were set based on the rental costs at that time. These rates are now outdated and do not accurately reflect current market conditions. The gap in financing between what local authorities initially pay and what is eventually reimbursed by the national government is known as the Temporary Accommodation Subsidy Gap. The current reimbursement system, which largely relies on these outdated 2011 rates, exacerbates this Subsidy Gap.

As such Council:

- 1) acknowledges the endemic housing crisis affecting our communities across Exeter and the current inadequacy of Local Housing Allowance, frozen since April 2020;
- 2) notes that Local Housing Allowance has not kept pace with rising rents;

- 3) expresses concern that Temporary Accommodation Subsidy Gap places additional strain on local authority budgets.
- 4) implores Government to commit to immediate interventions to alleviate the housing and homelessness emergency in the short term; and
- 5) notes the anomalies in the LHA guidance in relation to the Shared Accommodation Rate, for example:
- 6) the rate applies to single people without children aged 25-34 - which limits opportunities and lifestyle choices;
- 7) Multi Agency Public Protection Arrangements (MAPPA) limitations apply from age 25;
- 8) pregnant women under the age of 35 pregnant are expected to be accommodated in an HMO and can only apply for a higher rate for a one bed property *after* the birth of the child.
- 9) notes that the Exeter Broad Rental Market Area for Exeter covers a very large rural area, so drags down the LHA making rental properties in the urban area unaffordable.

#### Government to

- 1) unfreeze, relink and consistently uprate the Local Housing Allowance levels so they cover rents for the 30% cheapest private rented sector properties<sup>4</sup> in every local authority area; and address the Temporary Accommodation Subsidy Gap;
- 2) redefining the Broad Rental Market Areas covered by Local Housing Allowance at a level that better reflects local rental markets; and
- 3) review the Shared Accommodation Rate anomalies listed above to lower the MAPPA age and enable pregnant women to apply for a higher rate before the birth of their child(ren)."

#### In presenting the Motion, Councillor Moore made the following points:

- people were losing family networks as they could not afford to live in the City;
- LHA provided allowance through Universal Credit, in February 2025, 4580 households on UC were working, and 7169 were not in work. Almost 7% of households in Exeter were in receipt of housing benefits; and
- in 2022/23 Customer Focus Scrutiny Committee looked at homelessness, and was referred to the Devon Housing Commission, this motion was a continuation of that work.

#### Councillor Banyard, as seconder, spoke in support of the motion:

- LHA rates were set according to rental market area and extended past Hatherleigh. It would take 1 hour and 38 minutes to get a bus into Exeter from Hatherleigh; and
- rates were not set by looking at what was affordable in Exeter but looking at what a small flat might cost in a rural area such as Hatherleigh.

#### During debate, members spoke in support of the motion making the following comments:

- regarding temporary accommodation there were quality concerns, and costs had continued to rise which meant there was an overspend of the budget. The Council would now be switching to long term leases, and aim to reduce unit costs, and improve quality;
- long term leases would enable break even at 95% occupancy levels;
- there was a housing crisis in Exeter, and it was difficult to find affordable accommodation;
- the LHA required a review of boundaries and levels, and hopefully the Council would investigate this irrespective of this motion;
- more housing needed to be built, and for those to be affordable; and

- housing was seen as an asset rather than a place to live.

In summing up, Councillor Moore made the following points:

- an update on temporary accommodation was welcomed;
- concerns over rent inflation were understood;
- LHA expected to be sufficient to fund the cheapest accommodation hence the Hatherleigh drag issue; and
- she welcomed the comments on working together through the LGA.

Following a unanimous vote the Motion was CARRIED.

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#### **NOTICE OF MOTION BY COUNCILLOR KETCHIN UNDER STANDING ORDER NO. 6**

Councillor Ketchin moved and was seconded by Councillor Wetenhall, a Notice of Motion in the following terms:

“This motion proposes that capital receipts from the sale of ECC-owned green field sites or land never developed that is for all intents and purposes green field site, be used solely for the purchase of other green field sites within the Exeter City Council boundary or immediately adjacent vicinity.

##### **Background**

England is the second most densely populated major country in Europe. Consequently, with huge pressure on land England is also cited as one the most nature deplete country in Europe and has the lowest 'nature connectedness'.

Regarding Exeter, many of the finest and most appreciated public assets are its river and valley parks. They provide recreational and natural amenity. These important elements of a liveable city are captured in some of our guiding documents, the with Corporate Strategy 2022-26 and new Exeter City Council Local Plan. Once greenspace is developed it is typically lost to the public and natural domain permanently.

The development hierarchy of habitat loss is avoidance-reduction-mitigation. Where the council chooses on balance to develop green space, it can follow the second principle of harm reduction.

However, this motion recognises Exeter City Council does not have a robust mechanism to mitigate. There is a practice to intensify biodiversity in land through development design, the practice of "biodiversity net gain". This can be viewed as improving the quality of existing biodiversity in a given space. In the case of green space development, in effect nature quality is expected to compensate for the loss of space. This may have validity, but clearly the practice of pushing natural habitat into every smaller and smaller but better-quality parcels have rapidly apparent limits. This is particularly the case in our urban setting Biodiversity net gain is arguably a concept best applied to brown field and grey field sites.

Perhaps even more importantly for an urban setting, this model of concentrating nature, says nothing for public access to green space for recreation and wellbeing. For these reason that is why this motion has come forward. As Exeter rapidly runs out of development space, the loss of greenfield space to the public domain is increasingly aired by residents and apparent to all.”

In presenting the Motion, Councillor Ketchin made the following points:

- Exeter was one of the most pressurised cities in the UK as the boundaries were tight, and the rate of growth was high;

- green land which was immediate and accessible to residents was being squeezed and this motion aimed to mitigate this; and
- there were areas within the city boundaries that were not developed and could be bought to improve wellbeing and increase recreational facilities like the Valley Parks.

Councillor Wetenhall, as seconder spoke in support of this motion, making the following points:

- the local nature recovery strategy of Devon was to be published soon, and ECC were a partner; and
- biodiversity net gain could be put by developers anywhere in the country.

Members speaking made the following comments in relation to the motion:

- Exeter already has excellent green spaces, such as the Valley Parks that were currently looked after Devon Wildlife Trust;
- this motion appears restrictive, and there were no robust mechanisms for mitigation;
- biodiversity was becoming an issue, there were no swift boxes in new developments;
- the next generations should be healthy but the opposite was true as many did not have access to green space;
- this was not deemed the right strategy for Exeter; and
- this could make it harder to deliver affordable housing, as it could drive up the cost of greenfield sites.

Following a vote, the motion was NOT CARRIED.

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#### **QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE COUNCIL UNDER STANDING ORDER NO. 8**

There were no questions from members.

(The meeting commenced at 6.00 pm and closed at 9.05 pm)

Chair



**Response from Councillor Wood to Colleen Natola-**

No decision has been made, and we note that the question is speculative so we cannot respond however, we are not aware of any evidence of significant inaccuracies.

**Response from Councillor Bialyk, Leader to Richard Ilsley-**

“The Leisure service is a discretionary service provided by Exeter City Council. The service receives a subsidy as part of the Councils’ commitment to promoting advice and healthy lifestyles. There is no fixed threshold of regular elderly swimmer required.”

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