

PLANNING COMMITTEE

Monday 27 April 2026

Present:-

Councillor Knott (Chair)

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

Councillors in attendance under Standing Order No. 44

Councillor Haigh speaking on item 7 (Minute No. 67 below);

Councillor Read speaking on item 8 (Minute No. 68 below);

Councillor Moore speaking on item 8 (Minute No. 68 below)

Also Present

Strategic Director for Place, Principal Project Manager (Development) (HS), Principal Officer - Urban Design and Landscape, Team Lead - Property, Planning & Non-Contentious, Planning Property and Contracts Lawyer and Democratic Services Officer

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MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 9 February 2026, were taken as read, approved and signed by the Chair as correct.

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DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of interest were made by Members.

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LIST OF DECISIONS MADE AND WITHDRAWN APPLICATIONS

The Committee considered the report of the Strategic Director for Place.

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

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APPEALS REPORT

The Committee considered the report which outlined appeal decisions received and new appeals lodged since the previous report.

A Member noted there was missing information on the report for 3.05 - 25/0763/FUL 6 Matford Lane, Newtown & St Leonard's, and requested the information be made available.

The Chair advised that the report would be corrected accordingly.

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

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PLANNING APPLICATION NO. 25/1042/FUL - SCHOOL PLAYING FIELD, HOMEFIELD ROAD

Councillor Williams, M arrived during the officer's presentation and did not participate in the debate or vote for this item.

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

- she was speaking on behalf of herself, Councillor Rees, and consulted local residents;
- need and demand were not the same, and the applicant had not demonstrated a demand for over 55s accommodation at this location;
- Heavitree Ward already contained nine existing over 55s retirement housing sites, with some units currently empty and unsellable;
- questioned the evidence for approving a further 36 units within a conservation area, particularly where need could potentially be met elsewhere;
- the applicant's had claimed that the scheme would save the NHS £3,500 per resident per year; however, the Devon Integrated Care Board comments indicated local GP surgeries lacked capacity for new patients and required funding;
- the proposed permissive path was challenged as a public benefit, noting that the officer report confirmed that it could not be made step-free, was unable to accommodate segregated cycling, constrained by existing trees, and was gated and privately managed;
- the path would exclude wheelchair users, mobility scooters and prams, and that RNIB guidance had not been followed, resulting in ineffective tactile paving and difficulties for guide dog users;
- the development gave the appearance of inclusion rather than genuine accessibility;
- Sport England had requested to be re-consulted once mitigation projects were confirmed, and enquired whether this consultation had occurred;
- if consultation had not taken place, a national consultee had not signed off a material obligation;
- if the committee were minded to approve, it was requested that the £95,000 sports pitch contribution be directed specifically to Heavitree Ward play and sports facilities;
- the 10% Biodiversity Net Gain could not be achieved on the site, and required off-site provision;
- the location of the off-site land, ownership and how long-term management would be secured was queried;
- biodiversity net gain was statutory, and should carry significant weight in the planning balance;
- the Principal Heritage Officer's comments in the update was cited, noting: the previously undiscovered archaeological remains and recommendation for full archaeological investigation;
- what due diligence had been undertaken before proposing permanent development on such land;
- the Principal Heritage Officer was quoted in concluding the proposal failed to meet a statutory duty under Section 72(1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990, identifying a legal failure rather than a design issue;
- despite this, officers still recommended approval, and asked officers how public benefits could outweigh a statutory failure, and requested that this question and response be recorded in the minutes;
- Historic England's objection was also referenced, stating that the scheme failed to preserve or enhance the conservation area;
- reference was made to the former headteacher of Bramdean School, stating that the associated playing field had not been sold off during earlier housing development and that residents understood she had wished for the space to remain open;
- the role of Bramdean Field C.I.C was in seeking to honour this legacy;
- the historic covenant on the land, which not being a matter for the Committee, supported the principle of protecting the green space;

- in conclusion, the NHS had indicated capacity constraints, the path was not accessible, there was no demand for development at this site, and heritage and statutory duties were not met; and
- the committee were requested to refuse the application.

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

- she had been made aware that the covenant could not be provided or considered as it fell outside the Committee's remit and the Bramdean Field CIC may be better placed to comment further on the matter;
- she had not met the former headteacher personally and that her comments were based on long-standing correspondence and conversations with residents who had expressed concern about the potential development of the playing field; and
- regarding ownership, she could only assume that the land may have formed part of her estate and been subject to probate, making the position more complex than a straightforward transfer to the community.

The Chair invited Charlotte Corden, to speak for five minutes. In speaking against the application, the following points were made:

- she was a local resident of Heavitree, living opposite the field, and stated that both she and the local community strongly opposed the proposed development;
- objections were raised on the grounds that the proposal overstated the demand for additional retirement accommodation, harm to the local community, planning policy conflicts and failure to reflect local views;
- over 130 formal objections had been submitted from local residents;
- the Bramdean Field Community Interest Company (CIC) had been formed, which she was a Director, and that an Asset of Community Value (ACV) application had been submitted to seek protection of the field for community use;
- the site was within the Heavitree Conservation Area and was designated as a protected open space for sport;
- development on the site contradicted the Exeter Local Plan, which sought to protect green infrastructure, recreational spaces and historic character;
- the proposed three-storey building, would not be in keeping with the surrounding Georgian and Victorian townscape;
- the development would rely on an existing drainage system, which was already at capacity, and causing issues at the site;
- the design and materials were described as being driven by cost efficiency rather than quality;
- the noise assessment was optimistic, but did not account for potential tree loss through future applications, and underestimated the impact of generators, visitors and events;
- there was no clear justification for additional retirement accommodation in Heavitree, with a substantial nearby provision citing at Pegasus Court, Mayor Court and Mowbray Court;
- residents' evidence indicated there were vacancy rates of up to 38% at some local schemes and there was no shortfall to justify the loss of protected green space;
- Homefield Road was described as being effectively a single-track road, with parking on both sides with no through-route for vehicles;
- the road was well-used for walking and acted as a cycling route. The proposal would increase risk to daily users of the road;

- there would be an insufficient level of parking, leading to overspilling onto surrounding streets, increased congestion, reduced safety and a deterioration in living conditions;
- there was existing covenant on the land, which the community was prepared to pursue legal avenues to uphold it if necessary;
- no positive planning decision should be made before the ACV process was concluded;
- the developer did not currently own the land, and if permission were refused and ACV status secured, the community was ready to advance a credible and funded alternative proposal;
- Bramdean Field CIC were created to protect and enhance the field as a permanent green space, shaped by community input, with potential uses including sport, outdoor learning, community growing, allotments and play space;
- the field was a valued green space with a 100-year educational history and the proposal was widely opposed; and
- in concluding the committee were urged to refuse the application and allow a community-backed alternative that protected green space, heritage and long-term community well-being.

Charlotte Corden responded to questions from Members as follows:

- there were soft pledges of community share capital, which the group believed would be sufficient to cover the initial purchase cost of the land at a fair market price, should the owner be willing to negotiate;
- no discussions had taken place with the current landowner, however, contact had been intentionally delayed pending the outcome of the planning committee decision;
- compulsory purchase powers had not been explored to date, but would be looked into going forward;
- the Community Interest Company (Bramdean Field CIC) had received informal expert advice who considered that they met the criteria for designation as an Asset of Community Value (ACV);
- the CIC was a formally constituted body and the application to nominate the land as an ACV had been submitted;
- the community currently had no access to the land. It had been privately owned and was closed to the public since the school closure 2020;
- the primary objective of the CIC was in preventing commercial development of the site and to secure it for community ownership;
- the CIC, while opposed to commercial development, recognised the need for the land to be economically viable in the long term and would support appropriate, community led development to sustain it for future generations; and
- the CIC was confident that sufficient funds were available to purchase the land if negotiations proceeded, however, the exact figures could not be disclosed due to confidentiality of pledges.

The Chair invited David Williams, to speak for five minutes. In speaking in support of the application, the following points were made:

- the site was a private, inaccessible field within a conservation area, which was formerly part of the old Bramdean School, and had remained vacant since the school's closure;
- the site was in a highly sustainable location, which was suitable for older persons' accommodation, with good access to local shops, public transport, and medical facilities;

- the development would address an identified need for older persons' housing provision, which was an alternative to family, student or starter homes, in line with the Exeter Local Housing Needs Assessment;
- the proposal would also meet the critical housing need, as recognised in national policy, including the absence of a five-year housing land supply and reliance on local plan policies, with the tilted balance in favour of sustainable development applying;
- both the pre-application and application process involved over 14 months of engagement with Council officers and stakeholders, including the design west panel, the Planning Member Working Group, and local residents, supported by a local exhibition;
- the scheme had evolved in response to consultation feedback to achieve an optimum, sustainable form of development;
- viability considerations associated with older persons' housing had been supported by an independently reviewed viability appraisal, which demonstrated the delivery of over £1 million in affordable housing contributions;
- those contributions could support additional housing delivery elsewhere in the city, with Morton Road cited as an example;
- the proposal sought to retain and enhance the existing boundary tree belt, which had been identified as a key feature within the conservation area. The proposal was also supported by a detailed landscaping scheme for additional planting;
- a permissive pedestrian route along the southern boundary was also being proposed, which would provide a new access point to the green space, which supported a pedestrian-focused, low-car development;
- there would be provisions for 100% electric vehicle charging, mobility scooter storage, cycle storage, and a travel plan;
- the building would be a sustainable design, incorporating a fabric-first approach, PV panels, mechanical ventilation with heat recovery, and air source heat pumps;
- Devon Highways had supported the scheme, with parking levels described as appropriate for older persons' accommodation, reflecting reduced car reliance among residents;
- evidence showed that there would be more shared trips, community activity, and reduced car ownership over time in schemes of this nature;
- highway impacts would be minimal, and supported by an upgraded pedestrian crossing with improved visibility, with strong access links to public transport and local services;
- the Section 106 agreement would secure contributions toward affordable housing, off-site sports pitch provisions, health infrastructure, a travel plan, and recreational mitigation; and
- the biodiversity net gain requirements would be met through a combination of on-site measures and off-site credits, subject to condition.

David Williams responded to Members' questions as follows:

- staffing would include one permanent health manager on site during the daytime hours (9am–5pm);
- additional visitors, including support workers and personal visitors, would use designated visitor parking spaces within the development, which would not be allocated spaces;
- accessibility improvements to the permissive path had been assessed, but significant changes would require substantial engineering works due to level changes between the site and the road;
- a full step-free route would have adverse impacts on boundary trees and the

character of the conservation area, leading to a preference for retaining steps as a balanced solution;

- the steps would be usable by most residents and local users, and alternative step-free access was available from the adjacent road;
- the parking assessment assumed no reliance on on-street parking by residents;
- the travel plan documentation clearly set out parking arrangements and restrictions for residents, staff and visitors;
- the vehicular access point led onto Homefield Road and had been subject to extensive discussions with the highway authority to ensure adequate visibility and safety for both vehicles and pedestrians; and
- Homefield Road could be narrow and heavily parked at times, but the highway authority had raised no objections and considered the highway and public safety impacts to be acceptable.

The Principal Project Manager (Development) presented the application for the erection of a three-storey building for retirement living apartments with associated communal lounge, internal refuse and recycling store, electric buggy/bike store and house managers office; creation of enlarged vehicular access onto Homefield Road, car parking, electrical substation, internal paths, landscaped grounds and creation of a permissive path.

Members were advised that an additional information sheet had been circulated, which included written representations from the Heritage Officer, reference to representations received from 'Bramdean Field CIC' and that an Asset of Community Value (ACV) submission had been received after publication of the officer's report.

The Team Lead – Property, Planning & Non-Contentious (hereafter referred to as the Planning Solicitor), in speaking to the legislative framework for Assets of Community Value, explained that:

- an application had been received by the Council to nominate the land for listing as an Asset of Community Value (ACV);
- the statutory regime for an ACV operated separately from the planning system and did not form part of the planning determination;
- the ACV listing did not prevent or preclude development but did give the community a right to bid for the asset and introduced a pause period of up to six months to allow negotiations to take place;
- decisions on ACV nominations were made by a different department within the City Council, not by City Development;
- a statutory notification process needed to be followed to invite representations, and that the Council had eight weeks to determine whether the nomination met the ACV criteria;
- the ACV application was only at the nomination stage and had not yet been determined. It could be treated as a material consideration but should only be afforded very limited weight in that it applied to recreational/community uses; and
- should the land subsequently be listed as an Asset of Community Value, the listing itself could be a material consideration. However, it would be the underlying community usage associated with the listing, that would carry any material planning weight.

Members received a presentation and following information:

- the site location, was outlined by a red line, positioned north of Heavitree

around Homefield Road, Goldsmith Street, Barrack Grove and Park Place;

- a part of Homefield Road which was adjacent to the site and Park Place lacked footways, were relatively narrow, and had mature trees surrounding the former pitch, many of which were protected by Tree Preservation Orders;
- the site was adjacent to, and contributed positively to the Heavitree conservation area as a designated open space under planning policy;
- the surrounding context included a locally listed former school building opposite the site and terrace housing to the south;
- photographs illustrated the site's relationship to the surrounding streets, changes in land levels, and the raised nature of the former sports pitch above road level;
- the proposal was a three-storey development of 36 apartments, arranged in a series of blocks to break up massing;
- vehicular access was being proposed through an existing field gate onto Homefield Road, with a slight widening, requiring the removal of three trees to achieve safe visibility;
- the scheme would include 25 on-site car parking spaces, integrated scooter storage, and dedicated cycle parking within the site;
- the building would have a broadly symmetrical layout with a central entrance and apartments accessed by stair routes and design revisions had been made following review panel advice prior to submission;
- landscaping proposals sought to retain the majority of existing trees, reinforce boundary planting, and minimise visual impact issues;
- a permissive pedestrian route was proposed through the southern part of the site, including stepped access between trees. It was not possible for a step free or cycle accessible route at this location without significant engineering works and tree loss;
- a publicly accessible green space and seating areas were also being proposed alongside the permissive path;
- illustrative views showed the development as seen from Goldsmith Street, car parking areas, and other open spaces;
- key planning issues were discussed and included the acceptability of the greenfield development being within a sustainable urban location;
- heritage impacts had been acknowledged, with officers concluding that the proposal would result in less than substantial harm to the conservation area due to loss of openness and the building being located within the tree belt;
- the level of harm was weighed against public benefits, including housing delivery and was considered to be less than substantial;
- the provision of 36 dwellings was identified as a significant benefit in the context of the Council's shortfall in five-year housing land supply;
- highway access and parking arrangements had been accepted by the highway authority, who had raised no objections;
- there was no evidence of recent public use of the sports pitch following the school closure, and therefore was no demonstrable loss of public sports provision;
- a package of negotiated planning obligations was outlined, including contributions towards sports facility enhancement, local GP surgery improvements, and off-site affordable housing;
- the residual contribution towards affordable housing was estimated at being £1.07 million, for potential use in other deliverable sites;
- potential heritage harm was acknowledged and assessed as being less than substantial, with no evidence of recent public access to the sports pitches being identified, with no significant loss of sporting opportunity; and
- benefits included the provision of new housing and financial contributions towards off-site affordable housing delivery and a combination of on-site measures and off-site contributions were being proposed to achieve a

minimum 10% biodiversity net gain.

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

- future residents would be excluded from eligibility for residents' parking permits;
- the development would be visible from Homefield Road at closer range but that long-range views would be limited by trees and topography;
- existing three-storey buildings along Goldsmith Street had been taken into account and that additional tree planting was proposed where gaps existed;
- the police had been consulted on the seating area and that a management plan was in place showing CCTV, natural surveillance and the ability to close the area if necessary;
- having a more direct accessible route was desirable but was not achievable due to impacts on trees and the site's appearance;
- access would be provided a tactile crossing over Homefield Road and a dropped kerb on the opposite pavement, allowing connection to the existing footway network;
- the site was designated as open space but planning policy did not provide specific protection for small urban greenfield sites;
- although brownfield sites were prioritised, greenfield development within urban areas was permitted where the benefits were judged to outweigh the harm;
- the emerging local plan carried limited weight at this stage;
- there was a six-month period for completion for the Section 106 legal agreement, after which the Council could refuse the application if it were not finalised;
- cycle parking provision had been increased following consultation comments, including internal storage with charging points and additional secure cycle parking;
- concerns about density were addressed by confirming that the scheme proposed 36 dwellings on approximately half a hectare and that officers considered this acceptable given the three-storey form and landscaped setting;
- the development included a mix of one- and two-bed apartments; and
- similar retirement housing schemes elsewhere had comparable or higher densities, and that the proposed scale and units were typical for this type of development.

The Principal Officer - Urban Design and Landscape advised that:

- views of the building would be filtered through existing trees on the street and new landscaping around the site;
- the design intentionally responded differently to Homefield Road and Goldsmith Street, reflecting their differing street characters;
- the Homefield Road elevation was described as being articulated with screening at ground level, adding visual interest;
- the building's appearance would be softened by sunlight and shadow across the elevation modelling and the scale of the development was considered acceptable, with cross-sections showing the building set below the ridge line of the existing development in Homefield Road;
- the building was stepped back approximately 12 metres from the Goldsmith Street frontage, with additional new landscaping and street trees proposed; and
- the scheme would make an acceptable contribution to the townscape, aside from the loss of currently inaccessible open space.

During the debate, Councillor Asvachin referred to the earlier representation from the member of the local community regarding the potential for the site being taken into community ownership. She expressed concern that granting planning permission at this stage could result in the loss of a green space that the community may be able to secure and manage.

It was therefore proposed by Councillor Asvachin and seconded by Councillor Mitchell that the following amendment be made:-

- to defer the determination of the application to allow time for the Asset of Community Value (ACV) process to be determined.

During the debate on the amendment, the following points were made:

- while deferring the application may appear positive from a public perception perspective, legal advice indicated that the outcome of the Asset of Community Value (ACV) process would not be materially affected by whether planning permission was granted or deferred;
- the ACV process was separate and would proceed and be determined on its own merits regardless of the planning decision;
- there were concerns on planning grounds including the scale and massing of the development, the proposed access from Homefield Road, and site accessibility;
- the amendment to defer would enable the ACV process to proceed and was supported;
- deferring would support inner urban greenfield land and allowing sufficient time for community initiatives to be properly developed;
- concerns were about design and similar developments could be accommodated elsewhere in the city without the loss of this site; and
- clarification was sought on the legal timescales available to the Council and the community, and whether a deferral could be achieved lawfully to allow the ACV process to conclude.

The Chair clarified that the amendment under debate related solely to deferring the application to allow the ACV process to be determined, and not to broader planning concerns or design changes. It was emphasised that the ACV process would take approximately eight weeks and that, if deferred, the application would return to committee in its current form.

The Principal Project Manager (Development) in responding to questions raised from Members advised that:

- the application was already beyond the statutory determination period and that an agreed extension of time had been in place and was due to expire at the current committee meeting;
- if no decision were made, the applicant would have the right to appeal to the Planning Inspectorate on the grounds of non-determination, in addition to any appeal against a decision made by the Council;
- an appeal for non-determination could be submitted by the applicant immediately, as the agreed extension of time expired at the current committee meeting;
- any appeal process would take time to progress through the Planning Inspectorate; and
- the Asset of Community Value (ACV) application had an eight-week statutory determination period and therefore by the time a non-determination appeal

was likely to be considered, the Planning Inspectorate would likely have the outcome of the ACV application available and could treat it as a material consideration.

Returning to the debate on the amendment, the further following points were made:

- there was a need to make a decision but the community had made significant efforts to reach the stage of submitting an Asset of Community Value application and potentially raising funds;
- an eight-week deferral was reasonable to allow the community the opportunity to progress the work and fulfil the Council's role in representing residents' interests;
- given the representations from the community and the timing constraints, it would also be in the developer's interests to use any deferral period constructively to engage further with the community and planning officers; and
- Asset of Community Value applications, processes often attract strong local interest and required time for communities to organise effectively.

The Chair concluded the debate by highlighting that officers had advised that a successful ACV listing would carry additional weight, albeit still as one of several material considerations, when the application returned for determination. He also noted that the matter would return for full debate should the amendment to defer be agreed.

The Strategic Director for Place made the following concluding points:

- the officers' report had set out the relevant planning balance and the weight to be attached to each factor, with the final weighting being a matter for the planning committee to decide;
- although the planning committee was currently the decision-maker, this could change, should an appeal be lodged, making the Planning Inspector the decision maker;
- officers had approached the planning balance in a manner consistent with how a Planning Inspector would be likely to assess it;
- any change to the planning balance would require a material change in circumstances, and both officers and a Planning Inspector would be required to reconsider the balance if such changes arose;
- the Asset of Community Value (ACV) nomination carried very limited weight, being at nomination stage. Should it be successful the weight attributed to it could increase, but would be limited to its recreational value;
- the current weight was minimal due to the lack of public access, and that any realistic prospect of future public access could justify revisiting its weight;
- whether any increased weight would be sufficient to outweigh other planning considerations remained a matter for the decision-maker or the Planning Inspector;
- deferral to allow reconsideration of the planning balance was possible, but that the scope for change was limited; and
- reconsideration could take place either by the Committee at a future meeting or by the Planning Inspector, with likely timescales extending to a later date, potentially around July or following any appeal hearing.

Following the debate, the Chair moved the matter to a vote on the motion to defer the application to allow the Asset of Community Value (ACV) process to be determined. Members voted unanimously in favour of deferral.

The Planning Committee noted that the application would return to committee for

determination regardless of whether an appeal was submitted, in order to provide officers with material considerations for any appeal process.

RESOLVED that the Committee DEFER determination of the application, to allow time for the Asset of Community Value (ACV) process to be determined.

The meeting was briefly adjourned at 19:01 and resumed at 19:08.

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PLANNING APPLICATION NO. 25/0781/FUL - MARY ARCHES STREET CAR PARK

In accordance with Section 10.5 of the Members' Planning Code of Good Practice, Councillor Ketchin left the meeting at the start of the item as he was not present when the application was previously considered and deferred on 19 January 2026.

Councillor Williams, who had arrived late for the previous item, was present and took part in the consideration of this item.

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

- concerns relating to heritage impact, massing and density, referring to the summary section of the officer's report, highlighting that those concerns were widely shared by residents of St. David's ward;
- the amendments made to the scheme were acknowledged, however, the development remained over-massed and visually dominant for longer-range views, particularly from St. David's Hill and the Iron Bridge approach;
- the report concluded that key views of historic buildings, including the Cathedral, would not be impeded, the wider heritage setting and the proximity to the St. David's Hill Conservation Area had not been given sufficient weight;
- the enlarged structure would tower over nearby heritage assets, including Napier Terrace, Bartholomew Cemetery, the Grade II Synagogue and the Mecca Building, disrupting the established scale and character of the area, which was in-line with concerns expressed by Historic England;
- the proposed sixth storey and rooftop plant, would increase the overall height and create an unduly dominant skyline feature, causing harm to the St. David's Hill conservation area;
- Historic England's view was that a four-storey development would be more appropriate for the character of the area;
- the impact on longer-range views was unacceptable, in which the report acknowledged the loss of views of St Michael's on Mount Dinham and from Fore Street and the application had not included sufficient visual assessments of those views;
- significant visual harm would arise from more distant viewpoints, including from Exwick and St. Thomas, affecting the wider landscape setting of the city;
- the changes presented through developer briefings, had not adequately addressed wider visual harm, and even a reduction by one storey would still result in a large, uniform structure harming key city views;
- concern was expressed about diminished views from St David's Hill towards the Cathedral and city centre, which would erode the historic relationship between the valley and the city;
- agreed defined views from this location did not appear in the submitted material;
- the proposal failed to respect the surrounding scale and architectural context;

- the building should not exceed the height of the existing multi-storey car park and should incorporate greater articulation to break up its massing;
- had the outcome of the further Design Review Panel been published and, if so, where it could be accessed, or if not, why it was unavailable; and
- in closing they objected to the application on their own behalf and on behalf of local residents, citing concerns over scale, massing and the resultant harm to heritage assets and their setting.

In responses to questions from Members, Councillor Read made the following further comments:

- concerns regarding views from Exwick were based on on-site experience, and the view of St Michael's Mount Dinham from Fore Street would be largely lost, as quoted directly from the report;
- the scale and massing of the development was not considered necessary and that there was insufficient evidence to demonstrate a need for additional co-living accommodation in the city;
- there was an existing co-living development in the city centre, which was described as having high levels of vacancy since opening, supporting the view that the proposed massing was driven by the co-living model rather than by wider community need;
- reiterated that the massing was not considered justified and did not represent an appropriate asset for the city;
- the proposed development would exceed the existing car park's height, once the rooftop plant was included, and that the new building should not be higher than the existing structure.

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

- Block A would be approximately 4.5 metres higher than the existing multi-storey car park;
- although the development was described as being for long-term living with only 10% student occupation, the ratio of bedrooms to kitchen space remained poor, with insufficient storage and concerns over overall habitability;
- the redesigned corner feature and stepped entrance was welcomed and would add a visual interest to the building;
- expressed concern that the stepped entrance would not be wheelchair accessible, resulting in the main accessible entrance being located further up the street, potentially leaving the lower entrance as a redundant space susceptible to antisocial behaviour;
- despite illustrations in the briefing materials, no pedestrian crossing was proposed at the bottom of North Street, and no improvements were planned for North Street or the Iron Bridge junction;
- North Street had narrow pavements and a junction layout designed primarily for traffic, presenting challenges for pedestrians, cyclists and wheelchair users, and that local residents and businesses had expressed a desire for improvements;
- would the proposed Section 106 contributions be delivered as expected and in a timely manner;
- the confirmation from the developer of a £151,000 Section 106 contribution towards public open spaces was welcomed, particularly the for the pressures on the cemetery, but early payment should be secured by a condition;
- in reference to the engagement between the developer and the synagogue, appreciation was given for the additional drop-off and disabled access arrangements, however, it was requested that this be secured by condition as

- a formal, long-term arrangement, including provision of a dedicated parking space;
- the Local Housing Needs Assessment, had not identified a role for co-living accommodation in Exeter and that the proposed scale of 297 units was disproportionate and unsupported by local evidence;
- the applicant's co-living demand evidence did not adequately reference local housing needs assessments and was therefore not policy compliant; and
- raised concerns regarding reliance on the tilted balance, questioning the evidence around the Council's five-year housing land supply and noting inconsistencies between previously reported figures and documents submitted to the Planning Inspector.

The Chair invited Mr Keith Lewis (Exeter Civic Society), to speak for five minutes. In speaking against the application, the following points were made:

- while the Exeter Civic Society supported redevelopment of the site in principle, it would prefer provision of family housing to address the Council's housing waiting list;
- the application had been deferred in January 2026 to address concerns regarding scale and massing, design quality and the treatment of street-facing elevations, and the Civic Society was disappointed that, despite amendments, the revised proposals still comprised 297 rooms;
- the retention of the same number of rooms, despite the removal of the top floor of Block B, had been achieved through a reduction in internal community amenity space, which the Civic Society had not expected;
- the reduction in amenity space was not clearly acknowledged in the officer report and was considered to fall below the minimum standards set out in the London Plan guidance, which had previously been referenced by officers as an appropriate benchmark for co-living schemes;
- the January 2026 report had concluded the quantum and arrangement of community spaces complied with relevant local plan policies, and queried why a significant reduction was now considered acceptable;
- concerns were raised regarding inaccuracies and omissions in the report relating to the provision of community facilities, including the absence of spaces previously described, and a lack of correction in the update report;
- a further objection was made to the suggestion in the report that the London Plan guidance should now be afforded minimal weight, which was described as inconsistent with previous assessments and other recent applications;
- the amended scheme resulted in reduced building costs for the developer while retaining the same number of units and projected income, and that any approval should be conditioned to meet minimum amenity standards, including kitchen ratios, as set out in the London guidance;
- expressed concern at the submission of further amended plans during the committee process, noting the volume and late timing of drawings, which he considered limited the ability of third parties and Members to review changes;
- additional concerns included the lack of independent toilet facilities within community areas, facilities for staff, and appropriate hygiene provision, which was requested to be secured by a condition if the scheme was approved;
- there were concerns about proposed gated routes between North Street and Mary Arches Street, with an inconsistency with previous approaches taken elsewhere on public safety and permeability;
- the design judgement rested with the planning committee, but it was highlighted that Historic England continued to object to the appearance of Block A, which was a view shared by the Civic Society.

Mr Lewis responded to questions from Members as follows:

- the reduction in height to Block B was welcomed, although Block A had not been reduced and Members had previously accepted as acceptable;
- Members may not have anticipated that changes to the elevations would result in a reduction of internal community amenity space for future residents;
- long-term residential living should be a key consideration, particularly given the absence of restrictions on length of occupation under current legislation;
- the provision of adequate communal and amenity space was more important than reducing the overall scale of the building when the same number of units were being delivered;
- the assessment on the design appearance was subjective, however, architectural advice received by the Civic Society considered the design changes to be insufficient, based on the plans available at the time; and
- multiple late submissions of revised plans was concerning, giving an uncertainty about which version was under consideration and whether the officer report and update had been based on the most recent drawings.

The Chair confirmed there were no public speakers registered to speak in support of the item.

The Principal Project Manager (Development) presented the application for the demolition of the multi-storey car park, surface car parking and redevelopment to provide a co-living development, public realm works, landscaping, cycle and car parking, servicing, refuse and recycling provision and associated works.

Members received a presentation and received the following information:

- the circulated update sheet included a further consultee response from the Council's Landscape Officer, which resulted in a number of additional and amended planning conditions being proposed relating to design matters;
- a further condition was recommended to approve a list of plans submitted prior to publication of the update sheet, comprising 43 drawings, which formed the full approved plan set for the application;
- the application had been deferred by planning committee in January 2026 to allow further consideration of scale and massing, design quality, street-facing elevations, and the management of the pedestrian route through the site, and that the presentation focused on those matters;
- since January, officers had reviewed the Committee's earlier deliberations, and held an extensive debate at the Design Review Panel, in which comments had been added to the report, alongside previous pre-application advice;
- further design meetings were held with the applicant, followed by submission of revised plans and supporting material in March 2026, including CGI images, which formed the basis of the substantive reassessment;
- two further plan submissions were received, comprising minor and largely internal amendments;
- Block B had been reduced from five storeys to four, with the roof terrace removed and the architectural approach to Block B had also been revised;
- the east and west ends had been stepped forward to meet the street and to improve the street enclosure meeting issues relating to heritage;
- there had been some internal reconfiguration undertaken to retain the approved number of residential units;
- the overall building footprint had not changed significantly, aside from limited

- stepping forward at street edges;
- a stepped entrance on North Street had been introduced for Block A, incorporating a co-working space beneath and providing a direct and legible route to the reception;
- the building would be managed 24/7, with CCTV and officers did not consider antisocial behaviour to be a concern;
- seven ground-floor rooms had been introduced, which did not have directly adjacent to kitchens. Officers considered their proximity to communal facilities to be acceptable for co-living use;
- communal kitchens were retained on every floor, each meeting the relevant space and cooking station standards, supplemented by a larger shared kitchen facility;
- external terraces, including a fourth-floor terrace and sunken ground-floor space, were retained and combined with internal provision, exceeded London Plan benchmarks for co-living amenity space;
- the two ends of Block B had been brought forward to strengthen the building's relationship with Mary Arches Street, while the central section remained set back to avoid residential accommodation directly abutting the footway;
- the pedestrian route through the site had been realigned to function better;
- proposed gates at the entrances would be managed and secured through conditions and the Section 106 agreement to ensure accessibility in accordance with the Committee's previous resolution;
- a larger reception and communal kitchen/dining space would be provided at ground floor level to serve shared resident use;
- upper floors retained communal kitchens, each with two cook stations, and the building comprised of four floors in total;
- landscaping, including hedging, was proposed to provide appropriate separation between ground-floor units and the street;
- alterations had been made in the area opposite the synagogue, including the provision of three disabled parking spaces;
- the seating area at the corner location had been removed and replaced with tree planting and landscaped space;
- amendments made to elevations sought to break down the massing into distinct elements, with a variation in façade treatment and roof forms;
- the removal of a storey on Block B led to a revised flat roof design, replacing the previous clipped roof form;
- changes made to window designs, material treatment and roof elements were intended to improve the building's appearance when viewed from Mary Arches Street and North Street;
- active ground-floor uses, including a reception area and co-working spaces, had been retained to support street activity and natural surveillance;
- while many archaeological artefacts found at the site would be removed for museum storage, it was hoped that some items of interest could be displayed on site, subject to further investigation and agreement; and
- overall landscaping proposals included new planting and tree groups, with details to be secured by condition to ensure successful establishment.

The Principal Officer - Urban Design and Landscape advised that:

- the reduction in scale of Block B had been welcomed, and noting had improved views of St. Michael and All Angels Church from Fore Street by allowing greater visibility of the church spire;
- the revised design now functioned appropriately as a background building, whereas the previous version drew excessive attention;
- the re-designed Block B was a suitable contemporary addition that helped

- repair the street frontage;
- bringing the two end sections of the building forward to the back of the pavement was commended and highlighted as improving the sense of enclosure along Mary Arches Street;
- setting back the central section was also considered appropriate to protect privacy for ground-floor accommodation on a busy street; and
- appreciation was given to the revised design of Block B, and the applicant's willingness to make the changes.

The Principal Project Manager (Development) further advised that:

- CGI views demonstrated townscape impacts and that, although the building remained taller than some surrounding structures, the overall massing was considered acceptable;
- view analysis undertaken had identified public viewpoints, highlighting that some directions did not provide public views and that the Cathedral lay outside key sightlines from the affected streets;
- CGI views published in March remained representative of the current application, with subsequent amendments being minor and largely internal;
- reducing the building height by one storey had improved views of the Church, allowing partial visibility of the spire;
- updated images showed improvements to street-level design, including revised steps, lowered planters, tree planting, and space for trees to mature at key junctions and entrances;
- there was some continued heritage harm within the conservation area, but this had been significantly reduced through the revised design;
- the scheme continued to secure the same Section 106 contributions, with updated wording to reflect the Committee's previous resolution regarding the permissive route, and the enforceability of the legal agreement was confirmed;
- the application was a vast improvement, particularly in relation to reduced massing on Mary Arches Street, design, and enhanced landscaping; and
- the application was therefore recommended approval.

The Principal Project Manager (Development) responded to Member questions and clarification points as follows:

- excluding residents from parking permits was a matter for Devon County Council, who had not thought that co-living schemes would be eligible;
- Section 106 contributions could fund traffic order reviews and tighter parking controls, including disabled parking provisions;
- the number of units had not changed from the previous report, and concerns about over concentration had already been considered;
- the development was still regarded as being acceptable and appropriate for a city-centre location, bringing benefits through increased city-centre living;
- high-density developments were considered suitable for this city-centre area, which already accommodated a mix of student housing, co-living and flats;
- Section 106 contributions normally had payment triggers, with open space payments usually due on commencement, to make funds available when residents moved in;
- the revised design still met and exceeded the London Plan standards for room sizes and internal and external communal amenity spaces, despite there being some reductions from the previous scheme;
- parking spaces on the site would be managed by the applicant and bollards also formed part of the privately managed parking spaces. Their operation and safety arrangements to be addressed through the site management plan;

- Block B had been reduced by one storey, but Block A remained at the same height, with improvements made to the roof and improvements to the parapet detailing to reduce visual heaviness; and
- because Block B had been reduced to four storeys throughout, it now had a single roof level and no longer allowed for a side access to a roof garden, while the rear height of the block remained unchanged.

The Chair confirmed that discussions between the synagogue and the applicant were ongoing and that any agreement on its use would be a private matter between those parties.

The Chair asked reminded that this was a deferred application, and that the principle of co-living had already been extensively debated previously and highlighted that debate should focus specifically on the changes made since deferral, resulting from officer work and cooperation from the developer.

During the debate, Members made the following points:-

- improvements made to the street-facing design was welcomed, and a greater variation in frontages, particularly on Block A;
- massing concerns were acknowledged, and the greater resident amenity in the original proposal could carry more weight than the limited height reduction achieved;
- the height reduction was commended as was setting Block B back;
- the provision of disabled bays near the synagogue was welcomed;
- the changes made demonstrated how the developer had listened to concerns raised by the planning committee;
- the remaining height of Block A was acceptable and massing issues had been sufficiently addressed to support the application;
- the reductions and set-backs were acknowledged but it was noted that Historic England still considered the proposal excessively tall and bulky, with no height reduction to Block A;
- the changes were only a partial response to committee concerns and, there were still unresolved massing issues affecting heritage interests;
- the developer had taken on board many of the points raised at the January meeting and the revised scheme was a material improvement on the previous proposal;
- additional engagement with the synagogue regarding parking was commended, despite not part of the previous deferral reasons;
- the improved outlook at North Street and the reduction to Block B, particularly in views down Mary Arches was praised;
- main concern resulting in deferral had been for Block B, which had now been satisfactorily addressed; and
- Block A remained at the same height, but design changes had reduced its perceived massing and was considered acceptable.

The Strategic Director for Place made the following concluding points:

- at the January meeting the Committee had been satisfied with the principle of the development and had deferred the decision to resolve two key matters: scale and massing, and design quality of the street-facing elevations;
- the Committee's primary concern at the January deferral was the height of Block B, which was considered one storey too high in relation to Mary Arches Street and its historic context;
- officers had since undertaken detailed design workshops with the applicant, including a further Design Review Panel, resulting in significant submitted

- revisions and re-consulted on in March;
- there had been a reduction to Block B from five to four storeys and enhanced articulation of the Mary Arches frontage, which was considered to have substantially reduced harm to heritage assets;
- any remaining heritage harm was assessed as being less than substantial, allowing the Committee to weigh harm against the public benefits of the scheme, including regeneration and increased city-centre living;
- improvements had also been made to Block A, creating a stronger architectural bookend to North Street and contributing positively to streetscape regeneration;
- the landscaping and creation of new spaces would be welcome enhancements, supporting wider city-centre regeneration;
- revised plans had been fully consulted upon and refined through further architectural adjustments to achieve the best possible design outcome;
- the existing building was considered to be harmful to the historic setting and was widely acknowledged as having a negative impact from all viewpoints;
- officers had acted on the Committee's earlier advice by working with the applicant to secure improvements; and
- the scheme now represented a high-quality development, which would repair harm to the historic environment, and that there were no longer design grounds to refuse permission.

The Chair moved, and Councillor Rolstone seconded the recommendation, which was voted upon and CARRIED. (7 in favour, 2 against and 0 abstentions).

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:

- 20% of Co-living Units (60 units) as Affordable Private Rent, including 3 wheelchair M4 (3) units;
- highways contributions totalling £139,050;
- contribution of £10,000 for Traffic Orders;
- car club contributions of £146,434.62 for vehicle provision, together with £7,269 for associated Traffic Regulation Orders and £7,269 for associated road markings;
- provision of permissive path, to be kept open to the public at all times, unless closure is subsequently justified by demonstrable incidents of antisocial behaviour, or for maintenance, as identified through the management plan;
- a Co-living Management Plan, including measures to discourage car ownership and use;
- primary health care contribution £87,184 towards the expansion of GP surgery provision;
- contribution of £457 per bedspace towards the provision and improvement of off-site public open spaces serving the development.
- contribution of £278 per bedspace towards the provision or improvement of off-site playing fields city-wide;
- Habitat Regulations mitigation (Exe Estuary affordable units only) of £1278.71;
- provision of a 24/7 on-site management presence;
- a financial contribution £93,035 to support public engagement of the archaeological investigation and its findings;
- a restriction on full time student occupation limited to 10%;
- a S106 Monitoring Fee;
- a bio-diversity Net Gain Monitoring Fee; and

- the conditions set out in the Planning Committee report and update sheet.

All S106 contributions should be index linked from the date of resolution; and

RESOLVED to REFUSE permission if the legal agreement under section 106 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended) is not completed within six months of the date of the meeting or such extended time as agreed in writing by the Head of Service (City Development).

(The meeting commenced at 5.30 pm and closed at 8.15 pm)

Chair

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