

STRATEGIC SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

14 November 2024

Present:

Councillor Councillor Liz Pole (Chair)

Councillors Mitchell, M, Atkinson, Haigh, Hughes, Jobson, Knott, Moore, Palmer, Rees, Rolstone and Snow

Apologies:

Councillors Ellis-Jones and Williams, M

Also present:

Strategic Director for Place, Assistant Service Lead – Local Plan, Head of Legal and Democratic Services & Monitoring Officer, Planning Solicitor, Democratic Services Manager and Democratic Services Officer(LS)

In attendance:

37 Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 12 September 2024 were taken as read, approved and signed by the Chair as correct.

38 Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interest were made by Members.

39 Questions from Members of the Public Under Standing Order No.19

There were no questions submitted by the public.

40 Questions from Members of the Council Under Standing Order No.20

In accordance with Standing Order No. 20, the following questions were submitted by Councillors Jobson, Mitchell, Moore and Palmer in relation to the Portfolios of Councillors Allcock, Bialyk and Wood who attended the meeting. The questions were circulated at the meeting to Members of the Committee.

The Chair clarified that due to the number of questions received and supplementary questions would be answered in writing only and appended to the minutes.

Questions and responses are set out below:

Questions from Councillor Jobson

Question: Is there a break down of the finances of Wellbeing Exeter on an annual basis and is there an independent audit that can be produced to members to show the value for money to the Council Taxpayer of Exeter?

Response from Councillor Wood: Annual financial information is available. This has not been subject to specific independent audit. Evaluation and impact reports identify social value through a variety of approaches.

Question: I note from the reports available that between 2016 and 15th March 2024 (New Report highlights massive impact of Wellbeing Exeter on communities) 5,503

have accessed their services. Can this be broken down to an annual or bi-annual count for each year from 2016?

Response: Quarterly dashboards of impact and outcomes are produced and uploaded to the Wellbeing Exeter website [Impact | Wellbeing Exeter | Exeter](#)

Question: Does Sport England require quarterly returns to show how money is spent and is that against contractual targets? If there are no contractual targets are any targets set and if so is it possible to know the basis on which those targets are set?

Response: The Sport England Grant Agreement requires the production of performance reports on all aspects of the Live and Move Programme including Wellbeing Exeter. Six monthly evaluation reports are sent to Sport England: these are available on the Live and Move website. www.liveandmove.co.uk Outcomes are monitored at a number of levels, strategically we focus on information on physical activity levels gathered through our Local Active Lives Survey. More information is available here: : [PowerBI Dashboard](#)

Question: From that 5,503 is any analysis undertaken at periods of say 6mths and a year after the project that involved them or the activity they were prescribed has concluded to enable an analysis of the long term benefits to be undertaken?

Response: In 2023/24 we commissioned an academic evaluation of Wellbeing Exeter the details are in the impact report available here: www.exeter.gov.uk/wellbeing

This is worth a read as it sets out a range of impressive outcomes using a variety of evaluation methodologies, for example the research concludes that *“Robust data analysis shows that community connecting is effective in improving wellbeing, reducing loneliness, and connecting people with their community. Scores on recognised scales for levels of loneliness and wellbeing both saw a marked improvement.”*

Wellbeing Exeter is more than Community Connecting and the Impact report is rich in evidence of the positive impacts all aspects of its work are having across the City.

Question: Is any income received from, for instance, the GP surgeries who are making use of Wellbeing Exeter? If so, are any accounts available?

Response: There is no funding from the NHS into Wellbeing Exeter.

Question: Should not a report come to Strategic Scrutiny and potentially Audit and Governance that sets out such a detailed analysis?

Response: Any of the Wellbeing Exeter reports can be scrutinised.

Given the renewed interest in Wellbeing Exeter being shown by members I have asked officers to provide the opportunity for members to attend information and briefing sessions about Wellbeing Exeter where they can find out more about this excellent pioneering work in the City of which we should all be very proud of.

Question from Councillor Palmer: Young people in the care system struggle to access many things, do we offer anything specifically to help?

Response from Councillor Wood: This could be considered alongside increasing uptake.

Questions from Councillor Moore: **Re Bids have been submitted and due diligence has been undertaken at Clifton Hill.** ECC received £425,000 for demolition and enabling works from Government - what has happened to those funds?

Responses from the Leader: £200k of the funding was used to demolish the former leisure centre. £120k for Surface Water Attenuation, £85k for a Substation and £20k

for off-site enhancements for the local community are held on ECC's accounts and can be drawn down when the works are undertaken.

Councillor Moore asked a supplementary question: Will the community be involved in this?

Question: Exeter Development Fund As the Exeter Development Fund has now been removed as a mitigation on the risk register I assume the project is no longer supported. A task and finish group was set up but didn't do anything. Will the leader commit to councillor involvement in the "identification, timing and modelling for a smaller site. or flagship sites" for the Liveable Exeter project?

Response: I have asked that the Portfolio Holder for City Development, to be kept informed of progress with the Exeter Development Fund. Once the technical work is completed next year, I will update Councillors accordingly.

Councillor Moore asked a supplementary question: Are the Council committed to Exeter Development Fund?

Question: As of June 2023 ECC held £805,000 of funds from DLUHC for work on the Exeter Development Fund, how have these monies been spent over the past year and what are the deliverables that have been achieved?

Response: Government funding is enabling ECC to explore delivery models, so the learning can be shared more widely (by MHCLG) and potentially replicated in other places. When the technical work is completed next year, the outputs will be handed over to MHCLG.

Councillor Moore asked a supplementary question: Has any money been spent on this?

Question: In 2021 ECC received £5,966,470 One Public Estate monies for the following sites to create homes on the following sites:

- Cathedral and Quay Car Park
- Mary Arches Car Park
- Bonhay Meadows
- Belle Isle
- Exeter Canal Basin

What deliverables have been achieved for each site, how much money has been spent on each site and how much money returned to Government?

Response: £1,009,870 for Bonhay Meadows and the £2,373,183 for Cathedral and Quay were returned to Central Government last year. The remainder is held on ECC's accounts and can be drawn down if/when the works are undertaken.

Councillor Moore asked a supplementary question: Canal basin money, what has been, or is expected to be spent?

Question: Open Space depot As land values have changed since the decision by the Council to dispose of Belle Isle is it still financially viable for the Council to dispose of Belle Isle, buy another depot, cover the costs of the move and establish a new depot?

Response: Our appointed acquisition and disposal agents are confident an alternative site can be acquired within budget and that the disposal values haven't changed materially since the decision.

Councillor Moore asked a supplementary question: Is the agent looking for sites outside Exeter given prices?

Question from Councillor Palmer: could we have an update on the King Billy site at the corner of Longbrook st - the site has been abandoned following unauthorised demolition of a medieval wall - what action is being taken against the developer for this and when will further work commence on the site?

Response from Councillor Allcock: King Billy Site Update: The King Billy site encountered issues with the medieval wall during the adjacent demolition of the King Bill Pub, compromising its stability. As a result, Exeter City Council had to perform an emergency demolition of the wall's upper section. Subsequently:

- The applicant, under application 23/1215/VOC, assessed the wall as unstable and received approval from the case officer at that time to partially demolish it. Unfortunately, this led to a more extensive demolition than initially intended.
- The Council considered actions to require the wall's reconstruction. However, because the historical significance lay primarily in the wall's original authenticity, it was deemed more effective to preserve and protect the remaining wall, along with ensuring the remnants continue to reflect the site's historical character.

Councillor Palmer asked a supplementary question: When would further work commence?

Question: In relation to other approved PBSA sites at Cowley Bridge and West Park why are these developments delayed?

Response: Cowley Bridge Road: Delays at this site relate to complex ground contamination issues, for which the Council has been working with the Environment Agency and the developer to protect groundwater quality. The current target for occupation is September 2026.

West Park: No specific delays have been identified at the West Park site. The most recent application (24/0184/VOC), approved in May 2024, introduced a phased plan and various design adjustments, which are proceeding as scheduled.

41 **Portfolio Holder Report - Leader, Councillor Bialyk**

The Leader presented his report drawing attention to the following topics:

- One Exeter;
- Digital Customer Strategy;
- Residents Survey;
- Corporate Plan;
- MTFP update;
- Senior Leadership Review – new appointment to the remaining Strategic Director post;
- Office relocation; and
- Key cities.

Councillor M Mitchell asked a Question: When does the Leader envisage the Council will be carrying out a public consultation regarding the 2025/26 proposed budget and what does he consider are the key questions that it should pose?

Response: Public consultation on proposal for the 2025/26 budget would commence in mid-November. We would ask residents to rank, in order of their priority a range of ideas under consideration.

These included things we may consider investing in; some areas where we may consider introducing or increasing charges and some areas where we may consider reducing service provision.

A briefing note will be circulated to all councillors ahead of the consultation launch.

The Leader responded to Members' questions making the following points:

- there is a wider programme of work for Key Cities;
- Strata Scrutiny could consider facilities for those who can't or won't access digitally;
- the Corporate plan was aligned with the ruling party and similar to 2040 vision;
- that there would be a Member Briefing on the Corporate Plan;
- that there was no outstanding debt from Exeter City Living;
- a professional organisation carried out the residents Survey on behalf of the Council following LGA guidelines;
- that due to technical reasons scrutiny could not be broadcast at present;
- there was no reason for Residents Survey responses not to be on the website;
- that the survey wasn't only online, a methodology was followed;
- would endeavour to retain Exeter's position in CCA; and
- that collaborative working regarding housing would be needed.

42 **Portfolio Holders Report - City Development, Councillor Allcock**

Councillor Allcock presented her report and thanked the team of officers for the huge amount of work they have undertaken, and drew attention to the following points:

- Placemaking Charter;
- Water Lane;
- Exeter Plan had three extensive consultations and Member engagement;
- it was excellent that the timeline for transitional arrangements looked likely to be met; and
- challenges in brownfield development.

Two questions had been received from Councillor M Mitchell.

1. **Question:** Does the Portfolio Holder consider now is appropriate time to review the authority's 35% affordable housing target in the light of our failure over many years to achieve anywhere near this figure? In 2022/23 the figure was 16.88%

Response: The Council's 35% affordable housing (AH) target remains a central goal under Policy CP7, which applies to developments of 10 or more homes. However, achieving this target has been challenging due to factors impacting viability. To clarify, the 16.88% figure mentioned by Cllr Mitchell represents affordable housing delivered as a percentage of total housing completions in 2022/23. This percentage reflects the overall delivery rate, which is naturally lower than the 35% target that applies specifically to eligible developments.

Affordable housing delivery over the past five years, as a percentage of total housing completed, is as follows:

- **2022/23:** 16.88%
- **2021/22:** 18.97%
- **2020/21:** 11.49%
- **2019/20:** 14.65%
- **2018/19:** 25.76%

In addition, recent data shows the average affordable housing percentages secured on specific S106 developments:

- **2021:** 30% on average, plus financial contributions totalling £27,387.65
- **2022:** 36% on average
- **2023:** 43% on average, plus contributions of £467,011.12
- **2024 to date:** 36% on average, plus contributions of £241,916.44

These figures reflect higher percentages on individual developments, often greenfield sites, with fewer viability issues. The Council has also secured 100% affordable housing on select schemes supported by Homes England funding.

Our approach to addressing viability includes acknowledging the impact of factors such as the Vacant Building Credit and the reduced national requirement (20%) for build-to-rent developments. Both factors can reduce the percentage of affordable housing achievable on certain sites.

Looking ahead, the emerging Exeter Plan considers the latest viability data, highlighting the need for a more nuanced approach. The Plan may shift away from a single percentage target towards differentiated requirements that reflect each site's characteristics and development constraints, potentially improving feasibility while sustaining our commitment to affordable housing.

Our experiences have shown the importance of phased reviews and clear viability documentation to ensure realistic, sustainable, affordable housing contributions. National planning policy also requires that affordable housing requirements do not compromise overall project viability, which can sometimes limit our capacity to enforce higher targets.

Beyond planning policy, the Council actively pursues affordable housing delivery through initiatives outside of development management. These include Council-led developments and partnerships with Homes England and neighbouring authorities. Such collaborations provide additional funding, expertise, and strategic support, helping us bridge any shortfalls in delivery.

2. **Question:** Can the Portfolio Holder explain why no planning enforcement action has been registered on the council website since the 28th June 2023?

Response: The Council's approach to enforcement prioritises resolution through voluntary compliance wherever feasible, which can reduce the necessity for formal enforcement notices. However, I can confirm that when a formal Enforcement Notice is issued, a redacted version is promptly made available on our website in accordance with standard procedures and confidentiality protocols.

The limited number of formal notices over the past year reflects our success in achieving compliance without resorting to formal measures rather than a lack of

enforcement activity. We continue to engage with site owners and operators to address breaches swiftly, aiming to prevent further escalations. Our team routinely monitors the website to ensure it accurately reflects any formal actions taken and updates as necessary.

The Portfolio Holder and the Assistant Service Lead – Local Plan, answered questions from Members’ making the following points:

- that she had a strong personal interest in the northern hills, which is a designated landscape setting, protected in the plan;
- the best that could be done would be to get the plan submitted with the new policies; and
- evidence of landscape setting would be updated to ensure protection.

Remaining questions would be answered in writing and appended to the minutes.

43 **Exeter Plan Publication Process**

The Assistant Service Lead – Local Plan presented the report drawing attention to the following points:

- there had been changes to procedural matters since the last consultation;
- there had been previous consultation and additional partnership work;
- Planning Member Working Group had discussed the emerging plan;
- the Plan period had moved on by one year;
- transitional arrangements for plan-making were proposed by Government in the national planning reforms consulted on in summer 2024. These proposals would amend the NPPF and increase housing requirements from 602 to 815 per annum for Exeter;
- it was important that the plan continue in a timely manner; and
- that the publication process was formal and statutory.

Councillor Moore expressed disappointment that the Local Plan was not available for scrutiny and in the governance of the process.

The Strategic Director for Place and Assistant Service Lead – Local Plan answered Members’ questions making the following points:

- that the council worked jointly with neighbouring authorities with Gypsy, Roma and travelling communities;
- work continued with the university rather than students themselves, using demographic projections;
- that the recommendation to Executive will be seeking approval to publish the plan, waiting would fall outside the transition arrangements;
- Valley Park Master Plan would run until 2026, would be valuable evidence but the Plan had higher status;
- There had been three rounds of extensive consultation, online, in-person, public exhibitions and a number of methodologies used;
- all responses to consultations were collated and brought to committee and the response rate had been higher than any seen in his considerable experience; and
- that the Plan is only one mechanism to meeting the 2030 net zero ambition.

Councillor M Mitchell moved a motion, seconded by Councillor Palmer, that a special meeting of Strategic Scrutiny be held after the publication of the Executive agenda on 25 November 2024 and before the meeting of the Executive on 3 December 2024 in

order to consider the content of the draft local plan which following a vote was **NOT CARRIED**.

44 **Forward Plan of Business and Scrutiny Work Plan**

Councillor Knott moved a motion, seconded by Councillor Snow that this item be deferred and following a vote was **CARRIED**.

The meeting commenced at 5.30 pm and closed at 8.26 pm

Chair

Original Question	Response given at meeting	Supplementary Question	Response given outside the meeting
<u>Questions from Councillor Moore to the Leader</u> 1.Bids have been submitted and due diligence has been undertaken at Clifton Hill. ECC received £425,000 for demolition and enabling works from Government - what has happened to those funds?	£200k of the funding was used to demolish the former leisure centre. £120k for Surface Water Attenuation, £85k for a Substation and £20k for off-site enhancements for the local community are held on ECC's accounts and can be drawn down when the works are undertaken.	Will the community be involved in this?	We are in negotiations with the two top bidders for the site (both retirement living led). Both offers are subject to planning and will need to go through the public planning consultation process prior to land completion.
2.As the Exeter Development Fund has now been removed as a mitigation on the risk register I assume the project is no longer supported. A task and finish group was set up but didn't do anything. Will the Leader commit to councillor involvement in the identification, timing and modelling for.. smaller site or flagship sites" for the Liveable Exeter project?	I have asked that the Portfolio Holder for City Development, to be kept informed of progress with the Exeter Development Fund. Once the technical work is completed next year, I will update Councillors accordingly.	Are the Council committed to Exeter Development Fund?	The City Council is committed to using government funding to explore delivery models, including an Exeter Development Fund.
3.As of June 2023 ECC held £805,000 of funds from DLUHC for work on the Exeter Development Fund, how have these monies been spent over the past year and what are the deliverables that have been achieved?	Government funding is enabling ECC to explore delivery models, so the learning can be shared more widely (by MHCLG) and potentially replicated in other places. When the technical work is completed next year, the outputs will be handed over to MHCLG.	Has any money been spent on this?	Yes. The government grant is being used to fund this work.
4.In 2021 ECC received £5,966,470 One Public Estate monies for the following sites to create homes on the following sites:	£1,009,870 for Bonhay Meadows and the £2,373,183 for Cathedral and Quay were returned to Central Government last year. The remainder is held on ECC's accounts and can be drawn down if/when the works are undertaken.	Canal basin money, what has been, or is expected to be spent?	The Exeter Water Sports Association ("EWSA") site included £150k towards demolition and £450k towards decontamination and abnormal substructures. A viable route to vacant possession and disposal is still being sought before any monies can be spent.

• Cathedral and Quay Car Park • Mary Arches Car Park • Bonhay Meadows • Belle Isle • Exeter Canal Basin What deliverables have been achieved for each site, how much money has been spent on each site and how much money returned to Government?			
5.Open Space depot As land values have changed since the decision by the Council to dispose of Belle Isle is it still financially viable for the Council to dispose of Belle Isle, buy another depot, cover the costs of the move and establish a new depot?	Our appointed acquisition and disposal agents are confident an alternative site can be acquired within budget and that the disposal values haven't changed materially since the decision.	Is the agent looking for sites outside Exeter given prices?	Unfortunately not, the acting Head of Operations has made it clear that due to the number of vehicle movements and "tip off" points associated with the depot it has to remain central. The focus is currently the area west of Exe Bridges around Marsh Barton and Matford.
Question from Councillor Palmer to Councillor Allcock as Portfolio Holder for City Development Could we have an update on the King Billy site at the corner of Longbrook St - the site has been abandoned following unauthorised demolition of a medieval wall - what action is being taken against the developer for this and when will further work commence on the site?	The King Billy site encountered issues with the medieval wall during the adjacent demolition of the King Bill Pub, compromising its stability. As a result, Exeter City Council had to perform an emergency demolition of the wall's upper section. Subsequently: • The applicant, under application 23/1215/VOC, assessed the wall as unstable and received approval from the case officer at that time to partially demolish it. Unfortunately, this led to a more extensive demolition than initially intended. • The Council considered actions to require the wall's reconstruction. However, because the historical significance lay primarily in the wall's original authenticity, it was deemed	When would further work commence?	In early 2020, Exeter City Council's Engineering and Health & Safety teams identified significant concerns about the structural condition of a boundary wall between Longbrook Street properties and the John Lewis Service Yard. The risks of material loss or collapse due to cracks, poor-quality brickwork, and lack of structural support were deemed critical. • February 2020: The wall was reported to Building Control as a dangerous structure, and structural inspection (R200233) recommended reducing the height of the upper brick section for safety while repairing the lower stone section. • Subsequently, ECC lowered the wall's height, adding coping bricks and sand/cement capping for water resistance. Notifications were issued to relevant stakeholders (John Lewis and the former garage site owner), with no objections

	more effective to preserve and protect the remaining wall, along with ensuring the remnants continue to reflect the site's historical character.		raised. The work was completed in June 2020 before the demolition of the King Billy Pub commenced. During the pub's demolition, additional issues arose involving a medieval wall. • Under application 23/1215/VOC, the applicant determined the medieval wall as unstable and obtained approval for partial demolition. However, this extended further than initially intended. • While the Council considered mandating reconstruction, the historical value linked to the original materials led to a focus on preserving remaining sections and ensuring the site's historical character. Regarding commencement of further work: The site has an active development permission following the King Billy Pub's demolition. A pre-application process for a variation to the development plan is underway, but these discussions are not yet public. It remains within the applicant or any subsequent owner's discretion to proceed with development as permitted.
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Flooding [SFRA](#)

1. RE SRFA second report: What increased risk of flooding in surrounding areas from the development of brownfield sites along the Rivers, canal and other Flood zone 3 area has been identified and what Local plan policies will be put in place to protect these areas?

Response: The NPPF states that development in flood risk areas will need to satisfy the exception test which means it needs to be safe for its lifetime 'without increasing flood risk elsewhere'. Policy in the emerging Exeter Plan will also require residential development in flood zone 3 to contribute to reducing flood risk overall.

2. Will the Council or EA offer insurance for those residential or commercial properties in a flood zone 3 of adjacent area at a higher risk of flooding?

Response: This is not a planning matter. However, insurance companies and the Government have introduced a 'flood re-insurance' scheme - known as Flood Re. This aims to help support households at highest flood risk.

Transport

1. What confidence is there that the Local Transport Plan 2020 remains a suitable document as part of local plan evidence?

Response: The DCC Exeter Transport Strategy dovetails with the spatial strategy proposed in the Exeter Plan. It is effectively being updated as part of the current work which DCC is doing on the Local Transport Plan 4 which is currently out for consultation (until 30 November).

2. What policies are there for the requirements for managing the logistics of building the majority of the new plan in the city centre?

Response: Policies which consider the impact of development in terms of transportation would cover the construction and operational phases of development. The development management process also includes mechanisms to manage construction impact through, for example, construction environmental management plans which can be required through conditions.

Climate

The Local Plan evidence for climate change and reaching net zero is based on work in 2019 and published in February 2020 on the GESP, looking at national net zero policies and carbon in use, but not embedded carbon in the build out of the local plan.

The document states: "Emissions have generally fallen in absolute terms over time in a broadly similar manner to how they have fallen nationally. However this decline is due to the reduction in the power sector elsewhere in the UK and, if power is excluded, emissions in the GESP area have not noticeably changed. Estimates of projected GHG emissions have shown that in the absence of any carbon reduction policy emissions would rise to approximately 4.2 MtCO₂e in 2050 including an allowance for population growth."

1. The Local Plan evidence makes reference to net zero 2030 but in light of the above statement from document there is a conflict already between the supporting evidence in the local plan and cannot rely on decarbonisation of the grid alone. **So how will you evidence that the local plan will meet that target of Net Zero 2030 greenhouse gas emissions for the build out of the new local plan and in use?**

Response: The climate change evidence supporting the Exeter Plan is being updated. There will be a series of policies in the Exeter Plan which will play a role in achieving carbon ambitions, however planning itself cannot alone achieve such ambitions; it is part of a much wider picture.

2. The Climate Change Committee recommends that the UK's Nationally Determined Contribution commits to reduce territorial greenhouse gas emissions by 81% from 1990 to 2035. **Given that this milestone (81% by 2035) is towards the latter stage of the new local plan is this an more realistic achievable target for the new local plan to be modelled on and achieved?**

Response: The Council has a net zero 2030 ambition and therefore it is appropriate for the Exeter Plan to refer to it.