

## COUNCIL

Tuesday 18 July 2023

### Present:-

The Right Worshipful the Lord Mayor Councillor Kevin Mitchell (Chair)

Councillors Asvachin, Allcock, Atkinson, Begley, Bennett, Bialyk, Branston, Denning, Ellis-Jones, Foale, Fullam, Hannaford, Holland, Jobson, Ketchin, Knott, Leadbetter, Lights, Miller, Mitchell, M, Moore, D, Morse, Parkhouse, Patrick, Pearce, Read, Rees, Sheridan, Snow, Sparling, Vizard, Wardle, Warwick, Williams, R, Wood and Wright

### Also Present

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

In accordance with Standing Order No. 8, the following question was put by Councillor Wardle to the Leader

**Does the Leader agree that the announced plans to close almost all staffed ticket offices in England, totalling nearly 1,000, following changes to the Government's guidance relating to ticket office opening hours and operation are likely to discourage use of the railways, compromise safe travel and increase road and air congestion and pollution. The plans are very likely to result in the closure of the Central Station and St David's Station ticket offices. Would the Leader agree that the Council should write to the Secretary of State for Transport, expressing the Council's opposition to the possible closure of staffed rail ticket offices, and in particular the offices at St David's and Central. Together with responding to the consultation due to finish on the 26<sup>th</sup> July 2023.**

For information to the question for councillors  
(<https://www.rmt.org.uk/campaigns/rail/save-ticket-offices/>)

Read a fuller briefing on why you should oppose ticket office closures here:  
<https://www.rmt.org.uk/news/public-document-library/act-now-to-save-your-ticket-offices/>

### **Response**

The Leader thanked the Member for submitting a question relating to the proposed closure of the city's station ticket offices and he encouraged Members to register their views before the end of the consultation on 26 July. Residents used the ticket offices for a variety of reasons, and any withdrawal of this service may have an impact on travel, with some passengers avoiding the trains and travelling by car instead. It was important to make sure the railways and the ticket offices were supported by all, and the new station at Marsh Barton, had showed the importance of investing and not divesting in the railways.

The Leader responded to Councillor Wardle's supplementary question and welcomed the legal challenge being mounted for the appropriate consultation period not being followed under Section 29 of the Railways Act 2005.

In accordance with Standing Order No. 8, the following questions were put by Councillor D. Moore to the Leader

- 1. Last week an updated Brownfield register was published on the Council's website ([Brownfield Land Register - Exeter City Council](#)) and states that inclusion in this does not confer planning permission. But it does allow permission in principle for residential development. In relation to the area designated BL30 in the St David's Ward, the Council flats Westgate and Southgate are designated as brownfield sites - is this an error? If it is not an error why has it been included?**

#### **Response**

The Leader stated that the City Council has decided against identifying any sites in the Register for "permission in principle". Westgate and Southgate are Liveable Exeter brownfield sites and were proposed for redevelopment in the Outline Draft Exeter Plan.

*Councillor Moore in asking a supplementary question enquired if the Leader will know when the site will be developed, as in principle planning permission would be for 15 years.*

The Leader responded and stated that they had not identified any sites for permission in principle and the site was identified in the Local Plan.

- 2. A number of the Brownfield sites suggest edge of or inclusion within the City Wall - how will the Leader ensure that the City Wall is protected and should a protection zone be included on these areas?**

#### **Response**

The Leader stated that the City Wall is a Scheduled Monument and there is no intention to propose development which would cause any harm to these important assets which are of national significance.

*Councillor Moore asked a supplementary question and enquired whether a protected zone would be introduced or if further advice could be sought from Heritage England on how to treat the boundary of the base site of the city wall.*

The Leader responded and stated that when the sites come forward, the required planning advice from Heritage England would ensure that all works were fully compliant, to protect this asset for the city.

- 3. The area designated BL30 includes St Edmunds Church - does the Leader consider this historic building on the City Wall and its curtilage as a Brownfield site and suitable for redevelopment?**

#### **Response**

The Leader stated there is no intention to propose development which would cause any harm to St. Edmunds Church.

*Councillor Moore asked a supplementary question that if any development would look to improve on this heritage site, why not include it, as a brownfield site.*

The Leader responded and stated that there will be no harm caused to any church on any development. There was a strong planning team at the Council, dealing with in principle planning matters in an efficient way, including heritage sites which are maintained for the benefit of the city. A planning zone had been suggested and he assured the Member there was no intention to cause any harm.

- 4. What are the Leader's aspirations for the proportion of a) affordable homes, b) council homes c) co-living on the Liveable Exeter sites that he will be pushing to inform emerging planning policy?**

**Response**

The Leader stated that draft policies for the provision of affordable housing and for the tenure mix of homes on Liveable Exeter sites will be included in the next round of public consultation on the Exeter Plan.

- 5. Site BL23 has historically been zoned for employment land. Does this inclusion of Marsh Barton in the Brownfield register now confer permission in principle for residential use, in whole or in part?**

**Response**

The Leader stated that the Brownfield Register does not include a Part 2 section, therefore none of the sites on the Brownfield Register have been granted permission in principle as a result of being identified on the Register.

*Councillor Moore asked a supplementary question and enquired if site BL23 was empty land and included in the Marsh Barton brownfield allowance with permission in whole or part and set out in the Government guidance and not on the Part 2 register.*

The Leader responded and stated that the Brownfield Register does not include a Part 2 element as he previously advised.

- 6. Given that the Planning Member Working Group only has the status of a 'sounding board', which Council committee or body has formally approved this new Brownfield Register?**

**Response**

The Leader stated the Brownfield Register does not require formal approval to publish. However, the detail of this will come to the Executive and Council. In response to the reply, Councillor Moore advised that she had previously raised these issues at meetings of the Planning Member Working Group and brought these questions back to Council for an appropriate response. The Leader referred to the questions and welcomed the opportunity to meet the Member, with the Portfolio Holder for City Development and also the Director of City Development to discuss this important issue.

(The meeting commenced at 6.00 pm and closed at 8.05 pm)

Chair



## **RESPONSE OF BEN BRADSHAW MP TO CITY COUNCIL LETTER ON THE PROPOSED CLOSURES OF RAIL TICKET OFFICES DATED 25 JULY 2025**

Dear Howard,

Thank you very much for your email concerning the closure of railway ticket offices. I share many of the concerns raised in your letter to the Secretary of State, Mark Harper.

This announcement, driven by this Conservative government understandably causes huge anxiety to vulnerable, elderly, and disabled passengers, as well as rail staff.

Currently, 12% of ticket purchases are made at ticket offices with approximately 1,000 ticket offices still in operation. Following the Government's proposals, Great Western Railway will permanently close all the ticket office windows at Exeter St David's station. Over 186,000 tickets were sold from the windows last year.

There is widespread opposition to ticket office closures from such organisations including Disability Rights UK, the National Federation of the Blind, Transport for All, Royal National Institute for Deaf People. This action will significantly reduce the accessibility of transport, limiting the freedom of many affected individuals, including more than three million people over the age of 65 who have never used the internet. Furthermore, rail staff face potential job losses.

The Labour Party is deeply concerned with these issues. Shadow Secretary of State for Transport, Louise Haigh, has asked the Government what actions it will take to ensure these proposals take into consideration the impact on the accessibility of services and job security. To deny equal opportunities and accessibility through these measures will push people away from the railways, which we should be trying to make easier, cheaper, and more accessible. The Conservative Government needs to explain why it is cutting services when it should be cutting fares, as many of our European neighbours are doing. This also means that passengers are paying more for less under our broken rail system.

The Labour Party, at last year's party conference, reaffirmed its commitment to bring railways back under public ownership if it wins a majority at the next general election. Louise Haigh said putting "failing private operators in the hands of the public" would "improve services and lower fares" putting passengers at the heart of the British railway. My colleague on the Transport Select Committee, Ruth Cadbury, questioned Huw Merriman, Department for Transport, on the concerns of these measures for vulnerable individuals and railway staffing provisions.

I assure you that I will continue to raise concerns over the closure of railway ticket offices and support calls for building a fairer, more accessible railway.

I hope that this is helpful, but if you have any further concerns or queries please do not hesitate to get back in touch.

With very best wishes,

Ben Bradshaw MP

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