

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 26th 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



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11 August 2023

Mark Devin
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By email: Committee.services@exeter.gov.uk

Dear Mark Devin

Thank you for your letter of 20 July to the Rt Hon Mark Harper MP, Secretary of State for Transport, about changes to railway station ticket offices. This has been forwarded to the Rail Passenger Services team for reply.

We appreciate your and Exeter City Councils' concerns about the proposed closure of some station ticket offices.

There has been a significant shift in the way passengers purchase tickets, with just one in every ten transactions taking place at a ticket office in 2022/23, down from one in three a decade earlier. An estimated 99 per cent of all transactions made at ticket offices last year could be made at ticket vending machines or online.

Together with the rail industry, we want to improve and modernise the experience for passengers by moving staff out from behind the ticket office screens to provide more help and advice in customer-focused roles. We have been clear that no currently staffed station will become unstaffed as a result of this reform.

To propose any changes to the opening hours of a station ticket office, or to propose its closure, train operating companies must follow the longstanding process set out in the industry's Ticketing and Settlement Agreement.

Train operators must consult on any proposed changes, advertising them at the relevant stations and inviting members of the public who wish to comment to write to the relevant passenger body (Transport Focus or London TravelWatch).

When proposing major changes to ticket office opening hours (including closures), operators are required to take into account the adequacy of the proposed alternatives in relation to the needs of all passengers, and to include this in the notice sent to other operators and passenger groups. We would also expect operators to consider other equality-related needs and make this clear in their consultation.

The Passenger Assist service will continue to help disabled passengers, and those with additional needs, to use the rail network with confidence and in safety. Since April 2022, passengers have been able to pre-book their assistance up to two hours in advance of their journey, at any time of the day. This ensures that reasonable adjustments and special assistance can be provided at a wider range of times, with minimal planning ahead required.

The Department recently hosted roundtable discussions with industry and accessibility and transport groups to discuss this matter. We continue to engage with the Disabled Persons Transport Advisory Committee.

You mention the safety of rail passengers. The UK's rail network is one of the safest in Europe and the Government will never compromise the safety of passengers on our railways. Safety remains a top priority for all parties.

To ensure that your views are taken into consideration, we would ask you to send your comments on the proposed changes to Transport Focus or London TravelWatch at the freepost address: RTEH-XAGE-BYKZ, PO Box 5594, Southend-on-Sea, SS1 9PZ. Further information about the proposed changes will be available at stations and on train operating company websites.

Thank you once again for your letter. We hope this response has been helpful.

Yours sincerely,

Correspondence Team, Rail Passenger Services Directorate